



hyphen

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Cover: Just Resting by Kristen Gabriel

Rob I

Noah Mannix



Saturn Gnawing*Brianna Fairman*

on the rotting, wet flesh
of his own creation

I am

starved and caged
on the precipice of satisfaction eclipsed
by carnal Tarrare plucking manna
from the sky unripe,
tongues of another
language spill
from my mouth like teeth

bloodied

pulp staining
knuckles red
paint colors these walls

with testimony

of a man tormented
and swept away by the swell
of worship's tide, sea foaming
at my mouth

I am

rabid and free
this too tired body gives
out under the weight

of

father, son,
my spirits
consumption
this denial my sustenance
this small resistance
how my spirit gets fed

The Tower*Michaela Baus*

In the tower all youth
always close to the site
of higher vision-
it can only possess
rather than be possessed.
The rosy reign of optimism
& the misery of its successors-
the scent of old wood
crossed into lattice & laced
along the spiral.

Returning to the heart-land
of verdant spring rage-
with a gouging gaze,
to watch from anywhere
but above is to anoint the wound,
to feel this as reason
to flutter & cast the curse
over & over...

The little silhouette
in the tower pane,
twin beams from green eyes
& the glint of morning grass,
crystalline reflections
only of a far off figure...

The structure gives way
to its nonmaterial nature,
into the flower beds,
back to sleep.

Graveyard Party

Noah Mannix

“We never meant to end up here, in this field of bones and grey teeth. We were once these bones, but never were these teeth. Now we are merely the ghosts that haunt the stones, that rest under the earth during the bright day, that send a shiver up your spine on a warm summer evening.”

‘ We don’t remember who invited who to the Graveyard Party. We don’t remember whose idea it was to call it that in the first place; surely there was someone among us who was more clever than that. Nevertheless it stuck, and one autumn night we all got up, left our homes around the small town, and drove, walked, or biked to the graveyard a mile outside of town. Who brought the keg? Maybe Jackson; he had a truck. But we all had trucks – it was that kind of town. Varsity jackets and apple orchards, mothers’ mouths spreading whispers over phone lines. The kind of town where secrets weren’t far behind any event, person, or place. But somehow, none of us knew anything about the graveyard just outside of town.

“We wish they wouldn’t come. Mostly it’s just the outdoor cats, and the odd stray dog every once in a while. They make a mess, sure, and Will’s stone is fairly reeking with the years of dog-piss. It’s a ritual for them; when you’re old enough, or the first time you manage to escape, whichever comes first, come on down to old Will’s grave, give it a good piss, and then run home as fast as you can, before we get you. The cats aren’t all bad, but for the screeching and yowling when they’re in heat and yearning for a connection that we can never reach again. But the worst is the kids, the party. The smell of beer and vomit lingers for weeks, turning stale then sour, browning the few green patches of grass we have left.”

We got there at dusk. Our parents weren’t worried about us; they remembered their time at the Graveyard Party, years ago. For some reason, that will surely become incomprehensible to us as we age, it all seemed a lot more simple, a lot more quaint, than what it really was, what it really is. At the end, we’ll be considerably shaken and confused, but able to stomach it all at first. Then, the first few will move away. Of them, a solid majority will return, but there will be the few that don’t. Most likely they’ll forget entirely, or try to force it into the shape of a

cocktail story, an amusing anecdote of their youth in the country, so different from their lives as powerful ad executives, literary professors, artists. Most of them won't do this, however. Most of them will try to forget entirely, except for a single instance of the night making a surprise appearance in their thoughts, their writing, their artwork, something.

"Why do they do this? Why do we have to suffer these fools? Our names are invisible, worn away by years of neglect, wind, nature, woe. Time isn't a factor in this process; Jenkins was the last one of us to arrive, and his is in the worst state, cracked in two, the small portrait above where his name is covered in kudzu completely faded (or was it stolen?), yet still emanating a protective force against the vines and dirt, remaining a purely white circle."

Those of us that don't move away have the harder path, assuredly. We don't know what to do with ourselves after the Graveyard Party; what is there left to do? We do what we used to; school, football games, dating, sex, pregnancy, marriage, but what's after that? And what is this underneath it all? What did we do there?

"We're all generally nice, to each other at least. There's some of us that participate in the more vicious of the gossip circles, particularly Jenkins' wife Gloria, always at odds with Mrs. Brown for some reason or another. We saw them though, once, sitting quietly together by the small creek bordering us. The creek is barely large enough for the scant minnows, and is usually filled with trash, blown in from the landfill one town over. It's always worst after one of their events. That's when the new one joins us as well. They all sit together on the tree-stump, sitting in their own viscera. They probably don't stop looking at their own body for at least a week. When they do turn around, they don't see us; they don't have eyes to see us with. So they just sit there, and every once in a while look up at the sky."

Of those of us that stay, our number will dwindle by a few more immediately after (besides the one that we knew we weren't coming back with), those that couldn't handle it. The rest of us will pretend that they were weak, but when it's our turn to face the night, we're not sure we can handle it either. We never really know which choice is the better one.

"The ones without eyes aren't usually belligerent. We've never really tried talking to them much. Mrs. Brown did once, but found them unsatisfactory conversationalists. Again, they only ever look at themselves, nothing, or the sky, so how are we supposed to know they're really paying attention? They never say anything either, or nothing much at least. What they do say is known only to them, we can't understand it. But still, we guess they're a part of us now, and we love them. Hopefully someday we figure out how to talk to each other."

Eventually, we all become like our parents, and we forget, either by force or through simple time. We leave it behind, and we never think about the Graveyard Party except when our children head out for their own, and we grab our wives, or our husbands, or our dogs, and we hold them tight and say remember when, tears streaming down our cheeks.

Finding Spring

Claire Petersen

Rage with me
What rage
What delirious foresight
Has created this reality
What has squashed all ambition to be beyond blood
Beyond sex, skin, and land
To let my heart pound and legs shake at the sight of a hammer.
This novel was written years ago
The day you put feather to ink and ink to paper with someone guiding your hand.
Who is this invisible man,
Is it a man at all?
Is this ink or is it blood, my blood in which my death note is written.
Then why won't I pull back my hand
Wrench my arm away from this invisible soul eater and run
How disappointing it is to sit back and watch my soul shrivel away and I shake my head from the future
Release yourself to your humanity
Embrace that raw and regal rage
Let that energy empower you and guide you beyond survival and pleasantness
Take my hand and rage with me

Religion is

Kay-Ann Crawson

Religion is:

Sung by factory workers,
And for those above on the catwalk,
Who believe they ay be Gods.
All else is a scam.

Pinocchio as Toothpick

Mal Makalintal

Marionnette is derived from the now-obsolete *mariole*, an old french word once used to refer to figurines and pictures of the Holy Virgin. So *marionnette* means *little Mary*, means young girl and her even younger body, painted into place against the hay, means unripe fruit chewed down to its pit, means apple core, means mouth, means something is swallowing so something else must be swallowed, means the throat is a dark tunnel but the stars still tear Mary's teeth into a smile, means that Emperor Wu had his favorite concubine recreated in the image of a puppet after her death so that she might continue to dance for him, means that Shiva and Parvati would animate the toymaker's carvings only as long as they were interested in them, means spotlight burning into shifting backdrop, means fat fists full of copper coins, means we are all here waiting to see you move, means what is food for if not for consumption?

Anak (Child)

Alexandra Reyes



My Two Sons (or, Black Kids & Education)*Jamal Goodwin*

My youngest was in first grade when the staff told us he'd never be able to read or write. Now, he's a senior English major, 4.0 GPA, with a book awaiting publication.

My oldest was in second grade when I met the principal: "He'll never grow past the mind of a six-year-old." Now, he's a train engineer, driving across the country, with a hobby of DJing and love for all genres.

My two sons are the lucky ones. The amount of dreams crushed from black kids marked a blight and not a light: innumerable.

Glass Galore

Natalie Linch



Pearls

Jessica Marvin-Romero

If I had to tell a story
about who I am,
I would tell you to look at the pearls.
Strings wound around our tiny fingers,
dripping from our shoulders as if to remind us we are of the water.

The phone wire, coiled between our teeth,
as we ask for extra time
and dream
of a place where the worlds between us are willing to compromise.

When we're together, we siege the dressing table,
asking permission from the picture frames
who smile at us:
paint us onto you.

We become her red lipstick,
drawn eyebrows,
his nose ridge and pen.
Her fear and fire and hope,
his brown coat.

This is our heavy history.
The houses we came from,
the mysteries left to carve themselves into the walls.

The walls,
with our handprints and theirs,
the drawn curtains,
the ghost in the corner,
the songs in the hall.

And when the spell breaks, we remember

the pearls are not ours,
but borrowed
like our names.

I don't know at what point we gave them both back,
spitting ourselves into the jewelry box,
closing the lid.

If you are what you eat, I am all
ten of my fingers
and every orange in the world.

Medal

Jamal Goodwin

“Go for the gold,”

They say,

As they blood and

sweat and

tear.

They

montage

their

training

on

insta,

record

their

A Skips

and

B skips

and

Karaokes.

It's January, and you are
rough aluminum. Cold as
you sit in the metal auditorium beside
your crude cut brothers and
sisters.

You don't yet have paint to be chipped

Your golden coat wasn't fitted for you yet

From tumult I was born anew.

