

pathos

LITERARY MAGAZINE



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Dear Reader,

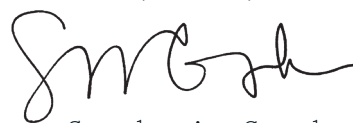
Art remains an essential tool for understanding and healing during times of hopelessness and violence. As creative citizens, we have a responsibility to reach out to one another and become political workers in the community we live in. I'm so proud to be a part of PSU's Student Media team and to witness the courageous action and reporting of my cohorts at the Pacific Sentinel and The Vanguard. Their dedication to and solidarity with truth and justice must not go unnoticed. Thank you to all of the students and citizens fighting for what is good and right in this world.

I'd like to say a huge thank you to the best team an editor could ask for. Clover, Brooke, and Malcolm: You're all so smart and creative and have taught me so much in the past year. The world is better for you all being in it and I am better for knowing you. Thanks for learning and growing with me through Pathos and friendship. And thank you to my advisor, Reaz Mahmood, for your support and guidance. I appreciate the wisdom you bring to the Student Media organization and your generosity in sharing it.

It's been a privilege to explore art and creativity here at PSU. Although my time at Pathos has reached its end, I intend to maintain my connection to the literary and arts community here at Portland State for a while longer as I prepare for the next step of my journey. I can't wait to see what's next for Pathos and the new team.

This term we have a magnificent selection of writing and visual art to share and we hope it will bring you exactly what you need in this moment. Comfort, encouragement, understanding, joy. The following pages are a testament to artists, writers, and makers everywhere in the world, but especially here at PSU where we are striving to leave our mark.

Best, best, best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SGresh', written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephanie Gresham
Editor

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Editorial Team

(right to left)

Stephanie Gresham
Executive Editor

Malcolm Church
Creative Director

Clover Gullans
Copy Editor

Brooke Metropulos
Social Media Manager

Artwork

FRONT COVER: *Pecking Order*,
Lizzie (Acid Lich)

BACK COVER: *Verano Vibes*,
Ana Danel

STAFF PHOTO: Ash Kukuzke

*Additional editorial images
created by Malcolm Church*



643 Miles Away

Gigi Giangioffe-Rodriguez

You used to make me tuna melts—canned tuna with mayonnaise mixed in, piled on top of Thomas English muffins, toasted, then finished with Colby Jack cheese or Kraft American singles, which really barely qualifies as a cheese. Because these melts topped English muffins, it was an open-faced sandwich situation. Sometimes you mixed red or green onions in with the tuna, or hard boiled egg, or pickles or capers. You took something borderline gross—quintessentially middle-American-Boomer-cuisine—and you dared to add pickled capers. You were actually a pretty decent cook, and we ate well: pasta with gorgonzola, stuffed bell peppers, lots of big salads, rice pilafs, blueberry pancakes. You shied away from canned or frozen vegetables and got the fresh stuff, but you had your exceptions: whipped cream came out of aerosol cans, pancakes were from boxes, and when I was very young, the fish you bought had been shaped into fingers and frozen, to later be dumped unceremoniously onto a baking sheet, baked to a golden brown and slathered in tartar sauce.

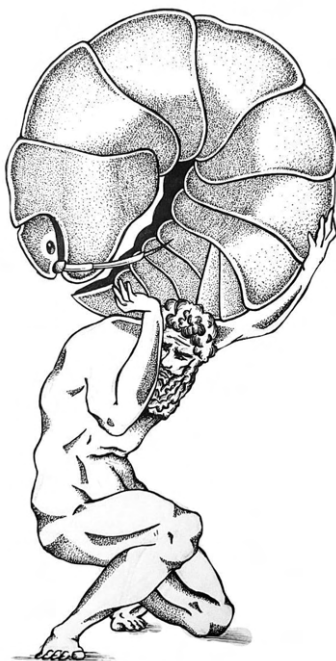
The other day I ordered a tuna melt at Grand Central Bakery. I saw it on the menu, and thought, *Well damn, when's the last time I ate a tuna melt?* I sipped on my dirty chai with Evan and we waited for our food to be ready. When the sandwich arrived in front of me I pursed my lips and furrowed my brows.

I was taken aback by the presentation of the tuna melt. Actually, I was disappointed, and a bit sad. This was all clearly written on my face, as I am terrible at hiding my emotions (not that I try). Evan saw me, asking *What's wrong, mi amor?*

It was hard to put into words, because I didn't quite understand it. I said, *It's a regular sandwich. It's not open-faced.* He gently responded, *It looks really good.* I said back, *No, I know. It does. It looks great. It's just...the cheese is like, a sharp cheddar cheese, and the bread has grains in it and there's no minced Vlasic pickles mixed up with the tuna...*and the rest was unsaid, whirling around in my thoughts—and it's not on a 1950's ceramic plate that has dwindled down to a set of two because the other two plates had been dropped or chipped, which was fine because it was just you and I, so we only needed two plates; the plate is not atop a stained 1970's cloth placemat; your old refrigerator isn't creaking and humming in the background; when I'm done with this sandwich, I'll just throw away the wrapper and walk away, I won't have to put my plate in the dishwasher and shake the crumbs off the placemat into the trash can; there's no Mom to thank and then get annoyed with, finding an excuse to leave the room as soon as lunch is over. You broke my heart so many times but you were the parent who stayed and tried. You did what you thought was best. You're 643 miles away now and I really miss

Scatter

Heather Mars



piccolo atlante

Annica Davis

a grammar for here and now

Aubrey LeWarne

disclaimer

the following

are

excerpts

from

the soon

to be

published:

a grammar for *Here and Now*

suggestions

for the

working

translator

this text

is

written

in

a tradition

of (before)

our best

approximation of what

was called

“standard english”

for the modern reader

please note that this text

is arranged into sections

known as paragraphs

the meaning of this

practice is lost to us now

but we thought

the chunks of text looked nice.

from chapter 1: orientations

we, the editors of this text, love talking. in our time, which we call *Now*, language is made up of all sorts of talking. in the time (before), people had many words for talking: jabbering, gossiping, crazy talk, arguing, lying, joshing, joking, lecturing. all great and still in practice *Now* (we the editors of this text particularly love whispering, the most intimate of talk).

(before), people had many fancy ways to talk about talking. grammar, syntax, phonology, spelling, composition, real and fake words. people could talk about what was grammatical and which words were not real regardless if people understood what they meant. and (before) people used to think about talking in political divisions. abstract beginnings and ends drawn on bumpy blue spheres, imposing strict notions about how people talk in one place or another. people used to build mental borders too. native speaker, first and second language, fluency, with or without an accent, broken or deficient talking. we do not draw the same borders on land nor in our minds. if you asked someone *Here* what their first language was, they'd look at you funny. they'd probably assume you're asking them to pick which kind of talking is better than others. a futile and frankly rude question. people *Here* all understand varying degrees of many different kinds of talking—but not every kind of talk. to compensate, we have a need for many more translators than (before). people who work to bridge the gaps day-to-day.

we the editors of this volume are translators, but so is most everyone *Here*. we are perhaps the most outspoken ones, the ones who put it on our resumes, but very few people go through life *Now* and never translate. the meaning of the term has changed. to best understand, it helps to focus on the trans- portion of the word. we are those who go between. we facilitate between people, and help those from one place reach the other end. we attend legal proceedings, interpret songs, we perform therapy, teach board games, organize neighborhood parties, explain tax forms, tell jokes and laugh and laugh. always in service of the most fundamental human question: “did that make sense?”

recently we have considered how we can best train the next generation of translators, and we considered crafting a reference text to prepare new translators on how to get started at the job. there has never been a grammar book written for how we talk *Now*, and we frankly weren't sure if we should make one. the editors of this text spent months sitting in cafes prodding and dissecting the grammar books of (before). style guides, elocution texts, descriptions of syntax trees and books on writing written by con men in elbow-patched coats. all of these texts had this idea of a standard, the ideal form of language in the mind, and how to bring that “correct” form into the world. we tried to emulate this approach for a bit, but in practice it did not make sense to us. none of us wanted to argue why their way of talking should become the guideline, and we all dreaded a return to a world where people held a personal distaste for their own voice.

so, we write this to start a new tradition, a new guide for talking. we borrow some of the traditions of the grammar of (before), but we leave much of it behind. we nod to the past with the use of their language (a form that we believe was called “standard american english”). in our research, we noted how the scientists from (before) often used terms from old languages to name new things they discovered. we find that we cannot perfectly honor the tradition of a grammar book, but we can honor the practice of borrowing the old to make sense of something new.

we write this with the consideration that there are some who lived before *Now*, and may need this text to make sense of the world that we've made. we hope that this guide helps you shake off the burden of the rules of talking from (before) and we write this for the many young people who were born *Now* and will spend their whole lives trying to make sense of it. we cannot make the task of translation any easier, but we hope this will get you started.

from the preface

for the reader that is unfamiliar with *Now*, but perhaps knows how it was (before), consider the word *Here*, the way we talk about where we live. we have adapted the term from this old way of talking. it's similar to what it meant (before), although we do not make the same sounds when we look at those letters, and there are many synonyms that convey the sentiment (a favorite of we the editors that remains in use *Now*: an index finger aimed at the "here" in question.) but when we talk about the place *Here*, there is always an emphasis. in this text, we do so with a capital H and italics. similarly, (before) is always to be contained some way. in spoken word we speak it softer and quieter than the words that precede it. here we box it in with parenthesis. we do so to always remember (before), and to keep it with us, but only as recollection, like photographs in a frame.

please note that our talkings do still have words for things that are close and all around (here) and a word for distal things (there), and many other ways to talk about how close or far things are. but there is only *Here*, we do not make the same emphasis for *There*, because there is no *There*, there's no need to distinguish between the home we have *Here* and someplace else. *Here* goes beyond any country or continent. we hope that this is understandable to those that spoke the languages of us and them, of good and bad.

