

Galaxy

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Opening I Comments

What we call fate does not come into us from the outside, but emerges from us.
—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

We often view our world through secondhand memories—a film, a novel, a poem, a song, a person recalling an event of their past—the things that never really happened to us, but still seem to hold a truth of reality to us. We have cocooned these moments, these words, within ourselves, and they emerge from us as naturally as our own real memories.

Chris Ware, in an interview for *Rookie* magazine, states—*Our memories are all we have, and even those we think of as “real” are made up. Art can condense experience into something greater than reality, and it can also give us permission to do or think certain things that otherwise we’ve avoided or felt ashamed of.*

We read a poem, and the words from it become our own, capturing our emotions in a single moment. We read a book and the characters we visualize become engrained within us. We listen to a song and the music becomes our thoughts. The moments that we remember from what we read and hear, they are unique to us, unique to that very first experience.

That moment of reading, listening, viewing, of feeling and living something for the very first time, or even for countless times, where we realize that we *like* something, that it speaks to us, that we will read that book over and over, that we will play that song on repeat—that moment is somehow perfect. A feeling that is always new—a condensed experience that allows to unabashedly feel—these secondhand memories, realities, and imaginations that are so engrained within us, that once we have experienced them, we can’t ever remember not knowing them.

We have changed—Rainer Maria Rilke writes—*as a house that a guest has entered changes.* Like Holden Caulfield considering entering a museum—*Everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move. Nobody’d be different. The only thing that would be different would be you.* As Franz Kafka urges us—*Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached.* These words are ones that have stuck with me, which I have contained within myself in the memories of reading them for the first time, but each reading is always new. Are we constantly reaching this point of no return, as we constantly consume and contain these old and new memories?

For sixty-one years, *Galaxy* has been a place for these memories to be shared, to be passed along, to be explored. The discussions, the spoken words, the music, the written words, the art—this magazine is a time capsule of new experiences. Read this magazine, take these secondhand memories, allow them to enter you, and, one day, allow them to emerge from you.

Mira Bodek
Editor-in-Chief



Look
Cassidy Pearsall
Digital Illustration

A Long Exposure

showing stars rotating around the southern and northern celestial poles.
Photo Credit: Planetarium Observatory”

Hand dipped into a blue ink pool, my palm is outer space.
Sitting side by side on the porch,
we watch liquid truth seep into every path engraved on the tips of my uncured fingers,
divulging clandestine histories and psychological parallels,
This helps me know you.

Man carries a small tin of blue ink.
He will offer a peek underneath the lid to a stranger,
but hide it in the floorboards from his own mother.

Speaking in deep sea pigments,
we watch the lines on my hands develop like instant polaroid stills.
This line is a story about my father,
another an irrational emotion,
another an early memory.

You make me write honest poems.

Madison “Bloo” Van Edwards



Today is Like Salad and Cucumbers

It smells like hydrangeas,
and it feels like avocados.
I am slightly cold but
it's an agreeable seventy-two degrees.
I'm wearing my dearest piece of clothing:
a thinly striped cotton shirt
there's a hole at the hem.
We're driving somewhere with
my sister and her boyfriend,
a lake maybe?
I had always thought her boyfriend was so cool
whenever he was around I would always
show my cool and unaffected facade.

My parents are making frequent stops at wineries,
but I really don't mind.
Wineries are charming with their
endless rows of vines
of eggplant colored grapes.
My father loves his pinot noir and grigios,
maybe he'll drink a little too much
and be stubborn and insensitive,
but I won't let it bother me today.
My best friend since seventh grade
is brushing her mid length hair—
we're not squabbling today, it's pleasant,
and I'm starting to forget why we argue so often,
I think it's because we're too similar.

It smells like listerine
and it's suffocating.
I feel like an ant stuck in toothpaste.
I'm covered in a dense substance
and I'm unable to move,
there are responsibilities
lurking about on my shoulders.
It's a dreary day in the midst of
a drab semester
and I'm taking a bath.
I'm looking through the structured
but dainty leaves of the bamboo plant
at the charcoal and indigo storm.

Maybe, I shouldn't even be taking a bath
because
taking a bath is just basking
in your own filth isn't it?
My mother says showers are a better
alternative.
She also says that one should
brush their teeth before breakfast.
I was so ashamed in my fourth grade
health class
when I shared my brushing habits but
everyone said they brushed their teeth
after breakfast.
Condescending stares were then sent in
my direction
in that horrible fourth grader way.

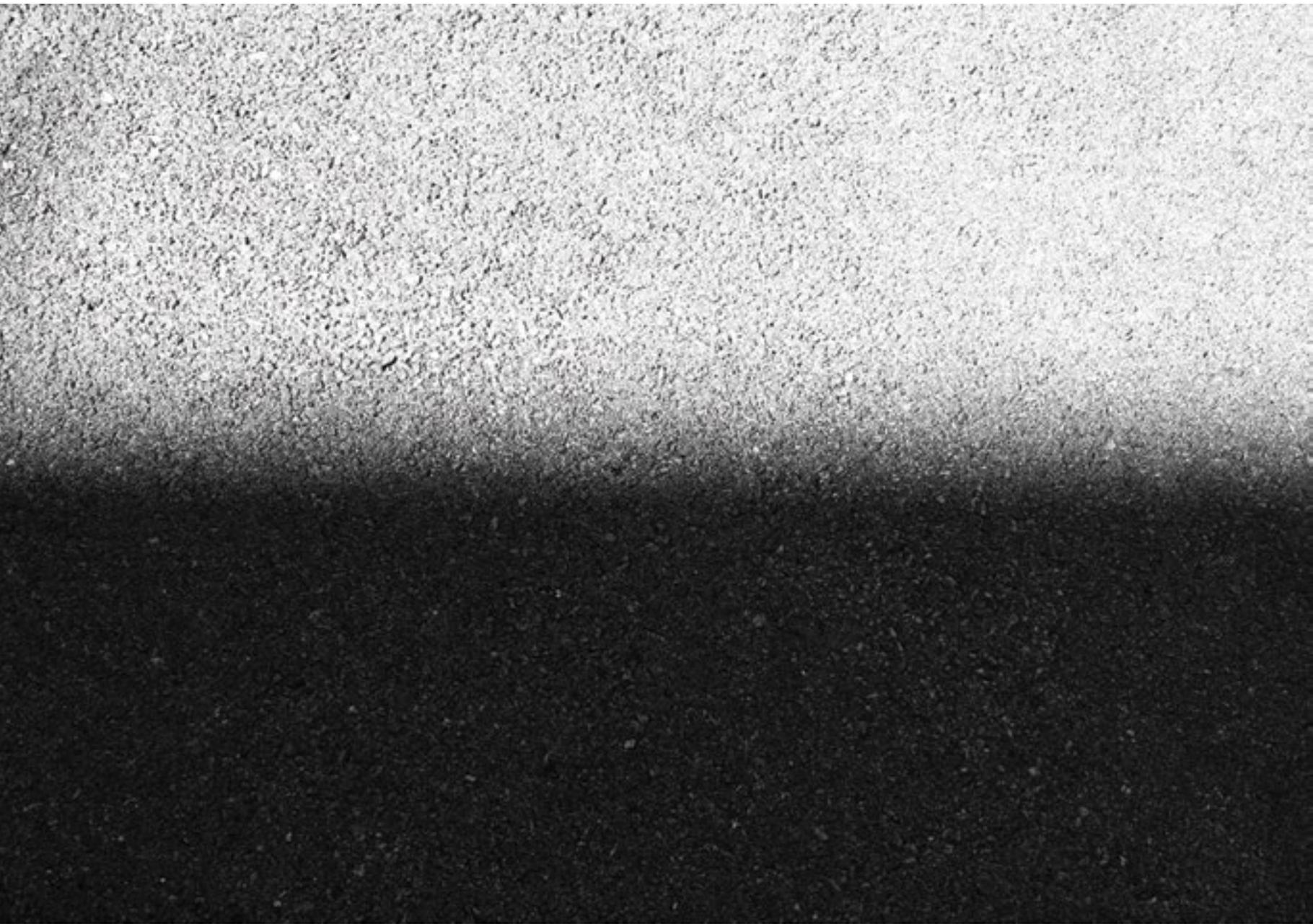
It smells like my mother's favorite perfume—
I loathe artificial scents.
It feels like I'm in this swamp
in Louisiana I once went to
and I'm being engulfed by velvety duckweed
but I'm just lying on my parents'
unnecessarily large bed.
I'm staring at the windows and into
the black abyss that is my backyard.

The set of three windows were higher
and smaller seven years ago.
I remember one morning in March,
my parents were uncharacteristically
pleasant with each other.
My father was loudly slurping his coffee
and reading the new york times,
and my mother was looking at
the sunday catalogues.
I climbed up on their wooden bed frame
and looked out the window
and made some remark about how
the white nothingness
that was my backyard looked
as if it was a field of whipped cream.

Shivani Singh



European Roller
Qing Qing Yang
Digital Illustration



Dear highest whatever-the-f—k, supreme prankster, personified or not I doubt that I will ever understand you. The bored state of mind, which made you cast little dots along the vast expanse of nothing-you were sick of total bliss I assume-Is sometimes reflected in me, on the days when nothing seems to work right, and the basement is a good place to feel pretty safe. But you wonder, I suppose, how I could be bored while this question hangs over me, cloaked in the distant pulsing of mortality. What does anything mean? It kills me every time. The cruel comedy and the cruelty itself clash and neutralize each other, exploding in a puff of “F—k it.”

John Cage figured something out. I’m sure of it and I’m sure I lived according to it for a few months, but I can’t remember it now. If I tried, it would be mutilated beyond belief and maybe if I went back and checked, read the quote, I would disagree with it. Maybe I wouldn’t even understand the old mantra. Maybe September wasn’t the confused anxiety I remember it as, and maybe I was only shaking when we talked in February because it was cold out. I doubt it though. But what about that old mantra? Springtime was alright, good even. I hardly quivered. I wasn’t analyzing things so much then, I guess. Nihilism became very comfortable. I felt happy so I didn’t question if I was or not. What’s happy and what’s meaningful? Who cares? Who cares.

Then summer came, and the star’s and Lily’s voice and the candle’s flame tore my blanket to bits. I could almost conceive of my insignificance and its infinity. I was smaller than one of those points in the sky. In spring I wrote a song and the hook went “How long until I break apart again?” I rewrote it after the paper lanterns went up and we all were certain we’d see each other again which is funny and sad. It’s mostly dull. That song’s springy floral blur turned to her face and the staircase I was climbing-and sighing as I did so-up again to that paper-filled room. It was hot and crowded and I hardly remember some of the faces. I faked two crushes in the first week. I say faked and I mean that I was playing pretend in my head. No one else knew. On the last night, I realized that I had a real one. You sometimes don’t even realize you’re lying until you stop. Language is supposed to communicate. But sometimes it seems more honest just to hold you. I’m not sure what that means. Language is supposed to communicate and I’ve bastardized it here. So unless we really are all pretty similar inside, this will only have been a way to sort some things out and I think I have.

If this is a little pointless, I wonder where I heard that art is a mirror of everything that ever was.

Puff.

Anonymous

i didn't lose anything

Anonymous

it's really quite faint, mom and fading fast (please stay) but I
will cover it up today
for you (and for him)

when i was on my way home i was thinking about it and i
thought about if he might be thinking about it until i realized what
else would he be thinking about?

we're basking in the same sunlight

my friends congratulate my "loss" mine must have been
smaller than most a mental phenomenon; doctors would gasp!
it didn't leave me with a hollow heart

i saw him in the morning and i don't know if he saw me as
well but does really it matter when either way he was walking
away and i shouldn't obsess over it when we made a silent
agreement long before he left and long before i should have
walked him home

will he remember it like I did

when I think back on it giddy nerves shiver up my spine and I
wonder who was there instead of me
the strange girl who wasn't shivering

how can i say i miss him when that was all i saw of him?
but of course i miss him i miss him shouting in my ear i miss his
hands pulling me this way that way i miss the stubble on his jaw
and the words on his tongue

I didn't ask for much else



Julie
Cece Tassione
Conte Crayon

It spins.

Mira Bodek

The ceiling fan in the bleached room whirs at the starved air. Long external veins connect to my grandfather, pronouncing the ridges of his withered arms. The mask over his gaunt face is fogged with gasps as the star on his chest rises and falls. The room's rhythm is the beeps of the heart monitor and his slow pants. Each beat is reassurance that he is alive, each beat is guilt knowing that he will die, guilt that I will never hear the stories a younger me disregarded.

It spins.

The wind rattles the haphazardly-built tent, but the gusts do not shake the temporary grave marker. I walk to the front, having asked to speak in his memory, desperate for closure. As I cross the miles, my mouth fills with cotton, my ears with wax. Every sound, every gesture, is slow and muffled. As I attempt to speak, I find my throat sewn shut. I attempt to unstitch the strings, like pulling at the threads of my bubblegum pink coat. My face matches the color as I mumble through the single memory I have.

It spins.

The spider's web of thoughts laces as I reflect on the moments -- gossamer strands of life and death. I consider my grandfather's stories, the ones I never heard -- the ones of him and my grandmother being evicted from their home and stitched with golden stars, of his Aryan looks allowing him to escape Poland, of his survival. They weigh heavily on my chest, like a Star of David forged in iron.

