

WINDHOVER



NCSTATE UNIVERSITY

2025

Volume 59

**COVER PHOTO:
BEATING FOR BLOOD
BY DANIEL KNORR
(PAGE 25)**





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Volume 59

2024 AWARDS

COLLEGE MEDIA ASSOCIATION

1st Place: Best Literary Magazine

1st Place: Best Literary Magazine Cover

1st Place: Best Literary Magazine Use of Theme

2nd Place: Best Literary Magazine Table of Contents

3rd Place: Best Literary Magazine Spread

ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS

Finalist: Pacemaker, Literary Arts Magazine

Finalist: Design of the Year, Magazine Cover

4th place: Best of Show Award, Literary Arts Magazine

6th place: People's Choice Award

10th place: Best of Show Award, Magazine Design

NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE MEDIA ASSOCIATION

Best of Show: Literary Magazine

1st place: Two-Page Spread

Honorable Mention: Nonfiction

Honorable Mention: Poetry

MISSION

We are NC State's literary and arts magazine, striving to serve the creative community of NC State by annually publishing student art, film, music, poetry, and prose. Our main goals are to provide a welcoming environment for out-of-the-box thought and a platform for artists to display their work.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This edition of *Windhover* is a mirror, and I hope you can see yourself in it.

Before we started book production this year, our leadership staff dove into our archives. Rifling through volumes of *Windhover* from 1964 to 2024, we looked at past volumes to remember where *Windhover's* been and let it drive us toward where we wanted to go. What I saw in those editions was every aspect of humanity—realism, romanticism, laughter, protest—and from that long day in the archives, I knew what Volume 59 would be. I didn't know what the cover would look like or what pieces would be submitted, but I knew that reflecting the extraordinary and devastating range of humanity would be our goal. To me, that's what being a part of *Windhover* is about, what getting to make this book and recognize great art is about. It's a poem's ability to capture what growing up and not feeling right in your skin is like; it's a painting's ability to confront grief and suffering; it's a song's ability to create and sustain community.

We've said since that beginning that we are *Windhover*, but so are you; so is the person who picks up our book, the person who comes to an event, and, of course, the people who worked for hours on end to put these pieces together. Thank you isn't enough, but I'll say it a million times anyway because this book wouldn't exist without these wonderful people. To Tuesday, Will, and Isabella, thank you for dedicating hours to making sure every writer's piece was pored over with love. To Jordan, thank you for ensuring we captured the diversity of mediums and voices on our campus. To Kira, thank you for taking the leap into audio and video and growing it larger than it's ever been. To Cora and Katharine, thank you for every little part of the way this book looks and for the way both of you bring out the best in a stressed-out staff. To Vy, thank you for embracing every random promotional idea and always blowing me away with how they turn out. To Cal, thank you for being willing to pursue any idea, and for occasionally bringing me back down to earth on some of the more outlandish ones. To our volunteers, thank you for believing in us enough to want to be a part of what we're working to accomplish. To our advisors at Student Media (and especially Ray!), thank you for putting trust in us to make something great, and giving us all the tools (and the millions of fliers) to make it happen.

Finally, this book wouldn't exist without you, the person reading this. Thank you for picking up a copy, for seeing all these bright colors, and for wondering what could be inside. There's a Mary Oliver poem in which she gives instructions for living a life: "Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it." This volume of *Windhover* is our way of showing that the community of artists at NC State is paying attention, and telling about it. There are stories here of joy, growth, grief, loss, hope, recovery, and community. I hope you'll sit with them for a moment, give time and feel with and through them, and use them as a bit of connective tissue to be part of the community that's here on campus. We're all growing up together, and we all don't know how to do that right, and this volume of *Windhover* speaks to that the only way we know how: through art. Thank you for reading, and don't forget to go live a story of your own after you close this book.

Happy exploring,

Staff



Josie Headley
Editor In Chief



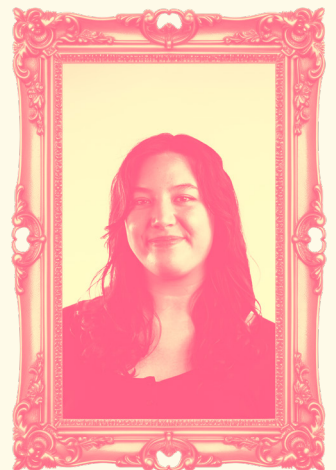
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Normal

KAYLA LARE

My blinds are open,
and I'm awakened by the sunlight
illuminating the T-shirts
scattered on the floor.
I register the birds
chirping outside my window
and I wonder if it's normal—
mourning what's right in front of you.

Nervous about nothing and everything,
I pick up a call from a friend.
Without telling me, she tells me she's scared. I tell her
that's normal, and she asks what that means, and
without telling her, I tell her
that I have no idea.

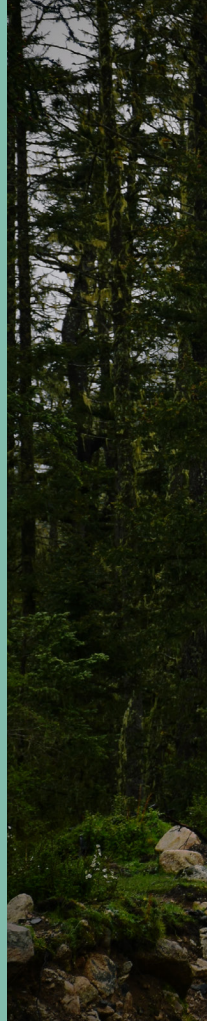
My parents always smile when I enter a room.
Steaming eggs on the table;
three mugs on the counter.
It's a normal Saturday morning,
and I try to bask in a love undeserved,
as I dig away at the guilt
that has buried my gratitude beneath it.

My friends tell me it's normal,
for the butterflies in my stomach
to get lost in my brain.
"What's the worst that can happen?"
And I don't reply.
Not because I have no response,
but because I have twelve.

My dad said that after tragedy, it's normal
to blame yourself for things that you couldn't fix.
Yet still I wonder if it's normal,
to assess and reassess,
to analyze the dominoes' path,
and watch them fall
over,
and over,
and over again.

I wonder if it's normal,
to reorder and regret,
to wonder what-if
over,
and over,
and over again.

I pick up a call from my friend.
Without telling me, she tells me she's changed. I
tell her that's okay, and she asks what that means,
and without telling her, I tell her
that I have no idea.





*Oh Nature,
My Lover*

MINGDUO LIU

*After
Allen Ginsberg's
"Howl"*

EMMA CARTER

For A.G., K.J., R.L.

I.
I did not see my generation's
brightest minds destroyed
by madness, not starving,
sometimes hysterical, but
often naked in the way that I can look
at myself in the raw
mirror, sometimes clothed, always in
the eye, always
pieces of our mothers poking out, always the fingertips
of our father's minds (even if he was touchless). How do we
leave those bits behind? Is there a place to store brothers
and sisters other than in the deep folds of the mind? Deep folds
of the palm? Deep cracks in the nail? Deep holes
in the yard; the dog dug them, all wild fur and ears with
roots flying behind him, left there without a second thought,
just like your sister did for school when she warned
you to seek out a therapist the second your heel clears
the threshold of the new old house, she hopes that
you do
every night before you close your eyes to fall asleep
because
the things our parents gave us cannot be outrun in
our sleep
but only in dreams, maybe nightmares, maybe in
sloping
backyards that end in creeks that flow to lakes and to
tire swings
that nobody will particularly mind if you sit on for a
while,

flinging feet in and out of that long river (so long as
you
dry your feet before going back into that old house)
so long
as you kiss your mother hello so long as you call your
sister
on Tuesdays at 4:03 pm to let her know just how it's
going
and hope that you don't have to hear her wailing
down the hall
from your bunk bed any more or ever again on the
other end of the phone
but she calls from somewhere else is home now, so
it's up to you to climb
the ladder down and find your way to the bathroom
where
there will probably be a soft yellow light.

II.

Who lives in the rolling trolley beneath my old bed?
Who cracks
its knuckles in the darkness between supper and
breakfast? Who
is supposed to help me? Who was supposed to help
my father? And
his father? And his? The ugly black maw of
unforgiveness is only
ever feet away from our children, but who are you to
fight it? What
tools has your mother left you? Her mother left you?
Her mother left
you? How can it be up to me to stop her? To save
her? Can I? Can I? Can I?

III.

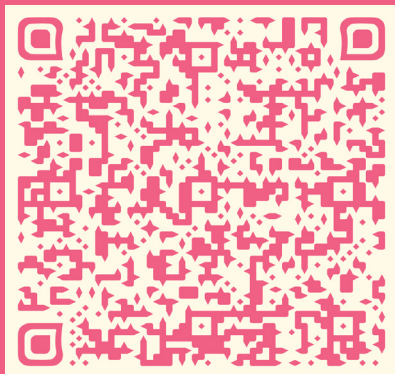
Kimberly! Robert! I'm with you on Brookton
where my hands first saw light
I'm with you on Ashgrove
where our feet bored pits into the shaggy carpet that we felt new
but instead of seeing softness for what it was I found shittiness in
old porcelain
I'm with you on Lancelot
where there is an unacknowledged rage that somehow keeps us
each warm in its way
I'm with you on Huntington
where a sorrow still sits, on its own, but attended to with
gentleness
I'm with you in Elmwood
where your father's father's bones are settled in a box that one day
we all might know once we lay down our fat bags of agony to beat
on into the current of the ceaseless to come

North Carolina, —



Eyes of the Devil

BELL TOWER BLUES



I was a traveler long ago
Tryin' to find me a woman to love
I'm gettin' tired of the ones I know
Asking for guidance from the Lord above

And then a fine lady walked my way
She started talking 'bout nickels and dimes
I didn't know about the tricks she'd play
I didn't know at the time
I didn't know at the time

She's got eyes of the devil
Eyes of the devil babe
She's got eyes of the devil
Eyes of the devil babe