from chapter 20: choreography

(before) talking was cut up into many discrete pieces. the sounds that make up talking were the phonetics, the ordering of those sounds into words the phonology, and the ordering of words the syntax. we applaud the efforts of the linguists of (before), how they dissected talk into its discrete organs. but *Now* we do not think of talking as the body of organs, but how that body of organs moves. to understand a certain kind of talking is not about learning anatomy, but rather choreography, the steps of talking.

people from (before) studied phonetics and phonology, the sounds and rhythms of talk. it concerned the boundaries of sounds, where a "tuh" sound ends and a "duh" sound begins. but also the magic of sound as it plays out in time. phoneticians would map plosives and peaks and staccato syllabic steps, flung out in high tempo trip-uh-lets or slower even, with long, arduous syncopations. they transcribed the quiet song that scores every sentence, and as a translator, you must learn to hear it.

there is no point in us teaching you the nature of sound in written word. writing and sound are much the same as a metronome and music. the former cannot predict the latter, though they are related. and neither tempo nor rhythm alone can tell you how best to dance. so, to understand the choreography of *Now*, walk around the streets on a crowded day, preferably at the market where people go to sell the crops they grew on the tops of nearby buildings. hear the farmers yell from their stalls, the footsteps, the nods and glances and smiles passersby give as they move through the

market. the guffaws and coughs and sneezes, listen to the way the beats move a song on the breeze, take in the melody, remember the parts you liked the most. begin to write your own song. then go to the place closest to you where you can buy cheap food and drinks and where no one gets mad if you stay too long. sit wherever the most people are gathered. listen to people talk about their days, the weather, opinions you respect and ones that make you livid and want to scream and shout at them. bring a journal (you should always have a way to keep track of things with you) and listen. really. Listen. write down your favorite parts. keep at this. eventually the order of things will become clear.

from chapter 7: a history of *Now*

to understand the grammar of *Here*, you must understand what it's like *Now*. language is different *Now*. or at least, the way we talk about language is different. its unclear to us if language changed because the world changed, or if the world changed and made us see language differently. (before), when things became worse, there was a tectonic rearrangement, a breakdown of the rhythms of everyday life. the horrors of (before) (that we opt to not relive in the writing of this text) drove many different people from many different places all around the globe, and slowly there were no longer different places for people to be in. this was not the end of people, but it was the end of the world.

as the world changed, so too did our talking. at first the smartest people of *Here* worried the different ways of talking would be too complex, and we would be too disorderly and confused to build a new world. they conceived of a universal language, based on the languages they spoke well, that could bridge the gap between the educated peoples. they made plans for how we would talk and what we would talk about. there were words for executive decisions, and ways to devise food rationing programs. there were very few ways to talk about the color of the sky or ways to tell jokes or to ask people to apologize to you. very quickly, other talkings filled in these gaps, and that supposed universal language became just another way to talk, reserved to the rooms where people still talked about kings and investments. much to the surprise of these educated people— things were fine. it seems people are quite adept at working things out with one another when no one is standing by to tell them how to do it.

from chapter 45: dating, weddings, and funerals

if you follow the instructions in previous chapters well, you may find yourself in the fortunate position of making some friends. this is the most beautiful part of the choreography of talking: dance partners. the people you befriend will all have their own songs and rhythms, certain ways they like to two-step and the preferred tempo for their laughter. here you can learn about one of our favorite ways of talking: shooting the shit (this has become the most common term for this kind of talking *Now*). we believe all translators should spend a good portion of their early lives participating in this language practice. we find that this casual place is where the most fundamental parts of talking reveal themselves, unadorned by expectations of how best to word something. here you'll learn the language of joke making, of story-telling and of active listening. you'll learn how people get around with talking, the paths they take in between topics. that reminds me... have i told you about... what i meant was.... you'll learn how to follow along as people make these little pit stops and detours, and you'll learn how to get around yourself.

this is where you can learn about the different sizes of talking. the small talk of every day, the little words you can carry in your pockets. how are you, uh huh, sure, that's good, not much, could be worse, oh thank you, thanks for asking, no problem. you'll also learn the big talk, the weighty words, talk that you should always make with someone while you hold each other up, lest the words drag you down too far. this is also where you will learn the language of silence, the pauses in between where the most difficult and complicated talk can be understood. oddly, it's the hardest language to hear, but the easiest to speak.

inevitably your way and their ways of talking will mix, and you'll start to sound a bit more like one another. this is good, learning how to talk like someone else and to understand them is one of life's great gifts, another is finding someone who talks like you. if you find a same-talker, it's natural that you might fall in love with them, and together you can invent entirely new ways to talk. the most intimate and personal languages. we cannot tell you what will be said here, in those tender moments atop bed frames or in alleys or in trains (we don't have cars *Now*, but same idea) we know it'll probably be spoken somewhere dark, and at a low volume. and we can't tell you what it'll mean. we leave the translating to you.

some people who fall in love get married. weddings are similar *Now* to how they were (before), though the grammar of matrimony is much less prescriptive. people love and live together *Now* in ways that look similar to the married couples of (before), but they don't need to get married to do so. really, the main reason people get married *Now* is to throw a big party. in exchange for throwing a lavish event, guests talk to the newlyweds in the beautiful language of fond memories and gratefulness, and the peculiar varieties that are only spoken by those with tears in their eyes and too much wine in their stomachs.

if you are translating at a wedding, you have the exhausting but crucial task of asking the same questions over and over and over again. some translation is about taking one thing and making it understandable to someone else. but there is also the translation of circumstance. to make an awkward situation into nice memories, strangers into party-goers. you must ask questions, like how people know the newlyweds and what they do when they are not at weddings and so on. you must remember what people told you, and then in subsequent small talk, you use this information to connect two disparate peoples. "oh, did you know that mary also enjoys walking to the old burnt out warehouses in northwest?" "you know, milo is an acupuncturist, she may know how to help with your back pain." "jenna's dad loves that writer, they can lend you a copy of their new book!" the task will feel repetitive. it is repetitive. you may wonder why you have to do this. sometimes this process will not be fruitful, but you must mingle. sometimes this job is about saying something, sometimes it's just about saying anything at all.

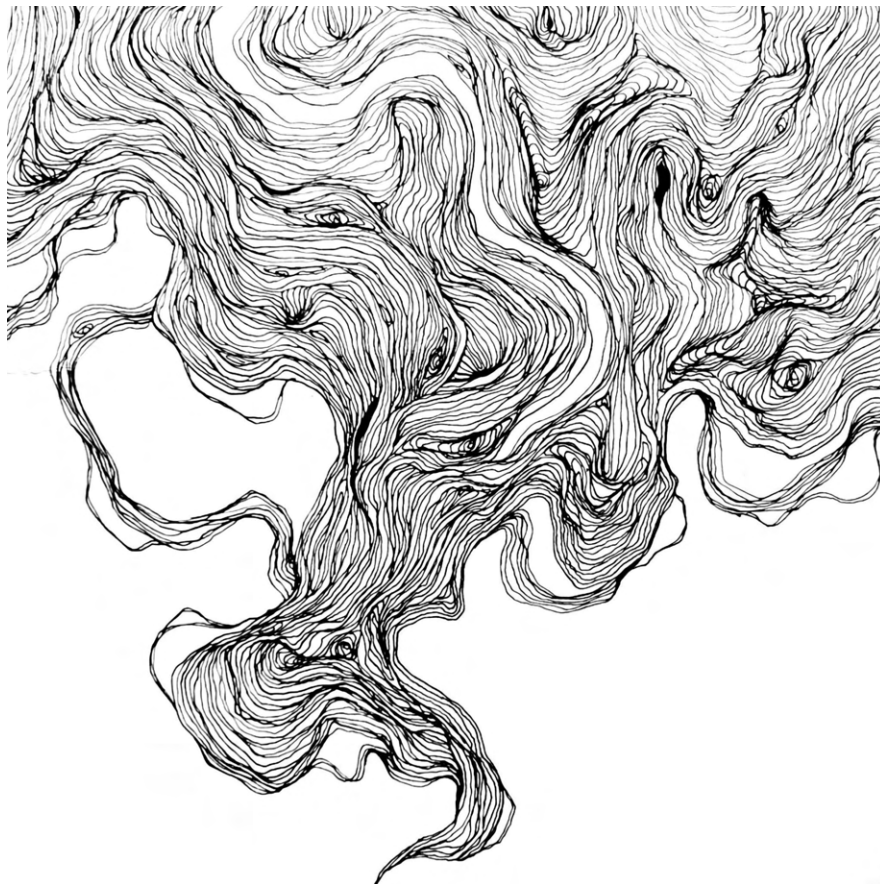
unfortunately, you can't always get drunk and chat with people at weddings. another common job for translators is to attend funerals. when someone dies, a kind of talking dies. it is the most tragic thing that happens *Now*, and we honor that tragedy accordingly. much like a wedding, people throw a party. they take the records they have of the deceased's talking. notes and videos and stories that they can recall, and they try to commemorate the dance they did over the years. people recall the different talking they did with the deceased, and will realize slowly that the talking they heard was only one dialect in the deceased's vast array of languages.

as a translator, you must understand that whether you knew the deceased before the event, you have become a scholar of their now extinct language, but through you that language lives on, at least in some small way. remember what people recall about the deceased, the things they remember the most. they will often recall the small things, like how someone liked their coffee or a certain way they'd phrase things. the routines of their talk, the special touches they would always make. the small greetings and supportive refrains. take care to remember the taking and honor the best parts in some way, perhaps by taking your coffee with honey every once and a while. know that someday you may be the only person who ever heard this language that is still *Here*.

from the conclusion

we will probably spend the rest of our lives explaining what we were getting at here, in follow-ups or panels or parties or arguments over lunch. if you would like us to clarify anything written here, we hope you understand how willing we are to do so.

this text will become harder to understand over time. as future people make new words and new talkings for their world, and they will start talking about *Now* the way we talk about (before). through our years of helping, understanding, explaining and clarifying, we've learned that talking will never stay the same for long. we only hope that even as the shape of the world changes, the lessons we've laid out here hold some value. no matter how the way we talk changes, we hope people are still talking, and still trying to figure out whatever the hell people meant by that.



sententia

Annica Davis



Open My Eyes

Lucy Erickson



sunny angel
Cody Zelmer

After the Gold Rush

Adriana Stanzione

It was the same year as that whole Donner Party fiasco. The roads were so wretched with wet newspapers and fool's gold dust among the stifling mud and dead leaves, and the boggy mires hummed with insects that fed on man's desolation, throbbing like the ache of those whose fingers were pruned and bruised by frigid water and steel on skin. The air smelled like rain and dirt and sweat and an impalpable tension permeated the air, as if we all were waiting for God's hand to either strike us down in spite, or gently lift us up into the world of the Vanderbilts.

