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### The Independent Ed. 7 Vol. 2

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*The  
Independent*







# The Independent

ED. 7 VOL. 2      SPRING 2020

ROLLINS COLLEGE CENTER FOR INCLUSION AND CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT  
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## Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

This isn't how I imagined writing my fifth and final letter from the editor. Typically, when I sit down to write these opening remarks, I'm in my Sutton apartment, maybe with one of the two CCOs I've worked with during my Indie career (both of whom happen to be my best friends), getting more than slightly drunk (it helps with creativity and word flow!), and laughing at the nonsensical (and nonexistent) SAT-level vocabulary words my more-than-slightly-drunk brain makes up while I write.

When I started this semester, I hadn't reflected much on what my last writing process would be like (that, admittedly, would have been a bit of a weird daydream), but if I had to, at the time, muster up a prediction, I probably would have described something similar, maybe this time instead Facetiming with our current CCO Caitlyn Patel who (again, at the time) would have been studying abroad in Italy, and proudly basking in the exhaustion of having not only finished yet another magazine, but four years of college. Instead, I am here: sitting—sober—in the sunny backyard of my childhood home that doesn't quite feel like home anymore, and definitely still tired, but in a much different and less satisfying way. I won't share too much about my own personal, emotional experiences of coming to terms with the changes and uncertainty brought by COVID-19; there are many pieces within this issue ("Sink or Swim," "Following Orion's Belt," "At the Mercy of the Microbe," and "So We Sing") that do a much better job capturing these feelings and tensions than I ever could in such a short letter.

Skipping the corona talk, then, I instead offer my final goodbyes and closing remarks. What I have always loved most about the Independent, and what makes it all the harder to leave, is that the magazine has served as a haven for both myself and others on campus to critically reflect and question, to share and express radical ideas, and to learn from one another in creative ways. The individuals who have supported the Indie throughout my four years of involvement (whether by writing or simply reading and enjoying) are hands down some of the smartest and most thoughtful and interesting people I have ever met—and I am so incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to interact with them at all. Throughout my four years I have continually sought, with a loving and benevolent iron fist, to make this magazine the best it could possibly be, and I thank you all for sticking with the Independent throughout its various developments, changes, and minor hiccups.

I leave the magazine in the steadfast, strong-willed, and clever hands of Emily O'Malley, who I knew would be a great fit for the magazine from the moment she had the nerve to, as a freshman, ask for the position. Now finishing her second year at Rollins, Emily has continually proven the deservedness of her now-claimed title, contributing some of the most poignant pieces to the magazine and affirming her own commitment to bettering the Independent. I wish her the best of luck in the (humbling) journey that is leading this magazine—I can only hope that it is for her, as it was for me, a source of immense challenge, growth, and fulfillment. Thank you all again—and let's overthrow this damn system!

In solidarity,  
**Kenzie Helmick**  
Editor-in-Chief

## Letter from the Almost-Editor

Dear Reader,

I have been a writer for as long as I can remember. If there really is nothing to writing except sitting down at a typewriter and opening a vein, then I have bled across laptops, notebooks, and Post-It notes. As an English major and Writing minor, I have come to believe that anyone can write, as long as they have something to say. And in my time as a writer and copy editor for the Indie, I have come to know this humble publication as a place where the audacious voices of those writers can be heard. Essays on politics, feminism, reproductive justice, mental illness, representation. Fiction and poetry that explore what it means to be human. Art series that highlight a spectrum of emotions. All this and more has found a home in the Indie.

Much of that is thanks to Kenzie Helmick, my predecessor. She has led this publication with pride, helping individuals from every corner of the campus community share both unique talents and unifying themes. Kenzie is in a league of her own, a strong personality recognizable all across Rollins. As she graduates and gets ready to change the world, we all find ourselves prescient of the day when we will say we knew her when.

I have big shoes to fill as editor-in-chief, but I'm not afraid. I have you, dear reader. As long as you have something to say, I will be here to listen. The Indie is a perpetual work in progress, and we will work together to ensure that it is a space for the creativity and intellect of our campus to flourish. Together, we write. Together, we read. Together, we are the Indie.

I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Sincerely,  
**Emily O'Malley**  
Almost-Editor-in-Chief





Photography by Daniela Zini

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I have always hated jumping into water. It all happens too fast. I hate the half-second of panic as I fall, when it feels like I might keep sinking forever. I hate the feeling of water threatening to rush into my eyes and ears and nose. I've always preferred to acclimate before I put my head under. It feels safer, more controlled, and I don't panic.

When I got "the email" on March 12, everything changed. I felt myself falling. Suddenly, I had no firm ground to stand on, and I felt myself sinking deeper and deeper into this uncertain new reality. I did not know how I was going to resurface, and I had no time to figure it out. My friends and I were forced to pack the end of our senior year into just a few days. I ran from one goodbye to another, barely stopping to sleep or eat. I did one last improv show with my troupe, and we did our best to enjoy it, despite how sad we were. My friends and I recreated our first Fox Day photo, watched movies, played games, sang karaoke, stayed up late talking, and tried to soak in every last second we had. We helped each other pack and clean and by the end of the weekend, we were all exhausted. None of us could believe this was real, and that our time together was over.

I had to say goodbye to my friends the moment I needed them most. We were supposed to be hugging and crying happy tears in caps and gowns, planning our summer road trips together. Instead, we stood dazed and confused in front of each other's over-packed cars, not knowing what to say other than "I love you" and "see you soon." We knew we meant "see you eventually," but that was too hard to say out loud.

Now, I am at home, just an hour away from Rollins. I'm still mourning the loss of the last

weeks of my senior year, but I no longer feel like I'm falling. I'm keeping my head above water. Webex game nights and long FaceTime calls and constantly active group chats are not the same as living on campus with your best friends, but it's something. And the longer we do this, the easier it is to breathe and trust that one day things will be normal again. Our world will be different, and my friends will be scattered across the globe doing amazing things, but we will still be there for each other.

The Saturday after the email was sent, people were lounging by Sutton Pool and the lake, enjoying the gorgeous weather. I joined my friends there, and they suggested we run down Dinky Dock and jump into Lake Virginia. "We HAVE to!" they said, excitedly. I had never wanted to jump into the lake before, but my friends were right. It just felt like something we *had* to do. And so we sprinted down the dock together and leapt into Lake Virginia.

The change was sudden. In the blink of an eye I went from having both feet planted solidly on the dock to being completely submerged in the lake. No firm ground below me, no air to breathe, just water trapping me on all sides. A half-second of panic—I could keep sinking forever, down into dark, unknown depths. But I didn't keep sinking. Instinctually, I beat my arms and legs. My head rose above the water. I turned and saw my friends, all of us swimming and laughing and cheering. Suddenly, I understood why we wanted to do this. Just seconds after throwing ourselves into the lake, we adapted. All of us were treading water, breathing easily. Not sinking, but swimming. Floating. Surviving. ■





# THE SPECTERS

Written by Dave Herbster  
Illustrated by Ghina Fawaz

## Part 1: The specters

*“All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.”*

*-Ernest Hemingway*

One true sentence? Well, here are three.

The grass needs cutting.

The table where I will write looks barren.

I am regularly visited by dark specters in our bedroom at night.

About those specters...

They are shadow figures who are large enough to fill a doorway. They are mostly silent, and they observe me before I realize one is there. I see them with my eyes wide open. I often think I will need to share the room (and even my bed) with them, and so I say to them, “We will have to get along if we are going to share this bed.”

Usually, they don’t speak back.

Their faces are always in the dark of our nighttime bedroom. They are visible mostly in silhouette, but the specters clearly have volume, an imposing physical presence, and it often seems they are dressed in robes and hoods.

Before I turn on a light to confront them, or before Jani, my partner, sees them, they dissolve. They dissolve into the shape of a doorway or the curved shape of a piece of furniture.

They always leave me feeling like the doorway or bureau has an alternate state of liveliness. And that I will see another shadow sometime soon. And this has held true so far, as I am visited once every ten days or so.

After they leave, I conclude that I was not awake but dreaming with my eyes open.

I’m never really sure.

I will add this—the specters have always been anonymous. I have never recognized them, nor have

they identified themselves to me. Until last night.

## Part 2: Frank

I have this uncle who, at times in my life, I have been obsessed with. His name is Frank DeMill, and he has been dead since his life ended on a French battlefield during World War I.

I was first introduced to Frank when I was handed his photograph. “This is your uncle, Frank DeMill from Winnipeg. He died in World War I.”

Looking at the picture, I couldn’t help but be struck by his slight frame, the innocent features, fair skin, and impending fate.

I would later learn he was:

*Name: Frank DeMill*

*Rank: Private*

*Battalion: 102nd*

*Brigade: 11th*

*Division: 4th Canadian*

*Died: 9-April-1917, Battle of Vimy Ridge*

Other than that, nothing.

In a family where we know each other by the stories told about us, Frank didn’t have one. His life cut off practically before his story really got started. Stopped. No markers. Cut to black.

Or so it seemed, until I opened a book of his. It was a pocket Bible, and the story went that he had carried it with him to France. As far as I knew, it is the only surviving personal effect of Frank DeMill.

It was given to me by my mother upon the passing of her Aunt Helen. Helen was Frank’s younger cousin, and she had kept it as a keepsake of him. When Helen died, the Bible passed to my mother, who in turn passed it to me.

I first opened the Bible on a flight home. As I thumbed through it, I found 26 marks of a pencil that

pointed to some of the richest words in scripture. Those pencil marks were like the essence of Frank DeMill. I pictured his young fingers on a stubby pencil, marking words that spoke to him as he funneled toward war and his death.

### Part 3: Frank speaks

One true thing: I have never seen the face of any specter that has visited me. Nor have any spoken. Until last night.

The specter appeared in the space normally occupied by Jani's bureau. For me, this unfolded in a now familiar sequence. I woke and looked around the dark room. Slowly, My eyes became aware of a shape that had physical volume and presence, and I sensed it observing me.

This one was very close—Jani's bureau was not far from the bed. The specter and I went through the now customary stage where the specter that has been watching me realized that I was watching it.

True to form, the specter moved slowly and deliberately, what appeared to be a hand reaching for a hip, then bent the left leg until the heel could be reached by the right hand.

And here is where this specter broke with convention.

It scraped something swiftly across the heel that came to light like a blue tip match touched to the end of a cigarette that hung from the specter's mouth. In the glow of the matchlight and the newly lit cigarette, I saw the innocent face of someone who had to be Frank DeMill.

I could see he was in uniform as in the picture, except for the left arm of his jacket (which was pinned up at the shoulder).

We locked eyes for what seemed like an eternity until he shook the match out. Then he broke the silence.

"Write much?" he said.

I had been shocked to see his face. And shocked again that he'd spoken. But I had adopted an approach long ago to do all I could to never rile a specter. So I responded in slow, measured words.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Write much? I know you worry about whether you've got a story worth telling. Well, I got one—but I worry you won't tell it right."

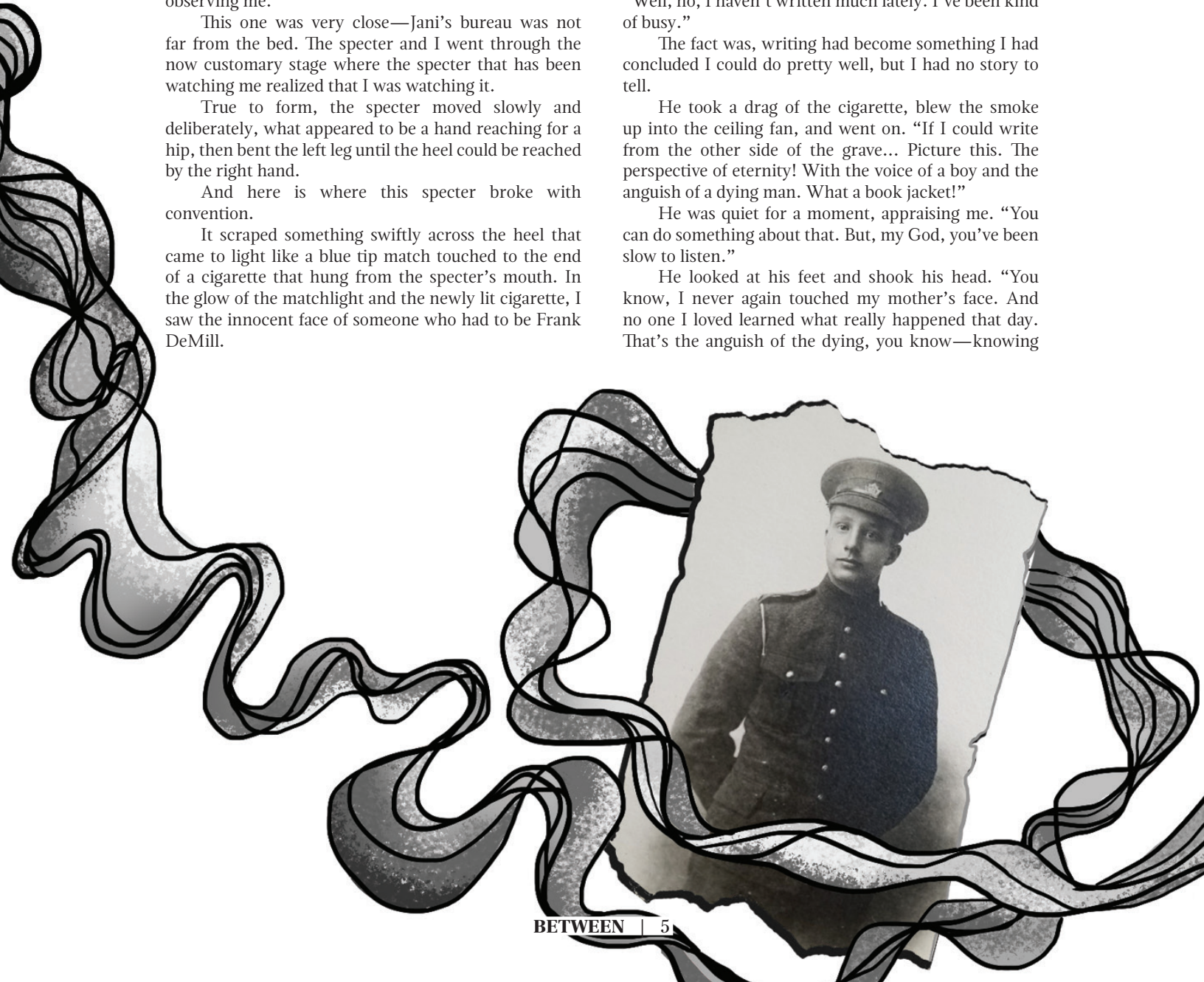
I tried to shift gears and answer his question. "Well, no, I haven't written much lately. I've been kind of busy."

The fact was, writing had become something I had concluded I could do pretty well, but I had no story to tell.

He took a drag of the cigarette, blew the smoke up into the ceiling fan, and went on. "If I could write from the other side of the grave... Picture this. The perspective of eternity! With the voice of a boy and the anguish of a dying man. What a book jacket!"

He was quiet for a moment, appraising me. "You can do something about that. But, my God, you've been slow to listen."

He looked at his feet and shook his head. "You know, I never again touched my mother's face. And no one I loved learned what really happened that day. That's the anguish of the dying, you know—knowing





I HAVE  
THIS UNCLE  
WHO, AT  
TIMES IN  
MY LIFE, I  
HAVE BEEN  
OBSESSED  
WITH.

that no one will know what really happened.”

