



2021-2022
TRILLIUM

Established in 1971, Trillium has been Ramapo College's literary and art magazine for the majority of the past 45 years. Staffed by students, Trillium features the poetry, prose, and visual art of Ramapo College community. The magazine is published every spring and is available across campus, free of charge.

Trillium can be viewed online:

www.ramapo.edu/trillium

RAMAPO COLLEGE

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers six graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.

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Trillium

Published by Ramapo College

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An Open Letter to a Volcanologist

Danielle Bongiovanni

Dear ~~David~~ Dr. Johnston,

I am writing this to ask for permission to ~~kill you~~ to close your Wikipedia page.

You see,

I have kept the tab open for the past 3 weeks on my phone.

Every time I try to close it,

I see the photo of you sitting in that chair,

13 hours before the eruption,

Smiling with a book in your hands,

The picture of ease.

You looked so ~~young~~ dedicated to your job.

I cannot bring myself to ~~let you die again~~ to click out.

I stare at your photo, and I wonder,

~~How do you let go of someone you never met?~~

If I stepped through the screen and warned you

About the following ~~mourning~~ morning,

Would you run? Or would you stay,

Determined to see Mount St. Helens unleash her fury firsthand,

Dedicated to delivering that ~~fatal~~ final message,

“Vancouver! This is it!”

~~Where did your thoughts go in those final moments?~~

~~To memories? To your mother?~~

I hope you are ~~safe~~ happy at peace now,

As life grows back above

And those inspired by your name

Tread the soil over your resting place.

~~Are you waiting for one of them to find you?~~

Wherever you are,

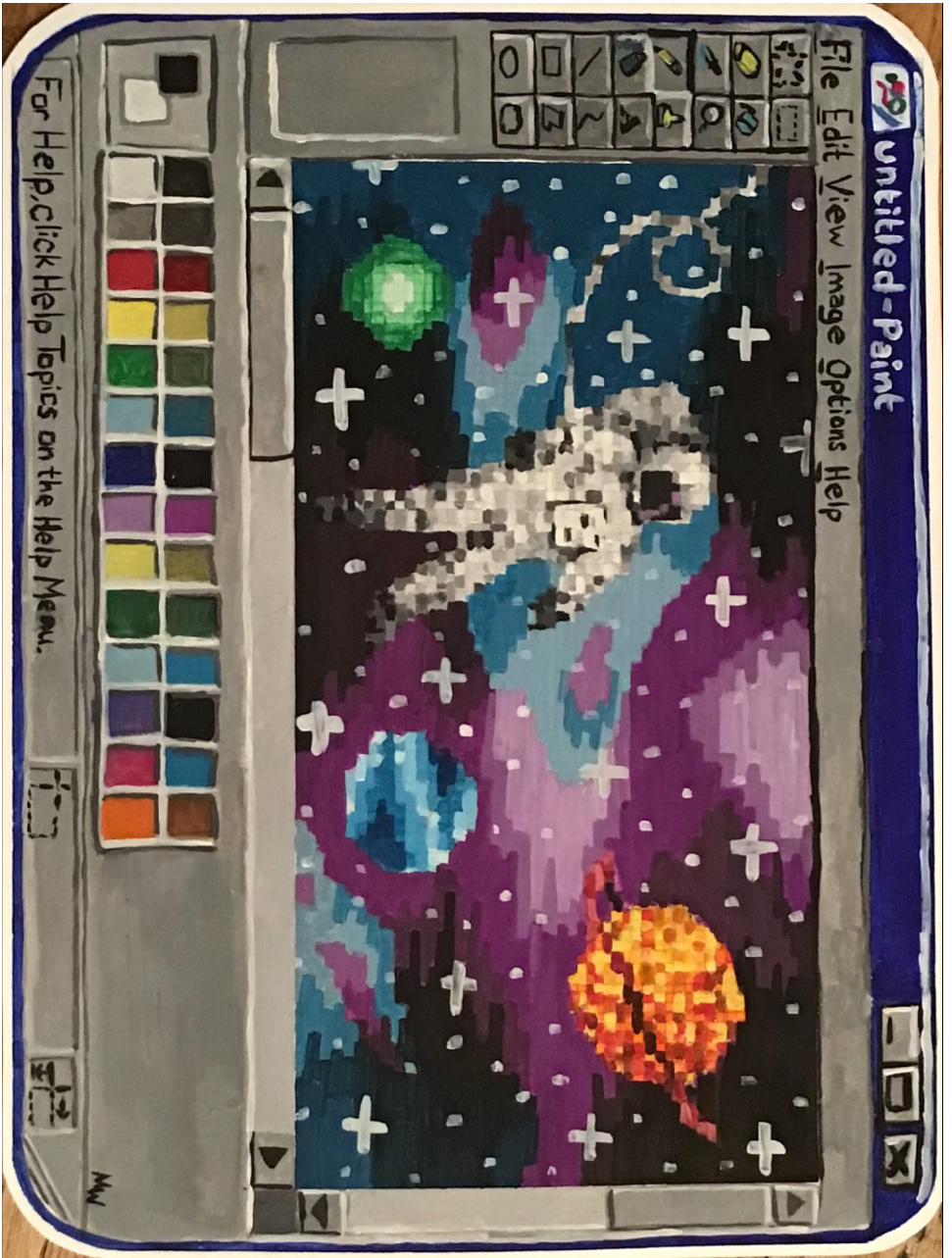
~~I hope you dream.~~

~~I hope the mountain has embraced you gently.~~

I hope you know you are remembered.

With ~~regret~~ grief love admiration,

A future fellow scientist



Waiting Room

Natalie Tsur

A new nurse crowds next to me every few minutes,
Just checking in, they say
when another patient leaves. They aren't shy
with body language,
bringing a hand to the top of my shoulder,
dropping fear down my arm. Some distant voice
sings about miracles until the door slam cuts
the notes short and the nurse doesn't flinch. Instead
she gives me that smile
that's supposed to warm and distract me
from realizing I'm sitting on a flat hospital chair --
which couldn't have been any less comforting -- as I
wait for my father to leave
one of those rooms, our third visit.
This time back to tell the doctor
the prescription isn't working, and the nerve's still
pushing into his spine like a dislodged tooth stretching
further through the gum each day. My sister often talks
about which of us will take care of him when he's older.
In the scenario where it's me, I unscrew my limbs like
lightbulbs, unzip my skin, peeling back each layer to
trade every bone I've got. I tell this to the nurse and she
laughs, rubs my back a little harder and between chipped
teeth
she spits out, Here, drink some water.

Brake

Kendra Banach

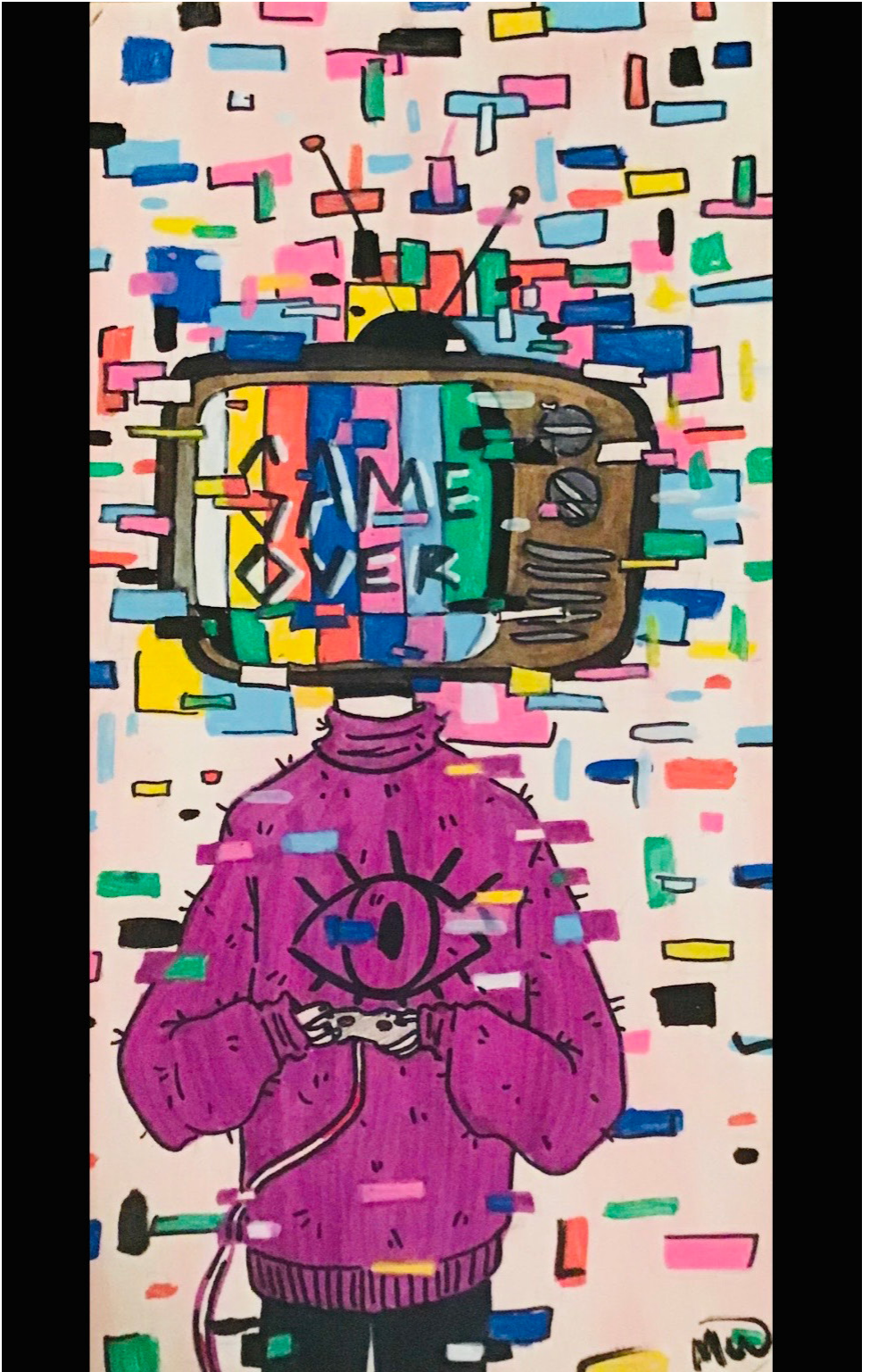
He stands in the headlights,
and doesn't flinch.
Every fiber of my being
wishes for revenge
but I could never hurt him.

Each inhale reminds me that
I didn't brush my teeth this morning,
because I never slept,
I just lay in bed for five minute intervals,
choking on every neon green digit on the cable box. And pacing in
disconnected patterns on the hardwood floor.

Sara sits in the driver's seat
and laughs about my animosity towards classical music. She lets me play
Nirvana on the drive
even though she has a migraine,
because she can tell I'm not ready to be alone.

Tiny paper cuts grace my cheeks
in the fall wind, and I hope it'll freeze out
the reminder that he only stayed my friend
to spare my feelings.

I'm roadkill at his feet,
gut punched and writhing
I want to reach over and shift the gear into drive, and put us both out of
our misery,
but I won't.
I stare at my hands, buzzing in my lap.



Dear Magic 8 Ball

Megan Woods

Dear Magic 8 Ball,

I wish you could answer more than just yes-or-no questions.

I'd ask you to solve my math equations when I'm up late, finishing my homework.

I meant to get them done earlier, but then

Heidi asked me to paint the windows at Franco's for Halloween,
and it sounded like more fun.