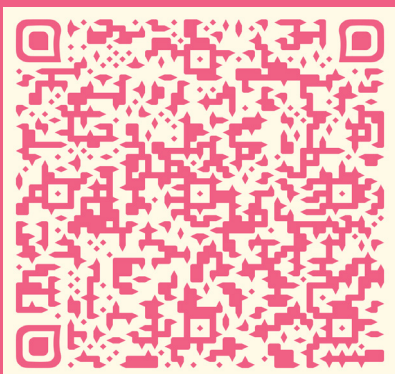
She took away all my material possessions
She even stole my soul
Little did I know that she would teach me a lesson
And cage me in a prison of gold

I didn't know at the time
I didn't know at the time

She's got eyes of the devil
Eyes of the devil babe
Well she got eyes of the devil
Eyes of the devil babe

IN LOVE

JOSEPH SABATINO



MUBBLEGUM

MOVING BOXES

My bones are taking their sentence again
Shouldering their burden with humility
Paying penance to the voice in my head
Giving it space to breathe

You're watching me in this car
It's taking all my strength to speak
But still my words lodge in my throat
A hand of panic to squeeze

Maybe I'll rewrite myself this time for the new year
I say it every time

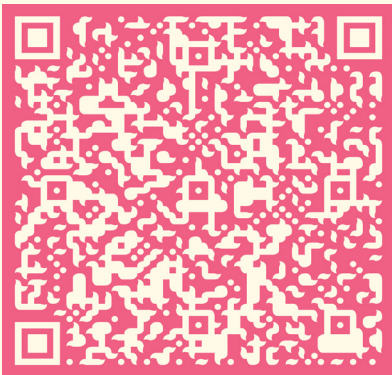
Is living this hard for everyone
Was I born with broken knees
Am I forcing a limp by placing nails beneath my feet

my fears have become my demons
I'm living every regret
and counting my missteps
the boundary's inset
seeing their failures in my face
they say I've stepped out of his sight
but I feel I'm learning to see in the light
And I've always been my chain

Maybe I'll rewrite myself this time for the new year
I say it every time
Tracing lines, try to make out the signs before they smear

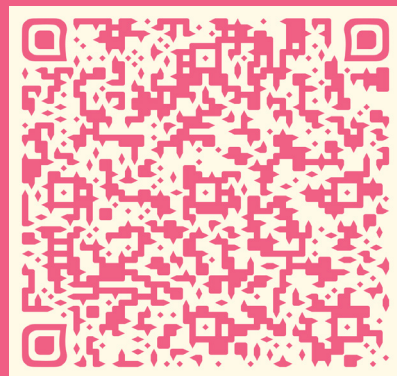
Is living this hard for everyone
Was I born with broken knees
Am I forcing a limp by placing nails beneath my feet

Maybe I'll rewrite myself this time for the new year
I say it every time
Tracing lines, try to make out the signs before they smear



Becoming Creation

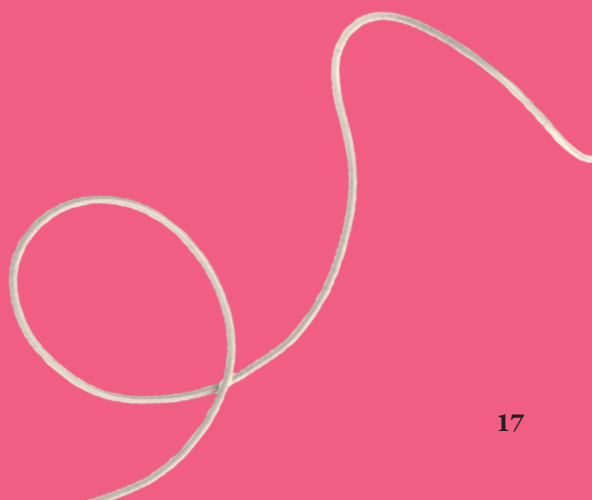
JAYDA MURRAY



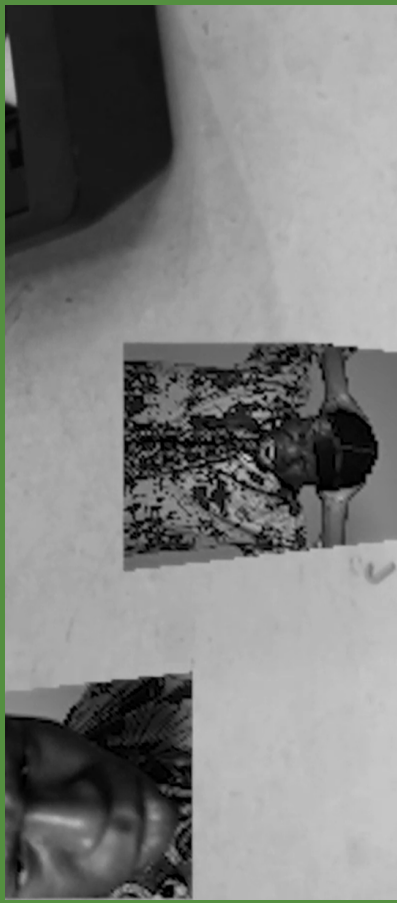
love
passion
prayer
journey

love is a two step figure of my passion is a one way trip to your prayers
aren't a hotline to beeline from your
journey the long way to learnin
how to

taking control of what i can and what i ought to
do with what i was given ima
about to
knock down the walls
and write down some bars
and write down some laws
before i change parts
fill out the clause
this ain't the three wishes
business
no sainty clause or under tree kissin
read solomon chapt 8 verse 4 before we get to that (sheesh)
iss it gettin hawt in here or is that the sound of a crisis evaded
palpitating hearts in here almost like a stroke of genius struck
lightning bolts inside your ears i hope you're listening or waiting for the
sound of what you needed to hear that your



VIEW! DIE OFF





Trigger Warning

AYOMIDE BAYOWA

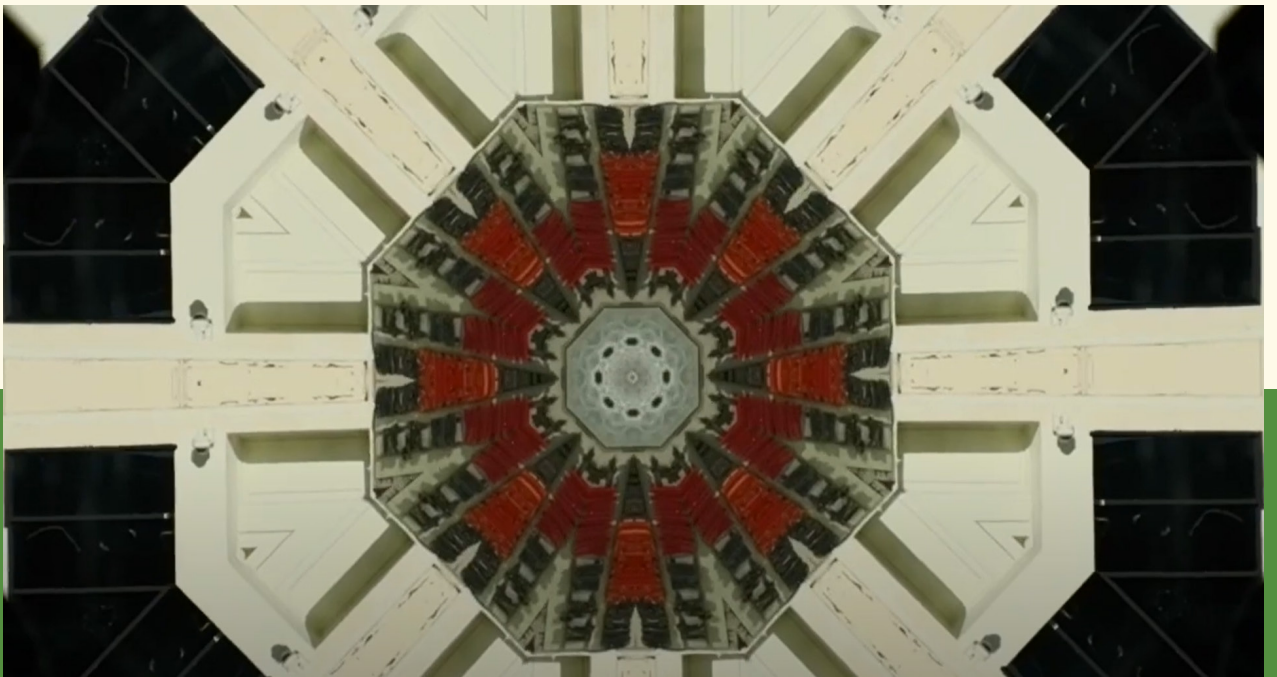




Running Out
MOE GAMEZ



San Diego
ANNA MCPHAUL



ACRID

KRUSHI BANDAM

I've never been a good cook.

there has always been something disobedient in my touch -
a swirling fingertip bound by no god, no amount of ink,
a pattern which doesn't exist - like a brand that has made a home in my skin,
a stamp I leave everywhere I go, one you cannot help but find,
collecting in the edges of your vision – a spectre of half-formed words

how separation loves me; i skim atop you like oil over water; everything
sweet and stained and terrible for me, swishing round my mouth anything
to mask the taste,
betel leaves and red spittle, the gauze of tobacco on a cloudy
night, every moon is a full moon, a mottled reflection on
aluminum as i watch my life boil over on a faraway stove.

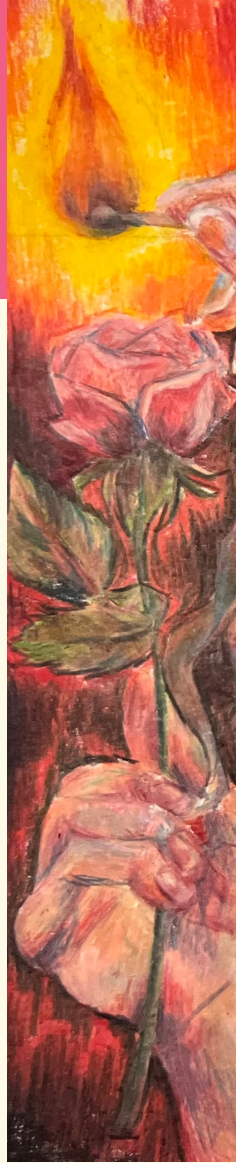
My fingers twitch over the metal dial,
diced. transient? bubbling away under an idle eye
take a sip.

why is it that everything i touch finishes bitter?

i'll stick to an art that won't betray me
(it was born from my head, fully formed, spilling from my lips)
something that staggers onto paper with a mind of its own, a
wish on the body of a bull - bound by limp string,
falling into an unbound spiral,
only read from above,
it is braille on your burnt fingertips,
trying to translate something you will never understand

i'd rather it finish bitter than not at all,
i know our souls will brush knuckles in paradise,
i'll forget your language by then -
i will never run out of paper; and in time,
i'll learn to like the taste.

in heaven, we will wish for nothing at all





Twenty
MOE GAMEZ

STOMACH PROPHET

MEERA BUTALIA

I'm worried. I will love you
too late. When I'm finally breathing
deep enough,
you'll have already known me.

