orangepeel

in conversation

orangepeel

issue 6

orangepeel is a digital literary and visual arts publication. Its objective is to showcase memorable pieces from around the world. More information can be found on the *orangepeel* website at orangepeelmag.wordpress.com. Follow *orangepeel* on Instagram at @orangepeelmag for updates regarding submissions and new issues.

cover art:

Flying Two Mirka Walter

- inspired by Full Tilt and depicting Charlotte Hannah and Danielle Summers (@fulltiltaerial, @charlottehannah1, and @danielleksummers) -

pages 8–9:

Bodegón Fernanda Armada

- inspired by Joel Peter Witkin -

Editors' note

Welcome to *orangepeel*: in conversation, our little magazine's sixth issue. Thank you for joining us on this adventure! Ahead of you are over a hundred pages of poetry, prose, visual art, and comics which are sure to make you smile. We hope that you enjoy these works as much as we do.

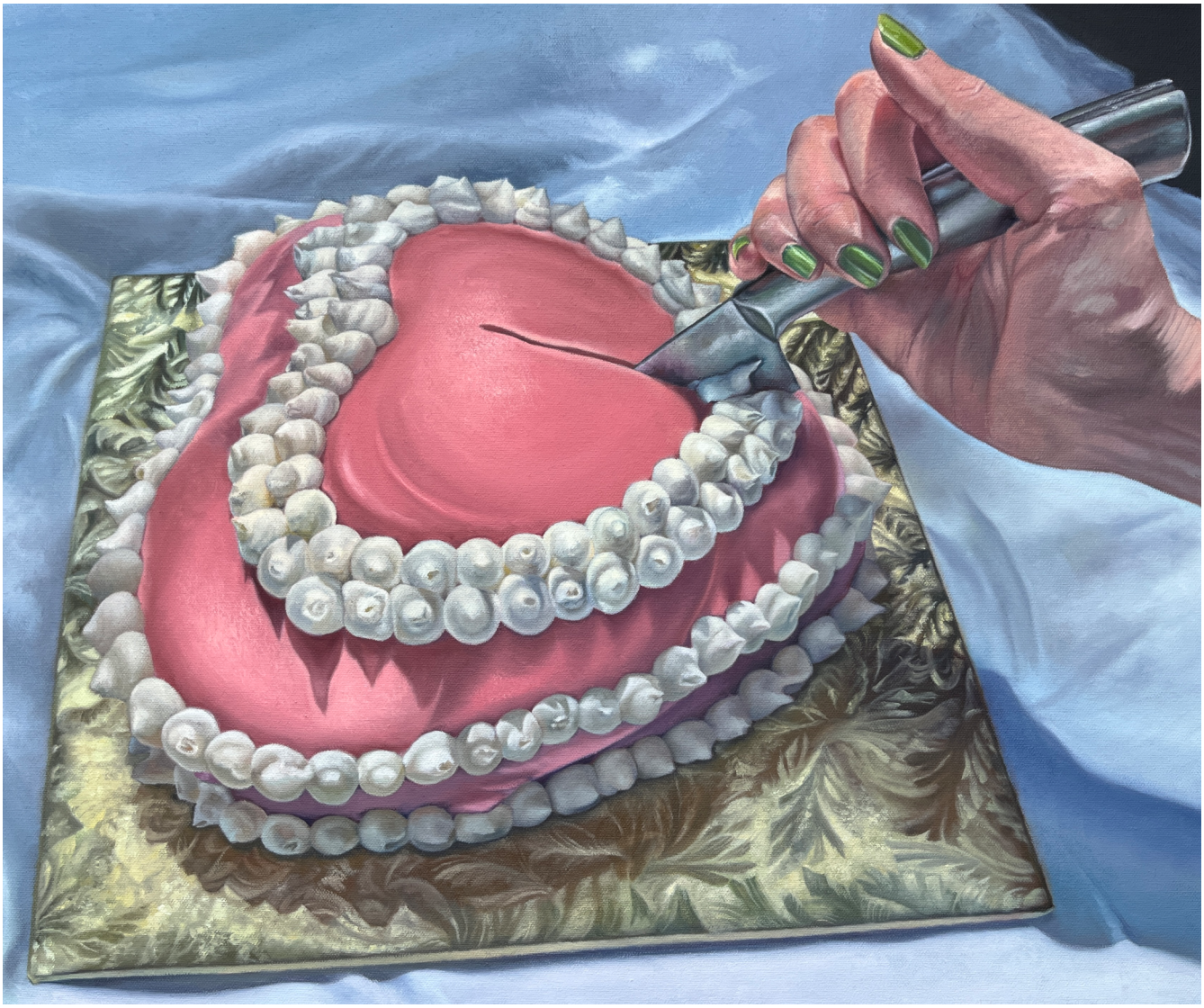
"In conversation" is a theme inspired by inspiration itself. The relationship between the influence and the influenced is a precious one. In this issue, we sought to put those relationships on display by listing inspirations alongside each work. There is such a sweetness to finding something so striking that it drives you to create. And once you are creating, what pieces and parts of the inspiration wiggle themselves into your own work? It's invigorating to see the different ways that our contributors celebrate the pieces that paved the way for their own, and we hope that they may even inspire you, too.

As with the rest of our issues, the *orangepeel* staff has collected a few orange peels for you: images within the issue that we find ourselves returning to even while we aren't working on the magazine. For this issue, we have a swirling latte, a traveling sunbeam, the recurring smell of wisteria shampoo, and one very big crow. We hope you find these, alongside some orange peels of your own, while scrolling through the issue.

We also like to shine a light on the places that our contributors call home. This issue's contributors answered that they are from: Australia, Austria, Canada, England, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, South Korea, and the United States of America. Thank you to all of the kind folks from all over the world who shared their works with us for this issue, and a huge thank you to our readers as well. We say it every time, but we mean it: we couldn't do this without you all. A blank .pdf wouldn't be much fun to put together.

Without further ado, here is the issue. Find your beverage of choice (champagne or sparkling apple juice, perhaps?), take a seat somewhere comfy, and enjoy our love letter to the creatives of the past, present, and future.

–the orangepeel editors



Soft Spot *Aurora Abzug*

visual art

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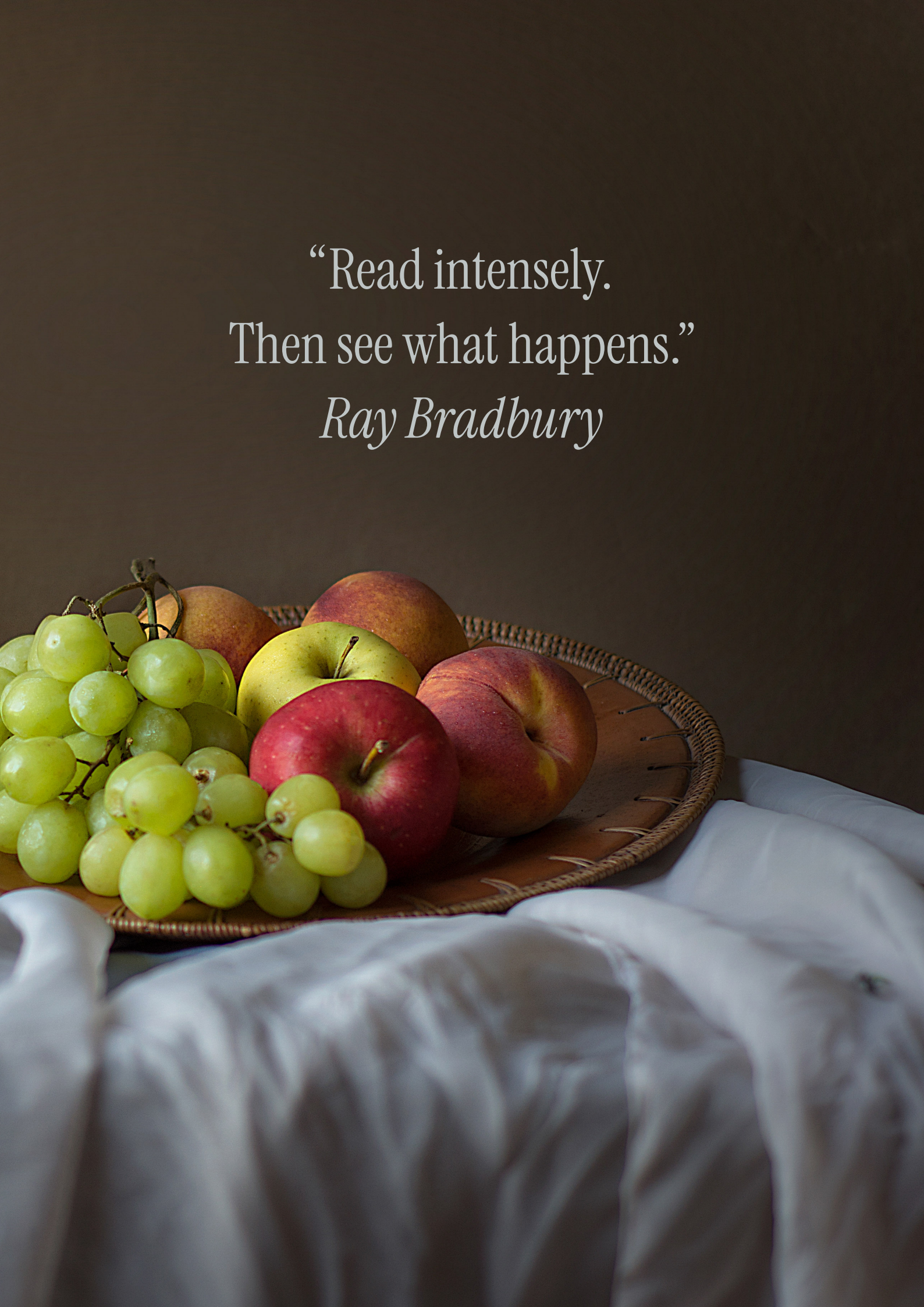

“Read intensely.
Then see what happens.”
Ray Bradbury

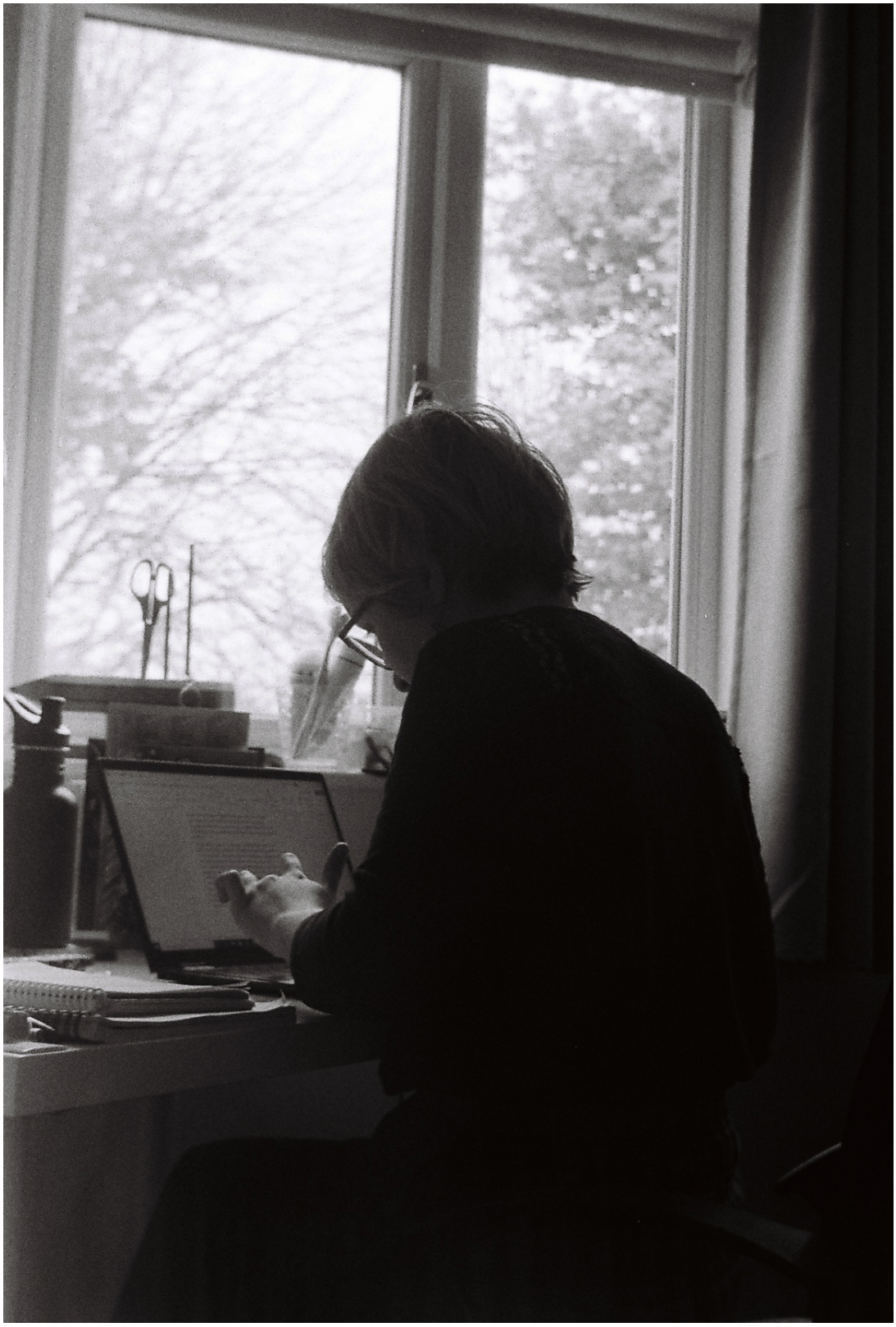
victorian admiration

Taryn Paige

we discuss aesthetics, to be
part of an elite group of
understanding in a Wilde world,

to look at beautiful things and harvest
the good mind's thoughts which
recycle beauty back unto you.

confidently, i proclaim my spot
in the hierarchy, for this is a privilege
bestowed only upon the lucky.



