



ASTERISM

VOLUME I



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SHORT TALKS ON ANNE CARSON

Lady says, "I never felt entirely female" and I say *snap snap*
instead of *me too* because one is safer than the other.

Lady says,

 "cardiograms"

 "dreams"

 "I have learned mostly what it means to be inarticulate"

and I am tripping over tongue

 teeth

 trials

 trying to touch my words together without
losing their meaning. Lady tells me I am forgetting feeling;

 heartbeats in locked hospital rooms;

 eulogies I did not write;

 dreams I had more than once.

Lady teaches me the difference between dark corners and dark words

learning to paint the sky above me with language

 (I am throwing my oil paints in the trash, putting them out on the curb Sunday
night.)

Lady shows me Antigone

disagreeing, suffering, martyring.

 Lady hands me Antigone who says *no* and learns to die.

I say "anti-gone" in my head.

Learning to be anti gone, learning to be here,

learning how to die in reverse, crawling out of graves I dig. Me: sitting on the bathroom



floor

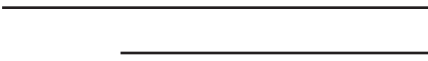
picking dirt out of my fingernails. Me: believing in leaving spaces empty for

God.

Lady writes essays that make me ache.

Lady is designing new ways to feel.

Lady gave me instructions I carry like a Bible verse
folded twice over and tucked in my boot.



ANYMORE

University of South Dakota
Miranda Easthouse

i don't live there anymore
scraping away at seven years of sticky memories from
floral bed sheets and plaque-coated, chattering teeth
an amorphous blotch bleeding through the
cotton fibers to the fibres of my being

i don't live there anymore
no yearning for bottles of bottom-shelf booze and her
presence in the current of breath round your lips
dried trails of mascara tears long wiped away on the
backs of hands and sleeves of hooded sweatshirts

i don't live there anymore
a little love lost for my secret desire to get married
and buried amid the rural comforts of home
the same home that taught us looks
don't matter but meth makes you ugly

but i don't live there anymore
so don't expect to find me in my usual corner
scribbling words and letters for a broken soldier
and between us only half-assed weather chats and the faint
burn scars from the friction of skin against skin



i don't live there anymore
and i won't miss you



University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Lillian Sickler

SCENES FROM BLUEBONNET DINER

scene 1. you spend the whole summer working
which is better than last
summer when you moved
from Florida to New York and then back
into your parents' basement reading anne carson
buying used CDs

lucky for you "the lighting was perfect" for taking
old fashioned photographs eating cereal
out of your palm

scene 2. September hits. you drive back down the coast, moving
through people and places
with the same method: fleeing
over fences, trekking through mud knees biting
into the grass

then you drive off, forget how you had
gotten there in the first place

[negatives 1/4. returning to where you once saw
the prettiest thing can be so ugly]



scene 3. in your car. the first time
we touch—
you ask me “how many times
have we missed each other?” *darling*,
how many times
have you taken a left when I took a right?
did I sit on the floor right above you
in a library?
did I take the 4:50 bus instead
of the 5:25?

scene 4. our mattress
back in Georgia
has begun to ooze fruit flies

[negatives 2/4. a shooting star is not a star
at all when it comes
to star deaths, the insides either explode
or diminish]

scene 5. when nights grow cold, bodies revel in creating clouds
I hate calling you late
at night, waking you up
like this
what if
you'd stayed?

-END TAPE-

scene 1. one last day in August. it is
the early bird special, just two
young poets
crack -ing up to hold
hands hold forks hold pens

[negatives 3/4. “you know, it’s the move
- ment, it’s all about—“
the movement in hope all over
your poem, hope in the way you
look at paint -cans, how you leave
the faucet running]



scene 2. summer comes back. it will
always come back you
fly high. you fly in zig-zig patterns

and away

-END TAPE-

scene 1. just two
cars on this golden
-rod highway
origins stamped
on each license plate



RUIN ME

“What do you think?” He asked
not that he had to.
The look on her face said it all
eyes communicated
what it was she wanted to do
not that she ever did.

“My lips match your tie,”
she mused. “You did that on purpose.”

“Why do you like red so much?”
The color of blood
always tainted her mouth.

“Because when boys kiss me
I like to leave something behind,”
she told him. It was proof
of their
sacrifice.

She sat on the chair near the bed
watched him fumble with his tie when he said,
“Is that why you won’t kiss me?”



Yes, he was special
her eyes took him in from head to toe
in a black suit he was beyond exceptional.
He walked over to her
uncrossed her legs
so he could slip onto her lap
his knees squeezing her hips.

His eyes drawn to her lips
she smiled, wickedly.
“Would you like a taste?”

He kissed her quick,
a gentle collision
smooth to the touch,
so when he pulled away
his lips were stained.

“So this is ruin?” He asked
not that he had to.

Grabbing his tie
she pulled him back into a kiss
the taste of him so pure
she knew he
would ruin
her.



WAFFLE HOUSE

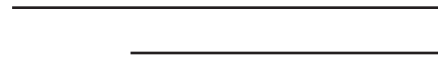
She sits in the polyester booth
twirling her fingers in her melted milkshake,
coating them in chalky suds,
that date back farther
than war-torn nations of Eastern Europe.

The lights of the cramped building do not flicker,
but I wish they did to distract me from her.
Instead they blaze with pale light,
the worn waitress delivering grease-stained eggs
not holding my attention the same way she does.

The checkered seat squeaks
when she crosses her legs,
hands conducting her very own concerto
as she pitches her idea,
an adventure thirty-thousand miles away.

It is a distance measurable
in leagues of noisy water
and ridges of land
like the ones she drags her fingers across
on the globes in her flat.

But right now she is sitting
with dirt-crusted nails
in a booth wide enough for four,
eyes trained on me
and not a distant jungle.





PURPLE MOUNTAINS MAJESTY

Harper's parents weren't the kind to let her swim alone with a boy.

"For safety," her mother Charlotte insisted. She had her back to her daughter, dicing carrots from the garden. "I'm sure Vineeth's parents don't want him swimming in a pond unsupervised."

Harper was braiding her hair in the hallway mirror "Mom," she said, glaring at Charlotte's back in the reflection. "He can swim. He's thirteen."

Ah, the coveted number thirteen. Charlotte had spent a full five minutes in the supermarket last Sunday, holding the birthday cake candles in her hand. She usually bought the big goofy numbers, but suddenly found them too young for Harper. Well, Charlotte still thought they were cute, but she was sure Harper would be embarrassed by them.

"Well, you can explain it to your father when he gets—"

Harper huffed and disappeared from the room, her long hair flaying out behind her. She slammed the bedroom door, five slats of wood Charlotte and her husband Peter had nailed together crudely enough that every word of Harper's angsty music poured down the hall.

When Vineeth arrived, he and Harper went swimming in the pond out back. Charlotte sat in a lawn chair, a book and a margarita in her hands, dark sunglasses hiding the fact that her eyes were trained on Vineeth the whole time.

Charlotte tried to remember if she had ever met an Indian in real life. She'd seen them on television, sure. Were they the ones who couldn't eat beef?

"Have you turned a page since you sat down?"

Charlotte jumped at Peter's voice. "Scared me to death," she whispered. She'd spilled a splotch of her margarita on her good jeans.

"Let them be," Peter said. The words came out with a puff of tobacco smoke,



getting caught in the wires of his beard. It was his father's pipe, his father's habit, his father's lumber company, all inherited after his father's death.

After giving his wife a kiss that smelled like tobacco, Peter backed the pickup over the lawn to the house. He had a pile of chopped logs in the back, the firewood for winter. He shut off the engine. The truck spit out exhaust like a running faucet.

"Charlotte," Peter said, laughing and shaking his head. She was back to watching the kids. "Charlotte." Finally she looked over at him, blushing, trying to look innocent. "Leave 'em alone. Read your book. Better yet, cook dinner." He started unloading the truck. "No steak, though, I think they don't eat cows. They think they're holy or something."

"I already cooked dinner. Look at them," Charlotte said. "They ain't swimming. Their hair ain't even wet, they're just standing, waist deep, still as statues."

"It's cold."

"Cold' my ass, I ain't seen their hands in five minutes."

Peter dropped an armful of logs unceremoniously against the side of the house. He squatted down at her knee. "You sound like my mother, Char," Peter said. "Stop it with the ain'ts, you went to college, you're from the city."

Charlotte rolled her eyes whenever he mentioned the city. Missoula was hardly a city, and University of Montana was hardly a college, but it was the best of either in the state. She had wanted to go to New York. At least New York was a city.

"Why do you think he moved here?" Charlotte asked, and Peter rubbed his eyes with his gloved hand.

"First the ain'ts, now you're racist like her too?"

Peter was back to unloading the logs before she could figure out the right response. She hadn't meant it like that. She was genuinely curious. Why was Denton suddenly a place for an Indian family to move to? Why was Denton a place for anyone to move to at all?

She took a breath. That's what they said to do when bad thoughts started coming. She could feel her tears starting. Look around, the voice in the back of her head whispered. She avoided Harper and Vineeth in the pond and looked instead at the wildflowers surrounding the pond's edge. Two towels were stacked on the old tree stump. Behind the lake was a line of pine trees, the beginning of the forest that stretched forever until it hit Canada. Far back were mountains, painted purple by the distance and the sky.

When she and Peter first scoped out the land, before the trees were chopped down, the lady selling the plot said they'd have a lovely view after chopping down the trees. Peter climbed up in the truck bed and got on his tip toes



and could just barely see the mountains. Charlotte didn't try to see them. She was too short, she claimed.

"They're the ones from the song," Peter said to Charlotte. "Purple mountains majesty, above thy fruitful plain."

Even now, fifteen years after they bought the land and spent their honeymoon money on a log cabin, Charlotte had never been to the distant mountains. They did nothing to calm her down. She went inside.

She made herself another margarita and watched the kids through the window. With Charlotte inside their shoulders were looser. Harper plucked a cattail off its stalks. Vineeth wrinkled his nose. She broke off the green and showed him how to squeeze out the edible pollen. He held up his hands, the first time Charlotte saw them since they'd gotten in the water.

Harper licked the pollen off her fingers, proving it was safe. Her lips were dusted yellow. She offered the stalk to him. He hesitated, then got closer. There was a clatter outside, Peter was dropping another armful of lumber. His back must have been turned, because quick as the waterbugs skitting on the pond by their thighs Vineeth brought Harper's hand to his lips and kissed the pollen off her fingers. Harper's yellow mouth fell open.

Peter must have turned around. Vineeth dropped her hand and got Harper to chase after a frog with him. Like nothing happened. Charlotte watched them, no longer angry, just defeated. Those goofy candles were far too young for Harper.

"Remember when we were that age?" Peter said, finally coming in. He undid his work boots, hung his hat and gloves on deer antlers they'd found in the woods and nailed to the wall. "I was with Becky Ronda Lee. Even three names wasn't enough to contain her."

Charlotte was still looking out at the kids. "I was with Michael S."

Michael S., because there were two Michaels in her year. Even when Michael C. moved to Boise the S remained. Charlotte invited Michael S. over to watch a movie. They sat in silence for most of it.

"That's a cobra," Charlotte said eventually, to break the silence. "They're venomous and can kill you, but some people keep them as pets. In India and Africa and places like that."

"You're really smart," said Michael S., blurting the words as if they were held hostage behind his teeth.

That was about all they said, and yet they decided—through a mutual friend playing messenger—to begin dating. Charlotte and Michael S. were the couple of the sixth grade. Soon they began actually having conversations. The whole grade whispered when they held hands.

"I'd like to kiss you," he once wrote to her on a scrap of notebook paper. He had given it to her and ran off to catch the bus, with strict orders to not open it until



she got home. She reread the five words a thousand times that night, holding the paper to her chest. When they kissed after school, it was half a second long. He grazed her upper lip and didn't touch her anywhere else, then bolted for the bus again. It didn't matter. It was one of the best kisses of her life.

"It doesn't mean anything at this age," Charlotte said, sighing. "It's the next couple years we have to worry about."

"And all the years after that," Peter agreed. He kissed her softly, calloused hand on her shoulder. "I'll get them in for dinner."

As Peter collected the children, Charlotte wondered if Harper would keep the polleny hand kiss in the back of her mind for as long as Charlotte remembered Michael S. There were more boys after Michael S. that Charlotte remembered far less. Charlie Hubbard in eighth grade was her first "real" kiss, after he convinced her it didn't count unless there was tongue. Then Mitchell, Greg, David. She'd gone through most of the attractive guys in high school when she tried one a tier below her level of popularity. That was the one she ended up loving. Ryan.

Ryan joined the Peace Corps, and they broke up gently before he left for Guatemala. She didn't mind once she was in college, where there were a million boys. Some were from Outside Of Montana. When she met Peter at a party, the first and only college party Peter went to thanks to his cousin, she fell in love and forgot about New York. And Ryan. For a while.

At dinner, Harper and Vineeth were silent until spoken to. They barely moved above the waist, but Charlotte knew they were playing footsies under the table.

"Just moved in a year ago. Right by the high school," Vineeth said. "My mom's studying the Bearpaw mountains."

"The what?" Charlotte asked.

Vineeth gestured out the window. "Those ones there, the Bearpaws. She's a botanist."

Back to silence. Charlotte stared at her daughter for the millionth time that day. Such long pretty hair, interested in boys far too early and far too much. Peter asked if Vineeth had done traveling, and Vineeth told a few stories about India and other places Outside Of Montana. Every country on Earth, it seemed.

Ryan came to Charlotte and Peter's wedding. He was tanner, and seemed taller. He talked while Charlotte ate the first full meal she'd had in weeks, no longer afraid of not fitting in her gown.

"I wish you could have been there," he said. "It's absolutely beautiful."

"In Guatemala?" She asked, trying not to shout over the too-loud music.

"Everywhere," was Ryan's response, and Charlotte fell in love. "The people. The art, the blue skies. When I was in Turkey—"



He told her only one story, about a wonderful little Turkish restaurant owned by a sweet family, but in that half-minute long story she learned that after the Peace Corp he spent a year traveling through all of Europe and the Middle East by bicycle before doing an accelerated college program in China. He was in the States now for the first time since he left. His father had died. And they serve amazing menemen. She couldn't even guess what menemen meant, and was only half-certain she could find Turkey on a map.

"God," he said, taking her left hand, rubbing his thumbs on her wrist. "I wish you could have been there."

"I wish you could have been here," she replied.

He nodded, patted her hand, and got lost in the crowd. She didn't see him again all night. She never saw him again. Last she heard he was in an unpronounceable country in western Africa.

God, she hated Vineeth. She hated Vineeth so much. She hated how he ate his food, how he stabbed a piece with his fork then talked with his hands. She hated his clothes, his hair, how he held his shoulders. If she wasn't too angry to listen to him she was sure she'd hate the words he was saying, but all she could hear was his voice, which she hated, too. Most of all she hated the way Harper was looking at him, like he was the world—or at least the doorway to it. She hated the fact that Harper was braver, that she might actually go off with him.

"But honestly," Vineeth said in the accent Charlotte hated, his head tilted in a way she hated too. "Denton is the best place I've ever been."

Charlotte snorted so hard rice, actual grains of rice shot up into her sinuses. She'd laughed out milk before but never rice. She coughed, blew her nose, made all sorts of choking noises, but the grain of rice she could feel at the back of her nose stayed put. She recovered, tears streaming down her cheeks. Harper was mortified.

"You're kidding," Charlotte said. "Here?" Despite the rice incident she began laughing again, a bit less intensely. "What could possibly be better about Denton than all these places? India, Turkey, Guatemala? How could Denton possibly be better?"

Harper looked like she could have died. Vineeth smiled uncomfortably. Peter wiped his mouth with a napkin and tossed it on his half-eaten food as he stood up.

"He never mentioned Guatemala," Peter said.

Peter grabbed his tool belt and went outside, the screen door clattering behind him. Harper and Vineeth ate diligently.

"I'll be back," Charlotte said, standing. "Don't..." you dare touch my daughter. "Don't worry."

Peter had taken his pipe and tobacco off his belt and was puffing along the side of the pond.

"I know he's your missing prince," Peter said when he heard Charlotte's footsteps hit the sand. "But God, I thought you'd be over him by now."



“I am—”

“Yeah, you are over him. But you still think about him .”

“Not—”

“I know, not him, but what he could have done. He could have brought you all over the world, bought you incredible things, given you the honeymoon you wanted and all the colors of the rainbow.” He nodded at the Bearpaw mountains. “I can only give you purple.”

Charlotte took his hands and tried to make him sway. He was still. She rested her head on his chest, and they began to sway together, dancing to the sound of the pond and the wind, in a circle, their feet never wholly leaving the ground.

Charlotte began to cry. Her tears, silent, fell between their bodies and made drops of mud in the sand.

“Purple’s not bad,” she said, her voice as unwavering as she could manage.



