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POETRY | PROSE | VISUAL ART



ISSUE V | JUNE 2021



Masthead

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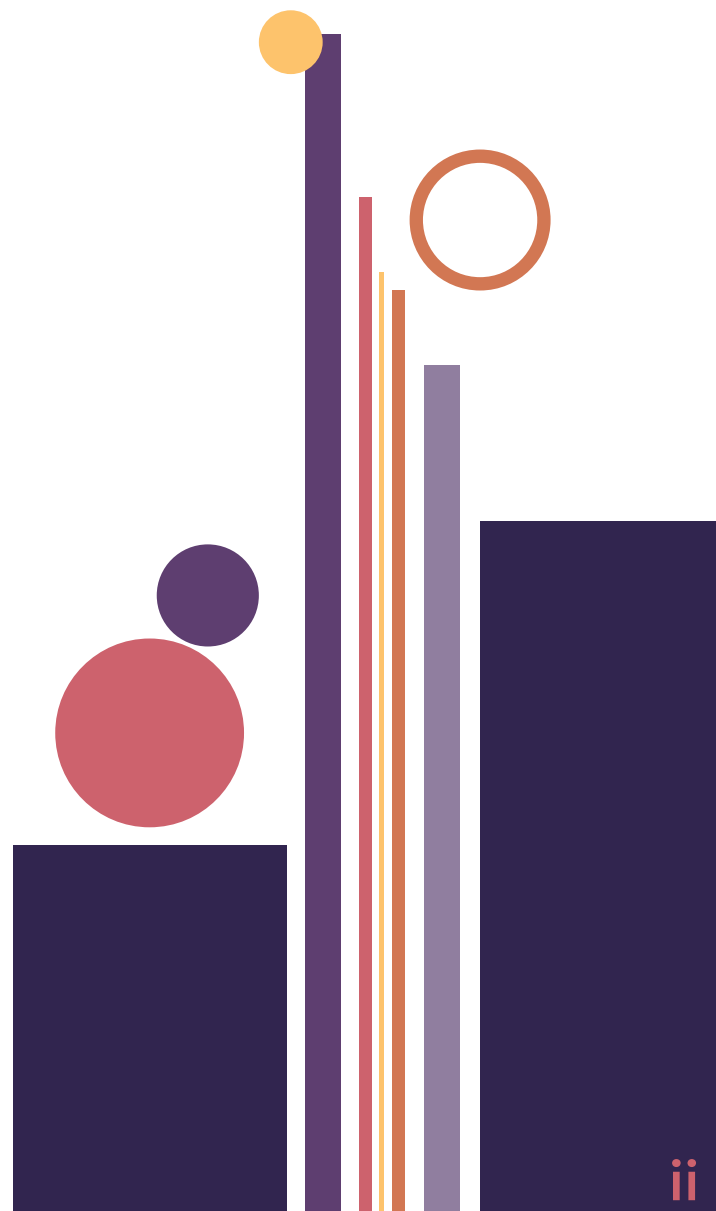
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farmland

By: Josephine Wu

// sown

unzipped in the back where the digits of my spine dot like spaces between words. trodden into rows, dirt stuffed under tongue, some between the crannies of my ribs. throat clogged—they dig me face down so that the corners of my armpits consecrate the ground like temples for the dead. dressed in the lace of palm on mouth, breast, hips: any skin that withdraws when touched.

in the field: ferns rolled out over granular bits of dust, humidity perfumed with blades of frost. what feels like an anthill flattened under my wrists. can't seem to move them, they're too heavy. grunts in the background like a metronome over *midnight sonata*, gravelly. intestines knotted. knuckles split. i didn't know why they're shoveling so much.

// harvested

every inhale a gasp of earth and suffocated litter. white lines crawling by my ears, tingle of worm tracing my palm lines. cinnamon girl planted beside me saying close your eyes it'll be easier. her toes have already taken root to the soil beside the weeds. want to close my eyes but can't. she says that's normal it takes some getting used to. plus, it doesn't matter because everything is dark anyway. like the pile of stuffed animals that i hid away because i was getting too old. i think i was twelve.

sudden light so fast i shut my eyes: they're digging me back up again. hardened fingers yanking my hair. ouch. voice doesn't work—just wind whistling out of my lungs. extracted like how a child collects pebbles by the shore, plucked and cleaned in laps of frigid water. come and gone. hauled into a wheelbarrow, rough against my buttocks, next to peeling radishes and bruised apples.

a cashmere sweater is not what they usually wear to do things like this.

// cooked

the smell of brandy and olive oil and smoke. crash of pans. popcorn ceilings stained gray and soaked with water. this place has been used before, foretelling a good meal. trying to blink but the bite of onions nearby makes my eyes puddle with tears. everything blurry but i can still make out the shadows hovering over me. close shapes. a hand, my throat.

starfished on the dining table because the kitchen island was too small. rinsed with salt water and they don't notice it leaks into my eardrums so i hear the sound of the waves breaking. skimmed with a filleting knife to take off all the unnecessary parts, the tip of it prodding my belly button to flip me inside out. embarrassed they can see all the tendons taut and red but they don't seem to care.

mouth pulled open so they can carve out the teeth and stick a handful of thyme inside. draped in the best honey barbecue sauce to be roasted above the fire spit; the flame is not as hot as some things. eyes scooped out with a spoon, later marbleized in resin and displayed in a glass pyramid. served on a golden platter, all glossy on the outside. eaten with slices of bread and leftovers from the week before.

they didn't even leave the bones behind.



About the Author:

Josephine Wu is a freshman at Georgetown University studying Culture & Politics and Creative Writing. A second-generation Chinese American, she loves exploring the nuances across culture, feminism, and identity. When she's not writing, she's probably finding the best iced chai tea latte or listening to Taylor Swift. You can find her on Instagram at @josie.wuu.



Peeping blue

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

12 in. x 8.5 in.

Mixed Media

transience

By: Hazel Thekkekara

i.

one might call her a matriarch,
but the lilt in her voice that

sounds like a hummingbird
perched upon rusty nails, &

the acrid scent of redolent myrrh that makes my
eyes sting & nerves fray

will never be enough to convince me
she is anything but Grandmother.

ii.

the prudence that once defined her
now gives way to pearl-painted coupes & an abundance of liquor.

her presence no longer prompts straighter postures;
her ebony hair has withered into ash.

through all the hemmings & re-hemmings, age still
peeks out through the cracks in her whalebone corset—

hera to juno, not realizing they are
one & the same, parallel universes.

iii.

the golden clock turns grayer as it ticks;
the same shade as the eyes that once gazed into mine,

lips crooning stories into the stillness of the night,
somnolent lullabies coaxing my eyes shut.

words once held so dear
now nothing more than broken syllables,

lost upon ears that have been
wearied by the endless babble, by the

world that just keeps on
turning.

when did my shrine to her
morph into a shroud?

halcyon was not halcyon
the day the clock struck nothing.

About the Author:

Hazel Thekkekara is a rising high school sophomore from Atlanta, Georgia. She serves as a reporter for her school newspaper and loves writing poetry, prose, and short stories. Hazel is passionate about environmental sustainability, and can usually be found creating content for her Instagram handle, @simplyenvironment. Some of her other hobbies include reading (and re-reading) 1984, listening to the entirety of Taylor Swift's repertoire, and training her puppy to stay calm when he sees food.

The King of Laguna Niguel

By: Anastasia
DiFonzo

Once, I asked
if you were a god,
metal rings and coarse
Sicilian hair cloaking
each of your thick red
knuckles, and the knowledge
of *or-else* following you
into every room. All you said
was *not anymore*. You left me
hiding at the bottom of the stairs
in our first mansion, so large
the neighbors couldn't hear
Mom scream. You still live
in the panicked punches
of my heartbeat, closer
than we were in life. Arm's length
was the range of your fists,
so that's where you kept me.
But what about that day at the zoo?
Craig's arm was around your shoulders,
proximity only a big brother
one full wife older
than me could be brave
enough to occupy. I don't know
how we were so close
to a deer, but we were,
and she untied your shoelace.
And you laughed, a chortle,
big enough to carry
me as you never could.
Then you decided the world
would be better off without you,
so you saved us
from yourself on the back
of five stockpiled Rx bottles.
You weren't a god.
You were only human,
and today, I'll call you
Dad.

About the Author:

Anastasia DiFonzo (she/her) is a San Diego based poet with a cat named Klaus. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Gnashing Teeth Publishing*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Salt & Citrus*. She is on Instagram at @anastasia.difonzo and Twitter at @anmidaludi.

like measures of central tendency

By: Emma Keas

and halves that exclude birthrights, when we dissect
to our spines, do we stand two-parts-never-whole?

drink of your legacy; drink of your blood.
but half-cup full or half-empty? mixed baby, I ask

you this: draw me a bath of soap-sud-stinging
eyes and gulp of your averages, your

mean, median, mode. straddle your box and whisker
plots with chafed thighs. find one leg stuck

