

THE CRUCIBLE

Earlham's Literary & Visual Art Publication

THE CRUCIBLE

Volume IV, New Style

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“Penland 2018” by Hannah Roman
acrylic on panel | 6.75 x 10 x .75 in

Acknowledgments

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Friends,

At the end of it all, what will we have to hold onto but each other, our unwavering gazes looking for answers in the eyes of those around us? What will we have to do but create? Works of art are how we navigate unfamiliar landscapes, and with the world encompassing each of us and all of us changing so rapidly, the ability to create something tangible is vital. Artifacts of the present are how we must persist.

Within the pages you hold in your temporary hands is the work of many hours spent under the shadow of the looming end. This work reflects the persistent idea that we are constantly seeking in others what we cannot find in ourselves. The cultural climate demands our attention and labor, but only in the ways that serve to perpetuate that existing climate. In reading this publication, we are asking you to consider what it means to be exactly where you are in the moment that you are here. We implore you to think about who is around us everyday, who we extend empathy towards, and who gives it back to us.

Our desire for this publication is that it is a break from the insistence of the world in which we exist. We hope that you may find a moment inside the featured work to stand still. We want to give space to recognize the hands that hold our communities together, included are the hands that helped bring *The Crucible* to life.

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We want to extend specific gratitude toward our advisor, Tessa Yang, whose illumination has allowed for this publication to be the artifact that it is. We would also like to thank every individual that submitted, read, created, contemplated, and otherwise contributed to and for this work. We could not have done it without each of you.

Love,
The Editors

The Island
Ian Murray

Fording the oxbow, early in the afternoon
A bluegreen witch's cauldron in the earth
waist high, all swirling, shimmering
Swarms of insects overhead, like Exodus
Yards to the respite of the island
A broad pebble beach without an inland
Where time unspools itself like the
roots snaking through the scattered stones
Whose heads trail off into the water
Where the ground is littered with fossils-it's like
Finding sand in the Sahara
Bend down:- a horn coral?
Or the petrified fang of a monster now sleeping?
Brachiopod?- or a little geisha fan
substituting stone for silk?
And in the center of the island, where the rapids can be heard
making their angry course- a conglomerate slab of
Shells, sponge impressions, a paused movie about an ocean bed,
Is lying, for the taking, under the bough
of white birch arms colored like an ossuary
It's heavy, but with two hands, one could lift it, and
Groaning, cross the oxbow again and use it as a mantelpiece
Like an antique dictionary of life with an ornate cover-
Or a funerary urn for the sea lilies.
Yes- it would even be easy with two sets of arms,
But you, in admiration of your own stillness
might also think, back against the tree trunk
Whether, at 400 eons,
It has really had a long enough rest to justify disturbing it

When Spring Comes

Leah Johnson

I will wear dresses
everywhere.
If I dare,
I will not shave my legs.
My hair
will be long again,
I will be emphatically
mammalian.

Somewhere, there's a story:
a mother bear
gives birth, unconscious
of pain in her hibernation.
Her young are like knobs,
unformed until
she wakes
and her loving gives them shape.

All this starts early,
in March, before the thaw
really sets in. Yes,

I will wear dresses
when frost becomes mud,
when flesh becomes cubs,
when anything is possible.



Wildflowers
Ellen Johnson

watercolor, ink, colored pencil | 3.75 x 5.5 in



fell
Sage Phillips

chalk pastel on butcher paper | 4 x 3 ft

Her toes curl around the soft soil. She decides that she likes dirt when it's under grass. *Dirt in the streets is just gross.* An ant crawls across her foot and she watches it for a few moments before losing interest and staring up at the sky.

Each breath brings a surge of cold air that burns her nose and throat as it goes down, but the coolness and freshness of it all floats around in her chest nicely, so she keeps swallowing down mouthfuls. She didn't have that back home, either. No comforting chill, no sparkle in the air.

A whisper of wind suddenly disturbs the soft fabric of her dress. She presses it down to her skin, annoyed; she loves the pink pattern, but it doesn't fit well. *This is all Caroline has to offer, and you must be kind to Caroline,* she whispers to herself.

Come on inside, Margaret, a motherly voice sounds behind her, the words almost lost in the now raging wind. She jumps a little, startled by the voice; it is not her mother's, nor her sister's. *No, they are home, across the sea, in the hospital, tending to men who are hurt, and whom I am jealous of, because they get to keep Mum and Janet and I am all the way over here until the men stop getting hurt.* The girl gives up on controlling the dress, letting it billow all it pleases.

You'll catch your death from rain if you don't come inside soon. Just look at that sky—it's sure to start crying any second now! Margaret allows a small smile at this. Ever since she got here, Caroline says silly things like *the sky is crying* instead of *it's raining*, or *baloney!* when one of the kids says they brushed their teeth before bed but their toothbrush is drier than the bread they have for breakfast.

Caroline stands in the chipped, wooden doorway, staring out at Margaret. *She looks like a feather, what with her twirling dress and all,* she thinks, and feels a twinge of guilt for not having anything that fits her properly.

She had gone to town hall not long after September 1st, 1939, expecting to take home one child in an effort to help out the Brits; she couldn't stand the words *I'll take that one*, spoken to officials while pointing at a child in the line-up. She asked the five saddest looking ones if they'd like to come home with her and her husband. They nodded silently.

I'm coming, Caroline, Margaret calls out, but she doesn't move an inch. The clouds look glum and dismal. *Caroline says the sky is going to cry and I know that is silly, but Caroline is nice, she let me stay outside after everyone else went in because she said it's okay if I eat later than them and Mum always does that when I'm playing with Ann, well, at least until Ann got evacuated, too.* Margaret finally turns towards Caroline.

Her accent is silly, but she says ours are silly, too, and she lets the older kids listen to the radio because they're worried about home. Margaret takes one last look up, her eyes the same color as the sky without clouds. She walks back to the open door, Caroline moving aside to let her in, saying, *Here, wipe your feet off with this, then go wash them. We can eat after, we have sandwiches.*

Margaret nods, dragging the ratted cloth across her skin, taking it with her

to the bathroom. She scrubs her feet and hands clean. Looking at herself in the mirror, she gently touches her hair. She, and several other children, had gotten lice on the boat ride to America. They cut her hair when they landed, and it's only gotten longer than John's last week. He pokes fun at her for it, but Caroline told him to stop.

The other children have already eaten and are scrabbling about in the two rooms they have upstairs. Margaret is glad for the quiet she will have to eat, not getting crumbs from other's food in her lap.

Caroline is sitting at the dining room table. The sky is getting ready to start crying, the thunder sniffing before the deluge of tears. They eat in silence, other than the whimpering of the sky. Margaret's tongue is sticking to the roof of her mouth from the peanut butter. Caroline has accidentally given her extra, despite her saying that they would need to ration their food more with all the children. Margaret isn't going to tell Caroline how much peanut butter she has, but she thinks Caroline did it purposefully.

I'd like to talk to you more, Margaret thinks, as Caroline begins to wash the dishes. The older children say home isn't doing well; they are allowed to listen to news about Europe, but ever since September 7th, 1940, the radio is turned off if London is mentioned. They think this means there is something Caroline doesn't want them to know. *I'd like to talk to you because you have the same hair as Mum and she lets me comb it sometimes and I want to know if I can comb yours because I want to comb*

14 *Mum's but I don't know when I can go home and I don't know if I have a home to go to.*

Can we read a story when you are done? Margaret asks, and Caroline looks over her shoulder, surprise in her face for a moment before melting into a smile, the wrinkles at the corner of her eyes making her warmer. She leaves a few dirty dishes for later and says, *Of course, babe. Maybe it will make the sky happy again.*

Maybe, and Margaret smiles back. She thinks *maybe Mum is waiting for me.*

Forgiveness is a daily exercise
I must endure
A regimen to mend the cracks in my rib cage

Each morning I forgive my mother
For the phantoms she left behind my eyelids
For the traces of her that linger in rooms she never stepped foot in
For giving birth to me

Each afternoon I forgive my father
For leaving the kindling of one fire only to step into a burning house
For neglecting to teach me his native tongue
Even as we traced the barbed fence that his accent encased around our family
For losing his tenderness

Each night I forgive my ancestors
For not transcribing the language of the waters
For not committing the voice of the trees to memory
For not charting the steps of the sun into melodies only our bloodline could sing
For leaving me here
between two worlds that don't want me

Each moment I forgive myself
For corrupting my Eden with the seeds of resentment
For tucking anger beneath rocks until it turned the soil red and bitter
For everything

Forgiveness is a daily exercise
I must endure
A regimen to mend the cracks in my ribcage
An effort to be made whole



bloom
Saskia Bailey-de Bruijn
digital collage

Optical error in 2, too
little clarity, insanity
of the pure, sure
reality of ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- - Eye,
metal, glass integrated, assimilated
with flesh; fleshed
out in the family - familiar,
enmeshed as ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- ; sigh,
mesh to a whole, Holy
Cow! holes
were left - left
not right is ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- .Why
Ohio? oh shortcuts, cut
to short circuitry, centuries
of poor traits - portrait
of malevolent ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- , fried
normalcy regulator, regurgitator
of brutality: brewing
tics, twitches; switch
him off! that ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- .
->Brother<- gorging in the parking lot; lots
of big brothers smoking, choking
back beer at 13 - seen
as atom, the ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- . binary
disrupted by absence since
the ->Dad<- is gone.
->Sister's<- wanton alienation: combinations,
inputs for the ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- . bi-polar,
->Mother's<- depression depressurizing
the network - wetwork
for the function: conjunctions
processed by ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- . engorged
with systemic regret, reset
the connection, vivisection
to find the cause.
.Pause.
apply the gauze to the ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<- . signs,
gaze for the future - suture
applied; complied to butcher. injurer
of old, silence; wince
and forge the ->Cyborg<!-->Boy<-

Skeleton Dust

Becca Moore

I heard that in cremation
When the bones don't fully disintegrate,
They use a hammer to grind them down to
Skeleton dust.
I bet you were too tough for the fire.

You made one final piece of music,
The rhythm of hammer to bone
Sending you back into the Earth.

18

I hope they played Tchaikovsky in the morgue.
Your dusty bones twitching to the way
Your fingers used to fly
Over little piano hammers

You once told us over Christmas dinner
That we need not be sad when you were gone.
I'm sorry I still cried that day,
When the organ played "Morning Has Broken"
You would have played it better.



19

Andrej
Masha Morgunova
oil on canvas | 25 x 25 in

Dent de lion

Bea N'Daou

My mother is not all there.
Her mind wanders like dandelion seeds and I'm left rooted to the ground,
unable to follow.
I am left with the naked bud where she should be blooming,
I am left with the memory of who she used to be.
Seeds that have flown cannot come back again.
And a memory cannot raise a child.



21

I am over here and you are over there
Lilly Hartman

earthenware and underglaze | 10 x 8 in

Back-Scratcher Man

Anna Mullin

Everybody knew back-scratcher man. Us kids most of all. After lunch we would rush from school out to the edge of the wildflower field and wait for him to walk by. He always walked backwards, he always wore a white loincloth and sandals, and he always had a back-scratcher. We would wave to him as he walked by, a couple kids would yell hellos. He never waved back, and never spoke, but we liked him anyway.

Once, we saw him carrying a loofah. We all wondered if it was a sign. Perhaps, John Marco proposed, he was trying to communicate! But it turned out it was just a loofah.

“Everybody has to change it up every once in a while,” Bobby Thomas said. We all agreed.

Everybody knew back-scratcher man except my father. We were asked to write a report on who we wanted to be when we grew up. An assignment dull enough that I would have forgotten it if not for my father bursting through the doors of our classroom waving my paper wildly in the air.

