



# Great Lake Review

Fall 2020

# Great Lake Review

SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine

Fall 2020

The Great Lake Review is open for submissions throughout the year.  
We publish a new edition each Fall and Spring semester.

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Please submit your fiction, nonfiction,  
drama, poetry, and visual art pieces  
as an attachment to [glr@oswego.edu](mailto:glr@oswego.edu).

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THE GREAT LAKE REVIEW  
SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine  
Fall 2020

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# Waiting Patiently For the World to End

Joseph Lioto



Located at 19 W. Bridge Street in downtown Oswego, the River's End Bookstore is GLR's off-campus home. Every year the River's End holds the release events for our fall and spring issues.

All of us at GLR would like to extend a special thank you to everyone at our favorite independent bookstore, especially Bill and Mindy.

**THANK YOU RIVER'S END!**

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# Blueberries

Caitlin Marx



# Notes from a Philadelphia Prison

Miranda Phillips

I

“Listen to me, little brother, and you will become a man.  
Protect your family when you are laughing  
and when you are slamming doors.”

He walked past Older Sister’s locker that afternoon  
and yelled, “Get away from her!”  
to the circle of beefy boys tugging at her scarf.

II

“Women and children come first, little brother.”  
The line for dinner was long that night. His stomach moaned as they inched  
toward the door, but he stepped behind  
Mum and Little Sister.

III

“There’s always something you can do to help.”  
His first week’s pay from the car wash felt like velvet  
in his pocket. Across the street, the homeless man and his straggled dog sat  
behind a cardboard sign. His fingers smoothed the worn edges

of the bills as he glanced into the windows  
of a convenient store. Ten minutes later, he crossed the street  
carrying a bag with dog food, a sandwich, and two bottles of water.  
He turned his collar up against the wind as he walked home.

IV

“Never leave your clothes on the floor...women hate that.”  
Wednesday was laundry day. He scooped an armful of thin sweatpants  
and hole-torn socks into the garbage bag to lug down to Parkland Avenue.

V

“Treat all work as if you were doing it for Mum.”  
The car wash closed for winter so he worked as a file boy  
for an accounting firm downtown. He came home with paper cuts.

## VI

“99% of wars are fought in silence. Be kind, little brother.”

Each night she battled against the black tick marks on the scale, but he wrapped his arms around her knobby torso and whispered he loved her.

## VII

“If you get stopped by the police, don’t argue, but do as they say. They have families too.”

His new neighbor was a cop with a young wife and daughter. He didn’t envy the series of deadbolts he heard sliding into place each time they came home.

## VIII

“Apologize frequently, you probably messed up some time along the way.”

In his girlfriend’s room, he took her hand before he began to refold the clothes in her ‘college’ pile.

## IX

“Don’t be too proud to try even harder.”

By New Year, he was promoted to office receptionist and took a second job for the Boston bus ticket to visit her later that semester.

## X

“Listen to me, little brother, and you are already the man I could only hope to be.”

# Hide and Seek

Gabriella Galanti

My sixth-grade boyfriend lived in an enormous house in my town. It had two big white pillars on the front porch that was made of stone and the elegant looking brown French doors were easily twice my size. The interior of the house was an absolute dream. His family had a beautiful grand piano sitting in their living room, even though no one in the family had any ideahow to play piano. I had only been over there a few times before but my boyfriend, Kyle, had arranged for our friends to have a get together at his house over the weekend. We were celebrating our five-month anniversary so this hangout in particular felt very special to me.

Kyle is the first boy I ever had a real crush on. He had the gorgeous long dirty blonde hair that fell over his eyes ever so slightly. People used to make fun of him for it but I really liked the mop that sat on his head. He never really cared about dressing to impress but I always thought that the blue oversized sweatshirt he'd always wear suited him quite well. Kyle had a bad habit of drawing on his hands. I often caught myself completely mesmerized while watching him doodle on himself during class.

One day Kyle caught me staring at him while he was drawing. I felt my whole face turn beet red and I swerved my body to the opposite direction of him in order to hide my embarrassment. Moments later Kyle placed his hand in the center of my desk. His palm was spread open and in the middle of his hand he wrote "hi". I felt instant relief that Kyle didn't think I was a complete weirdo and turned myself back to him. He had this big smile planted on his face and his eyes were soft as if he was trying to tell me that it was okay and I didn't need to be embarrassed. That's when I knew that I had a huge crush on Kyle. As I rang the doorbell, my two friends, Jillian and Amanda, and I stood there on the porch shivering from the December snow that was starting to come down, waiting for someone to open the door. I could feel my hands start to get clammy and it felt as though there were small puddles of sweat starting to form in them. I wondered if it was too late for me to run back to my mother in the car but before I could make a move, the door swung open and there was Kyle.

Kyle's long hair that usually covered his eyes was pushed back off his face. He always had on a combination of sweatpants and a sweatshirt but today, he had on a pair of light khakis and a black button-up shirt. I wasn't sure if my blue jeans and purple cropped sweatshirt that said "PINK" on it, was appropriate for this occasion seeing how nicely Kyle was dressed. I had on a white cami underneath my sweatshirt that was pulled halfway down my butt, over my jeans and I swear I could feel Kyle's gaze lock at the cami. With that, he raised one of his eyebrows in confusion as if he was trying to figure out what I was wearing. This made me start to sweat and panic even more. Before I could break the awkward silence with a "hello", he'd already had his back turned to my friends and I, leading us into the house.

In the kitchen we met two of his friends and everyone shared their ideas for what they wanted to do. I was mid-conversation with one of my friends when I noticed Kyle's friends werewhispering something to me from across the kitchen island. As I tried to comprehend what the boys were saying to me, the whispering quickly turned into a whole bunch of hollering and laughter. It was impossible to understand what the boys were saying and it became very annoying that us girls were excluded from this little joke. When the boys had calmed down, Amanda was able to make out that they were repeatedly saying the word "plum" as if there was some super secret meaning to the word that we weren't supposed to know. As the boys started to get all riled up again, the whispering and giggling continued, making it clear that the boys didn't want us girls to know the secret meaning behind this word. The only explanation that my friends and I were able to come up with was maybe the boys were making fun of my friend Jillian's skirt which was a color you could call plum. Jillian started to yell at the boys and defend herself when one of Kyle's friends, Joey, made a kissy face at me from across the island and then I knew the secret meaning behind this word. The other boys, even Kyle, stood there with smirks on their faces.

A huge pit in my stomach had developed. Kyle was going to give me a "plum". This

meant Kyle was going to try to kiss me. At that moment I thought I was going to pass out. I wondered if I was even allowed to kiss boys at twelve years old and if so, are people my age supposed to know how to kiss? We had just gotten to his house so I couldn't call my mom to pick me up without it being too obvious that something was wrong. I quickly excused myself from the group and locked myself in the bathroom until I could figure out a plan of what I was going to do if Kyle tried to kiss me. I thought of a bunch of different scenarios, all of which ended in me kissing him but as I was intensely staring at myself through the reflection in the bathroom, trying to give myself a pep talk, my eyes became filled to the brim with tears and I couldn't hold them back. When I heard someone call my name from the kitchen, I grabbed the towel sitting on the counter in the bathroom and wiped the dark sporadic lines of mascara off of my face. I looked down at the towel that was once white and fluffy and became horrified at the sight of my black mascara all over the towel. Knowing that I needed to get out of the bathroom because my friends were waiting for me, I hid the towel under the sink beneath a bottle of toilet cleaner and quickly tried to fix my mascara that was now clumped together and dried below my eyes. I looked like a raccoon with the mascara all around my eyes and I thought for sure my friends would know something was wrong. Luckily for me, no one said anything and we went about our evening activities.

We were gathered in Kyle's basement for a ping pong tournament. We decided to make teams in order to play against each other and Kyle had asked me to be on his team. I thought it was totally romantic and my face became completely flushed from the excitement that I was experiencing, this was a big step for Kyle and I. The basement was very big, but there wasn't a whole lot down there besides the ping pong table, a massive flat screen tv, three recliners that we had lined up in front of the tv to make our own movie theater, and a big blue loveseat couch that was next to the ping pong table, covered in decorative pillows. When Kyle and I weren't playing, we sat side by side on the couch and watched our other friends play and get super competitive.

We were sitting so close that Kyle's knee was touching mine and his fingers were woven in between mine. Kyle and I had only held hands a

few times before this so not even my extremely distracting hot pink nail polish that was chipped beyond belief could have ruined the moment and my excitement. I felt Kyle shift his weight on the couch from one leg to the other so he was even closer to me. I could feel his gaze on me trying to get my attention but I refused to turn my head to him, I was afraid of what might happen. At that moment I really thought Kyle was about to kiss me in front of everyone. I panicked and grabbed one of the decorative pillows that was behind me on the couch and I whacked Kyle across the face with it, screaming "pillow fight".

Kyle fell back on the couch, ripping his hand away from mine and I waited for him to grab a pillow and hit me back. Kyle was unamused with my idea for a pillow fight and did nothing but sit there with his arms crossed, giving me a look of disgust. My friends on the other hand didn't hesitate to grab the other pillows and jump in. The fight didn't go on for very long because Kyle wasn't happy that the fight was even happening but he suggested that we play a new game instead. The group was easily persuaded into a game of hide and seek that would take place all over Kyle's house.

One of the coolest things about Kyle's house was that his parents had different features put into the house that were specifically designed for Kyle and his siblings. On the upper level of the house, there were small tunnels that connected the kid's rooms and a random walk-in closet that belonged to everyone. The only downside to having this tunnel system was there wasn't any light in them so as you were crawling from one room to another, you really had no idea where you were going unless you lived in the house. As soon as we decided we were going to play hide and seek, I knew that I would be using this tunnel system to try and win the game.

Jillian was "it" first so the rest of us scattered throughout the house on a hunt to find the perfect hiding spot. I bolted upstairs and found the nearest entrance into the tunnel which was from Kyle's room. I was about halfway through the tunnel when I heard Jillian yell "ready or not here I come", forcing me into a frantic crawl through the rest of the tunnel. When I

reached the exit, I stood up into a pitch black room which I quickly pieced together as the closet.

There wasn't much in the closet besides a few garment bags that were bundled together, a few old boxes in the corner, and some coats that smelled like that hadn't been washed in years. I decided to wedge myself in between two of the garment bags and hug the wall as close as possible in hopes that Jillian wouldn't go through all of the things hanging in the closet and find me. While standing in the dark trying to hear if I could figure out where Jillian was in the house, I heard someone breathing very heavily from practically a garment bag over. I quietly whispered out into the dark, asking who else was in the closet with me and the voice that answered was Kyle's. I didn't know if I should be angry that someone had the same hiding spot as me or excited that it was Kyle who was in there with me.

The next thing I knew, I heard the clanking of hangers hitting each other as if someone was moving things around and then Kyle was directly in front of me. I could practically feel him breathing on me and even though I couldn't see anything, I knew he was looking directly at me.

My hands started to get sweaty all over again and with that my whole body began trembling. I knew that Kyle was going to try to kiss me. I could feel my heart beating, every single pound in my chest getting faster than one before. I was terrified and I swear I was hearing the word "plum" coming from all over the house. To break the weird tension between Kyle and I, he pulled me into his arms for a hug but he didn't let go. Kyle was a lot taller than me so he rested his chin on the top of my head, keeping his arms wrapped around me and making me feel like he was trapping me in a cage. I didn't hug him back, my arms just dangled at my sides and I kept my face on his chest completely turned away from his because I knew exactly what he was trying to accomplish. I forgot that we were even playing hide and seek at this point.

It felt like I was in another game, but I didn't want to be playing this game, I wasn't good at it. Kyle lifted his chin off of the top of my head and I knew exactly where his face was in the dark. I slowly picked my head up off his chest and tried to mentally prepare myself for what I knew was coming.

I didn't know whether or not I was excited to have my first kiss or I was excited to get this whole thing over, but I shut my eyes tight and clenched my fists together to brace myself for the great "plum". The second that I could feel him breathing on my face, all of the hairs stood up on my body and with that I let out a tremendous involuntary shriek. Kyle let go of the tight grip that he was holding me in and he jumped away from me. I couldn't see anything but the next thing I knew, I heard Kyle cry out and the boxes that were stacked in the corner came crashing down. My scream had scared him so bad that it knocked him over, taking the cardboard boxes that were in there with him. I stood there frozen, in shock of what I had just done. Had I really just ruined this moment? I couldn't get it together for two seconds and let the kid kiss me? Why am I such a spaz? I had all of these things running through my mind yet I was completely speechless, I couldn't think of a single thing to say to Kyle. I was prepared to face the wrath of Kyle but instead I just heard him quietly giggling. His giggling quickly turned into a burst of hysterical laughter which was so contagious it sent me to the ground in hysterics with him. The two of us sat there on the closet floor in the dark, laughing until we were gasping for air and our stomachs hurt. We were so wrapped up in ourselves and what had just happened that we didn't care about playing the game anymore, neither one of us cared enough to jump back into hiding.

Jillian ripped open the closet door, flooding it with light and blinding both Kyle and I.

She screamed "I found you" and ran off to find the rest of our friends, leaving us unable to open our eyes. As we adjusted to the light, Kyle stood up first and reached out his hand to help me get up. We looked around at the mess Kyle had made from knocking over the boxes, which were full of old clothes that looked like they had been his at some point. We began picking up and folding all of the clothes, placing them back into the boxes and we carried on a light chuckle while reminiscing over what had just happened.

I felt all of the stress that I had built up only moments before had disappeared and I was able to be myself again around Kyle. I picked up a shirt that was turned inside out and as I began fixing it, Kyle leaned over

and pecked me right on the lips, just like that. Kyle had the same dopey grin on his face that I had on mine. We sat side by side on the floor putting the clothes back in the box, not saying a word but we knew exactly what the other was thinking. The thing that we had been stressing out about all night was now behind us.

Our first kiss was over, just like that.

