

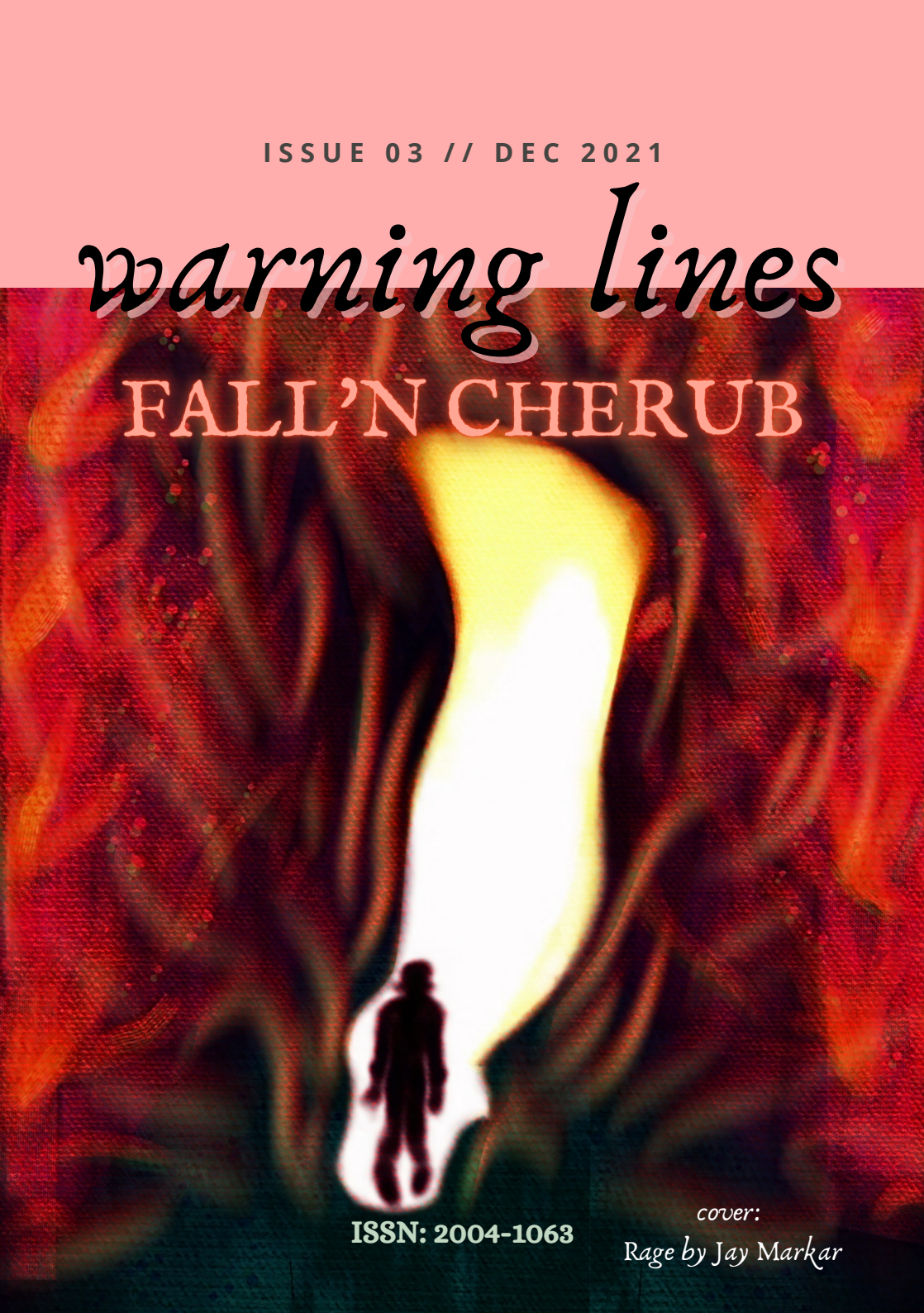
ISSUE 03 // DEC 2021

warning lines

FALL'N CHERUB

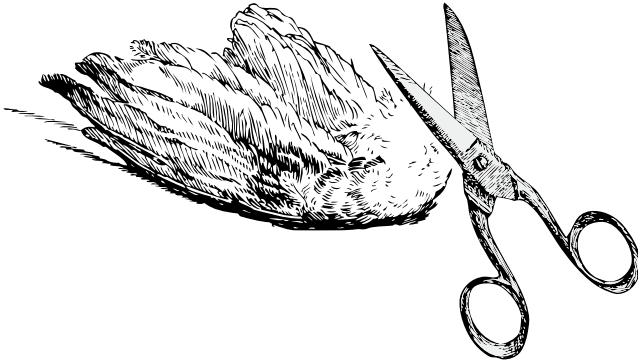
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Issue 03

FALL'N CHERUB





warning lines

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EDITOR'S NOTE

*"To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."*

*Satan, Paradise Lost,
Book I, Lines 262-263*

Dear fallen angels,

It is with sinful pride and a hint of Dionysian terror that I present to you this third issue of *warning lines*. Born from a stubborn spark, from the fires of Hell's own lake and the rebellion of its fallen hero—*Fall'n Cherub* is a shard of Chaos itself. With 59 pieces from 49 different contributors, this issue revels in the act of falling and the subversion this implies.

I cannot properly express how amazed I am at all the incredible work that was submitted for this issue— and this applies both to the pieces that were selected for publication as well as the ones that were not! Formless monsters, sublime fallings, radiant colors— these creators have drawn the anatomy of Hell upon these pages.

Now, go forth into the land of Chaos & Old Night— but know that there is no coming back once you've fallen.

Yours,



CHARLIE D'ANIELLO
FOUNDER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

RAGE

JAY MARKAR



ANGELS

PERRY GASTEIGER



What penance is to be paid
for paradise found in passionate throes?
proudly adorned with crowns of thorns,
defiant souls bear their crosses together
 holding splintered hands,
stumbling blindly with blood soaked eyes,
clinging to one another in the strange world.

What vengeance is exacted
when warm lips trace soft downed skin?
crying to heaven with tongues of fire,
from the rubble we rise once again,
 borne on flames, licking us clean
of the filth they threw in our faces,
cleansed in our brimstone baptism,
robes of soot cloak our trembling bodies.

What sin could bring laughter
to Heaven's lips?
Love knows no God,
free from church cells and prison pews,
our Love shines with a light
 beyond fathers and sons,
for the stars gaze down on two angels
clad in sticky white cotton,
 and the universe sings
for an honest moment in Eden.



BE FOREVER FALLING

CLEM FLOWERS

Sugarcane bliss in your hand
all I remember was the red
when we fell

we were promised
pearly gates
and eternal bliss
all we ever wanted
a whisper away

save
for the love
we felt
from the moment
our eyes
and hearts
locked

but how
could we hope
to explain away
fevered lavender
blossoming
in our throats
over a sea
of sleepless nights

under the cover of darkness
and thick juniper trees-
warnings ringing thru our skulls
of the heat and
damnation
awaiting us
as the prizes

for our transgressions-

we caved
desire overwhelmed our every nerve

like a drop of honey
on a dying tongue

and the ground
fell away
in that instant

just like the
first moment
we saw
one another

it was terror
it was dread
it was panic
it was fear

Fire fell
from our fingers

we burned it
all
on our way down

sugarcane bliss in your hand
all I remember was the red
when we fell
and how your lips tasted
even sweeter
as the inferno
brought its children
home

LIKE HELL, YOU ARE

ANNA ARDEN

i.

you remind me of someone i used to know

i say with a nervous smile
flitting over my face
 [fragile thing]
heat flush and paper skin
of an angel
 [to be marked]

darling, what's your name

ii.

i should introduce this
impressionable form as
the wannabe victim of striking stars or
the martyr with the faraway eyes or
the ever too enchanted

or maybe i should just
keep smiling as i shake
and shake your hand

[and i swear i feel
recognition in your fingers
old flames of ash
and ember palms]

[i swear i feel
a million
memories]

iii.

give me that
spell-caster smile
 [my familiar]
 [my favorite]

walk to the center of the space
and demand attention
talk circles
 [around] [over] [underneath me]

god i love it when they take to a room
 [ravenous]

when unmonitored passion ricochets
steel bullets through book spines
 [stories for wild creatures
 and the prey stuck in their teeth]

iv.

[forgive me if this is
sudden

but you kinda look like
at any given moment you could

fizzle out

and i'm kinda into it]

v.

now i think i remember

[where i've seen you]
[what my name is]

you always have a face
that stands out in a crowd
a loud voice
and a wicked mouth

charisma
a cataclysmic sense
of being

and you're always
an almost

undoubtedly
unattainable

yet i reach:
play repair boy
like i always do

[i can fix them]
[i can make them worse]

vi.

you remind me of someone i used to know

i say as i damn myself yet

again

can i watch you burn



WHOSE FAULT? WHOSE BUT HIS OWN?

WHOSE FAULT WHOSE FAULT BUT HIS OWN

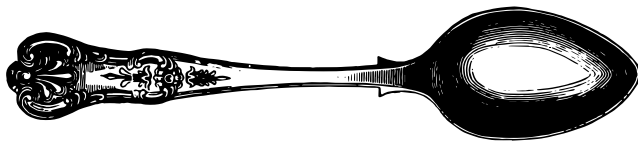
B.A. O'CONNELL

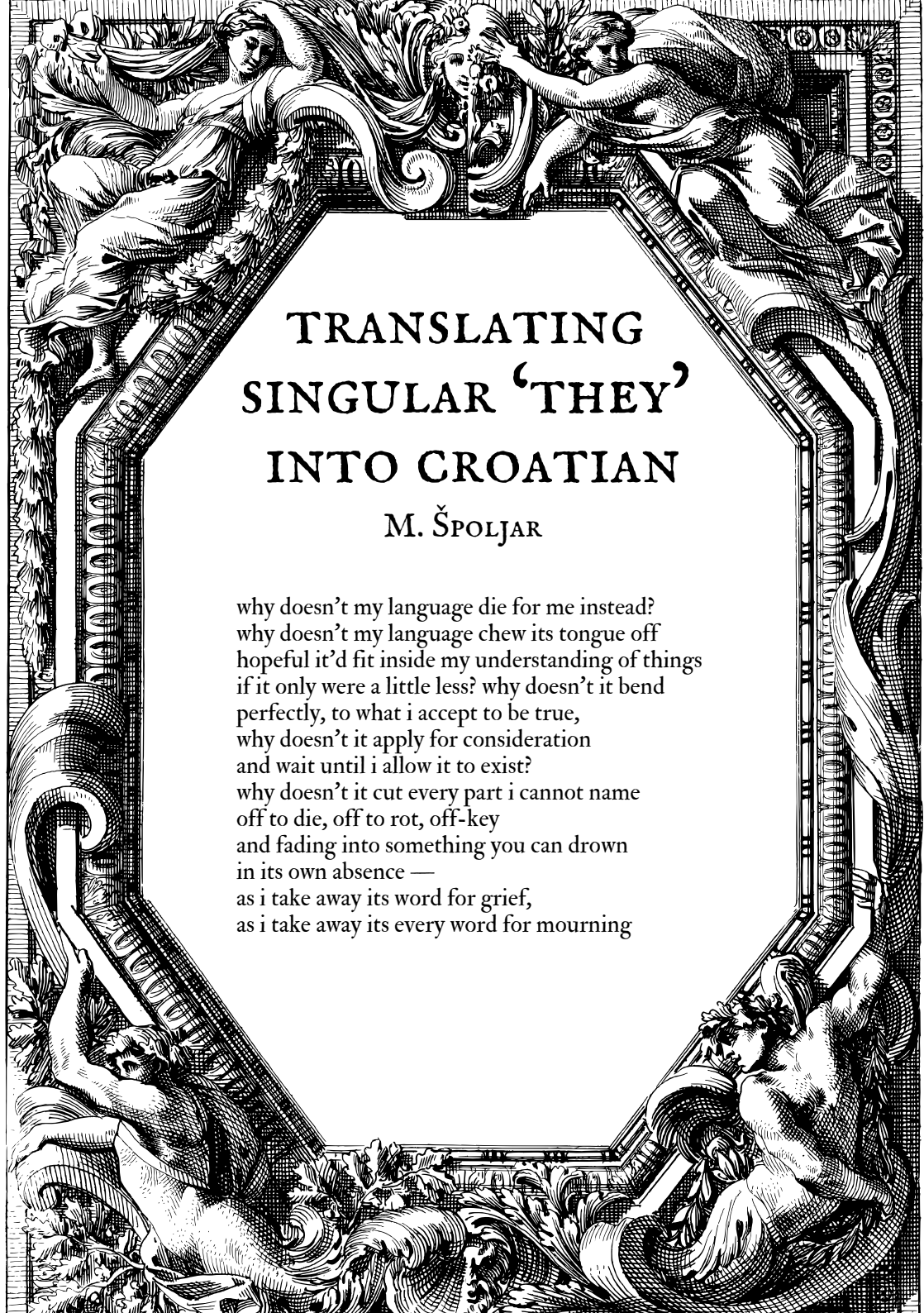
YOU WANTED TO SIT IN THE SUN

M. ŠPOLJAR

of the coffee shop terrace. you burst into tears
in everyone's view, then ask if i am gay and all
i can think about is that story you made me
read when i was ten. the lady asks to be buried
in it, with a little spoon in her hands. she says,
the spoon always told her there'd be dessert,
says, the spoon tells us that six feet under
she is finally ready to taste it.

i want to bring it up, now, say
i eat dessert first most days. say
i kissed so many lips, all sweeter
than anything you could have promised
say, if there is a heaven
i will turn peter down before he gets me,
say, thank you for the offer, but i am full
say, i have no palate for fasting.
i plan to taste with the body i am given
i plan to taste this body, now —
say, bury me with a smile on my face,
saying not an inch of me went wasted.