You know the womb well.

It's where we meet,
your bright wide eyes shifting, sifting.
I shiver
entering the wetness
and warmth,
where you sit and shine
with a placental beam. We speak
through red plasma, a gelatinous light
muting everything

It teaches me a more gentle phrasing.
So I say my own name more softly now.
In front of you
it feels like I'm stealing
your language,
one with tongues who deliver
warmer thoughts.
A world of words where birth and death flirt
and speak
and swing

At last the air rushes into me,
belly heavy.
You feel the cycle end,
ready for rebirth.
While I peel
my very last layer.





*Beating for
Blood*

DANIEL KNORR

Deep Water

T. M. CARTER

Content Warning: Violence and Implied Abuse

When Bonnibelle Owens hears that Joseph Ward and Jolene Miller had run off to Jackson to become Mr. and Mrs. Ward, she breaks the rusted padlock on the barn's tool closet and steals her grandfather's 1873 Winchester rifle.

He'd gotten it a few decades back while off on commission in the west, back when Dallas city was the Dallas frontier, and had planned on going back someday to wield it like a real rancher. For lack of grandsons, he'd taught his granddaughter how to shoot it. She's never been more grateful for his lessons as she dons his hand-me-downs and hops a southbound train.

Bonnie hates Jackson. She hates Mississippi. It's a lousy, good-for-nothing state full of mud and mosquitoes and stupid laws about marriage. Maybe some people *shouldn't* be allowed to go off and get married all willy-nilly. Maybe some people should stay where they were born and raised, like proper, and marry sweet girls from their hometowns in the mountains. Maybe some people should get a bullet in the mouth for breaking promises.

She's sorry for thinking this. She's sorry for meaning it, meaning it all along the Ward's trail, all until this moment.

Bonnie leaves her rifle propped on the porch of the Ward's secluded riverside shack, too frightened and remorseful to use it after lugging it and her murderous intentions all the way from Appalachia. She decides that she wants to talk to Joseph before shooting his wife. Their grandfathers had gone west together, all those years ago. Raised them together. She owes him at least this.

This is a mistake. Men don't like it when their women are called two-timing, ten-cent Memphis whores, and Joseph informs her so enthusiastically, forcefully, bru-

tally. He always was stronger than her; ploughman's shoulders and ploughman's hands. Half-way to the door, he catches her.

With a deafening bang, Joseph jerks, head wrenching at the incorrect angle, and his fingers slip loose from their bruising grasp around her throat. Blood splatters thickly across the wall, cupboard, and Bonnie's face. She flinches, eyes screwed shut. Joseph thuds to the floor.

Bonnie's blood roars in her ears. Something warm and coppery is dripping into the corner of her mouth and she adamantly refuses to consider what it is. The tang of gunsmoke is heavy in the silence, pressing against her pounding temples, curling inside her lungs and lingering.

"Bonnie," Jolene says, voice hoarse.

Bonnie shakes her head.

"Belle, sugar, look at me."

For a moment, Bonnie can't recall how to open her eyes. When she finally works it out, the sunlight slicing in through the open windows is blinding. Motes of dust drift in the golden rays. White lace curtains sway gently in a light, airy breeze. Blood drips in soft, steady patters off the cupboard.

In the doorway, Jolene stands, Bonnie's rifle clutched with white knuckles. Her hair falls loose from its braid and a dark bruise colors one high cheekbone, making Bonnie's blood run cold. She's pale and as skittish as a spooked horse. Bonnie longs to rush over to her, wrap her arms around her, and hold her firm and close until they both stop shaking. There's something laying on the floor that she can't bear to look at, though, and it blocks her path.

All Bonnie can say is: "You married him. You runtoff and married him, after everything."

Jolene responds, "He's got five thousand paper dollars in a shoebox beneath the bed."

"I still love you," Bonnie admits immediately. "I came all this way just for you."

Jolene tosses the empty rifle onto the floor with a clatter and steps over Joseph. She looks like an angel in her white sundress. Her voice trembles, and it's even more lovely than Bonnie remembers.

"He bragged about it, before we—before. That's why I went." Jolene stands before her now, the most perfect thing Bonnie's ever seen, and every murderous thought she's had in the last week flashes through her mind. Jolene continues, "I knew I had to—if I could find a place for us. If I could find a way to make it all ours..."

"You could've told me."

"I'm sorry, Belle. We needed the money. I needed a man."

"I'll be your man." She's fragile. Bonnie decides that if Jolene touches her, then, she will shatter into pieces. She will never be able to put herself back together. "How? How'd he get the money?"

"The land his and your grandfathers had out near Dallas. Old Ward had been sitting on the deed for decades; by the time Joseph went to pawn it off, it was selling nearly a hundred

twenty-five per acre. He sold all of it. It's at least half yours, by rights."

Five thousand dollars. Not a fortune. Not enough to live on forever. Still enough to buy her childhood home in North Carolina many times over.

Jolene watches her, chewing her lip. Bonnie knows what she's waiting for, the dreaded question, the chasm yawning between them: *How can I ever trust you again?*

Rather than ask what she already knows the answer to—the answer lying in a growing pool of red at their feet, the answer splattered across the wall—Bonnie stands placidly as Jolene reaches down and pulls Joseph's handkerchief from his pocket, gently wiping Bonnie's face clean. Her touch lingers on the mottled fingerprints beneath Bonnie's jaw. Without a word, she opens the bottom drawer of the cupboard, rifles through the tablecloths folded there, and pulls out a flat, dusty-brown bottle.

Bonnie takes a long pull as it's offered to her, the sickening-sweet bourbon clinging to the back of her throat and soothing her. She tries to laugh—breaking Prohibition seems such a silly thing to worry about now—but no sound comes out, leaving her gaping wordlessly, eyes burning.

They sit silently on the porch steps and finish the bottle. When it's empty, Jolene stands, walks to the edge of the property, and hurls the glass into the river, where it vanishes with a splash. Bonnie is dizzy and flushed and it isn't from the booze, it isn't even from the flashes of pale, freckled legs she's catching from the way Jolene hikes up her skirts and wanders barefoot into the shallows, dappled in gold and green.

She's beautiful. Bonnie forgives her. Bonnie maybe forgave her before ever leaving North Carolina.

"Do you think it's deep enough?" Jolene asks. She watches the spot where her bottle disappeared.

Bonnie stands. She brushes at the reddish-brown staining her grandfather's shirt and tells herself it will all come out in the wash. If it doesn't, she has five thousand dollars to buy a new one with. This knowledge is tinged bitter and heavy.

Carefully, she searches for her voice, coaxing it back to herself like a startled calf. "Do you have a rucksack, Jo? And rope?"

Jolene wades out of the river and shows Bonnie to the shed. Gardening tools. A wheelbarrow. Cordage and a burlap sack. Bonnie takes the last two and asks Jolene to start gathering stones for her. She does so without complaint, brushing her lips softly against Bonnie's cheek before going, piecing murmured promises back together all the while.

The river is cold despite the heat—muddy, fast-flowing, and deep.





OCEAN'S LULLABY
KAELA BELINGON



Alarwao Dudu
AYOMIDE BAYOWA

THE TOPOLOGY OF GRIEF

LIBBIE CURTIS

i search for you in the woods,
overturning rocks
as though you've folded yourself paper thin
and slipped into a geocache
or some other grey facsimile
to make a home far from the sun
resting in the chilled mud
alongside the centipedes.
trees towering overhead
weave a patchwork blanket of shadows
that drape across the ground,
and when i push a rock over to reveal
a mouse skull smashed into a smile,
the branches tighten as though
that darkness will warm the pins and needles
pressing against my fingertips

i gut the geocache,
emptying the plastic carcass
onto the back of my windbreaker,
rummaging through the entrails
of old polaroids and tangled necklaces
as though i can use cleromancy
to create a makeshift map to you;
coordinates spelled out between
the chipped glass deer figurine
and the miniature compass.
its broken needle spins lazily,
guiding me to a place
that no longer exist.

i drown ascending mountains,
cold air pin pricking my lungs
too much resting in the spaces between my bones,
not enough escaping to keep me alive.
i press my hand against my pulse
when i reach the peak
my heartbeat grounding me as
i try to find you from high above,
squinting at the clouds
covering the valley
in swathes of silk and cotton,
much too delicate for the likes of you.
perhaps if i crack open my ribs
i'll finally be able to breathe.

