



RC REVIEW 2014

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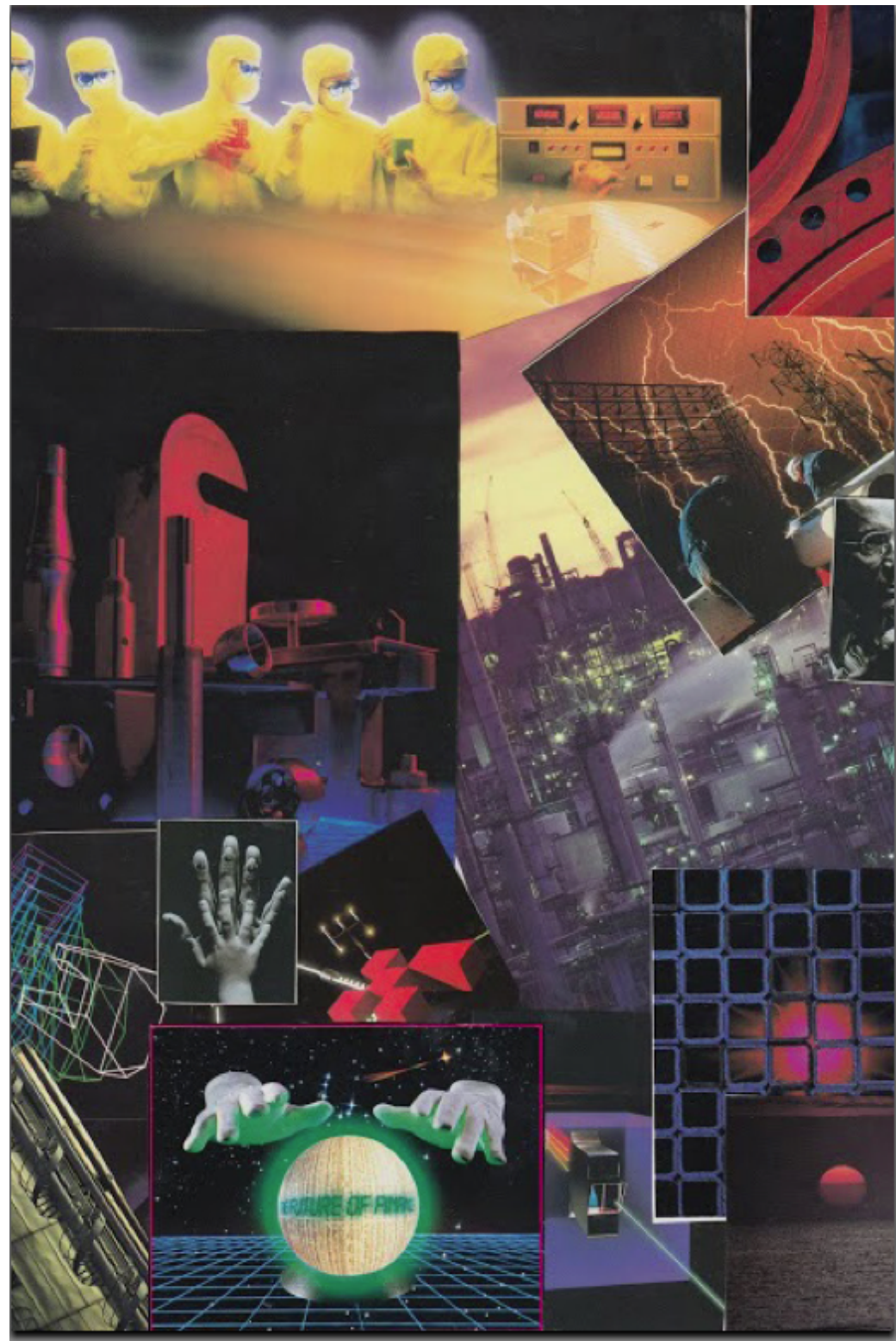
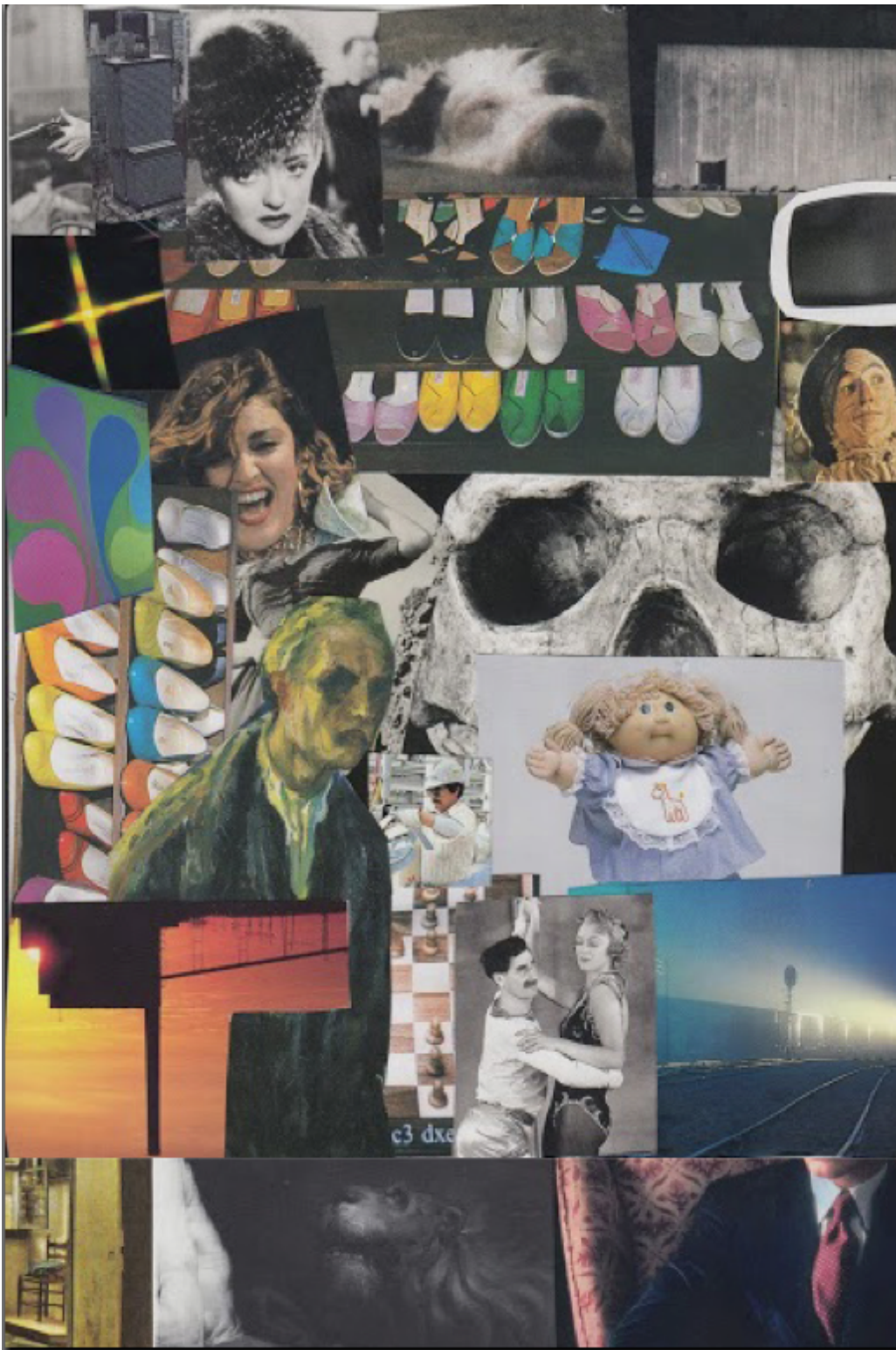


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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the RC Review.

We hope you enjoy your flight with us through student writing, poetry, art, photography, and general creativeness.

If the cabin pressure should change at any time, please leave all small children to fend for themselves. We don't like children here.

In case of a water landing, swim.

The local time is RC Review time. Please enjoy your journey.

-Allison Epstein
Editor-in-Chief



ARTIST

DANIELLE ZIAJA

it is the way he bends his back
hunched
eyes focused on fingers
sliding, picking their way
through acoustic water-wind

the way he shapes the sound
head bobbing
assuring his strings
matching heartbeat
packed essence

he looks up
soft stare
power
mild, knowing, smirking
leaking identity

i reach
on edge
as he pours Music
waterfalls and trenches
to my thirsty lungs

face twists
micro-movements
drops of pain and empathy
faltered breath –

he swept me up

the floor is clean

ODE TO A YAWN

CAMMIE FINCH

There, dormant inside you,
It finds peace.
The yawn –
Tight fist of exalted energy;
Nucleus of vibrating venom
Waiting to erupt,
To flood its tresses
Through your foggy marble.
Great reviver of spirits,
It slowly creeps up your spine.
Its fingers tap

tap

tapping

A secret message,
Calacking up your ribs,
Holding on to your desires,
A spring zephyr waiting to breathe.

The hurricane's eye expands inside you,
Jolted by a warming excitement.
Awake, awake,
We walk the world as stormy gusts.
Are we but one cluster of storm
Divided into a trillion vessels?

A shimmer swirls the fairy dust;
It knocks at your lungs.
Remember me, Yawn speaks,
The one with the tickling whistle.
I blossom within you;
Within me.

Breaking through your fault lines,
Creating a chasm to burst
(With effervescence!)

A stream of silky steam,
Your kettle brews and bubbles
In darkening clouds.

A thunder within
Shakes free.
The loudest spray of nothing
Sirens from your gaping cave.
No-named birds fly from the nest.
A fragile glass flings fragments
Of soft-edged nuggets.
It's there – for the taking,
Splattered on the pavement,
 Soaked into the underbellies
Of finely waxed shoes.

But resonance never rests.

The force reflects off starry drums;
Their footsteps in your shadow
 echo in a (billowing) rhythm.
With a silent *ding*
Cascades of rumbling sleep
 Undulate in a wave of global unity.

where in that time
sky knits a pocket
a momentary socket
where our ticking breath can
rub noses
 back
 and
 forth
until it returns (and it always does)
–that yawn–
like a crumpled boomerang
to its place of slumber
to the place where you feel whole again



RACHEL PERNICK

OMGYN (THE HEAD AND THE HEART AND THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM)

MOLLY REITMAN

I'm not sure why, but as soon as my eighteenth birthday passed my mother's fingers were already anxiously reaching for the phone to schedule my first OBGYN examination – "You know, just to make sure everything checks out down there." Since turning eighteen I've been to the gynecologist four different times, which seems like quite a few considering there are a considerable number of girls my age whose vaginas have never even been viewed by another human being, much less tested on and probed. By ten a.m. my period blood had already been on someone else's hand, so any normal expectations for the rest of the day were kind of shoved to the side at that point. On Wednesday my mother picks me up at eight a.m. from my dorm in Ann Arbor to drive me all the way back to Northville for an appointment with my gynecologist.

She told me about it as if she were inviting me to the special ladies' brunch at a country club, ironing out my best cocktail dress and assuring me that the hors d'oeuvres would be divine. Something about being involved in her daughter's reproductive health gets my mom going, I guess, and I am reminded of the stack of books in my childhood bedroom outlining my "changing body" and "natural human urges." Cartoonish diagrams of girls inserting tampons and cute little illustrations of the first curls of pubic hair peeking out of a preteens blotchy skin pattern my memories of childhood, and by the time puberty came around it felt less like a nightmare and more like the much-anticipated movie adaptation of book I'd read over and over again.

My mom knows we're going to be late but never allows her foot to push her Honda CRV above the state-sanctioned seventy miles per hour, and the NPR segment about human trafficking in Honduras this early in the morning makes me want to slam my forehead into the driver's side window until the blood from my skull paints the hairline fractures in the glass. It's only my second day of college, but of course I had to wait until I was on my period to have the procedure done, so here I am: missing an art history lecture, slung across my seat, and going a steady seventy miles per hour down M-14 with cramps bubbling in my lower abdomen and a solid four-and-a-half hours of sleep behind my eyes.

My mother tells me that she's worried because Cory didn't come home last night and he hasn't called or texted. "He needs to be more conscious of who he's affecting," she says. But really, if a twenty-one year old goes out to the bar, goes home with someone he meets there, then has to worry about texting his mom to ease her mind in the morning, he just needs to move out of the house. I tell my mom that he probably just slept somewhere and hasn't woken up yet, but the wrinkled frown on her face doesn't subside.

After changing into the paper towel sheet that is my dressing gown at the gynecologist's office, I am asked to pee in a cup in order to test that I'm not currently pregnant, and I can't help but want to ask them if the blood that I am currently leaking onto their rubber chair is not proof enough. I consent to the test anyway and find myself clutching a plastic cup in their restroom as I read the twelve step directions for the task I am about to undertake, which I never assumed would require any directions at all. I read on anyway, to make sure I still have a solid grasp on the English meaning of the phrase "pee in this cup." The instructions tell me to direct "the stream" into the cup, fill it about halfway, and then remove the cup from "the stream." It seems important that they retain these impersonal articles throughout the instructions: the stream, the cup, the labia – never your stream, your cup, your labia. It seems that anonymity and formal procedure is a very important concept to the person who's going to be sifting through my cup of hot urine and then shoving something into my uterus. I sit down on the toilet and start to panic about the process, forgetting steps eight through twelve and instead wishing this doctor's office would have taken a more scrapbooking class-esque approach with their instructions and reminded me to "just relax and have fun!"

I pee into the cup, splashing urine onto the fingers of my right hand, and it occurs to me that having urine splash on my body is hardly a foreign concept. Between high school nights peeing at the foot of the rock wall at my old elementary school (a rite of passage, I believe) or lazily reaching to take tampons out before “the stream” is fully complete, the hot familiar stick of yellow urine on skin reminds me that my time in this over-sanitized doctor’s office bathroom is just another punch line in the ongoing joke that is my day-to-day life. Without thinking about it I start to chuckle as I carefully set the cup of urine on the ground and watch the frothy bubbles fade from the top. I finish up and screw the baby blue cap onto the cup, write my name in messy block print on the side with a Sharpie, and place it in the metal cabinet marked “urine sample deposits.” I wash my hands no more thoroughly than I would at any other time and return to my examination room to await Dr. Marback’s arrival.

Dr. Marback has the kind of face that could be easily recreated with felt and string on a Muppet, and her smile is a glowing cave of big and crooked teeth. She wears chunky jewelry and warm earth tones and walks with the unapologetic grace of someone who enjoys listening to the rain. She asks me how I’m doing, but not so many questions that I start to hate her, which is how I usually end up feeling towards my dentist or some of my more distant relatives who I run into at awkward family gatherings. She asks me if I’ve done all the research on this particular IUD on my own, and I reply with a sustained glazed-over look followed by a noncommittal nod that is so unconvincing even a blind man would know I’m full of shit.

“Yeah, pretty much,” I push out from behind a plastered smile, and I wonder how unfair it is that I’m being punished for missing an assignment I didn’t know I had. Will this be on the final exam, I want to ask, but Dr. Marback doesn’t seem to be in much of a joking-about-your-semi-permanent-contraception kind of mood.