I should've asked if going off with Heidi was a good idea in the first place.

I'd ask you what piece to audition with for an acapella group.

I ran my voice raw

preparing for that audition, going through every song I had ever performed
before,

only to decide on the first piece I had chosen anyway.

Still, it was kind of nice sifting through old music I haven't performed in a
while.

I'd ask you what to say to people that might make them want to be friends.

Irving says he thought it was funny when he first met me—

how I'd jump from subject to subject

just to keep talking,

but I wasn't trying to be funny.

Maybe it would just be better if I had a Magic 8 Ball to choose my words
for me.

I think most of all,

I'd want to know how to get out of this slump.

I don't love the things I used to,

I don't write what I want to say anymore.

Magic 8 Ball, I wish you could ease my mind by answering the harder questions for me.

I know you don't even really know the answer to those yes-or-no questions,
and you're not really magic at all,
but in those couple of seconds I shake you up,

I always magically know what I want your answer to be.

Hidden Foreign Citizen

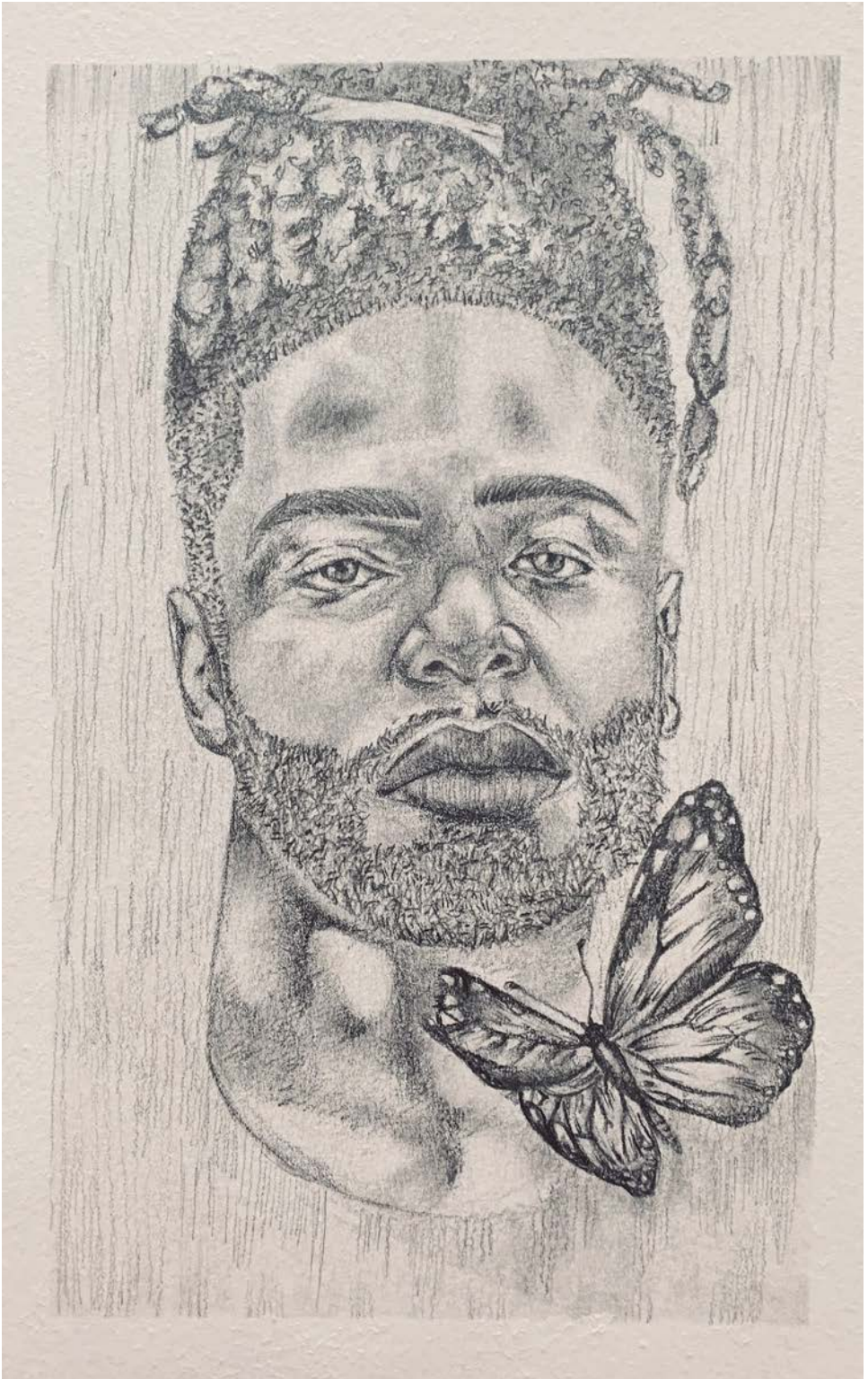
Luka Marjanovic

You are not a citizen here but nobody knows until you speak. You are a citizen, somewhere, but not here, so your rights are non-existent. You are an intruder, and yet you feel more seen than Claudia Rankine, who was born in the United States. The fact that you had to check that fact (Claudia Rankine was born in Jamaica in fact, but her nationality is in fact American) before being comfortable stating it as a fact is in fact quite troubling. Would you check her background if she were white and wrote in English? Would anybody check your background if your name was more American and they only read your writing? If you signed it as Luke instead of Luka, and used a different last name as your pseudonym, would anybody think you were from a third world country whose only historic relevance is that the first World War was started in its capital? One of the bloodiest conflicts in the history of humanity started in a place where you spent most of your youth, and yet you inspire more confidence than a black citizen of this country? Makes sense.

How weird is it that the day after you binge old videos of Serena Williams' racist court and life issues, you read about her in a poetry book written by a person you never heard of before and yet you agree with so much? Especially that US Open final when Naomi Osaka won her first grand slam, and you love Naomi because she speaks as awkwardly and as shyly as you do, and yet is somehow so great under pressure in front of the tennis crowd, under the same pressure you want to be under, in front of the theater crowd one day. Naomi wins, deservedly so, Serena yells because of racist unfairness, deservedly so, the crowd boos the judges, deservedly so, Serena comforts and congratulates Naomi on a fair win, deservedly so, Naomi cries because of the crowd, deservedly so, Serena did nothing wrong and the comments on the YouTube video say that she is an entitled bitch, she should go fuck herself, she stole the spotlight from Naomi because she is a privileged black woman, and everybody agrees with the horrible racist sentiments that flood the internet: "Deservedly so." Makes sense.

You are white enough not to be considered an immigrant, so

nobody minds when you run through your gated-white-community-neighborhood. Nobody tries to tell you how to play tennis when you go to the courts ten minutes from your house, because you are white, and a man, and not a woman, and they are all men, and white, and old, and they think they know how to play tennis, and lead, and destroy. You are good in their eyes until you speak, and then doubt creeps into those same eyes, and they start hunting for weirdly pronounced words, and they try to place your origin without asking about it, because it's somehow insulting to ask a white man where he's from when you're obviously foreign, and when that is obviously a fact, a non-insulting fact, something that you might be proud of actually, the fact that you are different, and that you do not fit the only two molds that seem to exist in the current US zeitgeist: white-American and non-white-non-American. You are a hidden white-non-American when your mouth is shut, and you stay a white-non-American even when you open your mouth until somebody has the guts to ask you where you're from, and then, and only then, do you become a foreign-job-stealing-how-did-he-get-his-visa-who-allowed-him-on-my-white-gated-man-court-filthy-immigrant that you really are. Makes sense.



TTA1

Tristan Anderson

Power on.

Autism: a serious developmental disorder that impairs the ability to communicate or interact.

Aspergers: a type of autism affecting ability to socialize and communicate. When you're a kid nobody knows about strains, and symptoms. All we know are names and faces of the bodies inhabiting the spaces beside us.

Programmed by birth to seek similarities.

These social systems stop the spread of diversity.

Building barriers of ignorance against understanding.

Blocking the path to truth.

Bullied everyday for my failed speech.

I turned my volume to 0.

And chose to be mute.

Afraid that raising my voice would make me a target of unwanted attention.

I can see past traumas, like a stored image on an SD card.

Loading...

Age 5 kids from class say they can't hang with a weirdo.

Loading...

Age 15 friends fizzle out,
allies don't want to become casualties of bullying.

Loading...

Age 20 Teacher says "That explains why you act so funny."

Loading...

Age 22 police officer tells me I've got a few "screws loose".

As if my mind was written in hieroglyphics.

Sometimes I don't understand myself.

Like a book with torn pages.

Pieces of me have gone missing.

I can't compute reasons for why I am.
Or what I am.
Or how I think.
It makes me feel inadequate.
Masking my idiosyncrasies behind a facade of normality.
A skill developed over years of having to camouflage myself to avoid being prey.
Men, women, students, teachers ...they all blur into predators.

I'm tryna be like the latest update.
But I'm rerunning old lines of code.
"Stop being weird."
"Don't fully express yourself."
"Compact your presence."
I never questioned these changes.
Until the upgrades made new problems.
Putting stress on my servers.

I'm overheating.
Trying to make myself fit in a place I didn't belong. It is my self destruct sequence.

My apologies, I have been disingenuous.
Meet the true me.
This unit's name is TTA1 and I am the human robot.
Cyborg by mind.
Organic by heart.

I am the tin man who turned into titanium.
Bent and beaten but still fully functioning.
I am.
Error.
I am
Error.
I!
Error, Error, Error.





Your Only Art

Gensis Siverio

Every time, as the music overhead melodizes,
I stand with the paintbrush in hand
and struggle
to find the right hues to decorate
yet another white, empty canvas.

