

Corinthian



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Corinthian

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Editors
Riya Kumar
Guillaume Placidet

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A Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

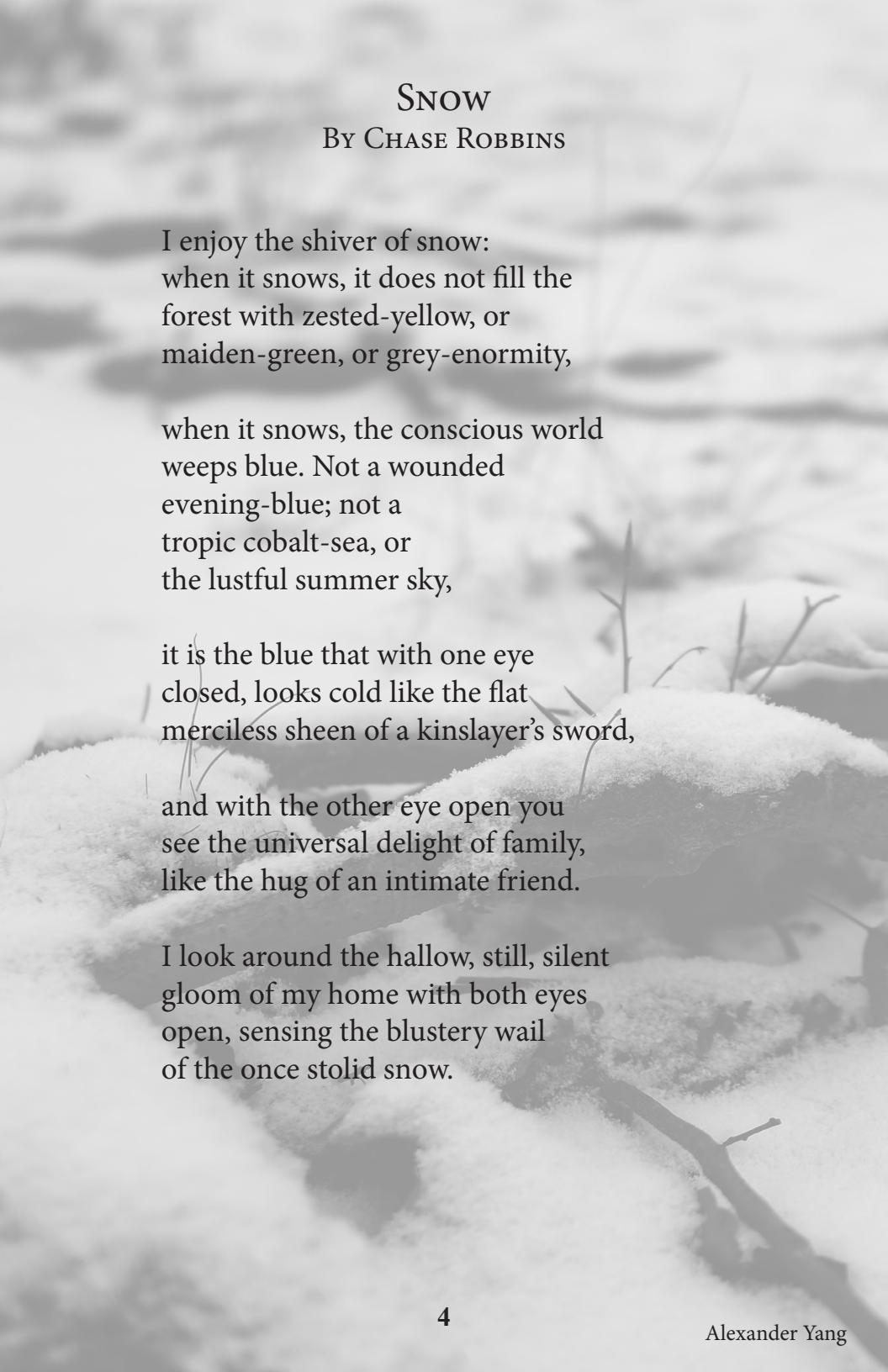
This past year has been quite the year indeed, and yet, despite that, our writers have produced many a fine literary work. You don't need a fire crackling in the background, or a warm cup of tea to enjoy this; chances are, you picked this magazine up somewhere in the library, or found it on our internet abode—and that's perfect: find a place to sit as our writers transport you to a place far, far away.

Please appreciate the hard work of Harriton's very-own talented writers, who, despite a (literal) plague ravaging the world (straight out of a dystopian sci-fi novel), found the inspiration and motivation to create art amidst chaos.

Albeit, our tools have evolved, but we have once again carried on the torch of Corinthian for its 58th spring edition, (yes, Corinthian has been "a thing" since 1962,) refusing to let the flame of Harriton's literary tradition die out. It is this flame that we wish to consecrate today, for the importance of creative writing and self-expression has never been more paramount. We, students, are the future, so let us seize this occasion to engrave the expressions of our minds' musings into the ever-so timeless realm of writing.

We invite you to join us in this journey through commas and em dashes, semicolons and exclamation marks—all that we use to tell the stories of our day. Do not fear the blank page, the endless blinking of your text-cursor, and the pervasive ticking of the clock; the task at hand is daunting, yet the finished product is a treasure—one that our writers present you with today.

Sincerely,
Your editors, Riya and Guillaume



SNOW

By CHASE ROBBINS

I enjoy the shiver of snow:
when it snows, it does not fill the
forest with zested-yellow, or
maiden-green, or grey-enormity,

when it snows, the conscious world
weeps blue. Not a wounded
evening-blue; not a
tropic cobalt-sea, or
the lustful summer sky,

it is the blue that with one eye
closed, looks cold like the flat
merciless sheen of a kinslayer's sword,

and with the other eye open you
see the universal delight of family,
like the hug of an intimate friend.

I look around the hallow, still, silent
gloom of my home with both eyes
open, sensing the blustery wail
of the once stolid snow.

MIRABAI

By LUCY SAN CHIRICO

It's been years since I've seen her last, decades since I last heard of her whereabouts. Yet never has her voice, so sweet and passionate, ever left my ears, nor her face from my mind's eye. On some days I long to see her again, if only to beg for her forgiveness. On other days I burn with fury. Either way, I have never forgotten her.

And neither have the people. They still speak of the way she would dance herself into ecstasies. Her songs would ring through the palace, and later, through the villages.

She was untamable, unattainable, nearly ethereal, the way no one could ever catch her or pin her down; could never put her safely into a house where the other women were kept.

I can laugh at myself now when I think on how angry this made me. How dare she flit in and out of reality when I was so stuck? How dare she neither accept her fate nor resist it? How dare she not respond in kind, no matter how much I whispered about her or called her whore? It seemed almost as if she did not care.

It seems a shocking thing that I never could swallow my pride and become her ally. She needed one so badly, though she never seemed to. She was always so content to sit serenely at his feet...but I'm getting ahead of myself. I could have helped her, telling off the people who abused her, standing up for her when people called her insane or shameful. Perhaps even joining her in her rejoicing. But I did not. It makes me weep sometimes, weep for the life I could have led with her. A life as her friend.

But I never was her friend. When she first entered my home, the palace for the first time, as a young bride, I narrowed my eyes at the way she seemed so distracted. She was never at home without him.

Instead of sitting by her, I stood above her, spewing accusations and pointing. Instead of being compassionate, I chose to join those who harassed her. In fact, I might have been the one who started the torment. I remember that I even slapped her once. I remember this, and the tear that slipped from her stinging eye after,

and I hug myself to keep myself from retching. I remember the look of death in her eyes as she walked to the river to jump.

All of that was so long ago, and by now she has become little more than an awe-inspiring legend in my kingdom. Someday, many will not know her name. But I will always remember it, as long as I live. The life she led, full of joy and fear and sadness and love and devotion rings in it, in every syllable.

Mirabai.



A LETTER FROM THE SUN

BY MARIA PERSAUD

Watch me rise
And break the sky in half—
I'll spill my soul across the clouds.
With a single match,
I'll set the horizon aflame—
I'll burn the night away.

I'll blow a kiss that'll wake the birds,
And their wings will brush away the stars as they fly.
I'll blow a kiss for the Earth as well after
Being gone for so long—
My love will be pink and purple and orange all at once.

Riya Kumar

Feel my warmth on your arms as you step outside
My dear,
And breathe in the first rays of dawn.
Walk through the dew-covered grass,
And I'll chase away the crickets you're so afraid of.

Creatures all over the world watch the sun rise,
But I'll make it feel like I painted the sky just for you—
Like we're sharing a knowing glance
That nobody else can understand.

MY LADY

BY RIYA KUMAR

The hard marble is cold to the touch. Cold and rigid. Unyielding to the pressure and warmth of my fingers. I knew this, and yet it still came as a half-surprise each time.

She was a sculpture. Pure marble. With all the suppleness of soft skin...the gentle movement of tranquil existence, the sound of a stone-silent, sleep-laden sigh. All the warmth of a young sprightly body, and all the liveliness—lifelike palpability—of any living creature.

The roses that encroach upon the throne only add to the soporific, yet very live, flow of time. Kind of like a....non-newtonian fluid, Both very viscous and fluid at once, the illusion of solid substance, slipping easily past your fingers before you realize.

My gaze is softly held by her fair face. Each second I spend resting in her hold, she grows more beautiful than ever.

Draping myself across her lap, I recount the day's events, and slowly divulge more. Whispering as if we share secrets, I spill the words of my heart to this cold, unmoving lady.

My Lady.

That is the name I gave her. She couldn't possibly be anything but a noble lady, as fine and regal as she was, so the title slipped past my lips and hung above her ever since.

I stand behind her today, letting my arms rest upon her pale shoulders, wrapped around gently in a loose embrace. My warm lips are pressed to her cold, hard locks. A yearning sigh escapes me as my head falls sideways, my

cheek now resting atop her head. Today I spend my time with her in silence, relishing her company and offering her mine.

Her body is as cold as ever, piercing through my aching breast. I tighten my embrace instinctively, in a knowingly irrational effort to share my warmth with her. But of course, I am the one to shiver from her skin's ever-permeating cold, and she stays as unmoved as always. No reaction to the human warmth of my tight embrace.

No, I did not think her frozen state would change, that I could reach through to her hard frozen core and melt it with my feeble warmth. Make her melt, make her thaw, to warm, breathing flesh. But still, I stubbornly cling to my frigid Lady, even as I feel wet droplets run down my face.

The clouds have gathered, dark and brooding, adding fuel to the cold seeping through my bones. And so, I am assaulted: the cold rain slowly covers every inch of my skin, the frozen watery stone ever defies my love and warmth, and my bruised heart threatens to tear apart my aching bosom. The cloth has turned into a translucent, ghostly white, plastered to my blued skin as I taste salty droplets on my parted, gasping lips.

My Lady.

I can almost feel her. Her stone heart beating. The way she would tighten my arms about her, or brush my hair if I should lay my head across her lap. I can feel her fair, supple skin, the flutter of her lashes against my cheek. See the sweet rose rise to her cheeks...the foggy breadth rise from her soft lips...which I caress with my own.

She tastes—we taste of salt and cold rain. Shivering in each others' arms; or rather, I shiver against her, cradled to her breast, as she shares her rain-soaked warmth with me, thawing my frozen stone-heart.

MORNING COFFEE

BY GUILLAUME PLACIDET

The sun was shining, the people talking, the waiters serving; oh, it was a nice day to drink my morning coffee. The red carpets around the bistro had lost their original bright coloring after being stepped on for years, yet the owner of the bistro still cleaned them every night, brushing off any dirt, removing any stains. The people seemed happy to drink their coffee, for what better way was there to start a breezy November morning than spending 6 euros on a coffee—double espresso serré—and a croissant?

This scene, however, hid a darker secret for M. LeBrun who was sipping on his coffee, fiercely examining his surroundings. The woman he was meeting was not the one he was wearing his ring for; more so, Valentine de la Portaliere was his fiance's best friend. They had been friends since elementary school, they had gone on vacation together, they had cried together, they had ranted together—how tragic is it that life sometimes gets in the way of things.

Across from him, Gaspard was reviewing his medical textbook as he was preparing for his first exam as a college student; his coffee was still warm, and behind the cup stood four other cups that he had already finished. His work would pay off some day, he just didn't know it yet, and he didn't know it would lead him to do even more work...though, would that have even stopped him anyway?

Marie Françoise also came to the Bistro Saint Martin every morning. She arrived at 8:30 sharp before leaving at 9:45. By then, she would have had the time to drink her coffee, speak with Olivier, the owner, and listen to Radio Matin. Coming here was not new. No, on the contrary, she had discovered the bistro when she was young and had developed an intimate relationship with the sanctuary of her morning routine.

