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Vantage Point

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Vantage Point
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"I love you more than my own skin"

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Letter From the Editors

“They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn’t. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality.” — Frida Kahlo

Reality is subjective. Through passive and active moments, choices, and actions, we warp the liminal borders of our experience like an empty bathtub or swollen eye. Writers and artists: create space. Fill it up thigh-deep with grit, dust, and milk-thick pulsing of lungs. Be active.

- The Editors

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waltz

By Anonymous

oh broken instrument
we name the spine
laughs and stiffens and heaves
throws itself out

in the cold, in the dead trees it
dances on fractured ice
molding vertebrae with snow
to lengthen up to the void of sky
and be chipped by the stars to return
as flakes

of bone, of sore eyes for sight of
height, sleight of hand-eye
twitches and trembling through
withdrawal — the vibrating edges
of strings and keys out of tune

as if this body could sing

Dollar Bill Mouths

By *Emilee Conroe*

At 23:00 hours: she looked down at her hands, disbelieving that they had gotten her here. Squeezed into her private room at the County Jail, complete with complimentary sink, toilet, and moth-eaten blanket, she cried silently, her nametag still pinned to her cherry red shirt.

She could feel the mascara globbing on her face, smearing all over her hands, tattooing her shame.

At 21:00 hours: the nice police officer with the gentle eyes and stern mouth took her into the booking room, twisting her fingertips over a half sheet of paper until a full ten fingerprints stared back at her, a sick version of Picassos. Precious art.

She didn't smile in her mug shot. A single tear reflected in the flash, hanging off of her chin by its fingertips.

At 17:00 hours: the officer's eyes met hers in the rearview, vaguely piteous.

"Do you have children?" He asked, taking a sip of his diet coke.

"Two," Her voice was fragile. "Dan and Thomas."

"How old are they?"

"Four and Six." She looked out the window.

"Are you close?"

"Extremely."

Dissected by the bars separating their two bodies, she looked oddly delicate in the backseat of his patrol car, like a fawn, lost and confused. Unable to figure out how it had wandered into this part of town.

At 16:30 hours: She sat at the scene of the crime, waiting for the police to arrive and take her away, surrounded by her former co-workers, bosses. Holding her head in her hands, she couldn't muster a tear, a sigh, any reaction of merit. Her mind was blank, a void.

Her cherry red uniform slouched around her knees, her visor lying haphazardly at her feet. It all matched her chipped, painted nails.

At 15:45 hours: She collected her things from her station in slow motion, on autopilot. She unlocked her register, final count. Her fingers reached into the cash drawer, thumbing the bills one by one. Against her skin they were tantalizing, raising goose bumps on her arms.

She drew one out, then another, slipping them into her pockets, leaving swirls of dust to float in the air where they had been.

She felt hope - suddenly, the sensation of her throat closing with adrenaline.

The faces on the bills were ones she recognized, but not presidential. Young, wide-eyed, too skinny, too cold.

An alarm sounded far away -- someone shouting. But she wasn't sure where it all came from.

At 15:30 hours: She was called into the manager's office. She expected employee of the month, her disinterested portrait adhered to a wooden plaque, hung on the wall just behind her register.

Probably the greatest accomplishment of her young adult life.

"Trina, sit down." Said Paulette, the puffy, bleached blonde, middle-aged woman behind the Manager's veneer desk. "Roscoe's has been forced to reevaluate its current revenue shares. Unfortunately, we have no other choice but to consider lay offs..."

Something was sinking, but she couldn't tell what. Her pride? Her future? Her composure?

"Trina, I don't know how to tell you this. We're going to have to let you go."

At 13:00 hours: She showed up to Roscoe's, the corporate grocery chain she worked for and her only source of income. Adjusted the Velcro on her visor, tightening it on the back of her head. Locked her car and walked inside. Clocked in. Smiled. Was charming. Personable even.

Magazines, papayas, razors, turnips, tilapia, she scanned all of it. Whatever came her way, without judgment, without malice. With a smile that hid everything.

At 11:00 hours: She ushered the boys out of the backseat of her car and towards the babysitter's house, aware she would soon be on the verge of lateness.

She heard Thomas say, "Mommy, my stomach hurts."

Then Dan said, "Mommy, I'm hungry."

"Mommy, how come the refrigerator is empty? How come we have only cobwebs to eat?" Tom cried.

"Mommy, why don't we have money? Why can't you provide for us?" Dan whispered. All in her mind.

At 7:00 hours: She woke up. The knot in her stomach was incessant now, dulled by its consistency. A permanence. The neighbors were loud this morning. Someone screamed whore through the paper-thin walls. Bitch.

She watched the black mold in the corner of the ceiling grow.

Took a shower in the cold, over-chlorinated water.

Split a piece of bread for the boy's breakfast, their eyes too large in their hollowed faces. Ignored the clenching of her own stomach. The blue-black circles under her eyes.

Wondered how she had raised this lived reality.

Kleptomania

By Eli Karren

When you leave, take everything. There should be oceans
in your pockets, not just salmon & swordfish. Take
the Chordata people don't know about: the Lionfish

& Mantis Shrimp, the Axolotl & glass squid. Take
everything. The apartment locks its windows behind us.
Left to become somewhere half remembered. Where

iridescence blossoms over bedsheets & the shadows grow
feral at night. Take the barcodes of pixelated sunshine
off the mahogany flooring; take the way it splices

across motes of light like a coffee stirrer. If you want more
than morning, take the dulcet tones of suburban midnight,
too; the little prattle of dew metastasizing, the whine

of a fence shuddering with moonlight, a distant chill
of wind chimes, their cacophony like an orchestra
of mannequins. Take down the constellations and bring

them with you. They are too easy a payment to deal in;
taking them away gratifies daylight, gives an extra hour
of recess, another month without seasonal depression.

Conversation in Silence: Reflected

By Winter Seyfer

Inside I'm crumbling.
I'm the bones of the briar ghost
Sharp with longing and covered in dust
I'm the shutters of the window
The empty tea cup resting against the electric kettle
A picture frame faded with age

Her eyes catch mine
Peering out from behind the black and blue coats
One, a turning tumultuous sea with dancing
blues and sea foam greens
The other
A chilled winter evening, too cold for frostbitten kisses.

In her eyes
Lilting whispers play like children
Tumbling in the wind and flickering with fallen leaves
The way my eyes follow hers,
Reflected

Light hits her back
Casting shadows upon the cool teal-speckled tiles
Overlaying two tones of grey
Reminding me of the way you used to press your body into mine
Pooling in my crevices
(Come a little closer if you dare, my darling)

She remembers too
Head half-tilted towards her toes, listening to
Nostalgic pangs pulsing like eighth note drumbeats
Don't move, I implore
You'll break the spell my mirrored friend.
She smiles.