I found my own cadence,

I strayed from others' sounds.

My forefoot strike wasn't done to

please you, medal. I didn't need your
wink and nod.

Day and night, uphill and in snow

My feet propelled me and in

May I landed in your arms.

It's January, and you're my flatmate
lounging beside my old watch, old drawings,
My high school yearbook, graduation cards.
Your life is humble, not ostentatiously displayed,
But tucked away with items of nostalgia.

I feel for you.

It gets lonely when you're the only one.

Someday soon, my feet will fly again,

and I'll get a

new

medal.

Mary at Night*Noah Mannix*

Book(end)

Shelby Green

I started as a thought.
Charcoal scratched onto stretched skin or
Feathers dipped into India ink so
Indelible in the way I could be destroyed

I watched as I was bound by leather and twine held
Together by the faintest whispers of glue and
Made to sit precariously while waiting to be
Passed down like precious stone

I felt a cold ache as I was pressed
Against the wooden backdrop of a tireless machine
Bellowed in and out stereotyped to be
Twinned for the masses

I fear fire but love to be beside it. It is only when
I curl in bright flame that I begin to wonder what
Could happen if I was allowed to gather dust and
My old black ink turns brown

I am encased in metal glowing as if skin
Has become a pixelated screen trapped
Behind a plexiglass divide looked at
But never opened

It is better than being
Forgotten. But am I forgotten if I am cast off so easily,
Recalled only as the worm sees fit?

The day that I cease to exist is the day that the world does, too.

Complaints of a Hypochondriac*Brianna Fairman*

Runny red stream coagulates into thrombosis of deep vein and arterial walls collapse in a pulmonary-embolic-septicemic-hemorrhagic-strokey-fungal-meningitis worry down molars with old silver fillings I heard there is mercury in those and the fish too concerned with the art of dying well to live like the literature or the old testament says prepare like your father and his mother and her mother too touch the old mezuzah just in case a case of necrotic erythema multiforme major sets in I just can't shake the sheets out for bugs and check the color of every fruit and inspect the bread for mold me into the woman I was supposed to be protected but the greenery is in need of water wash away the oils and thumbprints and stains and viruses and bacterias can you please make me clean again

BERGENTRÜCKUNG*Kelly Thompson*

ash,
as it turns out,
smells like nothing. nothing
coating the lungs. smells and tastes
reduced to
nothing. into the oppressive
nothing
you are launched.
you come
from somewhere at the limits of
cognition, lungs coated
with nothing—
nothing that smells
like ash.

Respect Your Mother

Alexandra Reyes



Bear-Fox-Owl-Man / Man-Owl-Fox-Bear

Noah Mannix

You are watching your daughter turn into a bear. There is a small fire beside her, adding to the heat of the forest in summer, the heat that is soaking sweat through your many layers of clothes. You were doing yard work when you smelled the smoke, moving piles of wood from one quadrant of the property to another, dragging the sticks along through the underbrush in your thick muscular arms, reminding your body of the work that it is used to, that it craves while you sit at your desk in your office in the city at your job. Your daughter is in front of you, turning into a bear.

She has already burned the clothes. You can tell by the melted plastic button from her favorite flannel shirt, sizzling on the ground ten feet away from your silently shaking body hidden in the brush. Now you are crouching, watching, as she strips off her skin, wincing, as she starts with the toenails. One by one they pull out of their soft resting places, revealing the pink and bloody skin underneath. She works sharp fingernails into the crevice where the toes meet the foot. Beside her on a rock you see a knife she has brought along, in case she couldn't get it started, but she is going now, slipping out of this suit of skin that held her back for so long. Underneath, black fur begins to appear, matted down with blood and fluid. Underneath the skin of her fingers, you realize, have been growing long sharp claws, that are now working quickly at the skin of her neck, unzipping it like a shirt that is choking, too tight, ready to be rid of the thing. Too late, you forget to linger

on her face, remembering just what it looked like in this moment, and all of the others.

Now it is gone, replaced by the long sloping snout, only slightly pale, and the two black beady eyes, and the round ears that remind you of a stuffed animal you had, maybe, once. You try and figure out which part of the suit of skin that is lying on the ground was once your daughter's ears, her nose, her lips, but it all looks so different, lying there, and just as you are about to decipher this new code, you hear the grunting and sniffing and chewing as she begins to eat her skin. *Her old skin*, you think to yourself. *This is her old skin*. You know you are not supposed to be here really, that you don't have the right, that this is sacred, and personal, but you have to know. Of all of your children, she was the one that you could divine the least about. Second-son, and First-daughter, they were sometimes tricky, but not like her.

Second-son became a fox, and you remember when you realized it had happened. One day he was there, with the same look in his eyes that always seemed like emptiness, but which now you know was deepness, and vastness. You did not see him again until you heard pups yipping, and him and his wife screeching with the voice that chilled your bones, in the dead of night, and the next morning your grandchildren played at the line of forsythia that separated you from the forest. They bit and scratched, tumbling down the hill coming close to the brambles, and

your son Second-son was nowhere to be seen, but you could feel his eyes on you and from you.

First-daughter became an owl, silent and serene and solitary, calling through the night to let you know she is out there, making sure that you never forget. You will never forget. You still feel sadness for her, for how she rushed this process, how she hurt so badly that she needed to leave as soon as possible. She fills your mind often. Like Second-son, you do not see her. But she is on your mind often, and that is enough.

Your daughter is panting now, her long tongue lolling out of the side of her mouth. The blood on it is foaming and bubbly and pink, steam rising from her panting breaths. Her ears have new functions that you notice, that she too is noticing. The cicadas are loud in this part of the forest, it is closing in on dusk. The crickets will start soon, have already started somewhere, you can tell from the swiveling pads atop her head. Setting her nose to the ground, you watch as now she takes in all of her new senses, fully bathing herself in them, using them to wash away any humanity left. She can smell the dirt, the clay, the iron deep under the earth in tiny particles. The insects that are crawling down there smell delicious, caked in grime and full of sweet juice and soft meat. She turns her head to her flanks and begins bathing herself with her tongue, her mouth and nose working in tandem to let the smell and taste of her old blood fill her completely. Some of it has

stuck to her new fur, congealed in the humidity of the air, and she engages her teeth in the task of picking at it, like a scab. It feels good, you can tell.

You could tell with First-son, born after First-daughter, that something was wrong. He had come in one night to the kitchen where you were sitting with your coffee. You had known that that day was his last day, and that he was anxious, and afraid. Still, you knew he had to do it alone, and that you could not be there, no one should be there. So instead you made a pot of coffee, like you did when you couldn't sleep (or didn't want to) and you sat at your kitchen table reading, looking out through the window occasionally at the darkness that almost invaded your home, looking straight out to where you knew the forest was, where you knew if you could see it that the trees were there, looming, at the edge of the clearing you had made when you first came here. Lost in thought, you almost screamed, your body tense and your eyes wide, when out of the corner of your vision you saw First-son standing in the doorway to your left, drenched in sweat and blood and dirt. You looked into his eyes and behind the exhaustion and sadness was terror, your terror and his mixed into one. You looked down at his bare feet, caked in mud, and saw his shadow, connected only by a thread. And that is how First-son became a man.

Your daughter is almost done, you can tell. Her body is bigger now, yet closer to the ground, hunched over. She turns, once, twice, three times, chasing her tail like a dog and smiling. Her eyes close gently as she breathes deep, feeling new lungs, larger lungs, stronger lungs, straining for longer against larger muscles in her

chest, layered on top of thick bones, supporting this powerful new frame. You can tell this feels good too, and you are reminded of when you felt the same way, fully grown and comfortable in your skin. You can also feel the pain of losing it, losing the strength, and immediately know with dread that one day she will feel that pain too.

She opens her eyes and stares directly at you, and you are frozen, the sweat that has been pouring into your shirt and pants chilling you in an instant, and you know that she sees you now better than you have ever seen her, better even than you see her now. Your mouth opens to speak to her, and quick claws sever herself from her shadow, and quick teeth snap it up into powerful jaws, and before you know to mourn it, you know there is no chance of ever seeing your daughter again. Because now, she is just a bear.

You leave immediately. The fire will put itself out. The bear will find some berries around the next tree. You saw them, and you know that she did too, when she was planning this. How long has she been planning this? You don't think you will ever know. For now you head back inside, abandoning the wood you were supposed to be moving, taking off your sweat-soaked clothes in the entryway, leaving your boots outside, looking forward to the shower that you are going to take. First, though, you go into her room, looking for clues, looking to know her. You don't find anything. Defeated, you take your shower, you try to dry off (it is

impossible in this humidity), you wait outside in your robe. It is dark now, and the coffee is brewing just inside the door.