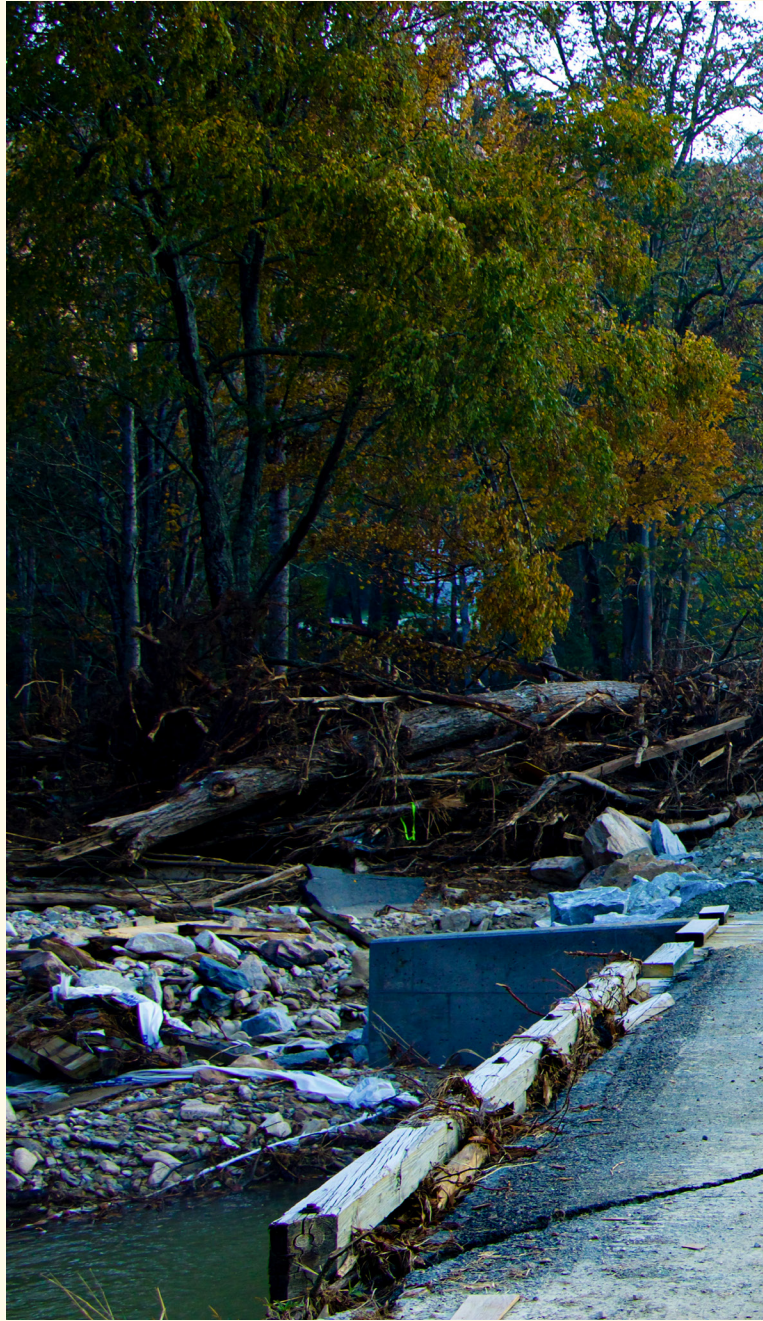
if i use
the needle thin teeth of the skull
to fix the borrowed compass
and swallow a flashlight whole,
will it illuminate the holes in my lungs,
constructing a constellation,
pointing me to you?

A note from the editors:

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene hit North Carolina, particularly impacting the western Appalachian region. The storm caused major flooding and the destruction of homes, businesses, entire towns and lives. Helene put on display the resilience of North Carolina communities and the individuals that inhabit them; it brought to light complex grief, anger, and, eventually, hope. In seeking to be a mirror for the experiences, hopes and frustrations of the NC State student population, we felt it necessary to include this note alongside this striking piece captured in the aftermath of Helene.

A note from the photographer:

I took this picture in Avery County, North Carolina- my home. It's the one place in the whole wide world that I know, without a shadow of a doubt, help is never far, and that the term "stranger" doesn't exist. I'm lucky to be from such people. . . a community that always prevails with a kind of raw strength that can only take root in the heart.



Helene's

EARLY MORNING BLUES

ABBY SCHWEBKE





You are Here
GIULI HOFFMANN

Diverging Diamond Interchange

SAM WILLIAMS

where my Subaru's a blooming
sickle cell, tracing power line ganglia
and joining hematid Hondas in clogging
congested auto arteries— where
popped-blister potholes and orange cone acne
make the neighborhood quite depressing—
years-old pollution, evictions, crushed
Jumex cans left their own impression,
yet air-conditioned rooms with a view
crawl up the landscape's leg, their tissue-
paper walls and upstairs matadors
stomping on four-inch floorboards
make expensive kinds of dereliction—
I try not to mind the city's puberty,
but when I trace seven-lane veins
and pass kudzu-clad Chevys
sat in a ditch with emptied \$7 coffees,
I see remnants of what was here before.



MY GRANDMOTHER CALLS ME TO
WARN ME ABOUT
“*Transgenderis*”

AUDREY FATONE

I want to talk about the time I went to Monterey
to see one of the biggest collections of fish from the Pacific
behind glass, and a docent who must be my grandmother's age
tells me about the California sheephead
a name fitting to its cartoonish forehead & bulbous face
is one the of the many fish who change their sex
she swims next to me, she doesn't know
what it means to be a girl or a boy but
we like to put our labels on fish
“see, there's transgender in nature too!”
the enthusiasm of the docent asks
if the fish is someone like me, of course
as a biologist as human being I know
I want to present this fish to congress
I'll carry her via a rolling tanks
to the house of representatives
and come back in a week as a boy
and of course, later, I'll wheel him to
the door of my grandmother
and ask if she's afraid of fish,
and of course she isn't.
I'll ask if she is afraid of the seasons
when you grew up a girl on the farm
in a home without insulation you said
you wore wool during winter
you went barefoot in spring
looking for morels under walnut trees
burrs on your toes, you welcome
the sun of June, you know change.
You know everything will be okay.

”
M



ORGAN
MEGAN MERSCH

That it began shall never be known

LAURA ROMAN-RANTZ

Everything began and ended here. I've only had the chance to bathe in the island's golden sands a handful of times; its crystallizing grains seep through my fingers and rain down onto the surrounding amber waters. My knees are saturated with bits of coral and leftover skeleton that, over the years of being withered down by the increasing strength of the Atlantic, now find themselves sticking to the pores of my skin. These armored fragments of the dead may as well be my kin—and together, we huddle against one another burning amidst the brine of the breeze, embracing the encumbered silence that is prelude to a hurricane of uncertainty. The sea's wrath, anticipated by those laid long ago, will be cruel—detoxifying the world of its imperial prints. Someday, we will all end up like our prehistoric ancestors who now hug my calves at the waterline; in pieces and shells too polished by nature—constantly advertised.

I empathize; on the mainland, I seek out answers from my parents for these things. I ask, "How were our people like?" just to receive the spit of Columbus' praise in face of Paseo del Morro's tearful gaze. Even today, I still struggle with comprehending the conflicting values previously ascribed to the truths they live by; that, having been established onto these graceful lands for generations, they somehow speak and act as though they had been swept away from our coastal shorelines at fossilized accelerations.

South American descendents. Imposed as indigenous, but stood by their culture. An ancestry fired away like the stellar remnants of stars surging above. *Taino*. I can't believe they never cried for you. Are you here among the ocean's corpses? Have you been poaching woefully upon my shoulders? Would you, too, deduce me as just another one of their soldiers?

The winds of the Earth's rotational axis whisper nothing, and I am left to weep in its forgotten sorrows. Of crashing waves; following the cress moon in its celestial inching further and further away, complicit in their listening as the shepherds continue exercising their glory in exoticizing the bodies of your living—a jaded treasure that they incarcerate my being for faintly bearing. And because your influence within my blood will die when my time has gone, I'll settle my worth with the American conch and lean somberly into its deadened songs until my grief becomes bleached like the corals that gather around me—

—lifeless in their reach.





EMOTION

HENRY O'BRYAN

Content Warning: Body Dysmorphia

I was always one of those gross gummy girls stuck beneath a desk; my body bulging out of seams and bursting from corners. My hair was stringy and smelled of earthworms. My legs were grasslands and untamed gelatin and striped tights from Walmart. And I couldn't figure out my face; it was drawn in Crayon and smeared with grease. It was too jumbled and not smooth enough and it reminded me of those Picasso self-portraits where he's all fucked up.

I was an abomination of gooey, uncontrolled wilderness that I couldn't help but loathe. Because it felt unfair that I had to live with this when I hadn't done anything wrong. I was unfixable and unmanageable and it was undeniably exhausting.

GELATINOUS ENORMITY

STELLA GARRABRANT

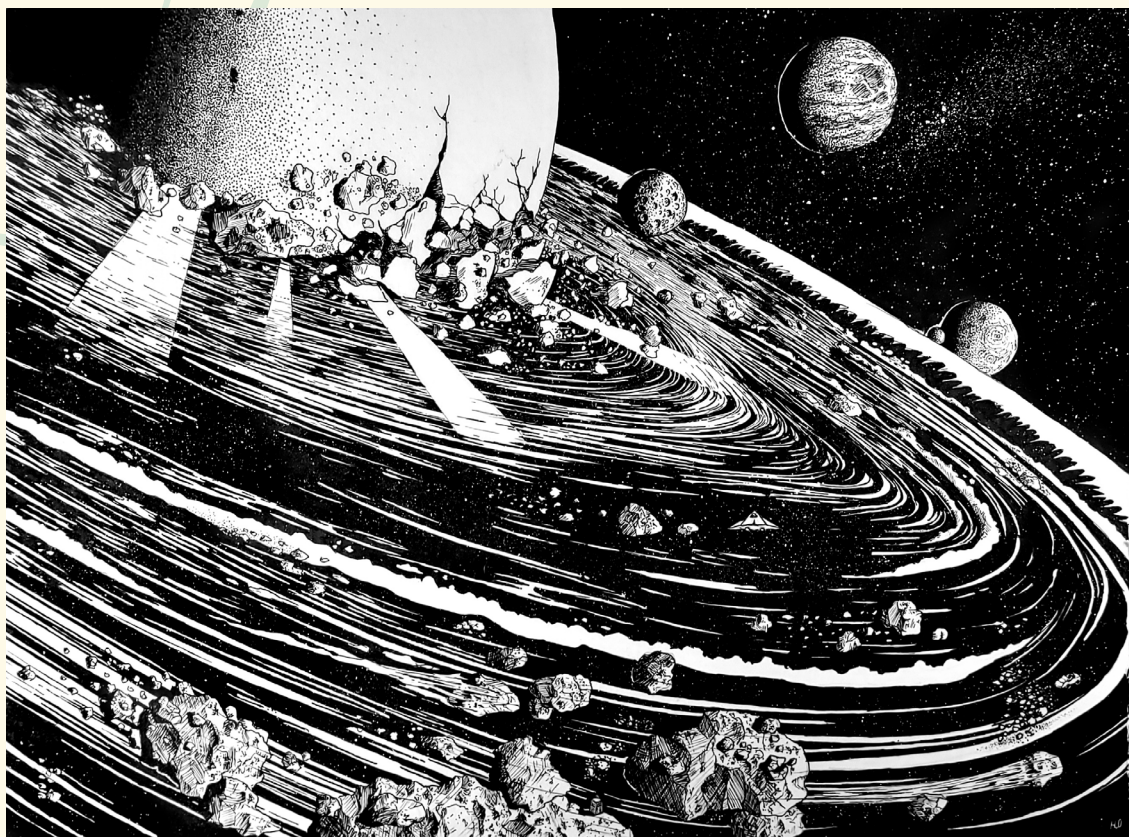


HEART
DANIEL KNORR

In the Deep

SULLY BROWN





CATAclysm

HENRY O'BRYAN



Midnight Walk
MARIA SOKAR

Texas Winter

ZOE SIMPSON

I got locked out of my house on that night
when my mom and stepdad were gone.

