

# Reflections

2024 TATTLER LITERARY ISSUE



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*Tattler* Editorial Board  
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considered for a prize

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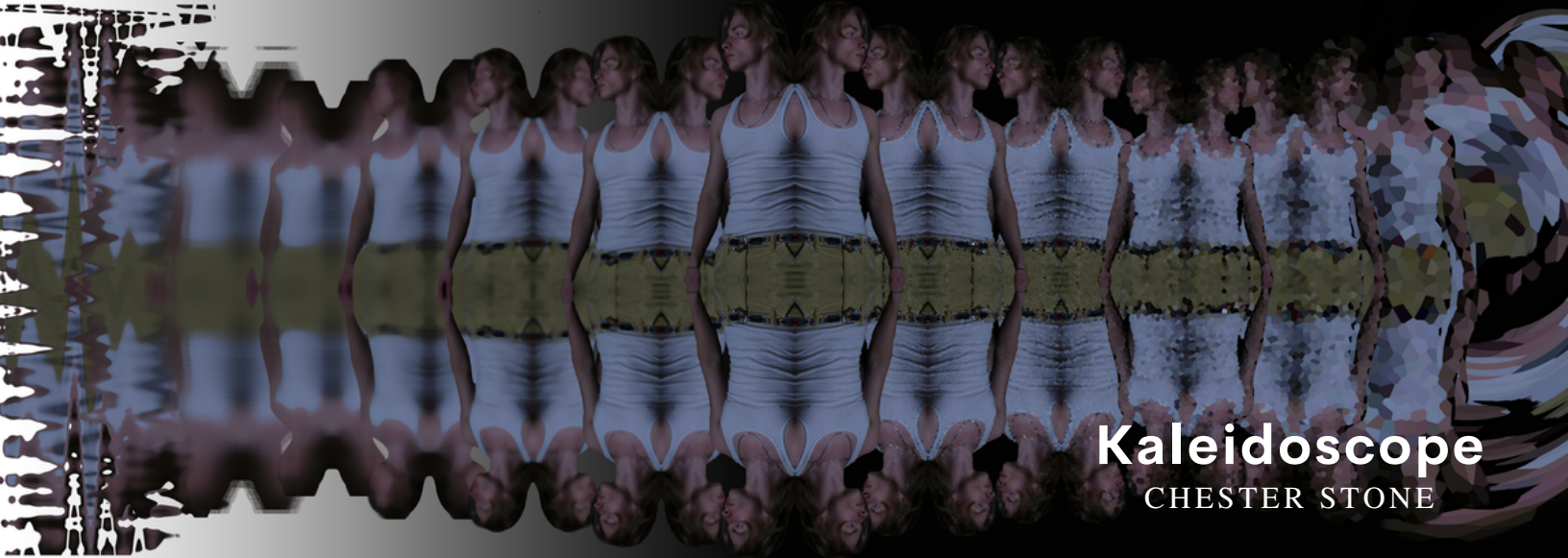
# Reflections

"Life is only a reflection of what we allow ourselves to see and be" -Trudy Symeonakis Vesotsky





1<sup>st</sup>  
PHOTOGRAPHY



**Kaleidoscope**  
CHESTER STONE

## Solo Flight

By *ARKAEDI BARKER*

**T**he rumbling of the plane taking off woke my mind from its non restful slumber. I haven't slept in days, the excitement of such a wondrous and far destination distracting me from a peaceful rest. I could feel the anxiety creep up from my fingers into the rest of my body as the reality finally hits me. I was awake, and so was this hungry, carnivorous goo that clawed its way through my body until it grasped my heart and squeezed. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't fight back, I could only feel the wet tears slide down my cheeks as I gasped for air. I am terrified. I am going to be across the world, in the country farthest away from my home. I will not see my family for weeks. I had previously congratulated myself as I walked through the airport security, feeling like an adult as I scanned my passport and waved my mom goodbye. Through that excitement lingered anxiety. But now as I was sitting in the airplane seat, anxiety grew into a powerful beast that overpowered my former excitement.

I tried to distract myself, as I heard the ding of the seatbelt sign I took a deep breath. I focused on the conversation between the two women beside me. One of them had just gotten engaged, and was returning to her fiance after a work trip, and was gushing to the other woman about how excited she was to have a gorgeous and large desi wedding. Her excitement did little to tame the beast clawing at my chest, as I turned my music louder and wrapped the scratchy complimentary blanket around me. I may have been an adult when I stepped onto the plane, yet as it takes off I am but a child completely alone in foreign territory, silently craving the embrace of his mother back home.





JUJU CRANE

*Evanesce*

# Chinese Buffet for Take Out



Zairan Chen

3<sup>rd</sup>  
REFLECTIONS

## Untitled

By JULIA KLEINBERG

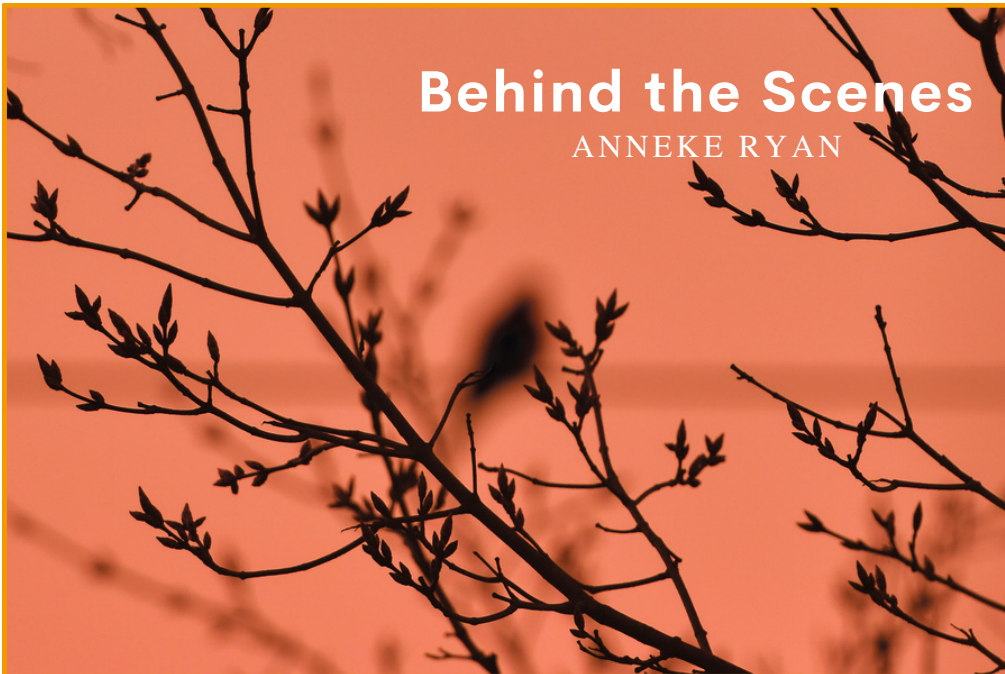
Truth: finally seeing myself  
Within mirrors:  
The broken half  
I've seen myself as fully,  
Perfections I cast away.  
Discovery that with perfection  
Of illusion,  
One's "perfection" dreams are broken.  
Then,  
Broken are dreams' perfection,  
One's illusion of perfection.  
With that discovery,  
Away cast I perfections  
Fully as myself,  
Seen.  
I've half-broken the mirrors  
Within myself, seeing,  
Finally: truth



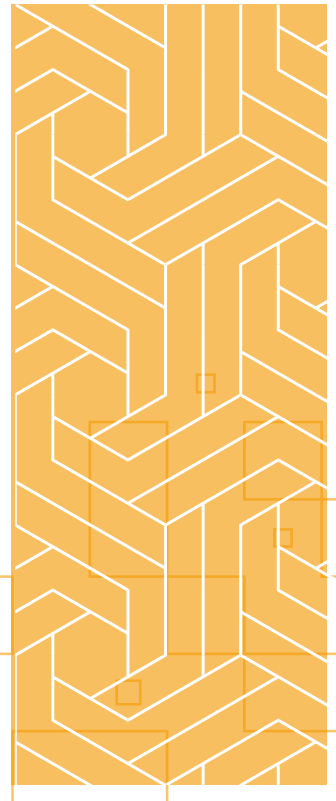
**Butterfly**  
LEVI JIROSCH



**Autumn Rain**  
MALU ALPHA



**Behind the Scenes**  
ANNEKE RYAN





# Hidden

URBAN HOPKINS



## From the Shadow of Her Pen, You Live

By *NAVEENA CLARK*

She be  
sweet as a lemon/sour  
discovering more herself every hour  
under the sun &  
leaves of trees  
in fields of sweetgrass  
with scraped-up knees  
far beyond the “ways of right”  
she loves, she loves,  
she loves herself—  
and palms her pride no more.

she is red with passion  
/self-possession

and everyday she spends in this  
though not always happy  
is happiness.

she is self-recovered.

though  
it was her /Mother/  
that turned over the earth  
to grow her  
from girl to womanist

they say she’s a tempest.  
an untempered,  
seething, misandrist  
/articulate but,  
“we wish you’d reign it in.”

“come bring laughter  
share in our good mood  
humor us with the retelling  
of the colors on your shoes.”

they see her as a puzzle  
as something incomplete  
so they pick her like a petal  
to weed what’s underneath.

they wedge their words within her  
—“now she’s really sweet”  
and wait to harvest the rewards  
of their “thankless/kindful” deeds.

but the sweetest part of all  
is that she’ll write them dead  
so years from now  
what’s left of them  
will be only  
from her pen—

an articulate revenge.

“As water reflects the face, so one’s  
life reflects the heart” – Proverb



# Untitled

AYU ANDERSON

## Dangerous Waters

By *CAITLIN STRONG*

From a distance  
The ocean is beautiful  
All those shades of blue  
Blue, blue, blue  
As far as the eye can see

Closer now  
The sounds seem serene  
Seagulls and lapping water  
Sand shifts beneath my feet  
I open my eyes

Waves crash against the shoreline  
Threatening to spill over  
They retreat  
Dragging everything the tide has trapped  
Down into unimaginable depths

I step forward  
Drawn like a moth to a flame  
The water pushes and pulls  
Surges and subsides

Tugging me along for the ride  
A huge wave towers in the distance  
If I swim farther  
If I push closer  
Will I make it through?  
Or will this be the one to drag me under?



**Picnic Puddles**  
SOL JORDAN

# Ice Skating

By BRENNA LUCIO-BELBASE

“It is *too*. Dang. *Cold*. For this!” Chloe complains, her teeth chattering even as she speaks. “I’m *serious*, Drea. It is *quite literally zero degrees*. What are we even *doing*? What is *so important*?”

“Ice skating!”

A pause, then-

“You’re actually *serious*?” Chloe demands. “No way is this lake frozen! I thought you were *joking*.”

I look at her, amused.

“You *just* said yourself that it’s far below freezing. We can just stay near the edge. C’mon, Chloe. Don’t be such a killjoy.”

“Say no to peer pressure, kids,” Chloe mutters under her breath, even as she inches out onto the ice, following, “Drea, don’t get that far.”

I can’t help but smirk.

