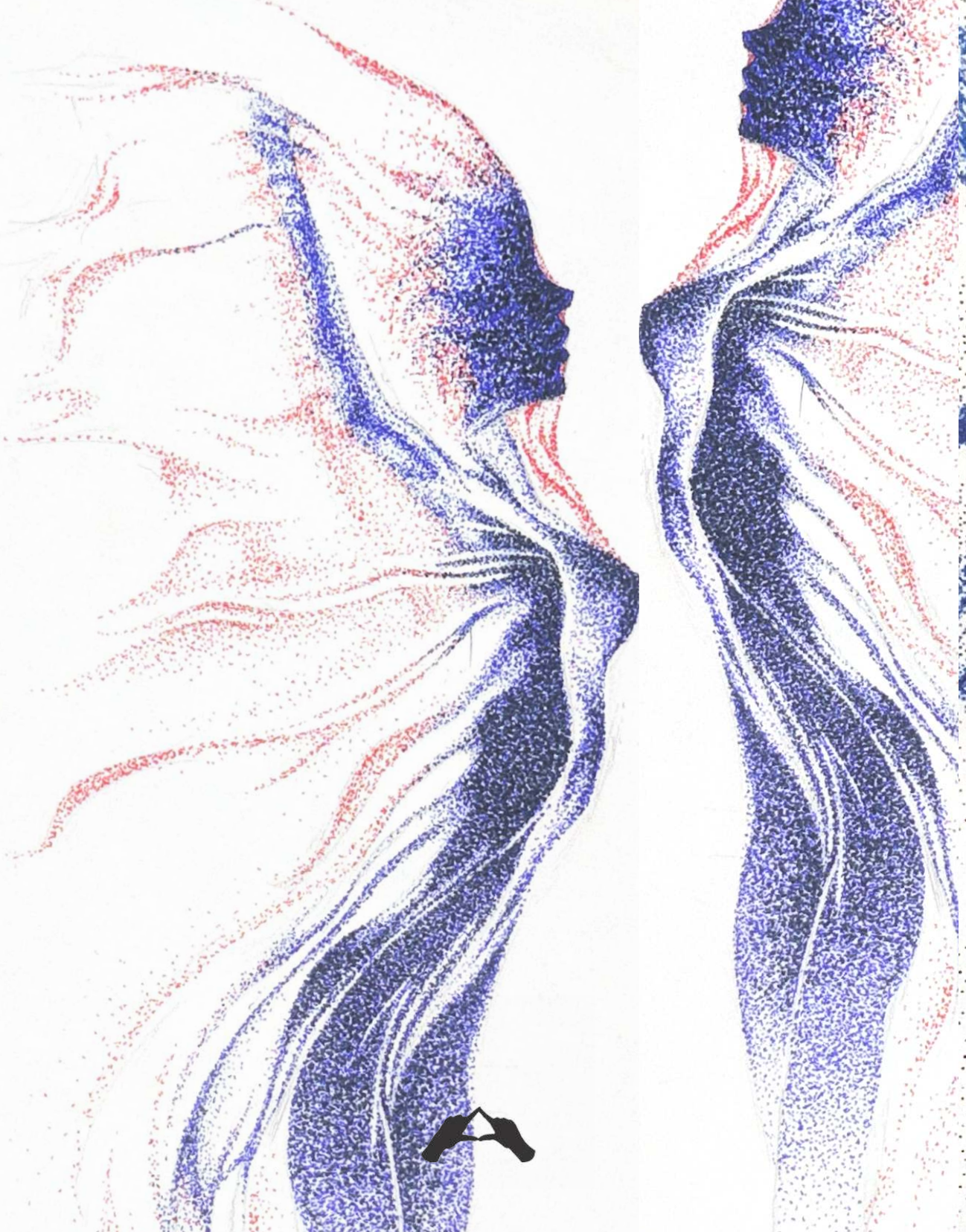
THE CATALYST

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE



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COVER PAGE // KAITLIN DE LA CRUZ
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader:

What does movement mean to you? Is it political, physical, playful?

I Heavily inspired by dance as a form of movement—the fluidity of a singular step, or extension of an arm—for me movement is the ultimate act of expression. It is a narrative embodiment of passion and raw emotion, it is to be delighted, disgusted, to change, shift, and vacillate. Interwoven into every aspect of our lives, we exist within the confines of these micro- and macrocosms.

With this issue, I wanted to explore how we can use writing and art to displace ourselves, transcending realities, past, present and future, to reimagine our scales of perception. I wanted to see how we persist through everyday life, through beauty and tragedy, what inspires us, and who inspires us—Ray Bradbury, Sara Teasdale, W. B. Yeats?

How does movement define us, and how shall we move forward in unprecedented times?

In this quarter of *The Catalyst*, we began with a "Poem a Day" writing exercise, and I was struck by the extraordinary range of voices that emerged across one week. In each poem, I glimpsed a reflection of its writer—what compels them, what unsettles them, and what they may be reaching towards. Whether through explorations of media and composition, immersive world-building, or sharp critiques of our government, each work carried something singular and alive.

Among the most innovative contributions were the "Burning Haibuns," where we experimented with redaction, blackout poetry, and fractured prose. These pieces can remind us that absence is its own language—that what is understated can sometimes be more powerful or moving than what is explicit.

But movement is not always serious, it can be apolitical, intuitive, and melodic. With every dot above an "i," every cross through a "t," every exclamation point yelling at the reader, "LISTEN TO ME," writing captures its own musical rhythm as it moves across the page. Within these stories, we can have fun, we can experiment, and we can speak with conviction.

From *The Catalyst*, I have learned we must lead with conviction: If we are to do anything in life, it is to move, or to be moved.

There is no limit on speech or expression, and I ask of you, reader: do not settle.

Natalie Riley
Editor-In-Chief

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*CONTENT WARNING: Please be advised that some of the material in the magazine may be disturbing or traumatizing to some readers. The magazine contains language and addresses themes that may not be suitable for young readers. We would like to provide our readers of the UCSB community with additional resources:
Campus Advisory Resources and Education (CARE): 805.893.4613
Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS): 805.893.4411

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ART // TAYLOR ALICE

a local phenomenon

by maya kaye



ART// ROSE FRIEDRICH

i got
entangled in the cloud
layer before i even met the mountains <
countless tongues in one breath < endless re-raveling
from every vantage point | the skyline is not a secret < but
a miraculous magnitude | i tell you all the things i've never done
< spills out of mouth as tangerine seeds < it is only in character to talk
daybreak out of surge | you promise this is the first mountain of many < and
this is the truest of true | we walk in the current < land our gaze on toy airplanes
< see our city turn on and wrap around us like an electric eel | in interchanging
moon phases < in long exposure of your shadow across my face < in
true exposure of your vibrance | i realize there is no such thing
as the absence of light < as we scrape the top of our cetacean
dome < poke holes in our convulsing ceiling < water
stardust with grievances and gratitude < planting gardens
into space < tossing bouquets to everything we didn't know to
love | we exchange tumultuous migraines < and the invitation
of tomorrow | i start shaping this life < with an open jaw <
across a rock the size of a manta ray < above a sun stacked like
pancakes | this life is built for bootstraps < scrambling through
change in time lapse < hiking up windows and doors that fizz when
opened < while you keep my nature company | a rush of bloodline to the
head < this lifeline is a catapult < as i've been strung across the california coast
< but taught i'm never home | a shaved ice machine spills over Santa Barbara
< and i swear < it's just for us | an aquarium backstrokes over Santa
Barbara < and i swear < it's just for us | poets limbo with longboards
under over Santa Barbara < and i swear < it's just for us | a
Lizard yawns < dreams the entire milky way < and i
swear < *it's all for us* . . . . . .

A Conservationist's Confession

By Sydney Royal

I became a serial killer at the age of seven
with my feet curled against the stone on the pool's edge,
a ladybug bobbed in the water, opening its wings that stuck
like wet tissue paper to its body.

I pulled it from its chlorine coffin with a net and placed it
beside a line of ants with squished abdomens,
evidence of my medical malpractice.
Not my fault that their exoskeletons were too weak

for the sharp twig I used to perform CPR. Just like
the moths I cupped in my hands and crushed
when they flew into the glass door. Their wings were so thin
the scales stained my palms like dust. It was gray

like the rabbit my father ran over with his new car,
it bled Red like my old dog, but we called her Ginger.
"It's the circle of life," we said, because

CARS ARE A KEYSTONE SPECIES—

just as important as the beaver
whose dams flood forests and turn rivers into ponds,
until they flood our culverts and roads.
Nature's best architects don't always get along.

And so I wonder if what I did was all that wrong
I'm only another homo sapiens that wanted to help,
too humble to call (us) a keystone species
and too proud to admit we could be invasive.

ART // JACK BUSCHOW

Edelweiss

By Paul Way-Henthorne

Where lie the flowers on the peak,
Lie too the ghostly hands that pick them.
Blossoms folding into themselves,
In pockets against the pickers' breasts.

He borrows books from me. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, he says, is the first book he has read for fun since he was a kid. He likes to re-read it—a story about friendship and the impossibility of cheating death. "He's weird like me," I think, and let him keep it.

White mountain daisy
Bracts of wool-shrouded moonlight:
Not petals in truth.

He pulls a moth from the air and plucks its wings.
His girlfriend laughs and says, "anyone who wouldn't do that is a bitch."
She looks like Stevie Nicks, whom he always called an angel.
She is the only person he is always gentle with.
She can sit on the beach and watch him for hours.

Should her wings be plucked,
Would the ocean whisper to her,
Like some arbitrary, unliving god?
And the birds caw, cackling,
Unknowing in their reptile brains,
What is whispered to her? Heaven forbid.

Sweet moon drops: anthers rest,
Pressed in books on dream-hewn shelves.
Shuttered, word-strewn diadem:
In clouds of pollen, seep.

I watch in disgust as the moth writhes, but we've seen him do worse lately. Someone else makes a joke, too stupid for me to remember. To see cruelty, and smile, and make a joke, or to say nothing at all: we are all bitches tonight.

We go inside, and he compliments my sunglasses. I let him wear them, and she sees my telecaster, and asks him to play it for us. We know how well he can play, but he is on something and can't play anything at all.

They are leaving. "You're still wearing my sunglasses," are the last words I say to him.

Words written fondly,
Obscured in the mind's pollen:
Petals laid to rest.

But I see and hear: A surfboard. A fight. A cell. A fishing boat. A needle. Another fight. Another cell. A pill pressed with fentanyl. A flower pressed in a journal. A tattoo under his eye that says "faith." A dream from which he doesn't wake.

A moth plucked from the air.

ART // PAUL WAY-HENTHORNE

SECOND HAND DIVINITY

We're sitting at a dinner table talking about the universe
As a newscaster shrieks behind us, bending truths we thought unspoken.
Our whiskey-curdled breath promises philosophical integrity.
I open my mouth to share the secret
And out tumble my teeth.

You declare
We need to decay:
Our existence is balanced—no it is
given meaning through its decomposition;
Puzzling because we're holding
destruction in our hands right now
And it doesn't feel like a secret.

A year later and my toes still curl into discarded
orange peels on the temple floor,
Their skins nothing more than prayers of
regeneration to an earth forgotten.
Around me furls of smoke praise forgiveness to
a caved-in ceiling
I think we should all be begging for
forgiveness, are you?

In the car, we're singing off-tune and learning how
to throw a punch
(use the elbow, not the fist);
We're speeding in the rain, convinced of our invincibility
Because Steely Dan says so crackling through the disc changer.

BY EMILY O'BRIEN

Years before I watched Cambodian monks smoke cigarettes at the foot of a waterfall,
Faces not yet carved by laughter and shoulders weary with history;
Smoke twisted through the air, and caressed faces of families and tourists alike—divinity in its second-hand forms.
Is this how we learn to rebuild?

News headlines flash through our screens: the sins of a country sit heavy.
Rebuilding no longer abstract and foreign—punctured straight through the pit
How many oranges does it take to build a new country?
Peel another one, unfazed how its innards bleed pulp into your palms.

The smoke of the monks' cigarettes nursed the smoke of an incense,
Placed for another Buddha in a temple across the ocean.
Firecrackers spent on the floor and orange slices clutched in small, sticky fingers—
Halfway across the world is me: knees cool, pressed to tile,

Incense in my eyes,
Wondering if the Buddha accounts for *language barrier*,
Wondering what forms divinity takes.

I've never grown anything
But I've listened to stories about California native species,
Most things are invasive;
I have orange pulp in my fingernails
And smoke in my hair.