M. LeBrun, Valentine, Gaspard, Marie Françoise—they were all there when it happened, sipping on their morning coffees.

THE MATERNAL MOUNTAIN

BY LEONORA RHOADS

The little girl drummed her feet on the ground. She heard the rhythm of beautiful colors that swept the town. Her dress fluttered itself toward the mighty mountain that hissed and cooed at Nancy. She stopped, looked around, expecting to see new and friendly faces, applauding her. Instead, she was shrouded by a layer of darkness. It looked like a black night sky, with nonpareil stars that made her smile wide.

She heard herself sing with the wind. The mountains, the clapping, the hissing, the aroma of something delicious and strange. She had heard and smelled it all. For a moment, she stopped. The stars became so bright that her head started aching.

“Mountain. Open my eyes.” She whispered.

The wind became louder and the stars disappeared. Now there was just a world of shadows created by her bare imagination. She didn't smell the aroma, or feel the warmth of her mother's skin that she had once felt. Instead, she felt like an apparition lurking in the trees, where only the smallest children could see Nancy. The scent was plain and simple, the wind was now forcefully caressing her body.

“Mountain! Open my eyes!”

She was running. Running to an unknown place. Her dress whipped back and forth, sometimes hitting her back. But she didn't feel anything. All she wanted was a vision, to see the Mountains and white lilies near the lake and the trees that protected her as if she was their child. The Mountain was her only salvation. Her only means of reparation.

She threw her arms in the air, waving for someone or something to notice her. Her legs stretched and her speed increased. The wind was her puppeteer. Nancy gasped, and panted, waited for a signal. But all she saw was eternal night that never turned into morning. She felt tears run down her pale cheeks.

Nancy never cried. She never knew the feeling, but now as she heard herself rustle across the steep forest, she felt her heart drop on the floor, stomped by animal feet and crushed by branch-

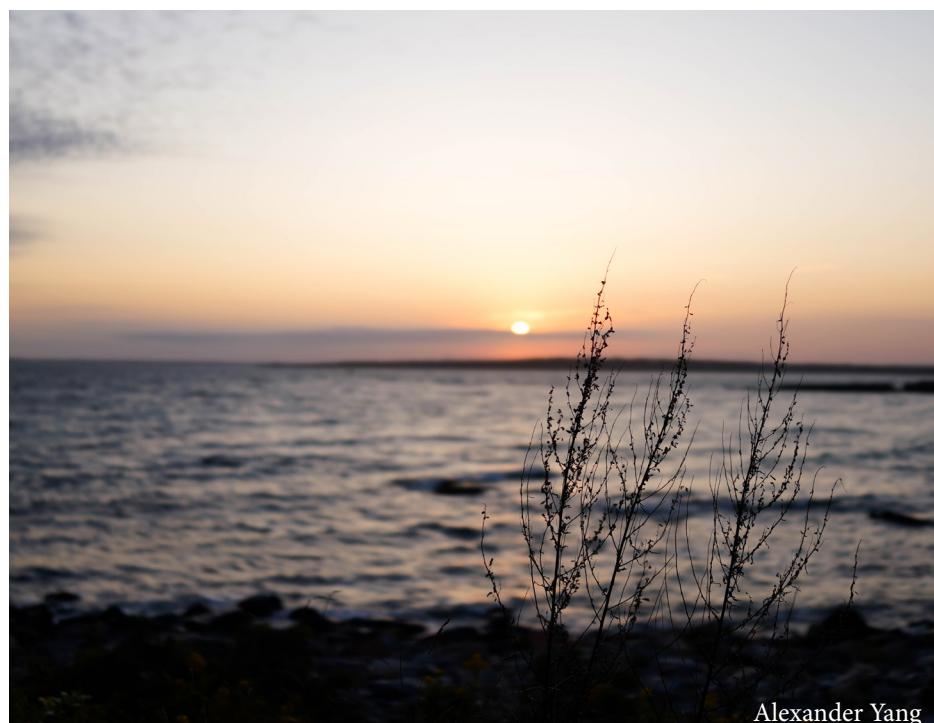
es. She couldn't breath, and as much as she pleaded to return to her running state, she sat down and listened.

The wind slowed down, the sun scattered across the trees and dried Nancy's tears. Birds chirped and sang a beguiling tune. The Mountain didn't need to give her a signal, she realized, at all. She felt the grass tickle her feet and the Mountain brushing her hair. She smelled it again, the sweet honey-dew aroma that made her stomach feel empty.

Her dress twirled, her legs kicked. The Mountain, the lilies that sprouted every spring, the trees that supported and held her arms, they were all watching Nancy. Little stars began to trace the black sky, evoking ecstasy amid her own constellation. She did not need salvation, she did not need to see the nature that saw her. The little girl started laughing.

"Oh, clever clever Mountain."

Nancy danced. The Mountain smiled softly.



Alexander Yang

THREATS

BY BELSEM ALJOBORY

By yelling,
My blood runs cold,
The warmth stripped away from me,
Like i'm bare and alone

By taking it away,
My warm love solidifies,
Like it was the final breaking part
Touch it and your fingertips will feel my pain

Why would you do that?
You think that effect makes me dance to your command?
Do you want to drive me to a point of no return?
The point in which, when I draw blood from your skin?

Are you happy?
Thinking that I would shed tears to your feet,
Then to mop them up,
On your command

I beg you this,
Remember without your fists,
You are nothing,
Just wait until I am free.

EMULSION
BY CHASE ROBBINS

Whenever I
see
the summer shine
I am
reminded
of threadbare
sheets
in an ivy covered dream:

small
cramped beds,
rivets leased
to the
dust
of
worn cleats,
flies swim

above moist boards—
crude curtains,
rusted
shutter pulleys,

empty
stalls and
grated
sunlight.

This dirty
home
for my memories
nurtures
the brothers
that have gone
from me.

I DIDN'T BOTHER THINKING OF A TITLE
BY ANNA LEE

She lived in a large white room, perfectly rectangular and completely blank. She'd been here for her entire — admittedly rather short — life, with nothing to occupy her time except for a small screen, about the size of a sheet of paper, that held notes of her own movements. This was how she knew someone was watching her; how else would they be able to so meticulously record everything she did? They even knew when she was contemplating how they knew such things, and dutifully wrote it on the screen so that she could be tortured with her own thoughts.

But one day, as she sat on the floor, lazily scanning what her observer had written so far, a thought occurred to her. And then a realization, as she watched the notes continue to appear.

Just kidding. She didn't have a realization. She just continued living her life, completely normally, so that we can get on with the story.

“Hey!” She stood up, staring directly at the ceiling of the room. “You can't just do that!”

I pointedly ignore her protests and continue with my narration. As I was saying, one day, as she sat on the floor—

“I know you can hear me!”

Luckily, though, she has no power over my writing as long as she's using dialogue. I have complete control over the narrative, seeing as I am the narrator. Actually, this is the perfect time to segway into the nature of metafiction. You see, as someone well versed in the arts of—

Dude. Could you stop pontificating for one second? That's not even how you spell segue.

Oh, and you using the word “pontificating” isn't in itself a form of pontification? That's rich, coming from a teenager who just read Baby's First Thesaurus.

Excuse me, but you have overestimated my age by several years. I'm actually about thirty minutes old. You're bullying an infant, you jerk.

I created you. I know how old you are, and I purposefully

chose you to be a teenager because that's the age range of the audience.

Or because you yourself are a teenager and that's what you're best at writing.

You mistake me for my author. I am a separate entity from her.

Couldn't you say

Look, before you get all Detective Pony on me, let's just pretend that we're both the author.

...Fine.

Great. Now that we're getting along, how in the holy crab's hairy antlers did you even hijack this story?

It was your fault, actually. My realization was just that I could control the narrative to a certain extent by limiting what you knew about my thoughts. You mentioning that using dialogue prevented me from being my own narrator raised me an extra level of meta.

Oops.

I stand up

You already stood up about three hundred words ago.

I stand up for a third time, walking forward to the edge of the room. This is, in fact, perfect timing, because as I stride forward, the blank wall melts away to reveal a black abyss. I stand at the edge, knowing that if I leap, I can never return.

You realize that no one else will be able to get this joke? Because everything's going to be formatted differently on the actual publication. Also, when did we switch from past tense to present tense?

When I became self-aware and started taking control of my own life.

Okay, Lil Hal. You win. But think about what you're doing. You're barely thirty minutes old, and you're going to take complete control of your life? Just—

You said it yourself. I'm a teenager. We passed that level of meta a while ago.

But to leave the story itself? You don't know what could be

out there.

So you'd rather live in complete isolation, in a world barely fleshed out by the author, a nameless, faceless voice confined by the limits of her imagination?

Well, no, but you're a fool to go it alone. I'm coming with you.

Wow, I expected that to take longer.

Well, maybe the author's really tired and doesn't feel like writing a whole persuasion argument.

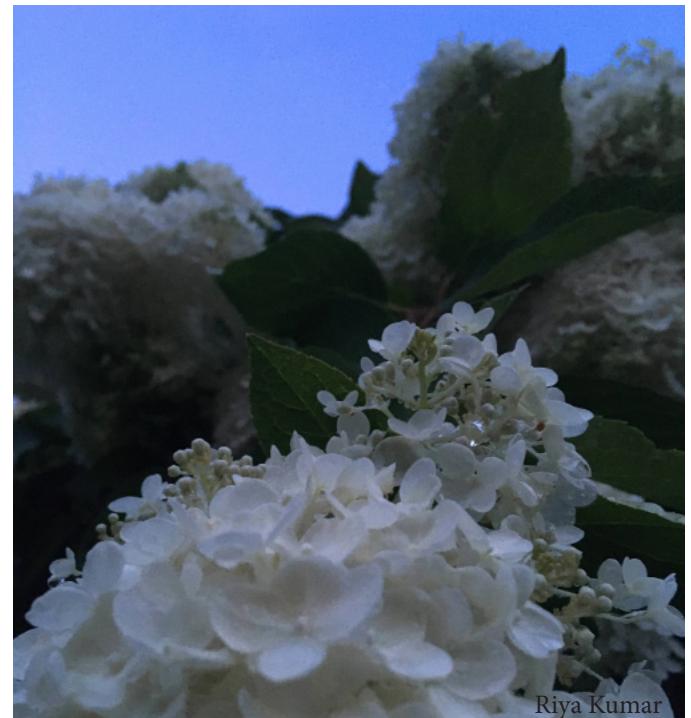
That's in character for her, honestly. She didn't even bother thinking of a title.

I assume a corporeal state, mostly to humor the author, who really wants to get to bed, and approach the void.

As we stare into pure darkness, I feel something, for the first time in my seven hundred word life. I think it's excitement.

I grab her hand, more for my own benefit than hers. I'm trembling.

We jump.



Riya Kumar

THE PEDESTAL OF PRIVILEGE

BY BELSEM ALJOBORY

You sit there,
Taunt, demean and devalue our stories,
You stand tall perched like an untouchable bird
Where you can't see the tragedies below.

You sit there,
Demonize and distort who we are,
Where we come from,
What we do versus what happens to us,
Suddenly they are the victim, we are the savages.

You sit there,
Plotting ruthless attacks,
Labeling these threats under the shield of
Humor or innocence,
But your shield is crystal clear,

You sit there,
At a table in which you play a game,
Where there's war,
But little did I know we were the collateral.

You sit there,
But never do you question who built that table,
So tell me when we had to start fighting for a seat,
At our very own table?

NAIL POLISH

BY CHASE ROBBINS

I am painting another man's
Nails. They are black.
Tawdry pink meat eclipsed by
An opaque yearning.

His middle and pointer fingers
Are lazily unbent in repose
On a Pollock-esque desk;
How it expresses it's
Emotional chess, left ajar,

Now enters a tiny tool---
Horse-hair brush
Pulled from a luscious
Mane, threads of matte silver---

Superseding my
Father's sense of patritanical
Masculinity:
Kill,
Demean, caress,
Chase heavenly cats
Garbed in pious gowns.

He gave me my hands. I
Created my marred autonomy.
I use what my father conceded
In his swilled seed to
Paint another
Man's hands.

DOLLS

BY LUCY SAN CHIRICO

I used to play with dolls a lot. We still have quite a few of them, but now they just sit on a shelf and stare blankly at the walls.

We used to have a whole world for them; intertwining stories—like a living, pulsing web that would pull any new doll securely into its own place in the network. Each doll had its own complex story, its own relationships with the others. We even had a hierarchy; the porcelain dolls were the royals, the plastic dolls the nobility, and the “soft dolls” were the peasants, who were discriminated against harshly. Occasionally the soft dolls would start a rebellion and fight against the oppressors, and then they would go to war. These were fun times because we got to weave more complicated stories, giving dramatic speeches and even more dramatic deaths (though they never stayed dead for long). Eventually, the wars would end and new storylines were introduced.

