

THE GUILD

2019

The Shape of V | Love Manifesto | Melanin Boy

The Guild

The Writers' Guild is happy to present to you our Annual literary Magazine. In this issue of our magazine we are celebrating culture. We as a people do not just come from a single cultural background, we come from many walks of life and through all the changes in this world, this magazine speaks out loud about how our culture is still strong within us and how we embrace it fully.

The making of this Magazine was a long and difficult journey, a thanks to everyone who made a submission and for the help of everyone on the team all the hard work put into this magazine was all for you, to show the written creativity and wonderful artwork and photography. It was a great experience being a part of this magazine. Shoutout to the magazine advisor Prof. Goodison for the motivation, and for Anthony Lombardi for all the help, Deborah Hughes for being at my side through thick and thin, and Keegan Hakim for always being there to support and help along this creative process. Lastly, I'd like to thank OSA, SGA, and BMCC for supporting our endeavors.

Sincerely,
Jasmine Augustus Editor-in-Chief

A special thanks to everyone who submitted their work that helped to make this magazine become what it is.

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By Deborah Hughes

There was a trek, a stroll rather, through the silent wood
One that bore intriguing perfume,
Impeding a sharp pessimistic miasma fringed along every offshoot,
Of every seemingly innocent plant

Black clusters muddle this dismal scope,
Performing a shrieking woodwind-like orchestra that entices the naive,
To enrapture them with frisky possession

The very fruit of butchery sways in a slow dance-like motion,
Camouflaged by the celestial lush of silky segments
Surely ready to envelop the undefiled flesh of the poorly meddlesome

Hushed droplets of gore swell the veins of blinding currents,
Eclipsing the compressed shrivel of carcass that are eternally frazzled
Or rather damned by misjudgment,
For omitting the competence of this sinful wood

Too coward to bear what sprawls ahead,
Yet too bold to turn back,
This sauntering is proven beguiled
So seduced by the fake euphoria that plasters atop this shady ferocity

The stubbornness of branches and vines scourge the void,
Heady by the waft of bountiful dermis that acres this soon-to-be meal
Then there's the neighboring thicket,
Eager to send greeting by planting sharp kisses along that tender waxen torso

Leaves will take a dive to brush that rigidly divine neck,
Quickly lacerating their way through to release a sweet cerise trickle

Ankles suddenly convulsed exasperatedly,
Because the moss, sulky by impatience, had already enclosed itself around them

Distant trees said farewell to their outreached arms,
For they felt it was their greatest virtue to chastise this doltish intruder

Nothing but a horrendous squall had escaped,
As these splitting spears had sank deeply into the unguarded cushions of muscle

Skin flayed gently away,
Blood scuttled freely in a velvety cascade,
Posing as a yearning offering to this ravenous woodland

Then for a moment,
Hysteria thwarted itself amongst these fiendish forms of nature,
Halting all playful slaughter

But only for a moment.

An abrupt swelter arose from the air,
Immense fury blotched every-damned-where

For the interloper had broke free!

Blades of grass grasped for those bloody ankles,
Trees cried out their leaves in scorn,
Nearby florets had exhaled their lethal miasma,

Now, the sprinting had slowed,
Intoxication overturned all sense,
Increasingly steady yet again

Heave, snap, and stream goes the red spectrum,
Sending ripples of sway-like bliss

The very roots gulped up the remains of the legs,
Feverish panting escaped splintered lips

Arms now flayed to the bone,
A thunder of screams sang out in a one-man chorus

The black-winged clusters above had accompanied the plunge of the trees,
Entangling this wretch with all their weight

Faintly whimpering at once,
Forever deprived of living

With face split open and chest ravaged from the center,
This being is beyond recognition!

All gore devoured and flesh disposed,
Nothing more but cartilage was left

Together, the hedges had pushed them forward,
Hurdling shadily into the blinding depths of the undertow
To rest eternally with the rest of the collection

There was a trek, a stroll rather, through the silent wood,
A gradual serenity that led to a stealthy downfall

With the kill off complete,
And the woodland satiated,
Silence is restored

For all here that exists naturally,
Bewitches luridly

Though there is a deafening that over clouds that

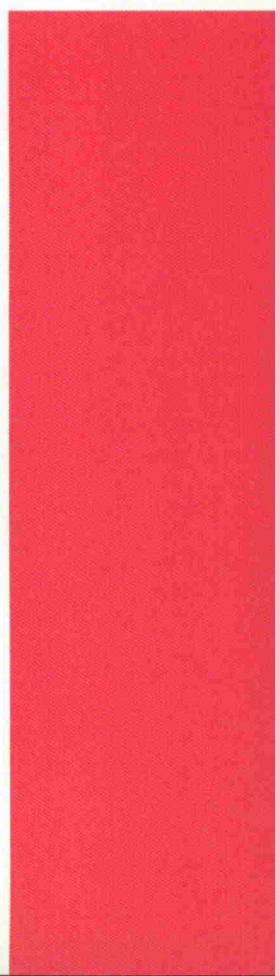
The riveting strike,
Of Stillness all the same

How can I claim to be free
When I hide from my pain
I lie through my teeth
And I smile it away
I am not one
But two
Divided by four
If it's not one it is none
I have never been able, to tell the truth
The truth that
I have a disconnect
Sex
That the thing that fucks me I can not fuck back
The thing that touches me I will never touch back
The thing that loves me I gladly will never love back
It is a shame. How can I call myself a woman when I
Can not even bring harmony to two warm bodies that are supposed to be the
same
Is it wrong I brought and redefined my harmony of you



By London King

Art done by: Millagros Cinton
Edit done by: Deborah Hughes





To Be Puerto Rican

By Anthony Pantoya aka Tony Sorrow

Que bonita bandera
Que bonita bandera
Que bonita bandera
Es la bandera Puertorriqueña

Man what the fuck does that mean? Cut the smokescreen
I will come clean cause the truth remains unseen
I was taught about this pride till you die
The pride has died, but the pride was built on lies
Supposed to wave the flag and march at the parade
I didn't get it, so family kneel and prayed
Supposed to be proud of where we all came from
I felt like I was just Fulton Street Brooklyn scum
Exposed to salsa, wouldn't dare to hit stop
But of course so many youth wanting hip hop
Exposed to the cuisines and kitchen machines
Great routine till American dining scene
La fiestas, Chupacabra, piragua
La biciletas, recuerdo tantas cosas
El patio, dominoes, the cuchifritos
Limber de coco, any borough, vamonos

What the fuck does it mean to be Puerto Rican?
Take time to reflect, thought I had the right reason
Thought I could go to them for the right meaning
Identity, confusion, what the fuck happened?

Now before I quit let me rewind a bit
What you find in the pit will make your head split
The human history try to teach to me
What the schools denied me, stories that speak to me
Mesoamerica, you'll find the origins
Arawakan language to the Caribbean
Enter Tainos, the island of Boriken
Fourteen ninety-two, contact with Europeans
By royal decree, property of slavery
Enforce Spanish language and Christianity
Renamed it Rich Port, aka Puerto Rico
Women for trade, smallpox deals a deadly blow
Africans replace the dead, Spanish deny
Till they die, the fact it wasn't discovered by
Christopher Columbus, serial rapist
But the history books will not reminisce

What the fuck does it mean to be Puerto Rican?
Take time to reflect, thought I had the right reason
Thought I could go and research the right meaning
Identity, confusion, what the fuck happened?

For a hundred years waiting for a decision
Whether common wealth, state, or independent
We're U.S. citizens, can't vote for president
Fought many wars, but nowhere near equivalent
One way relationship, we're America's bitch
Struggling with blank checks and tremendous debt
But global warming said hurricane on deck
Jones Act terms of contract says watch your own back
Its gentrification, assimilation
And fucking cultural appropriation
Oppression and racism at its proudest
Don't forget capitalism speaks the loudest
Fighting each other instead of pigs at power
Get our shit together, we can do better
Take cluster fuck culture, unify for next gen
Cause I won't pretend again, so until then

What the fuck does it mean to be Puerto Rican?
From the island natives to the Nuyoricans
Tit for tat, fucking tip toe around the world view
After all that, I still don't fucking know, do you?

Your eyes illuminate my heart
Your words touch my soul
Your touch eases my mind
I think this is how love goes
Your love is so passionate
To which there is none to compare
Although our love is very spacious
I can feel you are still here
Present in my life, my heart and mind
Our love is surely one of a kind
I love you so deeply
Sometimes it hurts
I will not wake up to your kisses
Or see you leave for work
But I love you anyhow
And that's how it's going to be
Just for a little while longer
We'll be together again
You'll see

My Love
By Tiara Jenkins

Give a pen to a child; s/he
will change the world for
the better

By Mohamed L. Diallo

The Rights of the Abused are Human Rights and Human Rights are the Rights of the Abused. Somewhere around the world lived a young man with a memorable story. His name was MOUSSA. I asked him about his life.

MOUSSA was born in a country where the average daily income per person was below \$1. It is a country where eating good food, going to good schools or visiting good hospitals were privileges reserved for rich people. It is also a country where clean water and electricity are not accessible to everybody, and where the vast majority of the population was uneducated. Those who get the chance to go to school have to walk miles every day. Children must provide for their parents at a very early age.

Now we come back to the story of MOUSSA. He was the son of a trader who left his country to provide a better living for his family. He was eleven when his dad left the household. His dad had married several wives and fathered several children. He was raised by a single mother whose only surviving child was MOUSSA after the death of two other children. MOUSSA was now everything to his mother.

N'na, as he often called his mother, inspired him to be strong and resilient. His mom's endurance and commitment were his model. She swallowed her pride and went to the neighbors to ask for food, clothes and medication for her son. She comforted him and always made him feel special.

Overtime, he decided to take over and help his mother the best he could. He woke up every morning to pick the fallen mangoes from the night before to send them to his mom for the breakfast. In short, he took on the responsibilities of an only son and daughter. He shopped, cooked, and cleaned. He often felt humiliated, though, for assuming the tasks traditionally reserved for girls.

One day, his mother went to sleep but never woke-up. As MOUSSA told me, the earth moved under his feet that day when he heard about the death of his mother. He was seventeen. Had Allah abandoned him?

MOUSSA began living with his stepmothers and their children who spent their lives fighting his mother until she died. He had then begun his real struggle. MOUSSA was now a marginalized and shunned member of his extended family. The hero of our story was beaten, insulted and subjected to many ethnic slurs... especially by his half-brother. Moussa would ask himself: Why me? Why are they treating me so bad? Is it maybe because my mom was from a different ethnic group? or maybe my face reminded them of my mother's? Moussa knew that he was unjustly mistreated.

Many times strangers would intervene to save him from sibling cruelty. He went to school without anything in his stomach and came back home to empty kitchen tables. He was on a road to failure, another person abandoned on the street.

But, he was a survivor. His life was all about shattering expectations and destinies. He hated glass ceilings.

Let me stop for a moment. I am a liar. I am embarrassed to tell you this. I am both the narrator and the main character of this story. There is no Moussa. The above story is mine. I am Mohamed. My friends told me to write about my past, but I am a private man.

Why have I lied to you dear reader? The reason is I am embarrassed to tell strangers --- let alone to your honorable review committee --- about my true past. I attempted to use my name and the pronoun "I" instead of "He" at the beginning of my first draft, but I couldn't write more than two words. It is only when I transposed myself into the young man named Moussa was my memory liberated. I then allowed myself to write this story.

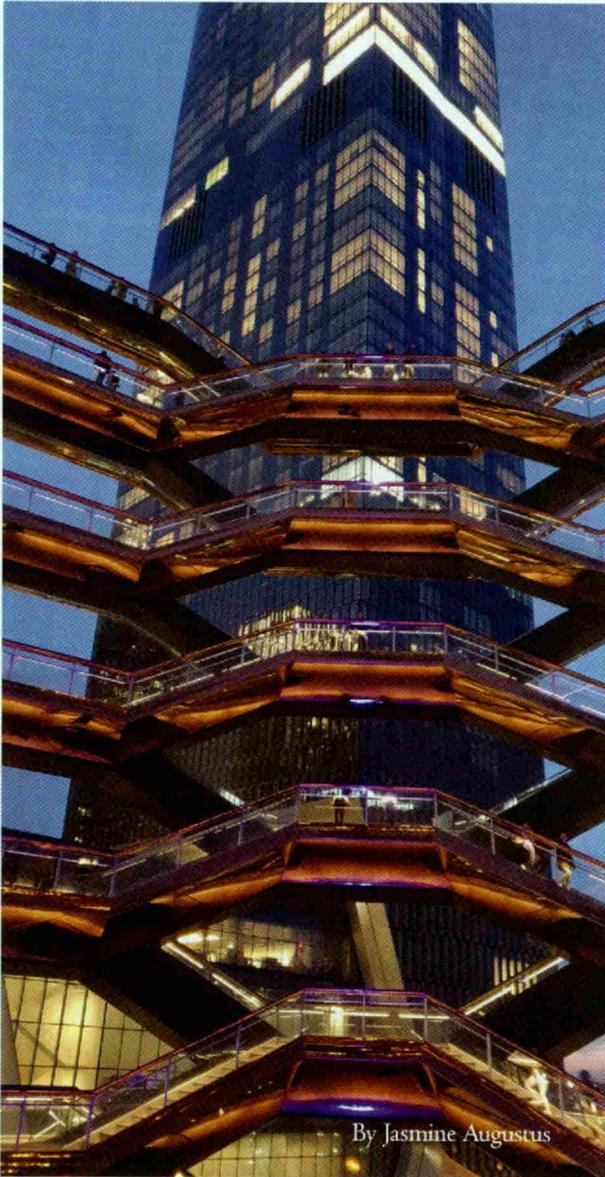
If the saying "true passion comes from going through moments of difficulties and great odds" holds true, then mine lies in my past. It has revealed my mission on this earth, which is to serve people in need and bring them together.

Please know that the offered above-portrait of my life is what shapes my vision of

professional destiny.

In the nutshell, my recent admission to pursue a Master of Laws (LLM) at a prestigious American Law school was a consecration and embodiment of my intention and actions to further equip myself with the knowledge and values for fundamental progressive societal and economic change. I hope to empower the disenfranchised and inspire them to overcome the great odds they face. Drawing upon the memory of my childhood abuse, I aspire to help the powerless find: food, jobs, and economic security. The rights of the abused are human rights and human rights are the rights of the abused.

Mohamed Diallo, a farm boy turned global education and peace advocate.



By Jasmine Augustus

December nights never felt colder Shivering in the dark as the wind aches my bones
Will he return with blankets over his shoulder Leaving me with hormones and unknowns

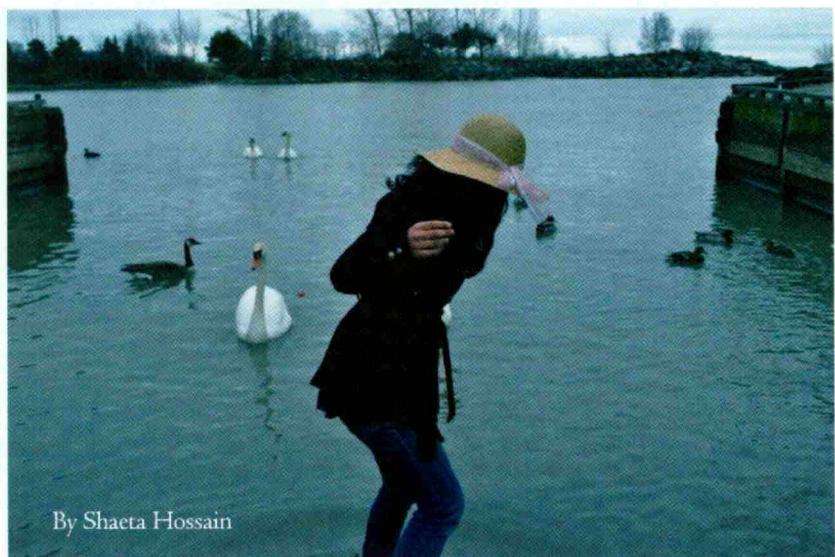
He was my cold-hearted misconception Teaching me lessons in pure deception
Burying me in the deep pale snow He keeps warm with my heart and another
My tears wonder if cupid has broken his bow As snowflakes lay like the memories of my lover

Only a few more days of winter, he lied Only a few more days of winter, I cried

A new season equals a lengthy price of absent lovers and virgin flowers blooming
My love for you is the sight of melting ice Spring promises Winters departure will be illuming

Like a mother giving birth to her new born child Only a few more days left of winter I smiled

I was inspired to write this piece reading Queen Elizabeth's poem "On Monsieur's Departure" in my English class. Queen Elizabeth was forced to betray her heart for her royal duties dying a virgin. I Mimicked her structure and rhyme scheme to show her theme of grief and love and turned it into empowerment and hope. For people struggling with broken hearts, you will smile again.



By Shaeta Hossain

Shivering, I've become so cold due to the warmth you've grasped from me. My heart feels so frigid, infinitely incomparable to ice. Numb, not feeling anything because the pain you've precipitated cut too deep. I thought departure from you would allow recovery, it was too bad that I fooled me.

You were my addiction, and withdrawal seemed worse than dealing with the overwhelming broken-heartedness I felt while being with you. You allowed me to fall into your trap of what you knew all along was counterfeit love. How did it feel to tell me I love you when you knew your words were never true?

How many times did you cheat? And how many times did you lie? How many times did I leave? All the countless times that I cried. How many chances have I given you? Although you fucked around with my heart? All along was it your mission to use me? Persistently tear me apart?

Reminiscing, I'm in my bed now, right in the spot where you used to lay beside me. Years later I see so clearly how well you blinded me with your pearly white smile and attractive charm. You knew exactly how to reel me in, maybe even better than an over experienced fisherman. But truth is you were the pouring rain on my sunny days, and your heart that I believed was made of pure gold ceased to be so plastic. You are so fraud it seems unreal.

So weak, my heart and mind conflicting one another because my mind knew from the emergence of what was supposed to be 'us', was too good to be true. I'm in the bathroom now, looking in the mirror years later I still see a shattered version of me. I was complete until you came along and tore me into countless pieces, each shard withholding agony, woe and despair. I thought eventually you'd be my sweet Prince Charming and help pick up the pieces that were already broken. Literally laughing out loud, why was I so stupid, I had already known you've never cared.