He seemed to gain some distance from that, and he flashed a half-smile at me. “That’s good stuff, huh?” He took a drag. “My perspective of eternity and your somewhat dull pencil. But we’re all we’ve got.”

It was then that I heard footsteps at my doorway and Jani entered the room. She was apparently finished with the late night TV or the latest novel or Facebook. She entered quietly so as not to wake me. As with all the specters before him, Frank dissolved.

“Did you see that?” I asked her.

“You’re awake,” she said.

“Yeah. Did you see that?”

“See what?”

“The specter.”

“Was there another one? Honey, you worry me. Maybe you should talk to someone.”

She did not even smell the cigarette smoke.

#### Part 4: Various deaths

For years, I had wanted so badly to know Frank’s end, and to write it for him. I imagined the death of the helpless, nowhere-to-hide in a barrage. The mechanized death that rattled from German machine guns. The haunting voices of dying men in no man’s land, cast on their backs like sheep facing the stars, bleeding out, calling for their mothers. I read a number of pieces on World War I and Canada’s fight. In the process, I cataloged a number of deaths and wondered about Frank.

There was the ox’s death in a movie where a man brings a machete down swift and hard on its neck, its knees buckle, and its eyes go wide.

Elijah Whiskeyjack’s death—choked to death in hand-to-hand combat. Looking into each other’s eyes, speaking to each other, faces crimson, eyes crimson, his windpipe collapses. Intimate, but he still must die.

Bull’s death described by Paul Baumer—a shovel swung accurately is better than a bayonet. It can cleave a man open from shoulder almost to heart. A bloody death of gurgling bubbles.

Sean Patrick’s death—shot in the neck by a sniper. Shock and surprise. Windpipe and neighboring arteries explode. Another struggling death.

Kemmerich’s death in the field hospital where it “reeks of carbolic, pus and sweat” and with time to realize that he isn’t going home. He waits for death and



cries because “his little life leaves him.”

Gilberto’s red flower death—in no-man’s land, Gilberto smiles, helping Xavier when suddenly his “face blooms into a red flower,” hit by a bullet. Almost instantly dead before he hits the ground.

Mellish’s death—the German in a French apartment wrestles with Mellish, gets leverage and slowly inserts the knife in Mellish’s chest, speaking softly to him as a baby, shhh, shhh, shhh.

I imagine Frank telling me, “Once I shot a duck. Killed it clean with a single long shot. No visible wound—as if the duck had just gone to sleep for me. There’s this statue in Winnipeg where a Canadian soldier rests his head on the massive wing of an angel who watches over him. Everything intact—body, mind, and spirit. Like that duck—maybe never looked better. Like he’d just gone to sleep in the arms of the angel. Maybe that statue is the instant before he wakes in eternity with his eyes clear, hair combed, teeth brushed.” Frank scratched at a sleeve that contains no arm. “But I doubt it is the instant before he died.”

#### **Part 5: Frank’s death**

But Frank’s death was different. He moved at a clanging run across no-man’s land—pack, appendages, shovel, rifle, helmet making an echoing sound, voices unintelligible in the din, various types of explosions around him, a rolling rumble from the hill, his ears alert for the sound of gas, the muddy ground sucking at his boots, with plugs of mud popping up around him like baitfish chased by flying eels, as the hill ahead flashed like a thousand cameras firing metal that he could sometimes see in his periphery as it dopplered past him. All of this spilled together in the jostled running blur.

He heard Paul Baumer inside his head, “just keep going.” And he would have, had he not found himself suddenly off his feet in the peace of a silent, slow half-gainer. A feeling that recalled hot days jumping backward off the dock, aware, comfortable, surprised by his own grace—ready for a soft landing in the warm August water through which he dove down into the cool, green darkness.

He’d have stayed there on the bottom had not another swimmer shaken him, shouted something garbled in bubbles. He listened closely until he found himself coming to consciousness in no man’s land. Still in France. Still in the shadow of the ridge. He was

being dragged to a crater and unsure whether to trouble his dragger with the insight that he should be dragged gently as it seemed his arm hung by shreds of vein, some skin and a ligament, breaking free from his shoulder.

Frank recalled a story about a German who had his shoulder blown off but put his artery between his teeth to keep from bleeding out and made an interminable crawl back to his trench. Frank felt for his artery with his right forefinger, but found the artery cut too close to the shoulder. He was embarrassed that his fighting day was over.

To his right, it seemed his Mother sat on a root. She had her apron on and appeared ready to put seed in the ground. He found it odd that she would plant so far from home. His eyelids were heavy and he was embarrassed to be dropping off rather than asking about her (it had been so long). Frank’s mother looked quizzically at him as if trying to rectify what she saw—to recognize the aspects of his clothes. This was once his arm.

To his left, the mud grew dark with his blood. She touched fingers to Frank’s eyelids and simultaneously marked the time. She waited until after his eyes were all closed, then she dissolved.

#### **Part 6: A word from Frank’s mother**

When Frank was born, his mother Mary said, “That boy passed through my birth canal like a baseball through a drinking straw.” She’d always known where he was, but now he had passed out of life and she hadn’t sensed it until the telegram. She recalled Daisy Goodwill, who stayed in her room in the dark for weeks as she fought the measles. When she was well, Daisy was amazed to learn that while she was in the dark, the mail had continued to arrive, the birds had continued to sing, and the school yard had remained as full of life as ever. From the day that Mary learned of the battle until the telegram arrived, Mary wondered how she failed to sense that he was gone. From then on, in her bed at night, she replayed him in her mind for she knew that only by rote effort could she keep the curve of his face and sound of his voice from passing out of her recollection.

#### **Part 7: One true sentence**

As I sit here, a faint hint of cigarette smoke passed my nostrils. ■



# FOLLOWING ORION'S BELT

Written by Jack Gabriel  
Illustrated by Elizabeth Fleming

It had been hours since the sun disappeared beneath the veil, taking with it all the color in the world. The fire pit, unlit and filled with burnt beer cans from an unknown past, sat at my feet. Atop the stone ledge surrounding the pit, the soft hymn of Glass Animals radiated into the void, echoless. The cool, brisk air of Northern Georgia whispered to the trees and bushes as it rustled through the foothills around me. In the dark, the clay dirt had lost its reddish hue; it made up the surrounding terra as a black expanse where the ground stretched towards the horizon and morphed into the trees, hiding that apparent junction. The foliage of autumn's past was cast about the clay, leaving but a leafless canopy reaching towards the heavens. That black void filled with nothing but the light of eons past from stars whose positions deceived us. The firmament above seemed like nothing more than a dome with stars about the surface, rotating just above our heads. As if with a long enough reach, one could grasp them. Even if one was to reach that precipice between the Earth and the vacuum, the stars would continue to deceive, being an eternity away. Those celestial beings who reside in a wiser time, they were looked to that night for answers, and even lacking an ability to communicate through nothing more than their movement, the stars spoke wonders that night. This is their story.

A week prior to my spring break outing, we received the news. Schools around the country were closing their doors for the semester and in the back of everyone's minds we knew it was only a matter of time before COVID-19 came knocking on ours. But like a musket ball ripping through a body, I could never imagine the crater something so small could make. Of course, the magnitude of the information was enormous, not minuscule. However, information on its own is meaningless; it has no shape, no size, no dimension. As physical as the past, these abstractions devoid of reality are unable to rely on their own merits. It is only the tangible medium through which it is conveyed that value is conferred. In this instance, that curtailing

medium was an email. It was nothing more than a ping on my phone, a buzz on my watch, and just like that, the framework of time fell apart. Irrespective of the surrounding environment, everything stopped. The disrupted speech never to be finished, the class never to be reconvened, an entire semester of senior celebration, send offs, awards, formals all whisked away in an instant. As time stood still, we were simultaneously transported two months ahead to the future. A future for which we were supposed to be better equipped. A future where none of our goodbyes went unsaid and none of our final moments were rushed. A future full of festivity as opposed to one destined for despair.

And in our agony lied anger. But anger can be a tricky thing, for it is only exacerbated in isolation. From an abstraction of emotions, with no host in which to harbor, no satisfaction can be seized. But the nature of the host is that it must be real. In that moment though, I didn't care about the nature of hosts or the abstraction of emotions. I was upset; I was expecting better; I was promised more; and, I demanded my fair share. But with no face to plaster on a dart board and no effigy to send burning to the pits of hell, no relief could be found in trying to temper my anger of this phantom. And with that, it was easy for my anger to be misplaced. The hardest of angers to overcome are from the times that we are wrong. Rollins made the right call. It was the hardest truth to accept because Rollins was the easiest host for my anger to infect. The cruelest of foes is not the sadist without morals, nor is it the ideologue who indoctrinates all who are around, but rather it is the one who is cold, impassive, apathetic. With this foe, there can be no satisfaction, no redemption, no victory—only acceptance. However, I was not yet ready to skip ahead to that stage of reintegration. For that, I return to the cool Georgia mountains, basking away under the light of the stars.

Away from all the city lights and urban bustle of civilization, it is only the stars that are left to keep us safe. In the dark, the inner machinations of our minds manifest in reality. Darkness, that intrepid



force, manages to seep its way into every crook and crevasse, both inside and out, masking what our eyes tell us to see and revealing what our minds don't want us to. From the glaring eyes out in the distance to the rustling scamper of an unknowable creature behind, from our periphery to the forefront ahead, our mind lets slip the demons it tries to store away. However, where forlorn darkness exists below, the stars offer us their light and their hope above.

Like Christmas lights scattered on a tree, the stars were littered throughout the sky that night. Some bright, others dim, a few too shy to reveal themselves behind the passing clouds or wavering branches. One cluster has always caught my eye: Orion's belt, that triad of glimmering stars, easily recognized by the casual observer. Little did I know at the time, it would act as my guide on this fabled night.

At any given moment, a glance at the sky is but a snapshot. The stars, acting as solemn guardians of all that is wise, have movements so imperceptible as if they are not moving at all. But as I gazed towards my guide, the stars were not still. Dancing about their posts, the stars were always close enough to where they were supposed to be, but never exactly in a point where they could be found. Little halos circled their blaze as they merrily danced through the skies.

But the hours passed and as the playlist dwindled towards its conclusion, it became apparent that the stars were no longer where they belonged. Suddenly out of view, Orion's belt could no longer be found. I searched and searched over my head; it must have been somewhere, for it had disappeared in an instant. Or an instant I had believed, for as each passing second makes up an hour, those passing hours made up a millennium. With only the

passing of songs to gauge the passing of time, each moment in time was experienced at once. Looking up, Orion's belt sat directly above my head, but as my head tilted east, those three stars were identically perched perfectly between two parting branches of a tree, and as my head continued to turn leaving those branches out of view, Orion's belt remained, situated just before the leaves covering up a portion of the sky...

As I sat watching Orion's belt gracefully glide into the unseeable future, I worried. Soon, its light would no longer grace my eyes and the playlist would run out of songs and my buzz would wear off and... The ends would never end and my worry would never cease as I waited for Orion's belt to cross over the horizon. That's when the realization came: my worrying had not been true to its intent and instead, it was merely a cover. I was waiting. Waiting for the playlist to end and waiting for Orion's belt to leave my view, waiting for the school year to begin, waiting for it to eventually

end. It felt as if so much of my college career could be summed up in the same way, especially my senior year. I went from waiting for each meet of cross country to waiting for grad school responses to waiting for formals and Fox Day, awards and graduation. I longed for each milestone to occur, only to cast it aside once it took place. As I waited, life did not wait for me. Each snapshot of Orion's belt felt like an eternity, but in a snap of the fingers, it fell out of view. In the same sense, as the days were long, the months flew by. It was as if each new hour was a cry of desperation, pleading with me to take notice of its existence, rather than longing for its eventual demise.

I was angry. COVID-19 had abruptly ended my senior year. So many goodbyes went unsaid and

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long-awaited moments went uncelebrated. I was waiting for the proper moment, waiting for closure, waiting for the sake of waiting. My anger was not unfounded, but neither could it find a host. That host, of course, was none other than time itself. The worthiest of foes, it was here that I discovered the error of my ways. Because no matter how much I cared, or how much I hated, or how much I screamed towards the heavens that this was unfair, time did not care. It was the hardest thing to accept. I had to admit that I was wrong. I had assumed the future would be different. I thought there would be a proper time where I could say goodbye to everyone and fully appreciate my memories and experiences. I had believed in the myth of closure, and that myth tricked me into waiting for it to come. And blinded by its promise, I missed out on so much of what was going on all around me. As inevitable as the morning sunrise, I took advantage of all that was small, believing it would always be there again.

Now, I stared towards the heavens that night, long and hard. And in the void, I did not see the face of God or the Word of Logos, only the wisdom granted by watching the passage of time. But time is too abstract, and it takes something like watching the stars pass through the trees to truly understand its passage. There is no going back. The past is but a dream, blurred among the clay dirt and the horrible beasts within the mind, and the future is but a fantasy, covered behind the canopy of the trees. It is only on the horizon, in the present where we can truly live, truly survive. ■





# MAPPING

Written by Isaac Gorres

# MATERIALITY

Charting a Course for Contemporary Art Conservation

Designed by Francisco Wang Yu

The Young British Artist Marc Quinn has created sculptural self-portraits from his own blood slurried with frozen silicone since the early 1990s, each of which is entitled *Self*. Relatively recently, the National Portrait Gallery in London purchased the 2006 edition of *Self* cast from eight pints of Quinn’s blood. Whether it is on display in the museum gallery or in the vault, the sculpture must be maintained with industrial refrigeration equipment at a constant temperature of  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  to prevent the self-portrait from collapsing.<sup>1</sup> Another iteration was not as lucky. Allegedly stored in the private refrigerator of eccentric British art collector Charles Saatchi, Quinn’s 1991 *Self* reportedly melted when its enclosure was unplugged for a 2002 kitchen remodel, leaving nothing but a puddle of crimson liquid in its place.<sup>2</sup>

Oftentimes controversial or even vulgar in nature, contemporary works of art have continually revolutionized the art world since their genesis in the latter quarter of the last century. The rise of the contemporary artist is indeed amazing, with the net worth of individual artists such as Damien

Hirst and Jeff Koons reaching hundreds of millions of dollars. Recently, Yayoi Kusama’s traveling *Infinity Mirrors* exhibition created an Instagram-friendly craze as it settled into art institutions across the United States, shattering all predictions for attendance. Love it or hate it, contemporary art is here to stay—or is it? Museums, galleries, and other art institutions are seeing contemporary artworks decay at accelerating rates, frequently eclipsing those of their more traditional counterparts. Contemporary art conservation—long a nonexistent phrase—has surfaced in recent years as an entire field of specialty for museum conservation professionals. This shift occurs as art institutions realize the unique and immediate problems faced by their contemporary art objects.

Many of these issues arise due to the physical composition of the artwork in question, also referred to in the sphere of art conservation as the “materiality” of the work. Material categorization is continually challenged by contemporary art. While earlier artists were largely confined to using predetermined media—often oil paints on canvas



## As museums begin to expand their contemporary holdings to include a diverse range of material objects, they need to evaluate new approaches to art conservation and reevaluate established practices, reaching across disciplinary boundaries to rediscover innovative solutions

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or linen supports in the realm of Eurocentric, “Western” art history—contemporary artists feel immense freedom to utilize diverse materials in the construction of their works. Unfortunately, many of the unique forms of media employed by contemporary artists were never intended for fine art applications. The extensive list of materials has even expanded to include human tissue and the artists’ own bodily fluids in what has been termed “biological media.”