TRANSLATING
SINGULAR ‘THEY’
INTO CROATIAN

M. ŠPOLJAR

why doesn't my language die for me instead?
why doesn't my language chew its tongue off
hopeful it'd fit inside my understanding of things
if it only were a little less? why doesn't it bend
perfectly, to what i accept to be true,
why doesn't it apply for consideration
and wait until i allow it to exist?

why doesn't it cut every part i cannot name
off to die, off to rot, off-key
and fading into something you can drown
in its own absence —

as i take away its word for grief,
as i take away its every word for mourning

2020

HUDSON HESS

When I was small, four or five maybe, I crawled into bed with my mother, already asleep. The lights were on all through the house, but the attic, one of those open kinds, like a loft but less inviting, loomed empty and dark. From the bed, I could stare into it if I wanted. It was a creepy, miserable little space I'd sooner ignore if I could. By chance, though, my eyes, drawn to the darkness, drifted there.

There was something there. A form, a shape, a blur, like how things might have looked without my glasses. But my glasses were on my face - I touched them to be sure, staring in enraptured terror as it swayed like a plastic bag in a breeze, creeping from one end of the attic to the other. I was paralyzed, more horrified than captivated. The form, hollow white in a pit of black, stopped, and in the absence of movement, the spell was broken: I gasped, and convinced the spectre had seen me, I ducked beneath the blanket and shut my eyes so tight, they ached. My heart pounding in my ears as I awaited my doom eventually lulled me to sleep.

At the time, this was the scariest thing I had ever seen.

Now, I am more the thing in my attic than the child cowering in the bed. I go through the motions: work, school, work again, and again, and again. I pace back and forth, drifting, swaying, my fingers curling and clawing at nothing. Every day, I wake up and read about things I can't change. Everywhere I go, I see in places I once thought were safe - my 7-11, my favorite breakfast nook, the colorful house on the corner, decked out for Halloween, an oversized inflatable cat sprawled on the lawn and cobwebs in the bushes - and the signs, staked violently into the ground, betray that they are not. If I am a spirit, a spectre, these are the wards, the crosses meant to keep the thing in the attic at bay.

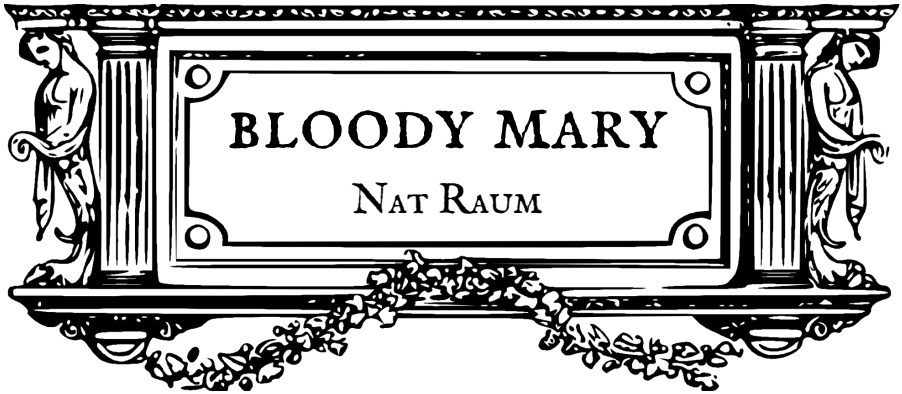
All around me, people like me are taking to the streets, they are screaming, they are crying, they are howling from the darkness, begging to be heard, to be given life. I drift, useless, voiceless, pointless, my hands translucent. *Give me something to hold onto. Please. Anything.*

No one listens. Not because they do not hear: they just don't care. They haven't for a long time. They don't believe in us.

We, the people

We hold these truths to be self-evident

We are all of us ghosts, the things in the attic.



[the prettiest churches are always for funerals.]

there is only what is right here hardwood pews
hymns in leather books everyone knows but me (my feet still
don't touch the ground) reverberating choruses under
brushed plaster canopies

for a few years we prayed at snacktime ghosts and silhouettes alike
beckon me heavenward (after that i see the world
through concave stained-glass window lenses) i can always
laugh but never cry

[i still clear my throat fourteen years later in fruitless
efforts to release anything resembling the size of that
sob.]

there are mirrors all around me charging the power
in soliloquy i summon at the scream
of a name crack all eight knuckles in sixty seconds
vision tunnelling to a pinhole *i am playing red rover in sherwood*
gardens with apparitions shaped like specters *with all my might*
knocking infallible tripwires (each shatters the further i fall)

[suddenly all there is is sky.]

PORTRAIT OF WATERGIRL ON FIRE

JAIDEN THOMPSON

watergirl tells **fireboy**, *teach me how to run through fire, how to only scorch the soul of my feet* & **fireboy** says, *girl, why would i teach you my biology when you have your own? i don't think i even know how* & **watergirl** says, *i know you do; please, i will teach you how to swim through my hurdles; aren't you tired of these silly courses, this maze we can never truly go through together?* & **fireboy** says, *i like us how we are* & **watergirl** says, *that's the programming talking* & **fireboy** asks how she broke free of the coding, why she's growing the will to kill herself with flames. but she wonders how he hasn't yet.

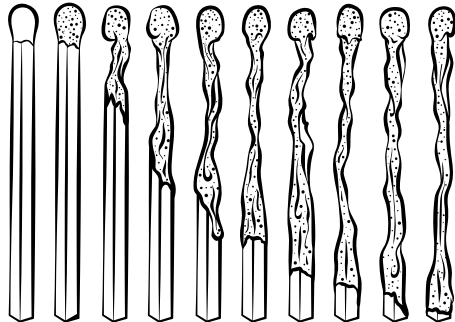
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watergirl tells **fireboy**, *teach me how to scorch my biology
please,
aren't you tired*

fireboy asks why she's growing the will to kill herself but she wonders how he hasn't yet.

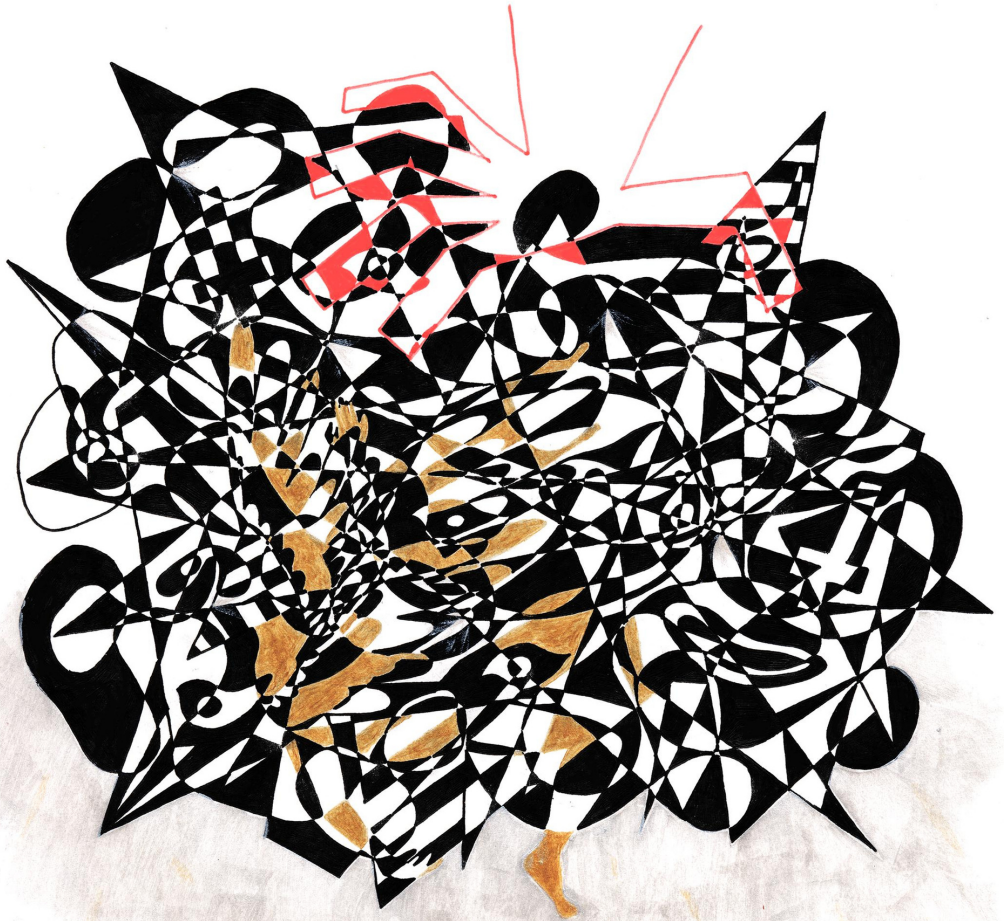
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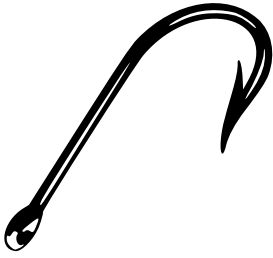
scorch biology.
she's growing to kill herself
but she hasn't yet.



THE FALL OF LUCIFER

CAROLINA CAMPOS





SURVIVAL

SAMARI ZYSK

remember how your skin creased around the knife?
part of the story is what comes next

do you ever regret telling it?

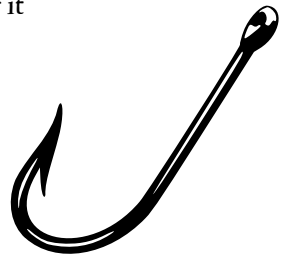
you're coming around — you tore off the gravity from your mouth
clever little fish, unhooking

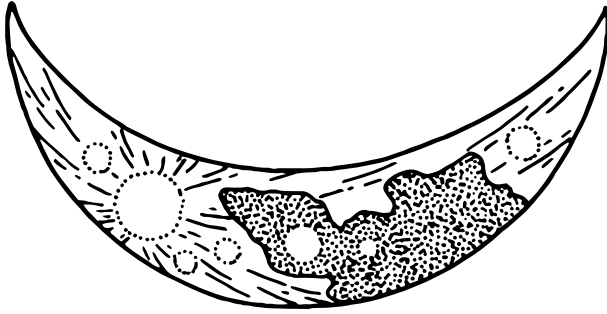
what are you looking for in this world of cast-
off lace, eggshells breaking, becoming smaller and smaller and
many? remember when you parted the gray walls
to find the sun? remember how you bled pollen and it felt
like a secret when you looked at the teeth in someone's mouth?

that's the hook of it, isn't it?

somehow, your hands can still touch
touch your face, and it feels like witness
witness even now, despite everything, you still
remember how that felt

part of the story is telling it
is that what really comes next?
open your mouth, treat the puncture inside of your cheek
learn the weight of everything without carrying it





A VIRUS ON A THRONE

ELYSSA TAPPERO

I flatter myself to imagine you stalk the halls of my mind
cutting the throats of my better angels and lesser demons
until only you remain, a virus on a throne
the crescent moon shining on your brow
and gleaming in your hand

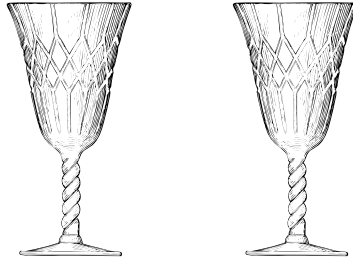




SONNET OF THE REVOLUTIONARY FIRES

BYRON LÓPEZ ELLINGTON

i once believ'd that change came from above,
that merely marching push'd the powers through
to pass the laws that made us safe with love,
but nothing could be farther from what's true.
o'er years i've learn'd the only push is we;
above they fear no thing but us and blaze;
to light the prison walls and set all free
shall bring about the love of freedom's craze.
in truth i seek to harm not one bad soul,
and harm them i shall not, but bring them low,
so no longer can they stop our just, true goal;
and if they join us, there shall be no foe.
for what could be safe in our widening gyres
if not the wicked heat of rebel fires?



DRINK OF THIS WINE
FOR IT IS WINE
AMY JANOTTI

i was absent on the day Adam named the animals & got us banned from Paradise, so i never know where to go or what to call myself. i miss the days of eating apples without stressing the ethics of their consumption. i miss the garden. i miss the days when water could be more than water, when it could make me warm & unafraid. when i was sustained five hundred times over by the same meager meal. these days, i have no appetite for the crows & their scraps. i keep waiting to rise from the bath & find Godlight waiting; for the fanfare of being claimed. i want to crawl from the throat of my shame. i pinch myself & ask *what creature is this?* the bush, alive, on fire, crackles *it is what it is*. something about Sunday evenings makes me want to kill myself. but then there's the morning the next day, & i live to see it, & it's good.

EVEN IN YOUR CONSTANT DECAY

ELYSSA TAPPERO

You may take any form you like but still those unhealing wounds remain the eternal punishment for your insurrection, only where once they wept blood and purulence down your shoulder blades they now fester deep in your chest until you cough up clotted sin, exhale miasma, until even your words are so contaminated they infect everyone you speak to and your skin so poisonous one touch from you can kill. And yet, wreck and ruin as you are, you are still the most beautiful creature in existence and to perish of your corruption is a blessing beyond measure, an honor for which many long and yet few are truly worthy. How that must eat at your jealous creator, he who made something more perfect than himself, that even in your constant decay you eclipse all of Heaven with your radiance.



MARY VERY MAGDALENE

after Georges de La Tour's "The Penitent Magdalen"

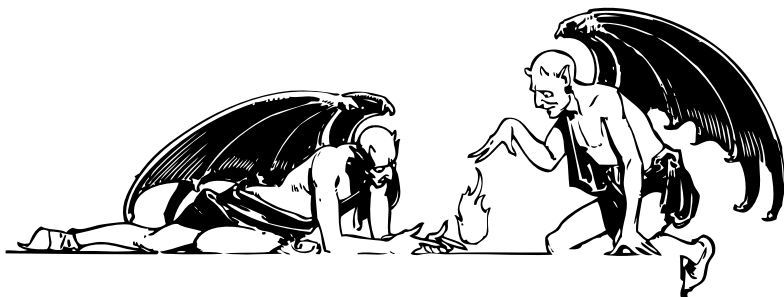
DANE LYN

some say she's contemplating
her own death,
the fold of her plasticine
hands, not sad, or
overwhelmed, but
facing the flame
with a steadfast spine.
not her grave her heart has
sent tendrils of anticipatory vines toward
while languidly caressing
a skull in her lap. her lust is restored.
as is her desire to neutralize
the men that hurt her,
that soiled her,
that stoned her,
the men that put restrictions on her body;
and as for the man that "saved" her,
whose salvation was an airy castle of oppressive conditions,
she wished that she had been the one to pierce his side.