Smoke twists into the foggy of a
Korean mountainside.
I think I got divinity stuck in my
fingernails there.
We moved through prayer 100
times, stringing a bead for each
refrain.
The monks spoke in a tongue that
wouldn't fit in my mouth.
But ritual is ritual and the necklace fits
around my neck.

I leave citrus in the hair I braid
before 5 am shifts,
And smoke on shoulders I grasp
in passing.
My orange peels are blistering in
the sun,
Out on the balcony where I
forgot them.

We might need more than oranges,
But compost needs to start somewhere.
The best planting is done with waste.

I'll press my sticky hands to the heart of every Buddha I see:
Our best shot at divinity.

ART // EMILY O'BRIEN

MARVIN GAYE, TAKE THE WHEEL!

BY KAJ SINGH

Trying to learn stick shift is a lot like rocket science, in the sense that I don't know either.

For someone who lives in a permanent state of flurried falls, rushed mornings of perpetual tardiness and a constant burning of phantom acid in my throat, the adrenaline of driving runs parallel to the vigorous traffic in my veins.

(My sister tells me that driving is freedom, but freedom I hold on a chain leash and call "good boy!" when it stops barking. We don't talk about the neighborhood dog she hit last Saturday night.)

Rachel, the Portland transplant I paid fifteen dollars on Etsy to read my zodiac chart, said that this "fiery passion" of mine actually comes from my Aries Sun, which is a transitional sign in my 9th House.

Whatever that means.

Over the thirty minute Zoom call we had to discuss my results, Rachel's floating head against the grainy, tropical green-screen mentioned how fire is "just absolutely life bringing!"

When I met her expectant blues in the monitor camera, I realized she wanted me to actively engage with her post-ayahuasca ramblings, so I asked her to explain further.

The conversation went something like this:

"I mean, if you think about it right? It brought OUR ancestors—"

"Oh! Well, I don't know about *ours* but ok—"

"No but like you get what I mean right? Like, it bought them light and… and…warmth! And I mean I wouldn't be surprised if it was literally *life-bringing too*."

Rachel then proceeded to wink at me with so much sheer smarm that I considered hanging up, until I remembered that I spent the price of approximately four and a half al pastor tacos on this call.

She continued.

"No but like, could you imagine? Taking your caveman—or cavewoman!—date to the fire pit for an, I don't know a…a fine dinner of grubs! And then going home to your personal cave and fire, oooh and of course there's like, a wooly mammoth fur on the floor in front of the fire? Hah! Now if that wouldn't inspire you to procreate and further the human species I don't know what would."

I asked her if she thought they listened to some caveman version of Marvin Gaye when getting frisky with it. She ignored me and focused instead on the way Venus and Mars formed a sextile square at a forty-five degree angle in my chart.

(She said that it meant I was doomed for a life of angry sex but overall happy relationships. I tend to prefer it the other way around.)

I tried to listen to regular Marvin Gaye the first day I drove by myself. I unfortunately did not get frisky—not even caveman frisky! Since I proceeded to crash my sister's 2016 Mitsubishi Lancer into a brick house. I was ten minutes into my trip to the grocery store.

(A. Fucking. Brick. House. It's like I was in some fucked up version of the Three Little Pigs. Headlines featuring me: understudy for a recently neutered Big Bad Wolf.)

But you see, the building didn't come out of nowhere. It wasn't that I wasn't sober, or mentally unwell—I mean, suicidal ideation takes far too much time and energy anyways. So trust me when I say that I simply saw the wall, and couldn't will myself to turn the steering wheel thirty fucking degrees to the left.

There was butane in my lungs and sweet gasoline in the air as I spun out at the last second.

The last thing I remember seeing is red; brick, blood, me, grinning in the mirror.

When people ask me what it was like, I tell them I don't want to talk about it. That reliving it would be too much; a knot of unresolved trauma sitting on my chest and taunting me with a pulsing that mimics my heartbeat a little too closely. And it's not like I'm fully lying, because I've learned to breathe differently to accommodate the evergrowing weight against my lungs since I was four. I've learned to feed her bottled anger and canned grief when I myself was starving. Hunger gnawing on my stomach was the norm, often paired with biryani-full plates. The food would never get to be eaten by anything other than the ants on the sticky kitchen tile, since the rice was always oversalted by my amma's tears and my father's bloodied knuckles. I would scrape cold goat meat off the floor, saving it for when the emptiness travelled up my stomach to my esophagus. Sixteen years later, she and I don't worry about food anymore.

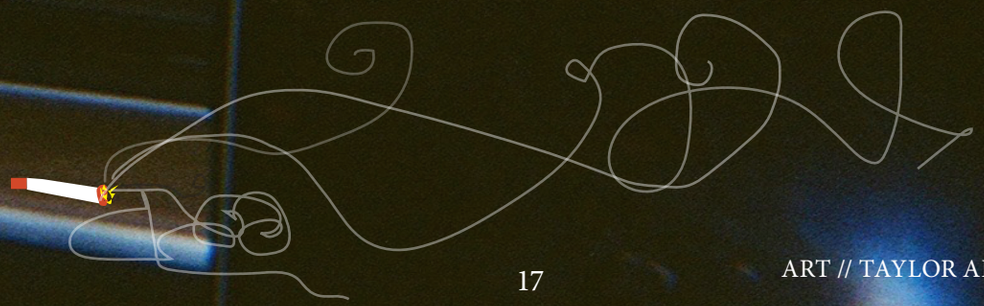
But the emptiness
still lives in my throat,
even though it is stuffed
full constantly with words
and bile and taste, and a
finger if I'm lucky. No matter what, is never full enough. It needs more sobs choked out of me, more food forced into my gullet, and sometimes it needs the blunt head of a gun to skullfuck me with the trigger off.

Because I can't drive. I go too fast and I almost hit brick walls and I get so anxious behind the wheel that sweat pools in my bra and there is no gold prize you win at the end except your life, which is hopefully just as stable as before you embarked on your twenty hour road trip so you can go fight an Etsy seller who lied about her esoteric astrological knowledge, and you know she lied because a transitional sign isn't even an actual thing (you checked).

But I also can't drive because the press of the gas pedal shoots through my heel and into the starved dog that wants to escape, looking to slam its too-big cage into every brick wall that it passes. I can't drive because I taste metal in my canines when I can feel the wind against the nape of my neck. I can't drive because my passenger seat will always be filled by a shadow that has my father's hands and my amma's tongue. I can't drive because if I drive maybe I won't look back when I floor it, and maybe I'll go searching for the freedom of a forest fire.

So I'll just remain an Aries with a fiery passion and too-sharp teeth. I'll stay the lit candle that can be blown out with a single breath. I'll be the self-consuming embers of a wood burning stove that is stoked for other's pleasure, and I will burn.

I'll burn and keep matching with too-old firefighters on Tinder, who leave me (ironically) drier than the arsonist I fucked to Marvin Gaye's *Let's Get It On* when I turned seventeen. I will burn and ignore the poorly bred dog whimpering to escape its smoking house. I will burn, and I will pretend that I don't know how far fire can spread in a quiet California forest, where the Sequoias grow big enough to graze the sun.▲



ART // TAYLOR ALICE

A Song of blue Moons

by Miles Trachtenberg

Blue moons toppling
a string
of tumbleweeds
against a scarlet horizon,
pouring upon
formless stretches
of a lonely desert,
melting ever so slowly,
like Dali's clocks.

Endlessly they go,
'round and 'round
and around,
rolling
ever faster
to winds of comfort,
echoing in the hollow,
dirt-ridden ale
of a swashbuckling pirate:
the joy
of a night
only just begun.

Prancing and
striding
and swaggering:
hands entwine,
and branches sway
to sweet
melodies
of finches
in song.

On and on
and on,
the tumbleweeds
stumbling along without care,
past endless
bulbs
of tangerine light:
an owl's
flickering
eye.

Past and past, past
the drumming
of voices
colliding,
Past and past and past:
the street
a rhythmic blur;
the night
a knot, yet
to be tied
together.

ART // MILES TRACHTENBERG

BECOMING

By Rosa Brooks-Kamper

You know you're home when greeted by the sweet-singe of lingering smoke. Fire season stampedes San Diego summers, leaving you with scorching Septembers and frizzy curls. The brisk chlorine-saturated neighborhood pool beckons and Mother pioneers the sloped path with you in tow; log-rolling down fields of clover, dense like the hair inherited from Mother's Mother. The concrete-lined pool is stained with the red syrup of a spilt Slurpee—sweet remnants of summer. Pruned fingers grasp the edge: body baptized but for your skull, all while beholding Mother basking in her bikini. Your swimsuit hides your bloated navel in the name of modesty. Body blistered with shame, disguised as self-respect. Sacrificing feminism for her father's unfiltered faith. Emerging from the pool your toes water-color the cement, mapping a path to Mother. You catalog the furrowed brow and defeated sigh before she meets your suckling stare and softens her gaze. Hiding her pain because a daughter should never watch her mother calcify. But your eyes see too wide. Witnessing Mother is your ritual, your religion, your rubric. Bearing her testimony to sisters piled in pews of piety; their cheeks turned in complicity. Inevitability is slow when fate is dreaded. Heading home barefoot, skipping so the sidewalk can't scorch your soles. Dirt from Mother's garden—blooming with fertility—clings to your skin, lives under your fingernails. And scrubbing it off? As futile as rewriting history. Mother's body was never a sacrament; it was her tithing, paid with the sacrifice of childbearing. Begging God gently that you turn out different. But, who are you becoming if not her?

home, by the sweet-singe of lingering smoke. Fire season stampedes scorching Septembers and frizzy curls. Chlorine beckons, Mother pioneers the sloped path Log-rolling down fields of clover like your Mother's Mother. stained with red syrup. spilt sweet ants of summer. Pruned fingers grasp baptized while beholding Mother in her bikini. Swimsuit hides a navel blistered with shame Sacrificing faith. Emerging toes mapping a path to Mother. catalog the soft gaze. watch her mother calcify. your eyes; your ritual, your religion. Inevitability is slow when fate is dreaded. barefoot, so the sidewalk can scorch your soles. Mother's fertility as futile as rewriting history. Mother's body a sacrament; her tithing Begging God gently who are you becoming if not her?▲

CHLORINE STAINED SWIMSUIT- BLISTERED TOES CALCIFY SLOW. GENTLY BECOMING HER.

ART // SOPHIE ALTEMUS

1st Avenue

By Lottie Probst

1st Avenue,
The rise of my fall,
And the street I fall back onto when all else fails.
1st Avenue.
The holy land of seventeen.

Time wanders away,
And lends her helping hands to someone else.
A different girl, much more deserving of her patience.
I was never one to wait.
I was never one to want to worry for more time;
Then the train came.

Will the infrastructures of these people's lives hold up in 50 years?
Will my children know my mothers favorite diner
That I would frequent in the womb?
Will I be able to live past my growing pains of you,
Or will I have to cultivate another place, the same as you have done to my 14th Street?

A new city of your 20-something voyeuristic journey.
A new home for your theatrical rhymes that doesn't yet fit the beat of my city.

But can I conceive of myself without you anymore?
No, and there is nothing worse than a painful truth,
Nothing more heartbreaking than the breakage of what was me before all of you.

If you told me of my past,
I can't say for certain who
would be in those stories.
A girl without a face,
Only a name
with a street
attached.

ART // EMILY O'BRIEN

There Will Come Soft Rains (after Sara Teasdale)

By Allison Urton

ART // STELLA MULLIN

The sky is heavy with the promise of rain,
the smell of petrichor filling the air.
Two shadows sit quietly under cover,
waiting for the first drop to hit the parched earth.

It's quiet, a soft proclamation,

The Sky saying hello to the earth,

a long-lost friend.
Contact established, a second drop follows,
then thousands more.

Soon The Sky darkens,
clouds suffocating the blue
reducing the world to black and white,
The Twilight Zone coming to life.

The clouds riot,
The wind whipping and screaming,
No longer a soft proclamation,
But a declaration of war.

The shadows shiver,
emerging from the darkness.
A mother and child,
emaciated, barely alive.

Rain pelts their skin,
burning, stinging,
agony where the droplets connect,
but they have no choice

desperation driving them,
half-dead things.
A rare commodity, water,
more valuable than diamonds.

This rain is different,
fire against their skin,
flame instead of water.
Death instead of salvation.

What was hope,

for a brief, glorious moment,
is now a nightmare,
damnation.

Their skin blisters,
then melts,
their screams failing to find space
amidst the cacophony of rain and wind.

