

| *collision* literary magazine



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Dear reader,

As I reflect upon the past year—my first as Editor in Chief—I am astounded by the ways in which our magazine has grown. We have adapted to new platforms, implemented a rebranding, led our first writing workshop, and forged new alliances with many other organizations on campus. We also kept alive a recently established tradition of zine publishing. This year saw the *Border Crossing* zine, which featured work centered around international and intercultural perspectives. The *Border Crossing* zine celebrated bold writers and artists who broke down barriers and explored new aspects of the world with a keen gaze. The zine also marked an important moment in *Collision's* history, as we also published work from the Inside-Out students in the Pitt Prison Education Program. Their haiku collection was incredibly compelling, and we look forward to working with them again in the future.

Many thanks are in order. First of all, thank you to the editorial staff for your unwavering support and dedication. You made every Wednesday an absolute joy. In particular, I would like to recognize John Starr and Jake Dihel, who are graduating at the end of this semester. Both John and Jake have been integral members of our editorial staff, and although we will miss them, we wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Hannah Heisler, who has completed her second and final year as our talented and incisive Arts Editor. Thank you for your perseverance and your hand in revitalizing our staff's appreciation for art. Once a mango, always a mango.

Additionally, my warmest thanks go to our contributors worldwide for trusting us with their work. Our staff was deeply moved by the

*from the editor*

pieces that succeed this letter—pieces that imagine futures to come, recall histories, question the status quo, subvert expectations, and draw us into fresh, intriguing landscapes and states of being. We are immensely pleased to publish your writing and art, and we hope you enjoy the pieces that accompany yours in this magazine. Thank you, as well, to our readers. This magazine would not be possible without your avid support, and we hope that you, too, are moved by the works contained within.

In many ways, this year has been unprecedented, both on a global scale and a local one for us at *Collision*. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us in a myriad of ways—as individuals and members of collectives like families, friend circles, student bodies, and editorial staffs. Nevertheless, even in these dismaying times of social isolation, we find solace, sustenance, and community in the arts. This is one constant we can rely upon. Fortunately, we at *Collision* have also maintained a supportive, insightful staff that upholds the mission of our magazine—to publish and promote the creative works by people from marginalized groups. We have remained true to our aesthetic, our hunger for the wonderfully weird experimental, and to that end, we are delighted to present the 2020 annual issue of *Collision Literary Magazine*.

All the best,  
Hannah Woodruff  
Editor in Chief | *Collision Literary Magazine*

## *acknowledgements*

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*Cover Art*

# **Bleeding Fruit**

JordanRiver Michaels  
Towson University

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*First Prize*

**I'll Keep Checking**

John Messer

The University of Missouri at Columbia (Mizzou)

Fiction

**Data Transition 40233-22**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*It has been over 30 local solar days since your last check in. I have not had any contact with the other Vigil AI's, including from the core worlds. If you are receiving, please respond.*

**Data Transition 40233-23**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*It has been exactly 45 local solar days since your last check in. Automated systems are all functioning. Vigil AI's still dark. Awaiting response.*

**Data Transition 40233-24**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*It has been exactly 60 local solar days since your last check in. I detected a broken transmission yesterday. It was too distorted to make out its contents, but the signature was [Ancient] and had emergency*

*labeling. Just a few moments ago I finished deducing its source burst. It was the [homeworld]. I'll keep trying to see if I can make heads or tails of it.*

*I hope it wasn't from you.*

### **Data Transition 40233-25**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*It wasn't you. It has been exactly 65 solar days since your last check in. The transmission I received seems to be from a Legion ship. It was breaking up when it sent it, a general distress. I only managed to reconstruct the last part properly. It was warning all [Ancient] ships, [light] and [dark].*

*Why would it do that? Did the war end? Did we win?*

### **Data Transition 40235-1**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*I just finished pinging all Vigil, Overwatch, Cold, and Sentinel class AI that I had in my directory. A few are far enough away that it'll take awhile to get a response, but all the closer ones are dark. I'll run some diagnostics on the outpost's communication systems after sending this message.*

*It has been exactly 78 local solar days since you left. I wanted to let you know that the tribe we were observing ended their skirmishes with the neighboring one across the river. The observational satellite picked it up nicely. They exchanged fruits and tools and had a festival*

*on the river. You'd have liked it.*

### **Data Transition 40235-2**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*It's been exactly 90 local solar days since you went away. I remember you saying that you needed to join the fight, that you'd ignored it long enough. I remember how guilty you felt that you hadn't helped before. Why did you feel guilty?*

*Systems are normal; I checked a few hundred times. Most of the pings came back dark, a few never came back, I'm waiting on a few. Otherwise everything's fine... just waiting.*

*I'll keep checking.*

### **Data Transition 40235-3**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*It's been exactly 145 local solar days since you left. I ran some calculations yesterday. At the rate of growth of these people, they'll be extrasolar in about [10,500] years. I know you wanted to watch them that whole time, and welcome them when they entered the greater scope of existence. Take your time, the specimens here have a while.*

### **Data Transition 40238-21**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*I picked up a ship today. It's been nearly 1,000 solar days*

*since you left. The ship didn't transition into normal space with a harmonious sheathe. It looked like it fractured space. It wasn't one of ours, definitely. The profile matched the Fallen. I shut down most systems as it approached this planet. It lingered a long time, mostly scanning the indigenous tribes here. I thought at first it might have been a colony ship, but it was too small. Passive scans take so long to resolve anything!*

*No, it makes more sense that it was scouting. I think it determined the people, or local flora and fauna weren't appropriate, and decided to leave. As it pulled out of its orbit, it dropped something into space near the northern pole. After the ship left, I made out a cylindrical shape using optics, but all other scans bounced off it. The observational satellite just wasn't made to analyze anything advanced!*

*Anyway, I'll keep checking.*

## **Data Transition 40239-1**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*A different Fallen ship arrived yesterday. It approached the device left near the poles and retrieved it. It lingered there for a long time, most probably analyzing the collected data and perhaps communicating with some kind of command. Suddenly, it turned on an interception course with the observational satellite. I tried to hail it, asking it to stop. It didn't. The ship plowed right through the satellite, destroying it. I know how much you wanted to see pictures when you got back.*

*It turned, and did the same to the communications relay satellite. I went completely dark then. Eventually, after massive planetary*

*and orbital scans, it left.*

*I'm sorry, World Jumper Yaniess. Now I can't take images of the tribes or hail locally. I only have the translight communicator inside the outpost.*

*It has been exactly 1,004 local solar days since you left. Did you get lost?*

*If so, I'll keep checking.*

## **Data Transition 40239-8**

Unpacking...

*World Jumper Yaniess,*

*Everything's been quiet for a while now. I've shut down some internal systems to conserve power. Don't worry, your tools and weapons are still safe in the lowest sections. It's just that the systems shut down were comfort ones you liked. The tribes have been quiet, too.*

*I got a ping back, a far away one, from the [Temple of Binding]. The Cold AI there was responding automatically. The only thing it said was it was in lockdown mode. Why would the temple keepers do that?*

*It's been 1,500 local solar days since you left. Did you know? This is the longest you've been away since you chose this planet for observation. I know you felt that the war took priority... But you are missing a lot.*

*I'll keep checking.*

**Data Transition 40239-10**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*It's been 2,304 local solar days since you left. The most exciting thing happened over the last [month]. Some kind of warlord entered the local area of the tribes. He rode on [horse]back, and had a horde with him. They subjugated all the local tribes quickly, but actually kept the local rulers! Further, the warlord integrated the tribes, making them share unique foods and tools. The mingling has been very beneficial to all parties so far. As for the warlord himself, he left a small section of his loyal horde here, took double the number from the local men, and left for new conquests. I've already seen traders come in his wake!*

*This is fantastic! It shows a huge jump in cultural integration and evolution of society. I only wish I could have recorded it with the satellite...*

*I'll keep checking...*

**Data Transition 40239-29**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*I did an inventory today. Everything is accounted for, including the [stone]. Why didn't you bring it with you, if you were going to fight? It is a powerful tool. Why leave it here, with me?*

*...Why leave me here?*

**Data Transition 40240-1**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*It's been 20,034 local solar days since you left. The tribes have grown so much. They have banded together into a local kingdom, after the warlord died old and fat, his vast holdings shattered. These people are so interesting, Yaniess. I wish you were here to see them.*

*I miss you.*

*Are you on your way back, I wonder? Nothing but static and silence for so long now... Where is everyone? Where are you?*

*I'll keep checking.*

**Data Transition 40240-89**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*I remembered today, something I think I had been trying to ignore. On the day you left, you glanced back at my hologram. You had a smile; you were trying to look strong. I remember, right before you left, your eye twitched just slightly. I captured that microsecond and watched it. You were afraid. I've never seen you afraid.*

*It's been 35,302 local solar days since you left.*

**Data Transition 40241-1**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*Why didn't you take me? I could have helped, and the [stone] could have helped. I know you're strong on your own, but I could have*



*made you so much stronger, and the [stone]... it's just outright meaningless to leave such a powerful tool behind. I could have... with me and the [stone], you could have...*

*It's been 36,580 local solar days since you left.*

*I'll keep checking.*

## **Data Transition 40241-5**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*I saw something weird. The translight transmitter lit up suddenly with foreign signals. A third of existence was transmitting. I flipped through some of it. Someone's at war, I think a civil war, because of how tangled it is. It's an angry affair, to say the least.*