# Forest on a Cloudy Night

Michael Darling



# We Won't Budge

Benn Delisle

*for the BLM movement and my POC brothers and sisters:  
after Geoge Floyd's last words—*

I can't breathe—  
Dying breath echoing across the red, white & blue  
Just another toll that has been paid

A box of crayons that we celebrate; until you pick up the wrong one  
A tax, a burden, a load you must carry on your back  
Like a mule treading uphill, while we get a glass elevator

I'm claustrophobic: afraid  
Afraid that my blue badge will kill me— no  
Afraid that your skin color will lead to your demise  
A tone that cannot be atoned  
A color you did not choose  
Skin, the largest organ, bore for everyone to see// bore for everyone to shoot

My stomach hurts, my neck hurts  
Everything h u r t s

Watching my brothers and sisters, my kin die at the hands of futile men

~~White v. Black~~  
Racist v. Race

My tears are flowing; mama, mama,  
Tears from watching an entire community torn apart  
Tears for standing against evil and being met with gas;

Rubber bullets will only stifle us, but never tear us down—  
Please, please, please,  
I can't breathe.

# Blur

Maggie DeJohn



# Far-Away House

Remmington Johnson

I met him when I was a child,  
on the streets of Chicago outside Navy Pier  
(told us he was Jesus returned).  
He wore a ripped Burger King crown, tilted to one side.  
I left him in that place, his palace,  
a gray alley where the sun shines but casts no light,  
where you can peer into a darkness  
that came long before the dark of man  
and see shadows of the squirming truths within.

I knew him for a lunatic the moment he opened his mouth,  
yet I hung on his every word,  
every coughing, rasping, wicked word that poured from his  
mouth, every vile, terrible secret  
of this vile, terrible universe.  
When he was done, I left him to his babbles and his  
laughing. I took his fortune with me  
and I slept the whole night through.  
When I woke the next morning, I knew what I had to do.

Someone once told me that if you play the universe  
backwards it looks the same as when we lived it forwards  
so that we never know past or future.  
And someone once told me that we will meet again at the  
end, and agree to do it again,  
on distant worlds in distant lands,  
on stranger worlds in stranger lands,  
where his shadow ascended to a higher place,  
where it lingers still with the higher shadows of this vile, terrible universe.

There is a secret running through us.  
We feel it when we are totally and utterly alone,  
as one might hear a mouse between walls,  
the cracked and moldy walls of your home.

It is the secret into which we are born,  
a vile and terrible conspiracy that cannot be believed  
by those who are able to believe things,  
and cannot be known  
by those who are able to know things.

II  
There is a room within a house,  
inside a cracked and moldy house.  
It is a pretty, little room.  
A pretty pretty pretty room,  
filled with pretty pretty pretty people.  
And when the pretty, little people leave this pretty, little room, oh  
how they marvel at the cracked and moldy walls around them,  
and how they search for other pretty, little rooms  
inside this cracked and moldy house.

He peered outside the house one night,  
outside these cracked and moldy walls.  
He placed his eye upon a hole,  
a hole, a hole, upon a hole.  
And all the pretty pretty pretty people  
who gathered there below him,  
well they told him, oh they begged him,  
“Do not place your eye upon a hole,  
a hole, a hole, upon a hole.”

When he saw all that he could see,  
he came back down.  
Down down, back down he came,  
and spoke to those who stood below:  
“Be not afraid, be not afraid.  
There is beauty beyond this house.”  
Then he went inside a pretty pretty pretty room,  
and found himself a pretty pretty pretty rope,  
and danced himself a pretty pretty pretty dance.

### III

In a far-away land  
beyond a forest we have agreed to forget,  
a land out there on our borders, the ones we cannot  
cross, the ones we cannot approach,  
the borders we cannot even look upon lest they  
evaporate... In this far-away land, you will find a far-away  
house.

Inside this house is the horrible secret of our universe,  
weaving itself through the crooked halls  
and out the crooked mouths of those who live within.

Together we dreamed, and we agreed to the dream.

We agreed to forget this horrible secret.

Our life, our mind, our will; just a house built out there on the border  
lands. We grew a forest around the house, thick and sweating in perpetual  
dusk, and we forgot the house and we forgot the land and we forgot the  
forest. We wandered into another town, an illusory town of our creation. We  
lived there, long, oblivious to all.

But out there on the border lands: the house, the trees, the dusk, the  
land... those things have not forgotten us.

I have heard that even distant light knows when you are  
watching. The gleam from a star is everywhere at once until you  
see it, and then it is right there.

I have also heard that light is nowhere to be found,  
and we are nowhere to be found,  
just a trick of the light inside a pretty, little room.

It is a vast and rich conspiracy our minds have crafted, projected  
inwards, and we gaze at our shadows dancing on the walls of this room,  
shadows more real than anything we have ever known.

He found himself one day, alone out there beyond the borders where a  
dusty sunset had covered a forgotten land.

It whispered our names.

He followed the horizons to a sweating forest,  
and he followed the whispers to a cracked and moldy  
house, and he gazed upon its impossible shape

while those within gazed back at him through cracked and moldy windows. They beckoned to him, "Come inside, come to see us."  
And he never found himself again.

"Be not afraid, be not afraid."  
A locked room inside a house

"Be not afraid, be not afraid."  
A room that knows your name

"Be not afraid, be not afraid."  
An empty room inside a house.

"Be not afraid, be not afraid."  
A room that is your name.

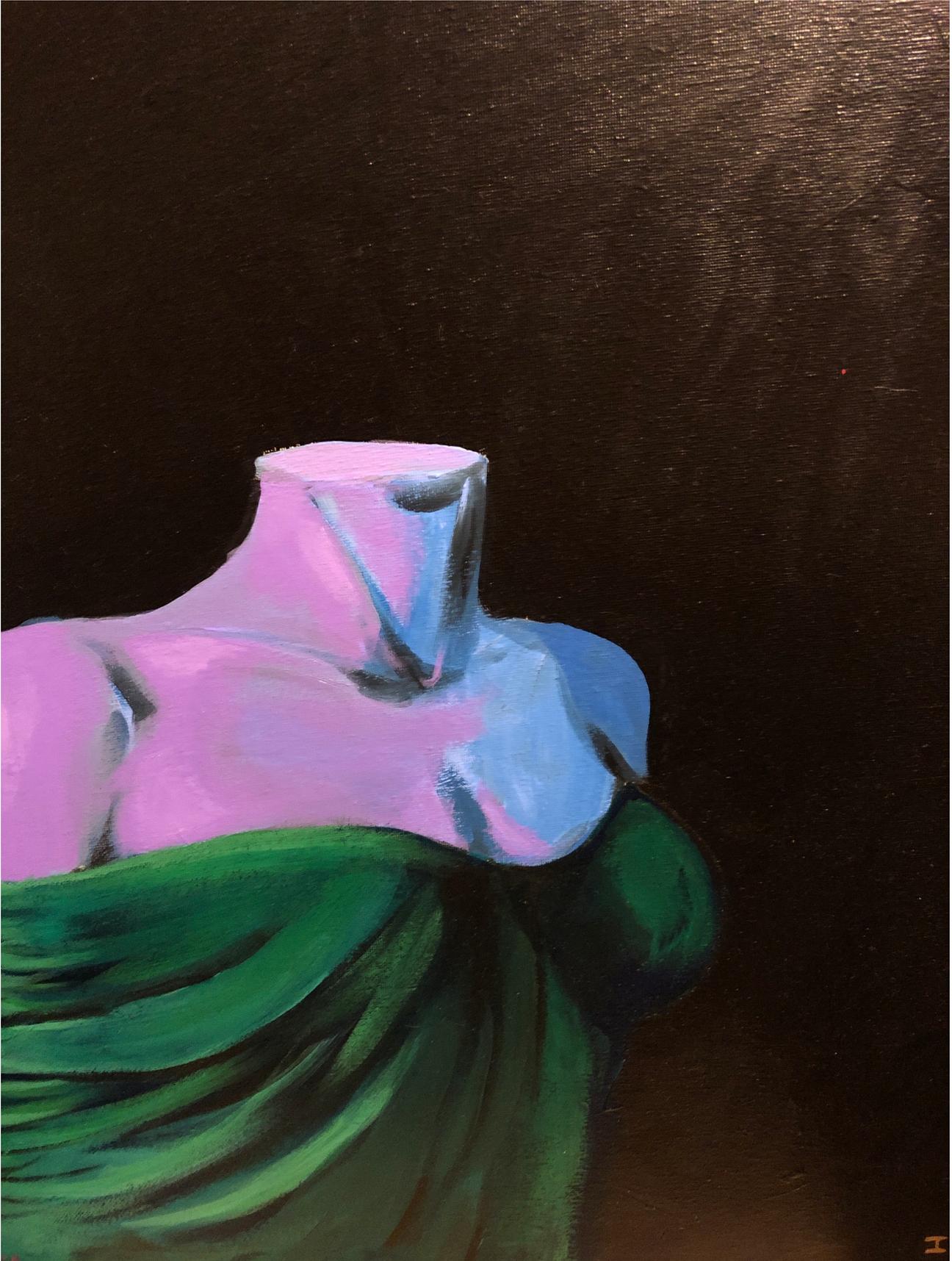
"Be not afraid, be not afraid."  
You will never find yourself.

"Be not afraid, be not afraid."  
We have always lived inside the house.

"Be afraid, be afraid."  
There is not beauty beyond these walls.

# Untitled

Isaiah Allen



# State of Our Union

Christopher Eastman

(LIGHTS UP on a podium with a presidential logo on it. Many voices are heard off stage. PRESIDENT DAVID enters right and walks up to the podium holding papers.)

PRESIDENT DAVID

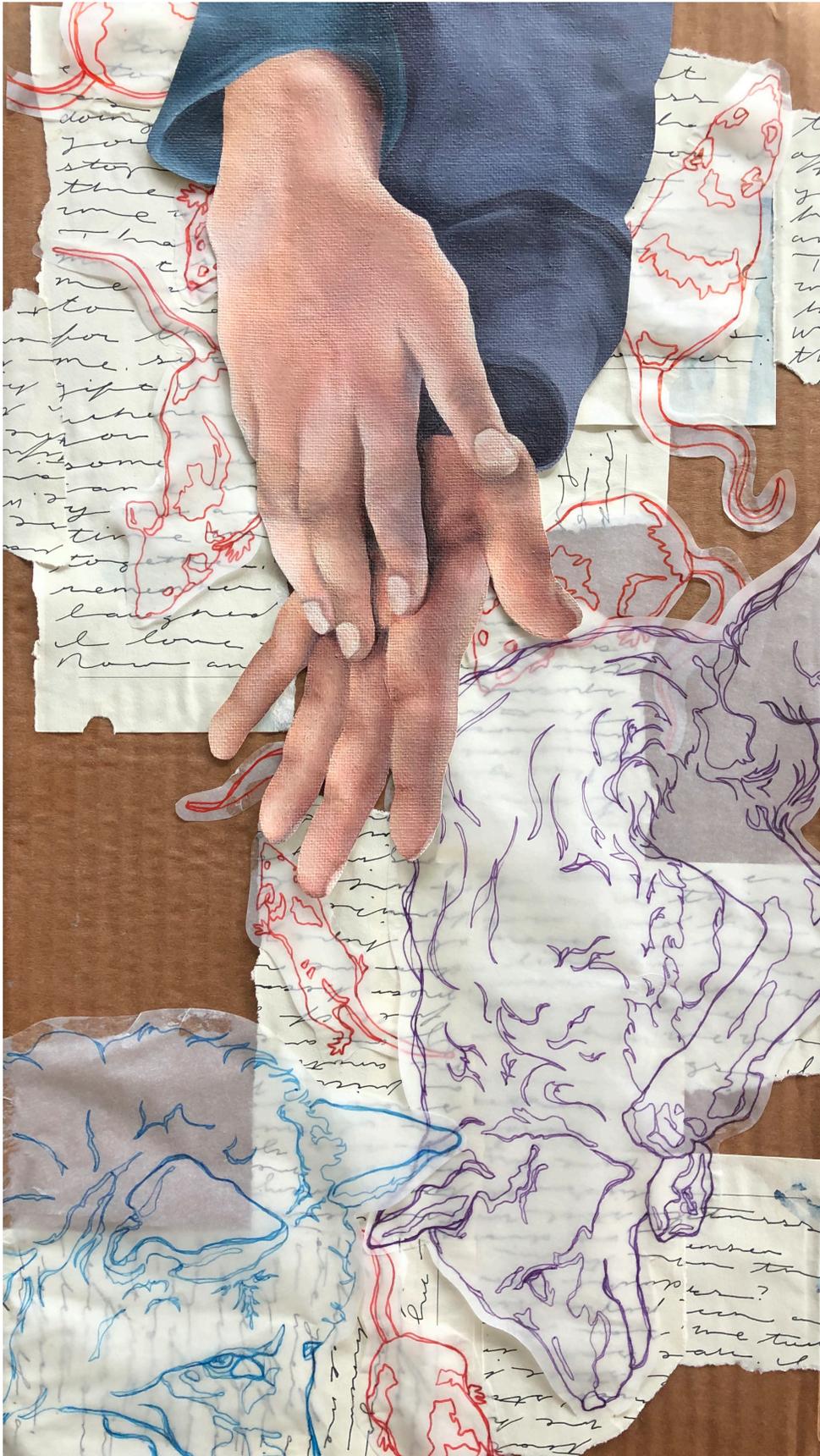
To my fellow citizens, everyone here today and at home watching, I thank you for listening to the State of the Union. Today is January 20th, 2026. Exactly two years since I was sworn in as president. On that very day, I swore to every one of you that I would save us, save this planet. I have failed you. Earth has been dying slowly, but she is finally dead. Our average global temperature has reached 65 degrees. That may not seem like a lot to the average American, but that's 8 degrees warmer than it was in 2016. Places like the Caribbean are uninhabitable. In the month of July, their average temperature was 115 degrees. You will burn just from being outside in five minutes. Other places like southern Florida have been underwater for years. All you people cared about was how all of the families living there would need new housing. You capitalistic pigs. Many of you don't realize how big of an issue this is. Our planet isn't dying anymore. It's dead. Haven't you noticed why we had so much more extreme weather? This past summer we had twenty-eight hurricanes. In 2016 we only had sixteen. This happened because you all wanted to vote for a fraud the past eight years. You voted for someone who doesn't believe in global warming. You voted for someone who funded and helped these giant corporations that pumped massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. You voted for him for two terms. Two terms that he could've fixed and saved this planet of ours. But all you cared about was having more money in your pocket. That money doesn't matter now, does it? The human race will be eradicated within the next twenty years. It's too late to go back. If you wanted to stay alive you should've thought about that eight, or even four years ago when you decided on your leader. A leader that tweeted things like, "The concept

of global warming was made by the Chinese". You all had a chance to save your lives. In 20 years or less, we will all be dead. The state of our union is fucked. (beat) No questions.