The Sky continues to punish the earth,
revenge for the poison in its clouds,
drowning the world below,
a second flood cleansing the world.

When it stops,
there is silence,
deafening in its completeness,
the world half-melted.

Mother and child lay together,
holding one another even in death,
their skin mixing with the puddles,
Reduced to shadows once more.

Horace the Cat



ART // JACK BUSCHOW

Horace had always been a loner. Relying on other cats just didn't suit, didn't sit well. Sure there had been times when you might need to run with another, feed with another, stay warm with another, but those were fleeting moments and the time soon came to move on, and so that's what Horace did. Usually he'd slip away in the early hours before sunrise, his bed neatly made, the patchwork quilt folded across the bottom, and his pillows neatly stacked. So it was unusual to say the least when he came back to us that day. Unusual in that it was mid-September, the late summer skies already darkening with the approach of fall, the smell of it. And unusual in that Horace should have been well into the sardine run off the southern coast by now, the one constant in his nomadic existence. Every year as the days began to grow shorter Horace would begin to get that antsy feeling, start looking longingly to the door, start making the same old noises about how it was time to get going, that he was needed, the sardine crews relied on him to read the stars and show them the way. But here he was, passing the time with us, reading, playing chess, and sometimes even joining in with after dinner cards or games of backgammon with Mercy. As the days shortened and the leaves turned Horace seemed more content to stay, as if he was waiting for something, but he wouldn't or couldn't tell us what that was. And so September turned and October passed in a flourish of late summer bloom. Horace was with us in November, and would take early to the hearth to warm and stretch himself on the flagstones, resplendent as ever in his tuxedo coat. He would talk deep into the night, especially with the younger cats and even the kittens if they could stay awake. He seldom played with them during the day any more though, preferring to watch from his hammock. When I saw him last it was early, in the deep small hours before the dawn. As ginger cats are wont to do, I had risen to see the late appearance of Mars, from just off the shoulder of the Pleiades, and Horace was on the porch. He had no possessions, and he wasn't wearing his travelling cap, and so I suspected he had perhaps wanted to see the red planet himself—as often we had talked about the worth of such omens. Horace glanced at me—then to the sky—"I am nine" he said simply, "I have you my family to thank for that." Then he pushed through the yellow plank, and he was gone.▲

By Brian Donnelly



RAPUIT -Ripped

BY CAMILLE FORD

Billows of cold burn my skin, a barrier
Against the heat
Where dewy elements play at war and defeat.

These skirts have seen the wasteland,
Made a home on me,
Death-soaked and faded, worn nakedly

I am no emperor. But hark! I could be
Alone complete control
Hailed into cosmic being—

One upon the grains of sand
To become the five-hundred
Merging indistinguishable; a mass of band.

The never-all of nothing-something
Fears no blazing winter
Or the rise and fall of seeing, coming, taking,

Feeling, both. Fueled by the fire frozen river
Seethes a magma that merely waits
To point the fasces ever westward at the bloodlet gates.

Rescind The Order!
Lest the fallen return to command
Scattered troops with infinite number of groping astral hands

Impervious to temperance
Eke, totalitarian mind!
Temperatura will not stop what tempus cannot find.

Ripped are the wearied bodies

and the tired clothes
and the worn wind
and the fading coughing

of life spent in a sinner's lungs

or death drained
from a baby's
hands.

SUNSHINE

BY NATALIE RILEY

ART // FRED & NATALIE RILEY

I am kissed by the sun, hair burnt and hallowed forward in memory. My on my skin—I lick away the ash, revealing a smooth surface that tastes warm and familiar, a dirty-sweet yearning. And when I visit the banks, I how hard I look, I can't seem to find her reflection. The dimensions of her bangs? But as I trace her steps, I stumble upon a set of cold breathless

Remember me as a kind man my father said to me. The vibrato of his always loved the deep reassurance of it, now it was weak, languid. hunched over sipping a tincture of muscle relaxants, anesthetics, (orange and lime popsicles were meant to be savored for movie popcorn—not a farewell to life).

Good-Day Sunshine, sings Paul McCartney—my dad's last song dad did always have a sense of humor. And as his eldest son is *could you do this, how could he not?* Soon, I begin to cry, or quiet, that I am scaring him, but how is anyone supposed to death? My brother tells him that *it'll all be okay*; and at this eye, no longer father and son, but an old man staring at his

And I think to myself, is this what it means to die? The squeeze their hands, knowing this is the last image you seen, that you choose your own fate? Or are you petrified

I am no longer looking at a man, but a boy. managing, *I'm scared, I'm so scared*. It feels wrong,

Do you believe in God? Resistance in my voice. console us both.

A thick glob of snot and grief fight its way up my dying. But I assume like for many others, it was questions or at the very least remembered direct thinking, Lord I pray for strength in

I didn't know of his past, of his me was there was an evil man in his I can still feel the house shake, the the hair off the floor, and my eyes anticipating the aftershock—I was

Remember me as a kind man my dad and he was kind to patient and have always been

Now, every December 21st, as he strums the ukulele, without him.

And with every stepping all, grief is a reminder of on your tongue, and dove coffee, worn leather, and

When I miss him, I revisit

I am five, sitting in the

Good-Day Sunshine.▲

knees are dry—chalky as my nose presses down like a mixture of the outdoors and sweat. It is imagine myself staring into a mirror, but no matter face: runny nose, flushed cheeks, the length of—*my* hands.

voice was no longer—gone since the stroke. I had This was not how I wanted to remember him, and barbiturates chased with an orange popsicle nights with the lights dimmed and fresh popped

request. Shut up Paul, it's not the time, but my on the phone, they both cry: disbelief, *how* cry harder and my older brother tells me to be remain strong in the presence of suffering and moment, for the first time I see them, eye to reflection.

faces of everyone you love peering back as you see? Do you feel content that to be loved is to be as the wrinkles seem to release?

Hyperventilating with fear, you stuttered for words, this was wrong, so I ask:

A final Hail Mary—I don't believe in God, but maybe I can

throat and I forget his response, or rather I don't care to listen. He is complicated, he was complicated. But I wished I would have asked more more. Like the moment I found his daily prayers: Lord I pray that you calmness, and Lord I pray that nothing will upset me.

childhood and the abuse he endured and years of alcoholism…All he had told life. But the years of repression made him volatile with a disposition for anger. doors slamming—I am 10, and my face brushes the carpet, hand balling up stare blankly as I lay wedged between the wall and my bed. I act with invisibility, never scared but always ashamed, louder does not mean stronger.

my father said to me…I do remember him as a hurt man, a sacred man, but he was me—he was gentle and good—he is me, and I am him, though I do try to be more cowardice to confrontation.

I will listen to his recording of *Happy Birthday* to find some semblance of the past, and calling my name it feels too real and I am reminded once more that I grew one year older

stone I squint my eyes and hold myself real tight to tell him I love you and miss you…after love; a love that is burnt into your ethos, like the smell of sunflower seeds, salty as they rest hairspray that still lingers though you have now past, and the black Lexus that smells of stale an apparition of man with combed back hair—and, and, and—

the memory bank.

dry heat, my face unrecognizable, but I like to pretend the warmth is my dad kissing me back—

VICTIMS DRIVEN TO STRIFE

BY MAYANA CARBONEL-MANGUS

Livin life in a glass prison

You dont wanna leave cause youre passionate

And baby if you want to take the stairs

You can always go

Its the long way you know

But you know

You know

And Ill stop letting glass prisons show

They only show when you go

My freedom is ice in cold snow

So its just like youre still here

Like revenge on those who are doing wrong with your life

Wisely choose a victim you think is driven to fight

Victims driven to strife

All I wanted was the truth

ART // ROSA BROOKS-KAMPER

UNTITLED UNTITLED UNTITLED

BY LEILA FRANCO



ART // LEILA FRANCO

It's not mine.
It belongs to the stares.

Ripping it apart, devouring it, licking the bone once it's bare.

Empty faces give the want away.
They gather around looking it up and down,
searching for a way in.
They haven't eaten yet.
The growling of stomachs is deafening.

What is it worth if not naked?
What is it worth if not spread open?

Bend it, fold it, slap it, mold it.
Over and over until it breaks.

You want to be inside it, but don't want the insides.

God forbid it bleeds.

Force it open and unhinge its jaw, you stuff it full
until it gags.
Saliva dripping out the sides of an open mouth.

Choke it, spank it, bruise it, fuck it.
Don't ever let it scream.

The words "get off me" are simply background noise,
but "get me off" is vernacular.
It's all the same to the stares.

Something to claim, something to eat.
A piece of meat stuck between their teeth.
My tongue rolls over as I bare my stomach
to the vultures.

Torn apart, **they like it raw.**

Picking pieces out of their back molars, spitting on the
ground.

I'll get it back when you get bored.
So just take it.

It's not mine.

ART // SERENITY ORBE

Ode to the Mosh

By Sarah Baldwin

I wanna mosh till my heart gives out,
I wanna thrash till I can thrash no more.

I wanna be somewhere where
malice has rules,
Unspoken rules we all follow:
You push me, I push you.
You elbow me, I elbow you.
You fall down, I pick you up.
I fall down, you pick me up.

We embrace.

I want intimacy,
I want violence,
I want this crazy pit where violence
is intimacy.

I wanna shove people,
I wanna be shoved.
I wanna sweat,
I wanna stink,
I wanna hurt people,
I wanna be hurt.

I wanna feel pain, but on my own terms,
With music so loud I can't think,
With body odor so bad I can't breathe.

I wanna be close to people.
I wanna touch them,
Grab them,
Breathe them in.

I wanna push,
I wanna shove,
I wanna love,
Smacking bodies until one hits the floor.

ART // AMANDA ROSSITER

LAKE DALLAS

Sometimes I feel like I've gone nowhere, despite the fifteen-hundred miles there and back. The small Texas town that introduced me to God. And ripped Him away. Taught me to pray, but not the right way. At school, which doubled as a church, they taught me to count to *ten* and how to trace letters and how to sit still and not interrupt. On the weekends my mom would watch me walk home along the moonlit sidewalk from Brooke's house when I was too scared of her attic to spend the night. I couldn't help but imagine a man behind the door, wielding an axe, waiting for me to fall asleep. And it was there I learned people could be their own biggest enemy. I still remember when the boy who bullied my big sister in math class hanged himself with the dress code in the seventh-grade bathroom. By the time I got there, belts were no longer required. So my jeans would ride down and I had to wear a stupid polo t-shirt and I was learning about the Alamo and Davy Crockett and my mind lingered every time I walked past that bathroom.

When the cold fronts came and made the grass frozen and crunchy in the early mornings it was especially hard to go to school. Brooke and I would wait for the bus in front of my house with our little siblings bundled up so tight they couldn't move their arms. Watching the end of the street I would will the bus to turn the corner and come rescue us from the chill but seconds felt like minutes felt like eternity. Then the warm fronts collided with the cold and made the weather bad, they taught us which parts of our body are the weakest. *Huddle in the hallway, cover your stomachs and the back of your necks.* I wished away the clouds that brought the storms that made the tornados that sounded the sirens that made me think about how vulnerable my organs are. In the summertime, my friends and I would walk to the pool only to discover hundreds of June bugs on the water's surface. The dry side of things wasn't much better, mosquitos the size of a pinky finger's tip would swarm and leave large, itchy boils on my arms and legs. And if you weren't careful and stepped on an ant mound, fire ants would crawl up your leg mercilessly ripping into you. So we would turn around, abandoning the bugs for a Disney Channel original movie and a tub of Dibs.▲

BY AMANDA ROSSITER

Laptop Time

ART // EMMA CHASTAIN

Something wicked is here, but you put on your blue filter glasses

You lose track of the same ten minutes every morning
on your way to blur your eyes on command
and roll picked skin between your finger and your thumb
while you supplement your daily Blue with
Laptop Time, 'cause God knows

you can't get your fix from your collar.
Painting places you can't afford,
you load a color called "Hard Day's Work" onto your brush
and paint the sky.

You feed your ego its dinner,
but leave your soul's bowl empty, and whining.

Something wicked is here, but you put on your blue filter glasses
so you can't overdose on current events.
You keep them on your nightstand,
next to the alarm clock set ten minutes earlier.

By Emma Chastain

DUEL WITH A DEAD QUAIL

By Jack Buschow

I count
Ten paces,
Armed with a shovel—
A long line of hunters ends with me,
Failing to bury a quail in the icy ground
Under the aspen trees.

The second son plays undertaker
While the flock's fourteenth daughter
Is dropped gently atop the soil
Soft feathers and brittle feet.

