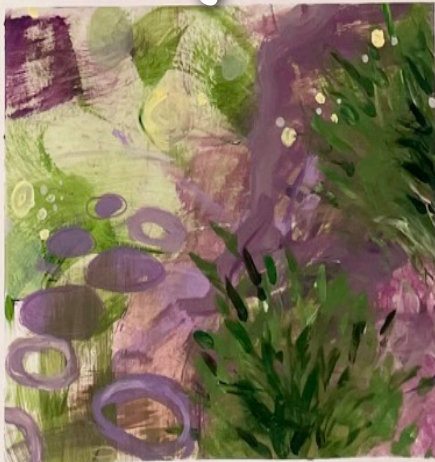
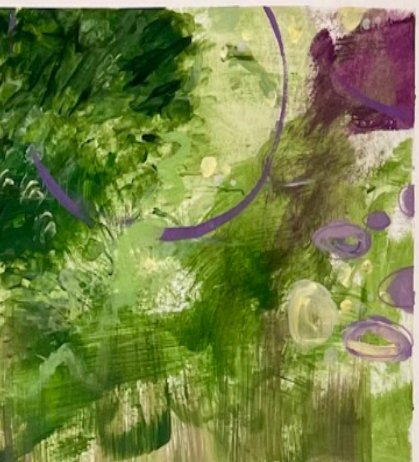


# The Lion's Eye



VOLUME 51 : FALL 2022



APPLES  
*olivia d'orio*

# The Lion's Eye

Fall 2022

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“THE WORST ENEMY TO CREATIVITY IS  
SELF-DOUBT.”

— SYLVIA PLATH

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ALEXANDRA  
*rachel shuster*

# THE FIRST LOOK

## A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

How do you, dear reader?

As of my time writing this I've been in a bit of a slump, which is both usual for this time of year and unusual in general for me. Hoping to be past that once this issue is out, but we'll see what happens.

Anyway, anyway. There's a neat historical figure I learned about in one of my classes, and I thought I'd pass along some fun new knowledge to you all. Diophanes was an ancient Greek philosopher whose tradition of thought has roots in Socrates' Theory of Forms. Where Socrates was interested in exploring the ideal, metaphysical forms of concepts such as "good" and "beauty," Diophanes had a dogged interest in discerning how to access the "ideal form" (think blueprint) of humans—the soul. Long story short, he came to the conclusion that to die is to unite one's imperfect "bodied" soul to the purity of its metaphysical form, and that death in itself is an ideal to strive towards. Modern scholars refer to him as the father of classical apocalypticism because of a small, extreme group of his followers that became involved in a series of seemingly random killings around Athens. Athenian authorities sentenced him to death for the fatal events that his teachings caused. At his execution he famously said...

I made it all up. "I" as in me, Filip. Yeah, sorry. The guy is literally named Die-off-oh-please: ba-dum-tiss, huge applause. Maybe for just a moment, though, some part of what I said became part of your total understanding of history. It's so, so weird how that just happens. What I'm getting at is language might be the most versatile, important tool in human experience. Without it there is no conversation, no fun, no intrigue, no art (so long as words cannot to some extent give it meaning or establish the conventions that give it meaning beyond words).

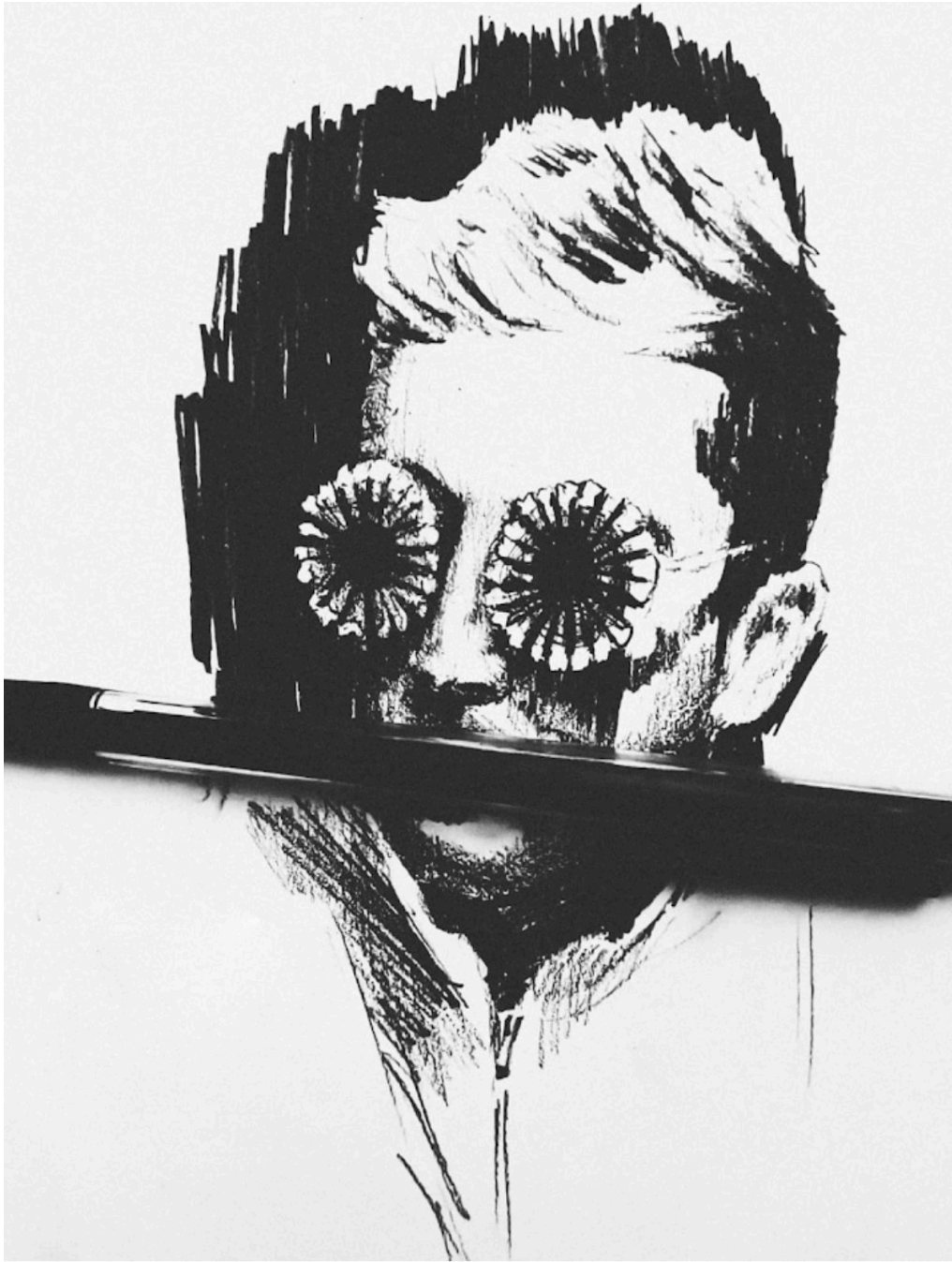
I'll leave off with this. Stories influence how we perceive the world, and how the human world perceives us in turn. Create new stories or recreate the stories you live through, be it for fun, for wisdom, for both, or for neither. The stories you choose to tell, retell, and invent show others who you are and what matters to you whether or not you mean for that to be the case. You wield (potentially) the most powerful tool in human experience. Anything you say may be a big deal.

So write your stories in the ways that are most meaningful and enjoyable to you. Give yourself time to rest and relax whenever and however your body demands of you. May your time be fruitful in every domain you value most. Stay safe and be well. Thank you for picking up this magazine, and a huge, huge thank you to everyone who helped make it happen. Without your stories we would not be here today.

*Filip Maziarz*

Filip Maziarz  
Executive Editor





ICY  
*chloe yadav*

## ONCE UPON A TIME(S)

sometimes my life feels like an everlasting list of beginnings with no endings,  
a bunch of one line hooks  
and gripping intros

that reel people in,  
tricking and tempting,

but ultimately leave them  
and myself  
disappointed.

and it goes both ways,  
sometimes i am the hook,  
other times i am the captured.

gleaming and hopeful i swim to the bait  
and am swindled every time,  
the beginning so beautiful, leads to no great end.

i can write a great intro but can't turn the page,  
the fear of what comes next,  
or what doesn't,  
makes me slam the book with a thump.

i can start but apparently never finish  
this race they call living—  
because one wrong ending is more terrifying  
than a thousand beginnings.

*emma wenger*

---

### HIRAETH

I keep looking  
for painted doors  
doors in places  
they should not be

to see if fate  
has chosen me  
to be part of the  
world unseen

to sail that  
sticky sweet sea  
and drown  
in its memory

---

---

## THE ART OF FEELING

Your eyes resemble  
brush strokes and the mixing of paint on a  
palate. Each hair on your head was delicately drawn  
by a fine tip pen. Your lips were carefully hand sculpted in  
clay. You were assembled cautiously with a vast attention to detail.  
Your face has been shaded to perfection. I once said that you remind  
me of *The Starry Night*, with details so perfect and colors so comforting.  
You then told me you were more like *The Scream*. I laughed and called you  
*Mona Lisa*, and went on about how I wish our life was just as picturesque as  
*A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. I would've just settled  
for being a new *American Gothic*. Most of all, I wished for us to recreate *The  
Kiss*. Instead, you called me *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* and I joked about  
how I never wear pearls. And now that entire conversation is left behind with  
*The Persistence of Memory*. But I still see your pictures and think about how  
you must have been created by Monet. How else would your image elicit such  
emotion from me? How else would you be forever engraved in my mind? I think  
that I think of you like a painting because that's how well I know you—from a 2D  
perspective. I know you on a very surface level, and I am sure that is all you know  
about me. We are like two portraits in a gallery, waiting to be seen, yet left apart in  
entirely different frames. I spend my time trying to remind myself that if you  
were made by Monet, then I must have been made by Vincent van Gogh.  
How else were we in the same showcase? How else would you have even  
noticed me? My feelings for you wash over me like *The Great Wave  
of Kanagawa*. Your feelings for me feel like *The Storm on the Sea  
of Galilee*, strong and short and over. Despite it all, I just can't  
help but see you as bright, abstract colors. Your words blend  
together in my head like oil pastels, all messy and everlasting.  
Our memories are stuck with me by Mod Podge and sewing  
needles. Even though our story looks more  
like a fingerpainting, I will always see  
the da Vinci and Picasso influences of it  
all. Because art is subjective, but so are  
feelings. And at the end of the day, both  
are impactful. And permanent. And beautiful.