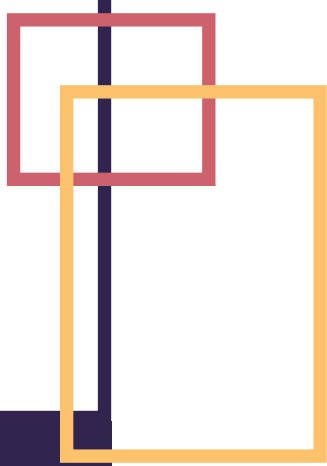
between traffic and the other racing roads
home. map out nonlinear heredity, branch

one fat-almond-eyes-black-haired-baby
to twice-tongued-foreign-familiar-baby

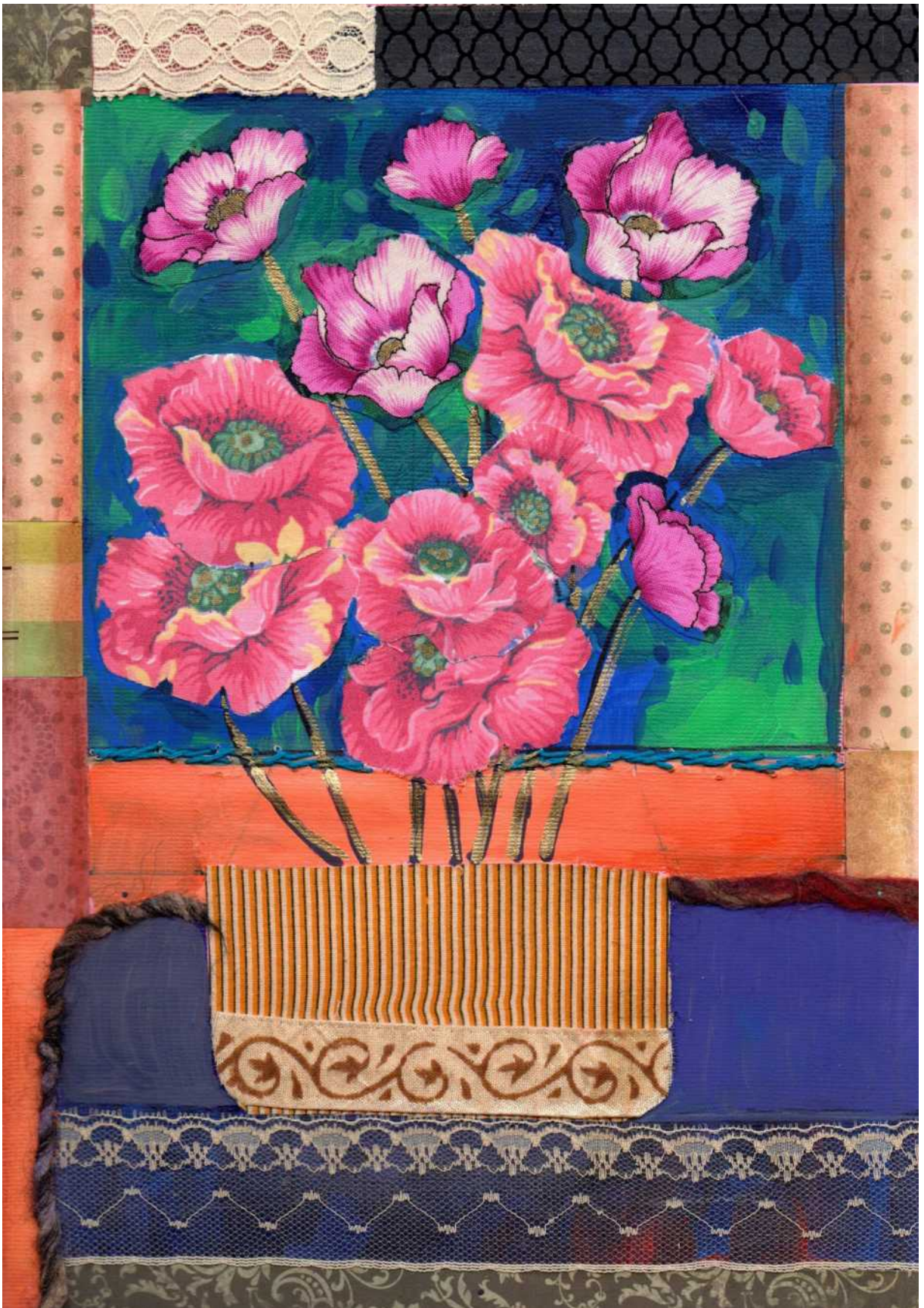
for a third star-in-mother's-motherland-baby
for a fourth my-last-name-deceives-baby

for a fifth forked-veins-in-spleen-baby
for a sixth both-either-nor-baby.

rock-a-bye, rock-a-bye, baby.
split cradle and all, you'll stand—you'll speak.



About the Author:
Emma (she/her) is a high school student from California whose love for writing stems from its unlimited potential. Other than writing and editing, you can find her painting, reading, daydreaming, or brooding over bucket lists in her free time. She hopes you're having a wonderful day!



Pink razzmatazz

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

12 in. x 8.5 in.

Mixed Media

Blue Noise

By: Ralph Lam

Content Warning: Rape, Suicide

A house needs a strong foundation. One to last generation after generation, one to contain the euphoria of newlyweds, one to witness the growth of a happy family. This two-storey condo in Tai Po with windows that faced neither the mountains nor the sea had none of that.

Gravel crunches: a beige-yellow shuttle bus rattles off into the distance. Luggage drops, pounding the dirt; rising dust mixes with an air of disappointment.

Lila, her fingers *tap-tap-tapping* on a leather handbag, the first wedding gift she reached for on the table, walks up to the front door: a tall gate. She slides the gate to the right; *right*, a supposedly fortuitous direction.

One or two meters, *who knows*, away from the front door, Darren can already picture the living room: austerity at its finest.

Despair, the feeling that had festered at the pit of Darren's stomach since he had said his "I do's" and pressed his lips to Lila's—her father would be happy that Darren's sticking to the agreement. Kisses are meant to be shared with those you cherish: the one who Darren cherished had worked at a street stall in Mong Kok and he only got to kiss her once.

There was a lavish dinner after the ceremony. He had thought about his future while his mother had thought about Lila's parents' bank account. She gorged herself on roast pig skin and washed it down with acrid rice wine. She didn't need to pay for any of the food.

Lila's shoulders, *tap*, slump over, *tappity-tap-tap*. She, too, can see the vintage television sitting upon the tapioca table, a staple of cheap pre-furnished housing.

The tapping—metronomic march in *allegro*—grows faster.

It's just a temporary accommodation. Lila's father stared at his daughter's pouting lips. She was sitting curled up at the end of her king-size bed. Darren stood beside her. She held his hand tight: not reciprocated. She wanted to be somewhere on the main island. He wanted to be at a particular stall in Mong Kok.

Temporary: funny word. *Tehm-puh-reh-ree*. Founded on uncertainty.

The word demonstrates lack of permanence. Used by those who want to avoid the obligation of promises. This house promises Lila's father a (permanent?) respite from the demands of his daughter.

Lila, you understand right? We will find a house in the Mid-Levels quite soon. The father shot a sideways glance: an indirect command. Darren nodded; oscillation of a bobble head pushed by external force. He wasn't used to being given things. A sharp crack of the belt and a bloody welt: on the house. The turmoil of mind never breached the surface of his countenance.

The television is gone, no more prismatic reflections in an ashen ocean. Tapioca is still the strongest flavor in the room. The walls furnished with semi-convincing copies of Warhols and Caravaggios. Elaborate phonograph in the corner, leaking Darren's favorite song. A lavish chandelier on the ceiling, appears to be crystal, upon closer inspection, just cheap glass. The inhabitants: discordant, dissonant.

Upstairs. In the north corner is Lila's closet; orgy of designer brands. Such luxury, money isn't the problem. Anything to keep Lila satiated: the enfant terrible of profligate spending. She wants a baby. *No*, her parents want a baby. *No*, her parents *and* his mother want a baby. Baby, daughter, son, granddaughter, grandson, responsibilities: anchors on a ship run aground.

Darren wonders how Mong Kok street stall girl is doing. Of course, rape is quite a fickle thing. Blood is not a pleasant liquid. Crying is not a euphonious sound.

He *thinks*—no—he *knows* she should be doing fine, *maybe*.

Perhaps he could visit her over the weekend. Walk down the busy pavement. Find her, take her to a hole-in-the-wall. Let one thing lead to another. Oxytocin: a dangerous chemical. He tosses the plan aside. Too risky; also, it's not a part of the agreement, they won't let him.

Lila, out the door dressed to the nines, back in a hospital gown—blue like the blue of a lake. His son: pink flesh and a pink covenant of dedication. *Baby? From where?* He... he doesn't know.

He holds the child, *no, sorry, his* child, with the affection of a Chinese mother conducting a honeydew melon inspection: *hold it up, shake it once or twice, knock on it, repeat a couple of times.* Lila snatches the baby away

from him, she doesn't like Darren shaking her, *sorry, their child*. He stares. This woman he married—*who is she?*

Maybe he just doesn't know her that well, *maybe*.

Lila enraptures the child with coos and *tsk-tsk's*: *faux-acapella*.

Don't worry sweetheart, you've got my good genes, I'm sure you will be kind to everyone. Lila is louder than she thinks.

Darren, as always, sits in the corner listening to his music, his quotidian occupation. Later, Darren overhears a phone conversation. The dialogue is a half-solved jigsaw puzzle: he thinks he can put the rest together.

You didn't tell me he was so cold. Lila, crying (not a euphonious sound).

But I want one now!

No, don't sue him. He hasn't exactly breached the agreement. Can I just come home?

The phone emits a muted beep. End of conversation.

Some time ago.

Dark alley. Why were they there? Maybe, perhaps, possibly walking home together. Burning cigarettes and dank sewage coalesced into a memorable noxious scent. But they didn't care, too preoccupied with each other. The ground was wet from the runoff of faulty pipes and clogged drains. But, when someone is slamming your head into the ground, wet concrete is just as hard as is dry.

Darren, forehead bleeding, too weak to stand, only watched from the soft padding of trash bags. Mong Kok street girl (*does Darren even remember her name?*), navy blue skirt wrapped around her ankles. Some man was thrusting himself inside her. Coterie of tattooed somebodies stands behind him: perverse indulgence—they all take turns.

Mong Kok street girl—blood, not a pleasant liquid, streaming down her legs, crying, not a euphonious sound, reverberating off of rusty metal pipes—was ragdolled, *snap*, thrown onto the floor, crack (remember that wet concrete is still painful). The last somebody, libido satiated, pulled up his trousers, walked away, everyone followed: no remorse.

Darren, in bed, now awake. A nightmare (maybe?). Looking around, bedroom is moldy and wallpaper droops from unbridled leakage. Bed, springs popping out like maggots in decay, is empty. Where's Lila? Must be a dream, *maybe*. Blink once, blink twice, now Darren can see Lila sleeping in bed.

The acceleration of an object under gravity is approximately ten meters per second. This is a well known fact. The hangman's knot tightens when its loop is pulled. This is knowledge possessed by those with intention. Given these two properties, an object of average weight can use acceleration under gravity to prompt a swift tightening of the hangman's knot.

Darren remembered all of this as he tied the knot, looping the other end of the rope around the chandelier.

Lila said she was leaving the house; she wanted attention from Darren that he could not give because he was too distant and far too aloof from the marriage. He just wanted to see the Mong Kok street stall girl, but naturally, Lila's family would not let him so he stayed in his corner listening to music from the elaborate phonograph.

