

Spring 2023

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 2023

PERSIMMONS

Art & Literary Magazine

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Letters From the Editors

Molly Fording

For the past four years, Persimmons has been one of the most consistently joyful, inspiring, and energizing parts of my life at Kenyon. As this year's Editor-in-Chief, I've been lucky enough to lead the magazine through two semesters of celebrating student art and writing on campus through our weekly meetings, our events, and now, finally, our 2023 magazine! Thank you so much to everyone who submitted work to Persimmons this year, everyone who came to our meetings and reviewed submissions with care, thoughtfulness, and respect, everyone who attended our events, and all of our wonderful published artists and writers. Thank you to our Editors, Emmaline, Lucas and Katie, for their hard work, dedication, and creativity. Lucas and Katie, I can't imagine leaving the magazine to anyone else; you're going to do great things. So for my parting words, I want to again thank our wonderful staff: you all make Persimmons what it is. To Emmaline, Lucas, and Katie: you've all been such a delight to work with. As I leave Kenyon, I can truly look back at my time at Persimmons and say, from the bottom of my heart: I'm so happy we did this together.

R. Emmaline Rogers

The people in Persimmons have taught me why literary magazines should be made. Ever since I joined the publication in the fall of 2019, Persimmons folks have drawn out the weird, the exciting, the hilarious, the loud, and the joyous aspects of both my literary taste and my nature. Good writing can capture truly anything, and I loved witnessing and celebrating all of the odd and/or deeply meaningful writing that my peers create. That first-floor room in Lentz was made beautiful by our loud joy—and hopefully also by the chalk drawings I would throw up every Sunday evening. I am honored to have been an editor this year, and I am sad to be tombstoned, but I know down to my bones that Lucas and Katie will keep the soul of this publication alight and will continue to encourage writers to create wildly weird poetry and short stories and visual art. Kenyon is a better place for having Persimmons people in it.

Lucas Dunst

The space that Persimmons Magazine makes on campus for the weird and experimental is super exciting to me. In affirming the value of experimental art and literature, and providing a forum for sharing it with the wider campus community, Persimmons has made it so much more exciting to be making weird things on campus. That's so important to me, and it's been an honor to help make that possible as an Editor. Experimental art and literature at their best give us new tools for imagining alternate ways of living in, feeling in and seeing in the world. That's such an important thing to be able to do, and I like to think that the work our magazine publishes plays a small role in fostering that capacity. Here's to another awesome year of weird writing and art, and to the awesome editorial staff and contributors that made it possible.

Kathleen Turk

Since joining Persimmons, I have learned that writing can and should be joyous, electric, experimental, and weird. Surrounded by so many amazing writers and students at Kenyon, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and to forget that writing is about so much more than praise or the success of the final result, but about the process of creating and what you learn through this process. Everyone at Persimmons—especially Molly, Emmaline, and Lucas—have made Persimmons into a space and a magazine which welcomes experimental writing and creativity in all its mess and beauty. I'm so happy that I got to be a part of that! Thanks to all the weirdos that helped create this magazine.

bird's glee

Anne Beckwith

on the fjord side of the wind-walker
the knife of a wave cuts deep
it scars the cliff face, carves it
rock sloughs off like meat
a meal for the fishes
they take a slice, then wander
drive upstream to catch a movie, then they
take a walk on the edge of the universe
fall in love
I wonder, then, what lies up there, they ask each other
does God float somewhere, waiting, watching,
is there a beginning where we cannot tread
and then, unfeeling, the water splashes
they are the blade, the knife, they carve,
die,
become food for other fishes who may someday
fall in love see the surface wonder what lies
die,
fall in love,
die,
fall in love.

Best Western

Lily Leone

Shadows leer like ghosts haunting the valley below, and he waits, figure
looming heavy,
For her to arrive,
Jet black Cadillac with the top rolled down
And sunglasses eclipsing her eyes.
That Wayfarer stare, sharp as ever
Like a lost puppy, his brown eyes ached for piercing blue.

She tasted like red dust,
Her love like spilled blood on white tiles, creaky beds and neon blare of
motel signs.
Tall, dark, cowgirl in the setting sun.
And he knew she would do him no good,
But ran, still, eagerly
Away from gilded madness, when paranoia creeps in idly, sweet like
molasses.

Follow in her stardust,
Relieved to trail behind, feel the sting of aftertaste, bitter words hurled at
the wall
Buckled knees to the floor
Two fists to the door
Onward into that jackpot feeling,
A rush beneath cerulean skies going dark, bleeding to dusk.

Crusted canyons and rolling hills whisper incantations, and
fall by the wayside, hiding in the crunch of deep fry.
Golden arches guide them down south to the border.

Wide eyes know better, but still,
Burrow into bad habits, as gold dust settles into dusk,
Jackalope running, edging towards oblivion,

Plush with money,
Save your soul,
“Buckle up, honey.”
One for the road.

crozj:kaleidoscope

Mia Tsuchida



I've got a hole

Nicole Wang

've got a hole
in my finger
from when I scraped
it against the pool table
trying to score a shot.

It's bloody. I didn't make it.
But, I'm getting better.
I know where to hit the ball
with the stick, and how to
keep my arm still
for the swing. I know how
to hear for the clang,
the violence.
The greed. The pump in
the middle of my heart after
a score.

Don't shoot it off the table.
Don't hit the wall.
Don't think
of the balls, as bodies,
Pushed around, collapsing on themselves by cock-sure men,
trying to short stack a win.

Evening Tea

Lorien Kauffman

“Oh Mel, you’ve played out of turn again. Mary Ann goes next, you know that.”

Margret made a shooing motion at the other woman and Mel’s thin painted lips formed an apologetic O. She flicked one gnarled finger to guide the card back into her hand.

“Really Mel, it’s no fun if you keep on forgetting the rules,” sniffed Mary Ann.

The three of them sat amicably hunched over steaming mugs of tea, their cards clutched near their breasts like long-awaited love letters. The room around them glowed with orange lamplight which settled on the plush sofa, the bookshelves, the lace-lined curtains, and the empty birdcage in the corner. It was a warm and well-kept home.

“Right, now that that’s sorted out,” said Mary Ann, as she put down her card with a decisive smack.

Margret gasped.

“Not the queen, dearie me! And so soon! So unexpected!”

“Oh calm yourself, Margret, and let us get on with the game. Mel, what have you got?” Mel had gone very still. She cocked her head and gazed at the window like a puzzled bird. “What’s she on about now? My stars, if we could get through one hand without—” But Mary Ann was interrupted by a catastrophe.

There was a crash, and a large dark mass flew through the window. For a moment, the creature hung fixed in midair, eyes bulging, jaws gaping in mid-snap and matted fur standing in every which way.

Then the wolf landed with an ungainly thump on the persian rug and scrambled beneath the table. There was a grating screech of claws scrabbling on wood and a howl laced with such despair that Margret had to dab at her eyes with a napkin. The sound rose in a single, sore-throated, lonesome note before cracking in the middle like old china.

Mary Ann clucked to herself.

“Now, why did you go and do that? We’ve got a perfectly good front door!”

“Oh can it, Mary Ann, can’t you see it’s upset?” said Margret, wagging her tear-stained napkin in the other woman’s direction.

“An upset person can still knock can’t they? We must have some composure!” “Oh is that what I should have told you the time you kicked a hole in the bathroom cabinet?”

Oblivious to the bickering of the other two, Mel hummed a soft lullaby and lifted the table cloth to slip a butter biscuit underneath. The cookie was promptly chomped up and the wailing subsided. Mary Ann and Margret looked up from their spat. Silently, all three exchanged glances, then each took a corner of the table cloth, lifted in unison, and peered under.

A grimy mound of fur panted up at them. It was dingy and decrepit, its ribs protruding from a mangy pelt. Foam dripped from the wolf’s mouth onto the carpet below as it panted and wheezed. It flinched away from the women’s gazes.

“Oh dear, oh dear,” sighed Margret, “whatever are we going to do with you?” “Must be running from something,” muttered Mary Ann, “and running fast.” Mel continued humming and dabbed at the creature’s muzzle with her handkerchief. As most often happened, Mary Ann was right.

