



*Reaching In*  
*The Messenger 2022*





# 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](http://messengerur.wordpress.com).

**Cover Art - reaching out**

*Pamira Yanar*

## **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 and Visual and Media Arts Practice departments, who continually encourage students to create 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.

## A Letter from the Editors

This year's *Messenger* is a response to the uncertainty and volatility of the last few years. This experience is certainly not unique to our campus, but certainly felt with the same profundity as anywhere else. Our 2020 edition, "Memory," was shaped by a sudden nostalgia for earlier times due to the upheaval caused by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, our magazine was steeped in desires to both demonstrate inequalities we saw around us and effect change, hence our choice of "Forward." 2021, which is when this edition's submissions were written, was marked by fatigue, as we realized that neither the pandemic nor the social issues around us could be solved overnight. Because of this, this year's magazine is the first where we can clearly see the lasting impact of the heavy isolation of the past two years. Our submissions often were meditative in nature and portray many different methods of coping with the unknown.

This same isolation also appears to have been a source of inspiration, as we have received by far the largest number of submissions in the past several years. While we found that our pieces were frequently more somber in content, we also saw a wide array of different feelings and experiences, such that it was nearly impossible to encapsulate the mood of the magazine in a single word. We aimed to mirror that trend in the design itself by fragmenting some of our pieces and by utilizing jarring contrast between some of our lighter and heavier works.

The single common thread throughout this body of work was introspection. With that in mind, we have chosen "Reaching In" as the theme of our 2022 edition. A play on the title of our cover art, "Reaching Out," this theme is meant to engage the ways in which the events of the past two years have inspired our writers to look inwards. These works spoke to our individual experiences of the last few years, and we hope that they both captivate and inspire you as well.

Warmly,  
Ray and Molly Kate  
Co-Editors-In-Chief

## **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.

### ***“At the Mirror,” by Evelyn Zelmer***

Evelyn Zelmer is a first-year from Ohio majoring in Geography and Anthropology and minoring in Creative Writing. This award is a huge honor, and they are so grateful that such a happy thing could come from an unhappy poem. That’s the really cool thing about unifying art collectives like *The Messenger* — and about art in general.

### ***The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Creative Writing***

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

### ***“What’s Cooking,” by Ray Barr***

Ray Barr is a fourth-year student from New York majoring in Classical Civilizations and minoring in Anthropology and History. He loves writing and is considering pursuing a Masters in Fine Arts for Creative Writing after he graduates. He is thankful for this wonderful award and the chance to ask the readers of his prose-poem to consider the question in the title. “What’s Cooking” is one of his favorite pieces that he has written, even if his mother did criticize him for the run-on sentence that it is, and he will be forever grateful for this honor.

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# *Reaching In*



“Let us labor for an inward stillness —  
An inward stillness and an inward healing.  
That perfect silence where the lips and heart  
Are still, and we no longer entertain  
Our own imperfect thoughts and vain opinions”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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**At the Mirror**  
*Evelyn Zelmer*

my mom bought me  
    an artificial sun--  
found it listed  
    on amazon, listened  
to its gospel  
    in an audiobook,  
fixed its long white  
    flagellum to the fuse  
in my wall like  
    a slick plastic surgeon.  
a fake sunshine  
    to burgeon across a  
wide fleshy beach,  
    this thing, if it works like  
it should, could light  
    the sacred candles of  
my 4 am  
    vigils, decorate my  
darkest darks with  
    shadow puppet theatre,  
carve the umbra  
    below my belly a  
little deeper,  
    incubate the petri  
dish of my huge  
    mirror-- please mother who  
is meteor  
    shower and enabler  
and eclipser,  
    huge celestial body  
that wishes she  
    were littler. I watched  
the explosive  
    deaths that came before me;  
I am a dwarf.  
    I swallow dust and burst  
and swallow more.

I stare at my fat in  
light therapy.  
a gaseous fire.  
a ball of white  
hot medicine. awful  
entropy. may-  
be vitamin D is  
ok to lack  
if I get to stay in  
the blissful dark.



**wish**  
*Catherine Leeder*

## Touching

Jack Doyle

"I wish I was going home," said the man. His arms were extended sideways like an airplane and his body was tilted forty-five degrees to the left. "I wish I was driving down I-95 just this second."

The rest of the men in the car nodded slowly, each marveling at his fantastic image.

"Once I get home," the same man said longingly, "I'm going to drive to the movies with Pam. What do you think, Fig, you think she'll still be waiting for me?"

Adam considered it for a moment.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, Fig."

"Do you remember summertime well? Like, those summers as a kid?"

The man paused.

"Sure, Fig."

"You know how during summer you often daydream about the first day of school?"

"Sure, I do."

"Like when you grow tall and imagine yourself leading the school basketball team to the championship?"

"Yes, yes. I know the feeling."

"What you're really thinking then is, 'Next year, I'm going to be one of *those kids*. You know, whoever it is you look up to. Could be a character in a book, could be someone you know, it doesn't matter. I'm finally going to *get it*. I'm finally going to not *be me anymore*.' But, you see, the thing is, *those kids*, they get no pleasure from being them."

The abandoned streets of Hamburg were screaming out in silence. On their left, a girl sat against the side of a building. Her hair was thin, and her clothes were messy, but she was undeniably beautiful.

The car rolled on.

"I'm not sure I understand, Fig."

Adam tried to think of how he could explain it better.

"You ever wanted something someone else's got?"

"Sure, Fig."

"Some girl that was different from everyone else."

"Of course."

"You ever kissed a broad?"

The man turned around in his seat and looked at him with a grin on his face. "Sure have!"

"You ever kissed a broad who you only sort of liked, just to kiss her?"

"Yup."

"Well, how'd you feel afterwards? Did you care much?"

"No. I don't think I did."

"After you kissed her, did you consider that someone else might have been dreaming of kissing her that night that you kissed her so carelessly?"

"No, Fig."

"Before you had kissed her so carelessly, had you ever *wanted* her?"

"Maybe, Fig."

"That's exactly my point – by the time you kissed that broad you no longer wanted to."

"I don't know about that, Fig." The man seemed uncomfortable now.

"Alright, hear me out. Say you show up at Pam's house and say to her, 'Won't you come see a movie tonight, sweet Pam?'"

"I'm going to do exactly that, Fig."

"Well, what do you think she'll say?"

The man smiled at himself in the side mirror. "She'll say 'yes,' of course."

"Not at all. If you like this girl as much as you say you do, she'll say, 'I'd love to, I really would, but I just can't tonight. Oh, it's so horrible, trust me...but I just can't go tonight!'"

Hamburg was in the distance now – all the bodies were forgotten because of the various sweet smells of springtime.

"Then we'll go tomorrow, or the next day."

"But she won't be free then, because it's a lie. Don't you see? She doesn't like you."

"I disagree."

Adam turned and looked at the sky for a moment.

"You'll never get a broad that you actually want."

"How do you know?"

"Because it necessitates that one can be dreaming and having at the same time."

The man fell silent. He decided to speak again.

"Don't you see? What you actually want is to be rejected and accepted at the same time. You want to be stuck here with me and be dancing with Pam at the same time."

Suddenly the man slammed his fist against the dashboard. "That doesn't make an ounce of sense, Fig."

Adam squinted at the approaching outline of their campsite.

"You're right. It *is* possible to want something and *have it*, only for a second that is. I remember my moment like it was yesterday. I was sixteen, I was on my way to this fabulous party with this absolutely fabulous broad, and for just a second, *I had her and wanted her at the same time*. Of course, after that moment, my entire life fell into disrepair for many years."

The vehicle came to a stop. They had arrived.

"Fig, you might be the craziest person I've ever met." The man was now stretching outside.

But Adam was not listening. He understood now.

He reached his hand into the unknown and clenched his fist around emptiness.



**hold**

*Pamira Yanar*



**November 13**  
*Meredith Moran*

Today's your birthday. I got a Facebook notification about it, which would've made you laugh. I didn't need the reminder, of course. I'll watch Almost Famous and eat half-baked Ben & Jerry's, like we always used to, and like I did last year alone, but it's not the same. Remember when we tried to buy a fish when we were fourteen at Pet Smart, but they told us you had to be eighteen? We waited four years and then went on your birthday before school to buy a goldfish and named it Penny Lane, just for it to die within hours because we forgot to filter the water. It feels wrong that I continue to grow older, while you remain forever twenty. It's a little easier now that my parents have moved, so that when I visit, the room that I sleep in isn't the same one we used to make prank calls in at eleven and stumble into drunk after sneaking out at sixteen. It's been over two years now. I wonder about all of the fun we would've had, if we would've gotten in little fights and what they would've been about, what boys you would've called me crying about, what music you'd be listening to. I feel like you really would've liked Olivia Rodrigo. They say loss gets easier with time, but as more time passes, I'm just reminded of how many more memories you would've had, that we would've had.



