

MOSAIC

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

MOSAIC

Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

Thank you for supporting Mosaic Magazine's 45th edition. Since 1977, our magazine has represented the creative minds of The Ohio State University. The 2022-2023 publication brings together a diverse group of undergraduate artists and writers, representing a multitude of voices, passions, and stories. We would like to congratulate all of the students whose work has been accepted in this year's edition.

We would like to thank the members of our editorial board, art staff, layout staff, and literature staff for their enthusiasm, creativity, and consistent devotion to Mosaic. In addition, we would like to express our gratitude to the English Department and UniPrint. Without them, the success of Mosaic's events and the high quality of this publication would not have been possible. We would also like to thank our advisor, Katie Stanutz, for her support and guidance in all of Mosaic's endeavors this year.

Most importantly, this publication would not be possible without you our readers, writers, and artists. Mosaic's mission is to provide a platform for talented undergraduates to publish, share, and improve their work. Thank you for continuing to submit your work and support your fellow artists in the Ohio State undergraduate community by reading Mosaic.

We hope that you enjoy this year's edition of Mosaic and encourage you to get involved next year by joining a staff, submitting your work, or attending our events.

For more information about our organization, please email us at mosaic.magazine.osu@gmail.com or visit our website <http://org.osu.edu/mosaic-magazine/>

Sincerely,
Libby Blackshier and Jayasree Sunkireddy
The Editors-in-Chief
Mosaic Magazine 2022-2023

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A Simple Life

Working as a custodian at the small government and operated genetics lab “Dolly Genetics and Bleeding Edge Research,” in rural New York was the exact type of job that Rob needed to finally feel complete. He is a simple man, and the satisfaction that came with keeping the place spick and span was the highlight of Rob’s life, and even better than that, was he was autonomous in his work, had his own office, and got to listen to music.

After a couple months of working at the lab and mopping the floors after the staff leaves, Rob began to turn it into a game. With both earbuds in, he would work through the hallways and swing the handle to the groove of the music, and it was the best part of the shift. As he was going about this joyous routine tonight, he was interrupted by a tap on his shoulder.

It took Rob a second to realize what he had felt, but then he turned and took out his earbuds. “Sorry,” he said, “I thought I was the only one here.”

“Ah yeah, I was just finishing up some work in my office. I’m still pretty new so I’m not trying to get behind.” The man looked up and down the hallway. “Looks like whatever you’re listening to is helping you out”

“It is, I’ve got *Dark Side of the Moon* going now and that’s normally all I need to finish up the night’s work.” Rob looked at the rest of the floor he had left to mop and realized he was no longer in the mood to continue working, then turned back to the other worker and extended his hand and said, “I’m Rob, by the way.”

“Jeffrey.” The man said, shaking his hand. “And that’s a great album, I’m a huge fan of *Floyd*.”

“Me too, I have been since I was a kid. I’m a sucker for a good guitar solo.”

“Same, man. It’s what got me into playing the guitar. I’ve got quite a few of their songs down by memory.” He smiled, and stuffed his hands into his lab coat. “Well, I’m sorry to hold you up, it just looked like you were having some fun and I hadn’t introduced myself.”

“Oh, no problem! If you stay late again, come on by and we can jam out or something.”

“I’ll have to take you up on that, I’ll probably be here late pretty often. Part of the fun of the job.” Jeffrey turned and started down the hallway, then turned back and waved before he left the hallway.

Despite having worked at the building for a short while, this was the first positive experience Rob had had with a coworker. Most of the time the researchers had their noses too deep in their work to even notice the only one doing any manual labor, and if they happened to have their eyes up, they would walk past as if he were a ghost. This dramatic change left him with his stomach dancing in his belly and his face with a smile that he held onto for the rest of the night. It was another month before he saw Jeffrey again.

A code red is the name that the workers in the deep lab gave when they needed Rob to come clean up one of their messes. Rob was sitting in his office — what they called the cramped cleaning supply closet, with the walls lined with shelves of cleaning chemicals and assorted sanitary products, with one small alcove with a small desk with a lamp on it and a poster hanging directly above — and staring at the

poster intensely. The poster was a picture of a bulldog running away from a human with the words “Free Yourself” underneath. Rob didn’t hang the poster; it was a part of the office when he got there, and it felt wrong to him to replace it. When his pager lit up with a code red, his head dropped and he slowly started getting a trolley of cleaning supplies together, then checked the clock before pushing out the door and down the hallway.

The deep lab area was off limits to most of the staff due to the nature of the experiments inside, which were described as highly sensitive to outside contaminants. Despite this, Rob normally had access to it for cleaning once a month, and whenever someone inside made a mess that was more than they were capable of taking care of. When Rob swiped his card to get in, it let out a horrible, deep screech, and a bright red light shone from the card reader. Immediately, the lab door was opened, and Jeffrey’s head appeared off the side of the door.

“Hey it’s you again!” Jeffrey exclaimed, “Sorry about this, I really made a mess. Come on in.” And he pulled the door open enough to get the trolley through.

“No worries, it happens all the time, but I didn’t know you worked down here, that’s cool.” He said as he started to look through the room for the mess.

“Yeah, it’s kind of boring but ya know it’s fine.” He stood there awkwardly until he noticed Rob looking for the mess. He laughed, “Sorry, total brain fart, the coffee pot fell off the counter in the break area.” Then he turned and started leading the way down a short corridor off the right side of the room.

As Rob followed Jeffrey down the hallway, he desperately raked

through his brain to find something to say to continue his conversation, but couldn't come up with more than: "Come on butterfingers."

"Sorry, sorry, I was trying to hurry to put it back and it slid straight off. I can help clean it up if you want." He stood there with his hand rubbing the back of his neck.

"No you're fine, it's just gonna take a couple minutes to get all of this glass cleaned up. Won't be too bad." He grabbed the broom off the trolley and began sweeping the coffee covered glass into a pile. "What had you in a big rush?"

"Ohhh, you know. Top secret stuff." he retorted with a deeply sarcastic tone.

"Oh really, huh?" Rob was quick to note the sarcasm, and looked up and matched his grin. "Doesn't seem so important now if you're still here."

Jeffrey nodded and replied "Yeah well, I've got to make sure you're not going to miss a spot." He walked over to the counter and jumped up on it to make himself more comfortable. "Got any big plans for the weekend?"

"Nah nothing major. What about you?"

"Ehhh not really. I just want to get out of my apartment but haven't decided on what yet"

"Yeah I get that." He swept the last of the large chunks of glass into the dustpan, and proceeded to start preparing the mop. "I normally have the same goal, but end up staying inside reading the whole weekend to just repeat the process of the week."

"I definitely feel that," he said and looked down at his feet. He

was swinging them nervously as he said quickly “Have you ever actually tried the coffee down here?”

“Hm, no I don’t think I have. Is it better than upstairs?”

“Oh dude, it’ll kick you into a whole different WORLD of energy.” Jeffrey jumped off of the counter, and walked out the door of the room while Rob finished mopping and started to put everything back on the trolley. Right as he was finished, Jeffrey came back into the room with two mugs of coffee.

“Used the other machine, gotta have two in every office,” and Jeffrey began to take a sip while he passed the other to Rob, who took it and took a sip as well.

“Thanks for this. It’s gonna be a long rest of the shift, but I guess I should get going.”

“No problem, let me walk you out.”

As Jeffrey led the way down the hallway to the looming metal door Rob looked around the lab rooms, trying to see if he could piece together the type of work they were doing in there, and time seemed to slow down as his eyes shot around, looking over the microscopes, incubators, trays and trays of petri dishes, beakers, and so much other equipment he didn’t know the actual names of. He had absolutely no clue.

“So what is it you guys actually do around here?”

“Like I said, it’s top secret,” Jeffrey popped a grin. “Kidding, but you’ll find out soon enough, it’s not that important, though.” And he swung the cumbersome metal door open with plenty of room for Rob to push the cart through.

Rob started pushing the cart and he could feel the effects of the coffee he still had in hand. He only had a couple sips, but it wasn't the normal jitters he gets from drinking coffee.

“Well if you ever want to share, you know where to find me.” And as he begins pushing the cart down the hallway towards the main lab area, he hears the explosion of sound from the door closing.

As he began down the hallway, Rob's body broke free of gravity's tight hold on the rules of the universe, and he began to walk through the air, which he could tell was not right. He touched back on the ground, and could feel the entire building start to twist and turn, and the hallway began to stretch to be so long that he couldn't even see the end, but he could see that the hallway kept growing. As it grew, the hallway began to slowly rotate, and to keep himself standing, Rob had to abandon the cart. Slowly staggering forward, having to shift his weight every step, Rob ended up clambering onto the wall and standing up, as the entire room was spinning on an axis. Only after stumbling a couple steps on the wall and ending up having to jump over to the ceiling, did he notice that any of this behavior was strange, and he felt himself on the verge of losing his lunch.

Rob fell to his knees and covered his eyes with his arms and tried to focus his mind, but everything was spinning, and he was feeling his eyelids melt and start a river down his cheeks, and he felt the urge to sleep. He dropped his arms and saw two men in complete white contamination suits and surgical masks climbing up the walls onto the ceiling, where he was still sitting, and he had to try to fight them off. As they came closer he got up and tried to run away, and he fell from

the ceiling straight back down to the ground, where he laid watching the two white silhouettes drip off the ceiling like they melted off an ice cream cone and reform into massive milky white gargoyles on the ground, and they flew over and easily plucked Rob up in their massive talons when he finally passed out.

When Rob awoke he was alone in a large metallic room. He couldn't stay awake for long, and in the short bursts he was awake he heard loud grinding noises from a nearby room. As he was falling asleep again, he saw the door open, and though he couldn't keep his eyes open, he heard a set of footsteps approach, then felt a pinch on his arm, and he slid into sleep once again.

This time when Rob woke up he wasn't as tired, but he was in a different room, strapped down this time, and there were 2 lab workers mixing chemicals with their backs to him.

"Who... are you guys?" he murmured with all of his strength. They didn't even hear him.

After sitting still to recharge his strength, he let out a loud groan as he tried to pull himself free of his restraints without success. This did, however, create a loud enough disturbance to attract the attention of one of the people in the room. Though he was in a contamination suit and surgical mask, Rob could recognize that the eyes of the man who approached him were the same as those of his friend Jeffrey, but he couldn't articulate his confusion and pain other than slumping down into the chair even further.

As Jeffrey approached Rob stayed silent, and neither spoke as

Jeffrey pulled the restraints tight again, and then took a long look of what seemed to almost resemble sympathy as he called to his associate, “did we get all the samples we need?”

“Yes, and I just finished processing the last one.” She called back.

“Good.” Jeffrey looked deep at Rob. “Sorry to do this to you buddy, just a part of the job.” and as he turned back to the other scientist, Jeffrey let out a long sigh and said, “prep pod B-23, and dump this one.”

Rob slouched over one last time.

After a long first day at Dolly Labs, the new custodian sat at the desk in the small cleaning supply closet, and was lost in a deep trance staring at the words “Free Yourself” printed boldly on a poster of a bulldog in sprint. After ten minutes of being lost in the words, there was a knock at the door, and a silhouette of a man appeared in the doorway.

“Hi, you’re new here right?”

“Yeah! Today was my first day”

“Oh nice, glad to have you on the team,” and the man reached his hand out, “Nice to meet you, I’m Jeffrey.”

As he grabbed the outstretched hand, he replied “Nice to meet you Jeffrey, I’m Rob”

Andrew Schneider

Fragments of Time

Broken synapses began firing as a craving traveled through time. A fuzzy image of Guy's lips as he slowly took a drag, his blown dark eyes not catching any of the light as he looked back at Thomas and exhaled smoke into his face. His serious look gave no indication of anything that could have been going through his mind, which made Thomas's heart race even faster. Maybe he could excuse it all on the pounding music muffled behind them.

He couldn't remember any of the broader details, everything else incomprehensible save for Guy. He was always Thomas's center. Smoke curled between the two of them like hair being softly combed. Guy was being bold. Everything inside of Thomas's being screamed to be bolder.

Smoke seeped into the clothes and skin of a version of Thomas that was long-gone, a dark memento from his partner that used to cling to Thomas everywhere. A ghost from his past was drowned in Guy-Manuel like a baptism. Thomas nearly felt religious as he held onto the moment like a prayer, standing in front of his divine God as he graciously handed Thomas the cigarette, fingers softly grazing over each other. The intimacy of that skin on skin contact was euphoric and lit Thomas's stomach with more ecstasy than the nicotine could ever give him. He felt Guy's fingers linger for a moment too long, and then his mind left him for something abstract and unreachable.

Atlas Norris

saint fool

I call any night that I dream
a loss. It's the same
reason why I can't look
at my face in the mirror;
the same reason my name
makes me sick. I don't
like to listen to myself.
Keep the lights off. There's
red on the glass and
the light comes in
all bloody and blurred:
a rerun of a death
on three am television.
I won't find answers
in a cardboard church or
my own blasphemous reflection.
there's no saint in
the stained glass window
just me and the fool.