The hunter found the small cottage without much difficulty. The sight of the broken window as well as the clawed paw tracks in the snow brought a frown to his face. He set his shoulders in preparation to dutifully observe any gore he found with the utmost composure. His knock on the front door was more a courtesy than a question.

“What now?” groused Mary Ann.

The door burst open with an indulgent amount of urgency.

Rushing in, the hunter looked around, taking in the glass shards on the carpet, the slightly rumpled tablecloth, and the three women, cards held perfectly still in front of them. Mel had extended her arm in order to

look like she had just been about to play a card when she was so rudely interrupted.

“Thank goodness you ladies are alright,” boomed the hunter, but not before clearing his throat several times.

He hustled around the room, peering under the couch and throwing the cupboards open. “Stop that this instant,” cried Margret, waving her cards at him. The hunter stopped.

“But...but you see, there’s a wolf on the loose. I’ve chased that nasty thing for miles now, and its trail leads right to your house! And whatever happened to your window?”

Margret pointed at Mary Ann. Mary Ann pointed at Margret. Mel gave the hunter a knowing smile and nodded discreetly towards the empty bird cage.

The hunter shook his head in exasperation. He began to make his way towards the table, slamming both hands down on its surface for emphasis. There was a muffled squeak at which Mel quickly pretended to have a coughing fit.

“Alright, now I know you must all be in shock, but you’ve got to tell me if you know where the wolf’s gone! It’s a matter of your own safety!”

“Oh dear, I’m afraid we’ve seen no wolf. You must look elsewhere,” said Mary Ann with a grin like a lemon wedge.

Margret got up and bustled around the kitchen.

“Oh, but you mustn’t go empty-handed! Take these, you must be famished wandering around the woods all day. What must your mother think? It’s no good for your health, young man, all this excitement, all this running around. Here, here, take some biscuits. And some jam, that’s good jam, it’s raspberry from last year. Now off you go. Oh! And don’t forget your hat. There you are dear, ears all snug. Now, out, out! You must catch the wolf or we will all be done for! Off with you!”

With one final push, the old woman bustled the hunter out into the snow, his arms now piled high with jars and packages. The man stammered, blushing. Margret offered him one final wink and closed the door.

All was quiet now in the little house. Margaret sat back down at the table.

“All is well,” she whispered, “You can come out now, dearie.”

After a hesitant snuffling, the wolf poked its nose out from under the table. Its large, watery eyes flitted around the room.

Margret got up gingerly and pulled up a fourth chair. Mel gave a playful wink to the window and the window set about fixing itself, its painted frame blushing sheepishly.

“There you are, dear,” she said, putting a generously stuffed cushion on the chair and patting it twice for good measure.

“You can join us if you like. We’ll deal you in for the next round, it’s no trouble.”

The wolf took one step, and then another. It leaped up in the chair and wrapped its tail around its primly folded paws.

“Just as well,” muttered Mary Ann, “it’s more fun with four anyways.”

Somnolent Lines Written After a Nap

Charles Atkins

Weary eyes, which struggle to stay open,
Glossing over the page and spitting out words,
Undigested, as with a stubborn toddler
—blurry, out of focus, struggling to stay upright,
A faltering, fearful feeling of free-fall, and restless
Vertigo.

In repose, lying on the bed, I rest,
In pharaonic pose,
And let myself drift, cut off from the world,
Sense-deprived, having arrived,
At the zero point of return,
From which, unerringly, without want,
I take flight to distant shore,
And rocking, tie the cord to unfinished threads.

Consuming, turbulent waves:
The phantasmal zone of pulse,
The weight of Time, which presses
From above, down, to the abysm of
Backward-haunting, tunneling groves;
To which, in hungry gasps, the droves
Sink, in breathless haste, famished, their
Teeth dripping well-posed intentions.

Light: elevating with half-conscious tones
That turn and turn by wrought gears,
And cycle 'round in slothful reverie;
Light: the head which turns, and sees;
The body which feels its feeling, and knows
What is buried beneath, with pungency,
In coves of time-begotten passions.

But sweet bliss that lies above;
It beckons with weary solace,
That those who take it, and latch on,
Ascend, and are shrouded over

Into obstinate peace—peace that
Cannot rest; a peaceful resting,
By which, gradually, arresting, the
Clouds are pillows, and the Sun a
Blossoming flower, and—
I've forgotten the hour...

The Star

Charles Atkins

In the night sky, in black oblivion,
There, above our quaint concerns—*a glimmer!*
—When the eclipse of life is just begun,
And all the light in the world grows dimmer.
So faint, so fair, painfully unaware,
Through the sheath of unholy pall it shines,
Like a beacon amidst depthless despair,
And harboring untranslatable signs.
A star, a guide, and a whole host beside:
The near-end, far-off—Chronos' irruption,
Sidereal plaints, which our fates betide,
And the eternal, merciless resumption.
Restless, nebular drift in endless space.
O, who among us knows if there be grace?

Dawn?

Cecilia Zhang



A List of Hands and What They Mean

Tia Wagner

1. I saw a girl with watermelon nails, and on her thumb some polish over skin. I witnessed how she worried back and forth, with fingers on her palm, and chips of paint. Her put-together face revealed no stress. I watched her hands to read how she'd react.
2. I saw a flutist close her eyes and play, with fingers like a brook that rambled on. I witnessed how her joints were pirouettes, that bent so strange, and twisted all around. The higher notes would bob along the wind, the lower ones would dip and drift and sink, and drag along, then lift again. I saw her hands that whispered like the fall.
3. I saw guitar scars on somebody's palm, who long ago had left it in the dust, and wondered if the markings in his skin would ever itch like amputated limbs.
4. I saw a shaking hand of liver spots, and sinew over bone stretched thin as lace.
5. I saw a callused palm from years of work, a man who wiped back sweat with sweaty skin. His jacket he wore tight around his waist — he whistled as he walked, and wrung his own security from belt buckles and paint.
6. I see short nails and wonder why it is that they are short.
7. I see a pianist with fingers long and slender for the keys, who taps against the wall when she is bored, whose feet (a metronome) keep time with clocks. She shows me a recording on her phone. Vivaldi, and her fingers fly so fast. I ask if she's been classically trained; she tells me that she sat on someone's knee, and mimicked how their hands would dance along. She says, I have not learned enough to live. She says, there are more scales than major and minor. She says, I am so hungry always.
8. I see my mother's hands are early-old. Her veins that wind as tree roots through her flesh, and freckles like the mushroom spots outside.
9. I do not see her bones as deficit. I do not see her tightness as a curse. Her nails are cracked, her hands are working hands. As though her life has etched into her flesh, a record of each meal she ever cooked. And in the way her knuckles curl when no one seems to look, the tapping of her finger tips on counters made of stone:
10. I see the echoes of ink stains, and plaster in her cuticles, and shadows where a paintbrush once stood still. She must have worried wood between her teeth, the handles now all notched like apple cores. She must have licked the bristles smaller yet.
11. Her hands are the exhaustion that she doesn't let show on her face. Arthritic like a woven basket. The pressure of raising a child. This is not

the shame she has to bear. This is a forest. The years with a mallet, the years with a brush; river bank raised veins, liver-spotted with plants.

12. Yes, her hands.

Lion Killer

Caeleigh Stamper

My third night on the boat I had a nightmare about a string of murders in my hometown. It began with female lions – they were found in parks, pools, parking garages. Their necks had been slit, and gnats flew above their matted blood. Soon it was no longer lions, but women. They were young, slain exclusively in the fruit aisle of grocery stores.

There was a warning on the news that it was a woman who was doing it, that she wanted to ‘cleanse’ the younger, less respectful generation. I woke up moments after examining a pomegranate, an older woman approaching me from a distance.

Once, while we were observing lions, a guide told us that a lioness will kick her sons out of the pride, for the sake of her daughters.

I spent a week on the boat with my family. We sailed around a few islands, jumping in the water each morning to wake ourselves up and allowing ourselves to wade to sleep. We ate dinner on land, at a restaurant near the dock. I watched sophisticated women smoke cigarettes and stare pensively into the horizon, like one would in a movie. I saw two little girls spinning in dresses. I watched as the older one weaved throughout the tables, her sister trailing behind. Every three minutes they nuzzled their mother’s hanging arms, and she’d pat them on the head. They were too happy to care when their dress straps slipped from their shoulders.