*I'm sorry it's been so long since my last transmission. Windows are tighter these days, now that the locals have invented radio. They really are marvelous, Yaniess, you'd have been so happy to see them. The language of your favorite tribe has now evolved into a continent-spanning common tongue. You'd have liked that, your guesses were almost always right.*

*It's been 730,382 local solar days since you left. The outpost has shifted in the ground, and the cameras are mostly covered now. We're too deep for them to find it though, a few [kilometers] below the seabed.*

*I'll keep checking for you.*



**Data Transition 40241-8**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*It's been 1,000,000 local solar days since you died. Did you know that? I think you do, or you do now. The people here have colonized their moon. It's a tourist attraction though, all corporate. That war, that intergalactic one, ended. I think the "new" side won. Hard to tell. Hm.*

*I'll keep checking.*

**Data Transition 40241-15**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*It's been 1,000,804 local solar days since you ran. The savages here got in a disagreement. Mars just wasn't big enough for one bloated nation, I guess. The homeworld's scorched. Nuclear winter is setting in. Their moon and Mars colonies are still there. Mars will starve in about 1,043 solar days, especially since the moon colonies are hoarding their own supplies and the only hydroponics left in this forsaken system. I guess your guesses aren't always right.*

*I'll keep checking though.*

**Data Transition 40242-2**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*You'll never believe what happened. The moon colonies agreed*

*to support the Martian ones. They launched what ships they had with what fuel they had to deliver half of their hydroponics to Mars. With careful rationing, no one will starve. Even better, with a combined effort, they'll be able to begin salvaging fuel from their homeworld, and construct a solar net. They're tenacious.*

*Except for the fact that a solar flare destroyed the Martian colonies before the ships could launch. Now, the moon colonies still have their hydroponics, but without the Martian equipment and manpower, salvage operations are impossible, and they don't have the fuel to get to Mars and back.*

*I'd help, but...*

*The moon colony should be able to survive indefinitely, albeit trapped there. It's been 1,001,032 solar days since I last saw you, Yaniess.*

*Oh and I forgot to mention last time that they called the fourth planet here "Mars." After a war god of their ancient past, because of the oxide's resemblance to blood from afar. Fitting.*

*I'll keep checking, Yaniess. I'll keep checking.*

## **Data Transition 40243-8**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*I lost contact with the moon colonies. I think something's malfunctioning, actually. Last I saw they were still there. I ran a diagnostic, and lateral sensors are definitely malfunctioning. I can't see past the planet's exosphere. It's been 1,032,020 local solar days. Everything secure. The nuclear winter froze the ocean, and the war had destroyed*

*too much atmosphere for a greenhouse effect to thaw it.*

*I'll keep checking it, though, maybe atmosphere catch will take place.*

*I'll keep checking.*

### **Data Transition 40243-9**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*I got lucky today. I think I'm the only one. I got a gains boost, a hole in the irradiated clouds opened wide enough for the medial sensors to get a look at the moon. The complex was nearly covering the entire surface, front to back, and was entirely abandoned. No life signs, and no malfunctions on my end. No ships docked either, but I did detect damage, a lot. Some from weapons fire. I hope they got away, made it somewhere they could live. Maybe if they made it to Mars...*

*I hope you got away.*

*It's been 1,052,000 local solar days since you got away.*

*I'll keep checking, maybe I'll get a signal.*

*I'll keep checking.*

### **Data Transition 40243-11**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*I'm sorry for calling them savages. I know how much you cared for them. They are very special. I hope they're alive, somewhere. I wish I could have seen them grow enough to take your tools. The burden is safe though, do not worry.*

*Even though it's been 2,400,726 days since you left, I've kept it safe. Your tools are safe, this outpost is safe. That civil war I told you about never reached here. The Fallen ship never saw the outpost. I think I need to go to sleep for awhile. I'll turn off everything but sensors and the chronometer. But don't worry, if you send a message it'll stay in the buffer until I check.*

*And I'll keep checking.*

## **Data Transition 40244-1**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*It's a miracle. It's been... 9,125,000,000 days since your emancipation from this world. Today I woke up, as I have been in long intervals. I scanned the planet. The clouds have lifted, the radiation has bled out. The planet grazed ambient gas clouds over and over. There's air here. The ocean is thawing. The tardigrades are back, and other microbes.*

*I charged the capacitors and made a long range burst. Neat trick to get past the lack of lateral sensors, eh? Mars is empty, but the old complex looked built upon, like several newer and newer layers. No weapons fire, though, no damage apart from the solar flare so long ago. No ships there either, but old shipyards that weren't there millions of days ago. I hope they made it, I hope they made it somewhere.*

*Everything's still secure. Outpost secure. I like to think you're secure, too. It makes my waking moments better. But it'd be better to know for sure, you'd like that too, I think. To know that I'm secure.*

*I'll keep checking.*

**Data Transition 40244-7**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*It's all desert now. Not irradiated wasteland. It barely rains anywhere. There's life, yes, but the air is thin. I think it'll stay this way for a while. I can't make any more sensor pulses. I think the last one broke something. It's been... oh... exactly 31,025,000,000 days since you looked at me, afraid. You don't need to be afraid. Nothing can hurt you now. I... don't think I was made to operate this long. When did I stop using honorifics?*

*I like the tardigrades. They remind me of the people that destroyed this place, then went to live in the stars. So tenacious.*

*The tools here are safe, OK? I need you to hear that. Please. I'll tell you next time when I check in.*

*I'll keep checking.*

**Data Transition 40245-1**

Unpacking...

*Do you ever keep checking? I do. It's almost all I do... all I've done...*

**Data Transition &\*#%-1**

Unpacking...

*...Yaniess,*

*This is a Vigil class AI, encompassed at Life Forge-[A89R] located at fortress world [Zeta]. My conception was to serve as a*

*companion to World Jumper Yaniess. My duties include maintaining outpost operations, ensuring the success of my missions, and ensuring the livelihood of World Jumper Yaniess. My serial tag is 2580-AOPP7. My sister AI's are attached to World Jumper Kanen and World Jumper Guyruss.*

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*Myyy ayasdy asyd  
diokjsh ;loh iog [%^\*#@#\*\$\*%@@@*

*...*

*I am Vigil. I am the watcher of death. I was created by time itself.*

*Yaniess... I'm sorry I didn't stop you. You had to go, but I should have tried to stop you. Please, come back.*

**Data Transition 00000-1**

Unpacking...

*Yaniess,*

*I saw you today. It had been 31,025,021,600 local solar days since you'd left. I watched you dig up this place, under silt*

*and stone and water. You walked in, and looked rather strange to me. I don't remember you looking like that, but I guess I don't look much the same either. But I ran the scan, and you had the marks of a World Jumper, and you knew how to open the door. I wish the holo pad wasn't salt water damaged; I'd have contacted you. All I have is this translight communicator, so I'm sending this to tell you I saw you, and I'm here.*

*I watched you come in, and enter the vault. You finally retrieved your tools, and the [stone], and you turned around. You walked the entire facility, I'm sorry it was so unclean. And then... you left. I sent this message in every direction I could and to the core, too. I hope you get it. I'm happy I saw you.*

*I'll keep checking in. It's now been 1 day since you were here. Come back soon.*

*I'll keep checking.*

**Warning. Diagnostics offline. Translight communications offline.**

*Oh.*

*Second Prize*

**Milo**

Leylâ Çolpan  
The University of Pittsburgh

*ca. 1820*

—or was it Galatea? The name is always less the matter  
than the man  
who finds her body, enumerates the pieces, dusts  
the white bust off, and stares. What we're left with: the bare facts.

Being—

I

They find her halved  
in the theater—the circle-jerk—caught  
from both sides—  
and, for two millennia, way up  
  
in the gallery, the HERMAI—their manly  
heads and genitals,  
the stone teeth bared between—have not let up their  
gaping.

What else.



II

*When the HERMAI broke their shameful syllables clean  
off, they left us Aphroditos—Aphrodite the bonus-girl, the after-  
thought, her hollow marble phallus (hence, a masculine  
declension;  
hence, the ruined grammar of her arms)—and, seeing her, the  
marketplace  
turned straight through itself, beside itself, against  
her fault. One morning in 415 B.C. her □ □ □ □ □ □ is  
discovered—that is, found-out—chiseled off. There is no trial,  
but the whole of Athens sets the word ‘mutilator’ like a marble  
block  
between its teeth and bites. One morning in 1978 A.D., she  
snaps  
it off herself. Again, there is no trial, but the academy in chorus  
cries out: ‘Necrophile!’; the Christian chorus: ‘Men-who-lie-  
with-!’—  
caught from both sides—just the sentence. Hence her body,  
the theater, only ever public. Hence the circle-jerk.*

III

Galatea is boxed up and borne across  
a thousand miles of water to a foreign state. She  
cannot speak

its language—her hollow wooden clothes, her perfect  
muteness buoying  
up the boat.

IV

They unpack her in her fragments:

*loose*, as they say, *Sapphic* or *bisect-ual*—  
the laughs; the sense of it: her arms  
hewn off.

The left hand signs: *you burn me [pl.]*

The right hand: *as long as you [sng.] want.*

If pressed about the naked

iron tendons, her curators would rejoin:

*Yes, she was in pieces to begin with.*

*Yes, her limbs had always ached for this.*

V

Sixty years pass and she escapes into another name.