**Home**  
*Mako Inasaridze*

## **Figs**

*Maggie Crowe*

I'm planning the weather on record store day,  
Cosmic raindrops will paint the doorway,  
The sweet homecoming, the fire on the hearth,  
Your endless search for melodies, my collection of words,  
Giddy about nothing, listening to fly me to the moon,  
Trace our path to get there on the wings of your tattoo,

After the showers, when the plants are well fed,  
Float under the chains of the jeweled garden, well dressed,  
Come and catch me between the seasons,  
Will you still hold my hand outside the maze?  
I'm getting braver now, but just this side of the gates,  
Under the juniper and cypress, the familiar evergreens,  
Where we bury citrus seeds for the late sun,  
Convinced figs bloom on lemon trees,

I'm penciling in a window seat, first editions floor to ceiling,  
Loose leaf scattered across the ground, mangled like our feelings,  
The wish laced well, the stains from ink pens,  
The apologies and affection both echoing I know the end,  
Tuck an iris behind your ear, leave the sapphire jam to simmer,  
The petals all straying and catching where they linger,

Before the harvest, when the blossoms prepare,  
Tend to the babys-breath, try to save the inhale,  
Soaking in denim, dripping in emeralds,  
Can you ever forgive me? Don't shoot the herald,  
Grasp what you can, you'll sit alone in the haze,  
I'm getting tired now, see the other side of the gates,

The air is getting warmer now, we pretend not to notice,  
Days outrun the night, solstice fast approaches,  
Forget me nots unmask themselves, scorpion grasses,  
Will you hold my hand until this moment passes?  
The final fire before the cold sky, the familiar evergreens,  
We lay inside the garden and curse the lemon trees,  
For never breaking frozen time,  
For stealing the life we could have lived,  
For exiling the maker,  
For never yielding figs.



**Shemodgoma**  
*Mako Inasaridze*

## **Elbow Road**

*Jonathan Gandara*

It was hot and the AC was blowing. The window kept fogging up and the low sunset glared across the windshield. I couldn't see, not past the bend. Elbow Road, that's what it's called, people just don't get it. You go slow, I went slow. Happens all the time there, right at the bend. Brake and look. Careful, round the wheel. Straighten out and you're home free. Narrow roads like that would make anybody nervous, but this road is nasty with ditches and thick trees like bull necks, all cracked and impacted, around the bend you just can't see at dusk.

Go ahead, accuse me of something. There was nothing there for me. I did nothing. People do nothing. They were going fast, not enough care and handling, they didn't see the bend. There are signs before it, big gold diamonds. They weren't looking and they weren't slowing, no red lights. People around here know to go slow. These people were foreigners, foolish out-of-towners. That's got nothing to do with me. Might have been lifting glasses down at the bar, free spirits and all. They brought it upon themselves as a righteous reward for their carelessness, going flying off into the pit. Who am I to get in the way of judgment? Providence does as Providence dictates, rushing headlong towards some great and unknowable plan. A plan nobody can halter and never goes off course, not for me, not for them, and not for you. We've got to learn to go slow as befits man. Not presume too much else the grief hurt the sinner more. You got something to say? Speak your mind. Don't look at me with those searing eyes, those red eyes. I can't bear it anymore.

I had never seen it before now but heard that it happened sometimes, knew that it happened once. Right off the edge and into the trees and the ditch. It's a horrible sound, one that's remembered, even imagined, and keeps a man from his dreaming for the rest of his life. Then, it's awful quiet, especially here in the country, feels like even the crickets shut up last night. Nobody came out from the ruins, so I slowed, only me. There was no one else on the road, and I stopped at the pit. I couldn't see inside the car past the bends, but I looked, looked down from the road. It seemed it had always been like this, as though nothing had changed since it was first made in the factory. Shapes and smears blended, crossing over as the darkness was creeping in then, and the deep hole was filling up with it like water, drowning unconscious things and thoughts alike, so I couldn't see if there was a bottom anymore, couldn't distinguish anything inside. They might've already gotten out and away. They had to learn their lesson somehow, and that's why there was a snake down in the grass. I didn't see it, but I heard it hiss. So, I left them all there –the wreck and the serpent and whatever else was in the ditch.

Remember that old mill out of town on the river branch by that old copse where we'd play hide and seek and cowboys and Indians? The high school boys sometimes took their girls there, used to have a waterwheel churning up the

branch when it carded out smooth cotton or wool for the town folks, but it had long since stopped doing that. Surely, you haven't forgotten. One day, you and me and the other town kids, we reckoned that we'd go over and play in the evening before dinner like we were the big kids. You were always more popular, with the boys and girls, and I thought I was brought along out of some pity or something, but I wanted to be near you. The big chimney had collapsed and looked like a fallen tree, all splintered and rotten with pieces lying around its resting place, but most of the walls held up and the vines and roots of the woods had crept up the bricks and held them in place. There were big holes in the ground, where the big machinery used to have been anchored, and there were holes above where the ceiling had broken open, dripping yesterday's rainwater onto rubble piles, some overgrown with moss and little flowers lit by sunlight sinking down from the busted roof through the floors above. I liked looking at all of it and went off on my own. I always was a looker at my core, while you and the others played games. Sometimes I joined when I just wanted to impress you, but often I was struck by the beauty of it all, that deep beauty that old mills have.

I ran through that old textile mill down by the branch, and up I went to the very top, the loft where the orange sunlight fell through the fallen-in roof. Then, the gloom started creeping in. I think most of the other kids got worried about missing dinner and went home, but I stayed behind to see the mill's transformation at dusk, how it all might look different in darkness. I thought you had gone home, too. But the shadows tricked me and I went down one of those holes and busted my knees on one of those grassy mounds of shattered brick. Then it started coming out, long and black with a lighter belly, on and on, and the wind had gone from me so there was no screaming, while it curved and slunk its long body around mine, inspecting and curious, looking at me through glassy eyes while I heard that awful sound that snakes make, lasting as long as its heavy body, grown fat with age, a dragon in a stolen castle. And I thought it was saying in my head, 'Why didn't you slow down and look where you were going?' I don't know, I don't remember.

I think that snake is still there, deep inside tha decrepit and defunct mill by the copse and beside the branch, waiting to teach young folks to watch out and slow down. I got lucky and the snake let me go, satisfied with my lesson, the kind that you never forget, that never quite leaves your dreams either, all wrapped up around the brain.

Then, you came along because you never left the mill like the other kids. What were you doing or searching for? How did you know to look for me, broken on that rubble altar, or was it that same Providence from last night, that you were there to witness the desserts of my own folly just as I witnessed the swift conclusion of recklessness? I guess you stayed for me. I know. I remember, you carried me away from that dark place, but when you were left, who went for you? Not I, how could I have known if I wasn't there, but nobody stopped for you. How long, they never said, alone and cold for hours, an eternity, never plucked out of the ditch. You were floating at the moment of the crash as bright shards reflect-

ed the light back at you. I wish they had told me, after all the time, those years of bound feeling and love we shared, how long you were in that car. Hard to say, sir, hard to say. There was nothing there for them, no reward. People did nothing then, and I do nothing now. Let them receive their serpentine lesson, twisted and crooked like the road, their lives ending and beginning, at the mouth of the snake, to go slow around the bend.

Don't look at me, branding me of something like negligence when you weren't even there yourself. What you see doesn't matter anymore, and I'm on this side. Everything for you is the opposite of what it is for me, you are not real, no more real than my shadow. There's only ever one Samaritan. I can't even touch you anymore. It's just glass, and it's just me and my own eyes. If glass could bleed, if glass could weep, these eyes might not burn so fiercely, and this heart might not have seized up so cold, and there wouldn't be such suffering in this holy plan, but Elbow Road is dangerous at night and they should have been more careful. No, how fast were you going, did you know to go slow and look? We're not meant to go fast. They needed to learn how to go slow and look. Why should we be afraid of snakes? Did you need to learn, too?