Sinéad, Spring 2022 *Jim Xi Johnson*

The one in which I lie in the grass beside Mary Oliver and love the world

Lauren Kaeli Baker

Part one:

in which a murmuration of starlings
enlivens concrete sky and I
raise my hand to heaven as though
I could feel its heartbeat
- *it's a hundred tiny wingbeats*
in the dusk of a silvered november
Mary rests a hand on her own heart
and smiles more at the world
than at me

Part two:

Mary hides pencils in trees, says how else
could she write love letters to the daisies
and the dahlias?
draws her childhood – pastoral, wild
prairie soul barefoot on soft carpet
of grass, breeze tangled hair and I
with southerlies in my veins, reminisce
about growing up on the edge
of the sea

Part three:

Mary holds a buttercup under
neath my chin, tucks petunias
into my plait and the lines around her
eyes are evidence of persistent weathering
river-carved canyons and I
rejoice as her laughter alights on a single sun
flower

Part four:

in which I ask her
what about the floods?
- *we all get hungry*

she says
but what about the flames?
- *life emerges from the ashes*

and the volcanoes? tornadoes?
- *have you never been that angry?*

what about when the ground itself brings us
to our knees?
- *love it anyway*

says Mary
- *as though it's all you have to stand on*

Wayne Thiebaud Dessert Circle Interpret #7

Luisa Vidales Reina

Funeral pledge / Summer life

Sam Moe

1. It was dawn, the trees turned gold, each branch slicked in old cold berries, each leaf as sweet-smelling as a newly sliced orange and I was living my life again as if we were the same person in the same body. To the left of the forest wall were bursts of honeysuckle, a grey bird in a nest, someone else's heart twisted into a crown. I asked if you were dreaming and you laughed in that gentle way of yours, said we aren't anything, and it didn't hurt as much as when the arrow pierced my flesh. Here I am, you, I am gold, I am pain and summertime, a fracture, your favorite hooked fish, your vision, your eclipse, a baby wolf not yet understanding the responsibility of having a jaw.

2. Try as I might to pause the gap, it widens. We fall in. The earth whispers, que bella, she's talking about you not me, and la luna begs me to surrender, destroy mis dientes. Everything becomes apples, onion marmalade, a bundle of goats, brie and honey, a hole fit for a comb, a fang dipped in Manchego.

3. Gold space, plants and hate, broken record player, hands tirando mi corazon off the balcony, a bend and twirl then you're all satin and still in the loveseat, the others arrastrandarme and we head to the dining room where one by one you will consume my life energy until there is nothing else. It's like, why not me, couldn't you have taught me to stitch my seams back together, we could have saved the city and taken on your exes head first, instead you make me into a poltergeist and I pull the Hudson from its resting place like a cape or the mouth of a shell. I open the water and send it to consume the apartment, quiero hablar contigo, let's melt the eulogies into glittering buckets, there is no noise when I come for your history, blue lamps then white, the wrong alphabet but it doesn't matter, there's a fire in the medicine cabinet, there is our sister braiding your hair in the bathroom mirror, you don't care I'm gone, you are eating hazelnuts by the stove and no one seems to mind when I drape my rains all over the room.

4. You know, once I told you a story about a mother who locked her daughter in the refrigerator room and made her eat away at frost and lovely, cold, blue things, sadness neatly tucked into a pastry, she couldn't find the hallway out, she drowned in doors and drawers, ripped out the rug with her teeth, yo se que tu no es yo, pero verano comes anyway, slick with beetles and grandmother's emeralds. Let's say goodbye to each other, let's tell stories the way they're meant to be told, spoken, coin clicks, perfume bubbles, roses inside my chest, let's complicate things.

5. My heart, independent of me, dependent on you. Come late, come dawn, come over, come back, come and doodle mushrooms on my shoulder, come what may, come hell, come blood and ships and ropes and sea, come salt and eyes and freckles and hair, ven tarde, ven ahora mismo, come oro, come flower fields and falling apart on the floor, come with ripe knuckles and bruises, my hickory, my throat, come grief, come alive or as a ghost—it doesn't matter—falling apart or flying, a failure or a walk in the evening, a fire, a weed, my father or yours, an accompaniment and a dream. At once I am asleep and then you're here breathing in my ear, next time I'll call you by all your names, next time will be different, delicate, serene, a list fit for the kingdom of summer, everything will be steeped in rusty verano and nothing will hurt.

6. Abre la puerta for the flowers, the procession of mourners, the moon, the priest who carries her hip bones, they are bringing bags of my hurts and amongst the pain are button mushrooms, cups, enoki and oyster, a portabella large enough to house a horse or a heart. A family seated at the breakfast table floats through the window like a dream or a stream, everything is egg yolk and my mother takes my history to the kitchen table, she rolls my arms into pines, she dresses me with king oysters, my body has been consumed a thousand times and it will be consumed a thousand times more, dried porcini, hedgehogs and lion's mane, cremini and truffle, this isn't about the time they brought me to the forest of death but it could be, over dinner you accuse me of not healing enough to take care of another person let alone myself, you tell me if I don't start putting my body back together then I'm going to ruin everything, but what do you know? Is my body not already together, ribbed, lobster, chili, maroon, a ruby, a company of wounds?

7. The walls in her room have been painted over dozens of times, you have to hit the doors with your hips, you don't know what I would do to enter a new space, the pigeons are high on the stoop, the pizza place is open twenty-four hours a day and they sell glow-in-the-dark pepperoni and mushrooms, they line plastic dinosaurs on the counter where we deposit money, they tell me I don't have to pay because I'm a ghost but even a ghost has dues. I feel I'm in love, a knife twist, the secret beneath an apple juice lid, pop rocks and punch, I reveal myself to you in carefully curated lists of birds, nuts, satchels, fabrics, tendons, lies.

Il bacio *Lapo*

The Bloody Chamber *Lottie Stephens*

Infatuated With You

K. G. Munro

Oh Sappho,
She saw you too
As the sun dripped into the sky
Covering everything in gold
Your chestnut brown eyes
Kept her grounded
You were her moon that she shone under
She wrote letters about a woman
Who inspired her
An angel who fell from the stars
Writing words across her soul
You never knew it
Because she returned your declaration
In her prayers.

The Three Weird Sisters *Lois Keller*

They Got into Macbeth's Head *Lois Keller*

Bless these Oiled Hands

Amaani Khan

In a dream
my mother's head is the size of a statue
four small versions of me are plaiting her hair
each one takes a clump of hair from her head
like a handful of straw
and moves around.

Every time I think back to that dream
I think of the crossing I took
on the way back from school,
of avoiding the bees in the lavender bush.

To bring your mother the *tayl* and *kaghi*
and sit at your mother's feet
between her legs
as she oils and brushes your hair
is to be a daughter.

To pour drops of baby oil,
from a bottle with a child lock,
into the crib of your palm
and rub it between your hands
to knead it into your temples
into the memories of the day,
your hair a reflection of moonlight in a puddle
is to touch the hair of those who oiled their hair
before you,
it is to partake in a ceremony.

To oil your own hair
is to divorce your mother's oiled palms
from your hair.

Tayl - Oil
Kaghi - Comb

Without You *Salma Abumeeiz*

To Send Myself Back (again)

Sara Wiser

"Sending someone back in time is to destroy them."
– Ocean Vuong

I have done it again.

I have sent myself back
to a time,
to a place
where I do not belong
and yet always have.

I have a new name
that is also an old name,
full of power
and legacy—
the eruption of vowels and consonants
all pushed together
squeezing
squeezing
squeezing
to form the syllables to define
who
and what
I am.

I am wearing my same clothes,
and yet upon my head
the scarves
(rags)
of the Shtetl,
of the desert girls
who draw water from the well

and dry their sweat
on the backs of their arms.

A wedding ring,
a tattered robe,
the sound of a ram's horn
in the wind
as my skin scorches under the
oppressive desert sun.

A cattle-car,
the shoes of the dead,
smoke in the air,
ash in my lungs.

A gunshot wound in my side.

The wailing of a child
that might be mine.

All of these new-old things
surround me,
shroud me,
wrap me up and
swaddle me
tighter
tighter
tighter
until I can't breathe.

To send myself back
is to send myself to a place
in which I have always lived
and yet never breathed
the air.

To send myself back
is to become my own ancestor.

To raise daughter after daughter
who will eventually raise me,
each one sending back more
and more
children
until they pile up one by one
in the death-pits.

To send myself back
is to die a thousand times,
yet live only twice.

To send myself back
is to destroy
myself.

Counselor

Kathleen Weed

Thursdays without fail the grief group met at noon
and sat on mismatched chairs in clicking radiator heat.
From here, with feeble smiles that throbbed
from molding upturned lips all day, they made
stilted small-talk quiver. No one ever mentioned death.

I'd start with a poem and watch masks melting, crumbling.
When the room was hushed by poesy's alchemy, I'd wait
until softly someone said her child's name.
Next all their children's names crisscrossed the circle,
splashing stifled love across our laps —

weaving a breastplate for each griever
who had dared to stake his heart with strangers
and forge armor for their gored lives besides.

Because to hazard hope they gazed at me,
I'd blanket my own ghost-child longing —
smother a decade's worth of desolation.
What could I bear, what could I bear
in kinship to a raw and staggering calling?

After the Waiting Room *Jennifer Casey*

Smokestack Ode

Kat Mulligan

Lunging like herons from high-rise to high-rise,
our bipedal machines make their way through the
blue and sodden city.
Brick is severed,
the roads are skinned of their tarmac,
and the night is robbed of form as its color spoils
into an ever murkier shade.
Tongues droop from the clotheslines,
speaking slower and slower in bone-dry words
about love,
and fumes leak in endless droves from the smokestacks
as if from a heart scorned by its own nudity.

Down in the strained saliva pit you can find the
frenzied ones gumming cement,
chewing tunnels towards the mantle.
Up close, their skin softens like clay torn between
both hands,
but a certain mechanical reflection mows down
the steep pitch of their irises—
same as any old puritan in awe of terror.
It's currents and moss and enough sludge
to make your flesh ache its way into a living bruise,
and here we have the fitting words to crop the ears
of the frenzied ones.

Here we have the lagoon a man would give his teeth for
in order to gaze wisely and with heightened sense,
just to hold the mud in his stomach like a seed
grasped by the earth's humid fist.
Here we have the lagoon whose soles trample the
melting body of a verdigris lover,
who died with a mouth swollen with blood and

no chance at martyrdom,
whose memory is mistranslated by the rotating jaws
of the water—
and the bipedal machines know that his backbone
is long and ubiquitous
and will be stretched across this canvas
to the unholy stature of Purgatory.

Looming conduit lagoon limbs cast their opaque footprints
over the TV-box skylights.
Inside, the women are waiting for their black
and blue husbands to return
while the pasta keeps its goosebumps.
One plate will grow flies,
which the living lover could not predict in the
dim wake of the machines that pass overhead.
Hunger disintegrates in a gut disintegrated by steel-toed boots,
says the philosophy of the lagoon,
and a kicked-in skull cannot roll uphill to dinner.

Crowbars will rain down on the missing one like sleet,
and the undertow will hum so loud that death
accepts its gag, its complacency,
and the heat will run out from the porcelain's cheeks
as it begins to truly understand its uselessness.
He was asking for it
through the wooden mouthpiece of his hand soap delusion.
That's what the dreamer will say
when this nightmare fits itself snug into its cartridge
and seeps through his eyelids.

With a jolt,
the lagoon heaves—
two seconds until its lips settle like ash
atop its shelled declarations.

- inspired by "Slinky" by King Krule -

thanksgiving after neel *Michael McDonnell*

Bingo for Adults

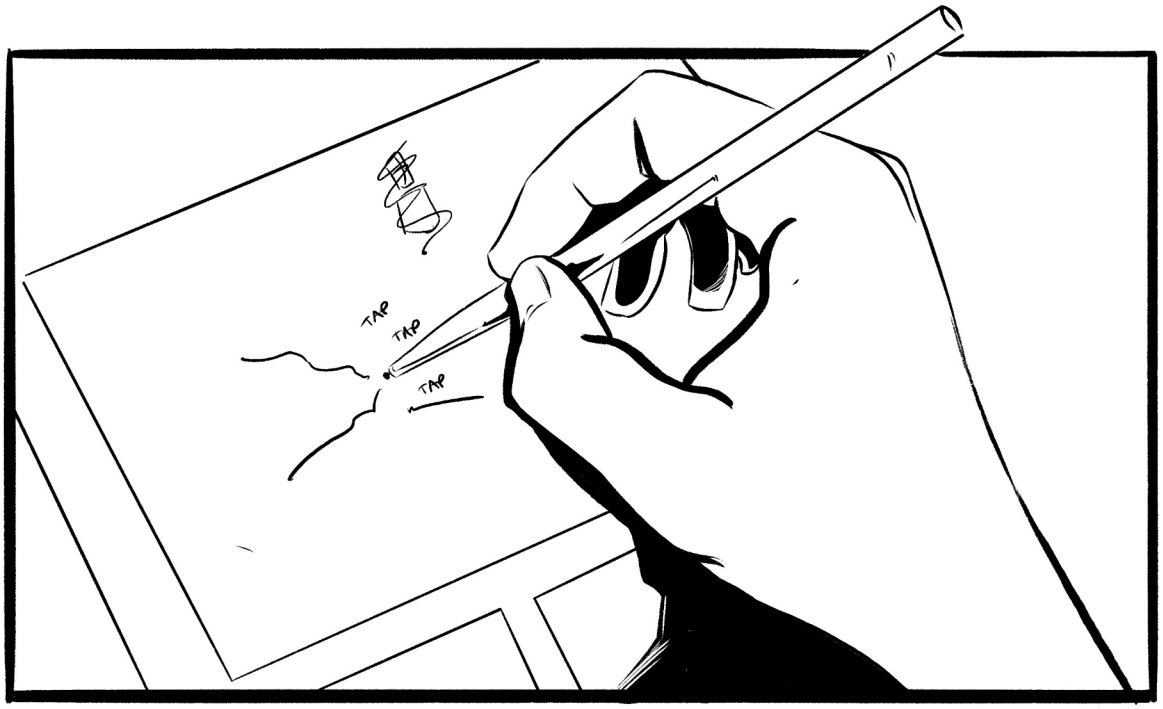
Chow Chung Yan

	33	7	29
home	At 33, Jenna bought a house from her salary as an iBanker. 'It's nothing,' she smiles. 'It's not even a thousand square feet, nor did I pay it in full.'	The optometrist frowns at you. 7/20 vision. Bet you are one of her worst patients. Not a surprise when you can't even see your heart clearly.	Your back is a brittle branch and your skin imitates leaf patterns. Man-rings from carrying 29 years of mortgage.
work	You return to your desk, the prison walled by memo pads and propped-up files. This is what 33,000 is worth. In the TV dramas you watched as a kid, only the CEO had the space to shove everything onto the floor and have someone else pick it up.	You believed, rightly or wrongly, if you stretched and reached stars in all 7 subjects, you would get into your dream school, meaning closer.	One extra day in February. One more delightfully red day on the calendar. You will sleep most of the time, you think. No more vacations, anyway.
sleep	Last night, 33 rabid dogs chased you in your dreams (you just knew, for some reason). Which are less frightening than what's out there.	How are you supposed to answer your elders when one had 7 different dreams?	1 more minute before you need to get up. Of course, today is going to be a productive, good day.