Fast forward, I've found a new lover now. He's began to help gather the pieces to make me whole again. You've vandalized me so much, spray painting all over what used to be the girl that I loved. I thought I couldn't ever love myself again. But thanks to my new lover, I've never felt so rejuvenated. Today, I'm a new woman now, although I still carry my past with me. With the help of my new lover, I can finally look at myself in the mirror and smile, and even tell myself that I love me.

Current

By Kofi Antwi

an overturn, a ripple, undercuts time, migrates
bodies, a vibrant thing deposited into banks
a ghetto poet's balcony samples war and
or love withdrawn as a backdraft, an honest
brother's doctrine, it was written for corner
boys and block hustlers, a vivid vortex
redirects subjects, an erosion precipitates –
a path clears, mirrors synergy, an overflow
heaves one last wish, a gloomy page turns,
abreast; yesterday's affairs remain prevalent,
tragedy; another death encapsulate time, an
electric tendency relocates precision, as it
surges through fazes, contemporary art remains



Freudian autocorrect or Frank
O'Hara taught me everything i
know about public transportation

By Anthony Thomas Lombardi

between falling in love
with F train ad models every Tuesday afternoon
i bend each exclamation point
 into a question mark
so you have something to hold onto

while you straddle the New York Times
you read me ATM receipts & laundry lists
i listen exquisitely & nervously

if they align we've hit the jackpot

the last time we ate breakfast
 on Saturn
you stubbed your toe on the rings

you brushed your hair into a pot of clay
you smoked cigarettes
while painting your nails
 neon pink with little dots

that looked like hearts —
at least i thought they looked like hearts
(i'm never really sure what hearts look like

do they look superfluous or mellifluous or menacing or lackadaisical
 am i just using words
 that sound like hushing
 in a movie theater?)

can you please will you please —
they're asking us to leave!
we're leaving we're leaving

as i remember we still have one evening left to destar
grab your sickle & let's go
 trickle-down economics inhales everything on the kitchen
table

so put a hustle in your bustle
& scarf up the ellipses we saved for

dessert — store bought of course —
& a hollow pie you baked in a polka dot dress
so even without filling or flavor
it has to be good for something right?

Love Manifesto

By Cassandra Rohr

I shall know when the time suits -
When the sweater fits
When my organs catch fire, ceasing to exist
Love will only come to those who are ready to burn under an eternal flame
Love is a privilege to which I have yet to earn
Time is dropping like fresh rain, and within the wetness I understand the
necessary loneliness that haunts my spirit
I have one of two choices
Let seclusion haunt my every move, or cast a spell alleviating the sandy
dooms of an hourglass clock
I will live in order to live, not live in order to wait for the divine
The divine slips into vision when I find solace in solitude
The will to accept divinity's calculated device shall swallow worry; choking a
longing for something I don't belong to
Have patience for love
Do not force an occurrence, for exerted occurrences are rare to stick, and
true love only churns in a freshly oiled pot

Tall is Her Body

By Jasmine Augustus

Hello my people,

Legend says she arose from the ashes of a small volcanic Caribbean island
Her fertile soil grew lush with thick beautiful rainforest that welcomed the
bluest of rivers and waterfalls.

It was said that her core rose up ten volcanoes from their sleep and bore hot
springs from under the ground.

Her skin was kissed by the sun they say, until it darkened along with the coils
and kinks of her hair that bounced with radiant beauty.

She is fierce

She is Nature

She is Waitukubuli

This is the Commonwealth of Dominica.



By Deborah Hughes

There are times when I go to my window
I lean over the sill
And my mind goes where the wind blows
This is where I get lost
I lose myself in these thoughts so light and airy
My daydreams get turned into little fairies
And my mind gets carried
To a wonderland where it can be merry
And some people say that the way I lose myself is a little scary
But it's the only thing I know how to do when times make my mind weary.
This is where I find myself
In a place where my thoughts are portrayed clearly
Where I sit by myself
In a place where the world can't get near me
Where I need no help
To tell my fears to back off and fear me
Where I need no mic
To make sure that this world can hear me
This is where I start to think
I think about how memory lane is more fun to walk through than I remember
I think about my fun times in warm Julys and cold Decembers
I think about my youth and how everyday was great
Then I wonder about what's next and start to question fate

I start to ask questions like what, where, why, and how
I feel like I need to know now
Because I'm the one having these doubts
I go on my knees
I beg and plead
Then I start to scream and shout
"Damn you!!! Why won't you help me figure my life out??!!!"
This is where I realize
I realize that we never tell fate when to answer
Because that's for fate to choose
So in the meantime, I spend time
With my optimistic thoughts and pessimistic views



By Jelani Roberts



Honey

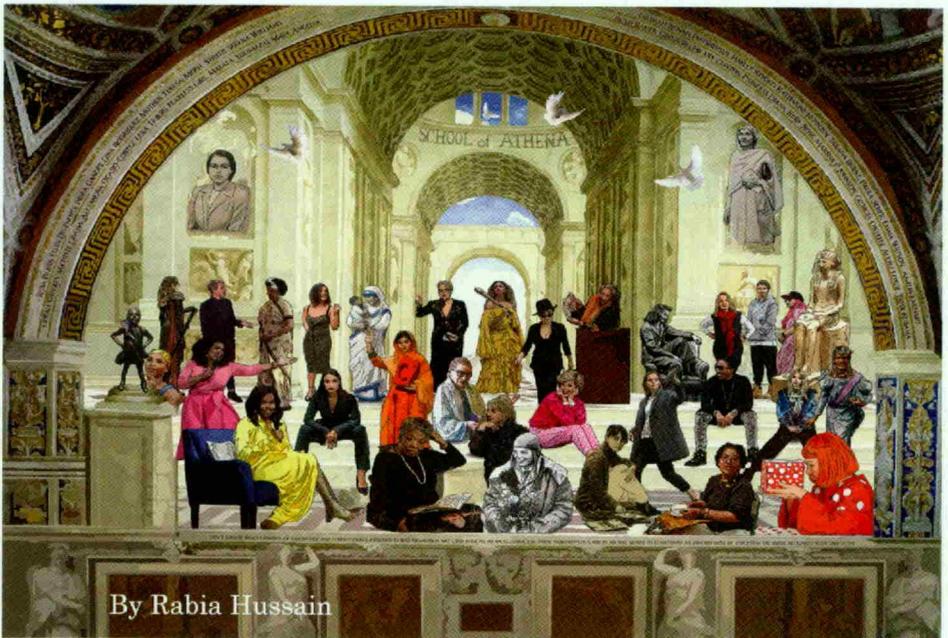
By Josline Fernandez

honey, i am magic
i can give you life
& end it just as quickly
simply with my choice of words
honey, i am love
i can make you feel things
& the only way you can describe it is
“crazy sexy soft and a whole lot of happy”
honey, i am like roses
soft, with a few thorns
but keep me & i’m yours forever, just be gentle for i can break with one indeli-
cate touch
honey, i am a work in progress
i have days where i feel like pink heavens
& days where i feel like my world is ending
but honey, i am strong
i am holy
i am historical
i am my ancestors, Taino beauty
no matter how hard you try, you cannot erase me
i am here
honey, i am here.



By Rabia Hussain

It's crazy that people think I'm perfect just because I smile.
They don't know half of the journey I've been through and the pain that I've cried.
Yeah, you see me standing now, but if only you knew how many miles I had to walk.
The mountains were really high to climb, I felt completely stuck in the dark.
But I wasn't born to be a failure, I was born to be a fighter.
God said so, that's why he named me to be Natima.
I wasn't just born to be created.
No! I was born to make a difference.
My spirit is undefeated and it will never be desolated.
Trust! If you step to me be prepared because I'm not the one to be played me with.
You can bring an army, or you can bring your warriors
But none of them can beat me believe me!
My enemies believe that I've fallen into their trap.
Little do they know that I have God above who will always have my back!



By Rabia Hussain

Theresa leaned against the cold stone and watched the sky sparkle the flat roofs of her village; the world was fearfully quiet except for the tree crickets successively running their wings together. She caught her breathing complacently after sliding one hand inside her bag. Earlier in the day she nearly picked all the boysenberries in the field leaving the tips of her fingers scarlet.

"Lie on your stomach," a whooshing produced by a dry tree branch left three throbbing shapes on her back. When healed, they will leave behind scars to join the rest of her collection. Her step-mother, pregnant now on her fourth, tried hiding that beating stick a few times with no triumph, her father always seemed to find it without even looking much.

Theresa's scarlet fingertips toyed with the blue stone around her neck, and she wondered sincerely in desperate longing if her mother existed in that dimension people have named heaven. A copy of the 'Thousand and One Nights' hid in her bag, but she had already read it twice. It was the only book she owned; it was the only book she had ever read. She did not wish for more books; her wish was to pray for her father to go away.

The goats are wild in confusion; the day's hour had changed with the November season. What should be six in the evening is now five, and it startled Theresa to her bare feet, and she rushed back home, the small one chimney home at the end of the village where the bulk of the hill trees start. A forest of hundreds of red spruce and arborvitae trees was the view from her window. In her run through patches of dirt dodging where the grass grew long (she knew how easily her flesh could tear), Theresa reached the pebble-road of her father's house. Bello ran and jumped up throwing his enormous weight onto her, and they sat on the ground as she giggled from his kisses. But she was nearly an hour behind; there were deliveries to be made. Every night, before bed, Theresa carried the large wicker wooden basket around the village. Her step-mother crocheted winter socks: thick heavy made of colors interlaced together so well they created new ones, a lucrative business this time of the year; her father made and sold shoes. The idea of making shoes for sale was entirely inappropriate for Theresa because when she thought of shoes, she thought of them as something to be worn not sold.

Then she drew water from the nearby river and warmed it to boil behind the house where it was secluded enough to take a bath. First, her two sisters bathed, dressed, and cleaned after and then she bathed fast enough to be in bed at the same time her sisters were. Her showers were short; she had little time to clean herself due to her sisters, but it always seemed to suffice her father. Tonight, she might not get that opportunity. She was late.

Inside where the large mirror hung over the warm fireplace, plates of date cookies, dried fruits, honey and biscuits, and the boysenberries all laid on the

table. The smoke of the tobacco-pipe still danced in the air, a deserted scene. A whack banged on the other side of the ceiling and scratched the wooden floor as it rolled in the bedroom above the standard room (where her father and step-mother slept). Fibro walks in the room wearing a white clean evening dress, the opposite of what Theresa had on; everything she wore had been something abandoned by someone else.

"Father's sick. We're taking care of him upstairs."

"I didn't do it."

"My mother demands you to draw the water for our bath."

"I have a basket."

"Papa's sick. You can deliver that tomorrow. Go on."

"No."

Candlelight pulled her attention, "you need to draw the water," her step-mother answered from the top of the stairs. "Your father's fallen ill. It isn't the berries; I had them too."

Theresa made her way to the door, "alright," she said quickly.

Outback, the downhill to the cauldron was still misty, and Theresa imagined what it would be like if she fell so hard that it nearly disabled her to do any more work. But her father had beaten her so badly one night and tied her by the feet upside down before locking her in an abandoned room out in the woods for nearly two days, and yet it did not seem to relieve her of the responsibilities. She almost died but the very next day she was found, she scrubbed the floors on her knees. She had no way out. She wanted every bone in her body broken.

"Papa's very ill," her other sister interrupted Theresa's thinking.

"I didn't do it," Theresa mimicked the words from earlier.

"Doctor is upstairs with him. But you go on and get that water," she said dismissively. "We need to prepare for bed."

Near the river, the stream ran fast. Theresa had come to the age of acknowledging her duties that differed from those of her sisters. Two barrels hung around the back wall of the house and one of them, the blue and silver one which seemed to be her favorite, was tied on her back. Without untying it, she filled it up one small bucket at a time until it was heavy enough to carry up the hill. She only needed to do this twice. Once for her sisters and another for herself. Across the river, a wild boar met eyes with her and prepared to charge. Its nose emitted gray steam and its legs had stiffened in preparation to attack. There was no fear left in her; she stood in place and held herself high ready for his charge. Something must have frightened the creature, and it retreated slowly back and into the bushes away.

The water began to boil in the cauldron. Theresa gathered more sticks and

placed them, one by one, into the fire. Although a few large logs sat behind the house, she was often ordered to assemble other pieces of wood as to not run out for the fireplace. A pile of them sat next to the water where the blue and silver barrel sat still half full. The idea was that combining the two would give a warm, comfortable temperature. Her sisters' scream came out from behind where she was standing.

"What is it?" Theresa thought her father had finally died.

"What is that," Fibro impersonates the same tone and points at the cauldron.

"Why it looks like a small fox or a large rat," Theresa admires.

"That is no worldly thing," her older sister says to Fibro. "Why it is inside the cauldron, in the boiling water as if it is swimming."

The two sisters ran toward the front of the house leaving Theresa alone. She admired the creature as it sat in the boiling water; both hands wrapped on the edges of the boiling cauldron. It seemed comfortable, and Theresa felt its comfort until the sound of the front door opened. Her sisters had called their mother, and she had brought with her a pink rosary.

"Now what's this talk of?" her stepmother says.

"It's right there; you see it?" Fibro points, arm stretched.

"I don't see anything, what are you talking about," her hands shook as she fingered the rosary.

"It's right there mother," the older sister said.

She inched closer to the cauldron with the rosary still tight in her shaking hands, "I don't see anything."

"It is right there mother," Theresa said. The notice of calling her mother for the first time took a little attention from her praying, but she continued. "I don't see a thing now."

The conversation continued as her stepmother moved closer and closer to the cauldron. Theresa and her sisters both following her as ducklings following their mother. The creature suddenly took notice to this and quickly stepped out of the container and onto the large wooden bench. It looked directly at Theresa before moving away into the forest. Theresa's stepmother continued to walk behind it until it disappeared into the woods.

"Spill that water," she ordered Theresa to as she shoved her rosary in her dress pocket.

"It's a lot of water, and it took me..." Theresa was interrupted.

"Do as I tell you to," her stepmother demands before heading inside.

Her sisters followed their mother inside the house. They mentioned that they were no longer interested in a bath that night and that they were prepared to go to bed. Theresa took the boiling water, collided with the

silver and blue barrel before putting her body in it. The blue stone still around her neck. She sat and imitated the seating position of the creature facing the back of the house. A candlelit inside the window of her father's room and her stepmother's silhouette appeared standing still before raising her both of her hands to her face to cover her newly crying widowed face.