My Hair is a Sign of Resistance

Lillian Reilly

My hair is a sign of resistance
It bore the oppression of ancient Egypt
And fled across the lands of Europe
All the way to mother Lithuania

It escaped the reign of the Cossacks
And sailed like a sardine to America
It waited at Ellis Island
And signed its name on papers
For a chance to live in peace

It watched the synagogue get burned
And felt the spit from the passersby
It ran to catch its kipah
From the bullies, unconcerned

It found a home in the burbs
And went to public school
It graduated and went to college
Just to get called knotty
And came home crying
Looking for a place to turn

But my hair did not mat
It did not fall out in clumps
It washed itself and applied fresh spray,
cream and gel and pump
And soon it was shaken from the crunch
And beautiful curls arose
And bounced around upon my head
And sung their highest note

“Your hair is a sign of resistance”
I will say to my beautiful child
As I brush out the troubled knots
Hoping that Yetta will one day see
What we have all become

Rob II

Noah Mannix



Blackest Sheep*Kelly Thompson*

I am the first daughter
of the first son
of a series
of a series
of a series of second sons
or third sons
or fourth.

I am a fruit that blossoms
on a branch so long clipped
from the great tree of ancestry
it lays underneath wedding cake
layers of seasonal detritus.
Nourished on private love
and private spite,
ancestral memories of

humiliation

scorn

and failure,

I grow fat and solitary.

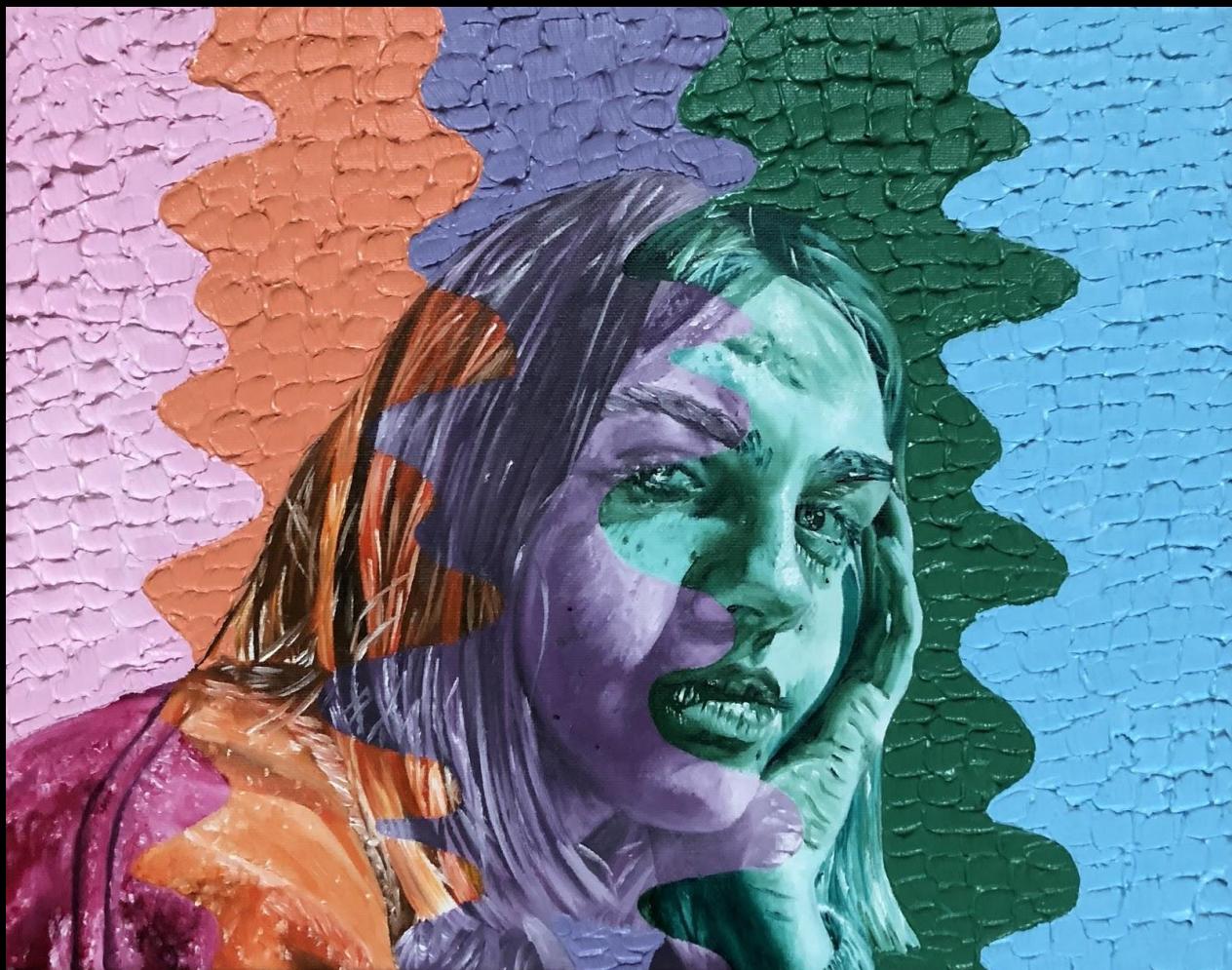
I am a bonobo

that hibernates

like a bear.

Funkytown

Natalie Linch



Shakespeare in the Park

Noah Mannix

We didn't think we were especially disturbing. We certainly weren't hurting anybody; how could we? We were in love. And when you're in love, what better way to express it than in the immortal words of the bard himself.

Apparently some parents spied our behavior from the playground on the hill across the pond. Why they had their binoculars scanning the horizon while their children ran into the woods and found their fun in playing with the dead fox that's been back there for a week, I don't know. But they saw us, in our robes and crowns, pacing the shore of Puffer's, reciting soliloquy and monologue, aside and iambic pentameter, only ever stealing sly glances at one another; anticipation makes the moment sweeter.

Our "wherefore"s and our "forswear"s were our own; they were never meant to be for others. Just between the two of us, brushing hands as we stood back to back, laying in the crypts of our minds, seeing the other through the feeling of being so close to someone, yet so far.

A bear watched us from behind the blueberry patch across the stream. His small black eyes filled with tears, watching our passion, our devotion, our rebellion. He listened to our words, the words of our father, and was moved. "When we are

born we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools," he whispered, and his lips began to move independently, picking blueberries from their branches.

When we broke our eyes' sweet fast, we embraced each other, drinking in the sight of our love, shouting lines of ardour to shake the sun from its perch.

HAVE NOT SAINTS LIPS AND HOLY PALMERS TOO

AY PILGRIM LIPS THEY MUST USE IN PRAYER

We didn't mean to hurt anyone.

The older couple woke up from their nap, their picnic blanket stitching impressed upon their skin from laying in the sun, sweat dappling their foreheads. Blinking, they assume this is heaven. They frolick down the hill, skipping with glee, and rush into the warm water, kicking up clods of mud with sandaled feet, ripping cottontails from their soggy beds, whipping each other with the stems, laughing and screaming joyfully.

Our lines were written merely to entertain; that is what we are. Mere entertainers, on the world's stage. What better stage than this? What better audience than you? Our patrons, sweet and gracious, lovely and beautiful (cheap sunglasses and yellow armpit stains notwithstanding), we please you with verse. We revel in the contradictions, our brawling love, our loving hate, Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,

Still-waking sleep.

The mothers cry silently into their telephones, the station is reached, their mouths move, "Fair is foul and foul is fair; hover through the fog and filthy air." Miles away, the sirens begin, the calls of war.

We are prepared; our love is a battlefield we shall defend. We shall prevail, our game is set.

THESE VIOLENT DELIGHTS HAVE VIOLENT ENDS

Intermission: the fox's lungs inflate, flesh and fur grow out of air, she stands up shakily and walks away, licking her chops; the children are changed forever; the bear is comforted by a small dog, escaped this past week from a woman who feels she needs something in her life she can control; the mothers have appointed a rotational system of leadership, and every twelve seconds a new one steps forward, says her line, and fades into smoke; the old couple continues doing beautiful backstroke, though their clothes have begun to fill with the tadpoles of an especially wizened frog; a catfish sleeps in the mud.

ACT V

Where is our soothsayer? Has he been delayed? This is the next part; or was it the beginning? What use is a soothsayer who comes at the end? The priest steps

out from behind a tree, his eyes wild and his robes overflowing. He joins our hands, and for the first time, our gazes are locked, staring into the wonderful depths of another, reverberations and meditations on mirrored pools. The priest makes a hasty retreat.

The old couple has completed their swim. They stand in the middle of the pond. Shame is a fast-growing weed; they will never speak of this day again. They will get in their mid-range SUV and drive into the sunset, forever and always, or at least until they run out of gas, and then they will buy the first piece of land that they see, and it will be their land.

The prince's guards have come; our time is nearly consummate; their decrees glint in the sunlight. We take a final gaze at one another, drunk on beauty; daggers are drawn.

Parking Garage on Montgomery and 11th

Daniel Kandra

And I saw her there,
Across the abandoned asphalt.
She stared to the moon,
The horizon, the skyline.
She stood there,
In her isolation,
And she saw the harmonies of love.
The strings of colors that weaved between clouds,
Haloed the setting sun,
And casted shadow puppets.
The moon was their backdrop,
And she was their audience.

I watched from afar.
She didn't know I was there,
Her eyes were on the performance in light.
That faithful aurora.
I see so much in her.
Her hair was childhood,
Her cardigan was faith,
And I knew these were the things I had
Started off with, but lost somewhere on the road.
I never saw her eyes,
But I know if I had, I wouldn't have ever left that spot.

The time is seven thirty.
Our homemade cathedral tolls.
One bell chime rings through a city with sleep on its mind.
It ends the harmonies' performance,
The cloudy curtain falls on the moon,
And the bell toll is still ringing in my ears.
I wonder if she heard it too?
Our mantra,

Ours and ours alone.
A secret we could've shared.