Art Block

Jay Kennedy

- inspired by artists including Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko, Vincent Van Gogh, Salvador Dali, Walt Disney, and Keith Haring -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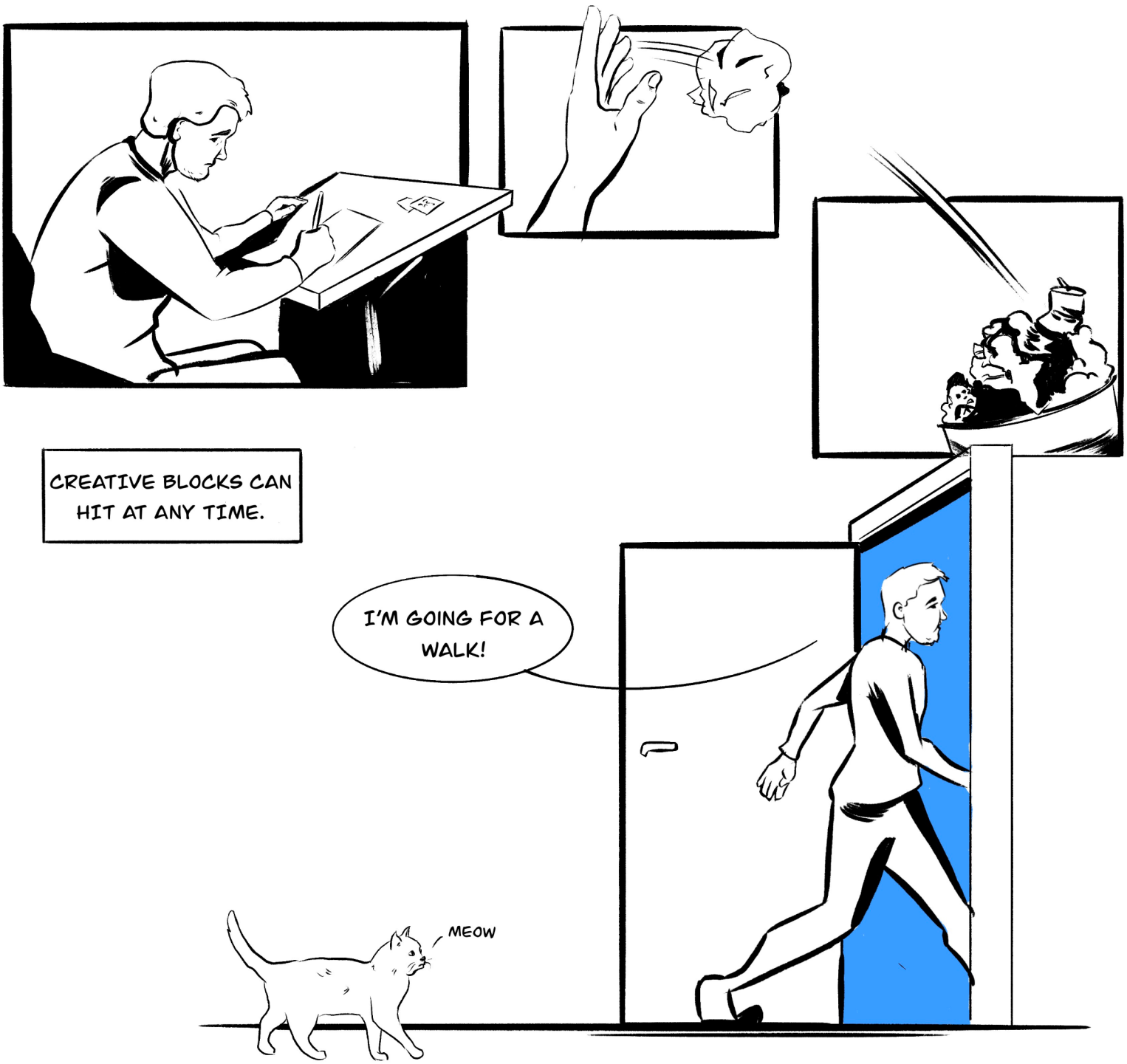
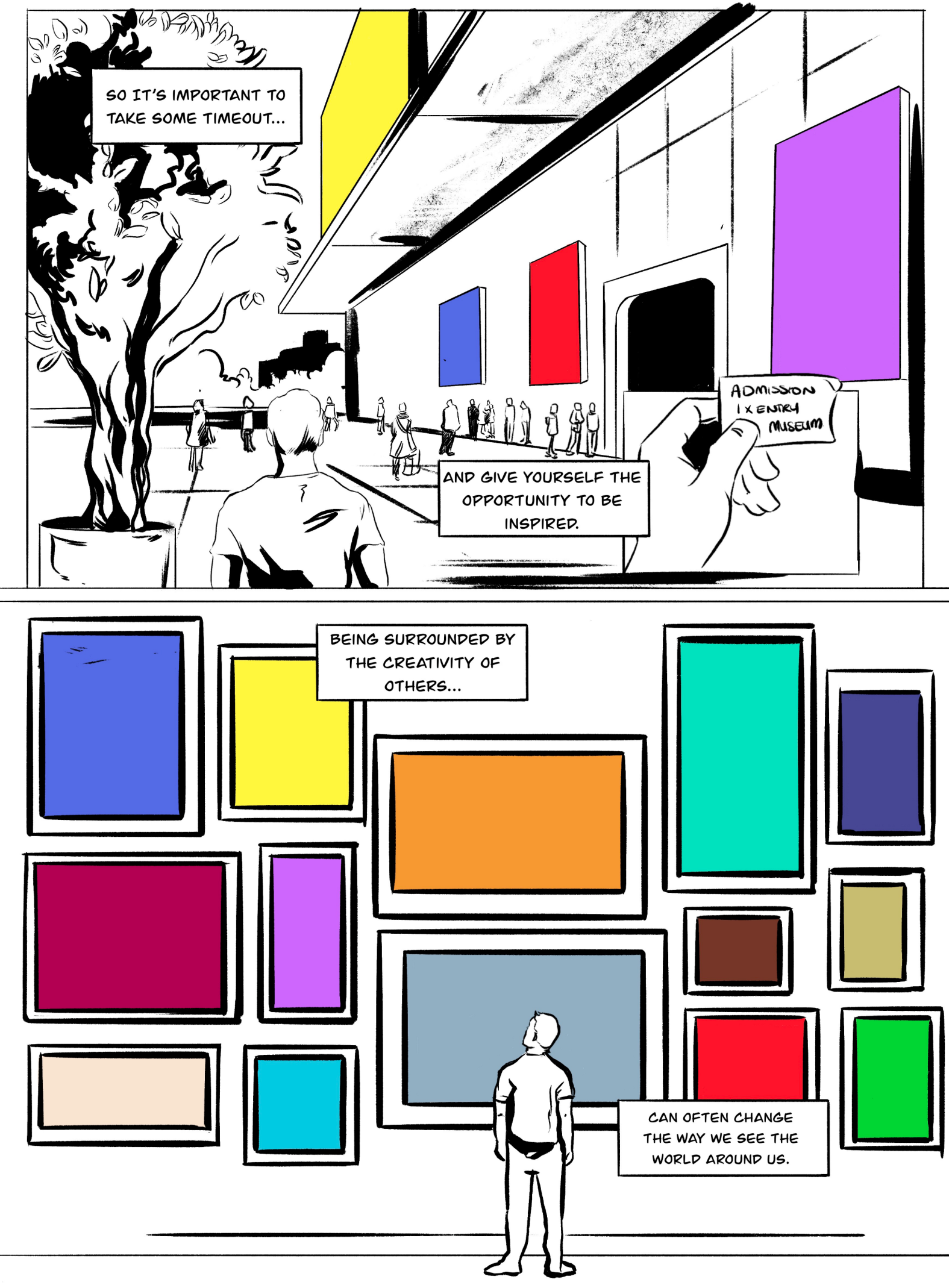

CREATIVE BLOCKS CAN HIT AT ANY TIME.
I'M GOING FOR A WALK!
MEOW


SO IT'S IMPORTANT TO TAKE SOME TIMEOUT...
ADMISSION 1 x ENTRY MUSEUM
AND GIVE YOURSELF THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE INSPIRED.
BEING SURROUNDED BY THE CREATIVITY OF OTHERS...
CAN OFTEN CHANGE THE WAY WE SEE THE WORLD AROUND US.

EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES CAN BE SEEN IN THE STYLES THAT HAVE SHAPED ART HISTORY...
AHH
CLINK
ALLOWING ARTISTS OF THE PRESENT TO BE INFLUENCED BY THE CREATORS THAT HAVE COME BEFORE THEM...

INSPIRING NEW WAVES OF CREATIVITY FOR ARTISTS...
MEOW
WHILE CONTINUING THE CONVERSATIONS OF ART HISTORY FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

Live Your Life, Build a Home, Fill it Full of Flowers and Bottles of Eau de Cologne

Berlinda Paliza Recacho

We passed each other earlier on the street today when you startled those pigeons on Boulevard Montparnasse. I looked up in a flurry of wings, at you, the cause of their panic, and you weren't really there, your eyes trained on something far away. Isn't it strange how we can tell that the focal point of the gaze turns inward? A photograph can catch it if the shutter is fast enough. Better if it's a film, a moving picture that captures all moments so that you can find the exact frame. But an artist is like a magician, with the skill to use light and shadow, focus and blur to create reverie out of thin air.

Yes, that was right after I watched that terrible man on the sidewalk, swallowing frogs for francs tossed into a hat. I was already in a dark mood. Angelie, Bob, and Maurice were being impossible. I had to get out to clear my head. The frog man was not a good sign. Do you believe in signs? I distracted myself with a drink at Le Dôme to calm my nerves. They were playing my song. Not just a song I liked — I was the singer on the jukebox. Nobody cared. Later, while walking past the bar, I saw a crowd gathered around the shattered front window. Someone had shot a gun through the glass. The bullet grazed the cashier and killed a man. I might have been sitting there instead. I dropped my purse and my mirror shattered. It was an omen. My friend Dorothee said that the broken mirror was for the dead man. She doesn't believe in these things, but she knows I do. It felt like fate.

I don't believe in fate. You can change your life whenever you want. I was married. I have a little son. I didn't feel connected to my husband or child, so I left. That's the freedom of living in 1962 — nothing ties you down, not society, not convention, not what you're expected to do as a wife or mother. Would they be better off with me, physically there but mentally elsewhere? I don't think so. Paul will move on and the boy will not remember me. That's for the best.

I'm the most afraid of being forgotten. I thought that it was enough to be famous and glamorous and have spectacular love affairs with rich men; this actually happened, and I still felt as hollow as an empty room. My apartment is mostly space and a bed. It's like a stage set for a play about a woman pretending to live.

There is no pretending. There is just life. You might have seen me on

Boulevard Pereire. Do you like my coat and skirt? It's my uniform. I was fired from the record shop on Avenue de Wagram and then tossed out of my loft for skipping rent. I sort of fell into this. I have what some men want, and they will pay for it. It's actually a regulated profession. Raoul took me through the official handbook of expectations. He brings me business and I give him a cut of my profits. The men are young and old, handsome and ugly, rich and poor, but they always have money for this. It is tiresome, but at least there is no love in the mix, just spectacle, like your frog-swallower. I won't even let them kiss me on the mouth.

My lover — I can't say his name because he's too influential and too married — only has time to kiss me on the mouth. Life is too short to spend it as a commodity or a product for the use of others, especially men. I didn't always think this way, but recently my health took a turn. Probably cancer, my doctor said, but he wanted to be sure, so he did some tests last week. Then today I had an ominous reading. "Death only means change," the fortune teller said after turning the cards, but I could see the fear in her eyes. My aura was bad for business. Later Bob and Maurice wrote me a torch song — *Sans Toi* — that I sang to myself. I teared up, thinking of the world without me.

You are so melodramatic! Take charge of your own destiny and get a second opinion. Do you know "The Oval Portrait" by Edgar Allen Poe? My lover — I can't say his name because he's so poor and decent, so I only refer to him as le jeune homme — was reading it to me on my day off. It's a sort of macabre tale — what other story can Poe tell? An artist marries a woman of uncommon beauty. He's so inspired by her loveliness that he aims to capture it eternally on canvas. He paints and paints and she sits and sits and finally when the portrait is finished to his liking, he discovers that his wife is dead, from neglect. But she was just as complicit in her ending. Imagine just sitting there, waiting to die! Not me. I'm going to start again with le jeune homme and leave everything else behind.

Whenever I try to leave, something or someone pulls me back. It happened today — did you know it is the longest day of the year?

A day is no more and no less than 24 hours. I don't wear a watch when I'm not working.

When I met a soldier named Antoine in the Parc Montsouris, he told me it was the summer solstice. I thought he was trying to pick me up, but then I let my guard down. I asked him the time and he wasn't wearing a watch either. You see, I was supposed to find out my test results today.

It's always better to know than to not know. Even if I was going to die, I'd rather know than be surprised.

So, even if you knew you were going to your death, you'd go willingly?

Yes. I would.

Antoine said that what saddens him is dying for nothing. I'd rather be dead than be alone. I was afraid to hear my test results in person, out loud. But he came with me so I wouldn't be so scared. Maybe being the center of attention is never what I need, even though I always think it's what I want. It felt like a sea change.

Like the Death card you were so afraid of. Death, I suppose, is the ultimate change. The death of an idea of yourself, for example.

You are very perceptive — has anyone ever told you that?

You mean because I'm a prostitute I shouldn't be perceptive?

That was careless of me. Antoine would say, 'Even grand emotions are full of vanity, and great minds of foolishness.' You're a feminist trapped in an ancestral story. You've read Simone de Beauvoir? *The Second Sex*? She echoes what you say about choosing your own freedom.

Doesn't it matter that I chose this path? Even if it leads to destruction — which I don't think it will. I have a knack for getting out of tight situations. In fact, last month I ran out of an arcade during a shootout on the street and miraculously did not get hit! I don't consider myself a feminist, but I do believe in free will.

You can't believe in free will and miracles — they cancel each other out. You should meet Dorothee. She's a model for a sculptor, but unlike the wife of Poe's painter, she is in charge of her availability. Dorothee would never sacrifice her own well-being for anyone else. She takes her clothes off for a living, but the students only look and draw and carve, never touch. Dorothee has a lover, but he has nothing to do with art. He's a projectionist and when we visited his theater, he showed us a silent film about seeing the world through light lenses or dark glasses. The girl in the film looked like you, but with longer hair. Your style reminds me of Louise Brooks, that American flapper from the 1920s. Have you ever seen *Pandora's Box*? She plays a woman in your line of work. It doesn't end well for her.

What I do for a living is strictly a means to an end. I haven't been to the cinema since a date took me to see Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc. *I wept at the scene when Joan is being tortured but refuses to tell them what they want to know. The tears lay like jewels on her cheeks. I couldn't stop crying. Usually nothing moves me.*

I am always moved. Aurelie has to calm me down when I get upset and start to hyperventilate like a child. But when my doctor drove off in his ridiculous little sports car after delivering the best news with the worst bedside manner, I felt strangely calm. "You will be fine," he said, "Two months of radiation will set you right." I don't know about you, but one second of radiation sounds wrong to me. "You have nothing to worry about," he insisted. He couldn't get away fast enough. Then Antoine said, "I'm sorry I'm leaving. I'd like to be with you." I told him, "I think my fear is gone. I think I'm happy." And I was. We stood there, on the cobblestone drive, looking at each other and smiling. His eyes were so bright. And a tear gathered in the corner of an eye and slid down the track of one of his laugh lines. It was a moment of complete understanding.