We are the half-open dresser who
Guards plaid button-downs that no longer smell like you.
We are an afterthought
Boxes of Altoids hidden under my roommate's pile of clothes
A silly hopeful notion shared between the self and the soul
But on the outside
Through the cracks of our temperamental structures
Flowers have grown.

Ink-Stained

By Lydia Moreman

He sits in the chair by the window,
a newspaper in his hand.
Deceptive, for his eyes do not read the ink stained words.
Instead, they look outside the glass wall
at the people passing on the street.
He's seen marriage proposals and worker strikes,
accidents and chance meetings—
a robbery, once.
He's heard the quarrels of lovers,
from unwashed dishes to cheating spouses.
A conversation between peers, one telling the other
the failed surgery is no one's fault,
sometimes these things just happen and maybe
it's not a good time, but would he like to go out to dinner
and she knows it won't change anything, but...
He's heard the whispered "yes" that quieted her stream of words.
He doesn't read the newspaper, choosing people
over crossword puzzles and legal games.
He knows that the most significant moments
are not found among headlines
and can be easily lost among the bustle.
But his chair is empty today
and will be tomorrow as well.
I open the newspaper to the back,
where his name is written in ink.

Learning How to Take

By Mackenzie Baker

it's time to start biting mouthfuls of dirt and twisted roots
not worrying so much about charm or mascara
and instead breathing life into the bricks
you throw at windows,
show them all that you're stronger than glass

it's time to start stealing things,
that's what writers do
taking lines like
"i wear self-loathing like an ugly dress, proud and pretty"
i'll let you guess the words that aren't mine

it's time to start putting your salt back in the shaker
collect your dropped stitches
re-shelf your half-read books
string together thoughtless words
and make a necklace for your leftover lovers

it's time to start putting away your tears
in a box, wooden, dusty and warped
turn up Joy Division louder
than what you're thinking
light up pathways made from sorrow

it's time to start begging for forgiveness
at the foot of a priest
and while i'm on my knees
i'll spit on his shoes
selfish Thief that i am

it's time to start
stopping yourself
i'm strong enough to know better

be my friend, like it's just that easy
just know that i'm careful with "i love yous"

it's time to start writing about the cracks
in my walls -- like i have none
i sweat too much and i never brush my hair
i've got curves and too much weight
in all the right places

it's time to start kissing yourself
slowly enough that
you can feel your own warmth
you've got it in you
it's time for you to know that

i've got less and less time to spare
it's time to start bearing my soul's teeth

Nobody Ever Does the Dishes

By Calum Buchanan

And winds blow the sands and water erodes and, even, tectonic plates collide and they just keep piling up. Many a mountain had an anthill in its place.

In our sink was an anthill just last Monday. "Jake, these aren't my dishes in the sink. Are they... yours?" Fruit flies crawled out of that anthill, verging on a mound by Tuesday night, and made themselves a home on a soy saucy rice encrusted plate - the ceramic floor for their new dining room. Nobody does the dishes and the fruit flies are happy.

By Thursday the fruit flies have realized it's just too difficult keeping a house in order without thumbs, a house that grows to a mansion with every falling piece of glass. The sheer size of the task is just too daunting for such small bodies. But they've heard lore from the elders that,

by Saturday, their misshapen mountain crushes against the ceiling of this hundred-year-old house, whose structure can hardly support its weight, and fruit fly gods from on high proclaim their all-mighty power against extermination. Brad wakes up and yells, "every damn morning the first thing I see is this mountain of dishes!" which obviously isn't true, because for one it isn't always a mountain. And I'm quite sure he never takes the time to thank the fruit fly gods for the floods with which they wash away their whole world in the middle of the night and, come Sunday morning, rest in some fruit fly heaven I can't see, having scrubbed the bits of marinara sauce from the ceiling with a care that could only be of holy nature given their lack of thumbs.

The New North End

By Seth Wade

With a jolt, I wake up, sweaty and shaking. Darkness glazes my vision. Sloppy thuds, in sets of three, echo against my headache. I groan, fumble about my pockets, try to find my phone.

"Drae?" a voice calls, in that Northeastern habit of flattening vowels like dough.

Shit. It's nine. The Good Witch of the North End is at the door. I paw out of bed, woozy. Wobbling towards the thin bar of light under the front door, I knock over a pile of empty Bowman's Vodkas, sending them rolling back towards my bed. I get to the door and pause, sighing. She's about to start pounding again, so I open the door, let the searing light in.

"Good morning," says a saccharine voice.

I mumble as I stagger back, not staying in that oppressive light any longer than necessary.

The witch wears her usual dressing: a Nordstrom blazer, her leather messenger bag, pinned up hair and heels about as high as I strive to be. She's bejeweled from ankle to ear, the silver and diamonds on her Tiffany bracelet being extra glossy. She slips inside, bringing with her that stench of rotting fruit that some people give French names.

"Still not a morning person, Drae?"

I go to the fridge and pull out a roommate's half-empty bottle of sangria, take a greedy swig. "Still work at night, Miss Bisson."

She lets out that greasy cackle of hers. I wince. "Ah! That's right, you still run that ... meat thing on Church Street. Well, the sunlight would do you some good." She squints. "Can't even tell this place has windows."

"Window, you mean."

"What?"

"Back one still needs fixing."

"Oh." She pauses, scans my apartment. "Trash is going be here in an hour."

"Don't have trash, just recycling. Recycling ain't coming today." I put down the sangria. "Do you have the new lease?"

Her eyes refocus. "I take it your loving brood is at work?"

I nod. She whips around her bag. She goes to set it down, grimaces, then awkwardly juggles it until she hunts out a stack of papers.

"Here we are!" She hands me the lease.

Like a seasoned scholar, I flip through it. "Increasing. Again?"

"Oh, absolutely." She smiles so sharply I imagine it slicing through her cheeks till her half her face falls off.

"You upped it last year, too. Floor still needs leveling. Damn incline makes it feel like I'm always falling."

"Yes." She sighs about a breath too long, shakes her head as if she's swatting flies. "More and more demand. And it's costly, keeping these old buildings up to snuff. But I like to think it strikes a balance between utility and character."

"I'd take less of each if it meant no rent hike." I close the contract. "Getting really hard to afford this place."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry! So many great people are just flocking to the North End." She looks at me with that iron-hot stare. "In fact, I'd say their livelihood grants them a much larger appetite."

A high-pitched scream cuts in, startling me so much that I drop the contract, and it too slides back to my bed. Something gurgles, like a sick thing gargling off a cold.

