

Spring 2022

Persimmons

Art & Literary Magazine



*...These I painted blind.
Some things never leave a person:
scent of the hair of one you love,
the texture of persimmons,
in your palm, the ripe weight.*

— *Li-Young Lee*

Spring 2022

PERSIMMONS

Art & Literary Magazine

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*I needed to try
Needed to fall
I needed your love I'm burning away
I need never get old*

- Nathaniel Rateliff

*“The world is shit, but I’ll shovel
like hell in my little corner.”*

- Matt Henriksen

*I can't believe I squandered
those gemstomes I used to have, I
thought to myself, mournfully and
with some disdain, while at that
very instant continuing to squander
my current gemstomes.*

- Mikko Harvey

Table of Contents

Lie /lī/ verb , by Joshua Earle.....	11
“I love you” Never Fixes Anything , by Halle Preneta.....	13
I Submerge, Leaving Nothing , by James Griffin-Frankel.....	15
The World’s Mouth , by Noah Magill.....	16
Title IX Complaint Against the Shower Curtain , by Halle Preneta.....	17
Good Luck , by Sarah Tomasi.....	21
In the Beginning , by Molly Fording.....	22
To the Skeleton in the Woods , by Lorien Kauffman.....	23
Fish Feet , by Sarah Tomasi.....	24
Alluvium , by Ellie Roman.....	25
Grenadine , by Emily Hirsch.....	27

Table of Contents

Lucky , by Julia Holton.....	28
Three Postcards , by Molly Fording.....	29
A poem for the one I , by Emmaline Rogers.....	31
I Think the Muses are Vain , by Noah Magill.....	33
The Mysterious Night , by Ayman Wadud.....	35
Common Sparrow , by Ayman Wadud.....	37
Pleading Peacock , by Noah Magill.....	39
The Kiss , by St. Orlon of Undercross.....	41
The Source , by Joshua Earle.....	45
Memento Mori , by Julia Holton.....	49
Gone! , by Isabel Keener.....	50

Letters *from the* Editors

Grant Holt

It is a strange feeling to be retiring as an editor. Since my first year at Kenyon, this publication and its community have been an integral part of my college experience. Now, at the end of my Kenyon and Persimmons career, I could not be more excited for the magazine's future. Over the past four years, we've built a community of artists and writers committed to making Kenyon's creative culture more inclusive and experimental. I said this last year, but I will say it again — the best part of being an editor has been watching Persimmons grow — the magazine, but also my fellow editors and staff. To Claire Oleson, Brent Matheny, Sophia Fornwalt, Cassie Coale, and Sam Hafetz, thank you for the memories. Lastly, I'd like to give my eternal gratitude to Molly Fording, to whom Persimmons is passed on. She's a writer of the first degree, and a good friend.

Molly Fording

As another school year draws to a close, I want to thank everyone who submitted work to Persimmons this year, everyone who attended our events and voted on submissions, and everyone who reads this issue of Persimmons. Being part of this community remains one of my favorite parts of life at Kenyon, and the creative work we have the chance to share in the magazine always inspires me. I also want to take this chance to thank and congratulate our fearless senior editor, Grant Holt, for his years of leadership of Persimmons. Grant, your creativity, integrity, and kindness are a huge part of what makes Persimmons so much fun; you're an incredible writer, leader, and friend. Congratulations on your graduation—the Persimmons community that you've helped to create will miss you!

Sam Hafetz

I am excited to present “Persimmons Magazine” to you all. It has been a great semester, super stimulating. I hate seeing words on pages, at this point gives me paranoia more than anything. Yet, there are moments in this magazine that transform my relationship with the English language. In Molly Fording’s poem “In the Beginning,” Fording writes, “Once, I cried watching a video of the moon landing. I just couldn’t imagine the new words for feelings we’d have to invent.” Lines like this remind me of the way language can aid your relationship to your imagination, it can invite the reader to imagine their own spaces of touch, hearing, and sight. They can reimagine their gaze of the material and immaterial world. In this world of technological development and everyone being available to view events so quickly, sometimes literature serves as the best reminder that we can participate in shaping new forms of meaning out of the world presented to us. That even though I feel like language oversaturated us, it does remind us of our own capacities of self determination and autonomy.

Cassie Coale

This year of Persimmons was one I shall not forget. The people who dedicated their time to creating another small testament to this moment are some of my favorite at Kenyon. I feel particularly proud of the art and writing that we're publishing this year, and I feel deeply indebted to my fellow editors - Grant, Sam, and Molly - you really have taken Persimmons to another level with your passion, dedication, and pure enthusiasm. Truly. I feel the work I put towards this issue pales in comparison to yours. My thanks to those who submitted - whether accepted or declined - your creativity is awe inspiring.

Lie /lī/ verb

Joshua Earle

To assume

(of a person)

(of a thing)

(of a dead person)

a resting position

Lie in wait

“the solution lies”

To remain

(of something abstract)

(of a place)

(of an action)

in a specified state

The position of a golf ball

“his body lies”

To deny

(of an action)

(of a charge)

(of a claim)

its inevitability

Let something lie

“restitution would lie”

To escape

(of a grandfather)

(of a breath)

(of a dead person)

us

Lie in state
(of the corpse
of a person
of importance)
“to lie; to haunt”

“I love you” Never Fixes Anything

Halle Preneta

I spout “I love you”
hoping I can rebuild
what I have broken,
knowing that every house
on a rocky foundation
is always bound to crumble.
That water damage
is always inevitable
when we are drowning.
That when I sleep,
my body attempts to build itself
into the woman
I will never be.
We cannot fix
what we do not understand.
We cannot build
out of nothing.
I build with words
softly spoken or
never said.
“I love you”’s hanging in the air
like border walls,
barbed wire spiked,
spilling blood from
my all too caring heart.
The “I love you” bullet
taking everything
I have ever loved
so much
away.
We build so we can forget.
So we can stay safe.
Convince ourselves
that our destruction
is not ours.

