

The
Nassau
Literary
Review



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NASSAU
LITERARY
REVIEW

WINTER 2021
“From the Crucible”





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Cover art "Untitled" by Drew Pugliese (above).

Dear Readers,

As our staff came together to finalize this issue, situated as it is in our current time of hardships, we were struck by what the issue has inevitably come to represent: a year of artmaking spent apart. It was not only a year of collective isolation, but also one of shared fury and grief at the lives that were lost through the pandemic, unconscionable acts of racism and violence, devastating wildfires, hurricanes so numerous we ran out of names to give them, and the selfish and ignorant acts of governments across the globe, particularly the U.S. government.

In short, we have lived in, and our art has emerged from, a crucible. This is not to say that our art was somehow refined by these fires, or that suffering is requisite for the production of art, but simply to say that we have existed in these fires and that our art has been indelibly shaped by our experiences. The fingerprints of our recent history are pressed into every inch of the works we have produced this past semester, and such common threads and themes seemed to bring together the works we received into a tapestry—a greater whole.

Many of the pieces rang with echoes of frustrated introspection and a yearning for human connection that carried through works of art such as the piece by Drew Pugliese which features a figure seemingly lost in thought while framed in a sea of twisted faces. This theme also appears in stories such as Cassandra James' "Delgado at the Window," in which the eponymous character finds himself trapped in a swirling eddy of his own thoughts, memories, and insecurities, staring out into the world without the confidence that he will be able to join it.

Into our growing tapestry came glowing threads of memory: of sweetness, shame, and home in Sheherzad Jamal's "Lahore" and of unspoken grief in Ethan Luk's "Nativity." Other artists depicted a reality encroached upon by elements of fantasy that, rather than lighten the burden of heavy realism, crystallized and amplified the violence that had always been rippling under the surface. This impulse is captured in Sandy Yang's "Suspended," with its black-finned goldfish floating impossibly in rising tears—and in the stories "Three Twenty-Eight" and "The Knight at the Cheese Castle," which I cannot bear to spoil the experience of reading uninitiated.

And, as it is often the case with painful, troubling experiences, out of our crucible also came hope. Hope shone through the warmth of intimacy and honeyed understanding in Hannah Wang's "what to say during the instrumental opening to whitney houston's 'i wanna dance with somebody'"; through deftly sliced cubes of sour mango, eaten always with the sense of a mother's love and resilience, in Jeremy Pulmano's "Mango"; through the dissent that makes us all braver in Juliette Carbonnier's "Protest"; and through a surprising new companion to our writing explored by Ben Guzovsky in his essay, "Bot Poetry: Generating Randomness."

Through this time of extraordinary hardship, we still have had the gift of art and the responsibility to choose what to center. This year, inspired by the vulnerability, resilience, and courage we have witnessed in the world around us, we strove to present from within the crucible a picture of empathy, grief, and a hope that emboldens us. It is our hope that the following works will help you find meaning within your own fires and the spark of determination to build a better world. We are honored and grateful that you are here.

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SHEHERZAD JAMAL

Lahore

In the sticky heat of Lahore before monsoon,
you cut me a slice of fresh mango,
its flesh was sweet though a little warm;
it melted into my neck that August noon.
When you threw the soft peel away, I
wiped my hands on the beige seat cover
of our old FX and licked my fingers slowly,
swallowing the juice and spit thickly.
Did you know, I found that car a shameful thing,
it trudged past school, while I folded into myself.
The air conditioner never did work; sweat
was always a river in your dried streams.
Perhaps, the rain will wash it away,
while we all say—*‘It was time anyway.’*



EMMA MOHRMANN

Readiness is All

EMILY WILLFORD

dream after falling asleep while my father watches a war movie

modern children dressed
in scarlet and black file to me—
child-ruler who should-not-be-but-is,
who is lounging on a mattress
without ceremony—

approach me through
the muck-eyed grown ups,
present me with a red and empty
birdcage, to say:
they will not help us
when the floods come.

NANCY LU

Kouros Reclining



Three Twenty-Eight

“Last song,” said Elda, nodding at the horizon, where the new sun, red as plasma, was poisoning the purple sky. She retrieved a pair of catlike glasses from the seat divider, and Gus handed her the umbrella from the backseat.

Gus’s phone was in the cupholder, and Elda reached for it primly. The fingertips of her gloves, opera-length, had been snipped off so her hands could navigate the device while wrapped in ivory polyester-satin. “Badass Audrey Hepburn,” Gus had said the day she’d done it, and the next evening he’d gifted her the glasses.

“What do you think?” she said, tapping the playlist labelled *Countdown*, whose icon was that fuzzy monocle-wearing puppet whose appearance made Elda laugh every time. “Who’s this again?” she asked.

“The Count,” said Gus, smiling. “Do 3:28. My actual guess is 3:23, but I’m giving you some wiggle room since you’re a slow clicker.”

“It only seems like I’m a slow clicker because you give me so much wiggle room.” Gus tilted his head. “Chicken and the egg.”

The song switched. It’d been Gus’s pick before—something folksy and

lonely like always—but the *Countdown* playlist was random. Elda didn’t know most of the songs, and even Gus, with his seemingly omniscient music taste, was eluded by a few. Hardly a second into 3:28, Gus giggled.

“You know this one?” asked Elda.

“Kanye,” said Gus. “Classic.”

“Classic,” repeated Elda. Sometimes she could feel the blue convertible moving forward while her own body stood still, and everything felt exactly as fast as it was. Half of Elda’s picks were just Gus’s from a few nights before. The other half were Dolly Parton, who was lonely and folksy too, but her high, witchy voice felt familiar to Elda, like something ancient and intrinsic repurposed into something new.

These past few nights Gus’s driving, which was usually expert (and maybe the best thing about him), was losing its edge. He went slower now, and sometimes he would dip briefly into the neighboring lanes, which bothered Elda even though there was no one else on the road.

3:10.

Was that long enough? Long enough for an “it’s not you, it’s me,” followed by a “we can always be friends,” all tied up with a bittersweet goodbye?

3:05.

Elda turned the music down. She couldn’t turn down the wind, which was actually most of the problem. “Gus?” He swerved recklessly into the right lane. No—he was just changing lanes. They slid onto the offramp, and rolled off the freeway. At the stoplight, Gus said, “I’m gonna park.” Elda nodded, and realized that Gus must have known what was coming. Maybe he wanted to break it off even more than she did—maybe he wanted to break it off *first*.

He parked in a practically empty lot that shared space with a fast food restaurant. The M-shaped sign gave off a marigold glow. Elda noticed that Gus had parked under a tree with sagging foliage, one that would blanket them in shade when the sun finally rose. By day, Gus was a manuscript editor. Elda would miss his attention to detail. She’d miss reading over his shoulder and saying, in a sing-song voice, “That’s not accurate,” when a werewolf bayed its respects to the full moon or a mermaid tucked shells into a jewel-colored updo. “Werewolves hate the moon,” she’d tell him. “Shining alabaster in flashy pink hair? Sounds like shark food to me.”

2:02.

This was a bad break up song. It didn’t play. It thumped. Also, Elda kind of liked it.

1:55.

Elda folded her glasses, clipping them to the front of her dress. Her eyes stung, but she could at least save time trying to explain herself if her face said it all.

“I think we should—” mumbled Elda as Gus asked, “What if you turned me?” Elda looked at Gus’s phone. They were closing in on a minute and a half, and Elda didn’t know how they were supposed to have either conversation—the splitting up one or the “Gus-you-must-be-out-of-your-fucking-mind” one in less than a hundred seconds. Elda saw the entire exchange play out like a premonition. She was determined to skip the filler, like the part where they played ‘chicken’ with their facial expressions (Gus’s cool and sure, Elda’s absolutely mortified) until one of them flinched. She would have to cut the “we can always be friends” stuff for time.

Elda’s neck itched. The rising sun was at her back, and she latched the parasol over her shoulder. It was white, emblazoned with gold basketballs and Lakers a dozen times in violet. Behind Gus’s head, the sky was just taking on the dusty hue of dawn.

Elda blinked. “Gus, you must be out of your mind.”

“We’ve got a minute twenty-eight, Elda. You’ve got to be more productive with your words than that.”

“*Exactly*. You couldn’t have brought this up sooner? Like, hours ago?”

“You’re breaking up with me on my birthday. Who’s got bad timing?”

“I’m not turning you. This isn’t *Twilight*,” Elda insisted.

“You’re right. I’m way more attractive than Robert Pattinson.”

“This is you being productive with your words?”

Elda looked wearily at Gus. His under eyes were discolored from lack of sleep, and she could probably manage a pretty decent echo from shouting into the sunken hollows of his face. Elda didn't know when he slept. Sometimes she feigned an engagement just so he'd have his evenings free to rest. Still, his eyes were filled with mirth.

Finally Elda got the joke. “You don't really want me to turn you.” She consulted the phone. One minute on the dot, and she wouldn't have been surprised if they really had less.

Elda noticed Gus thumbing through his hairline in the flip-out mirror. More and more frequently, he was mistaking sun-stripped brown for grey.

“God, I'm old,” he said. “Thirty.” Something ferocious and fleeting entered his face. “*Thirty*. That's like a Los Angeles fifty.”

“That's not old,” Elda snapped, with two hundred and something years' worth of indignance.

“Then stop looking at me like I've got an expiration date printed on the bottom of my shoe. I spend almost every night, dusk 'til dawn, with someone who's allergic to sunlight, silver, and fire—hell!—garlic. If I taped together two Outshine popsicle sticks into a holy cross, I could burn you to ash in two seconds flat. Don't you realize that right now you are one Lakers umbrella away from a fatal

sunstroke? ‘Immortal's not invincible, Gus.’ You said that, Elda.”

“It was a typo. In a manuscript.”

“You still said it,” he insisted. “I gave up Italian food for you, Elds. If you wanna break up with me, do it because I suck, not because I'm human.”

Elda picked at her glove with her free hand. “You don't suck,” she said.

“You do,” Gus joked, tapping his incisors. It was his turn to check the music. “We've got ten seconds. You better tell me quick.”

“Tell you what?”

“If we just broke up to *Gold Digger*.”

0:00.

Elda felt her skin tighten. She flexed her hands as a familiar stiffening overcame her joints. “No,” she said, in that constricted way that hopefully looked more painful than it was. Gus knew to turn away, and faced the glowing yellow M and watched as probably-night became definitely-morning. Meanwhile, Elda shriveled and shrunk into a leathery brown bat. Gus caught the umbrella just before it could topple out of the car.

“Same time tomorrow night,” he declared, and Elda fluttered into the shade-giving tree, the backs of her wings tender against the dawn breeze.

She'd have to ask Gus for a darker umbrella.

JULIETTE CARBONNIER

Coat on the Train



SABRINA KIM

Joyas Voladoras

Because I am a person of obsessions, and because I impose my obsessions upon those who come near me, I have read Brian Doyle's "Joyas Voladoras" aloud many times—to friends, students I tutored over the summer, and my mother this morning in the kitchen. Why thrust more of myself toward others when I can share Doyle's words, which effortlessly articulate how I aspire to interact with the world? And so, the essay has become a sort of adopted manifesto.

"Joyas Voladoras" is succinct and dynamic, universal and intimate. The essay begins with the hummingbird, celebrating its dexterity, color, and ferocious energy for life. With humility and childlike fascination, Doyle moves from the hummingbird to the blue whale, eventually broadening his scope to all living things. He examines the heart—its solitude, desire, and tenacity—and how it holds our human tendencies. The final sentence, an elegiac list of sensory images like "a child's apple breath" and "the words 'I have something to tell you,'" throbs with longing and nostalgia. "Joyas Voladoras" invites us to consider how we interact with the living world, and at the heart of that, how we interact with other humans. How wondrous it is to be able to remember—and to have a language for remembrance.



Courtesy of americamagazine.org

I think literature should be a lunge toward the truth. Perhaps the truest form of experiencing Doyle's essay came this past summer, in the dim middle-of-the-night stillness of an Airbnb. A friend and I sank into the living room sofa, close enough to hear each other's pulse. It was a fragile, emotional moment, and I was careful to half-speak, half-whisper Doyle's words. The way my voice, aware of itself, walked between smallness and fullness felt true to the essay: "So much held in a heart in a lifetime. So much held in a heart in a day, an hour, a moment." It's a divine thing, for prose and life to mirror one another, to look each other in the eye. As if to say, *I see you, I'm with you, and I'll be here in the morning.*

HENRY WRIGHT

An Ear to the Ground

Every silence seems to have something to say.
The small silence of the bedside lamp sitting alone in the dark,
The half-chewed dog bone under the couch,
And the vase of flowers on the kitchen table.

The shyer silence of the cat slipping away through the porch door,
The empty booth in the diner,
And the cellist's thumb lying still on its neck.

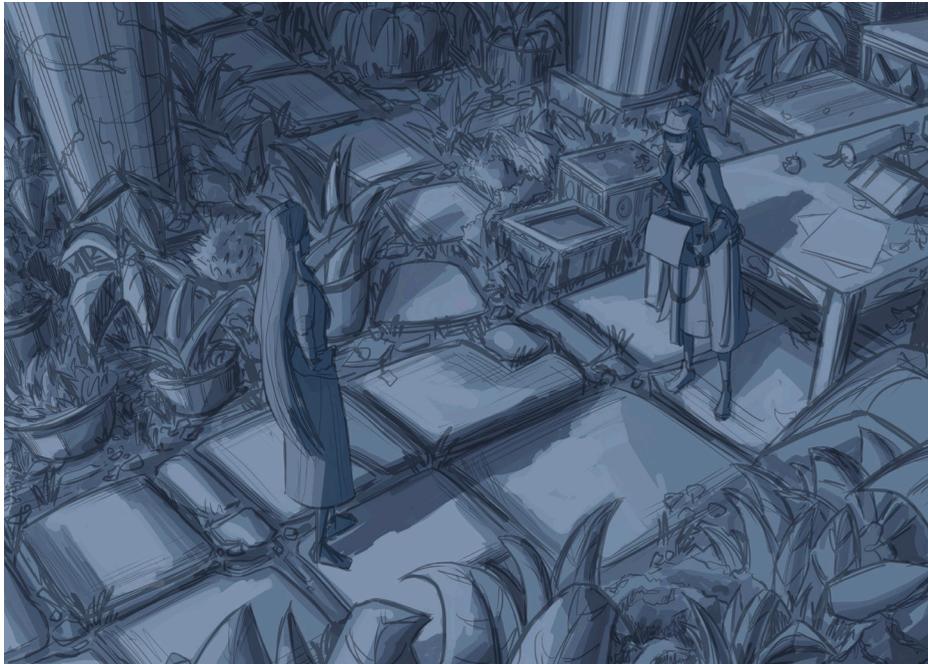
The deeper silence of the deckchair at the end on the dock,
The suitcases gathering dust in the attic,
And the sculpture without its head.