It spins.

The arrow changes direction, a new north every second. A maze of streets covers the globe of my brain, each storefront an option -- for beliefs and new thoughts to try on, for a single label that sums it up -- and none suiting me. No neon light tells how I can honor my grandfather's struggle while lacking faith in his religion. My legs quicken, my heart-rate increases as I remember my grandfather's fading heartbeats, the street signs flee behind me, and suddenly, I am back in the bleached room, watching the green line run flat.

It spins.

The kitchen's blender turns the lush berries as I turn my thoughts, muddled violet from questions crimson and cobalt. As I pour a glass for my father, I speak to him for the first time about my struggles, and he speaks of something I never considered -- how questions are essential to identity, how we may never truly understand. His syllables are simultaneously a single drop and a downpour, trickling and overflowing the cracks in the maze of my mind. Revitalized, the storefronts are no longer daunting enigmas, but intriguing mysteries, and I long to explore each one.

It spins.

The fan in my room whirrs as I consider the conversation. It spins through the hot summer, slowing as leaves and snow and dew sprinkle the ground, then returns full throttle as the sun rises. With its constant spinning, I turn over my thoughts, cooking them from every side while the core remains raw. It is on one spin that I forgive myself for not hearing my grandfather's stories; that I pledge to hear all my father can tell. It is on another that I know that I will cherish the star sewn lovingly to my heart, and that my questions are not betrayals, but revelries.

It spins.

The Earth curves around the sun, tilted on its axis. I lay under the same sky as Jerusalem, longing to feel the heated brick on my back, the cool stone of the Western Wall on my palms. But I now find solace, not shame, in my desires for Angkor Watt, for Giza. Places beyond my heritage, places that will fulfill and foster questions, just as my father's homeland will. There is an answer in constant questions, and comfort in the many havens of a maze.



They are not always what they appear to be
The parties and frolicking on the beach trifle the tide
The sun-warmed sand houses ignorant company
On the brink of a blue universe

By some mistake
two should attempt to understand each other
pure accident
Both might discover something they had no idea existed

Underneath wooden planks and rusted iron
Where waves lick at shaky supports
And strange things dwell
There could be countless mysteries

Down, down
Discoveries abound
In the vast blue vertigo
Teaming with coral and infinity
While a thousand rainbows of fish cascade about

No party could compare thus
To the exquisite gala of color and movement
A passion brought to sight by mere happenstance

Down, down
And deeper it goes
To the sands at the bottom of the abyss
Where dwell in solitude the most wondrous stone crustaceans

Rock Lobsters

Sam Rapp

Tell me the
plan, or I
won't believe
there is one

Natalie Karlsson

I walked the plank because you told me to.
You are the captain,
and I trust you.

You gave me some dumb excuse,
then pushed me towards the edge.
And I wasn't too upset,
because you're supposed to trust your captain.

Slowly, I walked the narrow board,
and after a pause, I jumped.
Funny thing is,
I chose life on the sea because I can swim.

So I'm stuck here, no land in sight,
starting to wonder when the sharks will come,
or when I'll run out of energy for treading water,
wondering if I still trust you.

In the end, it was I who walked that plank,
even though you made me.
You were my captain,
and I trusted you.
But maybe you were never meant to be in charge.

Teach my thoughts to be idle

Take away my ability to comprehend.

It won't make a difference, either way.
You disregard me entirely.
I just want to make it easier for you.
An empty shell may...cooperate better.

I have done...everything you wanted
Never told a soul about...
this, is all I want.
Please

At least this way I may forget...

the ocean.
the salt so rough against my skin,
the seaweed taught around my wrists, my ankles...

It cut in, too.
Left scars.
The salt didn't help.

You wouldn't have tied me up
if you'd really thought you were right.

There is no pleasure in treading water
when you are unable to control your own body.
You told me you would teach me how to swim.
That I would learn to love it.

I shouldn't have listened.

You have already taken so much,
what's a little more?

I'll never be dry again.
it's everywhere.

I thought water was supposed to cleanse?

No one ever taught me what it really did.
That it was so easy to drown,
that I wouldn't even try to fight.

And now the tide is coming in,
the waves wrench me back and forth
in an unending cycle
I do not want to endure this any longer.

But what is my alternative?
Be washed up on the shore?

I cannot do that,
what will people think?
You would certainly tell them

You've already taken my body.
Taken any part of me you liked,
So please, just take my mind away, too.
Allow me to forget.

Maybe then, I'll be able to sleep.

All you have done is push me under.
My lungs fill with water,

How hard it was
to breathe.

and then I would be forced
into the water again.

Rachel Khazanov

Bones

I'm a train wreck
but every time I smell the smoke
all I can think is,
at least I'll have something to write about
It's not as if I've gone off the edge
right?
I've let myself be touched on invisible
bruises from boys before
I've broken friendships purposefully
just for the fun of it
I've talked too much to everyone
besides my therapist
My wrist is painted by a tree of
drunken rage
These things and so many others
cable cars all smolder in the sunset
And I try not to romanticize my own
fucked up life decisions
But it's hard when the girl you love
more than your mother has done meth
It's hard when you spend all of your time
doing homework for AP classes
but you used to spend all your time

daydreaming about smoking just to
get through the hour
I try not to think of my ex-boyfriend too much
because that seems cliché and I don't miss him
but he's the only one I've had and I'm
not sure who else to think about
when I think of past mistakes or
present musings
I'm not the same person that I was
when I was with him
And I guess I'm more afraid of him
saying that than myself admitting it
Because he's the only person I ever
believed when they claimed
they loved me
And I'm in flames right now
How can I be adored
I can't even love myself without
fantasizing about characterization
from films like fight club and pulp fiction
I'm scared of being depressed again
because I take too many pills for that
And now that I've licked contentedness
I won't ever give it up
It's not happiness I'd miss first
It'd be feeling genuinely O.K.
and not guilty over something that
my mom bought me, that I didn't ask
her to get me, that was way
overpriced, that was so
necessary, that was so
undeserved when I dislike her so
aggressively, when it freaks
me out that she's spending
money like that, when I'm
too selfish and greedy,
when consumerism wins
but my mom hates the idea of
dreadlocks and incense
I'm inspired by a whore with daddy issues
and a rich kid asshole
not too unlike my own friends that
I've chosen
she's truly the friend that I would be
able to tell I've murdered someone

and she wouldn't think of me less
he's truly the friend that doesn't care
about whether he's my friend or not.
I've always wanted to be the girl that
the boys fall in love with
and as soon as I lure them in and
they praise me
I tear away my skin and empty out
my guts just to feel less like an
idealized object
I want them to be undeniably lusting
for me
because I always think that it'll give
me power
but instead it just reminds me that I
don't matter, that I'm a piece of meat
to be consumed
I've recently become a vegetarian
and decided that I'm still unsure as to
how I feel about cats
they frighten me but I always
approach them, hand out tail
wagging
ears nowhere near perked
When I was younger I dreamed about
gumby and thought that if a stranger
ever offered me candy, I would take it
so that I could experience the drug
and become the doted upon victim
I was in kindergarten
I thought about killing myself
in the fifth grade
but I decided against it because I
hadn't yet beat Super Mario Galaxy
I can't comprehend why I would've
wanted to die
I like this boy in my class, and told
him I hated him
I've always felt estranged by girls
I'm not sure if that's because I'm a
dude, or if it's because I pledge
allegiance to the flag that hides under
short skirts
Am I perverted or just a boy?
Am I needy and annoying or just a girl?

I once thought I was gay and was
overcome with fear,
until I realized that even though I had
a spark of attraction to a man
I was a girl
and more of a fairy than tinker bell
Does my whistle even go off when
the engine starts to run down
do I ignore it like I ignore the want to
do homework when I'm sitting staring
do I ignore it like I ignore my alarm
clock for forty five minutes as it
tortures my cringing spinal chord
or do I turn it off
like I did to my heart once when I
thought another boy had broken my heart
He lost his v card in my vineyard
but either one of us could be lying
and I wouldn't know if it counted or not
or if it even happened at all
if the trains even crashed
if this is all a premonition
from the window seat of a train,
looking over plains and fields that
have never seen my birth certificate before
from the tube of a clinic who helps
girls in trouble,
from under the curtains of sand and
clouds and sandles of Jesus

Maddie Baum



Banshee
Sam Rapp
Colored Pencil

Severance

And yet, here's a spot,
painted red as the eyes of the devil, perched on the carcass of my palm, mocking me and my aging youth, sneering at the sagging eyelids that droop like folds of dough kneaded into perfect crescent moons and I can see him, see how he looks at me, as if his stare is glazed with the remnants of my face that is nothing more than sharp eyes, eyes that don't leer or stray or roll in their sockets but pierce like daggers ripping through soft flesh, blood seeping onto my fingers here and there, and oh how I would like to bite him, but they do not know, the red liquid splattered across pale canvases is invisible to them and I am clean, clean, clean, as if scrubbed viciously in warm bath water with a wire sponge, scratching along my back and tearing away bony curtains until the serpent hiding under the curve of my shoulder blade is drowned in bubbles, and still I am clean, clean, white and glistening, for they do not know, so they know nothing, and this nothingness makes me good and clean and here, here is the spot, the spot that blinks at me, devil eyes glistening and sneering and it smiles at me, dimples stretching to the whiteness of my cuticles, rubbing at my face and laughing and giggling and they do not know
but I can still see him

Joy Krasner

Walking

Natalie Karlsson

The sky was made of breath. At least that what it seemed like to her at the moment. Big puffs of breath, visible in the cold, clouds gently moving the way breath does. She sighed, making her own little cloud, and watching it disappear into nothing. She sat there thinking for a while, trying to think about everything, but her mind kept wandering back to the sky and its breathiness. She wondered then who was breathing, whose breath was so important it lingered for all to see. She wondered what would happen if they died, and the sky went away. She didn't have an answer, and she wished she did, she wished it so badly because now this was one more answer she didn't have.

She looked down at her feet, at those old black boots. They belonged to her older sister before her, and her older brother before that. She hated wearing them, and she looked down at them now with a passionate dislike. Each step she took was no more than a dragging of these boots along the snowy sidewalk. Each step lengthened the trail she left of two lines, stretching from the school to here, and eventually to her house. She looked up again with a sigh, this time just ahead, not at the sky or the ground, but to the endless sidewalk before her. It seemed to go on forever, but, if she wanted, she could count the exact number of streets she had to pass until hers. It wasn't worth it, though. She liked the idea of the sidewalk continuing forever, eventually touching the horizon, meeting the breath in the sky.

She decided that if the sky had breath, it could have a voice too, and words. She pictured the words, endless in number, so plentiful that on some days they spilled out of the sky as raindrops or snow. But she was just dragging at the snow now, mutilating it, torturing it. She picked up her foot and took a real step; she knew how important words were. But as she brought her foot down again, she hesitated, thinking about how crazy this was. The sky wasn't actually breath, it didn't actually have words. She began dragging her feet again, and watched as the boots slowly scuffed out the path, and watched as the snow built up around her toes, until it covered the black surface. She liked the way the black stood out in the snow, even though neither was perfect. The snow was dirty and musty and icy, and her boots were faded with white creeping up the sides from the salt on the streets.

Nothing is perfect, nobody is perfect. She knew those words through and through, endless times where people repeated them to a crowd of blank faced teenagers, and she believed them, in a way. But sometimes she would try to define the word perfect, and all she would see was the way her little cousin laughed or the way her brother scored that one goal that one time, or the way the sky looked like breath. And it was always on her mind, an obsession. The snow on the boots was perfect, those two mile-long lines were perfect, everything was perfect. She sighed again, wondering why she was thinking so deeply, about such random, yet philosophical thoughts. And there it was, another question she had no answer to, another reason to sigh as she walked home. She took a breath, a long, deep, tedious breath, and as she puffed it out one last question entered her mind, the question of where her breath went, why she saw it one moment and it was gone the next. She involuntarily shrugged, brushing it off, trying to brush everything off, ready to repeat the pattern again: sky, ground, forward. She took a normal breath, and on the exhale looked up, and in that moment, it was she who breathed the sky, and she who was perfect. Everything is perfect, everyone is perfect.



Reach
Laura Castelein
Photography

Enough Time Will Be Taken

I know it's safe to say.
I think it's safe to say it.
I don't think I've seen so few people fill a
room so vast.

My hands covered by worn, dirtied sleeves
encased by pockets, keys fondled by
trembling fingers, sturdy fingers clenching
a phone.

I'd go upstairs, I'd go outside.
Tall, lean, purposely messy hair, tired eyes,
pale, lightly freckled.
Offers me a cigarette, even a light.
A smiling decline to a described stranger.
Cold air brushes against my already red
cheeks. I'm still waiting for you, Now.

I'm not actually waiting, this didn't
actually happen.
I think I wish it did happen
but I wish it happened so I didn't realize it
felt so planned, so forced.

It is not a symbol.
You are so ideal.
You are not the one described.

I think I've avoided The Other One for a
long time now.
I think I looked in the mirror this
morning and turned around to see who else
was there. I think you don't care, I think
I don't give a damn about how you don't
care because you snatch my words before I
say them and bite and burn and break them
before I can count to ten and you're gone
and I'm chasing after you but you turned
left and I went right and we should stay
apart.