Lila said she was leaving the house, but Darren never heard her leave. Blink once, she's there, blink twice, she's taken herself, the baby, the maids, and the furniture with her. Lila said she was leaving the house, which made Darren upset, *was the despair actually for Lila?* Perhaps it was, or perhaps it was for someone else, *who?*

Darren can't quite remember Lila or anything before her. Everything seems like figments of a long fever dream. Despair, anxiety, frustration, they all come flooding in. Darren doesn't like it.

He takes two steps forward, off the chair. He has done his part. Time to let gravity and the noose do theirs.

The condo had always been quiet; yet, as of late, villagers had been hearing a wailing from deep within its walls.

Each night brought the same soliloquy from the house's distressed spirit: a lost love, an unwanted marriage. The villagers also heard the squeals of a newborn baby, or, at least, a grown man's imitation of one. The shouts and cries were not pleasant to the ear.

The sounds continued for weeks and months. Then they stopped. The spirit had run out of breath. The villagers chose not to question anything: Darren's body was left to rot. A house needs a strong foundation, one to last generation after generation, one to contain the euphoria of newlyweds, one to witness the growth of a happy family. This two-storey condo in Tai Po with windows that faced neither the mountains nor the sea had none of that. Instead, it contained the despair, delusion, and death of one young man.

windows that faced neither the mountains nor the sea had none of that. Instead, it contained the despair, delusion, and death of one young man.



About the Author:

Ralph Lam is a junior at Phillips Academy Andover from Hong Kong. Ralph enjoys writing about family, culture, and the impact they have on identity; he likes to read his work in front of his plants, they make for a quiet and respectful audience. He also tends to look far too closely into every scene of a movie. Ralph's work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and published in various literary journals. When Ralph isn't sitting at his desk, he is traveling across Hong Kong to encourage younger generations to pick up a pencil and write; he believes that everyone should have access to a platform to express their creative agency.



present haze
Gabrielle Beck
7.375 in x 11.1 in
Photography

Wolfish

By: AW Earl

In these moods
you say I'm howling at the moon.
Dog-truth is less a wherefore than a *where*,
a wide-eyed whining, heaven high, this
missing is a square thing, oddly held,
is large in my throat, is a masterclass
in thumbless paws. My retriever-heart
runs restless, the bed, your chair,
the door, my dull claws
skitter mute reproach. It is no help,
the only scents I find are
absence made air.

Are these not the lips you kiss,
not these my wrists and
back and toes? Human body curled
within a canine coat?
There is no drawing out, only the dragging pace,
the silent door,
the empty chair.

About the Author:

AW Earl is a writer, storyteller, and performer whose poetry is concerned with gender, deviant bodies, and folklore. Their non-fiction involves them being quietly angry about transgender issues, and the much misunderstood history of marriage. *Time's Fool*, their debut novel, was published by Unbound in 2018, and their collection of illustrated short stories, *Scars on Sound*, was released in 2017.

a deconstruction of honey & candles & church


By: Natalie Hampton

My mother taught me lessons in honey.

Imagine age five: she smeared it across my bare
back and told me to lay in the middle of a flowering field.
Burrs painted patterns of pink across marred skin, grass itched,
and I wondered what it would be like to sink into the
ground, absorbed and melting like the last candle on an altar. She
used to take me to church when I was younger, but I was never
chosen to light those sacred wicks as prayers hung low in the air
like steam—it was always the priest's daughter, and I
never understood why. We stopped going two years after, and I
missed those lines pews and stained-glass windows.
She made me lay there for hours until piercing canyons of ants
crawled up by back, attracted to the saccharine sweetness,
and they left their crimson bites behind.

*if you attract men to you
my mother said
all they'll cause is harm.*

Imagine age twelve: the cusp of teenage years, and it
doesn't yet feel like a movie. I lost the knobby knees but
gained new awkwardness in my movements; I lost the chubby cheeks but
gained weight elsewhere. Instead of honey sweetening my foods,
she replaced it with artificial creations: *sweet 'n low, truvia, splenda,*
stevia, equal. Zero-calorie powders that never tasted ripe enough,
but she threw away all the honey, said my clothes were too tight and I
needed to maintain my figure. She pinched at my sides, weighed
and prodded Sunday mornings, calculated calories for the week. My tastebuds
never adapted, they yearned for confection and love, and I dreamt of
caramel chocolate and hugs, but she gave me diets and cleanses. Workouts
and routines, and the fat began to melt away and I thought back to
those alter candles, wishing my entire body would dissolve with the fat.



*your body is a weapon
my mother said
learn how to use it.*

Imagine age eighteen: legal adult by name only, neither comfort nor ability. I still called my ex boyfriend every time I ran a load of laundry, still looked up tutorials every time I tried to cook. She came to my room as I zipped the final bags, my new life across the country contained. College: what a strange place to go. I had never been without her for more than a night. A flickering match lit up her grave expression and she pressed the flame to the center of my palm. It was the same match from those old church days, the ones the daughters breathed into candles, and as I cried out and a wound bloomed, I wondered if the girls ever burned themselves on accident. If they prayed for healing or if that was too selfish of a need. She handed me a bottle of honey to pack and said it would soothe the burn better than any medicine. I didn't pray as she left but I ducked my head and imagined the words pouring out of my mouth, thick like honey.

*hurt yourself enough times
my mother said
and no one else can cause lasting damage.*

Skincare Routine

By: Natalie Hampton

I wash my face with pigs' blood in the morning
and when you see the red on my hands, I say it's
pomegranate seeds. My aunt gifted my first butchers'
knife, told me to cut until I felt something solid, to
churn until there was nothing left but foaming cream.
Flesh isn't solid, tendons aren't solid, bones aren't
solid. Deep inside the pig, I felt a lump chipping the
edge of the knife until it cleaved right in half, the tip
absorbed as a new internal organ. In the place of
intestines, there was a coiled rope, scales of liquored
velvet. It slithered out of the pig's corpse and into my
hair. For a moment, I felt like Medusa and looked in
the mirror, but no stone statues erected. Spiders crawled
out of the pig's gut, and I still feel them across my skin,
pulling and tugging like leeches drinking my blood,
washing their faces in it.

About the Author:

Natalie Hampton is a rising junior at the Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in the Creative Writing Department. She has been recognized at the National level of the Scholastic Art and Writing Competition and by the Harris County Department of Education, the Young Poets Network, and Ringling College of Art and Design. She serves as an editor at Polyphony Lit and Cathartic Literary Magazine. When she isn't writing, she likes to volunteer, work in activism, and play soccer.



Character of a Man

Junseob Yoon

46 cm x 40 cm

Colored Pencil on Paper



the orphan's memoir

By: Jeffrey Yang

seventeen years, eleven months, and twenty-three days. (seven days left)

The laughing lights tremble across the earthy grounds, the unholy creatures croaking from afar; with toes of grease and soles of charcoal, my hands of blood, cuts, and bruises, the smell of the dumpsters trolleying along—*it's quite cool tonight*. By the warm windows of the crackling fire from inside the closed-off nightclub, I look to and fro from passengers wandering the day away inside my unrecognizable life. I pick up the ashen newspaper from the dusted cobblestone curbsides, trailing the clacking of the midnight strollers upon the streets of home.

The awning of the nearby bakery is a tinted red, one that had a mild resemblance of a cure of blood. I tell myself, *today is the day*, but I've told myself that for the past year and a half. My hands caress the ripped, vintage photograph of my past self—*how soft my hands looked*. I smile and wonder what life could have been like.

With the soft, fading music, the city of lights, love, and theft is at its peak silence. I chase the silhouette of my winded hair, freely glazing the cold air of a French winter. Yet the fireflies are dancing along with me; *I'm the star of the show*.

The clang of the church bells sends me back to the little wooden cottage on the corner of the peddler street. A row of ruffled beds encasing groups of abandoned children, each dreaming of a home and family—to be loved. My teetering feet whisper their way back into the dark room, careful not to cause any disturbances. *One more week*.

seventeen years, eleven months, and twenty-six days. (four days left)

Sitting to the west is a line of single square windows, each with as much of a view as a plain wall, except one—with a view of the whole city. As the sun rises past a new day without a family, the scuffling of the townsfolk scrambling to their lives, each as their own—I see *my mother in the crowd*.

For seventeen years, I've asked myself the question every orphan asks themselves: *why did you leave me?* Out of the countless sleepless nights filled with burning questions and storylines seen only in the black-and-white, filtered cassette-playing television box in the basement, I decided on

the idea that she was a young woman unable to care for herself, much less a newborn. The pain I feel through every breath, I hoped she felt during the four months I was in her hands—*I'm no longer mad.*

In the photograph, my mother looks young, too young to be burdened with a child. Her hair is a dashing spray of red, her cheeks, a thinned out roll of bread, and possibly her most noticeable feature, the mole on her right temple, a single imperfection on a picture-perfect face. *I hope her heart is filled with imperfections for leaving me.*

seventeen years, eleven months, and twenty-seven days. (three days left)

I am given a plastic bag that holds a plaid shirt that I know for a fact belonged to the dead janitor, a pair of jeans with more stains than fabric, two black socks from the annual “*save the children*” fundraiser put on by the opera house across the street, and five euros, enough to get me through... maybe two meals. I reassure the few friends I made in the place I called home for most of my life that I would be fine. A few nights here, a few nights there; the nightly crows could be my friends, I said. I laugh along—*reality is days away.*

My soul is a tarnished rose, flutters of hope trampling away along with my time—*home?* Only the second home I've been kicked out of—

I'm too old to cry. With an inhale, the forming tears suction back into my pinking eyes, *I don't want to be homeless.* My pillows are dry no longer, I blame the rain they say is to come.

seventeen years, eleven months, and twenty-eight days. (two days left)

I kick the ticking clock of a bag underneath my mattress; the dip in the bed where my stomach plumply lay on for seventeen years softly collides with the contents of the bag I desperately hated.

Today there is rain. I look out the single window of action and stare into the worlds of the working class, much too poor to afford the taxi—*who am I to call them poor.* The hair of a dozen strangers, all painted red. All with cheeks hollowed out as if carved with a large, round spoon—each of their faces, a piece of my mother.