"The fuck is that?"

"Progress!" Miss Bisson cackles. "Looks like the Zimmermans are moving in!" She slips back outside. "Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Zimmerman!"

Curious, I grab the sangria and creep out.

At the unit next door looms a gangly corpse. It's missing a lower jaw, and the tongue drapes down like a tie. Its grey skin has occasional rips, and dark, clumpy organs mush in and out every time it sways. It wears a hodgepodge of clothing, seemingly assembled from random outfits. The eyes are a ruddy yellow, like the inside of a bruised banana.

Another gawky thing springs out of the unit. It's similar, but it has its lower jaw. Half its head has long mangled hair, the other half misses a scalp and skull entirely. Its flesh sags heavier, the muscles and fat sloshing around as it moves. It's dragging a woman by her hair with godlike ease. I recognize her: Maria. She works at the Rite Aid by Church Street. She buys a pulled-pork wrap from my stand every Friday night. She never tips that much.

Still hungover I become queasy; the smell of flesh gone to waste burns my throat. The surprise of such a sight needles my skin, and I almost drop the sangria.

Maria's squeals turn to hopeless moans. I stand, too nauseated to react. She flails as the thing yanks her around like a piglet.

Maria looks at me. "Drae?"

I'm supposed to say something, but the creatures pounce on her first. They rip through her like a piñata, with an explosion of blood and flesh. Blood flings on Miss Bisson and me. She dabs the spots on her blazer with a handkerchief.

The half-skulled one rips out a long strand of Maria's hair and tries to stick it on her own, but lacking half its scalp it misses, and just jams it through to its brain. The

other one scoops hunks of Maria into its mouth, frothing, but lacking a jaw the pieces just fall back down again.

All of this is too much for my stomach. My tongue quivers and sweats so I stumble back inside. I still hear their slushy feast.

"They're in business, like you. Believe they opened that new café on Church Street." Miss Bisson smirks at me. "And I hear they're just dying for some good street food!"

Away from that smell my stomach eases. I chug the sangria, weigh my options.

"Apparently."

"Just think of what it'll mean for your business to have such well-off consumers."

I go back to my bed and sit. I throw the now empty bottle of sangria on the ground, rummage through the blankets, and find my flask. "Do you think the ... Zimmermans like pork?"

"I'm sure they will." She laughs, tilts her head. "That one certainly had a lot of fat on her!" She comes back in, picks the contract off the floor, and puts it on a stand by the front door. "Please make sure your roommates see this. I'll return tomorrow and collect it, signed." She pauses, that fancy wide grin cutting across her face again. "Or not." She trots out, and I stand up.

"Miss Bisson, I don't know if I—"

"Oh! Remember, trash is in an hour."

"I don't want to be—"

"I know, recycling isn't today. With your tastes I can see how you'd have more recyclables than trash."

I wiggle my flask at her. Her eyes cast that broiling stare again.

"Remember, sometimes it's easier to just throw some things in the trash." She leaves.

Part of me wants to go after her, but I suppose I don't have any real options. With an uncanny grunt one of the things pokes around the doorway. It's the one with the tongue tie, and it has Maria's arm jammed down its throat. Trying to swallow the arm whole, it chokes, and bits of innards fall out. It reaches out to me, and in utter panic I drop my flask, rush and slam the door, and plunge my apartment into darkness once again, before I finally vomit.

I'm rattled. I brought my flask filled with Tesco Classic gin, but I've yet to take a nip. I've almost finished my work day and the night sky grows stale. The salty smoke spewing from my grill dwindles with the wafting fog, and the needling of rain on street bricks blends with the hissing from my grill. The fog is so hazy it blurs the little Church Street shop lights into vague, gassy swirls. The moon still roams above, but the darkness grows frail, and I imagine that those little lights sneer at the inevitable retreat of the night. I'm about to turn off my grill when a dim figure emerges from the haze. It

rocks back and forth like meat hanging in a cooler, slowly lumbers closer with sloshing stomps, in sets of three. I catch a whiff of something sugary and rotten. I have a customer.

“Hello, Mr. Zimmerman,” I stutter.

It’s the one with the tongue tie. There’s a pause, as those ruddy yellow eyes stare back. One pupil seems to be slacking off toward a corner, and I can’t even locate the other.

I reach for some fresh pork. “What, uh ... what would you like?”

Before I retrieve a slab he lunges at me with a gargling snarl. I jump, fall to the ground and miss his swipe. Chills fizzle throughout my body. I think of leaving my stand and running away, but something lands on my grill with a wet thwomp.

I slowly stand up. An arm sizzles on the grill, with the spongy skin smoking, the pooling blood burning, and a glossy Tiffany bracelet slacking off the wrist. The thing sways, waiting. I don’t react. It moves its arm and I flinch, but it’s just groping around its pocket. It throws a wrinkled scrap on my counter, with blood smearing Jackson’s face.

“I only cook pork.”

It groans, points a bent finger at my menu stand: *Classic Vermonter, pulled-pork wrap* – \$8.99. It tosses another scrap on the counter, and this time it’s Franklin’s face. I inspect those paper-faces. They don’t look mortified – they remain silent, stoic, ignore their grotesque surroundings.

“Well, guess if they don’t mind.” I grab my spices and utensils and set to work as the thing just sways, watching. Its cheeks widen and its jiggling tongue tie rises, and I think it’s smiling.

Faces

By Erin Kelly



Don't Throw the Ball

By Emilee Conroe

My dad says. There's a bad man here.
He drives a rusty, cement colored Toyota
Like a scene from some horror movie
Along our neighborhood block.
 Next to the park we stand in.

There are kids in the grass across the street.
There is me. There is the ball that now cowers at my feet.
The car is a vexed tiger, an irked predator,
A cheetah stalking houses on the suburban Serengeti,
Deciding which family to sink its teeth into.

I need a phone, my dad says. Get inside.
The car still hunts, haunches raised, teeth bared
Rumbling like an imminent thunderstorm
 Hungry, slobbering, unfathomable.

It stops in front of innocent blue shutters,
A cranberry door.
Caught in headlights
The house frozen, like me,
Watching wide-eyed as a flashlight pulls apart patterned curtains
Peeking through unsuspecting living room windowpanes.
My dad is going to call the police.

A woman steps out of the front door, her loud voice a visible shield.
She has a baseball bat.
All I have are goose bumps.
 Two vultures are now dancing.
They circle each other like stricken lovers.

There's a moment of silence.
Prey and predator face off,

Until a Chinese boy steps out of the car,
His hands held high, a tower in surrender.

He doesn't speak English well,
Lost looking for 235 Victory Circle.
A leopard with Kung Pao chicken,
And the teeth of a gazelle.