The cold ate away at my flimsy jacket
wrapped up against my stomach,
a pit from where the night could writhe.

I waited with my back against the brick,
the sun disappearing with its reflection
in the backseat window of a smoker's car.

The ashen smell tried to start a fire
in my jacket, wrapped up against my chapped
lips, clamped together like a narrow road.

I got locked out that night
when my dad would talk over dinner, cigarettes
on the table, kicking my foot against the booth.

I got dropped off as the sun left me
in the hands of winter's moon.

I had the key
with its imprint in my palm,
my breath billowing up like smoke.

The door didn't unlock for me.

I turned it, and
I swear it turned back on me.

No one was home,
no one on the road,
hands in my pockets.

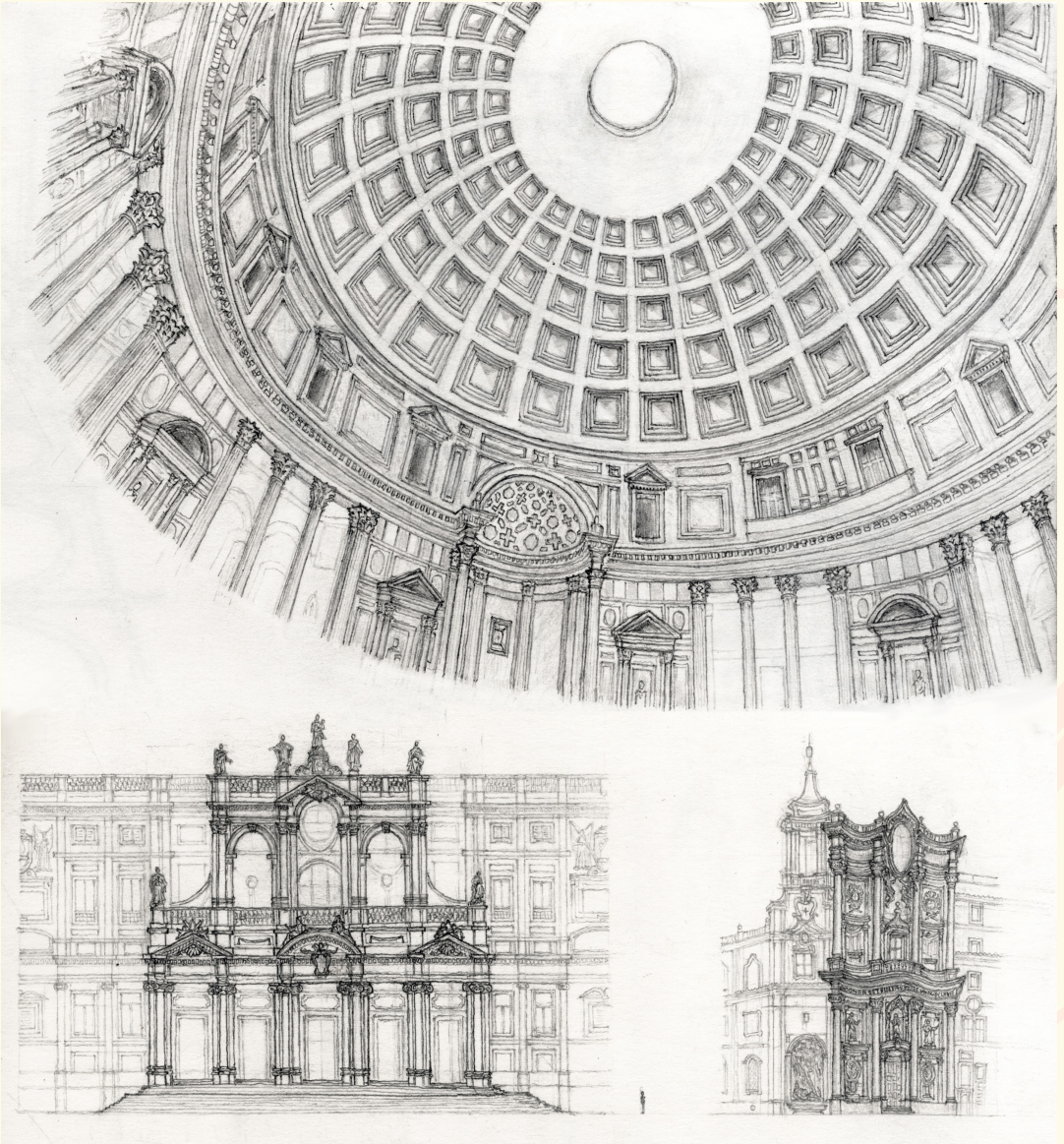
I stood alone, suburban street lamps
turned on in a row,
kicking that door.

I stabbed it with its own key.
It didn't open for me.

THE DRUNKENNESS OF NOAH

ALEX MCRORIE





Rome

SEAN MACKAY

New Data Entry 2015

TYLER ROSADO

Spending hours dropping numbers into the sea
of Excel sheets gives you time to realize
you're sinking. You've been dragged under.

I have no desire to find a lover
—or even a new friend. I keep
busy with work, studies,
or some conglomerate of both that looks
like torture in the name
of something. Excellence? Perhaps.
But then I find my mind drifting as I type...
three, two, four,
two, three, two,
six, two, one,
you.

You wouldn't catch my eye on the street.
You look like every other NPC
programmed to walk by so I can't say I'm lonely.
If I saw you at a coffee shop, or a bookstore,
or at church, I would never guess you've
conquered degrees up and down the eastern seaboard.
Somehow, you've ended up here. I give you numbers,
you give me more intake forms, I give you New Data Entry 2015
and you give me something
that makes my heart race?
You have the life I want,
you've got a doctorate,
a few papers floating around,
even the shadow of someone at home
who lingers on your lips in the downtime.

Oh God, let me be where you are.
Crazy to say as I turn these paper files into Excel sheets,
and drown out the hum of humanity
in a white sea.

GAGL

JOSEPH BUNGER





EL CAMINO

ROBERT SWANN

But Sunday

STELLA GARRABRANT

I sponge up my tears on Monday
and on Tuesday I shut my eyes
to the sun. And Wednesday—
on Wednesday “Dreams” plays on the radio
and the air cups my cheeks in glossy hands.
And red maples become blurs beside I-40 E.

And then Thursday beckons me close
and I am not afraid. Because I pass fields
of wheat and maybe rice
and perhaps soybeans. And they wave
to me and the Civic as we gallop
on asphalt.

And Friday is a French kiss
in the backseat as bodies pulse in tandem—
peeping Tom stars glimmering
through the misty windows.

And Saturday is a shared joint that leaves me
grinning—my eyes like Christmas lights
outside the local 7/11. My hands in her hair
as I taste the remnants of the smoke. Her grip
on my torso electric—our embrace neon in
the night.

But Sunday is a suitcase thrown
in the trunk—my stomach
turning as I take
the long route
home.

Alien Girl ON THE *Balcony*

ADRIAN WARD

Content Warning: Child Abuse, Bullying

Girl-Next-Door wears shorts and a t-shirt with a faded logo on the front. She's lying on a towel on her balcony, which wouldn't be a big deal except that it's January, and January in Worcester is freezing more often than it's not.

Girl-Next-Door tells me that aliens are coming to freeze the Earth, and today's people are woefully unprepared to survive the cold. She tells me that she's training to survive the ice age, and she says it boastfully through chattering teeth.

She tells me she moved here from Georgia, which was warm even during the winter and had clinging wet air during the summer. She moved in last week after her mother's divorce papers were finalized. Her mother is in love with a man named Harry. Harry has a tattoo of a word that Girl-Next-Door isn't allowed to say, and Girl-Next-Door hates him, because he hates her. She says that he deserves to be frozen.

Girl-Next-Door, I decide, is strange. Something new. Kind of interesting. But strange.



Before Girl-Next-Door and her mother and Harry, the house next door was owned by a nice old man who let me call him Mister Arthur. He grew tomatoes on his balcony, and sometimes he'd knock on our door with a bag of them and ask if we'd like any. Those were always good nights—Dad would invite him over for dinner, and the tomatoes would become sauce for pasta or the best part of a sandwich.

That was back when Dad was still trying to become a chef instead of a bean counter. Dad says sometimes that he preferred cooking beans to counting them, which I think is a joke because he laughs when he says it.

Mister Arthur always laughed at it, and told me I'd understand when I was older.

"Mister Daniel," he'd say to me, which I liked since it made me feel like a grownup, "you should be glad that you don't understand! It means there's still much more of the world for you to see." And then he'd start describing places I'd never seen, and that night I'd dream of giant pyramids and purple trees while laughter drifted up through the floorboards.

Mister Arthur sold the house after he hurt his back. He moved to South Carolina to be with his son, who's all grown up and working as something called a code jockey. He took the tomato plants with him, and me and Dad helped strap them into a moving truck with a giant

lightning bug painted on the side, since Mister Arthur wasn't supposed to lift heavy things anymore.

"Mister Daniel," he said, crouching so I could look him in the eye, "you can do whatever you put your mind to, remember that. And don't stop learning about the world, you hear me?"

And then he shook my hand, as though I were a grownup, and said goodbye to Mom and shook Dad's hand, and gave Dad two envelopes labeled Daniel- First Day of High School and Daniel- 18. He sat down in the passenger seat of the truck, because he wasn't supposed to drive, and we waved as the truck went down the street.

I didn't want him to see me cry, so I waited until the truck turned the corner.