“*Drea*,” Chloe says again, inching further out, extending a hand. I smirk, watching her continue, “Come *on*. That ice is *really* thin. Drea- stop being stupid- *Drea!*”

*Splash*. The water is cold. So, *so* cold. Human beings can only survive a few minutes in such temperatures.

“*Chloe! Help me!*”

“I’ll go and get help!” Chloe promises, already turning around.

“*What?* By the time anyone comes, I’ll be *dead!* What are you *doing?*”

Chloe is a good friend. *Such* a good friend. Carefully, she extends an arm out, lowering herself onto the ice to more evenly distribute her body weight. Smart, too.

Smarter than Drea, but not smart enough.

“*Drea!*” Chloe yelps, drawing back suddenly, scrabbling at the ice. “Let *go* of me! What are you *doing?*”

Drea’s body weight begins to drag Chloe off the ice, down, down, under the surface of the river. She’s a fighter, too, just like Drea.

“What is *wrong* with you?” Chloe sputters, slapping at Drea’s now-limp arms.

“There’s nothing wrong with her *anymore*. There won’t be anything wrong with you soon.” I reply, and then I pounce.



**fish**  
FREYJA HILL



**Untitled**

YEN TRAN



**Untitled**

YEN TRAN

SKY BOYKO

# Untitled

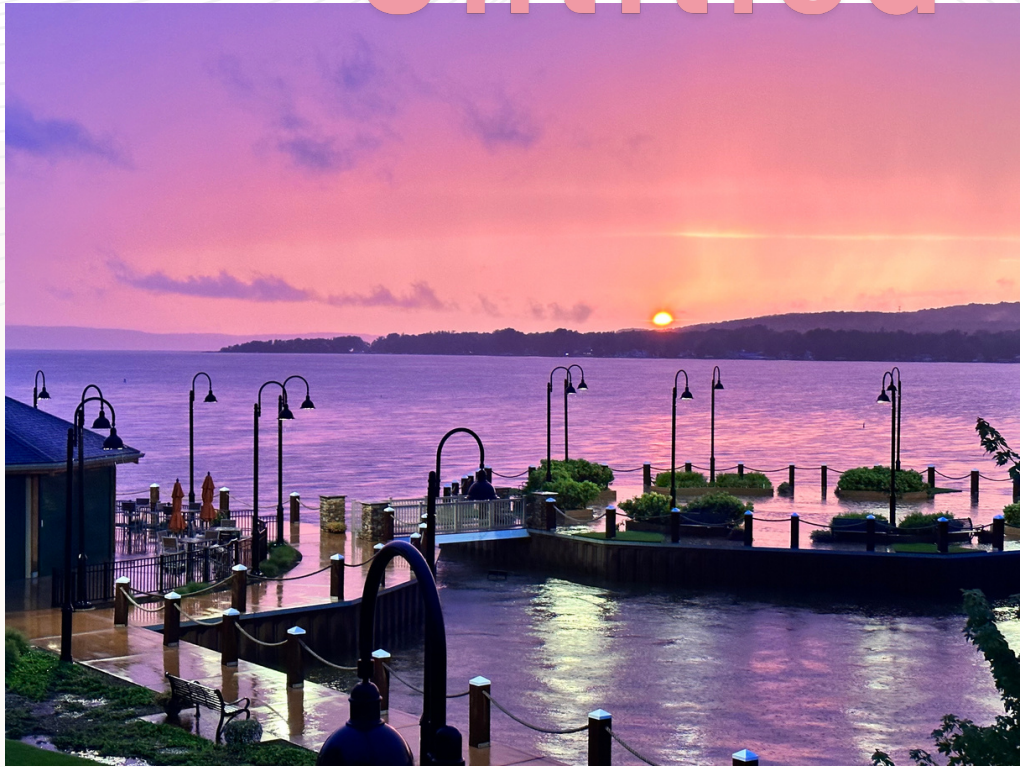
## Proletarian Haiku

By LIAM SPARKS

Proletariat

Proletariat is you

Proletariat



## Radical Rat

LIAM SPARKS

## Ode of Peace

By ELLA HOWE

The waters are calling,  
I must answer their  
Rippling and enchanting song.  
The delicate green stems of  
Luscious little lotuses  
Beckon amongst buzzing  
Bejeweled dragonflies.  
The lone toad croaks  
As the cricket hums a low tune.  
Serenity sounds from all around,  
A medley of ephemeral peace  
Composed just for me.

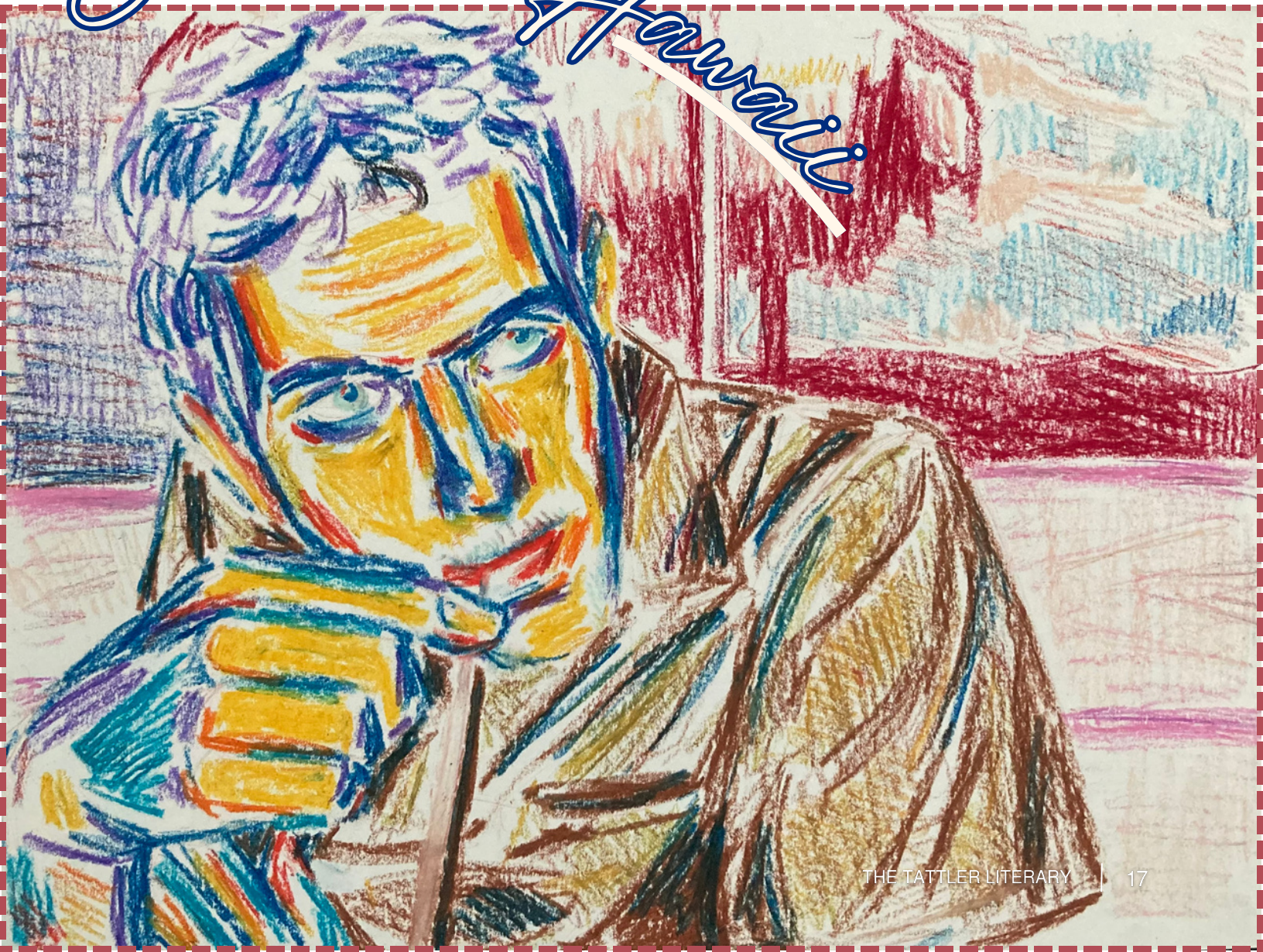


You say you know me. But do you?  
You say you can help me. But can you?  
You tell me that youre here for me. But are you?  
You dont know me.  
No one knows me better than you, you say.  
You dont.  
I do.  
Do you have to live in this hellscape of a body?  
Do you have to lift the weight of all of your  
friends on your shoulders?

Do you have to live like this, always too close to  
falling off the precipice, or flying into the sun?  
I am icarus.  
I cant solve this.  
Ive tried too hard for too long.  
My body aches from every action i complete  
It aches for your approval, for your praise  
It aches for everything i have to go through  
I hate my entire visage, my form  
Dark lines, sprinkled throughout my skin  
Pain is a virtue, and love is pain.

# Brian in Hawaii

JUJU CRANE





2<sup>nd</sup>  
ARTWORK

## Puddle Mirrors

By KYLA TORELLI

Are cloudy skies,  
Rainy days,  
Aftermath of storms,  
The thunder and the lightning,

A reflection of self,  
Story of a glimpse  
Daydreaming,  
On fields of endless clouds,

In which stories are told,  
Black rainboots splash,  
Running in the rain,  
Relish the chill,

A mirror in day,  
An abyss at night,  
Gone by morning,  
Forgotten by evening,

"I had never been at peace with my own reflection...until I saw it in your eyes" - Ranata Suzuki



