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Spring 2021

SAGA Vol.84 / 2020-2021

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ed in my eyes, and I know why. *I can see it now*, see right through the shadows.
I live behind a window it is a dangerous safe haven;
seeded, a weed in Eden's garden grown. a precaution rich with the sweatiest
palms and the most gracious heart.

and I switch off the stove and sit by the unlocked door until
knocks rings the doorbell texts me knocks again, *Who carved* out her own reality
because he's remembered too. from the egos of her father and brother.
but you came and realized that after all, *there is nothing like Canaan's land*
Laughing Screaming and Sacred Music filled our mouths

Prayers to Gods of Flesh/ Gods of Stone we are made of the same stuff, the dust
and pollen kicked up
you had a purpose in your coming here, but all this while, I thought we had a rapport
you made me live in a fool's land
let your heart guide the red, pulsating coal in your throat that aches so bad you cry

concede to your skipping stone; the one you have hidden away for
three years in the hopes of using it in the truest moment we could muster.
There's spring now, spring ahead of us and so many more possibilities
I can hear a lone bird's melody through the branches
of leaves.

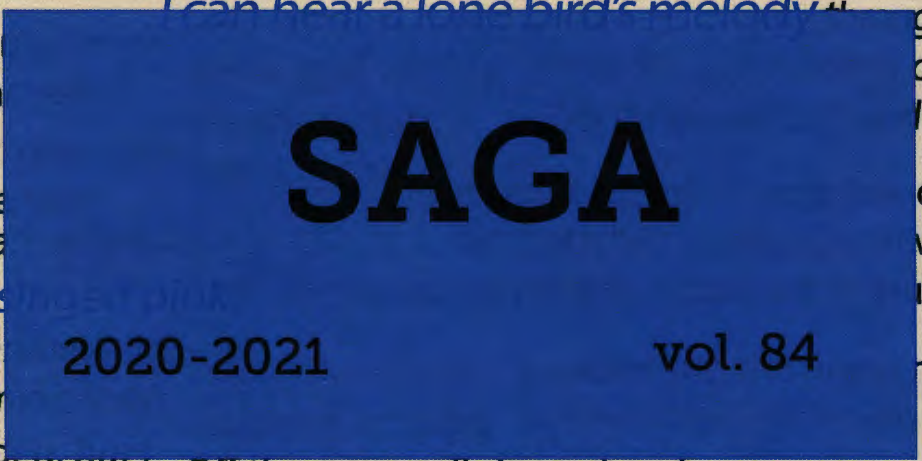
mind me of my *you are here.*
en take me to th
u were born wit
let your coals be
time's never-cea
u are the sky s
uarantee the da
l morning is com
m not red-blooded, but
n't bleed blue, either. Off the cave walls in my head
Unable to rest My violated olfaction crinkled
and gagged.

m nine years old. It makes me angry too.
e wood chips in the playground are frozen I pulled my hand away
om the morning dew. You stare me up and down and the small wooden door swung shut
fore I jump onto the slide. on the two lovers.

I rub my tears with my blackened hand and return
turned to glass to my usual routine of living in a lie and laboring for a few coins
ould I be stained but lovely
clear and hollow? *Nothing like that exists so just ignore that it can happen but should*
that happen share with me *the magic you used.*

hat are we Waiting For? Your coming here did not do any good to me other than
Your blatant lies and images of me killing the little life left in me
r utopia grew Cultures of Vision
arning How to See Futures Past as the sweet flowers
and smoke wrap their tendrils
e do not sweep in the morning around your neck and shove their
vines down your throat,
e wait until the day is done, after and you beg

e lie to the visitors, saying *this house has not seen death.*
aceless woman comes to me in a dream, says: Laughter echoing
ve you in the absence of a mouth and i wake up. Off the cave walls in my head
ve you her words hang in the air like dust in a cobweb Unable to rest



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2020-2021

vol. 84

SAGA

volume 84

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about *SAGA*

SAGA is Augustana College's art and literary magazine, which has been published by students since 1937. While *SAGA* traditionally published two magazines per academic school year, one in winter and one in spring, it has been published as a single, larger issue since 2014.

The goal of *SAGA* and its staff members is to spread and showcase student art and writing around Augustana's campus, and to increase the prevalence of creative spaces and outlets around the place students call home. Those of any major, interest, or background are encouraged to submit, uninhibited and uncensored.

Submissions are open exclusively to currently enrolled Augustana students. All submissions are sent anonymously to hired genre Editors and their volunteer student boards who have selected the pieces published in this issue.

We are proud to present this year's selected pieces in *SAGA Vol. 84*.

Cover design by Elisa Wynn

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letters from the editors

SAGA has been a driving force in my life for the past four years: its creators have grown to be my friends and it has connected me to the world in a way I never thought possible (strangers reading my writing? never!). When I applied to be a Poetry Editor my freshman year, I had zero clue what I was getting into. Honestly, I thought I was applying to be a member of the board—not *running* it. I didn't feel worthy. But I found my footing, sent some emails, and got to work. At the release party the following spring, I saw a camaraderie between everyone involved with the magazine that I hadn't seen elsewhere on campus. I can pinpoint that moment, that spark, for my continued work with SAGA, and for adding a (third!) major in creative writing. I have been honored to serve as Editor-in-Chief during this, my senior year.

Admittedly, this year was not what I had hoped. The ongoing pandemic limited our resources, tightened our budget, and moved all of our meetings onto the grid of Google Meet. Sarah and I were unable to attend the annual AWP (Association of Writers & Writing Programs) conference as we had hoped. All of that said, I fully believe that this year's magazine is stronger because of this adversity. The pandemic has made art (of all forms) extremely difficult. When the semester drags on with no breaks between the first day and finals and we're all terribly overworked and tired, the last thing anyone wants to do is paint or write or dance or create at all. And yet we did. Each line break and pencil stroke contain within them the sentiments of the past year: loneliness, grief, and simultaneously, hope. Without intending to be so, this edition of the magazine is a testament to the strength of Augie students. I am so incredibly proud.

Creating art curates friendships and as cheesy as that sounds, it's true. I'd like to thank Sarah, above all, for being the best co-EIC I could have imagined. Without her, I never could have made it through this year. Her infectious giggle brightens my days. Thank you to my fellow triple-majors, Alli and Carly, who inspire me to be a better person and creator. Thank you to my roommates, Natalie and Megan, who put up with my crazy schedule while conquering their own. Thank you to all of the creative writing professors for pushing us to pursue excellence. Lastly, thank you to my parents: to my mom, who taught me to tell stories, and to my dad, for whom I tell them.

There are so many words left to write, visual arts to create, and stories to cherish. I pray you find peace and inspiration within these covers.

Megan Hoppe
Co-Editor-in-Chief

It was a hot September day when I paraded around the Activities Fair searching for a place to belong. I had visited every group and every table as a way to broaden my horizons because, like any excited freshman, I realized that college offered a fresh start. My peer mentor directed me to *SAGA* after listening to me blather on about my love for writing all morning. That table is where I met Jack and Rene, *SAGA*'s 2019–2020 editors, and where my story begins. Those two told me all about *SAGA* and its ability to give the student body creative freedom and a voice. As they spoke, I picked up Volume 82, the 2018–2019 magazine, and opened it to a poem titled “Thank You,” a phenomenal piece about thanking buildings for existing. After reading that poem and realizing I held an entire community in my hands, I knew that *SAGA* was something I wanted to be a part of, something I *had* to be a part of.

I am extremely grateful for and equally stunned by the hard work that everyone puts into *SAGA* each year. Staff, judges, and contributors alike have a mutual dedication and desire to see *SAGA* flourish, and this year was no exception. Everyone gave their all, despite living through a harsh and lonely pandemic. The submissions we received were outstanding, and our staff's commitment was timely and exceptional. This magazine – that you are holding, are *reading* – is a testament to that. I am beyond proud, not only to take part in Volume 84's creation but also to produce something so extraordinary in such dire circumstances. I hope that, as you read the pieces in this magazine, you share our pride and revel in it with us.

A year after that fateful Activities Fair, I discovered that the author of that poem about buildings – the one that made me fall in love with *SAGA* – was now my co-editor-in-chief. I couldn't have asked for a more inspiring, more insightful, more passionate partner. Thank you, Megan, for always being there, for making Literary Residency a blast, for pushing me *and SAGA* to be the best versions of ourselves, and for just picking up a pencil and helping that lost eighteen-year-old find her place. I have so much to thank you for – the list really would go on forever. Thank you to our staff for doing an absolutely amazing job putting together this masterpiece, and thank you to our judges for treating our students' work with respect, integrity, and grace. Finally, thank you to my friends and family for endlessly encouraging me to turn my hobby into a dream.

And thank you, dear reader, for taking the time to read this year's *SAGA* and for letting the artwork in these pages live on in your mind.

Sarah Luepkes
Co-Editor-in-Chief

Tricia Plachno

Right Place, Right Time

do you ever miss the ease of conversation?
the effortless sweetness of a newly stolen vernacular and the refraction of
sunlight through unfamiliar blinds. authenticity in vulnerability, strides
between a shattered past and calculated whispers.

memories of star-gazing and people
watching from the freezing rooftops, my loves swaddle me up
and rock me
slow. they've allowed me to trust in this anxious sensation of a
filling meal
when you have relied on scraps
your whole life.

i concede to your skipping stone; the one you have hidden away for three
years in the hopes of using it in the truest moment we could
muster.
your conviction in the pursuit of the right
hair scarf to best suit your
outfit today; an infatuation with intricacy.

i give thanks to your millions of soft kisses and words that will
never leave this broken
car. to be grateful for the life i've led to this moment and to find comfort in
days
i've yet to know.

there is something so relieving about being in the exact right place at the
exact right time. truth is sticky and full—the net that saves the trapeze artist
before his fatal drop from the stratosphere.

it is a dangerous safe haven;
a precaution rich with the sweatiest
palms and the most gracious heart.
my truth carries me through everlasting days, where the sky is
stained blue & the clouds do not move.

Cassandra Karn

'Twixt My Lover and Myself

'Twixt my lover and myself lies
The branch of a yew tree, shedding.
We grind the debris into the
Sheets, mortar and pestle, adding
Another ingredient for
Our potion. Kisses charge our spell,
Wordless incantations. We will
Burn for this, I know. But we both
Rejected heaven long ago,
Savoring gasps of brimstone breath.

Abby Berry
The Trip

I had the flu last week, so they put me in the back seat. The way back, the last row of a triple-rowed van. Normally I'd complain; I like being the center of attention and that means the center of the car. But right now, I'm too happy to mind.

The van smells of chlorine and cherries. Cherries from Jack's vape pen, which he hits every so often to our great disdain, and the chlorine from all of us. We left the water park two hours ago, and my sweatshirt is still wet from my hair.

Mal is driving, but Nate is on aux. Frank Ocean is in the background, the bass vibrating under the sound of our overlapping voices.

Usually I'd be talking the most, unintentionally dominating the conversation. If I were in the middle row, maybe I would be talking. But here in the back I like to just listen.

It's dark out, but as I look out the window I can see the sparkle of snow from the headlights. Big fluffy flakes steadily falling. This wasn't in the forecast for our spring break, but it's Wisconsin. I'm not surprised.

There's something peaceful about it. The snow, the music, all of us together. I blink.

A bright yellow light is zooming our way, except before I realize it's coming toward us it's already here. Scraping metal drowns out Frank Ocean. The aux is disconnected. I'm upside down. My seatbelt is holding me for dear life, stretching to capacity. Glass shatters. I hear something crack. I feel like I'm swimming, the air is thick, time is bent. Peter is screaming. I know it's him. I heard him hours ago on a water slide. This scream is different, though.

I can't feel where I've been cut but I'm bleeding. I can taste it. It's too quiet. Peter is gasping now. There's a moan from up front. I think it's Nate. I can't see Mal or Jack. I can't hear them either. My face is wet and I am not sure if it's blood or tears. Everything is black.

I blink.

Mal asks why I'm so quiet. I force a laugh and tell her I'm just thinking. I hear Peter chuckle and smell the cherry vapor from Jack. Nate changes the song. I look back out the window at the falling snow and try to keep from thinking again.

Zack Horve
Snowglobe

Jack took his eyes off the road for a moment and glanced over at Shay sitting in the passenger seat.
“So, what’d you think?”

Shay turned away from the window and smiled. Snowflakes passed by behind her, illuminated by the highway lights.

“I thought it was pretty great. I especially enjoyed the part where they lost.”

“Why? I was kind of excited about going to state.”

“I mean, yeah, but what’s more important: My personal satisfaction, or the basketball team advancing in the playoffs? I enjoyed watching Clay cry on the bench.”

Jack chuckled and shifted in his seat. It had been a long drive, but they were almost back. The road was still pretty clear despite the snow.

“I can’t believe I dated that asshole,” Shay continued.

“Yeah, I know.”

Shay paused for a moment and began tracing a snowflake on the foggy window.

“He was sweet sometimes. I don’t know why, but things changed.”

Jack didn’t know what to say. He stared at the road ahead of him. It looked like it went on forever. The snow continued to fall silently. The radio was off. The only sound was the quiet murmur of the car.

Jack glanced over at his best friend. She had finished her masterpiece on the window. Now she was scrolling through Instagram, her face illuminated by the soft glow of her phone.

Outside, the fields were now coated in a thin blanket of snow. The road was more slick now.

Suddenly, Shay put her phone away and turned toward Jack.

“Do you remember when we went to the lake?”

“Which time?”

“Right after I moved in junior year. You were the first person to talk to me, and you invited me to go swimming at the lake.”

“Of course I remember. What about it?”

“I was just thinking about it. I don’t know.”

Shay paused. Jack looked at her, hoping for further explanation, but Shay was back to staring out the window, preoccupied by the passing landscape.

They were no longer on the highway. The frozen fields morphed into barren trees as the car passed the entrance to Shay's subdivision. Warm light radiated from homes on both sides of the street. Their long driveways were filled with snow and ice.

After a few moments, Shay broke the silence. "It was just really nice. That day was so hot, and the water felt so good. I remember you telling me that if I dove deep enough, I could get to the part where the water was ice cold. It was so refreshing, and I remember thinking I would go swimming every day that summer."

Jack pulled into Shay's driveway. The fresh snow crunched under the tires.

