



VOL IV

**“At least we still have freedom of
speech,” I said.**

**And she said, “That isn't something
somebody else gives you.
That's something you give yourself.”**

Kurt Vonnegut, Hocus Pocus



Editor's Note

Sink Hollow is growing up.

Our fledgling magazine is not so fledgling anymore. Bounding into a maturity that even the most passionate founding members could not have envisioned, Sink Hollow is here to stay. It is my pleasure, as this magazine's third Managing Editor, to present to you my inaugural publication: Sink Hollow Volume IV.

This issue presents a raw, magnifying view into the ever-changing human experience. It reminds us that, no matter where we come from or what has shaped us, we are all uniquely, gloriously human. In these tumultuous times, it is essential that we allow ourselves to speak, to give voice to the thoughts that characterize the individual nature of our lives. Our contributors have done just that.

Like the words and art that have found their home in this issue, we hope you, too, find an excuse to stay awhile.

Jess Nani
Managing Editor

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With Ashbury Blues

TERIN WEINBERG

The facts of difference: all
crossing paths and
separating. My solar
cobalt specks. I always wanted
my worth in gold-
float. Engraved faces
in the nurse sharks'
worth. When the sea gulped
I gathered
in my stomach.
poison—
the distance between
moment, I see

lines
deciding to go;
light swallowed
to weigh
coins in their final
sunken and swaying
streamline. I counted
and quaked
in gallon jugs,
I compared milk and
snake-spit curdles,
you and I. The only
red in a world filled.



Gooney
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JAMES TAYLOR

Conversation with Bees

KATRINA FUNK

I deserved it, but you didn't sting me. I wish you would have because then we would have been even. You were scurrying inside your hive that morning, just as you always do. At your entrance, bees, some with their legs so laden with pollen it encumbered their flying, were already in and out making their reports. Just as some arrived others took off again to collect the pollen and nectar that is your colony's survival. As I pulled your cover off, I saw your ten wood honey colored frames lined up in succession. You crawled upward between the frames and over the edge as if curious about the sudden exposure of your hive. Your little bodies weaved up and down between the different frames, the combined motion of hundreds of you creating the effect of swells in the ocean. A few of you poked up your heads, your big eyes watching me, on guard and ready if anything should go amiss, but your humming was soft and lulling and through it I could hear your mood and I knew that you were not bothered by my intrusion.

I began my inspection pulling your frames up one by one as I searched for signs of your health and productivity. Each one was nearly identical with the comb drawn out in symmetrical wax hexagons lined up next to each other row upon row. In the comb I saw the glory of your summer's work. The outer rim near the top of the frame was filled with a deep amber-gold honey, followed by a rainbow of pollen: yellows, oranges, reds, and even a spot here and there of purple. The center was filled with eggs, larvae, and capped brood. New sisters emerged, eating away their caps, their heads surfacing like bears in the spring: fuzzy and hungry. An older sister danced nearby, wiggling her abdomen as she circled a figure eight communicating to her other foraging sisters where to

find nectar. Nurse bees moved from comb to comb, dipping their heads in and out as they fed larvae, a job repeated thousands of times until the larvae grew enough to be capped to finish their transformations into bees. The queen made her rounds, her skin dark like burnt wood, her abdomen long and lean, her attendants flowing about her as she dipped her abdomen in an open hole, laying an egg and starting the cycle all over again.

My hive check to that point had been just like all the others, but then I did my something I'd never done before. I took a frame and slammed the side of it into a little blue bin dislodging all the bees onto the floor of my box. That seemed to startle you a bit, but not enough to engage you in a response against me. You went about your business leaving me to intrude your hive unmolested. I then did something near unforgivable. As you bumped and buzzed, confused in that little blue bin, I scooped you up in a measuring cup and dumped you in a mason jar of rubbing alcohol. Three hundred of you died instantly. And then I shook it. I shook that bottle as if you weren't already dead and it provided me some sort of thrill to glory in your death. For a minute I shook, and then I poured the alcohol through a strainer leaving your corpses wilted and broken in the bottle, a mangled heap barely recognizable as my bees.

Though it pained me, my murder had a purpose. In the bowl of alcohol lay eighteen dead parasites: varroa mites. The mites had attached themselves to you, sucking your blood, laying eggs in your brood. The parasites, if they were allowed to continue to grow in number, would take over and kill your colony completely. You need to know I killed you for your greater good. I didn't want to do it, but if a few must die so the rest can live, I'm going to do it. Your mite levels were higher than what is healthy. And even though I did it for you, you still should have stung me. It would have made us even.

You only stung me once when we met a few weeks ago. It was an innocent error. You got caught up my shirt. You were a curious bee

without a way out and as I moved you felt threatened. No one can fault you for that. I don't believe it was out of malice, though it should have been. I stole your honey. Perhaps stealing is too strong of a word as we do have an agreement. I give you a sheltered and secure place to live, you give me your excess honey. You may not see it as that as you gave no consent, but that's the way it is.

I brought you home for just that purpose. We perhaps didn't have the greatest of starts despite my months of preparing. I read books, scoured the internet, watched YouTube videos until my computer battery ran dead for nights on end. But the second I set you down and opened you up I realized how unprepared I was. I was a new mother out of her element. It was not the first time I have become a new mother and the experience was eerily similar. I prepared for my first child much the same way I had prepared for you and I thought I was ready, but when the nurses handed that baby to me to send me on my way I thought they were crazy. What kind of operation were they running? I sat on that hospital bed staring at that baby while my husband pulled the car up to take us home and wondered what on earth I had just gotten myself into. I couldn't see how the hospital staff could just hand a couple of twenty something year old kids a baby and send them off with nothing more than a good luck. I felt as if I had just been swallowed by a hurricane. They sent me home, just like that, with a swaddled bundle of chubby cheeks and funny noises.

You came in a five-frame rectangular cardboard box, white with some airholes and a larger hole as your entrance, plugged with a yellow stopper to keep you contained for the car ride. I thought I was ready. I drove you home all giddy and bouncy with naiveté and watched you adoringly through the rear-view mirror as you sat alone, just a plain rectangular white box in the bed of my little red pickup.

I got home feeling the surge of confidence that, although I had been a beekeeper for a grand total of fifteen minutes, I was already doing everything right. I picked up your box against my chest, felt the

thrum of your wings vibrating against the side, heard the hum of your combined singing. My heart seemed to be beating in harmony. I walked you to the very back of my yard, and set you on a little wood stand next to your beautifully painted sunshine yellow hive in a space carved out of my raspberry bushes just for you. I removed your cap at the base of your box and walked away to allow you to orient yourself before I installed you in your new home, just as the books said to do.

Okay, so perhaps I was a smidgeon impatient and I didn't go about it exactly by the book. You were sitting there in your box and I watched you from my back porch and it all felt so idyllic. It was a perfect day in May. Those days that are a blend between spring and summer. I felt the summer coming but also the steady hold of spring with the sun shining brilliant overhead and everything so green and fresh around me that I felt like the world was mine to conquer. It was that kind of day. I was so full of optimism and excitement. You were my bees! My apiary of one. And so maybe I didn't let you sit there as long as I should have, but I could almost smell those pounds of honey that were to come, and it seemed to me you would be anxious and ready to become oriented in your new home.

Out I went, t-shirts and jeans, ready to show you just how great this new relationship was going to be. As I pried open the cardboard top of your travel home you immediately began to bubble up like fizz in a shaken soda bottle. In just a few short seconds you swarmed up to the top and started wrapping yourselves around the outside of your box as if in one solid mass. I noticed your cheerful hum seemed to have taken on a not so friendly tone as if you weren't quite as excited about this new adventure as I was, but my task was simple. All I needed to do was to lift your five frames and secure them in the middle of your meticulously prepared hive. A few minutes at most.

You were buzzing fierce now, a high pierced whirr as you dove at my head, bouncing off my forehead and shoulders. I do admit my hands began to shake as I looked at the open box in front of me and the stark

reality of the situation slammed into me: I had never picked up a frame of bees before. I had watched other people do it plenty of times both in person and in online videos, but there you were in front of me, a foaming sea of frenzied motion, and I froze. Maybe you sensed the change, or smelled it in the air, or maybe you were furious about being stuck in a cardboard box, but that was when you took action. Your minds fused together in one purpose: protecting your hive from intrusion, and that intruder was me. A shooting pain in my shoulder, a sensation that burst like fire spreading inward and outward like acid on my skin. I stared at your box in horror as the hostile buzzing around me ruptured into a frantic cloud. I stood unable to move, my mind clouded by indecision. I couldn't just leave the box open and naked to the world. This wasn't in the books or in any YouTube videos that I watched. Another shot in my back, sharp and spreading followed by another on my neck.

I ran, all cares for the hive forgotten. She-bear, mad woman, arms flinging, barreling forward almost blind with panic as I charged into my raspberry bushes. Thorns grabbed at my legs and arms snagging the skin and tearing as I pulled away, but I hardly noticed as another fire burst from my upper arm. Once free, I sprinted across my yard in search of the nearest door. You weren't content with me leaving your immediate proximity. You couldn't just let me go. You followed, your piercing high pitched buzzing a bugle call for your sisters to follow. I dove into my garage side door throwing it shut and I almost felt your bee bodies slamming against the door behind me. My reprieve lasted only seconds. I was not alone. A few of you made it through. My ordeal wasn't over. I reached for the nearest thing my fumbling fingers could find: a bike helmet. I grasped it tight and began swinging it wildly above my head as I stumbled over bikes and scooters to the safety of the final door.

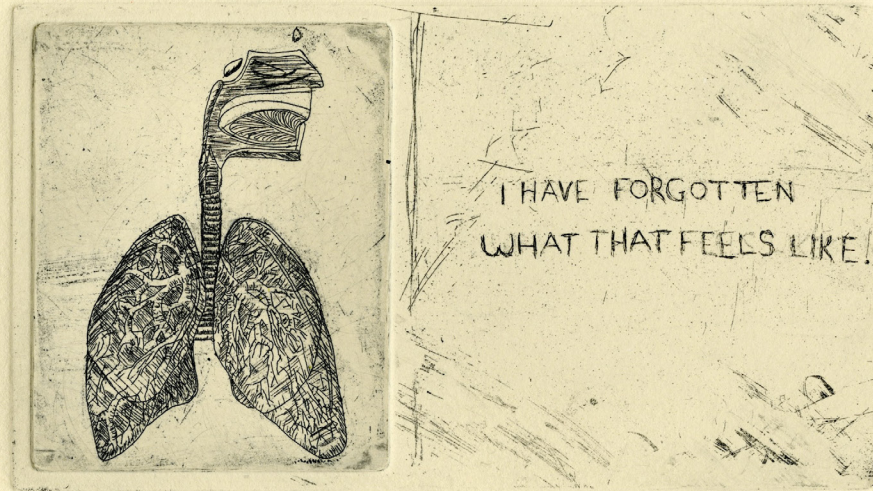
I dove into the house slamming the door behind me once again. I lay on the floor shaking, my ears on high alert for any indication that you had followed me through. Nothing. I was safe for the moment but I couldn't help but wonder how a well-respected beekeeper could just

let anyone come and pick up some bees without even a question to determine their competence. Once again, I found myself swallowed by a hurricane. I eventually got up and I walked to my window overlooking my back yard. I looked out at your box, the top still open, a whirlwind of bees swarming above. The sun didn't seem quite so bright now, the grass a shade less green. I stood there shaking so deep I felt cold.