And the widest silence of the boats bobbing in the harbour,
The pitcher's mound under floodlights,
And the train disappearing around the tracks.



JPROCHART

In all honesty,
where does time go?



NED FURLONG

Country Edict

I step out
of the nineteenth century
farmhouse

Step careful
over loose survey
lines

Step before the sun—
which, bowed
late in the day,

asks no bow—
only the time it takes to set
and a face.

Before the brilliant sky
I listen to light
in piles and rows,

shouting with a preacher's
flame:

Quiet
is the most versatile color

but I hang on close—
I know

there was nothing
but quiet
when I got here.

EMMA MOHRMANN

Not Waving



LILA HARMAR

Man in a Moleskine

1999

He dies at the end.

Eli repeats the words Hannah snarled to him the morning he started reading Harry Potter. Well, the morning he purloined *The Philosopher's Stone* from his sister's room in order to fill his unquenchable desire for fantasy. Eli, relying upon simple logic nonetheless advanced for a first grader, knew that Harry couldn't die yet. He had seen another book on her shelf, had heard her planning to stake out the bookstore for a third. He knew that they couldn't keep calling the series Harry Potter if he died, and Eli doubted that J. K. Rowling would be so morbid as to pen the death of an eleven-year-old.

There is still a touch of doubt in his mind, though, because Eli trusts Hannah. He is closer with her than he is with his brother, Abraham. Hannah had pulled him down the narrow streets to Hebrew school every week, always peering over both shoulders before crossing the street the way their mom showed her, taught him everything she had memorized about local Massachusetts snake populations, first introduced him to perusing paper-bound ink. That morning, with warmth spreading through her usual pallor and fists clenched at her sides, he knew that anger pushed the words from her small mouth, that for at least three volumes, Harry would be safe.

Eli finds peace in observation. He watches people and not only sees them, but feels them, feels what they do, more acutely than he ever wishes to. He hates when, after inevitably losing an argument to either of their attorney parents, Hannah retreats to her room. He detests the walls which cut them apart. He lies on the floor of his room, staring at the ceiling, tormented by the thought that his sister should suffer alone.

Books get him through most days, letting his mind run to far distant lands in which wand-adorned wizards duel, mice conquer vast kingdoms, dragons and their keepers battle to the death over the futures of empires. He fills the walls of his stuffy attic room with novels, histories, anthologies, and, while his youth precludes him from leaving Northampton except for the occasional family vacation, he attempts mental escapes daily through whatever form of fantasy he can acquire.

Eli has one friend, Ben. Roaming through the damp New England streets, he and Ben superimpose mythical landscapes onto the old houses, faded roads, and sparse forests. They call their creation Zoon, and they escape into it. Ben draws the pictures, illustrates the maps, and Eli tells the stories, forms the adventures.

They create a world for themselves—a world in which nobody spits at them, throws soda cans, calls them dirty Jews. In Zoon they are apart, and they are safe.

Years slip by, though, and Eli requires more: he needs more than a distraction—more than ink trying to express things which can only truly come through life lived. Ben drifts away; with the dissolution of his friendship comes the dissipation of Zoon. The only safety Eli was able to build for himself disappears: he is stranded in reality. Family history and new friends begin to catch Eli in their hold. Depression grows, deepening a chasm within him—but alcohol, weed, and acid offer him a hot air balloon, an altitude from which he can peer down at the triviality of it all.

Up there—up where he takes his mind when the earthless earth can no longer support his feet—is where he is most truly alone. Yet the hallucinations never leave him alone. They follow him into his life, surrounding him in a cloud of fiction more real than any story he has ever told. When he turns and sees no one, he knows that the people who have been trailing him have merely slipped behind the bushes. He knows that they have always been stalking him; he knows that, one day, they will get him. The people, the flashing bursts, and the whispers pervade his every waking moment on both the days he gets through and the days he cannot raise himself to face.

Eli knows of the things which cannot be captured in pen and ink. He has seen love fly between strangers' fleeting glances, seen world-weariness bend

countless men to the ground, seen the heartbreak of a girl reaching her hand out of habit to an absent lover. Like any good man, Eli sets his mind to the unattainable—to committing this humanity to paper. The more he feels from life, the more he needs to find a fictional path through it—the more he tries to extract comfort from words which, as mere representations of what he seeks, cannot possibly placate him. After tiring of the attempts of other authors, Eli begins to forge words himself—to encapsulate, rather than experience, the world. Early attempts leave him shaky and disappointed with the clunkiness of how his written emotions compare to others', of the people he creates who remind him of coloring-book pages—mere unfilled outlines of clichéd characters.

Progress, however, comes quickly. He begins to go through notebooks with a voraciousness rivaled only by his appetite for reading. Filling the spaces between light blue lines fills his days, nights, summers. He hones a short, curt style for himself. He crafts sentences which end abruptly. From summers spent safe from the heat of the Virginia sun within a manicured, enclosed campus, he learns to give readers just enough to piece together a character, to entice them with a touch of knowledge, then stop. To sprinkle in only a hint of conclusion.

Eli knows now that the world is not full of chosen ones predestined to destroy evil. He knows that his sister did not lie, that in the end Harry does die. But he also comes back. Now, though Eli has seen the world; he knows that there are certain places from which no one returns.

“They follow him into his life, surrounding him in a cloud of fiction more real than any story he has ever told.”

He imagines a world darker than the witchcraft-laden backstreets of Boston he writes about—a place devoid of heroic journeys, expectations, and fear. He dreams of a place where there is finally rest—a place which will accept his apathy as an attribute, not an issue. Death is a way out, above, beyond the paranoia and the anger. And, for this reason, he chases it.

* * *

2016

I have lain here close to nineteen months. Nobody looks at me. To be fair, barely anyone enters this room anymore. Sometimes John, deep in the night, after hours in his attic office, wanders in. Always before the sun comes up. He kneels in the middle of the floor, on the carpet he laid down the week his son graduated from his crib and moved into his own room. John kneels, and he weeps. Sometimes Dorothy enters, pretending to dust a bit when nobody is home. She comes in, lifts the duster, drops the duster, and drops onto the bed. The worst part is, she doesn't even cry. She just sits there, half-up on the pillows, and stares at the wall.

Empty.

Hannah returned once. She came back for the funeral, one day after her apartment burned, when the only place for her to go was home. She walked by the room, paused, and could not bring herself to enter. She stood in the doorway, watched, waited.

Their eyes never stray to the bedside shelf, the small one with the unexplained, unquestioned assortment of books and uncased CDs. The one by which I sit, obscured by the wider books protruding beyond my feeble spine. I am classic, three-by-five, black, grid-dotted, hidden.

I have words. Small words, scratched in pen, almost always black. The handwriting varies, not based on person—only one has ever opened me and graced my pages with his thoughts—but based on the mental state of that person—that artist, I should say. He was a writer.

What coursed in his veins determined what he chose to record, the strength and rapidity with which he penned it, the shape of his letters, sentences, thoughts. I'm not referencing fear or courage as fairy tale authors so often do. I mean the benzos, legally obtained, sometimes washed down with whiskey, sometimes alone; the countless joints, the ash of which lingers between some of my pages; the mystery ones his friends popped alongside him, as well as the unmistakable ones they watched him inject.

When he wasn't writing on substances, he was writing about them. About their hold over him. About how easy it was to get his therapist to increase his dosage,

about how he wished it hadn't been that easy. About how he thought he had maybe loved Anna, how he was torn apart when she packed up and out of their apartment, how he knew how to numb the torment for at least a little while.

Distance.

Separation.

They were all he wanted. First from life, but after cycling through meds and strictly non-medicinal substances, he began to chase removal only from them. He had always considered himself a loner by choice—all he wanted was to not depend on anybody. And he didn't. He depended only on things contained in bottles, vials, needles.

Through it all, though, I give him credit. He wrote me the truth. He lied to many, lied to their faces. Hannah. Dorothy. John. Abraham. Anna. He had decided love was not it, love was an act, and he acted it well.

But he loved words—he could not pretend to me. He gave me his thoughts, and I readily absorbed his ink, the black blood running from his mind.

2018

Maya cannot help but think of the Velvet Underground song. She knows that it glorifies exactly what brought so much pain to this family, what stole the energy from their once-full home, but she cannot help but play it over in her head on the drive up toward Amherst.

*Din din din din din din din din din
Dee din din din din din din din*

*I have made big decision
I'm gonna try to nullify my life
'Cause when the blood begins to flow
When it shoots up the dropper's neck
When I'm closing in on death
You can't help me now, you guys
And all you sweet girls with all your sweet talk
You can all go take a walk
And I guess I just don't know
And I guess that I just don't know*

She and her mom are journeying North. Maya wants to tour Amherst, and her mom wants to reconnect with cousin Johnny. Neither of them knew anything had happened until one day her mom looked at one of their yearly cards and noticed an "in loving memory," with a date which she had missed the first four times she read it. A phone call followed, tears were shed, and a trip was planned.

Maya hadn't even known him. She never met him. Her only memories come from the Happy Chanukah cards John and Dorothy sent out every year. All she knows is that she had resented him. That while she sat around—lazed, really—her cousin—something-removed was a creative writer. He was an author. He was published. His slightly bearded face smiled up at her from the double-sided, picture-encrusted cardstock, proclaiming that he was handsome and successful and that his family was sending only the best "Season's Greetings."

"He decided love was not it, love was an act, and he acted it well."

They approach the house, and Maya takes a shaky breath. The nerves kick in. Well, they always do with new people. Even though their faces will look vaguely like her mom's, they will have the same strongly voiced liberal intellectual ideas, the same wine- and granola-stocked pantry, and the same newspapers lying on their tables, and she will be nervous because, to her, they are unknown. They have felt a grief that she has never known, that she has only imagined lying awake in bed, wondering where her brother could have gone for so long.

They are kind, but their seriousness is startling. They welcome Maya and her mom inside, offer them bread, show them up to their cozily-carpeted third-floor rooms. They are kind; but, instantly, Maya sees the hurt. Now it's Johnny Cash looping through her mind as she focuses on Dorothy, whose eyes reveal nothing, but whose mouth turns down at the corners, whose voice flattens at the end of every sentence.

*What have I become
My sweetest friend?
Everyone I know
Goes away in the end*

She cannot help but feel some odd form of survivor's guilt when, after dinner, they sit around the living room, and talk finally turns to their two-year-long grief. To their youngest son. To death.

They say that he did them recreationally, that he was not one of the ones like her brother, an addict. They say that he dabbled with his friends, that he was one of the rare ones who could take something for fun and only for fun,

that one day he took too much. Plain and simple. A mistake.

"But he loved words—he could not pretend to me."

Maya is dumbfounded. John and Dorothy spent their lives practicing law, and Maya has been raised to respect that kind of dedication, that education. But she knows better than this. There are no dabblers. If they do exist, in some mythical world, in some parallel universe, they are certainly not the ones who end up lying on the floors of Brooklyn apartments alone, metallic blood stagnant within their punctured veins.

She will not pry, though, she has too much tact to ask more about him, to force them to fill the silence that lies heavy with their memories. When no one fills it, they decide to go out for ice cream. A little break. Some fresh air. The guise of cheerfulness.

Confusion runs through her mind as Maya climbs the stairs, her steps dampened by the high pile. There are too many emotions; too much welled-up, hidden and controlled; too much practiced smiling and polite conversation. All she wants is solitude.

Good thing the room they offered her is small, book-lined, far-removed. She pauses for a moment, noticing the finger painting of a snake traced

long ago on the window. Plopping down on the floor, she begins an exploration of the shelves, searching for something thoroughly unrelated to reality, something light, something where people smile, but out of happiness, not obligation.

As usually happens when seeking a literary cure to reality, nothing seems satisfactory. Expanding her search to more random items, she knocks over two loose CDs and pulls out a small black volume. It is promisingly scuffed: it appears actually used. But after reading countless Nancy Drew stories as a child and being consistently let down by life's lack of codes, secrets, and hidden stories, she has learned to stifle any excitement. She reads the name embossed on its front: Moleskine. Interesting spelling.

Opening to a section in the middle, she begins. Though it resembles her own, the handwriting feels male. The thoughts seem male.

Morbid curiosity glues her body to the floor, her hands to this tiny Moleskine. She never met him, but now she peers into his head. Into what was in his head. The head which now lies somewhere, disintegrating, beneath a pristine lawn.

*'Cause when the smack begins to flow
And I really don't care anymore
Ah, when that heroin is in my blood
And that blood is in my head
Then thank God that I'm as good as dead
And thank your God that I'm not aware
And thank God that I just don't care
And I guess I just don't know
Oh, and I guess I just don't know*

His parents were wrong, as parents often are. He was no dabbler. She holds the proof, the truth which he only divulged to paper and pen.

She holds his last story—this one unpublished and unedited. True in a way that his completed ones can only mock.

This one is completed, though, in its own way. Completed, but not concluded, she thinks, as she slides Eli's journal back, behind the other books.

"As usually happens when seeking a literary cure to reality, nothing seems satisfactory."