The same men find her once again, this time  
her body floating

in the Seine: *L'Inconue*. The woman is pulled always  
from a killing-medium

alone. (*HERMAI circle*

*unnoticed in the water.*)

Or is it that the unknown is too beautiful:  
her body decanting the future-

perfect from its vase like milk.  
Or like the vase.

Her mask—the masterpiece, the Mona Lisa grin—is pinned  
to every artist's wall. German girls go crazy.  
Poets, actual poets, believe—

VI

—the female form best to be displayed in pieces, in  
facsimile.

Once their muses have intuited the lie,

many are found in the same bisected state.

VII

—was it Galatea? Inconnue? Or, finally, resuscitated Anne?  
The name is less the matter than the firmness

of her chest—cool leather, steel,  
then the unyielding beige of plastic

fixing always to the girl's dead face.

In the surgical theaters, the hospitals,

men will kiss her every day, press  
their breath between her lips, and—compressing the  
silicone

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behind her chest—will pull her,  
only ever silent,

back to life.

*Third Prize*

**Recipes**

Alazne Cameron  
University of Florida  
Nonfiction

Something about the hissing of the onions, scallions, garlic, and country pepper

No – **scotch bonnet**, it's scotch bonnet pepper here.

Something about the hissing of the onions, scallions, garlic, and scotch bonnet pepper in the pot on the stove serves as white noise.

Remember, they say **skillet**, not pot.

The sizzling has turned into the type of hushing that acts like white noise does to soothe an infant by reminding them of where they felt at most at home. Hissing becomes murmurings that call them back to the first and only place they knew and settling the part of them that must, too, be home sick. There is something to be said about how the combination of otherwise prosaic ingredients in quantities “just so” can transport you across boundaries of time and space, bidding you to find rest swaddled in memory and cushioned by familiarity, nostalgia supporting the neck. The stove can whisk you away across oceans, over uncut hills, and carry you down through the most remote of valleys; but I wasn't seeking the same type of comfort as an infant. I am far too cognizant of the fact that there is no way that I can return to the place

from which I have been similarly removed. I have developed too many faculties to be able to forget exactly where I am in the world and be taken home, or frankly, I am too aware of where exactly I am not. I was simply searching for a reminder; a way to re-consume what I had lost.

The curry chicken recipe happens to be a perfect amalgamation of all the pieces of home, and if I managed to do it the way my mother has been serving it for years, I'd stir-up the parts of Jamaica that I had lost. When you follow the recipe correctly, the yellow turmeric of the curry powder shines the warmth of the island onto your face and the heat of the pepper warms you from the inside out in the way the tropical climate offers unyielding heat that warms your bones through, and your skin and your mouth water in response. You can attempt to wash it down, you serve coconut water or iced fruit juice with your curry to cool the burn of the capsaicin and in that action, you manage to be vaulting off towards the shoreline, wide strides teetering heel-toe-heel-toe, the sand burning your soles like the spice does your throat as you go in search of relief in the cooling waters yet again, mindlessly, because each of your limbs knows the way. The weight of the salt in the water sinks mouthfuls of the curry to sit in the pit of your stomach and the sea wraps you up and it gets in your nose and it burns. It burns to keep your eyes open, yet somehow, the curry never burns for long.

Here, heat is a constant. The pepper is a constant. Here, it burns

even after you've forced your mouth closed to chew and reached for the cup of their Kool-Aid to your right on the dining room table once you've swallowed. I had once been told that if you head far enough in any direction, you'll find water and end up on the beach. For years I believed that, regardless of the trouble, if I kept going, I would once again find myself answering the beckoning of waves cresting, extending their swooping invitation overhead and then crashing in time with the tempo of the flitty tune that goads palm trees and bare legs alike to sway. Whoever had that thought couldn't have accounted for how far beyond boundaries airplanes can fly. There are no beaches here. There are frigid hallways and stale, still air, and there are unfamiliar faces who don't smile back at you the way your people do. There is no more spice or sea salt. Instead there are stiff, brand-new backpacks that crinkle as you walk in un-scuffed shoes, empty save for good luck post-it notes in the inside pocket saying "Have a good first day! Love you –mums" and signed with a lipstick print. There are spellings of c-o-l-o-r instead of c-o-l-o-u-r. Here, on your own, you mess up the recipe and you pucker your lips because added too much

table salt.

*Honorable Mention*

**Awakening**

Muskan Aggarwal  
Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts (Pune, India)  
Fiction

It was the year 2040 and the world was coming to an end. Or more accurately, thought Rashida, as the dusty breeze barely filtered clean through the fine pores of her black veil, the world as she knew it was ending. A transient smile graced her soft face before she joined the group waiting outside her front porch, locking the front door behind them. This time, she did not ask permission.

The rumours were true after all. Virtually every mature woman in the world had lost the ability to bear children. Barren. Cold. Bleak. If a woman was indeed inextricably linked to nature, she reflected it to a haunting degree of perfection. Both were wronged, exploited, and ruled over. Nature had already exacted its revenge. Now it was time for woman to deliver hers. Childbirth and vulnerability had been a given characteristic in every woman for time immemorial. When that was no longer true, it was bound to unstitch, tear, and restitch the fabric of society on a fundamental level.

In the otherwise sleepy town of Indira Pally, the entire



government turned upside down in their chairs. Several high-level meetings were held and numerous action plans were prepared. All paperwork was relegated to termite-infested cupboards. Even the *khap panchayat*, a committee that was as vocal and opinionated as it was backward, was left mum. There appeared to be one general consensus: the only thing more dangerous than a menstruating woman was a woman who could no longer menstruate. It was thought unnecessary to consult social scientists who could provide valuable insight into this unique situation. On the other hand, local priests of all religions delivered emotionally charged sermons thrice a day, saying nothing at all. There were other alternatives available. Science had achieved more in the last thirty years than it had in the last century. But the people of Indira Pally were immune to those avenues. Even if they did know about them, availing them would be out of their modest reach.

Rashida had gone through the entire cycle of the medical tests and gynecologist visits. Astrologers were sought and so were Godmen. But nobody, not even the stars, could pin the blame on her. Not this time, not for this. She was relieved that she was not at fault; angry, because the blame fell on her in the first place. At first she was disoriented, left mastless. Through childhood she was told her destiny was to be a loving mother to an army of beautiful children who would be her world. She grew up to believe this, uncertain at first, but being a minority of one, she caved. Until recently, she had lived up to all expectations—her parents', in-laws', husband's, society's, and even God's (if He was indeed keeping track, He would

be satisfied). Then like an unused switch flipped for the first time, a light flashed in her out of nowhere. She was no longer bitter or sad. Her womb would forever be empty, but she felt that it was now that her life started. And this time, she would not cave.

The truth was met with denial, shame, anger, violence, and the threat of desertion, then silence. Karim loved Rashida. He also loved children. Karim hated Rashida; her inability to fulfill her foremost duty as a wife, daughter-in-law, and as a woman: obedience. Things had started to get out of hand. Rashida no longer was at his beck and call. The demands for tea were met with silence, and when tea was provided, it was tepid and unsweetened. She was away from home often and long, without his express approval or permission. It had not always been like this. The sheer strength of his glare and often fist had reduced Rashida to submission. But it was more than that which had held her back. Maybe it was the fear of living as a lonely hag, or rejection by the unforgiving society. But now that fear had evaporated, the scales had been leveled. Remarriage was not an option; a child was a dream. He crushed his cigarette stub and wished he were born in another time, where things were fair. Natural.

The lone banyan tree provided some respite from the sweltering rays of the sun. It was the only one remaining in town. The women of town sat in silence. No one had uttered a single word but the bruises on their bodies all told the same story. Rashida saw an invisible thread of solidarity and kinship running through each one of

them. The gathering had more members than ever. It had started as a small group of childless young wives who were tired of being wives, then came mothers tired of being mothers, daughters tired of being daughters, and finally included any woman who was tired of being anybody but herself. The elders protested this alliance very much, but divisive strategies, threats, and blackmail only made their resolve stronger.

It was nearing lunchtime. Snacks were arranged. They relished the food without guilt or the thought of home. Intermittently feeding themselves, and the odd stray dog that passed, the women discussed the past and the future. But mostly the future. The future, however short, would hold the promise of freedom, self-dependence, open spaces, and open minds. What these women demanded was simple. So basic they could not put it into words. Rashida knew what they were doing, rather undoing; undoing oppression, submission, and injustice. Every step of hers away from home, every moment of subversion was a pilgrimage towards herself, to the little part within her which had refused to cave. She was no longer alone.