When I stop her from hugging the falling calves of my lower body, the small face of the six-year-old girl, who has no name, is one that knows nothing of the horrors of our goodbye. *No one wants you. No one wants me. No one wants us. Welcome to death row.*

seventeen years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days. (one day left)

Everything is blurry; dreams and reality, a formidable mix. My shoes are

expanded past the breaking point, with the laces tying the falling sides of leather together. The weekenders spinning across the landscape of France look something of Monet, flaunting their colorful accessories—*their wealth taunts me.*

The cottage is at pure peace, the onlooking children doe-eyed staring at my back as I hesitantly admire my paced breaths of air. *tomorrow.*

eighteen years.

The bulking bag with already-loose handles in one hand and my life's memories in the other. A wave here, a hug there, my feet drop at the steps of the small cottage I once despised, but where I now wish to stay. The striking wind and lowered sun. *Where can I go?*

About the Author:

Jeffrey Yang is a current high-school sophomore at the Orange County School of the Arts in Santa Ana, California. He has had multiple pieces published in the Voices de la Luna literary magazine and Poetic Power's "A Celebration of Poets," and has also received numerous awards from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards.

We only work if I'm a funeral urn

By: Melanie Greenberg

Your apology embedded itself in six failed molds
of resin trapped with insects and drying petals, motionless

In the early afternoon I puke again—seven altoids kiss
my gums. I look for pity in you on my bed, motionless

I don't know how to look past ruin. On this cliff
edge, I'm only safe when I'm motionless

Nothing like months ago when your blood crept
but we didn't stop, too flushed to be motionless

Now I tell you my day in bare bones (less flesh)
The words fly out bald and motionless

Our love is an animal that ate something wrong—
Guilt stills the cells under the physician's hands, motionless

In my dream you are a ritual mourner you rip
at your hair for the love of me, motionless

About the Author:

Melanie Greenberg grew up in Seattle, Washington and attends Sarah Lawrence College in New York. She was awarded the Rex Warner Literary Prize during her year abroad at the University of Oxford. Melanie's work has appeared in the 2019 summer issue of Nixes Mate Review, the Dog Door Cultural, the Eunoia Review, and the 2018 issue of The Sarah Lawrence Review.



Afternoons in scarlet
Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad
12 in. x 8.5 in.
Mixed Media

some kind of murder

By: Joella Kay

Content Warning: Self Harm

the funny thing is, you used to chew on glass chips in lieu of ice cubes and still had the audacity to look shocked when your gums tore and bled. now you shred your flesh with the casual ferocity of a tigress at lunchtime. maybe your body arrives at the guillotine before the rest of you, your ribs kissing the scaffold, your brittle bones waiting to be gnawed at and snapped in half like a dog's teething ring. maybe you guide the tectonic plates of your skull through the lunette yourself and wait for the fissures to deepen to cracks, to split open and dissolve into a torrent of vermillion fading to gray.

this is a stranger shattering on the altar with you behind their flickering eyelids. you look on vaguely, a detached observer in this twisted game: how far can one girl scatter? the waxy sheen of hair follicles ripped from a reddening scalp lips chapping, peeling, unraveling like a ribboning onion grating your skin like cheese till you've built up a milky white film beneath jagged, torn fingernails itching for more to destroy.

the funny thing is, you apologize to this body even as you crush it like orange pulp beneath a callused heel. watch it bruise brilliantly, a glorious field of yellows and purples and greens. you cry to a broken visage of yourself even as you hammer the mirror with your fists, letting it splinter into shards that pierce you like arrows. you beg this vessel for forgiveness even as you hurl it from rooftops and watch it fracture infinitely, a kaleidoscope of endings. you are sorry, which is to say: you wish there were some way to implode without hurting yourself.

About the Author:

Joella Kay is a Korean-American teen and sometimes a poet. among other things, she enjoys composing music, long walks near water, and anything with strawberries. catch her on twitter @joelleche_.



Aries Overhead

By: Mufeng Liu

I once thought that if I ever returned to the Arizona desert, I'd be a lone biker in a leather jacket. I thought I'd be an invisible hiker, a silhouetted figure, descending a slithering trail to a place outside time. I thought I'd find stillness in the roaring waters, peace in the moon-cast shimmer, the essence of existence in the Colorado River.

I don't think I understood the difference between quietness and silence.

I want barely echoing footsteps slightly out of sync with mine, metallic jingles from the fluttering zippers of your bag when I trick you into turning, the sight of your laughter when we descend into the valley and I say "I think we've hit rock bottom"—neither of us can hear each other over the waterfall but we don't stop for ages.

I don't think I realized I want the quietness of abundance, not the silence of emptiness.

I want us to camp at the bottom of the canyon (away from the river—2 a.m. confessions aren't meant to be shouted), where we'll live the moment of every coming-of-age movie when the universe unravels around us. We'll gaze at the stars, and I'll tell you about the time I ran around a beach stargazing with Stellarium on my phone, looking for Aries overhead until my battery died and left me trudging through the sand in darkness.

Some time later, between me reciting old poems and you composing new poems, I'll burst into laughter, and you won't even pause to question it before joining me.

Have you ever heard of the frog in the well?

Of course I—are you comparing us to frogs?

And then the clock strikes 2 a.m. and I think *I love your pact with words and I wish I could make one too but I've only ever known how to make contracts where loss precedes glory and one day I'll run out of things to lose and it will be the end of me but you'll be something great and tomorrow we'll be on diverging paths—*

(I blink.
There in the sky hangs Aries overhead.)

*but tonight,
in this moment out of time,
we'll be frogs in the well and
claim this sliver of sky,
just for us.*

About the Author:

Mufeng Liu is a student in Ottawa and an aspiring future Formula One engineer who also dreams of becoming a comedy writer for SNL. Her favorite ways of procrastinating include writing, listening to podcasts, watching stand-up comedy, and hoping that her homework will write itself soon.

Preparation

By: Bhavika Malik

Two words slipped from Mama's wine glass and rested on the kitchen table. As she wished for repentance in silence, she fixed her earrings, picked up the plates, and tried to dust off her mistake. But Papa already noticed it, and so did I. Just a month before our relocation, Mama mentioned a headline. It didn't belong to this year. She picked an old scar and made it fresh again as she dug out the memories.

Three years have passed since that headline. The dirt is firm on the graves, and Austin's Bar and Grill has replaced the old meat shop around the curb.

Mama didn't react to the news then, and she didn't have anything to say about it now. Her face was a tight grin looking over the window. But my mind was a drain clogged with many questions; I knew that she was testing me, so I stayed silent.

"Don't let anyone feel strongly about you," Mama always told us. She believed that neutrality would keep us protected. So she wrung her wrist every morning, forcing out every ounce of heritage and history connected to her body. She expected me to do the same.

Papa had a lot to say but kept quiet. He was afraid, but he knew that a successful man must live in America, even though success meant building a house in the mouth of trauma. And tying knots around your joints so you can turn into an effigy when night mocks you with a game of cat and mice.

We all knew that discussing headlines was the last resort. News was the estranged mother of racism who visited daily, but we never invited her to dinner.

If dinner starts at eight, then everyone must ask why the dinner didn't start at seven-thirty. If dinner starts at seven-thirty, you complain about the delay in the dessert. Once the family completes the dinner discourse, you wait for your Papa's signal to talk about grades.

After Mama complains about your screen time, you swiftly change the discussion to tomorrow's dinner.

The dinner is over.

At nine, you help Mama clean the table and rush to your room before Papa turns on the TV. You sleep. When the voice of the news anchor enters your room from gaps in your door, it clings to your ears like tar. You can never get rid of it. It lingers in your ears until you are deaf with reasons to hate how the letter R rolls off your tongue and how you softly cradle the Ts. Or how your barley-colored skin can detonate at any moment, especially at airports.

On the porch flooding with moonlight and dust, they stared at the newspaper cut out in Mama's palms. They imagined sitting on a similar porch in a yard with sunlight glistening on the snow as they yelled at their daughter for being late to school, knowing that it might be the last thing she hears from them.

They picked out the trash in their new home, collecting tears and debris from the cedarwood floor left there by neighbors who taught them that brown was synonymous with terror. Meanwhile, at school, the long looks and stolen glances weighed me down. None of us knew if the smiles were out of fear or affection.

Walking back home, we wondered if the next name we hear on the news would be ours. It wasn't a matter of "if," but a matter of "when." Everyone knew that. Like rust on metal, we were the fading remnants of forgotten history, stuck together until we turned to nothingness.

About the Author:

Bhavika Malik is an emerging writer with a few scattering pieces published in journals such as Ice Lolly Review and Cathartic Literary Magazine. She is currently a high school freshman in Gurgaon, India and an editor for her school magazine.

a note in Ravel's string quartet in F major

By: Isabelle Lu

somewhere in a concert hall swoons a brightness
like a belly, and us only brushing the poppies festooned about it
guzzle in through the doors sit
smooth the creases of the program in which the portraits of robins ready
to chase one another, like string animals legged ones.

there's a note in which a bird's breast shatters against its violin. guide him
that is, Ravel stroking the feather the aged player
which sprouts again upon first touch of callus
to twirled gutsting in the *assez vif*.

since I entered this chamber I couldn't amass the brawn to virtuoso.
I watch fastidious Ravel caged by abstraction after the taxi
strikes. and now us passing the blotches
of his easiest melody between fingers unspeaking like children.

the bough of my neck slips under a slim and forgiving machine.
we lie
as if the world would end here, where something painting pale fire
thinks of us kindly and grants this: that I could never stand

that which I couldn't bow to. listen:

in his branches is preserved strange music. it becomes
something to rock within irises
golden watching the bows heave waiting for them to burst.



what was grown (in the garage)

By: Isabelle Lu

i.
My father / never nurtured anything / but clay-bound things / which—like hands / only unfurled
once a year / In the backyard / among them / I bound my knees / Fixed them / with a wax kiss,
then coddled all his / gardens. Every cerebral daughter / that I thought'd be given forever /
crumbled. Some relic of catalytic iron / bypassed good pastor walls / with a knuckled / shiver /
How they trembled, my baby / the thunder beneath the lid of my throat / Lop tongue / tinged
verdant like / their furtive petals / preening the burn skid on each leaf / Locating the ever-absent
flesh: no scarlet-run nectar / to suckle and thumb / over my chin as I readied to rupture / at
another soft palm / *I wasn't made for a caress, I was made to scream.*

ii.
the good moon ladles the river.
I stagger onto its bank: nymph but gritting,
dissolved but cartilaginous.
the ants in my marrow unearth no bone memories but how to linger. & I
swaying want to ask everything of the waiting water. tonight,
just this: why, like my mother, I forgot how to
bloom.
the river keens back her only chore to pass on.
all my elegies close
like my father's cereus.