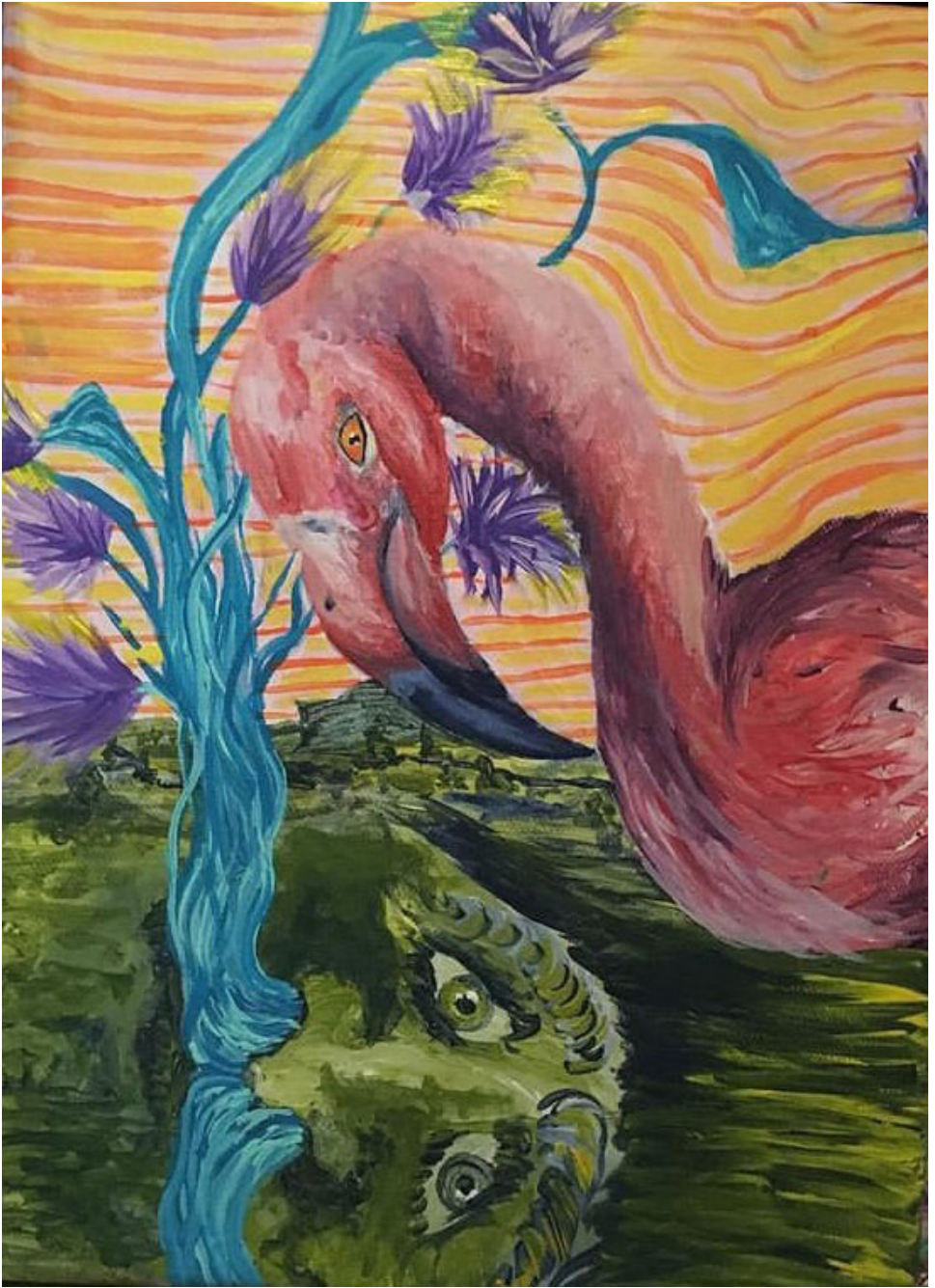
What pigment will work best to color
my loneliness?
To varnish my solitude?
To, with shades, recount my sorrow?

My wondering hand seems to
break off its hinges
and lively, laudably, longingly
paint only you.

Your golden eyes,
those dimpled cheeks,
and vulpine muzzle.
Each stroke another fraction of you I miss.

Close to completing its paragon,
my now free palm
never forgets to add
a generous gash
pervaded with crimson red
and dismembered skin.

A laceration resembling the one
you left on my soul, my vivacity,
my fervor, my heart.
All carved by your
razor-sharp callousness,
your only art.



Calls From A Stranger

Devon Roberts

I couldn't talk for a while, so you decided
we wouldn't talk at all, so here I am
talking to your ghost.

You ghosted after I ghosted
and we're just two spirits waiting
for a phone call—no explanation—
wondering what it was we did (or said)
to make each other feel so insubstantial.

And the future is full of wormholes—
where you once existed, but
reality doesn't hold together well
when people leave people
to become shadows. Time
rips open—no one else can
see it, and I'm too
imaginary to fill the gap.

The pieces of you I borrowed
and the pieces of myself I gave
fall from our discarnate forms
like pocket change.
The coins are rusted and have no faces.
They phase through my ghosthands and
slip between the cracks in the floor.

I'm lighter—
the silence feels different now.



untitled smoothie shop poem

Kendra Banach

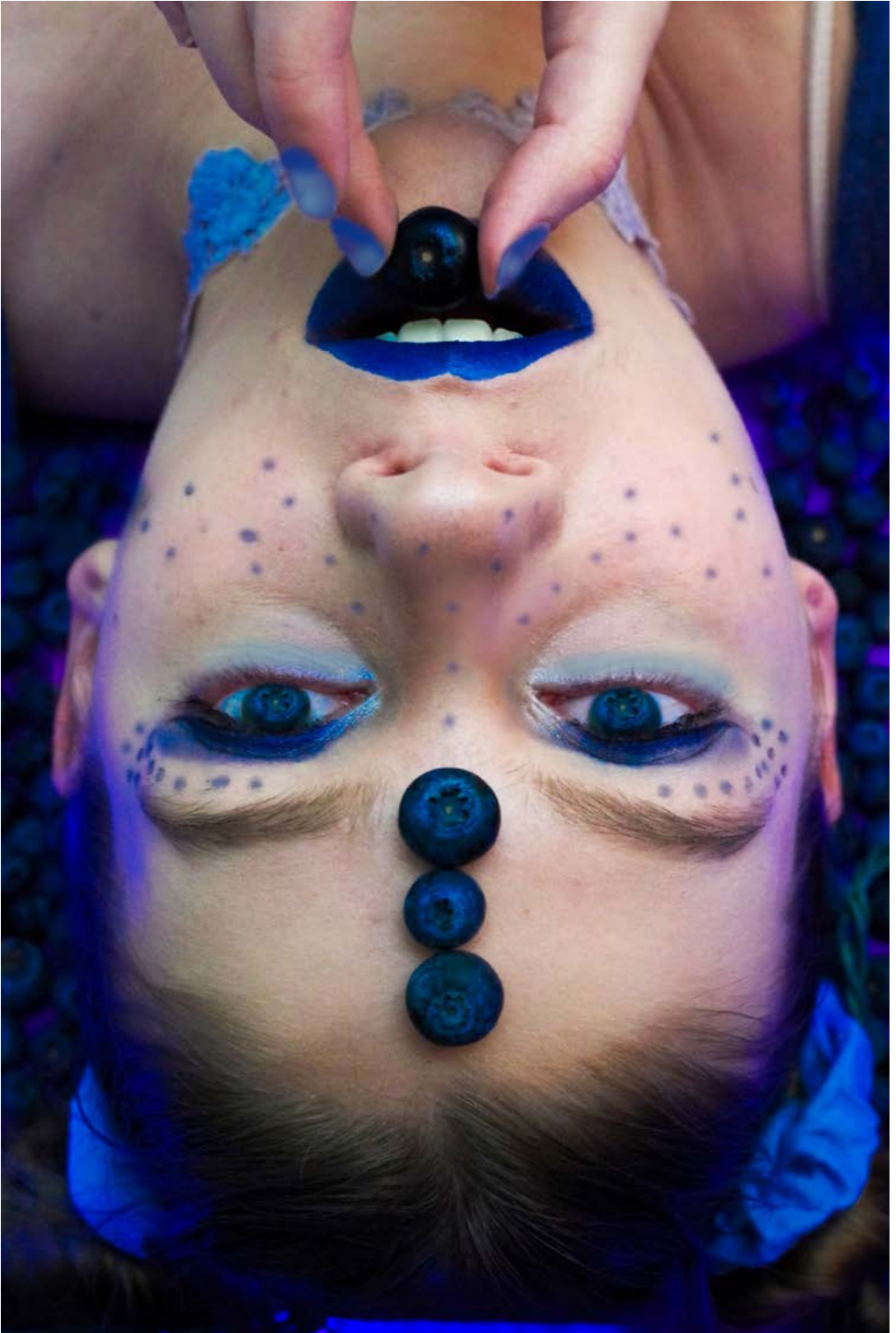
i know i could make a better smoothie at home but i'd rather have a staring
contest with your car outside the smoothie shop you work at
hiding my face behind my phone and telling myself this is a normal thing
to do on a tuesday morning

in the middle of summer we sat on a curb behind the spanish church
across from my house to listen to the choir sing
and laugh at the way the preacher cried

the gravel made craters on the bottom
of my thighs as i breathed in each reason you listed for why we would be
better off taking things slow i nodded, maybe too eagerly,
faking agreement

in our last texts i told you about how often i burn frozen waffles in the
toaster
and received no response
even though we said we'd stay in touch

so now it's 11am and i'm perched in my Nissan thinking, which would
sound more nonchalant? "banana and strawberry please" or
"strawberry and banana" and
"yeah i was just in the area"



Sexual Fantasies

Devon Roberts

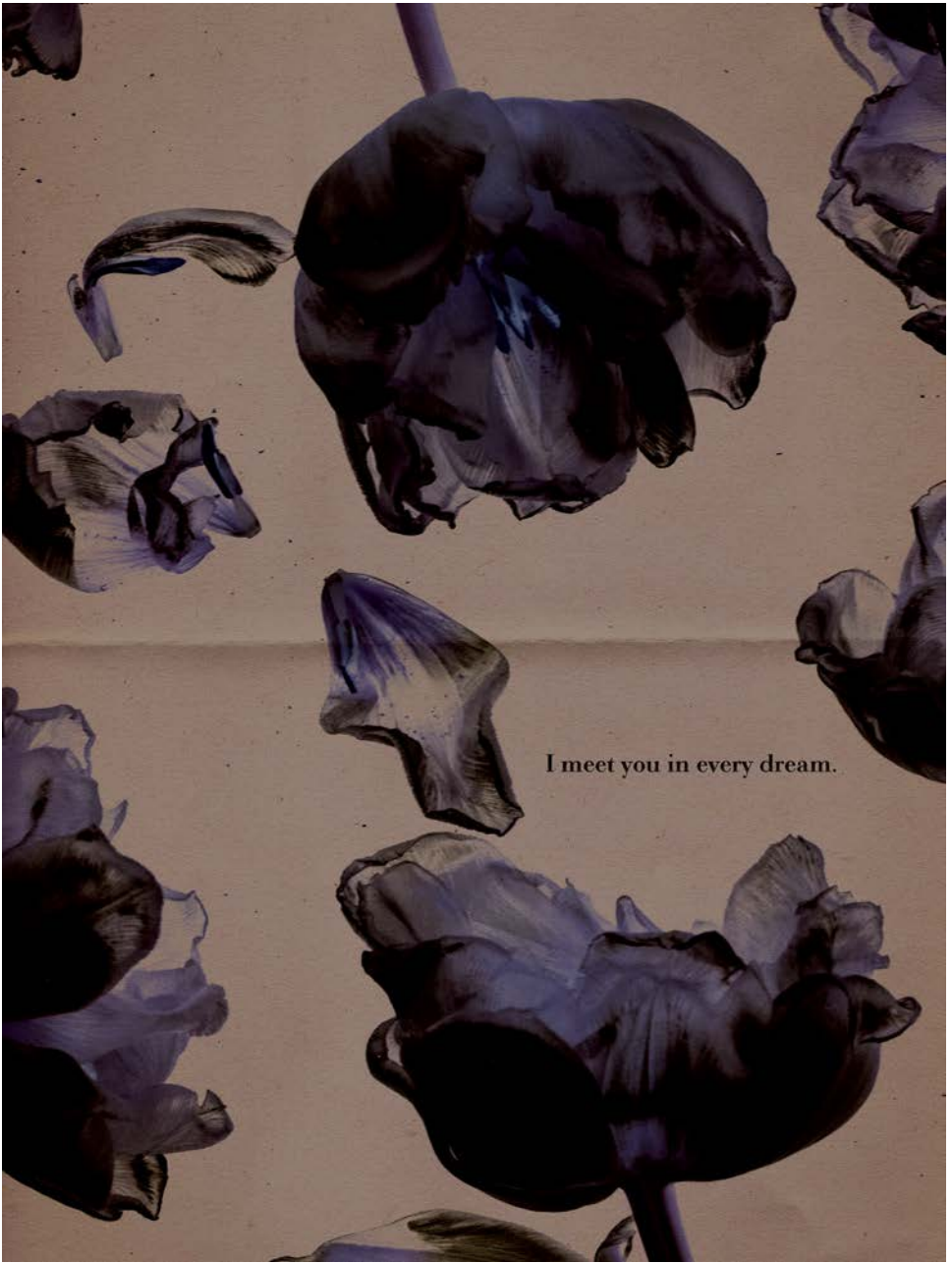
After a thorough review of our bucket lists, we choose tandem skydiving—for the adrenaline rush and restraints. Under our chutes, we are 3rd graders playing with the giant rainbow tarp, disobeying our teachers, hiding, as the bell rings somewhere far away from us.