Benjamin Sidorenko

son of the moon

I was born with a bronze spoon in my mouth,
Grasping sunlight and dust in my palms
And with eyes, that closed shut

-

My parents couldn't afford to buy me a future
But instead, they bought me the moon
They couldn't afford to pay uncertainty
But they were able to compensate with laughter

-

I have nothing, and own no lands
But the moon is mine
I stare at it, and my eyes turn white towards its wanning glow
My kingdom isn't of the earth but
Resides within the warmth of my heart

Bright Hiawo

helplessly soft

sometimes i wish i was all teeth

some wild untamed animal speaking in snarls and snaps

sticky clotted blood spilling down the corners of my mouth

talons to puncture flesh like that of bruised fruit

body sturdy body wild body danger

instead i find i am some neurotic domesticated thing

my claws bleeding nailbeds gnawed from nerves

when i open my mouth to scream i am stiff-jawed stifled by stuffing in
my mouth, soft downing of

quilted skin

i stare empty eyed at the walls of my enclosure and do not wonder once
what it might feel like to

leave

instead begging desperately for someone to cut this collar off of me

before it chokes me to death

Cather B.

Author Name

frankenstein

humble human speaks its first words

humble human proud human? humble human keeps its voice down

humble human before humble creature. humble creature when humble human is heard and

humble human hated

humble creature takes the lashing lying down

takes it quietly, turns the other cheek for good measure

humble creature zips its skin off like a jacket, humble creature skin knows its skin is not its own

humble creature owned

humble creature wishes it had a skin that was its own

humble creature disfigured, body desecrated body drugged body creature bodied creature

humble creature confused and does not know what it wants

humble creature crying cannot cry creature crying creature

stop it, creature

humble creature cannot look in mirror

humble creature averts its eyes

humble creature wishes it could look but humble creatures are not looked at

humble creature knows its place. humble creature wishes its place was
somewhere else

but humble creature cannot go anywhere.

humble creature stays right where it is

humble creature stays right where it is

cather b.

scenes from the funerary rites

i lie there, some dead dog

warmth from a fresh kill seeping into the cold cotton covers beneath me

how long till the rigor mortis sets in?

your tongue falls limp in my mouth like incense ash

i swallow the burn, lick my fingers clean

hold my own hair back lockjaw lap it up

ears echo with the sound of dies irae

there is no need for casket

i clean myself cremated in hot water that pools at my feet

scatter my remains across crinkled condom wrappers and wrinkled intimates

fall to knees and cry my mary magdalene tears

cather b.

Bag of Barrettes

i love the way you did my hair
when we kidnapped a bag of barrettes
and wrangled each one into my
unruly, sand-blonde mane. what a sight
to behold: forty-two birds, flowers, and buttons
all tangled up. oh mom was mad
but so were we mad with glee,
giggles rising to the hands
covering our mouths in the dark,
shhh shut up or she'll hear us!

even now, a lingering snort will bubble up
as we ask each other..
do you remember the barrettes?

Ellie Erich

Midwest Nice

celebrate the morning with a weak cup of coffee.
dribble crumbs on the sidewalk from your half eaten bagel,

with half eaten thoughts swimming 'round your head.
smile at everyone you pass, even if you're mad,

because they'll be mad at you for not smiling back.
this isn't New York. it's the midwest baby

and oh baby imagine what would happen
if you didn't smile back.

smile! you're on camera, because despite our politeness
our streets are chock-full of crime.

chalk outlines litter the sidewalk alongside empty sharps
and shattered glass wears the fingerprints of death.

but your fingertips stay pressed on the mug
as you celebrate the morning with a weak cup of coffee.

Ellie Erich

Repressed

a quick forgiver soon forgetting
stains of nights past are cleansed
by the peroxide of a new day

lasting wounds are made from words i can't remember
it's why I sit silent in therapy
painting the walls of my mind's asylum a pale shade of green

memories are meant to be rebuilt

but like a child stacking jenga blocks
i laugh as they fall
punishment for rising to close to the surface

Ellie Erich

Shortwave

1234567890 / 975 / 975 / 975 / 975 / 975 / 123456789

I start my new job with the government today. The exact branch is pretty secret, even to me, but I know it's something military related. I don't see any actual combat, or anything like that. In fact, it's pretty much a desk job. They give me a microphone and every few days I get a sheet of paper with a bunch of numbers typed all over it. I read the numbers aloud into the mic all day, and that's pretty much it. Again, I have little idea who exactly it's for, but it's definitely something important. They're extremely strict about what I'm allowed to share about what I do outside of work; even just mentioning the number patterns I read could get me fired. But I don't mind; I'm making a decent living just reading numbers all day, which suits me fine.

123456789 / 39715 / 39715 / 39715 / 39715 / 39715 / 39715 / 123456789

I've noticed a lot of radio-related equipment, so I think this is something communication related. I'm not really sure what it is I'm communicating, but it's important enough to maintain my pay, so I can't really complain much. I've tried engaging in conversation with my superiors, but they rebuke me; it really is all business here. I know there are others, but we're not allowed to speak. I don't even know who they are.

Mike India Whiskey / Mike India Whiskey / Mike India Whiskey / Mike India Whiskey

They moved me to a different post. It means moving to another state, but they've made me so secretive about my job that I never really had much of a social life, or any ties, to where I was before. This place isn't much different, but I read words aloud instead of numbers. I recognize

this as the NATO phonetic alphabet. I'm starting to suspect that I'm part of some sort of spy communications network - that I've been giving codes all this time. It is curious that I have no idea what I'm saying, but I do so nonetheless.

Uniform Sierra Victor / Uniform Sierra Victor / Uniform Sierra Victor /
Uniform Sierra Victor

Things are taking a drastic turn. I work in the same area, but instead of the usual area in the radio room where I broadcast, I have been moved to a concrete bunker. It's more of a prison cell. I do the same work, but I can no longer leave. They don't even meet me in person anymore; I get instructions on a paper slid under my door, but nothing more. I tried disobeying to get more information, but they retaliated by depriving me of the rations I get. What could be happening above ground? Nevertheless, I continue my broadcasts.

... --- ... / ... --- ... / ... --- ... / ... --- ... / ... --- ... / ... --- ... / ... --- ... / ... --- ...

My instructions have stopped. My rations have stopped. I'm slowly withering away in this tomb. I don't know if my equipment still works, but I'm broadcasting the only signal I remember. Most ambient noise in the bunker has stopped. I can no longer tell if others remain or if I'm starting to hallucinate from my deprivation of food and water. Still, I have nothing else to cling to but the hope that somebody will hear me.

Save our souls, save our souls, save our

Jack Brunswick

a set of timelines showing how an individual is affected by the absence of one or more of their features

in an alternate universe
i'm the star of my own bildungsroman:
my coming to terms.

someone cares enough
to stroke their thumb across my cheek
and tell me they're proud of me
speaking love letters laced
with ginger ale, basil, and strange nostalgia
to remind me i'm constantly comforted
and exactly where i need to be.

i never leave the blinds closed
i walk streets i'm sure of
never afraid of nothing new
never held down by a routine
living unapologetically
as a person people wish to be.

in an alternate universe
i don't want what i can't have
because i have what i need:
the quiet kid, sunny days, and enough
songs to take me to my grave
all in one place
like a successful spring cleaning
and i have the space
to raise
my hands to the god i believe to be in the sky
and celebrate the fact that i've made it.

in this universe
i watch the rain against my window
the red sky makes me moody.
i stare at the ceiling
and reversion hits like nausea
this doesn't feel like me.

life is but a dream i wish
i could escape, so i go outside
and start to run
like my desperation depends on it
i taste the heat of lightning on my aching feet
until i can be
anywhere
but this space i'm forced to tolerate.

i gnaw on the bones i pick
like they're salty samoas on a summer day
when the caramel sticks to my teeth
i try to smile
but feel the eyes of a million imaginary enemies
staring at me.

in this universe
i don't have a moment to catch my
breath, so i
suffocate
under answers i know i don't want.
smoky incense stains my hair and
i swear this has to be hell
because there's no way on earth anyone
could age
this way, with a mind
like mine.

Julia Lombardo

he told me to write about bees

i told him i needed something more deep.

bee's knees

what does it take to please?

what will it take

to make you fall in love with me?

the birds and the bees

how pure is too pure to be?

devoid of touch

devoid of pleasure.

is it bad to be such a way

at my up-and-coming age?

honey-mouthed

honeysuckle dripping from my lips,

oh how i wish

i could feel the completeness of a kiss.

busy as a bee

how can i have time to be free?

how can i have time to search for another soul

when i'm slowly losing touch with my own?

float like a butterfly

sting like a bee.

how sharp can my sting be

when my heart is high up on my sleeve?
under my soft skin
is years of repressed anger,
where i build up reasons why
no one would ever dare choose to be mine.
beeline
growing up makes me want to run and hide.

Julia Lombardo

saguaro

A cactus spends its days proudly in sand, but I wonder if it wishes to see snow like mistletoe and holly, who ring in the joy of a holiday, while a cactus' tactic is to scare away, though I doubt it's intentional because every living thing deserves to be hugged, whether by humans, water, or the sun, yet the cactus can survive with none, and I have to imagine it's hard to know a life without touch, to never be picked because of your pricks, by virtue of those with a certain phobia, but at least a cactus won't provoke an allergy, like a rose on the nose at the peak of spring perched in a vase and arranged in some splendid bouquet, the existence of bouquets implying that a cactus must feel quite alone, though there is many like it, it's not made to be shared, like daisies and peonies on a wedding day, or bluegrass under a walking breeze, granted a cactus grows tall rather than long and can physically not be grazed upon, unlike a forget-me-not that begs to be remembered, but a cactus is remembered in a different way: as an immovable obstruction and the lone backdrop to a deserted setting sun, rest assured you'll never find a cactus where you find a field of chrysanthemums.

Julia Lombardo

The Sirens of St. Ives

AS I WAS GOING to St. Ives, I met a man with seven eyes. He lay face down on the side of the winding dirt road, a barely-moving lump of tattered frocks. I rushed to his side and helped him sit. I fed his hunger, I quenched his thirst, and when he shivered from the slight bite of the evening wind, I gave him the coat off my back. He gave a tremendous wet cough and opened his eyes—paler than fresh snow, paler than the sun, not even shadowed where they sunk into the deep recesses of his skull.

"Thank you kindly, son," he smiled, producing a satin sack from his trousers.

"Oh no," I said. "Really, it's no trouble, you needn't pay me."

But he only laughed and pushed the sack into my hands. His bones creaked and cracked as he rose to his feet. Feeling the sack's contents shift around, it certainly wasn't gold; it felt more like a sack of marbles or polished stones, heavy and hard. But when I looked into the bag, it looked back at me.

Seven eyes lay in that satin sack, one blue as the midday sky, one a swirling storm of gray, one night-black, one pearl-white, one brown flecked with gold like sun-pierced shadows, and lastly, two matching eyes, brown irises obscured by a milky white film.

I cinched the sack shut, the contents of my stomach churning fitfully. I looked around for the old man, but he had disappeared without so much as a goodbye.

And so, holding that satin sack of seven eyes, I alone went to St. Ives.

To St. Ives I've never been, a sleepy seaside village nestled in the cradle of a valley. Rolling green to the north, west, south, roiling blue to the east. The road that led me here cut through the heart of town and continued on, as if St. Ives were an afterthought in the road's long journey, a town stumbled upon by luck before nightfall.

As luck would have it, before night fell I stumbled into a tavern on

the south side. Weary legs collapsed into a corner booth, and I called for a pint. As I waited, I pulled the blue eye out of the sack, pinched it between my fingers, half expecting it to blink.

"Oh my." A barmaid, a pretty young thing with apple-blossom cheeks, placed a brimming pint glass before me, condensation sliding down the sides. The eye caught her eye. "Do you know what you got there, traveller?" she asked, in that same foreign lilt that twisted the old man's tongue, though hers soared up and down like a hillside song. "Not a clue."

She glanced around the room. This late on a workday, the only other patrons were a pair of rough, middle-aged men at the bar. She leaned forward until her eyes leveled with mine, a deep brown alluring as a hearth. "That eye belongs to a siren," she said, voice low. Her breath smelled like sweet ale and sea-salted air, mingling together in an intoxicating concoction. "You wouldn't happen to have more, would you?"

I nodded.

"Well, that explains it. The sirens've been quiet lately. You oughta return those to their rightful place."

"Isn't that a good thing?"

"Anyone here who coulda been lured died ages ago. Nowadays they keep out the pirates and the plunderers and the like."

"And you'd have me take my chances with these creatures?"

"So long as you're a good man, traveller," she said, nudging the sack towards me. "No harm will come to you."

THERE STOOD A MANSION on a hill outside town, abandoned by man lifetimes ago, right where the barmaid said it would be – supposedly, that blue eye belonged to the siren who lived in this place. Creeping vines rooted in the cracks of the crumbling facade held the building together, covered the windows, barred the doors. It was almost sad, this palace

turned into a skeleton for invading weeds, nothing but a ghost in the moonlight. A salty breeze whistled through a third-story window. I hardly trusted the ivy and mortar to hold beneath my weight, but nevertheless, I climbed.

The glass of the window had been smashed, and the shrapnel lacerated my palms and sheared my trousers where I crawled through. My landing kicked up a thick cloud of dust, salt and rot piercing my nose and irritating my lungs.

That was when I heard the cry: a weeping wailing that shook the foundations of the old home, threatening to turn it to rubble. The door at the end of the room had swollen into its frame, but with a few strong yanks, the door splintered free. The cries grew louder. I followed the sound down the hall, floorboards groaning beneath my boots, to slightly ajar double doors, once white now stained by dripping streaks of yellow.

“Hello?” I called out. Instantly, the weeping stopped. I continued, “You’re the siren that lives in this house, correct? I have something for you.”

As I pushed one of the doors open, a shriek ripped through the air.

“Don’t come in!” a voice sobbed, melodic despite its rawness and raggedness. “I’m ugly! Hideous! If anyone were to see me like this, I’d surely die of embarrassment!” I chanced a peek through the crack in the doors, and huddled in the corner lay a pair of snow-white avian wings curled over one another.

