

VºL.47 ♦ 2023

Magazine of Literature and Art

Alchemy Magazine

Issue 49 Spring 2023

EDITORS

Amanda Sheppard Lead Layout Designer Sharon Texta Social Media Manager

Jason Miller Contributing Layout Design

Matt AlbertsonManaging EditorHannah WhittleManaging EditorBrooke BauerNon-Fiction EditorShawNee FieldsNon-Fiction Editor

JB Bowen Fiction Editor
Mary Gilmour Poetry Editor
Cae Marquez Poetry Editor
Cassidy Matthys Poetry Editor

Megan Savage Faculty Advisor

M

We Should Also Thank The Following

Chris Rose, Dean Program of Reading, Writing

and English

Angela Koslofsky Instructional Administrative

Assistant III

Damien G. Gilley Graphics and Printing

Daniel Soucy Instructors

Joselin Ford Cover Design

M

And We Can't Forget

Maggie Songer

Printer Center Interim Manager

Ty Graham

Production Operator

Colophon

As a nod to our esoteric cover art, PCC *Alchemy* #49 is set in the following typefaces:

Bookmania (Headers)

Kepler 3VF Display Extended (Masthead, Colophon, Ornaments)

Kepler 3VF Display Caption (Contributors' Notes)

Leo Small Text (Body)

ART AND CRAFTS EXTRA LIZHT (Footer)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Alchemy, Graphic Design	3
Joy Nguyen	
Dorm Showers	4
Cae Marquez	
El Poema de la Caja	5
Marc Zegans	
Lingered Love	6
Hazel Bretz	
Untitled	7
Grace Dunbar	
Bye-Bye Bambi	8
C.M. Eden	
Demise	7
Melian Welscher	
In Memory of Water	18
Charlie Divine	
A Sunday Hangover	17
E. Smudde	
Toilet Selfie	18
Matt Foster	

Nine-Hundred Bucks and a Disorder	19
JB Bowen	
Leviathan	22
Connie Colter	
Who Are You Going to Tell,	23
My Mother?	
Cae Marquez	
Crown of Yours	30
Camryn Clary	
Rendition of Portrait of an Artist	31
(Pool With Two Figures)	
Lee Holoubek	
Battleground, WA	32
Kendall Larson	
This Terrible World	37
Zanni Schauffler	
Kiki	38
Kylie Kramer	
Untitled	39
Mario Loprete	
<u> </u>	

I Wish I Could Write a Poem Like a Man	40
Quinn Brown	
A City's Spirit	41
Mahedy Hasan Mim	
At the Heart of It All	42
Grey Shawger	
Summer At Tharothpadi	43
Arathy Asok	.0
Til utiliy 1150K	
Washi Tape Envelope	48
Shane Allison	
Alchemy, Graphic Design	49
Connie Bisson	
The Flag Salute	50
Amanda Sheppard	
The Act-Mist/Smoke	54
Alex De La Cruz	
Paoay Church	55
Fevie Hernandez	

Blue, Blue, and Blue	56
Oscar Nieves Lira	
Malan	50
Motes	59
Charissa Roberson	
In My World	60
Larisa Murariu	
The Wellington Methodology	62
Matt Albertson	
Ouroboros	66
Mackenzie Donnelly	
Spatial Visions: Digital Manipulation	70
Lindsay Anastasia	10
Linusay i mastasia	
Mushrooms	71
Anon Baisch	
Goldfish Drop	72
Augustina Droze	
Magasuna D1026	
The Cat Blues	73
CJ Maruyama	

Severance	75
Mary Gilmour	
Mal de Ojos	76
Thania Morales	
In Which I Become a Kidnapper	77
I.M. Cordova	
Mother	78
Alexa Tusing	
Kamloops Graveyard	80
J W Goossen	
Trials	82
Bryce Kriegman	
Safari Sam's	87
Veronica Young	
Flower Wall	90
Trinity Maxwell	
One Day, I Will Become	91
C.M. Eden	

Not Dead, Just Asleep	93
Dani Hoyos	
Unspoken	94
Riley E. Childers	71
Smoke House	95
Ricardo Bravo	
Spreading Dad's Ashes on a	96
Nine-Month Road Trip	
Hanna Rae Whittle	
Star Stuff and Flames	97
Jason Miller	
Change Change Change Man	104
Stars, S'mores, Campfires, Meow	104
Conner Kinnamon	
Madness Lived	105
James McCarthy	



Welcome to the 49th PCC Sylvania literary

After upwards of two years spent indoors, persistent talk of a divide in our communities, a global shift in social attention spans, and the emerging threat of artificial intelligence on individual creativity, we believe artists' adaptability, insights, and unique perspectives are more valuable than ever. Artists, like those featured in *Alchemy*, are tasked with transcribing how the world moves around us and ultimately what unifies us as a global community — transformation through it all.

The works we've collected in this issue – voices that span Oregon to Bangladesh, the neuro-typical to neuro-divergent, and all spectrums of gender and identity – converge towards a transformative narrative. Starting with personal vignettes like that in "Memory of Water" where "...in the estuary of memory and imagination, a child wades..." we shift into sparks of connection as "we whisper blurry details to one another over mugs of subpar coffee..." during "A Sunday Morning Hangover." The work featured in this issue then underscores our similarities across cultural contexts as we wonder, "Why are the red ants in such a rush today?" "A City's Spirit" and observe as a "...faceless crowd whittles / down the concrete blows of the

Note

issue of Alchemy, Campus's annual magazine.

jungle..." through a fresh perspective in "The Cat Blues."

To conclude this transformation, our publication ends appropriately — on endings and the seemingly dispiriting themes like those found in "Safari Sam's" or "Star Stuff." But with creative minds, we find that termination is the harbinger of new beginnings and in that way, "[we] can only dream, / to one day become / a bird that falls / dazed by glass windows / and other things / I cannot comprehend" ("One Day, I Will Become").

In the midst of rapid change, it's one thing to recite our thoughts and challenges in the clinical and streamlined way this era requires of us, but it is quite another to creatively embrace our vulnerability and use it as a landing pad for a fundamental necessity — to transform, to amplify our voices and to strive for unity while we attempt to understand our shared world. Thank you to all our contributors for making this work possible and to you, our reader, for supporting our vital creative community.

Sincerely,

The PCC Sylvania Alchemy Literary Magazine Team





UntitledJoy Nguyen



Dorm Showers

Gae Marquez

I heard another woman
Singing in the shower
I silently thanked her
For gracing me with her voice
I was glad to be in that moment
At peace
With wet hair
Naked, bearing witness
To another woman's tenderness

El Poema de la Gaja

Marc Zegans

Your walls, summer citrus salamander, yam skip-troweled Spanish lace traveling beside stained and polished concrete floors the color of mole coloradito, resting in a bisque earthen bowl undulate like your hips under the red silk dress you wore the night we met.

They are as if your dance was transmuted to frame fixed, yet flowing—carving and cleaving space after your ringed and bangled arms rose to the June sky the tips of your fingers kissing clusters of stars moving them into shapes and patterns never seen the firmament erased

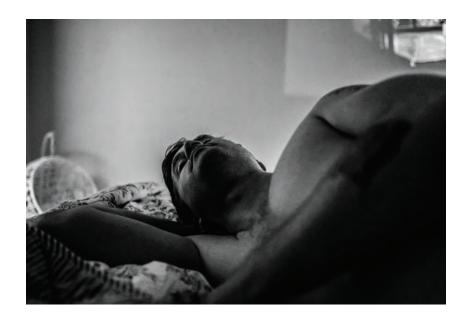
replaced in a moment
with surety and delight
the heavens your canvas
matter and light your paint
the swirl of the starry night
you made brought down by hand
to this house of stucco
and flame, cactus and rain
copper and stone—a seed
a root, a branch, a shrine
a stair to an alter

a veer, awakening
at the landing beneath
the final flight of tiled
risers, painted and fired
in the domed kiln behind
this house, filled with mesquite
fixing the signs you gathered
in your sleep, on the roof
beside the parapet
in the bed of forged frame
and white embroidered sheets

this house—a container for the dreams, channeled through your heaving body covered by loose woven white cotton, red-threaded along the opening at your throat, your black hair spread thick on the pillow your face turned to the moon ornamented order rising on your in-breath

passing to the walls
on your exhale, buon
fresco, set by morning
the murals of the day
dancing before children
rubbing early-sun eyes
as you squeeze oranges
into cobalt blue glass
then sit before plated
huevos con chorizo
bare feet, a fork, cool floor.





Lingered Love Hazel Bretz



Untitled Grace Dunbar



Bye-Bye Bambi

C.M. Eden

Skies are not blue in the musty confines of a car. They are green-like water that has been destroyed by fertilizer, so overrun by algae that it sticks to your legs and your stomach by the magic. Rue plucks the pen from time you are out of it, and there is a fish suffocated by the water's green blanket, lying dead at the edge of the shore—she thinks it is because of the dark tint in the windows. Tinted windows, or are they just sunglasses for cars? The mismatched mutation of color was always why she hated wearing sunglasses. She would rather squint away the sun full five seconds, she knows than look at a different world. But sunglasses are not all bad; sunglasses look nice on Rue.

Hearts, shaped with gold rims and lenses that are a mixed tint of pink and blue, sit on her nose. The gold chains dangling from them tinkle against each other every now and then. There is a pen puckered between the sparkly pink, coconut gloss she coats her lips in. When a plume of water vapor wisps past Rue's lips like white veins in the air, even the driver must slow down to a timid eighty so he can watch from a mirror. It is the kind of showboating most people do not get to see, the party tricks no one dotted arm falling back to the

ever expects to be so pretty.

"Melina." She speaks and then she huffs. Sometimes, the white air spills from her mouth with her words and it looks like her lips and wiggles it in her fingers-it is the flavored kind that is supposed to taste like lollipops or bubblegum or blue raspberry, and she bets Rue likes the tropical flavors the best. Mel can still see the sparkle from her lips on it. No one bothers to wipe it off. "Do you want to try?"

Mel shakes her head for a it is too long, so long that Rue is smiling at her like she is a child. "No. No, thanks." The air in the car is thicker than she is comfortable with, but the tumbling in her stomach is enough to keep her from rolling down a window. Instead, she pulls her jacket up past her nose, that puffy purple that is so heavy but so airy it will bake her face in a manufactured sauna. Still, the muggy warmth is better than a coughing fit from the pumpkin spice fog.

"Roadkill!" Eddie, the driver, points at something that is quickly behind them, his mole-

Bye Bye, Bambi

wheel in almost an instant, and try as she might, Mel only makes out a disappearing spot of black on the road. "Anyone else see that?" Mel shifts in her seat, soft and smooth in her grip, but clutter does its best to keep her from moving. Leaning against her legs are the bags that couldn't fit in the trunk, filled to the brim with towels and swimsuits and trunks and sunscreen and water bottles.

The guy in the passenger seat is spinning around frantically enough that she is near-positive that he cannot actually see anything. She figures he is only trying to garner a laugh or two. "Where? What was it?"

Eddie bops the steering wheel with the bottom of his palm. It is lined with a fabric cover full of hibiscus flowers in a rainbow array of colors, but there is no dancing toy in a grass skirt and a flower necklace on the dashboard—thankfully. "Already passed it—it was like...a possum, or something." Mel had not seen it well enough, but she was sure that, whatever it was, it was too large and too dark to be a possum. "No one else saw it? That was gonna be twenty."

She remembers the rules. It was a strange sort of car game, but she had put in her two cents every now and then, pointing

out a dead crow or a ginger cat that had crawled to the side of the road to die there instead. The first rule is that two people must see it. If only one person sees it, it does not count. The second rule is, you must be able to recognize what type of animal it is. Not down to the genus, but to its family. Basically, you have to know it was a bird or a lizard or a cat, and both witnesses have to be sure about it—no, maybe it was a skunk. Either it was or it was not. The third rule was made after they had all spotted the third cat on the road: cats were now a minus point. Eddie was a bit fed up with pointing out dead cats.

She had not really been looking for dead animals, it was mostly Eddie and the other guy—a stranger like Eddie, although she could at least say she remembered Eddie's name. But Rue would chime in sometimes, and it was nice whenever she would smile and laugh when Mel said that what they had pointed out was a shrew, and not a rat.

It is something to do
in between staring at the
mountains, rocky inclines
that spew from the constantly
shifting backdrop, or the road's
pavement, going from black
with bright white streaks
to dim, stony grays that are

so broken apart they look like shattered glass panes. Something to do besides digging her finger nail into the hardened stain of something dark and tacky at the edge of her seat's cushion, a strang spill on the otherwise clean gray.

The road is smoother now. not brand new, but not bumpy either. The mountains are gone and replaced with yellowed grass—a yellow that has turned green, even greener than the sky behind the cars sunglasses, but she knows it is yellow-and tree stumps and the trees that were not cut down are these shriveled black stalks rising from the dirt. Eventually there is a shift. The grass is actually green, and it is not just grass. There is also ivy and moss and other plants she can not make out with the car speeding down the road. The trees here are not cut or burnt to a crisp, instead they are standing so tall that the sun cannot touch the road. and the baby trees beneath their goliath parents will surely die because neither rain nor sun's shine will ever touch them.

There is a yellow sign along the road, one of those signs with a deer mid prance on it. The sight of it, along with the fresh morbid thoughts of roadkill, have Mel endlessly readjusting her seatbelt. "Hey, Eddie." The stranger is tapping away at Eddie's shoulder, following the beat of Analie—it is almost drowning out his words, the car's speakers are thrumming with it—in a fluid tap-tap-tap-tap before it is smacked away. "How many points do you think a deer is worth?"

Through the rear-view mirror, Mel can see Eddie's brows scrunching up at the question, but his voice sounds like he's smiling. "They're all one point, man."

The stranger is tearing away at the wrapper of a stick of meat that is sporting "SPICY JERKY" in big white letters on its clear plastic covering. He is trying to open it with his teeth as he speaks. "Something has to be worth two."

Rue, with a familiar resting smile that sits on top of her lower lip, chimes in, and an icky weight settles in the bottom of Mel's stomach when Rue leans forward to talk to them. "Like a bear?" Rue pulls her feet from her shoes, white flats with fake sequins all around the edges. She pulls her left leg up to her chest, her chin sitting on her knee.

The stranger raises the jerky stick high in the air, its tip almost stabbing into the roof. "Or a moose!" The car smells like jerky now too, mixed with

Bye Bye, Bambi

the stench of a smoke and citrus medley. It is clear enough where it comes from: the small bauble hanging from the rearview mirror and the water bottle, cigarette butts swimming in its half-full, murky waters.

The road is getting curvier, the once straight line in front of them, now twisting to the point that no one can see what is going to be around the next bend in terrain. For once, Eddie is only going sixty. "You're not gonna find a moose around here, Tug." They're all laughing but Mel, and her body is heavier than before; Rue is laughing with that occasional wheeze sinking in from the back of her throat, and her extensions are bobbing up and down, and Mel wants nothing more than to be laughing along as well. But even as her voice begins spilling out and all smiles are on her, she still feels outside of it all, as if she is not in the car listening to Rue's playlist on Eddie's beat-up car speakers. As if she hadn't been watching videos on Rue's phone with her when they'd all gone quiet for a while. As if she had not been there at all, and was only an intrusive viewer looking in.

"Double points if we hit it?" The boys up front are still at it, but Rue has stopped laughing. She is still smiling, but it is not the same kind of smile as before. She is no longer smiling with her teeth. Her smile is sloppy and unsure; the look on her face as she is staring back at Mel feels like a warning. It is the kind of look that makes her want to hide inside herself. "Sorry, bad joke."

Tug's laugh sounds like the sputtering of an exhaust pipe, although it does not have the deep rumble of one; it is lighter, but in the same nasally pitch. "No, no, I like that. That's a good idea." He takes his first bite out of the jerky in between thoughts, but he does not wait to chew before speaking. "If we see something, well, Eddie, you can just swerve and—" bits of meat and spit spatter the windshield and the dashboard, but Mel is the only one who winces; even in her spot outside of the splash zone. "Pwish! Right on the hood and then it'll roll straight into the windshield!"

Rue is smiling with her teeth again, even as she crosses her arms and sits straight once more. "You guys are so stupid. I hope you all know that."

Tug is poking at Eddie, but this time his hand is quick enough to dodge Eddie's retaliation. "So if we hit a bear, that's five points, yeah?"

The road is less curvy, but darker still. Their traversion



over the slight downs and ups—mostly ups—has the car down to a near-steady forty. Eddie slaps the steering wheel. "At that point, we've won the game!"

Rue's fingers pluck at her hair, she is fishing for dandruff as a flaky tuft sticks to her nails—nails like razor blades painted light pink, with white lines drawn along the ring fingers' nails—and Mel notices Rue's forehead has the same consistency of beeswax; smooth with just the right amount of shine. "Please, dear god, do not tell me you are actually gonna run over something."

Eddie shrugs. "I was gonna get rid of this piece of garbage anyway."

Rue purses her lips, drawing out his name in a hiss. "Eddie."

"C'mon, it should at least go out in a bang!" The trees are sparser than before, and there is a chunky stink bug crawling across Mel's window. She watches it crawl over the scratched-up cat decal at the bottom left corner before it is thrown off completely, and its fate becomes a mystery.

Rue punches the back of Eddie's seat, but it is the careful kind of wallop that means nothing but to be playful. "That is *not* funny, Eddie."