I lived by the window and watched him pace and mutter to himself. A city of abandoned cargo ships, empty buildings and a population of a little more than a thousand ghosts used to haunt San Francisco. Now you have to make yourself two-dimensional just to walk down the street. See, here's the money, he'd say. Here's the love. He'd spill it out on the table. I don't want to look at it. But it's right here, just—he'd turn my head, literally—look at it!

I think he must have seen my eyes shine with the golden reflection of his day's labor; though oftentimes he'd see things that weren't really there. His eyes would soon become embedded in his skull, burrowed in deep burgundy caverns, and an electronic buzz would pulse through his bones—soon he would become completely synthetic. Soon he'd become just a whisper. Sometimes I wished it all would have happened sooner, but to say that out loud seems wrong.

You have a "golden arm", I'd tell him. It's what my mother used to warn me about, a sort of ghost story your mother would tell you too, if you're anything like me. The story of the golden arm is different from other ghost stories. This ghost hasn't returned for revenge, to terrorize, or simply because they're unaware of even being dead in the first place. No, this ghost has come to take back what is rightfully theirs, something stolen from them when they were buried.

Their "golden arm" could be anything, a ring, a pistol, a woman. You never know whether or not the ghost will have mercy on the thief; even if you return the "golden arm", your life still isn't guaranteed, though that last part depends on who's telling the story.

This rush and rivalry and competition—for what? I'd say. Our love is all of God's money. That last line would always come out a little more sarcastic than I meant it to. He'd say something like, darling can't you see how you cause my will to weaken with your girly naivete,

your Cherokee philosophy! And he'd bury his face in his hands and laugh half-heartedly.

Now years have passed since that time. One life ended shortly thereafter and the other kept going. Last Wednesday morning when I cleaned the house, I found his letter that told me why he ended it the way he did, with the picture of his lover. The night he died I thought I saw him crying, rocking back and forth in the firelight mumbling something to himself. His hair was long and dirty, plastered to his furrowed brow, eyes staring daggers into the pit of his cupped hands, at a little pile of gold he had taken from where it was previously hidden beneath our floorboards. From where it was taken from the earth, human hands and fingers penetrating the unknown, bloodshed over it.

If the angel on my right shoulder was the Dead Rabbits and the devil on my left was the Bowery Boys, call me Tammany Hall. That's what we used to say to each other, when he'd come home with another man's smell on his clothes to find me asleep at my windowsill with an opium pipe. We said it affectionately, smiling at one another through a cloak of shame and mutual understanding. Not serious but not jokingly either. If it were one of those nights when I was generous with my dosage, I would whisper that I loved him, despite it all, to which he'd frown, like a big brother would frown while watching his little sister struggle to tie her own shoelaces. That one look was a punishment medieval in cruelty, each time our eyes meeting my love for him growing greater, just as he strayed farther into the dark.

His letter, now collecting dust on that windowsill, I haven't been able to decide what to do with it since its discovery—that place where I spent so many of my days, hunched over like a gargoyle hugging my knees, watching the world change in a little square of glass—that's where he left his list of explanations. He wrote that he just liked life a little more during the days of hopelessness, the days of us, the days of childlike uncertainty, and the promise and letdown of American prosperity. He held onto that little mound of gold like a crucifix, down to that last second when he said goodbye for good. When they found him they had to pry it from his clenched and rigid fists. To this day I still refuse to inherit it, and I refuse to burden his lover with it either. For I was the one who warned him, and since I'm a woman of my word, you best believe I'd never take from a ghost what's rightfully his.

Apples and Tea and Cigarettes

Spencer Tiedkte

Marvin ate apples every Tuesday after he was let go of his job. The apples reminded him of his neighbor's shiny red car. When he ate the apples, he imagined the car getting into a nasty crash, the sound of his teeth crunching the apple mirroring the car's scraping metal. His mother never wanted to talk to him when he was like this, no matter how much she missed him. His brother, Tom, drove an old pickup truck to work, never feeling any desire for a new car. Marvin hated him. Marvin hated everybody. His job let him go after he punched his coworker, Dave, out cold. Dave wanted to talk to Marvin about real estate, and how he could help Marvin find a better home. A giant explosion happened at Marvin's old grade school, killing his old friend Rob, who was now the school's principal. He also ate the apples because they drummed up memories of his mother's homemade applesauce, but he couldn't find out how to stop hurting.

The tea Tom was drinking reminded him of his first date with Julia when they were fourteen. It made him think about how the beautiful lakeside danced in the midnight's alluring darkness. He was also close to Rob, and as they were friends long before he had begun to date his sister. Rob seemed to drift away once they started dating, but Tom never lost contact with him. When Rob died, Julia moved away and broke up with Tom. Tom took it well, but he couldn't find out how to stop hurting.

Marvin, now finished with his apple, turned on the TV. An old rerun of *The Flintstones* played. He remembered once seeing a video of the commercial that would air at the end of the older episodes, which had the characters smoking Winston-brand cigarettes. His father smoked

cigarettes, but he never thought to ask him which brand when he was six. His mother, Clarissa, remembers well that they were Marlboro, and remembers the exact price of a dollar and sixty-five cents. She also remembers the exact shelf they were on at the dingy grocery store. She remembered that Julia and Rob's mom was there once. She asked Clarissa if she was a smoker, but she didn't answer and turned her head away quickly, not wanting her to see her face. Marvin's dad, Al, didn't like being out of cigarettes. He was good at getting his point across with more than his words. She always did as he asked as often as she could, but she couldn't find out how to stop hurting.

Tom had reached the end of his teacup. He watched some videos on YouTube talking about old Power Rangers toys that he had always wanted as a kid. He and Rob always pretended to be the Red and Blue Rangers whenever they would play down by the lakeside. He always wondered why him and Rob sort of drifted away a bit when he started to date Julia. He suspected it was that just because he was dating his sister. He never knew that Rob had been building up the courage to confide in him about his feelings for him around the same time. Rob kept being friends as much as he could, but couldn't find out how to stop hurting.

Al was a hateful man. Al was an anxious man. Al was a sad man. Al was a mysterious man. Al smoked cigarettes because he wanted to feel a warmth inside him. He wanted to feel like a better man than he ever could be. He thought that if he could be the biggest and strongest, that if he could conquer everyone else, then he might be able to conquer himself. So he smoked cigarettes, but he couldn't find out how to stop hurting.



Danger on SE Grand

Bambi L. Moss

dig down

Kaitlyne Bozzone

There's a dream I have most nights, in which I sit on a curb in the rain and call my sister. I stare into the street as the phone rings and watch the reflected lights flicker and glow in the puddles. The entire street is lit up like a rainbow, blues and purples and reds that sway and converge in my view until I feel my eyes cross.

When she picks up, I feel relief for the first time in a long time. She asks me what's wrong, why I'm calling at 2AM, and I ask her to come pick me up.

"Can't you take the subway?" she asks.

"I need you," I tell her, and she comes.

—

I'm in her car, not one she ever had when I'm awake. I have the thought that I'm meant to be doing something better with my life, but she doesn't comment on it, so I let it go.

"It's late," she says.

I stare out the window at the blurry, glowing world outside. The rain races down the glass, constantly replacing itself line after line.

"What do you need?" she asks, and I realize she isn't speaking to me in her voice—it's mine. I turn to look at her, and for a split second she is me. I blink, then blink again. She sits beside me once more.

"Please don't leave," I say.

"How could I?"

She pulls up alongside cemetery gates and steps out of the car. I follow her, because I don't know what else to do or where we are, and we stand together in the dried-up grass. The rain has been replaced by a low, stagnant fog, and we wade through it like we're in a swamp. When I survey our surroundings again, I think we may actually be in a swamp—towering oak trees shrouded in Spanish moss hover overhead, providing a canopy for the graveyard. We certainly aren't in the city anymore.

We stop in front of two matching gravestones, side by side. Our names adorn the stone.

"I don't understand," I say.

