

into the wild

2022

THE RC REVIEW

Editor's Note

Another year, another RC Review!

Thrust back into a forced sense of normalcy, we once again push through turmoil to continue forward. Though sometimes life is the weight of a boulder, we are no Sisyphus – there will come easier times. Our muscles will grow stronger with each step. Such is demonstrated in the work of this year's magazine; strength, reflection, collaboration and unity weave throughout the pages to encourage us to continue investing in one another. Don't get lost in the weeds! We are here to help each other weather the storm.

As you read our 2022 edition, I'd like you to imagine yourself at the edge of a thick forest – machete in one hand and walking stick in the other, let us traverse the wilderness and emerge on the other side. Together, we will make it out alive.

Come, and let us go 'Into the Wild'.

XOXO,

Marlon, your faithful Editor-in-Chief

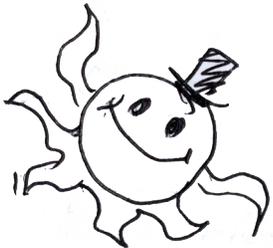


Table of Contents

Prose and Poetry

Credo of Belief - Emilia Ferrante	6
-unfinished - Rojin Shirwan	10
Uku stone, energy bars, tobacco - Ani Seigel	10
brushing my teeth - Sawyer Santella	11
missing persons - Theodore Poling	12
Analogy Shortage - Grace Meinke	17
“Is Morris Home?” - Gabriela Barrett	18
Baby-Shaped - Nina Smith	22
whiteroom - Aarushi Ganguly	24
I Sing for Flowers - Shao-Chi Ou	26
A Love Letter to the Moon - So Jung Shin	28
Call Me Silly - Emerson Lauster	32
What I would write to you if I were Emily Dickinson - Emilia Ferrante	33
The Great Buffet - Elizabeth Schriener	34
Immigrant’s Granddaughter - Ani Seigel	41
Love of All, Waterfall - Mateo Diaz	44
Miracle - Isabelle Zeaske	46
Addressed to Me - Jing He	47
Moon Ode - Emilia Ferrante	48
Magic - Ani Seigel	49
Light - Clyde Granzeier	49
At home with our saddest songs - Laine Kibler	50
Tongue-Tied - Jing He	52
Bird Nest - Lillian Pearce	54
this is nothing - Sawyer Santella	55
Hungry - Nina Smith	56
The Grapefruit - Emilia Ferrante	59
Instructions on Wanting - Leonor Brockey	62
Clouds and Mushrooms - Clyde Granzeier	64
A Search History - Elizabeth Schriener	68

Jumping Over Gravestones - Laine Kibler	70
two lovers - Sawyer Santella	76
St. Mary’s - Ani Seigel	77
The Word - Sarah Bayne	80
This Time - Grace Meinke	82
drugs, my father, and other things - So Jung Shin	83
Mushroom - Emilia Ferrante	86
turn of july - Maya Simonte	87
The Body in Cabin 14 - Evan Marcus	88
The erotic - Emilia Ferrante	102
i hope that you still love me - Sawyer Santella	104
The Book of the Beautiful End - Clyde Granzeier	106
Love, You. - So Jung Shin	112

Artwork

Blue - Abigail Schreck	10
Addictive Chemical - Isabelle Zeaske	17
think - Esther Sun	22
in the eye of the beholder - So Jung Shin	32
All Our Days are Pulitzers - Sarah Bayne	38
I Can See the time - Siyuan He	53
‘Hun-tun on the Sixth Day’ - B1 & B3 - Emily Mann	62
Spill - Jing He	64
Puzzle 41-2 - Dequan Gambrell	76
Duh - Dequan Gambrell	94
power and pleasure - Dequan Gambrell	104
Copy-And-Paste Sky - Tianyi Zhai	110

Cover art: *into the wild* by So Jung Shin

Doodles: *beloved childhood cartoons characters doodles* by Maya Simonte

Credo of Belief

Emilia Ferrante

I believe in museum dinosaur bones as a mode of time travel.

I could ride those bones back to the age of giant ferns and
oversize bugs, to the Cretaceous period before any living thing
named the eons.

I believe in soap bubbles as they drift away;

the longer they float the more possible it is that they could float
forever.

I believe in holding a rock in my hand and trying to feel its beginning.

(This one started when it broke off a larger rock in ancient
Rome. A man -- a gladiator, perhaps -- threw it into the sea. It
stayed there through the fall, the death of that gladiator; it
tossed in the wake of the first trans-Atlantic voyage; it looked
countless fish in the face, watched them get hauled up in a net
it could slip through. It was submerged for many revolutions,
both of countries and the sun. It was oblivious to two world
wars, the invention of the apple corer, and the first time some
one said "Well, that's the bee's knees!" until it washed ashore
and I held it flat in my palm.)

I believe in regional accents and humans trying to imitate bird calls.

I believe in two people dancing to street music.

I believe in reverent silence

music both terrible and fantastic
things that glow in the dark
sticky sea-salt skin.

I believe in watching someone watch fireworks,

ignoring the spectacle and getting a better show.

I believe in both shitty kid drawings and shitty adult drawings.

I believe in the color green;

specifically, when the sun is up and shining through a
leaf-canopy in a way that makes the shifting green above glow.

I believe in letting your feet sink into mud up to your ankles.

I believe in mermaids and space aliens, because I don't really know
anything.

I believe in the way a word can make you feel and a smell can make you
remember.

I believe that the night sky before the Industrial Revolution, before
even the dawn of man, was so full of stars it choked out the darkness.

I believe in the aurora borealis lights, even though I have never seen
them.

I believe in stained glass on stone floors, especially in churches.

I believe in the bug on my windshield, holding on for dear life from
Pennsylvania rest stop to Ohio rest stop. I try to show him the
map next to the Dunkin Donuts, but he flies away.

I believe also in the bug that did understand cartography, the one that
marched across Manhattan via the subway map on the R train.

(His bug-legs tiptoed over the Flatiron Building, toed the 2
line, took a trip to Central Park and Washington Square,
terrorized tenants of a highrise on fourth avenue, tried a
bite of pizza from a stand in Times Square, shocking tourists
with his towering spindly legs stretching above skyscrapers, big
bug body blacking out the sun.

They don't see how carefully he steps to avoid the cars, dogs,
hot dog stands, chain stores, fire escapes, and street artists.

They don't understand that he's trying to make his way
upstate, maybe escape to Canada, find some other giant
fugitive bug from Chicago or Colorado Springs or Rockville,
Illinois.

When they shoot him down, crushing an apartment building
in Washington Heights, they put his body in a glass case in

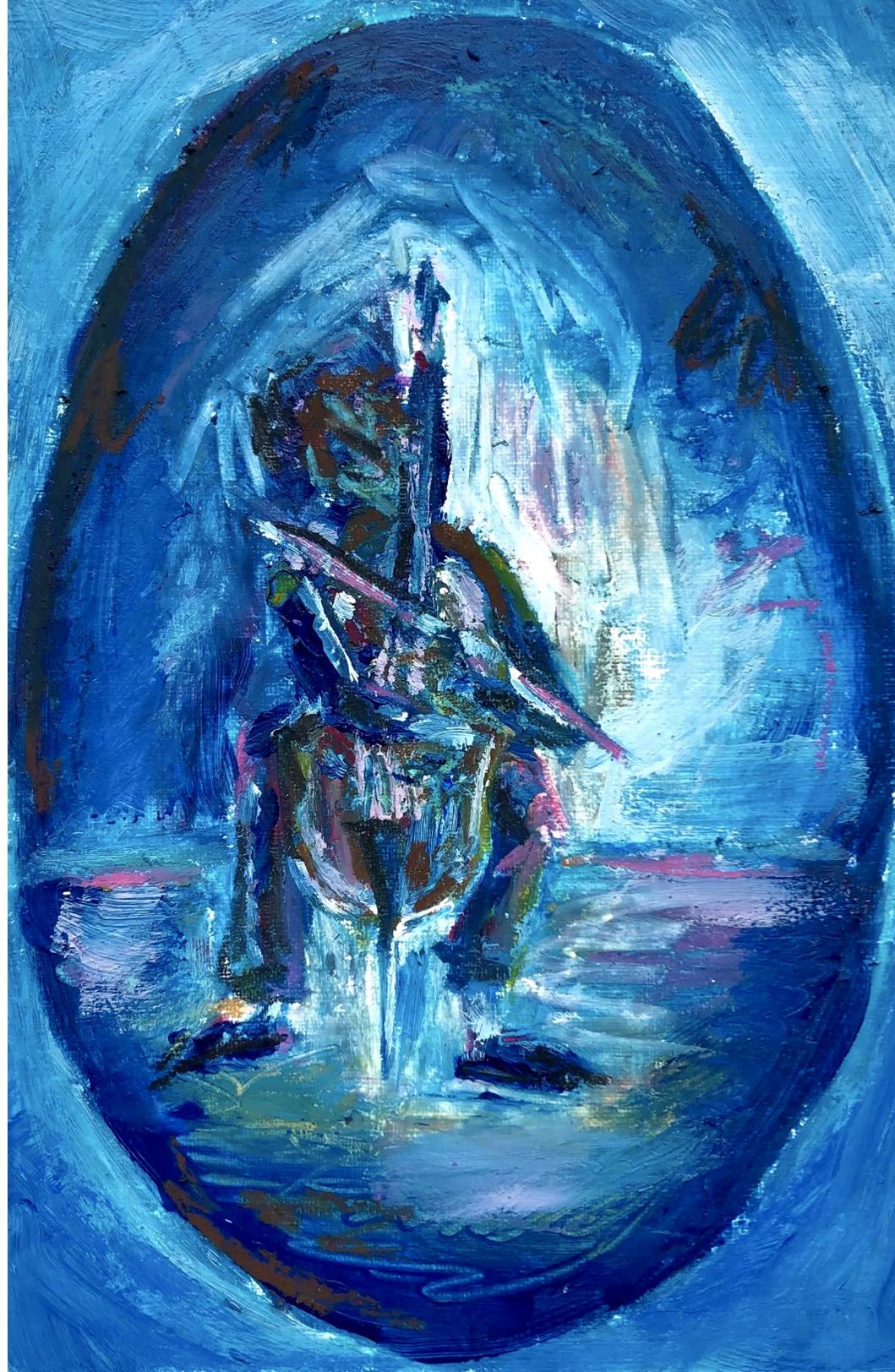
the Museum of Natural History as a reminder to all other bugs
of the consequences of comprehending cartography.)

I believe in the 250-pack of Crayola crayons with a plastic crayon-
sharpener built right into the back. (I especially believe in the
color Purple Mountain's Majesty.)

I believe in both libraries and used book stores;
I believe in explaining myself only some of the time --

I believe in buttercups, beech trees, bluets, and Babybel cheese.

Blue
Abigail Schreck >



bitter are the thoughts in my mind
red the color of blood stains the sky
the wind creates goosebumps on my neck
a chilling spirit continues to seep into my bones
clogging my lungs
poisoning my mind
oh it's just another day as me

i'm scared i'm going to burn out before i can even truly begin to
breathe

-unfinished

Rojin Shirwan



Uku stone, energy bars, tobacco

Ani Seigel

Last March, we snowshoed up Mt. Baldy and
my snowshoe's bindings broke on the way down.

Feet frozen, you told me about the time
a cougar tried to eat you and your friend.

We shared a cider while my socks dried out.

Uku stone, energy bars, tobacco.

Dirty pagans—we know which trees are good.

brushing my teeth

Sawyer Santella

i was just in the bathroom right? i love the bathroom. i love peeing in my own private little cubby (the third one is my favorite, the last one right before the big one) and i love looking at myself in the mirror—not in a narcissistic way (well, sometimes in a narcissistic way), but in a “that’s me, that person is me and i am that person and we are real” way. so anyways, i was looking in the mirror, brushing my teeth, and i heard a small group of people talking around the corner, back by where the showers are. they were speaking in that really excited, increasingly loud, super speedy way where you’re not totally sure whether they’re speaking a foreign language or not, until you’re finally able to make out a word or two and you realize that even though you have been speaking that same language for the eighteen years that you have been alive, you have absolutely no idea what they are talking about. and it’s not that big of a deal, because you don’t know them and you’re not even talking to them—you’re just moving the whirring toothbrush back and forth and up and down (not in an “i really enjoy brushing my teeth” way, or even in an “i really care about my personal hygiene” way, but more so in an “i really hope that my dentist is proud of me when they see how hard i’ve been trying” way)—but it does feel a little strange to be so close to a conversation and still so far away. you smile as you walk away, towards your room, because they are excited and having fun in the bathroom late at night as they are brushing their teeth, and you wonder what kind of conversations will happen there tomorrow, and whether they are at all like the conversations that happened there twelve years ago, or if they are somehow dramatically different.

missing persons

Theodore Poling

Missing Persons Report

July 24, 2021

Five-three, female

Her feet push deeper and deeper into the woods. She has the sight for this, has had it ever since she was a child. Her eyes scan for any safe passage forward, as naturally as breathing, picking her next step with ease.

She tiptoes down deer trails, walking a balancing act down the narrow snake of hoof-worn dirt. She crawls under hawthorns, soaking the knees of her jeans, finding refuge in the blank spaces under their sharp swords.

She takes her shoes off to ford the creek, hooking the heels of her sneakers with her index finger and tossing them over her shoulder like a businessman carrying his suit jacket through the city. Mud sinks between her toes, cold water numbing her feet.

Brown hair, brown eyes

She knows that moss hides the sound of steps where roots and leaves don't. She knows which clusters of cone-heavy spruce might hold grizzly bears and which are safe to pass through. Her senses are heightened, alert, animal, making it impossible to have any other thoughts, making it difficult to doubt herself.

She doesn't mind bowing before mighty oaks, limbs heavy with the weight of their leaves and acorns. She slips past a patch of raspberries with her head lowered, accepting the cuts that draw blood from her ankles.

Movement is her purpose, the mantra echoing in her head. She knows where north is, but does not follow it. Her feet hurt, her skin burns. Her only destination is up. Up the spines of the mountains, up and away.

Away.

135 pounds, stocky build

She avoids places where trails or tents might lie. She switchbacks up and through the same grove of pines, over and over. She hauls herself over boulders, browning her nail beds.

She stops for a rest only when it would be risky, even stupid, to continue. She falls more than sits on a small crag jutting out from the weathered stones embedded in the mountainside. She has found herself in an unlikely glen, a perfectly circular, random openness between thatches of wild lavender as tall as her shoulders. Her breathing evens out, her lungs feeling less like meat under the tenderizer. The muddy earth here only documents rabbits and squirrels, robins and foxes. She is careful to limit her own prints.

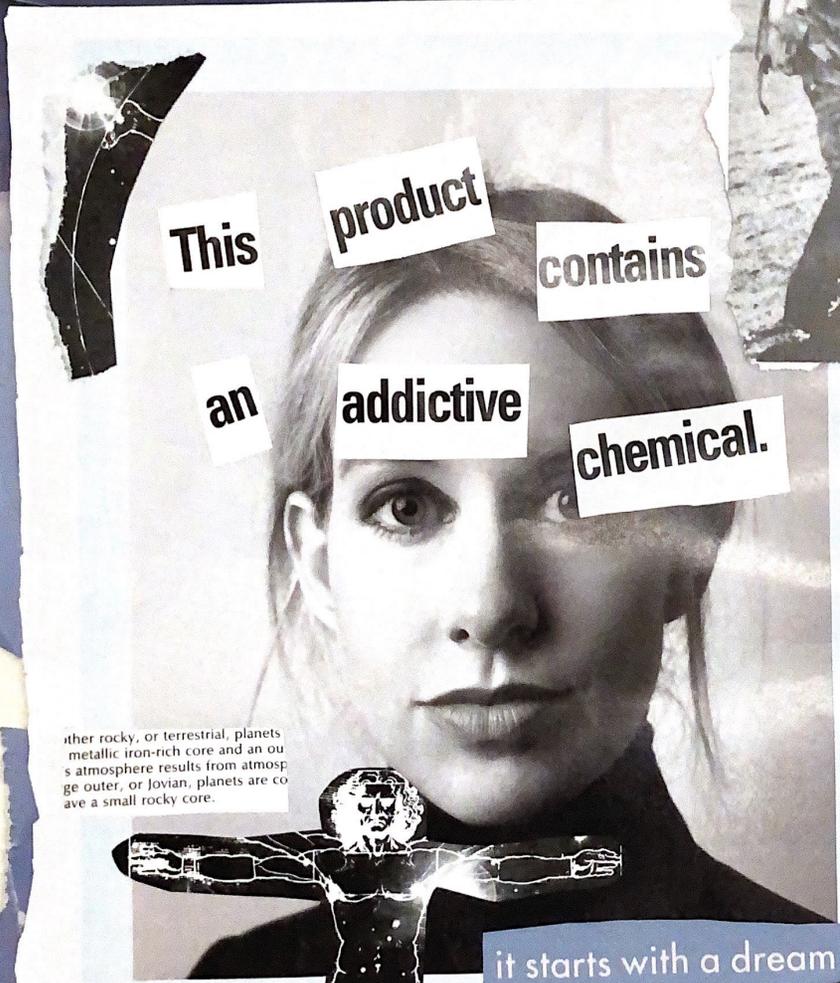
A heavy sigh falls out of her. She leans back against the mountain, letting it dig into her shoulders. A pebble is displaced, skittering to a stop by her left hip. She picks it up and rolls it between her fingers. It's jagged, a chalky white, glimmering slightly in the weak sunlight.