"Okay, okay, We're just kidding." Eddie's fingers, lined

with silver rings that could catch the sun and blind you, are tapping away at the steering wheel. "But it's pretty funny."

Rue's lips are back on the pen, white and long; the smoke she puffs out is just the same, swirling around her. "No, it's really not." Mel is trapped, watching the wisps play around; she wonders if her eyes would burn if they touched, but there's a blur behind the white cloud, and Mel is leaning over the driver's seat with her finger pointing off ahead of them. The trees are no longer passing them like runners on their first ten miles of a marathon. Tiny brown ears flick at her like kitten paws, and just one black bead is pointed her way; wide and in awe like it has seen the smoke too. Staring at her just like she does at it.

"Stop!" The belts hold them back, like slippy arms ringing around their chests and waists, friends pulling them away from the danger, but they are the danger and the deer—so small its head hardly stands higher than the hood of the car—has both black bulbous eyes and the wet spot of black at the tip of its snout pointed straight at them. They all grab at the car as if it hasn't stopped and the beating of their hearts is still stopping time. In those

eyes she can see nothing; not the smoke, not themselves, not a shimmer from the sun, nor their car and its tinted windows—just a glassy black, as dark and indistinguishable as twilight, that tells you nothing.

"Holy shit." Tug is the first to let go, his hands no longer flat against the dashboard, but working at the crank on his door to roll down the window. It wobbles and creaks under his thin fingers, like old bones. The deer's head turns back towards its initial destination. Eddie's hand pats at the wheel before he too is working at the crank on his door, his voice cracking as the fear in the air turns to wonder. "It's Bambi!"

Rue is already clambering through her purse, pulling out her phone—a chunky device as tall as her head. "It's just a baby."

Eddie is leaning out the window and patting at the outside of his door. "Thank god we didn't hit it. That would have seriously ruined my day." He whistles and the deer is swiveling its head again, ears perked in a startle. "Hey, c'mere!"

The half eaten stick of jerky is waving in Tug's hand. "Want some jerky, Bambi?"

It springs away, off where it was going but in the same carefree way that it came. It is as if there was no danger, but only a whimsical beast with an eyeless face that had halted before it. "Aw, it's leaving." Rue is still tapping at her phone, reaching forward with it. "Bye!"

Everyone but Mel is smiling as the deer skips off into the bulk of nature surrounding them. So quaint, and so overwhelming for a moment that it is underwhelming in its departure. But the fear is still there and still racing in her heart. She wonders what its secret is. "Bye-bye bambi!"

To look at the beast and to be able to look away.





Demise Meilan Wechsler



In Memory of Water

Charlie Divine

Memory flows like water. Sometimes it rushes like a river breaking through a dam, and others, like the drops of a dry spigot collected in the cup of your hands. Stretching my mind backward through time and space, I can remember myself, small and sexless, before the body's betrayal.

In a house without a bathtub, Mama bathes me in the shower. She is towering above me, a woman like a mountain, her head lost somewhere in the steam. While I do not yet comprehend the relationship between sex and gender, I know that we are here because we are the same. I know it like I know that the delicate aroma of apricots blooming in the vapor is her special soap only for grown-ups. Which is to say I know it because I have been told so repeatedly.

I have my own special soap though, the bottle is yellow, and Mama promises it is made for babies and will not sting my eyes, but it doesn't play by the rules, and I cry just the same. Descending from the clouds, she stoops to gather me into her hands and thrust me under the stream of the shower head. Water pounds on my scalp and face, and in breathless shock, I complain loudly,

"to be remade was the most terrifying option of all"

as toddlers are wont to do, while suds run in rivulets down my legs to spin away into the drain.

The dripping spigot slows, then stops, and the memory evaporates from my palms. It is a wonder I remember the shower's relentless assault but not the warm towel that surely enveloped me after. Perhaps it was the confusion that arose from comparison between my mother's body and my own, what it was foretold to become, that cemented the scene in my developing mind.

The betrayal of puberty happened long before I had the vocabulary to describe its dysphoria. The discomfort and shame evoked by the mirror haunted me like vengeful spirits despite the lengths I went to exorcize them. Grabbing, pulling, and flattening



to manipulate my shape as a tween became papering over my dorm room mirrors as a young adult. It was the way taking a shower became navigating a warzone. If I couldn't favor my reflection, then I'd pluck my eyes out instead.

Blindness was favorable because to be remade was the most terrifying option of all. It meant relinquishing control to the body—again?—by driving needles into flesh. It meant seeking a doctor as the marble went to Michelangelo and saying make me David, saying make me whole by carving pieces away. It meant leaving behind the settled to build a house out of hopes.

Somewhere in the estuary of memory and imagination, a child wades into the churn of confusion and fear. Her fingers are pink and puffy as she fights the current of time to take my weathered hand into her own. She smiles and says, if you ever make it back, tell me everything. And in the greatest act of sacrifice I've known, she lets go.

A Sunday Hangover

E. Smudde

Tables of sleep-deprived queer vagabonds mopping up runny eggs with undercooked toast,

wrung out by those well-whiskey sours and lightning-fast romances that bloomed like fireworks in cracked vinyl booths at eleven last night, and burned to a nub by half past three this morning.

Wearing wrinkled jackets, oversized glasses, and a smear of black eyeliner

like stage makeup for this performance of "Genderless and Full of Passion,"

we whisper blurry details to one another over mugs of subpar coffee, eyes pulsing like ripe egg sacks along with the beat of our hearts.

We devour stacks of too-sweet pancakes and dishes not unlike Huevos Rancheros,

feeling every ounce of bubbling nausea in our stomachs, because last night, we touched God. Last night,

we touched every edge of what it means to be human, like a child touching

the corners of their room. The whole fucking universe, at our beer soaked fingertips.

We danced marriage dances, mourned on bathroom floors like windswept sailors' widows,

birthed whole new holy doctrines while perched on rocking bar stools, and anointed ourselves saints with

spilled cocktails and evening sweat. We unhinged our jaws and swallowed life like snakes, and so, today

we're left inside out, bruised banana blotches raw as a hangnail.

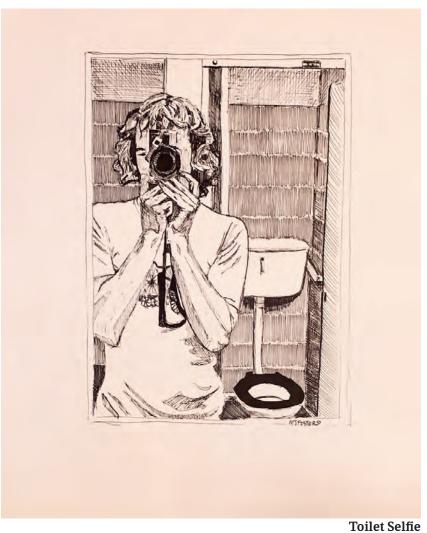
And this morning our minds lag like old Dell laptops. We eat dripping bacon dipped in jam

because what better way to reattach to your earthly form than with carbohydrates and grease.

And despite the ache behind our eyes, we never worry about falling backward

into deep waters because we already know what lurks beneath.





Foilet SelfieMatt Foster



Nine-Hundred Bucks and a Disorder

JB Bowen

My garage cannot become a hospital ward for vegetable cars. I have neither the space nor the desire. I do not want to become a nurse to indigent vehicles whose owners cannot pay for repairs. Neither can I work for free—I work for money, like everyone else. So I'm putting off telling this man how much the repair will be, stalling, educating, shooting the shit. I am dancing around it like a ballerina, because I am reasonably sure that he cannot afford the repairs I have already made. I am dreading the awful dry look on his face when he hears the number as much as he is dreading the hearing of it.

First time he came in—maybe two years ago—he had made a mess of his brakes. When you don't have money and something goes wrong on your car (which you need, everyone needs), you go out there in the driveway with your wrench and your jack, you pull off panels and lift the car to see if you can find the source of the squeak, the knock, the fine dust. You make it worse—they make it worse every time. Two years ago, this one tried to replace his brake pads and installed all the calipers incorrectly. A wrenching sound and four small piles of silvery dust made him realize his mistake, but he drove it here anyway—he couldn't afford a tow. I get that a lot—I get these types a lot. They have a disorder.

The way things are now is hard on them, I get it. My wife says the way things are now is good, that they must be pushed to do better, get better. But I don't know. It seems like they're getting worse, and their cars are definitely getting worse. And anyways, I did not give them their disorder, I just fix their cars. And anyways, their money folds.

This time, he's done a real job on his ignition column. He correctly identified the problem, and bought a new relay, and a new solenoid for the gear-shift lock mechanism—the solenoid talks to the relay so that you can't pull the keys out if you're in gear. The solenoid breaks, then the relay fries itself trying to put its energy into a dead thing. It just keeps reaching out and reaching out,



moving and moving, until it's dead. And you can't get your keys out of the ignition, and your car is stuck either on or off. I've seen it a lot. This one pulled off enough panels to successfully change out the solenoid, but botched the relay. Still, he managed to get it running, and he drove it here.

When he brought it in, a small tangle of brushy copper wires were sticking out around the left side of the steering column. I tell him: you should have towed it. He kind of nods, his eyes dart around the room, like always. He can't be still for even one second. He swallows, and I can tell from the sound in his throat that his mouth is all dry. I tell him: you could have gotten shocked. You could have fried yourself. I tell him: best case scenario, you get a little buzz on the wrist while you're starting the car. Worst case scenario is you're barreling down the highway and make contact with those live wires, and oh boy. That's the ballgame. I ask him if he knows what I mean by live-wire? He nods, he's like a bird. The ballgame, bud.

He owes me nine-hundred dollars. I had to pull out the relay he bought, do some soldering. I replaced and rewired the column—no more deadly copper reaching out to him from behind the steering wheel. I'm explaining this, and he's thinner even than a lot of the other ones I see who have a disorder. I don't want to tell him how much it'll cost. Just to have something to do with my hands, I rub at a smear of grease on my garage desk—the garage which I cannot allow to become a home for orphan cars—but then I stop. I don't want to act like I'm the one with a disorder, all fidgety and wiry, always moving. But the time is coming when I have to tell him that he owes me nine-hundred dollars.

I ask him, but really I'm just saying: you tried to fix it yourself? He makes this noise, a laugh and a cough. His breath is very sweet, like someone going into ketoacidosis. I know about that because my wife's sister is diabetic. His breath makes me think of him trying to fix some creaking or knocking sound he's hearing

in himself, pulling off panels, and winding up with diabetes. A mean, unwelcome thing to think, but kind of funny. Then I think of myself as a doctor keeping a patient in some raggedy ward of the hospital because they cannot pay, and that's neither funny nor mean, and twice as unwelcome. Well, he says, I thought it was just a simple part, and I could switch it out. But then. Yeah, bud—I know what then.

I ask, is this your daily driver, and his eyes stop darting around. He's funny, he's got a sense of humor. He tells me no, this is a grocery getter—he keeps the Bentley as a daily driver. I laugh harder, maybe, than I should. The truth is, that kind of joke is hard to hear from someone who looks like him: sunken-eyed, shaking, all gray skin and bones.

Here's a different ballgame: I cannot be that doctor, I cannot be that nun, the head of a dingy orphanage. I like fixing cars, but I do it for money, and so one day, I will have to be that nun, I will have to be that doctor, maybe even to this man. But I do wonder if I'm telling him the sweetest lie anyone has ever told him, and I wonder if he knows it's a lie. A little color comes into his neck and cheeks, and so I think maybe yes. But no big deal—easy fix, I tell him. Took me ten minutes, just a little tinkering. Anyways, I like fixing cars, anyways it took just a few minutes, no charge. You always bring her here, I know I got a customer in you. That's my second lie, because Jesus Christ, please stop putting me through this, please take your car and your disorder anywhere but here, take it across town, anywhere, please god. Another unwelcome thought. It passes quick enough, and I can shake his trembling hand, and get back to work on cars that will not lay around my little garage like vegetables in a hospital basement.





Leviathan Connie Colter

Who Are You Going to Tell, My Mother?

Gae Marquez

"You know, everyone blames me for why your cousin Jeff-Jeff is gay," my mother began to tell my eight-year-old self as she peeled a banana. I stood there, licking honey off the spoon she handed to me. "When he was just a little boy, maybe your age, your Auntie Elena and Uncle Jose didn't have anyone to watch him other than me. But I was young and wanted to go out with my girlfriends, so I would just bring Jeff-Jeff along. Your uncle would give me money to spend on him. We took him to the markets and let him buy whatever he wanted. Powdered makeup or purses."

My small feet touched our cold ceramic tiled floor as I bounced up and down, more excited for the bowl of honey, rice, and banana my mother was making for me than the story she was trying to impress.

"We were like best friends. Closer in age to each other than I was to Auntie Elena. I took him everywhere. Not just shopping, but fishing in the river, to my school events, all my friends' houses. Eventually, when he came out to everyone as gay, they all looked to me. It wasn't just auntie and uncle telling me I ruined him, but everyone else too."

My mom began to stroke my arm and hair almost mindlessly as she talked, a habit from when she whispered to us in our beds in the early mornings. Now I realize, the stroking was more for her comfort than it ever was for mine, but it had the same effect on us both regardless. "I'd cry and ask them why they don't want him to be happy, but to them, he could never be happy if he couldn't marry a woman and have children. It never seemed to bother Jeff-Jeff. He'd flick his hand like this and tell them that they had two other sons to get married and give them grandchildren. Afterward, he shaved his head. Then he began to walk like a supermodel and never apologized for being so loud."

She continued to run her hand through my hair as I ate the rest of my rice. I wondered why my mom and my cousin got in trouble. Of course, I understand now: my mom told



me that story in an attempt to show her unconditional love and her open-mindedness toward peoples' differences.

One of my first loves was a childhood best friend, as many people's tend to be, a cat lover who wanted to eventually change

her name to Cat. I never figured out if that was because it was the nickname I called her by. Ego will have me believe so. We'd stick together all through our school days. The moment we got home, we were on our beds, kicking our legs in the air, talking on the phone about how so-and-so did this or that. Each weekend was a sleepover, usually at my house, and the whole night would be spent cutting hair or laughing at Jim Carrey's over-dramatics.

Boys were always a part of Cat's antics, but in the many summer days we spent together between fourth and fifth grade, an anxiety arose in Cat. She never

"How am I supposed to get good at kissing boys when I've never kissed a boy?!"

really kissed a boy, and Steven in the first grade surely didn't count. In her *Teen Magazine*, they spent a whole page explaining the best methods for this new "French" kissing.

"How am I supposed to get good at kissing boys when I've never kissed a boy?!"

I shrugged and winced sporadically as her heightened state made braiding my hair painful.

"I'm not going to practice on someone ugly either. That would just be a mess. I wish I could just practice with, like, you, y'know? Someone easy-going."

My ears glowed hot. The chance to kiss my best friend's

What Are You Going To Do, Tell My Mother?

lips? The young and eager me, bursting with the same tensions she had, was never going to turn her down. "Would you?"

"Would I what?" she asked, as she patted my shoulders to release me. I pulled the pillow next to her off my bed and cushioned it in front of me. Cat slid off the bed and sat facing away from me. I began to run my long spindly fingers through the black silk threads of her hair. "You wouldn't kiss a girl." I replied.

"Why not? If it's just for practice, it doesn't count," she said as I braided.

"But you like boys," I said, thankful my hands were doing something other than trembling.

"So what? If we practice kissing then you get to practice too. Or are you going to just be a virgin your whole life?" She laughed and lunged forward, her hair slipping from my hands.

I pressed my hands to the cold tile and brought them up to my red cheeks, something I'd do often when her back was turned and my face hot. I gathered her hair after her comedic relief and started braiding again. All I could muster was, "Yeah, I guess."

She went on to talk about the different techniques in the magazine, sounding like an unnecessary sales pitch to someone who wanted to buy the damn car anyway if the salesperson would just stop talking for a moment. At one point in her persuasive argument, she asked me if I wanted to. I don't remember what words, if any, escaped my salivafilled mouth, but they were full of enthusiastic consent.

Cat turned around and, once again, her smooth braid unraveled to drape across her porcelain shoulders. She leaned forward and kissed me. I was so full of bewilderment that I forgot to close my eyes for my first kiss.

Things escalated naturally after that kiss. We would sit on my bedroom floor and make out, sometimes for hours. Sometimes it would progress further, and sometimes it wouldn't; an ebb and flow of practice sessions I was all too ready to accept.

One unusually passionate day took me by surprise. Perhaps it was because she was crushing on the popular guy, and he had talked to her during recess. Maybe, it was just a natural surge in our budding teen adolescence. Her kiss was unbound by the "washing machine technique" in which we tried out whose lips should be higher than whose. As my hands cradled her face, a sharp signal on my thigh of her hand moving



towards me made me lose all reason. I'm sure I kissed her back with all the untethered ambition of my desire as her hand burned on my thigh like ice running across exposed skin.

Cat sat back on her heels, and we were both panting with dew drops on our temples. "You like this way too much. You know we're just practicing, right?"

I nodded as I wiped my lips on my forearm.

"Are you gay?" Her eyebrows pressed together and small balled-up fists dug into her knees.

All the droplets scattered across my body froze. I was suddenly aware of how far away she sat from me. Memories of my mom silently nodding as my dad exclaimed how disgusting it was to hear about Ellen DeGeneres coming out as

"gay" creeped up. His homophobic rants were nothing new, but the image of my mom sitting on the couch reluctantly nodding flashed into my head at the sight of Cat's taken-aback stance. This was now the third time that word, "gay," had been etched into me, and it was not in a delightful manner.