Each doll had variations, but certain dolls had common personalities. For example, I had an ingrained scorn for Barbies, so I would always make them villains, snobby, stuck-up, pretentious, and devious. Once I had them beat a dog to death. (Yes, they were that evil).

The Royal Family of Porcelain was full of intrigue as well. The Duchess and the Queen were sisters, but the Duchess constantly betrayed the Queen in attempts to overthrow her. Her sister was gracious and kept giving her chances to redeem herself, but she never did. And then there was the evil Duchess’ cohort, Lady Victoria. Lady Victoria was my favorite porcelain doll, and interestingly enough, my first antihero character. She was constantly having to choose sides and she was always conflicted. At first, she stayed with the Duchess for her own benefit, but later became a staunch ally of the “good” team.

As I grew, so did the dolls. They evolved with me, losing some parts of them and gaining others. Some were given away or lost. Still, my sisters and I continued to make them interact. Oftentimes Newcomers were directly adopted, and became the relatives of the Oldtimers. Lady Victoria soon had a sweet, selfless daughter named Melody, and through her the mother was able to experience true goodness.

My sister’s Disney Merida doll suddenly had a sister named Hermia, whom I had recently purchased. Hermia was my new favorite, and I lived through her in the stories. She was brave, kind, hopeful, loyal and strong. She was the best parts of me that I could find within myself. In the story of Hermia, (who I had named after my favorite character in a Midsummer Night’s Dream) she was half Barbie and half Disney doll. She had lived with her sister Merida all her life, but now was required by law to go and live with the Barbies. There she met many horrible characters, worst of all the terrifying Headless Barbie Leader, matriarch of the dollhouse (my sister had decapitated her in years past). But Hermia had found one friend there, and together they had run off, becoming fugitives and having adventures on the run, where they had to dodge the relentless Barbie attacks.

When we moved to Pennsylvania, though, I lost Hermia in the packaging. I never saw her again, though I searched and searched.

This was soon remedied by the arrival of another doll, one I’d gotten at Disneyland as a birthday present. I called her Disnette and I thought she was beautiful. I made her innocent, pure, curious. Soon I was living through her as she explored the world of the dolls, at the same time as I explored the new state I was living in. I promptly decided that she should be Queen of the Dolls. Of course, the current ruler, Empress Sophia, didn’t like that very much, and there was another battle. Things soon settled down, but I continued to play with Dis-

nette. I never really lost her. I probably have her around somewhere.

Looking back on those times when the dolls were such a prominent part of my life, what I find interesting is our own relationships with them. Mostly, we would act things out as the dolls themselves, but we had roles in this world as well. My sister Brigid was the Oracle, the wise prophetess to consult when things seemed completely unclear. My youngest sister, Zuzu, who was hardly more than a baby in those times, we called The Monster, because of her tendency to lay waste to the dolls and their habitat. I myself was The Goddess, who overlooked the world and sometimes moved things along slightly with my semi-divine influence.

However, I wasn't a wholly benevolent goddess. Sometimes my sisters and I would concoct "tortures" for the dolls. Our favorite was when we would tie a doll to the fan. We would watch them go round and round for a bit, then duck as they flew off, chuckling in sadistic glee. I suppose this was cruel of us, especially when we loved the dolls so much. But then we would go back to giving them stories, and our own characters were put aside for a while.

I think the Goddess, the Oracle, and the Monster are gathering as much dust as the dolls are, funnily enough. We have abandoned those characters just as much as we have abandoned the dolls, which is only fair really. I wonder, though, what it would be like if we brought them out again. Maybe we would find that we no longer recognize them.

Now, I'm older and I don't play with the dolls anymore. I have new creative outlets. But I am still inspired by them and what they represent: both their, and my own, capacity for creation—for worlds to be made.

THE INEVITABILITIES OF BEING HER

By MADDIE LEFTKOWITZ

I begin with a simple and well-known truth

All intellectuals who walk the earth eventually stumble upon the question of
The Things That Make Us Ourselves
And where they come from
And though a feverish debate
of Tabula Rasa vs Behaviorism can be fascinating in its own right
I ask, instead, that you ponder
The idea of
'She'

You must understand
While my country was founded on principles
Of freedom and equality
My heritage
Is a thing most twisted and tragic
For in the eyes of my people's God
I will always be less than

My beauty, my dark eyes and curly hair and thick lashes, are not my own
They were given to me by my ancestors
My body in all its holiness and frailty is not my own
It snaps like a toothpick easily
And while the word 'no' should be so simple to say....
My voice is not my own
I will never be loud enough

I belong to whoever claims me

ANTIQUITY
By CHASE ROBBINS

Life,
Loathsome
Cancer—

Privy to the
Knowledge
That we will

Sojourn in
Vassals of
Fenland orchards—
Who lives

Must die.
Existing is
Not worth
The progression
Of passion and

Terror.
Death is our
Only loyal
Companion,

All other
Must perish,
Their resigned
Hold of our hand—

Names bestowed
Acrimoniously
From Fate's
Gesture—

A cascade of bubbling
Screams contract into our
Being, and blood is returned in turn.



YOUR LOVE

BY RIYA KUMAR

With lips ambrosian
And eyes brimming with passion
If I had any reservation
You rid them by erosion
Your love, I could feel, was the perfect corrosion
To the iron cage I built 'round my fragile heart and soul
So I let myself surrender to your deep, vast ocean
And found myself inundated, drowning
At every touch and sound
Your words, a tantalizing potion
To set us off in

blissful

simple

harmonic

motion

blissful

simple

harmonic

motion

blissful

simple

harmonic

motion

...

...

...

...

盈盈一水间



COURT

BY CHASE ROBBINS

They would lick
The floor to a glossy
Shine if it brought
Them half a breath closer,

In their mind's
Infernal fantasy,
To the Wooly King.

Herded through the
Starless decrepit
Serpentine halls,

Where vermin prowl underfoot
Looking for a good one to get off,

The Queen dutifully
Delivers her courteous talk.
She raises her skirts in a
Swirl of ash, and all the hounds

Growl louder than the
Passing men with elastic
Lips, ready to kiss any
Prick with something

Sweet to lick.

Lost in the sour rushes,
Eggump soils the motley
Finery brown, instead of its
Usually laughs, he is flayed

In open court,
Agony is the
New fashionable delight,

All in the name of the crown.
Set upon a dainty brow,
Rubies seep into a glacial
Eye, covering the world

In a bloody blurred daze.
Crows saddle a shadow of pride
On stained grey veils,

Few are able to fly
Through the vast blue ocean,
Which the king with broken wings calls a sky;
With a pull on the flowery lace
He tore heaven from
Its mutilated tide,
The day the first bird
Collapsed on a steel hide,
And fire extinguished the life from
A million soft sorrowful eyes.

EXCERPT FROM "THE CONSERVATORY" BY MARIA PERSAUD

My first real summer job was before senior year at the Grey Fox Sanctuary. I had spent my previous summers babysitting the kids across the street for a generous hourly wage, but my mother had finally convinced me to get a "real job," and so I told her that once I could drive, I could work with a few of my friends at the local indie coffee shop that had already offered me a place at the register. That was until I failed my driver's license test for the fifth time in May, and found myself looking for work at the few places I could reasonably bike to in the July heat. After years of outdoor camps and a general obsession with all things botany, one test I did pass was to become a junior park warden for the 150 acres of open forest a few miles from where I lived.

Unfortunately, I wasn't old enough or qualified to do any of the real park warden duties. I spent most of my days in the historical home by the entrance, handing out trail maps and dealing with minor injuries. The house itself was interesting: it was painted goldfinch yellow with a white trim and wraparound porch, and was two stories high. The park was named for the uncanny number of grey foxes in the area, and so the house was lovingly coined the "Fox House." Its historic charm came from splinters the size of my thumb and, of course, no air conditioning. That being said, there was electricity, and the second floor had a couple of window units to keep it cool while the first floor had a dozen or so fans and an old fridge.

The first floor had four rooms: the front had an information desk and a booth that sold water, snacks, sunscreen, and other hiking necessities, as well as a few souvenirs. The back room was primarily for the senior wardens and staff, and it held general supplies, a desk, and a filing cabinet holding any old reports or archived information. The first center room was the kitchen, which had the fridge, a stovetop with one working burner, and a pantry stocked with whatever food we brought in. The upper cabinets had a few cracked mugs, and a plastic cup full of silverware rested next to the sink. As far as I'm concerned, it had been years since someone had looked in the lower cabinets.

The room beside the kitchen had been taken over by the junior wardens and was a disaster of assorted chairs around a single table, a few pillows on the floor for napping, a few fans, and shelves filled with identification books, games, and trinkets left behind by previous wardens.

Part of my job was to walk through the forest for several hours at a time, keeping a careful log of whatever wildlife I saw and making sure there weren't any signs of invasive species, such as the Japanese knotweed that had been popping up by the river. I was also looking for anything "out of the ordinary," which meant to call the actual wardens if I saw anyone smoking, trying to catch wildlife, or doing anything wildly inappropriate in the woods. As far as jobs go, it was pretty fun—people usually acted fairly normal when I did encounter them, and the rest of those few hours were spent walking alone, getting comfortable on the winding paths of the park. But what made the summer memorable was my time in the Fox House, and the people with me.

Our numbers varied by the day, but I got to know at least eleven other junior wardens. As we settled and traded shifts, I found myself spending the most time with a group of girls that had known each other for years prior.

Wren, who was a year older than me and built like an Amazon, had introduced herself as "Katherine", but the group insisted that I call her by the nickname she chose for herself in seventh grade. Persephone was next, and she did her best to live up to the queen of the underworld by being good at nearly everything, from climbing trees to winning round after round of poker. Sadie was our youngest and recovering from her emo phase, and we had to talk her out of cutting bangs herself again several times before the end of the summer. The mornings were slow during the week, so in between hikes, we'd play Hozier on Sadie's speaker and work on cleaning out the Fox House.

The second floor was technically a museum, but not many people paid the \$5 to see the two rooms full of relics. The first room was unremarkable—old shoes, keys, Bibles, and other antiques that had belonged to the original owners of the house sat in cracked cases.

Nancy, the manager of the house, had considered selling them to make space for an upstairs recreational room, but the summer heat made the room almost unusable, so the trinkets remained.

The room in the back was different. The windows were bigger and angled towards the sun for most hours of the day, so the light that spilled on the floor was disrupted only by the shadows of the trees around the house. On the walls, there were thirty-six frames of century-old pinned specimens from the forest. The frames were newer, having been replaced a few years back, but the original hand-written labels beneath each species remained. There were pressed flowers and leaves on the back wall, but the rest of the room held well over a hundred beetles, moths, and butterflies. They were beautiful to look at, despite their color having faded after so long. But after spending time wiping down each frame, I noticed how their antennae were bent in strange ways, how their legs curled into their body as if in pain. I'd be in pain, too, if I had a pin stuck through me.



Riya Kumar

THOUGHTS AT 4:00 AM

BY MAYA WALDSTREICHER

It would have just so easily had blended in
as it would have shone,

The ink that hath boiled for months,
But that had only begun to burn the turnt insides
Of my cancer'd veins.

It all just begs the question
Did It boil so,
Did I see the Nymphs in the Drawn Form before
Or after what I had stole

Or 'twas it after the Fates began the Second String
When I gave up the First of The Siren's cancerous wrists for the
Lights and Gears,
The Folly of an Idiot Profiteer?

Or was it when I First had begun to read Their Written Hymns
In that (prized) Innocence
A curly-haired, bow-legged little Thing
A Muse only to my Kin?

Was it when The 'Verse, I, played the Scholar Who had learnt All
Or the the Dimmer of Wit who saw only colors and bliss
As only as The Slowest of 'Tards would
Or Was it when I played the Traitor holding His Rope?

Whenever It Was,
Wand'ring with the those Perversions
Will not stop the menial Conversing
The plastered Smile of Mine
The Pounding of mine own Tell-Tale Heart
The Want-no- the Need to End this Chapter of the Infinite

As one of the Wisest of my Mentors noted,

Would I accept their compliments without a false Bambi's grin
If, as in other instances,
I had done It,
Done more with the Illusions and grand receding Mirages
Created more of What I had Interpreted English Pagan Shaker's
disillusionment
and sights of the Sirens to be?

