

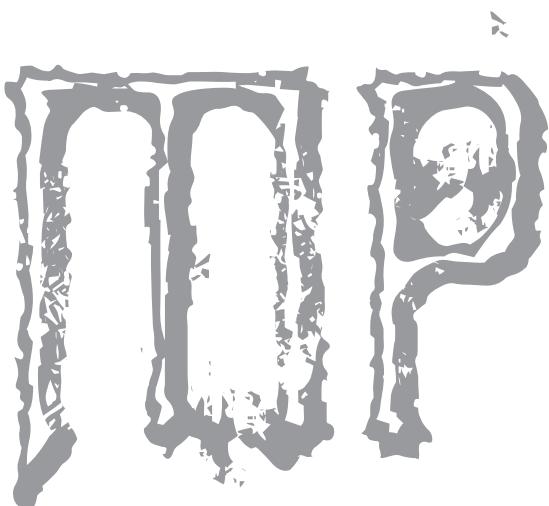
THE MILLENNIAL PULP

VOL. 4



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2023



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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Here at Millennial Pulp, our goal is to share art with the world, art that may otherwise clutter desk drawers and never see the light of day. Every poem, story, song, and artwork within our pages was crafted with blood, sweat, and maybe even a few tears; and it means a lot to our artists that you took the time to check it out.

We would first like to thank our contributors, without you there would be no magazine. Art is about taking a part of yourself and making it tangible, putting it down on paper, and letting it take on a life of its own. It becomes something more than alive, but less than living. It becomes art, and we are beyond grateful that you decided to share a part of yourselves with us.

And finally to our staff, who deserve the most heartfelt thank you of all. When we started this adventure at the beginning of 2020, we had no idea how strange the world would become, but our team worked tirelessly to ensure volume 4 would be the best version of itself. Thank you for helping build this platform, where unheralded voices can be heard.

Thanks for reading, we hope you enjoy!
Isaac Russo and the MP team

POETRY BY C.G. DAHLIN

Novus Ordo Seclorum (New World Order)

Odysseus waits
outside the corner store
on 5th Ave

Ezekiel stares
at the ceiling, a nurse
comes in and hands him blue pills

Thales of Miletus takes his
art off the walls, the gallery
is closing, portraits trade space
with dust

Dionysus detests
his day job but tells himself
that this is for Ariadne, for the children
and that structure is good for him after all those years

Zarathustra's rental application
gets denied, he moves to sell
what little left he has
on Facebook marketplace, where
they ask, is this still available?
and nothing more

these men were all
at the same punk show, in the late 90's
amidst women in fish-netted skirts and dark leathers
and other men with various forms of spiked hair and
singular gold hooped earrings, in
the dying days of the light

they are young, vile, and alive, they could be
heroes, visionaries, they could
get a hand on the forming clay of mankind
as the guitarist rips at the cords
as the drummer splashes the sticks across
the shimmering cymbals
they all scream together
but nobody hears them
there's too much noise.

FICTION BY CHARLOTTE BURNETT

CUCKOO

My name is Mia Nelson née Walton, and it's my fucking birthday.

I know, I know – I'm thirty-nine today and still just as excited as I was that first time. But I can't help it, birthdays have always been something special to me. Heck, my first memory was of a birthday party.

There I was, stumbling up my parents' garden – drenched in mud, because you know that's just what happens when you roll head first down a hill and crash into a tree – with no idea that waiting for me at the top was a freaking birthday party. My first surprise birthday party! There were balloons and cake, and sure I didn't know any of the kids there but that didn't matter, because for one day at least, everything was about me.

Now, I'm not expecting anything big from Gerry this year. Hell knows we've got enough to worry about, what with the new baby, who refuses to stop being sick and cries every time it rains; Gerry's insane mother who we had to throw in a home last Tuesday; and of course, the freak storms we continue to have over our house and our house alone. But come on, we've been married for twenty years and even at his most exhausted, Gerry never can resist doing something special for my birthday. It's why I went out running this morning; give him some time to cook something up. I hope it's cake, I love cake.

But I've been running around this block for two hours, that should be long enough to give wonder husband a head start. I'm going home.

There's a man standing outside my house when I get back. A man dressed like a priest, standing outside my house,

knocking on my door like the demons of hell are standing behind him.

Ha, I made a funny.

He doesn't show any signs of hearing me as I creep up behind him, so I know when I tap his shoulder that his scream of terror is real. When he whips round to face me, I get a good look at him. He's dressed like a priest, so he must be a priest, but I've gotta tell you, looking at the rest of him, you wouldn't know. He's too good looking for a priest. With a long nose and deep puppy-dog eyes, hair as black as my mother-in-law's soul, and a self-conscious smile, half hidden by the short scruffy goatee that he wears like a rebellion against the stiff white collar wrapped around his throat.

Okay so he's gorgeous, young and innocent looking, which I won't lie is a bit of a turn on for me. Is this my birthday present?

Really, we should have sat down and discussed if we were gonna have a threesome, but, well, a threesome with a guy dressed as a priest? Damn, Gerry must have been reading my diary.

But I'm a married woman, I can be subtle about this.
'Hello, Gorgeous.'

The 'priest' clutches his chest and gives me a smile, though it's thin and shaky.

'Oh,' he sighs. 'Sorry, I thought, well, it doesn't matter now. Are you Mrs. Nelson?'

I grin and nod because yes, I definitely am.

'Oh good, I thought I'd never reach you, my name is Father Velez. I'm here about the possession.'

So apparently my mother-in-law tried to sick a priest on me.

There's a reason she's in a home.

I let the guy – sorry '*priest*' – in because I'm not a monster who would send someone with that face home without at least getting him to take his jacket off; I mean, making

him a cup of coffee for his troubles.

‘Look,’ I say, trying to keep my eyes on his face, instead of letting them stray down like they want to. ‘Whatever my mother-in-law might have told you, I cannot emphasise this enough. My. Baby. Is. Not. Possessed!’

He smiles at me, a sweet twist of the mouth that helps sooth even my fractured nerves. And it strikes me then just how unsuited this man is for the priesthood. Priests should never be this pretty, it’s such a waste.

I’d liked to say that I don’t realise what I’m doing until I’ve already done it – but even my insane mother-in-law wouldn’t believe that. One of my arms wraps around his neck, my fingers splaying wide against the back of his skull, while my other arm snakes around his waist and pulls him towards me. Then I’m kissing him. It’s my birthday and I’m kissing a priest.

So far, I’d say this has been a pretty good birthday.

‘Mia!’

Oh shit, Gerry’s home.

My husband stands between the pillars in our living room that keep our roof from crushing us all, with his hands on his hips and his mouth pursed, like he’s annoyed at me for some reason.

‘Mia Nelson, what did we agree? The next time you did this, you’d wait for me.’

I turn and smirk at my balding spouse.

‘Sorry, dear, couldn’t help myself. This is Father Velez; he was sent by your mother.’

The smile creeping across my husband’s face suddenly drops.

‘I’m so sorry,’ he says. ‘I thought she was joking.’

I make a face at that because, really? His mother developing a sense of humour was suddenly more likely than an overly complicated plan to get back at me for sending her to a home?

Gerry slaps his forehead and growls ‘Christ, I’m an idiot’.

The priest – who thus far had been sitting stunned by my bout of amorous lunacy – now snaps his head round, and stares at my husband. ‘Wait, you . . . you don’t have, Mrs Nelson, could you please . . . could you please let go of me?’

I let him go, my face already turning red. Hell, what had I been thinking? I was going as crazy as my mother-in-law.

‘You don’t have a possessed infant?’

As if sensing it’s being discussed, the baby begins to cry from the other room. And just by coincidence, the whole house begins to shake.

By the time the house has stopped shaking and the thunder and lightning has started, the priest has leapt to his feet, terrified. I don’t know why, we get earthquakes all the time, especially when the baby cries.

‘I think I should have a look at that baby,’ says the boy in the priest clothes.

The three of us stand around the crib and look down at the baby within with different mixtures of horror, excitement, and boredom on our faces. I spend most of my days locked in this house with the kid, so he’s nothing new or exciting to me. He looks the same as he always does: small, grey, with bright red boils all over his face. He’s crying of course, since the only time he ever stops is when he passes out.

‘Not . . . not that I’m saying this is real or anything,’ stutters my idiot spouse. ‘But have you ever seen anything like this before?’

The priest leans over the cot and stares at the baby in utter wonder. As for the little grey traitor, when he catches sight of the priest, he stops crying. His scrunched-up face smoothing out as he gazes up at Father Velez. It’s because he’s a new thing, nothing to do with my unlovability or failure as a mother.

‘No, I’ve never seen anything like this.’ Says the younger man, mouth hanging open as the little beast grips his finger, peels back its grey lips, and snarls with teeth it shouldn’t have.

‘So, you agree with my mother then? You think . . . you think he’s, I can’t even say the word. It feels ridiculous,’ says Gerry, his face already turning red just from the thought of his mother. Or possibly the close proximity of Father Velez, I mean that would turn my face red.

‘Well, that’s okay,’ says Velez. ‘If I don’t like a word, I use another. The child’s a child, even if he’s not yours. So, let’s call him a Cuckoo, for that’s what he may be. And if he is, well when I’m done the Cuckoo will’ve gone home, and you’ll have your own chick back. And if he isn’t, then he’s always been yours and you may want to call a doctor, because that’s not a normal rash.’

For hell’s sake, had everyone gone insane?

There’s nothing wrong with my baby.

‘I’d like to say a prayer over him, please. If I’m wrong it won’t hurt him at all, but if I’m right . . .’

A surge of anger fills me then because he’s about to hurt my baby, and Gerry . . . Gerry’s gonna let him. Suddenly a bolt of lightning crashes through the window and strikes the ground just in front of the priest’s feet.

In his crib, my baby giggles.

‘Well, that’s probably not a good sign,’ Gerry mumbles, deliberately not looking at me.

The baby’s room smells wrong.

Everything smells wrong.

It stinks of incense and that sizzling smell that holy water inevitably leaves in its wake.

I don’t want to be here, don’t want to stand in this place while Velez does his . . . his de-cuckooing. Not because I’m scared of that strange medallion in his hand, I’m not afraid of anything. I just don’t like this.

I don't like the smell, I don't like the words, right now I don't even like the man who says them. Gerry shouldn't have allowed this, I shouldn't have allowed this. But the priest's face was so lovely and clearly my mother-in-law's insanity must be contagious, and we let it happen.

The baby's not crying, which is the strangest thing of all, because he cries about everything. He cries when I feed him, when I change him, when I hold him. Maybe it's me, maybe it's me that makes him cry so much. But no, it can't be. I'm a good mother, aren't I?

No, a good mother would be standing by her baby's cot. Not squeezed into the corner at the back of the room, trying not to look directly at the medallion hanging from the priest's fingers, or listen to that awful prayer he's muttering. I don't need to hear that right now, I just . . . I just don't want to hear him stumble over the words, okay? It hurts my ears. I mean, that's all it is. I've got sensitive ears, so what? It's not like that's something that other people don't have.

'May the holy cross be my light.'

I have sore ears, and a headache, and weak knees.

'May the dragon never be my guide!'

My eyes hurt.

'Get away Satan.'

I feel like I'm pinned to the wall.

'Never tempt me with your vanities.'

My skin feels like it's peeling away.

'What you offer me is evil.'

My head aches.

'Drink the poison yourself.'

It feels like I sick everything up then, all the way back to that first Birthday cake.

'Mia, are you okay?'

Gerry's voice sounds faint and very far away from me. Funny, I wonder what's happening to him? Oh, the priest is raising his medallion over my baby's cot, my baby, my baby! What's he doing to my baby?!

‘Demon be gone!’

Oh shit.

My name is Mia Walton, and I am eight-years-old today, but I don’t think anyone remembers. Dad didn’t give me a kiss on his way out the door. Mommy didn’t even make me a cake, no one ever makes me a cake. I don’t even know what flavour I like best, I’ve had it so little.

I tried to ask for one, I really did, but Mommy yelled at me to go play outside while she worked. It’s okay, outside is better anyway, it’s bigger than all the rest of our house combined. I’ll go down our hill and hide behind the dead tree at its bottom, then Mommy won’t be angry at me anymore.

As I wander down, I close my eyes and raise my face up to the blue, blue of the sky. I like the feel of the cold air against my cheeks, and I can’t quite stop myself from skipping down the hill. After all, it’s my birthday even if no one else remembers it, and the world is so pretty. But I should know better by now, today’s not a good day to be me. My ankle turns the wrong way and suddenly I’m tumbling, tumbling down the hill. Over and over again, until at last, I land face first in the mud at the bottom of the garden.

Everything hurts as I push myself up and out of the mud. Then I fall, my back hitting the dead tree, my head smashing against it. Its bark feels cold and brittle touching my cheek, but I don’t want to move. So, I won’t, instead I’ll just sit here and listen to the wind blowing through the trees.

If I listen hard enough and don’t think about anything else, I can almost hear a voice in that wind.

‘Help me, Mia, help me.’

Mommy says I shouldn’t listen to the voices I hear in the wind, but she’s not here right now. So I open my eyes, stare up into the dead branches above me, and say in the clearest voice I can manage . . .

‘How can I help?’

‘The tree, you must open up the tree. Crack it by the

heart and set me free.'

I turn around and squint at the center of the tree, it's got a big crack in it, I'll give the wind that, but how can I possibly break it open with nothing but my bare hands?

'Oh, my hell, do I have to do everything myself? Put your hand on the center of the tree, and I'll do the rest.'

I close my eyes and touch my palm to the crack in the tree, and when I open them again, the tree is gone and I'm not alone anymore.

I'm in a little room, in a house I don't know, with a cot in the corner, and a baby crying.

'Mia? Mia, are you alright?'

There's a bald man crouching near me, but I don't know who he is.

'Mrs Nelson? Are you alright, would you like to get some air?'

I don't know who Mrs. Nelson is, but the man who asks me is a priest and you're supposed to trust priests. That's what Mommy says.

'Father, where am I?'

'Your home Mrs. Nelson, where else would you be?'

'No, I'm not. I'm not home, my home is up on the hill. Who are you? What have you done with my Mom?'

'Mia, you're sounding crazy.' Says the bald man, he sounds angry now. The priest is stepping away from the cot and he looks horrified.

'That's not your wife, Mr. Nelson.'

'What?' Says the crouching man.

'The Cuckoo's gone home.'

'Mom! Mom! Mommy! I want my Mommy!' I scream, but no one's listening anymore.

POETRY BY MIA CANCIO
GOD LIVES IN NEW YORK

I walk to the bus stop
In mourning
This morning,
There is laundry to be done.
Rent to be paid.

Strangers, polite and knowing, shoo past
There are birds bowing their beaks to me
Sirens crying your name
Candles kissing empty air
Fountains wishing us well

They hang their owers for us,
Now that you are gone
Out the window
 On the trellis
A bed of ambrosia and nettle
Lay as we did
Sheets soaked in love

I am paying my spiritual dues
Everytime we say goodbye

Poetry by Bruce Gunther
GLASSES

He stubbed out his cigarette
in an empty baked potato
skin and picked his teeth
with a steak knife.

Instinct told us he was on
the verge of something,
like pistols locked and loaded,
rage ready to snap.

Still, I picked at the scab.

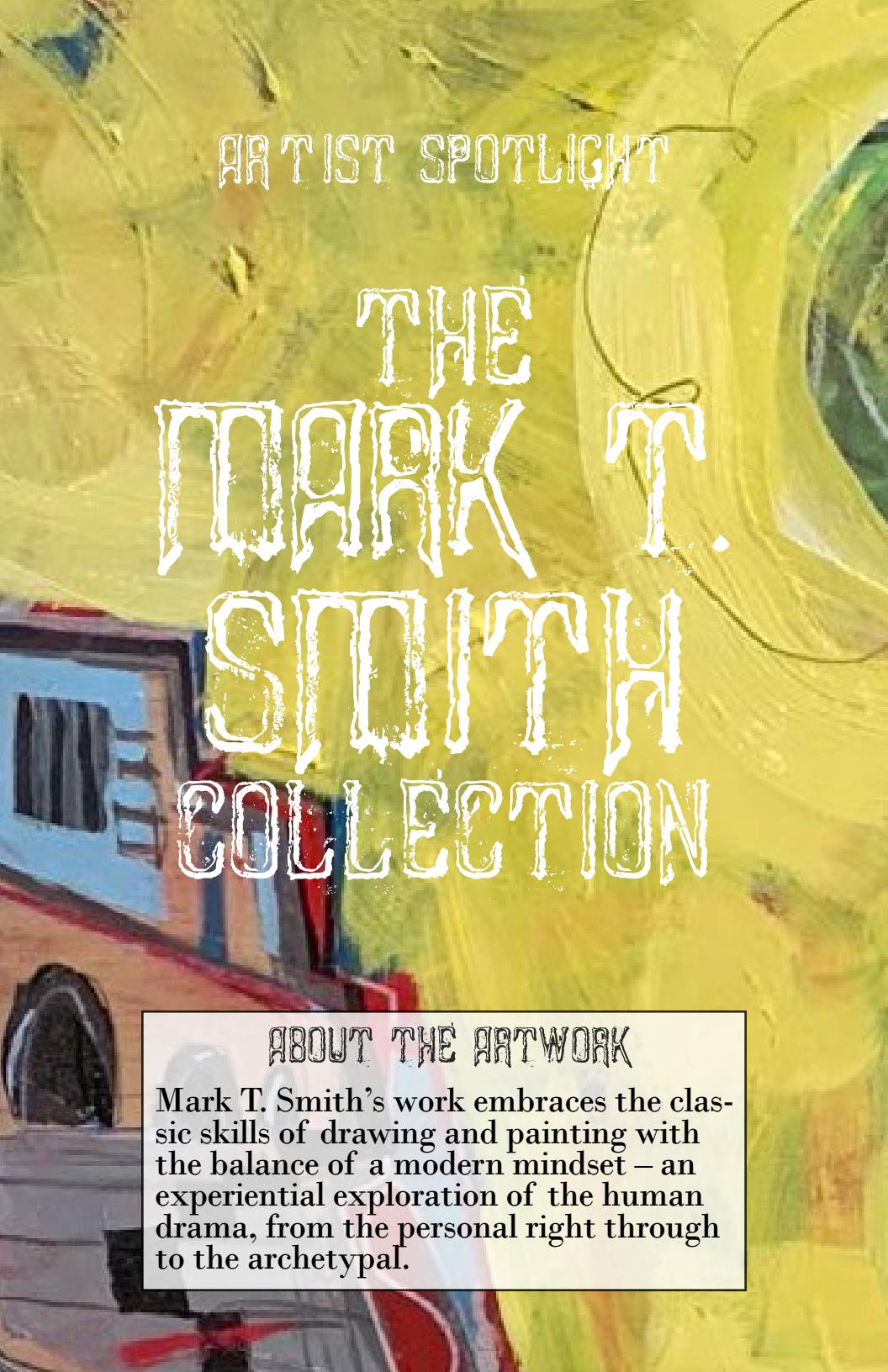
Ever consider a toothpick? I asked,
after the knife emerged from his teeth,
a morsel of food on it.

