

THE MESSENGER



SPRING

2020

MEMORY



THE MESSENGER

About the Publication

The objective of The Messenger is to encourage the appreciation and exploration of the creative arts on the University of Richmond campus. Since 1876, The Messenger has celebrated student work by publishing submissions in a literary and visual arts magazine. More information on the magazine, as well as past publications since 1987, can be found on messengerur.wordpress.com.

Cover Art - Light in the Dark
Nichole Schiff

Acknowledgements

The Messenger staff would like to thank Dr. David Stevens for his continued support and guidance as our faculty sponsor. We are also grateful for the University of Richmond English department, who endlessly encourage students to write and submit their works, and the authors and artists who never fail to amaze us with their talent. Finally, we would like to thank our readers for their interest in our magazine. Without you all, we wouldn't have this publication.

Letter from the Editors

This year, our campus, country, and international community have faced unprecedented challenges in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. These difficulties have touched The Messenger in tangible ways, including the delay of our publication in print.

Therefore, this year, the Spring 2020 edition of The Messenger will be published online before the edition is printed later in the year. Despite the uncertainty we have faced over the last few months, we are so proud of our team for coming together over Zoom calls and GroupMe to produce a publication that we are truly proud of. We would also like to acknowledge the incredible contributors to our magazine, who submitted art, poetry, and prose pieces that impressed us, made us laugh, and prompted us to view the world in new and exciting ways.

Both of us joined The Messenger as staff members during our freshman year with no intentions of ever becoming Co-Editors-In-Chief. However, over the past four years, we have watched this staff and our publication grow in talent, skill, and creativity. No matter the circumstances, we know that the Spring 2020 edition will inspire profound reflection, and hopefully bring a smile to your face. Please share The Messenger with your friends and family, and congratulations to all on another successful publication.

Warmly,
Claire and Mitchell
Co-Editors-In-Chief



Tu Amoris Ignem

Casey Murano

MEMORY

**the act or fact of retaining and recalling impressions, facts, etc.
to draw from memory.**

--

*“I think it is all a matter of love:
the more you love a memory,
the stronger and stranger it is.”*

Vladimir Nabokov

Award Winners

The Margaret Haley Carpenter Award for Poetry

This award is presented to a student who has had an outstanding poem submitted for publication in The Messenger. The winner is chosen by a panel of English faculty members.

Other by Bridget Bodley, '20

Bridget Bodley is a senior at the University of Richmond studying Leadership and Biology from Baltimore, Maryland. A last minute decision to sign up for a creative writing class in the fall turned out to be perhaps one of the most surprising & best of her time at Richmond. She would like to thank her family & friends for their sincerity and encouragement along the way.

The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Creative Writing

This award is presented to a student who has had outstanding creative work submitted for publication in The Messenger. The winner is chosen by a panel of English faculty members.

The Eulogy by Gabby Kiser, '21

Gabby is a junior majoring in English and minoring in History. Winning the Margaret Owen Finck Award for "The Eulogy" means the world to her because the piece is about her great-grandmother, Hazel Scott, who helped to raise her. "She would be so excited!"

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Black Hole

Reda Ansar

There it goes,
there it goes,
here we go again.
Light is stolen
beaten, bruised and used so easily,
a blink of an eye and we're gone.
I have lived each turn on this earth,
only awaiting a glimpse of dawn
but a finite amount of light is no match
for an endless sea of gravity

I follow too closely to where it disappears -
Can you believe I once thought this was courage?

And I am one with galaxies,
or should I just call it naive
that despite the push and pull of it all,
no cosmic burst can make me leave
So I remain stuck where I am -
just a missing fragment of time
who revolves around the light so tightly
that she forgets the chaos lurking behind.
Thus I am not surprised,
to be pulled in once again,
Though I'll admit I had hoped,
that after eons of destruction
this last light was calling me home.
But there it goes,
there it goes,
here we go again.



Lost in Time and Space
Nichole Schiff

Sunlight

Liam Lassiter

The golden light of the celestial chariot illuminates the walls of the receding labyrinth in hues of blood. The young man's arms stretch outward, waxy and golden and glowing in the brilliant, bronzing light. The light he can finally reach, now that he and his father have taken wing. Like seraphs they rose through the skylight of their iron prison and left what was known behind for the freedom beyond.

He drowns in the blues of the sky. He had never seen so much blue, not through the little porthole that showed him what lay beyond where he was raised; his eyes ached from it. He's certain that his irises must have tinted to the same ethereal sapphire because of its constant eternity, it bleeds into the mediterranean ocean far, far beneath him, and growing further as his eyes swallow the sky.

"Recite to me the warnings again."

"Stay centered. Don't fly too low, nor too high..."

"Otherwise what will happen?"

"Too low the wax will be washed away by the sea. Too high and it will be melted by..."

The young man soars higher, drawn like a moth to an open flame. The sunny glaze across the hues of his gaze and the unblemished skin of his shoulders is emboldened by the wax affixed upon him like the mantle of sheets on a beloved sitting upright in bed. They uphold the artificial wings that he works up and down laboriously on his shoulders; they are the keys to freedom from his and his father's prison within the labyrinth, broad keys with bunting from bold, bronze bars. That's all that they are to the ancient artificer, merely the last creation he would ever need.

But to his son it holds a greater value; it is how he can finally reach the unreachable soul of his heart. Reach the one that visited his dreams when he'd lie upon the cold marble floors and stare through the hole to the sky in longing for more than what he immediately saw. The one that left gentle, sweetened whispers by the dark curls at the nape of his neck and warm breath across the bridge of his brow. The one who would stay until forced to leave by duty and laws of nature.

"I wish I could go with you."

"Maybe one day you can."

He can. He will. So he would. He soared upward with the twist of his arms in a zephyr. The wind howled through his hair and pulled a giddy smile across his face as his heart pulled him higher into the sky, guided to the heavens like a shooting star being hung by the hand of the gods. Faintly he can hear his father crying out to him.

“Icarus! You’re going too high! Come back! Icarus!”

Suddenly the heat builds. Then aches. Then burns. Then blisters. Rioting heat blooms in biting rashes across his shoulders and face and tears spring, a rough cry of agony erupts from his throat. But he can’t stop climbing, not

when all that he wants is this close!

He claws his way through the clouds, upward, only upward, the only way to go is upward, until he hears the sizzle and pop of metal on his shoulders. Golden feathers finagle loose and drop like drachmas.

His vision starts to grow dark as the burning mounts, his wings of flame searing into his very skeleton and ripping the cries of Artemis’ hunted from him. The moment of turbulent fear is masked by a sudden agonizing

ache in his chest. A pain that surpasses even that of his flayed skin under the heat of

the sun’s faraway rays. Aloof. Indifferent. Uncaring.

And tears that burn and sting

with the aching salt of

a breaking heart

fall with him.

Suddenly, hands

warm, powerful, and gentle

gripped him tightly and pulled him in.

He opened his eyes to behold the cause and was blinded

by a thousand shades of gold and blue and red swathes of paint, the very ones that visited him upon the marble floors of his and his father’s familiar prison. The tears recede as the pain subsides with the sweet caresses. Where fire once ignited his skin now lies the earthen stars of the sun’s kisses. Relief swells, and with a tender, familiar smile Icarus finds his hands cupping the heated guise of his savior as he lavishes him with

unadulterated praise. “I told you I would come, I told you!”

“You fool.” Apollo whispers with affection that rustles like the burning air, “You beautiful, beautiful fool.”

Poetry From “Consider the Twists”

Raven Baugh

i. began

The twists began with hope, vision, and love.

Maybe.

To reject, likely, is to favor a thing.

That’s more honest. For me, twisting, was a rejecting of straightened hair.

Straight hair, relaxing, was quite costly.

ii. freedom

Twists are freedoms like rights

To then define to other people

By force, twisting fine hair into small chains

Is it (maybe)

Worse to submit then convince the self: [submission]

Is the answer to my freedom?

iii. building

I am twisting,

I am building,

Left hand right strand,

Tension to the root,

gentle to the ends,

But I always pull—

Twist like the screw,

Right hand left strand,

So much more to do.

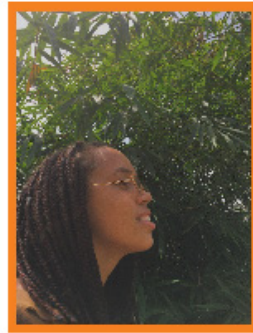
iv. together
I put the twists together,
I take them apart:
Plump, juicy, thick
Then
Mini, tight, rigid
Hands coated in leave-in
Mind tired but I don't want to go back to the start
Are either types really what I want?

v. free
The Twists are free
To be what I want them to
By force, I twist fine hair into small chains
Locked up, side by side, into one collective
The Twists
Is it their making–
Or their undoing–
That is the answer to my own freedom?



Greetings from Ghana: Portraits of Greats

Johnnette Johnson



Thundercloud

Reilly Geritz

My brother's eyes are nothing like the sun,
but rather reflect its glaring blue expanse.

Like vacant summer days transfigured by looming black clouds in the west,
as swiftly are his orbs obscured
by the rage within his chest.