I did eventually recover enough to get you in your hive, though it did require me dressing like a spaceman to do it. It was over a week later that I felt composed enough to give you a thorough look through. I had learned enough to come prepared and I came with a bee veil and adequate clothing to keep me safe should your mood match that of our first meeting. You had settled in nicely and it seemed all had been forgiven, though perhaps on my part, not forgotten. My hands trembled so much as I went through your box, frame by frame, that it was only through some miracle we both made it out unscathed. I paid my respects to Her Royal Highness the Queen, all cloaked in black and a beauty to behold, and felt the flush that perhaps I could actually do this.

We have had regular weekly appointments since then, a whole summer to acquaint ourselves with each other, and though I have been stung many more times I feel none have been of your own accord but rather because of my own stumbling mistakes of a first-time beekeeper. I've misplaced my hand or mishandled a frame or was careless with my clothing and left gaps where a curious bee could get stuck. You have been patient and forgiving and have done your part and delivered your honey and in gratitude I killed three hundred of you. I know it was a dirty game to play after all we have been through. Your mite count is dangerously high. Without treatment, it's likely the rest of you will die as well so it had to be done. It still gives me no joy to have done it, but because of it I'll hopefully get you through the winter.





Breathe
Breathe
Breathe
Breathe

JOHN ARMOUR

Ghost's Mouth

K LANGE

a ghost's mouth
is shaped like an old september
something extinguished in dry sage
(there were no fires in the foothills that summer)
robbed valley
longing this whole
hollowed out
how we slump our entire lives in it
everything turns to
stone if you love
it by the throat
every year a
chip in the quarry
falling rocks
of all
us

Tai Chi Group ISO Leader

MATT MILLER

Bi-weekly commitment.
No experience necessary.

We're a congregation of
serious Life-livers,
enlightened craftspeople who feel Earth's magnetism and enjoy its flavor.

Our members include:

Doris,
our ceramic-hipped sage.
She parts the wild horse's mane,
whispering beasts into submission.
She is Truth,
an Earth-mother overflowing with knowledge of Good and Evil,
a singer of songs long forgotten.

John,
hardened from twenty-plus years of thermos and claw-hammer,
his snake creeping low through the grass
resembles a spaceship in orbit,
but make no mistake,
his double fists pierce ears
and crush skulls.

Kimberly,
practicing Customer Sales Representative,
closet cosmic butterfly.
Her hands wave like clouds.
Her feet defy the ground.
She is the leaf riding the wind,
the under-supervised balloon giving way to physics and sailing away and never coming back
despite your daughter's cries.

And then there's pale Dale.
Accountant.
Breadstick.
What he lacks in physicality he makes up with mental faculty.
He is a knower of things known.
He is a knower of things unknown.
His eyes see around corners.
His mouth topples governments.
His ears hear every single one of your prayers.
His nose smells misplaced confidence and also other things.
His eyebrows are for display purposes only.

There are still others among us who don't feel comfortable divulging their personal information over the internet at this time.

Those interested
must weigh at least two hundred pounds,
have exemplary knot tying skills,
and are capable of living a sedentary lifestyle for at least ninety consecutive minutes twice weekly.

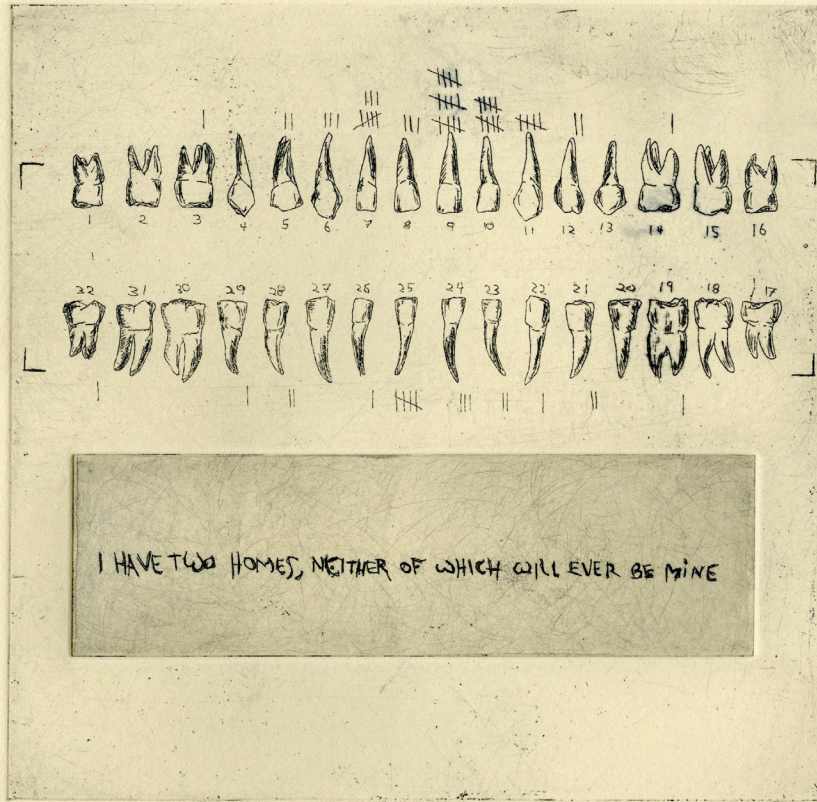
To be clear,
we are not in search of instruction.
It is water that flows like us.
Our request is of a different nature.

When our minds transcend this reality,
our bodies have the habit of floating off of the ground
toward higher planes of existence.
We are looking for someone to be our belay,
a literal anchor for our sinless skin-vessels.
Leash our bone-houses to your own,
reel our flesh-temples back to within limits of human understanding,
lead our meat-cathedrals downward,
safely,
from places of beyond.

Meet us
when the Sun and Moon agree we should begin.
You'll know where.

Rope will be provided,
as well as snacks of our choosing.

For more information,
look inside yourself.
This will teach you enough.



The Edge of Fairhope

SARA SIRK

Mosquitos buzzed in the darkness outside. Light spewed from the house windows like candlelight from holes punched in tin. Helpless moths battered at the window, trying to drink that light in or destroy themselves trying. It made Ava want to break every lamp in the house. She pictured it going something like this: as the moths flew back into the darkness, Ava would watch them go with her hands dripping blood and glass shards, victorious. She would wave goodbye to their soft white shapes. It would be a noble and poetic last deed.

With moonlight lacing her spine, she would walk into the backyard—barefoot, of course. She would walk away from her and Mom’s house, a slumping one-story box of worn boards and tin, and its red paint. She would walk across their stretch of lawn that turned into beach, then bay. She would walk into the shallows, past the choir of frogs and crickets, past the crabs that peeped from beneath dark rocks on the shore. One last time, she would look at every inch of their small weedy lot and their spindly dock. Then she would walk into the bay. It would swallow her whole. No one would hear from her again. It would be like Ophelia’s death from Hamlet, Ava thought, but way better.

Unfortunately, Ava could not be the superior Ophelia, or the savior of the moths. She was too busy dealing with an irritated Mom. Like always, Ava slouched at the dining room table, rubbing her fingers along the edges of her sweater sleeves. She hoped this conversation would end soon.

“Ava! Ava, are you listening to me?”

“Yes, Mom,” Ava said.

Mom huffed. “Really, Ava,” she said. “Don’t call yourself average.”

“I said it because it’s true,” Ava said. “What’s wrong with looking average?”

“Nothing,” Mom said. She placed dirty mugs into the kitchen sink harder than necessary. “It shows a lack of confidence, that’s all.”

“I think I have just enough confidence,” Ava said.

Mom scrubbed on the mugs with a brillo pad, worry seething beneath her irritation. Ava watched the corner of her mouth tighten. It looked frailer than it had two years ago. An old ring gleamed on Mom’s finger.

“I don’t think you do,” Mom said. “This Monday you’re going to the guidance counselor and talking to her about it again. After that, I’m talking to Mrs. Reynolds to hear what she has to say. We should throw out your old clothes, too. There’s nothing like old clothes to lower a girl’s confidence. I’m not sure how you have so many left.”

It was once more time to hide her comfort sweater, converses, and a bundle of her shirts in the unused fireplace. Ava began planning when to stash them there.

“Yes, Mom,” Ava said.

A lock of Ava’s hair fell over her eye. It covered Mom’s form, blurring her into nothing but frantically working arms in front of the countertop. Water splashed around the sink’s silver confines. Their kitchen was a clutter of potted succulents, papers, and allergy medicines on counters and small tables. When Ava let her vision unfocus, all the potted succulents around the sink looked like green bulbs. Ava closed one eye to enjoy the image. Part of Mom’s pale calf stuck out the back of the hair strand, but if Ava ignored it, it did not ruin the sight of floating arms framed by green disks. She pretended she was in an alien place.

“I mean it, Ava.” Mom shivered. Ava did not know what brought the shivers on, but they always coursed through Mom’s body when she saw ill organized plates or thought of the same conversation for the

seventh time again. Her worn hands redoubled their efforts to wash the plates. “A signed note. I want a signed note from Mrs. Reynolds. You understand me?”

“Yes, Mom,” Ava said.

“But do you really?”

“I do, Mom,” Ava said.

“This is for your own good, you know.” Mom turned her gaze back to her silverware. “I failed at making you feel like a good-looking girl, but you are one, and we’re going to fix that. Look at Cherry. She has plenty of confidence.”

Cherry. Ava cursed her again. Why wasn’t that bitch here to save her yet? The cluttered house crowded Ava, trapping her. The floor swallowed her whole, pulling her down in a vortex of tissues and Claritin, and the weight of the whole building settled on Ava’s chest. Her ribs and lungs wheezed under the immense, dizzying pressure. A fragment of her screamed and clawed at the floorboards above. For a moment, Ava again considered swallowing a whole bottle of Nyquil. That was an escape.

“While we’re waiting,” Mom said, “we can talk about your grades. You have two Bs. You could be doing better.”

Mom’s words snapped the house back onto its foundations. Ava shakily rubbed her shoes against the floor. She needed to know she was here, here, here. Mom did not notice that.

“I have two B-pluses, Mom,” Ava said. “Those are close to As.”

“That’s not what will be on your report card,” Mom said. “Think, Ava. I might need to get you a tutor. You want to get into college, don’t you? Cherry went. So can you.”

A flash of headlights announced the tires crunching over the gravel. Finally, the universe had some mercy. Mom sighed.

“There’s Cherry, I suppose,” she said.

Ava scooted back her chair. She went to unlock their door, already seeing a silhouette on the porch. Heat billowed inside as Cherry stepped in. She was older than Ava, a beach-brown woman who taunted the borders of athletic. The tiniest shorts creased the space between her hips and thighs. Cherry jingled her keys around her fingers.

“Hey, sis,” she said. “Hello, Megan.”

“Hey, Cherry,” Ava said.

“Cherry! It’s good to see you,” Mom said. She rose to pat Cherry’s shoulder and welcome her in. “I hope you and Ava have fun with the boat. You know where you’re going, don’t you? You’ll help Ava out?”

“I do.” Cherry patted Mom’s shoulder back. “Sorry for being late. I got held up at Dad’s house. But don’t worry. It’s not my first time gigging. I promise Ava will be fine. Ready to go, Ava?”

“Yeah,” Ava said.

Cherry was driving Dad’s oversized pick-up truck. It barely fit into the driveway, even without the the clunky boat trailer hitched to the back. Cherry and Mom bickered about safety while Ava climbed into the front seat. She felt a crescent of mosquito bites growing on her ankle after she shut the door.

Yes, Cherry was late, but she was here. Ava tapped her fingers on the dashboard. She wondered what kind of conversation with Dad had held Cherry up. Ava pictured Cherry, in her smallest of shorts, standing in the living room with her father, him in his t-shirt and old jeans. Memories of the scrunchy beige carpet, the scarred coffee table, and the ratty magazine rack rose without bidding. She smelled cologne again.