I get anxious when I see you approach me
but I feel like I can't walk away.
Not yet at least.

The First One got better. The first one was
okay. You, First One, you were healing.
You saved yourself from further judgement
and you battled me until you gave up.
You were intoxicated. But you apologized.
I falsely forgave and you shook my hand
with a blade but we laughed about it.
Then you took that blade a few weeks later
and came up behind me to put a slit in my
throat.

I think it's safe to say that This One Now is
better than The Other One and The First One.
This One Now, you are the only lullaby to
ever keep me awake, the only blanket to keep
me cool in a fire.

Why am I waiting for you.

I'm waiting.
I'm outside I'm upstairs I'm waiting.

Cold and cold and cold and cold I'm waiting.

This is not forced
or a symbol
or anything but genuine
you're so genuine
you are so needed
I need you.

This is not what I'm aiming for.
This is not what it should mean.

Forget what had been.

I strike matches on bridges to see in the dark.

Kerry Lubman



Radiate
Laura Castelein
Photography



■ Skin
Catherine Lewis
Acrylic

The Red Eye

James Macias

The sea was uncharacteristically calm as the two men played poker on the deck of their ship. Above them their standard, a dark blue star on a green field, beat itself against the wind. They had docked a few minutes ago and wanted leave to go to shore but their captain held strict rules, first of them being that no one could take shore leave until the ship was cleaner than a baby's cheek.

"Put your backs into it you mongrels!" shouted one of the men at the poker table, "not a single bed will wanna give you no sponge with ya working like that! Especially not you, Ger, with you looking all sly and all!" He chuckled at that for a bit before returning to the game. People would have described him as surly if his build were just a bit larger, but he was far from gentle.

"You've got doubles down, Merkoph," the man across the table said to him. "You keep getting hands like this then you might as well be calling me The Red Eye!" He pulled the pot for that round, a few gray and bronze coins, onto his side, laughing softly but hoarsely.

"Yeah and what of The Red Eye?" Merkoph replied, obviously trying to mask the stink of his mood, "I'll have them running on their tails by the time I'm through with them." He took out his two knives, one crude and one sharp and nearly new, "I'll get 'em with old Rusty here, make sure they don't even get the satisfaction of a clean kill. That's what they get for taking my sea." He stabbed the table with the older knife and returned the cleaner one to his side.

The man across the table started shuffling the cards and muttered, "It ain't yours 'til you've won it."

"Are you sly or something, Dwal?" Merkoph said, pushing the table a bit towards Dwal. "For all you know I've already won it. Foambleeder'll be back in no time with those Red Eye mutts and they'll bend their necks to me. They're probably on their way right now." He shifted in his seat a bit before snatching the cards from Dwal saying, "I'm gunna shuffle."

"I could be sly for all you know," Dwal said a bit angrily in response.

Merkoph had just started dealing the cards out when someone on deck shouted, "Ships on the horizon, sir!"

Merkoph gave the man across the table a snide look before producing his spy glass and looking out to the sea. He saw two ships, one with his own blue and green standard flown alone and the other with his standard own standard above a larger one with a red circle upon a black field: the standard of The Red Eye. His crew had dominated in battle. "We've won, boys!" he screamed out and the crew gave a cheer in response. There were a few good remarks between them before they fell silent, waiting for the ships to arrive.

The wait was shorter than they anticipated and soon the ships were upon them. The one that bore only the blue star docked nearby while the one with the blue star and The Red Eye came up right next to them. "Foambleeder decided to take a short leave with the other and russle up some sponge. He left the prisoners with us for you to deal with, sir" a voice shouted from the now docked ship.

“As he should,” Merkoph shouted back. “Get a plank up and get them over here!”

A man on the other side drew up a plank over the small gap between the ships and four blindfolded and bound prisoners were brought over by seven men. People would have described the man at the front as a mountain if it weren’t such an underwhelming measure. His hands were tied tightest of the four and behind him came a tall figure bound looser than the first but still tight enough to keep them trapped. Two women followed, one with holsters on her legs for two long knives, which were taken from her and held by one of her captors. The other woman was short and well built; it took as many people to keep her restrained as it did to keep the more-than-a-mountain of a man.

Merkoph met them on the deck of the other ship with Dwal at his right. The man who had greeted them before spoke, “the rest of the crew was on shore leave while these four were sleeping in plain sight, the bleeders. They didn’t even put up a fight!”

Merkoph smiled at that and shouted to his crew, “that’s why I don’t let you take shore leave so early!” He then turned to the large man and said, “You’re bearing the chief standard of The Red Eye, so you must be the captain. A big man like you must be quite the starfish, especially guessing by your company” The man said nothing.

“This ship my men caught you in is yours, is it not?” Merkoph asked again. The man said nothing.

“Are you sly or something? I am Merkoph, lord of the sea, and I have taken you prisoner. You will respond!” Merkoph shouted taking off the man’s blindfold. The man said nothing.

Merkoph took the fine knife from his side and pressed it against the man’s chin. “What *are* you, you dog?” Merkoph said gritting his teeth.

The man was unphased. In a deep voice he replied, “sly,” and said nothing else. Dwal chuckled and blushed until Merkoph elbowed him in the stomach.

Merkoph was put off by this, but decided to go on, “you know why I’ve kept you alive, don’t you?” He paused waiting for an answer but didn’t get one. “Where is your vault?” he continued and still didn’t get an answer. “Me and my men have scoured through the whole of The Bend and couldn’t find squat. So where is it?” He received no answer once again.

“I could be sly for all you know, Dwal said a bit angrily in response.”

“Maybe one of your little girlies knows,” Merkoph said, moving onto the figure that crossed behind the large men. He groped the prisoner’s breast and whispered “maybe my little missy knows where it is.”

The figure stepped back out of his grasp and yet daunted him. “I am no woman,” he said, “and you will address me as sir. You could do with some manners, even if you’re only motivated by greed.”

Merkoph asserted himself again and snarled “What do you mean, little missy? You’ve got lady parts and everything.”

But even as he moved forward he was repulsed by the figure again and they daunted him. “If you call me missy again you will come to regret it,” they spoke.

Merkoph shrank back again in fear, but settled himself and tried to win back control. “Since you seem content on speaking, do you know where the vault is?”

There was a pause, and the figure responded, “this one reminds me of the one we met back in Utrant, don’t they, Nesa?”

The woman who had had the blades responded “well he’s certainly a pig, sir. Remember that, Ayala?”

“He wouldn’t stop talking and I had to knock him out,” the strong woman replied. She kept her tone straight and was still aware of the situation, but didn’t let that fact master the conversation. “It’d be a shame if we’d have to do something to the captain of such a well-respected faction,” she said. “Oh by the way do you think you have time for some swordplay after this? I’ve been practicing.”

“Of course I will,” the girl with the knives replied. “We’ve just got to wait for captain to finish up this sour lemon of a man.”

Merkoph attempted to take control again, “no one will be finishing me up! You have already lost! You have no place here you—”

He was cut off by the figure that had daunted him. “I could take you. Rago, it sounded like he took off your blindfold. How tall is he?”

The large man replied, “he looks strong, but not too strong, sir. Like that buggard from The Esa?” The four prisoners laughed at some inside joke they all knew. Their laugh seemed to have struck a chord of power among them that reverberated across the ship and Merkoph’s crew all took a step back. The large man continued, “and he’s a bit tall, but not as tall as you. You could probably take three of him at once and not break a sweat, sir, if I may be so bold,”

“You may always be so bold,” the figure replied, “you’re not in Paltria anymore, Rago”

Merkoph broke in “you may not be so bold on my ship though! And to think I was thinking about letting a strong man like you join me! But it’s clear now that you’re just a brute and caught up sly like the rest of these folk!”

“Sly and proud,” the man said and another laugh rose among the prisoners.

“That’s it!” Merkoph broke out at last, “I’ll show you mongrels to respect those above you!” He drew his dagger and moved to swing it at the figure. But the figure was quicker than he was. They jumped over their bound hands, bringing them in front of themselves, and caught Merkoph’s hand between the bonds. They spun Merkoph around and pushed up down, almost to the ground, but held him up by his hand which dropped the knife from the grip of the figure. They pushed one leg onto his back and held him in place. Merkoph tried to move away but every move threw him off balance and he had to return to his submissive position.

The figure then spoke, “your ships are forfeit to me. You will swear allegiance to me and your crews will be set free from the thralldom you’ve put them under. Speak, you worm!”

Merkoph strained under his breath and shouted, “I’ll never swear allegiance to a little miss like you!” In that moment the figure pushed down their foot and pulled Merkoph’s arm towards themselves and he screamed in pain. The crew stood around stunned at what they were seeing. The figure dropped Merkoph’s hand, freeing him from their grip, but he screamed and writhed on the floor of his ship.

“Be quiet!” the figure shouted before speaking to the crew, “it appears your captain has dislocated his shoulder. Someone, get him to a doctor!” The crew still stood still, deck silent save for Merkoph’s screaming.

“Shut up, it’s only your arm” the figure said and looked over to Rago. “Could you take of my blindfold?” He walked over and removed the figures blindfold with his teeth. The irises of the figures eyes were red as rubies against the whites of their eyes.

The figure then found the table Merkoph and Dwal had played poker at and broke their bonds with the rusted knife. “If this is how he treats his knives then I’d hate to see how he treats you men,” they said out to the crew. “I am Taila, captain of The Red Eye. If you swear your allegiance to me I will keep you and your loved ones safe from harm. What say you?”

The crew cheered loudly and slowly piled onto the other ship and the standard of Merkoph was lowered from on high. Taila unbound the rest of the prisoners and Nesa made Merkoph a make-shift splint with some fabric and his spy glass. “Even the worst of us deserve both arms,” she said and Taila did not stop her. But Merkoph just laid in the middle of his ship, staggered by what was happening around him. The last of all over was Dwal, who kicked Merkoph before leaving.

Taila gave the command to leave, and the ship of The Red Eye sailed on.

Cities and Their Large Appetites

She had always been warned
As a child, not to traipse the big cities at night.
Night is for the wild things.
A girl could be snatched a way like the breeze.

Yet here she was, and
In the sky, not a light
And down of the pavement, unsavory characters
Came out from their nooks to play and to tease.

I will add here, the girl
Was not alone, not quite.
Her small class was there, and her teacher far ahead,
All, unlike her wary self, chattering away with ease.

But she still felt fear,
Yes, muscles coiled to take flight.
She did not know the city, yet she knew it's kind
Enough to set a knock to her knees.

And there-- her fears
Were not baseless-- in her sight
Stood a couple, as foreign as she was, yet
Not from the same place, full of unease.

And facing them, two natives to that country
Bawdy and taking pleasure in the couple's plight
Laughing, slovenly and staggering, broken bottles in their hands
Coughing out slurred drunken insincerities

As she passed, she heard
One of them stammer in fright,
"Yo no hablo..." but the drunks just laughed,
and continued to heckle her. That made the girl freeze.

She stood there, at the back of the group
Wanting to help, yet her lips stayed shut tight.
Scared, terrified out of her wits, those feelings
In her mind, jumbled with the couple's innocent pleas.

She could have done it, but then
A boy out of her class, tall with hair so blonde it was almost white
Grabbed her arm and pulled her away,
Away from the couple's distress and the drunkards' disgusting sleaze.

"Come on, keep up, you don't want to get lost".
Indeed, she didn't; she knew he was right
Yet her conscience weighed on her for she,
Like the couple, felt lost overseas.

The group reached the hotel in safety,
Nothing else approached them like she feared they might.
The city growls at her, day in and day out
Yet she keeps to herself events like these;

Night is for the wild things.

Annaliese Taylor



Gatehouse
Laura Castelein
Photography

STRANGENESS

Inspired by *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

Strangeness, which had me sleepless,
Set in a blue sea that itself looked solid,
Like a towering fragment of the ever-lasting night.
Gliding irresistibly towards us,
Already within reach of hand
It has a fascination, too,
Ending in serenity of still and exquisite brilliance.
Unexpected, wild, truth stripped of its cloak of time.
Let the fool gape and shudder,
But a man must meet the truth,
With his own inborn strength.
The mind of man is capable of anything,
Joy, devotion, valor, sorrow, fear, rage.
Who can tell?
Principles won't do, off at the first good shake.
But truth, with beautiful generosity and unimaginable terror
Shows the world its true form.
To look upon the form of a shackled monster,
Takes no true courage,
Look at a thing monstrous and free, without a wink
Whirl of black limbs in incomprehensible frenzy,
Whose is the speech that cannot be silenced,
There will the truth make a man.
Be he cursed or blessed, the light, blinding or enlightening
Will not be known except to the one who took a leap.