Baby Teeth

By Izzy Siedman

Sometimes in the morning,
as my sleep laden lips graze the soft skin of my upper arm,
I long for there to be deeper things
beneath its tender surface.
I want sometimes
as I stare at the swoop of my palm,
to be filled with something harder.
When I shake someone's hand for the first time,
I want to tell them "you'll never know when I leave you."
I want to drag unforgiving fingernails
painted deadly dark colors
across every sinking surface,
and believe in my own pain.
Instead I know that I rarely walk away
My back is in the highest acquaintance with the dark
and my chocolate eyes are chalked with jealousy
for the black things my shoulder blades have seen.
Perks of being an optimist.
I know that when I do leave,
I will kiss your forehead
and wish you well.
My fingers will linger long.
Because despite my teething
and my temptation to tear,
there is only fleece behind these ribs.

Alone Time

By Riley Hoff



Half of One

By Mackenzie Baker

my mother never made me blackberry pie, she wanted me to know how to make it myself, so that i could quench my own thirst as i licked my lips, and learned that half a dozen eggs, was the same as six.

the blackberries i pick from my aunt's yard stain my hands. she never calls anymore. and i wonder how much that has to do with time and how much it has to do with my mother. i guess it just takes six dozen of a person or half of another to lose a place to stain your fingers.

blackberries tumble out of black tongues leaking black syrup like needles oozing whatever your drug of choice may be, a high is just a high, it's six of one, half a dozen of the other.

i get off by licking the sides of buses as they pound slush and salt into a melting winter, if i lean too far my head will explode, and i risk becoming half of one and six dozen of another.

i learn about the places we don't think about, the starving street children who can't think of cars. i am too far away, i slouch, i place myself between the wall, the professor writes on the wall, i lick the wall, the minutes tick, i start to slip and time finds a way of passing into six minutes or half a dozen.

i'll take cliff diving over uprisings any day. i'm sick of all your insane demands, stop inviting me to protests on facebook, i'll never show. i'm a man on fire and i'll take kicking or screaming, but not both. it's six of one, half a dozen of the other.

the bus i take to Boston whirs by and i wonder if the people i see in cars are standing still, how many of us are actually moving? where are we going? is half a car, six dozen in a place where cars are scarce- the ones we don't think of?

blackberries are never as sweet as i want them to be. i'd paint them on my body if it weren't for me having eaten them all. i'll play with a dozen on my stomach and leave you half a berry to suck on.

i lean into your mouth, and you show me the universe of stars beneath your tongue. the sweetness of blackberries swallowed up by your breath which tastes like the sound of light- years whirring by. maybe it's six million stars, or maybe it's half a dozen.

a blackberry cut in half reminds me of how i would feel under the light of introspection, splayed out on a lab desk waiting for you to notice, the juice from a blackberry was too personal for me to taste, so i let it go to waste, it was half of one or six dozen of another.

i let time take it's place and i wonder about the clouds. what a silly way to pass the time, just existing, and not bettering themselves, i say as i take time to tell you about the weather- it was that or talk about us together, half of half a dozen is three more minutes of talking to you.

six blackberries stained the carpet again and i luxuriously dragged my nails through their messy insides, licking my fingertips. i wanted to crush them all and feel some semblance of control in my shaky fingers. i wanted more than six but all i had was half a dozen, squashed on my floor.

i take careful measurement of the minutes gone by since you made my bed, what a simple way of saying fuck you. i undressed that night and wrapped myself in your neatness, what a simple way of picking through numbers, half of one or six dozen of the other.

i find a cup of fresh blackberries on the corner of main and st. paul, i wonder what farmer would have thought to leave them alone. to wilt in the afternoon sun and to never say sorry. i pick them up and toss them back, it's all the same when they're inside you, six of one or half a dozen of the other.

the way you biked past my window was always arbitrary: you were never quite sure of where you were headed. your young, skinned, bleeding knees were so careless and healing, how i wish i could do the same. i'll find comfort in counting my scars, six exactly? or half a dozen?

you fed me blackberries from a fresh box you said you had picked but i knew you never had the time. simple intimacy couldn't satisfy you now or ever before. i keep writing all the same, to me you were always just half of one and never more.

Amnesia

By Lauren Murdock

Mother, I weep
when the autumn breath
floats through the window
and hugs my uneasy bones.

The coffee pot steeps
on the kitchen counter
and you are like a religion
as I read the ridges on your thighs.

Alhambra Qalat
or the postcard on my nightstand
ticks like a crocodile
as you beg for uncertainty.

I hear the dripping
of rusted pipes
and brimming laundry
paining to kiss the musty floor.

I feel secrets slipping
through cracks in the ceiling
and footsteps moving
to the pulse of our breath.

These were rainy days,
aging days where sun was
a shimmer on lace curtains,
silhouettes painted on walls.

Maybe we burn like birthday candles,
maybe we love in sections
but maybe the warmth I wept for

our lady of the bridge

By *Emily Johnston*



A Quiet Morning

By Christian Soychak

Thin beams of morning sunlight peeked through window shutters, illuminating slivers of passage across age-old parchment. Flipping a page, a young woman adjusted circle-spectacles resting on her nose. Emerald eyes carefully scanned across the curved writing, occasionally flicking to tiny illustrations etched into the book.

Adding another note to the margins, she set her quill beside its intricately carved inkwell, hand moving to grasp the steaming mug beside it. She inhaled the ground coffee scent, reclining in her chair and bringing the cup to her lips. As she drank, the wizard enjoyed the bitter yet sweet taste, along with the utter silence of the room, aside from the faint singing of song birds outside. Yet as it usually was, she was unable to enjoy those pleasures for long.

"Sybil!" A boy her age stormed into the room, clutching a blanket around his nightgown. "There is a bear in my bed *again!*"

"Well, that's certainly unfortunate," Sybil replied, setting the mug beside her, adding in a mutter; "*for the bear.*"

"I heard that! Get rid of it right now!" He emphasized his point by stomping on the wooden floor.

Sighing, the girl wondered how Milo managed to do anything on his own. Then she remembered that he didn't. "Would it kill you to say please?"

"I'm gonna kill you in a minute! I refuse to live in these sort of conditions!" Another stomp. He would damage the floor at this rate, and only now did she begin to appreciate his immaturity.

"Fine," lifting a hand, Sybil snapped her fingers, and the bear in question popped out of thin air, sitting at the dining room table. Looking quite surprised and disgruntled, the beast glared around the room before finally catching sight of the breakfast meal set before him, which it immediately began gorging itself with.

"Sybil! *That is not what I meant!*" hissed Milo, edging away from the flying scraps of eggs and bacon. "It is eating my breakfast!"