His dignity shattered in shards on the floor,
his mother kneels among them with eyes that implore her boy
to put down the gun
listen to her
when she repeats
how his splintered heart
wrenches hers--but
today he isn't stronger than his swirling fears,
which goad his fists to punch the walls
as thunder roars we stay indoors,
for heaven forbid the neighbors saw
the butter knife on the top shelf
or his white palms against the window pane.

We're whisked up through the chimney
and off with the tornado,
but the sunshine outside
pays no mind to the hurricane's eyes
chained to a bed,
to a wrist,
to a future
they can't see for the torrent.

No, my brother's eyes are nothing like the son my parents wanted.



London Eye
Sarah Pencak

The Eulogy

Gabby Kiser

Birds chirped, cars drove behind the tall chain link fence, and I held her soft wrinkled hand in mine. It was the last day I would visit Hazel at the nursing home. I knew that then, but didn't want to admit it. We sat outside, even though she said she was worried it would snow. Like it did the other day, she told me.

Should I have told her it was August?

And what a beautiful August day it was. I wish she had realized. Hazel had always loved summer, had always hated winter. We stayed in the shade together that day, me in my t-shirt, her in her grandmother's cream-colored cardigan to keep her tissue paper skin warm.

One of the nurses held a small Bluetooth speaker in her lap. There was a thin, tired smile permanently set upon her lips, and no crinkles in the corners of those eyeliner-ringed eyes. The residents were requesting songs for her to find on her phone, their wheelchairs pulled up around her in a semi-circle. Someone kept asking for Elvis, and the day's slight breeze drove the music in the other direction. None of them would've heard anyways, I'm sure. Certainly not Hazel. She stared at an empty, lonesome bird feeder hanging by the window. She'd told me when I got there that she didn't know why she was outside.

The nursing home was quiet despite the music and laughter, the bird songs and car engines and squeaks from wheelchair wheels. It felt wrong. Everyone was holding their breath, even me. But I knew I had to remind Hazel that I was here, to say something to show how happy I was to see her again. The night before, I'd desperately reminded her of every memory I could think of. We went back and forth for at least an hour. Remember the toad in Lucille's cellar? Oh yes, yes. Remember the moldy cake? Huh? M-hmm, yes I do.

Why was she here if she could remember all these things? The present confused her, sure, but the past was always on her shoulders.

Sitting in that white plastic seat next to Hazel in her wheelchair, I thought of the cassettes that used to sit in the console of her old beige Toyota, the bluegrass and ballads I'd slide into the player on the way up to Teddy's Restaurant, or to her friends' houses, or to the cemetery where her name waited upon the stone wall. The only one I could see in my mind was

that “Candle in the Wind 1997” single with a white rose on the front. It was difficult to remember clearly, being suffocated by all the silence, yet memory was all that could get me through these visits. I was constantly grasping for something hidden by the sterility of the dementia ward.

“People are listening to cassettes again,” I said to Hazel, finally.

“What?” she asked, and we both leaned in closer to each other.

“You know that people are listening to cassettes again? They sell them at the record store.” Silence, again, but only for a moment.

“Huh. M-hmm. Things always come back ‘round. Always do.” She smacked her lips. “Always will, too.”

Elvis finished “How Great Thou Art,” and I opened my mouth to talk again, ask another question, say anything to keep the conversation going. I didn’t want to admit to myself how much I already knew her words would come to matter to me. In the back of my mind, I knew why they would. A tear rolled down Hazel’s cheek from the eye she couldn’t close anymore.

“Well, Hazel, what’s your favorite song?” I finally asked. I had to repeat the question a few times, slowly, carefully, and watched as she thought. It was like holding my hand under shower water in the morning, feeling it warm up slowly, so slowly.

“Well, Beulah Land,” she finally said, as if I should have known. “Beulah Land, m-hmm.”

“Beulah Land?” I repeated for the nurse to hear. After searching for it on her phone, she put someone’s rendition of the song on. Of course, Hazel didn’t hear. She stared at the bird feeder again. My eyes landed on her hand in mine. Silence.

I’d like to think that Beulah Land played in her head so it could keep her company. I had to leave her again, and she knew that. It loomed over every visit. I still wonder if she knew it was the last time she’d watch my back through the doorway like I knew it was the last time I would see her waving when I looked over my shoulder. Except, for this final sad goodbye of ours, when I looked back, she only stared ahead. Her wheelchair faced the other direction.

The plastic straw in my Sprite bottle hopped up and down as I bounded behind her. The two of us were pushing up the hill behind her little one-story brick house. She’d built that house with her husband, Teenie, adding on rooms through the decades. Not one item had ever

been thrown out from it, I'm sure. I'd realize that years later when I was one of the few who volunteered to clean it out.

She was hunched forward, whistling her airy whistle, those slippered feet of hers rustling the high and dry grass. When she wasn't whistling, she was breathing heavily. It was the same when she washed her dishes in scorching water, or glided over the pea-green carpets of her house. Eighty or so years wear on a human. It was just eighty years then.

"Now, I own this land," she said to me as she shuffled up to the top. "It use' to be my mommy's. My grandmommy's." She was talking to herself, mostly, with a concentrated look like she was reestablishing the truth of it, pulling it from the depths of her mind and back into existence. I knew that the old house next to hers, the black one with the roof falling in and the tall grass and that rusty bus bench on the porch, had belonged to her family. I'd never met her mother, I don't think, but I'd heard she laughed so much she had to wear Depends early. Laughter runs in the family. Hazel called it "gettin' tickled."

We followed a wire fence that marked the end of Hazel's land up toward the trees, and she waited back to take my hand. Then we walked in silence through the woods. Her, with a direction. Me, trailing behind, always led by that resilient life force she carried.

"This was the ol' cemetery," she told me. Her 'was' sounded like 'wars,' 'wash' like 'warsh' thanks to her Appalachian accent, one that's hard for me to do justice in print. My own pops out when I say 'drawing' sometimes; now that I've moved away, I try to bury it.

"This was the ol' cemetery. My little-- little girl was buried here, she was." Hazel was still a bit out of breath, but didn't take my drink when I held it out for her.

Myralyn Shayne was her name. She'd died just a month after she was born. I saw the date when I flipped through Hazel's meticulously-kept calendars. It was a few days after my birthday in March. Hazel sometimes took me to clean Shayne's headstone at the new cemetery, at the top of a narrow, meandering road in a neighboring county. We would carefully wash dirt off of the little stone lamb with floral-patterned rags and a bucket of soapy water. Hazel whistled as she did it, and the mountain winds carried the song to Teenie in the mausoleum behind our hunched backs.

She kept looking at the empty plot, rounded by its own leaning wire fence. With my lack of imagination, I couldn't imagine that anything of interest had ever been there. I couldn't

understand what it had meant to her, climbing this same hill years and years ago to bury that tiny, expensive coffin, a tiny, expensive coffin that was dug up and moved from the edge of her land for someone else's convenience.

"I wanna go," I mumbled after a while, and we both turned and left for the house, hand in hand. She led the way again, as always, but didn't whistle.

I sipped at my coffee in its cracked, flowery mug, eyes on the TV as Hazel and I sat alone in the den. Everyone else was always in a rush to leave her house. They all went out to eat that morning, so Hazel and I made microwave bacon and buttery scrambled eggs on our own. She whistled under the loud voices of the local news. Her hearing was getting bad. I could tell when we talked on the phone. Sometimes I worried to talk to her for fear that I couldn't be loud or clear enough, but I also knew in the back of my mind that she could figure it out. She'd always ask if I needed anything, and knew that I'd tell her no. She'd tell me how proud she was of me, and knew I would be thanking her. It was a script. Those phone calls, as much as I cherished them, all became the same. But when I finally came to visit, she'd stay quiet and smile, rocking back and forth in that fuzzy brown rocking chair of hers and watching her temporarily full house.

"You know I see you sometimes?" she asked when she set her own flowery mug of decaf down on a cork coaster.

Unable to hear over the TV, I leaned in closer to her. "Huh?"

"You know I see you? When you're back home." Her words came out slow.

In my mind, I could see the familiar image of Hazel standing on her porch, waving as I rode away. As we rode away, all of us. It happened every time, and I was the only one that looked back.

"Oh really?" I asked over the commercials. Last time, she'd cried. I get so lonely, she'd said. On the way home, I'd stared out the window in silence, brown eyes burning and pale cheeks dry.

"You're always sittin' on that couch, lookin' out that there window. With that little dog of yours. M-hmm." I looked at the tangerine couch, at the frilled cream curtains behind it. My dog was laying across the Noah's Ark afghan draped across its back, watching through the blinds at the cows across the crick out front. That was the couch Hazel slept on when we all visited so

that we could sleep in her three well-made beds. It was the couch I used to hunker down on as I played bomb shelter, blinds drawn and TV off. The couch I always waited on as everyone packed their bags to go again, knee jumping with nerves as Hazel watched me. The couch that, today, sits in a storage unit with my name on it.

I smiled at her, laughed a little. An understanding laugh to normalize her words. But I didn't understand.

What should I have said?

"I get to missin' you all, I really do," she added. I saw her lips move under the Medicaid commercial even though I heard nothing. Even if I hadn't seen them, I'd have known what she said. I guess we both had that sense.

I'd always dreaded going back home, but now I didn't ever want to leave her again. I never wanted to leave this house. It was the closest thing to home I ever knew. But I had to go. It wasn't my choice.