"Then, of course, I started dating Clay—which wasn't that bad," Shay said. "He just was never interested in swimming. It makes me sad. I feel like it could have been so much fun."

Jack turned off the engine and breathed deeply. He turned to Shay and started to speak but hesitated. His heart pounded. The air felt heavy, loaded with anticipation. Finally, the words tumbled out.

"Do you still feel that way?"

Jack held his breath. Something burned in his chest.

Then all of it melted away. Shay rolled her eyes and smirked. "No, dumbass, not right now. It's winter. The lake is frozen over. It's snowing. The time to go swimming came and went a long time ago."

With that she left the car. Jack sat still for a moment. The snow had stopped falling, but the layer that remained showed no signs of thawing.

Kyle James

Winter at Holden Village



Kyle James

Sunset Captured



Alex Bernheimer

Haikus 4, 14, 21, and 34

Haiku #4

Moonlight scars the night

The lit haven is so small

Darkness infinite

Haiku #14

Laughter echoing

Off the cave walls in my head

Unable to rest

Haiku #21

If I turned to glass

Would I be stained but lovely

Or clear and hollow?

Haiku #34

Stuck in the river

A current always flowing

Polished to nothing

Paige Sheppard
a weed for Eden

to lay upon a dirt and mossy floor
and drop my anchor beside trunk and root
my tempted eyes, deviced, would fall no more
but to a gleaming sky my chin would shoot.
a rested night 'neath swaying canopy,
cicada lullaby and creaking limbs
and crickets, be the sweetest symphony,
rustling branches—my favorite hymn.
bud to bud with daisies I'd surely grow
rain on my lips, like nectar I would drink,
from my mother I would give and borrow.
these are thoughts, though, that I can only think
for these dreams I live behind a window
seeded, a weed in Eden's garden grown.

Siena Lei Olivera

Lovers on the Prarie

A cloud of dust blew from the door hinge.

Lying,

wings folded

on a bed of dry grass and ants

I peered into the dead bird's empty eye socket.

Its stench invaded my nostrils.

An orange and black beetle crept

from behind the neck of the

rank, dead fledge.

As if the bird belonged to the bug and I had walked in on their

intimate departed lovemaking.

The young swallow was helpless to the hard beetle

Helpless to summer love on the prairie.

My violated olfaction crinkled

and gagged.

I pulled my hand away

and the small wooden door swung shut

on the two lovers.

Ah, darkness again.

Jaclyn Hernandez

When No One is Around



Lalini Shanela Ranaraja

Linguistic Anthropology

Nihongo/Japanese/ කලාමැදිරියා

The kanji hangs over my head and weaves itself into my dreams. 忍 *'shinobu/endure*. It's an eighth-century Japanese ideogram, rendered in thick brush strokes on an A5 canvas daubed to look like parchment; my little sister and I painted it together, one of the last things we would share before the coronavirus pandemic trapped us on opposite sides of the globe. I've worn the same kanji around my neck for two years, on a copper pendant I ordered from Etsy; I wear it all through the semester in which I take Japanese 101. I register for the class on a whim, with vague aspirations of reading Haruki Murakami and watching Naruto in their original incarnations. Sure enough, within weeks words start leaping out at me from the Netflix subtitles – *tomodachi/friend*, *tadaima/I'm home*, *itadakimasu/thank you for this meal*.

But my motivations for continuing with the class change. I am one of two seniors studying with the freshmen, and they are energized beyond belief, hungry for learning even in an era when group work entails shouting through masks at each other and the Google Meet screen. They are zestful; they remind me of myself, and learning with them becomes renewal of faith. I start asking questions and finding connections again; I remember the mythology of *shinobu* that first fascinated me, its references to the *shinobi* or ninja of feudal Japan, the way researchers dissect both the word and the warriors it came to represent. However, *sensei/teacher* is the word I keep saying even after the class ends, every time I run into one of my professors at the track. There's always a breathless, "*Genki desu ka?/ "Are you good?"*" as we sprint past each other; she jogs for miles and around my neck the pendant turns ever greener with oxidation.

Nederlands/Dutch

I take astronomy to fulfill my science requirement, which is one of the conditions of a liberal arts education. The language of mathematics has lain dormant in me since the SATs and I try to remedy matters by translating the PowerPoint slides into Dutch, which I'm learning in preparation for a semester away. *Sterrenstelsels/galaxies. Maansverduistering/lunar eclipse. Sterrenstof/stardust.* Polysyllabic compound nouns, reminiscent of German but somehow more delicate – or maybe that is my bias – imbuing them with the memory of the sweet, sharp Dutch boys whom I keep meeting, who are maybe one-third of the inspiration behind the planned trip. That fall in Amsterdam, I don't speak Dutch so much as I lose myself in it, singing along to Marco Borsato in the supermarket, foraging in the farmer's market for *azijn/vinegar* and *kaneel/cinnamon*, obeying swift, split-lipped orders at the dojo. But I am proudest of having a 20-minute conversation with the non-English speaking exterminator who arrives for the rats in my shoebox apartment. Some of what I say is actually in German, but Karl is kind enough not to remark on it and lets me chatter away as he affixes boards over the mouseholes. He asks where I'm from and when I say Sri Lanka, he knows where it is on the map because his country colonized mine three hundred and eighty years ago.

කලාමැදිරියා /Hindi

I only started watching Hindi movies after moving to America. Before, I associated Hindi with the telenovelas my grandmother watched at full volume in the afternoons, high drama and fields of flowers and more musical numbers than Broadway. But then I am eating cold wontons in the empty dorms during a muddy spring, and I realize that India has made it to Netflix; I turn there for comfort and find a surprising abundance of friendly rhythms. In Sri Lanka that summer, I take Hindi classes for three months; my mother makes me lie to the teacher and say I'm in the twelfth grade because if the teacher finds out we have the dollars to live in America she'll charge us more for the classes. I tire of the lie long before the lessons are over, but I delight in the learning, the delicate suspense of the Devanagari script, the links between this language and mine.

When the summer ends, my teacher sends me a Facebook request that I cannot accept and I don't end up speaking it as much as I'd thought; it becomes one of the several languages I don't acknowledge on my resumé or during my icebreaker self-introductions. But I keep watching the movies and memorizing the soundtracks; I rejoice, along with the Indian subcontinent, in the marriage of Nick Jonas to Priyanka Chopra. On the wall in my house that is papered with vocabulary lists, there are words that remind me of the Indian-American girl my best friend once loved. *Dil/heart, jaan/life, pyaar/love.*

කලාමැදිරියා / **Tamil**

The second time I learn Tamil it is at the convent school I attend until the seventh grade, and it is mandated by the government. I am abysmal at it. A tutor is engaged at the house of another child, and a group of us walk there every Tuesday after school. I remember nothing from those sessions except the dread suffusing her frilly bedroom, all of us futilely hoping that the tutor will miss her bus and we will get to disperse home early.

The third time I learn Tamil I have multiple reasons for believing it will work. It's the same summer I learn Hindi and my brain is primed for language acquisition; being trilingual will be an asset once I start working within my country; I made the choice to pick it up again. My father suggests I learn Chinese instead; my grandmother says at least I'll be able to get better service in the Tamil-owned textile shops. The Tamil teacher is the same one who used to tutor my brother, who ended up being far better at HTML than he was at Tamil. The lessons are at her house; it has metal grilles instead of windows, and the mosquitos eat us alive. We both try our best – I buy every textbook on offer and she offers to teach me via telephone in America, but when the summer ends, I leave the textbooks behind, and I don't speak any of those words again.

I don't list Tamil on my resumé, but this omission, unlike the others, suffuses me with guilt. I was twelve when the civil war ended, so I remember what it was like before that at the convent school, how my best friend with a Tamil surname insisted she was a Sinhalese Catholic like her mother, how everything from textbooks to classrooms to playground games was split into Sinhala and Tamil and no one crossed over.

But somehow, in all that, the idea of learning Tamil would not let go of me, so the first time I learned, it was from a Tamil girl in my age cohort. At this distance, all I remember is that she was tall and moon-skinned and she had a name that meant *gift from God*. Our classroom was the corridor because the monkeys had invaded the school again and were destroying the actual classrooms. I have no idea what became of that girl, but I remember the words she taught me because they were the ones that made sense to us when we were too young to understand why we were supposed to feel divided. *Kudhirai/horse, punai/cat, nai/dog*.

Deutsch/German

For a long time, German is my favourite language. My teacher is a blue-eyed, corn-haired Austrian who falls in love with Sri Lanka even as half the students at the international school fall in love with her. Her name is Sylvia. She wears saris and learns broken Sinhala while teaching the eighth grade to bake lemon cookies. She and I bond over shining compound nouns – *Engelsgeduld/saintly patience, Dämonenkinder/demon children, Schmetterlingskuss/butterfly kiss*. When I demand to specialize in French and German in my final three years – unheard of even at an international school – she goes to bat for me. The summer before my last year of high school, she wrangles a three-week trip to Austria for me and two other girls from the school.

It is one of the Wendepunkte – turning points – of my life. I am seventeen and I fall hard for Europe – the cathedral cities, the motorways threaded through mountains meadows, the freedom of swimming the Danube in summer, wandering the streets of Vienna, taking a tram to anywhere. We stay in a youth hostel for a fortnight and I speak a mix of French and German and unaccented English to other teenagers from Morocco, Luxembourg, Sweden.

The Sri Lankan girls huddle together and glower as I chatter about Zara Larsson and gender fluidity and postcolonialism, as I run off to museums with Alex and Nathaniel, a pair of worldly tow-headed twins from London who would rather read *Brighton Rock* than swim the Danube. It is the first time I catch a glimpse of the many kinds of people I could be. When Sylvia arrives to drive us to the airport, I do not want to leave.

Français/French

French is my first escape. I am failing every class at the convent school, miserable under the reign of terrifying nuns, and my mother, farsighted and armed with her own affinity for languages, enrolls me at the local Alliance Française. The textbooks are bright and beautifully illustrated and I bloom; within eight months I am reading French picture books. I transfer to the international school and work my way through the perfect tense, the subjunctive, the pluperfect. The first book I buy off Amazon France is called *La Maîtresse de la Guerre/The Mistress of War*, a YA fantasy about a woman who goes from prisoner of war to master swordswoman in a kingdom that sounds like Samarkand. I am still thrilled today by the memory of reading it piecemeal, paragraphs and pages come together in leaps and bounds of understanding.

By the twelfth grade I am the only person still taking French. My teachers are expatriates and they push me. The first is from Alsace-Lorraine, no-nonsense and intimidating, but when she migrates to Australia she leaves me eight Margaret Atwood novels that become my comfort food. The second is a Scotsman who fled the UK school system because students used to attack him bodily. He asks me philosophical questions – if a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound? – and lets me pick the novel I have to study for the final exam. By the time I make it to college, I've been studying French for over half my life. Every language after that is exotic in some way, but French is my baseline, my fallback, the language in which I know the most songs after English, the language my little sister speaks better than either of us speak our mother tongue.

කලාමැදිරියා /Ingrisi/English – කලාමැදිරියා /Sinhala

When I look at job postings that ask for native speakers of English, I skip them automatically because I don't want to give the explanation/defence for which they will ask. The first time I bought coffee in America the barista looked at my face and expressed amazement at how good my English was: Did anyone even speak it where I was from? It was the first in a litany of microaggressions, and it was ironic because English – the language of a people who colonized my country for a hundred and thirty three years – is natural to me, more natural than my mother tongue. But that nuance is lost in America, a country that has no official language but still prizes English above all else.

The truth is this – as a toddler I am bilingual, because my entire family is bilingual, but as many young bilinguals do, I talk too fast for my thoughts and develop a stutter. My parents take me to a doctor – I do not know what kind – and the doctor says, “Stick to one language.” And they choose English because English was and is the lingua franca, the currency, the meal ticket and – perhaps – because English was neutral ground during a civil war fought in part over the two mother tongues of two ethnic groups, Sinhala and Tamil. I read British storybooks and sing British nursery rhymes and go to English Catholic mass and watch Disney movies without the subtitles. My parents listen to Coldplay and Celtic Woman. I am, quite honestly, enormously privileged, because when it comes time to apply to American colleges, I can speak, I can write, I can *think* in English. Like every other international student I meet, from Austria to America to Amsterdam, English is my ticket out. I come to college and get a job that sometimes involves tutoring Americans on the use of the semicolon.

But I also remember coming last in every class at the convent school, where every class was in Sinhala. Remember parents of friends crowding me at the school gates, asking me to say something in Sinhala and howling in mirth when I inevitably pronounced it wrong. I remember those friends snubbing me at playdates, saying, “She only speaks English,” in the same way they said “Her skirts are too short.”

I remember the only consistent encounters I had with Sinhala were houseboys and maids and trishaw drivers and louts who loitered around the lake catcalling any woman on two legs. I learned to forget I had a mother tongue even when I was living in my homeland, because in my mind, there had always been a backup.

America changes things. People ask me, “What language do you speak there?” (after they ask for directions to my country) and I tell them that Sinhala is endemic to Sri Lanka, with fewer native speakers than the population of the state of New York. My international friends tell me there’s no difference whether I say “whale” or “veil,” and as much as I protest, it’s true, because Sinhala has sixty letters but only one that signifies v. My mother tongue becomes a secret code allowing me to gossip with my parents about people in the room, the same way Spanish and Amharic and Dutch become codes to other multilinguals.

I swear a lot more in Sinhala, but I know no songs. I can name no great books. But I begin writing Sinhala in the margins of my class notes, in the curlicued abugida alphabet that monks once inked on ola leaves. Sometimes it's a transliteration of my English thoughts about the polar vortex. Sometimes it's a long list of every noun I can remember, everyday words that I have never learned in German or Japanese or French but are most beautiful in my language.

කලාමැදිරියා /handhunkuru/incense sticks.

කලාමැදිරියා /ahaskuru/fireworks.