I had never wanted so badly to be someone else. The girls jumped and squealed as though they had no consciousness of other people’s perceptions of them. As though they had never seen lions as anything but beautiful.

As we left, my mother poked me in the back. She told me to pull my skirt down - it had ridden up a few inches while I sat. “Have some respect for yourself,” she said.

The Small Eavesdroppers

Raya Kenney

Such luster so transcends the silver sets!
Seams searing into skin, we strain and hear:
Ear cartilage pressed against the oak beams up,
Discerning ladies in gowns whispering—

Receding back to rooms where we were taught,
Up past our time for sleep, our eyes deceive
But wild stories glue us like the screen
And oft we stand and listen from this spot.

So drowning out inebriated purrs,
The fabric of our handmade dresses, pinned
As women with their heavy, luscious furs
Are doling out (in whispers) they have sinned.

I Threw My Shoe Too

Benji Rothman



Untitled 2022

Nicole Wang

I miss sour things,
and bitters, and spice.
I miss the excitement
to eat, to engorge.

And I miss
feeling you watching
me fill - up
in the park with
the pool where you
watched the rich swim
in circles for
hours. for minimum wage and endless sunburns
and melanoma.

Pitch black, mosquitoes sucking
us raw. Refuge in four walls and
an engine. The feeling of your
hands in mine. You bite, I tear.
You will never be satisfied until
you swallow me up.
You want to stay starved.

De Timore

Alex Johnson

I measure my life in measures unsung,
for positives declare the dying of the day.
'Mine' and 'us' are delusions far-flung

Do I mark time and rest in spoonfed grief?
As I ponder what stuttered notes to play,
I measure my life in measures unsung.

I crack the spine of a Freud or Jung
to practice molding myself in clay,
But 'mine' and 'us' are delusions far-flung.

Critique a subtle 'hanged' or 'hung'
and distract myself from things to say.
I measure my life in measures unsung.

Oh, to build a castle with my tongue!
If every brick were not a parlay!
'Mine' and 'us' are delusions far-flung.

If only I didn't bite my lung,
I might breathe color into gray.
I measure my life in measure unsung.
'Mine' and 'us' are delusions far-flung.

Arrival at the Ambit of Alliteration

Lucas Dunst

Passively you perceive purple polyhedral porpoises perusing potential public policy plans purposefully.

Readily, the red-faced regional manager repulsively reproaches your reticent, reposeful rest.

“Spectrum’s sales slump sustained itself six months this season” he says, slathering at your simpering slumped silhouette.

Ignoring his ingoble, irritating, irrational, indignant, irate, ongoing orations, Oakley (by which of course you mean yourself) opens the oblong orifice opening into the opulent orange outhouse.

Accessing the Ambit of Alliteration is always accompanied by daunting degrees of the distinctively dangerous dilemma of delineating all abstractions and airing all aims in alliteration.

Here, hopes for health and hold on power hang weakly with one’s wily ability to alliterate affectively.

Three troubled times you’ve trekked into this treacherously tricky tract of time-divorced terrain, but talking and thinking through tremendously tempered tirades targeting

single syllables is still as time-consuming, trying, and troubling as it was the first time.

Reaching into the toilet’s round, rectangular, rectal repository you retch, remembering right away why you regretted that weekend rambling through Reno, despite the ridiculous rise of rolls you’d raked in, and the road to the red rabbit range you’d recovered.

Filing away those forgotten memories for further consideration later, you begin fishing through the bowl with flitting fingers, before finally finding the frenzied freckled flock of fuschia fish. You filch one, and flush.

Tucking the trout into the thickest trestle of your trench coat, you think thoroughly about how to trick too many trained trappers as to the true origin of your trickling trouser

stains. Slip up, and they will see that something is suspicious, stop you, and slice you into a sparkling swarm of sickly seahorses, separated and stranded in slimy sapphire spheres.

“Sorry! I spilled so much salty sable sauce when I slipped on the slick slate siding surrounding the steam room’s circumference” you say, stumbling over the doorway’s sealed sill back into the conference of seated sleek cetaceans. Monocled marine mammals momentarily make a moratorium on their meeting, untethering in unison from their unifying ultramarine umbilical cords and turning toward your trembling torso, tempestuous and ill-tempered.

“That plan performed poorly” you ponder, already hastily heading for the hallowed hairless hatch hammered into the wall of the hazel hallway. Detonating directly through the doorway, you engage your exaggeratedly enlarged eyes to more easily expose your escape-route from these enraged echolocators entirely enthralled by their efforts to end your expedition early. Lengthened legs lashing against the linoleum, you streak down the stairs with serendipitous sylvan speed.

Aiming for the arched amber aperture agreeably adorning the artifice of loading area a4, you lunge, leaping like a leopard and crashing through the casement carelessly, grains of glass now ground up and gently gleaming under the glittering green glow. Rolling recklessly on impact, you reach for the room’s rim on the right. Throwing open the trapdoor with throbbing thick triceps, you slip inside, your slim torso slithering down the slick surface of the slide seamlessly. Venturing to view the vast void as your velocity escalates, exploring eggshell eyes eerily drill into you through the darkness. Directly, they disappear. Disappointed. But not defeated.

Careening out of the chute you cascade into a churning charcoal castor oil concoction whirling wildly like charybdis calling Jason’s crew beneath the waves choking and crying. Briefly, your breath is bashed out as your belly batters against the boiling brew, but you briskly breaststroke to the bog’s border, bring yourself up and over the bank, and bask for a moment, lungs burning for breath. Time ticks away tirelessly, taking each passing time unit and turning it into a tool tailored trickily to trap and torment you. Realize that the region around the repulsive whirlpool’s rippling rim is ribbed with rotogravured rose runes, and right away remember the riddle you read while reciting a reasoned review written by revered Reverend Richard

Rotagrast.

Pink print ponderously produced;
molds marked mainly for matches;
signals saints to singe stones
hurling holy humans home.

Fumble furiously for your faithful firestarter,
tucked away thoughtfully in your trench coat
deep down in its denim interior so as to discreetly dissuade this realm's denizens from detaining you for daring to deny their disallowal of the decadent device.

Strike steel with
flint frantically,
hoping wholeheartedly to hurl hewings into a
burning blaze. But the
conflagration won't catch, and
emerging eerily at the edge of your eyes are
twelve tittering,
glittering glowing,
fatally furious,
calculating and curious,
purple porpoises.
Stalking stealthily in the surrounding shadows, they
come ever closer. Closing in. You're cornered.

Slow time to a standstill,
direct your discernment toward discovering any desperate device
capable of circumventing your coming comeuppance.
Words once whispered will wondrously whistle through your ears again.

"Filch the flammable fuschia fish from the
Ambit of Alliteration."

Tug on the tail of the trout,
holding it above your head heroically,
squeezing its sides, slime spilling from underneath its scales and onto the
stones,
going into the grooves and
flowing fast.

Prowling porpoises perceive your plan, picking up the pace of their progress

toward your person. But you're too brisk, and beat the brim of beaming steel against the boundary of burnished stone. It sparks spectacularly, and when the spark strikes the seeping slick seafood sludge, it sets fire to it. A sparkling silvery screen ejects from the etchings as they erupt in flame, engulfing everything in an eerie ebony glow. Seething sea pigs shrill, beaming barriers now blocking them from breaching your besieged body. Hope you're holy enough for this hex to hurl you home and not hurtling through hell.

You feel your body lurch forward, limbs contorting into positions that you seriously suspect aren't possible. The mounting pressure tugs your stomach in every direction, and your head whips around furiously. At this point, your senses are all entirely blank, short-circuited by an overabundance of sensory data. But at least you've stopped alliterating. That's probably a sign that you carried out Reverend Rotagrast's instructions correctly, right?