The room grew quiet as a mausoleum
at midnight, and his fingers twitched
on the handle of the blade.

When he set it down on his plate,
the clink of steel was so loud
that I nearly covered my ears.

*How about I shove those glasses
down your throat,* he said, meaning
my spectacles, the pair necessitated
by my adolescent nearsightedness.
My brother watched with excitement,
a spectator at the firing squad,
while my mom kept her eyes on
her half-finished plate.
I said nothing within the lethal
lock of his stare and, finally,
he pushed away from the table,
guns back in their holsters for now.

*Let me know when you have
an answer* he said before walking
to the couch and TV, which
kept him company the rest of the evening
without one word from any of us.



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

THE

MARK T.

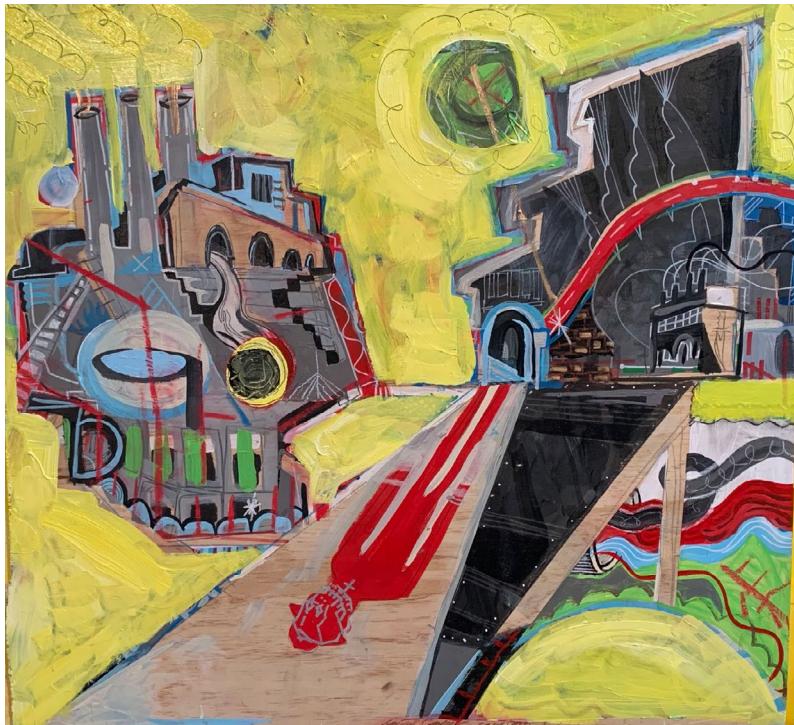
SMITH

COLLECTION

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Mark T. Smith's work embraces the classic skills of drawing and painting with the balance of a modern mindset – an experiential exploration of the human drama, from the personal right through to the archetypal.

ARTWORK BY MARK T. SMITH
SUSPENSE PART 2



25 in x 25 in

ARTWORK BY MARK T. SMITH
BLUE HORSE



48 in x 36 in

Mark T. Smith

23

ARTWORK BY MARK T. SMITH
Diagram of a Charlatan



40 in x 52 in

POETRY BY ANDREW LAFLECHE

BALANCED BETWEEN SANITY AND THE OTHER KIND

Where the coffee tastes like blood, and
The jellyfish swim in barrels of aged whisky—
Where piano strings are strung on guitar frets,
Played backwards underfoot, behind the head—
Where the sun never sets, and the veteran moon
Is hung by the dead man's noose, swaying
As the crowd slips away, single file, three steps
Ahead the rain comes to rinse the gutters, so new
Filth hidden in neon rubies can root, and
Squirrel the herd's attention in another day.

POETRY BY KUO ZHANG
AT THE HR OFFICE

I see three options on the form.

1. A US Citizen
2. A Permanent Resident
3. An Alien Authorized to Work in the U.S.

“Am I an alien?” I asked the lady.

“I don’t think so.
But you have to
choose that option.”

NONFICTION BY MIHRIBAN NUREFSAN FIDAN

WARS AND PAINTINGS

Section One: Battlefield

GUERNICA BY PABLO PICASSO

On an ordinary day in a small Spanish town, everything seems colorful and alive. Suddenly, darkness falls as ash and debris fill the air; people scream in terror. Amidst the chaos, one sees their injured brother lying in the field next to the burning wheat they had planned to harvest that summer. Feeling helpless, they look to the sky, praying for the nightmare to end.

Picasso captures these harrowing scenes in his black-and-white painting, “Guernica.” The absence of color symbolizes the people’s loss and the artist’s despair for humanity. The painting organizes everything with lines instead of colors, creating a sense of restless movement. This technique evokes feelings of unease and discomfort in the viewer.

The figures in “Guernica” are intentionally distorted, with elongated limbs and twisted bodies. Picasso uses the ugliness of scars and disfigurement to captivate viewers and convey the victims’ pain and despair. The horse, representing freedom and nobility, gazes in agony at the carnage, while the bull, a symbol of brutality, appears distressed. Abstraction enables Picasso to translate intricate ideas into symbolic forms, making the suffering of the subjects visible and poignant.

Picasso’s aggressive brushstrokes create a textured, scarred surface, emphasizing the violence depicted. This rough texture enhances the emotional impact, inviting viewers to understand the victims’ pain.

At the top of the painting, a lamp symbolizes hope

and the desire for salvation. A man on the right, seemingly detached from reality, gazes at the light while others witness the massacre. The lamp illuminates the suffering of each character in the painting, providing a glimmer of hope amidst the chaos.

“Guernica” is a powerful anti-war artwork of the twentieth century. Picasso uses his own anguish to represent the 1,600 lives lost on that fateful day. The painting serves as a reminder of the brutal attack and the capacity of art to advocate for peace. In the face of violence, the creation of art remains an unstoppable force for change, reminding us that every piece of this earth can be a tool to inspire transformation.

Section Two: Inferno

GASSED BY JOHN SINGER SARGENT

One day, John Singer Sargent was spending his time in a British soldiers' camp as part of a mission to capture heroic scenes of the war. He observed a line of soldiers coming from each road with white cloth across their eyes, some of them destined to be blind forever. He saw the falling soldiers behind a group of men sharing one common thing: a moral belief that makes one blind.

Sargent's painting depicts a scene from a horrendous mustard gas attack, a new weapon of the First World War. The remnants of the yellow smoke and the redness in the sky remind us of the nature of mustard gas. The calmness in the background, with a group of men playing a match in the afternoon sun, serves as an element to reveal the ordinary, horrifying aspects of war. Most importantly, this was a real scene that the artist himself witnessed, and nobody can be more upset by blindness than an artist who lives his life by seeing and picturing people's lives. The figures are human-sized, forcing viewers to engage with every element in the painting. One

can feel the pain in their eyes, the shaking hand on their neck holding tight, and even the uncertainty and fear of the soldier at the front of the line, waiting for the command to finish his step.

The white cloth is an element of a biblical metaphor, “the blind leading the blind.” It serves as a reminder of the propaganda that sends young people into the embrace of death. This art piece tells the story of millions of soldiers from every nation. The calmness of the field and the falling soldiers who appear to be in a deep sleep is a shout to reveal how hard they try to cling to normality. But how can one be normal when this is their reality?

Sargent’s “Gassed” not only reflects society’s changing attitude towards war but also conveys his own grief and despair following the death of his niece, with whom he had a special bond. This personal loss emphasizes the painting’s depiction of the tragic consequences of war experienced by countless families. Sargent was one of the few artists courageous enough to face potential shame from society for his unwavering portrayal of the war’s horrors. Viewers of this art piece may experience a sense of mourning akin to attending a funeral, evoking feelings of desperation and the overwhelming weight of grief – a feeling that makes you want to hold your chest while breathing.

Section Three: Homefront

THE VETERAN IN A NEW FIELD BY WINSLOW HOMER

The war is over. There is no meaning in holding a bloody gun anymore. Many men of the same age have been killed, but no one could explain the reason – it was just one order, and it took seconds to take another man’s life. Now it’s time to return to family and blood. A different world awaits on the horizon, where everything has changed. Friends are gone, and all that remains is a tattered uniform and a feeling

called “hope.”

Winslow Homer’s iconic painting of a lone farmer reaping a vast field of wheat emanates a sense of calmness in disguise. Homer’s composition includes just a few elements: wheat, sky, and farmer. One can see the blue sky, feel the breeze on a cotton shirt, and witness a sun that provides company. Imagine the sound of tall wheat swaying back and forth, offering shade from the burning sun.

The artist points out the time of the painting with the man’s Union Army uniform and canteen. Painted in the summer of 1865, not long after General Lee surrendered at Appomattox, “The Veteran in a New Field” is a deeply symbolic painting – a statement that shows what has been lost. The veteran’s new field reminds us of his old field, the battlefield.

Homer’s veteran handles a single-bladed scythe, which was already out of date by 1865. The artist’s initial idea was to picture a cradled scythe (its outline is faintly visible on the left side of the canvas), but Homer decided to replace it with a more archaic tool. This gave the image of a farmer in his field a disguised reference to the work of the Grim Reaper, the age-old personification of death.

The unusually tall wheat, ready for harvest, is reminiscent of the man’s previous battlefield. Each wheat plant reminds us of fallen soldiers, the man’s old friends, and the unspeakable, horrifying deaths of many people he knew. The art piece captures a man surrounded by his own grief and sorrow.

The painting tells of people’s hopes for a productive, peaceful society after the devastation of the American Civil War, referring to a passage from Isaiah 2:4. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Section Four: The Killers

THE THIRD OF MAY 1808 BY FRANCISCO GOYA

On the third of May, 1808, there is a palpable sense of desperation in every household. A series of men are taken from their homes and led to the field. One witnesses the unspeakable as they look at their friends lying on the ground, giving their last breath to the world. Fear surrounds you as you acknowledge that there may be no tomorrow. The faces of the enemies are obscured by the glowing light, which serves as the last sight for many. You raise your arms one last time, not to beg, but to show that you are a fighter until your final breath.

Goya's painting tell us the sad story of how humans can be inhuman to each other. The piece depicts a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty in human morals, describing the pain caused by ignorance that manifests as the executioner. It is easy to imagine this contrast between the victims and the murderers playing out in every horrifying massacre across the world.

The extreme contrast between light and dark in the painting represents the relationship between life and death. The hurried brushstrokes mirror the haste of the execution, making the picture seem like a photograph capturing the exact moment. The man in the white shirt is central to understanding the scene, as he kneels in a pool of blood with his hands stretched above him. The white strokes on his shirt appear disoriented and quick, as if it was the moment before he raised his hands towards the executioners. His stance resembles the crucifixion of Christ, with the man's right hand displaying a scar of stigmata. As if, like Christ on the cross, he is saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Goya's "The Third of May 1808" exposes the ugly reality of war, where there is no redemption or heroism. War

is depicted as a bloody ordeal that kills or transforms men into machines. In the field, there are no real winners, and no religion or regime can justify the atrocities committed during war.

Art serves as a powerful way to document human history because it captures the true essence of the human spirit, unfiltered and untainted by external forces. As humans, it is difficult to comprehend our thoughts unless we create something tangible from them. In many wars, art has been a means of rebellion – a way to see through the eyes of those who have lost their loved ones, who have become inhuman, and who have been forced to leave their homes. Art serves as a tool to confront “The Killer,” a reference to the war profiteers who benefit from the devastation and brutality faced by countless individuals.

POETRY BY JOHN GREY
ROAD MANNERS

The light is green
but the guy ahead of me
is not moving.

I press down hard
on the horn.
I roll down the window
and scream obscenities.
I have some place to be.
Five minutes ago.
An hour ago.
Maybe yesterday.

If I had my way,
every damn dimwit
on the road
would be thumped and battered,
torn apart, eviscerated,
until there was nothing left
of the damn fool.

Some kid
on a skateboard
peers in the window
of the guy's car.
“I think he's dead,”
the kid says.

So I get my wish.
But it's still not helping any.

POETRY BY KAT STUBING
CLADOGENESIS

When each day looks
quite the same
it gets so very hard to
tell them apart,

Like blades of grass in
a meadow or
incompetent men in
positions of power.

I wish this human body
of mine could
function on less rest
and fewer meals.

I work to feed, maintain
and house it
then it's time to bathe,
stretch and dream.

Please don't get it twisted,
I'm grateful to
occupy a warm vessel in
which to move

About this tiny rotating rock
we call home,
I can't help but wonder, however,
how much more

We could accomplish
wearing steel

and aluminum, wires like
veins in our core.

The average person spends
twenty six years
sleeping by the time
they depart,

Facts like these get me
thinking; maybe
we're not as evolved
as we thought.

POETRY BY J KRAMER HARE
RE: LITTLE GREEN MEN

The morning that the news breaks out
and all the talking heads announce:
they're real, they're here, they're among us —

*we now go live to the Oval Office
to hear the President say so himself,*

I will not be atop my roof,
singing madly to their saucers,
or whipping up a banquet spread;

I won't be making mixtapes or clipping
some fav films, so they'll know our greatest hits;

I won't be crouched in the cellar
with just a hundred-hour flame,
ham radio, and can of beans;

the fateful morning that news breaks out,
my boss expects me at my desk — nine sharp.

FICITION BY KENNETH M. KAPP
DOPPELGÄNGER

DG woke up with a massive headache. He struggled out of bed and staggered to the bathroom. A quick glance in the mirror was enough. It would take several cups of coffee before he'd even venture a guess at the apparition that stared back at him. One more step to the toilet, where, bending his wobbly knees, he cautiously reached for the seat, his reptilian brain telling him not to look down and if he missed on his first try, *tant pis*, he'd probably miss the target anyhow in his condition.

He hooked the cover with a trembling finger and then slammed both hands against the wall behind the water closet, regaining his balance. "Ah." And then what seemed like an eon later, another "Ah."

DG didn't give a shit. He felt as if he had drunk like a drowning sailor, but splashing water on his face, or whatever face was staring back at him, felt like a good idea. His t-shirt was a mess and he felt a strong breeze down below. He muttered, "Six-bells, sailor boy," and wrapped a towel around his waist, awake enough to worry he might be in a strange house and was only lucky to locate the toilet.

"Find the galley before it's too late." *Galley? What's this with the sailor stuff and better slam down the hatches before it's too late?* DG bumped into the wall more than once and did his best to keep his eyes on the horizon, moaning "There she blows!"

He closed his eyes and for a moment felt as if he were trapped in a whirlpool. Finally he stumbled into a kitchen and, on autopilot, punched the electric kettle to the right of the stove. Instant coffee and the mugs were to the left of the sink. *I must be home if I know this.* He dumped the brown powder into a cup and, without waiting for the kettle to click

off, poured in the water. For a moment he had forgotten that there was a small table under the window.

“Steady on, steady on,” echoed off the ceiling. DG wasn’t sure if he actually said it and didn’t care. Setting as true a course as possible, he tacked past the stove and slumped into a chair, all the while holding the cup in the air. He was convinced the table, his life raft, was bouncing in a rough sea.

Damn! Need one of those sea anchor things to steady this ship; the coffee cup will have to do. DG set the cup down and noticed on the table across from him a couple of pages torn from an exercise book. He reached over and turned them around, then sat up and squared his shoulders. *Steady on sailor, steady on!*

He squinted, making a face as he struggled to understand the title: “Doppelgänger.” Centered below it was the author’s name: Shorty Ess. He turned the pages. There were two held loosely together by the torn perforations. *Ha-ha, Shorty Ess, just some jerk writing short stories, not terribly clever. Probably wrote when he was drunk.*

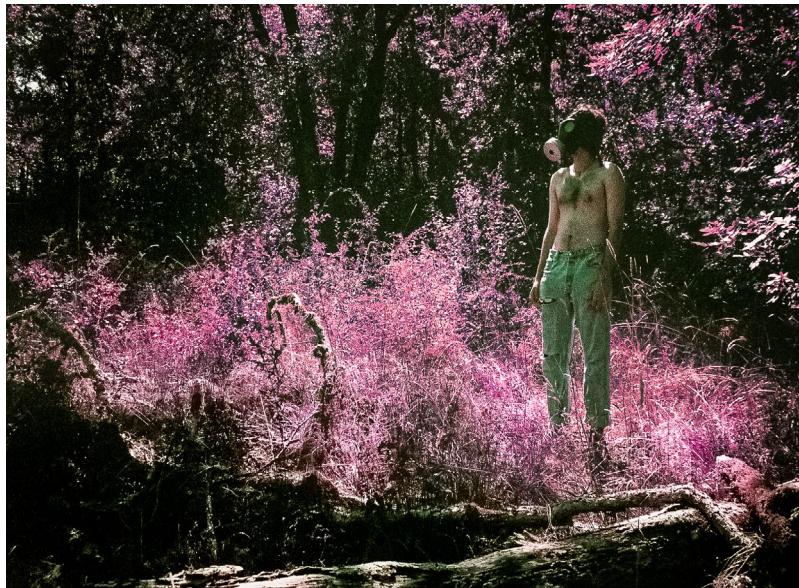
He released the top page and picked up his mug, tentatively taking a couple of sips to test their effect. *Fine, I may as well read; I’m not going anywhere soon.*

DG woke up with a massive headache. He struggled out of bed and staggered to the bathroom. A quick glance in the mirror was enough. It . . .

ARTWORK BY TOMISLAV SILIPETAR
ALTER EGO



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MILA RAE MANCUSO
CALEB



*Shot on 35mm
Eugene, OR – Summer 2021*

ARTWORK BY JW SUMMERISLE
OCEAN CLOAK



COLLAGE POETRY BY RACHEL KISKADDON

OFF THE WALL CANVAS



Mixed Media

POETRY BY DOMINIQUE RISPOLI
SOFT VERSE

they want grit.
the dirt between your fingernails
and words that shoot from mouths like bullets.
they want your organs laid out on a bloody canvas.
your deepest secrets,
must be a scandal.
like a bad car accident
you just can't look away from.

but I am the bubblegum pink sky
as the sun says it's evening farewell.
cotton candy on the beach,
the sugar that sticks to your lips.
I put pen to paper
and paint you flowers to wear in your hair
with the softest of words.
I bleed too.
but, my blood
is laced with sunflower seeds
and I am always looking toward the sky.

FICTION BY IAN WOOLLEN

ROAD CLOSED, DETOUR AHEAD

Here's what we know so far. The weather was changeable. It had rained lightly during the night. By 10 a.m., the temperature was soaring, with heat waves rising off the pavement and straight-line winds kicking up clouds of top-soil from farms on both sides of the highway. Trucks slowed and turned on their blinkers. Orange pylons skittered across three lanes. It was the first day of June. The bond markets were tanking. The Cardinals sat a game and a half out of last place.

For about ten minutes, white knuckle driving. Stay in your lane. Among the parade of vehicles were two shiny cars barreling west on I-70 across Illinois towards St. Louis, passing each other now and then, establishing a vague sort of relationship. One was a blue Dodge Charger, the other a red Cutlass convertible.