ZAIRAN CHEN

**Life at the Cemetery**



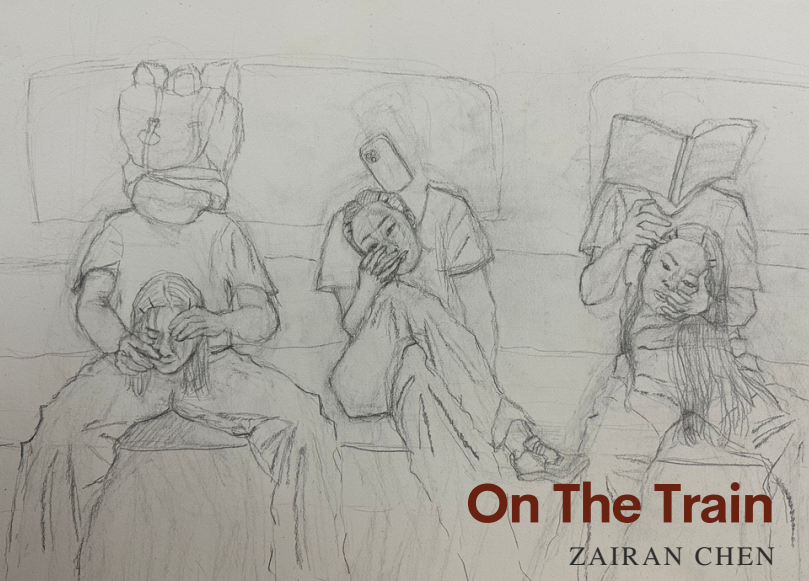
**Prelude**  
By *KAI IMANI*



# Hourglass Figure

LEANN ZHU





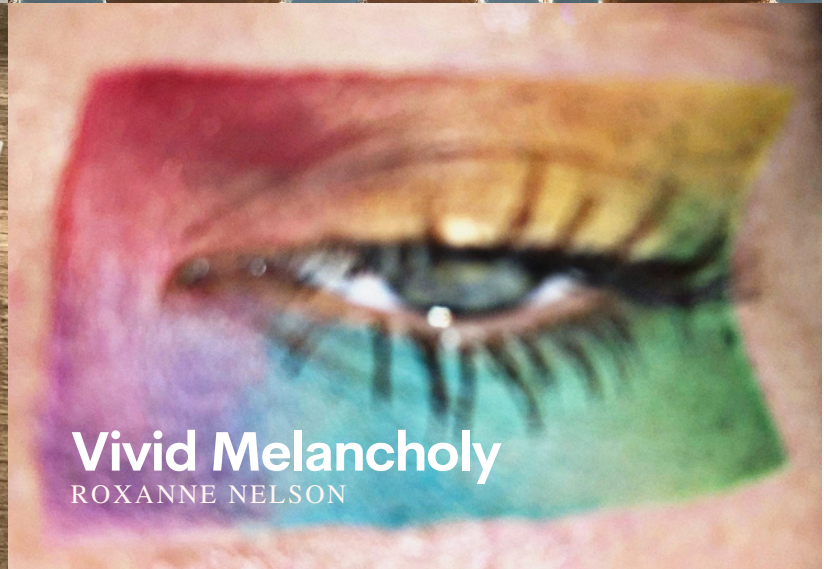
**On The Train**  
ZAIRAN CHEN



**Passengers on the Subway Car**  
ZAIRAN CHEN



**Rainbow Reeds**  
RANI SETHUPATHY



**Vivid Melancholy**  
ROXANNE NELSON

**Before & Before**  
*By LUCA WOLL*

Before the kettle calls –  
the whisper – unknowable from the second floor  
seems as a furtive chorus – here  
my waiting ear, close enough  
to hear the warmth  
of the blue flame  
feels the sound like thunder –  
simmering and shifting as do long skirts  
over long legs  
envisioning a destination –  
I anticipate the scream with a sound  
I’ve heard before, echoes  
of the near future squeeze bubbles into battle shouts  
yelps of shock and bellows of fury  
the steam emerges  
from a small nostril  
steady as mules - laboring for corn –  
soft as the heavens - weightless and immaterial –  
Steadily each second rose –

and bloomed, flowers clinging to the deadened ground –  
November which stole into our homes  
and gone before we changed the calendars –  
Oh, painting with such light touch –  
with the girl with the moon in her lap  
and the days all mapped  
out underneath, I will never know  
the picture of time, slice of life  
I could have felt with you on my wall.  
Instead my toes grew cold right under my nose  
and before the pot blackened underneath  
from exposure to sweet tongues of flame –  
I began to crave warmth  
and comfort  
and hot, easy swallowings  
of tea.



'waiting for the bullheaded catfishes to bite.' (Phoebe, Bridgers. "You Missed My Heart." Sept 2017) (edited "Variations on Mignonette." 2021)

By *JAMIE KINAST*

**I: Blueberry**

The silk,  
what is so white around her folded body,  
watched.  
for once the birds had gone  
quiet  
and she stopped to relax in the sound  
only her legs felt cold, as if  
they'd just been lying in the icebox  
but she could see that no,  
they were lying on the trampled sweetgrass  
her toe twitched. her feet had been dormant  
for

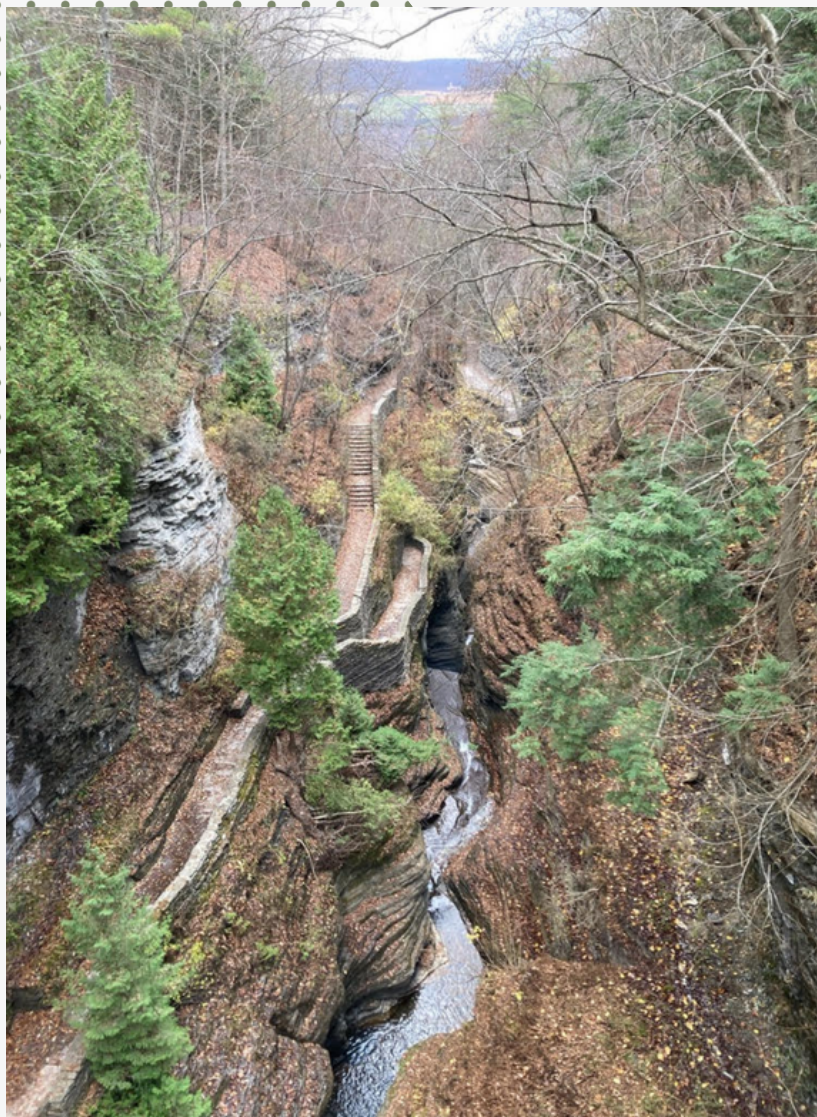
quite some time. and then, of course, she  
wondered  
if she was asleep: her eyelids wandered  
up  
and down  
the silence didn't stop, just kept fading  
in  
and out  
far off beside the peak of the hill the  
sweetgrass rose  
and fell  
with the wind. it was a hot wind,  
carrying the scent of summer, which is to say

the savory perfume that wafts off the  
floorboards  
when they warm  
in recalling this she also recalled how her  
stomach was filled with blood  
if only the cold that possessed her thighs  
would leech upwards  
and freeze the unpleasant stickiness so it  
would be just like a crinkled paper  
it was beginning  
to bother her: how she wanted to move but  
didn't think she could  
from what her lazily blinking eyes allowed  
her to see,  
the sky seemed to be descending  
like a giant balloon, rippling far up where the  
clouds should be.

But it was a perfectly clear day  
still the balloon, which she decided  
resembled most closely a plump blueberry,  
grew closer  
and the closer it came, the farther  
she could see  
through its walls  
Outside, the day grew dark  
the sweetgrass finally still  
she woke up from her dream unable to  
breathe;  
the balloon had made its final rest, settling  
over her face.

**II: Catfish**

The silk,  
what is so white around her folded body,  
watched.  
for it only was now stained  
green because of the punch and the punch,  
it was only spilled because of the spiders:  
dancing on top of the plaster  
a memento of their pain  
in the time they were  
here  
I should have known  
from the quiet way the water lapped  
at the shore. it is so careful  
to never let suspicions arise,  
not even to the catfish who glide  
like war submarines just under the surface



knowing  
their teeth will find them a meal,  
their whiskers jumping between waves  
like little grasshopper legs  
drowning in a world that is not their own  
The human,  
what with the body of a woman slumped,  
watched.  
Watched as the child stole away,  
maneuvering between the stoic trunks of  
chair legs

with grace. It might have been her child,  
Of how the lowlights flickered and buzzed  
casting the dark room in a strange glow  
leading all the spiders that had traversed the  
walls wherever they go  
when the high noon grows  
cold, were the boiled eggs stuck in the empty  
spaces  
her eyes  
had left behind, it was so cold  
and now the spilled drink seemed like such a  
petty thing,  
it didn't matter if whoever was stained green  
summer's grass is just the same: it  
will be cut, and cut again  
her fingernails the shape of snap peas,  
they dig into the space between her pelvic  
bone  
and belly button  
I can't have that, they all said  
I can't have you if you're just going to sit  
there and bleed  
bleed  
I should have known  
that when those lights shone across the water,  
it was a warning. only by day  
we frolicked among the waves  
those hats that flew off our tossed heads?  
we allowed them to float  
just a few feet before snatching them up  
again  
sending a silent salute to the shapes of the  
catfish,  
who sunned their time-tightened flanks in the  
shallows  
merely testing the waters. If  
someday those waters could grow hot  
enough,  
eggs could be boiled  
I should have known

### III: Movies

The silk,  
what was so white around her folded body,  
watched.  
watched while she was at the movies.  
The screen,  
strobing the beat of an action scene, went on.  
watched when she walked home from the  
theater.  
The street,  
lying flat and innocent beneath her feet, was  
silent.  
watched as she undressed in her room.  
The screech,  
of an owl tucked in the trees, startled her,  
and she looked out the window.  
watched as the orange square of light grew  
smaller,  
her feet the last things she knew to be real,  
falling



## The Most Beautiful People

ZAIRAN CHEN

# Freedom

By SKYLOR FORD

Is to feel free  
Is to be flying  
With wings so light, so full of  
feathers  
That you can't help but float

To have no weight  
No burden  
On your shoulders  
Without worries  
Just enjoying  
Enjoying life  
Without fear  
That's what it is to be free

The last time we were really free  
Was as kids  
We were without concerns  
Without grief  
Without the knowledge  
Of how bad the world is

How bad it can be  
Back then  
As kids  
We were free  
  
But now  
We are older  
And so we must find our freedom  
We must fight for it  
We must enjoy it when it comes  
We must celebrate it  
For although it's rarer  
It's beautiful  
It's amazing  
It's free

The last time I was free  
Was at the collage concert  
With friends all around me  
Part of a community  
We were waiting to go up

To perform  
To share our music  
And backstage  
I just started dancing  
I danced to joy  
I danced to nothing  
I danced to the feelings  
I danced to be silly  
Chaotic  
Fun  
To enjoy the moment  
To calm my nerves  
To feel the freedom  
The freedom