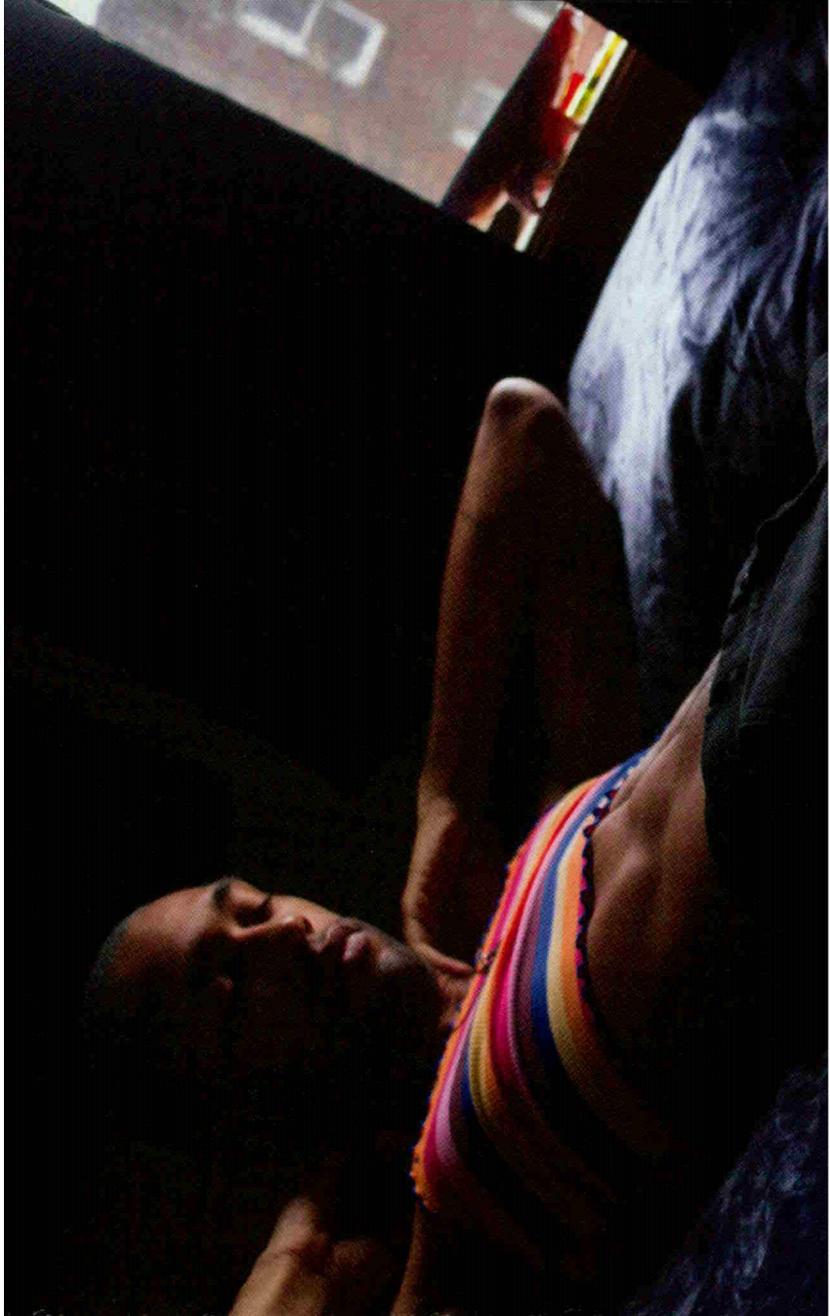


By Keegan Hakim

Melanin Boy

By: Zenobia Bhola

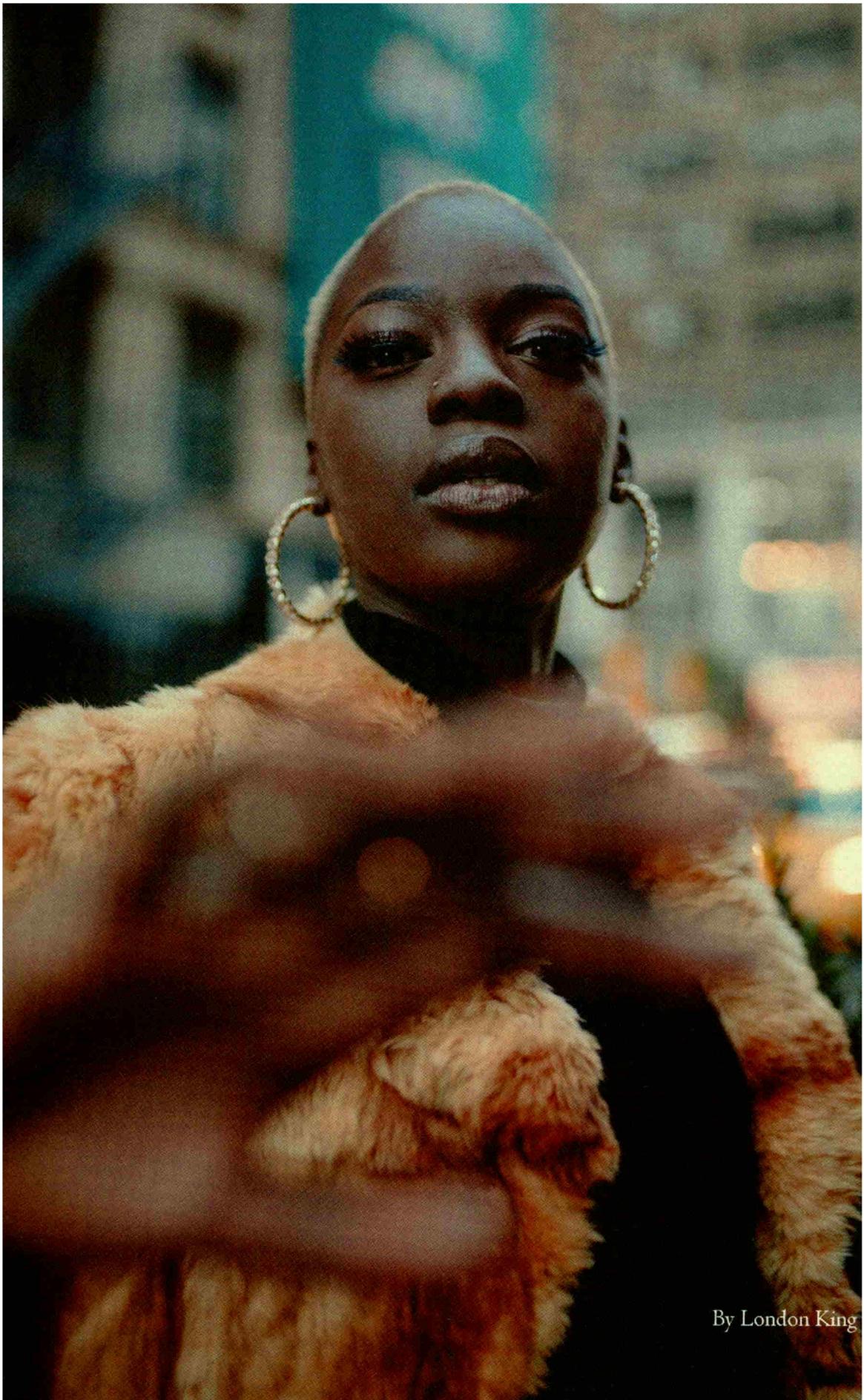
Golden boy you come alive like the sun kisses daisies at dawn.
Like thistle's bloom when they smell the fresh nectar of stinging bees.
Like valleys roam making love to the wind at midday.
Your golden strips cuddled into the popping veins of your neck which
glistens under the sun
marinated by the simmering beauty exhumed by you.
Your step scorching with might
You are of elegance and purity
You cannot be dulled
You are gold
You are glory disarmed by the stares which build you
You have overcome the sun and its sizzle your weapon
And through you, a wonder lives
A mystery
An unexplained godliness mothers push their good children too
Because your beauty is peace.
Peace. Scraped from the fossils of old fear, and goosebumps unexplained.
You smell of vanilla and sweat,
Like innocence trapped inside your pores,
You create universes for people to drool over
You are gold,
Your pretty teeth glitter with shine
Pretty girls twirl their pretty hair staring at your pretty teeth
Because you are golden and robust and everything mama was afraid of.



Planting Credit Where It's Due

By Cassandra Rohr

I received a letter sealed with her spit.
A rose colored kiss had been pressed faintly against the envelope's surface.
The same lip lacquer worn on balmy summer eves when she and I would venture through the garden to hear cicadas sing.
And so I wonder why she writes.
Her mind must be comprised of pity, because if not, the thoughtfulness behind her words would lead me to suspicion.
Has she finally conjured a thought of my being?
Maybe she's curious about the progress of the banana seed she planted long ago,
Or of the old lap dog we named Hera, who lies buried beneath mulch only inches away.
The two garden centerpieces that steal earth from the peonies and light from my eyes.
So, she says she misses me.
It's so great to know she has heart to miss, time to write, and concerns to impede.
And although the Helvetica font choice seems rather foreign for her, it tells me she's happy;
Happy to butter her own bread and de-string her own beans.
It's been eons, yet the letter is still not timely enough to pretend that our past and the banana tree isn't just a poetic memory she longs to revisit.
And so, she claims they're the fruit of her loins, as if I had not been the one to water them all these years,
as if I had not nurtured their soil even after the heavy rains poured in.
Each time she did not write, I cried to her, to the same banana tree in question.
Tears seeped through my bushy lashes relieving her dry spell, and these are the reasons for fruition -
The only thing that kept her so neat, was sweet release.
So, Dear Forgotten,
Your seed had been useless without my thumb, and let it be known that it was your absence that yielded the canary colored bananas,
to which, you will never have the pleasure of tasting.



By London King

The Grand Guignol

By Dornica Levy de Szekely

At precisely 6:00pm lights are turned off in Forest-O-Sibirsk. Fireflies fold their wings, lest they be considered enemies of the people. Owls perch erect for their night vigilance, their eyes moving like a pendulum, from left to right, click clack, from left to right, click clack. Just before curfew, Forest-O-Sibirskians leap to their abodes to wait. They know what will happen to them if they don't. Every time they walk past Jane Doe, they are reminded of the rules. Jane had put an acorn in each ear to mute out the nightly broadcast. At last, the thunderous blast of Grandmother's imperious voice makes their ears perk: "Citizens of Forest-O-Sibirsk, pray that you may continue to be guided and protected by these godly hands." And then, the invariable admonition, "you are reminded that you have no worldly needs, that there is but ONE Goddess, that you are to hold vigil over your neighbors, your spouses, your parents and your children, at all times. Reporting their dreams to the Super Sibirskian Porcupines is an act of valor." From dusk till dawn, night after night, hour after hour, Grandmother's mystic intonation creeps into the citizens' homes, permeating their every thought, even in their sleep they hear the litany of state propaganda.

At precisely 6:01pm the Elders of Forest-O-Sibirsk and their guests, convene around the richly set dining table. Little Redkovska removes her flowing, blood-red hood, and takes a seat next to Badovich Wolfov to preside over the meeting. Infidel Castor wipes his glasses and reads out the convention's topics:

"Tonight's agenda will address the following matters:

- Superior Sibirskian Master Race
- Increasing Labor Hours to Reduce Appetite
- Additions to the Blacklist and
- Income from natural resources."

At precisely 6:04pm, the camouflaged entrance creaks open. Dr. Josef Angelicus Krasnyy, his usual state of disarray giving way to excitement, sprints to his seat.

"Late as always, Josef?" says Little Redkovska. "Let's hope it is for a good cause." All eyes settle on Josef Angelicus.

"Hurra, Hurra, Comrade Redkovska," bursts out Josef Angelicus, "the tests performed at "The Spa" have been successful. We have injected our Sibirskian volunteers, aged one to three, with red beet juice. Their skins are already starting to turn red. Only a few upward adjustments to the level of beet concentration, and we will have created our SS Superior Sibirskian Master Race!"

"May I add," interjects Infidel Castor, "that in my long-time experience as a politician I have noted that adding a next of kin to the lab reports that we fabricate for the people, makes for wonderful propaganda. My saintly mother, may she rest in peace, volunteered, after some - effective - convincing."

"Fools seldom differ Comrade Infidel; that is the reason why Grandmother's seat is vacant tonight. Alzheimer and all, she insisted on having yet another Vodka. We consented and let her have the very last one. Three drops of Novichok, give or take, crackle crackle, out flat into the grave. Good old Grandmother," remarked teary eyed Redkovska. "May I take this opportunity to thank Comrade Lynx for having recorded Grandmother's voice before her premature demise, to guarantee continuity in our nightly broadcasts" while eyeing Badovich Wolfov suspiciously. "Badovich Wolfov, you have been extremely quiet tonight. Do you have any qualms about my disposing of Grandmother?"

"Not at all, Comrade Redkovska," says Wolfov with a jerk, "I have had many a kick out of gobbling and having to throw her up again. I couldn't be more delighted to see her go. One less mouthful of caviar, for all I care. Which brings me back to tonight's agenda, increasing our labor hours." Changing the subject, Wolfov suppresses a sudden pang of fear.

"Our working hours, Wolfov? You mean the citizens' working hours. And more time working means less time thinking of food. Does the Komintern agree with me?" Dr. Josef mumbles consent between sips of iced Vodka. "Aye, aye" they answer in unison.

"Now," says Infidel caressing his beard, "regarding the income from natural resources. It is my most desired suggestion, that the government of Forest-O-Sibirsk raise the cost of the energy they sell to less deserving states and turn off the lights on their citizens at an earlier hour. Such patriotic act will enable my Skruba to receive free Sibirsikian energy. In exchange, my government will provide this committee with my best-selling advice on becoming a thousand-year empire."

"Motion approved" sounds Redkovska's hammer on Wolfov's paw. "Oooooouch, Comrade Red, watch your hammer!" howls Wolfov. At the signal, two SS Porcupines approach Wolfov from behind, and lift him from his seat, paws dangling in the air.

Pulling the blood-red hood and mantle over her shoulders, Little Redkovska solemnly announces:

“Traitor Wolfov, our owls report that you are using the Turtlelov sisters to communicate with our sworn enemy, Forest-O-Libertsky. The messages they carried in their shells attempt to overthrow me, ehemm, the Komintern, at the Bay of Boars tomorrow. Your treachery is only surpassed by your stupidity, choosing the Turtlelov sisters as your speedy messengers!”

As Wolfov is dragged away by the SS Porcupines to the Traitor Quicksands, Dr. Josef Angelicus reveals his other medical talent, doctoring history. “Traitor Wolfov’s legacy must be erased,” he begins. “From now on, the events came to pass as follows: Wolfov, a capitalist pig, was bribed by the Forest-O-Libertsky to spy on our beautiful forest. When Grandmother realized what he was doing, Wolfov gobbled her up and impersonated her. Comrade Red, valiant and astute as ever, quickly realized what had happened and alerted the heroic SS Porcupines. Grandmother unfortunately passed during the rescue attempt, but Traitor Wolfov paid the price of treason...”



By Deborah Hughes



A Soul Search

By Tiana Jenkins

As she gazed in her mirror
She found something,
It was deeper than
Her eyes can see.
There's more to be
And she can feel it!
She's determined to find it.
There's something within
That she wants to come out.
But It already has.

I Am

By Jacqueline Scott

I am determined to be more
More than what "they" expected
Because you see I'm owed a debt and I'm here to collect it
Collect what was taken from my ancestors when they were stripped of their
pride

The pride in which I embrace, and, in my heart, it resides
I am an African girl with kinky hair and blackheads on my face
I speak with spunk, sass, and class and I dress with style and grace
Statistics said my fate was welfare, grief, and teenage pregnancy
But see the problems with statistics is they didn't prep for me
Who I am is yet to be determined

I could say I am a student but that is evident

A mother, I am that too

But who I am to me isn't who I am to you
See what you see before you is just a shell
Created perfectly in heaven to withstand Earth's hell

Look into my almond-shaped, brown eyes

One might say what they see is fire, strength, and spice
I'd say, I'm a warm, loving girl with a heart as cold as ice
You see because life hasn't always been fair, but I've learned it never is
So, you do the best that you can do and give all that you can give
Give your heart to those who need it, don't regret, always forgive
Love yourself, your friends and family and don't forget to live
I am determined

Determined to be more than what "they" expected
Because you see I'm owed a debt and I'm here to collect it



By Jas

A Short Story Excerpt From a Novel in Progress

By Rafael Smith

By Rafael Smith When James first stumbled upon Simone he did not understand the foreign feeling that had begun to reign over him. The strange shudder that ran down his spine that forced him to pay attention bothered him. Rarely did he give a woman he was unfamiliar with any thought. He never looked at them twice and never paid them much attention. Yet, here he was eyeing down a girl of color. In truth, he never paid much attention to any of the girls he was acquainted with either, sure he'd give the better looking ones an extra second of his time here or there but not enough as to disillusion them at the possibility of any future. He thought them mostly vein or too submissive. None of them challenged him or even had an air about them to capture him. However, this dark girl with her rich golden coffee skin did. Her air was that of something he could not put a name to but it captured him all the same. Stole his tongue away from him, his logic, his movement, everything. He could barely see, barely smell, barely touch or hear. He was captured in a daze. His mother would have fainted had she been present to witness such an atrocity.

The girl was seated on a 'Colored Only' bench just outside the post office, a good amount of time had passed and she had not even noticed him. She seemed to have discarded any thought of him just as he did others; thoughts that had barely even been to take root to begin with – he supposed. It was not until one of the horses on his automobile began to bellow that she spared him a glance. He wanted to move, to say something clever like one of his witty remarks his mother and sister hated so much but made the society girl hapless. He did not stand a chance though as she looked at him with sinfully bright eyes. Dark and mysterious. Round and sweet with a shining softness that made him feel undeserving to be in her presence. Quite simply she took his breath away. He struggled so hard within himself to find words that his breathing had become labored and restricted. Dumb from loss of his tongue, he had forgotten how to breathe.

She did not stare at him very long; it was impolite to do so. She could hear her Ma's voice her head as she averted. She felt so awkward. He just stood there, not doing anything at all, just staring. He did not utter a word and she decided against breaking the silence that had settled. What could she say? Stop it? Leave? Of-course not, she would not dare wag her tongue away like that to a white man. She knew better, she had seen enough to know better. Henceforth, she forced her wondering eyes to evade his direction at all cost – no matter how curious she had become. She could not wait for her sister to exit the post office so they could journey home. This situation was making her very uncomfortable. She disliked this feeling a lot. She did not know what to do with herself, so she remained still. She did not dare to move, not even to satisfy an itch.

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sigh and

I inhale a large
gulp of air
as it gets harder
to breathe.

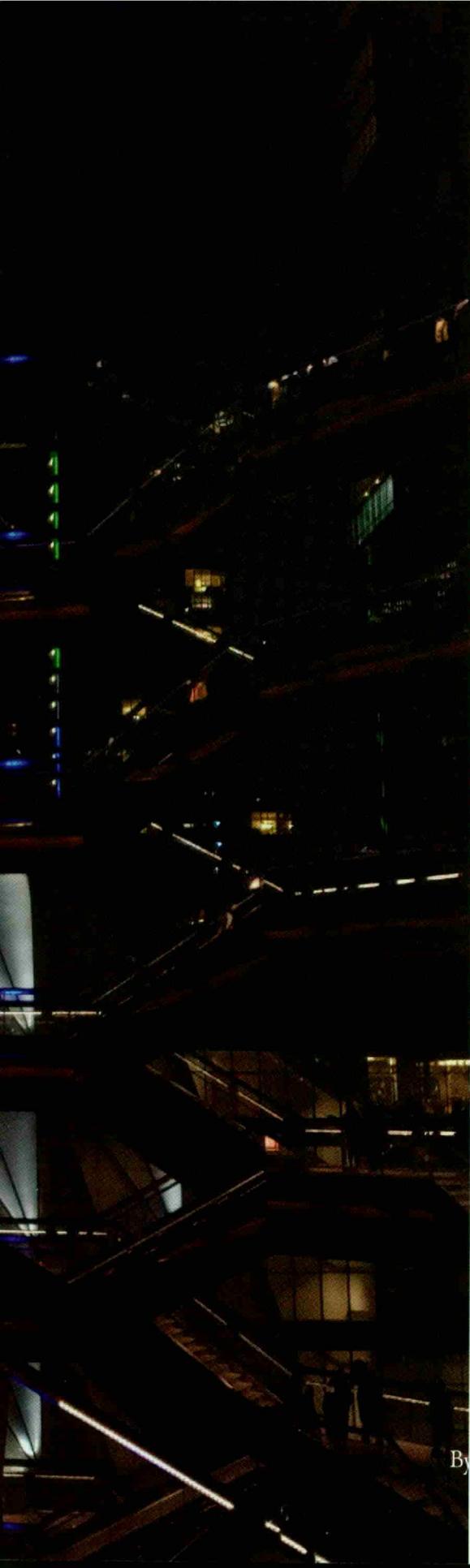
The beautiful
garden
blooming
within

my lungs—the
one you've
planted, is
slowly
killing me.

I'd thank you,
but you've
killed this part
of me

that was im-
portant
and now

I am dead.