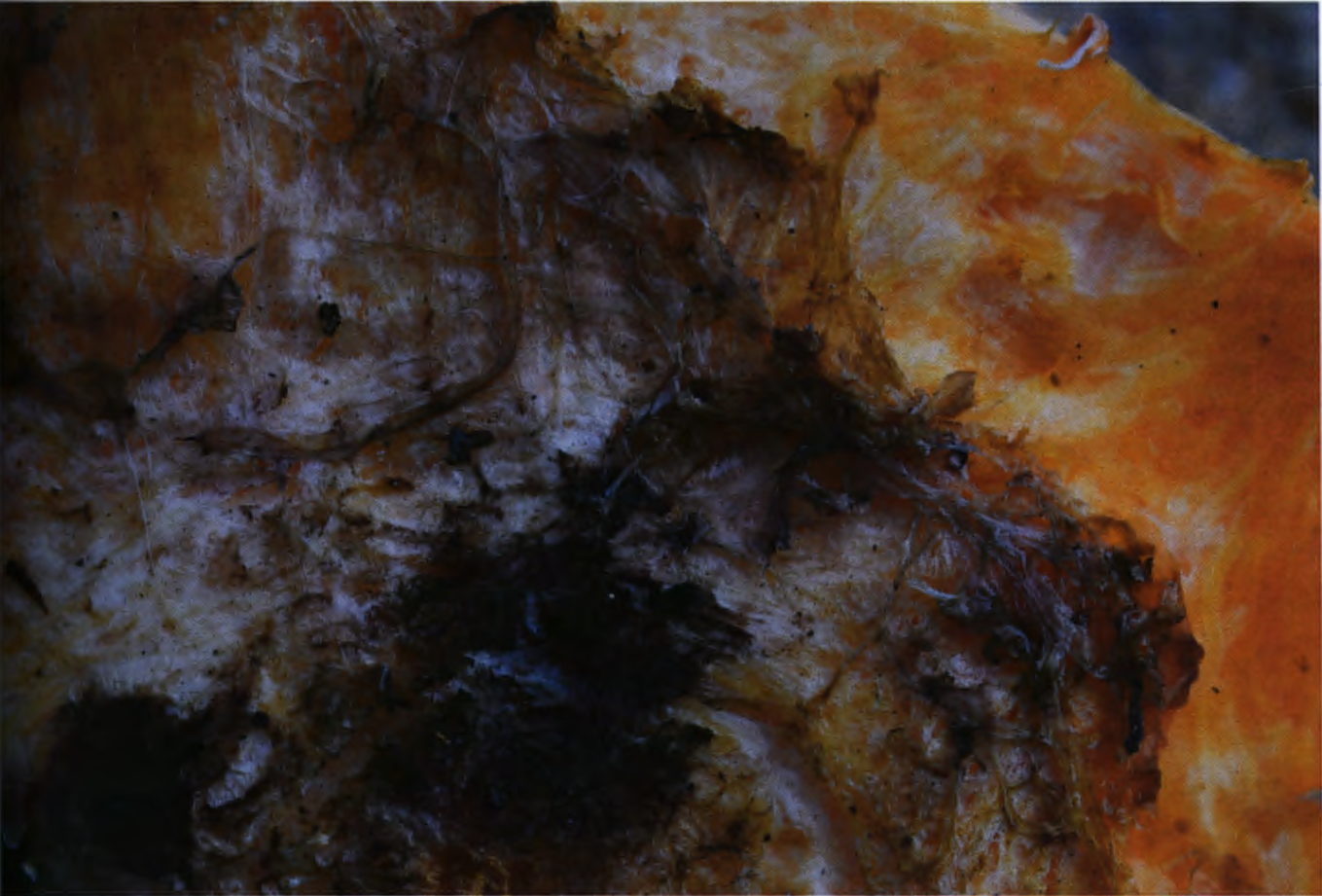
කලාමැදිරියා /kalamadiriya/firefly.

In my final year of college another girl from Sri Lanka flies in, and I find myself bubbling with Sinhala every time we have a conversation. I think she is startled by it and I wonder if she minds being marked as other so obviously, but I have spent three years with people who emanate clouds of Amharic or Nepali or French, weaving shields from their otherness, and I want that for myself. I share secrets and advice and warnings in Sinhala and there is something different about these words, something rich and dark like arrack and treacle. I'm still unsure sometimes which consonants to use when writing my own name.

There are words I will forget the longer I live abroad. But others are coming back. Sometimes, I'll walk away from someone who's angered me, and I will think an insult. It's in Sinhala. It's probably not what any of my teachers envisioned for me, but it's a start.

Christopher Ferman

Smashed



Davey Snubbs

Remembering Posada



Megan Hoppe
The Coming Storms



Jack Beemsterboer

Summer of our Discontent



Lalini Shanella Ranaraja
Bulletproof

I'm watching the stove, so I text my best friend,
the front door is open.

He texts back, *assuming I walk into the right house,*
because it's the first time he's visited since I moved,
and I nearly type, *lol don't get shot,* and then I remember
Black people are being shot in America,
being shot for being in the wrong place at the wrong time
or the right place at the right time,
being wrong, being right, anywhere, anytime,
just being.

America is burning, smoke bombs and teargas,
and my best friend's head is haloed by fluffy black curls,
and I switch off the stove and sit by the unlocked door until
he knocks rings the doorbell texts me knocks again,
because he's remembered too.

I pull him inside and bolt the door before he can even hug me,
say *amaseganalehu*¹ to anyone out there still listening.

Over dinner he tells me of moving house by hand,
mattresses carried for miles on curly heads,
says while spooning lentils onto his plate
a white man came towards us out of the woods
and I was sure we were going to die.

I say *I'm going to put the kettle on*
and stand in the kitchen clutching the Lipton,
wordless.

He leaves three minutes before curfew,
carrying the boxes of food that I put in his hands,
not knowing whether carrying them will save or damn him,
and I watch him out of sight up the middle of the street –
and then I hold my phone and pace, thinking *please God be safe,*
thinking *bullets don't stop just because you pray,*
thinking *what do I tell your mother* –
and then the phone chimes in my hand and he's safe and I sag
over the sink of dirty dishes and I think
of the generation that lived before me,

1 **Amaseganalehu** - thank you (Amharic)

through the JVP¹ raids and the LTTE² horror –
of the generation that lived before him,
through the famine years and the Red Terror³ –
of the generation that learned to tell their children
pack a bag with the essentials
sell our wedding gold for safe passage,
which led to our generation, running for oceans
from curfews and checkpoints and the vague memory
of buses burning on 8 PM TV,
and now I am in the promised land,
crying in my rented kitchen
because I didn't know if my best friend would live or die
walking home from dinner.

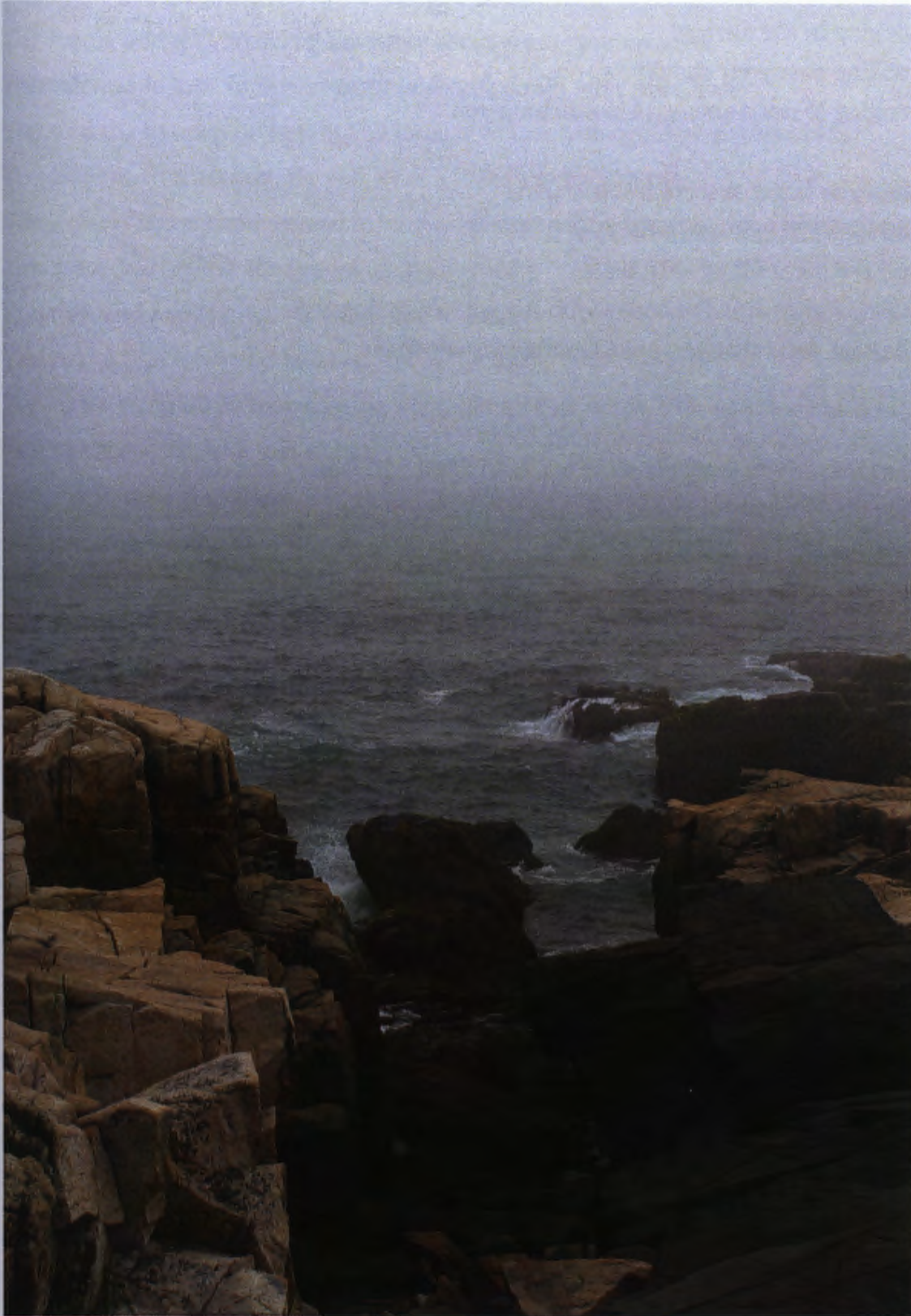
1 **JVP** - Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, a Communist movement in Sri Lanka that led violent uprisings against the government in 1971 and 1987.

2 **LTTE** - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam - Terrorist organization involved in Sri Lankan civil war, 1976–2009.

3 **Red Terror** - Period of violent repression carried out in Ethiopia 1977–78 under dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, later convicted of genocide.

Carly Davis

Salt



Moreen Akomea-Ampeh

THE TRUTH WE WILL NEVER TELL

Looking in the mirror
Looking over your shoulders
Looking to see if someone is watching you

Then you fidget and continue looking
You look straight into your eyes in the mirror
And see them filling with tears
Later, overflowing the banks with tears gushing down your cheeks
They are tears that you have held in for centuries
Because they lied to you

They lied to you that this place is a land filled with honey and milk
But you came and realized that after all, there is nothing like Canaan's land
That everything was painted on lies
You are mad at yourself
You know now that you sold yourself
Into the labyrinth and the web of no return
but you are always yearning to go home

So, what do you tell your people
But I know you won't take that risk
because they would think you are mad
That you are a lazy cocoon and probably
sniffing, inhaling, and chewing on drugs

I rub my tears with my blackened hand and return
to my usual routine of living in a lie and laboring for a few coins

Moreen Akomea-Ampeh

UNSPOKEN TRUTH

After Maryam Sheikh's STARVATION IN AFRICA

You came and stared at me like I was in a circus
You came, and all I heard all day were clicks from your camera
You told me to look into your camera so you could offer me a soda
You told me to open up to you and look at you, so you could give me sweets
You told me to trust you, for you were not here to exploit me
You looked different and seemed to be of a different nature from the rest who had been here
You made me believe that you were trustworthy
You did, and I did entrust a half of me to you
You broke that trust and stabbed me in the back
You had a purpose in your coming here, but all this while, I thought we had a rapport
You made me live in a fool's land
You made me think there were good people like you in this world who don't live off
 other people
You came, you saw me, and showed my ribs to the world
You did do that, but you forgot to add my lovable character to those dry images
You revealed to the world only a small portion of me: my impoverished state and sad face
You forgot to tell the world that I may look impoverished, but I have a good life
You forgot to say to the world that I had dimples and could laugh till my tummy hurts
You made it look like I was starving and dying of hunger here
Your coming here did not do any good to me other than
Your blatant lies and images of me killing the little life left in me
You crushed my dignity and made me feel worthless
You sold me as a commodity to the world
You sold me as a pauper who scratches the earth to afford a three-square meal
You sold me as a beggar who depends on others to survive
You sold me as a lazy person but as always
You miss the true meaning of who I am
You forget this is my typical way of living

You let it slip from your memory that life is not all about flaunting toys and
electronics

You lost sight of the fond memories we made here without external pressures

You have shown me your true identity, and I appreciate you teaching me to
not trust strangers like you

Lauren Clarke

PWI

I am seven years old.

My mother gives me chicken adobo that my lola made the night before. It's packed tightly into my thermos, on top of white rice made this morning with my scrambled eggs.

Your nose shrivels when I open the lid.

"Gross."

I fall back into myself
sitting in the gym that doubles as the cafeteria.
All the first graders stare.
I eat my lunch in silence.

I am nine years old.

The wood chips in the playground are frozen from the morning dew. You stare me up and down before I jump onto the slide.
"Do you eat dog?"
I'm paralyzed.
Why you asked, I don't understand.
"My parents say you people eat dog."

"We don't."

I am eleven years old.

We're learning about world history, the class projector quietly buzzing. The teacher drones on about some Magellan killed by the warrior Lapu Lapu. Your eyes turn to me, you only think of where my family's from. I want to shrink into my seat.

I am eleven years old.

We're learning about world history, the class projector quietly buzzing. The teacher drones on about some Magellan killed by the warrior Lapu Lapu. Your eyes turn to me, you only think of where my family's from. I want to shrink into my seat.

I am thirteen years old.

We're posing for the class photo in the yearbook. "Time for a silly one." You press your fingers to your temple, pulling back on your face. Suddenly my eyes are too small, too almond and chinky.

I am fifteen.

The summer musical is finally here, and the cast list is out. I see my name. I'm not white enough to be the typical Baltimore teen. So you try to find a slot for me, with everyone else with "flavor." I don't belong here.

I am seventeen.