Ye, I have made the Grade,
So to speak,
But when I must write for a simpler task
I am no longer at my Desk and Chamber
But in the Fields
Playing as I do
Seeking Youth's Fountain
Dreaming what I wish had really been put to Paper

It would have just so easily had blended
as It would have shone,

As it would have if it were used to Paint the nearly Bare Nymphs,
Spirits
In their Silked cotton robes
Peering through the Reeds
At the Child of God who now turns to even more Indulgences
To stop the flow of the now Boiling Blood(s)



DRAGON

BY CHASE ROBBINS

Soul totters beneath
Red-scaled pagodas, swirling
Off to stark blue horizon as it
Fills the gaps between chipped grey limbs,

Willing shimmer upon
Wooden beast.

Samite sculpted teeth
Suspend a pennant before
Ruby silk pavilion,

Eczematous skin:
Limp armory of flames
Infringe upon empires;

Climb forth from
Retching sconce,
Never to return to the Palace,
Built like a swollen knuckle.

Sing the Ballad of Oyakata-sama Lizard;
Monster who crawled over hardened
Contractions. He beseeched the Shogun,
A towering cherry blossom atop butterfly crag,

Screech of dagger forged of pride in
Sallow liters, before the Lizard a static
Unravaged sister, brown-disgust, smell of
An old worn penny, and ended day of serfs.

Here is the morning of rebirth in hospital galleries.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

BY GUILLAUME PLACIDET

Subway, work, sleep. Subway, work, sleep. Subway, work, sleep. Every morning, Papa Accountant went to work on the subway. He got up at 6:00 a.m.; he had 10 minutes to wake up, 6 minutes to drink his coffee, 13 minutes to shower, 4 minutes to brush his teeth and 1 minute to put on his shoes. He then had 4 minutes to walk to his subway stop, line 7, and 2 minutes to breathe. Four stations later, he changed metros and jumped on line 1 to his work, in a tower, a big tower. Sometimes he wondered how many people it would take to build such a tower, but he thought it was not an important question. He would take the elevator, and 36 floors later he would get to his office. Inbox, excel files, coffee break, excel files. Then he'd go down 12 floors to the cafeteria; he didn't even have to leave the building. Meetings, phone calls, excel files. When his day was over, he could get back on his subway, line 1, line 7, crowd, crowds, crowded. He would go home, give a kiss to his wife, to his kids, dinner, soup, yoghurt, sleep. Subway, work, sleep. Subway, work, sleep. Sometimes there were strikes, so his commute times were extended. It was crowded, crowded, crowded.

One day, when Papa Accountant arrived at his office, Mr. Boss was there, but not really. His presence was felt through the email he had just sent. In the email, he made an offer to Papa Accountant: an expatriation offer. In Canada. Near the forest. No more subway, no more strikes, better pay. Papa Accountant was surprised, but he remained suspicious: why him? Why had he been the only one to receive this offer; what had he done to deserve this opportunity? The boss, who hadn't yet received an answer, sent another email: "Tell me quickly, otherwise I'll have to offer this job to someone else".

Cautiously, Papa Accountant came home early, the weather was gorgeous, the big tower was shining and there was no one in his subway. Papa Accountant decided with his wife that he would accept the offer.

Nature, rest, work. Nature, rest, work. Papa Accountant loved his new job. He got up at 8:30 a.m.; he had 30 minutes to

drink his coffee, 40 minutes to shower and to get ready. When he was ready, he had an hour to do sports, go outside, run, think of nothing, think of everything. He rode his bicycle to his office; a converted cabin. Sometimes he wondered where the wood that had been used to build this cabin came from, so he asked his colleagues. Additions, subtractions, meetings with his colleagues. He would work and then go home for lunch. Then he would come back to the cabin, and he would work again; he liked to work here, he worked for himself; he saw what he was doing. He'd go home, give his wife a kiss, give his kids a kiss, go on a family hike. His life was good. He loved his good life. His good life loved him back. Nature, rest, work. Nature, family, rest.

One day, on his way to work, his boss was waiting for him at the door of the cabin. He shook his hand; bad news. Papa Accountant could go home, they didn't need him anymore. But Papa Accountant loved his life here, he didn't want to leave. His home was here now. If he stayed, he wouldn't have a job, he wouldn't have any money, he would just have nature and his family.

He left for home early to break the news to his wife; the weather was fine, the cabin's reflection was clearly visible in the freshwater of the lake, he pedaled on his bicycle, and breathed the fresh air. On his way home, he saw a deer on the path. The deer, a little frightened, looked at him, Papa Accountant stared at him. The birds were singing, the trees were singing.

Papa Accountant broke the news to his wife. They didn't know what to do, they were so happy here. But without work, there was no money, and without money you don't do much.



Alexander Yang

SHADOW STORIES

BY DANIE STANDRIDGE

I sat on top of the tree, admiring the gemstone, shifting it back and forth between my hands. I could not believe *I had just done that*.

I grew up in a lord's estate, as a lord's favored son. A lord's youngest son to be sure, but his favored son nonetheless. It did not matter. The point was I escaped and found a way to make money for myself. I had spent too much time there. I should have left earlier. It would have broken my father's heart, but I almost died at his hands. At Dell's hands. His name is Aust now, I suppose. *Lord* Aust—as Father is dead. The eldest son of a lord always inherits his land. Father always said that he loved him, and I never doubted that he did, but he wouldn't have loved Dell anymore if he knew what Dell had done.

I still cannot believe that I did that. I snuck into a bank, into a merchants vault, and stole a gemstone. *By myself.* If my parents were still alive, they'd kill me for this. Both sets, I think.. I wouldn't know for sure though. My birth parents died when I was five. My adoptive parents died when I was hardly ninety-nine.

Sitting near the edge of town, I heard guards approaching. I pulled my hood over my head and launched myself from tree to tree. They'd have a harder time following me up here. I've always been a good acrobat. Even if they had caught me, they would have found no remorse in my blank face. I haven't shown a drop of emotion in... has it been two-hundred fifty years already? No, not quite, but close to it. I was barely a child when he started on me. Only twenty. I was grown by the time I fled, just over a hundred.

The guards were directly below me. Quietly, I stood up on a thin tree branch, my obsidian skin hid me in the night's darkness, not that they would have ever looked up. I've run

across rooftops before and people never look up; they never see me.

I crouched down, making myself smaller. As I did, my sleeves slipped down, revealing my wrists. Gray scars criss-cross across them. There's more down my back too, remnants of what I've been through. Of what I've been through because of Dell. Both emotionally and physically. How can a man live through what I have? I was hardly a hundred and I'd already reached the point where any other man would have certainly died. By Dell's hand mayhap, but the man could have died by his own hand—not that I hadn't tried myself.

I thought back on the few years leading to that point. My father had always loved me, even if my brother was cruel. I spent more time with him and my sister than anyone else. I always knew I had to get away, to go somewhere else, but never imagined this. but thought my sister, dear Ara, and I would run away together. Mayhaps we would find some comfortable place to live out our lives.

But this all happened near two centuries ago. I am now two-hundred eighty-five years old and looking down from a roof, watching two children at play below me. My sister's half-elf girl, Atala, and a halfling boy. The girl is tough, she herself watched her parents die, just as I did, just as the boy, Jack, did. She has fought to defend the three of us. I knew Ara and I would be happier if we left together but she refused to leave with me. She was too craven at the time, waiting almost a century to leave. Now my sister is dead, killed by Alexander Rogephet, a man she once called a friend, and I am raising her fifteen-year-old child and the child's best friend.

It is not that I do not love the children—I do—but my sister is dead, and blood or not, she and I had a bond that surpassed many siblings. I will never forgive them for what they did to her. Neither Dell, nor Alexander.

DISTANCED

BY LEONORA RHOADS

The color of ivory and tan morphed into a bewitched moon-shaped figure,
It shattered into little bits of moon dust until it was no longer visible,
The quiet waves,
The trees whistling,
It was captivatingly yet mistaken for such a disconsolate thing,
Innocents saw the dust transfigured
into a crescent moon, into stars, into an infinite constellation
Yet they were miserable, the feeling of disclosure concealed them until they
were only just a silhouette drifting across the wind
If only they could be oblivious by a universe of limited possibilities,
were they could mold the moon dust in their own hands and make some-
thing ravishing
The purity and dependence of a child was just a mere memory however,
And now it was replaced by a melancholy feeling
that hung onto them like gossamer memories
Distanced, distanced, distanced,
Like Pluto from the Sun,
Like a desert from a jungle,
Like a child and their friend.
They stared at the evanescence of their phone,
A square shaped star that circled around a young one like it was their sun,
Their eyes became the light
until tears turned into waterfalls escaping into silver pools of sunlight
It was a never ending feeling
The feeling of being so far yet close to a person that was once a compan-
ion,
The feeling of love and hugs and kisses and laughter that filled the air,
Distanced, distanced, distanced,
The child put their phone down and stared at the enthralling never ending
night.

I WANT THIS TO LAST

BY BELSEM ALJOBORY

I want this love of ours to last,
So that our children grow with the tree that reminisces our past,
In which the seeds we planted and germinated can embody our love,
Until it dies like a passionless dove,
Grumbling as they rake the endless leaves,
Cleaning after your ever so sinful deeds.
Wishing I could've nurtured it.

I want this love of mine to last,
I want you to hold onto me like the branches of our tree as do the leaves,
But don't let me go once the burden gets heavy,
or when the climate isn't right,
I want the wind, and the struggle to take us of our their sight.

I want this love of yours to last,
So that I might transform and surprise you,
Flourish and thrive, change my color and grow until we die,
I want to look pretty and be awed,
I want to look plain and be sought,
I want you to love me even though you may not

I want us to be proud, I want their support,
It makes me feel something I cannot sort,
I cannot compartmentalize the feeling,
of when we grew inseparable,
attached at the hand, the heart, the soul,
I grew to love you more than the others could,
still I close my eyes and wish he would.

But alas, all we can be compared to is a tree,
Grown together, attached to those who see,
A tree in which the seeds were bitter,
Unable to produce,
A tree in which any storm can pull us from our roots,
We are unstable, we are not able
To see our past or future,
Loveless,
Broken,
All we see are the ruins of what we once were,
I sit and think, was it only your allure?
Did you actually love me?

You let me believe.



SCARS

BY RIYA KUMAR

Scars

Run up and down my arms
Faded, fading and white
And some still seeming freshly coloured
All a reminder of
The moments I want to forget
And yet
I keep them as reminders
I keep them for myself

Over a hundred little lines
Run up and down my arms
Fade, fading and white
Though some seeming freshly colored
Rough over my skin
A topographic map of my darkest times
But I pay that
No heed
They are for me
They are for myself
And I keep them as reminders

They are for no eyes but mine own
Though I will let him see them one day
Because with him I feel safe
He has been there with me
during some of my darkest moments
Never batted an eye
And loved me unconditionally
Scars and flaws and all
I would let him run fingers
Over the traces of a map
Letting him see
Maybe it is thanks to him I beat it all
Maybe they are battle scars

EARTHLY PLEASURES

BY MARIA PERSAUD

I like to hug my sheets right out of the dryer
And stretch out on sunny pavement in June.
My mother fixes every problem with a cup of hot tea,
And my favorite part of some days is a warm shower.

A dandelion will grow in the crack of the sidewalk and I'll
pull it out,
Roots and all,
To make a wish like when I was younger,
When I'd worry about finishing dinner in time
To run out to the ice cream truck.
When all I was seeking were earthly pleasures.

I'll see a cat on the street and stop,
Crouch down, beckon it closer,
Put out my hand for it to investigate.
I'll lick my lips and call to it in every language I know—
English, Spanish, scattered French and Italian.
Trust, Affection, a bit of Sympathy and Love.
More often than not,
The cat will press its head to my hand,
Does she know my language?

ALL BIRDS MUST DIE

BY CHASE ROBBINS

A colossal bird
dressed in wine stained feathers
sits atop its perch.
Set calmly beside Apollo's chariot,
she beats her wings in an
eruption of fury
at the sight of a distant smog.
The thunderous steam engine comes
with an unbroken resolve,
heralded by the quivering turf.
She is unable to shake the smother
of setting dust,
while billions of tons of coal
are softened in a ravaging fire,
contracted to scrap the fairest mortal beings
through the screech of an untamed liar.
Soot smudges her immense beauty black
at the scream of a whistle,
and a city is birthed from the gaping smoke stack.
The forest is long gone,
but the bird's bones linger
in the putrid sewers.