About the Author:

Isabelle Lu is a Chinese American writer from New York. She currently attends South Side High School, where she is the co-editor of Context literary magazine. In her daily life, she may be found doodling and enthusing about books to unsuspecting innocents.



Basking in viridian

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

12 in. x 8.5 in.

Mixed Media

On a Theme from Lorca to a Tune by Keats

By: Mark J. Mitchell

*Sería el guardian que en la noche de mi tránsito
Prohibier en absolute la entrada a la luna*
(It would be the guard who on the night of my death
Would block the entrance absolutely of the moon)

—Federico Garcia Lorca

Casida of the Impossible Hand (The Tamarit Divan)

No one was home the night he died. Unlocked windows may not invite cats but no moon could scare them off. No one came up the walk to edge his door wide. He lay there—no wound showed on his cold form. Those empty eyes stared to his left. An old picture—black and white—he saw that last: A woman’s silvered face. The man, stiff-backed, at her side. They can’t care for him now. A breeze down the long hall might close some cabinet, but this empty night won’t hear. He’s still under moonlight. Erased.

About the Author:

Mark J. Mitchell was born in Chicago and grew up in southern California. His latest poetry collection, *Roshi San Francisco*, was just published by Norfolk Publishing. *Starting from Tu Fu* was recently published by Encircle Publications. He is very fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Miles Davis, Kafka and Dante. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, the activist and documentarian Joan Juster, where he made his marginal living pointing out pretty things. Now, like everyone else, he’s unemployed. He has published 2 novels and three chapbooks and two full length collections so far. A meager online presence can be found at facebook.com/MarkJMitchellwriter and his website, mark-j-mitchell.square.site. He sometimes tweets @MarkJMitchellSF.

Deconstruction

By: Katy Sharp

I shed my skin,
leave it curled up around itself
at the altar, and wonder
why moving forward has to feel
so much like falling apart.

They used to say
come as you are
and I wanted to ask how anyone knew

but they'd all sewn their seams up tight
like solid rock, until you got close
enough to see the layers:
inherited foolishness
passed down
spread around
and left to petrify.

Breathe shallow, child
barely notice
but scratch the scab
and your wound will become your undoing.

Here's a lesson:
vulnerability is simply
unravelling, phrased differently
and it's not being yourself

it's understanding
that you are
not.

About the Author:

Katy Sharp spent a long time trying to work out who she is before realizing that the not-knowing makes for much better poetry. She writes about journeys in love, faith and womanhood mostly from behind an espresso machine in her current hometown of Cardiff, UK - but if you ever can't find her there, she's probably staring at a lake somewhere, thinking about whether she said anything really stupid in her author bio. She appears on Instagram as @ktyshrp.

Who Drinks the Wine in Sochi

By: Remi Seamon

When Russia was tropical
wine-drinkers stood, half-naked on the beach
like flamingos—on one leg or the other

or so I was told; an inexpensive import. The grapes only fell
because I shook them, for 50 roubles an hour—there were no beaches
when Russia was tropical.

On the day he tripped each grape in the vineyard was the weight of an eyeball
when he landed in the path of the harvester and what happened happened leaving him to
stand
like a flamingo, on one leg—no other no other

and the heat was dizzy. It was blind. But I saw him. His face, red and capable
and flinching. On a smoke break, I watched his eyes roll twitch as the harvester took his arm
but mostly leg into its teeth
when Russia was tropical.

It was a shredding thing that drove me back North.
There were not enough cigarettes. On one leg I watched him watch after us who left
like the saddest flamingo in Russia. With no other.

I did not know his name. And they on the beaches (whose bathing suits were reversible
who reddened fashionably) did not want it nor his flinching face, that man who made the grapes fall
who twitched and rolled and crushed the fruit who lifted the barrels who lay ragged and gasping
with his eyes peeled in the red-soaked dirt—we must stand
like flamingos—with only one leg
when was Russia tropical.

About the Author:

Remi Seamon is a young poet who spends her time split between Cambridge, England and Seattle, Washington. She received an honorable mention in the Foyle Young Poet of the Year award and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Unlost*, *Clementine Unbound*, *Rat's Ass Review* and *streetcake*, among others. She considers her greatest inspiration to be her dog.

The Labyrinth

By: Lena Levey

“Tell me what you can’t forget, and I’ll tell you who you are.” - Julie Buntin, *Marlena*

I wrote that line in lavender on the first page of my notebook when I was in sixth grade under a heading that said “Book Quotes I Like.” I had bought the notebook to match with Mara, my science partner and new best friend. I was witnessing my sister enter the enticing world of urban adolescence, and I was fascinated with the idea of reckless youth, which is why I picked up the book from the high school library about a young woman and the teenaged mistakes that haunted her adult life. It was the sort of tragedy I thought I could handle: to be haunted by something beautiful. I could say that sort of thing before I knew any better, when we were still standing anxiously at adulthood’s starting line, where life was school and Mara’s kitchen, and bipolar was nothing more than a hyperbolic criticism of our chemistry teacher.

Seven years later, as I packed up my books to escape the city forever, I found my old notebook again, and I thought of Mara with a twist of regret in my chest.

How can I explain the Mara I can’t forget? I’ve written down the story about a hundred times, and I still don’t know what kind of person it makes me. The problem is Mara is the sort of person that evades description. She slips between adjectives like an escape artist and leaves me with half-truths that desperately attempt to weave into a world that resembles my memory.

I can call her a force, which is both a cliché and an understatement. She is impossible to forget, with dark red lipstick, six-inch white heeled boots, a frightening knowledge of Greek mythology, and a sharp British accent that cuts through every doubt that creeps into my mind. She is maybe the only person on Earth more stubborn than I am, and if she declares something, it will happen. *No one can stop her.*

No one can stop her. These words echo in my mind when I discovered I could

also describe Mara as manic. There's a painful irony in this particular Achilles heel. Her energy is what makes her the only person I can never release, but it also is the reason I have to hold on so tightly.

I've never called her an addict. Not to her face, anyway. Maybe if I had, her image wouldn't linger in my thoughts, and my memories wouldn't be wrapped in secondhand smoke. I think back to a rooftop in April, at a party so disgustingly gaudy it has since become my mascot for the materialism I left London to escape. Mara used to joke that our classmates were the best argument against legacy admissions since the generation that came before them. She stopped saying that after she started buying from the boy who was throwing up in the corner of one of the most exclusive clubs in the city. "I need some air," I had told her, and we weaved our way through the sweaty fifteen-year-olds who were still as enthralled as we used to be by this whole spectacle.

On that rooftop, at the party that I would only enjoy in my memories, Mara lit a cigarette, and I became haunted. The smoke moved through my consciousness, blowing through her phone calls and the one time—I pretended to believe her when she promised that it was the first—I saw blood dripping down her arm, through every drug that she started and would not stop, right back to the first time she called me her soulmate. The Nat Sherman ghost rested in my notebook and danced its way through each line of purple cursive.

"Tell me what you can't forget, and I'll tell you who you are." Nat Sherman reads the line in a mocking tone. With a paintbrush of thick smoke, it draws me a picture of the girl who wrote it and her best friend. They had bushy hair and bad skin and baby fat on their cheeks, and they could only dream of the life that I would run away from. It waves the cigarette, and I watch us grow. Only this time do I see how fast it is. By fifteen I could be mistaken for twenty-five, an Achilles heel that I wore as a feminine badge of honor. My ascension felt endless. I finally stopped glancing at my own reflection, but I started to sneak glances over my shoulder as I walked home. Only this time do I see how my weakness, too, was the price that I paid for my strengths.

I watch Mara on a park bench in ninth grade, as she washes down her Seroquel with Bacardi. It's 10 am. I watch myself laugh because I did not yet know that I shouldn't, and because Mara managed to make even her descent into something mesmerizing. Nat Sherman puts a hand around my waist,

and I am locked in. I wonder if I just missed my last chance to get away.

The smoke shifts again, and we are in her kitchen. I am curled up next to her oven, desperate for the warmth to reach my bones. I am sobbing from my stomach to tether myself to the ground, as if my tears were heavy enough to keep me from floating away. Mara pours a glass of wine, the same sweet red that we used to cut with Fanta Orange, back before we needed something stronger, and sits down next to me. I tell her everything I think I remember; it's flashes of light and music that shakes the ground beneath me and a callused hand pressed tightly against my throat. It's the man in the navy suit telling me to tell everyone that *I wanted it*, and our handshake that leaves bruises that linger long after the ones on my neck have faded, because I did not yet know that an agreement for quiet was not the same as one for peace. Mara listens to my fragments and holds me tighter than I knew she could. We blend together, a melted pile of blood and tears and bone. That night, she lights a cigarette. It's the first time.

Smoke swirls again. The images stop on that April rooftop where the two of us reached our stalemate. I am wearing one of her dresses, a silver wrap that I could never afford. Her dress is darker, and it has a cape that makes it look like she has wings. I hear myself cough, and then try to release everything that had been building up in my chest. The pink and blue lights pulsed with the music from inside the door, and Mara leaned against the fence to look over the city skyline.

"I'm going to say something, and if your answer is no, I promise I'll drop it forever." I sounded more confident than I was. Getting Mara to listen to anything was no small feat. But some combination of her three martinis and my impending departure made her nod and close her eyes. Nat Sherman and I watched as my words tumbled out of my mouth, and I fiddled with the hem of my dress.

"Is there anything I can do to make you stop?"

Mara stared at me for a minute. She glowed blue from the lights of the party. Finally, she responded.

"No."

"Is any of this because of me?" My mind is on the kitchen, on my notebook,

the three white lines of god-knows-what, and the souls that we had stitched together so tightly that we could never unravel them from each other without tearing every inch of ourselves apart.

“Lena, I promise I don’t regret anything.” It’s the only answer she could have given. It was my answer too.

Mara rested her hand on my shoulder. In this smoky reconstruction, our skin blends together.

As Mara let out a puff of smoke that stung the back of my throat, I could see my breath curl through the air. Were it not for the wings billowing out behind her, Mara and I would have been reflections of each other.