That was as far as the scenario went. Ava’s imagination refused to make Cherry and Dad anything but stiff dolls. Despite having seen them one Christmas, Ava could not fathom what they talked about. She could

only remember Dad awkwardly presenting her a ticket to a summer ziplining course while flurries flirted with the window. Since he was scared of heights, he would not be joining her.

Cherry opened the driver's door with a spin of keys. Ava saw Mom heading inside as the truck's headlights flared to life. The weight on Ava's chest deflated a fraction.

"Let's do this," Cherry said, grinning. If her hop into the truck wasn't as smooth as before, if it had a weak-kneed falter, it wasn't worth a comment from Ava.

After Cherry backed out of the driveway, they rattled down the road. Knee-high weeds and mailboxes flanked the manicured ends of driveways. Potholes perfect for hiding moccasins bumped beneath the boat trailer's wheels. Ava wondered what it would be like to lay her head in one, drink in the soupy darkness, and let the wheels roll over her.

"How's ninth grade treating you?" Cherry said.

"Not bad," Ava said. "It's ninth grade. Boring, a lot of the time."

"I remember being that age," Cherry said. Her painted nails flashed in the light as she turned the steering wheel. Her hair was fragile from bleaching, folded into paper-precision kinks that puffed out from her head. Ava could see where the red halo of dye ended near her roots.

"Oh, how young you are."

"It's overrated," Ava said.

Cherry studied her lips in the mirror. They were unfairly full. Ava pressed her own thin lips together. Cherry had a face for makeup, Ava thought. She was a woman who glimpsed herself in the mirror and didn't wish she could scrape her face off, layer by layer. She didn't wish she could rip her hair out of her skull and find someone different looking at her. Anyone different. Cherry always admired herself. That was an art.

Cherry glanced at Ava with something akin to sympathy. Ava wondered if she hid her scars from the accident with cover-up. Her tons of makeup made her seem kind of like a slut, but Ava wanted to look like her anyway.

“It’s alright, sis,” Cherry said. “It gets better. I promise.”

“Don’t call me sis,” Ava said. “You’re not my sister.”

Her not-sister frowned before she pushed her mouth to neutral again. Ava pushed her feet up higher on the dashboard. She sulked in a slouch. When she felt Cherry’s eyes on her, she glared back. Cherry’s gaze reminded her of the dumpy councilor’s gaze: shrewd, searching, looking for something in her normality that needed fixing.

“You didn’t mind when I did earlier,” Cherry said. “Why don’t we try to make this work, Ava? Come on. It’s a girls’ night out.” She winked. “We’ll have some actual wild ones when you’re in college.”

College, college, college. Mom’s voice warped in her head. Her life would end in a void before twenty; why did college matter?

“Look, I don’t care.” Ava sat up. The sudden pain inside her cut her tongue loose. “Just because Dad and your mom decided to get married doesn’t make us siblings. I wanted out of the house. I don’t want to hear what you do in college.”

“Fine.” Cherry stomped on the brakes before an intersection. “This is what I get for trying to be considerate. Jesus.”

They proceeded to the boat landing in silence, aside from Cherry’s mutterings. Moonlight lit Ava’s high cheekbones and Cherry’s smooth collar. Ava hated the bitter taste in her mouth. If anything happened to her, God knew there would be talk about Cherry, about Cherry’s broken body made recklessly whole again, about how Cherry influenced her and made her do something stupid. There wouldn’t be anything about what she wanted.

It's never about what I want, Ava thought. It's always about comparing me to Cherry, or shutting me up so Mom doesn't get upset, or making Dad feel like he did a good job, or school. It doesn't matter if I want to disappear or if I don't want help. Do I even need help?

"We're here," Cherry said. "I'll need you to help me back the truck up."

The landing was eerily quiet. Their spotlights cut through the water to reveal the ramp's ridges of concrete and soft mountains of mud piling around it. Ava helped Cherry back the trailer into the water. She clutched her spotlight, along with the boat's rope, when Cherry left her to go park. The small, flat-bottomed boat rested on the water like a matchbox on half-molten glass.

Dead eels bobbed in the shallows. A handful of cigar minnows floated next to them. Shrimp heads and filleted fish carcasses littered the landing pier. Ava saw no signs of life. She kicked at a shrimp head. It rolled over, its peeled skin crunching beneath her toe. Ava smelled it and its dead friends all over the dock. Its beady eyes stared up at her, startled. Why would you do that? the shrimp head asked.

It was so small. Shame filled Ava. She hunkered beneath its pressure. What was she doing? Shrimp were so insignificant that their carcasses withered on the landing without anyone caring. Ava did not know if she was jealous or scared of them, and that crushed her into an even smaller ball of shame. The bay's breeze stung her face. She hastily scrubbed the tears off her cheeks. No crying. Not here.

Maybe, Ava thought, I need help. Maybe Mom is right. Maybe there's something wrong with me. Feeling like this all the time might not be normal. Ava sniffled. She fretted until Cherry returned and they could both get in the boat. Its motor rumbled to life in the silence. The smell of salt tweaked her nose.

"What did you say people called nights like this?" Ava said. "A jamboree?" Already, the wind's hands pressed at her face as they picked up

speed, snatching her hair and pushing it into tangles behind her ears.

“A jubilee,” Cherry said. Her oversized sweater rustled around her bare shoulder. “It’s when there’s not enough oxygen in the water. Everything comes up to breathe or die.”

They forged forward into the channel. Distant buoys blinked at them, growing brighter and brighter until they were there, then gone. Their beauty winked out instead of curdled. Dying stars envied them. The girls’ spotlights were sabers against the empty bay. There was nothing but the motor rumbling, wind howling, the gig rattling in the boat floor, until there wasn’t. A chorus of splashes broke the water ahead of them. Cherry slowed the boat into an idle, then stopped. They drifted into the shallows.

“The fish are here.” Cherry grinned at Ava. “Since you’re the first timer, you get the gig once we’re in the water. Let’s go.”

Cherry snatched up the bamboo pole with three metal prongs glittering at the end. When she stepped into the water, her body was lithe, as though cliff-diving at Summersville hadn’t once crumpled it into a wad incapable of anything. Ava inhaled deeply and removed her sweater. She stepped into the bay.

The water was piss warm. She was thigh deep in it. The bay’s unfamiliar floor of sand cushioned her feet while sinking beneath them. Cherry pulled the boat behind them, confident, unfettered, and Ava struggled to keep up.

“Hold on tight to the gig,” Cherry said. “Now, what you want to do is tilt it down, like this.” She pushed the pronged end into the water. Ava’s grip felt weak and pliable. “When a fish gets close enough, stab it. You have to be quick. The water will distort how things look, too, so remember that.”

They were here to kill the dying and no one had stopped them. The bamboo gig was sticky in Ava’s hand. Her small shorts stuck to her

legs as waves licked at her hips, almost there but not quite. Ava's vulnerable belly was bared to the water. Her thin cotton bra held tighter to her chest in response to the infinite darkness. The splashing of fish surrounded them. The boat glided behind the girls on a rope, looming behind Ava, and she sucked in a breath whenever her foot located dips of deeper water. Their buttery columns of light pushed through the silty water to glance off the schools of fish.

There were no shortage of those. "Mullet," Cherry said. "Maybe some catfish." The words dropped from her lips like razors. Hundreds of silver fish thrashed at the water surface and flew away at the intruders' movements—there then gone, almost always too far away—flicking past their elbows, their legs, retreating into the bay's eternal darkness. The fish gasped for air. Begged. Ava's hair hung loose around her shoulders. Even with the shimmering gig in hand, she felt like an animal. If something attempted to swallow her, she would fight it like any overturned rat that knew nothing but struggling under God's thumb. The fish suffocated.

This suffocation was natural, Ava thought. So natural, they had a name for it. She wasn't alone. Her suffocation was natural too. A blanket of comfort enveloped her. It weighed against her with as much pressure as the bay. Ava discarded her half baked thought of getting help. She didn't know why she had considered that in the first place. What was she going to get help for? The shadow of a thought? Being alive? Cherry's spotlight highlighted another slick of fish. Their nickel sides cut at the surface. One day, Ava decided, she, too, would die like a fish in the murk. There would a flash of brightness, then nothing. Only miles of bay and darkness and writhing catfish.

The part of her not full of fear inhaled in relief: good.





Fever

KEVIN OLSON

Fever
Fever
Fever
Fever

lily

ALEX HENKLE

He got really drunk
again,
stiff-legging
the rocky ground
which once supported his feet.

His eyes were blooming
before the lids fell,
soft loves-me-not
daisy petals
crinkling slowly
into the ground.

“Please,
don’t ever
ask a girl
if she is tired,”
lily says,
sipping her last beer.
“You will thank me later.”

Upon the red dawn
of a foreign horizon,
she promises
to return
the wineglass,
folding his papers
neatly
back
into her sack.

What dreams await her this morning?

Alone
Alone
Alone
Alone
Alone
Alone



Alone
Alone
Alone
Alone

JAMES TAYLOR



Prologue

JAMES TAYLOR

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Note to Self

ALYLA ROBLES

Use this and not this.

The sound of bells ringing on our door handle woke me up. Mom hung them after the break-in. Security systems cost an obscene amount of money, and she figured that was a cheaper alternative. We haven't had a break-in since.

But that isn't why the bells are ringing now. I know you are leaving. It is 4:38 in the morning. It is pitch black outside, but if I focus hard enough, I can see your silhouette outside my window. Black hat, black jumpsuit with horrible neon hazard-lines, heavy brown boots; it isn't hard for me to imagine how you look. I've seen your tired face and sunken eyes in your uniform for almost 17 years.

Use this and not this.

My earliest memory was when I was two. I was learning how to speak and write properly already and in English! I was a genius in my family. Unfortunately, everyone was so focused on grammar and spelling that they didn't bother to teach me about locking mechanisms.

I was also potty-trained(!), so I didn't need a chaperone. I just needed to say I had to "do number one" and go, so I did. I got up from the hideous floral couch every Mexican family seemed to own and walked to the restroom. I closed the door, "did number one," stood on the steps to reach the high sink, and turned the knob to open the door only it didn't open. My two-year-old self knew how to spell my name, but I didn't understand the small latch on the chipped door blocked my exit.

I instantly started panicking. The walls started to close in. My lungs collapsed, and every time the familiar broken light flickered, my

heart skipped a beat. I had never felt so helpless before, and to this day, I haven't felt that same fear that overwhelmed me that day.

My screams attracted my family, who were still sitting in the disgraceful couch in the too-small-to-be-considered-an-actual-living-room living room. I'm sure it only took them a second to run to the bathroom, but at the time, it felt like years.

"Que pasó?!" My mom called from the other side, trying to open the door. The chain made it impossible.

"The door!" I sobbed, pulling on the door myself in vain. After all, my mother, who was once a cheerleader and could lift any girl twice her weight, couldn't open the door. How could I, a tiny two-year-old who needed help getting on the cliché couch, do it?

"Just move the chain, you idiot!" My brother interjected. I didn't know what idiot meant at the time, but I knew could tell by his tone how frustrated he was at me. After all, I distracted them from the season finale of *Abrázame Muy Fuerte*; I was a nuisance.

I kept banging on the door until the rusty hinges broke. The door collapsed and fell away from me, and you were standing there holding the door, huffing in your black jumpsuit covered in grime and sweat. Even though you reeked of gasoline and smoke, I still ran into your arms. It was the safest place I had.