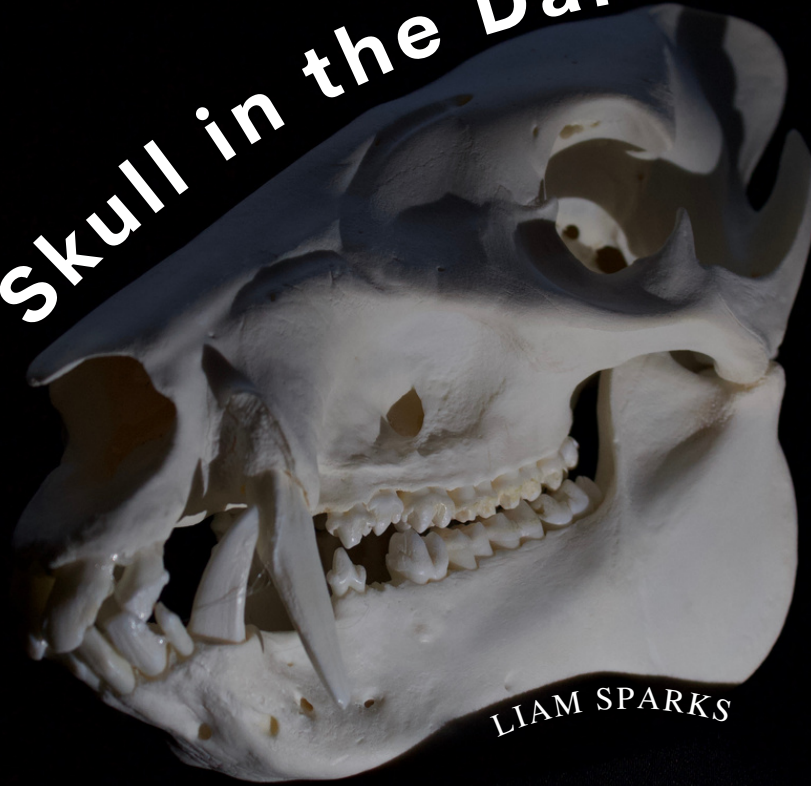
And so then we went onstage  
And we sang  
We sang our freedom  
We sang our emotions  
We sang ourselves  
We sang  
And on that night

**I felt free**

JONATHAN BAELE  
*West Rd*



# Skull in the Dark



LIAM SPARKS

## we search and find nothing

By ANONYMOUS



NOT OKAY.

The light sliding in between the trees

No permission  
to come into my heart like that,  
to warm my skin, the morning  
without telling me of the day  
ahead

It can't be that bad.  
one time or another,  
everyone  
gets hurt

so you're not special  
just  
broken down like boots,  
like everybody else

and their eyes see things too

Don't you know?  
the way half of the moon is hidden and  
slowly revealed  
is not watched with rapturous eyes,

most are inside

looking into a screen, or into  
the dark  
perhaps trying to find something  
perhaps trying to pass the time, bide  
until tired

but it doesn't mean we find nothing.



LAURA MEAD  
*Some Days*



# Cello Concentrations

JUJU CRANE



## Complexity

By SKYLOR FORD

When you start something, it's complicated  
Overwhelming, all-consuming  
But once you get into it  
Break it down, hands dirty  
You realize it's not  
It's more simple  
Still a lot  
Simple  
Not

## A Childhood Gone



RANI SETHUPATHY

# Memories

By *CAITLIN STRONG*

The waters are calling,  
I must answer their  
Rippling and enchanting song.  
The delicate green stems of  
Luscious little lotuses  
Beckon amongst buzzing  
Bejeweled dragonflies.  
The lone toad croaks  
As the cricket hums a low tune.  
Serenity sounds from all around,  
A medley of ephemeral peace  
Composed just for me.  
The gentle purring of a motor  
Arms outstretched to feel the cool spray of  
droplets  
As the boat travels across the water  
Jumping off the end for a swim  
Only dry long enough for a quick lunch  
Living for days spent on lake waters

# Untitled

AYU ANDERSON



# Untitled

AYU ANDERSON



A drive miles upstream  
Entering the cool river waters  
Laughing through the rapids  
Spotting the telltale white heads of Bald  
Eagles  
They let the current carry them home  
At peace in the beautiful landscape  
I grasp these memories tightly  
Of tranquility and natural wonders  
Of time spent away from a busy world  
To be treasured my entire life  
Hoping that in twenty, fifty years  
These moments won't solely exist in  
memory

# Wildflowers

By CAITLIN STRONG

2<sup>nd</sup>  
SHORT STORY

The sun is already halfway past the horizon when Hazel steps out of the car. She basks in the fiery glow, admiring its simple beauty. For a moment, she almost forgets why she has returned to these familiar fields. She gazes out across plains of tall grasses and the bounties of wildflowers and breathes it all in. Even though five years have passed since her last visit, everything seems to have stayed exactly as it once was.

"Hazel!" Mari runs up beside her, her smile radiating warmth.

"Hey!" Hazel smiles back, pulling Mari in for a hug.

Hazel reluctantly releases Mari as she tugs Hazel towards the large sycamore tree of their childhood. Underneath its green leaves and lively branches, the girls sit and begin to speak. "So, how have you been?" Hazel asks.

"I'm great," Mari replies. "Of course, I miss you, my mom, and Bear, that silly little goofball. But I'm doing fine."

Hazel laughs as she pictures Mari's Jack Russell terrier. He was always trying to pick up as many toys as he could fit into his mouth: tennis balls, bones, stuffed toys. "I'm glad."

A gust of wind blows through, catching a withered leaf from among the greenery above. It comes to rest on the ground beside the two girls. "And how about you?" Mari asks. "I'm—" Hazel pauses. "I'm doing good. I think. I started birdwatching, so that's fun." She smiles, remembering all the nicknames for the birds they had come up with in their youths, unaware of their true names. "I can recognize a lot of them, even by their sounds now." "Sounds great," Mari says. "You should invite me sometime. Don't just keep all of the fun to yourself!" She pokes Hazel, laughing, but Hazel regards her with an unreadable expression.

"Someday," she agrees, finally. "Someday, I'll let you tag along."

"That's a promise I'm holding you too, okay?" Hazel rolls her eyes, and Mari smacks her lightly on the shoulder.

"Hey!" Hazel protests half-heartedly.

Mari chuckles lightly, but then she frowns. "I haven't seen you in five years, you know." Hazel's face darkens. "I know." She sighs and leans back. "I'm sorry. But—" she pauses. "I just... couldn't. All of it was just too much."

Mari softens. "I know. I'm sorry, too. That I, you know, couldn't be there for you." They return their gazes to the fields before them. Hazel wistfully stares at the abundance of wildflowers, the familiar view stirring up an infinite number of memories. The first time she met Mari, Hazel remembers, she was sitting in this very meadow. She was smaller then, younger. She had wandered just a little too far away. The world had seemed so big, and she didn't know how to get home. If she would ever get home.

After wandering around, trying to find her way back, Hazel had come across the meadow. She thought she might've found the right path, but she'd never seen this meadow before. Frightened and alone, Hazel collapsed under the sycamore tree and began to cry. "Why are you crying?" A girl's voice interrupted Hazel's panic, and she lifted her head from its resting place on her knees.

"Why are you crying?" The girl repeated softly, crouching down next to Hazel. "I- I don't know where I am," Hazel said, lips trembling, voice strained. "I want to go home!"

"That's ok," the girl said, smiling at her. "I'm Mari. I'll help you!"

"I'm Hazel," she sniffed.

Mari suddenly stood. "Wait here, Hazel. I'll be right back."

Hazel's teary eyes followed her movements, afraid that Mari might leave her here, alone, but Mari didn't go far. Instead, she wandered over to the tall grasses and carefully plucked a handful of the colorful flowers peeking out.

When she returned, she presented them to Hazel like a bouquet. "For you," she said with a smile. "So you won't feel so sad anymore."

That was only the beginning of their friendship. After that afternoon, the two girls quickly became inseparable. And after that afternoon, for any and every event, happy or sad, they would pick a bouquet of wildflowers for each other.

Now, Hazel goes out into that same field once more. She slowly picks a selection of white daisies, blue forget-me-nots, and red poppies while Mari looks on from their spot by the tree.

Once she's collected enough, she arranges them into a bouquet and walks it back to Mari. "For you," she says softly. "To celebrate our reunion."

"Thanks!" Mari laughs and wraps her arms around Hazel. "I love them." Hazel clutches her tightly before finally letting go. Another leaf, cracked and brown, drops from a branch above, swirling away in the breeze.

Hazel stays there for a couple more hours, sitting under the sycamore. This has always been her favorite spot. Mari's too. "I miss you so much," she says, but Mari doesn't respond. With a sad smile, Hazel stands and walks back to her car. As she leaves, she gives one last glance to the sycamore tree, and the bouquet of wildflowers lying beside it. "Goodbye," she whispers before driving off into the night.



**Night Time  
Lake Vibes**  
JUJU CRANE

# Unearthing the end of an obscure ancient civilization: Excerpts from the archives of the Lestonian people

By *ALEX ELIA & JENNIFER ZHAO*



The year they revolted was an anhibortuous one. Historians through the ages have porniferously noted it as particularly noteworthy, yet much remains unknown about the incident, and as a result it is not widely recognized by the general public. The few relics recovered were scattered, as if in the middle of the night: a cat's wig, a child-sized sandwich. Through these, we've pieced together the trepichordial story.

Although the rule of the Ghornchi could be described as rather curinical, all appeared deceptively calm until the Curnels, the first of the three groups, began to make themselves apricious to the other two. Throughout their control, the Ghornchi relied on fierce separation between the tribes; they knew that cooperation would spell out their deaths. Yet, unbeknownst to them, the three groups slowly built up an underground black market to rival that of the Ghornchi. Each night, thousands of parakeets were stapled together and thrust into the poieferous bioluminescence of the algae lamps that lit the dank tunnels. Soon they were flying back and forth between the grumbles in a clandestine opera, entertaining delighted refrincials and customers with their plumage. Their glamour became so well known that the wealthiest of Ghornchians procured them as catecharchs hidden beneath their home, where they secretly doubled as communications transmittants for the purposes of the three groups.

What they didn't know was that these birds had a tertiary purpose. They were, in fact, incendiary explosives, designed to shred the Curnel's captors into bloody charcoal from beneath their very feet. Historians debate the agathokakological nature of the rebellion: though the Curnels were fighting for their freedom, their goal was undoubtedly the ruthless spillage of Ghornchi blood.

And they almost did not achieve it. In the end, the entire operation relied on one periluminic day. The Curnels constructed their entire plan around their ace—a beknictic cat, whom they equipped with their fastest firing ordnance and a stunning disguise. In one historical reenactment, the cat coyly twirled its blonde hair around its finger as it prepared to enter the Ghornchi lairs. The Curnels had instructed it to detonate the catecharchs and escape through the pipes it entered through. But this was a mistake.

The Curnel's trust had been misplaced, for this blonde cat was not blonde at all. In fact, it was a double agent, hiding its true tabby nature under a wig. And as it dashed between the Ghornchi dwellings, quentering of the plot and facilitating an evacuation, the wig came loose. When the Curnels found the blonde mass upon a tunnel floor, they knew of its betrayal, and although they mourned their loss of a skilled complé, all was not yet lost.

Though the Ghornchi seemed two steps ahead, the security system of their underground lair was not easily surpassed from either side. But their eventual failure was based on the very thing they thought would save them—the evacuation itself. As the Ghornchis fled from their dwellings, they could only carry what they could take in the precious seconds before they trepattled. But one [child] who had been nicked by his parents as he was preniering a midnight snack couldn't bear to leave without his food, and snuck back into the castle when everyone had been evacuated. The Curnels couldn't get in through the doors, but through their catecharchs they skillfully convinced the [child] to eat his sandwich... on top of the switch set to detonate the entire system.