Inside the Dodge were two recent graduates from Indiana State University and one soon-to-be dropout. They were on their way to a classmate's wedding in Springfield, Missouri. Tapped to be groomsmen only a month ago. What the heck? Going along with the gag. Any excuse for a road trip. And in the Oldsmobile Cutlass, were three young women, formerly classmates at Depauw, all headed for the same wedding. The occupants of these cars were unacquainted.

"I always figured Chuck for a guy who would elope to Vegas," said Randy. He was driving the throaty Charger, one arm on the steering wheel and the other dangling out the window.

"Yeah, who does these big weddings anymore?" said Bruce, from the backseat.

"It's probably her parents' show," said Mark, slumped

in the passenger seat. “They’ve got money and they want to put on a fancy event for their friends.”

“You think Chuck is marrying her for the money? This all came on real fast. The first we heard about Tiffany was over Christmas.”

“How did they meet?”

“On a dating app for nerds and misfits. He claims to have immediately known it would end either in marriage or a restraining order.”

“People do strange things to maintain the life to which they are accustomed,” Randy said, “Our buddy took a serious bath in the latest crypto meltdown. He’d gone all in, as usual, and now he’s all bust.”

A dead deer lay sprawled in the breakdown lane. Turkey buzzards circled high above. Plus or minus 95 degrees. Temporary DOT signs announced road construction for the next five miles. Merge left, merge right. The Cubs had lost three of four in a series with the Pirates. The fans were still undecided on the new infield-shift rules. “Nothing like gas station coffee, especially cold,” Bruce said. A row of giant wind turbines dotted the horizon.

“Speaking of parents and people doing strange things,” Mark said, “I just found out that mine are divorcing.”

“No way.”

“As if they waited for me to graduate and get a job and then, boom, splitsville.”

“Ouch,” Bruce said. “I like your folks. Your dad grills a good burger.”

“That’s part of the problem,” Mark said. “My mom just turned vegan.”

“So how’s your job?” Randy asked. “Can you work remotely?”

“Nine to five at the office. And they made me sign a non-compete clause, which I am now regretting.”

Bruce said, “At least you’ve got a gig. I’m starting to

think about dropping out and joining the military. I can put in my twenty years and retire with a pension.”

“Nobody gets a pension anymore,” Randy said.

“Be careful. You don’t want to end up deployed to some malarial hole that no one can pronounce,” Mark said.

The Dodge passed a semi-trailer full of squealing pigs. A digital sign above the highway blinked an alert about a stolen gray Toyota Corolla. Smells from the pig truck and the wildfires lingered. Crank the tunes, light up a cigarette, and remember, if you can’t see the truck’s mirrors, the trucker can’t see you. A hawk glared down from atop a fencepost. A dozen cows lay dozing in a field. Nature acting inscrutable as ever. More wind turbines clustered in the distance.

“Why aren’t the blades turning on those things?” said Carol. She was driving the Cutlass, pedal to the metal, top down, hair blowing everywhere.

“Could be a number of reasons,” said Rhonda, from the backseat. She was a chemistry major turned med-school applicant who had just bombed the MCATs. “Lawsuits from farmers and birders, or mechanical failure on the transmission grid, or they’ve recently been installed and somebody forgot to flip the switch.”

“Tiffany would know,” said Megan. “She always knows about that kind of stuff.”

“Does she know what she’s getting into with this marriage? I never thought she’d be the first to go.”

Megan said, “She claims that he’s cute and she figures they can work it out.”

“Maybe she’s pregnant and afraid to get an abortion,” Carol said.

“Is Missouri one of those states?”

“Or Tiff suddenly got religious. She always did go off on jags.”

They passed an RV towing a jet-ski. They sped across a river as the prairie sky expanded in all directions, a bruised

blue. St. Louis was still an hour away. A sign for the upcoming exit announced a Dairy Maid and a Havarest Motel. Does anybody need to pee? An aluminum outboard sat perched on a trailer with a flat tire, just beyond the exit ramp. Carol shared her dad's rules for safe highway driving. "Don't travel in wolfpacks and never pick up sailors." Truck after truck and truck after truck. Soybeans to the left and ankle-high corn fanning to the right.

"My dad was a long-haul driver," Megan said, "before I was born, my mom used to ride along with him."

"Sounds like an adventure," Carol said, "or was she just keeping an eye on him?"

"The former," Megan said, "and that's why she tells me to have my adventures before it's too late."

"I've been thinking along the same lines," Rhonda said, "maybe the Peace Corps is an option."

"Could be a blessing in disguise that you flunked those exams," Carol said.

"Easy for you to say, Miss Honor Roll."

"Much good it did me," Carol grumbled, "I'm making two bucks above minimum wage."

Swerve gently to avoid a crew in yellow vests with brush cutters and a tractor mowing slowly at a tilt along a grassy ditch. Punch on the radio to find some news, and land on classic rock. Ducks swoop, feet down, splashing onto an irrigation pond. A series of homemade Burma-Shave style signs flow by, promoting guns and Jesus. Two kids on bikes ride along an access road parallel to the highway. One kid was pumping an arm up and down, trying to convince a trucker to blow his air horn. Toot! Toot!

"I wonder if the bride has been fully informed about Chuck's previous girlfriends," Randy said.

"She might think twice if she knew about that cast of characters."

"Remember Joanne from the bowling alley?" Bruce

said.

“Chuckie has a thing for women who throw gutter-balls.”

“She was good company,” Mark said, “one of the guys.”

“Full confession,” Bruce said, “Joanne and I have been dating for over a month, and I don’t want to hear anything about scraping the bottom of the barrel.”

“I wondered what that sound was.”

Work zone speed limit – 45 mph. Decelerate for a state police car hiding behind an overpass. Phew, all clear... another glance in the rear-view mirror, just to be sure. “How’s that for a fixer-upper?” See Rock City. A ramshackle farmhouse and barn surrounded by a windbreak of poplars. Fading graffiti on the next overpass, initials within a heart, proclaimed somebody’s eternal love.

Way past time to close the windows and turn up the air conditioning, but nobody wanted to say it. The red Cutlass cruised effortlessly by the blue Charger again. The women waved. The guys waved. Just for fun, the Charger swung out to return the favor and, oops, forgetting a turn signal, almost hit a helmeted couple on a Harley. Careful now. This could go a number of different directions, especially with pot being legal in Illinois. Eyes on the road. Another flattened raccoon carcass.

“Why isn’t your new beau coming along to the wedding?” Megan said.

“He doesn’t do well in a suit and tie,” Carol said.

“Has anyone come up with a toast yet?”

“I could talk about Tiffany dancing on the Sigma Nu pool table.”

“Or the time we went to the casino boat,” Rhonda said.

“Probably best not to mention that.”

A slight dip and rise revealed a long line of brake

lights. The truck in front turned on its flashers. No apparent reason for a slowdown. Both lanes were suddenly at a crawl, 10 mph, increasing momentarily to 20 mph, and back down to 10 mph. An accident maybe. “Let’s hope no pile-up or fatalities,” Megan said.

The culprit appeared in the median, around a sharp bend. A rusty Ford Ranger with some hastily evacuated household possessions loosely tied into the truck bed had dropped a stained mattress on the roadway. Notifications beeped on phone screens about a tornado watch until 3 p.m. A renegade Jetta shot past in the breakdown lane.

“Okay, now I do need to pee,” Megan said.

“There’s a rest area coming up soon.”

“I wouldn’t mind stretching my legs and getting something cold to drink,” Rhonda said.

“Hey, those guys in the muscle car are stopping too,” Carol said.

“I have a theory about them,” Megan said.

“Does it involve smoking a joint at a picnic table in a rest area?”

“No, honey, not anymore. I am officially in recovery.”

The facility was crowded. Trash cans overflowing. Dogs frolicked in the pet zone. Groans and sighs. It felt odd to stand upright. One by one, the young people sauntered in and out of the bathroom and peered at the ‘you are here’ spot on the map in the lobby and wandered out to stretch and bend into improvised yoga poses. Slowly, as if choreographed, they all moved toward the shade trees and finally assembled, some sitting, some standing, around two picnic tables at the far edge of the rest area.

“Well, hello there. Nice wheels,” Randy said.

“It was a graduation present from my dad,” Carol said, and to make conversation, “I’m sort of worried that the implied message is ‘time to leave home.’”

“Yeah, my folks gave me a set of luggage,” Mark said.

“We have a theory about you guys,” Carol said, borrowing Megan’s line. “You’re going on a fishing trip.”

“If only,” Mark said. “I did bring an extendable pole. Never know when you might get a chance to drop a hook in the water.”

“And we have a theory about you all,” Bruce said.

“Does it involve a witches’ coven?”

“You’re headed for a bowling tournament in Kansas City, and running a little late.”

“That sounds fun,” Megan said, “but no, sorry, it’s a shotgun wedding in Springfield.”

“Whoa, wait, what are the chances,” Randy said, “Tiffany and Chuck?”

“Honestly, we’re kind of skeptical of the whole thing,” Rhonda said.

“Us too,” Mark said. “They’re both still babies.”

Silence while the situation settled or developed, or rather, metastasized. The groomsmen and the bridesmaids listened to birds chirping and dogs barking and a child crying and somebody’s phone pinging. The choreography shifted again. Megan excused herself to get a soda from the vending machine. Mark went to fetch some snacks in the car. Rhonda pulled a hairbrush from her purse. Carol sat down and carefully placed her hands together, as if ready to chair the meeting. She waited for Mark and Megan to return.

“If it’s true that friends don’t let friends drive drunk, does the same apply for impulsive marriages?” she said.

“What are you suggesting?” Bruce asked.

Rhonda chimed in with, “Isn’t there a point in the ceremony where the minister asks if anyone knows a reason why this couple should not be getting hitched?”

“We could all jump up together and voice our objections,” Randy said. “Shut it down, nip it in the bud. Chuck would probably thank us.”

“Tiff too.”

“This is brilliant. Let’s do it,” Megan said, laughing.

“The videos will go viral.”

The enormity of this proposed action hung in the air like exotic incense. It was intoxicating. Spines stiffened. Feet stamped on the ground. Leaves in the trees overhead rustled in response. Mark offered his box of mints around.

Bruce cleared his throat and said, “I don’t know. Here’s the thing about such decisions, two things actually –”

Randy interrupted with, “Watch out. Mansplaining alert.”

The women smiled and shrugged. Bruce shook his head and said, “I don’t mean to be a buzz kill. I just think that underneath, we’re probably all feeling a bit anxious about the future, worried about what’s next in our own lives. Trying to stop this wedding is like trying to stop time. It doesn’t work. It never works. You can’t stop time.”

More spontaneous groans and sighs from all concerned, mostly as a begrudging acknowledgment that the guy had a point. A chipmunk scurried under the table to steal a cracker crumb. Rhonda tapped at her wristwatch. “Speaking of time,” she said. A wind gust blew sandwich-wrappers from the overflowing trash cans across the grass and into the trees.

Back out on the highway, both cars stuck to the speed limit, with the Charger following behind the Cutlass at an appropriate distance. A flock of geese flew overhead, possibly in the wrong direction.

POETRY BY TOBI ABIODUN
ELIJAH

I was writing on a wall, mortar in hand
cementing my trauma onto someone else's home
soon they'll move in and the house will be haunted
can you tell a ghost from a nightmare
or do you just run when the light becomes unfamiliar
if the night becomes too dreary to close your eyes, will you
daydream

all the birds I know are
d
r
o
w
n
i
n
g

and god is watching, a chess board on his footstool, two fingers on his cheeks

everytime I am happy I turn to the world,
say 'stare a little, doesn't joy look good on me?'
when close to death I turn to poetry
and say 'save me'

I was two when I first led a prayer in church
these days I walk past the church with black lips
mouth burnt from screaming patiently at the sun
my lungs are incense holders
cloudy cottons

where I am from, they say gifts will take you places
nothing in my life has moved yet
poetry has me anchored
feet pressed on to land

I am no Elijah, no chariot is coming to take me
but fires already have

FICITION BY TOM STEVENS
DAWN OF PAM

Day 1. Pam shares a meme. It says “resistance is fertile” and shows an anarchy ‘A’ symbol made from gardening tools on a green background. A friend comments “only you eh our pam!”

Day 4. At a café with friends, Pam declares that “something has to be done.” Her friends don’t take it lightly. They see her confidence, her conviction. Those in the seats around them hear it too and go silent.

Day 12. Pam submits her demands in a council meeting. They don’t laugh her off. There’s something dark, something solid buried in it all. They do not give her what she wants. She smiles.

Day 40. The night booms with drums and cries. Pam’s forces give the officers defending the police station one last chance to surrender. They answer with a gunshot. The building is burnt to the ground. In their pelts and flax, her tribe howls at the flames.

Day 411. You don’t see cars on the road anymore. Pam is broodmother; she paints her face for the new moon ritual. You wouldn’t want to know what she does for a blue moon.

Day 1003. The smell of flowers on the summer breeze is overpowering. Pam is carried on a palanquin through the re-forested foot hills. The people weep to see. She curses her enemies by pointing; such is her cult, they die within three days from fear.

Day 2764. Pam walks slowly past the lined up men of her harem. She glares at each of them. She personally kills the one she most suspects of disloyalty and makes eunuchs of two more. Just in case.

Day 10,000. Pam, in her feathers and paints, rests in her fir-needle and hide bed. Slowly, shakily, she passes her favoured daughter the long bone blade. It is her time now. Smiling, Pam is content. She is ready to welcome her nigh death. Looking back, she can't help but wonder how it all started.

Day 1. Pam shares a meme. It says everything that should and could ever happen. A friend comments “only you eh our pam!”

FICTION BY MATT GULLEY

MORT À LA FABRIQUE DE FAUSSES VOLAILLES

I think the most elegant thing about working in the rubber chicken factor is the sense of levity. It's hard to take yourself seriously when you have a hundred of the little yellow guys rolling off the line every hour, pointed forth, mouth agape like a humor-seeking missile. That's why it was so especially off-putting to witness the gruesome death of a co-worker.

Ben was a good guy, a hard-working man. A real salt-of-the-earth type. He was salty. He cursed a lot, bragged about cheating on his wife. He was constantly slacking off, now that I think of it. Kind of a leach, a real scumbag. He was the manager of quality control, so he typically walked the line, squeezed a chicken or two theatrically, and made little marks on his clipboard.

It was a Friday as I recall. On Fridays we got pizzas brought in for lunch. You have to wash your hands carefully after eating pizza; if you've got greasy fingers sometimes the chickens will slip right out of your grasp. If that image is making you laugh, please don't, there's nothing funny about potential OSHA violations, even if it's one of the special-edition St. Patrick's Day rubber chickens, which sport a green waistcoat and striped socks. It's not funny.

Ben hadn't washed his hands after eating some of the greasiest pizza available here in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. He was leaning against one of the fabricator machines, a big, grey, belching box with a latex injector and a series of interchangeable molds, chatting up one of the new girls. Ben was supporting his weight with his outstretched palm when it slipped.

He face-planted on a conveyer belt and there was enough friction between the moving belt and his weight that

he got fed into the machine. What happened next is truly unspeakable, which makes it extremely convenient that I am writing. Ben got pricked by the mechanical feeder rod and filled to the brim with molten latex. His bloated body was ferried along to a cooling pool with eleven other chickens and then sprayed with yellow paint. He was probably dead at this point; we could only watch helplessly as he was fitted with a squeak box in his neck. Robot arms know not flesh from rubber, they move with the innocence of a determined and brutally strong child.

I don't think I can ever look at rubber chickens the same way. Corporate sent us a grief counselor, but even the whoopee cushions we received as a condolence gift retained a sort of macabre weight. I'm looking for a new job these days, maybe something where I can give back to the community. I'm not sure – I have a pretty good offer from the fake vomit place up the road.

POETRY BY KELLY NICKIE
RUMINATE

Four out of four
therapists would agree
I'm living in my head

They recommend
deep breaths
in through the nose
and out through the mouth
until the brain ferments
into the celestial

But what if
my divine intuition
is telling me
I am a piece of shit

It's not a cognitive distortion
to know I have hurt
friends
family
and exes
by running away
from uncomfortable discussions

I need to fix this
by staying up late
to overthink
ways to
reverse the past

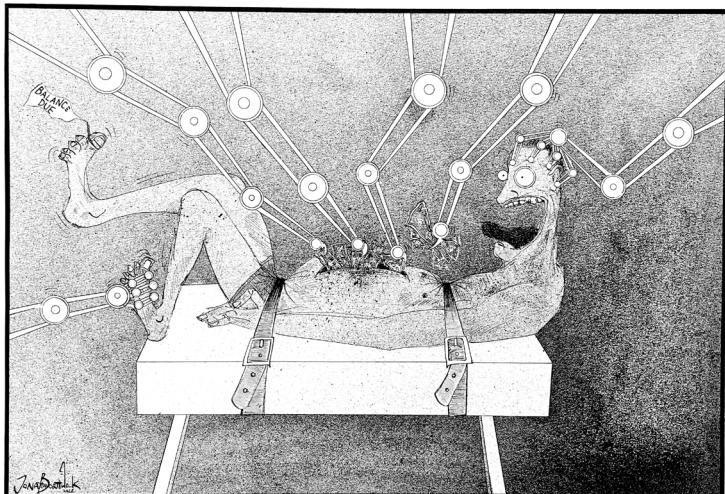
ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

THE JONATHAN BORTHWICK COLLECTION

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jonathan Borthwick is a self-taught cartoonist based in Houston, Texas. Originally from the United Kingdom, his drawings explore the political and social landscape of the United States over the past several years. All works are Indian ink on paper.

CARTOON BY JONATHAN BORTHWICK
BILLING DEPT.

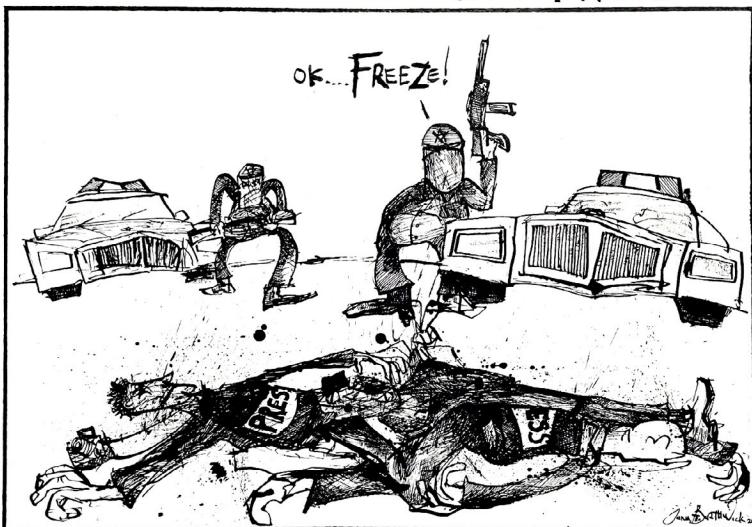


AMERICAN MEDICAL BILLING DEPT.