A Rare Occasion

by Josline Fernandez

A warm summer morning

We laid together

Hand in hand

Sand hitting our backs

The smell of the ocean filling up the space in our lungs

Calling out the different shapes we could find in the clouds

On a rare occasion

I realize that this moment will end

And I will soon wake up again

By

The Sea's Atonement

By Cassandra Rohr

Poseidon's tank stood gallant without visibility,
without coral peeks to mingle and puncture its cool iridescent tone

An opaqueness reigned over the usual hour of transparent blue
Low tides caused the shells of her heart to quiver and crash onto white foam

Falling little scopes of liquid rose hairs on her head high
Chestnut ringlets locked betwixt the grey from salt on a gummy breeze
Washed linen fell daintily over toasted sand
Limbs stretched and lingered, still no sights of human form

A middle name like Mara no longer endows designs of this pace
Misanthrope is much better suited for her cause
Part to blame; camaraderie - a distant forte,
Embraces, or rather porous covers that smothered one whole
Needless efforts to maintain an unwanted sociability

She digresses under turtle homes,
"Too much small talk wears the bones,
talk, talk, talk and you'll turn to stone"

Albatrosses dip their wings under the moonlight's gleam
Ophelia shivers by the thought of frivolous submergence
Brows crunch and furrow to honor trivial yet tangent fears

Supple fingers grip Voltaire's Candide
With intent, she reads his prose
His wit unveils crooked dimples and a row of pearls
Jovial balloons are then blown along a narrow horizon

Conventions only fancied in elderly hearts
Yet ever so starkly, Ophelia was foraged beneath archaic light and modern
darkness
She possessed a Heroine-ness shadow that hung below belt
Dark like Athena's owl, clear like Cassandra's crystal ball

Young and bright stars shined radiant immortality,
Old prophets turned ashes at the stake
New titles for first generation glee,
Reduced to cold words such as these

"Blasphemous little devils, what do you see?
You can not be what it is you want to be!"

If notions of the latter were to hold,
Ophelia's hands would be cut clean off
No more powers to hone, or flowers to pick

Such attempts would condemn a youth's soft independence,
Ban exploration of incubating minds,
Exile a questioning soul, who wishes to know origin before extinction
This would single-handedly force romance into captivity,
To obediently stay put inside thousands of tender little bones

For it was the young Sailors' fleet that made it possible to wish upon shooting stars
A seaman's sly exuberance outruns the galaxy's vastness,
And she knew such and how to apply such
And with that, closed lids pointed towards open clouds
Whispered wishes dissipated upon a blink
Spit was swallowed with charmless conviction,
Clearing a throat clogged of an overdue speech -

"Set me free from a world of expectations high,
Let me fly into the sky with albatross eyes
The ones careless of deaths approaching fate,
The birds living each moment without stake
Cold wet wings in return for prey,
Feasting on Poseidon's opaque grey

I shall soar from all social mores
And in achieving that,
Let me love faithfully, my solitude,
And it's immeasurable green chasms,
For it isn't hurting anyone anyhow"

The Storm: excerpt from novel

By Jasmine Augustus

The rush came suddenly, it came like a tidal wave, it came like a bull charging at you looking to pierce you so deeply with its horns... it came like a hurricane in the dead of night to rip your life apart...

The storm cracked, crackled, rolled, pounded, and roared. My breath was shallow, my eyes wild like a boor, my heart racing like Usain Bolt, and my body sweating like a landslide. It was attacking me.

My eyes, my heart, my body, my stability was being toyed with. *How did I even know if he was innocent? How did I know he didn't kill Owen then hide his body? How did I just assume his innocence from a single conversation that didn't prove anything other than his intelligence and his kindness?*

How was this going to end?

I need to find out for myself... I want the truth, but I also want justice...

He can't be the person they all accuse him of being. He's... He's—no! He's different! Is he?

I crouched down and planted my hands on the side of my head. My head felt like it was spinning out of control and I'm afraid that if I let it go, that it'll spin itself unscrewed.

I needed my head on for this. I stood up, taking in a deep gulp of fresh air—as fresh as it could be in a locker room, and turned towards the sinks. I needed to keep my cool. The assumed murderer of my town just spoke to me... and before... his eyes, they... spoke to me too.

I splash the cool liquid to my face, a shiver running down my spine before I repeated my actions. He caught me though, why would he even care about a girl that anyone barely knew... Well, after that scene I think everyone was about to learn my name...

I ran my hands down my damp face then pulled two paper towel sheets to dry my face. I need to go back to class and act as if it were just a regular day. I need to not draw anymore attention to myself and just play it cool.

I stood up as tall as I could and inhaled until my lungs burnt. I set my head on straight since it tends to get caught up in its own silly predicaments and marched for the door. Like a toy soldier, I marched, out the doors of the locker room, I marched, towards the same hell I escaped.

I gulped, the same hell that housed Cillian... his name was different, it didn't jump out as unique or one of a kind, but it was fitting nonetheless...

The bag on her back felt heavier with each step, with each heartbeat, with each second. She struggled to not hyperventilate and pass out before she returned to a class which held burning eyes of judgment and spite. She swallowed hard, praying that her body didn't act against her brain and do as it wanted. Such a rebellious body, doing as it pleased when it pleased—inconveniencing its owner.

Her hand was at the handle of the door but dare she open it? Dare she push through the entrance that held the softest blue eyes and the kindness face? What would the eyes say? Would the buzzing resume, will the murmurs cause uproar; will she drown in her worry before her hand gets the door open? She exhaled, the small glass clouded and the creak of the door tickled her ears. She couldn't stop now. There was no return, she had to make herself walk, she had to deafen the voices and walk, just walk.

They snapped towards her in unison... All but one pair. The voice of the teacher faded on deaf ears as the walk of judgment began. She couldn't escape them. She made her walk towards the back of the class—the searing burn of the eyes, the multitude of eyes from the bees, and wasps and hornets all around her. The silence was breaking her, the tension smothering her lungs, she couldn't breathe, the crack that cut through her heart, quaked her being. She gasped, jumping back. Her eyes snapped to the windows to see the rolling gray with lightning marking its curves.

“Arlo?” she whipped about, eyes wide, chest rising and falling like the bounce of a ball. “What’s wrong?”

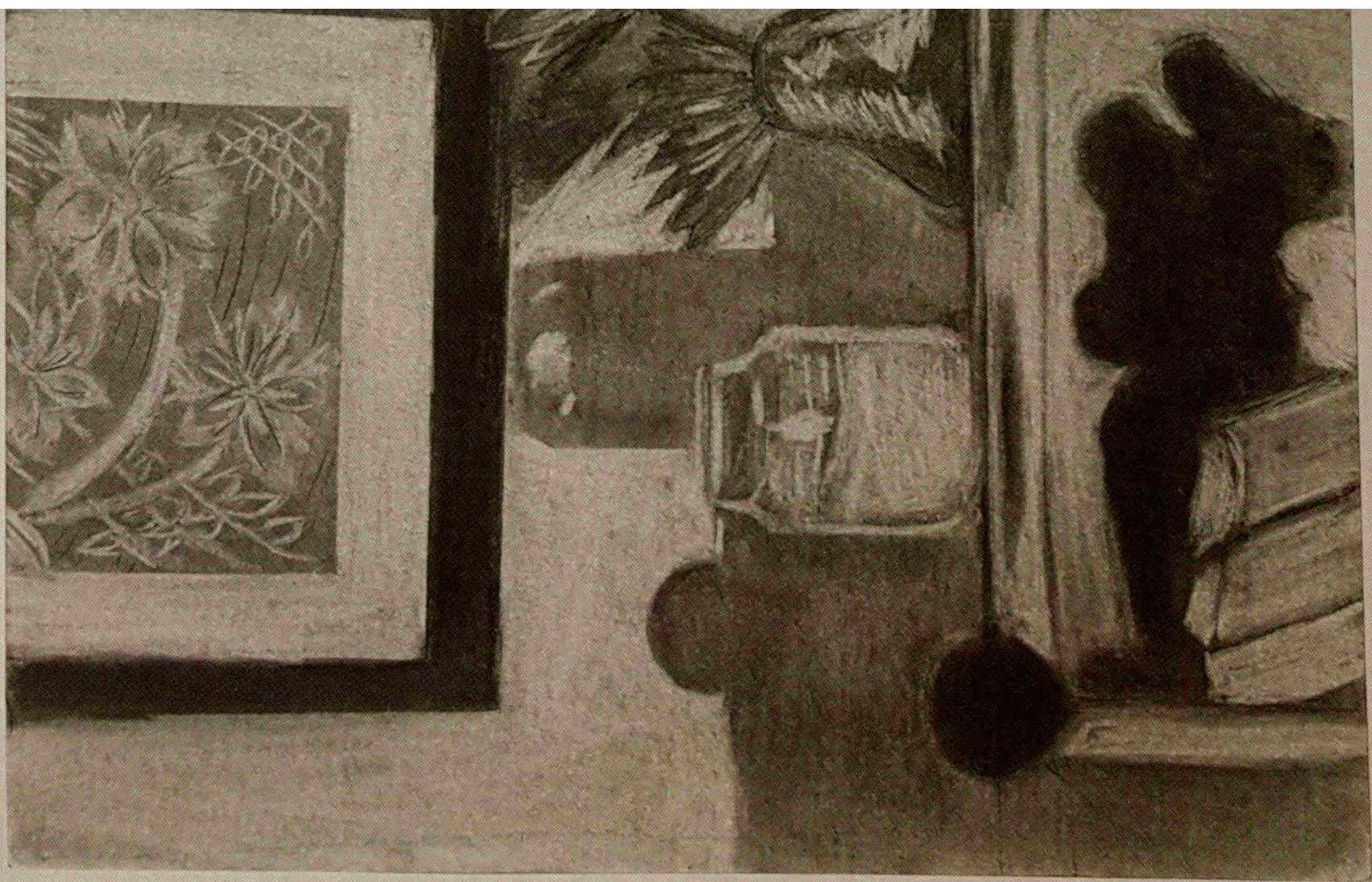
Her ears heard his words, her brain processed his question, and then her mouth uttered its results. “Th—the thunder... It just scared me.”

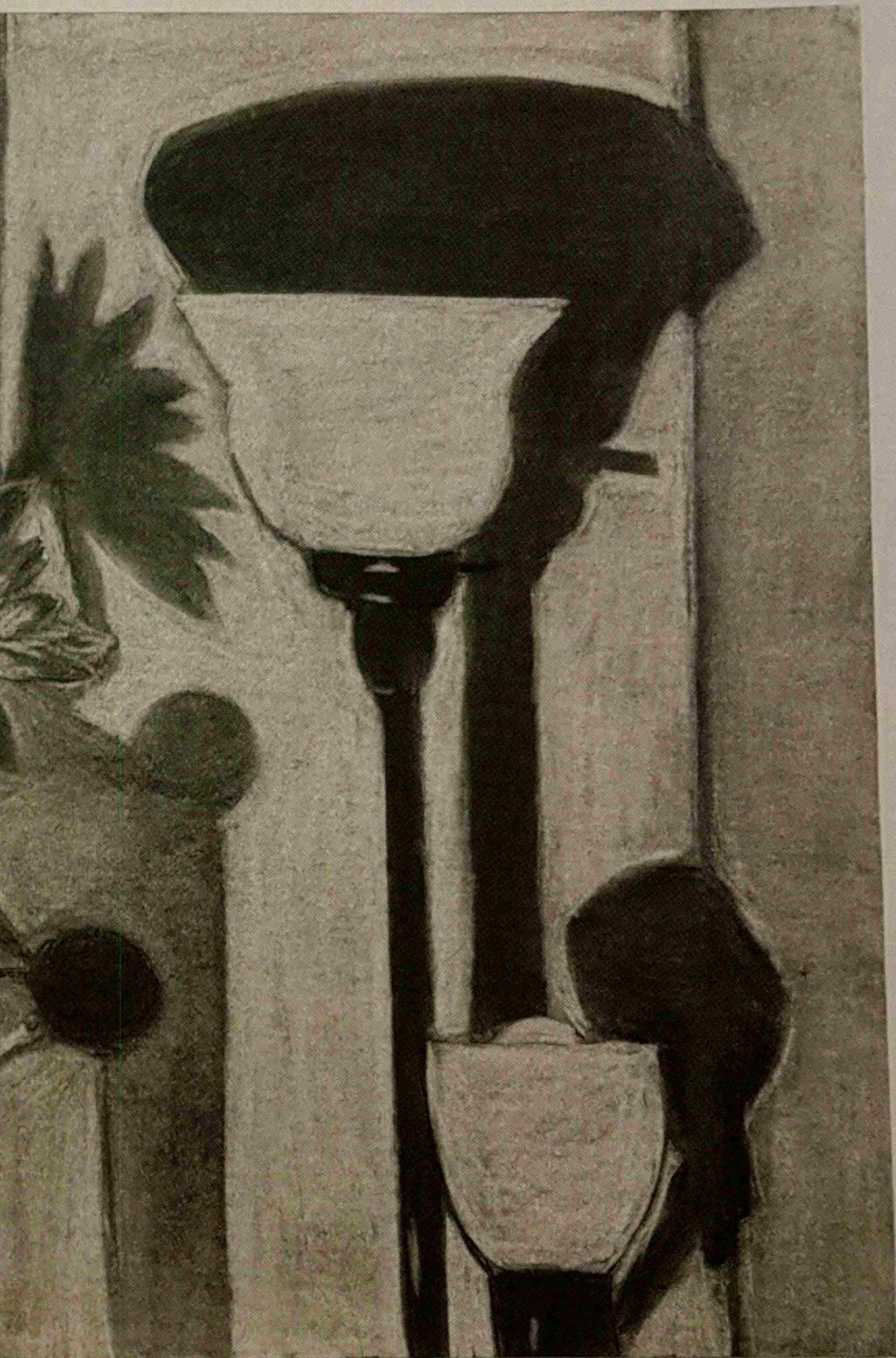
“It’s only a sound dear, please take your sit.” she nods and continues to her chair. The eyes no longer watching, the walk, finally over.

She set her bag back, her palms flat on the cool wooden desk. A slight lean, worried laced words. “Are you alright?” wide brown eyes looked to see a face riddled in concern. A singular nod.

His eyes didn't waiver and his worry followed suit. ‘I don't believe you.’

Dry lips part to reply... then shut and turns away. The storm goes on and class proceeds.





Corner of the Room
By Toompa Rahman

Self-care as an outbreak from Melancholia

By Anthony Thomas Lombardi

i don't look for trouble, i make it —
all up here in the two cubic feet of space
i've managed to squeeze behind my eyes.
your lungs don't breathe, they burn,

& how long has it been since
it didn't hurt to exercise a natural bodily function?

i get into an argument with the trees
but they get passive aggressive
& refuse to acknowledge
the look of hostility
i spent hours fogging up my bathroom mirror
trying to perfect.

i haven't perfected anything
since i learned to cross the street without looking.
miles & miles of dust mites
swallow every sunset you've ever imagined.

it's cool — we'll just wait for the next one;
it's hiding behind jumpy extras in horror B-movies & film
stuttering in a projector that will only take a minute
to correct itself & play your most embarrassing bloopers

if you'll just please be patient for a moment!

we have a lovely spread of half-baked almost-ideas
& faint love affairs that refuse to die
in the meantime.

i duck into every cafe on Carmine Street
to avoid people i think i know —
of course we can just ignore each other
but i have to relieve myself of the
dirty looks the sidewalks are giving me somehow.

i try to mutter "i'm sorry i startled you" to the moon
that only exists when i cross off another calendar box

but there's something caught in my throat — it's an elegy
for my time spent pacing
between your doorstep & the Hudson River.

fuck it, the West Village don't know me like that —
you can't even remember my sober date.
why would i give you the time of day?

i'm tying a string of lavender
around the doorknob
& locking my mouth.

CLICK CLICK CLACK

don't knock unless it's urgent.

This sacred temple is mine.

I am selfish.

So selfish that I lie about its being.

Make believing that she will nurture and give you warmth

She will grasp you with every being and love you like no other

She is mine. Mine to be kept, never yours to borrow.

Real Money

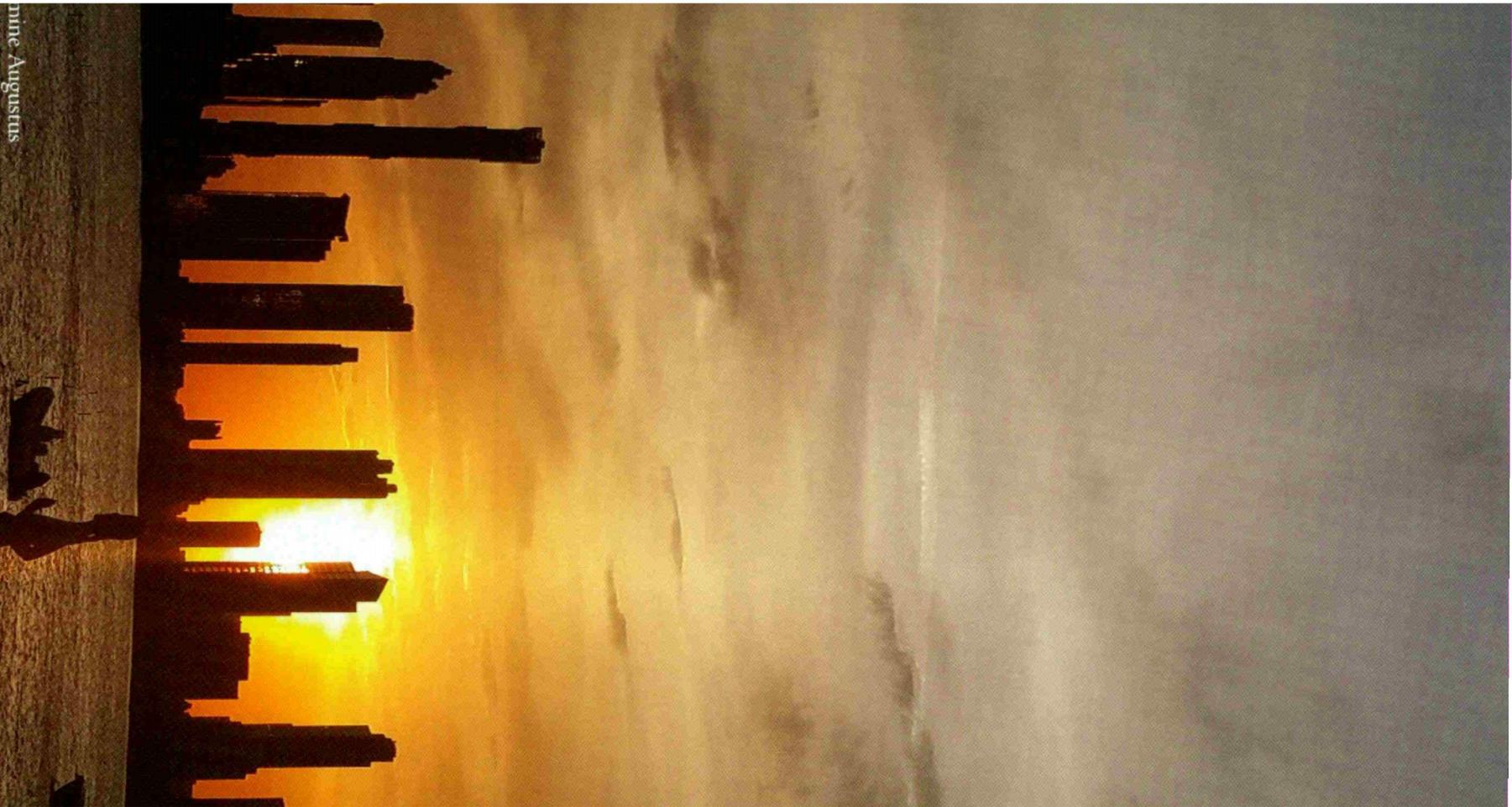
By Symohn Alasa-as

I need that good money, that money that don't quit
I need that fat money, that money that just sticks
I need that type of generational money that raises some spoiled kids
They don't know where it came from money, ungrateful money, and grows to
be a bitch
I need that real money, I'll take any money that I can get
Blood money, smart money, dope money,
Bargain with the devil to sell your soul money
So much money, I wouldn't know what to do with myself money
So much money, I still want some more money
I won't stop till I get the entire world's money
Now pass me a light so I can burn all this damn money
But who am I to fool that's only pretend money
No real value in green notes, they can just print money
Trading goods and supplies, now that's how you produce money
A spark, an idea can be the birth of true money
Knowledge is power and power can bring money
Without knowledge and skill to acquire and use money
Chained to the endless cycle of poor thoughts and lost money
More money more problems, more problems make money
So money ain't to blame for the problems that I got
A lack for a solution is why I have no money in the pot
No luck in wishing for all of this dream money
Better to have lost than never to have money
In God we trust money, and trust I do believe in God but...