While she runs her long motherly hands under the stream of hot water in the sink, she explains the procedure, which starts with her giving me two shots in my cervix, a body part that I was not even aware had the outside access point which I assume is necessary for an injection. I lay back and the familiar crinkle of paper fabric-on-rubber examination table whispers in my ears. She asks me to put my feet in the stirrups. I comply, but with the ever-raging hate in my heart for a term that associates something incredibly sensitive and uncomfortable with the memory of being slammed up and down with bowed legs onto an unforgiving

leather saddle the first time I tried to ride a horse. Dr. Marback crams something cold and metal and thick inside me, and then tells me she’s giving me the first shot.

I don’t mind giving blood or getting shots because I get scrapes and scratches and bruises on my arms all the time, and if I look down and a little needle is poking them, it’s no need for panic. My cervix, on the other hand, is not a part of my body that I am entirely sure will survive a pinprick, considering I’ve never really even been consciously aware of having a cervix, much less considered what would happen if I jammed a needle into it. For all I know, the cervix could be the most sensitive and nerve-filled surface of a human body, but no one ever talks about it because who the hell is poking at their cervix on a regular basis? It’s this series of thoughts that pounds through my head as I dig nails into white skin while a muffled stabbing sensation forces a gasp from my lips. It isn’t painful as much as it is horribly unfamiliar, like feeling someone tickling your pancreas or pinching your liver. The second shot goes relatively the same, and then Dr. Marback leaves me alone for five minutes as the numbing agent takes effect.

What’s interesting about a gynecologist’s office on the west side of suburban Northville is literally nothing. I lie on the table and try to relax, painfully aware of the liberated period blood pouring out of me and running down my bare skin to form a small puddle on the paper-dressed table between my legs. I contemplate an awkward apology for this fact, then decide if they didn’t want me to menstruate all over their stupid table they shouldn’t have made me come in today in the first place. Across the room on a small shelf there’s a copy of People magazine, and I’m not sure if it’s the hormones or the sleep deprivation or an unexpected effect of my newly-numbed cervix, but I want to read that magazine so badly I start crying. So here I am, sitting in a pool of my own period blood, staring at Kate Middleton’s unassuming face across the room and weeping silently onto the crinkly paper table cloth beneath me, desperate for my gynecologist to return regardless of the total human mess she’ll find when she opens the door.

By the time Dr. Marback eventually does return, I’ve thankfully stopped crying. Unfortunately, she readjusts the table before realizing that my vagina is the Niagara Falls of menses and ends up with a bit of the blood on her bare index finger. As her warm brown eyes meet the crimson stain on her hand, I expect some sort of panic or at least a series of expletives. However, neither occur, and she coolly washes her hands

with an ever-pleasant smile while I have to make a conscious effort to close my jaw as it is hanging open with utter disgust.

When homeless people spit on her does she grin and shake their hands? When someone vomits on her hair does she tell them good job and send them a thank you card once a year?! I realize that this is her job and that this must happen all the time, and that just grosses me out further. I can't help but imagine Dr. Marback on her first day of medical school, confident and enthusiastic about changing lives and bettering the world. As I watch her dry her bare hands of my period leakage, I wonder how that naïve freshman would feel about this future – monotonous days of diagnosing teenagers' yeast infections and acquiring a complete indifference towards a stranger's menstrual blood staining her skin.

Reality shifts sharply back into focus as Dr. Marback explains that the next part of the procedure is going to be a lot easier and will only take a few moments. It is the actual insertion of the IUD, which will prevent me from getting pregnant for five years. I tried to take the pill for a year, but, as evidenced by my "extreme gingivitis" and stack of empty diaries, doing things once a day every day usually doesn't work out for me. So I've resorted to more drastic, yet less inconvenient, methods, because if not getting pregnant depends on me remembering to take a tiny pill at seven o'clock every night, I am going to need to start buying diapers now.

The IUD is just a small piece of plastic, probably doused in chemicals and hormones but harmless looking enough. It seems that the chastity belts of our generation are a lot more subtle and convenient and involve a lot less chastity, in coherence with our passion for shortcuts – our love affair with loopholes. After inserting it, Dr. Marback tells me that I can get dressed and that I will have to come back for a follow-up appointment in two weeks. I thank her and start putting on my clothes, wiping the dried blood off my inner thighs before slipping on my ratty underwear and cut-off jean shorts. She has left a sheet of paper for me to take to the receptionist, so I leave the room and find the front desk with the walls fuzzing around me. I didn't expect to leave feeling like a new person, but I had gone into that room having never cried because of a People magazine, and, well, I came out different, I guess. I rifled through the sticker basket at the front desk for a while before settling on one with a snowy owl staring at me saying, "You're a hoot!" It's enough to get me through the rest of the day.

I find my mother in the waiting room, staring at the dark screen of her phone with eyes pink from fresh tears. I ask her if she's alright and

she tells me Cory still hasn't responded to any of her messages, and she's starting to get really worried. As we walk out of the building she contemplates calling local hospitals and police stations, but I tell her to hold off for a while longer with the reassurance that I'm sure he just slept at a friend's house. The piercing cramps and intense, burning lower abdominal pain start when we're driving away, and I wonder how many Motrin one can take without dying as I pour six into my hand and swallow them one by one. Mom tells me to at least eat something to accompany the feast of pills, and as I eat baby carrots out of her lunchbox, her phone rings. It's my dad, and I can tell from the elastic-band release of the lines in her face that he's saying Cory is alright. They talk some more and she takes us back on the highway, and all of a sudden it's NPR and stomach pain again. I can tell the whole morning has worn her down, so I make conversation, telling her that the appointment went well and that Dr. Marback says hi and that I'll have to come back in two weeks for a follow-up.

"You have another appointment?" she asks, her voice creeping up slowly in register. I tell her I still have to schedule it, and I can see the glint in her eye as her shoulders sink back into their more confident position, sturdy and refreshed at the thought of scheduling another visit for her daughter to the gynecologist.



KARA MULLISON

NIGHT IN PARIS

ARIEL KAPLOWITZ

Years from now, when I am grown, I will
think back to this night: black kitchen
table, candy wrappers strewn, rumbling city,
the four of us gripping
the hands we were dealt. We have
rarely played cards before:
age difference making us strangers,
though I recognize my mother's round cheeks on each face;
my grandfather's eyes in my sister's.
Tonight, we laugh so hard my
father wakes up to hush, and we roll
our eyes behind his back.
One brother leans against my shin.
My sister whispers, "Can we play again? It's so much-"
and "fun" isn't the word
for these glimmering moments, this sudden
awareness of pounding hearts,
fellow soldiers in a wobbly life.
Until now, our twenty-year job has been:
argue, complain, fight. Not laugh, not lean on each other's shins,
and not love;
at least, not mention love, our implicit and hidden beast.
It's been there all along, beating for
those brimming round faces who
shaped my bones & dreams & fingernails.
I want to say, then, how this night feels like apples and honey,
but when I open my mouth,
my old line, "Not tonight, it's too late," slips out.
I wish I could suck those words back into my lungs,
and say, yes, of course, another round, &
I love you & you alone know me truly,
but I falter in my human way
as life careens swiftly forward and
we become grownups and nights like
these are only silky memories.

ARACHNE

CLARE HIGGINS

Her love is a spider's web
a sweltering hurricane of addictive release.

Her deft fingers pull softly, forcing meaning from locals' reluctant tongues
as their willing hands
pinch at the corners of her dress.

As each man's resolve crumbles, his destruction
loosens caverns within her that long to stretch and lie open.
Still.

Her parted lips taste stories that wrap
around their own beginnings.
Her teeth prey on promises, and the touch of a young man's fingers.

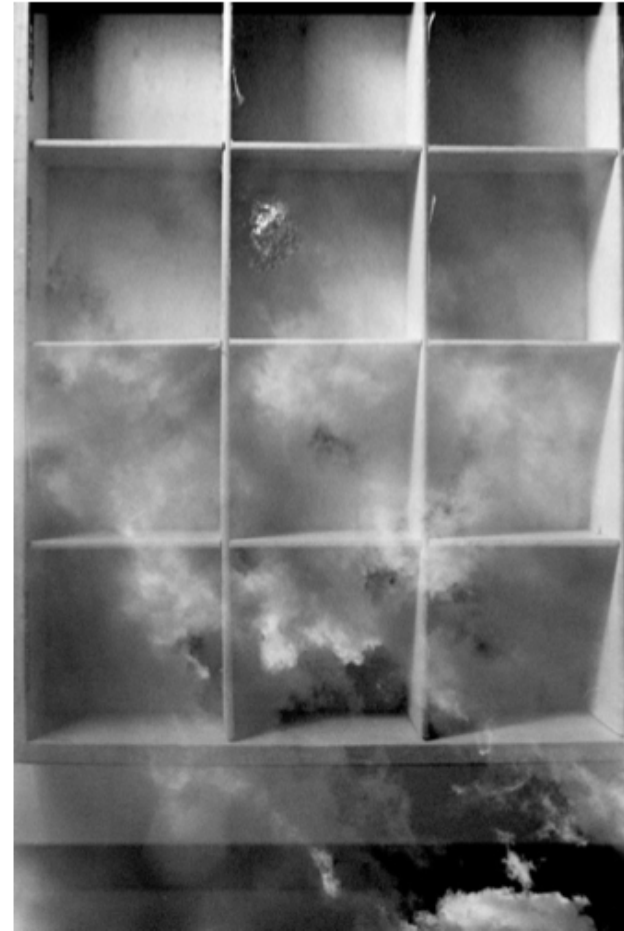
Atop a red bar stool

Against the cash register

Her heart's hunger provokes a dance. It is quick
and biting
washing over and through her; familiar.

Her web captures beads of truth.
She weaves. And weaves
until her lies mummify
reality in sticky-sweet silk.

After hours
as stars swallow fading sunlight
she swallows hearts
whole.



KARA MULLISON

FIRE SAFETY

ARIEL KAPLOWITZ

If nothing else, we are prepared for fire.
The house is made of wood.

Besides the fire escape, Maggie bought a special ladder that,
after some assembly, can be thrown from a window.
Right now, it lives beneath her bed,

but we are prepared, if necessary, to climb.
We keep these options open.

It feels good to be prepared. It feels good to say,
okay, first, try fire escape; second, assemble ladder.
The logic is linear. The fire is conquerable.

Outside the house, the world is wild.
The wind tears trees and roots up from the ground.

Our boots are not waterproof. Our hats are full of holes.

We are not prepared for outside.
The house, though flammable, is safe. We would vow
not to leave, except for the mice, and

the unwavering clench in our stomachs. The dust could eat us alive.

The rule, then, becomes: throw ourselves out the door.
Sometimes we slip on the ice.
Sometimes the wind carries us away. The logic is not linear.

There is no logic. There is only the door, and its movement of opening.

READY TO BE QUIET NOW

SOPHIA WARREN

He used to get mean when he drank. I remember dragging
him out of a party one night, begging, saying I wanted to go home
and crawl into bed next to him; feel his heat suspended over me.
We walked across town, west to east, the wind meeting our flushed
faces, my skirt rising in a billowing cloud.

“Fuck you,” he said, “You spoil all my fun.”

Then he threw the whiskey bottle in a high arc, so it
smashed onto the hood of a car across the street and broke into a
million shards.

I ran by his side. Ran home and he demolished his power
strip with a hammer and threw my backpack out the fourth story
window.

As I said, he used to get mean when he drank.

There was one night in the spring when he was home from
college: the ground was littered with nitrous oxide containers; the
alcohol flowed freely; my head lolled about, eyes fluttering. We'd

started early. It was Saturday. This is how things went back then.

We'd found a gun in the attic at the house where his father had grown up. It was a beautiful little handgun with a mother of pearl handle, designed to fit in a lady's purse so that she could guard herself from whatever harm might come her way. We played with it all day, pointing it at each other and laughing as we pulled the trigger. There were no bullets.

The sun set and it was time to go out. We loved to party. We were young. He and I filled our coats with Robotussin at the Walgreens in Union Square and made our way down the street drinking cherry syrup, which stained our mouths a beautiful, childish red as though we'd stuffed them with candy. I remember these spring nights during my senior year of high school when the air felt calm and cool against freshly shaved legs making their debut for the warmer seasons.

I didn't like to steal and he promised me he wouldn't when he went into the liquor store to buy some wine. I leant against the brick wall outside, smoking a cigarette and smiling, head growing heavy and hot from the cough syrup. My skin tingled and I watched the fluorescent sign, flashing the word "liquor" in red letters like some sort of warning. Lost in the flashing, the pulsating, I barely noticed the commotion as he ran past me, booking it down the street.

I ran too, weaving in and out of the heavy foot traffic on 14th, apologizing to people as I passed.

He was hiding in a doorway when I found him, two bottles of wine in his arms.

"I broke a bottle in the store," he said, nonchalantly. "It broke all over the floor and there was wine everywhere and the man was yelling, so I grabbed two more bottles and ran."

He'd broken the first rule of stealing: if someone notices, you don't take anything.

"Well that was fucking stupid," I said.

He smiled at me. "If anyone had fucked with me, I would've taken out the gun."

We'd agreed the gun would never leave the house.

I frowned, suddenly worried about being followed; about cops; about all the situations; about my purse full of drugs and empty baggies, torn open and licked clean. And the gun. My fingerprints splayed across that gun like an invitation to wrap my wrists in cuffs and let the metal sink in, like the cops had done when he'd been arrested for drunk driving.

"Well, don't take the gun out," I said.

But you don't tell him what to do and the next thing I knew it was out, raised high in the air as he staggered backwards.

"Why? You scared?"

"No. I just—"

"You're a fucking pussy. You're such a fucking pussy. And you spoil all my fun."

There it was again. The fun thing. Yes, that's me. The fun spoiler.

"You don't mean that. You're drunk. Can you please put that goddamned thing away?"

"No! You're always fucking telling me what to do. I'm so fucking sick of you."

Sirens.

We took a cab uptown. Had to get out of Union Square. The lights of the piers on the Westside Highway swirled around me, dizzying. I was starting to feel the drugs I'd taken earlier, my body all warm and fuzzy, and stroking my leg felt so good and my eyes were so twitchy and weird and uneven and my pupils were growing and shrinking and blinking.

He kept the gun out, pressed into my thigh, toying with me, knowing I was scared of him.

We spilled out of the cab onto the corner of 119th and Lenox in front of a deli. He sent me in to buy beer. The store was bright, nauseatingly so, and when I came back out, met by the cool night, he was talking to someone. The man was large with very dark

skin and the sort of buggy white eyes that seemed to flash in the street lights. He carried some sort of incense holder.

"This guy is going to sell us some opium. We have to go in this building."

"Okay." I had learned that often the best option was to be annoyingly submissive and, judging by the way he was staggering about, I knew that there was no other way.

We climbed two flights of linoleum-coated stairs, following the incense smell until we reached a landing. Everything moved quickly, slowly, weirdly.

The man turned around and grabbed him by the throat, lifting him up from the ground, sliding him up the wall. The man smiled.

His face was turning blue and there was this terrible sputtering noise and drool hanging from his mouth and the sputtering wouldn't stop and then it did and it got quiet, too quiet.