2020
18" x 24"
Ink on 300gsm Bristol Paper

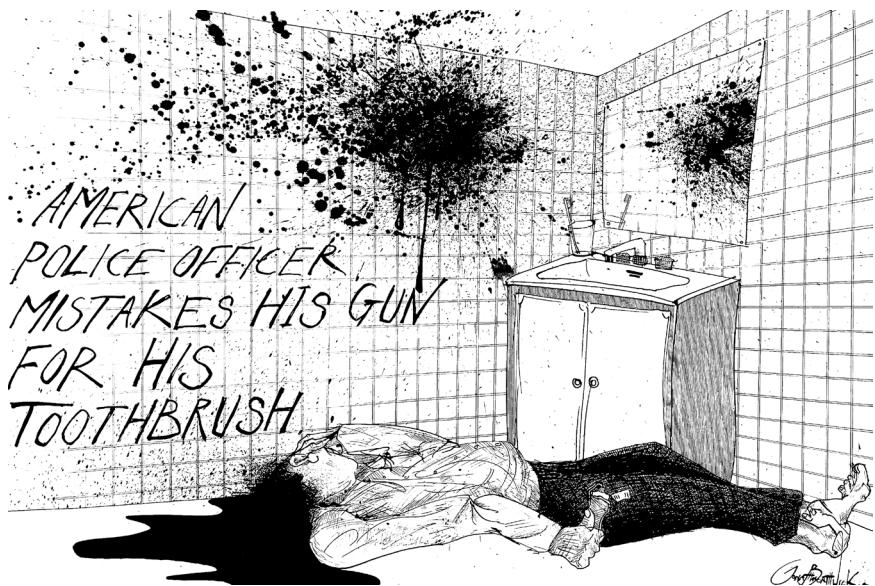
CARTOON BY JONATHAN BORTHWICK
No Press — No Bad Press

No Press — No Bad Press



2020
12" x 18"
Ink on 300gsm Bristol Paper

CARTOON BY JONATHAN BORTHWICK
POLICE MISHAPS



2020
12" x 18"
Ink on 300gsm Bristol Paper

FICTION BY MORD McGHEE
HORUS AND THE LORD

A cone of black spiraled upward, issuing as one continuous belch from a smokestack at the back of the car. A man and his dog, coursing ahead slowly, steadily, sticking to the third lane. The man dropped a bone on the ground in front of his furry companion, and said, "There you go. Quit your fussing." The mutt did not move. He turned and merged onto the highway to the sound of a blaring horn. Beach-people traffic. Always in a scamper.

The driver of a pickup shouted, leaning out the window. The look on his face frozen as he tried to figure out what he was seeing. "Almost there," the man said, his car chugging along at pace. In the adjoining lanes vehicles ripped by, breaking the stream of exhaust into wispy puffs like cotton candy. It was a trip he had taken every Saturday since 1958. Not always with his passenger friend, but the rest was a longstanding tradition. A necessary one when he needed to get what groceries he was unable to produce himself. Not many, but Euless loved her Swiss Rolls and he meant to bring another box. Around him the car rattled, squeaked, and shook. There he saw the parking lot of the store ahead, and he stuck his arm out to show he was turning off into the megaplex of storefronts.

Horus looked up, pulled into one of the first stalls directly along the six-lane road. A truck pulled up next to them, shiny and silver with the markings of a county sheriff. The truck's door flew open and out stepped a young man, clean cut, mirrored shades over his eyes. Horus glanced at his companion. Bubbles sat on his flattened lips as he lay hunkered down against the car's frame, yet unmoving.

The officer walked a slow circle around the car. At last, turned to Horus and said, "What do you think you're doing?"

“How’s that?” Horus said, accent thick and local. Low country South Carolina.

“Said what you think you’re doing?” The officer asked again, shaking their head. A scoff escaped the strange grin on their face.

“Sorry, sir, but I don’t follow yer,” said Horus.

“Ma’am,” she corrected, scratching the back of her head. “Maybe I should ask what this thing is?”

Horus shrugged, said, “Mah-car. How’s that, unh?”

“Sir,” said the officer. “Are you kidding me? Because . . .”

“Eat your bone,” Horus told his dog.

“Is there some sort of anything what rolls race?” She said, fading at the end of the sentence.

Horus said, “We’re going to market for feed.”

“Feed?” She said with a scoff, drawing out her ticket pad. “On my highway. In this contraption? Don’t think so. What’s your name?”

“And Swiss Rolls,” said Horus, matter-of-factly. Adding, “Horus Rumpus.”

“Mr. Rumpus, mind stepping out of the . . . uh, over here, sir,” she said.

Horus shrugged again, said, “Well alright then,” and climbed off the frame.

“Where’d you get it?” She said.

“This?” He said, “Or the hound?”

“The vehicle,” she said.

“It’s a car,” he corrected. “Not a vehicle. Built it.”

She said, “You don’t say. Out of wood, yeah?”

“Powered by mah-old charcoal smoker,” he nodded. “Run best on hardwood. Hotter. Longer. Ask the Lord ain’t that right! How’s that, unh?”

She said, “Whatever it is, you’re done for the day.”

“How’s that?” He said.

“Not on my roads. Mean, you can’t,” she began, kicking one unmatched tire. The entire log frame shuddered, and

the smokestack let loose a thick, wide cloud. “You just can’t.” She wrote up a ticket, handed it to Horus.

“Y’all new to Horry?” He said, shifting his chaw from one cheek to the other.

“I am,” she said.

“Sausage?” He asked, flipping open the lid of the smoker. There were a dozen sizzlers within.

She shook her head, “No thank you. Sorry to do this to you, but I’m calling for a flatbed.”

“The Lord won’t ride in no flatbed,” he said. “Only come to town in mah-car.”

The officer looked at the jumble of wood and its belching engine. “You take His name in vain, sir?” She said, hands on hips.

Horus threw a thumb at the dog and said, “Eat your bone.”

“Sir?” she said.

Horus swallowed, said, “That his name, ma’am. He the Lord.”

“The dog?” She asked.

“Ma’am?”

“You believe your dog is God?”

“No ma’am,” said Horus. “Mah-dog’s mah-dog. May I sell my sausages and get my Swiss Rolls now?”

“No!” Said the officer, stamping one boot. “You may not. You may kindly take the Lord and head on home. Don’t care how you get there if it’s not on my roads in this death-trap.”

“Well alright then,” Horus said, climbing back aboard and working the vent so the thing began to roll.

“Ho!” The officer cried. “Ho!”

Horus looked up. “Ma’am?” He said.

“Shut it down and step away from the vehicle,” she said, losing her cool at last. “I’m about to collar you, you keep this up.”

A voice drew her attention. “Something wrong, rook?”

The officer looked up to see a second highway patrol had pulled in.

“Fred,” Horus said.

“Go on ahead, Horus,” the second officer said. “Before you run out of coal.”

“Well alright then,” Horus said, pulling away.

The second officer waited until the noise of the contraption was out of the way and stepped out of his patrol car. He walked towards his coworker, said, “No one told you about Horus and the Lord?”

“No,” replied the first officer.

“Well,” said the new arrival. “Now you know,” and he tipped his hat and added, “I’m going for a sausage before he sells out. Be right back. Best ones you’ll ever taste.”

POETRY BY MORANDA BROMBERG
IF THERE IS A GOD

If there is a god she doesn't heal the heartsick.
She indulges but never interferes in our tragedies
she is the cry of coyotes over the hilltops
she is the birdsong on a cloudless morning
she is the pulse of blood in the bed of your fingertips
she does not rage watching us dutifully destroy all she built
she encourages Earth's splendor even as we stump tree after tree
she basks in the brilliance of all that remains.
If there is a god she writes all of my poems.

POETRY BY CARISSA MADDOX
REMEMBER THE DEAD

Maybe one day
I will dig you all up,
carefully pull out
each individual bone
and place you carefully
on the walls
of this tomb
with adoration,
on display for all to see.

The things you did to me,
long forgotten
by your bones
as your soft tissues
and memories
oozed into the ground,
only damned souls
there to catch your fluids
in hopes of hydration
from Hell's dry heat.

The hands plastering
you in place
remember your swiftness,
your cutting words,
the atrocities
you brought on them.

This macabre mosaic,
a symbol to my future self
that dead men cannot conquer

the healed flesh and muscle
of the living they left
for maggots and beetles.

Your name will be discarded
with the broken wood
and soiled satin,
but your weathered
femurs and empty eye sockets
will be a reminder
that you are nothing
but fragile bits of matter
and hollow cavities.

FICITION BY SCHUYLER SIMONTON
A MEANING FOR VIOLENCE

Violence. What is it for?

Erik had long pondered this question. As a soldier, violence was a tactic, a method of success against enemies. Its beat was drummed into him, and the other soldiers. He often had it beat into him, as much as he beat it into his peers. Violence was training.

The dull edge of his sword slammed directly into the wrist of the ogre. Erik could just make out the sounds of breaking bones from underneath the roar of pain from the beast.

As an animal, violence was a means of survival. Utilized to earn a meal, the right to live in a world that challenged you. You fought, or you died. If you were very lucky, you would not have to fight often, or you could hide well enough that you never had to fight. Even then, you would have to use your strength or cunning to get your food, your shelter and continued safety. Violence was life.

Erik stepped back, weaving out of the backhand of the giant-kin's club. He could hear Twixt-in-Banches worriedly tittering above him. "It's okay, I saw it," he managed to get out between breaths.

As a man, violence was desire. The need to prove himself to others, to express his will upon the world, and the civilizations it had raised. To thrash against the cage his ancestors had built for him. He felt this rage, this sadness, in being raised to be a soldier. In expectations forced, explicit or otherwise. This violence was quiet, left to be expressed by oneself, in rooms sealed away from polite company. Violence was rebellion.

As Erik stepped back, surveying his foe, he spared a glance to his right. The doe was still there, its thin limbs

shivering with fear. Yet it stood upright, facing the ogre, putting its thin pale body between it and the creature behind it: a fawn, with golden spots. It had been born under a fae moon, and it glimmered with magic. The shine had not gone unnoticed by the more brutish predators of the forest.

As a protector, violence was necessary. There was always going to be pain in the world. You had to fight to live. Someone had to lose, someone had to win. Just the way life ended up. But you could step into the way of violence, direct it towards yourself. The pain has to go somewhere, but he could take pain that others could not. Violence was suffering.

Erik had been there shortly after the fawn had been born. He wasn't looking for anything particular, just wandering through the underbrush, following a few beautiful moths. And there it was, nestled under its mother. Its pale fur matched the mother, but already its spots shone in the dark, a radiant gold. The mother stiffened at his approach, too tired to run, but ready nonetheless. It would protect its child.

Erik had simply sat down, where he waited and watched. In time the doe had fallen to sleep, with the rest of the herd slowly investigating the stranger in their midst. Twixt-in-branches had done what she could to soothe them, but many of the deer had already calmed in Erik's presence. He always had that way with people, no matter how many legs they had.

For months, Erik had watched over the herd. They traveled a short distance, seemingly happy in the section of the forest they had found. He did not intervene when wolves or hunters took the elderly. He mourned when one of the herd would fall ill or become wounded, with nothing more he could do.

Yet when a pack of goblins had attacked, herding the deer into a ravine to be slaughtered by their lazy pet ogre, Erik could not stand by. This was no longer the common violence of life. This was cruelty. Cruelty and malice, simply

to destroy that which was beautiful. To break and laugh at the remains just because you could.

Twixt-in-branches' magic had the goblins chasing illusions, striking each other. Erik had run down the ravine and placed himself directly between the ogre and the doe. Backed into a corner of roots and mud, Erik had done his best to dissuade the ogre of its excessive meal.

Already it had chomped off the head of one of the other doe. Now it seemed to be getting angry at Erik's persistence in refusing to let it crush the shiny creature behind him.

Small cuts ran up the ogre's arms and legs, with fractured bones in the beast's right hand. Still, it swung the large wooden club in its left, its movement hampered by the sides of the ravine.

The ogre was just doing what ogres are want to do: smash and eat things. It wasn't the beast's fault that it was a beast. But Erik would not let its excesses lead to further cruelty.

"You are not —" Erik panted, "— getting this fawn. You have already eaten enough, and your allies are —"

The ogre roared once more in something that sounded like a monosyllabic insult, and raised its club above its head, no longer wildly swinging. Instead it fell, like an executioner's blade, covering the end of the ravine.

"Okay," Erik let out the breath and raised his rusty shield far above his head. With a large crunch, Erik's head was slammed downward by his shield. His arm shot with pain, his elbow creaking in protest at the strain. The blow had taken him to his knees, but he had not fallen.

As his ears rang from the impact and his vision shook, Erik was vaguely aware that the club had lifted, and was slowly rising to fall again. His arm shook with the effort of holding his shield. He let it fall limply to his side, the leather straps sliding off of his possibly broken wrist.

Erik wobbly got to his knees, aware of Twixt-in-Branches' sudden cries of shock above him, the belly shaking

chuckle of the ogre in front of him. None of it mattered, so long as the beauty and life of the world continued.

As Erik Luthson, violence was a last resort. He did not enjoy violence. As a soldier, he was good at it. As an animal he never sought it out. As a man he had felt its pull. But as a protector, Erik embraced the cost of violence. His pain was nothing to the grieving of a world that had lost its light, its beauty. Even the smallest spark, the tiniest miracle, had to be savored, protected, from the casual cruelty of evil that would crush it simply because it could.

And so, Erik raised his dull sword and leapt with all the strength left in his wobbly legs.

His sword sunk directly into the chest of the ogre, a greenish golden light erupting from the wound. The ogre gasped, dropping the club. With its unbroken left hand, it swatted Erik aside, roaring a final cry of pain and frustration.

Erik felt himself flying for an all too brief moment, quietly enjoying the sensation. It ended when his back slammed into a tree growing in the side of the ravine, his breath no longer in his chest, his eyes rolling in their sockets. He fell, tumbling down the side of the ravine, mud sucking into his gaping mouth, his burning eyes. Finally, he rolled into the bottom, face down in the creek that fed into the base. He rolled over, his body an entire wound, trying to suck in air as his diaphragm sought to regain its rhythm.

Erik was uncertain of how long he laid there, but he knew that almost immediately, there was a small glittering emerald light dancing in worried patterns above his face. A woman, close to a foot tall, dressed in green leaves and acorn armor that was somewhat reminiscent of his own. Her small round face was flush with worry, her green wings beating faster than he thought was terribly necessary.

“Okay. Twixt. Is the –” he coughed, rasping as his voice came back to him. “Is the fawn?” He managed, working his way up to an elbow. It took a moment for his vision to steady, blurry lights dancing in his face, one of which being

his closest companion.

But there, at the end of the ravine, slowly making their way out of the tangle of roots they had hidden in, was the doe and her miraculous fawn. They stared at him, nose and ears twitching, before turning their gaze suddenly upwards. Erik followed it. On the ridgeline, the rest of the herd stared down, their black eyes seeming to study Erik.

I wonder what deer think about? Erik mused quietly. All this time with them and that thought had never occurred to him. He doubted he would ever truly know, but it was a nice thing to ponder.

The doe and the glowing fawn gingerly stepped forward, before the mother gently nudged her child to the side of the ravine. Step by step, they made their way up the steep hillside. The mother always directly below her child to catch them should they slip.

Erik watched them, taking in every act of love, appreciating it for what it was. The doe and the fawn reached the top of the ravine, and with nary a look back, began to prance off with the rest of the herd.

Twixt-in-Banches huffed, crossing her arms.

“While it might have been nice, a ‘thank you’ wasn’t necessary, Twixt.” Erik said, his throat still hoarse.

He shakily got to his feet, every movement revealing a new bruise somewhere on his body. He was covered in mud, his armor even more dented and ruined than before. Turning, clutching his side, Erik surveyed the body of the ogre. Its death throes were gone, and now it looked rather peaceful in the ravine. GINGERLY limping, Erik stepped around its corpulent form, and rested a hand on the giant kin’s side.

“I am sorry for all that. I know it doesn’t seem fair, but you were taking far more than your share, my friend.”

Erik sighed, grieving the creature who had nearly killed him. “And I’m sorry about this next part.” With a grunt, he leaned across the greasy chest of the ogre and tugged his sword out. Its edges were still dull from lack of

care, and its upper half was coated in gore, but it was in one piece.

Erik leaned down to rinse it in the stream, while Twixt tittered behind him. “Oh, it’s still good. It’s still a sword, and it did its job here.” He splashed more of the cool creek water onto his face, washing out the mud around his eyes and in his hair.

Deeming it good enough, he cocked his head to listen to Twixt as she proceeded. “Perhaps. What was his name again? Edren Smith? He seemed to be hiding out, but maybe he would help. It would be nice of him to do so.”

Picking up his near ruined shield, arm still aching, Erik grunted with the effort. “He can fix this at least. It did its job, and now it’s run its course.” He shrugged and began to carefully climb his way out of the ravine. Even at its low height, his progress was slowed by the pain wracking his body.

Twixt-in-Banches flew by his head, angrily chirping in his ear. Erik nodded as he reached the top and sprawled out on the soft grass and dirt.

“Oh, that’s right. Let’s try some of those healing spells you taught me.” He paused, gathering his thoughts. “I was just pondering . . . you know. Violence. What does it lead to?”

He smiled a toothy grin, bits of mud visible amongst the yellow and white. Twixt gave something that sounded distinctly like a dove sighing.

“Oh, it’s not as grim as it seems. It can be quite nice for the right reasons.”

POETRY BY INA PAL

NEVER NEVER AGAIN AGAIN

Last night I saw children die
I turned off my screen
I cried and couldn't sleep
And then this morning
I yelled at my toddler
For some reason
I don't remember
Does that make me a monster?

I have supported genocide
With an occasional burger, a chai latte
I've let children descend
Into hand-dug mines
To bring up the minerals
That make my cheekbones shine
It looks so pretty
Does that make me a monster?

My clothes are made from exploitation
My food pollutes the soil
My phone is drenched in blood
My western wealth was built on backs
Toiling on a colony
But I think that slaving away
At a company
Is the real agony
Does that make me a monster?

I cannot like, share, and donate enough
To give back what was taken
Lives and land

The childhood of children
The dignity of ancestors
A future people might have had
If only
If only I had
Liked and shared
Shared enough
Does that make me a monster?

What would I do
To get out of a death camp?
What would I do
If I saw my children crushed
I saw my mother murdered?
If I ever got out of that cage
Would I feel inextinguishable rage
To go and burn down the world?
Would I be willing to lock up others?
Would I be killing sons of mothers ?
Would I lie and bribe and kill
To ensure, insure, secure that I will
Never, never again be weak again?
Am I a monster?

If I were to command great wealth
Would I let it have my soul?
Would I trade for all that money
my precious little spark
of humanity?
Would the people in the streets
Change in my eyes to commodities
That well managed could deliver profit
And exist solely for my benefit?
Could I think that means don't matter
If I could wholesale hoard and gather?
Would power corrupt me as well?
Am I a monster?