After that traumatic event, I couldn't go to the restroom alone, and every time a guest used our bathroom, I had to warn them about the monster that would trap someone inside when someone flipped the latch. Everyone got a kick out of it, but you were completely understanding. While my brother would tell me to grow up every time I asked to be accompanied to the restroom, you would just smile and escort me. You'd hold the door open and guard me against that monster as if I was a princess, and you were my knight in shining armor.

You have no idea how much that meant to me.

It was at my next birthday, the one you missed because you had to work overtime, that I could finally go to the restroom alone. We had a

new door.

Use this and not this.

When I regained consciousness, the first thing I felt was pain from my nose. It was my fault it was broken. I wouldn't sit still when the nurses tried to slide the tube down my nose and into my throat, so they had to shove it down. I screamed when they did. My screams were silenced, though, when the charcoal pumped through my stomach.

You weren't in the room nor was mom, but I could hear murmuring outside the door. My body was still numb at the muscle relaxants I was injected with earlier, so I couldn't move closer to the door to hear better. Instead, I just stared at the ceiling and listened.

"...no permanent... CT scans... blood... negative... broken nose." I couldn't recognize the voice.

"...relieved... bill?" Mom.

"Unfortunately... insurance... full amount... burden." Unrecognizable.

"But... policy..." You.

"Yes, but... ambulance... relaxant... nose..." Unrecognizable.

There was a long pause. The only sound I could hear was my heartbeat, and I wasn't connected to a heart monitor.

"Also... policy... Child Protective Services..."

My mother's cry made me close my eyes. I didn't want to hear this. I didn't want to be rescued. That's why I took pills in the first place.

The bullying had become too much. The taunting in the hallways, the beatings after school, the ignorance from my teachers. Then my brother would tease me at home. I was done with middle school. I was done with it all. But here I was listening to mom crying, and no doubt you were too. That's what killed me.

I don't remember when I drifted off, but when I woke up, it was pitch black outside. The only source of light came from the bathroom.

You used to leave it on for me as a nightlight when I would sleep in your bedroom.

You were sleeping on the chair next to my hospital bed in your black jumpsuit. You were still covered in grime and reeked of gasoline and smoke, but it was a better alternative to the sterile hospital scent. The only difference was the streaks on your cheeks where the dark grime seemed lighter. I refused to accept the obvious. I just dismissed it as a trick of the lighting.

I didn't regret trying to commit suicide; I regret failing. If I hadn't failed, then I wouldn't have witnessed the financial and emotional pain I put you through. I was completely selfish.

Use this and not this.

My brother's words hung heavily in the air, but that was the calm before the storm. The tension and my mother's temper was rising, and just like any Mexican mother, she was getting ready to cuss out in Spanish loud enough for the neighbors to hear. They always had their ears on the door and their hands on a camera. Metiches.

But it didn't matter. All that mattered was my brother, his girlfriend who was starting to show, and you. You held back tears because he did it; he made the same mistake you did centuries ago, and you failed. You failed as a father. First, your daughter tried to commit suicide, and now your son knocked up his girlfriend at 16, and that happened all in the same year.

You looked at him, stared down at your hands, then looked at me. Your eyes were red and glistening. Over the years, they grew more tired as the bags darkened and the wrinkles deepened, but I had never seen you so defeated.

Still, I understood what you were telling me. Your mouth wasn't moving, but your words were loud and clear, and although I knew my word wasn't worth anything, I still nodded my head. I promised you I wouldn't make the same mistake and ruin my life.

I had no intention of keeping that promise.

Use this and not this.

High school became my second home years later, but it wasn't a good thing considering I chose to go to an at-risk school. I passed the Magnet Test "with flying colors" (or at least that's what every teacher said), but since that incident, I lost all motivation to achieve anything. It killed you to see me with that mindset, especially since I was "wasting potential" (or at least that's what our family said), but being clinically depressed "wasn't an easy mountain to climb" (or at least that's what my therapist said), so that's why you allowed me to go to the public school in the south infamously known for its drop-outs, teenage-pregnancy rate, and rumored drug-trafficking system.

God, I wanted to get out of this town.

Use this and not this.

"Hey! Take some!" Some guy yelled at my face. He held out a few colorful tablets. Ecstasy, my new favorite for the month.

This party was the usual high school party. Drugs. Alcohol. Loud music. People passed out on the couch. Others vomiting outside. Smoke clouding the ceiling. Beer pong set up in a corner. Angry neighbors. Native parents. The threat of a police raid. It was bad news which was why I was here. My life was spiraling downwards.

Use this and not this.

"Nah, I'm good," I dismissed without a second thought. Suddenly, everything seemed so dull. I came down from my high. The cup in my hand seemed disgusting. The entire atmosphere was too chaotic. A few minutes later, I left the party and came home early. Earlier than you.

And it only got worse.

"Hey, let's skip."

Use this and not this.

"Can't. Sorry."

"Hey, take a hit."

Use this and not this.

“I’m good.”

“Hey, can you drop this? I’ll split the profit.”

Use this and not this.

“Sorry, I need to do something.”

I actually started using this and not this.

Since my sophomore year, I’ve been coming home early. I haven’t gone out, drunk alcohol, or abused drugs in any way. I’ve done my homework, listened in class, and raised my grades. I have a 3.907 GPA, and while it’s not record-shattering, I’m the shining valedictorian for my class of 116 students. I’m the first person in our family to graduate high school, and our extended family is ecstatic. There will be Carne Asada after graduation to celebrate with the entire family.

You volunteered to make it. You are so proud of me.

You waste money on snacks so I have something to eat while I fill out college applications. You leave little notes in my binder just to remind me how much you love me. You check up on me every night when you come home and every morning when you leave while I pretend to be asleep. And when you leave, I curl up into a ball and cry in frustration, hot tears sliding down my cheeks and onto my pillow.

Why can’t I ruin my life?

“Daddy, why do we have to go to work?”

“Because mom is at work, and no one is at home.”

“I can be by myself. I’m four now!”

...

“Daddy, are you tired?”

“Sí, mija.”

“Why?”

“Es mi culpa.”

“Why?”

“Well, mija, I made the wrong choice. I didn’t go to college.”

“But why do you not go just back to the college now?”

“It’s too late. I’m too old.”

...

“Mija, don’t make that mistake. Don’t be dumb like me.”

...

“Use this,” you place your index finger on your temple, “and not this,” then you hold your hands up between us, showcasing the damage from years of hard work. What used to be smooth skin is now the family’s rough, calloused, swollen money-maker.

Two hands, sweat, and gasoline is the foundation for our family. It’s your past, your present, and possibly your future, and you never show how much it kills you, but I know. I knew at four years old, and I know now.

“Make a note of it.”

Well, I did, dad. I did. As long as the bells keep ringing, your words will stick with me.

What an unfortunate situation we’ve found ourselves in.





Whispers

DAISY CRANE

Whispers

Whispers

A Chip off the Old Block

MATT MILLER

Why is everything I own
covered in coffee cups? I own
coasters, but they are never
there when you need them.

This is home:
my desk. Blue tote
flipped upside down suspends
notebook and laptop at
a convenient height. I stand
and write my incantations amidst
ceramic cauldrons, bottoms
besmudged with charred Coffea
that escaped the French press.

I swear, they're worse than
rabbits, humping, clinking,
multiplying each time I
look away. At least my elbows
are never lonely.

Another page ripped,
crumpled and balled.
Another gulp of thin, cold
oil for another few minutes
of "clarity."

I run downstairs, for
I'm not committed enough

to plug in a pot at
my desk, but dependent
enough to brew another.
My eyes must stay open.

Another surplus cup, my
desk tempted to collapse
under the ridicule of
becoming nothing more
than a dish rack.
She passes,
her goodnight kiss
lingers on my neck,
where it will
stay, I will stay.

Another sacrificial notebook
page, balled and crumpled.
Another sip of oil.
Another calorie burned and
released outside our quilted
sanctuary, where she lay.

I must move mountains.
I must break chains.
Another sip of oil.

The second time
I saw a therapist,
not even for
psychotherapy: our
obligatory pre-marital
counseling, but he read

my wrinkles nonetheless.

“So, why do you work so hard?”

I had never given thought.

“When was the last time you spoke with your father?”

Crumpled, balled

on the pretend couch.

I had never given thought.

Another sip of oil.

Another inky finger.

These mountains are no
match for the hardness
of my forehead.

He did what he had
to do. He always
found a way.

Mother was my mother,
and mother and mother
four times more. He did
what he had to do.

He did not get “me”
time. He did not get
our time. Instead, we
we had bread.

There was seriously
no one else.

Somehow,
he always
found a way.
This I have given

many thoughts.

I knew what he was
from the time I could
know, but I truly
met the man when
when he found a better way,
before our time ran out.

My picture, my
fifteen minute
goodnight popsicle
and hug and prayers
transformed into
a singing alarm clock,
the supper disher-outer,
a face to find
in the crowd.

My strength teacher,
a mythical endurance,
he never could quite
kick the habit,
splinters, blisters, scabs,
working by flashlight
long after the sun
clocked out.

He,
he is the mover
of mountains.
He always
finds a way.

He has never asked
me to find it, never
once required it of me.
Why must I find the way?
My magnetic nose pulls
me towards it, my wings
flap without my say
while she turns over
in our nest, expecting
less and less heat
from me.

I'm out of oil
again, another empty
for the collection.
Another sign,
but how to read it?

These damned cups,
I'll wash them
in the morning.

The Universe's Motto

FOYINSI ADEGBONMIRE

People come forth and people return
to the dust from which they were formed.

An action triggers
an equal and opposite

reaction. Prey becomes predator (and vice
versa) as the cycle ends

before beginning. The human body is a series
of couples. Arms, legs, eyes, lips never feeling

the weight of loneliness—a gift
to be thankful for.

Like the sun and moon's dance,
patiently waiting to exhibit their next

step on heavenly floor. An injustice
should trigger an equal and fitting retaliation.

This—actions, arms, and injustices—this
is all about balance. Someone must maintain it. Must.

We return to the dust from which we were formed
while others come forth to take our place.



Dreams
Dreams
Dreams
DAISY CRANE



Tired Rain

DAISY CRANE

Tired Rain
Tired Rain
Tired Rain
Tired Rain

Portrait

PATRICK RONAN

I reached my hand up the skinny pipe. The wet walls breathed onto my hand as I felt around for the magnetic Hide-A-Key box. I bent my knees and did a short twist to get a better angle at it. My knees faltered and lowered to the ground. Knees to the wet earth, I stretched my fingers upward and felt the warm, metallic right angle of the box. I popped the box off the pipe and lowered it down to the cool air. I looked at the small black chamber in my palm for a second and then slid off the cover to reveal the key.

I'd been sneaking into my parents' cabin this way since high school. It was only about two hours north and a couple thousand feet up from my hometown. I used to bring a bunch of my friends here during high school to waste weekends away with beers and smokes. I don't think my parents' ever figured out about it. They don't pick up on a lot of things.

Today, I was here to relax, decompress. After high school, I picked up a job at a local construction firm. The work has been really fucking up my back, and I figured what the hell, I need a break. The cabin's best feature is undoubtedly the hot tub. Always at 102, fourteen different jet settings, and enough space to baptize The Great Khali in. And I'd be using all of it to smooth out this knot in my back.

I raised myself up from my knees and walked up the porch toward the back door. I inserted the key into the lock on the golden, bulbous doorknob. I turned the key and pushed forward into the cabin.