Sybil held back a smirk. "Correction, he's eating *my* breakfast," she countered, dodging a stray waffle. "When was the last time you made your own food?"

"Could we please stay on topic! There is a bear at the table!" His foot met the ground once more. Sybil cracked a smile at the thought of him breaking through.

"Yes, and by the looks of it, he's famished. I don't mind if he has a bit of my food."

"It is eating *all* of our food!"

Sybil looked over, eyebrows raised at the creature's massive hide threatening to break the spindly chair it sat upon. "Well, he is a bear. His helping might be a bit bigger than yours or mine."

"I-! Would you-!" he sputtered, face flushing. "I don't care what his serving size might be! I don't care if he's famished! I am sick of you letting random animals in here so you can test your spells!" This comment actually sparked her attention.

"What?" the girl turned to him in surprise. "When was the last time I used magic on an animal around here? I thought I stopped after that whole owl-moose debacle."

He was upon her in a matter of moments. Face inches from hers, he somehow managed to keep his voice restrained through gritted teeth. "If you mean to tell me that the fact that I woke up next to a gigantic bear in my bed this morning had nothing to do with you or your magic, than you really are insane! Now get rid of it this instant!"

For a few long moments nothing happened, the pair staring each other down as the bear moved on to a platter of scrambled eggs in the background.

Finally, the young wizard let out a sigh. "Alright, alright, fine."

"Good. Thank you." Milo moved as Sybil stood and stretched, placing the leather book beside her morning coffee.

Seeming to sense his meal was about to come to an end, the bear looked over at the girl, egg plastered across its face. "C'mon, let's go," she began. Whining, the creature gazed from Sybil to the food and back. "Yeah I know, but what he says goes. Wouldn't want to upset little miss pampered." Milo shot her an incredulous look. "Sorry, *mister* pampered."

The beast's great hide rose in a sigh as it clambered off the chair. The wooden frame remained mangled from the weight, it's arms outstretched as if praising the sky in thanks for its sweet release. But as the creature began lumbering over, the young wizard raised a hand to stop it. "Wait a minute. You know what you forgot." The bear huffed, turning and pushing the ruined chair back to the table with a nudge from its nose.

Nodding in approval, Sybil led the way to the door as Milo watched in utter disbelief. "I'm going back to bed. And there better be nothing else that wakes me up!" And with his threat said, he marched back to his room, blanket still trailing behind.

As she held the door open, Sybil watched as the bear shuffled off the front porch and into the woods beyond, occasionally pausing to lick syrup from its paws. Silence once again enveloped the cabin, and thankful that the situation was over, Sybil rolled up her sleeves to start cleaning the mess. With a snap of her finger a sponge appeared in her hand, and, enjoying the quiet, she set to work. She did, however, pretend not to notice that the the door had been left open.

Castle

By Sky

I look at him, and I see a castle.

Somedays, I sit in the grass beside him,
And watch the way the sun falls over his face.
On these days, his drawbridge smile beckons me closer,
Allows me to search for cracks in his walls,
To run my fingers over the shattered bricks in his defenses.
I hold my breath,
And tuck pretty words into his empty spaces
Hoping he'll continue to stand tall
Somewhere between history and a fairytale.

On other days, archers aim through the windows of his eyes.
I know he's not aiming at me, but I still flinch
Every time the wind rustles my hair.
Monsters assault him from the inside.
I beg to be let in,
To be allowed to fight the terrors
That seize the hallways of his mind;
Sometimes he accedes, but I think he's afraid
Of what will happen to me,
To both of us,
If the monsters win.

But my monsters look a lot like his,
And when I'm under siege, he gives me a place to hide.
He keeps my heart warm and safe,
Wraps me in soft blankets and softer words.

He's convinced that he's an abandoned house—
Rotting
(regardless of the flowers in his laughter)
Dangerous

(despite his gentle kindness)
Empty
(notwithstanding the worlds that hide behind his eyelids).
But if he's derelict,
Then I don't need to sleep under a roof.
Even when he falls apart,
When I'm forced to keep my distance
From the rubble and debris crumbling around me,
I will look up at him
And see a person who is noble and strong,
Wondrous and breathtaking.

Just like a castle.

Seyon

By Alex Woodward



American Horror Story

By *Eli Karren*

Somewhere in America, Miley twerks to Jay-Z's bar
about her twerking, as self-referential internet darlings
place bets on which Disney Princess will leak nudes

next. Somewhere in America, the classicists have chosen
iconoclasm & begun writing the epic of the EDM
scene, quietly hoping to find a ballerina pirouetting

in the froth. Somewhere in America, Helen Keller
has a perfect score on Dance Dance Revolution,
& Nike is making her a signature sneaker. Somewhere

in America, Nat Geo photographers have moved
back to disposable cameras, & outsourced Instagram
accounts to children from broken homes. Someone

needs those followers, a spokesman says.
Somewhere in America, a group of Amish boys
have caught God on Pokémon Go & debate his release.

They are nervous about the implications of political
asylum. Somewhere in America, Kanye West
has interrupted a Bingo game, or a family dinner,

hopped the barricade at a high school gymnasium
wrestling show & cut a promo on how he is untouchable.
Somewhere in America, the honeybees are making

their own Agitprop; they like the sound of their revolution
being broadcast through Bumble, but are still working
on the infiltration plan. & somewhere in America,

some of us have gotten away; Molly Ringwald

& Jeff Magnum sip luke-warm Miller Lite & write a thesis
on the Marfa Lights. But, somewhere in America, fame

is a white bronco traveling down the California 405,
Schrödinger's Orenthal holds a starting gun to his head;
fading in and out under streetlights, existing, exiting, etc.

the lion tamer

By Emily Johnston



This Time

By *Emilee Conroe*

The car headlights sweep up the drive, cutting through the fog of my indecision. He's cheating. I can feel it. A nausea of the heart, a sickening, sticky, violent throb I conceal the moment his muscled frame walks through the door, carrying a single grocery bag from Sally's. It's all very innocent, bringing chocolate frosting and pound cake home after a late evening run.

He's done this every night, for the past two weeks. Ever since work started running late.

"They were having a sale, heard about it on the way home from the office," he mutters, by way of explanation. "I know how much you love pound cake."

Shuffling into the kitchen, the creak and slam of cabinet doors slices at my composure.

Anytime now, he'll say it...

"How was your day?" I ask, in some banal, monotone attempt to keep normalcy between us.

It grows quiet for a moment. Reappearing before my seated body, his eyes glisten like he's just assaulted them with Visine.

"I have to step out, there's a meeting. Work, unfortunately, just hasn't stayed on schedule lately."