How long was this pebble a mountain? How long was it whole, staring out over the distant rivers like small gems glimmering in the valley below?

Now, it is broken. It is small, distinct from the mountain. This rock had moved through the earth, between tectonic plates, solidifying from magma. This rock had once been many things, had once been everything. Now, it rests for a brief hundreds of millions of years, inert, but someday, it will be living again. Its atoms will disperse, forming the throats of hummingbirds and the stamens of lilies. She rolls it across the pad of her thumb, seeing even then small pinpricks of material scrape off and fit into the grooves of her skin.

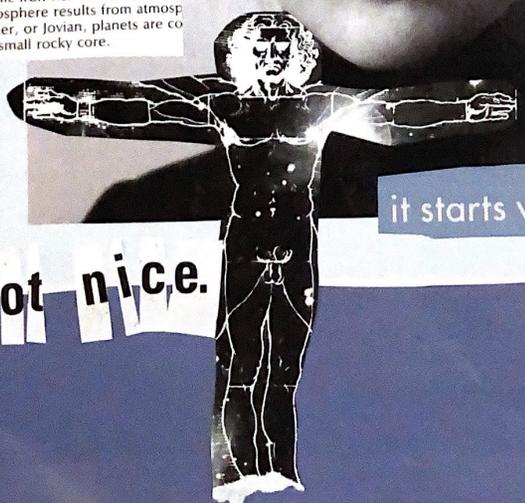
She puts the rock down, but licks the sediment off her thumb in apology. Now it can be a part of her and live with her. The world had gone quiet in the interim, the trees stilling their limbs. The glen around her appears untouched by human influence, undeveloped, unmarred. Is she the first one to sit just here, to disturb these rocks? In the city below, people walk the same sidewalks every day, leaving this part of the mountain quiet for now. She can imagine a girl like her, native to this forest, stepping through here long ago with the

BLOOD



This product contains an addictive chemical.

Other rocky, or terrestrial, planets have a metallic iron-rich core and an outer atmosphere. Gas giants, or Jovian, planets are composed mostly of hydrogen and helium and have a small rocky core.



it starts with a dream

Not nice.



understanding that she belonged to the world, not the other way around.

She has to keep moving. Calves protesting, she stands, feeling her back crack like stinging nettles down from her neck to her waist. She continues upward, progress scratched out in small victories as her world becomes increasingly vertical.

Last seen in Danbury on August 5

It is almost nighttime when she reaches the summit, and her body is at its limit. This is one of her favorite times of day. It is just after twilight, and people have closed their doors and drawn their curtains. The outside world belongs to the fireflies now, and to the moon.

She finds another place to sit and looks out over the furry backs of the mountains, the messy tip-tops of the pines and deciduous trees. For hundreds of square miles, it is just land, but the valley is flat and bright, glowing with sodium orange light in dotted grids.

She is seventeen, and she has run away from home. She left this morning, and is miles out. She did not measure her progress or memorize any landmarks. Her internal sense of place is impeccable, but looking down at the city, she does not know how she will get home.

She is not running from a heartache. She is not running from a raised fist.

No, her heart is only tired. Tired in a way that only her true mother can soothe. Sitting here, she does not think about missed notifications or rejected applications. She only thinks about the skin she has now, how it is grown and replaced by the food she gives it. How the groceries her mother brings home are wrapped in plastic. Like the pebble

< *Addictive Chemical*
Isabelle Zeaske

she'd created, the plastic that meets her hands clings in small portions, and goes into her. Down to her very core, little pieces of plastic fit and move alongside the meat, the muscle, the bone and fluid. This is the world that tires more each day, struggling to breathe in the air of its own creation.

She is comforted by the idea that she still has enough meat to feed a host of animals. She still has enough blood to soak the roots of the trees. She is not all plastic and stone. No matter what happens when she walks back down the mountain, she will return to this earth as she came from it. And from her will be new existences, new ways of living, climbing up this mountain with chlorophyll and paws and riverbeds.

There are no trails here, no phone signals. Naked under the sky, she lays down in the grasses, swiping away ticks and mosquitoes. She sleeps, wishing it came easily to her.

Her skin grows cold, first red, then white, but she drifts, and does not notice.

If found, please call () ___ - ____ .



Analogy Shortage

Grace Meinke

sand slipping from between the fingers...
waves receding as quick as they'd come...
petals wilting, forgetting who they were...
embers sighing their last breath with the wind...
summer sun sinking into nighttime...

what metaphors are left?
what simple fleeting things,
still bear resemblance to you?

leaves fall away
and so do people
and so does time
and so does the number of words left
to describe the way you always
depart...

unable to be felt,
you are a shadow,
whose silhouette is always
retreating.

evening thunderstorms lure worms from the earth.
by morning, the birds are perched and ready

“Is Morris Home?”

Gabriela Barrett

September 14th, 2021

“Morris? Is Morris home?”

“Not yet, Grandma.” I whispered and held her hand tightly.

Tracing her blue-veined hands, I remembered how alien like I thought these to be as a child, and how scared of them I was. But now, well into her 80s, they were evidence of age and time. Nothing alien about that.

We sat in her corner. A coffee-colored couch that needed to be thrown out had been the designated area for eating, sleeping, talking, and re-watching *The Wizard of Oz* for years. With it came an antique side table with a lamp only illuminating the cup and straw beneath it, and a multi-colored glass mosaic, filtering the setting sun through the window.

“Sandra!” my father exclaimed. He greets her as if they haven’t seen each other in years. A greeting filled with his contagious smile and his never-relenting energy that fills each room he enters. My grandmother was his elementary school teacher. Imagine that? Your mother as your teacher both in school and at home. But their relationship was strong. On the surface, the over-the-top yet hilarious personality of my father bothered my grandmother, but I could see clearly that she adored it and knew where he inherited it from.

My father set the grocery bags on the dining table. Bags filled with bagels and lox, white fish and cream cheese, rugelach and pastries, and some gefilte fish for good measure. We always came here for the holidays, permitting if my grandmother was mobile. The addition of her oxygen machine slowly limited our options.

I gazed up at my grandmother. Sandra. Or Sandy. Her hair is a dirty blonde with her roots slowly turning white. When I was younger, I never knew whose hair I had inherited. None of my immediate family had curls. But I eventually saw the wedding photo of my grandparents. She had two small, brown curls on the top of her forehead while my grandfather was almost balding. The high school sweethearts went on

to stay together through graduation, the war, a professional baseball career, five sons, and the many births of their grandchildren. I knew I had always longed for a relationship like that. Their dependency, their love, their need for each other’s safety and well-being. I remember flipping through photo albums and seeing their travels and adventures around the world. But my grandfather rarely looked at the camera while my grandmother smiled big and wide in her khaki shorts, white tennis shoes, and her pastel-colored windbreaker. It was curious.

I looked down at her hands again, those pale white hands with turquoise veins bulging through. I always held her hand. As much as I could.

“I got my nails painted today, Grandma.” I said while wiggling my fingers in front of her face.

“Oh, how beautiful,” she responded, as I saw the wrinkles on her face lift and morph into her classic smile. She chuckled slightly, as if this small piece of news I had delivered was a highlight of her day. Her chuckle was soft but familiar. She chuckled with an elegance you could only have acquired in the golden age. An age of big bands and swing dancing. An age where you could see Frank Sinatra live before sitting down to watch a film. An age of missing the young men who were drafted. An age where your best bet was changing your last name to something less...Jewish. An age where sewing a dress for your wife was looked down upon but you did it anyway because you picked up the trade in the war.

But it was clear, time had passed. I only knew my grandparents in the present. My grandfather’s wisecracking jokes, their unplanned visits to our house with a quart of ice cream tucked under one arm, my grandmother’s classic rich chocolate cake, meeting at the Italian restaurant down the road after my dance recitals, and the never-ending stories heard around the table during Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

I can remember hearing my grandfather’s thick Bronx accent, teasing my siblings and I with his riddles. “What color was George Washington’s white horse?” I giggled at the question, always wanting to hear it again during every visit and reacting as if I was hearing it for the first time.

But as time passes, age is its testament.

I glanced over to my grandmother again.

“Look, Grandma!” I exclaimed. She gently took my hands and said, “Oh how beautiful, when were they done?”

“Today.” The feeling had become regular. The repetition had become a staple of our conversations but that was oddly the only way to move forward. My chest tightened as I was reminded of how this was how it had to be. My grandmother was not any less than she was before. She just needed to be reminded of certain things.

“Why don’t you tell Grandma what you did today?” my father said as he motioned me to continue.

“But I already did.” I replied.

His face became relaxed, and he slowly nodded. “It’s okay.”

She reacted the same way every time — as if it was her first time hearing it.

I roped my arm through hers, clasped her hand again, and sat

think

Esther Sun

in silence. I rested my head on her shoulder and heard the hums and whirring of her oxygen machine, playing in time with the rise and fall of her chest. She smelled of her perfume, a perfume that can be difficult to describe but it is probably true that many grandmothers at the time wore it. It was strong, not overbearing, and was mixed with the scent of mothballs which was a familiar but pungent smell on her clothes. Her hand always grasped mine, tightly. Something physical to hold onto, something she was sure of.

The worst part was when I had to let go.

I had hoped that deep down in her mind, she still remembered who I was, even if she could not remember my name. My name is not the only thing that identifies me. I am the grandchild who always held her hand. The grandchild who is the second born of her youngest son. The grandchild who shares her love of Frank Sinatra and the Andrew Sisters. The grandchild who dances as she did as a flapper. The grandchild who inherited her chocolate curls. The grandchild who walked her to her car, making sure she got in safely. The grandchild who talked to her, even when she couldn’t respond. The grandchild that always thinks of her during the *Mourner’s Kaddish*.

And the grandchild who so badly wanted to tell her that Morris was not coming home. That in fact, the next time they would meet will be in another time, another place. But they will be together and hopefully dancing again.

After many years, I realized why my grandfather rarely looked at the camera in the photos that filled our family albums. He was always looking at her, making sure she was happy. And I hope — no, I am sure, he is doing the same now.

My grandfather, Morris, died over two years ago.

“Morris? Is Morris home?”

I glanced at my father, fought back my tears, kissed her forehead, and said with a smile, “Not yet, Grandma, not yet.”



Baby-Shaped

Nina Smith

I play until the tips of my pinkies hurt and
then I lie on the piano bench like a baby.

When I was a kid, I would dream of fantastic things
emus and butterflies and cliffside turquoise pools
with clear glass between them and
waves as tall as my house and lemonade
and my grandparents' blue tile bathroom across the Pacific Ocean
and down the street and I think the buyers
knocked that bathroom down it was so midcentury

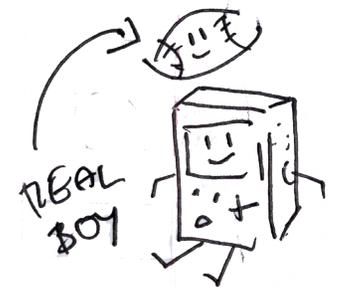
actually, I have no idea what they've done with the place and I never
will, will I
it's very silly how something can be so yours and then
not yours at all
(perhaps I could visit although I'd only be able to stand
outside unless they let me in but who would let
a stranger into their house just because she's claiming that
it used to belong to her grandparents and
she used to swing from those stairs like
they were monkey bars you know the main staircase the one in the
dining room
and her drawings were hung up on those cool-looking bricks
by the laundry room and the little office it's
actually a very unique kind of brick she just can't remember
the name right now but she has photos of her playing dress-up in the
backyard
and in fact her grandpa built it Cyril Smith maybe
you've heard of him he passed away
last summer but his company does a lot
of the buildings around here although
now his son her uncle is moving to Byron so who knows what's going

to happen
to the company)

I haven't had a dream since I've been here
though I lie awake at night consumed by dream-like things
lumps and little beans and thank god there are no bugs in my room I
wouldn't sleep a wink
though it almost feels wrong doesn't it to be so unplagued I spent
a summer in the mountains and slept with mosquitoes in my sleeping
bag
and woke up with their kisses on my ankles I still have the scars
to prove it I can prove anything Lia told me so
she said I make it hard to disagree with me and wouldn't elaborate
so I have to assume it's a good thing or I do because it's easier
than taking it to heart

now I have an avocado rotting in my fridge I don't have the heart
to throw it away I don't have any heart at all or I have too much of the
wrong kind
the soft slow beat excitable kind and I can't put it away
couldn't if I tried and by god have I tried but that's all beside the point
isn't it

now I won't dream here, I won't even sleep here
but I may just lie a little longer, baby-shaped.



whiteroom

Aarushi Ganguly

1. I am in the white room, but that is to say that the white room is outside of me. We are two distinct entities stuck, suspended in time. There is nothing to indicate if this is before or after, life or death, only that it is this white room and me. My own purgatory perhaps.

2. I am in the white room, and everything is white. Not just white, but blank — an empty surface to be remade into something decadent — or depressing — but the optimist in me chooses decadent. In this new reality, nothing is white. Instead both the room and I are dressed in vibrant reds and blues. We are no longer prisoners of monotony.

3. But I am in this white room, waiting I suppose for something to knock us out of this moment. There is a draft. From what? I don't think it's for me to know because all I see is the blinding reality of me and this room, this place. I can't remember what I was, or where I was, who I was. I can't remember what happened or what didn't, and yet, I know deep down this was not a mistake.

4. I am still in this white room that someone painstakingly devised, and now they are laughing or crying or maybe they are in a white room of their own. I wonder if their white room is the same shade as mine, stripped bare or painted over. Are we complete strangers or connected by another person in another white room? More questions, no answers.

5. The white room and I are at odds. I can't explain it, but something feels different between the two of us, as if we are slowly becoming unstuck, as if whatever I do will become my own punishment. I suppose, then, that the room is alive, and that scares me even more.

6. Since finding out that the white room is living, capable of seeing and hearing everything, I've done nothing to stop the inevitable outcome.

Try as I might, I feel it begin to pull at me, point at the different corners of my limbs. It jeers at me, sticking its invisible tongue out to let me know that I am no longer safe. Not that I ever was.

7. I am in a white room, but now, it's begun to eat me from the inside out, and I wonder as the universe drains in front of me — what happens next?



I Sing for Flowers

Shao-Chi Ou

I sing for flowers
Graveyard, poppy, and lavenders
All kinds of fragrance and colors

I sing for the withered
That wept in the nothingness of bullet casing
Tears polished, souls feathered
Wish them a dream that will never be thundered

I sing for the syrupy past

As slimy is the tick-tock of the eternal moon night
At the tip of the haunting smile I sit, don't know how long my spark
will last

My notes blanketed with tender that the morning light will not cast

I sing for the waiting, and the waited
Across a whole universe of torrent my voice travels
To the tranquil plain, lush but rusted
To the abandoned lighthouse, sturdy yet never visited

I sing, for flowers
For sunlight, for soil
For the palms of wind that embrace
Vulnerable petals

信仰 (*Belief*)

Siyuan He



A Love Letter to the Moon

So Jung Shin

My dearest Selene,

Another cosmic year has passed and I am getting older day by day. How are you, and the child? Are they well? I write to you in the hopeless hopes of saving the burning bridge between us, of getting my words across the infinite distance between you and I. You'll listen to me, won't you? You always have. Why, I'm not so sure. Your patience, and your unconditional kindness—it's what made you weak for so long, what let me hurt you for so long.