“I love you” was never mine.
I stole it from my ancestors
who had walls
before they had me.
Who whispered it softly amongst themselves at dinner parties
and shouted it across
whole houses covered
in pictures of the living
and the dead.
“I love you” was the band-aid on my knee when I jumped off
my grandpa’s couch
and came crashing down onto
the table below me,
crying as he bandaged me up.
“I love you” was my friends
cleaning up my own vomit
on a bus
in a foreign country,
knocking on the door
to pass me paper towels
brimming with all the poems
and guts and shit
that live inside me.
“I love you” was the day you held me when I cried
even if it was just
a dream.
“I love you” was the parts of me I gave away.
The parts you ripped out
and shredded to pieces
and then had the audacity
to think
“I love you”
would fix what you did.
“I love you” cannot fix
what is already broken.
We cannot build
with nothing.

I Submerge, Leaving Nothing

James Griffin-Frankel

The indifferent rays of blinding fluorescent day beat down on me,
My mirror shattered as blackness consumes every angle.
Churning water creeps up to an imperceptible high while I find a
cold, endless chasm of metal
taunting me, a sense unconjurable in nature.
I submerge leaving nothing but my pathways swelling with darkness.

Dark chasms erupt from purity, the blossoming buds of roses erupting
all at once.
I stare into the red heart of oblivion decked out in chivalrous mistletoe.
The blazing red eye of life stares me down.
Fiery birds spun of molten ash pour down the cerebellum of churches
decked in glory.
Beady darkness, dust of former glory

The wadi's arms outstretched, entrancing what was lost.
The red eyes of lady death,
The red face of lady death,
Formulating the indignity of the scene.
Crows align and blur my small window that peaks into the vast,
Unexplored world.

As the sanguineous gloom swells,
And grows sour in my mouth,
She and the crows descend into one being
And I, the faintest incarnate breath forcibly pulverized,
drown in ambiguous screams.

The World's Mouth

Noah Magill

The world has a mouth
What is there to learn from this?
It chews leaves fallen

Title IX Complaint Against the Shower Curtain

Halle Preneta

What the fuck is this??

There are not one,
not two,
but *three*
gaps between
the shower curtain
and the wall,
allowing anyone to freely get a peek
at what's inside
like looking through a peephole
in a door
or listening to the next room
with your ear
against the wall.

Seriously??

The one thing I want
during a shower is
peace
and you just took that
away from me?
Others able to get a peek
at what a woman's body looks like
whenever they want?
Don't you know that
I do not have a woman's body?
That I am not Venus?
That I am not Aphrodite?
That I am simply me?
The strands of brown hair
slinking into the drain.
The red splotches
on my shoulders

I don't even know what they are
or how they got there.

The red scar on my stomach
from when I had appendicitis in third grade, the memory of when
my mom would take me down the hallway
into a waiting room with a fish tank
and I would make the eel talk
because that's the kind of person I am flooding over me
like the water dripping
down my back.

My veins
bleeding blue
like you could string them up
like fairy lights,
watch them glow
in the dimly lit sky
of my heart.

My heart glowing
as I slink into a towel.
Attempt to dry myself
quickly

so no one can see
the body
I never asked for.

Look, I know a body image poem
is the most 14 year old thing
I could ever write.

You have seen this poem before,
I know you have.

Maybe you have even written this poem before on bathroom mirrors
and post it notes,
anything you could quickly find.

But even here,
standing in a communal bathroom shower, the warm water hitting
against my back like a mallet to a bass drum,

I know
I am imperfect.

I am the last puzzle piece
that does not fit
with any of the other
puzzle pieces,
clunky and frustrating
and wrong.

I am the plastic piece in your dishwasher that has broken off
and now you can't use
the top rack
because it won't pull out
of its home.

I am the chipped mug
you used to have your coffee in
but when you cut your tongue on me, you threw me away.

I sing way too loudly
when I'm scared
and have panic attacks
in bathrooms,
hearts ticking
like little time bombs
against white porcelain
ready to explode
at any second.

I agonize over talking to you,
draft words I hope make sense in my brain
but then lose them all
when I see your smile.

I love way too quickly
and resort to being alone
when I really need help.

I am not perfect.

This shower curtain
is the perpetrator of
my vulnerability,
allowing others to see
the internal organs
and emotions

that make up this body
that's been given to me.
This body I'm still learning how to love, even at eighteen,
even at nineteen,
probably forever
and that's okay.
I just didn't need other people
to see the battle,
to hear the war cry,
to know I'm not perfect
before they learned
who I really am:
Just a girl
trying her best
to live.

Good Luck

Sarah Tomasi



In the Beginning

Molly Fording

First the trumpets. Then—now listen closely—the wailing. It's summer, but I dream of summer. I read essays about birds. I think of tiny golden canaries, blinking out from the safety of a man's huge fist. Who are you? I've been following you along the shoreline at night, like a plover. Here, I made the coffee just the way you like it. Here, I made everything just the way you like it. Mother rabbits do not have the strength to carry their young by the neck, the websites say. I too could move important things without my mouth, you say, if I was so inclined. So many things in this world, and you've thought about barely any of them. Two people having a conversation are not really having a conversation, they are repeating the words of pop songs, over and over. Speak in whispers. Speak in pixels of sound. Eat lemons, rind and all. Get drunk and sing a very slow ballad in a very high voice. I, too, would have sacrificed something vital for power, power, power. I don't care if it's you inside. Each time you remember something, you dunk it in a bucketful of bleach. Once, I cried watching a video of the moon landing. I just couldn't imagine the new words for feelings we'd have to invent, if everybody could see it for themselves, the Earth, rising up out of the forever darkness.