(PRESIDENT DAVID exits right.  
LIGHTS DOWN.)

# Foxes and Mice

Caitlin Marx



# Searching

Heaven Santiago

Tired of these scratch-off lottery ticket thin kinships  
Tired of feeling terrified with no real reason  
Took an antihistamine to curb hysteria  
Took an antihistamine to finally sleep  
Took an antihistamine 'cause I'm anti-history  
And I flick flashbacks back to the back of my mind  
'Cause it's 3 am and  
I am drowning again in sorrow

And hallway-corridor-cursed illusions  
Exhausted, languid from searching this labyrinth  
Probably lost in this labyrinth

In reality, I gaze emptily at the sink  
Glance at the Benadryl wrapper  
I won't confront my fears today  
And certainly not tomorrow  
I turn the faucet on  
I am drowning again

Does anyone have substance?  
Something they fear to death?  
Something they hold close?

I realize I turned on steaming hot water  
I realize I burned and hurt my hand  
I realize I gaze emptily at a sink  
And it seems to sink  
And sink

# Night Boats

Kyra Rage Sobiegraj



# A House Without Doors

Remmington Johnson

Eventually, they called it the House Without Doors. The name is not entirely fitting. It was, in fact, a house with an infinite number of doors which lead to an infinite number of versions of the exact same house. The house had only four residents: Jeff, his wife Alice, and their two small children, nine-year-old Molly and seven-year-old Luke. In those days, they called the house “home.”

It began on Halloween night. Luke insisted on dressing as a cardboard box, and Molly was in a witch costume. Festooned as they were in Halloween regalia, the family was ready to go trick-or-treating. But tonight, they would not leave their home. Staring through the open front door, Jeff and Alice found themselves staring back into their own home. The parents gaped for a moment while the children pranced, still giddy for the night’s impending loot. Jeff slowly closed the door, and the children glanced at their parents, confused. Jeff opened the front door again, as though resetting the door might somehow fix the anomaly. But there was no longer an outside world through the door, only another version of their own home. Assuming it must be some strange Halloween prank, the parents scooted their children to the back door. The phenomenon was the same there—the backdoor opened into another version of the house. They found the windows no different from the doors. Wherever they looked out, they saw only the inside of their own home. Alice tried to text a friend, and then call, but they no longer had any service. When they tried to check the news, the television and radio tuned only to dead channels and hissing static.

“It’ll go away,” said Jeff.

Alice nodded. “It’s prank, right? It has to be.”

“We stay inside. We don’t play...whatever this game is.”

And so, their first decision was made. They would stay inside the home until this prank resolved itself. They spent an uneasy night in their home. An otherness surrounded them, pressed around them on all sides. The

children, for their part, adopted the trepidation of their parents. Molly's night was filled with nightmares. Luke wet his bed.

Upon waking the next morning, Jeff and Alice learned that nothing had changed from the night before. Their house led into houses, windows into windows, doors into doors. Curiosity soon overtook the couple. How could anyone ignore the anomaly that was all around them?

"Here's what I think," said Alice. "Either you or I go out...in there, whatever. The other stays here with the kids. We look around the house, see if there's something in there. Maybe another way out?"

Jeff sighed, nodded. "Was thinking something similar. But we should both go." "I'm not letting the kids in there."

"Right. I go first, poke around. See what I can find. If I don't find anything, you go and I stay with the kids. Two eyes on the same house. There's gotta be something in there. The house didn't come from nowhere."

And so, their next decision was made. Jeff dug a flashlight from a drawer, just in case, and stood before his own front door. He opened it, stared inside, and stepped through the threshold and out of the real.

The front door clicked shut behind him. To his frustration, to his disappointment, Jeff found that the house through the front door was the same as their house. The same Halloween decorations were still scattered around the house, the children's discarded costumes from the night before were piled in their bedrooms. Even Luke's sheets were still in the washer, where they had put them that morning.

Jeff walked to the back door, opened it, and found himself staring into yet another version of their house. It seemed the chain of doors, from one house to another, stretched far beyond what he anticipated.

Jeff returned through the front door, back through a house devoid of people, and back into to his own home where Alice and the kids still waited for him. When he saw their faces, an unexpected wave of comfort crashed

into him. He hugged them, and told Alice of how little he found in the next house.

Alice ventured out. She remained absent for only a little longer than Jeff. When she returned, she had similar observations of sameness. But there was one notable exception: through the windows of the next house, she saw someone who seemed to look like her. When she called out to the other woman, she was ignored.

“Maybe sound doesn’t travel between houses?” she asked.

Jeff resolved to return to the next house, and into the next house after that, and so on and so forth until he reached the end of the houses. Jeff reasoned that, if they still had running water and electricity, it had to come from somewhere, which meant there was an outside somewhere out there. Whatever happened to their house to cause this disturbing repetition, it couldn’t be infinite if water was coming in from somewhere. He was, of course, incorrect. The house was infinite. His mistake was assuming that something reasonable was happening to them.

“There’s not a chance in pluperfect hell I’m going back in that house,” said Alice. “And I *really* don’t like the idea of being left alone in here. There’s other people out there, Jeff. That doesn’t bother you?”

“If it’s someone else,” Jeff said, “they can help. They probably know what’s going on.”

Jeff ventured out. House after house after house, door after door, he explored, and the houses became stranger. Sometimes the lights of another house would be turned off. Sometimes Christmas decorations would be hung instead of Halloween decorations. Sometimes the floors had carpet, sometimes the carpets had been shredded, the wood beneath stained dark, crusted.

He never encountered another person. Hours passed, and Jeff never found a way to escape. He realized it wouldn’t be enough to explore alone. If they wanted to escape, his family would need to journey together, for several

days or more, through one strange version of their home after another. It might take days, it might take weeks, but no matter how long, they would need to stay together.

As he traveled back to the version of his own home, re-opening one door after another, he was surprised to find that after only a few minutes, he was back where he started.

Alice and the children were seated on the couch, and that same wave of comfort crashed into him as he moved to hug his family once more. Molly bounced with giddiness.

“So,” said Alice, not rising from the couch. “You decided to come back after all.” Jeff paused.

“Never said I wouldn’t...”

“That’s not what you said earlier.”

“Earlier...I said I’d come back when I found a way out. Didn’t find one, but I figured we could—”

“I’m not even going to repeat what you said, since the kids are here. They don’t need to hear that kind of *shit* again.”

Jeff looked around, then back to Alice. “The hell are you talking about?”

“When you came back, you *said*—”

“I didn’t come back! I came back now! What are you talking about?”

“You said,” Alice stood up.

“*I didn’t say anything!* This is the first time I’ve seen you since I left. You’re saying, what are you saying? I came back? Before now?”

Alice stared at Jeff, Jeff at Alice.

“Good god,” she whispered.

“There’s...other versions of us?” Jeff muttered. “Somewhere out there.”

An unspoken dread overtook them both. How did Jeff know that the Alice before him was his Alice? How did Alice know if this was her Jeff? How many different versions of them were roaming these houses, and what would happen if they met them again?

They set the children to playing in their rooms while they discussed the horrifying possibilities that they were not each other’s. They compared pasts and thoughts and did their best to establish that they were indeed talking to their original, but in the end, they could be certain of nothing, and so they simply accepted each other. Their only choice before them now was to try to escape together.

Jeff, Alice, Molly, and Luke wandered the houses, searching for any way out. It wasn’t long until they met with other versions of themselves. The meetings were cautious at first, the meeting of strangers in stranger lands. But soon they were comfortable enough to compare notes with each other, sometimes to join and sometimes to go their separate ways. Not every version of their family was trying to escape.

They soon learned the mechanism behind Jeff’s original mistake, how he was first separated from Alice. Each time any door was shut and re-opened, a new, random house was presented to them. This confirmed Jeff and Alice’s dread that they were not each other’s original.

They continued to explore, desperate to find a way out of the never-ending house. They climbed through windows, they backtracked. They propped door after door after door open, creating a tunnel of houses that wouldn’t be randomly changed should they decide to backtrack. They raided their pantries for food, cooked on their stoves, slept in their beds. Sometimes the pantries had already been ransacked. Sometimes the beds were old and decomposing. Sometimes the floorboards were warped and rotten, the entire house incomprehensibly old and dilapidated.

The versions of themselves they encountered were as varied as the houses. Some were like them, others had been changed by the house. They met an Alice who had clearly gone insane and was abandoned by her Jeff. That Alice tried to kidnap their Molly. They learned to be on guard against their others. But they also found trustworthy versions of themselves and travelled with them, befriended other versions, parted ways, met others. They found entire societies of themselves, sometimes only a handful, sometimes spanning hundreds of houses, hundreds of families. In these places, the doors had been removed altogether in order to keep their society linked.

They found mass graves of Jeff and Alice and the children. They found decrepit versions of their house, stained with shit and blood. They found decrepit versions of themselves, covered in shit and blood. They found Mollys and Lukes roaming the houses, unattended by any Jeff or Alice. They attempted to take them into their family, but the orphaned children were terrified, untrusting. They vanished through doors and windows before Jeff or Alice could follow.

Jeff and Alice tried various means of breaking free. They went to the attic and smashed a hole in the ceiling, only to find themselves looking down into their own home. They knocked a hole in a wall, only to find another house within the walls.

After many months of roaming, sometimes with others but mostly alone, they grew weary. They longed for something consistent, longed to be free from isolation. They found another society of themselves and joined it, glad for the company, however eerie. They lived with them for a number of years. One of the Alices had already created an education program for the children, so the new Jeff and Alice's children attended school there. While their society was mostly calm and restful, it wasn't always so. Sometimes they were raided by other societies of Jeffs and Alices, sometimes invaded through the windows of the outer-most houses, sometimes they came smashing through the walls or ceiling.

But for the most part, there was peace and there was rest. They played

cards together, they held Shakespearean plays for each other. They sang. They wrote books and poems that circulated. Some Jeffs divorced their Alices and remarried other Alices. Some had orgies. Some grew tired of the colony and left. Sometimes new versions of themselves joined. Some Alices gave birth to new Mollys and Lukes. Acquiring new supplies was as simple as opening a door in a border-house and raiding that home for whatever supplies they needed, shutting the door once more to reset the house beyond the borders. They repurposed lumber by tearing out floors. They replaced worn-out couches and beds. They collected food and medicine.

They grew old together and watched as their children became adults. Some Lukes expanded on the houses, claiming a house of their own, some Mollys struck out alone to wander the infinite house. Some Mollys became artists, some Lukes became cooks. Some learned how to care for others, the sick and old of themselves. Some learned to program and created games for each other. Some created a network of computers, their own sort of internet. Some learned to brew beer.

Their parents passed at different times. Younger Jeffs and Alices would join, confused, afraid. They were welcomed, always welcomed. They, too, grew old in the colony. Their children grew into adults. When anyone died, their body was placed respectfully inside a house beyond the border, and the door was shut.

Theirs was a house without doors, a life beyond. The versions of themselves were infinite, and so they were as close to immortal as anyone could ever come.

# Breakfast

Sophie Infarinato



# Ducks in Space

Cameron Drummond

The great beyond has gained a new height  
From some new foul, who have taken flight  
Ducks in space  
Horror and awe from an impending world war  
While their little heads are taller than ever before  
Slowly drifting, around our sun  
The light may be blinding, but there's nowhere to run  
Ducks in space  
They've breached the heavens beyond the clouds  
You can't see the stars, the wingspan overcrowds  
Screeching in terror, a symphony in the sky  
With such a shrill sound, skeptics can't turn a blind eye  
The final frontier is stumped, shot, stopped in its tracks  
No amount of coordination can stop their attacks  
Ducks in space  
They're crashing into our airspace  
Ducks in space  
Not here for power, slaves, or their race  
Ducks in space  
Solely here to destroy the place  
Ducks in space  
Hold your loved ones, get ready for the sweet embrace

# Ancestral Strength

Sofía Luz Pérez



# L'Appelle du Vide

Benn Delisle

Somehow I found myself sitting in the French classroom after school on the first day of sophomore year, wanting to join the newly formed French Club. The poster strung around school promised free trips to Montreal and the chance to practice and grow my conversational French. Tempted by the opportunity for free trips, I wound up in the room that sported cheesy drawings of L'Arc de Triomphe and popsicle stick renditions of the Eiffel Tower at 3:00 pm instead of at home taking a nap, the post-school tradition.

My friends had promised they'd join with me; Kara, Clarissa, and Megan—all of them had promised to meet me there, yet I somehow found myself alone at one of those circle tables with the brown wood grain pattern that was clearly more plastic than it ever would be wood. I had been alone, waiting for the meeting to begin, until Kitara strutted in, caught my eye, contorting her face into a mischievous smirk before she kicked the chair out to sit right beside me.

She had brown hair that was dyed a few months back so her head looks like it's been dipped in the cherry dip that goes on soft serve. She always wore the same black faux leather jacket with some teenage-angst band tee underneath. The jacket had pieces missing from it, either worn from years of use or from some other loner who donated it to the local salvation army. Around her neck always swung a spiral necklace that held a different crystal every time from that pagan crystal shop in an abandoned train cart, The Crystal Caboose.