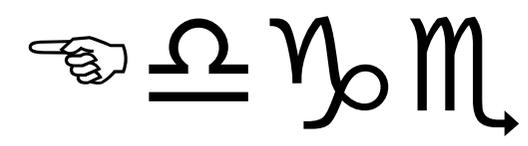
James Rafferty

Figure Drawing
Cecelia Tassone
Charcoal





Auburn Silk
Kevin Le
Photography



James Macias

They sat watching bubbles go by outside the window. Well she sat anyways. The others had headed down the hall to a different room a while back, but she didn't mind. The others, not effably with the other bubbles, were the one bubble and the other bubble. Additionally they definitely were not bubbles, but bubbles bubbles. The distinction was a bit small but also exceptionally important to her. It was important to define things by what they were and never at all by exactly what they are not. It'd be terrible to live a life where everything was only that one thing that isn't what its opposite is. She imagined the sky looking down and thinking, "Well I haven't the foggiest guess what I am, but I sure as heck ain't that." She chuckled at that.

It was always calming to her to think about the sky. It was without an edge, even if it seemed like it had an edge to her. She knew it just kept stretching around until all its edges were unedged and nice and smooth. And the clouds why, the whirling clouds were unfailingly the best part for her. Just

the other day they were sitting just inside the window, they being herself, the one bubble and the other bubble, talking about what the clouds seemed to look like and say and never say. The one bubble said one cloud definitely was an oyster of but the other said it was a yak of some sort. She, being her, never could really tell what shapes the clouds were. But an overwhelming amount of the time she could tell what the clouds were saying.

"Up there," she'd say, "do you see that one cloud there?" The other bubble responded to that with a small nod. She continued, "That one cloud is saying

'the death is upon you, the unemptied void. We are the unbitten flame. Our grasp is the grinding darkness and it will devour you.'"

Having never been good at listening to the clouds, the one bubble just said that it couldn't ever have said that because skywriters never write anything that long. In fact she said, "Thelma um I think you're pointing at a tree." And she was right. Thelma was pointing at a tree.

Now seemed the right moment to her to introduce herself, her being the Thelma her, not ever the one bubble her. And she, Thelma, disliked trees. They were nothing like the sky or like most clouds and they were all raggedy and sharp and if you touched one you could feel yourself pop on the bark or the branch. People and things that pop and just popping in general were Thelma's personal least favorite type of thing. While she understood that some things inadvertently will always pop other things and that it'd be wrong to hate something for everything it can't control, she wished those things that were like trees and even trees themselves did just go off somewhere away from things that weren't trees. The other bubble reminded her very gently that

those things were called forests and Thelma bobbed her head in understanding.

Of course forests were places that trees got together and did tree things, just the same like if a whole bunch of bubbles get together it's called a city. But something seemed wrong about doing that, putting a bunch of things in the same place and saying they need to be there. Whatever happens if a bubble wants to be in a forest? Or if a tree want to be in a city? Thelma's eye fell back upon the tree that she thought was a cloud and wondered if it wanted to be there. And maybe it didn't want to be just outside her window, but rather unwanted to be inside the ravenous forest. Thelma's gaze burned hard against the tree behind the window until her own eyes stared back at her. The window had folded her gaze back against her, but it leaped forward taking the rest of the world with it. "Well that's not an accurate way to put it," Thelma thought to herself in the moment. The world still was where it was but she also saw without it. She saw the edges flatten up against themselves like a portrait, and a mass bent and tried to bleed through upon it. She was conscious of a thousand odours floating in the air, but the ghost that was now nearer out past didn't come for salvation or redemption. It was the specter of the noiseless tumult breaking against the failing day. Each odour hearkened back to a time unforget, a time beaten into the depths of Thelma's mind. The grip was nearly upon her but she shot up and spoke, towered against the tide.

"This behavior is not welcome here!" she shouted. The knuckles of her fist pressed hard ever against the window. Not set to break it, but for support.

"Not what isn't allowed?" the one bubble asked, used to these kind of bursts. The world folded back into its preferred mold and Thelma sat down and looked back out the window, listening but not answering.

Trust

There is a war going on all over the world. That is what Papa tells me.
He says that in order to protect myself, I must hide in this small, cramped room.
I believe it is the old basement of some run down old building.
The smell of it is absolutely horrid, but I may be here a while.
That is all he says.
To be honest, I just don't understand what is truly happening.

Papa may think I cannot tell because of my youth, But I know.
I know he keeps some sort of secret from me.
If only I could confront him, but the previous time I saw his face was when
he told me to hide in here.

I am actually quite worried about him.
It must have been a handful of hours since
my last conversation with him.
Possibly even supper time, my stomach has been grumbling nonsense for a while now.
Now I cannot help but wonder who those men he was talking to were.
Seen through a crack in this dark window glass.
They seemed awfully rude, grabbing at him like that.

But... he smiled at me when his eyes met mine.
Told me with a hand signal, said he
would be back soon. Said I should wait/
Since I trust him so much, I still sit here.
Scratching off at this useless scrap.

Rebecca Ritterman

The Wheat Field

The first time it learned to turn
is the first it truly feels,
the ancient coals ignite,
into those long and winding wheels.

A machine of sorts,
it sputters past,
on a gravel road,
jumping orange when the field is reached-
Field, forever forebode

For wheat catches and it winds
the wheel's axes and its flames,
unto a dawning light rejoicing,
up higher into shame

Una Stroszeck



Landscape
Mira Bodek
Acrylic



Lights
Alexa Bower
Photography



Darius
Cecelia Tassone
Ceramic

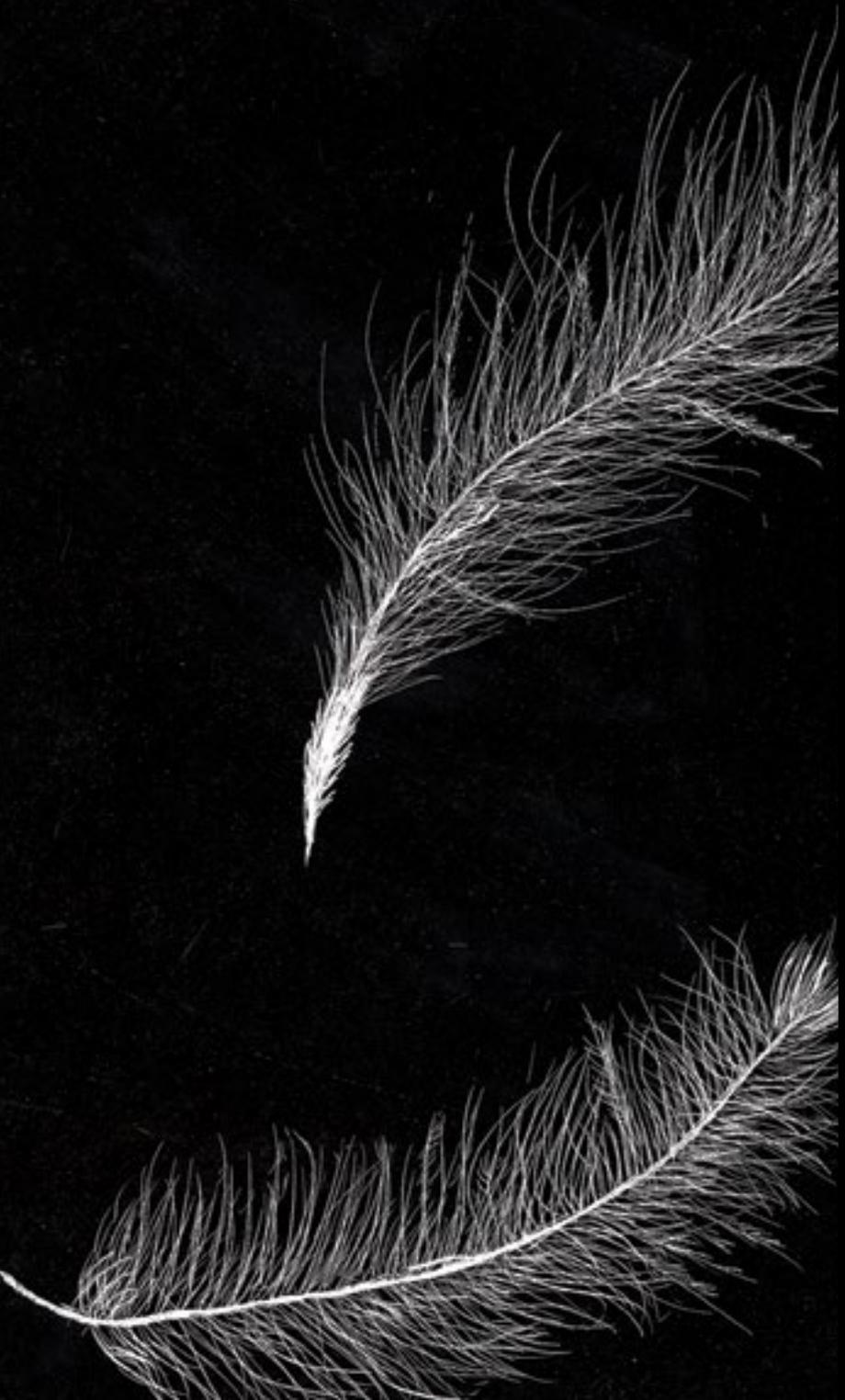


View from the toilet seat
Mai Joi Sharp
Scratchboard



Serenity Now
Noah Baskin
Photography





Down
Madeline Heilbronner
Scratchboard



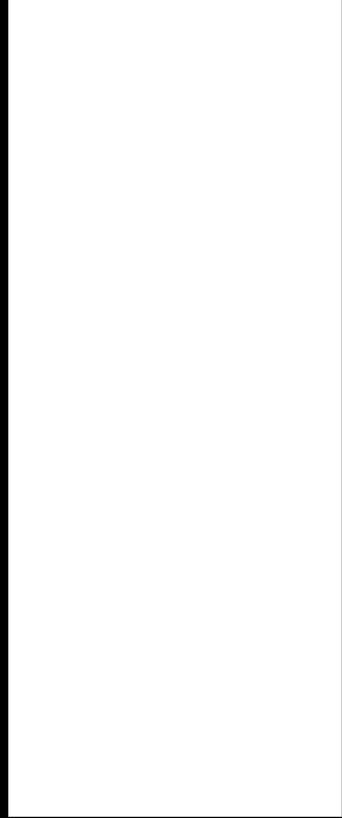
Still Life
Cecelia Tassone
Charcoal

Self Portrait
Mary Flanagan
Graphite





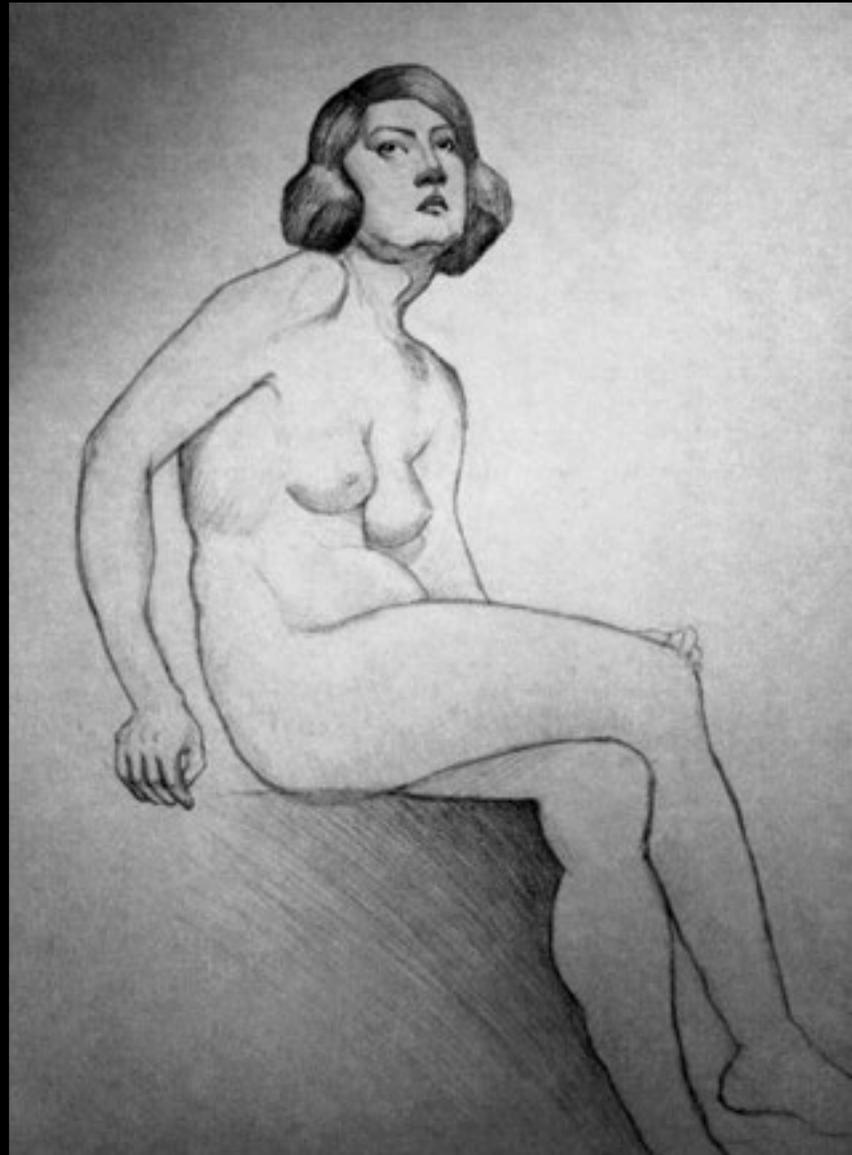
Self Portrait
Melissa Illig
Marker



Landscape
Catherine Lewis
Acrylic



Untitled
Natalie Tse
Graphite



A Leaf Embraces the Rain
Aisa Panero-Armoska
Photography



Where are you wandering
child in white?
Why all alone
on this sacred night?