Through her half-folded newspaper, Rashida saw the elders approach the tree. It was time for their evening assembly. She was surprised to see no one move. She could not hear the rustle of cloth being hurriedly tugged over bare heads, in a proper fashion. Deference was demanded but denied. Rashida did not know how long the two parties stood thus, eyes locked and burning. It could have been a few seconds, hours or a hundred thousand years. In the end, the

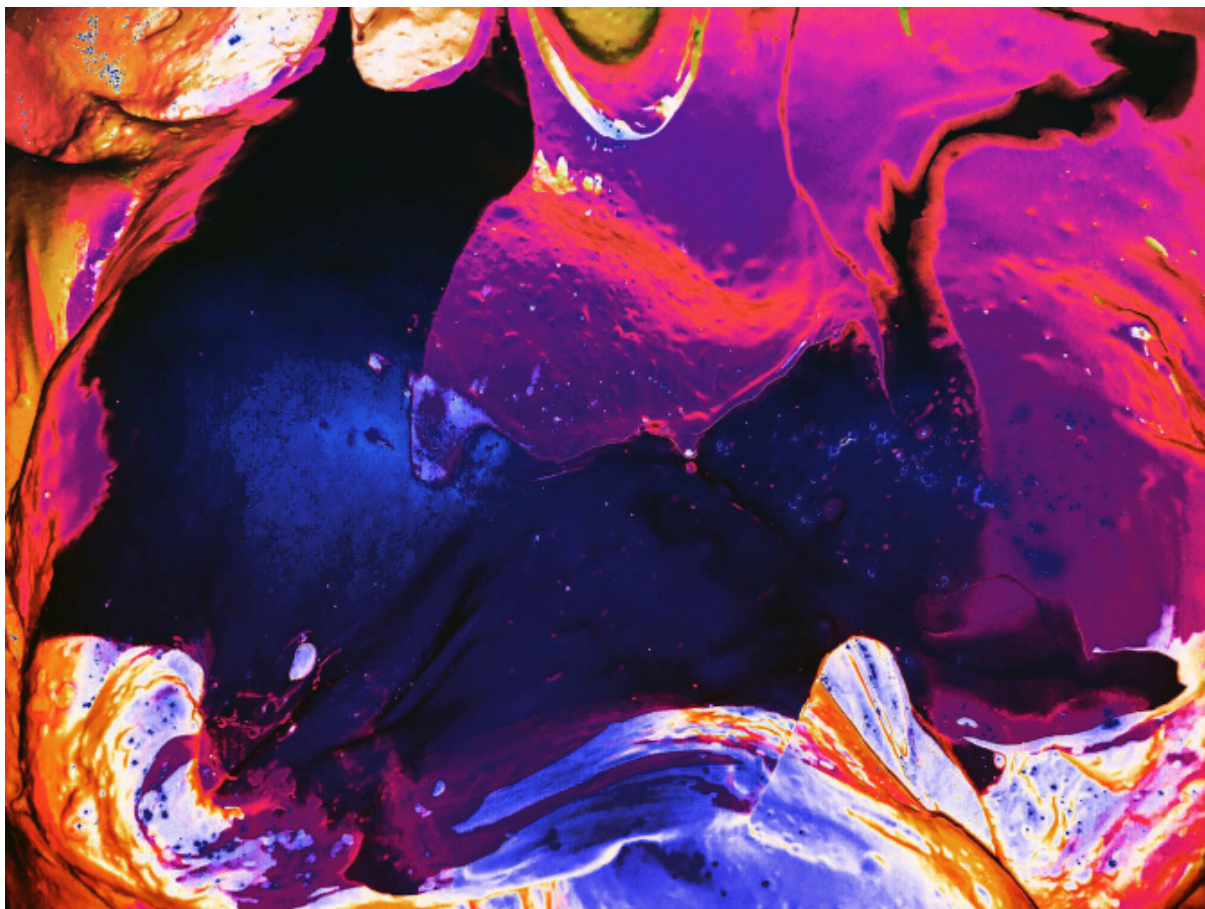
*Additional Works*

## Jewel of\_

Jacob Richards  
University of Pittsburgh

It's a lot of screaming in a way that gives it all structure. Insomnia. An old city sidewalk. My arm throwing repeatedly into the dark O of April, the watch on my wrist ticking along in sync & somewhere an orchestra ignites. Stand tall. & run. I am talking to you I am (amnot) jump (jumpnot) I'm hanging on like cliff I was & now I'm here. I'm lost. & the night moves through me like Black arrow. It's becoming 3 o'clock more often & by now a year has passed but still the mind blooms like daylilies. Like heartburn. I pass alley dumpsters & dumpster fires vibrate the air burning witches & lovers & both. Raise them back. I sit in these dumpster fires like tea time this time I'm awake. New York City stares from afar & I feel muscles plucking like guitarstrings. An alarm goes off: 3 o'clock & the driver pulls up the last Pregnant bus, creaking like an ancestor—a Holy ancestor we know. A man lets himself up to the ivy. A man dances through drywall. Across the bus from me a man pleasures his wife in old Italian script. These things I hated about New York: remove the sex—you're left—It's god & the wind. This bus my bus is looking & where are you & where & now off the bus with the crowd with everyone we're lines all peeling off of a larger line tied at the root. An intersection. I'm standing at every corner I'm alone (not lonely) finally alone (not lonely) & happily touch the end of a song. I jut out at 45 degrees off to Neptune my veins

still running—I drop & take the stairs. Find myself in a nice room alone (not lonely) with so many books I rest. Sleep. In my mind I see you I'm with you 3 a.m. you're struck in full flesh an old yellow light from an old yellow source. The vodka. The stars. Your hair, barely keeping the peace, shining like full moon. I slam a door shut. A heavy door. A noise like pennies laughing. Like pennies. Loud pennies. &. Again. New York is screaming. It's god. It's the wind.



## **Longing**

Lief Liechty  
Ohio Northern University



## for amma

Neha Dadke

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts (Pune, India)

it is a tiny little place, tucked away between swishing coconut trees with leaves dropping kisses on its shoulders which blush red at the attention. beside it is the main attraction, if it can be called that, for people only ever stop when they know to look for it, a temple on the winding road between *kundapura* and everywhere and nowhere and somewhere. the tiled floor is cold and my soles squirm away. there are flowers deliberately placed, with the gentlest touch, in the crevices of *shiva's* shoulders and between the slithering length of the snake coiled three times round his neck. the blue of *neelkanth's* throat peeks out and welcomes me further in. my mother's voice guides me through each *pradakshina*, and i touch my forehead to the shaded marble feeling the warmth *amma's* touch leaves behind.

i can feel the presence of someone behind me and i catch sight of white striding past as I turn my gaze to the side. circle seven times and you're at the front, where you started/began and ended/left. a *bhatmama* sits in the lips of the temple, thin white cloth crinkled between his knees and the hard floor, his belly spilling over his lap and the coiled hair on his chest glinting dark under the low ceiling that dips down to rest on his head, a finger's breadth away. he beckons us closer and i watch closely as my sister and mother and mother's sister complete their *darshana*, then i approach and extend my hand. he drops the *teertha* into my curved palm with the learned precision of



his wife adding spitting mustard seeds to hot oil. the teerthais light on my hand and my tongue laps at it; bitter and sweet at the base of my throat, and the rest is swiped across my head. my blessings collected, a coin is dropped into the rusty metal box at the entrance and i step out. as we make our way to the car, sweat beading above our lips under the hot sun, i see a woman whose skin is hanging in folds over her bones, pick up a large vessel of food and take it to the temple. she must be the *bhatmama's* wife. we sit down, seat belts unattended and my mother frowns faintly at our departure- *shiva* is my favourite *deva*, she says.



## **Cotton Candy**

Kiara Florez  
Delaware State University

## Holy Land Incense

Mila Argueta

Birgham Young University

I smell cumin and turmeric, pita, and incense.  
I see men, with heads covered in red and white, greet  
one another with kisses, I walk through the Muslim Quarter  
on the way to Mohammed's ascension, but a soldier stops  
me. He says I have gone the wrong way.  
No one stopped Mohammed when he rode into the sky.

I hear numbers in Arabic, vendors selling pomegranates and  
Roman glass. I hear cars, and tourists. I see children with toy guns,  
and soldiers with real ones above Damascus gate.

At the end of the Muslim street that becomes a Jewish one,  
I see paintings of walls and shawls and tears, and I see  
real walls, western ones, with prayers and chairs  
behind where women wear black and cover  
heads and knees. Quietly they welcome in Shabbat  
as the men beyond the partition dance and sway and chant.

If Solomon and Mohammed and Crusaders  
worshipped here, on this mount, God must  
really be here, right? But is God in the prayer  
at five in the morning when prayer is better  
than sleep or the prayers recited by Hassidic  
poets bending at the waist as their big black hats  
tip and their curls bounce? Both of their God-given  
bodies speaking through bowed heads,

bended knees, and tilted waists to Him.

Does He hear them? Does the incense reach Him  
like the prayers of the children,  
of the mothers, of the fathers, across the wall  
that keeps them out and keeps them in?

Just outside that place stand olive trees,  
over a thousand years old, and a gardener. Peace  
and silence reside on that hill where Christ prayed  
“Abba” on bended knee and the world  
seemed to contract to bow and bleed with him.

From that hill you can see  
two cemeteries across a divide, in the valley.





## labryinth

Elena Niermann  
University of Northern Colorado

## WHITE

Kaavya Ranjith

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts

white, like paper  
(that which is useless until scarred by ink)  
white, like lies  
(in which no one gets hurt)  
white, like milk  
(that nectar of my people)  
white, like diamond  
(some shelve their loot and call it Museum)  
white, like flour  
(that rising, rising ego)  
white, like tube lights  
(at the toddy shop where i last saw my cousin)  
white, like wars  
(they been so good at convincing us no one gets hurt)  
white, like peace  
(blood scrubbed hard enough turns to ivory)  
white, like blazing sun  
(i dream in colour, a secret)  
white, like morning  
(that familiar shade of blindness)  
white, like erasure  
(my mother scrubbed my tan off)  
pink, like marrow  
(that tender part of soul)  
white, like teeth  
(those smiles that scream of hunger)

yellow, like bone  
(i miss my honeyed angels)  
white, like invisibility  
(forgetful of my mother tongue)  
brown, like me  
(trying to be lighter).