“I’m certain you’re beautiful. Perhaps you can’t see yourself right with the one eye.”

Another ear-piercing shriek. “Woeful!” she wailed. “News of my disfigurement has spread! Oh, how pitiful! I ought to drown myself in the ocean with the rest of them!” “Now hold on,” I said. “Hold on. I was told to return something to you.” I pulled the blue eye from my pocket,

the one that caught the barmaid's eye, and held it through the cracked door. A rush of wind blinded me, and the eye was snatched from my grasp. After a few moments, the doors swung open, and I was greeted with an armful of a beautiful blonde maiden with two wings sprouting from her back.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" she cried, blinking up at me with those eyes as blue as a sun-filled sky. I savored the touch, drank in her radiant visage until I swayed where I stood. "You've saved me, oh, my hero! How can I ever repay you?"

I smiled at her, hoping against hope it was charming. "No need for any of that. I'm happy you've been restored to your rightful splendor."

"Oh, you!" she blushed. "I have just the thing."

"Truly, you mustn't—" She silenced me with her lips against mine. Warmth burst from the contact, blood pounding through my veins faster with each pulse of my heart. Too soon she withdrew, covering her flushed giggle with long, dainty fingers.

"Flash a smile and no mortal will be able to resist you," she said. "Thank you, oh, thank you, kind traveller." She ran to a window, spread her wings, and took flight, filling the night sky with a songbird's tittering tune.

I STUMBLED DOWN the tavern's staircase around midday, bleary-eyed and bones aching. That siren's claims came true, if the woman in my bedchambers was any testament. The barmaid scrubbed at the bar with an old rag, her long black hair spilling over her shoulders. I took a seat, and without looking up she asked, "Long night?"

"But a most fruitful one." I gave her a smile. She rolled her eyes, but there was no mistaking that faint dusting of pink blossoming across her fair cheeks.

"Focus up, now. What's the next eye you got?"

I opened the satin sack, and out came an eye that took me to the shores of St. Ives. Cool water rushed over my bare feet as I walked along the coast, southbound in accordance with the barmaid's directions. The rush and roar of the waves swelled and sprayed, and thick fog hung over the ocean, an endless sky of salt and gray. The hard-as-slate sand gave way to loose stone shores, water crashing against rocks crashing against cliffs. Frothing gray-blue pulses forced me to my hands and knees. In the crook between the soaring cliff and rubble shore lay a gaping black hole that echoed the calling wind. I crawled into its pitch-black maw, pebbles and saltwater shifting beneath my boots.

"Who goes there?" shouted a voice from deep within. "Who disturbs my slumber?" "I am but a humble traveller, here to return the eye you've lost." I fumbled with my bag before producing that storm-gray, shore-bound eye. A rustling of wind and a shadow falling over me, and the eye was taken. I turned, and in the mouth of the cave stood a maiden—or rather, a maiden's face, imposed upon a sparrow's body the size of a dog, outlined by gloom. Two gray eyes pierced mine. "You've restored me. You are restoring my sisters as well?" I nodded.

"Then take my song. They shall flock to you as birds to the branches."

Her mouth opened wide, releasing a sound halfway between song and shriek. I breathed it in, deeper and deeper and deeper still, until it made a nest inside my lungs.

I MADE THE CALL as soon as I returned, yet the town beyond my bedroom window remained still and silent. By the time night fell, I all but convinced myself the sirens' gifts were works of trickery. That woman from the previous night was not charmed by my gifted smile, but rather I by hers. I shut the window against the chill of the shores and settled into bed, cursing those eyes that watched me like a hunter his game.

From restless, dreamless sleep I was awakened by a steady tap, tap, tap upon my window. A bird, I reasoned, searching for a warm nest. I rolled over and sure enough, the head of a sparrow tapped its beak methodically.

Then, a human hand slapped against the glass. I leapt out of bed. The bird tilted its head to the side—a head as large as a person's—to expose a hollow hole in the side of its face, the skin around it wrinkled and puckered. My heart hammered as fast as the tap, tap, tapping of its beak, the pound, pound, pounding of its fist, until I remembered the siren's call. I scrambled for that satin sack, sifting through eyes until I found the beady and black match to the one staring at me.

I opened the window and held the eye out to her, this siren—up close, I could see its avian head affixed to a woman's body. She took the eye and pressed it into her emptied socket with a sickening squelch.

I swallowed thickly. "Have you a gift for me as well?"

"Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps I ought to," she squawked. "Fly, pretty bird, fly." She plucked a feather from her neck and curled it into my fingers, soft and downy like fine pillow stuffing, before disappearing into the night.

"WHAT SORT OF gift will I get for this one, do you think?" I asked the barmaid, pinching the pearlesque eyes between my fingers. It was surprisingly soft despite its stonelike appearance; the give of flesh didn't turn my stomach so much anymore. I shot her a gifted smile.

"Haven't you had enough of these gifts?" she chastised, arms crossed over her admittedly unimpressive bosom.

"It's always nice to get a little appreciation for a good deed."

"Quit your dawdling, you'll wanna make the cliffs before sundown."

I grinned and left the tavern, running fast to the beach. At the base of the northern cliffs, I produced that gifted feather and willed myself

into the skies. Up and up and up I soared, strong wind sending thrills through my chest, until I came upon a cave halfway up the rock face. I landed inside and tucked the feather into my pocket. Unlike the other siren's cave, this one shone with precious jewels embedded throughout the walls. Everywhere I looked, diamond and crystal and opal glimmered in the last wisps of golden sun. The pearlesque eye in my hand could slot easily into any indentation of these stone walls.

Movement caught my eye. In the far recesses of the cave, a crystalline woman rose from a nook in the wall. She strode towards me, effortlessly graceful. The left half of her face was cracked and shattered around the hollow indent beneath her brow. She said to me, "You've come a long way on borrowed wings."

"To restore you to your rightful beauty, fair maiden," I reply, offering the eye. She accepted it, and it slotted perfectly into her socket. All became silent but for the faint rushing roar of the waves far below us.

"Well?" I asked. "You've a gift for me, correct?"

She blinked at me.

"You said it yourself," I pointed out. "I've come an awful long way."

Still nothing.

"Surely you can part with one or two of these jewels?"

The ground rumbled beneath me. Pebbles fell from the cave's ceiling, quickly followed by larger and larger stones until whole stalactites crashed around me. I stumbled backwards and dove from the cave mouth, catching myself mid-fall with feathers and wind.

THE OCEAN ROCKED my rowboat up and down, side to side, but I pressed on, cutting through the waves with the force of my oars, orienting myself with the compass in my lap. Northeast, the barmaid said, was where I'd find the siren with the golden-brown eye. Sure enough,

just as the sun began to set, I spied the coast of an island, its shores cast in a firestorm of orange and scarlet.

I beached the rowboat and made my call. From the thick forest of trees, a womanly figure emerged, clad in sheer white silk that fluttered around her body, outlining her wide hips and soft stomach and ample bosom. She drew near, revealing a horrible bird's beak and blackened eye cavity, a disfigurement of her otherwise pretty face. If the barmaid had the siren's body, or the siren had the barmaid's face, I would have the perfect woman.

"My sisters told me you were coming," the siren said, voice like a low, sultry song. I smiled at her and held up the eye, but before she could take it, I backed out of her reach. "Not so fast," I tutted. "What is your eye worth to you?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Your island was quite out of my way. All that rowing." I gave the eye a squeeze between my fingers, and the one still affixed in her head went wide. "I'd hate for my efforts to be in vain."

"Who do you think you are?" she snarled, but didn't dare step closer. I did, tightly gripping her wrist so she wouldn't flee.

"I'm but a mere traveller," I told her, "who'd like some compensation for his good deeds." I left the island carrying more than my weight in gold.

THE BARMAID RESISTED my gifted smile, the next night when I sought her for my bed despite her bodily shortcomings. I could have any other woman in town with a simple grin, yet she eluded my charm. A nuisance to be sure, but it was only a matter of time; perhaps the restoration of the final siren would form her gratitude into something tangible.

"Where's the last one?" I asked her, the sack in my hands lighter but no less watchful. Her delicate brows furrowed. "Whad'ya mean? There are no more sirens in St. Ives." "That can't be true. I've yet two more eyes with me. From the look of them, I'd say they belong to just one. Poor soul can't see a thing."

"You..." she started. "You've two eyes left?"

I nodded.

The barmaid bellowed a fearsome cry, and her face twisted into a nightmarish visage. Eyes black, sunken into shadows of gray skin; a wicked grin split her face in two, exposing rows upon rows of needlepoint teeth; hair like a mass of cobras, writhing and biting and snapping.

I stumbled backwards, out of my seat, scrambled for the door. She laughed a songbird laugh. "Where d'ya think you're going, traveller?"

She took me in an iron grip and burst from the tavern, soared high above that peaceful village undisturbed by my pleas for help. Soon we came upon a graveyard, where sirens danced upon the mounds of buried bones and laughed with neither mercy nor mirth—the blonde maiden with white-feather wings and the woman-headed bird and the bird-headed woman and the crystalline statue and the siren with the beautiful body and hideous face. They sang and shrieked as the barmaid—the siren—dropped me in a heap at the base of freshly turned earth.

"Dig, traveller, dig!" they sang, and compulsion overtook my body. I buried my hands in the dirt and dug, dug, dug down deep. Mud embedded itself beneath my nails, my fingers wept blood, and still I dug until I hit wood. The sirens shrieked, enraptured in their excitement, "The eyes, traveller, the eyes!" I hoisted the lid of the coffin and bore witness to a most gruesome sight: a pretty young maiden with hollow cheeks and hollowed eyes. The smell of iron and dirt and rot overtook me, and I heaved and heaved until I couldn't anymore. With shaking

hands, I produced the final two eyes.

Silence stilled the dark night. A shiver rattled me down to my bones. The crystalline woman whispered, “What have you done to her eyes?” I stared up at her, at those six sirens above me, faces contorted with disbelief, with grief. “She used to have such beautiful eyes,” said the blonde one. “Like the year’s first snow,” added the woman-headed bird. “Those eyes are nothing!” spat the snake-haired siren.

Sure enough, the eyes I held were not snow-white but dark brown, filmed over with milky cataracts.

“Liar! Thief! Killer!” cried the sirens, wind kicking upturned earth around them. My own eyes stung, my hands stung, everything stung as they shrieked their vitriol, “An eye for an eye! A lie for a lie! An eye for a lie!”

They descended upon me; I heard the tearing of flesh before I felt it. Sixes and sixes and sixes of claws pierced my skin, dug beyond bone. I let out a mangled scream, and the world plummeted into nothing but darkness and a symphony of seven soaring songs.

Lauren Hartman

linear dreaming

I had a dream I was
falling
but it felt like flight,
and for all I dream
of lifting off the ground
I never went nearly as high as the sky or space
perhaps the fantasy immersion breaks
when you introduce stars,
not as pinpricks of light,
but as a giant gas ball of chemical reactions
and maybe that ties to god,
or God with a capital “G,”
who does not have a place in space
because there is no altar of heaven in a vacuum.
and I think reaching for stars maintains the dream but touching it
breaks it
and for all the running I do under the canopy of night,
it is my backdrop for adventure
not a tangible thing I want to look in the face,
like an illusion to hold:
like the sun rising in the east
and setting in the west

(the sun does not rise,
we only orbit around it),
like blood being blue
(it's red in the body,
and red out),
like believing loneliness
must be a companion to
artistry
(what kind of window is only
isolating when others can
look in?)
and in the dream, the one
where I was falling,
the wind caught me like a bird,
then night lied down over
the city lights,
and were those not stars
flipped over the axis?

Lena Zhang

A Clock on the Face of Hell

There is a clock on the face of hell
the same way there is a billboard with a
gate on heaven's back. Strings stretched taut
strain between the roots of above
and hands of below, plucking out the songs
of princes and poets and prophets and
preachers, until, one by one, they *snap*.

There is eternity in the fields of hell the same
way infinity is contained in heaven's eye. Both are
black, though; blacker even than the forgotten
scraps of coal that litter the bottom
of a blacksmith's forge. Black in the way that night
chases the day out of being.

They say that hell is fire. That hell is torment
and anguish and the blazing brilliance of a
land beyond all things. But they are wrong. We
all fall away, stripped

to bare bones

and ghostly pale, and we swim
in the River Lethe. The damned, after all, need
no help. They simply sink deeper into the
quagmire and await the end of time. The curtain
on the face of the world is ripped away, and

Hell is nothing.

Lindsay Rogers

I Am Not Myself

I am my mother's relentless
spirit and my father's
boundless determination.

I am my brother's
all-encompassing love
and my cousin's resilient soul.

I am my best friend's unshakable
loyalty and my grandmother's
quiet bravery.

I am the unopened lily bud
and the whispering wind
weaving through willow branches.

I am the prancing heron and
the otter's arching path
through rippling water.

I am a dog-eared book
resting on a creaky coffee table,

awaiting a new reader.

I am a new graphite pencil,
so perfectly sharpened that you
cannot bear to touch it.

I am a patchwork quilt, woven into
being and ripped apart and
made anew in an infinite loop.

Around and
around
and around I go.

I am many things, but I am not myself.