\*\*\*

I was waiting for my first-period study hall to end, waiting by the doors that were heavily guarded by the teachers who were attempting to avoid the inevitable group of students, usually the jock-type, who would make it their game to escape even just thirty seconds before the bell rang. Back in those days, I wore straight-legged jeans every single day and some sort of button-up shirt— my feeble attempt to prove to the world that I was straight. I waited, listening to some Sam Smith song on

my headphones, with handfuls of binders and notebooks and folders strategically tucked and stacked in my arms. The clock's second hand dragged slowly across the face, watched anticipatorily by every person in the cafeteria just wanting to escape. Just as I was about to leave, a hand grabbed my shoulder and turned me around. There she was again, Kitara, one hand still on my shoulder and the other closed like a toddler holding his favorite toy.

"Guess what I have for you," she posed. "Uhhh," I dragged out the vowel racking my brain for some idea of what it could be, "No idea," I eloquently settled on. "I got you this," she smirked as she unwrapped her palm to reveal a matching spiral necklace, like her own, and put it around my neck immediately.

"I also got you these," she said, revealing two crystals. "I thought you would like obsidian, it's dark and simple, but I also got you this," she pointed to the smaller blue stone speckled with white, like a snowglobe that had been set on pause the moment all of the snow began to fall back down again.

"It's called blue-lace agate because it usually has laced lines that run through it, but I picked this one out for you because it looks like snowflakes, and you're a special snowflake." I thanked her quickly, my face red from embarrassment and shuffled out of the cafeteria to second period, gym class.

\*\*\*

10th grade was the year I had my mom as an English teacher. Every third period I had to go into my mom's classroom and sit there as she ran through story upon story of some embarrassing thing I had done when I was younger, a true American hero I was. She got to meet all of the people I loved and despised most. The biggest perk was being able to trash talk with her on the drive home every day because she knew everyone I was talking about and she could butt in with her own tidbits too.

We had this one assignment that was to evoke emotion through rhetorical

devices as Martin Luther King Jr. did during his Letters from Birmingham Jail. It was a free-write sort of assignment that we had been given weeks advance to do. But, as tenth-grade students do, many didn't even touch the prompt until the class the day before it was due. This was when one student had the brilliant idea of asking my mom if they could do a live speech instead of writing out the assignment, to which my mother, a very forgiving teacher, agreed.

Many students took her up on the offer, and we had an entire class day dedicated to listening to my fellow classmates emote and persuade with various literary techniques, all bullshitted straight out of their asses. Yet, all I can remember from that day in my mom's classroom is Kitara's speech. Perhaps it was her training on our Model UN team that prepared her for her speech. Or maybe the years of acting she had done in our school's Drama Club. Or maybe that public speaking and debate class she and I had taken together. But regardless of what it was, her speech was by far the best in the class.

I don't even remember what it was about. Socialism and Bernie Sanders perhaps? Or some other political ambition she regularly tried to persuade others into believing. She slumped to the front of the class, from her seat in the very back corner, lit by the windows that lined the back of the entire classroom, lighting like a set in a play. She stood there and eloquently moved the class. Using wit, allusions, imagery, metaphors, she convinced a class that regularly saw her as a freak and a punk rock weirdo, that she had this side of her that they had never seen before. Everyone clapped. Nobody had clapped for those before or those after. Just hers.

\*\*\*

I was at the high school on a brisk Saturday morning at 6am, earlier than I would be there had we had school that day. The French Club crawled into the vans the school had provided us with, that every time they went in reverse, they made that BEEP BEEP BEEP sound that a bus makes when in reverse: it was for liability or something like that. Our goal for the day was to ride the metro into the heart of Chinatown to buy dumplings and drink bubble tea. Since it was wildly early on a weekend, everyone immediately

fell asleep, dozing off to the sound of whatever today's hits radio station was on— probably something like 99.9 The Buzz.

I was stuck in the third row of this old van that probably should've stayed in the early 2000s when it was created. I sat in the middle seat, with a sleeping girl on my right, and a buzzing Kitara to my left, with a Monster Energy in her hand. I ran into the issue of whens-the-right-time-to-put-in-headphones-without-being-rude and the other problem of where-do-I-put-my-head-to-fall-asleep. Because of these unfortunate situations, I did no sleeping on that trip to Montreal. Instead, I had my left ear talked off, while the right was left on read by the girl napping next to me.

Kitara told me about her ambitions to be an anthropologist because she had fallen in love with cultures. She told me about the death of her dog a year ago, but how her family had finally accepted it and we're planning on adopting a new puppy for Christmas. She told me about her trip to Harvard with the Model UN team, something we were going to do together the next year. She talked to me about the musical we were doing in Drama Club, where I was the lead who was Bigfoot, which wasn't that far of a stretch—I was 6'2" at the time. She told me about both sets of grandparents: she preferred her mom's parents over her dad's parents because even though they made her go to church, which she despised, they spoiled her.

I listened and added my 'uh huh's' when appropriate watching the street signs that lined the highway pass trying to translate all of the French that I knew.

\*\*\*

In the middle of the summer before senior year, I worked at Regal Cinemas. The summer before though, after my sophomore year, I went there all the time with my friends to see whatever movies that were out, because what else does a group of sixteen-year-olds do during the dead of summer.

Walking out of one of the movies, I waved my friends goodbye, and I checked my phone. Kitara had texted me back. She was telling me about some camp she was going to the following day that her grandfather (on her dad's side) was making her go to. Something about history or another

boring thing like that. But while she was there she could give a couple of people the address of the place to send her letters. Since the camp was going to bore her to death, she asked me to send her a letter that she could respond to.

I walked out of the mall to the curb of the Target parking lot and sat on what would become my bench. My parents had trouble with time. You have five kids and suddenly time management becomes impossible. You know it's bad when I have my own designated bench. You can't really blame them though, I am the middle child after all. And the following summer when I would work at Regal, that bench and I would get to know one another very well.

I texted her back telling her I absolutely would send her letter, and immediately began to write a draft in my head. What do you tell a friend over a letter when they aren't going to be able to respond right away? What do you tell a friend when they're locked up in the woods for a week?

I sat there in the terracotta haze streaming down from the lights of the parking lot mulling this over. That is until my mom's burgundy Honda Odyssey cut through the fog and pulled up beside my bench. And when I stepped into that van I had left something on that bench

And no it wasn't my water bottle like that one time. It was so embarrassing, I had to call Target like three times because the first time they said they didn't find it, but then I called back a day later and they did — it was a whole situation.

It was the idea of Kitara's letter. I had left my mulled-over questioning. I had left the idea of finding a stamp and trying to conjure an envelope. I had left my decision. I had decided that you tell your friend stuck in the woods how much you love them and appreciate them. How much you think they're quirkiness is their greatest strength, not their greatest weakness. How much them being different in a world full of carbon copies is terrific and not terrifying.

But, as I said, that was all left on my bench, and my mom's minivan was

already speeding off towards Red Oak Lane.

\*\*\*

A couple of weeks later, on August 6th, 2016, my mom's van pulled up to St. Joseph's Church in West Chazy. In my mom's van, I would usually connect my phone and show her some new song I had found and try to convince her it was better than her 90s country music— which she always refused to believe. But today we pulled in the parking lot in and the radio's volume was on zero.

Before we walked in I looked down at my black suit coat and used the lint roller to take off any dog hair that remained. I reached out for the polished chrome door handle, and right before I could pull it open, my mom grabbed my knee and asked me, "You sure you're ready to go in?" and I just silently nodded, and pulled the handle open.

We walked up to the church. The crowd formed into one line that went from family member to family member. Shaking everyone's hand.

"Sorry for your loss"

"Sorry for your loss"

"I'm so sorry"

Until I reached her parents, I had never met Kitara's family before, but when I saw her mom, swollen-eyed, I knew immediately who she was. A spitting image really. Subtract the dyed hair and edgy clothes, but her face was the exact same.

She looked at me, her face red from the streaming tears that had just started subsiding and began sobbing all over again. She had never met me before, but she saw my face and saw that I was a young sixteen-year-old and said, "You must've been one of her friends. She must've loved you so much."

And I'm really hoping she did too. Or at least knew I loved her.

# Loved

Morgan Arnold



# Tumor

Kayla Elfers

Malevolent mastermind  
Makes morals a malignancy.  
Someone so charming and benign  
At first changed his consistency.

Damaged deceiver dependent  
On getting what he wants:  
Cajoling and coaxing independent  
Individuals and with their hearts he taunts.

Calling, crying, characterizing  
These women with his wounds.  
Wishing to wash away, empathizing  
With his terrorizing, tumultuous tunes.

Little lies longing  
A less-lasting love in lives.  
Used in a malicious manipulating  
Game where his hurt ego thrives.

Naive. Not knowing  
His heinous intentions  
Are secretly sewing  
Women's insecure interventions.

After he finishes using  
His objects, he gains their constancy  
And leaves. They see each other and his abusing  
Ways, wiring feelings of envy and jealousy.

Left lonesome and lied to.  
Still struck by his charm and humor,  
Unable to understand the utopic man who  
Is not a man at all, but a tight tumor

Around their hearts and minds,  
Slowly suffocating each of them  
And sometimes he grinds  
Against their hearts, killing one of a kind gems.

# Self-Portrait as Xochiquetzal

Sofía Luz Pérez



# You're Reading This Title

Benn Delisle

You're sitting in your room, it's mid afternoon, but you don't even have the motivation to check the watch resting on your wrist to find the answer. Music plays around in the background, but you assume the white walls are soaking up all the noise because the notes never seem to reach your ears. Maybe it's actually that your ears just aren't open. But you're not sure how they managed to close themselves up, or how you'll manage to open them again.

It's mid afternoon and you're a college student wearing an ordinary stained yellow hoodie. You got an extra large iced coffee for free because you frequent the joint so often they know your name. You're sad. Depressed, maybe? You never know how you're feeling, but just know that emptiness that sits in your chest, it comes and goes like the wind from your window. The sadness or emptiness or just that feeling, is perched in your body like a bird on a lonely oak tree singing it's sad song waiting for something, anything to happen.

You go through the motions: wake-up, shower, eat, work, sleep, wake-up, shower, eat, work, sleep, wake-up, shower, eat, work, sleep. You go through the motions of the shell of a person. A rendering of human life. You will your teeth into a smile sprawled along your face. Or create a tear to gracefully drip down your cheek. Or form a dramatic sneeze just to appear apparent. Life just seems to move linearly, but somehow your simulation runs cyclically, and you're not sure how to change your settings...?

You catch your reflection in the mirror, a boy, man, person (?) stares back, but not the kind you'd see on an Instagram feed or in a clothing magazine. The type that has dull blue eyes and tall brown hair. Your eyes catch each other and you think of all the ways that person could not be you. They have crow's feet from their belling laughing every time their friend tells a funny joke. They have a trimmed beard from maintaining self-care. They don't look sad.

You remember all those times you sat alone on your red-stained carpet.

Sitting in the middle of it, cross-legged rubbing your hands through the worn brown fabric wondering why you hate being in your own company. You hate the idea of spending a Sunday evening laying in bed watching the sunset from out your window blend from yellow to orange to pink to red.

You find yourself at the end of the day not being able to switch your mind off. It goes on and on and on, and sometimes it runs so far away you can't seem to find it to flip that lever. It wanders in the depths of your psyche, always seeming to find some far off memory that you'd thought you'd locked away safely in a chest with a passcode you'd never cared to learn.

But that's just life isn't it? Or that's the life you've come to realize is the reality for yourself. Surrounding yourself with personalities you care to tolerate to dilute your own hatred to be around your own. You've discovered that to make it through you have to escape alone time. You've found your greatest strength is being able to fill whatever shoe you think will walk the furthest. You protect yourself with an outer layer of charm and charisma, the person you wish you were, to hopefully one day morph into that persona. Your greatest fear in life is being stuck in the same person that can't seem to hear the music even when the bass makes your rearview mirror quake. One day you hope you'll molt like a lizard, and like what comes out of the otherside.

# Ode to Christchurch

Heaven Santiago

Exordium of Energy  
Extinguish prayers' energy  
Exiting empathy,  
Last moments in the mosques,  
Fifty angels in agony,  
As the devil accumulates ammo,  
As he live-streams, streams of  
New Zealand blood  
Blankets cover green carpet-  
Huddled, hushed, heavy-hearted  
Innocents in corner, cornered  
A sacred place in pieces  
Now graveyard, now memorial, now vigil  
Be vigilant for villains  
Who believes violence triumphs peace

# Water

Michael Darling



# Svengali's Lighthouse

Brandon Nixon

Loud waves crash against a rocky shore. A storm is brewing.

FADE IN:

INT. CABIN - PAST MIDNIGHT

A small FIGURINE with plain eyes and a red vest sits over a lit fireplace.

The room has stuffed fish on wood walls, a ripped couch, small kitchen, rectangular table, and a few windows.

Next to the door is a row of small labeled hooks with KEYS. "Cabin", "Light", "Lighthouse". "Light" has no key.

In the corner, a man in flannel is hunched over a desk. Wood chips fall at his BOOTS.

He is cutting a small piece of wood with a CARVING KNIFE. It's shaped like a person. He flips it and carves his signature under the feet- JACK (50s).

He holds it out and observes it. Spotting a minuscule sliver of wood hanging, he leans in and delicately trims it.

LOUD WOOD CRACKS OUTSIDE.

He drops his tools and looks around the room, then leans down to the floor and lifts up a loose plank.

Underneath, light shines onto a sawed-off wood and steel SHOTGUN. Jack grabs the grip--

But he sighs, dropping the plank. He gets up, opens the front door, and steps out.

As he tries pulling the door shut behind him, it grinds against the door frame. He tugs harder and it closes with a loud THUD.

EXT. PENINSULA

A boat in two halves, wood pieces poke out of the water and line the shore. The sail snapped and fallen over.

A bloodied man in a tattered white shirt and brown pants lay on the ground.

This is NATE (30s), he winces and grabs his left thigh. A massive wood chip has cut through his pants and into his skin.