Just Resting*Kristen Gabriel*

Reflection

Sara Joyce

where do the leftover pieces of me go. I hope they find peace
 in a way their maker
 does not.

candle throwing shadows around the room a whisper
 behind the mirror. where do the leftover pieces of me go.
 is she there behind the
 mirror. *who is that girl I see*
 she opens her eyes when I close mine
staring straight back at me she is
 back-turned back-stabbed back-pedalled
 buried
 in my lungs

I close my eyes when hers open
 she looks me up and down when
 I turn my back
 slice of sword swifter than wind
 fly away on the back of Stallion
 fly away thrusting shoulder blades skimming treetops
 masculine maid sing songs of war
 father's only daughter so I am strong and he is old
 I am
 stronger than his son
 stronger than your son stronger
 than the soldier who violates who
 is the mortar the field-woman who
 is the pestle
 in the rice fields
 in the scorched fields
 burning villages black smoke
 choking snow
 the guardian is Dragon
 who protects women
 their daughters
 I cast my hair into the fire
 with my ancestors' hopes dreams and desires

The Hunger (1983)

Mal Makalintal

1. The ceiling beams
of my childhood church curve
into one another like wooden ribs
reaching over spine. Beneath them,
I open my mouth and Christ
 crawls onto my tongue.
The Sunday mass teaches me how to eat.

2. Everyone I've ever loved sits inside my mouth like teeth,
 glowing at night in the wet and cavernous dark.
I know you understand this.

3. We are the same; our mouths slaver beneath tooth-
aches & we have the thumbs of thieves in little light.
What I'm saying is this: we always want too much.

4. Figs are not fruit but inverted flowers, ugly and wet as gums smashed in. To
fertilize them, a female wasp crawls inside the fig. If the fig is a male, she lays
eggs in it that, once hatched, will carry the fig pollen with them as they burrow
out. If the fig is not male, the wasp lays nothing but dies anyway, a bundle of
wings and small, dark legs among sweetness.

5. I hope this is a soft death, with all the lights gone out. I hope you feel my
heart
as it beats out of my back. I hope you can hear all of my wet teeth
sharpening.

Flies

Bridget Lynch

You know now, you shouldn't take that street home. You've learned a lot since then. Past-you and current-you (me) are virtually different humans.

It was hot that day, today, wasn't it? It was hot the day before too, and the day before that. But! It was a different kind of hot today. Instead of stepping into a warm oven and being baked, you were broiled. Crispy! You stayed in the shade. (Of course you had to, look at how pale you are.)

You found your place by the tree.

Though you longed for the back support, you didn't sit directly under the tree because there was a squirrel's corpse. Flattened. Seeing a dead animal is never easy for you. The flattened street rats hurt your heart while also repulsing you. (Pick a struggle!) Why was the squirrel's body flat? It couldn't have been run over; it was under a tree away from a road. But how much do you know about squirrel decomposition anyway?

There were a lot of flies swarming the squirrel's corpse. Death becomes food becomes life. What an act of reverence and recycling on the fly's part. To honor by pushing yourself forward.

So, you sat on your blanket a few feet away, the squirrel corpse hidden from sight, reading, and not even at all paying attention to who was walking by, not even a bit.

And it was hot.

So you didn't stay for long.

On the walk back, you didn't rush, for once. The heat makes it appealing to get inside quickly, but also appealing to walk slowly so you don't sweat more than necessary. It's a balance. (We've been saying that a lot; I hope you're paying attention.)

But that's beside it all. (You know that now.)

It was under that pile of rubble on the sidewalk. The sidewalk by that busier street, not the super busy one, but the medium busy one. Mainly residential.

You've been seeing this pile for a while. The drywall or cracked concrete, or maybe both. Either way, it was the bit of rubble that you stepped on and over every time you walked down that street. Local construction, you thought, but it never moved. Unknown origins. Collaborations unseen.

A bit of the drywall, or cardboard, or concrete, wasn't in its usual position, and you saw part of a plastic bag sticking out. A darker bag, just slightly peeking out from under the pile.

You step on the bag, as it's in your path and it doesn't matter anyways as you have to step on and over the pile that blocks the whole sidewalk.

But, instead of your foot hitting the lumpy concrete or drywall or cardboard, it squishes. You sink into something softer, something spongy. The bag slides and shifts.

A piece of cardboard (concrete, drywall, dust) slides aside.

You see skin. You see hair. You look away.

You keep walking home.

You turn back around.

You see the skin and hair. You shift the top of the bag aside with your foot, of course there isn't a human head underneath this pile of rubble, concrete, cardboard, drywall, dust.

You see an eye.

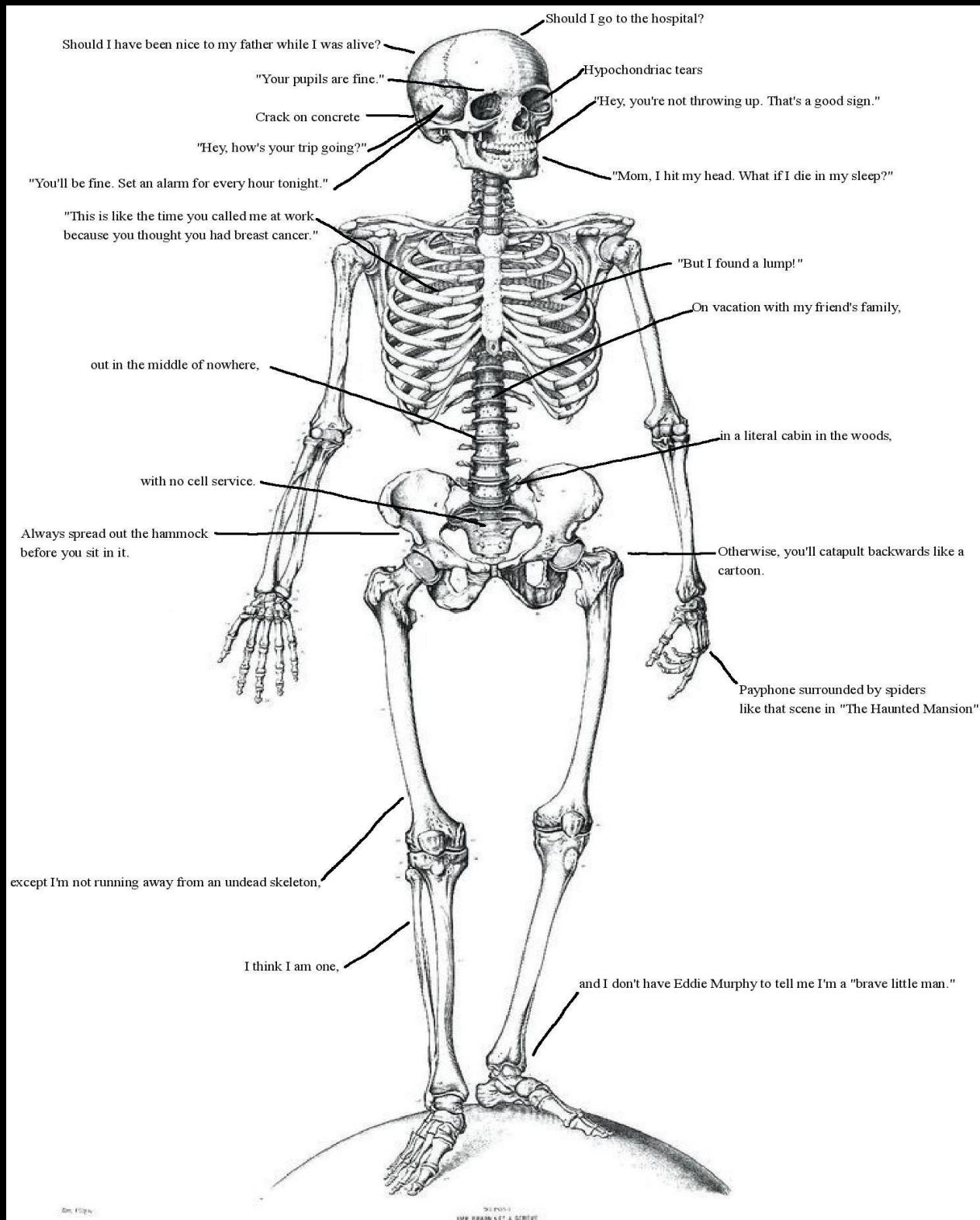
You look away. You walk home.

You hear buzzing behind you and you're glad he isn't alone.

Crack on Concrete

Isabella Piacentino

after Monia Ong's *Silent Anatomies*



A Man Walks Into a Cornfield

Noah Mannix

A man walks into a cornfield, and when he comes out on the other side, he is a different person; he is older. Twenty years have passed, and he has more wrinkles, more gray hairs, a slower walk, tighter joints. He doesn't know what happened. One minute he was in the cornfield, and the next he's blinking in the bright sunlight, looking down at hands that have liver spots. He isn't just twenty years older; he's thirty years older, forty, growing older and older by the second. Down the road is a small diner, he remembers, only two miles. He could be there by lunchtime if he walks fast enough. Could he?