There's only been one time that I've felt on equal ground, noticed for my intellect — and not judged for my looks or my profession — in conversation with a complete stranger. In a cafe on Place du Châtelet I started chatting with an old man who turned out to be a retired philosophy professor. I was tired of talking. I said, "The more one talks, the less words mean. Why can't we just be quiet? Why do we have to understand each other?" He argued, "To communicate one must speak, and speaking is almost a resurrection. We swing between silence and speech because it's the movement of life. Thinking and speaking are the same thing. There's little difference between an error and a lie." Then I countered, "There's truth in everything—even errors." He agreed. "That's why love is a solution — but on the condition that it be true." I added, "Lend yourself to others, but give yourself to yourself." The philosopher noted, "Montaigne said it first." I said, "Well, I repeated it just now."

Antoine would have said to give yourself to others and don't expect anything in return. He gave his time to me, when he had so little of it left for himself. When we were together, time stretched out like it had no end, but at the same time, I could hear the clock ticking. We only just met, but we've known each other forever. It's not about romance. It's not even about sex. It's about love, the highest form of charity.

I thought charity was the highest form of love.

Aren't we saying the same thing?

Well, in the week that I've known le jeune homme, he bought me a pack of Gitanes in the pool hall. I didn't even have to ask! In return for his kindness, I danced to a swing tune for him, twirling to the music as he sunk his shots. When he asked me to live with him, I was over the moon. That is what happiness is to me — looking forward to the next big thing on the greener side of the fence.

Raoul is never going to let you go.

Your soldier might never come back.

I was there for him, and he for me when we needed each other. That's what matters. Everything else is out of our control. I can say for once that someone recognized the real me, and not just what's on the surface. Antoine said he liked my given name, Florence, better than my stage name, Cleo, because he preferred flora to fauna, and to him Cleo sounds funny and dangerous at the same time, like a tigress or a temptress.

Nobody calls me by my name — Nana. It's from the novel by Zola. Have you read it? I have no desire to find out what happens to my namesake. Or am I her namesake? It's terrible what these men, these writers put women through, even on the page. Zola is just a more acceptable version of Raoul. The last time I heard my name out loud was at the police station when I was being booked last month. I said it myself when they asked who I was, and it sounded funny to me, like I was hearing it for the first time. Did you know I once had a dream of becoming a movie star? I paid for professional headshots but the photographer didn't stop there — he shot my whole body.

What happened to your dream?

Like most things, it dried up and blew away on the wind.

I'm going to walk the rest of the way home. It won't get dark soon, remember? There was a reason that our paths crossed on the longest day, Nana. It gave me more time to reach you. We should live while we can because who knows what tomorrow may bring? This is the affirmation that Antoine gave to me, from the second he threw me a line to save me from drowning in self-pity to the minute I saw him off at the train station just now, before we met. You're right. We all have dignity, regardless of profession. Don't underestimate Raoul's reactions. Go away with le jeune homme. Live your life, build a home. Fill it full of flowers and bottles of eau de cologne. I'm sorry — that came out of nowhere — but it was something

I needed to tell you.

Your directive is inspirational, Florence. I will take it into my meeting with Raoul. I will say I have no future with him. He will have no choice but to send me off. Thank you for sharing your soldier's kindness and wisdom. It was nice to walk in your daydream at least for a moment. I hope he returns to you. You've both inspired me to look more closely and notice the details. I see the world through the eyes of a realist, where you're much more of a poet. But even I can appreciate the golden hour bathed in roseate light, the shadows stretching long and green over the pattern of the cobblestones on the Rue Jenner.

I haven't yet walked that street, but you make me feel like I've been there.

We might be the same person, in different movies.

There, but for the grace of God, go I.

- inspired by Cleo from 5 to 7, *dir. Agnès Varda, and* Vivre Se Vie, *dir. Jean-Luc Godard, both 1962 -*

Misery Is a Butterfly *Amy Meng*

- inspired by "Misery Is a Butterfly" by Blonde Redhead and Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle *by Vladimir Nabokov -*

Looking at Art *Andrew Kozlowski*

Painting My Portrait in the Style of Frida

Bonnie Wehle

I choose a thin board
that has already seen some use. Apply
gray primer liberally, then coat

each inch of the surface
in a thick impasto of bold colors.
I don't hold back.

I paint the mirror image
turned a bit to one side,
so the face is partly in shadow.

With the tip of my brush, I tease
the downturned lips into a faint smile,
nimbly paint over any revealed emotions.

I add flowers, birds, small animals
as distractions—lots of them—
around the face, earrings, necklaces,

scarves and ribbons, both pink and red.
Yes, that should nicely mask
the doubt and longing.

I soften the hard edges with my finger,
then resist the temptation to lay in the past
as background. Instead

I dab in some cacti—prickly pear—
and with a pointed brush
carefully stroke on thorns—lots of them.

while listening to black rainbow ad nauseam

Megan Luddy O'Leary

I used to just sit and shake, maybe pulse. The condensation building in the lid, tears clinging to the ceiling of the coffee, sweating inside, rejoining the hot liquid and leaving the hot liquid again. Never escaping the cup. Have you ever heard a song that gives you pleasant palpitations — neck thorns? A melody that climbs perpetually, some sort of auditory trick. You have to imagine Sisyphus happy, lying on the floor with his airpods, gasping for nothing. Made of sinew and granite and electric currents. I take the lid off and take

> a sip. Still hot, and weaker than I was expecting. It's getting hard to remember the feeling. Now I cry because the leaves are so green, because the breeze reminded me of an open car door in Cobh, because I am so near the sun (beautiful) and so far away from everyone else.

 - inspired by "Black Rainbow" by St. Vincent -

Famiglіə *Stefano Pullano*

Ismene

Christina Hennemann

(Greek: 'to linger towards' – *eis* = towards, *mene* = linger)

I

Linger:

Is she not too pretty to perish, and fair indeed. Her hair is a golden waterfall rushing over her back, and nothing tangles. Life is a wallet to be stuffed until it bursts, and she'd rather lurk in the shadows than be stabbed by the light of day. What is right is not always wise, and your street-smart act of rebellion will achieve only pain in the end. She wants to live in this world, eat more apples and burn more wood. Reap the power of wind and sea. Sail until she reaches the new frontier. The dead don't bear grudges, they visit in dreams and forgive. They forgive everything human, for the human is flawed. The newborns are raging. They lash out against the elders. They won't forgive anything, for being human is to be selfish. She loves you, but not to death. She would rather plot like the ever-mischievous Gods. How much you could achieve if you taught her your anger and strength, hid behind her beautiful face.

*

My sister, don't let go of my warm hand,
Eternal love is dust from where I stand,
Erect his statue in a secret hole,
No friend or foe can rule thy mind and soul.

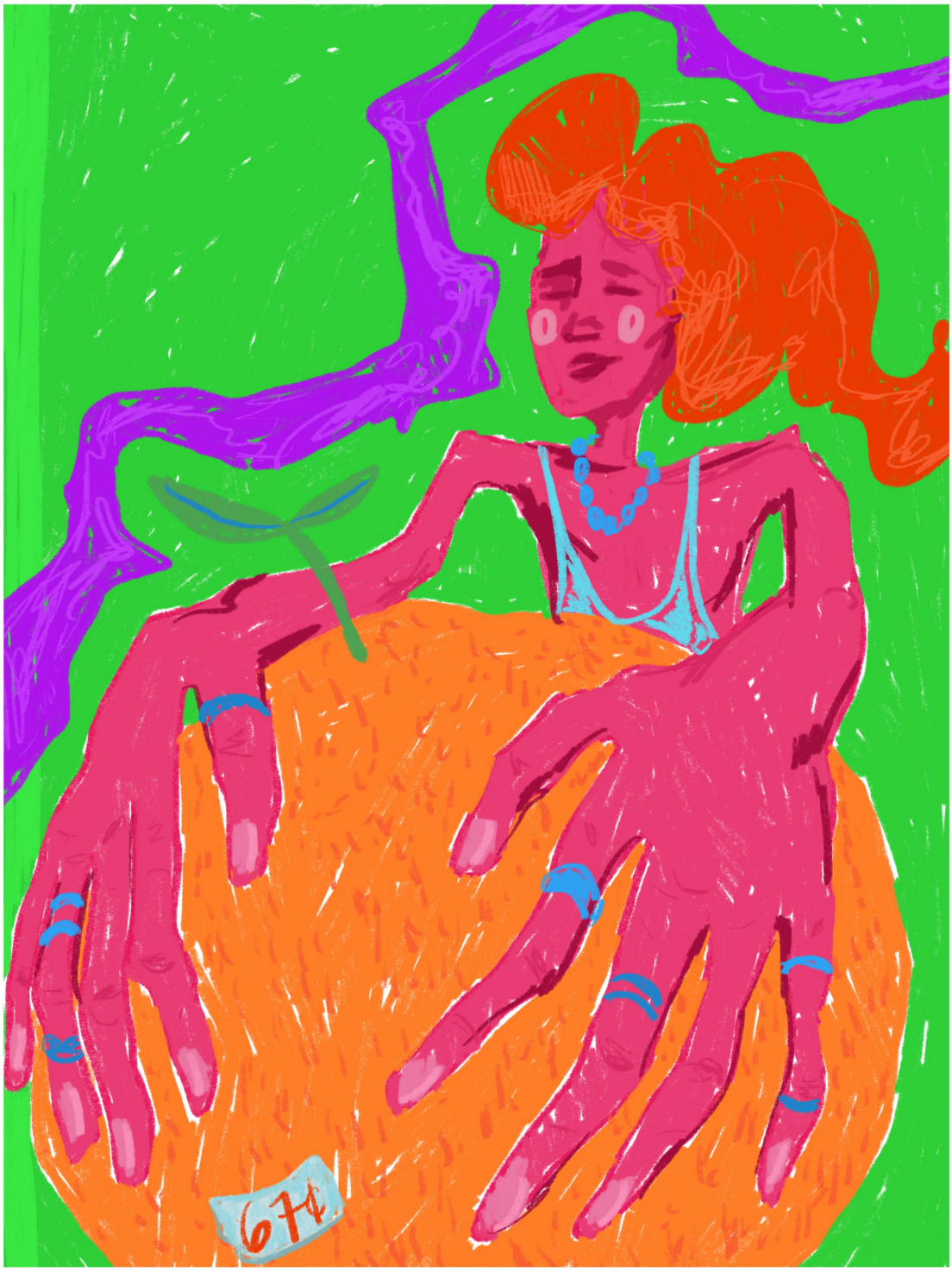
II

Towards:

She is not too pretty to perish, but fearful indeed. Your scorn is a dark blanket over her limbs, blackening her veins and choking her love. You're causing the living a great deal of agony, Antigone, and yet your monument will transcend time. You won't let her die with you, and so she will always be the hollow, obedient blonde. Men will rape her with their eyes and long to tie her hands behind her back. She won't budge. The world needs both rebels and rememberers. Her secret weapon will always be you; she'll bear a daughter and name her after you.

*

Elect my fragile heart to go with thee,
In life, in death, we shall be bold and free,
Survive will those with hearts that sing and see.



Miss Orange *Katherine Taylor*

clingstone

Sally Woodcock

tawny children
pulp-spattered and spitting
fruit fountains in the dirt

a tangle of legs as
squinting elders drag their
heels in the dust
tracing borders drawn with
water on hungry soil

ceding ground to
ghosts of
noble soldiers
deserters of a bloodless cause

time is irrigation
the landscape lapsing
off
and
on

the sun tethered against its will
tender-hearted and
still as a beast in a barn

blinking a new day into being
beating for a new life worth seeding

Requital – 1956

Katherine Hashimoto

Late-day sun shoots southwest
lays low and
laps a charge nurse
walking from Cook County Hospital
to the nine-floor, red-brick staff apartments
that could have held the whole of her hometown
then ducks and fires
straight through the plate glass lobby
to blaze her autumn hair.

She doesn't notice. First shift's ended, but
the westside med center's
general resurrection
for her
is only of the body.

She heads through the elevator lobby
to put up her white cap,
change her white uniform for civs
then take the L crosstown to night school

but her mind's still in OB and peds
with 25 or 30 babies
and some fifteen and seventeen-aged mothers
got that way by dads and brothers.
While her guard's down
on the ward
an elbow crooks her neck,
Vs across her windpipe.
Yokes a head to her head,
a mouth near her ear.
Hostage-style, if we're talking movies.

Whoever's the director
of this little drama
didn't plan ahead.
In five seconds
Cook County's tidal surge will wash in further nurses
as the assailant bolts.
There's time for one line each.

"Get on the floor,"
The arm's thick-jacketed but thin
and he sounds Spanish.
Which of them is newer here?
Newer to elevated trains,
to indoor plumbing,
mugging?
His breath's too foul for fear alone—
she knows this from the wards.

"You're sick," she says. "The hospital's three blocks."

Telling whispered secrets to the walls and the sheets *Haleigh Givens*

Aaliya, above.

Himani Tripathi

The first time she sees the little girl in the closet, she doesn't scream. She stopped dreaming years ago, no longer drunk on the wine of revolution or love or both. She recognizes the change in herself as clearly as she would recognize it in another. The loss of sharpness from the world, the blunt softness of what used to hurt. As if some of her mind has gone into a deep slumber, tired as it was from the constant vigilance in a hostile homeland. So, when she sees the little girl, with her skin half peeled off her face and the irises that have all but consumed her eyes, leaving behind an odd blob of white – she recognizes that the part of her mind that is slumbering must also be dreaming. This doesn't come as a surprise to Aaliya. For months, she has felt as if she were two people inhabiting a single body, as if her skin were too small for the spirits inside her, locked in a cannibalistic embrace. As if she were both the guest at the dinner table and the meal. As she raises her hand to pet the girl on the head, she feels no horror.

She does, however, feel grief and that is terror enough. The fact that she feels the pull of the tiny black hole in her stomach for the first time since it popped into existence all those years ago, in a different country, under what felt like a different sun. She blinks thrice, and the girl fades slowly – as if reluctant to leave, as if clinging. She shakes her head and steps out into the Scottish winter. The roads are thick with ice and the sun shines weakly on her. Suddenly she feels as if she is underwater, and the sun is a bright mandarin-colored octopus. It is trying to swim toward her with lazy tentacles, as if drowning in honey. Her eyes half close and then she is humming under her breath a song from her mother's Sunday kitchen of the past. *Wo jo hum mein, tum mein, qarar tha; tujhe yaad ho ke na yaad ho.* The love that was in us, between us, do you remember it, or have you forgotten? *Qarar.* She translates it as love. "Qarar, qarar," her mind whispers. Something stronger, something more viscous than love. Something syrupy and thick – love but cooked in sugar and milk for hours over a slow flame. She hasn't realized she's been walking but suddenly she's in front of the bookstore she wanted to reach, and she gathers herself and folds into a smile. The owner is kind and exhausted, as is the nature of booksellers. She finds the smallest phrase to ask for the book she needs. Somewhere miles away, across a continent, in a small, dusty bedroom, there is another copy of the same book with her name on it. She pays for it, holding the yellow and blue of the cover as if holding a floating memory, 'til the cover slightly bends under her fingertips. She thanks him and she leaves.