If I was offered opulence
To live in such vast affluence
The world has never seen
If I could take with impunity
Would I colonize and steal?
Could I resist complicity?
Could I have said no
Centuries ago
To a cargo of silk, slaves and spice
Can I resist it today, tomorrow
When whatever I desire
Is hauled to me just overnight
Shipping fee included, express?
Have I inherited a heart of darkness?
Am I a monster?

ARTWORK BY JAIRO DEALBA
POISON IN MY WIDENESS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELIZABETH WING
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Photography

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELIZABETH WING
BLUD RIGHTS 2



Photography

Elizabeth Wing

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ARTWORK BY VIVIAN CALDERON
VESTIGIOS



POETRY BY MYLES ALLEN
ISCARIOT

Judas ate at his table.

Now, I'm not Christian, but that has never sat right with me.

The Jesus I've come to know through sidewalk pamphlets and white & red picket signs is not a kind man. He is fire and brimstone. He is unforgiving. He is brutal and stone-faced and immovable. He draws hard lines and fusses over nothing and punishes the sinful.

But then I remember that Judas ate at his table the day he was betrayed,

that Jesus was a scared, queer, mud-streaked Jew
With a denim jacket and smiley face earrings and a lop-sided grin
Who offered Judas a second chance —
Not because he was the son of God,
But because his mother was human
And knew the patience of love.

Perhaps Jesus kissed his hands that night,
Shared with him private psalms that would never be scripture
Cleaned his back and braided his hair
Traced fingers across his stomach

They can say that Jesus let himself die because he wanted to save humanity, because he needed to die for our sins, because his father told him so. But Jesus did not die for our forgiveness. Jesus gave his life because he loved a man that didn't deserve it.

And sometimes I think I don't deserve it, either

That I, too, would destroy my world for
Twenty pieces of silver
And I would turn bitter and cruel and callous
As I watched him hoisted unto the cross

But Judas ate at his table.

It's not my job to decide whether or not I deserve it
Redemption and patience and faith
It's the man with brown curls
That thinks he can shoulder the world.

FICTION BY MAUREEN MANCINI AMATURO

WHEN HOUDINI WAITED ON AL CAPONE AT LA MAGIA RESTAURANT

Tonight's the big night, the grand openin'. The boss, Al Capone himself, called Joey Two-Bits, Sally Boy, and me to join him for dinner at this new place, La Magia. You can't say no to Capone, so the four of us are here gettin' the royal treatment. Why we gettin' the red carpet? It went down like this...

When Capone heard Gino Spats wanted to open an Italian restaurant to support his family and to help with, you know, neighborhood business, the boss rounded up a few thugs, I mean associates, and called on a few friends to squeeze, I mean collect, some cash to pass on to Gino. Gino was the guy who would front, um... manage, La Magia, over on the South Side. They made a contract. Not in writin', see, just a handshake and their word. Part of the deal was that Capone's favorite, spaghetti with walnut sauce – olive oil, bread crumbs, toasted nuts, and some cheese – had to be on the menu. The prices? Eh, just a little high so people think they're gettin' somethin' special and so there'd be enough in the kitty to write Capone a small check once a month. The boss isn't involved in the place, just the money guy. Gino is runnin' the operation at La Magia. So, it was Gino and his brother, Angelo, who got the place set up and hired the help.

It's some openin' night. What a crowd. Gino is seatin' Capone personally. We follow, but he don't give us a second look. He brings us to the best table in the joint. I hear Gino say to the boss, "Grazie."

Capone waves his hand. "No need."

Then, Gino opens a bottle of the best wine in the house and pours a glass for the boss first, then us guys. He tells Capone, "Couldn't do it without your help. You're a generous man."

"What can I say? I'm a kind person. I'm kind to

everyone, but if you are unkind to me, then kindness is not what you'll remember me for." Capone reaches for an envelope in his jacket pocket, and I could tell Gino caught sight of the .38 caliber revolver the boss always carries, a Smith & Wesson Model 10. That and the scar on his face are the boss' trademarks. Capone sees Gino's face freeze. He says, "A smile can get you far, but a smile with a gun can get you further." Capone hands Gino the fat envelope. "A little bonus."

Gino just stands there movin' his thumb over the wad of cash inside. He tells Capone, "You did a lot for this neighborhood, all of us. Me, my brother, my whole family thanks you."

Capone winks. "Public service is my motto," he says. "I'll go as deep in my pockets as any man to help any guy that needs help. I can't stand to see anybody hungry or cold or helpless."

The boss has a big heart. He does. Not everybody knows how much scarola he throws at charities. They only talk about the other stuff. I want to say somethin', but nobody talks when Capone is talkin', and he wasn't finished talkin'.

"As for business? I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them have a good time, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man. I am just a businessman, giving the people what they want." He scans the room. "Listen." He calls Gino to lean in closer. "Be careful who you call your friends. I'd rather have four quarters than one hundred pennies. Capeesh?"

Gino nods.

"Good. Now stay out of trouble."

"Won't be no trouble here. Angelo and me checked out every hire personally. And if something does happen, you got my word it won't come back to you."

"Maybe it will, maybe it won't. But it usually does. Every time a boy falls off a tricycle, every time a black cat has gray kittens, every time someone stubs a toe, every time

there's a murder or a fire or the marines land in Nicaragua, the police and the newspapers holler 'Get Capone!' I'm sick of it." Capone tears off a crusty piece of bread. "I'm the boss. I'm going to continue to run things. They've been putting the roscoe on me for a good many years, and I'm still healthy and happy. Don't let anybody kid you into thinking I can be run out of town. I haven't run yet, and I'm not going to." He points at Gino. "Now, you got work to do. Where's my waiter?" Capone swipes the bit of olive oil from his plate with the last piece of crusty bread in the basket. "We're gonna need more bread here." He looks around the table at us. We all have our mouths full but mumble and nod so he knows we agree. We agree Capone ain't gonna run or get run out of town. We agree we all want more bread, too.

Gino calls our waiter over. A short guy shows up, couldn't be more than 5'5", with hazel eyes, dark hair parted down the middle, and a receding hairline. He don't look Italian. You know, the guy doesn't look like much at all, not for a classy place like this. He's no baby grand but seems, I don't know, like a fella who's no flat tire either. I got the feelin' this guy knows his onions. He don't come off like no waiter. Some-thin' about him looks familiar. I swear I saw that guy before.

"Take good care of these guys," Gino says to the waiter. He nods at Capone and leaves for the kitchen.

When the waiter says, "We have specials tonight that might interest you," I could tell the guy needed to see a dentist. His teeth look bad enough to ruin my appetite.

"Let's hear them," Capone says, "and give us a menu while you talk."

The waiter waves his arm. "You already have them."

Sure enough, we look down, and there is a menu, a big, red, leather-bound thing, sittin' right in front of each one of us. We look at each other. Capone says, "Nice work."

We're lookin' at the menus while the waiter is tellin' us the specials. Capone stops him. "First, you're gonna bring some spaghetti with walnut sauce, enough for everybody."

Okay, keep talkin'." When the guy finishes, we all order, and the boss says, "Bring a pitcher of water and clean glasses for everybody."

"That I did already," the waiter says.

You can take me to hell right now if there wasn't a fresh pitcher of water in the middle of the table and a new glass in front of every one of us. I ate at lot of restaurants over the years, but I never saw nothin' like this waiter. "Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle," I says.

"Applesauce!" Joey Two-bits says. I agree. I don't believe it either.

Sally Boy looks the guy in the eye and says, "Ain't you kinda fluky for a waiter?"

Get this, the waiter takes a bow, like we was gonna clap or somethin'. I was waitin' to see what the boss was gonna say about this one, but he didn't say nothin'.

We all tell the waiter what we want, and he says, "Can I get you anything else before I put your order in?"

Capone is starin' at the guy. "Put the order in. Make it fast."

Somethin' didn't look right. I know the boss, and I know he thought this guy was fluky, too.

If you ask me, I don't think there is a faster waiter in all Chicago, maybe even in all the world. Me and the boys can't stop talkin' about how he got those menus on the table without us seein' it happen. And right in front of us, the guy makes a pitcher of water show up, a whole pitcher. Either this guy is some kind of magician, or maybe I swallowed a bad batch of hooch. Capone, he doesn't make a peep. Every time our waiter walks by, though, the boss asks for somethin' – a new napkin, ice, take away a used fork. Every time, the damn thing appears or disappears. I'm still waitin' for the boss to say somethin', but not a peep. And then I remember. Me and the boys was down at the pier one night last week takin' care of business. There was this hubbub. I heard the trouble was somethin' about a guy puttin' on a show on city property

without a permit. Big crowd. I remember there was a guy, about this waiter's height, in cuffs, a few coppers around him. The guy got away. Seems he slipped right out of those cuffs like they was mittens. Yeah, that's where I saw him. I think he was the guy.

Capone calls the waiter over again. He picks up the pitcher of water and points it at the waiter like a gun. "How do you do that?"

"Some say I do it this way, others say I do it that way, but I say I do it the other way," the waiter said.

"Wise guy," Capone says.

"No, a showman, and the secret of showmanship consists not of what you really do, but what the mystery-loving public thinks you do."

"What makes you think I'm a mystery-lover?" the boss says.

"Everyone is."

"You think so?" Capone puts the pitcher down and shifts around in his seat.

Yeah, this was the guy. I was sure of it, but I figured I better not say nothin'. Anyway, not many people hold their own with the boss. This guy was doin' a good job of it so far.

Capone keeps his eye on the guy, see, and he asks, "What is it with you and all this appear-disappear, all these old tricks?"

With a straight face, eyes like ice picks, no smile, no nothin', the waiter says, "Old tricks? An old trick done well is far better than a new trick with no effect."

"You some kind of a magician? You're paid to be a waiter," the boss says.

"I'm both."

The boss looks around the table at us guys and says, "Get this, he's a magician." Capone laughs. "Well, I don't believe in magic."

The waiter put a pile of four new napkins on the table, and I swear I didn't see them comin'. Then, he says, "Anyone

who believes in magic is a fool.”

“I ain’t no fool,” the boss says.

“I can tell,” the waiter says.

Finally, Capone asks, “What’s your name?”

“Houdini.”

“Italian?”

“Hungarian.”

“Sounds Italian.”

“It’s my stage name.”

Capone nods real slow. “Stage name.” He looks the guy up and down. “So, you got a career on the side with these tricks?”

“Somewhat. I do well, but I do think I have a bigger future.”

“You think you’re pretty good,” Capone says.

I elbow Joey and I says, “I think he’s pretty good.”

The boss looks at me. “Did I ask what you think?”

Then, another table needed somethin’, and the waiter had to leave. Capone asks a bus boy to have Gino come to our table. Gino shows up and the boss says to Gino, “This guy only waits on us tonight. Give his other tables to another waiter. I’ll make good for his tips. Hear?”

“We only got just so many waiters on tonight, I don’t think –”

Capone slips a sawbuck into Gino’s hand. “Make it work.”

Gino pulls our waiter aside, and I guess he explained the deal. Next thing I know, the spaghetti with walnut sauce is on our table. The waiter says, “I’ll have your salads out shortly.”

“Get a chair,” the boss tells the waiter. “Houdini, right?”

“Yes, Harry Houdini.”

Houdini pulls a chair from a nearby table, and we scooch a little so he could have some room. I really had to go iron my shoelaces, but I was holdin’ it in ‘cause I didn’t want

to miss anythin'.

“I wanna talk to you,” the boss says.

“I’m sure your salads are ready, and I’ll have to check on your entrees,” the waiter says.

The boss calls a bus boy again. “Tell Gino to bring our salads and entrees himself. Got it?” The kid nods.

“So, where do you do this magic? The circus? Kids’ parties?” The boss asks.

Houdini shakes his head. “No, never try to fool children. They expect nothing, and therefore they see everything.”

“Hm.” Capone rubs his cheek, not the side with the scar. “So, you know a lot about this magic. You’re good enough to make people, people who aren’t kids, believe this stuff?”

“It’s my skill. What the eye sees, the ear hears, and the mind believes.” Houdini puts his head down a little and stares right at the boss, what a weird look, like he was cuttin’ right through him. Then, he says, “Never tell the audience how good you are. They will soon find out for themselves.”

Gino shows up with the salad, and Capone brushes him away, and he don’t even look at him.

“Can you make people disappear?” Capone says.

“I can.”

“Seems we are in the same line of work, so to speak, but I never called myself a magician.” The boss laughs, so we all laugh, too. “You make things appear. You make things disappear. What else can you do?”

“Escape.”

I see Capone’s eyebrows go up. “Escape? Now that’s a talent I can use in my organization. Tell me more about this escape work. Escape from what?”

“Anything. On land, in the sky, underwater. I am an escape artist. I like to say the greatest escape I ever made was when I left Appleton, Wisconsin, but my Chinese Water Torture Cell escape is one of my most famous feats.”

Sally Boy puts his fork down. “What the hell is that?”

This Houdini guy says, “My assistant locks my ankles into a steel frame. They wrap me in straps and chains until I can’t move, and I dangle upside down over a tank of water. They lower me head first into the water and lock me in place. And I escape.”

Joey Two-Bits nearly drops his fork. “Aw, says you.”

Houdini looks at him and smiles, not like he’s happy, a smile that was more a threat. He says, “No prison can hold me. No hand or leg irons or steel locks can shackle me. No ropes can keep me from my freedom.”

Now this is where the boss perks up. He says, “No prison can hold you?”

“No.”

Here comes Gino again with our food. I guess he knows not to pipe up. He puts our plates down and hightails it.

So, the boss says, “Let’s just say...you’re working. Say you do something, and maybe it’s something the cops don’t like. They get out their handcuffs, and –”

The waiter pulled a pair of cuffs out of his back pocket. I swear. Then, he says, “Handcuffs are simple.”

I knew it. He’s definitely the guy from the pier. He asks me to put the cuffs on him, right there at the table. I look at the boss, and he nods, so I do it. I hear the click. I know that sound pretty well. Me and handcuffs have some history. Those cuffs were locked. He holds his hands up and jiggles them, tries to pull his hands away from each other, but they’re cuffed all right. Then, he asks how we liked our spaghetti and the salads, and he asks if we live in the area, and small talk like that. Then, I swear, he was talkin’ with his hands, and the cuffs was danglin’ from his finger. He was out! I’m tellin’ ya he was out of the cuffs right in front of us. Joey and Sally Boy and me, our jaws was hangin’ in our plates. We all look at Capone.

“I could use a guy like you,” the boss says, “and

there's some big clams in it for you." He takes a few bites of his veal. "I'd like you to teach a few of my guys these escapes, these tricks. This kind of skill could go a long way in my line of work. You in?"

"I am in until I am not."

"What kind of answer is that?" Capone shrugs. "Once you're in, there's no out. If you're in, you're in."

"For a man like me, that's a challenge I can't refuse. I've already told you, nothing can hold me."

"We both have our skills, Mr. Houdini. And you don't know mine yet." Capone takes a few more bites of veal. "I think we can bring your skills to a whole new kind of business. Do some big things together, some wonderful things."

"I always have on my mind the thought that next year I must do something greater, something more wonderful," Houdini says.

"Oh, it's going to be wonderful, Houdini, real wonderful." Then, the boss tells a bus boy to bring Houdini a dish, a whole set-up. "So wonderful, we'll both go down in history."

POETRY BY AINE THOMPSON

I THOUGHT SMOKESCREENS WERE FOR WARSHIPS

The spine of my great-grandfather
was stripped and pounded to dust by stiff iron, his
cruelty drained out through his soot-covered ears and weaved
into dull rust

from one side of his life
to the next; the train leaves what cannot hold on
and I wonder how many men were laid to rest here long before
they died –
This town has eaten everyone I have ever known.

NONFICTION BY SAINT DESMONDE

THE PHILOSOPHER

He came to us at the apogee of November. He taught at a tired college a short train ride away. Our professor wanted his old friend to see our institution, to meet his brilliant students that he claimed to lack. The room was airy and broad but the intimacy of the setting was not lost on the five of us – the slim oak table drawing us near, the warm lighting, his electric charm. He spoke to us of alienation, city junkyards, and Wittgenstein.

Are you a Marxist? I asked him later.
Yes, but a bad one.
Are you a Marxist? Yes.
He looked at me, really looked at me.

Ardent, arrogant, and nonlinear as he was, I had to have an affair with him. Here and there Philadelphia, on and off New York. It was a simple thing for a time, but in one abrupt moment I became sickened with him.

You see, when you have a philosopher between your legs, he's the same as any other – helpless, trembling, primeval.

You almost find it pathetic.
Wittgenstein would have been no different.

POETRY BY DANICA S. MILLER

GOOD INTENTIONS

Dude said 2 me: “My intentions were good.”

Definitions important for you to know:

1. **Good** (*noun*): That which is morally right/positive or beneficial/healthy.
2. **Intention(s)** (*noun*): a determination, goal, aim, or plan to do or achieve a “specific” thing.
3. **Action(s)** (*noun*): The method, means, or process of doing something, completing an act/task, typically to achieve an aim or goal.
4. **Manifestation** (*noun*): an event, action, or outward/visible demonstration that clearly shows or embodies an abstract thought, idea, belief, or feeling (all personal).

Therefore, it’s great to have good intentions, but good intentions without any action(s) can/will result in some “manifestation(s)” like:

Kool-Aid with no sugar

Peanut butter with no jelly

Ham with no burger

Mike without Ike

A raisin in the sun

A dream deferred

Shoulda/woulda/coulda

“Damn, there goes my bus . . . I just missed that shit, fuck!”

Oh shit! My alarm clock didn’t go off this morning! I’M LATE 4 WORK!

Procrastination in 10

A 20-year crackhead saying, “Imma quit; this is my last time. I swear!”

Starting a garden and not watering the flowers.

Asking your mom, “Can you do something?” She replies with, “Not now, in a minute,” but that minute never comes.

That school trip everyone has been waiting and getting ready for all year, only to find out that it has been canceled.

Giving someone an apology by saying, “I’m sorry but . . .” or “I apologize if you think/feel . . .”

Opportunities missed and not taken advantage of

Choosing to have McDonald’s when you can go to Ruth Chris

Having a flashlight in a blackout but no batteries

Running out of toilet paper after taking a shit

Basically, “Good Intentions” really mean nothing without “actions” which demonstrate the “manifestations” of those “Good Intentions.” IJS (I’m Just Saying)

POETRY BY NOAH BROWN

SCORCHED SPOON

Eating cereal with a warped spoon is a lot like eating cereal with a normal one. I can still lift my frosted flakes and milk right into my mouth and I've washed the taste of heroin right off it. It's good as new. It was a chore to go into my bathroom and search for it (it's usually behind the toilet but this time it was in the linen closet under a towel) but it was the only spoon in the house. My mother usually carries a spoon in her "makeup bag," along with some used needles and empty baggies but she has this bad habit of losing the spoon so now we have one shared spoon that she steals a few times a day when she runs off to the bathroom. It's not like we talk about the spoon. If I told her that was the last spoon and not to use it to shoot heroin, I'd feel like I caught a dog taking a shit. On top of all that, it just feels nice to share something with her.