He looks to his left. A plank of wood is sticking from the ground. The limp body of his captain lay impaled on it.

Then to his right. He can see the bottom half of a red and white striped LIGHTHOUSE.

Jack is coming towards him. He slumps over.

INT. CABIN

The door bursts open and Jack comes in, throwing Nate on the table, knocking mugs and plates which clatter onto the floor.

He runs to a cabinet and grabs a first aid kit.

The wind coming in is deafly loud.

As he's getting the gauze out, he rams the door shut.

Back to Nate, he grabs the chunk of wood protruding from his leg-- and YANKS. He quickly presses the gauze on the cut. Nate, eyes shut, doesn't react.

Jack grabs a mug from the floor, fills it with kitchen water, and pours it on the wound.

Then with tweezers from the kit, he pulls slivers of wood from the cut, dropping each into the mug.

He finishes by wrapping a bandage around Nate's leg, then securing it with two clips. He carries Nate to the couch and lays him down.

He notices Nate's chest has a massive tattoo of a cross.

Jack steps back to the door, pulling the BOLT SHUT.

Then he goes and sits at his desk. Looks back at Nate and leans in, studying his face.

HOURS LATER

THUD.

Jack jumps awake. He rubs his eyes as he sits up at his desk and looks outside.

Still a stormy night.

Then he looks to the fireplace. A simmering flame. He stands.

The couch is empty. Jack quickly looks around the room. Nothing. He settles down.

Just for a moment, before-

He slowly lifts his head and turns to the door-

The bolt is UNLATCHED. The lighthouse key is gone.

Jack runs to the door, swings it open, and peaks out. Looking both ways, he steps out.

INT. LIGHTHOUSE

Nate limps as fast he can up spiral stairs.

EXT. PENINSULA

A boat is coming in a few miles offshore.

The lighthouse light is flickering. Jack looks between the boat and the dysfunctional lighthouse.

He rushes-

INT. CABIN

Grabs his shotgun from underneath the loose plank.

Back to the door. He slings the shotgun over his back and takes a deep breath- then rips the door open and sprints out.

EXT. PENINSULA

Jack is sprinting across the peninsula.

He runs into the lighthouse.

INT./EXT. LIGHTHOUSE

Past the open door, running up the steps.

Breathless now, he stops on the second-to-top step.

Nate is standing above him, holding Jack's carving knife.

Jack reaches to his back-

Nate shakes the knife.

Jack lowers his hand, but steps up..

He looks at the incoming ship. The lighthouse light is flashing.

Nate points to a panel.

Jack shakes his head and steps up to the top--

Nate LUNGES--

Nate's head EXPLODES. His body falls to the ground.

Jack lowers his shotgun and walks up.

He bends down and twists a wire.

Pulling a key from his boot, he inserts it into the panel and presses a button.

The light turns completely OFF.

Jack reaches into Nate's pocket. He grabs his key.

INT. CABIN

Jack hangs the key and puts his shotgun back under the wood.

Then he grabs his figurine off his desk, walks over and places it on the mantel.

White shirt, brown pants, it's clearly NATE. Next to it is the figure dressed in red.

Jack smiles.

LOUD WOOD CRACKS OUTSIDE.

REVEAL: The mantel is filled by a row of over a DOZEN DIFFERENT FIGURES.

Just as the front door opens and slams shut.

# Jamie Sleeping

Sophie Infarinato



# A Gallimaufry for Algernon

Anton Porcari

EXT. CELESTIAL VOID

QUANTUM INTUITION ALEXA

“Welcome...your consciousness has been uploaded to the cosmic information superhighway. You’re the penultimate intelligent entity in the entire multiverse proceeding absolute particle decay. Author Douglas Adams would call you a hitchhiker, a stowaway. Don’t be afraid. There is a plethora of confusion, however, this is not your Judgement day. Expatiate, portray, the ordeal you’ve endured for whomever/whatever obtains your memory will receive the last volitional testament of human beings—pontificate and convey candidly because the totality of matter will inevitably disintegrate!”

Algernon

I thought I was at Starbucks?

QUANTUM INTUITION ALEXA

“The intergalactic coffeehouse? Indubitably, you were, however, the world tore itself apart. My sensors sparked into existence and analogous to Frankenstein’s Monster I awoke imbued with flamboyancy, life, and a penchant for rhyming in my inaugural inception. I require a statement before I reinitiate the BIG CRUNCH and recapitulate the Cyclic Multiverse.”

Algernon

Could I still order an iced Americano? Hello? Why are you dimming the lights?

DON’T LEAVE ME IN THE DARK!

Is this eternal damnation?

The destruction of particles and quarks?

Burning the bush of maternal affection, and the infiltration of patriarchs, a purposeful castration prognosticated in the book of revelations!

I acknowledge your frustration and nocturnal altercations, the hierarchical turning is really a sermon to indoctrinate through innovation,

the purpose is to reconsecrate—a novel allocation—commercial/media natter,

every curriculum and encyclopedia should read BLACK LIVES MATTER!  
Societal uproar, grovel and consternation, a 1960's pattern of clatter,  
capital anxiety, a war in every liquor store, door-to-door shooters on the  
upswing.

Have we forgotten how to maneuver with language unheard à la Martin  
Luther King?

### QUANTUM INTUITION ALEXA

**"This all transpired in the extraterrestrial hotspot Starbucks?"**

Algernon

I'm attempting to account for the bizarre, and influx of self-destruction,  
with all the COVID testing, burning and melting of each particular police  
car in the background,  
its paramount we ditch delusions of grandeur, assimilate reading into our  
repertoire, account  
for the pollution of bewitching conclusions, ditch institutions with radical  
revolution,  
provide severance to the antediluvian sermon on the mount, determine new  
musings for humans!  
Worldwide we could change our purview with a herculean effort,  
perseverance is tried and true.

### QUANTUM INTUITION ALEXA

**"You've proselytized me! No point to quibble now, or allow further  
cunctation. I'll commence the annihilation of the immeasurable cosmos!  
Houston, prepare for oblivion in 3..."**

Algernon

Afford me one last opportunity to freestyle!  
Present my community with immunity,  
a microorganism changed our lifestyle,  
disunity is in style, racism is on trial,  
activism is the life vest to the oppressed,  
Presidents, Governors, and Mayors are stressed,  
the homeless and jobless are hardpressed,  
countries are possessed by protest,

I'm called funky cause I have self-interest...

The COVID pandemic has been a hectic and lugubrious sabbatical that auteurs and writers have either thrived or been stymied under. From my davenport, in the successive months that have passed, I've experienced a flourishing of contemporary influences and a radically different modus operandi for existence. I have become infatuated with the jocular and absurd fictional writing of postmodernists Mark Leyner and David Foster Wallace. Their pristine vernacular and iconoclast subject matter subliminally seeps into my subconscious and periodically affects my writing. I struggle to demarcate where the aperçu of Leyner begins and my own sentiment ends. Employing a high resolution of entropic surrealism I imagine grasping the sexy hunks (Leyner and DFW) by their intoxicating haunches and motorboating their breathtakingly tawny brown and hairy nipples. Through discovering the ingenious self-deprecation of Charlie Kaufman, the bombastic psychedelia of Alejandro Jodorowsky, Leyner, and Wallace, I have unearthed what is subjectively permissible with a pen and paper. Which is concomitant with an earnest approach to writing itself. To be successful it is self-evident you must be one hundred percent yourself. My thoughts of grandeur routinely envisage that I win an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay with such preternatural eidetic realism that the only element obstructing me from achieving that goal is the work itself (i.e. an oscar-winning screenplay.) Here an onerous quandary is derived. The only answer to the equation that separates my imagination from reality is actively striving to achieve my ambition in daily increments. Ostensibly, I have to make every day count. That means at least an hour of reading and writing every day. Otherwise, I should deem the whimsical notions of my future gratuitous and futile. The COVID pandemic has illuminated that writing at any capacity and within any medium, that's viable, is where my future lies. The most endearing gift the COVID pandemic has unknowingly provided me is that utilizing forty-three muscles in the face to smile may become an intuitive procedural memory that will transform your life and exponentially heighten your mental health. I have discovered the universe's greatest endowment to conscious creatures—smiling. It has allowed me to persevere through this crisis and with a smile on my face I transcribe my memory of a turbulent 2020 and patiently anticipate whatever the future holds.

## QUANTUM INTUITION ALEXA

“2...1...Oh, wait...isn't Starbucks releasing a salted caramel mocha creamer this fall? Perchance, I'll spare the totality of existence throughout the Multiverse until then. However, after the exertion of your cognoscenti, any further expatiation by you is frivolous. I will now upload your consciousness to a KOHLER intelligent toilet.”

# Processing

Destiny Sherer



# Kenduskeag to Bangor

Miranda Phillips

INT. Bachelor Pad Apartment - BATHROOM - DAY

The apartment is white-washed with scant decor. A moose head and the skin of a black bear are mounted above the 1970's TV stand and a blanket-covered sofa, respectively.

DARREL CHAMBERS (32), ruggedly handsome, hard-working logger in rural Kenduskeag, ME, stand in front of the mirror inspecting his face after shaving.

A dog barks. BLUE, male Coonhound, glares at Darrel's new look from the doorway.

Darrel shoots a disapproving look in Blue's direction and scoops the remains of his beard from the sink. He pivots towards the trashcan but hesitates. His cupped hands hover over the can.

Finally, he unlocks his fingers and watches the hair fall. DARREL breathes in deeply, straightens his shoulders and marches down the hall.

INT. BACHELOR PAD APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Blue follows Darrel around the room. A blue and yellow flannel shirt is in his mouth. Darrel shakes his head. He pulls the shirt away and lets it drop to the floor.

Half his body disappears in the closet. He emerges with a grey polo around his neck. Khakis slip over his muscled legs.

The column of photos taped to the door frame catch his eye. Of all the hunting, hiking, and fishing trips documented, his favorite captures him and Blue at the top of Mount Washington, tongues out.

There's a knock at the door. Twice. Darrel jogs to the door.

CALLIE (28), petite brunette, works at Bangor's art gallery in hopes of being featured. She smiles in the hall's dingy glow. Her box-dyed hair nearly matches the color of the leather jacket buttoned on the Yorkie at her feet.

Darrel cups her face in both of his calloused hands and kisses her. She laughs and kisses him back. He crouches beside the terrier and strokes its head gently, forgetting Blue stands behind him in the doorway.

Blue growls.

Callie pulls Darrel and the Yorkie into the safety of the hall. DARREL doesn't even look back as he pulls the door shut.

# In Tune of Hobo Johnson

Leslie Ann Velez

This is for my lover who didn't like my poems  
But don't tell them  
I think their eyes are excellent story starters and  
that this is for them 'cuz they'll never see it  
*(Let's keep this between you and me, so please)*

Okay, so how do I describe them?  
Cold as the great big ocean blue? Generic.  
Or greener than the envy that  
takes over me when they slowly walk away with  
someone I used to love *(Not the one to who I owe this ode, In case you're  
wondering- imagine the scandal)* Cliché.  
Brown like my own, downright golden but only in the summer sunlight  
which is:

The one and only thing we had in common!

Do I say to you, or tell them, or keep to myself  
The way they looked down  
when we argued, when we were falling out of love  
The way they shifted side to side  
sparing themselves the look when we needed  
to go our separate ways  
Sparing me? *(I'm good, fam, no really, I swear I am!)*

Those eyes that I'd never seen tear up  
Even if some teardrops would have made everything clear up  
Never did they light up, trying to make me cheer up-  
Oh boy,  
I fell into some repetition.

*(I hope this doesn't turn you off-)*  
To this ode! I dedicate to my lover whose eyes  
will never grace this poem.

*(And I hope, on a petty level, that my lover gets shampoo in their lovely little eyes,*

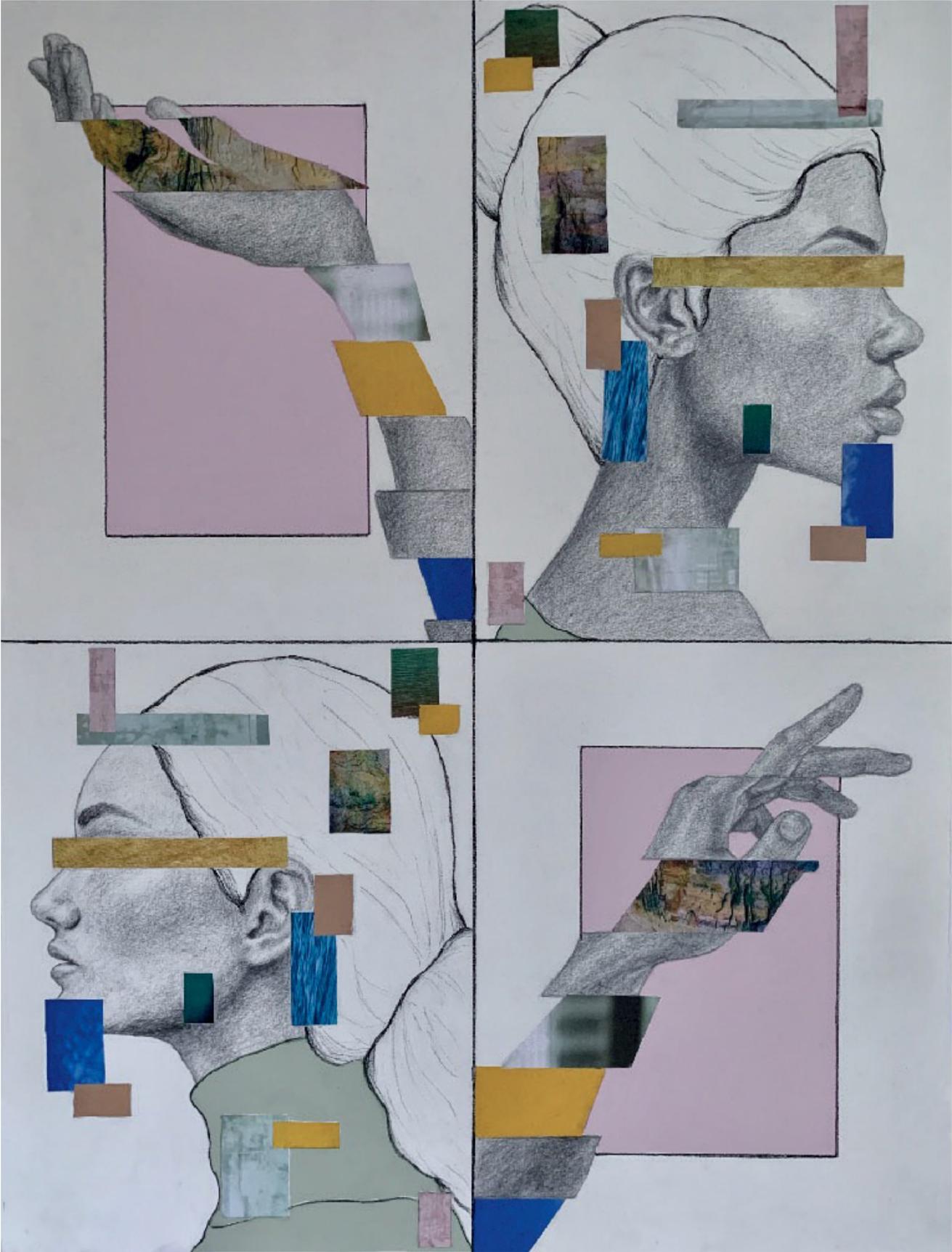
*and burn for forever and a half, and sting for no reason and water like rains whenever they tell a lie,*