WILL HARTMAN

biking no-handed through a herd of bison in the rain

'like burning' we said when
they slipped their skin-tongues around
horned words like anvil skies like steel palms
words 'how did you like it' and a head-tilt
discarding a circlet watering
grass with gold they said 'how did you like
it when you rode the blue mist' we said 'it
smelled like sulfur' like fox-bitten sun-
brewed quail eggs 'very nice' they said and shed
their fur gouged it from each other with
horns with fangs with horns 'and how did you
like it when you stole the raindrops with
speed and turned it upside-down all moon-knuckle
and quick and gray' they wailed and then
well then we gathered up counts 'one
two three' and passed them by and
that was when we said 'like burning' and then
the rain clapped that rare awe-fire against our
mouths and we started to grin and then to shriek.

JULIETTE CARBONNIER

Protest

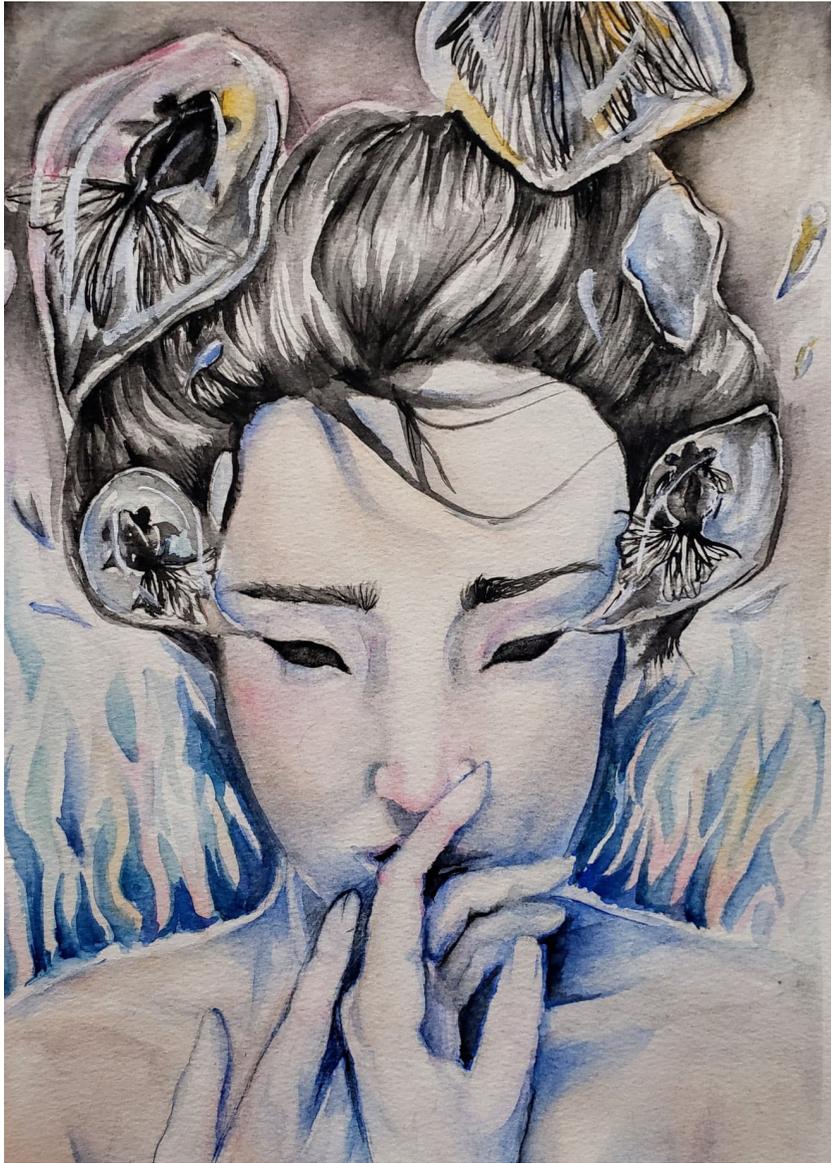


BEATRIX BONDOR

Autopsy

A lock of Lincoln's hair sold for eighty-one thousand.
What will they want next?
My treasures: toenails, toothbrush, pen,
vocal chords, book spines, clock faces, cups,
calves, marrows, cells
spread and pinned and borne before
posterity.

This house, divided
can be yours in pieces. Claim one,
quickly, so that even when I perish
from the earth, somebody will possess
me, press me
near and whisper "*mine.*"



SANDRA YANG

Suspended

CASSANDRA JAMES

Delgado at the Window

Esteban Delgado sips his wine and turns on his lamp. He is waiting for his father to die. Night falls with a Christ-like patience, and he sinks back into his chair and the passing of the hours, feeling the wine wash against his teeth, an earthy sweetness, like dried blood. Delgado keeps his back to the hallway and his eyes on the window, the window he has never opened, not once in his life. Since the age of fifteen, Delgado has left the house on only two occasions: the first, an incident involving the family dog, he does not remember; the second, which occurred only half an hour ago, he does not wish to remember, either. Here, at his desk, in front of his window, he warms himself in the golden glow of the lamplight and watches the city below. There is the indignant bleat of a car horn, a distant shout, and the metallic growl of engines leaping to life on a green light. Young girls, linked together in a chain of arms and elbows, laugh together on the corner with lipsticked lips. And there, a balding man drags a tiny white dog behind him as he walks, yelling into the phone pinned to his ear by his shoulder. It is the most perfect of love affairs: Delgado enjoys the city freely, with abandon, and yet it cannot touch him.

Delgado is quiet and fat, and that might be all that can be said of him, since he speaks too infrequently to

offer anything else on which to base judgement. Without much effort, one might observe him to be a man with too little interest in women, too great an interest in wine, and a complete disappointment in the world and with himself, which he occasionally expresses through the profoundest of sighs. His beady, farsighted eyes demand that he wear glasses at all times; otherwise, his dress is spartan, layered in shades of brown and gray. Most of his time is spent at his desk in front of the window, looking out on the world, weighing it carefully. Delgado doesn't think—he wanders in his internal garden, slowly, leisurely exploring its recesses, pausing occasionally to rest.

It can't be long now. His father will die before the night is out. It occurs to Delgado that they will have to hold a funeral. The lawyer can arrange it all—isn't that what lawyers are for? People will gossip, of course. People always gossip. They will whisper about the strange, fat son who never leaves the house, who most likely drove his father to death. A few might even come to the overzealous conclusion that the son killed his father outright, in cold blood. And in the end, the rumors will eclipse the dead man in his coffin. Delgado cringes inwardly at the thought.

Reaching for his glass, he whisks the wine into a swirl. The lamplight warms the liquid's color; it is a rich and

soothing burgundy. This particular bottle is an Italian Brunello, specially shipped. Too much money, Delgado knows—but what is money for, if not to buy a moment of pleasure in a lifetime of unhappiness? Or perhaps not unhappiness, Delgado muses to himself, but the absence of happiness. And with that, his eyebrows scrunch down over his nose and he drinks, crossing one leg over the other as he leans back into his chair once more.

"What more could a man ask from this world, or give to it?"

The clock in the hallway chimes eight o'clock. This has no significant meaning for Delgado, besides that he is one hour closer to nine o'clock, which does, in fact, bear significant meaning. Shadows rise like the tide, stretching the walls higher, thinner, and lending the ceiling a cathedral's weight. With the disappearance of the sun, the lamp is the sole source of light in the room, and it is less comforting, less than harmless now; its glow is like that of an angel of judgement. Delgado finds himself fiddling with the lampshade, a nervous habit. He drinks again.

Delgado's father is a kind old man. He keeps a hatch of doves on the apartment roof, and cares for them as if they are his children. He names them after the saints: Peter, Agnes, Aquinas.

When new doves are born, he ties blue ribbons around their necks to mark them as his, and he christens them with a spoonful of tap water. He treats his son with the same kindness, if not the same attentiveness. Most of Delgado's memories are lopsided, heavy with his mother and empty of his father. His father was always away, visiting the family construction sites, hounded by immigrant guilt—he was perpetually afraid of failure, of the American Dream being snatched from under his feet like a rug. He was always holding onto the Dream with his toes.

There was always the drinking and women, too. Delgado's father was not an angry drunk—he was a singer. He belted American pop songs into the sky with his deep, warbling voice and laughed himself to sleep, while Delgado's mother rolled her eyes and clicked her tongue against her teeth. And his poor mother—he can see her now, tall and dark-eyed, smiling thinly at the latest young girl to scuttle away from their house at dawn—his poor mother endured it all. If she ever complained, Delgado never heard her. From the way his father sobbed when she died, large shoulders heaving like a failing organ, he knew she'd been nothing short of a martyr.

And yet in spite of—or perhaps because of—his shortcomings, Delgado's father was a man of purpose. The fire in his blood burned for movement, for progress. In his seventy-eight years of life, he'd amassed a small fortune, bejeweled his wife with her every desire, gifted his son an expensive education, and donated the leftovers to various

children's charities. What more could a man ask from this world, or give to it? He will be mourned by many, Delgado knows, when he is dead—a man too large for life, let alone death.

And I, says Delgado to himself, looking down at his prodigious stomach, I am too large for life, and too small for death to notice. Delgado, who has never worked a day in his life, who can't even go out to get the mail. He notices that his wine glass is half empty. So he grips the bottle standing to the right of the lamp with his large, meaty fingers, and fills the glass again. The sound of the liquid calms him, like a mother's gentle whisper. With glass in hand, he looks at the phone on his desk, eyes narrowed, as if it is a predator prepared to pounce. The doctors had promised they would call him when it was over. He doesn't know if he wants the call to come, or if he wishes it never would. All he knows is that he needs the waiting to end: his hands are beginning to shake, and a cold sweat beads on his sloped forehead.

He must distract himself—the waiting will kill him. He stands to face the bookshelf on his right, perusing the titles with brows furrowed. The books are sorted by country: Russia, China, his family's native Colombia, Italy, Egypt and so on. Tonight, he thinks he will visit Japan. There is nothing like Japanese poetry to soothe his thoughts and whisk him away from the city's breakneck whirl—and it is a small tribute to his father, who fell in love with Japan after visiting several decades ago. It is his father who collected the books, one by one. For every country his father traveled to—and, Delgado

suspects, for every used book shop he visited—there is a book on the shelf. They range in subject from philosophy to poetry, science to law. Very few of them are written in English, demanding that Delgado be able to read at least ten languages, which, of course, he can. His father never told him expressly, but he knows the reason for the books nevertheless: his father had, quite literally, attempted to give him the world. A world unaware of Delgado's feeble existence. A world Delgado would never see.

Falling back into his chair, he takes up his wine and book. He opens at random to a short poem about a man's travels on a river, where the river, Delgado proudly deciphers, is a physical manifestation of the journey of life. From his boat, the man in the poem looks back and realizes the shore is gone—that there is only the fog behind him, and the river ahead. And Delgado is standing in a boat on a Japanese river: he is looking behind, looking ahead, and the world is swathed in gray. Then his boat begins to sink; the water tickles his knees. He doesn't try to swim. The current closes over his head, and he is wrapped in a coolness like silk ribbon. Slowly, his heartbeat dips to a murmur. The river creeps into his ears, up through his nose, several gentle hands feeling the inside of his skull. He stops breathing with all the naturalness of the sun setting on the horizon.

Delgado's stomach turns and squeezes. It must be the wine—1982 was not the best year, anyway. He closes the book with a snap, and returns to looking out his window.

With no other children and his wife long dead, his father must leave him the money, the house, and the business. Delgado's certainty of this fact is not rooted in pride, but in an all-consuming dread. His father has attempted to convince Delgado to take over the business too many times to count. And every time, he has failed. Delgado's lips twist wryly at the thought. His father would fly to the moon, if he could, using nothing but his arms. His agoraphobic son is merely another moon, another Everest. Now his mother, she understood—she understood the impossibility of improvement, and rather than nagging her son to achieve the impossible, she worked to make his existence as comfortable and unchallenging as she could. Her one error was to assume he needed a wife.

From the moment he turned twenty-one, she invited women to the house, each with their own personal epithet: Rebecca-I-met-at-church, Lydia-whose-mother-I'm-friends-with, or his personal favorite, Francesca-who-bags-my-groceries-while-she-tells-me-she-is-single-and-lonely. Pretenses for invitations grew thinner as the years dripped by, dissolving from, "She's my friend Patricia's daughter, she's such a nice, smart girl, you know," to, "If you don't find someone soon, mijo, who will put up with you when I'm dead?" And his mother's sanity hadn't been the only casualty—the women must have been ecstatic, he knows, to discover the truth: that the only son of a filthy-rich Colombian construction mogul was fat, and quiet, and thoroughly uninterested in them.

Well, there had been Christie. If he hadn't been in love with her, he had at least been interested in her. It would have been difficult not to be—Christie Eaves was wildly intelligent, wildly stubborn, and, to his delight, wildly liberal. She was the niece of one of his father's clients and so had escaped his mother's thorough vetting process. Thus, she made it to the Delgado dinner table without anyone knowing that she was an unapologetic anarchist—until, of course, she mentioned firing a missile into the White House and his mother nearly spit her wine across the room. His mother had fabricated some excuse to send her home involving a repairman for the air conditioner, and Christie, unperturbed, had thanked her for dinner and stood to go. Delgado followed her into the foyer, not wanting to miss a moment of this woman's presence in the house; he assumed she wouldn't notice him, since she hadn't seemed to notice him once since she'd arrived. But before she left the house, Christie Eaves took his face between her hands and kissed him. And she'd winked—winked!

"You looked like you needed it," she said, by way of explanation.

And then she'd stepped out into the night, disappearing as outrageously as she'd come. Only after he'd stood there for a full ten minutes, trembling from head to foot, did he begin to cry. His bloated cheeks were flushed and tear-stained when his mother found him, clicking her tongue against her teeth.

"Sometimes I could kill your father," was all she said.

"And then she'd stepped out into the night, disappearing as outrageously as she'd come."

Delgado kissed his mother's head. "You are the best woman I know," he told her.

She waved him off. "Just wait until you're married," she'd said.

For whatever reason, he never told his mother about Christie's kiss—the only kiss he'd ever had. It was a thing he kept in the corner of his internal garden, like a marble statue or a rose, to be enjoyed in the solace of memory.