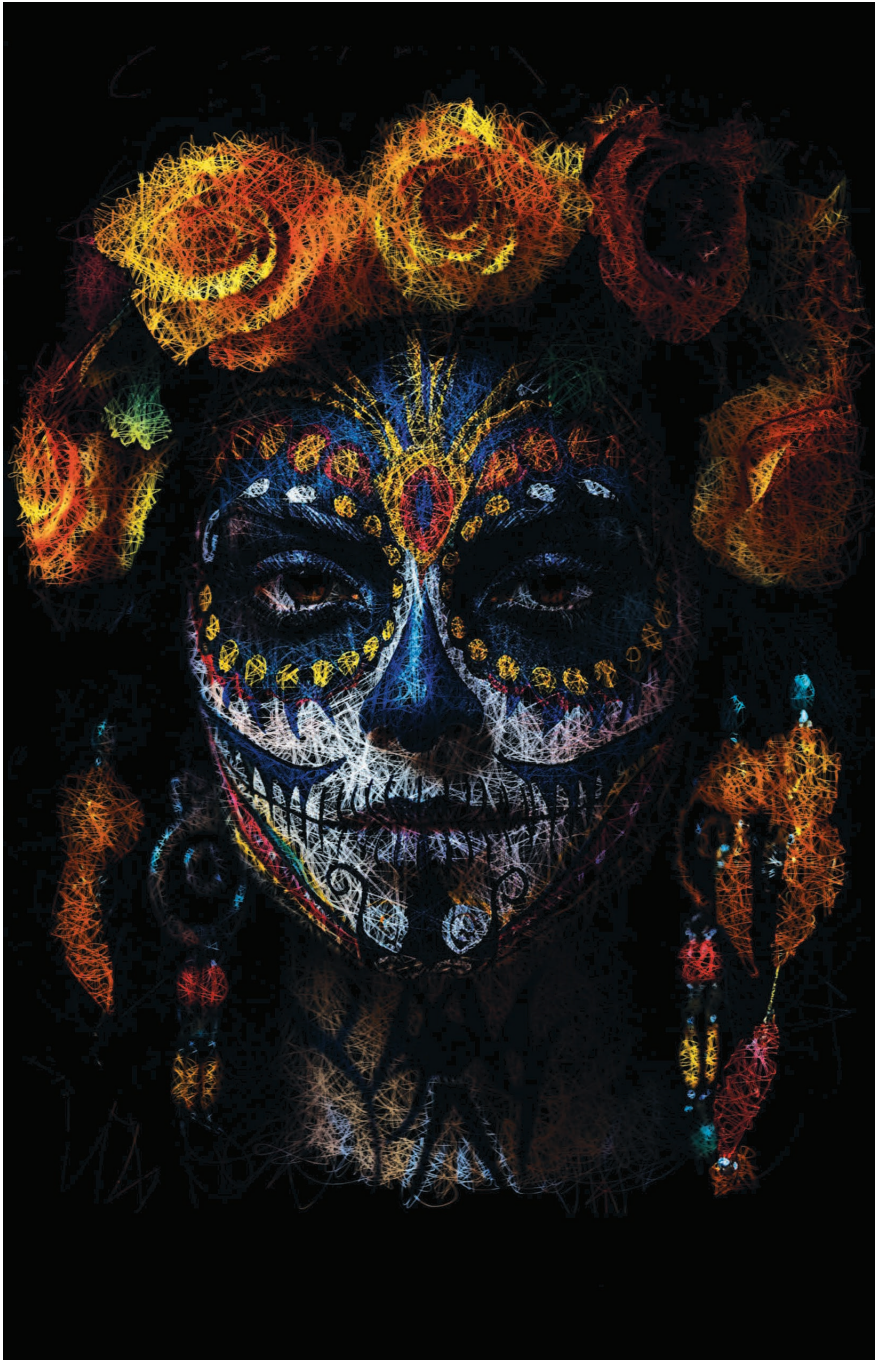
"You never have," she agrees, and takes my hand gently. "Should we lie together?"

We crouch down into the wet mud obscured by the fog, the slimy softness of the earth rising over the toes of my shoes and worming its way in between my fingers. It doesn't bother me as much as it should.

She lays on the ground, gazing up into the mossy ceiling, her head by her grave. She could be a corpse, her skin is so pale. I lay beside her, but I look to her—her mud-caked hair and dreary eyes.

"Are you upset with me?" I ask her.

She smiles. "We're together here. What more could I ask for?"



La Catrina

German Javier Amaya

From Humanity With Love

Casper L. Valentine

They ask us to condemn all but genocide,
And you ask us to wait as if stopping it were a business meeting.
So take your pause and shove it up your
Assessments of threat are meaningless
When the real threat comes
From our own leaders who fund the guns
And bombs and illegal weapons sent overseas
To massacre people in their restless sleep.
When genocide is on the table, there is no time for pause.
Not when peace is only gained
By silencing the screams of people begging to live.
When children are dying, you stop shaking hands
With the people who are killing them.
You worry for your students' safety?
Then don't send in the calvary.
You empathize with Palestine?
Then don't participate in their genocide.
You care for the voice of your university?
Then don't silence us.
You cannot condone criminal activity?
Then don't condone a genocide.
They're trespassers in the library?
We trespass Turtle Island.
Do not forget we occupy this land too.
"Discuss the ethics," well let's discuss them now.
You talk big and loud, stand up with confidence
That your school is a place of transparency and education.
But do we learn about 1948?
Or do we only learn that asking for an end
To the colonial project is somehow wrong?
While you benefit from blood money,
Know that we will always remember.
That you sent in men with guns to stop unarmed kids
Who stood up for what was right while you did nothing.
But let us all remind you that white comfort is a pillar of fascism.
So while you sleep in the comfort of your own home
On land stolen from people who still have not received justice,
Remember that your rights were only won
With the blood, sweat, and tears of those willing to risk it all before you.
To demand a better life not for themselves
But for those after them and those who were silenced
And you know, I really like jellyfish, they have no backbone either.
They just sit and let things happen, float through the ocean and
Never do a thing to help their species improve.
I didn't know a person could be an invertebrate too.
But I think I like jellyfish more.
So listen well, and hear our voice.
We will not be complicit in genocide.
Will you?

Is That A Promise?

Aidan Ferns

"The garden smells new today."

"Of course she does, it is spring."

"Did you sleep with your bedroom windows open?"

"Yes."

"Did you smell the moon?"

"I did."

"Did you ask the spiders to weave any spells?"

"Only a few."

"Are you hungry, or are you starving?"

"Starving."

"And if you could, would you be a bandit or a beetle?"

"What kind of question is that?"

"A simple one."

"I'd be a beetle."

"I'd be a bandit."

"And why is that?"

"I would know the best garden to steal from."

"What is your motive?"

"Retribution, of course. The garden belongs to two evil queens, they spend their days sun-stained and wasted. They sit atop the stone walls that guard their manicured jungle and admire their panoply of plants. They take advantage of the world outside. They steal children from the village and use their skin as fertilizer. I would slaughter the queens and redistribute the food from their garden. All who went hungry in the village or suffered the loss of a child would know what it would feel like to be full again."

"That's quite the story."

"I like stories."

"Are you hungry, or starving?"

"Starving."

"For what?"

"A handsome bandit, one who could take me away from these walls."

"You don't want to stay here?"

"No, do you?"

"No."

"I thought so."

"We can't leave."

"I know."

"We will never know anything other than this garden."

"I know."

"I miss seeing you against the summer, Iris."

"I miss seeing you against the rain, Aster."

"We have spring now."

"Yes, we have spring."

"I wish we were buried in the ground."

"Are you hungry for that?"

"Starving."

"Would you kill me for a chance to leave?" "I would brutally murder you."

"I would brutally murder you too." "Is that a promise?"

"Certainly."



Golden Dragon
Clare Clark



dreamy beauty

Cody Zelmer

Anchoress

Marley Sherwood

I'm building convents
everywhere I go
leaving trails of dark dark robes
veils and wish-worn rosaries and
piles of our baby blankets
walling in the fugitive
species evolved for
lying languid in mycelial embraces
Even if hidden
and a little sorrowful
the cavern quenches our thirsts with
stalactites dripping like breasts and
maps of mist-carved paths and chambers paint-drenched and clay-coated hands
laughing about death or dying
lying sick in sylvan laps
My eaves are ivied
and I leave the dirt on the floor for
I will not sweep out the divine
with the debris
corners crack open just so
the rain can slither in and
give its fertile greetings
lying face down 'til we hear the Word.

Payphones are
for telling your
friends you
love them

Charlie Huxley



Years Don't Really Matter

Kerim Bueno

A single seed was planted with four
Hands and two intentions in the
Middle of a lush green garden.
Before any signs of a successful
Germination, questions arose
About which species and color
The flower would be.

Like a renaissance painting the
Garden with its vines stems and fruit
Knew how to guide eyes towards the
Middle where an ornate ceramic pot
Hosted a lone blushed purple chrysanthemum.
It stood tall with its delicate slim curled
Petals pointing towards the sky.
In its near perfectness the chrysanthemum
Gloated of longevity to all those who
Viewed it under the glistening sun.

The Chrysanthemum's serrated leaves
Have begun to yellow slightly.
Initial concerns are dissipated when it is
Realized that like the seasons that
Come and go—change is inevitable.
Shifting eyes avoid the center of the garden
And ignorance is the solution
Because it is perceived that the
Hardy flower will resist further decay.

The singular dull chrysanthemum
Is now void of any life. Its problems
Were ignored until it completely
Dried up. Its once blushed petals and
Viridescent saw-toothed leaves now

Boast yellowed memories.
It has been relocated from the center
Of the garden to a shadowy corner
So that everyone could soon forget.

Despite all odds, hope remained that
New growth would arise, guiding
the flower into a new era of prosperity.
Everyday the fragile flower was watered
With saline sighs and sorrows
But nothing changed. Then one day,
At last, two slivers of green growth
Were spotted from afar on the withered stem.
Upon further inspection, it was but
Two praying mantis—one
Was consuming the other. Its head
Nearly chewed off.