The bell chimes in the diner as he walks through the door. He remembers it as playing "Camptown Races" in a tinny, whining, electronic tone, but now it's nearly silent, just a faint hum of electricity and a squeal that's trying to make sound. He finds the least dirty booth, in the back by the kitchen, and sits down, scooting all the way to the window. The sun feels good on his shoulder, and his eyes water as he stares outside, already used to the cool darkness of the unlit diner.

The vines are new, and they are everywhere. After sitting for a while, he starts to pick up on the fact that nobody is coming to serve him, to tell him what the specials are and ask him what he'd like to eat, whether he wants cream and sugar with his coffee. But by this point he's already fifty years older than when he first went into the cornfield, and too tired to get up. He rests his hands on the table, feeling the thick layer of natural grime that would be impossible to take off at this point, and watches his hands. The growth is fast, like watching time-lapse footage of his skin, his nails, his bones. Freckles, moles, bruises, cuts, dirt, grow and fade, grow and fade, every inch flickering and flashing, sharp beams of sunlight on them. The nails are the strangest part; every time they grow past the tips of his fingers they are cut back again, and again, and again, this strange repetitive race, a losing battle with invisible clippers.

What was his name? The man tries hard to remember, closing paper-thin eyelids over sunken dry eyes. Light from the window turns his internal world red, with dark veins running through the sky.

There was a dance, and a girl, and a bed. His mother and father, standing over a crib. Birthdays, Christmases, play in the fields behind his house. The nearest neighbors were weird, and religious, and he thought they must be strict

and cruel to their children, but they all seemed so happy all the time, which made him upset because he was so sad. It was only him and his parents, and then after a while, when his mother grew big and his father came home without her one day, it was just the two of them, and he was lonely.

The little girl his own age down the road was nice to him. Whenever they would play, he would get scared and red and burning, and eventually run away into the dusk to his home. He remembered the heat of summer, and how the grass felt on his small legs, sharp and itchy. Later, he would realize that they were called blades, and this made sense to him. Words always made sense to him.

One day his father died, and he realized that this was the end of his childhood, he was left alone with the farmhouse. He decided to keep it, even though the neighbors wanted him to sell, to give his childhood friend and her new husband land all their own. He refused out of spite, disguised as hate for his father, love for his mother. His job in the city paid enough to let him keep the farm and his small apartment, and the fact that he didn't have a girlfriend, and absolutely no children, meant that he had enough money to do things others couldn't or shouldn't, things that people with other responsibilities might not do, which translated for him into doing whatever he wanted.

At first he went to the farm every week. He'd put on the old red and black flannel shirt hung meticulously in his closet, dry-cleaned at the place down the street with the nice Korean ladies that he could never understand. He loved to let their words wash over him, and think about how he would never have this, their language. When he put the shirt on, with a pair of meticulously preserved denim jeans, he tried to think he felt natural, at home, out there, not here.

Gradually, he spends even longer and longer hours at the office, and he takes less and less care of his farm clothes (incidentally, when he does put them on, he does start to feel more natural), and when he turns forty, he realizes that except for the yearly tax bill on the property, he doesn't think about it that much anymore. In his nice apartment, high above the city, he thinks about how he's been promoted on the regular schedule, about how much more money he is making now than back then, about how little his colleagues know about this other life of his. He thinks that maybe he'd like to have one person, just one other person he can share the farm with. Immediately the neighbor girl comes

to mind, and he pushes her out, and a breeze takes her place. He goes and turns up the thermostat, gets dressed in his pajamas, and sleeps fitfully.

As he dreams, he dreams of corn, and wheat, and sharp itchy grass finding its way into his shorts, and when he wakes up the bed is filled with blood.

The doctor tells him that what he has isn't hopeful. He likes this doctor; he's practical, like him, and cynical, like him, and he charges a lot for his services, like him. This news seems shaped like he can't hold it in his hand, so instead it sits on him. At the end of the meeting, the doctor tells him that there might be a chance, fifteen percent, if they operate right away ("Sit on it," the doctor says). The man fires the doctor for lying to him, but doesn't explain that this is why.

He drives out to the cornfield in the middle of the night. When he is halfway there, he goes into the roadside bar that he used to stop at every weekend. There are half as many people inside as there used to be, and he notices that they're serving women too. Even when the bartender was a tough old lady with missing teeth and a wide stance that could stop an eighteen-wheeler, they never served women. He walks up to the youngest, most gullible looking boy he can find, and gives him the keys to his car, his clothes, his bank account, in exchange for the boy's truck. The man keeps his flannel and his jeans, but buys a jacket from the oldest man at the bar.

He arrives at the house, and he leaves the truck in the driveway, right where his father would be coming home from the bar. His father would coast into the driveway, engine off and lights turned down, hoping that he wouldn't wake his sleeping wife and child. But his son would wake up every time, peering over the window sill that overlooked the dusty lane. Even after his wife died, and he started spending more and more time at the bar, getting drunker and drunker, the man's father would still coast right into place, the muscle memory impossible to erode no matter how many shots of whiskey tried.

The man sleeps in the spot where his childhood bed used to be. The wooden floorboards are cold, and the wind is sharp. It used to be his lullaby, and a couple of times it threatens to send him to sleep, but he doesn't let it. That's not what he is here for.

In the morning he lays still for two hours. When the sun starts to warm the house, he dozes patiently, waiting in his dusty rectangle on the floor. He knows it is ten o'clock when he hears the door slam, his father coming in from

the field for a sandwich that his mother has made. He goes outside and walks out to the lane, facing the cornfield.

ODOR*Isabella Piacentino*after Harryette Mullen's *Trimmings*

cheek spritz peach breeze sunset neck bridal rose
vein spray ethereal daisy field angel daydream scalp
virgin pulse cherry thigh strawberry cupcake eye
princess blossom temple bloom cucumber melon drizzle
wrist tropic honey navel lavender tree leaves
enchanted jungle throat wild magic nymph breasts venus
vanilla child jugular coconut island citrus mist

no wonder you cannot see us

Stank

Natalie Linch



meat (ghazal)

Sara Joyce

with the fresh rainfall hosing down your meat,
ammonia seeps into the ground beneath our feet.

wet waste to inject naiads with feces,
stud juice to father the next generation of meat.

we worship the thundering electric fans,
if they stop we will surely be dead meat.

dilution is the solution to pollution:
sour milk and birthing fluids to wash our meat.

genetically-altered bacteria makes us superheroes,
only from the pharmaceuticals keeping alive our meat.

algae blooms arsenic green from our run-off,
a rebirth from the sacrifice of our meat.

slaughterhouse screams are deemed
inevitable to slow down our stumbling meat.

