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HOW ABOUT NO
ANH LY

a note,

LETTER FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Dear Readers:

When prompted to consider the theme for this year's issue, we thought about what would matter to students, peers, ourselves. Time at university is often a period of transition, and we latched onto that idea. With the theme in-between—hyphenated or not, the argument may go—relevant memories were constantly appearing and new moments making themselves known. One draft complete, time for the next; one semester finished, let's get through the next.



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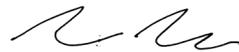
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there's me BY LILLIE GIRINO

a world

My body silkily wraps around yours. You feel the bumps of my skin and latch onto them, with such force, I can't get away. From you or the other thing we've yet to talk about. I carry you in my lap. Legs wide open for me a meal a feast a moment of unity. I meant to ask you how you felt about me. Whether or not there's more. In this world there is and when we talk about it you laugh to yourself and say c'mon. Is that God's way of speaking to me? Have I reached a level of glory that can only be achieved through you? Inside you. And you love me, you haven't said it yet but I know, in time, you will without a doubt. And when that time comes I want to be there. I want you to be laced by the thread of my sweater. Intertwined, my body phases into yours. I want to know how your body works. I want to see your blood cells swim. Because we're swimming, so free. Only in this world can we do this, so remember these moments. Remember the way my face contorts, how I look hiding behind the shadows of big trees. Remember this, for it can never happen.



JUNGLE WRECKS
CHRIS GIMMILLARO

laika

BY ADRIAN LEVA - CARNES

laika

and other considerations

but fond memories were not enough, I tried to dissuade them
we could never go home.

the blood is spilt. the fish, processed
and served dock-side. this dish is cold. this dish is
a key,

a coin, a block of ice
under lock and concrete. I tried to tell you
there's a fire that lives in the hollow of your throat.
go for the groin and that solid set of shoes;
cold walls will not protect you. there's tables higher up than you or I
there're nails that can be pulled from the root. names and dates
people and places, changelings and cuckoos
flipped on their backs and written in thin lines of chalk

ethanol
iodine
vaseline
vinegar

topical, by mouth.

that's a lot of clipped teeth. that's one long, lonely earring.
count your pigeons. scrub their shit from the sand

wool coats and the clementines don't know to keep their pulp past the peel.



SYSTEM SCREAM
LIZ HASSELL

bottle

BY JAX SIMINERIO

bottle



of swine

A dead leaf falls from the old apple tree and crunches against dried-up soil as my needle swivels its way through fabric. The steady squeaking of my wicker rocking chair is a metronome and my sewing is a slave to its beat.

With years of quiltmaking under my belt, I hardly need to watch my hands as they work thread into cotton—a skill that comes in handy since my bony fingers have shriveled up to a dismaying extent. I prefer to direct my line of vision to something less morbid, such as my farm's decaying landscape with overgrown tangles of long-gone crops and sparse animals losing their fur and feathers.

After adding a final touch of ribbon to my project, I hold the finished product out in front of me, extending fragile arms as flurries begin to fall. The completed sack is made from hundreds of stitched squares—some red and some green—and it's the perfect size for Amelia's gift. I am filled with a rare sense of pride as I examine my other creations: a cherry-red bodysuit made of thick fleece and a pointed hat to match, both accented with fluffy white detailing. However, as I step into the suit, I am disgruntled to discover that my gaunt frame is swimming in it. I tug gently at the

midsection. Perhaps, with a little bit of effort, I can fill it out by tonight.

I misplaced my reading glasses ages ago, so deciphering the fine print on the cookie dough packaging is a bust. Thankfully, improvisation is my dearest friend. I plop the sweet-smelling contents onto an ungreased baking sheet; the cooking spray is starting to smell like rotten eggs, so I opt against it. I can't read the directions on how exactly to split up the rectangle of dough, so I decide to keep it in one full piece for simplicity's sake. I set my rusty oven to an eyeballed 500 degrees and toss in the treat. A flickering digital clock on the counter reads 4:30 PM, and I resolve to check on the cookies in an hour.

In the meantime, I gorge on whatever loose ends I can find—ideally those that are carb-filled. I munch on dry macaroni seasoned with garlic powder, chew around the black mold on multigrain bread, and gnaw on the last of the dirty potatoes harvested ages ago. I eat voraciously, leaving as little space as possible for dessert. Clutching my bloated belly through the woolly red suit, I feel more driven than ever.

I glance at the clock and my heartbeat stutters: 4:30 PM. I could

have sworn I changed those batteries when they started oozing mint green chunks.

The disastrous state of the cookies reaches my nose before it reaches my eyes; it's the all-too-familiar stink of hot toasting ash. When I open the oven door, I am greeted with a massive cloud of onyx that makes my eyes water and my airways scream. It's nostalgic, and in some way, comforting. The kitchen walls used to be doused in this odor before I ditched cigarettes, back when chain-smoking, wine, and saltine crackers counted for my three meals a day. I don't think Amelia minded the smell, except for the handful of times her one friend came over to play.

“

**‘WHAT DIED IN HERE?’ HER FRIEND
WOULD ASK, TO WHICH AMELIA WOULD GLARE
AT ME WITH A REDDENED FACE.**

“What died in here?” her friend would ask, to which Amelia would glare at me with a reddened face. She was in elementary school at the time, but I often wonder if she was already plotting what she would do at seventeen.

I peel the toasted black brick from the pan and it miraculously comes off in one piece. Gripping

it with both hands, I chomp into the charred dough with no hesitation; I'll do whatever it takes to nail this portly character. When I reach the end of the burnt mass, I scrape the overflowed bits from the bottom of the oven and inhale those as well. My mother always scolded me against being wasteful, and mothers know best—or so the saying goes.

Now brimming with an ungodly concoction of food, I creak open the door to Amelia's childhood bedroom, reminding myself not to knock this time as I tend to do on instinct. The bed is unmade and there is a sour hint of aging vomit in the air, which was never cleaned

from the rug. Most of her items are precisely how she left them, including dollar-store makeup that lay uncapped and mid-use on her vanity—expired by a desolate decade.

As a pre-teen, Amelia would always complain that she couldn't afford name-brand cosmetics because her piggy bank would find itself empty each morning after she'd

made a deposit. I used to convince her it was an evil money fairy that smuggled her savings as she slept. I assume she put the pieces together eventually, that I had been lusting for any change I could find to cover my liquor, but she never had the guts to stop me, just as I never had the guts to stop myself.

The thick layer of dust accumulating on her trinkets and sports trophies makes my nose perpetually itch, but Amelia forbade me from touching her belongings ever since I pried open her diary, snooping for the feelings she'd never share with me. Now eyeing myself in her large heart-shaped mirror, I realize that my icy hair is far too long and my beard is nonexistent, so I'll have to do some crafting to achieve my goal.

Even with the bluntness of Amelia's safety scissors, it isn't a challenge to cut through wads of my brittle, thinning hair. I chop the strands right against my scalp and the fragments fall leisurely onto my suit's soft shoulders. When one lock hits the carpet, I can't avoid staring at the large burgundy splatter by my black-booted feet. I lean down and take a sniff to confirm what I already know: pinot noir still looms within the fibers, teasing the self-control I have battled to obtain.

It's the scent of stumbling into

this very bedroom on a past Christmas Eve and the scent of "What the fuck, Mom?!" as I throw up on my teenage daughter's only nice dress. She told me then in a wailing cry that she hadn't enjoyed a single Christmas since the last one she spent with her father.

He had gifted her a pig plush back on her seventh Christmas, which she'd affectionately nicknamed Pinky. Pinky had soft peachy fur and endearing button eyes, and Amelia adored it so thoroughly for so long that it turned a tired pink-gray. I resented how she hugged her father that Christmas morning because it reminded me of the way they danced together at our wedding, with her tiny feet planted on his leather shoes for elevation. With him, laughter would bubble from her lips, the genuine kind that would send me sneaking off into the bathroom with a handle of vodka hidden beneath my shirt.

"You can't even say Dad's name, can you?" Amelia asked on that abominable Christmas Eve, wiping spatters of my vomit from her face. In a heated response, I chucked my fifth glass of wine against her bedroom wall, spattering Pinky with blood-red stains in the process.

"Why would I bother?" I slurred out in a garbled syllable, feigning

defense when I knew in my shame-drunk heart she was right.

Amelia's face reddened with that same old embarrassment of her own mother as her eyes searched for anything to love within mine. I grappled for some magic word to make her stay, but we both knew I was always best at saying nothing at all. She grabbed only her now-ruined Pinky and slammed her bedroom door on the way out—a certain thud unique to Amelia that I'd never hear again.

items from the safe, including his long-expired driver's license, his favorite gold watch—the face of which is shattered and covered in dried blood—and, of course, his death certificate, which I have refused to read since the crash. My paranoia convinces me that it could somehow feature a note from him—an “I told you so” of sorts—but I don't need to hear from my ex-husband that drunk driving is moronic. My ex-daughter never let me forget it.



**‘YOU CAN’T EVEN SAY DAD’S
NAME, CAN YOU?’**

Cheap school glue isn't exactly ideal for sticking snippets of my own hair to my chin, but it gets the point across well enough. I compulsively stroke the curls pasted across my jaw as I approach the closet of someone who was once my husband. I kneel down before a hefty metal safe located between his loafers and tennis shoes, and anxiously click each letter into place on the padlock: P-I-N-K-Y.

The lock pops open in my shaking hands and the metallic noise makes me jump, prompting a few white tufts to fall from my face. I cautiously retrieve a handful of

I reach deeper into the safe's threatening void and pull out a small ovular case. Morally, I know I am supposed to be despondent as I dig through my dead husband's things, but I can't prevent a budding smile as I snap open the case to find his thin, squarish spectacles. As I slip them onto my face, I feel anything but mournful, as I am finally, completely, someone else.

It was only a few days ago that we finally crossed paths. There I was, routinely perched on a bench at her favorite park, and there she was, my used-to-be baby, pushing a carriage

for a baby of her own. Her stomach was round and filled out like a massive ball of yarn; I couldn't help but wonder if it was a girl or boy she was crafting in there, and whose needle had done the poking.

One in the oven and one in the world—I realized that her stress levels must have been off the charts. I knew then that she could undoubtedly use a knowing mother's guidance, and that there was no way she could refuse if I told her I had traded booze for remorse. Plus, I myself would benefit from two tiny copies of Amelia goofing around at their Grandma's house, livening up its kidless gloom.

I would have approached Amelia then, but the mental list of questions and catch-up stories was growing at an overwhelming rate, so I decided I needed some time to prepare. Not to mention, I wasn't in the most appealing get-up, considering my slippers were coffee-stained and I had skimped on the makeup that morning. So, naturally, I followed her home from an undetectable distance, took note of her address, and vowed to return a hero.

I am far less mindful when chucking my husband's possessions back into his safe, as I am now itching

to get out the door. While throwing in some miscellaneous documents, a yellowed photograph escapes. It depicts my husband holding a young, beaming Amelia, and standing proudly in front of his thriving farmland. I peer out the window and compare; the trees were so much greener, the crops so much fuller, and the *animals*... they were alive and they were plentiful.

However, I resist getting discouraged once my eyes land on my current farm's most prized feature: a wonderfully fat pig grazing in its pen with a soft peachy coat and endearing button eyes. It feasts indefinitely on stolen canned corn and soybeans, stuffing itself until it's nearly bursting at the seams. On its hooves, failed drafts of knitted socks for a newborn, now muddied and well-loved. This redesigned Pinky is the one thing in my life that I have given proper care to, and Amelia will be so grateful that I was such a dedicated Mommy in her honor.

I adjust the red hat on my hodgepodge pixie cut and take one more look in the mirror before I make my exit. With my expectant quilted sack in one hand and a butcher knife in the other, I'm ready to give my daughter the most delightful Christmas surprise.

we are all BY BLAITHIN SIMPSON we are all just dirt

Blackout garden the hydrangeas are dying
Queen of Coins, Dark Woman tending to leaves
Well-being of abundance, neglect of responsibilities
Weather a blatant storm of passion
A midwestern rodeo
Volcanic tourist attraction.

Fertile soil, gravesite forgotten
The night shift is whispering sick jokes
I hide under two-thread-count cotton
November of thorns preceding my lady howl moon
Harbingers of change
Prevails vegetables rotted.



I'M SCARED OF DYING, IT'S FINE
MADS TORRES



how can i BY DEL ZIEGMAN how can i

write a poem about everything?

(alt: i make a mess of things and try
to blame it on the climate crisis)

Now we try to see each other's hurting,
Lock eyes with the bodies of insects
Grasshoppers, stacked and burning,
Masquerading as children.
Children
Who ache to smoke down the street throwing glass
And other good things. Like bricks. In the heat.
Sometimes, just for the sound, sometimes, for the HAVING-DONE of it all.

In the morning, the trees still reeeeeeeeeeek of our spunk.
Still so many go walking.
Pretend nothing happened
Pretend they heard nothing from their beds...
...Just imagine what it was like to stay out
And lick strangers in the dark.

The morning, just over our heads. Us kids:
Watching girl-on-girl videos, sunrise through the smoke, the queer side of
fucking—
Mostly ignoring the men making a young girl of our planet,
Who go on remarking her thin shoulders,
Calcifying her honey in hot sun.
Can even smell the burning,

Like the rest of us.

Kids:
if at the end of the world,
There is no one to write the final poem...
We will still bury them in their fucking newspapers like spoiled fish
And sing. Making meaning of partnership to a vaulted sky.

It sounds like future, looks like hurting, smells like fun.

ode to

BY SARAH LI

that old h-mart

Yes, that's right—
The *old* H-mart.

Not that fresh new one, with its polished floors and endless shelves,
Basking in its own shining glory

I'm talking about the old one,
the dirty one

the one parked in Elkins Park with its parking lot full of twisty turns and bad
drivers The one with concrete stairs blackened by gum stains,
and with a back section that overpoweringly reeks of seafood due to years of
crabs and lobsters and fish flopping out the last of their last lives
in tanks lining the walls

Mmm.
The smell of childhood.

But I don't love you because of your cramped aisles filled to the brim
with hoisin sauce and Pocky and Meiji gummies and dried seaweed and heaving
bags of rice,
Nor for the Paris Baguette next to the grocery, where I grew up
drinking bubble tea and eating soft Japanese milk bread
Or even for your sweet Asian pears and salty kbbq,
your yellowing floors and scratched signs,
the bright "paid" stickers that decorate the floor,
or the free samples of kimbap and potstickers flung forth
to passing customers every weekend.