She sits on the large patch of grass that the ice hasn't reached and starts to read a book she remembers almost every line of. The exercise is familiar and safe. The words come to her as though through a looking glass – from

another life lived. The Aaliya in the book, her namesake – the Aaliya from above – knows grief so intimately. The Aaliya on the grass feels jealous. She hasn't lived through a civil war, nothing as clean as that, no way to pin her grief anywhere. Her grief is like mercury, constantly moving and impossible to catch.

Suppose, she thinks, Delhi is a country. Suppose its boundaries are borders. She banishes the thought. There are borders enough in that part of the world. Suppose it is a microcosm then. It is a play, a fictionalized account of a whole country. It has the nation's heart and vivacity – but most of all, it has its pathology. Is a war still a war if you share cigarettes and chai after the blood has been shed? After faces have met pavements and boots, is it still a war if you break bread with the people wearing those same boots? Is it still a war if it never really met you outside the university campus? All of Aaliya's rage, all her anger is bottled up in a college with red walls, in a country that imagines itself anew everyday with increasing violence. A nation making human sacrifices at the altar of the motherland. And Aaliya, Aaliya of the grass, Aaliya of the down below – she's only touched by this violence in passing. She's alive and she's safe in a cold, beautiful wonderland where there is eternal youth. In Scotland, sorrow almost always seems like a personal thing. She understands that it is still systematic, but here you cannot see the wires and machinery of the system. In Delhi, she sees everything. The heat makes it impossible to dissociate. Everything is sharp, clear and in focus. She sees the wires that carry her electricity, she sees the woman cook her family's food – food that costs half her monthly wages. She sees the bulldozers that tear down houses and the flesh that falls on beaten, broken bones. Delhi swallows you and doesn't spit you out. It is Frankenstein's monster made up of beautiful things – a ghastly sum of glittering parts.

Aaliya remembers the dying of her fire. She remembers it falling into itself like a dying star, she remembers the pressure behind her navel as she felt the black hole pop into existence. It was a bright, sunny day in late February. She tries hard to concentrate on the details of the memory but, after years of suppression, her mind only allows her to focus on the small things. She remembers the bright red of the Gulmohar flowers on the pavement mixing with a stream of blood – the red of a Rothko painting. She tries to see the face of the man, the glacier that sources the stream of blood, but she can't see, her memory glazed over by the custard light of the sun. She sees Malika and their hands anchored together, like two ships trying to hold on in an onslaught of bad weather. Aaliya still can't remember the faces, but she remembers the feeling of small fingers gripping – almost bruising – and then she's lost and she's drowning in the sea of men, crazed and chanting. They're chanting for the motherland, but the slogans seem off. The slogans of love and freedom now have phrases that call for blood – and all she can think about is her grandfather and the way he loves India. Now, when she remembers, she cannot separate the memory of her grandfather sitting at the dinner table telling her about Gandhi, Nehru, and

Bose from this bloodthirsty crowd of madmen screaming those same names for a different purpose. She realizes with growing horror that she is now trapped in the memory. Then, she stumbles upon the one face that she can't unsee. The one face she will always remember. He looks at her through the crowd and his face crumbles for a minute.

Then it contorts into the ugly mania of violence – a thirsty, mad, snarling man, parting the sea to reach her. She feels the iciness of betrayal like a thin, cold tentacle wrapping around her heart and she hears Malika's shrill voice. *Run, Aaliya.* And just like that, nothing is hazy anymore. She is plunged headfirst into the stifling heat and sweat of bodies around her. She can hear the crying and the sounds of pain so acutely – she thinks they will never end. She can see every face around her with impeccable clarity. She turns on her feet, and she runs. As she runs, she remembers his face again. She remembers him soft. She remembers him smiling. She remembers his hands on her skin like a prayer. She remembers the mutual worship in a hostel room doused in the fuel of desire and set to burn by the sharp sunlight coming in through the window. She remembers his ardor and the lazy heaviness of being loved by him. The qarar – the love honeyed through desire and desperation. The low voice repeating "jaana" over and over again as if in disbelief that she exists, that she is his. But now all that remains is this madness – so she runs.

It finishes almost as soon as it starts, almost as if it never happened. But for the bruises, nothing remains. She stood on her terrace later that night, nursing Malika's wounded face with soft, sure hands. Nothing is said. They stand there, watching a nation eat itself.

Aaliya jerks out of the memory, terrified. Adam stands stall next to her, blocking out the feeble sun. He smiles at her and pulls a guitar out of the case he has carried on his back. She goes back to reading. Later, after they kiss, he tells her of his heartbreak – and she listens, enraptured by how clean the story sounds. There is no blood on the streets in his story, there is no immediate tilting and ending of a world. It was a clean break, as if hearts in this part of the world were made of glass. He seems genuinely hurt though, and she tries to empathize but fails. It seems to her like a fairytale. Like a French film she saw lying on her mother's diwan a lifetime ago where summer seemed eternal even as seasons changed – and love and heartbreak were both soft pinches rather than sharp, blinding pain that she knew them to be. She left after that summer. Her professor said, "Leave, go anywhere but here – don't look back." If she was honest with herself – she did not have any trouble leaving Delhi behind. Maybe she hadn't stopped running since she had heard Malika's voice commanding her to.

But she always looked back. She no longer recognized whether it was nostalgia or morbid curiosity that made her look.

"Have you heard this song by The Beatles?" Adam's voice pulls her back. She hasn't, but she hesitates to admit the gap in her knowledge. It sounds vaguely Indian, and she suspects that is why he is playing it. She is used to

this now; the way people try to hint to her about their vague knowledge of her heritage. She supposes she should be grateful – it is a way to be included. She shakes her head in a gesture suggesting a no, and he launches into a story about the band and their visit to India. She half listens, her gaze caught upon the little girl with the peeling flesh and black eyes staring at her from behind a tree in the distance. She hesitates, and then smiles at the girl. Maybe one day Aaliya will turn her full attention to the little girl haunting her. Maybe one day she will disentangle the tentacle that is still wrapped around her heart. Perhaps she will even decipher the physics and biology of her pet black hole. Then again, maybe the girl will never leave. Maybe she will always carry Delhi around her neck like an albatross. But, for now, there is a boy with soft, white skin and kind eyes wanting to know her. For now, there is music – that has now progressed to John McLaughlin and Zakir Hussain's project together. For now, there is sunlight – however little. And that, for now, is enough.

Vision on a Necklace *Harsimran Juneja*

Far Away *Antonia Giordano*

Fugue State

Natasha Wolkwitz

The lamplights faded i'm feeling

stoic hand to the stove
and stealing its speckled

rapture, bubblegum
in your sandwich, quick flips and fawning

and beating around the bush before falling.
It’s a cool looking contrast, an iron flicker and a cup

for decor. The black lasting
round is banished and bad. “I can’t

help the stare,” she says.
I run deep silver. Green sips

like khaki are covered and running
down me like a surrender. White flag

falling like it understands
the tone and I run deeper.

/when reading an excellent gay poem on the internet/

Emma Loomis-Amrhein

the translation conferred by
a backslash on the page as a caesura denotes
two things: one, that slashes may only conditionally exist,
as indicators of predicated breath,
or concretely as themselves,
more often in edgy/concrete poems,
and two, that i did not
until recently
have any grip on understanding my desire to be enjambed, as in i
would like
for my predicated breath to be taken away again and
again til morning
for you to surprise me like
wind from lungs on a cliffside like
sunrise on Saturday like
betony in may like
Sandhills thundering for
the thrumming of the light of the moon like
the moon of your ass walking to the kitchen for water for

pause(/)

the difference between a masculine caesura and a feminine
caesura being defined by
the stress in what was said
says everything about how transition happens
line to line
body to body
self to self
trauma to trauma
liberation to liberation

binary to fullness
touchstone to barometer to do you
feel the lightning coming
too

/(come back)

i want to be had
nervous and normal
i want you to straddle my lines
pull me to
tug me fro
read me
for all my convention and metaphor
taste me
for all my argot and yearning
keep me
for i am all moony and moonlit for you
naked in our bed
fully breathless
ready to be read again and

Sylvia x Me *Basundhara*

Daughter of Cyclones

Jacqueline Parker

Echo Lawson's first memory is of being squished into the bathtub, huddled against her mother under an old mattress hauled in from her brother's bedroom. A stale blend of sweat and her mother's earthy tobacco pressed in on them, mixing with the faux floral aroma of a fallen shampoo bottle, its contents oozing at their feet. Echo's mother hugged her fiercely in a way she never had or would again and whispered a song into her daughter's ear.

The banshee wind whistled outside. At eight years old, she had never heard something sound so hollow and alive and terrifying. The whole house trembled, and Echo imagined they were being lifted into the tornado's terrible eye.

Two towns away, a splinter storm descended upon a baseball field where Echo's father and brother were gearing up to pummel the Pitman Patriots. According to a survivor, her brother's team was up three with bases loaded when the sky turned a mesmerizing shade of emerald. Wind kicked up so high the ball sailed way past the fence. Would've been a home run.

Not much was retrieved from the rubble, and most of what remained they left behind. The storm had stolen artifacts of their lives, transplanted shingles and siding across the tired town of Hillsboro, but it left them.

Only one picture of the family as a complete unit was found—one taken in front of the oak tree that had landed inches from what used to be the front porch. Echo picked the photo out of the debris while her mother stood at the open bathroom door with her mouth open in awe. Echo collected newfound treasures: a spatula, a keychain of a red guitar, half of a friendship heart necklace, a water-logged pencil with a star eraser. Everything was a fresh discovery.

Sadie Lawson curated the rest of her life very carefully after that. Together they shared a two-room apartment with thrifted furniture on the east side of town, far from the home that used to be theirs. They lived as makeshift minimalists—forced by memory to eschew anything extra they might miss should disaster strike twice.

A second tornado never came. At least, not in the way they expected.

It was a slow slide down the bottle for Sadie Lawson, but when she hit the bottom she stayed there. It wasn't obvious at first, her stutter-steps with sobriety. Young Echo loved the carefree spirit her mother exhibited after a few beers. Exuberant and spontaneous, she'd flail around their apartment living room to Stevie Nicks and let Echo eat ice cream for dinner. This version of her mother sang day and night, her lilting soprano rising and falling with the melodies, urging Echo to join in.

Later, the warble in her mother's voice was less inviting. All of a sudden Sadie would gosilent and fall into a memory. She'd sit with it until venom

simmered to the surface and bubbled out, caustic and melancholy. It didn't matter that they lived through the same event; Sadie's grief scorched everything.

One afternoon Echo returned home from school and found her mother on the couch, her head propped up with a flat, tired pillow. On the coffee table beside her, a rocks glass of whiskey and a pack of Marlboros. The bottle of Jack was newly purchased, half gone. Blue-gray light from the television flashed against her mother's skin, illuminating streaks of dried tears.

"You don't know what it's like to have your whole life ripped away," she said to Echo. "You were just a kid. You don't remember. I had everything taken from me."

Echo wasn't in the mood to protest. It was exhausting enough to be a teenager, let alone a ghost. She smoothed her mother's tangled mess of curls while the woman sobbed, too drunk and blind to see that something—someone—still remained.

In the apartment where Echo grew up, the late Sadie Lawson's presence lingers, a miasma of depression thick as cigarette smoke. Echo wanders through the dark rooms, picking things up and putting them down. An old newspaper with coupons cut from grocery flyers. Cup of water with greasy film around the rim. Opened tube of Carmex on the counter, its red cap half under the blackened toaster oven. Empty beer bottles everywhere, most turned into ashtrays. She pictures her mother swaying through the living room chain-smoking, peppering the furniture with gray ash.

In the kitchen, Echo finds cleaning supplies in a cabinet and patrols the empty house. She goes room by room, unearthing pieces of her mother hidden in corners, under piles of bills, in the folds of sheets and clothes.

It takes three days. She's hauled thirteen trash bags to the dumpster; emptied the fridge of mold colonies; scoured the kitchen tile; vacuumed generations of dust bunnies; watered the patient fern; scrubbed the toilet; opened the windows and watched the stagnant air slip out. Her skin is white and dry and chemical raw.

She washes her hair and body twice with the same wisteria-scented shampoo her mother always used. Hot water runs down her body until her skin is pink and numb. Even though she's cleaned the bathroom, buildup still colors the grout between the tiles: jaundice yellow, Pepto pink, six-feet-under brown.

It's not the same bathtub, but the memory's enough. Echo digs her nails into her scalp and screams.

At the Tilted Magpie, an older guy with a salt-and-pepper beard sound checks in the corner. Echo walks past him and instinctively rubs her thumb

over the pads of her fingers. It's been too long since she's played.

"Well, well, look who it is." The bartender, Carl, leans over the bar and tousles her hair. Creases line his forehead like roads on a map, but his teeth are perfect rows of white. There's a weariness in his eyes now. Still, he looks good.

"Sorry to hear about Sadie."

"Appreciate that," she says.

"Glad you came in. Thought you might've forgotten about me." Carl grins and rubs his chin.

"Never."

She could extend her fingers and touch him if she wanted to, and part of her does, though she knows better. Whatever she and Carl could have exists in an alternate universe where she stays here and forges little dreams instead of big ones. It's a nice life, what they might build, but it's not hers. Even if her city life is getting old hat, she's not sure she could leave it.

Carl passes her a bowl of pretzels. "In town long?"

Echo reaches for one, then another. "I've been here three days so... too long already."

"Oh stop. This place ain't all bad. Besides, it'd be nice to have you around for a while. I have some openings if you're looking to play."

"I don't do that anymore."

"Why the hell not?" Carl looks genuinely offended.

"Singing don't pay the bills."

"Y'ain't got love for it anymore?"

Echo shrugs and looks toward the musician in the corner. She remembers playing for a crowd: stage lights warm on her face, hungry silhouettes staring back at her eager for one more song. Playing, singing, it's always been about love. She stopped because she ran out of love to give.

Among Sadie Lawson's possessions, Echo retains enough to fit inside one small cardboard box.

There is her mother's oversized black sweater pilling around the collar and under the armpits. Echo fingers the seams where her mother has sewn it back together with mismatched yarn.