Her grave is just a smudge of my boot
Frost gnaws my skin and I wince;
We make eye contact through closed lids
Until she rolls with finality into the roots.

I never learned to eat, or kill, or mourn,
So I cross myself right to left.
Empty handed, hold a vigil.

though she was prey.

I mumble good hunting, even though

I scrub my hands till they're raw,
Thaw by the fire.
Swear. up and down I did her right;

I was meant to eat her.

I know I'm no delicacy—
Someday I'll be left by the aspen trees.
Eyes flinched shut from impact,
A clean garden shovel
To keep me company.

ART // NATALIE RILEY



NIGHT MARES

BY JAE ZENG

On cracked concrete
you teach gravity to sleep.
Palms drum stories into stone,
legs write circles into dust.

Every freeze says listen.
Every spin says live.
For one bright breath
you are not of tomorrow—
you are flight.

You believe this gospel.

To Icarus
we take a
bow.

I can tell you now:
not all is what it seems.

I promise there is one answer,
and your dimension has sheltered none.
Get out of here! and take your betrayed heart,
of memory gliding off concrete.
The drum of your soul, estranged,
were only illusions of change.

Tomorrow will arrive the same.
Escapism only fools you twice.
How far before a fall
Catches you dead?

Outside the whirls of night,
Your fantasies are folly,
Degenerate, then just dread.

This hypnotic rhythm,
between you and I, whispers we are the same.
But timing calls otherwise,
it's time we heard, and take off to separate
rays.

Last thing I say
before I plummet in disarray—
I hope you see me in your dreams.

SADO/ SEXUAL/ RITUALISTIC/ INHIBITION (SSRI)

By Tyrell Morales

ART // ALICE BUSCHOW & RIO BLACKSHAW-MCKEE

oh baby, will you
quit it? all the mood swings
and dead stares:
it's turning me on.

whispering something vaguely erotic:
like a tragedy unraveling, or a
river in motion.

the endocrine routine—
sultry synchronized swimming,
drowning in my bloodstream.
god, you know i go crazy for being
so crazy.

so open me up, a swiss army knife, to
sharpen only the ones that cut,
making killers of my exons.

Venus as a Toy, or
arrhythmia disguised as passion,
lying on a bed of baby's breath;
decaying under a mattress.

what use of such pornographic
pathology. resistance of any
persistent uptake, the novocaine numbing
of the sickening substance.

still, i want it all:
the sado-sexual
synaptic signaling,
the euphoric euthymia that comes
from elusivity.

lay me down so i can be
fully submitting to
a sterile medium,
naughty for my own faulty neurology.

you know just how to talk
to me dirty—with a low voice that
i confuse for my own, but carries
a different name.

how i ache for it,
the autoimmune aphrodisiac.
the suppression of my
endless starvation.

i need you in my mouth: to crush you and your pale
fragility between my teeth,
to swallow you whole, and all the paroxetine pleasure
that's inside of you.

for desire is my clinical illness,
and illness is my only desire.

A Strange Encounter

By Roy Cohen

I saw a strange man
beckoning
at the end
of a long and narrow street.
Under the flickering
streetlight
in the witching
hour:
a tall, thin
silhouette—
looming and
desolate.

As I approached, he emerged—
A pinstriped, three-piece suit,
tailored perfectly.
Jet black hair swept to the side,
ink black, thick and tarry.
And a smile.

Under the flickering light,
I felt his gaze,
his lips parting,
revealing
something uncanny.
Pearly white squares, perfect and iridescent—
but far too many.

Teeth,
spilling from his mouth.
Ethereal stones
shimmering against the light.

The hum of the streetlight
grew louder,
the flickering
faster.
My heartbeat
banging
against my chest,
a rabid animal
against its cage.
My heartbeat
banging
and the flicker
of the light—
a symphony
to score
my fear.

The man twisted,
hunching over me,
forcing us
face to face
and he smiled,
ear to ear,

a shit-eating grin.

My skin crawled,
his smile stretched wider.
Teeth
shimmering against the light,
but far too many.

Teeth,
shifting,
curving,
pointing,
to a central
place.
Lengthening,
stretching,
into fine needles.

Their color faded,
Once
white and pure,
now
dun yellow.
Snaggled.
Rotten.
Maggoty.

I feel his cold breath
on my dry eyes.

The hum of the streetlight
grew louder,
the flickering
faster.
My heartbeat
in my ears now,
blood pounding,
racing
the flicker of light.

Then,
one loud hum,
a flash of light,
the street goes dark.
My heartbeat.

And as quick as it went
out,
the light came back
on.
And he was gone.

I still hear
his breathing.
I still see
his smile,
still feel
his cold
breath
on my dry eyes.

ART // ROY COHEN

BREATHE

BY ROWAN RIGGS

You gave me your hoodie to put on over my own sweater and jacket, but it does nothing against January's icy grasp. A gentle breeze drifts through, rustling the trees and rattling my bones. The fog of my breath is indistinguishable from the smoke billowing from our lungs. A roll of paper and plant rests between your fingertips. A thin trail drifts from it into the endless night sky and weaves itself into constellations. You inhale, and a cloud pours out from your lips and nostrils. The light twinkles in your dark eyes matching the expanse of stars above us. I watch as the collection of smoke around your face sews a patchwork quilt of nebulas.

You pass it to me, and I give you the water bottle sitting on the cold concrete next to me. Hot ash bites at the back of my throat, but the relief comes soon. I am picked up and cradled in a comforting embrace, as a mother would with her newborn at the end of the day. The roll-up hangs there in my hand the same way a pencil does and I swirl it around slowly, watching it draw shapes against the dark background. We stay there a while as the passage of—no, the existence of time becomes a complete mystery in the bliss of the moment. The music murmurs softly from the speaker on the table, a song we've listened to together a lot, so I mumble along to the words but I can't remember the chorus right now. *I just wanna dance all the time*—wait, no, it's "all night," can you rewind it so I can start over? My limbs hang loosely at my side like a marionette with no puppeteer, limp and useless and you, being a masterful performer, take hold of my strings and guide me through the dips and twirls and leaps of our private recital. Everything feels so heavy, I think I'm being turned into stone; could you put me out in the garden like those old Greek statues I like and make sure the moss doesn't grow into my eyes?

The cold is still there, my fingers burn from it almost as bad as my throat, but it feels so easy to ignore in this moment because all I can think of is you, and being here with you. I can't look away but I don't even want to try, I just want to absorb it all, the faint glow of the still-lit end highlighting your features when you take it in, the curve of your button nose, the little dip in your top lip. The gentle swell of your chest as you breathe, your hair swaying in the breeze, the shivers that take over your entire body in waves as we sit on this bench, otherwise motionless. I take another drag, and the smoke encircles my head like a halo, dragging me to heaven with it—and here amidst the pearly gates, I look back and find an angel next to me.▲

ART // ROWAN RIGGS

ART // NATALIE RILEY

To all the boys I
did not kiss—my heart trembles:
windblown pink roses.

Rush of cheeks carmine—
a wished for warmth or winter's
sharp and bitter embrace?

Languid, grass-stained heat
of orange days—at sunset
our breath is closeness.

His shirt had lemons
against cerulean and
just one loosed button.

I cannot recall
now the color of his eyes.
I like to think green—

Even an above
ground pool is a refuge—soft
blue, chlorine, us two.

A Melancholy:
is nighttime more black or blue?
You: a blue without.

Cut lavender, so
sweet, reminds me of all the
boys I did not kiss.

Haiku written after Gilbert Baker

by Shaun Nowicki

Genesis

By Emma Chastain

ART // EMMA CHASTAIN

Dances to hymns can be a revolution
If you just pop that hip, and let the Devil in.

Raise the arms—Glory be!
And make room for the tongue that fattened when
you let the Devil in.

Glory be!

Glory be!

There's a different colored light between the legs of those who
move for God
and those who lap up the spittle of Genesis left on the dance
floor
(After they let the Devil in).

It doesn't smell like sacrament down there forever,
So do a split and cop a whiff, you'll know to let the Devil in.

Now make love to the madness of being a woman without
God—
And stamp towards the door and tell the Devil to come on in.

PSYCHEDELIC COW BOY

Resting along the mantle of the Great West; a sideburned, burly prince of the dead—hands big and dry as cow hide—walks alongside his solemn horse. Her hooves burn on the relentless sand, her fly-smothered eyes ejecting warm tears onto the now soulless earth. The last drops of life that will fall upon this golden Vatican. The days run long now with this restless sun. Their skin is frustrated, sore and sweltering like a blister getting rug burned. The horse looks to the sky for salvation and sees nothing but suffocating blue. A vast, boring scene: sandy knolls and lousy shades of orange. Their saliva turns static. Peyote calls: a bitter whisper humming in his blood. He thinks he hears songs of the Mojave. Cocoon rattles and basket drums. Tomahawk in a knapsack. His eyes, so muted their blue irises appear grey, see warmth radiating, breathing. The rocks sing a tender song. The horse sways. Her hide's gone sour, releasing an unnatural sweetness. She prays for her mother, for a taste of water. He prays for his banjo, for a deep long sleep. The caves of their nostrils are coated in a mean dust. A crusty mixture of snot and powdered bones. He hums sermons under his hot breath and sees their flowing color dance upon the sky. The blank scene inverts itself into a beautiful living thing, each gradient, each speck of brush, so intriguing. He forces himself to continue despite his raw state and lingering eye, which glazes over the flowing floor beneath him. The horse exhaustedly trudges alongside her cowboy, unable to see anything but a hot death. The sole of his boot is beginning to give out. He might need to crawl to the preacher. Praying to the old desert gods, he stares down the hollow barrel of his dry canteen and looks up to see the Reaper coming with his scythe and lasso. Coming to meet them both in this empty plain.

ART // FRED RILEY III & CLAIRE TRASK

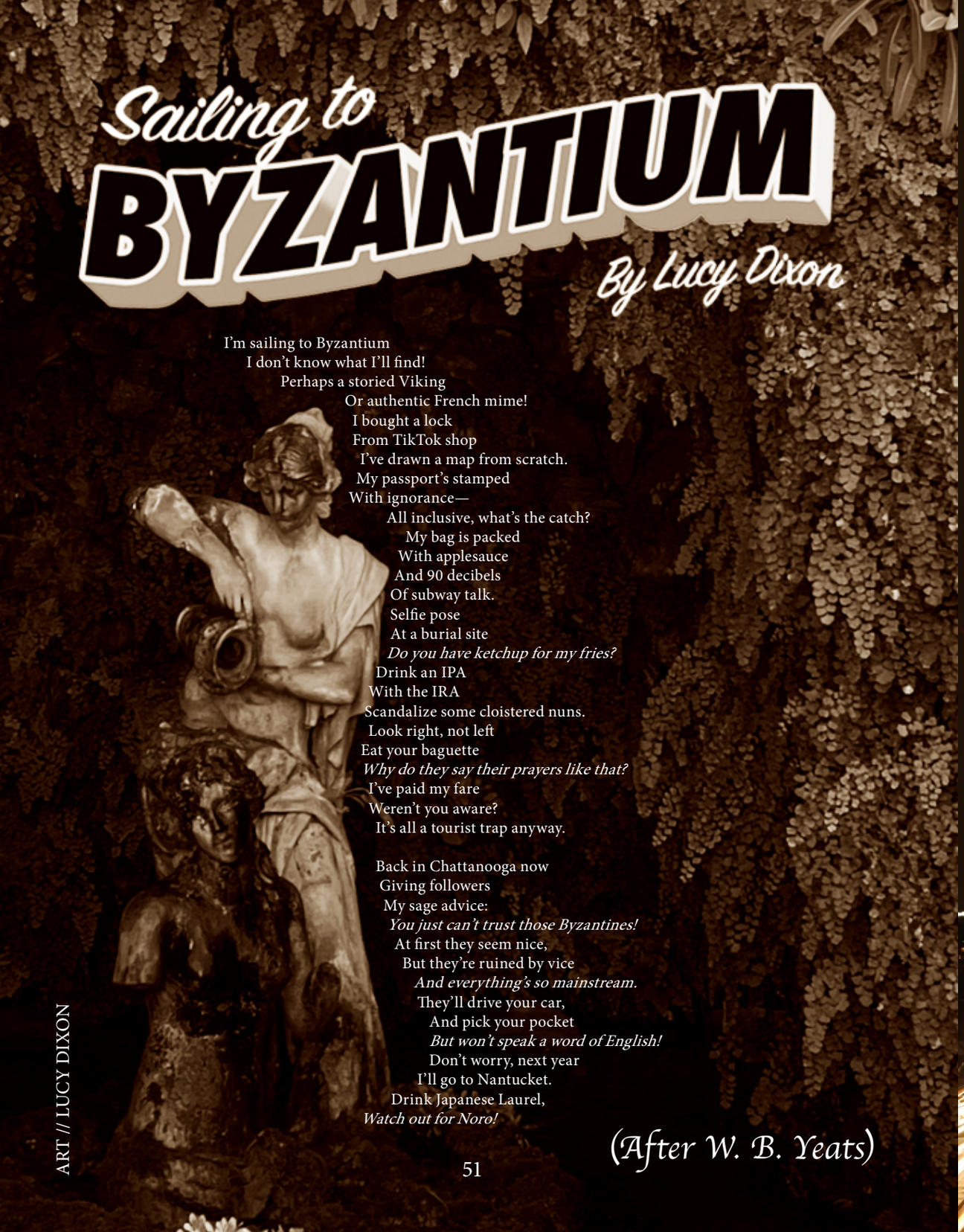
the Great
horse. Her hooves relentless. ejecting
a soulless earth upon this golden day, run
long restless
sky, salvation sees nothing saliva,
bitter
songs of
sour
nostrils and
powdered bones. hot breath dances upon the sky.
sermons
need the preacher. He prays
to the Reaper and lassos
this empty plain.▲