PUMPKIN SEASON  
*jenna mulcahy*

*elizabeth klein*

---

## LEAVES

I feel like a shell of a person today. I look at the first few fallen leaves of October.

Smushed and stepped on. Torn apart. Dried up and drained of color. The sunshine tired me out today. It was warm and sweet and placed a blanket over me as I fell between the couch cushions. Then I woke up and just felt hollow. I look at these crumpled things that once belonged to trees. Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Now they're cracked and shredded and grinded down with every shoe of every passerby that either isn't looking, doesn't care, or likes the sounds of things breaking. I look at these leaves, and I see fading growth. I look at these leaves, and I see worn out wonders. I look at these leaves, and I see me.

These leaves remind me of time's ability to change what is beautiful and alive. I wish I could join these leaves on the concrete, add my misshapen form to the pile. I'd lay down and close my eyes and hear my bones crunch as I am stepped on. I'd smile in the security of nothing. I'd be shriveled and mangled, scattered across the concrete, until the wind took me as its own.

## WALTZ IN C MINOR, ILLUMINATED BY STARS

They are beautiful, dancing through the coarse sand, their feet sinking in and kicking up with each delicate step, quick movement, graceful leap, and glimmering twirl. Under the gleaming, blue light of a full moon, a spotlight appears, following around the mirthful dancer as they move like the waves that threaten the shore. Their body, illuminated by stars, twinkling up and down their legs, arms, and face, drips with outer space.

Truly, they are the most beautiful thing you have ever seen.

With a flourish and a deep bow, they turn towards you; suddenly, you are seen; their eyes are binary stars, and their freckles are constellations; your rotting corpse on display for the Universe to see – to love, to hate, to criticize, to praise, to *observe*. Their graceful dance slows to a halt, and it is just you and them and the infinite, unsteady sand – sand that gets in between the crevices of your fragile bones and smoldering flesh and dying organs.

To your horror, the Universe approaches you, and takes your boney hand.  
And the moon's spotlight falls upon you, in all your decrepit, decaying glory.

Falling into the Universe's waltz, matching them step for step, twirling and faltering and keeping your skeletal feet in all the proper positions, they lift your corroding corpse and twirl, and you see the black void of ocean stretching for millions of miles beyond; all light, all reflections, all of the glittering constellations in the violet night hue –

Swallowed by the oppressive ocean.

Your feet land softly in the sand and the Universe pulls your arm, and you are falling through infinite space and sea and sky, and you land in their arms – they are looking at you, into your sunken, eyeless skull, with two burning stars searing through the putrid skin on your face. The Universe leans back and twirls, with your frail body dragging behind them. Your skeletal feet strain as you are forced on your toes.

You finish your twirl.  
One of your boney toes falls off.  
Your rotting corpse moves as though it were still there.

First, second, fourth, fifth position, copying the maneuvers of the Universe's graceful and beautiful dance with your clumsy and unsteady movements – they use their hands, so smooth and frigid and shimmering, to guide you in the motions. A quiet breeze picks up as you rock back and forth with the Universe, the wind playing a tinny, lovely melody to accompany your slow dance. They press their face to your jagged chest, and suddenly the Universe is so *small* and *helpless* and *hopeless* in your arms, a child embracing a guardian, looking for protection and love and adoration. How beautiful, how wonderful, the way your bodies sway

back and forth, the way their hand yanks yours and – suddenly – spiraling, spiraling, spiraling, your arm detaches from your shoulder and lands in the sand, shattering into twenty-seven separate pieces.

But your body keeps moving.  
You keep dancing and dancing and dancing.

When you leap, your shin falls to the ground, and when you clumsily land, your foot stays planted on the ground as your body continues to move. With your arm around their shoulder, they throw you into a dip – and at the bottom of the dip, your head tilts backwards, too far backwards, and suddenly your head tumbles from your shoulders, falling into the sand with a soft *thump*.

Your brain rattles in your skull.  
The shores of the ocean tease your vertebrae.  
The water is cold.

Oh, but your body keeps moving in unison with the Universe; with every step, every twist, every turn, the Universe spots your eye sockets with that searing gaze – at the end of a twirl, when their head whips around and for that moment when you cannot see their eyes, around you the world darkens, and you're left on a beach of infinite void and sand and quiet little stars.

The ocean meets you again.  
High tide approaches.  
Then their eyes reach yours.  
The world brightens.

Your heart falls from your ribcage. Slabs of rotting flesh slip away from its bones, skin burns and peels off from the intense starlight of the Universe. Your withering body, on display. With each dance, every step and every bow, another part of your body lands in the sand; first your other arm, then both of your legs, then your pelvis – flung, discarded, into the sand – until the only thing the Universe dances with is a floating ribcage – *your* ribcage. Suddenly, the breezy, metallic melody comes to a dramatic, complicated end, lingering on an unfinished note – the Universe and your ribcage, frozen, as if waiting for an audience to applaud.

No one claps.  
There isn't anyone to clap.

The Universe bows, their arms spread, and their hands delicately hung. Your ribcage falls to the sand, right on top of your heart. Black seawater rushes once again, harsh and rough, and when it recedes, the Universe lifts their head up, and looks with those luminous, twinkling, horrifying eyes, those eyes that contain solar

systems and galaxies and millions of asteroids, those eyes that danced with your deteriorating and eroding body, those *eyes* that belong to the most beautiful and terrifying apparition you have ever seen. Their fine, white lips quirk up into a smile as uncaring and quiet waves surge and drag you under. When you resurface, the Universe has straightened their posture, and their distracted eyes stare at something in the distance, away from you, away from your bones.

The waters welcome you.

And yet you struggle.

And yet you resurface one last time.

The void of the ocean washes away your bones and flesh and organs and the last thing you witness before you're pulled under the black water forever – the Universe, a constellation of beauty and wonder and life, dancing.





EMERALD PARADISE  
*ayesha sultana*



BRIMSTONE  
*charles obi*

*filip maziarz*

---

END OF MIND; APOCALYPSE  
IS ANIMAL

We are starting to die in the most meaningless age.  
We and everything rest upon the shades of our priors—  
days, lives, forms within—  
themselves of no more substance than the ideas  
that tarnish them. Falsehoods.  
Damned things.  
To live is to dance under spinning nightlife lights  
if only to shred the shadow into nonexistence, and so die with it.  
So dance, party freak! Thou who wouldst forsake thy past!  
You like the light, don't you?—how it causes sweat to glow,  
how even in the killing of your mind it glints intelligently in your eyes.  
The flesh's memory fails to inform the earth's,  
and so why bother?  
“Live your truth,” recommit the atrocities of the past!  
Suffering builds character, and besides,  
it permits prosperity to happen somewhere else—  
like a lightless room,  
or a room that's nothing but light.  
Only in the in-between where they coexist  
can the past pretend at meaning.  
Suffocate it: rend to bits and sear the ends, scatter ashes to the wind.  
Times don't change and neither does time.  
Go to a funeral, go to the fair,  
see bodies as they've always been  
for all we care.



UNTITLED; DISCOVERY  
*charles obi*



*javaree gordon*

---

## DEAR DOVE

*Do you believe in soulmates? Star-crossed lovers? Right person, but at the wrong time? How about kindred spirits? Or some simply put, destiny?*

*I do. I believe in it all because I've seen it. Felt it. Lived it.*

*Dove.*

*That's what I used to call him.*

*He was the only man I ever loved. And I never got the chance to tell him how I feel.*

*You see, this all happened years ago. We were young. We were strangers. We were hurt.*

*I was 19. Dove was 21. He was single and trotting down a dark path filled with drugs, alcohol, and self-hatred. I was heading down a dark path myself, having spent most of my late teens seeking validation and comfort from men through physical attraction. That phase in time isn't my proudest moment.*

*Like I said, I was young and I was hurt.*

*Many years have passed since then, and I still remember his eyes. It was the type of shade one associates with leaves in autumn. Green fading into brown with the smallest hints of yellow. His eyes told me stories, secrets, even before we exchanged words. I could see the burden he carried inside them. I saw his past, his pain, his love, his loss. I saw ancient trees with knowledge tattooed upon its bark. I saw how time had come and gone and left nothing behind but damage. It was almost as if I could touch them. I could reach my hand out and feel the different layers.*

*Bumps against my fingertips.*

*Unnatural cuts.*

*Man-made engravings.*

*Dove was in what I called the deep end.*

*What exactly was it?*

*I'm not entirely sure. But I was there too. I was in the deep end.*

*After all, I saw myself in his eyes.*

*Dove and I had met through his best friend, Chance. He was the guy I had a fling with at the time. The night we met, I was going through one of my spirals.*