There are some things, Delgado muses to himself, which are too precious to be shared, and others too precious not to be.

He fiddles with the lampshade; he swallows his wine; he rests his free arm on his stomach. Whether from the wine or the dull, distant sting of Christie's kiss, his nerves have calmed a little. He could handle it, now, if the doctors called. He would answer calmly: yes, I realize that my father is dead. No, I can't come to the hospital at this time. My father's lawyer will be with you shortly. A cruel world, where sons send lawyers to visit their fathers' corpses. His mother wouldn't blame him—at least, he doesn't think so. She might smile at him, sadly, and click

her tongue; she might kiss his forehead as if he were dying, and he would be instantly crippled by guilt. But his guilt would be self-inflicted, as always.

He dreams of his mother at least once a night. With few exceptions, she takes one of two forms: in the first, she weeps beneath a veil over an unmarked grave and refuses to lift her eyes to him, though he calls and calls her name. When she does look up, she mouths a word he can't hear, and then a ball of light explodes in his face, transforming into a hundred brightly colored wings, and the dream is over. In the second, she stands on the roof of their apartment with a flaming sword in hand and burns the building to the ground with grim, unforgiving eyes, like an angel of Death. He begs her for mercy, but she doesn't hear him. The city burns around her as she rises into the night toward heaven. At the end of both dreams, he wakes with tears in his eyes and a terrible guilt balled in his stomach, so that it takes him an hour before he can even think of sleeping again.

His hands are trembling. For a second time, he refills his wine glass. The lipstick girls on the corner have moved on, likely to the movie theater a few blocks down. Across the street, a homeless man settles at the bus stop for the night. The stoplight changes, and a car horn blares when a woman busy texting doesn't drive quick enough to satisfy those behind her. Office lights blink off, and apartment lights blink on. Delgado wonders if his father is immortal—if they aren't waiting for his death, but the beginning of his second life.

For the first time that night it occurs to him that after his father's death, he will be alone.

The phone rings.

Delgado sets down his wine glass. He stares. The phone goes on ringing, and he thinks the sound might go on forever, shrieking into eternity. But it doesn't—it ends abruptly, and Delgado realizes that opportunity has missed him, has passed him by like wind in the dark. With quivering fingers, he picks up the receiver to check for a voicemail.

Hi there, this is Jeff Cruz, calling from the site on 39th, we got a steel shipment today that's not right, and Mr. Delgado wasn't picking up his phone...I've been trying for a couple hours now... so, uh, if someone could let him know that'd be great. Thanks.

Jeff Cruz—Delgado recognizes the name, but can attach no meaning to it. He makes a note to remind his father about the steel shipment, then flushes at his mistake. With careful fingers, he takes off his glasses to wipe them against his shirt. His cleaning is methodical and almost loving. He slides the glasses back onto his nose and blinks; he takes up his wine again. It might be hours, even days before his father dies. Should he go to bed? It might be better, if he sleeps while he can. But what if the phone rings—what if it rings, and he isn't there to answer?

“That, too, might be better,” he murmurs to himself.

The guilt that follows is too thick to be swallowed. He washes it down with wine.

The clock chimes nine, and Delgado sits straight. He sets down his glass, so abruptly that the wine sloshes onto his coat, and reaches for his pencil and paper, focusing his attention out the window again. All apathy is instantly leeched from his body, so that he might be a young man again, strung-tight for battle; his dark eyes glitter with anticipation; he is almost handsome. In the building across from his, in the apartment level with his own, a light turns on. Delgado glances over his shoulder at the clock—9:05, to the minute. How he admires this creature of routine.

The woman appears at the window and he is lost all over again, just as he is each night at 9:05, although he doesn't—and never will—know her name. He memorizes every detail as if it is the last time, because every time might be the last. His pencil moves furiously against the paper, scratching out quick, precise lines to match the quick, precise woman they are meant to capture: the solidity of her chin, the firmness of her shoulders, the proud tilt of her neck. As always, he leaves the face blank. She moves with such clarity, shrugging the coat off of her body and onto a hook, removing and organizing the contents of her purse, pulling her honey-brown hair into a clip. She slides her shoes from her feet and stretches her spine, hands pressed to her hips. Then she walks into the next room, a small galley kitchen, where she pulls a Chinese takeout container from the fridge and a plastic fork from a drawer. She opens

the container and spears the first bite of orange chicken, plopping it onto her tongue, her eyes fluttering shut. The woman never cooks, a fact he finds endlessly amusing.

He plays a little game, imagining what kind of work she does—she'd make a wonderful lawyer, and it would explain the late hours. Or a surgeon, for brains or hearts, delicate work. No!—a chemist, measuring things to the line. Of course, his guessing is absurd. Her apartment is a glorified closet: paint curls off the walls, the furniture is ripped and faded, and the pale-green fluorescent lights flicker threateningly, on-off, on-off.

He slides the sketch into his desk drawer with all the others as the time turns to 9:15, and the woman's husband walks into her apartment.

He has never actually been able to determine if they are married, but he supposes it doesn't really matter—it is enough that the woman isn't alone. The man is tall, so tall that he has to bend his head to avoid hitting the doorframe, and his clothes hang long and loose, lending him a wraith-like quality which might have been frightening if his smile was not like the curve of a crescent moon. Delgado looks away at exactly 9:16, when they embrace in the living room, and looks back up at 9:18, just to be safe. This is the point where the woman usually walks to the living room window, looks out on the world—tilting her head to the sky, and then down again, smiling to herself—and pulls the curtains shut.

But that is not what happens tonight. Tonight, she looks at him, Delgado—she stares straight into his eyes. He struggles not to let his jaw fall in shock. He blinks and holds a hand to his chest, as if to say, Me? The woman only watches him. The expression in her eyes is unreadable. Is she curious? Angry? Frightened? He is all of these things at once, and his skin pulses with unbearable heat. He is suddenly possessed by the desire to be swallowed whole. But as usual, his desire goes un-granted.

For the last twelve years, from the day she moved into her apartment, Delgado has watched the same twenty minutes of this woman's life. He knows her routine, her mannerisms, her singular tics, as well as he knows his own. And yet—and this is where he loses himself—he can never know her. It comes down to her face—the face he has never sketched. Yes, the woman is beautiful—but that is besides the point. The point, Delgado insists, is the smile. The smile that occurs every night at 9:19, when the woman glances up into the starless dark—the smile that slices through glass, across air, through glass again and buries itself between his ribs, like a fractured bullet. And he will never attempt to draw it—it would be an exercise in futility—a waste of pen and paper. That smile that perches like a bird on the edge of her mouth, in the corners of her eyes—he doesn't—he can't—understand it. They have looked out on the same world, she and him. And he has never, not once, smiled at it. And so he loves her, because she is capable of what he is not.

Despite his poor mother's doubts, it has never been that Delgado doesn't want to love a woman: it is that he's incapable. To love someone is to touch them, body and soul—he has read enough poetry to know that, at least. And Delgado can't step out of his own body, let alone into another—his fingers are as unpracticed with touch as his soul. He must love through a window. He must adore through glass. A half-love it might be—but is love not the best that we can offer of ourselves, no more, no less?

So his love for the woman was constructed over a distance, like a bridge stretched over a chasm. And now, with a single look, the woman has shattered it. It is as if she has reached across the void and slapped him across the face. He burns to run, to hide. But he's stuck to his chair, gaping like a fish, praying for the woman to move and praying that she never moves again.

She recognizes him. He is sure of it.

Then she waves at him. It isn't much—the faintest lift of her hand—but he would've collapsed had he not been sitting. And she smiles. That smile! For him—from her! He can't move—his limbs—this paralysis. Thank you, she mouths—she moves her lips in exaggerated Os. Thank you!—for what? And why? Then the curtains are pulled shut, the woman is gone, and Delgado is left alone with his glass of wine and the pounding of his heart.

She knew him.

He doesn't know if the thrill that fires up his spine is hope or pure terror. It's impossible—it can't be. And yet it is—

the woman knows him. He curls and uncurls his fist—the hand she touched just hours ago. He lifts it to his face. Could it still smell like her? Did she leave a scar? No, he's dreaming again. He's always dreaming. But tonight—tonight, he is awake!

He's on his feet; he's pacing the floor, muttering to himself, and not in English. Delgado rubs a hand over the back of his neck, then stops, because that is what his father would do—and he remembers his father, and that his father is dying, that he could be dead any minute. But suddenly he isn't thinking about living alone in his dead parents' house, or about calling the lawyer. The clock winds backward: he is standing outside. He is holding the woman's hand.

***"A half-love it
might be—
but is love not
the best we can
offer of ourselves,
no more, no less?"***

Until a few hours ago, he hadn't left the house since he was fifteen years old and acne-covered, when he'd almost died

trying to save the family dog from a bus. At least, that's what his mother told him, after the fact. His mother had answered the door for a delivery, and the dog had slipped between her legs and out towards the street, chasing after a bike. Delgado hadn't had time to think—he'd scrambled past his mother and out in front of an oncoming bus, snatching the dog before tumbling to the sidewalk. Then, with the backs of his arms raw and bleeding, he'd passed out from his subsequent panic attack. Delgado himself didn't remember anything beyond the smell: burning rubber, and the cloying sweetness of gasoline.

But now there is tonight. There is the woman, and the warm calluses of her hands.

In the garden of his mind, it is 7:30pm again, and Delgado is still watching the lip-sticked girls and the taxis, sipping his first glass of wine and waiting for the phone to ring. And that's when he sees her. It's the woman, striding up the street in a long blue coat. He'd recognize her anywhere in the world. He knows she'll stop at the pharmacy before going home, because it's a Tuesday. When she crosses the street, she doesn't look up; she keeps her eyes on her feet, and she's talking to someone on the phone. Maybe that's why she misses it—because she's talking on the phone, looking down.

Bursting from the twilight haze, a car barrels toward her. Delgado leaps to his feet; his wine sloshes. The car stops inches from the woman's legs, and she turns toward it in shock, blinking, the phone tumbling from her hand. Then

the driver climbs out into the street, yelling and waving his hands, and the woman stammers, shaking her head. Whatever she tells him isn't enough, because he towers over her, then strikes like a snake to grip her by the wrist; and the woman, breathing rapidly, reaches into her bag with her other hand, wrapping her trembling fingers around a small, red-capped can—pepper spray.

Delgado leans against the window until his nose is pressed to the glass. Heart pounding, he searches for someone—anyone—who might intervene. But no one is watching. The lipsticked girls chatter away; an old woman lowers her eyes and quickens her pace; a bald man across the street is too absorbed in a phone call to notice.

Delgado rakes his hands through his hair. He can't—there are a hundred reasons, a thousand—and he can't, and that's all. His mother's voice comes to him, warm, soothing: it's alright. It's alright. He can't, and people will understand why he can't. Best not to worry—best to move on. Closing his eyes, he leans into her phantom touch. Then his eyes fly open again, and he moans pitifully. Why, why, is he condemned to watch? Why can't he be capable, like other men? He doesn't wish to be silver-tongued, or strong, or powerful—only capable! And instead he must watch. He must watch, like a helpless, hapless child.

Outside, the driver tugs the woman toward him and spreads his legs wide. The woman cries out; the pepper spray slips from her hand to the pavement.

If Delgado does nothing, he will be forced to live with whatever happens to the woman in the next five minutes. And that, as he is continually reminded with every three or so glasses of wine, that is what Delgado dreads—that is what looms over his shoulder, tapping it and sneering: not living alone, but living with himself.

And so Delgado is fifteen all over again—he doesn't think. He abandons his desk and his wine, and races for the door.

The rest is a blur. There is shouting, and tremendous color. Delgado sways on his feet as he runs; he is half-drunk on the world. He doesn't know what he says to make the driver disappear, but in the next moment the man is gone, and Delgado is alone with the woman in the street. The woman is gasping, holding back tears, leaning down to pick up her shattered phone and pepper spray. Then she thanks him, squeezing his hand, while Delgado fights for breath, shaking his head, a thousand stars exploding in front of his eyes. He can only think that the world is painful, and painfully white—that her hand is surprisingly warm for such a cold day—and that her skin is callused, with the texture of something worn, lived-in.

“No, no.” He pushes her away. “Anyone would've done it. Anyone, anyone.”

The look on her face is strange—like she's about to laugh and cry in the same moment.

“Yes, anyone could have,” she says. “But no one did.”

That's when Delgado passes out cold.

When he wakes, the woman has an arm looped behind his shoulders, and two of her fingers are pressed to the side of his throat. She's asking him if she should call an ambulance, if she can use his phone, because hers is broken. He shakes his head; he's fine; he lives just down the street; he'll walk himself home. Well, if he's sure—the woman stands reluctantly, worrying her lip. His ears are ringing, but he thinks she says something about not knowing whether he's a hero or damsel in distress. Then she smiles, a brilliant, yellow smile that curves her face into a small and perfect sun. And he might pass out again, if he doesn't move.

He stands, shaking. He reassures her that he can walk, that he's alright—he craves and detests her touch. She thanks him again, still smiling, and he leaves, the glow of that smile branded onto the backs of his eyes. He stumbles up the steps of his cold, dark house. He shuts the door. He collapses, pressing his face between his knees. He wonders what he's ever done to deserve a day like this.

And now, it is 10 o'clock. Delgado looks out his window. In the brown-black night, the city is a child pretending to sleep, eyes squinted almost-closed, fidgeting under the sheets. It will wait until its parent, the darkness, is gone, and then it will spring awake in self-satisfied triumph. And so there is a restlessness, a burning to the silence that seeps through Delgado's skin, pulses in his veins. Without his noticing, his leg has begun to bounce, drumming a lopsided beat beneath his desk. He's forgotten to refill his wine. His mind

is elsewhere, lost in the maze of what he might've done differently. He could have walked the woman back to her apartment; he could have asked for her name; he could have grabbed hold of his consciousness until she'd left him, and avoided the embarrassment of collapsing in her arms. He groans at his own weakness, kneading his nose between two fingers.