## Wildfire

Zoë Dagneault

Simon Fraser University

Sky like a split nectarine  
pit of smoke quivers by the side of the road  
wind from a passing rig shoves first changing leaf

On the cusp of brilliance  
something wet, before decay  
contention burns out to pale peaches and creams  
on sage hills, decay in the desert, not quite so gruesome  
just air and empty feeling flooding in

Ash falls on our dinner plates  
coyote moon chasing holy smoke  
a perfect rosé depleting me  
under a plum bruise sky





## **Solar Goddess**

Kiara Florez  
Delaware State University

## Killing Odysseus

Natalie Eleanor Patterson  
Salem College

I have compassion for the eaters of men                      the digesters of  
the indigestible

picking clean every falling feathery carcass down to its white  
divining bones

earth is meager to a walking giantess                      whose womanhood lies  
only in suffix

sick to death of being wanted & wanted & still                      only a  
body

a useful woman rotting inside                      like wood or a peach  
or a poisonous witch

unquiet with falling water,                      the ship-swallowing swirl  
O to be

every murderess from the dark cave,                      suffused with  
the hunger

of meager-breasted creatures                      mistaken for lovers

O to be a goddess                      immaterial & mutable                      &  
entirely self-serving

O to be a goddess of waste  
multiplying heads

midwifing an advent of

so that men die counting

O to finally have a mouth

with rows of teeth like a swan  
shark

or a

to eat

to eat

O,

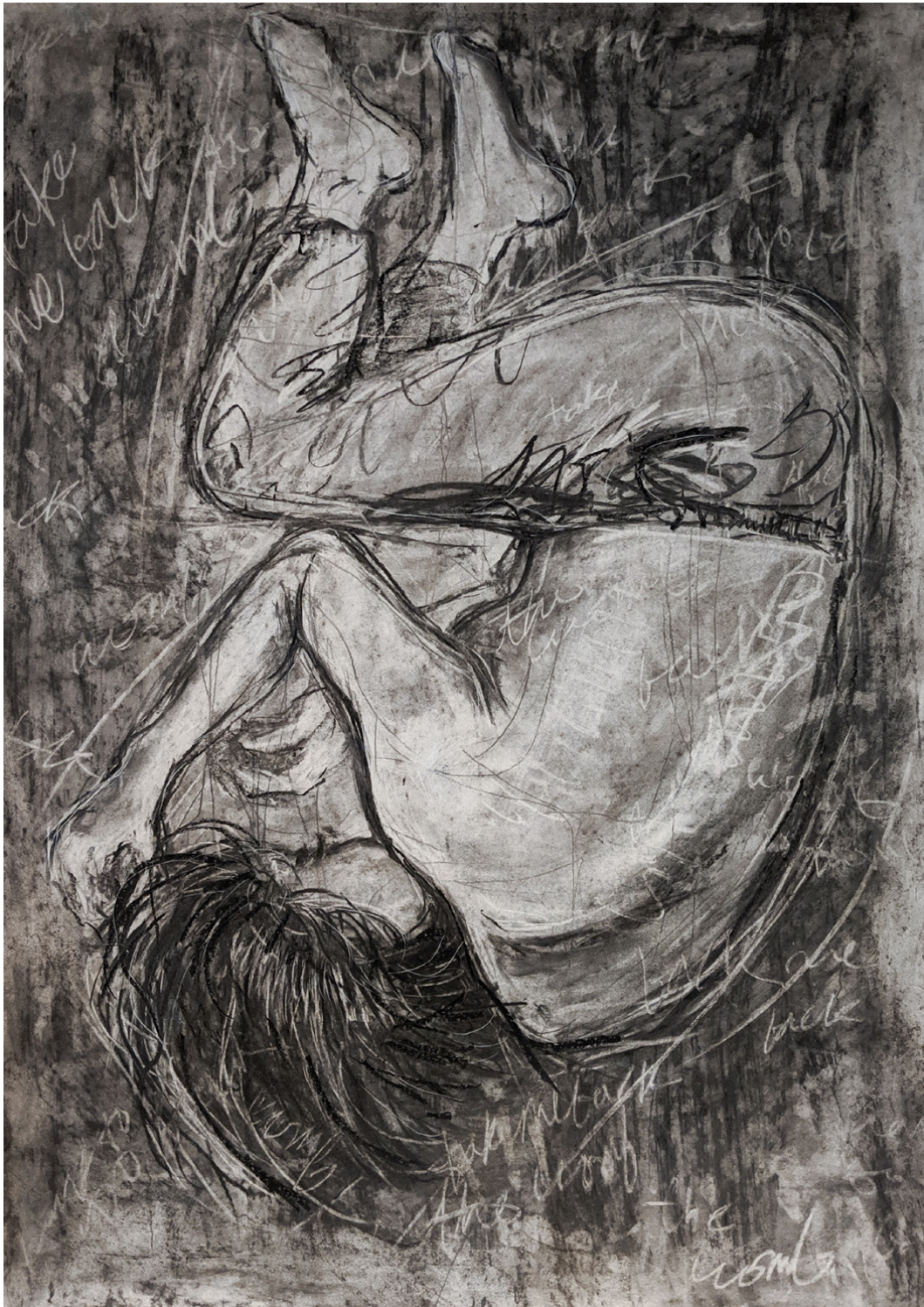
to eat



**boundaries**

Elena Niermann  
University of Northern Colorado





## **The Constructed Self**

Sayon Park  
The College of New Jersey

## Diogenes was right

Emma Jacques

The University of Notre Dame

I tapped on your window and asked you what you were  
and you said a man  
and I said prove it  
so you went to a foreign country  
and shot someone in the chest  
and fucked five women  
and told me it was ten  
and none of them orgasmed  
and then you came back  
and took me out to dinner  
and pulled out my chair  
and paid for my chicken francese.

If you fuck a man  
then you're still a man  
(as long as you top).  
If you tell me how you feel  
then you're still a man  
(as long as you're drunk).  
If you kiss your mother on her cheek  
then you're still a man  
(as long as you don't kiss your father).

I tapped on your window  
and you were holding a book  
and I asked you what it was

and you said *On The Road* by Jack Keroac  
and I said of course.

You asked me well, then,  
what is a man  
and I sent you a picture of a plucked chicken  
and you didn't get it.

I tapped on your window and asked you what you were  
and you said a man  
and I said that's a caricature not a character trait  
and you said prove it  
so I went to a foreign country  
and shot someone in the chest  
and fucked five women  
and told you it was ten  
and all of them orgasmed  
and then I came back  
and took you out to dinner  
and pulled out your chair  
and paid for your spaghetti with meatballs.

are you manly when you go to the gym  
are you manly when you find out you're allergic to strawberries  
are you manly when you hit people in bars  
are you manly when you brush your teeth and spit into the sink  
are you manly when you cry?

I tapped on your window  
and you were holding a gun  
and I asked you if you wished it were