Dark room. Real dark room. Voodoo lamp that turns on when flesh is applied to its base. How the fuck does that work? Lamp is by my dad. He's young,

awake, wide-eyed, not sniffing and popping his sinuses like a damn cricket. TV on. Massive TV on. Rhinoceros of a TV, fat, crackle-heavy, blowing out fuck's and shit's like spit bubbles. Me - young, bad haircut - excited at the spit bubbles, feeling awfully cool and mature and real close with dad, sharing this space with him, watching Das Boot, being just one of the guys, but also wanting to crawl onto his lap and shed this newfound maturity and sink into his leathered chest. Back then movies held all the pain in the world. I'd pretend to love them all so I could be close to my dad for hours, count his sneezes on my toes and hear him raving about his favorite movie. Learning how to read through the milk white subtitles of foreign films. My dad's glass rifle case fogging up from the fireplace. Days in the dark of this downstairs room, the snow climbing up the glass, feeling so warm because of how cold it looked through the window. Linger, linger, please linger.

I went up the stairs to the top level. The living room has incredibly high ceilings that form a V from below. Toward the top, morning sun peeps through a sole window. I went out on the balcony to where the hot tub was. It sat in the corner like a wooden tank- intimidating, sturdy, defensive. I walked over to it and lifted the thick cover off, expecting to be greeted with a whisper of warm steam rising from the water. Instead, the water was silent. I dipped my hand into it. Cold. I looked down at the control screen and saw only the off-gray background. I pressed a few buttons. Nothing happened. The tub was broken. I tossed the cover back on and walked back into the cabin. I sat down on my dad's recliner. I had nothing to do. I wanted relaxation, pleasure, and banked on those pulsing jets to provide them for me. But now, I needed to find something new.

When I was younger, we used to spend the summers up here as a family. I had one friend in the entire little mountain town, Alan. He was four years older than me and lived across the street. His tiny, decaying house barely peeked out behind piles of random shit - toy cars, lawnmowers, car parts, piles of wood. I never saw his parents. Just him, sliding around the neighborhood on a razor scooter. I never liked him

much. He liked to light things on fire. One time he brought a blowtorch to my cabin and burnt down a tiny squirrel house in our backyard. But it was a boring town, and when you're a kid, it doesn't take much to have fun.

In high school, when I'd come up with my friends, Alan was the guy we got everything from. He'd buy us beer, sell us weed, introduce us to new chemicals and music. Each drug had its own song. He'd sit like a shaman and coo, "they're codependent, man. They exist for each other."

Sitting low in my dad's recliner, I figured I'd might as well make a trip out of this. See where it takes me. You never know with Alan though. The first time he sold me acid, I gained short term telepathic powers, which sounds cool but really just made me laugh until my body ached so bad I tried to drown myself in the hot tub.

I walked across the street to Alan's, stepping over an old-fashioned tin trash can to reach the doorway. Alan always stressed that he "ran an open house," but I couldn't imagine he had a whole lot of visitors. I opened the door and walked in. He was about ten feet away; his bare back facing me. His greasy, brown hair fell onto his naked shoulders. He was holding a large pane of painted glass that stretched his arms out to the sides of his skinny body. The living room had no furniture in it. It had wood floors and was littered with random art supplies: a block of untouched marble, multiple canvases with numbers painted onto each, empty paint cans filled with murky water.

"Hey, Alan?" I said cautiously.

He turned slowly around in a way that somehow seemed to suggest that he didn't hear me. He didn't look me in the eyes, but walked toward me with the pane of glass still in his arms. As he moved closer, I could see that there was a face painted in on the glass. The face had long brown hair and a thick mustache above pink lips. At first, I thought it was George Harrison, or maybe Jesus with a pornstache. But when I looked back up toward Alan, who was now within arm's length of me, I

saw it was a self-portrait.

I started, “Hey man, I was just looking for some a-”

“Shhhh,” Alan swallowed, “back up.”

I backed toward the door. Alan’s pupils seemed to be attempting to eclipse the whites of his eyes. Alan looked at the glass painting, raised it above his head. He held it there for a while, letting light reflect off the glass and illuminating the falling dust in the room. Then, he dropped it. The pane stayed perfectly straight in the air as it fell. It hit the ground flat and shattered in a low, controlled manner. No shards splintered out or jumped up. They just spread and mixed among themselves like a liquid.

I didn’t know what to say. I looked at Alan. He was smiling right at me.

“A real portrait is a mess of bits, shattered pieces of some unknown whole all thrown about in no pattern at all.” He delivered these lines with a rehearsed eloquence. “The only way to truly know someone is by drinking these fractured fragments in.”

Alan turned away and walked into the kitchen. I was left with the shards at my feet, looking down at what was now a gross sea of colored glass.

I called out loudly so Alan could hear me. “That was cool but I’m just trying to get some acid.”

“Of course, my dude. I just wanted to give you an extra little something, you know? I’ve been waiting for someone to walk in for a while so I could do that little bit.”

He walked back into the living room holding a broom, a dustpan, and two bags.

“You want paper or plastic?” He raised the two bags in the air toward me.

“Huh, for what?” I asked.

“Come on man, the glass! Didn’t you get that? I want you to really

know me,” Alan dropped the bags and began sweeping the glass into a small pile, “like really, really know the true me.” Alan placed the dust-pan next to the glass and swept the pile in.

“You want me to drink the glass?”

“What the hell? That was obviously figurative. Just mix these drugs and tell me what you think.” He handed me two small baggies. One had a small sheet of dark red gel tabs, each with a hexagonal top. The other was partially filled with a fine white powder.

I held the bag of powder up. “What’s this?”

“Ecstasy! It’s good shit. You know I was reading about all the origins of drugs the other day. Did you know that ecstasy comes from the Greek phrase “ek stasis”, which means something like to stand outside one-”

I broke in. “Alright yeah, I got it. Thanks. How much do I owe you?”

Alan dumped the shards of glass into the paper bag. “On the house. You’ve just got to take this,” he handed the brown bag to me.

“Oh, thanks.”

“No problemo. Just remember to drink that shit in, figuratively my man, figuratively.”

I left Alan’s and walked back toward my house. In the driveway, I tossed the bag of glass into the garbage and then entered through the front door. I shut the door behind me and headed down the stairs.

Same dark room. Darker now. Me - eight, pure, knows no grief except through films, and that’s all pretend - under kilos of blankets, eyes glued to that rhino, Tora! Tora! Tora! flashing in the dark. I know this memory. It has become morbidly funny to me by now. My cousin hopping down excitedly, a girl proud with a secret, gleaming to tell me.

“Hey, hey, hey! My mom just told me that Uncle Joe’s mom died.”

Me - hesitating, shuffling through my tiny brain for the Uncle Joes I have.

Coming up with nothing. Remembering my dad's name is Joe. Cheeks rising like a flag, eyes crashing like a tagged plane. Throwing off the blankets, racing upstairs to see everyone moving slowly. My mom crying. Dad had already left for home. Me - a little broken in places - heading downstairs to bury myself in red sheets and watch films with the subtitles off. Letting the alien voices console me, wishing for dad to explain this all to me.

I cut up the tabs on a green plate with a steak knife. Stuck one gel tab on my finger and rested it on my tongue. Let it dissolve, checked the time - 12:35 - typed it into my phone notes. Time gets weird on acid. It doesn't slow down or speed up. It just doesn't register in your mind. You move freely and fluidly through space without the structures of the fourth dimension to hold you back. I parachuted the Ecstasy. Crushed the pill into a fine powder, poured it into the middle of a square of toilet paper, held the corners and twisted them together, then cut the excess paper off of it. The thing looked a lot like one of those little white firework poppers my dad would buy for me on the 4th of July. They were the only fireworks I was allowed to use. They were harmless and altogether lame. I placed the popper at the back of throat and forced it down with a glass of water.

I waited for the effects to come on by counting the crosses in the room. There were four of them placed on the walls around the large living room. My dad brought a cross wherever he went, tucked one into his pocket and thumbed its smooth backside throughout the day. He hung a darkened silver one in my bedroom that I left up to avoid having to talk to him. I sometimes flipped it upside down.

Me - looking goofy in an oversized suit, do penguins shed?, awkward, juggling my digits at my belt buckle, standing in a line of penguins, shuffling toward the altar. First communion. We've been trained for this. The light slices through the stained glass in thin sheets, staggered and sturdy like a staircase to... The crowd: tightening their grasps on our leashes. They'll drag us to heaven

if they have to. The crowd: mom, dad - papally proud, sister - penguined, and grandma - still alive here, bullet-proof glasses on, the round, comically thick kind. She's so so skinny, on her way out with those purple gloves.

At the front now, leader of the march, looking like Moses, wobble with me friends, it's easy! Father Paul leaning down to welcome me. Sharpest teeth I've ever seen on a man. Scoops out a ritz cracker, a holy ritz cracker. Father keeps his nails real short.

"The body of Christ", I used to chew all the skin off of my hand, starting at the fingers and pulling thin, epidermal sheets down to the palm. I'd rest it on my tongue and let the salt from my skin seep into my saliva, then stab it with my front teeth and cut it into small pieces to be swallowed.

"Amen."

"The blood of Christ," fava beans and a nice chianti.

"Amen."

Father Paul smiled and put his hand on my shoulder.

I found myself in the too bright kitchen. I grabbed what's left of a sourdough loaf from the pantry. My parents let friends stay up here. My mom is always complaining about how much work it is to do so: hiring a maid afterwards and leaving detailed instructions about how to turn off the air conditioning and turn on the hot tub. She lets hordes of them stay anyways. I think she likes the stress of it all. Or at least likes people knowing the stress she bears. It's the Catholic in her blood. The holy martyr. I don't mind. They always leave food behind.

I broke the bread with my hands and chewed on the soft, wheaty flesh. Acid pretty much kills your appetite and completely numbs your mouth, so eating becomes a ceremony of necessity. It makes you feel all primal, ripping through a tasteless substance not to satiate the instinct to eat itself, but the remembrance of that instinct. The recognition that eating is something humans have to do, and that I should probably follow suit. In the moment, it's really just a way to occupy yourself. There's

a gnawing, unsatisfiable urge to do something, anything on acid. You can't just sit still waiting for the next wave to come. I finished the bread, sat down on my dad's recliner, and lit a cigarette.

The day was especially cold. A heavy gray seeped into everything. There I am, same too big suit, same stained glass stairway, lost its holy light though. It's dead silver and frozen now. Father Paul barking from the altar. Religion brings comfort in grief. Dad sitting in silence, his face looking the length of the cross, chewing on his flushed cheeks. Closed casket, couple dozen friends of the family have their butts to the pews. All of grandma's were gone before. "She's joining them now; she's in a happier place." Thanks. I didn't cry that day. I couldn't cry at a wooden box. I almost did when my dad began to. I see it now, why it was so tough to watch him weep. I recognized death in him, realized that he once saw his dad cry over his mom's body; that it'd be him in the box next, and that it'd be my cheeks spitting red in the front row.

It's dark outside now. I can't find my phone. Losing it. A loud bird chirp sounded off from behind me. I turned to see a skinny black crow sitting on on the kitchen counter. Its beak reaching up for the heavens. I got up and moved toward it. It continued to cry out. I reached the bird and wrapped my hand around its black base. The cries stopped. I looked at the thing in my hand. It grew hard in my palm. Static came from the beak. A muffled sound streamed out.

"Hello?"

A jolt passed through my body. I squeezed the crow hard.

"Hello?" the soft, crackly voice repeated.

I brought the crow to my ear to hear it again.

"Hello? Can you hear me?" the voice asked.

I felt every single neuron in my body fire at once. This was it, Him, God! Speaking through crow's cries.

"Yes! Yes! I am here! Speak to me!" I screamed into the crow. My

face tightened around my skull.

“Oh, hello sir. This is Nancy from Arnold Spa and Pool Maintenance. This call is just to confirm the appointment Mr. Joseph George set up for tomorrow at 10 o’clock.”