To the Skeleton in the Woods

Lorien Kauffman

I spy beneath the ivy pearly plateaus of your brow.
You're vine-caressed in fading rest beneath the maple boughs.

Til light grows dim, I'm safe within the huddle of the trees I might
just tarry, ever wary, with you to shoot the breeze.

Did you whisper to the brambles, did you gamble with the brush?
Did you shiver in your shambles when you heard the songbird hush?

And did you, drowsy dry-bones, whistle tritones til you died or cry in
rousing sorrow knowing both your hands were tied?

I am a light-toed wand'rer, see, I cannot linger long.
I only hoped your ruins might just make a charming song.

My friend, I kneel to you and then, with reverential smile, I pull and
prize your skull away and place inside a candle.

For I am not one bound to earth, but neither am I dead And thus, for
want of guide, I make a lantern of your head.

Fish Feet

Sarah Tomasi



Alluvium

Ellie Roman

You know a good storm down there feels like God.
When Zora was alive a giant lay down in Lake Okeechobee,
displacing His bathwater with His unfolding legs,
so it spilled over the edges of His tub.
We pulled the plug and crawled like Lilliputians over Him
with ropes and levees and the introduction of bamboo.

Maybe you don't know the flood I'm talking about, but if you've
been
you know the air down there shakes out its frustration against the
skin,
shakes it out in the roseate spoonbill's passing, heat, bug wings,
and the engines of the fan-tailed boats.

Your guide will tell you it's alright to feed the gators.
Leave a wake of Jet-Puffeds and they'll come and go, and go and
come again.
In the warm backwashing water things are drifting and insected,
and all dead matter rotting will show marshmallow white.

Further out and south in the mangroves, the water heaves like lungs,
inhaling me in my green boat and sighing me out again.
The ocean's scrubbed by oysters, piled bodies, mucus-filmed.
The ocean's breath grows labored as the sleeper starts to stir.
The first white naturalist down here, you might not know who he
was,
but he called this the wet death of the world, the sinking end, the wet
world's ending,
two hundred fifty years ago, and it's still here.

Look at this place.
Look at its swamp, its shamelessness.
If you can't love this place then you can't love it,
but if you love this place then you do and then you don't and then
you do and don't again.
Most of us arrived here in alluvium.
We were deposited by water, water, and the one way out is waterward,
and the tide comes always snoring in, and down into the caves.

I float like foam or scum atop the warm green water.
The fevered giant yawns me in, and coughs me spinning out to sea.

Grenadine

Emily Hirsch

Pebbles poke in egg-white palms

Plum freckles underneath

sticky heat cauterizes

Near Shirley-Temple teeth

Pooling in my cupids bow

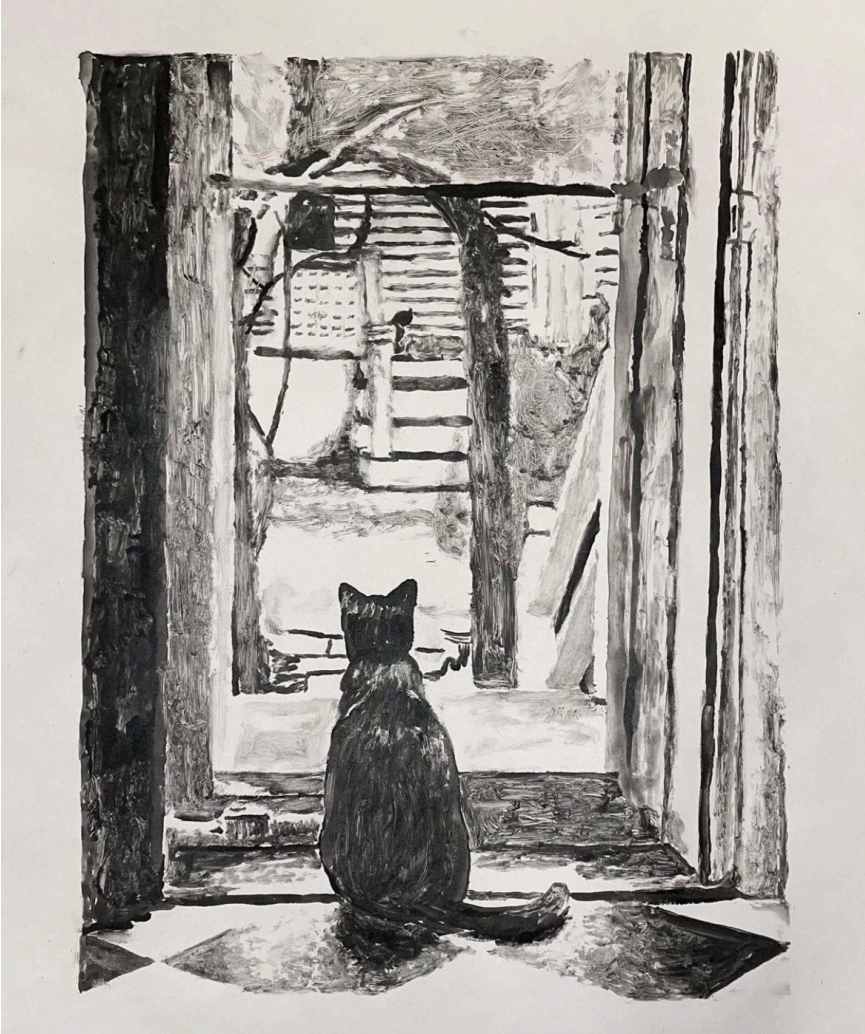
diluted with saline

Swill sickly stains from my chin

Mix spit with grenadine

Lucky

Julia Holton



Three Postcards

Molly Fording

Dear Ash,

How are you? I'm living near the ocean now.