Horse hooves ejecting
Earth upon the long sky
Bitter songs of an empty plain

BY NICOLE DE BEAUCHAMP

Sailing to BYZANTIUM

By Lucy Dixon



I'm sailing to Byzantium
I don't know what I'll find!
Perhaps a storied Viking
Or authentic French mime!
I bought a lock
From TikTok shop
I've drawn a map from scratch.
My passport's stamped
With ignorance—
All inclusive, what's the catch?
My bag is packed
With applesauce
And 90 decibels
Of subway talk.
Selfie pose
At a burial site
Do you have ketchup for my fries?
Drink an IPA
With the IRA
Scandalize some cloistered nuns.
Look right, not left
Eat your baguette
Why do they say their prayers like that?
I've paid my fare
Weren't you aware?
It's all a tourist trap anyway.

Back in Chattanooga now
Giving followers
My sage advice:
You just can't trust those Byzantines!
At first they seem nice,
But they're ruined by vice
And everything's so mainstream.
They'll drive your car,
And pick your pocket
But won't speak a word of English!
Don't worry, next year
I'll go to Nantucket.
Drink Japanese Laurel,
Watch out for Noro!

(After W. B. Yeats)

ART // LUCY DIXON

TICK TOCK!

BY ANTONIO GONZALEZ-BRADFORD

It speeds and slows
yet no matter how crisp the air
or how beautiful the sunset,
I'll always know
I tell a tale of yearning,
yearning for it to s--l---o----w,
knowing it goes faster
I'm still reaching
waiting to stop the slipping.
Slipping, slipping, slipping down,
I grab out,

always praying to stick my hands on that clock,
yet biting my nails on the days I pray for claws
lying in the anxiety and fear,
a space filled, only in the absence of memory
anything to fill that time, fill that thought.
The prospect of a new promotion?
First date?
Like shoveling dirt into the grave,
living to forget about each moment,
but always forgetting to live in them
because there I can hide,
in solace and denial,
denying the clock, as
it speeds and slows.

ART // ANTONIO GONZALEZ-BRADFORD



WINNOWING HAIBUN

Snowfall reminds me of smoking cigarettes. Me and four boys huddled close in the barren copse, down Bunker Hill 'round the rooted corner covered in gray slush and slipsign and butts and beer caps and half-burnt sticks from summer, to get a brief pass and puff of the glorious stolen stuff. My mom smoked menthols and was easy to steal from (later she'd had enough of presumptuous kids taking her packs willy-nilly and would find ways to buy by the carton and share the wealth) and we were young, stupid, and often in love. Menthols have a distinctive hit that feels better in the cold, long drags of January air. "don't take too long" "you got axe" "wanna see a dead body" I don't know if we knew how inane we sounded, how stupid it was to come home in a thick haze of Dollar Store body spray and terror. The architecture of our souls was ill-formed but coalescing. We found a Christ-like solemnity in watching the frozen river for its flow; in daring to step on the frozen concrete blocks they sunk to limit the creek's flooding; in the half-whispered rumors of who smoked weed, and whose dad got into fights, and who still pissed themselves at night.

The first time I smoked I coughed up a bit of blood–red and right there on the snow, quickly buried with a dash of boot. The pinkish hue was left undisturbed, a signifier of childish fragility layered with degrees of untold remembrance (my father smoked, my mother smoked, my grandfather smoked, my grandfather smoked, my grandmother smoked, my grandmother smoked—all this, too, was a kind of memory it seemed). When we huddled back together my face was redder and my cheeks tear soaked. I couldn't speak but they didn't want me to and I worried I'd left some blood on the filter tip. They drew it in, nonetheless. That's when I first began, spirit and soul, to believe that all men are brothers, and that we had now ascended, bare-chinned and squeaking into that holy garden of our elders (what luck, it takes blood, heavy coat sweat, and nicotine).

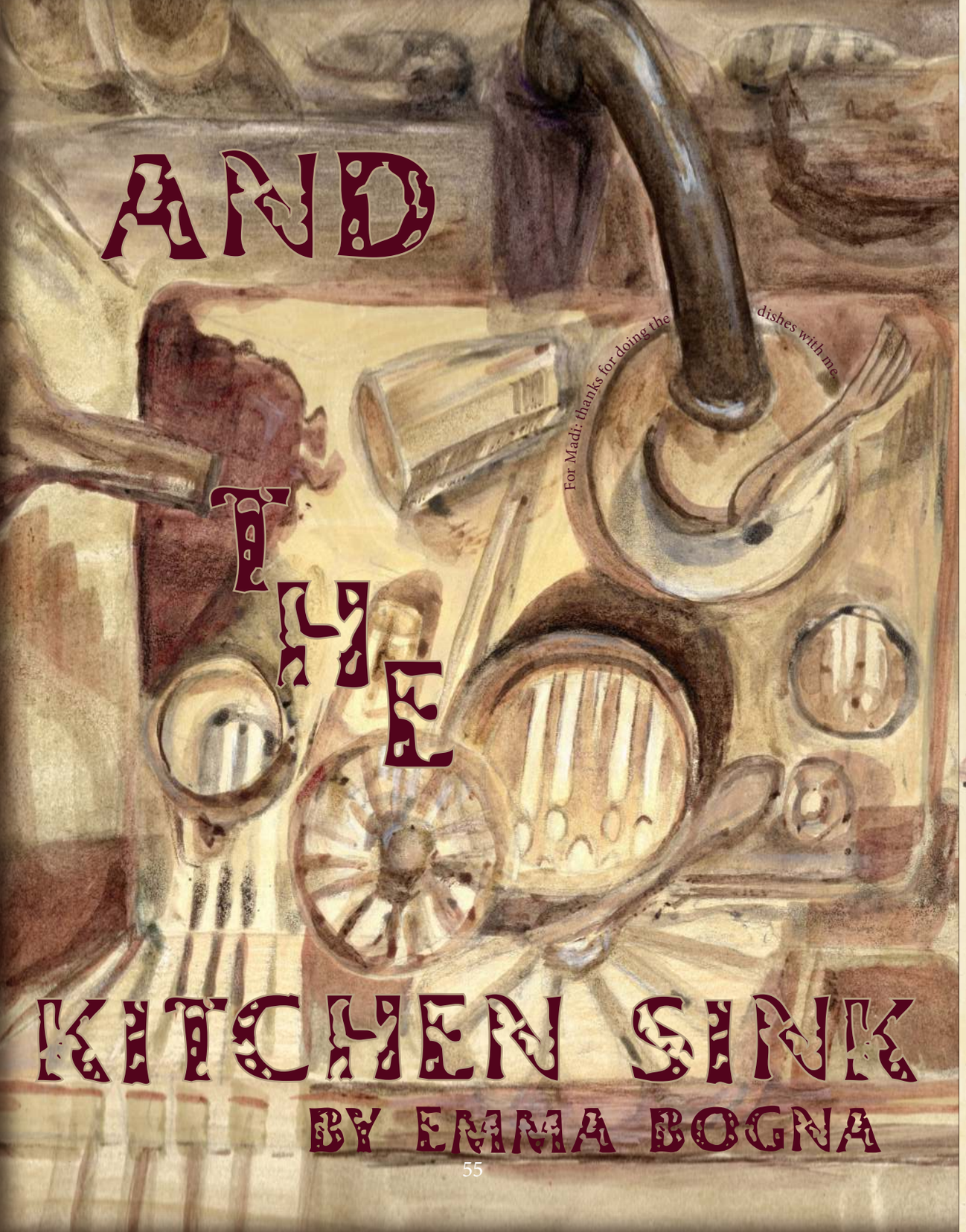
The next winter we were back—this time willing to step unsteadily onto the icy floes and whip snowballs at each other, hard. In the face. Often inaccurately. Our number had winnowed from five to three (one moved to the next school district, still parts unknown, the other found another smoking spot). By that time, our interest in girls and boys was more than a hypothetical—and menthols became crushes with the first blush of real cash in our hands. Habits are expensive, but produce an indelible and inexplicable place for love. It's a common phrase that in wintertime things die—time stops—nothing changes until the unexpected revelry of lively green shoots its tender branches forth in the brown-gray nothingness of slush. Death is an expectant form of life—flitting somewhere between the ashy decay of mintsmoke and snowfall.

ART // KEVIN WHITE

Snowfall of cigarettes close in barren cover slip from summer to a brief often—
Love, a distinctive hit that feels better in the cold—see,
sound how terror, the architecture of our souls found a Christ-like
solemnity in the half whispered rumors coughed up
of blood. Red and right, there undisturbed. Fragility was a kind
of memory, redder and worried that all men are brothers bare-chinned and squeaking
into that holy unsteady. Our number winnowed, one unknown other.
Our interest became crushes produce an indelible and inexplicable
place for love. It's common that, in time, things die.
The unexpected revelry of live branches forth—
Nothingness expectant, flitting snowfall.▲

BARREN COVER, LOVE—
SOLEMN, RED AND RIGHT WAS KIND.
BRANCH FORTH NOTHINGNESS.

BY SHAUN NOWICKI



Nobody in this town believes in God,
or laundry,
or dishwashers,

or anything that makes you feel good,
clean. I turn on the tap and
wait for the water to run holy:

Give me strength to
wash the twelfth dish of the evening
that is not mine.

My fingers turn to raisins.
I dump the cabernet
down the drain

and think about my sins.
I scrub the bolognese
stain out of my housemate's tupperware;

I play Almighty with a sponge.
I search for something holy
at the bottom of the sink,

and find only a colander,
some mushy peas.
They will each return home

in disbelief:
their blender has risen to the drying rack
after three lukewarm days in the sink.

Touch its side, I'll say,
and they'll repent, or they won't,
but they'll know:

In our house, feeling is believing.
I grab dish thirteen
(a cheap plastic wine glass)

and hear the front door open.
My roommate's rings clink on the counter.
Sighing, she rolls up her sleeves.

The bottle of Dawn,
a soapy confessional,
our testament of complaints,

and still forgiveness.
Her cuffs have slipped to her wrists,
but she continues. We continue

If anything sacred exists,

It exists in my kitchen—
under my slippers shuffling on linoleum,
between the water droplets on her sweater.

It's the fresh wrinkle in her palm,
in the corner of my eye.
Anything loving exists in our shared sacrifice,

not in a dishwasher,
nor in anything that makes you feel good,

CLEAN.

REPUGNANT PARADOX OF THE WALKING DEAD

BY HADLEY SIMMONS

My skull,
your skull,
incarcerated expectation.

Calcified cartilage.
Cerebral confines.
Carve in them valleys of vapidity.

Tell the mush where it is allowed to slop and slide.
It must be structured; It needs structure.

The rigidity of ideation; It reeks idyllic,
spilling from caul-de-sac'd confines.
Cast in its cells of corporeal congruence.

My eyes,
your eyes,
amalgamation of perception.

For you to see me, you must wade in the pungent mildew of paradox.
You must make opaque the incongruence.
Clip off the bits that don't make sense.

For you to know me, you must reach the limits of
jagged fingernails,
Feel me through the salt-lipped streak of
your winter-crusted lip

And
the
steady
stench of
perspirant
obedience.
Soured stagnant, for
your unhooked jaw.