*I lived alone and had no one to depend on.*

*No family. No friends. No partner.*

*My life had been that way ever since I was born. My father was unknown. My mother never wanted me. She kept me around during my earlier years. I had shelter, and sometimes food. That all changed shortly after I entered puberty. Her boyfriend at the time was a vile man. He did unimaginable things to a child. And somehow I got blamed. For years I endured the abuse.*

*He was hurting me. She was hurting me. I was hurting me.*

*I still had hope though. And as soon as I turned 16, I ran away.*

*By 19, all I had were the blurry faces of the men who took interest in my body and left after a month or two. They all had said they loved me, and I believed them.*

*I was always desperate for love.*

*Somewhere along the way, I began mistaking love and lust.*

*At 19, I knew better, but the feeling those men provided was like a drug.*

*A spiral was a term I used for when the urge to live started slipping away. It was a term I used when my nightmares became too real. When I felt like fading into nothingness.*

*For my own safety, I never stayed alone once I felt a spiral coming, and that's how I ended up on Chance's doorsteps. We had a meeting planned for later that night, after he was done hanging out with his friends. I knew he'd be home so I knocked on his door without hesitation.*

*It was Dove who answered. Chance was too intoxicated to do it himself. I explained to him that I needed to see Chance, just for a moment.*

*All I needed was one touch to feel numb again. I'd conceal everything and silence the oncoming storm.*

*He refused to let me in.*

*I told him to tell Chance that Evangeline was outside. He was in the process of closing the door, but stopped once he heard my name.*

*I saw the dots connecting in his head. My guess was that Chance had mentioned me at some point in time. He stepped outside, beer in hand, and closed the door behind him. He told me that Chance was drunk and that I should come see him in the morning. I think he expected me to leave after that. Instead, I started crying.*

*It wasn't Chance that I wanted.  
I just needed someone.  
Anyone.*

*Dove didn't say or do anything in response to my crying. He just stared. My silent tears soon turned into heavy sobs, and eventually I began letting out all the things I was holding onto. I told him I hated myself. I told him I felt worthless. I told him that I was scared I'd do something I couldn't undo. He seemed to understand. I remember him setting the beer aside and suggesting we sit down on the steps. He told me not to hold back any tears and he offered his shoulder for me to lean on. I cried until no more tears came. Even after the sniffing and trembling stopped, we stayed together, with my head resting on his shoulder. I was the first one to break the silence. I told him I was sorry. He ignored the apology and instead asked why I was seeking out Chance, who spoke of me like I was an object, instead of going to a friend or relative. I told him the story of my life, without missing a single detail.*

*"You're just like me, darlin."*

*That's what Dove said after I had finished my story.*

*It wasn't until then that I noticed his country accent. It wasn't until then that I found myself paying attention to his eyes.*

*I remember asking him what he meant, and then he began his story. An abusive father. A reckless mother. Poverty. An unstable household where children matured young. A teen without direction. Toxic relationships. Responsibilities far too excessive for someone his age, like running his family's farm and being the sole provider in the household.*

*I apologized to him again. My issues seemed small compared to his. But he told me not to apologize. He said he only shared his story so that I'd see that I wasn't alone. His kind words were enough to make me feel safe. From there on, we talked about nothing and everything. Music. Art.*



*Books. History. The beginning of the world. The end of it.*

*At some point, I fell asleep. I woke up in an unfamiliar room, and an unfamiliar bed. Dove was sleeping in a chair across from me. He woke up shortly after I did, and the first thing he did was apologize. He said he tried to wake me up a number of times and even offered to drive me home, but that I insisted on staying with him. Leaving me with Chance wasn't even an option in his eyes and so he brought me to his home.*

*I ended up staying there for a week. Nothing ever happened between us. At least, nothing explicitly sexual. I drank moonshine and black coffee from Dove's fancy mugs. He taught me how to catch squirrels with traps. He taught me how to properly handle a WeatherBy Mark V. He taught me how to ride a horse. In return, I taught him how to dance. It was the only thing he was clueless at. Each night we practiced, there was determination in his every step. Dove used to call me a swan. He thought my dance skills were top tier, and would always applaud whatever basic steps I did. In return, I called him a dove: a divine symbol of peace, love, and hope.*

*Chance visited us on the third or fourth day. He wasn't aware of any of my issues, nor did he know how I ended up at his best friend's place. He just assumed I had sex with Dove too. Given the version of me he knew, I understood why that was his immediate thought. I tried to break things off with him. However, things took a turn when he suggested that we all have a threesome. Dove placed an end to that suggestion before I had the chance to decline it. Chance kept pushing though.*

*He said I'd probably enjoy it. He said I was a freak. And before he could have uttered another word, Dove punched him in the face.*

*He never stepped out of line again.*

*During our time together, I took care of Dove just as much as he took care of me. If I was eating, I made sure he ate too. I kept his water bottles filled with water, and not alcohol like he did. I brushed his hair at night. I read him stories to help him fall asleep. I took care of his hands. Even after he showered, they remained rough and stained from all the labour he's endured. I did what I could to clean them up. And even though they were rough, I never once pulled away when he touched my face.*

## *Dear Dove*

*I remember the night you told me you loved me. I had spent a week at your house. Your parents were away. They had managed to sober up in time to travel and meet their third grandchild. You were the one who convinced your sister to give them another chance. All your siblings hated them. All of them left town as soon as they turned 18. But you stayed. You always had hope that they would change.*

*After experiencing bliss for seven days, it was time for me to return home.*

*I remember being at the train station.*

*You said you'd break through heaven and the gates of hell to be with me.*

*You said you'd build our future with your bare hands.*

*You promised to give me your best one day.*

*Not the best. Not the world. Not riches. Not gold.*

*Just your best.*

*And I believed every word.*

*You handed this to me. A black journal with the following words embroidered on the cover.*

## *My Darling Swan*

*You told me to write in it whenever I felt a spiral coming along. You told me that I didn't need someone to run to. You said I needed healing. You made me promise that I'd be kind to myself. And after that, you asked for permission to kiss me. I remember everything precisely. The clear sky. The sound of the train. The hustling of bodies getting on board. My heart thumping in my chest. Your hold tightening around my body as we watched time pass and rewind in each other's eyes. Eventually we let each other go. But we knew we'd find each other again. If not in this life, then another.*

*Your Soulmate. Your Swan. Evangeline.*



PRE-COVID HAIR, 2019  
*rachel castria*



BODY: WHO CONTROLS IT?  
*jenna mulcahy*

*megan finan*

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## AMERICAN RUMPLESTILTSKIN

sell your stories to me, dear girl.  
prove to me you have overcome, dear child.  
prove to me you have suffered, dear human.  
prove to me you have bled, dear.

sell your stories,  
sell your body,  
sell your soul,  
sell your mind.

strip naked on the page.  
(remove your hands  
from your breasts,  
dear.  
i want to see and  
measure  
your vulnerabilities.  
i won't judge,  
dear.)

let me rip open your stomach,  
investigate the contents.  
(lie still,  
dear child.  
my fingers are cold,  
but they won't hurt,  
only probe.  
i won't move  
any organs,  
dear child,  
do not cry.)

tell me death,  
tell me illness,  
tell me insecurities,  
tell me pain.

i want to quantify your blood  
on the gold scales of justice  
and determine your worth.

write it down, dear,  
and maybe you'll  
be worth college,  
magazines,  
accolades,  
and Art.

## A PERFORMANCE

There was a piano playing, it was a feverish circular tune that looped back into itself each time changing slightly. The sound was shrill, stilted, unnatural, it sounded like a song that you knew but couldn't place, a tune that you remembered from your childhood that you would finish in your head as you listened, but it was never quite right, the satisfaction was denied. The music looped again and again and again. Like a buzzing fly, like the dark corners of your mind.

Listen to it long enough and you would go insane.

"It's time for your performance Madame."

I lifted my head. A young man was standing before me, he was well dressed and smiling. I did not like him. His smile was too large, his voice too friendly, his posture too perfect. I didn't believe he was real, or maybe I am just too far gone, maybe the insanity has gripped me tighter than I had thought.

It didn't matter really. Whether the man was real or fake, whether I was insane or not. I had come to perform and nothing would stop me from doing so. I would perform to myself if I had too, I would perform to the trees, to the beasts, to the rocks if need be. The performance kept me alive, it kept me sane.

Well, mostly sane.

It stitched together the disparate parts of my mind and kept it from collapsing. I always thought of it as a loose web, in the past my mind was tight, it was sharp, it could catch and devour everything. It was this web that had first discovered the performance. But overtime the web has loosened, it catches very little now. The performance repairs the web, but only a little, enough to keep it together. A silly metaphor maybe, but one I quite liked.

I have to hold on tightly to the things I like, otherwise they slip away.

I stood up. The man was taller than me.

I decided he wasn't real.

I turned away from him and walked onto the stage. Before me was a colossal theater, seats extended far off into the darkness and circled up and up to the ceiling. It was filled with people. They all broke into uproarious applause at the sight of me. It was like a stampede of wild beasts, a million tiny explosions, rain against the window.

I turned to the crowd, but I couldn't see them.

I bowed and the rain quieted.

The piano was still playing. I stood center stage and waited.

Around and around and around it went.

And I listened.

Ah! There it was, as beautiful as the autumn sun. I moved.

Many have asked me how I came up with my performance, they marvel at its complexity, its intensity, its audacity. They've called me a genius more than once, but I didn't create the performance, I simply found it.

Back in the days when the sun still shone.

I found the web that ties the world together.

It was so beautiful that I went mad.

My arm follows the thread above me, more threads start to appear, my left arm reaches out, then my leg, soon my whole body is moving, following the threads. I don't hear the music anymore, I don't see the crowd, I can't even feel the cool air of the theater, but I trust the threads, never once have they failed me. The strands multiply, they start to wrap around each other swooping and diving across the stage.