I love you because, in you, I can become the monolith, can live in that stilted
paradox that haunts my every word
Because only people who really belong have the luxury of wanting to stand out.
Among your rickety racks of food, I can blend into the sea
of old grandmas in vests, young college students in flip-flops, rich mainland
girls with their luxury bags and necklaces,
Our brown eyes and dark hair (except for those who bleach it, because who
doesn't want to look like a kpop idol?) all looking the same to them
In you, people assume I speak Mandarin



and I don't have to disappoint them with an *oh, sorry, I don't speak Chinese*
(like chinatown)

I can be *just that other Asian American girl*, part of the community, an egg tart
instead of a banana (everyone loves an egg tart!)

A sweet pineapple bun (that, disappointingly, doesn't taste remotely
pineapple-y) instead of a Twinkie

Under the chill of your AC and the cool of your freezers that house sweet
tāngyuán balls and

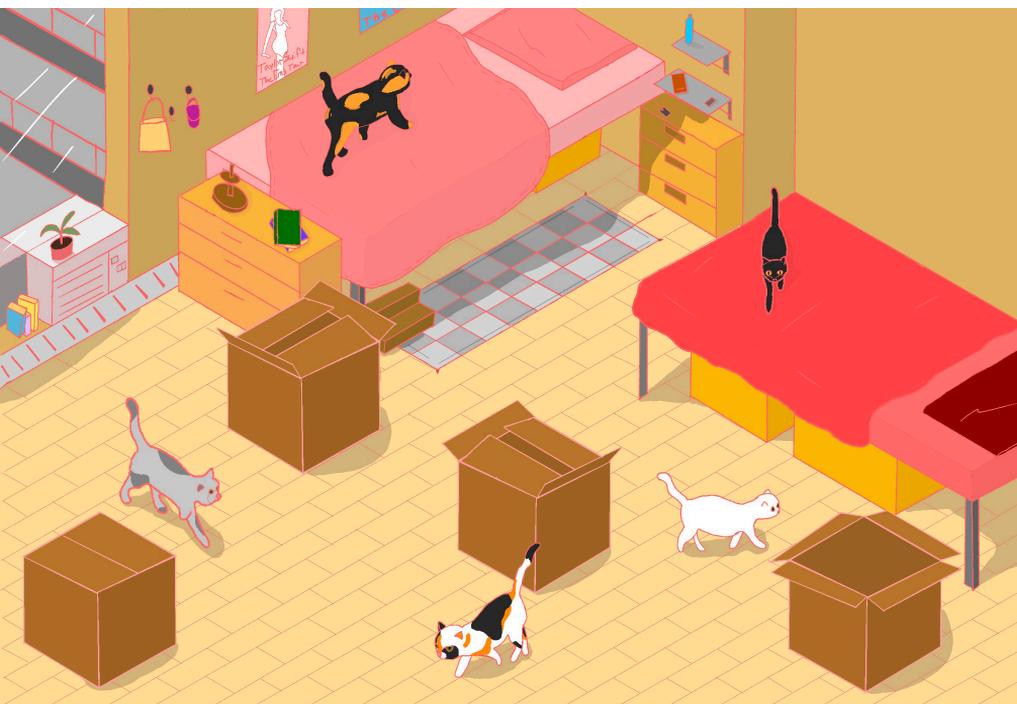
thick slices of nian gao and

a thousand varieties of fish balls for huōguō,

my American fire fades from red-hot to orange to a pale yellow,

And I can be no one and everyone at the same time

THE DREAM
MYA EISNOR



life

BY FRANK SEITZ



of dodi

10/12

My name is Dodi Schwarlette, and welcome to my MURDER JOURNAL. Why am I writing a MURDER JOURNAL, you may ask? Well, it's simple: because I plan to MURDER!

Ever since I was a pebble on this concrete desert we call Earth, I was constantly bombarded with the prospect of *success*. "Oh, Dodiliah," my parents would say to me. "We expect you to grow up into a fine, young woman." Aye, but what does a fine, young woman look like? Is she kind and sweet? Perhaps soft spoken? Who are the finest, youngest women? They must be the most successful of the bunch, obviously! They must be the ones on billboards and on the covers of magazines! On stages, with all of the audiences—YES! They must have an audience!

But, as a young girl, I came to find that these women—the ones on billboards and magazines, with audiences—weren't actually always kind and sweet. Some of them curse the very same audiences that idolize them. Some of them go home and beat their kids or something like that, some of them are assholes to fast food workers, and yet, they are fine, young women. They must be, if the whole world knows their names.

And that brings me to why I have decided to murder! I must appease my stupid fucking parents! I must do whatever it takes to be a fine, young woman, and I will do it how I please! Murder is such a unique thing, don't you think? How often do you meet people who've killed someone? Not quite often, I presume. And yet, how many killers can you name? How many documentaries are there about, let's say, Rosemary West as opposed to Taylor Swift? How about biopics? The point is, there are so many murderers who are just as famous as the pretty women in magazines, and they are idolized just the same. Therefore, they are successful.

Also, don't you tell me that it's "not about the murderer but instead the victim"! Name all of the victims of Jeffrey Dahmer: go! I bet you can't! And then you may say there are some victims who are more famous than the killers, like JonBenét. To that I say: are you fucking stupid? First of all, nobody knows who killed JonBenét in the first place. Second of all, that's exactly why *the killer* is more famous than JonBenét; anytime someone talks about her, they talk about how she was murdered! Not about her favorite snack or her favorite TV show! It's about her death, which is



ILLUSTRATED BY
JASMINE DOMINGO

by extension, about her killer!

Anyways, less about that and more about me. I want to be a fine, young woman. A.K.A. famous. I want to be famous by being a murderer. I want future generations to grovel in my path. I want the world to think my name and gasp in fear! Because, you know who else is feared? God. I want that fame, so, so much. Some

with the beautiful masculinity of John Coffey, and ever since, I've been in love. *Deeply* in love. Pop stars aren't always soft and sweet, but this murderer certainly is. His voice was like a soft and slow kind of whisper that's in no hurry to get to anyone's ears. His smile, so tight and so sweet—piercing through the dark circumstances that engulfed



**AS AN ASPIRING MURDERER, I'D
BE DISTRAUGHT IF I WEREN'T FEARED.**

nights I wake up in a sweat, panicked because I'm not already there. I walk the streets and wonder where the pedestrians would run if they knew my name. Oh, how I yearn for such recognition!

Of course, I am not a heartless person. I am capable of love and am in fact very much in love! Unfortunately, my lover is dead; he suffered at the hands of the electric chair. But I know that if I can prove myself to be the most merciless killer, he will indeed meet me in heaven with open arms. This man, the subject of my love, is none other than child-murderer John Coffey!

You may know him from a little movie called *The Green Mile*, which is his biopic. That's right; another killer with a movie. I was only a little girl when my eyes were graced

his life. John Coffey, with a body carved from the steady hands of God, and a spirit like water that can put out the flames of hellfire. And yet, he killed two little girls.

Such a man who meets both standards of success (the standard of kindness and the standard of fame) should be worshiped, and most certainly loved. I'm not sure if he's loved by the populace. I hear talk about him, how people are sorry for him. I think these people misunderstand my lover. They don't fear him. As an aspiring murderer, I'd be distraught if I weren't feared. I'm sure John Coffey feels the same, deep down.

I'm choosing to take a less empathetic and sweet approach to my fame. I can not be sweet *and* feared. I must have a bloodthirsty image in

order to convey myself to the people. I love John Coffey, but I believe that this was his fatal flaw. If he had never shown compassion, people would have feared him more.

But, at the end of the day, it's all gonna be ok. They say that opposites attract. I think my evilness will compliment his sweetness. We are soulmates, John Coffey and I. Picture this: Mrs. Dodiliah Coffey! It really has a ring to it, ya know! No one can deny the perfection of this love! We'll be like Edward and Bella! John Lennon and Yoko! Chris Brown and Rihanna! We will be famous!

10/14

I've been thinking about who I should kill in order to become famous, and I've come to a conclusion. I've decided to kill my parents! What's more disturbing than a child killing her own mother and father? My name will be in the newspaper and other parents will read it and go, "Gosh, what if my kids turn out to be just like Dodi?" I hope that when the children read it, they'll either grovel just like their parents or they'll break away and follow in my memorable path!

Besides that, I have a few personal reasons for killing my parents. For one, they don't love me.

Of course, they say they do every night—and my mother always gives me the sloppiest kiss on the forehead YUCK—and they don't understand me. Therefore, they don't love me. If my parents loved me, they'd know my true aspirations. They'd know that I want to kill and they'd support me in it. Well, I'd like to tell them that I'm a murderer, but I feel like they'd react negatively. They'd throw me in therapy or something. I can't have that!

They also make me do the dishes every night, and they make me take out the trash. Who the fuck does that?! Who makes their own children take out the trash? If you are forcing your kids to carry smelly trash bags to the curb everyday, then you DO NOT love your children. It's impossible.

Now, I can't just *kill* my parents, if you know what I mean. Like, I can't just shoot them or stab them. No, I have to be exceptionally cruel. And this is where I've hit a roadblock in my planning because there are so many ways to do this but I can't do them all. I could incinerate them—burn the house down—but then I won't get to skin them alive! You may be saying: "Why don't you just skin them alive first and then burn them to death?" Because they'll probably be dead by the time

I'm done skinning them alive, and then burning them alive would be useless!

Useless! Useless! I refuse to do anything useless! That's what all the girls at school call me: Useless! But little do they know that I am a weapon—a weapon that's slated to be married to another weapon in a world beyond this one! God, I cannot wait to see those sickly whores cry! They think they've got it ALL. They think that they are the ones who are fine and young, sweet and soft, but I know that all their personal little ego-kingdoms will come crumbling down when they hear that the girl they laugh at is capable of so so so so so much more!

Another little thing that you may have noticed by the dates of these entries is that Halloween is on its way. Disasters happen all the time, right? But, what if this disaster happens on Halloween? Halloween is not just another day. It's a joyous celebration of what we fear. But what if, after everyone is done celebrating, they go back home and they turn on the TV—and they see that Dodi Coffey has just brutally killed her parents and fed their body parts to the dogs around town! That would be badass. Well, at least to me and John Coffey it would be. To everyone else on the

planet it'd be preposterous, which is perfection!

10/15

You will not believe what bullshit lies have been force fed to me today.

Well, ok—let me tell you a story. My Aunt Bertha came over, and so that means little Mike, my cousin, came along with her. Little Mike isn't little, though. He's 19 and tall, with black hair and cool tattoos. Well, at least I thought he was cool, Dearest Journal, but it turns out I misjudged him!

I came up to Mike and told him about my plan to kill my parents. He thought that was cool. But then I told him about my secret crush, John Coffey, and he asked if I was fucking stupid!! FUCK YOU MIKE!!! FUCKKKK YOUUU!!! I said, "What the fuck did you just say to me?" And he said, "Duhhh, Dodi, you do know that John Coffey never actually killed anyone, right?"

Now, I was truly unaware of how dense my DUMBASS cousin was. I guess there really is a reason why they call him Little Mike! I told him that he was plain wrong and that if anyone knew anything about John Coffey, it would be me because I'm LITERALLY GOING TO MARRY HIM!

Mike called me delusional and

said that John Coffey was very against murder. And I said, “No, Mike, you’re wrong. John Coffey literally murdered two little girls and got sent to the electric chair for it. How can he possibly be against murder if he, himself IS a murderer?” Mike retorted with something like, “Bluh bluh my name’s Mike I’m so stupid and also John Coffey wasn’t even the one who killed those girls in the movie bluh bluh. He was actually framed by fucking—Wild Bill or whatever the fuck his name was bluh bluh.”

THEY THINK THEY’VE GOT IT ALL.

Call me crazy, call me what you will, but how THE FUCK can John Coffey be framed by a character that I’ve never even heard of. Who the fuck is Wild Bill? I am 100% sure that this fucking guy wasn’t even in *The Green Mile*, let alone John Coffey’s actual life! Mike is a dirty, rotten liar and he knows it! Goddamn it, he should be sent to the fucking electric chair fuck I HATE MIKE!

Also, this stupid prick claimed that John Coffey was a magical healer? Does this guy even know what the fuck he’s talking about? Perhaps him saying that “John Coffey isn’t a murderer” is so absurd it can actually be funny! But what

really sent me over the edge is when he specifically said that John Coffey was able to absorb the pain of others and cough it back out into little dust particles that float it into the air! What the fuck?!

I told him that he’s a stupid motherfucker and that there’s no way John Coffey was a fucking healer! I mean, John Coffey was a literal pervert; he literally groped Tom Hanks’s fucking balls in that movie. How can a man who gropes balls be a fucking magical healer? And then little Mike said the most

OUTRAGEOUS bullshit to me. He said, “Durrr, actually the reason why John Coffey grabbed Tom Hanks’s balls is because he was healing him of a UTI or some shit bluh bluh I’m Mike, I’m stupid bluh.”

WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK IS THIS FUCKING GUY ON ABOUT?! Did Mike ever even make it past first grade? I wouldn’t be surprised if his fucking umbilical cord were still attached to him, that fucking pussy! FUCK MIKE!!!! I began to shout at Mike, and all he did was stare at me blankly. All that did was make me shout LOUDER and more profanely, until my stupid whore of a mother walked in and said, “Dodi,

”

where the hell did you learn such vile, disgusting language? I am very disappointed in you! Mike, I am so sorry. Dodi, I am taking your computer away and you are staying in your room! Also, did I mention that I'm a dumb bitch? Bleh!" FUCK YOU

“

**FUCK YOU MOM THIS IS LITERALLY WHY
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!!!!**

MOM THIS IS LITERALLY WHY I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!!!!

And then she left with Mike and my computer. Once again, I am alone in my room, with only the prospect of marrying John Coffey to comfort me. Oh, John Coffey! If only you'd come down from the heavens and explain yourself to the world! If only you'd clutch me from the sickly hands of this godforsaken world and take me to your fields of love!

I should've never told anyone about my love for you, John Coffey! Never! Now little Mike's gonna tell all his friends and they're gonna laugh at me! The misery I feel now is insurmountable! It is one thing for people to slander my name, but to slander the golden name of my lover? Simply despicable. I can not stand for it!

Maybe there should be a change of plans. Maybe instead of killing my parents, I should kill Mike... Yes,

kill Mike! And I'll make sure to kill him EXTRA hard! When the world sees what I'll do to that fucking BRAT, they'll regurgitate until their waste overflows into the ocean! Yes! And even after he's dead, I'll continue to dismember his body until all

that's left of him are mushy, charred clumps! YES! YES!! FUCK LITTLE DICK MIKE!!!! FUCK HIMMM!!!