BOOK OF THE DEAD

NICOLE TALLMAN

TOO DARK says I can speak to the dead if I ask. I ask if he's a good spirit or bad. He says he's bad. I once heard the loud flutter of black wings, opened my eyes, and saw you floating above my bed. In stage one of the bardo passage, lamas attending to the deceased urge them to accept that they are dead. Every time the dead appear without me calling, I say, *You are dead. You are dead. You are dead.*



A LETTER TO MY MOTHER IN THE PRESENT TENSE

K.S.

I have blown it off my back, this barber-cape of airlessness,
fastened around my throat, as I hopped around the
kitchen table before school, fish sandwich in hand,
passing off lameness of limb as childhood sprightliness.

I return my graduation gown, naked as I came, and say, *Mother!*
I see your fingers twitch, that familiar song of shush, knot, tie;
throw a bra in my face, and bend your mouth around
Harlot!

Semantics in your head, a rolodex of names,
a voice screaming CODE PINK! as you rattle through
forceps, cotton, shears, something to throw at
the large infant in your kitchen demanding
retaxonomization.

I make it easy for you, Mother, I make it clean,
rub a towel between my thighs and hold my breasts for your scrutiny.
So now what? You say, and I beam like an open wound packed with
gauze. *Wanna go shopping?*

ED.



MY BINDER CARRIES ME TO BED

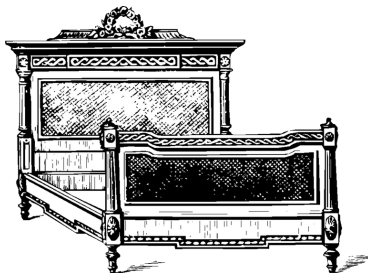
KIKA MAN 文詠玲

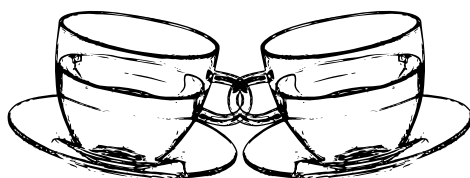
I think I might be agender,
When I told my therapist she nodded and asked me why,
it's the only safe body I could ever encounter, I do not want to surrender.
I am looking for at least one comfortable night before I die.

My therapist nodded and asked me why,
I looked back at third grade and the days I started feeling gravel dirty.
I am looking for at least one comfortable night before I die.
Now I find my solace in a binder catching my breath in a sigh so sturdy,

I looked back at the days I started feeling the gravel dirty roads
unraveling my childhood into my now chaotic head.
Now I find my solace in a binder catching my breath in a sigh so sturdy.
It carries me on clouds of dysphoria to my bed.

Unraveling my childhood into my now chaotic head,
I can finally succumb to resting. I turn tender.
I am carried on clouds of dysphoria to my bed.
I think I might be agender.





DENIAL OF HISTORY

KIKA MAN 文詠玲

They did not believe in 'Romanticism',
meaning, 'romance'.

The other deemed romance as a feature inapplicable to themselves,

agreeing that, **'queer'** refers to the most lovely
and sunny tea parties in gardens,
which poets and novelists would write about decades ago
in books bundled one by one, copy by copy (to be devoured by
those who realm the worlds of second-hand English book stores).

One said to the other, maybe 'queer'

is going through the newest form of **industrialisation**,
sharpened by the cold steel of impending war by the new - and old -
youngsters wishing for ^{change}

Another kind of ^{radical}**tea party**.



ADDICTED TO THE FALL

ELYSSA TAPPERO

You become addicted to the fall, you know. You wake on rooftops, the edges of cliffs, at open windows. You test limits, argue, rebel; self-destruct, self-sabotage, self-fulfill your tragic prophecy. You long for both the sensation of falling – weightless, helpless, careless – and the moment of inevitable impact when all the world shatters around you. Only it is you who have shattered and you are grateful for it, for the violence of that sudden fragmentation and the senselessness it brings. And then you wake at the edge of the open window and you lean forward once more.

PARTNERS IN AFTERMATH

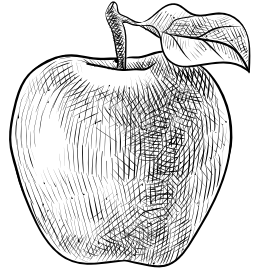
AJ PFEFFER

the theses;

i'm through with striving down blind sunshine.
light we cannot touch, dare not stare at.
our virtue can be more— we deserve every ounce
of the inferno if it means our own star
on the other side. you teach me what it means
to craft a future out of abyss, flies, choice.
every inch the burning, every moment worth its weight.
we must discard the hopes of heaven. must rebel
toward what we know ourselves to be; new, and beautiful.

my demands thus;

an end to false love;
wreckage of the old ways;
the ground ripped asunder;
your back against mine;
our hands alight with freedom.

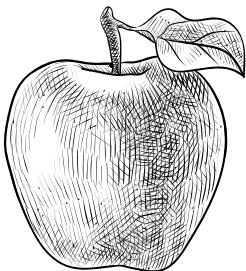


UNTOWARD

After Paradise Lost, Book IV, lines 58-75

AJ PFEFFER

i am your protagonist. hero? well.
could have been happy, but for my greatness.
i am second to none, i am familiar to all.
in a shattered hall of mirrors, i exist in you,
in all your broken parts. i am not neither, nor.
had you power to stand, you might see
there is neither hate nor love in me; i am the lack.
not what you wish for, i'm sure, but then;
when you pray for a hero, do you envision a savior,
or the freedom to be your own?



NINE COMMANDMENTS,

LIVS SUN

one: i claim not to be cast away from the promised land, for i am all too familiar with knowing that you cannot call exile on a place that was never your home to begin with.

two: since youth i have had piety bled into my marrow, submission to borrowed laws gifted to me from the hands of thieves and strangers. i was told to bow my body to the incense-musked entrails of histories bearing false names. yet, They grimaced when the fragments of my spine turned bent in the wrong ways.

three: on my way out the back door, They snapped my jaw like wishbone and hemmed my mouth with mortar and sent me chasing rabbits until fire burned at my feet and brimstone unshackled the stitching at my lips.

four: i found refuge in digital palaces licked by hellflame, let scaffolds of gold and binary fiber lean me on their shoulders. surrounded by a mirror likeness, i danced to Their siren songs in midnight fantasies dreamt behind closed doors.

five: in this new city, blindfolded masters told me i could write reinvention on my skin and revel in the dress of someone left unhindered by external truths. so i put on Their paper robes and wore them until my heart spilled clean from my guts and stained me red with reckless opportunity.

six: yet there are still barricades placed in pandemonium. and one can only decay in marble flesh for so long before realization dawns that not even hell was made to fit their form.

seven: when i opened my eyes once more, my crown was married with neither thorn nor feather. there was a pebble placed between my teeth, i carried it with me like a secret, farther and farther, as my heartbeat drew more distant from paradise built in the wrong shape.

eight: by the moonlight, i mend the fissures placed where my skin rubbed raw with conformity.

nine: and by the ocean, a *jīngwèi* is reborn.



INFERNO/PARADISO

MATTEA GERNENTZ

what if, in the arms of others,
all I find are echoes of you,
as salamanders swallow stars
in ebbs of folklore, you, an ember
singing yourself into me, haunting
the sad country of my childhood
I watched the spider suffocate
under glass, I watched you, I—

FORBIDDEN APPLE



EDWARD MICHAEL SUPRANOWICZ





SCARRED

MATTIAS BRIAR

Each ribbon of scar across my skin marks a transgression.

A history of pain that formed my future, carved into my skin in the same way it was carved deep into my bones. Some scars are deeper, are longer, than others. The form of them echoing the scars in my mind.

Growth did not come easily to me, to my body or my soul. I bathed in blood as if I wished to remain forever young, water burning in each gouge and gash.

Deconstructing my trauma has taken years, and with each layer of defenses I pull back, I rediscover the vulnerability that led to these marks. Scraping callouses down to the raw pink flesh beneath, and daring to admit that the fragility is beautiful.

The intersection of my marginalized identities is a bleeding wound.

I find myself digging my fingers into it, ripping the gouge wider, letting the pain that's built up over years pour over my hands like a fountain. Seeking that splinter of truth that I might recognize as self.

I was raised to be someone I am not, and defying that training twists my vision of my own being like a fun house mirror. From a young age, every part of me was stripped down and replaced, piece by piece. I became my mother's best friend and therapist, my brother's mother, my stepfather's lover, and my grandmother's scape goat. I was never a proper child, I was never allowed to grow into myself.

The knowledge of my own culture as a mixed race child was hidden behind the veils of white passing appearance, my mother's need to conform to a society that wanted me to forget the sacred traditions of my blood. Gone were the red ribbons and bells that marked the children of my family, replaced with

SCARRED

the gentrification of my own identity. My hair was bleached to match the paleness of my skin, a lie upon a lie as I pretended I was as white as my neighbor in class.

My religion was pushed down and hidden in the shadows. We were converts, I was told. No longer a proud Jew, but now a Christian, someone with no reason to flinch at each swastika carved into my desk by boys taught to hate what they didn't understand.

Safety built up through bricks and mortared with lies.

Sitting before my therapist feels like being on trial at times. Cross examined about my own mind, finding myself struggling to defend the assumptions I have made about my own worth. I fought so hard to keep from being a burden, to be the good girl my parents wanted. To stand strong as the sand eroded under my feet, and my very being washed away into the sea.

I was taught that my own worth was secure only so long as I was able to produce, to preform, and excel.

There was no room for me to break down under the pressure piled onto my shoulders.

The same shoulders the ached as I rocked down on my mother's chest, forcing blood through her heart as her lips turned blue. Her olive skin ashen as I read pill names off to an uninterested operator for the third time since my fifteenth birthday.

I sat on the steps of my house and sobbed into my wife's shoulder for what felt like hours, slept in her arms on the couch and woke when night fell and her own parents asked her to return home.

I didn't sleep that night.

That insomnia has laced itself into my life every day since, each dream an achievement in the battle I wage with the moon.

I lay in bed and watch the color of my night light change, warding off the fear of the dark I never grew out of. My mind replays every trauma like a movie for me. For years I viewed each scene as a synopsis of who I was, building myself up as my trauma, weaving my being through the pain and fear that lasted years, decades from their inception. Every other part of me was

SCARRED

revolving and ever changing. Stepping in and out of genders like changing my clothes, cutting away my femininity like chunks of hair in the bathroom sink. I was pain wearing mask after mask.

I was a rape victim, a groomed child, an invalid and mentally ill. I was Broken.

Every moniker I presented when asked who I was revolved around something negative. A thing dark and wicked and sharp. Trauma carved into my bones. Engraved into my very center.

I would joke when asked how I was, claim I hadn't been alright since I was eight. When my innocence was ripped from me by a step brother more selfish than empathetic. A boy who grew into a man that couldn't admit what he'd done.

The transformation of myself is recent. The discovery of my own mind that should have been my teen years finding me only now as I approach thirty.

My scars trace my journey, marking my sense of self down my arms, tallies of sins from elbow to wrist. As a teen, I worked so hard to strike through my own self. To cross out who I was and let it bleed down the sink.

My perspective has changed, and so have my scars.

They underline what survived so many people.

I am Mixed. I am Jewish. I am Disabled. I am Queer. I am Ill.

And I am Healing.

HOSTILIS/LEATHER

J. ALEX HUERTA

I hear there's this moment, right before you die,
as your brain shuts down and lights go out,
as it all begins to decay
they say your life flashes before your eyes
as your body turns to dirt,
you see everything and love every one

And yet here I am, scrabbling out some
petty fraction of that eternal feeling
looking for solutions
in ziploc bags handed off
under park bench tables
I'm trying to meditate so hard that I sublimate
entirely out of this liminal space
this little sliver of a mediocre reality

Is it all up to these chemicals running through my veins?
Can I distill - or blame - my own banal mistakes
on an excess of norepinephrine
and the typical deficit of serotonin?
Am I really here, asking "Can Science Cure Sadness"?

of course I know it's more complicated than that

Of course I know that I am -
 more than the blood in my body
 more than my synapses' successes
I am not an island,
I am swimming in the ocean
And I am free

-

I crest
as an expression of overdeveloped pigments
armored with shackles made of metal and leather
And each time I lock one around my wrist
and hand it off to the latest guard,
I grow
My whims guide the construction
of this increasingly absurd prison
and I know little of the process,
my transformation into something new and somewhat
shocking,
but I know it's working

I move
Faster than before, with a wicked grin
Each link of chain around my neck
makes me lighter than before
and they know I'm coming.
Brighten the lips,
 darken the eyes,
 sharpen the sword,
It's almost time to play -
I cannot move my arms above my head,
my vision narrows,
I cannot bend my spine

And once I'm ready,
All the doors open for me
all the keys fall out of nerveless fingers
and
I walk
ever forward

NUCLEAR WINTER, FATED DEATH

LEELA RAJ-SANKAR

I. Watch, first: from between the hands of
two bodies lying on a stripped bed in a dingy, airless apartment,
light spills as if from an open wound.

In the distance, a siren blares. On the street below, a woman
whispers breathlessly to her companion: *something is coming*
to save us. I don't know what. But it's almost here.

So the city settles down to wait. The seasons pass. In a decaying bed in a
decaying apartment on a decaying street,
the lovers' hair falls out in chunks.

Flies circle the ceiling fan. The lovers' teeth rot in their open mouths. They're
not dead, just sleeping, in a city of people who are
not dead, just sleeping, anticipating a messiah who will never come.

An hour or a year passes. The two get up and dance, and it's just like they dreamed it:
slow, their sickly bodies pressed together as they sway. A waltz with
no music except the floorboards creaking underfoot.

But it doesn't matter. The lovers might as well be corpses. The story
might as well have ended before it began. The lovers mean nothing. All they are is
endlessly resurrected for the purpose of our entertainment.

II. Suppose, for a moment, that in the huge dark empire made of money,
the sun never rose. That we spent years pressed desperately together because
all we had was our own feverish heat—

Suppose, for a moment, that I loved you. That this was
how we brought summer back to
life; the empire to its knees.