Thinking back now, I wish I had been strong enough to say something other than "no" that day on the floor. I grapple with trying not to blame that small girl who did not feel safe enough to be truthful. I've also since forgiven the friend who, over the years, has volleyed between her authentic queer self and submitting to the social norms we were both imprinted with.

This was now the third time that word, "gay," had been etched into me, and it was not in a delightful manner.

NSOO

It's a little harder to be kind to the memory of my childhood best friend responding to me with, "Good, because that's disgusting."

Many years later, from that cold spot on my bedroom floor, I found myself walking into my college roommate's new church, a church her aunt urged us to attend if we were to live with her for our college years. The church's great room was filled with best-dressed wives and smoothed-over cowlicks. However, we young people were ushered into a utility room of golden blonde braids and teenagers with braces, where large skylights loomed

What Are You Going To Do, Tell My Mother?

overhead. With the event chairs in two blocks nearly full, we were grateful to find two empty spots to huddle into. I was startled when the chiseled salt-and-pepper chin boomed in this small room. "You were brought here today because the adult sermon is not for the ears of the unready." He placed a hand on his chest, "And I am here to prepare you to be ready."

We shuffled in our chairs as he proceeded relentlessly. "Today, the Lord's disciples in this church are here to redeem and enlighten the sinners. The gays who hide because they know the weight of their sins can be saved. For Jesus loves all his children, and just as he forgives those addicted to drugs and alcohol, He, will love the children influenced by Satan. As long as these children of God repent and abandon their unholy lifestyles, they can be saved."

Looking around the room, I saw most congregants nod their heads and glance at each other. I dared not meet the eyes of any, especially my friend; instead, I slid my hands between my thighs and the hard plastic chair.

As noon approached, the beam of sun streaming in through windows placed high up on the lofted ceilings began to approach me. Its warmth, which I usually welcomed, burned atop my black jeans on its way towards my face. I made a silent prayer, "God, please, I just want to love everyone. Do not burn me for being in your church. I'm sorry."

The pastor swept a pointed finger at us. "They are sitting right next to you in their sinful silence." Looks of disbelief were exchanged again as he continued, "They dress in the same clothes and talk in the same youthful ways as you do. Satan dresses them well! But it is time to repent and come, join in the light of God."

He creaked the old stand out of the way so that there was space next to him as he invited us, sinners up front. "If you repent now, Jesus will love you. God allowed you into this place of worship so that you may recognize your sins and trade them in for his eternal love. Heaven awaits you, and this church will welcome you. There is a reason you were brought here today. Now, come up."

The sun simmered my sweaty armpits during his talk and was now slowly baking its way across my face. We all sat in silence, awaiting a poor soul to confess their gay crimes, but nobody did. I could bear the sun no longer as he continued to bait the sinners amongst us; I released



my left hand from under my thigh to shield my eyes.

"The first brave soul to embrace God's love! Young lady, I have never seen you in my congregation before, who have you come with?" I, along with all the others, looked around to see who he was talking about.

"You, my child!" He turns to his wife, "I asked for her to stand, but God will take her hand if she cannot walk." They both chuckled to each other.

Shocked, I frantically waved my hands in front of me as I stuttered, "No! You're wrong, the sun was in my eyes! I'm not a sinner!"

"God's light is cast on those who need it the most. Child, don't be afraid. Come and repent now."

A creak filled my ears as the doors opened and parents began to pour into the room to collect their children. Like all the others, we shot up from our chairs and rushed to be collected. In the car ride, we only mumbled "good" when her aunt asked, never mentioning what happened even to each other.

As I approached my thirtieth birthday, an undeniable truth began to seep deeply into everything I did. I had grown to be the "good daughter." I married a good man who came from a family seemingly healthier than my own. My stable, successful job had survived a pandemic, and I was now making more money than my mother. I was back in school and receiving good grades. Most achievements had been unlocked. Yet, somehow, I was deteriorating from the inside physically and, more impactfully, mentally.

In a session with my therapist, he went out on a limb. "I don't normally do this, but given everything you've shared thus far with me and especially today, I'd like to make a presumption for you. Please, let me know if I've gotten this all wrong, but I'll wager that I won't."

I took a deep breath of the yellow cough drops my therapist frequently eats and sat on my hands before nodding.

"I think, and could be totally wrong, but I think that being bi[sexual] is just a responsibility for you, and you're actually just gay."

The moment I had dreaded flew out of his mouth and landed on the reddish-brown carpet in front of me. My hands went numb as we finished the session. I vomited that night and spent the remainder huddled on the floor of our

What Are You Going To Do, Tell My Mother?

closet silently sobbing as my husband slept peacefully.

Approximately six months later, I called up my mother first thing in the morning. I paced the cold sidewalks of my suburbs at seven in the morning. I was awake and ready to proclaim a secret I was previously convinced I would've taken to the grave. "Hi baby, I just got off work and I'm going to buy these blankets on sale at Walmart for \$8. Can you believe it? Do you want me to ship you one?"

I turned down her offer and began my descent into what I was positive would be the last interaction of our loving but distant relationship. My whole life, I had replayed this conversation in my head, with it always ending in the shame I had brought upon my family, and in my mother's disappointment.

"Mom, I want a more honest relationship with you. I don't want to hide things from you or avoid talking to you."

"Okay, but I think we have a good relationship. Do we not? Is everything okay? Are you mad at mommy? Is that why you don't answer my text messages some days?"

I tempered her flurry and told her of my separation from my husband.

"Oh, I already figured. Earlier this year you'd change whenever I asked about you two. Instead, you'd say like, oh he's doing this or oh I'm doing that. But before, it was always good or we're going to do this today."

In my stunned silence, I could almost hear a smile across her face.

"See, mommy knows her babies. And you say we don't have a good relationship."

I laughed and said, "I didn't say that! I said I want a more honest relationship."

"Same thing, so what's next?"

I fumbled my words, and like an infant who cannot bear the weight of their chubby body, I failed to get out any coherent sentence.

"Hurry up! You're making me worry! What's wrong?" I finally confessed. "I'm gay mom."

After a moment of silence, she said, "What do you mean?" I darted my eyes between two trees and repeated myself.

"You mean you are like leff-leff? Like you like women?"

A small and wilted "yeah" slipped out of my lips.

"Oh, okay. What's next?"



I was frozen in time for what felt like three whole minutes but was more likely for but a fraction of a second before almost yelling, "That's it?"

"What do you mean that's it?" my mom asked.

My eyes felt like they were filling with magma as the world around me disappeared into a blurry pool. "What do you mean, what do I mean?" I began to rub the length of my arm up and down until it became numb. "Mom, I have been preparing for this conversation for my entire life. I've had this talk with you in my head thousands of times and all you have to say is, 'Ok?' I thought you would at least ask me more questions or something!"

"Well, I don't think you would lie about something like this. Are you lying to me?"

"No!"

"Then, okay. Sure, I'm surprised, but only because you never said anything. Thank you for telling me. What's next?"

Suddenly, I didn't care who knew I was gay. Who were they going to tell? My mom? She already knows.



Crown of Yours Camryn Clary





Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures) Lee Holoubek



Battleground, WA

Kendall Jarson

"What have I been waiting for?" The thought circled around in his head as he rode his bicycle down towards the river. This summer was hot, the hottest ever. Sweltering. It was hotter in town than it was in Las Vegas, or so he'd been told. The heat was all anyone would talk about. He spent as many days as he could in the water. The bike ride from his house up north, down through the city to the lake, went on for nearly 10 miles. This gave him time to think.

"What have I been waiting for?" Sweltering, but fleeting, was the summer. He knew it had to be savored. Soon, the leaves would turn, and the days would get short and cold and quiet. He wondered if Garrett would still be around. He wondered if he still wanted Garrett to be around.

The sun warmed the path ahead, warmed his aching bones and muscles and spirit. Something about riding bikes down this path always felt like the beginning of an 80s coming of age movie, before things got serious and dark. The beginning, before they got the girl or found the dead kid along the train tracks. The beginning when the sun was shining, and they were still kids, pedaling through the trees. Laughing. Bike wheels clicking and spinning.

Clicking and clicking, spinning and spinning. Johnathan rode along trying to map the conversation out in his mind as he went. The moment he saw Garrett, he knew it would all vanish, caught up in his gargantuan feelings. Caught up in Garrett's big, brown eyes. He hadn't been able to get it out last night, or last week, or the week before. Every time he saw him, his mind went blank, and he'd pretend everything was okay. Thus, the feelings remained. His friends noticed he'd been quiet, that there was something wrong, but he never said what.

"Garrett, we need to talk. Garrett, I know what's going on. Garrett, I saw what you said. What you did. Garrett, I love you. Garrett, just hold me. Shut up and just hold me, I love you so much," Johnathan said aloud, but to no one. Soon paved path became dirt road. Spinning and spinning, thoughts and wheels.

"Garrett, how could you? Garrett, you know better." Dirt road turned to rocky space between trees, just wide enough for the

Battleground, WA

handlebars to fit and just narrow enough that one had to be paying attention to where they were going, lest they snag on a rogue branch. A few weeks back, Johnathan had misjudged a gap and fallen, hard. Garrett had been riding nearby and turned around when he heard the smack of wood on metal, flesh on dirt. For a moment, Johnathan didn't know where he was. When he saw Garrett, he was confused.

"Hey, hey, bud. Are you okay?" he asked, poking around Johnathan's body for jutting bones and broken skin. Johnathan didn't say anything. He couldn't figure out who this person was or how they knew each other. He racked his brain for memories, but none came. He threw up in the grass.

"How many fingers am I holding up?" Garrett asked and laughed, a little nervous laugh that meant he hadn't found anything worrisome yet, but he was still looking. "Just joshin," he laughed again.

A feeling

Johnathan studied every inch of his face and hair and skin. He recognized these freckles. He recognized these muscles. He knew his name. The memories came flooding back; the familiarity didn't. When Garrett held him there between the pines, he didn't feel a thing. This lingering distance remained.

A feeling of immense loss would come over him as if his partner was already gone.

Each night, as they lay in bed,
Johnathan would run his hands along his partner's body and look
for anything that might spark an emotional response. The little
tattoo of a heart that matched his own. The chip in his tooth from
when he fell playing handball in the 7th grade. Nothing. Nothing.
A feeling of immense loss would come over him as if his partner
was already gone. Maybe this was why, when Garrett left his phone
on the counter one morning while he showered, Johnathan felt
compelled to look.

The lake came up quickly. Another 10 miles gone. He started to see crushed cans of PBR and spent cigarettes and socks and briefs littering the path. The boys were already in the water. He should've known, Garrett was always the first in. The lake, fed by lingering

spring snow melt in the first hot days of the year, was so cold that every summer people died of shock. Getting in too quickly, too recklessly. Everyone in town had heard a tale of someone's neighbor's grandson's classmate getting hypothermia or drowning when it came time for folks to be out swimming again. Garrett never seemed to mind. While everyone else brave enough to take a dip was shivering and retreating, he would float peacefully until whistled at and beckoned ashore.

"Garrett, this is serious. Garrett, I'm done. Garrett, I forgive you. Garrett, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have looked, it's my fault for snooping. I invaded your privacy. God, I really screwed this up," Johnathan lamented, kicking the sand with his shoes. This lake was massive, extending in places far past what the eye could perceive. The area surrounding it had no campsites, no picnic tables. The occasional fisherman could be spotted amongst the trees that lined its beaches closely, but they were few and far between. There was very little beach. The tree line and the blackberry brambles grew right up to the water, save for the occasional log that stopped the flow of the tiny lapping waves enough that it revealed a space to sit. Sometimes, these fallen trees provided a way to walk out further across the lake to carefully lower yourself down into the water. Sometimes, no such route existed and you had to either stay out or jump in. In areas like this, the boys would normally sit along the log like children, dangling their feet down into the depths. Fish would swim by and tickle their feet and they would scream, mostly in jest. Everyone mimicked pushing the others into the lake but no one ever dared. There was no place that anyone could see even a suggestion of a lake bottom.

Johnathan stepped past the bath towels they used in lieu of beach blankets to try to get a better look at what everyone was doing. No one had taken the plunge, except Garrett, of course. Johnathan could barely make him out in the distance. The remaining two friends were posted up along a big tree that had made its way down, back to the earth. Casey had his feet in the lake. Andrew had his tucked underneath him, crisscross applesauce. Both had beers in hand.

How could he get Garrett's attention? The radio would have been too loud had there been anyone else nearby. He waved and waved, and Garrett waved back trying to indicate that it was, in fact, him all the way out there. As if it could be anyone else.

Battleground, WA

They had to have this conversation. He had been hyping himself up for it. He had been sick for days over it. Not sleeping, not eating. Sick for weeks, over something he read months ago.

The little head of auburn hair that stood starkly out against the murky green water bobbed and sank, bobbed and sank, up and down as he swam. Johnathan waved again but received no more waves back.

The little head, even smaller now, bobbed and sank once more. Johnathan waited for it to reappear. When it didn't, his eyes jutted frantically around the tree trunks and lichens. It's a lake, it's contained, he couldn't have vanished. He stared at the space where the head once was, holding his breath. "Come on," he whispered. Nothing.

"Guys!" Johnathan yelled, sprinting down towards the lakeside as if getting a little closer might help. "Guys, I can't see Garrett anymore!"

"Johnathan?" his friend Casey replied. "I didn't even know you were here."

"Yeah, Johnathan! When did you show up?" Andrew shouted. "Get a beer, they're in the cooler."

"You guys don't understand. A second ago I could see Garrett swimming way out there and I saw him go under and now I can't spot him."

His friends replied scattered, but synchronously, "Yeah, he does that." Johnathan shifted his gaze back to the water. Nothing. He didn't see any struggling. He didn't see arms waving or water splashing. It was almost like something had wrapped its tendrils around Garrett's leg and snatched him quickly through the water, straight down into the abyss.

"Are you worried he's drowning?" Casey asked, taking a sip of his beer. "You know Garrett always comes back. He just likes to explore." This felt different. Of course, of course, he had to go missing today. He always seemed to go missing when things were getting tough. Johnathan felt his stomach climbing up into his throat.

"In 15 minutes," Casey said, "We can worry."

15 minutes passed. 20 minutes passed.

"You don't think something could have gotten him, right? Like a shark? What lives in lakes?"

"Not sharks, Andrew," Casey replied, smacking him playfully.



Why wasn't anyone taking this seriously? Johnathan had since walked along where his friends were seated, stepping carefully over and between legs to the tip of where it had jutted out, his eyes trying to focus on one place. Any place. Anything could be Garrett. Everything started to look like him. A rock or a branch or a bird, it was all Garrett. He tried to see between the trees, but they all blended together.

After 45 minutes had gone by, Casey and Andrew formed a search party to find him. "I'll stay behind," Johnathan said. "In case he comes back."

Johnathan watched as his friends vanished and was hit by an incredible sense of isolation. He tried to get in the lake, felt the slippery algae on his toes and decided that he should avoid drowning in the instance that his partner could be found, unharmed. He was never a strong swimmer. He walked back to shore and continued to watch the beaches where a person might wash up had they gotten tangled in the sticks somewhere during their swim. Nothing.

The rocks near their things had been baking in the sun, now, for many hours. The rocks burned when touched by warm bodies and, desperate to feel anything but anguish and dread, he removed his shirt and laid his bare skin on them. One could almost hear it singe. Between the warmth of the sun, the wind blowing the water against the shore, and the exhaustion of both his bike ride and the mourning of the love of his life, Johnathan started to doze off. He fell asleep, dreaming of Garrett dreaming of someone else.

When two hours later, Garrett manifested along the path they had circled a dozen times in their search, he was lugging a giant stick behind him like he was dragging a corpse. With each step he took, the mud would indent and lake water would drip down his body and pool in the space he left. His feet were bleeding. They were about a mile from their camp. The walk back meant stepping over rocks and twigs and broken glass. Garrett wasn't looking down. His friends asked him where he'd been. Wordlessly, he dragged the stick all the way back, scraping a line in the ground wherever he went.

At the exact moment Garret was found, Johnathan gasped and jolted back to consciousness.

When he awoke, his skin was red. When he awoke, the sand was hot, hot, hot.

This Terrible World

Zanni Schauffler

A walk by the river, bicycles racing madly by crash-helmeting at each other, and everyone on Sunday was happy. We were so happy to have our baby—the five of us raising him on raisins and walnuts, black-eyed susans, David Bowie and Prince who he dances to wildly like a little grown upgrown-up adult thumbing his thumbs through his belt loops and falling down over the poor old dog.

I want to communicate with fish and feed them little pellets of shrimp.

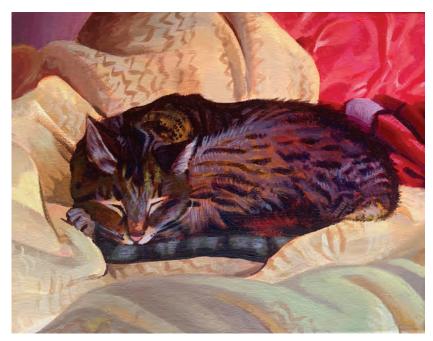
I want to live in the circle of the ok symbol the wave is making. I want to make love with everyone,

get in brutal, hurtful fights, spread pudding all over the floor and ski on it.

I want sanity three days a week, deep rage on Tuesdays and I want my dead cats back.