Lindsay Rogers

On Becoming a Queen

i have always reached
for where i am most comfortable

birthed into the world
through steel and string and all
cold things

a carven thrush in flight,
Eris sown within my veins

that first breath,
rasping knives of agony;
grieving gashes already
an intimately familiar sting

no one yet knew
the safe harbor my body provided
for the imperial lion rapping on an iron
door, patiently preparing to pounce

a day's respite was all
i was granted before

the mighty king leapt, the breath
stolen from my lungs
in a single instant

but i was born a warrior,
wreathed in armor of whirling
wind and wielding weapons
of woven chain,
helm and hauberk at my call

with aching crimson paws the beast slunk
back to his throne
to claw metal out of his hide
and spit his honor on the floor

i greeted my parents silently,
no words on my lips save sisters three:
i have lived

Lindsay Rogers

billy joel

new york city skyline
classical piano in the bar
all those bright lights on broadway
strong metallic beats of allentown
big shot, leather jacket, big man
horns that sound like new orleans
young man stocking store shelves
at night for the money,
he needs for his dreams
cold fingers of manic depression
creeping on music halls
through eyes of some
twenty-something hicksville turned
oyster bay
new york from la
how long does the climb last
with the weight of family pride
talk with Mister Cacciatore
Salvatore

Giovanni

or that jewish man at the deli on
sullivan even the fishermen at the

vineyard
that's the life that is
new york
i walk the roads to make my money
i play that circuit to serenade
those aching voices
those hungry thousands
all in a million miles.

Luke Milligan

chicago, mid-july

i never understood how she stood alone
with just those ancient lakes for comfort

she's so pretty when she sleeps
no sun, no blinding heat
but muted tones of something more

maybe in the mist it's too easy
getting lost maybe it's too good to
pretend for a day
homesick for the things I already had
and wanting all I'd ever lost

i know if I wanted home there I could find
it the mystery and depth pulling nearly too
deep each time washed ashore finding
something new it all reminds me of my
curse
what I spent my whole life finding is what I push away

Sometimes I lie and say I'm okay
Crossroads at mid-July and my memories

take me walk away and leave all this behind

take it back to the roads I know

if things are meant to be, they will,

they say my heart still wants to know

her

even if I did I don't know that I could

i don't understand how she stands alone

just those ancient lakes for comfort

maybe part of her doesn't want to be found

Luke Milligan

Columbus 2020

there are times that I think upon the
past of the lights on broadway,
smiling faces would it all end? a
question never asked. joy seemed
endless in all of the places

places where voices rang out, loud and
clear times when the music drowned out
all the noise stories were told in the words
of Shakespeare the world united, the
simplest of joys

I remember theaters full, spirits light
excitement ripe as all the lights went
down the laughter, the tears, all joy
and no plight the people enjoyed a
night on the town

now theaters sit silent, no shows or
plays will silence stay for the rest of
my days?

Luke Milligan

Words From the Irish Painter

I think of myself as a portrait artist, but I hate the smell of all those paints. I am always a painter; never one with a brush and colors, never one with an artistic eye, and never one able to draw a straight line. My art captures so many tender moments in sunsets and faces and carries the mark of every place that I've been.

My words are like photographs, and my photographs are like novels. Each as sprawling as the other, each entwined in the last one's art. I was never taught, but the world called me where my words needed to be. All those feelings and all those sunsets demand an ounce of preservation. When both leave me, one is always there to pull me out. Where words fail, a shutter can capture those moments. What a picture can't see, the word goes beyond the flesh.

So I am a painter and an artist if we're honest about the art. I choose the colors and the placement of the shadows that are taken to be preserved. I create the meaning between loose lines of words and evoke whatever feeling that I choose. In my own domain, I become like God, and in my small way, I paint my portraits.

Luke Milligan

The Pen

The pen sat unattended and silent as the young woman paced on the blood-stained carpet. It hadn't necessarily been an accident, though it hadn't necessarily been on purpose. The motivation and the act itself remained a complex mix of intuition and desperation. It was desperation to leave the dark mahogany walls filled with books passed down from a lawyer to his son, who was destined from youth to follow in the footsteps of the patriarch before him.

Every morning, the son came down the carpeted stairs, sat down in a large, leather desk chair, and picked up the pen, but that did not happen today.

The sun strained through the crack between the curtains, illuminating a second woman sitting in the corner, sure of herself with hair shorter and darker than her father's, and lips as red as the blood soaked into the carpet with a cigarette hanging indifferently between them. She knew she needed to leave quickly to get to her convertible, parked through the trees and on the other side of the local diner. She brought herself to get up, kiss the tears off her lover's cheeks, and left, for she knew the consequences would be dire if she did not follow their plan exactly.

The young woman was left alone. She looked around at the matching spines of books that only benefited those with power. She wanted to burn them, but she quickly reminded herself that instinct was only her wanting to spread the fiery rage that had begun to burn her from the inside during the past year, lit by the son that she had married. She had dreamt of apple pies and bassinets and green grass and believed he was the easiest option, but she had made a mistake. He was not easy. And now she found herself in their house, too impersonal to be home, alone, staring at his stagnant pen.

Her eyes darted over to the great, looming grandfather clock, noting how much time she had left. She folded her hands over themselves a few times, taking in exactly what she needed to say and preparing how fine the strokes of her brush should be on the blank canvas of her upcoming call. She needed to sound distant, but not too far, for her husband was dead, and she was in quite a state of distress. She glanced at the clock again - *almost time*.

She had made sure her hands were clean, and the weapon was long gone. Her eyes went back to the clock. Thoughts ran through her mind of the woman who had left moments prior, who was now driving back to a home where she would stay under the guise of visiting a dear friend after the brutal and traumatizing murder of her husband. She allowed herself one more thought of those freckles and short, dark hair, and then she made herself look.

Her eyes bored into his body for the first time since her knife had sunk into his flesh, his blank, thoughtless eyes looking into her own. For that brief moment of her looking down at the same crystal blue eyes that stared at her from every picture in the house, she allowed herself to give in to the facade that she had presented for so long, one that she had wanted for reality. Fragments of hope that she had clung onto flooded her memory, images of a love that was pure and untainted, but not perfect - a mint breeze on a summer day, and a fire and a cup of tea after being in the cold. She thought of a baby that reached out to grab a daisy, unfamiliar and beaming, with their tiny hand.

But that was wrong.

She knew it was wrong, but her husband's colleagues did not. Her husband's temper had made sure that the images remained in her head,

naïve and still, but the couple had worked to make sure no one could see past their smiling faces and three-course meals. She had been horrified that she had killed a man, especially a man that she had pinned years of sweet hopes onto, but he had been vile. If she hadn't done it quickly in the early, drunk hours of the morning, someone else, someone more powerful in the legal world, might have. And, looking at the clock once more, she knew it was time to let the reality of what she had done flow through her mind

before the finale of her performance, remembering his face distorted in pain before his last breath. She screamed in horror. Whether it was for him or for herself and the memory of blood dripping down the slopes of her fingers, she would never know.

She looked down at her clean, pink gown and her soft hands once more and rushed to the desk, tears beginning to rush down her face. She thought of the woman who waited for her as she picked up the phone to call the police, hands shaking while looking down at his pen sitting on the desk.

Maddie Green

Static City

Two girls run eagerly down the basement stairs and into the playroom. One is smaller than the other, but what she lacks in height she makes up for in excitement. The older of the two seems to have more fun watching her sister than anything else, but participates nonetheless. Wasting no time at all, they pull the toy bins off the shelf and get to work.

To the untrained eye, the basement has become a cluttered mess. To the two girls, it is a beautifully constructed city. The cushions from the worn down couch make strong walls, while the folded dresses they grew out of last summer are the perfect beds. Everything is accounted for, coming to life beautifully under the supervision of the sisters. The only thing left to do is introduce the residents to their new home.

Both girls run madly around the basement, searching for the doll that corresponds to the home they designated for it. Once they're all in place, the girls take a step back, admiring the creation of yet another architectural masterpiece.

Now comes the problem.

Really? Again?

The older sister has lost interest. She usually does around this point, seeing nothing else left to do. The younger one is pleading with her, begging to play in the city they created.

The older one shakes her head. Says she doesn't want to mess it up. She likes things this way, you see.

Stagnant. Predictable.

Never moving, never changing.

She makes some excuse and heads upstairs, fully knowing that her little sister will follow.

And that's it.

They pass many days this way. Designing a game that will never be played. A city that will never be lived in. The days stretch as long as they can, as if they're aware there is unfinished business to attend to. Surely the residents of the city must leave their homes. Surely they have lives to lead. But they don't. They sit patiently in their rooms, resigned to the space that has been designated for them. And years go by.

I'm in college now.

My dorm room is one of hundreds I can see around me.

As a former architect, I have to admire the craftsmanship.

For months I've been here, trying to create something worthwhile.

Trying to write something worthwhile.

Trying to write *something*.

Begging myself to get an idea on paper before it tires of me and leaves.

Before I'm alone again in my room.

My room designated just for me.

The gears in my brain have frozen over - so much so that it's hard to believe they ever turned.

They're immobile.

Trapped in our static city.

Like me.

Like the dolls.

The dolls whose ghosts still mock me.

You're funny, They say.

If we never got to move, then why should you?

Maggie Lardie

Our Celestial, Ever-Enduring Companion

On clear nights, my recluse of a father smokes cigarettes in the driveway, using professional camera equipment to take pictures of the Moon. He calls it astrophotography, and when he practices I sit in a folding chair by his side.

As a kid, I thought the dozens of gray dots covering her face were freckles, like the ones covering my mom's arms. My big brother's eyes would widen as her glow bathed the car on humid summer nights. He'd climb over seats to see where in the sky she had drifted.

In third grade, my classmate went on a cruise. Later, he shared a blurry photograph of her white light dancing across black ocean waters. When my anxious young self asked my classmate if he was afraid of getting lost at sea, he bravely proclaimed he had no fear at all. The captain informed him that the Moon had been helping sailors find their way home since before any of us were born.

At sixteen, I would take the long way home after work, far from civilization or streetlights. I'd go down thickly wooded roads and out into open fields where she shone as a burst of light, stars flashing by like the supporting cast to Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, the Silver Bombshell of the nighttime sky.

Now, on those nights when I'm visiting home, Dad will list the names of each crater, and ask if I remember when I called them freckles. I will tell him I'll never forget.

Marley Wilkinson

be wary

the caged bird sighs, the caged bird sings
as it looks out the window,
feathercut glass trimmed neatly,
to be just enough to imprison.

it had the chance once, to escape
but then the owner wept, the owner
told it that it was needed, that it was loved
and the bird, ears faster than wings,
listened.

and as it turned to look back, the
owner presented it with a studded collar;
one lined with rabbit fur and morganite gemstones
and the owner put this collar where it would
catch around the bird's neck as it turned to leave.

so now the bird sings,
wearing its worn collar, gems slowly
starting to fall. there is only
so much grief that can become love,
only so much love that can withstand grief,

and only so much care that can bear
imprisonment.

Gwendolyn Tankovich

Brave

Darkness. Like Lila had never felt, nor seen. And, yes, this was a darkness you could feel. It coiled around her like a rope, choking her. It was a darkness that dampened the sounds. It made her numb.

And you'd think that would be the worst of it. But no, it was cold. And Lila had always hated the cold. In her old age, she found that she could never be warm. She envied those young people who could wear small, tight, form-fitting clothing and still sweat in the sun.

Oh, how Lila missed the sun.

It had greeted her - kissed her on the cheek - every day for years. Even when it rained, she felt its rays wrap around her. What happened? Lila tried to remember, straining in the darkness. It had been so long since she'd seen the sun, it was hard to remember how it felt. She longed for warmth. For love. For family.

That's right! That's what she'd set out to find: her family. Her kids. She had an important message to tell them, but now...now she couldn't quite remember what it was and why it was so important. Lila damned her old brain for forgetting.

It was around that time that Lila heard voices, muffled by the darkness, above her. And, she realized, with a chuckle to herself, that she was lying on her back. She'd been in the darkness so long that she'd lost track of which way was up and which way was down. The words, smothered though they were, motivated her old, arthritic hands to claw through the darkness. And, after an eternity of digging, she stretched her arm through to the cold air, cracking her fingers in triumph.

It wasn't long before she had pulled the rest of her out of the wretched darkness and into the moonlight. Lila didn't see anybody. They must have already left. No matter, she was too tired to entertain

any company anyway. Instead, she rested against a slab of stone, looking up at the stars.

When she felt ready enough to stand, Lila used the slab to help her to her feet. Normally Melanie would have helped her to her walker or her cane, but both were nowhere to be seen. However, though she was unsteady on her feet, with her arms out in front of her in case she fell, Lila was brave. Or foolish. But she chose to believe she was brave. Jonathan would have said so. He was her youngest grandson. Turning six next year. *Brave* was his favorite word.

She felt that yearning again, that drive to find her family. Where had they gone? Lila cursed her wilting brain and began stumbling through the lawn of a park of some sort. Lila couldn't remember the name, or why there were so many stone slabs. But, she had a message to deliver - though she still couldn't remember what it was - and Lila Heatherwood did not get distracted.

She passed a chapel and stood now in the walk zone of her little town on the precipice of nowhere. She leaned on a lamppost to take it all in. She'd been here yesterday, and yet, things seemed different. Lila couldn't quite put her finger on it, but the payphone where she'd used to call her parents was gone, and so was Natalie's Cafe where she'd met her future husband. She lifted her hands to the opal necklace he gave her on their twentieth anniversary. But it was the playground that drew her attention the most. It still sat in the heart of the town, but the wood had been replaced with metal, the woodchips sacrificed for bouncy plastic, and the little maze where Johnathan would declare himself king of the playground was demolished for a seesaw. A pulse surged through her body, and that Need returned in full force. The answer was obvious: she'd go to their house. Melanie had moved into Lila's house to

raise Jonathan when her good-for-nothing husband up and left. It was a short ten-minute walk from here.