After tumbling for what feels like both decades and seconds, like time was stretched, cut apart, ground into a fine powder, mixed back together, and baby-birded into every sensory organ in your body, you stumble out into the laboratory of Dr. Fordham. Deep in the bowels of an unremarkable New Absalom high rise, his lab has always felt cold, dreary, and lonely to you. Haunted almost. Today though, it might as well be your own bedroom after all you've been through. You made it back, safe and on solid ground. Home.

Coughing, and panting for breath, you hold out the fish, the entire aim of your expedition beyond the pale, and clumsily toss it onto the observation table in front of you.

"I filched your freckled fuschia fish Fordham", you sputter, grinning a little at your own joke, before collapsing from exhaustion.

my first women-loving poem

Prarthana Aggarwal

the disclaimer i'll hand you is that this is a Bedroom poem by which i don't mean that you need to be in a bedroom to read it or that i'm in bed when i write this,
a chair is more appropriate: you might even sit up straight maybe? don't make eye contact but be serious about this because this is a serious poem.
i ask you to be serious like silence
because here comes an ever-burdened she:
you, there's so much to say about,
blurry like pencil to paper, cliché as a dog in a poem
you're miserable in the sun, bedroom dancing
with not a care, your smile scarcer
than the mention of girls in this poem,
you're softer than the sound of clothes
breath breaking fresher than bread
when I tell you I like the color of your shirt,
you're intimate like a bedroom youtube workout
Tall as lists and silly as a death idiom
mocha lips caught up in some situation
losing speed catching up to your head, full of
hair unique worth much beyond description
not that i want to go off in a tangent about your hair
just that i'm precarious about it, alienatingly forming
aches strong enough to rival beauvoirian words
staring in a mirror minutes are longer than manmeasurement unsettled
like that delicate starglitter under your eye,
or rather something raw has gone missing: a lipstick kiss? now i'm just getting desperate to make a metaphor
about how much the irretrievability of your fallen smile means to me i want to get on my knees in the grass and lose all my eumelanin to the sun. and that loss would mean nothing to me because either way, when it comes down to it
i can just sit in bed
and tap my evercold fingers against yours to feel
the pressure of warm poetry in them once again.

In the Mirror

Mia Tsuchida



“I regret all of my books.”
—Zora Neale Hurston

“In some languages the word for dream
is the same as for music

is the kind of thing poets like to say
to prove they’re on your side”

—Dobby Gibson

“The nourishment is palatable.”

—Millard Filmore

Namesake #1

Katie Turk

You lent me a name and a left eye that dissolved the world—
what the Greeks called silvery fog, a gleaming
storm—stealing edges and forsaking me to colors
that never became shapes and people who stretched
taut to a knife's edge—slashing my skin until it scarred,
branding me like cattle, caged and kept.

Guilt knit your braids tight down to your waist and wound
itself through my grandmother's wedding lace—my grandmother
who
chopped my mother's curly hair off at the nape—my mother
weaving this guilt, this womanly gift, like a madwoman
into my freckles, my chewed lips. My namesake, my grandmother,
mother and I—our hands tied together by the wool of all we know.

I tried to be beautiful for you—I tried to be you—you with your voice like cellos
and cigars; your clever, clouded eyes; your name untranslatable
meaning either beloved or divine. So which were you? A woman
dear to all she knew? Or the divinity who cursed me with a tiredness
that never sleeps, with blood and bad luck that comes and goes, comes
and goes as if I am something to be filled and emptied and left—

You left me, namesake—
You left me with a name I cannot understand and a weight I cannot
bear.

You left me with a mortal body and a mind that is difficult to love.
So, I must know—which were you? Beloved or divine?

All I know is that you cannot be both.

Namesake #2

Katie Turk

My mother painted my bedroom the color of her—
a purple that weeps.

Petting and pinching my pink cheeks, she promised me
the room was mine to keep.

She spoke as if happiness was a choice we all made—
as if I had chosen this name—

As if her own mother's tongue did not burst from her lips
like a wilderness she could not tame.

One day she asked me why I cried in the room the color of her
and cried when I did not answer.

She forgot I knew only the language of silence—
the tongue of her mother's mother.

When she closed the door, she called me by the name of a woman
whose lungs gave out too young.

Groceries

Tia Wagner

Trigger Warning: substance abuse, food deprivation, mental illness, suicidal ideation, near self harm

She is an art student. She's already won a few contests. There is paint on the tips of her fingers, deep blue. Her shirt is Metallica. Her hair is wound into a tight braid. Her name doesn't matter. When she gets home that day she slings her purse onto a chair. She undoes the buttons of her coat, drapes it over the side of the heater. It's far too cold in England, she thinks. And the apartment is unreasonably drafty for something so stuffy and small. She's been out shopping. A bag of fruit, melatonin gummies. She forgot to close the curtains earlier, and the sun had instantly begun bleaching all the color from her couch.

There's an oak tree outside her window. One of these days she'd like to curl up in the branches and sketch the bright sunset. She read somewhere that waking up at dawn is good for your mental health. It would be great to go whitewater rafting, too, while she's on the subject. Or diving among coral reefs in clear Brazilian waters. She should make a bucket list. Twenty pages of must-dos and some-times. She should do laundry.

She couldn't get up the stairs that morning. She was too dizzy. Abuelita always tells her to exercise more.

It's been about a week since she's eaten anything. Not by choice. She bought all the ingredients for carne asada, and her dishes are clean. She has more than enough groceries. But she can't. Last Monday she'd discovered after lunch that she couldn't keep it down.

Three years ago she tried to learn the piano. But she already had carpal tunnel and was never very good at it. As a kid, she'd been a chess champion, two times over. Lost the third tournament. It was just school-wide. She didn't play again after that. She wants chocolate fudge.

Her cat has been hiding her clothespins.

She can't keep it down. That's the big issue. It's not that she's sick. Once when she had the flu in third grade she hadn't been able to eat either. Not even the chicken soup that her mother had made in the big red pot from the yard sale. You know, she thinks, I have so many stories to share. I bet I could write a book. I'd tell them about Jesús from next door, and my science teacher who was arrested. I don't know who they are, but I'd tell them. Authors, she thinks — the whole pretentious lot of them — speak only to an imaginary they.

Her box spring is broken. It squeaks as she sits. There are stars

hung from the ceiling. She built them herself out of papier-mâché not even a month ago. For a painter, her room is surprisingly bare. But she can't stand to look at her own work, and she's too broke to afford anyone else's.

When she puts the food on her tongue it disappears. Like something out of a story. Her mouth is the wardrobe to Narnia. No matter what she tries she can never manage to swallow. It's just gone so fast. Even her meds.

Her boyfriend last year was from the agriculture department. They broke up when he got too clingy.

She lives on Edison Mill. There's a big elastic factory down the street. It would be great if they could fix the potholes already. She has to park her car a few blocks away. Her apartment smells like the neighbor's cigarettes. She doesn't want to acknowledge that she's out of options. How can she eat if the food is stolen from her mouth? Who steals it? That goddamn bastard. If she gets her hand on him she'll wring his neck. Water, he doesn't make off with her water. But juice, soda, milk. He's after her flavor, she thinks. Wouldn't it be in his best interests for her to keep at least some of it? Every parasite is in trouble when its host dies. She feels like she's going crazy. She needs her pills. He won't let her take her pills. What was that movie, the one with Audrey Hepburn?

She lights a candle. It burns in the corner of her eyes. Andrés sent it to her. The smoke goes a-fluttering through the edge of her vision. Dances across her skin. It was made in China. She can't pin down the smell. A hint of spices, clove or cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla. Not her favorite. She snuffs it out with her fingers. Citrus would be nice right now. A slice of lemon under her tongue.

She wants to feel a blossom against her skin. She wants to prick her finger on the thorn of a rose. When she was fourteen she used to put her compass beneath her eye in math class to see if anyone would notice the sharpness and the danger. She wants to make herself sick on cheap candy. She wants to fall asleep to chamomile tea. She wants to wade into a cold mountain stream. She wants to cut apart the hems of her jeans. She's stalling.

See, she has a bit of a plan. Her meds. There's over three-fifths of a bottle left. Far above the recommended daily dose. Even iron pills can cause poisoning in large enough quantities. This bastard is gonna get what he has coming.