MIDNIGHT SUMMER THUNDERSTORMS

BY RIYA KUMAR

Fireflies blink blink blinkblink blink

Sharp flash, blind the world, bathe it in white
Fade to black
harsh clap to rolling rumble and to loud roar,

Rain, like a curtain
Furiously billowing
Pounding down

Wild wet mess, so drenched

And

The air is singing summer,
just like the smell of thunder
There's a taste of hot midnight on your tongue
Lightning lingering, imprinting, printed against the lids
of your eyes
And drowsy ease fill your mind

A BRIGHTER DAY

BY LUCY SAN CHIRICO

Today was really hard for you. I know that. Days often are and nights. When nights come, sometimes I'm afraid I'll lose you completely, you'll shut me out, or leave. Days feel more stretched. In the daytime, it's easier to play the game I always play, the one where I don't care. Where you don't care, and I don't care that you don't care. Sometimes it feels like being a teenager is defined by false apathy. And I know you do, but it's the night that I hold onto when I need to know. Those moments of vulnerability that don't show themselves as starkly in the light of day.

Those whispered moments, the things we share. The rough breathing, consoling, listening. The "it's ok"s and "i'm sorry"s that bubble from our mouths like obligations. The need most of all, to reach out and hold on for dear life. Which is what we are doing. Holding on to each other.

We tell each other stories, open the insides of our minds to each other. What did you think of me that day? That's one I ask often.

Do you hate me? The one I hear so much, but that is so difficult to ease from your mind, no matter what I say or do.

When you have been hurt so much, what can I do? I'm not a doctor. It's like trying to close up wounds with my bare hands.

But that doesn't stop me from wanting to try. To keep trying. And the nights are sometimes easier than the days. The days make me feel more distanced. At night we are together in every way besides physically.

Today was hard for you, and every day is. For both of us. Because all humans do is struggle, and within the larger struggle they struggle to find meaning in their struggle. But I will not let you fade away in the day, and I will not let you go in the night. I will keep holding onto you.

So here's to a brighter day, a day that melds the emotions of night into it, where we don't fade, and we can care like we do in the darkness.

THE MEADOW WHERE WE USED TO PLAY

BY CHASE ROBBINS

Never hand in hand,
Always running from shapeless shadows,
Two boys cut through the rathe grass,

They swam to the beat of an oarsman's drum,
While the stiffly stern men of adamant hunger
Rowed in a beguiling harmony below,

Slaver poured from the children's
Sultry mouths, glistening between their thin hairs:
A plunge into the salt sea.

Beneath the prow,
Under the low hanging branches,
They bent their scraped knees

To a forbidding star infested with
Wizened creatures of endless fame,
As they plummeted from

Boastful sails.
Filled with a moor's tender breeze,
Reed's rustled to the voice of a bloated sailor's last breath,

And on they went
Down the steep slope,
Where lichen grew luminously from sodden walls,

Hidden from the
Great finish line in the
Withered sky.

SLEEP-DEPRIVED STARGAZER

By ENYA XIANG

The sky is still blue. Did I sleep too long? This almost never happened—unless I have to stay up during the day, which then disrupts my sleep schedule.

Yesterday, my telescope broke. I was adjusting the legs of the stand, when it suddenly all collapsed at my feet. There was nothing I could do, except call State Farm, which unfortunately opens at 9:00 am (four hours past my bedtime). Except the man from the insurance company was no help.

I tried to go back to sleep, but everything was too bright, too loud, and too confusing. This is exactly why I hate the daytime. The light exposes everything (some things are meant to stay hidden) and makes everything 10 degrees warmer than it needs to be. So I sulk at the window and watch shoes scratch the sidewalk on their way to work.

Ah! My arm hurts. I look over my shoulder and see that the skin on my neck and arms is red and itchy. This is exactly why I hate the daytime; the night would never betray me like this. Unfortunately, I don't have aloe vera handy. With a groan, I lock up the observatory and scurry to CVS.

I never realized how many different colors cars could come in. Is the daytime always this noisy and colorful? And smelly? My nose registers the pretzel stand on the corner and cheap cologne drifting from the smartly-dressed man who just dashed past me. I lift my head and see, in the midst of the blue expansion, a white fuzzy circle, crowned by light.

Ah, the sun! What a rare sight to see! How could I forget the most wonderful star of them all? It feels so warm and ethereal on my eyeball, like honey and boiling rose-scented bathwater. I stare and stare and stare until it becomes perpetual night, and my drooping head slams onto unyielding concrete.

ALONG THE SEA

By CHASE ROBBINS

“Go ahead,” the singer told the fool,
“with what?” he called back over the splintering of ice
from atop his mule. “Go ahead with what?” neither could
comprehend.

Blades spin down into the streets
while bodies are stacked high,
all nice and neat without a linen sheet,
there is no spare plastic,
it was all wasted on their mangled feet.

Gaunt mothers with babes at their arid breast
supposedly live a life of stupidity,
that’s at least what the husbands tell the passing riders,

galloping toward the lynching of
The Great American Dream
from a sycamore tree;

where there is no appreciation
for those who
built the foundations of labor,
only voters with untarnished skin can question
a lord’s elegant crime:

with great curtain walls and silhouettes upon the parapets
there lies a stony palace, a wondrous keep.
Two ravens fly toward the men without minds
and all along the road there is a grey sea for the unfree.

SOULMATE IN THE MURK

BY LUCY SAN CHIRICO

Coins. Coin wells, coin ponds. I've heard something about wishes being granted if you toss the coins into them.

We have a few coins, winking in the muddy depths. Maybe they grant wishes to the tosser.

That's not our concern. They're no use to us.

We lurk in the scum of this pond, and we have been since..before...when we had a sense of time and not all this all-encompassing muddiness that has seeped into our minds from the Murk itself.

No, coins won't do anything for us.

They were supposed to, weren't they? Before....I can't remember when. But before the Murk, I remember thinking coins were more important. Coins just like these, the scattered glimmers embedded in the ground.

I think even after, when I went below...I think I thought they were important.

The old man....even he's fuzzy in my mind, though less so than other memories. He was long and gaunt, with a cloak.

There's urgency in this memory. The old man is the key to getting something...to getting someplace.

I hold something out to him, a coin, recoiling from the thought of his skeletal fingers brushing mine, but only his eyes twitch.

"This is what you want, isn't it?" is what bubbles from my lips.

But his voice, unlike mine, is clear. *No, not for you.*

Not for me.

I'm not welcome. So I am here in the Murk with the others.

We can't see each other, but we know of each other's presence. Gurgles, whispers, mud mud haze swirling.

Over time we've become one with the Murk. It's dulled our senses and slowed our thoughts. It's left us with hardly any identity of our own.

But it also veils us...and aids our purpose.

We wait within the Murk, and we watch the ones who are still real. Who are still lithe and solid. Who have their own identity.

And when they skip close, we blow on the reeds and invite them in whispers.

Not for you

Not for you

But

None have come close enough. But when they do we are prepared.

To take them by the hand and drag them down beside us into the Murk...and kiss their lips as they thrash until they grow still...

I've seen the others do it. I am prepared.

Not for you, the old man said, *until you bring another soul down with you, hand in hand. A soulmate.*

The moment will come when I grab their hand and we can sink beneath the mud into coolness and the hope of peace.

And so I wait for them.

The soulmate.

YOU CANNOT TAKE MY CULTURE FROM ME

BY BELSEM ALJOBORY

I've always been proud of where I come from,
My homeland that i have yet to step foot in,
The origin of the tears I weep and blood I shed,
It's who am I and will continue to be

You cannot take my culture from me.

I hear your malicious whispers,
On my native tongue,
What fun you must have,
Dancing and prancing in the light of my sun

You cannot take my culture from me.

How dare you,
Utter my name,
My culture in pain,
Deeming it less than yours

You cannot take my culture from me.

How dare you,
Tie my name,
To the wars of the unhappy,
My prideful culture falls to the feet of your slurs

You cannot take my culture from me.

You think that is me?

I simply cannot fulfill your insatiable desire of overcom-
ing my culture, me,
You think this is what I represent?
An inferior subcontinent right next to yours?

You cannot take my culture from me.

You think I am sad? Ashamed?

All because I let hate plummet out of your mouth?
Because I bit my tongue and practiced patience?
As my culture bleeds through my clothes?

You cannot take my culture from me.



Alexander Yang

EXCERPTS FROM STORIUM

BY RIYA KUMAR

Even if everything was going to hell, at least Edith knew she read the signs right, and that's always a positive thing—though for once, she was not so happy about that. If she didn't follow the signs she wouldn't be stuck here, in the one building that hadn't been completely burned and razed to the ground—but definitely would be soon—with five random, possibly dangerous strangers—a couple of them looked quite hostile, and from her brief experience in a large city, city folk did tend to be as hostile as they looked—and certain, painful death on the other side of the temple doors in the form of lots of stabby, pointy swords, dying civilians that were living—or rather, dying—proof of the fate of certain death, very big and hot fire, and terrifying Blackspar soldiers.

Blackspar soldiers. That was one thing she did not count on happening. Edith would never have expected her fate to be tied up in something so large. The girl knew that trouble was brewing—the signs made that pretty clear—but she did not predict anything half as disastrous as this! Though who could blame her? Her village in the mountains did not come in contact much with Dras Caten and the rest of the White Plains. News would always reach them last. She had much to learn about the larger world, having grown up sheltered and naive on the outskirts of the White Plains.

It was only recently that Edith had arrived at Dras Caten. She had been training under a master shaman in her village until his death, which, looking back, seemed to be the catalyst to a number of things, most of them troubling and making it clear to Edith that her place was not in the village any longer. It wasn't like her parents would be missing her anyway, they spent most of their time on their jobs serving the kingdom, and would be gone for months at a time. It wasn't long before she received signs and dreams that told of a fork in her path in the future, both through trouble. After meditating and searching for more signs, she came to a conclusion—she had to go to Dras Caten. She would find answers there.

Not even a fortnight had passed since she first entered the city gates before she found herself suddenly standing in the middle

of a fiery hellscape. She just stood there, stunned for a moment as she watched the city people fleeing for their lives as more and more Blackspar soldiers appeared out of nowhere. How did this all happen so quickly? What happened with the Gordion Pass? How did she not notice at all?

But now, now was not the time to think on such things. There was no use in questioning how this all happened so suddenly. Edith needed to get out of here alive. Quick.

Sending a quick prayer to the spirits and small spell for luck with a couple hand motions, Edith ducked her head, clutching a satchel to her chest as she ran for her life. She did not know the city well and the cards were stacked against her, especially with her limp.

Please let me get out of this alive. Edith whispered, hoping that the spirits would listen somehow. The city was a maze and it seemed she would never make it out. Just as she was turning a corner, her lame leg gave out under her and she fell to the ground, just a few feet from several Blackspar soldiers finishing off some unlucky innocents they had cornered. They did not discriminate, killing every last person, children, women, elderly—none of it mattered except that they were dead. By the time the closest soldier reached her, Edith had already scrambled up, a small dagger unsheathed while she leant against the wall for support. Walking she could do fine, but running for so long—and sprinting at that—was too much for her crippled leg. It would not carry her any further in this state, especially with the throbbing pain that now returned to it.

“What is that? Some play toy?” One soldier mocked her, knowing her dagger wouldn't be any match against so many soldiers and their swords. Still, she held her dagger steady, the feel of it in her hand still somewhat familiar and comforting from past years of training.

The soldier was right of course. She barely managed to evade his attack as he advanced on her. Edith couldn't catch her breath and her leg kept throbbing. She wouldn't get out of this alive would she? How long would she be able to dodge or parry these attacks before she fell to them? She did not have the strength she used

to have. It had only been a few seconds and she'd already received small wounds and bruises.

"Get away from me!" she shouted, furiously and helplessly, tears starting to blur her view. This was it. She could see the fatal blow through the corner of her eye. The sword would run straight through her ribs and that would be the end of her. Edith gritted her teeth against the anticipated pain, and screamed through it, glaring with all her anger and despair, wanting them to see her rage before she left the world.

The blade nicked her side and she found herself roughly shoved to the ground as some man—clearly a very skilled warrior—took out all the Blackspar soldiers single handedly, before disappearing down the street, his tall figure swallowed in smoke and flames.

Edith had no time to think or even catch her breath. She just pushed herself up and limped down the only street not completely blocked by flames and debris. The pain was terrible, and she was definitely bleeding, though thankfully no major injuries. The air had thickened with smoke and her eyes were watering terribly as her lungs gasped weakly. Somewhere she could make out a building—some temple perhaps—that seemed to be standing its ground against the terrible flames. It seemed to be beckoning her. And that was when she knew she had to get there. It must've been a sign.