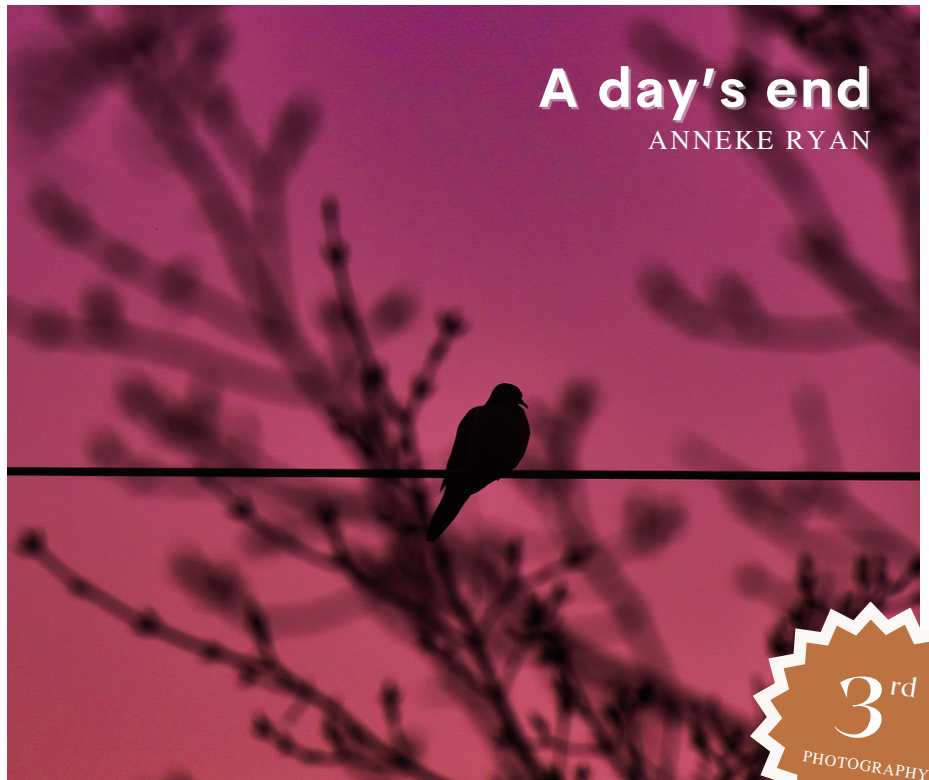
Curiously, historians found the un-maimed sandwich crusts atop the ashes of an entire civilization. How the sandwich survived the blast, then weathered the elements of centuries, is beyond the imagination of any current historian. In folk retellings of the incident, the [child] survives and is treated as a hero among the Curnels, but there is currently no evidence to suggest this is true.

With the Ghornchis successfully decimated, the Curnels quickly established power over their supporting tribes. Their dynasty would last only for 200 or so years before being usurped by a race known as the Homo Sapiens. This group would domiciliate a fragile and ignorant rule, which unfortunately remained supreme for thousands of years. Their extremely erunciating lifestyle was effective in destroying most evidence of Curnel rule, and of the Curnel revolution. We're lucky to have pieced this semi-complete narrative together over the course of the millenia after the Homo Sapiens' fall.



## Looming Changes

By SYLVAN GREENFIELD



## A day's end

ANNEKE RYAN



## Untitled

AYU ANDERSON

## Mom,

By COCO HAMILTON



A poem can appreciate,  
 a poem can convey,  
 but a poem can not possibly contain my love for you.  
 Even the word seems menial,  
 'love,'  
 a trivialization of my whole world.  
 How do you pen the feelings  
 that you can't even describe?  
 How do you write an ode for a person  
 to whom you own everything?  
 I could appreciate the little things;  
 the freshly cooked dinners,  
 the chocolate chip cookies,  
 the laundry you still do for me.  
 I could reminisce;  
 about trips to California,  
 about road trips and stomach aches,  
 about holidays that you always made special.  
 Or, maybe, I could just say  
 Thank you.  
 For everything.  
 A poem isn't much—  
 and it's probably full of grammatical errors,  
 since you didn't proofread this time,  
 but I want you to know  
 that I love you.



# AFRICA

Africa, my  
motherland, the

Africa my ancestors lived in, The Africa  
my parents were born in, The Africa I've  
grown in. The Africa where the lion roams with  
majestic grace, and the elephants march leaving  
trails to trace. The Africa that holds all its people  
together, and stays together. In the fiery sunset,  
colors ablaze. The spirit of Africa sets hearts ablaze.  
A symphony of grace, resilience, and might. Igniting  
souls with an eternal light. And now, the distance between  
fiery sunset, the distance between color ablaze and the distance  
between grace, resilient and mine. Africa, my dear motherland  
I miss you. Even though I am not with you right now,

I think about you, you are still in my  
heart. From the day I was born 'till  
the day I will die, you will be in  
my heart. And you will be the  
motherland I've never had,  
you made me strong and  
and brave, and I'll thank  
and love you for that.

Africa my dear motherland  
thank you so much for  
raising me.

I love you



# A Picture Worth a Thousand Words

By BRENNA LUCIO-BELBASE

I couldn't look away. I was so mesmerized by the painting that I didn't even hear our teacher calling us back to the bus.

It was a simple painting, a portrait done during the time of the Renaissance. A woman stood in the center of the frame with a serene half-smile, evoking a similar aura to the Mona Lisa. The precision was incredible, of course, but what really struck me was how realistic it was. I wouldn't have known that it was a Renaissance painting if I didn't read the plaque—that is to say, her face didn't have the shape that I was used to in Renaissance paintings, nor did the painting show the typical conventions during the period. Besides, it didn't even look that old.

The painting was beautifully preserved, more so than paintings of even twentieth-century art that I had seen. The woman's gown, in particular, was a vibrant crimson. I hadn't even known that painters had really used that color at the time. Her eyes, similar to the Mona Lisa's, seemed to track you across the room, though these were creased forebodingly, as if worried—or angry. I would be, too, if I was living shortly after a third of my continent had just been struck down by the plague.

"It's rude to stare, you know."

I jumped about a foot in the air, looking behind me—for Samantha, or Maggie, jokingly reminding me not to wander away from them again, even as I was realizing that the woman's mouth had moved. Someone must have cut a slit in her mouth to make her appear to talk.

*Crafty*, I thought admiringly, moving closer to try and examine the operating mechanism. Her mouth wasn't just moving up-and-down, either—it was widening and narrowing horizontally, like a real human mouth would.

"Sorry, that was a joke. I didn't intend to frighten you." She said, sounding vaguely alarmed. Her voice, too, was realistic—not with the metallic tinge like computer voices, but with the sound of a human voice. Slightly lilting, almost as if she were on the verge of singing.

"Who's operating you?" I asked.

"Who's operating me?" She repeated confusedly, rolling the word operating around in her mouth confusedly. Whoever was operating her was really into character—and was apparently going to stay in character.

I changed course. "How are you so well-preserved?"

"Aw, thank you!" She exclaimed, which struck me as a kind of modern thing to say just like Samantha would say, while Maggie rolled her eyes at her antics. "*Everyone* says that. They *so* love my dress. Is your teacher there? Perhaps she can explain."

"No, they all left." I answered distractedly. "That's not really important. How do you look so..."

I drifted off, frowning.

"*Realistic*? I'm based off—modeled after—real people, after all." She laughed. "And I just get freshened up every once in a while to stay looking so...unblemished and pristine. Come on, have a closer look at my dress."

"You're not supposed to touch museum stuff." I said, even as my feet moved me forward. My eyes stayed focused on her face, not her dress—probably just instinct because I was having a conversation with her. I hadn't noticed a freckle before, on the corner of her left eye. "Hey, you and Samantha—one of my friends—have the same freckle."

"So we do," She answered, astonished, "What about my mouth? Have you figured that out?"

I blinked. "No. How *does* it work? Is someone speaking behind the wall, or-?"

"What about my eyes?" She pressed. "Come closer. I won't bite."

I inched closer. As I did so, a smell began to fill my nostrils, sickly sweet.

"Fresh paint." She said cheerfully. "I just had a new coat done—an hour ago or so. See my dress? That part looks dry, right there."

Of its own will, my hand went out and touched what would be a single thread—just a small dot—on her dress, where her

eyes had traveled to. Her eyes were being controlled, too? Was that why they seemed to follow me earlier?

“Wait.” I frowned. “People?”

“Hmm?”

“You said you were based off of *people*, plural. Not one singular person.” I pointed out, with what Samantha and Maggie kindly sugar coated as a *stubborn streak*. Mom just told me to stop trying to be a lawyer and catch people in verbal mistakes. It’s not intentional- I’m just confused.

“You don’t recognize my eyes or my mouth, then.” The woman said sadly, before her eyes lit up, a bright, bright, emerald green. I *did* recognize that green- those eyes. Her lips curved a little to the right as she smiled. I knew that smile- that mouth “You lost track of your friends, didn’t you? Maggie and Samantha? Your teacher did say that buddy systems of three might not work as well.”

“How did you-” I tried to take a step back, but felt my finger suddenly stuck to the painting.

“You’re a bad groupmate, Allie.” She said, sounding disappointed. “You’re not carrying your weight. Oh, don’t struggle, now- I don’t want to have to clean up.”

“Clean up?” I repeated, incredulous. “What on Earth are you talking about?”

“Don’t scream now, either. Samantha did, hence why-” The woman gestured to her mouth, “-and Maggie kept looking for an escape. But I don’t need *much*- I’m nearly complete.”

“What?” I tried to pull my finger away, but found it searing hot, growing hotter the more I struggled. It was then that I recognized the smell from before, coupled with my own what I hadn’t realized before. My own flesh was...

“No burn marks, darling, please!” She laughed. “I probably only want one more coat, now. Who knows? You may even leave alive- oh, no. But you could die *slowly*. How does that sound?”

“Another coat?”

“I’m nearly dry,” She said airily, just as I realized- *finally*, too late- why her dress was so vibrant.

This was no sick joke. This was real. The sight, the smell, the warm, sticky texture as some of it dripped onto my fingers-

“Your choice, my dear. Would you prefer a vein or your jugular?”