My life, your life,
measured in the unsteady
tow of mundanity.

Read me left to right.
Thicken to roux.
Tell me how to live, and
you can show me how
to die.
Expectation is so comfortable.
I know how to play the part.

I lay supine on the sterile dirt.
Lifeless, melded to life.

You know how to see me. See me, see me now—alien bile packaged as
astronaut ice cream.
What oozes within me? What lies beneath the porcelain?

ART // RIO BLACKSHAW-MCKEE & JEOVANY TZILIN-GOMEZ

Cigarettes, never Sex

It's not that I'm addicted to cigarettes, it's that I buy them before the children do. So you see, I'm not really a degenerate, I'm a savior to the people. You who wish to judge me forget that I stand between Big Tobacco and your newborn, Tobias. My selfless nature has nothing to do with how the paper burns; that fiery undressing in mass heat and flame, a smoldering ember of ecstasy. I'm an all-encompassing force, a nuclear reactor powered by the euphoric conflagration of limitless cigarettes— consumed solely on behalf of others.

When I smoke, I ensure the poor medical student will have a job someday. I ensure the single father of four with kids to feed will be employed by the pharmaceutical industry. And yet, despite my sacrifice, my habits they still call unhealthy. My mother, father, older brother all with beliefs aligned against me. I hear their words, but cast them aside: *one does not merely switch between night and day.*

Yet do I falter in the face of ignorance? No, never. While some may fear the inexorable march of time and the differences which separate us, I alone stand tall. I'm a guerilla rebel, overthrowing the oppressive circadian rhythms that trap humanity.

For opposing the forces which threaten to consume us, I accept no prize. I do this not for me, but for those who have not the strength to fight by my side. You can thank me…but there is no need. It was never my choice. I was put here by design, and so the wheel turns.

The divinity on which I walk, neither blessing nor curse. A McDonald's drive-thru where friends come to dine. It called me when I was lost, yet I was forbidden entry. My invisible car and dreams of a Big Mac utterly extinguished.

But there he sat. Shapeless, blurred, radiating in the cold night. A homeless man, poised with dignity, a fallen deity. In my time of need he gave me a cigarette. Wrinkled, browned; utterly dilapidated. The forsaken Marlboro Red which found its way to me was no mirage. It was reality's true form, revealed to my disbelieving eyes.

And so another night passes and I step outside. My laptop inside glows with 30 open tabs, and I formulate the sublime while battling chess masters across the globe.

I find my seat on the patio, the old straw chair. My own throne and shrine, a companion in the darkest times. And I light a cigarette.▲

By David McGrath

ART // EMILY O'BRIEN & AMANDA ROSSITER

THE LAST TIME YOU MET THE SABERTOOTH

Was the time when you knew your mind
Was buried in the unforgiving snow.
It's a process from the unconscious,
Something you wish you can rewind
By asking the wind to warm the forest up.

POOLS OF MERCURY ARE APPEARING

With your shoes infected in fandango mold.
Elk would drink and grow dead tree horns,
Killing any bird who lands on them.
You must know about this, the attempt
For your ideas to be in a physical place.

I PLAY THE CARAMEL DRUMS TO DANCE

The acidity away from your body.
A ritual you see as terrorizing
Is a calling to the mother of topaz,
Polishing your fractured glasses
For a view of plains instead of pain.

I URGE YOU WITH MY SAPPHIRE RING

To wear it and let the blue stream enter,
Cleaning your blinding perfections
That don't fix what is already whole;
A ghost of sharp metals won't lead you
To a luxurious house of warmth and brightness.

I'M TELLING YOU NOT TO LOSE YOURSELF

BY JEOVANY TZILIN-GOMEZ

ART // MILES TRACHTENBERG

Silver Plated Spoon

Cradling honey:
Held sweetly, reverently.
Lips and tongues, no teeth.
Two spoons brought home from afar,
bridging distance: a bright sun.

by Aliana Hermann-Campana

LEMONADE

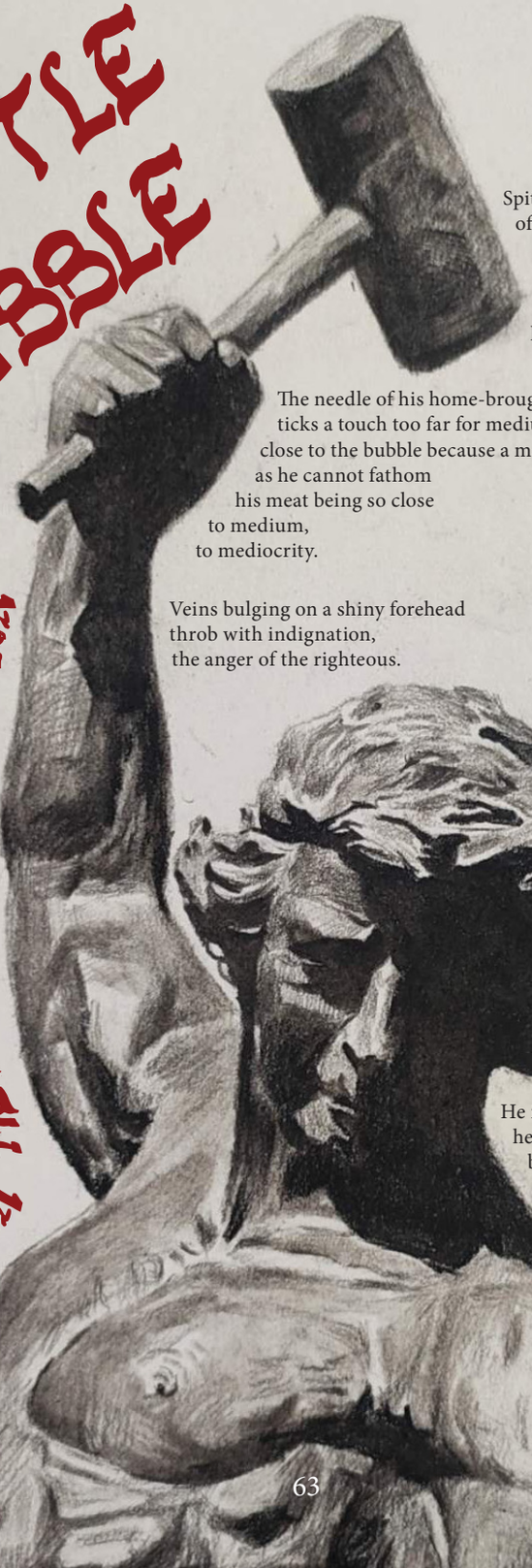
When life gave me
a woman's body,
I made lemon water.

Drank it from a canteen
all throughout the day
to romanticize the act
of sustaining myself.

by Summer Green

Spittle Bubble

By Aliana Hermann-Campana



Spittle bubbling at the corners
of his mouth, sputtering in disbelief.

His money ought to buy priority,
ought to blow the bubble
he nurtures close in his chest.

The needle of his home-brought thermometer
ticks a touch too far for medium-rare and it pricks
close to the bubble because a man as rare
as he cannot fathom
his meat being so close
to medium,
to mediocrity.

Veins bulging on a shiny forehead
throb with indignation,
the anger of the righteous.

He is bursting at the seams:
buttons pop off a tailored jacket,
ricocheting off the walls
of a restaurant
his flushed skin
is expanding
to fill.

He is a bubble, a pink balloon.
He is in a bubble, and by God,
he will continue until he pops,
boils over,
foams
to
nothing.

ART // RUICHENG ZHANG

A Paradise

by Scarlett De Alba

ART // OLIVIA BIEVENUE



The road to paradise
is long and harsh.
Vines intertwine on the path,
as thick fog blinds and hides;
difficult to find, drowning in
the smoke of cigarettes.

Inhale the crisp, cold air
exhale fogs up the vast sky above.
The rhythm of breathing,
the rising of chests
are signs of life.
Evidence of paradise,
evidence of lit cigarettes.

Above green mountains,
across the sea
paradise demands
purification of the soul
as the rushing river flows through our fingers.
Heaven has been called,
to wash away all sins
destroying
the scent of cigarettes.

The closer to paradise
becomes unveiled.
To fall from Heaven
must have been painful
like skin against cigarettes.

The road is long and harsh:
walking through it hurts the sole.
A place not made for smoking cigarettes
is no paradise
to call home.

Too Late, Too Late

By Harim Choe

The first thing she notices is the weight of her hair.

It falls past her shoulders, black and heavy with salt, and when the wind moves it across her face, she does not flinch. She's been waiting for this hair her entire life.

The ocean stretches in every direction; endless and flat, the clear, sharp cerulean of shadows on snow. She is standing on it. Just standing, as if the water were glass, as if the world had finally decided to hold her up instead of pulling her under.

She looks down at her hands.

Small. Unpainted nails. The fingers are slender and sure and hers. Something cracks open in her chest that she didn't know could still break. She spent thirty-seven years studying skin. She knew every layer, every cell, every mechanism of regeneration and decay. She built a career on the membrane between self and world and never once, not once, felt like she was living inside her own.

Isn't that something? Isn't that really just something.

The dress is white. Simple. It moves against her thighs like a question she finally knows the answer to. She has never worn anything that didn't feel like permission.

And then she remembers dying.

Fast. A truck, a red light, a sound like a thick wet tear in her own skin. She never told anyone in the half-second before everything went dark. Not her wife. Not her mother. Not the therapist she'd been seeing for two years, the one who wrote "generalized anxiety" on the intake form and let her talk around it for fifty minutes every Wednesday. She couldn't say the real word. Couldn't even think it without feeling like she was committing a crime against everyone who had ever been proud of her.

And they were all so proud.

Her mother cried at her wedding, grip tight on a Tupperware lid that still smelled faintly of sesame oil. Her father shook her hand at graduation and said, "you've made something of yourself." Her wife, who smelled of rain and expensive vanilla, would straighten her tie in the hallway and whisper, "you're my rock." Every morning she sang Disney songs while she cooked, and smiled back across the kitchen and felt the girl inside her sink a little deeper into the dark.

She was a good man. That was the problem.

She was a good man who went to a good school and married a good woman and built a good life, and every year the goodness accumulated like calcium in a joint. She couldn't bend anymore and moving at all meant breaking something someone else depended on. She had the money. She had the knowledge. She had everything she needed to become herself except the single, stupid, simple courage to lose what she had.

So the truck took it instead.

The sun is warm on her face. She tilts her head back and feels it on her throat, her collarbone, her skin. She is twenty-two. She is the age she was before the acceptance letters, before the white coat, before goodness began to calcify around her spine. She knows this the way you know your own name in the dark. She designed this self in the margins of notebooks she burned at 3 am, kneeling beside the trash can so the smoke detector wouldn't wake her roommate. She met this woman in dreams she woke from, gasping, guilty, and grief-stricken.

She is so beautiful.

She is so familiar that it makes her sick.

She is standing on an infinite ocean with nowhere to go and no one to see her, and she wants to scream at the absurdity of it, the waste. All that waiting, all that silence, and for what? To be perfect and alone?

But when she opens her mouth, what comes out is laughter.

It rings across the water, bright and strange and hers. Hers. She laughs again just to prove she can, just to fill the sky with it.

She laughs because she spent thirty-seven years afraid of what people would say, and now there are no people. She laughs because she had a house, a practice, a reputation, and a wife who loved her, and she would have traded all of it, all of it, for one day in this body. Walking down a street. Buying coffee. Being called "ma'am" by a stranger who didn't think twice about it.

She would have traded everything to be ordinary. A woman in a white dress on an ordinary beach on an ordinary Tuesday.

Instead, she is a goddess on an empty ocean, and the only witness is the sun.

The water is cool when she finally steps into it. The breeze lifts her hair again, and she lets it. She doesn't fix it. She doesn't hide her face. She lets herself be messy and alive.

The water rises to her ankles, her knees, her waist. The dress floats around her like a lily, like surrender, like the last page of a story that should have been written differently. She doesn't know whether she's walking toward something or away from everything. She doesn't know if this is redemption or exile, or simply the shape her dying brain made from a lifetime of wanting.

It doesn't matter. She is done solving things.

She is herself. Finally. Entirely. Utterly herself. The cost was only everything, and the reward is only eternity.

Somewhere, there is a man's body on an operating table that no one can save. Somewhere beyond the sky, there is a sun that will never set on a woman who will never be seen.

She hopes he wasn't always lonely there.

She hopes there were moments, like the first snow, a dog's weight against his leg, his wife's laughter carrying down the hallway, when the goodness felt like enough. She hopes he forgives her for leaving.