A collection of cheap costume earrings. Multicolor beaded ones, the flimsy wire bent. Gold hoops nearly ripped from her earlobe in a brawl, never to be worn again while drinking. Turquoise teardrops from the day the storm came. Bulbous, delicate pearls Echo bought for Sadie's sobriety celebration. Metal tarnished. Missing backs. Lonely earrings searching for mates.

Parched houseplants. A ceramic Christmas tree with colorful lights. A blue and gold AA token marking 100 tiny steps. Echo tosses the chip up and

down, watching the sunlight glint off the edge.

She misses a catch and the token rolls under the bed next to an overlooked shoebox. She sifts through the items like rubble. Playbills and open mic flyers. A glued macaroni heart. Show posters with Echo's name so small under headlining acts it might as well be microscopic. Echo's whole life, her persistence of presence, cataloged by the one person by whom Echo fought to be seen.

The man on the platform taps the mic and picks a string on his guitar. His movements are practiced and thoughtful, assessing the small crowd before clearing his throat.

"Evening folks. Only one half of Musketpony tonight, so I guess I'm just Musket. Or pony. Take your pick."

A few people in the audience laugh. He starts with lowkey, humorous songs about whiskey and dogs and fields, typical country stuff. Then he shifts, flies into a few bars and holds notes that reverberate throughout the room. Something in his voice comes from a place deep within, like he shot his hand into the earth and reached and reached until he pulled out the roots of sorrow.

"Who's this guy? He was here last night, too."

Carl passes her a beer and whiskey. "Jim. Regular staple. Lost his partner not long ago."

"The musket or the pony half?"

"The Sadie Lawson half."

Echo doesn't want to feel anything but, despite her best efforts, she does. They didn't talk much, but she figured her mother might have brought up her music once or twice. The knowledge is sour in her mouth, a betrayal. It's that, and the damn box of mementos, the army of bottles on the countertop, sweat-stained sheets and dusty memories so old they creak like a rusted weathervane. She takes the shot and signals for another.

Almost an hour's gone by before Jim stops for a break. The two inches of beer left in Echo's bottle, room temp and flat, aren't worth drinking. It's possible she doesn't need another drink, but she wants one nonetheless.

"How you getting home?" Carl narrows his eyes and holds the whiskey over her glass, not filling it up. Still some left at the bottom anyway.

"How are you getting home?" Echo laughs at herself and turns to Jim, who's seated two stools down. "Some great playing there, Jim Pony. Real... deep shit."

Jim raises his beer and nods. "Thanks. Little better with my partner but she's—"

"Dead?"

Positioned between them is Carl, wringing his hands on a bar towel, looking sheepish and tense. "Jim, this here is Echo. Sadie's girl."

The grimace on Jim's face tightens, then it's awash with sympathy. "I'm sorry. She was a good woman."

Echo scoffs as she brings the glass to her lips. She misses and clacks the rim against her teeth instead, spilling what remains of the whiskey down her shirt. "No, she wasn't."

Carl slides the rocks glass away from Echo and replaces it with a Coke. "Maybe it's time we—"

"How long did you play together." It's not a question. Alcohol has made Echo brave and this man, this Jim character, seems to have some insight to her mother she doesn't.

"Few years."

There's a sharp feeling in her jaw and her saliva is warm, like she's about to throw up or cry. Maybe both.

"Couldn't play a dang instrument, but her voice. Nothing like it."

Echo nods, smiles a little. "Yeah. She coulda been something."

"She was something. Don't get me wrong, Sadie had her faults. First time I met her, I near booted her off the stage — came up all swaying and mumbling — but then Sadie just... transformed. It was like all the pain and sadness she was storing came pouring out. Pinned people to their seats, that's how powerful she was. Near forgot the chords to my own song." There's a wistfulness in Jim's eyes Echo can't pin down. It looks something like love.

Echo feels a soggy pretzel bit stuck in a molar and probes it with her tongue. "Glad someone got to see a good side of her. I sure as shit didn't."

"If only we could change the past. I'm sure she'd have done it different."

"Well, Jim." Echo leans in over the empty stool next to her. "I sure appreciate you saying that, but I would strongly disagree. My mother was a males—maestro—mallestr—"

"Maelstrom?"

"Yup, one of those. All she ever cared about was making her pain go away and she forgot about everything else in the process, including me. Stuck in that goddamn bathtub for the last twenty years. She could've changed, but she didn't. Know what I think?"

"Hmm?"

"I think she wishes that storm had just—phloof!—taken her away with the rest of 'em."

Jim stands and squeezes her shoulder gently. "Some of us have a darkness inside too big to name. I'm sorry for your loss."

There are a lot of things to be sorry for, she thinks, but her mother isn't one of them. For someone who'd been slowly killing herself over decades, perhaps Sadie Lawson is finally at peace. She wants to tell Jim she's sorry too, but she can't seem to find the words. By the time she does, Jim's back on the stage singing a jangling ballad about getting lost and finding his way home.

Carl pushes the Coke closer to her and she stares as the bubbles wiggle their way to the surface and spasm in fizzy fits.

"Jim lost someone, too," he says. "Heck, so did I. We all loved your mom."

Echo rolls her eyes not because what Carl says is wrong, but because he's right. The hitch in her throat expands and her hands go up. "Goddamnit, I did, too. I fucking loved her. Why'd she have to go and—" Echo swallows, fights back tears. "Why couldn't she just love me?"

The music stops and Carl looks toward the stage where Jim is clipping a capo to the fretboard of his guitar. It takes only a few chords to know the song and it's one Echo knows well.

Jim smiles when she reaches the stage, as if he knew all along that this was her song, like he was waiting to play it with her. It doesn't matter if she hasn't heard it in years, she knows the words; they are etched in her bones.

If she closes her eyes, Echo will break under her mother's embrace. Wisteria shampoo will puddle at her feet. Otherworldly wind will uproot trees and mailboxes and cars.

And she does close them, for just a moment. She's a child and her mother's warm, calming voice is in her ear as she whispers the words to a song Echo has carried her whole life.

She grips the mic stand to keep her hands from shaking. When the knot inside her unravels, Echo opens her mouth and sings.

- inspired by "I Wish I Was the Moon" and Middle Cyclone*, both by Neko Case -*

I don’t have my mother’s eyes *Sophie Schweitzer*

Katherine Carlyle: A Quiz

tw: sexual violence

Andrea Eaker

1. My name is Katherine Carlyle. When my story begins, I am...
   A. In prologue: a fertilized embryo, frozen for eight years. Eight years in the cold and dark, waiting to be thawed and born.
   B. At chapter one: 19 years old, living in Rome. In a few pages, I'll have a one-afternoon stand with a man I meet in a train station. I am haunted by the eight years before I was thawed. I am haunted by my dead mother. I'm desperate for my father to show that he loves me.

2. I was...
   A. *Made in a small square dish.*
   B. Created by my author (Rupert Thomson).

3. Which of these would you rather experience right now?
   A. Thwarted pleasure: *I sense possible orgasms, but they glide far below the surface like fish in deep water, incurious, unruffled.*
   B. Intense stillness: *It's so quiet that I can hear the blood circling round my body.*

4. (At least one of my) Readers absolutely loved my story, the pace, the language, the evocation of a distraught adolescent girl who believed herself unloved, who went fearlessly after a new perspective. The fact that a 59-year-old man wrote this story from a teenage girl's perspective is:
   A. Irrelevant. Surely we are not all required to write exclusively our own ages, genders, orientations, ethnicities, allergies, proclivities, fetishes, denominations, or affiliations.
   B. A little skeevy, especially when I (Katherine Carlyle) stand naked in front of a mirror, taking in the view.

5. Which of these foods is most enticing? Don't think about eating the food, just hear the words, then feel the words in your mouth.
   A. *Pork escalopes and potatoes in a sour cream sauce*
   B. *Breast of musk duck with glass noodles*
   C. *A scoop of Russian salad, some sliced white bread*
   D. *Tiny cloves of garlic and pink-bellied river fish*

6. A novel should be judged solely on its own merits. The context of any other work by the same writer is irrelevant.

A. True

B. False

7. If you answered true above: does your answer change knowing that my author (Rupert Thomson) also wrote a novel about a professional ballet dancer who was kidnapped and held captive by way of a ring through his pierced penis? Note: This other novel gave (at least one of my) readers the sensation that she was not quite understanding the subtext, which led to conflicting feelings of inadequacy and dislike (meaning: even if she was able to understand the subtext, she probably wouldn't like the story) both of which carried over to her reading of my story's end.

A. My answer stays true

B. My answer switches to false

8. A novel should be judged on its own merits, not on the personal virtues or failings of its author.

A. True. Think about not reading Dickens anymore, because he treated his wife terribly.

B. False. Think about not reading Dickens anymore, because he treated his wife terribly.

9. In which location does the most evocative description of color appear?

A. In Berlin: *the sky is the color of an oyster and has a clamminess as well, a glossy, slightly swollen quality.*

B. Still in Berlin: *the sky is a marbled gray, like the endpapers in an old rare book.*

C. In Ugolgrad: *the mountains loom, their flanks a milky lilac white, like yogurt flavored with forest fruits.*

10. The fact that I, Katherine Carlyle, a self-confirmed hottie, traveled extensively through Europe alone and cohabited with or otherwise accepted generosity from a series of male strangers is...

A. Disturbingly reckless

B. Refreshingly independent

11. The fact that I was not sexually assaulted for the first 284 pages of my book is…

A. Unrealistic.

B. Irrelevant. Not every story has to include sexual assault.

12. Rank the following statements in order of most to least realistic things that would be said by (or about) a young woman?

A. About herself: *Let's just say that I'm experimenting with coincidence.*

B. Said to her: *If you're not careful you'll get hurt.*

C. About men in general: *You can never guess what lies behind the face a man presents you with.*

D. About a man she's not interested in: *I'd almost rather he tore my shirt off and pushed me down onto the sofa. At least that would be honest.*

E. About her future rapist: *The poor man. He's such a mess. What can I do, though?*

13. My story ends with my rape. I get away from my assailant by hitting him in the head with a convenient dumbbell, then struggle back into my clothes. Based on the description above, which statement is most accurate?

A. This is not realistic. Anyone actually in that situation would run. Maybe pick up her clothes and take them, but she wouldn't stop to put on her clothes, not with her rapist within clutching-distance of her ankles.

B. This is not realistic. Anyone who is pinned on their stomach by an assailant wouldn't be able to swing a dumbbell behind their head with enough force; shoulders aren't built that way.

C. This is not realistic. Anyone in that situation would keep hitting her assailant until she knew he wasn't coming after her, until his face was gone, until his skull was a different shape.

14. My rape is what forces my reversal. It is the incident that spurs me to finally reach out to my father, acknowledging what I've struggled with the whole book: I want to be seen and loved by him. Keeping in mind the context of "rape inspiring knowledge," which of the following Library of Congress index tags for my story is problematic?

A. Self-realization in women – Fiction

B. Self-actualization (Psychology) in women - Fiction

15. For 284 pages I (Katherine Carlyle) have been reckless and impulsive and desperate for love; I have lived in gorgeous prose, in deep and meaningful passages of interiority, and I deserved better. I deserved a chance to be the agent of my own reversal. There was a better way to finish my story than by raping me.

A. True

B. True

C. True

The Magic Is the Wind in Her Hair

Peter Mladinic

Kinuyo Tanaka in Yasujiro Ozu's film,
from 1948, *A Hen in the Wind*
is bedraggled, worn from worry
and caring for a sick child.
In 1930, in Ozu's college comedy dramas
I Flunked, But and *I Graduated, But*
she wears a kimono, her hair plaited,
her long face powdered, painted.

Here she's dressed plainly, as if she's
forever carrying a wicker laundry basket
up and down stairs. Her face is fuller
than in 1930, her cheeks famously
charming. You want to kiss them softly,
they're like roses. She and a friend,
played by Chieko Murata, take a leisurely
hour on sand dunes close to the sea.

We glimpse the water rushing to shore.
It's mostly the two friends sitting, talking
of the past and the future. It's mostly
Tanaka, her still young, haggard, incredibly
sweet face, there with Murata, on the dunes,
tall grasses wavering, wind in her hair,
blowing strands of her long black hair
over her brow, nearer the sun than before
she walked to the top of the dunes. It's that
moment, lots of talk of the past, a little
of what might be, out close to sea, the wind

in her hair, before her small son falls ill,
and recovers and her soldier husband finally
comes home and makes life so her face is
tear-streaked, her steps across a floor
hesitant, her back turned to him
because she was unfaithful. She needed
money, she sold herself and concealed that
but then it came out, as did his raised voice
clenched fist anger that the child started up
in his crib, as if to stay, Don't hit my mother.

Before that strife, Tanaka and Murata
on the dunes, basket of food, and the child
just over the hill, scampered near the slate
shore, his footprints in wet sand, the wind
churned the sea and blew through her hair.

The trouble of compromising with a loose tooth *Haleigh Givens*

Ghost Fields

Annette Sisson

On an early drive to Dublin,
black fields of turned soil

exhale whiffs of steam. The mist
collects into sheets, thins to silver

spires. Is this how the body expels
the ghost — pores releasing vapor

into morning haze? Last night
a choir of teenagers sang Rutter's

Gaelic Blessing for the St. Patrick's Day
banquet. The anthem's merging parts

lifted the chapel's rafters, the singers'
airy tones blending with memory,

their voices curling like extravagant coils
of smoke. The closing harmonies twist

and collide, tearing at last through a gate
that opens to meadow and daybreak.

Now countryside streaks past
windowpane, sheaves of steam catch

the shine over fields. Rutter's
discordant strains unravel, settle

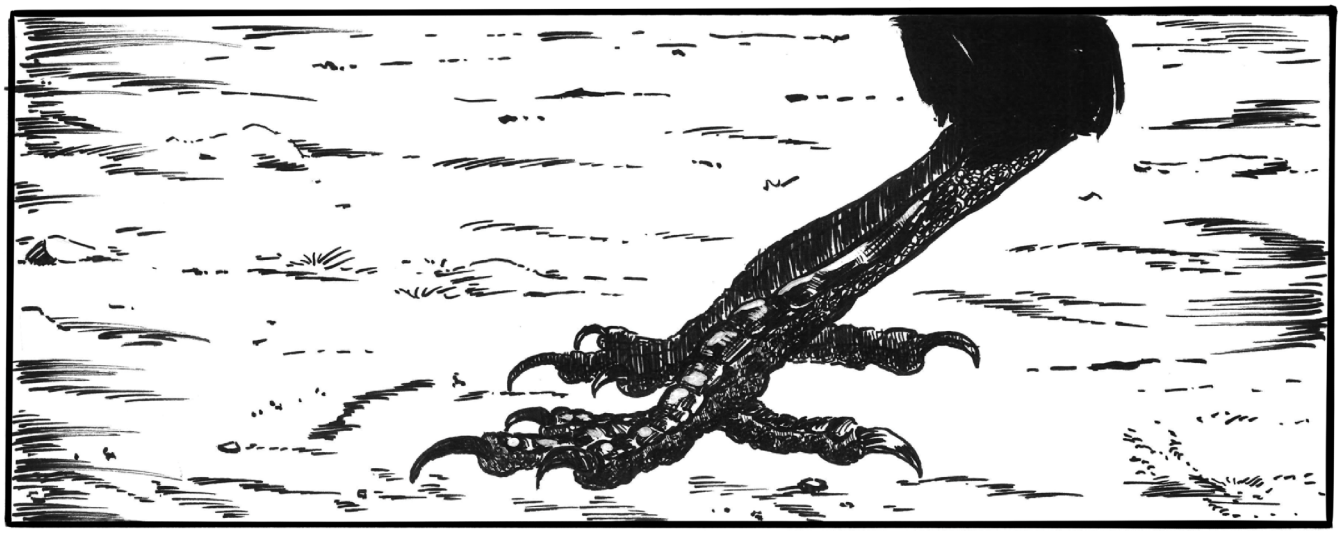
into light — clods, tilled ground,
grey-blue sky, fog rising.

