

KALOPSISIA

POETRY | PROSE | VISUAL ART



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Masthead

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Amazonia
Patricia Avellaneda
90 x 110 cm
Oil on canvas

Just now a pufferfish floats in a 500-gallon tank

By: Lisa Keeton

at the lobby of the children's hospital where
upstairs my sister is fading. My vigil grows weary too.

My old eyes envision a tunnel out of this too bright hallway
back to our childhood when we were coal miners, our quarry built
from wooden chairs and soothing blankets. It was a sturdier time
when we went searching for our first prizes.

I bang the clock against my head but its arms will not turn back.
Even with buckets of tears, my eyes cannot wash your image clean.
I kick the clock in its hands and still, no budging. Everything is failing.
My eyes beg for a miracle but only shadows remain.

Their long arms grab at me from the corners of my eyes.
Cowards retreat when my vision adjusts to their presence.
Now only this stark white hall is left between us. Are you upstairs crying too?
Is someone there with a kerchief to catch your falling tears?

I'll never forget all the things I've done wrong, or forgive the fist- shaped
vital organ in my chest beating in spite of you. I will beat it instead
as a bloody head against all those who wish well for me. For you, I will become
inconsolable.

About the Author:

Lisa Keeton is a third- year candidate in the Creative Writing MFA Program at the University of Missouri- St. Louis. Her work has been featured in the River Bluff Review and is being considered for publication at small presses nationwide.





hiding places: Ophelia

Elwing Gao

18 x 12 in.

Colored pencil, printmaking ink, newspaper clippings

What songs gave your choices their forms?

By: Julia Retkova

But come, what currents would rage
if only for the taste of light? What monster throws a peaceful mind into tatters
resplendent with suffering?
You are nothing but a beast who breathes through but a man. What creature burrows
into the hollows of your mind? What creature sits quiet
on a throne crumbling in blasphemies of all-jade? Of empty fires?
For the gathering dusk brings flowers of confusion: this my mother tells me as she strokes my hair.
Is it the creature or the man who weaves the tapestry of life?
What choices come before you? What song can give them form?
But come, the day is drawing deeper, deeper—
let Dusk set smoky arms around you, let breath sink deeper, still—
let all those rest behind you, heads heavy, heads filled
with the bursting song of night-birds.
(But ask, still, while the house rests thick in sleep: would you strive for the unearthing of truth?)
It is a home with no rooms: truth walks freely. That we know. So come,
let peace descend, cloaked as she is in star-stained veils. Let us close our minds.



There are currents everywhere we look.

By: Julia Retkova

Let me tell you: thoughts flow like waves
over the face. The underneath, hidden.
Skin turns to white froth, and in
the dips of cheeks, in the crash of the brow, there's the color
of frenzied, blackened seas.

This all began last Sunday.

*I saw a man cut off his head and throw it
in the sky.*

I had stopped, then. *How extraordinary*, I thought, but the crowds around me
they kept moving, kept pulling me deeper into currents.

Their heads buried down, I thought, *how do you come up for air?*

So I ran, knee-deep and coughing, and caught up to the headless man, thinking at least he
would share

in my amazement. But, the shining of his eyes—


it pierced at me with such

hatred

that I felt my lips go numb.

About the Author:

Julia Retkova is a King's College London graduate student with two degrees in Literature and Digital Studies. When not working on an app that connects foreigners with their family overseas, she's lucky enough to be running a small literary journal called Nymphs. She was born in Ukraine, but grew up in the south of Spain. She loves reading books in the sun and writing when everyone's asleep.





Trouble don't last always

Peter Donley

11 x 17 in.

Oil pastel

lollipop headlights

By: Yun-Fei Wang

for the longest time, the years after i left us
things changed: the sweets jar is always empty.
hollow. it was a curse— every candy i tried
would taste like headlights that evening

in the backseats of your run-down car
we broke into crushed sugar, condensed
at all the sweetest places—
your smile, fingertips, ecstasy, my ghost

like hourglass sand through a narrow tunnel
your nails slit open powdered flesh
the past and present remained still
until one overflowed into the other— i met you:

sculpting candy with serrated teeth, you
dragged the lollipop across my closed lips
scraping with shards of broken headlights
as our moonlit nights slowly slipped away

like this one: back of your car, tasted
timeless scars, you tell me it's okay—
lollipop bits stuck to the back of my throat
and sticky under my tongue like sand

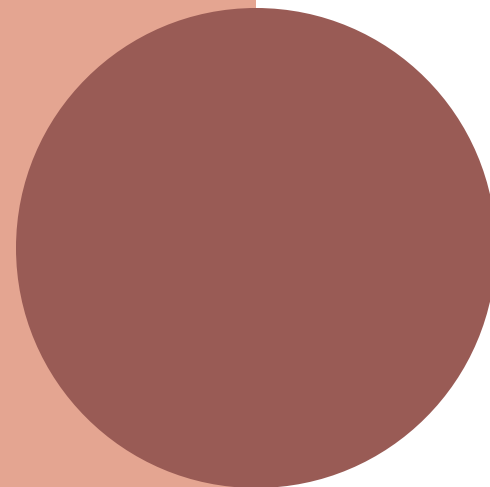
after every grain has passed through
the hourglass neck, will there ever be
another us? the sweet blood i crave.
searching through an hourglass; *our* glass

somehow my lips ended up etched in shards
pressed tightly against the side of your neck
i fed on your blood trickling into my scars
intoxicated from the sugar on your lips

slowly, i sank, like metal keys in honey
into oceans of starlight, sickly sweet
they became mists of heavy dreams
seeping into scars until we were but—

your fingertips poisonous to my skin
like headlights waiting to break.
and that was why, even after a forever
every piece of candy would remind me of:

one, a taste no artificial sweets could match
two, a story ending with broken headlights
three, the hourglass on your bedroom shelf, and
four, you;



dreams unconscious

By: Yun-Fei Wang

it started from hollowness
where my heart should've been
four summers ago you
shattered what was left of me

taken aback by your eyes
black glass, the color of
forgotten cities an hour
before apocalyptic dawn

and vinyls that played out hymns
crept into my veins, bloomed
sugar-coated whispers
like the guitar you'd strung

against my waist, so deep
your nails painted scars on me
so soft, music almost sings of
the name carved into my cheek

that burns in cold air, engraving
patterns of your lips into midnights
i hid from, writing about galaxies
in your eyes, yet i've never seen

moonlight through a window pane
afraid that its beauty would suffocate
and it'd feel just like you.
one of these nights, city dreams

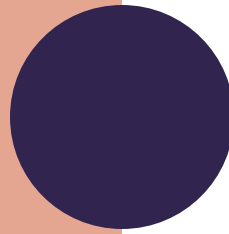
a misty hilltop with roses and
violets flying in the wind. i am but
a ragged blanket, back of
dusty wooden shelves. some nights



there is a way to live again
without ripping at the seams
but living on spilling blood and
strumming all these broken strings

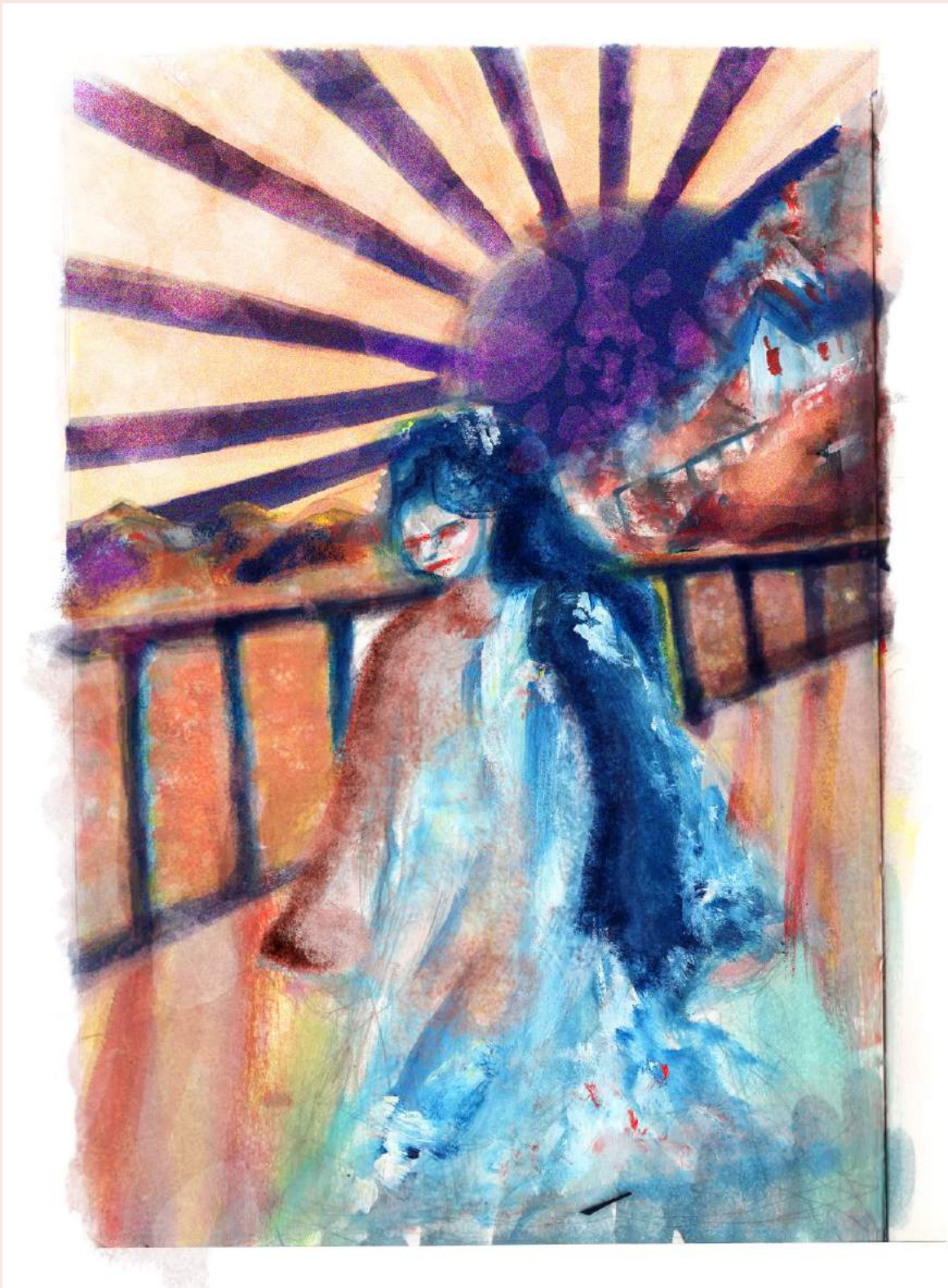
a sunset of colorless dreams
constellations and paper planes
you intoxicated me without
even touching my wounds.

the highest life, ended in
nightmares and crushed glass
i think you understand now
why i had to leave.