The air tastes sweet, and somewhere her lungs are forgetting the trick of breathing. The sun is warm. She is leaving it behind. This is a backward birth: the world contracting, light narrowing to a point, a first breath drawn in the body's final second.

The ocean does not judge her. Does not forgive her, either.

It only holds her, finally, the way she always needed to be held.

Gently, completely, as herself.▲

ART // EMMA CHASTAIN

I see salvation on the horizon.
It smells like your skin.
I breathe it in deep.

A bookshelf of mispronounced words.
A necklace of bookmarks,
I wear them every day.
From my window, she tells me to go to sleep.

Surround me with clothes to lay up my soul,
Internal showers with animals, trees, sun, and air.
Emerald Lake, tears trickling down my cheek.
Dreams.
Revelation.
Sinking.

I dreamt of rejection. Weeping naked.
Looking in the mirror and seeing that I was in the wrong place.
Felt the eyes of unwanting wandering all over me.
Knotted up, I asked a friend
Come sit and talk with me.
I cried to him, reaching down, and I dug up the truth.
He told me it was beautiful, although it was an aching pain.
I see salvation on the horizon.

Ever-blooming flower.
Reflecting on everything around me;
Every song, every book, every conversation.
I am a trip to the beach,
I'm the sunny spot in the garden,
I'm an owl in the trees,
and I'm a shooting star.
I'm a sweet scent,
reappearing like an angel on the cloud.

Hammer and nail. What's buried is built.
Theres magic in the belly
And a fighter in the ring.
Teeth are a sharp knife
Unraveled over time, I'm relieved.
The earnest truth
Humility unmet.
Swallowing hole and premature sweat.

Ease.
Tender.
Dream.
Just by looking, what's hers becomes mine.
Strip me down, and what do you see?
My body, your eyes.
An impersonating compassion.

I'm the bubbles of seafoam,
I'm the layers and layers of rock formation,
I'm the soft breeze as you roll down your window to see the full moon,
I'm the first sound waves that grace your ears when your favorite song plays.

I find the light in the dark.
Rain, wash us of our sins.
Rain, swim me to the sea.

ART // TAYLOR ALICE

Light Enters Through the Wounds

By Taylor Alice

ਗਿੱਧਾ

By Yogita Sharma



ART // YOGITA SHARMA

I steal away from the summer, my time spent in the closet,
Absent from the eternal Indian heat,

Dressing up in the vibrant pinks and yellows of my mother's youth,
Time left lapsing over her old lehengas.

Skin itchy from the netting inside the strict fabric:
It will not stretch to fit over the soft of your body.

Long outgrown my choice, the fabric no longer drapes loose,
Instead the thick of my skin cramps in the outline of my identity.

It's meant to be spacious enough to sweat in:
To pant, to heave, to run in.

Upper arms wrapped tight in corset of curiosity, but I want it tighter,
For it to suffocate not just me, but all the curves accentuated in western TV.

It takes both my aunts to peel the top up and over my shoulders,
Our own sisterhood in suffering.

These clothes don't belong to me.

Mehndi drips from my fingertips down to the bend of my elbow,
Wrapping around me until my skin becomes the same red brown shade as my nani's morning cha.

Hair warped by borrowed oil, it trickles down my spine:
It will not soothe the brittle bends of your body.

Parting back my braid, I weave through the same paranda patterns as my Punjabi sisters,
The motion older than any border drawn.

Playing dress-up in a golden graveyard of assimilation:
Always torn between who I was born to be and who I've become.

I don't belong to these clothes.

The chun chun of churiyan echo their way into my mind,
My pakhi swinging in symmetry with my dadhi's old giddha routine,

My eyes reflect her kajal silhouette:
Our movements match one another and we become one.

I belong beyond these clothes.

ART // ROSA BROOKS-KAMPER

A little sunshine might save me,
Been told I'm looking a bit pale lately,
Cut from something cold and threadbare,
Dead on my feet, dreadful, to say the least—sorry, it's just I've had my
Eyes held open to the eclipse recently, *[looked Evil in its fucked-up,*
***F**layed-open face]*, and—and I've got crow's feet, suppose I shouldn't
Glare so much, suppose I should expect the guillotine, not pearly gates, cause
Heaven set sail ages ago for its own reprieve, sandy shores of an
Island yet untainted by our reach, girls without smile lines awaiting
Judgement by a saviour who marches first in a procession of
Kings holding its leash, who preach divine karma to avoid Earthly justice,
Launching their wars, sitting on the sidelines, and I'm writing odes to lost lovers,
My imagined millenia, because how pretty a word, how pretty a thought is time
Not to be had, ages collapsing, when ten years ago I might've
Opened my wrists over a failing grade, and now I've got straight A's but
*[**P**edophiles run the fucking country]* and anyone meant to do anything is
Quietly cutting up their dinner, not caring or caring in identical passivity,
Reaching for the salt or selling you rejuvenating injections—
Shoot me up, *[or just shoot me, why don't you?]* you've already slaughtered every
Thing promised to us in primary school, stolen the visions of
Unity, usurped our futures, unbuilt our freedom brick by brick; you, the fat and fed
Vultures, who eat the people's prosperity, pay for it in peace at the drive-through
Window; tell your chauffeur to step on the gas, leave us all in the dust of your
Xenial—*[no]*, menial—no, *[fucking evil]*—care, leave us to contend with the
Years we won't have, or fear to see—*[oh, I'm looking peaky?]* sorry, I stopped taking my
Zinc pills because, *[fuck, what's the point?]*—sorry, because the government says my problem
is actually low vitamin D.

I'm So [REDACTED] Sick Of This

By Katrina Drury

Bathroom Floor

By Molly Merrifield

The TV glow casts shadows throughout the room. *America's Next Top Model* plays quietly on the screen. The girls' bold skin and dainty way of carrying themselves makes their presence seem bigger than the TV itself. I turn to the spread of food laid out in front of me. The greasy, day-old pasta paired with stale gummy bears and chewy pieces of bread saved from the night we ate out. For each bite, I stretch my mouth open wide and scarf down whatever my hands happen to grab. Tyra Banks pulls out a measuring tape to record each model's bust, waist, thighs, and hips. The smallest girl smirks to herself with satisfaction, obviously enough so that the other models know what she's thinking. The smallest crumbs on the table do the same. My insides twist in response to what was just swallowed. Disgust works its way up from my stomach to finally stop my mouth from eating more. I lock shameful eyes with Tyra and she reaches her long arms towards me while she whips her measuring tape. It wraps tightly around my wrists and she struts towards the bathroom, dragging me behind her. She throws me in front of the toilet and stares at me with her nasty *smize*. I know what she expects me to do. I assume position—hair tied into a scraggly, tangled bun, strong right hand pressed against my fat, and rashy left hand down my throat. With every vile and loathsome jolt, I feel my legs getting smaller, my stretch marks melting away. My right hand pushes further and further into my stomach until it deflates into my spine. Then, and only then, my left hand removes itself. My legs tremble as I try to find my feet. I tell myself not to look in the mirror and look at the splotchy, tear-stained, purple and red mess that I am not in the mood to be reminded of. Instead, I'm reminded of the girls' voices from the TV.

The TV glow casts [redacted] My body [redacted] bigger. [redacted] every greasy, [redacted] bite, a new roll protrudes out from my abdomen. [redacted] thighs and hips. [redacted] waist. The tiny [redacted] girls on TV sneer at me with [redacted] Disgust [redacted] my stomach [redacted] eating more. [redacted] hide the evidence [redacted] bathroom [redacted] I [redacted] scraggly, [redacted] fat, [redacted] vile and loathsome [redacted] further and further into my stomach [redacted] my left hand removes itself. My legs tremble [redacted]. I look in the mirror, seeing [redacted] a [redacted] red mess, not [redacted] the girl [redacted] on [redacted] TV.▲

Bigger [redacted] hips. [redacted] waist.
Disgust [redacted] hide [redacted] the bathroom [redacted]
fat, [redacted] in the mirror, [redacted]

ART // MOLLY MERRIFIELD

AIRPORTS

BY EMILY O'BRIEN

Traveling alone is an exercise in unraveling. You exist in the airport in a way dramatically distinct from traveling with a group. When you travel in a pack, you're a part of your own bubble, you pass by the other families and people rushing by and you think nothing of it; you are too concerned with your own fraught journey: friends yelling that they need to pee or that they can't remember where they put their passport, sisters impatiently yelling about your tardiness while fathers grumble about how the car coming to drive you to the airport is too small for the price you're paying, mothers checking and then rechecking and then re-rechecking that the oven didn't magically turn itself on or that the entire house hasn't turned into some giant gas leak. But when you're alone in the airport, there is a certain quietness. There is no comfort of familiar frantic noise. Instead you simply exist inside this place that seems to stand outside of time. Voices shout over one another. Different mother tongues bleed into one giant noise. You stand parallel to men in suits and teens in pajamas and no one thinks anything of it.

Traveling to another part of America is startling in a way that feels embarrassing, the obvious but stark reminder of how different the regions are. These differences aren't even tangible, nothing more than a shift in energy alerting you to the unfamiliarity of the environment. Airports do an excellent job of signaling an otherness. Passing through the airport in Houston, Texas is an entirely different universe than the one created in Los Angeles, California, than the one created in Cleveland, Ohio. It's in the smallest of things—the speed that people walk, the length of the line at the Starbucks, what language you hear the most in the food court—even if logically, at least half of the people in each of these airports are not returning home, but flying home. And yet, it's hard to not feel like I am the only person who is a foreigner, the only person that sticks out—an old penny forgotten in the cash drawer of our new, post-post-modern age.

In an airport I can be anything that I want. When I'm traveling alone, I am an adult. I have been living on my own since the beginning of time. I am falling apart in the airport with my adult-ness. When I'm traveling semi-alone—without my parents—then I am even more adult. I am the adult to my sister. I stand next to her and am convinced everyone else in this airport sees us as two sisters desperately clinging to each other. That we exist alone. That we are everything to each other because there is nothing in between. None of this is true. But it all could be.

And then you leave the airport. And the weather is never as good. Temporality comes crashing in with the exit of temperate California into sheets of pouring rain. Once, I stood in this

pouring
rain—phone almost
dead, backpack dragging down my
shoulders, duffle bag slipping off my shoulder—and contemplated
turning around.

My luggage was overbearing and I was confident my Uber driver had gotten lost. My Uber driver *had* gotten lost. Upon arrival he granted me aux privileges, to then immediately berate my music choices. Minute by minute, my fantasies of the car turning around and dropping me back at the airport were becoming more and more vivid. The purgatory I had been in, starting at 4:30 in the morning when I left my airport, to my layover in Texas, to the twenty minutes where I had gotten lost in Atlanta's baggage claim, was abruptly shattered.

Ridiculous, considering it had only been about eight hours of traveling. Yet, the protective shield of an airport's limbo of liminality was rapidly beginning to splodge away, leaving me unbearably present in the pouring rain with an Uber driver who didn't like Zach Bryan. I had left a place where girls with septum piercings and cowboy boots stomp their feet to country music and twirl for the croonings of Stevie Wonder, to a place where my shitty country music was aptly recognized as just that. My cab driver, once he had finished explaining to me why Zach Bryan's music is repetitive and overplayed, confidently asked me where I was visiting from. There were no doubts in his mind that I wasn't an Atlanta native. I'd like to think it's because he saw how tan I was and the way I was unfazed by a long drive and figured I must've been from California. While this likely wasn't true, it is undeniable that where we are from is embedded in our bones, impressed into the way we move through transitory spaces, dictating the performance of our travel.

This distinct presentation manifested itself the first time I traveled to Cleveland. There had been chatter on the plane on the way there, some sort of sporting event had been occurring, and the plane was filled with the low hum of people excitedly discussing the results. Unable to participate in the conversation left me feeling like a rock in the heel of your shoe—small and unwanted. I felt moments away from sinking entirely into my seat and becoming the flooring of the plane. This was also my first time traveling alone, weeks before I was to start college, and that moment felt like a prediction.