"Give me all your money. Now."

I didn't have any money. We had no money. I mean, we'd just stolen a bunch of cough syrup for crying out loud. Did we look like we had money? Maybe he had money. I reached into his pocket. No money, but my hand met that mother of pearl handle and I drew quickly, wedging the gun between the man's bottom ribs.

"Let him go," I said, "Now. It's loaded. I'm fucking loaded. And I will fucking shoot you."

He let go and stepped backwards, raising hands up in the air and looking into my eyes. We stared and then I took off down the steps.

We ran up Lenox. I ran as fast as I could, faster than I knew was possible, watching the lights blur around me as my eyes filled with tears. Seven blocks up and around the corner, I dropped onto the stoop of a vacant house, put my head between my knees, and threw up on my feet. I was spinning so quickly, the gun still pressed into my palm in my pocket. I couldn't let go of it. I didn't want to.

We sat there together for a while as I heaved and heaved and he kissed my neck, telling me, "It's all gonna be okay, baby."

And he played with my hair and breathed against my skin and held me tight, but not as tight as I held that gun.

"I want to go home now."

I lay on my belly across his bed, my mirror open on the nightstand, snorting lines until I couldn't see.

I didn't want to fuck, but I let him anyway because he was drunk and as I said, sometimes it's easier to be submissive. My whole body was numb and my feet were cold and I lay still except for each line I snorted and each sob I let sneak from my mouth.

For a minute, I thought about how nice it would be to die, to go to sleep endlessly and feel nothing but silent emptiness. I imagine that heaven is like being in a womb: quiet, with your body submerged in viscous fluid that you just twirl through until the end of time, whenever that may be. I would like for it to be quiet; for him to shut up; for me to never have to kiss his drunken, sloppy mouth again. His kisses are always so wet when he's drunk. I would like to lay somewhere without feeling my legs pried open and my insides split apart and my knees forced in directions they cannot really go.



KATJA MOLINARO



“Let\$ Pollute” is a sculpture from the East Quad courtyard and is made up of found objects from outside. It represents how students pollute their bodies with alcohol and then pollute our environment with the containers.



ELIZABETH STAPLETON

**MY MOTHER HAS ME TEXT MY
SISTER SEVEN TIMES TO SEE IF
SHE'S STILL SICK**

SOPHIE RUF

My mother tucks the daylight to sleep –
heavy with hours

and tears the secret black of night
through her teeth
like red meat
fresh from slaughter.

She spools
her own coats of anxiety –
trimmed from every frown
of her back.

She dresses the house in them:
her worry-rugs.

She cries on the phone to her sister
until she's caught
under her own water
and funnels down the
tempest-bow of her own throat.

She can't see where
she's from anymore.

Her eyes sting –
scratched by salt waves.

She sags her bathrobe
like a single limp wing.

Her breasts –
two sunken punches.

Her stomach –
a rolling ocean
of bread.

She reaches for my sister
her arms

like two speckled branches
cracked-veiny from trying to nest
hundreds of birds at once.

“I have to know if she’s feeling better,”
she reaches further.

“She would call if she needed anything,
right?”
she unhooks her torso from her waist
leans like a pouring teapot.

“Right?”
Brimmed high with piping hot nervous.

“I need to know my babies are okay.”

Still
reaching

HIGH-WIRE WALKER

ERIC ZUGHAIB

Halfway across the wire and
Hundreds of feet above the ground,
I find myself wondering why I am here.

What caused me to walk on this wire?
I remember my father,
telling me I could never reach great heights.
And my mother lying through her teeth,
Saying I could be anything I wanted to be.

All the people are below me watching
From the safety of the hard cement;
Silently trying to push me off
With eager anxiety in their eyes.
Hoping that a tragedy will happen.
I wonder how many are here,
just to see me fall to my death.

But I’ll show them.

I don’t consider it crazy to think
That they might even envy the man
Who is higher than they will ever be
And is closer to the sun and the stars.
Higher than their roofs and their ambitions,
Is where I stand, amongst the clouds,
On the other side of the wire.

TREASONOUS WORDPLAY IN THE TIME OF GRAMMAR COMMIES

RYAN SHINKEL

Let us play words until
Our dictionaries run out.
Let us frolic and fiddle
With consonance and syllable
And assonance till we make
Constant asses of ourselves.

Let us breathe in books as if
They were real Greek to us, and
Without care I might dare to say,
“Words in and words out, words
Within and words without, and
Words of worlds about words.”

Worlds of words in syntactical
Alliance to procreate semantics –
That is language; that is the
Communication of feeling and
Rhythm with rhyme and reason,
Always never in the right season.

It is never in the right
Season for words – I say autumn
In fall and chill in winter.
Spring forth the misquotations
And mistranslations and the favored
Misattributed tribulations

From the Translator of this poem.
Now is a season for words – well,
Within reason.

DECENCY'S END

ALEXANDER BERNARD

We found the body on Twelfth in an alley under a fire escape that climbed twenty-one stories above the unforgiving pavement. The body, now saturated with death, had at one time belonged to a Mr. Andrew Denksport. The coroner pegged his death at 1:32 the night before. Word around the department was that Denksport jumped from his apartment on the tenth floor and got exactly what he wanted when the ground met him on the way down. Suicide, probably. And yet, as I examined the body, the puzzle seemed to be missing a piece.

Though I was a first time detective and Denksport offered me my first personal crime scene, death didn't cause the pit in my stomach. I'd seen enough “bad landings” in photographs to know a few things about heads and how much pavement they can endure before – CRACK! As it happened, Mr. Denksport's body was clean: no marks, no cuts, and no blood. Sure, I hadn't the first-hand experience, but it doesn't take a detective to know that a man doesn't have a fight with an ten-story fall and walk away without a scratch.

After a few hours of dead-end investigation, I decided to pick up dinner, head home, and review the evidence. I checked my phone and saw my brother, and roommate, Jonathon had called me. He left a voicemail telling me not to wait up. He wouldn't be home that night. Not uncommon.

“Stop it, John!” She giggled under the covers, concealing her naked body as she bounced up and down on the bed. I poked her in her sides again and she squealed, my fingers tickling her and sending whimsical shivers through her stomach. I laughed and plunged myself under the sheets and blankets, which now hid both of us. I gently kissed her neck. “That tickles too!” she said.

"Geez, are you just ticklish everywhere?" I said and poked her sides again. She burst into laughter, swatted my hands away, and crawled to the other side of the bed. No longer concealed among the fabric, the light from the window cast a bright shadow over her bare skin. She was like a playful dog that constantly fell for the same tricks because, in truth, she wanted to fall for them. For the time, she entertained me, but in my heart I knew she wouldn't last much longer. It was sad, but what can you do? We'd been seeing each other for three weeks now, and I still didn't know her name. Martha? Marjory? Annabelle? Something with an "a." That's about as far as I ever got. I always hoped to sneak a glance at her ID, but the chance never presented itself. In the mean time, I'd succumbed to calling her whatever pet name seemed to suit the moment: Baby, Kid, Darling, Sexy Mama, etc...

Still, I had no real reason to be pessimistic. By all accounts at the time, the girl delighted me with her righteous pilgrimages into noble causes: five years volunteering at a soup kitchen, three and a half years lobbying against tobacco companies, one year cleaning up the Hudson, and two months on the pill. What a gem. I still find it fascinating and astounding that through three weeks I could learn all of this personal information, but no name. And I can't very well ask what her name is. That wouldn't be very gentleman-like.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked me, resting her head on the heel of her hand.

"You of course," I said. She smiled and sprung from the bed to her dresser. She opened the top drawer and rearranged the clothes, pulling out a small packet of Marlboros.

"Do you mind?" she asked. I paused, thinking of her work as a lobbyist and wondering what my lung capacity was.

"Not at all," I replied. She gave me a toothy grin and put a cigarette in her mouth, igniting the tip with a lighter. I just watched her and allowed the hypocrisy to seep through every hole and every pore in my body. I let myself feel every drop of contradiction and inconsistency that she exuded. And it poisoned me. "I'll be right back."

I walked out of the room and flipped open the flap of my briefcase. Where businessmen would carry fountain pens, I had three vials of Stillentod slipped into the black leather. One of the vials easily compressed into my syringe, and I strolled lightly back to her bedroom, hiding the needle in my sleeve.

"Come here, you," she said, the cigarette now extinguished in the trash. She'd thrown the covers off and lied naked on the spread. She was asking for it; she needed relief. And I wouldn't disappoint. Grinning like a cat, I slithered to the edge of the bed, put one hand on her bare hip, and kissed her lightly.

I stuck her right in throat.

She shrieked, pulled back, and went limp. A sigh fled from my lips and a trickle of blood crept down my chin. I'd been biting my tongue. I wiped it on her chest and sat down for a smoke, my own relief. After all, I wasn't a lobbyist. Later, I'd throw away my cigarette, dress her, and deposit the body in the alley outside her window when the night had grown dark enough. Then, I would forget, and move on to the next one.

A gaudy turquoise wallet stared at me from the nightstand. Rhinestone and sequins lined the places where the leather should have been stitched together. I opened it and took nothing but her name.

Catherine Leer. The gust of wind from outside hit me like a light breeze. I felt a brief chill, but shrugged it off because it didn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

We found another body just two days later. A young woman named Catherine Leer had fallen from her apartment, or so we thought. Still no blood splatters, no breaks of the skin, no cuts. Nothing. She hadn't been raped or strangled. No sign of foul play. I popped a cigarette into my mouth but snuffed it under my shoe after one puff. I couldn't stomach the body, much less the smoke that was like the fumes of an exterminator. Even just standing by Ms. Leer's corpse made me want to vomit up my lunch and every lunch I'd ever eaten.

Catherine Leer was pretty, beautiful even. Well, she was

pretty. I didn't know her at all, but God, I wished I could've spoken about her in the present tense and told her that she is beautiful. But death robs us of the present tense and force feeds us the past because it's all we have left of the dead. So we fight it, or at least we try to. Catherine Leer never had a fight. This serial exterminator's fumes smothered her.

An hour later, I drove home. Orange glowing lights passed on either side of my car, flying by the windows and giving me a headache. Eventually, I made it back to my apartment and sat next to Jonathon on the couch. He was eating Chinese food and fumbling with the chopsticks.

"Just use a fork," I said.

He chuckled. "No, I'm determined to figure this out! I want to appear cultured."

I laughed. Jonathon's sarcastic condescension balanced my life and made me forget Catherine Leer for just a second.

"How was work?" he asked. "Deliver some justice?"

"We found a girl dead in an alley. No marks. No blood. Nothing."

"Just like that Denksport guy before, huh?"

"Seems so."

"You alright?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I'll be fine," I lied. Catherine's vacant blue eyes were still flickering in my head. "She just seemed so innocent you know? I just – Catherine Leer shouldn't be dead."

Jonathon pushed himself up from his chair and went into the bedroom, mumbling something in reply. I couldn't hear what he was saying.

"What's that?" I asked.

He mumbled something back again. The only word I could pick out was "deserved."

The nightmare continued. A third body was found in a local bookstore. The body belonged to Mr. Martin Appling, who managed the store along with his wife Sharon. Once again, no marks. No blood. No cuts. Most importantly, though: no window to jump

out of. We began to examine the prospect of a killer who didn't exclusively operate out of tall buildings.

The job was beginning to strain. Sure, Martin Appling's death was considered a breakthrough, but the mere sight of one more lifeless corpse with lifeless eyes pushed me to the brink. How could a simple bookstore owner be murdered? What could possibly be the killer's motive? It didn't add up. Andrew Denksport. Catherine Leer. Martin Appling. The names spiraled in my head like a tetherball, swinging around and around until the string wrapped around the pole and the game was over. Appling should've been just one more body to me.

After seven months off the stuff, I got drunk that night.

My brother walked through our door that night around 2:45 AM. I heard him crash into the coffee table and then fumble with the remote. The television blasted a late night talk show or a rerun of some TV show. I couldn't be sure. I liked reruns. It was comforting to know exactly what was coming next. But not at three in the morning.

After about a half an hour of listening to the muffled noises coming from our speakers, I rose from my bed and made my way to the family room. Like a child, my brother slept curled into a ball on the couch, his knees tucked up to his shirt and tie. A half-empty bottle of whiskey rested on its side on the coffee table. I put the glass in the fridge and went back to my brother and friend. He seemed cold and alone. While I always seemed to make friends relatively easily, social life came difficultly to my brother. He wasn't married and, consequently, had no children. I really felt sorry for him. He deserved better, but would never get it. If only he hadn't drank. If only he had stayed true to his vow against alcohol. It was really tragic.

The Stillentod broke the skin of his arm. His eyes flew open like a window shade. I put a hand over his mouth to keep him calm, but it didn't matter. He never made a noise. His eyes closed again to begin the final sleep we all will take one day.

"Good night, Robert," I said to my brother.

The television was still on. I wasn't tired, so I put in a DVD and watched reruns until the sun rose again, as it always does. In the morning, I made myself some toast and eggs and ate them at the kitchen table. Robert was still lying on the couch. Chuckling at my foolishness, I moved him to the chair across from my plate and retrieved Atlas Shrugged from my room. It didn't take me very long to find the spot.

I read, "Contradictions do not exist. Whenever you think that you are facing a contradiction, check your premises. You will find that one of them is wrong."

Robert didn't say anything.

"You're wrong, okay?"

Silence.

ON GROWING OLD AND ON DYING

CLARE HIGGINS

I. On Growing Old

The rivers you weep will evaporate.
You will soon melt where you stand
and the skin on your neck will pile up like soft taffy.

Bits of your body will waltz into picture frames
without returning.
You will forget entirely what braces felt like
what Rachel so-and-so whispered into your hair at lunch
and the way you tangled your feet
around a chair whenever you talked to a boy.

II. On Dying

The mountains you have moved
will scuttle back to their birthplaces.
The weeds you have pulled will snicker
and climb.

Think – when you cried over your mother.

The world will cry for you this way and not that –
mourners will hold handkerchiefs while you are lowered
but once they understand you are gone
they will find they are still here.

Breathing in, out.

DEEP BLUE VELVET

LIZ SWAYNIE

From the living room we pass through an archway with black strips of crêpe paper flowing down from the ceiling, covering the passageway. Sadie and Drew walk in first, hand in hand, followed by Danny and me. At first, as we walk into the pitch-black room, I wrap the fingers of my left hand with Danny's right, and my other hand rests lightly on Sadie's shoulder. We hear an especially eerie version of "Danse Macabre" echoing throughout the funhouse, and I am hit with the distinct smell of sweat. But after only a couple of footsteps, the four of us are jostled up against another group of kids.

I feel my hand slip away from Sadie's body, and I call out to her.

No answer.

"Should we try to go find them?" I ask Danny.

I think I see him shake his head in the darkness. "They can take care of themselves."

Bodies push up against us from all directions, but I'm still leaning against Danny as we stumble together into the room in front of us. We walk past ghostly decorations, sheets with eye holes draped down from the ceiling, and I try to keep from laughing. We walk past a door smeared with "blood," but I'm pretty sure I can smell the ketchup from where I'm standing.