Do you remember, when we were children, just bits of gas and rock? Do you remember, when I first learned about the existence of me and you and the universe? How I thought I had been the centre of your orbit, how I let my obsession with power and strength devour me. Do you remember, how I was force-fed by the galaxy, taught the age-old tale that defined my destiny—something I still don't quite understand. My youth was a brutal playground, and you were my favourite toy.

I was taught to breathe fire and nothing else, because I am heat and I am power and I am the life-source of this world. So, no, I do not want your rivers, or your waterfalls, or whatever other streams you think will cool me down. Because, yes, I enjoy the burn. I enjoy the pain. It's all I've ever known—was what I had believed during my adolescence. I hadn't known of the point where we came together, where fire and water met to become the lava that leaked from volcanoes, where ice and heat yielded deserts of frosty white that marked the ends of a world. You are weak, I had said, so let me help you. Let me show you how to burn the way that I do. Let me protect you, because I know how to best. It was that mentality that left you with craters and rubbles across your skin, the aftermath of a silent war.

I wonder, how, through all that, Gaia came into existence. Beautiful and kind and giving. They took after you, without doubt, they took after your grace and beauty. I can see it in the way they dance with you in the night, their gentle waves a mimicry of your

gravitational pulls. They look beautiful under your moonlight. I see myself in them too, sometimes. I see it in the way that forests burn and mountains tremble and beggars cry for water in the summer heat. I see myself in their self-destruction; I wonder if I taught them that.

Do you remember, when I asked you, what would happen if an ember could cry? If it means that it extinguishes itself and ceases to exist, because it went against what its prophecies dictated. I asked you, in the throes of anger and fear, what would happen if an ember diverged from the legends and tales of its eternal forefathers. Show me, again? How you cry.

I have never seen a sun weep. Does it mean it is no longer a star? Has it lost its light, its spark? Tell me, dear Selene, how do you glow so brightly against the darkness? Because, I think, my soul is tired. I think, I am dying, and I think, I will perish. Do you know, dear Selene, why I've hurt you so? And Gaia, why I've burned you so? I used to believe I was your saviour, but now looking at the mess that is my being, perhaps you are mine. So tell me, dear Selene, how you sing in the dark, how you guide lost sailors and stars alike. Tell me, Gaia, how you hold ashes and sand, how you burn and die and come back to life.

I used to believe you came into my orbit, in search of warmth and knowledge from a blessed god of fire. I hadn't realized that you never asked for my protection, and neither did Gaia wish to be birthed to this impossible existence. And so, I wonder, if you could break this gravitational pull that binds our miserable existence, would you do it? If you had asked me before, I don't think I would have let you. There's nothing sadder than a sun burning to its death alone, a single star forgotten in a galaxy marked by emptiness. You're all I have, you must understand. I held you in the only way I could: in burn marks and tainted skin and love that hurts. Because you are my salvation, Selene, and I needed you to stay right where you were, where you lived in my shadows until I slumbered and you could finally shine.

But now, as I look at our child—a culmination of our dichotomous existence—as they live and breathe and thrive, it gives me hope for a universe where I don't have to hurt you in the name of love. And so, you must forgive me for realising so late, that in all our years of life, I have always burned for you. Flawed, yes, but I've never learned to love gently the way you do so easily. And so, I look at our child and

whisper a prayer into the cradle of my hands, an ancient script I know I learned from you, to wish that their fires do not burn so harshly, and their waves do not crash so hard.

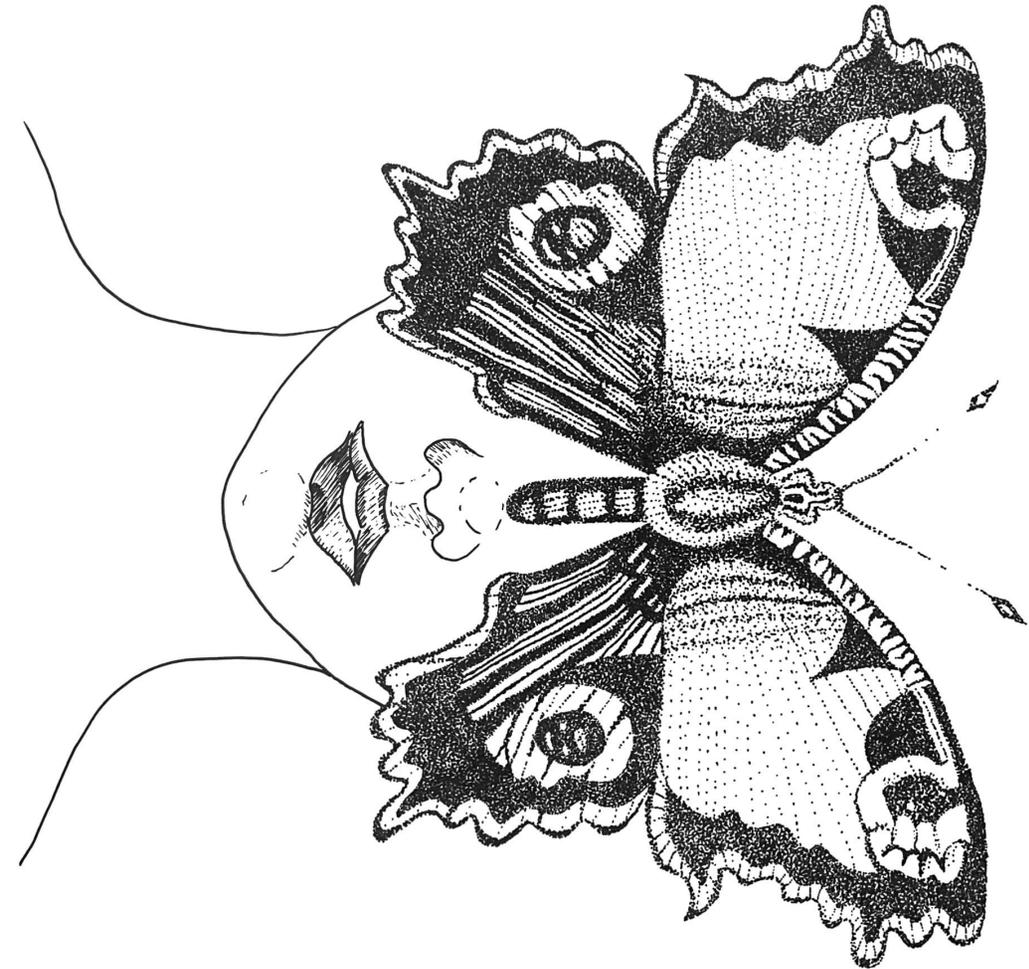
I've come to realize that the emotions that rule your heart, the waves and the water and the tide, they are just as powerful as the immortal spirits that guide us, as the fire that kindles within me. You have taught me, even in your silenced victimhood, that anger is not strength, and abuse is not love. You are not weak, and neither did you need protection from the universe; if anything, you needed protection from me. And so, I write in sorrow and in regret and in apology, for the hurt I have done to you, and the misguidance I have received. I write in fear, of the suns birthed in hatred and wrath, of the ones who know not of passion and kindness and patience.

I write to ask you to shine in my place, as I burn to stardust and disappear. I write for you to teach those that will come after me what I have learned far too late. I write to confess my final sins and my final kisses and my final goodbyes.

And I write to say that I love you, and that I am sorry. The bridge between us has crashed and burned, that much I can see. But I hope that you can see the ashes as flecks of stars, each a moment of goodness between us.

And so I write to the moon that shined, as the sun that burned, hopeless and lost and lonely.

Helios.



in the eye of the beholder

So Jung Shin >

Call Me Silly

Emerson Lauster

Silly me
What little sleep I've had
Silly to think of sleep when the world is dying
How selfish to mind myself as people perish
Fires blaze while I scramble for good grades
The plague is raging while my homework is due
"Just apply yourself and you'll get through"
"Climb a tree" they tell a fish
While it's not allowed to show its wrists
Go to school
Don't worry, the cases will end soon
Watch your classmates drop like flies
But we only accept the best
So how dare you cry
I'm younger than the warfront
But older than my rights
Media mixed with propaganda
And my brother just joined the fight
Another school gets bullet holes for decoration
Another attack for being an abomination
Atlas, how I seem to kneel with thee
You may be the only god left to hear my plea
Because my words apparently haven't gone on
Haven't reached the big man, what did you expect?
A King to confer with one of his pawns?
Silly me
How could I live in apathy
The world still turns
As my compassion burns
My heart has given all its could
But we lived in a messed up world
So silly me

What I would write to you if I were

Emily Dickinson

Emilia Ferrante

open me carefully, dear one
like a letter made of rice-paper

fold me out, unravel me
but make it gentle,
for I am unused to the oils on your fingertips.

you may find that I am
held together by gossamer thread --

take me apart,
then,
examine each shimmering strand,
tell me if I am still beautiful
when I am in pieces.

put me back
neatly, softly, like you care,
as if I were precious.



The Great Buffet

Elizabeth Schriener

Lila practically lived at The Great Buffet. In the middle of a strip mall, it was sandwiched between a dollar store and pizza place. White tile floors lined the entrance leading to the front counter and a wooden barrier separated the path from the steaming food on the other side. Large ceiling fans mounted above moved faster than they should have, just like Lila whenever she saw the boy.

The best part of the restaurant was the regulars, even if she rarely talked to them. The boy and his family used to come in every Sunday after church, and Lila always recognized their voices as soon as they walked through the door. Despite the starkness of their Sunday best and cream-colored skin, the family always came in chatting and chortling like a small circus. The parents typically led the way, nodding and rattling on about the day's sermon. The elder brother followed closely, his puffed-out chest and angled chin indicating a proud and boisterous presence. Lila noticed he frequently fashioned jokes or funny faces to entertain the younger sister, who radiated joy.

The middle boy, on the other hand, was quiet. He simply listened to what the others had to say, his shiny black shoes squeaking against the laminated floors as he followed the rest inside. Lila often fixated on him. She knew what it was like to be an outsider.

He didn't seem like an outsider now, though.

Bennett, that was his name. He had the same dimples and shy smile, but he was taller and stockier than he had been the last time she had seen him. Nonetheless, she knew it was him the moment he walked through the door. Had it been maybe two, three years? She remembered that he had said something about his parents' divorce and that he wouldn't be around as much. That was when they had entered high school. By that time, she had already started working at her family's restaurant. Now, she had graduated from high school and would be heading to college in a few short months. She wondered if the boy would be doing the same.

Lila watched him stop in the middle of the entryway. She

noticed the father was absent. It didn't seem to matter, though, because Bennett took his place in the front, turning back to face his mother and siblings. His sister nodded at something he said and walked back outside. Perhaps they had left a wallet in the car or were waiting for someone.

The boy's curly hair moved as he bobbed his head in conversation. He styled it differently now. There was also something different about his demeanor. He seemed reserved, just as he had always been around his family, but there was a certain air of confidence detaching him from his past as the forgotten middle child hiding in the back.

Lila wasn't sure how so much could change in the span of a few years. It seemed like yesterday her little brother Gavin had convinced Bennett to play with them.

Their hangout room had been a small room near the entrance of the restaurant filled with old board games and a computer. Lila and Gavin were expected to entertain themselves there during the workday. While Lila was allowed to help her mother occasionally, Gavin was not. They were not supposed to interact with customers unless they were addressed first. Gavin knew the rules, but he didn't always follow them.

Bennett had been sitting patiently, waiting for his family to finish their food. He perked up when Gavin approached him. "Do you want to play a game with us?" Gavin asked. Lila chewed her lip and put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm so sorry my brother was bothering you. We'll just excuse ourselves..."

"It's alright. Bennett can play with you if he'd like," the mother said.

Lila froze. A parent got involved, which meant it was too late to back out. She would probably get in trouble with her parents later. She was happy for the next part, however. The boy looked up at Lila and excused himself from the table. Lila led them to their hangout room. The children fumbled awkwardly at first, unsure of what to say or do next. Neither were the loquacious type; Bennett didn't seem as outgoing or confident as his siblings, and Lila's shyness did not help her dispel the ugly rumors going around at school about "the Asian girl." Gavin, on the other hand, never cared about what anyone thought. He picked out a few games and set them in front of him.

“Okay,” he said. “We have Sorry, Monopoly, and Operation. We also have Chutes and Ladders, Clue, and checkers.” He pointed to each game’s respective box, slightly worn from use.

The boy did not respond.

“Well? What game do you want to play?” Gavin asked. He bounced up and down on his knees impatiently.

“You mean I get to choose?”

“Of course, you’re the guest. Or we could take turns if you want,” Lila said.

They played Monopoly and Sorry for the rest of the afternoon and did the same the following Sunday. It became a tradition that lasted for years. When the boy was done eating, he would excuse himself and go into the small hangout room. He always finished his food faster than his family members, who were more talkative and indecisive. He saved his conversations for Lila, and she did the same. Talking came naturally when they played board games. There was no pressure to say anything spectacular, or to say anything at all.

But that was when they were kids. As a hostess and server, there wasn’t just pressure to talk to the boy and his family as customers: it was mandatory. The bell at the restaurant entrance rang, and Bennett’s younger sister ran through the door with a purse in her hand. She handed it to her mother, and the family approached Lila once again.

Lila backed towards the kitchen, hoping to find an employee to take her place. The white door swung open, and Lila bumped into her mother.

“Mamma, can you replace me at the counter?”

“Give me a minute, Lila, I’m taking note of food for Papa.”

“But it’s the—”

“Lila, please. Gavin’s in the kitchen. I’ll have him replace you in

an hour or two, okay?”

Lila’s mother brushed past her towards the hot food. For a moment, Lila’s legs refused to move. In a few short months, she would be giving up her hangout for a dorm room and her apron for textbooks. She had already accepted the fact. What kind of twisted sense of fate made the boy appear when she was this close to leaving the restaurant and its memories behind?

She heard the laughter grow louder. With a deep breath, she listened to her mother. She willed herself to treat the boy and his family members like any other customers even though it felt like her heart was beating out of her chest. She turned towards the counter and planted a fake smile on her face.

“Table for four?” Lila asked. Bennett nodded. He wore a polite smile; warm, but the kind given to a stranger rather than a friend. Maybe he didn’t recognize her. She felt embarrassed, the way she felt playing checkers with Bennett the day before they entered middle school.

Checkers had been their go-to game for some time, but that day was special. More than anything, she remembered how she had felt. Gavin was last-minute school shopping with their aunt, so it was just Lila and Bennett.

All Our Days are Pulitzers

Sarah Bayne >



“Are you excited about school tomorrow?” Bennett asked.

“I like school, but I’m a little nervous. Middle school just seems so different,” Lila said.

“You’ll be okay. You’re smart and nice. You must have plenty of friends,” Bennett assured her. He jumped over one of Lila’s red checkers with his black one.

“A few, but not really.” Lila shrugged. Chewing her lip, she captured two of the boy’s checkers and landed in the first row of his side of the gameboard.

“Well I think you’re great.”

Lila blushed and placed another checker on top of hers, denoting it a “king.” She always won at checkers, but that wasn’t the reason she played.

Lila pushed the memory aside and gazed up at the present-day version of Bennett.

“Right this way,” she said. She seated the family and took their drink orders. She exhaled a deep breath as she walked away. It wasn’t that long ago she and the boy spent Sunday afternoons playing checkers and other board games in the hangout room. Then she became old enough to work, and gradually she saw Bennett less and less. He told her about his parents’ divorce, and then he had stopped coming altogether.

The hour pressed on, with Lila serving other customers and occasionally glancing at the boy’s table. Soon enough, he had finished his meal and made his way towards her.

“Lila?” he asked.