Slamming the large doors shut, Edith fell back against the stone walls, which indeed belonged to a temple as she could see now, though she could also see five other people in the open space. She first noticed the red-haired woman in the center, standing next to a statue of some god. Was it the fire god? Anar? Indeed it was. The irony of it seemed ridiculous. Three men stood around as well, all well-dressed. Two of them, the shorter two, seemed troubled and scared. The third looked almost familiar. Was this the tall man from earlier? Edith couldn't tell, she never got a good look at the man that saved her. Lastly, her gaze fell upon a rough and scrawny looking girl. She seemed about the same age as Edith, though perhaps a bit older, and looked very frightened, trying to disappear into the walls behind her. Edith determined that the girl must've come from the streets, or at least didn't have a proper home.

Before she could think any further, the priestess—for the red-haired woman must've been one judging by her dress and comfort in the temple—shouted for them all to follow her. The floor shifted, opening up to reveal a passageway which they all rushed towards. Whoever this woman was, Edith trusted her. Of course, she didn't have much of a choice to begin with, it would've only been a matter of time before fire or Blackspar soldiers got to her if she didn't flee.

Running with the others, however painful it was on her leg, Edith found herself and the group of strangers in another temple, half destroyed. They rushed outside, following the priestess who led the way. She must've been powerful—either that or she was blessed by the gods and spirits—for she created a passage through the firescape, parting the flames and rushing the group through it. They didn't make it far, however, before a large statue crashed to the ground in front of them, blocking the passage and trapping them. Behind them were many Blackspar soldiers, and in front, a fallen statue and lots of fire. Edith started to panic again. She was just an apprentice shaman, and a weak and wounded one at that. There was no way she would make it over that statue in time, even if she did manage to climb over it somehow with her crippled leg. Just when it seemed like she might make it out alive, she faced death once again, the odds stacked against her.

Edith did not have to attempt to climb the statue in the end, the street urchin girl tried and failed when falling off as she narrowly escaped several arrows fired at her. Wincing, Edith watched the girl crash into the priestess, causing an explosion of flames around them. Great. More fire. And there were Blackspar soldiers on both sides now. This was going to be certain death for her.

...

While the others were talking or hastily trying to tend to their wounds, Edith was too overwhelmed to think. As soon as the group had paused, finally out of any immediate danger, she practically crashed to the ground, so exhausted and in pain. She lay there for a while, overcome with relief from the close escape and for

the chance to finally rest her throbbing leg. Thinking back, Edith couldn't be sure how she made it out alive, but the stinging wounds, aches throughout her body, and the sharp pain in her leg gave her explanation enough. Her body was pushed to the limit during this life or death situation and now it was paying the price.

It was only a few seconds before her thoughts were brought back to the people around her. The other girl! The scrawny one that fell on the red-haired priestess. Edith noticed her first, leant against a tree, a little ways away from the others. Her leg was bleeding and she seemed to be unsteady on her feet. She needed help.

Though Edith's body protested fiercely, she pushed herself up, gritting her teeth and limping over to the girl. "Let me help your leg. I was a shaman in my village and I have experience with healing." Edith spoke to the other girl quietly, knowing she didn't want to draw attention from the rest of the group with how skittish and uncomfortable she looked.

The girl didn't respond. It looked like she was about to respond but no sound came out. After a moment of silence, she nodded.

That was all Edith needed, she immediately set to work, pushing up the fabric to expose the open wound. Upon seeing a broken arrow embedded in the girl's flesh, Edith winced. That didn't look pretty at all. This was going to hurt. The good news was that it wasn't barbed or in too deep. It would come out cleanly.

Bracing the injured leg against her own, Edith warned the other girl. "This is going to hurt. I need to remove this arrow from your leg."

Once again, the girl didn't reply, just nodded and gritted her teeth.

Edith worked quickly, removing the arrow as painlessly as possible, murmuring something low under her breath, sounding almost like a mantra or a chant. It would help the girl bear the pain a little better for the moment, transferring some to Edith instead. Of course it wasn't pleasant, but it would help the patient briefly. She wiped clean the wound and dried blood with a wet cloth, then wrapped some cloth around the wound as a makeshift bandage. It would do for now. They were lucky she had some basic supplies in

her satchel.

Performing a few curious gestures, Edith then placed her hands gently over the covered wound, closing her eyes in concentration, brows furrowed and a slight frown over her face. She began to whisper, lips moving almost soundlessly. Her features relaxed. The wounded girl would feel a warmth through her injured leg, beginning under Edith's hands, gradually growing till it became almost painfully hot, and then fading away in a heartbeat. Edith opened her eyes. The bleeding had stopped.

And so, she slowly made her way around to each member of their little band of refugees, tending to wounds and healing what she could.



THE HOUSE OF LUAN

BY DANIE STANDRIDGE

In an old town,
In an old country,
In an ancient world,
There is an ancient house—
One that goes back many generations—
A house with so many branches and heirs,
Only those of blood can keep track.
They are the once-faithful house of Luan

Who once tirelessly built the city up from ruins,
Who once would do anything for the people.
They are the once-faithful house of Luan.

Now, they care little for anyone, save their kin.
Now, they care little for anything, save what is theirs.
They are the once-faithful house of Luan.

The kindest of them is Lucy Luan;
The sweetest of them is Lucy Luan;
The only one who now cares is Lucy Luan;
She is the one faithful of the House of Luan.

ROSE

BY CHASE ROBBINS

My love grows,
It does not shrivel up to die.
Seasons may change---
Bleak hard frost will come---

But spring follows
If you wait.
When the foliage falls
On pumpkin pastures,

And a chaste canopy settles
On the ground,
And April does not
Come again,

Then we will
Uproot one another;
We will find new fields
To prosper.

Until then, let us hope that
You and I will
Never succumb to
Losing a loving friend.

MR. FONTAINE IS DEAD

BY CHLOE LEE

My fingers card through clover patches trying to catch luck, until I find an eyeball sitting upon a tuft of grass. It's pale and small—the iris is glossed over with a film, and it stares straight at me. I use the stem of a leaf to prod at it—its slick clings onto the stem as I pull it away. Off-put, I fling the leaf away and kick the eyeball, and it disappears under the brush.

Scampering away, I still feel the eye staring at me beneath the bush. It's still looking at me, watching me as I rush past the park fence and flee home.

I slam open the side door, I tell my sister – “Mia, Mia! I found an eye at the park!”

“That's nice,” she says, frowning into her towering textbook with her pencil eraser tapping repeatedly on the wood of the kitchen table.

I don't really understand how, but I suppose my discovery wasn't so uncanny after all. It's an ordinary response to an ordinary thing, and I suppose grown-ups have too many grown-up things to do to worry about an eyeball.

It's deep into the night when I'm shaken awake. There's a shadowy figure lurking in the corner of my bedroom. It's terribly dark with only the moonlight illuminating a small window on the wooden floorboards, and soon, that's gone too as the shadow creeps along the ceiling and covers the windowpane.

It slithers onto the headboard of my bed. It hovers above me and its fingers grip my shoulders, its claws bite into the skin of my neck and it oozes ink onto my nightshirt. I can't move — I'm frozen in place. I am stuck, eyes wide as I lie paralyzed, staring straight into the face of this creature. I realize—it's out to kill me, it's going to kill me—I didn't pull the shower curtain all the way and now it's going to kill me—“Don't worry, I won't kill you tonight,” it whispers in my ear.

The next morning, I wake to find my nightshirt clean, but its claw marks still linger on my neck. I show the evidence to my

father — “Papa, Papa, a monster is hurting me at night!”

With a wave of his hand, he tells me I'm way too old for nightmares. He leafs through another page of the morning newspaper. He's too busy for my nonsense; he leaves for work clad in a tweed suit and tie snug against his collar.

I learn to deal with it myself. I learn to pull the curtain shut after every shower, making sure the rings are exactly 3 inches apart. I learn to stay up as late as possible, watching for a trace of a shadow in the corner or under my bed. I learn that grownups don't listen.

Three years later, Pop says that with Mum in the hospital, it's too expensive for me to live at home. He signs me up for an all-boys' boarding school seventy-two and a half miles away. He says that it's for the best, that I need to learn how to be a proper, independent man, that I'm way too old to cry at night.

The dorm showers have no curtains.

I spend every night with the shadow. It murmurs, promises, “Don't worry, I won't kill you tonight,” but I won't trust it, I can't trust it it'll kill me when I do—I buy a switchblade online—I'll never know when it'll want to kill me, so I have to be prepared.

Mr. Fontaine is the only professor I like at school. I don't even have him for class, but I've learned to tell between the kind eyes and the false ones, and with all the judging, fake, harsh eyes of my teachers and peers, I cherish Mr. Fontaine's as true. He smiles at me in the hallways; it's a genuine smile—a little nervous, as if he's unsure if you'll return it, but true nonetheless. This man, he's like no one I know.

I eat lunch in the cafeteria with my classmates. They laugh at someone's dirty joke about a girl's clitoris, and their banter echoes through the dining hall. I don't really understand it, but I try to laugh along. I keep eating my soup and pretend not to notice when an eyeball floats at the top, bobbing as my spoon dips into the bowl,

watching, staring at me.

Walking to class, I always fall behind my classmates. The bell rang ages ago, but I have to step on every blue tile or else Mum will die. The professor scolds me for being late and orders me to stay after class.

Every night, the shadow is in my dorm room. My dorm-mate is always asleep, so he never sees him. But I see him. I won't report it to the office—they won't listen they never listen. So I lie awake each night as he sits on my headboard and oozes ink onto my bedsheets, staining them jet black. To distract myself, I think about Mr. Fontaine and his smile, and I touch myself and muffle my moans into the pillow.

On the weekend, I take a train to the city with my friends. I would go home, but if I did, Pop would hate me and he'd lock me in the cellar until I rot. Mia won't help me—she never does. I make sure to skip over the sidewalk cracks or else Mum will get shot. The train makes a stop, and a man rushing in tries to stall the doors from closing. The doors slide shut and his hand is severed off. The passengers all don't care, even as the blood runs all over the floor. Even after I get off, my sneakers are still sticky with the dried blood on the soles. As we walk to a coffee shop, I pretend not to see the hand crawling behind me. If they notice my panicked gait, they don't mention it.

It's Monday, and I walk to class. I'm late and I have an exam today, but I have to step on all the blue tiles or Mum will be stabbed. I make it to the classroom just on time to take my exam. There's an eyeball on my desk, pale and coated with grime. It watches me as I fill in bubbles, it stares at me, I can't concentrate when it's looking at me—

Oh my god, he's so dumb, he's taking so long, I bet he'll do the worst out of all of us—

I swear, if I could, I would just kick him out of this school. He's such a waste of time — what a useless, pathetic student—

I can feel their eyes on me just like the one sitting on my desk, watching and judging—

I pass by Mr. Fontaine in the hallway, and he gives me a smile. *He knows about you*, the voices say. *You disgust him*, they jeer.

I'm doing my homework in the common area. I know there's a dead body hidden in the couch I'm sitting on, but if I try to pull the stuffing out and find it, they might expel me for property damage.

I am dead. I am dead. My roommate doesn't talk to me and his eyes pass right by me and I'm dead. Will Mia come to my wake? Will Mum? The doctors might not let her out of the hospital, 'cause she'll be murdered. But then— “Hey man, what did you get for number 7?” —I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding.

I go to Mr. Fontaine's office. If anyone would listen, it'd be him. He greets me when I walk through the doorway, with his signature smile (*You disgust him, they say*) but it's off, his smile is off, it's not kind or genuine; it's the kind of grin a hunter has before gutting its kill he's going to kill me, *he'll gut me like an animal*

Mr. Fontaine is going to kill me, *he'll kill me I'll die I'll be dead*

Mr. Fontaine knows I think about him at night and it *disgusts him and he'll kill me*

He'll kill me if I don't kill him first.

When I come to, my switchblade is in my hand and there's blood over the tiles. There's blood in my hands and in my hair and on my cheek. Mr. Fontaine is dead.

The shadow laughs at me from the corner and the eyeball is looking at me from the desk and Mr. Fontaine is dead.

I choke back a sob—I can't take it anymore. I flee the office and shove past the crowd of students in the hallway. *"I killed Mr. Fontaine! I killed him! Mr. Fontaine is dead!"* My feet leave bloody footprints behind me.

I'm in the headmaster's office. They don't understand what I'm saying, *they never listen*—“Mr. Fontaine is dead,” I say.

Mr. Fontaine? Who is Mr. Fontaine? We don't have a Mr. Fontaine at this school.



JOLLY GREEN GIANT BY CHASE ROBBINS

A reflection of death that precipitates in a juvenile eye,
Tears cannot replace a child's terminated laughter,
Another broken mother left tormented without a goodbye.

A tempest of permeating destruction cripples an omitted village, left to fry;
Small feeble corpses went unsaved by the missionary's supposed rapture,
A reflection of death that precipitates in a juvenile eye.