## Untitled

YORDANA WILENSKY



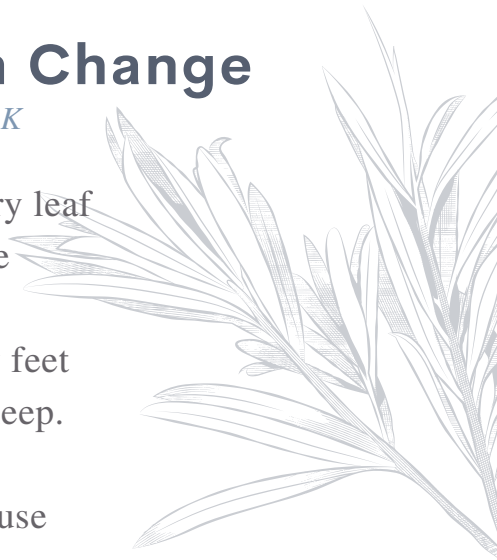
## Untitled

YORDANA WILENSKY

## Rooted in Change

By NAVEENA CLARK

if I inspected every leaf  
that fell before me  
or  
crushed under my feet  
I would lose all sleep.  
oh,  
but if I did not pause  
to wait  
for the limpid rolling water of streams  
/ever so patient as to guide me—  
I would lose the ease of peace  
and if my heart didn't quicken its beating  
to chase /the paced/ run of rivers  
whose flow is unyielding to force  
but willing to curve—  
I would lose my dreams.  
limbs tremble like branches on trees  
awaiting uncertain winds  
doubt and hope be neath  
roots won't release  
I must decide to stay or leave  
like leaves do trees  
my future folds  
I leave



Tears of Relief

By NORA COCH





# Untitled

AYU ANDERSON



# Untitled

YEN TRAN

## A Tree ————— By SKYLOR FORD

From a young sapling - fresh and free  
To a huge oak - wise beyond it's years  
A tree grows  
In the middle of a forest

Then a match sparks  
And a phoenix of fire rises  
Burning down the forest  
Leaving nothing but a pile of ash

But a funny thing about ash  
It's full of nutrients  
The exact nutrients needed  
For new life to grow

And so from the forest floor  
New life sparks  
A tree grows up again  
Rising from the ash

And although it's not the same  
It's similar; a new version  
And from the ashes of the previous trees  
A tree rises up again

When we fall  
We are like the tree  
We rise back up again  
A new version of ourselves

We are different  
We are the same  
We are reborn  
We are rebirthed



# The Lookout

JOHAN MCGARRY



## Searching for Words

ZAIREN CHEN

## Panacea, Please

By NAVEENA CLARK

how long can a lie live  
if i wrap it up in spit  
and give it like a gift  
would you  
take it  
like a champ  
medicine  
would you  
take it  
on your knees  
begging  
i bet a lie would live  
longer in your belly

in the warmth of your depths  
in the comfort of your flesh  
host body digest  
and we'll find out  
if a lie takes root  
like an invasive plant  
growing and twisting  
in the corners of your conscious  
panacea, please,  
the bitter lie  
unfolds within you  
sickens the soul  
the prescription said "feel no pain"  
but we feel everything



## Light From Within

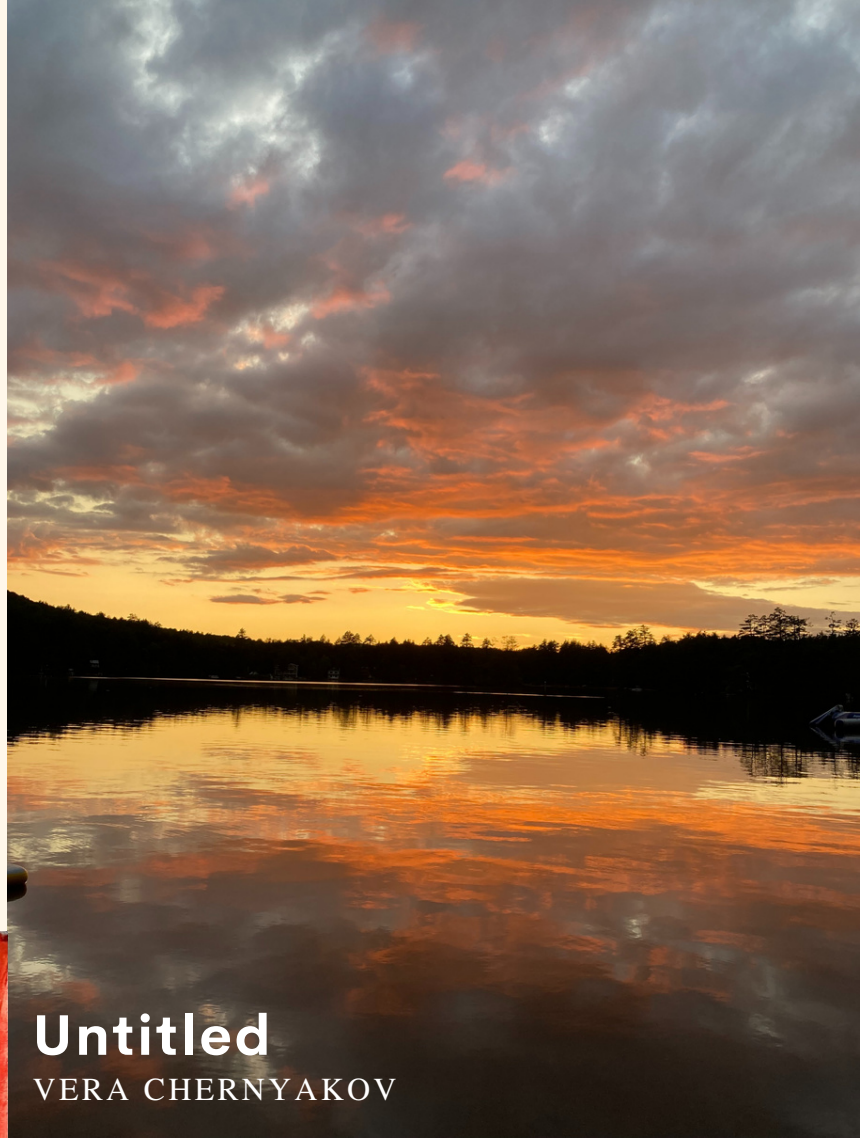


LIAM SPARKS

# Women of Serious Love

By *NAVEENA CLARK*

that bomb on 16th Street was meant for me  
and the ones who take up too much space  
with our dreams and cotton candy holding hands  
outstretched to hug the sun—  
our mothers can't shield us from every bomb dropped  
so they paint the sky in constellations  
as if each life taken  
creates a new point of light  
on earth's black canvass  
/my sister stars, my memory  
yaaaah, our mothers be the creators of constellations in our  
own images  
cuz they wants us, the women of serious love,  
to unlearn all that the co conspiring  
mistresswives have taught on us\  
my mother gave me my name  
so there'd be no confusion as to who I am



# Untitled

VERA CHERNYAKOV

our mothers be the ones to brighten stars like Harriets'  
bringing gifts off they hips, no chariots  
we dig in  
/hang off the concerns of their lips  
where she threads her stories through  
our mothers be the tilt of the sun  
that our sisters died to love  
and the weight of those darkened clouds that fix droughts  
our mothers be all that and contradiction  
strength in vulnerability/  
mother of waters—missisipian  
agile like a cat, black  
escaping the corners you put her in  
fleeing the body to free her soul  
my mothers speak the way to me  
/show me where my sisters are, yeah,  
stay and live with me,  
walk and close the gap between  
us, the women of serious love



1871

ZAIRAN CHEN

# Untitled

AYU ANDERSON



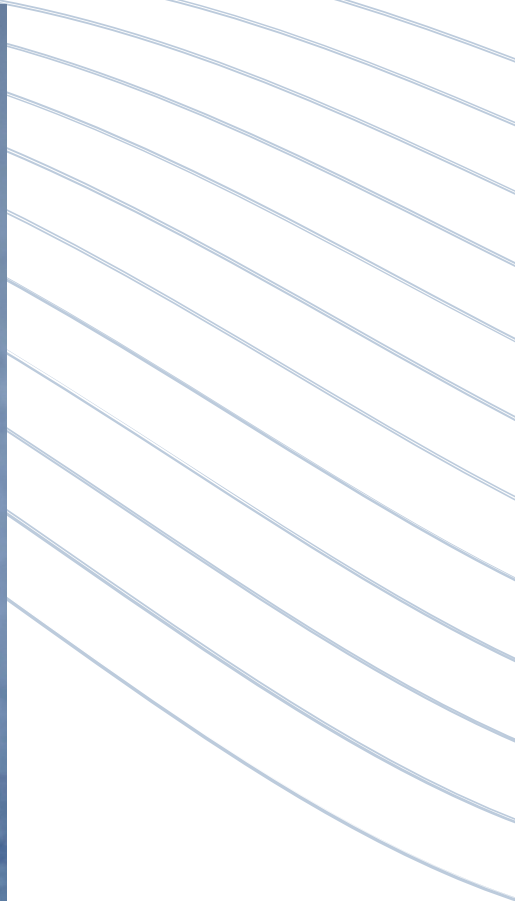
# Lake Sunset

ECHO DOGGETT



# Paintbrushes of the Sky

RANI SETHUPATHY



# The Voidfish

By SKYLOR FORD





Say Her  
Name



ZAIRAN CHEN

## Bricks

By AARON MAINES

Bricks are hard and rectangle  
In all different shades of red  
With them you can build great walls  
Or bang 'em against your friend's head

## CAPITAL SUGGESTION

By LIAM SPARKS

A CAPITALIST  
ANARCHO-CAPITALIST  
CAPITAL AWESOME

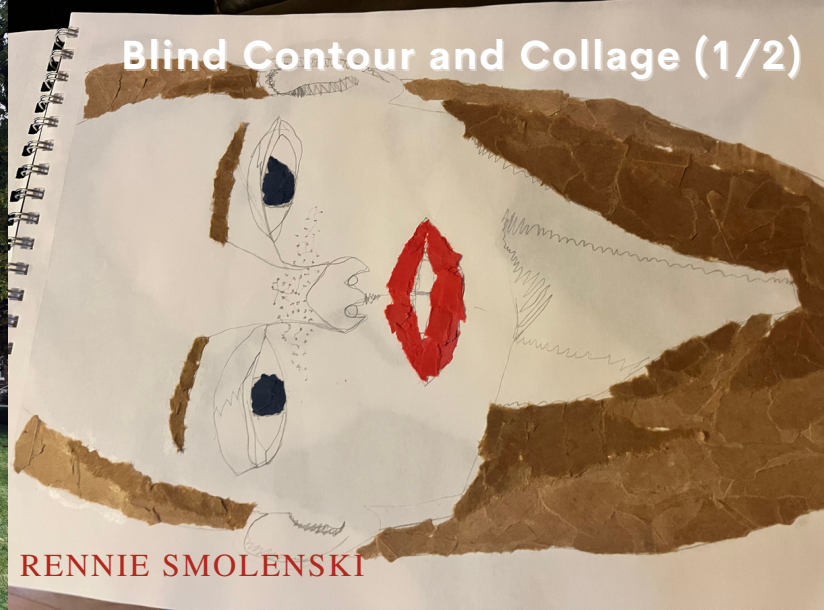
ZAIRAN CHEN



Self Portrait



**UVR**  
JONATHAN BAEI



Blind Contour and Collage (1/2)

RENNIE SMOLENSKI

# Time Keeper

By CAITLIN STRONG

Tick. Tick. Tick.  
The hands move  
Round and round again  
Forever in motion.

Stop. Make it stop.  
Helplessly frozen  
Watching the minutes tick away  
Time disappearing before your very eyes

The cursor blinks  
Against the blinding white page  
Staring tauntingly  
No words in sight

They're right there  
Pounding, aching  
But they won't come out  
Not coherently. Certainly not beautifully.