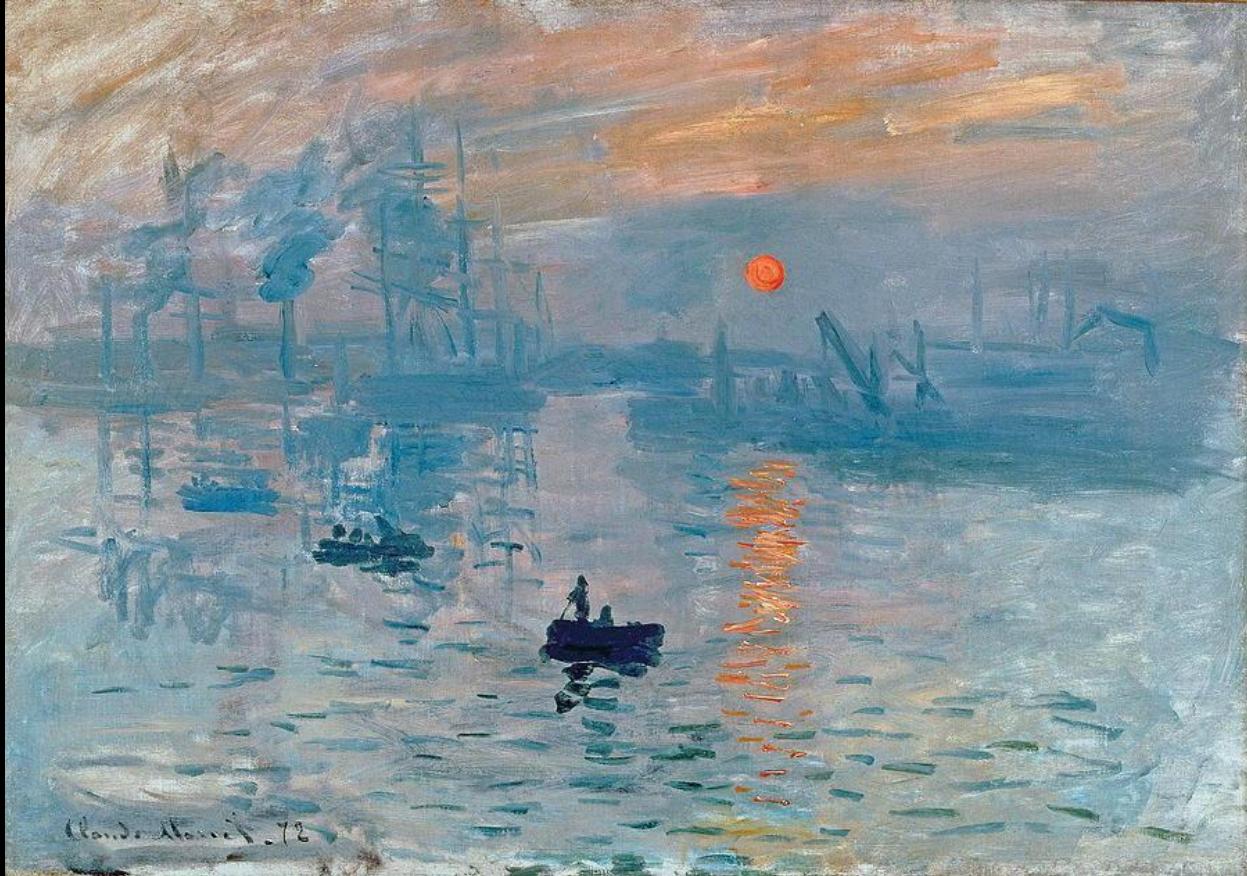
Psyche in Eclipse*Helen Zeidman*

blue-gray BLOOD ORANGE

Isabella Piacentino

blue-gray

hushed strokes sweep sleepy scenery kissing sea & sky smoke-submerged blue chill haze
morning swaddled in ashen fog while dreams swim misty minds skim sixth senses & the
wrist flicks fleck waves ocean breath rocks charcoal blots of shadow-sailors floating city-
bound or towards some fantasy shore colossal stick ships still docked masts swaying crews
slumber-stuck in a faded wasteland sightless before the coast awakens



BLOOD ORANGE

CIGARETTE BURNS THROUGH CANVAS FIBERS HISSING PEACH PEEKING THROUGH
night still clinging to clouds ZEUS'S ACCIDENTAL ASHTRAY RUPTURES pearl-blue sky &
MELTS dawn INTO GOLD BLOOD ORANGE SUN SIMMERS STATIC PIN-POKING fog TO
DIP WARMTH INTO glossy blue TOBACCO EMBERS DIVE & cool atop the arctic glass
gray silk TANNED BY HONEY FLAMES WAVES BUTTERED BLOND SWIRLING
EXHALING DAYLIGHT IN salt, sea breeze, & ivory glow

Ekphrasis on Monet's Impression Sunrise

warm luxe cashmere*Christina Mendes*

flaming ship
anchored to
glass

singed fibers
burn while
tensions pass

aqua ripples
with deep purpose
crimson fire shifts
the surface

dark blue
ocean of wax,
soon to be
nothing left.

i watch my candle burn.

Stairwell*Noah Mannix*

Tarrare Speaks*Mal Makalintal*

I have dreams where all of it leaves me.

Spit-stained cat paws & skinned dog ears. Unpeeled apples. Soft-boiled eggs. Tobacco pills & unchewed eels. Lizards. Laudanum. Wine corks. Watches.

I have dreams where all of the meat crawls out of me, half chewed & panting & calling for home.

& didn't I give it to you? You greedy, dirt-lined dog lip.

Wasn't my throat just a warm, damp night? Wasn't my uvula such a bright pink moon for you?

& weren't we supposed to be together? In these dreams, I cradle the bones.

I croon to their marrow: the only part which stays still.

In Search of Tongue

Noah Mannix

In Search of: Tongue

Help! I need a tongue to complete my collection so I can sell it at the convention this weekend!

Details:

I am looking for a tongue from a woman between the ages of 21 and 34 to complete my collection. I need to sell this collection at the convention this weekend so that I can afford to go on vacation. I have collected the rest of the set (old woman, old man, dog, cat, beetle, young woman, slightly older man that the young woman is in love with but who is married, woman who is married to the slightly older man but who is secretly in love with a student in her senior philosophy class and really it would be for the best if they all got over themselves and talked about things, cow, etc.) over the past five years, saving money and being smart about it. But the convention's this weekend, and I need the final perfect piece, a tongue from a woman aged 21 to 34 (preferably who has seen at least one murder but hasn't screamed)! If you can help me, please email the address listed under "Seller Information", or come to the duck pond at the park on the edge of the city where there are never any ducks because the cars driving by are too loud and it always smells like sweet garbage.

I suspect that there might be some questions, so I've tried to anticipate them below, as well as collect other questions that I've gotten over my years as a tongue collector:

Q: *What should I bring?*

A: Just your smiling self (and a valid photo ID for board certification)! But don't smile the whole time; I need to be able to get in there with the forceps and various knives. I will provide bandages, whiskey, a cooler of ice, tools, and a burner cell phone to call an ambulance. Basically, everything that one needs to remove a tongue!

Q: *What's the photo ID for?*

A: The collecting board needs to certify who the tongue came from so that it fits the criteria for the collection. I will need to take a photo of you (but really just your tongue, sticking out in the cold air, with the ID held up next to it).

Q: *Will it hurt?*

A: Hopefully. I would expect it to. If it doesn't, you should probably talk to a medical professional. Pain is to be expected in most things in life, and if you're seemingly immune to the pain of someone removing your tongue, I would get that checked out. You could have a tumor, or worse, be some kind of psychopath.

Q: *Can I see the collection?*

A: Unfortunately, not in person, no. I have posted an image down below for reference, so you can see that I am a professional (this certainly isn't my first

tongue-rodeo!). However, I can't risk taking the collection out in public before the convention. Obviously you understand: what if it gets stolen, or worse, you for some reason back out after seeing up close the other tongues that your tongue will have to spend the next however long with (trust me, it's happened before; so disappointing)?

Q: *Will we be friends after this?*

A: I'm not sure. Maybe if we go out for drinks, get to know one another, spend some more time together - we could start to form a sort of bond, the special bond that exists between one person who has given a tongue, and another person who has taken that tongue. IMPORTANT: You cannot contact me for at LEAST a month after I take your tongue. If you try to do this, I will be very upset, and bad things could happen. Just the rules.

Q: *What got you into tongues?*

A: I'm glad you asked. Nothing in particular really, I just think they're neat, and sometimes other people want to pay me for them. The collecting community is really friendly.

Q: *How will I know that it's you at the park?*

A: I will be wearing a puffy pink coat with red camouflage patterns on it, like if Cupid was a Navy Seal. My instruments will be gathered around me on the bench at the Northwest corner of the park, on the side of the duck pond near the donut shop with the boarded up windows, across the street from the psychic with the neon

sign. When you approach, I'll most likely be mesmerized by the neon, staring at it, letting the electric hum fill my mind like a swarm of bees. Just shake me, not too hard, not too soft, or yell your name directly into my left ear, and I should snap out of it.

Q: *Where are you going to go on vacation?*

A: Probably India. There's a fakir in a small village that doesn't have a name, and he pierces his tongue with a red-hot knitting needle every ten minutes, and when he pulls it out, it's as if it never happened; the taste buds are all still perfectly small and bumpy, there is no charring or scarring, no hole where the needle passed through, no discoloration or dryness. It is the most perfect tongue in the world, and I can't wait to see it. If I can't afford that, though, then Maine, to see my mother.

Q: *Does the fakir have any other talents?*

A: Not that I know of. I think I heard that he tried sitting on a bed of nails once, but it just made him sore, so he opted for the knitting needle instead.

Q: *Will I ever get my tongue back?*

A: Probably not. You could try tracking down the person that I sell the collection to, but I can't give out any information; it's a pretty tight-knit group. If you really wanted, you could go to the police, try and describe my appearance to them, explain what happened, listen to them laugh at you and your rushed handwriting, feel your cheeks burn as you run out, crying silently. You could spend lots of money on private detectives, scraping the bottom of the barrel as money runs out; they'll

never find anything. When you're finally out of cash, you can liquidate your assets, use that to travel around the country in your car, until finally you collapse on the doorstep of a complete stranger, someone you weren't even thinking could possibly have your tongue, or maybe your parents' home, or your cousin's, and then, bam, there it is; your tongue. You won't be able to reattach it at all, but it might be nice to reconnect with an old friend.

Q: *How will I talk/sing/laugh/cry/etc.?*

A: You probably won't. You could try using a small whiteboard and erasable marker, or a pad of paper and a pen or pencil, or even an extremely interesting parrot. But eventually people will get tired of any option you try to come up with. Sign language isn't even as popular as it used to be, which is a real shame. And you can never really trust birds.

Q: *What should the last words that I ever say with my own voice be?*

A: This is really up to you, but here are some suggestions that I've gotten and things others have said over the years: "I love you," (to a spouse, child, dog, fish, the sky), "I'm sorry," (to me, themselves, their tongue, the grass), every Bad thing they've ever done (to a priest, to me again, to the water of the pond), every Good thing they've ever done (to an old coat in their closet, their pillow at night before going to bed), all of the things that they wished they still had time to do with their tongue (eat ice cream, kiss someone in the French style, perform oral sex on the person they used to have a crush on in college, burn it on really hot tea just one last time).

Q: What are people's actual last words?

A: "Ouch!" (said with an open mouth and my knife slicing into the flesh, so more gurgled and incomprehensible, but we both know this counts).

Q: Will I be compensated for this?

A: No.



Image Credit: <https://imgur.com/gallery/HXcPg>

Lynne

Kelly Thompson

When she was a child she couldn't be expected to
know not to listen to the barely-there gossiping of
hydrangeas and daffodils and
most of all
those ugly sprigs of rue
that grow at the edge of the railyard.