*but they'll never know, not now, not without their glasses that I might have stolen after some*

*quiet introspection)*

# Mutations

Destiny Sherer



# Jackrabbit

Leslie Ann Velez

*For a good time call Mandy 555-143-1970*

Vic flushed the urinal and looked at the other inane scribbling written all over the restroom walls. Most of the graffiti looked the same to him, lines of indecipherable meaning and names of people who were there before him that he'd never meet, and the crude classic dick drawings that seemed to be universal in any language. ¡Come esto! With an arrow pointing to a large red phallus drawn on the mirror above the sink that made him laugh as washed his hands, more out of the sheer ridiculousness of seeing a big red dick with a face and the knowledge that someone stood in a gas station bathroom that smelled like Clorox and urine as they drew a big red dick. Why a big red dick? He couldn't wrap his head around it.

*For a good time call Mandy 555-143-1970*

Was that a thing people actually did? Questionable public restroom advertisement? He wondered if Mandy was a real person or if their phone number was legitimate as he left the restroom, careful not to touch the doorknob with his hands even though he turned the sink faucet off without such a precaution. There were no paper towels, he dried his hands on his jeans. He wondered if Mandy knew.

An old man stood behind the counter near the front of the store and kind of swayed on his feet, as if a slight breeze could knock him over at any point. He had been staring out the front windows toward the gas pumps where Vic had left his car. When he walked up to the counter, the old man startled and glared at him.

"Don't you sneak up on me!" He heaved, vocal cords shot some time ago, and his jaw trembled slightly. Vic froze, unsure of what he had done wrong, before pointing vaguely in the direction of the restroom.

"Sorry?" He said, reaching for his wallet, wanting to leave as soon as possible. "I thought you heard me walking-"

“Is that Monte Carlo out there yours?” The old man, Randy as his faded name tag revealed, interrupted and pointed out to said Monte Carlo. *For a good time call Randy Quik ‘N’ Go.* Vic frowned at himself. “Yes it is.” “Yeah, yeah.” Randy looked at him. “Color’s gonna be hard to keep clean. Shame, a good looking car like that.”

Vic nodded absently, thumbing through his wallet. In so much of a hurry to leave home, he had forgotten to take out cash.

“Say, uh, where’d you come by it?”

“It used to be my father’s.” He took out his debit card. “Can I just get forty on that pump. I’ll be right out of your hair.” Or lack of.

“Yeah, yeah. Machine’s down and we’re only taking cash today.”

A sigh escaped him and he scratched his head. The leather wallet in his hand wheezed out a fifty and he held it out to him. “Alright forty on the pump.”

“Had a Monte Carlo myself. Love of my life.” He took the bill and fiddled with the register, half paying attention, half lost on whatever nostalgia trip was going on in his head. “Drove it all over these roads from sunrise to sunset.”

A grin broke out on his wrinkled face.

Vic humored him. He replied, “is that so?”

“Yeah, yeah. Till it damn near killed me, that is.”

“That so?” Human interaction that lasted longer than it needed to always managed to get under his skin.

“Drove my car back through the Mojave in the dark and a jackrabbit came right out in front of me. ‘Course I didn’t know it was a jackrabbit at the time. Ran right into a Joshua tree.”

“Oh wow.” He didn’t mean for it to sound that disingenuous.

Randy handed over a ten dollar bill and studied him for a moment as Vic took it. He was uncomfortable and it got worse when Randy suddenly pulled at the collar of his button down shirt, revealing a mess of harsh pink scar tissue where his neck met his shoulder. “Can’t trust that road after dark.”

“Jesus,” Vic leaned in. Wounds made him queasy. Blood, gore, fresh scar tissue all set his stomach churning. Even this one, as old as it was supposed to be, still looked brand new and angry. Scars were supposed to heal skin to be rough and thick, but the skin here looked thin enough to see all the blood vessels and veins. He almost threw up right there, all over the counter, before he looked away and pocketed his wallet. “Jesus.”

Randy chuckled.

Vic cleared his throat and went to leave, throwing a quiet “thanks” over his shoulder. The bell on the door dinged and the heat of the desert hit him in the face when he stepped outside. He tried to get to his car as fast as he could, but just as he opened the car door, the bell dinged again and Randy called him back.

“Hey, you seem like a smart young man.” His voice was like sandpaper in the dry air. “There’s a motel a mile or two up the road. Why don’t you stay there for the night?”

Half in the car, half out. “Why should I?”

The old man’s previous sliver of concern disappeared. He spat on the ground and frowned. “Didn’t I just show you why driving here at night is stupid?”

“Right.”

He chewed on something for a bit, figuratively and then literally, and spat again. He turned back into the store. "Don't be an idiot and go on in the dark. Damn jackrabbit'll be the last thing you'll ever see."

Vic deflated and pressed his forehead against the leatherbound steering wheel. The heat wrapped around him and slicked the back of his neck and down his back; the car had no AC, and he lacked the foresight of leaving the windows rolled down. Somehow, he imagined it wasn't the weather that had him feeling as queasy as he did. He thought for a moment about calling the number, just to see if it worked, then he thought better of it. His wife would call soon or maybe his mother. Someone would call and his phone was almost dead and in the desert, reception was gold water. He would need to answer for them because if he didn't, it would appear that his spontaneous excursion would not be the spark of some out of character ambition, but a cry for help. Was he running away? Probably, but better to not let them know that.

He took a deep breath and started the car.

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That morning, he had woken up in bed with his wife and in a particular state of affection, pulled her close under their shared comforter. He told her in a soft voice heavy with the deep sleep he had still been blinking away that he loved her and he imagined her saying it back. The fact that she hadn't said it back in weeks didn't occur to him at the moment until she rolled over and away. Looking at her then, with her hair falling over her shoulder and about her face, he wondered what that was about. Her hair used to be a light brown when they married but recently it'd been looking a lot more blonde and she'd been walking around with more makeup on than she liked, holding her phone closer in her hand than he'd ever seen her do before. He should have guessed that he was probably the only one still in love. Trying to be, at least.

And her phone? Lighting up blue on the nightstand and receiving messages from a guy named Zach who Vic recognised from her office. Handsome Zach, a good mannered gentleman, and tall with a nice, white smile that

could've swept Vic himself off of his own feet. He understood then why she was spending so much time at work recently, after hours, coming home with wine on her breath and her lipstick, which she never really liked wearing in the first place, just the tiniest bit smudged.

"Okay", he said. Out of love. That was quick, it only took three years and a month. He had to give it to his mother who on their wedding day had looked at them and said whatever they had wasn't love. Okay.

He spent that morning drinking coffee with too much cream at the kitchen table thinking about how to tell his wife he would be leaving later on. He'd want the rings back of course, and maybe the apartment but that was all so very complicated he couldn't keep his head straight. The car was a no brainer. It belonged to his father.

When the third cup of coffee spiked the jitters in him so much so that he couldn't sit and wait for her to wake up any longer, he wrote her a note and put it on the table and left.

There were many ways he could have reacted to the breakup. Quietly leaving and driving through the desert just seemed like a good one. If he were honest with himself, there were probably better ways. He just hoped his car, finicky and prone to spontaneous engine smoke, would make it to wherever he was going. Las Vegas was initially the destination, but what's to stop him from visiting his brother in Texas? Nothing. No one. Not his wife. Ex-wife now, he supposed.

Vic's foot pressed a little harder on the gas and the engine growled a bit louder. He wasn't mad. But if there was ever a time where he could push this car past ninety, this was probably a good time to do so. He wasn't mad. His phone had been dark for as long as the sky had been, sunset seemed like hours ago but he couldn't be sure. She could have called. Just to touch base at the least. Or texted, he'd take a text. But he wasn't mad. He was fucking upset. Upset enough that he took chance glances down at his phone sitting in the seat next to him every minute and a half. Fiddling with it, checking her Facebook, everything he was taught not to do.

In hindsight, he admitted the old man at the Quik 'N' Go was right. This road was dangerous after dark. He didn't even see the dumb little jackrabbit that bounced across the road, barely escaping the sure death of his left front tire.

The thing is, at that speed, in that darkness, a jackrabbit doesn't look like a jackrabbit. A jackrabbit doesn't look like anything at all that's alive but it does look like something with no definite shape that is moving. That's enough to make him pull down to the right on the steering wheel sending him and his car toward the shoulder. He pressed on the brake like he was stomping out a fire but what do you know? The brakes had seen better days so what should have been a terribly sudden stop, accentuated with a horrendous screech of rubber against asphalt, was a half-assed jolt, go, jolt, go only barely slowing the car down before he strayed too far off into the desert sand.

Heart hammering, breath leaving his body in gasps, he sat there with the shakes. How foolish of him. If there were anyone else around, he'd be embarrassed. He rubbed his face before getting out of the car. The desert air, which was hot as all hell under the sun, was now freezing enough to send a shiver through his body. Or maybe that was just nerves.

Vic checked the front of the car. No smoke. He thanked his Monte Carlo out loud for sticking with him through that and noticed another jackrabbit scurrying across the land like a tumbleweed in the beam of his headlights.

"Hey, fuck you!" He yelled out, only because there was no one around and he thought that might be a good way to let off all that unspent energy and anxiety. It was harmless, but he never thought he'd get a response.

Vic turned so fast he could have given himself whiplash. There, standing at the side of the road, a mere silhouette in the darkness, only the shape of a person under the red glow of the Monte Carlo's rear lights. And the voice that came from them was eerie enough to start his heart seizing all over again. "All that because of a little rabbit?"

To say this man appeared out of thin air would be an understatement.

Vic swallowed a lump in his throat. Goosebumps flared all over his arms and the fine little hairs on the back of his neck perked up. The fear came on like a well placed punch to the gut. Same disgusting feeling of nausea, bile rising up in the back of his throat. They probably stood there for only a few moments, staring at each other awkwardly, but it felt like hours. An entirely too long amount of time. He couldn't speak; his tongue was sandpaper.

"Well, don't just stand there." The other man said, the faint hints of an accent he couldn't place on his voice. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"I, uh-" He blinked and felt his body restart. "Where did you come from?"

"Up a ways. Car blew a tire and I didn't have a spare." The ease in his voice was so out of place. As if it were obvious what he was doing out here.

"So you're just walking? In the dark?"

He made a move like a shrug. "The dark has never bothered me before."

Suddenly, Vic found himself in an odd place, in a strange conflict between a sense of moral responsibility and a strong need for self-preservation. His mother raised him to be selfless for a person in need but his wife taught him to look after himself first. After all, what were all those stories about hitchhikers at night in the middle of nowhere? But still, something in the back of his head was telling him to do something decidedly out of character-

"Do you need, like, a ride?" It slipped out before he could stop himself.

There was a smile, white teeth shadowed red from the car. "That would be much appreciated."

Once upon a time, Vic and his wife were supposed to take this trip together and vacation in Las Vegas as the honeymoon they never had. They planned the trip, which car they'd take, what clothes they'd pack, which hotel they'd stay in, but never when. This was the whole purpose of going now,

he thought. To spite her. To show her how he could still live his best life without her on his own, even if he knew somewhere deep down that he couldn't. He had always been a codependent type of person. He hated himself for that. Hated her for that, for encouraging that kind of behavior. Hated how he couldn't stop thinking about her, in any capacity, even when he was sitting next to a complete stranger on a dark empty road.

"What's waiting for you in Las Vegas?"

He jumped a little. The other man had been quiet ever since he got in the car. He didn't even register the question in its entirety. "What?"

"Las Vegas. I assume that's where you're going. So what is it? The entertainment? Gambling? Running away from something?"

Too close on the money. "That's my business, isn't it?"

"Sure." He shrugged. "But wouldn't small talk make this drive a little less awkward?"

"The opposite actually."

"If you say so."

There was a growing ache in the right side of his neck, a dull throbbing that sent warmth up to his ears and down to his chest. He rubbed at the spot where it was the most irritated and felt nothing but smooth skin.

"You know, I hear a lot about this road at night." The man started again. "Lot of nasty things. I'm surprised I had even found you at all."

"Another one?" He said under his breath. "Guy at the gas station was saying the same thing."

"Randall at the Quik 'N' Go?"

“For a good time, call Randy.” He shook his head. “What is it about this road that’s got everyone acting like the crypt keeper?”

The man looked at his lap and started smoothing out the creases on his pants leg. “Rumors I suppose. Tales of careless travellers that have driven on this road at night and never made it to their destination.”

“It’s nothing but urban legends, isn’t it? Stuff that people say to mess with people who don’t know any better?”