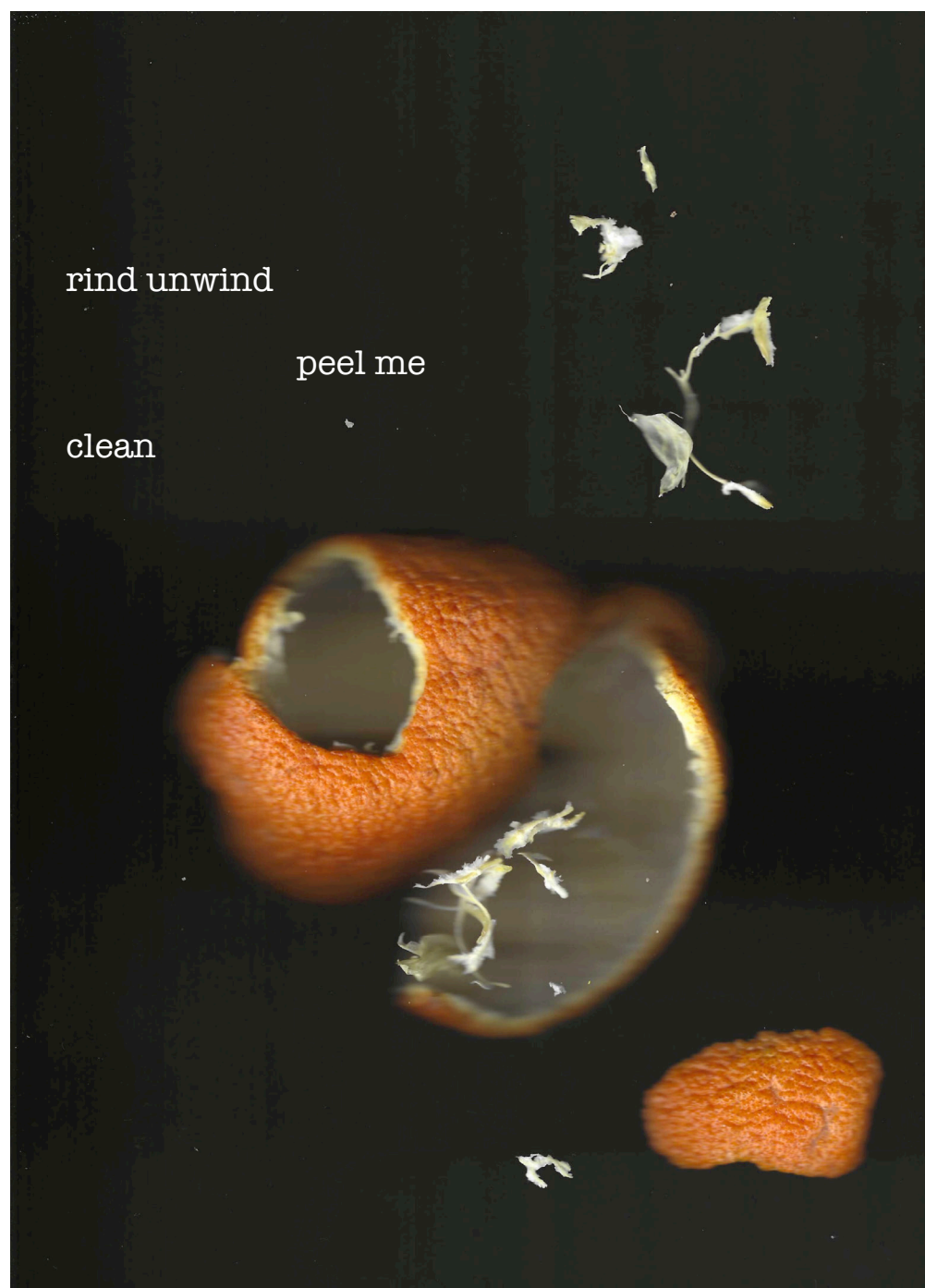
Men With Periods

Lio Jones

Men don't get periods
I'm told by a woman
On the internet
A collection of bigoted
Ones and zeros
Girl you are confused
Girl you are wrong
Girl you are damned
But boy am I bleeding
And oh man does it hurt
The words
The lining of my uterus
The doubt I'm fed by my own
The question of my transness
Lingering on the lips
Of well intended people
Allies
Friends
Internet activist
Saviors of souls in mall parking lots
Men do not get periods
But war paint flows from them
Marks of a body prepared for battle
Scars under chest
Teeth gritting
From the death
Of our sisters and brothers
You are willing
To let us bleed to death
Bullets and bills
But the blood of our men-stration
Is cursed and damned
There are Men
That bleed life
Leak it from their core
I am told
Men can have periods
By my body
A collection of love
Flesh and bone

Pith

Heather Mars





bitter cotton coating

what remains

Pith

RIPE

Bridget Kasch

I am born: a plum pit.
 slick with chewed up remains
 remains
 thick shell
 small heart
 bruised and soft
 back in that amniotic sack
 then split
a wet warm hornet hole
 for burrowing creatures
 (the flesh eaters)
 fermented on the stem
 sour like wine
 staining like blood

 I fall.
 from grace

the Original Sin: unpicked fruit
 wasted youth.

Mother Tree

By Aaron Menconi

My mother's house is a tree,
epiphytic belongings of people
come and gone, hanging on.

The basement's filled with ferns and moss.
Liverworts pile up in the spare room.
Her attic's rife with lichens and orchids
blooming with the memory
of whose it was.

Some are neglected,
collect dust and wilt.
Others live on the walls
in the sunlight
basking in recognition.

My mother's house is a garden of memories,
all the weeds in their proper place.
And she, the archivist of this herbarium,
can't bear to uproot them.
They may become endangered, one day.

Mark Twain Said

Sydney Ririe

that quote from Mark Twain
about how no one in the history of humans
had prayed for the devil

I laughed when I read it
Little me had been praying, considering the humanity of Satan
for years

alone and outcast
for messing up/
not doing enough/
being the necessary villain in the predetermined drafted destined creation story

how could I not worry and wonder if he was doing ok
was alone
was cold

the church I left has never asked
if I'm doing ok since /
invisible until I

return to the ranks
Of the divinely blessed
alone and outcast
for messing up/
not doing enough/
being the villain in a predetermined drafted destined story

my small weak simple child heart knew what

~love, do unto others, love is kind, neighbors as thyself~

meant long before I learned
my church couldn't practice what they preach

My Parents Used to Laugh at Me and Call Me Mom

Reid Goodman

*"You are younger
But you are the older sibling"*

I was told at six years old

*"He can't control his anger
But you can control your actions"*

I learned to hold my tongue

Hold my fury

Hold my sadness

Hold my laughter

Hold my breath

Learned to herd my little brother

Into my room

Telling him stories to build worlds

Around the crumbling

Learned to silence my crying

While locking my door

Hiding in the corner

Ignoring the yelling that followed me

I am not a girl

I am an eldest daughter

Give me your secrets

I will lock them away

I'll listen to your problems

While begging to a wall

Give me your anger

I will be your outlet

I'm the only one

Who won't fight back

Give me your blame

What am I if not a scapegoat?

So many explanations and reasons

Yet I have no excuse

Give me this history

I will bear it

So you may move on

Make it my cross

Raise the cast iron skillet

Above my head

Give me a blackened halo

An omen of my destruction

Bring it down upon me

I can take it

I can take it

I can-



Maybe we will always be looking for our fathers

Charlie Huxley

No Knives in the Kitchen

Lio Jones

Warning: This story contains discussions of suicide.

I've been home for six months now and I still feel like I'm surrounded by soft padded walls and sterile white lights. I got out of the institution on the day of my father's funeral, the routine of my existence still imprinted on me. Breakfast at 9:00, classes at 1:00, dinner at 6:00, and bed by 10:00. This was the ritual I lived by for those months I was locked away. For the first month I was there my father visited me every week on Saturday. This was the only day my routine was thrown for a loop. We would play board games and eat take-out pancakes from a cafe down the road. They say he died of a heart attack but, in a sick and cruel way, my family thinks he died of a broken heart.

My stomach still sinks when I think about my mother sitting across the cafeteria table from me. Her face was stained with tears and her eyes were swollen from days of crying. She whispered across the table that he collapsed in the garden. My mother's voice still haunts me from that day. Her vocal cords echoed and rumbled as she choked back tears.

I was able to make it to the funeral in time to hear my sister give the eulogy. I was still in my plain jeans, a white shirt, and rubber shoes surrounded by a sea of black. Compared to the cleansing brightness of the institute's halls, this crowd of mourners was like deep ocean water. Cold, pitch black, and filled with creatures I couldn't begin to understand.

After the funeral, my mother insisted that I live with her. I had nowhere else to go and the idea of sleeping on stiff hotel sheets made my skin crawl. Her house was like a museum, filled with the memories of her life with my father. I slept in my childhood bedroom. Mom had prepared the room for me before my arrival. The Mickey Mouse wallpaper was beginning to peel off and exposed a neon coral that I swear glowed in the dark. A twin mattress adorned with ancient Tinkerbell sheets was waiting for me. I had stepped out of college into a kingdom of routine and safety to only be thrown back into a life I was expected to thrive in.

My mother and I only see each other for short periods despite us living together. We sit down for dinner each night, both of us taking turns on who will cook our meal. Tonight, I am taking on this task to still grasp the security of routine. Today is Friday and Friday means spaghetti and meatballs.

Our kitchen is a *Better Homes* time capsule. Canary yellow cabinets speckled with impromptu crayon graffiti, rust orange countertops, olive green linoleum floors, and a novelty cat clock. The one with moving eyes and tail, a reminder of the last time this kitchen was remodeled.

The clock hung next to the stovetop, the face of it at eye level with me. It was 5:55 and I had five minutes to finish the best part of this dinner, the garlic bread. Slicing bread and spreading gloriously processed garlic butter would normally be an easy feat.