“Where is the teacher?” he demanded breathlessly.

The teacher leaned back deeply into her rocking chair.

“Can you tell me who this back-scratcher man is? Or why my daughter wants to be him?”

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There were seven reasons why I wanted to be back-scratcher man. They were outlined in detail in my report.

#1- Because Back-scratcher man is old. I would like to be old.

#2- Because Back-scratcher man is always on time. This is important.

#3- Because Back-scratcher man has a beard.

This was apparently as far as my father had gotten before arriving at the school.

“There is an old bearded man who regularly visits this school?” He hissed, “Without clothing?” He jabbed at the page furiously.

Everybody knew back-scratcher man except for our teachers. After my father visited our school we were told to stay inside for recess. Every recess. The staff gossiped in shocked voices in the hallway as the shop teacher forced us to watch videos of his favorite online carpenter Stubby Nubs. “Where safety used to be our number one priority!” Stubby Nubs proudly proclaimed as he waved his mutilated appendage.

Over the next weeks I would learn more than I ever wanted to know about chainsaws, hacksaws, chop-saws, scroll-saws, and every other kind of saw that could potentially amputate a finger. The video was loud, and involved a lot of sawing blocks of wood. It was loud enough to drown out the teacher’s conversation in the hallway. We all wondered if this was intentional.

Everybody knew back-scratcher man except the police. A coalition

was initiated by the parent-teacher organization. They put signs up around the school that the third graders had to sound out for us. They said things like “Don’t talk to strangers” and “Don’t trust men in loincloths.” Emily Paris found this quite confusing, because as she told us, her parents had always said that a man in a loincloth saved everyone’s souls some years ago, and we all found that pretty interesting.

“Do you think back-scratcher man can walk on water?” a kid asked. We figured probably not after back-scratcher man was apprehended at the edge of a lake by no fewer than 20 armed officers.

“If he could then he would have walked right across the lake and gotten away,” Reagan Thompson reasoned. We all nodded.

Everybody knew back-scratcher man, except he wasn’t back-scratcher man anymore.

We were finally let out for recess after 17 days of seclusion. Everyone waited by the edge of the field, wondering if we would ever see him again. A couple kids got bored and tried to see who could throw crabapples the furthest. Sally Watts found out that she could put her leg behind her head. She also found out that she couldn’t remove it. A circle of boys wove clover into bracelets while Barbara Rookwood pretended to be a dog.

I was the first to spot him. A figure appeared from the distance. he was dressed in a grimy t-shirt, cropped jeans, and brown sandals. He walked impossibly slowly, as if he was not used to the movement. “It’s back-scratcher man!” I shouted. But he had no back-scratcher, and no loincloth. He didn’t even walk backwards.

“What do we call him now?” Liam Jenson asked.

“What’s that?” Somebody pointed to his feet. “It’s flashing!” Somebody added. We were all very impressed.

And even though ankle bracelet man wore a grimy t-shirt and cropped jeans— even though he didn’t carry a back scratcher anymore, and never waved, and never spoke— even though police sirens wailed somewhere in the distance, we liked him anyway.



Chefchaouen, Morocco
Illianna Gonzalez-Soto

digital photograph | 3072 x 4096

we no longer say goodnight
Maddeline Wallace

wait
up, we are
shifting,
changing,
we no longer say good night.

our
byes, roll from
lips,
from tongues,
and the bitter taste subsides.

truth: I
was fine on my own
without you:
fine
alone.

What does that mean?

that half of what
comes out
is never even
half
of what I think.

sour breath
ethan pickett

nervous fingers dig into knotted, flayed, scarred skin belonging to nothing but a heap of guilt-driven actions turned worse by the inability to say no. i don't want it but he insists, and— altered, strong, and manipulative— isn't used to refusal. won't listen to things he doesn't want to hear, built a home inside a space full of fear, doubled-down walls with ignorance and competitive oppression. imposed body rests heavier on mine than i've ever felt, not used to the violence it takes to make sure it stops, already gone too far to cause anxious heaves in a bathroom filled with deceit, swimming fast in attempt to surface and scream but met with rising lies flying down the back of my throat each time i open my mouth to say what's wrong, unsure if the words would find his evasive ears even if they managed to escape.

26 from here on out, i will organize my life into a series of “if, then” statements in a desperate attempt to stay warm, wandering formerly familiar halls of now unknown, constantly looking over my shoulder to expect the worst. the countless “i'm sorry”s will never be in repentance or asking for my forgiveness, but a face-saving structure to let me know he wants to play by the rules now. all the “what's wrong”s i'll get from other lovers, referring the manifestation of walls i've built up around myself for protection, convince me that i look the same as he does in my memory.

six shots ago he said “i love you” and six shots from now he'll say “i hate you” and here we are in the middle of it all. the harder i swim the faster i sink, gasping for air at every small chance there is, unable to ever fill my lungs enough to feel safe.



27

Steam Tunnel Silhouette
Jakob Posti
silver gelatin print

Homesick Kamilah Wright

You had me entangled in your lies of vines and trying times.
Webbed and weaved around you and your words.
Strung into a sweet and sticky entrapment.
I was your nectar, ambrosial and pure.
And you fed until only a seed remained.

I was corrupted and disrupted until I erupted.
And instead of reaching my igneous peak,
I slowly began to harden and transform into something solid,
sedimentary.

But still I loved your flowers
and as my seed blossomed and bloomed,
I offered you my roots.

28

And I waited for the seasons to change,
for metamorphosis to begin,
for you to come out of hibernation.
But you stayed dormant.

Instead, you planted me in the ground
and gave me a drought with a promise
of everything I hoped we would not be.
Cutting down everything I hoped we would be,
could've been.

And yet, I still found myself
blooming for you every morning
and closing for you every dusk.
Why do we make homes out of people
who are not ready for us?



Let's Never Do That Again

Bea N'Daou

Rory spent the night alone, staring at cheap glow-in-the-dark stars on a mattress with no bed frame. Erin had left to go to the bathroom, not saying a word. The light from the bathroom spilled into the dark hallway. There were glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling and Rory just laid there, staring. She could hear the faucet running- maybe Erin was trying to wash away the past hour. The first thing she said after they'd caught their breath was "where's my clothes?"

Rory didn't know how to feel. She should feel different. Better. There were flashes of what had happened dancing behind her eyelids- Erin's head between her legs, Erin's lips between her teeth. And yet it felt distant from Rory. Like she was remembering a really well told story of someone else's experience, not her own. They'd been friends since kindergarten, grown up together. And now here they were, 19 and trying to act like they hadn't just fucked for an hour.

She could remember saying things, things she wished now that she hadn't said. *Why haven't we done this sooner? It's okay, really...* It's what she thought she should've said. And she hated that the words had left her lips. But Rory knew she couldn't take them back. She could pretend they never left her mouth-- pretend she'd swallowed them down.

30

There was no explanation for how she knew what to do. She'd just done what she thought she should do, bite Erin's lip, draw it out, tease a little. Make it last and make it count. But when it all stopped, she felt like she'd been acting a role in a badly written play. Rory could feel her hands, sensitive after touching and *touching* and *touching*. She thought of Erin's body, how angular is had been against hers. How pointy her elbows were, how slim and dainty she was. Rory could remember teasing her about how bony she was when they were younger, and now she knew, intimately, how those bony fingers felt inside her. Rory's body had felt foreign to her. And she only felt herself again when Erin climbed out of bed. She was left lying there, with a tongue that felt strangely heavy after being in Erin's mouth.

How much time someone can take in the bathroom apparently depended on how good the sex was. Since Erin was still in there, the light still streaming light into the hall, the faucet still running, maybe it was great sex after all-- and Rory just didn't know the difference. She had no other experience to compare it to.

Now she could remain vaguely unnoticed in the throng of kids her age, having moved from the small group of virgins to the larger group of *I've sorta kinda had sex before*. Rory couldn't help but think that since she didn't feel any different she could still stay in the virgin group, if she tried just a little harder to forget the whole thing happened.

What would she say in the morning? *Why did morning have to come at all, after a night like this?* Rory could barely think beyond the next few seconds, there was no option other than to let tomorrow fuck her over– or just fuck her, like Erin had. Maybe it would be okay since now she knew what to expect. No more dollar store romance novel fantasies of what her first time should be like. Just the memory of this. This moment.

Erin came back into the room, made an excuse about making a phone call, something about a friend in New York– real urgent. She told Rory she'd go downstairs for a bit and then come to bed. She didn't come back. Rory's lips were still tingling. Her mouth was dry. Her fingers still slick and her thighs spread carelessly on a mattress with no bed frame.

American Ghosts Opal Harbour

My sister taught me how to look for ghosts along i-70.
You can hear them in the static between municipal radio stations,
Or see them stalking through the cornfields in Kentucky.

You have to set out before sunrise,
While the cold still peels off the empty road in thin sheets.
If you watch closely you'll see daylight lurch forward with the moon in its jaw,
Dripping coagulated light on the horizon of your rearview mirror;
Don't stare too long.

Learn to read the roadkill on the shoulder.
An American zoography is smeared along i-70 in crimson.
Their shapes change as you press on;
Past Kansas the road is scattered with flattened armadillos
And possums with arms splayed, ready to receive salvation.
Don't stop for them.

32 Industrial ghosts stalk through barren fields and howl at passersby.
The largest died along the road –
You can see their bodies from a distance.
Hulking concrete factories that bleed into the undergrowth,
Skin marked with graffiti and decay.
Don't walk through them.

You can stop for gas in Abilene and feel the eyes along your spine.
Pull over when you exit town.
A faded billboard looms on high –
The voyeur savior lingers over quiet concrete,
A rest stop where an apostle knelt to the lord,
Knees bare on sunbeat concrete,
And took communion in an open stall.
The billboards here will ask you if you know that hell is real –
Don't answer them.

Take the exit by the corrugated steel cross that leans toward the power lines.
You'll see a deer spread across the median,
Its antler shattered under semi tires.
It crossed last night before the moon went hollow,
Heard the truck come on too late.
You'll wonder if the headlights looked like God.



Nepal 1
Sunil Pun
digital photograph



It's Just in your Head
Kinsey Emerson

copper, enamel, patina | 3 x 5 x 5.5 in

Repercussions

Qawi Rucker

And the pavement's thirst was quenched by the blood of the bastard, and the tears of his Nana.

The bastard's niggas congregated with laced blunts, twisted fingers, and talks of repercussion.

The bastard's son cannot understand why his mother is crying.

35

The mother of the son of the bastard cries because she knows she had started a war with one phone call. She now understands why the niggas call her grimey.

The bastard's sister plans to erase the motherfucker who made the call to get her big brother immortalized on that corner.

The Nana will lose 2 babies that week. One to the death and one to the numbing.