About the Author:

A few years ago, aspiring writer Yun-Fei Wang had begun using fiction as an escapism from the overwhelming sadness of being alive. Now that she's 16, falling deeper than ever, she can fortunately affirm that literature has been, is, and will be the only fragment of sanity in her life. Find her at a silent midnight, or at [@immortalrainpoetry](#) on Instagram.



Memory

Luana Góes

21 x 29.7 cm

Acrylic on paper

My Lover's Nest

By: Simra Sadaf

Oh to lay in a sunflower field on summer evenings picturing what color your room is, your bed and the bed spread, silk or cashmere or cotton and the women who sat there folding their

arms and then unfolding them as they watched you tiptoe your way to the bathroom, as they watched you forget your god, as you ran your fingers along their pelvis.

They didn't drape you in velvet. Let me.

Do you become holier each time you drag your nails into everything you touch, shoulders, spine, thighs, foggy evenings, into everything you love, my ribs, your cat's pink paws, my grave? Do you stop loving once your nails sink into them? There are red marks all over my chest but you never touched me.

You burned me.

Class is too subjective of a matter to take into account when my obsession meets your unmalleable weak bones. And my wounds open wide enough sucking me into an abyss that looks like a coffin or at least smells like it, like wood, mud, like rotting flesh, like camphor, where we sit across each other and you still don't see me.

Why?

You know when you read Andrea Gibson's poems and you can't help but cry because it's so beautiful? That's how it is when you talk, that's how I want to paint you in these poems, fiercely, in violent screams, in first heartbreaks, in the fall of Icarus, in the first burn of alcohol, yet you would still be the gentlest person to ever walk on the face of this earth.

Now summer is gone. Bring death to me.

Wasted Youth

By: Simra Sadaf

at the raw age of 21,
tragedy crawls
towards me like
a bare-assed baby
caked with dirt,
throws its hands
up in the air
asking to be held,
and I do.

at the hazy age of 23,
wanting to get rid
of the dirt stain
on my arms and
my T-shirt,
I go to the
nearest mosque
wash my hands
and do my ablution,
but the “faithful ones”
are triggered,
said I am leaving
blemishes on the
prayer mat.

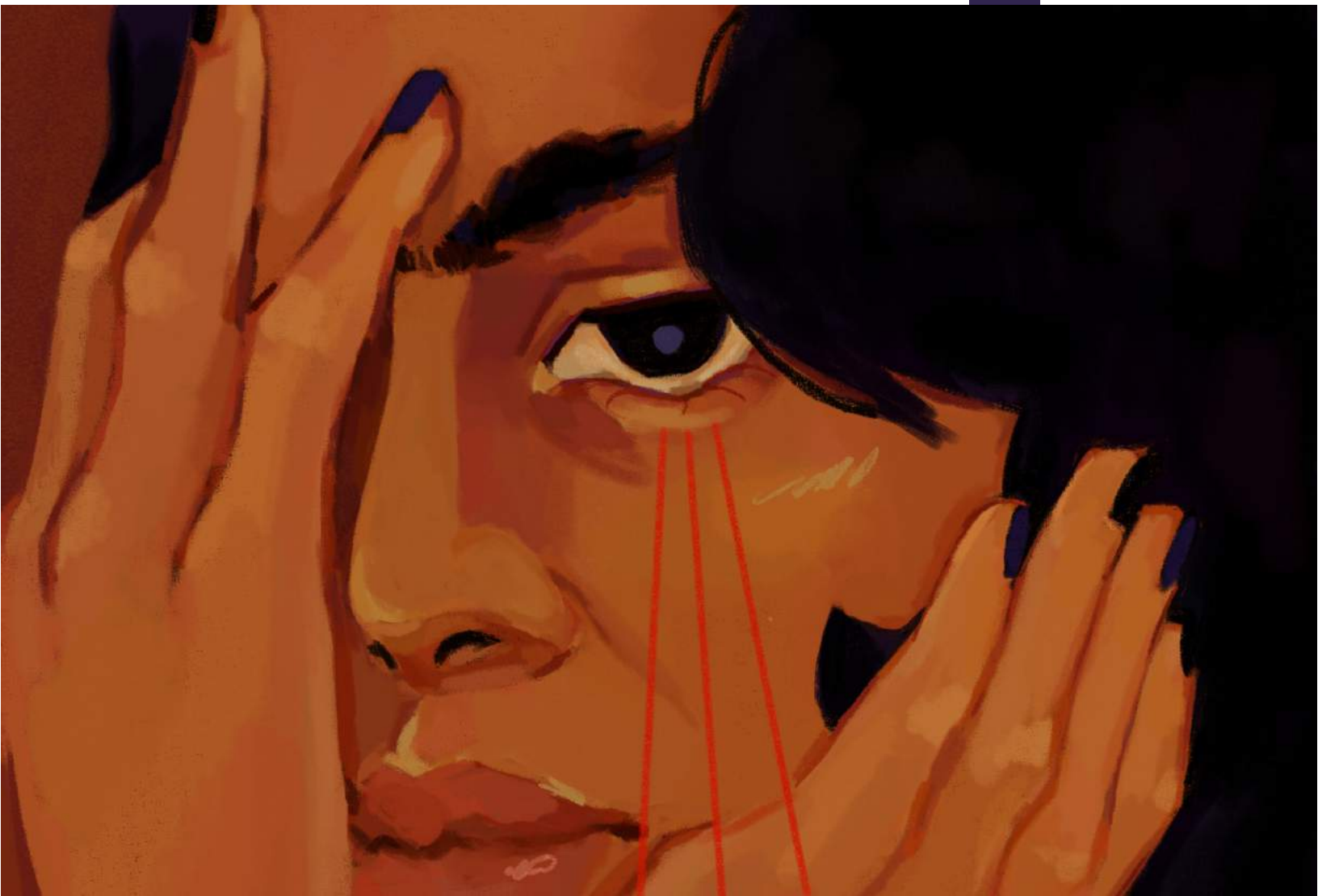
at the dire age of 25,
my Adam’s apple
is slowly being
sucked in,
my spine steadily
disappearing as
I roam around
this godless town
in search of a
whorehouse,
barefoot.

at the crippling age of 28,
my tragedies and aches
find a home,
it is shiny and warm,
I have since been
learning God’s language,
and the night’s mouth
does not engulf
me anymore,
it kisses me,
gently.

at the brittle age of 30,
my cocaine infused
arteries now host
a venomous
snake bite,
and as the dawn
falls far away
from my sight,
I scream under the
bubbling bath tub,
“annihilate me, God,
I love every second of it.”

About the Author:

Simra Sadaf has finished her Masters in English Literature from University Of Madras. She writes short stories and poems for magazines. She pursued her bachelors in Sociology and has an abundant knowledge about the workings of a society which she incorporates in most of her writings. She reads books of all genres and likes to review them on Goodreads and other social media platforms. She loves the art of storytelling and someday hopes to write something that will leave a lasting impact on the readers. Literature drives her spirit and words churn her soul.



Portrait of an Indian Girl

Alisha Verma

19 x 13 in

Digital art

these walls are thin; my breathing is too

By: Grace Liang

she has *Pride and Prejudice* open on her lap, fawning over Jane Austen's brilliance. I swallow my jealousy to snark that it really *does* take imagination for a rich man to atone for his pride.

her laugh sounds like rustling silk and I can see how I shall die.

"oh, you're so clever. I'm very glad to be your dearest friend."

I want to wash those last two words out of her mouth. no one who has taken root in my stomach and snaked vines around my spine should be tainted with the title of a friend. not when she's seeped into the pores of my tongue and every word I choke on in her presence is laced with a sugary tremor. not when I fear that every syllable might be the last.

the evening paper flutters at every table in the dining hall; the boys titter when they see a headline about some Austrian archduke's death and trouble simmering between the "Great Empire" and "the Huns."

beside me, she shudders.

"what's so delightful about war? i do not think it's necessary, for one, and once they begin they never quite end so..."

she rambles on and I only nod, because I have lost my mind and truly do agree. somehow, she lets me see a future where we do not need to stitch our hands together and wait for letters from corpses; where men can decay in meadows under joint headstones instead of on the scorching strips of battlefield with bullets as their funeral procession. she makes me forget that we are pathetic puppets with wretchedness in the marrow of their bones—she certainly is not one.

she knows that's a lie; I cannot be so sure.

I wake her on a night that spares its judgment of a windy lashing, when the stars still slumber, and the hall monitor is as good as dead. I press my sanity into her hands. when she finishes reading, she thanks me with a kiss on the forehead and swipes a used handkerchief over my mouth. I store that handkerchief where half of my heart used to be.

About the Author:

Grace Liang is a Chinese-Canadian writer who lives in Toronto. She likes reading graphic novels, wasting her time on AO3 and Twitter, and daydreaming while listening to music. Find her on Twitter and Instagram at @yf_grace.



touched

Elwing Gao

11 x 15 in.

Watercolor, salt



fever dream

By: Jasmine Kapadia

you are eternal summer.
burnt sunshine, brown rice,
honey jasmine tea with a thin slice of lemon. *aiyu*.
melt freezy on my tongue, the awkward dance of converting fahrenheit to celsius.
trying to fit both worlds into the gap between your two front teeth. lip gloss
is the only thing that survives, is sticky
on rims of cups and mixes into hotpot. no more sticky than the air around us; god
the tropics are humid. this dragon slumbers.
we go breakfast shopping at the market,
tuck lychees into sleeves
search between molars for first language. this steady build-up like
noodles crowding in the mouth. we are
greedy for some cramped space to breathe in. strangers make us
take off our rings and relatives make us put them back on, so
scrambled and sweaty we are grateful when the
air conditioning hits. but you, dark green and sesame oil and mangoes and red bean,
who i can no longer smell when the plane lands.

About the Author:

Jasmine Kapadia is a 16-year-old poet from the Bay Area. She has work featured or forthcoming in Same Faces, The Daphne Review, Malala Fund's Assembly, the Eunoia Review, and The Rising Phoenix Review, among others. Find her on Instagram @jazzymoons.



He, She, They

Raka Panda

4 x 8 ft

Charcoal and oil on canvas

Canthus

By: Finn Cargill originally published by Illagrypho Press

A baby rabbit will push his face
Between two walls, ears folded back.
A brown 9mm round fired into linoleum—
Though exposed, stubborn and steeled
Against all pronged voices
Or fat, pinching insults.

Not for comfort,
Not in the book dog's ears
(Folded and forgotten),
Nor in the sleeve peeking
Out of a coat cuff,
Asking to be tugged—
To be trimmed with teeth.


The corners
The underarm nook,
The upturned mouth,
The eye and its pink slime,
I have always sought the corners
Of mouths, of rooms, of hot, hollow
Thoughts like rogue Mercuries,
Silver bodies, poison planets,
Distant messengers, round
and boundless, though

I have never
Seen the middle of you.
In a silver hollow-point hole
I bury my face and wait
For anything to happen.