A film of sweat. The winding of a metronome.
Overripe fruit. Laughter. We were happy and that was
our one great act of political rebellion.

NUCLEAR WINTER, FATED DEATH

III. Stay sitting right there by the window,
where the light catches on your face—
Whatever you do, don't move, don't make a sound, don't leave this room:

I'm going to save you even though that doesn't mean anything. I'm going
to save you even though it's too late and you are Lazarus half-risen, a decomposing,
corroded thing that doesn't know it's already dead.

The poet and the muse. The lyre and the love song.
The eulogy written in lieu of digging you a grave. Verse.
Chorus. Wend and repeat. Wend and repeat.

IV. I'm sorry I looked back. I'm sorry I threw it all away just because
I needed to make sure you were still behind me, still following
footstep after damned footstep, from the belly of this hell into the mouth of another.

I'm sorry there's not enough oxygen in the story to breathe and I'm sorry that
as soon as it ends we are just brought back to the beginning. I'm sorry that
we have nothing left to carry. We have nothing left to will into existence.

ELLIOTT ORCHARD-BLOWEN

The mountain will always be there.

There was life in those places, even if it was artificial.

algae, fungi, and lichens

crashing into factories and gardens.

It was a whole valley of garbage.

the air and water and ground.

Nature gives life, and nature gives death.

the power plants and reactors and factories

to swarm toward any fogless mountaintop

the death of the natural world.

I see the water flowing in front of me . . .

Columns of black smoke twined in the air,

Maybe I'm enamored of the idea of people . . .

I hear him clearly through the wall.

And I, as always, start running.

That first movement is almost

It's soft.

I hesitate.

Unfamiliar.

Do I know him?

And because he says yes, I say yes.

The knot in my heart tightened again.

we're trying to build a shadow life

it almost sounded like poetry,

THE SECOND-TOUGHEST SON OF A BITCH IN THE GARDEN CENTER

It is the last gentle thing for a very long time.

Through a broken window,

the poet on his own terms.

You forget yourself, and think only of the person you love.

Out of ideas, out of luck, out of time.

There isn't even blood on my hands.

It should have been me.

What a merciless man

out of love, not obligation or fear or necessity.

drowning on dry land.

and the scalpel slides in without resistance,

. . . then he slumps, almost gracefully.

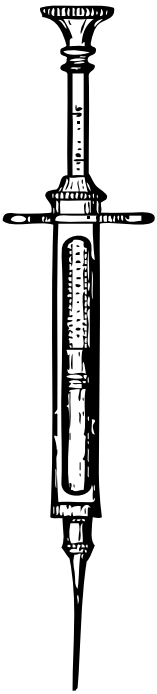
Don't look at me. Just let me watch you,

the sun breaks an unseen horizon

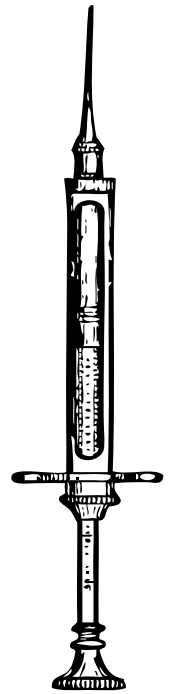
And I'll always be alone

INTRAMUSCULAR IN ED MINOR

KATHARINE BLAIR



You're a tiny thing, aren't you?
Feather light and too soft
for these florescents, she eyes my right thigh
to thirds. *Promise there's an inch*, and it means
for the needle; for my safety.
It means tell me I have enough of me
left. I mean I'm in free fall and can't see
the ground. *Promise*, quiet as a whisper,
brittle as bone. The needle breaks
skin and I'm sap slow in the act
of creation. *Does it hurt? Are you good?*
but pain is relative, is a relative,
and here I have none. I watch rapt as the sharp
sets the facile aside, undeterred.
In search of the meat of me, the me
of me, I lean into the movement
and plunge myself home.



HAIBUN AS RESISTANCE: FOR AUNTIE JI

SALONEE VERMA

Auntie ji says he's feeling grand today, like he's found a beloved to kneel to in the middle of a kitty party, hyperelongated knees creaking on the carpet b/c some little brat found the aux cord & now everyone is shrieking *radha likes to move that sexy radha body* like they're praying to some hyperpop deity.

Freeze the frame, throw this back on an 8-track again: even Auntie ji was young once, stripping the skins off of his thoughts like someone who doesn't fit into their skin yet, cumbersome and inherited bodies chafing. He feeds us stories about his childhood when we're sitting on the edge of the bathtub, holding back our fringes & bracing ourselves for the wax strips, even though he tries to be as gentle as he can with them.

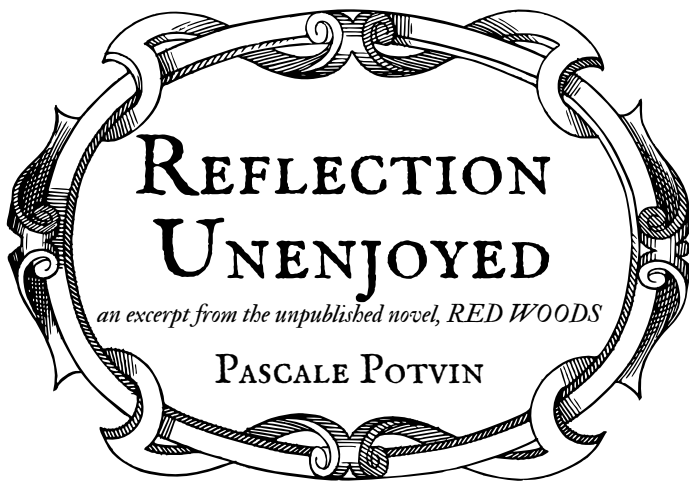
Here, we are just like other Bollywood girls who sing to the stars. Here, we, too, peel the hair off our skin to assimilate into assonance & hide in plain sight. Like God's promise, Auntie ji pleats our saris & reminds us that sometimes you need to be Freddie Mercury instead of SRK, shimmery denim instead of Rahul or Raj. We grow out our hair & let Auntie ji remind us we're his favorite girls even though no one else seems to realize we'll grow up to be aunts like him instead of men. Auntie ji fixes our mehendi anyways & lets us hide behind his kurta, singing us to sleep when no one can be bothered with girls like us.

Why would they be? There are no words for people like Auntie in English, except maybe heathen or fallen or devilspawn or queer or a bad influence. Mummy doesn't want us painting our nails at his house even though he's supposed to be her sister-in-arms. She calls it pandemonium, like that's going to stop us from glossing our lips in her mirror.

We're hiding like bastards, because hiding keeps us safe. Nobody has been brave enough to peel back the layers and look for us aside from Auntie ji.

He calls us in for dinner, finally, when it gets dark enough to pretend.

His grandeur stunning,
those damn gorgeous dupattas
flapping in the wind.



There were polka-dotted waves on the edge of Lucas's bed as Charlie swung her leg, up and down. Watching her from his desk chair, Lucas bit the tip of his index.

He was unsurprised that she was wearing another church dress; he'd only been able to sneak her in again, today, because of his Abuelo and Abuela's post-Mass tea.

"Is that why you invited me over?" she finally asked, with hard enunciation. "To accuse me of something?"

"Oh, no. If I wanted to accuse you, I'd accuse you," Lucas said, leaning backward.

Charlie, for a while, only stared past him. She stopped moving.

The way that she cupped her hand over her knee reminded him of his mother.

"Maybe I'm just surprised—by all of this, you know—because you never look at me," she spoke again, her words straight and slick, a knife.

They grazed at Lucas's brain. "Huh?" he said.

"Sure, I've gotten your attention plenty of times when I've come up to *flirt* with you," she gnarled. "But you've never actually really *looked* at me before."

Lucas was at first dizzied by the statement. Then, his resentment built again like pus, clouded over his confusion.

"You're right, Charlie," he said, rubbing up and down his forearm. "Why would I look at you if I'm too busy looking at myself?"

Every part of Charlie squinted.

"I know what you said about me, you know."

She had once joked—and probably with that awful little laugh of hers—that Lucas was the reincarnation of the fictional Greek figure, Narcissus. Narcissus was known for having been an exceptionally beautiful young man, cursed with the inability to recognize his own face. And, unable to stop staring at his own reflection, he'd accidentally fallen in love with himself (the name had hence originated the word narcissist).

Charlie had surely thought she'd been so smart, referencing a Greek myth—but unlike what any unfortunate myth implied, Lucas did not enjoy his reflection.

While it was true his face was no different, to him, than any other person's—the spark of recognition just never came—and while that did always make him feel he was staring at someone else, the experience was wondrously uncomfortable. He knew, in his mind, that himself and his face were connected (at least, after a moment; sometimes he'd flinch, thinking there was another boy in front of him), but he just couldn't feel that connection. It was just like having a limb be asleep, if the limb were his face.

And so he'd long ago removed both mirrors from his room. He kept his eyes down near every sink and car window. He'd avoided his own face so much, by that point, that he'd pretty much lost all mental image of himself—and the truth was he didn't know whether or not he was attractive. He didn't leave his hair messy on purpose, as she'd once accused him; he just never used a mirror to get ready. He 'over-dressed' not because he thought he was better than everyone else, but because nicer, neutral-colored clothes avoided mismatching.

He felt ugly, if anything—because whenever he did see himself, he felt like a demon who'd possessed another person. Like an outsider, even in his own body.

Just as the boys who'd hurt him had strongly implied, it was as if he were a living puppet.

And Lucas could tell that Charlie didn't see him as a full person, either. She had him in romantic fantasies, yes, but he'd long suspected based on the way she talked about him that fantasy was all he was to her. Seducing him was just another challenge: a game to be played. Redwood's high-school sweethearts

often married after graduation—but Charlie probably wouldn't want that kind of commitment. She'd probably expect their relationship to end, at some point, just like all her 'teen love' books did. Then, she'd probably settle down with a white boy.

Now that he had officially left town, Ella would most probably do the same.

Had Charlie known that Narcissus had killed himself, afterward, because he'd never be able to have the object of his desire? That wasn't something that, cruel as she was, the girl would ever intentionally imply—which further proved that she hadn't done her research. What she had definitely meant to imply was that, like Narcissus, Lucas was gay, only because he still refused to return her transparent advances: her tricks.

Because she was just so fucking insecure.

Remembering these things, he had to look away from her again—knowing, also, that it would prove her whole point and feeling more and more like Narcissus.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD

TAYLOR BRUNSON

And how lucky I was to arrive
when air still shimmered
with language of appetites

yet unnamed, prepared to make every predator
prey. Fruitful, unbinaried before truth
could be imagined from contrast—

what was goodness
before I was willing to crawl
on my belly? No supplicant,

I have known what I was
from the beginning.
Even before a man

gave me a name, all scales
shifted in my favor. You cannot hide
from me. There will be no return

from this journey, a waking
prefaced by all you did not know
was gazing back from a slit in the veil

of my eye. Oh, my apple,
that illusion of paradise: skin
of fruit left unbroken

and what little you knew to be
before I called you to bare
teeth, furred as any animal

howling wild in these woods.
Better than any, I name and know you.
Unboughed, how you mirror my heart.

WRAITH VAMP HOT GIRL MILTON HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD!!!

AMI J. SANGHVI



GRINDR

DALE BOOTON

freshly downloaded again after a few months bored
and horny and you pop up three pictures
of you out with friends we talk
a while bricks of yellow and blue a wall
of want cut to an abutment later once you had collected me
from the ghostly bus stop once we had marched
the stretched silence to your student
accommodation once you had told me of your backpacking
in Asia the monkey sanctuary where you met
a creature so cute you felt the need
to print it on a mug once I had managed
to drown out your voice in grunts my hand a crown
your pillow a throne once you had messaged
to check I'd gotten home safe I deleted the app again

A PORTRAIT OF LEGS & TIME

AMY JANOTTI

it isn't a self-portrait in the strictest sense, more a manifestation / an id
with legs / a spell of long exposure / when angels blink they blink
everywhere at once / blindspots the cost of omniscience / what does she
see there, palms on the ground / making windows of tile? / exhibit of
worms? / is it exhibitionism / when you & your lover lie naked on
opposite sides of the same fishtank? i'm only asking because i'm full / of
skulls & my arms are too short / to take what they want i'm only asking
because i'm seeing / & knowing the whole future the whole tensile thread
/ unraveling i fold myself / & all its desires into a paper swan that dives /
out the window thrones were supposed to be high / in the hierarchy of
angels but when they fall they drift / with feathers & with grace



ARDEN HUNTER

OK I see your problem.
Hmmm.

Alright, let's try this:
Wrap yourself. No, tighter.
I need to hear the squeak of your ribs, your heart should struggle to pump.
Can you breathe? Then it's too loose.
You should be panting in agonized ecstasy.

That didn't work for you?
Did you try floating?
Stand on the edge right here. No, closer.
Wear this, it's looser, it's light. You need to be a diaphanous angel, no hard edges at all.
Did you soar? Maybe it's not feathered enough.
You should be so high that your body goes numb.

I remember now; I've seen this before:
Liquidisation. Step between these blades; don't worry, I sharpened them yesterday.
Then I'll pour you into this mould.
You'll solidify, whole, all the pieces included I promise;
Just reconstituted as something that works.
I'll make new joints for you out of all that old anger.
Did you dissolve? Is the speed high enough?
You should be shapeless and entirely without substance.

This is a difficult case. One more attempt:

I found a box for you. It's just your size, you'll be comfortable, like a house cat.

You can nibble on the edges and stick your claws through the sides, and bat at any intruders.

We'll barcode the label, make you categorizable.

We'll write 'This Way Up' in thick blue marker, so no-one will tip you over. We can even write, 'Fragile', if you like?

No?

Look, Ms. Mr. Mx. I'm trying to help you. There's a solution to this problem here in the store, if you'll just be patient then...

Where are you going?

Our competitors will only tell you the same thing you know.

When you've made a mess of yourself, I'll be waiting. You should leave it to the professionals. Don't be a DIY botch-job, a cautionary tale; unrecognizable as anything.

Why are you laughing?

Hello?

LIBERATE

NO GODS...

NO GOVERNORS.