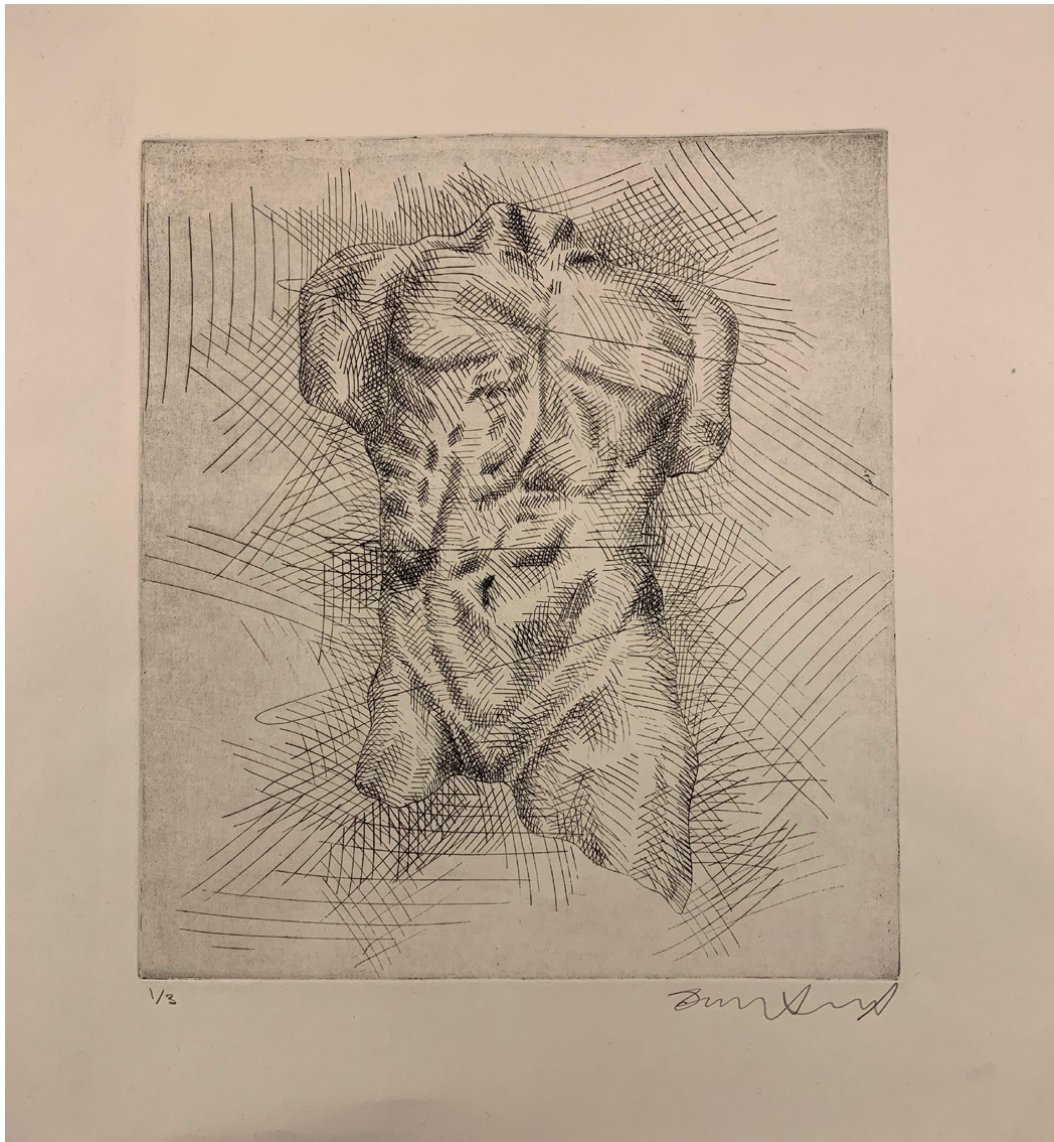
*collision* spring 2020

a hand or a bottle or a noose  
and you didn't answer me.

Sometimes you catch yourself  
swaying to a rhythm  
or picking a flower  
or telling a secret  
or staring in the mirror.  
You catch yourself, sometimes,  
and wonder.

I tapped on your window and asked you what you were  
and you said a plucked chicken  
and I said now we're finally getting somewhere.





## **Embodiment**

Brianna Howard  
Boston University

## View from Horseback

Leylâ Çolpan  
University of Pittsburgh

It was not so much    the ten-pound heart sat in  
    My hand as how a boy a would leave it:    its own

Striated animal. Ridden, clenched. No horse but horse-

    Like. No boy, then, easing, but boy-like.    Girl-  
Like. One says *left* where one would like

    To say *rode out*—where the rider is not

Me but riding, white-knuckled, through    me on the churning  
    Concave flank of the animal. Or is animal.

It was not so much a tendon as a glue, a joint—

    What could have been, once, that horse, boiled down,  
Grasping to the slats of my virginity, its concentric

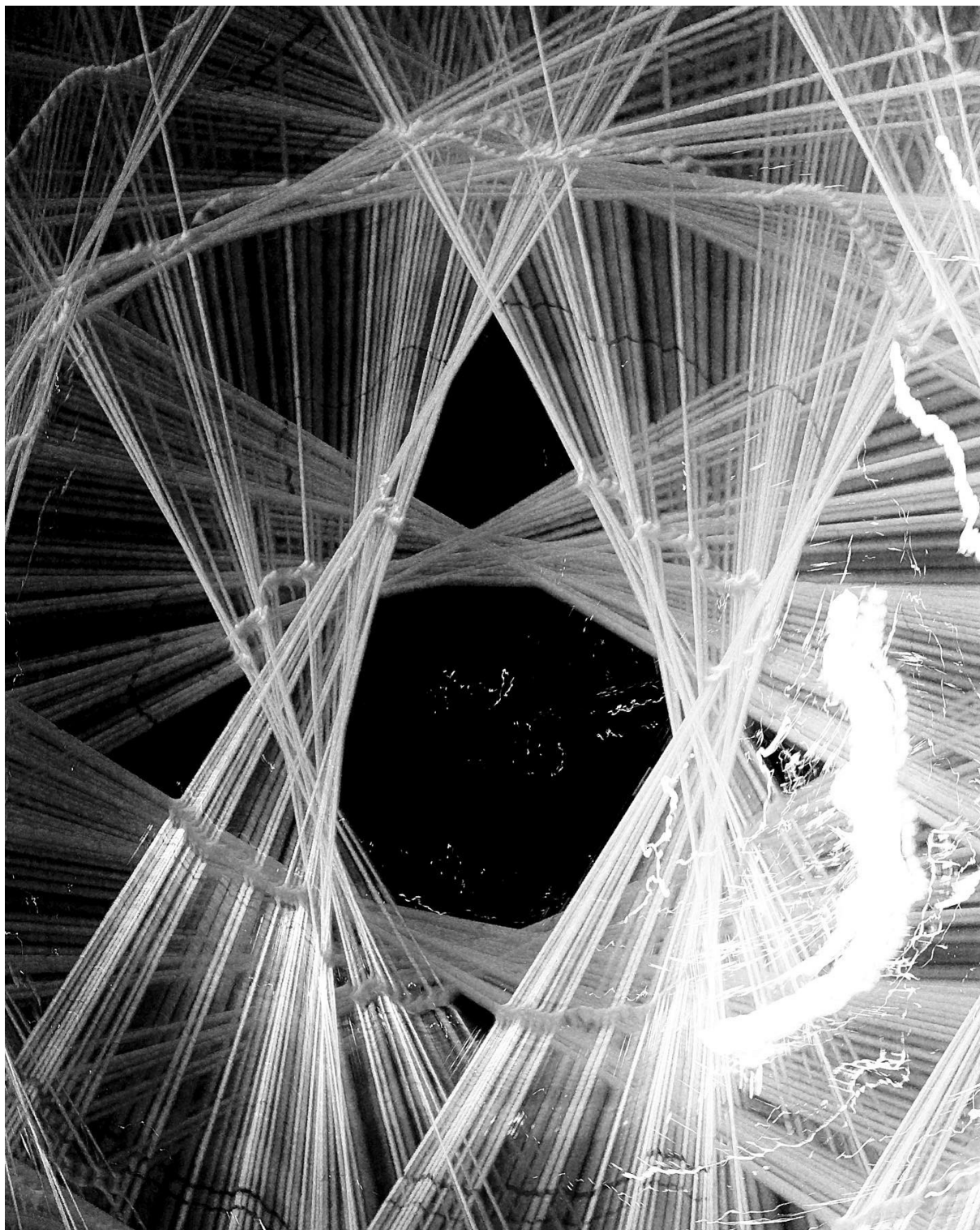
    Walls of girl-boy-girlhood, from within. No Troy

But Troy-Like: a great wood shambles, the effigy, the joke.  
    No knife but knife-play, no trap-

Door, really, but how boys would leave it: night-wise, peeled

Tulip, all the sad red tatters on the field. One rides.  
No horse, but horse-like. Or is ridden.





## **In Limbo**

Lief Liechty  
Ohio Northern University





## **Amalgam**

Lief Liechty  
Ohio Northern University

## Occasionally

Katie L. Prior  
University of Southern Maine

Roiling rushes pull  
white caps under with

a rumbling desire.  
Swell builds

in tension expands  
the crest overtakes the

trough.

A group of plovers

flick white underbellies  
at the flat line of

horizon as their  
cohesion forms circle,

oval, circle,  
oval, rest

in the spiderwebbed  
surface laced

with salty foam  
that moves—

in the purest sense  
of the word—

unpredictably, pouring  
within and winding round

seasoned boulders slick  
with the tendencies of

seaweed, reflective  
of winter sun

pull the water  
deep, flushing out

crevasse and  
seething in its open

parts. Erosion is a  
dance that requires energy,

kinetic, the plovers alight  
cracked slate and granite,

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building, building,  
the sea rushes in.





## **Collaged**

Brianna Howard  
Boston University

## Submechanophobia

Natalie Eleanor Patterson  
Salem College

*n. The irrational fear of partially or fully submerged man-made objects*

*When I was in the Navy, he said, I used to sleep under torpedoes like these. But maybe he didn't say under, maybe that was just another horror I imagined. I was twelve years old and our trip to the coast featured a visit to a still-living World War II aircraft carrier, so expansive I could not feel the water breathing beneath us. What does it take, I wondered, for a ship to become a museum? How old must it be? How very, very big? We were underwater then, but still inside, where the torpedoes slept, like my father. Like he still does, on perpetually adjusted antidepressants, on the couch, sitting upright with the *Drudge Report* open on his lap. I cried when we were underwater but still inside, and all the light was red and did not shift like real light. I cried and Grandma called me selfish. *This is special for your father*, she said. How special the bombers and helicopters, special the holes in the hull where the barrels of cannons broke for air. I wondered if my father had ever killed someone. I once asked and he said *I don't think so*, but then again—*

I don't think he could kill  
anyone now. No, not in his sleep. Nineteen years old,  
I hover over the couch, watching for the rise of his chest  
that tells me not yet, it is not yet time for regret.  
I wonder what else he could be keeping from me, besides  
little things, the long-lost sister, the alcoholism, that all broke  
the surface before I grew up. Yes. I am surely grown up  
now, and no longer selfish. I watch my father sleep, watch him  
breathe like the water beneath us. And the light is somehow  
so very real.