Dowsing Stick

By: Finn Cargill



Turning out plastic tokens from my pockets
And running an upturned hand along the underside
Of witch-tree branches (overgrown: needing amputated).
I could retire from the biomes of The City—
Here I've no gut to complain, no neck to put out,
Or claws for burrowing, a spine to prop me up straight,
No scales or hide or carapace for a mobile home.
So, I want to look down and see Steinbeck
Beneath the ground, held in the taller grass—
His boots welcomed into the sweeting ground.



I could impregnate the selfless greenery,
With my automatic tools, my metal extensions,
Terraforming the low fields and ascending forests.
Or, end myself simply against a felled sleeper,
Not by money, not eviction (or any invisible string).
Beaten yet again, but honestly this time, and final—
Unceremonious. Trading in a heavy head for another,
A sinner's mind for a mute bone in the ground.
Following only the Y-shaped divining rods,
Severed on the ground. All my tangled aspirations,
Now crosshatched and clotted, wetly unwinding into a new bed.

HOOF

By: Finn Cargill

Under the shade of whose authority
Did I once sit? Cloven feet tucked beneath me
I would laze, chewing on a soup tin and bleating.

I have stolen knife-fuls of butter from larders,
Delicates from clotheslines and love-trinkets
From kists. I have peered into mouseholes, roused
First by Curiosity's little invocations
Then Obsession's shameless demands
And so have undone the honest work of honest people,
Casting mud-clods of doubt at the front doors
Of the thread-cutters and sawbones.

Now, as I am guided to the gallows
The women in my family implore me:
REPENT REPENT REPENT
The men of my family command me:
REPENT REPENT REPENT
My feckless ears can only tremble at the sound:
REPENT REPENT REPENT
Heedless and plugged
With coarse hair as they are.

Tarred and feathered,
Buck-toothed and braying,
I make as if to plead
—interrupted
The trapdoor swings open.
A kimono gown, vivid colors
Of dyed silk, erotic,
Moaning blues and purples part,
Revealing bronze skin, glistening.
Long black feathers
Descend in spirals.
The rope corrects the throat,
The throat plays a final, odd note
To the ashen pleasure
Of the small, seething crowd.

Days of Mercy

By: Finn Cargill

Originally published by The Black Spring Press Group

I strangled my broken memory of a horse
Into a clod of potter's clay and painted it poorly,
Victory Red when wet—now a dry, spiced mud.
The lodgers eat their potatoes without salt,
One fries onions in the bottom of the kettle.
I, their idiot father, inhale the fat in the air,
Heavy, massaging my bread-and-beer gut.
Today I was a sun dog, waiting restlessly to rise
And alongside my mother, puncture the sky.
Though my cue never came. Hurt,
Like the paunched rabbit hung up
Before me, I watched my blue entrails
Thud onto the wood-effect vinyl flooring.
My surrogate Turk aunt at the corner shop warned me
Of the dangers of painkillers in times like these.
I explained, it's only for the bulging pain behind my eye
That brewed last night, while I overslept
(Groping for comfort in the net of my dream
About the nearing end of days). So, I chew the pill,
Readying up for my 4 o'clock early
With the rottweiler who beams back at me
From the wet, black mouth of my boiler room.

About the Author:

Finn Cargill is a worker at a community cinema and student of Media & English at Goldsmiths College. Born in Suffolk, he has since lived in Glasgow and London. Cargill has been writing poetry for eight years, gravitating towards free verse, often in a confessional style. He curates the collaborative project "Dirty & Anxious" with fellow poet Luke Surl, housing creators from different artistic backgrounds.

Website: finncargill.com

Instagram: [finn.cargill](https://www.instagram.com/finn.cargill) // [dirty_and_anxious](https://www.instagram.com/dirty_and_anxious)



Burning Flower
Raka Panda
24 in. diameter
Mixed media on canvas

Bottle tree,

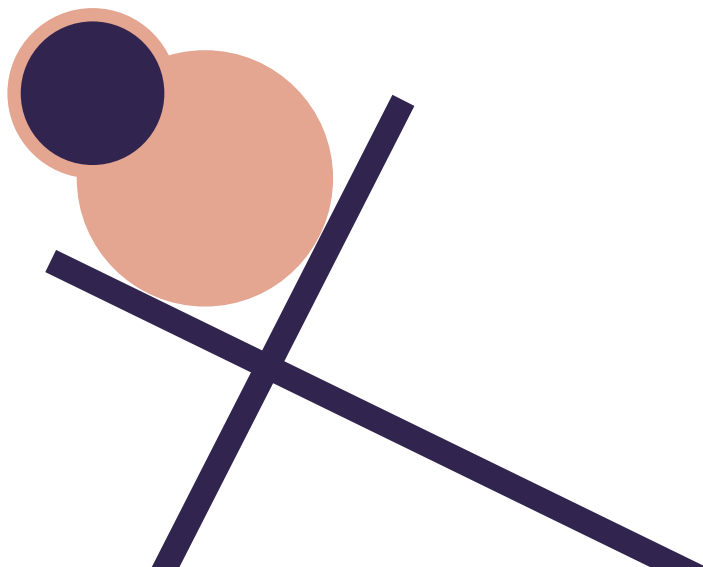
By: Alisha Verma

the sweet chill of those fireproof mornings
in harmony with posies and turmeric tulips stitched to
my conscience oozing with formaldehyde
with a refrain singing of Indian cuisine
the forgiveness of my mother's honeyed perfume lurking in the wings
ever-familiar, everlasting.

They tore the tree down to make way for a new road
but the Honda driving past it remains
its epitaph quietly resting
in a glass jar.

About the Author:

Alisha Verma is an Indian-American high school freshman from the Midwest who enjoys making art and writing poetry in her free time. When she's not doing either of those things, she can usually be found baking sweets or watching old movies.





Arrecife de Maguey (Maguey Reef)

Patricia Avellaneda

180 x 145 cm

Oil on canvas

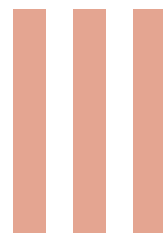
At the Mouth of the Magic

By: Gary Glauber

The sun is more powerful here in this ancient Mayan ruin—where time-travelling portals were built with masterful precision. Symmetry aligns with serpentine shadows on equinox days, impressing in ways that transcend any tourist gift shop offering. Even when the temperature hits triple digits, loud gringos in their louder shirts climb hundreds of stairs that dominate the north platform-temple's pyramid, showing off as they bound up the 98 feet. The summit presents a breathtaking vista. It is only then that these bellowing blowhards realize that they cannot easily descend from that paralyzing height. There are no handrails—only open air, and the real possibility of some horrible and damaging fall. Beyond the protection of patriarchal pride, these men deliberate on hands and knees, backing down inch by inch in an embarrassing display of how little foresight exists in this mighty, modern world—where it is easier to beg forgiveness than ask permission. From a safe distance, they almost seem to be kneeling in prayer, but this supplication is more entreaty to reach ground safely than sacred promise made in heartfelt contrition. If you listen closely to the wind, you'll hear the feathered serpent god Kukulcan laughing.

About the Author:

Gary Glauber is a widely published poet, fiction writer, teacher, and former music journalist. He champions the underdog while negotiating life's absurdities. He has four full poetry collections, *Small Consolations* (Aldrich Press), *Worth the Candle* (Five Oaks Press), *Rocky Landscape with Vagrants* (Cyberwit), and most recently *A Careful Contrition* (Shanti Arts Publishing), published in February 2021. He also has two poetry chapbooks, *Memory Marries Desire* (Finishing Line Press) and *The Covalence of Equanimity* (SurVision Books), a winner of the 2019 James Tate International Poetry Prize.





Incompatible Spaces

Elwing Gao

8.5 x 11 in.

Colored pencil

Van Gogh Feels Blue

By: Nachi Keta

Van Gogh stands on a ladder and paints the sky blue, with his blood—his brown eyes reflecting the yellow sun. Still in his shorts, he is a little boy who doesn't know what lightning and clouds are. May he live a thousand years—the silver moon wishes. May he continue to breathe yellow in the hearts of people, even when weepy storms blank their eyes. May he never fall from the ladder, may the ladder never fall—the entire world wishes.

It is not merely hope. It is a yearning for childhood—something one should never lose. For we all were children once and stood on a ladder trying to learn the colors of the sky. 'Paint the blue sky blue'—we wish to do that again, don't we?—and collect amber pebbles from beige earth and put them in gray pots. We want to rhyme with the world and make it colorful—green a little green, blue a little blue and yellow a little yellow.

He stands on his ladder, the melody of birds going into his ears—one of which he'll chop off when he grows up. He thinks aloud to the world... unaware (is he?) that the world will hear his words even four hundred years after he stops breathing, because it listens more to the dead than the living. He just puts his thoughts out as if I am not here with him, listening to every word he says.

He starts in medias res, "Back then, the sky was blue. Today the only thing blue is despair. Why?" Then pauses. And continues, "Can you hold the ladder from the bottom so I can walk up and start putting a few white clouds in the sky and then paint it blue? Can you give me my paint brushes back? The ones I had painted the 'starry night' with? Do I even know how to hold a brush?"

But no one listens. Everyone is busy with their screens—clicking on the LIKE buttons under the HD images of his paintings (and my poems), sitting in their closed fancy rooms, using technology that erases yellow from earth and replaces it with black. Black, black everywhere. Black of machines.

The black of machines differs from the black of night—he says.

And since—he knows—I'm a poet and love nights as much as the idea of fate, he also says, "In ancient Greece, they said, Fate is the daughter of Night. Was. For today, it is not so. Today, fate has divorced her mother. Today 'starry nights' don't have a fate because the black of machines has taken over them.

Once the night was starry. We were lazying in my balcony and I was sitting on a plush teal couch. I like teal, even though blue has been after me for centuries. 'A slash of blue' teal is. A fragment. I was in a blue pair of socks then, hidden by my pants. And scratching on a notepad bordered with blue flowers. Hidden because if he knew about my socks, he would have said that blue symbolized my pain.

Blue symbolized pain, white peace, yellow happiness, and black represented death for him. Not the death I liked, though. The kind I abhor—the death of earth and colors. He was passionate about colors and emotions they represented. Colors were everything for him. Just as death is everything for me.

I was smiling when I told him about my nightmares; not everything, though. I didn't expect him to understand how 'pain has an element of blank' because of his passion of filling blankness with yellow—the symbol of happiness. But he said something I hadn't expected. "Nights are more precious than yellow meadows," he said. "And late-night trinkets called stars decide everything. Like yellow."

Every night I wear jewelry made with trinkets of seawater. I touch them with my tongue, remove dirt off them by swallowing it all inside. And wait—for Moira to accept me as her sister. For I am the child of her mother—Nyx. But she won't let me. Moira, my sister, wants Nyx only for herself. She doesn't understand how I was never with her in life because 'I could not stop for death.'

The sky is not so blue, presently. There are gray clouds aloft—smoke from factories or vapor of clouds, we don't know. He is on a ladder—which I hold with my hands lest he should fall. I ask him, "You love the night so much, and yet, you don't like the world getting black. How so?"

"Because nights have a light more luminescent than the black of the day—the black of smoke and filth, broken hearts, molten glaciers and hyper-world of internet," he says. And then I ask him, "What is so special about colors that we talk more about them than emotions?"