That day was the first time that I worried about last times. It was one of the hardest goodbyes I've known.

- - -

"I'll come back to see you." A promise that couldn't be kept forever.

A couple of months later, Hazel moved on to better things. Whether you believe in heavenly flight like she did or you see the end as some well-deserved relief from being so old and so alone, I do know that she is in a better place. It would be selfish of me to wish she'd been here longer. I only wish I had been there for a more proper goodbye before she left. But does grief accept any last time as proper?

I'll always feel guilt for not being there. Until the very end, though, I hope she saw me sitting by her like I had come back to say goodbye, a schnauzer in my lap and a chipped coffee mug in my hand.

If only I'd been able to see her again before it actually got cold out, if only I'd filled that bird feeder for her so that she could watch the birds. If only they'd fixed the phone in her room like I'd asked them to, even though she couldn't hear what came through the receiver.

I didn't get to give a eulogy. After the first two, the funeral directors motioned the musicians back to the microphone to sing a familiar funeral song. I sat back down in the front-row pew, eyes fixed on that quilt over the gray casket. Hazel had made the quilt herself, wore it over her legs the last night we talked. Green, orange, red, pink, white. At first, it struck me as out of place on a casket. But maybe the color was her life force, bringing out all the vitality in her art. Maybe it could keep her warm in that frigid stone box. That's just the sentimentalist in me, I guess. After the service, they folded Hazel's quilt up and handed it back to her family, just like they handed back the dress she'd wanted to be buried in. It'll show her bruises, they said.

That concludes this evening's service. Drive safe, and we thank you for celebrating this life with us.

And I drove back home with those words echoing in my head, those winding mountain roads she used to follow with ease leading me to the interstate. For once, I kept the radio off. A homesick feeling settled in my chest as I fumbled for my keys at the door. Once I locked it behind me, I threw the quilt she'd made for me years ago over my comforter, put a picture of us by my plants, took a sip of coffee, and started typing.

Things come back around, yes. They always do. Always will, too. In their own way, they do. *Beulah Land, I'm longing for you.*



Tree Fort
Charles Mullis

Shovel

Raven Baugh

Lovely little
Ditch digger
Scraping at the concrete

Edges dulling down
Red rashing from the rain
Body flaking and shaking
Yet continuing to last

It's a shame
Your quivering
And last week you were so
Glad
To be head first in the mud
Socket popping off your shaft

I gripped you tightly
Your frayed metal digging at my
hands
Then shoved your round tip back
down
Down in the ground

It has been hours in the sky's shower
And I've lost my mind
So I'm filing you
Then hiding you
Before your cutting blade
pierces through my shame

Edges dulled down
Red rash from the rain
Body flaked and shaken

When I think about it,
I guess I'm kinda sorry,
I never loved you a day.

1+1 is 3

Amara Nwangwu

For the past few years $1 + 1$ has always been 2, but I write to you today to let you know that there has been a sudden change, and $1 + 1$ is now 3. Before you furrow your brows and dismiss me, please read this letter in its entirety. Every time I lay with you, you prove to me that the answer to this question is 2, and that no other answer would ever work. But 1 night about eight weeks ago our calculations were off, and now the answer is 3. I fear to tell you in person, because I know that you have a wife and that with her the answer becomes 4, and then when you add in your son it becomes 5. My love, you need not worry about them, because they were never in our equation to begin with. You have shown me that our love can only exist between the 2 of us, but I really think that this thing we created together can share in our love as well. I understand however, that this is not what you wanted, so if you want, I can take it somewhere.

And $1 + 1$ can be 2 again.

-With Love, V



Lost in a Dream
Caroline Bisese

Notebook

Liam Lassiter

A blank page

Pressure is mounting

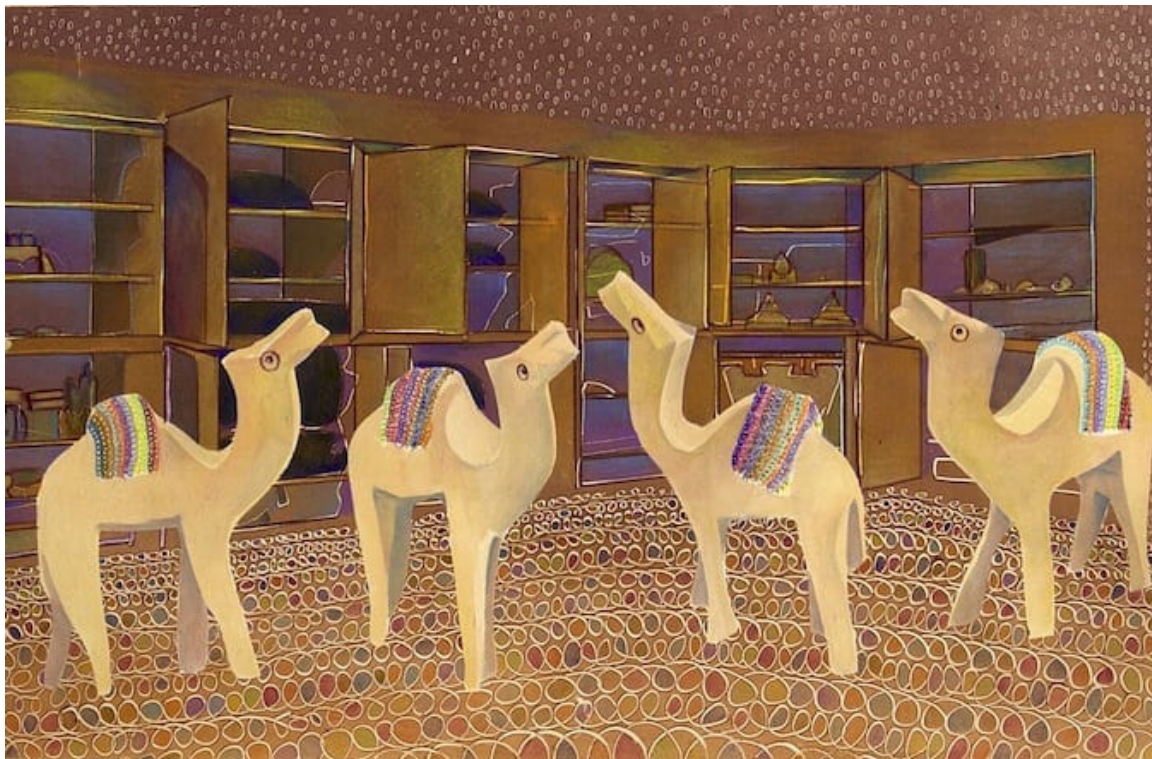
It's time to seize the reins

It sees but cannot be seen until its skin
is inked and pockmarked, filled with mistakes
But they're only perceived by the melted pool of firing stars
trapped behind blind, stubborn discs that yield for no one but those on pedestals
Paralyzed in search of meaning to be assigned to a phrase
Throwing out metaphors until something stays
Perhaps something about snow and boots

Mosaics and puzzle pieces

Anything that isn't

A blank page



Weaving of our Stories

Casey Murano

Objection

Metasebia Tessema

You're standing there,
clueless to my turmoil.

Your heart open,
your face straight.

I walk towards you, contemplating. People stare at me as I walk down the aisle. You stare as well. You smile. I smile back, my heart aching. You seem so happy. I wish I felt the same. I have to put these thoughts aside, before I drown in them. I think back to how we first met. I was bored, and you were there. You wormed your way into my heart, and I let you. I love you, and you loved me too. But our love was different. Your hour of happiness, my hour of gloom.

Here in this sacred place,

I stand to the side reeking of sin.

Running my fingers through my pink dress,
I watch your face glow as your bride walks in.

Socks

Reilly Geritz

Through harshly-lit hallways with cold linoleum tiles,
In bare rooms empty but for monochrome couches,
Past the doorways that restrain my neighbors' mutterings,
I pad languidly
With dulled eyes scanning listlessly
For just *one* sunbeam—
From a place where
Sweatshirts had strings
Mattresses had sheets
Roommates had smiles
And socks could make ice skaters
out of my sister and me.

The “regulars” tell me we’re safer here
Than in a place that allows slipping—
But I don’t feel any safer
In a box with the thoughts that got me here.

The one thing they gave us
Is socks that stick to this earth
In the hopes
That we will
Too.

Internalized

Liam Lassiter

I forgive when I'm ready
I forgive when I'm not
I've forgiven the curling knots of boiled peanuts
Before the broken eddy.

I forgive the salt that burns open wounds
I forgive the knife of rules
That rips my reality and preserves
That this is what's normal, "*this is what you deserve*"

I forgive those who don't deserve it
I forgive those who didn't conserve it
I need to forgive those who preserve it
Even if it means that I must submit
It's about finding a voice

"Forgive the horse for its neigh
Forgive the dog for its bark"
I forgive the innate and the frayed
Edges of morality that cling in the dark
It's about the choice

But it's easy to forgive the outside
It's harder to forgive what's inside
These pains fraught by hardships made
By those who forge habits to be ingrained

The blacksmith strikes until it's twisted
Lips that tremble as the metal bends
I cool the iron with my panic enlisted
Before the edge of past trauma rends

"*Then forgive yourself:*" you say
As if it is one process, one's right
How can I forgive myself to this day
When the darkness that strangles the light
Bears my name?