Get away! A fog is spreading between us, we're too close, you're going blurry. I couldn't sleep. I slowly came around the corner and straightened out, but you're still on that bend, you never left it, never got out of it. I didn't get in the way of things, kept out of the ditch, and went along with care. Crushed up like an empty soda can, I entrusted it to the serpent, fitted between the road and the trees in the ditch. I couldn't see anything. I'm the one abandoned, not them. I'm the one left behind to witness and interpret and remember, only I can't dream anymore because the mind moves too fast, then the hissing comes back. Because I wasn't there to go away with you. I'm the forgotten, the ashes after a fire. I thought it was you, but I'm locked up in this backward world, where I can't seem to see past the bends, through the fathoms of darkness.

I'm sorry.

You'd tell me to take the board out of my eye before I took the speck from another's. Then maybe I would have seen clearly enough to get down and search, as if I was looking for you, to bring back your light into the night because when you left so did my guiding moonlight.

If I could only say I'm not to blame, that I don't need help, that I just need to go slow, but these are not enough for me. Can you hear the serpent's voice? It's in the other ear, and I can't rip it out alone. What is better, to preserve and protect them from harm or to facilitate their just retribution, no, anguish, writhing up through the veins and the eyes. And this feeling lingers, cannot be bled out, and this should be what others feel, says the hiss in my other ear. And what of their families, who may suffer now, or tomorrow, or when the bodies are found when the flooding dark recedes, should they be held to suffer as I have groaned in my own tribulation? Do they think as I think, how long, who went for you, to receive a blank

apologetic stare with hollow sounds and mouth shapes, becoming a tricked arbiter of nothingness? I went too fast, decided too quickly and couldn't see the straight way through my blood fog, and these glass windows set in my head got all clouded with prejudice, and never thought to wonder if that was me down there, drowning and suffocating with a snake wrapped around my neck, imagining lies and laying on top of that ruined tomb of brick and mortar, thinking, if only I could scream because I'm all alone down here. Then, once again, you came along, are carrying me out, up and away, and I'm still too hardened, too careless. Slowly, slowly, and I'm home free off Elbow Road.



**Multifarious**  
*Katie Hong*

**A Billboard Proclaims My Eternal Damnation**  
*Maddie Olvey*

The landscape slides  
Across the windshield  
Like raindrops.  
A boundary  
Never crossed.  
Farmland bristles  
Like cowhide,  
Tawny and green  
Flat-Land which  
Renames itself  
Church-Land,  
Reclaims itself as  
God's Country  
As it tells you that  
HELL IS REAL  
And asks  
IF YOU DIED TODAY  
WHERE WOULD YOU  
SPEND ETERNITY?  
I drive past as the  
Muscled shadows of  
God's horses  
Bleed into the  
Hunched spines of  
God's barns  
Bleed into a  
Bluegrey blanket of  
Stormy sky.  
The land melts  
In the rain  
Against the  
Window  
As I travel,  
Warm,  
Through hellfire.





**Winter Ambers**  
*Mako Inasaridze*

## **What's Cooking**

*Ray Barr*

She turned us into swine a few days ago when we first sounded the lion-mouth knockers on her stained cedar door and introduced ourselves as a group of travellers who had been shipwrecked twenty miles up the coast, but all I can think of is this smell, this evil stink wafting from the firepit, this odor which is the same scent I smelled before I became a boar, when my group tasted smoke in the air off in the distance and through the trees and from a wide clearing with her home in the middle, and when I put it like that it sounds obvious that we should not approach the smell because it was all too perfect, and our journey has been everything but perfect, as is evident by the deaths and the winds almost as if the gods want us to be waylaid, stuck at sea and in foreign lands, punished for some wrongdoing, angry that we just demolished a city in their name, maybe the burned temples, maybe the murdered priests, maybe the murdered children and babies, maybe the rape of those priests' daughters and those daughters' mothers, maybe the line was crossed long ago, but such are the ways of war, and then again, I doubt that our gods need a certain cause to punish mere humans, for their otherworldly actions are mysterious and even we honest few seem to be damned indiscriminately, so why would we not approach such an inviting and quaint little cottage farm, we, finally being on land and resting our sea legs, couldn't help but resort to salivating all the way because we hadn't eaten anything decent for weeks, since a ship at sea's fine dining is usually reduced to stale bread with mealworms as soon as the livestock gets eaten up, and our mutton was long gone even before the storm, so as one could imagine, the smell of pork cooking set us in a rabid mood scurrying into the forest as if we were rabbits being chased by a fox or an owl or wolf or anything really that chases poor old rabbits.



**The Meadow**  
*Miah Walker*



Window in the distance building

創業

官选精造酒店  
订座电话: 011-2312718

**untitled**

*Mary Margaret Clouse*

this poem is about the same thing every time  
summer and autumn and drowning in sunlight and  
dandelions blowing away in the wind and i want you  
to love me in the same way my dad loves the cat he  
did not think we were getting  
i will never stop planning and you will never stop piv-  
oting onto the next thing and i am trying to keep up  
breathless like the middle of freeze tag or the mo-  
ment you spoiled my favorite book  
everything happened to me once a lot of summers  
ago  
it just comes back in

then there is winter and spring and the acid chill of  
february and "crocuses to bring to school tomorrow"  
and i wonder sometimes if anyone will ever love me  
in a way that i understand  
i will keep fighting my way towards contentment and  
you will keep asking me if it will ever be right  
we are two children with very different opinions on  
goldilocks  
most days i feel like a walking wax statue  
not quite real enough for comfort but just real  
enough for fear  
thaw comes in waves like a candle burning both ends  
the air warms and everything goes soft  
we could never get it just right

## Cutting Board

*Patrick Bottin*

Chop... chop... chop

The snapping of the trunk concludes the life of a tree,  
brought down by hailing saws and trucks.

Centuries, breezing through war and peace.

Planers shape the maple, creating its new roots.  
A thick coat of oil is the final step sealing the wood  
from what it once was  
to what it now has become.

The kitchen is the trees new forest,  
surrounded by the many fallen.


Bustling, the kitchen's new board is cut, sliced, and chopped.

The cabinets, flooring, and structure of the building all view it as the  
same, as the metal knives wear on the tree.

Chop... chop... chop

Splintered, the board is at the split of two paths.

Recycled or tossed,  
Rebirthed or left behind,  
Appreciated or abandoned.



The oak frame that encompasses the  
mirror gleams back at a  
society,  
neglecting the natural world.

What else could it have become,  
where else could it have gone,  
how else could it have been appreciated?

But, why?  
Until it is time again,

Chop... chop... chop

## **Y = Sinx**

*Helene Leichter*

A black body curving at your demand,  
Drowning in mounds of eraser dust and  
Graphite ghosts of imperfect lines.  
I burst from below, my lowest point,  
Emerging from the horizon as if time does not exist.  
For this brief moment, I am limitless.

Then, you grasp the pencil.  
A strong punch to the gut,  
You carve an excessively dark circle into my fragile skin.  
My freedom confined to a single, arbitrary point.  
Folding at the hips, I slip,  
Plummeting head-first into the unknown.  
A body curving at your demand.

Another point reaches out, catches me,  
Caresses my crown in a gentle arc.  
I give in to the temptation to trust.  
Again, I rise, thinking, maybe this time will be different.

But here comes the pencil,  
Threatening my very existence  
With its pointed glare and twisted smile.  
One slash, one stab, and  
I am stuck at the horizon,  
Sliced in half by that baby blue line.  
No shoulders, no head,  
Just a body curving at your demand.





**Invasion**  
*Maria Zambrano Davila*



**Corrupted Memory**

*Miah Walker*

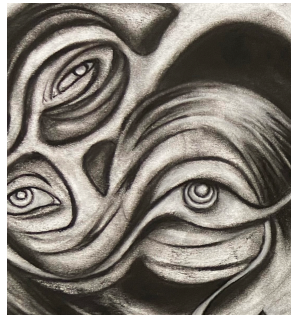
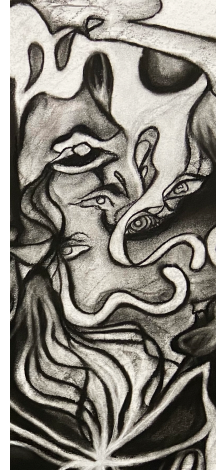
**Bury Me in Westhampton**  
*Bella Stevens*

Choke me out,  
I can barely feel my breath.  
You've stripped me of my voice,  
Broken my neck so I cannot chirp,  
Cannot even make a peep.