You smile at me, introducing me to your parents. I don't understand your language, but I know what you call me, "Chinita." That's all I am.

Nineteen.

The world has shifted, and I settle into college. You come to me again, this time with regret, even if you can't remember what you said. It doesn't change the fact that I'm the only one in the class who doesn't look like you.

From an Angry Woman

I must swallow the scathing hot coal
that is stuck in my throat for all too long,
bury it into my chest and stomach
and hope it won't erupt anytime soon.

I must unclench my fists
and politely smile,
be a diplomat and giggle
at a joke that was not funny.

Burning tears well in my eyes,
aching to spill and burn my cheeks
but I must not let them fall lest you see
and so they stay, brimming.

I cannot afford
one raised word, one ugly grimace,
one misstep off the tightrope,
so I bite back my words
and let the coal simmer in my stomach.

You have the luxury
to throw an impolite punch
and let your heart guide the red, pulsating coal in your throat that aches so bad you cry
and they will still listen to you.

You were born with the right
to let your coals be free,
allowing tears to scar and fists to clench,
it's not your fault
how could you know any better?

It makes me angry too.
So my fire stokes inside
while you are allowed to burn brightly
with no magnifying glass on your every action. It's unfair, doesn't that make you
angry?

It makes me angry too.

Blake Traylor

Refraction



Christopher Ferman
A Drowning



Mason Sargent

I Can't Stand It

I¹

Can't²

Stand³

It.⁴⁵

1 *I* as in me, as in the author, as in the voice inside your head, the one who steals your time, the one who tells only lies, the one who scribbles and whispers and is legible but screams.

2 *Can't?* More like will let it happen, will be angry, will not act to stop it, will not speak out except in dark corners behind closed doors among trusted friends. Can't is a word for the weak. I am weak because I say I can't when I can but I will not because can't is easier than won't and is innocent like a last breath in bed with a loved one in the dead of night during a soft rain.

3 *Stand.* It is important that the meaning is not misconstrued at this point. Conciseness without clarity is the fastest way to live a substanceless life. At that point, you might as well read only the last sentence of the book. Dreaming about lions is futile unless you first bring ashore the skeleton of the greatest beast of the sea. Only then is this the most beautiful dream to dream. But what are lions to standing? What can I not stand? What will I not stand for, but will sit down and bicker for? Shake my head for? Look down at my bloody hands in disgust for. Pity for. Hypocrisy for. No better than the sharks who tore the flesh off the great beast for.

4 *It* as in the reason you are still reading. Willing to breeze over several cryptic footnotes to reach this one, because pronouns without context only cause confusion. Frustration. Before you can ever be legible, you have to scribble. But what motivates you to scribble? What ever changes a can't or a won't into a can or a will?

Desire, not external but inherent, solely for the sake of improving oneself. But is anything worth doing in and of itself? Does anything have inherent value?

I asked the man who dreamt of lions. He didn't answer. He was sleeping. I asked the great beast, bones bleaching white in the arid summer sun. The eye sockets in the beast's skull pleaded with me. Ribs washed away with the passing tide.

I asked the sharks that tore the flesh from the beast. They laughed at me while gore trickled from the sides of their mouths.

What is the it that I can't stand? Before I tell you, you must consider yourself as the I and your legs as not doing the standing. Legs that are twitching, spasming, imploring you to reconsider. You do, because while passing peacefully during a soft rain sounds nice, you know that the soft rain will become much heavier if nothing is done about the it you can't stand. You kick back your chair and stand up to it, stand up against it, lash out at it, get it out of your head, steal its time, spit at its lies, break its pen and silence its whispers and screams.

You couldn't stand it either, but unlike me, you acted to stop it. Someone had to.

You do not dream of lions. Lions dream of you.

5 *It as in water fowl.*

Carly Davis

First Dream

a faceless woman comes to me in a dream, says:

i love you

i love you

i love you

in the absence of a mouth
her words hang in the air like dust in a cobweb

and i wonder if this is what it feels like.

she takes my hand and leads us to the beach,
her footsteps without falter,
and my nervous hand floating above her waist,
an anxious honeybee circling a flower.
the faceless woman brings us to the shore,
where her steady feet are washed clean and i dig my toes into the sand.

i ask:

don't you wish you could see it?

and she turns to me,
something strange in the tilt of her jaw.

i don't need to,

i hear, and the words brush against
the pink shell of my ear,
the sun-reddened bridge of my nose.

she pulls up my hand with hers, then, from where
they had been lying heavy between us
and raising them towards the water, she points
at the crashing waves and says:

i don't need to, and it sounds like she's smiling.

lover, i know your face well

and i wake up.

Carly Davis

First Dream/This Morning

a faceless woman comes to me in a dream, says:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

i love you

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

and i wake up.

Carly Davis

Boiling Over

I make the tea out of habit these days. Always two cups of water in the kettle, one bag when I remember there's no one here to drink it with me. It never tastes as strong as it used to.

There's a collection of half-empty mugs on my desk. Green from the morning and mint from the night, all with bags pinned to the side, sagging with their own weight. They sit bone-dry above the leftover tea like little herbal piñatas. I knock them into the water just to see them take on liquid and sink.

I think the mug in my hands is an unsweetened black tea. I can't tell, really. I never make it strong enough to taste. It's hot water with a garnish by the time I bring it to my mouth. She always used to over-steep it. She'd bring me the still-burning mug, black tea brewed in almond milk, sweetened with honey, and dusted with cinnamon. I smile. She smiles. Our hands touch as she passes it to me, and for a moment, I can't tell what is ceramic, what is her hand, what is my own.

It's all the same warmth.

I drink deeply then. I drink deeply now. In one version, I grin over the lip of the mug and she catches my eyes over hers. I can't tell who's looking up or down at whom, but we're looking, and I'm happy. She winks and I startle. Tea splashes onto my shirt, and she helps me out of it.

In this version, I burn my tongue and let the water scorch its way down my throat. I leave the mug at my desk and walk outside. I light a cigarette. Chase one burn with another.

The taste of tar is something I have all to myself, and it's the worst kind of comfort but I'm glad I have one single thing of my own. Over time, it became harder to separate a before and after, but there are little pockets of my life that sealed themselves off from the time we spent together. I don't know when my memory became a custody battle, but sometimes I think I need a better lawyer.

The smoke pools in my lungs, and regardless of my anatomy, I can feel it pushing against my chest. If I close my eyes and focus, I can feel it curl around my ribs and settle low in my hips. I feel full for the first time in weeks as it flows into my limbs and fills them out.

I'm a balloon animal at a child's birthday party. My joints are knotted, but I'm buoyant and filled to burst with something that once seemed magical, though it's all the same air. I feel light, like I could float off this porch and into the air. I could pop.

I remember that sculpture of the balloon dog, the ten-foot-tall one that seems to take you out of your body with its scale. I saw it, once, in a museum. I remember grinning with juvenile wonder, a tiny person and a giant piece of my past. In my memory, I reach up like I could pet it. In another version, I see a woman stretching toward me.

I'm the child with the toy and the adult marveling at the sculpture and I am the little latex creation, pulled and shaped by caring hands.

And I'm thinking about her hands again. How she used to guide mine to her hips and hold my shoulders, leading me in a dance I never knew the steps to. We are alone in my kitchen, mugs abandoned on the counter. The radio croons some timeless song, and we sway with the music. My head folds into the curve of her shoulder, and we become one two-headed creature with four legs and four arms. I can see twice as many stars in the sky.

I cough myself out of my reverie, and the cigarette is burnt all the way down. I don't remember doing that, but I still grind it on the railing and toss the butt into the yard. My throat hurts, whether it's from the smoke or from trying to swallow the figurative.

There's an acrid, decaying hole in my chest, and it rots up to my throat, eats my words before I can say them. There's this emptiness and the expanse of her body and the ballooning space between the present and the past, and I'm grateful I can't tell which is which.

When is when.

My fingers are pink and raw where I grind them on the railing.

I'm thirsty.

I go inside and heat up two cups of water. I watch the kettle mindlessly. I grab one teabag, and I don't care what the blend is. Water steams up the side of the mug when I pour it in, and I throw in the bag unceremoniously, leaving the half-empty kettle on the stove.

I chase one burn with another, reveling in the hot water coursing its way around my tongue and teeth. For a moment, I taste something and swallow hard before I can figure it out. I don't want to taste chamomile and remember the way she parted her hair or catch lemon and feel her ragged breath on my bare shoulder.

Grimacing into the steam, I focus on the sensation of hard ceramic on my hands, unmoving and impersonal. I tentatively bring it to my mouth again, holding back the soft string of the teabag with my finger. I don't think about the softness.

I'm like the damn snake eating its own tail. I'm the head and the tail and the body, caught in this endless cycle of eating and spinning and crashing back into place. The dust settles and I'm still tangled in myself, tied off at the joints so the air won't get out. I'm washing away something I'm running toward, always chasing one burn with another. Dry for wet, abrasive for soothing.

I need another cigarette.

Megan Hoppe

Apocalyptic Bibliophile: The Triumph of the Dark

A Modern Utopia existed in the clouds
a Being and Nothingness with
A Foot in Each World
this was the City of Dreams but now
its citizens are lies that propagate On Hallowed Ground

Gaiasophy: The Wisdom of the Living Earth
we were Caretakers of our Common House
caretakers of a lush field
but there was found a Barbarian in the Garden
planting Weeds among our Flowers of History

Soon we became Victims of Memory
beings bred and Created to Praise
Laughing Screaming and Sacred Music filled our mouths
prayers to Gods of Flesh/ Gods of Stone

We worshipped and begged
for a Reason for Hope to Comfort the Heart
Optimism is an Echo Chamber when
there is So Much to be Done

What are we Waiting For?
our utopia grew Cultures of Vision
learning How to See Futures Past

we were The Cigarette Century
burning alive
The Body Betrayed by The Arrow of Time

Hungry Ghosts writing essays On Death and Dying
they were called The Sleepwalkers

Slowly, The Economics of Planning faltered
and halted, The Eerie Silence permeated

Fallen is Babylon.

Into That Darkness.

Jaclyn Hernandez

Artemis

Artemis, my

god of asexuality.

Who carved out her own reality

from the egos of her father and brother.

She runs under the blue, purple, and silver

skies that shape the moon that glows in

tandem with her arrow tips. She holds

nothing else but the freedom that she stole

from a world that would never have given it to her willingly.

Lalini Shanela Ranaraja

Nallur Temple, Jaffna



Lalini Shanella Ranaraja

Maharani



Megan Hoppe

8:45 at Flynn Mansion

After Emily Dickinson's "The Bustle in a House"

Dewy grass mutes the
few footsteps outside as I settle my bustle
behind my waist, tie the strings in
a knot, walk upstairs in a
creaking old house.

My skirt awakens dust bunnies who hop into the
dark corners. We do not sweep in the morning
we wait until the day is done, after
we lie to the visitors, saying this house has not seen death.

But visitors are not yet here. It is
eight: forty-five and the grounds are at their solemnest
soon we will stand on the porch and hear the screech of
barn doors, see the broom maker begin drying her straw, watch all of the industries
we have grown wake up. Soon children will come to see our re-enacted
history, but until then, I will sit upon
the step and watch the blacksmith's smoke billow up from the earth.

Megan Hoppe
Gladiolus

here

then

not here

like a game of hide & seek
but different because I knew
I wouldn't find you behind
the lilac bushes or under the table.
I no longer hear your voice calling
marco

then

polo

echoing around the azaleas.
the weeds have grown too fast
and too thick: they mar the pictures
of you. there are only so many
memories left to prune:
there

then

not there

fading, but suddenly bright and
so strong it hurts to look at them.
and photo albums bloom
rose bushes full of lies. and thorns
I softly push my thumb against until I
bleed

your

blood

Karli Wilson

Window



Marissa Milone

A Breath in the Tide

On the bottom of the ocean floor, she rests. After a long day of pulling tides and maintaining coral reefs, that is the best option she has. The sand hugs her hips, the flounders hide underneath then rise to blanket her. An octopus, small and delicate, deflates atop her skull. The vibrations of the life around her lull her to sleep like a child's lullaby. For a while she finds comfort in it. Her lungs rise and fall like the Earth sighing, and the flounders slip from their position. Quickly, they wiggle back into formation, a routine they've grown to take seriously.

She was meant to be among the stars, you see, but much like the heavens that men worship, she is a beacon of order. Ranging from the deepest blue of oceans to the vibrant shades of passing schools, her guidance balances the waters in harmony. She knows she cannot lie here among the grains of sand much longer, but she revels in the tranquility of her home. The sharks and schools of fish floating meters above her fill her dreams with echoes and vivid colors. The octopus atop her head shifts and cradles her head.

The sun barely touches them down here, but if she opened her eyes right now, she would see the streams of light twisting and curling in the current, the ridges of sharp coral cutting the light into splinters, the anemones swaying lazily with the current. She could almost feel slippery eels running through her hands. Face down, she imagines the sand as satin and slips further into the soft swells, disappearing completely.

Jack Beemsterboer

Rural Obsolence



Carly Davis
Field Study



Karli Wilson

Ben and Beatrice



Carly Davis

Homecoming

For someone who didn't listen to
much Springsteen growing up,
I sure talk a lot about country—

not the genre, but the interstices.
The driving and ass-busting and nights
spent draped over the bar, watching
who-beat-who and play-by-play
while I ask, "What's on tap?" just
to order a 16 oz. Diet Coke, no ice.

Friends and countrymen, fellow
voters and non-voter felons:
we are made of the same stuff, the dust
and pollen kicked up by mud-caked
Ram 4x4's with fragile little flags
cruising the strip in a nightly procession.

I am not red-blooded, but I
don't bleed blue, either. You could
never know, and I will never
tell you because I do not bleed. Let it
be a mystery, then, 'til the bartender
hauls me over the counter

and sets a spigot to the wound on my side,
says, "we have a bitter IPA tonight,"
and drains blood, not wine, into
steins which he puts in the hands
of the very farmers who once
let me climb on top of a tractor and plow.