“That’s me,” she said. She wondered if he could see the surprise on her face. His voice was much deeper than before.

If Bennett thought Lila’s expression was strange, he didn’t show it. In fact, a wave of relief washed over his face. “I thought it was you. It’s good to see you. It’s been a while since I’ve been here,” he said.

“Well, we’re glad to have you back,” she replied, managing a slight smile.

“Yeah, it’s weird. But not in a bad way.”

“Time flies. It’s pretty much the same here, though. I mean, some things have changed, of course. I know I have. I mean... Well, how have you been?” She swallowed and chewed her lip nervously. She

never could get over that habit. *Slow down*, she thought.

“Good. Finished high school and all. I’m off to university in the fall.”

“Nice. Me too.”

“Where?”

“U of M.”

“Ooh, rivals. MSU here.” The boy tapped his fingers against his pant leg. He leaned over the counter and pressed his palms against the artificial jade. “Anyway, I guess...I guess I just wanted to thank you. You were a good friend to me a while back, and I still think about that.”

“Oh. Of course.” Lila felt the heat rise to her cheeks. She tucked a strand of black hair behind her ear.

They heard laughter and glanced in the direction of the boy’s family approaching. “Well, good luck next year,” he grinned.

“You too.”

Then his family was there. The mother noted how much Lila had grown, and Lila made similar comments about Bennett’s sister. The mother paid for the bill and headed for the exit. Following her, the boy looked back and smiled. Lila blinked a few times and drummed her fingers on the counter. Time had passed so quickly, and now they were going their separate ways. She wasn’t sure what came over her, but she knew it was now or never.

Lila scribbled on a sticky note and started towards the door just as it closed. She threw it open and sprinted into the parking lot.

“Bennett!”

He took his hand off the car door and turned to face her. Lila suddenly became aware of how silly she must’ve looked standing in the middle of the parking lot in her work attire. Bennett’s brother stared at her from the driver’s seat, and his sister smiled from the back. She fiddled with the fraying edge of her apron as she approached Bennett.

“What’s up? Did I forget something?” he asked.

“U of M isn’t far from MSU. I know you’ll probably be busy, but if you ever want to visit for game days... Nothing beats the Big House, haha.”

She dropped the apron and smoothed it out. From the corner of her eye, she saw his mom lean forward from the passenger seat to see what was going on.

“Here’s my number... in case you ever want to visit Ann Arbor. Or, you know, grab a coffee and play checkers.”

She met his stare and handed him the sticky note. She had spoken quickly, and her palms were sweaty, but she had done it. The next move was his.

His eyebrows furrowed. For a split second, Lila was scared she had made a fool out of herself. But he flashed a toothy grin.

“Thank you, Lila. I’ll have to take you up on that offer.” His dimples crinkled, and Lila noticed his eyes were bright blue in the sunlight. Were his cheeks pink?

He waved and got in the car. Lila watched it exit the parking lot and turn right, vanishing from sight. Heading back into the restaurant, she heard a ding and pulled out her phone from her back pocket. There was a text from a new number.

This is Bennett :)



Immigrant’s Granddaughter

Ani Seigel

for Ana

Take me back to my homelands
where I’ll reside across the borderline,
thatched roofs, barn swallows’ song
mingling with the misty air.

The summer light never fades until winter
breaks the cycle of sun, only leaving
starlight filtering through
the fragmented glass, I can see it.
Between the lake and the woods,
my native tongue. I’ll travel down
those cobblestone streets,
searching, yearning
for a beginning to the story of
this immigrant’s granddaughter.

Festival of Colors

Riya Aggarwal



Love of All, Waterfall

Mateo Diaz

Love of All

\\

“It’s like a drop of blood running down the wall
and then a waterfall.”

the Beast pacing in my mind stalks
so quiet, so Subtle
Like it’s not there at all

A tart to taint my Sweet,
Cherries rotting in the summer rain
You gasped, and said you Love me
your words have yet to bring our pain

Still as autumn leaves changed
I came into your bed
As thoughts of your smile beamed at me
would fill into my head

and when Fire burned the dead leaves
to make way for the snow
As we stared at Waltzing Embers

I could feel your feelings go

Waterfall

//

...

My spring goddess Blooms again
as Honey smothered rye
The gentle love I give you
reflects nothing in your eye

In the night you sing a Song as I play you with my lute,
but in the day when I call out to you
your voice is always mute

The care I’ve always gave to you
seems to be in Vain
Despite the love I planted here
It Withers with Your Rain.

Miracle

Isabelle Zeaske

“Well, we’ve solidified operations. Maximum efficiency and minimum overhead. Actually, maximum overhead...because I work on the first floor!” The bishop laughed. Andrea wasn’t so sure about the whole thing.

“So...where do you hold services? And how does the whole thing stay up?” Andrea looked out one of the many stained-glass windows, this one depicting the Angel Gabriel visiting a crouched, blue-clad Mary.

“That’ll be the fourth floor. We have a guide in the elevator, you must have seen.” Andrea had, now she thought about it. But she had been distracted by the bishop himself. His all-white business suit seemed mismatched with his Pentecost stole, carrot-orange hair, and deep Mediterranean tan. Together they approached the water cooler, which was filled with a dark red substance and surrounded by a gaggle of cardinals blessing each other’s conical paper cups. “And as for the architecture...We’ll chalk it up to a miracle.”

Andrea’s editor had been most concerned about that one. The new Vatican headquarters had been making headlines left and right, but Mr. Johan had been dying to break the story on how the twenty-story, stained-glass monstrosity managed to be constructed in the shape of a perfect cross.

Addressed to Me

Jing He

Did you know that
between the books of mama’s desk,
beneath the mountain pens and lined loose-leaf papers,
there lies two cards?

One is of mama, black hair slicked back,
smiling—the kind through the eyes,
through the cheeks, through her
firm skin, fine teeth.

The mama in the photo—-young
and uncreased—-as if untouched by
time looks just like an old friend,
ready to leap under the sunlight.

There, below, did you see?
The one that glints under the
yellowing light—-tucked behind
the first—-and shimmering
in a nauseating shade of green?

That woman stares straight through
her eyebrows and bites her tongue, her
hair tied tight to hide the grays and whites.
Even in the sunlight she is a mute shade of
gray. Black eyes, blank stare—-
do you recognize her?

Did the photo make you swallow, hard—-
a foreign feeling of something tumbling
back to the tip of your tongue
and back to the back of your throat—-

the photo is acidic, and you vomit in reverse.

You do recognize her,
perhaps through the blankets of time,
soft fabric across skin, time that slips
through the books of mama's desk,
above the mountain pens and lined loose-leaf papers.

Moon Ode

Emilia Ferrante

I have a lover
who drapes a blanket of darkness over my shoulders
keeping me still as the night is still
filling the holes in my heart.
She waits for me at the close of day,
my nightly sun, my partner in the sunless sky.
She knows I ache for the sun--
 that I yearn for a warmth
 not imagined,
that I live each day crossing my fingers behind my back,
praying that this time it won't
fall back beyond the horizon.
She knows this, and still she waits
behind the treeline each night,
knowing I'll be back because she knows also
the fire of the day will never last
the sun is an indifferent and finicky creature.
I give her my dreams
and in return,
she offers me a nightcap
 of stars.

Magic

Ani Seigel

Where
did the magic
go that let us feel
things we could not
see? We felt infinite, yet
insignificant. We liked not
knowing how the world turned.
There was light behind our eyelids,
scrapes on our knees, fairy gardens beneath
our feet, and unanswered questions in our hearts.

Magic.

Light

Clyde Granzeier

The orange-tinted western sky patterned with wisps of clouds
The fronts of rushing cars and trucks in the streets below
The windows of brick and steel buildings that I walk past
The waxing white moon above that can't be captured by camera
The lamps that glimmer and shine in the dark and overtake my eyes
The intermittent yellow blinks of fireflies I hold in my palm
The strings of electrical white that illuminate a Toronto tapestry
The neon blue and melting wax of the lamp I brought with me
The monitor screen I write this on in the comforts of my room
All of them lighten my burden with their glow

At home with our saddest songs

Laine Kibler

What if you showed me
all of the most beautiful
sad songs you've ever heard?
And after we laid our pain
out on the table,
we shared a warm drink,

warm spiced cider for you
and the sweetest coffee for me,
because embracing each other
through the good in our stomachs,
through the pain we have sung,
may do more healing
than the quiet ever has.

The dog is running in the lawn,
so after we have finished,
you go chase her and I
smile through the window,
knowing your toes will freeze,
a pair of fresh socks in my hand
to give you once you come back in.

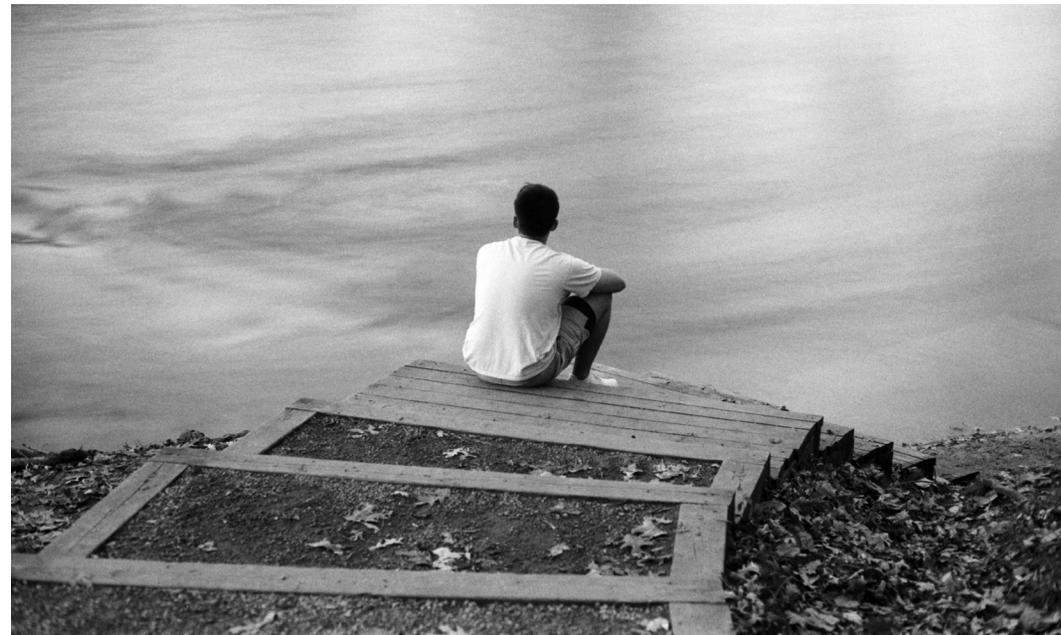
Maybe I'll put on a record we love,
one of the lighter ones,
and it will sound like the sunshine
you say you feel when you're with me;
so we'll dance,
hands together and hearts parallel,
the invisible string wrapped up
around us,

swaddled in each other
(in my words; in your hands)
and warm, so warm,
in winter as well as summer,
and spring and fall
and all the seasons they never discovered
but we found in our songs,
in ourselves, in this dance,
in the hurt, in the joy,

in the socks you pull onto your feet,
and the dog asleep
on the living room floor.

I Can See the time

Siyuan He



Tongue-Tied

Jing He

My teacher reads from *The Rainbow Fish*, but the only thing I can think about is the pressure of my leg pushing down on my ankle from sitting cross-legged on the hardwood floor. Everything in the reading space is draped in a nauseating blend of red and orange, the place shimmering in the summer heat. Two rows of bookshelves outline the space crammed with little odds and ends oozing out of the corners; one more book will cause the shelves to explode—words flying out of papers and taunting me for not being able to understand them. I am not sure how the reading corner has space for twenty-two fifth graders, nor how the twenty-two fifth graders have the patience for each other.

I sit in the back; the sun shines onto a bookshelf next to me and the light bounces off and hits the corner of my eyes, but I don't ask to move. Glued to the teacher, the other kids sit, shoulders forward and eyes wide, listening intently as she explains the story. I try to focus on the words I understand: "beautiful fish," "shiny scales," "loneliest."

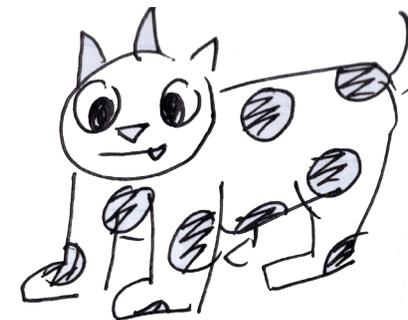
Two minutes pass, three. Her words blend together in soft "r"s and "l"s, a melody foreign to my ears. The floor below me is warm, almost too warm—absorbing our body heat and radiating it off into the air. The room keeps on getting brighter.

The teacher pulls out a teal marker and writes on the board, her wrist twirling like a ballet dancer on the stage. The other kids shoot up their arms, and she calls on them, one by one. I hide behind the raised hands—they are like a wall, shielding me from the glaring, white board.

My head pounds as I translate the letters in front of me. I can feel a bruise forming on my ankle, my feet warm and tingling from the pressure of my leg. She is asking about the main idea: "main," for important, "idea," for purpose.

The girl next to me speaks. Her English is smooth, matching the soft tone of her voice. The teacher responds, and they go back and forth, building off of each other's words like a tango dance. I feel my head spinning, the answer on the tip of my tongue, ready to roll off, but not quite.

Then the eyes fall on me. The teacher gives me a smile—the kind of smile that only the bottom half of the face moves, the eyes unwavering. The tag behind my t-shirt irritates my neck; the room is filled with the suffocating smell of cheap air-freshener and damp sweat. I try to remember the rhythmical tones of the girl's voice and search for the words lodged in my throat. I hold onto my idea like holding a piece of paper on the tip of my finger. But I let it go, watching the paper burn in the summer heat, never allowing light on its surface. My answer falls deep within me, and I don't speak.



Bird Nest

Lillian Pearce

there's a bird nest in my living room
i noticed it this morning
in the lampshade across from the frosted window
close to the floor, but not quite

it is made up of orange string from
the knitted pillows and black dog
hair from the rug, chipped paint
and yellowed sheet music from old carols

it looks close to bursting
some light is seeping through the
cracks and gaps and holes
searching for nearby spots to metastasize

there's only one egg now, but i feel
a second one coming

this is nothing

Sawyer Santella

i really think you should know
that, at night, when i'm alone,
i tuck my pants into my socks,
to keep the spiders out.
and still,
they're never more than
6 feet away.
and when my legs feel fuzzy and weak,
and i can't tell myself why,
i pick up a marker
and color outside the lines
of my tattoos.
and sometimes i pretend
to play video games
because the plastic feels
calm and safe,
pressed firmly
against my palms.
and the buttons help vacuum the carpet in my brain.
sometimes
when i lie in bed at night,
i wonder if i'm
back home again,
but then, i don't think i'm anywhere
at all.



Hungry

Nina Smith

You will always have an attractive home that'll be a source of pride and pleasure.