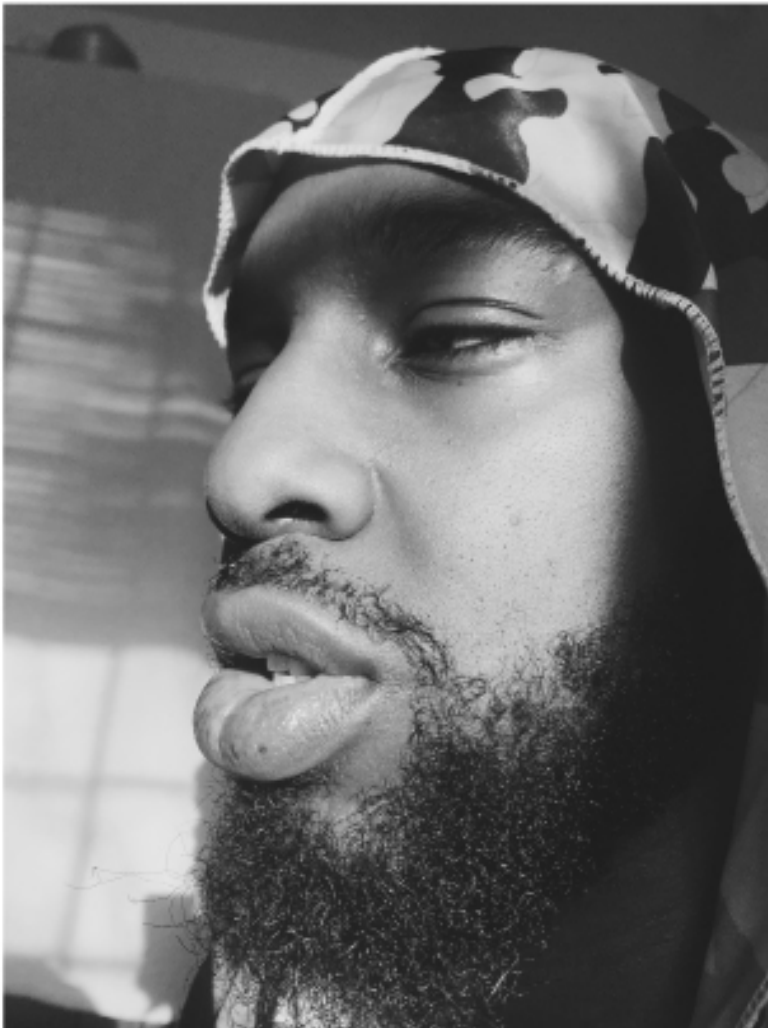


Warmth of Royann 35mm

Jess Chiotelis

CONTEMPLATION

Johnnette Johnson



The Rats of the paris opera house

Megan Brooks

scutter across the stage floors
limbs -longed and gawky :
a *petis de la rats*. Stage
rats infesting the opera in
a masquerade hidden under blue
tulle. Rats with pointed shoes
shaped like the speared snouted
head which sprouted ribbons that
twirled outward like the wispy
whiskers and scaled tails of
unwanted pests. Lurking

beyond the wings in shadowy
nests stalk men of every shape
and size in sexual unrest ; hands
quiver in clamoring -capturing
the veracity of the real unwanted
guests. The ballet's notes singe
signaling the end and the begin
ning of the interlude and secret
private minglings of

the Pas de deux: a step of two
dancing together as if in mutual
creation. A supple back is arced
over in forced submission: the bend
ing of a *plié* -a tutu tulle pirouettes
out in plummets -pillowing softly
around knobby knees -falling over
pale skin till it spills around ankles
- sitting blue in the wings -patient
in fearful waiting - the exchange

of monetary pleasure. Bodies
knocking into one another in begin
-ers frustration - the tip - tap -
touch of toes pointing down
ward - raising the head up
haloed in the stage lights
the last sense of innocence
crowned around the young girls
head faded into blackness as
the lights dimmed and the curtains
closed in the paris brothel house
Foyer de la danse : a night at the ballet



La Ville de Paris

Nathan Burns

Indigo

Bridget Bodley

When the sky turns indigo, just before the cicada's midnight lament, long past the apricot colored hours, I feel the indigo on me.

I walk outside to show her. The sky. I plead with each creak in the floorboards the whole way there. Exhale as my hand meets the door's hinge. Inhale the acrid scent of the marsh water. My sour friend fills me up and pulls me in.

I wade into Georgica Pond, where she and I can meet. Removing my mud-colored, mud-covered dress, I show the sky the places we match. Just above my left rib and just past where my hairline begins and all along, all along my abdomen.

Her gaze meets my indigo skin and becomes the first to see every last bit of it. My blackened, blueing rimmed and tinged bruising. So many, and all of them mine.

The muck creeps up my ankles, whistles up my spine. The pond water passes the blemishes on my calves. It races by the yellowing marks on my thighs from yesterdays. Washing my scars, licking my wounds.

Relief and redemption wash over me. Climb upon me. Press within me. And I trudge deeper and deeper into the pool. My own brackish baptism.

The sky's moon sheds its tears for me and I count them in constellations. I haven't learned past eleven yet. Pa was teaching me, but I haven't learned past eleven yet. So I just start over again for the sky. Nine, ten, eleven, and again. And then I start to count the bruises. The sky asked me to. Nine, ten, eleven, and again. I haven't learned past eleven yet, but I counted eleven at least twice.

Dawn beckons before long, so I reach for my soaked smock to cover myself up. The indigo sky is fading and I can't bear the color alone.

The Diary of a Worm

Conner Evans

We were assigned to watch comedy. A Doug Stanhope special, which concluded our college freshman English gen-ed. We lingered in the basement of the library after the raunchy laughs were over and the credits rolled. It would likely be the last class my business school friend and I would have together.

I'd been having nightmares about Thomas. He was a beautiful soul. Sitting next to me, he moved his dark curly hair away from his eyes and closer to his ears. He let it grow out during the semester, because the only barber he trusted was back home in Sutter Creek, California. He hadn't shaved in five days and it was just showing, revealing his mother's Asian heritage under his father's Irish schnozz.

I watched him let his plaid green flannel fall off his shoulders. It's his most natural Thomas outfit, revealing a graphic tee underneath that he'd designed himself. The designs always referenced things you'd have to be in on. John Carpenter films, Kurt Russell costumes, Ron Funches jokes, Kinks albums. The goal was never to make an auspicious connection through the shirt or to boast, but to fill Thomas with the spirit of creativity, to wear his art and influence. But if you ever ask him about it, he wouldn't even go that far. He'd tell you it's just something he could do in his free time and that he's lucky to have a screen printer at home.

He's doughy without the flannel in a boyish way, still only 18. He won't be old enough to drink until he's preparing to graduate. And yet, there's a sturdiness in him, and deep roots. There's a self-assurance that he inhabits that the icons on his shirts can only act on screen. A boy on the cusp of manhood who knows what he doesn't know.

He looks over at me and asks if I want to play cards to kill time. We play Speed. When he deals, I notice his nails have grown out too far, like they often do. He'll clip them when he gets a chance, but I always feel concerned. I clip mine nearly once a week.

We play a few rounds, and I'm losing uncharacteristically. I'm usually a half-step quicker, but I almost don't want him to lose. I keep the games close. I force a half-smile at his victories.

He leaves for the bathroom, and I start to breathe shallower. I'm back inside my head. I'm imagining the nightmares from the nights before. As I've gotten closer to Thomas, I've become more terrified for him. Am I doing enough? Can I save him?

He's the first boy I'd ever grown close to who'd never been to church. Never with a friend after a Saturday night sleep-over, never on Easter or Christmas. Never forced to by his parents or encouraged by his country.

I'm running into this problem more in college. I once asked another friend who he thought Jesus was, a question that youth leaders told me helps break the ice on the mammoth

questions to follow. He smiled awkwardly and said he didn't know. I didn't know how to continue, so I dropped it. I can't leave it there with Thomas.

He's taking his time, and I'm losing my sense of it. I'm sitting, facing the glass door and searching for a way into the Word and the Spirit. I pray with my eyes open, so he won't get spooked seeing me try and make time for God in between card games and comedy specials.

Evangelism means spreading the Gospel: the Good News. Evangelism means spreading that Good News to complete strangers, because we don't know any other way to do so. Salvation, in my religion, takes faith alone. This means it really takes two things: hearing the Good News and then accepting that Good News as truth. Salvation also means the better of only two distinct options. To never know, is to not be saved.

Following the directives contained in that Good News are insidiously optional, but the hope is that once you hear the Good News, the Spirit will compel you to tell others. We are directed not to hide our lights, but to teach all nations. And nations begin with people.

My senior year of high school back in Georgia, I went to an outdoor mall with my youth group leader, and asked strangers what they thought about God as they sat with their partner or ate in the food court or walked without purpose. We targeted the people who didn't look otherwise preoccupied. Some would say they didn't have time, or they didn't believe in our God, or they found us obnoxious. Others would light up. The ones who engaged seemed like they were waiting for us all along to come and reignite their flame, set them back on the course toward eternal life. I was never convinced that this was the way to lead people to Christ. But when you understand the stakes, it seems completely reasonable. In fact, it feels imperative.