I follow: I step, I leap, I spin, I dance. The threads increase in complexity, in intensity, no human could do this alone.

But that was the beauty of it, you weren't alone, the threads danced with you. They reach into my body, they guide me. They ensure I never falter, that I never waver, even when my arms start to tear, even when my feet start to bleed, even when my bones start to crack. The threads pull me along. The music circles and circles and circles as the threads interlace, intertwine, they wrap and wrap and pull, until the web takes its full shape.

I started crying.

It was an indescribable beauty.

A summer sunset on the ocean.

A union of mountain and sky.

A still lake.

A soft breeze on a sweltering day.

I would trade the world just to touch it.

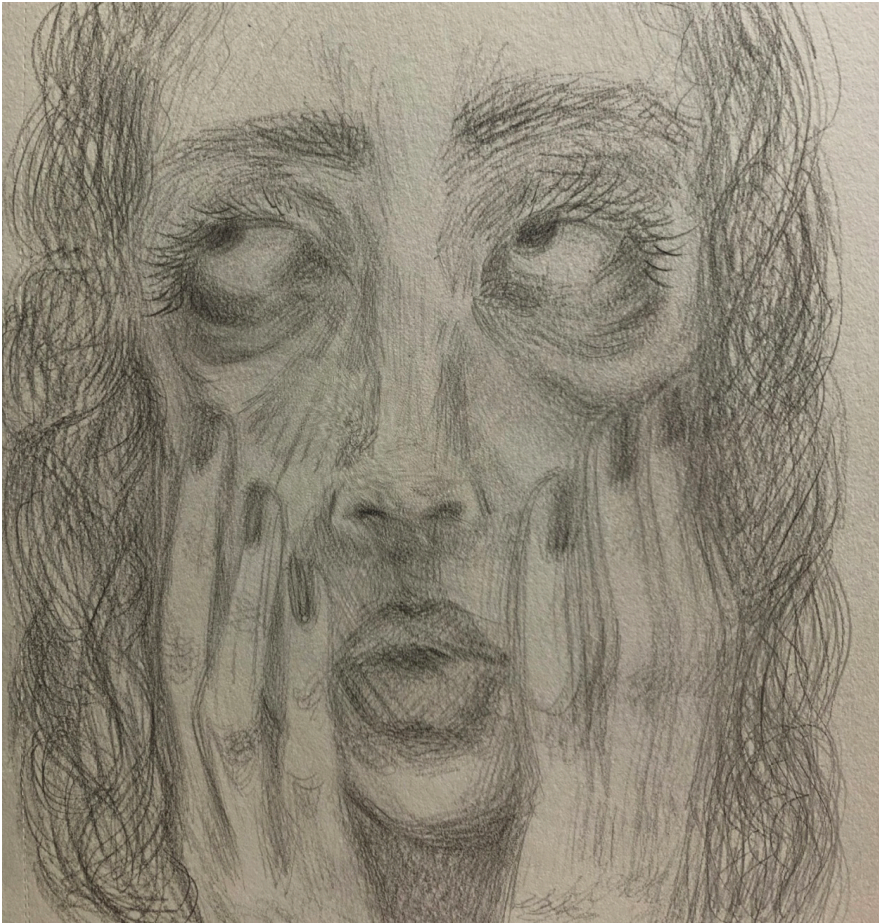
I reached out.

It vanished.

The music stopped.

I collapsed.

The Performance ended.



WOOZY  
*aniela erwin*



*madison flynn*

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## GAZE

The introduction of it, a small gangly child criss-cross applesauce on the carpeted floor, staring at a silver screen. The idea of it as a goal, attainable for all girls once they reach the age, growing younger by the second. The teaching of it, the steps and the tips on how to trade yourself away piece by piece and calling it beauty.

The expectation of it, the waiting and preparing and learning as those around you lost their dignity one by one. The anticipation of it, falling asleep dreaming about it, clinging to the remnants as the sun rose. The first interaction with it, not what you expected, scary and growing scarier. The experimentation with it, changing the look and evaluating your results, crafting the perfect equation.

The satisfaction of knowing you have it, learning to love the painstaking work to obtain it. The joy in it, the idiotic giddiness that injects you with the mindless happiness you were promised. The pressure of it, what wasn't working and why it didn't look the way it should. The revulsion of it, waking up and remembering, the fingerprints of a ghost that won't come off in the shower. The disgust with it, questioning it, yet succumbing to its demands even though you told yourself you wouldn't. The repetition of it, the endless cycle, the inability to break out of the cage. The truth of it, the discovery of the true desire behind it, raw and inhumane and heartbreaking.

The way you hold his gaze when he offers it, and the way he drops it without a second thought.

## A GIRL'S NAME

My girlfriend's name is Belladonna.

Belladonna Sofia Alvarez.

Belladonna because she found the name enticing, rolling elegantly off the tongue in a way that made her feel like a princess (not realizing it's the prettier name for a poisonous plant). Sofia, her middle name, for her mother, her queen, the gorgeous woman who nurtured her and gave her life.

But everyone knows her as Bella, and some still call her by the name she burned alongside the remains of her old self. In the tale of telling her parents her newfound name, she says she took the ashes and gave them to her parents, who set them on a shelf in their room in remembrance, but never in longing, and from then on called her by the name of her choosing. Belladonna. They said it was lovely, just right for their daughter, and embraced her.

I love that story, and every time I ask her to tell it, the sweetness on her tongue only gets richer, more fond.

I remember the day Bella asked me why I chose *my* name.

I sat with her head in my lap that rainy afternoon at my house and recalled how it all happened.

I was 13. I wanted something to tie alongside my last name, Hua, meaning flower. When I went to my grandmother for suggestions, she guided me to her garden in the yard. She pointed to the large white flowers that took up half the garden, the ivory petals only just beginning to bloom, revealing themselves for the first time that spring. My grandmother then told me the story of how my father offered these flowers to her, a peace offering in exchange for the blessing for my mother's hand in marriage. While she was concerned about my mother's future, unsure of what this charming young man from the mainland had to offer her, she saw the gleam of hope and pure love in their eyes, so she took my father's offering and gave her blessing. They got married in my mother's hometown in Hong Kong, where the same type of flower was used in the wedding, and when the three of them moved to America my grandmother began her garden, with those flowers being the first thing she planted. My grandmother said that the flowers always reminded her of my parents' love, and even after so many years since they've been gone her heart flutters strongly whenever the flowers begin to bloom each year. She said they reminded her of new beginnings, hope for a happy future.

So from that day forward, with my grandmother's approval and the memory of my late parents, I became Lily Hua.

The world always fades around me when I tell that story, and I didn't even notice that Bella had risen from my lap and was looking at me intensely with the remnants of tears streaking down her cheeks.

I never really thought of the story as something to cry over. Sure, my parents have passed, but I don't remember them. Nevertheless, my name is for their memory, one I will treasure alongside the portrait of their wedding photo I keep in my wallet, and as an added bonus my grandmother smiles whenever she calls my name. I don't think that's sad. I think it's quite heartening.

"Why are you crying, did I make you sad? It's a nice story; it's my *name-story*."

I put my arms around Bella's waist and brought her down to rest her head on my shoulder. She wiped her tears away with the back of her hand, giggling.

"It is nice, Lily, beautiful, actually, that's why I'm crying. I'm not sad. I'm just happy to know your... What did you call it? *Name-story*."

She kissed my cheek softly, like a landing butterfly, and I melted into her.

I gazed out the window, at the garden getting soaked in the yard, and how the lilies, though damp and glistening, stood tall. I felt myself grinning.

"Do you love your name?" I asked her.

"Of course. I got to choose it. It makes my heart happy when people use it."

"Belladonna."

Bella blushed, voice becoming shy, wanting. "Say it again."

"Belladonna, I love you."

"I love you, Lily."

This time she pulled my face down to kiss my lips, and her tongue was the sweetest it had ever tasted.

I wanted her to feel her name on my lips, to consume it. Our names are ours, and her name was hers, and it was special, and I wanted her to feel special. So I will always say her name, her true name, the one she chose.

Belladonna, Belladonna, Belladonna.

*corinne coakley*

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## LIVE MUSIC

Arms and legs ebb and flow and crash  
Human bodies to cracked tumbleweeds.  
A woman dragged below the surface of flesh in front of me  
I lose the arm I came with and think  
What a shame  
Anchorless  
I remember why I'm afraid of the water even when I'm on land  
Screams go unanswered.  
Punk rock will never die but we will and  
The last thing I'll see of you will be  
Untied sneakers flailing in the night air, send me a postcard  
With sunbeams and fields of flowers but I know you won't.  
I hope the view is pretty where music meets purple lights and moonbeams ignite coke-head sins.  
You want war  
I just want a gentle sway and  
Feathery brushes of hands.