— fortune cookie message on the window above the sink

Today I am walking to find myself
a place to sit
read
maybe eat a little, if I can find it

Today I am hungry
for lunch, among other things
for that kitchen with those plants perched in their jars
on that windowsill where my mother is propagating green onions
and the dust lights up in the afternoon sun
Ravenna sneezes — there is dust everywhere

I am hungry to be full
as if it will bring me some comfort to be uncomfortable
as if it will remind me
You are here
God forbid any moment should pass without your mentioning it
without its very own marquee, its place in the history books
its lamplight recollection and a portrait over the fireplace

I get why people have lockets now
I should like to have a picture on me at all times

Lately I am a cracked crystal cup —
overflowing on the phone and crying when it hangs up,
letting all the excess slowly drain until I'm empty again,
and when my eyes are dry,

dialing the numbers I know by heart for one more sip
of that slippery happiness
five one zero to feel at home, five two eight to feel far away,
seven zero five two to feel like you've never been there before

They say heart attacks in women often go undetected
and sometimes I think I'll die from this pain in my chest
like something large is sitting right between my ribs,
or else a weighted blanket is wrapped around
20 crushing pounds on all sides and counting
but when I lie under a weighted blanket I don't know where to put my
toes
and I don't have that problem when I talk to my mom, only that her
voice is breaking up
I call the landline
the service here is terrible
and I should go anyway, I'm going inside and my earphones always get
tangled in my mask

I took all the coins out of my wallet except for one
and when I go to get my key it rattles around with a small tinny sound
maybe all things have the same innate desire to be heard but unlike the
rest of us
the coin succumbs to it sometimes
or maybe it's just stuck between my library card
and the bus pass I don't need (I don't live there anymore and I have a
car) but keep anyway,
my moon is in pisces in the second house after all so who can blame me
I let myself into my room and the coin lets me know it's still there
and though I sang my song for thirty people who were all sitting on
one couch,
I can't imagine anything more embarrassing
but I guess at the end of the day we're more alike than we are different

In fact, when I sit on the grass I feel more like the girl in a tube top
crying on the phone to her mom than I do
any of the stylishly-dressed individuals that I by all accounts should be

aligning myself with
but I've cried on the phone to my mom more than a few times
and I've never bought an eighty dollar vintage sweater vest
and these sudden moments of intense love for strangers aren't anything
I'm not used to
I walk by her

Today is for walking and I might find myself
something to eat and a place to sit
and I am wearing the earrings that Sophie made me
and they fill me up, a little bit



The Grapefruit

Emilia Ferrante

Here is what I am afraid of:
The grapefruit in my bag
will be pierced by an uncapped pen,
that its juice will squeeze out
seeping into poems and essays
That I will not notice
until it is too late,
words rendered unreadable
by sticky sweet sour liquid
That it will finish with my books
and get started on the bottom of my bag,
That I will feel the dampness
on a dry surface.
I fear that moment of helpless resignation.
I fear the joy,
thrilling,
of being too late,
of realizing that insidious juice
was sweetening and souring
all the while, I unaware,
the pure exhilaration of being powerless.
I fear the grapefruit
but I leave it where it is
secretly hoping that one day,
it will explode.

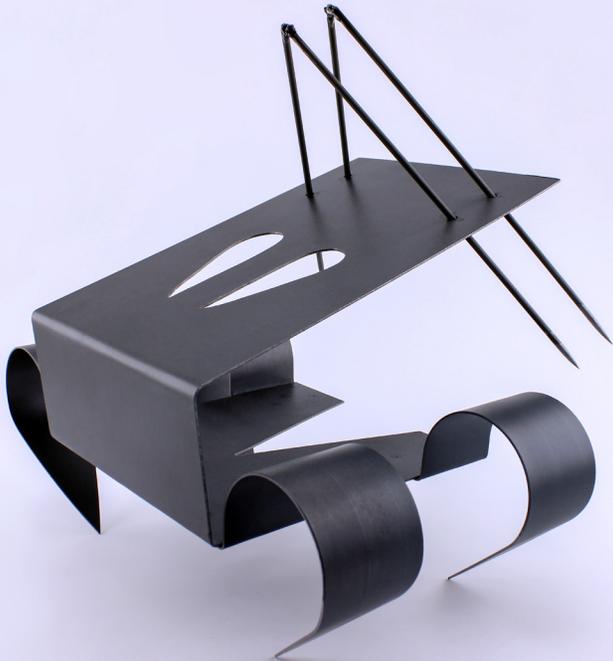
*'Hun-tun on the
Sixth Day' - B1 &
B3*

Emily Mann



Medium: Welded steel
Size: L 15.3 x H 12.5 x W 14.8 in
Date: October 2021

Artist statement: This piece is inspired by a writing / article by Michael Arrigo entitled "A Grotesque Paradise: The Roots of Culture in the Visual Ontology of Chaos". Arrigo recounts a story from the Chuang-Tzu, a traditional Taoist text, which tells of a benevolent but grotesque creature from Chinese tradition called Hun-tun. As the story goes, there were two emperors who were treated kindly by Hun-tun, and therefore decided to repay him by boring him the seven openings which man uses to eat, breathe, and see. They gave him one hole per day, but Hun-tun, being a creature of primordial chaos and not a man, died on the seventh day. My piece has six holes and represents Hun-tun's transformation from a faceless, lumpy, grotesque being into something more recognizable to us humans, who inhabit a world of order. The conceptual and material attributes of the steel, which is hard, impermeable, and man-made, lent themselves to this particular depiction of the events described in the text. The sculpture is symmetrical and zoomorphic, representing the penultimate day of the well-intentioned yet ill-fated endeavor to bestow order upon Hun-tun.



Instructions on Wanting

Leonor Brockey

Watch the boys, don't watch the girls; sleep in their bed but leave sheets between; that's not your husband; It isn't right what you've been doing, is it true you hold her hand in the park?; go to church, read your bible; be sure to read Leviticus it is what God willed; this is how you feel your shame — it's what you deserve; don't hold her hand, that's foolish; *No, I swear, she's nothing, I never held her hand and certainly not in the park*; wear the dresses, show off your curves; not too much, no one will marry a slut; this is how you sit like a woman; this is how YOU sit, like a man; this is how you cook so a nice man will marry you; this is how you smile and nod and listen — no man will want you if you run your mouth like you seem so keen to; this is how you hide the feelings; they aren't right; this is how you hide the bruises; this is how you hide; don't provoke him; don't tell him about your friends; if he finds a woman, this is how you forget, you ignore; don't find one yourself, I told you it isn't right; God will hate you if you do; brush your hair; cut it but not too short — you're not a boy; you will never be a boy; boys marry girls; girls marry boys; pull down your dress, don't become that slut I've warned you about; you want pants?; are you a

boy?; no; dress like a girl and the boys will marry you; this is how you have happiness; this is how you pretend happiness until you can forget it's not really there; this is how you feed his friends; ignore their eyes, they look too long, too hungry; it must be your fault, I told you to pull down your dress; I bet you held her hand again; this is how you walk past them and away; be quiet, the food is enough; *No! I promise! I wouldn't hold her hand*; if God gives you a child this is how you raise them; this is how you teach the boys to look at girls; teach the girls to look away; if He won't give your womb a child there are other ways but your husband may leave; it is fair; he might find a woman, you must not find a woman, are you listening?; it isn't right; the shame will stay, let it; this is how you hold in tears; this is how you hold him, not her; this is how you hold yourself when you break; this is how you look away when you see her; *but what if she's my friend?*; friends don't look that way, don't.

Spill
Jing He >



Clouds and Mushrooms

Clyde Granzeier

Though you'll usually see them placed amongst celery and radishes, mushrooms actually share more in common with us than they do with any plant. They're genetically closer to animals than plants, so maybe they should be near the deli? I'm not certain. I can't remember the last time I was able to go to the grocery store. My family and I have still been carefully divvying up the food we got right before hunkering down. A lot of it is rice and beans, considering the bags upon bags Dad brought back when this first began. We joked about it being a bit much at first, but they're actually quite good together for dinner. I'd like to see the inside of a grocery store again soon, especially without feeling like an extra in a zombie movie. That would be quite nice.

I get a lot of spare time when everything suddenly gets canceled. I also spend a lot more time on the computer when it becomes my main gateway to any imitation of the things that got canceled. Perched there by the window of my bedroom, I do my classes, I cut the camera whenever I can, and I fold and tear a small pile of scrap paper when I really want the day to be over. The particles of torn paper hang in the air with a stagnant stillness, melding with the dust. If it's bright outside, I can see them floating about in the air. I'm told to open a window and dispel the dust, but I'm worried the winds will scatter the small pile of paper that I want to keep all in one tidy area.

I end up staring out the window most of the time. At first, I do it just to give my eyes a break from the laptop, but after a while, I start looking up at the sky. Each day brings new clouds, new patterns to compliment the sun, rain, or gloom. I like to think I'm up there, falling through them without having to worry about the ground or gravity or anything else. On days with particularly pretty skies, I eagerly call my parents to the windows and point to the clouds. They don't notice them exactly at first, but a little more than a year later, we'll all be texting back and forth about how beautiful the sky is. I would love to see those clouds without any glass in the way, but I'm still a bit nervous about leaving. I read about what's happening outside, and I think I'd

like to stay in my small little corner of the world for now.

With all that free time, I start searching for anything new to discover. My subject of study changes frequently. I hop from wasps to spiders to corvids to vultures to rats, eagerly searching for any fact about their existence. I publish my secondhand discoveries in the esteemed institution of the family dinner table. Oh, did you guys know crows understand water displacement? Oh, did you guys know wasps hunt animals mainly because their larvae need meat to survive? Oh, did you guys know rats have empathy for each other? Oh, did you guys know vultures have the most acidic stomach acid in the world and that they can "eat" diseases like cholera or anthrax? Sometimes my findings are accepted with interest; other times, I have the foresight to know talking about rats and vulture stomachs might not be appreciated while people are eating. Nevertheless, I find something to do to help make the day shorter. Then, out of a mixture of curiosity and random chance, I start looking into fungi.

There they are on land before the first plants or animals have crept out of the oceans. According to one artistic rendering, they are living obelisks that look out onto the horizon like mycelial lighthouses. What I enjoy hearing most is that a fungus isn't just a single mushroom. Far from it, the mushroom is just the visible part. Below is a network of strings that form the bulk of the organism. They share nutrients and information throughout the whole being, only making themselves known by the tiny buds that burst out of trees, the ground, and food that probably shouldn't be eaten. For example, each fairy circle is an organism creating a pattern that has been the subject of myths and superstitions that warn both weal and woe for those who step inside. What's more, the largest organism in the world is a single mushroom known as a honey fungus in Oregon that has stretched itself across hundreds of acres. This being that appears disparate is connected under the soil, and that idea fascinates me.

When I'm finally able to feel comfortable going outside again, one of the first things I see is a single mushroom growing by a tree near our house. It's been there since the beginning of spring, I think, but I don't notice it until now. I smile as I wonder how far it continues. How I'd love to have what it has. I wish I could walk the beaches of Lake Huron in search of Petoskey stones, ride on my trails in the Leelanau

Peninsula, visit my old house back on Vinewood, and not worry about missing classes all at once. I want to watch the sun set on Lake Michigan while I take a stroll down Wyandotte's Main Street. For now, though, I'll just have to remember those things and swear to myself that, when this is all over, I'll return to them all. I planted bits of my memory in those places like spores, so even though the connection isn't tied through hyphae, I still have one.

Fungi don't just have these long hyphal tendrils for show though. They're important for breaking down and sharing nutrients and water both amongst themselves and, in many cases, with other plants in the surrounding area as a sort of symbiotic relationship. Old, established trees called "mother trees" serve as anchors for the fungal strands, which distribute nutrients and water in both the soil and plants throughout the forest in a system called a mycorrhizal network. One important aspect of this network is that it allows older trees to supply seedlings with the nutrients they need to grow. This allows for increased plant growth as well as plant growth in areas where they normally wouldn't thrive, all thanks to those small little strands running through the ground.

I'm grateful to be in the same space as my parents during the shutdown. We're close enough together that we can give each other the things we need to grow through the year. Be it reassurance that we'll all get through this, family movie nights, or just someone to talk with, we are fortunate enough to have it all. It can't fully stop the impact of the world, but it certainly blunts it. My family is my anchor.

When an ecosystem is destroyed, fungi are the first part of its recovery. They play the important role of breaking ruined and dead material down into food for new life, and this makes the soil good enough for plants to once again grow. They're one of the main decomposers of the world, and we've started using this to our advantage. Several small companies have created coffins and burial clothes made of mycelium, which breaks the body down into food for the soil without any of the pollution people criticize more conventional ways of saying goodbye to the dead for having. The body is returned harmlessly to the soil, freed of poisons. Fungi are also used in a process called mycoremediation, where they use their nonspecific enzymes to break down contaminants like heavy metals, petroleum fuels,

wastewater, pesticides, and even more dangerous pollutants into forms that are nonhazardous (and even sometimes beneficial) for ecosystems. Mycoremediation can be used in a variety of settings, from the soil to the lakes to the seas, and some mushrooms can even resist extreme cold and radiation to an unprecedented degree. When the fungi have finished their job, they sometimes give an extra gift in the forms of food and medicine that can be harvested. A fungus is a cheap and surprisingly effective way to decontaminate a place. What about a person?

Throughout the later parts of senior year, I often think of walking through the forest and finding a suitable spot to lay down, staring up at the clouds and imagining entire palaces made of water vapor in the sky. I want to lie in that spot without making a sound, listening to the wind go through tree branches as fungal strands grow around me. I'm not worried about the mycelium. After all, we have more in common than the trees all around us. I want them to connect me to the roots that grow below. I want them to break down the stress and doubts I've accumulated from the past year like pollutants in my ecosystem, to turn it all into food to grow from. The enzymes of the fungi aren't all too picky, so maybe they'd oblige. I want them to clear away the lethargy that keeps me from moving forward and enjoying anything. Break it all down into food for living again.



A Search History

Elizabeth Schriener

Stardew Valley game
Stardew Valley tips and tricks
how to choose classes

top Vine compilations
what to bring to college
funny panda videos
buy used books
where to buy used books
Stardew Valley tips and tricks
how to make friends
how to make friends in college
is stats harder than calculus
restaurants near me
how to do cat eye makeup
You Tube study music
probability rules
confidence intervals
how to stop being homesick
Stardew Valley tips
fun fall activities
apple orchard near me
how much coffee should you drink
how to stop sleeping so much
You Tube study music
hypothesis testing
what are p-values
stats study tips
how to contour makeup
Chinese takeout near me
how to cure a hangover
funny cat videos

how to cite journal article
how to ask for an extension
drowning memes
decorating dorm room tips
how to stop feeling tired
Pinterest dorm room
dorm fairy lights
daylight savings time
what time does the sun set now
how to email a professor
You Tube study music
citation machine
how to stop feeling tired
how to stop feeling sad
when does winter start
define depression
best winter boots
You Tube study music
how to stop losing friends
Myers-Briggs quiz
what to do if failing classes
depression symptoms
how do I know if I'm depressed
funny Vine videos
where can I get meds
health center near me
how late can I drop a class
what happens if you fail a class
baby panda videos
Pinterest inspirational quotes
can I retake classes
how to talk to parents
how to tell parents I'm depressed
health center near me
Stardew Valley tips and tricks

Jumping Over Gravestones

Laine Kibler

You're jumping over gravestones
while I laugh and watch.

Isn't this just it?
This time of night,
This much rain
 (a mere drizzle,
 almost none at all.)

• •

At home, on our way up,
your damp socks leave faint footprints
on the stairs.

I smile as I step in them,

following you,
and following you.

At home, in the bed,
there's this thing that happens
when you've fallen into rest,
and I know you're not awake anymore

because every bit of you twitches,
and you're trying to say something
but you can't

while I'm trying not to laugh
as your body jumps against mine
and your fingers grip
a little bit tighter.
 (It amuses me,

the way your body wakes up
when you're fast asleep.)

• •

These are the things I think of
in the loudest moments,
in the quietest ones:

watching you jump over gravestones,
running to an answer,
to the exit,
to get us home,
to make us smile,
to care for us,
to be as you are,
 The Optimist.

• •

I'm the last one awake,
the first one sober,

because I can't bear to lose
a moment,
because it could all just
slip by
as it has before.

I don't think I'm slipping anymore.
I'm following in your footsteps,
and I'm studying.

• •

What I've learned so far is
you make me laugh
the way my mother does,
so easily and with her whole cheeks.

I didn't know that was possible
for me.

I thought the laughter was tucked
away somewhere, it was just harder
for me to let it out
than it is for the rest of the world.

But I think you found it.
(How can I even begin to explain
the value in that?)

I'm getting it now.
I'm getting there.
I follow and I look.

• •

I look at you
and I wonder about the ghosts.
Were any of them this lucky?
(It couldn't be.
To have what we have
is immortality.)

Were they kissed in that same spot?
(The corner underneath
the linking jaw and ear)
in that same way?
(Like singing, like dancing together)
getting their hair all tangled up
in the rush?

Did they laugh when that happened too?

Did they shiver (the way these trees do now)
every time their person
breathed?
shifted?

existed?

Are they comfortable like this?
Lying side by side as they decay,
bones slipping away,
comfortable the way we are
when we're in the same space,
doesn't matter how far away.