He steps forward, hesitating before he leans down and kisses my forehead reverently.

This is the worst part. The feel of his warm fingers curling around the nape of my neck.

"I love you. I'll be back late. Don't wait up, Nina."

He's out the door before he hears my response.

"Yeah," I say, grabbing the set of car-keys from the hook on the kitchen wall. "I won't."

It's hard to follow him at first. I'm no detective seasoned in the arts of professional surveillance. There are hardly any cars on the road tonight, congested with fog from the passing chain of spring thunderstorms.

When he finally pulls into the cemetery just off Main Street, I almost turn around. The graveyard? That can't be where he's been all these nights, mourning at the tombstones of his mother or father, buried just on the other side of the southern Sycamore tree. He's had to have been with her, the leggy, ripe brunette who sits on his lap and

laughs too loudly at his jokes. So many nights I've lain in bed, feeling the cold from the side where he should be, imagined them singing karaoke together, or getting wasted, or having sex in some cheap, impersonal hotel on some scratchy, impersonal sheets, her lipstick smudged over everything.

Maybe tonight they're changing it up, fooling around in a mausoleum, the full force of their vitality hypnotizing, their passion electric against the jealousy of the dead.

When I'm almost sure he won't hear me, I follow him on foot, down the lone dirt path that spans the length of the town burial ground, the length of our twelve-year marriage. Past the tombstone of our honeymoon, the burial plot dedicated to our erotic years in college, the crypt of our fervor, our incessant need for one another. We live in a small town. Not many people die here. But somehow, we did.

Unexpectedly he hooks a sharp right, and I duck behind a group of headstones, crouching on the mossy ground. I'm crying now, and muffling the sobs. Somehow, we're only a few yards apart.

Hunkered behind the figurine monument, I take a deep breath. I've come all this way.

He's sitting on an old, decaying bench. Legs crossed. Eyes cast to his knees. She'll be here, any moment. Our divorce will strut in, all tall, tanned, and wearing too short of a dress. She'll seduce him, with her cherry smile and five inch heels. And I'll stay here, weeping on the shoulders of headstones.

For a while we sit and wait, the voyeur and her muse, who, the more I look at him, doesn't seem misplaced at all. If I didn't know any better, I'd say he looks almost pained, his jaw ticking, ticking, ticking.

When the silence nearly crushes me, there's a sudden chime, and my husband's eyes jerk to a spot on his left. I can't see what he sees, not around the miniature mausoleum I'm stuck behind, but I don't dare move.

After a few moments of nothing, his face goes pale, white even, his whole body shrinking, shriveling, until he's the size of a small boy, face sunken, skin ashen, dripping off of bones that shouldn't be visible.

"Please," he begs, voice so raspy it hardly sounds human. "Please, just a little while longer. I know I can save this. I have to."

A figure appears, blocking the apparition of my husband with a veil of black cloth. I should get up, I want to get up and save him, but I realize I'm snared, hand-cuffed by skeletal fingers that have woven their way up through the dirt and around the small bones of my wrists.

The figure turns after a moment, revealing a yellowed clock face, two giant, antique metal hands that emaciate my husband further with every tick.

"Please," I hear him whisper. He's crying, the sound of tin cans in a gentle breeze. "Just one more day with her."

Wednesday

By Emily Johnston



wrapped in the drifts (february children)

By Anonymous

and as the drifts of wind plow through
our minds with the ease of knives through
flesh

reflect on moments between fresh
snowfall, between fresh
wounds, cauterized by the bonfire and
sewn with needles
from the pines and

with crude spheres do we
build from the ground, craft with our
fumbling cloth-hands, tumbling with our

*new-fallen friends rise from the earth
made of laughter are they
made of youth do they
wave with maple fingers*

sleep with the sun above the clouds
you february children
you halcyon fiends of the icy earth
you souls of

painted flakes with pink of noses and
fingertips and cheeks flushed and
kiss before the fireplace

wrapped in the fondness of memory

question|process

By Dominique Boccanfuso



4 Months and a Couple of Years and 24 Hours or so

By Calum Buchanan

The nights were late then,
2 or 3 AM mostly when I'd pass
through security, eyes glazed, into the lot,
mounds of white snow tinted
yellow by a few lonely street lights-
Heaven's security blanket.

Gas from the world's tallest transvestite across the street,
home to the girl and the Saudis we were living with,
still hollow-eyed from acid taken days prior,
to sit and drink and smoke until forced into bed.
You look weary baby I said.
We were all hollow-eyed somehow.

7:30 I'm up to drive her to school,
7:50 I'm back in bed,
noon I pick her up and her shoulders hang down,
she's worn out I know it,
so I give her a few hits and a ride to Dunkin' ,
cheer up baby, we're here.

1:30 and we fix us some lunch,
2:30 and we fuck like there's no tomorrow,
3:30 and I'm back on the road,
past the world's loneliest transvestite,
back to Schodack Landing, to the warehouse
where a buddy painted SLAVE on his chest and back
and spent the rest of his career singing *Wade In the Water*,
loud as he could.

The nights were late then,
and when I passed through security,
quietly hummin' *God's gonna trouble the water*,

the snow was gone,
the grass was starting to grow green again
under those few street lamps.

I walked through my door uneasy,
there was no greeting,
no spun-out Saudis on the sofa,
no call from the other room.
Just a woman who'd decided,
though I knew it was set from the beginning,
she'd had enough. She said
she never much minded being reborn.