Girl-Next-Door is in my homeroom class. We have a new homeroom teacher named Mr. Warner, because Mrs. Nowak is having a kid and will be out for the rest of the year. Mr. Warner is tall and bald and wears a tie with rubber ducks on it. The rubber ducks have mustaches and top hats. Rebecca asks why they're dressed up, and Mr. Warner says it's because they're Victorian quack doctors. He waits for someone to laugh, but it's not funny.

Mr. Warner isn't married. He has a cat named Meowser and his favorite food is dumplings—Mr. Warner, not the cat. He became a teacher because his last job, as a bean counter, was too boring. I write in my notebook, Ask what a bean counter is. It's getting annoying not knowing.

We introduce ourselves for the second time this year, but Mr. Warner at least only asks us for one fact about ourselves. Mrs. Nowak wanted a whole presentation, which was kind of ridiculous to ask sixth graders to do.

Julio wants to design trains when he grows up. Eric's favorite food is grilled fish. Addie's family went skiing over winter break, and she cut herself on a ski. She puts a hand in the air and waves it around, but I'm too far away to see the scar.

Girl-Next-Door introduces herself. Her name is Lorelai. She likes the winter here more than Georgia's. She tells us that aliens are coming to freeze us all, and she can't wait. She says she'll laugh when we freeze. Mr. Warner makes her apologize. The rest of the class laughs at her, and I laugh along even though I feel kind of bad about it.



Nobody likes Lorelai, who I still think of as Girl-Next-Door. They call her stupid and crazy and cuckoo, cuckoo, twirling fingers around their ears and laughing. She's not totally crazy, I think, but I don't say anything about it, just like I don't say anything when Paul hides her notebook or Jessa kicks her chair. She's just new. They'll get bored, give up.

I accidentally call her Girl-Next-Door while I'm talking to Jonas, and he laughs and repeats it, Girl-Next-Door, Girl-Next-Door. Jonas is popular, so everyone copies him, and now we all call Lorelai Girl-Next-Door even though nobody else lives next door to her.



When I walk into class on Tuesday, there's a drawing on Girl-Next-Door's desk. It's a lopsided pair of planets, one with "EARTH" scribbled over it. The other has a little stick-figure girl standing on it, with "Lorelay" over its head.

Girl-Next-Door finds the drawing very funny for some reason. Mr. Warner

doesn't, because it's drawn in permanent marker, and he can't wipe it off with a wet paper towel. He gets angry and tells us that there will be no tolerance for bullying in his classroom, do we understand? We say yes without meaning it.



On Wednesday, someone draws an alien on Girl-Next-Door's desk. It has six tentacles and one giant eye. Now Girl-Next-Door is angry. She says it's a terrible drawing, because it looks nothing like them. She draws an alien on the whiteboard; it has two eyes and two arms and two legs and teeth that take up most of its face. She colors it in with a blue marker.

Mr. Warner is very angry. He tells us again that there will be no tolerance for bullying in his classroom, and whoever drew the alien needs to stay after class. He calls the vice principal, who says something quiet and then leaves. The janitor comes in a few minutes later with a bucket of black paint and a brush. He paints Girl-Next-Door's desk, covering the drawings, and now her desk stands out from the rest, which suits her just fine.

Nobody stays behind after class.

Girl-Next-Door follows me to English, where we're reading *Animal Farm*. Robert spends ten minutes talking about how much better the world would be if less people were like Snowball. He says that Napoleon was right, because Darwin proved that it's best to be strong. The teacher tells him that he missed the point of both *Animal Farm* and basic biology. Robert laughs and says that she wouldn't know, because she's not a science teacher.



On Friday, Girl-Next-Door is on the balcony again, shivering, holding her towel around herself like a coat. I stand there watching for a minute before calling out to her.

I want to tell her that nobody really means it, it's just that she's new and odd. And Jonas and Robert and Daniel and everybody aren't usually like this. But she doesn't respond, just ignores me and pulls the towel around her more tightly.



On Monday, somebody brings in white chalk and writes on Girl-Next-Door's desk. Go to Mars, bitch. Just die. Hate you hate you hate you, over and over, letters cramping together as they reach the edge of the desk.

Mr. Warner phones Girl-Next-Door's mother, who hangs up almost as soon as he begins talking.



On Tuesday, Girl-Next-Door's mother comes in. She's short and brown-haired and ugly, and she glares at everything she sees. Mr. Warner puts on a video about the Fertile Crescent and tells us to take notes.

Girl-Next-Door, her mother, and Mr. Warner leave the room. Girl-Next Door and Mr. Warner come back a few minutes before class ends. Mr. Warner's face is red, and he starts to shout at us but is interrupted by the bell. Robert finds it funny. I don't.



On Wednesday, the janitor sits in our class until Mr. Warner arrives, watching Girl-Next-Door's desk and scowling at all of us. He has large muscles and a short temper, and that makes him scary. Nobody dares to write on Girl-Next-Door's desk. I don't even look at it.

Girl-Next-Door walks in. She has rings around one eye, all purple and yellow. She calls it makeup, and it doesn't run when she starts crying.

Mr. Warner puts on another video and takes her out of the room.



By March, Girl-Next-Door is no longer new, and nobody cares about her anymore. We don't talk to her, but nobody draws on her desk or hides her backpack, either. She doesn't talk much. She's in an art elective, where she spends her time drawing aliens, and her other elective has been replaced by meeting with the counselors.

Mr. Warner assigns a project: make a short slideshow about an event in history and present it to the class. Mine is about Julius Caesar being stabbed. Mr. Warner likes my presentation. He asks me why I chose Caesar, and I tell him it's because Caesar was on the first page of Google after searching for historical events, which is probably a bad answer, but I'm no good at lying. He laughs and tells me that my presentation was fantastic, but to choose something I'm interested in next time. I don't tell him that I'm not interested in history.

Girl-Next-Door presents. She tells us about the day that aliens will freeze the Earth. She says they're going to make us into ice cream.

The class laughs, and I join in without meaning to. Jonas swirls a finger around his ear and goes cuckoo, cuckoo. Someone calls Girl-Next-Door an alien girl. Someone else calls her a stupid fuck. She flips to her next slide, which has a picture of Harry, asleep on the couch, which she's edited to turn everything blue. On the edge of the slide is a little drawing of an alien, and now I feel bad for laughing, but it's hard to stop.

We laugh and laugh and don't stop. Mr. Warner puts his head in his hands and sighs. He looks tired.

Girl-Next-Door ignores the laughter. She describes an alien planet: purple stone everywhere, rising from the surface in twisting columns. Green seas filled with gigantic fish. Birds with ten heads.

It reminds me of Mister Arthur's stories. Instead of pyramids and purple trees, it's purple pyramids and trees covered in bright yellow fruit that tastes like coffee cake and worlds covered in ice cream, and I know that tonight I'll dream of our world frozen and Girl-Next-Door dancing on the ice. But I'll be dreaming just how I used to, even if the details are different.

Girl-Next-Door finishes. The laughter doesn't. Mr. Warner has to shout for who's next, which turns out to be Jonas. He calls out one last "alien!" as he pulls up his presentation on "Cleopatruh," but I don't think Girl-Next-Door notices.

She's looking out the window. It's snowing, for probably the last time this year, and she's smiling at it, and I have a feeling that when I get home she'll be out on the balcony, shivering and looking at me with eyes that make me feel like the foolish one.





DOUBLE BUTT GUY

MICKY HANLON



Hour Sunrise

BELLA KALKBRENNER



Dumplings

MINGDUO LIU

He hadn't gone back for the Spring Festival, and sitting idly on the bed at home today wasn't exactly what he wanted to do, either. His shop in Tongzheng Alley had been open for five years now, and the eateries on the left and right had closed and reopened with new faces. Luckily, Ah-Bai knew how to keep things together and would let him accompany this narrow bookshop for some long days. He always felt like he had just gotten there, and home was no more than a row of Ice Peak glass bottles lined on the windowsill, where sunlight baked out the remaining orange scent, and the orange scent wrapped around the doorframe, which is well enough. No need to look at them once more, no need to wipe down the empty bottles once more.

But he had too much unrest in his mind lately, far too much for the four hundred and ninety-five square feet bookshop to confine. He walked back and forth on Zhongshan Road, didn't help, sat at West Street for a few hours, not enough, went further, all the way to the estuary, even worse. A night like this in May, with the cool breeze, should be perfect—not too hot, not too humid. Travelers' light shirts glowed amber under the streetlights, and the amber glow heated the streetlight's glare to gold. Who wants to be sad? The crowds had already thinned out at ten, leaving the lamps dimming, the streets empty. Yet here and there, a few couples wandered out of the alley, arm in arm. He kept his head down, lips pulled tight, half-shielding his face as he passed by, steps leading straight back to the shop.

"I'm gonna feel even worse if I stay cooped up in here. But I still need to run this bookshop tomorrow, and maybe talking with customers will ease things up a bit."

Before he could even finish wiping down the table, the frustration flared up again. "But what about after that? Am I gonna simmer the anguish every night for the next year and a half?"

He yanked his arm, ready to smash the prayer cards and the lamp all at once. But he didn't dare to damage this old house, and there was a mandala hanging behind him. He only

the doorframe, he stared at the glass bottles. When the streetlight filled them with an orange glow, his heart settled, just a little. Now he smelled it—the orange scent—and in one moment it was the kind that rushes out when you crack open a fresh bottle, then he heard the clink of an aluminum cap hitting the floor, one after another, each echo hitting out the aroma of lamb stew in Paomo.

He sat there on the floor for a while, and looking through the slits on the bookshelf, he saw the Hong Kong movie poster on the wall. The unrest in his mind flared up again.

“Fine. I’ll go back. Just to visit Grandma.”

The train ticket from Quanzhou to Xi’an in May was cheap, but the price for the return ticket doubled three days later. His leather bag lay at his feet. He was wrapped in a striped shirt, and his eyes looked outside. The Yangtze River pushed the ocean away; the Qinling Mountains stepped over the rice fields.

“Wendi, Wendi!”