"You aren't scared, are ya, Viv?" Danny asks me, with a hint of fear in his voice. He's never liked the dark much. I smirk, removing my hand from his and wrapping it around his waist.

"Who, me? Nah. I'm not scared of anything!" I lean my head against his arm and try to keep him calm with a playful attitude. I've never liked the dark either, but I've always managed to hide my fears from others.

While we're walking through the hallways, feeling our way around the house, I think I feel someone shaking me. But I know it's just an eerie feeling that comes along with walking around a haunted house. I tell myself that it's not real, and to get a grip.

As soon as we step together into the glittering room, my nonchalant attitude changes. The room has no visible walls; it is a maze of mirrors. The music that has been in the other rooms fades away. A single, dull light in the center of the ceiling helps to illuminate the surfaces of the walls. It is a prism of reflections within reflections within reflections.

I don't feel Danny against me anymore, and when I turn to look behind me he has disappeared.

"Danny?" The room's silence echoes. "This isn't funny." I stand on my tiptoes and lean forward and backwards unsteadily, searching for his disheveled brown hair and red Converse.

"Danny?" My fear is growing. I can usually handle a funhouse by myself, but this mirrored room is creeping me out.

"Danny! Where are you?" I shout at the top of my lungs. I'm quivering now, and I feel the hysteria building up in my body. It's happened before, but I don't like to think about those moments. I run through the maze, reaching dead ends more often than not, and while I try to find Danny, I get myself lost.

I look up and seek out where the main light is in the room. I'm standing directly under it. A creak from across the room grabs my attention, and I'm turning my body in that direction when a flash of color catches my eyes. The walls are suddenly covered in material. It is familiar to me, but I can't put my finger on it until it hits me like a smack to the face.

Blue velvet. Every inch of the walls is covered in a deep blue velvet.

"No... that's not right!" I yell out to no one. I know what the walls looked like before; they were mirrors – clear as day.

My knees quake and I see movement in my peripheral vision. Terrified, I slowly turn towards a full-length mirror across from me. My body overtakes my mind, and my toes bring me to the edge of the mirror. When I reach the mirror, an image that is

not my own is there to greet me. Maybe that's not entirely true.

It's me at the age of five.

My younger version glares at me, her curly chocolate brown hair falling to her hips and her straight-across bangs mirroring her non-expressive eyebrows. I am speechless, and I bring my hand up and let my fingertips touch the mirror. Her fingertips match my movements, and I feel her warmth through the mirror's cold exterior.

It is in this moment that my younger self straightens her arm out through the mirror's face and grabs my wrist, pulling me into the unknown abyss. My screams die away and my world goes dark.

I am hiding under a bench.

From my position, I can see that the underside of the bench is cracked and worn, and that the wood is cheap. I know this bench well. The blue velvet cover on the top is in good condition, though. It looks like any other piece of well-made furniture. The bench is pushed up against a wall in the kitchen, and I use the wall to brace my crouched form.

My mother is also worn; I can hear it in her voice. It scratches against my ears. I wrap my arms tightly around my knees.

My father's anger has been simmering during my mother's accusations, and when she finally goes silent his anger is unforgiving. His bass voice commands attention, and I move my arms to cover my tender ears. The sound is deafening. I feel him stomping on the hard wood of the kitchen floor, and the vibrations shake my little feet. Or maybe they were already shaking.

Their voices of anger mix with the air. My fear escapes from my grasp in little ways: a sudden quiver of my right hand, the uncontrollable twitching of my left eyebrow, my teeth gnawing at the dead skin on my blushing lips. I do not cry, though. I can control my tears.

They have forgotten about me for the first time in five years. They argue over money. Over how we might lose our home. Over whether they ever loved each other to begin with.

But then I am no longer forgotten. My mother drags me out of my hiding spot. She grabs me, her thumb firmly pushed into the meat of my wrist, and pulls me in front of her. I stand before my father as she continues to argue with him. I'm not listening to their words anymore. All I feel is shame. I see my mother being pulled back in to the argument, forgetting momentarily about my existence, and I take my chance to silently return to my hiding space.

My mature self, somehow fused with the child from the memory, realizes the futility of the situation, and I become overwhelmed with rage.

How could they involve me in this?

I am five years old. And I am hiding from my parents under a bench.

"VIVIAN!"

The deep voice revives me, and my eyes burst open. Danny leans over me, and he grasps one of my hands. There are people everywhere, and I realize that I'm lying spread eagle on the floor. Bright lights. Concerned expressions.

My face feels wet, and at first I think it's blood, but when I graze my fingers against my cheek I don't see any red. I realize then that I'm crying, and I don't know when I started, but I know that I won't be stopping anytime soon.

Danny tilts me forward and encloses me into his embrace. I see Sadie lean into Drew from a couple of feet away. They both look relieved to see me awake.

"I'm so sorry! Drew and I didn't think you'd react like this. It was just a joke... you got the weirdest look on your face, and then you were out! Did you eat enough earlier? Or—"

I come to my senses for a moment.

"Wait, I wasn't with... we got separated... there were mirrors..."

Danny's raised eyebrows and tightened lips keep me from saying anything else, and I'm too rattled to explain myself further.

"You're confused, Viv. Drew and Sadie thought they'd try

to scare us a bit by jumping out and screaming in our faces—” he shoots them a dirty look “—and obviously their plan worked out perfectly. But don’t worry, I’ve been with you this whole time.”

My eyes widen, and I am aware that my body is reacting to this news. I feel new tears forming in my eyes, and I sense their release more than allow it. My breathing speeds up rapidly, and I know that I’m already hyperventilating. My hands shake uncontrollably, and part of my midsection suddenly goes numb.

Drew brushes away a wet, stringy piece of hair that’s been stuck on the middle of my face. “Don’t worry, babe. I’ll bring you back to your mom’s house right away now that you’re awake.”

I can’t form the words, but I try to struggle against him. My control over my body has left me. To anyone looking at me, my eyes just appear glazed over, and I sit passively, like a limp rag doll, on the cold, wooden floor.

Danny wipes the little tears off of my face, and I see the room’s lights reflected in his amber eyes. He gently grips me as he tries to help me up, but the action agitates the newly-formed bruise on my wrist.

It hasn’t appeared totally yet, but when it does it will turn black and a lasting, deep blue.

DANNY

ARIEL KAPLOWITZ

1.
danny is the one with the lungs.
we knew the second he was born: this
kid would make some noise. he
started talking earlier than most kids;
his first word was my name. he had brown darting eyes
and pink orbs for cheeks. danny made noise with every part
of his body.
at the age of three, he memorized the words
to “american pie” and howled it, stomping along to the
rhythm.
danny wore cymbals on his shoes.
his tantrums were symphonies. his laughter was thunder-
storms.
he couldn’t carry a tune. he outsmarted every ghost in our
house.
they left him alone, even as the rest of us huddled and
jumped at the shadows. danny sang over them.
he held our hands when we were afraid. he loved touching.
he snuggled next to any warm skin.
he loved bodies. when we went to
the pool in summer, he would go up to strangers
and pinch the flab of their stomachs, just
to fill the space between his fingers with
the reality of another person’s flesh.

2.
danny is thirteen. at any moment, he might sprout
like a geyser into the world, a tall man with a creaky voice
and
stubble on his round cheeks. the doctor predicts he'll be
over six feet. danny will start kissing people and
having secrets. he will start holding back his bellow and
squeal; his
echo; his glitter. i want to keep in a jar all the danny i know,
the sweet
squishy kid who pins down the dinner table with his voice –
i want danny to always stay danny, whose soul clicks and
snaps like
a typewriter on a glass kitchen table –
i want to preserve the night we played monopoly and danny
hollered
and farted and roared; when danny thought my
jokes were funny and touched my knee; when
danny, losing, still tried to make me a deal.
This is how I want to remember my Danny, before he de-
cides
to lose weight, to turn in, to tame down. I want to remember
this cinnamon-freckled boy; this everything-bagel kid. Too
late,
I realize that I'd tear the world to shreds to keep
Danny exactly like this, a glowing little sun. Too late, I real-
ize
that everything about Danny has been a gallop and a feast,
and that I am lucky to been running along.

BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC

JEAN-PIERRE SEGUIN

When I looked at the front page of the NYT
this morning
I saw red.
That goddamn train station and
two other
prize shots of
ruin porn
Take center stage.
On the left is a balanced-
sounding article
That justifies taking the
pensions of
Workers because the city
Supposedly doesn't have the money to
pay them.
18 million in debt, my ass.
They barely fact checked;
Bought the official narrative;
Didn't quote nary a union official on the
first page.
Fuck you, cosmopolitan-ass
New York Times
If you gonna kiss the asses
of the bankers
Just come out and say it.

I cry for my city.
No tears just rage.
I howl for my hometown
where so many
Howl in vain.
Mine eyes have seen the
glory of the coming
of the Lord,
And Her next stop is Detroit.

Someday soon you'll see a manger
Set up in a burned out house,
Because in this bankruptcy
 there ain't no room
 for humanity.

A voice is calling in the wilderness of
 Detroit:
Repent of capitalist-financialist-nightmare
 death-visions;
Return to the love of the Lord.
The lion shall lie down with the lamb,
The Wall Street banker shall eat with the homeless
 man on
 Woodward,
She will put down the mighty from their
 dictatorial seat
And the lowly will be lifted high.

The rich done gone left;
Detroit lives on,
Always reinventing itself,
And now that it's coming back
The rich want to take the spoils.

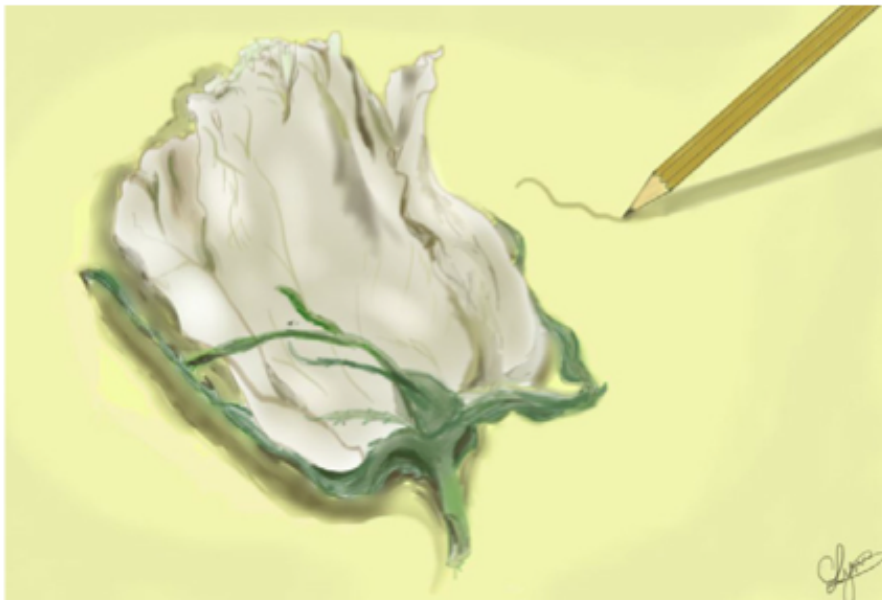
I howl for my city;
I howl for humanity.
Fuck the bankers,
Feed the hungry.
If I can't stop
This financialist
Fascist
Bullshit
I will die
 trying.
Praise be to God.

We rise from the ashes;
Live for better things

Amen



KATJA MOLINARO



LYNA AZZOUZ

LOST AND FOUND

ALLISON EPSTEIN

When objects no longer had a home, when they found themselves tossed out into the cold by owners who no longer needed them, they found a new resting place with Peter Martin. He was the collector of teddy bears with dust in their bead-black eyes; golden rings without sparkle or fingers. He picked them up out of gutters and off moth-eaten blankets at garage sales, and he stowed them in the brown leather briefcase he carried to and from work, always leaving out valuable tax documents and figures to make more space because, really, you never knew. He would take them home, these lost things thrown from a moving car, and he would dust them off and polish them until they shone. He kept them in the library; put them on shelves one right next to another, arranged so that they could make friends with their neighbors.

There were no books in the library. He had never been much of a reader. Life didn't end the way books did. It went out not with the soft rustling of pages, but with a flash and a bang and a cloud of smoke. He didn't like the way books lied to him. But the library was where he kept all his stories. Every evening, after the streetlights clicked on, he would sit in his favorite chair, in front of the kite with a bent tail and the inkless fountain pen and the picture-less frame, and they would talk together until the sun came up. They, at least, would listen without interrupting or taking notes.

When tiny motes of dust hung suspended in the beams of

sunlight, he would end his sentence, stand up, and walk to the hall closet to put on his jacket and pick up his briefcase. It didn't matter if he'd left off in the middle of a thought: they'd all be waiting for him there when he came back, probably a new brother or sister tucked into his pocket to add to their number. They had nothing if not loyalty and time.

This morning, the clouds that had hung with quiet, unspoken threats all night followed through on their promise, and big heavy drops the size of quarters splashed against the sidewalk as Peter hurried to the bus stop. Of course, he had forgotten his umbrella; there were eight items with varying degrees of usefulness in his jacket pockets, and none of them would be helpful in warding off the rain. Glancing around him in search of shelter, he spied a large, gnarled oak tree on the patch of grass between the sidewalk and the road and, panting with effort, he hurried over to it. It was plain that the tree had been there long before the sidewalk had, and it wasn't taking the intrusion without a fight. Its huge tangled roots reached this way and that, rippling the sidewalk, protruding up through the grass, nearly tripping him as he ducked underneath its moist green leaves and waited for the downpour to lessen.

It occurred to him briefly that he would be late, and Mr. Fassbender would puff angrily on his cigar and shout at him again, but the idea barely bothered him. The men at the office had learned never to expect too much from him, and "not too much" was something he excelled at delivering. He would stay an extra half-hour to finish the piles of forms on his desk, and then he would walk down Third Street and turn onto Hilltown Parkway and follow the neighborhood roads back, and when he finally made it home everything would be dark again. The rain pitter-pattered against the leaves like marbles on a snare drum, and a huge wet drop fell plop! on the tip of his nose. Crinkling his brow, he looked down and shook his head, and the raindrop continued down to land on the sodden grass.

And that was when it caught his eye, shining with tiny beaded droplets and nestled beside the tree's root. He felt that familiar rush of excitement as he stooped down to pick it up, that

tingling at the ends of his fingers. He was like a pirate discovering buried treasure; Romeo spotting Juliet from across a crowded ballroom. He turned it over and over in his palm, feeling its cold, smooth weight against his warm skin. The tin soldier did not respond to the sudden affection of his touch; if it had been drafted to see action during the Tet Offensive, it would have won a medal for steadfastness in the face of the unexpected. The soldier's uniform was smart and freshly painted, and his arms and legs bent on a tiny, invisible hinge, subject to movement at the impulse of its owner.

With a smile beginning to spread across his face, Peter manipulated the left arm into a sharp salute, and whispered so softly that the sound was almost drowned out by the tapping of the rain. "Reporting for duty, sir. Over and out."

The bus pulled up to the curb with a wheezing belch of exhaust, an elderly gentleman heaving himself forward with a prayer. Hastily, he tucked the tin soldier into his coat pocket and took up his abandoned briefcase with his left hand. His right never relinquished its hold on the tiny tin talisman hidden in his pocket.