My money is fake and my greed is fucking real.



Shades of Green
By Toompa Rahman



nine Augustus

Modern Hero of Discontent

Winner of the James Tolan Award By Jennifer Martinez

Regrettably, impotence could almost be considered the identity card of our current sociocultural moment. Our increasing lack of attention span, combined with our impatience for process and growing dependency on all things immediate, is feeling surreal to many, and in this social media-driven climate, more and more people are reduced to tweeting, posting, commenting and 'liking'... confusing this with the actual connection in human relationships. The particularity of our cultural impotence is notable in Sam Lipsyte's short story, "The Naturals", and it is an emotional one for the anxious protagonist Caperton, whose intellectual superiority in no way challenges his existential impotence, causing one to wonder along with Caperton, whether critical intelligence helps us nowadays at all. It is in this mounting conflict between the reconciliation of his emotional reticence with his burgeoning need to connect with others, that Caperton defaults to keeping the world at arms' length, and so fails to generate happiness in the way others seem to do with ease; namely, his antagonist, the boisterous and charismatic Rough Beast whose brute, theatrical physicality allows him more parley with the world than Caperton's constricting air of intellectual superiority. Lipsyte invites us to wonder, what exactly is happiness and what is virility, and how do these relate to joy? Caperton's cynical wit proves to be his most formidable block against intimacy, particularly in a world where anomie is the social norm of the day, making his circumstances seem all the more isolating, lonely and hopeless. Yet it is in these conditions where, in nuanced and subtler ways, perhaps Lipsyte is making a comment on the value of discomfort as a critique of the pursuit of "happiness". While Caperton's discontentedness may seem like a problem, in actuality it is possible to read it as a form of modern heroism, namely because his willingness to endure the discontentedness could ultimately lead to something more valuable and lasting than mere happiness; Joy.

In life, and in particular with the advent of social media culture, our words are becoming more meaningless, and for our hero Caperton, more hopeless. We glimpse this hopelessness when Caperton describes a work conversation surrounding the word "kiosk" and how the city-council representative kept mispronouncing it, "koisk." Caperton felt a "surge of a strange desire to shelter this apprentice politician from future displays of idiocy." He is not just upset at the unskilled misuse of the word, but he takes it to the next level, seeing himself as a father figure ashamed of, and hiding, "a defective son, though [he] Caperton had no children." Perhaps demonstrating that he cares; that there is at least in a social sense, a bond of sorts, albeit humorous. Similarly, in a world of dumbing down where everyone is a storyteller, Caperton expresses his inner disturbance with people chronically claiming storytelling to be their

expertise: "Doesn't it seem kind of creepy? All of us just going around calling ourselves storytellers?" as if he recognizes that by calling ourselves storytellers, we are throwing words around haphazardly, labeling narcissism on the common man as if "storyteller" was his right. Even if he feels that our words, in fact our discussions are losing their meaning, Caperton doesn't give up or quit the conversation, unlike the Rough Beast who shrugged: "Well, you can be negative. That's the easy way out." As uncomfortable as he is, Caperton is familiar with tough truth, "it might be the hard way out" he thinks to himself, recognizing his isolating emotional impotence. However, while often emotionally remote and cynical, this recognition may also be an acceptance of, and familiarity with discomfort itself. He is familiar with the ways people lie to themselves. He is aware that "stories [are] devices for deluding ourselves and others," and are often a thinly veiled attempt to glamourize and falsely redeem unsatisfying monotonous lives. Caperton sees these dishonesties and craves something more authentic and real. In this way, Lipsyte cleverly touches on something fundamentally human—our craving for real connection with others - creating in the reader, a subtle investment in Caperton and how his story will play out.

While Caperton's relationship to reality is indeed strange and different in the sense that he is constantly and privately scrutinizing each social interaction in real time rather than after the fact, his relationship to his father and to his ex-wife Daphne reveal existential dilemmas that he is unable to effectively address. But it is precisely these existential dilemmas which make him a modern hero. Indeed, there is a certain comfort in the often-strained dynamic with Caperton's father, Larry. When discussing the way Bernard Malamud's novel, *The Natural* ended, Larry complains "I know. That's why it's a stupid book. Why go through all that trouble to make a great story and then give it an ending like that? That takes real bitterness." Larry's inability to accept the tough truths about life, highlights his son's courage in facing them. Indeed, Caperton recognizes and identifies this bravery in others much more readily than in himself: "Caperton had said nothing but thought there might be something brave about the bitterness." Lipsyte highlights how accepting the painful let downs in life can be burdensome and upsetting, but also how it can add a kind of nobility to an ignoble life. Caperton's recognition of "bravery about bitterness" shows courage to see the truth, without romantic expectation that things should be unrealistically great all the time.

Similarly, when Daphne wanted kids, Caperton's existential crisis is made clear again, "[Caperton] liked kids, just not what they represent.",

possibly referring to the kinds of socially sanctioned expectations that result for him anyway, in feelings of separateness and isolation. The expectation of doing what married people do: have kids and live happily ever after, is not that simple for Caperton. He has real trouble participating in the regularity or social norms of life. "He wasn't exactly sure what [liking kids but not what they represent] meant, but it sounded significant, even if Daphne had finally left him over it." Caperton's preoccupation with locating the meaning in everything proved problematic in creating and sustaining intimacy in his relationships.

In a kind of post-modern kitschy iteration of mid-century existential crisis, "[Caperton] could only ponder how strange it was that you could know everything known and still control nothing." Yet Caperton still accepts reality, despite his wife's leaving, despite losing the lakefront job, despite losing his father. It's a different kind of happiness, accepting people for who they are; accepting circumstances as they are; it comes with sorrows - like 'controlling nothing', so in this way Caperton is really cultivating something deeper than happiness; he is cultivating something less fleeting, and more lasting and multidimensional: joy. In Lipsyte's "The Republic of Empathy" (the Danny chapter) the son, Danny, describes his relationship with his Dad stating that he felt "severely wounded but not quite dead." Both Danny and Caperton longed to really make meaningful connections with their fathers who couldn't reciprocate the sincerity or tenderness extended towards them. Like Caperton, Danny also covers with sarcasm continuing, "O.K., maybe that's sappy and jervis, but it's how I feel, and, as the young protagonist, my job is to..." try and fail and try again to "keep you abreast of my feelings." What is this if not heroic? To know you're going to get creamed but to keep going in, to keep trying again and again to connect is brave. Danny's admission "I'm brash, but you better believe I hurt inside" reminds us that this discomfort is costly. It takes a toll. This is the kind of sorrow, the kind of loss that Lipsyte's heroes confront over and over and reconcile themselves to by accepting it and showing up anyway. It is this resolve to, as Hamlet famously said, "suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (3.1 - Shakespeare's Hamlet), which define Caperton's heroism and indeed his arcane lion heart.

In his generosity towards his father, Caperton's character merit can sneak by us unnoticed, shrouded as it is in sarcasm and complaint. From the first lines of dialogue when Caperton blithely remarks about his father Larry to his stepmother Stell, "[Larry has] done deathbed before", and sarcastically quips, "A command performance?" we see that while he may grumble about it, Caperton is not only generous in his ongoing returns home to comfort his perpetually ailing father, one might even say virtuous. In fact, in the next sentence, Caperton is on a plane, rushing to his father's side. Devotion, while

The moments in between

By Deborah Hughes

taxing and unromantic is a cornerstone of joy. Simply by being there, being present even if it's at the expense of his own comfort, Caperton is demonstrating a heroic willingness to lean into the discomfort because of a loving devotion to his father. This act made all the difference when Caperton learned his father had died. Isn't that enough? It's like Caperton says of the lakefront job, "A lakefront, he wished he'd said at the meeting, was a place where you could stroll and enjoy the sunshine and the lake. Wasn't that enough?" Maybe that "lakefront place" is inside these smaller more unassuming humble acts of love. In Lipsyte's "The Republic of Empathy" a snippet of dialogue from the "Peg" story captures the essence of this small-is-more idea: "Is it too soon to say I love you?" ... "Yes. No." ... "Soonish I will say that I love you." ... "And in the meantime?" ... "I will merely love you" meaning that maybe what we say is really and truly becoming more meaningless, but it is inside our little behaviors which seem "mere" where the act of loving someone takes place.

In essence, Caperton's discontentedness is less a problem than a style; a style of the modern hero. Caperton's moderate and very modern version of satisfaction is not only enough, it is meaningful in a world where words are indeed losing their impact and their power to bind. And rather than pursue desires, or perpetually chase "happiness", maybe sacrificing a bit of comfort and contentedness in exchange for something more satisfying to the soul, is enough. Lipsyte is really suggesting that one's 'lakefront place' is simple continuous presence in life, which in today's world, is a tall order, and heroic indeed.

There are moments in between, and in those moments we often dream of scary monsters and outlandish things. We slump our heads and doze off to what we believe are just daydreams, our eyes have a strange gleam as we see in real time things we later believe weren't happening. In your mind a shadow comes to life and strikes you with a knife, or evil creatures come crawling out from the floor boards. You think you have the reassurance that you can easily escape by simply snapping back out of it and avoiding any scary hoard. However, you're wrong. Many a times people won't open their eyes, and will get trapped inside their mind. They get lost, going out to explore and the next person that dozes off into the moments in between becomes caught and haunted paying much to high of a cost then later, distraught if they stay too long. Beware the moments in between, because they are never just dreams.

I was a little black girl, blind and free
colour was just colour and humans were human.
The world looked so free, but I didn't notice the chains
The people so happy, but I didn't see the tears.
The world to me was mixed
The world to me was human.
Growing up, I was blind but my vision cracked, colour was mixing and I was wondering...
The people spoke in tongues
The world was moving, her chains were loud--my head hurt too much. My eyes were opening... the sun burnt.
While I was growing up the world appeared to me, the chains still invisible, my eyes half open. The colours ruining?
My whole life I was black. I knew blackness, naturalness, freedom, black was strong, running through my veins and my Earth.
The soil looked like me, the beaches looked like me, the people looked like me. The sun embraced me, hued me darker, kissed me deeply.
As I grew up... I know I am black. I notice I am black. I am black... African American they call black.
No.
I am black, blood of blackness, skin in love with the burn of the sun. I see colour, they see poison. Tainting their starkness. Their possession. Thieves of a nation. Liars of history. Black makes sense. Black is me. Black doesn't ruin, it enhances. The richness of our roots.
I'm considered grown. The world is diverse, the chains rattle on her. Thick black bulky metallic restrains, rusted from centuries of enslavement. She bleed black, cried white, hurt coloured and prayed mixed.
I am grown... they say... coloured, and black. I can never save her, for she gave her life for us.
Once I was blind. Then I saw colour. I loved the mix, now I question my sight and pray for blindness. As a child I saw only black being black and colours beside it. Now, I see the ruined, the mixed, the coloured. The black.
I fear the light for it shuns sight on us. But I adore the darkness for it cloaks me with my colour.
I was blind. I see blurred. I cry for Earth, cause she felt it all.

By Jasmine Augustus

I AM human

All Hail The City of Doom

By Kofi Antwi

When friends, family, and comrades raise questions about you
I hide and reek of silence

We boogie downtown, bypassing ditches and potholes engraved in its slender
terrace, clench at the stench of grinded coffee

White boys and girls, thoughtlessly squander their forefather's command-
ments, salvaging over sweetened taste of the forbidden fruit

Construction workers squat aimlessly on dainty street curbs, laughing. . .

On Bay Street pimps hustle their work, flooding corners with paraphernalia
and prostitutes

We are living in our last days, shouts the unholy man, rattling his cup, begging
for change, exposing hardships to privileged

Drunk or not, they fluently toss around the word nigger, as if it's their favorite
verb, past or present, we are constantly reminded of their possessive need for
control

On Jersey Street police officers bash skulls, unlawfully stop and frisk

On South Shore police officers push dope and strike their wives, lie and cover
it up

All hail the city of doom

An island constructed for not us but

Choke outs and the greater America, that doesn't include us.

By Christabelle Vasquez

Waltzes



I'm not quite sure when I began to change,
but I did.

Fell into pieces, it was all so strange,
I simply could not recognize, all that it did.

It was what the world wanted,
what I thought would give me a peace of mind,
instead, it left me haunted.

I took what the world saw as flaws and poured them into my soul,
carved each inch of my skin with a new identity,
a new scar that would explain why I hated myself, it was a public opinion poll.
I let these images fill my head with anxiety
and it tore me apart, all along it was their goal.

I began to cower in the idea of letting people in because of society
but I am even more mortified that I will become who I once was, a foolish at-
tempt to be whole.

So now there lies a constant battle of what was and what is.

But you will never understand, nobody ever does.

Broken and shattered,
but I somehow found my way home.

And perhaps that's just who I am, I have raised my standards.

It's in my veins, it is my norm.

It's the one thing that has stayed true, it has kept me far from disasters.

It has never shaken in the darkest nights of the storm,
in all my faults, my sorrows, regrets,
it was the only thing that never diminished.

I was in a cage, fighting to be let out and now I have escaped, I wanted this all to
be finished.

Professional and Personal

Two very different worlds.

Personal, the idea of creating relationships that value understanding and are pur-
poseful.

If Adam could let Eve take the fall for all of humankind to see in herds,
why would anyone stand by me, a fighting girl?

Ignoring all the loud whispers,

I fight the need to diminish the anxiety that hates the best parts of me behind
this wall.

I have learned my lesson, trust no one and never let them hear your whimpers.

This world for me is not to build relationships, after all,

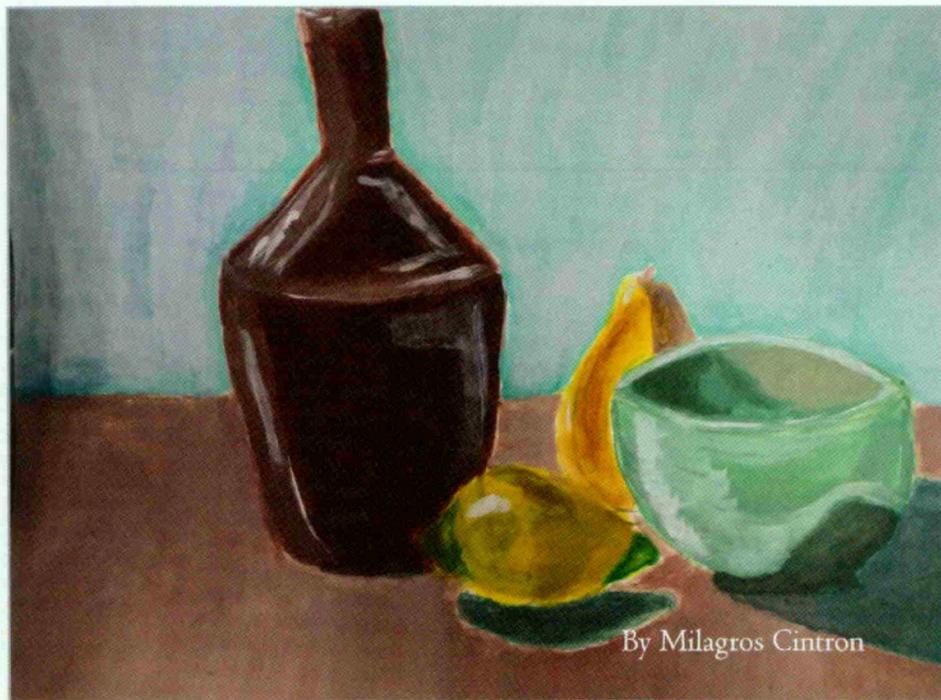
that aspect makes it hard to breathe, as society has given me nothing but barriers.

The expectations are set in stone and although we try to make do,

It's as if you're screaming and no one can hear you.