But he'd been in her arms. She'd held him. She'd touched his hand, and she'd smiled, and she hadn't forgotten him. He sighs, leaning back in his chair, rubbing his neck. It is enough. If he must relive what he might've done for the rest of his days, so be it; but in exchange, he will keep the calluses on her palms; he will bask in the glow of her sun-yellow smile. And it is enough, Delgado muses, to keep a golden memory, to carry it like a lantern through a lifetime of shadow. He will plant it in his internal garden—he will care for it, and gaze at it, and he will remember that for an instant, at least, he was capable of love.

*“And so there is
a restlessness, a
burning to the silence
that seeps through
Delgado's skin, pulses
in his veins.”*

Delgado dabs at his eyes with his shirt collar. He cleans his misted glasses, adjusts them on his nose. But perhaps he hasn't cleaned them well enough, because the city lights are smeared, like paint, into fantastic loops and swirls—the stars are falling, dying spectacular deaths—and Delgado can see the wind tearing through the streets, a herd of wild-maned horses. Standing, he fits his hands beneath the window. He grunts, lifts—it opens with the pop of cracking wood. And the cold blasts the air from his chest; the tears freeze in his eyes. Delgado smiles.

The phone rings.



ABBY DE RIEL

Blue Haze



ETHAN LUK

離開是為了回來 - a Cantonese love song

The house is on fire,
And I'm not leaving yet.

I'm not going to save the cat lying next to the split starfruit. Or the two origami cranes on the bannister.

I'm not going to save you, either. For you look most untouchable Asleep: body embalmed in the crocheted blanket.

Outside, your flannel is left to dry
On the begonia tree.

It's a quiet night for burning.
And I think:

This is how I leave, and this is how I will return.

I crave to touch what survives of you. Like the passing of tongues, Two Achaean runners handing a lit torch to each other.

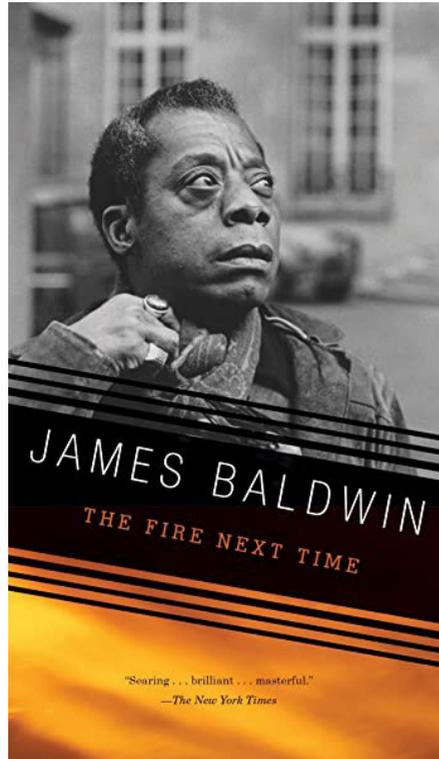


JULIA WALTON

The Fire Next Time

Many people have wondered what might make this historical moment different from the events of past years (especially 2014–2015). In many disheartening ways, this past summer felt like déjà vu: a police officer murders a Black person, protestors organize, and those in power make marginal changes to policing, while the structural racial inequalities of American society remain. Rinse and repeat.

As a brief look at recent anti-racist reading lists will show, this feeling has created an appetite, alongside contemporary voices on race (Ibram X. Kendi, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Roxane Gay), for classic works by canonical authors. I, too, have been returning to works on race that have inspired me throughout my education. It is shocking how much purchase they still have. But, now, we have a renewed opportunity to glean wisdom from them appropriate to our moment.



Courtesy of amazon.in

Particularly important to me is James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), the model for Coates' *Between the World and Me* (2015). A collection of just two essays, it is extremely digestible, but Baldwin's personal, literary prose makes it powerful. And though the first of the essays is directed to his nephew, the collection speaks urgently to white people. For me, his most powerful claim is that white people are "trapped in a history they do not understand"—that white people, as a collective people, in order to achieve political and emotional maturity, must be freed from their own racism. "We [Black people] cannot be free until they [white people] are free." It is a powerful reversal of the typical discourse on race: while many white Americans feel racial justice to be an attack on their identity, Baldwin emphasizes what they stand to gain, not lose.

But Baldwin is also unforgiving about white Americans' culpability in ways that ring just as true today. "[A]nd this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen," he writes, "that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it." It is not only that too many white Americans remain uneducated about our histories of slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, and on and on. If this country is to change, white Americans must want to know.

That the cycle of protests continues, and works like Baldwin's continue to offer wisdom, demonstrates how much social change in this country continues to be painstakingly incremental. We must constantly fight for justice in institutions and systems. Perhaps reckoning with important insights such as these can help us move our conversations forward.

the amount of his yearly salary, before taxes, but he was unconcerned by the prospect of paying it off for the next decade or so. He didn't plan on retiring, and apart from his mid-life crisis, he was an exceptionally frugal person. His savings were stellar, possibly because he'd begun them at the age of seven.

But the cat, he decided, *would* be too expensive. He needed a companion, or a friend of some kind, but money wouldn't get him that, he was sure.

"In fact, he felt it was a secret—what he did, that is, and how wonderful it was."

Joseph was a museum guard and had been since even before he graduated college at the age of thirty, having taken ten years to complete college—partly because he was working as a museum guard full-time throughout, and partly because he kept failing Psych 101. He liked his job. In fact, he felt it was a secret—what he did, that is, and how wonderful it was. All day he stood in a large, square, heavily air-conditioned room and looked at art. Yes, it was the same art each day, but he was not

a man easily bored. All he did, really, was occasionally tell off a squirming child for making too many noises, or scold some pseudo-art connoisseur for standing close enough to a work that, if sneezing should occur, would cost the museum thousands of dollars.

By trade, Joseph considered himself a poet. He liked to read poetry in the evenings, and while at work, he created his own little poems in his head by staring at the art. He would work on a poem all day, never once transcribing a word, restating it over and over again in his head until there it glued itself, oozing freshly, until the next day, when another concoction would replace it. Some of the poems were very short—only a couple of words, just enough for him to nurse from nine to five, but not so many words that on a more wearying day he'd find he'd lost his whole poem just by pausing to strategize his bathroom breaks.

A poet for a companion was who he desired, a poet like himself—but not any old poet. He wanted one *just* like himself. He wanted to befriend another *silent* poet, and those, he knew, were not common.

He began keeping watch for candidates everyday. Every patron who walked alone was a potential silent poet. One young woman seemed viable. She walked alone, and returned to the gallery every day for a week. Although it was still early fall, she dressed in a long double-breasted coat and a thin red scarf. That, Joseph thought to himself, was the attire of a poet. She was quiet, too, roving among the paintings like a ghost on wheels. He would talk to

her, he decided. He *had* to—and while they spoke, he would silently recite a poem he had created about her, and see if she understood.

"Hello," he said, striding up to her one day. "I need to talk to you."

She turned to face him.

"Yes?"

There was a long pause before Joseph spoke again, because he was busy silently reciting the first couplet of his poem.

"Why do you frequent this museum—so, so frequently?" Internally, Joseph cursed himself, even though that wasn't part of the poem. It had been so long since he'd talked to anyone other than his scientist friend, his doctor, and the cashier at Trader Joe's.

"Excuse me?"

"Why—why do you frequent—"

"I heard you the first time. That's none of your business."

The woman turned and stalked sharply away, and Joseph forgot his poem in an instant. He hadn't lost a poem like that in years. He was furious with himself. She couldn't have possibly been a silent poet. She was much too loud, and now his day was ruined.

A week later, he tried again.

This time it was an old, old man. He looked like Gandalf, if Gandalf played golf and drank Stella Artois.

Joseph decided to take a somewhat less direct approach. Instead of marching across the gallery, he sidled up to the man, and handed him the question on a piece of paper. This, he was certain, was a far more silent and poetic way of going about the whole matter.

The man looked up, and, in a low voice that stank of wisdom and stale beer, he said only three words: "No, no, no."

And then he walked away.

Joseph was so grief-stricken he almost skipped going to the bar that night—it was the time of the month he had drinks with the scientist. But, in the end, he went anyway. The scientist had bad news.

"I was looking over the samples of that hair product—you know, for old times' sake, and I noticed something rather odd. I don't know how else to say this—but it appears that it contained a kind of poison."

Joseph stared.

"Every patron who walked alone was a potential silent poet."

“Odd, don’t you think? And it turns out—all the other participants passed away from it four years ago. You’re the last one living.”

Joseph felt instantly faint. The bar stool wobbled. Four years had passed—he must be late to the poison, but this seemed wildly late. He couldn’t possibly last another day, could he? “I have to go,” he said.

“Hey, old man, I know this is tough news, but—”

“I think I’m going to head home,” Joseph interrupted.

* * *

Joseph drove his Giulia back to his house. It was late already. He felt strangely weak, and when he caught sight of his reflection in the car window, he looked paler than his newest pair of Fruit of the Looms.

He staggered into his kitchen. The formica countertops looked like they were crawling with ants. He lived in a somewhat secluded neighborhood, and everything was silent. He couldn’t even hear the cicadas. He supposed it was too cold for them outside. *Where do they go in the winter?* he wondered, and suddenly it occurred to him that the silence around him might be, in fact, from the poison, not the weather. Maybe the poison was making him go deaf.

Joseph felt close to tears. Here he was, dying alone at sixty, too early to die yet too late to turn his life around. He would never meet another silent poet. This seemed certain. Poets always have

***“Poets always have
troubled lives, he
reminded himself.
His, it seemed,
had been destined
for loneliness.”***

troubled lives, he reminded himself. His, it seemed, had been destined for loneliness. The only “friend” he’d ever had had been that hair scientist, and now even *he* had been revealed a traitor. A murderer. The cause of Joseph’s premature demise—or maybe it was fate that was killing him now, giving him his rightly poetic death—swift, and excruciatingly painful—but decades too soon.

Joseph stumbled into his bedroom, clutching his abdomen. Maybe he should call 911. But he knew it was too late. He knew it was no good.

He sat down heavily at the end of his bed and looked into his mirror. A man stared back at him. Full-haired, fresh skin, bright eyes—but all aged. All tired.

Joseph frowned. Was this the man he had seen in the museum earlier? Gandalf? But there was no beard—no, this was a different man.

Could *this* man be the silent poet companion he was looking for?

Joseph began to recite a poem he had thought he had forgotten about. He’d written it years ago, when he had first thought of the term for himself,

silent poet. He recited it as loudly as he could, in his head.

To his utter yet jubilant surprise, he saw the same familiar concentration passing across this man’s face. Those eyes, set, staring at nothing anyone else could see; those fingers, knobbed, clasped in his lap, twitching without sound; that nose, hard, nostrils flared single-mindedly—all the hallmarks of a silent poet. They were all there.

The communication was silent, but assured. A smile cracked across Joseph’s lips, and so too did one across the mouth of the man who shared his burden.

He knew he was not alone, no matter how silent his poetry.

He closed his eyes and lay back on the bed.

SANDRA YANG

Fertile



ETHAN LUK

Nativity

There was an autopsy at dinner last night. The patient:
steamed grouper. We separated the meat from bone with chopsticks.
I licked the plate of its flesh clean.

Remember when you were dissected too, ma?
Anesthesia laughed its way into your spine
when I cried my way out of your abdomen.
Your feet pressed milk out of the cold linoleum floor
three days after the stitches swam across your stomach.

I was the only body in the room who could not help you.

When I was five, I visited another hospital room where you rested.
Ba told me you had a stomachache. What I didn't realize was that a sibling
had failed to come into the world. The next week, we sat at the dinner table
and buried his name under the plump belly of the steamed flounder—
its eyes staring back at us.



BEN GUZOVSKY

Bot Poetry: Engineering Randomness



Computer Generated Art by Jakub Cech

from a dictionary or from published writing, that strategy seems to work—computers are getting better and better at fooling people into believing their writing is human-made.

There's a growing movement in the literary world to embrace what is computer generated as genuine art. Just a month ago, Lillian-Yvonne Bertram's *Travesty Generator*, a poetry collection that utilized Python and Java to write certain lines, was longlisted for the National Book Award. It's one of many examples where humans have collaborated with machines to create something they couldn't have alone. With collaboration comes questions of authorship—questions we can only explore with a better understanding of how these machines work.

Machine learning poetry programs are complicated and, more importantly, proprietary. We can only guess how they work. To try it out, I did some coding on my own—not with the hopes of winning a National Book Award, but to see what this trend was all about.

I started with haikus. Fewer words mean less complexity for a COS 126 student to deal with, and they're just as instructive as longer writing. You can illustrate all the principles of computer-

generated poetry in 17 syllables or less. First, a quick refresher on the modern English language haiku: there are no rules. The 5-7-5 form has been discarded as a relic of bad translation. In Japanese, that flow of syllables is much more natural. Haikus don't even have to be three lines anymore. For example, examine Francine Banwarth's poem, a recent winner of the Haiku Society of America's Museum of Haiku Literature award:

off to on I disappear into the visible

Using around 300 of the most commonly used words in published haikus, I created a random haiku generator. The program wrote each line of the haiku using a "mold"—a predetermined order of words, like "noun, verb, adverb" or "conjugation article, noun, verb." Each mold was drawn from published haikus as well. Then, I generated ten thousand haikus.

Of the couple hundred I read, 30% were logical and grammatically correct, 10% could pass for human-made, and a handful had literary merit. Here are two of my favorites:

stone blossoms between hills
cloudy river disappears
blue daydreams

moment —
everything swimming leisurely
a leafless world

I couldn't resist tweaking a couple of the haikus that were almost evocative, but had one word out of place. In the following composition, I changed only a single word:

one snow —
through the window
a withered plum tree

I've saved the best for last. The true brilliance of the program is not its ability to create haikus, but the way it randomly puts words together. Here are some phrases it invented:

a stars' gathering

withered rage

world-moons

Here, the benefits of collaborating with a machine start to become visible. Whereas the goal of a computer scientist is to fool people into thinking these haikus are human-made, the goal of a poet is to write the best poetry. Since creating the program, I've used all of these phrases, these little computer-generated ideas, in my own writing.