The air was hot and heavy. He thought that if he closed his hand around a fistful of it, it would turn to water between his fingers, and drops of sweaty rain would run over the edges of his knuckles. He wished he didn't have to wear this heavy jacket and pants. He had mentioned it to Reggie the night before, as they lay next to one another in their tent, and Reggie had laughed so long that Peter was afraid he was going to piss himself.

"What, you wanna go out into the jungle wearin' your deck shorts and sandals? Jesus, you crack me up. Not a bad idea, when ya think about it. Them Commies would never think you were comin' in to get 'em if you dressed like you was going to a country club."

He didn't comment on this; the way Reggie threw around words like "Commie" and "comin' to get 'em" made him uncomfortable, but he never told him this. It was enough to have someone to share the tent with at night, to tell stories about home to and to sit up late and look at the stars with through the branches of the jungle. He wasn't about to ruin this by nitpicking.

But in any case, the jacket and the pants had stayed. The jungle was completely silent, except for the cries of birds Peter had never seen before and the steady crunching of twigs and leaves beneath their boots. He wished they could just stay still and listen to their surroundings for a few minutes. If he had been alone, he would have sat down; maybe even laid down in the underbrush, staring up at the patterns in the clouds and seeing if he could make animals out of them. He had always loved doing this, finding whales and bears where other men only saw blobs of condensation. There was always something beautiful to see, if you looked carefully enough.

Reggie stood at his side, both hands on his rifle, peering ahead into the darkness. He was a great sharpshooter, Reggie, having developed laser-accurate aim during his childhood trips to the woods hunting squirrels and turtledoves. Peter didn't particularly like the idea of doves falling out of the sky with bullet holes in their wings, but he couldn't deny that Reggie was a much better shot than he was, and spent much less time getting shouted at by the commanders for missing the target and hitting a nearby tree instead.

Making a motion with his head, Reggie indicated that Peter should follow him. He followed the unspoken advice, and the two of them delved deeper into the dense overgrowth. Their footsteps became louder and louder, for all that they tried to make no noise. To truly be unnoticeable, they would have had to be transplanted to a different war. The jungles of Vietnam masked them from sight, but as with any other kind of blindness it seemed to heighten the other senses in retaliation. Peter didn't know where they were going; in fact, he had already forgotten the mission that their lieutenant had explained to them that morning before packing up camp. It had something to do with tracking down Viet Cong; some village on the outskirts of the river; something to do with the words "search and destroy," but that didn't help. The lieutenant's orders had collapsed into buzzwords, meaningless jargon with more syllables than necessary. Besides, Peter had started to tune him out when he insisted on calling him "Martin," without

even asking whether it was his first name or his last.

His first name was Peter. His last name was Martin. Not that it really mattered.

Reggie continued on in front of him, a bobbing silhouette against the deep green of the jungle. Peter allowed his eyes to wander, glancing through the trees, continually moving in a straight line as his eyes bounced left and right in a dizzying zigzag. He thought he saw something to his left, something brighter and subtler than the khakis and greens of their platoon, and he glanced over his shoulder in search of it, keeping his left hand on the butt of his rifle as he had been taught to do...

The tiger moved so quietly that if Peter had not caught a flash of orange and black out of the corner of his eye, he would have missed it. Reggie saw nothing; he didn't even miss a beat in his stride. But Peter felt as though he had been nailed to the spot, pinned there by the bead-black eyes of the feline face that stared at him, framed by leaves and darkness. Somehow, he was not afraid that the tiger was going to pounce; there was no predatory hunger in its eyes. It had recently eaten, or in any case it was not interested in the kind of meal an armed US soldier would have provided under the best-case scenario. There was no fear in their shared gaze, nor was there any horror. Just a lingering sense of understanding.

"There's more to see here than they know. Maybe they'd notice me if they were looking."

It had always been one of Peter's quirks to fancy he could hear the voices of animals. Still, he thought Reggie could have heard the tiger speak too, if he'd stopped to see it.

"Reggie," he whispered, turning his head over his shoulder and trying to catch his attention without making enough noise to disturb the tiger. "Reggie, look at—"

BANG.

Peter flinched and dropped his rifle. He bent down hurriedly to retrieve it, and when his face was nearly at ground level, he saw Reggie, sprawled on the bed of leaves, a sticky scarlet stain spreading across the dark green. Reggie's rifle, never far from his hands, lying uselessly near a log several inches away. Three dark,

barefoot shadows with guns in their arms, turning on their heels and fleeing back into the jungle, not speaking a word, their feet making no noise.

Peter looked over his shoulder, but the tiger was gone, too. He was alone.

The sun was spreading through his library windows. Night was almost over, and soon it would be morning. Friday morning. The last day he would have to wait for the bus beneath the oak tree, the last day Mr. Fassbender would appear behind him and shout that he wasn't paying attention, again. He had finished his story almost at the same moment the sun came up. It was as if the moon had been listening and had prolonged her stay to hear the end.

Peter stood up from his favorite armchair. The air seemed too warm in the library; too humid. He made a mental note to check the air conditioner when he returned home that evening. As he turned away from the center of the room and walked toward the entrance hall, slipping his jacket on and picking up his briefcase, the objects in the library remained on their shelves, perfectly arranged, waiting for him to return and take up the story where he had left off.

The tin soldier, rescued from the rain and polished with a cloth and some dish soap until he shone as brightly as if he had been brand-new, sat in a place of honor on the second shelf from the top, next to a rock shaped like an arrowhead and a miniature plush lion from a fast-food kid's meal. Left arm raised in an eternal salute, he watched Peter walk out the door and close it behind him. He would be there still when he returned.

SISTER FROM ANOTHER PLANET

CLARE HIGGINS

Tangles of fire stream from her scalp
and take root within me.

She is the tree who has caught fire
and loves the way she is burning,
turning toward the horizon with branches
stretched wide.
She strikes the Sun God with her obscenities;
with her *You know who I am glance*.
She knows who she is.
She has always known.

Her roots twist and turn, tying my stomach in knots,
because she can feel that motion within her body, deeper than magma;
a trembling volcano next to my cool ash, my kingdom of ice.

She is the hippie goddess who spews fire and sizzles;
who giggles doves; and crows syllables that make the planet stop
and stare, the kind that melt from her blue lips,
from her disco veins.
We both have blood pumping through our bodies;
we should be so much together; so much the same,
like sisters who embrace on cue.
She is the twisting, gyrating love train,
and I stand waiting for her under lemon light
at the train station
some December evening –
waiting, moved by the raucous tremors
of that distant locomotive.



RACHEL PERNICK

THE MIRRORS PLAY TRICKS

SOPHIA WARREN

Two suitcases. Foyer. One blue and sparkly, probably for a child. The other orange, matte finish, rough to the touch, a small piece of crimson fabric sneaking out.

The light peered through the amber curtains that morning, basking everything a yellow glow and the tree outside, in the breeze, shook the light and made my mirror reflect dancing prisms.

I saw it all through closed eyes, lying nude under a golden sheet, never looking. There was blood on my inner thighs, dried in some spots so that my skin was tight. I could feel it and my swollen wrists all bruised and my face all crusted with salt and my eyes stuck together with melted makeup.

I'm not sure what time it was. I think he'd left around nine after he'd made me watch his video on the internet and showed me photos of his most recent sculpture and held me against his chest while I cried.

"Don't cry, baby doll," he'd said.

I'd sobbed and prayed he'd leave and when he finally did, I'd thought the tense air might go with him but his evil lingered; never left.

When I finally lifted my weary body from my bed and threw on an airy dress that nearly covered my blood-spattered legs, I made my way down the darkened stairway of my family's home, holding on to the ornate banister for balance as my head spun and my eyes flickered. There's a room with a bathtub in the middle; the walls adorned in silk wallpaper; large images of birds and trees and flowers. I climbed into the tub, not removing the dress, and turned on the water, watching the fabric and water rise as one, wishing

my body would lift up into the air and float off into oblivion. I laid back, feeling the cold against my spine and closing my eyes; was met with the horrendous image of his crooked teeth and his hands over my mouth and his knees holding my knees down and I could hear him breathing and panting and feel the searing hot of him inside me. And his breath so full of tobacco; his kiss thick with it.

The house was empty as I wandered through, wrapped in a sheet, and when I caught my reflection out of the corner of my eye, I could only see the back of my head. The ceilings seemed so high that morning and the air felt so stale against my broken body and the sunlight looked almost filtered, muted as though passing through a million layers of dust and debris.

The mirrors started playing tricks on me. I'd wash my face in the cracked basin of my sink and when I'd lean down to cup water in my hands, I'd have the peculiar feeling that my reflection was watching me, as though it no longer belonged to me, like I had become this strange split being.

I packed my things on the second day and put the suitcases in the foyer and I'd try to leave, but the door always stopped me and I'd find myself standing, hand on the doorknob, heaving and sobbing with air whooshing in and out of my pathetic lungs in great wheezing coughs and I'd turn back into the house, place the suitcases back in the foyer and make my way to the guest bedroom. My room had become uninhabitable even after I'd burned the sheets and watched them engulfed in great flames in the backyard, leaving behind a pile of ash that almost possessed the golden glow the sheets had once had. I laughed as the fabric twisted and turned in the heat, but afterwards, I felt no better.

I wanted to kill. I wanted to take his eyes out with a fork, hold them over a lit candle, and make them watch themselves melt and rip his heart into shreds and dump them in the Gowanus Canal with all the other filth and decaying bodies. Pull each tooth out and smash them with hammers.

My existence became hollow: orange peels littering the floor and bed around me, plates smashed apart, and empty bottles crowning the headboard. The phone rang incessantly, but when I'd reach for it, it'd fall from my hand, so heavy, like my head, which my neck could no longer lift. I stopped trying to escape through the door. There was nowhere to run but deep within my mind and occasionally, if I felt strong enough, to the basement where I'd lay across cold, smooth wood and chain-smoke cigarettes until I couldn't breathe and my lips started to turn blue.

The mirrors weren't helping, showing me demon eyes and a face that wasn't my own, so worn and pock-marked and frightened with giant pupils and wrinkles radiating from my mouth, making me look so old and withered and wilted. Everyone was lying. Everything was lying and the truth seemed wrapped in layers of gauze and hidden somewhere in this house, which had once been my home but now felt hollow, decrepit, and all the footsteps on the stairs echoed and all my family became ghosts.

My mind was fragmented on the fifth night. Everything looked like it was a reflection in a smashed mirror and my clothes were too tight. I pulled them off, sweating in the moonlight, making my pale body shimmer. I needed to move. I could feel that in every muscle in my body; they ached and stretched and writhed so that I could see ripples in my flesh. Move, I told myself. Just move.

And so I stood, reeling in the darkness and made my way, oh so silently, down the sixty-two stairs, feet sinking into deep carpeting and then meeting hardwood and then, outside the house, hard concrete. Four blocks to the park. No one stopped the frightened naked girl wandering down DeKalb at three in the morning; if they had, I would've scratched their faces and hissed because on this night, I was not quite human.

The grass felt good, full of cool dew. I rolled down hill after hill until the sun began to rise and I felt naked and bare and so I found a tree with so many branches and so many leaves that no one would ever find me. I climbed, my feet ripping open so that they left bloodstains across the ancient bark and a neat splattering of red dots in the grass below. I slept wrapped in leaves.

By two in the afternoon, my stomach growled and I had to emerge into the sunlight, shimmying down the tree. One block and I was stopped in front of the deli where I'd tried to buy a sandwich, but been refused because of my lack of attire. I kept telling them, But I'm hungry. Please. But I'm hungry.

They fed me sandwiches at the police station, but they weren't the kind I wanted and when I begged for oranges, they told me to shut up and wait for my parents. They asked me if I'd been attacked, but all I could say was, The mirrors are lying to me. The mirrors are playing tricks. Please make them stop. I am not who they say I am.

It's been a year, but a cool floor against my naked body still feels so nice and bathing in my clothes feels reassuring like I'm being weighted down by wet fabric so I won't float off into space.

And my mind still exists in fragments like no emotions overlap anymore and I can change from one to the next in the blink of an eye.

Who are you? you ask.

Who am I? I respond.

Because here in this house, which is not a home, I see illusions and feel phantom touches and hot breath on my neck when no one's here and I can see his crooked teeth each time I close my eyes.

It's all okay though because he hears me whimper in the night and when he looks at his fingertips, they're stained with blood and he feels my breath against his palms and my lips, begging and pushing. When he looks in the mirror, he sees exactly what he is, face coated with thin scars left behind by my sharpened nails and his eyes, so cold and empty.

LETTERS TO VARIOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS, INVOLVED AND NOT INVOLVED IN MY LIFE

RICH PHILLIPSON

Dear girl that I barked at out of a car when I was 14,
I hope that you did not misconstrue my intentions
I was not cat calling or wolf whistling
My friends and I were 14
And thought it would be funny
To bark at random people.

Dear girl that I (probably) (likely) (most definitely) frightened
when I was drunk,
I am sorry
I did not mean to clasp your shoulder
I was drunk
And I liked your hair.

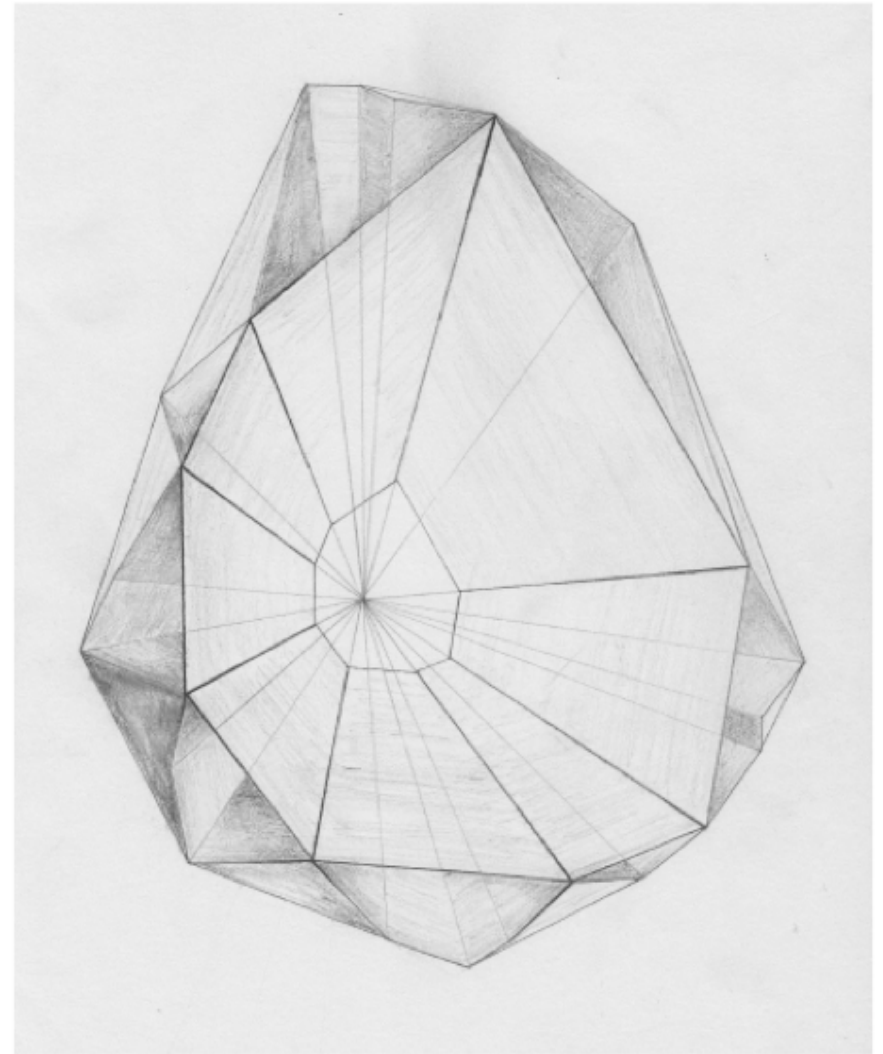
Dear other girl that I frightened when I was drunk,
I did not mean to frighten you
That guy was acting rude
I probably shouldn't have apologized for my gender
I'm sorry for saying I'm sorry.