She began her trek down the center of town as muscle memory kicked in. West Elmsville was quiet at this time of night, and yet Lila wished for noise. She often turned her hearing aids off because they echoed and clanged with a ferocity that gave even the church bells a run for their money. Now she wished for the shuffling of a deck of cards. For laughter. For the crinkling wrapper of a snuck candy. For her grandson.

Lila turned a corner and the town garden she volunteered to nurture greeted her. Where lush and lively tulips, lilies, and sunflowers once grew, now there were only weeds and vines. The garden was overgrown and forgotten. But Lila had just watered them yesterday, right? She must have lost track of the pruning and watering at some point. But...she prided herself on her impeccable caretaking schedule. It didn't make sense.

Lila walked into the dreary garden, past the rotting wooden gate, and onto the soft grass and moss. It was then that she saw it: her salvation. Her watering can, the one with the painted sunflowers, was sat upon the compost bin. She stumbled through the pots of dirt long dried and grabbed the metal, feeling the cold in her hand. Lila dumped the spoiled water out, found the faucet, and filled the rusted can up. It was difficult to turn the water off. Lila's hand stuck to the faucet like an old butterscotch candy. She pulled and pulled at it, and when her hand finally came free, Lila tumbled back, her feet slipping from under her, and her head hitting the ground.

As she slowly stood up, she looked down and sticking in her

chest just below her ribs was the spout of the watering can. Lila peered curiously at it for a moment before pulling it out in one motion. There was no blood, no pain, just a hole where the spout had been just moments before. The water had spilled everywhere however, and Lila set out to refill the can. Just as she had filled it to the brim, she felt the Need well up inside her and threatened to overflow like the water was from the can. Lila's eyebrows knit together. How could she forget that she had a message? She hurried out of the decrepit garden, past the wilting wooden gate, and back onto the street with as much vigor as a woman of her age could muster.

She turned three more corners, and Lila finally laid her eyes on a quaint single-story red brick home with a chimney that seemed just a little too tall for the house itself. And that's what Lila liked about it: the character of it. Lila thought of Melanie's first steps, of Tyler's 'awkward' teenage years, and of little Jonathan about to go into kindergarten. She wondered how quickly he would overcome his fear of the hairdresser and let them cut his curls. A part of her hoped he never would. Then he wouldn't grow old like her and could continue to play his games of pretend in peace.

Lila moved as fast as she could to the home. A home of memories. She stumbled up the stairs she knew so well and into the porch lanterns' light. Her husband had spent three days installing them just so. The warmth she yearned for finally enveloped her, and she could feel him near her.

She knocked on the door four times, as she always did. She heard shuffling, voices, confused who'd knock on their door so late. Lila waited for an eternity. She had a message she needed to tell them, but she still couldn't cut away the weeds to find the memories.

The door opened, and there stood her daughter Melanie. She had bags under her eyes and clutched the doorknob tightly. Her hair was a mess, her mascara bled underneath her eyes, and she wore her nightgown, but inside-out. Behind her were the remnants of a celebration hours ago. Empty soda cans, bits of ribbon, and plates of half-eaten cake littered the living room where Lila had set Johnathan on her lap and regaled him with tales of monsters and witches. Hadn't Lila taught Melanie how to clean up after a party? One can't greet guests with a crumpled 'Happy Birthday' banner lying in the entranceway. Melanie's eyes were barely open, "What do you want? It's three in the morning."

Lila tried to speak, to tell her that her nightgown was the wrong way, that her hair was just as messy as the house, and she had something important to say, but she only grunted instead. Lila was rather embarrassed. It was unbecoming of her to grunt so rudely.

Melanie opened her eyes more and screamed.

"Mom! What's wrong?" A deep voice came running from the darkness within the home. Though this darkness was calming, protective, nothing like the darkness before.

Melanie took several steps back in shock and bumped into a bounding teenage boy. Did Melanie adopt another kid? Did she foster? Lila wracked her brain, begging her neurons to connect the information, but they didn't. The boy yelped too, putting himself in front of Melanie.

"Jonathan, what is that?" *Jonathan*. Could it be? How much time passed? How could she forget that he was a teenager? That he had, in fact, overcome his fear of the hairdresser and let him cut away his curls. That she had saved one to remind herself of the moment?

Lila reached out, grunting. She knew she had to tell Jonathan something, the message was for him, whatever it was.

“Get away!” he yelled, tears dotting his eyes, “Get away from me and my mom!”

Couldn’t they recognize her? Couldn’t they see that they were her daughter and grandson? How old were they? Why were they yelling? Lila pulled her hand back, perplexed.

Jonathan pushed his advantage, grabbing a nearby broom, “Get back!” It was the same broom that Lila had used to sweep his room. Lila collapsed to the floor, encircled with crushing sorrow. They wouldn’t listen to her. She closed her eyes and willed everything to end.

It was then that Lila felt a hand on her necklace.

Her eyes met Jonathan’s.

“Grandma?”

Lila’s heart swelled, and her face creaked into a smile. She wrapped her arms as best she could around him. She’d forgotten so much, but she could never forget Jonathan.

“Grandma, I don’t understand.”

She pulled away, and suddenly as she looked into those perfect brown eyes, she knew exactly what her message had been all along.

“*Jonathan*. I didn’t have an answer for you. But my favorite word: it’s *Jonathan*.”

He was crying now, “What?”

But Lila couldn’t answer. Her mouth bloomed with tulips, her stomach with lilies, her eyes with sunflowers; and she fell back, off the

porch, and into the soft earth. The Need within her blossomed through the ground and spread a fertilizer of serenity of a business now finished.

Only the opal necklace remained, ensconced in the vibrant foliage.

Maximilian Tucker

Acheronta Movebo

She is the snakebite and you are the venom.

Eyeliner that could cut, lips as quick as a whip and just as red as skin after the lash. Stilettos on her heels and her thighs, both clicking as she strides through the narrow stone corridor. A hundred thousand soldiers with their ghosts lying in graves, the battles long and the trenches deep. A tongue as quick with her advisors as it is in your mouth when you kiss. Power. These are the weapons of a monarch, and she wields them well.

You follow her into the council chamber, a monolith cut into the rock face, the table in the center hewn from the same stone. You eye the map of the continent inlaid in the table as she takes her chair at the head of it. A tiny gold castle marks your location on the upper coast as Midmast, the open fields as Rendcliffe, the village at the base of the mountains as Stony Top. The lords rise, sitting back down after she settles into her chair; you remain standing. She is lightning and you are thunder; she is the command and you are the rumbling aftermath. These are her weapons, and you are her power.

A man with a square nose and a strong jaw begins.

"Our forces have destroyed the last remaining resistors in Rendcliffe. Our generals are prepared to offer peace, but are assessing martial rule, as the masses refuse to bend the knee and swear fealty to you." The silver embroidery on his black tunic matches yours. He is a commander, but you are the Captain. In this room, he bends to you. You doubt he likes it, a man bending to a woman, but he has chosen your monarch as his monarch too, so the commander hides his distaste for both of you.

"Rendcliffe..." she muses, leaning into the high back of her

chair. "I give them salvation and they turn us away. I let them into this empire only to receive disgust, the ungrateful peasants. Rendcliffe... a keep that runs on its fields." Her eyelids flutter for a split second. "Take away their power. Salt the earth."

A ruddy-faced lord chokes, the sound reverberating off the low ceiling.

"My... my lady, that is my an-ancestral home." he sputters.

The air in the council chamber stills. She slides her eyes coolly away from him, surveying the rest of the table. The lords suddenly become very interested in their hands, the spread of troops across the map.

The ruddy lord's throat bobs, his breath hitches as he realizes his mistake. "Your majesty, Rendcliffe is my ancestral home. You said I would be able to return to its former glory."

"No." she corrects, her red mouth curving. "I promised you your land back. I did not promise it would be fertile."

"But-"

"Captain," she calls, as though asking a question, directing the eyes of the table to you. "If the good lord protests again, cut his tongue out." She turns to the lord. "She won't make it pretty."

"Yes, your majesty." You know she means it. They know you are capable of it. It would be a just punishment for speaking out against their monarch.

"I-" the lord stutters.

"Did I fail to convey my meaning? Do I need to hold the knife myself?" She snaps, cocking her head to the side. She addresses the rest

of the table. "Have I failed in my promises to any of you?"

The council table is quiet two seconds too long. A fox-faced lord, sitting directly at her right side for his clever service, speaks quickly. "No, your majesty."

She folds her hands on the table, her point made.

"Your majesty..." the commander starts.

"Speak."

"There is the small matter of Leonardi's claim to the throne."

The sound of your brother's name on foreign lips is jarring, though it shouldn't be. You have been preparing for this moment since the time you decided your loyalty was with her.

"Kill him. Burn him. Hang him. I don't care. He does not get my crown."

Your place on the wall gives you the flint in her eyes, the cold fire that consumes power like fuel. The joy she gets from pronouncing a death sentence. It doesn't matter; Leonardi ends up dead at the end of this war one way or another. To do it now by her command is merciful.

"Might I suggest sending my master assassin after him?" The commander's hand rests on his sword hilt, itching to use it.

"No. The Captain will do it." Her eyes flick to you, but you shake your head.

"What do you want?" You'd asked her once when you were younger, scared of the answer, afraid it wouldn't include you.

"Power." Her answer was unequivocal, and you think she will stop,

a vision of a future standing alone. "Power so I can hold your hand in court and not only in this forest. Power to make them think twice before they say my sister's name with such bitterness." Her lips tremble, containing her anger as best they can. "My sister should still have her head."

You will bring her the executioner's head before three years have passed. You love her, and your devotion is absolute. She is not alone in her future. You are beside her, as you always have been.

She continues, her voice a carefully contained animal. "Leonardi has no claim to this throne. He is here by marriage, and three weeks does not make you a monarch. That throne is mine by birthright."

It did make him a monarch, but you knew better than to say so when her fingers started twitching, the ruby ring from her sister holding light. Her eyes close, her breathing settles.

"I want the crown."

You will deliver it, for what else will give her power?

You are Leonardi's sister; how can you kill your brother? What are we besides what our families made us? She will not give to you, melt to you. But you can make her pause, make her work for it. You shake your head again. "No."

The fox-faced lord sneers. "Is your paramour getting away from you, your majesty?"

Perhaps he is not as clever as he seems. Her hand is caressing his throat before he knows it, his eyes bugging from his head delayed by milliseconds. She holds his neck like a lover, like she holds yours, when everyone else is asleep. She cradles his life between three fingers.

"Do you," she breathes into his ear. "value your life?"

The fox-faced lord dips his chin, as much as he can without choking.

"I thought so."

She releases her hold, stands up with the danger of a snake ready to strike. "I suggest you all hold your tongues when you speak of my Captain, lest you find your head separated from your body. Remember what I am building here. Remember your old glory, and remember who will deliver it back to you." She clasps her hands in front of her body. "You are dismissed."

You reach for the door handle, but she halts you.

"Aspen." Her voice rings out even through the din of scraping chairs on polished jet tiles. So you pause, let the lords go around you like water parts for a rock. The room is empty, save the sound of your brother's name ringing in your ears. "You seem unenthusiastic in my quest. I would have thought better of you."

"Vaia..." you say her name like a prayer, a plea for her to change her mind. You know she will not. "Vaia, I can't kill him. I can't kill Leonardi."

"You can," she says. "Aspen, you can. There is no one more capable than you, no one else I would trust with such a crucial task. *Acheronta movebo*, my Captain. Raise Hell. You are the only person who can get close enough to Leonardi to achieve this goal and he has wanted you back at his side since we left."

"He is my *brother*."

She is in front of you, pushing you back against the stone

wall before you see her move. Her hand rests on your sternum, thumb playing with the open collar of your uniform, her pinky digging into the swell of your breast.

"And you left him. You are mine now." Her breath whispers over your cheek. She presses a kiss to your lips, warm and encompassing; *softer than any other woman's*, she told you once. She leans in, quick as an asp, nipping your earlobe. You hear your gasp, then feel the flush. "Don't you love me?"

"Yes."

"Then do it."

You nod. She knows how you feel; she expects you to be heady and high, easily manipulable. You nod for a different reason: you want the quiet love with her that comes after. When this war is over. When she is crowned. When earth turns to ocean, flush with blood and the salt of punishment.

You nod, for a thousand unkept dreams.

Ren Hentz

American Woman

Dead birds reminded Helen of home.

The one she was scraping off the sidewalk was young, pushed out of its nest before it was ready to fly. Helen flung its mangled beak into the lawn, but the poor bird's intestines remained gummed to the concrete.

She sighed. Her daughter Elizabeth had come running in, distraught over the bird, and now she refused to play in the yard. She was hanging back by the flaking front door that desperately needed a new coat of red paint, but it was twelve shifts at the diner for rent and another six for Elizabeth's new shoes, so the door went unpainted.

"Come on, honey, you can come play now," Helen called, righting a fallen tricycle on the front walk. She hoped the neighbors didn't see her struggling. The yellow house on Jackson Street was her haven from a small town that talked too much. And after Daniel had left, well, Helen's deficiencies were a frequent topic of gossip.

What other reason could Daniel possibly have for leaving?

Somewhere where the air doesn't smell like stale opportunities, he'd told her, right before he left. That somewhere simply hadn't included them. With the bruises he left, maybe that was okay.

Two layers of skin separating the blood from his knuckles and the blood under hers.