The corridor at home connected several bedrooms. Back then, people used white tiles and painted a white wall, which made the corridor seem even brighter. He saw the streaks of ink he’d once splashed on the wall back when he was in junior high, and a quiet calm washed over him—like the kind of peace you feel after seeing an old friend. He used fountain pens back in the school, the Hero Ink soaking into his fingertips, leaving a black stain beneath his nails. There were still a few stacks of half-used notebooks in his drawer and tucked away at the very bottom was a bottle of that same ink. But the fountain pen? He had long since forgotten where it went.

“Wendi, come help Grandma mix the filling.”

A light joy bubbled up inside him as he followed Grandma’s order and ran to the kitchen. In a stainless steel basin, two palm-widths across, half the dumpling filling was already stirred, the other half, a heap of chopped dills, sat there, like pine needles scattered on a hill. He gently held the bottom of the basin, while his right hand slowly pressed the dills into the grounded meat.

“Stir it well for me, I’ll go heat up the sauce.”

Grandma only used pork shoulder for dumplings, always a mix of fat and lean, slightly nutty and chewy. She’d poured two bowls of water into the pot, added green onions, white ginger, red peppercorns, two spoons of soy sauce, a few drops of dark soy sauce, and a spoonful of oyster sauce. Once it bubbled up, she’d pour it over the meat, then drizzle hot oil on top. Dumpling fillings like this come out fresh and juicy, every time.

“All right. Smell it for me. How was it? Good?”

It was exactly half past eleven, and the neighbors lit up the stoves. He was also hungry and no longer cared about seasoning. The dills mixing with the salted meat smelled just about perfect as before, so he dug his right hand into the bottom of the basin. The red meat and green dills swirling together hit the bullseye of his taste buds.

“Hungry, aren’t you? I saw you lost some weight after you came back.”

At those words, his stomach tightened even more. He stirred faster, bits of filling flew out of the basin and stuck to his apron.

“Do you still cook much now?” asked Grandma

“I do, but not so much lately. I’ve gotten lazy and not very into kitchen things.”

Grandma squeezed a few drops of dish soap onto the rag, scrubbing at the brown stains for a minute. She wrung out the soapy water, rinsed the rag over and over again, and wrung it dry before hanging it on a purple rubber hook. He looked up at the wrinkled rag, still marked with vinegar stains, and smiled to himself. Grandma really hadn't changed.

"You might as well need a new one. That rag's not coming clean anymore."

Grandma looked down, sliced the rested dough into strips, rolled them out, then dusted the cutting board with flour before pinching off dough pieces, one after another.

"Ei, that one's new. Just needs another wash."

He didn't say much more after that—like a child, always falling silent once he got an answer, whether it made sense or not. It wasn't that he believed what others said; even if he knew it was a lie, he wouldn't argue. Grandma tapped on the filling he had mixed, and while rummaging in the drawer for the rolling pin, she said, "I've rolled out the dough pieces. You may go and do what you need to do. I'll call you when it's ready."

The clatter of spatulas from the floors above and below had faded, the steady hum of cicadas from all directions enveloped the high noon of Xi'an. Grandma scooped a spoonful of filling onto a dumpling wrapper, smoothing it out. She folded the wrapper in half, hands overlapped—one firm press and one dumpling was made.

He didn't leave; he just stood there watching Grandma fold the dumplings. Back when he came home from college, it was always dumplings that Grandma made for him. In high school, it was braised chicken; in middle school, fried wings; in elementary school, sausage and fried rice. His eyes lingered on her hands. There were more bulging veins than before; the skin looking thinner and more fragile. The fine dusting of flour filled in the ridges on the back of her hands, a cheap layer of makeup that couldn't even conceal the age spots nestled between her knuckles. Once it was washed off, those hands would be left exposed again, wrinkled like crumpled cloth.

"Grandma, let me roll the wrappers for you."

He pressed the dough pieces flat into little rounds and tried rolling them slowly but couldn't control the pressure. The first wrapper, too thin in the middle; the second one, too thick on one side; the third one—though better—was still misshapen. He rotated the wrapper with three fingers, but the rolling pin ended up hurting his nails.

"See, you need to roll from the outside toward the center, and pinch it with these two fingers to turn it while you roll. You buy frozen dumplings, don't you?"

He nodded, watching as Grandma boiled water and wiped her hands on her apron, rubbing away the bits of dumpling filling clinging to her nails.

"And Ah-Bai? Has she gotten used to eating sour soup dumplings?"

He fumbled, and a handful of flour sifted through his fingers like sand in an hourglass, covering the once-warm dough in a cold layer. The board creaked every time he rolled. Getting sick of that, he pressed on the wrapper with the heel of his palm, grinding it hard, so hard his hand trembled and the wrapper was torn like a thin sheet of paper riddled with holes.

"She doesn't live with me anymore."

Grandma dropped about thirty dumplings into the pot. "And where is Ah-Bai now?"

"She went back to Lantau Island."

The creaking from the board grew louder, shorter, and more abrupt. The flame under

the stove burned bright, but silent.

“Then you better learn how to make dumplings. The ones they make in Hong Kong aren’t anything like ours.”

“Didn’t they tell you she left?”

Grandma looked at the torn wrappers, straightened the brim of her pink chef’s hat, and pulled out a new cutting board.

“Keep rolling; I’ll finish these up. Tomorrow, after you leave, I’ll bring some to your sister.”

He glanced at the dumplings, their fillings spilling out. For his sister’s sake, he started to handle the remaining wrapper with more care. Roll lighter, lift higher, turn smoother. Roll, pinch, turn. Roll, lift, turn again.

“What did Ah-Bai say?” Grandma asked.

He stopped rolling, and his thumb brushed away the flour from the wrapper, the sweat from his hands had already made it sticky.

“The wind from Lantau Island drifted into Quanzhou’s alley, but the wind chimes had long been taken down. So, the wind had only knocked over two glass bottles, flipped three pages of a book, left behind the sound that dispersed after two steps, then ran away through the dark window, dissolving into the crowd.”

“And you take her words, never went to Hong Kong to find her?”

“No.”

“So. Are you waiting for Ah-Bai, or the next woman...?”

Grandma took the cutting board away from him, deftly rolling and turning the remaining dough into perfect dumpling wrappers.

“...What about the rent? The shop is still listed under both of your names...”

The pot had boiled three times. Grandma turned off the stove and took out the skimmer.

“...The flower on the hairpin has long withered, yet here you are, still waiting. I’m just afraid you’ll drive yourself mad if you keep waiting like this. Tomorrow, after you leave, I’ll take a bag of dumplings to your sister.”

He watched as Grandma scooped the dumpling soup into a bowl, then he wiped the flour from his hands on the apron and took his first step.

“Where are you going? Come help me chop the scallions.”

“I’m gonna send her a message.”



Sustenance and Pain

DUKE DIX

Content Warning: Graphic Medical Language/Description

Sustenance and pain:
never more interlinked, interlocked
than by chains;
by pipes and tubes
welded to ducts and veins.

The blankets pinning you to the bed are shields,
but their embrace grows heavier each day.
The lack of fresh air is stifling and the
pristine walls remain as dull
as the secondhand sun that
illuminates them.

The flat-screen is your only window to the world
and it doesn't provide much light;
it only enhances the brain-numbing boredom.
You are fed and pampered, and sheltered from
the elements and the world.

The days weigh more than the blankets
and creep along as slowly
as the bile through a recalcitrant, hand-me down liver
and the time between each apprehensive stool.
Blood is taken and tested
and the results come back just shy of where they are
supposed to be—meaning one more day being sheltered.
And when you do leave, your arm
is yellow and pockmarked where the needles
collected their payment;
it's not cheap to keep your chains free of rust.

Eventually, you're freed from your cell,
allowed to breathe again and bask in the sun.
However, it rains more than it used to, you feel,
though it seems like more people are willing
to offer an umbrella; they can see you've just gotten
the shackles broken off your feet, and
you are learning to walk again.
You've still got chains to care for, though,
and who knows what would happen if
they ever rusted away; though you suspect
there'd be fewer umbrellas.

So you sort through all your pills, new and old,
wondering just how well they're working as you swallow them.
You vacillate on what to eat at each meal,
worrying every bite will lock your guts up
even tighter than the chains that already bind them
and trail behind you with each step.
You make appointments to maintain them,
these precious chains of yours,
to refurbish and re-polish and repair them
when sutures break or tubes get clogged
or rust rears its ugly head.

You go up on that operating table
time after time and smile, and there's almost
no question that you're addicted:
 to the anesthesia, the bliss, the chains;
 to the scissors and scalpel excising the tumor of self-criticism;
 to the IVs pumping antibiotics to purge the infection of expectation;
 to the drills and drugs that drown out the symphony of hurt and doubt while I lay there;
 to my body screaming with each movement afterwards
 summoning umbrellas and sympathetic smiles in droves.

There's no question that
all of me chafes from the chains
but I fear to relinquish them
and their sustenance and pain.



**DENIM
REINCARNATED
LOOK 2
DANIEL INMAN**

**DENIM
REINCARNATED:
LOOK 4
DANIEL INMAN**





NIGHT SHIFT

ALYSSA GIORGINO

Ode to Church Parking Lots

SAM WILLIAMS

Elle is visiting town and asked
where she could smoke, I told her
we'd need to walk a distance from the apartment,
but that I already have a favorite place.
Any time I walk along Trinity Road,
it's never with pure intentions—
I slither through the dewy grass
and slouch, out of sight, behind the cedars
lining the path to makeshift clarity. She's the first
I've taken down this route – we haven't caught up
since her parents sent her away
to Catholic school, where she was told she was born corrupted.

We land in a parking lot where Baptists slum it on Sundays,
she suggests that we dig through the trash
before sparking. The dumpster was leaking
rotting food and Hamrick's receipts, containing
nothing more valuable than empty lighters
and loose Jeannie C. Riley CDs. It's easy to hide
yesterday's waste wherever one believes
God's peripheral vision to be. We followed
an airborne worship handout to the curb,
where she contemplates lighting a cigarette,
asking if I'd share it with her. She knows it's bad
for her, that it corrupts and gnaws at what's inside—
but it's less daunting if she's not alone with hands to the fire.
Staring past the church's fluorescent sign,
she picks up the lighter.