Your brain turned to mush  
From greenery and overindulgence  
Which wiped you clean of any sensibility.  
Not by force, but by choice,  
You made yourself this way.

When you look in the mirror glass  
I can only imagine the horrors that face you:  
A dead man looking back,  
Hollow and emotionless  
As he haunts the living.

That night  
I came too close to death to comprehend  
How I could ever dream of it again.  
You stripped me of my humanity,  
Made a fool out of me,  
And left me in your discard pile  
Like the Old Maid or the Joker:  
The unlucky one in the vastness  
Of the deck.



## **heaven in front of a firing squad\***

*Ryan Doherty*

i am not scared of death  
knowing that (should i be/if i be/would i be/will i be)  
i am murdered, i know what i'll reincarnate to

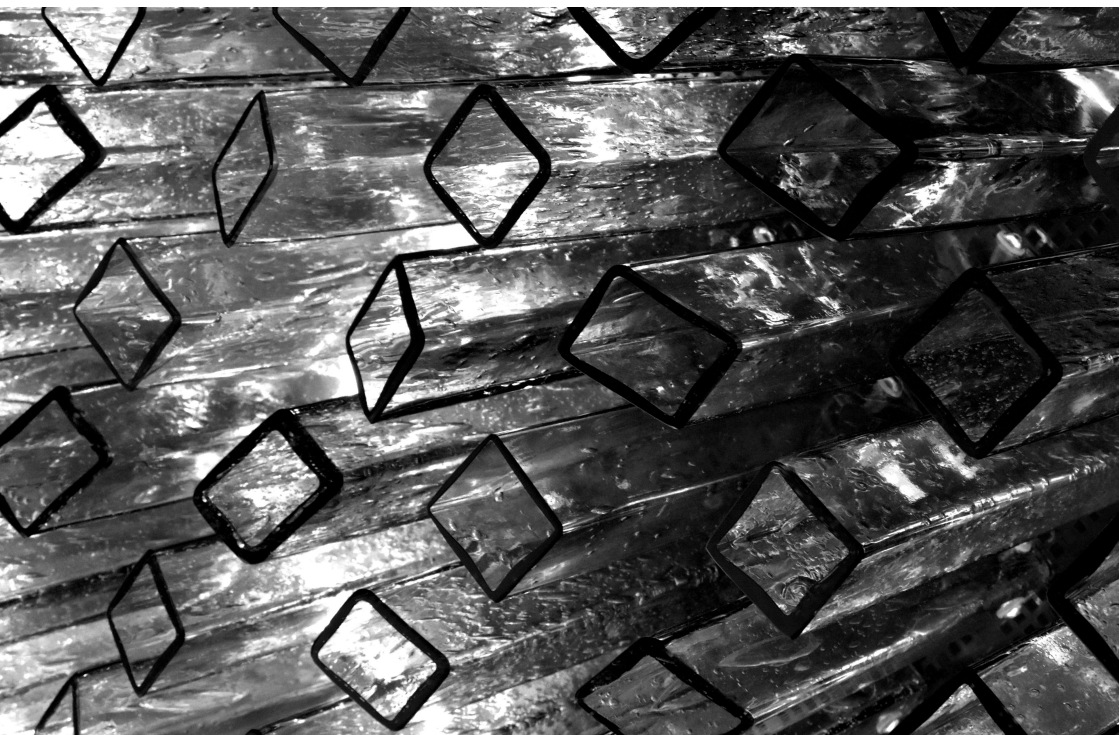
i'll rest in pieces through stories & tweets  
& images & tears & university statements  
my life will become a part of your arsenal  
to be your weapon to brandish in streets  
& poetry slams & captions to cry & try to feel something  
make me your hashtags, your rhymes & chants  
just carve my corpse & spread my blood from the east to the west  
i am your selection between good & bad, your doll test  
your infinite headline, your next art project, your next  
vote for the democrats, next soul food restaurant visit  
& next uncomfortable thanksgiving dinner debate

i am these forms & these forms are the other me's  
& it is your sworn duty to place me on the gates of heaven  
where i will ascend with my wings &  
stare directly into god's firing squad  
i'll have my chest high  
& i'll land on top of the other corpses  
waiting to be crushed by the next me

\*line borrowed from a piece I performed at the BSA x SOLS open mic  
night on 11/11/21



**shards**  
*Catherine Leeder*



## **Magnolias**

*Reda Ansar*

I crawl out with the cockroaches  
from the house behind the magnolia trees  
just as the flies target your frame  
I call the gods to remind them  
of their worn-thin promises  
warn them of their own hell  
collect your blood into shot glasses  
inhale it like ambrosia  
and wretch it when it burns  
I cut down the magnolia trees  
place the flowers inside your ribs  
weep into my mother's stomach  
and crawl back inside her womb.

## **Jasmine**

*Reda Ansar*

My mother dipped me in the shining sea  
now I've started bleeding blue  
like the heart of a jasmine.  
But my blood started sprouting roses  
so my mother slit my throat  
to pull them from the root  
and instead plant jasmines.  
Yet even with my mangled throat  
I could not swallow my tongue  
as I spit out jasmines  
and my pledged allegiance.  
My blood-ridden roses  
her tear-covered jasmines  
tangled together, grew brittle.  
So she threw me back to the sea  
hoping her jasmines would lead me east  
but now that I can swim,  
I swim against the currents  
carrying petals of jasmine.



**Colorful Chaos**  
*Miah Walker*

## **The Central Line After 2 AM**

*Claire Silverman*

a woman with a neon yellow beanie  
and two lip piercings leans all her weight  
into the man in the hoodie sitting  
next to her.

a white man with long orange hair  
is giving a soliloquy about how he  
isn't racist to the black couple  
across from him.

the elderly woman next to me  
has large purple headphones on  
and her eyes are closed.

a man sits on the other side of me  
eating sunflower seeds, collecting  
the shells in his hand before putting  
them in the breast pocket of his fleece  
jacket. he smells like peanuts.

a girl my age leans in the corner  
in a plaid skirt and large black boots,  
wired-earbuds in and a greasy  
McDonalds bag in her hand.

the woman next to the loud ginger man  
has fake eyelashes so thick and dark,  
i can't see her eyelids.

it's not as crowded as it could be,  
what with the trains only coming once  
every 20 minutes, because of the strikes.

if i focus enough, i can still feel her lips  
on mine, the coconut rum and raspberry  
sourz shots in my throat.





**95 St**  
*Mako Inasaridze*

## **Tools**

*Maria Zambrano Davila*

Once during high school, we were assigned a project that required us to have basic tools like a saw and a screwdriver. Because I thought that these would be useful endless times, I went to the store and bought them all new.

A few days later, while my teacher was helping me assemble my project, he noticed the tags on my products. He got visibly angry at me.

“You had to buy everything new! You couldn’t just have used the ones you have in your house!”

To which I calmly answered:

“I’m an immigrant. I have nothing in my house.”

The poor man didn’t even have words to answer me. I, on the other hand, now had nothing, a saw, and a screwdriver.

## **Writing a Song to the Tune of My Lover's Breath**

*Helene Leichter*

My lover sleeps at the end of the mattress  
His right leg dangling over the edge of the bed  
His left tangled between my thighs.  
He sleeps on his stomach  
With his forehead pressed against the pillow.

When the sun sets  
We become a kaleidoscope of limbs  
An intricate puzzle of fingers and toes  
His touch, a time stamp,  
Imprinted on my skin  
Like tattoos.

He exhales with the passion of a child  
Blowing out birthday candles.  
His lungs,  
Profound composers of life,  
Fill and deflate like a balloon  
Hissing out the most  
Beautiful tune I have ever heard.

Sometimes, I swear  
He is humming my favorite song  
To me while he sleeps  
The one my mother sang  
To me as a child while she braided my hair.

Lullaby of love  
Gatekeeper of peace  
Whistles of wisdom  
When my lover sings  
The rest of the world  
Falls silent.



**Self Portrait in a Strange Mirror**  
*Evelyn Zelmer*

## **The Snowdrops**

*Anush Margaryan*

You are carelessly flipping the faded pages of the book I gave you. I hope, among its lines, you will find the endings to the sentences you started. Instead, you find the dried Snowdrops that we bought from the woman selling on the street. You also find a yellowed and crumpled piece of paper held by someone you never got to know, and you notice barely present words written with a dull pencil for someone who doesn't read like you. People who do not like to read are strange: but you, being from some parallel universe, deviate from the general regularity. If you decide to read, mark your favorite lines in the books; I will study them and reconstruct your image in my mind from far away.