We wear each other's clothes, though our waists and height vary by (2x2) inches and it takes 3 pairs of socks to fit in your shoes. Your pants are baggy high waters and your ass looks great in my unzipped jeans.

We met for the first time on a bus. #3 to S. Laguna Drive, my work at the blood bank. You were supposed to head northbound, but you followed me off and let yourself get lost—anyway.

I buy body paint, and you lie naked on my newspaper floor. I spend too much time making post-impressionist spirals with your body hair, and you fall asleep. I paint your face like Dali.

My breasts are surgically removed. After weeks (and years) of swelling, you place a hand flat against my chest. Half-dead nerves send half-strength impulses telling me it's there, and I breathe into my lungs. We watch your hand, my chest, rise, a smooth, even plane.



Lucky

Jared Berberabe

The interviewer says, “Do you consider yourself lucky?”
I want to answer, but instead
I’m traveling back to old conversations
Where I learned what I’ve missed.

I’ve never gone into a mosh pit,
Throbbled to the melodic tones
Of some punk rock band whose name, I sense,
Is part of the fossil record of 2004 to 2012,
Nor left myself breathless after that night,
Caught on the high of the moment, convinced
That I’d finally touched peak freedom
Adulthood had so continuously hidden from me.

And I’ve never lost my virginity
In the back of my dad’s Subaru
On some wintry Friday night in the 7/11 parking lot,
Giving moans and curses the same name
To fill that empty cargo hold with ourselves.

Nor have I believed in the stars,
Consulted the horoscope section of the newspaper,
Worried that, by chance, I’d pissed off the wrong planet
And that they’d decided to free up some time
Just to fuck with my day.

My therapist says it’s good I’ve never gone to a concert,
Because the only company I’d enjoy would be my anxiety.
I’ve never found a public bathroom to be the place
To vomit, but the sickest I’ve been
Was when I just reached triple digits on the scale
Only to drop to double

The moment some tiny virus said hello. That

Was my brush with death. Meanwhile
It stole a friend's brother from her, convincing him
That it knew the one true way out of his self-made maze.
He forgot, as we all sometimes do, that
The first place the dead go is
The gaping heart of someone else.
Statistics, then, tell me
There are more dead men and women
In the ground than in our arms,

So maybe I should consider myself lucky.
I mean, yeah,
Mom survived her aneurysm,
My brother's getting his meds,
Dad has his job,
And I've never broken a bone or any heart
But my own, however temporary. No one's died
On my watch. The house still stands and our lawn,
Stubbornly grows against the creeping fingers of winter.

It's not like I'm hurting constantly.
It's not like I'm trying to scramble for answers
To why meaning sometimes fails to graft itself
To my brain midway through life's endless questionnaire.
This thing that passes for me, wears my skin
Like a thin jacket—it knows
What mask and costume to perform in,
How to fall into the role of living, to believe
We are anything but fleeting shards of light.

The interviewer stares, waiting to dismiss me.
“My friends think I have a lucky star,” I say.
“They look at the cosmos,

Watching for the warble of the Milky Way,
Point out which lucky star blew up
The date of my birth.”
What I don't say is
When I look at that dot, it shrinks,
Winking forever back into the black folds.



Solar Flare

Michael Sooy

My father wakes me up a bit before sunset. Usually, he'd let me sleep in a bit more, but we are getting more desperate for food and as he told me the past morning before bed, "We can't afford to lose any more time."

Getting my gear along with my arrows together, I tiptoe around letting my younger brother get some more sleep along with my pregnant mother who deserves plenty of rest. I'm waiting at the front door. I thought I heard my father go outside and as I reach for the doorknob to open the front door, a hand grips my wrist hard. My father moves even quieter than I thought.

"Don't be a fool, James," my father says sternly, "there's still some dusk out there you gotta give it some more time."

I look out the window and he's right. I'm overly eager to hunt for the first time so I forget I need to let the land cool off a bit first before we go outside.

"You have everything you need?" I hear my father ask me.

"..Yes." I say, taking a second to make sure I can be confident in the answer.

"You better. Plants are barely growing anymore. The sun fucked up all the crops, too, I guess. Need to rely on meat more now anyways and we're almost out of the last batch I brought in. "

I nod. The sun fucked up a lot of things. I remember when it happened that day. Luckily, it snowed a lot here on the farm so we were stuck inside, but the flooding was bad. I think of the poor souls who might have been at the beach, though. That sun must've fried them right into the sand. Or even the folks in their cars whose gas tanks just ignited under the heat. Can't do much when the sun spontaneously ages millions of years in a matter of seconds.

"It's time", my father says, snapping me out of my recollection. "Sunglasses on."

He opens the door and we exit the house quickly not letting any of the cool air out. It was a cooler than usual winter night, however. Only 85 degrees.

"Go fill some tanks with water. I need to see if any plants fared

better today.”

He walks off and I make my way to the well. It's difficult with sunglasses on, but the vast amount of UV that just lingers in the air now would age my eyes quicker than I'd like. The gravel path is clear and well lit and leads me to the well. I fill a couple of the old coolers that are there and bring them one at a time to the front door. I do three in total, not bothering to place them into the house now. We'll wait till the next time we enter so as to not waste any cool. My father walks back around the same time.

“Anything?” I ask, hopefully.

I could see the disappointment in his eyes through the two sunglasses that separated ours.

“Nothing.”

He walks away as if he'd said c'mon. We reach the gate in the fence around the property and he lets us through. I'm already sweating. Usually, I do simple chores for a couple of hours around midnight, but leaving so soon after sunset and having to walk so much, this is going to be rough.

We're both wearing clothes that might be funny to wear for a trip like this back then, but when there's a UV index at night, you may have to do drastic things. We're both in cargo shorts with my father wearing an older white tanktop and I'm in a light T-shirt. The kind I used to wear when biking outside in the warmer weather, but this night trek is even more exhausting. We head East to where he's spotted tracks on his expedition the night before.

“It's something big out there,” he told me when he got home, “Maybe a bear, I'm not sure. It's moving erratically whatever it is.”

This erratic movement is what prompted him to invite me. After that description and this sweating walk, I'm not sure what I'll be able to really do with my bow that I can barely hit a target with against some animal like that. Since leaving the property, we walk along a highway scarred from the event. Imprints of the explosions of the cars: the minimal frame that remains and the basic evisceration of the people within. Dark stains that're barely apparent at night are no way to leave a life behind.

I wish I could say scientists saw this coming or afterwards said oh yeah we're fixing it, but they didn't. No one really did. We spent days sheltered in our house as the flooding subsided. All the snow we

received caused a bit of flood damage, but pretty much the next day it evaporated. Like most water in nearby rivers and lakes, there was just no trace of it anymore. Just like the people on the highway.

After this sudden evaporation, we quickly realized that the daytime was deadly. All of our farmstock, just grazing in the field were no more. You couldn't even look out the window during those first days without feeling like you just stared into the sun for 10 minutes straight. My parents argued about my father going out about a week later on a night. He came back fine, but the next morning he said he felt like his eyes aged 10 years and the sunglasses idea was formed.

"James," my father's voice once again breaking through my thoughts, "look at this." He was hunched over on the side of the road looking at something with his flashlight. I make my way over to him to see what looks like fresh tracks as best as I can identify them.

"They're fresh," my father says, raising my confidence. Other than fresh, I don't know how else to really describe them. They are pretty deep in the ground and wide, but nothing like a gentle gait. This is an animal putting all of its force into its step. It led into the woods.

"Guess it crossed the road chasing something," I suggest, seeing that there are no real tracks before that.

"Or running from something else," my father says. Whatever made an animal move like that, I did not want to meet. The bow feels even flimsier in my hands. Across my father's back, is slung a shotgun which relieves any pressure I feel to really have an effect on this trip. We follow the tracks into the woods. It's not difficult. This thing crushed any undergrowth and basically blazed its own trail. Our flashlights guide us past the clawed tree trunks, shattered shrubs and further prints.

Seeing the impact this thing has I ask, "Is it even worth trying to hunt whatever this is?"

Hearing my own voice, I realize we haven't talked for what seems like a while and now that I think about it, I'm not even sure how long we'd been walking for. My father stops, but continues to look forward.

"Any breathing animal we had is dead," he tenses, "Every crop and seed just gets scorched day in and day out," he turns and

faces me, “We have maybe a week or two at the very most before we’re eating the burnt tree bark. Our old reserves just won’t make do anymore”

He steps closer to me and continues not angrily, but clearly I pushed some button, “So, yes, anything that carries this much force must have a good amount of meat on it. I gotta feed five soon and this hunk of meat barrelling through the woods would help a lot.”

He turns before I can answer and I think all this over as I continue behind him. We walk for a bit more continuing to see the poor woods that were in the way of this animal. Suddenly, my father stops and a hand goes up to signal me to stop and then it cuffs the hand to his ear to get me to listen. I then hear it.

It sounds like a whimper, but if it was a mountain. It sounds deep and strong, like something that shouldn’t be whimpering, but it does sound hurt bad. My father urges me along slowly now and the sound grows louder as we approach slower and slower. We follow the trail until we approach a small clearing in the woods. There are what looks like large stones around and as I begin to raise my flashlight to examine one, my father, again, stops me from doing something stupid, and grabs it out of my hands. He gives no explanation as he turns off my flashlight, hands it back and then turns off his. The sound is much louder now as if a dragon that had a broken heart is lying yards from me. My father unslings his shotgun from his shoulder and steps into the clearing signalling for me to follow. I knock an arrow.

It’s difficult to really see anything except my father right in front of me. The sound is echoing around as whatever is whimpering seems to be right near us. I glance around to try to see anything, but only see faint outlines. Suddenly, as I look forward again, my father is no longer there. I can’t see him anywhere. I can’t even hear him with the whimpering echoing even louder now. I try backtracking where we came in, but it is simply too dark. I rush around more in a panic. Too afraid to call for him, I try to find the edge of the woods again at the very least. I move quickly, but still no clear path of anything. My heart is racing, especially with how much time is probably left tonight, we don’t have time for this. This thought is interrupted as I run into one of the large stones. It isn’t as hard as I thought it would be and the whimpering stops at this point. I’m knocked back from the impact and land on my backpack. Out of reflex and not really thinking, I immediately reach for my flashlight and shine it towards

whatever is in front of me.

It's a large, black creature laying on it's side. I'm looking at it from behind and can see it's skinny, scorched and has no fur. It starts to get up and as it faces me a shotgun cocks in my ear. I look up from the ground and see the figure of my father standing over me aiming it at the animal.

"Get up, get behind me," he says. I keep my light on the creature as I get up. As it turns, I realize our property's flooding probably wasn't even that bad compared to other regions. For the hurt, out-of-place polar bear before us looks like it travelled as South as it could from the Arctic region. It only stares at us. The seven-foot animal could probably rip us in two, but it gives no impression that it wants to do any of that. It continues to look at us. Probably the first two creatures that haven't ran from it.

"Move back," my father says as he aims the gun at the bear.

"What're you doing! You can't kill that thing," I cry, not moving back but next to my father.