10/26

It's true. Oh, God! It's true.

I finally got my computer back from my mother and decided to watch *The Green Mile* again. I've spent the last few days trying to persuade myself otherwise, but alas, my sweet John Coffey is not a murderer, and he does not like killing.

In my defense, I haven't seen that movie since I was eleven. As soon as I saw John Coffey, I was elated and needed no more information. I once thought John and I were made for each other. I used to spend my time looking up wedding dresses! But how can such a sweet, tender, anti-murder man love an evil, pro-murder girl like me? It's impos-

sible. The yearning within me for murder is separate from my yearning for John Coffey, but now these two yearnings can not dwell peacefully within the same heart. What's a girl to do?! Does God not hear my cries? I can't sleep, for christ's sake!

The strings of life now have me at gunpoint, and I am forced to make a choice! Do I give up fame and murder for John Coffey, or do I give up John Coffey for fame and murder? I am incomplete without either one! What does a broken heart do when it has no thread to mend itself back together? How would the Earth continue to revolve around the sun if it were split in half!? I am stuck in between love and fame! Only a sadistic God would put his people in such a predicament!

Where do I go now that even the prospect of John Coffey's love is uncertain? What do I do? I am so ill, John. I am so, so sickly. Come to me and heal me of this disease! Come to me and give me answers!

10/28

I have decided to kill myself. Well, not completely, I'm still thinking about it, but the prospect is tempting.

The way I see it, I can not live a proper, full life without murder.

If I want John Coffey, I should just kill myself and meet him in heaven immediately, but what is heaven without a satisfied life? What do angels do when what they desire is beyond the final frontier of the afterlife? Where do dreams go when they die—if they die?

Ever since I was a little girl I dreamed of murder. I can not possibly imagine a life where I am not a world famous killer! And yet, the same applies to my love of John Coffey.

To be honest, I've never considered suicide up until now. But when I think about it, who will be there when I'm dead? Whether it's suicide or not, would anyone come to my funeral? Could there even be a funeral? Who would write my eulogy, if there even is one?

And that's another thing. If I kill, there will be no love for me. I was fine with it before, when John Coffey was sure to love me, but now I'm not sure. Is making the whole world disturbed by me worth it? And even if my murders brought followers and supporters—all that love from them would just be artificial. They don't know me. John Coffey does, though. Fans do not kiss you at night—they cannot provide any rhyme or reason for you because you're supposed to provide that for

them. True love, romantic love and even friendship, seem balanced.

I have no friends, either. Nobody whatsoever. Not even Mike because I called him names. Those mean girls at school are mean to me for a reason! I'm a freak. That's all I am; a freak! And being a freak is not something I can hide. Of course someone who constantly dreams about murder will come across as disturbing, even if they don't talk about it!

I'm pathetic, and perhaps it's all deserved. And I've noticed that this patheticness has derived a feedback loop within me. Whenever I notice I am pathetic, or feel pathetic, I hide behind my walls and delusions of murder because it comforts me. It makes me feel big and everyone else small. And when my wall comes down, I'd usually be ok because I have John Coffey to lean on.

I wonder now, though, if John Coffey is disgusted by me. I wonder if he would join the masses in their groveling and sickness! Even if I weren't to kill anybody, does he still accept me? Is he able to get past the fact that I was once an aspiring murderer, or is he stuck on that?

And if he is stuck on that, then fair enough. Murderers and killers don't deserve to be loved. Those who spend their lives taking away

should not expect to receive. Look at me! Who am I to sit on a throne? Now that it is gone and destroyed, I am forced to stand in line with the rest of humanity. There are no dreams to follow, for all of mine have shattered like antique china. Dreams are so pretty to look at, but beyond that they're useless. They sit there on their shelves, high and mighty and elusive, decorating the kitchens of old women. And when these old women die, these same dreams are passed down onto their daughters. These daughters continue to gaze upon the dreams of their mothers until one day, the dreams ultimately shatter in a U-Haul or something.

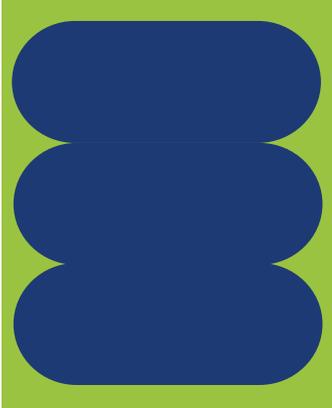
Of course, this is all a stupid metaphor for me. I'll probably have no daughters, and if I did they wouldn't want my bloody dreams of death. There is nothing for me to give. I've been planning my life to give nothing for future generations. I am nothing but a waste, and at this rate I'll die a waste!

...Or maybe I won't. I'm not sure. I'm not sure of anything anymore. I don't know what's true and what's false. I can't discern reality from fiction. Is life even real? And if so, why?

I think I'm gonna get some rest, Dearest Journal. Maybe I'll mull

all this over. Perhaps I'll wake up tomorrow and all of this will be a dream. Maybe I'm truly coming upon my last few tomorrows. I dunno. It doesn't really matter, anyway. Nothing really ever mattered anyway.

Goodnight, Journal. I love you.



druid

BY BLAITHIN SIMPSON

with a chip on her shoulder

with an eyelash in my eye i speak my final words to the tree that protected
my brick laid house.

no picket fence just weeds and sidewalk chalk and dead leaves, cigarette
butts and a breeze, autumn comes to welcome me.

an offbeat rhythm wakes up a child with little guts

takes them somewhere their mother told them they were not allowed to touch
you are jealous of them

what they set free

mad at not being able to believe what you cannot see

liminal space holding back long hair, it used to be a different color, it used to
make people stare.

with the difference of the fall of the seasons that come to call i live within my means
i listen to the trees.

a coward with straight teeth and a park at the end of her dead end street.

One day I won't hate what i see, one day when the sky opens up with the
dark blue of an upcoming dusk i will believe.



MEMENTO NOBIS
TAMARA TARVIN

water

BY CYRUS NASIB

water

births and clownfish

i went to the ocean today and saw myself there, 12 years old, sitting in the surf.
she looked up at me and asked

aren't you going to swim?

i responded with, *no, i don't really swim much anymore.* and she asked me

why? we love swimming, it's the most magical thing in the world.

and i had to find a way to respond well so i said *well, things have changed*
because they have, i've grown and realized some things, so i continued



i think that swimming is more of a you thing. and she looked at me and asked why? we're the same person.

she's right. she is me and i am her. but i can't look at her and see myself. i just see a little girl who loves to swim, and i'm not a little girl who loves to swim, i'm an 18-year-old boy who looks at bodies of water like they can see right through him. but i don't want to make her sad so i just say

yeah. we are.



CANDYLAND
MICHAEL STANIZ

body

BY KYLA KLEIN

body

electric



Blood is pouring from my nose, warming my otherwise cold skin. I tear at the hem of my shirt unsuccessfully, ripping the thing nearly in half and exposing my stomach. Whatever. I hold the damp fabric to my face in an attempt to slow the gushing, to no avail. I figure I'll have to sit down soon or I'll pass out. The quickly reddening cloth blocks my already blurring vision as I search for the best place to do whichever comes first. My back makes contact with a familiar thick, rusted pipe. I slide down it and settle onto a damp set of stairs, cornered between the pipe and the wall. I close my eyes for a moment and melt into the symphony of small ceiling leaks in every direction.

I place my worn leather messenger bag beside me then my pounding head between my legs. I pinch the bridge of my nose. My vision swims with stars as I question whether or not my nose is broken, and whether or not I have it in me to set it if it is. My dad used to call my nose a "schnozz," affectionately, accurately, and occasionally unfortunately. I'm lucky I keep a first aid kit at my ground camp. I wouldn't have made it up the seventeen flights to my main domicile if I didn't. An instant ice pack, a since soaked wad of gauze, and a do-it-or-die mindset.

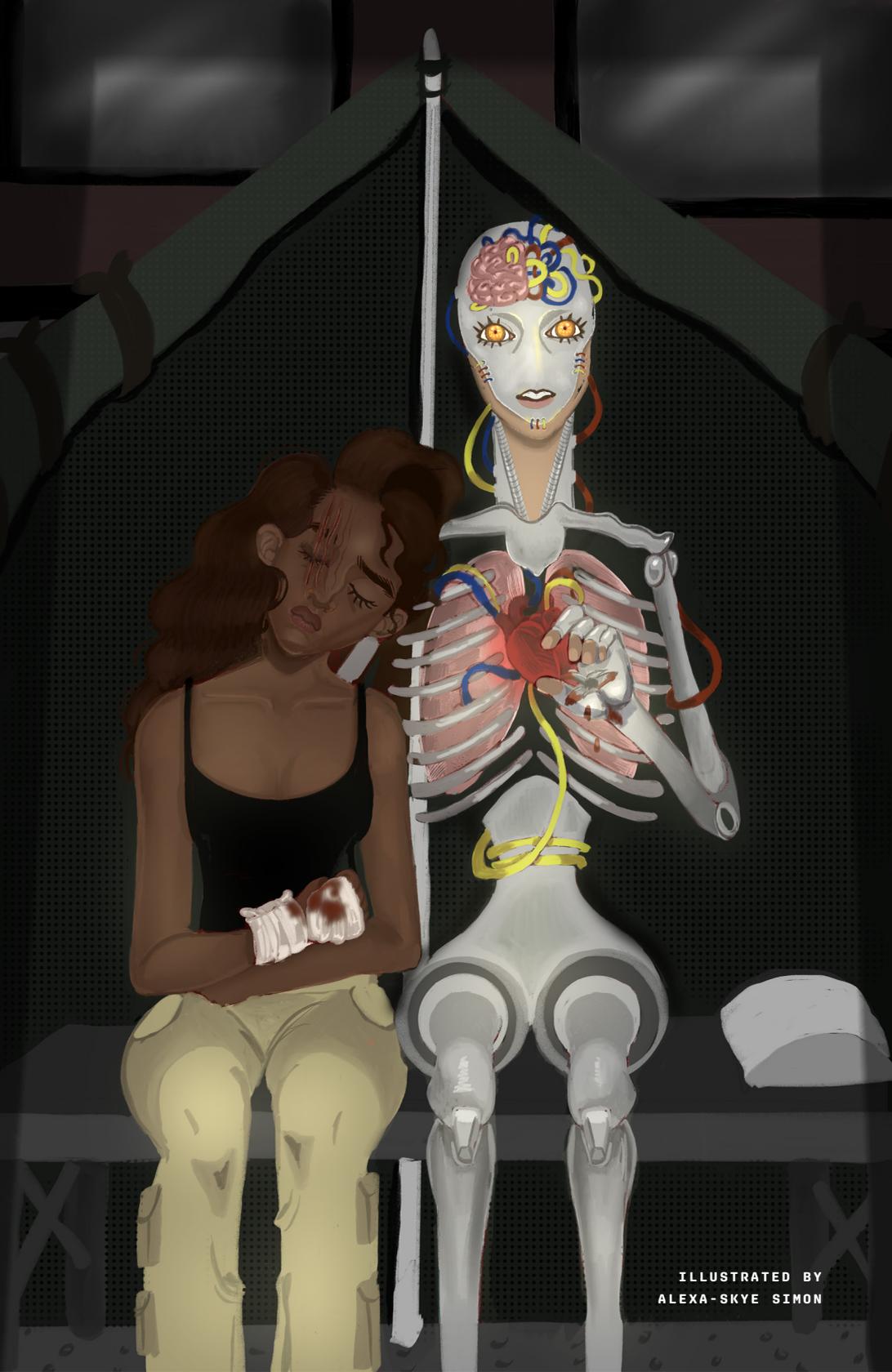
Seriously. I was being chased.

Leaving is necessary for gathering medical supplies, food, or anything else that looks useful. Of course, that's everyone else's objective, and like everyone else, I know that getting what you need can mean getting socked in the nose. Knowing, however, never makes it any more fun. Most of my scars are simply receipts for what I've taken, the four long, jagged scars across my left eye not included.

The bleeding's slowing down now, and I'm leaning towards a self-diagnosis of pretty bad face bruising without any actual bone snapping, which is really all I can ask for. I don't have a mirror to confirm this, but I imagine I wouldn't want to see myself in the state I'm in. It wouldn't be good for morale.

My vision adjusts. Slowly.

This place was a factory or a workshop before The Shutdown. I've never been able to figure out exactly what was being built here, but considering the barbed wire around the place I assume it was government. I'm lucky to have found the back entrance two years ago. I'm lucky that it only took me four hours of trying combos on the thick steel padlock to get it to pop its metal maw. From the outside you can barely see the doorway, and I'm



ILLUSTRATED BY
ALEXA-SKYE SIMON

careful not to part the bushes in a way that will call attention to it. And if anyone were to get past, they'd have to brave the hundred cement stairs leading to the "ground floor." And to reach me, seventeen more flights. Is it possible? Sure. But I won't make it easy.

Conveyor belts wind up and down against the wall, with vestibules like highway overpasses wrapped around them, tiny windows so the observers of this mystery construction wouldn't miss a moment. Small square monitors are scattered throughout the conveyor belt area. Their smashed screens spark and flicker, or more likely my vision does. I remember the studies about humans hearing machines go off long after they all lost power. The worst were the phantom buzzes from long dead phones. Some people kept their smartphones, whose name aged poorly considering without a charge they're no smarter than a brick, and much less useful at that. I kept mine. Why not, right? Sometimes I still panic if I leave without it. I've taken it apart and put it back together hundreds of times. Intricate things. Frivolous.

Creak. I sit up straight.

It isn't unusual for such a rusted building to groan and creak. The sound of it usually puts me to sleep

at night. But something about this creak was more... *intentional* than the coughing of busted pipes. A pause. Then another creak. Quietly, deliberately. Like someone tiptoeing. Like someone.

"Cyndy?" I call out. Blood rushes forward and my head pulses with the pressure of shouting. From around the corner, a surge of steam. Then, a metallic hand wraps around the wall. A face peeks out, timidly. "It's me, Cyn." I consider getting to my feet to greet her, but I think better of it. "Come out here."

"...what is the code word?"

"The code word is 'code.' Yeesh, we should really work on that, huh?" A dry laugh escapes me.

"Ha. Ha. I think it is good." *Creak. Creak.* Cyndy works her way towards me. Even after all this time, she is a sight to behold.