"Mom, can you get me a bread knife?" I popped my head into mom's room. She was hunched over a pile of clothes she had been slowly folding for a week now.

"Sure, just give me a moment." I knew that meant she would come out an hour later exhausted and barely able to eat.

"Mom, you can just give me the key, it'll be fine." My words sliced into her.

"No, Sarah I'll get it for you." She reluctantly pulled herself away from the mountain of clothing and into the kitchen. Smells of spiced tomatoes and garlic stuck to our nostrils, reminding our stomachs it

was time to eat. "What kind of knife did you need again?" The lockbox was filled with treasures that sang as she unlocked their cage. I felt oddly sympathetic for them. Being locked away out of fear. "A bread knife please." The clock now begging for my attention displayed that I only had two minutes before dinner time. "Mom, can you get the food out on the table, please." She handed me the bread knife. Her fingers trembled as they fell off the handle.

"Are you sure it's done?" She was clearly delaying her dispatch from the kitchen. I began to slice the bread, trying to ignore her eyes burning holes in the back of my head.

"Mom, you know it's been almost a year since the incident right? Maybe it's time we take the knives out of the lockbox." The heat from the oven reflected the annoyance in my voice. It was 6:03 and the pasta I worked so hard to make was now going to taste like disappointment. The bitterness of my home life tainting the sweet taste of the tomato sauce.

"I'll get the plates ready." Ignoring my plea for utensil freedom, mom meticulously began to set up our

dinner table. She placed white plastic forks next to the techno-colored plastic plates. The contrast ironically reminds me of my return home, plain white next to an overwhelming brightness of color. When I was in the hospital we only had plastic. That didn't change when I came home.

The only metal or glass was the flower vase my grandmother gifted us months earlier. Tonight, it was filled with a bouquet of irises and sunflowers. The purple and yellow tints swirl together in an almost nauseating pattern.

I wasn't going to give up tonight. I needed her to know I was ready for freedom, I was ready to live. "Mom, there's something we need to talk about. You can't keep acting like I'm still in that hospital bed." The pot of spaghetti made a loud thud while meeting the wooden table. Growling echoed out of our bellies like wild animals begging for scrap. I felt small at that moment. Her ears were taking in my words but her empty gestures of dishing out dinner told me she had already decided this was not the time. "I want to move out. I've been here with you since dad died and you still don't trust me." Mom twisted pasta on a fork idly staring down at the floral tablecloth. "I can't use knives, you won't let me leave the house without knowing my every move. Dad wouldn't let you—" Red tomato sauce flew in the air. Mom slammed down her plate in protest. Noodles were strung across the table like a crime scene. Meatballs meeting their fatality on the wooden floor.

"Your father would want you safe, Sarah! You might not agree with me but it's barely been a year." Finally, I was able to tempt the hurricane out of her. "So I'm sorry if I don't trust my daughter who I found face down in my bathtub. You broke our hearts and you expect me to trust you. If your father was alive he would want you *here!*" Her words rolled around in my head, *you broke our hearts!*

"Why don't you just say it? You blame me for dad's death. Angie said it the day I got out. He died of a

broken heart." *You didn't come and see me once!* Rational thoughts left me, I wanted to crush her. For her to feel the pain I did when she abandoned me in my time of need. "He saw me there! He held my hand and told me every time he saw me, that he loved me more than anything. I couldn't say it back." I wanted her to break like a twig, snap in the palms of my hands.

Tears began to fall off her cheek. "Sarah, I'm sorry. I want you to be safe and maybe I'm being too hard." She wiped red sauce and tears from her face. "Your father loved you so much. The day we had to leave you there, it broke him. He spent nights roaming the house trying to find out why you did it." The calm of the storm was filled with regret. I thought I wanted to hurt her, to make her feel my pain. I was trapped in the life of a child who disappointed her family. I couldn't have been more wrong.

"I was lonely. Not just sad or upset." I never talked about that day. My family held it close to our hearts like a secret. I felt loneliness so deep I could have been choking on seawater. I couldn't respond to my father, not because I didn't love him, I was drowning.

Our tears added to the carnage in front of us. Soggy, snot-covered noses wiping across our shirts. "I knew you and dad loved me. I had friends, I was ahead of all my classes. I tried, mom. I filled my life with people and school just so I didn't have time to be sad. That day, I couldn't pretend anymore." With those words, I was placed back into that moment. Warm water embraced me and filled the tub. Wet jeans chafing my thighs and my hoodie soaked to the brim. The numbing sting of making a life-altering choice.

"You didn't kill your father, Sarah. You didn't do that. I never thought you did." I don't know when she moved across the table but my mother's arms embraced me as we met the floor. Sobbing and clinging to each other, we both knew at that moment he was there with us, crying with us about the ghost of who we once were and laughing at the pile of spaghetti on the floor.



Ophelia Surrounded By Seagulls

Daniel Zysk

Painted Blue

Gigi Giangioffe-Rodriguez

My mom let me invite a few girls from school over to our house for a little birthday party. I was turning eight. After playing pin the tail on the donkey, but before we cut the cake and my mom and friends sang to me, the phone rang. I loved answering our phone, I always felt like a grown-up. I ran to the landline in our kitchen, linoleum tiles cold below my bare feet, and picked up the phone saying "Hello? Birthday girl speaking!" A cold, robotic, adult female voice told me, "An inmate at Solano County Jail is trying to reach you." I froze. I pressed the number she told me to press if I wanted to accept the call, but while I did so I shouted "MOM!" My mom came in asking "What honey?" and I told her what the robot lady said on the phone. My mom understood but didn't let her face give anything away. She told me to keep playing with my friends in the living room, and so I did. I had ice cream cake that year.

Later, after my last friend at the party left, my mom sat down next to me on our beige velour couch. "Gigi...you know that call you answered earlier?"

I looked down at the dark green tufts sticking up between my toes as I wiggled them deeper into our carpet.

"Ya. The robot lady said it was jail. Why was jail calling us?" I asked, but I already knew the answer. My dad had never had a job. My dad had never had a place of his own. My dad had a temper. My dad had addictions. My dad didn't make sense most of the time. My mom said my dad lived in the clouds. I never understood that phrase—living in the clouds. Grown ups said it and it was supposed to mean "an adult who doesn't act serious enough, an adult acting like a little kid" but I thought the only people who lived in clouds were angels and God. My dad was not grown up, and my dad was no angel. My dad was no God.

My mom let me know that my dad had been arrested and was in jail, and that he would be in jail for a while, long enough to maybe miss another birthday. I cried, partially because I was eight and confused but mostly because I thought that's what my reaction was supposed to be. Truthfully, not much would be different. My dad had moved out years before. I saw him some weekends, but never once stayed the night—there was no place to stay. I saw the way other dads at school acted with their kids, how they spoke, how they dressed, how they occupied their days. I knew the difference between sane and crazy people, and I knew the difference

between good and bad people. I knew my dad hovered somewhere in-between.

A few weeks later the first letter came in the mail. A few weeks after that another. A month or so later, another one. Every letter said the same thing, "How's school going? You're so smart. I'm sorry I'm in here. I love you." He wrote a lot of words but didn't say much. Each envelope was different though. Each one had a different ballpoint pen drawing on both sides of the envelope, colored in the middle with a subtle, pastel paint. Finally, after a few letters he deviated from his usual script and told me how he was able to paint the drawings. I had just assumed it was actual paint. I didn't know words like "contraband" and I knew nothing of our prison system and what inmates were or were not allowed to do, or touch, or see, or eat, or smell.

He told me that you can use m&m's to paint. He wrote, "You divide a bag of m&m's and separate them all into individual colors: brown, red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. Then you soak them in water for a while, and all the color runs off into the water, and there you have it, paint. I don't have a brush so I just use the eraser end of a pencil." That was the first thing my dad ever taught me how to do, and the only thing he intentionally taught me. The other things I learned from example. He taught me how to avoid my problems, he taught me how to overreact. He taught me how to put myself in dangerous situations, he taught me how to waste the little money I have. He taught me how to tell fart and poop jokes, and he taught me how to not take myself or anything seriously. He taught me how to eat an entire package of Nestle Toll House cookies in one sitting. He taught me how to use my imagination. I would get a letter from him and imagine him sitting in a jail cell with cement floors, a cement ceiling and cement walls, echoey and cold. I imagined him sitting at a little table outside of his cell in a common area, sorting and soaking m&m's in little paper cups, smelling milk chocolate while he painted lions and Snoopy and Woodstock on envelopes, eventually addressing them to me. I imagined him eating the soggy naked m&m's after painting with them because he wouldn't let good candy go to waste. I imagined him getting out of jail and getting a job. I imagined him picking me up from school and taking me to the dentist or over to friends' houses for slumber parties. I imagined him becoming a real adult. I imagined he never got arrested in the first place. I imagined my mom never met him at all.



Here I Prayed for Amnesty

Daniel Zysk

Relieving Conflict

Jackie Vondross

I woke up at 6 am sharp to the sound of my mother's alarm. I felt well-rested and wide-eyed and ready to start my day and do some great writing. But I was then gripped by a sudden worry. Is this a relatable way to start my day? Waking up early and well-rested? That isn't very interesting. That makes me sound like a boring, hard-working person, a morning person, and nobody wants to read about a person like that. So I went back to bed and after an hour of sub-somnolent struggle I eventually found my way back into sleep.

I slept until 11:30, when a need to urinate woke me up. I felt an incessant throbbing pain deep in my bladder that demanded relief. But I had also overslept, and I was very groggy, so walking over to the bathroom felt like an impossibly long journey. Then I had a shattering realization: I need to pee, but I don't want to get up to pee. This is a classic conflict. This is interesting. I grabbed my sleepy thoughts notebook from off my nightstand and began to explore this conflict. As I wrote, the pain in my bladder continued to sharpen, and as the pain sharpened, the acuity of my writing also sharpened. "Sometimes a man's greatest enemy is himself," is a thought I had, and then wrote down.