This is all I want besides you, and you and you and you and me, all of us and our rosy-cheeked fat baby we throw into the air, paper thin ears shining in the sun, hair like crooked filaments, walking along with our candy and crash helmets, walking along by our lucky, healthy river.





Kiki Kylie Kramer





UntitledMario Loprete



T Wish T @uld Write a Poem Like a Maη

Quinn Brown

I wish I could write a poem like a Man after his wife just left him for cheating and losing all their money on slots. I wish I could write a poem like a Man after he just remarried and forgot all about the tornado he left in the home of his ex and his son.

If I wrote a poem like a Man every skeleton I keep hidden, every tornado I've ever brewed could be flipped and switched and turned into something beautiful. I could be the hero of every story I've ever told and I would be believed.

A Man's poem goes down in history because after all, there is nothing more poetic than Comparing Thee to a Summer's Day or taking the Road Not Taken.

I don't write Men's poems because I am that wife being cheated on. I am the mistress. The son he abandoned. I don't write Men's poems because I do not need to.

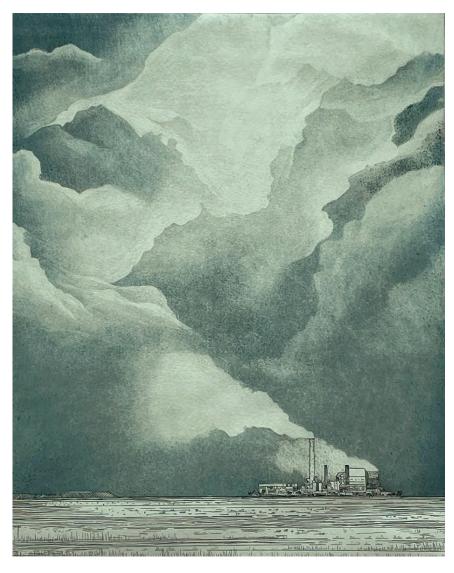
I write because I dare to.
Because I am not a Man,
nor do I want to be.
I write and write and write.
And I know
no thought, no word,
no poem I write could ever be written by a Man.

A City's Spirit

Mahedy Hasan Mim

This old city experienced it before but not like this. This silence, slaughter, empty roads, empty faces. Staring from a window, I wonder what happened? Why are the red ants in a rush today? Why aren't they enjoying this beautiful afternoon? The west wind brings the cold breeze of winter. Putting on my favorite blanket, I look down, It's colder there; is it their reason for leaving? Money flies in the air, but they never come to breathe it in. "Hail capitalism!" A suited gentleman mocks them. I wonder what's in his black briefcase. Another signed Document to legalize this slaughter; the slaughter of this city? The red army is so silent today, winter is the enemy now. Are they leaving because of the news? "An elected God Was holding a burning pen to them, watching as they burned." What am I doing now? Where is the difference? When I read the news, they live the news. They are leaving their dreams like shattered limbs of Love poetry. Ah! The punishment of loving a rich lady. Their ferry is sailing towards an unknown destination Like their grandparents did, fifty years ago.





At the Heart of It All Grey Shawger

Summer at Tharothpadi

Arathy Asok

That summer, when the sun was hot, two monkeys came home. They sat at the top of the ripe jackfruit and ate it, jumped onto the next tree at Ammayi's¹ house and then jumped back. They looked healthy and well fed; they looked clean. After some time, when the haby woke up, the young girl took him to see the

They looked healthy and well fed; they looked clean. After some time, when the baby woke up, the young girl took him to see the monkeys now sitting on the mango tree. When the baby called out to them, they climbed down. The next day they were not to be seen. Bhadra Chechi² said she saw them on top of the jackfruit tree in Aishu Umma's³ house.

Aishu Umma had a husband who gave her the house where she now lives. She was his second wife. The first one had three sons. Aishu had a son by him. After he died, the other wife and sons came back to demand the house of her. She brought out the document where it was written that the house was hers, and the other lady left soon, along with her sons.

The house had six bedrooms. In its centre was a huge drawing room and behind was a dining area that hid a kitchen. When her husband died, Aishu Umma sublet all the rooms in the house to other women whose husbands did not stay with them. They crowded their scents in the house: five families with grown-up children who stepped on each other's toes when they stepped out of their bedrooms.

That afternoon, she had slipped away from home. The pain in her stomach was growing. She felt a stickiness between her legs. As she was going to Bhadra Chechi's house, Aishu Umma caught her on the road and said, "You never come here. Why don't you come in?" She smiled weakly. She didn't want to go, but Aishu Umma did not give in. She pulled her by the hand and took her into the drawing room. All the women peered out of their bedroom kitchens, mingled smells of cooking rising from them, and watched her sitting on the chair. She sat at the edge, not wanting the stain to spread. Then they all came out to sit around, to watch her talk. She tried to smile at them. But they all stared at her, not willing to smile

Malayalam word for Aunt

² Elder sister

³ Word used by muslims for mother in Malayalam. Here used as a sign of respect.

back. She nodded each time Aishu Umma talked about her only son, how good he was, how she wanted him to go to the Gulf. She waited for the smells to go away. The mosaic at her feet was faded.

She remembered a long time ago when that house belonged to her grandfather's sister, a woman who was a teacher at the Mission school which later the government took over. Sheela Aunty had bald hair by the time she saw her. Her grandfather was already dead. He was younger than Sheela Aunty, but cancer took him away, just as it took away her mother. She got an old book of his, Rubbaiyath, the day her Ammamma⁴ showed her the tin box in the dark of the store room. Sheela Aunty was old, weak, and frail when she saw her. She married late. She remembered the stories that Ammamma told about Sheela Aunty. There was no warmth in her heart for that woman, now old and withered. She saw instead a witch who made her mother lie down on the floor when, as a child, her mother had to stay with the aunty to go to school.

She started when Aishu Umma tapped on her hand rather roughly to call her, "Aren't you listening to what I said? I asked which class you are in now?" She smiled weakly and apologetically again. "I am in the fifth." Silence. The women opened their eyes in wide-eyed scorn, looking at her long limbs and rounded breasts. When she stood up, they all got up to watch her: the fattened stomach, full hips, large thighs. She felt their eyes crawl on her body before she mumbled she had to go. She walked away quickly to the gate, the gravel grinding under her naked feet. "Quite big for a ten-year-old" she heard the youngest of them say to Aishu Umma, who mumbled back, "Poor motherless child."

The lane to Bhadra Chechi's house was brown, now a dull yellow in the hot noon sun. She had just finished lunch: rice with buttermilk and cucumber. Ammamma made it every day now that the cucumbers were coming in large numbers from her vegetable garden. She had not told Ammamma that she was going out. She had seen Ammamma going with her pot on her hip along with

⁴ Mother's mother.

Summer at Tharothpadi

Jaani Chechi and Sarini Chechi when they went to take water from the well to pour into the drains that led to the coconut trees. In the beginning of summer, Ammamma began by pouring ten pots of water for each coconut tree, then reduced it to two pots in a couple of days. Sometimes she also kept pots with small holes and a wick near the trees to water them.

When Ammamma and grandfather bought the land from the Tharoths, a long, long time back, the land was barren. Together, they brought five jackfruit seeds and small mango trees to plant in the huge strip of land. Then they added coconuts, chikkoo, drumsticks, cashew, lemon, tamarind, and the grass, huge lots of it, to feed the cows. In one part of the plot were the tapioca plants. Between them, she sometimes lay looking at the sky, with slits in her eyes. The blue became red, then pink. It was warm at her back. Ambi Ettan,5* who worked with the cows and who also climbed the trees, would sometimes sit on his haunches, to smoke his beedi. She lay down on the coconut palm leaf, green and cool under her, and sometimes shared a beedi with him.

When her young cousins were around, she took them for wild walks to the bigger fields with the small pond in the middle, the brown roads bamboo-lined, the wind whistling between them. From there you could see a house, small, white, tiled, where they said the woman was mad, where the young man had jumped into this very pond to die. She would let the kids play in the edges of the water. Sometimes they would get inside to sit neck-deep and splash. Women came in with large bundles of clothes to be washed. They all wore towels around their waists and brassieres, faded old ones, covering their breasts. The men came to the other side of the pond to take a bath, swim a lap or two. They wrung out their towels, standing in drawers coloured brown, red, green. Sitting neck deep and fully clad, she watched them: the women yelling at the children, the mailanji* plants in the corners, the wideness of the sky dipping far away in the endless fields.

As she crossed Lakshmy Chechi's house, she saw the dogs had all eaten their lunch and were lying down on the veranda. They looked up to see when she passed by and lazily wagged their tails. Bhadra Chechi's house was low, the palm thatch in the front dipping into a small veranda, shading it against the afternoon sun.

⁵ Elder brother.

Muthi, her mother, was not at home. Nor was Bhadra Chechi. She looked in to see if Suku was inside, if he had come back from the fields where he had taken his cow. He lay there on the torn palm mat and woke up when she poked him. His eyes were drowsy and he asked her to go away, sleep-drenched as he was. She looked at his thin form and went outside and sat for sometime. She felt the wetness under her, on her thighs, and walked back along the sleepy noon roads -- half running, half walking, and thankful that everyone around were inside their homes, unable to bear the summer heat.

Back home, she sees Ammamma sitting on the red steps in front of the house, the green coconut palms thatched and new. Her lips are red, and she spits out the betel juice before she sees her standing gingerly in the shade of the jackfruit tree. Ammamma threads her needle again and asks, "Where did you go?" Her voice is dull. The flowers on the cloth she has stitched are multi-coloured, a splash of colour on the white cloth. She does not answer. She picks up an orange leaf and walks around the tree. Then, she walks around to where they had heaped the cow dung, a huge hole under the mango tree, where she had sat to urinate the day before and found dark brownish clots when she put in her hand to see what was sticking between her legs. The dark brown soon turned red. They came little by little, the trickles, and now she had to wash more often; the blood did not stop flowing. She stands staring into the green darkness, thinking, thinking – what would she say? How could she say it?

A long time ago, when her mother lay wasted in her bed in Chennai, she had gone to visit; the schools had closed for Christmas. One day, Amma⁶ had called her inside the room and said, "I have to tell you something." She looked down at her toenails and wished Mother would finish soon. There were children out to play. Amma's voice was only a whisper and she spoke for perhaps five minutes. All the while Amma looked at her, her face sweating from play, her dress tight against her plump body. "One day when you become big, you may fall in love with someone. There will be boys in your college who will come to propose to you. Do not say anything. If you do like someone, please come and tell your father. He will know what to do." She paused. "Some days later, you will also see blood coming from that place where you urinate." Amma

Malayalam for mother



Summer at Tharothpadi

looked at her with blank eyes.

She remembers the red she saw when Amma washed herself, flowing beneath her on the floor after urinating. "You don't have to worry then. Tell someone." Amma paused in thought. "Tell some woman who will be with you." She remembers Aama's instructions, frantic. What woman? What woman would be with her? Who would be with her? When Amma died, where would she be? "It happens to everybody. Every woman. It is natural. You do not have to get afraid. I am saying this to you now because I may be dead soon. When I go up, God will ask me if I did all my duties down here. Then I will have to answer him. I do not know how long I will be here." Amma paused. "You can go now." She felt Amma's eyes on her back as she closed the door after her.

She knows it is that blood which came, the blood that Amma said. She feels something choking inside her throat. She turns around to look at ammamma stitching the flowers. Her old head is bent down. She has started to sleep, sitting there in the afternoon sun.

She goes into the toilet and spreads her legs. She can see the blood on both sides of her inner thighs. The water feels cold on her when she pours it. When she comes back, Ammamma is awake and again stitching. She sits at her feet and looks up at Ammamma. She mumbles, "Chora⁷."

Ammamma looks down at her. "Choru⁸? You hungry? What did you say? Devi! Devi!"

She calls to the Chechi in the kitchen.

"Chora," she says a little loudly.

Now Ammamma looks up from her cloth. Her head is upright. Her hand is not shaking. Devi Chechi stands behind Ammamma.

Ammamma says, her voice flat white in the noon heat, "Devi, bring a white cloth."

Devi Chechi goes inside and brings a white square cotton.

"Wipe and show," Ammamma says.

She takes the cloth. She wipes herself between her thighs and brings out the white, dripping red.

The next week, when Father comes, he brings new clothes and eatables. An uncle gifts a small necklace with different stones.

When she sits inside the dark room with three windows, the sky is hotter than ever.



⁷ blood in Malayalam

⁸ rice



Washi Tape Envelope Shane Allison



Untitled Connie Bisson



The Flag Salute

Amanda, Sheppard

No, I wouldn't say I liked school. My teachers were awkward around me because I wasn't allowed to salute the flag or celebrate holidays and they always felt the need to announce this to the class to prevent me from declaring war on Christmas. I also had a Spanish last name no one knew how to pronounce from a dad who didn't live with us or maybe didn't exist as far as my classmates were aware. And I was chubby and too tired to learn much before noon because I barely slept and carried the weight of my mom's winery worker job stress and religious idiosyncrasies on my eightyear-old shoulders. I had on a "kick-me" sign I couldn't take off. Starting third grade was already pretty exciting. We had subjects like multiplication and cursive. We kept black and white speckled composition notebooks in our little lid-lift desks, just like on TV. So what if I hated math since first grade and had a long way to go before I'd ever write good enough to forge my mom's signature? We were only in the first week of school, and I was off to a good start. Mrs. Souza found me charming.

Mrs. Souza was blonde, pretty, and petite. She was also married to Mr. Souza; they were seen as a glamorous, third-grade teaching power couple at my school. I heard rumors that he left his wife to marry her because she was getting too old and fat at my mom's friend's beauty shop. Didn't my mom know any nice people? Mrs. Souza was sweet, and our class adored her immediately. I was playful and chatty and more comfortable talking to adults than other kids because I was surrounded by them constantly. I dazzled them with the random trivia I absorbed from all the PBS shows I watched or told them some joke I overheard one of my uncles tell that made everyone laugh that time. I still needed to win over my new squeaky-clean affluent classmates, the girls who probably didn't watch Freddy movies or all the trashy eighties comedies.

They wore Esprit clothes, carried Sanrio lunch boxes, and belonged to some mysterious yet tasteful Christianity that didn't impose itself too strictly but gave them all an unspoken access to a privilege I'd never have. My interactions with them were impossible. I wasn't skinny, pretty, or blonde enough, and my jokes

The Flag Salute

were always too crude. I wasn't one of them; they could tell. These kids were all Bay Area transplants. I was born out here. I don't know how I ended up born in the sticks. I've never felt remotely connected to that life, even if I still know how to milk a goat after all these years.

I didn't need them; I had MTV. My heroes were Madonna, Elvira, and "Just Say Julie." Having the Esprit girls like me, though, would make my life at school a whole lot easier. I was gonna be a regular, well-liked kid. I could do it! Sure, I couldn't change my weird upbringing, but I could pretend I wasn't being raised in my mom's religion. So, when Mrs. Souza asked for a volunteer to lead the flag salute, I threw caution to the wind and raised my hand. I was too little to realize that maybe I was overplaying my hand with this move, but my irrepressible hammy nature wouldn't hear of it. In my mind, I was a star. I don't remember much about that moment, but I knew the drill. I'd seen it done enough times.

Face the flag, right hand over your heart. "Is everybody ready," I asked. Everyone giggled, including Mrs. Souza, and then we saluted the flag. I didn't feel guilty at all because, in my mind, I was acting. I was playing the role of a typical American kid. Once again, I was too little to know I was overplaying my hand.

I had a spring in my step, and for a little while, even the snobby Esprit girls couldn't take that away from me. I felt so good that I invited my mom to Parents' Night. Mrs. Souza was happy to see me and bound to be curious about who gave birth to such a wondrous bubbly creature.

My mom, of course, did not disappoint. She was working day shifts at the winery that week and was suddenly more obliged to take an active role in her proselytizing and Bible studies since being out in the day meant more eyes on us both. Mom's religious obligations also meant taking an interest in what I was up to while she could keep her eyes open. It was 1988, and the

It was 1988, and the Satanic Panic was still in full swing. Demons lurked in every Saturday morning cartoon, rock song, and Halloween costume."



KMZHZIR

Satanic Panic was still in full swing. Demons lurked in every Saturday morning cartoon, rock song, and Halloween costume. It was still a little early in the school year, so I thought I'd be okay. And I almost was.

My drawings were cute, my teacher had nice things to say about me, and we were seconds from a clean getaway until "Amanda did the cutest thing the other day when she led us in the Fl-aaa-g S-a-l-uuu-tte!" My mom smiled silently and quickly flashed a menacing look at me over my teacher's shoulder before she could notice what had just transpired. More silence. Mrs. Souza and my mom promptly shared an uncomfortable laugh as I waited for the Earth to swallow me whole. If the Earth had swallowed me up, my mom would've thought it was Armageddon. She'd yell, "I told you so," as I descended into whatever nothingness void was reserved for us non-believers who didn't want to defer our happiness for the promise of an exotic petting zoo on Earth in "The New System."

Mom thanked my teacher, and I tried my best to put on a brave face as we left the safety of my shiny TV sitcom-perfect classroom; with its cheery cartoon pencil decor wishing me safe passage on my perilous journey home.

Mom wasted no time yelling at me in the car for my deception, because "You know the rules, Amanda! How long have you known the rules now? Do you know how embarrassing that was for me? I just don't know where I went wrong with you. No TV for a week!"