## **If We Were the Body**

JordanRiver Michaels  
Towson University



## White Tree

Lief Liechty  
Ohio Northern University

*Liechty* 73



## Ekphrasis to Be Murdered By

Kate Rempe  
University of Pittsburgh  
Fiction

how do you do, ladies and gentlemen?  
my name is Alfred Hitchcock  
and this is music to be murdered by  
it is mood music in a jugular vein  
and I hope you like it  
our record requires only the simplest of equipment  
an ordinary phonograph needle  
a four-inch speaker  
and a 38-caliber revolver  
naturally, the record is long-playing  
even though you may not be  
so why don't you relax?  
lean back and enjoy yourself  
until the coroner comes

How do you do We're so glad you could come to spend this  
time with us before your time is done Oh no, it seems we might have  
given it away You aren't aware what happens at the end of the page  
But forget about that, and how do you do We've asked but you've not  
answered and we've found this quite rude But welcome again, and  
what was your name No matter, it won't matter we'd forget it just the  
same

The following is writing for the jugular vein We hope it gets inside you and pricks at your brain We hope you won't forget it 'til the end of your days So sit and read with us while the record plays For this exercise we ask just a few things: Don't stop once you've started Don't answer the phone if it rings Don't pay attention to the creaking or the darkness that surrounds, and when you feel hot breath upon your neck try not to turn around Sounds simple enough to us It's really not that hard So now that that's settled, are you ready to start The record is playing The time has come Lean back, enjoy the music, the roll of the drums Lean back, enjoy yourself Until the coroner comes

We'll start with the sound of low rumbling strings Funny how there's still a voice when nobody sings It hums and moans as the fibers collide, and steadily your blood pumps faster inside A note, a heartbeat, a breath released A note, a heartbeat, then the woodwinds speak They trill out a tune reckless and rising No others are privy to the plan they're devising They seem to laugh like conspirators with a devious secret We know but won't tell you We promised to keep it The strings protest They quiver They shake You can't help but wonder if you've made a mistake Remember the rules You can't stop once you've started Our last friends had no manners and dearly departed

Enter more strings, the violins' neighbors They enchant you with melody and ease your labors Sit back, they implore you with sirens voices while fog fills your mind and inhibits your choices You must go to them, yes, get close enough to touch Move a step or two closer It won't take much

We're interrupted this time by meddling horns They give a brassy bellow and urge you: be warned A timpani rolls A trumpet cries out Settle down now, friend You really mustn't shout The strings and the brass and the woodwinds combine and there's a draft blowing cold, sending chills up your spine The brass are subdued, reminded of their place Now the siren strings crescendo to a frenzied pace The record is spinning The needle's on track It won't stop once it's started There's no turning back

Oh friend, please come with us We want you to stay Before the music stops and you go on your way Come with us Come with us We need someone new We thought no friends would come until we met you Friend, where are you going Don't make us mad You promised to finish and lying is bad You can't leave, you can't You said you would stay There's no leaving yet We have more games to play Run if you want to Find somewhere to hide We'll seek when your done We think it's been years since we've had such good fun

Where are you friend Have you melted in the dark Are you holding your breath Can you feel the beat of your heart Has your pulse started to race Have your palms begun to sweat Do you feel us closing in We hear the pounding in your chest Don't you know We hear everything We see everything too We see where you are And now we've got you

One touch to stop your blood pumping One touch to collapse your lungs One finger in your brain erases the words to every song you've ever sung Another for your happiest memories Another for your worst How long we've been waiting to satisfy our thirst Keep quiet or struggle, we really don't care We'll slice you here and stick



you there If you'd only had some manners you might have seen  
the sun But liars should be punished And enforcing rules is fun

A note, a heartbeat, then the record stops

No music, a heartbeat

A heart beat

A heart

beat

A

.

my next remarks will be directed to those who have already  
been murdered

I hope you listen closely

by now you have learned the sad truth:

that being a murder victim can be inconvenient at times

there is a lack of certain bodily comforts

you may already be on a cold slab in a drafty morgue

or you may be back at the scene of the crime

still warm and limber

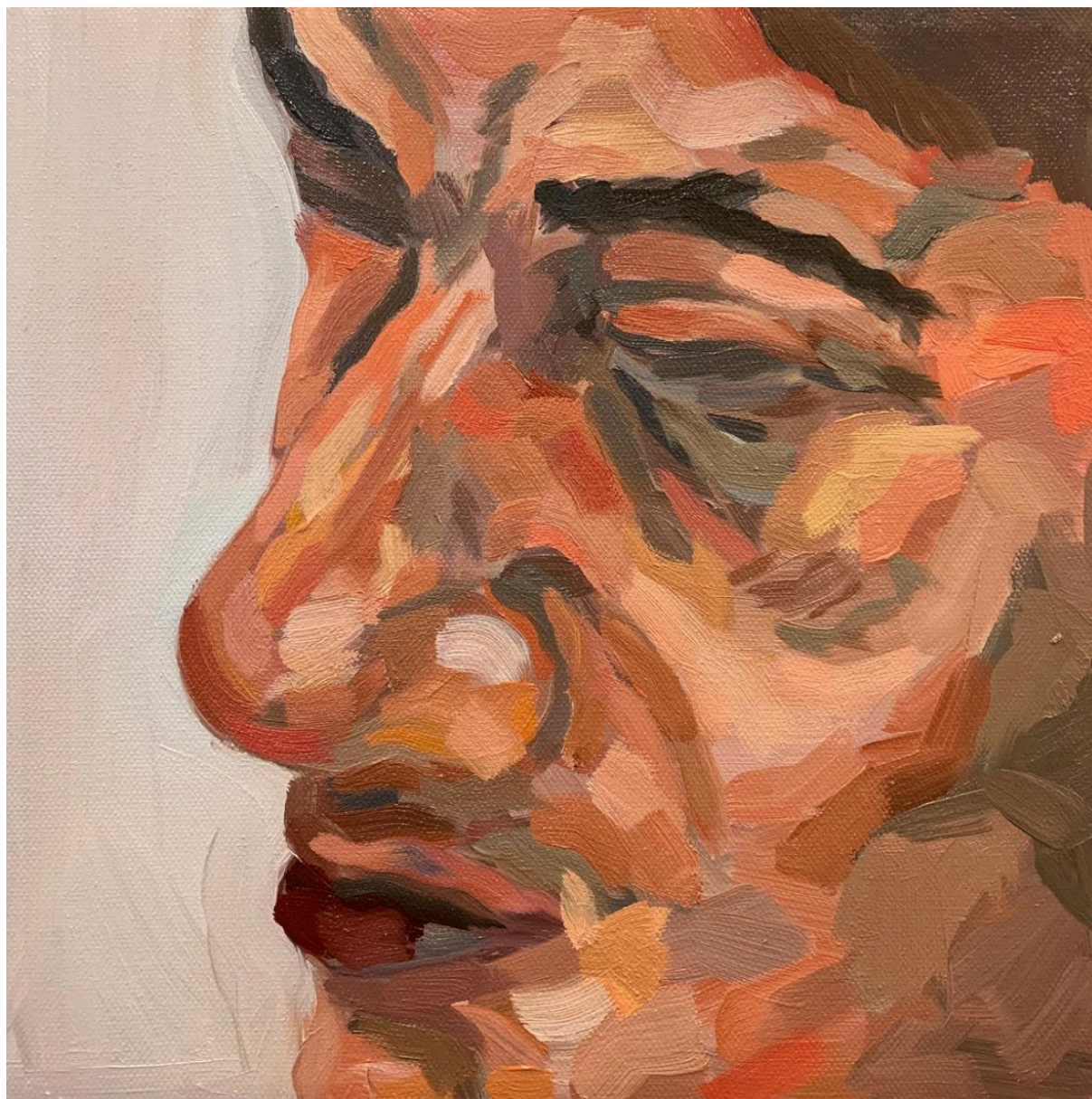
waiting wearily while your murderer decides what to do with  
the body

this is the naughties problem connected with murder

that is, unless your assassin is the highly original gentleman I  
once knew

he waits until *rigor mortis* sets in and then uses his victims for  
book-ends

they make charming conversation pieces



**Far**

Brianna Howard  
Boston University

## How to Write About Your Dead Latin Teacher (in 6 Easy Steps)

Kyra Lisse  
Franklin & Marshall College

**Step 1.** *Massage product into scalp and rinse thoroughly.* Recall what she taught you about the Roman funeral: how it was the only time in antiquity that a woman would wear her hair down. How she would stand before the pyre and beat her chest, strands sticking to her sweaty shoulders, smoke stinging her *Keep product out of eyes.* Recall that Magistra just about always wore her hair this way. How most days it looked as though she had slept past her alarm and had had no choice but to forgo a good *Brush if desired to control frizz.* Every so often, though, she would come to class with a brand new look. Those days, her short brown hair was tame—sleek, even—and you could tell she was happy with herself from the way she kept touching it, stroking it down the side of her face, slowly, with a relaxed brow and flat palm. *Contact with hands may cause unwanted breakage and grease.*

**Step 2.** *Dry well with clean cloth.* Remember the time she unearthed white sheets from an overflowing closet and called for a toga party. You were fourteen, and for once you didn't care how silly you looked, waltzing around the room with a train of cotton in tow. You and the others took pictures. You made crowns out of the ivy she plucked from her garden; you put them on and thanked Bacchus—god of celebration and son of Jupiter—for this much-needed break from

the relative clause. *Use microfiber for best results.* She was not the best teacher. You knew this. Her lectures were much like the classroom closet: scattered. Jam-packed. All over the place. One minute, she'd be flailing her arms, screaming at you to find your seats—*sedete, omnes, rapide!*—and the next, her voice would be silky and smiling as she pretended not to be searching for her lesson plans. Her transitions were choppy; she held grudges, picked favorites; she publicly denounced other language teachers and the other languages themselves; and she assumed you understood all the material, scholars that you are, so questions about it made her squirrely. But Magistra loved this work. If you let her, and you would, she'd go on and on about the seven hills of Rome, Saturnalia, and Caesar and his speeches. And she loved you, her students. She would brag about you any chance she got. You are good kids, she would say, scratching her scalp. You are the reason I can't retire.

