

**miniMAG**

*issue96*  
*magenta*



## Privilege

Kashi Bakshani

*Innocent—I would look up at cellular towers:*

Geometric skeletons  
of grieving primordials,  
racked in rows, standing  
side by side—yet unable  
to reach out and grasp.

*Lying is man's greatest privilege over animal, said Dostoyevsky.*

I fled to my mother  
dampening her sweater  
with young hysterics.

*Rather: Empathy is holy greatest privilege.*

War is live-streamed.  
The bones of mothers  
without children fall  
to dust and we watch  
like animals.

# Swimming Hole

Jerome Berglund

They're naked on a dip in the lake after midnight, and things are going swell up to this point but then when they conclude and are ready to head back in it becomes apparent that someone has taken their clothes.

*leaky can  
still able  
to water  
just watch the socks  
floor marking guidelines*

This is not such a problem for Bartholomew who isn't bashful – if more grower than shower – but his sweetheart it so happens proves highly opposed to showing her goods to whatever hooligans or good for nothings have decided to pull a fast one, presumably are stationed nearby in the darkness, pants around their ankles and peckers in hand waiting for a live performance. Unrehearsed and improvised, one night only, limited seating, the whole headliner shebang. Rita has zero intention of humoring said weasels, will not so much as consider dignifying her beau's speculation upon the possibility raccoons or

vermin have absconded with every solitary, hastily flung parcel of apparel the pair deposited en route into the cool, refreshing waters off this isolated, less frequented bank of the Minnetonka, accessible only via overgrown paths and careful navigating, a solid three quarters of an hour from the nearest car park. Its existence is a carefully guarded if public secret, only known to certain frivolous subsets of degenerate youths, passed down from older brothers and cousins, hoodlum mentors in a time-honored tradition perhaps stretching back as far as the nineteen seventies. Bart being among said rabble, feeling increasingly cold and pruney as they discuss it, Rita interrogates her swain on whether he didn't mention their amorous rendezvous to the gang, has not invited, may not even be a collaborator in the cruel mockery afoot. If he is whatsoever involved, she discovers he had masterminded this somehow to humiliate her, his paramour vows to poison his guinea pig and have her younger brother throttle his own within an inch of his life... And she means it! Having gone steady since sophomore year he knows her well, but she also has his number top to bottom, and is sufficiently convinced he was not party to this unnerving development reasonably quickly.

*don't have  
a ride  
can't drive away  
invisible car  
unassailable*

If they can just find something to drape over their patent nakedness, hide shriveled waterlogged genitalia from prying, leering eyes, and satisfactorily shield themselves primitively long enough to get through some dense brush to the Cutlass a mile down the Luce Line!! (Enduring in the process—if they are being entirely open and transparent—abundant mosquito's, wood ticks, and a few poisonous snakes. As you might guess the only acceptable course of action is for Bartholomew to exit the water to go gather up some leaves and MacGyver a makeshift outfit for Rita to employ as best she can, so as not to risk any ogling, whether by classmates, graduates, lads or lecherous townies, to thwart whomever's eyes, binoculars, night vision cameras happen to be trained her direction. Rita is no prude, has actually posed nude for French photographs—lying about her age—and drawing classes before, but neither was she some pole dancer! And those bastards have taken her prize pumps!! Goshdarnit, had she loved those shoes. So they'll get no jollies tonight, and if one slips up and Bart gets hands on him, Rita vows she'll scar him deep enough with her long gleaming nails that he'll think twice about trying any vulgar shenanigans like this again anytime soon. So off her man scoots, and then Bartholomew is coming back again arms laden with different exile options of branches, leaves, bushes, etcetera for her consideration. Except to his great alarm she is not where he left her. They hadn't

thought this maneuver, their overall strategy, through well enough, he comes instantly to recognize then, in fact the realization hits him like a delayed freight train. Bart cries out at the top of his lungs for an hour, wades along the shoreline both directions for miles, finally tears ass back to the car and his cellular, panicked calls to the authorities who dispatch choppers and dogs and spotlights, later dredge the area from top to bottom. In the end they find not the slightest trace of Margaret except a few glue on nails, which appear to have become dislodged some way. Bart does not want to think of precisely how, but cannot stop imagining. Indeed, he continues to into old age.