I don't know what was worse, the sting of my mom's words or missing all my favorite shows. I shut myself into my little walk-in closet-turned-playroom and cried it out with my Cabbage Patch Kids and Rainbow Bright. They were always great listeners. I was down, but I wasn't out yet. It was only the first week. I had to hang in there until my mom returned to working graveyard shifts and could chill out on this perfect holy mom schtick.

Who were we kidding here? The people in the congregation were her Esprit girls, I guess. Maybe she couldn't change her "worldly" lapsed-Catholic upbringing or hide her single motherhood, but she could get them to like her. Perhaps if they accepted her, her god would accept her too. What was it that her god liked so much about them anyway? They were always so nosey and critical.

Two ladies from her old congregation cornered me at my old

school in first grade and asked me questions about where my mom had been. I told them she had taken my grandma to garage sales.

"Tell your mommy that Garage Sales aren't the way to everlasting life," one of them hissed at me.

Technically, the JWs aren't considered a cult, because there is no charismatic central figure and no monthly tithes, expensive tests, or elaborate blackmail schemes. The organization is a smug experiment in sanitized Christianity no one asked for, running on good old-fashioned snitching and self-policing within its congregations. No co-opted pagan holidays, or any holidays for that matter, no nationalistic saluting of the flag, and a Rapture-like Armageddon without the ascension to heaven, and the non-believers die and turn to dust.

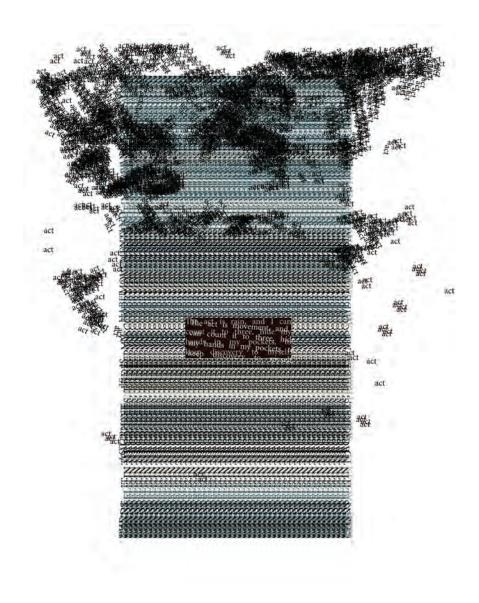
I didn't get the appeal myself. I just wanted to have fun like a kid. I didn't have a say in what kids I went to school with, but my mom chose to worship with these people even if I didn't like it. What I thought didn't matter, and it wasn't up to me to choose something else for her. I only knew it wasn't what I would choose for myself.

The next day at school, my mom gave me a note to give to my teacher, barring me from all holiday celebrations and flag salutes and thwarting any future attempts at going rogue. Mom walked me to class to ensure the note got to its intended recipient and wasn't thrown in the trash.

My teacher felt for me but knew she had to respect my mom's wishes. Instead of making yet another awkward announcement like my teachers before her at my other schools, she gave me a discreet nod, and I stood back enough from my classmates so they wouldn't see that I wasn't doing the actual salute. I also refrained from creating explicitly festive artwork and got good at side-stepping questions.

In a few more years, I'd be in junior high in another city, where I never have to worry about saluting flags or dodging JW kids in my classes. And I'd get to tear off my "kick-me" sign once and for all.





The Act-Mist/Smoke Alex De La Cruz



Paoay Church Fevie Hernandez



Blue, blue, and blue

Oscar Nieves Lira

Catching my breath was not easy. My hands were bleeding from pulling too tightly on the fishing line and the boat was still rocking from side to side. Once I managed to sit up, I glanced over to my right and watched the ripples lose themselves in the distance. Some of them would make it to the shoreline, but no one would be there to hear their testimony of what they had just witnessed. Maybe it was not the time to remember the longgone past, but the deep blueness of the water took me back ten years – before I ever took this job, before I took a liking to fishing, before I grew weary of people, before the lake and the rainy season flooded the town for the eighth time ever.

Mr. Vallarta posed a thought experiment from a man named Hume to the entire sixth grade class. He asked us to imagine ourselves as fishermen at the center of a lake. It didn't have to be an enormous lake, just one big enough as for us to be worried that we couldn't make it back to shore on a swim, if need be. His voice had the same calming effect as the sounds of tiny waves piling on top of each other. Then he said to close our eyes and put ourselves on our new imaginary tiny vessel, one big enough for two people, a strange detail given that we were the only ones supposedly aboard. Maybe the waters are gently pushing our boat in one direction, he suggested. Now, we feel the wind offering us some comfortable company, hitting our faces with the force of a whistle. Every time you whistle, he said, the air that comes out is cold and refreshing. When we look up, there she is, the sun, all alone illuminating everything, letting us see about a meter or two into the water. My father and uncle, whom I rarely saw because of work, had taken me on a couple special fishing trips, so it was not hard at all to think of all the things Mr. Vallarta mentioned.

Now to our right, he said, your fishing rod is securely placed and the line dances with the water at a slow tempo from one side to the other, waiting for a hungry carp to take the gracious nourishment that has descended from beyond the heavens. I never liked fishing as a child, for that very same reason. Luring out fishes who have no idea who we are, trusting in that piece of food because

they hunger. It is true that we are not the only creatures who lay traps for their prey, but we are certainly the cruelest. Originally, I tagged along because I wanted the company of my father and uncle, but I could not stand the ritual that took place after we caught our prices. They, however, were unbothered by it; it was very much like their job. At the very least, that is what I thought as a young boy. And Mr. Vallarta's brain teaser conjured a similar feeling of disgust in me. He continued, I know very little about fishing myself, and if I'm being completely honest with you, I find it profoundly boring. His voice caught a hint of sweet mockery at the end of his sentence that I am sure made everyone smile with their eyes closed. But he said, going back to his calm pedagogical tone, I have gone fishing once or twice with my wife's family at her request. The things we do for our loved ones are certainly strange; I bet you will surprise yourselves once you grow old like me. At that age, none of us ever imagined that the time to wear thick square glasses, a wrinkly but gentle worn down face, and clothes from half a century ago would realistically arrive. We were too young.

Mr. Vallarta spoke of things most of us did not understand, but he never bored us as he seemed to do with the adults. Instead, we found his stories whimsical and entertaining. In retrospect, there was enough nonsense in his lectures for the unrestricted imagination of children to accept his truths. He continued with his story: In one of those scarce moments of quiet contemplation I got amidst the limited space on the boat and the merry unending banter of my wife's family. I began to pity the creatures below me, but not because of their potential demise at our hands. No, no, no. His voice began to drift a little, but he continued nonetheless. I felt sorry for them because of their eternal ignorance of the fact that above their natural barrier, that is the surface, there is a completely foreign domain that they will never know. Those who return from that mystic beyond will be ridiculed by their peers or tortured by the incommunicable nature of their experience. Those who never come back, will simply be presumed "missing." As I said before, we did not always understand what he was talking about, we were kids, but he knew how to grab our attention. "How little do these carps know about everything?" you may ask, yet we are not that dissimilar from them, as you see - his voice returned to his natural calmness - humans are very much naturally confined to our planet and very few members of our species have ventured



successfully outside of it. While we might know relatively more about our world, its history and ourselves, the carp does not need to know more than what it already knows. They are not burdened with the curse of knowledge like we are. What he said afterwards made my young self feel as if I were the innocent carp being pulled out of the water. So, even if we strive to learn as much as we can about everything, we will never truly know everything or anyone and sadly, the rest of the world will not care.

My heart was still pumping fast, but I had managed to get my breath under control. The waters of the lake were as blue as ever, but I could still make out the shapes of carps beginning to gather around the boat now that the commotion was over. My hands still bled, but the adrenaline kept me from feeling the burning pain of the cuts. I had plenty of time to finish my task but the sooner I was done with it, the better everything else would be. I still do not know if it was Mr. Vallarta's words or his unforeseen death during the flood of that year, that left in me an imprint of eternal distrust towards everything and anyone. My father and uncle, although unaware, made sure to reinforce his lesson, expecting I would carry on the family business. Maybe that was the reason they showed no emotion while butchering the carps we caught during our fishing trips. They died because they trusted the bait, they would always say while pointing the expressionless dead face of the last caught carp in my direction, so, it's not our fault. They should have known better.

Sure enough, once I entered their business, I was made aware of how little you could confide in someone. How easily loyalties faltered, and allegiances shifted. So, it too became easier, or at least more comfortable, for me to exist in that unknown. I got better at luring out the ones who would readily betray our business, and those who took the bait needed to be returned to the lake. I regained my strength. It was time to tide the "carp" down and throw it back into the water. How many other things could be down there, unaware of what just happened above their heads? The only witnesses of my deed could never denounce it, share it, or gossip about it. I had an entire lake full of spectators, and none of them cared. Only the blue, blue and blue of the waters would know my secrets.

Motes

Charissa, Roberson,

Broaden your lungs. Look across the room at someone you know but have never seen before. Imagine their life before you. When you leave this room, you will be shadows, elongated and thrown across a wall like discarded coats on the cusp of spring. Now is transient, but whole. Grasp the after image of a moment already slipping to memory. When you breathe again, you will be older: unretractable. Watch the inside of your eyelids—let whorls of violet blossom in dizzying eddies in what should be darkness—and when you see nothing but color, let the world flood in. Watch it emerge from inverted shades of green and blue. The ceiling, the floor, the person across the room whom you no longer recognize.





In My World Larisa Murariu



The Indistinct Notion of an Object Trajectory Ryota Matsumoto



The Wellington Methodology

Matt Albertson

February 5th:

I submitted my latest research paper on the theoretical existence of alternate realities this morning. It is an extension of my work on Multiverse Theory, exploring the intersection of quantum mechanics and cosmology. I must admit, I've always found the prospect of parallel universes fascinating—the idea that there could be truly infinite variations of us, living out distinct lives in separate, isolated dimensions.

My colleagues are intrigued but remain skeptical, overall. That's academia for you. I don't blame them—such is the glory of the scientific method which brought me here. Regardless, I eagerly await feedback from the first step of the journal's peer-review process.

February 25th:

I received the reviewers' comments on my paper today. As is typical in this field, there are mixed opinions. While some are supportive of my theoretical framework, others question the validity of my conclusions. I cannot help but feel weighed down by this frustration. The equations are there. The data is there. $P \geq 0.05$, indeed. But I know deep within me that I am onto something. Something big. Something hitherto unnoticed about the universe itself. I must persevere and continue my research, doubters be damned!

March 10th:

Lately, I have been experiencing vivid dreams about experiences in alternate realities. Last night, I dreamt that I was a concert pianist, performing in a grand concert hall filled with a captivated audience. It felt so real — as if I was truly there, living that life. Intriguingly, my lucid dreaming techniques do not work in any of them. These dreams are becoming numerous.

March 25th:

I have been pouring over my numbers. I'm convinced as ever that I've gleaned a method to access alternate realities. The data suggests that one can create a bridge between our reality and

The Wellington Methodology

another which lies parallel. The potential applications of this technology are mind-boggling. I will begin preparations for an experiment immediately.

April 6th:

My prototype and experiments are progressing. Slowly. I have had to adapt my methodology frustratingly often. I've observed unusual phenomena during testing: a quicksilver mirage all about. I have yet to establish a stable connection.

My colleagues have voiced concern about my well-being. Good on them. But, I cannot be distracted. I am so close to making a breakthrough. It is electrifying.

April 19th:

Eureka! Success! I have successfully opened a portal—a tear, really—to another reality. The experience was brief, fleeting, but the proof is undeniable. I witnessed a world where our university does not exist, replaced by a vast, untouched forest. I must refine my methods to allow for a more stable connection. Soon the world will see the true shape of existence. And it is beautiful!

April 27th:

My attempts to replicate the experiment have been fruitless. Each time I try, I am met with some failure or another.

I've been noticing my colleagues... whispering. It's not a good feeling. I've grown isolated. But I cannot afford to waver. The promise is that great. I must continue my work.

April 30th:

I remain haunted by the other realities, tauntingly just outside my grasp. The dreams have intensified, blurring the lines between reality and the fantastical, as my mind, my memories, my values all shift with each swap of perspectives between different selves. I fear that my mind is unraveling, but I can't stop. The truth is out there. I can grasp it.

May 3rd:

The struggle to replicate my initial success has been an exercise



in frustration. The variables in my experiments seem to shift with each attempt, as if the multiverse itself stifles my efforts. I have become reclusive. All my waking hours, outside of teaching, are dedicated to refining my methodology.

My colleagues have stopped speaking to me. Their skepticism glowers. But, no matter. I have come this far. I can endure it.

May 17th:

I find it now... difficult... to discern the boundaries between dreams and reality. The other universes that I have glimpsed (I've lost count several times now) seem to bleed into my subconscious, creating a truly disorienting tapestry of experiences that leaves me...

The dreams are more vivid. These nightly walkabouts between universes are simultaneously a source of comfort and torment. They serve to remind me of the possibilities that lie just beyond my reach. And I am reminded of all possibilities, good and bad. All possibilities.

May 30th:

Today's experiment was cataclysmic. The apparatus malfunctioned, resulting in a small explosion in the lab. Thankfully, no one was injured. However, the damage to the school's equipment and lab space is... noticeable. I am disheartened. The faculty will question me. I must produce tangible, replicable results. The atmosphere at the university is now oppressive, suffocating.

I no longer dream.

June 1st:

It has become too much. Peer review has been in vain. So today I'll present my findings to my graduate students in today's seminar. Their youthful enthusiasm and keen minds may provide fresh perspectives on the multiverse, and perhaps they will suggest approaches that have evaded me thus far. I taught them, after all.

I no longer sleep. In the darkest hours of the night, I am haunted by the possibility that my theorems and equations are merely the products of a fevered imagination. Am I another Wellington's farcical idea of a scientist? My dreams, when I had them, became

The Wellington Methodology

tainted by some imp hissing quackery. Relentless torment! No. No, no. I must persevere, as I always have. Just keep it together. This will be my crucible—my students will test the common sense of my findings. I taught them, after all. If I cannot reject the null hypothesis, well then, I must confront the terrible possibility that I have been chasing quicksilver. I must apologize to my aging parents. This feels like dementia.

But I'm keeping it together...

* * *

The scene Wellington's students saw never happened before in this hall. Their professor had always been present this close to the start of class. It had been that way for years. Dr. Wellington was always—always—ten minutes early to his lectures. Whispers grew, gossiping.

They all claimed one bad thing or another had happened: a car crash, food sickness, a death in the family, the death of Dr. Wellington even! But what they saw was somehow worse.

The clock struck three. With haggard expression and clothes, Dr. Arthur Wellington stumbled into the lecture hall, looking more like Cosmo Kramer than a prodigy with early tenure. His hair was a mess of tangles. Dark circles clung beneath bloodshot eyes, now more red than white. He clutched a stack of disorganized papers and notes in a manilla folder, their edges frayed.

As this stranger made his way to the podium, the students exchanged uneasy glances. The air in the room was thick with anticipation, punctuated by the faint scratching of pen on paper as a few diligent students took notes through their initial shock.

"Wellington," the professor began, his voice trembling with urgency, "has made a... a significant discovery. Yes, he has—I daresay made a breakthrough of... unparalleled importance." He glanced around the room, but nobody laughed.

Oh, of course, they didn't know yet—but they were about to. His gaze darted from one wide-eyed student to the next, as if searching for hidden adversaries and confederates.

"And I have decided, in light of these... extraordinary findings, to abandon our scheduled lesson. Instead, I shall share with you the fruits of my research: the key to unlocking the mysteries of the multiverse."



His claim was met with a balking crowd. This crowd had never balked before.

Wellington pivoted to the blackboard and began to scribble violently, desperately. For twenty minutes, he worked until he had filled the lecture hall blackboard with complex equations and diagrams—most of which were alien. The normally taciturn man's voice grew louder, impassioned, as he explicated, as he revealed the tear in space time, and his every resulting glimpse into different Earths, different universes. His voice was ragged from sleeplessness. The students, mouths all agape, exchanged disconcerted looks throughout. This was something of a departure from the professor they had grown to know. Tension and concern for the academic's mental state heightened by the second.

With a flourish, Wellington stepped back from the blackboard, his hands, his face, his whole front powdered with chalk. Now they knew.

"Q.E.D.," he proclaimed. His tired eyes now wide and wild, "the formula that will reshape our understanding of the cosmos!" He turned to face his expectant audience.

Sleeplessness blurred his vision, but everything eventually came back into focus. Wellington surveyed the room, his triumphant grin cracked and crumbled into a frown. His lecture hall was impossibly silent. The desks were vacant. The chalky air hung still. Only the faint echo of his great proclamation remained—another impish hissing, no doubt. Quicksilver stirred. Or was it tears? He would continue, just as he had told himself over the course of many weeks.

"Wellington has ventured into the depths of the quantum realm. Wellington explored the very fabric of spacetime itself. You see? You see, my dear students, the key lies in the manipulation of matter's constituent parts at the Planck scale—that infinitesimal level at which all conventional models of physics break down. It is here," he gestured all around to an audience of chairs and desks, "within the confines of the quantum foam, that the seeds of alternate universes reside."

He had to continue, his words tumbling forth now like a deluge. Someone had to know. "The apparatus' intricate assembly of superconducting magnets, quark oscillators, and particle defragmenters—is designed to probe these minute fluctuations, all in line with the equations' predictions here, that we may tease out the space-time membrane that binds

The Wellington Methodology

our reality—all realities, really—to countless, countless others. It's Hilbert's Grand Hotel all the way down!"