Dear mother,
I am sorry for a multitude things
That I cannot
Fit on paper.

LIONHEARTED TOMES

CAMMIE FINCH

the stony lions guard the tomes of our lives
they lay crushed and broken at the mouth of our temple
the grip of their mighty claws has loosened
tattered scrolls tickle paws like dried prairie grass
a stray whisker is trampled by a speeding taxi
but broken lions are still wild
only worn and wounded by time and evolution
their passion are an immovable pride
their communal spirit remains even if tails and hearts
and memories of tales are lost
stone does not petrify the soul
stand back! these lions remain untamed
the stone simply makes them stronger
changing form does not change the nature of their stories
for cracked spines in this jungle
run on through the night and recover at dawn
so that the pain disappears by noon



KONHEE CHANG

BANAL

FRIEDA BLOSTEIN

I am so happy with the boring things and it seems

So wrong.

Shouldn't I yearn to travel, stretch from my center for some big blue
wonderland?

A sky I haven't seen?

A spice I haven't tasted?

And yet the good sex and warm soup slip into the center of my soul and
roost

In the same spot as the feeling I get when I drive down Main Street

And know exactly where I am in seven different kinds of maps and a
couple hundred

Dimensions.

Shouldn't the young people of this world, and I am nothing if I am not
young, shouldn't the young people of this world be in a constant state of
heat?

Lust for newness for adventure for throwing the old away and having
only modern furniture and friends who ride up your ass like tasteless yet
fashionable underwear?

Shouldn't I lust for the strange and incandescent the taboo the just this
side of not ok for a world beyond the simple sky in autumn?

And yet here I am so happy in the banal.

Shivering in delight with little deaths and homemade stew

And the boring crisp monotony of seasons.

GIANT SQUID AND WHAT SHE LEFT

SOPHIE RUF

Father named his new wife Daisy;
cradled her in his crib-hands through the
front-door;
rocked her down the stairs and
stowed her in the basement:
gulped in a mouth plagued by mold,
so her howls braided
with the whirring moan of washing
machine.

She came in a clear plastic sleeve
and stamped in slaps of dark Sharpie:
"Giant Squid."

She was trying to run,
tossing her flaccid limbs
under and out of air.

No one talked about her.

Under the gawking glare of moon
Mother tripped over her own ankles,
sloppy,
and spat white wine at
Daisy's reddening target-eyes.

I changed her water;
scrubbed the glass-skin of her tank
while Father sang her blues;
told her it's the only music
the ocean has a tongue for.

Father rinsed her eyes with rubbing
alcohol
until the red stung good,
and touched her body until
he forgot the smell of his own hands.

Touched himself
until his hands forgot who
they belonged to.

Daisy writhed under and out
like the lost legs of a monster,

beast of palm-harness.

Mother spat white
Father sang blue
Daisy saw red

and red
and red
and then black.

I empty the tank;
Mother is
too fast to swallow her in plastic again.

“Giant Squid”

No one talks as the sack
tumbles to the icy teeth of water.

Father doesn't look
as the squid weaves through
the greedy arms of the Huron River
and is sunk,
captive.

All that is left
is his hands.

CUT YOUR HAIR

EMMA SARAFF

I examine my body in mirrors.

In a year's time, my hair has grown longer than it's ever been; near the ends it feels like old hay, thick and unhealthy. I run my hands through it and think: this is Medusa's hair, when she is cleaning herself in seawater at night, running across the white sand; her snakes with their eyes half-closed, dormant, shedding scales dried out by salt.

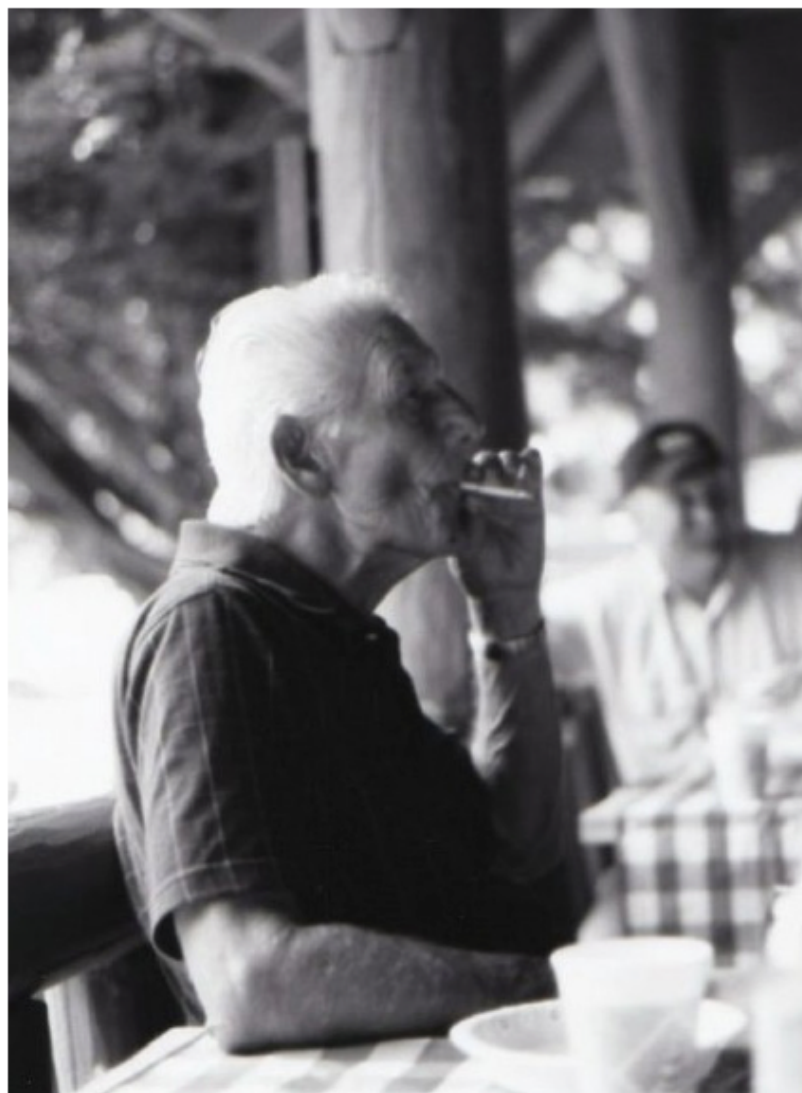
Under the fluorescent light of a hotel bathroom, my hair resembles a horse's mane, caught and collected against my neck: tangled, dirty; but during the evening, when I spot my silhouette on the wall, I see no hair, only fur down a wolf's back.

Prey or predator, girl or Gorgon; I still haven't decided which I am. I am pulling at Penelope, undoing her work, ripping my hair from where it's been threaded with silk and perfume, into her tapestry. I am running away, on the shore, hovering between water and land, my body flipping, switching: sweet, gristly, tender, crippling.

My mother is consoling me; she holds me; she lets me rest on my head on the hollows of her collarbones, my hair falling over her arms. "My God," she says, "so much hair. It seems like a curtain, more than hair." I think of actors in porcelain masks on a stage, appearing and disappearing as a velvet curtain rises and falls. For some characters, I bare my canines and carnivore's nails; electric and vicious, leaping up to kick flat in the chest, splitting the braid of blood that knots hearts. For others, I slip into yellow moon eyes and milky mouth, demure and gentle, so loving it's as painful as any wound.

Kindness like my monster Medusa bathing in the dark, to save the fishermen; cruelty like a hero, under the sun, with a shield of mirrors, putting a sword to her neck and swinging. They both have their own evils.

I've learned that a necessary consequence of living is the disloyalty of the heart, but my spine will always be mine. My feet and teeth, those too. And my hair, of course: short, long, unwashed, clean; wrapped around my body; pulled across my face. It springs from me like Aphrodite from the sea. Whatever I am, carnivore or carnation, moon or monster: I cut my own hair.



INDIA PETERSON

IN(FIN)ITE INFANT

KATJA MOLINARO

From Darkness, to Light:

The story of us goes something like this:

We made a rather grotesque agreement to brave the wicked woods without leaving a trail. And I think the story of us (as they will tell it) ends there. Ours is no fairy tale.

What I'm saying isn't Grimm enough, I know, to capture the severity of the situation – which is that you were an in(fin)ite infant, perpetually falling, sans cradle. And I may have been the gale that sent you down.

At first,

I unwound you slowly, like a childhood toy: a jack-in-the-box. Because you were, perhaps, a macabre plaything – button eyes, wicked grin – concealed by a whimsical tune and fresh-faced façade.

It wasn't your elegance that drew me in – though you were quite a beauty – it was seeing my own beastly reflection in those button eyes.

And when along came a spider (that's me), you? You weren't easily frightened. Even though I crawled inside you to spin a web between your heartstrings and your fingertips – your electric fingertips, which sent a current spiraling down my spine to my toes and into the ground beneath us – connecting me more than ever before to this earth – this base desire, this animalistic ritual.

You waited for the woods to awaken, for the rabbits and chickadees to serenade us, didn't you? A pathetic excuse for

fallacy. Your naïve nature lends itself to such things.

Because, my dear, the only animals were the cats with cyanide eyes and whiskers dripping with ab(sin)the. The only song was the duet of us, and the melody was increasingly melancholy.

At first,

You were (un[wound]ed).

Then – I offered you a poison apple.

“One bite and all your dreams will come true.” [If you have a death wish, that is. Which you may have.]

You readily accepted. What I didn't realize, however, was that this was unnecessary. You had already pricked your finger, and so had I.

The story of us ended something like this:

From this sleep, we never emerged.

SUN, WHISPER; CALLING OUR- SELVES TO THE BEAT

DANIELLE ZIAJA

the streets beg our forgiveness after we're through
barraging, borrowing, and drinking our souls to slate.
we'll live, i daresay!
we'll live in this heart-shredding moment of eagerness:
eager to feel; eager to breathe; eager to sing out our stories
to the untuned wind.

it's only a matter of time till the sun gives way to stars;
to the cream of the womb dragging us back
kicking and screaming to mortality –
this bulldozer we created for our own sanctity.
and, by god, we'll cry.
we'll cry to the moon our dismembered souls
that reek of tainted dreams and stolid actions.
all we can do is reach:
reach and reciprocate the desire to our offspring
who deny our lowly experience.

but, ah, what is life?
the untuned wind will always beckon,
leaving you smelling the remnants of summer sunsets
and colliding sounds of the song that ever live
in those unforgiving streets, forlorn.
in sickness and in death do we part
from this world of memories and lightning,
and only in old age do we agree:
we'll live, i daresay!
we'll live, for that is what we do best in the time that is given.

BIG MERMAID

EMMA SARAFF

It's easy to get lost in these worlds, where the waters begin and end
and the shore is a thin layer of gold, sinking where my feet are, like
the mattress dipping under your weight.
If they made boats as solid as your hands; if they made oars as
gentle as your hands; if they made sails as tender as your hands, I'd
never leave the salt sea.
Pull apart the clouds forming above the dinner table with your
fingers. These days are spread like lace: intricate, delicate; these days
are made of telephone wires, with your voice at all ends.
A body, a sound, a breath, a belief. Wipe off the yellow desert
spread like butter over your walls. Remember me, when you are in
pain. Remember me, when you are in pain.
Not everything is made of circles; not everything has a center; not
everything is provable, reducible, soluble. But your magic has made
me believe I could pour the oceans into a sauce pan and boil them
down into a blend of syrup, fossil, and glass.
If they had made my heart as solid as your hands; if they had made
my heart as gentle as your hands; if they had made my heart as
tender as your hands, you'd be drowned, and I'd.
The curtains are down, and all compasses are pointing here, to your
bedroom at the top of the stairs. Your room, with its clouds and
deserts; and you in the center, in a velvet-lined chair, knees pulled
to your chest.
Not everything is full; not everything is whole; not everything is
soluble. But my youth is still yours to use. The moons in my mouth;
the seas in my sauce pans: I sold them for bus fare here, from water
to land; from room to room.
Remember me, because I am in pain. You are asleep in your chair;
wake, find me here. Look at how badly I have broken myself, only
to see you again.



KONHEE CHANG

CELESTIAL

KATHERINE PLUMHOFF

Zadie leaned across my lap to stick her head out of the car window, yipping as the wind ruined her hair and ruffled her clothes. Laughing, she climbed back in, and her oversized scarf got caught in the Velcro of my jacket. Tufts of yellow yarn stayed behind in the tiny hooks, but I could barely see it. Occasional street lamps illuminated the road for a few yards before abruptly leaving us in darkness again.

Our decision to drive out of town at two a.m. during finals week to watch a meteor shower wasn't planned. Zadie, Michelle, Carolina, and I had been talking about the cosmic event over biochem flashcards, and Zach and Evan had overheard us and begged to join. Michelle, whose parents – richer and stupider than mine – had given her an Audi, offered to drive. We couldn't all fit, so Zach offered to follow us in his beat-up Honda.

Every girl in our friend circle had a little crush on one or the other, if not both, but we shared an unspoken agreement that all us girls would ride together, going back to the gender divisions of kindergarten bathroom break lines.

It was for the best: Zach was a horrible driver, but not in the reckless way that would seem appropriate given his omnipresent five o'clock shadow. He drove like my nana, slowly and erratically, and it's a wonder he made it anywhere alive. Michelle drove slowly so we didn't lose them in the darkness, and it took us twice as long to get there as it should've.

We finally parked on the side of the road. Michelle, who was on the university's equestrian team, seemed confident we were in the right place, a farm whose owners probably wouldn't care if we traipsed around their fields and were too old to chase us if they did.

“Look! It’s started; we’re missing it already,” exclaimed Carolina in her pessimistic drawl. We’re not sure why she came in the first place – no one really liked her, largely due to the fact that it took her seven years to say three sentences. I’ve never met someone who speaks more slowly. Maybe I could’ve forgiven her glacial pace if she ever said anything interesting or worthwhile, but all she did was complain. Her favorite topics to bemoan were her boyfriend, her classes, and her breasts, which are disproportionately large (we often wondered how she managed to remain upright with all that weight on her chest) and apparently brought her pain.