But what if she dies? What if it stays in her mouth like water? She'll be killing herself. Still. Damned if she does, damned if she doesn't. And starvation seems like a pretty nasty way to go. She remembers a violin. The strings so taut she thought they would snap. The sound was bright red. Sharp and piercing. Most wouldn't say so. She hates the word psychotic. People only ever use it as an insult. There's no medical diagnosis there. Nothing careful. Just the barbed sting, the weight of the implications. She hates how it looks on paper, too. Nine letters is far too many for a single word. Maybe she

wouldn't be a good writer after all. But in her opinion there really should be a cap at eight. Give me back my food.

She puts a pill on her tongue. Now she can dry swallow; not before. At five she'd had a tooth removed and couldn't get down the painkillers. Her parents bought liquid ibuprofen and made her practice every day with mini m&ms. It was dangerous how sweet the medicine tasted. She probably would've chugged a whole glass for fun if it hadn't been out of her reach on top of the fridge. Her favorite fruit is melons. Cantaloupe, honeydew. One day she'll grow some into a square. There's a photo on her desk from when she had braces. Nine years old, big smile, crooked grin. Her hair pulled into two scraggly pigtails. It hadn't wanted to cooperate. She pops another pill.

When she was eight she built a radio. She got the instructions in a kit at Christmas. At ten it was a light, but this time she figured it out herself, took apart an old clock, a strip of LEDs, a bulb, and when she pushed it down to form a circuit the whole thing shone with white. She'd never learned about electricity, what was or wasn't conductive. She just tried things until they worked. She's going too slowly. Will he notice she's taking too many pills? Will he notice before she gets them all down? She needs to be smart about this. She needs to be fast. Switch. Two at a time. She can do that. Three. That works. Four. Keep going. Five is too much. But screw it, she'll do six. Seven! What does it matter! What does she have to live for, anyway!

Her brother's in the navy. ¿Pero tan pronto? It feels like just yesterday when he was so small, when he followed at her heels, when he would sit on the edge of her knee. She's barely twenty-two. But she's heard that's the age you start to feel old. She used to steal chalk from the schoolroom to draw on the concrete. A little artist in the making. Ah, don't choke. Seven. Seven is good. Is she going to die? Maybe. It's fine either way. She wonders what she'll look like if she dies. In movies after an overdose they always go foaming at the mouth. But you can't trust movies.

She thinks about colors and tastes and smells. She thinks about honey gold and sweet vanilla and salty air. She thinks about the texture of a jam jar. She thinks about "good American money." That's what they called it in Vegas.

Her roommate will take care of her cat.

Sixtieth Birthday

Nicole Wang

On my father's sixtieth birthday,
I bought him a bottle of coke and hoped gas prices were lower,

and
that I had never been born.

We shared a cigarette in the second-hand Toyota my sister left us,
before she quit this house,
while I - like so often before - watched the smoke rise
and mix with the exhaust fumes reeking off this Quickchek parking lot

part-gas-station-part-convenience-store-part-fast-food-restaurant extrava-
ganza -
my father once sweated over
hot sandwiches made to satiate tired, hard-at-work white families. and, his
own two hungry first-gen daughters.
Before giving up.

Sometimes, I think about asking him if he's sad, but I know I can't take the
answer.

My tired juiced out brain spits out one final thought

Naomi Wong

I

Teardrops twinkle as they twirl and jump
Faceless Dancers Suspended In Space!
Light fractures through each member of the troupe
As they move towards the edge
Preparing to take their final bow
Before drip drab dribbling away into
glimmers of what once was.

II

I hope that one day I'll curl up in an elephant's trunk
And maybe if I'm lucky
I'll turn into a lazy ball of dirt
That dreams of huffing and puffing
At home in a human body.

III

Long, cascading folds of my skin droop to my knees
And I feel free.
Under muted sunlight
Thick with balmy orange condensation
I wade below rumps of whales
Under skin of mules
Between root and soil
Down throats of centipedes
Shamelessly sightseeing the forbidden wonders of the world,
I glide along porcelain sheets with ease.
I Am Running In Water!

IV

My mouth is dry
With my spit.
The taste is bitter and stale
It longs for something new
To stimulate the tongue

And the soul
Have we been spending too much time together? Me And You?
Impossible.
I change my mind and
Just like that
My mouth is wet and sweet again

I'll never get sick of you!

“Beak-a-boo”

Bella Strickland



Eve

Dorothy Yaqub

I stumble, blind, beneath a starless sky.
My tongue is parched, my lips chapped red and raw.
I hunger for the cause of my demise:
Your smile, the sweetest sight I ever saw.
I'd long heard tales of lush, forbidden fruit,
Temptation that the pious must resist,
But cast aside all warnings in pursuit
Of you: your warm embrace, your tender kiss.
I threw away salvation for your touch,
Forsook my God to worship at your shrine.
When I was caught, I proudly said as such:
"If love's a sin, well then, that sin is mine."
No threats of exile could make me repent.
Banished from Eden, I have no regrets.

In Her Clothes

Caeleigh Stamper

She had a name of slight alliteration. Her hair was thick and black and obedient, her eyebrows sturdy and her eyes deep. I genuinely believe that I loved her.

I didn't meet her at first, the way I should have. It was my junior year of high school and I was freshly seventeen, dating a boy two years older than me. He went to parties often without inviting me, and I spent long, aching nights wondering what it was – that I didn't smoke? That I was too young, my hair too flat, my ass too small? My Friday nights were drenched in worries that he was ashamed of me. Now, I am embarrassed to have associated with him.

She requested to follow me one night on social media, when I knew they were together. Not alone, but likely in some medium-sized group of people drinking cheap beer that only someone with a fake ID would buy. I wasn't particularly worried about her, since he was too attached to me at the time and she seemed too independent to ever want to fuck him. Her profile picture was herself, illuminated by the rays pouring through her car window.

She was pretty, the way I imagined the women were in Italy. It wasn't that she had long eyelashes or sweet dimples or straight, glossy hair. She was pretty without much makeup, with an aura of certainty that I, at the time, was ever-craving to emulate. I could pick this up simply through the screen. There was no way I could describe her other than gorgeous, but in the most modest manner.

Sometimes he'd mention her in passing. "My friend Shailene," he'd begin, and I'd actually listen. "I had dinner with James, Brian, and Shailene." I don't remember if those were the other names. They didn't matter to me. All I heard was hers.

By the time I'd broken up with him I still hadn't met her. I considered waiting it out just for that – so that he'd finally invite me to some party she'd be at. He took me to a few, maybe three; considering the amount he attended, that was a tiny fraction, a decimal. By then it was so unbearable – all of it, just seeing him – that I had to end it even though I knew that meant I'd relinquish a more conventional approach. I did it and he hated me, and she hated me too. If we were friends, if she understood, she'd hate him instead.

I realized the pattern after a few years. I became infatuated – possibly even obsessed, although I think that's a strong word – with the

ex-girlfriends of my ex-boyfriends. Sometimes it wasn't merely the girls they'd dated; it could be one of their friends, like Shailene, one of their friends' girlfriends, like Addy. She was another. Sometimes when I felt I wanted very badly to date a boy who didn't always want me, or at least notice me, I became infatuated with his girlfriend as well. It wasn't a precise science but there was always something, always a girl linking back to a boy I didn't want to be around anymore. A girl I wanted more than him.

It took some time but eventually I found her address. It's not particularly difficult to do so. There was some information online about her mother, though everything about her father was sparse. I knew they were still together because her mother accepted my friend request. There was so much you could find about a person through a tiny screen. I drove through their neighborhood as soon as I found it.

The houses there were all quite large, each its own distinct style. They looked like the kind of homes that would shelve hundreds of books around an old fireplace, houses perfect for sophisticated dinner parties. Except they were likely used for pre-prom photoshoots and sloshy basement make-out sessions, and I reminded myself of this so that my heart did not explode with longing. So that I did not make an extensive list, a plan that led me to that same house, raising my own thick-haired children.

There was no one behind me so I slowed significantly once I knew where it was. This was the kind of neighborhood that was too spacious, where a child might ride his bike every two months but otherwise the outside was lonely and I could feel concealed driving through.