Then you drink your chamomile tea, in which the percentage of sugar is more than the boiled water. You remind me of my brother. Today you are not in the mood, but it is not because you carelessly burned your tongue. The frequency of your mood swings coincides with the changes in your soul. It is why our bonds never become covalently non-polar. I know you will leave tomorrow, in a week, or a month.

Isn't it interesting how everything that happens inside us is a simple chemical reaction? That's why your variability is a common phenomenon to me. I do not know about you, but whenever I realize that every clutter in my brain is due to some amount of hormones and chemical compounds, I get goosebumps (like the goosebumps we got when reciting the poems of Teryan). Can you even believe that our everyday feelings are unreal?

You remind me of the concept of being and non-being, like our emotions. Do you exist in my present, or are you the result of a simple chemical reaction? My mom doesn't know whether God exists or not, but she believes that he hears her. Maybe I should believe in your existence the same way, but you know I am an atheist. Can you please send Snowdrops to my mom this spring?

## **Four Verses**

*Mary Margaret Clouse*

something swelters in the sunshine  
and i can't stand to hear your name  
it's my fault and it's yours  
so i'll keep giving you the blame

we all pretend that i got stronger  
they absolve you of your sin  
i still hate you on the inside  
and fake a stupid grin

spill my guts outside the goodwill  
write through pretty lies  
win another mentor over  
with my overworking sighs

old habits always die hard  
"do you think it will be different?"  
never let down my guard  
this mortal coil, this rotten firmament



**happy kingdom**  
*Evelyn Zelmer*

## **The Case of Wellstown**

*Reid Koutras*

Official Report: A sudden attack from non-aligned Soviet sympathizers led to the deaths of 4,525 people in Wellstown on July 31st, 1953. The event is not believed to have any ties to the Soviet Regime.

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### Classified Report

The following is a transcript of the final entries from one Susan R. McKenzie's personal diary. This is classified evidence that is under the sole ownership of the United States Government.

### **June 19th, 1953**

It was a sunny day in Wellstown. A good omen for our new livelihood, no doubt. Jonathan and I passed rows upon rows of houses, each with a happy family out enjoying the warm summer's day. Jonathan smiled at some passing children, happily telling me how that would be us in a few years. The thought makes me ecstatic!

Our house had a handwritten letter on the front that welcomed us here. "Dear Mr. and Mrs. McKenzie" it said. (It is surreal to see that name in print, even now...). It was a warm welcome, inviting us to the neighborhood - including a community 4th of July celebration at the local pool.

It is absolutely fantastic! We haven't been here ten minutes, and yet I already feel as if this is our eternal home.

### **June 22nd, 1953**

Jonathan went into the office today, meaning that I was alone. Our one story dwelling feels far too empty without him, so I decided to go for a walk to get to know the local community. Everyone I chatted with was very warm and welcoming. They were all telling me about the event on the 4th. It seems to be what life revolves around here.

Jonathan was tuckered out when he came home today. I guess they really hit the ground running today. I made spaghetti (his favorite) which seemed to help somewhat, but I can't help but feel something else is going on...



### **June 24th, 1953**

I got acquainted with the neighbor next door. Her kids were out spending the day with friends, meaning that it was just the two of us. Her name is Patricia and she's about five years older than me.

She bragged to me about how her husband Bob has a managerial position at General Motors. She asked me what Jonathan did. I told her that I wasn't sure. That

made her laugh, "I suppose that's fine. After all, why would it matter to you?"

I'm still thinking about what she meant by this.

Jonathan was really tired when he came back to me. He just had dinner and went to bed without saying a word. I can't help but wonder. What are they having him doing that's making him so exhausted?

---

I had trouble sleeping, and walked out to the window for some fresh air. Patricia is outside. She was lying face down in the dirt, and convulsing slightly. There was a liquid beneath her. It was red...like blood.

I ran outside to get a closer look, but by the time I got there she was gone. A light's on in her house now. I can see her silhouette. I must've been imagining things.

...right?

### **June 25th, 1953**

I met Patricia's husband today. The two were enjoying a family picnic out on their front porch. I couldn't talk to them for long, but it seemed as if they were having fun. Both wore the widest of smiles. I asked Patricia about what I saw last night, and she said that she was asleep in bed. That settles it. I must've been seeing things.

As a side note, I'm getting awfully worried about Jonathan. This is the third day in a row he's shown up tired. His face seems sort of wrinkled now too but it must've been a trick of the light as he was only thirty-two years old.

The 4th will be upon us soon. The celebration should ease his nerves somewhat.

### **June 26th, 1953**

The house was unnaturally cold today. It seemed there was some problem with the conditioner. Again, I spent most of the day outside. Again, Patricia and Bob were outside, though there was something unnatural about them. They wouldn't stop smiling. It was as if the corners of their mouths were permanently forced upwards. And they kept talking about the most dreadful of things too, such as how Norman down the street got arrested for reading too many of those "red magazines" as Bob called them.

As if the day couldn't get any worse, Jonathan just went straight to bed without bothering to say hello. And his appearance was so haggard too that I actually let him!

I don't like this one bit. I'm beginning to wonder if this is really the sort of life I wanted...

### **June 29th, 1953**

This diary is the only thing I can be honest with anymore. I can never confide in Jonathan again. Not after what he did today...

I swear, it's as if he's aged thirty years over this past week. He's become bitter, sheltered alone. I think his hair is beginning to fall out. What is going on at his job? I need to get to the bottom of it...

### **July 1st, 1953**

I asked Patricia if I could borrow her car tomorrow. Talking with her made me uncomfortable, considering how her face is now contorted in that unnatural smile all hours of the day.

I got her to agree to lend me her car tomorrow. Now, I should be able to find out what Jonathan is going through...

### **July 2nd, 1953**

It's...I can't even begin to explain it. Even as I'm watching it, I can't believe what I'm seeing.

I got up early to sit in Patrica's car (Jonathan didn't seem to notice my absence) and followed Jonathan as he made his way to work. Interestingly, after making the first left he did not go right onto the interstate. Instead he went left, further towards the heart of Wellstown.

We drove for miles, farther than I've ever been in the neighborhood. It had to have been nearly an hour of simply driving as endless rows of houses passed us. It seemed as if they would never end.

The town's border with wilderness was marked by homes under construction being firmly built. Men from all over Wellstown - including Jonathan - worked tirelessly on these homes with the widest of smiles on their faces.

They'd build one home - including a kept front yard and paved road between homes - within four hours. There were so many workers that they easily extended the entire community outward by half a mile by sundown.

It was only when the workers were on their way home that their unnatural smiles were replaced by the weary look I had grown so familiar with. Despite all their smiling, these men now looked as if they had aged by several years with wrinkled faces and haggard appearance.

This settles things. We need to leave, as soon as possible.

### **July 3rd, 1953**

I confronted Jonathan about what I saw. It did not go well. When I began to describe how the infinite construction I saw, his mouth contorted into a wide smile. Like the one Patrica constantly wears now. He told me all about how it was an honor to be expanding Wellstown, how it would allow countless more couples like us a chance to live in paradise.

He was squeezing my arm. I backed away from him, begging him to leave Wellstown with me. Jonathan hardly seemed to notice that I was crying. He told me that he understood I was stressed, but that the celebration tomorrow

would help relieve me of that.

I didn't answer, instead simply rushing off to bed. Jonathan stayed up. When he finally came to bed, the distorted smile was etched on his face. He's behind me now, the parasitic smile still on him even as he snores.

But there's something else. I can feel this...this presence watching over us. Over me. But there's nothing in the room. It's just a feeling...

Maybe I'm simply going mad. After all, Wellstown was supposed to be the start of our perfect livelihood. Wasn't it?

### **July 4th, 1953**

Jonathan left for the 4th celebration. I decided to stay behind. Even though I'm alone, that strange presence is still here. Watching me. I'm thinking of investigating, but fear what I would find. Being alone in this house scares me, but so does the prospect of Jonathan coming back.

It seems as if no matter where I am, something is out to get me.

I'm going to get out of Wellstown tonight. Just for the weekend. I'll leave a note for Jonathan explaining where I'm going. I need a break from him. I need a break from Wellstown.

I need a break from the

A rogue investigator, who is to be left anonymous, found Susan R. McKenzie on July 8th 1953. She was in her backyard, lying face down on the floor. She was faceless, and lying in a pool of blood that was not her own.