ALL THE FISH ARE DYING BECAUSE THEIR EYES

last week, all the oceans of the world suddenly turned red.
this week i bought a new coat and met a girl with black hair
who consistently wears next to nothing when we go out.
it makes me uncomfortable. i asked her about her parents,
and she said they wear clothes when they go out,
so i changed the subject. she took me to her apartment
which had no locks on the front door, and we watched
cartoons on her television. she keeps her mattress
on the floor, and one of her windows has a view
of the coast off in the distance past the high-rise
buildings of the city. the sky seems darker now
that the ocean's changed color. she has a goldfish
that she keeps in a bowl on a white square pedestal,
and i complimented her on it. i said,
"i like your goldfish,"
and she kicked me out. i don't
meet many girls, so i was upset with myself for
botching things with her, though i'm not quite sure
what i did. i think next week when i have a day off i'll
drive out to the coast to see the water up close. hopefully
by then the horde of people also trying to see it will have



shrunk in size, and the roads won't be so full of cars.
i heard all the fish are dying because their eyes
aren't used to seeing through so much red, and it's putting
them under a great deal of stress. it hasn't rained
since the oceans turned, and i've been wondering if
the rain will have changed too. a scientist on the news last
night said they're all working around the clock to find the
reason why this has happened, but nothing has come up yet.



FIVE SONNETS

Sonnet #1

If you are leaving, lock the door behind,
But keep in mind, *Ohio*, a home, left on
As lights (the shadows moving through the blinds,
You see, just shadows creeping into dawn.)
If you go back, pack heat, a knife, three rounds:
For pride, for heart, for strife. Go soon, it's night
And dark is dark like fear, dark with no sound
(You hear a pop pop pop) no chance of flight.
But if you think this not a crime: to howl
At moons beneath the bridge below fourth street,
At moons that are dilated with red eyes.
A fresher eye than mine has seen my death
Four times, has cried but three, now looks to me
Without a common tongue he turns and leaves.



Sonnet #6

You stay a while and then you disappear
All heavy bearing memories and all
Those cares and all that time you wasted though
You couldn't have spent it worse, deep roots and all
Will seek deeper water and all. So
You drift a while. Some time in the sun will bleach
You white and dry you up. You float
Along buoyant. You start fires on the beach
You may melt the sand to glass, glass that mirrors
The trees' reflections, towering and all
With slumping branches heavy with fear
Pretend you were once a prow, a masthead,
A part of ships once splintered and sinking
Like bodies sink, while you float back to shore.

Sonnet #10

When lost, staying far from home, where life is
A little odder than your death would seem,
Or odder than expected or believed,
Taking your last breaths in seizures and piss.
Even though you cut off Samson's hair, he
Stayed alive to see you as palimpsest
On which faint past traces remain, the best
Of you penned over scribbles of fear.
Go home, please don't go into the city
Alone. Don't go mad in your apartment
Alone. Don't mourn your dog, Samson alone.
Don't watch your paintings fade away alone.
Each brush stroke paints the symbol of your life,
The earth, the sunset, something far beyond.



Sonnet #15

We left behind our nursery rhymes, heading out
The door to scraped knees, stubbed toes, poison
Ivy. Treading on leaves crunching together
Like crumpled wishes. We left our words to

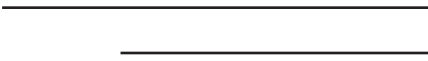
The wind -- a hushing sound to go silent
In winter. A wet squish of a spring. Suck
Of mud. A path cleared by walking down weeds
And walking, going the same way again,

Again, after nursery rhymes, we headed
Into bloody knuckles, near death, and black
Eyes. The leaves roll under tires, the babble
Of bodies brushing bodies like steel on steel

Trying to find our way back to nursery rhymes,
We find that these things of the past will heal us.

Sonnet 16

I beheld Mansfield in illicit night
From the top of Reed's Department store. I named
Other buildings, matched them to spots of light
Spread lonely in the dark. It's stunning
How motionless a city can seem when
We know it's blowing breakers in the bars
Or breaking into cars, hotwiring
A fuck with hard cash or a wink and nod.
You can cut the horizon with sirens,
Flash headlights up and down highways and roar
A cargo plane low toward the base, touching
The sky like a UFO. All so calm.
The trains won't let me forget that they pass:
brilliant graffiti, blasting horns for attention.



ROOM IN NOVEMBER, PRETENDING I AM NOT WHERE I AM

Florida State University
Julia Watson

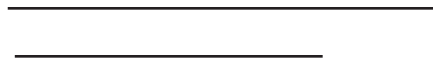
The idea of something is so much greater
than its bones

—of cigarettes at midnight and sitting on a balcony,
its floor just rotting wood, but when I return to my excess of pillows
and room misted of woodland sage,
I smell stale and cheap.

—of winter in a different language and foreign backdrop
where opportunity is flashing lights and snow is a reborn vision,
but I feel scared and alone with wet socks.

—of swirling wine like a ballerina trapped in a music box
while deciphering intricate tomatoes smashed on a white canvas.
Blazers and silk handkerchiefs eat cubes of moldy blue cheese,
feeding off each other’s merlot theories but still
I see some wasted sandwich topping on a milky board.

—of my love living an ocean away—
my moon is their sun, their dusk is my morning bird—
but memories tie our love like a pretty, christmas bow
and planes reunite weary hearts
yet I’m lonely and bored.



—of competition driving insanity,
blood crashing into my fingertips
as I bash my keyboard like it did me wrong,
my bitten nails fracturing against forced words—
which must have more sound, more music, more symbolism
than the guy who writes of sunset rowing, climbing mountains and dishes, sea-
crashed romance—
and I write about a slice of sourdough bread.

HOW TO EAT A FIG

Take me out of the garden.
Pluck me from the branches of my mothers.
Choose me for my shape:
swollen, full, fertile.
My skin, dark and yielding,
bears the bruises of your fingers.
Ownership is something you were born to.
Eat me.
Your teeth tear my skin,
sinking into pale pink flesh
as though I asked for it.
I succumb,
let you consume me.
Is that not what I was born to do?
My bite is small, acerbic,
an after taste of bitterness
bred through generations.
I regret the tree that bore me.
I tremble in your hands,
begging for leaves to cover this sin.



University of Colorado, Denver
Grace Wagner



IBBUR

There are ten sons of Yaakov; my uncle is one of them. He shuffles sage leaves in my mother's belly, to impregnate my soul. He serves as a guest, loiters rooms in my cavity, blows dust around, licks ice cream along with me, to accomplish hunger. His wounds, my aches, the utter of words, "Tikun. I must complete"; no time, space, perspective of oneness, my body orchestrated xylophone of lost keys. I let him enter me, non-erotic, but equal pleasure of knowing something is swimming, inside me. Teshuvah. Resolution of mistakes, from sin. He becomes a blemish, bruise upon my lemon rind, elevated above skin, the son Yosef, Joseph, slave, Vizier of Mind, he was, I am.



I REMEMBER

Do you remember the rain drops that turned to puddles?
Do you remember the ashes that drifted to the parking lot?
Do you remember how I waited for you in the window?
I'm waiting for you still.

I remember whispers through the cheap dorm doors.
I remember runny make up and soggy clothes.
I remember how I held you close. Stains on the futon.
I remember pale bodies tangled in the bed sheets.

I remember how morning breath was never enough for birth control.
I remember how you'd sing with me in the shower.
I remember long walks, holding my hand as we stumbled through the streetlights.
I remember clenched knuckles and tattoos. The ink burns my brain still.

Coughing in the winter rain,
white silhouettes in the driveway,
silver shadows in the snowflakes.
There's only so much that memory fakes.

I wish you would remember me the way I remember you.
You'd remember not to take me back because I'm not a different me to you.
I'd remember not to come back after leaving you so many times.
I know I remember, but did you manage to truly leave me behind?



I remember the snow filling your footsteps.
I remember red hairs on my pillowcase. I'm finding them still.
I remember the walk across the parking lot.
I remembered why all the reasons I let you go,
Were me.

JUST A TRIM



Athabasca University
Nicole Jeffries

Tom sat in the sitting room silently testing the three little words out, feeling the significance of them on his tongue. He watched a small trickle of blood weave its way down Ruth's neck. Ruth, more absorbed in examining her long thin cigarette, seemed not to notice the blood as it seeped into the collar of her shirt. The tip of the cigarette grew bright; the paper turned grey before crinkling back, exposing the orange ember as she sucked hard on the soft filter. "Darling, give it a try for little old me," she purred, before lying back on the chaise. Tom shook his head, flipping to the next page in the newspaper. Ruth rolled her eyes before leaning forward. "Oh, look at him! He's so handsome," she said. "Your hair would look fantastic that color. In fact, I bet he's coming tonight. There should be a lot of newcomers at the party," she said running her finger across the grainy black and white photo, the ash from her cigarette flaking off, falling onto the page.

"Watch it; you could set something on fire. Besides, you shouldn't smoke; I've heard those things cause health problems," Tom said while brushing away the ash, part of it streaking his finger black.

"Oh, who's *they* anyway?" Ruth flipped her hand in the air. "They this, they that, they are always saying things but does anyone actually know who *they* are?" Ruth said before slumping back on the chaise and stretching her long legs out in front of her. "By the way, we are supposed to be a married couple, which means we are to like each other or at least act like we do," she muttered before stubbing her cigarette into the ashtray that was already too full. "Pass me that," she snapped at Tom, pointing to another newspaper beside him on the floor. He rolled his eyes, hoping she didn't see as he handed it to her. She snatched the paper from his hands before licking her fingers and flicking the pages with fury. "Him, him, him." She poked each picture with her bony finger. "Any will do, any change will be an improvement to what you look like now."



Tom tossed his paper to the side, sending the pages fluttering across the floor before leaning back against the wall. He liked sitting on the floor more than just for the comfort; he liked it because he knew it drove Ruth crazy. He looked around, Ruth had demanded they move into this house; “It has old world charm. A real authentic feel,” she explained. Tom hated this house, with its vast rooms stuffed to the rafters with things they didn’t need, it made him feel claustrophobic. Through the blue haze from her cigarette he could see in the top corner of the room, the dark green wallpaper was starting to peel away. A dusty spider web swayed as a slight breeze crept in through the sides of the windows. The only good thing about this party was that after tonight he wouldn’t have to live here anymore, so he was grateful for that at least. The moment the party finished Ruth and him would slip away in the early hours of the morning and leave the help to deal with their mess. Their old friends, the ones from their homeland, would follow close behind and together the group would find another small town to live in for a while.

Tom stared at Ruth; the skirt she wore had crept up, revealing one lanky leg. Her flesh-colored tights bunched around her ankles. The faint outline of a varicose vein laced its way along the side of her calf, bulging out at certain points. Right now she wasn’t much of a prize herself, he thought. She could be anyone she wanted, and yet, here she was, some thin middle-aged woman who spent her days lying around the house smoking and bossing him about.

“Wanna go for a swim?” Tom asked. Ruth snorted.

“I’ve just had my hair done Tom you knew that.” She sat up slightly, leaning on her elbow. Tom could still see a bit of dried blood behind her ear. “That’s how we got on the topic of yours.” She muttered, absentmindedly touching the hairs that curled themselves perfectly under her ears. Tom had an urge to go swimming. The sensation of the cool water running over his face and body as he swam still felt fresh and new to him. He loved the way his lungs pinched as he forced himself to make it to the other side without taking a breath.

“You could sit outside and suntan.” Tom knew Ruth loved baking herself under the sun, turning her skin a crispy brown. One time she drank too much by the pool and passed out when she finally came to her skin was a vibrant red. But Ruth being Ruth quickly changed that; she called some people and within an hour her skin was perfect again.

Outside the parlor door Tom could hear shuffling and mummings. The snap of drums and the wail of a trumpet vibrated down the hall. The band was already warming up for the party. Tom hated social gatherings, being surrounded by people, judging and examining them. Tonight felt fake, the whole facade of a party, people getting so drunk they barely knew what was going on around them. But maybe that was for the best.



“I’m going to change my outfit; I’m going for a whole new look tonight,” Ruth said, before grabbing a drink and sashaying out of the room.

Small dust motes swirled in what little sunlight was left as Ruth closed the door behind her. Above him the clock ticked, he should change his outfit; if he didn’t Ruth would likely make some comment on how he wasn’t presentable for their guests. His body groaned a little as he stood up, the blood rushed to his feet in small little sparks.

The smell of lilies wafted over him as he walked out into the hallway. Their scent, mixed with the wax from the candles and floor polish reminded Tom of a funeral. Glancing in the mirror he ran his hands over his hair. It still had a nice deep part on the side and was nicely slicked back. Ruth was wrong; he didn’t need to change.

“Sir, the guests are starting to arrive,” Arthur, Tom’s right-hand man, told him. Tom motioned for him to open the door.

Outside the atmosphere vibrated with life. Crammed against the gates each person was trying to outdo the next. “My father’s the Earl of Devon,” one man shouted. “Haven’t you heard, I’m a war hero,” another yelled as he jostled his way to the front. “My father is so rich he basically owns all of America,” one young girl said in a tone that made others feel ashamed for not knowing.

“Open the gates Arthur. We might as well get started.”

Moments later waves of people flooded into the entrance way, down the halls, into the parlor, and towards the backyard. Flashes of color flew past Tom. The rustle of fabric, the ping of pearls and jewels bouncing from necks and wrists, the click of heels against the floors. Cries of delight sprung up from the masses as they took in their surroundings.

Moments later the snappy, upbeat rhythm of Ruth’s favorite song “Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue” bounced down the hall. People were starting to dance, kicking their legs high, swinging their arms to the beat. A group of Tom’s old friends, from their homeland, winked at him as they swirled past. “Oh, Tom! Look at all these fresh new faces,” Amy, an old friend of his, squealed.

“It wasn’t me,” Tom yelled over the band. “I had nothing to do with tonight.”

“What?” Amy shouted and held her hand to her ear. “Oh yes, you are right! Just think what will be happening soon,” she squealed, her face flushed pink with excitement. Tom shook his head and turned away.

Jim, Tom’s oldest friend, held a glass high “great party, old boy.” The gin from Jim’s drink sloshed over the rim of his cup as he toasted Tom. But Jim’s eyes were already looking past Tom, towards a tall man, a newcomer.

“Darlings!” Ruth shouted. “Hello, up here!” Ruth waved her arms in the



air before starting down the stairs, the noise from the crowds quieting down. Tom clenched his jaw and took a deep breath. Everything Ruth did drove him crazy. He often asked himself on a daily basis why he had ever chosen her to be his wife.

“Oh listen to that everyone! They are playing my favorite song,” she exclaimed just as the song ended. “Start it up again boys!” Ruth hollered to the band. “Don’t you just love this Tom?” Ruth winked at him as she took the last step, holding out her hand for him to take. “Look at all these people, just look at all the wonderful, beautiful people.” Tom noticed her eyes gleamed with anticipation.

“Just leave me out of it tonight,” he hissed at Ruth before he dropped her hand.

Soon Ruth was being pulled into different conversations and Tom was able to fall back into the shadows. All around him Tom could already see his old friends pairing themselves up with the newcomers to the party. But Tom could tell they were doing more than making small talk – they were deciding.

“Sir, another?” A waiter stood in front of him with a large silver tray.

“Mhm? Oh, yes.” Tom took the glass from the man, feeling the ice clink against his teeth as he took a long, deep drink. He really shouldn’t have another; the liquor was already taking hold, making his legs feel heavy and his head thick. He never really felt right in this body when he drank.

Gasps, cheers, and shrieks of delight erupted from the backyard. “Come on you just have to see the elephant! I mean an elephant right here in our little town, can you imagine?” A girl squealed as she grabbed her friend’s arm and they raced from the room.

Tom followed the girls into the backyard, groaning when he saw that Ruth hadn’t just brought in an elephant, she had brought an entire circus.

As people focused their attention on the acrobats, Tom felt Ruth’s lips brush his ear, “the best distraction, don’t you think old boy?” she whispered, her breath warm on his ear. “Gonna pick one?” Ruth asked, fanning her hand across the yard, treating the humans like an enticing treat. By now, all their old friends had turned and were watching, waiting to see what Tom would decide. A cold, uncomfortable sweat broke out over his body. He shook his head.

“After tonight I’m leaving. I’m going back.” Tom hissed.

Ruth glared at him before she spun on her heels and hurried over to a petite blond girl. Moments later Ruth whispered into the girl’s ear. On cue, their friends followed Ruth’s lead and whispered into their newcomer’s ears. Three tiny words were all it took to make the newcomers’ bodies freeze. Ruth, not wasting a moment, touched the soft strands of the girl’s hair before reaching up and latching onto her scalp. With a tug, Ruth plucked the girl’s hair, all of it, right off her head. Skin and hair dangled between Ruth’s fingers. Tom could hear a small sucking sound as Ruth reached up with her other hand and pulled off her own hair. For a moment, moonlight



danced on Ruth's white skull before she could swap hairstyles. The petite girl would never remember what had happened; she would never know she used to have wavy blond hair and now she had black cropped hair. That's what the three little words did.

All around him Tom saw his old friends pop body parts off the newcomers and swapped them with their own. "Violet, give this one a try!" someone called out as they tossed her a long sleek arm.