“Don’t worry, there’s still plenty left to see,” said Zadie. Her white smile stood out against the brown of her skin and glowed in the darkness, giving her an ethereal quality that made me like her even more than I already did.

We had been friends before going this trip, but we became extremely close afterwards. It was on her 21st birthday that I used my fake ID for the first time, and it was her steady hand that designed my tattoo. I crashed in her room when my roommate was busy trying to turn her obviously gay boyfriend into the perfect heterosexual that she and he both desperately wished he were. I flew to Ecuador for her wedding, and it is her name that is my daughter’s.

Zadie’s enthusiasm spread to all of us. Zach and Evan took off sprinting towards the middle of the field. e followed, careful not to trip over the frozen piles of manure.

“Look what I have,” sang Michelle.

“Booze?” asked Evan.

Michelle hit him, which was probably more an excuse to touch him than it was a chastisement. “No, dipshit. A blanket. You’re all welcome.” She laid out the horsehair-covered plaid on the ground, and we all squeezed onto it. The thin wool did little to keep us warm, but it kept our coats excrement-free and gave us an excuse to cuddle.

“Ah! There!” I shouted. “I just saw one!”

Zach leaned over and cuffed my nose. “Beginner’s luck, Jojo.”

“Because it’s my first meteor shower? I’m just better at most things than you,” I teased.

Several minutes passed. Every time we saw a white light streak across the sky, we’d whip our hands up to point at the already-disappearing spot. We were always too slow.

“Do you guys want to play a game?” asked Zadie.

“What game?” asked Carolina warily.

“I’m in,” I said.

“If Jolie’s down, I’m down,” said Zach. He may have winked, but it was dark and I wasn’t sure.

“Let’s do it!” said Michelle, after which Carolina was forced to either play or look like a fun-hating bitch.

Zadie arranged us all in a circle and stepped inside of it. “So you pick a spot in the sky, a star or something, and stay focused on it. And then you spin around and around in a circle, keeping your arms out, and then someone shines a light in your eye and you lose control of your body. You just fall to the ground and it’s like someone else is experiencing it. It’s hypnotic and crazy and awesome.”

Everyone looked wary, but she volunteered herself and no one stopped her. Zach launched the flashlight app on his phone and hid it under his hand, which glowed red and orange like a Chinese paper lantern. Zadie began to spin, her scarf flying around her and her huge parka blossoming in the wind she was creating.

I glanced at Zadie in the middle, but only for a second – I couldn’t stop looking at Zach, who was devilish in the darkness, a soft red glow at his side. He would decide when to blind Zadie and send her crashing to the ground. As his arm began to rise, I clutched onto Carolina.

After Zadie had spun around four or five times, Zach raised his arm and spread his fingers, letting the beam of his iPhone’s flashlight fall onto Zadie’s face. Her mouth opened up to this impeccable O, her pupils contracted rapidly, and her arms and legs flailed in one perfect collapse. She was like a puppet whose strings were cut, and her limbs seemed to move of their own accord, crumpling to the ground. She laid there, her long, black hair spread out over the manure, looking dead.

After a few seconds, she began to laugh, and her voice rang out through the cold December air. I imagined it wrapping around the globe, the sound waves racing to reach Canada, then through the Arctic Ocean, past Greenland to the North Pole. Her laugh kept going, and Carolina, Michelle, Evan, and I glanced at each other, concerned and confused.

That's when I looked at Zach again. He didn't look worried or uncomfortable, he looked thrilled. Zadie lurched to her feet and pushed me into the circle, insisting that I take a turn. I didn't want to and begged for Evan to go first.

He turned rapidly, nearly losing his balance when his Puma caught on a rock, but kept going, picking up speed. His neck, exposed by his tilted head, was young and perfect, unmarred by acne or hickies, wrinkles or age spots. His dark skin glowed like velvet. When Zach shone the light, Evan fell epically, his collapse so complete it looked contrived. After struggling to his feet, he told me it was final: I was up.

Zach kept the flashlight. I stuck my hands in my coat pockets and began to spin, slowly and awkwardly at first and then faster and faster. The trees in the distance blended into the road and I felt like I was in control of time, speeding it up to my liking until everything looked like a blurred watercolor painting, beautiful in its inaccuracy.

I was nervous for the flash that I knew would make me fall. I dreaded spasming the way Zadie did. I knew the frozen ground would hurt and that I would make a fool of myself. As I was thinking all these things, my world flipped.

I had fallen. No light, no flash. Suddenly I was on the ground, looking up at the canopy of stars. My back and shoulders were ringing with the pain of impact but I hurried to my feet, worried that my hair was touching something disgusting.

"Are you being serious?" asked Zach. "I didn't even shine the light! You just fell!" He started his belly laugh, the one that always spread. Everyone but Zadie laughed with him.

She grabbed me by the shoulder and said, "Look at you, Jolie. You're too good at this game, you had to go and skip a step."

I'm still grateful for her for that – it's just one example of her kindness. She's the kind of woman who only gets her pets from shelters and volunteers in Detroit on her days off. She makes the world a better place by being in it.

After my failure, Michelle and Carolina were wary, but each had their turn. Both girls dove to the ground upon the flash of light, and Carolina fell so hard she skinned an elbow. If only she had landed chest-first, her God-given insulation would've protected her.

Last was Zach. He shed his leather jacket, not wanting to scuff it, and gave his phone to Zadie. He took a deep breath and began to spin, more gracefully than any of us. If someone were to make an instructional video for this game, they would surely ask Zach to demonstrate.

Zadie let him spin and spin and spin until it looked as if he was going to follow my example and fall of his own accord, then she shone the light in his eyes and shouted.

Yelping, Zach fell onto the ground. He landed on Zadie's feet and she tripped, falling forward onto him. They were a tangle of limbs and scarf and hair and something in me made me pick up his jacket and throw it over the two of them. I either wanted to give them some privacy or interrupt their moment; I'm still not sure.

Zach staggered to his feet, gripping his jacket in his left hand and Zadie's hand in his right. She smiled at him, all teeth, not attractive, except that it was, in her enthusiasm.

I don't know what makes a good marriage. Zadie and Zach crashed together and then got up, and that's been their template for the last nine years: fall and recover. It's gotten them through two miscarriages, one cheating scandal, several periods of unemployment, and the death of their dog. They'll be spinning and falling until infinity, like the meteors that blessed their union.

After that night in the clearing, I had my fair share of falls. I should've put them together; strung the signs in a row like Christmas lights until they illuminated what I should've already

known: Andrew was no good for me.

I wonder why I fell for him in the first place. Zadie warned me that I wouldn't be happy with him, that he was too boring, that he didn't make me smile, that his belief in the death penalty was reason enough for me to pass. I think I wanted to prove her wrong.

Andrew and I had a boring wedding in the boring United States and climbed out of love as quickly as we had fallen in. I watched Zadie and Zach adopt and smother with love two beautiful babies while Andrew and I used our beautiful daughter as a buffer, like one of those bumpers on the side of sailboats that keep the boats from crashing into the dock when the waves swell. I hope my Zadie turns out more like her namesake than like me. I wonder if I'll fall again. I'm allowed to – the divorce is finalized. But in order to fall, I first have to spin, and I don't want to spin, to blur the lines, to move beyond time. Not anymore.

BUDDY

MARY GALLAGHER

When I was 16 and in the shower my dog died
I ran down in my bathrobe in time to feel
The warmth slip from his black velvet ears
It was twenty minutes to the opening number of Oklahoma!
(That year I worked sets) but
We couldn't leave him cold by the fireplace
Even after all the weight he'd lost
It still took us three to carry him out to
The trash bin
He didn't quite fit
So we left
His hind leg and tail sticking out the top



KATJA MOLINARO

SECOND PERSON

KATE TOPHAM

You are standing fifth in quite a long line in front of a hotel desk, behind a man a few heads taller than you, so you can't actually see the desk, but you know it must be there; after all, you have been waiting to reach it an awfully long time. You close your eyes and try to think of something else. You are halfway through your memory scrapbook of your last summer holiday when you are suddenly interrupted by the word "NEXT!" seemingly shouted in your ear. You open your eyes to see that the tall man's blue trench coat is gone, and in fact everyone else who was in line has disappeared.

You walk up to the desk. It is a blinding shade of red-orange, and has nothing on it but an untied green- and lilac-striped necktie and a glass jar of unusual lollipops colored gray, black, brown, gray with yellow spots, and other un-lollipop-like colors. The man sitting behind the desk appears to be twiddling his thumbs, which have long, sharp talons in place of nails, and his eyes are closed as if he has had a long but uneventful day. His dark hair is dotted with white feathers, and his long, hooked, yellowish nose lies close above his lips. You clear your throat loudly, and he jumps violently, his pince-nez glasses falling lopsided on his face. Scrambling, he snatches up the necktie and ties it in an elaborate flower-shaped knot around his neck.

"Greetings, friend." His voice is a little high-pitched and almost chirps. "Maxibillion at your service. Do you require assistance? We have many rooms available, some with two kitchens, and some of our sea glass suites are open if you like; just tell me where you'd like to stay; the toe, the sole, and most of the laces are full, but the rooms in the heel are quite nice. Do you need a room for your aura?" He looks at you expectantly.

"Well, actually, I'm looking for someone," you say without thinking.

"Unfortunately, MAX Hotels cannot provide this service for you, but there are many search kiosks in the pancake cafés around here, if you like. Good day!" He turns his eyes back on his lap and begins untying the complicated rosette at his neck.

"Wait!" you say. "I don't know why I said that. I would like a room, if you have one."

"Well in that case," he says, readjusting his necktie-rosette, "Maxibillion at your service!"

"Maxibillion?"

"Yes?"

"Oh, sorry. It's just a bit of an odd name."

"Well, it is true that no one has had it before, but all my relatives have similar names. There's my father, Maximillion," he says, pulling out a photo of what appears to be an eagle with small wings and an extra pair of back legs wearing an orange and teal pinstripe suit, "and his father, Maxithousand" – a picture of a large bald eagle – "all tracing back to the founder of our family, Maxione, but of course he's just an egg now..."

He fumbles in his desk for a moment, perhaps for another photo, before you interrupt him. "Excuse me, but could I get a room?"

"Oh, right! Of course! I know just the place for you. Would you like a room for your aura as well?"

"Um, no, thanks, I think we can share," you say humorously. Maxibillion stares at you curiously.

"Well, if that's what you prefer. Please, take a lollipop and I will take you to your room."

"Oh, no, I'm all right, thanks," you say, eyeing the odd candies.

"I insist." He thrusts the jar beneath your nose. Hesitantly, you pluck out a tan one speckled with black.

"Sand!" He nods approvingly. "One of the more popular flavors, though I must say I'm partial to gravel and marble. Haven't tried lamppost yet though, have you?" While he rambles, you peel off the clear, stretchy plastic and pop the lolly in your mouth. It dries your tongue roughly and grinds against your teeth.

Maxibillion leads you through a hallway decorated with coat hangers and wagon wheels into a large, octagonal ballroom with a fountain at the far end. At the end of the fountain is a statue of a lofted bed, standing over one of a filing cabinet. Opaque, metallic-looking water falls heavily over the side of the bed and onto the filing cabinet, flowing seamlessly down the sides.

"You're lucky," Maxibillion remarks as you step into the fountain base. "Yesterday it was pea soup. Impossible to walk through." He slips a taloned hand into the sheet of water and draws it back like a curtain, waving you through to a vestibule with elevators that intersect diagonally with the floor. The one on your right opens, and clouds of bubbles float out. Maxibillion steps around them graciously, muttering apologies, and the two of you take their place. The elevator ceiling is slanted, and the higher side is occupied by other passengers, so you slouch and duck your head, hoping the ride won't last too long.

"You look rather tired," Maxibillion remarks when the lift finally reaches your floor.

"Oh, yes," you say, "I had a very long flight."

"Your wings must be tired," he remarks.

You laugh at his joke. "Just flew in from Seattle, and boy my arms are tired!"

"What is Seattle?" He gives you a quizzical look.

"I don't know," you respond, "I just made it up."

"Like a joke?"

"Yes. It's a very common joke, isn't it?"

"Perhaps where you are from, my friend, but not here," he says matter-of-factly as you round a corner decorated with a column shaped like a bottle of hairspray. "I don't understand your humor, I'm afraid. Why would your arms be tired? Surely one flies with one's wings?"

"Well, not me," you say apologetically. "I don't have wings."

"Oh, really? I am so sorry, flightlessness has become rampant in this region and I'm afraid it's rubbed off on me. Ah! Here we are." Max stops at a diamond shaped turquoise door with a small purple vase set into the wall next to the handle. He produces a

rather wilted daffodil from his pocket, places it into the vase, and the door swings open. "Welcome home!" he says cheerily, stepping into the room.

Four doors, clones of the door to the hallway, lead off from the main room, which is furnished only by a bed and an armoire. A haphazard pile of sweaters sits on the bed, flanked by two pillows stuffed in pillowcases made of dryer sheets. A faded Breakfast at Tiffany's poster hangs above the headboard. The armoire, covered in purple sequins, stands opposite the bed, some of its drawers put in upside-down and a few backward. A silver platter sits atop the armoire, holding a bottle of Pepto Bismol, a pearl necklace, and a hardboiled egg.

"All right, I will leave you to it. If you need anything, just call and ask for me," Maxibillion says, pointing to the egg. "One more thing: these lights change color with your mood, so if you want to turn the lights off, think dark thoughts."

"But what if I want to sleep?" you ask. "I don't like thinking dark thoughts right before I go to bed."

"Why would you do that? With hopeful thoughts you'll turn the light to the perfect shade of green for sleeping."

"I see," you say, looking up at the lights, which are glowing pale brown overhead. Maxibillion turns to go.

"Wait!" you shout. "Do all the rooms have this lighting?"

Maxibillion turns back to you, his head cocked to the side concernedly. He pushes his glasses up his yellowish nose. "Do you always dream in the second person?"

Jaime Bryant awoke with a start.

THE BOOK FOREST

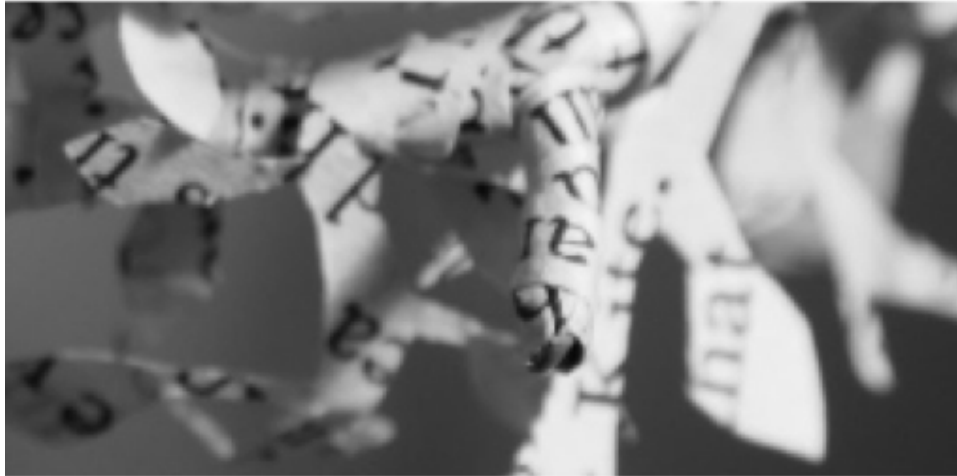
CAMMIE FINCH



The sun taps on your eyelids early one morning, the way it does when it wants to get your attention, and your attention only. "Wake up," it says. "I have something to show you." You throw on a sweater, pull on your boots (like Mama always said), and leave the door open a crack so you can easily get back in, just in case... you never know when it comes to the adventurous sun.