I took photos during a drive to Hoosier National Forest with my best friend. I took 482 photos, and the Search and Rescue team will see them all when they find my camera. I took a picture of our knees, accidentally, hers clad in neon orange Halloween pajama pants and mine bare, because I didn't realize the camera was on; a grave in a cemetery for someone whose last name was Hope; a dilapidated barn; a car being butchered for parts in front of an auto shop; a small house where our car's distorted reflection can be seen in the jagged, broken window; a different dilapidated barn, a dog on its side beside it; the horizon, but it's so dark you can see nothing but the tips of tree limbs, because I didn't have the lighting setting programmed correctly; someone's house way out in the distance that you can't see very well, but when I zoomed in with the lens you could see someone standing next to their pick-up truck in a camouflage jacket; a small, lone cargo truck on a side dirt road; a photo of my best friend, but it's so dark you can see nothing but the outline of her nose, because I didn't have the lighting setting programmed correctly, again; a better photo of my best friend, mouth open and shoulders hunched while singing along to "Hips Don't Lie"; an Expedition on the side of the road, no one inside, broken headlight; a small creek underneath an uneven concrete bridge, an inch of leeway on both sides before the fall; two more cars, facing one another, both empty; the Hickory Ridge Lookout Tower parking lot; the Hickory Ridge Lookout Tower stairs; the Hickory Ridge Lookout Tower behind us in the side view mirror, because we didn't want to climb the stairs; a gathering of three cars with 8 men in full camouflage, neon orange beanies, and rifles; the same 8 men, one of them looking at us, hand raised; the view of the winding road in front of us, the lane wide enough for one car but is technically a two lane road; the same view of the winding road, but it's dark because I accidentally changed the lighting settings, again; the view of a different winding road, the sun-rayed lighting perfect, the shadows creeping in just right, the ditches visible on each side in near perfect symmetry, the leaves heaped together beautifully; the same photo, but ruined by the tip of a pick-up truck coming around the corner; my legs below the knee, my flip flops, my best friend's slippers, and a rectangular plastic thing that is always there but I never asked her about; the same image again, shifted an inch to the right, because the pick-up truck did not move over enough, and our back right tire went into the ditch; a pretty rock that I didn't look through the viewfinder to get a better shot of, because we were looking for a place to pull over and I should've been paying attention; my best friend getting out of the car; my best friend glaring at me through my window, because I did not want to get out of the car; my best friend's foot, clad in a red fuzzy slipper, as she kicks the back right tire; and my best friend as she stares intently, searching for damage, her Halloween pajama pants the brightest thing visible. There are more photos, not all worth mentioning, not all my favorites. I would have deleted most of them if I could have. 3 weeks later the Search and Rescue team will see all 482 photos I took, along with the 1 I didn't. I did not take the photo of my best friend and I, arms around each other's shoulders, smiling at the camera and the kindness of the hunter who stopped to help, assured us our tire was fine, offered to take a photo of us, left his rifle in his car so we wouldn't be uncomfortable. I did not get the chance to take a photo of the handgun we did not know some hunters carried, the view of the forest when there is no road in sight for miles, the way the bare branches of the trees shattered the surface of the sky when you look up at it from the ground, the face of the SAR officer who first spotted my best friend's Halloween pajama pants amongst the leaves, the head of the hunter who does not wear a neon orange beanie.



Sulfur Lake
Madeline Chomentowski
digital photograph | 3456 x 2304 pixels

russian doll

Lucia Burton

dear little boy
who sings to himself
while clutching a russian doll
i know you squeal with excitement when your small hands break her open
and marvel at another girl inside

you say "i cracked her open!"
but please
after your four year old life has gained another year
and another and another and another
please learn
that us women
are not russian dolls to be cracked open
we do not hold other bodies
inside of us
for your discovery.

38 please, in your search for whatever it is you must find
do not split us through our sides in the process
we are not made of wood,
though sometimes our expressions
are painted on our faces.

and, little boy,
when you twist either end of this doll
in opposite directions
and the wood of her body
screams
in disagreement,
please, please
try
to
listen.



39

Untitled
Sulay Ranjit

oil on canvas | 30 x 40 in

Baby Carrots Opal Harbour

The carrots come up last in the garden.
In January, I dig into the snow with sore hands,
Through a tangle of dead foliage and into frigid ground.
It's cold enough to cut through the scar tissue of my hand and into the bone.
I push my fingers past the roots left from last harvest
That have softened and burst, and bled into the soil surrounding.
But the new little carrots are there, huddling in their rows.

My mother stopped growing carrots twenty years ago,
When she said that they had withered in the spring soil.
She hadn't known she was pregnant when she planted them,
And her belly was swollen by the time she dug up the roots -
Which were small, and crooked,
And still bitter-soft with summer's heat.

The winter baby died before I came.
I don't know how these things work; but I picture him
Curling up like a winding root inside my mother,
Reaching his hands into the soil and the snow and the undergrowth surrounding,
And dissipating.
My mother kept the crib for me.

I have to wonder what is inherited,
And where the earth is salted;
But I know that my hands are good and strong.
In January I will scoop the frozen Earth from its little bed,
Pull the tender roots from where they're sleeping,
And lay them in the snow.
The largest are the white carrots,
Grown chubby in the cold, and branching at their tapered ends.
As I cradle them in my hot hands, I see
Each root looks like a little finger, extended from a pale arm -
Reaching out as if to touch my hand.



41

Atmosphere
Masha Morgunova
oil on canvas | 36 x 30 in

Fully clothed, on top of dirty sheets fit to an unmade bed, I woke up in the ocean. My phone was twinkling and telling me it was time to go to a class I didn't care about. As soon as I shifted my weight, you were wide awake, looking at me with eyes that gave a whole lot and expected nothing in return. They made me grateful even when they were closed or looking at someone else. Tobacco-sweet sticky mist swirled between our collective breast and made sure to pervade our Wednesday morning communion.

When the breath between buss said "Want to stay?" I had to lie, say no, leave a wake of what's best for me. Lingering won't make it any better because soon it's really easy to crawl inside my own head, which is a place I should never be. Some of my fondest memories happen there, but I always seem to miss my mom's calls and forget to eat.

I might have given you too much this time, more than I can keep up with. I care and I want you to know that. I think you do right now. The last thing I ever want to do is disappoint, and I couldn't help but feel it when I left you that morning.

The classes I cared nothing for taught me nothing I didn't already know and I felt myself wasting away wondering about what would have been. I wandered all day, unable to see much through the blue that coated my corneas, stuck then to looking down at my shoes. I got back to my room which had the stench of sex above all else, roommate and muse gone for the afternoon. A cigarette later and I felt forever getting shorter. Forever is a word I never want to use because every time I hear it, I know it comes to an end. It's one of those things that you never learn is a lie until you do, and nothing makes sense after that. When you're confused and when your heart hurts, that's when the world is the most dangerous.

Food that tasted like nothing, I was fast approaching the question of the necessity to eat. The only thing I wanted to fill my body with was syrupy starshine, but I was recently told that it was eating me from the inside. I pretended to care when I learned, but doesn't everything eat until it's full? and have I ever been enough to suffice? and is anything satisfied anymore? and do we ever have enough? Coming to terms is easier when you're honest, that's all I know.

I am afraid, though. I'm afraid of fading. I could feel it happening, away from you and away from the people in my life that care about me. I could convince myself of anything these days, and lately it was the notion that no one really did care. Regret now fills my bones and seeps out of my fingertips every time I sit down to write about it.

The weight of all of this sat heavy on my chest as I wondered if it was alright to text you. I didn't and I should have. Instead, I sat alone with my dreams, which haunted me, which I kept walking further into, which I never wanted to leave. I thought you were with me sometimes in those dreams: as the leaf that turned over itself before falling on my face and melting into dust, and as the shard of ice that floated more gracefully on the river than everything around it until you didn't respond when I invited you to sit with me.

I wandered and I wandered and my arms got long and dragged on the ground until my hands were ground away. I always thought I knew where I was, but my childhood home was never painted lavender in my memory and the cave I found in the woods with my best friend was filled with beasts I couldn't befriend. At some point I woke up because familiarity in reality started to rearrange itself before my eyes and you were there next to me, for real this time. I could tell based off of the way you smelled which was much like the way champagne tastes with hints of rain cloud and the moment of self-discovery when you realize how small you are in the Grand Scheme, but how each of your actions as a cog of the universe is important to the operation of the whole.

You held my hand while I wept and the space around me became solid and material again. You told me you were worried and I responded that you shouldn't be, that I was okay. Still concerned and concentrated on my why, I gave you nothing which could make any of it more justified for you or for me. We decided I shouldn't reinsert myself back into the thrall of all I had to pretend I could do to be a person.

You drove fast as the sun went down and I kissed the backs of your hands. The cotton candy clouds turned corporeal on the backs of our throats and it was all I could do to swallow it down, sat shifting in my stomach as the constellations began to wave at me. I reached out to say my own hello, but they were beyond my grasp.

The inky black and blue consumed the rest of me and you as we sped toward the only source of light pollution in this part of the country. With those pollutants is where I used to belong. My parents still live there, and that's where you decided we should go. My mother was dealing with grief of her own, especially knowing now that her love alone wasn't protection enough anymore. I tried to tell you this but my tongue turned to sand and that same cotton candy now coated my throat, making it impossible to speak.

We were invited in by my mom, who was shockingly unsurprised, and the way her candles were flickering and the way the picture frames, full of fresh faces forgotten by time, were reflecting the light from the old and exposed incandescent bulbs set a scene for me. It reminded me of my brother, before his shoe size was bigger than mine, sneaking into my room to tell me there was a monster next door and he didn't want to sleep with her. It reminded me of getting old enough to where everyone went to bed before I did and it became my responsibility to turn off all of those old bulbs before sulking upstairs to a too-small bed. It reminded me of crying on unusually cold October nights, afraid of my own brain.

In the room next door, I could feel you sleeping soundly and envy rubbed my shoulders while I stared at the ceiling until the sun accosted me in the morning. There were ghosts in this room who haunted me intermittently all night. They jostled me awake every time I finally got ready to greet sleep. When the sun shone its face, it could only do so through a mask of dewy white clouds peeking over the treetops, through the tiny openings in my blinds and into my eyes, extra bright today to make up for last night's darkness. It was too light out to try to sleep anymore. The morning made me remember when the ghosts were born: spending

weekends playing gamecube alone, writing down the reasons I was afraid to go to school on tear-soaked journal pages, and during bad blow jobs. Surely one was born overnight now too. I was sorry to have to leave that behind for everyone else to deal with.

My head hurt quite a bit from the glare of the sun, but not enough to justify setting my heavy body in motion. Before I knew it, you were there standing next to the bed, my mom also at your side. You made a remark about how sweaty my hands were and it made me laugh. I realized then that I hadn't felt you touch my hands when you said that. I asked you to touch them again and you said nothing. I saw you reach toward my head, running your delicate fingers through my thin hair, still nothing.

I asked what's wrong and no one answered and my mom wondered are you okay and I said I don't think so and you exchanged looks with her and she asked again and I told her no, no, God no. I tried to make sure my mouth was still there and realized I couldn't. I was hollow.

My voice rose and I told you I was here and I could hear you. Nothing. I told you stories to prove I was me and your conversation with my mother continued on as normal. I told my mom to look me in the eye and she never did. I screamed at you, said that you should hit me. Hit me as hard as you possibly can. I screamed until my voice gave out. There was no way you didn't hear me, based on the way you looked at me before you turned to leave.



the sun with her burden
sage phillips

acrylic on butcher paper | 5 x 4 ft



Chiaroscuro
Georgia Tillotson

silver gelatin print | 11 x 11 in.

Lightning peeling across flesh.

Reaching out in jag-
ged knives for more.

Fal-
len are the gluttonous, branded with a greasy "F."
Sentenced to treading in T-Shirts.

Slather on purifying
balms; Praying to
Instagram to exorcise the other from without; meanwhile

it thunders within.

Nomadic fingertips trudging ov-
er the glossy ridg-
es. Pursuing the question(s).

Lost in Inquiry's Enormity,
they resign assuddenly
as the lightning laydown.

The Flesh is the Flesh is the Flesh;
only the eye of another can
cra(ar)ve its patterns.