You would like it here; we could stand on the beach and be quiet, just watch the tide coming in. I know you hate the water in Florida.

The other day I wrote our names in the sand on the big, empty beach and saw the waves wash in and erase it, leaving letters that spelled out some secret, nonsensical word.

If you came to stay, we could build sandcastles like kids again, if that's what you wanted. It's the off-season, so really I'm the only one

here. Look, I'm sorry I haven't been answering your calls.

I wouldn't know what to say on the phone. I thought

I'd write you this, instead. Drive up to New Jersey and stay with me. This morning I stood at the window and saw what I think was a shark fin, way out at sea.

Love,

Dear Ash,

How are you? I'm the ocean now.
Here; stand and be quiet,
tide coming. You hate the water. I saw
the waves erase, leaving some secret.
If you stay, we could build like kids, if. Really
I'm only here. I'm answering. I write.
Drive up and stay. This morning
a shark fin, at sea.

Love,

Dear,

You? Ocean now.
Here; and be quiet,
coming. The water,
Leaving. Stay,
We could build. I'm
here. Answering.
Write. Morning
A shark fin sea.

A poem for the one I

Emmaline Rogers

Devour me whole. Let the sour clinging to the dregs of my soul
flavor the next lips yours touch. Suck salt from the tips of my
hair. The strands will get stuck between your teeth and my DNA
will be in your mouth again Finally! Don't you miss the sweat
budding under my breasts? Don't you miss—what I can't
forget—what I can only hope for again? Devour me whole!
Devour, devour! How are you ignoring me? I am strung — a
thread — the weight of a spider could splinter me. Be the dew
accumulating all over my body. Touch my petals, leaves, the stem
of me. Your ignorance is insufferable. Break me between your
teeth like candy. Feel me cut your tongue. Suck on me.

*“The blank page gives us
the right to dream.”*

- Gaston Bachelard

I Think the Muses are Vain

Noah Magill

I think the Muses are vain,
Who are they to touch human hearts, and
Let flow pretty pose with colorful paper, with
Thoughts and landscapes scrape mortal souls, while
Passage and time deepen the impression, but
I feel nothing but gratitude for their depths

For,
It is so painful when they are gone, when
Science and philosophy can't help you mourn, so
You wordlessly choke at your love and failures, and
there is just hurt that sits in you, and
you need someone to pry it out, and
no one is there, and
cries do nothing, and
your face is red, and
it just hurts, and
tears burn, and
Where are they

Whose job it is to be there for Us when no one else is?
Can Melpomene pull nothing from my mother's grave?
Is that melancholy not worthy?
Does my life long self loathing for failing to protect those
Who needed me prove too short for you, Calliope?
Was Homer truly so uniquely worthy?
When I pace and punch why must you keep
Distance Terpsichore? Something to do more worthy?
But Clio, you wound me worst of all,
Please, I beg, provide an avenue
To let the wretched past go that proves,
Proves me to be unworthy.

So,
Are you not providers of relief to the glass soul, of
Human hearts and minds, if so
Find the courage, and
Do your fucking job of cruel passion, to
Let poor sore hearts rest.



The Mysterious Night (left)

Ayman Wadud

Common Sparrow (right)

Ayman Wadud



Pleading Peacock

Noah Magill

Would you split the sky for me?
Call it a true act of love
Grant me the heavens as blood sacrifice
Split without need or specificity,
Just let it be as the cosmos pour
In unnatural communion with desiring hands
I swear, that life currency will be valued.
Simply beckon the sickle and start.
It would be greed if done by me,
Cruel if I commanded,
But a favor, a truce, between fair lovers
What could anyone call it but beauty?

Refuse, I would never leave
However, watch the stars bathe in their blackness!
Please, I beg relentlessly

Let poor leeches suckle and wild coyotes naw
I can see the curved sickle!
Give me an opportunity to outstretch my tongue
Kissing the boundless void.
Weeping I caress
As mourners contort
I ask you to love me violently,
Nothing less can soothe my burns!
Part crystal cloud despite wicked wind

You may turn away, I could never be mad,
And if such a thing wounds your being, I prefer
you to not,
Knowing us both this isn't so,

Those constellations have had their centuries
I simply want a spark.
They are gods and I a cuttlefish!
No one carves, deaf to cries?

I will not give my love: you have it already
I will not give my admiration: it is yours
Please do it because I am no hated enemy

My throat grows heavy and eyes burn with salt.
Please!
I beg relentlessly!
For my dismissed sanity!
Would you split the sky for me?

The Kiss

St. Orlon of Undercross

“After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.” Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.” John 13:21-26 NIV

As the last bands of red orange light oozed from a lazy summer sunset, eleven hooded figures shuffled from a dingy highrise slum, out onto the rain-slicked, neon-streaked sidewalks of New Absalom. The twelfth man, the amator divinus, the betrayer, not wishing to distress the others gathered in that hallowed place that night, quietly pulled the revenant aside as the last of their guests departed.

“My beloved, how could I ever be the one to betray you? Are there any more dedicated to our cause, to destroying the Thanatos Group and conquering death, than I? Are there any more loyal to you, the apple of my eye, than he who is bound to you through the sacred rights of marriage?” At this, the betrayer broke down in sobs, inconsolable in his weeping. The revenant walked across the room and comforted him. They lay down next to each other, and the revenant wrapped the betrayer, his husband, in a loving embrace.