Carly Davis

American Oasis



Lalini Shanella Ranaraja

Sanctum

He is playing Apex Legends. You are curled at the head of the bed, watching the screen with languid half-lidded eyes. In your mind's eye you are the leopard in repose, panthera pardus kotiya watching from the dusky depths of a banyan tree as interesting things happen beside the watering hole. In reality, the screen looks to you like an exploded Starbursts bag because you're halfway to blind without your glasses. The unwashed blanket is aggravating your asthma. You sneak the inhaler out of your backpack while he's jumping out of an airplane and deposit it next to the bed. He notices and blows up a hostile.

The inhaler is nothing like those cheap candy-hued things you saw in American movies growing up; it's an oversized white bullet with a scalloped red base made in Sweden instead of China. Your mother paid thirteen thousand rupees so you could take three of them with you to America for the spring semester. Neither of you knew then that three inhalers would need to last you a lot longer than a semester. Now your mother doesn't know when she'll see you again. She doesn't know you're on your last inhaler. She doesn't know you've been sleeping over with your best friend.

You knee-walk off the bed and wear his slippers into the bathroom. The boys in the house have no toilet paper, and the way Fox News is telling it, neither does anyone else in the state. You rifle through your backpack for the Kleenex which lives there, beside the hand sanitizer, the mask, the toothbrush, the poetry book, and whichever sports bra you took off last weekend and forgot to put in the laundry. This is your go-bag; every Friday for the last six weeks, you have put it on your shoulder at sundown and walked into the woods. Summer is coming, so you get a couple of hours with the trees before you need to decide what to do with the dark. The logic is that if you have your go-bag, you can show up at his house; when he asks you to just stay the night, you will be prepared, with Kleenex and your toothbrush and the ability to say yes. So far, this has worked. So far, you have not wanted to stay in the woods anyway.

He is on the phone with his mother when you climb back into bed. You tuck yourself in to the soundtrack of digital gunfire and lilting Amharic. As far as you

can tell, she is scolding him for not having ordered groceries sooner. You don't think he's told her you're staying over either. In all the years you've been his friend, you've never asked him if she knows your name. By the time he tells her Ciao, you are half into sleep and your phone has joined your inhaler beside the bed. Tonight you have remembered to put it in Airplane mode so that when your own calls come from the other side of the world, it will not ring. You don't always remember.

The next time you're conscious, he's getting under the covers; you can tell from the hushed light and the riot of birdsong that it's nearly dawn. When this all started, he had to teach you how to be close because you'd never slept beside anyone after you stopped sleeping beside your parents. You didn't mind; to you, this room has always worn an ascetic air, a suggestion of mountain monks sleeping side by side on the monastery floor. You turn into his chest; he leans down to tuck your toes into the blanket. Then he pulls it right over your head, like always, because you haven't gotten around to telling him that it cuts off your air. When the coughing bursts from your lungs five minutes later, you struggle upright with sleep-addled resignation. He is worried, and because there is a pandemic raging outside, you let him worry. You fumble the cap off the inhaler when he hands it to you, twist the base, breathe deep. He rubs your back and your mouth floods with chemicals you never bothered to research; you hold them behind your souring teeth and wonder if he can feel your spine through your shirt. When he asks if you're okay, you're not sure what language he uses for the question, but you swallow the water he gives you and nod. He lies back down and you lean over his chest to set down the inhaler; in the light that is filtering through the blinds, you see that it expired a month ago.

Lalini Shanela Ranaraja
Harmony in the Hague



Jack Beemsterboer

Beauty in Decay



Marissa Milone

Time.

The news came at sunset.

Three times.

The golden rays gave warmth when all I could feel was the cold stabbing into my gut.

Denial.

Fear.

Twice in October

Again on the second day of November.

Third time's the charm, isn't it?

They weren't kidding when they said Autumn was a time of

decay.

October is when things

die.

There's no time like the present to love the ones closest to you, to honor them, but valuing the present over the future, future possibilities, future encounters, is one of the hardest things to do for someone who can't make a decision.

Knowing that there's time ahead of me to

think more,

try more.

The attempt to reach out more gives me solace.

How can I have solace in the future when the ones around me are dying in my present? Now it's time to reflect on the past.

What could I have done?
Which decision would have given me more time?
Was there a way I could have known they'd go in the nighttime?
Maybe if I would have loved them more
in the nighttime,
maybe if I could switch on a light to evaporate
the nighttime,
I would have had more
time.

The sun sets.
And with it comes the death of October, the
decay
of November, and the
eternal sleep
of December.

Happy new year.
Begone the

Death
and *cold*
and *decay*

of last year, last winter.
There's spring now, spring ahead of us and so many more possibilities

to grow,
to love,
to live,
to create,
to prosper in the present,

and then once again to become

Still
in the nighttime, to
Decay
in the nighttime, to be
Cold
in the nighttime.

All of the leaves dropped today.

I should have known.

All of the green is

gone.

I should have known.

There's only

Yellow,

Orange,

Red,

and they're all

dying.

Dead.

Karli Wilson

Staring Contest



Blake Traylor

Downstream

A sliver of amber light poured down through the open manhole, splashing scythe-shaped over the brick. The Golden Hour—so they called it. They didn't know what the hell they were talking about.

Kob squatted, crouching on the ledge beside the sewer's current, pan in hand, sifting through the muck that passed his way. After a while, he lifted the pan up and squinted at its contents. Shit still looked like shit, even under the most picturesque natural light. He emptied the pan over his shoulder, then held it down again, tilting it into the thick of the current.

Kob had heard rumors about how the rich folks down this way seasoned their victuals with gold flakes. Ever the opportunist, and ever starved of opportunity, he went and found himself an inconspicuous manhole, just outside the city's wealthiest ward, and submitted himself to the tides of fortune. As it turned out, fortune's tides smelled rather pungent.

But Kob's luck had always reeked a bit, even before he'd moved into the city. Kob had been born a country boy. Meaning, at least in his case, that he'd been born and bred among animal matter: animal noise, animal warmth, animal stench, animal bones. Above all else, animal shit. There was no telling how many tons of manure he'd hauled. And for what? All for the gold that grew from the earth: corn. Acres and acres of it. He'd probably shat a dozen fields' worth of corn before he finally broke and went off to the city, to see what lay beyond the cornstalk walls of his upbringing.

At this point, Kob wasn't sure what to make of his decision to go urban. If nothing else, it had given him an object lesson in trickle-down economics. Not that Kob would have known what the hell you were talking about, if you put it to him that way. What Kob did understand was the saying "Shit flows downstream," and if there were trace amounts of gold in them thar shit, he might as well grab a pan and see what he could get.

So far, he hadn't gotten much. Well, that wasn't entirely true. You could sculpt mountains from all the shit he'd panned. But he'd found no gold to fill those mountains with. But there had been rats to populate them. And the occasional goldfish, too.

And corn.

There had been corn.

Sometimes, it seemed the rich folk ate just as much corn as Kob used to.

Kob had lost count of the number of times he'd gotten his hopes up, having caught a glimpse of gold amid so much brown. Only to find that it was just another kernel of undigested corn.

As if corn were his only inheritance. Some inescapable proof of fate. Corn was in his blood, just as corn was in everybody's stool, apparently. But where was all the gold? What had all these people been eating after all?

Kob felt an unusual heft slip into his pan.

He lifted the pan up toward the light and appraised his bounty. It was caked with sewage, dripping with waste...

It was a human skull.

And displayed in the skull's lipless half-grin: a single gold filling, gleaming at Kob among shit-stained teeth.

Well.

Sometimes, luck did switch hands.

Mason Sargent

A Socratic Seminar on Ethical Pizza Toppings

“I would have to imagine human flesh would be unethical.”

“Unless you are delivering to members of a cannibal society.”

The room fills with murmurs of agreement. “True, true,” they say.

“Mayonnaise and pineapple sounds pretty bad.”

“I, for one, happen to like mayo,” one argued.

“And I love pineapple on my pizza,” another added.

“But together?” a voice cried out from the side.

“No, no, certainly not together,” they all agreed.

“And what of the container?”

“Later, later!” the crowd shooed at the singleton. “Wait your turn,” they said.

“What might be the most ethical toppings? The safest?”

“Pepperoni and sausage are the most popular by far,” some offer.

“But what would the vegetarians say? Or the conservationists?”

“Cheese then.” Surely cheese was harmless enough.

“Ah, but think of the lactose intolerant!”

“Then sauce and crust.”

“What kind?”

“What kind of sauce, or what kind of crust?”

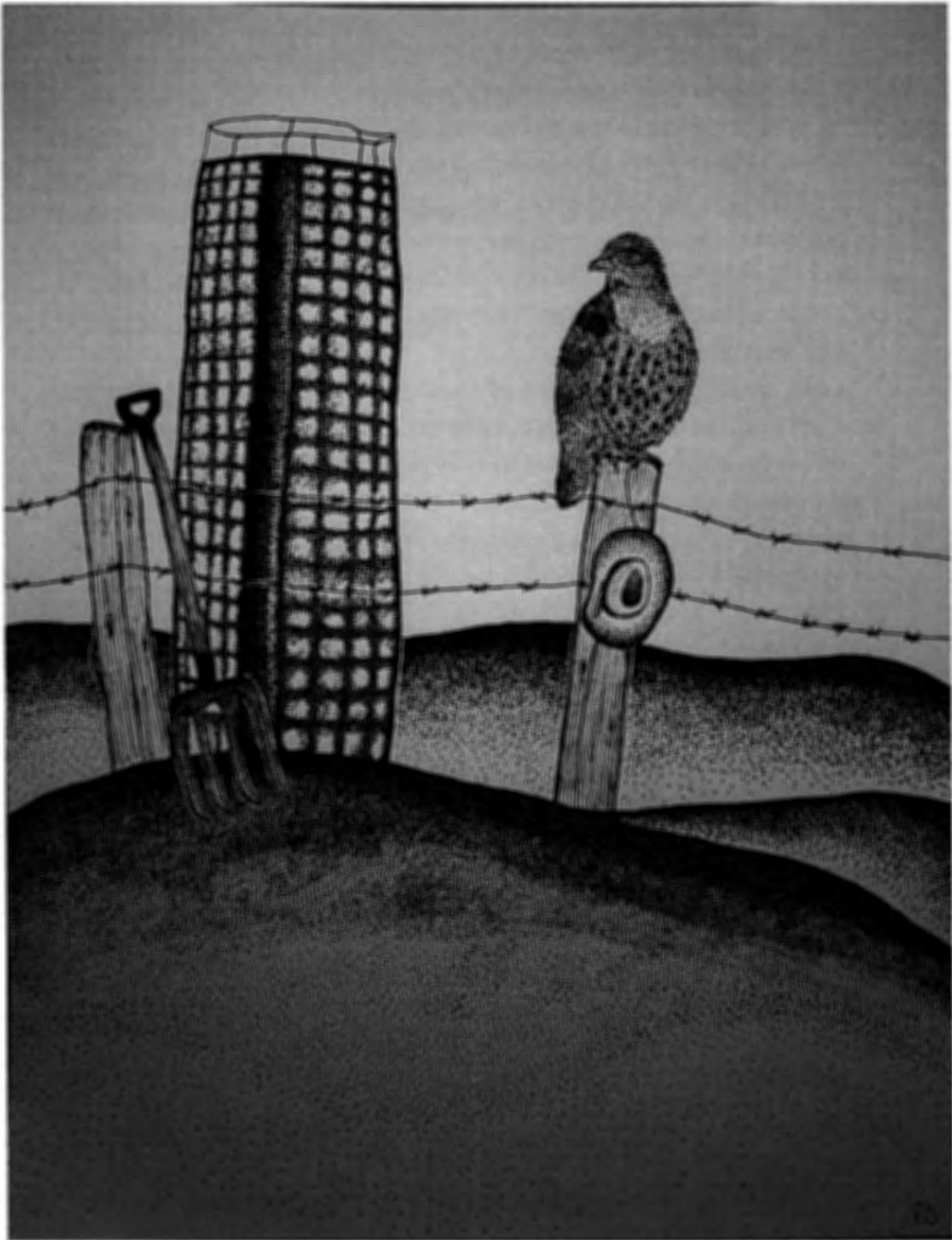
“I want alfredo sauce and thin crust!” shrieked out from the back.

“Silence him!”

Then they all sliced him to pieces,
And nobody ordered pizza that day.

Paige Sheppard

A Scene From Home



Siena Lei Oliveri

It was never mine

Remind me of my mortality
then take me to the sea

sink my heart into the water
to see if it will float

use my lungs
as your sail

use my hair
as your map

use my palm
as your compass

The Atlantic gales will
whistle through my vocal folds
as I sing

The breath of the earth as
my own
it was never mine.

The sea sang her tune
before we came
Our souls crossed and the sea
drew us near
When we left
she cried
When we walked away
she waved

She will sing long after
we leave.
She will wave long after
we're gone.

Jack Beemsterboer

Dissolution



Blake Traylor
Used

It's rose quartz tonight.

I can tell from the pink glow seeping out from under the bedroom door. Pink light, pink smoke. Smells like pink lemonade. Camphor's using the incense burner again. The one that's shaped like a little broken-off pharaoh's head. The one I got him for our anniversary. I wouldn't have gotten it for him at all if I really believed he would use it. I figured he would just jam it in among all his other bric-a-brac and leave it to gather dust. But he loves the thing. Can't get enough of the way the incense smoke comes pooling out of its mouth in cloying plumes. Every night another fragrance to match the healing stone of the day. Last night it was tiger's eye and tiramisù. The night before that it was onyx and black licorice.

Camphor has a sweet tooth. I have asthma.

I grit my teeth as if that would keep the stench from piling up at the back of my throat. I would clear my throat, but Camphor's filming another one of his ASMR videos, and he just upgraded the sensitivity of his recording equipment. He dropped some serious dough on a new microphone setup that could pick up a mouse's death rattle from three doors down. I'm not in the mood to ruin another take. I don't need Camphor to—

Breathe, Camphor's whisper issues from under the closed door.

In, two, three, four.

I step inside and slip the door shut. The hinges don't squeal at me like they did Monday night. Not after I got up early to hit them with the WD-40 the morning after.

Hold, two, three, four.

I grasp at the keys in my pocket, then think better of it. The door was unlocked when I got here. The door can stay unlocked for now. Always makes so much goddam noise when you lock something up. And then there's the unlocking...

Out, two, three, four.