Can they say anything now
that nobody hears?
(It's a freedom I didn't understand
until I lost my voice
that day you weren't here.
I could always say anything
to you.)

I'm so close to speaking now, but

• •

your silhouette is particularly stunning
under graveyard shadows
and yellow street lights.

You're here and it makes me lose
my words.
It's calmer now.
The brain chatter deadens.

Funny,
how every morning,
it makes me dizzy to see you
for the first time
since the night;

and every night,
(when you kiss me)

it makes me dizzy,
 seeing you
 for the last time
 until tomorrow.

• •

How can I feel all this at once?
 (the butterflies and the smiles,
 the daylight and the buzzing)
 How did I get here?
 (tangled in you,
 two hearts racing to no finish line)

And how can I ensure that we never leave?
 (and I hope I never lose you,
 hope it never ends)

• •

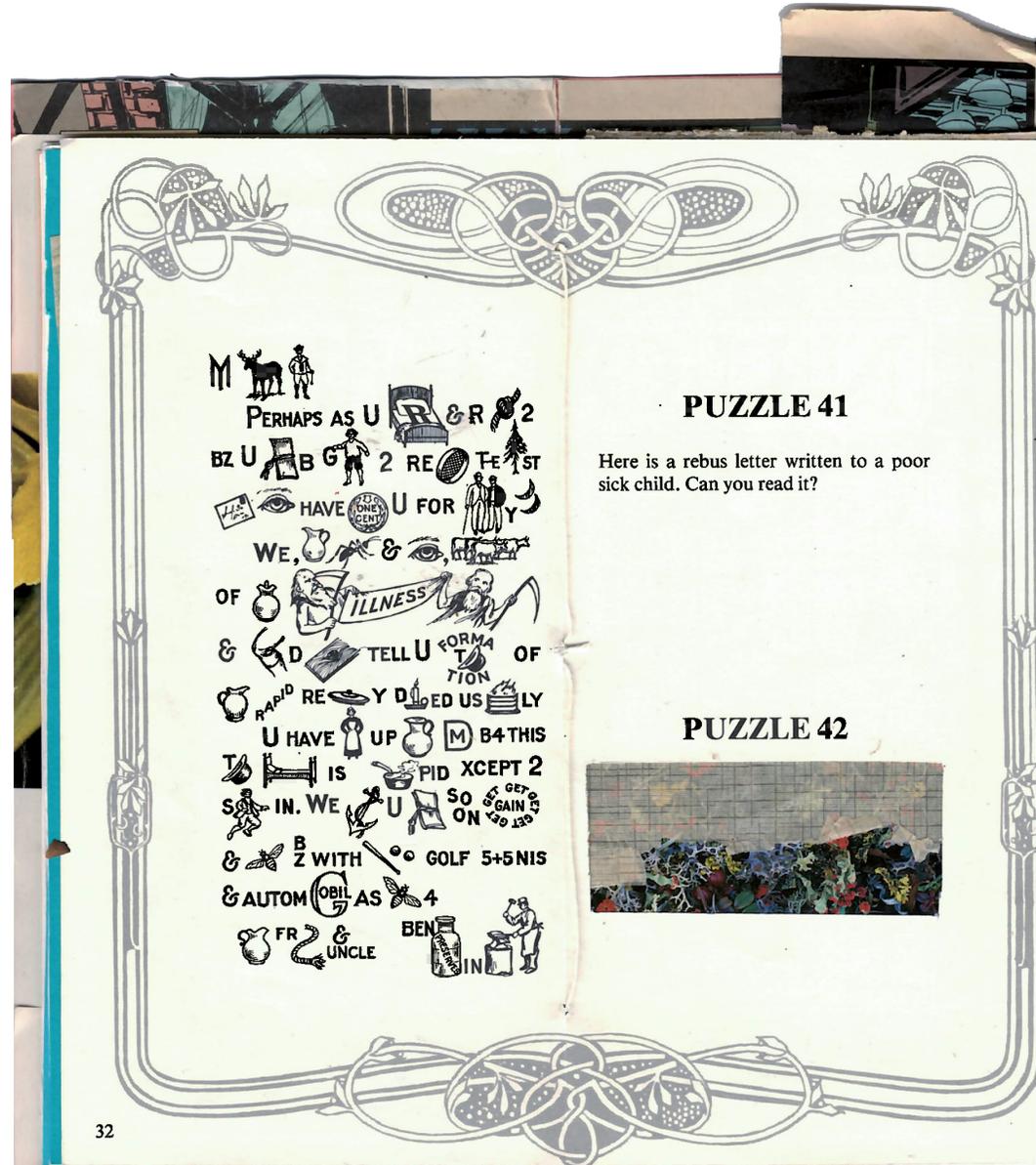
It's This until we're with them,
 wisping memories of a life,
 (because I know we will be, one day,
 though I wish it impossible)

dirt all around us
 the way we used to be
 around each other.

It's This until one day,
 when the moon is high,
 a pair of lovers pay us a visit
 and don't look twice at our names.

Puzzle 41-2
 Dequan Gambrell >

We'll feel his feet bounding
 over our bones,
 and the other lover following
 in his footsteps.



M PERHAPS AS U & R 2
 BZ U A B G 2 RE TE ST
 HAVE U FOR
 WE, & EY
 OF ILLNESS
 & D TELL U FORM OF
 RAPID RE Y D ED US LY
 U HAVE UP M B4 THIS
 T H IS PID XCEPT 2
 S IN. WE U SO ON
 & B WITH GOLF 5+5 NIS
 & AUTOM OBIL AS 4
 FR 2 & UNCLE BEN IN

PUZZLE 41

Here is a rebus letter written to a poor sick child. Can you read it?

PUZZLE 42



two lovers

Sawyer Santella

i've grown tired of watching the same scene,
day after day.
figures that won't stop blending together,
no matter how many times
i blink them away.

my feet were aching on the telephone wire,
so i flew off to give my eyes, my legs,
my mind
a rest.
i landed on a wooden post
at the end of
that old dock.

the water swayed along with the cool
summer breeze.
i turned and saw two lovers
dancing on the beach.

i watched as they smiled and laughed
together, that look that screamed
happier than ever.
they held each other with a gentleness
that they seemed to be
inventing
themselves.

i heard one whisper softly to the other,
what sounded like
darling, let's go home.
they disappeared suddenly, effortlessly.
the warm winds carried them away

like two clouds moving quickly
through the sky.

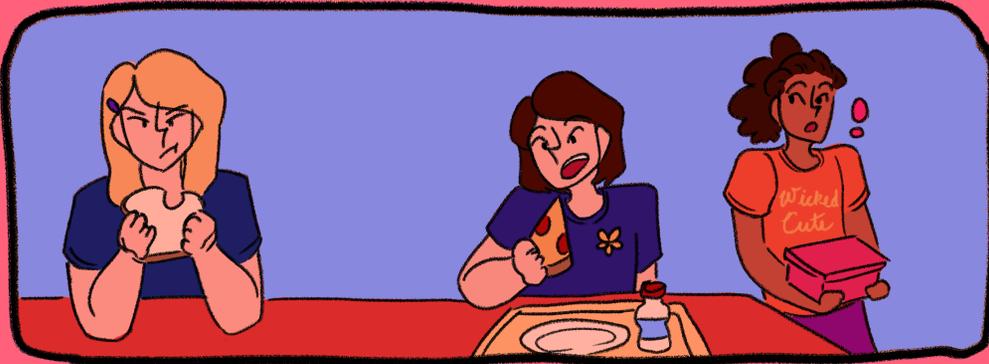
St. Mary's

Ani Seigel

Tallinn, Estonia

You are my cathedral,
full of stained glass and gold leaf.
The azure tinge of your whitewashed walls,
peeling to the sacrosanct bird song of an organ.
A soft breeze, cooling my dewy forehead,
as the day quietly melts into dusk.
The rhapsody of spring, poetry
composed by the budding birch trees
surrounding your steeple.
Do I fall into the caverns of your heart,
or float up to the vaulted ceilings
of your soul?

Leftovers



blair & cuddles

Maya Simonte

The Word

Sarah Bayne

birches bundled on my back
plumbs tucked into the hollows of my knees
and their pits nestled between my toes

willows whisper against my neck
sand poured into the pits of my ears
and shells folded between my eyelids

it is 5 o'clock
but I do not consult the tv
forests burn and
waters rise and
the news channels rage on

it is 5 o'clock
and I am kneeling
by the water
a pebble
on the shoreline

it is 5 o'clock
and I am offering
palms to the waves
a prayer
on the tongue

sun and sermon fall
darkness and disciples rise
This is The Word



Charcoal

Ruby Howard

This Time

Grace Meinke

it only took a second before i saw you:
a hooked beak vulture who has arrived on a whim.

choking on musty air, i wonder when your flighty
presence will be more than just the bad taste you get in your mouth

when stale bread is all you have to eat right now. there's
a duck pond where we first said, 'i love you' and it reminds me

of the way the sunset looks behind your silhouette, as you flee once
more,
drifting on a breeze that refuses my lungs why they ask for breath.

This Time, the air feels still. Perhaps
I will gasp, perhaps
I will speak, perhaps
you will hear me
This Time.

i'll summon up all the dusty air that hangs
like a musty cloud in my chest.
i'll call out a tethered chirp
but chances are
you will already be flying away.

drugs, my father, and other things

So Jung Shin

the cycles are repeating. that's what cycles are for, aren't they? looping,
over and over and over, with no end. i feel every turn and every spin
and therefore i am spinning at every turn. pills to medicate; slow down
the revolution. doesn't help, though. time stretches me through and
through like i'm dough pulled in every direction until i eat myself up.

i used to take my pills the way i eat my food: haphazardly and
irregularly, sometimes too much, sometimes too little. i didn't like
the way it slowed me down, or sped me up, or at times, both at once.
it's some sort of transmission across my neurons, but they seem to get
stuck in odd places before they reach my brain. it's what leaves this
unsettling feeling in my stomach, or the dizziness in my head, or what
makes me sway side-to-side when i stand. even when the feeling fades, it
permanently changes some part of me long after it leaves my body.

it reminds me of how i played with my toys as a child. or lack
thereof. i do remember barbie dolls. sorry, just doll, singular. i cut her
hair. swiped crayons on her eyelids and scrubbed them off until they
blurred into a motley of colours. she became the permanent ruins of
my frustrations, physical manifestations onto her perfect plastic face—
the face i wished to have. i remember wanting her skin, and her blonde
tresses, and those soulless blue eyes every writer seemed to talk about in
the books i've read. i drowned in those oceans every single day i played
with her.

i still am. drowning, i mean. sometimes i forget to breathe, and
so sometimes i stand on the subway platform and gasp, gulping down
bubbles of air until it feels like i'm suffocating all over again. but most
times i hold my breath because i'm afraid of that pain in your chest
when you breathe too hard, too fast. there's not much i can take in,
anyways, when my glass is already full.

there was this video of a therapist i watched recently—she
held up a glass of water in front of an auditorium of people. the glass
represented our stress, she said, the anxieties that plague our everyday
existence. i dreaded the "is the glass half-full or half-empty" question,

because, goddammit, it's trite and cliché and there's still water in the glass anyways. instead, she talked about how long we hold our glass in a day. if we were to hold it for a few minutes, it's no problem at all, just an extension of your arm. but then you hold it for a few hours, and your arms start to shake at the weight. and suddenly, the glass never leaves your hands and you're paralysed from what was once a mild discomfort. we're not meant to hold onto our glasses all hours of the day, she said. find time to put your glass down, she said. but that's not possible, is it? some of us are sculptures made to hold our glass, or glasses, plural. or maybe we're glass sculptures that break the moment we let go.

everything starts to hurt, though. tingles from my limbs all the way to my face. heart palpitations. short breaths in. no breaths out. earthquakes all throughout. the fetal position. eyes darting here and there. sometimes just closed. rocking, back and forth and back and forth and back and forth and back and forth and—

pill. i need a pill. i don't make sense but i never seem to make sense so it's alright. i just feel messy. so i need something to clean it up. maybe another? something to focus. the tremors in my hands are normal, just a side-effect. maybe one more to calm down. drowning again. just something to breathe.

my father and i; i think we were both drowning. while my mother taught me to fist my hands and rip my way through the surface, i think my father enjoyed sinking down to his death. the alcohol made it easier, the smoke made him blind. i didn't understand when i was still cutting the hairs of my barbie doll, but now that i have my own body to disfigure and my own bottles to drink, i get it. it's hard to hate something you understand.

i once told him about this concept of our collective drowning. i told him about the cigarettes and the alcohol and the pills. i don't think he liked that. it threatened him so he threatened me. i wasn't surprised though. there's this certain satisfaction in getting what you think you deserve, and i think that explained the maniacal high i got after. it's comforting, somehow, because it's familiar.

at some point, my sense of self blurred. it must've been the same for him. it's a generational passover of grief from his to mine. no one knows who they are among our shared trauma of drowning, so no

one is anything, and i am nothing. i suppose those were my thoughts when i stumbled in and out of rooms, eventually landing above a toilet bowl. visions of my pills and food i once ate and pockets of blood. i can't tell whether i am me or him or her or them or xem. xyr truth is mine to bear, but it's too heavy in moments like this when my glass is overflowing.

we live in a matrix of thought but oftentimes there are glitches in our realities. now is an instance of that. we relive the same nightmare again and again, a factory for our own brand of hell. in some alternate universe, the story doesn't end up above a toilet bowl, and we swallow the hard pill to heal and keep it down. but not in this world. in this world, we go through the same tale of tragedy we must've been destined for. star-crossed and infinite and tied by a red string of fate by our pinkies.

it's alright. i've accepted it and you've accepted it and we've all accepted the fact that we drown in the words we never say. and we share a glass of our poison of choice, tipping the edge as a form of acknowledgement; a "cheers" to the pain we've caused one another. so—here's to us, and our never-ending cycles.



Mushroom

Emilia Ferrante

On one part of the stump but everywhere
spilling into crevices and out
tiny circles, now palm-sitting
I am here not for the forage but because
they feel like holding earth in my hands
they taste like glorious decay
waxy waning crescent moon
breaking off the full cheese-wheel
glowing forest eyeballs
baptized in dark and damp
christened in whispered spore-dust
I decay and you decay
pinwheel spinning, turning black
I have hunted, foxlike,
scurrying in and out I have given you
something you cannot return
something that will eat away
at the festering deadness inside you
Mouth-watering inevitability
you, me, we, I
consuming and being consumed.

turn of july

Maya Simonte

it's almost too warm to be refreshing — on the way here the air was still and murky in the streetlights' hazy gold spotlights and the river is, honestly, not the kind of cool you'd want to wash off that summer heaviness. it was just about as hot back at the house. the water slaps up against the docks and the sky is black as we drop ourselves in, legs first and then up to our necks. it's really not cold, but it's vast and it's silent and we bob around in it like kids. and it's warm in the mornings, and i go outside in t-shirts, and the trees are full of leaves that rustle in the wind at night. when the oven and stove and kettle make the kitchen too hot to stand in we laugh about it but don't stop cooking dinner together. and i do still see that slimy underside of myself. hot algae and barnacles and all. and it's easy to think that everyone around me sees it too — a mystery why they don't run away from it. but we leave the fans on in the kitchen and walk to the river even though it doesn't cool us down and i could swim in the feeling. i'm floating. i'm laughing. i'm going under.



The Body in Cabin 14

Evan Marcus

1

David looked around the dingy cabin. “This place sucks,” he said.

May listened to the spattering of rain on the leaky roof, sniffed the dead air, and even she had a hard time disagreeing with him. David sighed, and he heard May take a deep breath, an indication that she was about to contradict his assessment of the location. May’s relentless optimism dictated that she must see something positive, even in what David had correctly deemed to be a dump.

“You can’t judge after one look,” May said to her twin brother. David took another sarcastically exaggerated look at the peeling wooden walls and six shabby bunk beds arranged around the single roomed cabin.

“That’s two looks now, and whaddaya know, it still sucks!” he replied. “You think any of the other cabins are a little more... habitable?”

May crossed her arms and harrumphed at David, but the gesture lacked her usual gusto. David walked over and poked one of the window panes lightly. As he suspected, it popped right out of its frame.