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

THE
EMILY
RANKIN
COLLECTION

ABOUT THE ARTIST

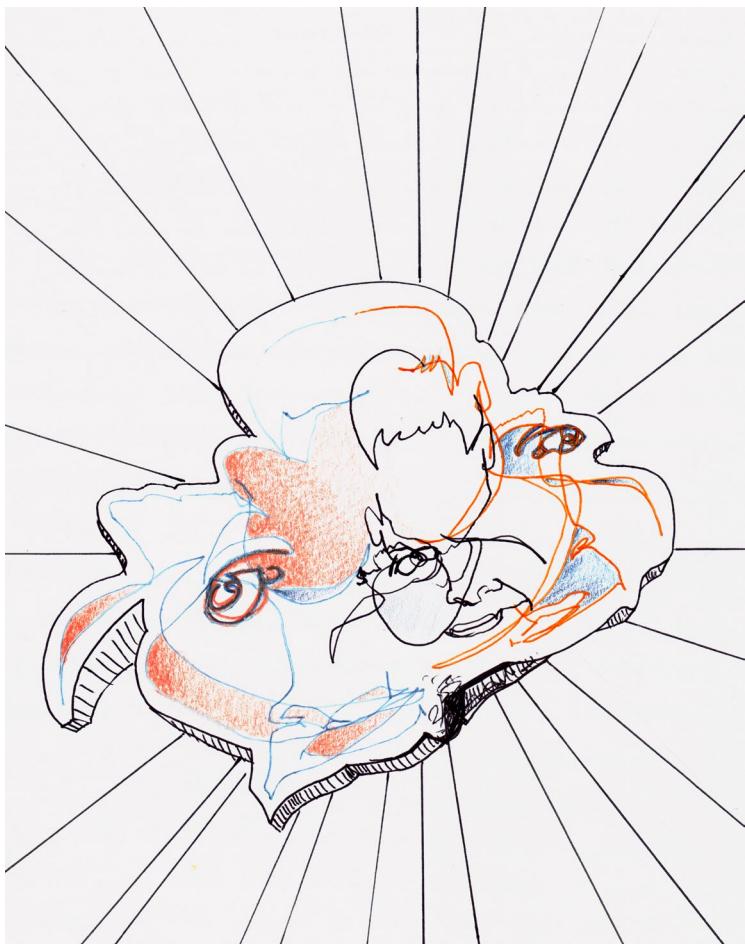
These pieces make up part of an ongoing series, Disintegral, which focuses on the alienating effects of dissociative disorders, in which the sufferer feels fragmented, solipsistic, and unreal. Disintegral seeks to capture these fragmentary feelings through a series of contour line self portraits.

ARTWORK BY EMILY RANKIN
OTHERWORLDLY



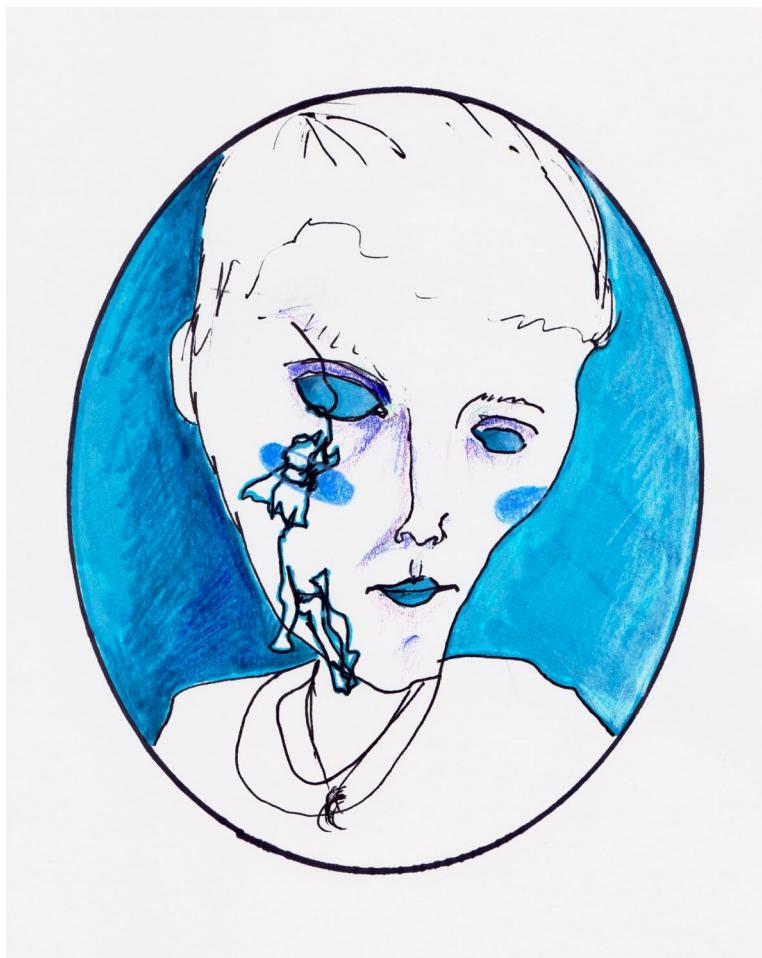
*Ink, Prismacolor, and highlighter on paper.
8 in x 10 in*

ARTWORK BY EMILY RANKIN
TANGERINE



*Ink, Prismacolor, and highlighter on paper.
8 in x 10 in*

ARTWORK BY EMILY RANKIN
BLUE DOT



*Ink, Prismacolor, and highlighter on paper.
8 in x 10 in*

FICITION BY DENVER BOXLEITNER

DRAGON FRUIT ROSES

A caress of grapes and melon painted my senses, doing its best to drown me in a sea of clouds, but I simply couldn't. I remained floating, I remained unfulfilled. *Maybe cumin will improve it.* No, untrue. This was a fresh creation, it'd be cheating. But damn me, I had to know if I was on the right track. I reached for the cumin jar, my fingers obscuring it so no one should see. Hauling the bowl of ingredients toward me, I disclosed my secret weapon.

“You wicked girl!” A voice emerged, and I recognized this cream hand with marigold nails. The hand of a woman who believes I have money to spend on more cumin. The jar shattered, threatening my bare feet as glass overwhelmed the floor.

“Mama, I was experimenting!” I shouted, taking up a spot on the littered counter.

“Witch finger grape and horned melon, excellent. Ice cream bean and soursop, never been done. Common cumin? Disgraceful!” Within moments, she was chalking up the remnants of my failure as an artist, disposing of them carelessly, and prying open the curtains of my self-consciousness. I'd been a fool to think people wouldn't know the difference between change and stagnance.

“I'm sorry, Mama. I'm just so nervous. Whose idea was it to pick such a young Spice Maker, anyway?” *Spice Maker.* The title still felt wild. This year, Princess Alix chose me to make three new spices for her Crown Empress celebration. Each night honors one of the Three Goddesses: Protection, Civility and Integrity, who in turn possess three random individuals and won't return to the heavens until the coronation. That means there are three strangers walking around somewhere, not even thinking for themselves. I flinched.

I had already sent off my canistel and lychee spice to

the High Chefs. Few were there to greet me since everyone is off hunting a pangolin; they represent protection. Which is ironic, since one hasn't been spotted in close to nineteen years.

My mother's eyes lifted coldly at the statement I made. "You think you're young, at the ripe old age of eighteen? Forty-six years ago, a boy of thirteen was in your place. Twenty-nine years ago, a girl of fifteen. A decade or so later, twins of twelve! So don't you dare give me excuses, Dechen." I released a sharp breath. She was right, always right.

"I think the grapes and melon spice tastes wrong, Mama. And I haven't even started on my third idea. The gardeners banished me for the rest of the day because I was stealing too much food." With that, I collected the fruit and veggie skins and set them in the compost basket on the sill. Redemption for my reckless thievery. And then I saw it. The mountain of twists, the rainbow of beauty. The dragon fruit rose hedge bordering the palace courtyard. In all my preparation, all the research that Mama gave me, the most perfect constituent had never been included. It was incredibly obvious, albeit inventive. When I turned, I realized my mother had been monologuing, and demanding I repeat something she had said.

"I assume you were giving me a pep talk, and it worked! I can complete my portfolio now." I embraced her briefly and grabbed a linen sack. "See you at the feast!"

As I approached the hedge, my usually heightened senses went numb. There was an arm sticking out hideously. It was covered in pitaya juice. No, wait. *Blood*. I couldn't view the body, thorns were disguising it. But I could tell it was a girl. The hand was so clean, so small . . . so innocent.

"A girl has been killed! Guards, she's dead!" I found myself saying, resenting the dullness in my voice. I most likely didn't know this person enough to scream and cry, though she probably didn't deserve it. Soon there was an army of men cutting away my newly beloved dragon fruit rose hedge. Pieces of fruit fell to the floor, and I scrambled to get them

all. Everyone gasped as the lost soul was revealed. *Gala*. My best friend's little sister, and somehow . . . mine. She was only sixteen, and already a dignified hustler, I knew. This couldn't be. It couldn't . . .

“Gala! Is that my Gala?” A boy said behind me. *Norio*. He placed a hand on my shoulder, as if I was preventing him from fainting or vomiting or both.

“What happened to my sister?”

“She was stabbed in five places. You shouldn't look,” a guard replied, angling himself in front of the gruesome sight.

“Well, who stabbed her? Why was she stabbed? When was she stabbed? And please, be as blunt as you were last time!” *Norio* was about to initiate a fight he couldn't win.

“Boy, we don't know anything –” The guard began.

“*Norio*, I need some help with my spices,” I cut in. “I know you're probably busy with the lobster and shrimp and all that, but this means a lot to me.” I was ashamed to be selfish, I was ashamed to play that card. Still, Princess Alix would resort to cannibalism if we didn't provide her with a flawless meal. Especially after witnessing how much hatred one can express, I'd prefer not to be in a similar position, in spite of my constant self-loathing. *Norio* whirled to me, tears pricking his eyes like dress needles, and whispered,

“Okay.”

We spent the remainder of the afternoon plucking pitaya. Miserably silent. By the time I returned to the kitchen, it was a half hour to go. Mama had bought me a flamingo silk gown and gushed about how it brought out my eyes.

“The most gorgeous emeralds I own!” She always said. “Uncanny to the tortoise beetle.” Referred to as the goldbug – the integrity symbol – which also went extinct the year I was born. Why we continued to celebrate these creatures who leave us to rot, I don't know. Either way, I think dressing up brought out the best in Mama and me, compared to our incessant culinary disputes. And tonight, I had actually earned a

seat at the table.

Naturally, gossip slithered into the nooks and crannies of the palace, but no one was so ignorant to mention Gala's death in front of Princess Alix. I didn't even inform Mama of it. Many blamed the incident on the lack of a pangolin, how that itself is a bad omen. Others claimed it was a warning that regarded an ill reign, a plea to protest. After all, there was already misfortune in the royal family after the Emperor's murder and the Empress's subsequent suicide eighteen years ago. Everyone suspected the latter was a sorceress and took her life out of guilt for stealing her husband's. I was quite intrigued by how the palace staff burned her study to ash, and opted to donate her remaining belongings elsewhere. As if books were a sin. Unless they really were filled with witch-craft . . .

I sighed as murder conquered every conversation tonight. The world will never be as lovely as what the colorful sky suggests. I learned that today. I can't believe I had gazed upon a dead person. A dead person who was so beautiful in life, with whom I would share my spices and exchange advice when lost. None of this is fair, but I simply can't fixate on it now.

Marble bowls filled with my work surfaced around the table, and I compressed my heart, hoping it wouldn't burst as everyone's expressions seemed to fade. Typically, the Crown Empress-to-be would taste the condiments first, though the guards convinced Alix to sanction the party trying it before her.

"You did peel the lychee before mixing it with the canistel, correct?" a man clad in serpent green questioned me.

"Of course, sir. I'm not that stupid." I retorted, earning a nudge from Mama. Soon the spice was adorning everyone's mango pudding – a majority in scant amounts – prompting my disappointment. Then Gala's homicide became trivial amidst the sudden plague of coughing, paleness, and overall suffering that reflected off these golden walls. My

spoon hadn't been dug in yet, nor my mother's. The room stilled and warmed. Everyone was dead, save for me, Mama, and Alix. The guards were instantly moving the corpses out of sight . . . not out of mind, however. Never. Norio was elsewhere, I supposed, mourning Gala while fishing for tomorrow's supper. I knew I wouldn't see it.

"Dechen," Alix looked to me, utterly calm. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Your Highness, I promise you, it was sabotaged. I'm a poor merchant, why would I ruin my one chance at glory? I want to prove I'm right for the title." I paused, certain my point was reasonable, that she knew these weren't crocodile tears streaming down my cheeks. "I'm just . . . not a killer." My voice broke, and I couldn't register if it was pity or sincerity when she continued.

"I believe you. I believe you're truly competent, unlike those who can't manage to find me one damn pangolin, or stop assassins from poisoning my friends and stuffing girls into rose bushes. I know this is not your doing, but we follow tradition here, so tomorrow you *will* serve me another spice, regardless of how well you sleep. If not, I have a lovely fantasy. Is that clear?"

I nodded instantly. Despite my reservations, I was certain I was qualified for this role. Evidently, someone disagreed, and should I prove them wrong a day from now, it would avenge Gala and the nobility that succumbed to a deplorable error in judgement. Because these murders weren't a coincidence. For an ignorant middle-class girl, I could see that much. And if I failed to deliver . . . well, I hope I'll be thrown into a pleasant part of the cemetery. My stone will probably be vandalized often, though I can count on Mama to bring dahlias. I'd rather be a name on the breeze than a complete stranger . . .

The next day, I concocted a solution to the grape and melon debacle. It desired a balance, something down-to-earth

that I figured could be discovered in the Lover's Jewel pond, where succulent koi were dancing about. Their scales were divine on the tongue.

Bijouterie is tossed here when someone's treasure is sent to heaven. It's excessively romantic and derived from plain idiocy, but it blesses me with chills all the same. Norio had accompanied me, intending to contribute Gala's bronze ring that resembled a fortune cookie. As we approached, a herd of water deer were laying beneath the nearby willow.

"They're sleeping here? Don't they know it's the best day for slaughter?" I said, gathering my cornflower skirts and peering closer. Indeed, today was the Goddess of Civility's turn at festival. Unlike the pangolin, water deer are common and an elementary prize. The only feature worth selling are the pearl tusks superstitious folk wear as luck charms. Yet, of course, these lovelies weren't sleeping . . . their eyes were torn from their sockets, dry crimson tinting the grass.

"Who would kill them and leave the body?" Norio replied, stoic.

"Must've been for sport, since their tusks are still there," I insisted. "Unless their eyes jumped places on the market." With that, we shared a dagger and plied out the glory. This was exactly like the pangolin's disappearance. I was born nine months after they vanished, the only trace of them being their scales. That was the year Alix's mother was to be crowned Empress. Maybe the Goddess of Protection possessed someone who died, and pangolins proceeded to be wiped out. The Emperor himself would be a good bet. So . . . the Goddess of Civility might be dead as well. Could she have possibly . . . been inside Gala? It would make sense, as evocations can only occur during a coronation. Norio distanced himself then, allowing me to receive the impression he could hear my thoughts. His gaze addressed the ring, a fogged glow in his eyes.

"I should sell this, shouldn't I? I'd make a handsome profit."

“Witnessing it sink in the water is how you’ll get closure, Norio.”

He huffed, as if he was convinced I’d say otherwise. “You do it, then.”

A moment later, it was in my hand. The bronze cracked and I waited for the verbal beating. *Is it literally . . .*

“Norio, there’s a note inside!”

“A note? From the High Jester himself? Dechen, how can a spice girl have a sugar bowl for a brain?” He mocked brutally, not a hint of teasing.

His response startled me and I hesitated to glimpse any gesture of regret. None came. The High Jester is a myth used to frighten children into labor, for his favorite thing is bringing chaos to grand celebrations. Me, a weakling, had nightmares of him well into my teens – as did Norio. I cherished the times when we’d huddle up in the shed together peacefully, distant from the wretched world. The fact that he would joke about such a thing boiled my blood to the point where I couldn’t retaliate. I glanced back to the parchment, at the rotten silver penmanship.

Dragon fruit is your reward.

I made sure to scoop out some sugar from my mind before piecing it together. Gala must’ve bargained with someone to tamper with my spice. But who? Another spice merchant? The others acted relieved to not be thrust into the line of fire. And what was she offered in return? As I pivoted to discuss it with Norio, he had vanished. Good riddance. If I were a fool, I’d assert he had the same amber eyes as the High Jester . . . the devil was a spirit, after all, and this was a celebration . . . *But who would dare summon him?* An enemy of Alix, I imagine . . .

That night, I was enveloped in rose-gold gossamer, desperate to appear honorable. Clutching my water deer charm, I made my way to the great hall. The crowd was fickle, and discerning from their tawdry garb, they were middle-class too. At least I wouldn’t be alone, especially after Mama

deemed herself too wary to attend. She'd been so disheveled since I told her about Gala. Actually stormed out in response. It's odd since they didn't seem to know each other well. Upon my entrance, a guard advised me to mingle – something I was never good at – in order to relieve tension. When all of a sudden, Alix appeared, and brushed by me so casually it could've felt normal.

Until she venomously whispered, "Meet me in the kitchen *now*. Don't make a scene."

It was impossible to obey as I trailed her like a mouse, nearly stumbling over her midnight gown. When the curtains parted, I ultimately concluded that death and me were long-lost siblings. Every High Chef was nailed to the wall and the second spice, a rich hue akin to my dress, cocooned them. Water deer eyes were posed in their mouths – apples to pigs.

I turned to Alix, who looked as horrified as I was, even though she'd already seen it. I knew whatever response I could muster wouldn't suffice this time.

"Sweet Dechen, do you care to explain to me why again, your spice murdered my High Chefs and was painted upon them before they were hung up one by one like pathetic taxidermy?" I opened my mouth, but she wasn't done.

"I trusted you to do one thing. In the grand scheme, your role never mattered. No one cares about the damn spice! And you knew that, didn't you? You knew you were trivial, so you wanted to rebel. I actually believed you were innocent, and pardoned you against my better judgement. And you had the audacity to make me look like a fool again. Trying to imitate your father, make what he did pale in comparison –"

"Your Highness, I *am* innocent," I interrupted. "The fact that you accuse me of devising some ugly master plan when . . . I've *hated* myself forever and because of my passion, things are ruined for you and the kingdom and these poor people I didn't even know, but – but who cares, right? You're already convinced I'm guilty, so feel free to drag me away!" I held out my wrists, expecting guards galore to surround me.

Alix glanced at the offer, then my eyes.

“It’s things like that that make me know you’re not a liar.” She gave a signal, and a gray curtain masked the hideous wall.

“One more chance, Dechen. Present your dragon fruit rose whatever tomorrow on the condition that it be *you* who figures out who’s done this.” *How did she know . . .*

“Why me?” I supplied instead. *One by one . . .*

“It’ll be your gift, since I know you didn’t buy me anything.” A strange, cold grin. The kind a witch would display. Sure, her mother was rumored to be so, yet she isn’t . . . I’d be able to tell. Still, that would mean all the books weren’t destroyed. *Evocation . . . coronation . . .*

“You’re aware of many secrets, Princess.” I struggled to rid myself of doubt.