Now she is an adult and she is expected to know
that when and
 a goat a cat
beckon you in opposite directions, you always
 always
follow the goat
 never the cat.

Color from Afar*Helen Zeidman*

Helen's Creature

Bridget Lynch

“He’s quite the creature. Blue and a little green, a little purple. Looks just like he was drawn with crayon. He has these spikes going down his back, like a dinosaur but sharper. Totally hairless. His single eye is small and mean. No ears. He’s got this tiny mouth, which looks pretty weird if you ask me. Bit out of proportion. But the things he says yank me away from a place of judging him,” Helen said.

We were sitting on the basement floor, wool socks on, space heater blasting, amongst a pile. Old clothes, magazines, weird gadgets, dust bunnies, sheets of paper, a baseball bat, books, notebooks, mouse shit. I think there were even a few eyeless stuffed animals and some decrepit dolls. Helen was about to move to Wyoming, and she needed a hand sorting through her “collections.”

I love a good ol’ junk clean out (though I didn’t use that word around Helen – these objects were sewn into her soul) so I volunteered. Plus, I wouldn’t be seeing Helen for a while. She’s gotten a new (dream) job at Devils Tower National Monument and leaves in a few weeks. In 1906, at the dedication ceremony for the national monument, the apostrophe was accidentally left out (hence “Devils Tower” not “Devil’s Tower”). Helen always says this was a sleight of hand by God, who wouldn’t let such a beautiful formation be claimed by the devil.

“What does he say?” I asked, picking up a wrinkled magazine and setting it in the “release” pile. (Which was definitely not trash!)

“Well, he seems to say all kinds of things, but they all boil down to calling me a liar. And I hate how much I believe him.” Helen said this staring at the ground next to me. She looked up at me, smiled a bit, and reached back into the pile. She pulled out a 2-foot long grey tube.

“What’s that tube?” I asked.

“Literally no idea.”

Release pile.

We broke for lunch. Neither of us cooked much, so we dug out two cans of vegetable soup from deep in the cabinet, dust on top. I didn’t mention it to Helen at the time, but that brand of vegetable soup is my absolute favorite. In order to feign involvement in the cooking process, we poured the cans into a saucepan and heated it by stove, not by microwave.

Helen stirred the soup.

"What does the creature say you're lying about?" I asked.

She took a breath in and said, "Well, a range of things. It depends. If I'm having an anxiety attack, to the point where I'm on the couch, clutching a pillow, unable to move, he rocks up. Puts his weird tiny mouth right near my ear. 'You're making this up for attention. You just want attention, so you're acting out like a child.'"

I could tell she was glad I asked. "That's terrible. I hope you know he's not telling the truth."

"I do now, but in the moment he seems right. His little slimy lips are so close to my ears it sounds like my own brain. He fucks a lot up for me."

Helen bounced a bit, remembering something. "Bread! I have some extra bread, we can make garlic bread with the soup. That would be nice."

"Ooo, that would be lovely," I said.

Helen buttered and seasoned the bread, then popped it in the toaster oven as I took over stirring the soup.

We stared into the toaster oven, watching the glowing orange metal.

Ding, taking the soup off, dipping the garlic bread in soup, adding red pepper flakes to the soup, realizing we added too many, realizing the Britta was empty, staring at the dripping water as we panted from the spice.

We descended. A whole morning had already passed of us picking away at the pile(s), but it didn't seem to get much smaller.

The hardest bit to sort through were Helen's old essays from undergrad. She held up an early essay, slathered in red slashes, and then a 20 page paper from her last semester with a big A at the top. She treasured each of them.

"Thanks to you," she said. We met in the writing center. She was failing a few classes and about to lose her scholarship, so her advisors sent her to the writing center, to me. It was my first semester working there, and Helen was the first person I worked with. There were strict rules for tutors, so we counted down the days until the end of the semester so we could follow each other on Instagram and get lunch.

"It was because you kept working hard and showing up," I replied, as I always did. Helen rolled her eyes a bit.

"Hey, give yourself some credit for once."

Helen was stacking her old magazines as I dug around, searching for books. (“I can’t take much with me and I know how you read, you can take whatever books you want.”) I sat cross legged on the ground. Helen was laying on her stomach, propping her chin up with her hand.

Helen paged through a notebook set in front of her that was labeled “May-July 2016.”

“Remember Ellie? From the dorms?” she said.

“Yeah, um, long dreadlocks, finance major?”

“That’s her. Now, you probably heard the rumours, but we had a bit of a thing,” Helen tucked her hair behind her ears and I would have sworn she blushed a bit. Continuing, she said, “Well, we were basically dating.” A pause. “But that fucking monster got in the way.”

“How? Did he talk to her?” I asked, curious about the boundaries of this creature. I pulled out a book, *Some Possible Solutions*.

“Frequently, as we were cuddling or watching a movie, he’d squeeze right in between us, in a way that Ellie couldn’t see him. She’d turn to me, kiss my cheek, and say something sweet. And the creature would bend his streaky, crayon face over towards my ear. He’d whisper, ‘Sure is a shame you’re lying about all of this. Faking it cause you’re lonely. Shitty thing to do.’”

Helen spun around the ring on her right middle finger. She’s worn that as long as I’ve known her.

She noticed me eying a small framed painting and said, “You can have that if you want.”

“Thanks, I might put it in the lobby outside my office. I want it to feel more cozy there.” The new location for my practice was nice, but a bit desolate, which isn’t the feeling I’m going for.

I set it aside, and asked, “What ended up happening with Ellie?”

Helen’s mouth was still and limp for a moment. “In the end, I broke it off. Couldn’t stand hearing that. I didn’t even think I was gay for a while after that” Her solum expression loosened for a moment, “Until Joann, of course.”

“Of course,” I said, smiling a bit.

Helen fussed with the space heater. “I can’t believe an ugly creature like that could trick me into leaving Ellie. I’m honestly ashamed I believe him.” She looked at her socks.

“Helen, you don’t have to be ashamed. He doesn’t have the right to make you feel any more negativity and guilt.”

Helen started loading the “release” pile into trash bags. “You know, you’re right. I don’t want to give him any more power. He’s the goddamn worst.”

“Yeah, with his dumb weird little mouth. Fuck that monster.”

“Fuck him.”

Three weekends of sorting and soup later, Helen’s “collections” were decluttered and reorganized. After four trips to Goodwill (the trunks of both of our cars were pathetically small) and a few drop-offs to friends (“I know Robby could use these skates!”), we made a trip to the dumpster.

There, Helen insisted on lighting a candle.

“Thank you,” she said, and tossed a trash bag into the dumpster. “Thanks, goodbye now,” as she threw the next.

About a year later, I got one of my regular letters in the mail sent from Wyoming. But, the envelope was noticeably lighter than usual (I usually received pages of scrawling accounts of life at Devils Tower.)

It contained a single sheet of paper- a crayon drawing of a creature, blue and a little green, a little purple. Sharp spikes down its back, with one eye and a tiny mouth.

Below the creature, in Helen’s tiny lettering, she wrote, “Caught him. -H.”

Gaudy White Light

Isabella Hornick

I get followed everywhere.
The limelight can't help
but illuminate my
every single move.

Fans come to me like moths
do to the nearest radiating light.
It never phased me,
until 10:24 pm today.

I'm used to hearing footsteps
echoing after my learned agile step.
I'm used to click,
then gaudy white light.

But this time was different.
My follower didn't have a camera
gripped in her bony hand, but rather
a glossy revolver, trembling in obscurity.

Picture of me embedded in her lefty,
paired with a fine point sharpie.
It almost turns my attention away
from the unsettling dominant pistol.

It's hard to comprehend how
charming she was in a sinister way.
I guess my predisposition that
all my fans are lovely isn't always so.

At gunpoint, I scribbled away
on shiny eight by elevens.
My palms soaked in perspiration
As her shimmering eyelids batted at me.

Her focus centered on my body,
Eyeing me up and down.
With each glance, my knees
wobble and buckle beneath me.

Rolling up the glossy stock,
she gets a better grip on the trigger
and pockets the autographs.
Steady and ready to end it all.

She purses her wine lips,
blowing me a kiss goodbye.
That flash of her dazzling teeth
is the last of her I see.

My weight deteriorates downward
and the fresh cement embraces me.
As my eyeballs lazily roll back,
the final stroke of my billboard is painted.

Rosh Hashanah Morning

Shelby Green

I kept my head down like I try not to do, and listened
 to the sound of the Rosh Hashanah service
 in my ear.

Yitgadal v'yitzkadash shmei raba

Past a sidewalk graveyard for lantern flies.

Oseh shalom bimromav

Past new buildings and my backpack
 bouncing off time to the

hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu

Did it always sound like that?

It's been a year since I heard it.

Longer since I chanted it and heard the words repeated.

v'al kol-yisrael, v'imru

My boots echoed up the steps of the train station
 clanging like the final bell.

This concludes our service.

Amen v'amen

Bexar

Nico Cisneros

*"I know I'm imperfect
And not without sin
But now that I'm older,
All childish things end..."*

-Tell Him, Ms. Lauryn Hill

I.

“Are you recording?!”

“Don’t record this!”

“Oh, you bet your ass I’m getting this!”

Javier closed his eyes, letting his head fall back as his friends laughed at him.