HEATHENS  
*chloe yadav*



SWEPT AWAY  
*ayesha sultana*

*emma wenger*

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## RECIPE FOR AN AUTUMN EVENING

a cup of cocoa  
with whipped cream  
and a sprinkle of cinnamon

a worn sweater  
loved every season  
even though it has begun to fray

a warm candle  
a simple scent  
one full of comfort and love

a pair of socks  
cozy and warm  
with a cheeky phrase embroidered

a blanket  
simple and plain  
that has seen many years

a book  
with a cracked spine  
and notes in the margins

this is needed  
for a simple  
autumn evening

*megan finan*

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## CLAP SMACK CLAP

socialization is important for children. *concentration. sixty four. quack diddly ack goes quack quack quack.* friendship through osmosis is no substitute. *no repeats.* socialization is important for children. *no repeats. quack diddly ack goes quack quack quack. or hesitations.* i thought- i think i thought **senorita, pizza pizza PIZZA** *or hesitations* **senora, senora** i never **miss mary mack mack mack** god, the noise *you go first* god, they always went first **i threw up on the kitchen floor.** sick, sick, sick. *i'll go never.* i think they hate me. **with buttons all down her back, back, back.** back to school, back to silence, back to back. *category is one anxiety* what if they hate me? **two** *no repeats* **quack diddly ack goes quack quack quack.** socialization is very important for children. **three.** bomb bomb bomb. *no repeats.* inside my heart. **four.** socialization





BUS STOP BITEZ  
*ravenna gemignani*



LILIES  
*harley (the dog)*

*javaree gordon*

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**L.D.R.**

*Can I hear your heartbeat?*

*I know I'm not there, but I'd  
like to feel like I can touch  
you*

*Meet me in a fantasy where we lay*

*Skin to skin, chest to chest*

*Fingers entwined with no boundaries in between*

*Allow my eyes to search yours*

*and find the entrance to your soul*

*I want nothing more than to feel that  
raw chemistry I want us closer than close  
and deeper than deep*

*As gentle as a breeze, whisper to me.  
Like wind passing through a meadow*

*Like dew kissing the grass*

*“As long as my heart is beating,  
you are mine...I am yours...  
and you are forever loved.”*

*julia vroom*

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## AFTER THE RAIN

Pools of liquid linger  
On the surface of hard cement  
Gutters rush with vigor  
Washing the streets in loud lament

Rain drops evaporate into steam  
The vapors of sweet petrichor  
The world submerged, a foggy dream  
Revived! Renewed! Restored!

The down pour drums have ceased  
A subtle silence takes their place  
The skies having released  
A flood from heaven's gates

All that was tired is reborn  
Encapsuled in freshened air  
The earth is now adorned  
And all is clean, and new and bare.

*madison flynn*

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## PEACHES

peaches  
tart crunch and sunset orange  
bleeding down my fingers  
sticky with glee.

eat until it's gone  
sweet smiles and stubby fingers  
toss the pit  
my dad buries them in the sand.

peaches shine like memories in the sun  
with a golden glow like  
7pm on the beach in a one piece bathing suit  
and mom carries me home.

peaches also rot like memories  
as they fade bit by bit  
no longer a glow, but a haze  
fraying around the edges like bruised fruit.

the ridiculous urge to cry—  
at the image of a mushy peach that must be tossed  
i want to keep the peach  
that's been in the back of the fridge for years.

struggling to remember the juice on my skin,  
the taste of a mindless smile on my lips,  
each year that passes  
peaches get more sour.



NICE GREEN BOAT  
*pia collado*

*lauren farrell*

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## ALL US CECILIAS

Cecilia is what I call the cricket before I kill it, named for the patron saint of music.  
It sits on the fireplace, music-making. I stomp on it, pick up the carcass, throw it into the fire.

Cecilia is what I proclaim myself to a bishop at age fourteen.  
It is a name that is obvious: I play flute on a stage and please my parents.  
It is a promise to a hobby I'll keep forever:  
Forever as long as the saint in her statues,  
Always mid-strum on her harp.

Cecilia is what every eighth grader in band and chorus proclaims herself when it is time,  
So years later when the Catholic flute section girls reveal their names, years unused,  
Emily is Cecilia, Victoria is Cecilia, Lauren is Cecilia.  
Cecilia is unoriginality! There is nothing worse.  
It is a name deleted from an Instagram bio, pride in Catholicism hidden.  
It is a prayer card on my bedroom shelf, dusty.

Years later, Cecilia is forgotten, and I mourn the names I could have chosen:  
Joan of Arc, female warrior. Hildegard, chosen simply because it is a harsh mouthful.  
Both cooler than Cecilia, a name chosen for a pretty sound, for a passion decaying with time.  
It is in this mindset I hear the cricket's own pretty sound as I practice flute by the fireplace.  
We duet, I name it, then I stomp, throw it into the fire.

The naming is an accident that occurs milliseconds before death.  
I wonder where it came from, and I think about my own Saint Cecilia for the first time in years.  
In the silence of the cricket's interrupted music,  
I hear the red crackling of fire, and realize I forget who she was.

When Saint Cecilia, a woman of great faith, was forced to marry,  
She walked down her wedding aisle, mournfully singing.  
She refused her new husband's advances, bravest of women.  
She introduced him to Christianity, kept her virginity, converted him.  
She spread her music and her faith,  
So they burned her, and when that didn't work—proclaimed a miracle—they cut off her head.

Cecilia is a saint, a martyr tormented, mid-strum on her harp.  
Cecilia is a cricket, a martyr beneath my foot, mid-strum on her harp.  
Cecilia is an eighth grader, a hopeful, mid-strum in her faith.

O, Cricket Cecilia!

Most martyrs bleed red as a bishop's vestment at Confirmation, but your yellow counts, too.  
You remind me of my connection to my faith,  
I just wish you didn't have to die for me to remember.  
If there's a heaven for all the martyrs, I hope there is a heaven for you, dear cricket:  
You play your music, love your God, as I play my music, repent to mine.



CAN'T LOOK YOU IN THE EYE; SELF PORTRAIT  
*jenna mulcahy*



## A MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD DOOR

a slam  
followed by an  
aching in my spine  
my brittle body buzzing  
from the impact

i remember it  
dreamily, yet so clearly  
like looking through the  
slick haze of a frozen pond  
to spot a fish  
                  swimming by  
and only seeing  
its shape  
and form

your heaving cries turn to hiccups  
                  sliding down  
                          my chipped back  
you lay,  
digging your fingers  
into the knobby felt floor

you bob up  
                  and down  
like a seaside buoy  
unable to control the spilling from the  
                  inside  
                  out

i stay as still as my former host in  
the garden of the past  
absorbing the roses and  
bathing in sunlight

you need a shoulder to lean on  
to process what has happened  
and find equilibrium once more

the blows you direct at my aching back—  
i tell myself—  
are all a part of your process  
scratches and punches and kicks  
you take it out on me  
i understand  
i withstand

stabbing and picking at my pimply hide  
grooves that i was born with and  
those you create with your nails  
clawing at the feelings you cannot describe  
with an animalistic anger  
foaming at the mouth  
grinding of the teeth  
unsheathing the talons you use to  
tear at my flesh

but it's been quiet  
since you left  
an emptiness has overtaken  
the room

i feel brittle  
hollow  
as i once was

i know that now you are  
shifting and  
growing like the  
infinitesimal blinks of far off stars

there's a new door in your life  
a room for  
a room  
this one with bolts and locks  
things i could not offer

if you ever need me  
i will be bolted to this wall  
still, unmoving  
for pounding or slamming or shouting out  
i can take it  
because i always have



DESTINY OF DEATH  
*dani caballero*

*madison flynn*

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## SCARY MOVIES

it's just like that spooked feeling you get after watching a scary movie.  
confident when it starts, terrified, clutching blankets in the middle, relieved when it finally ends.  
you don't expect it to come after you when it's over.

getting ready for bed, brushing your teeth, and think you see something in the mirror behind you.  
laugh at your own foolishness as your heart skips a beat.  
that's what it's like to see you now.

you think the worst of it is over,  
you're rid of it all, the jump scares and heartbreak,  
you're onto something else, something bigger and better.

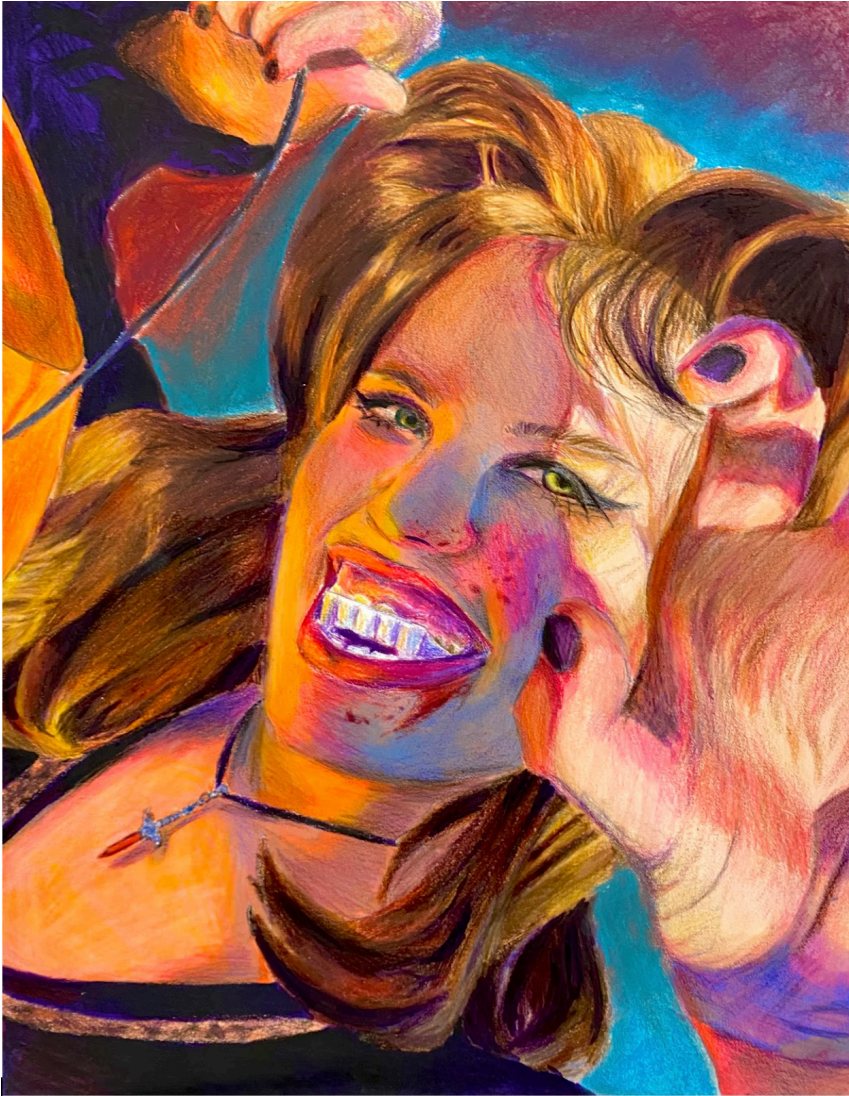
but *then*,  
sitting cross legged, with my rose colored glasses, optimistic, onto the next,  
*then* comes you.

sunlight in steps,  
blue tinted world, unknowing,  
hands in your pockets and my heart is skipping, popping like popcorn.

eyes make contact, linger too long,  
and suddenly the movie has followed me out of the theater,  
i caught a sight of you in the mirror.

even from across the room i could see your blue cloud eyes so clearly  
and i know you saw my hazel honey staring back.  
i wonder if there will be a sequel.