“Okay, maybe it needs a little TLC, but I’m sure when the sun comes out, and you put that window back, this will be a fun little home for the next couple weeks!” May pulled out her earbuds and started to play her “Workout Fun!” playlist. “Cabin number 14, you’re my new project,” she proclaimed as she placed her bright blue backpack on the creaky little bunk bed.

David knew that once the earbuds went in, the argument was over. He plopped his bag on one of the bunks, sat down on the freestanding camp mattress, and immediately, something pungent hit his nostrils. The bed didn’t feel right underneath him. Whatever he had sat on was rigid, but flexible enough to bend a bit. There was a cracking sound as his weight came down.

“Oh my god, did something die in this mattress?” David

exclaimed, jumping up and whipping around.

“What did you say?” May responded, popping one of the earbuds out. David put his fingers to his nose and pointed at the putrid mattress. The bed sat unmoving under David’s glare, unaware of its own putrescence. May moved across the room to take a whiff of the bed. She lowered her nose to the mattress, and her face instantly shriveled up like a prune. Bile collected in her throat. Suddenly, even to May, the cabin seemed more sinister.

“What could possibly smell that bad?” May whispered to David, as if the aroma itself could hear her.

“I don’t know,” David replied, feet inching away from the bed.

“Maybe it’s just a dead animal?” May theorized, her voice shaking a little.

David had smelled a dead animal before, but even that odor couldn’t compete with the stench now filling the little cabin.

David took a step forward. Holding his breath, he pinched one corner of the mattress and gingerly started lifting it. “It’s really heavy,” he said, when the mattress refused to rise more than an inch, “like, really, really heavy.”

David grabbed the mattress underneath with both hands, then readjusted his grip, caught off guard by how heavy the thing was. May joined him, and wincing at the smell that spilled out of it every time the bed was disturbed, the twins flipped the mattress so the bottom was exposed to the air. David stepped back to wipe his hands on his pants. His nose crinkled, and he vowed not to touch his face until he could wash his hands in a good, modern sink. David was turning his head to look at his twin when he heard a thump, and May shrieked.

“There’s something in the mattress, David, there’s something in there!” she rambled, backing up quickly. Her hands flew to her mouth as she backed up, jumping a bit when she hit the wall behind her.

David looked back to the mattress, and his eyes widened with shock. The thump he had heard appeared to have come from a shape that was now crumpled at the bottom of the mattress, apparently having fallen when David leaned the mattress against the wall. The lumpy mass appeared to fill the side of the mattress from end to end, and the way it sagged into the fabric gave David an impression of why it

was so heavy.

David looked back at May, who was still covering her mouth on the opposite side of the cabin, staring at the bed. They both stood there for a moment, eyeing the figure in the mattress, trying not to breathe through their noses, and trying not to be sick. May was the first to speak.

“David?”

“Yeah?”

“Is that what I think it is?” she asked, her voice so quiet it was almost imperceptible.

“I’m not sure, but I do think we’re thinking about the same thing... right?”

“Probably,” she replied.

“But that would be crazy, right?”

“Depends on if we’re thinking of the same thing.”

“Well then, one of us should probably say it out loud.”

“One of us probably should,” she agreed.

“Okay.”

There was a pause. Neither one of them wanted to say it out loud. May felt sick to her stomach, and the hair on the back of David’s neck stood up.

“It’s a dead body,” May finally said, surprised at how level her voice sounded. “There’s a dead body in that mattress.”

There was another pause. It was out in the open now.

The rain hammered away on the thin roof.

The mattress sat in silence.

This was a problem that neither of the twins had ever faced, and neither of them wanted to offer up a solution.

Finally, David tore his eyes away from the bed.

“We should probably do something, right?” he said, turning to meet May’s eyes. “We should call the cops, or something, we can’t just leave it here —”

May cut him off. “Okay, I’m all for getting the cops, but... um...” Suddenly what she was about to say felt a whole lot more grotesque. “Shouldn’t we, uh... make sure, um, that it is, you know... actually a, um...”

“A body.” David finished for her.

“Yeah.”

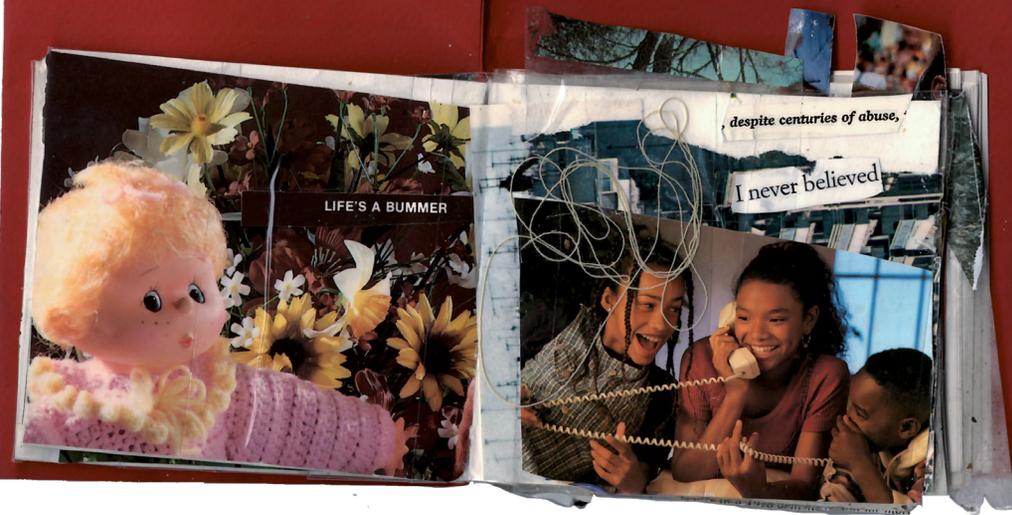
Slowly, David looked back at the bed. “It would be smart, just to make sure it isn’t, um, a big squirrel, or something...”

“Yeah, no sense calling the cops out here for it to turn out to be, um, not... a corpse.” May winced uncomfortably at the word as it came out of her mouth.

David inched forward toward the bed. The smell was still pervasive, but it wasn’t as overwhelming as it had been before. Unwilling to touch the mattress again, he looked around the bed as much as he could see without moving the pad, looking for holes or indications that wildlife had burrowed their way into the mattress. There were no holes to be found, but there was a zipper, lining half of the upturned bottom of the mattress, zipped tight. Gingerly, David pinched the zipper in between his thumb and forefinger, and started slowly unzipping the bottom of the mattress. When the zipper was about halfway across, the corner flap of the material at the bottom of the mattress sagged down, startling the twins, but only some sparse bits of stuffing fell out.

David resumed the opening of the mattress, and when he reached the end of the zipper, half of the cloth at the bottom of the mattress flapped down, releasing the worst stench that had yet hit their noses, as well as a shower of foamy mattress stuffing. David reeled at the smell, and retreated backward quickly, just as the weight of the cloth flap overpowered the rest of the mattress, and the pad flopped forward, once again right side up. More stuffing was ejected from the mattress as it hit the bed frame, scattering across the floor of the cabin. May squeaked again as the stuffing neared her shoes. The last of the mattress’ filling wasn’t the dull grayish white that the rest of it had been. The stuffing that now covered the floor was in different shades of pink and red.

This was too much for May. Turning, she shoved the door to the cabin open, stepped out onto the little set of steps that led down to the path to the main campsite, and was sick over the railing to the side. Her head had left the shelter of the little awning over the cabin’s door, and her hair was soon soaked through with rainwater, but she didn’t care. She stood there for a moment, dry heaving, reeling at what she had just seen and smelled. She gulped in the fresh outside air greedily,



Dub

Dequan Gambrell

free from the putrid smell of the cabin, and gripped the flimsy side railing of the steps for support.

When she had collected herself enough to step back inside the cabin, she attempted to wedge the door open to allow the air to circulate, but the thing refused to stay open. Eventually, she gave up, and turned to look at her brother. David was sitting on a bed frame opposite the bed with the mattress on it. He was just staring at the mattress, its rays of bloody filling drawing all eyes to itself.

May followed David's gaze back to the bed, and froze. Just barely visible under the overhang of the mattress, unmoving, was a hand, crusted with mattress stuffing and dried blood.

"I'm calling the cops," May said, pulling out her phone. Her hands were shaking and slick with rainwater, and it took her two tries to get her password in correctly. She tapped on the phone app, and began to dial 911 when David's hand covered the screen. He eased the phone downward, and May looked up to meet his eyes, but they weren't focused on her.

"Look at the hand," he said, his voice low and his eyes fixed on

the bloody appendage sticking out from under the mattress. May tore her eyes away from her brother's pallid face, and turned her attention back to the mattress. It was a little easier to bear this time, but bile still collected in the back of May's throat at the sight. She turned back to her twin, unsure of what had piqued David's interest. He gestured to her to sit on the bed he had been perched on when she had returned from relieving the contents of her stomach over the railing outside.

As May lowered herself onto the mattress, something on the hand in the mattress caught the light. When May looked closer, she could see a new detail about the lifeless hand in the bed. Around its wrist was a gold watch, the crystal of its face cracked and the sterling gold of its body stained with blood. Broken and pathetic as it was, the sight of that watch chiseled fear deep into May's chest like an icepick. The fine gold filigree about its face and the elegance of its silver band were contrasted by the broken glass above the clock, and the motionless hands barely visible through the mess of cracks on the glass face.

"You recognize it, right?" David asked after May had had some time to soak the new detail in.

"There could be two of them," May said breathlessly. "Why would..." her voice trailed off.

"You and I both know that watch is one-of-a-kind." David said with conviction. "What the hell is going on here, May? Why is there a dead body in this cabin, and why is it wearing Dad's watch?"

"Maybe he sold it —" May interjected, but David had a response ready.

"Dad would never sell that watch!" David said, backing slowly away from the hand, "You've heard him say that as many times as I have, you know that's true. You've heard him talk about the day Grandpa gave it to him, that thing matters to him more than we do!"

"You don't need to be such a prick, David, I'm just not ruling out any possibilities. I'm freaked out already, I don't need you going psycho."

David opened his mouth to argue, but turned his eyes back to the hand and stayed silent. Both twins felt the presence of the person in the mattress as strongly as if the body had been standing right in front of them, encouraging their discourse and separating them.

There was an unspoken apology between the two, and soon, all

was forgiven. Both of the twins' attention returned to the foul smelling fingers, which were splayed in such a way that they gave May the unsettling impression that they were gripping the sticks of an invisible marionette puppet. May was the first to speak again.

"You don't think... that's Dad in there, do you?"

"I thought it might be for a second, but I don't think so. The hand's too big. Dad always complained that his wrists weren't big enough to wear that watch, and he couldn't bring himself to change the band."

"It still looks pretty big."

"Yeah, it kind of does." David walked back over, and knelt by the hand, wrinkling up his nose at the stench. The skin was pale and had a greenish hue, but it wasn't peeling away. The skin hadn't been decaying for long enough to rot. David wasn't sure exactly how long it took for skin to rot, a piece of knowledge he sincerely hoped never to have, but he was fairly certain that the lack of decay on the hand meant that the body had only recently found itself stuffed in a mattress, heart no longer beating. He struggled to study between the cracks in the watch face.

"He hasn't been dead for very long. If he died at the same time dad's watch broke, that could be 1:20 this afternoon, 1:20 this morning, or maybe even yesterday afternoon."

"David, we really need to call the cops."

"You're right. You're right. Yeah. We should. Um..." David met May's concerned gaze, and she realized that there were tears in his eyes. "Can we call Mom first? I just need to know Dad's okay."

May felt her eyes begin to water as well, and she nodded. She pulled her phone out again, and the two twins sat down on the bunk furthest from the body. The phone rang five times before their mother picked up. Her words came out of the speaker sounding quick and clipped.

"Is this important, May? I'm kind of busy right now."

May leaned back from the phone in surprise, and paused. Her mother never answered the phone like that. "Mom, what's going on?"

"It's nothing honey, your father and I are just... working on a business deal. This one's... this one's important."

David cut in. "When did you last see Dad?"

"I just did, he's in the conference room. The one I just excused myself from to talk to you two. What's going on?"

May answered with, "Can you ask him where his watch is?"

Something in this response appeared to rattle their mother deeply. There was a long pause, and the twins could hear her breaths coming shallow and quick on the other end of the line. "Kids, your father and I are fine. I don't know what you've heard, but I need you to stay put. Don't call the cops. Stay out of trouble. Trust me."

David opened his mouth to speak, but the line had gone dead.

May tried the number again, but this time, nobody picked up.

The sound of the rain around them felt suddenly deafening to May; David could barely hear it over the blood rushing in his ears.

"May," he said, "did I just hear her tell us not to call the cops?"

"Yeah," was the response.

"And just to be clear, we never said anything about the body, right?"

"Yeah."

"How in hell did she —"

David was interrupted by a sound that terrified the twins more than anything else that afternoon.

Creak. Creak. Creeeak.

Someone was walking up the cabin steps.

2

May was the first to act. She could feel the adrenaline coursing through her, spurred on by the gut-wrenching fear of anyone else seeing the body. She sprang up, grabbed the bunk bed frame and swung herself to the door, pushing it open when she reached it. The door slammed into the person on the other side with some force, eliciting a cry of pain from the victim. May's hands shot up to her mouth in surprise at what she had just done as the door completed its return trip and settled back into its frame. David was up by this point, and he stepped past May to see what had happened. He opened the door, quickly shutting it behind his sister as she followed him out, and surveyed the damage. Silas, the groundskeeper that had greeted them at the central office 20 minutes before, was lying in the mud at the

bottom of the stairs, clutching his nose and moaning loudly in pain.

“Oh my gosh, I am so, so sorry —” May started as she clambered down the steps to help Silas. Silas shuffled away awkwardly in the mud with one arm, eyes wide. He got to his feet in a rush, and started staggering back toward the main office, gripping his bloodied nose and skidding on the slick earth.

“Oh no. Did he see the body?” David asked May, panicked.

“I don’t know, he might have, it all happened so quick —”

“We have to get to him before he calls the cops.”

The twins set off through the rain after the groundskeeper.

“David, did I just assault that guy?” May yelled to her brother as they ran. “Does that count as battery and assault?”

“I don’t know, that looked like an accident to me,” David replied, hand shielding his eyes from the raking downpour. “And I think that’s really the least of our worries right now.”

Silas wrenched the door to the central office cabin open, and stumbled inside. David reached the door next, and he held it open as May clambered into the warm little cabin, followed closely by himself. When they were both inside, Silas was nowhere to be seen. David noted that there was a phone on the wall of the room they were currently in, and if Silas had wanted to call the cops, he likely could have done it already. On the floor, drops of blood formed a line that led into one of the two other rooms in the cabin. The twins followed the trail left behind by Silas’ bloody nose, and opened the door to the room on the right.

The siblings stepped into a bedroom that must have been where Silas slept, but once again, he was nowhere in sight.

“Where did he go?” asked May, taking a quick glance around the room before ducking back into the entry room to see if they’d missed him. David looked around the bedroom, checking behind the bed in case Silas was hiding just out of sight, terrified of the murder-twins that had just infiltrated his campsite. The room was sparsely decorated, but it looked nice. The walls were made out of wood that had clearly seen a little more care than the dilapidated planks of Cabin 14. All of the furniture was made out of wood too, the bedside table with a copy of some camping magazine and a reading lamp on it, the bed itself, which had been made haphazardly, and the dresser/table

that had a mess of possessions and trash on it, all mixed together to the point where David wasn’t sure if even Silas would know what was garbage and what wasn’t. He could see several candy wrappers, two wallets, one old and one new, a fine collection of pens, and at least three different water bottles, among other detritus.

“David, he’s in the bathroom,” May beckoned from the doorway.

David followed May out as the door to the bathroom opened, and Silas stepped out, hands both clutching tissues to his face. His eyes widened in surprise, but he didn’t make any movements that would indicate any defensiveness. Neither party was gunning to talk first.

David took the lead, “Are you alright Mr., uh...”

Silas seemed to relax. “I told you before when I checked you in, kid,” he said, “just call me Silas. No formal last names for me until I own this campground here. ’Til then, I’m just Silas.”