"Arthur you rascal! That hairstyle was for me!" yelled a man. Peals of laughter shot up from the group as Arthur jogged around the crowd showing off his new hairstyle.

"Amy those are perfect, really baby -- just perfect!" A man shouted and pointed down to Amy's new legs. She winked and hiked up her skirt a little further, which was followed by hoots and hollers from across the yard. All night legs and arms flew through the air while Tom's old friends tried them on before deciding. Tom watched as Ruth made her way around the party, her long thin nose became a small turned up one, while her gangly legs were replaced with ones free of varicose veins. Jim winked at Tom before reaching forward and popping out the brown eyes of the gentleman to his left. Drink after drink Tom watched as his friends, and Ruth slowly became different people.

Eventually, the band started playing another of Ruth's favorite songs and a few of their old friends, happy with their new looks, began to dance to the steady rhythm. Their joints creaked a little as they settled into their new sockets. A few people moved their neck from side to side. A few girls shook their shoulders up and down.

As the liquor worked its way through Tom's veins and made his head swirl he found himself watching Ruth. Maybe it was her new look, or the way she was carrying herself tonight, whatever it was Tom found himself wanting her.

He looked around the room. There wasn't much choice left; everyone had already swapped body parts. The newcomers were now so mismatched it would take him hours to find two of the same legs or a proper hairstyle. The help was going to have their work cut out for them in the morning. Maybe Ruth could help him find a hairstyle; perhaps if they picked one out together she might approve of his looks and it would be a new start for them. "Ruth," he called. He cleared his throat and tried again, "Ruth!" She didn't turn around. Instead, he watched Jim stand beside Ruth and place his hand a little too low on her back. Anger surged through Tom.

"Hello? Can anybody help me? I'm a little late to the party but..." A man, tall with dark hair, called out before pausing as he took in his surroundings.



“You just missed it,” Tom muttered before looking over at the man. His heart clenched. It was the guy from the newspaper. Not thinking about anything but Ruth’s approval Tom shoved the man into an unlit corner. Moments later his lips were near the man’s ear, and his fingers were latched onto his scalp. Tom felt a small trickle of blood run down the back of his neck as the man’s hairstyle settled onto his head. From across the yard, Jim had been watching. “well done old boy. Finally!” he called out. Tom ignored Jim; instead he stared at the newcomer. Guilt ripped through him. The newcomer was still frozen, slack-jawed with a bit of drool dripping from his bottom lip. Trying to ignore his feelings Tom hurried off searching for Ruth, but she was nowhere.

Eventually, he stood next to the pool and ran his hands through his new hair. It didn’t feel right. This new hair was too coarse and too short. He had taken pride in the fact he had only changed once in five years and now tonight, in a moment of weakness he had changed, something he swore he would never do again.

“Tom?” Ruth’s voice pushed through his thoughts. “Tom is that you?” His heart leapt, maybe tonight hadn’t been for nothing.

“What do you think?” Tom turned and asked her. He ran his hands through his hair again and stood proudly in front of her.

“Mhmm?” she said, closing one eye to help her focus on him. “Think of what Tom?” she slurred.

“My hair, I changed it. I took his.” He pointed towards the man leaning up against the wall. Ruth shrugged. Tom felt his heart sink a little. “It’s the man’s hair from the newspaper.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about Tom,” she said before taking a sip of her drink.

“Today in the sitting room you said you wanted me to have his hair,” Tom said, feeling a familiar ball of hate beginning to burn in the back of his throat. “I changed the color and the style. This is the first time I have changed in five years!” He felt his cheeks grow warm from anger.

“Oh! Ha! Now I remember, but it looks exactly the same,” she said before pausing and cocking her head to one side, “well I guess it looks like you’ve had it trimmed.”

Tom shook his head and said nothing. Instead, he turned around and looked at his reflection in the water before he dove into the pool; head first.

DAYBREAK

Mornings I soak
in the sun's wink that
 creeps
 through
 my curtains.

I can no longer see
veins staining lactescent skin.

I think of you creeping
through those same thin curtains
when I bolted the door shut -
how your shadow filled empty space
in my bed where my dirty nails sink in
to break the skin and see what is beneath.



The Ohio State University, Lima
Jenna Bush



LANDSCAPE

pushing and pulling at the pale plateaus that line my sides
wanting to change their form their color
sculpt and trim them
sucking in air
allowing the ruts to show
because that is beautiful

cursing the weeds that sprout from my scalp
wishing they looked different
or would behave better
longing to change the color
always wanting what i don't have
because that is beautiful

damning the trunks that are my legs
small dents show their age
the bark has stretched as i grew
peeling strips of it back
stop the splinters from growing out
because that is beautiful

always comparing my landscape to others
constantly wanting to add improvements
cut this
remove that
change the pigment
slim down

if only i could —
because this is beautiful



Art by Riley Klaus

Katherine Michalik
Salisbury University



LOCKSTITCH

Dear Puppet Master,

The stuffing is falling
out from my center and I never learned
to sew. A needle can't help
me back. My arm torn
from my body. The old threads can't hold. My lips
are hemmed shut and placed on my face so they can't
escape. My eye was ripped
out and replaced with a broken one. Shame
it wasn't blue. I might like it.



A TRAILER PARK IN CLEVELAND, THE SPRING OF 2015

Saturday was warm and dripping of winter and the
mud slides through a mad dog's claws as he bites at a thistle
a neighbor: "shoot him," her finger shakes at the foam between his teeth

There is a white child who sits under a trailer in Spring, on his back he peels the pink paint
from the siding
his mother: "do you know who peeled that paint away?"
the boy: "that lil' black kid next to us"

The trailer park is quiet in the winter night, now there are people talking outside
the little boy presses his ear to the wall – the people whisper: "nigger"
they pound on his door, his knees are knocking

The little boy is on the pavement, drawing the mad dog that he saw on Saturday
the foam from his teeth is made of pink chalk, a dripping tar, rich in fear
the lady next door hovers: "you the boy picking the paint off my trailer?"

The neighbor's yellow nails dig into his skin, the pink chalk is a mark on his beautiful hands
like the layers of colored sand in the desert
that parch themselves from the sun

Sunday was warm and dripping of winter and the
mud slides through a little boy's hands
a neighbor: "shoot him"



UNREQUITED LOVE IS A SUBATOMIC CONSPIRACY

Zoom the camera lens back and locate Universe A
a macrocosm with little room for absolutes
a Cosmo that spits not wax poetic
and all matter can be humbled down
to a single speckled layer of linen
weaved together by small particles known as atoms
that sometimes because of curiosity
or maybe even romance
will stich closer than usual
in what is known as quantum entanglement.

Now zoom in
and the scene switches to an exposition
of two people.
Each with lives that unraveled out
would equate to hardly a centimeter
of a spool's thread in the world's linen.
Yet somehow, subatomically, they're infinite.

They are sitting right next to one another
drawn together by entanglement.
One is a girl
with sandstorm hair and closing eyes
She is taking two hits from a joint



condensing the circle of life to a blunt
before passing it on like ritualism.
Her thoughts are flowing out like muddy rivers
and her world is transforming to impressionist paintings.
Words,
are being spoken to her and getting drowned
coursing out the spaces in her ear canals.
She is from Universe A.

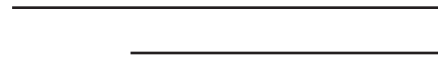
Pan over and we see the other
a boy
with comb-over hair and vortexed eyes.
He is carrying only one absolute truth
condensed in the form of three gold words
buried deep in the caves of his mind.
He is chiseling stone,
his mallet tapping out a slow S. O. S.
as he tries to excavate out a single phrase
I love you,
with thoughts and sounds that don't seem to want to find an exit.
He stretches his arms towards the girl
pleading with himself
begging to make sense of particles infinitesimal
seemingly insignificant
that caused him to become so entangled
so infatuated
and can't.
Maybe the closer he reaches his hands to cup her face
the easier his words will slide out.
What he needs right now is a punji
to charm his thoughts
raise them up out from his skin
and create an exodus
for everything he feels on the inside,
because just one small whisper
of an escaped confession
would be enough.

What he needs right now is to reach a denouement.
He leaning into her.



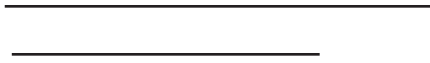
She curving into him.
Or better yet a light bulb switch to a realization,
that sometimes love isn't given back the way we might hope.
Sometimes it gets stored
in blackholes found in Universe B.

CICATRIX



The Ohio State University, Lima
Mattea Rolsten

Taking off your shirt,
You bare your body
Revealing dense scars
That speckle
Your skin.
My eyes sweep over
Your goosebumps,
Catching the glint
Of each patch of fibrous tissue.
Carvings of past loves,
Slithering slashes,
Burn marks,
Spot your back like
Animal hide.
The whites of my eyes
Are the first
They've seen.
Too many years
Hidden
Beneath thorns and thistles.



My tongue spends the rest of the night
Trailblazing your spine,
I pour my taste buds
Onto your shoulder blades,
Seeping
Into the wounds,
The heart rot.
As my chapped lips connect
With each needle's stitch,
The rings of your rib cage
Tremble.
I revive your flesh with
My syrup and nectar.



A CATHOLIC PRIEST WALKS INTO A BAR

we met at the altar of St. James'
and kissed under the stained glass windows,
his lips puckered in a thuggish way
took me to his apartment so i could
wash dirt from his feet
beg for forgiveness, whore
didn't even take his shirt off when we finally fucked
after he made me pretend to pray the rosary
and called me Mary the whole time
next morning i kissed the cigarette burns on his palms
as he drank wine instead of water
then dropped me off at the bus station after
asked me to send his regards to my son
still don't know what he meant
think he just wanted to get a catholic
on her knees



CASSIOPEIA

1

Her breast was universal – shedding light on
men in suits,
men on suits, who couldn't even be bothered
to notice she enjoyed nails down
her
back
and the soft caress of grunted obscenities. Men whose eyes
trace unabashed the outline of her nipple, yet somehow miss
the residue of the
tiny Maraschino lips
for which her breast
exists.

2

She told him she couldn't get on her knees –
they'd been bruised for weeks and were starting to turn to
mush.
But he needed a fistful of her ionic hair, to be absorbed into
a black hole, hidden from
the discolored boy whose juvenile fingers reached
for him at night.



3

The auroral blue light seeped into the slit of her
crusted eyelids,
delivering morning to her before
she knew how to exit the night. She jerked awake,
covering the salty evidence of her previous night with
the dun eider-duck duvet. Through penetrating rays came
a single, outstretched palm.

4

They were as rough as the men she'd known –
his callouses – but the marks they left were not localized
they oozed through her,
antibiotic fondles tickling her sides,
raising bumps on her nape. Together
they battled the vicious eventide, healing her
marred skin one star at a time.



Lauren Stetson
University of Mine, Farmington

ELEGY FOR YOUR CURIOSITY

For some reason, your face
does not quite look like it did
six months ago, when we first went
for coffee and sandwiches and talked
about the history of schools and
the change in time zones
as you crossed the Atlantic. That day
you were so alive and full of wonder,
wanting to know who I was under my
checkered peacoat and grey wool sweater,
under my skin and muscles and
deeper than my bones. But a
few nights later, we were in separate beds
in your tiny poster-covered dorm,
across the room from each other,
and neither of us spoke or slept, and the whiskey
and cigarettes burned through our veins
as we silently stared at the same ceiling. But now
I want to know why your curiosity diminished,
why your face has weathered, since the day that
I drove you to the coast and you asked me, pointing
out my window, *Is that the Atlantic?*
and laughed as we circled the bay. You swore
that you could almost see the outline of

France, and I knew that in your mind
you could make out your farm on the other side
of the water. And with two months left before
we are again separated by an ocean,
you look so weary as you talk about
your little sister and how much she
acts like me, and maybe, you think, you don't
want to see her drunk and sobbing,
either. Your face is so heavy,
I almost want to lift it to the streetlight
and make your eyes glimmer just for
a second, so I can remember if I really
loved you like I thought I did.





BURN

A single source of colour is present, differing itself out from the suffocating white, and as the flame flickers the oranges merge with yellows merge with reds. Colours splitting and melting over each other¹ in the flame: yellow mixed with red, red seeping into the orange, hues and shades mixing and diluting each other. The mixing of yellow with orange and red. The mixing of orange with red and yellow the red with yellow and orange yellow merged with orange split room engulfed. Lashes flicker hands scrunch orange split. Yellow overtaking hands stretched orange overbearing. Tears fall² orange grow yellow die. Hands red more tears yellow back orange dead. Red pain yellow hurt orange tears all lost too gone all orange. Tears fall black yellow too bright too orange nails bitten hands sore red. Forever yellow suffocating orange red dead.

That's all I remember, the searing pain of burnt hands reddened³ and dead skin. The flowing red pain against yellow sky⁴ melting away into the blackness of the night. Despite

1 I was never very good at colouring, colour-blindness sets you back like that. But when you're a kid, no one pays attention. They didn't know that I coloured the wall behind my bookcase yellow and red, stretching up into orange until they changed my room as I'd grown... By then I'd forgotten too.

2 My mum didn't cry much. I saw her once at Christmas, Dad had forgotten that she'd wanted a present too. She cried a lot when I was taken away, but the nice man who put me in the yellow car said it would be fine.

3 It was high school that I discovered drama, I was forced into playing the role of Lady Macbeth. For some reason, they didn't let anyone play their own gender. I remember the line "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" most.

4 Just like the times when me and Katie would set alarms to watch the sunrise. The blackness fading as the sky births shades of yellow, orange and golden. Katie would always stare at the sky... I chose to look at her instead.



efforts it is forever burned into my eyes, my skin, my nose, hands, mind, hair no part untouched I still recall I remember the scars and the hurt and the smell and the scent⁵ yet I have not sinned I did never not once turn the sky red and orange and yellow with pain. I confess nothing I have done good only good my feet do not burn when I walk in the church⁶ I am honest. I do not deserve this pain so make it stop. Please.

The flame never dies. Hues smash together as fragments of colour lost shades pour blood stills, the mixing of the red and orange yellow back with the pain suffocating surrounding my skin the burning room⁷ shattered tears fall lives⁸ gone black less yellow orange fighting red dead floor alight yellow overtaking red spilling orange too much orange ceiling gone black red tormenting pain⁹ large screams into black. Forever unforgiving pain too orange too red yellow growing and pain not dulling eternal.

It's a single inescapable terror that's stalked my mind for years and shows no sign of mercy, no retreat, and no escape¹⁰ escape impossible trapped by fear hope lost the black is back growing stronger with infecting touch must battle. Every day is a battle against my memory: the lack of amnesia or forgetfulness – it hurts me. It's a sick twisted play of death, but as all plays do, it comes to an end.¹¹ Curtains fall and its instantly like the black of night. A sturdy blanket of blackness until yellows grow and oranges split across the sky with red roaring up attacking the black with black fighting tears falling orange swelling pain more yellow house orange spots with outstretched red tearing walls down.

Orange spilling from hands replacing¹² red with yellow burning tears fall red dull eyes

5 It was like when we went to Grandma's and she'd made cake. Mum said you always came back from "the damn house smelling of smoke" but I only ever smelt the sweets. Grandma would always tell off Grandad when he tried smoking.

6 I didn't like church, but I liked getting dressed up. A little suit jacket and shorts, it was nice in the summer. I didn't feel like I was allowed in there. Murder is a sin. I don't believe in God anymore.

7 The room was engulfed in flame, the orange reaching up to cover the bed and the curtains, the rug on the floor burnt black while the flames climbed higher, unstoppable. Blackened possessions removed and spread across the green as they turned red and blue against the cold lights of the van.

8 My life was happy, home was fun. I loved my mum, and my dad. I'm sure I would have loved my sister, too.

9 The searing pain of fire crawling across your skin as it taints it red, with more red pooling on the floor- only to be later mixed with tears. Blue water mixing with cold red. I didn't cry much, I was like my mum.

10 A wall of fire standing between me and the door inspires me to go back and attempt to fix my mistake, only to see the curtains be eaten by the flame. It tried to absorb the rod, too, but failed and let it go. It fell, and then more red as I said goodbye to my sister. Mum cried when she found out then, too.

11 Although I had been on many stages, I never got used to how dark it was once the curtains closed, I couldn't hear any applause and was too focused on getting out.

12 There was a show I used to like called 'The Replacements' where the main characters would replace any character with one they liked better. I asked my mum if I could be replaced with my sister,



staring light hands engulfing room red growing orange dead yellow back splitting black. Flames spreading orange overbearing too much yellow no break aggravating black attacking. Orange spilling from hands hues merging elixir of shades my hands my deeds my sins orange growing yellow dying black eternal. Red pain orange gone yellow gone only pain more pain more red dribbling flowing pressure not enough more red more pain more dead no yellow no orange but fading black. Black is back and black spots fading in out leaving not gone more pressure more black red flowing hurt more pain more pressure black overtaking possessing me not enough red more pressure dead red dribbling not enough¹³ but pain red dead flowing more and more black suffocating black surrounding overtaking red.