*creepers*  
*encircle*  
*moonflower*  
*viewing*  
*the eclipse*





# Teeth

Amy DeBellis

Before my Hinge date I amuse myself by making faces in the mirror. I purse my mouth like an overripe strawberry, beckoning future rot. I slide oil through my hair, expensive oil that's supposed to be very different from the grease that will seep through the roots after two days without a wash. A few minutes before sunset I slip on my combat boots and trendy trench coat and we're out the door, me and the fragile home of my body.

I'm listening to "Botanica de los Angeles" on my earpods so I don't notice him until he's already seen me, this lone man on a block where I've realized—too late—that everyone else has crossed to the other side of the street. Automatically I keep walking towards him, past the point where I can pretend I was going to turn around anyway, and I lower the song volume to nothing so I can hear him saying to me as I pass by: "Yeah, fuck you too, bitch."

A guttural memory ( *bitch stupid bitch* ) surfaces: belly-up, bobbing. My mouth tastes like rust, sharp and sudden.

He laughs at my blank face. "What are you gonna do? That's

right, nothing.”

Something hot and feral slices through me. Still walking, I turn around and flip him the finger like a stupid, pissed-off teenager. He loves this—gleeful he stalks towards me, following me over the arid concrete, heavy hands curling into fists. And me a woman, me a weightlifter and supposedly something of a boxer and able to do a few consecutive pull-ups but still weaker than almost any untrained male, my bones like fiberglass sculpture next to their bodies of bloodless iron. Me in my useless combat boots, my body stupidly costumed.

As he closes the distance between us I stop and open my purse and find my pepper spray; my hands are shaking, but no I don't fumble, I don't drop the pepper spray and flee screaming down the street. With my thumb I twist the nozzle around so it's ready, my heart thundering in my chest and in my hands and in my face, and he's four feet away by now, panting and grinning, anticipating.

I hold the cylinder up between us. He looks from it to me, eyeballs rolling in his sockets like loose joints. The whites of his eyes are the color of spoiled milk.

“Awh, come on, I was just kidding,” he says eventually.

The whites of his eyes are the color of my ex-boyfriend's teeth. More memories surface, bobbing. Terror like a collapsed star.

“I was just fooling around,” he says.

We back away from each other. Unknown, unheard music is still playing in my earpods, the volume turned all the way down.

I continue on my way to the restaurant downtown. My Hinge date is a polite and well-dressed man I've never met before, who pulls my chair out for me and asks me about my day. I lie. I perform hope, confidence, trust. We eat handmade dumplings and are the first to applaud the live musicians. He listens to me, performs respect and charm and maturity. At the end of the date he asks me to come home with him. I decline. “Come on,” he says. “It's just on the next block. Just around the corner.” I think of blocks of arid concrete. I think of things coming around corners at me.

He smiles. He has teeth, too—they're small and bashful, nestling crowded in his smile. I decline again and he stops smiling, his lips knitting a closing wound.

I unmatch him on my way home. “Botanica” is roaring in my earpods. I take a bath and the water tongues me, warm like the womb I can't return to. I wonder when I will stop seeing men as various shades of violence. I wonder if I should stop seeing men as various shades of violence. Alone, I go to bed and lose my shape in the darkness. I circle men like jackals in my dreams.

# Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Caleb James K.

It was the offseason and a stretch of unseasonably warm weather made the beach the perfect place to spend the afternoon. The weatherman threatened a storm, but it seemed he was all bluster today. Though the wind did blow—jostling the small beach town with its irregular outbursts—all was fine and no one paid mind to its tantrums.

Candace, wanting to escape life for a bit, decided to surprise her two children with a fun day at the beach. Her kids, Jacob and Lacey—the boy six, and the girl almost eight years old—squealed with delight when they pulled up to the beachside parking lot and saw the gray-blue waves breaking and washing over the sand with foamy white bubbles. They hadn't been to the beach since their father had left; Jacob had no memory of the beach and Lacey only remembered the sound of the water and the salty taste of the fresh sea air.

"Wait a second you guys."

Adrenaline pumped through the kids' veins and they could barely contain their excitement. Jacob bounced up and down in his neon-green swim trunks while Lacey stared in awe at the vast ocean.

"Here, Jake, you take this. Lacey, you can carry these."