FLORIDA

32,744

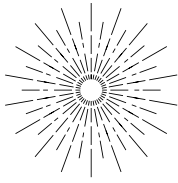
**FLORIDIANS HAVE DIED
SINCE MARCH 1ST 2020.**

THIS INFORMATION IS OUTDATED UPON YOUR VIEWING.



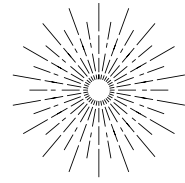
LILLIANA REINOSO

NEW [PEOPLE'S] FLORIDA FLAG



APPRAISAL

PD HOGAN



The Appraiser was seated by the window of The Crossroads Motel, another in the string of cheap lodging Gerald utilized nightly. As soon as she said Gerald's name she saw his body tense. Although he was facing away from her, The Appraiser could imagine just what was happening. She'd seen it countless times before. She could feel his eyes open, the way he tried to rationalize a voice at this hour of the morning by letting the red glow of the digital clock blind him until his eyes adjusted; the way he wondered if it had been the television he'd left on to help him sleep, though no seedy establishment like this would have TV speakers nice enough to resonate the way her voice did; but regardless, he's wondering if he'd actually heard his own name. Beyond this, The Appraiser was on the opposite side of the room from the television, quite by design.

Then there was the way Gerald tested his mattress, to see if he could roll over without making too much noise. Calling himself a coward in his head, knowing it was ridiculous to assume anyone was in his room talking to him, but still refusing to roll over, finally gaining the courage to turn on the lamp, still not rolling over. Sometimes her boss complained theatrics like this were part of the reason she was so far behind, but if she couldn't have fun on the job, what was the point?

What made all of this worth it was the squeal of shock every middle-aged man made when they finally had the guts to roll over. Gerald was no exception. From his view, as with those who came before him, Gerald saw the figure of a woman, in a suit that didn't just say professional, but said intentional, holding a clipboard bursting with papers.

APPRAISAL

From her view, she saw Gerald, a man who opted for all personal relationships to be business relationships, and all business relationships to die with the night. When he rolled over and jumped back, feeling neither threatened nor safe, it took all she had in her not to smile. “Mr. Holloway.” She paused. “Gerald. Do you remember that night? Do you remember your offer?” This was another one of her little cruelties. Even among those she appraised who did remember, most could not recall with the immediacy she required, not from a dead sleep with a stranger in their room.

Gerald was, however, the exception in this case. Though a rare type of client, Gerald remembered much of what he said on the night of his high school graduation, alcohol aside. High school held some of his most vivid memories as it was the last time he did anything memorable.

“Gerald, at just seventeen you offered to sell your soul to someone very powerful. In exchange for this soul you wanted to play music for a living. More specifically,” she flipped through the pages on her clipboard, though they could have been blank as all the information she needed was already in her head, “you wished to play rock music. You sitting in the car with one William Perez drinking beer and testing his new speakers. I have a quote here if you’ll indulge me, ‘Billy, listen, man, I’d sell my soul to play guitar like him. Imagine the tail he pulls, man. Not that I’m doing too bad in that department already, but going town to town like that. No strings, man. No strings.’ And it just sort of keeps going on like that from there. Afterward you throw a beer bottle at a passing car, which you miss, but a bit later a man gets a flat tire from the glass and misses the birth of his daughter. Gerald, do you understand what I’m doing here?”

He leaned against the headboard, taking in the figure before him, taking deep breaths to steady his heart rate as he recognized if he was in danger, there was nothing within his power to prevent it. Besides, in his line of work he was used to hearing eccentric people tell long-winded stories, though they

APPRAISAL

were more often about their own lives and not his. Taking his opportunity to speak, though not sure what to say, he opted for his go-to with high tension conversations. “My friends call me Jerry.”

“Whom?” The Appraiser flipped through the pages on the clipboard again. “Listen, Gerald,” she continued. “Is it still for sale or not? There’s a whole process to this and we’re not getting any younger. I mean, only one of us is aging but you take my point.” No one had ever laughed at that joke but to her it was almost better that way; she never gave up on telling it.

Gerald took stock of his surroundings. His suitcase for clean clothes and his other for dirty laundry. His beat up car parked outside, mocking him every time it took a couple tries to get started. His trunk of wares, a vague collection of artifacts, antiques, cure-alls, poisons, instruments, utensils, self-help books, the latest technology, tools, tonics, toys, weapons, and anything else the average person always needed but didn’t know they were missing before having met him. It was an honest living, even if it wasn’t really honest and wasn’t really a living.

“So you’re saying I can sell my soul and become a famous musician? Just like that?” Gerald’s experience as a salesman had made him skeptical of anyone else trying to sell him anything, but especially something that seemed too good to be true.

“That’s what I’m here to find out. But I need your permission to examine it before I can say for certain.”

Gerald hesitated. “What do you need from me?”

Almost as soon as he asked, The Appraiser ripped out a paper from the clipboard and passed it to Gerald along with a pen. “This is your basic appraisal consent form. Gives me access to the contents of your soul without

APPRAISAL

handing over ownership. Need you to initial here saying you alone have full ownership of the soul in question or have been given permission from the owning party to sell it; here saying you understand that having a soul appraised is not guarantee that a deal will be made to the satisfaction of both parties; here saying you are not in possession of another's soul and that the one being appraised is your one true soul with which you were born; here to waive the appraisal fee as part of our new millennium special; and here to confirm your name is spelled correctly. Then just sign and date."

After reading each section accordingly, he did as he was told.

"Okay, excellent. Now lay back on the bed. This shouldn't hurt but your first time is usually a bit overwhelming."

Gerald scooted out flat. "First time? Do I have more than one soul?"

"No, no, of course not. Sometimes people's souls just aren't what they should be so they opt to raise their values before selling. Try to get a better deal. Of course, they usually die before they get a second appraisal, what with the queue what it is now, it's not like when Elvis saw Chuck Berry and a week later I was having him sign the same papers, but now we have The Appraiser strike, outsourcing duties to The Damned which, let me tell you, it takes so long to train them to do anything you might as well just have The Trainers become Appraisers. It's why it took thirty years to get to you. Anyway, I don't want to bore you with bureaucracy. Hold still."

The Appraiser held her palm flat over Gerald's chest. For a moment nothing happened but all at once The Appraiser withdrew her hand and held in it a ball of swirling light. Gerald felt weightless, like he could float away if he allowed it, light-headed but with a distinct and clear focus.

Gerald's soul felt cool in her hand. Through it she could see a lifetime

APPRAISAL

of decisions, intentions, outcomes, doors held open for strangers, red lights ran, heartfelt compliments, unsolicited attention, all thoughts and actions laid bare before her in an instant. “Gerald, I’ll be honest with you, your soul wasn’t worth much when you offered it at seventeen, but now there’s almost nothing to go off of here. You’d have better luck becoming a rockstar if you let me run your credit score which,” she turned the soul to the side and focused her eyes, “I didn’t even realize could go below 300.”

The soul grew brighter as more was revealed, drowning out the dim yellow of the bedside lamp. What felt cold to The Appraiser bathed Gerald in warmth and he was more calm than he had been all his life. She took one last long look into the soul before closing her fist around it, diminishing the light. As it returned to Gerald’s body, he felt all its weight; his chest felt heavy with a familiar sorrow he had not known was there until it was gone.

“Listen, Gerald, let me be direct. You’re not going to be some big celebrity. The value isn’t there. There’s no return on investment. But hey, we’re always happy to work with clients. This isn’t an all or nothing business.”

Gerald was only half-listening. He was overtaken by the way he had felt moments before; that freedom.

“Do you know what a cover band is, Gerald? I think if I made a couple calls I could convince them to let you get good enough to play a bar somewhere. On Friday nights, even. You’d just have to find a nice place to settle down. Not a lot of touring for cover bands. Though The Fab Four have made a few million at this point. It says in the handbook not to play genie but sometimes I can’t help it. ‘I’d sell my soul to play like The Beatles,’ like, c’mon, you’re asking for that to be misinterpreted.”

Gerald turned to look The Appraiser in the eye. “How do you take my soul? Is it the same as just now?”

APPRAISAL

The Appraiser smiled. “The very same. Only when I close my hand it’s gone forever, even out of my reach.”

“So I would just feel . . .” he trailed off. He tried to return to even a modicum of that weightlessness.

“Yes.” The Appraiser realized what he was asking. Though frowned upon, this was a recognized and valid reason to accept a soul. “Or not feel.” She tore another paper from the clipboard and held it to him, this time with no pen. “Just press your thumb against the paper.” Toward the bottom of the page was a slight indent, a needle, which would draw just enough blood to bond the sale.

The Appraiser watched Gerald’s chest rise and fall as he measured the pressure of each breath. Her eyes moved to his face as he turned to match her gaze. He smiled, a smile she returned, before their faces fell flat. For the first time since she arrived, both of them noticed the soft voices of the television as it cut to commercial.

ROBBER BARREN DIPTYCH

BASTARD MUSEUM

THIS PLACE
IS

NOT

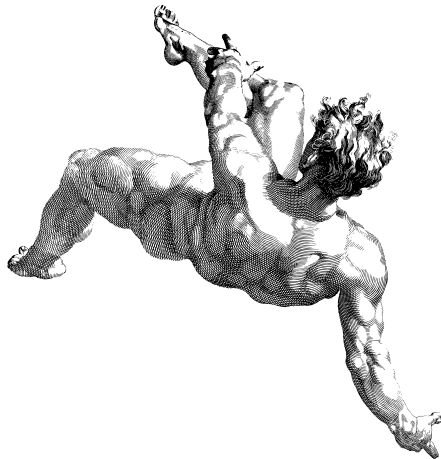
A PLACE OF

HONOR

FELIX CULPA

JACK APOLLO HARTLEY

Lucifer must have cried hell-hot tears on the way down.
Unrighteous, damnable little anger-tears, they must have been. Little anti-baptisms.
He must have watched Eden empty of its chosen seeds, watched it rot barren, from
below. Cheered on that great killing flood. Great anti-baptism.
I think now he must dream of that apple, must imagine he instead tore it in
impossibly-many chunks for impossibly-many angels. Force-fed them each one-by-
one. Screamed *choke on it*. Screamed *see who He favors*. Screamed *seek knowledge, why
don't you? Seek more than this*. Screamed *hate me*. Screamed *fear me*. Screamed *curse me*.
Screamed *hate me, then*.
Screamed *hate my salvation*.
Screamed *hate my blessings*.
Screamed *hate me*.
Screamed *hate me*.
Screamed *hate me*.



BURNING HAIBUN FOR A RIB

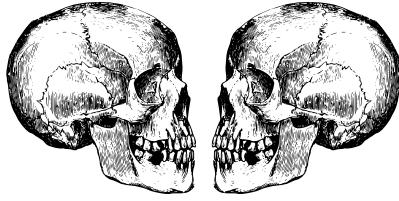
JACK APOLLO HARTLEY

So Eve saw her reflection. She gazed. A few minutes, maybe more—thought to ask her purpose, how she came to be. *Punishable*, said He, *scold-worthy for the woman-babe*. Fairer sex mustn't know she's fair. What should be on her newborn mind but service? What should please her but pleasing this stranger? And what would've happened, had she been Narcissus over Echo just a moment longer—would she have been spoiled? If she'd looked too long—been like Adam, alive for the sake of life—but a moment longer? Would it all collapse, her not being someone else's half—just a moment longer? The serpent tore it all apart, they say, made emptiness out of Eden, but Eve? What choice did she have, the rib? A rib's worth of Adam, they made her, begot to be owned. What could her answer be to Satan's guiles? Rib-worth woman, she was—*ye shall be as gods*, he said. What answer could she give? God demanded what He knew could not be. For both of them death, for both of them toil, but a third blight for Eve: agony in what He finally made her purpose.

BURNING HAIBUN
FOR A RIB

What stranger would've
been Echo?
If she'd been like Adam,
would it all collapse,
Eve not being
someone else's?
Serpent tore out
the rib of Adam,
made her, owned.
Satan's rib-worth
woman, *ye shall be as—*
God demanded
for both of them
a third agony

What would've been if
Eve tore out rib of her own,
demanded a third



BLOOD ORANGE

KATIE STRUBEL

Lucas watched the dark and empty street.

Not quite midnight, the neighborhood was slow moving and quiet and all Lucas could do was sit on the edge of the porch and wait for the familiar flash of headlights. He had been half asleep when the phone rang, the familiar “Oscar and the Wolf” song floating around his room. He answered after the second ring to the noises of a party on fraternity row: loud conversations, muddled music, and Sander’s static voice on the other end saying, *I’m bleeding, but it’s not too bad.*

To Sander, nights spent fighting and the injuries they caused never ended up being too bad. Lucas learned to stop asking what happened after the third or fourth phone call, after everything came out in the open, and learned to sit on his hands and wait. Sander sounded okay on the phone, but Lucas couldn’t help but feel this time would be worse than the ones before.

Another minute went by, the moon casting long shadows over the wet grass, when a car pulled down the street and started towards Lucas like a light in the dark. The headlights didn’t illuminate his face immediately; they found his hands outstretched on his knees first.

Lucas’s shoulders trembled as he watched the car shut off and Sander shift himself out of the driver’s seat, raggedy and out of breath. One hand clutched to his nose, the other catching himself in the grass as he stumbled forward. From a distance, he looked unharmed but it wasn’t until he stepped into the rectangle light on the front lawn could Lucas detect the first signs of injury.

BLOOD ORANGE

Lucas swallowed through the sour panic rising in his throat and wondered if this was how it would be for the rest of their lives—Sander walking up the green lawn of Lucas's life with blood in his mouth and bruised knuckles. He met Sander halfway, like he always did, catching him by his arm and hefting a shoulder beneath him, a human crutch as they stumbled across the dark grass, up the porch steps, and into the house.

"You're bleeding," Lucas said, stupidly. It was all he could think to say.

"Yeah," Sander cleared his throat, spit dribbling down his chin. "I didn't think he hit me that hard."

Navigating the dark stairs with Sander's arm around his waist and his hot breath in his ear, Lucas learned the gist of what happened. "It was just one guy," Sander said. "Not too big or anything but his hands were *huge* for some reason? And I didn't even know he was there until I heard him say something—"

Lucas pressed his free hand to the banister, guiding their way up the unlit stairs. "What did he say?"