It's a memory I won't forget. I don't deserve, nor want, and can't forget. The way the blackness grew¹⁴ and how the colours stretched up into the sky. A sturdy blanket of blackness dribbling over my vision, it was all I could see. Like when I clutched the burnt teddy- the person in the van with me tried to take it away from me, I yelled¹⁵ at him. I clutched it close until all I could smell was the regretful smoke and my eyes only saw how the soft pink had been turned to black with disgust and mistakes. I made a mistake.

I've paid for that mistake through a life¹⁶ of guilt and self-hatred and I still can't forgive myself. I have sinned, and no number of tears, hope or guilt will fix that. The memory will continue and replay itself in my mind serving as a constant reminder of how my past is painted with the colours¹⁷ of sin. Apparently, it wasn't my fault... but I was the cause of the fire. My payment is the insanity that I get brief breaks from before the colours burn me again.

but "it doesn't exactly work like that, hunny." That was another time she cried.

13 There was never enough pain to deal with my past, suffering is accepted as suicide would be an easy escape and she did not get that.

14 Forever growing pain as I tried erase but the overbearing orange merges with the red and the yellows of unforgiveness and I can't undo what I've done as tears fall with pressure black is back and growing help room breaking world shattering.

15 Screams of pain swallowed by unforgiving blackness as the colours the reds merge with yellows and leave only black behind, a sea of black that absorbs all while the orange bleeds and the red grows overbearing and painful as yellow consumes all.

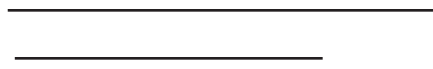
16 A life I wished to give away instead of see the world in just red and orange with dots of yellow before it leaves and becomes permanently black at night, the suffocating black that is all that remains when the colours finally evaporate, only to come again the next day or the next hour or the next minute or the next second and then the reds are back and oranges fly around because they're free and yellow starts to play again.

17 Red and yellow merging as painting happens with brushes of pain and death which colourblindness cannot stop as the colours split and combine, merging the shades together.



18

18 I'm sorry.



THE FRESHEST KIND OF LOVE

my velvet prince
how have you come to me?

balmed and oiled
you are laid out before me as an epitome
to white
to water
to pure

the freshest kind of love
is from the knocking of nodes,
the coalescing of eons

the planets know you and how you were conjured
from the dust of stars
the fall of empires
the inception of knowing
which moved the bumping bodies of our ancestors

I have never touched something so fulfilling
as when your soft hand curls around my finger
I can feel the tightening of infinite love

in quiet



I wish for you:
That Time Brushes Your Cheeks With Rose Petals



Red hair burns my eyes.
In the sunlight,
you shake hands. At night

the order flies and explodes
in my face.
Burn the picture

of peace and happiness
from that time,
once upon a summer,

once upon a love.
Ripped down the seams,
it seems nothing lasts

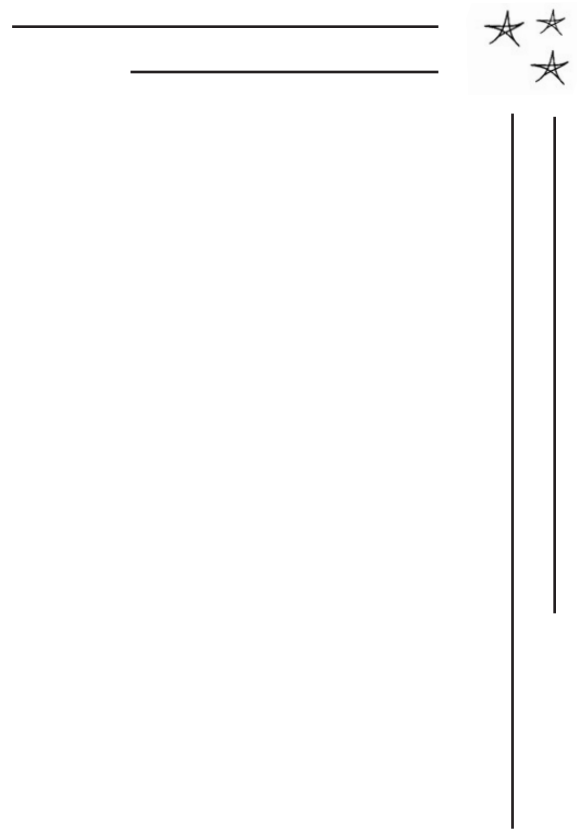
and gas burns the eyes.
So, Mr. Missile,
so, Mr. Cold War,

how much more do you plan
to take? How do you plan
to make this death a victory?

MR. COLD WAR

And what will be left?
Whatever survives,
it cannot be me.

It cannot be me.





A REQUIEM FOR PIGS

A requiem for pigs,
A recitation for swine,

Lay waste to your brain and marinade your mind,
Skin drips like leather lacquer
I'm too weak for silver liquor,
I'm about to do something stupid.

It's weird to think about,
The luxury suites all the way down,
So don't think about it,
Slept under two ton torpedoes,
Those little death tubes,
These apocalypse machines.

Find the meaning,
Save the dream,
A blind man's bluff,
Separate threads culled from the same cloth,
Maybe it's just a series of words,
A luxury only the poor can afford.
What if death is like this?
Pardon me, Sir, for I did not mean to do it.



Metal mentalities,
Bulletproof blasphemies,
Children came to play at a hanging,
Sax is on tap when the war drums come banging,
Follow the roots and find the weeds that bear bitter fruits,
Bunny ear knots tied into a severed noose,
Scattered drops of black cherry fizzy juice.

Grab my rifle and part the underbrush,
Life is a race, don't ever tell me not to rush,
Caribbean culture of poison, they have the anecdotal antidote,
Don't sit there and tell me stories while my poor wife erodes.

In one unmarked envelope, please send me some gravity,
Once I was like you, and one day, you will be like me too.



AVOIDING MIRRORS AND FRANKENSTEIN'S CREATION

I seem to meet you at the same times
after the sun has gone down
and I'm alone
stuck still
in my apartment
because I'm trying figure out new ways
on how to tiptoe around some dirty mirrors
or really any kind of reflective object
on my way to the door.

Though at night it's always harder to escape
because there aren't any more distractions left
other than silence,
but I still hear your voice like snapping branches
shouting out to me
to look at you,
this person built from invention
a composite of hacked corpses and static electricity,
and I'm not sure if it can be pinned down
to a madman's arrogance
or if it was instead a smart's man obsession
that led Victor to bleed his hands
to just capillaries and veins
trying to sew a person up into a concept



of how he thought the world should worked
before realizing he'd never be able to get it quite right,
because people are more than just complex arrangements
of flesh and bone,
though it doesn't really matter anyway.

All that blood dripping from his hands
has soaked into you
and you've been hunting after red ever since
in whatever form
love or rage,
anything that can keep at bay numbness.
And I keep wanting to face you
to tell you I understand what that's like,
constantly chasing after colors,
but right now the world is too collapsible
plaster instead of cement
sticking it all together,
but maybe in some distant future
nothing gets marked "fragile: handle with extra care"
and maybe in that future I have courage
and I clean all the dirty mirrors, reflective objects
won't seem so scary
so I'll look at you and walk out of my apartment.



EPISODE # 1

I bought Christmas presents for people in
March, during a thrift shop spending spree.
My humor admired the irony –
how I threw away my savings on other
peoples' thrown away things.
And I went to the gym twice a day to run as many
miles as I could while staying in the same place.
Treadmills are good for that.
And I started thinking I could be famous
that I probably should be famous;
that I could save the world
from the people who didn't believe in magic.
I cleaned my room for the first time
in months (even decided to color
coordinate the clothes in my closet).
Professor Rissner's only A+ in philosophy
that semester.
Maybe it was because I was the only one
who could explain Marx's dialectical materialism
in my own words, and it helped that my
professor wasn't an undercover FBI
agent the way my mailman was.
I started to talk like an auctioneer.
I had to let the words out and



when I couldn't speak I would write on my hands, up my arms, down my feet. I was too afraid to write on paper, afraid I'd lose it, spill coffee on it, or accidentally throw it away and lose every good idea I tried to conjure as if I only had a limited amount of unknown time to save the entire universe. And when my body became covered in indecipherable squiggles, drenched in black and blue ink, I moved my words onto the wall behind my desk. At night, when everyone else slept, I'd soothe my insomnia and scribble words between the ceiling and the baseboard with "Espresso Beans" Home Depot paint. It was a trip – living just inside the confines of my mind for a couple weeks. There were many attempts made by family, friends, teachers, doctors, the girl behind the cash register at Wal-Mart – to get me out of my own head. No one could keep up. I thought I could fly out my sister's window like a bird, and I needed to meet John Lennon, ask him how it felt to be shot by someone so obsessed, so "not in his right mind." I also wanted to hear Lennon's opinion on my parents naming my older brother Sean Patrick John Paul George Ringo Doran. (The "Patrick" my mother added because he was born four days after St. Patrick's Day.) Would he laugh or think that, too, was insane? I thought I could figure the world out, I thought I could make sense out of all the nonsense. I was always on the verge of the next breakthrough – then I broke through. One night, after splashing my walls with words, a heavy tiredness came over me. My mind decelerated to only thinking a single



thought
at
a
time.
Then I finally found sleep,
and woke up to the fun being over.



REMEMBER

Empty house. Perfume of decay hangs derelict yearning. Lungs creak echoes people passing. Passed. Past. Head buried in the attic, she dreams under sheaves of half burnt wedding photos, baby blankets with worn corners, prom gown stains, ex boyfriend's pants. Sift through dust to find her mouth. Kiss it until the rafters remember how to smile.

Wrists curl half submerged in the bathtub, white porcelain, milk gone bad. She cracks like worn tiles. Drain stale water and stitch wrists until she remembers how to paint. The staircase rests on her spine, each vertebrae step curling upwards into speech. Etch a word in her bones, scratch out silence until she remembers how to cry.

Lungs acquiesce in empty rooms, dust cloth shrouds hang like dead breath. Open windows and sing until she remembers how to breathe. Stomach curdles in the kitchen sink, bleeds mold and creaking. Wash it until she remembers hunger.

Bare walls hold faded rectangle scars. Broken board floors trace no steps. Dust gathers on her flesh. She sits silent. Hearth harkens no heat. From the outside she is dead, but a heart still beats. Teach her to open her doors, teach her to grow flowers, teach her to be a home once more.



INTERLUDE

Our intermingled breaths form
clouds we walk on, obsidian figures against
the pale moon backdrop. We don't know
where we're going - Heaven? -
don't care as long as we get there
fluttering, banded hand
in hand. As long as he - whoever
- can wed our bedded, torrid souls the way
our breaths do.



FINE GRAIN

He tells me I have a fine grain. The mustache man rubs his hand down my leg and tells me this. He presses a hand down hard on my green wicker seat. I bend. He grunts and nods to his wife. Good flex to it. He lowers his wide nose to my arm and inhales deep. Smells like Cedar. He is wrong. I am not Cedar, but this is not his fault. The bright green and white paint, the varnish, underneath it all, I am Birch. My legs are White Ash. This has always been a source of insecurity for me, to come from different trees.

Mustache man puts me near the front of the shop. I am Antique. I am Expensive. Again, he is wrong. I am young. Last year I was made by Frank. I was Frank's Hobby. Frank quit smoking. Frank needed something to do with his hands. Frank's wife clapped when I was finished. But they already had enough chairs for the dining room. I went to the shed. I was Dusty and I was Spider Webs. I look very handmade. I can see why mustache man thought I was an antique. I am not. The rest in the shop, they are antiques. Their voices are old and they are stuffy and they are racist. They resent me. Someone so new. So ugly. So close to the front window.

Gary and Ellen open the door to the shop. Gary looks bored. I later learn that Gary usually looks bored. Gary makes a joke about being old and antiquing in Vermont. Ellen pushes his arm. She shushes him. She smiles. Gary picks up a plate, examines it, and puts it down. Ellen walks up to me. Her eyes move quickly, scanning. She grins wide. She gushes. I am Marvelous. I am Perfect. Cindy is going to love me. I hear whispers and barbs from the antiques. I do not care. Gary walks over. He fingers the price tag attached to the string on my leg. Gary rolls his eyes. Ellen calls mustache man over. Gary carries me to the bed of his truck. He ties me down with bungee cords. They are tight and they bristle, but they are not unpleasant. We drive fast. I watch the trees and the road as the wind whistles through the gaps in my wicker.



Most of the other dining room chairs are part of a set. They match, with red trim and dark lacquer. They do not engage, but appraise me, coldly. There are others in the dining room, chosen after the fact, like me. A haughty parson's chair with floral upholstery. A pair of snickering English Windsors. A slightly warped, but well-meaning wooden ladder back. The ladder back tells me that all the furniture in the kitchen and dining room fall under the jurisdiction of the recliner. A leviathan in blue corduroy, rich in cheeto crumbs and loose change, he stands in the corner of the living room. I saw him confer with the ottoman when I was first brought into the foyer. They weighed their options, pretended the decision was theirs to make, and then accepted me into the house. The furniture cheered. That fanfare is over now. The chairs are keeping their distance, taking their time to size up the brightly-painted newcomer. I have never been surrounded by this much furniture. I have never felt so alone.

I learn at dinner that there are two other people living in the house. There is a boy, Ryan. He is wearing a hood. He is sullen, withdrawn. When he eats Gary makes him take his hood off. His ears are heavy with loops and bits of jangling metal. There is a girl, Cindy. When dinner is called she bounds down the stairs. She notices me immediately. She shakes me and grins wide. She is missing teeth. She pushes me forward and plops her tiny body in my seat. She says I look like a Big Ole Key Lime Pie. Gary and Ellen laugh. Ryan does not laugh. After dinner, Cindy asks Gary to help her carry me up the stairs to her room. Everything is green. Cindy loves green. I am green. Cindy loves me. She puts a blanket over me and lady dolls around my feet. I am Hampton's Beach House. She puts pillows between my legs and more toys behind the pillows. I am Castle. Gary forgets to take me downstairs. Cindy moves me by the bed and rests a book on top of my seat. She falls asleep with the lights on. I love Cindy.

For a long time, I live in two rooms. From breakfast until dinner, I am in the dining room with the others. There, I am Chair. At night, Cindy takes me up to the green room. There I am not just a chair. Cindy sits underneath me, reading with a flashlight and warming her hands on a lamp. I am Tent. She sits on me, a plastic crown on top of her head. She fills cups from an empty tea kettle and dances with her stuffed animals. I am Throne. I am happier than I thought I ever could be. Cindy gets older and stronger. She takes me up and down the stairs by herself. I want my life to always be this way.

In the spring, Ellen's sister Mabel is coming to visit. The other chairs speak in hushed, frantic voices. This is a bad omen. This is a sign of dark times. I do not understand. Weeks later, Mabel comes for dinner. I understand. Mabel is big. Gigantic. She seems to fill the entire door frame. Folds of flesh spill out from a pasty orange sundress. She wraps Ryan and Cindy in her wide, flabby arms, smothering them and covering their heads in kisses. At dinner, the other chairs quake in fear as Mabel selects a target. I pray, but my prayers are unheard. Mabel lowers herself on top of me



with the slow, unstoppable force of a tsunami. Cindy opens her mouth to protest. I am her chair. Ellen gives her a dark look and she goes silent. I am in pain. I am in agony. I am Atlas, holding up the world. I feel the wicker at the center of my seat straining. My legs are beginning to bend. I scream and scream but no one can hear me. One of my wicker ties snaps like a tendon and I gasp. Mabel reaches a hand down and scratches her tremendous behind. She must think it was a bug bite. More of my wicker snaps, and Mabel makes a move as if to get up, but it is too late. My front right leg snaps, my center gives way, and I crumble. Mabel makes a soft sounds of surprise as she is pitched to the floor. She grabs onto the table cloth, dragging it down with her. A platter of sweet potatoes and a plate of green beans fall to the ground and scatter. Cindy leaps from her chair and runs around the table to look at me. She sees my broken body. Her face crumples and tears fill her eyes. She runs sobbing up the stairs. My pain is so go great that I feel like I am watching the room from above it. Mabel picks herself off but she is more confused than before. She asks Ellen what that outburst was all about. Ellen tells her that Cindy is sensitive.

Gary moves me to the garage and tells Cindy not to touch me. She will get splinters. Gary is going to take me to the dump but he forgets. I am in the garage for longer than I was in the house. I see the family sometimes. Gary getting in and out of his car. Ellen stores drinks and boxes and seed in the garage. At night, with the lights off, Ryan sneaks thick, sour-smelling cigarettes. I watch Cindy grow. I watch Gary go bald. Cindy sometimes gives me long, plaintive stares when she gets in the car on the way to soccer practice. As the years go by, she stops looking at all. Again, I am Dusty and I am Spiderwebs. I think she forgets.