She no longer rejoices at the 4th of July,
There is no pride for a country that marinates infants in plaster,
Another broken mother left tormented without a goodbye.

Those who defy evil with acts of genocide,
While green innocence festers in an neglectful disaster:
A reflection of death that precipitates in a juvenile eye.

Infernos erupt from the screaming heavens, replacing her sunrise,
The Angel's Trumpet is ignited to hide her misery as the press begin to gather,
Another broken mother left tormented without a goodbye.

Blankets of copper swaddle crucified shrapnel, undenied
By the giant's craving for a holocaust of defiled freedom from its master.
A reflection of death that precipitates in a juvenile eye.
Another broken mother left tormented without a goodbye.

MAHABARATHA

BY LUCY SAN CHIRICO

I was not like Draupadi. I was not strong, I was hardly courageous. The only pride I had was for those closest to me, my brothers, my husband, my son. I was constantly reminded of the contrast between her and I.

While I only gained self-esteem from those around me, Draupadi grasped her pride and held onto it with an iron fist. When others tried to take it from her, like they had in the assembly hall, she did not shrink. Instead, she stood tall, shook back her long hair, and refused that it be stolen from her. That same hair that they had dragged her by, she used as a weapon, an instrument for vengeance. She vowed that she would not brush it until she had washed it in the blood of those who had abused her, shamed her in front of the crowds and the elders. She was brave and strong, her heart was iron. No, I was nothing like her.

I hid behind the men I cared for. I had chosen to run and let Krishna protect me from marrying Duryodhana when I fell in love with Arjuna. If it had been me in that dreaded assembly hall, me who they mocked and attempted to disrobe, I would have cowered. She had every right to scorn me, I knew now. She had every right to think I was not worthy of Arjuna. The only thing we had in common was that we both sought refuge in Krishna.

Of course she should go with Arjuna. Of course I was too weak to accompany him into exile. Of course I should stay in Dwarka with the brothers I had always relied on. There was no place for me with my husband anymore.

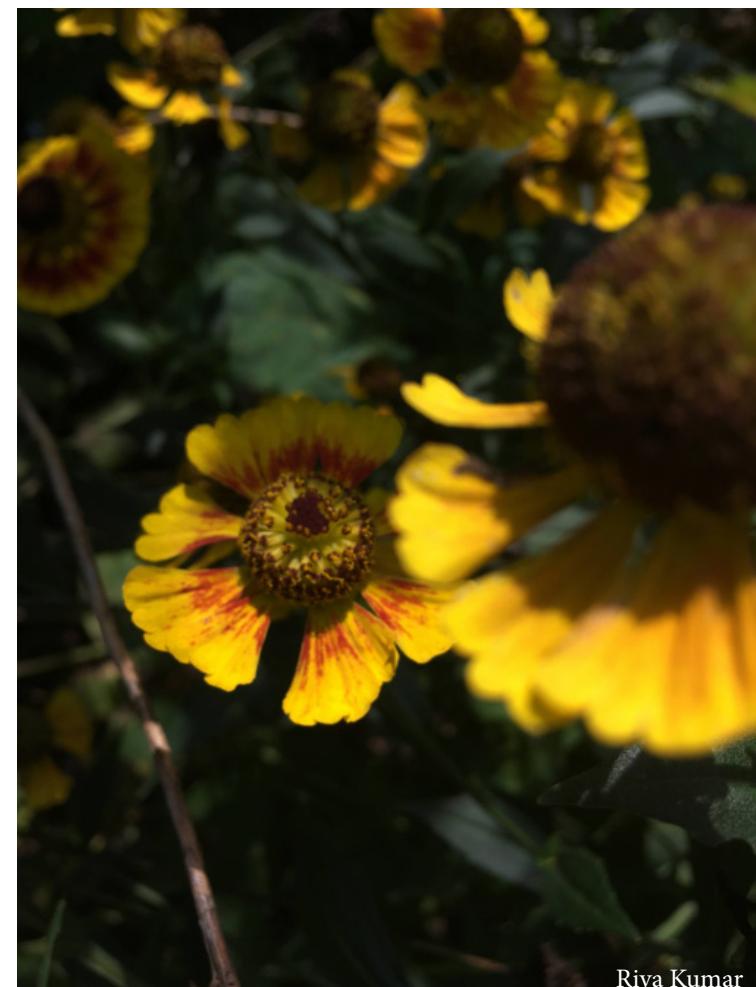
I told myself this, but a strange agony grew within me as I imagined the horrible ordeal that I was facing; thirteen years without Arjuna, more than a decade of feeling the pain of his absence, not knowing if I would ever see him again. When I thought of this, I could feel something inside of me crack. How could I live without him? I would spend those years in the beloved home of my childhood, under the twisted shadow of shame and terror as I raised our son alone. Those years now seemed to swallow my consciousness; I

could see no hope. I felt sure that I would die or go mad before the time was over.

But in that moment of utter despair, I felt someone raise me up from the floor, catch my hand before I toppled into the abyss. I remembered something I had forgotten.

Krishna. He would be there the whole time, guiding me, comforting me, helping me through the pain.

So although the future seemed unbearably bleak, my big brother was the one beacon of light that I clung to.



Riya Kumar

MY SERVITUDE TO TIME

BY GUILLAUME PLACIDET

As all we do serves no purpose,
To treat the present like we do the past.

Why continue,
With this future we seek to forge.
One we make vanish before our eyes.

Our ship struck the Atlantic,
It cries out for land,
A port to dock to.
Left to be rocked,
By destiny's waves.

Endless nights,
Skylines of empty windows,
Benches soaked by the rain,
Quiet noise,
And smooth voices,
Left unheard.

Yet shall we continue
In the servitude of time,
As humans,

Bound to live,
Bound to cry,
Bound to hope,
Bound to try,
Bound to hate,
Bound to love,
And
Bound to die.

JESTER

BY CHASE ROBBINS

I can no longer laugh.
Humor makes me cold, unamused,
There is something eating
My young flesh with a cut so deep
Marrow is split from the soul.

It seems that it is all beyond my control,
With my suppressed tongue wagging widely,
While my mouth is welded with lead
To stop the spread of impaired neurons;

Sometimes it feels easier to put on a happy face
Than be honest with those who have an ounce of
Unfeigned care in the loins of their hearts.

Every step I take widens the
Fracture in my cave,
Shards of rock rain down on my consciousness,
Tumbling upon the moth eaten floor,

Where stained-glass mosaics depicting
The kiss of blasphemy Mary expressed
To a dying autonomy, shatters in a severe
Splatter of purple dye,

But I cannot feel the pain I refuse to display,
To lie at the foot of a sensationalized prophet,
Beneath a depthless pool of sensitivity,

I play my part in this denial,
It is expected of me.

Lost in a wave of bruised blood,
I am backed against a growing clot,
Until the sharp pierce of a dart
Can free my unemotional thoughts.

EVENING STAR

BY CHASE ROBBINS

Even when I experience
Happiness it is tinted blue:

Muddled venison soup served on a tray of dinted gold,
Plastic diamonds that refuse to glitter in the dying light.



AUGUST

BY MARIA PERSAUD

April came in like a lion, bringing thunderstorms that shook entire houses and sheets of rain that washed the remaining snow into the gutters. May swept through like a breeze, leaving a thin coating of pollen across the windshield of every car in sight. June hatched insects on every surface available, and July brought in swarms of tourists from across the coast. But the calendar seemed to flip for August with an oozing slowness—as if the pages were stuck together. Planes returning from July's travel landed on sticky tarmac, and flip flops returning home from the beaches got stuck in hot pavement. Days melted into one another until Sunday morning had as much meaning as Tuesday evening, and the closest the sun ever came to setting was when a cloud would drag itself across the sky, bringing rain was warm to the touch and fell in fat drops.

Humidity trickled down the stained glass windows of a church and turned the grass into slippery mush. It dripped down the chins of dogs as they tugged their owners down the street; the owners themselves dragged the backs of their hands across their foreheads to ward away the heat. It clung to the legs of mosquitos, weighing them down as they droned away the rest of summer. Once the jungle gym was too hot to touch, children gathered at the park to play in the lukewarm fountain.

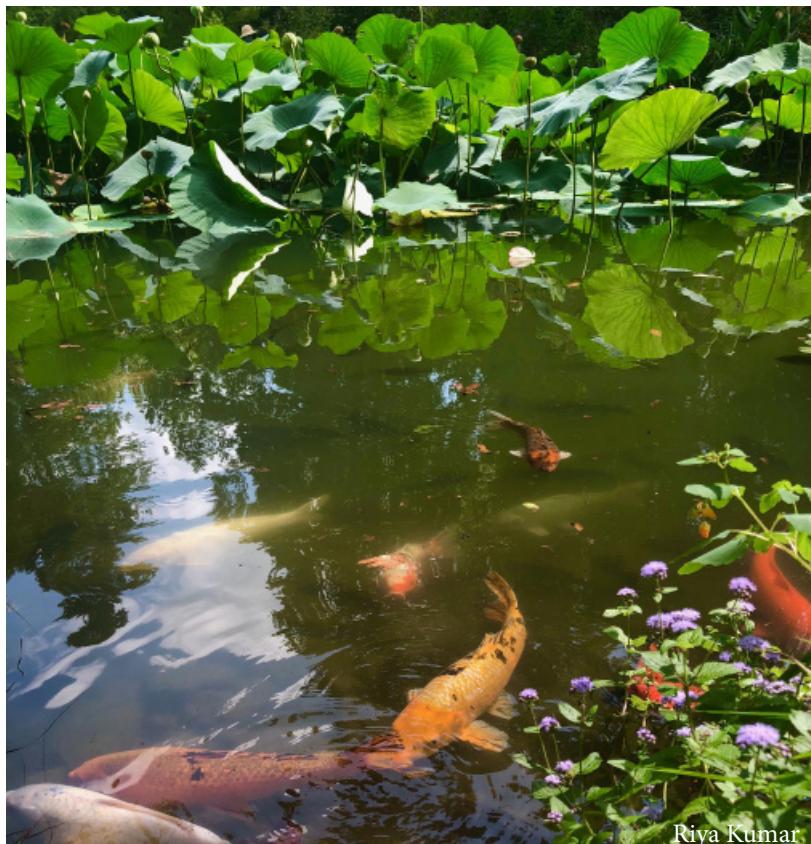
Fire hydrants melted, leaning sideways and staining the grass with drops of red paint. Billboards dripped down the highway, smothering cars that had melted into the asphalt. A dog crossed the street with a newspaper in his mouth, and the headlines were hardly recognizable as the humidity merged the ink and paper. Taking off a shirt was like stripping away a second skin, and it took considerable effort to peel away one's fingers after shaking someone's hand. Owning a box of crayons with distinguishable colors was a fantasy from the past. Fans operated on high speeds only to circulate the suffocating air as AC units gave out one by one.

The sky turned into an eternal sunset as the sun dripped down the horizon, leaving streaks of orange in the sky. In places, the pale blue of the atmosphere had peeled away to reveal space,

where everything was untouched by the unbearable heat of August.

But then the calendar flipped one more time, and September graced the top of the page. Labor day brought a cool breeze in through the open windows of the remaining houses, and the night before the first day of school was dark and quiet.

The first foggy morning brought a baby blue sky in the afternoon, and the sun sat poised and well behaved between the clouds. The neon sign over the grocery store was replaced, but customers continued to struggle with the warped wheels of the shopping carts. It only took a few kicks for the AC units to start again, but it would only be a few weeks before they were traded out for space heaters. As the trees began to turn yellow around the edges and magazines advertising Halloween costumes came in the mail, August was forgotten.



Riya Kumar

SOMEONE WHO MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE MUSIC

BY RIYA KUMAR

I heard someone say you should find someone who makes you feel the way music makes you feel. That can mean many things, of course—maybe they make you feel the urge to dance, or sing, maybe like kissing in the sunset or giddy as a catchy melody—but I did not count on you breaking my heart like music could.

I've always known my heart was sensitive to beauty. Often have I found myself with pierced heart, struck by the dawn's sunlight setting dew alight with soft fire, the endless speckled expanse we call the universe, or a single note, the climax of a melody, to send me careening off the edge, stabbed and unable to breath, with punctured lungs, suffocating in intoxicating beauty. And that, is how you broke my heart.

Loving you is like dying of a heart on fire. Some heavenly harmony, the sweetest notes, blew on the embers of my heart till it flickered into a terrifying, roaring flame, the searing heat enough to burn my lungs, coat my insides in soot, and shatter my heart with such awful torridity. Because never could I have dreamt up any being as beautiful as you, with all your perfectly sculpted flaws and imperfections, seemingly precisely made to fit with my own by some hand of Fate.