"The hell are you talking about, James, this thing is already as close to death as it'll get."

The bear doesn't seem to be interested in our quarrel. It's eyes, probably once filled with ferocity, now look tamely at us.

"It's all burnt up, though, look at it. The meat probably won't even be good anyway, just let it be," I say.

My father considers this, but does nothing to show it. The barrel of his gun continues to point at the bear.

I continue, "Let's just go, there's gotta be other animals out here we can hunt."

"It's huge, James. We can't afford to just pass up on this"

Then, either out of suspicion at my father's words or at boredom of this conversation, the hairless bear looks and moves its body more squarely at us. Something from its older life glints through its eyes for a moment and I see it more as a predator and less as a poor animal for some reason. There's silence. The light on the bear is shaky like the hand that holds it. I can hear my heartbeat. I can hear the bear's slow breathing as it stares at us.

Perhaps if we had stayed a couple more minutes, the polar bear would have killed my father and me or maybe after a loud bang,

we'd be lugging several hundred pounds of meat back over the next few weeks. No, none of that happens. Something happens that scares all three animals staring aimlessly at each other there in the clearing. A rooster. Some poor bird that must've been lucky enough to survive in the shade of the woods and has called out something that makes our hearts drop. The slow break of dawn.

We look up and sure enough, the dark sky we've come so accustomed to seeing was no longer that dark. The stars were barely visible and some color could be seen in the edges of the sky. I was drenched in sweat, but I suppose I had thought it was from merely the encounter, but sure enough as I think about it now, it was getting awfully hot. The bear senses it, too. The predatory stare that was once present in this Arctic apex predator diminishes at once. It seems terrified now and begins to back away and tremble as if it was already on fire. Or just remembering the last time the sun hurt it.

My father still holds the gun, but like the light on the scared bear, he's shaking a bit, too. I'm not sure what he'll do. Starting some fight with this animal now will be useless if we're fried out in the open like this. The bear is still backing away, keeping an eye on my father until it reaches the edge of the woods. They stare at each other and I see my father's face contorted in thought. I realize now that the dawn is indeed coming as I can see him just a bit more clearly now. My father acts first.

"Let's go, we need to hurry," my father says as he lowers the gun. The bear doesn't hesitate and charges into the woods away from us to hopefully find some cave it can survive the day in. I watch it go just for a moment as my father slings his gun, but then grabs me to start running.

"We need to hurry, James, we have maybe an hour out here. That thing took up too much of our time." We hurry back in the woods. It grows hotter and hotter. It must be the stress and the steady pace we're running now, but each and every second the sunrise approaches, it gets hotter and hotter. I'm right behind my father as we make our back up the familiar track towards the road. I know my father is fast, but the way he is pushing himself shows me how worried he is.

The day time is nothing to joke about or linger on. Sunrises, once a sign of a fresh start and a new day, are now just the daily reminders of the nocturnal life we've been imprisoned to. To start

with, the moment the sun breaks over the horizon as it starts the fatal survey over its lands, temperatures sky rocket. If you happened to be in a shady spot, it doesn't matter too much as the ground and rock beneath and around you would instantly feel as if you're sheltering in an oven rack. The only way to survive is inside, in air-conditioning and as low as you can get. Or perhaps in a cave. Our cellar is a cool 75 degrees during the hottest points in the day, but we can't ask for more. As the sun rises more and more, the UV radiation that it showers on the land is enough to age your skin as if you've been sunbathing for twenty years, in a matter of seconds. My skin sometimes feels warm to the touch after some chores outside during pitch blackness.

We reach the road and hurry even quicker back to where we came. I'm completely exhausted, but there's something deep within me that knows if we falter or rest, we will be sautéed. My father knows this, too and immediately turns down the highway once again. We run alongside the road because the asphalt is already too hot to step on even in shoes.

As much as I know the danger behind it, the sky is starting to look nice in a way. I've never been out this close to sunrise before and in a way, it's something I've missed. I feel like it's so unnatural for humans to live like this. I still have trouble sleeping with this reversed day/night cycle but I guess we'll just evolve, too now. I don't know if anyone will ever be able to help or fix this. It's suffocating to know that those warm, summer days or even snow days will no longer be possible for any day just means danger. This troubling thought pushes my legs on as I run behind my father.

My skin is starting to burn a bit. It is no longer sweating, but feels as if a hot iron is clamping down on the back of my neck. I allow myself a quick glance back East. It's pretty bright in that direction. It's coming ever so slowly, like it's trying to savor the breakfast it's about to cook.

We make it back just in time. The water that I had collected before we left has been brought in luckily before its boiled. My father gets to the door first and opens it for me and I run in. It's a couple of steps to the cellars. I hear the front door close behind me as my father steps in. I glance towards the window on the back of the house. Right as I descend the steps, a blinding light takes on the landscape outside as the sun just rises, disorienting me for a bit. My father urges me along as he shuts the basement door.

My family is glad to see us as we should've been back hours ago. I feel exhausted, sweaty and pretty burnt. Our weariness prevents my father and I from answering too many questions posed by my little brother. We get ready for bed, though uncomfortable and achy, I can't resist the urge to lie down. I look around me and see my family very close together in this warm room. I hear my father fall asleep quickly, probably from tiring thoughts of how we gained no food on that trip out.

I think of the polar bear somewhere out of its environment and probably trying to rest in a cave after being scared by us. I wonder of the distance it came after its home melted probably so drastically, but also the spirit it must have to survive for so long. We are not so unlike in a way, I think, drifting off to sleep. The sun has made day-fearing animals of us all.

Distance

Luka Marjanovic

It killed us.
Her first,
Then me,
Revenge.
Through underwater fiber cables,
Blame traveled,
Running one way,
Then the other.
Deflecting it was easy,
At least for me,
But it seemed that my acting dream
Finally came true
And I became the villain
At the end of our story.
We'll keep producing episodes,
Only the writers have changed,
And now it's just sad to watch,
Like Ashton Kutcher in Two and a Half Men.
I suppose the distance was too close,
Tricking us into the false belief
That our time zones weren't different,
And that I'm not alone in the evening
When she's asleep,
Or that she's drinking her coffee,
While I can only dream,
That we can go out after classes
Instead of sitting alone in rooms
With headphones in our ears,
As the Internet breaks
Under the weight of our needs.
The blame is gone now,
We parried it to pieces

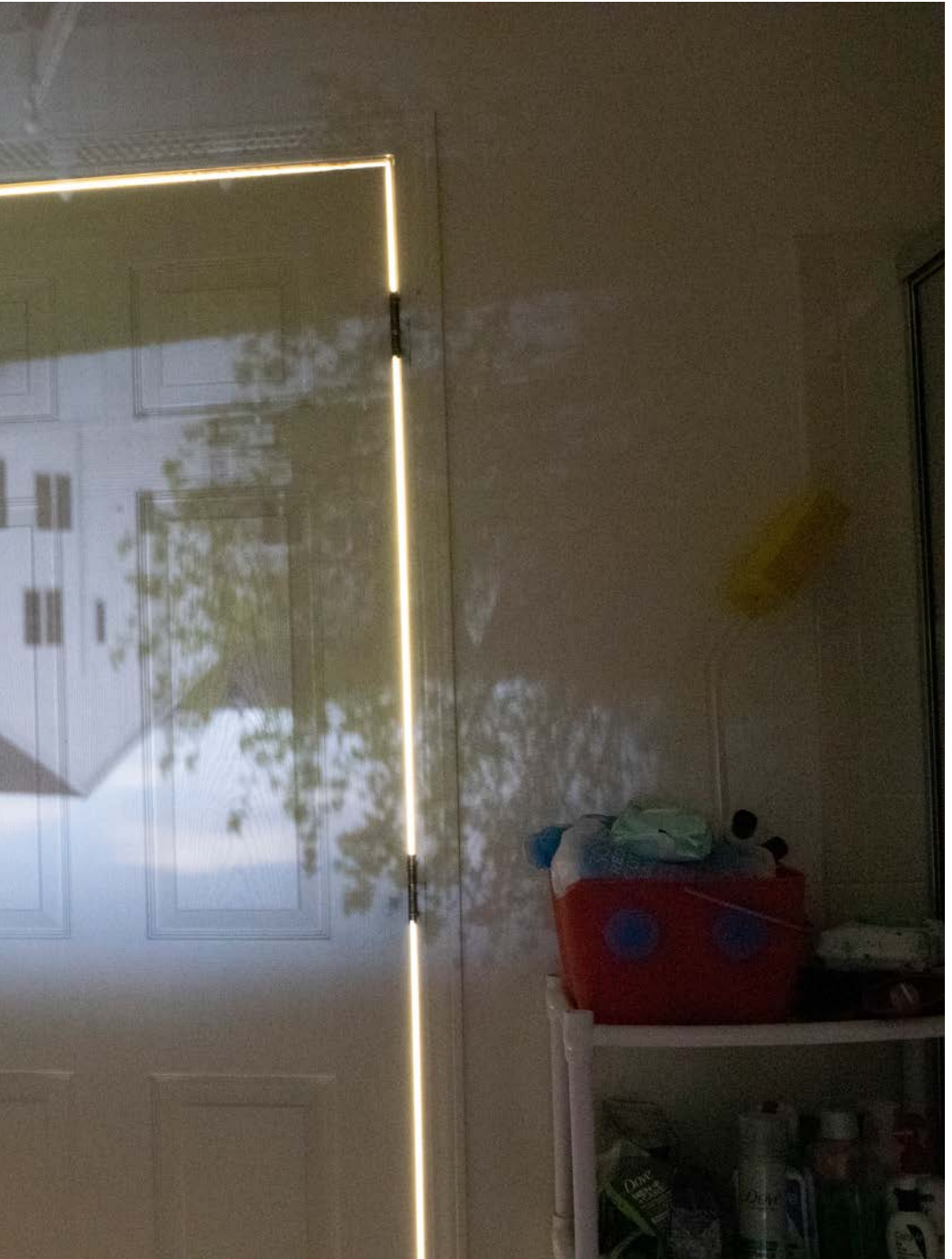
Until it fully disappeared.

The past is buried under the Atlantic,

Just another gigantic pile of garbage

Floating through its waters.





Matches

Emily Melvin

Unworthy of your love,
your matchsticking skin,
your curls, your words
and your proofreading
sessions. My dialect earns
definition, while your lips
still touch. A pucker
isn't wide enough
to holler what you hold.
Those teeth are just
ice. The pick you pass
from left to right
can't shatter those igloos
or melt lyrically
with the greenery.
No matter how high
your ruptures are low
bestowed in a place
I will someday roll
in sheets of paper for you
to ignite an asthmatic cough.

You shrivel for my potential,
I'm so unworthy of it all:
your pointless affection
Friday night booze
cut skin and tattoos.
You've placed me in your
juncture, we're joint by design
so I'll give you a hit of your
words, the ones that are
stuck burning inside
your mother-fried lungs.

The Burning Torch

Ben Hopper

As the sky's jagged colors shifted onward, I stared endlessly at the torch standing proudly in the middle of the road. I had always thought of a torch as lost fragments of the past, slipping through, amongst the smokescreen of time.

The ancient flame stood hanging gently in the post midnight air, leaving its glow engraved in the freshly paved asphalt below. Its splintered wood burned brittle yet still upright, curved slightly under the concentrated assault of heat.

Picking up the torch I could feel the warmth as it echoed out to me, grasping helplessly towards nothing. Felt the pulse of the blaze, the line tracing its elemental power and its natural purity. Hollow winds pushed hard against me.