“We can’t really save each other, you know,” she said, softer than I had ever heard her speak. I nodded, but said nothing. It was an agreement, if not an acceptance.

It’s a strange thing, we each think to ourselves, to watch someone dissolve in front of you as you hold their hand in silence, gripping as tight as you can until you discover that you can’t keep them with you, and all you’re left with is sweaty palms and survivor’s guilt.

She lifted her hand from my shoulder and our bodies became distinct again. I watched as my figure of smoke became solid and opaque. Mara’s dress turned back to black satin, and her lips back to the cherry red that had stained her glass. The scene disappears, and I am back in a packed-up apartment with a notebook in my hand. The figure of smoke sits by my side.

When I wrote that line in purple ink, my God, what I would have given to be a woman on a skyscraper at a party that existed only in the legend of middle school gossip. I wish there were a way to warn myself that the sort of beauty I was daydreaming of comes at a price. There are some sacrifices that you don’t understand until you hear the ghost of someone who is still alive ask you if you’ve done enough, and all you can do is hold on to your soulmate as she flies towards the sun, and pray that the wax won’t melt off her wings before she makes it home.

By Self and Violent Hands

By: Lena Levey Content Warning: Drug Use

Something sweet sits under my tongue. The lady told me to press it against my gums until it's gone, but she didn't say what gone meant. The little grains have dissolved into nothingness, but I can still taste it. Can I lift my tongue now? I need to focus on this. On what's in front of me. It does no good to let my thoughts roam free.

That's what she told me, when she gave me the orange bottle, to focus on what's in front of me until I am soothed. But in front of me is out of order. I can't be here. I tried to explain to her that it's a floodgate, that these thoughts don't belong to me. "I just ride the wave," I tell her, I don't make eye contact, I am staring at the hoof of the giant stuffed giraffe.

Which is a weird thing to have in a doctor's office. Who is that even for and before I finished the thought, I know the answer, and I feel so old and I think I'm going to be sick again.

Something sweet sits under my tongue, I remind myself. I'm home now. I'm safe.

But I had known him for years before we really met, warm and all at once in a smoky Shoreditch restaurant with people we had, "known for years, but never really met," either. He said it just like that, in one exhale of Marlboro, and I thought it sounded pretentious, so I asked if he was a poet. He said "songwriter," which was worse, I thought. But he told me about his guitar and I listened because nobody ever listens to me for real and maybe if I made him feel important he would return the favor. The giraffe lady asked me if I believe in karma and I told her I believe in debt.

The taste is gone now. I should find something in front of me. A dishwasher, clean and full. I can't breathe. I inhale harder and faster. Thank god I'm alone—when I'm with people they watch this and see pressure and tell me to breathe deep to make it disappear, as if my lungs can push my memories off my chest. And I don't like the way they look at me when I say that it's not pressure, it's a release, it's proof that something really did happen or else I

wouldn't be shaking like this so Watch me. But not today. Today, I can lie on the floor and count the dishes.

We sat in the back row of The Globe and got to know each other between the acts before he finished his glass—his fourth one—and walked me home. Neither of us really wanted to see that play, but we did want to be the sort of people who would spend their Friday night watching Shakespeare, so we pretended, indulging in our delusions of grandeur. He liked the term *enthusiast* more than *alcoholic*.

“Besides, you can't be an alcoholic before you're thirty. Or if you drink expensive shit.” We walked in silence for a bit after that.

“I liked Lady Macbeth,” I told him. “I don't know if I was supposed to, but I did. She used the tools at her disposal.”

“She's a bitch.” I tensed up. I don't like when *bitch* slides off a man's tongue so easily. But I was being ridiculous. We were talking about a character. He wouldn't say that about a real woman.

It would be easier if I could remember him as evil. Sometimes I get close to destroying my sympathies so as to hate him purely, the way everyone tells me to. Had he been cruel the whole time, I could breathe normally, remember normally. But we were friends. He walked me to my door and told me I was different than anyone he had ever met before.

I wanted him to fix me back, or at least prove that there is a version of this where I am unscathed. So it didn't matter when my friends pushed back.

“When's the last time he even asked you a question?”

“It doesn't matter. He is there and it's enough.”

“He's not nice back.”

“I'm trying to help.”

“You wouldn't let a girl treat you like that. It's not right.”

“He's just depressed.”

“So are you and you don't do what he does.”

“I know but—”

“He won’t make an exception for you.”

“He cares about me.”

“He cares about what you provide for him.”

“I don’t have the luxury of noting the difference.”

Six rows of white circles, minus one now. The ceramic is still warm—focus on the heat. I close my eyes and I’m holding a sweaty hand, cold and hot on top of each other and it won’t release me. “I know I’m messed up but—” Be in the moment. When does this stuff kick in anyway? It’s been at least I don’t know how long and I can’t stop thinking about that damn car.

Not even the car, really. More his apartment balcony, clammy and gray at daybreak, who knows how many nights in a row telling him that it will be alright. That this isn’t forever and if he just got some help—“I don’t need them. I have you.”

I took that as a compliment. As the drugs and exhaustion dragged him into shallow sleep, I felt safe. I felt powerful. I fixed my gaze on the flag his father had hung from the wall: blue field, white cross. I exhaled. I had something to give that had nothing to do with the way I knew he looked at me.

“I have you.” I whisper it to the plate, trying to conjure his intonations. Impossibly slow, dragging each word like warm honey. In that awful gray apartment, I was starved for every last drop. If I hadn’t been so naive, if I had escaped him, would I still be in this kitchen? The longer I spend here, the more my presence seems like a forgone conclusion. Right before she gave me the orange bottle, I told her that if a woman is lucky, she chooses her last meal.

I thought he was different no I thought I was different will it always be like this? Why do I want so badly to win a rigged game? I run two fingers along the edge of the plate and imagine all the other ways I could have made it here.

“You make me feel like I matter,” he tells me. *I matter to him*, I tell myself, even though he never said that, even after he locked the car door and put his arm around my shoulder and I noticed for the first time that he was stronger than me. I stared straight ahead and felt myself fossilize; defeat encased in amber. I open my mouth through sweet glue. “You don’t want to do this,”

I warn, as evenly as I can manage. “It’s not worth it.” I feel every inch of his skin digging into mine, a branding iron against my back. It burns, but I don’t move. I can’t.

And then he lets go. He unlocks the car and I leave without saying a word. He needed me more than he wanted to take me.

Women wanted, dead or alive. Better alive, this time, to suit his ambitions. *Use the tools at your disposal.* So I guess that I win, but I can’t stop crying. I thought he was—no, I thought I was different. I rub my hand faster against the plate but it won’t get clean. God, when does this start working did I lift up my tongue too soon or something?

I shouldn’t care. He didn’t even do anything. It’s happened before. It’s happened worse. But he is the one I can’t forget. Nothing even happened.

But I am left here alone looking like an idiot sobbing with this stupid plate in my hands and he is free. “You owe me,” I imagine saying to him. In return, he unlocks the car.

“Are you mad at me?” He is on my doorstep, sweaty, wild eyed, and reeking sickly sweet of whisky.

“Couldn’t this have waited until tomorrow? It’s late—”

“No, I need to know that you’re not mad at me. I know I’m messed up but I can’t lose you I can’t I can’t.”

“It’s okay. You did nothing wrong. You’re a good person. I promise. I promise.” I wrap my arms and words around him before I even question their validity. He slides his hands down my back and I know he has me. It burns.

How quickly my fear melted into twisted pride as he steadied himself against the doorframe. I could always hold myself together better than he could. Or maybe I just found satisfaction in sparing him from his consequences. If my final responsibility were to disintegrate, away from an audience’s judging eyes, I would have done that too. My last breath: a whisper to no one, choked out with pleasure. “It has been an honor,” I would say, “to have been of service.” I would find peace at last, imagining that he had heard it.

I only make myself unhappy by replaying these near misses over and over. “Ignorance is bliss,” the giraffe lady muses, which I decide is just a nicer way of saying that it is unlucky to be forced to know exactly how lucky you are.

I let it go. No use dragging him down with me, I tell myself as I promise him everything will be alright, I tell people once the floodgates close again and I am constructing justifications that sound better than “I am afraid.” But of course, once you notice that someone is stronger than you, there’s nothing you can do to forget it.

In my memories I set him free, but when the despair hits before the Xanax does I imagine my veins filled with stone. A plate shatters against the wall. That didn’t feel like I thought it would. Throw harder. I dream that I hit him, closed fist into his stomach. He stumbles back, and stares at me in shock for the first time. Too hard. Porcelain flies across the room. I hit again. I fall to my knees and brush pieces of broken plates into my hand. I hit again. I shouldn’t have done that. It makes no difference. I cannot restart time. I hit again. I should have gotten a dustpan. I’m bleeding. I hit again and again until my hands are paralyzed with pain and fatigue. My fists crash against his chest until he is unrecognizable, as much every other man as he is my friend, until I am surrounded by broken glass and fantasies, and I finally stop shaking for long enough to wash the blood off my empty hands.

About the Author:

Lena Levey is a recent graduate of Georgetown Day School and will be attending Washington University in St. Louis in the fall. She grew up in London, England, and now lives in Washington D.C. She plans on studying international relations and creative writing at university.



Cafe beauties

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

12 in. x 8.5 in.

Mixed Media

for all the times we lived and died, i say

By: Jessica Tsang

here is the battlefield strewn with our corpses. already, from these
towering turrets i spy you through the telescope, ready to launch

yourself back towards the war. teeth bared, maw gaped, jaw unhinged
like the way our bodies scream silently. our armies are ourselves,

marching past versions of us through the night, carrying swords
made of spite and defeat. surrender lingers in the air, but none of us

make a move to inhale it. this is the calm before the storm. after
tonight, i will find myself fighting off my nightmares in the shadows,
because

each face at the corner of my eye is mine, with bleached skin and dead eyes.
there are only so many times i can watch myself die,

but there is nothing else to do other than combat. on the days escaping feels
like relief, i remind myself that there is

room for only one person in this house, and it will be me.

About the Author:

Jessica Tsang is from Hong Kong. Her work is featured or forthcoming in Cathartic Lit, The Heritage Review, The Blue Marble Review and more. You can find the more interesting side of her on Twitter @JessicaTsa_g.