Helps that there's nothing worth stealing here, anyhow. Just look around. A clay figurine shaped like somebody's withering grandmother, complete with detachable (well, detached) leg. A lamp gnarled like a dragon's foot, yielding up an ancient incandescent bulb that won't turn on anymore. An oversized doily departing elegance, stained and tattering. Who else would want any of this shit?

In, two, three, four.

And then there's his goddam pet rock collection—he hates it when I call it that—all those little “precious” stones overflowing from their enclosure in the dresser next to his side of the bed. A New Age geologist's wet dream, financed by me, the kind of guy who gets sucked into funding his jobless collector boyfriend's pet project turned obsession, because he thinks it would be nice to have someone else's hand down his pants—er, pockets.

Hold, two, three, four.

I lean my umbrella against the corner beside the door, expending more time and care than anyone ever should. Its tears stream silently down.

Off come the shoes. Knees come up, feet slip out, real slow, just like I've practiced. Movements stilted, automatic. No sense of urgency. No sense of purpose. I set the shoes aside and pad silently forward, socks damp with the dim light.

Out, two, three, four.

In gaudy, battered frames, pictures of strangers bump up against each other, thronging the hallway, obscuring the holes in the wall. Painting or photo, era be damned, their eyes all look at me the same way. Camphor must enjoy the feeling of their eyes trailing down his back just as much as I hate it.

In, two, three, four.

I pass the bedroom and head into the kitchen.

I open the pantry door.

I blink.

Hold, two, three, four.

Rice Krispies.

Boxes of them. Packed tight across the shelves, warehouse-style. Spines compressed against each other. Snap stifling Crackle choking Pop.

Why.

Out, two, three, four.

For his fingernails to drum against the cardboard. For the cellophane whispers of the bag in his hands. For the skull-shivering rain of cereal falling, settling in the bowl, crackling in the milk.

For ASMR.

Why else.

In, two, three, four.

And the ramen has been displaced.

Another sacrifice that should never have been made.

Hold, two, three, four.

I ease the pantry door shut.

As I leave the kitchen, I stop outside the bedroom door. My glare penetrates through the wood: I can see Camphor, sitting cross-legged on that oversize cushion, bathing in flavored light. Black hair flowing down, mingling with the folds of that old green bathrobe that never comes off, that “becomes him,” like mildew becomes a neglected bathtub.

Clutching a heart of rose quartz: veined, fissured, nerveless, empty. Tracing magic over a camera lens that can't look away. Chanting, entrancing those weird microphones that look like a pair of white rubber ears. Telling his audience to breathe. Holding his breath. Always holding his breath. Only ever holding his breath. Except—

Out, two, three, four.

—when he doesn't.

I unclench, but the tension stays.

In, two, three, four.

Shoulders locked, I tread heel-toe through the hallway, into the living room. I maneuver my way through the tiny forest of armchairs, each of them patterned uniquely—dissonantly. All of them faded, stained. “Given character.” Give me a break.

Hold, two, three, four.

I slump down into one of the armchairs. The upholstery is supposed to be a sort of off-white color: “ruined eggshell,” or something like that. But painted by shadow and the distant light from under the door, the upholstery turns a sickly pink, and the wrinkles take on the look of chewed gum or toothless dentures. So I sink down, as best I can, into a spat-out thing.

Out, two, three, four.

The air is too thick.

I remember the smell.

All these fucking armchairs.

In, two, three, four.

All these fucking armchairs, and it's only ever the two of us up here, we don't have anyone to come play visitor, to be received into our cramped little parlor. It's only ever us, hauling in new old shit to come and join our old old shit. All this trickling-in, squeezing-in, accumulating, suffocating...

Hold, two, three, four.

Shall I take inventory?

Shall I try, again?

Out, two—

—three, four, I know, I know. I get it. Do you? Do you even get what you're saying? Breathe out, breathe in. Do you really know how to take it in, how to genuinely take anything in—

—two, three, four—

—into yourself?

How about how to let go?

Hold, two, three, four.

Oh, you know how to hold. You can fucking hold. You'll hold onto anything.

Out, two, three, four.

My knee twitches. My foot knocks against something, breaking the silence.

I hear the pause behind the door, slight beyond slight. But it's my first offense of the night and only a minor noise. Forgivable. Carry on:

In, two, three, four.

Red in my eyes, and I know why. I can see it now, see right through the shadows. At my right foot: the bowl I kicked, filled with soggy cereal. At my left foot: a Tibetan singing bowl and a half-depleted box of Rice Krispies. Prototype of an upcoming video. Ripe for repurposing.

I don't want forgiveness.

Hold, two, three—

Under the flourish of my wrist, the Kellogg's choir makes its grand premiere, live at the Tibetan Bowl.

Under the racket, everything I wanted. The insuck of breath, cutting clear through the distance. The digging of teeth into lip. The drumming of painted claws against glowing flesh. The thawing amber of your eyes, sleepless and colored the same shade as that weird orange cast in the air that forebodes a tornado.

I hum to myself as the doorknob rattles in its socket:

Out, two, three, four.

Megan Hoppe

The World is Your Playground

1999

I was born the same year my elementary school and its playground were built. Before my neighborhood was filled with small children for me to play with, all that existed was the playground. It wasn't unique, but it was mine. There were short slides, long slides, and a curlycue slide with years of initials carved into the plastic. The wood chips were packed around the three sets of monkey bars, each shaped differently. The blue set was squat and wiggled around itself a bit. One set looped into a circle. The third set was the tallest and followed a straight path—its height made it the most difficult. There was a domed jungle gym that was once brightly painted but had been worn down to a metallic silver by tennis shoes and Iowa winters. The playground housed benches: many wooden and one metal that was quickly designated the time-out area. There were also basketball courts, painted four square spaces and hopscotch paths, and a huge grassy field with soccer goals.

2004

My favorite fact to share during recess was that you could see my house from the playground. When meeting new people, this information quickly followed my name. I would drag them over to the edge of the playground, as close to the yellow line as we could get without being yelled at, look across the soccer field toward my house, and point. "That's where I live!" I'd say with a toothy grin. "That one, right there, with the yellow slide in the backyard!"

2016

Junior year, I felt no need to go to prom. I didn't have anyone to go with besides my best friend, Iris, and dresses weren't really her style. So, I held an anti-prom. Morp. I told everyone I invited it was "like Prom but backwards and without stupid people." Iris came, along with some of my underclassmen friends who were too young to go to prom. We ate dinner, played games, and even filmed a parody of a murder mystery. (The butler did it.) We wore tiaras

and elbow-length gloves. Spencer brought candy and ribbon to make corsages. We ate the candy. We spent the night laughing and enjoying each other's company.

Before the sunset, we walked over to the playground and took Morp pictures. We piled one on top of each other on the slide. We stood on the shaky bridge, leaving us with a blurry picture of Spencer jumping up and down. Iris and I took a picture by the jungle gym as if recreating the moment we met again in first grade.

2007

When the idea of taking the training wheels off my small, purple bike was first announced, I was thrilled. No training wheels was one step closer to being a big girl. However, when the day finally came, I was terrified. What if I fell? Or worse—what if I fell and people saw? I peddled down my driveway but was so racked with fear that I couldn't even make it to the sidewalk. I reached my feet from the pedals to the ground and planted them. I would not be a big girl that day.

A week or so later, my parents and I pulled the bike through the tall grass of the soccer field. Unlike riding my bike in our driveway, no one would be watching me on the playground. There I could fall without fear of embarrassment, though I was still nervous about falling.

Before I got back onto the bike, I made sure my helmet was snug on my head. I even fastened on elbow pads—you can never be too careful. Nervously, I tried my best to balance the bike while I peddled slowly. I grew frustrated each time it started to tip, and I was forced to take my feet off the pedals.

"Go faster," my dad told me. "The faster you go, the easier it is to balance."

Soon I was riding in circles around my parents, giggling with glee. They watched as I grew up just a little bit more.

2004

Anna first talked to me because she thought my hair was pretty. We were Kindergarten classmates and very quickly became best friends, spending every recess playing together.

One day, I watched her swing back and forth on the monkey bars until her palms were bleeding. "Your turn," she said finally. I shrugged. I couldn't do monkey bars.

In Anna's mind, this was a tragedy. She set out to teach me. With the help of her friend Amber, I was taught how to pendulum my body and build momentum. Amber would attempt to pick me up by the waist and hold me

so I could build calluses without falling. Though I was small, even for a kindergartener, this would usually end with us landing in a heap of limbs on the wood chips.

I was set on being able to do the monkey bars. During the weekends, my dad and I would walk through the soccer field to the playground so I could practice. He would pick me up and carry me across from ladder to ladder. I would get upset because he wasn't letting me do it enough on my own. He watched as each time I tried without his help, I fell almost immediately.

I worked on my monkey bar skills through the winter, my naked hands freezing against the metal. The snow made falling softer but just as frustrating. Slowly, as the snow melted, I began to make it farther across before my fingers would slip. While Anna and Amber picked dandelions, my calluses toughened.

The first time I made it all the way across, I was at the playground with my dad. The whole time, his hands had been ready to catch me, but I didn't need them.

When I tried to show my success to Anna and Amber, I fell before I was even halfway across.

2011

One Sunday during seventh grade, my dad and I were out driving. On our way home, he pulled into the parking lot right next to the playground and looked at me. "Your turn to drive."

I was twelve, two years away from getting my learner's permit, so this came as a shock. However, I got out of the car, and we traded seats. With heaps of patience, he taught me how to shift the car into drive and slowly accelerate. I used the turn signals to drive in awkward rectangles around the parking lot. He talked me through parking. And then he talked me through backing out of the parking spot.

We called my mom and told her to go out into our backyard. We had a surprise. I drove around onto the basketball courts of the playground and showed off just how excellent of a driver I was. (I was mediocre at best but felt like a superstar.) I looked across the soccer field toward my house, and my mom was taking pictures.

2005

In first grade, I was one of the big kids on the playground, and I played with anyone and everyone. On September 13, I overheard someone wish happy birthday to a very small, shy new student who was standing next to the jungle gym. We hadn't talked before, but I walked over and said joyfully, "Happy

Birthday!” She looked at me curiously. “Do I know you?” I wasn’t sure, and I said so. We started chatting casually, and I noticed her socks.

For my preschool-age dance class, my mom had crocheted beads onto white bobby socks as part of our costume. This strange girl, who did seem familiar, was wearing a pair of those socks. Iris and I apparently had been in that class together, and it just so happened that she wore those unique socks on her birthday. It had been more than a year since we had last seen each other but, through God or fate or whatever higher power, we were together again.

Though eventually we would grow closer, the next few years, Iris and I were simply friends and classmates. I sometimes joined her and her group at recess for their odd version of tag, and we would have infrequent playdates on the weekends. We were connected by socks, but not much else.

2017

In our caps and gowns, Iris and I stood in front of the jungle gym, looking across the soccer field toward my house. The pomp and circumstance of our graduation finished, we grasped at what felt like the last moments of everything we’d ever known.

We’d always lived five minutes from each other, and though our colleges were only an hour drive from each other, there was an intense fear in the back of my mind that things would never be the same. With Iris, or with any other aspect of my life.

2009

There were a lot of playground tricks my friends could do that I was too scared to attempt. Especially the Circle of Pride. Perched atop the horizontal bar, with one leg wrapped around it, my friends would flip over 365 degrees and wind up just where they had started. Every time it was my turn to attempt the Circle of Pride, I would assume the starting position and then freeze, unable to convince my body to flip over.

One weekend, I set out to master this terrifying flip. I practiced enough that sometimes I was brave enough to do the trick. More often, I was brave enough to do it if my mom helped.

The next Monday at recess, my friends waited for me to show them my version of the trick. I’d asked my mom to look out at the playground, and I’d been assured that she would watch. With excitement, I climbed up and wound my leg around the horizontal bar, hands gripping until my knuckles

were white. I went to spin and then...froze. I looked panic-stricken across the soccer field toward my house. I managed to peel one of my hands off the bar and wave my mom over. Without missing a beat, she walked through the soccer field toward the playground. She helped me do the flip. And then she walked back home.

If I hadn't realized it before, that was the moment it dawned on me how much I was cared for. Some people are always watching over you.

2006

During a spring recess, I noticed one of my friends (everyone was my friend) sitting alone on a bench. I approached her curiously. "Maddie, do you want to play with me?"

"I'm sad," she said. "My grandma died."

I knew nothing about death except that Heaven was full of old men playing chess. I did, however, know how to cheer people up.

We sat quietly for a bit. I somehow knew to respect this sadness that I didn't understand. When she seemed ready, we talked. I don't remember about what—maybe what we'd done in math that day. Or the upcoming roller-skating unit in gym.

During our conversation, a game formed. We were sisters working in the circus. Tightrope walkers. The bench was the crowded stadium seating. We sat there and watched the other circus acts rehearse. The yellow painted lines of the basketball court were our tightropes. They dangled so high above the crowd that small children would have to crane their necks and squint to see our daring feats.

We were the best circus act in the world, Maddie and I. We never fell. We walked on the flat pavement with our arms outstretched like our lives depended on it. In our imaginations, they did.

There were many days of recess that we played our game, just the two of us. I don't remember when we stopped, but years later my mom told me that she'd received an email from Maddie's mom. It thanked me for helping her through her grief.

In second grade, I didn't understand death, but I knew how to be kind.

2004

The kindergartners and first graders had recess together every day. I often tagged along with a group of first graders that I creatively dubbed as "The

As fourteen-year-olds, we couldn't drive ourselves, so my mom drove us to the movies, and his mom picked us up. On the way home, he asked to be dropped off at the playground because it was close to both of our houses. "Are you...sure?" she asked.

"Yeah. I'll walk Megan home from there," he promised.

The sun had almost set and the playground wasn't well-lit, so I can't even imagine how sketchy this seemed to his mom, but she dropped us off there anyway.

We sat on a cold, metal bench and awkwardly held a conversation about how "good" the movie was. Finally, he gulped. "Um...should I...kiss you now?"

I shrugged and he leaned forward for a quick peck. Like a kiss you would give to an elderly family member who wears flowery perfume and has a few too many whiskers. I don't know if it was the metal bench or our winter jackets, but someone had picked up static electricity, and with our peck, we shocked each other.

"I think I felt a spark," he said, laughing at his own joke.

After that, he walked me home. In the five months our "relationship" lasted after that, we didn't kiss again.