Six and a half feet tall, thick metal rods for legs and thinner ones for arms, ball joints that obviously need to be oiled. I've been gone for a few days, after all. A gold steel rib cage protecting pink lungs and a beating heart, arteries to wires. Her eyes, forever wide, shallow in their sockets, pinprick pupils cut deep into gold spheres, lock on me as she takes her time approaching. "Hello, Lola."

"You're not supposed to leave our

lab if I'm not here. It's dangerous."

I say "our lab" lightly—it's more my lab, Cyndy's bedroom. But I find it's friendlier to say the place is ours. It's the most controlled space in the entire building, unlike this unpredictable oasis I've collapsed in. I wince as water drips onto the floor beside Cyndy.

"I heard you come in. You did not come straight back. I thought you might be hurt. I was right." She is standing over me now, bent at the waist, gears grinding in her hips. I try my best to keep a stern expression over the increasingly bloody cloth. "Also, I was bored. How is the world?"

' ALSO, I WAS BORED. HOW IS THE WORLD? '

"Hell. As it always is. But I brought you something." Cyndy perks and straightens with a whir, her hands clasped behind her back as if not to appear too eager. But her slamming heart gives her away.

"Wow. For me. From Hell." She grins, exposing titanium teeth.

"Straight from the seventh circle." I reach into my bag and clumsily produce a small package, wrapped in brown paper and twine. "Be careful, okay? Happy birthday."

She reaches out with both hands and cups it gently, bringing it to her

chest. She rests it in one wiry palm as if it's a small animal, pinching the twine between her other index and thumb. She pulls gently, and her shoulder squeaks. I make a mental note of which mechanism seems sonically responsible. As I watch, I lower the half-shirt from my face and swipe at my nose with the back of my hand. The bleeding has finally stopped.

The paper falls around her hand as the bow releases, revealing a small potted plant, a tiny sprout of green against a miniscule brown landscape. Her eyes whistle as they dart between me and the plant in her hand. Her heart is working

overtime, and steam is most literally shooting from her ears.

"Oh. Wow. I have never seen green like this before. Wow."

"You like it?" I smirk. She obviously does. Her ribs are practically clattering.

"I certainly do. I might even grow to love it." A smile squeaks across her face. She mechanically makes her way to sit next to me, lowering herself by bent knees onto the step below mine. She considers the plant, the ceramic pot clinking daintily against her metal finger-

”

tips. I stroke her shoulder. It evades me sometimes that she can't really feel my touch, at least not on the metal plate of a shoulder blade my hand is on, but I think touch is important regardless.

"Is there anything special you want to do today?" I ask, and she cranks her head around to face me. An ear splitting screech rings out from her neck, making me cringe.



' BESIDES OILING YOUR JOINTS, THAT IS... '

"Besides oiling your joints, that is..."

I clamber to my feet, one hand on the railing and the other using Cyndy's shoulder as support. I step down onto the cold floor and extend my hand. Cyndy gets up, stiffly, holding the plant pot tenderly in front of her chest, and we begin walking towards our lab.

"For my birthday, I would like to do two things," Cyndy states, turning the corner she had appeared from and leading me down a corridor lined not by walls but by low-hanging, every directional pipes that create their own vine system of sorts, a seven foot high ceiling and four foot wide walking space between them. I know, I measured as I was sketching out Cyndy's stature. This tunnel of multi-sized metal snakes goes on for thirty feet or so.

I find it eerily beautiful, although it used to scare Cyndy. Even now, she keeps her bent elbows pinned to her sides as she walks, so as not to risk scraping metal against metal. I wonder what it would be like to experience a world all made of my flesh and skeleton, to be sentient on a planet not engineered to comfort my material vessel. Then, I try not to wonder so much. I don't speak

while we are in the tunnel. Cyndy doesn't like the echo it makes, and she doesn't like having her concentration broken while we walk through it.

We enter our lab, a large, considerably drier room, as sterile as I can possibly keep it. Sunlight filters in through windows periodically lining the walls, all barred and covered with thick white plastic. In the center of the room is a medical examination table, with a dark blue cushy top that reminds me of the ones I hopped onto with a step stool as a kid. The ones my father sat on as they told us that without a way to recharge it, his pacemaker would only last a few more months.

In the left corner is a wooden bedframe a few feet off the ground. It houses a thinly padded mattress,

a faded red pillow and sheet set, and a worn stuffed lion. That's Cyndy's bed.

By the time my coat is on and my goggles have been heedfully adjusted over my aching nose, Cyndy is sitting on the table. She places the small plant gingerly on the flat surface beside my tray of tools. I pull on my gloves and approach her, oil can in hand.

"And what are those two things?" I tilt my head to the left and she follows suit. The spout of the oil can locks into her neck joint, and I generously grease her gears from behind her ear to her collarbone.

"Firstly, I have questions I would like you to answer."

"I'll try my best, but I can't promise anything."

"Secondly, I want to see the stars tonight. For an hour. Or more than an hour. Please. And thank you."

"Done deal. Let's start with those questions," I say through a yawn. I realize how little I've slept the past few days. It isn't safe to sleep outside, so on these longer excursions it can be a necessity to find a few unconscious hours in a back alley or an abandoned apartment. Not great for the REM cycle. Shaking my head, I remove the oil can and offer her a smile.

Cyndy typically asks about the

world before The Shutdown, tales of talking fridges, and the horrors of Black Friday Sales. Her favorite story is the 2008 Stock Market Crash. The things we thought were a big deal back then...

"Why did you make me, Lola?" Cyndy asks, tilting her head the other way. My hand trembles, taking the oil can with it, and black splotches spread across my already less than pristine white lab coat.

"What do you mean?" I steady myself and keep working, guiding her head back upright once the other side has been oiled. I progress down to her shoulders, being extra cautious as I work closer to her thinly veiled innards. Watching her heart thump rhythmically behind metal bars, I am glad my own speeding centerpiece isn't on display.

"Why did you make me?" I can feel her staring at me, but I don't look up. I lower my gaze so the top of my lab goggles blocks her face from my periphery.

"What—" I work her arm up and down a few times before leaving it straight out and moving on towards her elbow. "—makes you ask that?"

"It is my birthday and I want to know why I was made. That is why I ask."

"I just don't have any way to know if—" I move on to her wrist, inch-

ing further down her outstretched arm and away from her questioning face. “—you’re capable of internalizing that type of information. I wouldn’t want you to have some kind of... crisis.”

“I have never had a crisis before.”

“I don’t know if you remember, Cyn, but you have had one crisis.” I’m working on her finger joints now. What is usually a relaxing moment we share suddenly becomes an unpleasant job as I think about the scars they left on my eye.

Sometimes, Cyndy seems to remember and regret the four thick, jagged scars that trace from the top of my forehead to just below the end of my nose over my left eye, and the red pulse that runs through the eye itself. Then, other times, she will stroke them with the cool metal back of her hand, saying she does not have a clue what animal is capable of such a thing. No animal at all, I tell her. No animal at all.

“Well, this time I will not. I am an entire year old now.” Cyndy flexes her finger joints as I finish up with the thumb, metal dancing and glinting as she plays air piano.

I sigh. At some point since the conception of her being she is inquiring about presently, and the present itself, Cyndy has gained quite an attitude. I think I’ve even

heard her try to use sarcasm. Considering she only speaks to me, I can’t imagine where she’s learned it. I move on to the other arm, starting the process over again with the left shoulder. She contracts her right arm smoothly and silently out and to her chest, out and to her chest.

“Hold still, okay? I’ll uh, I’ll try to explain the best I can.” My eye twitches. “Give me a moment to think about how to say this, alright?” I am on her other hand now, these joints taking a bit more quickly to the treatment, and I pause for a moment with her hand in mine to meet her eyes. “This is all very... personal to me. I’m sure you’ve figured that.” She nods. Then looks up. I imagine if she had eyebrows they’d be furrowed.

“That is irony, is it not, Lola?”

“What is?”

“This is personal to you. I am personal to you, yet I am not a person at all, am I?”

“Well, no, um, yes, I suppose you’re right. It is ironic, isn’t it?” I smile at her, pride building in my chest. An answer building in my throat. “You’ve learned a lot, Cyndy. I suppose that’s the best answer to your question. I made you so you could learn. And so I could learn about you.” I move on to oiling her hip joints, starting with the left.

She tilts her head up, watching the squares of shadows on the ceiling grow longer as the sun works its way down the late afternoon sky.

Silence hangs in the air, save for the steady drip of the grease. I don't tell her that she's enough of a commodity as it is, just being herself. I don't tell her that if she knew everything, it wouldn't stop them from tearing her limb from limb in the outside world, or worse, imprisoning her, selling her, stripping her slowly for parts, even the human parts. I don't tell her thoughts of this very thing keep me up at night, staring at a still ceiling. I finish up with her knees and ankles, trying to keep my hands from shaking, pat her leg to let her know we're done, and turn to hang my lab coat and flex behind me, by the whoosh of thick metal and clatter of elbows interlocking rather than the shrill shrieks she was emitting before.

I turn to observe her. Cyndy stretches like a person, which I assume she learned from watching me. It's quite endearing, and technically useless.

"How about you find a nice place for your plant, and I'll come back for stargazing in an hour or so when it gets dark? I should get out of these clothes..."

"You have already started to get out of them," she teases, gesturing smoothly at my exposed abdomen. She hops off the table and I cringe at the impact on her knee joints.

"Funny. I'll see you in a bit, okay?" She's already halfway to her bed, and I'm halfway out the door.

My room is small, dark. The torn blinds are drawn, letting in dancing beams of rectangular light. I don't have a lot of clothes, a few plain shirts of varying condition and two pairs of pants including the ones I'm wearing. I strip them off and swipe at my legs absentmindedly with a washcloth. My room is about 20 by 20, low ceiling, a rickety twin bed in the corner. I duck under the clothesline running from the doorway to the back wall as I grab a pale pink t-shirt and a pair of black cargo pants off of it, replacing them with the ones I was wearing. I'll wash them next time it rains. I make my way out of my dormitory and head back to the front area where I abandoned my bag in the wake of the nosebleed. As I pass the corridor that leads to Cyndy's room I hear her singing, her voice echoing and contorting through the pipe lined walkway. I wonder if she is singing to her plant. I wonder if she is singing to herself.





Why did she have to ask that, dammit? And today of all days... I catch myself absentmindedly caressing my own face, my thumb working the longest of the four jagged scars. I don't realize tears are spilling until salt water traces the back of my index finger down to my wrist. It's unclear to me why I'm crying. That happens sometimes.

I retrieve my bag from the stairs. It's heavy. I was able to get four cans of soup and a water filter still in its packaging. That's huge. Which is why I took a hit to the face for it. Most people think a good hit to the face knocks someone over, so after hitting you they tend to let their guard down. I go for the stomach. Then I run.

When I pass by the hallway again, Cyndy isn't singing anymore.

I hold the door to the fire escape and wave Cyndy through with an overdramatic bow. A few months ago, when we first started coming out here to watch the stars, I laid doormats over the metal flooring. I was afraid the grated metal would rip Cyndy's heels right off her, or cause her to lose balance.

There are a lot of stars out tonight. I lean on the railing and Cyndy stands next to me. Once she tried to lean the way I do, with elbows

on the rail and wrists crossed over each other, and she nearly took the whole thing tumbling down with her, 17 stories to the cement. She knows it's serious now, certain death and all, but in the moment, she laughed. It freaked me out.

We have quite the view from this height, and while Cyndy fixates upwards to the heavens I often find myself looking down on the city, or what's left of it. Behind the building there's a bay, cargo ships rotting in it. Birds perch on a dock pole and I wonder if humans were ever supposed to exist on this planet at all.

"Lola?"

"Mm?" My head leans against the railing, heavy. I don't remember laying it there. "I'm good, Cyn. You wanted more than an hour, you can have it." As I say it, I remind myself— I've been gone a few days, I should spend some time with her. It's her birthday. I'll sleep when it's over.

"...Okay."

I don't know when I fell asleep. I don't know how I fell asleep. I know why I fell asleep, technically speaking, but I have never fallen asleep standing up like that. I don't know how long I was asleep, either. All I really know is that I woke up alone, drooling over the railing,

and I could hear the front doors to the building opening. I was outside alone, near delirious, and now I'm running down 17 flights of stairs, trying to beat her down the hundred steep cement ones leading from the front entrance to the main roads.

"Cyndy, come back!"

I'm panicking. I know I cannot panic in this situation, because I will not be able to address the problem to the best of my ability. I also know I am panicking. I know these things simultaneously. I know them as I panic. I need to run out after her. I am going to call attention to us if I do. I am running after her. I need to get in front of her. I know she could hurt me if I do. I get in front of her.

Halfway down the building's front steps, her hand sparks against the rusted railing. Orange sparks of teenage rebellion, a toddler tantrum, a tangling of the two, follow her. I wince thinking of the palm plating she's ripping raw. I manage to catch up and run down a few steps in front of her before turning and running right up to face her. I want some momentum behind me to make up for my relative lack of size, lack of strength. She's strong but she's fragile and isn't used to inertia. I feel a pang of guilt know-

ing my aim is to scare her. It mixes well with the panic in the cavity of my chest. I park myself one step below her and stand up straight, hands at my sides. I'm panting like an animal from the running. I want to collapse but I don't.

"Lola." She stops walking. Praise something. She stops walking.

"Cyndy, please. I mean, what if it rains," I blather. I wish I knew what I was meant to be saying. "Can we discuss it in the morning?"

"Lola. The morning is nothing but cold light to me. I have never seen it. And I would like to." She towers over me.

"Cyndy, anything, please, let's just go inside, for now, okay?" I'm frantic, shaking, but I control my body language. I do not raise my hands at her. "Be rational, please—"

"You gave me half a brain, is that true?"

"Cyndy, Cyn, c'mon—"

"You said you would try to answer my questions." Her metallic voice hangs sharp in the quiet night air. "Is. That. True?"

"Yes, yes, it's true."

"Which half of my brain is human?"

"Your right brain is human, Cyn."

"And my left?"

"Programmed. Motherboard. Microchips."

“So when you ask me to be rational, what are you asking me to be?”

“I’m—what?” I stutter.

She has me. Or, she’s lost me. Either way, I don’t have the answer this time.

“You are asking me to be machine.” I open my mouth, not quite a gasp. I try to speak and somehow I choke air inwards. Her heart slows like a metronome. I square my shoulders.

“Cyndy. Go inside.”

She breaks eye contact, looking to her left. Considering it.