The burden is on each believer to save others after you've found Christ yourself. Sometimes the only way to spread the word is to spread it to strangers through chance encounters, and perhaps they will read the Word with you and remember Him later. But one worries about the whole world of strangers at their own peril, and so, I can only worry about those right next to me, day after day. And how much easier it is to approach the man with a hotdog and mustard, waiting for his Marvel movie matinee than it is to talk to your closest friend about the state of their soul.

Thomas steps back in our study room with his favorite children's book, impressed our university's library would hold such rich nostalgia. He set *Diary of a Worm* on the table and started flipping through it.

"Check it out."

He was performing a bit. He had an innate sense of when I wasn't quite alright, or maybe

I'm not as good at faking it as I think. I was already getting misty and there was an apple in my throat that I couldn't swallow. He showed me his favorite pages and read them aloud. He did so in jest, but his affection was sincere. Hardly having to look at the page to remember the words, he watched my responses. I forced myself to smile, but couldn't quite keep my lip from quivering.

"Conner, man, what's wrong?"

His oak-colored eyes latched onto me, and they weren't going away until I had wrung myself dry. His right hand was still keeping our place in the book, as if he were ready to pick up right where he left off once my throat was empty. I wanted to lie in his agnostic shade and never step back into the light.

Next, we were both standing, and I poured my eyes onto his shoulder.

"I've been having these dreams, Thomas. And I'm in line to the Great Gate, and you're going the wrong way. I call out to you, Thomas, but you can't even hear me. I step out of line, I'm risking losing my place, but I can't pull you back. They don't let me lose my spot. I'm terrified that we may not end up together. In my dream, I need to pull you back. I've been so selfish, and the stakes are so high. They're so high. It's really everything. It's the only thing. I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry."

I don't know if he understands. I don't know if he can. I can't stop myself, but in this moment. I'm blubbing like a child, and I need him more than I thought he needed me. And he's so comforting, letting me hold him as long as I need to. He strokes my hair at the end of his long arms and grips my back in the right places. He's tender and firm. And he feels so much older than me, even without the wisdom I'm desperate to share. I'm shaking so hard that he has to plant his foot to stabilize. My crying, my descriptions, my memorized verses, are muffled and meandering. I'm still scared.

The fire that I shall not hide under a bushel has turned into a conflagration. My faith has consumed him in ways that burn and char and leave permanent scars. These conversations are supposed to happen with backwards caps and morning coffee and pocket New Testaments earmarked to John 3:16. My own high school reawakening happened in a Waffle House on a Friday before the school day started. Instead, I showed Thomas not the Gospel, but Revelation, the absence of light. I showed him I'm tortured like Job, but through self-immolation. It takes a long time to settle down and try to explain myself. I can't ask him who he thinks Christ is, because I've shown too much of my hand. Christ is the Judge, not the Redeemer, for Thomas now.

There's no way he can see what my faith has done to me in this room and think that this is worth following to the ends of the Earth. And his face is unchanged. He's concerned for me in the same way you would be for a friend who has gone through a break up or death in the family. There's no selfishness in his eyes, he's not scared of me.

And who am I to tell him we won't be in the same place later? Who is Paul? Who is John? Who are they to judge his soul?

“We’ve still got a few pages left,” he says.

His unclipped nails still mark the page. He drapes his flannel back over himself as my eyes turn back to their proper green, and he reads aloud again.

The next fall we’ll be sophomores. I’ll ask him if he wants to try Bible study with me on Sundays. I’ll say that I’ll make it simple. That he doesn’t have to prepare anything and that he should give it a shot and see if he likes it. He’ll say he has no interest. He’ll say he doesn’t think he needs it when I pry further. And why would he say any different? He still knows what he doesn’t know, and I remain certain of the unknowable.



Wrinkled Wing

Jess Chiotelis

The Nature of Time

Colette Creamer

It rises

And falls

Like breath

Between whispers

It twists

Turns upon itself

forever

always will it swallow itself

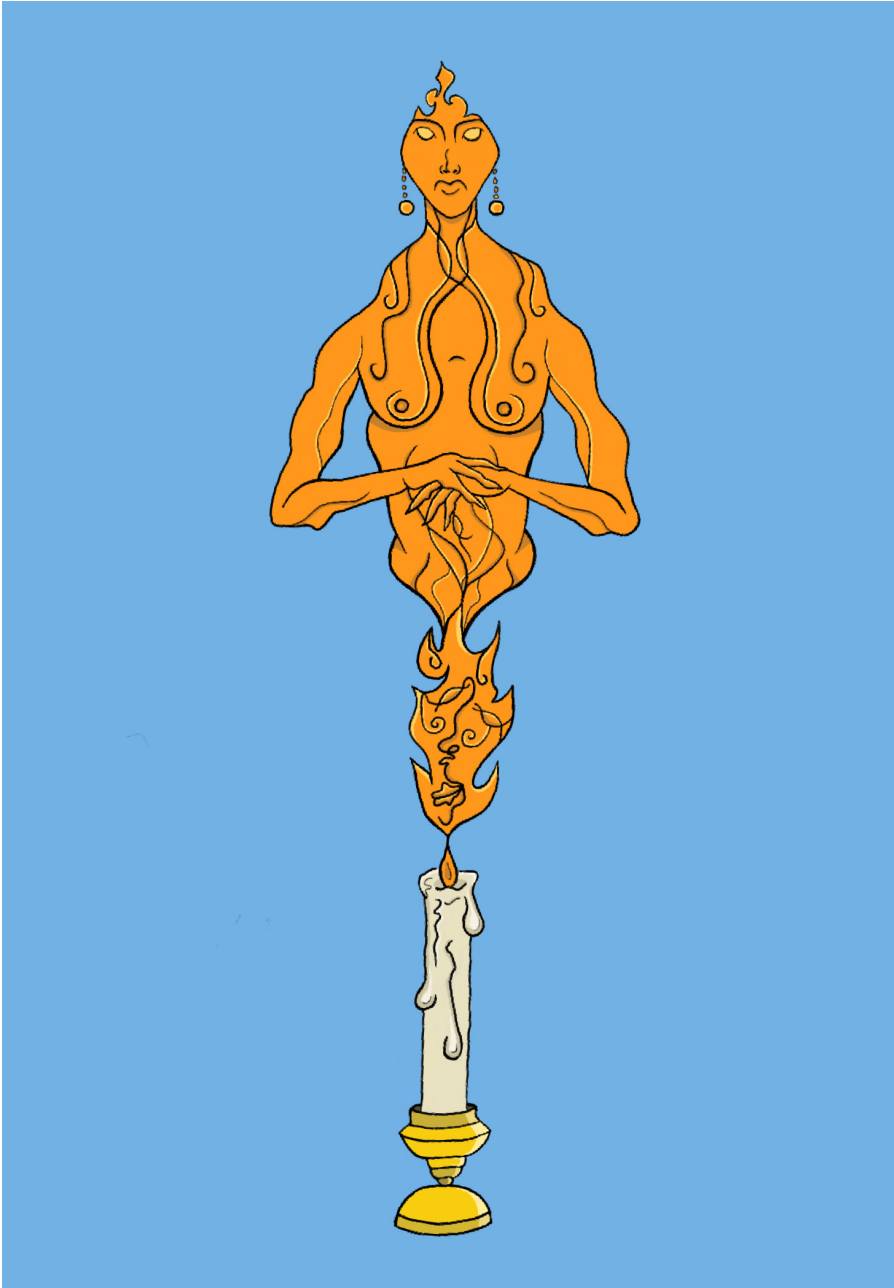
moment gorging on moment

A snake eating its own tail

turning

always

to consume.



Untitled.
Ellie Holdsworth

Taking out the Trash

Ray Barr

The room was suddenly silent. She backed away from him, but she couldn't look elsewhere. Her gaze fixed on his eyes. His eyes that were still looking at the door. His eyes that held her in silence.

She broke the silence with a laugh.

He didn't react, of course. His face remained the unchanged stoic model.

She had never won before, but it didn't feel as glorious as she'd imagined. He ruined her satisfaction. The one time she ever hoped for joy, he managed to spoil that, too. How could she expect anything different from him? There is no way in hell he would gratify her by actually emoting for once.

She breathed a sigh while moving into the bedroom. He stayed.

She tossed her belt down in the middle of the floor and went to his closet. When she opened the door her anger redoubled; her closet could have fit in his three times over.

"Relax," she breathed, *It's my closet now*. She started on the shirts, but it didn't really matter the order. After the shirts, she moved on to the ties. So many fucking ties. Who needs five green ties? She could almost picture him holding up two of them, trying to decide if it was an emerald or shamrock day.

When she finished clearing his closet, the pile in the center of their room reached right above her knee. He couldn't hear a room over, but that didn't stop her from saying "a shit ton of clothes for a shit guy."

She had to walk past him to get into the kitchen, but this was the first time that she saw him and wasn't repulsed. Maybe the remorse was catching up to his face.

She got out the ice pack. The one she usually gets; the one with the smiling bears on it. at this point, getting the ice pack was a reflex, and then she would go to the supermarket just to get out of the house. But she got food yesterday. The only thing left was to clean up the mess.

She swept up the plate first and tossed it in the trash.

Then she stuffed his mound of clothes into a black garbage bag, tied it up, and put it by the door. The door he was still looking at.