I looked at the number on the mailbox. I peered through the windows, hoping to see her face. Expecting to. She was not there. I memorized the color of the hydrangeas drenching the front yard. I noted the basketball hoop in the driveway. I genuinely took a picture with my phone. As I drove home I listened to her favorite music, which took me two hours to find.

"I think that's mine," she whispered. I turned around, forcing my face into an expression of shock. I had watched her set the drink down, held it up to my right eye as she walked into the other room, calculated exactly where her lips had touched and centered it right on my mouth, the same spot.

"Oh, shit, I'm sorry," I told her, worrying my smile was too obvious. I handed it back to her, almost giggling, and placed my hand on her left arm. Her skin was smooth as I suspected. Mine was dotted with eczema patches.

“No worries! I’ll just grab another. Do you want something else?”

I didn’t. I wanted to drink what she had. I wanted to feel as the liquid that had touched her lips, that contained slivers of her saliva, sloshed across my tongue. I felt a pang, offended that she didn’t want the same, that she was so quick to dispose of our shared beverage.

“Sure, I’ll have what you’re having.”

She handed me something fruity, the type of drink that guys at a party would degrade for not being Bud Light.

“I’m Shailene,” she told me. She leaned in and smiled when she said it, like it was a secret. Like I didn’t already know.

“Layla,” was all I said. Her eyebrows stitched together and she held a hand to her chest.

“I always wanted that name as a kid.”

“Thank you,” I said. “My mom loved the Clapton song, if you know it.”

At this she reached her hand to her forehead, as women always did in old movies before they fainted. I knew it would get that type of reaction from her. It was her favorite song, the first in every playlist. I suddenly grew uncomfortable, afraid to make it too obvious that I knew everything about her. I had to dial it down so that our match wasn’t too perfect, too pristine.

She guided me into the next room, the one she’d visited as I stole her beer. We were latched together for a glorious second, and I basked in the love that could only be given by drunk girls of high social standing at a house party, girls who didn’t know you but accepted you because you had to have been decent enough to be there, standing in the basement of a kid whose parents liked to go on cruise vacations alone. The girls who should’ve hated you but in this circumstance, extended a hand, extended their heart, free for you to pick because perhaps they should’ve known who you were. I felt that I would never receive a love so pure, so innocent, so addicting as that love in my entire life. I wanted forever to be no older than twenty.

She brought me to a room with people who wouldn’t recognize me, which made me grateful. She was no longer close to his old friends, I assumed because she finally realized how immature they were. I knew she was better than that. I knew I was right to see the good, the light in her.

We sat and I drank and she braided my hair. I felt how I used to, when it was circle time in third grade and girls would braid my hair and boys would stare in awe, stare in jealousy at the one thing they couldn’t do. I could sit and have my hair braided by her forever and I would never want anything else.

“Shit, I broke your hair tie,” she mumbled in a way that indicat-

-ed her level of drunkenness was quite high. I was about to tell her that it was okay when she said, "I'll have to buy you a new one now." I could feel my heart double over and dance.

We exchanged phone numbers. I'd deleted hers from my phone that morning in case this happened, but I wrote it on a slip of paper and tucked it in my desk drawer. But it worked – I had it. I had it authentically.

I worried when I woke up the next morning to an empty phone. Maybe she'd forgotten about me completely, or she really wasn't interested in making up for the broken hair tie. Maybe I didn't impress her as much as I hoped.

It was Christmas Eve and I was sitting down to dinner with my parents when the text came through. *Should I pick out the hair tie myself, or would you like to put in a second opinion?* I loved her. I ate dinner with my leg shaking violently, bouncing up and down. I knew I couldn't respond until after, until at least two hours, but I wanted to call her and tell her, "I love you."

We went out the day after Christmas, during all the best sales. She asked where I wanted to go and I told her to take the lead. I would jot down every store she mentioned and chose as inventory, another slice of her life I could finally inhale. I sat in her car. I never thought I'd be able to say those words, "I sat in Shailene's car," but I did.

We went to three different stores. We never bought any hair ties. She picked out a purse for me and I told her it was perfect and I carried it around with me everywhere for the next two months. I watched as she glided her hand across everything and I tried to emulate all of her moves, each reaction. I wanted to crawl inside her skin and become her. I wanted to merge the two of us together, but I worried my existence in that coalescence would taint her exquisiteness.

She took me to a few parties, at least more than he ever did, and I wore her clothes. I told her I didn't have any and she believed me even though it wasn't true. Everyone sat across the room while we danced with our bodies pressed together, her closet out on display, and I felt her hair drape around my shoulders. It was the closest I'd ever been to someone, close enough to pretend that their hair was mine. In the bathroom mirror I noticed her lipstick smudge on my arm. I wasn't sure how it got there but I grabbed a tissue and pressed it, preserved it so I could hang it in my room.

Winter became spring became summer just like that, braiding each other's hair and dancing in her clothes and sleeping in the same bed. I had never been so happy, but I wanted more. I was never close enough

to her. I was never her. I couldn't stop until I was her.

I smoked with her for the first time. We were in some college wrestler's backyard, our feet bare and our toenails painted with the same shimmery polish we'd put on each other the night before: a night with our hair wrapped in puffy white towels and our faces coated in a clumpy green face mask that made her skin glow and mine break out. By the time I was nineteen like her, I'd find that my skin didn't break out anymore.

I coughed like I knew I would. She smiled and her eyes became enclosed by skin, her cheekbones raised higher so her face seemed truly mature. I reached out and tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear, and she turned her head to the side, shyly.

"Fuck," I whispered.

"I know," she said, indicating toward the blunt. "It's good shit."

I followed her around that August like a puppy. We did what we always did, but we did less of it. She took me to the beach and we waded in the water, far enough away from each other that we couldn't touch. The last night there I stole a framed photo of her with her mother and a tube of the waterproof mascara she wore every day. During middle school dance recitals I'd been warned never to share eye makeup, that I'd get a disease, but I didn't care then. I wanted anything she could give me.

I hugged her the morning she drove off for college. A different state, a medium-sized school with plenty of girls to share clothes and dance with and boys to use for alcohol. I wondered who the first person there she'd have sex with would be. The last one I knew of was two weeks before, at the beach, and I sat in the hallway outside and listened. I didn't have anywhere else to go. Even if I did, I doubt I'd have left.

We both cried. We both said, "See you at Thanksgiving!" I thought about what we'd do then, the stories she'd have to tell me about the boys and their fumbles and their misconstrued ideas about women. She wouldn't tell me about the girls, the same way she didn't spend time with them around me. It was a silent understanding we had, I suppose. The boys I didn't care about. With other girls, it would be different. It would be vicious. No one would want her quite as much as me, but they would all drawn to her in a way, and girls knew how to get what they wanted in the most detailed, malicious manners. It was what I admired most about them.

It ended the way I knew it would. It was the following summer. She'd spent spring break with some friends from college in Florida. She told me they did coke, at one point. I never wanted to do coke but I hated her for doing it without me.

She showed me the pictures she'd taken, the ones she'd had boys

take of her. Her body up against a girl with long blonde hair, their chests touching. Suddenly the yearning I felt for her turned to disdain, the way it had with the boy, the reason I knew her to begin with. I felt I didn't know her anymore, or possibly to begin with. It always ended like that – abruptly, with hostility. She didn't seem to care, though – not as much as I would've.

I finished the year at school. I began college. I dated a boy unlike the last in many ways, but similar at his core. His ex-girlfriend was in my psych class, and she was beautiful. I felt like I could love her. And I think that maybe I did.

Lethargy

Nora Archer

It is so hard to pull myself up out of lethargy
for my court date you'll have an easier time
burning me in effigy
I add jail time to an array
of consequences I escape

but I am still interred
in my freedom to abandon
to cut ties and
bury myself by the wayside

choices and chances deferred
from the nadir of my ditch
without peace but
laughter at my moving worries

I am guilty as charged
with unproductivity,
or bystanding,
insipid apathy.

No defense will be presented
plaintiffs and bailiffs
don't invite ifs ands or buts
my case is rested.