At the 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in the summer of 2019, I witnessed biological media in contemporary art firsthand. In the Giardini venue of *May You Live in Interesting Times*, the Biennale’s central exhibition, the German contemporary artist Alexandra Bircken exhibited an actual human placenta in a glass tank of Kaiserling solution, a preservative concoction of formaldehyde and potassium salts invented in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the act of creating her sculpture, titled *Origin of the World*, Bircken referenced the history of anatomical preservation techniques, many of which already have extant conservation procedures to correct for inadvertent solvent evaporation and eventual clouding of the preservative solution.

Perishable materials in contemporary artworks—often human tissues or other biological media sourced by the artist—raise multiple concerns on the front of art conservation. How can a museum, often with limited resources and zero on-staff conservators, approach a growing number of materials from an art conservation standpoint? How can museums justify collecting contemporary artwork, often outlandishly expensive, if it is destined to degrade? Whose opinions should the museum consider when attempting to conserve contemporary artworks?

Prospective answers to these questions generate much scholarly debate. Increasingly, both contemporary and traditional art conservators are turning to the individual material identity of the art object to dictate their conservation interventions.<sup>3</sup> However, much disagreement exists, specifically in works whose artists intended for their ultimate degradation in the museum environment,

challenging museological values of responsible collection management and reliable preservation in the process.

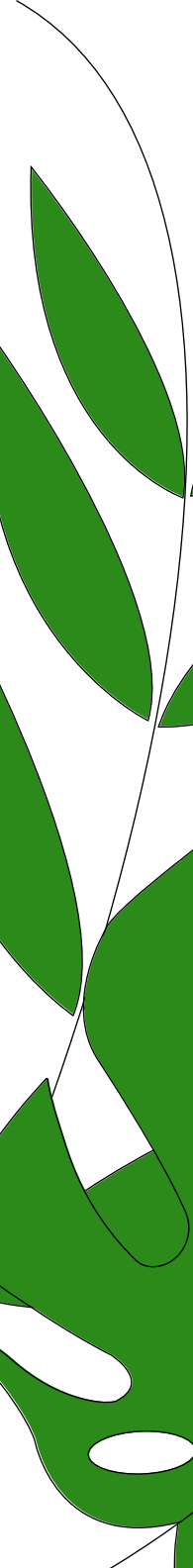
Contemporary art conservators tasked with the care of *Origin of the World* may want to look at the preservation techniques of large anatomical collections, such as the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia. The Mütter contains specimens of diseased human body parts preserved in very similar ways to Bircken’s work. Many of the specimens, including a pair of hands with rheumatoid arthritis in a tank of Kaiserling solution, demonstrate decay that will potentially be encountered by *Origin of the World*. The hands have yellowed significantly since their acquisition by the Mütter, and other examples have fallen victim to accidental desiccation when their preservative solutions evaporated in storage. Indeed, procedures exist for rehydrating desiccated samples, much as one rehydrates dried mushrooms or vegetables. Other procedures detail the gradual changing of preservative solutions in an attempt to restore natural coloration of the specimen. For example, a series of studies by the Western Australian Museum in Perth investigated the switch from aqueous ethanol to aqueous glycerol as a preservative solution for their *Megachasma pelagios* (“megamouth” shark), a change that facilitated the return of native coloration and texture to the 30-year old marine specimen.<sup>4-5</sup>

None of the potential solutions discussed above originated in art museums. In fact, many of the procedures for the care of biological media originate in scientific institutions intending to preserve their specimens for future anatomical study. Ultimately, the decision whether or not to conserve specific artworks is left to the discretion of the purchasing institution. One sentiment is universally agreed upon: as museums begin to expand their contemporary holdings to include a diverse range of material objects, they need to evaluate new approaches to art conservation and reevaluate established practices, reaching across disciplinary boundaries to rediscover innovative solutions. ■



# At the Mercy of the Microbe

Written by Christelle Ram  
Illustrated by Samantha Anderson



I think a lot about what is going to happen to the world after this. The time that I would have likely spent procrastinating on assignments, dreading work, and having short but meaningful social excursions have morphed into times that I lament. I have so much time to lament. Too much. And it seems that these days it is all I do.

What has happened. What is happening. What could happen. What will happen.

The time that I spend with myself is humbling. I realize that I don't know myself. I edge away from my thoughts. I throw myself into activities, feigning productivity, hoping for a new distraction against the ebbs and flows of the thoughts that could very well cripple my fragile peace of mind. Fortunately, or in my case unfortunately, the comforting (i.e.: numbing) tide of routine is gone. Leaving me alone, vulnerable to my thoughts.

These days, I think often of the things I would do had I known that 2020, shortly after my 22nd birthday, would devolve into the absolute shit-show that it is now. Maybe as you make sense of the world around you, you can make sense of it with me. Here are some of the thoughts that have been sitting with me today.

Just five short months ago, I was spending time with my dad. He is not a directly accessible man. It takes approximately five hours by plane to see him. A stop in Orlando, a stop in Miami, and a late-night plane landing that forces my father to stay up past a time at which I am comfortable with him driving. Seeing him is always... something. It is a trip that at times I dread, other times I relish, and now, I long for.

He likes going into the Bush now. He has a farm on a creek. We departed from a stelling on the Demerara river. Leaving 4G, reliable cell phone signal and even the slight whisperings of WiFi. He enjoys being there. He is 75, and the thought that he will not be present for my future graduations, my wedding, and the birth of my children has started seeping into my consciousness. It is a possibility that he will see none of those things. And it is something that I have only realized in my 22nd year. So I venture into the Bush with him. With his library of books and lacking cell phone signal, I try to spend as much time with him as possible. I don't always enjoy the

Bush. But I gladly seep in the memories, aware that they will be gone sooner than they should.

I did not realize that uncertainty would come so soon. No longer would I be able to visit my father, no longer would he be able to visit me. At least for the foreseeable future. There would be no graduation, no family portrait that I had planned. There is no longer anything. We are now at the mercy of factors other than our sometimes tumultuous relationship and refusals to see each other.

I wish I had known that the world that was promised to be my oyster could shatter with a few mutations of a microbe. I planned and God laughed.

Planning is about the only thing I do. I am compulsively obsessed with the future. I am forced to be this way, as I have a partner that lives approximately 8,800 miles from me. I count the months, and then the weeks. And when it can fit on my two hands, I count the days and the minutes and the seconds until we are united. The last time we saw each other, I believe I felt my heart breaking into pieces on the last day. We expected to have an extension of our trip. But those days were cut short. Our time was stolen. And before I knew it, he was behind the glass of the airport, and I was on the other side.

I am painfully conscious of the distance. Aware always of the adages that say it is impossible. Wondering if sheer willpower and love is enough to see anything through. I cry again, picturing him behind the glass. Well aware that the two inches would turn into two feet, two miles. And then two months again, and now, even longer.

I wish I was more aware that we are all on borrowed time. At the whim of the flight schedules that are at the whim of the trillions of microbes that could shift and decimate our world completely. Ultimately, I have become more aware of how absolutely nothing can go as planned. I spent 2020 with grandiose plans of travel, unifications, parties, wine, and graduation. But today, I am at the mercy of a microbe that has shredded my concept of time and future.

This piece ended abruptly, but then again so did my year. I planned and God laughed. Let's try again tomorrow. ■



# Stilled Life

Art by Christine Cole  
Designed by Caitlyn Patel

While the idea of home varies, it commonly conveys underlying feelings of comfort or safety. This concept is often related to the objects the inhabitant keeps. My work visualizes the relationship between self and space through observations and recreations of my personal dwelling, the items it contains, and the actions that take place there. Perhaps paradoxically, I use the medium of video to record the stillness of life in the quiet moments of accumulated keepsakes and clutter periodically interrupted by my passive or active hands entering the frame. By capturing rituals of the everyday, I am able to observe the habits and behaviors which make my house into home.

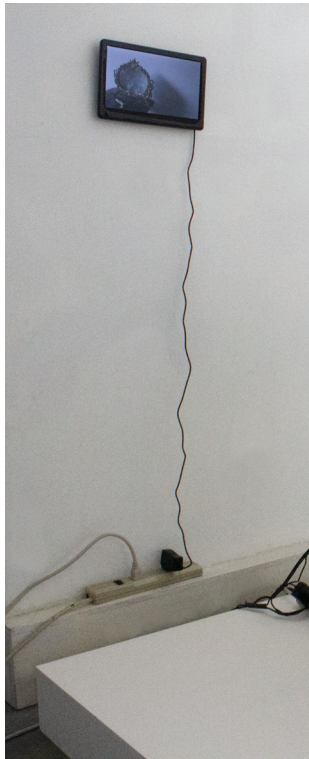
Through representation of symbols evocative of *memento mori*, suggesting notions of death and the fleeting of life, I produce moving, time-based compositions in which each frame of the video functions as a still life vignette. Influenced by seventeenth-century Dutch works as well as contemporary responses to this form, I draw upon this imagery in relation to philosophical concepts of time and repetition to reflect upon memory and perception within the physical world.

Layering still-life in a way that is non-linear, accumulative, and uncanny, individual videos loop continuously on multiple screens installed in a simulated domestic space containing furniture from my own home. This arrangement results in a composition where any single glance appears as a still life in itself. Pointing at the anxious, the absent-minded, and the thoughtful ways of creating home space, I ultimately ask viewers to question the emotional value of things and the ways we choose to control the world around us in the search for the peace of home. ■













*Untitled Still Life*  
Four color video monitors and wooden side table  
Dimensions variable  
2020





WE DON'T HAVE TO

# IMAGINE

## *Ourselves into Love Songs Anymore*

Written by Sanjula Rajat  
Designed by Christine Cole

The television series “I Am Not Okay with This” features mysterious superpowers, flying bowling balls and exploding heads, but it is fundamentally an exploration of a lesbian love story that does not attempt to placate straight viewers for a single frame. It is a show centered around lesbians, yes, but it is crucially also a show that is unapologetically created for teenage lesbians and bi girls, not one that attempts to make a straight audience comfortable, as so many films and television shows that feature ‘gay representation’ do. The soundtrack of 80s love songs operates as a backdrop to explore the budding relationship between the lead couple, the telekinetic Syd and her best friend Dina.

Early on in the final episode, Dina and Syd sit on the bleachers, the long-awaited resolution of the tension that has been building up between them. They laugh, trade inside jokes, Dina even rejects a cute boy asking her to Homecoming saying she’s “so over boys right now,” and asks Syd to go with her instead. This scene could easily be passed off by the show’s creators as the reconciliation that would both act as the lesbian ‘representation’ that they talk highly about, but leave unexplored on-screen besides a tipsy kiss at a party. Leaving gay romance arcs at a

point that is implicit or unspoken is a tactic that many films take, often because it serves the narrative best, like in “Carol”, but also sometimes because it allows their straight viewership as well as creators to engage in the self-congratulatory exercise they call ‘gay representation’ without taking the risk of being overt and actually engaging with the reality of queer love. This leaves gay representation in mainstream media as nothing more than lip-service that exists as a product for publicity’s sake rather than a genuine attempt to explore rich queer narratives. As Collins writes, “how little these faux-radical acts of representation mean in the scheme of things, how little they actually do to enliven, reflect, or explore the lives of queer people or, just as urgently, *challenge* the norms that have made this representation necessary.”<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, these flimsy attempts at representation exist mainly to reinforce heteronormativity and they further relegate gay relationships to the margins even as their efforts are heralded as revolutionary.

“I Am Not Okay with This,” though, actively and blatantly refuses to do this. Right after Syd says yes, ‘Here Comes Your Man’ by Pixies starts to play. It’s tongue-in-cheek, almost, this classic straight love song playing over a montage of them getting ready to go to





Homecoming together. As Thomas notes, “Pop music, for most of its history, has relegated the expression of gay love to the subtext, so there’s an audacity in Felder’s repeated selection of overtly straight music to score a lesbian love story.”<sup>2</sup> The soundtrack of straight 80s love songs is a deliberate choice of reclamation and defiance when played over a lesbian love story, but ultimately it tells young lesbians and bi girls that their love is allowed to feel like this, too, and that queer love is not a novelty of the modern age. There is a unique isolation in being young and gay and feeling like nobody has ever been a girl that loves other girls, and the show’s messaging here is for those girls.

Another extremely common story element of so many queer movies is homophobia in some measure. It has been used as a narrative device in so many ways, from the gay conversion camp where Megan and Graham fall in love in “But I’m a Cheerleader” and the casual homophobia woven through “Alex Strangelove” to the blackmailer that threatens to and eventually does out Simon in “Love, Simon.” It is the reality of so many of our lives, and maybe one that needs to be explored on screen, particularly when it is directly challenged.

Still, when films take care to either try and turn these homophobic characters into sympathetic ones that the audience is supposed to feel bad for, or has the gay characters guide them away from their homophobia by explaining their sexuality, it feels like an arc meant to pacify straight viewers more than anything. When even lighthearted romantic comedies feel the need to give homophobia space and a voice on screen, and when the negative mental health impacts of having to endure discrimination are both obvious and well-documented,<sup>3</sup> it is clear who these films don’t want to alienate—and it is not their gay audience. The need for queer visibility is real, and the lack of it can cement the adverse mental health impacts of discrimination,<sup>4</sup> but to watch fictional gay love stories on screen, queer people need not also be reminded of the very real homophobia they more than likely already have to endure.

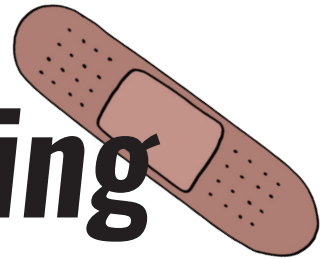
“I Am Not Okay with This” has no patience with homophobes, and when someone outs Syd and calls her a dyke at Homecoming, she doesn’t try to argue with him or rationalize his beliefs. Instead, she explodes his head with her telekinetic powers.

“It used to be that queer kids had to imagine themselves into love songs,”<sup>5</sup> but now we get to fall in love on screen and explode homophobes’ heads instead, and isn’t that beautiful? ■



# Extremes of Feeling

Written by Emily O'Malley  
Illustrated by Elizabeth Fleming



When I was growing up, I wore socks on my hands. They were pink, with puppies on them; I still have them in a beat-up flat-rate box I use to tote things between my dorm and my house. Sometimes, I slip them over my palms. The fabric has worn thin over the years, especially by the puppies' faces—where my fingernails fit.

I started wearing them when I was in the first grade and my little sister got lice. For hours, my mom combed through my sister's hair, zapping bugs and brushing their dead bodies out. All of our sheets and pillowcases were washed; so were our stuffed animals. Nobody else in the family caught lice.

That didn't matter to me. I could still feel them in my hair, no matter how many times I washed or brushed. The only solution was to get rid of my hair so there was nowhere for them to hide. Strand after strand, I dug my nails into my scalp and plucked. When my mom realized what was happening, she made me wear socks over my hands so I couldn't pull anymore.

From then on, the hair-pulling came and went, irregularly but persistently. In second grade, I thought I was getting sand off my scalp and peeled the skin away. During the summer before seventh grade, when I went to camp, I thought a bug had bit my head. And the pulling started all over again. Each time, a bald spot developed, smooth and raw. Then, slowly, the hair grew back. For a while, I kept my hair short so the regrowth wasn't obvious. The problem has never gone away. Even now, I have a tuft of hair only an inch or two long that sticks straight up. I wet it down a couple times each day so people don't notice.

It's called trichotillomania. And I have other

illnesses like it.