I felt their strength as they distorted the flame, its gentle embers dancing through the air. I used my hand to protect the fire like one would a wounded child. My efforts though were in vain, defeated, I dropped the charred husk.





Thanksgiving

Natalie Tsur

String trussed over flesh. Knees
folded inward. Legs taut

against a plate. Metal
flowers framing the glimpse

we catch of ourselves
hunched over the body.

Too explicit this time.
My cousin back from Kuwait.

Sets his camo duffle
away from the table.

He looks at the turkey
and starts with the head.

It was so small, he says.
Sticks his thumb to show the bullet

pierced through a man's brain.
Carves a leg, nails packed red.

Someone passes potatoes.



Yearning

Jocelyn Frohn

Wind soothes my skin with its crisp touch, like fingertips brushing against my blushed cheeks. My anticipation runs like my feet, skipping over each other in patterns that dance with each step I take.

I await it.

The dividing line between two states shown in green and orange paint.

Pennsylvania and New Jersey embrace at this point in the water so it seems, as I look down to observe the rushing current below.

This bridge is special.

Anticipation wanders across it. Hungry ducks feed below it.

Whether you are walking from one end of it to the other, you await the labelled line in the middle.

To be able to stand in two places simultaneously.

What a strange thought, I think to myself. How I am in one state of bliss in two states at once.

I've made plans to meet you on this bridge, to embrace you.

How one day we would hold each other tightly in one another's arms for the first time.

My heart beats for it.

I picture it in my mind:

You would lean over the rail with that sly look in your eye and tell me that you told me so.

Told me what? I would ask you with a shy smile.

You would reply with a glimmer in your eyes,

I told you we would make it.





It Speaks

Emily Melvin

After biting on your tongue it eventually bleeds.
You'll try to quickly
cure the swelling,
but your blood has already come seeping in between your closed lips and
red teeth.

It's too late now -
you can't take it back.
You can't swallow or sip the thick liquid back in. It's not as bad as you
thought - not just metallic and pennies; it was strawberry scented.

You won't clean up
the spill with white
rags and towels;
you'll wear it like lipstick sly smirk then a kiss
smother it on your cheeks embrace your inner sewage bathe in the relief.

Cement

Jared Berberabe

Lolo Boy steps out onto the concrete deck, feeling the scorching heat lash through his calloused feet. He barely registers it, and picks absentmindedly at an itch in his side. Beads of sweat roll down his back like little crawlers.

His other hand comes up to shade his eyes. It takes a moment for him to see. Across the way, down past the bushes and trees, there stands a lone deer. Its thin muzzle and frame are frozen in time, and it regards him with dark eyes that seem to glow with a mix of confusion and pity. Lolo Boy knows this cannot be, because deer are stupid creatures who do not think about what the owners of their yards feel day by day, but he considers this anyway.

He and the deer stare at each other. The sun beats wildly on them both. Lolo Boy feels sweat on his brow, then his cheeks. It's everywhere. It falls over his eyebrows, spills over the lids, and a stinging brings him to a blink.

In that instant, the deer is gone.

Lolo Boy wipes his face with his arm. He sighs, looking away from where the deer stood and now at the concrete. Where he stands he can still see the faint impression of his foot from when the concrete was first poured. The sight drives a special chill through him, and he steps away.

He turns around and walks slowly up the steps of the wooden back porch. The beams creak under his weight. He slides open the screen door and goes inside.

The dining room fan is on, and Lolo Boy pauses in the doorway, feeling the rush of cool air flow over him. The reprieve takes him out of the heat, and he closes his eyes, one hand reaching out and resting on top of the kitchen counter. He can still smell that morning's breakfast: pan de sal and spam. For a moment he is taken back to that fateful day, a clear summer morning, the bread fresh and the spam sizzling in the pan, no sign that anything would become undone. That moment is a happy memory, and Lolo Boy revels in it.

"Close the damn door, you idiot! You're letting out all the cold air!"

Lolo Boy's eyes snap open. In another life he might have

yelled back, but he instead turns and slides the screen door back into place. A grunt emerges from the living room—the only indication of approval. Self-conscious, Lolo Boy wipes his feet on the carpet, before crossing the tiled kitchen floor as quickly and as quietly as he can.

Lola Rita reclines across the couch, an empty wine glass in her hand. Boy scrunches up his face in displeasure; it is far too early, he thinks, to be drinking, and she is much too old. His eyes trail past her to the coffee table, where an old wine bottle sits. It's uncorked, about half-empty. The displeasure vanishes, replaced with a sad dullness in him.

“Did you scare it?” Lola Rita asks. Her voice comes out as a partial croak, and she isn't looking at him when she speaks. Her brown eyes seem foggy from behind her thick-rimmed glasses. Her wig is ever so slightly off-center, but if she notices this, she makes no indication, and instead rolls her neck to look at the bottle.

“The deer? Maybe,” Boy says. “It ran away.”

“Figures it would run. Smart.”

Boy says nothing.

Lola Rita holds up the glass to him. “Help me finish this, Boy. Might as well make sure it doesn't go to waste.”

He returns to the kitchen and fetches his own wine glass. Returning to the living room, he sits down on the small sofa chair opposite of her, leans forward, grabs the bottle, and pours the rest of it between their two glasses. Rita swallows hers in one gulp, but Boy simply takes a single sip before placing the glass to the side.

“Did you call her?” Boy asks.

Rita scoffs. “Are you kidding? I'm drunk, Boy. There's no way I should be calling anyone.” She mutters, “Punyeta,” but it comes out half-hearted—it's a word to replace whatever emotion she's feeling, a way to correlate it to something they both can understand, a curse, an obscenity, “fucking bitch,” but if that's to him or her or someone else, he doesn't know.

“I'm drunk,” she says again, and gestures towards the top of the fireplace with her wine-holding hand. It is an aimless gesture, but Boy follows it anyway.

On the mantle, there are several photographs. The first is of

the two of them, much younger, in black and white, back when Boy first arrived in America and when Rita was but a young nurse at the San Diego Memorial Hospital. The second, tinted sepia, shows the two of them hoisting up a young girl after she had been baptized. In the corner of that photo there are several words, and while Boy's eyes are weak now, he can still remember what they say: Maria Constanca Mendoza. Their daughter. The third photo is much later, a somewhat grainy Kodak piece. Against the backdrop of the University of Sacramento, Boy and Rita provide shining smiles next to Maria, who stands with her diploma held between two hard-working hands. The sight and memory make Boy's lips twitch.

Continuing down the long line of photos, the years pop and vibrate. Now there's a clearer photo, five years down the line, of Maria and Jack Klepping, a white man from the suburbs with the heart and appetite of a true Filipino. In this photo they are dressed for a wedding—theirs. To either side stand Rita and Boy, for Jack had no parents of his own then—they had passed away already. A happy occasion marred by a sad one—or perhaps it was the other way around.

Beyond that, all these photos are dusty. Boy wonders when was the last time he took the feather to them, and then decides immediately that he shouldn't bother. He looks at the final photo. As a whole, it is of one smiling family, standing in the back of their house, a pool patio behind them. There are two old parents, two new ones, and a recent addition, a boy, no more than two years old. Boy can still remember his name.

Amado. Loved.

The shining faces there are a stark reminder of what is lost, and he cannot bear to remember that, not easily, not fully. He looks away, back at Rita. Maybe that's why she must be drunk this late into the morning. She doesn't want to see it, see much of anything, he supposes; we all must bury our wounds somehow.

"I still think you should call," he says softly. "She'll... she'll listen to you."

Rita doesn't respond. When he looks over, he sees she has fallen asleep, her mouth half-open, eyes closed, creases across her brow. Her hand remains clenched around the tube of the wine glass.

He reaches out and gently eases the glass out of her hand. Taking his own with him, he stands, stretches his back, then shuffles

into the kitchen to wash them both.

~~

Rita is still asleep by mid-afternoon. Boy has spent that time staring at the phone, thinking that it ought to ring, knowing it won't. He had considered picking it up himself and calling, but never did.

It has rung many times since then, but the one that stands out is when Tita Linda called their house, a day after it had happened. Boy had been the one to pick it up, because Boy was the only one in the state of mind to do so.

“Kumusta, Boy? Ay, what happened?”

“He just fell in,” Boy said in a hoarse voice, “before we could do anything.”

The line was quiet for a long time, so much so that he thought she'd hung up. In another part of the house, he could hear Rita softly weeping. Perhaps she was in their prayer room, asking for forgiveness for the unspeakable.

Tita Linda returned. “Will you come to the funeral?”

Boy said he did not know if they would be allowed. Linda was silent again, before picking up the conversation with an entirely different topic. The call lasted ten minutes and she did not call again.

Now Boy watches the phone, watches as it blinks softly against the kitchen walls, pulsating with quiet life. He gets up from his seat and walks over to it, and his hand moves impossibly slow as it picks up the phone and begins to dial. Nine buttons are pressed and beep, but his finger hovers over the last.

He looks back outside, through the screen door, at the flat cement. A part of him regrets having it put in, but another part of him believes it is necessary. It is the one scar he could not live with in its natural state; he had to fill the hole, convince himself it had always been filled, that a pool had never existed.

He hears a final beep, and his thumb brushes up against the green dial button. The phone rings. He brings it to his ear, listens to the series of one-notes that play at the same pitch. Through it he can imagine the voice on the other end, how it sounded the last time he had called, the way that it broke through the static with a scream, a threat, telling him never to call again, never to speak to her again, how dare they. But how can he not, he had said; how can he not call?

The phone rings and rings. A click, then another. No time for him to say anything.

Boy hangs up.

In slow steps he walks back into the living room. Rita sleeps, but her face is all contorted as she lives out a vague nightmare of uncertainty. Boy walks over to the photograph. He takes the frame and reaches into it, sliding the photograph out, and holds it momentarily in the air. There's a tiny fingerprint smudged in the corner. Boy covers it with his thumb.

Drawn by an unseen chain, he shuffles out of the living room, out of the kitchen, towards the screen door, out it, onto the back porch, down the wooden steps, to the cement deck, the photo still clutched in his hands. He holds it up in front of him as if to verify. I'm mad, he thinks. This never happened. This photo is a fake, a bad dream, that's all.

But no.

Boy steps onto the cement deck and then stops as though he had hit a wall. His vision swirls for a second. He collapses onto the hot concrete, but feels no pain from it. He holds the photo up, lining its edges with the edge of the cement deck, and sees that they are an almost perfect match. There in the photo and in the present are the same trees that line the edge of the yard, and the same chairs lining the rectangular area, and even the white metal fence that takes up the perimeter. All that's missing are the people, and the pool.

Boy, still holding the photo, looks past it at the cement before him. It forms a perfect smaller rectangle within the larger one. The same shape as the old pool. But it could not be a perfect fill-in. It's a slightly different color, and ever so slightly lower than the rest.

It is an imperfect cement fit. An imperfect cement memorial.

"You should call," Boy says.

Ways to Say I Love You

Megan Woods

There are so many ways to say “*I love you*”.

You can say it with words, yes,

but you can also say it by buying your best friend
those ghost-patterned socks at Target that made you think of her.

Maybe your brother says it
by picking you up from band practice
because you really don’t want to carry your saxophone case all the way
home
(Even if he whines about paying for gas the entire time).

You can say it by sending your nana a postcard
from your trip to Arizona with your family.
Sure, it’s nothing but a piece of cardstock
with a pretty picture and a couple of sentences,
but you thought of her, right?