JULIETTE CARBONNIER

Stargazing

With a completely customizable input for this program, there is limitless room for exploration. By changing the word bank and the molds, the program will generate prose or other forms of writing as well. Computer-aided writing is the future. Make this modern thesaurus your own.

I have a sense that this is cheating. The “author” isn’t technically the one writing. The chess world has a similar problem, as computers are close to solving the game but human players continue to compete for millions in prize money every year. Machines break chess because unlike humans, they have no preconceived notions of how one should play a position, no years of habit and teaching that they are afraid to deviate from. Chess engines see an idea, and then players have to struggle to figure out why such a strange move is the best one.

Writing isn’t a competition. When a computer puts words together, it doesn’t know if they sound good to a human reader. It is up to the author to decide if the computer-generated phrase is worth using, if it needs to be changed slightly, or if it doesn’t work at all. Unlike chess, where there is always a right move, writing maintains enough ambiguity for computers to be useful, but not dominant.

These authorial choices, the slight changes that make computer-generated poetry palatable, take agency away from the machine. There are few real questions of authorship to answer here. It doesn’t matter who writes the poetry—or, better yet, what machines help the writer—if the poetry is beautiful. The author is just a name on a page, accompanying art.

If an artist writes their own program, all is well. When another artist uses that program for their own art, even with slight modifications and a completely new, randomly generated output, is that ethically acceptable? Writing has always been a cumulative process, with one author building off of another’s ideas. But these aren’t implied connotations and allusions, or even structural choices. Anyone can write a sonnet without citing Shakespeare. Computer programs are someone else’s tools. Anyone can use tools like a thesaurus to aid with writing, but as more and more resources become available to authors, where will we draw the line?

We already have humans to write poetry; let’s write something that humans can’t. As nice as that idea sounds, even that phrase suggests an element of plagiarism, of taking something from a machine. Computer-aided writing is full of as much possibility as it is pitfalls.



SOPHIA MARUSIC

The Knight at the Cheese Castle

When I have to admit to people that I work at the Saturn Cheese Castle, I always add that the worst part is the cheese.

“That makes sense,” they say, “all that cheesy goodness. What a temptation.”

Then, because I have practically invited them to, they make a point of scanning my body, which is thin, but lumpy and un-athletic. They say, “Oh, you’re a skinny thing. You don’t have anything to worry about,” and then they are done talking about the cheese and the work. The conversation moves on to topics like the high school basketball pre-season or the buzz of potentially getting a Baskin-Robbins in town. To let you know where they stand on the divisive county matter, they say something like: “If a man needs to sample thirty-one flavors in his ice cream, then how many flavors of woman does it take to keep him entertained, if you know what I mean.” And then we both look knowingly at each other and chuckle, since there is no subtlety or possibility of misunderstanding them.

Truthfully, I wouldn’t mind a Baskin-Robbins in town. I quite like rainbow sherbet in a chocolate cake cone.

If the conversation doesn’t move on that quickly, I make a point of telling them that it is not the temptation of

the unhealthy food, but rather that the foods that employees eat free at the Saturn Cheese Castle are the orders forgotten by road-tripping patrons, food sent back by gooey-thighed mothers and their egg-allergic babies. The fried cheese conglomerations are cold by the time they are offered up, greasy and breaded and indecent with ranch dressing. I eat it because it’s free and also because I don’t want my coworkers to eat it, to get some added benefit from this terrible and thankless job. Each bite of cold cheese curds is as greasy and rubbery as gnawing the pink eraser off of the end of a pencil, so chewy that it makes a squeaking noise against enamel. With every curd I eat, I find myself apologizing to the millions of years of evolution that have gone into shaping my teeth into hybrid killing, grinding machines.

People find this part of my tirade against the curd very off-putting and too long to be appropriate for casual conversation. They usually laugh a little bit and then say something like, “That school up north has made you quite the talker.” And then they ask about my dad, or finally bring up the Baskin-Robbins. I find this funny, because the university where I spend most of the year is really not any farther north than my hometown, just farther east. At home, we strongly consider ourselves the

center of Illinois, the center of America, and possibly the center of the known universe. This kind of comment is also likely a reference to the fact that I didn’t talk until I was six years old, and then again was silent for eleven months after my mother died of cervical cancer when I was fourteen. People don’t forget that sort of thing, so I’ve never mentioned it at school.

“I’ve been silent for more than a third of my life!” I often imagine myself saying this over a black coffee with a waifish girl that I will meet in one of my lectures on Japanese Bioethics. “Don’t worry though. Only a year of it was because I was sad. The other time was because I had nothing to say.” Even I know that’s not a trait you spring on people that you are meeting for coffee for the first time.

At school, I have three roommates that are named variations of Katie who love me endlessly. One is from California, one is from New York, and the third was born in California and went to boarding school in New York. When they say where they were from, they all can say “I’m from just outside,” a phrase that I covet endlessly. I’m forced to say that I’m from a smallish town in Illinois and then people are confused and say “Really?” because I inherited half of my mother’s brownness, but only an eighth of her beauty. I want to tell them that there are brownish people everywhere, even in the burning core of America, and someday soon everyone will be brownish, but there is never an occasion to announce this because people are typically too polite to ask you what they really want to ask you.

When I tell the Katies that I am working at the Saturn Cheese Castle, they are predictably overjoyed for me. We have a weekly FaceTime where we drink pink wine and talk about how our lives have changed even though nothing is ever a surprise; we follow the same kind of pencil sketch arc of teenish girl development contained in any young adult novel you can buy at the airport. The three of them have consulting internships in New York and California. I am slightly embarrassed about the fact I don’t have a summer internship, but I am also in the process of designing my own major that I call “the agriscience of natural disaster folk art,” which doesn’t immediately lend itself to many job prospects.

“I don’t like the job,” I admit. “It’s a bunch of people that I didn’t talk to in high school. And it’s gross. Have you guys ever even seen a cheese curd?”

“I don’t eat dairy,” two of the Katies say, but because of the lag in connection, it isn’t readily obvious which two said it. The three of them all look like anemic valkyries, so it’s hard to distinguish them regardless.

“Please don’t talk about cheesy things to me, I’m on a cleanse,” Caity says.

“Mina’s scared of her job because the cool kids from high school work there,” Kat snickers, the screen freezing her face into a cackle.

“No, no,” I say, changing the angle of my phone so that my eyebrows look more angular and my face looks slimmer. “It’s not the cool kids. The cool kids all work

at the trampoline park. The other people at work are weirder than me. Like the band nerds, but worse. Like the clarinet playing horse girls, but now they know where to get drugs.”

“I’m sure they’re not that bad,” Kate Lynn says definitively, as if she knows better. “Okay, can we talk about the fact that I think I got drunk and made out with my cousin?”

We talk about it.

After we hang up, my room is quiet and heavy with blush purple dusk, the way overripe blackberries droop off the vine. I go downstairs to find my dad making corn and breaded chicken on the stove that we eat on the floor in front of the television while watching Michael Keaton’s Batman movies. I wipe my hands on the carpet because it is dark in color and my dad isn’t going to stop me. When I pick up my fork again, there is a long blonde hair threaded between my fingers. Not mine.

My dad works as the regional representative for a nationally hated bioscience company that I don’t need to name, supplying genetically modified crops and pesticides to our town and the nearby farming communities. He has a girlfriend named Denise that he doesn’t love, but he doesn’t hate her, and at a certain age, people compromise for that. I think she is fine, and like that she gives me a lot of space, the way you would an animal that you are forced to feed and keep but have no intention of taming, and I also like that she looked nothing like how my mom looked.

***“After I finish my
borrowed tale of
aliens and heroic
deeds and romance,
it is fully dark.”***

Not that there are many people that look like my mom. To my dad and I’s dismay, I have his face almost exactly. He is fairly handsome, but that is not the point. We have spent entire afternoons holding up old photos of my mom and searching my features for hers. Other people often don’t understand this; I am a brownish girl and, therefore, will always look like my mom before my dad, but we have put in the hours and the love and the self-hatred and the scientific distance and unfortunately concluded otherwise.

It is still light out when we are done eating, so we go to the porch and watch the fireflies. I pick the swelling cicada skins off of the deck rails. My dad smokes a cigarette. It is always hot and we are always sweating. My dad asks me to tell him a story and, as usual, I steal one from a book I have read. After I finish my borrowed tale of aliens and heroic deeds and romance, it is fully dark. My dad says something like “The imagination on you, kid. Crazy. You’re going to do something amazing.”

When I spontaneously ended my eleventh month of silence, my dad had just come home from work and I said, “Can we have pizza tonight?” My dad didn’t react—he simply acted like the

last eleven months hadn’t happened. He just said that we couldn’t have pizza because he had already bought a rotisserie chicken at the grocery store. Eating that disappointing chicken was the most loving act that I have ever experienced. When he says this new thing about me being amazing, I smile at him and grind the crushed up cicada bodies into the top of my thigh and they stick to the thin layer of perspiration that covers my entire body.

* * *

“Hi, welcome to the Saturn Cheese Castle, please let me know if there’s anything I can do to make your visit more enjoyable” is all I am supposed to say while I am at work. I stand at the entrance to the behemoth grocery store and announce this like a town crier while handing out little stickers that say MORE CHEESE MORE FUN. I am technically the junior greeter, but the senior greeter, an older woman named Mary Jean whose face looks like a frowning glazed cruller, is dealing with a flareup of Lyme Disease. This means that I am the sole representative of the Saturn Cheese Castle, the only voice welcoming these sad, milk-bag human beings through the drawbridge. I do not take this responsibility lightly and recently filed a request with Leon, the day manager, for an intern.

When the Greyhound buses make a stop here, I’m completely swamped. And the stickers stick together so while I’m trying to unstick them from each other, people are walking through unstickered and ungreetered. I wrote this on the purple sheet of paper that is reserved for employee requests. Leon ignored it.

At the Cheese Castle, I get paid a little over eight dollars an hour to say the mandatory greeting, so it is very easy to put a monetary value on every word that comes out of my mouth. I fill out another purple slip:

If we said “Welcome, please let me know if there’s anything I can do to make your Saturn Cheese Castle visit more enjoyable” it would mean the same thing and save time and money. This is the sort of thing I could teach my intern.

This slip, too, is unaddressed until Leon puts up a memo in the break room that the purple slips are intended to be used for time-off requests, shift changes, and sexual harassment claims. As I had told the Katies, I went to high school with many of my coworkers. The ones that work my shift with me are Betsy Beth, Ramona, and Caroline. The three of them all worked together at the Pottery Nook before a kiln fire reduced it to kitschy ashes. They have no interest in being my friend, which is likely because they remember me as the girl who did not speak for the entire freshman year of high school. Betsy Beth has lots of red hair and very pink eczema on her neck. She is engaged to a guy who was our substitute science teacher and she spends most of the day being rude to the customers that I have so warmly greeted.

Ramona barely comes up to my shoulder and looks like a little girl; she has a flat face that is the color of soy milk and bright orange braces. I once heard her telling Betsy Beth that her mom couldn’t afford to have the orthodontist take them off, so she was saving all of her money

she made because they had already been on for two months longer than they were supposed to be and she was afraid that all of her teeth were going to fall out soon.

Caroline is one of the most beautiful girls I had ever seen, but she is Korean, so people here don't treat her that way. As far as I can tell, she is also boring. She always has her earbuds in and perches behind the cash register, cyclically painting her nails with a rust colored polish that she makes at home and then chipping it off. I find this habit particularly disgusting for a reason that I cannot place, I feel ill when I think of her pressing buttons and making change with her perpetually wet and chewed up fingers. It makes me want to not have fingernails, just smooth nubs like a rubber baby doll. Sometimes she whispers something to Betsy Beth or Ramona, but for the most part, she seems to keep to herself.

The only interesting person that works at the Cheese Castle is Augie Spear, and he doesn't even work here, really. We are the same age, but he was homeschooled on and off because his dad is the formerly famous hunter Jackson Spear. Jackson Spear pulled all of his kids out of school to tape a wildly unpopular reality television show that aired on Catch&Kill Network. After I learned of Augie and I's mutual connection to the Cheese Castle, I went on YouTube and found an old episode. It was nineteen minutes long without commercials and seemed to be about raising a good, Christian family in a culture of blood and animal slaughter. As they descended on the

woods, I looked for Augie's young face and found it hidden in camouflage among the bushes, no weapon, just blending into the soil.

Every four days, Augie picks up the spoiled food and unsold products at the Cheese Castle and delivers them to farms in the area for pig food. Every time he shows up, I welcome him in my carefully practiced manner and he says hello back and then I watch him load his truck. It is hard for me to tell if he is good looking or ugly; he is slightly taller than I am, but has the stubby fingers of a very short man. He has brown eyes and straight brown hair the exact same color of his eyes that hangs down around his ears and lots of brown freckles that are also the same color of his brown eyes and brown hair. This color brown is closest to the color of chocolate labradors. I concluded my investigation by deciding that he is interesting to look at, which is better than being good looking or ugly. At this point, I have watched him very closely for a running total of three hours, so I have effectively fallen in love with him.

When he arrives today, I say, "Welcome, please let me know if there's anything I can do to make your Saturn Cheese Castle visit more enjoyable."

Augie smiles and says, "Hi, Mina." His smile doesn't show any teeth and barely turns up at the edges. It is more like he makes his mouth as wide and thin as possible, like some kind of river fish. Then he says, "That's different than what you usually say," and my heart concaves.

I tell him that I am working on making my greeting as efficient as possible, and that I hope to have an intern by the end of the week. Augie laughs and says that he would like to be my intern. It is lucky then that the fattest family I have ever seen arrives to the gates of the Cheese Castle to be stickered and greeted, because I am at a loss for words and it is very possible that my now basin-shaped heart will force me into one of my famous medically induced silences.

As I greet this family and their leashed children that look like they are made of microwaved marshmallows, Augie disappears into the store to talk to Leon. I consider what the Katies said when I had told them about Augie.