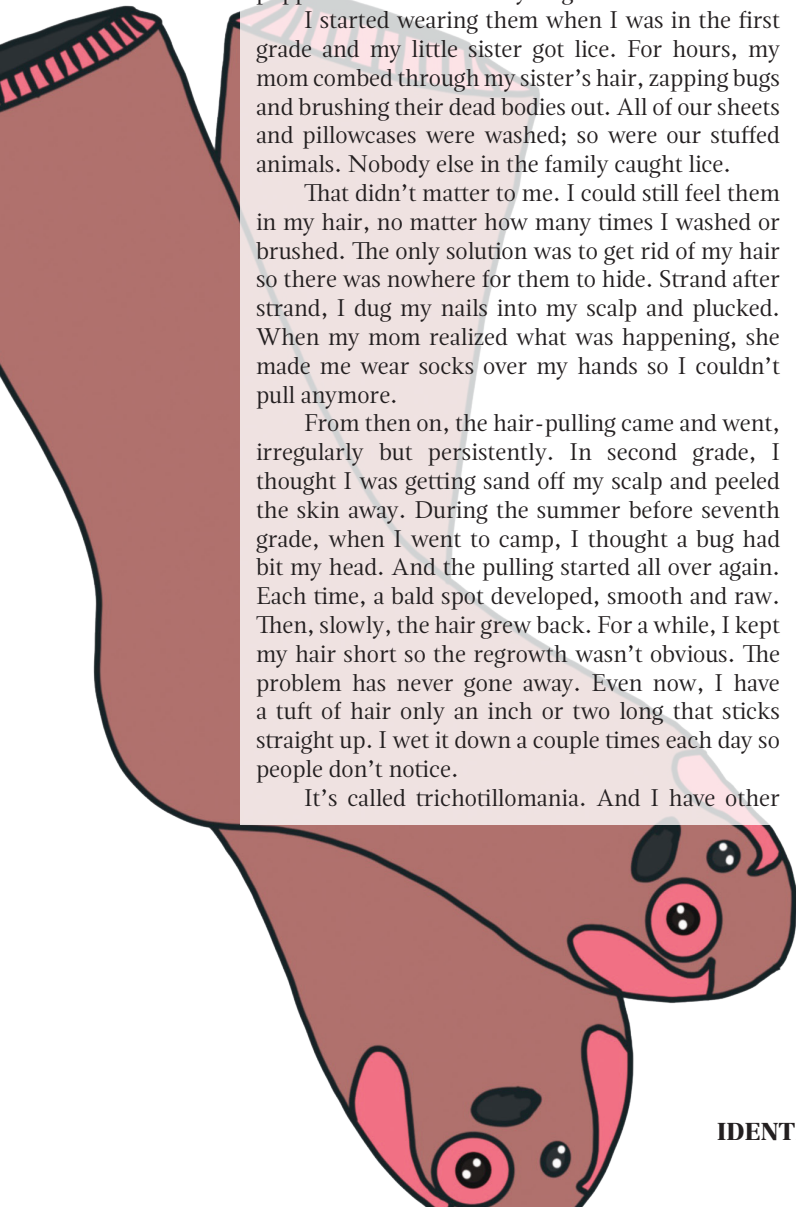
Even though I go to college in sunny Florida, I wear cardigans at least half the week—usually on my high-anxiety days. I stretch out the cuffs, twisting and tugging them. The fidgeting is a redirect for the tic I wear the sweaters to hide. My arms are pocked with scabs and scars from where I pinch. Hard. And I pinch even when my mind screams at me to stop.

Excoriation disorder.

Both are related to obsessive-compulsive disorder. I'm not agoraphobic. I don't test doorknobs or light switches, though I do have to check three times for my R-card. I'm not a hoarder, though I do have quite a few knick-knacks. But for as long as I can remember, I have suffered from ruminations and intrusive thoughts. I lose myself in mental threads. There is a constant thrum of anxiety about my sexuality and relationships. There are rituals I can perform to help me calm down: counting my fingers, shaking my leg, flicking my wrist, punching my thigh, and yes, pulling my hair and picking my skin.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) has always intrigued me because it is simultaneously glamorized and ridiculed, adored and stigmatized. Like depression and anxiety, the media romanticize OCD, or find some joy in it, like popular detective series "Monk." But they also make it a spectacle. I grew up in a household that enjoyed watching "Hoarders" even as we acknowledged that the individuals on the show needed serious help. We just never really talked about what help it was that they needed.

While I felt I could connect on some level to a character like Adrian Monk, I also felt only



partly understood. OCD's subsets—checking, contamination (physical and mental), hoarding, ruminations, and intrusive thoughts—are disparate groups. Sometimes, they are paired with other mental illnesses: anxiety, depression, social phobias, trichotillomania, and excoriation disorder. It took me a long time to see that.

It also took me a long time to talk about it. My college roommates have spent more time than they would like pasting Band-Aids onto my arms. Some weeks, I went through half a box. I started getting fun ones—my personal favorites being Spider-Man. My friends used the number of bandages on my arms as a sort of scale to tell how anxious I was.

But even when I was home for Christmas break, I found my arms bleeding and scabbing over constantly. My parents would shoot me stern yet heartbroken glances or smack my hands away from my arms, accompanied by a loving, gentle, “Why are you worked up?” I didn’t have an answer. Other than the constant flow of intrusive thoughts that I had grown used to, there was no particular trigger. It was related to my anxiety, not inextricably linked to it.

I spent a lot of time in office hours, asking my professors if they were comfortable with me ticking in the classroom. I learned to ignore stares—even from my friends—as I twitched, flicked, clenched, and pulled. To manage tics, I used sweaters, stress balls, and socks on my hands. What I have yet to do is learn how to live comfortably with myself.

The skin-picking has gotten worse this month. My arms hurt. I alternate between rubbing prescription lotion on them and digging into the flesh, even when my nails are kept short. Thick, pale spots of scar tissue contrast crusty red scabs. It is a constant battle between two sides of the same mind. Mine.

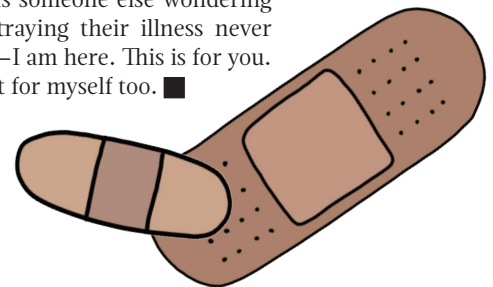
Virginia Woolf wrote, “All extremes of feeling are allied with madness.” I wear that madness on my flesh. But I don’t talk about it often. How do you explain to your friends that you compulsively check for your R-card because if you leave it behind, you might never go home again? How do you tell your parents that you constantly feel bugs crawling on you? How do you explain to the world that ripping off a scab to start a new trickle of blood helps you have some control?

I have found it so easy to talk about my anxiety and depression. I have found purpose in sharing my story as a survivor of sexual assault. In both cases, I feel like I am helping other people. But I don’t know if anyone else feels like I do. I

don’t know if anyone else wears sweaters in eighty-degree weather to hide their extremes of feeling. My traumas bleed together to make the watercolor portrait of my life. If I am the only person on campus who feels this way, then I guess I wrote this for myself. But if there is someone else wondering why the celebrities portraying their illness never have pockmarked arms—I am here. This is for you.

And maybe still a bit for myself too. ■

**Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) has always intrigued me because it is simultaneously glamorized and ridiculed, adored and stigmatized.**







# In the Moonlight

Written by Matthew Deveaux  
Illustrated by Francisco Wang Yu

I'm sitting in my room during quarantine, making sure I get my prescribed Netflix hour in, when I decide to revisit "Moonlight."

The first time I saw "Moonlight," I was in 10th grade. I had heard about its release and the discussion around it was especially heated in my community. My local movie theatre didn't show it due to its LGBT content but even if it had, I wouldn't have gone to see it. As a not-yet-out bisexual boy in The Bahamas, the last thing I was going to do was see a gay film and intensify any possible scrutiny on the nature of my sexuality. So, I waited.

I read the synopsis of the movie on Wikipedia, watched the trailer on Youtube, learned about everyone involved in the film: from Joi McMillon and Nat Sanders, who edited, to Terrell Alvin McCraney whose semi-autobiographical play, "In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue," serves as the basis for the film. I watched the Oscars, my heart going into freefall when I didn't hear "Moonlight" called until suddenly, it was. I felt the joy inherent in seeing people like me have such a massive win; the controversial nature of the Oscars notwithstanding. Throughout all of this, I ached to watch this film that had become such an integral part of me, a lifeline to the idea that queerness included me too. Then I saw that Netflix had acquired distribution rights to the film and the moment I saw it on my recommended queue, I watched it.

The first time I saw "Moonlight," I wept. It was revolutionary for me to see a gay black man go through life, a life full of the hardships inherent in the black experience in a society that constantly devalues us, and come out on the other side able to love another man openly. I saw myself represented on screen, at a time in my life where I needed it most. I didn't need to perform the mental gymnastics of a boy who never saw himself represented on his screen: attempting to find blackness in a sea of white faces and queerness in the midst of heterosexuality.

I had searched for media that represented black queerness in a manner that was familiar to me. I found

Baldwin, and while incredible and timeless, Baldwin was describing his experience in mid-20th century America. I wanted media that was current, black, and queer. "Moonlight" fulfilled that wish.

The film opens with a heavily stylized, whirling shot of a drug dealer, who we soon learn is called Juan. It's a cinematographic sleight of hand, an obfuscation of how "Moonlight" will develop. The scene seems to simply depict a drug dealer interacting with one of his agents on the corner, a familiar interaction when watching media portraying black people existing in poverty. But the next cut is to a child sprinting through tall grass captured by frenzied camera movement.

The switch up in camera style heralds a switch up of archetypes. In the next scene, Little interacts with the dealer we have already met, Juan, in a way that's unexpected when compared to other films with similar character types.

When we see stories in this context, the common style is often a bleak realism. Dark colours and harsh light are the only suitable lens, society has decided, for dark environments and harsh truths. But "Moonlight" decided to change perceptions. Color and light are tools for transcendence, used to reframe and elucidate. Miami is a sublime vision of pastels and neon, vibrant blues and gleaming skin tones. These lighting choices reflect the black Miami experience. There is a beauty to be seen in perspiration that it is unafraid to show.

The use of water in "Moonlight" is critical to the film. From the powerful scene of Juan teaching Little how to swim in the cyan waters of the Atlantic to Chiron washing his bloodied face in a tiny, porcelain sink under flickering fluorescent lights. When Juan teaches Little how to swim, he holds Little and keeps him afloat until he can fend for himself against the crushing waves, a representation of black fatherhood seen too little on screen. It is moments like these that reveal the duality of water in relation to the black existence, particularly the queer black existence.



Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley in *Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic*, describes it aptly when she says that "black queerness itself becomes a crosscurrent through which to view hybrid, resistant subjectivities and perhaps, black queers really have no ancestry except the black water."

This is made even more apparent when Juan tells Little, "There are black people everywhere, there's no place you can go in the world that got no black people on this planet." It's a critically important message for queer black people on the margins of the marginalised. For many of us, our first experience with queer spaces is those created and maintained by white queers. While there is a joy in finally being in queer spaces, there is an undeniable element of otherness felt when we enter. Queerness doesn't prevent racism or fetishization from occurring; in fact, in some ways it magnifies these issues.

Often, as black queer men, we are made to feel that queerness and blackness are antithetical to each other. In queer spaces that are controlled by those who aren't black, we may reduce our blackness to gain acceptance, while in spaces controlled by heterosexuals, our queerness is hidden for power. This applies, of course, only to those of us with the privilege to blend into these spaces, a privilege black feminine-presenting and non-binary people do not have. I see it every so often on Black Twitter when people discuss whether black queer men feel that our race or sexuality is the more important aspect of our identity. These discussions always baffle me: how can I divorce myself from either? My identity is intersectional, my queerness shapes my experience just as much as my blackness does and the two cannot be divorced. I am a queer black man, not a queer man who happens to be black nor a black man who happens to be queer. To be a black queer is to live a life shaped by both experiences with each aspect of my identity influencing the other. In

that same way, "Moonlight" tells the tale of intersections: between blackness, queerness, and poverty. It gives an example of one form of black queerness that cannot be accurately described without the use of both labels. While non-black queer men and heterosexual black men find some relatability in the film, for queer black men we see ourselves.

I find it important that "Moonlight" showcases the importance of chosen family for black queers through interactions between Chiron, Juan, and Teresa. Paula attempts as best she can to care for and love Chiron, but it is not enough, so he searches elsewhere. He finds a father in Juan and a second mother in Teresa, two people able to love him in all the ways that his biological family cannot. For many of us, this quest for familial acceptance is not bizarre but a part of the queer experience. We discover those who can love us in totality, not simply the parts of our identities that they see fit to agree with.

Yet as with most things, there is nuance, and we see this best in the scene where Juan discovers Paula smoking dope. After witnessing this, Paula and Juan clash about who is actively raising Little. Juan tries to argue that Paula is not raising her son, but she retorts with a simple question: "You gon' stop selling me rocks?" Juan has no reply and it is here that we see just how responsible Juan is for Paula's drug addiction and even deeper, the role black men play in the ruination of black women.

It's after this scene that Paula and Little cross paths in their home. No words are spoken and the two do nothing but stare at one another. Both mother and son are partially broken. We can see the depth of emotion and unspoken



words that are trapped behind their eyes. Fear, love, and hate all coexist at the same time. This is an experience that many queer black people know all too well. It is a representation of the great pain that arises from violence perpetrated by those you love. Often, the violence we experience is intimate: committed by those we call family, neighbour, and friend. Yes, as black people we know violence comes cloaked in white, but this is something different. This is a deeper cut, a wound that requires more work to heal.

Chiron's transformation into Black has taken on new meaning for me now that I'm watching this film four years after its release. Though as an audience, we are unaware of the specifics of Chiron's experience in prison, we know that in prison-like society, cisheteronormativity is the standard by which we all are meant to perform. Chiron—in seeking to gain power that comes with hegemonic masculinity—saw fit to be viewed as still invested in cisheterosex and so performed the role given to him as a black man by society. And what better way to be seen as fitting your role than to overact?

Under the patriarchy, masculinity is currency; for black men, we have a very narrow space within which society approves of us expressing masculinity without being penalized, so we perform hyper-masculinity in an effort to safeguard ourselves. The feminine is othered and seen as reducing our already weak position in society, which is why Chiron turns to hypermasculinity in "Moonlight's" third act. He had seen himself as weak, so he seeks to strengthen his position, but in the process becomes the stereotype that he attempted to reject. Black falls deeply into hypermasculine performance to create, as Eve Sedgwick once put it, a "hygienic dislinkage" of his queerness in order to have a comfortable and socially acceptable distance from the sexual degeneracy and immorality prescribed to queerness by the society of which he is so desperate to be a part. He becomes the wish fulfilment of men on Grindr whose first messages attempt to ascertain how masculine you are, and should you pass, then want to use you to experience their favourite Thug Hunter video in real life.

Despite this, when I watch the final scene of this gorgeous film, I smile as I see Kevin and Black sit in the diner. They are becoming reacquainted with one another, aware that there is no one else that knows them better than

they know one another. Resolute in their belief that there is nowhere they would rather be than in that diner at that crucial moment. It is the kind of flirtation that woos with body language rather than the spoken word. Although both are nervous and pretending to be relaxed, we can see the delight and hope seep through their pores. From the guzzling of wine to the Cuban meal prepared with assiduous hands, to the faint sound of waves when the diner door opens, reminiscent of that night they spent on the beach; everything for once, is right.