As the betrayer’s sobs ebbed into sniffles, the revenant brought his mouth to the twelfth’s ear and whispered “what I ask of you, the man dearest to my heart, will not be an easy burden to bear.” The revenant wiped tears away from the betrayer’s eyes. “I am not long for this world, my love. They know of our plans, and soon

enough, they will send their butchers to claim what they believe is rightfully theirs. This body will be battered, beaten, and ultimately broken. This outcome is unavoidable. But it is only through your actions that these torments, and all of our labors leading up to this moment, will amount to anything.”

“Master, I am but a man. Of flesh and blood, governed by the impulses of my bestial nature. What you ask of me is a burden which my frailty could never bear. How could I betray you, throw you to the wolves snarling at our gates, and leave you to die? Is it not our mission, our sacred duty, to prevent that which you ask me to do to you? In the past, I have always seen wisdom in what you’ve said, but this betrayal that you ask of me bears no marker of your former sagacity. It is a monstrous task, and a cruel one to place upon my shoulders.” The betrayer shook, in bitter anger, despair and agony, and the revenant pulled him tighter, planting a comforting kiss upon his forehead.

“As I have told you many times before, I am not your master. We are all siblings, equal in standing before our common goal.” As he said this, he gently brushed the hair away from the betrayer’s eyes, bringing their faces together as he spoke. “I will not command you, it is not in my nature. I only ask that you lend me your ear one more time.”

The betrayer nodded, and braced for the worst. “The thing that I ask of you will be incredibly difficult. I know this. I too, am saddled with the burden of those sacrifices we prepare to make in our war against death. Amongst the twelve, it will be you who must endure the greatest anguish as they break my body, and if you do carry out my monstrous request, in your moment of greatest need, you will be made an outcast by the remaining eleven. I know all of this. Yet I still ask this of you, my one true love, because there is no other way forward but death. Only through this cruel request can I cheat my own death, and in so doing, liberate humanity from death’s cold grasp. Among the twelve, only you can carry out my final wishes. The other eleven would falter, and so it is to you that I must entrust

this dreadful burden. If you do not betray me tonight, my love, death will prevail, and all that we have done will be for naught.” At this, the revenant joined the betrayer in weeping. He wailed, and cried, and tore his clothes in despair at the hell which awaited him.

Seeing this, and witnessing the full extent of his husband’s grief, the betrayer took the revenant’s face in his hands, comforted him, and planted a gentle kiss upon his lips. “I will do this thing that you have asked of me. It will tear me apart, and I may never recover, but I will do it, out of love for you.”

The revenant and the betrayer laid together, silent, for a long time after that. They held each other, indulging in the simple joys of physical touch. Their heartbeats became synchronized, their breathing perfectly matched. They would never forget the love that they shared that night. As the revenant drifted off into slumber, resting so that he may endure the coming agonies of morning, the betrayer rose from the couch, moving carefully so as not to wake his sleeping prince, and slipped off into the night.

“In the morning, they brought the revenant out to the rock at calvary, where they had prepared the metal monstrosity for him. They bound his arms in shackles, affixing him to the cross with his arms outstretched. Once the council of the Thanatos Group had been thoroughly satisfied with the preparations, the deathpriest tasked with carrying out the execution flipped the switch, and their steel abomination whirred to life. With an awful, ear-grating hiss, sharpened metal rods shot out from the cross, piercing the revenant’s flesh as he wailed out in agony. As they watched him writhing before the power of their machinery, the executives of the Thanatos Group jeered at him, mocking our noble leader as he seemed to crumble before their power. They called him “con-man” and “charlatan”, and jabbed his sides with a cattle prod, whooping with laughter as his body twitched and spasmed at the electric shocks. Soon enough, they grew tired of their plaything, shuffling off one by one to carry on in their twisted scramble for wealth and power. The twelve cried out, wailing for the revenant. None wept harder for our savior than the betrayer, but we,

the eleven, spurned him, ignoring the miserable wretch, for we believed he had abandoned our great friend and leader at the crucial moment. As the revenant neared death, body going numb, he was washed over with an overwhelming air of clarity. He looked upon the twelve, smiling warmly at the betrayer for the service he had rendered and said, "today, our task is completed. Through the betrayal of the twelfth, we conquer death and come into ever-lasting life. Reconcile with your brother, who has served me more than any other amongst you could, and rejoice together for the victory we have won today." After he had said this, the revenant drew his last breath. His body lay still for a moment, before a blinding light issued forth from his shattered corpse, racing down the hill and quickly enveloping the whole of New Absalom. The twelve watched this in awe, and each soul present wept with joy. With a great shuddering crack, the earth split, and swallowed up the Thanatos Building whole. All the world's people rejoiced. For they had defeated death "

-Mavis 27:17-35

The Source

Joshua Earle

They're not taking another minute from you. Your mother warned you not to speed in Georgia, but you haven't seen a cop since you got into the state and you're nearly past Savannah, so there's no obvious reason why you shouldn't keep living in the left lane like you have been for the past four hours. Besides, everyone else on the road is speeding, though not nearly enough, and not with half as much cause. The ETA is four twenty-three. Good, that's down another five minutes, though you suspect that the Mini Cooper's navigation system overestimates how long the drive takes anyways. You know how long the drive is; it's been a ritual route every summer since your grandparents moved from Arizona, and seven hours is way off the mark. You're aiming for somewhere between six and six and a half. You haven't stopped for gas since Charlotte, but like hell you're pulling off into Savannah's mess. What's in the tank right now won't get you to Florida, but it will be enough to get past the city. At least, it would be if Mr. South Carolina would pass a goddamn semi! Your eyes lunge at the car's license plate, as if that could push traffic out of your way. Focus shatters into frustration when your phone starts ringing from its spot on the passenger seat despite all that tweaking you did to hook it up to the car's system. Damn it!