The more you frequent an airport the more its movements twist and twirl like the lines on the palm of your hand. The second time I arrived in Cleveland, I moved with arrogance. I waltzed through the Music Hall of Fame, down the escalator, and threw myself into the hug I knew was waiting. The discomfort of being tossed in the air, head aching from an early flight—chosen for its cheapness, always has its pay offs. Anticipation is what moves you forwards on the journey towards your destination, longing festers in your throat, throbbing with the unsteady rhythm of a TSA line, aching with the frequency of announcements of other planes taking off. Conversely, there is an emptiness of the backwards movement through the airport. The body slinks, deflated through the terminals, slipping into the seat with the knowledge of finality. Things pass in airports. The only place we're ever truly able to mourn, because it is the only space we exist fully suspended. There are things waiting to be learnt that can only be truly learnt in the discomfort of a tiny chair, with hair a mess scratching at the nape of your neck, with a cold, expired $20 ham sandwich in your lap, eyes faced out to endless expanses of sky.▲

CHICAGO

BY AMELIA LAGNA



ART // AMELIA & MAIA LAGNA

At 9:37 pm, November 12, 2021 on State and 18th in Chicago, Illinois, a body tumbled down from the sky and no one saw.

I was on the train, sitting in my favorite seat with my headphones on. The red line loops around downtown so in those days I would get on where I got off each night to be a stranger somewhere else (I guess I thought my sadness might change if the backdrop did. Still every song droned the same tune: *This is not the right city. You are not the right man*).

I was staring out of the window with my coat buttoned up to my chin, fiddling with the empty wrapper in my pocket when I saw it, just like that, clear as day, a twirling ray of light and then a splash, right into the Chicago River. I gasped and looked for reactions in the other passengers: a woman bouncing a child on her lap, a man speaking Polish on the phone, a group of teenagers giggling, a lady leaning on a sturdy shoulder. "Did you see that?" I thought I said it out loud but there was no reply.

I got off when the doors opened and ran towards the Riverwalk. I weaved like a shadow through full-bellied crowds who took up whole sections of sidewalk in their twos and threes.

When I got to it the body was small enough to fit in my hands, but it rose as if possessed in front of me, not a drop of nasty river water to drag it down, I swear it. Face-to-face over the barrier, I was agape. And then there was a warmth, then a sharp pain in the back of the neck, then a feeling of solidity, like I had swallowed the dull ground. I always heard the wind, but there was music this time. The being's skin pulsed like an invitation and I reached out to it, but it jerked away at the last moment. I touched my own face instead and it was wet with tears.

Then there was a chase, and it beckoned me, weightless on its wings, through the howling city. If we were noticed then no one made any indication. Breathless I dove through tunnels, toll booths and parking structures until the mouth of Lake Michigan gnashed at my feet. Over the water my creature delicately flew, then looked at me to follow. "I can't go any farther! I would freeze! I would drown!" was my plea, but it only frowned and came no closer. So there we stood, transfixed, as the cargo ships bejeweled the horizon and the clouds wove a ceiling enclosing us. How long we stayed like that I do not know, but the light of its body glowed so warm, so heavenly, I soon found myself undressed, numb to the fingertips, and ready to be enveloped by the inland sea.

If my eyes were closed, it was gone before I opened them. That was all—no blinding flash, no whooshing sound, no gentle caress. For a moment I waited. Then in darkness I collected my clothes, save for my coat which had been fed to the water. I went straight to the station and let every car, delivery bike, and midwesterner pass on through me. At the apartment I washed up quietly to not wake my roommate, and then I went to bed. I don't remember what I dreamed about.

I will confess I returned to that place one time only, years later with my own honey. We were Californians and I had gotten a receptionist job that kept my nights occupied and a car that brought me place to place. She had never been to Chicago before, and I chose an unusually warm week in March to make my return.

When we held hands down the sidewalk no pedestrian could overtake us. And when we jaywalked on Wabash, cars honked and braked for us. We had lunch on the river and the waiter smiled at us with all his teeth. The tour boats scored our afternoon walk with music from a confident age.

I wish I could say I happened upon it accidentally, but it was a detour we took. I stood at the edge there again, taming the waves this time. I searched for evidence—a button, a wrapper, a shimmer maybe—some wink from the universe. For a second I thought I saw something but it was just a seagull.

She came up behind me and asked what I was looking for. "Nothing," I said, but I was crying again, I don't know why.

Then she asked if we could go to the museum now, so I kissed her head and went to hail a cab. I looked back just once.▲

POSITANO'S GOLDEN BREEZE

By Kevin White

The back of my eyelids—a dark movie screen—
Flickers bright with a long-lost dream:
A perfect painting, chiseled beauty,
Of pastel architecture cascading
Through mountainous greenery,
Down, down to the crystal sea.

Suddenly I'm there, on the cobblestone streets,
With the shining walls and the drizzling heat,
Rolling, in an effervescent sheen,
With the laughter in the soft breeze
And the aroma of melting mozzarella cheese,
Down, down to the Tyrrhenian sea.

Amalfi's famous charm, both grand and exotic:
High-fashion prances and white doves frolic,
Daffodil sundresses sway in the wind,
White stucco reflects the sun on my skin,
Tucked-away art galleries lure me in
And embrace me, as though a living mosaic.

ART // KEVIN WHITE

Once upon the promenade,
The dandelion sun gleams
as bright as lemonade
On tanned bodies,
as they pass by
in a glossy
shine,

Licking ice cream
and sipping red wine—
My feet waltz the entire time,
Led by the silver bells' chimes,

Down, down
to the glistening water
Where the city
embraces Neptune's daughter—
They swirl and twirl
under a ravishing gold,
Then pirouette and fold
Onto the gravelly
sand, as I'm told,
"Come, come, and
never grow old!"

What a sweet, sweet ideal,
If only for a moment
to feel
Beauty—
Under the holy name of Amalfi,
I long to take her with me
Up, up from the ancient
crystal
sea.

In I wade, and they paint my soul
To a crystalized mural—
My body weightless, my heart full,
I gaze with a wonder-filled renewal
Upon the great city of
sculpted
marble
As it trickles
down,
down
to the
liquid jewel.

My eyes
open to a cold,
dusky room
In a silence of
dull and gloom
But, if I listen carefully…
A wisp of
the golden breeze!
And a splash of
jewelled dreams!
And a sweet voice still singing:
La Dolce Vita—

DEVADASI

ART // MAITHRI VERMA

The Mysore crown begins to tip
when the battalion of boats dock from far West.
And the string
through *veena's* quivers,
Her devotion remains steadfast.

Lustrous temple jewels could be retired,
fine gold-woven silks could be hung to rest,
And the ringing echoes of *ghunguru* could be consigned to memory;

But no man can pry away
Her thick, calloused soles,
worn by decades of discipline,
beating and bleeding to *talam*,
growing from the friction.

Resistance folds into each simple cotton pleat
draped
across
Her
chest.
Condemned as vulgar by the pale man
whose lustful mind cannot comprehend
the *bhakti* contained within.
Nor the inscriptions left behind
on dried banana leaves for Her disciples to find.

by Maithri Verma

seaside improvisation

By Mia Hirsch

Tonight the rain falls hard, pattering angrily against
the roof, forming small craters on the sand,
dimpling like your face when you look at me,
like my love for you, like the dried skin

in the passenger seat, squished by my thumb
absentmindedly, while you asked me questions,
filling in the blanks, drawing me in,
gas-station-coffee coating my throat.

Tonight my head is not placed correctly on my neck,
it is two degrees away from unbearable.
Kale wilts in the fridge, curling into itself, fading into yellow strands.
Something is clenching my jaw, salt thickening my hair,
clouding my eyes. I cannot see four feet in front of me.

Tonight the music feels far away,
one gust of wind and the whole house might fall apart.
But tonight I look at you,
and I don't want to look at anything else.

Bare legs hanging off the stool, eyes sparkling with moonglade,
something is burning in the next room, silver smoke wisping in the air,

& I am half dizzy with affection.

Tonight I don't feel the dust resting on my shoulder,
I don't hear the house groan, shifting under the weight of time.
The termites don't abandon their work,
they don't get distracted
by this thing I see in your eyes.

Tonight we let the waves envelop us whole,
we let the current drag us in, spit us back out.
Salt water gushes down my throat,
I cannot say the words I've been thinking out loud.
Unforgiving rain falls over us,

& we shiver until day break.

ART // MIA HIRSCH

Only Time Will Tell

By Rose Friedrich

Many have tried to outsmart, defy, and name her. Believing if they can make sense of her, they can make sense of themselves. They bind her to calendars, divide her into numbers, hours and years. She's grown amused with the human desire to bargain, delay, and plead while she slips through their grasp. They always fail, but this does not deter them. She is all that we are not. Her mere existence reveals true human weaknesses, our inevitable defeats. She continues steadily on, setting the rulebook we all must follow.



ART // ROSE FRIEDRICH

Today she visits three.

She finds the actress gazing upon her own reflection, a brush trembling in her hand. Carefully, she smears on a second skin over her weathered face. She fills her gaping pores, and paints her cheeks a deep cherry red.

Her eyes have grown tired of analyzing the woman that greets her each morning; finding flaws that no other eyes can see. She sticks needles under her skin, drinks magic serums, and shoves pills down her throat by the dozen. With each candle placed on her cake, she, she…she avoids the sun and the sea, the elements that once touched her freely. But they are not the true culprits.

Your illusion is convincing. She smirks. The world believes your youth has been preserved, that you have mastered the art of delay, but you have failed to fool me.

"I can be painted and powdered, with nothing earned

I can be chased, but never caught"

And with that, She continues on her way. Leaving the actress to claw at her own skin; cursing the passing years as blemishes emerge on her face.

She finds the scholar in a dimly lit room, hunched over a desk in a cracked leather chair. It's two shades too light in the middle, where his body has left its mark. His ill-fitting glasses slip low on the bridge of his nose, revealing deep creases in his brow. The walls of his study are lined with ancient maps and books full of unsolved questions. His ink-stained hand scribbles speculations on empty pages, desperate to find answers where none exist. He writes as if precision alone can save him. If he can understand, he can gain control. If he can gain control, he can escape the inescapable. So here he sits. Alone in this chair, while his hair has thinned, his bones have grown brittle, his daughter has become a mother.

Your pursuits are noble, she muses. *But while you tried to define me I never stopped moving.*

" I can be studied for centuries, but never learned,

I can be measured, but never bought"

She drifts past the scholar—leaving him to decompose like the dusty stacks of paper in his endless cave of questions.

She finds the priest kneeling on a worn red cloth, calling her by another name. A rosary bites his palm as he whispers rehearsed rhymes to salvage suffering souls. His congregants trade him their secrets for his key to some great divine. They place control in the hands of their Father to deny the powerlessness over their own fate. Their greatest fears and deepest loves lie in a small black box—the names of the sick, the dying, and the already gone. They believe his words travel upward. He believes it, he must.

Your prayers are misplaced but true, she reasons. *It is me whose name you should cry out.*

I can be spent, I can be wasted; but not returned.

I disappear with each passing thought"

No mirror can deceive Her, no page can prove Her, no prayer can quell Her. She leaves only one thing up to us:

how we spend what little She gives.

I can be painted and powdered, with nothing earned

I can be chased, but never caught

I can be studied for centuries, but never learned

I can be measured, but never bought

I disappear with each passing thought

I can be spent, I can be wasted, but not returned

What am I?.

BUTCHER KNIFE: Self-Portrait

By Andy Huy Le

I

Wrinkled Palm Echoed Clang Frosted Plastic
Clenched Teeth Bloomed Knuckle
Boiled Hand Calloused Grip

II

Razor Swing Finger Cut Blade Bludgeon
Blood Drip Palm Sweat
Bandage Wound Blunt Sacrifice

III

Peeled Skin Labored Love Blossomed Fruit
Squared Ceramic Sweat Sweet
Planted Seed Mothered Martyr

CAT-ALUM

Andy Huy Le:

Andy Huy Le is a writer, editor and teacher. He is a former award winning competitor and coach in Speech & Debate representing Southern California Debate League (SCDL). Andy graduated from UCSB in 2019 having majored in English, he was a mainstay in Poets' Club, and his work appeared many times in *The Catalyst*. While at UCSB Andy founded the school's first team to compete in the College Unions Poetry Slam Invitational, a major annual tournament for collegiate spoken word teams. In addition to *The Catalyst*, Andy's writing has appeared in Word Magazine, WILDsound Writing Festival, and The Love Yourself Foundation (LYF), with forthcoming pieces in MoonLit Getaway and eMerge Magazine. Andy recently completed his first full length poetry manuscript, "Calligraphy / Ballads For Calypso" which features three poems he wrote and published in *The Catalyst*.



ART // CHARLOTTE DAVIS & MOLLY MERRIFIELD

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www.catalyst.english.ucsb.edu

CONTACT US:

EMAIL // english-ucsbcatalyst@ucsb.edu
INSTAGRAM // @thecatalystucsb

ART // RYAN DOWNING