He does not reply. He looks down from his ladder—now as old as he would've been if he had survived to this day—and says he's busy, with a trace of mock anger in his voice. "Go walk forever in the yellow meadows of your words, while I use my blue," he says.

Yes, he yearns for blue now. Yellow was important then. One hundred and fifty years ago, it was necessary when the world was not so black, so dead, and the sky bluer, the night darker. But today, as he looks at it, standing atop his blue ladder, by the side of a yellow wall which touches the gray clouds and goes a little beyond, he finds nothing but black. Why? He doesn't ask. He knows he won't have an answer.

So he picks up his brush and starts painting blue. While I write yellow on my notepad: "Nature rarer uses yellow..."

- Emily Dickinson

About the Author:

A kidney transplant recipient, Nachi Keta considers himself too old for this world, which is too full of healthy bodies, which is too stuffed with words, that are too despairing for this world, which is too young for him. He is a dropout of two of the most prestigious universities in the world, loves his privacy and does not tweet as SAGE (@KetaNachi).



Cactus del Buho (The Owl Cactus)

Patricia Avellaneda

120 x 90 cm

Oil on canvas

so you never were easy to love

By: Joyce Liu

Then again, neither was I.

We've been down this creek before. You left me here without a paddle. Don't you ever get tired of it? Of leaving each other in increasingly forlorn places? The endless hamster wheel of stab after stab after stab. You owe me one. Now I'll do yours. One knife, one back, one foot dangling off the bridge. Your laces are coming untied, and neither of us can reach them. Your laces are coming untied, and the only thing we don't know how to use them for is keeping your feet in your shoes.

Anything but that. Anything but this. There are words coming out of my mouth but you don't hear them, words that don't mean anything but spell out PLEASE LOVE ME in cigarette smoke. If I say it enough maybe you'll choke on it. I never could get you to notice me but maybe if I set myself on fire you'll see the smoke and wonder where it's from.

This is what it feels like to scrape yourself clean. There is a man in a hazmat suit inside me, holding a clipboard and a knife. Maybe when I am hollow I will finally be worth looking at, a taxidermy mouth set in a grimace or a smile. Beauty is terror and I could never be beautiful but terrible is close enough.

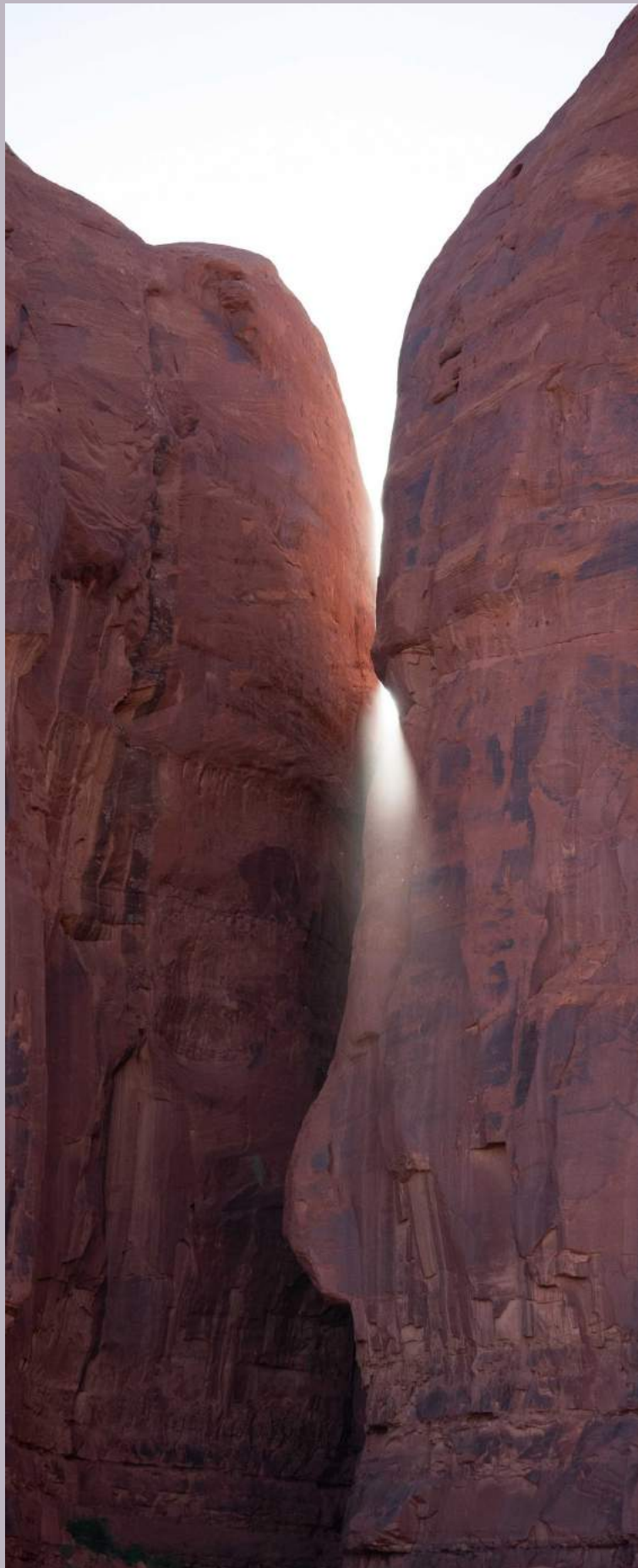
So that's where we are. A life of *close enough*, of *please won't you look at me*, of self-destruction in the name of being loved. They say a pound of flesh can pay for anything but I've given you pound after pound and you still want more.

If I give it all, will you finally see me? When do I get to stop spilling blood and lighting matches for you? Is the spectacle enough? Does that do it for you, or do you need even more?

I think you know how this story ends, but I can't see it yet. You know how the story ends, and I'm left here squinting through the dawn.

About the Author:

Joyce Liu is a teenage poet from Ottawa, Canada. When she's not writing, she can be found taking long walks in the woods and watching Formula 1 races. More of her work can be found in released and upcoming issues of perhappened mag, FEED, and Burning Jade Literary and Arts Magazine.



Relief

Elwing Gao

2030 x 5024 px

Digital photography

summer long summer lost

By: D.Y. Ink

About the Author:

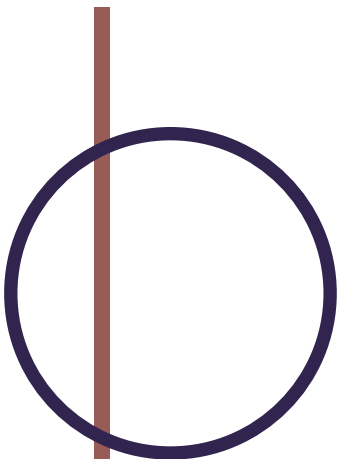
D.Y. Ink is a student writer living in the American South. In her free time, she can be found listening to music, pondering various unanswerable questions, and trying to write lyrics. Her work has been featured in Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine.

*hey, i've missed you, summer skin—
never coming back again.*

hades' ghosts whistle through
sunburnt windows; hot wind
kills me softly. hell haunts us
in the form of blue shadows,
orange skies, and green clouds,
stealing color from the earth and
wearing it like a broken trophy.
this demon kisses the underside of
my thighs, leaves puddles of
sweat-scented tears like hickeys
after sunday. oh summer baby, where've
you gone, away from me? the
lavender bush falls down, weeps
on its side; the spirits trade you
away for a glass of wine. my
white hands look transparent against
your furious light, ghostlike. the
demons throw themselves into the
sun, and their ashes fill the sky with the
smell of dirty rum. i swallow your
ashes like bitter medicine, and it
flutters out of my chest like a
broken-winged bird. autumn crawls out
of your chest and squeezes it so hard that
it bursts. you eat yourself alive and it
looks like the devil has finally died.

*summer lived and summer lost
summer lit and summer's*

gone.





Petrichor

Raka Panda

48 x 68 in

Ink and oil on canvas

A Rendez-vous Over Wine

By: Megha Nayar

contains allusions to sexual assault



“Just arrabiata sauce or should I also add some cream?” he asks me, eyes fixed on the concoction spluttering in the pan. He takes his culinary assignments seriously and my opinions even more so. I respond with a monosyllable, and just like I was hoping, he keeps up his preoccupation with dinner without turning around to glance at me. Which is fortunate, because I have spent the better part of the past hour gazing at him and I do not want to be caught red-handed in the act.

Although, I know I’m a hypocrite for acting coy. He is well aware of my roving eye. He’s letting me watch him.

This kitchen of his is miniscule, barely enough to accommodate two people. I am standing pulse-raisingly close to him, resting my head against the door frame. The man smells like a dream and equally aromatic is the meal he is rustling up. Their combined fragrances are sheer intoxication. This is a heady moment, uncluttered by words.

I am glad for the silence. We are both professional wordsmiths but right now, there is a delicious quiet space between us that I am in no hurry to fill.

I wonder though, at what point does a loving gaze become an objectifying stare? Am I crossing a line? What if it had been vice versa—would I have been okay with a man, even a man of my liking, staring down my back?

Sigh. It is difficult to resist him, but I force myself to turn away.

I walk into the living room. He has left his shirt on the couch. I pick it up and feel its texture between my fingers, battling a strong urge to sniff it like a dog. It is a bright yellow, a color that sits on him perfectly. He likes flamboyant clothes. Sometimes, he wears printed ties on striped shirts. I’d noticed this the second time we met. The details of the design have fudged in my mind but I do remember noticing that it was a case of “print on print,” something fashion stylists solemnly advise against.



Well, this is not the sort of man who will let some stylist tell him what to do. And the fact that he gives two hoots for approval is something I find enormously appealing.

He is still at work, so I go right back in and offer to help. There isn't much to do, he insists. The spaghetti is almost done. You set up the wine, I'll get the food.

Now, that isn't the best task to be assigned with. I have never really explored wine. The couple of times I gave it a shot, I came away quite underwhelmed. The only drink I have any tolerance for is Scotch. And they say whiskey people and wine people are two distinct tribes that do not overlap.

So, today, all of me is singularly hoping I begin to like wine. This is the first time in life that I'm consuming something with the express intention to like it. I feel something akin to performance anxiety. My heart is beginning to throb harder, especially because whenever I try hard not to appear clumsy, I end up falling face-first into misadventure.

I am reminded of this famous scene from the French film *Le Petit Nicolas* where Nicolas' mother is a hopeless bundle of nerves the day her husband's boss and his wife are slated to come home for dinner. She has spent weeks preparing for this day — she has bought herself a new dress and jewels, planned a meticulous menu, and appointed a house help for the evening. She has even crammed trivia about baroque architecture and 13th-century Slovakian poetry in order to come off as a connoisseur.

But, none of this is able to allay her self-imposed pressure to impress.

On D-Day, she begins sipping wine early in the afternoon to soothe her frayed nerves. Sips turn into feverish gulps, and by the time the invitees arrive, she is already light-headed.