I unclenched my hand from the crow. The black slapped the tiled floor and split into three.

I’d thought grandma would be buried in the ground. Would have a nice headstone and plot to rest in. But the town cemetery was old and filled entirely with bones, so she was shelved in a sort of large stone cabinet, tucked in around the bodies of others that lived too long to be buried. The ends of my pants rested on the grass as I watched the casket slide into it’s destined shelf. A clichéd graveyard mist hung at the feet of the grieving party. Not sure if that’s hallucinated or real. Father Paul led the prayer.

There’s solace in distraction. I scanned the stone squares that marked who lay in each cabinet. I want to ignore these. I’ve lived them before. A small bronze ring extended from the stone to hold flowers. Only a few held such remembrance. The names meant less to me than the years carved in. 1910-2003. 1960-2000. 2000-2001. 1997-2017. An airy reflection stared back at me here. Mouthed something here - “remember me” or “memory fades” or “memento mori”.

Me - disheveled, looking like he’s seen his bones, standing in front of a mirror now, or fogged glass; the reflection pale, his pupils wide, fist compact and needy like the metal head of a hammer.

The Irish prefer to celebrate life rather than mourn death. We had a party at our house for my grandma. I was giddy, the neighbor girls were over, and play distracts. The church pianist was drinking wine by the fire, Father Paul talking to my mom, opportunitites. Mom always said I looked good in white. I’d be Paul’s disciple up at the altar. There, I didn’t see any of this. Hide and seek was my focus. I slipped into the guest bathroom and sat indian-style behind

the milky, translucent glass door of the shower. Imagining I looked like the silhouette of a few shampoo bottles. I didn't say a thing, even when figures began to walk in and sit at the toilet. Thinking no one could see me, staring into the opaque, stained glass.

Dad swinging open the shower door and yanking me up at my collar. He thought I was perverted. Others thought the same. Hiding in the shower waiting for people to drop their pants so I could get a peek. Father Paul was to save me, crack open my chest and rip the devil from me. Altar work began next week.

Dark room again. Which memory is this? Something is dripping from my knuckles. A leak in the leather wineskin. It's thick and dark and drips to some silent beat.

In the windowless sacristy, stuffy and carpeted, 12 o'clock mass done. I pulled the white garment over my head.

"So you like watching other people naked?"

Pavlovian drool from Father Paul. I hurry to grab my shirt.

"No. Pull down your pants. We'll see if you like being looked upon."

Paul standing over me, feet pinned, nailed together, tall as heaven. My small body so white and naked and hairless as the cross.

There's a character in Das Boot who, when trapped at the bottom of the sea, refuses to help repair the submarine and just prays. Holds the bible to his shivering chest and calls out, up to the unknown. My dad stopped taking me to church. Everyone else still went. I cried alone over my purple body every Sunday.

The place where the mirror hung is brown. I hold the shards. They're piled in my palms like ashed granite, like buried bones, like casketed coffins and blackened spit bubbles against stained glass. My red hands are cupped in holy communion: this is my body.





Shanghai Daze

LINDINKOSI GUMEDE

Shanghai Daze
Shanghai Daze
Shanghai Daze
Shanghai Daze
Shanghai Daze
Shanghai Daze
Shanghai Daze
Shanghai Daze

Charlie the Alley Cat Goes to the Moon

MATT MILLER

Back before Sal's bakery burnt down and the entire city cried tears of absent pastries,
before we had ever heard of man-buns or snapchat or microsoft or professional basketball or slam poetry,
when boys wore belts and hats and tied their shoes and girls left the shape of their bodies to the imagination,
we felt the ground begin to shift beneath our feet and make the buildings sway like they were gonna be sick,
witnessed the sky crack open and shower our domesticated bodies with sonic booms,
shivered in shadows cast by metal monstrosities sprouting from the pocketbooks of politicians paying the piper,
who built their city on top of our city in order to own them both and win the mythical approval of their daddies,
inviting us to vacate their premises with big sticky stickers stuck on our doors and thugs who busted our kneecaps,
transforming our songs of love into songs of pain that nobody wanted to listen to because they felt uncomfortable,
forcing us to burn our guitars for firewood to keep our shared needles sooty yet sterilish in our cardboard paradise,
where we formed a committee and through parliamentary procedure's power realized we must evacuate the planet,
to save future generations from living in a world of noxious people with big money and small minds,
so we united a coalition of gutter punks and hopheads and dirt bags and scum balls and

went to work,

weaving together shopping carts and road signs and mud flaps and hopes and dreams to craft the space shuttle,

which we mounted to a dumpster packed with lighters and hairspray cans and other liquids that go boom,

right before Frankie Four Fingers nominated Charlie the Alley Cat to pilot the maiden voyage,

who agreed after kissing his Lucinda and promising her promises he had no way of honoring,

before entering the vertical cockpit with his coat pockets stuffed with various varieties of vegetable progeny,

plus apple cores and cherry pits and orange rinds and whatever else could be found outside of casual restaurants,

to commence cultivation of a lunar plantation capable of sustaining the population of a new civilization,

and once Charlie tied on his goggles with lenses made from spit-shined bottoms of broken soda bottles,

he took one last drag of his loose cigarette and tossed it into the volatile soup of the dumpster rocket,

and,

BOOM,

we witnessed Charlie leave the atmosphere and an hour later there were dust clouds on the Moon,

proving Charlie got there safe and sound and is waiting for us among his orchards and is enjoying the view.

Two at Night Abstracted

ELIZABETH WENGER

body as abstraction
figment & pigment
lavender & orange fragments
colors who taste & smell
sea blue laps up shell white hallows
& sing
limbs lonely w/out heads
heads lost w/out legs &
please, don't ask about hearts
organs personified are tissues
romanticized
for now,
let skin be stone
shifting & polishing in tumblers



Don't Play

JAMES TAYLOR

Don't Play

Don't Play

Don't Play

Don't Play

Don't Play

Don't Play

Don't Play

Don't Play

recognition

JOHN ARMOUR

February is usually a cold month, although this year
it was warm

We can only recognize a face from around 20
meters, any further and we start to pay attention
more to mannerisms and the build of a body

Friend of a friends' party, five of us sat on the
floor of a bathroom, hiding from the others.
While I tried my best to impress, you were not
the focus, and I was not yours. I watched you
through a pair of eyes that I did not think would
change

In my younger sisters' room, they paint my nails
for the first time in my life. The girliest of
colors, so as not to confuse my parents that I
was a boy no longer interested in girls

Every year since the millennium, the company
Pantone has released one Color of the Year. In
2016 they released two; Rose Quartz along with
Serenity: pink and pastel blue

You were in the passenger seat in front of me
and I was in the back. I hadn't seen you in just
over a year and I had nothing I could say to you
any more. I knew your mannerisms, though

probably wouldn't be able to recognize you
from more than 20 meters away

When I was born, someone had given me a
yellow blanket. I wouldn't leave without it.
Chewed on, dragged around, left behind, and
cried on

A friend of mine showed me gay pornography
when I was 11 years old, and said whoever gets
an erection first, loses. I left, and would not
allow myself to even wonder about men in that
way until I was at least 17

The party had ended around three, you and I on
the kitchen counter. I wrapped my legs around
your waist the same way so many girls had done
so to me. I felt you, our thoughts lost within the
danger of publicity. I was not the leader in these
motions; you had been here before. Your skin
was dark, hidden within shadows; my hands
were hidden elsewhere. I chose the girliest of
words and actions so as not to confuse that I
was a boy interested in girls

After 6 glasses of wine, definitely more, we crawled into a friend of a friends' bed, and I looked at you through a pair of eyes I had not known. This was not love, but that would hardly matter. Lying there, you kissed me like no girl ever could. We kissed like no other species on the planet, as kissing is unique to only humans

There are 7.5 billion people on earth right now. You will only meet 80,000 of them. On average, a person will fall in love with 5 people in their lifetime

I sit in the bathtub; she sits at the edge. Her hand runs through the water, playing with lines of soap that used to be foam. My body is too large to be fully submerged. My knees are hard and covered in hair. Scar tissue scattered about from more than just falling, these are not the legs I want

Apply a lipstick that is too dark for my skin tone, one that I will later want to wipe off. We will sit in her room; she will paint my nails for the first time in her life. A subtle Rose Quartz, so as not to confuse that this was ironic



Self Portrait
Self Portrait
Self Portrait

KEVIN OLSON



Untitled

HUNTER MURRAY

Untitled
Untitled
Untitled
Untitled
Untitled
Untitled
Untitled
Untitled



Untitled

HUNTER MURRAY

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Untitled
Untitled
Untitled

Glacial Melt

ELLIE EBERLEE

I'm looking for the crossword when I happen across his obituary. Alfred Apps, it reads. Died on September thirtieth. Fifty-eight. Former Toronto-based speech writer for the twenty-third Prime Minister. Suicide. I lay my fork down on the table. Pick up my napkin and work at the corners of my mouth, even though I know there can't be anything there. I haven't eaten anything yet.

"Anything on your mind, Cath?" Rob asks.

"No." I say, when really there are two. The first is that Alfred lied about his age when we started dating. He'd said he was thirty-seven, but this would put him well over forty. The second is that I may as well have murdered him.

"Any more coffee left in the pot?" Rob asks, rubbing his chin absentmindedly.

"Let me check." I say, pocketing the obituary section. I want to vomit.

On the August morning of his daughter's wedding, Alfred turned the stove burner up too high. I remember worrying he'd singe his moustache. That was Alfred at his most vivid: hunched over the stovetop, frying eggs in a pink bathrobe. Well aware that his ex-girlfriend had materialized— for the first time in almost a decade— in his fortieth-floor Toronto apartment on the morning of his daughter Grace's wedding and completely unconcerned by it. Amused, even.

"D'you know," he said, talking as only Alfred could, "there must've been fifty people here last night? Fifty. And they weren't all Liberals, I can tell you that much. Have to say, I was a little disappointed when the

Prime Minister didn't show, this is the second time he's—"

Tired by the familiar narrative, I turned and sized up the apartment. Not surprisingly, little had changed in the decade since I'd left. Drafts littered the coffee table, stamped by the sad seals of coffee cups and late-night sweat. Cat litter broadcast beneath the television like larvae. Actually, I was fairly certain that had been there ten years ago, which was especially confusing considering *he hadn't had a cat then either*.

It was no small miracle Alf had managed to keep his job so long, living like this. Surely the Prime Minister couldn't help but notice Alf's pudgy fingers were a deep yellow, or that he wore the same black turtle-neck so often that the collar had grown stiff with sweat. I suspect if asked he'd have said the same thing as any of us who had fallen under Alf's old-world boozy, nicotine-stained spell. Alfred was Alfred— and therefore irreplaceable.

"Erm, Cath?" he said, straining, "Would you pass the vegetable oil?"

I snorted and lay my jacket across the countertop. Rooting through cabinets, I remembered why the two of us never ate in. An army of bottles stood to be sort through, and the smell of liquor soon became oppressive.

"Some good stuff in here." I said, turning over a bottle of vermouth in my hands.

"Huh?" asked Alfred, looking over his shoulder. "Oh—that. I cook with it, mostly."

"Right." I said, and handed him the oil.

"You look great, by the way." Alfred said, procuring a cigarette from behind his ear. He proceeded to size me up while lighting the thing. "—really."

I allowed myself a thin smile.

"Shit."

"Jesus, Alfred."

The cigarette had fallen out from his dry lips and onto the eggs. Alfred sighed and turned off the burner. He placed the pan— eggs, cigarette ash and all— into the sink. Turning to face me, he didn't seem the least bit abashed.

“Can I get you anything, Cathy?”