She only had one thing left to bag up. She got another black garbage bag from under the sink, but it only covered half of his body, so she used two.



Saint Omer, France
Nathan Burns

The Burning Sun of the Shoah

Megan Brooks

I.

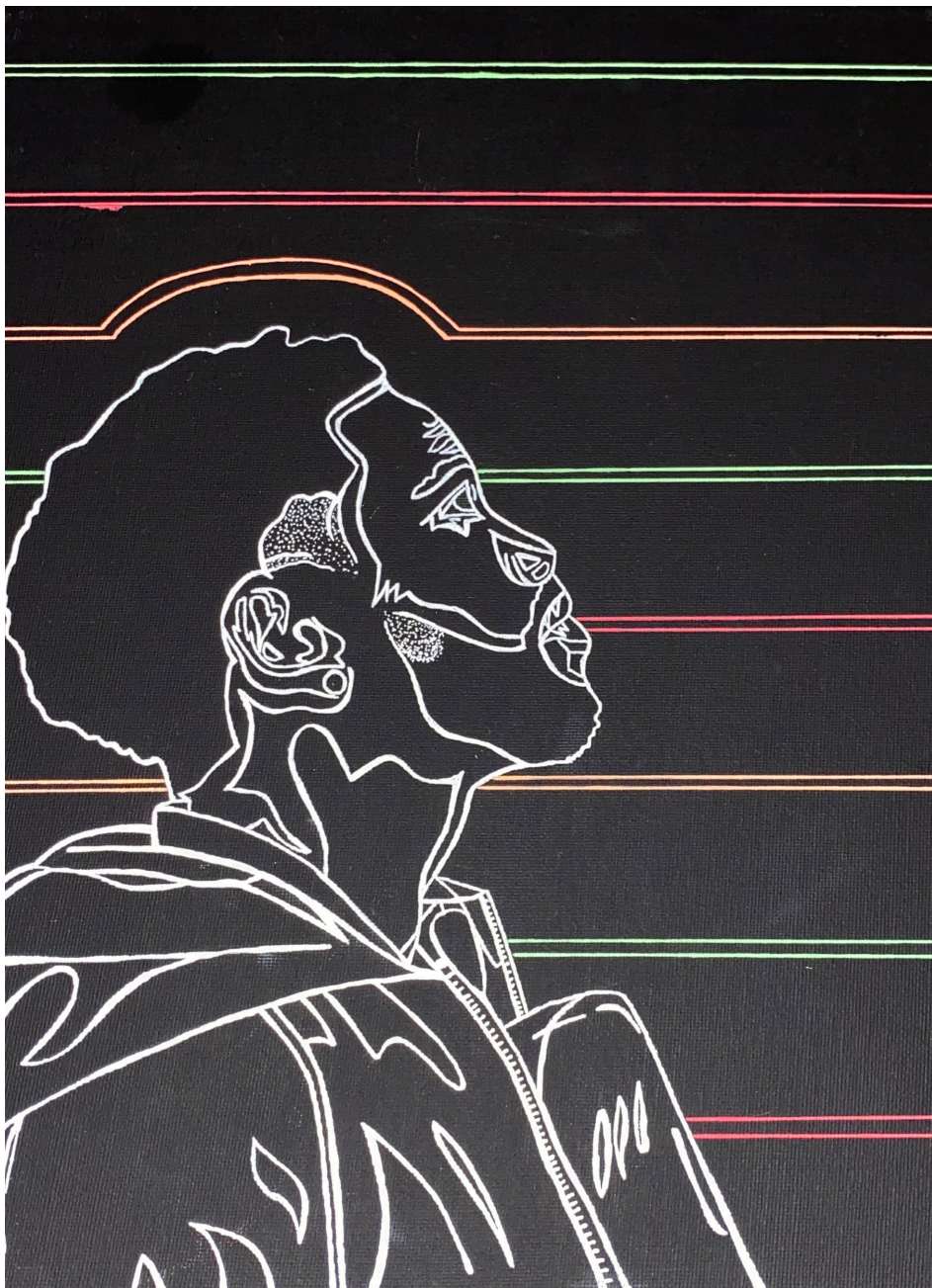
It's late January, the sun drips -melting - burning itself down - deep inside the earth creating a physical representation of hell. The cold - crisp - pure whiteness of the snow is instead ablaze in reflection - golden flames licking scorching embers like the serpent tongue of Death. All around the ground is shrouded - caked - covered in ash like a blanket for the snow. Ash - Ash inside the cappings of teeth, Ash among the crevices of worn bones, Ash swimming in lobes of lungs, Ash dancing two-step promenades in barracks , Ash seeping inside memories and Ash coating minds is burnt greyness. Ash tauntingly singing " Ash - Burnt Ash - Fire Ash - You soon will be Ash - Dead Ash - Auschwitz Ash- Ash on the ground and Ash all around."

II.

"Workers" slumped home in ash backs - arched - piling over on themselves - rounded out like worn gravestones and all around dead walking. The seeping sun - burned the blinding - brutal truth of the night in the ash backs- that try as they might when morning came as did the collection of bodies - pulled from the pissed stain, shit sheets. Friends faces unrecognizable - worn to the bone - thin flesh pulled over already decaying skulls - all identity stripped and anonymity worn in striped rags. In the dewy hours of dawn, the collector would have to search the barracks to try to tell the dead from the living. This was never a simple task not because of dim lighting but the mere insufficient difference of the states.

III.

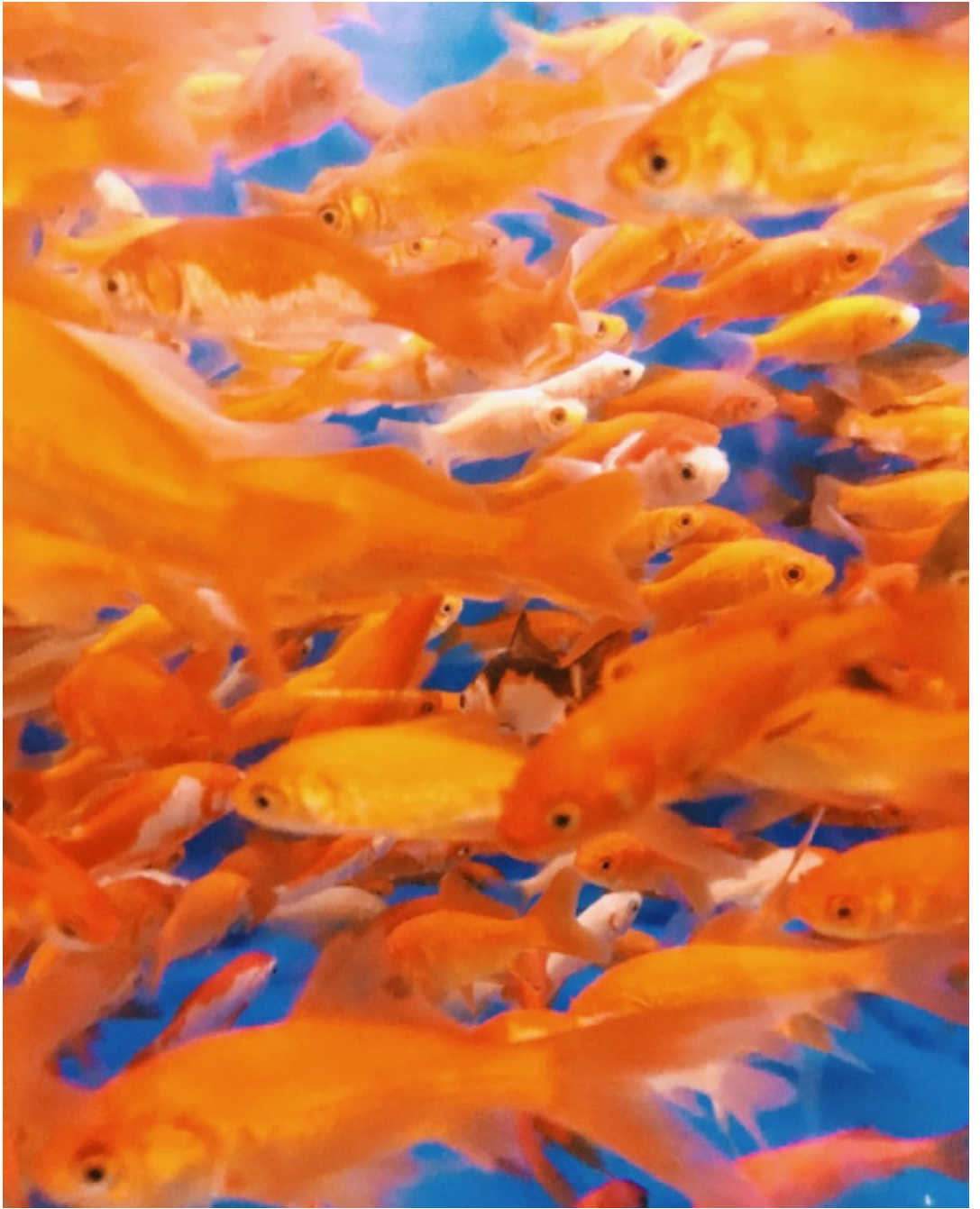
The brisk chill of the morning brought a breeze from the west and it picked me up and swirled me around - I am everywhere - I am free - I am dead-I am Ash.