"I love you more than my own skin"
By *Dominique Boccanfuso*



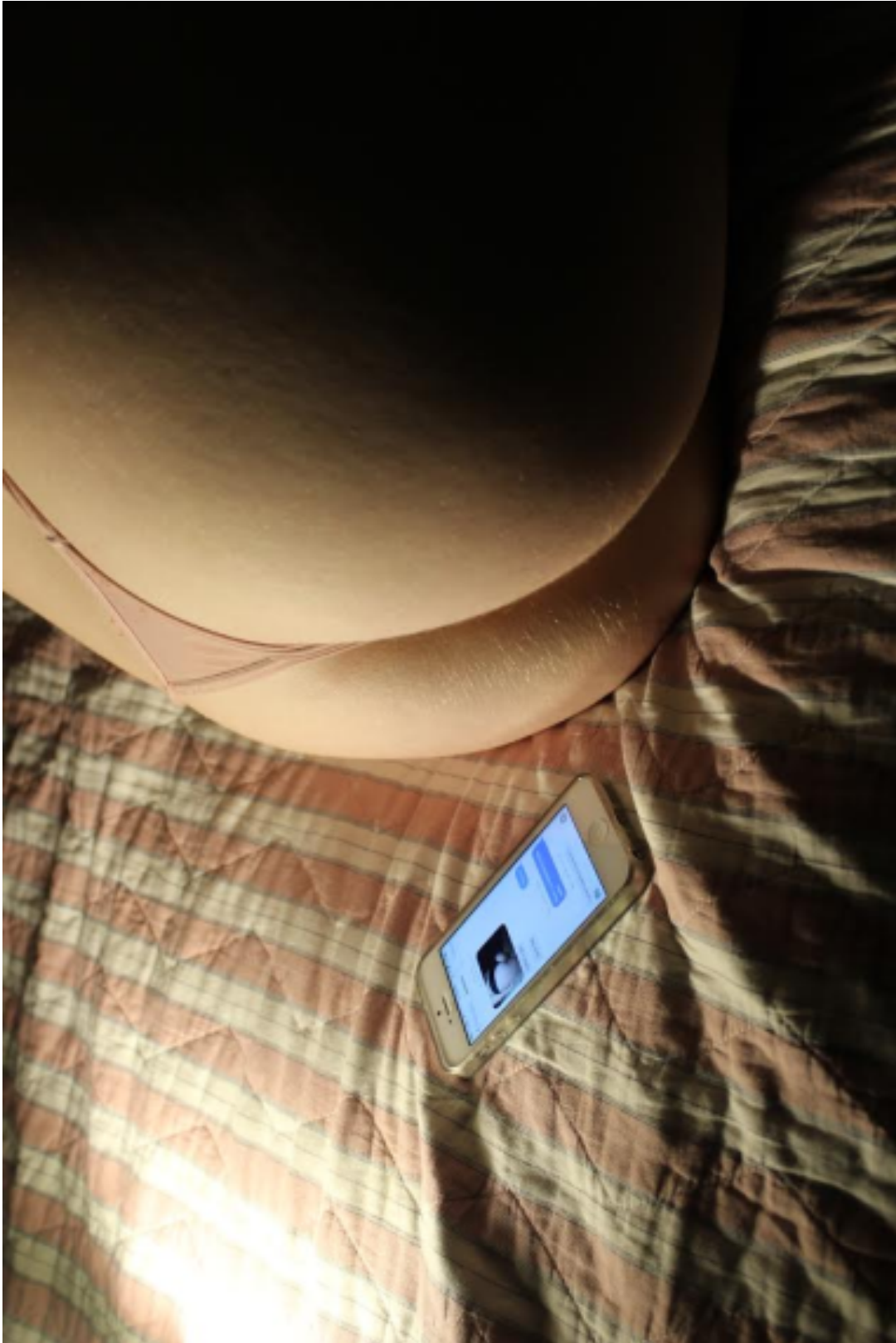
Senseless

By Seth Wade

A mossy stone whips like a bullet, shatters
holy rainbow glass with a torrent of shrieks.
We charge in, swarm like kids after butchering a piñata,
as the candy scraps of Virgin Mary cut our bare feet.
Bags out, we start pocketing
all the chalices, candles & sacred cloth.
Someone hollers, brandishing communion wine
like a trophy. We each take greedy swigs
& pour some on our cut feet. Someone chucks
pew hymnals like Frisbees while someone
else urinates on the altar.
Sated, we stare at the large crucifix above.
The moonlight bounces off the slush
of glass, wine, & blood at our feet,
casting a crimson glow on the Son of God.
"What now?" someone asks. We shrug & leave
out the front door. We forget our sacks of loot & only
take with us the Blood of Christ in our bellies
& bits of Mary in our feet.

Peaches

By Autumn Lee



Portrait of a Small Town where the Flower Shop has Committed Suicide

By Eli Karren

My brother taught me to fold a chess board so tight
I can win a game on a paper crane's wing.

Our neighborhood drowns

in the violet hue of summer stolen, while evening arrives
like blueberries to concrete, a Mason Jar rear—

ending God. Everything

in suburbia wishes it was something else. Mercury
dripping to the bottom of a thermometer dreams

of telling time. And so, it is here,

I can garner inspiration from ambiguity. The shipwrecks
of parked cars and stalled heartbeats glow

phosphorescent in the moon's

unambitious lather. The average town harbors hundreds
of stalagmites, you just need to know where to look.

Past the widows pouring cyanide

into birdbaths, and the flower shop that rouged its petals
with a pistol of pesticide, there is a semi-reluctant truth.

Have you ever seen a crow

perched on nothing? Just waiting in the space between
ideas; where the fire trucks fly by and I remember

how to unfold our origami dawn.

Choose your own adventure

By Jake Mooney

The air in the dungeon is filled with a smothering heat,
the overactive heater in the corner spewing like a volcanic geyser.

The young warrior's number two sword scribbles furiously on his pad of paper,
as he desperately strategizes from his armchair steed.

His comrades surround him, all watching the arcing descent of their twenty sided
oracle from on high,
bringing down the pronouncement of their fate.

In their eyes, he can see a look that mirrors his own,
He can see the people that they want to be, the ones whose stats they have scribbled
on loose notebook paper and whose miniatures they shuffle around the map
laid out before them.

The die bounces on the table,
every impact an echo of a thunderous roar of their unseen foe.

The young warrior looks at his friends' faces, fixed on the oracle as it tumbles off the
side
of their coffee table battlefield, backing out of its way to allow its verdict remain un-
impeded.

They know that they do not have long left in this battle,
soon the mistress of their dungeon will remind them of their impending school day
and force them to gather their two-wheeled mounts and cross the scolding asphalt
plains back to their own dungeons.

The cavern is struck by a deafening silence as the oracle announces a resounding
success, and the warriors rejoice in their critical victory.

The monster is slain and the day is saved,
but they know that this will not be the end of it.

They celebrate with a wild abandon,
passing around potions and popcorn to replenish their strength,

The warrior warns them to keep the volume down, so as not to wake his baby brother, and provoke a wrath greater than that of any monster they could ever face in their cozy basement battlefield.

The young warrior knows that he will have to return to school, where his trusty number two and sacred tome of the fifth edition will not shield him from the enemies around him.

But for now, he loses himself in the adventure with his comrades, worshipping at the altar of Gygax and reveling in their intangible triumph.

Masturbation Dance

By *Dominique Boccanfuso*

Masturbation Dance

In the bathroom/before the shower/after the shower/during/in my bed/on the floor half under my bed/half out.

My mom' s bed/on top of the comforter of course/but under the throw blanket god-forbid someone walked in. On the living room couch/ and my favorite one yet: standing up in the laundry room with a tide-hand-held-battery-operated-stain-treatment-soft- bristle-brush over the pants. Not all in one day/spread out/wide/ but enough to remember/enough.