HALLOWEEN NIGHT  
*rachel shuster*



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CREATURE OF HABIT

I am a Creature of Habit.  
No matter how many lives I live,  
They will all end the same--  
I will be alone.  
Brokenhearted,  
suffering withdrawal,  
Craving the passion I once was supplied.  
My isolation will be long & torturous,  
But necessary.  
And no matter  
how much  
I crave her,  
I crave my freedom more,  
And I will always leave,  
And she will always try to stop me,  
And she will always fail,  
For I am a Creature of Habit  
And I am destined to die  
Alone.

*megan finan*

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DARLING, TAKE THE WHEEL

tell me you see everything i do,  
tell me you'll take it from here,  
and when it's dark,  
drive my car to 7-eleven,  
let me be the passenger for once,  
let me pick the music,  
buy me a cherry slurpee,  
hold my hand in the parking lot,  
touch my cheek like i'm sacred,  
tell me i don't have to try so hard,  
tell me you love me  
even if i don't sacrifice my sanity  
to ease your life,

and i'm yours, darling.



Cozy  
*kira edgar*



LEVEL OF CONCERN  
*chloe yadav*



*brett moran*

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## HOW TO CELEBRATE EASTER:

- 1 Purchase a carcass
- 2 Sacrifice it on your dining table
- 3 Gouge into its hunk
- 4 Smile at the hypocrisy
- 5 Let its tail dangle from your mouth to hide your smirk
- 6 Drink the animal's blood that fills your plate
- 7 Hush so your grandmother may speak
- 8 Listen as she claims His day under your roof
- 9 Admire the cross she fingers out of her pocket
- 10 Be respectful as she crawls onto your table and shines it under your chandelier
- 11 Bathe in His glory
- 12 Let blood trickle from your ears
- 13 Retract the knife from the animal
- 14 Enact justice on your wrist
- 15 Carve a cross so slightly
- 16 Watch the blood under crystal lighting
- 17 Crawl onto Your table and face Your grandmother
- 18 Say, "This day is Mine, not his."
- 19 Claim Your glory
- 20 Let her bathe in it

*javaree gordon*

---

## THE X

Threatening

BLACK BOY

Strong

BLACK BOY

Angry

BLACK BOY

Dead BLACK BOY

Jezebel BLACK GIRL

Loud

BLACK GIRL

Tough

BLACK GIRL

Dead

BLACK GIRL

Go ahead and take all I have  
Steal the air I breathe  
Erase my roots from your history.

**This is reality.**

**No Story.**

**No Prose.**

**No poetry.**

Cut my tongue to keep me quiet  
Blind my eyes to hide the truth  
Put chains on my limbs to keep me from running  
And if that fails, hang my neck through a noose.

**This is reality.**

**No Story.**

**No Prose.**

**No poetry.**

Give me back to the Earth that birthed me  
Wash your crimes in the grave cold sea  
My blood has stained your white hands  
But know what was, will always come back to be.

**This is reality.**

**No Story.**

**No Prose.**

**No poetry.**

Your name is a grain of sand that I roll over my tongue,  
it's too bad you'll never turn into a pearl.  
Try as I might,  
you will always remain bitter to the taste,  
yet you're something I cannot forget.  
It hurts  
to feel you in my mouth  
knowing that you'll never leave,  
though maybe I don't want you to.  
I miss the moments spent  
when you were still sweet,  
but your sugar-coated candy lips  
melted away;  
now I bleed your name through rotten and sticky teeth.  
Tiny cuts and bigger scars  
all carved in your silhouette,  
so that I will always remember  
the way your back looked in the silken sunlight that  
entered in from half-opened blinds.  
Blue eyes hurt me still  
as my subconscious warned,  
but you can never really learn from your mistakes  
if you never remove the lenses that coat the world  
in a hazy pinkish glow.  
Sunset blur & muted joy,  
please bathe me in your...  
Your heat is gone,  
so in your empty cold I shall bathe  
until the shivers lodge in my bones  
and your shadow replaces the absence.  
I'll berate my body like you berated my mind and my  
heart and my...  
I'd let you bruise my insides out  
until my cries echo in your veins so that your next lover  
asks why your body is screaming.

I want my presence engraved on your es-  
sence  
so everyone knows that my heart still beats  
for yours.  
You may ignore my existence,  
but I'd give you my lungs if you wanted  
more air.  
I hope you remember butterflies are my  
favorite, that you look for me in them,  
in their wings,  
in their beauty,  
do you still find me beautiful?  
If I submit to the archangel's call,  
don't think my love will cease;  
my dear, I could die one thousand times  
over and still search for you in every soul I  
touch.

## HURT ME STILL

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*alyssa rimathe schweiger*



THE HIDDEN VALLEY  
*ayesha sultana*

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CRIMSONED PEARLS

——— New Orleans: August 21, 1926 ———

—— 10:38 pm ——

The toe of my foot taps against the bar along to the band's rendition of the Charleston, as the singer riffs off her notes. A very obviously fake strand of pearls falls between her breasts. They were likely purchased by an admirer, and she likely cannot differentiate them from an authentic set, but nonetheless, I pity that naivety. My gloved fingers brush my pearls as I clutch them at my chest, and yet the delicacy of my mother's gift forces me to free them from my grasp. The urge to keep my hands occupied, however, has me playing with the side seam of my dress not seconds after dropping my necklace. It's one of my finer frocks. The lace was imported from France and the silks from China. Yet again the elegance of it has me letting the fabric go. My next occupation will be to open my clutch and unfurl my fan. I squirm in restraint, tamping down my evident restlessness. Cat-long nails pierce my palms—a presumed tactic to center my trembling hands—leaving beads of pulsating blood pooling under the surface of my skin.

“Miss, would you like another Sherry?” I jolt out of my reverie and turn to the bartender. My eyes flicker to my drink. Empty. My eyebrows draw in confusion. I nod my head with the assertion of a seasoned alcoholic, internally questioning when I finished it.

The song ends and the West End Blues begin. My head turns back to the band as the bass player begins his solo, yet my focus strays to the singer, and I meet the young beauty's eyes. I shiver under her intense gaze, and though I may want to, I cannot look away. She smirks. I blush and bite my inside cheek to restrict a smile. Her entire being screams, “*Pay attention to me now, and I'll indulge you later.*” My lips are suddenly dry and I turn back to the bar, a freshly poured sherry awaits. I drain the contents for courage, and the bartender immediately pours a new one. I look back at the band and the singer has her eyes on me again, she promptly turns away, lightly blushing as if chastened for staring for too long. Her sultry notes, tainted with sensual lyricism, elicit a craving to speak. At this moment I solely feel a projection of my jealousy, and she becomes the siren I desire. I become a fallen captain captivated by her timbre. Yet she doesn't shy at the ferocity of my perusal. She wants to be chased. She wishes to be desired. And that's how I know she'll make the perfect victim for the tabloids and newspapers of New Orleans, just as the vocalist from New York City was depicted in the Times last month.

The trumpet blares into a solo, and I smile, a fully joyous beam overtakes my face, as elation overtakes my soul or the empty hole from where it should belong.

——— New Orleans: August 22, 1926 ——

—— 3:46 am ——

The pads of my fingers brush the brick wall behind me, my back pressed against it as my chest inflates with a gasp. I try to temper my chuckle, but the euphoria and rushes of adrenaline prevent a somber mood. My hand reaches to cover my mouth, but I figure I should minimize the spread of gore. Blood already coats my brow and I drag the end of my dress to wipe my face. I drop the frock and look down at my hands holding tightly to the once fancifully tailored silk. Though I do not detect blood on my black gloves, the sodden material clings to my skin as I attempt to draw them up my arms. My dress is destroyed, my pearls splashed with red, my tights glaringly ripped, and my hair is disarranged, yet with the darkness shrouding me in the alley I cannot determine the extent of my gory state. Once I step into the crowded streets of jazz, lights, and nightlife, my crime will be visible to everyone. Though, as proof of my brilliance, carnival festivities and costumes just so happen to take place on the weekend of the twenty-first and twenty-second. I truly even astound myself sometimes.

I turn the corner onto Royal, where the crowd dwindles, but the stragglers, eager for Bourbon Street, smile at my *costume*. They point, stare, and beam at the creativity and execution of it. I grin back at them, with supposed gratitude, but internal derision at their ignorance.

The street's music drifts from the speakeasies as I stroll down to the Dauphine Orleans, my residence for the past three weeks. I enter the lobby and wave at the bellboy's gasp of surprise. I'll miss this city.