The first blooper of the evening is when she mistakes the boss-wife to be the domestic help and shoos her away. When she realizes the mix-up, she is so mortified that she drinks some more, until she can no longer hold herself together. Eventually, she passes out mid-sentence, in front of her husband's boss, at the dining table. Since this is a film aimed at children, she literally falls off her chair in this comical slapstick fashion. Even for an adult, it is hilarious.

I have screened this film for several batches of students. At each screening, there are yelps of laughter when this particular scene comes on.

I can hear those classroom reactions in my mind right now, like a sitcom laughter soundtrack. What if a similar fiasco pans out here? Oh god, I should never have signed up for this. We were better off discussing the etymological commonalities between English and French. Why did I agree to join him for a round of wine tasting? It is not even a beverage that entices me. All this pretend-interest in bottled grape juice might land me in steep discomfort today.

“Ready for the meal?” he peeps out of the kitchen, interrupting my train of ominous thoughts.

He brings out the food and puts his shirt back on. We sit down to eat. I volunteer to serve the spaghetti, while passing the wine bottle back to him. I haven’t the foggiest idea how to work a wine cork. Good thing this occurred to me well in time, otherwise I would have fumbled with it to kingdom come.

Good job, lady. With some present-mindedness, you will hopefully manage to keep your wits in place.

It is hard to tell which one of his attributes I’d noticed first. He isn’t someone with just one redeeming quality. He is an indivisible whole, not an assembly of parts. Some men can be summed up as “handsome” or “smart” or “charming” but this one will never be at the mercy of epithets. He has this perfect posture, self-assured gait, and impeccable communication skills. He owns a baritone that stays with me long after our conversations end. His eyes, the way they look straight into mine, can melt the proverbial glacier.

Oh, and what do I say about the way our thoughts connect?

Ever since we began working together, we have flowed like water. We deliberate on people and cultures. We find humor in the mundane. There is a lot of laughter—deep, full-throated, uninhibited. Sometimes, when we’re laughing heartily, he places his hand on mine. His touch takes the grief off my skin and leaves me feeling dizzy-happy.

This is a man who knows the value of nourishing his soul. He reads, writes, and creates visual imagery with words. He is receptive of radical ideas. He never patronizes me. He values my inputs—and that, after my experiences with men so far, feels like a hard-earned win. Perhaps the reason why I dropped my guard as quickly as I did.

The spaghetti is perfect. The accompanying vegetables are neither undercooked nor over-done; the sauce is flavorful and mellow. This is the sort of gastronomical success that can only be achieved when the chef has a heartfelt desire to serve a meal worth remembering.

Nothing touches my soul quite like good food and intimate conversation. Tonight, we have both. I'm starting to feel more settled. I'm finding the right words, smiling easily.

As conversation veers to the people we've loved, I tell him that most interactions I've had with men my age have felt deliberate and labored to begin with. When you meet people with the specific intent to like and be liked, there is tremendous pressure to say the right things. It is soul-sucking, I tell him. Those chats are a means to an end. They're meant to lead you someplace, usually the altar. Should you meander midway, chances are you've lost the game. The whole charade feels transactional and shallow.

He smiles knowingly.

Which is why, he replies, it is exhilarating to converse with people you're not looking to acquire, isn't it? When the purpose of conversation is conversation itself, there is nothing at stake. There are no ulterior motives. You're not itching to impress. You can afford to speak your mind. Isn't that liberating?

I nod in agreement. At this point, my hesitation has entirely melted away.

As for the wine, it is a slow love. It wouldn't be correct to say that Chardonnay and I hit it off immediately, but I definitely do warm up to it after a few sips. It helps that the drink here only serves to accentuate the talking, and not vice versa. There is so much to explore — the whats and whys of two long lives, and how they came to be the people they have become.

He tells me about his years in France—particularly the struggle to grasp the language, given the way words roll off the French tongue. He tells me about the time he wanted to tell a waiter that he was feeling really cold (“J’ai froid”), but erroneously ended up approving an order for an exorbitant *foie gras*. He says he finds the Eiffel Tower over-rated, and I giggle. He shows me pictures of some wonderful street art he captured in Parisian by-lanes. I recognize Montmartre in some of the images. I am a long-time teacher of French but have never been to France, so his pictures leave me pining for a romantic adventure.

The evening slips by, unnoticed. I feel like I can spend any amount of time in the blissful company of this man. He feels like an extension of me, as if mine for the taking.

At some point of time though, his face begins to blur. I’m guessing I’ve overdone the wine, which is funny considering I’ve only had two glasses so far. For someone who is used to the aggression of hard liquor, this hardly amounts to anything.

Is that a leftover olive on his plate? Or a black grape? I can’t tell.

I try to keep a stronger hold on my fork, but it seems to be slipping. My food looks like a vague blotch now, and the contours of his body are blending in with the room.

“Hey, are also you feeling a little funny?” I ask, wondering if this is a particularly potent wine, because there is no other way it could have this impact on a seasoned drinker.

“No,” he says, and for the first time this evening, his smile appears different. It doesn’t look benign any more.

I’m feeling woozy now. I want to tell him that the room is spinning, and that if I’m not held in place, I might soon fall off the table, much like Nicolas’ mother, albeit this wouldn’t be an attempt at kiddie humor. I want him to come hold me, because it appears that I am in dire need of help, but no words emerge from my mouth. It feels like my senses are abandoning me.

He has realized it. Without a word, he sets his cutlery aside, gets up from the other side of the table, and lifts me up with both hands.

Err, that's okay, I try to say. You should just lead me to the couch, I'll be fine. But for some reason, my words are slurring and don't seem to register with him, even though his ear is less than a foot away from my mouth. He seems to be taking me into his bedroom.

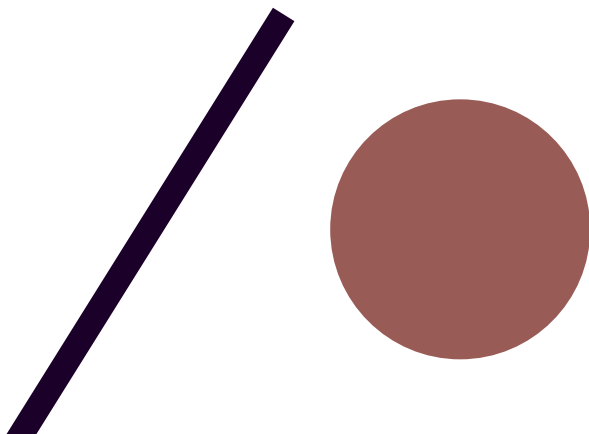
Perhaps he feels that will be more comfortable.

He lays me gently on his bed, takes off my shoes, and unbuttons my coat. Around this time, my eyelids droop. I don't quite know what happens after that, but my last vision of us is him on top of me, his eyes staring into mine, like those of a wolf about to devour a lamb.



About the Author:

Megha Nayar was longlisted for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2020 and the New Asian Writing Short Story Prize 2020. She lives in India. She teaches English and French for a living, and writes to remain sane. Her work has appeared in Trampset, Variety Pack, Versification, Burnt Breakfast, Cauldron Anthology, Potato Soup Journal, Postscript Mag and The Daily Drunk Mag, among others. She tweets at @meghasnatter.





Driada (Driad)

Patricia Avellaneda

120 x 90 cm

Oil on canvas

mother

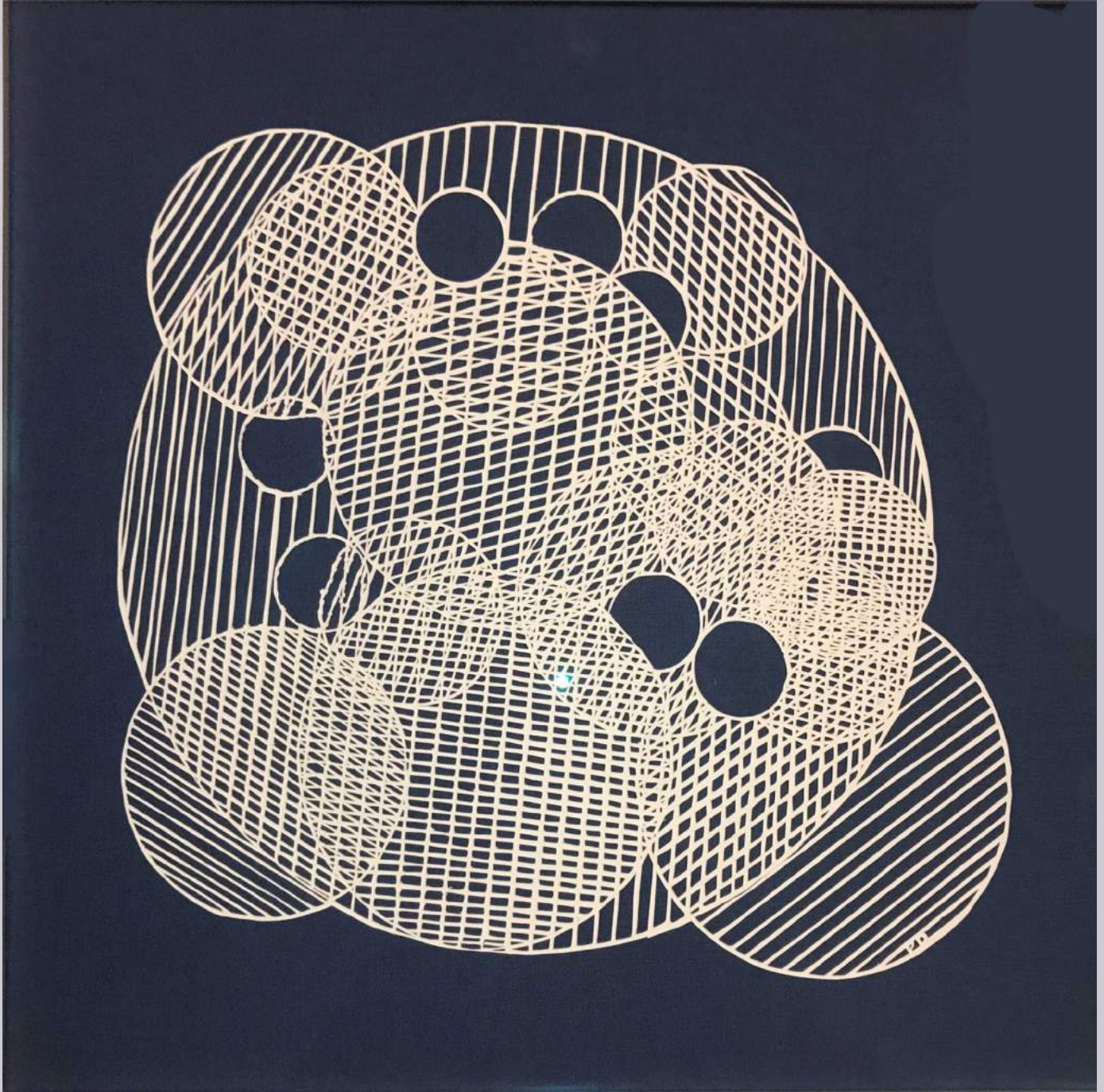
By: Aria Hadley

the sun screams
i hear it because it brought me here
i have no place on this stage
her world is one of paradoxes—
i am not subjected to breaths.
i am obligated to be happy for her
but cautious of my laughter. mornings
are warm with blood—red anger
light seeps its way in, unwelcomed.
she takes pride in blooming daffodils, ignoring the
way roots pry open their jaws for water.

i can only take in the sunlight when it's diluted
it's only beautiful in neon, wilting hours,
only bearable in a distance.
is it love if it destroys my very being? do the
phantom attempts count?
when i found something that *matters*
she tarnished it, and i, under sweltering heat,
had to wait for the moon to smile
to be able to blossom.