Empty, except for

By: Alice Watkinson

your laugh like a scream in a chapel the smoke that haunts you
the black tea in the pit of your belly your rum-kissed teeth
the way you scoff at la la land the clothes you sewed yourself
your missed calls at midnight your unpierced ears
the bleeding blue and orange and purple on your arms that grey ring
your death glare your broken tote bag
the way the air cracks around you and flattens when you leave
my frozen jaw my dormant chest
the chasm you leave between my ribs

The shade relies on the sun for definition
so charge me, lest I fade.
My outline only cements when you tap your ink
and your color
completes me.

About the Author:

Alice is an 18-year-old student from the UK. After reading so much poetry during quarantine (particularly Frank O'Hara), she started writing her own, and hasn't stopped since!



The Lights You Leave On

By: Letitia Payne

“Burnham, here we go.” She speaks on a long exhale, not bothering to bite back the relief spilling over the dashboard. It had been a long drive up to the coast. Small talk tried to slice at the silence that filled the car. You sit there for a while, scarf wound tightly against your neck, hat pulled down over your brow. A warm glow settles across the harbor, bleeding through the pale clouds above. The marshes stretch well into the horizon. You still don’t reach for the door, all you think of is the room, the blu-tack-stained magnolia and the rough navy carpet between your toes.

“It’s really pretty.”

She shifts in the driver’s seat to look at you. You wonder if the hat can stretch any further over your face. She pauses for a moment; you feel her searching for something. Then she turns and swings the door open. Her boots grind against the gravel of the car park.

“Better get a move on if you actually want to see it then,” she says, pulling on her gloves. The sharpness of the cold air hits you as you slowly open your door. You smell the salt, hear the sand crunching amongst the gravel beneath your feet.

Salt grazes your tongue in the open air. Every few steps you buckle into some shallow rabbit hole burrowed in the beach. You listen to the sea lapping against the shore, occasionally underscored by the desperate whistle of a concerned dog walker.

It feels like you’ve both been walking along the twisting trench in the sand for hours. You can no longer see the harbor car park. Tall dunes freckled with dry grass rise from the shoreline. There’s something familiar about it that draws you closer, up the fickle sand, grasping at the grass to pull you up. When you reach the summit of the dune, you finally see the silver stretch of sea that you could hear from the path below. You don’t remember the last time you were so close that you could smell it. You’d always tried to replicate it in the *Ocean Breeze* candles that sat upon every surface of your living room. He hated it when you lit candles in the room. A fire hazard he said, *just open a fucking win—*

“I guess here’s as good a spot as any.”

You hadn’t noticed her follow you up the dune. “You actually want me to do it?”

“Yes, I really do.” She says as she rubs her gloved hands together; her eyes stinging from the cold. The gleam of the mid-afternoon sun lights up her face.

You face out to the sea. The breeze licks at your cheeks, raw and crimson against the late winter’s edge. *Begin now, close your eyes.* You take your trembling hands out of the warm comfort of your coat pockets. She grows still behind you; you no longer hear the shuffling of her boots in the sand. *Count to ten.*

One

When you think of him, you think of the room. *His* room. Like he can’t exist outside of it. There isn’t much to it apart from a bed in one corner and a sink crammed into the other; the staple of city student accommodation. The concept of a sink in a bedroom didn’t sit well with you at first, but it means you don’t have to leave as often. Whenever the time comes to venture out, you sit and listen for the sound of the fire doors creaking in the corridor outside, for any signs of life that need to be avoided.

You’re a ghost in those halls, nothing more than a light left on in the kitchen or a strand of long dark hair clinging to the shower drain. You wonder if the other students living there think of you much. Maybe they hang around behind their doors when they hear you in the hall, scrambling to catch a glimpse through the peephole.

Two

“How did you guys meet?”

Tinder, really. Hours upon hours spent illuminating the lock screen on your phone hoping to see that tiny red notification pop up. You tell him you hate texting, that you prefer just really talking to someone. It’s bullshit, much like the story you both tell people about how you met.

“Well, he served me in the restaurant a couple of times and—”

“I knew I had to talk to her.”

Three

You’ll have to clear your thoughts, she says. That’s the problem with

trying not to think about things, they inevitably take over regardless. It's not like you have much faith in this, anyway. But she's persuasive.

"Just once, please," The buzz of the cafe settled over you like a haze. "Let it out, I think it could be really liberating for you."

"I don't need to be liberated."

She sucked in her bottom lip as she set the mug down on the table. "I thought you were breaking up with him."

Four

You're in the library, the one with the glass walls and the quiet room at the very top. It's up three flights of stairs. Behind the glass, all you can hear is the tapping of fingers across keyboards and the occasional strained exhale.

As the doors open, the commotion of deadlines and talk of the weekend's antics briefly bleed into the room before they swing shut again. She bursts in. In her arms she cradles a pile of large hardback books. As her feet pad along the carpet, a few students look up from their screens, soaking up the brief relief which accompanies any distraction. She lets the books collapse onto the table in front of you.

"Shhhh—don't *do* that." Your voice is little more than a hiss; heat rushes to your cheeks as she mouths a few words of apology to a couple of shaking heads. You're glaring at her, but she's beaming. She pulls out the rough plastic seat opposite you and plops herself down before eagerly spacing out each heavy hardback in front of her on the table.

"I know what I'm going to do for the performance art module." She leans in on her elbows, her eyes wide and expecting. "I'm going to do something inspired by Marina Abramović."

"The Russian artist?"

"She's Serbian, actually," she rolls her eyes at the handful of students that are still looking over, a few tapping their pens impatiently on the tabletops. "I've definitely cracked it this time," she says, flicking through glossy photographs of a couple screaming in each other's faces.

You pull the book from under her hands and slide it over to your side of the table. The woman's eyes are dark and lined, bursting in release.

Five

He's light-footed. You lie there on his bed listening to that fickle rhythm of doors swinging open and shut in the hallway outside, waiting. You always know when it's him and not one of the other students. The sound of the door

clicking into its frame feels lighter, more delicate.

His footsteps brush along the rough carpet outside and your breath stills. Light spills into the room and all the hours spent listening, waiting motionless on his stale bed sheets wash away. You haven't been back to your own flat in days.

Six

You stand in front of the mirror and watch purple bleed through your skin like a stain.

This isn't me.

This isn't—

"Why did you do it?" Your voice sounds like a crumpled paper cut-out of yourself.

You hear him click his tongue through the speaker. Your forehead rests on the edge of a door frame as you whisper into the phone.

"Why?" You push once more.

"Because I wanted to."

You want to hang up and shatter like glass all over the carpet.

You don't.

Seven

The bustle of the library has long died out. Sitting alone in one of the glass-paneled booths at the far end of the room, you listen to the soft hum of the cleaner Hoovering the floor below. Your laptop lays open on the table. The booth smells faintly of the cheese and onion crisps that are sprawled across the floor beneath you, the ones you never bothered to pick up.

The hum of the vacuum grows louder. Everything else shifts out of focus. You never hear her coming.

"Hey." The sound of the vacuum dies. She's cautious but makes you jump nonetheless.

"What are you doing here?"

She looks around, eyeing the carpet speckled with crisps and the phone that lay on the other end of the table. You begin to tug at the seams of your cardigan sleeve.

"Your phone was off. I got worried."

"I'm sorry." The nauseating stirrings of guilt kick in like a reflex.

"Is he calling you again?" She already knows the answer, it's why she's come. You've poked a hole through the knit of your sleeve. She pulls out the

chair next to you.

“I’m taking you home.” Her foot crunches a few crisps beneath it as she sits down. “Then tomorrow we’re going for a drive and you’re going to do it.”

Eight

“It’s controlling.” You can’t say it whilst looking at him. There’s a chill in the restaurant; it knits your bones together as you make yourself smaller, small enough that you could just slip off the chair, disappear into the cool linoleum of the floor. He’s shaking, but the cold hasn’t touched him yet.

“No one’s ever called me that before.” It’s mumbled quietly to the table, not to you.

“I didn’t call you anything. I’m just—”

You break off as you spot the waiter approaching. It’s a sharp intake, a forced tug at the corners of your mouth as you try to be convincing. He sits next to you in silence.

“What can I get for you?” The waiter barely manages to get the tune out before the chair next to you drags against the floor. He walks out, you don’t call after him.

“Just a flat white will be fine.” The waiter fades into the blur the restaurant has become, you appreciate that he didn’t try to ask. You sit there until your coffee grows cold, waiting to hear the buzz of your phone against the tabletop.

Nine

The air is thick, coating everything under the sticky layer of heat. Lights flashing a whole kaleidoscope across his skin. He reaches for you as the music pounds in the space between. The sea of moving bodies pressing against you both. His hands on your face, you feel it then.

Safe.

Ten

The scream comes from somewhere you don’t recognize. It’s deep, coarse, and violently scratches at your throat, clawing its way out. The whistles of the dog walker’s silence. The sea stills. You see her, the woman in the photo of the heavy hardback, as the scream tears through her too. The sound of it ripples and beats against the rocks of the shore.

It spills down the hall and seeps in beneath the weight of the fire door.

A deep purple stain on the carpet. You hear the strain of doors swinging open and shut under the harsh wind, the soft crunch of boots sinking into the sand. The scream cracks into a sharp guttural sound; it grates at your skin as it leaves. Someone is reaching for you, through the kaleidoscope of flickering lights and air sodden with sweat. Her hand rests firmly on your shoulder.

You open your eyes.

“Jesus, that was a big one,” she says. A blush pricks at your cheeks as the shore recovers its peace. You try to breathe, but it sits stubbornly in your chest.

“I don’t know how to leave.”

You think of your hair lingering in the drain, the lights you leave on in the kitchen. This is what you have. The prints you leave in the sand.

Her grip on your shoulder softens. “But you will.”