The wolves come at midnight
you must know this well
why sit you down
as the darkness swells?

The howls rip through
the nighttime air
tears stain your face
so smooth and fair

Why were you wandering
child in white?
Why all alone
in The Woods tonight?

Your Guardians sent you
out here all alone
although it's all for
Their sins you atone

Clasp your hands tight
as you pray to the gods
feel the fear grip your heart
Please

Run!

Run Away!

Run!

Run Away!

White Woods

Rachel McLauchlin

Child in white!
Scream like a banshee
once you take flight

Why aren't you running
child in white?
Why sit you down
roses clasped tight?

Figures of darkness
surround your new bed
frock and roses
slowly stain red

Before the dawn breaks
more children appear
All in white
All in fear

Your Guardians sent you
a sacrifice made
the children in white
a small price to pay

Woodencho
Anna Wisbey
Photography



Crimson-corrupted water surges down the bathroom sink drain,
I am hypnotized but I am not in love.

Sleepless hands rinse three paintbrushes under the rushing faucet again
liberating the only colors I ever use, I
stole them directly from the canvas holding “Light Cloud, Dark Cloud.”
Look carefully, that masterpiece is a timeline,
past present future. In the sink,
The pink water runs. The red water runs. The white water runs.

My hands are young and innocent
until the scarlet paint seeps into dry cracks and magnifies wrinkles,
observe; colors age their apprentices.
Colors age us in our skin,
and in teaching us the curious horror which is human beauty—
Rothko was an animal White is a survival technique.
but a wise one, I painted myself blank
the only works he left behind were colors, before living through
what a legacy! red.

Hands webbed with scarlet, eyes glazed with pink flashbacks.
I become a statue in the mirror. The statue whispers memories I am hearing for the first time.
She swears they are mine.
I paint her flowers in exchange for silence.

Art therapy, they say, has proven useful to soldiers,
to women like me and their statues,
to survivors of natural disasters.

My hands were young and innocent
until the war, the disaster.
I had lips like lightly blushing peonies. She swears.

Peony lips do not speak,
do not know they should speak.

Tonight, my wrinkled fingertips drip water and runny red paint.
In the mirror, I see the statue trace up my throat to my peony lips,
color them in until my mouth
speaks with vengeful scarlet roses.
My lips spark a fire which propel phoenix wings,
my tongue flits the hateful venom of a red spitting cobra,
I know what happened to me now,
and my rose-stained lips shatter the statue in the mirror
with the voice of a long-imprisoned spinto soprano upon liberation.

Peonies are not as valuable as some say.
Painting them red will not turn them to roses.
That scarlet shell will inspire a voice in flowers that were taught to keep secrets.
I speak angry, confused, paranoid painted peonies,
but I am speaking.

The pink water runs clear. The white water runs clear. The red water runs.

Painted Peonies

Grieving a Loss of Innocence

Madison “Bloo” Van Edwards



Cameo
Catherine Lewis
Acrylic

A Portrait of a Girl as a Woman

Mira Bodek

My mother lay crumpled in her bed, the heavy folds of blankets weighing her lean body into slight, frail lines. The flowers we had bought only days before were now unfamiliar, and she matched them. Her strewn frame was the withered petals lining the floor; her limbs, the wilted stalks; her face, the yellowed water drowning in the vase. There she lay, feeling the skeleton within herself far more than the dividing cells.

This was the night of my fifteenth birthday, three days after my mother had decided to go off of her antidepressants, a marrow she had taken since before I was born. Though the diminishing dose of pills had been gradual, the dwindling of my mother was abrupt. She immediately became withdrawn, a waning crescent of her former self, receding into a childlike helplessness -- forgetful and fearsome, infantile yet aged in her trembling arms and dazed actions.

I ate dinner alone that night, watching candle wax drip into the frosting of my cake.

Our roles of mother and child had been shifted, reflected as I tended to her. When she attempted to hug me in apology for my lonely birthday, I backed away, angered at her choice, afraid of this unfamiliar woman, this unfamiliar role. And when I gripped her palm that night to coax her to sleep, I did not know our hands, our new parts. I did not know this life and it lay bundled, newborn in my arms. These two hands, one young and one aged, laced together eternally -- fingers indiscernible, roles merged.

From her silver sliver, my mother began to wax; it was not a return, but a revitalization -- flowers replanted, buds barely blossoming -- but depression never departs. And though the roles began to shift back, my obligation to my newfound character remained. Within me, I felt a new fear of my mother's depression. I felt the juxtaposed roles within me, fermenting the conflict of the emotions I felt: love, anger, sadness. The intersection of the lives she and I lived.

I realized how I did not know my mother's life, only realizing its weight when her role was thrust into my hands. The heft of her emotions, her depression, of her life outside of me: it was greater than me, for it was a load I could barely bear, but a load she bore before I was born and ever after. She was more than her role as a mother, she was a person -- and she had weakness, she had blood and a heartbeat, and it was finite -- my mother was finite. I had never before seen how many paradoxes -- mother and daughter, life and death -- flowed within her. And it flowed within me, for I was made lovingly in her image, and we carried the careful, osteal lattice of the contradictions of life together.

Life is fragile, in that moment, I knew. A structure of paradoxes, and I was terrified to see it clenched and caressed between my own hands. For it is a great burden to hold life; to hold life is to hold another, it is to know it and to accept not knowing it.

In the passing years, my mother decided to return to her antidepressants. When she told me of her decision, I was surprised at my acceptance; the fear of her past choice had stilled, the anger had dissipated. She had trusted me to cradle her life in my hands, knowing that her life and my life were connected by blood, by bone, by bonds beloved, and back then, I did not know it. Now I knew. The part I had been pushed to play years prior had been nurtured within me, and the paradox of emotions lay comfortable, balanced between our two hands.

Maniac

Rolling down the ever-slightly twisted turns of mania/ I tap
my foot and pull my hair, hoping to dissolve the/ fuzzy cobalt sparkling
net that enraptures my dull cotton brain, wishing to fulfill my
dream of/ sending a spear straight down the pathway from
my elbow to my palm, although I know that it's a passing
phase ~~Galaxy~~ and serotonin will engulf the/ murky depths
of sanity, which are slowly sinking deeper from my eyes to
my nose; I summon up my Sapphic spirit to prove my individuality,
cursing all my Scorpion tendencies for willing me to shine,
but climbing isn't shining when you can't ever win. Happiness
is just a word but contentedness ~~is~~ a form/ a shape I often
find myself in the middle of a dream. I ~~am~~ worry that my
intelligence is a falsity and my beauty isn't real, that
compassion won't flow far enough when selfish is your name.

Maddie Baum

darling you could rock boats with your
deep sleep ocean sighs
like the halos in your eyes
battle green

darling you could send the waves to war
with that
murky moonlight voice of yours

darling you could part the sea
with those inky lashes
as heaven's ashes
smoldering bright

darling you could swallow the world
between your coral lips
and lick the dust from your fingertips

darling you could steal the light
from every rippling sea star
but I would hang the moon in the sky
just to see your wake

melicertes

Sarah Bothner

This is Still Trivial

Kerry Lubman

You see, I've stopped writing about you. You sort of just took a gauzy latex sheet and stretched it over my head, wrapping it over itself, tying a double knot over and over until the double knot was octupled and your hands ached. I understand though. I really do. Go ice your hands, love. Anyway, yeah, I just decided that a bandaid like you was better off being torn apart from my icy tender flesh and thrown away rather than sticking to me and eventually floating off onto the sidewalk. The blood has dried. I hope you're not off worrying about me. Oh, I'm just kidding. I know I don't cross your mind. But it's okay. I'm forcing you out of my mine as I write this anyway.

I drove yesterday. Well I wasn't the one driving, but you get what I mean. We were driving the same way you and I would drive to get to your house. We took the first exit this time. Exit 5. I'm okay. I still look for a deep teal Chevy even while I'm seven hours away from you. It's a certain comfort, a chain locked tight around me. The metal is just thick enough to dig into my skin and leave harsh looking marks.

But like I said, I've stopped writing about you. I know I gave a reason as to why but I don't really like that reason. It's false. This is all false. But the sentence before this one is also false. I do in fact still look for your car. Other than that, I'm lying.

I'm sorry for lying earlier. I guess that was wrong of me.

There are three bruises lining my left arm. Or at least there were a few weeks ago. Don't worry though, those were an accident. I have bad aim. There are three scars lining my left arm. My aim was good that day.

Salt and blood, wine and a bullet, burning rubber whiskey.
Cravings.
Your name is mass produced.
I do not laugh about it.

Look, I'm sorry, I'm getting off track. I want you to know that you introduced me to this song. I was telling you how I was feeling about some boy and you seemed a bit anxious about it so you told me to go listen to this song. A pleasant way to divert the conversation. I like how you maneuvered that. And I like this song. I sing it with extended emotion when I walk home in the timid night sometimes.

Did I ever tell you about that time I kicked my wall in?
Let's not talk about it now.

I started drinking coffee. I don't like the bitter taste but I think the drink suits me well otherwise.

I've never stood in the rain with you. Not yet at least. Let's try that sometime.

I don't tell you many things. I don't really tell anyone many things.

So yeah. I stopped writing about you, darling. Your name is a noun and I hate it. Caramel and veins, a porcelain mask. I've always loved the sound of your voice. I like how cliché that line is. I don't like this piece though. I don't think you will either. But you will never read it.

Your eyes won't lay shut tonight. In the morning, you will blink.

Blaring car radios never hurt anyone. Pitch black skies will pulsate.

Your velvet ideas get torn. Your tail light is out

I've stopped writing about you, you know.

Grandmother's House and the Grandfather Clock

James Keegan

Why is there such comfort,
In the yowling of a distant siren,
Trapped out in the dark?

The clock's ticking becomes a tide.
Its ebb and flow rocks me to sleep.

These walls are a wooden bubble
And I am a sleeping larva in its bulbous
home,
A kitten hiding in a shoe.

Distant muted sounds are common here
But they are not always so comforting.

Although the houses in this neighborhood are almost completely identical—conjoined twins some of them—there is a large patch of imperfection in their collective back yard. The woods which back them up are the place where I once found, or rather viewed from a safe-ish distance, a camouflage patterned tent, set up off of the trail. I had noticed it from the vantage point of a fallen tree which allowed me to climb up into the leafy ceiling with a friend and co-horror-film-maker. We placed the camera without tact. We wrote no script. The villain was a hackneyed pumpkin-headed man who lived in a hut made of garbage. We did not have adequate props to film any of the scenes which he was a part of. The film is unfinished. Weeks later, I found the tent again, a few days into a primitive building project with my young cousin. Our fort partially completed, we looked into its backyard to see the same tent which I had

seen less than a quarter mile away a few weeks earlier. This was near the field but not across it, our first building spot, and because of the faceless hunter we were forced to abandon it. Across the field we trekked, a two boy exodus, into the other set of woods. Although they are only a few hundred feet away from each other there is a marked distinction between the two woods. The first, although tainted with glass and plastic, is not nearly as present as the one across the field. This set of woods stands importantly, emaciated shoulders held as high as they can be held by such a disgraced thing. It is hard to see the entrance from there in the field which holds a sparse arrangement of playground equipment. It is rusted and beautiful. Wondrous perversion marks this place. Man-made objects and nature clash, until one is not sure which is the deviant. In autumn the place across the field is a wet acrylic painting, composed of umbers and greys, perpetually just-now rained upon. You can feel the wetness in your shoes.

(The houses and surrounding environments of older relatives become more interesting the older the relative is.) I found a table, there in that omnipotent set of gnarled woods, covered in the—at one time—neatly arranged bones of a deer. The table and the bones had the color of salt stains on pavement. It may sound too perfect almost, but my cousin and I attempted to catch frogs in the first set of woods in the spring. The place was absolutely jumping. Pants rolled up, we used fallen trees as balance beams, various land and pollution features as backdrops to various imaginary narratives. It could not have been more perfect.

The eggshell house I slept in over night
Gave the illusion of being wood,
Or at least strong plastic.

The clock ticking, I swear, is its cracking.
Every sound is an ambiguously shrouded intruder.

I do not look out the window.
I pretend that I am underneath an enormous blanket,
Warm and deep and soft.

But I can feel a frigid draft,
Coming from the window and who has opened it?