“Please, Cyn.” My voice wavers. I swallow hard. “Don’t make me do this.” I reach for the switch under her chest plating, right by her solar plexus, a failsafe, never something I wanted to use. I reach for the switch that would disconnect her neural pathways to her right brain. I reach for the switch that would make her machine. Her eyes lock on mine.

Cold metal connects with my wrist just before I can tuck it underneath her chest plate. I feel her fingers contort and grip my wrist, the frayed palm plating slicing skin. A guttural cry escapes me. My free hand flies to her arm, gripping it as my knees buckle. She layers her other hand over mine, hands around wrists like we’re preparing to catch a cheerleader.

The torn metal digs further. It catches something under the skin.

“Cyndy, stop, you’re gonna—”

An audible snapping sound. A razor sharp pain. My left wrist. A ligament, a tendon, if I had to guess right now, which I don’t, I don’t have to do anything right now except melt to the ground. I let go of Cyndy’s wrist and she lets go of mine, one of them, melting down with me, but in such a joint-by-joint way it’s more of a power down. Her grip on my left wrist stays steady. I hope my blood doesn’t rust her too badly.

We’re sitting on the stairs now, just as we did inside this morning, her above me, her other hand still fish-hooked to my wrist. I’m seeing white, seeing red, not seeing much at all. “Lola, what do I do?” She sounds somehow remorseful.

The thought of a robot feeling remorse eats at me. So permanent, stretching forever in both directions. Not a natural thing, not human. My eye twitches. I need her shrapnel out of my arm. Now.

“I’m gonna, ah, you’re gonna pull your hand out, gently, okay?” I say. Cyndy nods, a quiet, rhythmic whir. “I’m gonna take off my shirt and you’re gonna tie it around my wrist, quickly, then we’re going inside. Got it?” She hesitates. “Cyndy?” I

can't see her through hot tears. Metal digs further under my flesh.

"Lola. Why did you make me?"

My mind races. My wrist sings. "Cyndy, I told you—"

"I want the truth this time." Her fingers flex and so does my neck. I dig the nails of my free hand into my palm in an attempt to feel something other than the searing pain from my wrist to my bicep. "This may be on the nose, but I seem to have the upper hand."

Wow. She's getting funnier. A dry laugh breaks at the top of my throat.

"I was, fuck— I was alone. What if I needed someone? What if I..." My whole body winces, my head tucking down and my eyes shutting tight. "What if I got hurt..."

Cyndy releases its grip on my arm. Blood starts rushing, I don't want to look. My knees are splayed out on the cement stairs, vision's slanted dark. I drag off my shirt, an elastic black camisole the only thing between my chest and the twilight breeze. Cyndy ties it, quickly, I've shown her how before. She's precise, like a doctor, like a Girl Scout. The perfectionist hands of scientific nature, as well as scientist nurture. Cyndy helps me to my feet and supports me with her non-lethal arm. We only have to make it to the ground floor.

I don't know what I'm living for sometimes, but I refuse to let the world kill me. I haven't felt good about dying yet and I'm not planning on doing it.

"I am sorry, Lola, I—" Cyndy starts. I wave her off with my good arm, the other folded over my ribs. I feel like a wounded animal. I feel like my wire's been cut.

"It was self defense, Cyn. You knew what I was gonna do," I slur. I've never had to do it. But she knows I can. It's not a factory reset, either. She'd remember.

We're reaching the top of the stairs just as the sun is creeping up the horizon. Pastel yellows and blues dance across the sky above the dark water of the bay. From the ground floor you can see everything, since it's actually well above ground, atop a steep hill. Cyndy stares with awe through the building, past lush beach shrubbery and broken down docks, straight into the harbor, across, at a star she's never seen.

"Cyndy, you're really not supposed to look directly into the sun," I mutter as she retracts her arm from behind me. "Doesn't it hurt?"

"Yes," Cyndy replies as she continues looking.

"Come over here in the shade, okay?"

"In a minute."

mirror

LYRICS BY DISCORDANT GENERATION

eyes

I know you see right through
These fractured colored hues
But then I want to hold it in your eyes
Closing the front door
Creating your own lore
Your name may be in history but why?

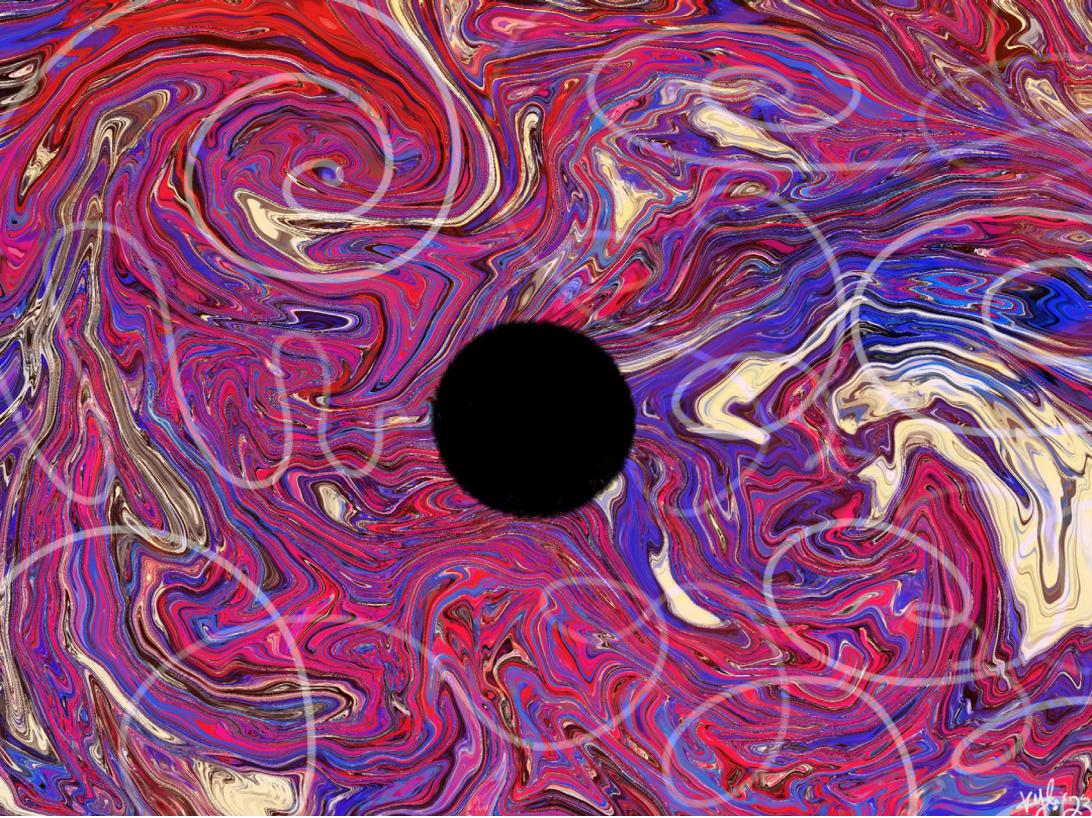
And now you're on your own
Reflecting the unknown
Translucent in your mind
Your fires hypnotize
In your mirror eyes

Cities schedule's set
The ones you haven't met
Fight the wind to stay upon your feet

Thoughts meander 'round
The ridges of our town
I hope somebody grabs them 'fore they're gone

Now you're on your own
Reflecting the unknown
Translucent in your mind
Your fires hypnotize
In your mirror eyes
In your mirror eyes

And now you're on your own
Reflecting the unknown
Translucent in your mind
Your fires hypnotize
In your mirror eyes
In your mirror eyes
In your mirror eyes
In your mirror eyes



BLACK HOLE
KYLA KLEIN

SCAN TO HEAR
A RECORDING
OF MIRROR EYES



i used to

BY AVERY MORSE

used to

catch baby crabs with a broken fishing net

she's on the boat and i'm on the dock and the gap between the two is increasing. a sliver of water between them grows larger. murky green brackish that would taste like salt and pollution. crabs that would fit in the palm of my hand attach themselves to pilings. the boat is tied. we could just wait. but instead she reaches out but instead she takes my arm but instead she braces her feet. and i stand there and grab her arm back and hang onto a piling and with elementary school strength we pull the boat back. we're both on the dock. worn wood and rusted screws pressing into bare feet.





NEW GEOGRAPHY
"LOW" LUCAS O. WOELK

baby

BY ADIAH SILER



“Okay you try,” you say.

“I don’t want to,” I say, but I talk weird and it always comes out like “wannoo, I don’t *wannoo*.” But you’re smart enough to know that I do wanna, wannoo. Really, I do. You have a hand in my stringy wet hair and then you push my head under. I stay, stay down `til my chest burns so, so bad, and I think I’ll die and my lungs’ll pop and turn Nana’s pool bloody. But then you let me up and I’m drinking air, looking at you through watered eyes and you’re only a shape. It’s my favorite game and you know this, even when I don’t. But we never tell anybody when we play since Nana got real mad when I puked in the pool and all but I was only a baby when that happened and I only remember it through stories.

“You look ugly,” I tell you, and you stick your tongue out at me, but you do. You look skinny all the time but it’s even worse when you get wet and even worser in that stupid swim shirt. It shows your nipples, tiny and solid as buckshot. It makes me so mad when you wear it around Nana’s that sometimes I just hit you and don’t tell you why. Usually you know why but not always.

You say *tartar* (which we say like “tar. tar.”) because Nana can hear

us from where she’s lying, asleep, probably, but also probably listening. The sun reflects off those humongous glasses she wears, big black holes, and a fat fly buzzes around her head. *Tartar* is worse than *fuck you*, but I only know that. I and you. You braid the grass pinned flat under your bony brown ankle and I hit you in the thigh with my knuckle so it doesn’t make a slapping sound. You rip the braid from the ground, revealing a bald patch of dry yellowy dirt.

“Onion grass,” you say, sucking the white tip of the root, ignoring me hitting on you. I take one out of your mouth and put it in mine. It’s hot and I want to get back in the pool but we can’t when Nana’s sleeping and we can’t go inside either. She doesn’t like us touching her things, even though it was all junk anyway, all old bullshit. Ugly flags, rickety chairs. And that pool isn’t all that great either, just one of those blow-up ones. I swallow a mouthful of sticky sweet onion pulp, but it’s mostly just my own spit. We watch the sun blaze over the brown field.

On the ride home Dad lets you go first which pisses me off but only for a second because you let me have the front seat and I’m making myself not mind. You choose the



ILLUSTRATED BY
ZIVIA BROWN

window and crank the lever `til it creaks down, stick yourself out `til the glass cuts into your big belly. Dad speeds up, glances back at you, runs a big hand through his hair. He's all sweaty and it slicks back in a funny shape.

"FUCK!" You scream, drag it out until your voice cracks. We whiz past the farmland so fast that it's

said it has more weight when we use it, which doesn't make any sense because the heaviest words are probably the longest ones, in my opinion. But I didn't correct him because I like to see him laugh.

"Baby?" Dad says to me, and I grin. I reach over his lap and press the button. The sunroof, all splattered with bird poop in weird



**' FUCK YOU NANA! YOU OLD RAGGEDY
CRACKER BITCH! '**

all just green and brown and blurry, whipping quick. Slow, stupid cows raise their big heads as we fly by. They'll never go this fast. Sometimes that makes me feel bad for them but sometimes it makes me feel jealous. I feel jealous a lot.

"FUCK YOU NANA! YOU OLD RAGGEDY CRACKER BITCH!" You scream. I have only ever heard you scream here, like this, in the car. It scares me sometimes, before I remember where I am. You collapse giggling into your seat, your hands over your mouth and your hair a frizzy mess. Dad reaches back to tickle your thighs. He taught us *cracker* (pronounced the same as the food) last summer and let us practice on him. It made him laugh and he told us we were lucky. He

shapes that almost look like things, states or faces, slides open.

I climb onto the center console and poke my head out, let the wind smack my face raw, blow my hair away from me. For a second I just breathe it, the heavy manure, the sweetgrass. I stand up all the way `til only my lower half is in the car driving home with you and Dad and the rest of me, my brain and my heart, are outside. Nothing you need is on the bottom half.

"FUCK YOU!" I confess to the sun and the naked, baked air. I yell it in a way that feels too loud, almost embarrassing, and then I scream it again. When I flop back down in my seat Dad ruffles my hair and his skull ring, the one that was real shiny when we were babies but is sorta

just gray now, gets stuck in my hair.

“My girls. You gonna do the same to me when I’m old?” he asks like every time. “Gonna tell your kids to say fuck you, Dad, you old creepy bastard!” And that makes both of us laugh, you and me, even though I like to tell people that we have different senses of humor.

When Dad falls asleep on the couch we wriggle out from under his big hairy arms and tiptoe to the bathroom together. We have to be quiet because the trailer is just one big room, but I guess any house is just a big room, really. Plus he sleeps like the dead. We take turns making each other finish off swallows of his warm Bud Light from earlier. You hate the taste of beer and I hate the taste of his mouth all leftover and meaty metallic on the rim. When I drink it tastes bloody. But I’m not a wuss and I wouldn’t ever tell you this, even though you’d probably understand. I finish off the last of it which is warmer than the rest for some reason. My mouth goes fuzzy like I got hit except there’s no pain. I touch my lips. You throw the can out the open window and it lands soft in the grass, probably, but it doesn’t make a sound.

You put a knee onto the bathroom counter and pull yourself up onto it,

your hands on either side of the mirror. You put your feet in the sink. I follow you. I like to check sometimes that we’re still identical. I flick my bangs, damp and curling in the heat.

“We need to get it relaxed again,” I whisper, even though he can’t hear us. “I don’t,” you say. Your hair isn’t even close to being as napped and curly as mine now, months from our last appointment. You still wear the bonnet at night. I lost mine. “Yeah you do. We look the same,” I say. You look in the mirror, furrow your eyebrows and tilt your head, squint at us.

The corn is higher than our heads. That’s my favorite way for it to be. I imagine a lot that you and I get lost out here and we have to live off the land and eat only corn and wait for it to rain. I hit each stalk with the flat of my fingers as I pass them. You’re somewhere ahead. “Wanna play killers?” I call to you. I can only hear my own voice.

“*Do you wannoo play killers?!?*” I yell.

“I said no!” I hear you. I can’t see you. I roll my eyes. I wanna ask you if you want to play boyfriend with me but I know you’ll say no and I hate when you make that ugly, serious face you make. It makes me feel tight, puckered like lemons. You always make that hard frown and

your eyebrows go up like someone died or something. The only person you've ever known who died was Mom and we were pretty much babies. Barely counts. Sometimes you're really fun and I love you a lot but sometimes you're a jerk.