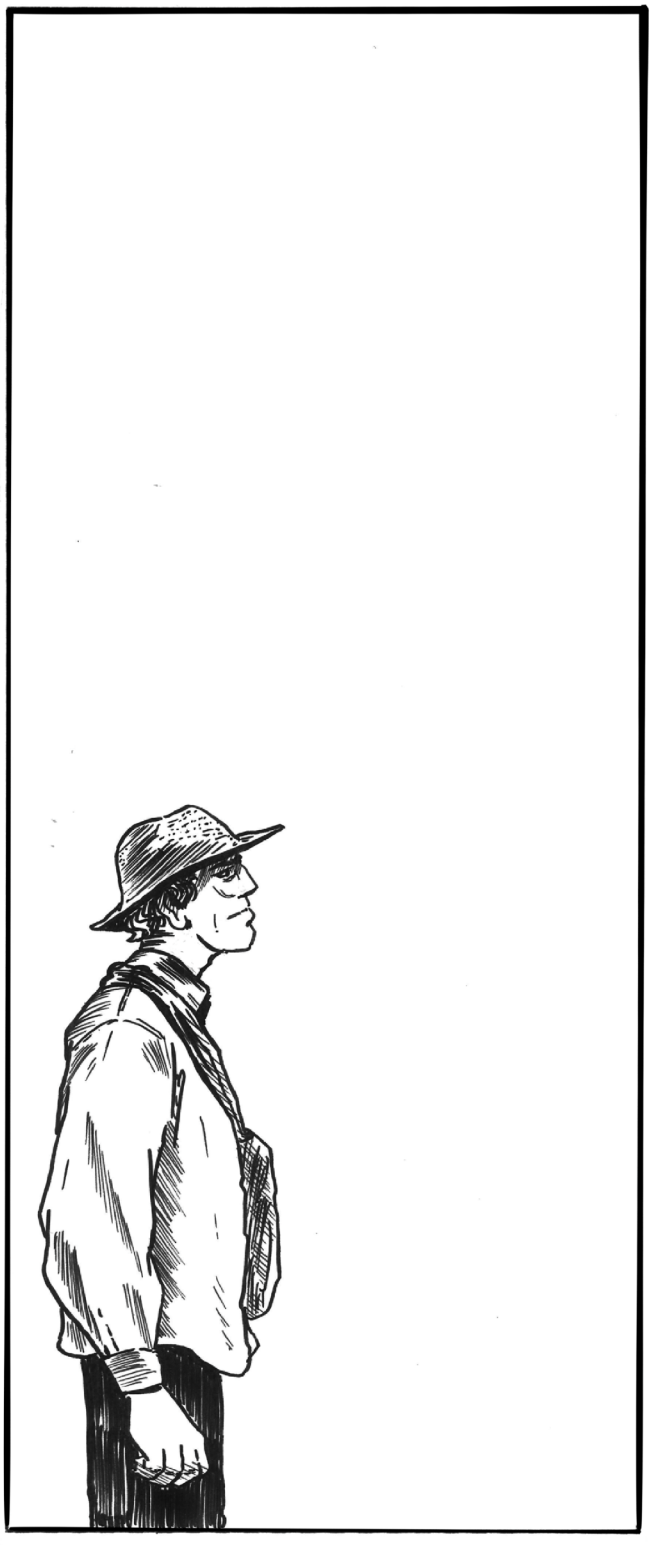
- inspired by "Gaelic Blessing" by John Rutter -

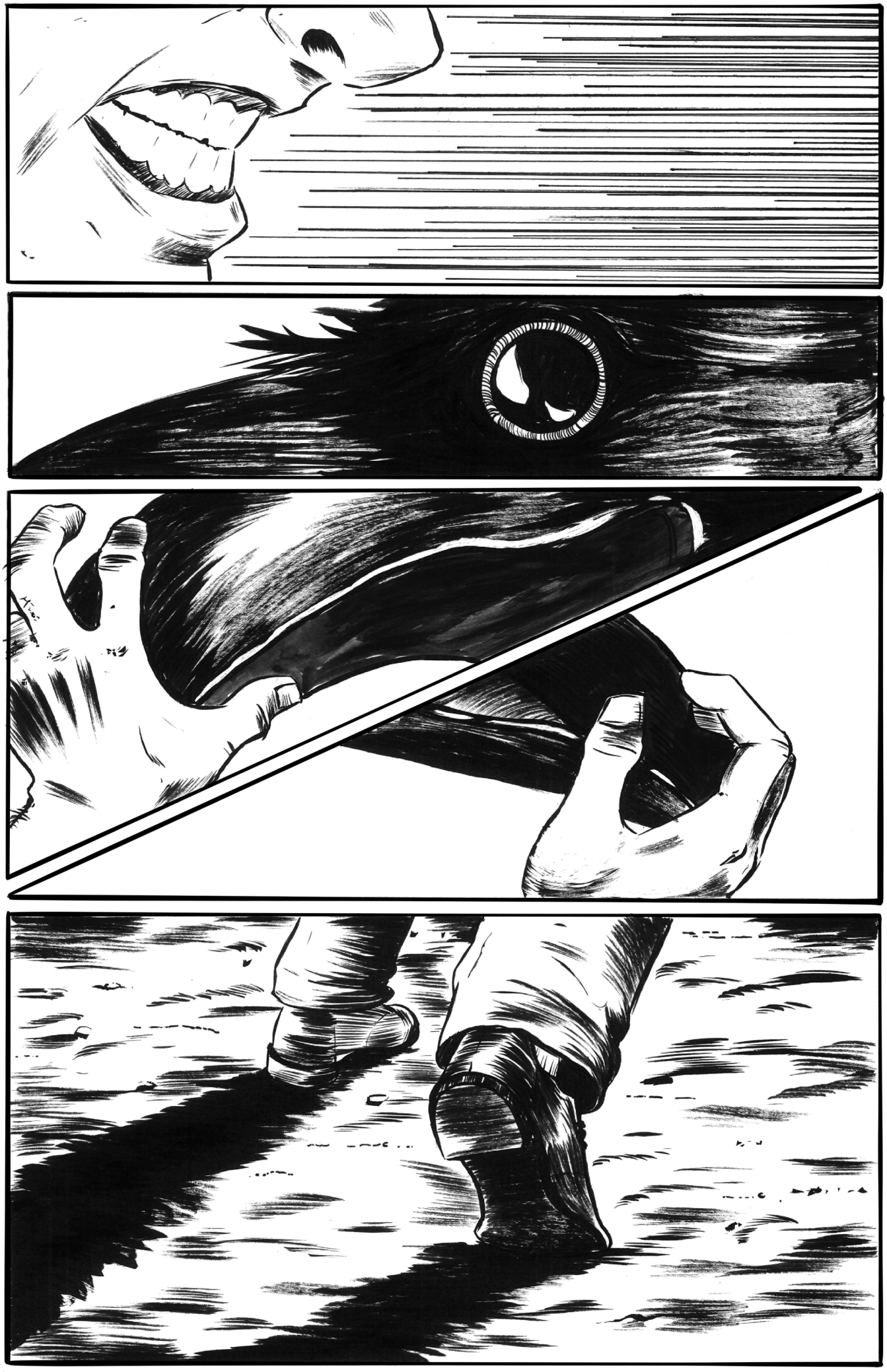
And the Birds Came

Ashton Trujillo

- inspired by Vincent van Gogh and Jean-François Millet -







CRACK

CRACK

to go home *Sonn Ngai*

- inspired by traditions of honoring and Transatlantic travel and the "Walls of Water" series by Maggi Hambling -

For Lake Wedington

Ione Singletary

March 24, 2018

Dear Lake Wedington,

I almost took your exit last time I went home. Were you calling my name? I thought I heard it in the wind. Weird. It's been years. But I still think about you. Do you think about me?

P.S. I'll write again.

March 28, 2018

Dear Lake Wedington,

So what's it like to be so calm all the time? Must be nice. That's what I want to feel like. But I've actually never really felt calm at all—thoughts always clog my brain, come too fast. When I was small, I would climb the ladder of your floating platform and jump from its golf-green turf into the arms of my awaiting dad. Over and over. Disrupting your calm. I'm sorry about that.

P.S. Please write back.

April 15, 2018

Dear Lake,

So I was seeing my psychiatrist the other day. He's worried that I may not be taking my medicine as prescribed. Meaning: I'm back to trying to rationalize the death of my father thirty years ago. Or: I'm lonely and missing human connection so you're standing in. Or: I'm talking to an inanimate object to voice my own thoughts.

If this is the case: Dad, I noticed you haven't written back yet.

April 30, 2018

Dear Metaphor,

I was thinking of Wang Wei today, and I wrote you the following poem:

O, Lake Wedington,
Empty lake, no one in sight,
only the sound of calm waves lapping;
late sunlight glistens on water,
illuminating green moss on bluffs.

What do you think? Is "illuminating" too much? Maybe heavy-handed? Let me know what you think.

June 15, 2018

Dear Ms. Wedington,

Sorry I didn't address you properly. I got a little too comfortable it seems. Maybe too friendly. Don't forget you taunted my daddy with your seductive curves, your hills and valleys, secluded by bluffs and woods, deep in the Ozarks. My daddy loved you like a mistress; you gave him freedom, made him feel young again. He traveled your thighs many times, kept coming back for more. I'm embarrassed to have sent you my little poem. It was only a first draft.

(Is this why you haven't written me back?)

June 20, 2018

Dear Too-Good-To-Write-Back.

Fuck you, Lake. I don't care if you didn't like my poem. That's no excuse for ignoring my letters. I was supposed to be with him that day. He left me behind. I was supposed to be there too.

June 21, 2018

Dear Ms. Lake Wedington,

It's me again. Sorry about that last letter. I'm just messed up about things. I'll forgive you. You forgive me? No harm done. Right?

June 23, 2018

Hey—

Listen. What I was trying to say is this:

When I was a kid, my dad would take me to the lake. We'd swim and play all day.

And I wish I could go back and stand on your raft, carefully keeping my balance, until Daddy would say *Three!* and I'd jump.

- inspired by "For a Recently Discovered Shipwreck at the Bottom of Lake Michigan" by Matthew Olzmann -

Standing in front of Joan Mitchell's painting Hemlock: three different views

Christie Taylor

I

You are standing at a picture window, looking
out into the woods — edges blurred from frost.

It feels frigid cold as masses of white paint
weigh heavy on the frozen boughs, frantic

brushstrokes of cobalt and crimson crisscross
the surface, trying to escape the season as one

vertical dark mark emerges from the chaos
anchoring the mighty hemlock into the earth.

II

You are standing in the middle of the forest,
branches burdened by the gravity of winter.

The falling snow seems to have lost direction —
you take a step backwards to catch your balance.

The air feels silent. Dark icy edges fade away
into confusion.

III

You are standing in a snow globe,
in steely, gray light.
A solemn hemlock tilts towards you.

Suddenly, you tumble against the curved glass,
dizzy wet snow falling all over your face.

Anomaly *Sami Mark*

 - inspired by the traditional method of log cabin quilt piecing -

Sorry, I am a stranger here myself

Bharti Bansal

But I can tell you the best shop for finding mangoes
And the road to the nearby church is actually lonely
Which is why I try to stay in the city
Noise has always been a better prayer
At least it puts me to sleep
A cat sleeps always by the front tyre of an old Maruti car
Only getting up to eat whatever is given to her
But this is the only way to exist here
You feed on the pieces of love
And believe you are needed here
Some will call it resilience
Some, just pure audacity to believe that you still matter
But all of us eventually will search for home
And nobody will ever reach it
But believe me when I say this
Of all the days I have lived here
I was the happiest when I could sleep as it rained.

Red Women

Jordan Hanson

I.
Every night
We return to
The ritual

Behind red curtains,
In a room lit dimly
By flames.

I've learned to lean
Into the pull
Of simple, daily pain.

Tilting my head back,
Endurance
My only chore

Before she returns the comb
To the table, leaving me
Untangled to sleep.

II.
Cyclical fever dream:
She reclines in the chair
And I reach for the comb

And her flaming hair.
My blistered, red fingers
Tremble with each stroke

But I am still, I hold
The flames calmly.
If there is a hint

Of singed flesh among
The heady haze of her hair
Only I can smell it.

I finish the task,
Return the ritual comb,
Leave for other chores.

The Happiness Machine *Deonna Janone*

A Shimmering Cup

Ronan Hart

The mountain is throwing a tantrum.

The path behind, which began as a gentle incline of stones laid flat, has melted into a mess of upturned rocks and deceitful shale. The ground to the south falls away to a cragged, curving chasm, the earth itself cracking a heinous grin of broken, razor teeth. In the eastern distance, early evening lights lining the streets of the town at the foot of the mountain flicker through the roiling mists, a shimmering dream of an oasis upon a desert horizon; refuge only a few miles removed, totally out of reach.

It's too late to turn back.

A boulder standing ahead, shaped just so, calls to mind the crone who'd stood outside the last house before the path, her hunched back and hooked nose, the crease etched into her brow, the tight, thin lips.

She never said a word.

She didn't need to.

She's seen it before. Self-belief. Pride. Hubris.

She'll see it again.

A sheet of grit and sleet slashes across cheeks and ears already raw.

Shelter. Must find shelter.

A silence, huge, conspicuous, defiant towards the raging storm, draws squinting eyes north to the forest. The treeline is a wall, bricks of ancient, gnarled trunks bound together by a quiet more solid than any mortar. Sturdy pine trunks tower up to a thick and dull canopy. Within a few yards, the space between trees fades to a murky darkness, dissolves to pitch. Gusts denied entry to the depths carry the burnt butterscotch scent of resin and sap, the sticky sweetness a potent antidote to the frigid air on the mountainside.

Serpentine fog coils upon the peak,

The chance to ascend fades.

Defeat and ruin (**and such shame)**?