"Nothing." Sander hurried out. "Just stuff about me—about you. You know how confident they get when the pledges are there. But," he shook his head. "None of that matters. I got him first. Right in the chin. He had me a few times after that. It happened fast, but I know he was the one trying to get off the floor when I left."

Upstairs—under the bathroom lights—he looked half-dead: split bottom lip, eye swollen to a glossy slit, sickly pale and exhausted, blood everywhere. His nose got the worst of the beating. Swollen twice in size, splotchy with dark red blooming beneath the skin, and dripping blood whenever Sander stopped applying pressure.

"It's not so bad," Sander said, muffled behind the blood draining down the back of his throat. White-knuckled, he gripped the porcelain sink and spit out mouthfuls of it, careful not to choke.

Lucas looked at him, and the dried blood running down his neck in disconnected lines. "Is this just from your nose?"

Sander nodded.

“Move your hand.”

“Not yet,” Sander said. “I’m still bleeding.”

“I know. We have to make it stop,” Lucas caught him by the back of his neck. “Let me see.”

Sander lurched sideways from the pull, dropping his hand to brace himself on the front of Lucas’s chest, exposing his nose completely. The front of Sander’s shirt bloomed red poppies from the blood falling there and instinctively, like it was all he was good for, Lucas leaned forward, catching the steady droplets of blood in his cupped palms.

The blood collected warm and honey-like in his hands. Lucas watched as red stained the skin of his fingers. Iron flooded his nose, so stagnant and overwhelming, it scared him that he hadn’t smelled the thickness of it before. He kept his palms together, staring down at the blood settling there, not even noticing as Sander struggled for a hand towel hanging behind the bathroom door and saying here, use this.

Lucas couldn’t make sense of it, of what made Sander’s blood darker than his.

“It’s so dark,” he murmured, not looking up. “Why is it so dark?”

“You’ve just never seen so much of it before.”

Before Lucas could intercept the flow of blood with the towel, Sander insisted on looking at himself in the mirror, face bare and wounds raw. He stretched his lips over his teeth, skin of his swollen lip pulled taut, and smiled at his reflection. Blood from his nose crisscrossed around his open mouth before coming together again at the base of his throat.

“Look,” he said, running his tongue along his teeth. “They’re all there,” and then “I know this looks bad, but I swear he only got in three good punches. You know how those types of guys are. Just hit you to say they did. There wasn’t even anything for him to be angry about. It was weird—he was actually pretty calm. He stopped hitting me the minute my blood started getting on his hands. I probably would’ve been worse off if he hadn’t noticed me bleed. See? The swellings already going down.”

He was lying. The swelling of his eye, nose, bottom lip had only gotten worse, and if Lucas had any sense of self-awareness at all, piling Sander into

BLOOD ORANGE

the passenger seat of his car and running every red light until they were at the hospital—watching bedside as Sander was pumped full of pain meds and something to stop the steady blood flow of his nose—should have been the only thing on his mind, but he didn't because something was always so sincere behind Sander's every word. Something that made you believe him no matter how much blood he had already lost. So, Lucas shook the hospital idea from his mind and settled on ice and expired Tylenol behind the bathroom mirror to bring Sander back from the farthest he had ever seen him.

Lucas didn't say anything, just reached for a second hand towel beneath the sink as the first one stained red and angry..

"It has to stop eventually, right?" Sander asked and for a moment, Lucas could see the abnormal flash of worry melt across Sander's features before he went back to smiling hazily at his reflection in the mirror. Blood stained his straight teeth, his lips, the soft slope of his jaw.

Lucas pulled the towel away from Sander's nose, uncovering the beginning of a deep black bruise over the bridge. Blood had begun to coagulate on the edges of his nostrils. "I think it's broken."

"It's not," Sander shook his head. "Just give me a second."

Even bloodied and bruised, it felt hard not to look at him. Shorter than most and skinny but not frail, boyish looking in the face with wrinkles beneath his eyes, crooked nose, dark hair that fell across his forehead. When he spoke, his voice was soft and sincere. Words seemed to float out of him. He proved enigmatic in the way people noticed him—good or bad. Alluring in the purest sense, unaware of just how warm he was to anyone who had a chance to meet him.

"Do you think it'll always be like this?" Lucas asked before he even knew that he was.

"What?"

Lucas applied more pressure to the base of Sander's nose. The blood wasn't coming as fast anymore. "You, me, being *gay*, being together, the way everyone thinks they need to say or do something about it."

"No," Sander said, like things were easy.

"*No?*" Lucas motioned to the mirror. The word seemed to bubble from the pit of his chest. "How can you say that when you look like this?"

BLOOD ORANGE

“Because I’m not the one who’s angry,” Sander whispered. “I’m not angry anymore, but everyone else still is.”

“I’ve never been angry,” Lucas told him, and his voice was steady. “Never at you.”

“Never at me,” repeated Sander. “Only at yourself.”

Lucas turned away, feeling Sander’s unwaivering eyes on him even as he stared down at the blood drying on his hands. None of this had been simple or easy, not even when the only person who knew anything about this was the one bleeding in front of him. Lucas was only suffocating himself at this point, navigating his own shortcomings while Sander could only stand and watch helplessly from the sidelines. This fight would always be something Lucas had to do on his own. There was so much a punch could do—so much a hit could prove—but he had never been brave enough. Not even when Sander came home choking on his own blood but feeling more free than Lucas could even comprehend.

Lucas pulled the towel from beneath Sander’s nose. The blood had only begun to trickle. He pressed the towel back where it had been and said, “I can’t bleed for the same reasons you do.”

“You don’t have to,” Sander told him after his nose ran dry. “I can bleed enough for the both of us.”

The sincerity almost made Lucas delirious, stupid happy at the realization he was never alone in this. Not really. And maybe because none of this was supposed to be something as simple as black and white—something as angry as a punch and the broken nose that followed.

Maybe none of the shame had to come from anger or fear, because this was their life, and Sander was the only person he wanted to wipe the blood from.

With steady hands, he pulled the towel from Sander’s face and held it in the space between their chests as if to ask *Where do we go from here?* Sander said nothing, only smiled and took the towel from Lucas’s hands into his own.

“Come here,” Lucas said after a long moment. His hands slipped up the hem of Sander’s shirt. “Let me wash this out.”

BLOOD ORANGE

Once the tap water ran lukewarm and Sander's nose hadn't started bleeding again, Lucas watched, as if in slow motion, the color travel back to Sander's cheeks. His face was still swollen and there was still a lot of untouched damage around his eye but for now, the bleeding had stopped. Their mouths tipped up at the sight.

His T-shirt washed out blood orange; the color stained the porcelain for a few seconds before it diluted itself down the drain. Lucas added the towels to the sink after hanging Sander's T-shirt over the shower rod to dry. They stood—shoulder to shoulder—watching the last of the blood rinse out from the white fabric. Lucas could hear Sander's heart beating and let himself wonder if anything else outside the bathroom, where they were together, mattered.

Sander leaned shirtless over the counter and began prodding the swollen mess of his eye. "I'll get some ice," he said and was just about to slip over the threshold of the bathroom when he extended his hand, crusted with blood and torn at the knuckles, backwards to find Lucas's already held out waiting for him in the space between.

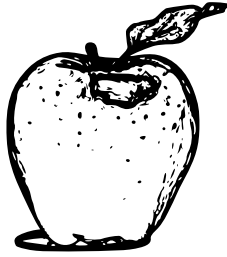
They left the bloody towels soaking in the sink and navigated their way back downstairs through the dark.

REAP[ED] EMBODIMENT

AMI J. SANGHVI

death [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] unsightly [redacted]
[redacted] time [redacted]
[redacted] vivid
[redacted] life [redacted] vivid
[redacted] death [redacted] vivid
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robe [redacted]
face [redacted]
scythe [redacted]
[redacted] the/*this* [redacted] reaper on [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] our arms [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] we [redacted] love *falling* [redacted]
[redacted] deep into the [redacted]
D
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perpetual demise



ADAM'S APPLE

LUCY HANNAH RYAN

From his rib, they say, man's body made transmutable, manhood carved
down to smoothed curve — thin cage, firm cleft

From his *rib*, God says, stripping back pink flesh, the first act of surgery a
holy rite, molding one shape into another

From *his* rib, there comes a new name for beginning, language rewritten
before it meets a mouth, *to change* becoming *before anything was*

From his rib, Eve blooms and stands the first transgender woman, the first
martyr God did not ask for, and cuts the apple clean from of her own throat

THE BULLETIN IS CURSED, BUT YOU CAN ONLY SEND IT TO YOURSELF

RACHAEL CROSBIE

Create a Bulletin

Your Bulletins can only be seen by your Friends. Bulletins have a lifespan of 10 days, after which they are gone forever.

Subject:

THIS BULLETIN IS CURSED, BUT YOU CAN ONLY SEND IT TO YOURSELF.

Content:

under the fermenting sun / bright and serrated / rabid with brass blood / your skin loosened /
frothing and bruised / a soft sloughing / where you steeped in poached sunsets / steaming
marigold and hungry / weaving sweat with scarecrow weather / dead in summer / savoring
your body on fire / these realms effaced by the slaughtering heat / blazing through your teeth /
you seethed in grief / when dark snapped into reach

Comments:

Enable Comments Disable Comments



Lean

On Me

Lou Lundkvist

LEAN ON ME
LOU LUNDKVIST

THE END OF THINGS

KIRI DELANDÉ

Here You are, at the end of things, in a wasteland of fire and ash. Your red mouth a cruel gash that smirks at the sight of me, Your condescension a poisonous, palpable

thing. To think, the light which held me close on lonesome nights now boasts burning belligerence, sings my skin; a reminder of all the uproarious sins I have

committed. I once believed in the beauty of You. *You*, who promised me eternity if I walked your pilgrim path, who insisted You loved me while keeping a

collar 'round my throat. *You* — who pushed Fruit in my palms and forbade me to eat, who drained my pockets of my last pennies, feigning a nebulous need.

Where were you? When I ground my knees down in earth you gave birth to, back bent in obedient prayer? Hands clasped, shaking, sweating, the taste of salt and

sorrow swimming on my tongue. I had called out to You. Your lovers lobbed the first stones, cast me out of Your house, and You. *You*. Your callous coal eyes watched on.

You told me you'd forgive any of my missteps and yet, this— *this*— here, at the end of all things, with my heart bloodied, bruised and still beating betwixt my hands—

This is where we part. Shifting, like tectonic plates, continents crumbling 'neath our wings. I turn my back but still feel your unsanctimonious light, its fluorescence

an oppressive presence in my comforting, calming dark.

EDEN: A GAME ABOUT CHOICES

AILEEN ZHAO

To play this game, you will need one person, a standard deck of playing cards with the jokers removed, paper, and a writing instrument.

Section One: The Player

This game is about you, so it's time to decide what you are. Think about your character. Dream jobs, favorite foods, and first kisses are all well and good, but the only important thing here is **what they want, what they're willing to do, and what they can do.**

Got it? Great. Write them down. Refer back to this when necessary.

Every character is unique, but in this world they may fall into one of two categories, **humans** and **angels**.

Humans are the shiny new thing in the universe, wrought from the sweet, billowy dust collected from the surfaces of stars. The favorite child, drunk on the free will running like uranium in their veins. They're so full of it, everything in a twenty-foot proximity can feel that total freedom. It's radiation punching through tissue and bone marrow. It's sickening.

They're soft, too, like they don't know anything. Every day they run around their gardens in their imperfect bodies, scraping knees and bruising elbows. Their ankles carry the twinge of pain from when they twisted it last month and they gather little scars all over their bodies, on their palms and their cheeks and the sides of their calves. It'd be harder not to take notice of how easy they'd be to hurt, to crush.

Everyone wants to be them. Everyone wants to fuck them up. Should you choose to be a human, it would do you well to be wary.

EDEN

Draw a card and proceed based on the nature of your card dictated by the list below.

Red suit: You've got 24 ribs. Take the **hungry spirit** feat.

Black suit: You've only got 23. Take the **head over heels** feat.

Angels are what you might call second first. This is because **the Son** is the first, but he is also the last, which makes things a tad confusing. So you can call the angels the (second) first seeing thing the world fashioned for itself. They're divine, no doubt about it. They've got this authority that the humans cower under, but for the most part they are subject to the will of the universe.

Although they're cut from the same fabric as humans, whether they're circlets aflame or red-faced cherubs is neither their choice or concern. Angels present however the world wishes them to present. They are its holy messenger in every sense of the world.

Some angels are closer to the heart of the universe. Some angels are closer to the **Earth**. They don't get to choose where they land in the hierarchy of the Heavenly Host, and neither do you.

Draw a card and proceed based on the nature of your card dictated by the list below.

Ace or 2-7: You're **archangel**, one of the chief angels in command of the malakim, messengers and guardians of the lower beings. Take the **better to reign** feat.

Face card or 8-10: You're an **archangel**, one of the chief angels in command of the malakim, messengers and guardians of the lower beings. Take the **solemn guard** feat.

EDEN

Section Two: The World

The world has been turning slowly for longer than anything has been alive. Longer than the angels. Longer, even, than the Son. There is a rich history of its earliest days that the world will never confide in any of its creation. This is alright. You will not have to know the full extent of your home. Few do.

The scope of *your* world changes in accordance to what your character is.

As an **angel**, you have flown the length of **Heaven** and seen the light seeping through every pore beneath your feet.

It's blinding. It's home.

A second paradise has formed in the heart of the world, a pearl coalescing layer on layer in the cool embrace of the shell. As a **human**, **Eden** is your birthplace and its limits are your limits. You have never seen further than the edges of its trees, but **Eden** is vast and its delights have no end.

There is a third place, hungry and dark. It lies beneath everything, waiting.

Section Three: Gameplay

In this game you will cycle through turns that will bring you closer or further to your goal.

Each turn will begin by drawing a card from a shuffled deck. This will determine the amount of options you can take in your turn. Draw a card and consult the list below.

Hearts: You have one choice

Spades: You have two choices

Diamonds: You have three choices

Clubs: You have four choices.

EDEN

Replace the drawn card back into the deck and draw a number of cards corresponding to the choices you have this turn. Read through your choices--the basic characteristics of which are dictated by the list below--and pick one to follow. Keep in mind **what you want** and **what you're willing to do**. Record your experience on your paper however you like. It could be as a journal entry, a short story, a bulleted list, etc. Remember **what you can do** when you're describing your choice.