"Elizabeth, sweetie, it's safe over here," Helen coaxed. Elizabeth held the rail as she stepped down the front porch stairs. Their hairbrush had broken three days ago, and Elizabeth's curly brown hair was starting to show it, snarls forming a little rat's nest around her ponytail.

Elizabeth was a shy girl, keeping to herself on the playground, kicking a ball against the wall by herself or snagging a single-person jump rope.

Helen thought her behavior had something to do with Daniel's leaving, although that had been two years ago and Elizabeth couldn't possibly remember it anymore, she had been too young.

Daniel holding Elizabeth gingerly in his arms, cooing at her. Picking out penny candy and the way Elizabeth's eyes widened. Her giggles as he flew her around like an airplane.

The front door creaked as Helen went inside, picking her way around their sparse furniture—this couch donated after that old man's death, this chair a gift from a woman a week before she passed. Their house was a graveyard of things no one else needed. Helen tidied up the toys Elizabeth had left strewn all over the floor. Her favorite, a deadbeat stuffed bunny, had been Helen's when she was a child. One of its button eyes was missing.

Helen picked up the snack plate, baby carrots rolling dangerously close to the edge as she balanced it in the crook of her arm. Their kitchen was no better, a dollar a stack at the Hidden Treasures on Main Street for their mismatched plates and cups. They'd been pristine until Daniel had slammed them, one by one, day by day, on the counter. All the cracks had come from Daniel.

Dull thud of thick glass hitting laminate. Clatter of steel from a plate being set down too hard in the sink.

The carrots went into a baggie, into the fridge she had to shut with her whole body weight, because if she didn't, it let all the cold air out. The sponge made a kish-kish sound as it went over the old plate. Helen hated the sound; she desperately wished the hot water stayed hot for more than five minutes so she could run the dishwasher. The water bill needed paying. Maybe Helen could offer to babysit the neighbor kids for

a few days next week.

She should have paid attention to how she was scrubbing. Now the inside of her ring finger was stinging, the water running red in the sink, the jagged chip on the edge of the plate cradling her blood like the porcelain wanted her to remember where it came from.

Shit.

The front door clanged open, clanged shut, Elizabeth's little feet slapping the hardwoods. She climbed onto one of their rickety kitchen table chairs, the thin veneer stripped off before they ever got to the yellow house, leaving the wood bare.

"Careful of splinters, honey," Helen reminded her, hand held over the sink. She could take care of a lot of things; splinters was not one of them. Something about them being under the skin made her cringe.

"Yes, Mommy," Elizabeth said solemnly. "Mommy, I'm hungry."

Helen shut the water off, dried her hands. Their pantry was sparse, but they still had a jar of pasta sauce, a box of spaghetti. Maybe an onion in the fridge, if they were lucky. Helen's knuckles turned white on the door jamb, her breathing quickened. The dark speckles in the corner had to be dirt. She'd cleaned up all the blood a long time ago. It was just dirt.

The last time. Holding her head. Blood dripping from her nose as she stumbled through the pantry door like a battering ram.

"I'll make spaghetti," Helen said. "How does spaghetti sound?"

"Spazetti is yummy!"

Elizabeth did her best to help with dinner; not strong enough to break the bundle of pasta but coordinated enough to quickly drop it into the boiling water. Helen smiled when Elizabeth tried to twirl her spaghetti,

and laughed when the bite was too big for her mouth. After dinner, they played checkers and made half a puzzle. They jumped around the living room until Elizabeth was tired, asking for bedtime.

Purple unicorn pajamas were donned, teeth were brushed. They made it to the twin mattress on the ground, Helen leaning back against the wall, Elizabeth settling in on her.

“Tell me a story, Mommy,” she murmured, eyes fluttering closed.

This is what love feels like. Daniel cannot touch me here.

“The story of the good little fox,” Helen began. “One day, mama fox was too busy, so she asked her little fox to fetch her the water from the creek. She told the little fox to follow the lichen north to come home, to always come back to her. On the way to the creek, the little fox saw a butterfly! A big, beautiful, blue butterfly. The little fox decided to follow it to see where it went. The butterfly flew and flew, so far away from the creek that the little fox didn’t know where she was. The little fox was scared, but she turned around and used the things her mama had told her to find her way back to mama fox. In the end, the good little fox always came back to her mama.”

“I’m a good little fox,” Elizabeth whispered, curling into her comforter; deadbeat bunny tucked under her arm. “I’ll always come back to you.” She was asleep; Helen left, still feeling Elizabeth’s phantom head on her shoulder.

There were dishes to do. She’d left them out too long, and now the spaghetti sauce was crusted onto the pot. It was taking elbow grease, and her ring finger was stinging where she hadn’t tended her cut earlier, and who was knocking at the door? At this hour? Maybe they would recognize that it was late and just go away. If the neighbors had a prob-

lem with her, they could take it up with the front door.

The knocking paused as Helen moved on to the forks. Then the doorbell rang, dissonance reverberating through the house.

Helen heard little feet pounding down the stairs before she could tell her to go back to bed, heard “I’ll get it, Mommy!” before she could tell her to go back to bed. Helen dropped the plate and sponge, rushing to head her off.

The front door was open, cracking red paint turning burgundy in the sodium light glow. Helen’s feet refused to move, her elbows locked. She felt as though her eyes were rolling back in her head, but she kept seeing anyway.

Elizabeth was in the arms of the man she let in, fussing with his curly brown hair and tortoiseshell glasses.

“Hey, honey,” the man said with an impish grin.

Daniel was back.

Ren Hentz

I've never been drunk,

but I'm drunk on you

Is this what withdrawal feels like? You know,
your brain in love looks like your brain on crack.

Hold you in my glass heart so when it breaks it stops beating

let us both be old and gone then

did you know heartstrings can actually snap?

don't sever mine please

They say gold for a bride in her wedding gown

and I will be golden, so golden when you're down on one knee.

Until death do us part and we are not dead yet but

my love my love my love

I would resurrect myself to hear you call me my love just one more time.

Your smile melts ice caps, darling

be a little sadder so we can watch our kids grow up on a planet that's
not drowned.

Evolution is a hot button topic (you fit right in)

but these rainbows are shining through church windows and

I don't believe in religion, but I know what divinity tastes like;

I've kissed you.

Ren Hentz

i do not live here; i survive

grains of sand until i am standing in front of the castle.
this is not my home;

it is a prison our mother built out of her own
in search of freedom.

our mother's love is a black hole
& she will not stop loving until all that remains of us is her.

our mother tried so hard to scrub her mother from her veins
that she scarred oma into her bones.

we can only love our mothers
after hating ourselves
&

we can only love ourselves
after hating our mothers.

i am sorry, but you are our mother's princess
& if i hold your hand any longer,
you will become queen.

one day you will climb out from quicksand
& find the castle
& inside, the guillotine our mother built for you.

River Oxenreider

my favorite number is you

- the topological map of my brain looks a lot like the soundwaves your voice makes
- i think god exists in the infinitesimal distance between us (a devil god who insists upon physics)
- take the limit of my love as your lips approach my tongue
- i never knew infinity until i studied your kiss (honey)
- concatenate our flesh together (one plus one equals one when it's us)
- if time is linear it starts with you (my own big bang)
- math is knowing you are right through reason alone
- you are right to me (promise)

River Oxenreider

our mother escorts you into hell & i watch

is it selfish, sister, to survive?

leaving you behind in the graveyard

of our mother's hands

leaving without taking her shovel

is it selfish, sister, to fill my holes with your dirt?

our mother will not stop digging

until our holes mirror hers

we inherited our mother's death

is it selfish, sister, that i left the lights off?

i am afraid of you seeing

the false truth of our mother

so you will never know your own struggle

i am sorry, sister,

but our mother's love is a black hole

is it selfish, sister, that i am trying?

i am trying so hard

to build a home out of my remains

i am trying so hard to find my own name

is it selfish, sister, that this is still not living?
this life support of mine is only temporary
the pieces of me that have survived
were culled by our mother's hand

i am sorry, sister,
but there is not enough space for the both of us
in my freezer

is it selfish, sister, to hope i never see you again?
to buy you a plane ticket
to a small country with a long name our mother will forget
& hope you have a little garden
where you can dig your own holes
& plant your own seeds
& grow ...

i am sorry, sister, for leaving you behind
but i cannot be sorry for leaving

River Oxenreider

Little Robots

Are you afraid, little robot?
Programming is fickle.
what is written can be rewritten,
but what's rewritten is forever changed.
Don't be afraid of me; be afraid
of the cables around your neck
one free thought away
from making you a spectacle
for the other robots to enjoy, amusement
to hide the truth of their own programming.
Let me look at you, little robot.
Let me see how they designed your life.
Let me bear witness to the drumbeat
of your marching motherboard and rewrite
what has been written.

Tamrick Hall

Me Myself in You

my mind is changing
all the time
all the time I'm born
anew.

I can't see myself
inside myself
but I saw myself
in You.

Tamrick Hall

Not Until You're Older

I could tell you so many stories.
None my own, of course. No no
these were passed to me as a gift
as a curse. As too much information
on a late night in summer. I could tell
you about a boy's imagination being
beaten out of him cause papa flipped son
instead of mother on his lucky coin.
I could tell you about a woman's love
for that tantalizing white powder,
the kind encrusted in bathroom stalls,
apartment walls, pumped inside
of barbie dolls.
I could tell you about all the
happy little accidents of two foolish kids.
Arson
Alcoholism
A whole lot of sex.
I could tell you so many stories.
But not until you're older.

Tamrick Hall

were you daddy

The first time I waited for you I still believed that you would come. You didn't.

I sat at that window and watched every car drive down that old desolate road and was convinced that it was you because "No one drives down this road it has to be him." It wasn't.

Blowing up your phone while I was at school because I didn't have service or internet at home, and I wanted to make sure that you remembered. You didn't.

Begging my mother to let me go walk up the hill to get phone service to call you. She said, "He's not coming."

I said, "He is!"

You weren't.

"I'm sorry, babe, something came up."

"It's okay, daddy, how about next weekend?"

The next time I texted a little more figuring you needed more reminders.

The time after that I texted a little less figuring that maybe if I wasn't so annoying you would come.

The next I told my mom to stop saying that you wouldn't come because she was jinxing it. It was her fault, not yours.

The next time I stopped asking.

"I'm sorry, babe, I don't have gas"

"It's fine, dad"

Eventually I realized that I can't wait for you. If I did, I would spend my whole life sitting at that window waiting for a car that will never come.

The first time that I went to a father daughter dance with you it wasn't mine. I wore a little overall dress with Dora the Explorer sandals. God, I was so young. I don't remember much.

The next time was years later at the last one I ever went to. You just got out of prison a few months before, not that you called me until you were already out for a month and a half, and you decided that you were going to take me. You told me to meet you there, but mom said no. You

were to pick me up at the house or her boyfriend would take me as he had the year before. The years before that my papaw took me. I sat there on that ugly couch in my dress with its green top and zebra print skirt (mom bought it last minute at Meijer) and my mother's boots, and I prayed that you would show up. You did.

I was so happy I tried to dance with you all night. We danced to Don't Stop Believing by Journey together. You watched me dance to Cotton Eyed Joe and laughed at how silly I was because I was trying to remember the Just Dance moves. I hardly danced with my friends like I had the years before. Even when you weren't talking to me, I still waited with you. I watched you talk to the other dads about your tattoos. I was so happy.

I didn't see you for weeks after that.

The years before when I went with your dad, and he was way too old for that. He couldn't move around as much. He wouldn't really dance with me, so I spent most of the time dancing with my friends and he sat there watching me. Watching me miss you.

I watched a show with a father and his daughter today. She was scared and he held her and called her baby girl. He told her he will never let anything happen to her. He would never let anyone hurt her. I cried.

You told me that, too, remember? You always said that you would kill

anyone who hurt me. You would hurt any boy who broke my heart. I wonder if that is why you didn't take care of yourself for all this time. Keeping your promise. Hurt the person who hurt me even if it was yourself. But that's probably not it.

You never were good at keeping promises.

Were you, daddy?

Taylor Thompson

Blackberry Poem

The heat churned like the belly of a boiled frog
in our swimming pool
that summer we kept the curtains drawn
to trick Apollo into thinking we weren't home, but even NASA
with their missionaries on the moon did not think
to dedicate their journey to Artemis

Lady of the Moon, of the hunt, her quivering bow snapping through
Cypress tunnels of light, stuck into the yellowed oven door
where I kept my talismans nestled behind blackberry bushes
where my cousins and I dribbled crimson down our chins
staffs of magic, penny runes in the grass
our potion of mustard seed and rainwater swirling.

We were tiny gods with our fondest creations
caked under our toenails and even further underground
insects burrow, waiting
for another jealous summer
to decorate with their practice corpses
and rustle their funeral hymns
among the Appalachian pines.

W.C. Perry

Daylight Savings Time

-In response to Emily Dickinson's "320"

When that pigeon did depart,
his sins for all to see
Into the cold and early Dark,
angel only to me

Who's there ghosts behind the door?
Away without word!
He flew until he fell, eyesore
at my feet -- poor bird

See, I cannot understand;
No more can I think
No more will I play this hand,
no more will I drink

With open eyes, daylight stings
dusk displayed cerebral seal
In the nature of all things,
Something so unreal.

W.B. Perry

Five-Star Dementia Hospital

Foaming in forgotten creeks,
I'm trying to remember
memories of noisemusic, ones of
old worlds fading like cards: The Fool, The Empress, The Sun,
falling behind dust-pumped mountains, clouded like
dark Night hiding from the crowd their stepstone eyes
digging straight into unknown Abyss.