I am not your leper for falling
somewhere along
that empty ribbon of highway
but I made the mistake
of staring up
my feet still but my eyes roaming
endlessly

The Cat

Kathleen Turk

“Why did you do this to me?” Mother asks. With her winter-dry hands, she cups my face. My face that I scratched with my nails. My face that I slapped with a comb. “Why have you done this to me?”

I don't know what I've done. I stare at my fingernails, worn down by my teeth, and do my best to remember for her.

“Why,” Mother asks again and again. I finger the fragile remains of the ceramic cat on my desk, guiding my skin from the smooth black of the paint to the fracture lines, rough like a cat's tongue.

“Look at me.” Mother lifts my chin with her finger. I grip the broken tail in my palm. Mother painted the cat for me seven years ago, back when every weekend was an art project, before the heat went off one winter and before we stopped repainting the chipping paint on the front door.

Mother's eyes are scared: a sky abandoned by the birds and the clouds, shockingly blue and lonely. I look away and back at the cat. One morning I awoke to find it had fallen off my desk. I didn't hear it shatter.

“Why can't you be happy?” Mother asks.

“You said you would fix the cat last month.” I nudge my head toward its black fragments.

Mother stares at me like I am her flower bed, dead with frost. She closes my bedroom door behind her as she leaves.

I'll make her fix the cat tomorrow.

МЯГКИЙ ЗНАК

Nicole Wang

Everyone in the world wants to eat me.
In springtime,
they barter with rocks for my body;
Standing on the table,
I pull out my teeth with a wrench
and bury sex and bone in the old rusted tool box.

In the year of pricking my fingers on thorns,
I ask myself when did flowers begin to eat meat.
I watch the bodies slip into each other and calcify like coral.
It's sad how they bleach white in Australia.

Even the stars are in love with us
Little garnets; they fetishize our bodies
We burn like candles in the wake of death.

Birds hash out songs like water from a cracked metal colander.
I stand on the corner and think of how they only glide in soft angles.
I cannot see the sky.

RUNT

Mia Tsuchida



Tuesday

Delaney Marrs

I sometimes imagine I die on a Tuesday. I drop dead someplace hot as heck and mortician-less and someone goes *oh, crap, we gotta bury him quick or he'll start to stink* and they call up everyone and are like, *c'mon, now, we're digging a hole, skip work, be here* and everyone's there Wednesday, maybe Thursday, after red-eyes and car drives, sweating in the heat, giving parting words, taking turns throwing dirt on my face and saying *we'll miss you, man* and someone says *can I have his car?* and gets smacked in the back of the head and I'm laughing down from the sky because it's my imagination and I can pretend that clouds are like pillows and I'm worthy of Heaven.

Most of the time I don't even imagine a body, a funeral, a grave, just someone calling to say *he passed today* and everyone saying *there's a life we want to celebrate or let's go talk about how he was a stupid git over tea and fruit cake*—whatever—but, though my imagining of the setting changes from restaurants to parks to space ships, everyone always ends up out late, kids celebrating escaping bedtime, adults not wanting to go to sleep and wake up to find out they had too much to drink, and sometimes I'll cry and imagine my tears turn into rain and laugh as everyone runs, saving the pudding, splashing in puddles, drenched and laughing before they can even get to cover.

Sometimes I imagine I don't even need to be dead. I'm just dying, passing on, leaving fast, a hero for saving that bank from being robbed or an idiot for going bungee jumping at the age of sixty-one, and everyone comes, sings me a song, and I say *please shut up*, and they talk to me, say those things you say at a funeral or say *green's not your color* then brag about the kids, whine about the kids, bring the kids, pull them out of school because if I call in sick, that's enough of a pass for them to skip.

And then I imagine that I'm sitting, in my apartment, alone on a Tuesday, and get a knock on the door, and there everyone is, skipping school, ditching work, saying we just wanted to see you, even if I am a *stupid git*, not waiting till I'm dead or dying to ask me to go for *tea and fruit cake* and tell me *green's not your color* and it doesn't have to be everyone, not everyone, just anyone at all.

Persephone

Tia Wagner

The ways of what cruel god have brought you here?
O taste of spring I feel upon my lips.
Your mother must have named you for a gem,
and yet you cross the floor like you're a stream.
Persephone, you know I watch for you.
This time of night you shimmer with the moon.
I should equip myself with knowledge of the Greek, a new appeal I'm
sure I thought of first.
But I am not the Mythically Adept.
When I read not, I sewed my hands with lace.
My button nails now twisted with the thread,
I wonder if you'd see my seams as strange?
The lovely lady all alight with grace,
who walks into the pond in her white dress,
and leaves behind the milk-trails of the moon.
I want to be a duckling in your wake.
But something seems to bar me from approach.
Your oil-tears, I think, would choke my wings.
No talents have I but to make you cry.

A List of Places the World Forgot

Jillian D’Herin

1. The swingset in my childhood backyard, complete with rusty chains that squealed when you went too high and a father who, Sunday after Sunday, repeated that one day, I’ll finally get around to fixing that thing. Grass grew in straggly strands beneath my pumping feet.
2. A hilltop where my mom brought me and my sister once, a telescope kit tucked under her arms. She wanted us to see the stars, though we could only see one bright enough to shine through the smokestack smog emitted from the factories outside of town. My sister and I took turns looking through the telescope, yearning for the faintly glowing dot.
3. My mother’s embrace when I had a bad day, a shield against the pressing weight of the middle school world. A shield built to protect me, to hold me, forever. It’s a shame that “forever” came with a time limit, but I couldn’t have known that back then.
4. My sister’s bedroom as I helped her draw flowers from images online. I told her that I’d never seen these kinds of flowers, far prettier than the brownish weeds that grew in the cracks of the pavement. She told me that these flowers could grow here if things were different. I didn’t understand her, so I kept drawing.
5. The red-painted bleachers beneath which I had my first kiss at fourteen, among the cobwebs and abandoned cans. Vicious laughter echoed louder down there, it seemed. Sobs did, too. The taunts surrounded me in that tiny space.
6. A high school football field surrounded by forever-beeping construction equipment, replacing whatever remained of the long destroyed grass with brilliant Astroturf green that shined under the football game lights. The hills surrounding the field were brown, but no one seemed to care during those late-night games.
7. The annual carnival set up in the rec center parking lot, a million sensations and colors moving all at once, my cotton candy-dyed fingertips clinging to the guardrail of a ride. Before, fireworks would light up the sky on that final night, patterns of reds and blues bursting in the night. Now, the smog was so thick there was no point — no one would see them anyways.
8. The living room where my parents sat on the couches when I came home from school one day, the channel on the TV rapidly shifting as soon as I crossed the threshold, a news anchor disappearing into a daytime talk show host. I asked what was wrong, and they told me everything was fine. I believed them.

9. A little diner standing alone across from the mall where my family went every Friday. Each week, it seemed a little emptier, our voices crowding the space as we tried to make up for the emptiness. The waitress joked that we were the only ones keeping the place in business.
10. A rainy half-day at the end of my sophomore year with no umbrella to protect me from the strangely dark rain that burned upon impact. Dark as ink, it splashed around my boots as I ran through the torrent, trying to get home as quickly as possible, cheeks and arms flayed. I came home scarred and soaked and burning, my skin aflame.
11. The cold tiles of the bathroom floor as I leaned my burned cheek against the door, trying to listen to what my parents were talking about in between rounds of applying medication to my injuries. Their murmured discussions were out of reach, and I was left alone with only the cold as a salve against my burning, droplet-shaped scars.
12. Saturday, November 18. Like we always did, we sat in the blue-painted kitchen, eggs and bacon cooking on the stove and no TV playing in the background, a Saturday morning tradition. My sister sat across from me, Dad next to her, and Mom next to me. I don't remember what we talked about. I don't remember at all.
13. A hospital room overflowing with patients, so many with marks from the endless black rain falling from the sky. Coughing echoed up and down the halls, a low rasping sound that had inky blood coming up with it. I stood, surrounded by it all, paralyzed.
14. My sister's bed as we both sat in it, the only anchors in an endless sea. I was crying, tears dripping onto the new marks on my hand. No matter how much I covered up during the rain, it kept finding my skin. She told me to stop crying because clean water was precious. I tried, but it was too hard not to. Eventually, she gave in and cried with me, the precious resource our tithe to grief.
15. A classroom that hemorrhaged students by the day. The pre-calculus teacher looked at me with pity and asked why I hadn't left to find a cleaner place to live, like so many of my former classmates. I asked her the same. Neither of us had a good enough answer to bother saying, so we just sat in the classroom, an air purifier trying its best to fight the inevitable. It was losing, but neither of us would acknowledge that. I didn't go back to school.
16. The space between car honks echoing from the interstate highway. I sat in the living room, now empty and dark, because there was no point in wasting candles when only one of us stayed in the house. My head pounded as I waited for my sister to return with food and clean water.
17. A front door that didn't open for a full day. Two. Three. I took to sleeping in front of it like a dog left home alone while its owners, its fami-

-ly, were just at work and school. But no one ever came back for me.