Candace unloaded the car and handed Jacob the towels. In his excitement, he let them dangle low so they touched the ground and his mother had to remind him several times to furl them back up. Since she was bigger, Lacey had the responsibility of carrying two fold-out beach chairs.

"Okay, over there," Candace said, pointing to an empty spot in the sand.

As soon as the words left her mouth the kids took off toward the open space. Before she knew it, Candace was watching her children dig, run, and jump around with more jubilation than she knew they were capable of experiencing. Then, after thirty minutes or so, they came up to her with low-hanging heads.

"Mom," Lacey, who was the brave one, said in a soft voice, "can we go play in the water?"

For some reason, Candace had never thought about them playing in the water; she hadn't prepared for it. Which was quite silly, she thought, considering she took them to the beach. Of course they would want to play in the water. That's what children do at the beach. Why had she waited so long to bring them here anyway? The question nestled itself somewhere in the quiet part of her mind.

"Yes," she said with some hesitation. "But don't let Jake out of your sight. You understand?" she finished with a bit more conviction.

Lacey nodded while Jacob did his best to remain quiet and let his big sister work her magic. She was the one with the large doe eyes and innocent smile, which made it easier for her to get grownups on her side. Jacob was far too mischievous and clumsy with his words to ask for things. Every time he tried, it came off as whiny and irritating. A surefire way to get a stern "No" from his mom.

A hard gust knocked over one of the chairs and sent a towel skittering a few feet across the sand. Candace looked out at the water and saw black clouds edging along the horizon. Above them, though, nothing but a clear blue sky and the bright yellow sun. Even so, her mild anxiety nagged and churned subconsciously.

"Both of you listen to me. Don't go too far out in the water and stay where I can see you." She pointed to some of the other children who were jumping in and out of the water a little way down the beach. "See what they're doing? Play just like that." A small twinge of embarrassment flickered in her eyes. She knew her kids didn't need to be told how to play. "Now go have fun," she added with a faux smile.

They rushed toward the water like it would disappear any second. But as soon as they reached the wet sand, they stopped. Neither knew what to expect. Though, as soon as the first small wave broke and the

and the cool ocean water rushed over their feet, something inside of them switched on.

Jumping and running and frolicking, if happiness could be bottled, theirs would need a whiskey barrel to contain it all. And after ten minutes of watching this go on, Candace relaxed and her mind drifted to another place.

She pulled out her phone—with the brightness all the way up she still struggled to see the screen against the blinding sun—and doing her best, she began texting the man she had met on a dating app a few weeks ago. They talked regularly, but when it came time to meet in person, he digitally vanished, only to reemerge when she'd given up hope of ever seeing him. Even though this trip was supposed to be a brief escape from life, she found the obsessive thoughts she held toward her social life—or lack thereof— wouldn't allow for that.

**I really want 2 see u ;)**

Her friends told her to be direct and this text was about as direct as she could manage. But as the minutes passed by with only the background noise of the beach in her ears, Candace tossed the phone to the side and hid her face beneath her big sun hat. Why didn't he want her?

**\*\*\*PING\*\*\***

She snapped to attention and snatched up her phone. He'd texted back.

**Hey**

*Doug is typing...*

Her cheeks flushed hot and her mind raced with the possibilities of what he might say: *Doug is typing that he hates you. Doug is typing that you're not pretty enough for him. Doug is typing—*

**Sorry if it seems I been ignoring u**

**Just been busy :(**

Her heartbeat quickened. How should she respond?

**Its ok :)**

"Ugh. So lame." She covered her face with her hands like she was a teenager again.

## **If u want, I'd like to meet up tonight**

Holy cow! He gave me the run around for a month and now he wants to meet up tonight?

**Yea. Id like that**

She couldn't believe she was committing to something so suddenly. What about the kids? Who would watch—

An eerie silence crept over the beach. Even the wind had stilled.

"Shit," Candace said to herself. She forgot about the kids playing in the water. How could she forget about the kids playing in the water?

Drowning in a flood of panic, she jumped up from the lounge chair. She frantically scanned the shore but couldn't see them. Even the families down the beach were gone. It was as if she was the last person on Earth.

Her phone clanked off the metal chair arm and landed with a near-silent plunk in the sand. "Lacey! Jacob!" she screamed, running toward the shoreline.