Something moves next to me, shakes the stalks. I freeze. I think maybe it'll be something real cool, something new no one's ever seen, and you and I can name it together and get rich off it. But it's only babies, little black cat babies with no mom or dad, still wet from being born. They've got goop in their eyes and they're crying. Patches of gunk are drying to their fur like snot in the sun. I say your name once, twice, and then you're there.

"Oh man," you say. "Oh man." And you kneel in the dirt and scoop up three in one arm and four in the other.

"What're you doing?" I ask and you stare at me.

"They'll die," you say, and I don't say anything back because I can't think of anything to say.

You're on your bare knees at the muddy edge of the creek. You held most of them in your white spaghetti strap, used it as a hammock and exposed your brown belly to the sun as you walked. You gave me two and

I held one in each of my hands, felt them breathe in tiny gasps against my palms. Their ribs and paws and hearts were so impossibly small, like toys. I ran my thumbs over their spines and they squirmed.

You lay them out in a line in the grass by the water and they kick blindly, shuffle a few inches before they collapse. One by one you take them softly, dip them under the cool running water for just a second before bringing them back up. You wipe the gunk from their eyes with your shirt which is almost as brown as your hands now. You whisper to them before you place them, clean now, wet, back into the line.

"Shh, shh, I got you. You're safe now," you say, and kiss their snotty black faces.

When we get back Dad is gone. You rush to put them down, dig in the closet through a small avalanche of junk. They look like a big black alien stain on the couch cushion if you cross your eyes, like they're breathing as one big thing.

You push a shoebox at me and gather them up in your hands. At the bottom of the box is a baby blanket. I can't remember which one of ours it is, which Dad kept. You lay them out one by one in the box but there's too many and you have to start stacking

them on top of each other. They paw at their brothers and sisters, cry in a way that makes them sound more baby than cat. You rush away.

“Do you think it’ll get them sick if the milk is a few days past due?” you ask. One of them tries to open its eyes, I think, but it can’t. You return without waiting for my response, shaking a pink baby bottle full of milk.

You play Mom until it gets annoying and then you keep going. The kittens you aren’t cradling in your arms, bottle feeding, shushing, rocking, kissing, you give to me. I rub the pads of my fingers over their little throats, feel the ridges there. I see how long they’ll let me pry open their watery eyelids or their pink mouths till they cry out, gummy and sad.

When Dad’s headlights turn us stripey yellow through the blinds you rush to put them back into their box. You stuff them underneath our bed just in time. Key in lock. The smell of him, like bricks and grease and a new baggie of bread.

Dad kicks off his heavy boots, the ones with metal in the toes. He’s growing a beard. I don’t mind much when it’s full because it goes soft if it gets long enough. When I was a baby I liked the feel of it against my

face, but I hate the in between. The stubble tears me up raw, turns me red through the brown.

“Sorry girls, didn’t know I’d have to step out.” He runs a hand through his hair. He’s so tall that sometimes I can’t see his eyes. People say we look like him but I think they’re just trying to be nice. We stare up at him. I can feel you next to me, buzzing with the secret, one thing he doesn’t know. I reach for your hand and it’s cold even though it’s hot here, even at night.

I match it up so that we breathe opposite, your air in my mouth when you exhale, vice-a vers-a. You’re not really sleeping. Your eyebrows keep jumping and you keep gripping the blanket. It’s like it always is, but tonight we’re sleeping on a secret. I pull a lock of your hair away from your forehead, play with it.

“They’re good,” you whisper. Your eyes are still closed, your lips parted. “They’re gonna keep us safe. We did the right thing.”

I feel the heat of them under us, though I might be imagining it. If I listen hard I can hear them mewling, chirping at each other, tiny noise. It’s almost nice. When I’m just breaths from falling asleep it sounds for a second like I’m somewhere else. I’m not sure where.

black

BY DESTINY HALL-HARPER

black

boy, phone home (after jasmine mans)

I've noticed your smile these days.

Your tendencies with touch and how good it feels to hold something that won't slip away.

Black boy, call to the heavens.

Let them hear a roar so loud that you finally let the tears drop.

Black boy, you got skin that feels like survival.

Hands that feel soft despite your roughness.

And Black boy, do your eyes always twinkle when you talk about your joys?

Do your eyes always scrunch like that when you laugh?

Black boy, if I told you that within a conversation

I could show you a whole new world, would you listen?

Black boy, would you open a galaxy?

Unlock a treasure trove of the memories you hide deep inside your box,
under your bed and away from all the monsters?

Black boy, call home.

If your past answers, would you hang up?

Black boy, call home.

If the circumstances arose would you have shown me your galaxy?

Black boy, I called you one day.

Called so many times when I knew your phone was off.

I recited the stories you told me on your voicemail.

I left my laughter in your voice memos.

Black boy, tell me this: if I was here, and you were there, would you have hit my line?

Would you have dropped pieces of yourself inside of letters and left a trail for me to follow?

Black boy, be careful in unlocking yourself.

Just because it looks like a light, it doesn't mean it is.

And Black man, you are raising a black light from the ground up with a smile so wide it can't help but show light through the teeth that are missing.

Black man, if we place both palms on opposite sides of the glass would you look at me?

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



was upon the face of the deep. And
d moved upon the face of the waters.
Let there be light; and there was
saw the light that it was good; and
e light from the darkness. And God

Just remember I care about you

am i even

It's not what you see, it's what you feel.
I'm not what you think, I'm what I am.
I'm not what you say, I'm what I do.

In the beginning w
with God, and the w
the beginning with
him; and when
was made. In Him w
of the And the lig
darkne comprehe

Now she's done and we're through
Next I'll be today
I've got it

TEXT: A SELF-PORTRAIT
DAVID IDOWU

Would we attempt to push with all our might until one side caves in?

Black man, phone home.

Call your mother so she knows you still have a heartbeat.

Black man, when you phone home, if you need to talk, know you can hit my line.

Know that I would listen to every word.

Black Boys, when you get the chance, you have a call waiting.

Answer it.

I'll be waiting to hear about your adventures on the other side.



but

BY DEL ZIEGMAN

then again, i do that all the time

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW TO BE A POET, is something you can say to someone that you love very much.

JUST LOOK AT YOU, mouth open so wide you're hoping the whole world will fall inside. I'VE SEEN YOU CRUMPLE PETALS AND PINE NEEDLES IN THOUGHTLESS PALMS. I've seen you want to want so bad that you went blue in the face.

YOU HUNGRY THING. but you are not a poet.

I'VE BEEN SWEATING YOU OUT FOR A YEAR.

you can love someone terribly, or miss someone terribly, but here we are speaking a language of broken qualifiers. i mean: that you are not terrible. i mean: that i write a terrible poem. i take a terrible picture. it is a picture of the memory and not the thing itself. it is like a handprint but it is not like a hand. it is a place that you can not return to. it makes me sad, terribly. i want you, terribly. i wander, terribly, to find you. THERE ARE DEAD THINGS IN THE UNDERBRUSH. we hang our heads like we're paid to do so.

I CONSIDER THE THRILLING INDIFFERENCE OF GOD.

but then again, i do that all the time.

How much can you say, really, as an animal with its eyes on the front of its face and not the side?

I wasn't born to see.

I was born to take.

I have to want what I will want, I think, at least I'm doomed to be that way forever. It can feel good, anyways, I guess. Driving headfirst into the sun. sorry- I guess that there was something that I wanted to say about releasing expectations, right- but i watch you press your back up against the wall of the world... still singing, though, with gravity.

LISTEN. You will not blow through this world, though you may be asked to scream.

keep screaming,

until no one hears you.

...THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS I DON'T REMEMBER HOW TO DO BUT

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



shot by @215_photos

ANGELIC COLLAGE
MESSIAH KING

it always makes you wonder if you ever knew how to do them in the first place.

NOT THAT IT'S AS IMPORTANT AS YOU WANT TO MAKE IT OUT TO BE but

ARE WE GETTING PREHISTORIC YET?!

i don't need anyone to tell me facts about livers or spit or breathing!!!!

I AM THE LUNGS. I AM BREATHING AND I AM BREATHED. I'M THE—
ok:

i have a hole somewhere,

i'll admit,

i can feel it all leaking out of me
BUT IT'S OKAY TO BE EMPTY.

SOMEONE SAID THAT TO ME ONCE ABOUT AIRING OUT AN

ATTIC. and that summer, i had sand on my feet all the time.

hungering

BY JAY CLARK

hungering

ground



The hunger makes it wake. It's a gnawing thing, scratching at the space where the bottom of its stomach should be. It hurts in the vacant way that ripping out a plug of dried blood and scar tissue from a newly-healed wound does, the air of the empty hole stinging more than the severed nerves.

Two days pass before it is ready to leave the marsh where it has been lying lazily, hibernating or maybe rotting. It has been asleep for a long time. In those days of lethargy, the hunger grows, digging deeper and deeper into every muscle until breathing comes in sharp pangs, wet and labored. The air around the marsh tastes of stale mildew, heavy and damp. Sick of it, the creature musters up the strength to pull its limbs together, knitting the inky blackness of its flesh into muscle and joint, an almost-shapeless thing. It sets off, a shambling form stumbling over tree roots and its misshapen legs in search of something to satiate itself.

Smelling prey hurts, that is how hungry it has become. It becomes a matter of following the pangs of pain, finding a hit of pheromones before doubling over into a convulsing mass until the hungry cramps subside and it is able to form itself into something more.

The forest has changed over its hibernation, though not by much. It has stayed dark and quiet, and for that, the creature is grateful. It hears an owl swoop by, dodging branches to give it a wide berth. Perhaps it smells the creature, rotted by its hibernation in the bog. It slept for a very long time, lying undisturbed just below the murky water. There is something acrid hanging in the air, so pungent it stings, masking the sweet scent of prey, sweaty and cloying.

The creature moves through the forest slowly. The pitch of the earth has shifted, and tree roots have stretched like tripwires and bear traps, snagging its many feet as it half-glides, half-trips over the ground, unsteady on new legs. Twigs crack under the weight of its body. Pine needles stick to it and slide over and into the tar that seeps from its flesh.

There is a town, now, where there was not before, with roads that smell sticky and sour, like carcasses caught in a forest fire, bodies left charred and smoking. The homes are tall, and the creature stretches as it creeps across bitter-tasting clean-cut lawns to peer into second-story windows, through yellowing curtains, and sees bedroom doors left ajar.



ILLUSTRATED BY
BRITTNEY MALLON

This is a town where the doors are left unlocked at night.

This is a town made for feeding.

There is a house, or what is left of it, sagging into the wetlands on the outskirts of town. The basement is half-filled with stagnant water, and the creature settles as it slips under the decaying front porch. It must feed, but it can take its time. The promise of nearby small prey is enough, for now. It allows its skin and flesh to sink off its bones and into the dying moss, skeleton stripped naked as it stares up at the stars through the crooked slats of the porch. There is not much to do, other than feed on the mice that continually attempt to call the hollowed-out house home. They are bland, quick heartbeats and short lifespans depriving them of the time needed to develop the rich flavor of life, the sticky fond that builds on the soles of the feet of larger prey.

It is safe, under the porch. No one approaches the house, and the creature is thankful. Time passes freely, as do countless raccoons and possums that venture inside, seeking shelter, only to have their bones licked clean. Nothing larger comes close to the house, and the creature smells sour, bitter fear whenever a person or dog or person-and-dog connected by a leather leash walks

by, though it does not know why. They may be afraid of the smell of it rotting, as it has been in the past. It may be the swaying and creaking of the house, load-bearing beams rotted through and groaning in the evening breeze.

The wind does not carry the sharp scent of fire, gunpowder, or blood.

The moon is nearly invisible when the creature decides to venture out from under the porch. The rats have learned to stay away, and toads carry a bitter taste as though they themselves are full of nothing but damp earth.

There is nothing easy left to eat.

It is time to hunt.

Near the edge of town, though, there is a light left on, shining orange over a small patio. The creature moves closer, emboldened by the promise of flesh. A woman sits under the light, staring up at the stars. A cigarette smolders between her fingertips, something acidic and cloying seeping through the fresh night air. The creature hovers in the shadows, shifting its bones about. The woman does not seem to notice, or, perhaps she simply does not care, blowing smoke out of her nostrils.

“You’re not going to hurt me,” she says to the air as though it is a mantra against fear, though she looks vacantly towards the hedge’s shad-

ow, where the creature has made itself small.

“You’re not going to scare me, either, if that’s what you’re trying to do.” Her voice does not waver, even

skin. “C’mere, if you wanna eat me so bad.” She smiles, and her teeth look sharp.

Slowly, the creature shifts forward. She keeps her eyes trained

‘ YOU ’ RE NOT GOING TO SCARE ME, EITHER, IF THAT ’ S WHAT YOU ’ RE TRYING TO DO. ’

”

as the creature begins to creep out of the shadow, into the soft fringes of the orange light.

I DO NOT THINK YOU HAVE A CHOICE

“Oh I know,” she says easily. Under her gaze, the creature feels itself solidifying, rot running backwards and sticking sinew back onto its bones. The hunger forms with its stomach and throat and teeth, gnawing at the scent of night sweat. “Get as big as you want, I don’t care,” she says. “You’re not making yourself any scarier.” The creature licks at its gums with a slimy tongue, tasting the air. Curiously, the acrid, putrid flavor of fear is absent.

I AM GOING TO EAT YOU AND YOU ARE NOT SCARED

“That’s very forward of you,” she says. Her eyes glint dark, even with the light radiating off of her face. Under the sickly scent of the cigarette, there is something tangy clinging to her, seeping out of her

on it as it moves, watching its joints grind against each other as it draws closer. As it nears, she closes her eyes, breathing deep. It is possible, the creature thinks, that she cannot smell it rotting, smoke sticking to the back of her throat.

There is a droplet of sweat running down her neck. It is going to bite there first, it decides.

I THINK YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO SCREAM

The woman turns her head, staring into the endless pits of the creature’s eyes. “If you want me to,” she says, low and secretive. Her knee bumps up against the creature as she lays back, lax and open. It comes away sticky and wet, the creature’s darkness oozing over her skin. The hunger grows, rumbling. “You’re looking at me like you want to eat me alive,” she murmurs.

I AM GOING TO SUCK THE MARROW FROM YOUR BONES

“I’ll hold you to that,” she says,

throat jumping as the creature draws close, sniffing at the sweat and dampness of the night air, the acrid smoke clinging to her skin. It

their insides are spread out to be picked through. Growing impatient, the creature begins to nose inside the hollowed-out cavity



I AM GOING TO SUCK THE MARROW FROM YOUR BONES

feels her sigh blow across its flesh, shivery and breathy.