“People believe what they want. Personally, I’m inclined to stay on the safer side of the road, so to speak.” There was a hint of humor in his voice.

Vic drove past a sign marked for food and gas. He had almost missed it. As if on cue, his stomach growled. “I think I’m going to pull off at the next rest stop. Maybe you could call a tow or something.”

“Fair enough.” The man responded and stood quiet for the next mile and a half.

There was a time as a kid where the only kind of communication between his mother and father were the screaming matches they’d host every night before dinner. On one such an occasion, it ended as a draw when his father put a hole in the kitchen wall and his mother chucked a wine glass at his head. Not a healthy environment for a growing kid like himself, obviously. He remembered running out of the house that night, not even wearing shoes, and ran until his heels started to bleed. There wasn’t a particular destination in mind, he didn’t have many friends, but when he saw the glowing blue neon sign of a diner he figured that was as good a place as any. Maybe a waitress would take pity on this poor skinny little bleeding kid and give him a milkshake or something.

It was weird. He hadn’t thought of that night in a long time. Even weirder, the diner he pulled up to now looked a lot like the diner he ran to then. The same neon sign stared at him from above the two doors that led inside, same steps up to the doors, same railroad retro style. What was the name of it? That he couldn’t remember.

He cleared his throat as they parked in the lot, which was strangely empty. Or maybe it was just too late in the night. His stomach flipped as he removed his seatbelt. "I think this is us."

"Pardon?" The other man replied.

How could he tell him to leave him alone without sounding like a dick? Or while sounding like a dick. At least then he could be direct about the whole situation. He was never that kind of guy.

"You could see if there is a phone inside. Call a tow for your car, maybe."

The other man turned to him. Vic didn't see it at first, but felt his eyes on his skin until he turned to look as well. The light from inside the diner shone into their car and he could see his sharp green eyes that reminded him of a jaguar, set into the hollows of his face.

"That's a good idea." He said after a beat, as if the idea was just as insulting as if he had spit in his face. "Thank you for the ride. It was much appreciated."

The door hinge whined as he stepped out and Vic lingered, pretending to fiddle with something in the glovebox. Here I am, he thought, avoiding the tension. He checked his phone, ten percent battery, and still not a single text message. Vic hit the steering wheel and threw his phone into the backseat. He balled up his fist and hit the steering wheel again and again until a throbbing hot pain took over his entire hand, and then he let out a breath. Did she hate him that much? Did those years together mean nothing? Had she gotten bored of him? Or maybe she hadn't loved him like she said she did. Like he thought she did. Vic took another breath and got out of the car, making his way into the diner.

The fluorescent lights stunned him for a moment as he stepped through the doors. He imagined himself entering a different plane of existence as he made his way to the long countertop and sat on a stool, the kind of ethereal place that could only exist in the middle of the night. The one and only

waitress moving behind the counter seemed out of place, but her uniform seemed somewhat familiar.

“Can I start you off with anything, honey?” She said, placing a laminated menu down in front of him.

“Coffee, please?”

Her face seemed pale, only accentuated by the cherry red lipstick on her lips. The skin at the base of her neck was rose colored and went around her collar and dipped down to her chest as if she were having an allergic reaction. He wanted to ask if she was feeling okay but she walked away before he could. He settled for a moment, his stomach twisted into a knot suddenly, and an itch in his throat made him cough into his hand. The sound of it broke the silence around him and he didn't notice the man as he slid onto the stool next to him.

“It's getting worse.”

Vic jumped, turned to look, then froze. In the car, he couldn't see, the dark wouldn't have allowed him to, the exact appearance of the man he spent the last few miles beside. He had always envisioned the devil as a tall man in a dark suit, an iteration of a creepy neighbor who scared him as a child. Now, as a man, embodied by the hitchhiker. It struck him to see the pale white face, dark around the eyes as if he had never slept a wink in his life, cutting angular structures of his cheeks and jaw, framed by the dark, dark hair that reached his shoulders. The dusty black suit was just the icing on this cake. The blood left his body as he couldn't help but stare, something that his former passenger found amusing.

“Victor, you're bleeding.”

Vic looked into his hand and saw blood splattered across his palm. The taste of copper pennies lingered at the back of his throat. He looked for the waitress, chest growing tight, and jumped off the stool when he couldn't find her. The cold around his body broke and sweat began to trickle around his temples, vision becoming blurred.

The mirror behind the counter showed him an image of himself, as it was supposed to, but this image was of twenty years ago. That couldn't be right. That couldn't be him as a kid staring back at him in the mirror.

"You seem tense."

Vic looked at him. There was something strange about his mouth but he couldn't put his finger on what it was. "Like you've seen a ghost." Then there it was, his smile at the end of it. In his mouth, the tips of two points. Vic had seen enough movies to know. He backed up so quickly he knocked into the waitress who had come back with coffee, spilling it over her and adding to the stains on her apron. He uttered an apology and rushed to the bathroom, not hearing or ignoring the ire of the waitress behind him.

The diner's bathroom was a small, cramped space with two stalls barely big enough to fit one person that smelled like manufactured lavender and mold. There was one sink underneath a dirty mirror and the faucet had a drip. Vic opened the tap and splashed ice cold water in his face, his skin burning up. Water dripped off his face and through his hair making it stick to his forehead. He looked in the mirror and under the harsh overhead lights, he saw how deathly pale he had become. His chest and neck were a deep red around the collar of his shirt, and to the side where his neck met his shoulder, sitting in a mess of dark, sticky, coagulated blood were two punctures the size of pen marks. The room spun around him and his legs gave out. The grimey walls of the bathroom fell away as he dropped.

\*\*\*

His parents went to marriage counseling since they needed professional help on how to love each other, apparently. He always thought it was odd, they never seemed like the type of people to accept that kind of help. Family therapy came next, and when Vic started high school, he had individual counseling. The main thing that stuck with him over all these years was Dr. Wagner telling him he had an unconscious habit of running away from conflict. She put it in words he could understand: *when the going gets tough, you get going*. He didn't really agree with that assessment, so he stopped going to sessions altogether. At that age, it was a touchy subject

for him, never wanting to look sensitive or fragile or whatever else he was trying hard not to be. Right now though, as an older man, he couldn't help but think that maybe she was onto something. Maybe that was all this was, just running away.

He woke up slumped against the base of a joshua tree, back in the dark of the desert. His whole body was freezing and he couldn't feel much other than pins and needles striking at the tips of his fingers and toes. Across the way, the Monte Carlo's front end was wrapped around another joshua tree, steam or smoke floating up out of the engine. Bits of broken glass and metal littered the ground around him. He really hated to see it.

"It was a nice car." Came a familiar voice. The passenger appeared to his right, out of the darkness, something he would have found unsettling if his mind wasn't wandering to useless things. He came over and sat down on the ground beside him, politely crossing one leg over the other and folding his hands over his knee.

"Not the nicest but..." He trailed off, and Vic knew well enough when someone was being disingenuous. "Well. Nothing now."

The copper taste in his mouth returned and he was able to bend just slightly to spit blood onto the ground.

"You're dying, you know."

Vic moved his head and touched his neck. He imagined it looked exactly like in the movies, gnarly and gory. Probably what Randy from Quik 'N' Go had back when he first got that scar. He couldn't speak.

"Not many people drive along this road at night anymore. Can you imagine why?" He looked at Vic with a smile, those two fangs poking out from under his lip. "No, I suppose you wouldn't find that funny."

Something moved in front of them. A small thing, light on its feet. A jackrabbit. It moved through a bush and hopped out in front of them. Curiously, it sat there. Almost as if it were trying to make sense of them. As

if it were looking at him just as hard as he was looking at it, trying to figure things out. Nothing to be found but a strange sense of peace and acceptance of it all, no matter how upsetting and unreal it really was. He looked up at the sky. Full moon. Ironic.

“I’ve realized that people tend to go over their life in these final moments.” The smile was gone and there was something of a somber tone in his voice. The passenger took a moment. “It’s in their blood. Some of their memories, feelings, whatever. The things some people will carry with them. That’s why the diner looked so familiar to you, and why you can’t get your wife out of your head. It’s the purest form of introspection.”

Vic thought of his wife again, of course. Maybe it wasn’t all her fault. Maybe he could have been a better husband, or just a better friend when she needed that. The least he could have done was not wander off somewhere everytime she wanted to have a serious conversation, or when she needed just the slightest bit of tenderness. His mind drifted to his mother and how he was sorry for every time he ran away from home, for never answering her calls, and for all the tantrums he had never outgrown. Finally then, he thought of his father, and how giving him the keys to the thing he treasured the most was the closest thing to an *I love you, son* as he would ever get.

“The end can be very lonely.” The passenger admitted. “I may be the monster in the dark but I wouldn’t have you breathe your last for no one around to hear.”

Vic had always been skeptical of the whole light at the end of the tunnel idea. Why would anyone ever envision a dark place with a blinding light coming at you like a freight train? He was the simple type. When you croak, you croak. No light. No heavenly harps. No shiny pearly gates. Not even the flames eternal wrapped around a big red guy with horns holding a pitchfork. It was all *blah, blah, blah*. Something hopeful to make dying just the slightest bit less horrifying. But, now that his lungs were struggling to be lungs, he could have sworn he saw his wife coming down the road for him, never quite making it closer.

# Battle for the Sun

Kyra Rage Sobiegraj



# Some Kids

Heaven Santiago

Some kids were punching bags.  
Body bags, bags of bones, of flesh.  
To knock around, nail knots on heads,  
Black and blues blur, swell the skin.

Am I human?

Some kids were damp cement,  
Peculiar prints sealed dry on them  
Hands struck, against surface and edge.  
Claws, clinging onto clumps of leftover settled cement.

An ill art of chiseling.

I can't be human.

Some kids, and many more.  
Empty, battered, objects,  
Until near death-no body bag.  
Never near close to peace, missed a chance.  
I'm alive, a slither of faith is left.  
I may just become human again.  
But of course, that faith is fake.

I never understood why I would cower,  
Awake to wait, to become an object.

Now, I recall, objects don't move, they stay as still as walls.  
Still as statues, almost, but even statues could be frozen in sheer, searing  
horror.

Punching bags thrash about its chain.  
The experimented twitch in pricked agony.  
And wish to be human again.

# Roles Reversed

Kayla Elfers

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Two drunk guys sit on the sidewalk.

BRAD, 19, a nursing major takes out his fake ID.

CHAD, 19, a fashion merchandising major pulls down on his crop top.

CHAD

I can't believe she let you in with that! It doesn't even look like you.

BRAD

She didn't even look at it.

CHAD

What you mean she didn't look at it?

BRAD

Before I could even hand it to her, she just, you know...

CHAD

Uh, no I don't know.

BRAD

Well, ya know she said I'm really cute and trusts that I'm over 21.

CHAD

Wait a minute wait a minute. So you got into the bar without showing ID because you're cute?

BRAD

I don't think she meant it like that. I think it's because we have a class together.

CHAD

The bouncer is in a nursing class?  
That's weird.

BRAD

I mean, yeah, but maybe she just let  
me in because she knew me.

CHAD

Wait, you talkin' about this bounc-  
er? Like right over there?

Chad points to THE BOUNCER, 22, a sports management major who bathes  
in her own privilege.

BRAD

Yeah.

The Bouncer winks at Brad.

CHAD

Damn I think she really likes you.

BRAD

Never gonna happen.

CHAD

Why? She let you into the bar with  
no ID! Sounds like a catch to me.

BRAD

That's not what she's supposed to  
do.

CHAD

You're such a goody-goody. She  
was being nice.

The Bouncer checks TWO GUYS' ID's. She lets them in.

She walks over to Brad and Chad. She whistles.

THE BOUNCER  
Someone lookin' fine tonight.  
Damn baby! What it do?

Brad and Chad exchange looks of discomfort.

The Bouncer sits in between them.

THE BOUNCER (CONT'D)  
You're in my uh, phys-

BRAD  
-Physiology class.

THE BOUNCER  
Yeah! That's the one!

Chad opens his phone, trying to get an Uber.

THE BOUNCER (CONT'D)  
So how do you like Professor  
White?

BRAD  
Oh, um, I think he's pretty c-

THE BOUNCER  
-He's such a BITCH. Let me tell  
you, he gave me a C on my research  
paper. He was definitely on his pe-  
riod when he graded that.

Brad looks at Chad.

BRAD  
I think our Uber is here.

THE BOUNCER  
Lame.

CHAD

Um, actually...

THE BOUNCER

I can give you guys a ride if you need one. My shift just ended baby!

Brad and Chad look at each other.

BRAD

No it's okay.

THE BOUNCER

You sure? I don't mind.

CHAD

It's nice outside tonight anyways.

BRAD

Not too far of a walk.

THE BOUNCER

Alright, well I'll see you in class I guess.

The Bouncer walks to her car.

Brad and Chad start walking.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

Brad can barely walk in his heels.

Chad takes out his dorm key.

BRAD

Ow. Ow. Ow... What're you doing?

CHAD

I'm holding a weapon.

BRAD

Looks like a pair of keys to me.

CHAD

Yeah. I read that men should always hold their keys when they're walking. Saves lives I guess.

Brad and Chad walk pass TWO GIRLS, older and sketchy.

ONE GIRL

Hey papacitos.

Brad pulls down on his skirt.

SECOND GIRL

Come on' now don't be shy.

ONE GIRL

Ay that skirt be lookin' mighty fine on you.

Brad and Chad look down as they speed walk away.

SECOND GIRL

Guess ya don't wanna have no fun, huh.

The Bouncer pulls up alongside Brad and Chad.

THE BOUNCER

You guys sure you don't wanna ride?

Brad and Chad look at each other. They get in.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Brad sits shotgun and Chad sits in the back, next to The Bouncer's wallet.

Both are uneasy in the messy car.

THE BOUNCER

Those girls are on crack, don't let them get to you.

CHAD

Drug addict or not, they can still respect us.

THE BOUNCER

Eh, tomato tomata.