"Tell him you'll mouth-F him in that cheese freezer," Caity had said, completely serious. Everyone agreed with her. Women were allowed to own their sexuality these days, it was important to be direct and be clear about what you wanted. I wasn't sure that I wanted to mouth-F Augie Spear in the cheese freezer, but I hadn't ruled it out.

"At this point, I have watched him closely for a running total of three hours, so I have effectively fallen in love with him."

Instead, I concentrate on standing perfectly straight with my shoulders back. If Augie approaches from behind, he will see my mediocre ass, but more importantly, the nearly perfect symmetry of my shoulders, bisected with my very careful braid. It's deep in human programming to have an affinity for natural symmetry; if you show enough people a fully formed pinecone, about sixty percent of them will report building sexual arousal that they can't ignore.

But Augie doesn't approach from behind; he must have gone out the back exit because I see him and Leon cross the parking lot with two dollies piled with expired ravioli. Augie is allowed to pull onto the sidewalk in front of the store for loading ease, but has a bad habit of parking too close to the doors. As they load the expired pasta into the truck, the sliding doors are sporadically triggered like a horrible blinking eye. I stand there in the center of the doors with my symmetrical posture like a too-long pupil.

When they are done with the ravioli, Leon says, "I have ten cases of stale Kringles for you somewhere. Lemme ask Ramona where she put them." Leon shuffles painfully slowly between the lids of the eye. I am fairly certain that he has a prosthetic foot, but I'm unable to prove it.

"Welcome, please let me—" I start, out of habit.

"Shut it."

Augie adjusts a few boxes of ravioli in the back of the pick up and then trails

into the store until he is standing too close to me.

“Can I have a sticker?” he says, not looking at me. I have never been so close to him before and realize now that his left eye is very slightly lazy. It looks like his left eye is looking at me despite all of his best efforts. This is very endearing. I give him the sticker. I think about telling him about the mouth F-ing opportunities that we have.

But instead I say, “Your freckles and eyes and hair are exactly the same color.”

“Is that a good thing?” Augie says. I have to be honest with him.

“I’ve thought about it a lot and I don’t know if it’s a good thing. But I’m pretty sure it is a good color.”

Augie doesn’t say anything at first, but slowly peels the sticker from its backing and sticks it to the front of his shirt, right in the center of his chest.

“We should hang out sometime,” he says. He smiles at me. He looks exactly as he was in the television episode where he was painted like the still forest.

“Yeah. We should,” I say. It is like every romantic movie I have ever seen, with golden light diced in through the now glitching sliding doors of the Cheese Castle. We are going to kiss.

“The damn doors won’t stop going again, Leon,” Betsy Beth shouts across the store floor.

“I’m carrying three hundred fucking Kringles, it’s gonna have to wait. Augie, get over here.”

And then there is a crashing noise and the three hundred fucking Kringles are scattered across the floor. The moment collapses in a buttery, flaky, cinnamon glaze. Augie flinches and runs over to Leon, who is sprawled on the floor with both feet still firmly attached to his legs.

I do not move to help, I am the gatekeeper of the Cheese Castle. Three priests arrive at that moment, rosacea faced and sweating, and I say, “Welcome, Father,” all hell behind me. Augie leaves with the pasta and the pastries. The day moves on.

Before I leave, I go to the break room to fill out another purple slip. This one is about having Augie come every two days instead of every four, so that we don’t have to clean hundreds of curdled baked goods from the floor in front of paying customers and holy men. I go to my locker and grab my backpack and a scrap of paper falls to the floor. I pick it up. Augie has written his phone number and TEXT ME.

Augie Spear’s house is somehow on the edge of everything. The edge of the forest, edge of the river, edge of the farmland, edge of the town; it is the prime kind of location to observe through hunting scopes. My dad drops me off at the edge of the Spear’s sprawling lawn and I feel like I am already locked in their sights, a little red cross hidden somewhere on my body.

“Should I go in with you?” he asks. “I don’t know the parents. It might be good to introduce myself.”

I want him to go in with me. At least, I want him to knock on the door and say all the right things in the beginning so I don’t have to. I don’t tell him that, instead I roll my eyes and huff in a way that feels overly practiced, “Dad, I’m twenty years old. God.”

“And you still have your dad drive you to dates,” he says, but then he concedes. “Just call me if you want me to come get you. Love you Meen Bean.” He drives away as I start up the long driveway.

I knock on the door and Augie answers.

“Hey,” I say, playing it cool, the way the Katies had advised me.

“Welcome, please let me know if there’s anything I can do to make your Spear House visit more enjoyable,” Augie says, and then he smiles that same flat river fish kind of smile.

“The job of intern is yours,” I say, laughing.

He smiles flatter and wider than ever before and steps aside so that I can enter.

I had mentally prepared myself to see a lot of taxidermy animals, but I guess I didn’t do a very good job because I am instantly disgusted to the very primal center of my being upon entering the Spear House. Every possible inch of space is occupied with something gargantuan and antlered and dead and all of the gargantuan dead antlered things have these unsettling frozen eyes. It’s like

the process of stuffing and configuring the carcasses imbued a little bit of life back into the eyes of the animals, so instead of looking dead, they look like they are perpetually dying, trapped in a purgatory of near lifelessness. I forget about playing it cool and comment on this to Augie, and then realize that I have forgotten about playing it cool and quickly try to backtrack.

“What I’m trying to say,” I stammer, “is that you have a lovely home.”

Augie moves towards a moose head that dwarfs the entryway, reaches out a knuckle, and raps on its eye. I flinch.

“Ha,” he says, “you’re right. I guess it’s just one of those things you just get used to.”

I agree with him, humans have an incredible capacity for routinizing the violent and the grotesque. Augie laughs. We walk into the kitchen and he gets me a beer from the refrigerator and the two of us drink our beers and lean onto the counter with our elbows like we have done it a million times before.

“Uh, so we’ll have to eat dinner with my little sisters tonight. My dad’s out of town,” Augie says after a little bit of idle chatter. He is blushing soft and pink all through his face. When he lifts his beer to drink, I watch the muscles of his throat move efficiently and effortlessly. It is intensely hot. “Sorry,” he adds.

“Okay,” I say, “That’s cool.”

“My dad’s just pretty big on family dinner. Even when he’s not here.”

“Yeah, no, it’s cool.”

“No,” Augie says, grinding his beer can into the table, not looking at me, “It’s not.”

“Huh?”

I’m not really paying attention anymore because I’m closely studying a taxidermy opossum family that is meandering around the breakfast nook. The mother’s jaw screams open to reveal all fifty of her fanged teeth lining the fleshy inside of her mouth, terrifyingly organic. I cannot think of a single reason why anyone would want this decorating their kitchen. If there is stuff like this in Augie’s room, I definitely will be unable to perform a mouth-F to the best of my abilities. There’s a noise at the entryway and Augie goes to answer the door. I resist the urge to put my hand in the opossum maw. There are noises of surprise at the entry. When Augie comes back, he looks like one of the gargantuan dead antlered things, with unsettled frozen eyes. His mild brownness has become grey and sickly and behind him is the largest man I have ever seen in my life.

“Well look at that. Augie brought a girl home,” booms the formerly famous hunter Jackson Spear.

When you see people on television, usually they end up being much smaller than they appear. Jackson Spear, who seemed rather normal-sized in the YouTube video clip I had watched, is somehow taking all of the breathable air out of the room with his unbelievably giant lungs.

“I’m Mina,” I squeak. I put out my hand in greeting despite worrying that my entire arm will be separated from its comfortable torso home.

Jackson Spear laughs and crushes my hand. “I like a girl with a good handshake. Jackson Spear.”

This is a generous lie because nothing about my handshake is good, my hand lies in his like a shriveled useless tongue in the toothy stuffed opossum mouth, but much sweatier. Furthermore, I’m not moving my arm at all. He is doing all the active shaking and I am along for the ride.

“My dad wasn’t supposed to be back until tomorrow,” Augie says, still looking very unwell. “Is it okay if we go get snow cones or something and then I take you home? We can get dinner another time.”

I start to nod, but Jackson Spear cuts in, “Augustus, your girl has to stay for dinner. Mina will stay, won’t you?”

I continue nodding.

“Great,” Augie says, almost a whisper. He is the color of newspaper.

“This is a very strange blessing, a very strange first date.”

Jackson Spear gives me a wolfish grin. He doesn’t look like a formerly famous hunter; he is clean shaven and has facial skin that indicates a moisturizing routine. I can tell he isn’t wearing an undershirt under his well-tailored blue button down, the outline of a heavy silver cross necklace is pressing up against the buttons.

“I don’t know about y’all, but I’m starving. You ready to eat?” Jackson Spear asks us, but he is already grabbing Augie by the shoulders and steering him outside. I follow them like a runaway and forgotten train car, through the kitchen door and out onto the large wooden porch. On the porch there is an outdoor dining table where Augie’s two younger sisters are already standing behind their respective chairs. I wonder how long they have been out there, waiting. The table has enough places for all of us, as if they knew that their father would be coming home. I stand beside Augie and Jackson Spear takes his place at the head of the table.

Jackson Spear asks me if I can say grace. Before I can tell him that I don’t know how, Augie interrupts.

“Dear All Powerful Lord, the Holy Green Sword of Righteousness, the Everlasting Vine of Life, we thank You for this food that You set before us, we eat and remember Your name, we live as Your humble and obedient servants,” Augie spits out quickly. The entire family has their heads bowed and their arms raised in the air. “Blessed be Berc...Amen.” Augie adds, stopping himself. Jackson Spear

glares at him and Augie blushes. Now he looks like undercooked chicken. This is a very strange blessing, a very strange first date. The family echoes Amen. Augie’s youngest sister, Delilah, serves everyone at the table. My plate is piled with corn and roasted chicken and potato salad. Without asking me, Delilah pours some kind of brown sauce over all of it. It is silent while she does this, the family stoically observing her careful and practiced motions. Once Jackson Spear takes a bite, eating commences in a flurry. I pick at my plate and compliment the food.

“We’ve got Gwen to thank for the cooking,” Jackson Spear says, pointing at the other girl who has yet to draw any sort of attention to herself. “She’s learning, but she’s not quite up to par with her mom yet,” he puts down his fork and gazes at me steadily, “Mrs. Spear passed last year. Cancer.”

I look at Augie, who is staring at his plate, not eating. “I’m so sorry for your loss. Really. My mom died when I was fourteen. Cancer, too,” I say.

Jackson Spear nods grimly, as if he expected it all along.

“Augie, I don’t know if you remember this, but after she died I didn’t talk for eleven months,” I ramble, uncomfortable. Augie still isn’t looking at me, but I feel him press his knee to my knee under the table. “I’ve been silent for more than a third of my life!” I hear myself blurt out. No one reacts to this. I put a lot of brown chicken in my mouth to stop myself from saying anything else.

“Well. I remember your mom. Really pretty woman, worked at the Urgent Care,” Jackson Spear says, finally. “We sure understand what a big loss it is. Especially for young girls.” He nods towards his daughters, “Both cancer, too. Wow.” Then, he takes a thoughtful bite of potato salad, swishing the mayonnaise around in his mouth. “It sure seems like there’s been an awful lot more cancer in the town these past years.” I tell him that cancer rates are continuing to rise throughout the country.

“Specifically in our town, though,” Jackson Spear says, studying the yellow corn teeth on the cob, “We’ve got nearly three times more cancer than what we had twenty years ago.”

I nod and shrug, hoping that we can switch to a different topic, so that I don’t have to explain why that isn’t actually true if you understand statistics. “So what do you guys think about the Baskin-Robbins?” I offer.

“Your dad works for that company,” Jackson Spear says, a statement of fact, rather than a question. He points to me with the pronged end of his fork, “The one where they put animal genes in our crops and clone everything and spray chemicals on our food that control people’s minds.” He smiles at me, but doesn’t seem like he is joking. I shift in my seat.

“I’m done eating,” Augie says loudly. “Can Mina and I be excused to go to my room?” He pushed his untouched plate away from him.

“Settle down, Augustus. I’m just asking your girl a few questions, getting to

know her.” Augie puts his head down and shakes like a dog in a thunderstorm. Something cold and uncertain settles deep in my stomach.

“Yeah, but that’s not really what they do,” I reply gently.

“He’s the one selling that stuff to our town,” Jackson Spear says, in the same statement rather than question manner.

“Dad. You said you wouldn’t. You promised,” Augie whispers desperately with such anguish that I don’t understand, but want so badly to fix.

Jackson Spear looks like he could bite through Augie’s neck with his strong, omnivorous teeth. “Augustus, if you don’t shut up, I swear to God, I’ll...”

“No, it’s okay,” I say quickly, “Really it’s okay.” They both seem to warily settle, as bristling wild animals do after a near confrontation.

I hesitate. “Yeah, my dad sells that stuff to the town... but it’s more about improving crop yields and using less water and stuff. It’s not really...” I trail off when I realize no one is listening to me. The cold, uncertain feeling in my stomach persists.

The sky is darkening into a cranberry color as the sun sets behind the black forest. The moon protrudes from the clouds like a pearly baby tooth. Delilah gets up and uses a long match to light giant pillar candles on the table. Everyone is quiet watching her do this, observing the way the flame jumps from the match to the wick like a butterfly landing on a thin, waxy stem.

“I’m sure that’s what he told you when he killed your mother,” Jackson Spear says, his voice so soft and poisonous that I am certain that I haven’t heard him right.

“Sorry, what?” I have started to feel dizzy. The tiny fires of the candle double and split and dance, forming fairy rings. I look down at my plate and around at the table and see that mine is the only one with thick brown sauce.

His tone changes again, upbeat and friendly. “I asked if you ever heard of the Green Knight?”

“Like the story with Sir Gawain? I think my dad told it to me,” I reply. I shake my head, I’m having trouble holding onto thoughts. I feel like he said something about my mother.

“Dad—” Augie starts.