The Night Train

Joseph-Paul Dongo

James was nothing more than a dark figure amidst the pouring rain. This was not the kind of rain that pitter-pattered down in an armada of tiny drops, this rain was heavy, it came down in big droplets of water smacking the ground hard when it hit. James's tattered umbrella did very little to protect him against the massive onslaught that he faced, he would have to invest in a new one. It was 11:05 on Friday night, on the 15th of May, much later than he ever thought to begin his journey home, but there was an "important" birthday at the office that kept him at work. James's brisk walk had turned into a sprint, the last train left at 11:07 and he was still a good two-minutes from the station. James blasted through the puddles and streams on his way to the train station, the ripples from his footsteps indistinguishable from the enormous droplets that pomeled the ground, the world was already beginning to forget him. He arrived at the train at half-past 11:06 and slipped into the caboose just before the train doors closed. Save for his head and shoulders he was soaked to the bone.

48 The train was deserted on this most miserable of nights, which did not come as a surprise at all to James, it was Friday, and everyone had likely cut out early in order to rush home to their families. The train ride was long and wound through the mountains, the view was spectacular at sunset. But James would not be enjoying that view tonight, he just hoped that the pouring rain would not prevent him from napping on the way home. James picked a seat next to an abandoned quilt, near the back of the caboose, so that he could at least pretend there was someone else on the train. James did not like being without company, it made him uneasy. There is a saying that only boring people can get bored, this was the truth for James, without other people he didn't know what to do with himself. He didn't care for his repetitive thoughts that manifested when others weren't around. Today, however, it seemed he was left alone, so he only had one option, he sank back into his seat and closed his eyes, leaving his ticket in his lap for the conductor.

The rain turned to hail.

The hail slammed mercilessly against the train bombarding it with hundreds of balls of ice, ranging in size from beads to golf balls. But it wasn't until an ice ball the size of a baseball, or perhaps even a softball, slammed into the train car directly above his head that James awoke, groggy and confused from his attenuated nap. The pounding hail made his head ring as the hellish sound echoed across the train car. He looked out the window to see what in the world was going on, but he could not make anything out in the darkness without the flashes of lightning in the heavens above briefly illuminating the ice-covered mountainside.

Between the thunderclaps and the uneven drumming of the hail, James heard another sound, this one much softer, yet loud enough to be distinguishable from the mayhem outside. It was the sound of something scuffing against the worn wood floors of the train. Next to him the blanket was moving, there was someone beneath it, and they had likely been disturbed by the hailstorm just like James was. Overcome with curiosity James inspected the stranger sitting next to him. The first

thing that he noticed were the buttons lining the quilt, keeping it shut, this was not a quilt it was a coat. The most gargantuan coat James had ever seen in his lifetime, he could not imagine the goliath that could wear the coat comfortably. But that goliath was not the stranger sitting next to him, it was obvious that the coat was far too big for them.

Up above a single water droplet freed itself from its cloudy prison, eager to plummet back to Earth and rejoin the vast ocean. But just as it began its descent it was hit with an intense updraft. This updraft carried it high up into the clouds, eventually above them. As it climbed it began to freeze becoming hail. When hail becomes too heavy for the updraft it drops off and falls to the ground. But this updraft was incredibly powerful, much too powerful for it to have been created by nature alone. This updraft was bound by the will of a being that held James's fate in the palm of their hand, running their fingers over it as if it were a fragile square of silk.

James continued to examine the coat still stunned by its size. The sleeves were thick enough to fit logs through. They lay rested in each other wrapping around under the coat where they lay pinned to the seat by the stranger underneath the mysterious cloth. The hood of the coat fell over the front of the coat reaching almost all the way down to the where the sleeves met. The coat extended all the way down to where the frayed end spilled over the floor. The buttons followed the coat all the way down to the floor. The buttons closest to the floor were worn and hung at the end of their strained strings, evidence of the stranger opening them repeatedly to allow themselves to walk around while still wearing the monstrous coat. The entirety of the coat was covered with patches of varying sizes and color hastily sewn in, seemingly randomly, to the silver-green background of the freakish coat.

49

By the time the commanding updraft lost control of the once small water droplet, it was slightly larger than the size of a softball, the other droplets caught in the updraft had surrounded the small droplet causing it to grow exponentially. Now looming high above the ground, the ball of ice restarted its descent, a spinning mass of dangerous potential. The ball sped back into the clouds, each water droplet that it encountered plastered itself on the outside of the ball. The ball grew and grew, before it had even traveled halfway through the tremendous cumulonimbus cloud that controlled the storm, it had well exceeded the size of a bowling ball.

The train had been steadily gaining speed since the hailstorm started. James locked in his silent interrogation of the coat, hadn't noticed, but the train had begun to rattle in its rapidly growing speed. The car was filled with a repetitive clanging sound that penetrated the train car and echoed off the walls, a desperate warning that the train was in dire shape. The clanging and rattling continued to get louder, finally the sound culminated with a loud pop. James flew 3 feet in the air, partially out of fear, but partially because the caboose had jumped as well. The last car of the train had been forced from the rest of the train by the hailstorm. Fear crippled James, his heart pounded, and his heavy breathing nearly drowned out the sound of the storm. Next to him the stranger hardly seemed to notice.

The meteor of a hailstone had completed its journey through the cumulonimbus. The mammoth object was now just below the clouds speeding down to the ground in an asymptotic approach controlled by the strong gusts of wind wrapping around the mountain. The hailstone was tearing through the air collecting more ice as it catapulted alongside the mountain gaining even more terrifying size and speed. About a mile ahead was the prodigious object's ultimate destination. Sliding along the side of the mountain on metal tracks was a freshly detached train car. The stone blasted forward heading straight for the caboose.

50 It started as a faint whistle out in the distance far off ahead of the train car. The whistling increased in size and intensity with startling speed. James was now standing up in the caboose rushing from window to window, doing nothing more than panicking and using his clouded mind to try and figure out how he could get out of this mess. He had pulled the emergency break handle countless times before he finally submitted to the storm by entering a full-on panic mode. As he raced around the car the whistling changed to a scream, something was coming. His instincts kicked in and he ran to the back of the caboose to the stranger, he was going to jump from the train. A frantic mind makes frantic decisions and yet to James his drastic decision seemed perfectly rational, though jumping off a moving train into a hailstorm on the side of a mountain would spell certain death. When he reached the back of the caboose to grab the stranger, It hit.

The sound was deafening, so loud that it might have been silent, so loud that James's ears could not properly process it. What he did notice was the train car tip, rapidly, so fast that it was a miracle they didn't begin to barrel roll down the mountainside. In a way the icy slope saved him from an instant death, instead of rolling, the caboose began to slide down the ice-caked side of the mountain. James, clinging on to the window, found it hard to move against the pressure of the caboose turned sled. His legs streamed behind him as the caboose rocketed down the hill. He managed to turn his head, and felt his mouth drop at the sight of the front of the caboose, or the lack thereof. Something had crashed into the side of the caboose so hard that the front third of the train car had simply been erased.

James stared out the newly created window into the darkness as the caboose sped towards the outskirts of the storm. The lightning from the storm offering him snapshots of the mountainside.

FLASH. The air was filled with chaotic ice, but off in the distance he could still make out the top of the mountain disappearing into the clouds.

FLASH. Off to the right of the opening he could make out the dark silhouette of the train still speeding uncontrollably along the train tracks.

FLASH. The silhouette of the train was air born, comically suspended in mid-air. The unforgiving turns of the tracks finally became too much for the runaway train to handle.

FLASH. The silhouette of the train was gone, it was now somewhere on the mountain sliding down the slopes just like James.

The hardened ice on the mountainside that carried the caboose down slowly softened into ice flakes, and eventually powder. The soft powder slowed the caboose's rapid descent, bringing it to a halt in front of a patch of trees big enough to get lost in but not quite a forest. James sat quivering on the wall, now the floor of the train car, stunned into silence. The stranger in the coat had hardly moved the entire ride. They now stood perfectly still, staring out the hole left in the caboose. James wanted to address them, just to make sure they were okay, but before he could open his mouth to formulate the words the stranger began to walk slowly, yet purposefully, toward the end of the caboose. When they reached the hole in the front, they, without breaking stride, stepped off the edge, disappearing into the powdered snow that blanketed the ground.

James scrambled after the stranger, he had enough sense to know that in situations like this it was best to stick together until help arrived, and of course, he never said no to company, no matter how strange. When James reached the opening, he looked up into the eerily quiet night. Any trace of the storm had been completely erased, and the waning crescent high in the sky illuminated the snow with a soft white glow. When he stepped off the train he felt the snow stick to his still damp pants, it was almost deep enough to reach his lower ribcage. Off to his left he spied the stranger. They were standing on the powder as if it were marble, or concrete, or some other sturdy material, blatantly disregarding gravity. James marched his way through the snow towards the patchy coat, which stuck out like a sore, or rather diseased, thumb amidst the pristine white powder.

Just a few feet from the them now, James watched as the monstrous coat slipped off the stranger, releasing a delicate fluffy puff of snow as it hit the snowdrift. The air was filled with swirling snowflakes and an intoxicating sweet smell. The snow settled to reveal the shimmering figure of a naked woman, with skin white like the snow glistening in the dim moonlight that blanketed the ground. The combination of the smell and the beauty of the woman stunned James into near paralysis, he couldn't even feel himself blink. Beautiful as she was the stranger was not flawless, her milky white was marked by gruesome dark scars, that seemed to suck the light out of the world, burying it deep in her body. She wore her pain like tattoos, on the outside, unable to conceal it beneath her ultimate beauty. James traced the canyons across her body, till he reached her face. Her pale blue eyes locked on his, and for a split moment his gaze was captured by the scar that extended out from her inner right eye and webbed across her face, spreading out like a river delta, before his eyes refocused permanently on her icy eyes.

With their eyes still locked, the woman knelt down on the snow to where James was buried chest deep, so that her face was level with his. She leaned in and

pressed her cold lips against his, keeping her eyes open all the while, but James never felt her frigid kiss. His mind was lost in hers. He never felt the cold from her lips spread to his chest, his groin, his legs. James saw something in her eyes that night, something that changed him. When he regained himself his body was immobilized, frozen solid, numbed by the intense cold. His eyes, filled with hot tears fought the cold, they were the only part of him he could still move. He looked deep into the eyes of the stranger and in that moment, he knew his fate. The tears streamed down his face, they were not tears of sadness, nor were they tears of happiness, they were tears of finality, James knew that his time had come to an end. Something had been awakened deep inside him that night, in his heart, in his soul, and he willingly accepted the fate that had been bestowed upon him. His flowing tears confirmed his acceptance.

Through his tear-blurred vision James watched as the woman reached into her massive coat and produced a slender pair of crystal-colored scissors. And with practiced precision sliced a square of his coat, concealing it within the folds of hers.

He watched as she donned her gargantuan coat and turned, walking carefully across the powder to the canopy-protected soil under the trees.

In his last moments of consciousness James Crest had one final thought. His journey into the woman's psyche, hidden behind her eyes, had left him with one question teetering at the edge of his mind. Like a dream deciding whether to be remembered or to tumble off the brain forgotten forever.

Who are you?

The question erupted in his head. His mind screamed out so loud that the woman almost broke stride to turn and answer... almost. In truth she couldn't answer, even if she wanted to. It didn't matter, James would die with or without an answer to his futile question. The final wave of cold had come, and James was nothing, but the desperate question echoing in the empty cave of his mind, leading him into the eternal darkness that awaited. That night his family didn't shed a single tear for his demise, no one did. The night was once again the dancefloor for the snowflakes, they twirled and twisted about in a complex number that only they understood, covering the world in bleaching white wiping James from the world. The once ordinary James Crest had died in a most extraordinary way, and no one would ever know.

When the spring finally came, and the snow was stripped off the mountain by the hot sunlight, all that was left of James Crest was a jacket with a square hole on the right side, and if you looked further down a pair of pants and a tattered umbrella snagged on a thorny branch, lost in the silence of the mountain.