His lecture mutated into a self-indulgent monologue. His dry, overtaxed throat became wet again—wet, and a bit sticky. "By harnessing the elusive energies of the naturally occurring quarktasmic flux, the user can pierce the veil that separates our world from the myriad realms that lie just beyond our perception. You see? You see! You see, the key is to attune the harmonics of the extradimensional resonator, to synchronize its vibrations with the undulating arrhythmia of that great turbulence we can call the Cosmic Aether."

His voice rose in pitch. His throat grew dry again—surely, too much chalk dust, surely—the remaining chalk in his hand snapped under the desperate pressure of his grip. He continued, holding the nub. They almost understood. Almost. Then his peers, all of academia, would see what quality of physicist he had become. Perhaps he could receive two Fields Medals this year! Once they saw. It was all here on the blackboard, now more chalk than blackboard.

"It is through this delicate quantum harmonization, that we can breach the walls of the structure of this universe, opening a gateway into the vast unknown—I did say a breach, but it's more a tear that spans the gulf between universes' space-time membranes, connecting this world and the infinite expanse of the intercosmic tapestry."

He turned in earnest. By now, speckly vermillion trails broke up the otherwise chalky coating around his mouth and down his front. A raw, bleeding pharynx was just collateral damage so that the chairs and desks in the lecture hall could see what Wellington saw. Somebody should.

As his monologue careened ever deeper away into mad ramblings, Wellington's once plausibly coherent explications fully dissolved into a sloppy word-salad of patently fabricated terms and fantastically fictional concepts. The air in the lecture hall grew heavy. The chalk clouds finally settled to coat the whole of the hall in powdery white. The professor's words echoed through the vacant room. If there were an onlooker at this point, they might liken it to the distant cries of a man lost in the outback of his own mind. But not even Wellington himself could recognize Wellington anymore, and Wellington wasn't there. There was no onlooker. There

was no observer. Because, in order to overcome Heisenberg's threshold, there could be no observer. There was a drift.

A moment of clarity—blessed, blessed clarity—struck. A self-realization unfolding like the slow decay of a subatomic particle, a cascade of collapsing wave functions within Wellington's evertearing psyche. At first, he perceived only the odd absence of all his students mid-lecture. Their once-eager faces had been replaced by the stark, bleak emptiness of the abandoned lecture hall. A creeping sense of confusion overcame him, and all he could do was grip himself. After a while, he wanted to move. But he could not move. So he gripped himself ever more tightly. But this, in turn, gave way to a truly putrid revelation: the impish hissing had won, hadn't it?

Time slipped. Wellington's awareness expanded. The blackboard, just now adorned with the nigh-alchemical scrawlings of his fevered mind, evaporated into the aether. The very walls of the lecture hall shifted and bent—they appeared to be closing in around him. The room contracted, continuing to collapse upon itself until just Wellington stood within the confines of a small, sanitized room. A small, sanitized cell.

The sudden taught weight of the straight jacket bore down upon his shoulders and chest, its canvas straps had dug into his flesh. But he writhed and writhed in the grip of this new perception. His was a brilliant mind, a powerful intellect. Arthur Wellington was now at the mercy of that powerful, broken intellect. His clear, measured thoughts were replaced with a cacophony of chaos and confusion.

He cried out, his voice hoarse with overuse and desperation. "This is not Wellington's reality! This? This?!"

Following his ragged, anguished cry, a team of orderlies burst into the room, their faces a blur (everything a blur) as they rushed to subdue the tormented academic. One shouted something to the other, his voice inaudible above the wailing of Wellington's frenzy. A needle pierced his neck and something cool flowed into his veins. This quicksilver-riddled vision of hell began to fade—just like his apparatus, he noted. It was his final note.

* * *

Dr. Arthur Wellington, bursting at the seams with excitement, settled down into his worn leather armchair. The dim light of the study cast a warm glow over the room,



shadows dancing along the walls, as the fire crackled in the hearth. He took a deep breath, savoring the familiar scent of aged books and his calming pipe tobacco filled the air.

He reached for his leather-bound journal, its pages crisp and inviting. A good scientist takes good notes, after all. He uncapped his favorite fountain pen, its nib gleaming gold in the firelight, and began to make history as he composed his first entry for this new volume. He planned his words carefully. The promise of a truly groundbreaking discovery—one which could very well herald a paradigm shift in science, a possibility to reveal the hitherto hypothetical multiverse's mysteries lay before him. A tantalizing feast for a scientist, which Wellington had never doubted himself to be.

His pen raced across the page to note the date first: February 5th. This was the moment, this was the day, of Arthur Wellington's triumph—of science's triumph.

* * *

A cold, overbearing light hung above. It constantly stung—slightly, so slightly—on exposed skin. But Arthur didn't care. Arthur was not there. Wellington was not there. Not anymore. The man laughed—a hollow, ringing laugh devoid of all humor, all irony, all levity. The once-distinguished tenured Doctor of Physics now sat on a tiled floor, hunched over, restrained in a white suit made just for him. What sat in that room was a grotesque caricature of the mind he had once been.

The man's eyes, once glinting with intellectual curiosity, now peered about vacantly into his room's void. A thin trail of drool constantly traced its way down his chin, his face stuck in a twisted smile—one that belied the turbulence within a genius prodigy's torn psyche. Echoes of his laughter, once filled with feeling, with the joy of discovery, reverberated through bleak corners of a nameless asylum, somewhere in the multiverse, made just for people like him.

If anyone could remember him, and not even the man himself could now, it would be as a haunting reminder of the price one Dr. Arthur Wellington unwittingly paid in his wanton pursuit of the ultimate truth: a Hilbert's Grand Hotel's worth of deluded fiction.





Spatial Visions: Digital Manipulation Lindsay Anastasia

Mushrooms

Anon Baisch

Humid scented morning of urine and cum-fatigue ::

urban nostalgias ::

odors of passage and exchange leak dark animal stains into creases ::

concrete sucking in as much of the minor liquid as it can bear ::

sun-parched to viscous remnants ::

foot traffic muted into dull adhesive clods ::

consciousness adapts to its environment ::

the fuck-weather reduces to olfactory burden::

we get used to that too



Goldfish Drop Augustina Droze



The Gat Blues

CJ Maruyama

I lost my home; I've the cat blues, and street silence can't deafen the woes; having no god to worship nor blame.

The alley where I now reside sits below several ladders leading up a five-story brick building. Each time I attempt a climb, my leg strains, eyes dry, or tail catches; and the falls don't startle me, I've the cat blues.

Across the road rides a fellow on a bus; he's losing the will to commute everyday. Papers stack to the crown moulding in his office, and when tossed, provide great placemats. At home, his wife holds the mailman hostage; she has the cat blues. Nothing arrives, and no one leaves.

Passing my puddle-ridden lot, there's the tavern with the speed bump out front, where there are gin and tonics and tons of libations. No cats allowed but on occasion, one will sneak in donning a fur coat and a large silver belt buckle.



Inside, the regulars drink with the bartenders all the same: better here than elsewhere, the owner admits. She has the cat blues; six years and two degrees led to soggy old men flaunting cash tips. At least she has a roof.

Early in the mornings, we stroll on separate walkways—together, we've the cat blues— one foot after another, a faceless crowd whittles away the concrete blows of the jungle, and there is no clearing for development ahead.

Severance

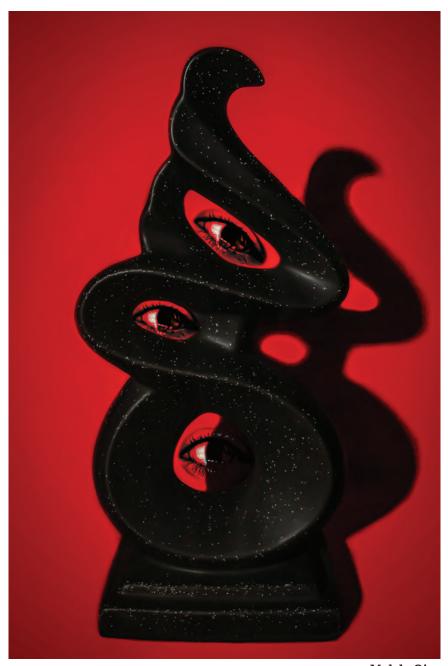
Mary Gilmour

her shoulders bow beneath the weight of finality, self-inflicted circumstance, and the tragedy of fate. this vestige of a girl, transformed into an avenging spirit. this is what she was born to be, it's what she was created to do: split open and carved with intent to kill, only to find that it isn't that easy.

the scars speak, thus she wakes to find new ones. somehow her appendages are still holding onto this body and her heart is still beating in this chest.

to feel the thumping against your rib cage and not recognize it as your own, when your vessel rejects you, you are finally alone.





Mal de Ojos Thania Morales

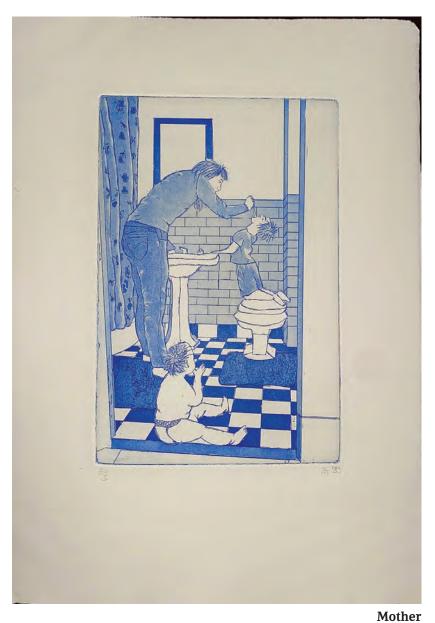


In Which I Become a Kidnapper

Isabelle Cordova

I saw myself as a child on the swings at the park. She looked happy enough, but the oncoming shadows filled me with an all-consuming dread. Without any real thought, I swept her up in my arms, while her mother tended to her eldest brother; we've been on the road ever since. She does not recognize me, but I hope she finds familiarity in our love of the woods and the way our knees skin the same. I share facts for every creature we come across and, to her delight, I take her to every waterfall. I hold in my heart the way her laugh is still her own, bright and unborrowed. We travel to the home of our ancestors; they speak to her but not to me. She forgives me when I am bitter. When we gaze at the stars, she shares her hopes and dreams for every bright spot in the sky. Some nights, she cries for her mother. I tell her I sometimes cry for my mother too, but that we still aren't safe with those who try their best. She does not cry for anyone else, so there's already damage done. I am kinder because of it. I teach her to be strong, but not at the expense of her nature. She will be whole. She will be unafraid of love and touch. I will not ask it of her, but she'll will find and fulfill great purpose. And when she is happy? That is when I will rest.





Alexa Tusing





Kamloops Graveyard J W Goossen



Trials

Bryce Kriegman

He made the dolls like I had instructed. He had constructed them out of corn husks, the same way that we made them when we were in kindergarten together. He wasn't an artist after all, I don't think he would have known any other way to do it. He carried three of them in his backpack. One was to represent his ex-wife Iulia from back when. One represented Charlotte, who he still believed was his true soulmate and saving grace. Lastly there was his mother, who had passed away one year ago this weekend-the reason I had chosen this time for our outing.

I had reminded him that these effigies did not represent either his lost loves or his mother. They were not equivalents. They represented the idea of them he held in his head. If our intent was to destroy a representation of the past, there were many other, more dramatic fashions for doing so. Our intent this weekend was to dissipate old ideas and regenerate new ones. To forge a new beginning.

I picked up Mitch from his office downtown after work. The

concrete was wet with rain and the sky remained a familiar grey pall hanging over the monolithic skyscrapers. I spotted him across the street from where my car stood running. He was standing in the vestibule of his building. Messy hair, a forlorn and confused look on his face. I rolled down the window and enthusiastically shouted to him, "Mitch man, over here." His blurry eyes searched the street. Once they landed on me he began to sprint across it, hiding his head from the rain under his jacket hood. As he did so he hardly noticed the width of the slick downtown avenue. or the headlights turning and swerving to avoid him.

I drove him away from there. First through downtown's labyrinth of one-way streets, dodging the anxious, honking citizens entrapped in their steel boxes. Eventually we broke free from that cacophony, then routed a way through a series of looping, numbered parkways, highways, and byways. They were so seemingly endless a citizen of the city center could believe that the rest of the world was nothing but a web

of suburbs. We finally escaped the last sprawling extensions of the Washington suburbs and entered into the green rolling hills of Virginia. My senses were immediately awakened. I opened the windows a crack to let the verdant air lap through. The mountains we were traveling into were older than clay and beyond their heyday. They now laid down low across the land, slumbering.

"You know these mountains used to be so broad and tall they were bigger than Everest. Even spanned out over the Atlantic shelf. The grains of sand on all those East Coast beaches are the remains of part of this range," I told Mitch.

"Yeah, interesting," he mumbled.

I wished he would learn to listen to himself, but I held back my thoughts.

The road weaved onwards. We passed by derelict factories left behind from the industrial revolution. They were set back from the road a distance, across green lawns and hiding behind trees -- red brick and iron shells studded with broad square holes. Some of the windows were still intact, but others were empty or rimmed only by broken shards which ushered the wind in. I imagined what they looked like inside: floors covered with rusty

nails, piles of rotten wood debris left by a foreman a hundred years ago; sharp pieces of metal jutting out from the ceiling and moldy wooden beams waiting to cave in unpredictably.

As we continued West in the late evening the Piedmont transformed into larger and larger mountains and the pale clouded sky finally broke a bit. Blurry little holes were cut out of the clouds in the direction we were headed and through those windows I could see beyond. A fierce blaze of red and orange from the vast firmament burned there. Through those slits shone long yellow streaming beams of light which cut through the mountain mist and onto the hills, their sides grasping onto the fleeting late-day light. Little bits of sunshine caught the wide green maple leaves over the roadway and the fresh drops of rainfall on them sparkled. "Your mom would have loved driving through this country," I said to Mitch. He piped up his head. It was the first time he seemed to notice anything since he got into my car.

"Yeah. Yeah she would have... I miss the cabin we used to have up here."

"I loved coming up there with your folks. Your family was always so sweet."

"Yeah," He chuckled. "They

loved you – the way you'd always want to help them cook. Then you'd get tired after a couple minutes and run back to play with the rest of us."

Mitch gazed off, peering deep into the woods as if he were looking for something elusive. A flash of movement from a deer or a black bear scampering away, perhaps.

I tried to remember what the cabin looked like inside, but it escaped me. I could only remember the appearance of warm light glowing on wood and the sound of the river trickling out back.

Mitch continued looking out the window for whatever was hiding in the woods.

"I loved sitting by that river too. Collecting all the different kinds of rocks on its bank. Then, how we'd compare the different colors and stripes on them. How we put our collection into those little glass mason jars." He chuckled again. "They'd get pretty sooty over time, and the rocks would always scratch the glass on the car ride home. I'd still take mine out of the jar down from its shelf every so often and would pour them all out across the table to take a look. Kept looking back at them for a long time, even in high school and when I'd go home in college."

"There was this one you had that I was so jealous of. It was sedimentary with brown and amber stripes that never faded. It had a white smooth top made of some other kind of rock, with little pockets dotting it," I replied.

"You remember when we made those bird houses with my mom? It was a sleepy summer afternoon. There was that yellow late-day light you could only get up here nothing you'd see in the city. It'd kind of move through the fluttering trees and tall grass. I remember hearing the birds and thinking we were making such a nice little house for them. Then we all sat together as a family on the back porch and painted them. It was dusk and the fireflies were coming out."

He inhaled sharply from his nose and then let out a sigh, as if he could smell the gurgling river right now. It was not too far from where we were, from only a few hills and hollows away it was beckoning him to lay down with it.

I let out a hearty sigh too and said to Mitch, "Things are much heavier now. So many big questions."

"How's Katie's pottery coming along?" he suddenly replied.

"Well, she's selling a lot. It

kind of just grew all of a sudden. I'm really thrilled for her. She's been moving into trying some new things like more freeform stuff. There's this series of sculptures she's making with really interesting pastel palettes."

"Pastel palettes?"

"Yeah, like turquoise, yellow, baby blue, bits of earthy red. They blend and curl into one another as the sculptures morph across themself."

"Her and Charlotte had a lot of similarities. I bet they could have done a lot together."

"Yeah they had so many connections. It was almost uncanny. Sometimes I felt like they were twins separated at birth. It's too bad you didn't come to that gallery night they set up. I think I only sold one painting, or maybe it was zero. Either way it was a fun night. Someone played an acoustic set at the end too."

"I would have liked to. I was working that night."
He needed to get out of his box. To try something new. He was suffocating under his own weight.

"Look I know you don't want to do this whole thing, but I promise you it worked for me."

"Why can't we just hang out normally? Like we used to. Let's just hang out, come on. The old cabin is abandoned now, but we could go check on the meadow, see the river running."

"That's not what we're doing Mitch."

He seemed to not notice me anymore and said, "I'm glad she met Katie. She left before I had a chance to introduce her to my mom. They would have loved each other like I loved them."

I stared ahead down the road, unsure of how to respond further to his moanings. If he spent less time working on engineering projects and done a little more for himself I wouldn't have to guide him through this mess. We let the drive pass in silence again. One by one the shadows of trees fell across the car, whooshing by. We were deep in the Appalachians now. We rounded a hill, revealing a wide-open view that led us to see that we were in a valley surrounded by the undulating mountains. Granite balds dotted some of the peaks, and in front of us the road curved before approaching a series of speckled cliffs and slipping through a narrow cleft in the mountain side.