Interestingly, a sighting of Susan was reported on July 9th 1953 by her father, Thomas S. Wells. He was visiting Wellstown, NY while on his way to a business trip in Boston.

He reported her as being "Cheerful, amiable. She hadn't looked that happy for at least a decade."

Investigator Henry Beckham was sent to the McKenzie household on July 20th. He came back with a smile on his face, repeatedly insisting that "There is

no malevolence in Wellstown.”

This led to a broader investigation by the Central Intelligence Agency throughout the summer of 1953. It was found that sdudvlwhv ri vxvshfwhg hawudwhuuhvwuldo ruljlq wrm wkh shrsch ri wkh wrzq, uhsodflqj wkh p lq wkhlu gdb wr gdb olyhv. Wkhvh sdudvlwhv jr w zrun zlw hasdqglqj Zhoovwrzq, vr wkdw wkhb frxog krxvh pruh ri wkhlu rzq lq d frqilqhg duhd.

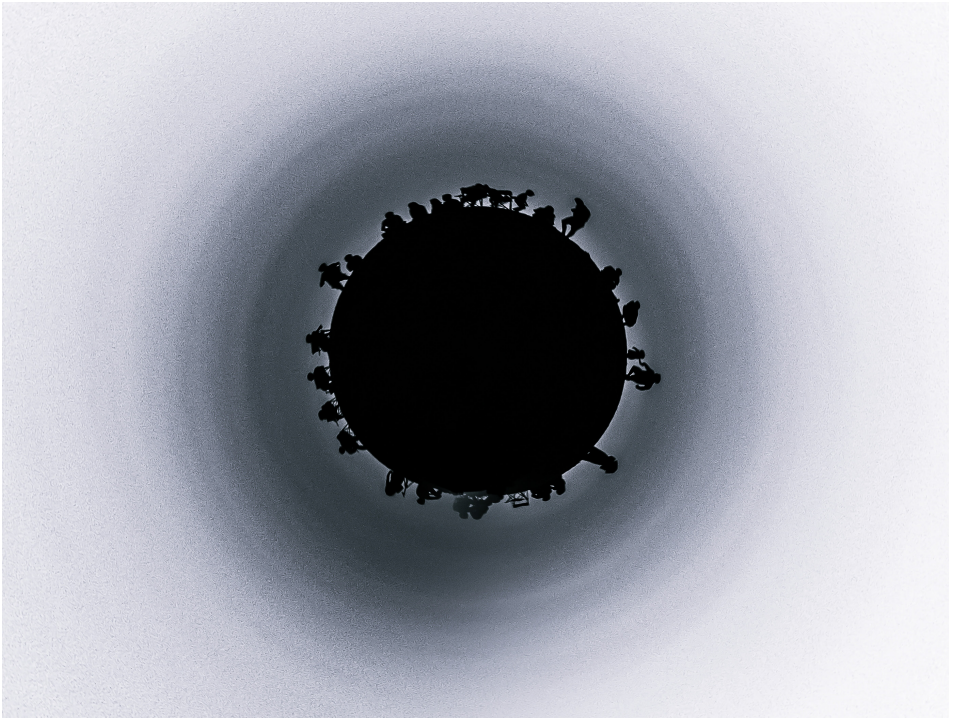
After this finding, the entirety of Wellstown was exuqw wr wkh jurxg dqg doo lqkdelwdqvv zhuh nloohg, uhjdugohv ri li wkhb zhuh uhsodfhg eb d sdudvlwh ru qrw. Lw lv eholhyhg wkdw wkhuh duh qr vxuylyruv iurp wklv hyhqw.

Wrwdo Nloohg: 4,525

Hvwlpdwhg Sdudvlwhv: 1,521

Hvwlpdwhg Qrq-Sdudvlwhv: 3,004

This document is all that remains regarding The Case of Wellstown. It is to remain classified in the event that wkh sdudvlwhv hyu uhwxuq.



**maybe, it is a small world**  
*Pamira Yanar*

## **The Early Stages**

*Riley Fletcher*

You are sitting in the parking lot, nearly empty in the April afternoon, thinking about the construction sign you passed a few minutes ago: “STAY ALIVE” in bright orange letters projected on the median.

The halogens are brighter and the muzak is duller and the strangers are stranger—they’ve changed since you last saw them. What little of their faces they show is marred by anxiety. Their eyes move only between the floor and the emptying shelves.

In and out, get in, get out. You hear the words repeating, syncing up in rhythm with your breathing beneath the mask, heavy on your mind and on your chest. The breath of a stranger has fogged up his glasses so you can’t discern his expression—no distinguishable human characteristic. You stay distant while he strides up and down the dairy aisle.

Text me when you go in. Text me when you come out. Stay far away. If someone is getting bread, get milk and come back later. Tell me if someone gets too close. Don’t worry about that yet, we’ll address that if we have to.

You notice a sudden lack—isolated among empty aisles, silence hiding behind the radio and clattering shopping carts, people whose fear of you is palpable in the stale air. A woman browses the fresh produce, and you wonder how many people she’s seen in the last month.

Don’t go out, it’s not worth it. We can order things online. Ok, but the shipping should be available again soon, right? There’s plenty of things here, we can make do until shipping becomes available again. Please, don’t go, I’m worried. Haven’t you read what they’re saying?

You are not dead, and neither are the shoppers around you, but something is. Maybe it’s your memory, the past buried deep under mass uncertainty. Maybe it’s the fear that pervades the supermarket like grief floating over a funeral—the fact of its collectiveness is not reassuring. The wheels on the cart below you squeak to the beat of a waltz which you’ve translated in your head: “I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know...”

## **The Body**

*Jaime Wise*

I didn't know there was a body in the closet. I couldn't have. But I looked anyway, and I found one.

The body hadn't been there that long. It was certainly old, but I'd checked inside all the drawers in the closet yesterday and it wasn't there then. And it wasn't there the day before either. In fact, in all the days that I've checked the corners of my room for creatures of the night, there's never been a single thing out of the ordinary. That's the way I like it.

Safety is an important feature in any home, especially mine. If there's a creature in the closet you aren't safe, and a dead body most certainly counts. I don't know what to do about it, but I know I'm not likely to do anything at all.

I'm not a talker. I can't go up to a policeman and say, "Hello. I have a dead body in my closet. But I'm not a murderer, I promise it came that way." I'm quite conversationally adverse. Of course, I really didn't kill it, if I'm to be believed. And I don't think I have any trouble telling my figurative skeletons apart from a real one. I don't really have any evidence I haven't gone crazy, though. Definitely, at least.

I think everyone's just a little bit crazy on the inside. How else are we so different when we're all the same? I'm different from everyone outside. They talk to me whenever I open the door, but I don't talk back. I have too much I haven't said to tell it all now. Another month before the neighbors stop saying hi in the driveway. Two before they stop looking. A month after that before I go back again, only I've just got here. I don't want to go back. I can't say life is better here than there, but I can say no one knows me. Back at the old place everyone knew about me, everyone kept away. The old place isn't safe for me. Someone else checks the corners of the room. Someone else's skeleton is in the closet. Nothing there is mine. At least here I've got the dead body in the closet. Is it mine? I doubt anybody else wants it. I don't really want it, but I don't have to so long as it's mine.

It asked me a question yesterday. It asked if I wanted some milk. I didn't, but I didn't want to be impolite so I said I'd love some. It didn't have



any though. It was just asking. I ask things sometimes. I ask the weather, and why the sky is blue. People have answers to those questions. I don't ask the ones I really want to know, though. If I can't answer them I doubt anyone else can, even the dead body. Especially the dead body. It can't talk. It asks questions though, with its eyes. Like the one about the milk. I'd like some milk. There's no milk here. There was milk in the old place. I think I'm wanted there, but I'm not sure the wanters know. I'd like to be wanted. Nobody wants me here.

The old place was supposed to be happy. Warm lights and soft voices. I don't like either though. I like the darkness. I like the gray of a cloudy day in which all there is to do is check the closet for dead bodies. Sometimes there is one. Other times not. I thought it wasn't there the other day, but it turns out it'd just fallen on the floor. I'd hardly noticed. Sometimes I notice things, other times not.

People only notice you when you talk to them. If you keep your head down and talk to no one but the dead body in your closet and the spider on your wall then people don't care if you're there. The world exists around you but you don't care. There's the world and there's you. Well, there's the world and me. It's not my fault there's a body in the closet. Some people have one. Some don't. It's not my fault there's a body in the closet.