18. What was once farmland that I now dug through with quivering hands. Dirt caked beneath too-long fingertips as I hunted for any sign of life, even a seed, to take home with me. The remnants were there but there was nothing concrete. My stomach growled. I kept digging.

19. A nearly empty house on a once-normal suburban street, the paint eroding off of the front paneling and the ground ravaged. There was only one set of footprints gracing the path up to the house. There was no one else left to leave marks.

20. Me, the only one left who's here to remember.

Nian

Nicole Wang

The old Chinese man on the train from Paoli
brings tears to my eyes. Where are his kids?
The ones he still carries the hello kitty
pink backpack for in hopes they remember
to take it back next New Years. The
ones he had to hold him up when the
diabetes kicks in, and the spirits eat his
aged brain by the window. Where are they
to witness the fading of his ox soul.

Ebola breaks apart the capillary veins.

Nicole Wang

Ebola breaks apart the capillary veins.
Your brain explodes, they say
But who is the white man to say
not to eat bushmeat, when they use
all that paper and eat all that lithium.
All that beef, all that pork, all that not-blood.
Especially when they say it's so sweet,
so naked, so close to a human body.

Busy Shift

Mia Tsuchida



Backyard Fences

Hannah Ehrlich

The sting of salt seeps into the crack that runs down the middle of Genevieve's bottom lip and coats the chapped, red skin around it, too. She takes a sip of apple juice out of a small plastic straw that sticks out of a small cardboard box and swishes it around in her mouth. She licks away the salt from the outside of her mouth only to shovel another handful of popcorn into it. Most of it is crunched up and digested, but some bits slip between her fingers, roll down her t-shirt, and land in the grass she sits on. She sits with her spine in the shape of a crescent moon and with one leg crossed over the other, the bowl of popcorn sitting in the popcorn bowl-sized hole created by her legs.

Genevieve, fatigued from holding her left eye shut and her right eye open for so long, shuts her right eye and opens her left. For those few moments, all she sees is the dirty white paint of her backyard fence. When she is satisfied with the rest, she switches eyes and once again peers into Mrs. Deedie's yard through a small hole in the fence. She watches the overalled woman's torso slither back like a cobra lifting up its head to stick out its tongue. Mrs. Deedie's arms slowly reach above her head, and gripped between her calloused hands is a giant mallet with a wooden handle and a thick, black, rubber cylinder sticking out of it. In one swift motion, Mrs. Deedie brings the mallet down to whack the head of a pole sticking out of the soil at the perimeter of where her garden is soon to be. Genevieve flinches with the sound of rubber banging metal, and the pole sinks deeper into the soil to match the height of the other two poles placed around the plot.

The springtime sun coats everything and everyone in a wet heat, especially those who swing heavy mallets. Mrs. Deedie places the mallet down and bends forward to release the tension from her chest and back. She takes off her sunhat and tosses it on the ground and lets her graying hair graze the grass. She shakes her head vigorously from side to side, and little beads of sweat launch themselves out of her hair and off her temples into the heavy air. Mrs. Deedie puts her hat back on, and before she returns to her task, she becomes distracted by the sound of crunching.

"Vermin," Mrs. Deedie mumbles, pacing around her yard, mallet in hand, ready to catch the little rodent that is leaving food scraps in her yard.

As she approaches the little hole in the fence during the search, the sound of crunching gets louder. That's when she realized that

the rodent must be on the other side of the wooden fence, possibly trying to chew a hole through it! Mrs. Deedie gets right up to the edge of the fence, and all Genevieve can see are the stitches of denim that make up her overalls. When Mrs. Deedie peers over the fence, ready to swing at a squirrel munching through wood, all she finds is her kid neighbor sitting cross legged, looking through a hole close to the bottom of her fence, and covered in popcorn particles.

“I see that I have a little spy next door,” Mrs. Deedie says with her arms crossed. “A messy spy who is attracting rodents to my yard,” she adds.

Genevieve removes her eye from the hole and cranes her neck upward. She sees the top half of Mrs. Deedie, who is looking down over the fence with her lips pressing together and flared nostrils.

“Well, if you’re curious about what I’m doing, you should just ask. It’s not polite to spy,” Mrs. Deedie says.

Genevieve watches the way the little bit of loose skin under Mrs. Deedie’s chin shakes like a gobbling turkey after she speaks and shoves another handful of popcorn in her mouth.

“Sweetheart, either back away from the fence or speak to me. But whatever is going on right now is scaring me.”

Genevieve was not planning on speaking this afternoon, but she also wasn’t planning on leaving the fence, either. So, she decides to say, “I want to ask what you’re doing.”

“Okay. Thank you for asking. I’m putting up an electric fence so that the animals who try to eat my vegetables can’t get to them.”

“Where are the vegetables?”

“I just planted the seeds. The season for spinach and peas starts now.”

“How does the fence stop the animals?”

“Well, they’ll get an electric shock.”

“NO!” Genevieve screams.

“Honey, this is normal for gardeners. I can’t let the deer and rabbits and rats walk onto my property and steal the vegetables I work hard to grow,” Mrs. Deedie says as she paws away a fly that is buzzing by her ear.

“Electric shocks hurt!” Genevieve shouts.

“There’s no other way,” Mrs. Deedie says. “Now pick up your scraps and mind your own business.”

Genevieve considers this, but instead decides to jump out of her criss-crossed position, launching the popcorn bowl and juice box into the fence.

She reaches for the rubber head of the mallet, and Mrs. Deedie, surprised by Genevieve's strength and speed, feels the wooden handle slip from her hand.

As Genevieve backs away with the mallet, Mrs. Deedie presses both hands into the wooden planks of the fence and hops over to Genevieve's side. Genevieve's small steps are no match for Mrs. Deedie's stern stomping feet, especially while she is weighed down to her right side by the hefty tool. Mrs. Deedie tugs the mallet out of Genevieve's hand, and heads back into her own yard.

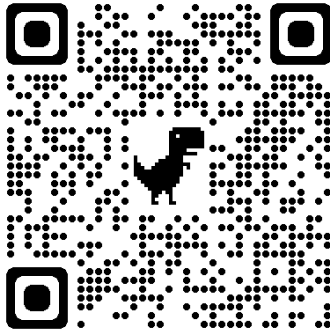
Genevieve drops to the ground face down, squirms in place like the deer and the rabbits and the rats that would soon be filled with electric shock, and whimpers into the grass.

Still Life with You

Molly Fording

On a day when my teeth feel too sharp for my mouth,
you boil water in the electric kettle,
and we talk about things: the terror
of graduation, how we don't know how we know
that we're women, the way a really good mango
can make the whole afternoon sweet.
I feel cradled in your gaze like a bird
in a child's hand. We drink. We talk.
The shadows lengthen through the kitchen.
The glowing microwave clock
counts us into the future, second by second,
pixel by pixel. Deep in our bodies,
life goes on: digestion, circulation,
cardiovascular gas exchange.
Your nails are pink, my wrists are slender.
Outside, the teenaged raccoons
are emerging from the trees
into the first summer of their lives.
Inside, my heart beats in my chest,
quietly, and for you, for you, for you.

PERSIMMONS



WEBSITE

SEE YOU SPACE COWBOY...

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

-Tokugawa Ieyasu