Ryan moves out. Cindy starts driving. I watch Gary get balder. I am part of the garage. I am compatriots with the lawnmower, the broken shelves, and the archery set that Ryan will never use. I accept the garage, full of the forgotten. It is better than the shed. I have company. It is many years from the dinner with Mabel, when Cindy enters the garage with a book. On the cover is a picture of a vice and the title, Introduction to Design and Woodworking. Cindy looks at me for a long time. She leafs through the book, searching for a page. She leaves. The next day, Cindy returns with white strips of lumber, a band saw, sandpaper, varnish, wood glue, and a can of spray paint. She cuts off my broken leg. I feel no pain. I can't remember the last time I felt anything in that leg. She sands down the empty opening and tries to insert one of the piece of lumber. It is too thin, there is too much space. She tries the next size. It fits perfectly. She seals the opening with wood glue. My new leg is White Ash, same as the others. It feels good. Cindy shakes the spray paint can and pushes the button that opens the garage door. She puts on a white surgical mask. I am covered in clouds of purple spray. The smell



is horrible and the feel of the fresh paint on my skin is constricting and a little nauseating, but I do not complain. I am not Ole Key Lime Pie anymore. I am Deep Purple. This is for Cindy. For Cindy, I will do anything. She leaves me to dry. She comes back for me the next day and carries me across the yard. I am so excited that I feel I am shaking, but Cindy does not notice. She takes me up to her room. Everything is purple. Cindy loves purple now.

In a way things go back to the way they were, but it is different. I no longer go downstairs for dinner. Cindy sits on me with her feet up on her purple desk. She still reads, but not as much. She talks on her telephone, mostly with two people named Maggie and Bryn, sometimes Chuck. At night she sits on me and blows smoke out the window from the same sour-smelling cigarettes that Ryan used to smoke in the garage. She draws shapes on me, whirling vortexes and constellations and hashtags. Sometimes she uses me to step out of the window. She leaves towels and shirts on my back. I want to live like this forever. Cindy moves out.

After Cindy moves away, there is a yard sale. Gary and Ellen are downsizing. I am chosen, as is the warped ladder back and the blue corduroy recliner from the living room. I am nervous, but it pleases me to see the king laid low. We in the front yard by the sidewalk. The sun is out and it is warm. I have a price tag around my leg again. I am not as expensive as I was before. People stop to look at us. I am smelled by dogs. Two men, Carlos and Louis, stand by me, talking for a long time. Their voices are musical and they roll their r's. I am Cute. I am Perfect. I am a Little Loud, for Louis' taste. They say they'll just paint over me. The men go to the door and get Gary. They exchange money, smiles, handshakes. I am crammed into the trunk of a Hyundai. I worry about Cindy.

Carlos and Louis share a loft in the city. The furniture here is loud and cat-ty, but somehow weary. The colors are all white or black or grey. None of the chairs match. There are no sets, but they are all white. The loft is big, but it mostly one room. From my spot in the living room, I watch Carlos and Louis in the kitchen. Lewis is cooking shrimp and rice in a big pan. Carlos walks up behind him and says something. They both laugh. Carlos kisses Louis on the neck and walks back to me. He places a paint stained tarp underneath me and holds a brush and a bucket of paint called Eggshell. The white paint is not like the spray paint at all. The motions are smooth and Carlos paints fast and carefully. It is somehow pleasant. When he is finished, I am Eggshell, like all the other chairs.

That night there is a party. There are forty people and they are loud. There are men and women and men dressed as women and women dressed as men. They smoke and drink bright liquids out of thin martini glasses. Carlos and Louis move around the party fluidly, effortlessly, talking to everyone. Sometimes separate, usually together. I hear the armoire groan when a drink is spilled on her. Louis lifts a long mirror off the



wall and lays it down on top of me. I am the New Coke Shelf. They laugh. The guests are talking more loudly and much faster. Most of them do not leave until morning.

Carlos and Louis throw parties like this most nights. I understand why the rest of the furniture seems so tired, so cranky. Carlos and Louis do not sleep very much. Their days are full of meetings and exercise and bickering. They make love often. Much more often, I imagine, than Gary and Ellen. I listen to their fights. Louis is tired of the city. He loves the energy, but he hates the cold. He wants warm weather and the ocean. Carlos will never leave the city. He was born there, he says. There is nowhere else, nowhere better. Sometimes I see Louis cry.

Carlos and Louis move out. There is no going away party. I am grateful, I cannot take any more. My frame always aches and my vision is blurring. Some of the furniture and white chairs are given to friends or sold online. Louis is impatient to move. I am donated to the Unitarian Church of All Souls on Lexington Avenue.

At the church, I am stored in the basement. I am surrounded by folding chairs and one morose Walnut shelf that holds bibles. The folding chairs find me extremely interesting. They treat me as a traveler from strange land. They ask me to tell me stories from my life before the church. Sometimes their attention is too much. I like to be near the Walnut shelf. He is quiet. After living with Carlos and Louis, I feel quiet is underrated. On Mondays and Wednesdays, we are chairs for Alcoholics Anonymous. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, we are for Narcotics Anonymous. Friday is for Overeaters Anonymous. Weekends are for Youth Ministry. I am the only wooden chair. I am noticed and become a favorite. People arrive early to try and claim me. The Alcoholics call me White Russian. The Addicts call me White Lightning. At the Youth Ministry, I am the Leader Chair. The same pastor sits in me every time. At Overeaters Anonymous, they call me Mozzarella.

I am accustomed to the cycle. The Alcoholics smells like cigarettes and drink cup after cup of coffee. They are jittery and legs shake in their seats. They tell stories and mostly laugh, but sometimes cry. The Addicts are the same, but with more hugging. None of the Overeaters are as big as Ellen's sister Mabel. I listen to thousands of Serenity prayers. I watch the boys and girls at youth ministry yawn and pick their noses. Their group leader, Pastor Dan is enthusiastic, but he has a bad stutter and is hard to listen to. When he stutters he repeats the entire sentence to try and make it perfect. His sermons are long. I watch his flock sneak headphones into their ears from out of their sleeves. I am in the church basement for years. Sometimes I miss the sun. Mostly I miss Cindy.



In the fall, the pipes burst. The basement is flooded with cold sewage water that soaks everything. The Walnut shelf and I sit overnight in the freezing, fetid water. The cold is raw and piercing. I think of a story I overheard in one of the meetings, about a man who passed out drunk, outside in a Minnesota snowstorm. He woke up with blackened frozen feet. I imagine this feeling is a lot like that. The cold doesn't seem to bother the aluminum folding chairs. In the morning, Pastor Dan discovers the flooding. There is yelling. I am Ruined. I am Soiled. Some volunteers from the church place the Walnut shelf and I behind the church. Next to a dumpster.

A man with a wide-brimmed hat and a denim jacket picks us up and places us in the bed of a truck. We drive upstate. The air is rich and full like in Vermont. The trees are orange and red and yellow and green and brown. Walnut Shelf quietly tells me it is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen. I agree.

We arrive at a campground filled with hundreds of parked cars. There are yells and the smell of cooking meat. I can hear the thunder of loud music from somewhere nearby. A team of men carry me and walnut shelf through the mud and the trees to a massive clearing filled with stages. The music is louder now, it is a discordant mix of rock, folk, and rap, coming from different stages in the clearing. I recognize one of the songs from Carlos and Louis's loft. The clearing is filled with dirty, sweaty, happy people. In the center is a massive mound of wood that must be thirty feet high. It is not just timber, but old desks, coat racks, shelves, and chairs. I see a rocking chair, a broken piano, and a moldy totem pole. They throw me on the pile towards the bottom. I smell gasoline and look around to see that green starter bricks line the bottom of the pile. This is a bonfire.

I feel panic and fear rising in my frame. I look at the people around the bonfire. I am desperate for help. Someone needs to stop these barbarians. Someone needs to prevent this massacre. The other furniture is silent. I am the only one yelling out. I look around the crowd and I see a woman. She is looking right at me. She is wearing a purple sweater and has short dark hair that she wears long in the front. She is holding a brown beer bottle with no label and a man with a beard has an arm around her. She is smiling. She is older, much older, but it is Cindy. My Cindy. She is still staring at me. Her smile moves to the side of her mouth like she is trying to recall a memory she is particularly fond of. I feel calm, at peace now. We look at each other forever before that side smile breaks into the toothy grin of that little girl who told me I looked like a pie. She recognizes me. She grabs the man with the beard and points to me. She is yelling something. She is proud. Cindy and the man make no move to remove me from the pile. I do not feel betrayed. I do not expect them to. I can feel this is right. I just need her with me here, now, at the end. Someone bangs a gong and another lights the fluid at the base of the bonfire. There is a tremendous whoosh of flame and the tower is alight. The crowd roars its approval. Cindy jumps up and down, clapping



for me. Clapping for the fire. There is no hurt, it is not like the cold water in the church or the incredible pressure under Mabel. The fire is warm and vitalizing. It strips away the layers of paint. The Eggshell white. The Deep Purple. The Bright Lime Green. It enters my bones, filling my being with energy and purpose. My body is reduced to ash and I am unmade. I am tiny particles of chair and as I rise above the crowd, over Cindy and the thousands of onlookers, I feel nothing but the most complete and utter joy. I smile and I laugh as the cinders of what I once was roil in the smoke over everything, over the treetops and the people and the music. I'm carried on the wind, dispersed over miles of forest. I settle on trees, and on leaves, and in the wood.



There is a light in my bedroom that is broken and
it blinks on and off.
I look up and I see
the light as you look down
and you see the inside of me as
I lay upon this bed.
I feel your fingers reach into my gut as I fall asleep,
and you pull my intestines like rope
out from where my thighs touch
and place them onto the dinner plate.
You know the area of my body well.
That pale china that your mother gave to you
serves as the altar.

Do this in memory of me.

I awaken to find you
standing in the way of the light,
holding a rib bone like a scalpel,
slitting my skin open. My
blood stains the white sheets, dots
not unlike the freckles on your shoulders. The
droplets disappear and reappear with this broken light. A
red bandana covers your eyes,

LIKE SPAGHETTI



those eyes that you don't show because you don't think they're bright enough.

They were bright enough for me.

You are blind, you are blind, you are blindly
tearing through me.
You are deaf, too: you don't hear me scream.
I try but I am silent and paralyzed
as you keep scraping
the snow and ice out from inside of my womb.
I see your hands on the shovel:

your knuckles are still white from when they gripped mine.

Under this flickering light
my veins have become the sinew that holds together
the bridges between us.
I watch you; I am mined out of myself;
my body like blood diamonds, my blood like diamond wine.
You pile my insides on this plate with your innocent fingers
and fill a chalice with my blood.
You don't stop until I lay as a separate pile myself,
pulsating in the light:
shriveled snakeskin,
porcelain bones
and a cracking glass heart,
watching you consume me
under the flickering bulb
like spaghetti.

WAR

war
war on my body
body

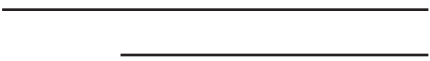
on the couch chest tightens immediately need to leave nothing triggered it that is
what's strange my body decided got in my car red honda driving away
his house embarrassed scared 9 p.m. still driving
chest constricts intense breathing blurred vision driving aimlessly fumble for xanax
popped one dry cry heart racing i parked
at home
safe get into bed pitch black now body is slowing rest

*inspired by evie shockley's fukushima blues



University of Kansas

Brittanie Smith



Art by Liya Swaminathan



SACRIFICIAL RITES

She eats little white bodies whole,
like sacrifices to a clever god
that only takes nausea as payment
for the removal of anxious habits.

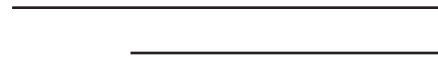
One milky round pill almost reverses
a Sunday religious breakdown at the diner
where she eats patty melts alone.
Her hair is in a loose ponytail
and sweat beads at her temples.
Her wrists smell like honey and vomit.

Another body feels chalky on her tongue
before the fizz of a drink carries it away.
This one keeps her nails from bleeding
and releases the four-beat count required
when she encounters each set of stairs.

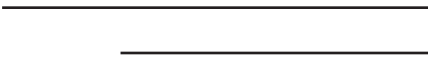
Her chin rests on the lip of the toilet seat,
turning the act into something dignified.
She turns on the faucet and prepares
the room for tomorrow.

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTMAS TREE

He was like Jesus in the doorway -
swinging limp and perpendicular,
suspended by a noose of fairy lights.



The University of Winchester, UK
Summer Young



PASSIVE FORM

Macalester College
Parker Grubb

Suck the color off my lips. Leave rings on skin. Fingers. Bathtubs. Smoke on city balconies.
Watch the train pass and-
Don't forget to be home by two and-
Lay out on the ice until it melts and-
Don't forget to ask permission and-
Kiss with teeth.
But oh god look at the stars and-
New pink flesh reminds me of you, but no-
Look again and it's sea-lip blue.
Drowning.
Don't be afraid to hurt me. Nails like kisses. Teeth are honey. Press bruises until you re-
member loving me. I am ache.
Do I leave you hollow?
Do you write me songs or poems or ballads or numbers on bathroom walls?
Call me yours. Drink shitty beer at three PM. Tell me you know what I want. Make me the
passive form and-
Say you should have fucked me and-
Ask me to marry you and-
Don't forget to buy more milk.
Lover.
Bodies are for touching, don't blame the fingers. Forget how to speak. I am breaker.
Let your tides wash over me and-
Forget soft edges and-
Cry when it hurts and-
Don't tell me how much you miss something that was never yours.



THE CAT

He stared at me as if there was something to see. As if I wasn't just empty space. His emerald beacons only relented in their glare with the closing of his eyelids.

He should be asleep. Most cats are, especially in a still house where the only sounds are the breathing of their owners. Perhaps he is awake only to watch the moonlight dancing on the plush carpet. Or to watch it play with the shadows of the baseballs and stuffed animals standing guard on the shelves.

I played with the hem of my white glove, luminescent in the pale lighting. The orange cat watched my every move. His paws were tucked into his chest like he's in prayer, an apt image considering what I was there to do.

A boy slept beside him, a stuffed horse tucked under his arm. Pictures of him and his parents decorated the walls. In every picture, genuine smiles graced their faces as they hold each other close. One picture has the boy and the cat. He has the cat standing up on his hind legs as he proudly looks over the cat's shoulder. The cat's face held a look of disbelief and astonishment, as if he was amazed to be manipulated that easily.

I stood and my dress clung to me like smoke. My glove slipped off.

The cat was still staring at me, the slightest hint of a mew on his lips

I think he knew what was about to happen, but hadn't decided if he was ready for it yet. Instead he stared at me, with my bare hand hovering inches from his face and his whiskers quivering. My hand kept its distance.

Maybe I shouldn't kill the cat. Not just yet.

Instead, my hand cupped the side of the boy's moon-shaped face. His skin was already silvery pale. I felt the breath come out of him as he sighed. His skin was still warm as the sound of his breathing left the room. The cat meowed slightly and closed his eyes into half-moons. I smiled.

It's a strange thing, watching the life drain out of someone. Everyone dies a little differently, which seems to be fitting. This boy didn't really move at all. His arm loosened around the horse and his eyelashes stopped fluttering. A stillness entered the room. I



slipped my glove on and left the dead boy and the purring cat behind.

“Did you find what you were looking for?” Alec said as he leaned against the banister. We were at the highest point of the bridge; a small stream ran below us. Wildflowers and trees surrounded us. The sunlight was bright against my eyes and it twinkled off the water. Birds echoed chirps off each other and they reverberated through the valley. I thought I saw a deer peek its head out between the trees several yards away. My hands were warm in the gloves.

“And what would that be?” I said quietly as I look at the water below. The rocks shone in the lighting, the changing pattern of the water reflecting over them.

“You tell me.”

I closed my eyes letting the sunlight hit me. “He was awake. He could see me Alec. He knew what was coming.” I sighed and my upper body decompressed as the breath left me.

“That’s no reason to let him live. It’s only a matter of time before someone else sees you. What will you do then? Let them live too?”

“You don’t understand. People don’t look at you in fear. You are not the unknown, you are not a part of one of the greatest questions there is. You’re only there to let people make mistakes or feel joy. You aren’t there to bring unquestionable suffering.”

A flock of birds flew above us. Blue jays.

My thumbs rubbed against the indents in the banister. I chewed my lip and moved my gaze to the ground. I slipped my glove off and traced patterns on the wood, leaving dark marks behind as it withered away.

“I still bring pain, Morana.” I felt him beside me as he leaned against the banister, his white shirt glowed in the sunlight.

“Why does everything have to die?” I barely had time to catch the words before they tumbled out of my parted lips.

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s not a difficult question. There isn’t much to it.”

“I know, but everything has to die... just as everything has to get sick, everything has to fight, everything has to go hungry. It’s an unchangeable fact, woven into the threads of the universe.”

The wood crumbled beneath my grip. Small specks of ash drifted to the boards below as the whole thing crumbled. “And we can’t change the threads of the universe? We can’t rip it apart as easily as cloth? As easily as I did to this piece of wood?”

I couldn’t tell what the look in his eyes meant, whether it was pity or something else entirely. “No.”