A SQUIRREL AND A GUY TALK VIA IPHONE'S TEXT MESSAGING APPLICATION

CARTER NORFLEET

Saturday 11:30 PM

you watching SNL right now?

no lol
what is that

Today 9:13 AM

Hey
did I just see you in the tree outside my window

LMAO yes probably
so embarrassing
i was looking around for nuts and seeds

HA i thought that was you
howre you doing

p good



j chillin
getting ready for the winter
wby

good as well ig
kinda stressed about work but otherwise good
Not to be weird or whatever btu saw you were itching
*but
whats that about

u saw that??
fuck lol
not to be tmi but I got mange haha

oh shit
is it bad?
what even is that

its pretty bad lol
im probs gonna die
its caused by mites
lmaoooo

oh man
i'm so sorry

its good
tbh not scared

well thats good
being not scared
not the mange
is mange genetic or something

nah man its caused by mites
like this little bug
ill probably die from dehydration
my mom got that shit and she died pretty fast
but also she was old

damn
and youre not scared?
youre braver than me

i dont think im brave at all
but ty
if u see death enough u realize its not a big deal
roadkill n stuff like that
just a fixture of the landscape
like yeah i like being alive
but also everyone goes
so idk

ig
thats very taoist of you

whats that

its like philosophy or something
the flow of the universe

whats the universe

you serious or

im a squirrel man
idk what that stuff is
my whole thjig is nuts and seeds
berries hit sometimes too tho
lowkey berries>>>nuts and seeds

stupid question
but is there anything i can do to help

nah

its really all good
i could go right now and be chill with it

how?
no regrets or antyhnting?
*anything

nah

my whole thing is to be here and be a squirrel
then leave
thats all i gotta do
how can i regret just being

if i died today id be really sad
i mean i guess i wouldnt be sad
id be dead
but i also like being here
and theres still stuff i gotta do

see thats why being a squirrel is dope
nothing i have to do
having to do stuff is for humans
i exist to be in the world
also sometimes when i cant find the seeds and nuts i buried
they turn into trees haha
which is rad
but thats not even on purpose

yeah that's dope
thank you for forgetting those seeds and nuts btw haha
because i really like trees

yeah me too
i love trees

oh btw did you see SNL last week
honestly decent

no lol
what is that







HE NEVER

Told His Story

MINGDUO LIU

My Friends Who Ride Bikes

AUDREY FATONE

for Tabitha and Ned

you're right, this is the best mode of transportation there is
I read somewhere about how bikes were important to second-wave feminism
by reading it somewhere I really mean I saw it in a TikTok
and obviously I do not know much about history
but I will tell you mine:

during summers in middle school my Dad would Scotch tape
the directions to Alex and Grace's houses on my handlebars
on an index card, his handwriting in blue pen
this was before I had google maps and so my world was small
but the creek where we would catch crayfish and water striders was endless
a decade later, in college, I was chased home by a man
he was sunburned and called me a bitch I remember this—
afterwards I was too scared to walk
and I didn't have a parking pass and the bus was often missed
but I had my bike, I always did. I got to class on the same frame
that took me to Alex and Grace's for the rest of college
and still the other week, and the weeks before that
when I kept having panic attacks, I had my bike, I always did.
I pedaled to the park and dodged all the sweetgum pods covering the greenway
sometimes I missed, sometimes I fell, sometimes I bruised my elbows
once, I scraped my hands but even that is freedom to me
thank god I get to fall and get back up again.
I think that is what joy must be:
choosing to bike to work and parties and the park despite
the fact it only takes one truck or SUV to end it
because on my bike, I am the first to get to the bar
finding parking is a foreign language
and so is traffic and oil changes
but mostly, when my open button down catches the breeze
and I can't stop singing
I have never been so certain
no one knows joy like we do
me & my friends who ride bikes



CITYSCAPE

ALEX MCRORIE



*On Earth
We're Briefly Gorgeous*

ROBERT SWANN



SEEKING WEAKNESS

KALEY EDGINGTON

I want to expose my neck to the world.

The soft flesh, my smooth underbelly,
face to the sky, eyes closed,
head lolling off my shoulders like a marble
on a spring.

I want to lie in the sun, sweet and stupid.
Easy prey for any creature's
snapping jaw,
arms limp and useless,
resting at my side,
as things that belong to me
are meant to do.

In dreams, I welcome drops of rain,
like old and precious friends,
or lovers,
I lost once,
then met again.
At heart, I'm still a kid with arms outstretched
and drenched in all those reconnected threads.

In practice, I protect my porous skin
with malice for the prey that I have been.
No snapping jaw,
just flailing limbs,
all snatching at the droplets
so as not to let them in.

I need to remember how to shed:
clothing, weapons, guns-to-heads.
Face to the wall, dead calm,
hands empty but for water resting gently,
in my palm.

WALK A PATH *Until The Earth* KNOWS YOUR FOOTSTEPS

i. life

LIBBIE CURTIS

an ache gnawing
a path through the man's bones—
the knowledge that he belonged
neither wholly here nor there,
a hunger that is never satisfied,
pressing against every corner of his body.

to live is to devour,
stuffing history down his throat,
drowning himself in a sea of books,
entangling himself in the web of lies
and truths sewn throughout them both.
it's not enough and he heaves and churns
a stormy sea that was shoved
into a human container, one that'll inevitably
crumble from time's touch.

ii. death

immortality is an idyllic dream
varnished by kings of old chanting
legacy legacy legacy
as they hoist statues up
and sign their name in blood,
while covering their heinous acts
with woven rugs that tell their stories
through thread

the man acknowledges
that they were right about one thing:
in order to transcend humanity,
one must lose their own

so he carved his away, piece by piece—
hands slicked with grief and sorrow
as he drained empathy from his veins
clipped away in ragged patterns,
unceremoniously capsizing his life
into the sea and setting fire
to what washed ashore

iii. Koschei

this is how one cheats death
this is how you live
to see the end of the world

steal the sewing needle
of a seamstress who's bled
for her craft
and take the thread of your death
and stuff it inside
take the sewing needle and
place it within something else
something inconspicuous—
sliding the needle
into the sinew like hem of a leaf
that could be tucked into the cracked pages of a book
—over and over
repeating the process
to craft an unusual matryoshka doll
that one would never think to crack open

on and on he went
hiding his death
and walking the same path
over and over and over
wearing a path into the world
for Koschei may not have become immortal
but he became deathless

(and really
aren't those two close enough?)

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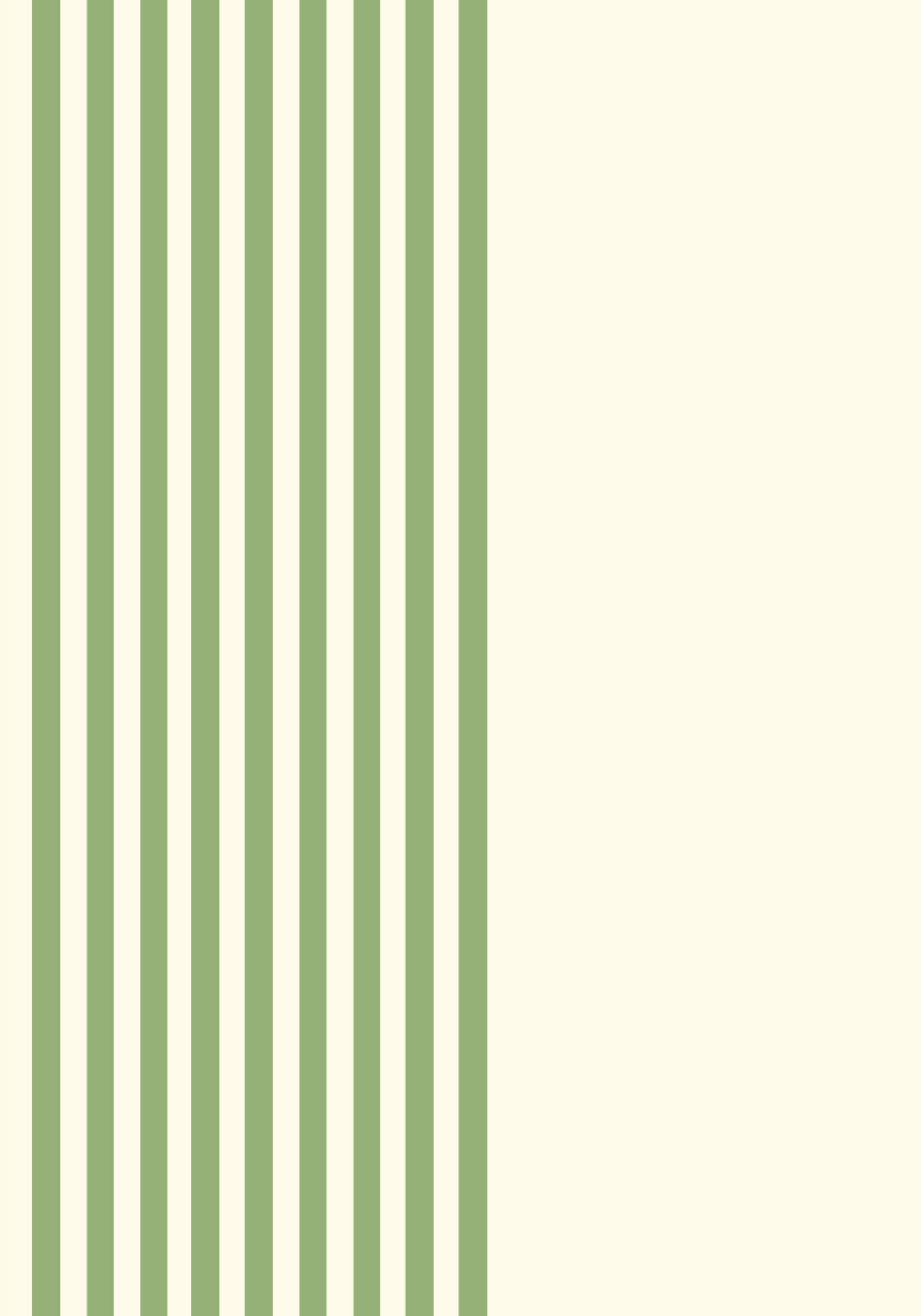
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Daniel Knorr, Sam Williams, Adrian Ward, Kayla Lare, Krushi Bandam

*For submission guidelines, please visit
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