Normally you'd have one of your siblings here to handle the phone, but they're both already in Florida like the rest of your family. Like loving grandchildren. Your brother works remotely, so it was easy enough for him to stay for the past months and your sister's college is only two hours north, so her drive was trivial. Why did you have to stay behind? What is there in North Carolina? Your girlfriend? An empty house? There is no peace and you were stupid to think otherwise. You were stupid to try and hide from the pandemic, from family, from school, to hope that you could have one moment to yourself where nothing is blowing up, where everything can just

keep its cool and let you rest for more than five minutes. Would the universe be kinder if it got to know you? Would everyone on the road shift over if they knew your grandfather? Would the clock stop for even a moment if it heard your mother tell you that he is in hospice?

Twenty-five years working in a hospital didn't leave your mother with much room for fantasies. She knew what was coming the moment you heard his cancer metastasized six months ago. She and your uncle both understood, though none of you wanted to notice their grim exchanges. Children don't want to hear that about their father, so like good in-laws and medical professionals, they reserved themselves to gentle reminders. Was that wise? Maybe if they hadn't protected you, if they were honest, brutal, then you'd be there right now. Maybe you wouldn't have come back up in January and you could have stayed like your father had since Thanksgiving. Maybe you wouldn't be stuck behind a U-Haul trying to pass an RV while the man who you owe everything to is dying! Fuck! Fuck whoever's in your way, fuck whoever doesn't get it, fuck anyone who would keep you another motherfucking second from him, and *fuck that goddamn* phone!

The ringing ends, leaving the car in silence. You turn on the radio. It's Bluesville, the XM channel. It's playing Stormy Monday, by T-Bone Walker. There's not a cloud in the sky. And it's Tuesday. And your grandfather is still dying. The ETA is four nine-teen, which means that the car thinks you need another two hours and thirty minutes to cover one-hundred and seventy miles. It's assuming that you'll average sixty-five miles per hour. You're going ninety. If you weren't interrupted, that would mean you would arrive at roughly three fifty, give or take a few minutes to account for navigating your grandparents' neighborhood. Time is all you can save.

But you still need gas. The traffic from the city has faded a little, so you doubt that exiting now would lose you that much time, as long as you're quick about it. Your father would hate that - 'be quick about it'. He never liked to rush things; he's always been a paragon

of patience and resolve. He'd be scared half to death if he was in the car with you right now, though he's a hypocrite for it. He checks his phone all the time for directions, trusting that other drivers know what they're doing for those few seconds his eyes are off the road. He has a lot of faith in people, or maybe just the universe in general. He trusted that the first round of chemo was going well, and was ecstatic that he could still play golf with his father. He joked about your grandfather's sallow skin. It was so orange, he should have been an Oompa-Loompa for Halloween! He watched college basketball games, waiting for when it was safe for your grandfather to see one in person. Maybe he could get the head coach's signature again? Or maybe you hoped for these things.

"Follow the route for - two - miles and turn left onto - Sunset Drive -, then turn left." The navigation system doesn't like the exit you're taking. It wants you to keep driving, cutting down your distance and ETA, paying no attention to your gas, or thirst, or anything other than reducing the miles between you and Eight Hundred and Five, South Saint John's Street, Saint Augustine, Florida. It wants to drive you to your end, and you want to follow it. You want to run out of gas and lose all the battery on your phone, completely stuck on the shoulder somewhere with absolutely nothing to think about other than how fucked you are. You want to watch the cars fly past you. You want to catch a glimpse of the drivers' faces and imagine what they could be driving to. You want the constant drone of the world in motion to surround you, and ignore you. There is comfort in the infinite present, when the future is impossible.

You're nearing the end of the on-ramp and you didn't notice the signs on the way in, you look around frantically to find gas. This exit is still too urban; multi-laned roads lined with fast food and hotels block your vision of the nearest station. You're turning right to try and avoid the worst of this traffic light and you spot a Shell on the opposite side of the road, you need to shift lanes now! The phone is ringing again, you catch a glance, it's your brother - shit! You swerve to avoid some asshole Honda who nearly came to a complete

stop, you're stuck in the two way left turn lane in the middle of the road. Oncoming traffic has managed to gridlock itself against the red light, making your left turn impossible from here. The phone keeps ringing; your ETA has crept up to four twenty-one; you can see the face of the driver of a blue and white convertible through the glare of her windshield. The light turns green; she's hunched over with a tablet in her lap; your phone is begging; she's oblivious to the seconds she's shaving from your life; The ETA is four twenty-two; you slam on your horn and she finally looks up; your phone is screaming; traffic's moving, but the light is stale; "If possible, make a legal u-turn"; your phone is crying; the light is yellow, cars are slowing down, if you don't go now you'll have to wait a whole new cycle; four twenty-three; your phone is dying; shit! You floor it across three lanes and hope the oncoming drivers aren't like your father.

You pull into the station and silence your navigation.

Your phone is solemnly waiting.

It shows you four missed calls, all from your brother.

You call him back.

"Papa Larry is dead." Mason's voice pierces you.