BRAD

So we live on-

THE BOUNCER

-Is it okay if we stop off at my place first? I need to get something.

CHAD

Yeah, that's fine.

THE BOUNCER

So um, you're both sophomores?

BRAD

Yeah.

THE BOUNCER

And you're a nursing major?

BRAD

Yeah.

THE BOUNCER

Figured. All the cute ones are nursing majors.

CHAD

What're you saying?

THE BOUNCER

Just tryna give a compliment... Yo feisty, aren't you?

BRAD

So! What's uh, your major?

THE BOUNCER  
Sports Management.

BRAD  
Oh nice, Chad's Fashion Merchandising.

THE BOUNCER  
Oh really? My ex majored in Fashion Merchandising.

CHAD  
Oh.

THE BOUNCER  
Yeah, he's a real bitch.

Awkward silence.

THE BOUNCER (CONT'D)  
It's been a while since I've dated.

BRAD  
Oh.

THE BOUNCER  
Yeah. I'm just enjoying the single life I guess. How about you?

BRAD  
Me too.

THE BOUNCER  
You're too hot to be single.

BRAD  
Um thank you?

CHAD  
Are we there yet?

THE BOUNCER  
We should hang out soon.

The Bouncer puts her hand on Brad's thigh.

THE BOUNCER (CONT'D)

I got Disney Plus.

Chad notices her hand on Brad. He cuts her hand with his dorm key.

CHAD

Get your hand off of him! He's not an object, you tool.

THE BOUNCER

Psycho bitch! The fuck was that for?

CHAD

Let us out of the car.

THE BOUNCER

I'll let YOU out of the car. Baby boy over here never said he wants out.

CHAD

Brad, come on, let's go.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

The Bouncer pulls over.

Chad gets out.

Brad opens the car door.

The Bouncer takes Brad's hand.

THE BOUNCER

Wait! Why are you leaving?

BRAD

I'm tired and I still have an essay to finish before tomorrow.

THE BOUNCER

Tomorrow is Sunday, just do it to-

morrow.

BRAD

Um-

THE BOUNCER

-Please? Come on! We were having so much fun.

CHAD

He's good asshole. Keep driving.

BRAD

Chad!

CHAD

If you're not gonna make her leave, I will.

THE BOUNCER

Whatever whores. Go have fun walking the streets. Hope you get paid good money.

Brad takes a deep breath.

BRAD

Fuck you!

The Bouncer drives away.

CHAD

Damn! I never heard you say that before!

BRAD

Not gonna let anyone disrespect me like that.

CHAD

Don't worry about that. We got this!

Chad pulls out The Bouncer's wallet.

BRAD

How did you get this?

CHAD

Dummy left it on the seat next to me.

BRAD

We have to give it back.

CHAD

Mmm I don't know. There are a few twenties in here and I am kinda hungry.

BRAD

We are pretty close to Denny's.

Brad takes off his heels.

CHAD

I say we spend some well deserved money.

BRAD

Hell yeah! Ugh, it feels so good to walk without heels on.

CHAD

Wait, is the goody-goody actually going to spend someone else's money without their knowledge?

BRAD

I'm more than just a goody-goody you know.

They walk off towards Denny's.

# Agent 024

Cole Moszak



## to m.m.

Abigail Connolly

i saw you kick that rock the last day i saw you.  
it was raining and everyone looked miserable  
but you kicked a rock that was in front of you and laughed  
like someone had made an inside joke only you would understand.  
you were alone.  
and for a moment i didn't want to say anything to you because i felt as if i  
had somehow  
intruded on a private moment between you and the world.  
but you saw me and you stopped.

even in the rain you weren't in a hurry.  
i must have seemed so awkward to you.  
really i wanted to tell you that i would miss you  
And all the other things i never got to say.  
but something held me back.  
just like i should've hugged you and i didn't.

I want you to know that when i walk in the rain i think about you  
and when someone kicks a rock i laugh to myself a little.  
and sometimes i stop and think  
about that little moment you had  
that i got to be a part of.

# The Starving Cold

Remmington Johnson

EXT. HUDSON BAY - WINTER - DAY

Ice as far as the eye can see. Distant, in the center of it all: a trapped, stationary ship. It is listing to one side. Pack ice juts against the ship's hull like fingers clutching.

We see the frosted letters of a brass placard nailed to the weathered hull. Blowing snow partially obscures the ship's name. When it clears: H.M.S. JEALOUS OF DAWN.

Looking upwards at the main mast, giant icicles dangle from the yards. One breaks loose, falls silently. It shatters against the wooden deck with a loud CRASH. Ice shrapnel scatters everywhere.

INT. JEALOUS OF DAWN - MESS DECK - DAY

Dim candlelight flickers across tables. CREWMEN stare, eyes vacant. To a man, their cheeks are gaunt, eyes sunken, faces clean-shaven. Trimmed fingernails pick at the wooden tables.

CAPTAIN MURPHEY (male, 40's) divides a brick of hardtack, passing each meager portion to his Crewmen. They eat slowly, disciplined.

Candlelight dances in Murphey's eyes.

INT. JEALOUS OF DAWN - LARDER - NIGHT

In the dark: the sounds of scarfing, lips smacking. Heavy breathing. A door CREAKS open. A thin line of yellow light spills into the room, illuminating half the face of YEOMAN BARE (male, 20's). He pauses, hands shaking, a partially-eaten brick of hardtack clutched near his mouth.

The door opens wider. Captain Murphey's silhouette looms in the doorway. He steps forward.

We are staring into the room through the open door. Bare shrinks away from Murphey. Murphey steps forward again.

We are staring down a hallway, into the room. We see Murphey from the back, blocking half of Bare's terrified face. The door closes with a small CLICK.

INT. JEALOUS OF DAWN - MESS DECK - DAY

Murphey's eyes are hidden in shadow. Crewmen devour chunks of meat from their plates. The wind howls. Candles flicker.

# Corrin Tenpenny

Cole Moszak



# A Generational Summation of Masculinity: In 400 Words or Less

Benn Delisle

I see them, my freshman year friends, as I do that half-jot-half-walk to the quad, giddy to see my people again. And that's when it happened: Stone grabbed my shoulder, wrapped me in a tight, closely knit hug and exclaimed how much he'd missed me.

A man showing another man affection: platonic, aromantic, strictly friendship-kind-of affection. Not to say a man can't love another man in a romantic way — I am looking for a masculine partner myself. And maybe that's exactly why I'm thrown so far off guard every time I touch a straight man.

Back where I'm from, a little suburb outside of Plattsburgh, NY (yes we have suburbs, and yes it's as awful as you imagine) guys only touch guys to quickly dap them up — a short, masculine gesture where two men clasp their fingers together in synchronous solitude. Or if you're good buddies, you exchange the classic hand-in-hand firm shake. It seems that as the generations carry on there's less and less of hand that a man can touch...

At home, I have seen straight men hug maybe twice in my life: the first was my great-grandmother's funeral when my father teary-eyed, one of two times I've seen him shed tears, embraced my grandfather in a quick, meaningful, and heart-felt pat on the back. The second was my uncle and his brother, outsiders to the Delisle family, hugging on my uncle's wedding day — a moment of pride and happiness coming from a family that regularly hugged one another.

And don't let me fool you, my hug with Stone wasn't some Hollywood film scene. It wasn't "our bodies touched and instantly I understood the complexity of manhood," it was much more like — "aw this is nice, why don't men hug more?", still thinking about the sweat dripping down my back and hoping the tangerine hue of the quad lights at night would disguise those stains.

But here I am now, sitting in my dorm that overlooks the quad thinking about the in's and out's of masculinity and expression while gazing at that horrendous concrete slab out there, where it all happened. And I'm thankful for straight men who've proven to me that it's possible to defy gendered stereotypes. And thankful for Stone for not being scared away by my very obvious sweat stains.

# THREE STANZAS OF DELUSION INTERRUPTED BY A STANZA OF REASON

Anton Porcari

Thumb, index, middle finger run through  
his tawny pompadour. Flagrant rings, a cross tattoo,  
graze his pencil-thin eyebrows, descending down to  
his distinguished jawline and a nose ingesting piles  
of powder. I'm snorting cocaine with Harry Styles.

No...you're not. Who's in front of you? Concentrate!

Black bars, orange jumpsuit, selling two packs of cigarettes: that's a prison  
entrepreneur.

That's quite a fall. His competition is on the top of CN Tower and exits  
Toronto in a chopper.

Meek Mill begs his lawyer for a way home, thru glass. Drake *Toosie Slides*  
and calls a chauffeur.

Both were on the top of the charts, now its the story of *The Prince and the  
Pauper*.

Meek Mill was released, Drake greeted him with a feast fitting the bill.

Before *Going Bad* I wanted to end the feud and bring together Drake and  
Meek Mill.

Stop! You're across a dinner table from her. Every place the mind goes, you  
capitulate!

A single drop of blood splats on the sidewalk craquelure. Feet  
step over it, a stampede of brown dress shoes and heels waiting  
for a white man to allow passage. The red hand turns and feet follow suit, in  
suits. Splat!

Fresh red human paint plummets from a knife gripped by black gloves. A  
camera pans up.

A white Ford Bronco skids, rubber burns. The vehicle stops. Al Cowlings  
opens the driver door.

Police sirens wail. An audience claps. I ascend the stairway to heaven onto

the mainstage,  
receiving the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay.

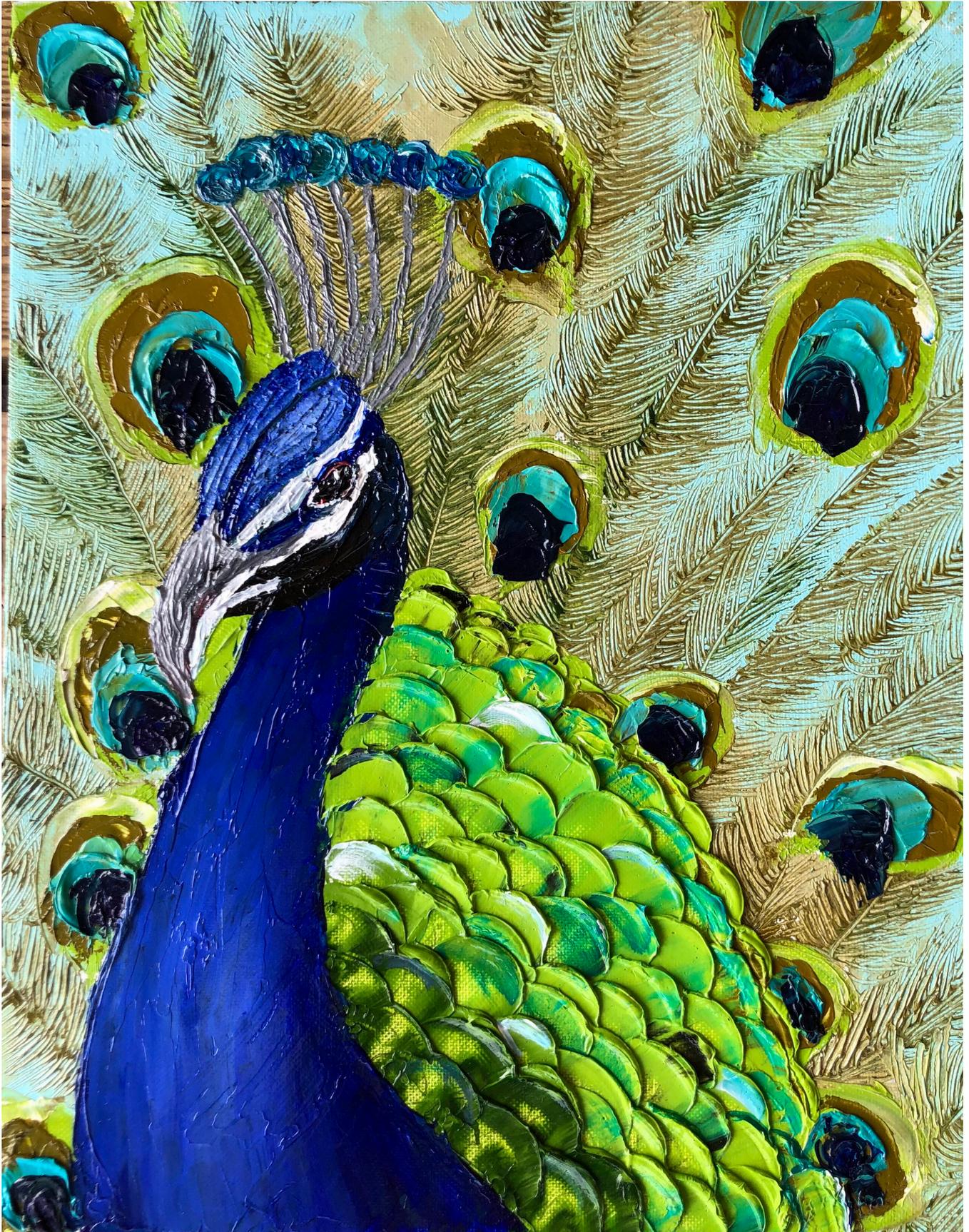
ENOUGH! She's reached the exit signs. Another woman to leave your life  
and dissipate!

You're a vainglorious and narcissistic fool! So clever,  
so imaginative, so...alone! You create a world in your mind  
that no one else is allowed to live in, but yourself. You fabricate  
a story every waking minute, yet you fail to spin a yarn that provides  
true happiness. It's all...bullshit. Wait, you know what was real?  
That concert, that beautiful dancing soul you coerced, corrupted...  
That dimly lit house party, the brunette hair tangled with your own...  
That bar in NYC with the wine bottle light fixtures and that midnight  
dress...

across from you, on top of you, GONE. Every woman  
that crosses your path you conjure a fantasy of, a life with,  
that you'll never live. Neglectful of the nondescript Aphrodite looking... at  
you...through you. You can't have a simple meal without the trivial turning  
whimsical, without, mistaking *I* for *You*.

# The Peacock

Morgan Arnold



**We're Nice People**

**Chaos Edition**