Then, the moment happens. Chiron finally receives the embrace he deserves. Throughout "Moonlight," Chiron was venturing on his odyssey. He had been searching for home. Searching for the love he received from Juan and Teresa. Searching for completeness. On his odyssey, he found Kevin, and Kevin found him. They find

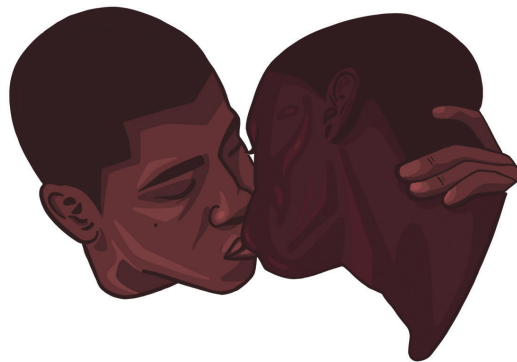
home in each other. For at least that moment, they live by Teresa's rule, "all love and all pride in this house."

Watching "Moonlight" again was a wonderful way to spend a portion of my quarantine. It reminded me of lessons that I learned from the film but also makes me wonder what the next major black queer film will be. I hope that it showcases the oft-neglected members of the black queer experience and lets the world know that it's not only masculine black queers that thrive in the moonlight.

Feminine, non-binary, and trans black people are the producers and movers of pop culture. They are who we see in our memes, create our slang, and push our fashion forward. Yet where is their accurate representation on our screens, in our plays,

in our books? They serve only as sassy best friends or punchlines in jokes, if they are present at all. This lack of media representation serves only to devalue both their work and them, continuing to feed into stereotypes and allowing for society to ignore the constant threat of violence that they are under. It is, in effect, a continuation of the minstrel show, a type of queer digital blackface where the work of these queer black people is demeaned and then sanitized to be made profitable and palatable for public consumption. They deserve to have award-winning films created about them, not because of their work in creating pop culture (because that only feeds into capitalist rhetoric that it is through work that one gains value), but because they exist and deserve to be seen in sunshine not just once in a blue moon. ■

*"Under the patriarchy, masculinity is currency and for black men, we have a very narrow space within which society approves of us expressing masculinity without being penalised"*



# THEY ASK & I WISH I HAD LESS TO SAY

Written by Taylor Gensolin

Illustrated by Kenzie Helmick

north miami little girl like me  
gets raised on fear  
i was  
breastfed a sense of wariness,  
swaddled in safety precautions  
taught how to count  
all the ways the world could chew me up and spit  
me out

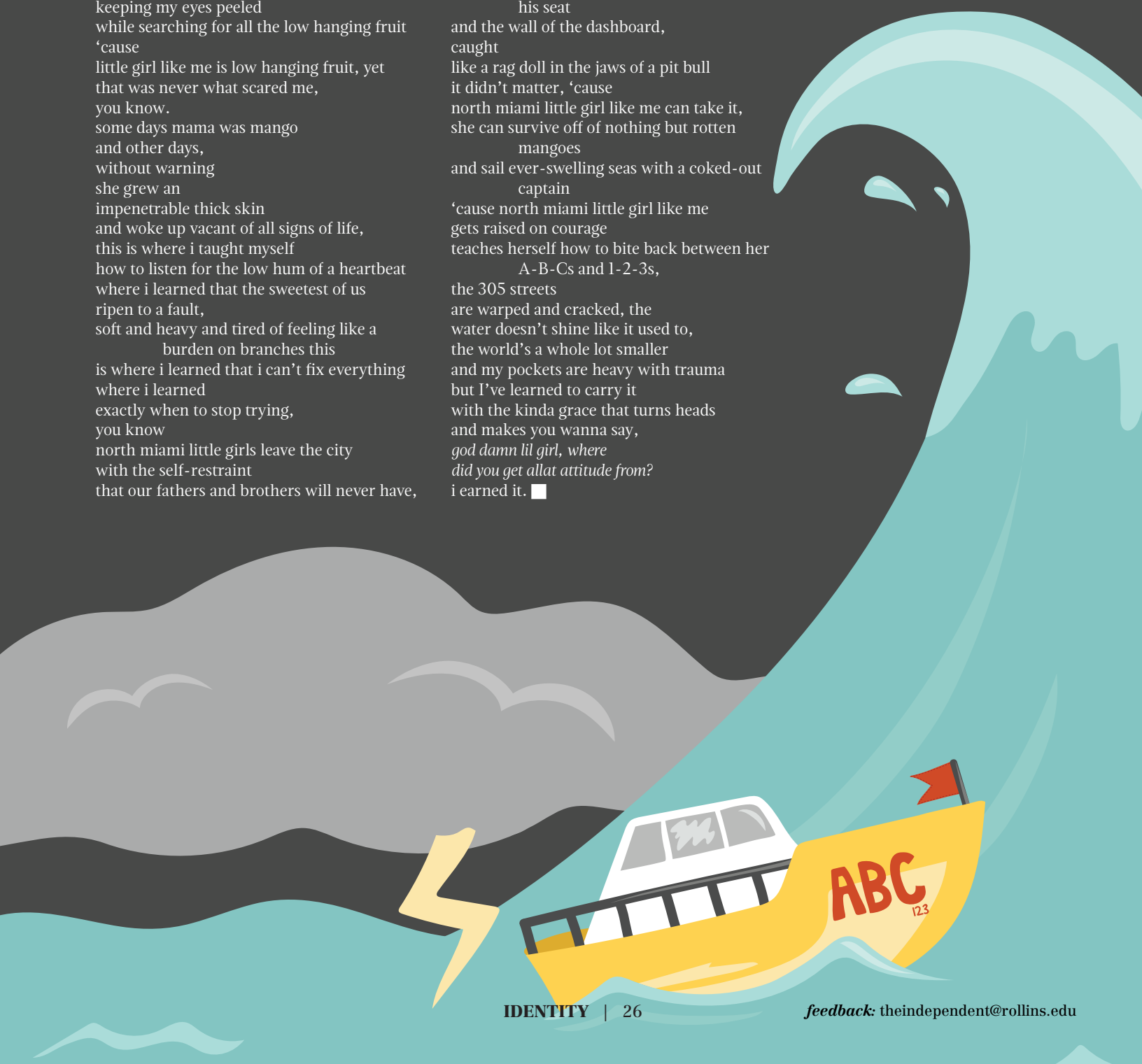
between my  
A-B-C's and 1-2-3's  
the 305  
will keep you grounded.  
my hands are  
most familiar with keystone concrete,  
lined with strange men that  
call me beautiful  
even when it's  
too dark outside to see faces  
and the only thing guiding my footsteps  
is the recurrent taste of gasoline  
and old rainwater  
and Newports  
mingling in evening air  
this is where i learned  
why we walk home fast  
with a cheap smile handy in our back pockets,  
anxious to toss it in the direction  
of any stray  
ayo, ma!





it gets you home safe every time, 'cause  
most of these boys just take what they can  
get—  
like my young soft palms plucking  
the fruit hanging off my neighbors' fences,  
the trees  
all pregnant with  
mango blossoms that burst with sticky  
saccharine sap drenching the skin in  
a golden film  
that looks just like mama after a day in the  
sun  
fishing on the  
clam-clad boardwalk lining my neighborhood  
canal—  
keeping my eyes peeled  
while searching for all the low hanging fruit  
'cause  
little girl like me is low hanging fruit, yet  
that was never what scared me,  
you know.  
some days mama was mango  
and other days,  
without warning  
she grew an  
impenetrable thick skin  
and woke up vacant of all signs of life,  
this is where i taught myself  
how to listen for the low hum of a heartbeat  
where i learned that the sweetest of us  
ripen to a fault,  
soft and heavy and tired of feeling like a  
burden on branches this  
is where i learned that i can't fix everything  
where i learned  
exactly when to stop trying,  
you know  
north miami little girls leave the city  
with the self-restraint  
that our fathers and brothers will never have,

never need—  
you can  
picture daddy and i miles off the coast in a  
little yellow boat  
caught in a storm he'd seen coming  
he shoulda turned us around,  
gone back to shore  
but it didn't matter how hard the sky was  
coming down  
he was an angry man with  
something to prove and  
it didn't matter if my seven-year-old palms  
clasped together to  
pray without any aim or strategy  
or if my body thrashed between the metal of  
his seat  
and the wall of the dashboard,  
caught  
like a rag doll in the jaws of a pit bull  
it didn't matter, 'cause  
north miami little girl like me can take it,  
she can survive off of nothing but rotten  
mangoes  
and sail ever-swelling seas with a coked-out  
captain  
'cause north miami little girl like me  
gets raised on courage  
teaches herself how to bite back between her  
A-B-Cs and 1-2-3s,  
the 305 streets  
are warped and cracked, the  
water doesn't shine like it used to,  
the world's a whole lot smaller  
and my pockets are heavy with trauma  
but I've learned to carry it  
with the kinda grace that turns heads  
and makes you wanna say,  
*god damn lil girl, where  
did you get allat attitude from?*  
i earned it. ■



# “UNACCOMMODATING!”

## RED RODEO AND RECLAIMING PUNK

Written and photographed by Maisie Haney

When Kit Dee moves on stage, all eyes are on them; they sway their hips side-to-side, each movement coinciding with each syllable of their battle-cry melody, which seems nearly orgasmic. Kit has no qualms about performing in the spotlight; they practically are one themselves: the stage lights reflecting from their platinum blonde mullet create a disco ball effect as they shake their hair wildly to the music, while their tiny, hot pink dancing ‘fit glows. Even the cismen who claim to only be excited by phallic, eruptive guitar riffs pay closer attention to Kit’s screams and cries on stage, and not in a demeaning or fetishizing way. In Red Rodeo’s song “Unaccommodating,” Kit yells “Unaccommodating, it’s what I do best! Unaccommodating, I wear that shit on my chest!” which is to say they don’t give a fuck about anything except performing in a way that reaffirms their hypersexual, non-binary (femme-presenting) identity. Kit is the frontperson for a local hardcore band in Orlando called Red Rodeo, whose members mostly consist of queer people.

Before interviewing the queer punk community in Orlando for a class project, I believed it to be very limited, with the same three acts circling in my head: Red Rodeo (the band previously described), Wet Nurse (older, more seasoned lesbian punks), and X Dirty Fingers (a solo non-binary folk anarcho-punk poet). While tuning into one of X Dirty Finger’s Instagram live videos, where they were playing the acoustic guitar outside, I messaged them about the song they were playing. As they messed up a few times trying to sing and read at the same time, TC (their off-stage name) and I talked about starting bands - they even said they could lend me their bass so I could start my own. I also asked them if they knew about any more queer bands in Orlando and they listed quite a few: AOL, Fatties, Really Fast Horses, Vivian K., and “a bunch of the Knife Punch Records crew.” Though there are many more punk bands with queer members and objectives than I originally thought, the community is still continually reminded that there are far more cis, male, and usually white hardcore and otherwise punk acts.



Kit Dee, Red Rodeo



For those who aren't familiar with their local music scene or the general idea of punk ethos, you might wonder, "Why does it matter who is starting punk bands?" Punk is a subcultural and political movement that uses its charged and disgruntled music as a weapon to fight injustice. For any of you Marxists out there, punk as an ideology is so for you. Punk distributes the means of production to the proletariat—whatever we haven't been given, we can make ourselves, giving us the power to express our dissatisfaction with our hyper-capitalist world! It sounds easier said than done, but if you were to disregard social norms it really can be simple for anyone, including those who need this power most. Who can stop you from drawing whatever is in your head right now? From going to Guitar Center, learning five chords, and writing a song? From creating a really shitty recording of that song on your phone or tape recorder? Punk inherently addresses the needs of people who are denied the resources to do these things otherwise; it places less pressure on someone to do things themselves than to set up professional relations with people who might not perceive their creative aspirations as imperative. The punk scene's habits and behaviors, as they are one version of a DIY community, fall in line with these "underground" interests.

I've always thought that punk and queerness were intrinsically linked. Queer in its very own name suggests identities that are atypical or perplexing, and it would be impossible to heed one queer identity. If punk's musical objective is to combat injustices, one of those injustices should be the propagation of criteria that classify a person as truly queer or not. Communities that value a queer reclamation of space celebrate queer performance in



*Sam of the Spoon Dogs*

**"I ARGUE THAT PUNK, ESPECIALLY HARDCORE PUNK, IS LESS ACCESSIBLE TO QUEER MUSICIANS AS A RESULT OF PUNK'S CIS, MALE HISTORY; FOR A NEW IDENTITY (THE QUEER IDENTITY) TO BE PROPERLY MECHANIZED BY AND EXPRESSIVE OF DIY PUNK ETHOS, IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE COMMUNITY TO CREATE MORE QUEER BANDS AND SPACES WHERE THEY CAN BE HEARD AND VALIDATED."**



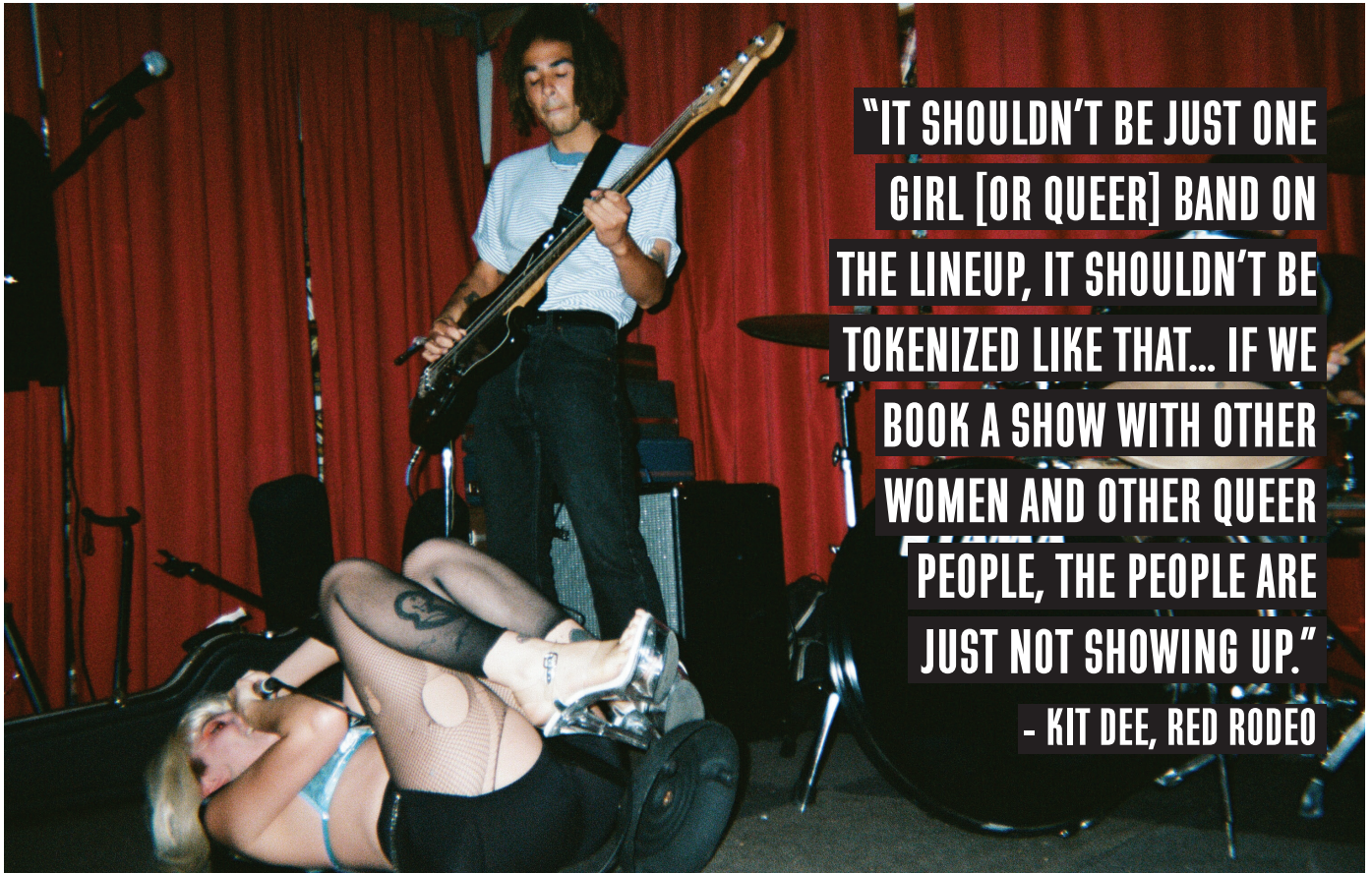
*Cass, c0mputer*

all its forms, acknowledging there is no one way to identify as queer. Instead, a collective identity should be created through the acceptance of variety and a push to channel aggressions through performance. When asked to speak about how their queerness is performed on stage, Kit Dee confirmed that their stage presence was partially natural and partially forced. Kit emphasizes androgyny so that they might make people start questioning, "What is gender, and what does it mean to me?... [Loving and sympathizing with] queerness creates an accepting environment." For people who experience gender dysmorphia, Kit answers that performing allows the genderqueer to realize themselves how they would like others to see them. Kit pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable, which is totally punk.