Big Sean
Chloe Khoshand



Vince Staples
Chloe Khoshand



Plenty of Fish

Jess Chiotelis



Lake Reflections
Sela Betz

Settling

Conner Evans

He wakes up still on the right side of the bed. His cats stir, and they know the man will feed them before he feeds himself. He likes that they still keep the left side of the bed warm.

It's still dark out as he creaks downstairs. He pours a cup of dry food into the black cat's bowl on the kitchen counter.

"Now, don't eat your sister's food, alright! Stay there."

He corrals the silver tabby into the laundry room, where dirty clothes remain on the floor and folded clothes still sit upon the dryer. He pours her food and scratches her favorite spot.

"You're OK. Don't let your brother beat you up."

She's skittish around people who aren't the man who feeds her. She plays with cheap toys, whether a hairtie left behind or a pingpong ball from the table that's now put away in the closet. Before Cooper, the man had a tabby named Silver. Cooper still eats out of her bowl.

The dog whines from the basement, sensing it's his turn now. Rocky is a black dog, wearing the red collar of the man's previous black dog. At four weeks old, the shelter told the man that Rocky was a Labrador retriever, but Rocky grew into a German shepherd.

"You've gotta be nicer to the kitties if you're gonna go upstairs, bud."

Rocky has clawed at the top of the carpeted stairs, revealing the worn wood underneath. Already next to his bowl, Rocky chases his tail until he can bite it and become a closed circle.

The man grunts back upstairs, so that he may tend to himself before work. He showers and blowdries what's left of his hair. He plucks an inchlong white hair from between his eyes and pulls up his pleated pants.

He leaves in his new SUV. It replaced a car that he ran until it saw 300,000 miles over 18 years. He misses the old leather seats and the 6-CD stereo filled with discs that his son made for him.

He prays to God on the way to work. He has memorized the names of children who haven't been found yet by the police or by their families. He prays for them; he prays for his family; and then he prays for his enemies. He gets to work before he can pray about anything else. He gets there and leaves early to avoid the traffic, and he repeats his personal rite on the way back to the neighborhood.

Back home, he parks the car and retrieves the mail. Some of it he still has to forward to her. Inside, he gathers the animals.

“Alright, you scooches, let’s go!”

He opens the door to the backyard and lets all three wander through the fence and onto the golf course. He remembers when he played golf every weekend, but he’s not a member of the course he lives on anymore. It’s a vestige of the neighborhood that he wanted to live in still. He asked her for the house and the animals. It’s good for the animals, because they have space here. He’s the only man in the neighborhood who walks his cats.

After the walk, he settles down and picks out dinner. Chicken thighs and a can of green beans. His son is probably done with class for the day, though he didn’t answer his last text. He calls him up.

“What’s up!”

His son tells him that classes are good, he has papers due soon and the apartment is fine.

“What else?”

His son umms and ahhs, but eventually tells him that he’s thinking about quitting his internship. It’s a lot right now, he explains.

“Well, you’re always busy. If it’s what you want to do, that’s fine. Anything else?”
That’s all.

“Alrighty, well the cats miss you and Rocky misses you! Goodbye.”
Goodbye.

The man falls asleep for 20 or 30 minutes after flipping channels. He makes his way up from the basement, leaving Rocky at the top of the stairs. He lifts his Bible from his nightstand and starts from where he left off.

He wakes up in the middle of the night and wipes his hands down his face. He fell asleep on the chair with his cap over his eyes and his Bible on his lap. The cats are sound asleep, and he watches them, half-waiting for them to transfigure into something sacred and past and whole. He imagines a flash of lightning, like Christ on the mountain with sleepy companions, when He brought back those loved ones of old. When she left, he asked for the dog and the cats and the house that holds them. The cats do not move.

He falls asleep still on the right side of the bed.



Cat and Chair

Charles Mullis

Clownin' Around

Michael Bonifonte

They say prostitution is the world's oldest profession, but that is where I have to disagree. That is an insult to the one true constant in our universe, the clown.

Now, you may be asking yourself, "What do you mean you crazy little man, how old can clowns be?" While this may appear to be a decent question, it is in fact complete garbage. You see, the people we know today as "clowns," a term coined in the late 16th century, have existed throughout all of recorded history, originally flying under the radar to avoid suspicion from the ruling class at the time. In fact, ancient Egyptians used to keep African Pygmies in their royal courts, calling them Dangas. They dressed in leopard skin and danced and made merriment for the pharaohs and their families, entertaining them. Or did they?

These "clowns" can be found in ancient China, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and more. Seemingly coincidentally, these men and women were always at the side of royalty, with no apparent influence of their own. However, this is where popular history gets it wrong. The reason that these clowns were always near those in charge is because whatever given "royalty" was present at the time was merely a puppet for the true rulers of the universe, the clown. Where else would you find a jester but next to the throne?

This continued throughout much of time, with the clowns utilizing their vastly superior intellect and creativity to stifle humanity. For you see, clowns are actually not human themselves, and instead come from the stars with TARDIS like technology, having the ability to regenerate, travel through time, and harness "bigger on the inside" tools to do their bidding.

However, whenever you get a group as powerful as this ruling the world from the shadows, you're going to find resistance.

This is where the story of the mime comes in. Mimes are in fact a rival alien race of the clown, being the complete antithesis of each other. Where clowns "hyuck," mimes mime. Where clowns throw pies in people's faces, mimes create invisible walls to lean on. The complete antithesis. But I digress. The mimes came to Earth for one reason and one reason only, to stop the clowns. However, without access to the same level of time travel tech as the clowns, they had to pick their spot. Thus the clown mime war of 1812 went into full effect.

It was around this time that the mimes thought the clowns weakest, and the most centralized. They wanted to take out as many as they could, and free Earth once and for all. The war was, of course, devastating, resulting in egregious casualties on both sides. Many clowns sacrificed their lives to act as cannonballs, cutting down the front lines of mimes on the battlefield. Many mimes gave their lives in return pantomiming suicide vests. Then, a miracle.

The mimes had the last of the clowns surrounded at the nearest rodeo, blocking their chronal tech like they had the rest of the war to ensure that the clowns stayed and fought. It was a chilly night on October 12th 1812 when the mimes took the final step and ended the war, giving up all that was holy to them and killing the clowns in a way even they would never have expected: by speaking.

For while it is widely known it is forbidden for a mime to speak, what is not so widely known is why. When a mime speaks, the resulting sound waves pierce the minds of any nearby organisms, rendering them obsolete. It is this way that the war ended, and humanity was finally free to advance, explaining the sudden surge of inventions and new technologies in the coming years. Of course, the mimes didn't kill all of the clowns in 1812, some still live among us today in plain sight.

While 1812 proved to have the highest concentration of clowns, nearly 95% of their forced gathered on Earth for one big circus, that last 5% has remained, running throughout our time stream and insinuating themselves into our popular culture. Nearly every famous clown today is merely one of the 23 remaining clowns in the universe, including Ronald McDonald, Pennywise, WWF Superstar Doink the Clown, Yucko the Clown, Bozo the Clown, John Wayne Gacy, and even the Joker.

The mission of these clowns is simple: stay alive until there is an opportunity to take over once again. While the mime resistance has left a small number of their ranks to protect the Earth, they won't last forever. One day, the clowns will Rise Up again. Hell, it could be happening right now. Why don't you pull my finger and find out?

something holy happened here

Nina Joss

You believe
something holy happened here.

So you've used gold and silver and you've built an image
here.

You've made the moment into an object of its own. To remember that
something holy happened here.

Yet we get distracted by the marble and the metals and we begin
to think of that as
holy.

A place where I can't stand here
or touch that
or say this
because something holy happened here.

But when it did, it was happening.
Someone was standing here
and touching this
and saying that
and probably even laughing or crying and definitely breathing
and it was a person and a place
or maybe some other being and this place
but when something holy happened here it was h a p p e n i n g.

And it wasn't really holy until we made it.
It was just something.

Something beautiful and miraculous, maybe, but it was just truth.
Truth happened here but we build it into something that is
so far from normal and
so far from real and
so far from here that
it doesn't feel true anymore.
I can't see any truth in the silver and gold. In the prayers and the stories and the legends
it doesn't feel true it just feels
pretty.

holy, but it feels like nothing ever actually happened.