Her heartbeat climbs, though her breathing stays even, even as the creature unhinges its jaw, sinks needle-sharp teeth deep into her esophagus and *rips*.

She is dead before her body can exhale.

Her flesh is sweet and soft, pleasant to taste after days of nothing but rats full of waste, thin wiry tendons holding their fragile bones together. The creature savors the taste of her, spreading the softness of her liver across its tongue, using its sharp claws to slice thin strips of muscle, delicately swallowing. It is unsure why it does this, moving so leisurely. It has never tasted a body like this before, one that does not taste of terror. Eating no longer feels like a chore.

Its stomach feels bottomless, and so it takes its time.

Her body stays warm, unlike the raccoons that cool in minutes as

of her torso, ripping at chunks of muscle and fat before letting them melt in its mouth. Her viscera smears around the edges of its mouth, filling the air with her heady scent.

It makes good on its promise, too, to consume her down to her marrow. Slowly, it exposes her bones, stripping back the connective tissue and cutting tendons and cartilage until it can pry the delicate curves of her ribs open. It bites until they snap and split, then gently scoops out the marrow with a sharp claw to suck on and savor.

Blood pools as it eats, splattering across the patio, the dewy grass, the buzzing orange porch light. The night darkens as it dries.

It leaves behind nothing but teeth, too hard to grind into a paste in its mouth. When the sun rises, it is gone, returned to the bowels of the abandoned house's porch, sleepy and full. The taste of her brain lingers, light and sweet.

Days later, it decides to feed on a person. It does not need to, but the idea of smaller prey is unappealing. It yearns for something larger, more substantial. It explores the trails that run through the forest, mapping them by the scents that cling to the trees.

When it finds the man, he is running. It can hear the rhythmic thump of his sneakers against the blanket of pine needles, the quiet puffs of breath. He smells like sweat and calm, and the creature follows him, slipping into the shadows of the trees. It drools, leaving a trail of sticky clear strings in its path as it watches the man move, a well-oiled machine of lean muscle. It can almost taste the sweat on his skin already.

He pauses in a clearing, walking in circles with his hands above his head. Sweat drips down the sides of his face, falls to his shoulders, runs down his torso. Every few breaths, he gasps, like his lungs aren't big enough for the air he needs. He leans back against a tree, tipping his head against the rough bark, and the creature moves, quickly. With purpose.

It comes up behind him, pinning his hands above his head, sticking them to the tree trunk. The smell of musk and sweat is overwhelming. It feels liquid, today, slipping

slowly across the ground to sniff at the man. He smells similar to the woman it ate, salty with something lower, acrid in the way that the creature wants to sink its nose deep into it.

The man's wrists twitch, blood pumping through his veins. The creature falters, listening to the steady beats of his heart. It was skeptical that humans did not have jackrabbit pulses, until now.

The man wriggles a hand free.

He runs a hand up one of its limbs, probing. His fingers press in and in and in, past the oil slick that coats the creature's sinewy muscles, passing through those, too, until he finds bone, soft and alive. The creature twitches, feeling the gentle touches along its insides, probing. The man smiles. His teeth are blunt.

YOU ARE NOT AFRAID

"Why?" the man asks, baring his throat. "Should I be?" He sinks against the tree, letting the creature hold more of his weight, sighing, like this is natural, the way things go. "Is it like, part of the *thing* for you?"

The creature pauses, confused.

OTHERS HAVE BEEN SCARED

"I find that hard to believe."

WHY

"I mean, look at you," he says, pulling his hand away from its bones. It drips, black and sticky, onto the



ground between them. He spreads his fingers, and strings of ooze connect them. His tongue flicks out and wets his lips, as though he wants to taste it. The creature cannot discern if it wants him to. "I don't think anyone's objecting."

WHAT DO YOU MEAN

"Don't be dense," the man purrs, pulling the creature in close, until the solid line of his body meets the shifting, shivering flesh of the creature. The tar that oozes from its pores sticks the two of them together, tip to tail. The man is warm. Solid. "Isn't this how it's supposed to go?"

I WANT TO EAT YOU

"The feeling is mutual," he hums. "You wanna get on with it?" Gently, he pushes at the creature's skull until it sinks down onto the forest floor, staring up at him. He smiles. "Go on," he says, canting his hips forward, just slightly. The forest is quiet around them.

This time, the creature sinks its teeth into the thigh in front of its mouth slowly, searching for the femoral artery. Above him, the man sighs, eyes closed, as though this is a sort of bliss.

When it strikes it, oxygen-rich blood flooding its tongue, it begins to suck, pinning the man's hips to the tree, licking and sucking down the blood until he folds at the waist,

flopping over, dead. His flesh tastes rich and salty, and the creature takes its time, pulling apart each bit of him, trying to discern the different flavors in its mouth.

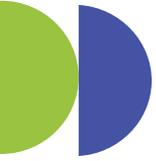
Eating feels hot, dirty in a way it has not before. The creature goes cautiously, glancing around as though something will pop out of the woods and catch it, blood and viscera smeared around its mouth. Each bite makes its body pulse with a foreign feeling, as though the syrupy feeling is coming from inside of it. It is hungry, that's all.

This time, it retches when it reaches the brain. It is typically the creature's favorite part, soft and spongy, melting against its tongue. This time, it can barely finish it, the flesh sweet and overripe, undertones of bitter fear nowhere to be found.

It leaves behind the bones, full before it can even get a taste of the marrow. The sickly taste of the brain sticks in its mouth and throat, making it heave and gag as it wanders away from the blood-covered clearing, into the forest that brightens under the rising sun.

No matter what it eats in the coming days, it cannot flush the taste of brain out of its mouth. It is not hungry, so full that it feels sick.

It wants to eat again, regardless, gluttonous and greedy. It misses



the gnawing feeling in the pit of its stomach.

There is nothing to justify feeding so soon, but the creature finds it does not care. It simply craves. It spends a sunny day lurking under the canopy of an old pine tree, scratching lines in the trunk and watching clearish-yellow sap bubble up like blood from a scratch and drip down the cracked bark. While the sun is still up, it plans its route for the night. It will leave the veil of safety that the tree creates, slip around the muggy stillness of the pond and climb the hill until it reaches a trail. From there, it will return to the town, and find a door that has been left unlocked.

It will go inside. It is feeling brave. It does not know how to feel.

Its stomach turns, thinking about its plan. It tries to sleep, to bring nighttime closer, but the meticulous way it has planned out its path, the promise of more sweet flesh and want and blood, makes it shiver.

Once the night has fallen, cool and low, and the last shreds of light have slipped from the sky, the creature emerges. It's shaking, surely smelling of rot and earth and excitement and hunger that refuses to stay in its stomach, spreading through its every limb, thrumming.

The path is lit by the moonlight,

and returning to the town feels like dreaming.

The doors to the homes at the edges of town are still unlocked. Emboldened, the creature ventures further into the town, where the dirt roads become more defined, worn in by daily travel. The doors are unlocked, here, too, and the creature picks a house on a road lined with yellow streetlights when it smells something soft and clean drifting out of the windows.

It pushes the door open and steps inside, dripping darkness on the welcome mat.

The scent is coming from upstairs, a door ajar, leading into a bedroom. There is someone in the bed, blinking blearily at it. The long lines of their body are obscured by the fluffy blankets. The curtains billow, beckoning it inside. In the dimness, the person smiles, sleepy, and lifts the covers, a silent invitation.

The creature moves slowly, clumsily. It has been a long time since it has been in a home.

The comforter sticks to it as it lays down, facing the person. Their eyes glimmer in the moonlight, content to share their bed with another, whatever that may bring. The hunger is still there, though not urgent. Curious, the creature shimmies closer. The person grins. Their

fingers tap against the mattress, a quiet *thump thump thump*, drawing closer to the creature's body, pulsing hot and wet under the blanket.

discriminately, groaning as it stuffs flesh into its maw. Gore smears around its mouth, dripping down its claws. It opens the skull up with



**STILL, IT FEELS HUNGRY, EVEN THOUGH
IT'S FAR PAST FULL. IN THE MESS
OF ITS BODY, PULSING HOT, IT CAN'T
FIND ITS STOMACH.**

They lie there, together, staring at each other, saying nothing. The creature feels small, tucked among the pillows and blankets, hearing muffled by the fluff surrounding its head. The person blinks, smiling like they are sharing a secret. They lift a hand. Their fingers slot against the divots of the creature's ribs. Their skin is soft as they stroke up and down, making the creature shiver.

The creature tastes blood. It can feel their steady pulse knocking against its skin.

It leans closer. The person closes their eyes. The hunger grows.

The kill is clean, a claw through the temple as their lips touch the creature's skin.

In bed, it feasts.

Throwing the covers back, it pries open their ribcage and eats organs in messy fistfuls. Heart, lungs, spleen, liver, it rips and chews in-

a sharp crack and scoops out bits of brain, smearing it on muscle just to mingle the flavors, lapping up blood as a palate cleanser, overcome with bone-deep satisfaction. The hunger simmers, sated, as though this is a promise for more, soon.

It leaves half the body. It didn't want to eat as much as it thought. Still, it feels hungry, even though it's far past full. In the mess of its body, pulsing hot, it can't find its stomach.

The bones under the porch of the abandoned house have dried by the time the creature returns. They crack as it slips under the uneven slats and lays back, staring up at the sky. The world feels as though it is thrumming, a tendon taut as a bowstring plucked and vibrating.

During the day, the hunger wanes. The creature rests under the porch,

lying naked and lazy and content, feeling its body break down bites of flesh into nothingness. It contemplates feeding again, finding another stranger's bed, touching and being touched before devouring with animalistic ferocity that leaves splatters of blood on the ceiling.

The sun sets.

A different desire grows, settling somewhere lower than its stomach. The creature does not need to get up to satiate it. Slowly, gently, it runs the back of a claw over its body, exploring, feeling its muscles twitch and jump from its own touch. Black ooze drips from its arm, and it catches some on its tongue, heady and rich with salt.

Slowly, it brings an arm to its face, running its tongue across the cool flesh. It opens its mouth.

It seals its mouth around the limb, licking and sucking until it nicks skin and sweetness gives.

exit

BY HERMAN EPPERSON



interview

This is to certify that the Secretary of The Army has awarded The Army Achievement Medal to Staff Sergeant Herman Epperson for meritorious service while serving as Squad Leader for A/337th Brigade Engineer Battalion.

You're leaving us?



BAKAYO ONIJOGBON
BY DAVID IDOWU

Staff Sergeant Epperson's unrelenting motivation and determination for excellence were instrumental to the success of his platoon.

What about the future of the unit?

Staff Sergeant Epperson crossed trained 40 soldiers in marksmanship and engineer qualification skills and operated above his pay grade in absence of his Platoon Sergeant.

You're gonna let all of these guys down!

His tactical and technical knowledge contributed significantly to the overall success of this command.

They look up to you.

So what if they call you a faggot behind your back? It doesn't mean anything.

His actions are in keeping with the finest traditions of professional military service.

Oh, you think you're too good for us?

And reflect great credit upon him,

White people are gonna think you look like a terrorist if you get out. Just stay in, bro.

the 337th Brigade Engineer Battalion,

Trump is gonna deport you back to Juarez when your ID expires.

Stop being a fucking pussy, be a man and re-up.

the 28th Infantry Division,

You ain't gonna do shit with your life. Just work and jerk off.

You'll be back, you slut. You know you love it here.

And the United States Army.

Fuck you, then. Leave. You ain't do shit but complain anyway.

We thank you for your service.

Fucking faggot.

my
my

BY CIARA "NORTH" DUGGAN

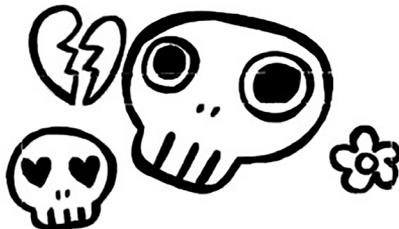
emotions are so powerful

I go on
three-mile walks O

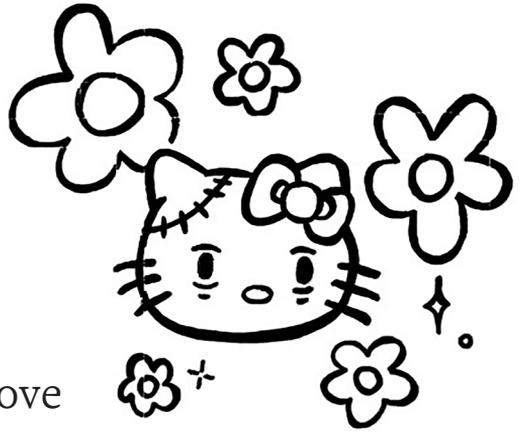
I glare down men with shifty
intentions at bars O

My manic episodes
make my room a shiny
Chrysler Building O

I am the hero
and the villain O



bo



r

Hardly move
from my bed

r

Timidly veer from potential
friendships

r

I'm as much of a slob
as a pig after
a hot day in the mud

f

my own stories
I still mourn for them

th

ismius

BY JAY CLARK

ismius

i say middleground and your nose
spasms with the sting of isopropyl alcohol
antiseptic spray on lab-grade surfaces i ask

what are you,
really?

you put feeling to the phantom
limb that you never got to have
and in my expert opinion you are a

truly unc-
anny

specimen of a thing.

let me touch and feel
lay back in all of your
gory girlboy glory

you want to be good,
don't you?

tell me when
it starts to hurt though
you will have to get used
to the way the stretch "sort of" stings

why are you crying
stop crying

you're smaller than average,
did you know that?



CIRCLE MOM, SQUARE BABY
ANH LY



ILLUSTRATED BY
LIANA DEMARCO



body

BY ISA PAYNE



She enters, heavy with decay.

She appears clean as

she passes through security. An employee greets her. When thinking back to this moment,

she won't remember the employee at all. Most of her life exists in this state—accompanied in actuality, independent in memory. The employee knows exactly who

she is without words being exchanged.

She's led to the first room in a silent walk and the directional wave of a hand. An antiseptic and uninteresting place. Light exists but from no hot origin.

She undresses. Deep pockets line the inside of her second skin athleisure: taut to the touch, begging to be emptied on access and excess. Metal to skin,

she remembers this will be the last time with this collection of DNA. With an intentional and firm touch,

she caresses each goose bump—wondering if the new body will

react to the cold. The warm. The soft. The newness enticed her and continues to. A deep, energizing excitement for specificity and choice outweighs risk and cost. The expert arrives with an explanation of sorts.