Queerness has also been described as "anti-identitarian," which is a somewhat oxymoronic, convoluted concept that is hard to grasp, but the complexity in its contradictions can be more easily understood if you start to dissect the process and importance of performance. Performing suggests that the performer is trying something on, and that their true self is somewhere underneath—the separation of these two parts of the person makes us think that there are no congruences between the performer and what they are trying on. But when we try on clothes, aren't there some clothes that fit with us well and others that don't? The performer and what they perform can be more genuinely aligned than we first think!

Despite the pretty apparent links between punk and queerness, punk music is dominated by white, all-male bands with lives and identities that offer little relevance to the fundamental principles of punk music. Bands like The Spoon Dogs are stirring





**"IT SHOULDN'T BE JUST ONE  
GIRL [OR QUEER] BAND ON  
THE LINEUP, IT SHOULDN'T BE  
TOKENIZED LIKE THAT... IF WE  
BOOK A SHOW WITH OTHER  
WOMEN AND OTHER QUEER  
PEOPLE, THE PEOPLE ARE  
JUST NOT SHOWING UP."**

**- KIT DEE, RED RODEO**

and must-see live acts that I consider to be some of the coolest bands in Florida, but the presence of all male bands in the scene—or lack thereof in terms of queer and femme punk show attendance—hinders Orlando’s queer punk movement. This isn’t to say there aren’t massive strides in the queer punk scene, as there have been magnificent turnouts for shows that prioritized the celebration of different expressions of queerness: “I’m loving how queer bands come together to overpower misogyny... it’s so cool how queer touring acts can [help to put us] on the map.” Other queer musicians in the do-it-yourself music scene—for example Alien Witch, Jas00n, Jün, and Mother Juno to name a few—are predominantly noise and electronic musicians, typically dancing and screaming to synths and beats pulled up on GarageBand, Audacity, or the like. In some ways, the noise musicians make punk-adjacent music and could be considered punks in that they embrace the do-it-yourself ethos, but electronic music is more accessible as a genre. I argue that punk, especially hardcore punk, is less accessible to queer musicians as a result of punk’s cis, male history; for a new identity (the queer identity) to be properly mechanized by and expressive of DIY punk ethos, it is necessary for the community to foster more queer bands and a space where they can be heard and validated.

Punk became more inclusive over the decades since its beginnings in the 70s, gradually representing people of color and women respectively, but a majority of the subculture is still white cis-males. They appropriate the idea of otherness that ironically works to reaffirm the fact that, as the widely represented and normalized racial and gender norm, they are not “other” at all. They adopt a radical anti-establishment lifestyle in an attempt to separate themselves from capitalism and bureaucracy, but they benefit from the privileges present in the establishment. In doing so, they hide these structural inequities and portray themselves as

victims, a performance that, in light of racial and queer struggles, seems trivial.

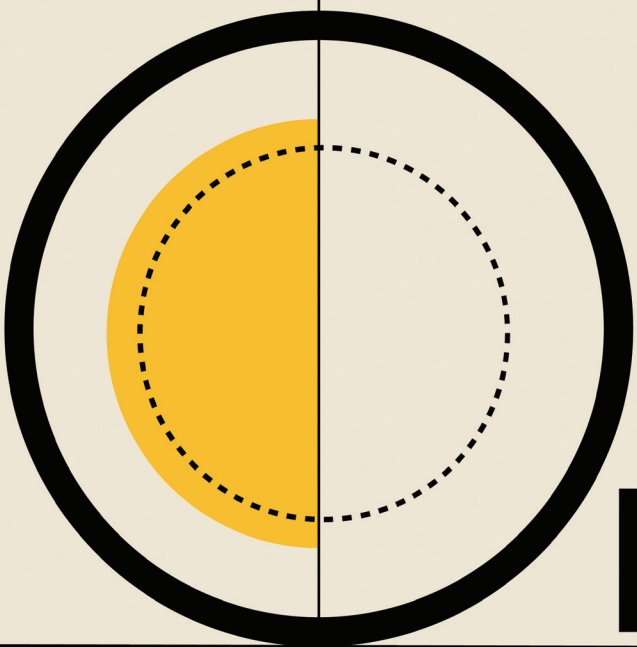
It is their self-marginalization that irks people of color and the queer and femme communities who need the DIY music space to express rage about the real oppression they face. These venues and spaces where queer people should be able to perform are dominated by cis-male bands, which ultimately makes the oppressed community feel further unaccommodated. Kit Dee spoke about how people in the music scene simply are not showing up for and thus are not supporting their queer and femme brethren. “It shouldn’t be just one girl [or queer] band on the lineup, it shouldn’t be tokenized like that... if we book a show with other women and other queer people, the people are just not showing up,” Kit complains about the punk scene. Kit and I agreed that there was a culture of supporting queers in the noise and electronic scene that is absent from the punk scene culture. The noise scene thrives because “people are performing and people feel heard, and their identities are recognized.” The punk scene centered around white cis-men must be reconstructed, but the ideal scene wouldn’t eliminate these men completely. White men whose queer and femme friends play shows must play their patriarchal role to transfer some of their undeserved power to the masses; there must be a push for men in the scene to share show posters for their queer friends and encourage their friends to go to the shows.

Red Rodeo’s song “Unaccommodating” then carries a very powerful message for both the queer and non-queer audience to absorb: the queer punks need to turn the tables. Form a band! Put on a show! Don’t let those privileged punks think we are fooled by their self-pity parade! “Try to shame me for being loud, try to keep me from going out,” Kit sings, but they will continue to book queer shows and demand a diverse audience. ■



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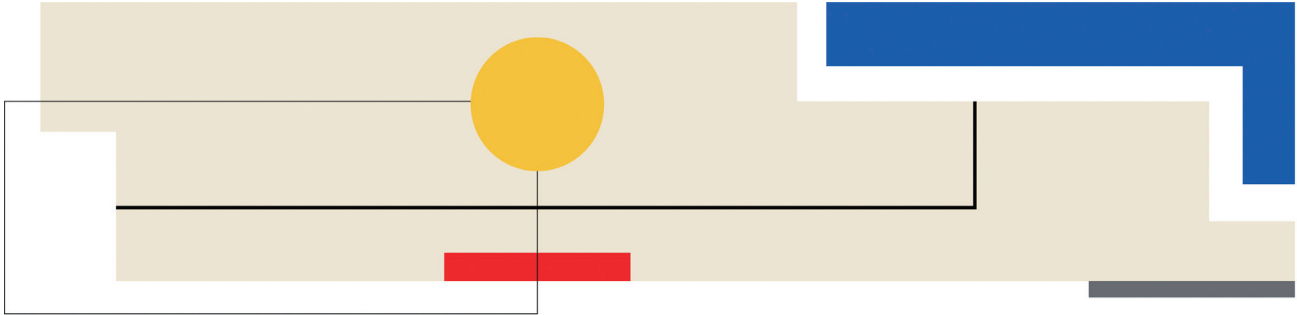
MATHEMATICAL

M  DEL

F  
SELF

SABOTAGE

Written by Rahmat Rashid  
Designed by Francisco Wang Yu



Do you ever make bad decisions on purpose?

Late last year, I had a mutual crush “thing” with someone I knew from high school. You can probably guess how that went. He said he needed to figure out whether a relationship was a good idea. I said the same. I can’t speak for him, but I was researching the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of different types of love and trying to determine whether romantic love exists and can truly be differentiated from other types of love on a rational basis. What else would I be doing with my winter break?

In this interim where we were both trying to figure things out, I was working a double role. I already knew how much I liked him and didn’t want him to know it. I acted just unpleasant enough for him to question if I actually liked him, until we decided not to have a “thing” any longer.

I don’t know why I did that. The obvious idea might be that I didn’t want to make myself vulnerable. Strange conclusion, considering how easy it is to get me to reveal my deepest secrets after either half an hour’s conversation when the sun’s out or pleasantries at any time past 10 p.m.

Sparing the details, a similar acting-like-I-can-just-about-tolerate-someone-I-like situation happened to me over the course of the semester. I’m almost sure that the crush in question thinks I have a general distaste and indifference for them, which is great for whatever part of me wanted that. Not so great for the rest of me that desperately wants to know so much more about them and talk to them for hours.

Now, I might have a better idea of why I did that. Partly because I’m still doing it (my crushes don’t leave easy, unfortunately) and partly due to some Googling.

When you search “self-sabotaging behavior,” most results are from psychology and self-help websites. While I’m a big fan of looking through those types of websites, I wasn’t a big fan of looking for a clear-cut reason, though that might be indicative of some meta-self-sabotage. I was looking for something that I could think about and work through myself. On second thought, it was definitely meta-self-sabotage. The very meta-self-sabotage that I go through any time I realize I’m making a bad decision right before I make it.

It’s impossible that I am alone in this, in having two parts of me arguing over whether or not to keep anything in my life that does or could bring me joy. No, that’s not accurate. Both parts want to hold on to joy, but have

different definitions of joy. Wait, that’s also inaccurate.

False dichotomy fallacy.

Sometimes I make bad decisions on purpose.

My favorite annoying-but-illuminating question is, “how do you define  $x$ ?” How do you define a bad decision? A bad decision hinders my progress. A bad decision hinders my happiness. Those two are not subsets of each other, either as a biconditional or as a disjunction of their conditionals. Sorry about the set theory; maybe fitting everything into logic and reason is a bad decision. It’s not one I intend to stop making, though.

My high school didn’t have a lot of support for students, period. In spite of that, there were some budding extracurricular activities during my time there, and the only non-sports one was Model UN, of which I became chair. In my last year at the school, I left the ailing club to die in peace. As with any other decision, I had a rationale. I was the only one left who both liked and did work for the club.

An ongoing theme of my life has been an all-encompassing passion that no one else shares, and at that point, I was tired of it. I’m still tired of it. I’m too intense, and progress and happiness are not the same, and why do I make bad decisions? These are all coming together. Don’t worry, I don’t know how yet either.

This is how the cycle goes: I find a person, activity, organization—call it  $x$ . I consider  $x$  nothing more than a past time. I start to get passionate about  $x$ , and can no longer deny that  $x$  makes me happy, and consequently, I devote more time to  $x$ . I realize that I derive joy from  $x$  and would probably benefit along the happiness-axis from keeping  $x$  around. At this point,  $x$  will leave one of two ways, barring external factors: I will construe happiness with the presence of  $x$  and deem this dependent relationship as dangerous. As if I don’t rid myself of  $x$  now, I’ll get rid of  $x$  because of how jaded I am with no one participating in  $x$  actually sharing in the joy I derive from  $x$ . I invent external reasons for distancing myself from  $x$  that I tell both to myself and others.

Without the analytical jargon, think of it like marriage. Barring external factors, it’ll end either because the “spark” fades from one of those sharing in the marriage, or because I anticipate such a spark being lost.  $x$  will stop being in your life whether you want it to or not, so might as well get ahead and cut  $x$  out before its absence hurts as much as it will later.



Deliberately bad decisions are smart, really. I'm training myself to stop being so annoying, so intense, so into an arbitrary  $x$  that no one else cares about. Bad decisions, conscious or not, are to build a thicker skin. I propose, therefore, an inversely proportional relationship between progress and happiness. As happiness increases, progress decreases. Intuitively, think of Icarus; the further up he flew to what he loved, the further he, inevitably, fell.

The cycle is an empirical observation. The moment that there exists  $x$  such that  $x$  breaks this cycle, the relationship between progress and happiness falls apart and bad decisions have no further purpose and the model has to adapt to this new empirical evidence. Determining whether or not  $x$  has broken this cycle is more difficult than it sounds. A broken cycle is no guarantee of not falling into it once more and making the good decision to make a bad decision, thereby upholding the model. The nature of a cycle is such that it's easy to fall back into—old habits die hard.

As a result, the romantic in me, the passionate amateur who wants to throw caution to the wind in pursuit of the things that make me happy, soft-heartedness be damned, needs a different angle of attack. So, the soft-hearted fool in me presents a closer look of the inversely proportional relationship between progress and happiness. Her conjecture is that, by finding a counterexample to this rule and disproving it, she can prove that the conclusion towards bad decisions being good is false, even if not invalid, due to the empirical nature of the model.

Sorry about the logic. Maybe it was a bad decision, shooting myself in the foot with dry writing so I don't have to publish  $x$ , an essay I worked on that exposes my vulnerabilities and flaws. Now that's some real meta-self-sabotage.

2016 was the best and worst year of my life, in terms of personal experiences. Unfortunately, the year started off with the good, meeting an  $x$ , and ended with the bad, the death of that  $x$ . The election of Donald Trump in November was the straw that broke the camel's back. That was when I made the clearest distinction between happiness and progress. The death of  $x$ , a result of external conditions, showed me that happiness was not infallible, and the election showed me progress was necessary. Up until that point, I was fine with making a smaller change in the world like a teacher with a quiet life, partaking in as large a subset of  $X$  as I wanted. After making the distinction, I decided

happiness wasn't as important as me making an indelible, colossal change in the world; the former was temporary even within my lifetime, and the latter could stay and benefit others beyond it. The logical decision was to forego happiness for progress. What else did happiness give me, anyway, but cycles?

The romantic fool, however, begs to differ.

She proposes a relationship between progress and happiness, where progress can be incidental to happiness, where  $x$  increases along the progress axis as well as the happiness axis and the two are not mutually exclusive. Oddly enough, she has convincing empirical evidence.

My first semester of college was not easy. I'm pretty sure it's not supposed to be. I tried to find out who I was, where I wanted my life to fall along the axes of progress and happiness. In the first semester, sparing the details,

I found something that was objectively high up on the progress axis. Let's call this something  $a$ .  $a$  was well known for being a lot of work but undeniably good at churning out thoughtful, smart world-changers. In my second semester, it was revealed that  $a$  satisfied the conditions to be  $x$ .

In other words, something that moved along my progress also made me extremely happy. The romantic may have found a counterexample  $a$ , but that doesn't mean, after the cycle,  $a$  will remain relevant.