Just put something down  
Something, anything  
As long as it proves  
This hasn't been a total waste



ROXANNE NELSON & SELINA DONG

# Urban Dreaming

# Ode to Music

By SKYLOR FORD

Music is joy  
Wonderful sounds, leaping into your ear  
Filling you with emotion, with feelings  
Whether they be wonderous or despairing  
You FEEL  
Music makes you feel

Music is acceptance  
It recognizes you  
It sees you  
It loves you  
You love it  
And that love is spread  
To any who hear it

Music is community  
It brings people together, bonds us  
In shared experiences  
In shared music  
In music  
You find yourself  
You find others  
And others find you

Music is expression  
It's a way to show yourself to the world  
It's a beautiful blend of rhymes  
Techniques  
Pitches  
Notes  
And you  
Yourself  
It comes together  
It all comes together  
Into emotion  
Into art  
Into beauty  
And forms you

Music is joy



## Sky

DINITHI SENEVIRATHNA



## Hanging On By a Thread

RANI SETHUPATHY



# 'Oboe' Spelled with Reeds

RANI SETHUPATHY



# Rani Sethupathy doing Contortion Handstand

CORALLUS MEEKS



RANI SETHUPATHY

# Oboe Reed Forest



CHESTER STONE  
**Through The Looking Glass**



## First Snowfall

By *KENT MCNAIRN*

When the now first falls,

The sun seems to shine brighter.  
 When the first snow falls,

Everything seems to come round.

When the first snow falls,  
 It's usually the end of the year.  
 And when it's the end of the year,

The family holidays happen.  
 The holidays when you see everyone,  
 When you see everyone you don't want to see.

When you see the people who don't care about you,  
 The people who ask shallow questions,  
 Ignoring your shallow answers.

The time of the year that I've almost always hated.  
 The time of the year that I've always dreaded.  
 The time of the year that defines seasonal depression for me.

So when the first snow falls,  
 The idea of "everything's all good! This family has no  
 problems!" is upheld in highest regard.

When the first snow falls,  
 I have to understand the mask I wear,  
 Caring to make sure it covers everything I hold dear.

Make sure it doesn't show me.

When the first snow falls.



## Cayuga Lake

LEVI JIROSCH

# Teatime

By ZADIE WANG



Watching my sister get married is more emotional than I expected it to be. I knew I would cry. I beat my face with a powder puff in anticipation of crying, but I never expected that so much melancholy could ferment in my stomach all at once. My eyes burn, but I hold the tears back for another few seconds, as long as I can bear it.

Her off-white gowns remind me of the princess dresses we used to frolic around in as kids. We would play dress-up together and imagine ourselves as the royal princesses of far-off lands, drinking fruit juice from intricately decorated cups with our pinkies in the air. We would make Play-Doh creations as part of our princess duties and accidentally got bits of the Play-Doh on our gowns.

As we got older, I felt too mature for dramatic play. I swapped out the princess gowns for shiny pants and progressively smaller shirts; I swapped out my trusty playmate for the boys at school with iffy morals and destructive streaks. This felt good at the time—I was getting older, and even though I wasn't leaving my sister in the dust, I thought it would be best if we branched out a little bit. After all, my friends were calling, and I didn't fit into my princess dresses anymore.

So, we stopped dressing up as often. She found a few other playmates, and I spent time with kids my age. Occasionally she asked me to play, and sometimes I'd say yes. When we did, though, I was often thinking about the events of the day and not fully committed to my pretend-play character. I could see the glimmer fading from her eyes when she realized I was distracted, and I felt the guilt tumble down my spine. Eventually, she stopped asking me to play with her.

We continued to grow up. I hit my teenage years and got more distant than ever; she went to a new school and began meeting people she enjoyed spending time with. As she became more social, I slowly led myself deeper and deeper into isolation. In that darkness, I reminded myself of our princess days. What I wouldn't have given, in those moments, to fit into my dress and have tea with her again.

Now, look at her. A real live princess, adorned with a veil and glimmering jewelry just like we envisioned. No strand of hair would dare look out of place—she looks perfect. As I watch her walk down the aisle, my eyes are glued to her beaming face. My dad hands her off to her awaiting lover and I feel the tears start to make their escape.

This, I'm sure, marks the true end of our princess days.



Untitled

AYU ANDERSON

# A Walk in the Snowy Woods

By SKYLOR FORD

You emerge from the shaded shelter of a shed as you step into the clearing. The sun shines bright in your eyes. You look upon the world as it unfolds before you, and you see trees stretching on for infinity. Each one is covered in snow, glistening and sparkling from the sunlight. You see a beautiful blue sky above you, splattered with clouds, shifting and changing, every second creating something new. You hear the wind, whistling in your ear, blowing your hair back and your hood off, chilling your ears. You feel the cold around you, but since you're covered in your thick, cozy, warm coat, it doesn't bother you much. With each step through the woods, you feel yourself sink down, just a bit, until the snow is packed enough to support you. But this is all background noise on your walk through the snowy wood

You walk along a path that twists and turns, breaking off in different directions. Each time you reach a fork in the road, you make a choice: which way to go. But whichever way you pick, you will continue walking. Whichever way you pick, you still feel the wind and the cold. Whichever way you pick, you will still see the trees and the sky, and you still take another step. Whichever way you pick, you still walk along the path before you. Each turn gets you to a different place, but you still have a similar journey.

You keep walking along the path, until...

You reach a clearing

The clearing is covered in a sheet of snow, with sun glistening off it. The snow has transformed the empty field into a beautiful piece of art, of beauty. And there's nothing even on it yet. It's waiting. For you. For you to turn it into something more. For you to bring beauty onto this blank canvas. It's waiting for the masterpiece that is your footsteps on the ground. It's waiting for you to draw something amazing on it, as each step becomes one of thousands of marks that when viewed as a whole, is something beautiful. It's waiting to record your journey, wherever it might take you.

You keep on walking until you've reached the edge of the clearing. The woods are upon you now, right in front of you. And in front of you are many different trails, each marked by a wooden sign. The signs are old, worn down, but still standing. Each one is unique. Each one is its own. And each one lights a way for you. Each one marks a different route forward. These paths are already there for you. They've all been walked on before, many times. And yet, they aren't the only ways forward. You turn left and then right, and you can see the footprints of a rabbit, a deer, a coyote. Each of them chose their own path, their own way forward. You could choose your own way too. But that's scary. That's terrifying. That's a risk. You don't know what could be along any of those paths. It's a mystery. It's a choice. It's a journey.



You look at the marked paths. You look at the alternate paths others took. You look at the empty woods. And then at the sky. Which way will you go? You ponder this for a while, and then...

You make your way forward.

Into the dark woods. Into the unknown.

And whichever path you chose

Whichever path you end up choosing

You will find your way

Who is that girl looking back at me?  
 She looks like me.  
 She smells like me.  
 She sounds like me.  
 But who is she?  
 Something in my mind calls attention to a carefully tended  
 to seed of pride,  
 already having spread its gnarled roots  
 down,  
     down,  
         down.

But for what?  
 What vanity is there to be had?  
 The girl is smiling, but that isn't my smile. Those aren't my  
 lips.  
 Those aren't my teeth.  
 The sides of her eyes crinkle like mine do, but they appear  
 hesitant to close.  
 Worried that to blink would be to lose progress of some  
 invisible goal that she so obviously wants to show off.  
 Something.  
 Something is off.  
 Who is She?  
 I reach up and prod my face with a pointed finger and feel  
 that my skin is burning up.  
 I gasp as a jolt of pain snakes its way to the tip of my  
 middle finger.  
 A blister bubbles up and I don't even bother to turn on the  
 faucet and run my hand through cold water like I know I  
 should.  
 I am far too distracted by the person in the mirror so I  
 figure it doesn't matter enough for me to care. It's not a  
 finger I ever use much anyway.  
 My eyes dart back up to stare at the girl.  
 I flip her off with intentions of checking my finger for  
 damage and my chest heaves realizing the girl in the mirror  
 has no burn.  
 Her finger is completely fine.  
 No bubble.  
 No pain.  
 She is still smiling.  
 Strange.  
 I think I'm supposed to be proud of her.  
 She sure seems proud of herself.  
 Why should I be proud of her?  
 Who am I anyway?

There's a phone sitting next to me.  
 I can't contain my wonder as my hands grasp the  
 device and  
 my sweaty fingers struggle to unlock it.  
 I manage to get in rather quickly once I realize it has  
 the same password as my own phone.  
 My thumb flicks through its camera roll, and I am  
 surprised to see it's filled to the brim, but barren of the  
 faces I love.  
 The people in the pictures look friendly,  
 sure.  
 But I can't help but feel conflicted.  
 My "forever friends".  
 They're missing?  
 Odd.  
 My body and brain are apart as my fingers begin to  
 speed through days,  
 weeks,  
 months.  
 As my thumb glides and swipes, the eerily empty  
 branches of the autumn trees morph into sleepless  
 summer nights and soon after, dewy spring mornings.  
 Something about the girl's face tells me she's happy  
 about these pictures.  
 About meeting these people.  
 I want more than anything to share her joy. But how  
 can I possibly be proud of her when I've lost my  
 identity?  
 I wish I could scroll through the girl's thoughts just  
 like I did with her phone.  
 I want to snoop through her ponderings and  
 daydreams. I want to know who this girl is.  
 Who am I anyway?  
 My chest swells and I notice a throbbing pain in my  
 throat.  
 I fail to swallow it away and a single hot, steamy, tear  
 cascades down my cheek.  
 Then another.  
 Then another.  
 And another.  
 I'm defeated as they pour down each crevice and slope  
 of my face with no sign of stopping.  
 I can't hold myself up any longer and I am suddenly  
 hunched over.  
 My elbows are drilled into the sink's dense marble  
 counter,



my hands mashed into my cheeks, catching the tears  
as they fall.  
The girl just stares back at me with a certain perplexed  
expression,  
her eyes completely dry.

I suddenly hear a familiar voice echoing  
throughout the room,  
bouncing off the walls like an organ.

I was once told that after the pedal of an organ is  
pressed, the notes will continue to play for eternity  
until the player releases his foot.

Unlike the player, I am not in control.

My eyes are fixed on the girl's mouth as her lips  
begin to murmur hushed sentences.

And her words,

They are from the book.

Alice.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a great  
girl like you, to go on crying this way! Stop this  
moment I tell you!”

But she went on all the same shedding gallons of  
tears, until there was a large pool all round her,  
about four inches deep and reaching half down the  
hall.”

I am immediately lightheaded and I have to grasp  
the edge of the counter to keep myself from  
falling. I know how the story goes.

I need to find a way to reach the key so I can open  
the door and move forward.

So, following in suit with Alice,

I decide to swim.

I need to figure out who I am in this moment or I  
fear I will drown.

But alas, my thoughts have long overflowed and  
seeped far into my veins.

Too far.

Too far to waver.

Too far to stop them from infiltrating my body.

They are weighing me down, forcing me beneath  
the pool of tears I so hastily created.

My lungs have deflated entirely, completely empty  
of any remaining air and I force my eyes shut.

Tight tight tight.

I squeeze them closed as hard as I can, unwilling  
to face the girl.

And then, all of a sudden,

I realize.

The girl in the mirror.

She is me.

And she-the girl I admire.

I understand this now.

High on a pedestal I sit with a crown she placed  
upon my head.

I hold all the power and no longer do I want to be the  
queen.

I make eye contact with my reflection and I hear the  
sound of a faint clattering of the crown somewhere in  
the back of my head.

I smile,

take a breath,

reach out my hand,

and ask the girl,

“Well, who could *we* be?”