2004

Before I even started school, my parents and I went to visit my kindergarten classroom. In the picture we took with my teacher, I'm all grin. We walked home afterward, stopping first to play on the playground. We slid down the slides, and my mom tried to do the monkey bars but was too tall. My dad bounded around with the energy of a small child. As we finished playing, he crawled up the jungle gym and sat directly on top, laughing. I was worried he would fall. He didn't.

2013

On a Sunday in April of my eighth-grade year, I texted Iris, asking her to meet me on the playground later that afternoon.

We met at three. I didn't know how to tell her, so we spent some time shooting hoops and walking around the playground. We sat mid-way up the jungle gym and went down the slides. We laughed and talked about middle school drama.

Finally, I knew I could no longer procrastinate. We looked across the soccer field toward my house. "Iris... My dad... He's with God now..."

Group.” I thought they were cooler than all-get-out. They did everything together, both in and outside of school.

I was allowed to join them with a few requirements; I had to prove that I was worthy to play with first graders. Their first tasks were simple: climb up a slide without getting caught by the recess monitors; hang upside down on a horizontal bar; play a worthy game of hopscotch. On and on. Eventually, they must have realized I wasn’t going to leave them alone, and they pulled their *pièce de resistance*. I had to sit on top of the jungle gym and then drop into the center of it.

I was terrified.

I climbed up to the specified rung and sat, my feet dangling below me. I looked across the soccer field toward my house. Then I made a terrible mistake: I looked down. The wood chips were a hundred feet away. At least. I knew that if I were to move, I would fall to my death. I felt too young to die. It wasn’t until I started crying that the group was satisfied I wouldn’t bother them anymore. The whistle blew. Recess was over, and I was alone and frozen on top of a skyscraper.

2007

In second grade, the boy I had a crush on liked soccer. Therefore, I did too.

One recess, I followed him onto the soccer field. It was not a place I went often because I didn’t like how mean the soccer field boys were. (This boy was different, of course.) But that recess, I wanted to play with the boy I thought was cute. Maybe if I was good at soccer, he’d have a crush on me too!

The beginning of the game started fine. I stayed as far away from the ball as possible while still looking like I was playing. At some point, I was distracted. Maybe I heard a dog bark or thought someone had yelled my name, but suddenly the ball hit my cheekbone and knocked my glasses into the grass.

Later, while I held a frozen paper towel from the nurse to my face, the boy came over to apologize; he had been the one who accidentally hammered me with a soccer ball.

2013

In October of my freshman year of high school, I was celebrating the one-year anniversary with my boyfriend. We had it all planned: we were going to the movies. *Despicable Me 2*. Then we were going to have our first kiss.

Please note—I scheduled my first kiss.

My dad had been sick on and off for about three years, but within seventy-two hours what had been improving health took a sharp turn for the worse. He died close to midnight on April 6, quickly and silently, after being taken off life support.

Iris knew my dad had been sick. We'd grown closer throughout middle school, and I often thought she knew my thoughts better than I did. But neither of us had seen this coming.

2005

On the playground, I had many groups of people I would bounce around between depending on what I felt like playing. If I wanted to run, I would join Iris for tag. Anna liked to sit in the hopscotch squares and watch the boys play basketball. A group of girls always played house (the living room was under the shortest slide). For a while, though, my favorite game to play was Power Rangers. Thomas knew everything about the show—which was good because I knew nothing.

Every recess, we would pick which Power Ranger we wanted to be. Thomas was the Red Ranger. Shane was the Blue Ranger. Josh was the Black Ranger. And every time, I wanted to be the Yellow Ranger.

"You can't be the Yellow Ranger," the boys would tell me. "The Yellow Ranger on TV is a boy! You can be the Pink Ranger!" And so, I was the Pink Ranger, with ninja throwing stars and powerful high kicks.

Thomas made up the rules as we went, which made sense because he knew the fantastical world better than I did. Every recess, we would fight and defeat the bad guy right before the whistle blew, just like an episode of Power Rangers. We were always the winners.

In my head, I was always the Yellow Ranger.

2018

During the summer between my freshman and sophomore year of college, my maternal grandmother died. I was two hours away at an internship, but I drove home for the funeral. Afterward, there were so many people at my house I could hardly breathe. I slipped out into the backyard and over to the playground.

I shuffled my feet in the wood chips, leaving dirt lines behind my feet. I circled around the jungle gym. I ran my hand over the horizontal bars. I tightrope-walked across the yellow lines of the basketball courts. I slowly climbed halfway up a plastic slide and looked at the metal bench and the monkey bars and the four-square spaces. I looked across the soccer field toward my house.

I want to say that the playground hadn't changed even though everything else in my life had, but that wasn't the case. At some point in the past few years, swing sets had been added near the blue monkey bars. An addition to the school had shrunk the basketball courts. Even the wood chips get replaced every few months. The playground was different. But it was still mine.

Alli Kestler

The Bathtub

I can't remember life before the bathtub. It had always been there in the forest clearing, season in and season out. It was a lovely porcelain thing, with ornate clawed feet and a gilded rim that had clearly seen better days. We'd used it in our games, or one particular game, rather. The bathtub was our ship, aiding our adventures as we slew the admiral's fleets that stood in our path, for we were pirates in search of gold. A perfect child's game on a makeshift playset. Make-believe.

One day, early on, we'd come into the clearing to find a gift left for us in the tub. A handful of buttons gleamed up at us, glinting in the afternoon sun. They didn't match each other or anything Jo or I wore, but it so clearly felt like a gift to us that we took them and made them the treasure in our pirate game.

Sometime after, we felt an absence. According to Jo, our hideaway in the forest seemed to need something from us. I thought about how it had given us a gift, and how it only seemed right to give one back. An eye for an eye.

So the next day, we each brought a gift. Jo brought a package of licorice, and I brought a small box of sewing needles that I'd swiped from my mother's stash. The day after we'd left our donations, more buttons appeared, but this time there was also a small plush doll.

The doll had no features whatsoever, and it fit in the palms of our small hands. But the doll was something, and we took up the bathtub's bargaining. A game, Jo said. A trade, I thought.

Years passed like this. Even after we were too old to play our pirating games ("I never cared about the treasure or anything, anyway," Jo once said. I'd snorted.), we still came to the bathtub. The gifts from the bathtub grew in size and rarity, and we sought to match the price. Once there was a sculpted wooden bird, so beautifully done that my mother thought I'd stolen it from the woodcarver down the road. I had to take one of father's best smoking pipes to match that gift, and Jo had given away a necklace that her late grandmother had given her.

Then the bathtub stopped donning gifts. We returned, day after day, hoping to find something waiting for us. It usually took a week or two, but after several months turned into a year, we began to wonder.

Or, I began to wonder. Jo was disinterested, mostly because she was taking over as a governess at a nearby estate. The absence was back, and I thought that I was the only one to feel it.

Day after day, I went to the tub. A few times, I even sat in the tub with all the dead leaves. I could see my breath in the frigid November air, and I stared out through the almost-barren trees at my sleepy town down below. Had we upset the bathtub? Was one of our bargains not good enough? I could feel it in the corner

of my mind, itching at me to give it something, anything. But we'd held up our end of the bargain. Each night I'd been in the tub, it entered my dreams, requesting outlandish things that we couldn't give—gold from kings, swaths of lands on other continents, titles.

The bathtub wanted too much of us, and it was asking the wrong people. After a couple weeks of these dreams, I stopped going to the tub. I had one peaceful fortnight away from that clearing in the woods.

Still, the dreams bothered me. I needed to see the bathtub again, so at the end of that second week, I went to see if it had left anything other than an indelible itch in my brain.

When I arrived, I received an answer. Jo's family hunting dog laid in the bathtub. He was curled up as if asleep, but he was cold to the touch. I ran down the hill, slipping over the frosted earth as I tumbled into Jo's house, frantic. A trade, I thought. We have to play the game, make the trade. And the bathtub had made its move, finally. A move outside of my brain.

I told Jo's father what I found, brought him to the tub and their beloved pet. They brought him back, promising to send for Jo immediately.

Jo arrived, tear tracks streaming down her face. She glared at me as if I'd killed him myself. "What did you bargain?" she demanded as we made our way up the hill toward the bathtub.

"Nothing. I just waited in the tub, wondering, and then I hadn't been there in a week." A trade, it echoed in my mind. Play the game. We had to play the game. We had no choice. But we had no way to play the game—it was now asking for impossible things.

I caved and told Jo about my dreams. She blanched at my words. Then, she became angry.

"Foolish," she snipped. "Absolutely foolish."

"Jo, we have to make a trade," I said, unsure if she was calling me foolish, or my dreams.

She stared at me. "What could possibly count? You said it asks for the impossible!"

We stopped a few feet from the tub, staring at it. After a moment, I coughed. "The price would be high."

"Yes." Jo snapped. "It would be. I can't believe you're entertaining the thought!"

I shook my head. "Then we leave it and hope nothing comes of this. Let's go."

I returned a few weeks later to the tub. Nothing had gone wrong, much to my surprise. Life was as normal as it could be. I wondered if anything had come of our beloved bathtub. I hoped someone had destroyed it or carried it away, but I figured that was too good to be true. The dreams had mostly stopped, but I still felt the pull—the absence—when I wasn't around the bathtub. It was easier to ignore now that I'd done it for so long.

As for Jo, I hadn't heard from her in a few weeks, as she was still at the estate not too far away teaching small children their letters and numbers. She was supposed to have arrived the day previous, so I went to visit. After the death of their dog, I had consoled her parents and regularly visited in her absence. Today, though, they looked worried when I arrived.

"Good morning, Mrs. Livingstone," I said.

She shook her head. "Morning, dear. Jo didn't come home."

Ice staked my heart. I frowned. "Is she not at the Hawthorne estate still?"

Mrs. Livingstone shook her head again. "She sent nothing indicating that she was. Arthur is there now."

I nodded. "I'll watch for her." I turned and walked to the hill. Nausea clenched my stomach as I thought about the look on her face when I'd told her about the dreams. I thought about the items she'd given to the bathtub, the pieces of her she'd given. I picked up the pace, and I jumped at every cracking branch or chirping bird.

As I came upon the clearing, I saw Jo already sitting in the bathtub, her head tilted toward the sky as if she were taking in the light snowfall that was falling around us.

"Jo!" I called. She did not respond, and I walked forward only to find that she was as pale as the porcelain tub, sitting in a pool of her own blood. There was no knife, no weapon on her at all. Jo's lifeless eyes did nothing but stare at the branches above.

Carly Davis

Andrew et. al



Kyle James

Snowed In



Alli Kestler
old lady perfume

the floral cloud chokes you out
as you push open the massive wooden
doors leading to the pews.
it wafts from their itchy sweaters,
dumpy handbags, white woolen socks
stuffed into Mary Janes.
they glare as you stifle a cough,
your face turning various colors that match
the stained glass windows.
the incense mixes in,
pulling on your ankle and
dragging you asunder,
screaming, bubbles shooting
out in panic—

the elderly folks preparing for the luncheon
narrow their eyes at you
as the sweet flowers
and smoke wrap their tendrils
around your neck and shove their
vines down your throat,
and you beg
the good Lord that calls this
sanctuary home,
for reprieve

awards

Lee White

Art Awards

Lee White was born in 1990 in Muscatine, IA, and grew up along the countryside, around the timberlands of rural Illinois. He studied with Leslie Bell & Kristin Quinn while pursuing his undergraduate degree at St. Ambrose University, majoring in Fine Art and Graphic Design. He came to Augustana College shortly after receiving his MFA from the University of Iowa's Painting and Drawing program in 2017.

Lee's work explores the susceptibility to outside forces evocative of traumatic repression, and the return of suppressed memory as enigma. Author Charles D'Ambrosio, said, "The image is language before its emergence, below your inner state of emergence; prior to its emergence. Its emergence would be its full articulation. It's very difficult to get writing students to work with images. The urge is always to move things towards articulation, rather than leaving the mixed feelings. The inability to put them into words is the power of the image that moves us in completely different ways. I feel the sense of words before their emergence in each one of these pieces individually. There is a submerged language present there. There's someone who can't speak, or didn't speak. I don't mean you, I mean in the very thing itself. It's powerful that way."

White has shown both nationwide and internationally in New York, L.A., New Jersey, and London. He has been published in Studio Visit Magazine and Claudia Eng Gallery magazine based in Chelsea, NY.

"I chose these pieces for SAGA because they present subject-matter in a manner that invites the audience to participate through speculation and wonder. Each artwork contains the capacity to transcend its own context by eliciting a connotation of the notional. The imagery selected broadens their potential to generate meaning by simultaneously possessing both an objective and subjective charge. In turn, a multiplicity of possible interpretations abound from each individual artwork."

First Place:

Jack Beemsterboer

Summer of our Discontent

"indexes the Zeitgeist we are currently living in by documenting this historical moment in time. The deadpan camera angle stalking the protest prompts the existential question of contribution versus observation. It conveys a journalistic affect caught in an allegorical interchange between imperative action and passive voyeurism. Is the cameraman there to document the protest, or to support the cause?"

Second Place:

Chris Ferman
A Drowning

“exemplifies the troubling anomalies that digital bits of data really contain, ultimately providing the framework for the commodification and commercialization rooted in the consumption of mass media like television and the internet. There is a palpable sense of falling victim to the anomaly of encoded information and surveillance that target us daily. The supply of a spectacle serves to distract our senses from any authentic presence in the moment. The work demonstrates a generational sensory overload in the act of dulling our senses.”

Third Place:

Carly Davis
An American Oasis

“revisits the idea of the long-distance road trip as the contemporary attempt to indicate and master the great expanse of the West. The mapping and parsing of gas-stations, parking lots, and other mundane modern landmarks turns the landscape into a conveyor belt of mass-produced, serial structures. To see the gas station vacant of human presence gives off a sense of post-humanity; a world depleted of difference and thus of meaning. The subject-matter serves as a powerful analogy to the motif of the planted American flag, as it waves alone upon the surface of the moon.”