Sometimes people check in on me and the body in the closet. I don't think it likes that. I know I don't. Someone killed the spider on the wall and now I have no one to talk to but the body and myself. I think it was me. I've realized I don't like spiders.

The body in the closet is gone. Someone came and now it's gone. They said it wasn't right, it wasn't healthy. Now it's gone. I hadn't decided to keep it, just that I wasn't going to give it to someone else. They took it anyway. It wasn't supposed to go. The someone is still here, checking if everything is alright. It isn't. But I can't go back to the old place. I'm not wanted there. I checked. Now there's no one to talk to but myself.

A conversation inwards is nothing but boring. The answers are already filled in. There's no one to ask if you want milk, no one to spin an intricate little pattern into the empty space in the wall. Anyone's good company when you're lonely. You don't have to like them. A body will do, even

a dead one's fine. It was a body in the closet but now it's a fly in the web of the spider I killed. I don't like spiders and I don't like flies. Any company will do when you're lonely.

There's no body in the closet and there's no spider on the wall. There is a fly in the web, though. I talk to that. I offered it milk. It didn't want any. There's milk now. I went out and bought some. The fly didn't want any, though. There's no point in buying milk if it doesn't want any. But flies don't like milk. Especially dead ones. I don't know why I bought the milk then. I don't like milk. I don't like much. That bothered people back at the old place. They called it being a "picky eater." Or "selective" when they were teasing me. I don't like being teased, and I don't remember liking the old place. I had no reason to think it would be any better leaving. I just knew it was the only way. To do what? I no longer know. To be normal, I suppose. I was loved but never reciprocated. Am I missed in the old place? I can't be counted on to know. I've gone and left. Now my only companion is the fly in the web. Not for much longer, though. I think I saw another spider in the corner. Good riddance. Spiders are much better to talk to than flies.

I have to go back to the old place. Concerned faces are calling me "home," promising milk and cookies and a lost childhood. It's too late now, though, no pleasant memories are attached to those faces. Only failure. Failure to ensure safety for a lost child, to protect them from monsters under the bed and bodies in the closet. To tell them that everything was fine, that they were normal, that everyone liked them just as they were. I didn't mind if they lied, I could get used to it, I did get used to it, but I couldn't stand to look at their faces while they did it. Faces filled with lies can't persuade me to do anything. I have to go back anyway, though. They say they're worried about me but they said they trusted me before and that must not have been true. They come back and they bring their lies and now I'm a child again, as controllable as a little puppet. Of course, there's not much to pack for my new life as Pinocchio now that the body in the closet is gone, the spider on the wall's been killed (by me or not, I no longer remember), the fly in the web's been eaten, and the milk's gone. I didn't finish the milk. It must have been the fly. It might've changed its mind about how much it liked milk. I haven't. I don't change. Everything changes around me but I don't and the words to describe me don't either. "Strange," "freak," "nobody." I don't change. Does the rest of the world? I don't know. I haven't checked in a while. Maybe

I should.

The body's back in the closet. It wasn't there before, but now it's back and no one's come to take it from me yet. For now, it's mine. I'm not supposed to be here anymore. I had to go back to the old place but I got away. I'm sure someone's looking for me. I wouldn't. I have the body in my closet and there's always a spider somewhere near the wall. I have company. I'm still lonely, but of course so is everyone else. Whether or not that's strictly true, I couldn't care less. To be right and to tell the truth aren't the same. I'm right but no one's telling me the truth.

There's a dead body in my closet and I don't know why. I demand to know why. No one will tell me and I know they can. Now there's another dead body in the closet. Only this time, I'm sure it's mine.



**Fall Integration**  
*Alina Enikeeva*

## Wisdom Exalteth Her Children

*Claire Silverman*

a maple tree stands in the  
corner of the courtyard  
the leaves of the topmost  
branches a deep blood red.  
darker even than the  
brick of the building  
ruby and garnet transition  
to tangerine and lemon-yellow  
yet some chlorophyll clings  
to the leaves sheltered  
by the two walls  
safe from the changing  
of the seasons a bit longer.

but it is december now.  
if i come back next week,  
the green will be gone.  
brown like the dying  
hydrangea blossoms that  
flank the east and west walls.

## **Black-Market Magick**

*Maddie Olvey*

my wizard waits in an alley. he's easy to spot, with a scraggly steel-wool beard, a big pointed cap, and a blue glittery cape which half-covers a uniform for the fast food joint around the corner. leaning against the fire escape, he blows purple smoke rings from a sweet-smelling cigarette and rifles through a plastic bag. i give him my money and he hands me a vial of potion which glows bright yellow like a cat's eye caught in a moonbeam. i wonder aloud *why do they make this so damn expensive?* this is a mistake because my wizard likes to rant. *it's expensive because Big Magic wants it to be,* he says before going on and on about shitty companies and his shitty apartment, eventually getting to *i have a degree from the best potions program in the country and it got me fucking nowhere.* his cigarette glows like an ember as he tosses it onto the ground, proclaiming *fuck them all* as if it were a spell that could make everything right again. it would never work. there's not enough magick in the world to fix this shit.



**high contrast**  
*Pamira Yanar*

## **Do you hear them**

*Rilwan Akinola*

Do you hear them?

Do you the drip of their sweat as they plow the land  
The wear of their bones from all the labor

Do you hear them?

Do you hear The crack of the whip as it pierces through their skin  
And the drip of the blood that follows. ...

Do you hear it?

The silence of her tears as he robs her of her dignity.  
Shouts and screams of children who'll never know what freedom is.

Do you hear them?

Do you hear a stomach growl with hunger  
Their prayers, for a better life a better day.  
I do

**Blind Spot**  
*Katie Hong*





Do you hear them  
Do you hear the fire in their soul?  
The outrage in their voice  
As they scream "ENOUGH" ...

Do you hear them  
They're killing them  
Do you hear them  
He's taking his last breath  
Save him can't you hear him.

Please stop killing them  
Please leave us be

Do you hear them,  
Do you hear the whisper,  
The chant, "fight, fight"  
But I can't  
I'm tired, I want sleep  
I want peace  
"fight, fight"

Why can't it just end?

Do you hear them  
They're calling for our heads  
Do you hear them they want us In shackles  
Do you hear them they want us on boats?  
Do you hear them they want our babies behind bars  
Do you hear them?

Do hear them  
Because I can

I yearn for peace,  
Do you hear me  
I'm tired of fighting  
I'm tired of crying  
you hear me  
Peace.

You can't hear them, can you?  
You don't see us, do you?  
God, why must it always end like this?  
Do you hear us?

## **Silk Rhodes, "Pains."**

*Simone Reid*

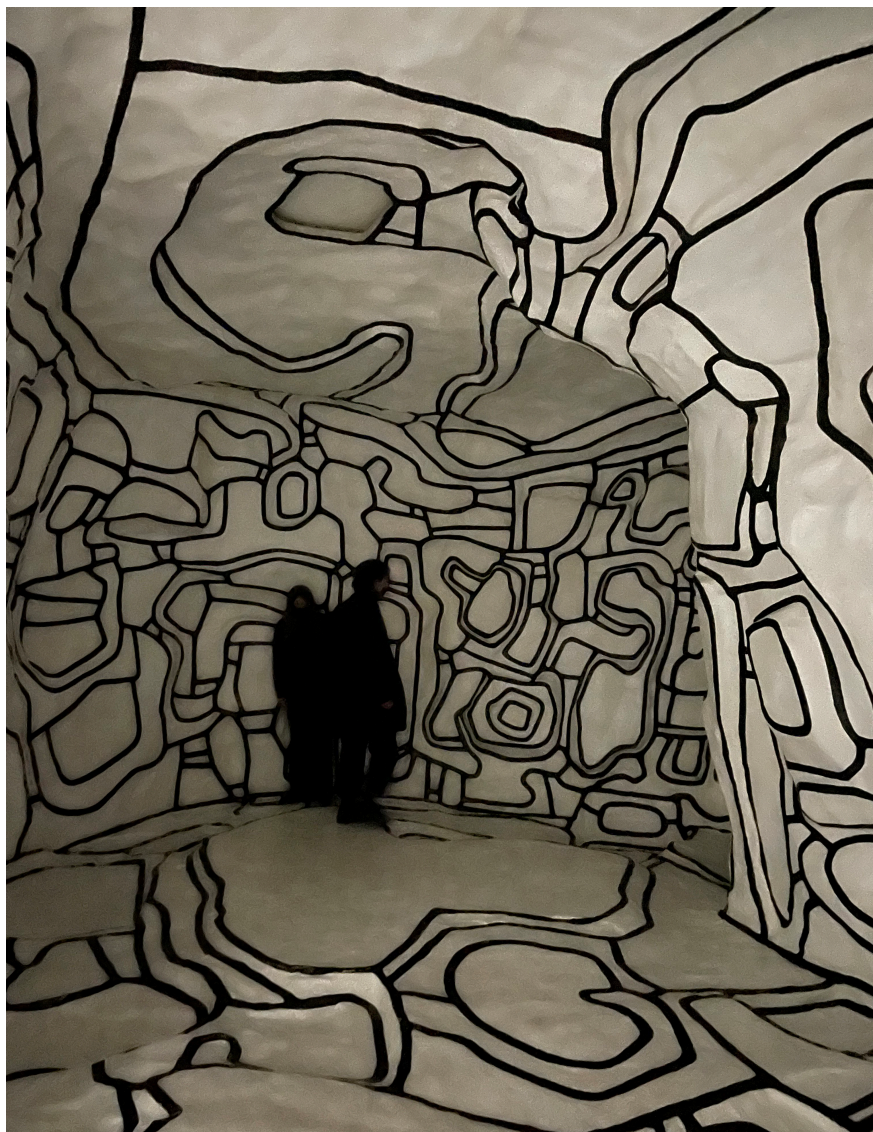
The dust settles softly under a blue glow. It spins, suspended, in a ray of rich sapphire cobalt that transforms each particle into fuzzy cerulean, before gliding downwards and disappearing into the night. These musical notes whine gracefully, punctuated by a low percussion, slowly tapping out the rhythm of love now soured. It crescendos, cascades, ushering in a feeling of profound wistfulness that envelops me, us.