"Look up ahead there Mitch."
I hid it, but I glanced over at him out of the side of my eye as I waited for his response. I could tell that for a moment genuine amazement had fallen over his face. He looked handsome in

the sunshine – the way the light drew attention to his cheeks and eyebrows. He seemed unlike the Mitch who, a few hours earlier, was cowering from the rain. I could understand how all these girls had fallen for him over the years. Why they left I couldn't understand.

"Pretty beautiful place. It's really something," he said.

We pulled into the campground as the last of the day's blessed long beams of light trickled through the forest

"Aye, it is."
We pulled into the campground as the last of the day's blessed long beams of light trickled through the forest. I had reserved a spot tucked away on the backside where I had been before, where a meadow meets

the woods. Tent camping wasn't Mitch's forte, so I took the lead. Our camp was nothing fancy. We set up the tent together, arranged a couple chairs I brought, placed the stove on the picnic bench. We exchanged only a few words to each other, as few were needed. He was a great helping hand. Mitch always was a competent guy.

I wandered over to the firepit to observe the sullen ashy remains from someone else's fire. Whatever they had burned had returned to its elemental origin—pure carbon. I wondered about the conversations that occurred around that fire while it burned. Like the wood, their words too had now faded away. Squatting down, I picked up a piece of charcoal and crunched it in my finger, black dust puffing out into the breeze.

I kindled a little fire with wood we bought down the road and cardboard Mitch had brought from the pile in the back of his little apartment. By the light of our headlamps we ate our chili dinner from a set of flimsy, stained plastic bowls Mitch brought. Warm steam rose out of our bowls. I could only see part of Mitch's dim face from under his headlamp and behind the rising moisture.

"You feeling ready?"
He didn't bother to look up

at me but slurped at his chili, contemplating for a patient moment before responding.

Frogs hummed and chirped in the woods around us. The warming of the changing season had stirred a few of them from their hiding holes. Yet for me, since the sun had gone down, the air felt damp and breezy. I shivered.

Without saying a word, Mitch got up and wandered off toward the clearing, beyond the light of the campfire. He gazed above the clearing - I imagine looking for stars but I could see the whole sky was clouded again. I could just make out his breath several long slow exhales of white steam. I assumed he was even chillier than I was. only wearing his long sleeve t-shirt and a thin raincoat. He patiently strode over to the tent. There he picked up his bag then brought it over to the fire to rest between his legs. Out of it he pulled out the three dolls and laid them neatly in a row on his lap, their bodies facing him and heads up toward the fire. He picked up one of the corn husk dolls around the waist and studied it more closely. The dry corn crinkled in his hand. Its head was angelic and round, and it shone in the firelight. Below its waist the material

puffed out in an airy fashion.

"They're so light," he observed.

I wanted to feel them for myself, but I let him have his moment.

"Good people – every one of them," he continued, "I miss them a lot. I'm not sure which one I'm holding right now. There was one for mom, and one for Julia and

"His thinking had been sullied by the torments of passion.
Passion meant suffering in Greek.
I wondered if he knew that."

one for Charlotte. I made each one of them a little different on purpose, but I've forgotten which is which."

M

He held his head down, blurry-eyed and confused, depressed at the loss of his memory. His head began to hang lower, drooping down towards his lap.

"I don't want to hurt them," he cried out. I waited for him to say more, but when he didn't I reached out an arm around him. He was shivering now.

"It's ok, it's ok," I consoled.
"They're all going to be alright.
We'll just place the dolls in
the fire. Just dolls. Remember
they're not Charlotte or Julia
or your mom, just the fixed
idea you have of them."

"I don't. No, no that doesn't make sense," he pleaded.

I was exasperated. We had spoken about the ritual before. By letting the dolls burn it would cleanse him, cleanse his mind. His thinking had been sullied by the torments of passion. Passion meant suffering in Greek. I wondered if he knew that.

"It's cleansing. You need to clean yourself of the ghosts still living with you."

I continued to console my old friend. I could only imagine the courses his mind was taking right now, and what they had taken through countless nights alone in his dim and crowded apartment. The first doll the love who had betrayed him and disappeared for another. The second love was the mounted white knight who had salvaged his body before she too suddenly galloped off one night without

a trace. Then there was his mother, who had nurtured him through it all, taken away. All within so little time.

He finally lifted himself up as I gazed in anticipation. He stepped forward towards the fire, the three dolls coddled in his arms. He knelt down in the mud and one by one placedthem upright against a burning log, their hands touching one another. The glow of the fire illuminated the dolls' angelic bodies in yellow light. They appeared to levitate above the black charcoal, their dresses billowing. The fire licked mischievously at their shoulders. Then in one sudden swoop it rushed in, consuming the crisp fickle husks in their entirety. For a final ephemeral moment, they burned, rendering their own bright passionate light. I looked over at Mitch one last time, hoping to finally see a look of understanding on his face. Yet all I saw were the tears boiling on his sooty face, as he watched his loved ones again sacrificed to the world.

Jafari Jam's

Veronica Young

When I was a kid, there used to be a place in the Sherwood, Oregon commercial area called Safari Sam's. Here are some things that I remember about it:

- A It was one of those kids' entertainment places, with a giant play structure and an arcade and everything.
- A My family used to go there a lot when me and my sister and I were younger.
- The whole place had a jungle theme to it, with animal artwork and cheap fake plants everywhere.
- There was an indoor miniature golf course. The golf course was cool because all the setpieces and decorations were painted with fluorescent paint and there were blacklights in the ceiling, so everything on the golf course glowed bright and saturated against the pitch-black of darkness.
- ¾ I loved miniature golf back then, so I did the golf course with at least one other family member every time we went.
- The play structure wasn't like a McDonald's play structure: for one, it was so big it went up to the ceiling (which was very high in and of itself) and took up about half of the floor plan.
- A I liked climbing up and prancing around on the various platforms in the play structure. When I got to the top, I would look out from behind the rope-mesh walls over the entirety of Safari Sam's, like a mountain climber surveying the puny world below, before I would take one of the twisty tube slides back down to the ground.
- A If I remember correctly, Safari Sam's was actually the first thing I saw in Sherwood. When we were still living in Albany, Oregon, we took a trip to the Portland Zoo. My dad told me



that he knew of a fun place that I had never heard of and that in order for me to go there, I had to ride the Zoo Train. I did just that with the rest of my family, and after we left the zoo, we went over to Safari Sam's for the first time before driving back to Albany. Sometime later, we actually moved to a house in Sherwood and started visiting Safari Sam's more often.

- A I remember that my sister Roz particularly liked it as a place to go when she was inviting friends over for sleepovers.
- They served pizza at Safari Sam's. It was greasy and savory, yet not overpoweringly so, as all good pizza should be.
- They also had ice cream there, which they served in fancy metal bowls. I remember liking the cotton candy flavor.
- At the arcade, when you played the games, you got tickets as a reward, depending on how good you were at the game.
- 🛪 I don't remember if the game machines needed quarters or not.
- Anyway, I usually got a modest amount of tickets from the arcade; at the end of your visit, you could trade in all your tickets for prizes. I usually bought candy with all my tickets, even though they also had non-consumable objects as prizes, mostly because I didn't want a bunch of cheap toys cluttering up the shelves in my room.
- A One of the candies they sold there was a hard candy called Warheads, which were so sour that if you squirreled it away in your cheek for long enough as you were sucking on it, you would be painlessly peeling off strips of dead tissue from your cheek lining the next day.
- As far as I know, Safari Sam's was unique to Sherwood. We've gone to Bend and Ashland and Portland and back again, and we've never seen another.



- A In one of the back rooms, there were also some bounce houses, and occasionally, when I was feeling like it, I would go into that contrastingly well-lit room and run around on the bounce houses with tons of other children.
- Also in the back, just beside the miniature golf court, was a set of double doors leading to an equally well-lit conference room. We never went into that room, nor did we ever see anyone going into or using it.
- When I was fourteen years old, Safari Sam's seemed to be doing perfectly fine, until we saw people taking down the neon "SAFARI SAM'S" sign on the front and scraping off the cartoon murals covering the windows.
- A I asked my mom why they were closing down; she said that it was something to do with them not paying their rent properly or something like that.
- Nover the course of the next few months, we saw the inside get retrofitted. Another neon sign was placed on the building, reading "ROSS DRESS FOR LESS" in bold, blue, stripey letters.
- 🛪 I've gone into this department store a few times since.
- The ceiling is low, with large, white lights illuminating the space, and there are all the racks and shelves of wares one would expect to find in a department store.
- A It's nearly impossible to tell that there used to be another, larger structure there.





Flower Wall Trinity Maxwell

One Day, I Will Become

C.M. Eden

Nature gives, so I've seen today as the dandelions dance in tiny white dresses across the seedless winds. They spread word to every spot they fancy.

I miss the peach tree, and the apricots.
The fruit flies loved summer, and I love its symptoms.
The cool of a fan, and an open window to let in season's song.
Nature's boon.

Kissed by butterfly wings. My fingers are a pale blond. Powdery, from the leftover love which I've stolen from nature.

Nature reminds me of leaving and returning; I find booby traps. Gifts.

A gossamer headpiece, from the silent orb-weaver. She cares more for the flowering bushes in my yard than even I.



Nature makes me think of pools, and bees drowning in the sampling of chlorineflavored pond. Water conveniently poisoned for my pleasure.

The bees like to sit on pudgy flowers with white tops.
Some grow keen on collecting my hair until they are thoroughly caught in my thickets.
So that I may practice becoming habitable.

My body
an ecosystem which
only it comprehends,
leaving even I
in the dust.
I can only dream,
to one day become
a bird that falls
dazed by glass windows
and other things
I cannot comprehend.

Not Dead, Just Asleep

Dani Hoyos

I decay like wood in abandoned buildings, home to lost creeps and vultures. A fading memory to be buried.

I'm a painting left out in the sun, a corpse in the forest. Decomposing until nature buries me.

My friends feel like strangers, they drop like autumn rain. Maybe they will water the soil where I'm buried.





Unspoken Riley E. Childers



Smoke House Ricardo Bravo



Spreading Dad's Ashes on a Nine-Month Road Trip Hannah Rae Whittle

Where the longleaf watchmen lining forest road twelve lose hold of the snow that lie lambent on their branches,

Where their furrowed limbs unhinge from their base and tumble down to wave a weary farewell to their celestial friend,

I drive over cracks in the asphalt, I pass by the uprooted pines, and I shed a tear for the lonely dead dear downed at mile marker twenty-two.

I saw you in him but my orbit could not end. Still, I gave promise to return, to honor and hold faith, knowing fully that even gravity could not draw us together again—

the force is zero,

when the distance between bodies is infinity.

I stop to gaze up at the sky, your home in the vast cosmic islands of stars, dust, and dark matter, an effervescent emptiness

where you like those watchmen reach down to me. But my feet must stay firmly planted on the pedal of my lifted Chevy Suburban, despite this being quite a heavy load for such a little lady.



Star Stuff and Flames

Jason Miller

The floorboards creaked and he ignored them. Old boards, old drafts, they all made strange sounds as the house made its imperceptible yet constant shifts on the land. That was how it worked. In the strange hour before sunrise, it was a symphony of creaks and groans around the bed he lay in.

My place of rest has been disrupted; don't you know? My bones don't like it. And the heat swells the bones of my structure. It hurts those places where the beams join and rubs them against themselves. The land and the world had shifted too much for the house to comfortably adjust, and now it complained to him.

He understood the spirit of the house. You live somewhere long enough, and you eventually pick up words, phrases, then whole sentences of the language spoken. Even if you never become completely fluent, you know the meaning.

He stroked the fur of the brown tabby that lay on the bed next to him, peaceful, quiet. One of the only times the cat was not yelling at him or hiding under the bed, swatting at his heels.

Once he had dreamed of finding that perfect someone that could have been the earth to his house. Someone who would move and shift with him as the world continued forward. They would have come to know each other's constant, imperceptible shifts.

In his youth, the experience of love had been hard for him to grasp. He had of course fallen in love a select few times, but he had been more in love with the idea of love than anything else. It was not that he hadn't wanted it, but with a world so full of ideas, sensations, states of being to explore, he worried that loving someone would just lock him down, chaining him to the responsibilities that drove so many others to become shades of their own selves.

He had failed to understand then that he could have found someone on the same path he was, and that they could have experienced the journey together.

Fear was the heart of it. He had not learned, until far into his years, that fear was his ultimate enemy. Living in fear during his school years, he had learned to compartmentalize the torments visited upon him. Learned it so well, that he had built a locked



vault in to guard his feeling self.

To really fall in love would have meant unlocking that vault and allowing the other person to see the spark of his existence. Would have had to let them first see, then touch the light that made him who he was. Not one person in his life had he deemed worthy.

Now, tears rolled down his cheek and he sniffed while he continued to stroke the cat's fur. Animals have always been the best substitute for love.

"You know though," he told the tabby, "As much as it would have made me happy to have had a partner, that's not what I regret most about this life."

"The thing I regret the most is being born now, in this time. It's so stupid but being born now is a joke."

"You don't care, I know. Cats just do their thing, get their attention, food, and all that. So, you're fine. You don't see what could have been."

"Me though, bitter about it to be honest. I live in a world where I can see the stars and know we could be out there right now. We've been to the moon. We never went back. We've sent probe after probe exploring the equivalent of a quark's worth of information. We have telescopes that show us all the parts of the Universe we can see so far, but I will never see anything but this planet."

Over time, he had come to put aside the regrets for the choices he didn't make. He had come to terms with how his friends and family had made the mundane choices, settling down at the proper times, able to afford those nice houses and the wonderful trappings of modern life.

He had come to terms with his own life approximately a decade behind the curve. While many of the people he knew were finally settling down in their mid-thirties, he had still been trying to live it up. Live free, he liked to believe.

But it was all still connected to fear. If he had settled down into that simple, responsible life, that reprehensible compromise that led to the rut of routine, he would be forgotten.

He turned his mind back to regret. One thing that cast the largest shadow on his light: that he had been born into a world



Star Stuff and Flames

that didn't see their destiny in flying through the stars. The world dreamed of it. Constantly. So much effort had been put into the idea of the stars, that it overshadowed the actual stars themselves.

The world wrote about the stars, lived their lives by the meaning of stars, studied the information the stars provided to better understand the solar system they lived in. Myths and legends, modern fiction, poetry, academic articles; all the world's words to place meaning in the stars. Yet very few seemed to want to

touch the very thing they worshipped. They were more in love with the idea of the stars than the need to touch them.

He laughed to himself. He understood. Just as he had been more in love with the idea of love, than he was willing to explore it.

There had been a tv show that he had watched over and over. Set far into the future, it showed a world that was part of a universe so much bigger than itself. Of course, people were still people, with their egos and self-serving ways, but it was the minority. Many times, they were defeated by weapons in battle, but more often they were defeated by words and ideals. Ideals shared by the majority, not the minority.

"Yet very few seemed to want to touch the very thing they worshipped."

They were more in love with the idea, of the stars than the need to touch them"

The self-serving were defeated by bravery in the face of fear. Defeated by loyalty. Defeated by those with the courage to stand up for what was right. Those in the majority believed in the right to be their own explorers, they believed others had a right to exist how they chose to exist. That you could be who you wanted to be.

He couldn't watch the show anymore. It had taken some time for the Censors to get to it, but eventually they managed to convince the majority that it was useless imagination that only served to distract people from what was important. Work and responsibility for the betterment of the country. The show invited sin into the home by offering ideas to vulnerable minds.



They said it was all to protect the children.

He lived in a time and place where there had been the possibility, he could have at least visited the moon in his lifetime. But no, those in charge had turned their eyes from the stars and settled on keeping their neighbors' eyes only focused on the ground.

There it was. He was made of the star stuff that had seeded the universe but was never going to return.

More tears rolled down his cheek, and of course when he cried, his nose ran. Didn't everyone's? Between the tears and snot, he continued to stroke the soft fur of the tabby, making sure to avoid the rust-colored sticky patch. He only stroked the head and the neck. He couldn't bring himself to acknowledge the gaping hole in the side of the tiny form.

Even though he lived in a home that creaked and groaned whenever you walked, he had slept hard and never heard the intruders enter his room. He hadn't even been aware in his dreams that something was wrong, like when you heard your alarm, or there was a smell that shouldn't be there.

The first moment he knew anything was wrong was the gunshot that left the tabby dead and at the same time something was digging painfully into his back, then nothing. As quietly and quickly as they had come and done their damage, they left again. He could only imagine someone with some knowledge of anatomy had used a tool to sever some part of his spinal cord, leaving him to lay on the bed with only enough movement to pet his dead cat.

The room was getting warmer. He couldn't see it but seemed dawn had risen in the middle of the night. How long had he been lying there? It must have been hours since the intruders left. No, no it wasn't that time had passed and dawn had come while he lay there. It was the popping sound and the smell of melting vinyl coming up the stairs that told him what was going on.

He pulled the tabby next to him and held tightly. He didn't care about the tacky spot or the hole in the side now. He wept violently all the regrets of his life into the tiny form. He continued weeping until he felt the pain from the flames searing his skin.

The house roared with its own pain as the flames snaked their way through the cracked walls and burned the beams that held it together. His own violent sobbing and tears could not compete with the volume of the fire. So, he let loose his rage and regrets into his

Star Stuff and Flames

own roars. He would never see or explore the stars, but he would make sure they heard him calling out.