I looked at him. Running fat fingers through what was left of his hair, I wondered what it was that I'd once found so attractive. I'd been hard at work on my doctorate in political science when we'd met. Alfred wrote brilliant speeches, sure— we'd all heard them, been moved to both tears and ballots by them— but after we'd broken up I could never watch the words emerge from the Prime Minister's polished lips without hearing something hollow. Sometimes, for shock value, I look at old pictures of the two of us together: him in that crusted black turtleneck, me twenty years younger and smiling shyly, naivety powdered thick and pink onto my cheeks like blush. I emerged from our relationship relatively unscathed, but with the vague, irrevocable sense that some shining political illusion had been shattered. I knew what the people didn't: that the words supposedly worthy of their country were written while nursing a hangover.

“Get dressed Alf,” I said. “I'm parked out front.”

Twenty minutes later we were seated in a breakfast joint uptown. Alf was rambling on about his daughter Grace, about the wedding that night and whether they might not reconsider and let him make a speech. He was excited, and eating like it— chasing after slippery sausages with infallible good humor, applying generous amounts of ketchup to his eggs with the flat of his knife. I cast around for a distraction, and found myself studying his forehead. I'd always been in love with the ruddy, intelligent thing: used to spend hours watching those overworked ridges, massive folds of thought falling slowly over onto one another and layering like glacial melt. The whole construction dangerously close to caving in and covering his face.

“Can you believe it,” he said, shaking his head in wonder, “Gracie?”

My Gracie? Married, good god.” He picked up his coffee, took a sip and made a hasty, grimacing retreat.

“Boiling,” Alfred said cheerfully, “and brutal. We’ll ask for milk.”

“Alf,” I said softly.

“Mm?”

“—Alf.” I said again, and he looked up. “Grace sent me to ask you not to come.”

Alfred’s tongue worked its way around inside his mouth. “To the ceremony?” he asked, after a minute. Voice taut and quivering.

“To the whole thing, I think. She’s worried it’ll only make things difficult, and she’s stressed enough as it is—”

Alfred pulled hairs from his moustache.

“— and I have to say, it doesn’t make much sense, Alf. You’ve only met Mark twice—”

“He’s marrying my daughter, isn’t he?” Alfred interjected, searching my eyes wildly. His own were pink and strained. *I don’t have it*, I remember wanting to say, *whatever it is that might save you. I don’t have it*. Instead, I looked down. I killed him.

“So,” Alfred said, chest heaving, “my family sends you like some sort of messenger? Where the fuck is my daughter to tell me this?”

“She’s busy,” I said, but half agreed. I’d been skeptical when Grace asked me to pass on her request. I hadn’t seen Alfred since I’d come to my senses and left him ten years ago, standing outside the island airport, baggage in hand. Still, as Grace pointed out, I mattered to him. As Grace pointed out, she mattered to me. Like my own daughter— and I didn’t blame her for not wanting him there, not really. Visions of an estranged, alcoholic father wrestling the microphone from the maid of honor’s hands came all too easily.

“Not invited,” Alfred muttered, “not invited. I’m always fucking invited. I had the fucking Prime Minister over last night, almost—”

The waitress placed the milk on our table, smiling apologetically.

“Cath,” Alfred said, leaning forward, “this is my daughter. Fingers crossed, she’s getting married once. I can’t miss it...”

“It isn’t my call, Alfred.”

“Oh fuck calls. I’ll wear a suit, I’ll be sober.”

“Will you?” I asked.

He might have, had I given him the chance. Called Grace, told her I’d keep him sober for the ceremony. Instead, I killed him. Or maybe Rob did—arriving then. Tanned and muscular. Dressed for the golf course.

“Cathy?”

I frowned. I couldn’t place the voice, but I would, I knew.

“Holy shit. Cathy, it’s *me*, it’s Rob.”

“No, no of course Rob, I know,” I said, because then I did. Rob Halter. We’d done our undergrads together.

“This is the damnedest thing,” he said, smiling widely, “I just saw your book out on the rack at Indigo’s. Sporting a big *Staff Pick* sticker and everything.”

I laughed. “No way.”

Alfred leered. “No way.” he said.

“Oh—I’m sorry,” Rob said, “Rob Halter. Old friend of Cath’s.” He extended a brown hand.

Alfred looked at it mistrustfully, and took a long draught of coffee instead. “Alfred.” he offered unhelpfully.

“Right.” said Rob, uncomfortable. “Cath, I can’t tell you how glad I am to run into you. Are you living in the area?”

“Yeah,” I said, “down in the Annex, by U of T. I’m teaching there, actually. Are you still out in San Fran?”

“Just moved in up the block.” Rob says, grinning again. “Don’t know a single person. Am actually on my way to buy a coffee pot right now, if you’ve got any interest.”

Alfred guffawed.

I look at the two of them together. Unlike Alfred, Rob was as far as can be from disillusioned: illusion spread thick and obvious over tight brown cheeks. He looked ready to cross out large sections of speeches, or at any moment gather up picket signs and protest with arms that, though thin, were strong. I remember him in college, with his book bag and glasses. A denim collar peeking out from beneath a cashmere sweater. Bounding up the stairs to fiddle with his thesis; bound for the Ottawa, surely.

“Sure,” I said, “why not. We can catch up over your first cup.”

Alfred looked at me. He didn’t say a word. Did I know, disengaging from the booth, that I wouldn’t see him again? Maybe. Still, I was going to buy a coffee pot with Rob, that was all. How could I have known he’d never write another speech, that the Prime Minister would ask him to step down a few weeks later and the landlord would seize back the apartment within the month, cat litter and all—

I couldn’t know I’d be reading about his suicide little over a month later. Still, there was something final about leaving him in that booth alone, letting hot coffee eat away at his tongue. Knowing all the while that his forehead was dangerously close to collapsing.

“Anything, Cath?” Rob asks. We’ve been together for a month now. We’re happy. I’m working on a tan of my own. At night, when he reads the New Yorker in bed, I study his forehead, marveling at its careful construction. A sturdy piece of baseboard. Delineated by strong, straight lines into sections like slats, nailed in firmly at either end. No danger of cave-ins there.

“Yeah,” I say, “enough for another cup.”







Artificial Sin
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JAMIE LANCASTER

Passing

FOYINSIS ADEGBONMIRE

She tells you that it's time to return to the place where the ants call home and it's midnight all the time; You don't know how but you know where it is;

Her black dress is frayed; Her black dress is floating; Her eyes are her saving grace, the color of *I refuse to cower*; Her hair defies gravity;

Like yours;

She takes your hand; Hers is warm, like climbing under your blanket on a chilly evening; Or putting on your favorite black robe, the one with the pink stars; Before you know it, you are

falling, falling, falling,

wanting to hold handfuls of the purple sky, the color of royalty: Issa, Beyoncé, Michelle;

This would be the scene where the prince comes to save you with true love's kiss—Or princess; But no one comes and no one will; Because no one can help;

There's no rescue once you've progressed through the canyon, at least not by the living;

But you're not really falling; Could it be falling when there's no gravity? Nothing tugging you in a silent plea to join its misery;

To lament in its loneliness;

Her skin is growing bronzier; Chestnut, pecan, hazelnut, cocoa; And your own skin is fading fast; Without it, who are you?

Midnight girl, bronze girl, mocha girl, missing girl;

There's a sweetness to it all; Like that first bite of an overripe plantain, fried and soft and satisfying;

You are drifting, drifting, gliding, fading, changing, drifting, changing, fading, drifting;

In this place where your words, carefully crafted as they are, will not matter; The memory of you will not matter; Your life will not matter; As it didn't to them: the colorless.

One day, even Shakespeare will be forgotten;

And there's a finality to it;

Like the period at the end of this poem.



Untitled
Untitled
Untitled

BAILEE FLINT

Floating

JESSICA DiSALVATORE

My friend once asked me
“Did you ever realize that the world
Looks real but the sky doesn’t?”

And I realized
that beyond the facade
of beautiful sunsets
on pure nights
when the colors are beside themselves,
crying pink and whining orange
crimping themselves yellow and brushing
on some lavender above their tired eyes,
that beyond
the sky sometimes canopies
puffed up humanoids.

I realized
that astronauts are eons closer to heaven
than we’ll ever be, my friend-
floating in death’s debris,
through the fear of being
digested by the deprivation
of their own breath.

I realized
that earth has artillery
but the sky is a war zone
bigger than any revolutionary.

I realized
the sky is so vast

and is cracked open like
a shaken soda can
bubbling and breaking with stars,
foaming over and masking
the darkness
it holds.

To look beyond the colors
is to look down the throat of God.
To float there is to see the world
As it was born to be-
Out of touch.



Untitled Untitled

JAMES TAYLOR

the portrait of giovanni arnolfini & his wife

JESSE KANE

i got drunk again last night & called my ex-girlfriend
to ask her what that painting she based her undergraduate
thesis on was called. the one with the man & woman
who look like aliens & the woman looks pregnant
but isn't, & the little brown dog, & the christian iconography.
the painter must have been up his own ass, right?
i mean he painted himself right into the painting,
& why only one candle?

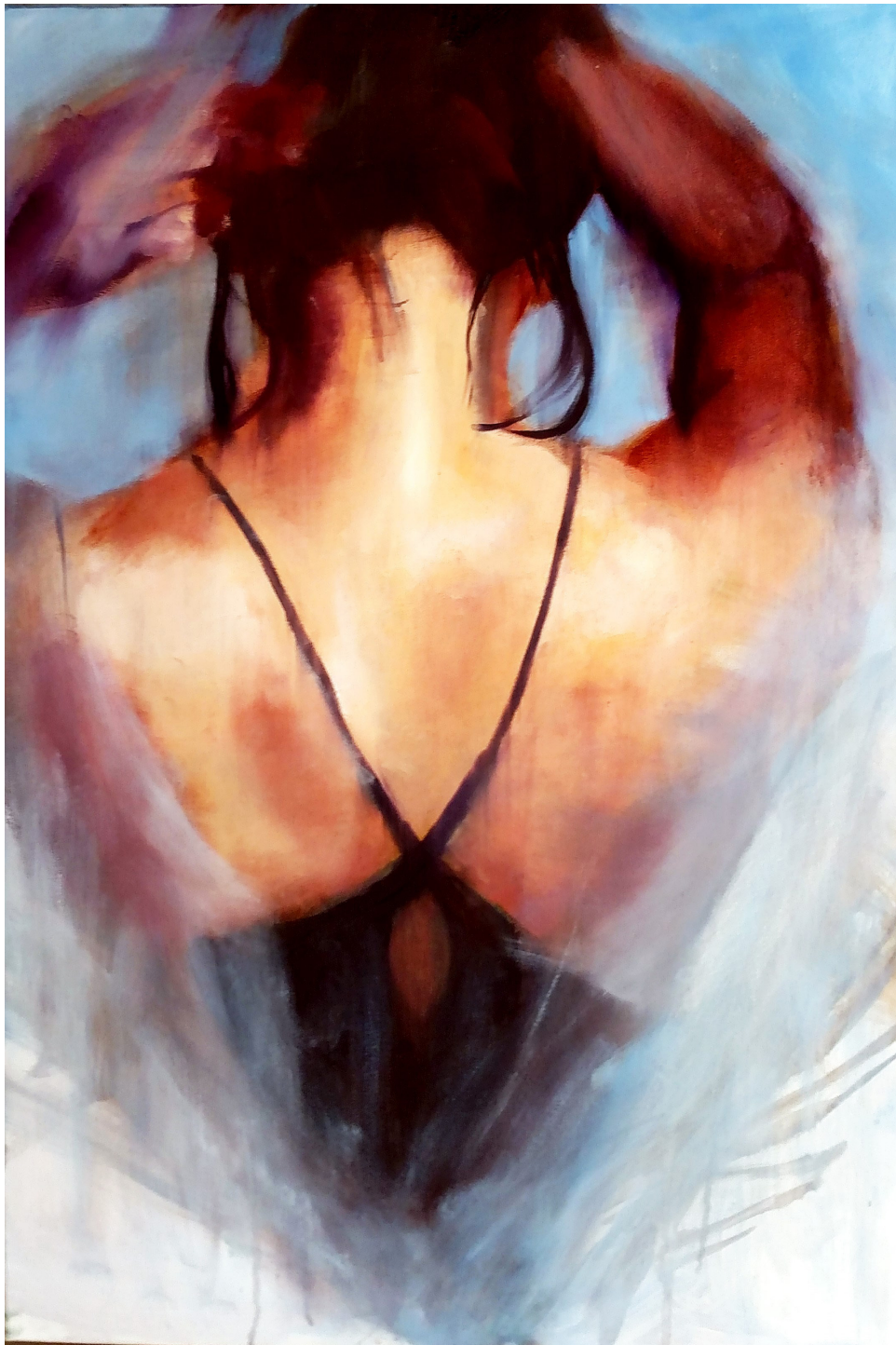
jesse, why are you calling?
i have new poems to send you & i need your address.
she asked me why i didn't write poems
about her when we'd spend our mornings
at the kitchen table over coffee & sourdough.
i told her there is little to hold onto in a poem
about fighting over who's going to set
the thermostat or take the dog out to shit.
i'd rather write poems about your affinity
for eyckian realism. or how the portrait of
giovanni arnolfini & his wife always stuck
with her after we decided we wouldn't keep the baby.