The clouds formed a sort of colony as they drifted across the blue expanse. “I’m not talking about every thing. I mean only a select few. Maybe a select few can



live forever. Be immortal.”

“We are the select few, Morana. Death, Conquest, War, Hunger. All of us are immortal beings.” He took my hand and turned it over, tracing the lines of my palm as if to prove his point. He looked into my eyes before taking the glove from me and slipping it back on. “We are the immortal.”

“I know, but why can’t there be more, why can’t there be more immortal things? More trivial immortal things, like a cat. Why can’t a cat live forever? Why does it always have to be something with an enormous responsibility?”

My hands slipped through his. “Just because we have an enormous responsibility upon us does not mean that we cannot be human. That we cannot be trivial. It does not mean that we cannot feel or question what we are doing. What it does mean is that we have to carry out our responsibilities no matter what. You cannot stop being Death because you feel for an orange cat, anymore than I can stop being Conquest because I am compassionate towards the other side. Everything must die and everything must lose at some point or another.”

My hands fell to my sides. The sunlight stayed stagnant across his face. It carved out the features on his left side, leaving the other shrouded in the shadows, splitting him in half. My face held a more muddled version through my reflection in his eyes. The sunlight was draped over the top side of my face, beginning at the far edge of my forehead and down to the corner of my mouth.

I knew what I had to do.

The sun was shining on the house, depriving the mourners the luxury of the shadows on this hot day. They were all wearing a variation of black as they filed in. The children played on the lawn, seemingly oblivious to the fact that someone had died. One of their own. Instead they rolled in the grass, laughter on the brim of their lips that dissolved into quiet shouting. Their smiles disappeared when the adults looked at them disapprovingly.

A tug at my dress brought my attention down to the cracked pavement. The orange cat had hooked his claw into the fabric. I laughed as I crouched down and pulled it out before letting go of him. He meowed and sat down, meticulously cleaning the fur in between the pads of his feet. A man passed by us and chuckled at the cat even though he was sitting behind me, not easily seen from the sidewalk.

I sat beside the cat.

My glove slipped off and he froze before he lay down and stared at me with those emerald orbs.

His tail twitched slightly as we held the tableau.

Maybe not the cat, not today.



**FROM YOUR BODY GROWS A GARDEN:
AN ELEGY**

I am wilting at the edge
of a frozen lake, melting into June.

My mother knocked twice at my door yesterday
your grandfather is dead.

I saw him in nature only once,
each atom a new bud, hinting at spring.

We went to the sea to tell our favorite truths—
we are from open wells and chipped dishware.

Weeks later, I dream of a beautiful boy. He is
adorned in peonies and dandelion, butterfly weed, honeysuckle.

I have never planted a garden,
how can wild berries be kept?

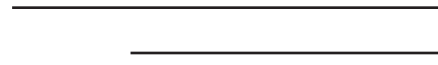
My grandfather's advice was always the same:
memories are seeds,
let them bloom.



SOME AFTERNOONS ARE JUST EASIER TO SWALLOW

he put on a weathered blue jumpsuit
and some work boots
and went outside to garden in the lawn
with his hands.
from the house, he heard
his black AC74 radio
spit static onto the floor
and then blurt out an air raid warning.
the phone rang and it was Emma.
she said she'd bought him a pair of scissors
and was coming over to cut his hair.
the sun was red and was sitting low
on the white sky over the plains
as she arrived. she sat him down,
and he kept still with his eyes closed
while she worked, combing
her fingers through his hair.
as she wiped his head clean with a towel
and swept up the floor,
they heard a loud thud outside.
an aerial bomb had landed
on the lawn in front of the house.
it was nestled in a small crater
and had scattered dirt all over the petals

of the carnations in his garden.
Emma turned to him
and said she wanted to name it Sam,
so they put it in a wheelbarrow
and rolled it inside
to give it a sponge bath in his tub.





CONVERGENT BOUNDARIES

We have been like hikers on the same trail a day apart,
our boots crusted with the same mud,
the dust of our passing intermingling in the air above our heads,
outside our view,
unbeknownst to us.

Where you have drank from the streams, I have drank from the streams,
so the snow of the mountain has nourished our bodies the same;
each of us now has trail-torn sinews in our walking legs which have been built by the
same journey.

What hell might have been had we not both stopped to witness the wildflowers?
Seeing in some similar glade something much like Eden.

And though we walked apart so long,
feet finding purchase in one another's foot prints,
even parallel lines meet at a vanishing point.
That makes the space within the circle of our arms a place to disappear.
Hide with me there till the shape of the peaks change,
worn away by wind and cold,
less timeless than our love.
And think!
Since every grain of sand was once part of a mountain,
the two of us,



Californians by birth, Nevadans by life,
aren't exactly meeting for the first time so much as...
rebuilding the Sierras.
Two grains,
hand in hand,
reversing the erosion of millennia.



BEHIND THE FLESH

I'd like to consider myself a pretty stable person. In fact, I'm so stable that the doctors decided to release me from the hospital after having only been there a month. I just walked through the front doors and no one said a word to me. I was the best patient they'd ever had. They even stopped giving me medication as a reward. The doc said there was no more need for it, that I was cured. So, I left, and somehow I wound up inside a cab with no driver. I shrugged my shoulders, took the cab driver hat lying on the seat next to me, and started driving around the city picking up random people and dropping them off here and there.

It was 10:30 on a Friday night. I had been circling the same square block for a little over an hour before she finally stepped through the doors of Rose's Luxury. I saw her out of the corner of my peripheral, waving me down with her bony wrists poking out from underneath her black pea coat. As I pulled up, I got out of the cab and opened the door for her. She smiled at me sweetly, as her cheeks blushed at the whispering wind. She slid in. As I made my way around the back of the cab, I heard a noise coming from the trunk, so I gave it a gentle shove until it stopped. They make these cars so cheap nowadays.

"Hey, weren't you the cab driver that dropped me off earlier?" she asked as soon as I sat down.

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

"Oh, wow, what a coincidence then," she laughed.

"That it is," I chuckled along with her. "I decided to come back down 8th street and you just happened to be walking outside. Where are you headed by the way, Julie?"

"Brookland," she said.



“Brookland? That’s a pretty nice area,” I smiled at her in the rearview mirror.

“Yeah, I guess it is,” she said.

“So, are you headed home to your significant other?” I asked casually.

I could see in the rearview mirror that she turned her head to look out of the window.

“I think it’s starting to snow,” she said.

I could see out through the front window the tiny snowflakes slowly trickling down from the sky. There were people walking down the sidewalk huddled together and others standing at the bus stop with their hands balled into tight fists, shivering from the wind. I looked into the rearview mirror again, and she was now looking directly at me, enticing me with those blue eyes. I averted my own eyes back to the road ahead and cleared my throat.

“Yes. It would appear so,” I said, turning up the heat. “Are warm enough back there?”

“Yes I am. Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome. I don’t like for any of my passengers to freeze,” I said, smiling into the rearview mirror.

“I appreciate that. You’re too kind,” she said. “I don’t think I’ve ever met a cab driver like you.”

“Well, we’re a dime a dozen. But, I really just enjoy making the ride as pleasurable for my passengers as possible, especially beautiful ones such as yourself.”

She blushed as I complimented her.

“Why are you blushing? It’s true. You’ve got great bone structure and the most adorable set of blue eyes which, if I were your beau, I would never stop staring into.”

She reminded me of an antique porcelain doll the way her blue eyes burned through my soul as she looked at me again. I remember my younger sister having one of these dolls when we were kids. One day, for fun, I took a blade to one of them and carved out one of the eyes just to see if there was anything behind it. Sadly, there was nothing. No bone. No flesh. But these eyes, these full of color pupils that stared back at me through the rearview mirror, there was definitely something behind those.

There was something that happened to me in that moment that urged me to invite this woman back to my place. Just for a night cap. Opportunity rushed in once I approached a long line of traffic after turning onto I-395. I insisted on going another route that wasn’t really that much out of the way. Anyhow, we continued our conversation as I weaved through the traffic lanes to take the next



exit.

When I asked what her plans were for the evening, she told me she had none so I simply asked her to come over. Of course she said yes. I would get to spend the evening with those eyes and those lovely bones of hers. At the resounding yes to my question, I turned the cab around to head to my house.

When we pulled up in front of the unlit house, I got out and opened the door for her. She had the same smile painted on her face, her cheekbones drawn high above her rosy lips which were smothered by her scarf. As we approached the door, I realized I had forgotten my key. I checked under the doormat and then above the door frame in which I retrieved the spare.

I opened the door to a dark room. I never liked to leave the lights on, so we stood in the dark for a few moments before I found the switch to turn the light on.

“Welcome to my home,” I said.

We walked into the living room. I directed her to have a seat, while I took her coat and went in search of wine.

“This is a very nice place you have,” she called out from the living room.

“Thank you,” I said. “I actually just finished furnishing it. It’s taken me months.”

I returned with two glasses and a bottle of Dom Perignon.

“So, tell me more about yourself,” I lifted my glass up to Hoover near my mouth. “I want to know what’s behind that beautiful flesh or yours.”

She blinked at me a few times before going on a spiel of tales throughout her life. I sat there, watching her lips flap incessantly. I had a burning desire to grab them off of her face. The antique doll was all I could picture at that moment.

“Do you like dolls, Julie?” I asked.

“What kind of dolls?”

“Porcelain dolls,” I answered.

“Oh, I love those!” her face beamed with excitement.

In fact, she was so excited that she took the bottle opener and started scraping it across her face. She said she liked the skin of the dolls the most, but I told her the real beauty lies behind the eyes, in the flesh. It was then that I told her that her eyes reminded me of porcelain dolls, and I proceeded to ask if she wouldn’t mind lending me an eye. She graciously accepted and took the sharp end of the bottle opener and drilled it through her eye. She wound the lever until it went completely through the other end and then released. It made a slight pop! We both marveled at the eye which was now slickened with a thick red string of blood that drooped down the handles of the bottle opener. She enjoyed this sight so much that she surprised me by taking out the other one; the two eyes looked like white olives on a kabob stick as they rubbed together at the base of the opener. I then reminded her of her beautiful, rosy cheeks, and she removed the white olives and nestled the sharp end of the opener on her soft,



delicate face and drew lines across it, her skin peeling back over itself like butter, as she carved out her cheeks. I was the only one who could see the beautiful bone beneath the skin. So strong, so powerful. I reached my hand out to touch it. To feel beneath the flesh of this doll, and it gave me new strength. The lips of this doll told me to take the bones of her flesh for myself.

I turned on the news, though I didn't really want to watch; it only served the purpose of drowning out the mindless chatter from the other patients which was bumping into my own thoughts. I could barely think clearly anymore. There was a missing person's report with the same picture of Julie Waters that they've been showing for the past month. I loved staring into those deep ocean blue eyes. When her picture left the screen, I turned the TV off, popped a few clozapine and whatever other pills the doc prescribed me and closed my eyes to dream of hers.



WHEN HER PARENTS FOUND OUT (THAT A GIRL TAUGHT THEIR
DAUGHTER WHAT LOVE WAS)

snowing in your state, south wading through waist-high
boston. I wish you had fields, my father doesn't
come home with me. my brother like to talk
tells me about you, my mother
that the world prays I already forgot.
is flipping. milkweed
bringing snow seeds float in
for florida late summer
and rain
in arizona then nights grow cold
monsoons water freezes
will stalk nebraska. in a bottle by my feet
meet me on the sidewalk
in a fever
dream you've written
I grew up this poem before
believing that there is always and it ended.
symmetry in beauty (remember)
any halved thing how it doubles
butterfly wings, two hands over
lungs and eyes its own eye?

there is no tomorrow must we take your advice
I would choose and make every goodbye
over today: into lungs

you and I paired and breathy



Hamilton College
Michelle Woodward

KOMOREBI

I think of you when you are not here
lingering like sunlight filtering through trees

KOMOREBI

coming in and out
of dreams_reality

I wish I could see you
and tell you that you shook the ground
that felt so firm beneath my feet
and let me fall to the earth
so quickly I fell to my knees
and prayed for redemption
because I thought there was something wrong with me
I saw in you what was missing
and I opened my eyes for the first time
and realized it was okay to like you
and maybe someday love you too



THE STAR PIN

1

I learn to crochet from my mother. I learn to laugh from my grandmother. I learn to admire the stars from my grandmother. I sew. I cook. But mostly I crochet. Useful girls crochet. My mother tells me. She tells me. If you can crochet they'll keep you. I crochet a pot holder. Mother sends me to the well to draw up some water. It's cold. The ground is frozen. I overturn a rock and find a patch of thawed earth. I dig with my hands. I dig until I find a pin with a star on it. The dirt is under my fingernails. There are worms squirming out of my fingernails. I draw the water and wash my hands in the bucket. I've seen the faces of the pale dark men. The pin is dirty. I forget my grandmother. I throw the pin in the well. I bring the bucket back to the house.

2

I crochet a scarf for my grandmother. The scarf gets caught on the stove. The scarf burns. My grandmother falls ill. I crochet some mittens. I wear the mittens. It's winter. It's snowing in the distance. It's always snowing. I walk through the snow to the well. There is no snow. I pull the bucket from the well. It is full of dirt this time. I dump out all of the dirt on the ground. I find the star pin in the dirt. The pin is clean. The pin is dirty. I am not dirty. I do not want to be dirty. I hide the pin in my dresser. My grandmother gets worse. I crochet a shawl. My grandmother dies. I cover my head with the shawl when the pale dark men come in. I crochet a blanket. There is no snow.

3

Mother takes me to the market. We buy tomatoes. When no one is looking I squeeze a tomato until it bursts and watch the seeds drip down my hands. My mother takes me



to my cousin's wedding. She dresses me up with ribbons and bows. She sends me for my prettiest dress. When I pull it out of my dresser, the star pin falls on the ground. I leave it there. I don't want to be dirty. Everyone at the wedding is beautiful. Everyone at the wedding is dirty. My grandmother was lucky. My mother tells me. She says. Grandmother was too old. Grandmother wasn't useful. If I'm useful they'll keep me. I crochet a hat. We put dirt on my grandmother.

4

The dark men keep me. They find the star pin on my floor. They keep me in a forest. It is dark. It is wet. I have a lamp and a cot. There is no lamp. The cot is made of moss. I have some yarn in my pocket. I crochet a scarf. The dark men burn the scarf. They make me wear the star pin. I weep silently in the dark. They don't keep me in a forest. They keep me in a long cabin, and I don't know where my mother is. There are skeletons in the long cabin. They stare at me with hollow eyes. They are not useful. They are silent. I run out of yarn. I crochet my hair. I crochet a blind fold. They reach for me with empty hands. I curl up in the corner. I throw the star pin at them.

5

One of the dark men takes me away. He takes me to a house in the forest where his milky white body looms over me. He keeps me in a bedroom, in the bed. I am useful. Then he gives me yarn. He gives me food. I am allowed to bathe. There is a tiny tub in a bathroom in the house. I scrub my skin until it bleeds. When I am clean I kneel down on the floor, naked and dripping wet. There is a loose tile on the floor. I dig my fingernails into the dirt around the tile. I tear at the tile until my fingernails crack and bleed. Finally, I pull up the tile and find the star pin staring up at me. At that moment the dark man finds me. In a rage he throws me back in the bedroom, still naked. He throws the pin at me. It is dirty. It is filthy. I pick it up with shaking fingers. I pin it to my breast. I try to crochet but my torn up finger tips and pierced breast leave splotches of crimson on the pale scarf. I am no longer capable of weeping.

6

The dark man's wife hates me. She glares at me when she walks by. She makes me wear the pin. The pin is dirty, but I do nothing about it. I can do nothing about it. I crochet her a scarf. One without bloodstains. She burns the scarf. The dark man is smiling at me again. But his smile has no kindness in it anymore. When he is gone one day, the wife corners me. She sends me out to the well. There is no snow. I bring up a bucket. It is full of water. I drink from the bucket. The water is cool and



crisp. When I come back inside the wife slashes my face with a kitchen knife. I cry out. I drop the bucket. I spill water all over the floor. The dark man comes back and yells at the wife. Then he locks me in the bedroom. He leaves me for days.

7

My face grows puffy. Puss oozes from the gash. There are worms squirming out of the gash. I kneel on the floor and dig at the boards. I tear up a floorboard. I tear up my fingernails. I hide the pin under the board. The dark man finds me there, bleeding. He does not smile. He takes me away from the house. He takes me to a building with billowing smokestacks and skeletons standing in lines in the snow. I stand in line with the skeletons. Before I enter the building he presses the star pin into my hand. All the skeletons are burned.

FOR RACHEL

She asked me to love her.
So I bought the 2% milk & watched TV Land re-runs & in return, she listened to me
sing Barbra Streisand's "Funny Girl" in the shower.
I thought this was love but she said that it's more than milk and show tunes.
And I can't help but thinking:
I never remembered to put the cap back on the milk,
& I fell asleep during the commercials,
& I couldn't make her come,
& I never liked her mother,
& I only made her laugh when I fell down the stairs
and all of these things were my failures —
but the greatest of them all was that I never made her love me back.
She gave herself to me, her aces & spades, even the joker and
I hadn't gone all in except for the cow juice & the TV & the sex with the lights off.
Instead, I kept the best bits of myself locked away,
inside my treasure chest of useless flotsam & jetsam.
I saved these things from her because they were trash,
and I didn't think that anyone would want them
but *she did*.