BlackandWhite London 2
Celia Matthews

digital photograph

Manos Suaves

Paloma Collazo-Vargas

My hands are soft
there are no marks
nor sores nor cuts

Rings litter throughout my fingers
and nails are always painted in
a dark red like-rose

My hands are soft
there is no history to my hands but
they are made up of ones

Son suaves
because de mi mamá are
rough wrinkled and dry

Son suaves
because de mi papá es are
tough marred and scarred

54 Son suaves
because my parents' hands were used to pick and pluck berries and
package boxes of mushrooms for your salad

Because
while they picked ripened strawberries and overdue fungi
I picked rainbows for my canvas to paint

Son suaves
because my parents' hands were used to lift this family from nothing
while the sun had not risen himself to the sky

Because
while they lost sleep from worrying and overworking
I kissed the moon goodnight and waited for sweet dreams

Mis manos son suaves
no hay marcas
ni llagas ni incisiones

Mis manos son suaves
no hay historia en mis manos pero
están hechas de unas.



55

Cascade
Georgia Tillotson
silver gelatin print | 11 x 11 in



Bill
Jakob Posti
silver gelatin print

Why Cynthia Won't Stop Seeing Ghosts

Finn Smith-Ruttan

Cynthia McKinnon saw her first ghost before her fifth birthday. She watched, solemn and wide-eyed, as it ballooned slowly from her stuffed dinosaur, newly purchased from the Goodwill. The boy looked to be about her age, hair sticking up in all directions and dirt coating his hands and feet, tinged with ribbons of blue mist. He stared at Cynthia reproachfully, declaring “You’d better keep your cooties off my allosaurus!” before spiraling into the air and vanishing. Cynthia proceeded to examine the dinosaur carefully from all angles, her small hands carefully propped open its mouth to check within for any trace of the unexpected intruder, before setting it aside in favor of a more predictable playmate. Cynthia haltingly related the incident to her father later on, but he simply laughed his shy laugh and patted her dinosaur on the head.

“You don’t need to worry about what a boy who says he’s scared of cooties has to say Cynthia. It’s your dinosaur, no one else’s.”

Cynthia seemed less than reassured, but nodded nonetheless.

In the fall of her sixth year, Cynthia was found screaming after witnessing a spindly old man in a pinstriped suit climb headfirst out of a can of peaches, tipping his hat to her in the process. Her teachers made little headway through attempting to question her.

“Cynthia, dear, where did the man come from?”

“I told you, he was in my peaches!”

“Cynthia, I’m sorry you spilled your peaches, but you must tell us where the man you saw came from!”

“Ugh!”

Cynthia stamped her foot as she learned that ever so frustrating lesson that all children learn: adults believe you only when it suits them. The teachers got nothing more out of her except flailing limbs and an unfinished complaint about a stuffed dinosaur.

By the time Cynthia was eight, the presence of spirits in her life had become a familiar, if unwelcome, regularity. As she walked to school in the morning, Cynthia would see youthful specters, their bodies grossly distended in the air, taunting leashed dogs while their owners attempted to locate the target of their indignant barks. When she pressed the keys of the old piano in her living room, squeezed into the too tight corner for its significance as an heirloom if not its use to the residents of the home, smiling faces of men and women of all ages would ooze up from between the keys. Despite being physically insubstantial, Cynthia would shiver in unease whenever her plodding fingers sunk into an eye or grinning mouth. On the Fourth of July, she would watch the ghosts of soldiers line up on the distant hillside, tricorne hats doffed, shedding milky white tears that dissolved before they struck the ground.

When Cynthia was eleven, any scrap of fear she ever possessed for the otherworldly intruders had long vanished. They flitted around her as she cleaned the house, the faces in the piano teasingly tapping out “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” as Cynthia danced from room to room, bearing her brush and broom. She kept a can of peaches on the counter in case the old man ever needed a home to come back to. She saluted the ghostly regiment on holidays. She held the dirty boy’s hand as she wept

and wept under her dark umbrella.

And of course, I still watch over Cynthia, take care of her the best I can. I always told her that the apparitions she sees, whatever their source, should not be feared. I knew she would always have me to bring her back among the living. Ironically, I suppose I was the final tipping point that planted her heart solely with the dead.

I can hear Cynthia moving about upstairs, no doubt getting dressed and ready for school. Her father has already started breakfast in the next room. Peeking up the stairs, I see the scrappy haired little boy waiting for Cynthia. She had named him Alan, after Sam Neill's character in Jurassic Park, since he could no longer remember the name he had been born with. Cynthia said that names matter, even if you have no one to tell them to. Seeing me watching, Alan ducked away. He wasn't used to me yet. That's alright. We have all the time in the world.

I watch her wolf down her toast and eggs, her father already finished and walking out the door. I wiggle my fingers at her and she shoots me a smile. I worry that I pull her away from the life she deserves, keep her from moving on, but I cannot bring myself to accept the loneliness of whatever comes next.

As Cynthia walks down the hallway, slipping her backpack over her shoulders, I smile, a crack in the air leaking worry and regret.

"Have a good day at school honey," I grin as the front door swings open before her.

She snorts. "You'd make a proper poltergeist, mom."

58 Waving, she passes through my stomach on her way out the door, sending me wafting into wispy tendrils that settle into the floorboards to await her return.



Uhhh
Emma Assarsson
oil on paper | 5 x 6 in

Somniac

Alex Heyrman

60

The light is dying & o how joyful the leaking of our eyes in that colorless room, we think of the colors of a splitting atom in the stomach of the whale, & every time the water drips my heart skips another beat until it's all silent, motionless, except for the fan blades which sing little songs every time they spin round, a medley of mechanical voices, it asks for no compensation; how can it be both beautiful & ugly, & not the fan but the sound of the voices behind my head, under my pillow & beneath the floorboards. nobody could love as much as you the sounds of a silent room, but I try to. Memories always come to visit at times like this: it's easy to slip from now to then, sleepless sleep to waking dream. Their eyes are never the same color in my thoughts: I like to try on new ones each time. This time he's blue, she's lavender, & I am green as ever, but the light seems to catch me better than it ever has. The strands of the carpet become a field, & they & I sit on the edges doing our best not to be the first one to fall asleep— I am never first, too busy keeping vigilant watch for a change in the pitch black scenery. He drifts off first, & because I was & am scared of boys & girls I escape. She smiles when I leave. He smiles in his sleep. I spend the night in a public restroom pinching my arm to stay awake, dreaming of a night that never happened.



Evalia
Emily Jade
digital photograph

Multi-Chambered Heart

Becca Moore

The average earthworm has 5 pseudo-hearts.
The cuttlefish has 3.
The ocellated icedfish has a heart 5 times stronger than any other,
While the blue whale is said to have one as large as a car.

Is it possible then, that my own heart is varied in some exquisitely abnormal way?
Maybe my heart has more chambers than the typical human chest.
Maybe this is why I feel empty when I am not allowed
To feel all this love that exists inside of me.

I was taught in my life that falling in love with someone new
Automatically means that all previous love is...Nothing.
I am filled with self-doubt when the cup that is supposed to encompass love...
Runs over.
And I am still pouring.
Liquid love filling up the room, entering my lungs...and
I cannot breathe until I accept that this too is air.
I cannot love until I accept every definition of the word.
I am learning that every version of my love is whole, and real.
I am whole, and real.

62 I want to ask you if you have ever seen a glass frog's heartbeat.
The way the skin's translucence lets you see all the way in.
There is no hiding here.
Just the quick-rhythmed beating of a multi-chambered heart.
I am showing you that hearts work in all sorts of beautiful, wonderful ways.

Not to say this will always be easy to swallow.
I often catch myself yelling at God for giving me these feelings that I can't
understand.
That no one seems to understand.
Yes, polyamory is unconditional love spilling over into multiple hearts.
It is giving your partner a high-five after she sleeps with someone in the spare
room.
But it is also...

Your mother telling you it will never work.
Coming out all over again,
Again, and again.
It is watching another person break your lover's heart.
Polyamory can be fights, and drunk tears,
The occasional whisper of
"I never asked to be this way."
"Why do I feel this way?"
"I don't want to be this way."

But I dare God to tell me it isn't "natural"
The way she laughs and grins when she tells me
We have made it to the 5th dimension of relationships,
"where no couple has ever traveled before"
We are astronauts, baby.

Lord, I am in love with a woman who pins up my backbone
When I crumble for another.
She sews up all the chambers of my heart when they split open so often.
There is no judgment here.
Just the rhythmic click of her needles
Sewing back the beats into my worn-down veins.

I am in love with another woman too.
She may never love me back.
And I understand.
My definitions and lifestyle are atypical.
My heart is misshapen and takes up most of my chest.
But I promise you that my love is whole and real.

When you sing, playing my mama's old guitar,
I turn into that glass frog.
All the chambers of my heart are desperately full.
There is no more hiding behind this fragile skin.

I can no longer cover my translucent, beating heart.

For I am alive.

My love is real.

A Song: No One is Coming

Sunset Combs

Verse 1:

Am *Em*
Heaven help me, son.
Am *Em*
I haven't got anyone.
C *Em*
My sisters have faded away.
C *Em*
My mother is down in her grave.
G *Em*
My father's behind his guitar,
G *Em*
singing blues into the stars.

Verse 2:

Am *Em*
Heaven help me, son.
Am *Em*
I've walked away from everyone.
C *Em*
I have the birds and the leaves.
C *Em*
I got a man who loves me.
G *Em*
But in these months of wintry cold,
G *Em*
well, I have no one to hold.

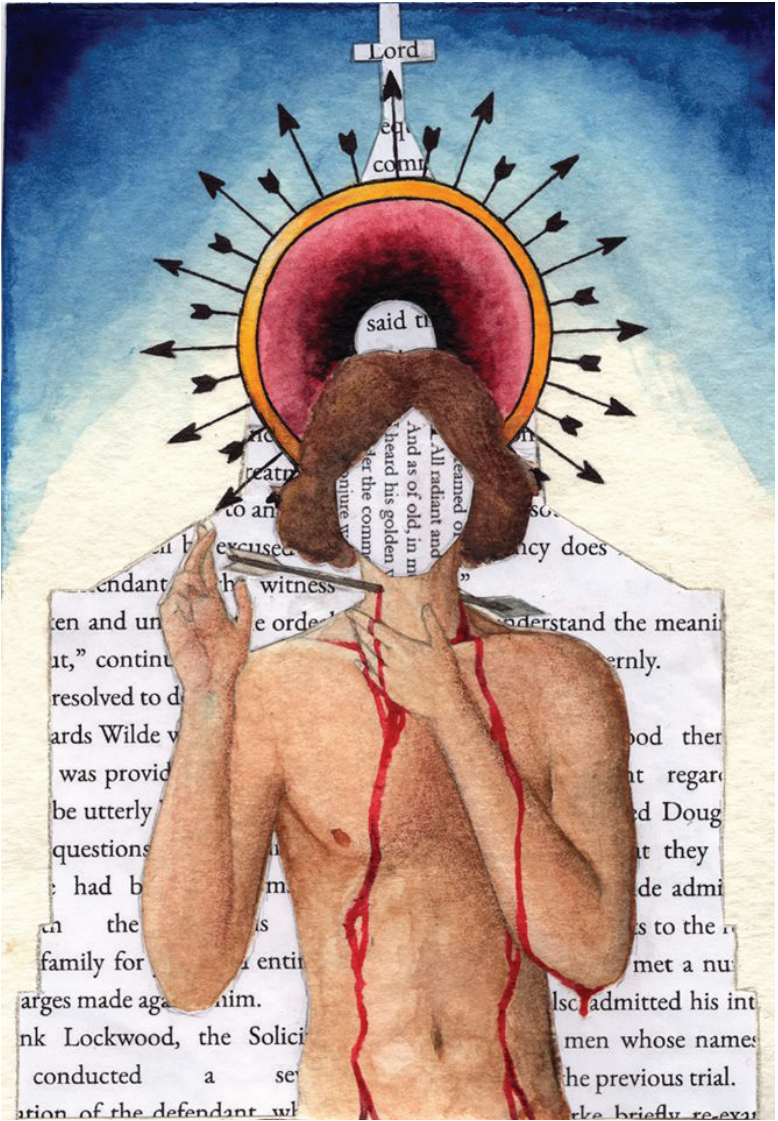
Verse 3:

Am *Em*
Heaven help me, son.
Am *Em*
I don't believe in anyone.
C *Em*
But when I hurt, I still find myself
C *Em*
looking to that sky for help.
G *Em*
Heaven help me.
G *Em*
No one is coming.