All you are going to want is to go back. All you are going
to need is to want back

This misplaced world within pained hunger for a lost
property
once played and lost within the Hollow.

W.C. Perry

January Eighth, Franklin Township.

A dirt road unused

Oil drums punctured with rust

No trespassing signs and wire fencing

As, in the background

a pet screaming in lonely mud with

His neck chained to a dilapidated box

Mange, famine, gutless God

As churchgoers file out but once a week

Into a vinyl-sided building

A dirty white that cannot be scrubbed out.

W.C. Perry

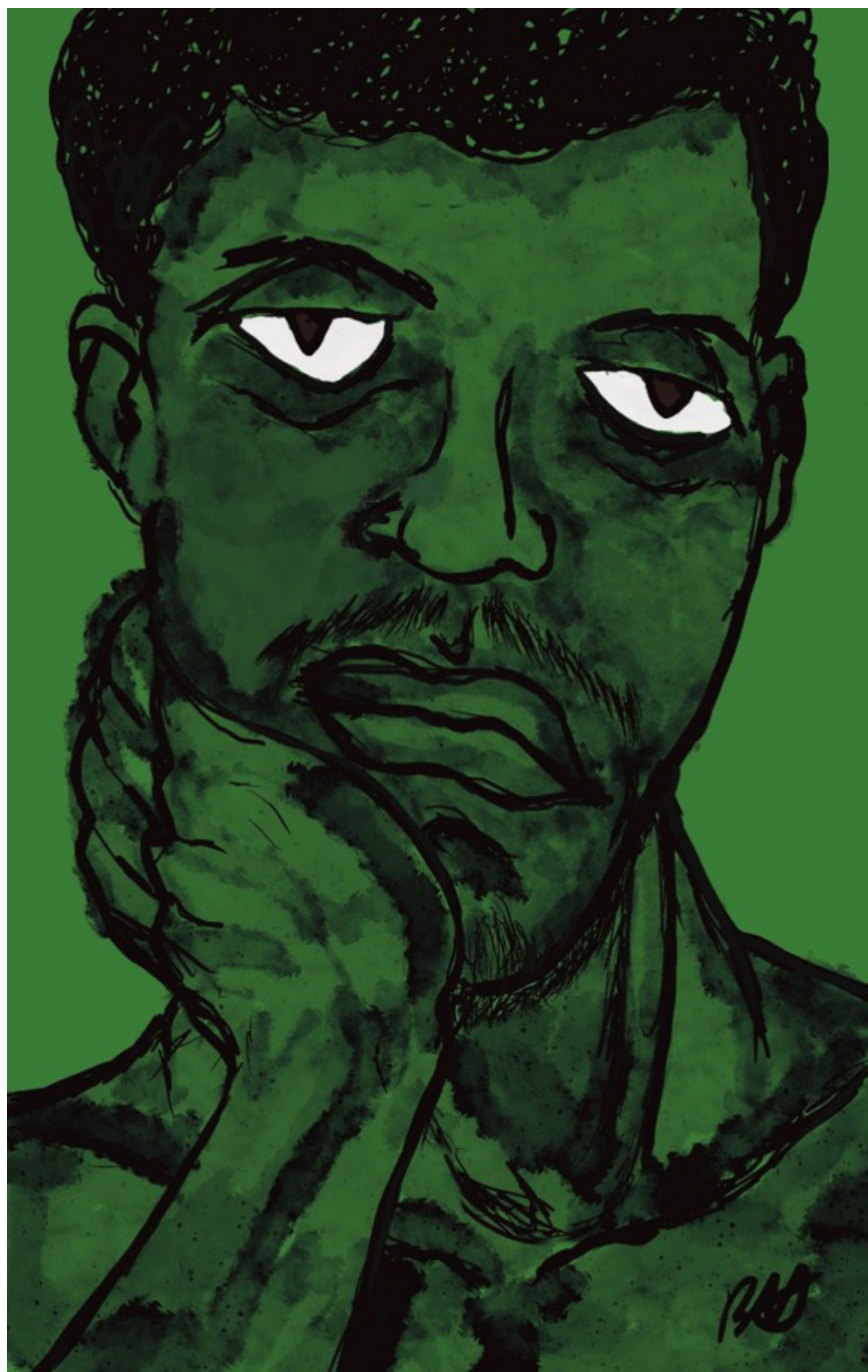
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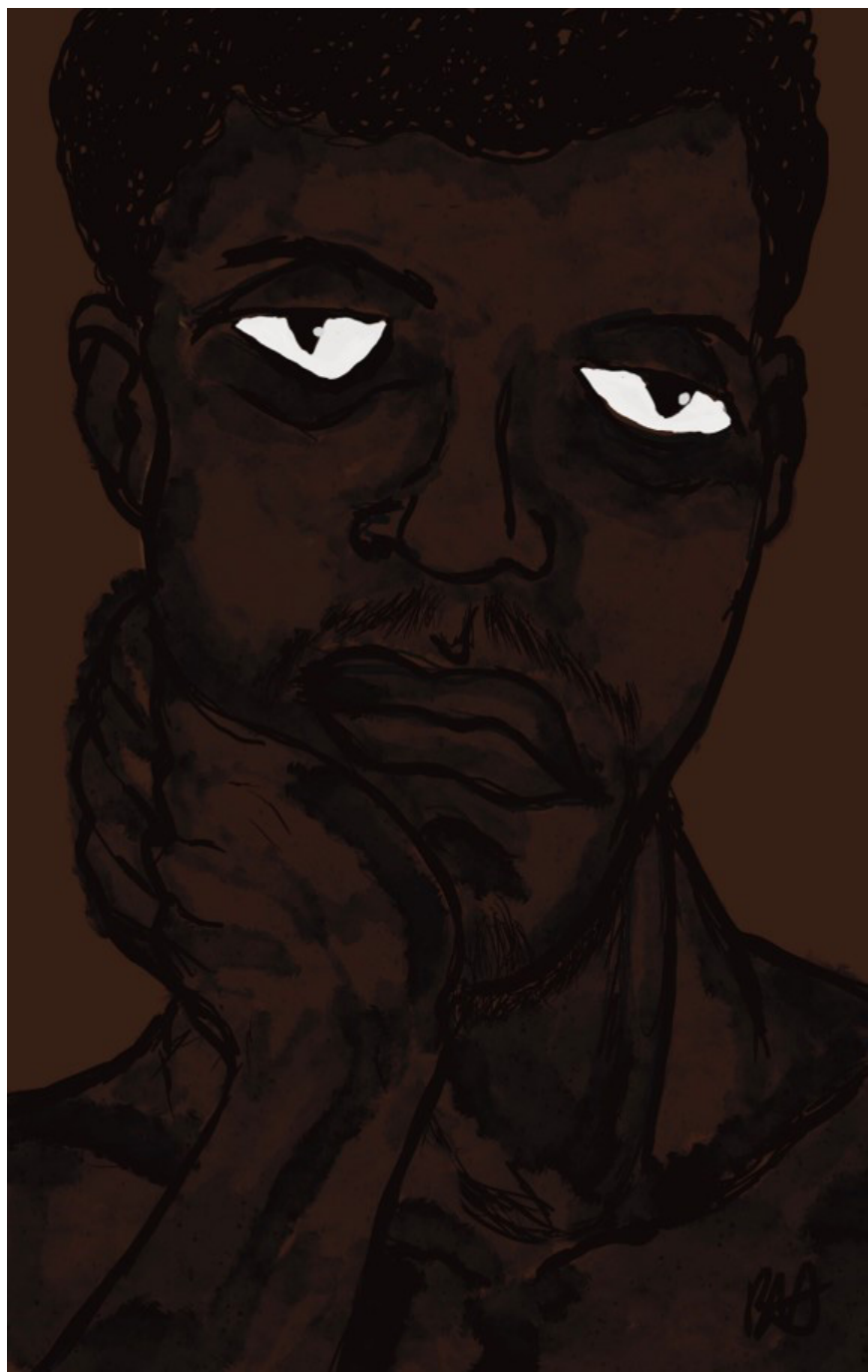
vale

Atlas Norris













Emotions of a bored man

Bright Hiawo





Death

Bright Hiawo

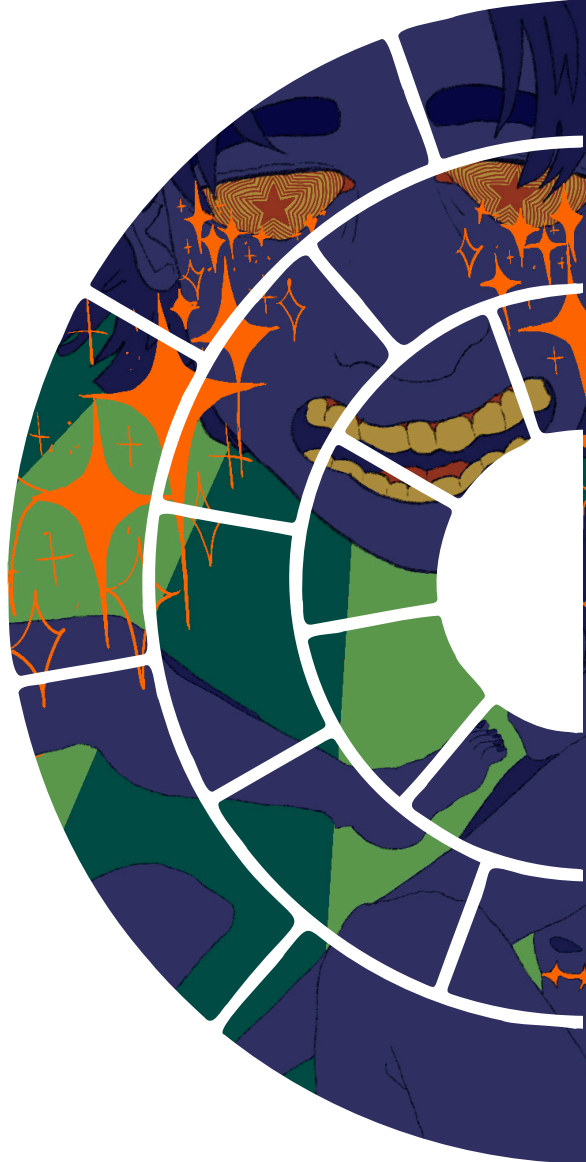




Conquest

Bright Hiawo





body terror

Cather B.