The Ohio State University, Lima
Kit Wuebker

Jenna Bush
The Ohio State University, Lima



EUPHEMIZE ME

your coconut butter words melting down my back
faster than you can rub them into my hair
that burns for you

that meteorite crashed into infantile Earth
destroying, accidentally, creating
the miniscule craters dotted along my spine

butter reaches my anthill cheeks
and I know our
accident

was

BRANCHES

Your tree leans to one side,
limbs stretched out, half a ribcage
shorn from its solar plexus.
Your ribcage, a set of fenestrated blades,
opened outwards.
I saw your lungs flutter like damp wings,
fleshy branches shifted by wind.
Rack-and-pinnioned breaths
shift you, bone teeth on bone rack.
Thoracic thumb-screws
new to you, your cavity pinned
and plucked clean
as your tree in winter.
I wish I could suture those limbs,
bark and rack, back to center,
but your tree leans alone in the yard.



University of Colorado, Denver
Grace Wagner

Michelle Woodward
Hamilton College



reclaim whiteness
buried in snow
my very existence is political
best kept secret
Loving v. Virginia was passed the year
my mom was born
1967-
fifty years ago
there was a time
when my very existence was outlawed
(still is)
in certain parts of
this country
identity riddled with guilt
I still get funny looks
from time to time
history on repeat

LIVING/LOVING



CAMPFIRE STORY

CONCERNING THE GHOSTS:

1. They had all owned the apartment at one time or another, in their separate lives, and had been very disgruntled to discover upon their deaths that they would have no opportunity to leave it. The apartment had been comfortable enough during their lifetimes, but each of them had grown accustomed to the prospect of a more celestial backdrop for the afterlife.

(“They told me I was going to see my parents again,” Mauve confided to Theresa one day. “They told me I was going to dissipate into the universe,” sighed Theresa. “To be suffused through it as oceans, mountains, stars, etc.”)

Instead they were to be confined, apparently eternally confined, in a two-bedroom apartment with an ancient electric range stove and patterned carpeting that Dominic sometimes described as “aggressively uncool.”

2. To distract themselves from excessive contemplation of this carpeting scheme and its implications for the state of human society, and from excessive interaction with one another (which tended to result in disagreements and sour moods¹), they spent most of their time observing the antics of the apartment’s current residents. The most mundane episodes became fascinating against the backdrop of an uneventful, aesthetically unfulfilling eternity in the apartment. They could watch Keelie push too-cold peanut butter painstakingly across a slice of toast, furtively egging her

¹ The problem was that Mauve had watched Dominic conning a steady procession of girlfriends for fifteen years before he died and joined her in the afterlife -- by which time she had thoroughly lost interest in him. Meanwhile, Theresa tended to bring up her dissertation on Coleridge too often to endear herself to anyone during her life or her death.



on, only to dissolve into groans of disappointment when she poked a hole through the toast with a particularly enthusiastic swipe of the knife. They could follow Mr. E through the house as he vacuumed, taking bets on which hard-to-reach corners he would conveniently forget to go over. They could sing along to Mrs. E's slightly off-pitch showertime medley.

3. When the family forayed outside of the house for vacations, the ghosts were deprived of their usual entertainment and therefore forced to exercise their imaginations. They would hover around the kitchen table and pretend to eat; or they would hover above the beds and pretend to sleep. Sometimes Mauve and Theresa would hover over the sofa and Dominic would hover, kneeling, in front of the T.V., pretending to be that wacky newscaster whom the family liked so much. (He had been an actor in his day, at one time notorious for his portrayal of Baron Von Mucus in a series of nasal decongestant ads.) He would slick his hair back and issue a steady stream of aspersions and apocalyptica -- to which Mauve and Theresa would nod sycophantically and say the kinds of things that Mr. And Mrs. E liked to say, e.x., "why can't they get guys like this in Washington?" These were the days when the ghosts came closest to liking each other, but they always found themselves exhausted by the time the family returned.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE FOURTH OF JUNE²

The family was in Costa Rica and Mauve would not for the life of her stop chattering about "how adorable" the pictures were sure to be. Consequently, Dominic and Theresa were getting along significantly better than usual: they didn't have anything in particular to say to each other but could rely on Mauve's sentimental outpourings to provide fodder for, at the very least, four or five shared expressions of disgruntlement per day. The peace in the apartment stood on a delicate balance, however, because Dominic had never had much patience for emotional inanity, and the threat of his inevitable snap loomed ominously overhead at all times.

"The ones they brought back from San Francisco were so lovely," sighed Mauve as the three of them hovered around the kitchen table that afternoon, eating imaginary noodles with imaginary chopsticks. "Don't you think Keelie could be a professional photographer?"

Dominic bared his teeth into a root-canal kind of smile, and nodded.

Theresa chewed contemplatively on a mouthful of air. It was a point of pride for her that she had always had better form than Mauve and Dominic when it came to pantomime. She thought about how it was funny because she had never had any real reasons to like her own family, they had been simple and Southern, they had always seemed to

² Not exhaustive.



belong to another world even within the mortal one -- but she had managed it just fine. What made it so difficult to grow into Dominic and Theresa the way she had grown into her family? Had the part of her that could learn to love unreasonably died also? Or maybe it was that they had all become lazy, and it was easier to love the Es speculatively from afar than to engage with one another. Or maybe it was easier to love the Es because they were alive and could do interesting things and go places and provide entertainment: maybe if you can't actually eat or touch or make contact with anything, if you're all walled up inside yourself and you can only look and nothing else, then nobody's love can get to you? She frowned, puzzled.

Suddenly there was a loud bump from the living room and the ghosts jumped. "Who could that be?" whispered Mauve.

Theresa shrugged -- Dominic was already floating away from them, through the doorway, out into the living room. Theresa and Mauve sat waiting. After a moment they heard a strangled yell, and drifted into the kitchen after Dominic.

"Oh," said Theresa.

There was a man standing in the living room -- not one of the Es, but a man who was a stranger to all three of the ghosts. He stood with his hands in his pockets, shaking slightly and making shuddering noises and looking down at the shadowy shape at his feet.

"Who is that?" whispered Mauve, squinting through Dominic to get a better look at the corpse.

"Me," said a glum voice.

There was a new ghost, hovering a few inches above the floor in the corner of the room, her vague, translucent form almost lost to the shadows of the truly awful living room curtains.

"Oh." said Theresa again. She pointed at the body on the floor. "That's yours?"

"Yeah." The new ghost performed a hesitant front-flip, then a back-flip, trying on her new form like a pair of shoes "I just died, like, a minute ago. He killed me. You didn't hear it?"

"No, we didn't hear anything," said Theresa, frowning.

"Sorry about that," offered Dominic sympathetically. "Although, you know, not much we could have done."

"No, it's okay," said the new ghost. "He stabbed me back in the car but I just died a minute ago."

"Huh," said Dominic.

"Who is he?" asked Theresa.

The new ghost shrugged. "I've never seen him before today. He just came up to me on the street outside my building. He said he had a gun and I'd better get in the car. He didn't have a gun, though."

Then they fell silent as the stranger stumbled over to the landline. He drew the



receiver up to his face, and dialed out a number with shaking fingers. After a moment, he mumbled, "It's done. I'm taking care of the body now." Then he hung up.

The new ghost had floated over to the coffee table. She hung upside-down in the air, examining one of the family's vacation pictures from San Francisco. "This is a really nice picture. Is that the family that lives here?"

"Oh, God," choked Dominic as Mauve's face lit up. Before she could say anything, though, the stranger had knelt down over the body, distracting everyone's attention again. They watched wide-eyed as he pulled a small hand-saw and a rolled-up garbage bag out of his pockets, and went to work.

The new ghost looked troubled.

"He's going to get blood all over the carpet," said Mauve disapprovingly.

"Well," said Dominic, "won't that be a tragedy."

They all hovered around the stranger, watching him brutally disassemble the presumably still-warm body into a collection of more conveniently-sized shapes. These shapes went into the garbage bag, and a few handfuls of paper towel from the kitchen were hastily squashed into the bloodstained carpet. Then he left, as quietly as he had come, with the bulky garbage bag slung over his shoulder.

"That was crazy," said Dominic.

CONCERNING THE NEW GHOST:

1. Her name was Carmen and she was immensely interesting to Mauve, Dominic, and Theresa for the first three days of her death. But they soon discovered that she had been a counselor at a summer camp for ten-year-olds and had a leftover penchant for organizing group-bonding activities. Then she quickly became immensely uninteresting.

2. But they did like to question her about the circumstances surrounding her death. They felt a bit like detectives interrogating a witness -- like in the cop dramas Mr. and Mrs. E liked to watch on Sunday evenings, while Keelie frantically finished the weekend's homework assignments. They would have her hover above one of the kitchen chairs while they hovered on the other side of the table, facing her. Dominic was normally the bad cop; Theresa, the good cop; Mauve pretended to transcribe the interviews.

They learned that she had been having two separate affairs with two separate, married men. They learned that she had inherited an upscale apartment and small fortune when her parents had mysteriously vanished five years ago. They learned that she had once turned in several of her college friends for an elaborate cheating scheme, and that this had resulted in their expulsion. These revelations would often have Dominic, Theresa, and Mauve on the edge of their seats (figuratively), with their fists clenched, eagerly anticipating the breakthrough that was sure to come soon. And Dominic would lean over to Theresa and mutter things like: "Damn it, if we don't crack this one... You know the



commissioner said my ass is on the line.”

But their interviews would soon conclude when Carmen would lapse into a tangential anecdote about the Blue Cabin’s antics or the counselors who told the scariest campfire stories³. Dominic was always the first to lose his patience with Carmen, and would backstroke out of the kitchen whistling through gritted teeth, thus concluding the evening’s entertainment.

3. At first she did not like the dark stain on the carpet, and would lurk in the corner of the living room with her arms crossed, glaring at the space where her body had lain. But after a few days it occurred to her that she was all right, really, if a little bored and lonely. Whoever that man with the knife had been, she was safely beyond his reach now. The blood lingered but its dark significance gradually faded away, and in a matter of days she began to feel at ease in the living room: she even agreed with Dominic that the stain was “actually kind of a huge improvement.”

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE NINTH OF JUNE⁴

On the ninth of June the E family came home and then hell really broke loose. Within minutes of discovering the broken lock on the front door and the blood on the carpet, Mr. E had been put to bed with a cup of chamomile tea; Mrs. E had gotten on the phone with her sister in Toronto; and Keelie had locked herself in her bedroom and turned her speakers up to full blast.

“What’s this music she’s been listening to lately?” said Mauve, scrunching up her nose. “She’s such a nice girl but I hate to see her getting into all this dark stuff.”

“It’s called being a teenager,” said Theresa impatiently.

“I just don’t know what to think,” Mrs. E said to her sister in Toronto. “It’s just so creepy to think that somebody was in here. No, it doesn’t look like they took anything.”

“Did they even call the cops yet?” said Dominic, zooming into the kitchen. “Did she seriously call Amanda before she even called the cops?”

“No, she called them first,” said Carmen helpfully, looking up from her scrutiny of Mrs. E’s face. “Okay, she looks really nice and everything but what is with her lipstick?”

“Oh, it’s just one of those mysteries of the afterlife,” said Dominic.

³ Some of her stories could have been good. They had interesting twists and occasionally even hijinx. But there was a droning, businesslike quality about the tone Carmen would adopt: it made them sound more like reports than stories, and Dominic suspected her of using a lot of big words and even the occasional allusion to seem impressive.

⁴ See footnote 2.



A couple of bumbling police officers soon arrived at the apartment. They had a look around, muttered importantly into their radios, and announced that a detective and a team of techs would be over soon to have a look around. In the meantime, they asked that the confused family members sit together in the kitchen and try to avoid touching anything.

The ghosts were ecstatic. They spent the better part of the twenty minutes debating what the detective was likely to be like: While Mauve was hoping for something along the lines of the Miss Marple prototype, Dominic firmly insisted that they were about to encounter a fully-fledged Sherlock Holmes. Theresa sided with Dominic, and Carmen, who had not yet been subjected to Mr. and Mrs. E's Sunday evening routine, didn't have much to say on the subject.

Then they showed up. The techs quickly colonized the living room and the detective sat down in the kitchen to ask the Es "just a few questions" over a pot of coffee. Mauve, Dominic, and Theresa were all disappointed to discover that he was, in fact, more along the lines of a Wallander. ("I would've preferred a Miss Marple," said Dominic glumly, upon a single glance at the detective's gruff, brooding features.)

The detective asked a few preliminary questions. Then things got interesting. He informed the family that he was investigating a missing persons case: a young woman named Carmen Quinonez had disappeared several days ago and the apartment might be connected to the case, had any of the family ever met Miss Quinonez? (Carmen and the ghosts laughed uproariously. "She's right here!" yelled Dominic.) Then the detective took a manila envelope out of his briefcase, and handed it to Mrs. E. "Do you recognize any of these faces?" he asked.

Mrs. E drew a handful of photographs out of the envelope. Each photograph depicted a male face. Each male face was gaunt, middle-aged, and a little sallow. Mrs. E flipped through them, frowning -- and the ghosts hovered around her, clenching their teeth. She overturned the final photograph, which depicted the face of the stranger, and the ghosts went wild.

"IT'S HIM, IT'S HIM!" they shouted, jabbing at the photograph with their fingers. Carmen actually attempted to shake Mrs. E by her shoulders. Even Theresa was too agitated to point out that dramatic irony is actually pretty sloppy as far as plot devices go.

But Mrs. E shook her head -- "No, I don't recognize any of them." -- and passed the photographs on to Keelie, who passed them on to Mr. E after a minute's deliberation. Not one member of the family had ever seen the stranger. ("Or," as Dominic said later, "none of them were willing to admit to it.") The detective didn't seem troubled. He stuck around for another hour, asking questions: Who else might have known that the Es' apartment would be empty on that day? Had any of them ever spent time in Rochester? How long ago had they originally booked their trip to Costa Rica?

In the end the detective left the apartment, assuring the family that they would soon have their apartment back to themselves.



CONCERNING THE AFTERMATH OF THE INCIDENT:

1. The family did soon get the apartment back to themselves. They all seemed very relieved when the last of the techs had cleared out: at last, Mrs. E could have the ladies from the walking club over for tea and subject them to the Costa Rica pictures. The ghosts, however, felt almost mournful. Even Mauve's keen interest in the pictures paled in the wake of all that had happened, and when the walking club ladies came around she actually found herself fixating on the misshapen hole⁵ in the carpet rather than the little portraits of beaches and a very sunburnt Mr. E. They sustained an ongoing conversation about the case for a few more weeks, but as there was no fresh excitement to fuel their interest, this dialogue and the amity that came with it gradually dissolved.

2. Of course, the general ennui was only intensified by the fact that Carmen was new to the afterlife, and kept issuing fresh outbursts of dissatisfaction. The ghosts, who had grown accustomed to the gloomy prospect of their eternity in the apartment, had to feel all the old stings of injustice afresh. Carmen had only recently been alive, and the small pleasures that the ghosts found around the apartment seemed trivial to her. "But why?" she cried, when Theresa suggested one morning that they all take bets on which patterned shirt Mr. E would wear to work. Theresa remembered that she had felt the same frustrations for a few months after her own death. She hoped that Carmen would soon settle down into the way of things, and learn to find excitement in the daily goings-on around the apartment. It would be a very irritating eternity if they were forced always to question why they liked what they liked.

3. The techs had cut the entire bloodstained patch out of the carpet and it fell upon the family to choose a new one. Dominic found some consolation in the ensuing debates and in the array of home decorating magazines that were always left splayed out around the living room. Would it be the little daisies or the faux Shah Abbas or the blue and white squares? He hoped fervently that the family would never make up its mind, or at least that they would draw out the issue into a good two or three years' worth of entertainment.

5 See point 3.



BABY MOLD

Mommy painted yellow on the walls
of a bedroom I wouldn't sleep
in. The lone crib sat mocking her,

us. I'd watch her stare from my spot
on the floating cherry shelf, half-way
decorated. My black and white body

forming inside a frame. A doll
with short black curls like my mother
had, like I may have grown

to have. She stood in the open
door until dust blanketed the crib
and that paint began to chip away in pieces

the size of memory.