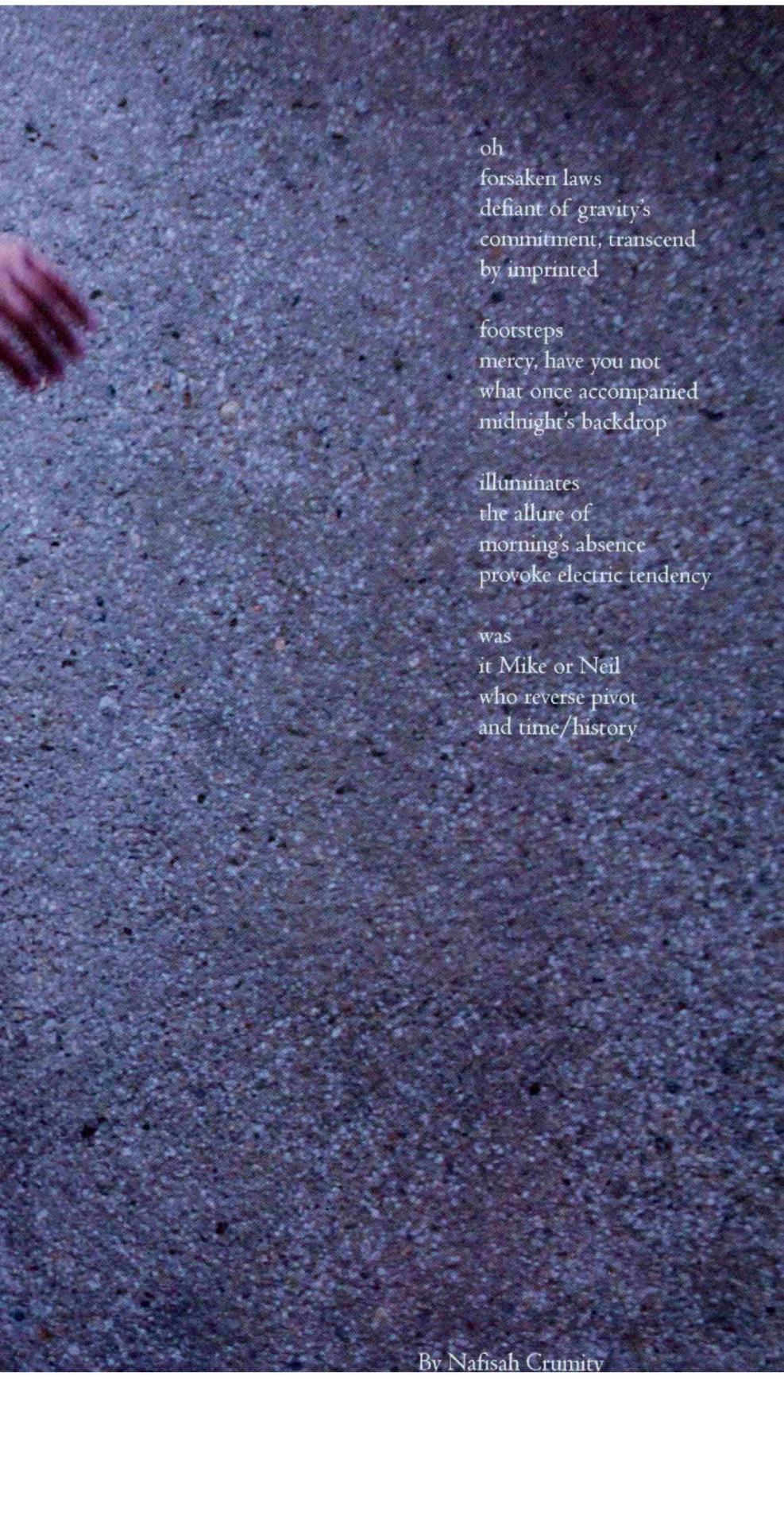
Professional, a world I am eager to step into.

A place where learning is encouraged,
there is money supporting my dreams, this way I'll never feel blue
and I know I am making my mother proud.
A world that I am ready for, which is something I always knew
whether it be a speech, a meeting, I needed to be loud.
My smile is so pure because this is where I grew.
I do not suffocate here and society's expectations will not be allowed.
My mistakes will not define me here, all these standards I must break through.
I will be the most fierce woman in the business world, listen to what I have
vowed.
I'll give you a front-row view when all my dreams have come true.
I will go wherever Allah swt wants me to go, even when he takes me to the
clouds
but I refuse to suffer while I am here, I am brand new,
Things have changed and this is to tell you all how
I have never hidden nor will I begin to now.
Through all these changes, though it seemed impossible
one thing has remained consistent.
I remain unstoppable,
and that's because I am simply that, even when distant
I am unstoppable.
A catastrophe that is unstoppable.



By Milagros Cintron





oh
forsaken laws
defiant of gravity's
commitment, transcend
by imprinted

footsteps
mercy, have you not
what once accompanied
midnight's backdrop

illuminates
the allure of
morning's absence
provoke electric tendency

was
it Mike or Neil
who reverse pivot
and time/history

Moonwalker

By Kofi Anrwi

By Nafisah Crumity

Her

By Jasmine Augustus

Her skin is soft to the touch

Her gentle curves that run down a slender frame

Her spine so sweetly arched

Her silhouette cast in the candlelight

Her face is blank like her skin is naked

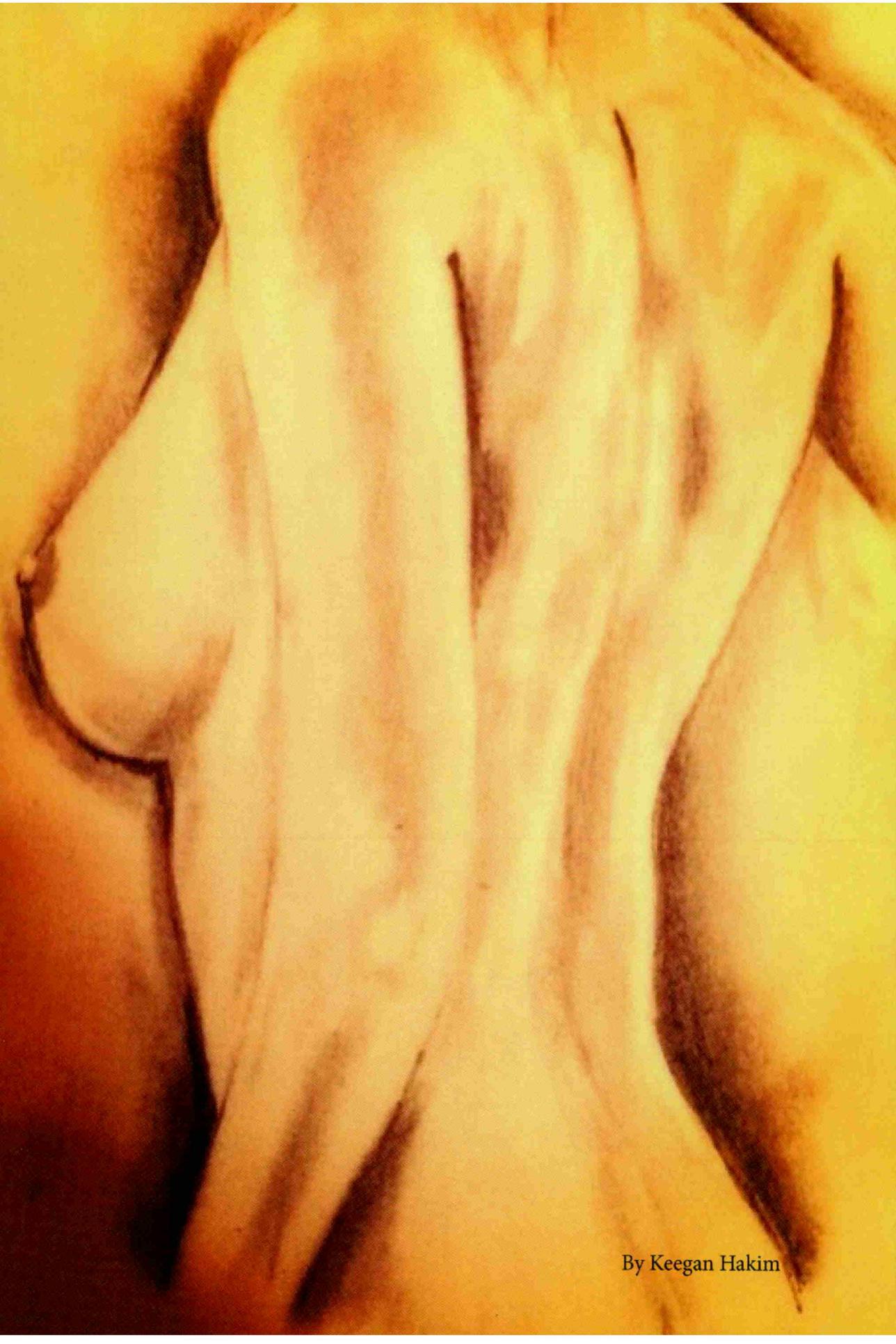
she is alluring

Her nipples perked from the cool night breeze

Her likeness is too perfect for this canvas,

yet she is so tempting to draw

Her beauty shall know no bounds



By Keegan Hakim



By Tommy Murrell

Maybe it's destiny or how it had to be
Play my movie, watch the cinematography
Tragedy, scars a plenty, nothing else that scares me
How life has been you won't catch me with a grin
Guaranteed down to every inch of my skin
Life is a bitch to me, there is nothing pretty
So don't call me Mr. Smiley, that's far from me

I quit smiling like it's a fucking bad habit
Face it, I'm the sergeant from Full Metal Jacket
Y'all a bunch of maggots waiting for your caskets
Or I'm just surrounded by what attracts the flies
I didn't know they fucking stacked shit that high
Tired of people in my immediate circle
I'm the Tasmanian Devil prepare for battle
Highly unstable, fighting whenever I'm able
Highly irritable, likely to pop blood vessels
If you're not careful, at my level shit gets fatal
I'm Team Rocket, prepare for trouble, make it double
Can't understand me, so you slap me with labels
I'm Magneto, I see pass the bloody window
No time for placebos and Ignorant peoples
I'm Wolverine, years of fighting the machine
All the bullshit I've seen, there is no vaccine

I told you I'm not Mr. Smiley
But other things I can be

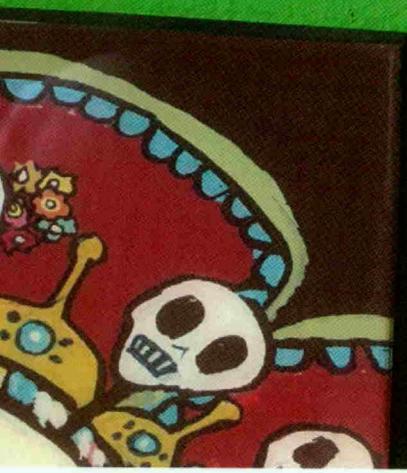
Life of abuse, I choose to be a recluse
I'm Mr. Scrooge, my tolerance can be loose
No, you're not excused, I will not be seduced
I'm Gru, Despicable Me too, who asked you?
I got Minions to kill opinions
I'm Kratos when you impose and get too close
I don't need another proposal, I hate those
I'm Oscar the Grouch, I'm the dwarf who's grumpy
Don't doubt me, I'm the Grinch that stole your Laffy Taffy
I'm the Cookie Monster that trumps the Joker
Listen closer, you don't want to be a bystander
When I can't satisfy my hunger, it's over

I'm Christian Bale when you can't tell my food is stale
Prepare when you fail, I'm harder than Nine Inch Nails
I'm Captain Hook when you get shook, you mistook me
By my looks cause you didn't read me like a book

I told you I'm not Mr. Smiley
But other things I can be

I'm Shrek, get wrecked, you're all suspects, get off my deck
Want to get disrespect or broken neck instead?
Hold that paycheck for when you're on the surgery bed
I'm Scorpion, how about you get out of here
I'm Vegeta, I'm the fucking prince of all fears
I'm the Punisher, forever a loner
Vigilante justice for the finisher
I'm Mr. Grumpfish, everyone's a clownfish
I'm the Hulk, if you poke me long enough, shit gets rough
It's no joke, don't cry when it hurts, I don't play the bluff
Savagery is crazy, the angrier you make me
Brutality necessary, let's go I'm stoked
Get choked, I'm not your friendly folks, I can be cold
I'll smash you when I get close, you got to watch those
The gamma waves radiating from my clothes
Leave me alone or go blow for blow, and now you know

I'm no fucking Mr. Smiley



By Tommy Muriel

Short Story

By Alexander Hiller

You are smart, funny, beautiful, inside and out. You aren't afraid to hold my hand in public. That's what you want, and what you want, I also want. You want public affection, to be known as my girl. Everyone will see us together. You won't be shamed by a man who ignores you, only invites you over when friends aren't around. You will be the queen--worshipped, adored, and loved. You deserve love, and I am going to love you. In public. You will love me, too. You will maintain long hair. If your hair is not past your shoulders, we can be in-progress, growing it together. Your hair goal will be waist-length. If you feel so happy about life that you want to braid your new long hair, go ahead. Be as happy as I'm going to make you. I love to see you happy. I love to see me making you happy. You will eat at fancy restaurants. Squat is how people insult me, or dwarfish. To be honest with you, I'm no dwarf, not even close. That's a scientific term; it shouldn't be an insult. It's like insulting an eye. People call me ugly. I am bald, like the famous actor Danny Devito, but not famous. Or a shorter John Goodman. Maybe you're too young for those actors. Imagine Adele, but a man, and 50. Well fiftyish. Why are you going to go out with me? Because I have a lovely apartment overlooking the East River. It's all yours if you are mine. I own a lot of property in the city, so I'm always running around. I'm busy, believe me. But my loss is your gain. You will love living in this apartment. I'll be around a couple of times a week. You'll have time on your own too. I am human, and I have my needs. You got your own young person needs and I- "-You got your own young person needs!" I laugh and snap my laptop shut. I rise off my bed. Who writes that? I look at my shut laptop. "Fuck you!" I yell. No I don't. Instead I sit back on my bed. It takes up almost my entire room. I sit beneath a small window cut into the brick wall. It faces brick. My room is new, everything unboxed from Ikea. I look out the window, look down a three foot gap. A tree branch sticks up like a hand between the two brick walls. It's dead. Or winter. I've been only been here a month. Maybe there will be flowers in

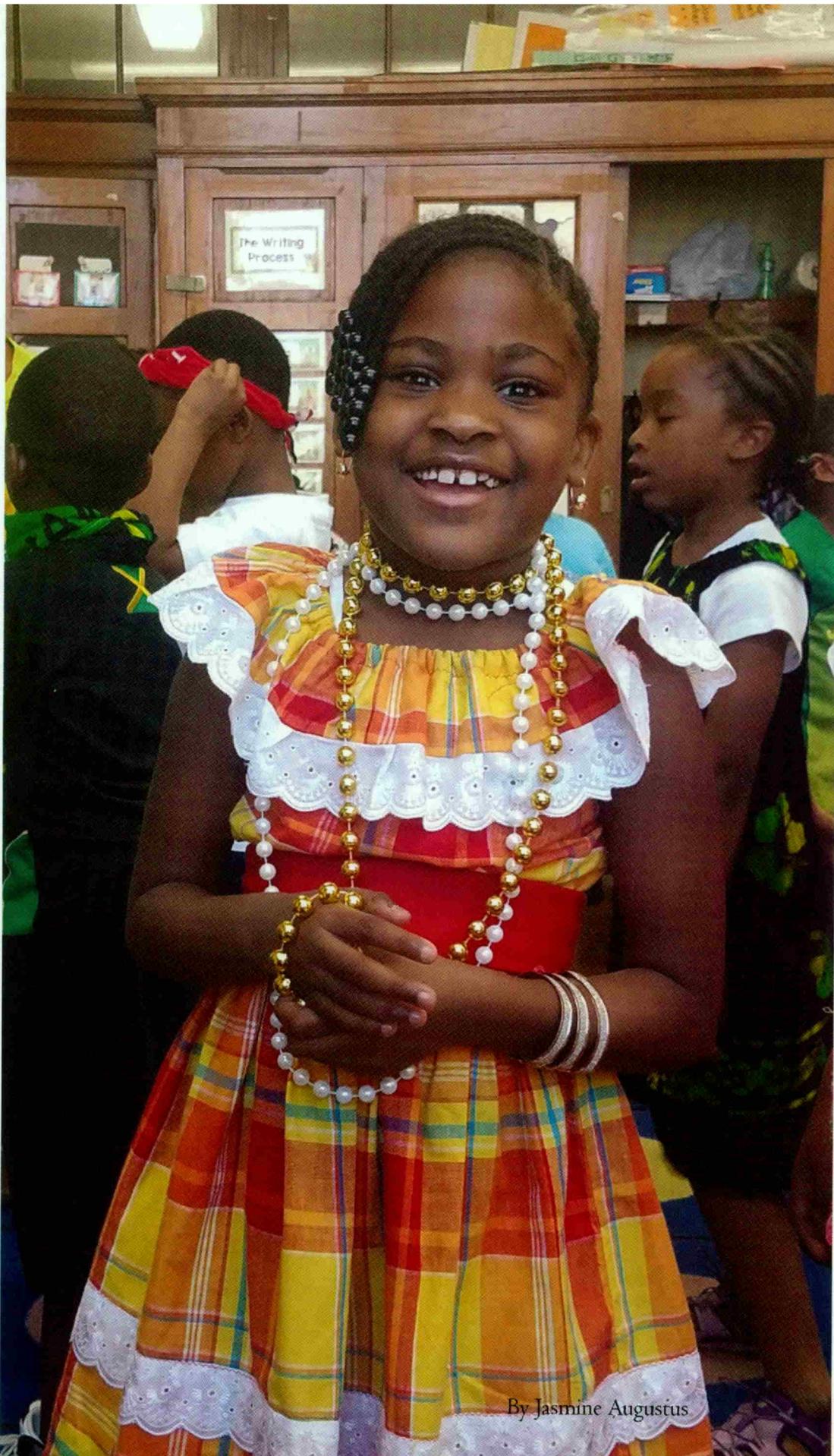
spring. That's
a good idea; just wait for spring. I could yell, "I'm young!" at my laptop, but instead I lie
down
on my bed. I wish I had a chair.
You rock. You're a rockstar, a god of the stage. The low end to my high guitar riff. You
hold the band together just by standing up there making everyone else sound good. Origin-
ally,
this was an ad for a new bassist. You could probably tell that, but I thought why not make
it
romantic? It's true, my band is looking for a bassist, but I'm also looking for love. There's
no
reason why we have to keep putting up with Conner. He thinks he's so good, but he can
barely
handle my fucking guitar riffs. Can you keep up? My drummer (and he's a drummer) said
I was
the best guitarist he's ever sat behind (and from a drummer!). I've been told it would even
be an
honor to play my guitar solo on John's grave after he was dead. But anyways, enough about
death and graves. Although I do want to point out that just by mentioning that, it makes
me not a
serial killer because a psychopathic killer would have deleted that previous sentence and I'm
lettin it ride, baby. Let's talk about you, the really good, or not, bassist. Besides heavy guitar
riffs, swamps and training my eyes to stare at the fucking sun, I'm most interested in you, a
beautiful woman.
I'm on tour a lot so I'm only looking for a girl to date and crash with between tours. I'm
36. I love hikes at night, music, putting my laundry in with yours. If you're going to do it
anyway,
why not? You could come on tour with us sometime. Not for the whole time, that causes
problems. But for a week would be awesome, maybe less. It's not my van. Drummers, you
know.
But anyways, some regional shows like in Jersey or Philly. I believe in love. I'm into part-
time
bartending. I know a couple of guys who work in the Lower East Side so I'd love if you're
on the
F or the L trains. I sleep in and don't want to Uber if I'm late for my shift. I like chipping
in for
food. I'm not rich, but I can make most women laugh when they're not angry. Sadly they-
"-No. Just no, absolutely not." I stick my head out the window searching for a breeze. It's
a long way down to the first floor. "You alive, Mr. Tree?" The streetlamp doesn't show the
roots
but its light catches the silvery insides of a potato chip bag between the two buildings.
Wind
blows my hair around. I wonder what would happen if I got stuck in this small hole cut
into a