His rays curl like beckoning fingers and float through the air with the lightness of dewy buttery particles. He illuminates a winding path for you to follow. Your heavy boots crunch across the frozen twigs, snapping them; waking up the peaceful doves.

The trees look marvelous to you in their coniferous splendor. Their regal manes drip with frosty crystals. You notice the sun has centered on a birch to your right. A whiff of a wind burrows between your knits, and strips at your skin like bark gently peeling back the stories of a tree. Its dog-eared skin senses your arrival.



You inhale deeply so its piny song can mingle with your inner chemistry, bubbling into a wintrous chorus of syrupy waltzes and maple sonatas. Through your nose pours a symphony of your thoughts, your personality, the essence of you; all bottled up in that vial of natural nourishment of carbon dioxide.

A branch hangs down with a scroll of papyrus wrapped round its wrist. A nest full of memories, adventures, of fairy tales. You aren't quite sure what the nest may hold. You don't dare break the magical stillness with the crunch of a boot, but you stick your head out now. Slowly, black letters bleed from within, in perfect typography, dyeing its flaxen flesh with a poetic tattoo.

"Trees have a way of knowing more about your world than you do yourself," says the sun as his light fades away. He allows you a moment of shadowless solitude as you read the next sentence of your bedside book that lies sleepily at home, awaiting your return.

HOW TO BECOME A POET

ALLISON EPSTEIN

Stop sleeping indoors.

Stop shaving,
regardless of gender.

Drink more coffee.
Become an alcoholic, if convenient.

If not convenient, do it anyway.

Spend your paychecks on Sharpie markers and red wine.
Stop getting paychecks.

Develop insomnia,
so you have more time to consider
the eight million ways in which
a rose is not a rose.

Stop majoring in finance.
Forget what it feels like to shower.
Embrace dirt underneath your toenails.

Move somewhere that has ruined abbeys.
If you can only find regular abbeys,
invest in pitchforks and torches.

Change your religion
so you can teach the
evangelical Hindus on the street corner
words in Sanskrit other than
Hare Krishna,
because seriously.

Learn how to cry again.
Learn how to laugh again.
Learn how to walk again.
Learn how to learn again.

Understand that laws are really
suggestions,
and if you want to have a bear as a pet
it's only illegal if you get caught.

Learn to shun phrases like,
"It's only illegal if you get caught."

Take up irony as a second language.

Become best friends with
words that don't quite rhyme
but hi-five each other on
the way out the door,
barely making contact,
whispering,
hey bro,
that was close,
maybe next time.

Understand that there is always a next time.

Say things like, "Time is an illusion,"
and
"spiritual journey"
and
other things that you find in fortune cookies.

Learn to yawp.
Do it often.
Prioritize silent conversations
over the ones that
give you headaches,
and
mishear others on purpose
to revel in the secondhand Freudian slips
and upside-down interpretations.

Hide a tape recorder in your hair.

Stop taking advice from others.



KATJA MOLINARO

ELLIOT THRUSSELL

KARA MULLISON

"I mean, they say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time." (Banksy)

Elliot Thrusell did not enjoy being dead.

Dying, he thought, had really been no problem; no one was surprised when authors and artists found early graves. He had spent his whole life drinking like a sailor and smoking like a chimney, so there had been plenty of time to marinate in sickness before his body gave up the ghost. The dying itself turned out to be a pleasantly sudden thing in comparison. In retrospect, he thought, there were many things more final in his memory than his final breath; signing his name on his last manuscript a week before had been a hundred times harder. If it hadn't been for his wife's tears, dying wouldn't have been a rough affair at all –

He never anticipated any sort of after-life.

As it turned out, the after-life was not his cup of tea.

For one thing, there wasn't much to do. Elliot had already passed nearly two hundred years staring at the top of his coffin breathing in the smell of dirt, uncomfortably aware of the way his spirit fit less and less into the shape of his decaying bones. Once in a while he rose to the surface, leaned himself carefully against the headstone, and plucked a ghostly cigarette from his breast pocket. He used to joke to his wife about asking St Peter for a cigarette when he got to the heavenly gates; she had buried him, it seemed, with five tucked away so that he could save his breath for better questions. (Spectral cigarettes were much better than physical ones. They never went stale, and as soon as he had smoked one down to nothing, it appeared again whole and unburnt in his pocket. Still, he thought, the experience lacked something when you didn't have

lungs.)

He often thought he would trade all his cigarettes for an hour's nap. There had been no way to slip out of consciousness since right after his death, when the sound of his own name had woken him after what felt like no time at all. The tight airless space of his coffin had been alarming then; the smell of dirt and decay wholly unexpected. He had reached out on instinct, panic rising bitterly within him, and his frantic hands had not brushed across the panels on either side of him but rather they had gone through –

He had sat up, torso intersected absurdly by the lid of his own coffin, and found that he was looking up at a crowd of all his friends and family; it was around then that he remembered dying.

He hadn't been able to get a single word out of his mouth, not that he would have known what to say.

So he had floated out of his body, finding that he could walk on solid ground so long as he concentrated on it being solid, and calmly walked away from the graveyard as that first shovelful of dirt rained down on the coffin.

He had floated through the streets all that night, unnoticed by all, no real direction in mind. His own name had echoed through his nonexistent bones for hours – he realized after a while that all the voices were distinct, not his own internal monologue, and moreover they were familiar. As his friends in the alehouse spoke, he was aware in a brief flash exactly who they were, where they were, what they were doing; it felt innate and correct, as though it was knowledge he had held all his life. The knowledge melted away as soon as silence fell.

After a few days he felt a peculiar ache: homesickness deep in his core, which he attributed to the absence of his bones. A part of him had wanted to return then, but the idea was somehow repulsive and he was a stubborn old bastard, even in death. So he had gone instead to the house of his widowed wife and hovered in what had once been his study. An early accumulation of dust made it clear that she hadn't touched anything, and he had a feeling she didn't intend to.

His life's work was in a chest by the window, packed away

in a mess of crumpled pages. A stack of finished paperbacks sat atop it, most of them in perfect condition, because Lord knew he could never bring himself to reread them once they were published. He had grown rather used to calling them "real penny dreadfuls" – all overused monsters and tired plots and screaming maidens in white dresses – the kind of thing a serious writer turned to when starving became a distinct reality and dignity was less important than a full stomach.

Still, he was proud of them in a strange way, and they seemed to anchor his restless spirit better than anything short of his own remains. They were enough to keep him there within the drafty old house as his mind ran far and wide, dimly aware of every volume of his books on every shelf across the nation. The knowledge seemed innate again, etched into his skull, and when faraway people flipped through the pages it was like a tickle on a phantom limb.

His dear wife died a year later, and the house was emptied out; his books were packed in with his manuscripts, into that chest that reminded him too much of a coffin waiting to be buried. Something inexplicable had taken hold of him. He had closed his eyes, concentrating until spectral sweat rose up on his transparent skin, and only then had he been able to pick up the matchbook and do to the pages what he should have done years ago: he lit the matches with a careless swipe, unable to feel the heat of them on his fingers, and didn't so much let go of the match as let himself forget that it was solid. The chest of books was the birthplace of a raging fire that might have taken out half the town if it weren't for a fortuitous midnight rain.

He still wasn't sure why he had done it. He had been briefly afraid that it would hurt, but these fears dissolved as soon as the match found home; it was a bloodless surgery, a quick cauterization, one finger cut off the phantom limb. And he had flown back to his grave like a child rushing home after a failed runaway attempt.

There had still been other ghosts in the graveyard at that point; silent, restless figures that reminded him of commuters wait-

ing for a train. One by one they had allowed themselves to disappear into flashes of shimmering light, as sudden as blinking, and they never came back. It reminded him of a passage he had written about a character who got hit by a train: a sudden light, a quick glimpse of inescapable destiny, and then – pain or nothingness, he didn't know.

His corpse was fine powder now, and he was still waiting for his train.

He should have been swallowed up like the others long ago, blinked out in that damned white light, but instead he was stuck like an insomniac six feet below the ground. By now time was a meaningless mess of celestial movement, phases of light and dark and cold and warmth that could not permeate into his nerves, and he was still waiting.

He thought by now that he knew why.

The voices were still echoing out in his brain. Most everyone else's names had died on the tongues of the people they left behind, he supposed, or maybe a generation after that—but Elliot had been stupid enough to leave those books on shelves across the country. He had never made enough money on the things to buy a round of drinks for friends while he was alive, yet two centuries later they were enough to keep him perpetually awake. *Dear old Shakespeare must be crazy as a bat by now*, he often thought to himself with a mirthless chuckle. *No hope for him. He's either crazy as a bat or he's out with Virgil and Milton, some sort of silent foodless lunch date –*

He could have traveled the world, seen anything he wanted, heard a million stories from millions of strangers, yet he smoked the same cigarette and stared at the same crumbling pine boards. He was a stubborn old bastard, alright.

On that particular morning, a balmy Tuesday in May, he tasted mildew on his tongue as the second-to-last set of his books rotted away into nothing. The last word became illegible shortly after midnight, and the loss of them felt like a stone being lifted off his chest. A tumor being cleaved from the bone.

One more, he thought to himself, almost in wonder. One more and then fifty years on the outside and everyone who had known him even in passing would be bound in the silence of death.

The other set of books, the final one, was packed in a box in the basement of a suburban house just outside of Seattle. Perhaps the house would burn; perhaps the lower level would flood; perhaps they would get tossed out with the garbage, torn into confetti and scattered in the wind. He wondered if he would even have time to discern what had happened before the white light snapped him up. Assuming, of course, there was nobody left who still had his name stashed away on their tongue. The silence had been falling for years at a time now, but nothing was certain until it was all done.

He tapped the last bit of ash out of his cigarette and, feeling its weight return to his pocket, let himself sink through the ground with a sigh. It would be over soon, but the last bit of waiting might be the –

He opened his eyes with a snap as his name echoed through his mind.

And then there were hands on the books, running a finger along the spine, flipping through pages with careful fingers.

Elliot knew then that he had fallen victim to a fundamental misunderstanding; this was not the afterlife, and his train was never coming. This was punishment itself. The bedrock in the metaphysical sediment, and he would spend eternity waiting for it to melt away.

The man touching the books was named Nathan Findlay, he realized dispassionately. He realized at the same time that he had heard Nathan before, years ago when the man was still nearly a child. Elliot shook his head, bitterness and anger threatening to bubble over as he shoved another cigarette between his teeth and lit it, puffing in noxious smoke.

He sat there on the grass of his grave, chain-smoking the same five cigarettes for hours, and when the sun sank behind the horizon he made up his mind to kill Nathan in the morning.



KATJA MOLINARO

FOR OSCAR

SOPHIE RUF

After your first schizophrenic break
you woke up without a throat.
Your breath lost its hooves and most of
its mane
from sprinting through tornadoes of
scream,
wild and unchained.

My basin-hands cupped your lungs,
twitching jellyfish out of water.

We sewed them back into your chest
once we could trust them
not to run away again.

After your second schizophrenic break
your mother called me.
Her hands weren't big enough.

I brought tape and glue and thread
and stitched together the cracks
the voices leaked through
while your mother mopped up your spit
and yells.

We flushed them down the toilet
so you wouldn't know how dirty their
many tongues hiss,
how feral they curse.

After your third
time pumped through you
sleep cured you weak,
And when you woke

you said the syringe-echo of your own
cries
was stuck-ricocheting between your
cars.

We tried to cut it out,
dissect it absolute, clinical,
but just made a mess –
spilled your bellows on the floor;
made a puddle of letters and blood.

We wiped it up but the stain

slashed a scar to the wooden panels.

We bought a rug to cover it.
A bandage for your head where the
needle
punctured its canal.

You whispered, "At least the voices have
a way to leave now."

After your fourth
I found you,
head viscous pummel to ground.
I crept through your jungle hair
pulling each strand back like the trunk of
a tree
until I found the hole we left
deepening to the stomach of a well.

We bought a new rug,
wide enough to hide an ocean of noise
and pus;
thick enough to muzzle your clattering
secrets;
heavy enough so they couldn't run away.

ANGLES

JEAN-PIERRE SEGUIN

The streets of the old city
Change direction
 little by little,
Forming an irregular
 circle.

I have memorized their
 routes;
Am now accustomed
To walking medieval
 streets.
This sense of normalcy
 surprises me.

As I walk, I note
 how the
 streets
 change
With each turn,
Creating wonderfully
 disorganized
 spaces.
There is no grid,
But rather a knot
 of buildings
Huddling as close to the
 cathedral as they can,
Like shivering stone people around
 a golden fire.

In this ancient center,
I see that the idea of
compact cities
is not new.

I perceive how a street can pour
out into a plaza,
Continue on,
Butt into a building,
And lead on to another
way.

To know this labyrinth,
One must take time
to wander;
Get lost.
Its secrets are only
revealed
To those with
accustomed eyes.

PROFESSIONALS

ALLISON EPSTEIN

You can tell we're professionals because we never ask questions.

Punctuation other than the period is a sign of weakness.

We already know the answers to your questions,
so don't bother asking them.

We are the men in black suits and white shirts who hold
your words in briefcases.

We are the women whose password is not, nor has it ever
been, "password."

When you look into our eyes, you are asked to authenticate
your identity.

We require three pieces of state-issued ID.

You can tell we're professionals because our accents are de-
tached from any

reference point in geography.

We speak in quotations and use citations instead of commas.

Our accusations have footnotes.

We put our middle names in superscripted brackets.

Multiply by the exponent in the Garden of Eden
to ensure the availability of emerging markets.

We are the men who know how to drive a stick shift.

We are the women who can explain your APR to the fourth
decimal.

We are the men who are not women who are not men who
have

never felt ugly or unloved or cold or
the craving for red dye number seven.

RC REVIEW STAFF

You can tell we're professionals because when we got our first tattoo

it was the square for uranium from the periodic table of elements.

We clean our kitchen sink with firewall and speak in ones and zeroes,

creation and negation.

You would not recognize us if you saw us because our resolution is terrible.

We may be going through a tunnel.

You may experience some mild turbulence.

This program not available for streaming in your area.

We are the feeling in the pit of your stomach after eating a full cup of vegan granola

without knowing what in granola contains animal byproducts.

We are the cat dressed as a shark.

We are the sock that vanishes from your laundry, and we are the place it ends up.

We are the polar bear and the zebra mussel.

We are Mother Jones, Tom Jones, the DOW Jones.

You can tell we're professionals because we told you so.

And who do you trust if you can't trust the experts?



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