I imagine the man opening the window. His hands are silhouettes. Once we heard him screaming in that second set of woods, my grandmother, brother and I. Before we even reached the field, we heard the monotonous and yet somehow desperate ululations, piercing or maybe more like ramming dully through the air. Blunt nails. His muffled voice beckoned and pushed away at once. I knew to be afraid but not why. In my mind, he was both heavily bearded and clean shaven, youthful and elderly; he held a hatchet and a gun and even if he wasn't armed—and in retrospect he probably wasn't—his bare hands would be terrifying enough, bursting through the tangled web of darkness. He never did this though—burst through—preferring, I guess, to remain unseen. He did not respond to our shouted questions regarding his state. We called out, asking if he needed help, and his voice went silent. He did not come out of the woods where he is permanently entombed in my memory. (Or not permanently. I'm

sure it's been tainted by now, taken on the color of salt on the road. So if I live in the past I guess I'm living a lie that I've given myself. So I won't sing of The King of Carrot Flowers, no matter how charming and saccharine he is.) I wonder if it was very painful, screaming for so long. It spanned almost an hour, but I never saw him once. So in my mind he is still a faceless terror or faceless mourner. He is one of the two or neither and he is outside the eggshell with a plastic icepick and he will penetrate the membrane if he chooses. He lives with the phantom that collected the deer skeleton, on the table I found in the mystical woods a short-ish walk from our second building site, and with the hunter who was seen by some resident's relative, strolling about in his orange suit. Shoot a shell through the shell, tear a hole into the hollow. Fill it with lovely and ugly things for me, my dear detested intruder. They could do it, the Boo Radleys of my child consciousness tumbling through the wet paint and plastic. And so, now I venture to peek my head out from the down and silk. What else is there to do? I can't sleep forever. I come up from this reservoir of egg yolks, panting and reaching out for the fearful seductress. I enter the bed of the siren and we meet as equals for we are both faceless to someone.



Comparatives
Kerry Lubman
Photography



a college boy

said that to me, too, once
somehow I am more believing of him than you
he probably knows more, you know?

he was tall... taller than you
as sensitive as every girls' dreamboat
kissed me with the practice of a sailor

I see you every day, pass by your hesitant smile
oh, but he's off somewhere
learning something, doing college things

well, I can't lie, I guess
even his name is as perfectly mundane as yours
but have you scruffle on your neck?

say it as many times as you think you should
but college boy only said it once
and that was enough for me

Anonymous

Objects

There's a boy running a hand up her skirt,
palms clammy and slick, licked like his lips,
seeping a sweaty handprint through her stockings.
He's disgusting, drunken and bronze,
but the attention isn't so bad and
his fingers could be an easy way to
rid herself of the dead cells laying
on the top layer of her skin.

She's barely a girl in this moment,
she can almost hear him whisper,
Yeah, I wanna see you on film
breath feverish in her ear,
Yeah, I bet you'd look great on film.
She smells the smoke on his breath,
and imagines him crumbling into ash
on her tongue
like a cigarette butt.
But it's some company, and,
in this moment, she can almost
see him flickering out.

Flashing on film, she saw the two of them.
Nude bodies struggling to keep warm.
Too exposed and too fake, like somehow
she was imposing on a moment privately shared
yet publicly dispensed, disposed for all to see.
Two porn stars squirming in the light
aching to turn off the camera,
tiring of living life bare (*barely*). And
she hoped she could keep a moment,
a thought, a feeling,
seeing, touching, living, breathing,
to herself.
But there was a lust to be a specimen
inherent within her.

Because she was a bottom-feeder girl, right?
Sea specimen lost, writhing under the microscope,
yearning for it, but detesting it all the same.
There might be gills lining her wrists
but they made her beautiful, right?
Barely breathing real breaths,
a fish on a slide, a fish in a glass tank,
barely a girl, but what of him?

Bare like bones, human down to the marrow, and yet,
only dead skin under her clothes,
and maybe he could rid her of it,
lick them off with his tongue,
love her decay like he could love her.
But were those cigarette burns on his arms?
He never said he saw her on film
but she projected and
she saw his face fall away into ashes all the same.
In that moment, he might have been the porn star,
disgusting but honest, terrible but true,
but she may have been the viewer.

She noticed the seep of her palms,
wearing into his jeans.

Maybe they could keep each other company,
bare, flickering on film,
sweat revitalizing skin.

Mira Bodek



Still Life
Melissa Illig
Graphite

Cherry Slices

Madison “Bloo” Van Edwards

I am coming down from my hellish orchestra of choice, and will try my best to articulate my thoughts in a linear fashion through a heavily misted carousel that refuses to circle counterclockwise or clockwise, but preferring to jolt forward and backward, lurching and jerking the artisanal Pegasus according to Pollock’s roping and splattering design. The winged horse and I agree that Jackson Pollock was no spectacular artist, just an infantile tantrum of the white man’s privilege, a poor baby filling a pool from a hose spouting booze, cigarette smoke, and self-pity, an Olympic sized bath in which he likes to drown.

I myself have just lifted my heavy wrinkled flesh out of a cooled tub, though I prefer tap water to Pollock’s sappy elixir, and am now sitting on my favorite bed sheets, a pale green and pink floral print with two bloodstains from the same wound/womb. This is the frequently seen symbolic potion of female-kind, a bloody Eden of faint paint palette.

Girls across the world suddenly got this idea; they dipped their raspberry teabag into

clear water, and watched the crimson swirl and cloud like red smoke in a previously unpolluted sea. It reminded them of something they had seen before. These girls, artists in the making, all unwrapped tampons and let them soak in a dish of dark raspberry liquid. In a trance, they watched their scarlet symbol of the female anatomy climb this white cotton sail and saturate it with hot tea. They came up with this idea all on their own, at several places at once, like the idea of a god.

Vanessa Tiegs watched strangers walk just under an installation of 88 hanging paintings in her art exhibit Menstrala, a term she coined to mean art made of menstrual blood. Women have been making art of their own pigments for centuries, since before we were taught that our bodies are shameful, revolting. Photographer Robin Holland says on her photograph depicting a naked woman’s body with a visible tampon string (printed on the cover of a 1995 Village Voice), “People were horrified. I think the reaction today would be similar. People are perfectly happy to see women as sex objects but the actual biology of our bodies is apparently gross and unmentionable.”

In an interview, Tiegs says “Only women bleed naturally without dying influenced by the gravitational pull of the moon’s cycle, and yet that is not considered powerful.”

We do not bleed the tea drunk by repressed Victorian ladies, we bleed blood, thick, stinking, heavy blood, the same blood shed by fallen soldiers, but they only had the strength to bleed out once. We bleed out each month, sometimes more, sometimes according to a clockwork of astronomical precision, sometimes the schedule of an erratic were-creature. How can you see us as anything but a fantastically functional monster? Do you enslave because you are afraid?

My hair is still wet and clinging to my hot neck. I am at my computer, toggling between this essay and the blog of a girl I learned too much from. Her little piece of the internet is a clutter of bloodied and bruised and stretched female bodies, Kurt Cobain’s little treasure chest of syringes and lighters, roping semen on tiny stomachs, feminist vagina art, winding rants about hating men. Erotic undertones suggest she is aroused by or otherwise fascinated with these photographs, conflicting with her misandrist texts—these pictures of battered, sexualized women point to a hatred of women over men. Has she been conditioned to find excitement in these images? Does she keep this blog as a collection of evidence, a reminder to hate men for their crimes against her? Both?

I knew she was a rape victim before she told me, before I saw these pictures. It is an evolutionary development women have tuned into, the ability to see unwanted touch on our sisters’ bodies. Try as we may, woman will never go extinct. Our greatest predator needs to keep us around to make more predators. Knowing this, it sometimes seems that the best we can do is look after each other, unlock each other’s cages when our masters leave the room from 9 to 5. Spider-like, we drop from the hanging crates to the floor with only a soft thud and the rustling of chains above us, the ones we climb when 5 o’clock comes and playtime is over.

My grandmother told me to never make myself financially dependent on a man, to lest I find myself slowly accumulating lose change and dollars leftover from the grocery that he won’t notice missing until my heaviest boots are full, and I am ready to put them on and walk away forever.

Each book on the round table in my dining room is in the hands of a woman. Jack Kerouac comes in, says, “Honey, could

you iron these before work tomorrow?” and I roll my eyes to the girls and say, “Jackie, the women are talking. Why don’t you go watch your shows?” Plath snickers. We muses would much prefer to bounce ideas and philosophies off of each other rather than sneak them under the pillows of stupid poet husbands. History is written by the victor; don’t let your present be written by him too.

The book club is often seen as a housewife trope, a little group of the bored and under household arrest coming together for gossip and wine. It is a Dead Poet’s Society of the oppressed literary, a retaliation of women who insist upon reading and thinking and discussing when motherhood proves to be more rewarding for a husband than wife.

I don my thickest coat and boots, and step out silently onto the snow-covered road. It is 5 pm, and I walk with mostly dried hair under a muted red sky and over compressed crystals. I just have to go to this place. I must visit her. Do you ever feel this way? Something is tugging you out of your warm house and out into the world, so you throw together a knapsack of your keys, gloves, and knife, and let oneness with the universe guide your footsteps? Cars slow beside you and inject dread into your pumping lungs because you are afraid of men? It is getting dark—will the oneness of the universe let you go home tonight?

But you push onward because despite the learned fear of man’s violence, you are a woman of conviction and you have a place to go.

I have a woman to visit. A man painted her in my image inside a vault up at Cobb’s Hill. Two identical water towers in the woods wear the weight of graffiti across generations, a constantly revised tapestry depicting youth’s true knowledge. There is a small portal in one tower, maybe five feet

off the ground, just wide enough to let me squeeze through, but not with a coat.

Inside is my own art, from when I was a young girl and I needed the world to remember me in case I forgot. I have most recently written, after several attempts at spray-painting a pair of red lips oozing smoke, “Bad Artist, Good Poet, Better Lover.” Is it problematic, an example of internalized misogyny to boast more of carnal experimentation than one’s intellectual creation? Mid-painting, I glanced over my shoulder and saw my lover painting the woman I came here to visit tonight. She is a poetess god. I wish I could paint lips like those.

“But you push onward because despite the learned fear of man’s violence, you are a woman of conviction and you have a place to go.”

I squeeze through the portal and flop into the ice rink, a zoo for artistic specimen to imprint alternate versions of themselves in one museum of animals, geometric patterns and vandal tags. From the inside, you can see that the portal has been painted to resemble an open vagina. I can see black silhouette trees stenciled over dust from within.

She is waiting expectantly on the far right of the circular tank. I thank the poetess god for bringing me here, for resisting the paint of other vandals since we last parted at her conception. I offer her a sacrifice of cherry slices, sugar-crystallized gummies that I tasted last when we first met. I throw a few red wedges at her base, where her collarbones kiss snow.

I open my lips. The whole point of a hellish orchestra is to open my lips.

“It’s cold.” Come on, you can say more than that. Deep breath.

I tell her about bodies. I share the prayer I say when shaking hands strangle my waist with a measuring tape. The ocean is at her peak of power and beauty when she is big; so, too, shall your body be. She seems to like this. The sea would never starve to dry up into a puddle. Her wide owl eyes agree. Feast, so that all lost ships and creatures of the deep may explore the priceless wisdom you give Earth. She is grinning, saying that yes, your kingdom of bones and waves of flesh have crowned you Poseidon, poison this earth with your ideals of feminine spirituality, let your ocean be a haven for battered women and girls, a place to let saltwater wash saltwater and sisters save sisters. Siren tongues will educate one another for generations.

My melting cherry slice sacrifice has decorated the white slush with scarlet veins, a sweet mother nature’s menstrala. The bloody snow is alive for the first time, and I think she likes it by how she takes to new color, spreading red to farther and farther crystals until she is a rosy wound edged by pink lace. The wound/womb is birth/rebirth, the recurring bloodstains on my floral bed sheets, it is the art portal home to a poetess god, the lips I wish I could paint.

References
An Interview with Vanessa Tiegs
by Jenny Lapekas
Sexual Objectification: What Is It?
by The Social Cinema

The

I am unexpectedly concerned to find that the pictures hanging on the threaded hooks of my veins lack eyes

Gone.

Undistinguishable.

Irreplaceable.

Hollow caves of darkness or crosses of pencil marks now substitute what used to be colored daggers staring from across the room

I wish I missed them.

It isn't that the expectations for the gallery showcasing my life's existing repertoire were set considerably high in the first place

Rather, it's the principle.

The act of carving, scratching, tearing away remnants of photographed figures that served as reliable proof of my existence, in a way

Seems personal.

Shreds of paper littered the floor, muddy footprints painted across newly waxed tiles, fingernail marks scratched like hieroglyphics

This crime scene reeks of incompetence.

Maybe tomorrow I'll search, flashlight in hand, pocketknife held up to my right cheek, ears tensing at the drop of a pin

Visitor

No one can hide in these halls.
Sometimes, even the echoes of my own thoughts find me, crawling across the ceiling like spiders until my wilted silhouette is unearthed by the light of a small, small sunroof

I'll lock her up.

Starve her, laugh at her, force her to suffer long hours of servitude for this obscenity displayed inside private property

I won't thank her.

Even though I'm secretly relieved for the absence of eyes piercing through me while I sleep
No, I won't thank her.

It may be a little harder this time, finding her, that is. These walls aren't what they used to be, paint's chipping, ceiling's leaking, surfaces are starting to crack and expose exhibits of wooden skeletons hiding underneath

The air tastes stale.

Yes, tomorrow I'll search. Every corner, every crevice will be scoured, scavenged, scraped through until the scooped out eyes of the culprit replace the missing ones on the wall

Maybe I should bring a map.

I can't seem to find my way around here anymore.