Solo

Outro:

Am, Em, Am, C, Em,
Oh,
G, Em
no one is coming.
G Em
No one is coming.



The Indecency of Saint Sebastian
Opal Harbour

watercolor, mixed media | 8 x 10 in

Two Deliverances

ethan pickett

Everything was the same temperature. Being outside was no different from being inside; even shocks of grass grew through the cracks in the tile of the first floor in the houses rented from shady landlords. Hot food and coffee left out on the counter for thirty seconds or more would cool to assume the same temperature, as cold glasses of water and cans of beer would warm quickly to reach that equilibrium. It also happened to be about the same temperature as the inside of most human bodies. The outsides of those bodies, being exposed to all of this, would be the same, too.

This is where I found myself melting during the months when there wasn't much to do. School was out, work was slow, time was slower, and I was floating.

There was one person. She meant the world to me. She had other groups of people where she was important, but I didn't. She was it for me.

I structured my days around the times when she would make herself available to me. When we would ride bikes as the sun set over the quickly-decaying city we resided in or climb on top of grain silos at abandoned farms or just when we would make coffee and eat peanut butter in the small sliver of time we could find to see each other before work or when it would get late after we ate dinner together and she would stick around and stay the night in my bed and there was nothing sexual about it, but maybe romantic. Those were the times I cherished. Those were the times
66 when I thought about Love.

There was one day when it was hotter than usual, blisteringly hot, and so we decided to go for a swim. There was a pond she knew about in some clearing in the woods by my house. We wandered there, already half-naked, holding hands maybe and making jokes maybe and enjoying how natural it was maybe to be with one another maybe. She definitely made eye contact with me right as the sun found its way between a few leaves of the trees overhead and turned her irises into a fiery-but-gentle amber color and it was definitely the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

And when we got to the pond it was strikingly still. The water was hot on the surface and got colder the deeper we swam and it was quite a rush to dive into it out of a tree branch or whatever we could find and feel the changing conditions of the water rush past every part of our fully-naked young bodies. There were small algae blooms forming at the edges of the pond and other forms of beautiful scum drifting along the surface of the water. They helped make the water green, slightly staining our skin.

And suddenly, we decided to become one of the surface dwellers. I leaned back to float. Only the essential parts of my body stuck out of the water, and for her, the same. I felt in that moment a closeness which I have never felt to anyone else before. We were touching, not in the ways people normally do, but surrounding each other, without one or the other ever being dominant. We were melding together in a mess of beautiful, vibrant green. We didn't have anywhere to be or anything to be

except exactly where we were, with one another. I never experienced bliss quite like that. And that instant now draws itself out in my memory. God knows how long it actually lasted.

I fell in Love first. Gradually she kept finding more and more time for me as our bond became deeper. We developed Routine and I always knew when to expect her. Often she would bring me the acidic foods that I loved and that her stomach couldn't handle and I would exchange the sweet foods that made my teeth hurt and that made her smile from ear to ear, bringing out the dimples that made my heart beat faster.

I remember these days distinctly as the warmest parts of the summertime. Temperatures rose enough to boil blood and we lived without fear or air conditioning, still soaking ourselves in the bliss of sunshine.

Eventually we were spending every waking moment together. That was all I wanted. I didn't care about what kind of mood she was in or how she looked or if she smelled like old carrots. She was important to me. She made me happy. I made her happy.

Until I didn't.

I woke up next to her early on a Saturday morning. She was in tears and then so was I. We held each other's hands and bodies and I never really figured out what was wrong. She had to leave and I was still confused but I said nothing. I wish I found the words then, but that's just not realistic because I can't even think now of anything I would have said. She walked out the door and left behind her a phone charger, the smell of new books, and quite a number of hairs that I would continue to find in the folds of my sheets for months to come.

I made breakfast alone, went to work alone, cried in the bathroom alone, cleaned up my nosebleed alone. I found her outside in my front yard when I came home. She was lying in the grass and I asked her what's wrong. She couldn't answer me. Instead, she looked at me and the setting sun caught her iris in the right spot and showed me the fiery-but-gentle amber I had fallen in Love with and it was right then that she sunk into the ground. I said I'm sorry as it was happening and I hope she heard it. I can't be sure though.

I knew that the hand that took her under was my hand and I knew it wasn't fair of me, but I did it anyway. Now somewhere deep beneath the crust of the Earth, she was confused and it didn't have everything to do with me, but I helped her get there. I wanted so desperately to help her out, to navigate the maze in whatever underworld she now existed, but she had to do this on her own. And I know she was strong enough to do it, but I wish I could have just told her that to her face.

I texted her and sometimes got responses, but nothing with any of her Heart in it and that's really what I wanted. But I knew I didn't deserve it. Not now. She never blamed me for leaving. She should have.

One day, after she left, I kept track of all of the things I did and this was it:

I woke up three times. Once at eight in the morning, once at ten, and once at eleven. At eleven, I rolled around on top of the sheets, which I never bothered to get under because it was too hot, and thought about going to the farmer's market a block over. By the time I stopped thinking about it, I was too late. I got up and, with a can of beer in one hand and a mug of coffee in the other, I took a walk down the street— but maybe up, I can't remember— to this overgrown garden that I knew existed but never paid any mind until right now.

The wildflowers were beautiful and everything was more green than I could comprehend. I guess I had forgotten to wear shoes because a bee stung the bottom of my foot after I stepped on it. It swelled quickly. The walk home was significantly more painful than the walk there, but with more purpose and reason, too.

So I decided leaving my room was going to be too painful and resorted to just staying in and reading. That was the way I lived until I lost track of time. I watched movies sometimes and laid in bed surrounded by her hair often and called my mom to tell her lies about my health because I was too scared to disappoint her or crush her idealistic view of how I was doing.

These were the things that made me cry that day: something I read, something I watched, something I wrote, something I said, something I did, something I smelled, something I felt, something I heard. The day lasted much longer than 24 hours, until I was too weak to keep it going.

68

You can't write a letter without a place to send it. And you can't apologize without knowing what it's for. And you can't regret something without acknowledging what it was that you did wrong. And you can't care for someone as much as you want if there's still a part of you that wants to be selfish.

And you can't Love someone without understanding them.

And I wish some of these things weren't true and I wish some of these things were true and I wish there were separate truths that we could choose to hold onto and others that we could decide to just let go of and I don't have any form to my days anymore and everything I seem to write is just about Longing and I now firmly believe that this is the greatest pain I've endured and I want to believe that it can't get any worse but I just can't seem to convince myself of that and I think that at some point there comes Acceptance and Moving On and right now I don't see that as ever being an option and I never know what to do with my eyes anymore so I just keep them shut.



69

Youth
Masha Morgunova
oil on canvas | 40 x 40 in

Onions

Ian Murray

The onions in the basement have started to sprout
From old mother-of-pearl globes
Into something more alien
Air perfumed with used oil rags and mildew
Holes in the wood from the carpenter bees,
Inconvenient, yes.
But they're only acting according to their nature

I open every closet door I see
You could call me curious
You could call it obsessive

Birds- they fly South
Because they are afraid
of things that decay
It is in their being to escape
"Your grandmother has gone South
for the same reasons"

70

Given enough time, even these walls
will transform themselves
They will begin to vibrate at all the wrong frequencies
Insulated with yesterday's newspaper ads

The onions in the basement have started to sprout
Although we have had years
And years to remove them



71

Peel
Annalee Shields
oil on canvas | 10 x 12 in



On the Beach at Night Alone

Yeheon Hong

It has been a while since I've seen Ryu. He says he's been busy with work, something to do with lobsters: deep sea trading, fishy business. Meanwhile, I'm clocking out of my day job at the high school for the weekend. I say bye to my homeroom kids, filing out of the doors into their Friday shenanigans, and me, in my casual blue blazer, to the near, little car parked a couple blocks away, where Ryu is waiting, leaning against the hood with an upbeat smile, youthful shoulders.

This weekend is ours, he says, ours only. He drives us to the far East Coast where the water is deep black. We arrive a little after sunset and have dinner by the sea, at a seafood restaurant he has been recommended by a superior. I'm not a big fan of crabs or raw fish, but I don't want to tell him that, not tonight. It's been too long since I last saw him, and I'm a little scared of the increasing lengths of his business trips. So I eat along, down it with beer, then soju, and after we are done, I go to the restroom.

When I get back, he is gone. I become anxious for a second. I step outside, and the breeze hits me, and there is sand between my toes, in my pocket, the summer wind cool at night. I wander around the shore to look for Ryu. I find him in front of a convenience store, holding a plastic bag of fireworks in his hand, and when he gives me his eager trademark embrace muttering - what took you so long, you slowpoke - it's nothing short of a tidal wave, smelling like the shots of soju we just downed. I'm a little wasted, I tell him, in the most intelligent sounding vowels I can muster, and I can't help but think that it's a little too repetitious. This pattern of loving and trusting, kissing his bristly jaw only to have it bite me back in short breaths of lust until he grows tired of the way I taste in the briny breeze of the beach.

Ryu drops the bag in a dip in the sand and takes out two sparklers. There is wind everywhere, in the crannies of our elbows, between our legs, our fingers, and we nestle real tight, crotch to crotch, to light the sparklers. Fuck this, he laughs, after a dozen tries and kisses my neck. I stare deep into his ear and think so loud he can almost hear: what do you sound like on the inside? What low-pitched voice drives you to make the choices you make, to want me so, so hard?

I take the lighter from him and ignite the sparklers. We give a loud whoop and flail them about, drawing stars, playing wizard, eyes hurting, blinded, dry. On the black slate of a sky, I write his name in bold, stately Korean, but it fades quicker than I can write.

When they die out, he comes close and grabs my hand, tells me, I'm sorry about last time, I really am. I'll try to make it up to you. And I instinctively cover my stomach, my cheek, where the bruises have faded. Too many places to cover at once, and I can't cover them all. He enjoys this, the fact that I only have two hands, and he's holding onto one. He leans in, weaves his way into my neck. And I let his wandering hands all over my trembling body.

The last thing in the plastic bag is a Roman candle, one of those bigger tubes that shoot out a dozen, consecutive small fireworks. It was the last one in stock, he says, his voice playful. I'm silent, don't know what to say or do. Seeing where this goes. He sidles up behind me.

As he lights it, he puts it in my hand, and I make sure I'm holding it at

the right end, both hands. We wait for it to start, every corner of the sky heavy anticipation, shallow breaths.

The first of the flares rockets through the sky, and at its apex, it bursts into a thousand stars. For a split second, everything is light - pure, right, and worthy.

The second volley hits the sky and shatters. I don't dare blink, not even breathe, and we are both helplessly ecstatic at the sight of each one that comes afterwards. The Roman candle is warm in my hands, the heat traveling further up my arms, eating us up whole, both of us caught in bright flashes of childish awe and warmth.