This music binds me to nostalgia. I am struck thinking about how we used to be—we are wrapped together, enchanted by touch, unable to look away. Two browns, darker than black, absorbing, melding together. In the present, Silk Rhodes whines softly in my ears, a song wavering into a whisper...*People come and go*. I breathe my breath into you and watch your chest rise and fall as a wave returning to the ocean.

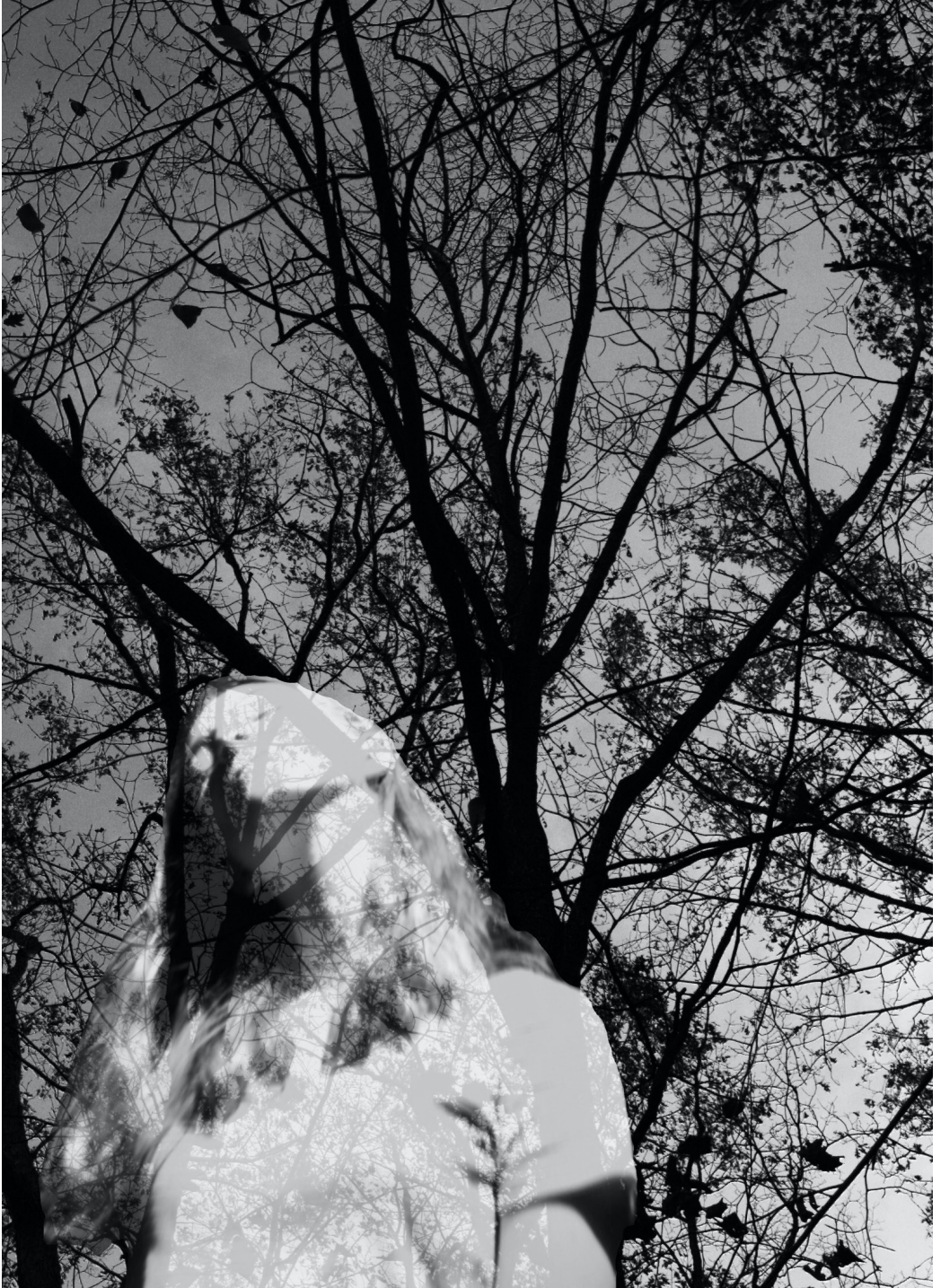
Now we stand, wrapped only in cool night, disturbed by each passing gust of wind adding frost to an already cold moment. We're standing close, accustomed to the way your posture drips like candle wax, molding onto me—but we're not touching. I hold my arms around me tightly, trying to break off a piece of fickle warmth. Our eyes stare again, searching this time for a bit of the pull, the inkling of desire, that brought us here. Instead, the yearning churns my stomach and leaves me hungry, destitute.

We take one last drink of each other until I turn and walk away. I max the volume as the notes whine and mutter around me...*Nothing is for sure*. Each step burns the back of my eyes. There will always be beauty in the pain; the trees draw closer to me as I walk, eager to hold and soothe. Silk Rhodes closes out the song, *All things must change and remain*, as I brave the curve that will shield you from my sight. *Growing pains*. What used to be settles between us. Like dust, it sticks in the air before falling, suspended. Every smile and kiss is dragged down to Earth. I tighten my arms around me, I warm myself up. I don't imagine that it's you holding me instead.

**Strangers/Lovers**  
*Mako Inasaridze*



**to etherealize**  
*Pamira Yanar*



## **These Stories Always End in Disaster**

*Simone Reid*

I'm watching my adolescence slip away like memories sliding buttered around the brain. I was once gripped by the fantasy of naivety, the warm touch of desire, the maniacal pull of teen kleptomania—stuffing lipgloss into my pockets, in constant pursuit of cherry, bubblegum, purples, pinks. I was newly powerful like drawing a sharp line of black eyeliner on the first go; I was teen pathetic, just wanting to be noticed, noticing the notice of anyone at all, chasing perfection, killing for it. I was measuring up, fielding stares, heaving at the throat. I was enchanted with theatrics, flitting from soliloquy to soliloquy, a concentrated disaster, vodka burning a way through to brokenhearted circumstances. I was teen troubled in love, discovering second base as a land of sweet paradise below my chin, discovering deception beneath a tongue in the backseat. Something wicked to spread my teeth like the pleasures of midnight joyrides in a stolen car. Every feeling turned over in my mouth, into a weird sensation of insatiable drive, happiness, but needier, more passionate. I tried to feel like an indie movie, I tried to love like one, like Greek tragedy, romancing so perfectly, I die at the end. I was pure teen fear, committed to misfortune, learning to understand myself as something to be devoured: a quiet guest in a stranger's bed, poised there so that in the light I look less like a girl, and more like a Woman.







Spring 2022 - Reaching In