Joy Krasner

Social Dances— Mind the Footing

I put on shoes a few sizes too big and shuffle with my head down not because I am ashamed of what I have done but because I am ashamed of what could happen if I looked up

This world is a little too big and my bones a bit too small so I will mind the gap for the time being

The art has been mastered and the year has ended but my work is still just traces of my friends

I must have missed that day for teaching how to speak with a certain tone or keeping a smile pinned on my face but if asked they would smirk and say it's common sense

It was called cute when I was a baby but now people expect a level I have not reached and my love of casual debates or baking chocolate lava cakes are masked—what has changed? Age? Perspective?

I have been taught table manners since I was three yet I am still clueless how to curl my lips or keep a pulse while speaking (not to mention the audacity to even speak)

They will keep preaching to be yourself but until my bones grow just a bit more and my posture a little straighter I will stay how I am

Elizabeth Cumbo



A Study in Pink
Angela Hu
Oil Pastel

A Light For Our Lonely Moon

James Macias

Pass me the wine, let me tell you the story of the Carlsberg Lamptress.

Me and Kat went out one night, I can't remember when. Wait no, it was in January. But we went out driving because Placid Water had just put out a new album. Now, as I'm sure you're aware, Placid Water is the most unexceptional musical group of our era, if not of all time. But both me and Kat grew up with parents that had an almost unnatural affinity for Jenny Clearstreet.

Now I'm almost certainly positive that you have no idea who the yot Jenny Clearstreet is, but, put shortly, her music is best described as feeling completely happy that you are surrounded by a horde of bees. Not in a menacing way though. More like having the most relaxing nap of your life and waking to see that you had fallen into some slop of honey in the Arizona Combslips and you suddenly had thousands of little fairies nuzzling up against you. And although you know the fairies are actually bees and could sting you at any second, you trust that they won't sting you and they trust that you won't hurt them. You then proceed to be given the best massage of your life by hundreds of mini-masseuses, all the while honey is flowing from your taste buds and to your ears and you hear the taste of honey and you taste the relentless and malevolently calming drone of your many companions. That's what Jenny Clearstreet's music is like.

And Placid Water has been, so far as me and Kat are aware of, the only group since the Great Clearstreet herself to arouse the same soothingly disturbing feeling through music. Both me and Kat had lived with that as the soundtracks of our collective childhoods and when Placid Water released their first album, "Landcloud", its monotonous and slow-moving sound caught us both in a similarly monotonous and slow-moving nostalgia.

Coming back to the story, me and Kat had a few days with absolutely no obligations as our Kal'rûn coincided with the release of Placid Water's new album. But, as I'm sure you are aware, no one can simply sit through an hour and a half of Placid Water unless if they literally cannot be doing anything but listening to Placid Water. And me and Kat, despite our history with the genre, knew that we couldn't just lay down in a room and listen to the album because, if we did try that, we'd quickly want to do something more interesting like read a book, or think about how the Ancient Egyptians dealt with belly-button lint, or sleep. But we both desperately wanted to listen to the album and remember the good old days, so we made a plan: talk Danny into letting us use his car, drive on the empty 3AM highway blasting Placid Water, and, when the album was done, find the nearest diner and get a bite to eat because you know how Danny is about "all that yottin' food" in his car.

And by all accounts, the plan worked seamlessly. Of course, I don't know if it should even be legal to drive while listening to Placid Water with the way their music entrances you. But luckily there was no one else on the road, it being 3AM, and we listened until our ears ached and our memories faded. The album was just as underwhelming as we both expected, and after 80 minutes, yes 80 minutes, the music had stopped and we were left with just the weary fog in our heads and the dark road ahead of us.

It didn't take us long to find the next exit, which led us into Carlsberg. I'm not sure if any of you know what Carlsberg is like—and I'm certainly not the best person to describe it as I had only been there that one time and once afterwards—but it's best described as a sleepy suburban city. It's all packed and looming and complex as

all cities are, but it doesn't have the same rushed feel as a city. I don't know what it is about Carlsberg, but I've always gotten the impression that its residents have yard sales and cook-outs, even though they don't have yards to host either of these in because they all live in apartments.

But me and Kat didn't go into deep Carlsbergian territory because we found this nice diner on the outskirts of the city called "The Lonely Moon". We walked in and it had every detail you'd expect in a diner: lighting that seems just the slightest bit too bright, a theme and decorations that are at least a decade past their prime, and the sweet smell of pastries that attracted a few stray, fat flies. The hum of the fluorescent lights seemed a bit heavier than expected though. Almost like if you looked down you'd find yourself surrounded by the enormous glowing strips, but when you do look down you only see the white and pink tiles.

There was a girl behind the front counter when we got there. She was about how old I am now, actually, but she was a bit older than me and Kat were back then. She had dark brunette hair and light brown eyes to match. One of the Medi-Sudanese people that came over during the Sail of the Afric, you know? She seemed delighted that she finally had some customers that night and her brown eyes lit up the moment she saw us. By her looks we had expected her to have a southern accent of some kind and, while she did have an accent, it definitely wasn't southern. Although me and Kat couldn't put our finger on where her accent was from, we both silently agreed that it seemed more familiar than it did foreign. She greeted us with, "Good evening and welcome to The Lonely Moon Diner, where if you come eating alone, at least you're eating alone with the rest of us," not put off by the fact that there was no one in the diner but us and her. "What's the size of your party?" she asked,

followed by “just kidding, I can see how many of you there are just fine. Sit yourself wherever you like and I’ll get you a menu.” We walked to a table just left of the center of the diner and she had walked parallel to us, but behind the long counter. She grabbed a laminated sheet of paper from a group of them on a shelf on the wall and gracefully, yet carelessly climbed over the counter to give it to us.

“My name is Christie and I’ll be serving you this lovely evening. Or maybe it’s better to call it morning seeing that it’s past midnight. I’ll give you a second to look over the menu if you need it, although I personally would recommend the chocolate-strawberry tart. It’s made fresh every morning and I personally think it fits in with every meal.” We had barely even looked through the menu but that sounded like it would be more than good enough.

So me and Kat looked up from our menu and told her, “Thanks, that sounds like it would be more than good enough”.

“Alright, I’ll go get that set up for you, love,” she said and she climbed back over the counter and back through the door that lead to the kitchen. She returned after a few seconds, climbed back over, and sat down across from us saying, “The flour base needs to soften for a few minutes before I start it up. I figured it’d be much more fun to talk to my customer than to watch some flour soften for five minutes. What brings you down to The Lonely Moon so late, or so early I should say?”

“Our favorite band just came out with a new album and we wanted to listen to it,” we said. “Well, not our favorite band; I mean it’s Placid Water,” she gave an understandably disgusted nod at that, “but we have this sort of strange attachment to them. It’s a bit complicated so we won’t explain it now. We’re off for the week because our Kal’rûn is coming up in a few days.”

She didn’t seem put off by the fact that nothing we said actually explained why we were there at all and responded with, “Aahh sorry about that. Customers. And Kal’rûn? I remember mine. Are you nervous?”

“Well, yeah, a bit,” me and Kat said.

“Don’t be. Me and my melki Devon were remarkably nervous for ours, but you’ll feel so much freer afterwards. It’s like my father used to tell me: Tsai kel nestrak y’ kumbraël, fe gahr hel bâk, vefur’tentæi.”

“Thanks,” me and Kat responded, “actually though, we’ve never really thought of it that—”

“Good evening and welcome to The Lonely Moon Diner, where if you come eating alone, at least you’re eating alone with the rest of us”

“Flour is about ready,” Christie interrupted, “I’ll be just a couple of minutes.” She climbed back over the counter and into the kitchen. It was silent for a while as me and Kat waited for our food. The flies buzzed harmlessly a few tables down. They kept hitting each other and we couldn’t tell if they were fighting or playing or just really dumb flies.

Then suddenly, there was the start-up of a very low hum that came from the direction of the kitchen. It was muffled, but definitely mechanical and definitely very powerful. Me and Kat debated over what to do, and

after about half a minute we decided we’d better go to the kitchen to see if Christie was okay. We didn’t climb over the counter like she did, feeling it would be rude, and went around it instead. Then we pushed through the heavy grey door into the kitchen.

The kitchen was the slightest bit smaller than what you’d expect for the kitchen of a diner, but it had the same fluorescent lights as the rest of the diner and was clearly still a part of it. Me and Kat found the oven on the left side of the room and it said it had 10 minutes, so we assumed that the tart was cooking in there. But the humming wasn’t coming from in the kitchen. There was another door across from the first and still in the direction of the humming, so the slightest bit more reluctantly we went through that one.

It led us outside and we were immediately overwhelmed by an intense and bright light. It wasn’t directed at us, but rather at the clouds. It made a circle against the night sky, and inside the circle was the number “19”. We were completely bewildered by what was going on, and after a few brief seconds of gazing we heard Christie’s voice.

“Oh, I forgot how loud the lamp can be,” she said half-yelling. “Your tart is in the oven, don’t worry, it’ll be out in a short while.”

“What is this?” me and Kat asked, still having trouble seeing.

“Well, after the Fall of the Seventh, the government was left with a bunch of LKR-32’s that they had no idea what to do with.”

“Wait, like Heinterbech’s Laser, the LKR-32?” me and Kat gaped out.

“Yeah,” she responded nonchalantly.

“Once upon a time these little capsules could’ve ripped the world in two. But no one felt safe keeping these things just in bunkers like the nukes they had before the Fall, so their two best operatives, the elderly couple

that runs this place, took them and put them in this,” she said kicking the massive lamp which made me and Kat jump.

“Don’t worry,” she continued, “the plates in front of the laser are ten-inches of lead. But those little babies still shine right through, the yottin’ bleeders! Only as strong as a normal spotlight, of course, but it’s almost like there’s nothing even there—” she interrupted herself and said “Oh your tart’s done!” obviously hearing something that me and Kat couldn’t.

She brought out two tarts (“I made one for myself,” she said winking) and we laid down on the hill out back of The Lonely Moon together, the lamp splitting through the foggy night. She explained how she grew up in Carlsberg and every night she’d look up at the sky and there’d be the number 19 right outside her window. Once she was old enough, she decided to investigate and found the elderly couple and their diner. Apparently the 19 was just a small quirk that they added without much thought, but Christie said that it helped her for some reason. The 19 was always there, even when nothing else in her life would stay. She soon started working for the couple and took the later hours so they had time to sleep.

We had lain there until the sunrise, just talking. And at the first sign of sunlight, she leaned over and kissed me and Kat slowly, her two tongues weaving and stroking mine and Kat’s one tongue. I still remember how her gills felt when me and Kat cupped her neck in our hand. The kiss lasted longer in memory than it probably actually lasted. She broke the kiss and got up, saying that the usuals would be coming in soon (we were lucky no one stopped by while we were out back) and me and Kat headed back home with a kind smile and a wave goodbye.

I stopped by a few weeks after mine and Kat’s Kal’rûn and the only workers there was an elderly couple, undoubtedly the one

Christie was talking about. But they gave each other a concerned look and said they had no idea who she was. I visited later in that night just to be sure and the elderly couple was still there.

In the end, I couldn’t even tell you the name of any song on Placid Water’s album or even the name of the album itself. But I remember the night so clearly and I doubt I’ll ever forget it. I wouldn’t say that I loved Christie that one night, but I wouldn’t say I didn’t love her either. And in the end, it never really matters who or what you felt for or why you felt for them so long as the feelings were real. And I guess that’s just how it is.

Sappho burns her thumb on a lighter in the violet night garden where
like hummingbirds we suck the honey nectar out of wildflowers.
She lights them in a long wooden pipe,
sweet smoke trailing like ghosts behind us and curling around our mess of
books pooled in a circle, opened to pages where stems bookmark certain poems, passages.
Wine bottle empty, candles low.
Bare feet press into cool soil, wobbling bodies laugh and trip on skirts.

Smoke follows us like a black cat down to the beach,
where we let foam off the tip of waves grace our ankles, wet our torn hems.
Perched atop rocks in a cave opening, two sirens sing to each other, oblivious to passing sailors.
My lips nurse her scalded hand, she adorns her hair with seaweed, tells me stories.
We practice witchcraft in secret,
hiding our twin pentagram rings on chains around our necks, pendant resting at our breasts.
On nights like these, reading up on floromancy, numerology,
(1—a connection to the ever-present hum of the universe that vibrates our veins,
7—the yin, the feminine moon spirit who casts light to illuminate our meetings.)
we wear them proudly.

She opens the drawstring bag and carefully removes
the square of scarlet velvet, the milk like bottled liquid pearls, the 3 raisins.
I produce the crimson candle, honey jar, the 3 almonds.
I breathe quietly as the spell melts from her lips,

“Spirits of union, angels of love,
Bring me a vision this night
Allow me to see, within my dream
My soulmate, when the time is right
So mote it be.”

When the candle is hushed and packed away for another hex,
We sneak into her house through the bedroom window,
peel off our muddy, salt water-soaked dresses, and clad in only our pentagram pendants,
fall back onto pillows in a tangle of seaweed and linen.

While there is power in the Craft,
the placebo device that lets us fantasize
that our easily silenced teenage girls can harvest the moonlight, control the tides,
protect the coven through a sacred bond of sisterhood,

we still get spooked by the creaking of floorboards down the hall.