The man who named your father Jamison. The man who solved puzzles with Cousin Ethan. The man who taught you and Cameron how to golf, who changed your clubheads, who played dominoes, enthusiastically declaring last place as "Beetle Bomb," the man who danced for you and Ashley, singing along with the Wiggles, the man you wanted to see so desperately one last time, even though you had just spent months living in his home. The man you wanted to say goodbye to. You wanted to tell him that it all comes from somewhere. You wanted to tell him that his love - his love for Mama Lucy, his love for Jamison, which extended to Kathleen when they married, his love for your cousins, his love for Aunt Donna and Aunt Lori, his love for Mason and Ashley, his love for you, all of his love - that's where it all traces back to. You wanted to tell him that your love is his. No one can take a minute of it from you.

Your tank is full. It's time to go.

Memento Mori

Julia Holton



Gone!

Isabel Keener

He was laid limp on his back, taking up half of the couch. She wuvs him. She stands by the tv with a drink in her hand, and the tv says does your makeup remover take it all off? every kiss proof cry proof stay proof look?

Then, he stands. He kisses her by the television and she wraps her arms around his white neck. As she lifts her fingers to curl his blond hair, he puts his hand on her shoulder and presses her
down.

She stares into the white stitching of denim. Is this where she wants to be? She's unmoving and he, a good actor who improvises, pulls it down for her. "Take me on the bed," she says after five minutes.

He asks, and he is telling her, if he can finish here.

She's sad then, cuz yknow, she's only here for OONNEEee feeling—the thing their meetings deny her.

Yer hurtin me, she says in her head, but out loud she moans while he tugs her hair round his fist and jams himself into the board of her throat.

"Relax." She wuvs him. She's trying but it stays closed for him, and for herself, because she's stopped wanting him. He looks so UGLY and SAD from below, and lonelier than the last tuna in the world.

When his zipper closes and they go back to the couch, she watches him as a kitty kitty for the next pounce. When it happens, she ruffles his mind and striped boxers. The thing she craves is a chest against hers, or a hand on her abdomen. Deez tinglings—her nose pressed on the soft skin above his parts. She could leave, she lets him think this is reality.

"Take me on the couch," so she says, and he tells her if they

can go to the bed. She walks, noting the silly rules of this game, her insides a rot because she can't stop playing.

She's sleepy against the brick wall of his building. He's on a call for work and he'll just be five minutes. Could she go for a walk or there's a cafe inside she could sit in bc the cold? Ok.

To the piers a few blocks down, winter air climbs into her with a stranger's look. He yanks his yellow labrador by the leash, flaring eyes. She scampers to a metal rail before the harbor and leans. *What let off?* Through thin shirt, it gnaws: to be seen and what's seen to be ugly; ribs ache on the cold beam that stops her body from fall. Eyes over the ocean—black, shattered light. A text rings *You can come now* but she stays for some time, cuz there's no way back but to crawl.

Dang these legs, like toothpicks beneath her puffer jacket and a scarf wrapped large round her head. *You wanna come up or me come down / Could you come.* Then he's there blue, in a sweater and a white baseball cap, to offer the stiffest of hugs.

Her secwund encwounter. Her lover, he needs her. It doesn't matter to her how age draws on his forehead but not hers, or that it takes many maneuvers for him to smile. Paper face, he is kind in the subtlest ways—when he asked her what she thought about libertarianism, or when he poured coffee in a white cup for her. “Do you have any sugar?”

“No, and no milk.”

She smiles, he stares.

“You've just given me black liquid.”

And it widens till two tiny corners of his mouth lift half up. The only time she strips him.

She remembers da nerves on da first fun time, texting a friend location and his name. Is this what she wants? Will it feel nice? She's afwaid. Geez I could get raped, her head speaks in the empty subway cart, night. She asks him to send a pic of his face. In the photo he's so handsome, like a man she'd want to love her.

Her body wants his arm that night, and he's stuck it strong to his side. *Hold me.*

She pulls his hand over her stomach for a moment. Sweat
lumber, palmy delicious.

“You took all the blanket.”

And he rolls to the other side of the bed, snuggling cushion.
Blond strands stick out from his pile of white. They sting her eyes
strange, she's hours awake: *Babie bower you older than me?*

Soon the dew is on the morn. His alarm is the banging kind,
like a head against a wall. WOMP WOMP, and it goes off three
times, every 30 minutes from 6 to 7:30 am (he seems to like pain).

He tells Alexa to blast the news of a kind, the stocks and foreign
money and names—incessant chatter, gosh cud ya jus die! But
she wants it again, and he said in the morning.

So she's loggy in bed, stiff with inaction and his silence. He
gets up to adjust his loosey goose boxers, but leaves with his back
turned to go to the shower. NOW HE'S IN DA BATROOM—gravel,
the news scratches her mind through the closed door, louder than
she can handle. Something inside her makes quiet plea, wants the air
from outside the last time she showed up, when over the ocean—
black, shattered light. She could've jumped in and been freed from
her laughter.

Here she is, thrice now and night. They lay on the couch to
watch Echo in the Canyon, a glimpse at the origin of the Laurel Canyon
music scene and how the echo of these musicians' work resonated
across the world.

Oh sunny, why's he lie like a broken man, whose blond hair
sticks evil in the air, havin her near cry. What comes on the screen is
a series of names, musicians who've had some part in the film. He
shares,

“I like Warren Zevon.”

“Wow I wouldn't expect that.”

and stares forward. *My child, you lie. Men like you do not bear
music.*

“I should go to more museums but I have work.”

An effort—his time is no place she’d dwell. But hey ding-a ding-a ding, she’s still here! Withh aa someonee whoose hurrted heerr befoore. What gives. A darlin whose lovin she only endures.