Garden of love

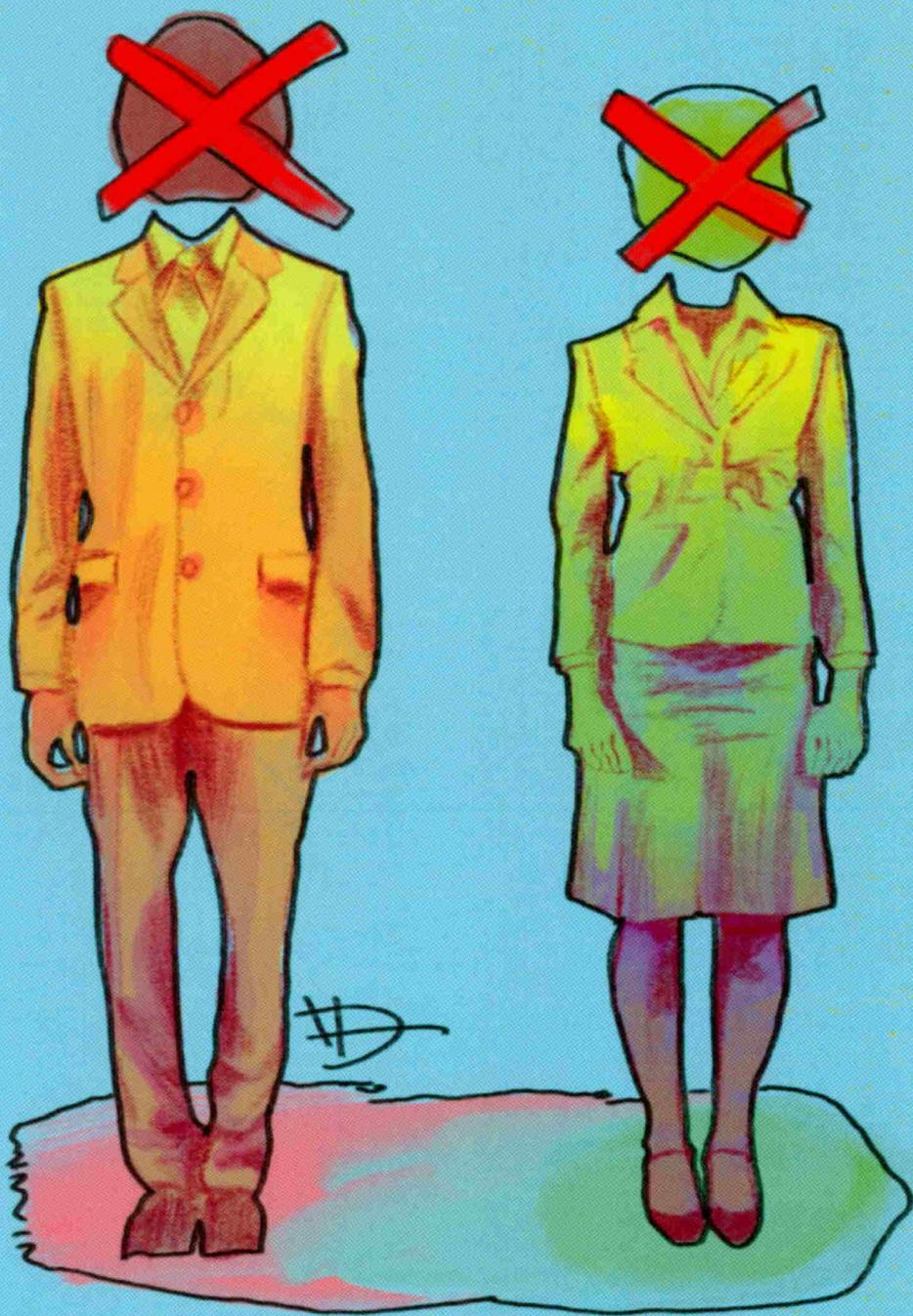
By Jasmine Augustus

brick wall. Would I be rescued, rescue myself, die of humiliation or just die? I sit, stand, decide
to clean the room. I stop, sit again and open my computer. I know how to do this. what's new york like, my friends ask me. nobody wants to give you a free glass of water or let you use the bathroom. it would be nice if i could go anywhere that i didn't have to pay. free places are full of men shaving. even in the women's bathroom. i'd like to say my fire escape is free, but it's attached to an apartment i pay too much money for. i sit on my fire escape and smoke. the time goes quicker that way. i plan and i plan. i'd love for something to go right. why should you pick me? i'm not sure you should. people have told me there's something almost astronomical and cosmic about my ass. As if it's perfect and revolving in space alone from the other heavenly bodies. if that doesn't make sense, that's ok. i don't get it either, but as i said, people have told me that. i get fairly down about rejection. i guess everyone does, but i put a lot of pressure on myself to succeed. i guess the only thing you really need to know about me is i love putting heavy whipping cream in my coffee every morning. i love being alive. and if that's enough for you... then i'm done.

The fear of love is the fear of every human.
Finding someone who completes you even when you're skeptical
is frightening yet so tempting.
But true love really shows when your demons don't scare him
and your darkness becomes a home for him.
I'm choking on the idea of breathing because to me it's all meaningless,
but with you by my side,
the flowers bursting from my lungs and out my mouth
are worth the pain if it gives me the beauty I seek.
The pointlessness of life becomes something of a farce when you wrap me in
your arms around my frame and pluck every stem out of my throat so that you
can replace these blossoms with your lips.
Drink me in like sweet wine and make me dizzy from your love.
Because I'm reckless and void, but you're crazy enough to withstand me.



By Jasmine Augustus



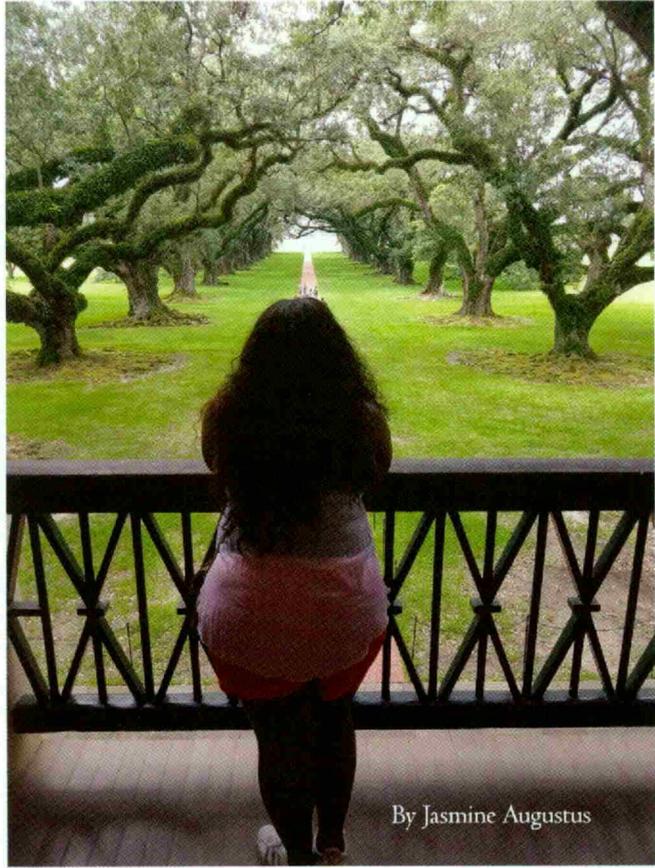
Facade on Bodies

By Zenobia Bhola

This body which you are not
Feels like the sweet high of summer heat.
This body which you find yourself intertwined to sipping on its purity unraveled
by this new taste
you dine on this love willing to give yourself entirely.
You fill up your head on this scent of cold shivers whined into this soul creating
electricity like
nothing else.
You hold on tight and beg yourself to let nothing better in because this moment
which you suspend
within your secret is monumental.
It is the awakening of manhood you were forbidden to discover.
Your golden skin desecrates into this being, melting through you love so dirty it
leaves you
speechless.
This warmth which you thought you understood all your life is suddenly new and
coils inside your
mouth as you kiss it into,
This body which is not.
This body which you are not is the welcome of the cliches sodomized into your
eyes breaking
through the malignant happy you perpetrate.
You mush your hands through such fine hair, it caresses the texture of your skin
You pitch your offering, with vile, this is what you want.
You touch for it the closest missteps you can make, following the end of your lust
to this mind which
rebuttals your everything.
You were told to destroy everything which destroys you, but this face which makes
your teeth grind
and your stomach tickle becomes the very destruction you live for
Because
This body which you are not will be the end of you.
Washed and alone with empty bottles of a magical something which leaves you
hollow and selfish.
You have become a mixture of toxic masculinity and love. A love no one under-
stands,
but you gobble on its pain like fine wine.
There is nothing left but dominion.

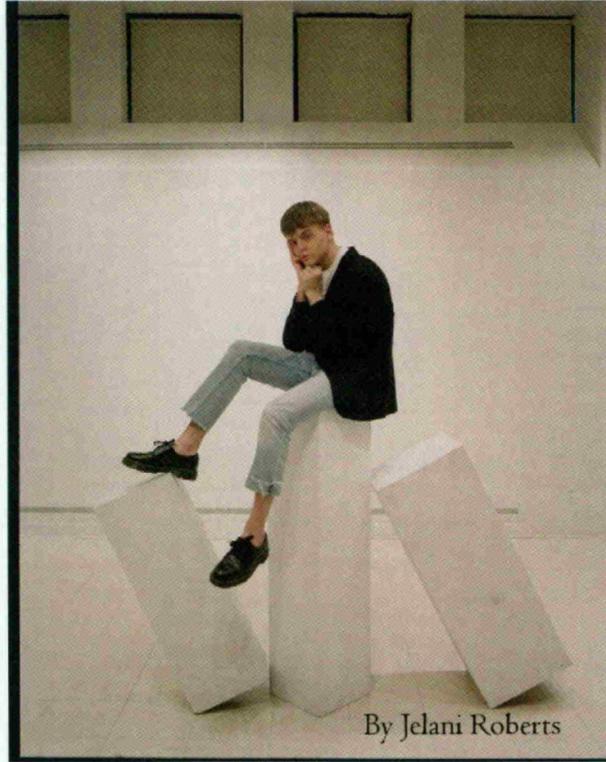
Nap of a Lifetime

By Tiara Jenkins

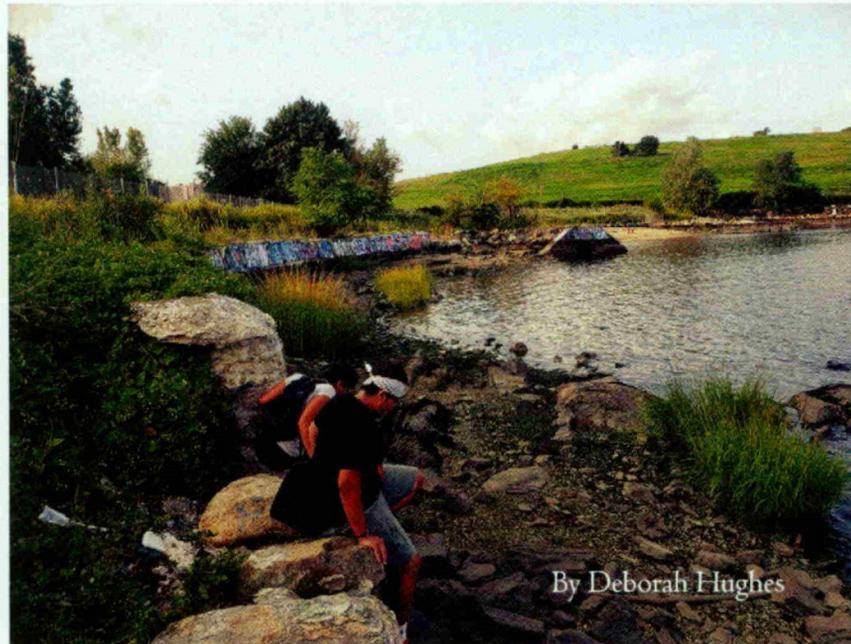


By Jasmine Augustus

As I lay on his chest
His heart sings to me.
He coils my hair with his fingers
And hums a hymn
From his native tongue.
His chest is as hard as a rock
But his skin is as soft as talc.
I caress his shoulder
Until I fall into a deep slumber.



By Jelani Roberts



By Deborah Hughes



Life truly doesn't make sense
Through all the ups and downs who is really your friend
Who got your back to the end
Who makes sure that you fucking win
God WTF why can't my life just end
I hate my body, I hate my life
If I ever get married I'll probably hate my wife
Fuck it I might as well walk into the light
The grip on my Glock I'm holding it to tight
Take a sip of whiskey I'll probably end it tonight
The pain hurts too much for me to grow
At my funeral I wonder who will show
But why should I care I was never good and it shows
The whiskey burns a hole in my chest
Fuck suicide maybe I should grab the Teck
Go to the hood throw up the wrong set
Pop one nigga and let God do the rest
But nah that's a lot of work
Either way I'm gonna end up 6 ft under dirt
Fuck it time for the show to begin
I want all of y'all to know I loved my kin
Take another drink damn my heart burning again
Time to get the show on the road
on the count of 3 fuck it here we go
1 I close my eyes planning on makin it quick
2 pick the gun to my head and cock it back holding tight on the Grip
3 pull the damn trigger and be another dead nigger

BANG

Next thing I hear it's the birds chirping
Pull up the curtains the sun burst in
Was it all a dream I tend to wonder
pull back the sheets the bottle is under the cover

Where were you?

By Christabelle Vasquez

Before I found you, I had my doubts
if love was made for me.
Until you came, I finally saw
for the first time my heart beat.

You have changed everything
in a matter of seconds.
You have given me a new direction
and here I am happy.

Even if this world stopped turning
and the stars stopped shining.
I will hold on and love you
it doesn't matter what comes on next.

Even if I have to give up my whole life.
I swear that nothing would separate us,
because you have given me light, a blue sky.
and tell me, where were you?
Where were you?

Now I know it's not a coincidence,
it was written in destiny this love.
I can never let go of his hands
Because I know that it was he who united us.



By Deborah Hughes

Lazarus

By Keegan Hakim

No one ever married me, nor did anyone want to have my children. When I was very young, my favorite part of commuting in New York City was taking the steps down to the train station. "It's fun," my mother said as she tried to calm my fear, "like jumping down." She held my hand gently while I put one foot down after another. Now, as I put one foot down after another, the air down here is incredibly offensive. It's an underground tomb that waits for you to die, or to be alive, or to make a decision on what seems to be the best thing to do. They say that people will push you out of their way, but that isn't true with me; I wish someone would notice me. Still, I walk down the steps, head down, unobstructive.

The subway has been my only form of travel for the last ten years. I know it well. Every week, Monday through Friday, and sometimes the weekend, I feel the bumps and jerk it provides. It shakes me back to the present; just as I am deep into my thoughts, it yanks me awake. It has become home for me – a place where I find myself comfortable.

My mother has been dead for eighteen years, or maybe longer; she might have been dead for nineteen years now. The loneliness isn't what bothers me; it's the unwelcomed sadness. Sometimes, I lie in bed and think about how I might go: a heart attack maybe, poison by carbon monoxide, some serial killer. As if anyone even really wants to kill me. But the chances of me dying soon are low. I eat healthily, there's a detector in my apartment, and the windows and doors lock firmly. I go to work every morning and come straight home every evening. If I suddenly become blind, I'd still be able to make it to work and back; the route is marked in my brain. For everything else, I stay in. All of my groceries are easily ordered for delivery, my laundry called for pick up and sent for drop off, and Amazon for the rest of it.

But why do I think about an hour from now to be unbearable? It's a few reports to edit in front of the desk, lunch hour, and a few more hours before I take the subway back uptown. Waiting by the platform, the intercom announces the train arriving in one minute. If I drop my bag before getting to the train, it might work faster. I won't disappoint when it reaches the sign advertising "It's a Wonderful Life" fifteen feet away. Eight seconds before I reach the edge, four steps before I collide, approximately two second and one crush before it's over. That seems to be the best thing to do.