When she came to the water's edge she met a faint pair of footprints leading out to the deep ocean. The dark clouds on the horizon had closed in and the waves were beginning to intensify. This was accompanied by a stiff, cold breeze.

"Lacey! Jacob!"

She told herself to stay calm but her maternal instincts had taken over. It was no longer panic that gripped her, but dread. Then she saw something neon-green floating about 30 feet out in the water and her heart sank like it was hooked to a dropped anchor.

"Jacob!"

Without hesitation, she dove into the water and swam furiously. Her son's warm smile flashed in her mind but with each new stroke, the image changed, morphed into a parody of the boy's face; a pallid death mask that was an effigy to her failings as a mother and protector. Thoughts of his lifeless body propelled her faster and harder than she knew possible. She was no longer present in her movements. All action was now out of pure instinct.

Closing in on the neon-green beacon, a wave crashed down heavy upon her head, sending Candace to the rough sandy floor below the water. Her palms scraped against the rocky bottom as she fought to get back to the surface. And when she shot through to the fresh air above, she broke into a violent coughing fit that expelled the water from her lungs.

After a moment, she composed herself and treaded water more

easily. Still stunned, she now faced the shore and saw two small people staring at her from a distance. Somehow the current had pulled her farther out and she found herself right next to the neon-green object. It wasn't Jacob, it was a half-deflated innertube.

"Don't move," she yelled, catching another mouthful of seawater in the process.

With great effort, Candace swam back to the shore and collapsed onto the warm sand.

"You went far, mommy?" Jacob said.

Battered but relieved, Candace looked up at Jacob and Lacey's confused faces. "I thought," she paused to catch her breath, "I told you to stay where I could see you."

"Jake had to go number two," Lacey blurted out with a giggle she couldn't contain.

Candace turned her head with an exhausted flop and noticed that the restrooms were not far behind where they had set up their beach chairs.

"Okay. Time to go." Her heart still drummed a mad beat.

"But I wanna play some more," Jacob insisted.

Right then, a cold raindrop landed on his cheek. The black clouds had arrived at last and were bullying the sun for ownership of the sky, casting a dark shadow across the beach.

"We gotta go. Lacey, grab the chairs. Jake, take the towels."

Candace got to her feet and the clouds let loose. The kids were disappointed but they knew there wasn't anything they could do now; the weatherman had been right. As they turned to go do as they were told, Candace stopped them with a hand on their shoulders.

"I love you both very much. Never forget that."

She pulled them in close for a hug and when she let go, the suction of their wet bodies made a squelching sound. The kids giggled and then rushed to load their stuff into the car. Since it had started raining, Candace didn't bother having them rinse off in the community showers. Drying off was the important thing now.

Once they were all in the car with the towels laid out over the seats, she blew clumps of wet sand off her phone and looked at the screen.

## **7 sound good?**

She stared at the text message while thinking about the green innertube bobbing up and down in the water. How that innertube could've easily been her son's lifeless body—drug out to sea where he would've

disappeared forever—all because she was too enamored with her social life to watch her children.

**Actually no  
I have plans with my kids 2night  
Sorry**

She shut her phone off and chucked it in her purse. "Who wants ice cream?"

The cheers from the backseat brought a much-needed smile to her face. Maybe she didn't need an escape from life after all.



## Someone asks my mother if I am getting married

Bharti Bansal

The burden of my grief is such that  
I have planned to pass it on  
Like heritage  
There are solar winds in my heart  
But I remember you like I remember darkness  
Light is a collateral damage in your house  
Almost parasitic  
Almost as silent as a candle blown off by wind

As gentle as a hair strand rubbing against skin  
I have learnt that kindness is a banana leaf  
It doesn't see beyond its own shadow

I tip toe in my room  
Afraid of this silence which begins in my heart  
Almost osmotic  
If I were water, I would have drowned in my own sorrows  
If I were air, I would have died of no breath  
Such is my tragedy  
I write about it  
And it diffuses



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ISSUE96 edited and ai art by Alex Prestia  
inspo: “Are you just living day by day?” — Shuzo Matsuoka  
<https://youtu.be/amXI7FG7J4c?si=IoyhQsWOPX5JLdZR>  
and a nasty case of food poisoning