“Augustus, be quiet,” Jackson Spear says. “Yes, Mina, that’s right. It’s an old story, I’m glad your dad told it to you. Sir Gawain happens upon a challenge where the Green Knight says that any man can attempt to behead him, and the next year he gets to return the swing. Gawain chops off the Green Knight’s head, and the Green Knight just picks up the severed head and reattaches it to his body. Or at least that’s one variation of him. An incomplete picture, if you will. He shows up in myth and legend all the time. He’s the life-force, the avenger, the tester of gods and men.”

The formerly famous hunter Jackson Spear stands up and starts to unbutton his shirt. “The Green Man. The

Horned God. Bercilak. Children?” The girls stand up from their chairs and start to unbutton the front of their dresses.

“Oh, uh, whatever you’re doing, you don’t have to,” I say, as the family continues to undress in front of me. Augie stays shaking in his seat and Jackson Spear slaps him hard across the face. I scream.

“I’m sorry, Mina,” Augie says, his eyes teary and his cheek hot and blistered from the strike. He stands up. I stand up too.

“What the fuck? I’m leaving,” I say. I sway where I am standing and fall back down into my seat. The air swarms around me and hems me in. “Augie. Take me home,” I grab at his arm. My breath starts to hitch and catch. The candlelight grows until I am worried that the whole house will be engulfed in flame.

“The cold, uncertain feeling in my stomach persists.”

“I’m so sorry, Mina,” Augie repeats. He shakes my hand off of his forearm. Then, he slips off his t-shirt. The front of his chest is covered in bumpy, brown tree bark, like that of an elm tree. It crackles and seethes as he moves and seems to grow and spread over his freckly, white skin. Delilah and Gwen have patches of bark like satellites on their stomachs and collarbone, asymmetrically spreading

across their sides towards their backs. Jackson Spear's entire torso and upper arms are covered in this bark, and I see now that the silver necklace that I mistook for a cross is actually intertwined antlers covered in foliage.

I rub my eyes with my knuckles, but the bark doesn't go away. "Are these, like, warts or something?" Under the table, I slip my phone from my pocket to call my dad.

"The boy whispers something, and the deer's dark eyes yawn with understanding. The forest hums and writhes and readjusts."

"She's using her phone," Delilah says. Her voice is like birdsong. Jackson Spear reaches over and slaps me so hard that light pops behind my eyes like combustible fireflies. He reaches over Augie again and takes the phone from my hands and crushes it in his giant fist. I start to cry.

When I wail, Jackson Spear laughs, deep and booming. Sap bubbles up from between the cracks in his torso

bark, red-gold and wet. "Warts. This is the touch of the Green Knight. We are his honored servants." He drops my ruined phone and it lands on the porch with a crunch noise. He steps on it.

"Please let me go," I whisper, "I won't tell anyone about this."

Jackson Spear shakes his head as if he is truly despaired by my request. "I can't, Mina. Your family has upset the balance of death and rebirth here by trying to manipulate nature. It's making the town sick. It's killing our land. It's killing our loved ones."

Delilah walks over with an axe and hands it to her father.

"The Green Knight calls for unwilling sacrifice to appease him. A game of beheadings." Augie is fully crying now and Jackson Spear pauses to slap him again, harder. Augie yelps. Jackson Spear's voice drops to a helpless whisper.

"We have no choice but to serve him." He points to the forest. "Run. And we'll catch you if the Green Knight wills it so."

I stand up on shaky legs like a still slick colt. The night is deep purple grey, like when I would eat those mixable yogurts as a kid and swirl together strawberry banana and blue raspberry. That's how I feel, small and vortexing. I look at Augie in pleading horror, but he shakes and cries and does nothing. Jackson Spear casually swings the axe and cleaves a candle in two, the waxy blade lodging into the wood of the table.

"Run, little deer," the formerly famous hunter Jackson Spear says, "Run, or I kill you right here."

I start to back away, and then hobble off the porch steps, turn around and sprint towards the tree line. I can hear the Spear family's leisurely steps behind me, their combined voices rising in some kind of holy chant, their tree bodies growing up towards the sky and taking root in the powerful green grass. I hit the forest, raked in and swallowed by the old oak. I move faster and then, impossibly, faster still. My feet hardly strike the ground. I am being eaten alive by the dark woods. My legs elongate, my feet become hooves, my body becomes longer and brown dappled white. The deer

throws itself into the underbrush and waits to disappear.

The leaves blanketing the ground are golden yellow and tender with rot. The creek where the deer brings its lips to drink is blue tinged with cold. The boy is here today and he has brought sour cheesy noodles. Some days, the deer seems to know him, other days, it shies away. Today, the deer allows the boy to gently put both hands on its long, sloping neck. The boy whispers something, and the deer's dark eyes yawn with understanding. The forest hums and writhes and readjusts. High above them, the white oaks are thrown by winds that neither of them can see.

HANNAH WANG

what to say during the instrumental opening to whitney houston's "i wanna dance with somebody"

i wanna call somebody 'darling'
like a gerund verb, like they are actively
dear to me.

so when the night falls, i wanna give
the shuddering larynx of my lonely heart

to somebody. i wanna bring them into my room
and realize that the walls
need a new paint job. i wanna believe
they will touch the peeling corners
anyway.

i wanna make space, make space,
for somebody who moves to me.

i wanna feel the disco stars
glide across my skin
with somebody.
even the darkness here is sparkling. say,

don't you wanna dance? say
you wanna dance. say you see me,

burning small and mean and bright.
i see you too. i wanna hold and be held.
i wanna be a mirror ball
full of constellations, or maybe

i wanna know how to be somebody.



DREW PUGLIESE

Untitled



MEGAN PAN

I lost my body

During the summer months of quarantine, I embarked on a pretty serious Netflix binge, particularly in the genres of foreign-language film and animation. One movie that popped up on my recommended list, which actually happened to tick both boxes, was the 2019 French animated drama fantasy *J'ai perdu mon corps*, known in English as *I lost my body*. Directed by Jérémy Clapin and animated by Xilam Animation, *J'ai perdu mon corps* is a Cannes Nespresso Grand Prize-winning and Academy Award-nominated film based on the novel *Happy Hand* by Guillaume Laurant, who is also known for the screenplay of French romantic comedy *Amélie*.

Centered around a young man named Naoufel (or perhaps more accurately, both him and his hand), the movie leads us through two intertwined storylines: one told in flashbacks of the orphaned Naoufel struggling to adapt after the sudden death of his parents, and the other set in the present of a severed hand making its way through Parisian suburbs in hopes of reuniting with its body. Through the unfolding of the dual narratives, we slowly come to learn more about Naoufel's history, from his happy childhood in Morocco to his subsequent relocation to France to live with his negligent uncle and cousin, as well as the circumstances of his involuntary amputation. As both plots begin to converge, the film leaves us with an understated yet poignant commentary on the themes of tragedy, loss, and reshaping one's fate.

In addition to its uniquely creative screenplay, *J'ai perdu mon corps* is distinguished by its beautiful animation and extraordinary score—the latter of which has been recognized by the

2020 César Award for Best Original Music. The animation style is simple yet attentive to detail, using nuances in color and tone to evoke different moods throughout each scene. Coupled with Dan Levy's powerful score—which blends traditional instrumentals with contemporary synths to create rich, swelling melodies—the movie has a constant sensation of restlessness and urgency, propelling the action of the piece forward. The eponymous

title track embodies this feeling of perpetual motion perfectly, as it begins with a repeated quarter note electronic refrain that gradually builds in layers of strings before it crescendos to a climax. Working in skillful harmony, the animation and the score together serve to set the rhythm of the film as it moves swiftly onward—effectively mirroring its central subject matter of forward movement and the relentless passage of time.



Courtesy of netflix.com



Courtesy of netflix.com



JEREMY PULMANO

Mango

What was going through my head when my mother rinsing mangoes would cause sharpness and pain on my tongue? My mother, in her morning robe and twine tsinelas,

humming the sun awake each morning, rinsing fruit while my Lola Violy fried chicken beside her like Jollibee. And on days my shirt curved from

her gluttony my mother would hurry me to the kitchen, palm a mango at the sink, slice it quickly into thirds, longways. One

of the thirds she would cup in her hand, slice into a grid, and push it inside out into a yellow turtle shell, each cube a little bit uneven, but even then I called it

a masterpiece, though I now call it surgical. My Lola wearing her aloe face mask would exhale sharply from her nose, say she used to peel mango with her fingernails hiding

in the mountains from soldiers, dirt in her nail beds and occupation on her tongue. My mother would *tch-tch* that I better eat my fruit if I wanted my skin to

stay smooth and my eyes twenty-twenty. And in my twenties I cut it this way still, look for the best angle of attack

as I eat one cube at a time. And each time I sense my mother beside me eating the other third, still whole, with a teaspoon. Lola, who grabs the seed. We eat quietly,

sour mango strands between our teeth.

contributors

POETRY

Beatrix Bondor '22 is a rising junior (currently on a leave of absence) from Manhattan at Princeton University where she is studying literature, French language and culture, poetry, and history. Her inexhaustible sources of inspiration include skyscrapers, Linden Lane, excellent meals, wending conversations, and unlined paper.

Ned Furlong '22 thinks you should come visit Iowa some time. He is always on the lookout for new colors, especially the ones you can't see.

Will Hartman '25 is from Boulder, Colorado and will enroll at Princeton this fall. He likes to ski, make music, and play soccer; he also likes alpine lakes and sea glass. He is currently working and travelling Europe during a gap year.

Sheherzad Jamal '23 is a sophomore from Islamabad, Pakistan interested in studying history and politics. She loves living in the mountains, listening to old school rock and looking at very large trees.

Ethan Luk '24 is a freshman born and raised in Hong Kong. He loves rewatching the film *Lost in Translation* and baking sourdough bread.

Jeremy Pulmano '21 is a senior from New Jersey studying computer science with a certificate in creative writing. All of his recent poems are food-related. He can't help it.

Hannah Wang '21 is a SPIA concentrator with certificates in French and Creative Writing. She hails from the Pacific Northwest and is actively disintegrating into seafoam as you read this.

Emily Willford '24 is a freshman from Montgomery, AL currently studying psychology and considering a certificate in creative writing.

They have an enduring love of D&D, narrative video games, and personal poetry.

Henry Wright '23 is currently on a gap year trying to "find himself" for the third time. He is studying Economics, Cognitive Science and Creative Writing. His accent can usually be found drowning in the Atlantic somewhere between New York and London.

PROSE

Lila Harmar '22 is a junior concentrating in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and pursuing certificates in Russian Language and Culture and (hopefully) Creative Writing. She discovered her love for writing in kindergarten, with a dictated story about a gnome in a car. She plans to continue writing until her hand falls off, or until her inevitable demise, whichever comes first.

Cassandra James '23 grew up in a family of Greeks, Italians, and Colombians, which basically means she had to tell stories to survive. She loves the ocean at twilight, playbills, and avocados served with lime and salt.

Lara Katz '24 is currently planning to major in Comparative Literature with a certificate in Creative Writing. She loves Latin, curling (the sport), and not following recipes.

Sophia Marusic '21 is an English major from St. Louis, Missouri. She reads and writes science fiction because she cannot be an astronaut.

Sierra Stern '24 is a freshman from Los Angeles who maintains strong roots in valley girl culture. She is currently undecided about everything except a creative writing certificate, and is an unwavering champion of the undervalued arts, such as young adult

novels and fiber crafts. Between us, at least half of her personality is directly stolen from the Alice in Wonderland franchise.

ART

Artist note from JpRochart: In honor of João Pedro "Stades, JP" Bernardo da Rocha, the man who, from hundreds of miles, showed the quill to be lighter than the pen.

Juliette Carbonnier '23 is a sophomore from New York City who hopes to study English with dashes of music, theater, art, and writing. She enjoys long walks in the rain, struggles to play chess, and is, sadly, allergic to onions.

Abby de Riel '22 is a junior studying English, dance, and any tiny wonder of the world in between. They spend a lot of time thinking about movement, necessary pauses, synesthesia, empriness, and how to love.

Nancy Lu '21 is a senior from Bridgewater, NJ majoring in economics. She loves making any type of visual art, and is a plant mother to the over 50 succulents in her house that are her mom's first grandchildren.

Emma Mohrmann '24 is an artist from St. Louis, MO. She has enjoyed creating art that focuses on projections and self perception, along with art that explores and questions mental states, time, change, and growth. One of her favorite phrases for art and life is "trust the process" and she tries to find beauty in everyday moments.

Drew Pugliese '23, is a sophomore from Northern New Jersey studying art history and visual art. Pizza, bread, and caesar salad are his passions. You can probably find him hanging around Leo in Brooklyn eating pizza, bread, and/or caesar salad.

Sandy Yang '22 is a junior in the English department who loves to paint and go on hikes in her free time. She's taken up baking a bit in quarantine which has had varying

(i.e. low) rates of success and she's more than hyped to be eating Murray-Dodge cookies again someday.

WHAT WE'RE LOVING

Sabrina Kim '24 is a freshman from Sunnyvale, California. She is interested in jazz, child's pose, and bagels at sunrise.

Megan Pan '22 is a junior from Short Hills, NJ concentrating in comparative literature with certificates in theater, creative writing, and Asian American studies. She enjoys doing her makeup for no one to see, debating the ethics of dating sim intimacy, and consuming unreasonably large quantities of anime. User reviews describe her as "lovely and a delight to be around."

Julia M. Walton '21 is a senior from the Philadelphia suburbs. She is concentrating in English with certificates in Creative Writing, Humanistic Studies, and East Asian Studies. Her creative and critical work has previously appeared in *The Foundationalist*, *COUNTERCLOCK*, *The Paper Shell Review*, *Tortoise: A Journal of Writing Pedagogy*, *The Nassau Literary Review*, *Questions: Philosophy for Young People*, and *The Best Teen Writing of 2016*. Currently, she serves as Editor-in-Chief Emerita of *The Nassau Literary Review*. When at home, she enjoys taking photos of her pets wearing little hats. Her pets do not share her enthusiasm.

ESSAYS

Ben Guzovsky '24 is a freshman and prospective comparative literature major. He has spent the holiday season dressed in all green and wrapped in Christmas lights, pretending to be a tree. He has yet to fool anyone.



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