"The carnivals here are truly some of the best I've seen!" I dawdling occupant of the hotel remarks. I amble towards the grand staircase, lips cheekily twisting, as I leave dropped jaws in my wake. I walk up to the second floor and upon opening the door to my room, I ease the balcony doors open. The music sweeps into my quarters, and as I undress I can't help but think of the fact that railway tickets towards Chicago are relatively cheap this time of year. A change of location is simply necessary, for the satisfaction of pained melodic cries will only satiate me for a time before I lust for another, and, anyway, I've always been told it's best to visit The Windy City towards summer's end.



KILLING EVE  
*chloe yadav*



*greta soos*

---

## JUST TORN

People told me relationships are messy,  
But I wore my rose colored glasses  
And ignored the smell of rotting petals and my growing muteness  
That all started with the vibrations.  
I should have expected for our relationship to be

ripped from the roots,

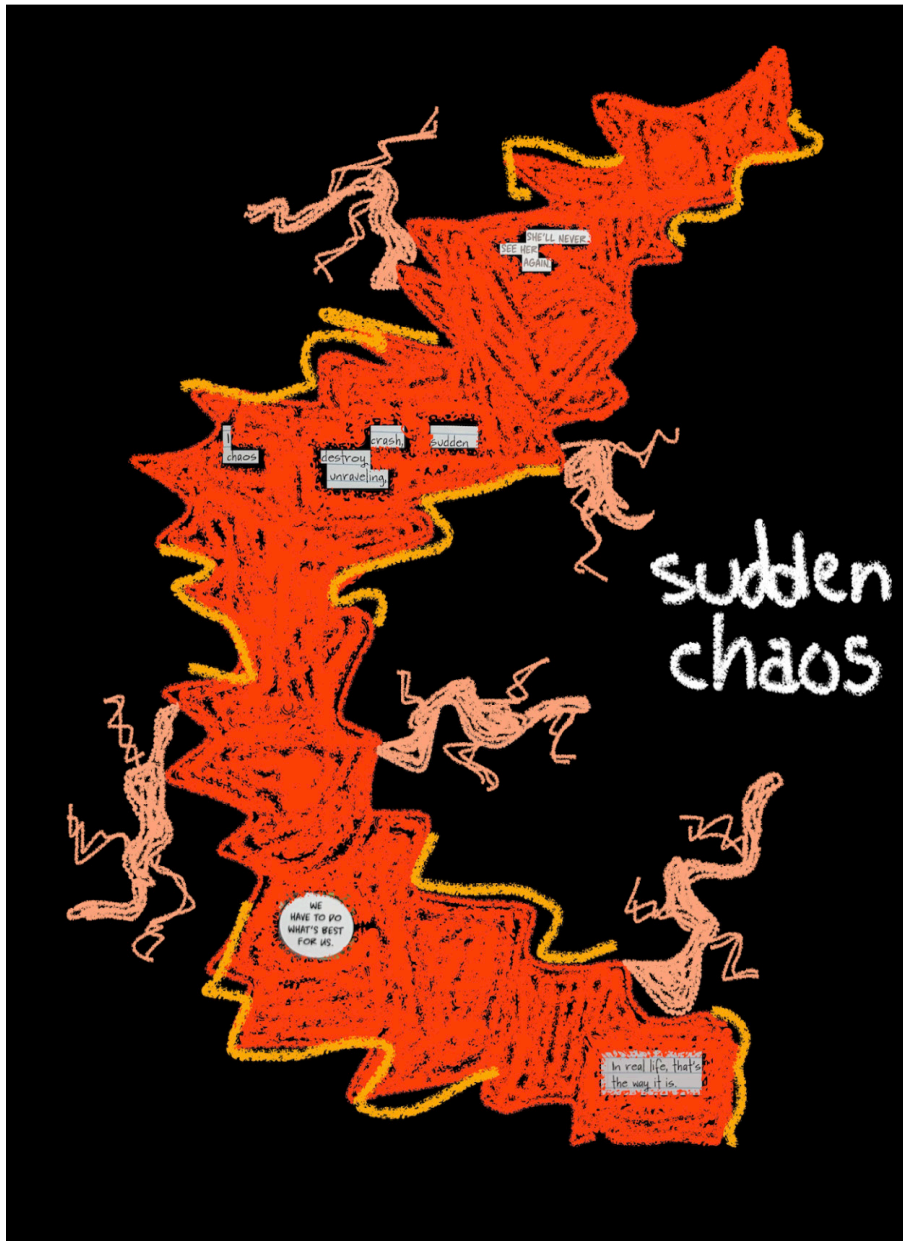
Yet I was still shocked when it happened.

I used to pick forget-me-nots to see if someone cares about me,  
Desperate for someone to complete me.  
Am I just terrified of having someone actually care for me?  
The weight of confusions pushed me away

from you and I broke.

I broke  
like a college student after paying for groceries.  
I broke like a guinness world record.  
I didn't want to drag you with me.  
I didn't want to use you.  
I didn't want to become someone you hate.

I was confused  
And so I told you everything.  
You sweet-talked me like a honeysuckle  
And made me believe it was just first relationship jitters.  
I lived in hope for a day  
Until I saw the thorns grow sharper.  
I can't continue on like this,  
So farewell from a crushed Gladiolus.



SUDDEN CHAOS  
*dani caballero*

*brett moran*

---

## GLUTTON

Sometimes when alone at work, you tend to steal and binge-eat leftovers from the break room.

I.

You're working a double today, and with a restrictive habit of skipping breakfast and lunch, your appetite is much like a child: growing loud, immature, impatient, and helpless in time.

Your demise is foretold by the whiff of fried dough dancing around your nostrils; teasing your hunger until you snap and devour.

You're lured to an unguarded pastry box and find everything you hoped and feared: warm doughnuts coated in glaze that glisten like sweat, dredged sugar shimmering like crushed diamonds, and silk frosting that shines even under dim ceiling lights.

II.

You smuggle the box into the bathroom and crouch on the toilet as a rapture kneels before the Lord. You find power with every vigorous bite that bob your cheeks and massage your jaws. Your plundering nails dig into the powdered skin and burst the raspberry-filled center of your luscious victim. You slurp the thick, sugary jam that trickles down your fingers because even bits are tempting; because you are hungry.

III.

As your mouth reaches the center of a Boston cream, you accidentally gnaw on your thumb submerged in the custard filling.

Your teeth tear into the walls of your mouth while choking between bites.

You're struggling to swallow chunks of chocolate glaze and slivers of shredded skin.

The box slides off your lap as you turn to face your demise.

From experience, you remember to plunge two fingers down your throat and purge your regrets before they are digested; before they become part of you.

"Too much," you pant between spits and coughs.

IV.

As the door creaks, a ray of light cuts through the bathroom and catches you red-handed. Your co-worker is appalled to find you on the ground beside scattered, half-chewed doughnuts.

"Sorry... I was hungry," you apologize in your palm to hide your final nibbles while wiping the smeared jelly from your powdered chin.



DRIFTING  
*charles obi*

*erin parker*

---

## WE DID START THE FIRE

We survived a pandemic,  
and watched our neighbors die.  
We've fought laws that hate our bodies,  
and systems of corruption.  
We've defended ourselves against other generations,  
and hoped for a change.

We've been robbed of experiences and success,  
of stability and happiness.

So dammit we did start the fire.  
And they say the world's still turning,  
but our flames keep burning.

We deserved to start a fire,  
Where we can burn our bras and torch inequities.

People ask why our generation is so messed up.  
As if our earliest memories weren't of a recession.  
As if our most formative years weren't online.  
As if our graduations weren't drive-bys.

We've tried to change and ask for help,  
yet we've been shamed for our concern.  
As if political debates haven't ruined people's lives.  
As if we weren't raised on cyber bullying.  
As if we aren't getting jobs amidst inflation and staffing issues.

So yes, we started the fire,  
and each morning I add kindling  
and each night I add a log.

We started the fire,  
Which gives us warmth,  
And comfort,  
And safety.

We started the fire,  
Which demonstrates our concerns,  
And unites our generation,  
And gives us a voice.

And on weekends we roast marshmallows,  
Over the flames of our success,  
Over the masking of our trauma.

And we make each other s'mores,  
With the joyful chocolate of our lives,  
And the crumbling graham crackers  
of our despair,  
And the sticky marshmallow  
That brings us all together.

Because if the world's going to burn,  
We're going to burn with it.  
And if we're going to burn,  
We're going to do it right.

We're going to do it  
On our own terms,  
In our own way,  
And at least,  
We're going to burn together.

So, that's why,  
We did start the fire.