“Indeed, I am.” With that, she turned away, leaving me stunned and for once, *confident*.

The next day, everything commenced ideally. The banquets at breakfast and lunch let each guest keep their life. Norio apologized for snapping at me, chalking it up to grief. I didn’t entirely forgive him, just played it like I did. I happened to notice a mark on his uniform that was close in color to my second spice. I tried not to dwell as Mama escorted me to the market, after she hadn’t spoken to me in two days. I couldn’t endure it any longer.

“You know it wasn’t me, right? All I wanted was to make you proud —”

“Save it!” She rejoindered. “You’re just like your father. The bastard always took the easy way out, and look where it got him!” Thoughts of the man rarely crossed my mind, until last night when Alix randomly mentioned him. How did she know who he is? Before I was born, he had an affair with my mother and she’s been ashamed ever since. He was killed a few days after I was conceived, so I’m told. Around the same time pangolins evanesced . . . and the Emperor.

“If I never met him, how could I be like him? And eight years ago, you banned his name on both our lips. The point is, I spent every moment in that kitchen preparing for this. Someone really hates me, and I’m going to figure out who.”

“It’s probably that Norio. Goes on a psychotic rampage after his sister dies, wouldn’t surprise me! And that Gala, what a gold digger. She deserved what she got!”

“I think whoever killed Gala is the same person who poisoned my spices, Mama.”

That last word made her stop in her tracks. “Don’t call me that anymore. As of today, you’re a failure. And I refuse to call a failure my daughter.” She slammed the coin on the table, as if it were a parting gift. That’s right, we were shopping. She had selected a white gown for me. But seeing her storm off into the clattered streets didn’t tempt me to surrender, as such a color would suggest. Another immediately caught my eye, and it struck me as a rebirth from this death.

Father . . . Emperor . . . Protection . . . pangolins . . . Mama . . . Gala . . . Civility . . . water deer . . . Alix . . . sorceress . . . Norio . . . High Jester . . . Integrity . . . goldbug . . . Spice Maker . . .

“Announcing Queen Alix!” A crier roared against the ballroom. She entered and sat, the enormous crown threatening to sink her into the floor. The plates were stocked with Banh gan, waiting for the final touch.

“Announcing Madame Dechen, Royal Spice Maker!” This feast honored the Goddess of Integrity; and yet they inevitably couldn’t find a goldbug, I was the replacement as I strutted in with an ornate plum robe pinned to my shoulders. I was hugging a bowl of my precious dragon fruit rose spice. I hadn’t let anyone near it, hadn’t let it go for a second. And I managed to bless each guest, Norio, Alix, and Mama included, with my proudest achievement. It was all mine.

“Before we eat, I’d like to make a toast.” I proclaimed, smiling for the first time in years.

“This is truly the greatest night to be alive. Regardless of what people did or will do, I promise it will turn out alright because my spice is in your hands.”

“Someone is conceited.” Mama muttered.

“I should think so, because I figured out the puzzle. As you requested, *Empress*.”

Alix’s eyes widened. “Do enlighten me.”

“The truth of it is, you never wanted to be Empress. Which got me thinking about the High Jester, who’s known for bringing chaos to celebrations. You summoned him, did you not? To poison my spices? Thank you for that, Norio.” He stilled, and his mouth popped open.

“You despise the High Jester, Norio,” I continued. “So if he weren’t bound to you on Alix’s behalf, you never would’ve mentioned him. It was you who killed the High Chefs, under her command. It fits because spirits can only be summoned amidst a coronation.”

“Idiot girl, you’re making things worse!” Mama sneered.

“And *you*, the other woman, who had promised to never talk of Father after I turned ten, tries to guilt me when it was you who made a separate deal with Gala to acquire poison from the dragon fruit roses. No wonder it was never used in spices before, and you made sure I was oblivious to it when you gave me all that *specific* research. Gala realized this, and you killed her. You wanted to sabotage my spices and kill Alix because she’s Father’s, *the Emperor’s*, firstborn!”

“Enough! None of what you say is true!” Alix belittled.

“Then how come pangolins vanished? Because years ago, the Goddess of Protection possessed our father and died with him when your mother murdered him. How come every water deer in the land turned up dead after Gala’s death? Because the Goddess of Civility possessed her for your coronation, and died too! And *you*, Alix, shouldn’t know that the High Chefs were nailed up one by one if you didn’t witness

Norio doing it. You three are frauds!"

The trio stared at each other, darkness stained on their skin evermore. The crowd was a statue garden. My mother spoke first, salt coating every syllable.

"I didn't know Gala was possessed by Civility when I stabbed her. She . . . demanded too much. The only thing I knew for sure was that I wanted all of you girls out of my life."

But Alix wouldn't give in yet. "You accuse me of plotting with the High Jester, a folktale? How could I possibly have a means of doing this, Dechen?"

I beamed. "Because your mother was indeed a sorceress, and *she* killed our father. And before she killed herself and all her books were burned, you kept the spell on evocation. You also knew that my mother killed Gala, and you wanted me to tell of it. Any more questions?"

"Where did the Goddess of Integrity go?" Norio snapped under his breath.

"She lives in me." My uncanny emerald eyes were the key to that mystery. In stories, Integrity and Jester were enemies, which explained Norio's newfound hostility toward me.

"Well, I don't know what you expected, Dechen." Alix drawled. "I'm Empress now, you can't do anything to me. I suppose you could, though. See, a little fact you missed is that I was always planning to eat your spices. For the greater good, I spared my people from lamentation."

"Fascinating," I quipped. "I would kill everyone too if I were in your position. Shall we toast to that?" Then and there, glasses were raised, and sips were taken. Happily ever after . . .

... Once upon a time, a kingdom drank one-of-a-kind wine at a party. The Goddess of Integrity and High Jester were freed from their prisons and never returned. Young Empress Alix was killed. By logic, the creator of the drink was immune to the poison. Thus, Dechen, the former Royal Spice Maker, settled onto the throne. She had no army, no subjects,

merely the pitaya bloom hedge she cherished dearly. The reason for her contentment. The reason she was Empress of the most powerful land in the world: Dragon Fruit Rose Isle. Happily ever after . . .

Glossary

Dragon fruit/pitaya: red and lime-colored fruit that resembles a cactus

Witch finger grape: maroon-colored fruit that resembles chili peppers

Horned melon: orange-colored fruit with spiky skin

Ice cream bean: white-colored legumes that taste like vanilla ice cream

Soursop: green-colored fruit with prickly skin

Canistel: yellow-colored fruit that tastes like egg yolk

Lychee: red and gold-colored fruit that resembles reptilian scales

Pangolin: scaly mammal that resembles an anteater

Chinese water deer: mammal characterized for its white fangs

Tortoise beetle/goldbug: insect with a solid gold shell

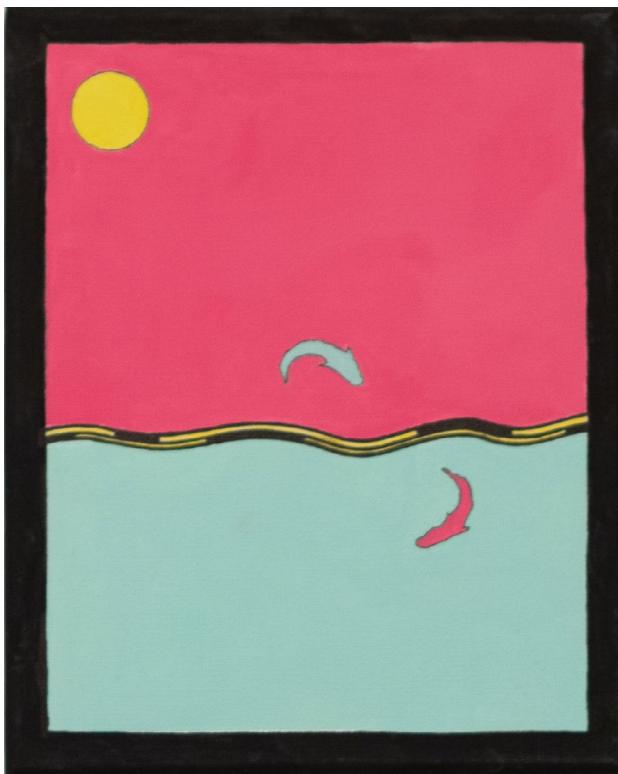
Banh gan: flan-like dessert that tastes like coconut and caramel

Disclaimer: None of these terms are fictional.

POETRY BY ANDRIANA BOZICA TRAJCEVSKI
SCYTHE

The slicing sound of my grandmother's scythe
sawing the blades of grass below her in half
cicadas swearing at each other from tree to tree
the sharp sickle staring at me from the side
but she didn't trust me enough to use it
baba had me sitting uselessly under the hazelnut tree
it's dark and strong branches caressing me in cover
shielding me from the sun's summer rays
my sun dress soaked in my skin's tears
a lingering sour taste in my mouth from the wild blueberry bush
sheep getting scythed to the neck heard from a distance
shabby barefoot children snickering around the fields
searching silently for a spot to secretly light a cigarette
grandparents reading sad Slavic folks to their grandchildren
I was the happiest girl in the Balkans

ARTWORK BY SAM ALEKS
SYNCHRONICITY



*8x10 inches
acrylic paint on cotton duck canvas*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TYLER ROBERT SHELDON

TRANQUILITY



Digital Photography
2024

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FUTURE FOCUS PHOTOGRAPHY
I.M.D.



Tulsa Club Hotel, Oklahoma
@future_focus_photography

ARTWORK BY LINDS SANDERS
LISTEN



Watercolor, Acrylic, and Graphite

POETRY BY SCOTT LAUDATI
JUST 300 MILES TO SALINAS

Those men under the piers they spit silica
but it never comes out as easy as it went in.
The dust hides little anchors
and even after the job is done they hang around
like Christmas ornaments still up in July.
Some things decay much faster than others.
Nothing is uglier than the path to Salina.
I tried to skip the middle chapters
but the compass only points one direction.
Were those years on the docks worth the cold?
The ice water getting between my gloves and sleeves?
Eating pills to stave off the pain.
Praying for a low tide so I wouldn't drown
if I fell off the barge.
And now my father won't talk to me.
The beginning and end mean nothing to him.
The pain of the middle is the glory.
Damian punches my arm and I ask how far we are from Salina.
Just 300 miles.
I've seen the country now and I've forgotten most of it,
but not that landscape between us and Salina.
The American Sahara.
The space where all things found the middle
and civilization rolled back.
A place no one has ever missed.
I can think so
clearly when there's no one listening.
I even remember how unawed the antelope looked
kneeling under the mothership's beam.
Once upon a time all land looked like this land
and it won't be long now before it all does again.

POETRY BY CARISSA MADDOX

UNTITLED DESTRUCTION #Six6Six

I will carve
these sigils in the soft
spot on my wrists
to summon the depths
of the abyss forward
to ask for release
from a control I never had,
from the level of Hell
Dante never spoke of.

I will let it consume
every inch of me
as the flesh falls from
my bones into the flames
at my feet.

This will tear me apart

I have no choice
but to let it gather
my dust and reassemble
someone I will not recognize
while a sewn smile
smothers my sadness
and laughs as my tears
evaporate
before reaching my chin.

*I am the monster
I never wanted to become*

Will you love me now
that my organs are packed
in the jars of those long gone?
Will you love me
more than I hate myself,
more than the sum
of the claw marks etched
on my heart,
more than the intrusive thoughts
that gain momentum
with each crash into my throat?

Or am I too far damned?

FICITION BY MATT GULLEY

CONSTITUTION OF THE BED

Section I: Congress

All love-making to fall under the jurisdiction of the bed recognizes that it shouldn't get too messy, that's what the couch is for.

Section II: Powers and Duties

Partner shall not impose on other partner's ability to do silly voices, or "bits" as they are defined in the general vernacular.

Section II, Article 1

Partner doing bits must concede and cease doing silly voices if other partner concedes it is quote "pretty funny."

Section II, Article 2

Partner will honor other partner's request to get something from the kitchen, in good faith, until such a time as 'lights out' or 'sleepyville' has been declared.

Section III: Taxation

Making of the bed shall be done in concert between two parties, unless one party declares that it is actually fine, and it's going to get unmade anyways, as this is a "very good point, universally understood."

Section IV: Cats

The supreme power of eminent domain is vested in the two cats, who are old but still spry, to occupy any portion of the bed not occupied by either partner, and to settle that space

until such time as the muse moves them to explore other areas they've been hanging out in for years.

Section V: Miscellanea

This place is where things are come to be understood, ancient truths about love known throughout history, repeated anew in maturing souls. Any nobody knows it but you and your partner, and it is sacred, secular or not, and you often recognize these are the moments you will hold closest when that thing you dare not ponder comes, it will have mostly happened here. So do yourself a favor, and use a fabric softener!

POETRY BY JESSICA DOE
JE SUIS L'APPEL DU VIDE

Je suis l'appel du vide,
je suis,
je suis,
je suis.

When they say i
am not beautiful, never
will be, yet still
there is
something about me,
[“captiveating”], something
baiting them close,
this
is what they mean: i am
your intrusive thoughts,
the black abyss, void blinking
back, the siren
screaming to reptilian
brain. Aokigahara, lynch
mob in the inside,
Walking Sam with stovepipe hat loping
through the Badlands, oven
cries and blue whale lies,
the darkness, i am
so very voraciously hungry.

FICTION BY MARIEL NORRIS
THE WAYS ARE YOU

You're painting her Milky Way eyes, adding constellations to her irises, when the bell rings. You place your art on the shelf to dry, then wait in line at the sink to rub silver-blue from your brush. You won't have time to use the bathroom because Biology begins in just five minutes – pea plants and Punnett Squares await. Fingers cold from the sink, you hurry down the hall, eyes still on the Milky Way lady's mind, mind still on her eyes.

Your friends describe you as organized, punctual, kind. Your off-gold hair sits in a ballerina bun, no strands astray. There's never a clump in your mascara-coated lashes, never a wrinkle in your blouses. Your teachers praise your excellence. Your mom frames your report cards. Your babysitting expertise is recognized throughout the neighborhood. You know when to smile, when to help, when to stay quiet.

You like to shriek more than speak. You smell of Magic Markers, tempera paint, spilled milk gone sour. You're a princess in a satin gown, rose-colored with royal blue paint stains at the hem. You're a goblin in a tattered tunic and scraggly wig. You cry every night when your parents leave your bedroom – you hold within you a deep unease that spiraled from your parents' genes into your earliest cells.

Your parents' own genetic malaise builds distance between them. Once the papers are signed, they each take a coast, and you take the plane. You see clouds, stars, simple white skies, raging black nights. Your hair is green, like that of a mermaid stuck in seaweed too long. You sleep with boys on both coasts, and when kissing one, he rips his tongue on

your tongue-ring. Dad starts his drinks before lunch. Mom spends her time buying shoes online – when you open her closet, it's an avalanche.

The sound of rain makes you want to cry. When the trickles and taps begin, you put on headphones and listen to heavy shouts and drums. Always nice, you soothe your friends after breakups, bad grades, family feuds. But you don't need to be soothed. With your bedside lamp on all night and sound in your ears, your cheeks stay dry.

You're one of those office-workers with tip-tapping heels and pencil skirts and never-ending to-do lists and crimson lipstick in your purse and phone calls and emails and Powerpoint meetings all at once. Your evening bath is the jewel of your existence.

You're an artist who hates offices and the confines of a cubicle. You paint women who live in other planes, untied to money or men or marriage. Some are on different planets, where they're never wary, never sedentary, always drifting, sifting, exploring . . . sometimes roaring. Your latest is a woman with a golden lion's mane that shoots from her head in all directions and trails behind her when she runs.

When you wake up in your loft, your hair is a frizzy mane, yet to be tamed. Your flannel pajamas are worn and torn. Crumpled sheets have creased your cheeks. You almost always sleep alone.

You've dated endlessly: spritely guys, sturdy boys, fitness freaks, thieves, chemists, drug-dealers, lawyers-to-be, womanizers, women, sensitive geeks, fellow artists, Wall Street lobbyists, boys who pull your hair at recess, guys who ghost you, guys who seduce you only to use you, girls who mock you, men who long to read your mind and drink your

soul, men who want to have you whole, boys who break you.

You've always been on your own and totally alone, ever since you were young. No one has seen you yet or known what you meant when you said what was maybe on your mind – it might have been unimportant anyway. Your body is a thick container, impenetrable as iron. You work out daily to Beethoven's 9th and disappear from yourself in all the motion, all the sound. Even you might not know you, or so it seems.

You date. You break up. You remain friends. You never speak again. You go out dancing 'til 5. You stay inside all night and don't cry. You spend the night baking a carrot-ginger cake for your ex-girlfriend's birthday the next day – she's now your best friend. The final product is impeccable, with immaculately frosted carrots along the edges. In a sudden fury, you slice it in half with your sharpest knife and scarf both halves down. Still hungry, you eat a whole bag of raw carrots, unpeeled. You write a poem about minerals and sugars forming juices within you. Displeased, you crumple it up, try to toss it in the trash can, and miss. A carroty sun now creeps over the horizon.

You sing hymns in the shower, soak silently in the tub, swim laps at the gym for a week, lapse back into vegetative habits. You're young and fun – you picnic in the park with friends, read zombie graphic novels. There's always paint beneath your fingernails and on your pants. A parakeet lives on your nightstand, and you warble each other to sleep every evening. You're too lazy to change the smoke detector batteries, and the parakeet thinks the chirps come from a bird like her.

You're not young and fun – you have a big job, you do your taxes on time, you're always tired, always cold. You

have creaky knees and lots of allergies. Many things make you sneeze: seaweed, goats, lemons, and bumblebees.

You're in the breeze, wearing just a skirt, no shirt, plucking green grapes from the bush beneath the porch. You're happy, if this is what happiness means. Daddy gets up, pushes his chair out from the porch table, stuffs his rustling newspaper beneath his arm, clanks his cup onto his plate, and pulls open the screen door to find Mommy doing yoga in the living room. With your little bare feet, you run up the porch stairs, over the wooden planks, and into the living room, where your parents are intertwined in an elaborate yoga pose. You toss your grapes all over their interlaced legs and then leap on top.

You're there when Dad dies. No one can outlive their liver. Before his final sigh, his cracked-skin hands grip yours with surprising strength. Everything is plastic and gray in the hospital room. You wish candlelight could replace fluorescence – the flickers and glow of a fire would bring him back to life. He used to light a lavender candle beside your bed, which danced while he read you tales of goblins and gnomes. Lavender helped deepen sleep, he said. When you went to bed, you smelled the lavender of the extinguished candle and the cotton of your quilt pulled up to your chin and the slight saltiness of Dad's post-woodshop skin as he shared your pillow and read to you. You don't know when to call Mom – will she even be sad? Your tears are lodged in your chest, and when you head outside, into the rainy night, you're relieved to feel cool drops down your cheeks.