Shortly after I made the realization that  $a$  satisfied the conditions of  $x$ , I sat down to do the work that  $a$  is infamous for, and I thought about dropping out because I'm not smart enough to keep up with  $a$ . An integral part of the cycle is numbing myself to  $x$  by

imagining life after getting rid of  $x$  where I'm not feeling an overabundance of emotion. So, I sat with books and notebooks and a computer in front of me, staring into the distance and imagining my life minus  $a$ .

It was neither happy nor bode well for my ability to change the world.

I did not get rid of  $a$ .

The cycle of  $x$  has been far from broken forever. Some cycles of self-sabotage are currently still in the works, to be honest. But, let's be logical. One counterexample is enough to consider a model might not be the rule. Eventually, I'll find enough instances of  $x$  so my mind's scientific community will be forced to throw out the self-sabotage model and adopt a new model where, barring external factors,  $x$  stays more often than not. ■



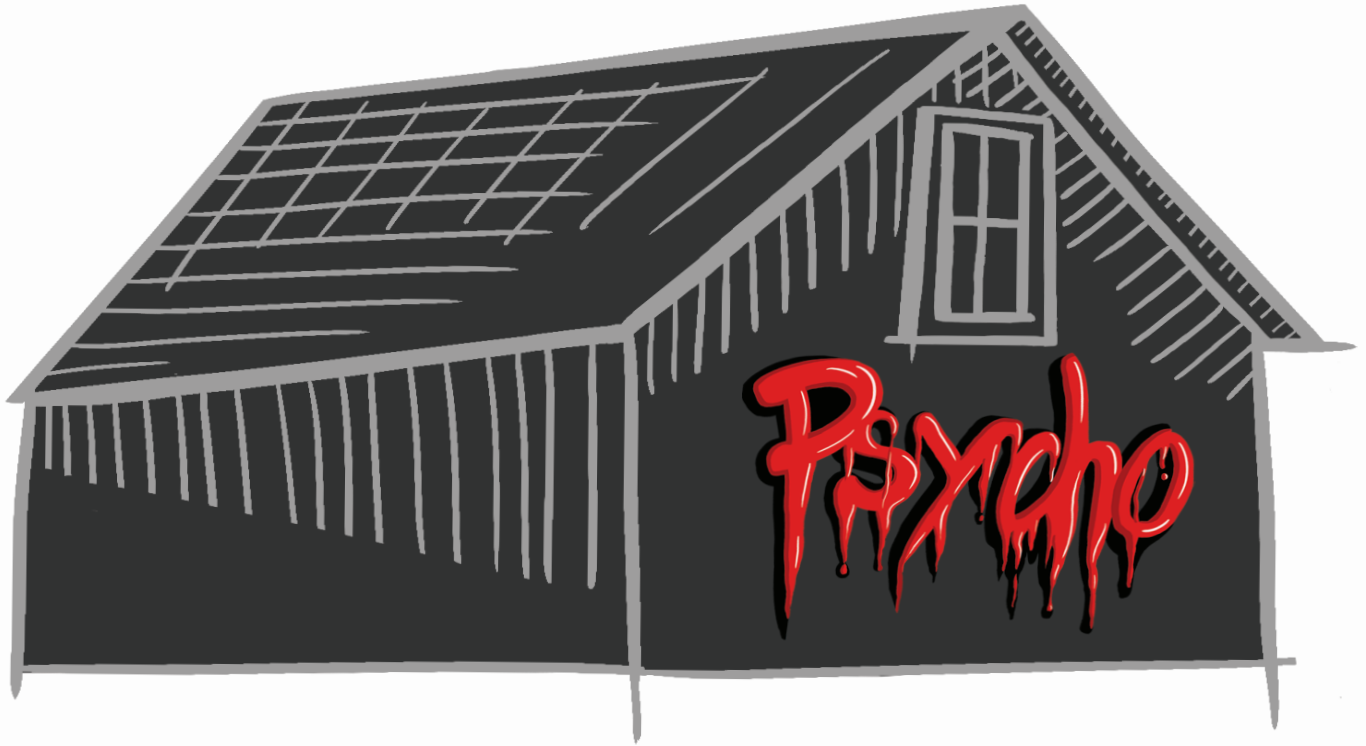
*The cycle is an empirical observation. The moment that there exists  $x$  such that  $x$  breaks this cycle, the relationship between progress and happiness falls apart and bad decisions have no more reason and the model has to adapt to this new empirical evidence.*



# The Hearse Driver

Written by Luisa Bravo  
Illustrated by Ghina Fawaz





Everyone knows never to laugh as a hearse goes by. That's why Eileen Corll loved to drive hers around town; she never felt the need to buy another car. No one cut her off on the road and no one tailgated her. None of the customers ever knew a thing about her personal life or what she thought of any given situation. There was no need for small talk in her business. She simply took the orders received and set up the funeral. Sometimes, people came by to clarify a few things. But for the most part, as long she planned out the funeral exactly how they wanted, they left her alone. And she was fine with being alone because it allowed her to enjoy her pleasures without any scrutiny from the outside world. But that was about to change.

Eileen's only contact with the news was brief glimpses on the TV, and her social media was limited, so she did not know about the latest events going on. There was one particular adoptive family that went to all the political events and was always seen in the news taking pictures with famous people. People agreed that the family was a different one. The children had been adopted by two white moms who were deeply in love. They had a large series of pictures showing themselves at festivals and rallies with their children with smiles on their faces. So it was all especially tragic when a few months later the youngest girl fell down the stairs and ended up at the morgue.

The teary-eyed mothers arrived with their three other children at Eileen's parlor. They told her they had just gotten her body back from the coroner and now they wanted a quick funeral to get past their grief. Eileen told her she'd respect their wishes as they drove off, but upon fitting the girl for a coffin, Eileen saw something odd on the girl's body. There was a shard of glass almost the size of a pebble buried deep inside her skull. This confused Eileen since the moms didn't mention

anything shattering on the girl. She called the coroner to have another look at the body before driving home.

Singing along to her favorite song, "Gloomy Sunday," she heard movement in the back of her hearse. Eileen hit the brakes, ran to the trunk, and opened it. Her eyes widened when she saw a tiny boy with his arms wrapped around his legs. Before she could say anything the boy spoke. "Please don't take me back to my moms."

"Why not?"

"Cause they beat us, call us names. And killed my sister."

Eileen was silent for a moment. Then, she said, "Alright, I won't take you home."

"Can I stay with you?"

"No, no, no," Eileen said; her apartment was no place for a child. She couldn't think of any of her coworkers who could take a child in.

"Tell you what, I'll drop you at the police station and explain everything."

She brought the boy into the passenger's seat and drove off. On the ride to the station, she unpaused "Gloomy Sunday" and listened to it for a bit. However, she quickly turned it off once she noticed the boy weeping. Once they got to the station, she told the police everything and they assured her they'd investigate. She tried not to feel guilty leaving the boy there alone.

At home, she saw a strange man with a red cape outside her apartment. Her heart began to race, so she remained in her hearse. The caped man approached the car and knocked on her window. In fear, Eileen fumbled with the latch of her glove compartment, where she kept her pistol. To her horror, the window lowered.

"Hello, ma'am. I was wondering if you would be interested in my proposition."

“What do you want?” she asked.

“It’s not what I want, but what I could give--power, the fulfillment of your desires.”

Eileen stood still. “What, what do you mean?”

“I think you know.”

“Whoever you are, *go away* before I call the police.” Her voice trembled.

The man wrapped himself in a red cape saying, “You won’t be feeling that way for long.” He disappeared into smoke.

Eileen looked at where he had been standing in horror before shaking her head and saying, “Psycho.”

She walked up to her apartment and decided to watch something to get her mind off the odd day. The first thing she did was turn on the TV and turn on “Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer.” She watched in fascination and arousal as the titular killer and his partner terrorized the innocent.

She slept soundly that night.

The next few days went by normally, working during the day and pleasuring herself with movies like *Taxi Driver* and *Compliance* at night. But she started feeling an odd presence beside her and knew she was being watched.

A few weeks she found herself being called to testify in court. She hesitated and talked with her coworkers who assured her it was the right thing to do. So she agreed to testify.

The day she went to court a man spotted her going in and hurled insults at her, calling her bigoted and homophobic.

“You want to take those children away from their loving mothers!”

“I can’t deny what I saw.”

“You’re just a liar in the pocket of Trump.”

“But I’m not. I-“

But the man slipped inside the courthouse. Eileen stood frozen, fury pumping her veins.

“What an asshole,” a voice behind her said.

Eileen jerked around and saw the caped man who had come to her the night she left the boy at the police station.

“You shouldn’t have to put up with that. He’s not the boss of you. Come on, show how you really feel. I know you don’t care about politics and he shouldn’t accuse you of anything. Go on, put your hands on his neck.”

“No! Leave me alone,” Eileen shouted. Then, she noticed people staring at her oddly. Head down, she entered the courtroom.

Eileen found out the man was Max Dalton, a friend of the mothers who Eileen knew as Naomi and Rhea Bramble. Eileen might have thought he was handsome had he not treated her so poorly. He thought of himself as a good person since he always supported the right things and called for the banning of anything that was even slightly less than progressive.

When it was her turn to testify, Eileen only told the court what she found and what the boy told her. When she was done, she headed for her hearse, but she was stunned to find reporters surrounding her. They shouted questions, though their voices drowned each other out.

She forced her way to her car and played the “Hearse Song” at the car’s highest volume, arriving home so uncomfortable that she was unable to fully enjoy the most violent scenes of “The Godfather.”

“Morons, aren’t they? All you did was say a few words and now you have all this attention. Is it so hard for them to leave you in peace?” the man in the cloak murmured in her ear.

“GO AWAY! You’re not real!” Eileen screamed.

“Are you sure?” said the man before disappearing from her view.

Eileen didn’t sleep a wink that night.

For the next few weeks she was bombarded with attacks on social media, messages accusing her of not only sexism and homophobia but also claims that she was jealous of the mothers. But the messages she hated the most were from actual sexists and homophobes who praised her and talked about how it is only logical that gays would destroy children, how women were only fooling themselves if they were attracted to other women.

They called her and wrote messages on her website, and they kept on coming no matter how many times she tried to block them. Her customers at best only stared at her oddly and at worst insulted and even hit her. Most days, Eileen fled home crying and wishing she could disappear. Why couldn’t they just leave her alone?

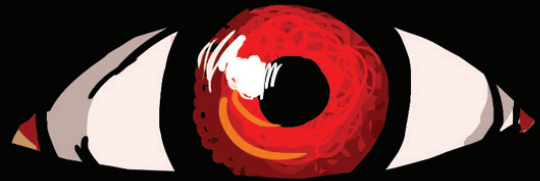
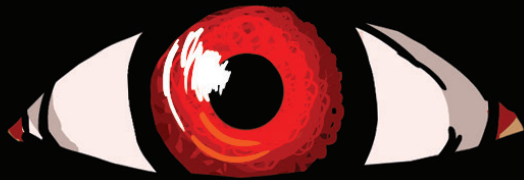
Then she reminded herself that she had no right to cry. Not when those children were trapped in that house.

As bad as it all was, none of these things could prepare her for what came next.

The next day upon coming home, she saw a message spray painted on her door: Psycho. Her heart leaped to her throat; she nearly threw up. How did they know where she lived? Were her neighbors turning against her? Would she have to move? She had money but then she might have to uproot her

**This was her home. Her sanctuary. What did it matter if she enjoyed what she did? It wasn’t like she was going to go out and do those things.**





business and... Maybe this would all just go away once the trial was over.

“You know that’s not true. Even if the judge finds those stupid women guilty, they’ll never stop hunting you. Left wing or right wing it doesn’t matter. Why don’t you shut them down?” the man said as he appeared next to her. He put a hand on her shoulder and caressed her back.

“Get out.”

“What?” said the man.

“I said get out!” screamed Eileen.

The man vanished as if he had never been there.

Eileen opened the door and noticed that nothing seemed touched. She climbed into her bed and willed all the attention to go away. In her distress she didn’t put on a movie. If she had, maybe things would have turned out differently.

The next morning she got a message from her coworkers to turn on the news, which she did. And her heart sank when she saw what was on. Mr. Dalton held a movie in his hands, one she owned. She desperately searched for it but she couldn’t find it. She continued to watch and prayed it wasn’t what she thought it was.

“Here is a movie straight from Mrs. Corll’s private collection, *Saló*. This so-called heroic saviour is nothing more than a violent pervert,” said a smug Mr. Dalton.

The channel then cut to an exact copy of Eileen’s apartment. At that moment Eileen saw a red mist coming over her. She smashed the screen just as Naomi Bramble began to talk about how she condemned Eileen’s interests and people like Eileen. How dare Mr. Dalton break into her apartment and go through her stuff? This was her home. Her sanctuary. What did it matter if she enjoyed what she did? It wasn’t like she was going to go out and do those things.

She felt the cuts on her hands from hitting the TV, but she didn’t care about the pain. At least she had this power left.

It all went downhill from there. The mothers were still given custody despite all the other evidence of abuse--bruises, previous accusations, and how no one ever really saw the kids outside except at political events.

Eileen’s business went under and eventually shut down

due to threats of violence and death directed at her employees. The hate against her was so strong that she was frightened of going outside.

A month later, she saw on the news about what had happened to the family. The mothers had given the children poisoned candy before they swallowed several sleeping pills and tampered with the space heaters to make it look like they had all perished from Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

On the screen was the children’s biological aunt, weeping as she recounted how she tried to regain custody of the children and did everything the system asked of her and it still wasn’t enough to save them.

Eileen fought to keep her mind from going to the image of the little boy who had begged her for help. For safety. For her attention. But she failed.

She came home, played “Gloomy Sunday” for the last time, and brought a knife with her in the bathtub.

But the man in the cape materialized in front of her.

“Wait! I can give you exactly what you need.”

Finally surrendering, Eileen nodded. He put a hand on her forehead and all her empathy, her personality, and her memories of life except for her darkest fantasies left her. She grew fangs and her eyes turned blood red.

“You will be now known as Cassandra the Grand Torturer. You will enact all of your fantasies whether you want to or not. Sustained by blood, you’ll have the ability to fly and harm anyone. You will not perish in the daylight, though you might not want to be seen then. Now go out and do your dark deeds.”

Max Dalton was out on the street at night after rallying support for the idea that news and police were lying about the Brambles’ deaths. He claimed they were trying to demonize such kind, giving people. He was stunned when he was slapped by a black butch woman but he figured she was just brainwashed.

A figure dropped in front of him.

“Who, who are you?” he said nervously.

The figure brought its fangs out and said, “I’m Cassandra the Grand Torturer.” ■

# Catalyst: A Series



Written by Kelly Porter  
Illustrated by Elizabeth Fleming

## The Argument

We battle, you and I,  
Drums taut—  
Our voices never at rest  
Play at a masque of stillness,  
A feigned peace ■

## Truth Serum

The chameleon of your intentions—  
Flawed—  
Their effects, painfully numbing.  
You pierced me soul and spirit:  
My pride of self, and you as well, defeated.  
These memories sting me with each reprise ■



## The Memory

A pulsating heart,  
In an unequivocal sadness  
Of longing—  
Regret—  
Dismantled in its senses  
And shadowed by my thoughts,

*Penetrations of darkness envelop me*

Desperately my heart seeks  
The illuminations of life:  
Lit anger her only sun—  
The transparent energy  
Of loneliness her old friend,  
And its bitter accompaniments:  
Slices of an abiding pain—  
Interruptions of bitterness—  
And sin ■





## The Gift

Rhythmic chords of temperance and longing,  
Pulsating minuets,  
Atoms splitting,  
Nuclei erupting,  
A hollow shell of loneliness  
I was,  
Until the moment —  
Lips pressed with passion,  
I first bent towards your crown.  
Shining of life  
The sweetness of your living breath  
Enveloped my senses,  
And delivered me —  
In the now ■



# SURVIVOR TO SURVIVOR

## SURVIVOR TO SURVIVOR

### SURVIVOR TO SURVIVOR

Written by Elizabeth Smith  
Illustrated by Francisco Wang Yu

*I'm here, just like you.*  
It's been six years since the first.  
Five years since the second time.  
Not even a year since the third.