I don't even notice that it's sputtered out completely, and we just stand there for a couple minutes, gazing at the sky. Then we lie on the sand and fall asleep, and when I wake up, he's gone.



break
ethan pickett
digital photograph (s)

relearning him: a chronological account

madeline gullion

we hash and rehash the rights and wrongs of what was, of what we were. it was both of us but mostly him and he admits that, freely. there was nothing i could have done differently because he was not ready. is not ready. let himself and me believe he was until he couldn't. "You were too focused on the long-term, and that scared me." i restrain myself from reading him the receipts, miles of text messages, words of lasting love. lying, pretending, whatever. he meant them briefly, on the surface. if only, i say. if only—a thousand things. i hold them under my tongue and only kind-of-cry once.

we eat burritos off of styrofoam as i contemplate the mirror beginning and ending and if maybe a restaurant with real plates would have built a stronger foundation. under the table, his feet point toward me, and i think of *New Girl*, and i tell myself he still loves me.

we hug, then hug again. too long. i ask if he's okay. he doesn't know. his forehead is against mine, his arms still around me. the air around us is delicate. i hold my breath, hold myself from moving too suddenly. from scaring him.

his mouth is on mine, brief. is this how he says goodbye?

76 we shouldn't, i think, but i barely breathe the words before we're kissing again, and it's more this time. it's not an ending or a goodbye. we're kissing in the middle of the street and we're carrying leftovers and Nalgens and car keys and nothing is convenient. we're kissing, my back curved around the back windshield of my car, his water bottle rolling to the sidewalk. urgency pulses between us. my fingers are icy on his neck. his are icy on the jut of my hip bones, just barely under my jacket, nervous. anticipation pulses between us.

does he know what this means to me? he doesn't want me to get the wrong idea. i've told him i'm still in love with him so of course i'm getting the wrong idea. we're kissing in my car, leaning towards each other over the gear shift. he tugs at me, pulling me into him. i am climbing over the console, straddling him. this is comfortable for neither of us, but we don't stop.

i squish the burrito in his jacket pocket with my left knee. he doesn't mind. he can't make up his mind about taking me back to his house. he says yes, takes it back. so many times my head spins. my head spins for other reasons.

"can i use your bathroom?" he says yes. i hover at the bottom of the stairs, waiting. "You can come up," he says. and our near future is determined. i climb the stairs in steady rhythm, trying to recall what underwear i have on.

he looks younger. he's let his hair grow out, all shaggy and soft between my fingers like when we first met. his body feels the same, rough in all the same places, warm against mine. he makes the same noises, says the same things. doesn't this feel as familiar to him as it does to me? the ease at which we fall back into us is as comforting as it is fleeting.

"Are you kidding? Of course I loved you. How could I not?" he is firm in his usage of the past tense. the present threatens to choke me in its immediacy.

he hugs me goodbye—just one hug this time—and i try to kiss him. he pulls away. "Too much."

he looks older now. a few weeks have passed but he knows how he feels now. i am no longer an uncertainty. he has tied up his loose ends. he wears slacks and a branded shirt and his room feels like a fairytale. fairy lights blur my vision. i look for traces of us on the walls and shelves, in the wrinkles of a blanket i've never seen or slept under. his duvet-cover-with-no-duvet-inside is gone. his bed is made. nothing happens. nothing is going to happen. i must repeat this to myself, i must make it my truth, i must relearn him.

i wonder if we'll find each other again.



La Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba
Illianna Gonzalez-Soto

digital photograph | 2627 x 4096 pixels

She tried to take what she could, the only things they had left to remember. She knew material things never endure. With each step, the weight on her shoulders intensified, but she carried on with her task with acceptance and determination. “Look,” she told him as they reached the end of their small town, “look at the rich desert ground. Mark the way it feels beneath the soles of your tired feet. Take note of each plant that we pass by, the way they look up close, and the way they look faraway. Breathe in our open fields and farmlands. Remember everything *cariño*, remember, and then let it all go.”

They had walked most of the day with few breaks in between. Her little one filled the silence intermittently as he chattered to her about his excitement to explore this new place. After a while, he asked the question she had already asked herself so many times before. She stopped to rest, placing the suitcase on the soft red earth. She looked up, noticing the way her neck creaked and moaned from the absence of the suitcase as she peered up at the cerulean sky. While they had walked, she had thought its enormity might swallow her whole.

She contemplated her answer for a while. As she thought, his tiny fingers curled and tugged mindlessly at her skirt.

She knew then that there was no stopping him from knowing. So she began telling him about the necessity for their migration, leaving out nothing. He listened with a sense of acceptance and determination that did not surprise her in the slightest.

79

She looked to the sky and felt solace, at least it would always be present no matter what difficulties lay ahead.

He could not escape that distant memory. The rich desert earth of Mexico, the cool dry breeze, and the deep blue sky that had seemed to encompass the vast landscape.

These images and feelings would come to him in waves, on some days more than others. Today was one of those days. He knew they had walked for hours, until they reached the border of California. He remembered nothing of the exact timing of their arrival, he just remembered the exhaustion. He had been 7 then. Only a boy.

My name is Armando, like my father before me.

His fingers grasped the cup of his *cafecito* as he walked outside, his name scrawled along the edges. Armando. A name that had been in his family for generations. The barista who had called out his name had not rolled the ‘R’, and today, this bothered him. This didn’t usually, he had gotten used to the harsh pronunciation. He remembered thinking about this as a kid. While his tongue had worked hard to

stop itself from hitting the back of his teeth as he tried to pronounce “Randy” or “Robert”, his classmates had not put the same effort into pronouncing his name. They didn’t have to, and they didn’t think to.

Say it. Lengthen the ‘R’ and be transported.

He thought of his mother. At the pool of strength within her that never seemed to need replenishing. He thought of her fight, her desire to make a better life for them.

She had encouraged him to forget, forget everything he knew of rolling the ‘R’s’, of the sacred Mexican earth, of the deep cerulean sky. He knew she thought it would be easier for him that way. He had been so young when they left. But the memories of Mexico were persistent. They hit him in waves.

Say it, and feel the red desert earth beneath your feet. Say it, and feel the indigo sky impede on your senses.

He knew his mother could never forget. It had been 17 years since they left. Her tongue would always reach to connect to the back of her teeth, would always reach to connect to everything they had left behind. He would find her looking up some days as she gazed at the sapphire sky. Mexico...I love you, her heart would say as she rose to work in the sea of grapes. She would wake early, and spend hours each day picking the crop. Her hands working quickly to rip the fruit from its vine, her feet shuffling along the desert land of California, crossing again and again the same ground of the vineyard. Back and forth, back and forth, along the rows of grapes.

80

My name is Armando, like the rolling waves of the vineyards. Like the grapes as they are ripped away from the vine.

More memories hit him as his fingers grasped around his steaming cup. He remembered the fields as well. It had been hard for him to attend school when he had to rise early alongside his mother. In the fields, all he really could recall was the exhaustion. Twelve hours a day picking grapes by his mother’s side. Sometimes she would sing to him, sometimes she was silent. Though she never revealed anything about Mexico to him. “Ya, Armando. We can never go back,” she would say. So he learned to keep quiet on the subject. Even so, he knew the true desires of her heart.

My name is Armando, feel its reverberation in your mind, heart, and soul.

They had lived in a migrant camp when they arrived. There was little food or water, and no electricity. But there were the other mexicanos. They had made sure he wouldn’t fail to recall the beauty that was...is.... Mexico.

His days passed by like this: Rise, work, sleep, rise, work, sleep, exhaustion, repeat. He looked up as his tiny body picked the fruit. Some days he would get dizzy, from the pesticides that encompassed each plump round grape. Dizzy too, from the sun that beat upon his shoulders. The deep blue sky always centered him.

My name is Armando. Bear its rays upon your shoulders. Endure its dizzying affects.

He thought for a while, the heat from his coffee had escaped.

California and Mexico. A human-made boundary was the only barrier that separated these alluring landscapes, the rich earth of each country. The omnipresent sky embracing everything.

My name is Armando. Say it and in the same breath experience the bittersweet lies of the American Dream, the treacherous hope for a better life.

California was their home, and Mexico was in their hearts. He was determined to reclaim them both, for each were a part of him, and a part of his mother as well.

He thought of her as he turned around suddenly, just before he exited the coffee shop. The weight of his reclamation bore upon him, yet all at once he felt light. "Armando," he corrected the barista as he put the tip in the jar. "Mi nombre es Armando," he said, feeling the way his tongue hit the back of his teeth.

Say my name, and feel the strength in our survival.



street lights on the walk to brick city madeline gullion

there are one, two, sometimes three
functioning street lights on my walk home.
i dip my toes in the faint yellow
that pools on crunchy snow beneath.
my shadow stretches and stretches,
from thick and black and full of knowledge
to the thin gray of street scum
on the disheartened debris
of last week's storm.
my head spins with thoughts of
the negative forcing factor of
black carbon on white snow,
materialist and functionalist theories
leaking from my ears.
i digest the day on this 15-minute trek,
grateful for legs and knees
that bend and stomp
and carry me home.
that's the thing about loss;
it teaches you a lesson that seeps
into everyday life,
reminding you to appreciate
the way your body moves
and carries its own weight.
i rub my scar through thick denim and long underwear,
wondering like always
when, if ever,
the feeling will return.
motion-sensor lights in carports blink on
as i walk by, strangely in sync
with blossoming ideas for project this
and workshop that.
the universe feels my ideas bouncing back and forth
and says here, let me illuminate.
overhanging bushes have been carved to
yield to human height, but i duck anyway,
skidding on melted-snow-refrozen-into-ice.
the end of the sidewalk signifies
the last leg of the journey,
emerging from the trail,
destination on the horizon.
the warm glow of brick city windows
beckons me home.

Tell me how to breathe

Anonymous

84

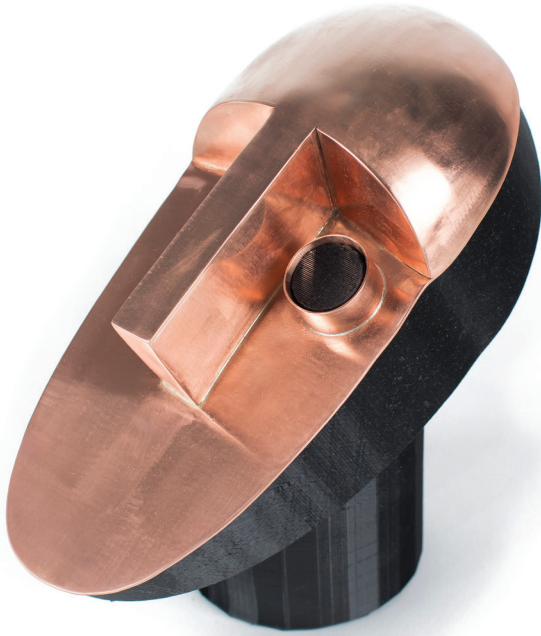
Thinking and sinking, and wishing I'm breathing, and all that I'm hearing is
you
I'm sinking from thinking of the times I was tripping, I'm slipping and
smoking and broken down now
I'm thinking and sinkin away from my feelings and I keep on wishing that I
could learn how to breathe



85

Three3
Hannah Roman

acrylic on panel | 26 x 33 x 3/4 in



Untitled
Sulay Ranjit
copper, 3D printed base | ~5.5 in tall

From the Collective Archives of Lost Letters

Bea N'Daou

Worker V,

Your assignment is as follows: analyze the following documents thoroughly. Find evidence to support the Council's theory that keywords 'love' and 'intimacy' were simply cultural markers for mental instability. Do well on this assignment and your transgression with Worker K will be expunged from your record.