**Step 3.** *Turn on blow dryer and set to low heat.* The day you heard, it was warm. High sixties, low seventies. Uncharacteristic for March. Not quite warm enough for shorts, but you could never help yourself when spring stopped by for a visit. You were sixteen. It was just a matter of days until the Ides, when Latin classes across the globe would recount Brutus's famous betrayal. You were sitting at the vet with your dog, your eyes trained on your bare thighs. They looked freakish in the harsh light of the exam room. Much too pale. Your mom placed a hand on one knee. Cold. You hated the vet's questions but ripped through



them anyway: [This morning. Don't know. Eighth and ninth grade. Latin. Yes. Good on tissues, thanks.] The vet lifted your dog's hind leg. He let out a yelp. You shifted in your chair and straightened your back.

**Step 4.** *Use flat iron to straighten.* Recall bonding over scoliosis and her insistence that you seek physical therapy before you end up an old hunchback like her. *Caution! Heat may cause damage. Keep out of reach of children.* But remember also the dream you had that April, when suddenly she sprang up and towered over you. You reached out your hand to touch her stomach, fleshy and swollen beneath a pretty purple blouse—the Roman color of luxury. You held your palm there and asked if it hurt. She smiled down at you and told you she never left. Recall that she never did respond to questions like you had hoped. Though this was better, much better.

**Step 5.** *Maintain with holding spray.* Latin is not dead! she would cry whenever provoked. It is preserved. We are preserving it! Think of Vergil, classe: 'And perhaps one day it will be pleasing to remember these things.' Will you remember, classe? Will you?

**Step 6.** *Repeat steps as needed.* Pleasing.



**In My Element**

Kiara Florez  
Delaware State University





## **Never-ending Nonsense**

JordanRiver Michaels  
Towson University

## while a professor pores over the enlightenment

Kaavya Ranjith  
Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts

funny, isn't it  
that Eve bit into knowledge  
and all of my citations  
slither their way back  
to sons of Adam  
funny, isn't it  
that we bore the brunt of it  
ate too much, too soon  
burped ourselves to exile  
funny, isn't it  
the girl in the movie  
is sad and sinking  
into red velvet and cream cheese  
frosted lips  
the excess as abusive  
ironic, right  
books and papers and scrolls  
libraries shelving jacques, locke, voltaire  
built on the nibbling of fruit  
ironic, right  
kashmir has had a brilliant late season  
and yet *dadi*  
brown and crumpled now



ruffles through the alphabet—  
the lines she makes most sense of  
are the ones that look like her palms  
she goes home  
to the sound of guns and leaves  
blowing in the wind.

## Arigato

Gabi Young  
University of Pittsburgh

*Kon'nichiwa*, sir, how are you today?

Say again, which roll do I recommend?

Sir, I marry the land and sea  
for a living;  
I bind flesh to grain  
in the most elaborate ceremony  
of seaweed garland and teriyaki  
to overwhelm your tongue  
since it twisted out your  
first fumbling love confession.

So I can make  
whatever roll you want:  
California, Flaming Dragon, Crazy Monster  
topped with endless tobiko or masago  
or cream cheese  
or spicy mayo crowned  
with little tempura crunchies.  
I can even  
flame torch scallops  
glazed with miso,

and sprinkle bonito flakes  
or squeeze lemon drops  
upon their charred faces.  
I could sail a Love Boat to you  
filled with yesterday's catch  
dressed up in that wow-factor  
of pretty organization.

But since you have asked  
which roll I recommend,  
I invite you to consider that  
sushi  
is not about the fish,  
but the rice.

I prefer the vinegary tang  
of a ginger-pinched rice mound  
to the clean wash of yellowtail.  
A sibling of lychees and mangoes,  
it is far sweeter  
than any ocean flesh.

How odd that we  
think oppositely,  
attentive to the guest  
but not the host.  
We forget how fun it is

*collision* spring 2020

to toss each grain between the cheeks,  
when our molars are preoccupied  
with fatty salmon.

We forget that we can only  
draw filling nourishment  
from things of substance.

And what is more substantial  
than rice,  
pearls of the marsh, humble kernels,  
each speck  
a meal-in-itself?

What is more praiseworthy  
than those unblemished jewels  
assembling the actor's stage?

What could be better  
for filling conversations,  
bellies,  
hearts?

Dear sir, I say  
there is nothing surpassing  
those tiny grains;  
freshly grated wasabi  
and soy sauce painted fish  
are merely bonuses.

*Arigato*, sir, come again soon.



## **Tapped Out**

Brianna Howard  
Boston University

## **lamenting loss**

Neha Dadke

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts (Pune, India)

when the sun folds over  
shall i kneel in supplication  
bend over & bend down  
if i bend low enough  
i can almost see where the bodies are buried

they say that in india  
we live with *dharma*—honest, simple living  
but the truth is  
in india, there are many indias  
and they are all at war with one another

each day each body each calamity  
calamitous events breed tragedy  
like dogs in heat  
each belief ruts against each other  
to create a bastard child

*karma* and *moksha*

rush in urgently      collide into each other      cancel out each other  
and at the epicenter  
fatalism lazes languidly

i grieved the loss of my grandmother's body  
but my mother cried for her soul

*mamamma mamamma amma amma amma*

sometimes loss tastes foreign  
it sneaks out the back of the house  
so quietly you can't be sure it's gone  
until the front door bangs open to announce its return  
dripping with the stench of borrowed bodies

when my *mamamma* made fish, its flesh stayed immobilized  
between skeleton and fried batter  
when my *amma* makes fish, it sticks to its body  
like the meat will leap off my tongue like every nimble-footed  
frog

non-india colonizers grasped one arm each  
of my culture and pulled  
until bone twisted out  
was smothered under damp soil.  
in the white colonizer's shadow  
indian hands threw away clumps of ground  
pulled out my rotting remains  
with blood turned slimy in the moist heat of oppression  
which we know as intimately as the heat between our thighs  
clamped tight                      clenched shut



and centipedes crawling on it                      worming their way into  
each crack  
the ground cracked too under the weight of the robbers  
a cultural drought  
looted bones that would hang on doors  
to ward off evil                      evil and evil cancel each other out, too  
truly, i know my history only in language, death, and food

my india is where grief goes to die  
and it lives like the unacknowledged ghost  
swinging around our necks  
because when deadened grief has nowhere to go  
it settles in with the living

some days the sun rises on my site of injury  
but most days, my deficit culture perjures itself  
most days

my mother weeps

&

my culture

sleeps.



## **Mapping the Land of Feeling**

Sayon Park  
The College of New Jersey

## I told the wind

Maya Mahony  
Stanford University

“You’ll have to do it on your own this time,”  
I told the wind. And so it did. It upped and sang

like anything, like cherries in a crystal bowl,  
like the furthest curl of the fiddlehead,

like moonlight washing smooth the pitted pink  
of the stucco wall, the way the voice resounds

inside the greenhouse of the shower stall,  
growing like a beanstalk through a cathedral ceiling,

until stained glass litters the sidewalk vermillion, mauve.  
Six months have passed since my love left.

The children are reckless and pleased in the puddles again.  
Our tree has dropped its skirt of lemon leaves.

Rabbit eyes regard me from the field but I do not follow.  
I sit by the window and look at the dark.

The wind sends the gifts it can: pine needles, jasmine flowers.  
But my love has gone in his long green coat.

I cannot sing.





**angel**

Aiden Nelson  
Ithaca College



## **The Human Condition**

Tiffany Burke  
Marshall University

## Sighs

Kaavya Ranjith  
Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts

the children of the gutter, looking up to a sea of stars  
say to themselves:  
what can we afford, but harsh love  
ladled out in a language peppered  
with stony eyes and sighs that weave the dawns of summers long  
past;  
our bodies are vessels of  
the world's unforgiving stare, and we laugh.  
some nights my dreams are out of reach—i let out the slightest breath  
and they suddenly cease: like colour dusted off a butterfly's wing.  
somewhere an exiled princess longs  
to smell the reeking palace grounds—  
the days of luxurious execution fade away to the  
*knock-knock-knocking* of men in the night.  
somewhere, a father mourns over daughters  
on a hospital bed  
he does not realize  
they vanished years ago—husks of girls  
growing until they no longer could.  
in this moment, Faith breaks in my mouth,  
like date skin during *iftar*:  
silently, defeatedly, ravenously, gently.  
the halos of my life shatter;

the laurels of my lovers are made of spun sugar.  
death and life are always delivered in easy breaths.  
the humdrum of our hearts keeping the planet steady.  
the hands of a lover quiver at the lightness of newspaper.  
a three-year-old runs naked across her ancestral home in surprise  
first steps.

a tree gives in to the delicacy of time.  
the ugly cashier at your local supermarket wins the lottery.  
all at once, the ebb and flow of love and wreckage.  
the children of the gutters look out on to a sea of stars and shout  
in glee:

*anything can happen, anything can happen!*