The Girl Behind the Wall

MIA KERCHER

I have parties in my apartment
I never invite Ashley
Ashley orders pizzas
never offers me a slice
and it's okay
we're not roommates or friends we're neighbors
I never caught up with Ashley over coffee or margaritas
we nod politely at the entrance to our building
then close our doors and return to our private lives
behind the wall we share
but I know Ashley well
at eight in the morning I smell her coffee through the kitchen vent
while I quietly sip my own
we rev up our blenders
smashing organic berries and greek yogurt
we sip our smoothies silently
knowing the girl behind the wall is sipping too
at five o'clock we're home from work
I mimic the distinct pop
of a wine bottle cork
and wonder if Ashley's watching the same tv as me
I could make Ashley a mix cd
I know all her favorite songs
she plays Abba while playing with her pets
Katy Perry pops around while she cleans up her apartment
I hear her sing through the window in the bathroom
she sometimes makes up songs
she shares secrets underwater
it's the only place she feels safe to be herself
Ashley knows I can hear her sing
because she hears my songs too

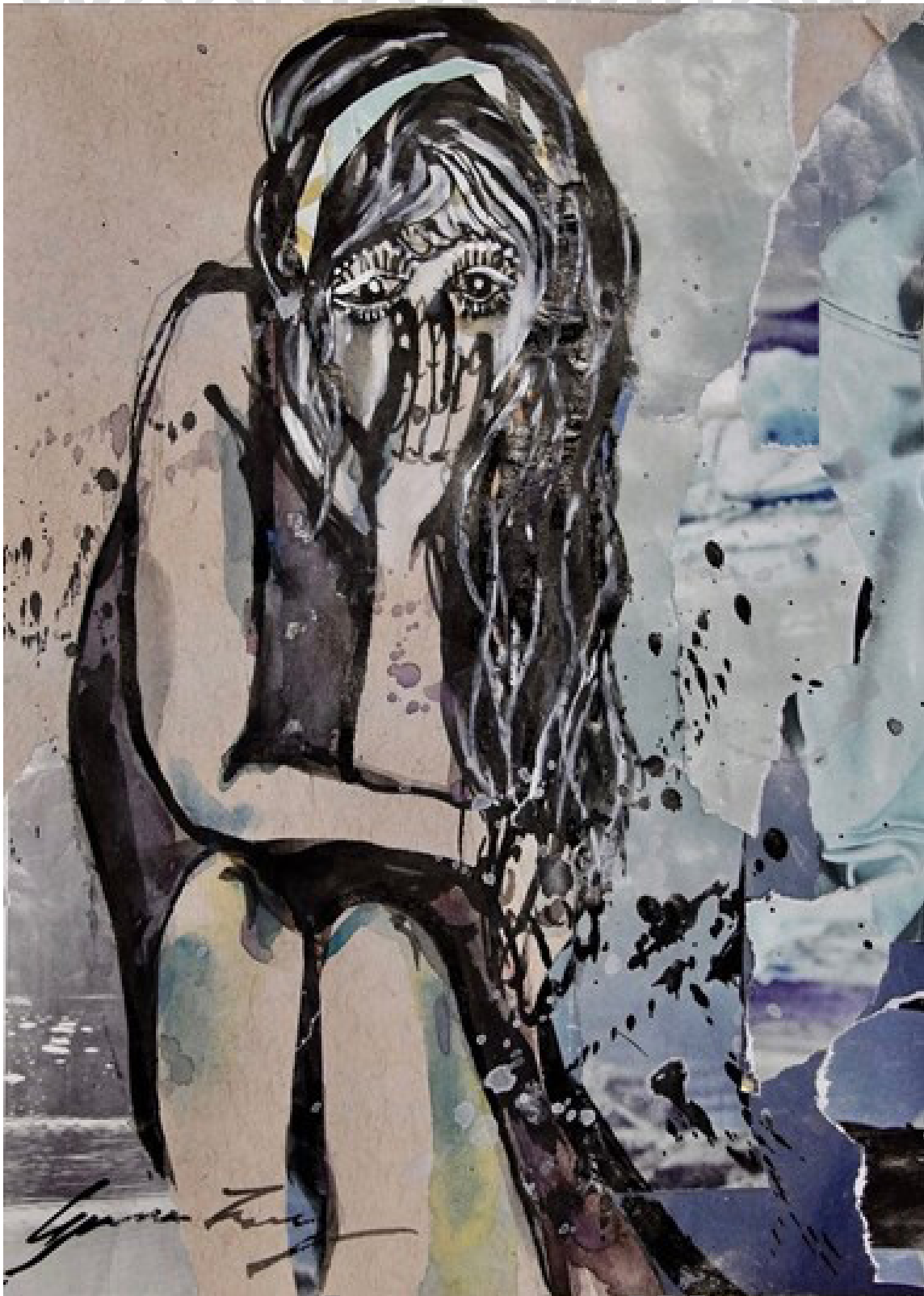
and it's okay
to mess up
when the girl behind the wall is making mistakes too
once it's dark outside
and late at night and time for bed
I considerately keep my orgasms quiet
and Ashley moans at a minimum
but we're not too quiet
and it's okay
to get off
when the girl behind the wall is cuming too



After you, After me

JAMIE LANCASTER

After you, After me
After you, After me
After you, After me
After you, After me



Weeping Willow Weeping Willow

From: Orange Blossom

K LANGE

I

Unseasonable frost comes
as if he has been waiting in the early shadows,
preparing gallows in the orchard.

Not much will be said of it
but we tuck in our hungry bellies
a quiet fear for the fruit trees.

The cold can always deepen,
has fingers that are never quite to the throat
but rest on the shoulders
as if to say

“When the chance comes,
you know
I will”.

II

Even next season,
if another progyny were to ask,
you would tell them
“I don’t know,
it’s always been like
this”





Contributors

Art

DAISY CRANE is an undergraduate at the University of Kansas. After completing her BA in Peace and Conflict studies and BFA in Visual Arts, she hopes to combine her passions for human rights and art in graduate school. If she's not eating pizza with ranch, hiking, or painting, you can find Daisy geeking out about documentaries, nature, books and/or the ridiculousness of society in general.

BAILEE FLINT is a undergraduate student at Utah State University. She loves to paint and draw. She mostly studies figures, and uses oil paints.

NKOSI GUMEDE originally from South Africa, is an undergraduate student at Deep Springs College. He loves travelling, reading and experiencing the beauty of nature.

JAMIE LANCASTER is an undergraduate BFA student at Utah State University.

HUNTER MURRAY is an undergraduate student at The University of Kansas. He is driven by curiosities, human values, and what cultivates self-fulfillment.

KEVIN OLSON is a Baroque themed Futurist; he creates drawings, pastel works as well as oil paintings that focus on energy, youth, transcendentalism, movement, and the core understanding of dynamism.

JAMES TAYLOR is an undergraduate student at Utah State University studying Photography in the BFA program. His work focuses on the human condition while exploring themes of cinematography and character development.

GRACE JI YAN TSANG is an undergraduate student at New York University majoring in Communicative Sciences and Disorders and minoring in English. She loves painting, reading, and watching otter videos over tea.

Contributors

Fiction

ELLIE EBERLEE is a sophomore at Middlebury College in Vermont, where she writes, paints with lots of color, and reads late into the night. She was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario.

PATRICK RONAN is an undergraduate student at Columbia University in the City of New York. He is originally from Northern California and spends most of his time reading, writing, and going to concerts.

SARA SIRK is an undergraduate student at the University of Wyoming. She loves writing, reading, watching bad movies, and revisiting the southeastern part of America she grew up in.

Nonfiction

KATRINA FUNK is a history major at Utah State University. When she isn't studying her bees, she can be found running or curled up with her favorite book.

ALYLA ROBLES is a Freshman at Texas A&M International University. She loves reading, writing, baking, and breaking stereotypes.

Poetry

FOYINSI ADEGBONMIRE is a senior at Hofstra University studying Creative Writing and Philosophy. As such, she spends her time writing poetry or trying to find common ground in science vs. religion/spirituality/philosophy debates as well as reading, watching shows, or sleeping. She believes in the power of writing as a way to inspire change, one mind at a time.

JOHN ARMOUR is an undergraduate student at Ohio University. While he usually works in print, film, and installation, his writing explores a much more personal aspect of his own gender expression and identity.

Contributors

JESSICA DISALVATORE is a sophomore at John Carroll University in University Heights, Ohio. She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in Communications. Jessica developed a passion for writing at twelve years old and is still an avid writer and reader today. Most of her work stems from personal experiences and her love of traveling.

ALEX HENKLE studies Philosophy and English with a minor in Honors at the University of Wyoming.

JESSE KANE is in his third year of studying English at Arizona State University. Winner of the 2016 David Kirby prize in Poetry. His poetry has appeared in the *Colorado Crossing Literary Journal*.

MIA KERCHER is an undergraduate student at Portland State University, majoring in Applied Linguistics and minoring in English. She loves biking, writing and drawing. On rainy winter days you will find her cuddled up with her calico cat, Cleocatra. She hopes to learn many languages and travel widely.

K LANGE is a writer, teacher, and UFO seeker from Boise, ID. Currently a student at Boise State University, their work has been featured at the National Poetry slam in 2016 and 2017 as well as in their chapbooks: *Sugarbecoming*, *Moonache*, and *Ways of Seeing*.

MATT MILLER is a senior at the University of South Dakota. He enjoys writing, outdoor adventures, and eating enormous slices of pizza.

TERIN WEINBERG is an Environmental Studies and English major at Salisbury University in Maryland. She serves as the Editor in Chief of *The Scarab Literary Magazine*. She has poems published in *Barely South Review*, *Red Earth Review*, *Dark River Review*, *New Southerner*, *Waccamaw* and various other journals.

ELIZABETH WENGER is an undergraduate student at the University of Kansas. She enjoys writing and reading about gender, sexuality, American Judaism, and history.

Acknowledgments

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Jess Nani

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