I expect your report to be thorough and meticulous.

Administrator F,
Director of the Archive of Lost Letters

[Dated February 14th, 2012
Written by Ms. Anna Smith, at age 37
Intended recipient: Unknown
Archived by Worker V in the year 3021]

87

To whom it may concern,

There was a chair I bought when I was younger, it looked like something out of a Victorian Era drawing room. It was upholstered with crushed green velvet and had dark wood trim. I banged my ankles on the underside of it every time I tried to swing my legs.

Every time I brought a lover home they would comment on it. What the fuck is that doing here, they would always ask. It didn't match the rest of the house, which was decorated in shades of yellow and warm brown wood. There were flowers on the walls, yellow roses, and it looked ridiculous sitting in the middle of my living room.

I would send my guest away the next morning and spend an hour sitting in my chair, watching the sunrise through my window and pretend my apartment was a drawing room in a small cottage somewhere in the woods. I really wish all I could remember about that apartment was the chair.

Sincerely,

Anna

[Dated April 22nd, 1877
Written by Samuel Johnson, age 19
Intended recipient: Oscar-Claude Monet
Archived by Worker V in the year 3021]

Monsieur Monet,

Je trouve ton travail inspirant. L'ensemble du mouvement, le groupe impressionniste, je veux dire, est pour moi une tentative de saisir l'essence de la vie. Car qu'est-ce que la vie, après tout, sinon une collection d'impressions? Le sexe, la parole, l'amour sont autant d'impressions vagues et impossibles à comprendre intégralement. Je trouve personnellement que les choses mentionnées ci-dessus sont encore plus incompréhensibles pour moi, car le sexe est quelque chose qui me rend confus. Il est impossible pour quelqu'un comme moi de trouver l'amour, car je préfère regarder vos peintures que de converser avec des femmes aptes à être les sujets des peintures elles-mêmes. Et la parole est tellement compliquée que je n'essaye même pas de comprendre. Merci pour votre travail et pour me faire croire que c'est bien d'apprécier l'essence vague de la chose, autant que ses spécificités.

Avec beaucoup d'admiration,
Sam

Translation by the Ministry of Dead Language Studies:

88 Dear Mr. Monet,

I find your work inspiring. The entire movement, the impressionist group I mean, is to me an attempt to capture the essence of life. Because what is life, after all, but a collection of impressions? Sex, speech, love, all are impressions that are vague and impossible to understand in entirety. I personally find that the aforementioned things are even more incomprehensible to me, because sex is something I find only confuses me. Love is impossible for someone like me to find, as I prefer to look at your paintings than converse with women fit to be the subjects of paintings themselves. And speech is so convoluted I don't even try to understand. Thank you for your work, and making me believe it's alright to appreciate the vague essence of thing, as much as its specifics.

Yours with much admiration,
Sam

[Dated November 21, 2038
Written by Alaric DeLuka, age 43
Intended recipient: Unknown
Archived by Worker V in the year 3021]

Hello ~~old friend~~ *beloved*, you deserve that title more than anyone else,
It's been a while.

~~The last time I saw you were laid out on my bed and still sighing from my touch.~~ How long will you stay gone? There's no one keeping you away now. My wife is gone, the children moved away.

I know now that sex isn't what you want from me. I don't know how else I just want you, your quiet breathes in the morning.

Maybe we could spend Christmas together. Just the two of us, the cat, and the tree. Or we could have an anniversary all our own, if only you'd agree to marry me.

~~Even if you didn't want to get married we could still have an anniversary.~~ I'd do anything to have an anniversary with you. It's not fair that she and I got to have what you and I didn't. Not when I love you more. Not when it was always you, and never her.

Yours,
Alaric

89

[Dated December 21st, 2018
Written by: Unknown
Recipient: James - last name unknown
Archived by Worker V in the year 3021]

To James,

I fucked her. And I don't ever want to do that again, I don't want to fuck someone who's only a goddamn substitute who could never be you. I only thought of you. Why couldn't you have stayed? Why couldn't you have told me that you wanted me when I was there, waiting for you to say something. But I wanted you to know. I fucked her. And I hated it.

X

Director;

There is no explanation for these letters. I have analyzed them, and processed them thoroughly. My findings cannot support your claims. These people did not show any signs of insanity; rather they were simply sentimental in a bygone way. The Council's theory will find no support for their theories within these documents.

End of report.

To Worker K,

90 I do not regret it. To hold your hand in mine, to sit beside you in the greenhouse and speak each other's names-- I cannot regret that. I simply regret that you have been reassigned. I do not know if this letter will reach you, or if it will be destroyed by the Ministry of Correspondence's Nationalist Committee, but I found I must write it down. I wish to hold your hand again. I wish to hear you say it again, Valerius. My name. I wish to call you Kristoff. I wish to tell you that what we feel was called love once.

Signed,

~~Worker V~~ Valerius



Miller Farm Tomatoes
Annalee Shields

oil on canvas | 10 x 20 in



Rooster
Ellen Johnson

watercolor, ink, colored pencil | 3.75 x 5.5 in

CONTRIBUTORS

Emma Assarsson is a visual artist interested in expression through vibrant colors and textures.

Saskia Bailey-de Bruijn is graduating in May with a Human Development and Social Relations major and a Theatre Arts minor. When her creative energy is not going towards dance or performance or photography, she is known to write often overly-vague poems as a way to process her perspective. Saskia hopes to keep learning from the earth and finding the balance between being inspired and becoming overwhelmed.

Lucia Burton is a senior WGSS major/English minor who is easily distracted, eager, and a Type 6 on the Enneagram. She loves mountains, bathtubs, and late night Domino's.

Madeline Chomentowski: Mads is a junior, studying biology. She has mainly studied film photography, but has been dabbling in digital while abroad. Current interests include sea stars, the good old outdoors, and group dynamics.

Paloma Collazo-Vargas is a senior in International Studies. Poetry and writing is usually not her thing, but it's her last year and wants to try new things, so here she is working them. Paloma wants to graduate with no regrets!

Sunset Combs is a senior English major, Creative Writing minor. She is a writer of Creative Nonfiction and the maker of folk-y music that can be found on Youtube and Spotify. She will miss Earlham when she goes. Goodbye, all. Goodbye, *Crucible*.

Yasmin Dasilva is a senior English major and works on the *Crucible* staff. They enjoy cats, friends, and the cathartic feeling when they close every file they had open once an essay is done.

Kyle Dickerson is a senior philosophy major.

Joseph-Paul (JP) Dongo is a junior Biochemistry major from Greenwich, Connecticut who feels very uncomfortable writing about himself in the third person. He enjoys writing in his free time and will likely pursue an English minor. Friends have called him "annoying and sarcastic." JP hopes to publish a fiction book one day before his future wife poisons him to death by slipping a slice of Provolone into his lunch sandwich.

Kinsey Emerson is a third-year Metals Major.

Illianna Gonzalez-Soto is a junior English major with a double-minor in Spanish and Hispanic Studies and Creative Writing. She is currently studying abroad in Granada, Spain. She wishes for people to take away from her photos and short story the ability to feel inspired, to feel empathy, and to feel compassion for cultures that are different than one's own.

madeline gullion is a second-year double majoring in over-commitment and self-discovery. she's considering a minor in indecisiveness. she loves to write and share stories and hopes that maybe one day, her words will change the world.

Opal Harbour is a sophomore history major who researches issues of homophobia and sexuality in the United States. She spends her time hooting and hollering on the roof of the Kroger until the employees chase her away with brooms. Find her on Twitter or in the soups aisle at Marsh. She's your grandpa now!

Lilly Hartman likes to make things with her hands.

Alex Heyrman is a sophomore English/WGSS major who sometimes writes things.

Yeheon Hong is a gay, Korean anglophone who enjoys smutty conversations with bearded strangers.

Emily Jade

Ellen Johnson is a senior studio art major focusing in drawing. She gets her inspiration from children's picture books, nature, and her hometown on the coast of Maine. Her illustrations are usually done in watercolor & ink.

Leah Johnson is a senior chemistry major with minors in English and creative writing. She plans to teach science and write in her spare time.

Kiara Kamara is currently a freshman who sometimes writes. She is also a very big fan of turtles.

Celia Matthews is a senior English major who prefers Sunsets to Sunrises except after the sun has completely gone and then she longs for its return. She also enjoys long, awkward rides in the elevator and hardback books with no flappers.

Becca Moore is a Senior Human Development and Social Relations Major. She plans to work at a therapeutic center for children after college, and pursue a graduate degree in Child Counseling. Becca loves to write about her personal journey with mental illness, polyamory, and her LGBT identity. She looks forward to one day being a mother and living a happy life full of kindness and love.

Masha Morgunova, Studio Art Major and German Language and Literature minor. She likes painting, people and babe cats in little cowboy hats.

Anna Mullin is a junior biology major who occasionally writes in her free time. She enjoys poetry, fiction, and most other forms of writing, save for personal bios. So we'll just end this here.

Ian Murray is allegedly a first year student at Earlham. Apparently, he is a biology major. He is supposedly interested in a career in genetics or paleontology, but readers are advised to be skeptical of unsubstantiated details.

Bea N'Daou is a second year student of Afro-Scandinavian descent who has had a lifelong love of writing both poetry and prose.

Sage Phillips: Midwestern-born, nationally-aligned, Sage is currently being Indiana-educated. She often finds herself stuck between versatility and expertise, and exploring the raw and messy parts of emotion.

ethan pickett hopes you are well.

Graham Pines: In a landscape which has been disrupted, dismantled, by man and greed, finding solace amid destruction becomes arduous. Forces uncontrollable push us beyond ourselves and our capabilities, begging to question when we will return to truth. Slices of candor come from human interaction, this is where find Brooklyn's Graham Pines.

Jakob Posti is a junior year student who makes paintings, films, songs and photographs. They are from Pittsburgh, PA.

Sunil Pun, a physics major at Earlham College, took these photos during his visit to his home-country Nepal in the summer of 2018. Often using bright colors and moody compositions, creating pictures that feel as real as fictional has been his primary focus while documenting/exploring social and individual topics.

Sulay Ranjit: The said individual is not into the concept of biographical notes at the moment.

Hannah Roman, class of 2020, is a studio arts major interested in exploring the personal importance of observation, interpretation, and process in her work. With an attention to color and color theory Hannah strives to capture emotions and insights through the abstraction of the spaces, energies, and structures around her.

Qawi (Q) Rucker: Q is from Cincinnati who enjoys playing basketball and crunching numbers. In his free time, he works out, improves his game, and socializes.

Annalee Shields is an art major from Chicago who is inspired by color and texture in simple natural forms.

Finn Smith-Ruttan is currently a sophomore English major at Earlham College, working on developing his creative writing skills. While writing fiction is a lifelong hobby, he is just beginning to dive into it at a more serious level. Major literary influences include John Crowley, Haruki Murakami and Ursula K. Le Guin.

Georgia Tillotson is a Senior Art Minor with a focus in nude photography. She is most inspired by the artist Ruth Bernhard and discovered her 2 years ago in her first photography class at Earlham. Georgia focuses most on playing with the light and shadow that human forms create. More specifically, she focuses on the concept of “chiaroscuro” which means “the treatment of light and shadow in painting and drawing.” Georgia is about to graduate but is always looking for more models before she does.

Madeline Wallace is an English major, former editorial intern for *The Crucible*, and aspiring something-or-other (TBD) who never has time to read or write. She’s in awe of all the art Earlham students produce and is thrilled to be among them in this year’s edition.

Kamilah Wright is a junior English major and creative writing minor. She enjoys reading and writing as well as entertainment. She hopes to one day write for film and television.

And anonymous contributors.