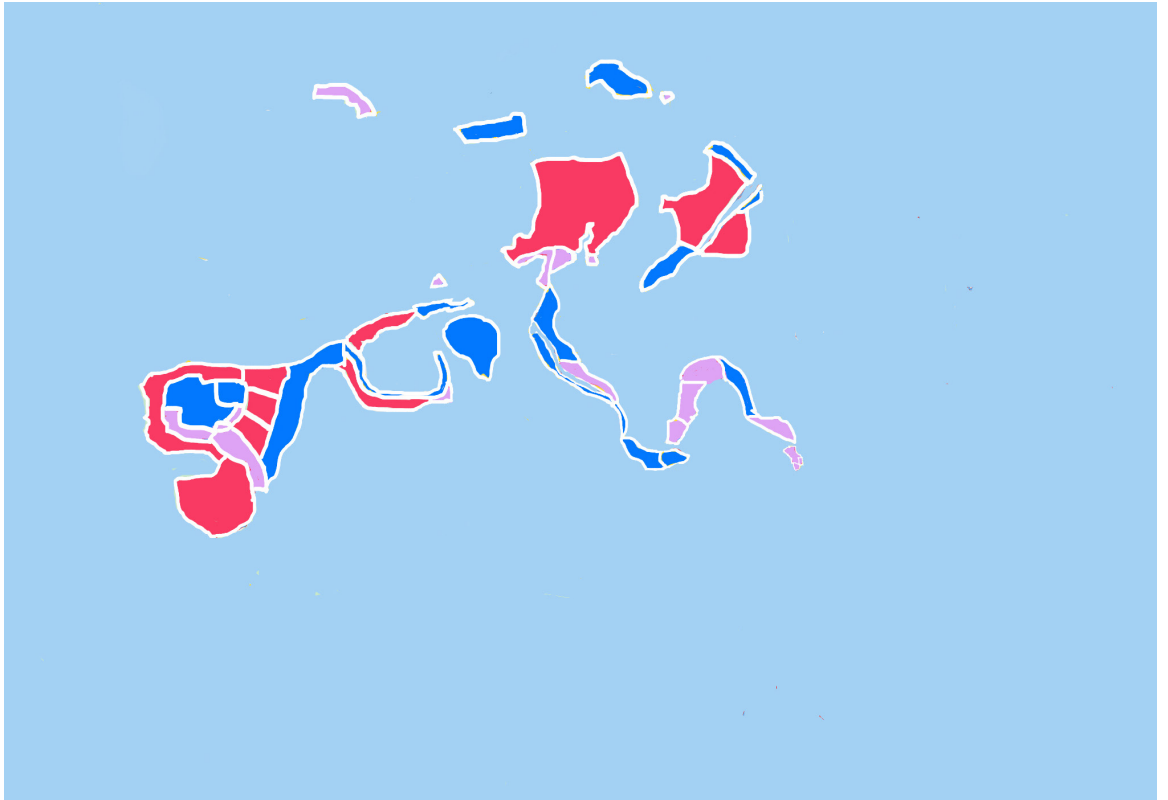
Maybe if we just left it as a rock with no dome, it would feel more believable.
But instead I just have to close my eyes and imagine this place as it used to be,
without the silver and the gold, and the domes and the prayers, and
paint my own image of what it was like when it was just a rock
and a hot day
and a breeze
and a God who I know actually exists but that's hard for me to remember in this place
and ask myself

why do they say this church is holier than the mountains?



Porte Mystérieuse

Nathan Burns



PROTEST ART
Mitchell Gregory

Fresh Off the Boat in America

Metasebia Tessema

If you go to any restaurants there, don't clap or whistle to get your waiter's attention. Always order a small meal. Their small is our large. You **MUST** tip your waiter. They don't receive a livable wage there. Don't eat rice with your fingers. They find that unhygienic, even though they eat fries with their fingers.

If you are meeting up with someone, don't be late. Punctuality is a big deal there. Don't greet anyone by kissing them on the cheek. They are very strict with personal space and have issues with intimacy. Don't mock their accent. They get very sensitive about it, even though they mock yours all the time.

If you are going to school, don't take anyone's seat. They all have unassigned assigned seats. Don't worry about your teachers smacking you. That's considered abuse there. You can wear shorts and crop tops to class. The teachers there are not allowed to flirt with you. Don't bother going by your full name. They say they can't pronounce it, even though they can pronounce Phoebe or Mckenzeigh. If people are discussing immigration, just sit there quietly. Everyone will assume you're African American.

INDIGENAS

Herlinda Tereza Hernandez

There is a lot that is wrong with the Achi.¹
They dance upon the sacred
They laugh at what seems fable
And they taint what was crafted by beautiful hands.

Where do I stand on this land that I was given?
How do I make these traditions eternal?

This ulew²of perpetual spring
Plastered with forests
And birds that sing our names
It must remember our existence.
We cannot let the whispers and tongues
Crafted by our ancestors and gods
Get carried in the wind.

Where will it go?
Through the ears of our offspring?
To those powerful up above?
Surely they can hear us begin to forget.

1 *Kaqchikel for man*

2 *Kaqchikel for soil, land*

My family
Resist what is despicable
Fight for what is yours
Scream like there is no sun anymore
Because blood was not shed for us to forget
For us to object
The colors of our culture.

My tongue and its dance will never be silenced.
These hands will never stop crafting, weaving, and praying
For as long as I live
This land is part of my body
And it is part of yours too.

The ladrones³ cannot steal
What isn't theirs and I dare them
To climb my temple stairs
Because what can those fools do
To my tribe of Mayan strength?

Other

Bridget Bodley

they anointed me with oil,
christened me *Other*

Mama,
lay me in the basin

come hell,
come highwater

wrap my ankles, leathered hands
release me, salt stained eyes

Rio grande, my river styx
take me as your tributary

i'll lay my armor down
will your waters wash me white?

swear, you'll weaken me
cloak me in clay

cut off my tongue,
paint my face - *pale and pretty*.

my whole skin
my whole self -
 make me all Achilles heel.

til I am nothing but penetrable.
pierce me by hand

until I seep,
make the river weep
rancid with red

Headwaters,
take me in portion, in part

carry the within of me
in
let me bleed into America



The Edge
Clarisse Liclic

Elliot Brown's Last Dance

Justin Kleczka

Where, then, shall we stop time once more?
Before my restless heart exhales at last.
Maybe we can lay in our favorite place to stay
Where the evening sky gently kisses the bay?
Or, perhaps, a spot we've never been before
Like that rooftop bar or the rocky shore?

Do you remember?

That first night amid the jubilee
Of desirous bodies out on the dancefloor
And us nobodies by the bar crooning.
I thought (and still think) that I was dreaming
When your friend whispered that you were into me
And I, finally, asked you to some toast and tea.¹

What followed was our first visit
To that café on the East End (I forgot the name);
I was blinded by the rising sun in your eyes
To the delight of your unfamiliar guise.
Guys would watch you and my half-wit
Thinking "when *will* he ever quit?"

But I never quit.
Time and time again I've tried
To beat this bloody disease
All to no avail.
I finally feel that my time is up.
My time. My ties. Mai Tais.
How about we go get drinks on the beach?

1

An allusion to line 34 of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Do you remember?

That time we laid under crystal-clear skies
Eons away in the land down under.
And the giggles that night when we tried to embrace,
Nothing but red looking back at my sun-burnt face.
But our desires burnt stronger than our bodies
And on we played, until the next sunrise.

However, there was that one night
We finally let the moonlight win.
After cuddles, music, and chatter,
(Much more of the latter) ...
Bob Marley sent you into a dreamful flight
With the three little birds, as they sung you “goodnight.”

We’ve also had our troubles, no doubt.
Now where should I begin?
How about our son’s middle name?
I wanted him to carry out his father’s fame
As a writer (if he doesn’t dropout);
We shared some sneers, maybe even a shout.

But we figured it all out.
Like I said, I never quit.

Young Walter Elliot Brown
Wouldn’t stand to be here
And hear the stories of our grating roar²
Against the precipice of Time’s pebbled shore
Screaming “Carpe Diem! Don’t let us down!”
Yet here we are, about to drown...

Do you remember?

Our weekly walks along Lake Voltaire
The silence spoke louder than Pangloss³
Which was broken (along with the law)
That time we dared disturb the placid awe
With our youthful bodies bare,
As we dove headfirst without a care.

And from there things have never been the same
Between you and I (and all the stars in the sky) ...
We shared our secrets, our lives
Our dreams, even our lies
Which set our relationship aflame
Hotter than the sun on a Summer's day.

I still remember the first poem I wrote to you:

*I sit in plight and wonder what to say
For the mighty playwright stole my design.
Then I realize you're not a "Summer's day"
Better yet, you are a fine wine
Plucked soft from fertile vines of the Champagne
Sparkling bright through idle tides of yore.
One careful sip of you will ease my pain.
What then, must I ramble anymore?
For you'll witness empires rise and fall
From cellars of the wicked and replete:
If only I could polish off you all!
Without you Heaven does not taste as sweet.
Alas, Time will bear His judicious hand
And I will wait... forever stuck in quicksand.*

3 Pangloss is a character in Voltaire's *Candide* known for vociferously preaching his theory of optimism

It was my first poem, what can I say?
At least I didn't cast you as a sorbet
Or soufflé – (I had fun with the rhymes)
What mattered to me was the pulse of the lines.

Had we all the time and youth alike⁴
We could sit still without rushing life
Like the turtles by the Thames' side
Soaking in the sun nary the tide.
But I grow weary! I grow old!⁵
My wandering soul no bed can hold.
I can see the Future, no longer blurred,
Like a cup of tea, just lightly stirred.
It's gazing back with a vengeful glee
And now it speaks... does it speak to me?
Shouting "You've had enough! That's it!"
Just so you remember, I never quit.

So, where shall we end? It's to you I owe
Our final throes before the coup de grâce.
All I know is we should hurry soon
My time is waning as the crescent moon.
So, where would you prefer to go?
What about where the spotted tulips grow?

4 *The first three lines of this stanza allude to the beginning of Andrew Marvel's poem "To His Coy Mistress"*
5 *Inspired by line 120 of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"*



Ireland
Sela Betz

SPRING 2020 - MEMORY