She understands at minimum, wants at maximum. The procedure is complicated. Full of systems. Machinery and biology. Her participation is simple and half complete—pay to bathe. Boil in rebirth. Experience thought, unclouded by physicality for several hours. Emerge unimaginably clean.

She is washed in a mixture of preparatory substances with long names and meanings

she won't ever research. The expert despises this, despite knowing the magnitude of status, and wealth of the procedure's market clientele. They hire others to regurgitate the bullet points. Understanding the intricacies of fetal pig stem cells fermenting into lab-grown human organs isn't needed to design a luxury expression of one's outer self.

She chooses.

She becomes.

She relaxes under the clinician's choice white rays. The expert checks the time. The woman's body will be approaching an appropriate level of malleability soon. Limp on the metal table,

she is wheeled from the first room to the procedure room.

She isn't fully aware of this movement. Her mind has begun retracting to something other. Something inexperienced. The procedure room chills the inside of her open pores.

She doesn't feel this. Her body loosens—a drifting ownership. The metal table is positioned at the peak of an oval basin filled with a thick, cellular fluid. With careful hands, the expert adjusts her extremities to a textbook precision.

His textbook precision.

She is ready. The expert lets the others take over. They are angular and wiry. They only know what they know. With purposeful intention sans comfort, the others work together to release her into the

basin—her body floats at the gut of it. Beautiful,

she is disassembled. Muscle and tendon slip off bone, skin separates into thin organic sheets, hair swims away from follicles gently, blood settles at the bottom under the fluid.

She is reduced to ribbons: the simplest form of herself. Brain and nerves. Wiggly and unstructured, this is her. Truly, her.

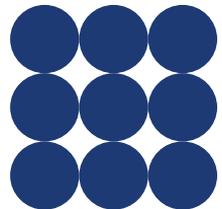
She thinks of paper cuts. Of cotton candy melting on her tongue. The way her fingers used to perfectly fit through the mail slot of her parents' front door when she was young. She thinks of laundry. Her first phone and her sister. The old neighbor at the seventh place she called home and someone's car alarm down the road the night before last. She thinks of the first time she had sex and the last. She thinks of the horrors of the world with a twinge of contribution and the joy of ease. Finding her go-to face wash and wearing clean socks at night. She thinks of the sourness of throwing up and feeling close and loved when trying on a friend's clothes. Spilling wine on a white

tablecloth, not thinking about setting down a credit card, knowing her mother won't live forever, getting lice when she was twelve, the chipped key on her grandmother's Steinway, eating spicy food—it's hot, it's hot, it's hot, it's hot.

She is ready. The others plunge long instruments into the basin; one plucks out the bits of her that are no longer needed, another organizes her nerves into the correct position. The final other enters the room with a second metal table similar to the first—the woman's investment lying exposed and undisturbed on the flat, reflective surface.

She is alone in the fluid when the new body is placed at the peak of the basin. The others release the new into the basin. The ribbons react immediately, seeking home in flesh and purpose. The others assist in reconstructing bonds and associations. Clean, clinically fermented organs fill out under her ribs, slick with possibility. Skin wraps, creating crevice and surface. In the fluid of genetic opulence,

she becomes herself once more.



grace

BY RONAN BRINKLEY

grace

Thank you to the way She smiles
Crooked
and joyful
and effortless

Thank you to my friends' laughter
Across a too-small table
Our own small universe
I feel safe taking up space,
Here

Thank you to the way the
Barista says my name

Thank you to the Sharpie
That did its best
Curling around my vowels
Until there was no ink left

Thank you to the rain
Inspiring pure joy
And inside jokes
I won't soon forget

And
Thank you to my skin
Making room for me
Where there wasn't any



UNTITLED
ANH LY



boots

BY ADRIAN LEVA-GARNES

1. Boots. Entryway [[unlock]]
2. Hear it from the room adjacent [[another->another_song]]
3. MCR, because of course. Stand and listen in [[listen->silence]]
4. For a little while,
5. silence.
6. [[Start->sound]]
7. You're...
8. [[-]]
9. [[-]]
10. [[x]]
11. Double-click this passage. Neither.
12. Room Service, thank you very much.
13. Guests are [[entitled->to_complaints_about_ice_tongs]]
14. Double-click, thank you very much.
15. Indistinct as [[the_couch->sit1]] and [[coffee_table->coffee_table1]],
16. music.
17. Click this ass page
18. Shame
19. Shame.
20. [[dwell->d1]]
21. [[dwelt->d2]]
22. Voice flat, "INSERT IMAGE HERE"
23. ERROR: undefined.
24. OFFENDING COMMAND:
25. Click you very much.
- 26.
- 27.

contributor

UNDERGROUND POOL 2024

bios

RONAN BRINKLEY (Creative Writing '27) is a poet, fiction writer, and film nerd. He enjoys obsessing over queer coded horror, sleeping, reading, and sprounging.

ZIVIA BROWN (Illustration '25) is a visual storyteller with a love of cats, goats, and board games. She has an arsenal of D&D characters and four cats by her side. She enjoys designing characters and writing stories. Find her on Instagram @ziviabea

ELLA CARTER (Illustration '25) is a Philadelphia-based illustrator and game artist with a passion for character design and visual storytelling. In her free time, she enjoys playing pretend with her friends and dressing the way Fleetwood Mac sounds. Follow her antics @ellac.artart

ISABEL ROSE CATALAN (Editor, Creative Writing '25) is a rabbit-and dragon-loving writer from Philadelphia who strives to highlight the magic in the mundane. She adores the color teal, the smell of lavender, listening to Studio Ghibli soundtracks, and making sure she is stocked up on beautiful notebooks.

LILLIE CIRINO (Creative Writing '26) is a writer and a storyteller. The two are very different, like apples to bananas. They love carbonated drinks and city lights. They crave new experiences and achieve them through their writing.

JAY CLARK (Creative Writing '26) is a sometimes-writer, sometimes-jeweler, and an always-fan of just how human various creatures can be. When he's not writing something strange, he's probably doing other weird things, like making odd earrings or learning to pick locks.

LIANA DEMARCO (Illustration '25) is an illustrator from New Jersey with a passion for painting, game art, and graphic design. She loves vintage shopping, pasta, and bunnies. IG: @lianaxart

JASMINE DOMINGO (Illustration '26), also known online as Tarotmisu, aspires to be a character concept artist. She enjoys her favorite manga, *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* by Hirohiko Araki, more than the average person should. Her favorite character is Noriaki Kakyoin.

CIARA DUGGAN (Creative Writing '24) also goes by North. She doesn't mind being called by either or. They have lots of passions and loves which would make this short bio no longer short. Other than that, she has no idea how to write about herself. Ironic.

MYA EISNOR (Graphic Design '27) is an artist who likes cats, cozy sweaters, and fall decorations.

HERMAN EPPERSON (Acting/Creative Writing '26) (he/they) is a Philly native and former US Army minesweeper, who after 11 years of service, decided it wasn't a vibe. They love 80's goth/post-punk music, plants, and painting miniatures.

CHRIS GIMMILLARO (Photography '24) has a passion for aviation, nature, and documentary photography. Chris loves to travel the world for the perfect shot and great adventure.

JOEL GREBLER (Creative Writing '24) seconds all that stuff that Matt says.

DESTINY HALL-HARPER (Illustration '24) is an illustrator and poet (among other things). She loves the color blue, mac and cheese, and iced oatmeal cookies (in that order). She's probably in the process of listening to the same six songs over and over.

LIZ HASSELL (Interdisciplinary Art '26) is a multimedia artist working primarily in 2D media, supplemented with writing. Their body of work is currently exploring ways to expose truths of systems of power. Fuck capitalism.

contributor

UNDERGROUND POOL 2024

bios

MATT HILTON (Creative Writing '24) is a singer-songwriter and producer who enjoys writing poetry, short stories, rock and roll, and most of all being in Discordant Generation with Joel Grebler. Discordant Generation has opened for the Misfits, the Vibrators, and Black Flag.

DAVID IDOWU (Fine Arts '24) is a student painter who lives and works in the Philadelphia area. He is as much an artist as he is a music enthusiast.

MESSIAH KING (Graphic Design '26) is a designer with an interest in collage work. They enjoy sewing pleated skirts and experimenting with design in any medium.

KYLA KLEIN (Animation '25) is an author, animator, and filmmaker. Originally from Baltimore, she enjoys 2-D animation, making zines about her time in the ever-expansive time void, and *Welcome to Night Vale*.

ADRIAN LEVA-CARNES (Illustration '24) is an illustrator and poet. He likes the rain, cats and dogs, and overly complicated puns.

ANDREW LIM (Editor, Creative Writing '25) is a person that thinks more than they write but we can assure you that they are thinking about writing. Whether it be from video games, anime, movies, or other writing, stories pilot their thinking most of the day. If you happen to catch them writing you may see they are either pacing and talking to themselves or closing their eyes and typing away.

ANH LY (Interdisciplinary Art '27) is a Vietnamese concept-driven interdisciplinary artist and a mom. Nature, cultural traditions, Vietnamese heritage, motherhood and social justice matters inspire her arts. Apart from school, Anh works with Mural Arts as well as in the tech industry on online children safety issues.

BRITNEY MALLON (Illustration '25) is an illustrator and screen printer who works primarily in watercolors and shows their love of marine environments and nature through their work.

AVERY MORSE (Creative Writing '26) is a writer because otherwise their brain would overload and explode. They want to make sure everyone knows that cows have best friends.

Z MURPHY (Editor, Creative Writing '24) the Jersey-born queer Black, Japanese, and Jewish multimedia artist of Philadelphia, is a published writer, spoken word artist, and award-winning drag performer. Experiencing a 25-year-long identity crisis, Z is happy to co-produce a magazine focused on the in-betweens of existence. Thanks for the four years and to the editors from here and beyond!

CYRUS NASIB (Directing, Playwriting & Production '27) is a director and stage manager who dabbles in visual art and poetry. He loves horror films, weird transgender fiction, awful Midwest emo, and spronging.

LILA NATHANSON (Designer, Graphic Design '24) is a graphic designer, multimedia illustrator, and amateur poet—enjoyer of true crime podcasts, yoga, cooking, and finding joy in the ordinary.

ISA PAYNE (Film Design '24) is a Texas-born, Philly-based art director, writer, and producer. She is passionate about honoring and centering stories that prioritize fantastical representations of real life issues, often focusing on religious imagery, femme empowerment, and childhood joy. Isa's work is always an expression of the kind of fantasy that the viewer can reach out and grab, attempting to bring greater truth, sweat, and flesh to the medium.

ALEX PIRANI (Designer, Graphic Design '24) is a former chef-turned-graphic designer. He enjoys printmaking and rifling through piles of old books.

NOAH DAVID ROBERTS (Editor, Creative Writing '25) is a non-binary poet based in Philadelphia. Roberts is the author of six collections, including *Mutable Forests* (Kith Books, 2023). Since the publication of their first book, Roberts has been published in *Bullshit Lit*, *Tribes Magazine*, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, and more. In 2022, Roberts won the Judith Stark poetry contest. They are a 2023 Pushcart nominee. They are the host of the monthly poetry reading Scribes on South.

contributor

UNDERGROUND POOL 2024

bios

ARIANA M. GONZÁLEZ RODRÍGUEZ (Dance '24) is a performing visual artist born and raised in Puerto Rico. She combines her own cultural flavor through movement and photography in her artistic journey.

FRANK SEITZ (Acting '27) is a guy who spends a lot of time in the closet... because that's where he does his homework! And he occasionally goes to class to learn how to pretend for a living.

ADIAH SILER (Creative Writing '24) is a writer, reader and sometimes drummer. You can find her in the library working on lengthening her attention span or journaling, probably. Depends on the day.

JAX SIMINERIO (Creative Writing '24) is a short story author and poet whose work meshes intimacy and body horror with a touch of dark humor. They are part songwriter, part videographer, and dabble in crochet, but most importantly, they worship all types of cheese.

ALEXA-SKYE SIMON (Illustration '25) is a student who loves to draw narrative pieces. Her goals are to draw book covers and be a concept artist! In her free time, you can find her drawing herself in 1810s royalty fashion.

BLAITHIN SIMPSON (Creative Writing '26) is a poet, fiction writer, self proclaimed "Miranda", and Catholic school survivor. She loves the Bravo channel, crispy chicken tenders, and hate-watching media.

OWEN SPALOSS (Editor, Creative Writing '24) is a fiction author who enjoys nothing more than working within and mashing together all kinds of genres. Whether it be video games, animation, or film, they attempt to find a way to translate art of all kinds of mediums onto the page within their work. When he isn't writing, Owen has most likely trapped himself for several hours in some virtual hell: he promises it's intentional, and he loves it more than anything else.

MICHAEL STANIZ (Illustration '24), unprofessionally known as sweathie, is currently procrastinating on his Illustration thesis work. If you're reading this before March 20, 2024, you should track him down and tell him to get back to work.

ALEX STEVENSON (Photography '25) is a book-loving gargoyle from Maryland who writes poetry, builds collages, and loves to photograph. They describe themselves not as a photographer but as an artist who uses a camera to share stories and build worlds.

TAMARA TARVIN (Interdisciplinary Art '26) is a multidisciplinary student who has dipped her hand in illustration, woodworking, sculpture, poetry, metalworking, and more. Her online person, Omnicorn, is a purple half-unicorn creature that loves color and positive vibes.

MADS TORRES (Illustration '24) is an illustrator and visual development artist who specializes in poster art, experimental comics, character art, and pre-production work for 2D animation. Their work is characterized by outlandish colors, rich textures, and wonky shapes.

“LOW” LUCAS O. WOELK (Fine Arts '25) is a mixed media sculptor and poet from Long Island, NY. His work explores meditative repetitive processes such as coiling, wrapping, and patchwork. He has received the UArts Presidential Award for Creativity and the Southampton Artists Association Award. Woelk has exhibited in galleries across Long Island and Philadelphia including the Parrish Art Museum.

LEE WRIGHT (Graphic Design '24) is a graphic designer, illustrator, singer, and lover of all things creative. She enjoys cooking, K-pop, pickles, and naps. In her freetime she enjoys hanging out with her pugs Queenie and Suki.

DEL ZIEGMAN (Film '24) is a Philly-based multidisciplinary artist and farmer who makes work in hope of a better world. Their work prioritizes queer futures, magic, and radical hope for working class liberation.