I've been through it over and over again.  
I understand how detrimental and toxic it is for you.  
Quite plainly, it shocked my body into a physical disability.  
An invisible one.

Aside from that, I had scoliosis.  
Led to spinal surgery where they drilled twenty screws into my spine, fused two rods.  
Pain surpassed 10 on the scale, yet the agony from what happened has been incomparable.

Maybe you, just like me, have seen the darkness of the internal subway.  
One that keeps going and going.  
Feeling numb some days.  
Extraordinarily angry others.  
Sadness.

*Words I wish away, guilt and loneliness.*

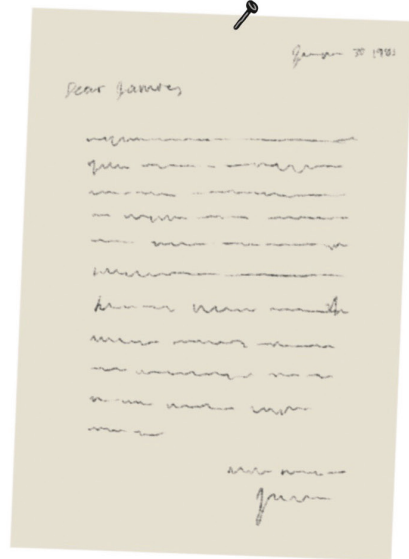
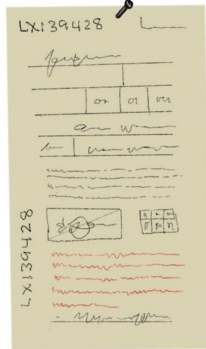
Maybe you, just like me, have seen the nightmares.  
Those horror films. Adapting new ways to cope.  
Tried to immerse in religion, but that only led to the second time.

Now, I have chosen to look forward and build something new.  
To create a story different from the insanity.  
To realize, nobody is coming to take this away.  
I must step up and make the path.  
'Cause I know...  
I know that being in the situation is utterly despairing, scream-worthy.  
Stepping outside the situation, living life after...

*Maybe you, just like me, wish what happened would go away.*

Let us unite.  
Let us take back the life they tried to take away.  
Build our lives to be something we've always dreamed of.  
To explore Yellowstone, Taj Mahal, every place on earth.  
Let us build that life we've always dreamed.  
One where you are loved and love being a part of life. ■





# This Time

Written by Liz Trepanier  
Illustrated by Elizabeth Fleming

The long, paneled wall was covered with rust-eaten metal signs, worn photos, and... was that an autographed speeding ticket? Some of the oldest photos were black and white: a grim woman beside a tall man, with their young baby dressed in a christening gown. It was tattered and mildewed along the edges. Other pictures were newer—happier—ranging from the faded sepia tones of the 60s and 70s to the brighter chromatics of the late twenty-first century.

One photo caught Nora's eye, and a fresh wave of torment washed over her. Nora hadn't seen this picture of her parents before and she had seen many photos of them in the past week, sorting through their personal effects. She took her time, drawing strength from the look of their effortless ease and happiness.

Her mother, Clara, stood beside her father, Duke, laughing toward someone or something just out of frame. Clara's bright hair glowed like warm sunshine over tanned skin and svelte denim-clad legs. Duke hunched over scattered engine parts on a workbench, neck twisted back to grin at his wife's profile. Mom's hand was hooked into his greasy back pocket; she couldn't let him go even for a second.

"Your mom was the nicest lady," the man said from behind her. "Never talked much, but she always made people feel like everything would be ok."

Nora nodded, mute. Clara Rigby, if anything, had been an empath. She always knew how to help people through their problems. Her one and only failure was her precious, stupid, careless daughter.

"Oh, Eleanor. How much this time?" Clara asked calmly, a hint of melancholy laced through the concern.

Nora's eyes filled and her head hung with embarrassment as she breathed through the wracking pains. Another burning wave of shame roiled through her as her mother wrapped her in her arms. She cradled Nora's head and let her cry.

No matter how awful it felt—that sweaty slick of humiliation—when she crawled back to her mother for help, Nora was miserable knowing she'd never feel that gut-wrenching relief again. Never again, would she feel safely ensconced in the love and hope of her mother's endless patience and grace.

Nora had run out of second chances.

Reaching around her, the man's large hand unhooked the picture from the wall. He held the photo out and Nora carefully took the frame in both hands, like a priceless relic. A water drop fell onto the dusty glass and she used the edge of her sleeve to wipe the photo clean.

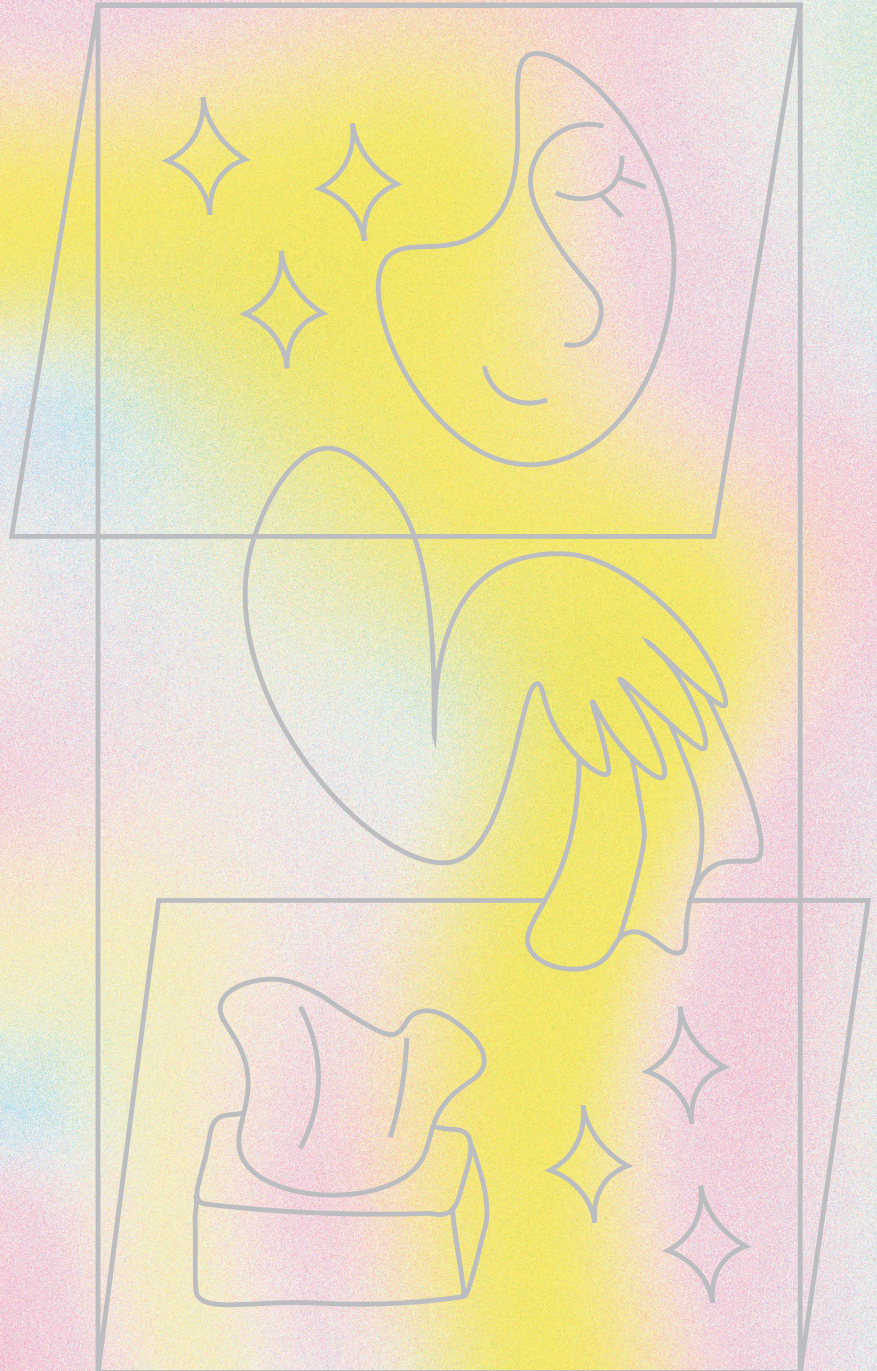
Hugging the frame to her chest as she left the office, Nora knew she would never be back here. ■



# WHATEVER'S LEFT

Written by Margot August  
Designed by Alicia Sales

“Here!” he says,  
Tossing me a half-empty box of Kleenex  
That he keeps on his desk—  
Between the Jergens and  
The desktop background  
Of oiled asscheeks that  
Appear to exist separately  
From a sentient being—  
Before waddling around  
The corner of the bed frame  
And stopping in front  
Of his trash can.  
Reaching his hand down  
And around his  
Suddenly shy shaft,  
Wiping away whatever’s left,  
He glances over towards  
A body that hasn’t moved.  
My hands find the box  
And pull and pull and pull  
Sheet after flimsy sheet,  
Pressing them to my chest  
Where shea butter and semen  
Swirl and spread  
And stain my skin.  
For a moment,  
He leaves me on the bed  
As he retreats to the washroom.  
While he is gone,  
I press kleenex against collarbones  
Along hip creases,  
Inside the belly button,  
Trying to soak up the slag  
With limited success.  
When he finally returns,  
I am lying face down on the mattress  
Scrolling through the  
Same images on my feed.  
Upon hearing the click of the doorknob,  
I press up on my elbows,  
Arch my back,  
And wait.  
He presses one knee to the edge of the bed,  
And then the other,  
Crawling over me,  
Until he straddles my backside,  
While pressing his resurgence  
Against me, and remarks  
“I love seeing you like this...”  
Before crashing onto his side  
And falling asleep. ■







Written by Morgan Snoop  
Illustrated by Kenzie Helmick

There's this ridiculous video from the evening of March 12, or "Doomsday," as my friends and I have been referring to it. The day that everything changed. Crammed into the living room of our friend's house, ten of us (all at varying levels of sobriety) sprawl across chairs, couches, and the carpet as we scream-sing along to a karaoke track of Billy Joel's "Just the Way You Are." I'm crying as I sing, a plastic cup of wine in one hand, the hand of one of my closest friends in the other. One of the guys sings the instrumental background music as the rest of us sway, laughing and crying. In that moment, we're holding onto one another, some of us physically, others intangibly, as we sing: "I need to know that you will always be/the same old someone that I knew."

It's chaotic. But it's beautiful. (Which is exactly how I would describe our friend group.) All of us together, singing along to a song that puts into words many of our emotions, anxieties, sorrows as we face the coming days of drawn out goodbyes. We're not yet prepared for how painful it will be to pack up our friends' dorm rooms and apartments. How in the process of packing, we'll come across objects and photos that remind us of so many moments and memories. How difficult it will be to send off our friends one at a time, each goodbye reopening the same fresh wound as we repeat "I love you" and struggle to say the farewells we don't yet believe are final.

This abrupt conclusion to senior year was the last thing any of us imagined, and feels like the worst possible way to end our time at Rollins. Up to this point in my 21 years, the period between Thursday, March 12, when we heard the news, and Tuesday, March 17, when I drove the 30 minutes home, stands as the most surreal and emotionally-exhausting few days of my life.

At the time, it felt like the world was ending. Now a month removed, it still sort of feels that way. But now, that destruction and chaos feel less like a personal attack. We've all gained perspective, acknowledged that this is much bigger than us. And so, in the midst of this situation that is too immense, too all-consuming to be comprehended—let alone controlled—I've found myself turning inward, so as to avoid grappling with all that exists outward.

The uncontrollability of our present situation has been especially difficult for me, as I've been



forced to confront the extent of my “control freak” nature. Due to an upheaval early in my life, I have long lived with this desire for control and dread of change. I’ve always hated change, so I’ve sought to maintain control in all aspects of my life. If I’m in control, I get to decide what changes. I can keep myself comfortable, keep myself safe. But I felt this controlling impulse steadily lessen over the course of senior year as I cautiously allowed myself to coexist with the change inherent to this transitional phase in my life.

Beyond accepting the big changes—the end of undergrad, the beginning of grad school, the prospect of moving away from the home I’ve lived in all my life—I was also learning to let go in small ways. My first three years of college, I was always so careful and disciplined with my time: finishing homework before spending time with friends, turning in early before the end of a hangout, and sticking to plans with a strong aversion to spontaneity. This started to shift during senior year. I prioritized friends over homework and even my thesis. I stayed up far too late (and got a little too drunk) and even went out on Thursday like every other college kid. We organized friend get-togethers at a moment’s notice, frantically figuring out the carpooling situation and driving off to restaurants where we undoubtedly disturbed every other diner in the place. We bar-hopped after a class event, ending up at Porch until closing, but then stayed up even later afterwards just talking. I possibly had more fun during my semester and a half of senior year than I did during the entire preceding three years.

But as much as we had crazy, chaotic times, we also had calm moments of connection and reflection. We laid out on the dock until the early hours of the morning, sharing secrets and confessing weighty thoughts and emotions. We sat on the carpet and couches in our Sutton apartment and allowed each of us to see, know, and understand us more deeply. Despite my hesitance to let go, I allowed myself to be vulnerable and admit a lot to both myself and my friends. We grew individually, and we grew together.

It is in this state of growth that we found ourselves suddenly

ripped from the ground, pulled away from the deep roots we had planted at Rollins. When we received the email that Thursday morning, I was in class with nearly all of my closest friends. Time stopped for a moment as we all stared at our phones and at one another in disbelief, trying—and failing—to grasp the gravity of this devastating message. In that moment, my first response was to cry—a crack in my controlling nature. (Despite my best efforts, I have never been able to control my emotions or stem my tears.) I sobbed. But as I did, I turned to my friends, the people I care for more deeply than I can even express, and said, “I love you all so much.”



**“In the middle of this turmoil, during this uncontrollable, uncertain, so incredibly unfortunate situation, we held onto something that felt solid and strong. We turned to our friendships.”**

In the middle of this turmoil, during this uncontrollable, uncertain, so incredibly unfortunate situation, we held onto something that felt solid and strong. We turned to our friendships. It would be so easy to let this painful ending taint our memories of senior year or our time together in college. I could choose to let this cataclysm upend my newfound appreciation for change and spontaneity. I could allow it to firmly place me back into my fear and control. We could let it undo the evolution we’ve experienced both personally and as a group over these past 3.75 years.

But we didn’t, and we don’t. We choose to hold onto the people, relationships, and communities that saw us through this time of radical growth and beautiful change. So that fateful day, we chose to surround ourselves with those closest to us, enveloping ourselves in that shelter of love and comfort, despite the chaos that swirled around us. I cried as I sang along to the music, letting go of control and allowing myself to feel those wild emotions that I have still yet to effectively put into words.

We’re swept up in a sea of change and insecurity, but anchored by our friendships, our love, our joy, our youth. Our futures bound together, even while physically apart. We know our relationships can withstand this. We know it’s not truly the end.

So we sing: “I wouldn’t leave you in times of trouble/We never could have come this far/I took the good times; I’ll take the bad times/I’ll take you just the way you are.” ■

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