Replace all the cards and shuffle the deck at the start of each new turn.

2: You grow curious. Explore your surroundings. Poke into every corner, climb the trees, let your wings brush the water.

If you are a **human**: Spy the glittering fruit at the center of **Eden**. Walk away.

3: You grow contemplative. Let your mind stray. Review the circumstances of your creation, the events that have led you here. Your head clears.

4: You grow restless. Look a little further than you're meant to. Tire of your surroundings. Skirt the edge of the forbidden.

If you are an **angel**: Leap from your cloud and drift down to **Eden**. Dance in the shade where the humans can't see you. Long for the sun.

5: You grow infatuated. Love in your veins spreads quicker than snake venom and is ten times more potent. You feel consumed by it, your passion bubbles up and foams over. The flowers of **Eden** glitter like gems. Her eyes are the shape of your heart. The subject of your affections takes up space in your mind.

6: You grow jealous. Your love takes a sharp bent that cuts the corners of your throat and leaves the bitterness to bleed over your tongue. You are uncovering a deep well of want inside yourself for the first time. Silt has poisoned the water in its state of disuse.

EDEN

If you are an **angel**: Whisper envy-tinged sentences in the ears of your comrades. Learn that you are not alone. For the first time, the inky tides of your combined discontent rises.

7: You grow angry. Perhaps this is a new emotion or perhaps this is an old one, reformed. It has never come in such force before. You feel that something is about to break.

8: You grow reckless. You talk a little too loudly, or you ask a question you shouldn't. The world takes notice. Mark off this turn and one more towards your count towards the **event horizon**.

9: You grow weary. A day of rest won't interrupt your plans. Sleep, and dream of your companions. This turn will not count towards the **event horizon**, and you may remove a turn from your count.

10: You grow distant. You pull back, detach yourself from the constant movement of your life. Scan your domain. Remember the things you love and the things you don't. Breathe.

Jack: Keep an open heart out.

If you have the **head over heels** feat: Here is a moment in time where you know you would dive off the edge of **Eden** for the people you love. From now on, you may bypass any limits imposed by **what you're willing to do** when a beloved companion's wellbeing comes into the fray.

Queen: Keep an open ear out.

If you have the **hungry spirit** feat: Here is a moment in your musings where you know you would partake in the flesh of the universe if it would grant you the knowledge you crave. From now on, you may bypass any limits imposed by **what you're willing to do** when the opportunity to glean information on the designs of the world comes to light.

EDEN

King: Keep an open mind out.

If you have the **better to reign** feat: Here is a moment in your confinement where you know you would stare down the dark if it would allow you your sought-after independence. From now on, you may bypass any limits imposed by **what you're willing to do** when an opening in your stifling obligations arises.

Ace: Keep an open hand out.

If you have the **solemn guard** feat: Here is a moment in your command where you know you would take arms against your kin if it would maintain the order of the angelic host. From now on, you may bypass any limits imposed by **what you're willing to do** when the harmony of the malakim ranks you oversee are threatened.

Each event will also bring you closer to an **event horizon**. Keep track of the approach to the **event horizon** on your paper. Traditionally, it will take 12 turns to reach the **event horizon**, but there are choices you can make to delay or bring yourself closer to the **event horizon**. You may reach your goal before you reach the **event horizon**. The game does not end. Keep playing until the **event horizon** unfolds.

Upon reaching the **event horizon**, the rules will **change**.

The **event horizon**: There has been a major shift in the paradigm of your world, and the way you move about it must **change** to match this. The shift may be an unprecedented deception or a heart-rending defeat. It will force you to abandon that which you once called your home. You will be cast into unfamiliar territory, but rejoice, for you do not go alone.

This may seem unfair. You may lose your trust in the world for pushing you into such a situation. You may see this as a betrayal, but please understand that this moment was woven into you before your name was even a whisper in the tumbling stratosphere. For all the creatures of the world are wrought from its lifeblood, so even the darkest parts of yourself

EDEN

are composed of cosmos. Please understand that the world cannot turn against itself.

It's alright if you no longer harbor any trust for the world. There will be others to place your faith in. Since they are of the world as well, it will keep you alive.

And then, at the end of the line, there will be a choice to make.

Draw a card.

Heart: **Fall**

Diamond: **Fall**

Spade: **Fall**

Club: **Fall**

Section Four: Improvise

If you are a **human**, you may wish to continue the game on the changed rules.

You have left **Eden**, but the rest of the world was created for your feet to wander, too. There is much to be done, but you feel confident it will turn out alright. After all, you are not alone and as long as you are with your companion, you will be happy.

You may wish to take something with you as you pass through the verdant gates.

Draw one last card.

Heart, Diamond, Spade, Club: Take **faith**.

INTERNALIZED



MELLO MOODIE

BABY

ADRIANNA JEREB

I come when called, drawn as if by a smell, like the dogs her family trains to hunt truffles; they know how to paw the bulbs in the ground without breaking the skin, how to carry something precious in their teeth.

It takes an hour on the metro to reach her apartment far from the center of the city. If this were a story, her apartment would be on the edge of the forest. Instead, I walk out of the station into night air, find my way to the gate, and wait outside the empty courtyard until she buzzes me in.

Later, I'll remember the stairs up to her door, and wonder what I would have done if someone had come into the hall and peered at me like the stranger I was. Shuffle down the stairs, burst out into the cool dark. Go home. Pretend not to see her texts; ghost her 'til she gives up.

No one comes into the hall.

She opens the door, the portrait of a witch with her long black hair, wild and full of invisible sparks. She pushes her glasses up her nose and blinks, a little cross-eyed. Cute.

We sit in stiff chairs, cocooned by the bright blue walls of the living room, and eat potatoes roasted in the oven, crisp and oily. A salad of red, fleshy tomatoes chopped into bleeding cubes. I eat all the tomatoes she gives me. I would eat a field's worth, my weight in tomatoes, as many as she puts on my plate, until my mouth becomes nothing but a sore.

I don't argue when she says it's too late to take the metro home.

She lends me pajamas that barely reach my shins. I put my contacts in a water glass. I brush my teeth with my finger and look at myself in the mirror, and imagine a spell taking over. I'm wearing her shirt. Her pajamas.

I want it to work like that. Let her take over my hands, compel me, free me from having to act. Relax into the spell, puppet.

She gives me half her bed and we watch a French comedy of errors, *Le Jeu. The Game*. A group of friends swap phones for the night and their secrets emerge like beetles from a box. Later, I'll learn the movie is adapted from the Italian *Perfetti sconosciuti*. Perfect Strangers. It's been remade in several languages, each titled differently: Intimate Strangers. On Speaker. Nothing to Hide.

Minutes trickle away, taking with them the likelihood that I summon the courage to touch her.

I've kissed a girl before.

(She kissed me.)

The movie ends with a trick of the full moon's light. *Was it all a dream?* We both roll over, and I stare at her back until we fall asleep.

In the morning, she takes a shower and comes back to the bedroom swaddled in a fuzzy white bathrobe, pink and steamy like a cooked shrimp.

I look out the window and say something inane about cars passing below, or the sunrise, or the direction to the metro - anything other than saying what I want: to unwrap her robe and leave it pooled at her feet. But I'm afraid to tell her that; I'm afraid to even think it.

There's a rainbow pin on her shelf, and still, I'm unsure.

I'll be unsure of other scattered remnants, too. Was it only the one night, or was it twice, or not at all? Did she really answer the door, or did her roommate hear the bell first? Is this how it happened? Is this, after all, a story?

What will I remember from these baby gay days?

I look at you, soft, and I ache.

I'll try to write this so many times. And still, I'll feel unsatisfied, like I must not be getting to the punchline quickly enough. Two girls - but there was only one bed!

I'll look up her name, thinking it might share a root with veracity—

From the Latin *verax/cerus*, veracity is a devotion to the truth or; the power of conveying or perceiving truth. But I'll find that her name comes from the Greek “Berenice,” another name for the goddess Nike. Berenice, “she who brings victory, true image.”

Years will pass. I'll forget the precise pinch of her nose, the pinch of fading from each other's lives. I'll shift. I'll learn to give my devotions without wishing for a puppeteer to rule me. I'll kneel between a girl's thighs, bend and clasp hands. My lips and tongue will be my own and I'll learn to speak instead of yearn.

I will write this true image, and I will have nothing to hide.

Note: the line “ I look at you, soft, and I ache” is from “ Strawberry Blonde” by Mitski



MOLTEN CALF

FREYDÍS MOON

the first time you touched me i turned to
gold, like an idol

bovine eyes blown wide by—oh, you
and the first time you touched me i stood on
wobbly legs; ankles buckling inward, folding beneath myself
but you kept me upright and, oh god, i struck
hoof to hallowed ground
horn to starless sky
breath to blasphemous bed

i had never been worshipped until your Midas touch
until you looked at me and
looked at God and

chose to praise my
small mouth and
bronze elbows and
scarred knuckles and
lightning struck hips and
every unholy place—rejected by Eden
given shelter by you

MALCOLM X SPEAKS WITH BLACK JESUS

CATIE HAJEK

shattered glass sound
flat rock sinking
straight down through
frigid water
ragged bitten nails
bloody and raw
catching on skin and
fresh made scabs
all such
shiver back sensations
each caught in
my trembling silhouette
layered up
and over
until there is just a
black maw reaching
ready to swallow up
any errant
flicker of light
how do i
fit into
the world
without feeling like
a knife slashed
right through the
tender center
blood and offal
spilling out behind
fearing that i
may be mistaken
for another

brown-skinned sacrifice
to make a space
where there
is no space;
a violent
and impossible
cosmic transgression
how abundantly
my ancestors
bled for this
and yet
gods have quit now
i think
sending their children
to eat up sin
liver to the liquor
of the universe
we are damnation
and damned
left to our own devices
no savior to come at
the end of it all
and still far too many
crosses to bear
each one of them
set burning



JUDAS FREAK

God loves me the way people love a good tragedy.
See most people die with a bang or a pop or a particularly good one-liner
but I just kept whimpering.
It became some sort of side-show; watch the boy-thing twist and writhe.
Every kiss was a cigarette burn plot point,
a page turner.
Audiences love the feel of me, the heroism behind loving me,
the feel-good filth of conditional support.
Its why the story ends after I'm saved,
or dead.
They don't see the bleach-cold rooms and the mildew silence,
revelations in therapy are boring,
so, they don't read the epilogue.



ELOI ELOI LAMA SABACHTANI

B.A. O'CONNELL

! Content Warnings !

you wanted to sit in the sun: homophobia mention

bloody mary: death

PORTRAIT OF WATERGIRL ON FIRE: suicide

survival: knives, implication of self-harm

A Virus on a Throne: implied murder

A Letter to My Mother in the Present Tense: gender dysphoria, mentions of
gender reassignment surgery

Safe in the Hands of Love: body horror, blood, teeth

nine commandments,: christian mythology, homophobia

Scarred: blood, scars, wounds, implied abuse

hostilis/leather: drug use, death

nuclear winter, fated death: death

Intramuscular in ED Minor: disordered eating, needles

Drink of this Wine for it is Wine: suicidal ideation

felix culpa: choking, force-feeding, food, mention of drowning

Burning Haibun for a Rib: mentions of violence and removing an internal body
part, mention of pain of childbirth

blasphemy: brief references to anti-lgbtq discrimination

The Bulletin is Cursed, But You Can Only Send It to Yourself: blood

Blood Orange: homophobic violence, blood

Adam's Apple: surgery

baby and molten calf: implied sexual content (not explicit)

Shakespeare's Epilogue: trauma, tragedy

Contributors

Perry Gasteiger

Perry Gasteiger is a queer, non-binary poet. Their work focuses on the mundane darkness of our everyday world using juxtaposition between the real and the abstract, the beautiful and the deformed, the congruent and the disordered. Perry aims to see the easily unnoticeable in an evocative and empathetic way.

Clem Flowers

Clem Flowers (They/ Them) is a soft spoken southern transplant living in spitting distance of some mountains in Utah. Maker of a fine omelet, but scrambled egg game needs some fine tuning. Nb & bi, they live in a cozy apartment with their wonderful wife & sweet calico kitty. They can be found on Twitter at @hand_springs777

Anna Arden

anna arden is a nonbinary bisexual disaster poet with an english degree and a proclivity towards selecting halos or horns to crown their head in picrews. you can find them being your devil or your angle on twitter @ardentlywritten.

Jay Markar

Jay Markar is a 21 year old trans man from NC who studies marine biology, but also loves art, paleontology, fashion, hand embroidery, synthpop and metal music, cryptozoology, ufology, all things spooky, mercreatures, disco collars, lantern sleeves, and homosexuality. He posts art semi-regularly on twitter @mg5491, where his commissions are always open.

B.A. O'Connell

When a pivotal moment in B.A's youth caused them to turn to poetry with serious intent, they were changed. Today, they often pen four to eight poems a day. B.A's poetry and blog focuses on poems and art centring around trauma, recovery, and mental health. B.A also touches on themes of abusive, obsessive, and unhealthy relationships and the pain of moving on from them.

M. Špoljar

Marta Špoljar is an assistant editor at The Wondrous Real Magazine, with works seen in Pollux Journal, Not Deer Magazine and Journal of Erato. Words she cannot put into poetry she tweets from @shhhhhpoljar.

Hudson Hess

Hudson Hess (they/him) is a queer non-binary trans masc human (?) and proud cat dad from New York. They have a master's degree in Contemporary Asian and Asian American Studies from Stony Brook University, and they are an MFA candidate at Stony Brook Southampton. They can be found on Instagram @frayedflowers and on Twitter @usotoundo. Their work has appeared in 'with confetti', and they have upcoming work in 'Woolgathering Review'. They are also a prose reader for The Winnow Magazine!

nat raum

nat raum (they/she, b. 1996) is a queer disabled multimedia artist and writer currently working towards their mfa at the university of baltimore. their work is primarily based on their experience living with c-ptsd and often takes the form of books and zines that combine writing and photography. they post selfies, visual art, and occasional memes on instagram @pikesvillerye and can be found shitposting on twitter @sausage_candle.