About the Author:

Aria Hadley studies Humanities as her senior high school track and can be found doing calligraphy in her spare time. She has also been published in Flare Journal.

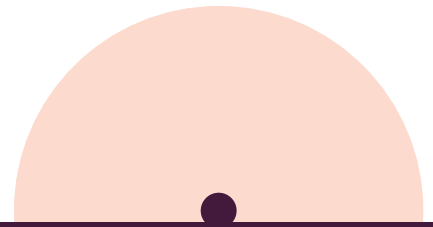


New Girl

Peter Donley
12 in. diameter
Hand-cut paper

the iris song

By: Jesse Cai



grandfather, i'm trapped again on this endless grassy blanket
it's dotted with murmuring violet hues
and the flowers are singing their feathery song
as petals rustle in a soft hymn

(but why is it different from when you came here with me? its eerie
susurrus before the crimson storm...as the petals begin to fall in the
waltzing wind...)

grandfather, there's a hollow mist that floats about—
the velvet echo in this meadow of haunting melody
the glistening crescendo as trees surrender their emerald treasures
for scarlet rubies and ambers and rogue garnets

grandfather, the birds' bellies now are mostly
staccato, speckled ones, showered in ash;
and the domed sky today is a serenade of a
soft, yet brilliant blue

(but why is it suffocating? why does it trap me here? i can feel their
eyes on me, i can feel their hushed intentions...i can't inhale, now i
have to exhale... i do as you always say... count backwards from ten and
breathe...10...9...8...)

grandfather, they stand in huddles around you
like vultures around a fresh kill
that woman in the fur coat keeps asking
for me—for Will

grandfather, why are they different?
from them i can hear nothing
but an empty silence
all music trickles to a stop with a creeping ritardando



(why does this haunting emptiness hug me so tight with its poisonous caresses, and its kisses steal my breath away...crawling up my throat...i'm drowning... i can't brea...7...6...5...)

grandfather, remember when you cried
with rivers of teardrops flowing through the mountainous crevices of
your face
i can see their eyes with tears falling too
drip...drop...drip...at an ever-steady pace

grandfather, but they are not crying
it seems even their tears can lie in a luring siren song
But now the music is returning with an all too silky sweetness
like the rich cerulean of a riptide
and i can hear whistling black rhapsody of the woman in the fur coat

(what is this aching throb? It lays heavily on my breast as the cold and
blue-tipped fingers clamp around my bleeding heart—lusting for my
shallow breaths...red-hot sparks in this bluish bruising ache...4...3...2...)

grandfather, the blanket's murmuring chorus now whispers so quietly
goodnight grandfather, did they tuck you in tight?
they're singing their goodbyes, in a saccharine lullaby;
a soothing azure, but i can still hear the dark harmony that lingers

grandfather? grandfather!
grandfather?

Grandfather...

I can't hear it anymore

Grandfather. You lied to me. You lied to me when you said it would be
ok. You lied to me when you said to count backwards. You lied to me.
You lied to me when you said to just breathe. You lied to me in your
familiar violet hues. *Liar...*

You lied to me, and now I realize how this aching blue and sparking red
make your purple.

He said
as the darkened iris song shed its petals
and echoed violetly through his boyish heart in its final
chord.

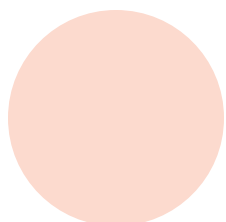
(...1...)

Inhale. Exhale. Breathe.



About the Author:

Jesse is a member of the class of 2023 at Brentwood High School. She enjoys editing for her school's literary magazine and has read Harry Potter too many times to count. In her free time, she enjoys watching movies (romcoms or anything Marvel) and going on adventures with her friends.





Deserted

Elwing Gao

8.5 x 11

Colored pencil, marker, Adobe Photoshop

Polar Bear to the Iceman

By: Phillip Shabazz

Found an old scratch to scribble. Dig streaks.
No joke. I want to call you. My bubble graffiti
will not wound your wall. A face-off does
not burn your breath. The ghost dog on my phantom
train shakes you off guard. The spray paint,
jungle green, greased ink might make you
step back. It's not a threat. My magicians
shroud stars in snow. They do not choke
rivers with plastic. On second thought,
I don't want to call you. I want you to call
off your police dogs. Leave me alone
with my loop of letters. Walk away
when we see each other, like a white flag
negotiates ceasefire in a battle: sleepy eyed,
not a zero-sum game, just an American
nonviolent masterpiece.

About the Author:

Phillip Shabazz is the author of three collections of poetry, and a novel in verse. His poems have been included in the anthology, *Home Is Where: African-American Poetry from the Carolinas*. Previous publication credits include *Across The Margin*, *Impspired*, *Fine Lines*, *Galway Review*, *Obsidian*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, and *Louisville Review*.





Arbol Ancestral (Ancestral Tree)

Patricia Avellaneda

120 x 145 cm

Oil on canvas

Second Return from the Underworld

By: Niki Brennan

how long this time? I ask, still feeling
the phantom of the swallow beneath me,

the rise and fall of the giant's chest,
and me on a little boat, waterlogged,

splintered and—

her unweaving the salt
you're home now, she says, bloodied,

the knife carved out of winter
cutting off the frozen white

pieces of me, the wormflesh.
I own nothing but the way she turns

my name into an anchor
and drops it, stopping the churn,

she cuts off the bruises that held me
together, and the wrinkled white pulp of the dying—

in her hands a knife is a cure
the same way the ocean is a garden

and love is not a noun but a verb
and that ocean is far away, so far

I can remember how she smells of peppermint
and the taste of honey on her skin when the sun hits it

and how the days sometimes fall gently,
the night landing on our forearms like silk—

you're home now, she says again,
and I believe it.



Fisc

By: Niki Brennan contains depictions of abuse, sexual content

At the start of their affair, Doctor Fisc called her his flower. The Doctor would see Isabelle as his tulip — a beautiful thing that he could pick the petals off of and plant back on the ground. She loves me. She loves me. She loves me. Isabelle knew how he saw her. She accepted it. Before she became the second Mrs. Fisc she would meet the Doctor at their spot once every week. It was at the glade in the forest near her home on the outskirts of the city. There was a small pond there in which nothing lived. He thought it was romantic. She wondered how long it would be before he snipped off her stems, folded her between the pages of a dusty old book and placed her on his shelf.

In the beginning it was like he was holding his breath around her. As though one stray exhale would scatter her to the wind like a dandelion. The leaves would paint dark patterns on her skin as he led her by the hand through to their own intimate world. He held branches back for her to slink under. He brushed bugs out from her hair, his fingers lingering on her neck. He lifted her over bubbling streams, the white foam climbing to reach for her toes. He stripped her of her clothes and fucked her on the grass right in the middle of the glade. He loves me. He loves me. He loves me.

*

"Was that good for you?" the Doctor asks, as he always does.

"Amazing." Isabelle replies, as she always does.

He edges his way out of the bed, pinching the sheet up before letting it tumble back down on her. He walks into the bathroom, his piss halts then cascades against the back of the pan. It is all Isabelle can hear. She listens to him open the shower door and clean himself - the stuttering splashes of water, the creaking shower door as he leaves, the droplets that spatter across the tiled bathroom floor. Her skin itches, she rolls and scratches in the hot sheets. She is sticky. The lukewarm sun that trickles in through the window irritates her eyes. Covering them with her arm, Isabelle brushes the tender, purpling flesh at her neck.

"Happy Anniversary," she shouts through to the bathroom.

"Happy Anniversary," he calls back.

*

That night Isabelle meets the Doctor at the edge of the woods, now an anniversary tradition. The sweet scent of rain is in the air. Its ghost hovers over everything, giving the trees a gray, bleak look. Their shadows reach out into the distance, great black fingers scratching into the earth. The canopy breathes in the wind and bleeds droplets down onto the leaves below. Footsteps squelch behind her.

"You look like shit, honey."

"Thanks," she says.

He closes in on her. He smells like sweat and chemicals. It cuts through the sweetness in the air. She kisses him, then turns and slips through the slick grass with him close behind her.

After walking for only a few minutes, Isabelle begins to feel that hot, sticky sensation again. She wonders how it can be so humid. She tugs at her collar and scratches at her arms. Her throat is parched. She takes off her jacket.

"Belle, it's freezing."

"Are you not warm?"

"No."

"Strange. I felt like this at home too."

"I hope you're not getting sick. We have that dinner with the Chief on Friday."

Isabelle nods and hurries her steps, searching for a stream.

A fog hovers around the stream before she reaches it. As she steps through the mist, she begins to feel something familiar in it, a certain kind of nostalgia, or kinship. It raises bumps and hair on her skin. It is both electric and ice cold. She feels each molecule upon her; each droplet rests on her like sunlight. It is suspended above her and around her. She wants to reach out and grasp each brimming particle and hold them within her until she overflows. It croons a high-pitched siren call.

"Do you hear it?"

"Hear what, Belle?"

"The song."

"There's no music playing, Belle."

She cocks her head to the side and listens.

"Maybe we should just head home. You're acting weird."

"No, let's keep going."

The music stops when they break the cover of the fog and the hot sensation returns. She wants to peel off her skin and leave it hanging from a branch. The Doctor is getting annoyed. He begins to drag her onward through the trees, looking back to frown and growl at her when she trips. She thinks about how she will have to make it up to him. She scratches at her arm and feels the blood begin to run free down her hand.

When they arrive, the Doctor walks through the glade, heading straight for the middle of the grass, feeling the shadow of Isabelle's hand in his for a few steps before turning to look for her. She is no longer there. Isabelle's body progresses across the glade at a right angle from him. It cuts through straight for the pond and stops. Dead. It reaches the edge and crumbles. The head bends towards the surface. The spine curves, the slender frame a question mark, racked with shuddering breaths. She submerges with a sigh.

*

Isabelle's new life began with coming home. First, that sensation of familiarity echoed again, a crooning deep within her. She remembers this. She remembers arching over the water, each disc of her spine protruding through her skin, ready to break the surface. She remembers seeing no reflection. She remembers her first breath.