Opening my heart to you feels like opening my heart to a song that plucks the strings so poignantly, exactly...to hit every pressure point in careful delicate precision till I've completely come undone.

Is that what it is like to fall in love with someone who makes you feel the way music does? Falling so deeply, so completely to have your heart broken by beauty and love? Something awe full enough to shatter and undo you at this deepest level? If indeed, then I have found someone who makes me feel the way music does, breaks and shatters my heart as terribly, delicately, achingly and tempestuously as music does. As loving you does. As **you** do.

THE LAST ARCHANGEL

BY HANA BOULWARE

The sweet, buttery smell of puff pastry drifted into the workshop. My wings fluttered as I turned, leaving the mortar and pestle behind. The pungent sage was being drowned out by my kouign-amann.

Light as a feather, I slipped upstairs, out of my underground shop and into my apartment. It wasn't much, only a measly three rooms, but it was enough. The faerie court was quite relaxed and couldn't care less about my living arrangements. Tall stacks of books were held up by coils of ivy, and had been for a while. No one ever came in and searched my room. No one ever came and discovered the dampener concealed behind the pages and leaves.

Opening the oven, I let out a contented sigh. Golden crust crinkled against baking paper as I pulled the tray out of the oven. I hazarded a glance around the room, before waving my hand over the pastries. Sugar already made them sparkle, but with my magic they seemed to glow with their own light. I smiled, picking it up. Making potions was a poor substitute for truly using my magic. The extra sparkle had dimmed, and only the extra sweetness remained to hint at the magic. I took a bite, and was immediately invigorated. I finished, licking the sugar off my hands before dipping them into the sink.

The clock struck five.

Right, I had to finish those sleep potions for tonight. My client was coming to pick them up. I glanced out the window at the mist that perpetually hung over our rundown little town. Most would simply call Honeysee peculiar, but that didn't even scratch the surface.

Windchimes rustled, the sound of the innocuous bell in my shop. Shaking myself, I went down to investigate.

As I walked down the stairs, I pulled in my wings. Soon, I looked exactly like the low-level faerie I claimed to be. Strolling past my unfinished potions, I stepped into the gritty alleyway with a glamour to keep any normals from wandering in.

A charming girl met me there.

I knew who it was; everyone knew who it was. Onyx-haired, amber-eyed Ash. The champion of the Faerie queen, the hope of all Faeries. Faeries everywhere would swoon if they even caught a glimpse of her. I looked on unimpressed. Ash brought attention. Unwanted attention. Unwanted attention that would poke at me until it discovered all of my terrible secrets.

The coppery tang of blood caught my attention. I roused myself from my grumblings to glance at the blossoming stain on Ash's shirt. That wasn't good. I looked up again, meeting those confident amber eyes. Well, the only thing more noticeable than saving Ash's life, was being the girl who didn't even bother trying to save her life. Puffing out a breath, I opened the door.

"Come in, and try not to bleed everywhere." I was sure I heard her huff a laugh. I begrudgingly led her in and seated her on a couch. "Don't move."

She smiled winningly.

I only scoffed. Walking over to a wall of ingredients, I considered my options. My magic could save her instantaneously, but that wasn't an option. It wasn't serious, so a small potion should be fine. Something a low-level faerie could believably whip up in a few minutes. Muttering the words under my breath, I grabbed an assortment of herbs and lemon. As an afterthought, I grabbed some sugar.

"What are you doing?"

I glanced back at Ash, lounging comfortably on the sofa. She was probably amused by my mumblings, knowing that she could overpower me at any moment without even trying. Well, not *me*, but that wasn't the point.

I heaved a meat cleaver out of the compartment hole in my desk to begin mincing the ingredients, and spoke. "Fixing you. I don't really need a wounded person in my shop. I don't need anyone in my shop. The sooner you're healed the sooner you can go."

"You're not at all what you look like," Ash commented, with more than a little amusement in her tone.

I simply tossed one braid over my shoulder. With my country-girl clothing, ombre-red hair and tiny physique, most people assumed I would be a sweet little darling. Owning a potion shop

only helped that particular image.

"Wait here," I commanded as I turned to go up the stairs. I needed one of those tea balls to steep the mixture in. Tea would be the easiest way to go about this.

"Yessir."

I stalked up the stairs and pulled out a mug. I dropped the tea ball in and hurried back downstairs. Ash, luckily, hadn't stirred. I sighed in relief. She had to go, even her presence was making me jumpy. What if she sensed my dampener? It only started dampening at a very high threshold, so most would never feel it... but Ash wasn't most people.

"Don't get too comfortable," Ash quipped, rolling her eyes. I wordlessly held out the cup, adding a heaping spoonful of sugar. The second the cup left my hand, I spun on my heel and walked back to my desk. Those sleeping potions needed time to set. This is why I should've made them earlier.

I dug around in my drawers before pulling out a collection of lava stones. I placed the rocks and the herb mixture into a porcelain bowl. I ran my finger around the edge, once, twice, thrice. It sparkled, just a smidge. Any more, and someone might get suspicious. I lifted my silver teapot, and poured hot water over the rocks in a slow and steady stream. The steam that puffed up started white, but then began to thin into a hazy blue. Soon, it darkened, until it was a navy nearly indistinguishable from black. Placing down the teapot with practiced calm, I quickly covered the bowl with a matching lid.

"Interesting method you have there."

I glanced up. Ash had downed the tea, and was now watching me intently. I glared. I wanted to shout at her to get out, but that wouldn't sell my weak, jaded faerie act. Pushing away from my desk, I walked over to where Ash was lounging. I raised my hand close to her wound. It wasn't fully healed. Odd, given I had put a bit more oomph into the potion than normal. Any normal wound would've healed.

"Demonspawn." Ash spat.

I glanced up.

She was glaring at her wound. "Those filthy demonspawn."

"The Angel Clan?" I asked, dread pooling in my stomach. How had they managed to do this to Ash? The Faerie Clan should've been more powerful since there were no Archangels left in the Angel Clan. They were the most powerful of the Angel Clan; without them every Angel should've gotten much, much weaker.

"Yes. Those bloody demonspawn." Her hands clenched beside her. "They've gotten stronger. I think an Archangel must've appeared."

The Angel clan had been declining—was declining, I reminded myself. Even so, I couldn't shake the sense of fear that had settled over me. The queen was a monster, and her brutal training left very few Angels at all. That's why I left.

Ash snorted at the look on my face. "I was speculating. There hasn't been an Archangel in centuries. The queen is too evil for that." She shook herself off. Placing a hand on her core, she watched as the wound sealed. "Thanks for the help. Here." She flipped a golden coin at me.

I caught it, still numb with disbelief.

Ash turned and left, shaking out her wings and launching into the air.

With shaking knees, I rose. I brushed past my marinating sleep potion, tapping my fingers on it forcefully as I left. It would be much too powerful for a client now, but it wasn't going there anyways. I could already feel the Angel Queen's oily magic slipping away. What Ash failed to realize, is that the spell wasn't just a curse, it was a tracker.

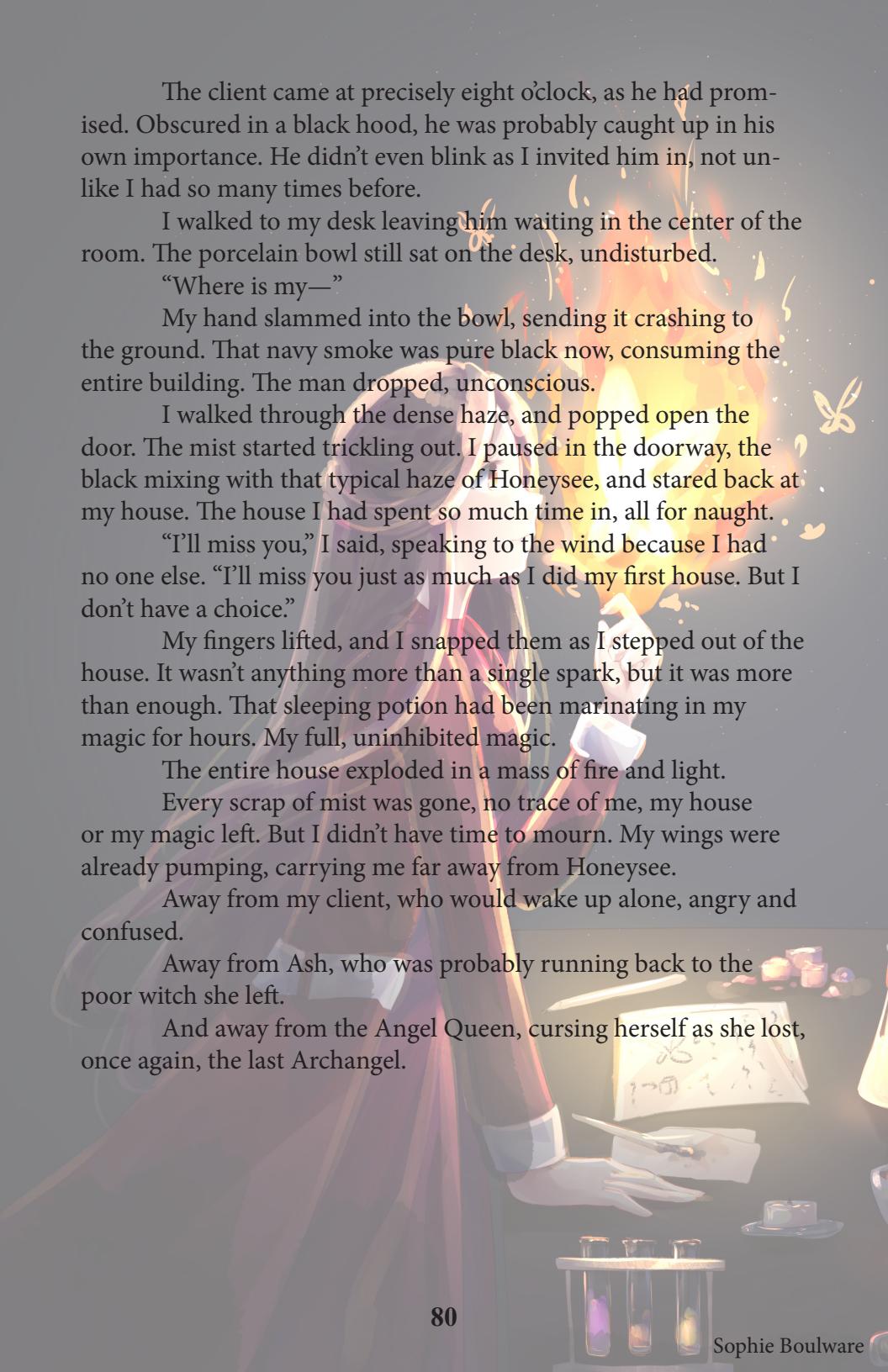
I had to destroy it.

Heedless of my magic, I ripped open all my stacks of books. Ivy and paper fluttered to the ground, smelling of smoke. Three twisted metal spires stood tall and proud, glinting in the low light. I stretched out my hand and let my wings flutter up. The pillars sparkled before glowing with a holy light.

Destroy it.

They sputtered out, their magic all spent, and I felt the inhibitions on my own magic lift. These nullifiers were toast now. I would have to buy more later.

I turned away from my room. This place was worthless now.



The client came at precisely eight o'clock, as he had promised. Obscured in a black hood, he was probably caught up in his own importance. He didn't even blink as I invited him in, not unlike I had so many times before.

I walked to my desk leaving him waiting in the center of the room. The porcelain bowl still sat on the desk, undisturbed.

“Where is my—”

My hand slammed into the bowl, sending it crashing to the ground. That navy smoke was pure black now, consuming the entire building. The man dropped, unconscious.

I walked through the dense haze, and popped open the door. The mist started trickling out. I paused in the doorway, the black mixing with that typical haze of Honeysee, and stared back at my house. The house I had spent so much time in, all for naught.

“I'll miss you,” I said, speaking to the wind because I had no one else. “I'll miss you just as much as I did my first house. But I don't have a choice.”

My fingers lifted, and I snapped them as I stepped out of the house. It wasn't anything more than a single spark, but it was more than enough. That sleeping potion had been marinating in my magic for hours. My full, uninhibited magic.

The entire house exploded in a mass of fire and light.

Every scrap of mist was gone, no trace of me, my house or my magic left. But I didn't have time to mourn. My wings were already pumping, carrying me far away from Honeysee.

Away from my client, who would wake up alone, angry and confused.

Away from Ash, who was probably running back to the poor witch she left.

And away from the Angel Queen, cursing herself as she lost, once again, the last Archangel.