He didn’t know why he thought it was a good idea to listen to Delao and come over and get his hair cut before “The Big Day.” Just because Delao had given himself the cut and it came out great didn’t mean he should have taken him up on his offer to get the cut, too.

He didn’t know why he ever listened to Delao, and why Vanessa was always sneaky like this and how he’d ended up with friends like this, because the absolute last thing he needed was his mom seeing this.

“Hi, Misses Rios!” He heard Delao laugh and his neck viciously popped as his head whipped around to see if, for some ungodly reason, Vanessa was calling his mother.

And, of course, she rolled her eyes at him.

“You really think I’d call your mother, Vee?”

He turned back towards the mirror. “I put nothing past you, Skiba.”

She smirked and shook her head. “C’mon, you’re stalling!”

He looked at her in the mirror, his eyes locking on the mischief in hers. For a brief second, he let himself think about how he would miss that look on her face-- hell, her face in general.

It was a blooming ache in his chest that brought him back.

Looking back to his own reflection, he silently scolded himself.

He was doing this.

“You ready, Delao?”

Delao’s eyebrows raised. “Are you?”

He didn’t resist when his eyes drifted to her, but he pulled them back and swallowed.

“Do it.”

II.

The only hiccup happened when Chris audibly gasped. Everyone just froze like Delao had somehow taken off a chunk of his head instead of his hair.

“My bad, my bad, my bad--”

“What?! What did I do?!”

“What do you mean, what did you do?!”

“No, you didn’t do anything!” Chris told Delao. “I’m just...in shock.”

Delao punched his arm, and Javier punched the same spot for good measure. “Don’t do that to me again, pendejo,” Delao said, shaking his head.

Javier tenderly touched the back of his head. “Is it ok?”

“You’re fine, pretty boy,” Vanessa laughed. “Let Delao finish.”

“That’s what she said,” Delao snickered.

The chorus of groans and reluctant laughter bounced off the bathroom tiles as Delao’s clippers zinged to life again.

III.

The rest of it seemed to happen fast. Maybe it was the conversation that pushed it along, all the talk of finals and whose grad party they were going to and whether or not they'd do Warped Tour this year.

Javier noticed that once they started talking about Warped Tour, Vanessa got kind of quiet. He didn't want to think anything of it, but that ache in his chest nagged at him again.

Still, though, it wasn't the time-- especially not since Delao had finished.

"And volia!" Delao grinned, turning off his clippers. "What you think, man?"

Javier's hand slowly glided across the sides of his head, the newly cut ends bristling against his palm. He liked the feel of it, but it was a trip to see. He didn't dare look down at the newspaper that laid in the sink, where there were the final remnants of what Vanessa had dubbed his "luscious locks".

He then ran his hand over the top of his head, where the hair was longer than the sides but still so much shorter than before. And the wave was gone-- his hair had been so wavy, but now it just sat there, flat on the top of his head.

He finally brought his hand to the back of his neck. To just feel bare skin on his palm instead of the wavy curls that had been there was jarring, but not more than the burning.

"What do you call this?" he asked Delao.

"It's a high and tight," Delao replied. "You'll probably need a trim by the time you get to Pendleton, but, y'know, at least I gave them the framework."

He turned to Delao, already preparing to make some smart-ass remark when he saw how soft Delao's eyes were. That ache vibrated in his chest again as he realized they both had the same cut now.

"Thank you," Javier said instead, taking Delao into a hug.

"Of course, man," Delao said as he released him. "Well," he turned to Vanessa and Chris. "What y'all think?"

"I think y'all are twinning too hard forreal," Chris said, Javier and Delao laughing. "It looks good, but man, y'all look more related than you did before!"

Even through their laughter, Javier could hear a silence. He looked over to Vanessa, whose eyes were down on her phone.

“Vee?”

“Hmm?” She didn’t look at him.

“What you think?”

Her eyes flickered up before swiftly returning back to her phone. When she spoke, it was so mumbled he almost didn’t hear her. “Looks good, man.”

Chris opened his mouth to speak up, but Javier shook his head. Delao started grabbing the newspapers from the sink. “Ayo, I’m thirsty, man, I’m gonna get rid of these and grab a drink,” Delao said. “Yo, help me with this,” he told Chris.

The two scuffled out, but not before Chris looked at Javier and nodded his chin towards Vanessa. He closed the door, leaving Javier and Vanessa in the deafening quiet.

IV.

Javier took a moment to close his eyes.

He remembered the last time he tried to tell Vanessa...well, everything.

It was two weeks ago. They were doing their stupid senior day at Fiesta Six Flags, as was tradition for the senior class. The two of them, along with Delao and Chris, had managed to get away from their teachers and were running through the park on their own.

They were going up the hill on a coaster-- it was a superhero one, that’s all he remembers about it-- and, of course, he was sitting next to her. Her knuckles shone white against the security rail she was gripping for dear life, her eyes shut just as tightly.

He couldn’t help but laugh. “You good?”

“Javier Rios, shut the fuck up,” she shot back. But he only laughed harder.

“Hey, give the rail a break, hold my hand,” he offered.

“If you think I’m letting go of this--”

“Look, just hold my hand, ok? We’re almost there!”

“We are?”

“Yes! V, I promise, we’re almost there!”

“Okay.” She didn’t open her eyes, but she did hold out her hand.

He took it-- and immediately regretted offering it, because damn, her scared strength was agonizingly strong.

“Okay, killer grip, you good?”

“Oh shut the fuck uuuu--” She began to scream as they finally hit the descent.

He laughed, raising their joined hands in the air. After the first inversion, she joined him.

As the ride slowed and pulled back into the station, he couldn’t help but rib her a little about how freaked out she’d been at the top. Of course she told him to stop and they kept laughing, but they didn’t let go of each other’s hands until the ride attendant lifted the security rail.

He wanted to take her hand again, but without the ride, what would his reason be?

So he let her walk off with Chris and Delao while he pretended to go to the bathroom so he could sneak off to the souvenir stand to buy the photo of the two of them on the ride, hands held tightly together in the sky.

V.

That photo felt like it was burning through the wallet in his back pocket as he watched her scroll down her screen.

“So I’m ugly now, huh?” he tried to joke.

“Shut up, Javier,” she sighed.

The full name was not a good sign.

“Well, you won’t even look at me, so--”

Her head snapped up to reveal tear tracks down her cheeks, her nose red, her eyes glossy. "There, I'm looking at you! Happy?"

She made for the door, but he stepped in front of her. "Vanessa--"

"What?!"

When she looked up at him, her brown eyes ablaze with furious hurt, the ache in him tore him apart.

He didn't realize he'd lifted his hand to her face until he felt her tears under his thumb.

"I'm gonna miss you, too."

The anger seemed to melt off her face, replaced by a sad kind of shock that can only be felt when an avoided truth is finally said.

Suddenly he was being squeezed by slender arms. He brought his arms around her, his shirt absorbing her tears as it muffled her cries.

For the second time that day, he had to tell himself he was doing this.

But goddamn if she didn't make him want to stay.

Hollowed Out and Hopeless

Stella Vallon

I'm scarred by words whispered in the dark,
by an absent lover who gets off on breaking hearts.

A peculiar fantasy-seldom achieved by me-at least I'm funny,
I'm kinda smart.

Waiting

He kisses my shoulder and I know then that it's over,
our little rendezvous.

I'll see him when I'm older,
he'll only grow colder.

But I'll be a mark on his thigh-a wrinkle beneath his eye-
somehow that'll keep time.

Where am I then?
My vision only extends to the mirror above the closet.
There his coat is thrown gracelessly,
my future's right in front of me.

Cheers!
He's finally rolling off of me.
Grabbing his coat and I've said nothing.

How to even articulate,
a grand fuck you,
I know you think you've got me but this was never about you.

The click of the door
The muttered goodbye
The dam breaks, and I'm left swimming in time.

The Gleaming Positive

Jamal Goodwin

Smile because you can.
Hold those
Moments, shifting sand,
Stardust,
re-Becoming grand.

Rob V

Noah Mannix



Editor's Note

At hyphen, we like to get straight to the point. We won't bother telling you all the ways that this year's hyphen is a little different than usual. We definitely don't need to remind you why 2020 was such a rough year. And we especially will not be waxing poetic about all the sappy, emotional epiphanies we had along the way, yadda yadda yadda....

Okay, fine. Maybe we will.

2020 was an unexpected year to say the least, but we persisted. We triumphed over the painfully modern process of making a literary and art magazine totally virtually. The editorial team only knew each other by blue light and social media, but we were connected by your sensitive, funny, and thought-provoking work. To our contributors: we sincerely thank you.

Geographical barriers of a virtual school year notwithstanding, this year we found ourselves more disconnected from the Temple community than ever. Due to circumstances involving both the pandemic and not, we found ourselves without faculty support, and more saliently, financial support. The digital copy of hyphen which you're currently reading reflects this. We would, however, like to extend our many thanks to the intellectual and emotional support from Temple's creative community, especially Dr. Gabriel Wettach and the English Department.

And last but not least - to our beloved readers, thank you so much, for reading this year's issue of hyphen, following us online, and supporting us endlessly. We couldn't (and wouldn't) have done it without you! We're proud of the work we've done, and we hope you are, too.

Love,
The Hyphen Editorial Team

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