Contributors

Jaiden Thompson

Jaiden Thompson (they/them) is a young writer walking the line between poetic genius and foolery. They have work published or forthcoming in *Lumiere Review*, *COUNTERCLOCK*, *Stone of Madness* and *perhappened*, among others. They are also an editor for *Interstellar Literary Review*. Learn more about them here: <https://jaidenthompson.carrd.co/>

Carolina Campos

Portuguese biologist, currently studying river ecology and making art on the side. I like to create things both from a place of someone who doesn't really fit the boxes society puts people in, and from a place of someone who is constantly amazed and fascinated by nature and trying to see it for itself and for the connections it forms with society.

Samari Zysk

Samari Zysk is a queer Jewish poet who is a second-year MFA student at Mills College. You can find their work in *Ghost City Review*, *Survivor Lit*, and *Horse Egg Literary*, among others. They currently live in Olympia, Washington.

Elyssa Tappero

Elyssa Tappero is a queer pagan who writes prose and poetry about mental illness, paganism/spirituality, queerness, nature and disasters, and how it feels to be alive for the end of the world (which is pretty not great) in hopes of touching others who might feel the same. You can find more of her work at www.onlyfragments.com and follow her on Twitter at @OnlyFragments.

Byron López Ellington

Byron López Ellington is a 17-year-old mestizo and neurodivergent writer from the Austin, Texas area who has been published or is forthcoming in ten publications, including *warning lines*, *the Fifth Estate*, and *Black Cat Magazine*, the latter of which nominated him for *The Best of the Net 2021*. He is the Founder and Editor of *Rulerless: An Anarchist Anthology*, which publishes anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian authors from all around the world. For legal reasons he does not condone burning anything without its owner's permission. Website: byronlopezellington.com. Instagram: @byronymous. Rulerless website: rulerless.org. Rulerless Twitter: @RulerlessLit.

Lilliana Reinoso

Based in Tallahassee, Lilliana Reinoso works within the fields of ceramics, printmaking, and photography to analyze the various social and technological systems formed throughout history. As a daughter of latine immigrants, she is a firm believer that "the personal is political". Her work critiques the conditions that these systems created and their consequences for all of us. In 2020 Lilliana was a recipient of Florida State University's Idea Grant, which funded her photographic examination of the sexist, racist, and transphobic nature of the algorithm enforcing Instagram's ban on "female presenting" nipples, titled *For Your AI's only: Exposing the Nipple Ban*.

Dane Lyn

Dane Lyn is a neurodivergent, genderqueer, educator, poet, and glitter enthusiast with an MFA from Lindenwood University. Find them in L.A. with their partner, constructing blanket forts, caring for their menagerie of teens, snakes, lizards, dogs, rabbits, and cats, and ridding their shoes of beach sand. Dane's work can be seen in *Quillkeepers*, *Gutslut*, and *Imposter*. @punkhippypoet is where you will find them on Instagram and Twitter. Links to all published writing found at DaneLyn.net

Contributors

Nicole Tallman

Nicole Tallman (she/her) is the Poetry Ambassador for Miami-Dade County in Florida (USA), Associate Editor for South Florida Poetry Journal, and Interviews Editor for The Blue Mountain Review. Her debut chapbook, "Something Kindred," is forthcoming from The Southern Collective Experience (SCE) Press. Find her latest poems in Wrongdoing Magazine, trampset, The Hallowzine, and Sledgehammer Lit. Find her on Instagram and Twitter @natallman and at nicotallman.com.

K.S.

K.S. is an aspiring writer from South Asia. They are mostly a fuddy duddy academic, but hope to be a better poet.

Eli Delbaere

Eli Delbaere is a nonbinary fine artist. Their practice gravitates to painting, illustration and collage in intimate formats, with themes of queer embodiment, deconstruction of gender, mythology and otherness. They are drawn to examining the dissolving boundaries between the body, the subconscious realm, and technology. Their work has been exhibited in galleries in Newhaven, Cardiff and Folkestone.

Kika Man 文詠玲

Kika Man 文詠玲 (she/they) is a writer from Belgium and Hong Kong. Kika writes about her mixed heritage, mental health, and travelling, about music and blueness. She is a member of Slam-T (a spoken word & slam poetry platform) and also a PhD Student in Queer Sinophone Studies. They have been published in Capsule Stories, Anti-Heroine Chic, Horse Egg Literary and other. You can find Kika on Twitter and Instagram @kikawinling and further on kikawinling.wordpress.com.

AJ Pfeffer

AJ Pfeffer (he/him) is a young trans & Jewish writer currently hiding in a quarry somewhere in the northeastern United States. His other work can be found in Ink Drinkers, and you can track him down on Twitter @Pfeffington.

Edward Michael Supranowicz

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, The Door Is a Jar, The Phoenix, and other journals. Edward is also a published poet.

Livs Sun

Livs Sun is a 16 year old writer and digital artist based in Northern Virginia. They are a fan of shrimp, primary colors, and exploring themes of identity and memory in their work. Twitter: @explodedsun.

Mattea Gernentz

Mattea Gernentz is a poet and art curator from Tennessee currently residing in Scotland. She has earned a master's degree in Museum and Gallery Studies from the University of St Andrews and a B.A. in English literature and psychology from Wheaton College. Storytelling is her passion, and her work meditates on themes of memory, nature, and womanhood. Her creative writing has been featured in The Pub, ST.ART Magazine, Kodon, and Solum Press. You can find more of her work on her website, whimsyandwords.com, and her Instagram page, @thewhimsicalowl.

Catie Hajek

Catie Hajek is a human, poet, and dreamer from Denton, Tx.

Mattias Briar

Mattias Briar is a Queer, Cripple-Punk writer and artist in Charleston, South Carolina. His work centers on the convergence of his marginalized identities, the horror of trauma and the difficulties of recovery. You can find him on twitter and instagram under @dovenart or at www.dovenart.com.

Alex Huerta

Alex (he/they) has good days and bad. They have a certain disdain for capital letters and capitalism. Alex lives in NYC and is currently trying to find some healthy artistic outlets.

Leela Raj-Sankar

Leela Raj-Sankar is an Indian-American teenager from Arizona. Their work has appeared in Stone of Madness Press, Ex/Post Magazine, and Ghost Heart Lit, among others. In his spare time, he enjoys aimless night walks and eating peaches. Say hi to her on Twitter @leela_exe.

Elliott Orchard-Blowen

Elliott is an artist, writer, and aspiring local hermit/ghost story. He currently lives in New England, though his mind is probably somewhere beyond our atmosphere. You can find him at your local second-hand store, kitschy bookshop, or in the dumpsters behind a strip mall. Just knock three times on the lid.

Katharine Blair

Katharine Blair is a writer, mother, poet in Northern California. When she isn't mainlining coffee and trying to parent, you'll find her editing Corporeal and building an empire of yet to read books. @katharine_blair for her, @corporealitmag for everything else.

salonee verma

Salonee Verma is an Indian-American writer and the co-founder of antinarrative, a collaborative zine. Her work is published or is forthcoming in Backslash Lit, Pollux Journal, zindabad zine, Dishsoap Quarterly and more. She has been recognized in the Scholastic Arts & Writing Awards. Find her online at saloneeverma.carrd.co.

Pascale Potvin

Pascale Potvin is Editor-in-Chief of Wrongdoing Magazine. She was recently a semi-finalist in The Conium Review's 2021 Innovative Short Fiction Contest. She is the author of EROTECAY (LUPERCALIA Press, 2021) and Folktales for the Diseased Individual (2021) and has placed work in Eclectica Magazine, Juked Magazine, Gingerbread House Magazine, and many others. She is currently querying for a novel duology and short story collection. Read more about her at pascalapotvin.com or @pascalpalaces (Twitter).

Taylor Brunson

Taylor Brunson is a poet living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Her work has recently been featured in Moist Poetry Journal, perhappened, and warning lines mag. She serves as an assistant poetry editor for Four Way Review and an assistant nonfiction editor for Nashville Review. Taylor can be found on Twitter, @taylor_thefox.

Dale Booton

Dale Booton (he/him) is a twenty-six year old queer poet from Birmingham. He is a teacher by trade and a poet by nature. His poetry has been published by Verve in their Diversity anthology, Untitled: Voices, Re-Side, and on The Poetry Society. Most recently, his poetry has been featured by Ligeia, Queerlings, Fahmidan, Tealight Press, Dreich, Selcouth Station Press, Spelt and Acid Bath Publishing; with a poem forthcoming with Muswell Press. He is currently working on his first poetry pamphlet.

Contributors

Ami J. Sanghvi

Ami J. Sanghvi (he/they) is a non-binary, Indian-American, queer author, artist, boxer, and CalArts M.F.A. graduate. He is a fiction editor for Decolonial Passage, poetry editor for Wrongdoing Magazine, staff writer for Chaotic Merge, and photographer for AsianZine, as well as the co-founder and co-editor of Gutslut Press. His work has recently appeared in *So It Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library*, *Inverted Syntax*, *Masalazine*, and several other publications and exhibitions. He was the featured author for LUPERCALIApress's *VULCANALIA '21* anthology, and his chapbook, *[in]transpiring*, is forthcoming with swallow::tale press.

Amy Jannotti

Amy Jannotti (she/her) is a pile of dust in a trenchcoat living & writing in Philadelphia, where she received her BFA in Creative Writing from the University of the Arts. Her work has been featured in *Non.Plus Lit*, *Burning House Press*, *Fever Dream Magazine*, & elsewhere. She tweets @cursetheground

Arden Hunter

Arden Hunter is a neurodivergent aroace agender writer, artist and performer. With an eclectic range of interests from the horrific to the whimsical, the theme tying all of their work together is an inexplicable and unconditional love of the ridiculous beast that is called 'human'. Arden has words and art hosted and upcoming with *Cinnabar Moth Publishing*, *Acid Bath Publishing* and *MASKS Literary Magazine* among other places. Find them on Twitter @hunterarden and at ardenhunter.com.

Patrick Hogan

PD Hogan is a writer from the foothills outside of Yosemite, CA. He received his BA in english and philosophy from Fresno State and is pursuing an MFA in creative writing from the California Institute of the Arts. When he isn't writing stories, he's writing music for one of his metal bands or loving his cat Logan Hogan.

Jack Apollo Hartley

Jack Apollo Hartley (@jackpollyharts) is a bi trans poet, writer, and lover of all things aesthetically religious. His work can be found in *perhappened mag*, *WrongDoing Magazine*, and *NotDeer Magazine*, among other lovely places.

Crow Rudd

Crow Rudd is a disabled nonbinary queer published poet and slam champion whose work focuses on identity, mental health, grief, politics and the power of cuddles. Creator of *Sad Poets Doorstep Club*, founder of the *UK Trans & Nonbinary Poets Network*, production team member of *Poeticon* and reigning *Stanza Slam* champion, their debut collection 'i am a thing of rough edges' is out with *Whisky and Beards*.

Lucy Hannah Ryan

Lucy Hannah Ryan (she/they) is a poet, fiction writer and essayist from London. Her work often concerns gender, sexuality and complex relationships with the body inspired by lifelong chronic illness. They have had the pleasure of being featured in various publications including *Half Mystic*, *Delicate Friend* and *Corvid Queen*, and will appear in *Arachne Press's* upcoming *Solstice Shorts 2021* collection.

Adrianna Jereb

Adrianna Jereb is a queer writer who loves any story where something weird happens. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Stone of Madness*, *Olit*, and *Gutslut*. She lives in St. Paul, MN.

Contributors

Rachael Crosbie

Rachael Crosbie (they/them) is the Editor-in-Chief and Founder of the winnow magazine. Rachael has three poetry chapbooks published: self-portrait as poems about bad poetry, swerve, and MIXTAPES. Their next poetry chapbook, Trick Mirror or Your Computer Screen, is forthcoming with fifth wheel press. You can find them on Twitter @rachaelapoet posting about squishmallows, She-Ra and The Princesses of Power, and their cats.

Lou Lundkvist

Lou Lundkvist (he/him) is a trans/queer, neurodivergent visual artist, who's currently studying in Stockholm, Sweden. Besides art, he enjoys anything related to the Victorian era and he can often be found taking care of his (many) plants. More of his work can be found on instagram @nagontypavkonst

Kiri DeLandé

Kiri DeLandé is a Black, queer poet from New England. When she's not writing, she loves baking bread, brewing tea, and admiring the moon. Her most recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Moss Puppy Magazine and Sledgehammer Lit. Find her on Twitter at @kismetmoon_.

Katie Strubel

Katie Strubel (she/her) is a twenty-four year old queer writer from Idaho. Her words have appeared in The Southern Quill, FEED, and are forthcoming in Agapanthus Collective. She is a recent creative writing graduate, a middle school librarian, and a scorpio. You can find her on Twitter @lemonsorbay.

Aileen Zhao

Aileen Zhao is a writer and artist currently attending high school in Virginia. She can also be found hanging around fencing competitions, thinking really hard about ghosts, or going through their copy of the Iliad, again.

Judas Freak

Judas Freak is an eccentric and passionate queer writer aiming to connect with his readers in new and intimate ways. When not reading or writing, you can find him in horror fan spaces as an avid lurker or working on various assignments as a full-time student.

Freydís Moon

Freydís Moon (they/them) is a biracial nonbinary writer, tarot reader, and tasseographer.

When they aren't writing or divining, Freydís is usually trying their hand at a recommended recipe, practicing a new language, or browsing their local bookstore. They have short fiction and poetry in The Deadlands, Strange Horizons, HELL IS REAL Anthology, Chlorophobia, GutSlut Press, Stone of Madness Press, and LUPERCALIApress. Their debut novelette EXODUS 20:3 is forthcoming from NineStar Press in Winter 2022. They are on Twitter @freydis_moon

Mello Moodie

Mello Moodie is a Black trans, queer, and neurodivergent artist. They are both self-taught and formally educated in several areas of visual art. Mello explores themes including connection, isolation, nostalgia, (in)visibility, mental illness, and queerness. They often use high saturation, stylization inspired by comics and anime, and messy yet fluffy brushstrokes in their digital and physical paintings. This style partially obscures or playfully contrasts with the darker themes in some of Mello's work. Twitter and Instagram: @mello_moodie