She shattered the water like a pane of glass. Some unknown magnetism drove her deep, her skin burning, each flashing beacon of her nervous system alight. She contorted in the murk, her bones and muscles groaning, twisting and breaking and shrinking. With every drowning breath the darkness thickened at the edges of her vision. She shrieked through her burning throat. Then the calm came. Her blood went cold. She could feel it, coursing in icy currents. Then that first breath. It was sharp, it stung like a fresh wound, but it was sweet. It cut through her, through her neck — where her neck used to be. Freezing gulps, tentative, raw at first, then effortless. She exalted with a pirouette.

She is more aware of her weight, her impression on her surroundings, than she can ever recall being. She enjoys the vigor of her tightly packed little body. She feels like a knot in a rope, secure but swaying. Her powerful tail fin, hard spines bridged by a slick membrane, helps propel her along. The perfect synchronization of all her fins, with the natural oscillation of her body, allows her to zip around the pond at her

leisure. Such little effort, merely a gentle press on the water for such exhilaration. It makes her giddy. She leaves satin billows in the emptiness behind her.

It is serene, not silent. There is a deep thrumming—a slow, prolonged bass. It is the symphony of the water. Not invasive; it is a sonorous overture, peppered with the subtle tinkling of expanding ripples. She conducts waves with her fins and releases harmonies from her mouth by pressing her thin lips together and making an O. She swoops and sails. She dives down to the bottom and disturbs the dirt, skimming between twisters and gloomy asteroids. She rises again, hearing something muffled over the symphony, something guttural.

"Isabelle?"

She flinches away from its harshness, from its alien sound.

"Isabelle?"

It takes her a moment to find a glimmer of understanding in the noise. It is a voice, her husband's. It is a name. Her name.

"Isabelle?"

The noise is grating, louder this time. She wants to dive away from it, to hide in the dirt at the bottom, to shut away the hazy memories that leak into her brain. A shadow eclipses her. A warped thing looms overhead. It pulsates, rippling. A face, her husband's face, distorted by the water. She doesn't remember his strong brows or the way she would rub her cheek against the dark stubble on his face like an old towel. She does not remember this face. It is of some strange ghoul, the skin flaccid and white, twisted in the disturbed surface.

"Belle?"

She dives just as something blanched submerges. A hand. She remembers this. She darts away from it, already tasting its filth, its contamination. She can feel its taint already in her world, in her mouth and gills, it is all salt and dirt. Trawling the pond blind, the hand eventually retreats.

"Isabelle?" The last one is heard in the distance.

*

She experiences an epoch of peace, unfettered from time, the count of minutes and days lost. She hears circling noises from above but they don't disturb her, except for the occasional spear of straight light that accompanies them. These spears plunge, wander, then retract. That world is forgotten. Warm light has hounded the cold dark several times now, revealing the beauty of her new world. An ethereal ballet, the grace and poise of shining, shifting reflections. Brushstroke kaleidoscopes. Polychromatic prisms. The reflections dance along her

scales. Sometimes she swims as close to the surface as she dares, just to see her dull green, the color of the algae that has begun to grow, turn to emerald and jade.

It is on one of these ventures that she sees it. A spectral figure, hovering at the edge of her world. It moves closer. She stays still. The figure hangs overhead. She feels something, some spacious sensation like touching at the ghost of a missing tooth. The thing makes a suppressed noise. Then again, clearer.

"Honey?"

The noise means nothing to her. It is dead sound. Remote.

"Honey? Is that you?"

Again, nothing. She feels like she should understand, like she should remember something.

"Isabelle?"

That sound. It is familiar. She strains to remember. She is rewarded with flashes, snippets of noise and fear from her earliest memories. Beyond that, nothing. She knows she has encountered this thing before.

Just as she comes to this conclusion, however, the thing swoops. It breaks the surface in a tempest of white clawing, sending her world into chaos. Storms take her and drag her spinning to the depths. She struggles to catch a breath. The taste is overpowering, repulsive. It is pollution. She is buffeted and bruised. The cadaverous thing all pale flailing meat. It flounders and splashes and grabs at her. She barely manages to slip away, feeling it scrape away some of her green scales each time it gets a grip. Her little fins working furiously, she tries to breathe, to hide. She begins to tire. Bubbles escape from her mouth. She looks up into the thing's ghoulish face and stops. Its eyes meet hers.

"Isabelle."

The thing stops moving for a moment, then it begins shuddering. It heaves. It wails. Juicy pearls of water splash near her. They taste foul. She waits. She breathes.

They stay like this for some time, before the thing gives a final, relinquishing sigh. He says something she can't understand.

"...not a flower."

"...not a flower."

*

Their worlds were between light and dark when it left, and are between light and dark when it returns every day. When the sky above turns orange, the thing sits at the side of the water and watches her swim, watches her revel in her world. Sometimes it speaks unheard things; sometimes it says nothing, nothing at all.



About the Author:

Niki Brennan is a 25-year-old writer and poet from Glasgow, Scotland.



Under the Sky

Raka Panda

64 x 48 in

Mixed media on canvas

Regenerate

By: Soumia Vellanki

The rug curls underneath
my suitcase wheels,
leaving the door an inch ajar,
one inch too far.

You shudder at the draft slipping in,
the stain on my shoelace,
& your lace hem peeking out.
Dungeon eyes, let me in.

Unsure of what to say
until those splotched hands,
like naked branches in December,
edged towards mine.

Until the crest of your fingernail
and the arc of the awning,
our makeshift altar
where we stood

heartbeats apart. My bare
feet upon your Oxfords:
toes on brick
ears on fire.

And just maybe you hear it too:
the gravel crunching,
the church bell's sway,
the crescendo.

Or maybe you fade
like the yellowing enamel
behind a waning smile.
An after-whiff of cigar
from my ash gray coat.

But in this
unloaded bunker lies
a match in the rain,
and we slip into remedy.

About the Author:

Soumia Vellanki is a previously unpublished high school senior from Atlanta, Georgia. At school, she serves as the Co-Head Editor of Evolutions Literary Magazine and a Writing Fellow. She is passionate about education reform and health literacy. In her free time, Soumia enjoys stargazing, wasabi peas, and wasting away on FaceTime.

Charybdis

By: Dina Klarisse

You've sat for centuries
across the water from your sister,
in synchronized, tumultuous
solitude.

So close yet never touching, cast away by He,
angered by his own loss.

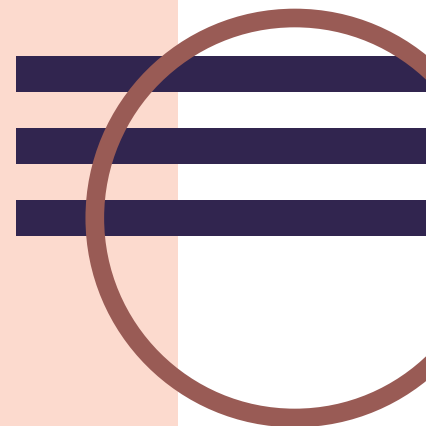
Your faces melted
into seafoam, hair hardened into rocks
that rip through ships like sugar cubes.

Rage in churning water,
boiling,
whirling,
a storm below the surface that swallows men
down into the depths of your prison. Water,
reaching across hemispheres to tether us,
laps at rocks and pushes you farther but still
in our orbit. We are
visible, lingering
outside fingertips.

Centuries gone and forgotten,
and you faded into legend,
as the ships stopped sailing and in their place the humans flew
in large, terrible machines. Hardened monsters
flying over, flying past.

Their faces peered through windows
down at the beautiful blue, unknowing
of the drowned souls staring back at them.

Not seeing you
opening and opening again,
crying out with no voice,
reaching with no hands,
wanting with no heart.

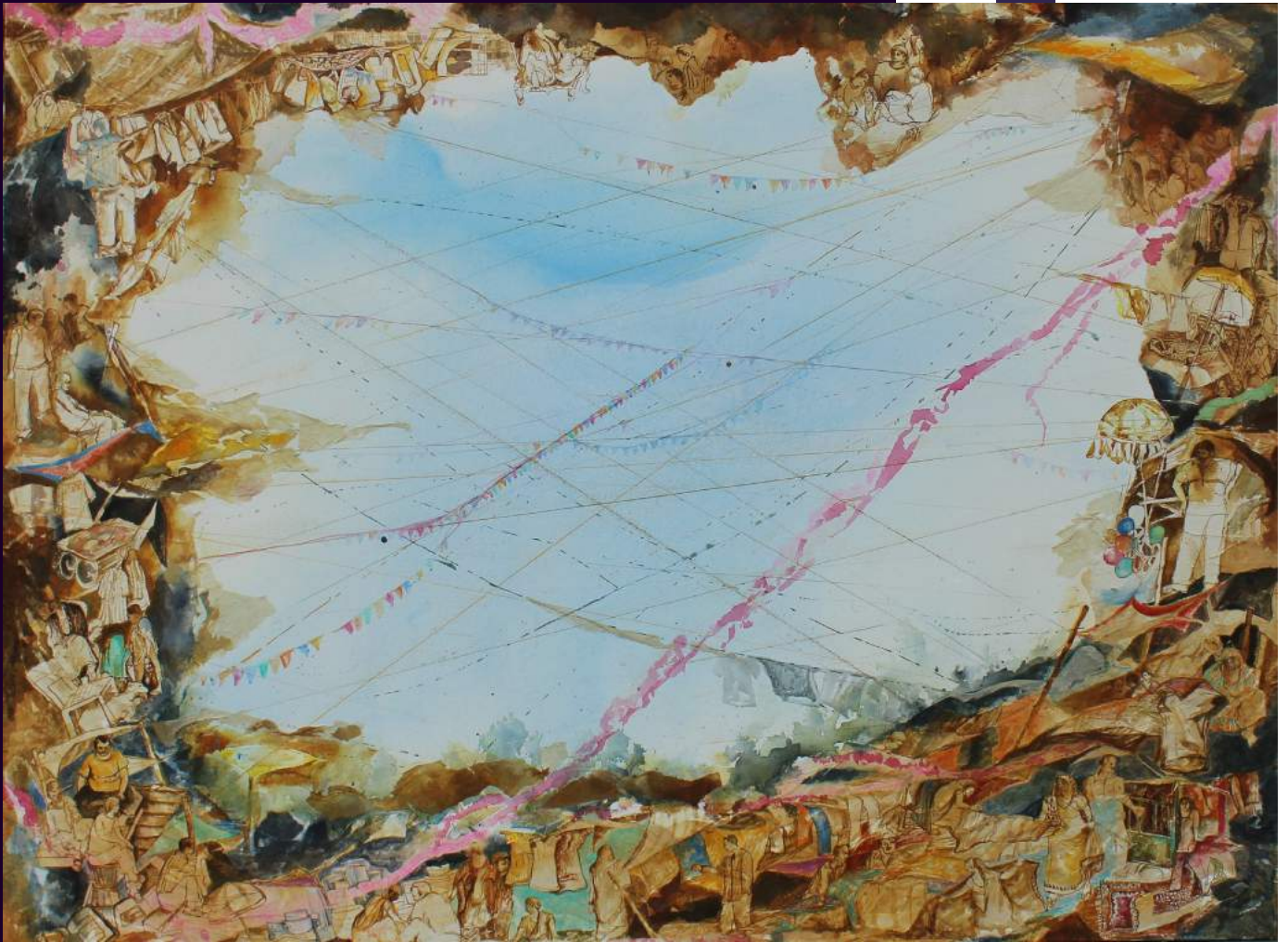


And they never seem fair, do they?
these stories written by men—
women punished for folly not theirs,
for courage and pride that towered over
the walls that kept them in,
fantasized into monsters,
beauty that once held power
distorted and stretched over rotting skulls,
cast into caves and islands and straits,
to be lonely until the end of days.