You paint fake scars or werewolf fur or poisonous leaves on your cheeks and wear black lipstick and false lashes and run through fields and scream or sing because no one knows who you are; and when it's time for dinner, Mom hollers at you, and you eat chicken tenders and powdered mashed

potatoes and tell her how classes were that day. Just a few days ago, you were on the west coast, visiting Dad, but she doesn't ask about that. Your phone vibrates during dinner – it's him, but you can't answer it in front of Mom, so you toss it onto the rug.

You never speak up in class, but you do all the work and write well, so you manage to get good grades nonetheless. Written words don't come out sounding tremulous or unassured, and you have time to delete them and mend a broken thought. The spoken word is for those who never look back. You constantly clench and tense because you never know when the teacher will put you on the spot.

When your boyfriend proposes, you can't speak, so you give him a long hug and inhale his neck: his typical smell of light sweat and sweet cologne. You stay that way, burrowed, for a while, knowing you'll never smell him or hold him again.

You iron every day but can't iron out your face, which holds your age in every crease. As your life ahead gets shorter, your days feel longer, especially when you spend them at home, but you never feel alone. You still have clothes from long ago – silky robes and splattered T-shirts – and you keep them around despite the holes. You reread your teenage diaries and hang your middle-aged paintings on the wall – having all of your selves around keeps you whole.

Your latest painting is of your grandchild. She looks a lot like you: a round cherub foraging for grapes in the late August breeze, bright green grass stains on her knees.

POETRY BY LEEOR MARGALIT

THE LAST BUS IS FOR LOVERS

The last bus is for lovers – for those who almost stayed the night.
For those who saw the fourth to last bus, and then the third to last,
and still decided to stay. The second to last bus came and went
and now, if I miss the last one I'll be in trouble.
But your kisses are worth the risk.
I look at the taxi app, see the approximate sum,
check my bank balance and sigh.
Such young lovers in such a big city;
we have no use for cars – except for now.
(We have no money for cars – including now).
You want me to stay but I work early on the other side of town.
One more kiss before you walk me to that bus stop
before you see me disappear on the bus,
the last bus, which is for lovers.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BI PICKARD
SALVATION



Photography

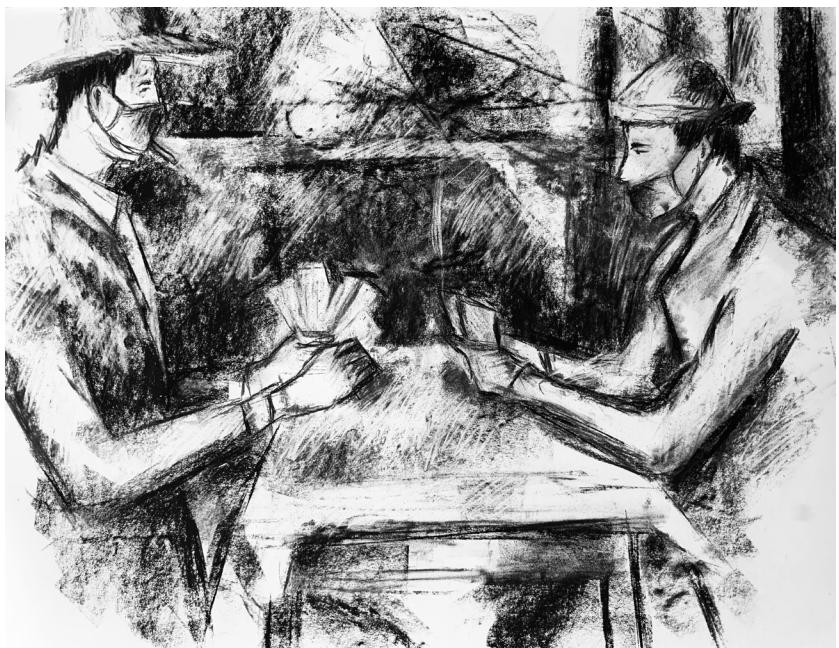
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ARTWORK BY DONALD PATTEN
COVID ANXIETY



ARTWORK BY DONALD PATTEN
THE COVID CARD PLAYERS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BI PICKARD
HER



Photography

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Tobi Abiodun

I am Tobi Abiodun, a Nigerian writer born and raised in Benin City. A multiple poetry slam champion holding titles across major cities in the country, my writing cuts across family, God and Nigerian politics. My poems have appeared in *Animal Press*, *Feral Poetry*, *Komorebi Magazine*, *Malimbe Africa*, *Nymphs and Thugs*, and *Nantygreens*.

Sam Aleks

Sam Aleks (Samvel Aleksanyan) is an Armenian-born, American artist/writer living in Los Angeles. His art has been featured in *Canyon Voices Winter 2018* and *RAR Summer 2019*, and has been displayed in the Northridge Annual Student Art Exhibit, Spring 2014, and in the NOVA Gallery, Fall 2014.

Myles Allen

Myles Allen is an English grad from the University of New Haven. They write free-verse and prose poetry centered around their experiences as a trans & queer poet, drawing inspiration from romantic form and experimental movements.

Jonathan Borthwick

Jonathan Borthwick is a self-taught cartoonist based in Houston, Texas. Originally from the UK, his drawings explore the political and social landscape of the United States over the past several years.

Denver Boxleitner

Denver Boxleitner is a college freshman whose poetry has been published globally.

Moranda Bromberg

Moranda Bromberg is a poet and entrepreneur. She graduated from Eugene Lang College of the Arts. Her poetry aims to connect people back to their inner voice, rediscover their connection to earth, and herald healing through immersion in nature. In short she wants her work to say simply this: "I am. I am. I am." Her work

has been previously published in *Allegory Ridge*, *Eleven and a Half Journal*, and *Chautauqua Literary Journal*. She currently resides in Napanoch, New York with her husband and two dogs.

Noah Brown

Noah Brown recently graduated from Florida State University with their bachelor's in Creative Writing. They focus on poetry, specifically narrative poetry.

Charlotte Burnett

Charlotte Burnett is dyslexic and high-functioning autistic. She lives in Scotland, and has had short stories published in literary journals such as *The Write Launch* and *Coffin Bell*. She also has a Bachelor's in Science from the Open University, focusing on Psychology and Sociology.

Vivian Calderon

Vivian Calderón is a Colombian Native. She holds a Bachelor's in Anthropology with a minor in History and a postgraduate degree in Journalism. She has studied art in Florence, Italy, and Fine Arts & Design in the USA. Recently, she was in Spain painting and having art exhibitions, and today she is in Colombia exploring her art.

Mia Cancio

I am an undergraduate student studying Biology at UCR with a minor in Creative Writing and an emphasis on poetry. My writing gravitates towards themes of romance, grief, time, and divinity. My work captures the most complicated moments I have experienced. I hope I am able to create a universal experience wherein the reader may find solace in the chaos and grief we share – a friend watching deeply personal events unfold from a third person perspective.

C.G. Dahlin

C.G. Dahlin began his literary career by becoming the first designated Poet Laureate of the University of Wisconsin – Stout's Honors College. Upon moving to Central Washington, Dahlin became a regularly ticketed performance artist and publisher of local emerging writers. In Spokane, he completed his MFA in Creative Writing through Eastern Washington University and became the Director

of the community-program *Writers in the Community*.

Jairo Dealba

Jairo Dealba believes their art is as original as it gets, and has sold as a guest artist in the Local Colors of Utah gallery in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Saint Desmonde

Saint Desmonde is a student at the University of Pennsylvania studying Political science and English. They enjoy writing, reading, and singing in their spare time.

Jessica Doe

I am a multi-award-winning poet and author of the just-released “*Selected Poems: 2000 - 2020*,” the winner of the Birdy Prize from Meadowlark Books. As a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, space, place, and ancestry in post-colonial “America” informs much of my work. You can learn more at www.thischerokeerose.com.

Mihriban Nurefsan Fidan

Mihriban is just a girl hailing from a country you’ve likely only associated with the city of ‘Istanbul.’ She passionately believes in the power of writing, seeing it as a meaningful endeavor that holds significance in the grand scheme of things. This unique blend of a young girl’s fears and dreams of descending like a waterfall in a single moment makes her feel truly alive. It fuels her desire to engage in conversations about matters that may hold importance for someone.

Future Focus Photography

Natalie Pardue is a Oklahoma-based photographer at Future Focus Photography, which create imaginative and experimental sci-fi digital art using robots. The goal for this project is to show everyday scenarios where robots replace humans. You can find more about the project @future_focus_photography.

John Grey

John Grey is an Australian poet and current U.S. resident, recently published in Sheepshead Review, Stand, Poetry Salzburg Review and Hollins Critic. John’s latest books – *Leaves On Pages, Memory*

Outside The Head, and *Guest Of Myself* – are available through Amazon.

Matt Gulley

Matt Gulley is thirty-four years old. He attended Wayne State University in Detroit and the MFA program at Long Island University in Brooklyn. He currently resides in Brooklyn with his girlfriend, Jenna, and tries to write a little bit every day.

Bruce Gunther

Bruce Gunther is a former journalist and writer who lives in Michigan. He's a graduate of Central Michigan University. His poetry has appeared in the *Comstock Review*, *Arc Magazine*, *Dunes Review*, *Modern Haiku*, and others.

J Kramer Hare

J Kramer Hare is a native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he lives and writes. When not reading or writing he enjoys rock climbing and listening to jazz. His work has appeared in *Uppagus*, *the Ulu Review*, *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Untenured*, and *Quibble Lit*. He can be found at kramerpoetry.com

Kenneth M. Kapp

Kenneth M. Kapp was a Professor of Mathematics, a ceramicist, a welder, an IBMer, and yoga teacher. He lives with his wife in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, writing late at night in his man-cave. He enjoys chamber music and mysteries. He was a homebrewer for more than 50 years and runs whitewater rivers on the foam that's left. Please visit www.kmkbooks.com.

Rachel Kiskaddon

Rachel Kiskaddon is an emerging artist and poet who lives and works in Philadelphia. Her work is currently featured in anthologies by *Moonstone Arts Center* and *Poet's Choice*. She shares her work regularly on her blog *Lines of Lavender*. Rachel's writing focuses on relationships, mental health, injustice, and women's experiences. To learn more visit www.lineosflavender.com

Andrew Lafleche

Visit www.AndrewLafleche.com or follow @AndrewLafleche on Twitter for more information.

Scott Laudati

Scott Laudati lives in NYC with his beta fish, Tom Thumb. He is the author of *Play The Devil* and *Camp Winapooka*. Visit him anywhere @ScottLaudati

Carissa Maddox

Carissa Maddox loves going to old bookstores and bringing home as many books as she can, as if they were rescue puppies. She spends her time teaching, reading, writing, and taking on new craft projects... even if she hasn't finished the previous one. Her poems appeared on the October 4, 2022 episode of the *Viewless Wings Poetry Podcast*.

Maureen Mancini Amaturo

Maureen Mancini Amaturo, NY based fashion/beauty writer, has a Creative Writing MFA, teaches writing, leads *Sound Shore Writers Group*, which she founded in 2007, and produces literary events. Her fiction, non-fiction, essays, poetry, and comedy are widely published in print, on line, in anthologies, podcasts, and magazines. Maureen is a 2020 Bram Stoker Award and TDS Fiction Award nominee. A handwriting analyst diagnosed her with an overdeveloped imagination. She's working to live up to that.

Mila Rae Mancuso

Mila Rae is a Boston-based writer and multi-disciplinary artist. Her work has been featured in *Hobart Pulp*, *Inferno*, and *The Messy Heads*. She is inspired by the study of dreams, people, insects, and visual languages of the past. Her favorite writer is Patti Smith. Mila Rae thrives on translating the make-believe into something tangible, whether kind or macabre.

Leeor Margalit

Leeor's work has recently appeared in *The Suterville Review* and *Rigorous Magazine*, among other publications. You can find my work on instagram @leeormargalitpoems.

Mord McGhee

Mord McGhee writes out of the American South. His novels ‘*The Seven Children of God*’ and ‘*Ironblood*’ are 2022 Claymore Award Finalists. Recent issues of *Quibble Journal* and *Big Bend Literary Magazine* contain McGhee’s short fiction. Mordmcghee.com for more!

Danica S. Miller

Danica S. Miller, also known as “The Vagina” or “The Social Shit Starter,” is an author who writes to promote social justice. They focus on race, gender, and class issues to inspire action towards fairness and raise awareness of important social issues.

Kelly Nickie

Kelly Nickie has been published in the *Resistance anthology* by Sue Goyette, *Pure Slush*, *Door = Jar*, and in the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

Mariel Norris

Mariel Norris is a Boston-based writer. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Copihue*, *Current Affairs*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Treehouse Arts*, *Zetetic Record*, and *Waif*, among other publications, and she is featured in the documentary about Federico García Lorca: *Lunas de Nueva York*. Read her writing at marielnorris.com.

Ina Pal

A Dutch-Hungarian multimedia artist and graduate of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Palosi’s writings about art have been published online, but their fiction and poetry haven’t yet been put before an audience. As a contemporary artist, all Karina’s creative efforts go into the daily life with my her small children, their Italian quantum physicist father, and two cats. In the time that she manages to salvage for herself, she watches the world disintegrate, change or repeat itself, and she weaves stories.

Donald Patten

Donald Patten is an artist and cartoonist from Belfast, Maine. He produces oil paintings, illustrations, ceramic pieces and graphic novels. His art has been exhibited in galleries across Maine. His online portfolio is donaldlpatten.newgrounds.com/art

Bi Pickard

Bi Pickard is a New York native photographer currently working out of Cleveland, Ohio and traveling. Specializing in analog works, working with musicians, and an extended project titled 'Postcards Home'.

Emily Rankin

Emily Rankin was born in California and attended university in Texas, where she received a BFA in 2011. Her body of work deals with the tangles of human emotion and understanding, the intuitive messages of dreaming and subconscious exploration.

Dominique Rispoli

Dominique Rispoli is a 25-year-old writer from Wilmington, Delaware. She recently self-published her second book of poetry called *Burn This Altar*.

Linds Sanders

Linds Sanders is a multidisciplinary artist whose poetry burrows in publications like *decomp*, *Plainsons*, and *Scapegoat Review* and artwork fills galleries. At the end of the day, all her work comes home to rest at LindsSanders.com & on Instagram @resounding_bell.

Tyler Robert Sheldon

Tyler Robert Sheldon's newest book is *Everything is Ghosts* (Finishing Line, September 2024). He edits at *MockingHeart Review* and *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Pop Culture and Pedagogy*, and his work has can be found in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Pleiades*, and other places. A winner of the Charles E. Walton Essay Award, Sheldon earned his MFA at McNeese State University. He lives in Baton Rouge.

Tomislav Silipetar

In 2014, Tomislav graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb in the class of Igor Rončević—Painting Department. In 2015, he became a member of HDLU. In addition to many group exhibitions, he has had solo exhibitions in Croatia as well as in other countries. He was the winner of the Rector's Award for Excellence in 2013. Tomislav's paintings are mostly made in acrylic, and the

themes vary from solitude and isolation to the very existence of humanity in a society that condemns.

Schuyler Simonton

A long time story teller, Schuyler has kept many worlds and characters in his head. It was about time he rectified that. Raised both in and out of the house, you can find him outside of his daily work as a career counselor taking long hikes and walks into the wilderness, or diving just as deep into a fictional video game world. If asked, he would say that he is not allergic to anything “that he is aware of.” But his dad is allergic to tigers, so better to be careful.

Mark T. Smith

Mark T Smith’s work embraces the classic skills of drawing and painting with the balance of a modern mindset - an experiential exploration of the human drama, from the personal right through to the archetypal. The tactile experience of making beautiful expressions in the traditional forms of drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpture is his primary interest. Artwork has a primary function, and must once more be connected to and integrated into our daily lives in a meaningful way.

Tom Stevens

Tom Stevens writes short fiction, poetry, nonfiction articles and essays (mostly environmental) at miragesofleavesinspring.blogspot.com. He is based in the West Country, UK, and works as a gardener.

Kat Stubing

Kat Stubing was born into the sticky heat of summer and has been searching for the right words ever since. Her poems have been published in *Beyond Words*, *Hare's Paw*, and *The Closed Eye Open*. Kat lives and works in New York City.

JW Summerisle

JW Summerisle has had their work in Leicester Museum’s Gallery, & the Haunted Antiques Paranormal Research Centre. They sell work at jwsummerisle.etsy.com

Aine Thompson

My name is Aine Thompson and I'm from a town in North Carolina called Fuquay-Varina. I am a nonbinary, bisexual, disabled, sexual assault survivor who writes about my life and therefore my trauma. I grew up very poor and that experience influences my art and poetry now. I try to find inventive ways to write about pain and sorrow, focusing on creating a gripping narrative in everything I write. I have been previously published in *The Raw Art Review*.

Andriana Bozica Trajcevski

No biography provided . . .

Elizabeth Wing

Elizabeth Wing is a writer unsuccessfully trying to kick a photography habit. “Blud Rites” is an ongoing collection of forgotten rituals. The subjects photographed are myself and my friends, and the process emerges from conversations about hard-to-explain desires: shapeshifting, catharsis, oceanic feelings.

Ian Woollen

Recent short fiction at *Front Porch Review*, *Failbetter*, and *Blue Lake Review*. A new novel, *SISTER CITY*, is out from Coffeetown Press. Currently cutting firewood in Bloomington, Indiana.

Kuo Zhang

Kuo Zhang is a faculty member at the University of Vermont. Her poem, “One Child Policy,” was awarded second place in the 2012 Society for Humanistic Anthropology [SHA] Poetry Competition. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *Gyroscope Review*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *The Roadrunner Review*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Bone Bouquet*, *K'in*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Rigorous*, *Adanna Literary Journal*, *Raising Mothers*, and *MUTHA Magazine*.

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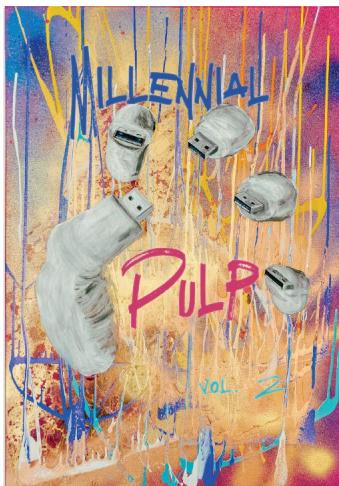
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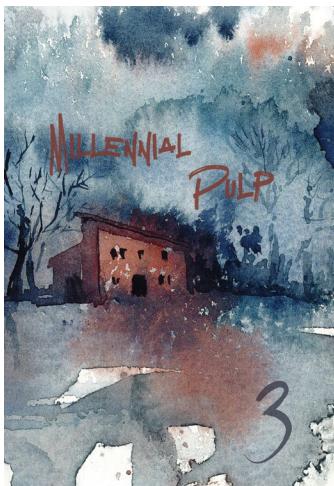
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