* * *

Of the five of them that had shown up for the Cleansing, only four of them drank and celebrated. Bob had even fired a couple shots in the air before someone took the gun from him. Danny stood off to the side, wondering how long they were going to wait it out. The pervert in the house had already been taken care of. The flames would destroy it all. Danny noted that even if the fire department had been called by someone who had been paying enough attention, they would not show up until after everything was ash.

The caller would be given a heartfelt "thank you" for alerting the authorities and be informed that the fire department and

"He would never see or explore the stars, but he would make sure they heard him calling out"

other emergency services would be dispatched as fast as possible, and God willing, they would get there in time. The caller would thank the fire department for their service and the conversation would be over.

The person answering the phones would lean back in their chair and continue reading the newspaper. You knew what side of your bread was buttered, and you didn't want to upset that arrangement. So, the operator would wait just long enough, then sound the alarm.

Danny pulled a folded paper from his pack and looked it over again. He read the charges the Hunt had placed against this individual.

Homosexuality. Proved Guilty by Self. Apparently, this individual had not purged his social media well enough and self-proclaimed evidence of homosexuality had been found.

He knew part of the responsibility of the Cleansing was to remain until no possibility of survival was assured. He hated that part, just waiting around with nothing to do but watch another house burn to the ground. He sighed deeply. If these people would



just keep their mouths shut, he wouldn't have to be out here. All they had to do was register, keep in line, and do what they were told to do. He wished he was in bed sleeping soundly.

Later, tired, and irritated, he would report the events of the night to his supervisors. He would describe how they entered the premises with no fight, the owner being asleep. He would leave out the part where Bob shot the owner's cat. Animal cruelty was frowned upon, and he didn't want the added headache that came with possibly putting a blemish on a good man's career.

He would in plain detail that they made sure to incapacitate the charged individual and set the cleansing fire. All in all, a standard report that would be filed with every other report. Those above wanted clear, concise documentation of the good they were doing. For history to see that they had made the world a better place.

* * *

The young proofreader went over the file with an eye that had proven to be one of the best in catching any mistakes or flaws. Most of the time, it was nothing more than undotted I's and uncrossed T's, that sort of thing. What they had really hired her for was her ability to read through the reports and find what was really wrong. The current report, by a young member of the force, Daniel Willem, she had read three times now.

It was a standard enough report like any of the other hundreds that came through, but it was the final comment on the final page that made her pause and read again. Then again.

Here, Daniel Willem had written that while waiting for the flames to fully engulf the house, he had heard the standard wailing that often accompanied the Cleansing. Normally though, he noted, that towards the end, the wailing would become choking screams of agony.

She herself did not like these parts of the reports, though she would never say it. She had always believed there was a more humane way to perform the Cleanse. Why it always had to be flame, she didn't understand. They could just as easily shoot them or inject them with some instant acting poison. She sighed and put the thought behind her. It wouldn't do to become soft on the offenders. The Cleansing was the Flame, and the Flame was the Cleansing. She continued rereading the comment in the final box.

"I heard the wailing as usual, but in the end, unlike most of

the Cleansed, it did not end in the screams of agony. I could have sworn that over the sound of the flames, I heard the roaring of someone in the throws of rage. Even until the end. Just noting for interest."

After she finished reading it again, she sighed again. Today was going to be a day full of sighs. She reached out for the phone on the desk, picking up the receiver. The dial tone called out and she answered with a quick press of numbers.

"Yes?" It didn't sound like a question, but an acknowledgement.

"Daniel Willem, PX-451, mark as to be watched. Notes in the report hunt at signs of possible sympathizer. Blue Mark as Watched only. No need to jump to conclusions yet," she told the voice.

"Understood. Watched only. Thank you for your continued efforts. You may leave early today as a show of gratitude."

"Thank you, I will enjoy my half-day."

She hung up the phone and began the process of shutting down her station. She packed her lunch back into its container, pulled her jacket on, grabbed her purse and keys.

"Hey Mary, you leaving early again today?" Janelle asked her from the other side of the cubicle wall.

"Yeah, half-day for good work." She continued to head out of the cubicle and out of the office.

As she passed Janelle's station, she heard her claim, "Lucky. She always seems to be getting half-days."





Stars, S'mores, Campfires, Meow Conner Kinnamon

Madness Lived

James McCarthy

Madness lived is the brilliant glow of dusk caught within the amber hue of a jaundiced eye; a thunderous cry of resilience that beckons through the stiff aphonic night.

It is the quixotic face of a mother, beloved, her voice supple in affection and straightforward in her fear; a dichotic prayer wandering, aimless, through the firmament.

It is longing for clarity, lucidity, the durability to see the untrained innocence on the face of a newborn child; to witness the widening eye and spread of crimson along the chin of a young woman in love for the first time.

It is yearning to taste the bittersweetness of morning after a night of storming rain; to feel the trembling hand become still despite the whiteknuckled chill that gnaws through bone amid a dappled grey and early dawn.

Madness lived is a fleeting glimpse of Ursa Minor, the modest Bear, obscured by the rising smoke of a funeral pyre; a dizzying stare, quick, upon the porcelain skin, caked of makeup, aged thin but beautiful, on the day of your best friend's wake.



It is the touch of a single white glove, spotless, dainty on the casket, carrying a man down the garden path to the potter's ground; the hoary copper face of a celestial sunflower peeking out behind a wilted yellow frond, flaccid, in the doomed dendritic field.

It is a bloodshot secret gawking, near awestruck at its reflection, unrecognised and queer in a mirror; the undiscovered self that recites a Psalm or Sutra, abloom like an orchid that reminds you of what is Holy and wholly gratuitous, saying:

Come out of the shell and be yourself; don't buy the cow without tasting the milk; love the unforgiving world around you and let the world love you, unforgivingly.

Contributors' Notes

Amanda Sheppard is a Portland, Oregon-based writer, and music journalist enrolled Portland Community College. She has also written as a contributor for *Please Kill Me* and *Legsville*.

Matthew D. Albertson is an emerging writer from Portland, Oregon. His work has previously appeared in HS Leigh Koonce's *Sincere Dalliances* and *Udolpho: Issue 1.* He is transferring from PCC to U, with plans to major in Political Science with a minor in Writing. He got into writing after taking a filler course from Matt Chelf at PCC and can't seem to stop himself from pursuing this new passion.

Shane Allison was bit by the writing bug at the age of fourteen. He has gone on to publish poems, stories, and seven chapbook collections with titles like *Ceiling of Mirrors, I Want to Fuck a Redneck*, and *Black Fag.* His first and sophomore novels, *You're The One I Want* and *Harm Done* are out from Strebor Books. His new collection, *Live Nude Guys* is out from Gimmick Press.

Arathy Asok is a poet, writer, translator and editor based in Kerala, India. She has been published in national and international platforms.

Lindsay Claire Anastasia is a designer and photographic artist originally from Chicago, IL, where she earned her BFAs in Photography and Graphic Design at UIUC in 2013. She seeks to bend reality into daydream, and her work has explored memory, emotion, and imagination superimposed upon the tangible world.

Anon Baisch is currently a data analyst working in the semiconductor industry. Anon's poems have been published most recently in *Defunct, 2River, OxMag,* and are forthcoming in UDP's *Second Factory, Nat 1 LLC – Audience Askew,* and *Waxing & Waning.* Anon's collection *w/Ashes* is forthcoming from April Gloaming

My name is Connie Bisson. I am a Graphic Design student at PCC. I am a nerd who likes to read books and binge shows on a Friday night.

JB Bowen lives and works in Oregon.



Ricardo Bravo is a first-year graphic design student at PCC born in Portland, Oregon. He enjoys making art because he's able to create something new and authentic. Ricardo hopes to continue creating with a desire that his work will deeply resonate with the audience and leave a positive, long-lasting impact on the world.

Hazel Bretz is a Photographer who's lived a nomadic life but now, feels most at home in Portland. Her fascination with photography started at a very young age, and long before phones had high-quality cameras, she wouldn't leave the house without her small Panasonic Lumix. She has since started chasing her dream of becoming a professional in the field.

Quinn Brown is a poet based in Portland, OR, currently attending Portland Community College. Her writing is inspired by all things including identity and gender.

Riley E. Childers is working on her Masters in English at the University of Indianapolis. Her work has appeared in Etchings Literary and Fine Arts Magazines, Doug Ramspeck's Under Black Leaves, Robin Lee Lovelace's Savonne, Not Vonny, and Tipton Poetry Journal.

Camryn Clary is an oil painter/multimedia artist based in Portland, OR. Their art is inspired by their own queer and transness as well as their queer loved ones. With art credits from PCC, they will transfer to the Pacific Northwest College of Art this coming fall to study painting.

Connie Colter is a sculptor and painter attending PCC with a studio in Gladstone, Oregon. My work witnesses the courage of individual humans and their innate defiance towards being reduced by societal, cultural, and economic forces.

I. M. Cordova is a Chicana writer hailing from Portland, Oregon. She is also an editor for the literary magazine, The Pointed Circle. Her current works include her poetry collection, *Conspiracies of Myself*, as well as her short fiction, *Kinesthetic Learners*, which will be showcased at PCC's 2023 Groundswell Conference.

Alex Roselio De La Cruz is an MFA student at PSU and graduate of PCC. His work folds between genres, ambiguity, and form. He enjoys reading (of course), counting the meows of his two cats, wondering, and wandering through thought and process.

Charlie Divine (they/he) is an emerging writer and student at Portland Community College. You can read his work in Issue 79 of Vagabond City. They live with their beloved betta fish and 32 houseplants in the shrub-steppe of rural Oregon.

Augustina Droze holds an MFA from the University at Buffalo and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Queensland. Her work has been exhibited internationally, notably at Banaras Hindu University as Fulbright Senior Scholar, Varanasi, India (2017), the Beijing US Embassy, China, as Distinguished Artist Envoy (2022), and the Huzhou Art Museum (2023).

Grace Dunbar is a Portland born and raised mixed-media artist. Recently printmaking and collage are her primary mediums, though she also enjoys working with watercolors, video and installation art. She received her BA in Studio Art and is currently taking classes to expand her body of work and gain new skills.

C.M. Eden is a writer of poetry and fiction with a passion for the thrilling, the fantastical, and the fear-inducing. She has previously been published in the 15th issue of *Letter & Line*.

Matt Foster is an emerging artist and boat engineer from the North Island of New Zealand. His work is inspired by the people, places, and culture of his homeland and the antics of two daughters. He holds a BA in History & Geography and is studying Graphic Design at PCC.

J W Goossen, born and raised in Vancouver, currently lives in Ladner, BC and enjoys carving out time for painting and writing poems and stories. Publishing credits include *Rhubarb*, *Geez*, *Grain*, *Canadian Stories*, *Red Ogre Review* and *Alchemy*.

Mary Gilmour is an amateur writer, a student at PCC and an editor of *Alchemy*. She is studying English and working towards a transfer degree.



Fevie Hernandez is originally from the Philippines and resides in Beaverton, Oregon. She constantly seeks growth as a creative soul, drawing inspiration from the beauty of nature, architectural marvels, human experiences, and the endless possibilities of imagination. As a student at PCC, she overcame the "creative block" through art classes.

Lee Jaesook Holoubek (they/he) is an interdisciplinary artist and prospective animator. Raised in Portland, Oregon. They are inspired by the perseverance of nature and individuals despite global issues. After graduating from PCC, they will be attending an art institution for animation and hope to work in that industry.

Dani Hoyos is a Colombian native, Los Angeles transplant, and current resident of Portland. Dani is a retired emo-rapper and stage performer and now devotes the entirety of his creativity to poetry and fiction. Dani is hoping to inspire others to vent on the page.

Conner Kinnamon is a Portland native who currently lives in Washington. He paints in acrylic, under the handle Bigsexy_Art for all social media platforms. He was told he would never make it as an artist, but here he is—painting his dream into his reality.

Kylie Kramer is an Oregon-born-and-raised creative who enjoys working across different mediums and genres. As an idealist and dreamer, she aims to create art that translates day-to-day experiences into pieces that move the viewer and remind them of the beauty of being alive.

Bryce Kriegman is a PCC student exploring the boundaries between individuals, community, nature, and chaos. Engineer by day and writer by night, he has ended up writing a healthy balance of brooding tales and heartfelt comedy while developing his artistic voice.

Kendall Larson is a 26-year old yearning poet and burgeoning linguist. After haunting open mic nights up and down the west coast, Kendall has recently delved into the world of the written word. Currently serving as an editor for The Pointed Circle, they hope to pursue language in all forms.

Oscar Nieves Lira is a young Mexican short fiction writer, poet, and freestyle rapper. Born and raised in the magic village of Tequisquiapan, Querétaro, now based in the city of Tigard, Oregon. He is an undergrad student at PCC seeking to earn a degree in Literature and Philosophy.

Mario Loprete: Painting for me is my first love. Creating a painting, starting from the spasmodic research of a concept with which I want to transmit my message, is the foundation of painting for me. The sculpture is my lover, my artistic betrayal of that voluptuous and sensual lover that inspires different emotions.

Cae Marquez is a queer Filippino writer locally in Portland, Oregon, currently enrolled at Portland State. In addition to the published works in this issue, she has had a fiction piece published in the '22 edition of *Alchemy*. When Cae isn't engulfed in words, find her in cafes and art pop-ups around downtown. @caes_notebook

CJ Maruyama is a writer based in Portland, Oregon. He writes poetry and fiction and is enrolled in Portland State's Creative Writing MFA program beginning Fall 2023. His poetry was featured in the Winter 2023 issue of *Letter & Line* Magazine. In his free time, CJ hikes and snowboards.

Ryota Matsumoto is an artist, media theorist, and architect based in New York and Tokyo. Born in Tokyo and raised in Hong Kong and Japan, he received a Master of Architecture degree from UPenn in 2007 after his studies at the Architectural Association in London and the Mackintosh School of Architecture—Glasgow School of Art.

Trinity Maxwell is studying at EKU, pursuing degrees in Statistics and Mathematics. In her free time, she practices her photography skills. She lives in Richmond, Kentucky and is inspired by nature. Her work has been published in the University of Louisville's *The White Squirrel* literary and arts magazine.

Jason Miller is a born and raised Pacific Northwesterner who loves to write and wants to write to live. At forty-seven, he enjoys the minor anarchies, contemplating the life of being a gunrunner when the apocalypse comes, and other peoples' cats. Jason is a true child of the Northwest who loves the trees, the fresh air, and the rain while complaining about them simultaneously.



Mahedy Hasan Mim is an undergraduate student of English literature and language at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh. Mahedy has enjoyed writing poetry from a very early age. Robert Frost is a favorite poet. Mahedy has a passion for photography and has been published by *Orion Magazine*.

Thania Morales is a Mexican-American amateur artist from Portland, Oregon. She discovered a love for photography at PCC. Her work combines still-life photography and surrealism. "Mal de Ojos" comes from a piece of her mind that conveys her view on regressed rage. Check out more of her work on Instagram @ LoserfromNeptune

Larisa Murariu: Who hasn't dreamed of reaching the moon? In December 2018, self-taught digital collage artist Larisa Murariu from Romania did just that, and if you trust her, her dreams are still up there. Larisa's cosmic vision focuses on everyday objects and common emotions, transforming them into something as magical as life.

My name is Han Nguyen. I come from Vietnam and I'm a secondyear graphic design student at Portland Community College. I'm still exploring my art style, and creating fun illustrations and playing with colors bring me so much joy.

Zanni Schauffler lives in rural Oregon with her husband Frank, her big dog, and her two fluffy cats. She works at the Post Office and the Range Rider—the best bar in Eastern Oregon. Her poems have been published in the *Iowa Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *FIELD*, among others.

Grey Shawger is a student at PCC in the Graphic Design program and currently lives in Portland with their partner, 2 cats and a Harley. Grey earned an MFA in painting and found inspiration while living in Santa Fe. The low horizons and booming clouds have stayed in their heart wherever they roam.

E. Smudde (SMOO-dee) worked in higher education marketing for ten years and returned to school to explore my passion for creative writing. The goal is to transfer to PSU to explore media criticism, literature, and gender studies. In my free time, I am an adventure lover, dark beer drinker, horror movie buff, and amateur athlete.



Alexa Tusing: This intaglio print "Mother" is for a printmaking class, where we chose an image based off of a chosen proverb and artist mentor. My proverb was "to understand your parent's love you must raise children yourself" and the artist mentor was Mary Cassatt. I explored printing techniques that Cassatt used as well as imagery.

Meilan Wechsler raised in Portland, OR, is passionate about the process of printmaking and the unique qualities that the carving away of negative shapes can create. She finds cementing a design in linoleum and wood carving to be therapeutic, as well as a timeless artform.

Hannah Rae Whittle is a California born, Colorado raised, and Portand living mixed media creative who has worked as a managing editor for 2023 *Letter & Line* and *Alchemy.* Soon to transfer for a BFA program in creative writing, she hopes to one day work in the editing and publishing field.

Veronica Young is a student at Portland Community College. She likes writing, but hopes to get into the Bioscience Technology program at Rock Creek because she likes biology almost as much. This is her first submission.

Marc Zegans has penned seven collections of poems; most recently, *Lyon Street* (Bamboo Dart Press, 2022) and *The Snow Dead* (Cervena Barva Press, 2020), two spoken word albums, a variety of immersive theatrical productions, and many poetry films. He lives by the coast in Northern California.