Your dog certainly lets you know
when he licks your cheeks and wags his tail whenever you come home,
even if you’re just circling back into the house
because you left your wallet on your desk.

Your mom says it
in the way she saves some of the smoothie she just made for you.
She knows you like the strawberry banana ones,
and she could have easily drank it herself,
but she didn’t.

But sometimes you can’t say it.
Maybe you’re too scared, or you’re nowhere near them, or it’s too late.

Maybe you're left to think back to the last time you said it to that person,
Desperately trying to remember your vulnerability.

Maybe you've said it a thousand of times before,
But you haven't said it nearly enough.

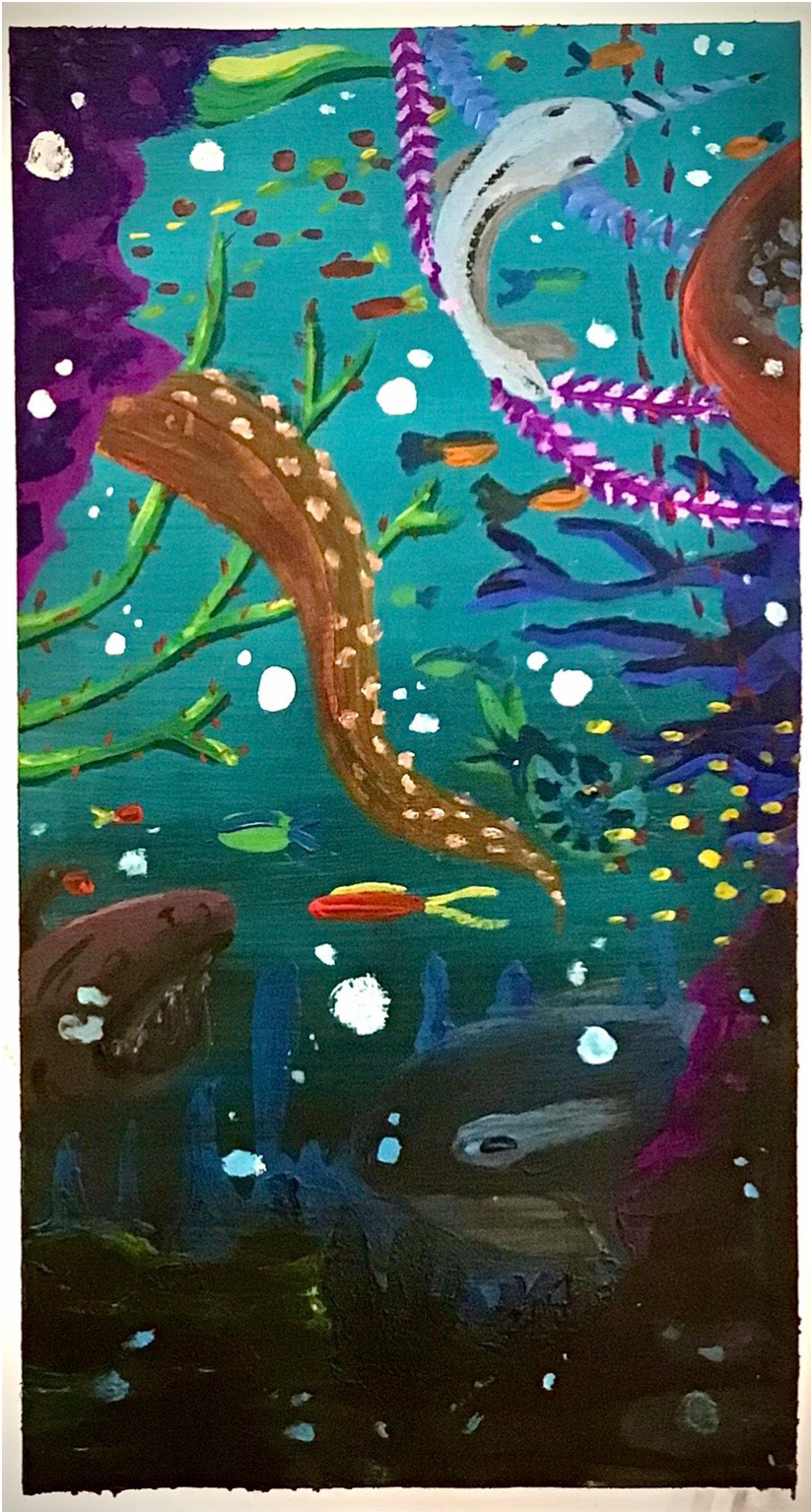
Renaissance

Mansuor Qurbanali

It was not the heart
that you carved from marble
but the hands that remained
tender after caressing stone
that night, I watched how
the body swallows moonlight:
it was the dew in your eyes
the way it glistened like
a thousand splendid stars
floating upon puddles

This body that was once
lost belongs to me now
rest your aching hands
on my warm skin
let them ask of how love
has made the body soft
and I will tell them of how
my breath trickling down
your spine is how we'll
turn our body into music





The Fake Croatian

Luka Marjanovic

A squared flag welcomed me to the USA,
reminding me again that I'm different,
that my passport doesn't reflect my nationality,
and that our languages are too similar to be different.

“We will explain how ‘Word’ works
because we have internationals in our class.”
says my professor in our first class at college.
“I’m going to slowly spell out some of this
because we have internationals in our class,”
says my professor at the end of the semester.

Thirteen years of learning English,
learning grammar, conditionals, and tenses,
don't matter when it takes me a semester
to learn how to use ‘tea’ or ‘deadass’ in a sentence.

It's funny to mention some long forgotten war
in some long forgotten second world country
to a second tier immigrant student,
and it's exciting to explain Uber and Monica Lewinsky
to the inexperienced and exotic second world citizen.
Why do Americans think they're so funny?

“Can you still receive emails
when you go back home over Christmas,
or did you apply for this incredible college
using a messenger pigeon?”
asks my first theater director in the USA,
who is also a professor.

Every conversation leads to my background,

my background leads to my journey,
the journey leads me back home,
and then I have to come back here.



To Rolf Jacobsen, on his “The Catacombs of San Callisto”

Jared Berberabe

I have never been in anything winding, short of a corn maze,
But the thin, withered pages you carry between your bony hands
Guide me into this Venice of night, everything in dust,
Everything beneath the stars and the earth. A city,
You called these catacombs: one standing darkly
In the shattered mirrors of the dead Roman empire,
And you, like a wandering excavator,
Casting your pale speckled light against the running corridors.
“The world’s pride,” you said to the air, spectacles
Slipping from the bridge of your sharp nose, *“a city with
its forehead split...”*

I should be afraid of all these bones, all these roots
Stretching over each spare part. But you step excitedly through.
I am surprised by the light of your words, the way
They reveal the lichen trembling against the dust.
Your glasses reflect the sharpness of your face,
Caked in sweat, in anxiety, but not quite fear—
Its cousin, wonder, the same word
You use when we find the tree growing in the dark.
“Wondrous. Keeping faith.”
You tell me nothing of its species, its bark, its age,
And yet I believe you.

Are you aware of this power? You must be;
Why else would you have enticed the idea of traveling to Rome’s
Underbelly, taking with you only the parchment,
Not knowing if you would find what you had not known
Needed to be discovered? And here we stand,
Almost shoulder to shoulder, myself still
A short distance from you. In ten stanzas

You helped me cross an ocean and a continent.
That is power.

I should thank the darkness that you do not see me with you.
No doubt you would have ordered me, your beautiful words
In hand, to jump into one of the many tombs,
Lie naked against the skeletons. I want to thank you
And pity you, or shake you against the tree,
Pointing, shouting, "Look, look! See what you have
Revealed! The beauty in the dust, the dark, the ugly!
How can you say such things and still
Roll over before the German machine?"
But you didn't roll over, you groveled,
And you did not grovel, you promoted.

How many catacombs did you travel through
Before you decided one filled with the graves
Of the gentle, of the decrepit and lovely, were worth
All of Norway? Was it this or another?
Yet your parchment tells nothing.
It basks in the glow of your revelations,
It holds its head high like an eagle,
It ignores the shadows writhing behind
Like snakes and worms and traitors.

You are about to turn, now, to head back up,
Or return to whichever place you wish before you die,
Cursing freedom which has led you here anyway.
I'll sink back into the dark before you do,
But follow you from a distance,
Thinking about your white beauty and black tongue,
How it led you to such a marvelous image yet said
My kind don't deserve to see it with you.





This is the End of the World

Rebecca Patuto

Last night, I had a dream about the end of the world.

[14:59]

There were too many suns in the sky in my dream.

I don't know how or when the suns arrived. Some scientists are on the television, trying to explain their numerous theories, jargon spilling from their lips. I watch them with weary eyes.

I do know two things: I am in a city, and I am alone.

(I don't know what city. I don't know why I'm alone.)

There are people trying to save us, of course. Some of us would actually like to preserve the human race, rather than trying to burn it all down. There are scientists, government officials, philosophers, religious leaders, and more. They all stood outside and pointed and wrote things down on pieces of paper. They each hypothesize, each draw up ideas to save us and begin to enact them. We watch as dozens of plans spring up and are put into action all across the world.

One by one, they all fail.

[12:17]

I don't really care about the people who are trying to save us, because I am in a city at dusk, there are too many suns crowding the sky, and I am still alone. I wander rain-splattered streets looking for someone who will hold me.

I know it is the end of the world. Perhaps that is pessimistic, perhaps I should be looking at this all glass-half-full, but all I need to do is look at the sky, and there is no doubt in my mind. This is the end of the world. An extinction event. The apocalypse. Armageddon. Whatever.

I pause by a shop with dozens of televisions all playing the same news channel, feeling like a character in a cheap sci-fi movie.

The news anchor is staticky, and his tears roll down his face in flickering silver-white pixels, and he is choking on his own words. I can barely hear what he has to say, but it turns out I don't need to, not really, because that's when they put the countdown clock on every screen in the entire world.

All the plans they created had failed. Those we trusted to lead us had not been able to save the world and instead, decided to simply give the kindness of letting us know how much longer we had to live.

Ten minutes, they say. Ten minutes until the end of the world.

[10:00]

My blood feels frozen in my veins, and I stand by the shop window longer than I should. The city noises around me grow louder, and all the wailing and sobbing and screaming just meshes into a large cloud of static in my ears.

[08:39]

I'm losing time, I realize, and I spring into action, running from the shop and down the street. I'm still alone, and I want so desperately not to be when the world ends. I turn a corner and keep running, pushing through crowds of people inconsolable with grief for their lives and their planet. I don't have time for that grief.

I don't know who I'm looking for, just - someone, anyone who I can be with before the suns get closer and ruin everything. My mother, my best friend, my ex-girlfriend, just - anyone.

The streets are slippery, and my legs move in that stupid and awful way they always do in dreams. Never fast enough, like wading in the ocean while the tide pushes me back.

[06:02]

I miss the ocean, and I realize with a pang that I'm never going to see it again. The heat on the back of my neck grows, and I miss with everything inside of me when that same sensation simply meant I hadn't applied enough sunscreen at the beach. Lost in the memory, I can almost hear my mother chiding me for it later, as I admit to her that I need a bit of aloe lotion to ease the sting, but aloe lotion won't be able to fix me now.

It's stupid, you know - the things you think about when you've got five minutes left to live.

[04:47]

I turn a corner and suddenly find myself in the middle of an empty street.

It's still dusk, which is odd, because there are so many suns in the sky, blaring down at us. In between the stars, though, is a hazy, half-grey violet. The street around me is wet and shiny, and its

sharper corners glow in blues and pinks and purples. It's strange and beautiful, even though it doesn't make any sense.