Honorable Mention:

Jack Beemsterboer
Beauty in Decay

“intentionally and unintentionally, focuses the gaze on the depredations of property development and communal inequity. There appears to be a spiritual dimension present in the warmth of light manifesting itself like an ambiguous, but nevertheless, omnipotent outside force. Containing the temporal tension and reticence of an amorphous apparition, the shaft-shine of light functions as a metronome illustrating the rotation of the earth’s axis. A sense of alienation amongst the decrepit demarcation of time tracks the physical marks of abandonment. The camera lens acts as a poetic metaphor for the eye of a displaced soul searching recollected spaces, like a flashlight unable to find a semblance of recognition.”

Tyler Barton

Prose Awards

Tyler Barton is a literary advocate and cofounder of Fear No Lit. His story collection, ETERNAL NIGHT AT THE NATURE MUSEUM, is forthcoming from Sarabande Books (Nov 2021). Find his stories in Kenyon Review, The Iowa Review, Subtropics, and forthcoming in Copper Nickel. Find him at @goft Tyler, tsbarton.com, or in Lancaster, PA.

First Place:

Blake Traylor
“Used”

“The narrative voice in ‘Used’ is golden without being gaudy, funny without being slapstick, and quick without being disorienting. Every sentence sounds spoken from the same mouth—quiet, opinionated, loving, yearning to be heard. What impressed me the most was how much tension this story contains for having such (to borrow a hated workshop phrase) ‘low stakes.’ I can’t put my finger on why, but the narrator makes me want to be quiet even as I’m reading it. I haven’t stopped thinking about this piece since I first read its opening (and my favorite) sentence: ‘It’s rose quartz tonight.’”

Second Place:

Blake Traylor
“Downstream”

“‘Downstream’ does the first and most important thing fiction should do—it takes a risk. A flash about a new-to-the-city prospector who’s sifting for gold in the sewers below the street, this ironic story about class and luck made me uncomfortable, and then it made me laugh, and then it made me laugh again. It has a neat, unexpected ending that feels like a magic trick. My favorite sentence: ‘Ever the opportunist, and ever starved of opportunity, he went and found himself an inconspicuous manhole, just outside the city’s wealthiest ward, and submitted himself to the tides of fortune.’”

Third Place:

Lalini Shanella Ranaraja
“Linguistic Anthropology”

“ ‘Linguistic Anthropology’ is comprised of exquisite and honest sentences that bring to mind the stunning acrobatics of Garth Greenwell. These vignettes about disparate languages make a beautiful, worldly collage of identity. My favorite sentence: ‘That fall in Amsterdam, I don’t speak Dutch so much as I lose myself in it, singing along to Marco Borsato in the supermarket, foraging in the farmer’s market for azjin/vinegar and kaneel/cinnamon, obeying swift, split-lipped orders at the dojo.’ ”

Honorable Mention:

Megan Hoppe
“The World is Your Playground”

Margi Rogal

Poetry Awards

After working as a librarian for most of her career, including twelve years at Augustana, Margi Rogal moved to a mountain cottage in the middle of Vermont where she writes poems, gardens, hikes, and makes little books. She attended the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and published her work in Miramar, Broad Street, Common Ground Review, Zig Zag, and other journals. A finalist for the Sundog Poetry Book Award, Margi's first poetry collection, Field Notes, is forthcoming from North Dakota State University Press.

"In reading the twenty-one poems for the SAGA poetry competition, I was struck by the stunning energy, ideas, originality, skill, and sincerity inherent in all of them, which reminds me of the outstanding qualities of students at Augustana. For the poets who didn't win a prize, please know that your work is worthy of commendation, and that you should keep on writing!"

First Place:

Lalini Shanella Ranaraja
"Bulletproof"

"In a relaxed, heartfelt way, over a lentil dinner between two friends, the poet conveys the hardships of being a refugee and the fear of being a person of color, of always having to be wary, on your guard, even when walking down the street to share dinner with a friend. The horrors the characters have experienced are all the more terrifying set against the ordinary event of preparing dinner, texting, eating, and slumping over a sinkful of dirty dishes. The poem ends by highlighting this contrast: the promised land vs. a rented kitchen, walking home from dinner vs. living or dying. The jagged lines of the poem contribute to the jagged emotions expressed in the poem: this is a tough, unfair, frightening world. punctuated by moments of warmth and friendship."

Second Place:

Cassandra Karn

“Twixt My Lover and Myself”

“It’s a short poem that packs a surprising punch through its clear diction, skilled enjambment, and rhythmic sounds. Seemingly archaic (‘twixt’ is not a contemporary use of language), the poem evokes another time when magic was alive and well. I like the slant rhymes that are sprinkled throughout the poem: ‘kisses/wordless’ and ‘brimstone breath.’ And I like the image of grinding the debris falling off a yew tree into the sheets with a mortar and pestle!”

Third Place:

Moreen Akomea-Ampeh

“Unspoken Truth”

“‘Unspoken Truth’ wins third prize for its fresh approach to the poem of address: beginning each line with ‘you,’ this poem is accusatory, building an increasingly powerful case against the wrongdoer as the lines mount one after the other. The repeated ‘you’s’, however, are relieved by a variety of verbs: ‘you came,’ ‘you broke,’ etc. The poet doesn’t lose sight of the narrator’s character, either; without too much information, we somehow come away from the poem with a sense of the integrity of the speaker.”

Honorable Mention:

Alli Kestler

“Old Lady Perfume”

“And, finally, ‘Old Lady Perfume,’ earns honorable mention for its lovely use of humor, a much needed antidote to the panoply of serious issues often on our minds. I especially like the description of the old ladies in ‘their itchy sweaters/ dumpy handbags, white woolen socks/ stuffed into Mary Janes.’ You can just see that row of ladies, glaring! The informality of avoiding capital letters helps to create the atmosphere of the poem: odd, crazy, ridiculous.”

Jack Harris and Rene (Powers) Jones

The Barbara Anderson Miller Award

In 1982, Dr. James E. Miller endowed *SAGA* in memory of his wife, Barbara Anderson Miller, who graduated from Augustana in 1943. While attending Augustana, she edited and wrote for *SAGA*. The award is given to the submission that is most competently crafted and most promising in imaginative power. This year's judges were all previous Editors-in-Chief of *SAGA* who took it upon themselves to read and critique every piece of writing and art in this edition. This is *SAGA*'s most prestigious award.

Jack Harris graduated from Augustana College in 2020, where he was proud to serve as Co-Editor-in-Chief of SAGA alongside Rene Jones for Volume 83. Currently, he is an MFA candidate in fiction at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and co-fiction editor of Blue Earth Review. He is an upcoming Teaching Artist at the Loft Literary Center, where he will lead courses in fanfiction as well as role-playing-game writing.

Rene Powers, now Jones, graduated from Augustana College in 2020, among the very beginnings of the Coronavirus pandemic. She served as Co-Editor-in-Chief of SAGA with Jack Harris during the newly unanticipated and unpredictable times of quarantine, during which they proudly cultivated the 83th volume of creative student work. She is currently studying at Western Illinois University, pursuing a master's degree in English, while also acting as a Teaching Assistant for classes on introductory to college writing.

Judges' Choice:
Blake Traylor
"Used"

"From the very first line, 'Used' sets itself apart as a short story with an aesthetic, compelling action, and thrillingly experimental form. If this sounds like a lot of breathless description, it's only because the piece is elusively hard to pin down: it is part translation of ASMR video and part poem, part short story and part painting. Most importantly, these parts, when blended together, work to underscore and compliment the piece's themes. Gorgeous detail is present not only in description, but in the action and interiority of this prose that depicts two characters locked in a power struggle that is poisoning everything around them—a particularly impressive magic trick given that one of these characters is never seen. Every time we read this piece we found something new to enjoy, which made it feel like a breathing work of art. And what is writing if not a living thing?"

contributors

Moreen Akomea-Ampeh is a sophomore majoring in Chemistry with a possible minor in Creative Writing. She loves to either sleep or binge on Nigerian movies. She is into dark poetry, which she uses to tell the ills of society, and hopes that the voiceless and oppressed will get the opportunity to speak up for themselves one day.

Jack Beemsterboer is a sophomore at Augie and is majoring in history education. He is an analog photographer and loves exploring the countryside looking for beautiful scenery or abandoned structures.

Alex Bernheimer: I'm a senior Psychology and Political Science double major. I would like to thank my friend Jack and the Reading/Writing Center for encouraging me to write haikus.

Abby Berry spent her childhood engrossed in fiction, to the point where her parents would often "ground" her from reading. As she got older and her life became more complicated, she began to dabble in writing as a way to release some of the chaos in her mind. Abby enjoys writing what comes naturally to her, which tends to be fictional stories loosely based on true feelings or events. When she's not writing, Abby enjoys daydreaming, playing Sims 4, and spending time with friends.

Lauren Clarke is a sophomore who is way too busy, but still refuses to say no. She's currently majoring in MJMC and Creative Writing with a minor in Theatre, yet she still has no idea of her future career goals, but that's okay. She spends more time than she'd like to admit writing poems in her head, and she's so honored that there are other people that seem to enjoy her work.

Carly Davis is an artist and writer based in the Midwest whose work revolves around being from Wisconsin and nothing else. When not putting off longer projects, she likes to write flash fiction, draft heavy poems, and make happier art.

Christopher Ferman is a horror movie fan and a sophomore double majoring in MJMC and Graphic Design. He enjoys making weird and abstract visuals through photography and glitch art. He spends most of his days stressing over assignments and missing his dog.

Jaelyn Hernandez is a senior majoring in English and Creative Writing. She loves reading, writing, watching Youtube videos when she should be reading, scrolling through Instagram when she should be writing, and of course, Baby Yoda (yeah, she knows his name is Grogu but the name Baby Yoda will always be first in her heart).

Megan Hoppe is a poet and seamstress. While she usually lives in the world of lineation, she sometimes ventures into prose. When not writing, she can be found sewing historically accurate-ish clothes and fretting about both the future and the past. Eventually, she hopes to become a fashion historian and bury herself within archives and under research sources. And she will be content.

Zack Horve is a freshman Environmental Studies and Biology major. Fueled by coffee and the challenge that writing provides. Read more work at zackhorve.com.

Kyle James is a senior Psychology and Philosophy major. Kyle loves doing nature photography in order to show off the beauty of the world in which we live. I hope you enjoy my work!

Cassandra Karn is a senior double majoring in English and Theatre Arts, with a minor in Women and Gender Studies, meaning zir writing approach tends to be, "Great story. What if we made this gayer?" You can usually find Cassandra in the library by the books on Gothic studies or on the wooded slopes by the Slough, worshipping the moon. Ze is also president of Little Happenings, the resident group of weirdos that plague this campus.

Alli Kestler is a senior at Augie this year. She usually lists off all the stuff that she does on campus in these sorts of things and then gets tired from writing (there's irony in there somewhere, she's sure of it), so just know that she plays women's varsity soccer for the school, is one of the zine co-ordinators of SAGA, and has three somewhat unrelated majors. If you're trying to get her attention, she'll respond to Allison, Alli, Kestler, Alli Kestler, Al, Alli K, Kest, KDaddy (courtesy of her teammates, much love), and literally any other name that sounds like any of those. If she doesn't respond right away, she's not try-

ing to ignore you; she's just thinking about cursed bathtubs and aggressively floral perfumes.

Marissa Milone is a sophomore majoring in Secondary English Education and double minoring in Creative Writing and Interdisciplinary Honors. She wholeheartedly believes chocolate chip cookie-dough ice cream is the superior ice cream flavor. In her spare time she breaks it down on the dance floor with her multicultural dance troupe UNYK, makes tie-blankets for animal shelters with Alpha Phi Omega, deliberates on the meaning of life with her fellow English majors, and spends way too long looking up at the sky. Most of Marissa's pieces chosen for *SAGA* this year were inspired by the hell-scape that was 2020, as she's sure several other writer's pieces were, but she looks forward to honor the pain it caused by putting all of that behind her in 2021 and making the most of what's left of her college career. Huzzah!

Siena Lei Oliveri is a senior studying Communication Sciences and Disorders and minoring in Music. She spends her days singing, collaging, stretching, creating music, and sometimes writing. These poems reflect her time walking along the ocean in Galway, Ireland, and monitoring bluebird boxes in Rockford, IL. Siena loves finding little stories in nature.

Tricia Plachno is a sophomore at Augie majoring in communication sciences and disorders and minoring in creative writing. She spends her time trying to decide which color to dye her hair next and scribbling indiscernible phrases into her trusty journal. S/O to the Swannie Sweeties, my UNYK babies in the Carriage House, & the rest of *fam bam*. :)

Lalini Shanela Ranaraja hails from Sri Lanka, an island nation of perpetual summer. As well as a writer, she is also a dedicated polyglot, an avid runner, and can usually be found in the company of tall trees. After college, she hopes to combine her passions for anthropology, creative writing and journalism to create radical change in the world and pay the bills, not necessarily in that order. This is her third and final year being featured in *SAGA*, and she is truly honoured to have witnessed this publication grow and change over the years.

Mason Sargent wants to... Mason Sargent wants to uhhhhh hmm. Well, huh. Mason Sargent didn't realize how hard it would be to write one of these. Al-

right, how about this: Mason Sargent wants to thank you for reading. There's a lot more where that came from.

Paige Sheppard: Growing up in a small town near Starved Rock and the Illinois River, I've always found the Earth to be a sacred place. My favorite childhood memories include eagle watching, skipping rocks across the Vermillion, finding walking sticks with my Nana and Papa, and washing dirt off of my feet after another awe-inspiring day outside. Now, whenever I pick up a pen—whether that is to draw or to write—I cannot separate myself from these core elements that feed my soul gold and green.

Davey Snubbs wrote a contributor's note.

Blake Traylor: Whenever he isn't taking miles-long walks around campus, unsuccessfully seeking a place where time can't follow him, Blake is finding his way through the interknotted workload of an aspiring triple major (English, Creative Writing, Spanish) plus minor (Linguistics). You might also find him at the Reading/Writing Center, where he works as a peer tutor and writing fellow. But if all else fails, you can find him here, in *SAGA*: this year, as a contributor and co-editor of Prose.

Karli Wilson can always be found with a camera strapped around her neck, or at least her phone's camera in her back pocket. She believes that the world has so many hidden beauties waiting to be captured and shared. Little things are what make her the happiest: clouds changing, extra honey in her tea, seeing a dog poke out of a car window... something small can make the biggest difference in her day. Undecided on her major, all she knows is that she wants to genuinely enjoy every day at her job, and let the money come when it may.