About the Author:

Letitia Payne is an emerging writer based in Norwich, UK. Her debut story *Bury The Box* was published last summer with Bandit Fiction. Letitia and her overbearing love for cats can be found on Twitter at @letitiarpayne.

the stranger in the mirror

By: Rachelle Wong

one day i'd like to meet the stranger i see in the mirror:

she seems kind enough and walks with perfect posture, poised proudly. she imagines she owns the earth, and she sings as though she drank in the sunlight and merely wants to share the warmth with everyone else. her tinkling laughter harmonizes the howling wind and fades as it is carried away, the same way she dreams upon a dandelion seed so that it straddles a wish as it floats up to the stars. she helps others carry their burdens on their backs, even though her own is weighing her down and only seems to get heavier. so she acts strong, refusing to let others see her falter, because she's convinced that with enough lifting she'll grow even stronger. she forgets that rest is necessary, weathering dark circles around her eyes, and wonders why her limbs feel limp and weary.

this is the same stranger others have grown to know, accepted as a person and not a monster. but to me, the stranger in the mirror is a hollow shell: empty, robotic, and lacking a soul:

my heart throbs with a pulse but not a beat. it feels the pains of running for 14 years and never given a chance to stop. it longs to process the dusty pile of emotions, covered in cobwebs, smelling of mothballs, and yet no care is turned towards them. my mind is a complicated space, an office lacking organization. several years without proper leadership have caused a lack of ability for it to work beyond its regular routine. finally there is my soul, always missing-in-action, gone since day one. it embarked on the adventure of a lifetime, gleaning for parts of me, glass gleaming amidst the gloom. each is a part of a beautiful puzzle, slowly built up with time. but it has yet to return, and until then i remain incomplete.

the stranger in the mirror acts in familiar ways, yet she often ignore my presence, for she knows not how to function with me inside her:

she pretends as though she's not being puppeted by her circumstances. she acts as though i can't spy her solar-powered smile and remote-controlled self-esteem. her song has been recorded, remixed, and remade, and for years

no one found out. she's listened to it enough times so she's started to believe it as true, but something still nags at her: she feels no one will ever hear her true voice, coarse and rough, weathered from lack of use. mama once told her that practice makes perfect, so for four years she's been practicing her laughter, the chime of bells though she feels more like she's trembling against another part of herself, a shaken vibration. she walks as though she's afraid of hurting the cracked sidewalk—she, too, is cracked, and despises those who tread over her fault lines. she's heard that the world's a stage, so she must be an actress with the role of a villain. she shields herself from the hurt and heartache, so every glimmer of beauty that drops to the ground reminds her that she has failed to catch yet another sliver of happiness. this drops her spirits, but her fists are clenched in fear, and how is she to receive beauty if she refuses to receive pain; if she does not walk with open hands?

i've heard we bear striking similarities, but the only similarity that strikes me are her eyes, for eyes are the window to her soul, yet it is more of a mirror to mine.

About the Author:

Rachelle is a writer from California, and she's in love with expressing beauty around her through words. She can often be found reading a historical fiction novel while watching the sunset, practicing classical and jazz piano, and playing with her dog in her free time. Her work has also been published or forthcoming in Ice Lolly Review and Cathartic Lit.



Ghost

Elwing Gao

2250 × 1500 px

Block Printing Ink, Acrylic, Adobe Photoshop

The Knights of Forever

By: Stella Xia



The princess arrives at the sunny meadow kicking and screaming, flanked by two palace guards who have long abandoned all courtesy in order to restrain her.

“I won’t do it! *I won’t!* You can’t make me!”

As it turns out, they can, and quite easily—horses are much faster than a damsel in distress’s attempt to chase them. She slinks back, head down, hair full of twigs, oversized sundress cut up in a million different places. Swinging open the creaky wooden door at the base of her tower, she drags thistle-stung feet up the stairs. Silence in the forest is soon restored.

Well, save for the occasional wail from the princess’s quarters.

Thus, the dragon’s term begins. What a fair punishment on the surface! Only a few decades out of infinity to compensate for the few decades the burnt-to-a-crisp shepherd would never see. Plus, the sheep were delicious, the first proper meal he’d had in days.

The finest craftsmen in the kingdom fashioned his chains: its two pressure points meant that the only key in the universe that can unfasten the titanium padlock on his chest is the human touch, his only chance of salvation the very people who imprisoned him.

It is written into tales older than time that the dragon is to watch, the princess is to wait, and the knight is to rescue with shining armor and chivalrous ambition. When Prince Charming slays the beast and rescues his true love from her loneliness, she’ll stay forever indebted to her husband, preserving the divine order that maintains social balance. And then, long after she is whisked away, the beast’s wounds will close, his captors will grant him freedom, and he may once again take to the skies and let the wind’s caress float him under the stars.

Five years pass without incident. The dragon distracts himself from his atrophying wings by watching her as she harvests tobacco to smoke, sharpens sticks for a growing pile of unbloodied spears, and counts—under her breath while cloud-gazing, too quiet to make out whether she’s going up or down.

Another three. The number of days between each attempt to escape lengthen; her sundress changes from the color of daffodils to that of mud. At the dragon’s mild amusement, she starts eating grass instead of foraging for mushrooms.

Then, at long last, something that isn’t a rodent stirs in the bushes. At the edge of the clearing stands a young knight—his eyes full of naive ambition, his chest plate fresh from the forge. Blue eyes and sideswept hair epitomize the happy ending. Behind him, the princess squeals from her tower, pointing frantically at the dragon as if he isn’t already ambling toward the boy, ready for this to be over already. Without a moment’s hesitation, the knight charges into battle.

Time slows as he approaches, a war cry rising in his throat. He swings his sword, and sunlight

refracts *through* the metal into a million different colors, like diamond, like—

Dragonsteel.

Oh, no. No no no—that's not part of the deal. If that blade punctures him, he will bleed out in the field, arcane healing prevented by the poisonous properties of the alloy. He won't live to see freedom. But that could only mean...

How could I have missed it?

Of course. The kingdom never planned to fulfill their end of the bargain.

He closes his eyes and spears out a claw. A gurgle and the knight slows; the sword flying out of his hand and landing a few meters away. He manages a look of disbelief before his knees give out and he collapses, pretty blue eyes going dull.

The princess chokes on the victory cry that unexpectedly shatters in her throat, perhaps noticing for the first time that the dragon is an entity capable of making decisions. He swivels his head, gaze level with hers as she plants both feet onto the window ledge. Her entire body quivers. They both know that there will not be another knight; both make the simultaneous realization that tower and clearing and loneliness is all they will have, forever. The hope that acted as helium on his shackles floats away, the extra weight of them already carving fiery grooves into his flesh. Blurring the line between scales and metal until he becomes just another skeleton, barely six feet above all the others. He lets his last bit of hope drain away, respectfully parting ways with both past and future.

“Three million seven hundred sixty-six thousand four hundred eleven.” On the ledge, her voice is clear. The dragon understands—she can count for months, years, even. But there is no quantifying forever.

She takes a last look behind her at her room. Three breaths—two shaky and one sure, followed by tears that race their way off her face to test the plunge first. The dragon tracks the drops until they land in the grass, each as noiseless as a body.

Eyes screwed shut, she strides into thin air.

Her too-long sleeves flap upwards as she falls, projecting shadows of wings onto the tower wall. It dawns on the dragon what is happening, and he has a sudden desire to harm her, too—how is it fair that she gets to opt out, to fly, an angel transcending the material world? How could she leave him here shackled to immortality, doomed to hope for a someday that will never come?

Perhaps he made a mistake. Perhaps death is the better of two evils.

Again, he flexes his claw. It snags onto the back of a dress that never fit, stopping the princess mid-plummet. She makes a strangled noise and grasps at her neck, realizing she is too close to the ground now to properly reach her destination. Fear and hate blaze in hazel eyes.

The dragon lets her down. Her legs give out. For fifteen minutes, she stays crumpled, sobbing eight years' worth of anguish into the grass.

Then, she stands. Each movement proves an astronomical effort.

“You,” she seethes.

She beelines for the sword. She is holding it all wrong, her stride unsteady as it skews her body weight to the left. But there is nothing unsteady in the viciousness of her charge.

Again, he closes his eyes, waiting for someone to die.

Except this time, no one does.

Instead, he hears the dull thump of a sword as it clatters onto the ground. He feels warm, soft skin pressing gently into his chest. With a click, the chains slide off. He smells festered, infected skin where his confines dug into his wings. He dares to peek—the princess takes her blessedly opposable thumbs out of the keyhole, aligns her hazel with his midnight black, and speaks.

“Looks like we have no choice but to be our own knights, dragon.”

With this, she reaches down to her feet and rips her muddy dress cleanly up to the neckline so that it hangs on her skinny frame like a cape. Then, legs free, she vaults onto his back, her hands hugging his neck in a rider’s embrace.

“So. Can you fly?”

About the Author:

Stella Xia is a teen writer based in Mississauga, Ontario. When she's not getting lost on the Internet, you can find her frantically cramming for class, walking her dog, or trying to figure out a better way to express herself.



are we there yet?
Elwing Gao
1500 x 2200 px
Adobe Photoshop



About the Artists

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad:

Pieces:

Cafe beauties
Peeping blue
Basking in viridian
Afternoons in scarlet
Pink razzmatazz

About:

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad is a Sydney-based artist, poet, and pianist of Indian heritage. She holds a Masters in English and is a member of the North Shore Poetry Project. Her art and poetry have been widely published in both print and online literary journals and anthologies. Her recent artworks have been showcased in Kalopsia Lit, Star 82 Review, Otoliths, 3 AM Magazine, and The Amsterdam Quarterly, and featured on the covers of Pithead Chapel, Ang(st) the Body Zine, Periwinkle Literary, and elsewhere. She is a chief editor for Authora Australis.

Gabrielle Beck

Piece:

present haze

About:

Gabrielle Beck is a junior attending Tenafly High School. When she is not writing or photographing, she can be found repurposing vintage denim. She is a finalist for New York Times "Coming of Age in 2020: A Special Multimedia Contest for Teenagers," and awarded with a silver medal for photography in 2021 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, and National Council of Teachers of English Superior Writing Award.

Junseob Yoon

Piece:

Character of a Man

About:

Junseob Yoon is a high school student based in Seoul, interested in examining life and all things human through the arts. He loves to experiment with all sorts of media, ranging from oil painting to sculpture. In downtime, Junseob often gets lost in thought with questions such as "what is the meaning of life?" and "where is our place in the advent automated world?"



About the Issue:
Layout and Design by
Peter Donley

Cover Art:
"Perennial"
Elwing Gao
8.5 x 11 in
Marker, Gel Pen,
Adobe Photoshop

Staff Artist Biography:

Elwing Gao:

Elwing Gao is a 18-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.

Layout Designer Biography:

Peter Donley:

Peter Donley is a rising high school senior 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. You can find him on Instagram [@p_eterd](#).