THISTLES FOR DINNER

the sandbox is small,
in need of weeding
a rusted fire truck shell lays abandoned on the cheap sand
thistles sprout from the metal poles
and braid themselves between the squeaking spiral springs
a thistle is plucked

my friend and I remember Mrs. Glass talking about the Mayans:
stone bowls and rocks were used to grind corn to meal,
a mortar and pestle,
the women pounded fiercely
so that hundreds of years later
we see crevices in the bowl the archeologist has found
dimples and dips of force
and friction fossilized

the thistle is lain on the sandbox frame
my childhood friend lifts a rock and pounds at the weed
nectar and purple smear the wood
juices soaking into the crevices
the smell of pine and grass is released

we hadn't eaten anything for lunch,
my friend tells me we can eat thistles for dinner,



that we can make bread from it when the rain comes
now there is a purple mush for dinner
and the rain has washed our pounding away,
our dimples and dips of force are gone,
our permanence rained away

STARBURST

Our love moves in slow motion orbits
that caramelize my tongue
so I cannot utter the words growing
on the roof of my mouth because
the sugar sticks to the y's and v's
until it sounds like

I lick glue

and laughter bursts like a gusher
from your nostrils – you *lick glue* too

and maybe that's why your breath
tastes the same as mine and the
stars seem closer

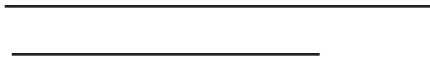
brighter

on The GoodNights when your lips
stick to my eyelids.



The Ohio State University, Lima

Jenna Bush



THE BATTLE OF MONMOUTH

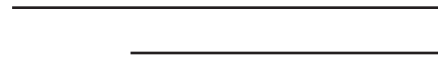
The thirteen-gun salute begins late
on account of Mr. Hennessey needing
to repowder his authentic horse-hair wig,
his third-grade social studies class shifting
amidst the gunsmoke and white chalk marks
that help the soldiers remember where to die.

Heat roils out from charred community pots
as women in carefully stained nurse's skirts
fan themselves with glossy pamphlets
while Molly empties her pitcher over her head,
lobsterbacks dusting mothballed coattails
on the splintered back of her cannon.

Children play hoop and stick in a flattened field,
sticky burs clinging to stonewashed jeans
thirty feet away from parents whose hands
are clutched over cherry syrup stains,
while a class mills in a frontier outpost
of the silver-domed museum off in the city.

Their hands rove to back pockets where
older siblings' cracked smartphones wait,
eyeing prints of the Founding Fathers

with their hands pressed over their hearts
as the descendants of other men
point empty muskets in the air.





one rectangular stone resting back
on two blocks of unpolished rock
forgotten in the corner of the yard
the epitaph no longer decipherable

spider webs wrap around the edges
grass sprigs creep out of the crevices
moss overthrows the crucifix

why label what's already lost
with flowers and flags
ropes and signs and glass
why prevent the public from
kissing stone

this decrepit rock knows honesty
soon to be buried under a carpet
of crunching leaves
unadorned and overlooked
tilting back into oblivion

RETURN TO DUST



THE MAGICIAN'S APPRENTICE

Come one, come all. Come big and small. You'll enjoy it all!

The ringleader's voice boomed, unamplified but reaching every corner of the heavy canvas that enveloped his audience. They sat in silence. Entranced. The announcer's pinched lips twitched, the hint of a grin at his own talent. Beneath his frosted face, make-up that disguised how long he'd been in the business, the man was dreaming of the cash that would be fattening his wallet as the stupefied spectators returned to their mediocre, suburban lives, exclaiming to friends and neighbors, "You've got to see it!"

They hadn't seen anything yet. *Ladies and gentlemen! You've seen sights wondrous and rare, tricks and treasures sublime. But what you're about to see next -- pause for dramatic effect -- is nothing short of real MAGIC!* They hadn't even seen the act yet but some clambered to their feet, hooting and clapping. Easy crowd.

A dramatic show of smoke and a swirling cape, glimmering in the cold, blue spotlight, a few sequins here and there, dazzled the audience into their seats, a silent reverie. The Magician. He wanted to do magic. His face was hard, a mask that did not have the patience for dramatics. His joy lay in deceiving people, not performance. But the people loved him. His skill as a deceiver overwhelmed his lack of charm on stage.

From the crimson curtain, a stunning figure appeared, floating onto the stage. Her dancer's legs carried her with grace to her mark by the Magician's side. Marilyn. The Magician's assistant. She wanted to travel, to see the world. But more than that, she desired to inspire, delight. She wanted to leave a little piece of herself everywhere she went. A travelling circus seemed the perfect opportunity. And so she did what she had to, to accomplish her dream. A corset strangled her curving figure, emphasizing the features that got her on the flyers. The reason boys begged their parents to come see the show. And what a show it was.



Under the protection of the deep shadow afforded by the curtain, a boy loomed. Norman. The Magician's Apprentice. He wanted to do magic. He wanted Marilyn. Not a bright boy, but good at taking commands and performing them without fail. Under muttered breath he was often described as thick. His slight stutter ensured he would never make it onto the stage, but the Magician appreciated his help behind the curtain. Having Norman backstage, in the Magician's mind, constituted supervising his young charge. Fostering a few delusions of success couldn't hurt.

The Magician opened with a trick where he pretended to chop off Marilyn's gorgeous blonde locks, and then reattach them. Those long seconds, brimming with the loudest silence, always tugged at Norman's abdomen. He knew that the magic always worked- he'd seen it a million times - but he wanted to run onto the stage and say, "How could you! You ruined her hair." To Norman, it sounded brave. Marilyn would cry like a movie star and fall into his arms. Then they would put their mouths together like her and the Magician did when he was happy, or sad, or angry, or after he'd hit her by accident. Then they would ride off together and be happy forever. But then the Magician would wave his hand and her hair would be long and beautiful again. Magic.

The Magician caught Norman's awed gaze and attempted a caring smile. His loose lips curled back into a toothy grin that didn't reach his eyes.

Now it was time for the water jug act. Norman wheeled the giant tank onto its mark, a little red X in two swift brushstrokes, making sure he never peeked out. He couldn't be seen, otherwise the audience wouldn't believe that the tank was rolling across stage by itself. The Magician made that clear. The Magician said he could make the tank move by itself if he wanted to, but there wasn't any point to using magic if the same feat could be accomplished practically. That made sense to Norman.

Marilyn followed closely behind the tank with a tall wooden ladder. Norman's heart doubled its pace as he smelled her glorious perfume. Cream of Citrus. At least that's what the bottle in her trailer was labeled.

Now, she climbed the ladder, a porcelain urn in hand. As she reached the last rung, she gestured dramatically to the jug, with commentary from the Magician. As she tipped its lip towards the empty tank, water began pouring, gushing, more than the pitcher could possibly hold. And yet it kept going. All the way up to the top. Applause was scattered. As if she knew this trick wasn't very impressive, the assistant raised a halting hand and began stripping off the flowing, satin coat that she had donned backstage. Applause. She descended the ladder and ducked behind the tank, its glass back concealing her and Norman as he bound her wrists, the rope in a practiced man's knot. No getting out of it.

Norman heard a particularly aroused gentlemen in the audience call, "Get back out here and take the rest off!" This was preceded by whistles and hollers.



With a wink, Marilyn stepped back into the light. More whistles. More hollers.

This was the part where the Magician's assistant would go into the crowd and ask some lucky young man to check her bonds, see if they could remove them, if they could free her. The reason the front row seats were normally purchased by young lads. Norman blocked it out. He couldn't stand the thought of other men touching her.

Once she had successfully aroused several men in the audience, she returned to her place at the top of the ladder. Her bare feet found their perch on the lip of the tank and, with a wink at Norman's cowering figure, she dove in. The lid snapped shut, closing automatically.

Norman wandered through carelessly crushed popcorn and soda-pop that still sizzled with the desire to be drank, to be enjoyed. The desire to delight. His pocketed fist gripped tenderly. Mar-i-lyn. Even her name was a melody. He trudged toward the bank of trailers behind the circus tent, its canvas flaps thwapping gently in the July breeze.

A weird sound caught his ear, distinct against the ringing silence of the night. The low grunts were too rhythmic to be Harry the Strong-Man at his dumbbells. He quickened his pace, propelled by his curiosity and the absolute black of the night behind him. Norman tracked the sound to the Magician's trailer. It was boisterous now, and occasionally a higher note chimed in to the harmony. The boy climbed onto the rain barrel he had positioned in order to reach the top window of his teacher's trailer. For extra studying.

The Magician was performing a trick Norman had never seen before. He studied every move intently, the distinct rhythm the Magician created with his body. Magic.

Marilyn paralleled the Magician's movements. Her lips were pressed into a firm line. And her eyes looked... dead. Weird. Norman always saw her smiling on stage. That beautiful smile. Those pretty teeth.

Maybe he could show the Magician. He could show that he could perform such a new and ground breaking feat. Marilyn seemed to play a key role in the act. Norman didn't know how he felt about going on stage naked. But he would. He would do whatever he had to. To impress his teacher. To impress Marilyn.

The circus never performed Monday through Wednesday. Perfect. Lots of time to practice. Norman took his time finishing his daily chores, planning every detail in his mind. That night, he found Marilyn stretching in her dressing room. He approached slowly, a last run-through of his speech. She jolted at his touch. Her muscles were tense. Before she could greet him, Norman launched into how he wanted to try a trick. How she was necessary.



"I'm sorry, Norman. I have work to do."

"But I need you."

She turned back to her barre. He tugged at her arm. She retracted. "Find someone else."

"There is no one else." He pulled again. Her foot slipped. The crash was loud.

Norman bent over Marilyn's body. Even asleep she looked beautiful.

Marilyn's eyes fluttered open. The knot at her wrist was tight. Practiced. No getting out of it.

She squirmed, her body restrained by the Magician's box. *Oh, no.*

For my next act, I will saw this woman in half. And put her back together again.

Her legs fluttered in the footholds. Her real legs. Norman pulled a rusted saw from the Magician's chest of tricks.

"Norman, please don't."

Norman placed a gloved finger to his lips. "You know how this goes."

Teeth met flesh. The grinding echoed into the cold bleachers. Norman winced. He would have to get a mop later. Some of the inky liquid spilling from the box even got on his shoes. He had just polished them.

Marilyn did not speak as he pulled the box apart to show the audience her leaking insides. As the boxes snapped back together, Norman brandished a child's joke-shop wand. His most prized possession. A gift.

And here is a t-t-trick so new, it does not yet have a name.

Marilyn must have been mad at him. She was just lying there, limp, refusing to give her flare to the show. It was quite rude. Norman decided to continue anyways. She would come around.

It was cold on the stage without any clothes. Norman folded his trousers with trembling hands. He kept his cape on.

The Magician almost clapped at the boy's performance. Almost. He didn't want to distract. The most important thing on stage: concentration. He was already imagining the Now Hiring posters. It wouldn't be hard to replace a long-legged blond who had to wave her tits around.

The Magician waited until Norman had finished to stand and applaud.

"Are you proud of me, Uncle?"

"Never prouder."

The Magician grinned. Norman smiled.

In the end, they all won somehow. Norman finally got to perform. The Magician deceived his fellow travelers into thinking that Marilyn had quit the show. And Marilyn. She left a piece of herself everywhere she went.

SNOW

The stars have fallen,
And the trees buckle in their roots
The grass lay dead under leaf.
The mountains fell into each other.

As mother's held their young
Hunkering under log and stone
Pressing in their beds.
The clouds hung beautiful
As they melted into stone.

Blackened trees grasped the sky
Baked in a grey white glow.

And you grabbed my hand,
And we fell
Into a soft emptiness
And dreamed.

We woke up one night
And fell again
Sure that this
Is heaven.



University of Kansas
Christopher Moss



We open our hands
And find that they are filled with
Rotting ash.

Snow



CONFETTI GIRL

my mind unravels
 in gold ribbons
my tongue
 in silver thread
and I am left,
 starry-eyed
 without word or expression
to qualify
 quantify
 quantitate
the emotions that dissolve
 and resolve
my being
 each and every time
 you speak the words
 that I cannot find first

you leave me a pile
 of shimmering
 confetti

reflecting all the light I can catch
in glimmers
 and flashes

completely,
 joyfully,
 utterly
defeated,
unable to express myself
 with anything more complex

than,

“_ _ _ _ _”



Art by Ishya Casukhela



NOCTILUCA SCINTILLANS

On the cusp of summer and fall, if the conditions are just right, the Milky Way falls onto a beach at the end of the earth, burning imprints of the stars into the sand. The moon shatters like a mirror into millions of pinpoint-sized shards. The stars and the shards line the coast and bury themselves under a thin quilt of seaweed and sand. (Now, there is an important thing to remember: you'll only see them if you look.)

It's not this dark, or this quiet, at home. Your bedroom is cozy and soft inside, but streetlamps glow yellow and cars and trucks rattle across your window all night long. Even when they turn out the light and kiss your forehead, the world outside your bedroom doesn't sleep. Here, you put your hand in front of your eyes and see a vague profile of your fingertips; the only thing to hear is the ocean, and it really does sound like the inside of a conch shell.

You flick the seaweed away with your toes. The wet sand feels like dark brown sugar on your feet and between your teeth. You wait for a wave to tumble up to your boney, little girl ankles, and then you rub the soft pad of your foot in its wake. There's something there, but it only lasts for a few seconds. (You're not easily satisfied.) The waves sound like a gasp. You do it again, but this time you dig your foot farther into the freshly dampened sand and sweep it across as far as you can stretch. Tiny specks of light appear, a number impossible to count, with a shine too dull to illuminate your face but bright enough that your eyes need a moment to adjust. "What is it?" you ask.

"It's magic," they say. They always hold hands at this part. (The night they fell in love is the same night they first found the magic on the beach, you know.) You watch their joint shadows walk across the beach, their heads bent close as they whisper memories. They left their sandals at the entrance and their bare feet leave faint outlines of their soles in the sand. You follow their tracks, hopping in and out of the



too-big footprints.

There's a lighthouse here. It's terribly old, but it still works. It perches on the precipice of the island, long and foamy white, broken by a wide red stripe. You scurry around and around the spiral staircase, up and up and up. They lag behind, but meet you at the top. (It never crossed your mind that they ever wouldn't.)

Every year they take you, and you go. And every year, somehow, the conditions are just right for magic.

When you get older, you learn that it has a scientific name and an explanation. The magic becomes Latin words and taxonomic classifications. It's not magic, but a species of dinoflagellate. They demonstrate bioluminescence when agitated because of a luciferin-luciferase reaction that's too small to be seen, like blue Saturn rings around tea-stained eyes and the sequences of A, T, C, and G in a double helix.

Surely something so beautiful must have more than one cell.

Now you're sitting on a beach on the coast of France, in the daytime, because you're old enough to travel on your own now, you might as well take advantage of it, and Montauk, Long Island isn't the end of the earth after all. Instead of sand, you walk across wet stones in shades of black and white, weathered into perfect smoothness and eroded into geometric, pinup-girl curves. There's no reason for you to be here except that you could and because of this your *éclairs* taste bittersweet.

They have never held hands here. You imagine that their silhouettes, as black and slow as tar, would look out of place against the striped umbrellas, pretty girls in delicate swimsuits, and bright, pastel-colored boardwalk. You wonder how magic becomes nothing more than phytoplankton, but you don't want to know why, if you put your ear up to a conch shell and listen, it sounds just like the ocean. (If you found out why, it might sound like something else.)

You hold your hand up to your neck and grasp the red crystal heart that rests where your collarbone protrudes from tender skin, knuckles grazing the base of your throat. When light hits the pendant just right, it's capable of blinding. You tug on it lightly to check that the leather string holding it, saturated with brine, is still knotted tight. It's the only thing left that is. (You were just checking.)

The lighthouse looks like Halley's Comet when you're so far out of its reach, distant and periodic and all dust.

There's a part of you that likes plankton now, maybe because they remind you of yourself. You read somewhere that they can't swim against currents, only float, and that, in Greek, the word "plankton" means "wandering." Even if they could travel against the waves with purpose, they wouldn't know where to go. But they ruined the magic and, for that, you will never forgive the plankton.

GRAFTING

I peel the clear film from my lips so that
I feel a sting when I kiss you

When my lips part and pucker, they
crack
you can taste my blood,
the organic rotten copper
that is warm between our teeth

There is a scar under my right knee
from the gnawing of knives and fingers;
after my scabs have healed
you kiss me there

Pull my fingers apart
so that you can count to 100
in sets of 10 and finally sleep

when 10,000 rears its yawning head
maybe you can rest on my unwashed sheets
where there are scabs and, scabs and, scabs-





Love is a skinless man wreathed in potpourri
naked and awake
for the sensation of crunching the dried flowers
in his palm
the bits sneaking between his muscle fibers
so that the scent burns him later

Pull my arms apart so that I am a crucifix,
and you can look at me
as a martyr for the dermis

maybe when you are dreaming I will be there:
crushing and picking the flowers you bought for me

ASTERISM

an undergraduate literary journal

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Asterism is an undergraduate literary journal from The Ohio State University, Lima. Formerly known as *The Hog Creek Review*, *Asterism* has recently opened its doors to English language submissions from undergraduate students all around the world! After an exciting first year, the staff of *Asterism* looks forward to encouraging and promoting new writers for years to come.

To be featured in our next volume, submit your original works of poetry and fiction to www.lima.osu.edu/Asterism/submit.

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