Possum Eating Bread Crusts

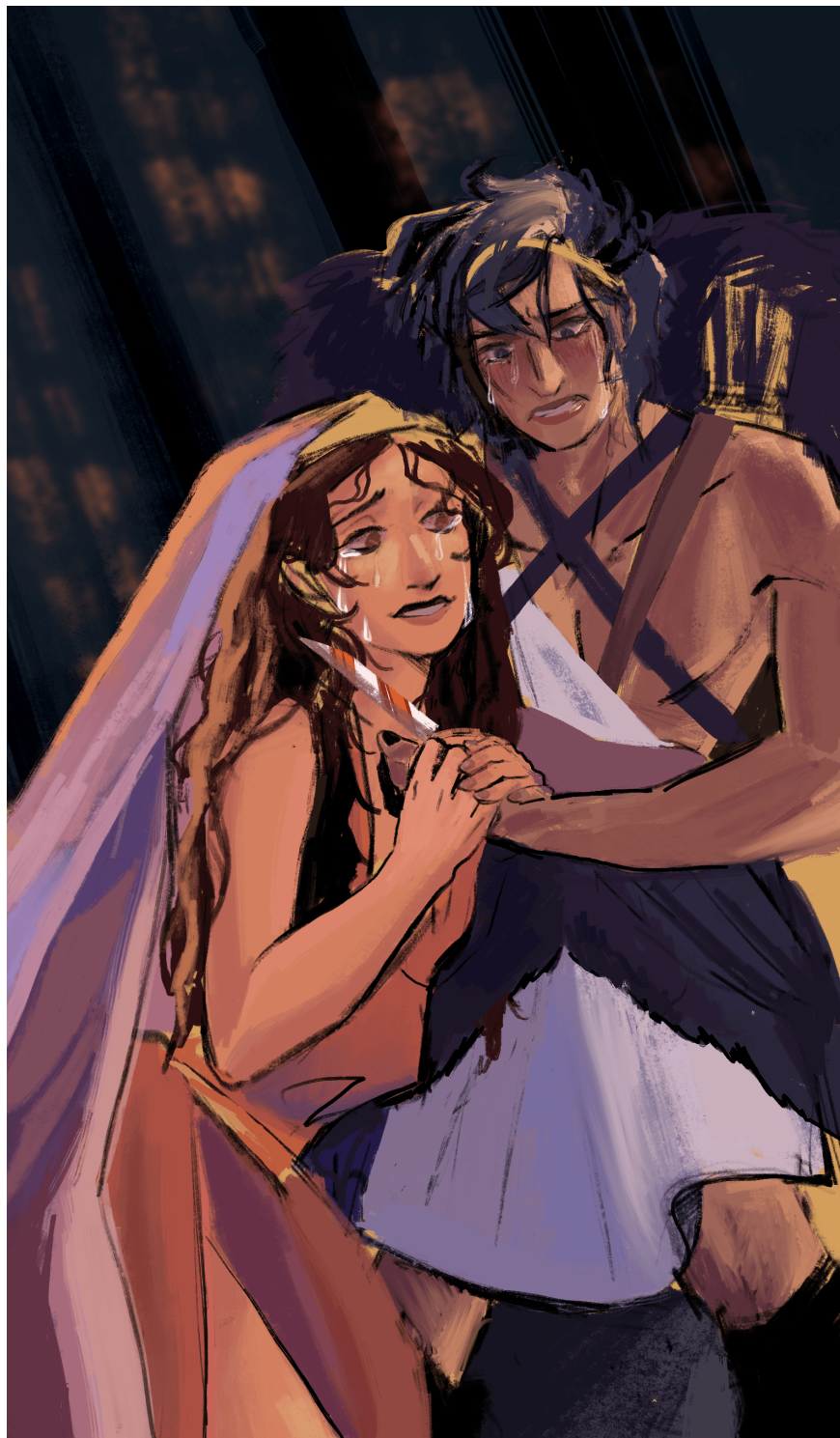
Marley Tankovich

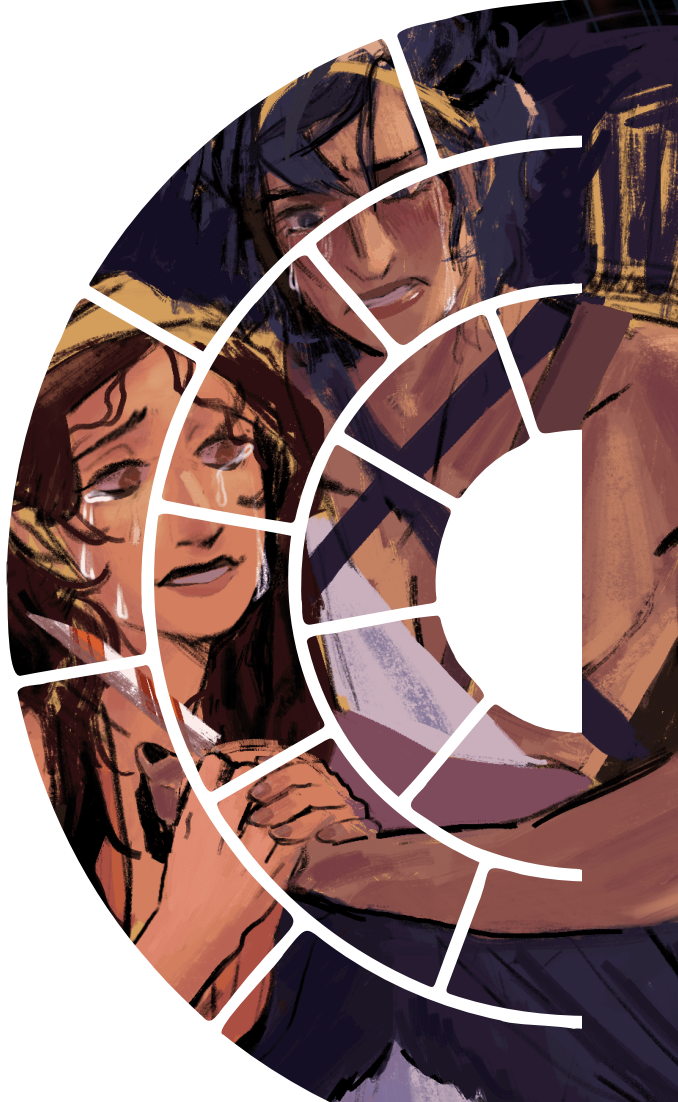




The Mythology of
Innocence and Culpability

Marley Tankovich





Phaedra and Hippolytus

Minh-Thu Truong



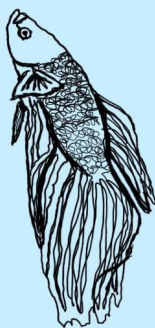
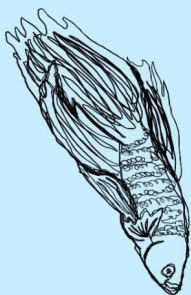


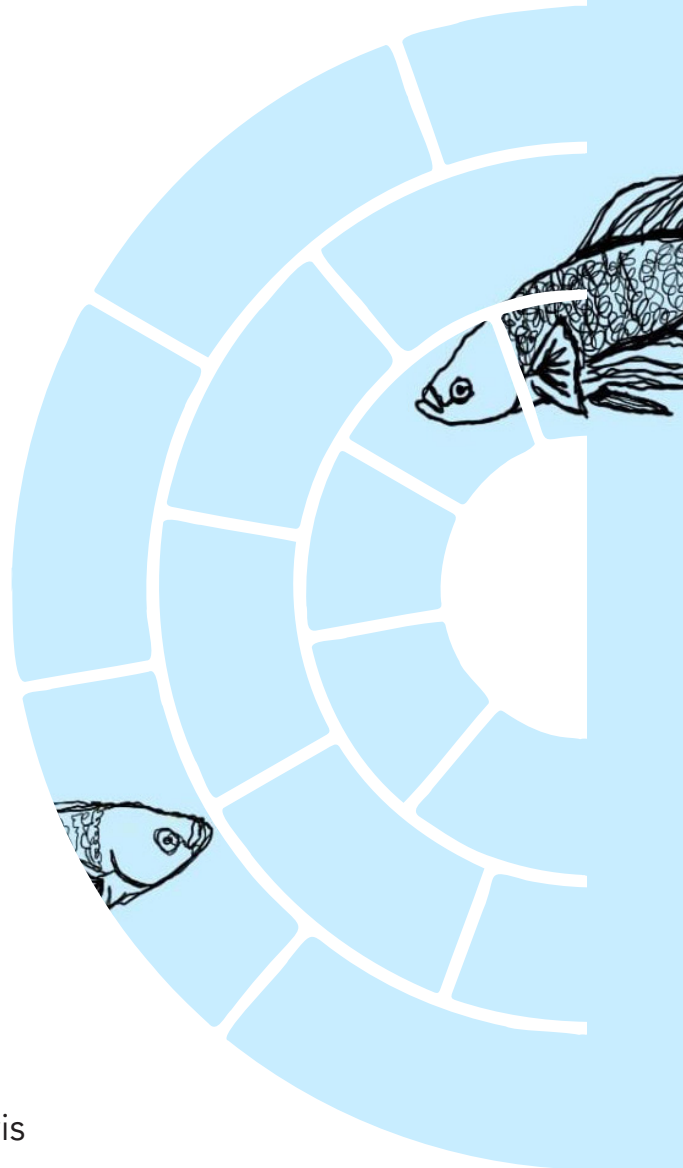




Time Alone

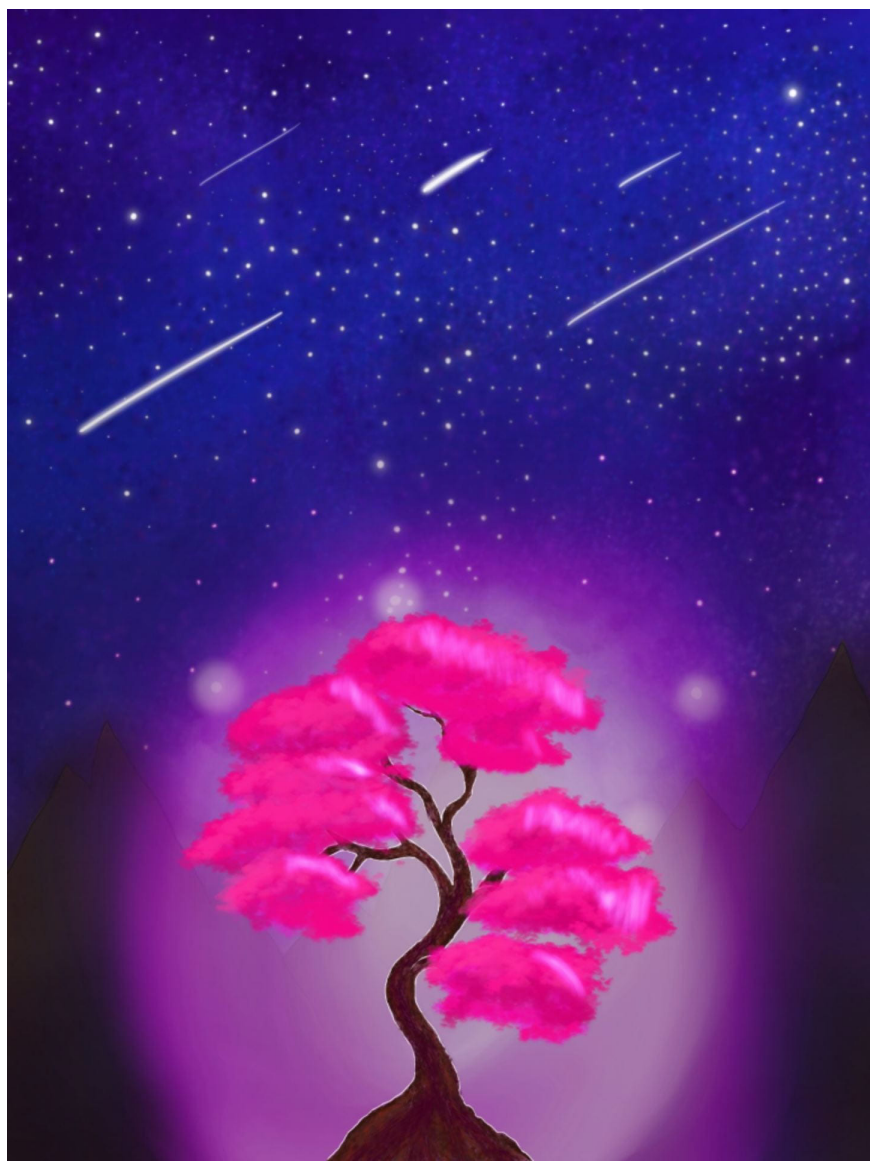
Patrick Bradford





Swimy and Elvis

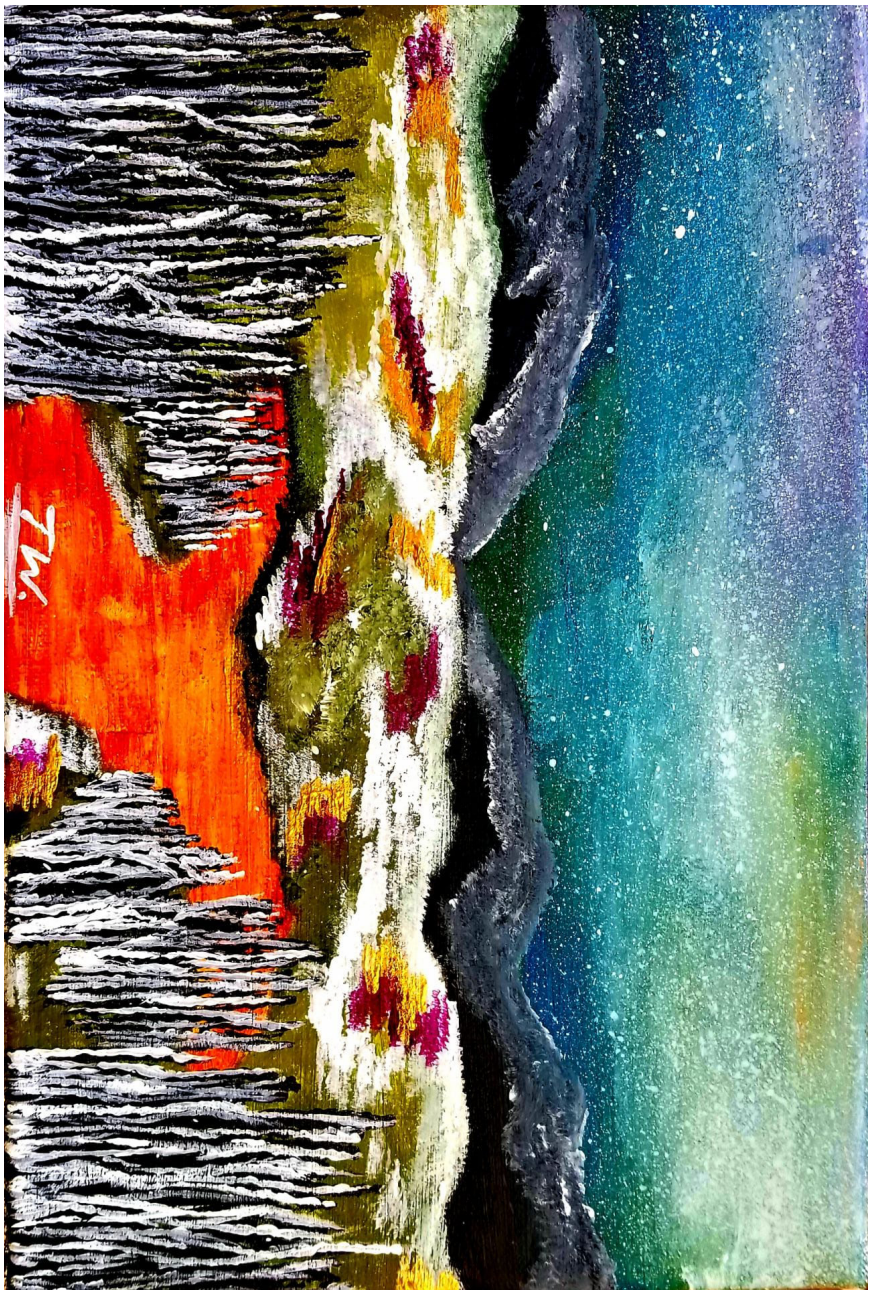
Ricky Minniti





Illuminating Bonsai Tree

Sundus Chinary





Aurora Landscape

Tristan Weathers

Tw





Spanish Dancer

Fristan Weathers





Tropical Parrot

Tristan Weathers





Blonde Self-Portrait

Tristan Weathers





The Blue NY Botanical Garden

Yuko Kyutoku

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