The pain of needing to urinate had by this point roused me from my post-hypnopompic grogginess. I was now plenty awake enough and could easily walk to the bathroom to relieve myself. But if I did that, would that really be interesting? It would be relatable, sure, plenty of people have been in this exact predicament before, and plenty of people are familiar with the bladder pain caused by being too tired to go to the bathroom and the subsequent high euphoric relief felt after finally urinating. But that didn't feel like a very interesting conflict. Even I, with my mastery of the English language, might fail to adequately engage the reader with such

milquetoast mediocrity. On the other hand, if I was to resolve this conflict in another, more interesting way, then it would follow that the story itself would become more interesting. So if, for instance, I relieved myself in bed, without getting up and going to the bathroom, then that would resolve my conflict in a creative way which would effectively sidestep the conflict caused by my wanting to stay in bed. It would be a resolution of the conflict without direct confrontation (very outside the box thinking, very interesting). It would no longer be relatable, but it would certainly be interesting. What could be more fascinating than a fully-grown, able-bodied man pissing himself because he'd rather not get up? Absolutely nothing! Because what sort of man would do a thing like that? What mighty streams of laziness and depravity must flow through a man for him to do something so careless and vile? And selfish too, it would certainly be selfish, because I of course wouldn't be the one to clean it up. That would be left to the maid. And oh, how my mind races trying to imagine what she might think upon discovering my magnificent lake of morning piss soaking its way into the mattress. Maybe afterwards I could interview her, and find out exactly what she thought. That could be a good primary source for writing about this very interesting day.

As I was thinking all of this through, deliberating the pros and cons of the act, and planning out the turns of phrase my piece could utilize, I took a chance, I made a leap of faith and simply acted. I started peeing. I'm typically a textbook over-thinker, and so I'm proud of myself for having the resolve to act promptly. The ferocious lake growing unstoppably around my hips felt warm and gentle, and I took a guilty pleasure in its hot embrace. And then, seemingly as soon as it had left my body, all the heat drained instantly out from the urine, as though some obscure but violent chemical reaction

had occurred the moment it touched the open air. The puddle of chilled urine then got to work sucking the heat out of my own living body, giving me such a shock that I leapt out of bed for the first time that day.

I showered and informed the maid about the mess in my bed, and she cleaned it up without any further questions. Freshly washed and in clean clothes, I resumed my writing. The adventures of that morning had given me several pages of really great writing, a lot of intriguing stream-of-consciousness material about the inner workings of the mind of the kind of person who can purposely piss themselves in bed. In my piece, I brilliantly showed the effect that an incident like that can have on a person's sense of self. I was my own Dostoyevsky writing about my own Raskolnikov. Throughout the afternoon, my writing slowed. I had not eaten anything yet and I decided to drive to the café for some coffee and a change of scenery in which to write.

When I pulled into the café parking lot, I looked over and saw a homeless man defecating behind the dumpster. That homeless man gave me an idea. Actually, he didn't exactly give me an idea, because really, I am quite sure that it was an idea that had long dwelled within me, and seeing the homeless man just now was simply what caused it to finally bubble to the surface of my consciousness. My idea is also much different from and much better than the idea of the homeless man, so I could not possibly have stolen it from him. In pursuance of this great idea, my own great idea which the homeless man revived within me, I ran out into the middle of the street, pulled my pants down, and began work on a story which would surely be full of conflict.

Senior Auditor

Laurel Reynolds

...her forehead a roadmap.

Over one eye
crevices channeling into latitudinal
left lid of
libidinal

Either Or.

Other eye restlessly tilting toward right:
longitudinal balance facing up
vertical divides

Visa Versa.

splitting hairs
gridding existence
keying into classrooms as
elder hearer
color coded orientation
may be scaled down index to being
here still
thus denoted

Speaking of eyes, in the legend of her forehead
there is the third one.

Look out.

There's a crater,

vicissitude symbol.

sun flares seismic shifts ley lines of forgone life in
pastel shades of brown spots
barnacles of squint age

...her forehead a roadmap.

dated schoolroom parchment chart of whorl pink
bluish
magenta
muted
above
her brow

Compass rose. Travel companion. must Atlas trust

Millennial space

Each country of her old life a different color on the dated schoolroom chart of whorl
Above her brows.
She carries above all else.

Who said the wrinkles on ones face are for all those wishes not fulfilled in one's life
Or some such
Did not know the squinting that lead to some such was
To tighten the view seen into a bearable semblance of the inner divination of the soul not because
one did not go there but because
The mercury retrograde phrase entered

Crevice of turning, yielding halting
Frowns and laugh

Today, an Olive Branch

Gigi Giangiobbe-Rodriguez

Smooth wooden beams
sanded-down,
like merciful hands reaching up to
offer the ceiling support,
[these ceilings have more support than—]
skylights letting the filtered light in,
illuminating our self-congratulation.
Missiles and bombs
handed-down
like merciless hands reaching out to
asphyxiate their dreams, then their lungs
[—these children in the land of olives]
they, too, turn toward the light
but no one asked them;
they did not want it to come.
When will someone—
anyone—
extend an olive branch,
bury our complacency six feet under the sand (like these babies in the land of milk and honey where the milk is
sour and the honey has all but dried up) when will the light stop pulling them toward it
[when will we stop guiding them toward this light!]
They need yesterday.
Tomorrow is too late.

Sinkholes and Setting Suns

Anya Krzoska

They will leave me one day
Or I will leave them
In a car or at the airport,
And I will hold them both as tightly as I can.
One of us will leave one day,
And it will be full of love and grief.
But above all, we will remember,

January, we three will stand on a beach talking about God and the majesty of the universe.

June, after my soul has been crushed, we will jump into cold sinkholes
On a river just north of the place we all hate.

July, we will swim in the ocean for the second time in two days
He will tell me not to turn my back to the waves
And his love will stand with his back turned to the waves
Because they cannot bear to be out of each other's sights.

August, we will drive 22 hours through the night to his parents house,
And for two days I will feel loved in ways I didn't know I deserved,
When I leave for a week to go to my home
It will be a trainwreck but I will tell them both a good story.
They will slowly help me put my soul back together,
Until we are the three of us standing on a beach again
Smiling in the setting sun.

We will leave each other eventually,
But it will not be because we have lost our love.
I will call them every night regardless,
And I will tell them both a good story,
One full of love and grief,
So that when I finally hang up the phone,
I remember that they have loved me and I have loved them.
And when I see them again,
I will tell them this story,
While we smile in the setting sun.

A NEURODIVERGENT ARTIST'S MANIFESTO

With this manifesto, I empower myself and other neurodivergent creatives by advocating against ableism and fostering neuroinclusivity in professional and creative environments.

I commit to dismantling barriers and fostering inclusivity within professional and creative communities, and advocating for anti-ableist practices.

This document recognizes that liberation for

neurodivergent people is the only path forward to liberation for all marginalized people. We are stronger together in our collective journey towards equality.

This manifesto is a fluid document, meant to be written on, scribbled on, and updated continuously with the viewer's own calls to action based on their experiences as neurodivergent individuals. 🧠

Written by Cherie Valenzuela

INCLUSION EFFORTS

- I demand profound structural changes within the arts sector; including genuine inclusion efforts and concrete targets for disability representation.
- I ask employers if they have trained staff on neurodivergent accessibility, and if they have access to training budgets as a standard process within projects.

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WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

- I demand personalized workplace accommodations and awareness of neurodiversity to address high rates of unemployment among individuals like myself.
- I collaborate with employers who accept my differences.
- When applicable, I ask for assistive technology, quiet spaces, and flexible work arrangements.

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RECOGNITION OF NEURODIVERSE TALENT

- I recognize the value of my neurodivergent traits and advocate for formalized roles that harness my unique abilities.
- I insist that those in power learn to recognize and value different communication styles or problem-solving approaches.

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NETWORKING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

- I call for networking events that accommodate my needs as a neurodivergent individual, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion.
- When applicable, I ask for advance agendas, alternatives to large group settings, and sensory rooms to regulate myself and access the world, breaking down some of the barriers to inclusion.

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REPRESENTATION AND TOKENISM

- I refuse to be tokenized based on my disability and call for genuine representation of my artistic talents, free from pressure to solely focus on my disabilities.
- I am an expert of my experience, and allies need to seek my input, feedback, and expertise to ensure that my perspective is accurately represented, respected, sought after.
- Like the rest of the human condition, neurodiversity is not a monolithic experience.

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HIRING

- I call for an end to biases in recruitment processes that disadvantage neurodivergent candidates like myself.
- I advocate for skill-based assessments and tailored accommodations to ensure fair hiring practices.
- I encourage employers to form diverse interview panels that include individuals from within the spectrum of neurodivergence.

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- I urge companies to establish tailored career paths that acknowledge and nurture my individual needs and abilities.
- I ask for flexible work hours or remote work options to accommodate sensory sensitivities or other challenges that I may face in traditional office environments.
- Overall, I know that my advocacy will result in improved employee retention, increased productivity, enhanced innovation, and a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

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COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

- I advocate for acceptance, patience, flexibility, and neuroinclusive communication practices to ensure effective communication.
- I ask for visual aids or written instructions when applicable.
- As Rachel Issan says, "Simply asking us, 'how do you best like to give and receive information' at the beginning of a work engagement will go a long way."