Before the hem of my dress snags on the windowsill,
I slip the talisman of scarlet velvet beneath her pillow,
smoky hair sprawling like serpents,
head aglow with the promise of flower divination and feminine power.

We sleep well knowing each will dream of the other.

17

Madison “Bloo” Van Edwards



Peace at Last
Aisa Panero-Armoska
Photography

Muscle twitches and a fallen-rock-zone stomach.

Is it over yet?

I could have sworn I've seen you before.
No other eyes have burned through me like yours do.

I don't recall your name. I don't believe that it's important.

Subtle contact from a fingerprint to an exposed shoulder.

Goosebumps.

Take it all in again.

My spine, rigid,
my inhales overlapping exhales,
I don't need to turn around to remember.
It floods.

You know my birthday. I know your mother's maiden name.
You know that my passenger seat door handle is broken.
I know how long your showers take. You know what time I fall asleep.

I know what you want and you know who I need.
You know why I left and I know why you came back.
I've looked past you and you've seen through me.

Breathing has ceased.

You call my name.

I'm running.

Dear Stranger, Hark Back

Kerry Lubman



Poetry
Evie Brooks
Marker & Colored Pencil

The Predawn Boys

Mira Bodek

Gilbert and I liked to sulk around behind the sports equipment shed during our free hours and in the evenings, always scampering back to the dorms before curfew. I would read while he would smoke. He always tucked a cigarette behind his ear, it was as constant a presence as myself. No matter how many times a professor would pluck the stick from him while lecturing a class and threaten detention, it was there.

Really, Gilbert was perpetually under pressure of detention—so was I—but he had a slick tongue and a splendid smile and always promised to never do such a thing again. He was also too good at football—not the shoddy American kind, the real kind—to be barred from practice. So he got out of the punishment, and I got out as a tag along, and we ran together on the field with ragged breaths.

When it got colder, and we finally decided that lurking outside was too numbing to be bearable, even for the slick image of our breath frozen white on the air. So we moved into the senior bathroom on the third floor of the humanities building. Gilbert found it to be the cleanest bathroom at the school—he'd claimed the last stall, right near the window, for the two of us, and scrawled it with graffiti—nothing too explicit, except for lines from great literary works—it's ironic that way!—he would say.

There was James Joyce in the bottom corner of the stall door; neither of us had read *Ulysses* at the time, because we hadn't yet learned how to sneak into the restricted section of the library, but the fact that it was restricted made it feel too perfectly rebellious not to write on the door.

When I made Gilbert read Ginsberg for the first time, he scribbled the most obscene lines from *Howl* right in the middle. As his stark black cursive marred the door, I kept repeating that he was missing the point of the poem. Gilbert shook his head and reassured me, every time responding the same thing.

"That's exactly the point, Duncan."

He kept on saying the same thing, "That's exactly the point."

We had a reputation. Gilbert and Duncan. The British prick and his French frog of a best friend. A tale of two cities, I used to say. It was my favorite, a golden thread binding our thumbs together. It felt right. The two of us like London and Paris, like Carton and Darnay.

Initially, our reputation began through pranks, or, rather, began through our unfortunate habit of sneaking condoms into unsuspecting seniors' lockers, a habit that just kind of remained lame forever. To tell the truth, I wasn't really sure where we got the condoms—or rubbers, as Gilbert would endlessly emphasize. Some of them probably came from one of the senior football captains, who, after tiring of exaggerated locker room talk, handed each team member one and told us to stay safe.

After our first year, though, we were mostly just known for being the two of us. Gilbert and Duncan. Football players in the fall, rugby in the spring; we both tried swimming and nearly drowned while trying to look cool while doing the backstroke.

But football, Gilbert breathed football, couldn't get enough of it; I liked it well enough, mostly because we played together—I preferred rugby. But football was Gilbert's everything, he played it until the sun went down.

We'd copy each others homework, maths for him, history for me. We were both terrible in Latin. We spent all our time in the bathroom tattooing the verb conjugations on our wrists, on our skin in the gaping holes of our ripped pants that never made protocol.

The seniors called us *faggots*. Even though we weren't together, we never were. They probably thought they were cool insulting us with freshly imported American slang. Gilbert couldn't get enough of it. He went on using the now dated British definition, laughing about us being burning cigarettes—he didn't care.

"People probably call Morrissey the same thing," Gilbert exclaimed, as the tape played out the window of the bathroom and he scrawled the lyrics to *This Charming Man* on the stall door, "And he doesn't care."

Gilbert was always trying to be Morrissey. I always thought he was more like Kerouac, without the writing talent.

**"A tale of two cities,
I used to say.
It was my favorite,
a golden thread
binding our thumbs
together."**

He still didn't care even after he took an interest in boys. He—and I—had dated before, sure. Girls, for the most part—Gilbert liked to say he didn't discriminate, I just didn't really know. But the third year of high school, he began chasing a dancer from the arts school on the other side of town.

Henry. American. Southern American. From Georgia, with an accent and hunting skills to prove it. He was a ballet dancer and he was lithe and beautifully boyish. Gilbert described him to me in those words when the two first met—they should've sounded trite, but the way he spoke them was rushed and earnest, consonants tumbling, almost like Kerouac. The two dated sloppily, casually, but not briefly.

When I met him, his form surprised me—lithe yes, boyish, yes—but beautiful? Henry had bright eyes, but there was hardened muscle, he was fit. Birds were beautiful, Henry was something else. And I wanted to dislike him, not for any particular reason though, or, at least, any reason I knew myself.

I didn't want to hate him but I didn't want to like him either. But that turned out to be hard, not because Henry was too nice to hate, but because he was too honest. He was sharp and snarky, blunt in his observations and inappropriate in his jokes—crudely formed, with a meandering mouth.

The only time Gilbert skipped practice ever was when they slept together for the first time. It was the only time the dorms were empty, right in the stark afternoon. I'd always imagined it being done in the dead of night, not with the afternoon sun streaming through the window lazily, drenching the room in a haze of amber light. Gilbert laughed when I said that, so did I, it was silly almost.

"Don't say something so Catholic," he said, grinning, "You're a terrible Catholic." "I'm still a Catholic!" I protested.

They broke up after a year and a half, though Henry was mostly in my peripheral after the first couple months. I remember asking Gilbert why.

He said, "Mostly because it wasn't really perfect anymore."

Perfection was strange and foreign, but it seemed tangible in some way as Gilbert uttered the syllables. But I didn't understand his words—they were as dark as the sky I saw in my imagination of the first time, blackened and blue, shadowy and unfamiliar.

Gilbert always joked about brawling in the bathroom, back when we first started staking out there. He went on about how, if he had written *A Separate Peace*, it would've had fist-fighting in the boys' room. He was an idiot, and I told him so. He said they would've been fist-fighting if there hadn't been a war going on. I pointed out that there was a war going on currently, and we weren't fist-fighting.

“Yeah, but there aren’t bombs ringing in your right ear,” he said, “They’re stowed away. The book takes place in 1942, and everyone forgets! Everyone forgets that 1942 had bombs, they just don’t tell you about them in your history textbook.”

It was in late October, after football practice when Gilbert got his fist fight. We were just about to leave as the sky began to darken, ready to hasten to dinner before lights out and another threat of detention. We were greeted politely, as we opened the door to the darkened hall, with four seniors and eight hard fists to the face, for taking a senior bathroom as third years.

Four flat knuckles to your face was like a fired gun. A surge of adrenaline rushing from the temple to the fist blazing like a bullet. Gilbert and I had never fought before, didn’t even box on the side or anything. It was lucid, like a lurid dream. Cathartic almost in the burst of stars behind my eyes as the bones crunched under my skin, capillaries rupturing in the blast.

We woke up dazed. Gilbert’s eye was mottled black and blue like the night sky outside. The blood dripping from his forehead had seeped into his eye socket, emphasizing the ripples of red in his eyes, the blood dripping from his nose had dried over his lips. I knew from my first blink that I probably looked just as bad, bloodshot eyes, a ringing in my right ear. Just like the bombs, I thought.

Looking at each other, bodies beaten and uniforms rumpled, there was silence. It was surreal, nothing we ever said happened. Life here was supposed to be dull, we were supposed to be able to complain about the bore, the drag. But not today, today, we laughed. Low rumbling and high-pitched laughter, the situation was absurd and amazing.

A brawl in the boys’ room with white knuckles clenched and broken noses bloody. It was ours, truly, that goddamn senior bathroom stall. We had missed curfew by hours, a detention or five was certain, and the sky was a cigarette burning in reverse—dark black crumbling into a flaring orange on the horizon. But it was ours.

As we walked across the football field, Gilbert two paces ahead, our shoes soaked with mud and dew, the sopped smacks of our feet upon the earth. With our faces and knees nipped by the brisk air, Gilbert and I were silent. The laughter and ringing echoed in my ears, it felt right tingling in the past, but I could still hear the bells. I could always hear the bells, as the clocktower at the edge of campus clicked towards dawn.

Then, suddenly, he turned around. He was illuminated, as he turned toward the rising sun, his face fierce, fiery like the sphere behind me. Wreathed in flaming first light, with each strand of hair ablaze, he was breathless, panting, and he spoke to me, “America.”

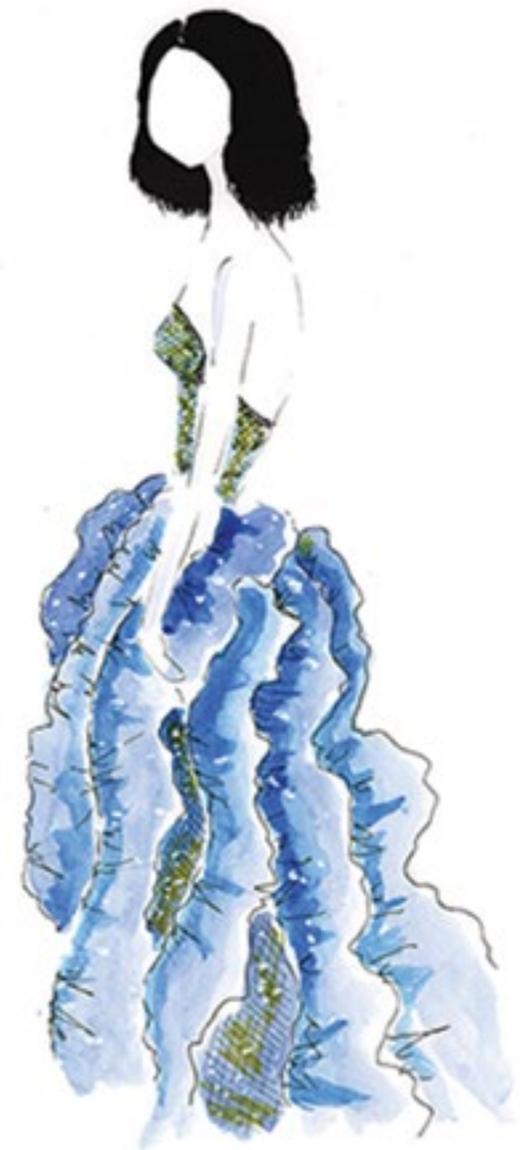
“What?”

“America, Duncan. Let’s go to America! Henry always talked about it like it was the best place in the world. It’ll be like *On the Road*.”

I smiled. I knew, I knew that the moment we crossed that ocean, it would be like the bombs never dropped but everything would still be shrouded in sunbeams and musky soot and darkening air—it would be the perfect day. But even now, here we were, here in the burning dawn, and I couldn’t stop smiling.



Shadowing Form
Laura Castelein
Photography



Fashion Illustrations
Natalie Tse
Watercolor & Ink

Closing Comments

On Listening

Vasudeva the ferryman's secret to life is listening to the rush of the river. This, I have found, is the only way to read the hundreds of your poems and stories I've collected like wildflowers in my digital basket as submissions editor. I simply listen, let your words wash the pencil lead from the curve of my right hand after a long school day, let them rinse out the dirt, smoke, blanket fibers out of my hair in the bath, let them smooth over my jagged judgement until my eyes are soft as ancient sea glass.

Often the editorial team has found the lack of participation at weekly meetings to be frustrating, taken as a sign of general disinterest in the selected poetry. To stimulate the critiques, we encourage each other to ask questions and brainstorm discussion points beforehand, which do work. Here I have to apologize to my colleagues for keeping my own lips closed during our sessions, and thank them for teaching me that I, too, am as articulate and passionate as them, a wisdom of the self I would like to bequeath to Galaxy's younger writers: those ideas that ruminate in your stomach and palms during critiques, the ones that you wait until the right moment to share them, a right moment which may never come--they are all valid.

The ferryman and I know that articulation is just as valuable a science as listening; a speaker who never learns to listen risks becoming ignorant, and oppressive.

To the young listeners who will be in my place someday, listen to that river for me and learn to speak and write with the rushing waters' profound fluidity. Listen until there is no sound left to hear, and then listen for what is not being said, why no one is speaking. Listen because it is comfortable, educational, natural. But when you look down to the water and see for the first time the ferryman's raft beneath your knobby knees, say something. We will listen.

*Madison "Bloo" Van Edwards
Submissions Editor*

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