Usually just with my fingers/ sometimes with those vibrating head massagers with the balls on the end/ just one/positioned just right.

No one would know/ it felt so right/but wrong/the right kind of wrong.

I' ve always known how to make myself drool, even when I thought I kinda wasn' t supposed to.

So tell me, why can' t I teach you to make me feel the same?

I hide how good I am at it from you, the same way I lower my brightness on my computer as I write this in a class of 100 people talking about target audiences and focus groups and other bullshit /and all I can focus on is the Kegels I' m doing under the desk that are undoubtedly turning me on.

It' s embarrassing that I' m embarrassed or ashamed when it comes down to it/down there your fingers glide against me/ I try to guide you/the way I like it/ the way I like it.

But with you I lose my voice/ usually so outspoken/ I *can' t* speak and unfortunately it' s not because your grasp around my neck is too tight.

My 8-year-old self would put my money where my mouth is, but with you I just-

I want you to touch me like a dance/ tune into the frequency between my legs and move to it/ groove to/ make me moan.

I can make my toes curl/ legs cramp/chest rise with two fingers/ sometimes just one.

On the floor half-under-my- bed- half-out/ Charlie horse in my calf on my pink and green shag rug/ head resting on the stuffed cat, Duchess, I still have in my room to this day/ it was good back then,

But I want you now/ you' re more fun/ Those big hands of yours can do small wonders.

So turn me on like my not-so-vintage overpriced record player, put your fingers on my needle and make me fucking dance.

d. B

Fireflies on the Water

By Eli Karren

after Yayoi Kusama, after Michael Dickman

Tonight
the sky is manufactured
The sky is full of LED lightning
bugs whispering to me

I am seeing what Van Gogh saw when he visited Harlem

Taxi cabs kicking up
the bones
of her older sister

The snow melt
revealing scars on her wrists

Back home

her dog is howling at the moon
and the moon is howling back

*

When the door closes

we are suspended
in outer space
Connecting dots and rewriting code
Changing satellite paths

Taking shallow breaths

In (the fireflies tickle your lungs)
Out (light fills the room like confetti)

Infinity stretched before like a sea of mirrors

Motes float in morning
where the sun doesn't rise
it doesn't need to impress you

*

We are back in your bedroom during a thunderstorm

The power
flicking on and off

I keep having the dream where the sky forgets
to pay its electric bill

*

Read me another haiku

Tattoo your journal
along my ribcage
Place your air
between my teeth

I watch sunlight fill a room with no windows

Your house falls apart with memory

The termites green
with radiation
Their revolution

silent

*

Her old bike bell

sounding in rhythm
with Yayoi's cosmos

A digital heartbeat

Fireflies sway like prayer flags in the evening breeze

Grandpa

By *Emilee Conroe*

When I barely reached your waist
I'd pull the quarters from your treasure chest
overflowing at your kitchen table
gold coins from Pirate Ships
buried under six leagues of dirt in your backyard

When I only came up to your shoulders
you let me swim through that sea of grass
your metal detector my snorkel
A button, centuries old and rusted with war
we added to that crusty wooden crate
hidden at the back of your off white pantry cupboard
just behind the canning jars

When I could look into your eyes
the lonely gold rings, misfit toy trinkets and confounded metal clippings
used your mouth - like puppeteers - to tell their stories
I could trace back their origins
Using the movement of your lips
A map leading to the discarded and forgotten

When I came level with your mind
you kicked my mother out of your house
and screamed that college would be a waste of time for any woman,
my future unloved.
And across your kitchen table sat that old junk box
A fourth spectator, glistening, untouched
keeping safe the man I once knew.

Untitled, part of *Gurrri* series
By Dominique Boccanfuso



denim creature (blacken blue-jean)

By Anonymous

if you dig deeper
into the pockets you'll find only
pale, soft denim
and maybe a leftover
apology

worn thin with the pressures
and creases of a moving body
a quasi-balanced creature of mind that
exists within seven dimensions at once—

the first makes mistakes
the second cultivates
the third, fourth, and fifth regret
the sixth is silent
and the seventh never
sleeps

and at the hems, you'll find only
splashed-up mud, blood, and kerosene
crafted from the bottles of glitter
and ink, and if you think
this isn't normal, you should see the
knees

blackened blue-jean with
wisteria embroidered over the
patched patellas
the violet so faded you should see the
(way they walk from a to b and
scuff, kneeling to the moons
waiting to shrink in the cold)

Covered/Uncovered

By Autumn Lee



Trappings of Teal and Rust

By *Emilee Conroe*

Coat your beautiful metal armor
Against the sharp, quick, teeth of your typewriter mouth
Buried under your breast plate
Bakelite knobs and keys
A skeleton's undead jaw
Remington Miracle Tab
Scrawled on your pressed stele slopes.
Gilded serial numbers
Just above your sprawling meadow of pressed letters
Suspended in midair, scattered throughout my imagination
Yellow, blue, green flowers, spring deciding if to fully bloom
Conceived in 1952 by the factory mother Sperry
Late to my 21st century serenade
Of words on pages
Tender like grandchildren
Or sheet music
You were made to be quiet
But you'll play my fingers
Like chords on black piano keys,
Sing with the cadence of a newly beating heart

Landscape with Capricious Colors

Sedona, AZ, glitter on sandstone, 64 x 34 inches

By Eli Karren

A map gorges on topographic lines, a ghost
town collapses under existential crisis.
Here, the spirits sell topaz rings & faux-Arapahoe ponchos

while the abandoned hotels are plagued with elevators
that dissolve up & down at night, televisions
that loop Donner Party documentaries. Here,

where Highway 66 ruptures its seams & reduces
pavement to fraying thread, I now haunt your ghost,
& crumple to the earth in prayer over red rock

& prickly pear. Here, where your sediment subsides
to tattoos of lupine & cedar cones, hollyhock
dances down my arms & hyacinth rises

from my feet. Killing you should have felt
like salvation, but was a destruction
as devoid as the still life of my bed, once you left

blankets scattered like sandstorm scuttle. Here,
where I couldn't paint you, I painted new landscapes,
to which my sweet Anasazi Ozymandias vanishes

under sandstone & glitter. But that too, felt wrong.
Your hands, illusory, yet constricting, like the too-sweet
scent of sarsaparilla, the noxious kiss of ocotillo lip balm.

This publication favors no form or content above any other; it is simply a journal of art that thinks. Our success is impossible without the creative talents of our contributors who continue to reawaken the journal's spirit. Our goal is to stimulate and support an artistic community, which will unify and strengthen the university as a whole.

*Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue.
Vantage Point wouldn't be possible without you!*