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MOVING FORWARD, I WILL:

- Initiate conversations and build solidarity to combat oppression and foster inclusivity for neurodivergent individuals.
- Amplify neurodivergent voices, fostering inclusivity and recognition for my fellow disabled and neurodivergent individuals.
- Remain optimistic about my ability to effect change and commit to collective action in building inclusive institutions.
- Confront internalized ableism in my journey from learning to teaching advocacy and activism, empowering myself and others like me.

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Balsamic and Oil

Audrey Malcolm

a stranger paid for our dinner once.
we were sitting on the same side of the table,
our bodies melding together
fingers laced, cheeks finding shoulder crooks

red wine bread balsamic and oil

i like to imagine she saw magic that night
a fountain for her to toss a shining coin
the young stars of a Shakespearean love affair playing
out their lines in the dim light of a restaurant

there's a box under my bed with every love letter
when we were we— you wrote me three the
words trailed, endings promised next time you
would have more to say

fresh faced love is like finishing
a long arduous race it seems, dragging
against your own loneliness
oh to be champions for our time

Fine Dining

Elysa Zahniser

I stare, and stare, and stare
at the back of the restaurant, into the kitchen
among the chefs, rushed and quiet
a restaurant so silent
I can hardly understand the quiet
among the music, and comfortable conversations
these strange acoustics
don't make sense to me
so it must be thanks
to their Michelin Stars
and the sparkling wine
I'll forever crave the taste
of wealth's hush

Darling, You're a Star!

Lizzie (Acid Lich)



Telescope

Kaitlyne Bozzone

Natalie had barely left the living room in three weeks, choosing to sleep sprawled out on the sofa rather than in the guest bedroom, not wanting to disturb it in the rare case of guests more deserving, and not wanting to disturb the main bedroom because... well, who would want to sleep with the dead? Her domain had been left to three rooms: the kitchen, the bathroom, and the living room, with its sad box of a television.

There weren't many books around—her father was never much of a reader—and the decks of cards she'd located in the basement her first week in the house were missing half of nearly every suit. All that left was the TV, which she really hadn't wanted to turn to. Her mother had always insisted that television rotted your brain, and so as a child Natalie had imagined that watching too many episodes of *Family Feud* would cause her melted brain to leak out her ears. But, eventually, everyone becomes bored enough to turn their back on their morals.

She started with the evening game shows—shiny, happy people fighting each other for a prize while a smiling, inhuman host egged them all on. She quickly grew to detest them all, which wasn't helping her mounting agoraphobia; the contestants were horrid and plastic, and they were just regular people like her—if they were terrible even on TV, what did that make the neighbors and grocery clerks and real people she actually had to interact with?

As the nights awake grew later and later, Natalie's foray into the television became stranger. When the game shows ended, the unpopular reruns of 60s sitcoms made an appearance, and she became lost in the world of miserable but smiling housewives and hateful husbands. She couldn't keep her eyes away from them, but no organs leaked out of her orifices, so she didn't stop. She'd channel surf through music videos and infomercials and televangelists, her own rabbit hole of self-destruction, and she loved and hated it in equal measure. She'd almost picked up the phone to call in an order for a compilation of the greatest hits of the last decade, until it featured that Bruce Springsteen song she'd always hated so much and she realized that maybe she should call her sister and have some sort of social interaction.

Instead, she changed the channel.

On the screen, there was a living room. The walls were a yellowed beige, the couch a shabby brown leather, and on it sat a young woman wearing an oversized

t-shirt and no pants. Natalie blinked, switched back to the previous channel, then to the strange scene again. Nothing had changed.

"What the hell," she muttered, scrolling several channels away and back again. The living room remained the same, and the woman on the couch did not move.

Natalie grabbed a strand of her greasy hair and watched as the woman on the screen did the same. She looked at the room around her: the beige walls, the ugly brown sofa, the t-shirt hanging from her shoulders advertising a liquor shop she'd never heard of. The woman on the TV mimicked her.

She ran into the bathroom and vomited into the bathtub.

The alarm clock in the corner cast the entire bedroom in an eerie green glow that flashed with intensity. It was three in the morning and Natalie couldn't sleep, couldn't return to the living room and face the TV, so she stood in the doorway to her father's bedroom and waited. Eventually, the clock would read a more appropriate time, and she would walk out of the house with all of her things and never return. It just wasn't time yet.

The rising sound of static filled Natalie's ears, but she didn't leave the doorway. She remained safe where she was, on the border of two dangerous places she couldn't quite confront, and she knew leaving the spot meant certain doom. Still, the static continued, its volume increasing to the point that she had to cover her ears, and grew louder still; she wasn't sure the TV was even capable of such a volume.

And then, even with her hands over her ears, she heard voices. Whispers, buried under the static, but loud enough that she was certain that it was what she was hearing. Her knees desperately wanted to give way, to give in to the urge to abandon her post and explore the sound, to see if she was still as alone as she hoped and feared.

She returned to the living room, one hand against the wall of the hallway for support the whole way. The static was certainly coming from the TV, the snow on the screen evidence of it. The sound was nearly unbearable so close to its source, but Natalie still came closer, kneeling in front of the television and listening for the voices.

As her head neared the speaker, the static cut off, and the scene of the living room returned to the screen. She gasped at the sight, the angle of view showing her own back, herself in front of the TV.

"No fucking way," she whispered, standing and turning to the spot the camera should've been hiding. If her father had done this before he'd died, what was the reason? Was there any, or was it just that he was still as much of a sick fuck as he was when Natalie's mother divorced him five years ago?

But there was nothing. No camera, no hole where a camera could be. She spent the next three hours scouring the wall for any evidence of what was watching her, the artificial lighting giving way to an orange sunrise peeking through the blinds, before she gave up.

She turned to return to the sofa but stumbled when she saw the screen. The woman on the TV was no longer copying her actions. Instead, she stood, facing the "camera" dead on, an eerie smile spread across her face. On a physical level she was nearly identical to Natalie, but she could no longer recognize herself in the woman. When she waved a hand in front of her own face, the woman on the TV didn't mimic it. When she sat on the couch, head tilted like a curious dog, the woman didn't move.

Natalie stood to approach the TV. There was only so much she could take of the woman's haunting stare, but as she reached for the power button the screen returned to static, the sound filling Natalie's brain with a mind-numbing hum. And then the voices returned.

She strained to make out what they were saying, but she began to think it might not even be words. Still, there was a begging tone, like someone was pleading to be set free.

In the kitchen, hidden behind a mound of unwashed dishes, Natalie found the phone. She dialed the number for a hotline she'd seen an ad for nights before, and waited. When it finally stopped ringing, she didn't even wait for the representative to start her spiel.

"There's something wrong with my television," she said, pressing the receiver flush to her face in the hopes to amplify her voice and drown out the static.

"Dear, I think you have the wrong number," the woman from the hotline said.

"No," Natalie insisted. "Because it shouldn't be possible. TVs don't show live feed of your living room and-and turn to static when you try to turn it off. They don't whisper to you."

"I see," the woman said in a tone that suggested she didn't really see at all. "So you're hearing things, seeing things?"

"But I'm not crazy." Natalie glanced into the living room, where the fuzz on the screen had once again been replaced by her doppelganger smiling ominously. The static still rang through the house.

"Of course you're not. Now, what's your address? I'll send someone to come check on you, dear."

Natalie jammed her finger on the end call button. For as much as she knew she should be doubting her own mind, she also knew she wasn't seeing things. Her sister would call it grief, the hotlines would try to check her into the hospital, and even the ghost of her mother would blame it on her lack of fresh air, but Natalie was not fucking crazy.

"Of course you're not," her voice said from the living room, tinny and distorted as though coming from a speaker. Her stomach dropped, but she ventured out to see what had stolen her voice. The woman on the TV sat on the floor of her version of the living room, and it was Natalie's turn to mimic her.

"I don't understand," she whispered, wiping hot tears from her cheeks.

The woman's smile didn't reach her eyes. That's the problem, Natalie thought. That's why she doesn't look like me. That's why she's wrong.

"Oh, I'm not wrong," the woman on the TV said, and Natalie swore her smile grew hostile. "I'm more right than you, aren't I?"

Natalie's stomach turned.

"It would be so easy for me to walk outside," the imposter continued in Natalie's voice. "Look at me. Look at how easy it is for me to smile. When was the last time you smiled, hm?"

She didn't know. It was long before her father died, before her mother died. Before she found it hard to leave the house or talk to other people. And now, she couldn't bring herself to utter a word.

“Pathetic,” the woman hissed, but the smile never left her face. “You’re as good as dead.”

Natalie screamed, an inhuman, blood curdling sound, but she wasn’t sure what else she could do. Good as dead, but not yet—the dead couldn’t scream, they couldn’t take up space.

She stormed away from the TV, into the main bedroom, her father’s room no longer. Hers. In the closet, he kept a rifle. Natalie didn’t know how to shoot, and it wasn’t loaded, but it didn’t matter. She retrieved it, and liked the way it fit in her hands, a cold, smooth sense of power.

This house was hers, this room was hers, this gun was hers. And she was going to wield it. A woman behind a television screen couldn’t do much, but Natalie wasn’t going to give her the opportunity.

The TV was frozen on the imposter’s eerie, smiling face; it made a perfect target. Natalie didn’t bother trying to shoot, she just brought the barrel of the gun down into the screen, the sound of glass shattering breaking through the static still filling the house. The woman didn’t budge, and so again and again Natalie slammed the rifle into the TV, sobbing and laughing hysterically with each little bit of damage she caused until, finally, it was destroyed. The screen went dark, and she was alone again.

The house was quiet for 37 seconds. The static returned, the voices whispering through the din, and Natalie fell to her knees in the pile of glass.

the limit does not exist (what a seizure looks like)

Lizzie (Acid Lich)





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ARTISTS, AND CREATIVES!**

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