ALONE BUT WITH YOU  
*elizabeth klein*

*ashley dzergoski*

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## FREE FROM HIS IRON GRIP; GLIMPSING THE SUN

After a year  
Of being escorted  
Everywhere in shackles  
She did not expect  
The slightest chance  
Of finding her way out

Zigzagged between levels  
A standard grid of hallways  
Silent  
Save for their footsteps  
Features concealed  
Meant to confuse and  
Intimidate

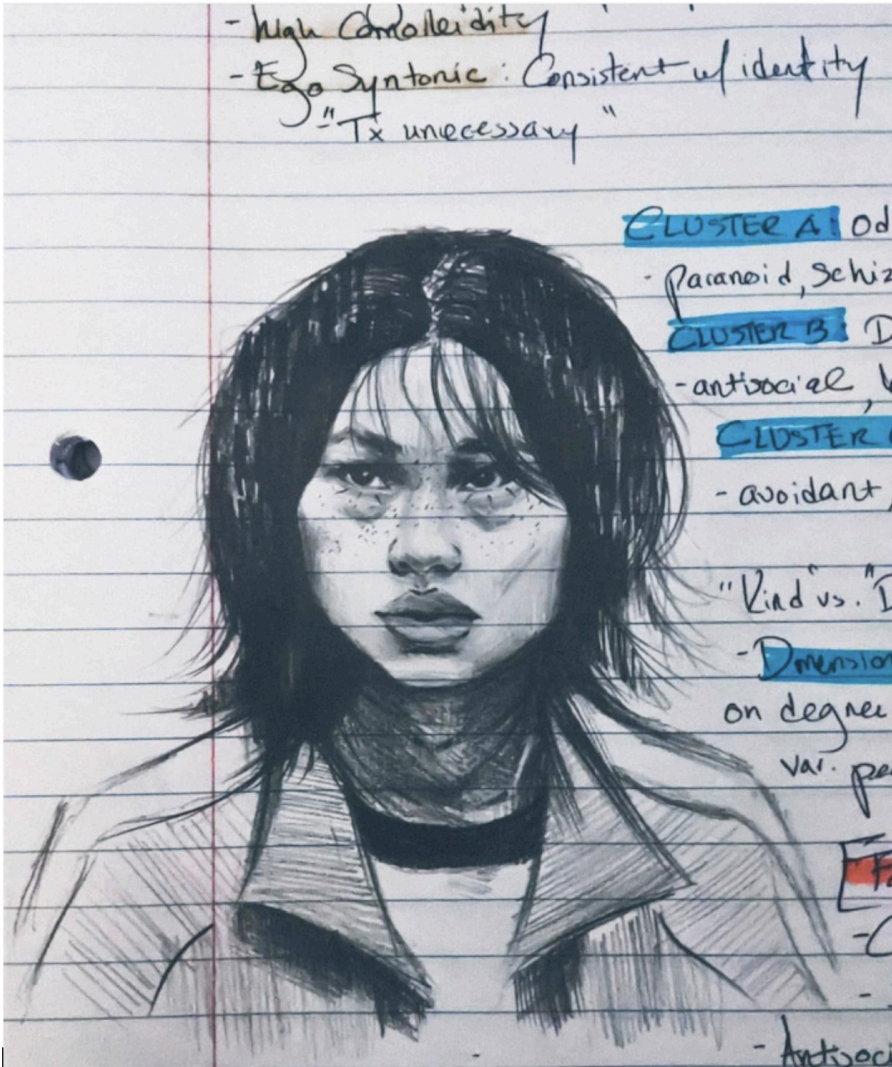
His iron grip  
Tightening  
He'd been waiting  
For her outside  
Standing there

The sky loomed  
The mountains  
Pushed from behind  
The earth swelled  
Toward her knees  
She hadn't tasted  
Fear in a while

*I will not be afraid*  
The difference between  
Breaking and  
Bending  
Shattering in  
The darkness  
She glimpsed the  
Sun

She was  
Frightfully pale  
She had been  
Attractive once  
Beautiful even  
Like an eagle  
Midflight

A smile tugged at the corner of her lips.



BORED IN CLASS  
chloe yadav



*sarah knapik*

---

## CORINTHIANS 15:53

Wouldn't it be funny if we treated human death just like leaves dying?  
Come fall every year and we stand in awe of the pretty colors, reds, oranges and yellows. We crunch the fallen leaves, we play in them and make piles to jump into. The leaves are dead, but we don't care. We see the beauty in it- we comfort ourselves with the concept of change and seasons turning and space being left for next season's leaves.

A dead human.

A gorgeous array of gray skin and blue lips, fingers curled tight and stiff against their palms. How pretty. After all, it's natural. Their time has come. They need to, to leave space for the ones after them. For the new season, for the rebirth.

But it doesn't feel the same.

No, it doesn't.

Our death is not leaf pretty.

It is dirt under nails pretty. Lungs burning pretty. It hurts. Why does it hurt? We play in the leaf piles, scream and laugh and feel the chill of fall as it comes. But this. This hurts. But it's natural.. Right? It needs to happen. There needs to be space for the next. Blood on your teeth pretty. And this should all be comforting. Bruises on your throat pretty. Everyone dies so others can take their place. Crack in your bones pretty. This should all be comforting.

Shouldn't it?

*Shouldn't it?*

*javaree gordon*

---

## HER BEADS

He heard her before he saw her and when he saw her, he was hooked.

Wide hips.

Big tits.

He saw no face and he saw no soul.  
He saw sunkissed skin and made her his goal.

Tiny Waist.

Thighs that quaked.

She wore sleek and small braids, with beads at the end.  
And with each step she took, the sound charmed him like a spell.

A mating call.

Misused Adderall.

Like a predator attacking prey, he took what was 'his'.  
Her beads screamed for help as she was stripped of innocence.

Another black girl

Wronged by the world.

*javaree gordon*

---

## HIS ROSE

blue.  
snake.  
void.

purple.  
knife.  
moon.

red.  
torment.  
death.

If I could, I'd build you a rose  
I'd sit in the night, surrounded by candles, and I'd cut each petal from poetry  
Solely ones I wrote

Upon those pages would be words of love  
Words of hope and praise  
Words of pain and sorrow  
Words of agony

I knew you'd understand what they meant  
Even with only seeing bits and pieces, broken fragments  
A feeling of familiarity would ring through your soul

I knew all this because I've watched you keenly  
I sought out what was beyond the flesh  
And when I found it, time and I stood still

blue.  
snake.  
void.

purple.  
knife.  
moon.

red.  
torment.  
death.

If I could, I'd build you a rose  
I'd sit in the night, surrounded by candles, and I'd cut each petal from poetry  
Solely ones I wrote

Each piece would be handled with care  
Every touch would be delicate and sure  
All the positions would be neat and precise  
It would be the most perfect paper rose

I'd admire my creation  
A physical embodiment of thoughts of you  
So beautiful. So strong. So fragile. So complex.  
I'd gaze at it for hours  
Rereading the words  
Watching shadows dance on it's surface

I'd kiss the rose  
A notion  
Made for you  
A creation  
Made for you

Soft lips against smooth paper  
The smell of ink fresh below my nose

blue.  
snake.  
void.

purple.  
knife.  
moon.

red.  
torment.  
death.

If I could, I'd give you the rose  
I'd tell you I sculpted it with my bare hands  
I'd tell you about the words that reminded me of your soul

I wouldn't share the kiss  
But I'd hope you would adore my efforts  
And treat that paper rose like gold



OCEAN  
*harley (the dog)*

*brett moran*

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## FLEEING DOVES

My mother tends to think out loud, especially over a glass of champagne.

She boasted last night, “You know, women are like doves: we’re pretty and we know how to fly.” Seeing how amused I was by her drunken humor, she turned on the T.V. and flipped through her favorite channels to entertain me some more.

Rose traded tightly wrapped corsets for rags with holes in *Titanic*.  
My mother said she chose to breathe.

Elizabeth’s father in *Pirates of the Caribbean* never told her the ocean’s deepest secrets.  
An hour into the film, she sailed across the Seven Seas and discovered them herself.

As the night grew weary, so did my mother. *Some fright should do the trick*, I thought.  
After Laurie’s brother tried to kill her in *Halloween*, she stabbed his neck with a knitting pin.

With my eyes glued to the screen, I asked my mother, “Do all women learn how to fly, though?”  
Slouched on the couch, her glass slipped out of her hand and onto the carpet  
as she flew to her dreams.

This morning, she told me all about the doves that flew there, as well.

*emma weniger*

---

## LEAF MAGICK

a falling leaf is a wish  
magick simple  
but well sought

people chase them  
eager to catch one  
before it falls  
magick vanishes

they are the ones who fail

leaves have a mind of their own  
those who chase  
are never chosen

but if you sit  
when the wind blows  
one may fall to you

settle in your lap  
granting you its wish  
for those who wait are deserving





AUTUMN  
*olivia d'iorio*

# THE LAST LOOK

## A NOTE FROM THE ISSUE EDITOR

I write this message to you as the sun is setting over campus, making it shine as people rush off to class. As this day, as well as the Fall 2022 semester comes to an end, yet another edition of The Lion's Eye is published. The sun sets so early in the fall, which, contrary to many other opinions, always comforts me in some way.

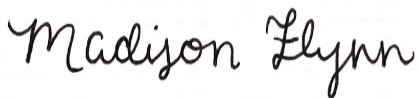
You have to put trust in the fact that the sun will be back soon. I've learned a lot about trust this semester, specifically trust in yourself. I think this edition of The Lion's Eye is a testament to that. The amazing work of the wonderful artists, writers and creators that you have just read is an incredible collection. Each and every one of these pieces started with two things—an idea and trust. These creators decided to trust that crazy voice in the back of their mind and listen to its whispers, take notes on them, and turn the voice into something completely their own. And look at what we have created with these voices!

Trusting that little voice is to trust yourself. Trust the things you create, the person you are, the person you are becoming, and the path that you are on, whether you know what it is or not. All roads lead you to the best version of yourself—make sure you are listening to that crazy little voice. Take it and channel it. It may have a point.

So yes, the sun sets earlier in the fall. You have to put trust into the sun, as well as yourself. For now, enjoy the orange glow that is casted over campus, the cold breeze on your face and the leaves that swirl through the air. Enjoy the fact that you are watching the sun set, and rejoice in the fact that the sun will come back tomorrow.

Thank you to The Lion's Eye staff and the TCNJ community for always providing a supporting, loving group of artists and creators to rely on. Seize the day, never stop looking for opportunities, take care of yourself and never stop being unapologetically you.

With love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Madison Flynn". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Madison" and "Flynn" being significantly larger and more stylized than the rest of the letters.

Madison Flynn  
Issue Editor

ABOUT US ::

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