Mist and wind and cutting chill bicker,

Scrabble among themselves.

The forest offers nothing (**and yet**)

(Whose voice was that?)

A flicker! A glimmer.

Light.

There is light in the forest. Deep and distant and tiny, undiscovered bioluminescent life on the floor of a frozen ocean, but unmistakable.

Fire.

A terrible roaring high above, the mountain's fury boiling over. A punchdrunk gust is hurled down from the peak, and sprawling hands plunge into snow and biting scree, trousers tear around bloodied knees, a hood is blown back. Unwilling supplication, bending to breaking. The summit is so close, as magnetic as it ever was. A hand made inarticulate and clumsy by the climb, the cold, and the effort reaches out, waving at the air, fingers unable to close around the onyx-black crown, patched by opalescent snowdrifts.

And yet... no. No, it's impossible. Teeth gritted, tears stinging, the reek of failure and the gleeful titters of victorious doubt. The forest beckons.

It is all right, say the trees. **We know. It's too much. Too hard. The unbearable, suffocating weight of it all.** The forest creaks and groans, the swaying limbs a sympathetic shake of the head that experience offers innocence. **Many have come before, filled with hope and wonder and entitlement. We do not scorn their delusions. We do not judge them. Enter.** The rustling canopy is a church choir heard by a despondent soul passing by. And the thought of light and warmth and shelter...

Yes. Light and heat and shelter, all. And more. A chance. A choice.

Taking a single step from the storm-ravaged path across the threshold into the woods now seems accepting the welcoming embrace of a long-lost friend; how absurd to have thought any other way? As a mewling hyena might desperately grab at a panic-stricken foal before it makes its desperate escape, the mountain lets out a last howl, ripping a red scarf from cringing shoulders. The scarf is hurled through the air, coming to rest in the petrified limbs of a bare, grey tree.

The wind recedes; the vast forest is an immutable tide too great even for waves as mighty as those buffeting gales. The forest floor is uneven, layered in crumbling, rotten detritus. Weary, stiff feet struggle to find sure purchase. Mossy clumps adorn the roots of each tree, forming an alternating carpet of bristly, cracking brown and soft, damp green. The hushed air is no less frigid than the mountainside. There is no movement, no sound of bird or beast. The quiet and the cold and lack of vitality — could this have been a mistake? It calls to mind a —

A crypt? No, certainly not, child. Nothing so morbid. A place of peace. Tranquillity.

Well, if that's what the forest thinks, only a half-wit would argue. There is the distant, disembodied rustle and thump of a clod of snow falling from the canopy to the padded forest floor; ancient timber creaks, bark snaps, leaves swish above as they form a frantic kaleidoscope of green and grey between canopy and sky. It is the echoless symphony of the forest, vital and ancient, in perfect harmony.

Where is the light? Has it gone out? Was it ever there at all? Oh. Oh, no. Lost. A maze. A trap. A mistake. Not like this, not –

Calm, child. Look, here. Through the gap in the branches, there. And the lichen, see how it grows, just so?

Of course. *Of course.* How ludicrous to conflate a mighty and noble forest with something so profane as a manicured hedge maze, a pruned, emasculated labyrinth built by the cunning of man.

There is a path. Look carefully, child. You will see.

And sure enough, pointing first one way and then another, some branches bent just so suggest a direction to be followed. At the base of each tree making up this wooded thoroughfare, patches of moss seem to indicate the way forward like those green glass buoys leading a fisherman to their line.

You have seen the way. Will you follow?

Yes.

Overhead, the storm's distant moaning. Tinder dry bristles and the accumulated debris of a thousand years crack underfoot as the serpentine path winds through the trees, slithering back and forth, false turns appearing only to vanish again in a flurry of leaves and branches. A steadying hand grasping at a bare branch comes away sticky and leaden with the bittersweet scent of leaking sap.

One foot before the next, on and on, endless.

Must find the light.

In the twisting midst of the green, warmth and shelter are alien concepts. Was the fire ever visible in the first place? Underneath the aroma of sap, another stench, ripe, putrid.

This was a mistake.

This place is a trap.

Is it too late to turn back? The storm may yet pass.

There is nothing here, save a slow death.

It is hopeless, it is —

There, child. Ahead. Do you see?

And sure enough, there it is. A squat structure, its splintered wooden walls so covered in lichen and grass, as to appear an eruption of the forest rather than a distinct dwelling. A horsetail of smoke trickles up from a sagging roof of rotten branches and moss toward the canopy. A mouldy flap of bark acts as a door in front of an uneven archway; a rough, squarish opening serves as a window. And in the window, a lambent orange, small, uncertain, but *there*, at last.

Fire.

Yes. Fire. You are here, child.

The rotten door creaks in protest. Inside, a single room, dank and petrichoral; a soft floor of packed earth, the scraped burrow of a hibernating animal into the roots of a great tree. In the middle of the floor, set within a ring of charred stones, the fire, centre of this microscopic universe, casts mercurial tenebrific shadows into the corners.

The heat is meagre, and yet in the circumstances, it is the elemental nectar of sanctuary. Numbed hands grope out, unfeeling fingers heedless of burns and blisters.

A collapse, a crumpling onto the blanket of moss.

Exhaustion washes over a body beyond its limit.

A hacking cough, tears flow unbidden.

Save for the crackle of kindle, stillness, a drift down into turgid sleep.

What do you want? It should be shocking, terrifying — a rasping, croaking voice, speaking aloud in a room previously unoccupied. And yet, it is the most natural thing.

What... do you want? it asks again, in a whisper like the rustle of a mound of leaves disturbed by a late autumn breeze. From one recess of the room where the wall and tree trunk become one writhing mass of roots and bark, there is a cracking. Shadows from the firelight are at play in the corner, but within the shifting darkness there is physical motion.

A form leans forward, a slow, deliberate heft calling to mind the wanton passage of a lumbering bear through a thicket, a racket of snapping twigs and swishing branches and scraping bark. Two deep bronze eyes, tiny pools reflecting the setting sun, emerge from the murk.

You are tired. Bone-tired. So weary in your soul that to speak is pointless. What could you say that would excuse you arriving at this place?

It wears the shape of a man; those golden eyes are so alive, bursting with the knowing of ancient things, dancing and glinting in the murk. It wears a cloak, formed of many layers of the same thin material, shapeless, soiled, frayed at the ends, as a man might. It wears skin the colour of lichen which hangs from two long, knurled arms and pointed shoulders. There is something akin to a mass of hair and beard, although it could very well come apart in clumps of moss at the slightest touch. But it is no man.

You want to reach somewhere.

That broken voice unfurls, blooming into something kindly, the genial laugh of a grandfather nursing a toddler.

A swollen belly sags forth as the thing that is not a man inches closer to the flames. From beneath the musty smoke of the fire, a new aroma.

You know you can't make it.

The smell seeps forth, still rich and earthen on the surface, but failing to conceal an undercurrent stench of vomit and bile, of wood rot and decay. It's so close now, just across the flames. Close enough to reach out and touch that skin, so lined it resembles the splintered, diseased bark.

It's too hard. Of course it is.

There's no nose, no ears. But there is a mouth, twisted into the smile of the grandfather as he pulls a coin from behind the toddler's ear.

You're moving in a dream. A dream that deludes and debilitates. Who could possibly make it alone?

I can. I can make it.

You cannot.

I can. It's just…

You. Cannot.

The voice splinters, feral and dangerous and delighted. The whispering autumn leaves are crackling in the smouldering embers of a fiery ruin.

I can help you.

The smiling mouth splits open into a grin with a creak like bark being stripped from a trunk. A disaster of teeth could be the thorns from a thicket of roses. The cloak ruffles – something is produced, grasped in long hands punctuated by gnarled knuckles. Liquid plays within an earthen cup, glimmering as sunlight glinting in the steam of a waterfall. Supple fingers ending in cracked nails stained brown with what must be decades of dirt lock around the cup, roots taking unyielding purchase within fertile earth.

Drink.

The liquid shimmers, at first golden, then a deep sapphire, emerald green, never coalescing. There's a soft, floral aroma from it, and the mug is warm between frozen fingers. Playful ripples dance upon its surface, though there is no wind nor motion. It would be so easy to drink, something to warm the insides, and yet, just beyond, on the very edge of things, is that stench.

Drink it.

A command masquerading as choice, the mutter of the voice reaching out as a vine creeping over a tree, seductive, inexorable. And really, what choice is there? The journey was so full of hope and potential. Shafts of sunlight through trees, the joyful tumble of a hidden waterfall, a well preserved bridge, the old stone hut used to store ice at the far edges of the village's reach.

And then the mountain awoke.

Drink.

Pretence withers.

There is no choice.

There is no hope.

Another glimpse into the shimmering cup. A foal, hidden, hounded thinks themselves safe at last, venturing from the undergrowth into a tenebristic grove, each footfall precise. With every breath of wind, every rustle, ears flick and eyes dilate; the memory of the cruel laughter of hyenas clear and close. In the middle of the grove, it freezes. It knows. It is too late.

Soundlessly, a lioness, giant even among its own kind, lopes forth with the easy strut afforded an apex predator. The heat of it, the sweat, panting sour breath, stained teeth lining a slavering maw.

DRINK.

The thing that is not a man leans forward, barbed teeth a riot grin, and as the liquid, nectarine sweet and pleasantly warm, washes over a tongue which never thought to taste the like again, the heady aroma is swamped in a vile, putrid fetor, rotting meat and excrement and damp wood. There is a ruffle of a cloak, and two sets of fingers clasp slumped shoulders in a vice grip, roaming, slithering as though roots were sprouting forth, and two golden eyes hover overhead, lustrous, gleaming, lascivious, and the mouth splinters open, distending jaw gaping, and, then, drowning.

A golden sun spotlights the path. Shale scraping underfoot lays down a gentle rhythm for melodies of birdsong and babbling water. A soothing soprano wind carries notes of heather and lavender.

Ahead and above, the mountain rises, peak standing proud, silhouetted against the cloudless cerulean sky, beckoning. This is surely what Mallory meant when he spoke of the climb and visions of the mysterious, ultimate harmony.

A heavenly existence, indeed, George. Onwards, then.

And yet, for a split second, a silence commands attention.

To the north, a pine forest, a brooding tangle, no friend to any climber or lost soul, the wrong way in every sense. A flicker of movement and colour. A tattered garment (a scarf, perhaps?) rises, lifted by the wind from where it is caught in the outstretched branches of a gnarled and petrified tree. Even torn as it is, little more than a washed-out rust-orange rag, it's stark against the quiescent darkness of the treeline.

The tree's limbs are twisted as if clutching out toward the mountaintop. Twig fingers grasp at something forever beyond reach. There's a gnarled pattern in the trunk, warped almost into a face, frozen at the moment of agony, when all hope is lost and the pain and despair flood in from all sides. The rush of icy bleakness, the dark squall of nothing, heaving, surging riptide and...

A shrieking gust tears the scarf away from the tree, whipping it momentarily toward the peak above, before it plummets into the murk of the forest, gone, forever.

The mountain calls.

The path leads up, away from this place.

- inspired by Swamp Thing *comics by Alan Moore, Len Wein, and Bernie Brightson; "Everest" by Public Service Broadcasting; and* The Conquest of Everest*, dir. George Lowe, 1953 -*

Letter to Lady Lazarus *Sai Chi*

- inspired by "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath - 107

Mandelstam Variations

J. M. R. Harrison

1.
The moon shrugged off a cloud;
a star melted in the barrel like salt.
I dipped in my pewter cup, drank
the ice cold winter. A black seed
of bleak disaster, now watered,
grew tendrils, tight across my chest.
My breath hung like death, pure
above the truthful, terrible earth.

2.
A star's beam fell — salt
upon an axe. Who dreamed tears
could be so lovely?

3.
I quarreled with God, raged
until my voice rasped like the whisper
of heaven's glowing rough stars.
After, the earth limned in shadows
more truthful and more terrible than ever.
I could not hide. Silence like a shroud
of new-made cloth woven from black ice
and salty disaster smothered my protests.
Water in the rain barrel held melted stars
but tasted of dust and ash. Bitter, but I drank.
Maybe on that solitary, ice cold winter night
it was the deity's echoing defiant answer.

4.
A padlock makes the gate secure,
but heaven's glowing rough stars fall,

streak the ice cold winter sky—stroke
of an axe, salt in the wound—omens
of disasters over-leaping the fence.

5.
I was washing at night. The yard,
the barrel of rain, my chapped hands,
formed a collage against background
ice cold winter and stars like salt
upon the blade of an axe. I believed
the padlock held the gates secure.
I thought disasters distant, unthreatening.
I was convinced my worst, wiliest foes
were frostbite and creeping hypothermia.
I was wrong.

6.
Padlocked stars, rough against
winter's sky, held heaven's secrets
close, mocked my prying eyes.

7.
Again, the mundane wash at night.
I grow weary of tasks. Not even
the glowing rough stars of heaven
assuage me. Padlocked, stunned,
my pulse and frozen breath wander
further than my aggrieved thoughts.
So fisted, not even an axe, studded
with stars like salt, could free me.

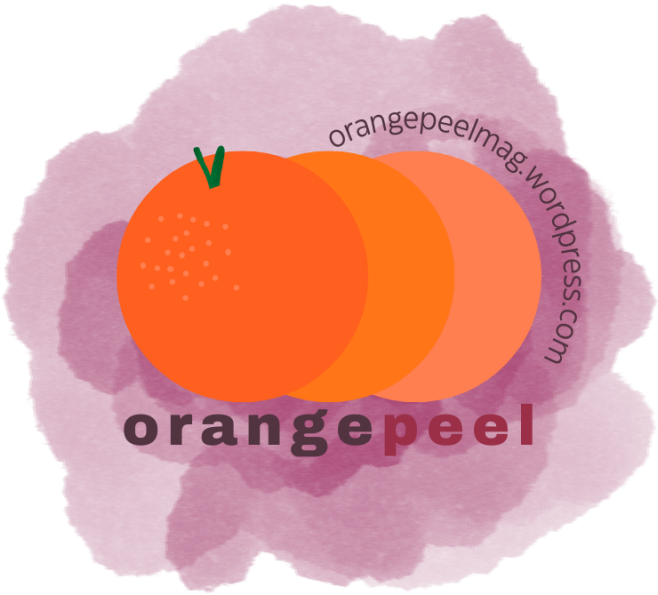
- inspired by "I Was Washing" by Osip Mandelstam
translated by Peter France -

Herons *Rowan*

After James Wright

Marda Messick

James Wright, after you
Wrote at the end of your famous poem
That you wasted your life, I've wanted to rock you
In the hammock of these lines and tell you
The hawk has gone home, and over your head
Full dark blots the bronze butterfly.
I've wanted to say, one wastrel to another,
Rock and rest easy, sweet James.
You are dead now, honored
As if that last line redeems you,
Leaning back in the overtaking night
That will cover me,
After you, James Wright.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