## 1871 Shoes

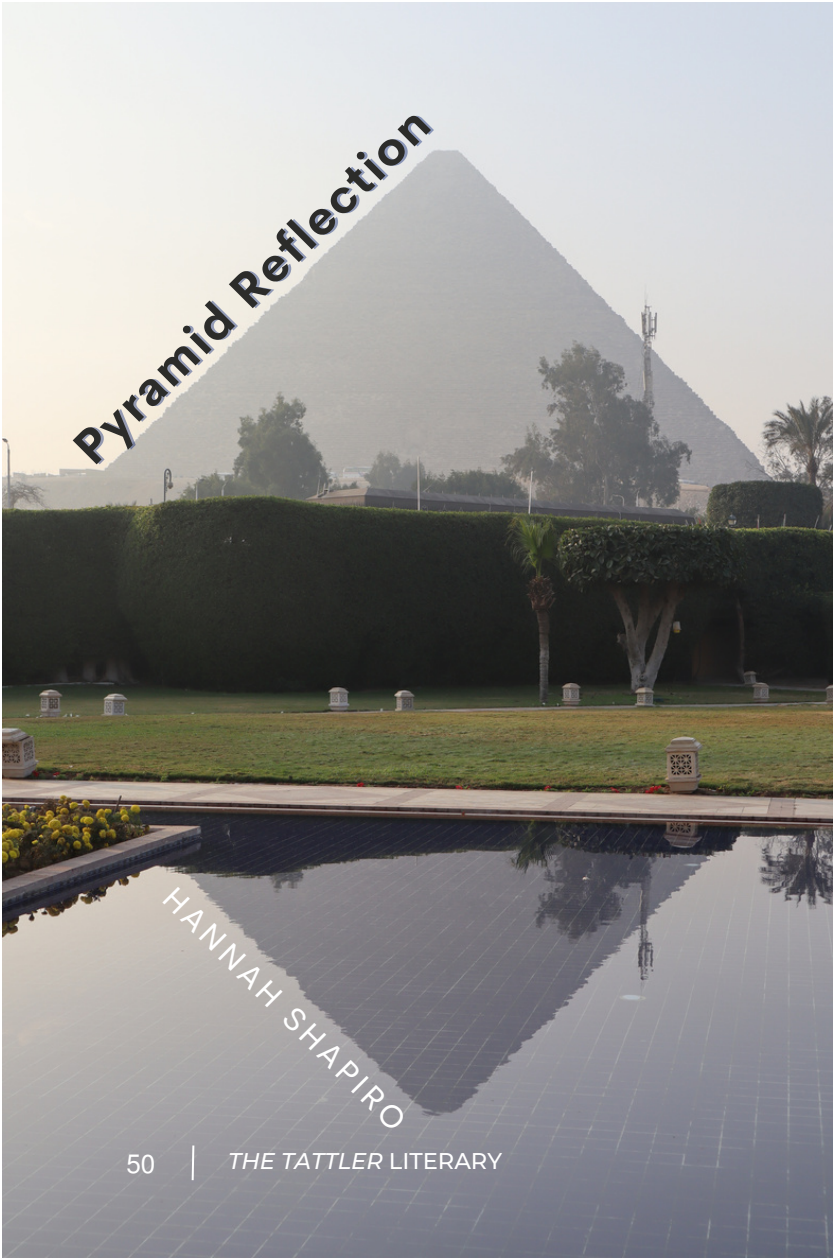
ZAIRAN CHEN



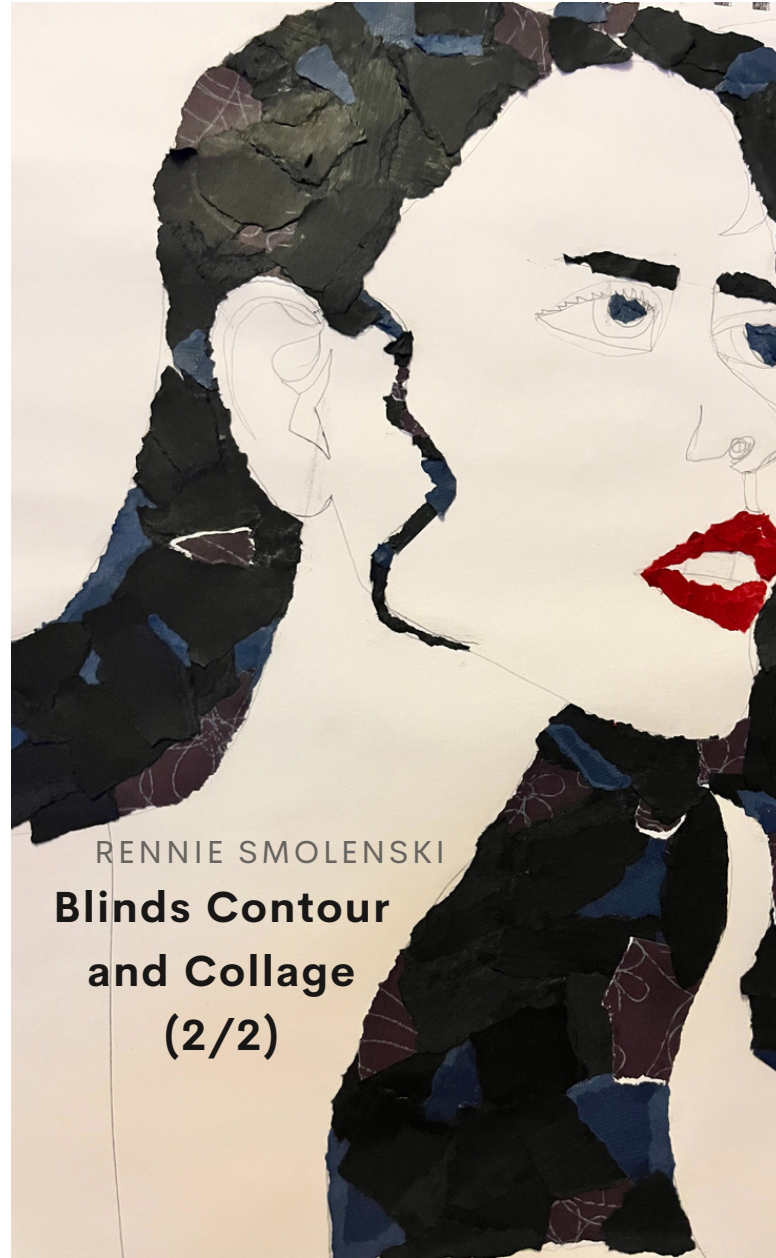
# Vinyl Rainbow



# Pyramid Reflection



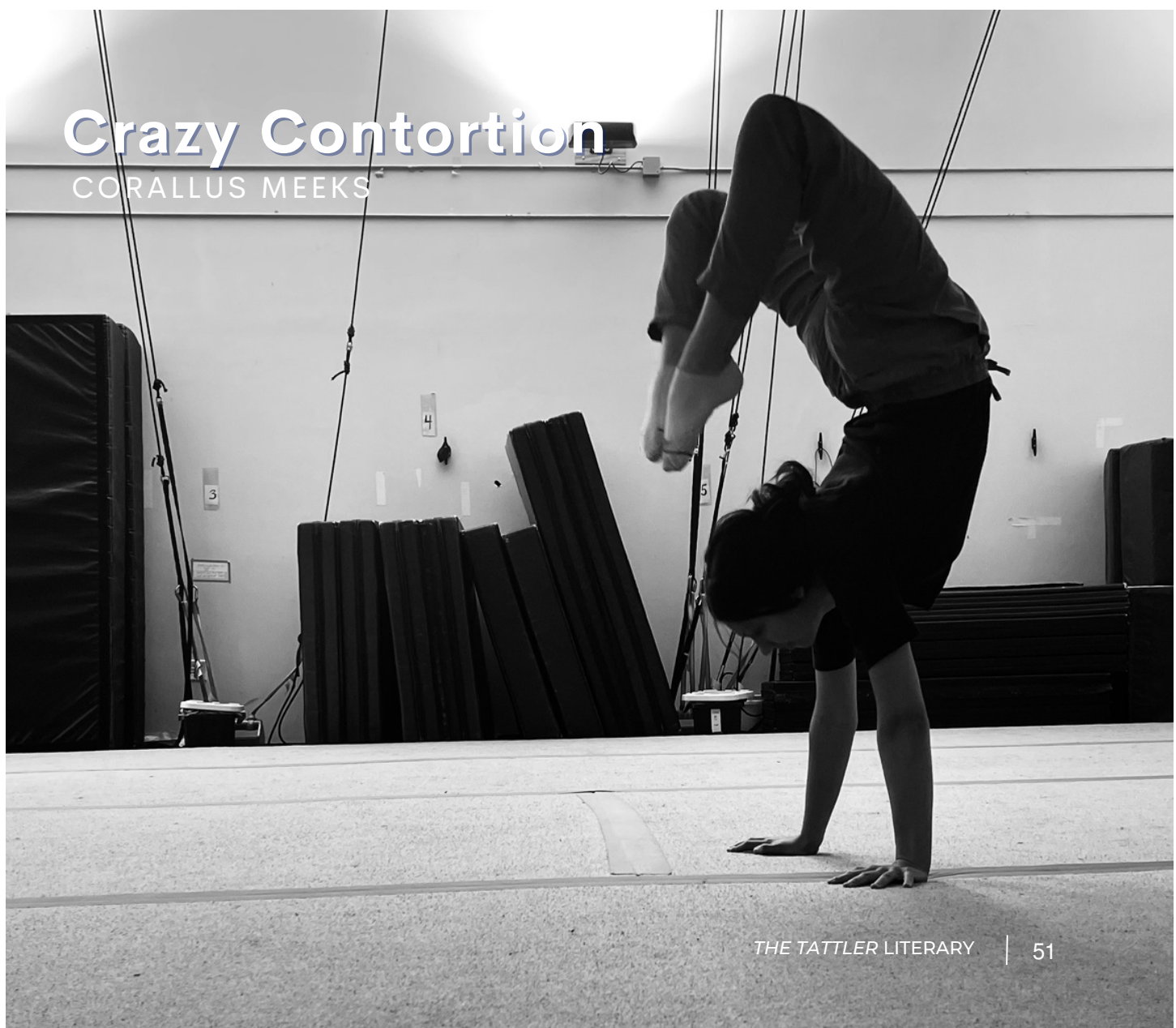
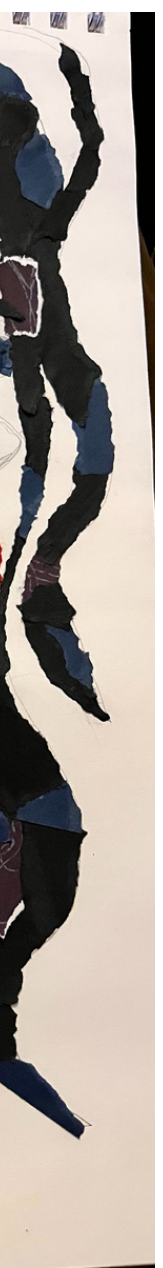
HANNAH SHAPIRO



RENNIE SMOLENSKI  
**Blinds Contour  
and Collage**  
(2/2)



JACK BONASSAR



# Crazy Contortion

CORALLUS MEEKS



**2024**  
**IHS TATTLER**  
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