I stop running. There's no one else here.

How did I get separated from my loved ones? When did I leave behind my family and friends, or when did they lose track of me? Have they all seen the countdown? Ten minutes isn't very long, so do they even know what's coming? Have they prepared, are they holding each other close? Is my mother clutching onto my sister, brushing a terrified tear from her cheek?

I've never wanted my mother's comfort more in my life.

[03:13]

I tilt my head up. The streets have gone silent. The rioting, the wails of griefs, the screaming, have all died down. People are just waiting, terrified, bones shaking in their sockets.

Out of the silence, though, I hear the soft lilt of a song. Someone is singing, maybe three or four blocks away, but in this hushed city, the music carries. It fills me up and wraps its arms around me, but it does not warm me. The suns are managing that on their own.

[01:28]

I wish I wasn't alone. I miss my mom and dad, my brother and sister, all my friends who I never said good-bye to. I can't even find solace in wishing for them to be safe, for them to be okay. None of us are going to be okay.

[00:45]

I close my eyes. The light from the suns glows in pulpy reds through my eyelids. I breathe in, slowly. The ground is solid beneath my feet, but the air is humid and the heat is beginning to press in, unavoidable. I let myself squeeze my eyes shut even tighter for just a moment, to wish that this was only a dream.

[00:11]

I breathe out.

[00:07]

[00:01]

[00:00]

Ill Omens

Jonathan O'Such

We used to play with dead ravens that landed on the path leading up to our black front door.

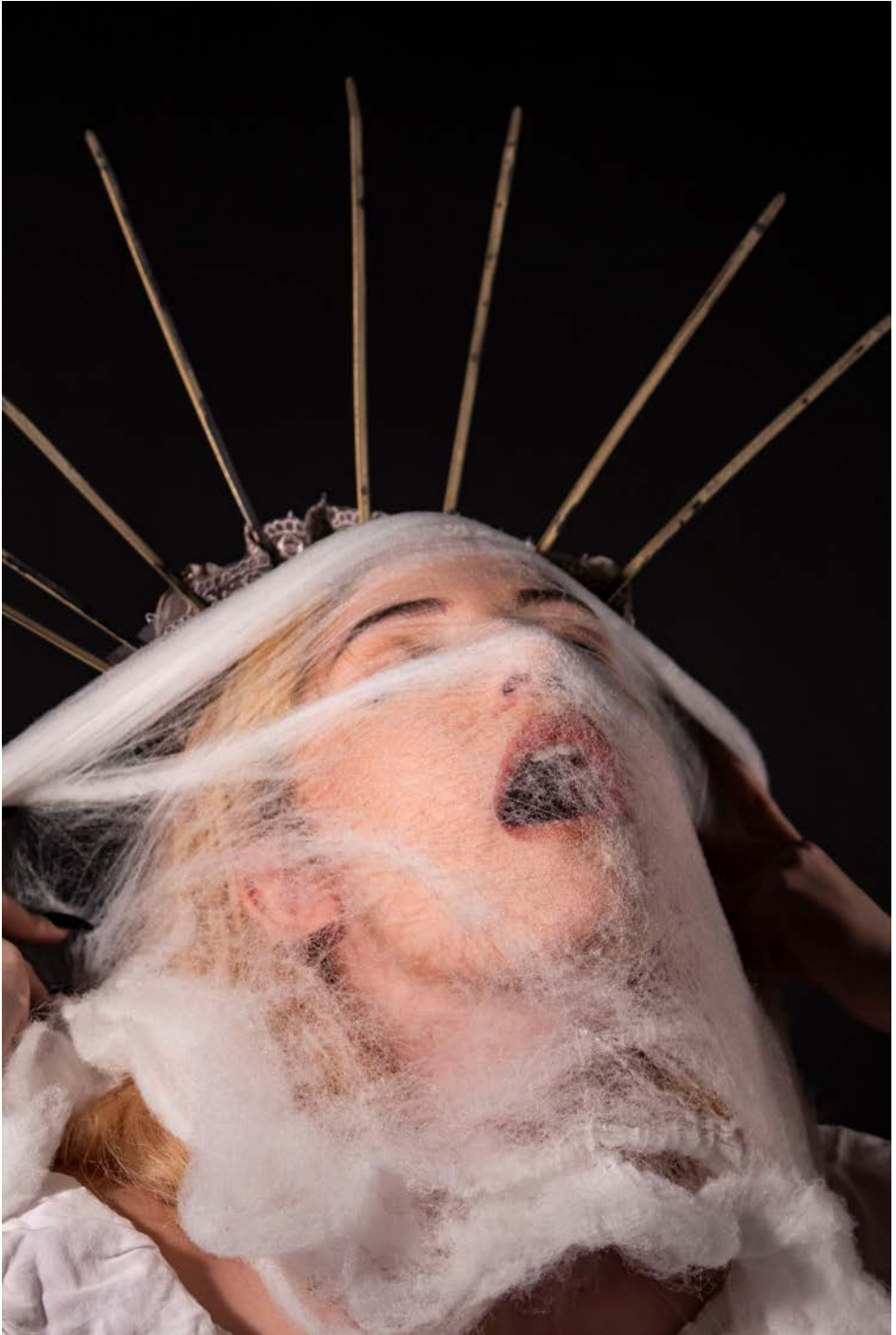
They'd come in flocks,
resting on the concrete,
burnt into feathery crisps.

We prodded their sizzling carcasses with sharp, wooden sticks,
expecting them to
make a sound,
a squawk,
anything at all.
They didn't.

We propped up their bodies like marionettes,
making them dance like lovers, breathing,
aching,
wanting.

But then he came
with his shovel
and scraped their melted backs off the concrete, and threw them in the green dumpsters
in front of our driveway.

We wailed, then forgot,
And went to play tag in the yard.



love letter to my amygdala

Ro Cavallaro

dear amy g. dala,

there are days i want to scream until my lungs give then cry it out. then there are times where my vision blurs and i dissociate. i watch myself hurdle my ceramics against a brick wall. dropkick my head into a lake. sew my mouth shut. chew my lower lip until my veins burst.

these sensations and urges are foreign. i was robbed of the chance to express my anger. after freeing myself from the nineteen year long choke-hold, i can breathe. my lungs swell then collapse, a howling scream echoing from the cave inside me. my head goes numb; tv static engulfs my vision.

you have been there through it all, manufacturing my thoughts of suicide, of self-loathing, of bitterness. thoughts of recovery, of relapse, of perseverance. thoughts of fighting, of freedom, of stability. thoughts of love, of light, of safety.

i journeyed all this way to reach the finish line. my diseased heart throbs in the most painfully pleasing way. i know i have made it by the ear-to-ear grin accompanied by tears of thankfulness. if you told me four years ago that i'd be this version of myself, i would laugh, but look at me now.



Unmoving

Michael Sooy

The dreary time of less
Light and more frost. Gray
Clouds stick to the sky
Like ambition in the eye
Of a child. Growing up May make dreams waver,
But the clouds are ever by

Snowfall and holidays
Blanket the dark
Months. People complain of snow,
But do nothing to shovel
The real weights in their life.
For cash, some neighborhood
Kid may clear
A driveway, but it costs more
To plow idleness.

I can't shovel the clouds
Or melt others' burdens.
The gray clouds laugh
As the sun pierces into them.
"Don't bother", they
say, "They'll just complain
About you, too."

things i don't believe in

Ro Cavallaro

lush bath bomb prices
pronouncing pecan as “peecan”
scientology
“cucumber is a fruit”
santa

eating one french fry at a time
“dunkin donuts has good coffee”
sister bra cup sizes
a meek “yes”
mirrors

too much chapstick
overgrown eyebrows
“women belong in the kitchen”
odd numbers
honor roll bumper stickers

“once a cheater, always a cheater”
hate speech deemed as free speech
american patriotism
typing with a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence
motels really being motels

public transportation
“cranberry sauce is a thanksgiving staple”
hunting
jazz music in bars
truly happy morning people

“summer is the best season”

just one kiss

insurance deductibles

mini vans

god (?)



Reasons to be Happy

Megan Woods

Over the summer, I created a list.
At the end of each day, I'd write down
everything that made me feel good that day,

no matter how big or small.

"Reason 250: Cheesy Pasta"

My mom had made cheesy pasta for
Dinner on Tuesday night, and
I remembered how much I liked it.

"Reason 792: Sitting on the Deck during Thunderstorms"

Tommy and I sat out
on the deck, the rain pouring down and the sound of the wind
combating the roar of the thunder.

"Reason 1,657: White Water Rafting Trips"

None of us were very good at paddling,
and maybe Danny fell into the water, but
we all finished the route drenched and laughing,
even dad.

"Reason 2,364: Buying a Gnome from the Dollar Store"

I came for super glue, but then
Heidi found the most handsome, blue gnome, and I
didn't think twice about spending that extra dollar.

When I finished, I had accumulated
3,004 reasons to be happy.

And what struck me the most wasn't how many great things had happened
to me,
or how many small things made me happy every day,

but how everything on that list brought me the same joy.
Big or small,
important or insignificant,
white water rafting brought me the same level of joy as cheesy pasta.

I don't know if that says more about the definition of happiness,
or how great cheesy pasta really is.

To the girl drinking diet coke for lunch

Leanna Kucinski

Sit there and sip your drink.

Every glorious gulp of sweetness. Hope the fizz is enough to heal
the gnawing monster in your stomach who claws and howls to be fed.

Let the liquid bubble up inside

-down from your once white sneakers to the top of your thinning blonde
head until you finally have to explode.

Let those shockwaves bring you to the night of your last little league game.
Your Dad's sharpie sign screams That's my girl!

When you miss and lose,

he holds you in his teddy-bear rough arms.

Dear God, don't let him go.

Please don't one day end up like me, looking skinny in the black dress that
you wear to your father's funeral. Just keep your small hand in his all night.

Beautiful Woman

Leanna Kucinski

I pour hot wax over the stubble
on my stretched out leg, in the hope
that a man will drag his fingertips
over the smooth skin, press down hard enough to leave a mark of purple
swirls that spread out like the wings
of a common butterfly. It doesn't matter

which man, as long as he calls his mother, calls me his baby. I rip off the
wax,
wince at the sweet sting of red on skin, now I am beautiful,
ready to step into the high heels
from the thrift store that opened on Second Street. Heels another woman
has worn.

I think a lot about the owner
of the red opened-toed shoes.
I wonder if she played her part,
properly dressed and behaved.
Does she keep pepper spray in her purse? Or maybe she trades in her heels,
smacks her gum to the world, watches as her body hair grows like a vine,
tangled and twisting up her thighs,
as her stubble turns her into a wild boar.



[You feel safe here]

Mar Popova

“Have you ever felt happiness?” you ask the leaves.
The trees stay silent, I wonder why that is.
The flowers turn toward the sea.
I’ve been here before, but it wasn’t with you.

You’ve dreamt of getting out
And yet it still seems impossible.
You don’t have the wings of butterflies
Or the courage of giants.
You only have yourself.
Can’t that be enough?

Discouraged, walking through the woods
The face of the sun glares down on your skin.
It burns, yet you feel nothing, still.

Numb.

I tried to warn you
When you were younger
But you couldn’t hear.
You were already drowning.
And you continue to drown out the words of those around you,
Your feelings and your world swept over by the waves.

Do you find comfort in it?
At rock bottom?

It’s not what they want to hear, but
You feel safe here.