“I’m sorry about your nose,” May blurted out.

“Don’t worry about it,” Silas said, waving a hand, leaving the tissue the hand had been holding stuck to his face. “I was just surprised, is all. I was headed over ’cause I never had time to clean that cabin, what with that Bone lady showing up so damn early and demanding every inch o’ her cabin be spotless.” The groundskeeper’s tired eyes narrowed slightly. “Hang on. What were you kids doing in Cabin 4 anyway? You two were booked into Cabin 14.” At this remark, he jabbed a thumb in the general direction of a cabin on the other side of the campsite from the cabin the twins had set up in.

David and May exchanged a glance.

“The number above the door says 14,” May said.

Silas looked puzzled at this, and walked to the door. He poked his head out to get a view of the cabin, and the twins lost sight of his expression.

“Damn handyman,” they finally heard him mutter, turning back to face them and letting the door swing closed. “Sorry for the misunderstanding, kids, that cabin used to be 11 before we renumbered ’em last weekend. When that cabin was reassigned to be four, they musta tore off the wooden 1’s and left the paint under ’em different, so when they put the four on top, yeah, it looks like fourteen.”

Curious, May mirrored Silas' earlier action and peered out at the numbers from the doorframe. Sure enough, now that she looked at it again, it was clear that the one was just painted on, and the four was a wooden number that had been screwed on separately. She turned back from the door and let it swing shut again with a hollow clack on the frame, and the rattle of screen in the door's window.

"You kids aren't too set up already, are ya? That cabin's kinda big for the two of you."

The twins' eyes met again.

"Yeah, we're already pretty set up and comfy," May said, a little too quickly.

"Totally, and with the rain and everything, it would be, you know, such a hassle to get everything back all the way across the campsite," David continued.

Silas seemed off-put by this rapid response. "Well, I should at least clean it for ya. Wasn't expectin' anyone'd be stayin' in there, so the place is kind of a mess —"

"Oh we can clean it!" May said, cutting Silas off. "You said you were tired, and there's honestly nothing else to do right now, so we can totally do it ourselves!"

David was shocked at how naturally this offer came out of his sister, but considering it, he realized she would have made this offer regardless of whether there was a dead body in the cabin or not. May was one of the few people on this Earth, he had learned a long time ago, who found legitimate joy in organization, especially if she was doing it to help someone else.

Silas considered her offer for a moment. "Not often guests wanna clean their own cabins... but I guess I can't turn down an offer like that. Go nuts, cleaning stuff is in the closet of the cabin."

He walked over to one of the wooden armchairs against the wall. "I didn't get much of a chance to talk to you kids earlier, what with how quick your mom signed you guys in and left. Why're the two of you here for the summer? This place doesn't usually attract teens." At this last remark, he paused, reconsidered, and said, "At least, usually not siblings."

David snorted in spite of everything, and May made a face.

"We're here for a month," she said, shooting David a

disapproving glance, "while our parents remodel the shop."

"What do your parents do?"

"They run a pawn shop," May answered, "But they're going to expand soon, and soon part of it will be a real jewelry store."

"Interesting, and they wanted you two out of the way while they did it?"

"Pretty much," David answered, fidgeting a little. He was keenly aware of how long they had left the body alone, and though he wasn't afraid of it going anywhere on its own, he didn't know who else might walk by and smell the body through the window that he had broken earlier. "You mentioned that someone else was here?"

"Did I? Oh yeah, I did, that Bone lady, uh..." he stared at the floor as if trying to physically dig the memory of her full name up from the floor, "Jennifer Bone! That's the name. Came in super early this morning. Kinda scared me, if I'm honest. Shut herself up in Cabin 15 half a day ago, and I haven't seen head or tail of her since. Came in with a buncha' big bags, paid in cash, and settled right in. There was somebody with her this morning, but I think he made off in the fancy car they showed up in 'bout an hour before you showed up. Big guy, kinda mean looking. Anyway, I was glad to see *him go*."

Silas pulled the tissues away from his nose and inspected the area. "That may bruise, but I don't think it's broken." He stood up from the chair, plopped the tissues in the wastebasket in the bathroom, and turned to the twins. "Looks like it's still comin' down pretty hard out there, you're welcome to wait in here until the rain goes away —"

"Oh it's fine," May said hastily, "We're already wet, so it's not like it can get much worse, anyway, we might as well go now." She started dragging David toward the door.

"Alright," Silas said, leaning on the doorway to the bedroom and kicking off his muddy boots. "If there's anything you two need, you just let me know."

"We will, thanks!" May said, pushing David back out into the downpour. She gave the bemused-looking groundskeeper a final wave, and stepped outside to join her brother.

The rain was abating now, but the mud and the drizzle still encouraged the twins to move with hastened, heavy steps. Neither spoke the entire way back to the cabin. May shoved her hands in

her pockets to stop them from shaking. David crossed his arms and hunched his shoulders. The rain had made it past his socks, and he kept his mind focused on that particular discomfort, rather than the million other thoughts and questions racing through his head.

David trudged up the steps to Cabin 14 (or 4? He didn't care at this point), and paused in front of the door. May joined him, and, never one to put off the inevitable, gripped the metal handle. She took in a deep breath of unspoiled air, and eased the aged wood open.

Nothing had moved.

Why had she expected anything to move?

That was the panic thinking, not her.

David stepped inside, and placed his foot on the raggedy little doormat that had been knocked askew when May had forced the door open before. May gazed at it, and noticed a problem she could possibly prevent.

"David, take your shoes off now, don't you dare track that mud in here!"

David turned around, feet still on the mat. "Really, May? That's what you're worrying about?"

"David, there are a lot of things happening right now, and I can't control any of them," May blurted out, uneasy, "This is something we can control. Please. Just... take your shoes off." May's voice trailed off as her eyes and nose gravitated inevitably towards the mattress. She stepped inside, quickly shut the door, and began to remove her shoes. She grimaced a little. In her haste to pursue the fleeing Silas, she had grabbed the simplest shoes available to her: her shower shoes, which were now filthy. She laid them neatly on one side of the door, and pointed at them until David did the same.

David moved to place his sandals next to May's shower shoes, but hesitated before they hit the ground. His eyes widened, and he jerked the sandals back up, releasing a spray of dirty water on the unsuspecting carpet.

"David, stop messing around —"

"May, look." David peeled back the corner of the doormat nearest where May had placed her shoes, revealing the entirety of a very scuffed footprint. The part that the doormat had concealed was smudged to the point of being little more than a vague, foot-shaped

blob, but the small part uncovered by the rug was unmistakably the sandy imprints of a shoe, pointed directly at the mattress.

The twin's eyes followed the line of the footprint, and the two started to pick out small clues hinting at the path that the feet had taken. Curiously, much of what was left of the prints had been scrubbed away in a haphazard but clearly deliberate fashion, judging by the streaks of whatever rag had been used to scour the floor. By following the scuffs that had been missed, the two began to piece together the trail of footprints. May took pictures of the steps as they found them, and placed them in an orderly folder in her phone.

David gestured to a large area that had been scrubbed away entirely. It was little more than smears on the floor now, but it was by far the widest segment of the floor where evidence had been erased. There was the piece of a heel leading into it, and another heel backing up into the bunk bed perpendicular to the mattress.

"May..." David started, his eyes narrowing, "The dent in that bed... and that window with the broken frame that I saw earlier... What if that's all recent? I think... I think there was a fight here."

"I see that," May continued, "Somebody got pushed backward into that bed frame, hard, to make a dent like that. Then they fell against the bottom bunk, and..."

"What?"

"There's something in the wire."

"What wire?" David asked, scanning the area with his eyes.

"The bed frame wires," May said, moving toward the bed, plugging her nose as she got closer to the body. She reached into the interlocking wires of the bed frame, and pulled out a small slip of paper.

"14, 15, 2," she read, peering at the paper. "What does that mean?"

She handed the paper to David. The numbers were handwritten, with hyphens in between them. Nothing on the back.

"I don't know."

The twins spent the better part of the next hour cataloging all of the possible hints at what had happened in the cabin, though they found no more clues about the paper. When they were satisfied that there was nothing left to find, they stood in the corner, as far away

from the body as possible. The smell, David noted, was not one you got used to.

“Hey, the rain stopped,” May said, peeking up at the ceiling.

To be continued...

power and pleasure

Dequan Gambrell



The erotic

Emilia Ferrante

is the moment between lightning strike and thunder crack
of waiting and knowing
the surprise and suddenness of the bright flash,
the deeply satisfying grumble then yawp of thunder,
the interminable seconds in between.

tangy delicious shadowy
electric-filament-spine
tingling to fingertips

television static on the wind,
fuzzy and sharp.

a time-squasher,
a time-expander,
pulling out seconds into a sort of infinity
until they fizzle and crackle.

Oh!

to live there,
in delectable suspension,
on the tightrope stretched
between flash and clap.

Take me there.

Make the air sizzle, and stand with me in it.

i hope that you still love me

Sawyer Santella

your words
never
make sense
to me.
i try to sort them
in my head.
i just make a mess instead.
you repeat yourself again,
i hope that you still love me.

tell myself to get organized,
tell myself to not forget,
wrote myself a list just now,
gotta get 8 things done today.
think i've used up all your yeses,
can't bear the thought of you saying no, but
pretty soon i know
you'll stop
letting me pass through
your garden gate
on my late night trips
to the woods.

i breathe the hot air in,
pull my fingers,
scratch my skin.
you tell me not to run
against the wind,
so i talk to the clouds,
make some friends,
watch the waves,
punch the wall again.

fuzzy feeling in my head,
clear skies on a cloudy brain,
i told my mind to take a break,
so i stared at leaves on trees all day.
they didn't give very good advice,
all they said was—
*chew up the rocks you collected earlier at the beach, the sand between your
teeth will get you squeaky clean.*
the clouds told me not to
believe a word they say—
*they're dirty rotten liars, who'll sell you down the river for a good day of
rain.*

i don't know what to believe.

copper coins creep up
my skull—
the cold feels comfy
in my palms.
i still wish that i'd been
born tall,
and i hope
that you
still love me.

The Book of the Beautiful End

Clyde Granzeier

On my journeys I met another wanderer, who had gone from the highest peaks to the deepest abysses

He carried a great number of trinkets slung across his back and a content smile across his face

Of all of his possessions, one in particular caught my eye, a tattered book cradled in his arms

It was bereft of all ornamentation, with mismatched parchment jutting out from beneath its cover

I asked him of its origins, its purpose, to which he merely laughed and said it possessed a magic to it

My curiosity piqued, I asked him what spells and enchantments resided within the pages

Yet he simply placed it on the ground right at his feet, leaving one final message before departing

“Read it and find out”

In the comforts of my lodgings, I sat by the fire, deciding to take the traveler’s advice

The frontmost pages were dry and yellowed parchment of some bygone era

From there, they grew newer, until the final pages felt as if they yet held

some warmth of the one who wrote them

I saw countless styles, shapes, and sizes of text within, yet each was somehow equally readable

As if a thousand voices all spoke in perfect clarity and unison

Whoever had first written in the book likely had their name long forgotten with the passage of time

And as the sun quietly set just outside my window, masked by the passage of wisps of cloud

I began to read

The first few lines held proclamations of the inevitable end

How all that we knew would eventually return to some inscrutable point of origin and begin anew

It had likely happened before, and it would happen again

How there was no grand purpose behind our creation, merely the peculiar alignment of a million chance coincidences

There was no malice in the book’s prognostication, merely a statement cold and factual

Like the laws the world was constructed upon

Disheartened and unsettled by such grim views, I almost put the book away for good

Still, I kept reading

And all at once on those old parchments I felt a shift

The author became comforting, jovial even, in their next writings

“Fear not the end, reader, and fear not a world lacking meaning in its existence.”

“For all will begin anew when all that we know returns to whence it came,”

“And a lack of meaning is the ultimate freedom, for we are not constrained to one path we must follow.”

“There need not be some divine purpose for compassion and joy, for goodness is its own reward.”

“There need not be some divine purpose for our existence, for it is too great a thing to be shackled by purpose.”

“Remember reader that the world is neither kind nor cruel; it merely is.”

“It is us who make it kind or cruel by how we view it and interact with it.”

“And I intend to make it kind.”

Copy-And-Paste Sky
Tianyi Zhai >

From there arose a list of the things the author cherished in the world, vast and detailed

From brief but amicable encounters with strangers to the joys of lifelong friendships

From the sound of wind quietly going through trees to the cacophonous singing of crowds at festivals

From the warm embrace of the morning sun peering through the window to the cool comfort of night

All were written in perfect clarity by the author, care and thought put into each description



Even as one author shifted to another, that care and thought remained
with the continuation of the list

The joys and treasures of countless writers mended together seamlessly
until the book's end

There, I felt a change

As I stared at the fire, its flames swirled with primal wonder and vibrant
color

Each crackle filled my ears as I heard the logs that fed it sunder and
embers float like fireflies

The pale blanket of snow just outside the window had new layers
woven onto it from the sky above

And through the window I could feel a piercing cold creep through
into my abode, held back by the fire

Everything was so much more vivid, and I pondered if this was the
book's enchantment

These things had always been there, yet only now did I see their value

I noticed that no author had quite detailed how these things felt in this
moment

So, I made an addition

I found paper at the back of the book not once there, plenty of room to
store my thoughts

With a pen freshly acquired, I began my own description, each idea
turned to strokes of ink

I would do so for many years to come, writing each newfound
appreciation I uncovered

On my journeys, I met another traveler who had freshly set out into the
world

He stared curiously at the book I carried, to which I told him it held a
magic to it

He asked what I meant by this claim, and I stared at the book, filled
with all I cherished

My work done, I laid the book at my feet, departing with one simple
message

“Read it and find out”

Love, You.

So Jung Shin

“I love you,” you once said.
It was written in cursive on
your tongue, and your lips
were the pen that went dry
when I stayed unresponsive.

And you balked, stumbling, maundering,
words skidding to a stop as red
ink tinted the canvas of your cheeks.
Even in scattered letters
you rhymed with art.

You gave me your heart
in a neatly enclosed epistle that ended with,
‘love, you.’
Succinct and direct and blaringly
honest in the quietest of ways.

I was never fluent in romance
the way love and you came so easy,
and so you must understand my
hesitance, for the language of the heart
is not as familiar to me.

How did you know? That
you loved me.
How did the words I and
love and you string together
and taste like truth?

I only know of love in the little
moments; like wine on a rooftop,

and playlists made for me,
or moments reserved, for
the silent moments of the night.

I only know of love in you,
through soft hands and long embraces,
or peppered kisses on the shell of my ear,
like whispers of intimacy
felt on skin.

But I don’t know if these pleasures
mirror your certainty,
if the love and you that I know of
string together differently
than yours do.

I don’t know if what I feel
is love, but if it’s what makes smiles
easier and warms the hollow
of my chest, then perhaps, surely
it must be in the spectrum of love.

And so, perhaps, surely,
though not on the same degree,
though not on the same page,
and quite a time delayed,
I love you, too.



staff dinosaur exhibit!



Marlon Rajan
Editor in Chief

Chelsea Padilla
Layout Editor



Grace Meinke
Poetry Editor



Heather Zimmerman
Finance Editor



Maya Simonte
Prose Editor

Emilia Ferrante
Grammar Editor



Laine Kibler
PR Editor

Esther Sun
Art Editor



Abigail Schreck

Isabelle Zeaske



Mateo Diaz

Monica Shankar



Ruby Howard



Rojin Shirwan



Shao-Chi Ou



Sarah Bayne



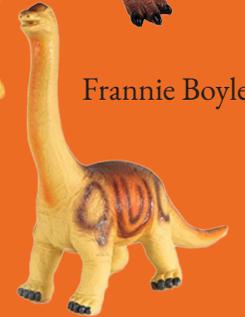
Sawyer Santella



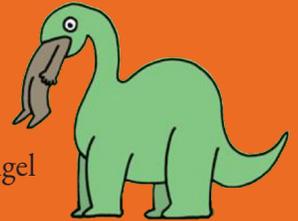
So Jung Shin



Emma Swanson



Frannie Boyle



Ani Seigel