You were beauty, you
who dwell for centuries,
we see you, we are you.

About the Author:

Dina Klarisse is a writer/poet living in the Bay Area. She writes about the Filipino-American immigrant experience and being a recovering Catholic, and because she's not very good at much else. Her work has been published in ASU's Canyon Voices, Marias at Sampaguitas, Rejection Letters, The Daily Drunk Mag, and Emerging Arts Professions SFBA, and she works as a content writer for Farside Review and Chopsticks Alley. More of her writing can be found on her Instagram @hella_going and blog www.hellagoing.com.



Around the Sky

Raka Panda

64 x 48 in

Mixed media on canvas

Bearing Fruit

By: K. Lee Graham

My hands are full of ripe grapes, their skins full, strained 'til they burst—they're that sweet inside. Jonah is sixteen and I'm seventeen, and while we're outside, he acts like the grapes are little bullets. When he misses me they splat against the dirt, staining the earth. I think he's missing me on purpose. It is the late-summer of 2011. My hands are full of grapes and leaves and vines and I run them down the length of the vines looking and reaching and dodging grapes and tumbling in the grass and Jonah and I are laughing until we're pink.

We collapse in the burnt green grass under the oversaturated sky with the grapes all around us. We pop them into our mouths one by one. We suck out the fruit from the skin as if it were an oyster. We spit out the seeds and let them collect around us—they are our little pearls now. For a moment, we let our hands touch.

Jonah gets scared. He says he has swallowed a seed and it is too small to get choked up on but it is just small enough that it could grow into something big. I ask, *have you eaten any dirt, for it to grow?* And he says, *a little dirt might have gotten in my mouth when we were over there, but I don't think enough.* We think about all the things that would have to happen and decide it can't get stuck or grow into anything, it's not bubble gum. He tags me with his hand so we have to start running away from the shapes of our bodies left by an outline of grape seeds and skins.

Jonah gets tripped up. *You're it,* and I tag him with my palm on his back. But when he gets up, there's nothing he tripped on, it's just that his toes look green, and then we see the little leaves peeking out from under his toenails. Jonah is not about to cry but his eyes look watery because it feels like he has stubbed his toe. *Be still,* I say it like my mother when she'd cut my toenails when I was little. I start to pluck the leaves off like I had plucked grapes from the vine—they grow back one by one.

Jonah gets my mom. She speaks with a hush-hush voice and says *use your inside voices, and, here let me look at that, and oh didn't your mother raise you to be mindful of seeds.*

We get all the leaves off him for a minute but they keep coming back and the vines on the inside have stretched him out so much that he is at least eight feet tall, and his eyes have dark green crescent moons under them. He doesn't cry and he can't look at any of us, just keeps repeating *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, really I am sorry.* After my mom has hung up the phone with Jonah's mom, I overhear her whispering to my dad that, *with a kid like him, it was bound to happen at some point.*

We wait for his mom to pick him up in her minivan. It's just us sitting on the front porch steps. My mom said she would be in the garage with my dad in the meantime. When she tells me we have 15 minutes at the most, she's really telling me, *I taught my daughter better than to get close to boys like him.*

Jonah is clasping and unclasping his hands around his knees pulled up to his chest, which gets more and more difficult to do with every minute that passes. The sun is starting to soften in the sky, and soon everything will look like it's on fire. When I try to say something, he won't look at me. *I should've never come here,* he says while letting the hand closest to me drop towards the ground, his palm open with a few new leaves branching out from each of his fingers. I put a hand on his back instead, say, *I'm the one who's sorry.*

I want to tell him that it will be ok but I don't really know that it will be. He's turning a deeper shade of green as the sky turns pink. We can see the minivan coming towards us on the dirt road, kicking up clouds of dust on either side until it stops in front of the house. When his mom gets out she slams the door, and we walk from the steps with heads bent. Jonah is trailing lengths of vines that I try to avoid tripping on. I'm scared to step on the ones coming out of his heels in case that hurts him.

He is so tall now they have to fold all the seats so he can lie down with his feet on the center console between the driver and passenger and his head in the trunk. I try not to stare at my friend there on his back. Yet, I can't help but watch as they drive back down through the clouds of dirt, away from my house, away from the yard where we spent too little time together, away from the little row of grapevines nearing the end of their fruit-bearing season. I watched from my place until they turned a corner and

there was no chance he could check to see if I was still waving goodbye.

Everyone in town knows Jonah had to leave. At first, they whispered to each other that he had left for rehab, then they started saying he was going to be gone permanently. Apparently, he's somewhere in Florida now. I wanted to tell all of those whispering people that I had picked and even eaten the fruit too, that all he did wrong was hold my hand while it was still light outside, and that I'm not in Florida—I still live where I always have. But it made more sense to everyone that he had gotten some girl pregnant out of wedlock, was addicted to hard drugs, or needed the discipline of the unforgiving swampland. Boys weren't supposed to grow to the size of beanstalks and the color of curling vines. The Florida story was more palatable for everyone, a fact we swallowed as effortlessly as seeds from the sweet muscadine grapes I'll still eat, if they're ripe enough, this upcoming August.

About the Author:

K. Lee Graham is a Charleston, SC-based writer. She is an alum of the University of South Carolina Honors College, where she was named a Carolina Scholar and obtained her bachelor's degree in English Literature with a concentration in Creative Writing. This is her first publication.

Minos and Asterion

By: Scott McNee

It is the sight of human teeth
in the skull of an ungulate
that brings halt to his humiliation.

For weeks he taunts and indulges,
bringing the child shoulder steaks and foreshanks,
watching drool slip over the hairless bull's jaw.

After a while this diversion loses all appeal,
and so he shows the child how the meat is harvested.
Hooks in exposed flesh, pulled apart into brisket—*spannrippe*¹, *testina*².

The child retches, sputters out its own resemblance.
He tells it that all meals shall henceforth
be served raw.

This too dulls, as the child adapts—
he feels the old humiliation surface and he commissions
the artist to build a sealed paddock for this brutish creature.

It is one day, on their way to view the labyrinth's progress, that man and creature discover
the carcass of the Athenian stable boy, head crushed by an errant stallion,
that Minos has another moment of inspiration:
scooping up the boy's robes to expose the pale underbelly,
he encourages the minotaur forward with the word *brizóla*³.

About the Author:

Scott McNee is a PhD and tutor in English and Creative Writing at the University of Strathclyde. Some of his work has been published in Gutter, Quotidian, and The Grind.

1 German: thin rib
2 Italian: the flesh of a calf's head
3 Greek: steak

In Another's Image

By: Isabella Romine

I think of this:

The church roof that crushed
parishioners in prayer.
Seventy-three dead.

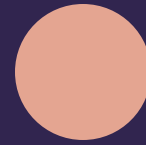
It is you for whom the complex is named.

Broken bodies soaked in milk & honey
for a carnal taste of the divine.
Apple to apple,
dust in lambs' lungs.

Crook a finger, beckon
and raw knees shuffle forward.

Do you see your shape, trembling?

Or only pond glass eyes
that Narcissus would love.



About the Author:

Isabella Romine is a senior at Grimsley High School in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she is the co-founder of the school's literary magazine. She's a serial zine collector, a philosophy enthusiast, and a purchaser of the ugliest clothes thrift stores can offer.



Celebration
Raka Panda
36 x 36 in
Oil on canvas

Autumnal

By: Samson Hunter

Canopies of crimson and amber,
On the calendar chlorophyllic break,
Confetti over walkways, bygates,
 Black crags, dead burns and ranges.
Mounds of Alba in metamorphosis—
Hills of ancient druid gatherings;
Sects blessed beneath faded fires,
Ritual stone circles—glimpsed
 In beams of fugitive twilight
When hoary barnhouses and kirks
Give passage to purpling heath and yew—
Air inhaled anew—
 For a moment—
Pilgriming carts tear trails upon the leafy paths,
Phantom forms frenzy like flame in woollen robes
 Before autumnal chills root the earth,
 Medieval stones return again
And a barnowl's tu-whoohoo reclaims the sky.

About the Author:

Samson Hunter is a poet and songwriter who loves all that is (mildly) horror and macabre and is writing a poetry collection about Halloween.

About the Artists

Alisha Verma:

Alisha Verma is an Indian-American high school freshman from the Midwest who enjoys making art and writing poetry in her free time. When she's not doing either of those things, she can usually be found baking sweets or watching old movies.

Piece: Portrait of an Indian Girl (p.14)

Patricia Avellaneda:

Patricia Avellaneda studied Teaching in Plastic Arts at the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, Argentina, earning a degree in Cultural Development at the Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit and a degree in Visual Arts for Plastic Expression at the Universidad de Guadalajara. She was winner on two occasions of the State Visual Arts Award Nayarit 2008 and 2011. She has made more than 10 solo exhibitions and more than 20 group exhibitions in places like Nayarit, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Jalisco.

Pieces:	Ancestral tree (p.53)
The owl cactus (p.33)	Maguey reef (p.27)
Driada (p.46)	Amazonia (p.1)

Raka Panda:

Raka Panda tries to build a world that is undeniably separate from the one we live in, pulling the viewer out of a logical and common world and placing them within a space that is more alive. Through her art, she aims to bring attention to deprived and stigmatized aspects of humanity that are typically ignored by society.

Pieces:	Petrichor (p.38)	Burning Flower (p.25)
Celebration (p.71)	He, She, They (p.20)	
Around the Sky (p.65)	Under the Sky (p.61)	



About the Issue:

Layout and Design by
Peter Donley

Cover Art:
"Mirage"
Elwing Gao
8.5 x 11 in
Acrylic, printed photos

Staff Artist Biographies:

Elwing Gao:

Elwing Gao is a 17-year-old artist from the Silicon Valley Bay Area. Her favorite medium is watercolor, which she is desperately trying (and failing) to stay away from at the moment in order to develop her own flexibility. In her free time, she likes to go outside, press flowers, and play guitar. You can find more of her art @waves.and.washes on Instagram.

Luana Góes:

Luana Góes is an artist and designer from north Brazil. Her work often uses more than one medium in one piece, from acrylics to watercolors and collages. The art she produces is very influenced by her culture and community, various topics like mental health and movements like impressionism. You can find her on Instagram at @luana.g.m.

Peter Donley:

Peter Donley is a high school junior from suburban Seattle. He first joined Kalopsia as an executive editor in June of 2020, and has been working as the layout designer ever since. In his limited free time, Peter is a competitive pianist and aspires to pursue mechanical engineering in college.