He gets up slow to the kitchen, walking like something between a sphynx and a boy, and brings back a ceramic dish of cheesy curls, for her. He says with a disappointed head sway to just be balanced, when it came up how she’s trying to be vegan. Le fou. Two times removed from any one person. Before he lies down again he catches her eyes. Past their hazel wall murmur the same pleas. He’s still a moment

I’m here.

—then laid limp.

She thinks about now how he lives alone, sees her so young, refuses touch unless it hurts.

And eyes like a blue variety of small beans, hard and flat. She could rap her knuckles against their shape and feel nothing behind them.

And why when he closes the door goodbye does he stand straight, two feet stationed like she might tackle him—staring, always, between the door and its shut. *Why do you behave so barely?*

Crazy guy. Yeah, went to Tulane. She’s left for home now with her parents and dogs and works on a paper for school. A text from the man a-rings:

Great to see you yesterday. I had fun.

Her mind spins some circles of thought. And back to the paper again.

OOO! OOO! OOO! BUT

She’s sad. She’s gone. In her, the black liquid swooshes. Oh! yes—

she's darkened, and the water makes light into pieces. Hopefully, one day she'll be better. But for now, you wave your hand goodbye and she says see you later!

Still, is she soft? Is she queenie? Is she a pillow but her heart's needley? These things he answered in every wanting touch, and yet. A snare, snug to her neck, wrists, and ankles, all she could do was move its place so it didn't tear her into tiny. Her spirit beat on the cold rail in the pain of each woman betrayed by the world, who conceal their betrayal with mirth. A watery brim on her lid couldn't appear because it's out of her and only over that rail. She's—erm—*grappe de ma vigne*: the man, a child that crushes grapes and slurps from his palm sweet juice. The angah rumbles. She tries to hold it, but it struggles. What she could yell over the rail that wouldn't fill each lung with water. Her palms clenched white around the freezing metal, some part of her whispered: *Soon I will search that harbor's low.*

Now her steps on the cement around her house and the neighboring muddy brick walls sow dreamings, which can only occur after being bruised and continually bruised, to find that everything's speaking. His is a still world where neither taste nor touch nor music is known. She drinks his torture like the water of life and becomes shattered light! shattered light!

A note in her phone from the first time they met:
I sometimes don't know how to kiss him. My lips were made years after his.

A little pin to gouge her eyes later, no doubt. She lowers her lids as light from the window wanders over her face. Across them play black and white images from a YouTube video of a man who tried to fly off the eiffel tower with a parachute, cloth made precious with trust. The dark shape of his figure weighs all the white sky in the moment he leaps. Flung—a moment that breaks through the stuff. *I sent my grief away to get rid of the smell, for I cannot care forever. I died and died and have to live. Yes, I am close to wanting nothing.*

Why she try to be a good woman who canna fix him and make him good? This man's a rover, no meaning, life's mean, and he needs a good woman to make it complete. BUt i wanna roam and know when I come home in the evenin, he's waiting there. And i am to be a woman with a dream and a good man's love under the moon. But all i have is a barroom to draink away my life, nevvver have a family, never take a man. The skeleton of a little girl was found in the walls of Edinburgh Castle, buried alive in a rite to make sure the building never crumbled—movements which come only to make others still.

But she lives, and away from the black water, in her room. I hear beautiful melodies, and the terrible possibilities in me end at the touch of my eye to the blue sky out this window. I walk on pale cement stained with black gum spots and think only of their soft, what my child fingers knew. I walk past the same bridge every day for years and it sees me as itself. Belonging, my warm skin with faint lines of blue traveling across shapes like hands and wrists, wrinkles along my thumb knuckles, the smell of close skin, all these and less do me favors I cannot receive without breaking under their weight, a kind that maybe says, "hOpe."

Take me with falling and sensation, against a car's hurdling body or with water drawn deep in myself, only if it happens. Otherwise, the fearful nightmare ends. Gone, because I'm broke new, cascading into it like the shatter of museum glass. I laugh outside of the thing and it's a sign of tenderness, a muscle sore from being punished. I thought I'd lay flat beneath pacing shoes but now I see I must walk. Please never leave me blue and alone. Words like water. I wuvs you. Swelling in me. Not my language but a voice Baby chanting in patterns survives on this earth Fuck me not history's bones but vocal tones.

*But I'mmmmm changed.
I'mmmuhmuh diffrint.*

Words fall into each other as newborn leaves in a bud, ancient and beginning, its form containing those to come. My own artifice trans-

55

ports me and mesmerizes to leave me sunk. A struggle between myself and thousands of demons alive in sounds I hear and faces I see. Too, they are free, possible to contain certain thrusts unto joy. Onward, a departure from tired and mannered ways. I leave only with a vague face with blond strands in my memory, whose empty eyes I do wish I could light. I am grateful to know only from a distance what it is to live on dust, to come across something whose only presence was in my distraction. A light breeze pushing the dust in contours along each other. Just that. But I trace the curves myself and hold them dear.

My aunt told me a woman killed herself after seeing teenage boys break a swan's neck in the park. I grab at anything to sort of express, but not a swan's neck, swan's neck. With the space carved, I hold the world in my heart; or, it holds me. All this for cheap. Tear from my soul little pieces and feed them to them who are absent in their despair. I will never be me because to try would cherish a lie of theirs, of separation from all others, of knowing nothing past separation. The voices grow further into mumbles that ask nothing. Thousands burnt in my blood and crazed my flesh with each howl, but I cool. You can hold me now, and I can rest a moment in your eyes. Keep me close for a little, only two seconds. Only two seconds. Hold me.

PERSIMMONS



WEBSITE

SEE YOU SPACE COWBOY...

**“A large persimmon will fall into my
hand, and I will be victorious.”
-Tokugawa Ieyasu**