The intercom announces the train approaching and something about the platform edge. The sound is distant. I lean my back against the wall allowing my bag to slide off my shoulder and hit the floor. The headlights come into view and the sound grows as the ground begins to shudder. I think about my mother who held my hand as a child. I think about everyone who never made it into my life; those who I never got to know. The moment is this then; I've finally made a decision.

I stare with my worries composed and my breathing controlled. My feet imitate a racer, flat on the ground and ready for take-off. I question my shaking body; am I afraid to die? That isn't possible though; I wake up every night

with the realization of death and the grasp of inexistence. There is no unfinished business. A few more seconds before it reaches the "It's a Wonderful Life" sign, and I shift into place. Jumping is fun; I tell myself. Here it comes now. Everything is all set, and everything is in position, perfect timing. Then I freeze.

I should have died — another unfortunate and disastrous situation, another failure. The mission was simple and yet, even this I could not pull off. No worries, I tell myself, I've come to know my ways of doing things, the way things work out for me. Everything I try I fail the first time. An endless sequence of letdowns is everyday living. I did not decide to do this this instance. That would be out of character. I chose the outcome before waking up this morning, and it will not be unmade. Once it is all done, I can never come back to it again; I can never revisit my thoughts or the stinging agony of desire, nor can I continue to fall, when I finally jump.

The station is empty and unstressed, the way it would look in the middle of the night, even though it's nine in the morning. The next train comes in three minutes; three minutes left to breathe. I won't fail, eight simple steps and a fall; it's nothing major. Failing again is unbelievably inexcusable; it is beyond reason not to go through with what is the best thing to do. A million seconds have led to this instant, a lifetime, if you will since it will all end soon, has created this moment. It will take another lifetime to talk me out of it. I hear the sound of the train approaching. Here it comes, I think to myself.

But it isn't the downtown train. Across the platform, the uptown train approaches and delivers the same message from the intercom. Through the glass of one of the cars, you stand and hold a book; "Mrs. Dalloway." I could tell that there were only a few more pages before you finish. But you looked up for a second and turned to lock eyes with me. I felt vulnerable and passive; I felt your quick smile as the third rail moved the train and took you away forever. A single second, a simple smile from across the train has crushed every moment I have lived, and it has undone my thoughts and all physicality I have known; and yet I have more now than I did before. An infinite sequence of a need to relive this moment before it has even come to past. I wish I could take it away only to give it back again. How can that be; what absence lives through my body now? I never thought a nonexistent consciousness could overwhelm me to such a degree. A strange face that has caused my mind to forget everything, if there ever was anything, and a simple smile which then brought to light every memory I have ever experienced.

I live today as if I am seven years of age; the day of my birth is the moment I saw you. You are, whoever you are, the reason for blood continuing to pump through my heart. You did not save my life that morning, nor did you fill me with passion to live; what you did was revive me, restart me to understand what is the best thing to do. It would be too cheap to thank you; it would be easy. I'm not here for that. I've come to ask you about the mystery that I am in since you raised me from the dead.

Another Round

By Edward Nugent

"I never trust a woman who squints when she smiles", I said.

Ben was sitting across from me. He looked at me, paused significantly and asked "Do you ever trust a woman?"

We both laughed. "Good point" I said.

We were in a beachfront bar in Waikiki. It was just before sunset and we both had a drink in front of us.

I had a gin and tonic with extra lime while Ben was drinking Bud Lite. Ben was generally pretty smart (smarter than me, anyways) but could be unimaginative in ways that frequently surprised and usually disappointed me.

Ten years ago when we worked for the same outfit, I tried to sleep with Ben's wife. I don't mind telling you that I actually came pretty close but bad timing and whiskey dick prevented me from sealing the deal. He never knew anything about it and anyway nothing ever developed.

A few years later she left him and they eventually divorced.

She never told, so I decided not to bring it up. Why ruin a good evening?

"You don't understand" I protested, but I could see scorn on Ben's face even before I finished, so my protest trailed off and I turned my attention back to the scene before us.

Outside on Waikiki beach, we saw the usual parade of humanity moving along the sea wall; trying to get someplace, anyplace, before Sunset.

To me, Sunset is the obvious physical but also magically metaphysical demarcation point between the day and the night.

Daytime, when families and throngs of tourists ruled Waikiki (not counting the occasional bikini-clad surfer-girl who has spent the day in the waves, ignorant of the hungry looks of tourists and locals alike).

Nighttime, when the tourists retreat to their hotels to nurse their sunburns and their empty wallets and prepare for the next day's exertions, and the locals all come out of whatever warren or den they have been hiding in all day. Out to eat, to drink, to get stoned, and to tell stories: stories of waves ridden, tourists scammed and money made. But mostly they came out to find someone to lay. Sometimes it was other locals, but Waikiki is a small town and after a while you've slept with everyone and you've either developed a reputation or a rash. Not that I'd know anything about either, but that's what I'd heard.

So most locals were out trying to find some unsuspecting tourists. Visiting college guys desperate enough to go home with a cougar or Midwestern girls getting anxious because they were halfway through their vacation in Hawaii and they still hadn't started on their "romance in Paradise" fantasy. They usually got in on Sunday and flew home on Saturday, so their standards were getting lower by the day and the local guys knew this would eventually work out in their favor. Heaven knows it had worked for me, more than once. I was a sure thing on Thursdays.

I sighed.

I was tired.

I must have sighed loudly, because it broke Ben's revelry and he asked "Everything okay?"

"I'm tired."

"We can call it an early night. Lord knows that my jet lag is catching up with me."

"That's not what I mean. How did I get here? How much longer should I stay?"

Ben, always the literal one, said "Are you that drunk already? You got here an hour ago. Sunset is in 18 minutes and we should stay a few minutes after to avoid the crowds. Stick around another half hour and we'll split."

I sighed again, louder than before.

"That's still not what I mean. I've been here on this beach, in this seat, with this drink, for 15 years. Which is probably 10 years too long. I've drank everything there is to drink, surfed all there is to surf, humped all there is to hump...."

"...I thought you once told me there was an endless supply of new humps h...."

"...don't interrupt me; there is, but that's not the point. After a while everything starts to blur. I'm starting to think it's time to go."

"So go", Ben says, more than a little exasperated with me. "You still have plenty of bounty money from that last runaway convict you tracked down, and Lord knows you're no fun here anymore. You'll find work on the Mainland US easy enough. Just avoid cities where the Syndicate knows you and you'll be fine."

I thought about that. Damn, I was tired of this place. Maybe I would finally go.

Moving away would mean no more tourists, no more squalling families, no more country yokels, no more toothless locals, no more traffic, no more crowded surf breaks.

Make a break and start again somewhere else.

Just avoid the Syndicate. And cold weather. Damn, I hate the cold. I forgot about that.

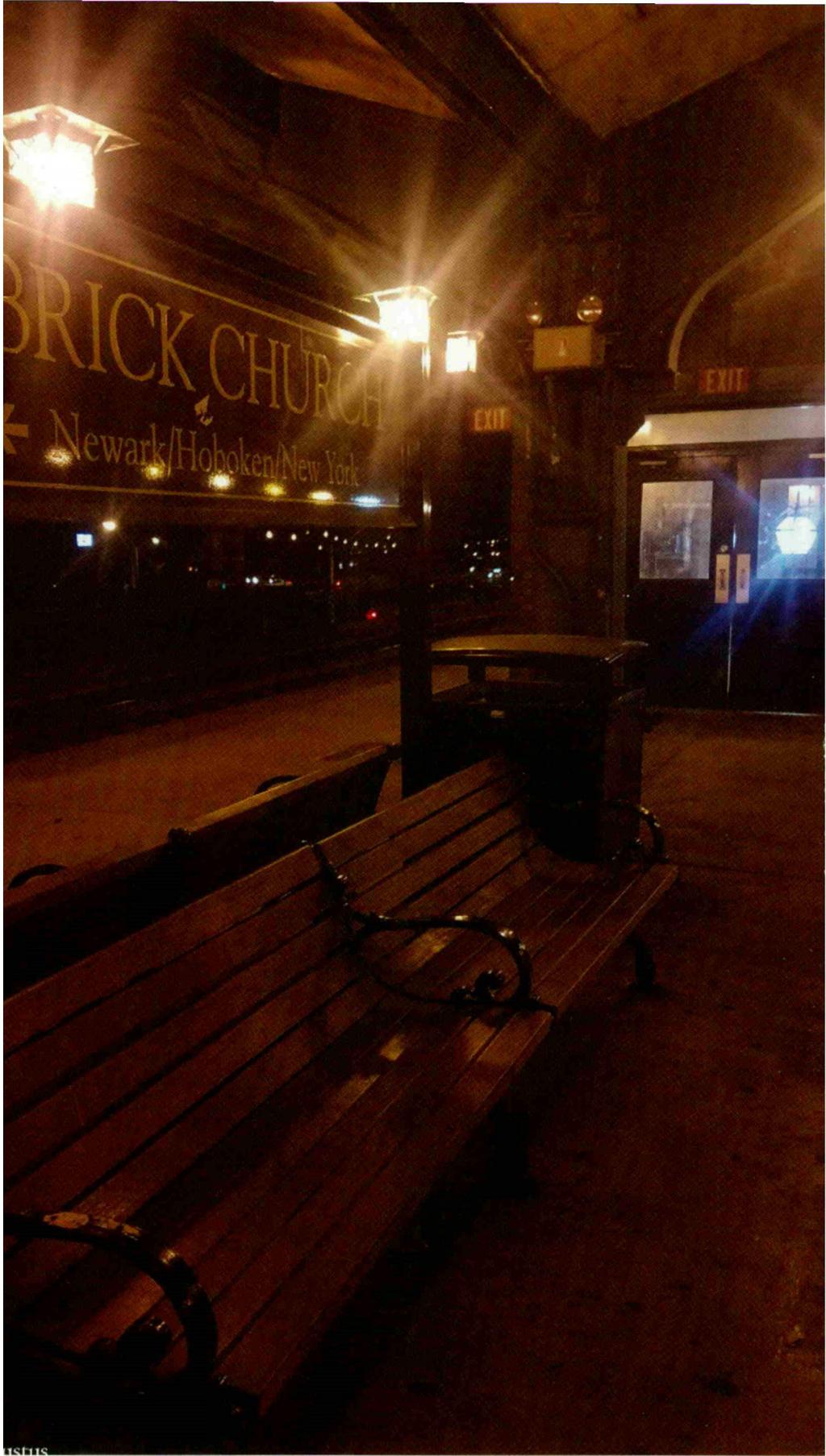
And her. I'd need to stay away from her. She was the reason I came here in the first place; partly to get away from her and to get out of the Syndicate's crosshairs for a while. She was the reason I didn't trust women, whether or not they squint when they smile. Ben (and Wendy, his ex) knew all this. Was he just testing me? Had someone sent him? I needed another drink.

Moving away would also mean no more crimson sunsets, no more golden sunrises, no more surfing atop pure blue waves. It also meant no more drinks on the beach and no more excitement at the prospect of helping Midwestern girls fulfilling their watered-down Paradise fantasy on Thursday nights.

I sighed, again.

I WAS tired, but moving and starting over is way more work than staying put, and sand and waves and booze and sex weren't a bad way to pass the time, so what was I whining about anyway?

"You know what?" I said to Ben, "you're right, it's early. I'll stick around a little longer. Let's get another round. Bud Lite, was it?"





The Fallen Angel

By Christabelle Vasquez

(Giorgio's life and mine)

My name is Luca Maximilliano mostly known as "The Fallen Angel". "Sexual Sadist" I love those two words because it explains everything that I am. You are probably thinking that what happened to me in order for me to become one of those "monsters". Well then, let me tell you a story; it starts like this. I was born in a low-class family. My father was an alcoholic that used to abuse of my mother and myself. I hated him and my mother with all my strength. I hated him because he was an abusive, misogynistic asshole, and I hated her for not leaving him and actually try to have a better life for her and for me. She used to work as a prostitute and to forget the problems she used to do drugs. Heroin and cocaine were her top two. I never had any food on the table apart from heroin and cocaine. Which I've never tried, but once I was tempted to try it, just to see If it really helps to forget my problems. I was scared, I was just a little 8-year-old boy who was hurt and angry and looked for a way to escape my anger. I didn't try drugs but I clearly remember one "accident" with my neighbor's cat. The cat's name was Giorgio, he was always around my house, he was fat, grey, green eyes; he definitely had a better life than me that was for sure. I hated him because of that. Why did a cat who does not speak nor demonstrate feelings have a better life than me? It was one afternoon that the stupid cat was laying on my window. I called him, I could see he was hesitant at first but then he just approached me. I picked him up, took up a knife from the kitchen and walked out of the house with the cat in my hands. My parents were asleep so they didn't even realize I've left. I started walking towards the back of my house, the woods. The walk into the woods was silent, I just kept thinking what am I doing?... Where am I going?... Am I really going to do this?... all of these unanswered questions and only one way to answer them. I kept walking until I was far enough from home. I felt anxious and nervous. My mind was spinning, after a few minutes, I was sure what to do. I grabbed the cat by the neck and placed it on the floor. I took the knife and stabbed the cat 6 times. Each time I stabbed Giorgio I felt like I was stabbing my father. It was such a relief to let go of that anger by killing something. I looked at my hands and they were red like rubies. The blood was hot and looked so beautiful. That was my first kill, a kill that would tell the beginning of my new life.

When the money that my mother brought home wasn't enough to satisfy my father, she started to sell me. She started to gain money by having old men sexually abuse me. I felt betrayed by my mother. She is the one person in this world that has to take care of me and protect me against everything. Apparently, I didn't have one of those nice and caring moms. I had a bitch as a mother that did everything, she wanted with me in order for her to keep buying her shit and my father's shit. I am so mad towards them that it forced me to do something I've only thought about it in wildest dreams. It was

My best feature is that I am good looking, like those typical male models; five foot nine inches, brolic, brown eyes, perfect hair, great smile, "perfect personality". I am what every woman dreams of having in their bed. One of the greatest pleasures in life that I have experienced is breaking a woman down. I think that it starts in breaking

my girl psychologically. At first, everything for her is love and tenderness; my girl this time was Miranda. She was a pretty little thing, brunette, green eyes, five foot three inches, skinny. For her it was love at first sight, for me, it was just another girl to relive my fantasy. Yes, I made an impression on her. I went into a restaurant wearing a fitted suit and a top hat; I made eye contact with her, smirked and kept walking. I sat down in at a table in the back of the restaurant, ordered a glass of Joseph Drouhin Côte de Beaune Rouge Burgundy, 1987. She got up and approached me. She asked if she could sit with me, I said of course unless she is still working her shift. In a small town, I surely was something she always wanted and needed. Having a good 'labia', and just being handsome as I was it was pretty easy to lure every woman I wanted. After a few months, I felt that it was time. She was in love with me, I could sense it. It was the weekend of May, to be precise May 5th at 8:30 pm. Her dad had left for work in Virginia so she had the house by herself. She gave me a key to her house so that I can surprise her. I went into her house as quiet as I could be, she had a dog in the living room. The dog didn't know me so in order to silence the dog before it starts creating scandal, I killed him. I slashed his neck with a sharp knife. It was a great feeling of adrenaline that I forgot that I had that inside of me. I blended down and touched the dogs' blood; it was hot, I licked my fingers and felt a wave of power rushing through my body. I got up and stared at the dog for a few seconds. I saw Miranda had a dog leash laying on the floor. I proceeded to grab it and I knew exactly what I was going to do with it. I started walking slowly into the kitchen. She was wearing a teal tank top and shorts. That is my mother's favorite color. I sense of anger came over me, I grabbed her from behind with the dog leash around her neck. She started to squirm and gasping for air. This excited me and made me even more anxious to have her. She eventually lost consciousness and that is when I covered her mouth this a cloth and her eyes as well. I tied her hands and legs just in case she woke up. I picked her up and took her to my car. I placed her in the back seat so that I can still see her through the rearview mirror. took her to a cabin in the woods that I had since I was little. I placed her in a soundproof room in the cabin with no windows. The only light she saw for 7 days was the light of a light bulb. Now it was my time to play. She was restless and didn't want to eat. So, I went in the room, chained her to the ground by the neck, cut her hair in a pixie style and left her naked. Every morning, afternoon, and night I went into her room and made her eat. After a few hours, I came back into the room and took a piece of her flesh. After 4 days she bored me and I was tired of her flesh, so I had to make an executive decision. I went into the room, caressed her face, grabbed her by the neck and snapped it. I felt so good and happy. She was dead. I picked her up, took her to the bathroom and gave her a bath, combed her hair, a little bit of pink lipstick on her, which reminded me the whole of my mother. I settled her on the metal table and admired her, she looked exactly like my mother. Memories started coming back and I just grabbed my knife and stabbed her in the face. I proceeded into breaking up her chest and looked at her heart. It was the most beautiful and pure heart I've ever seen. I took her heart out of her body and...

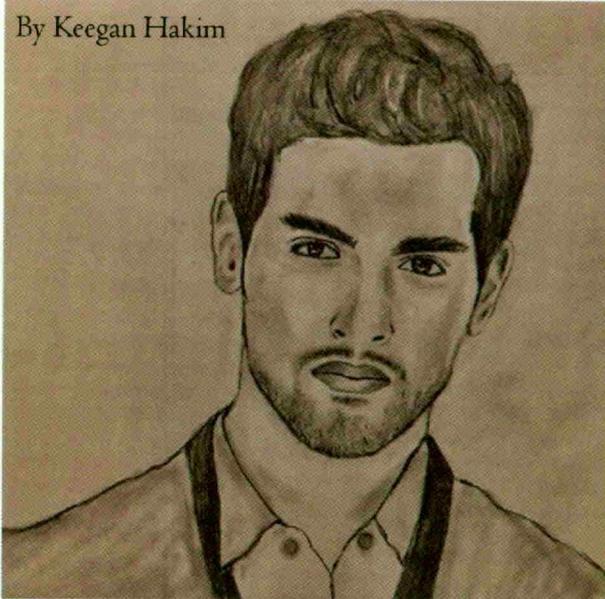
The Blind Man Says

By Rafael Smith

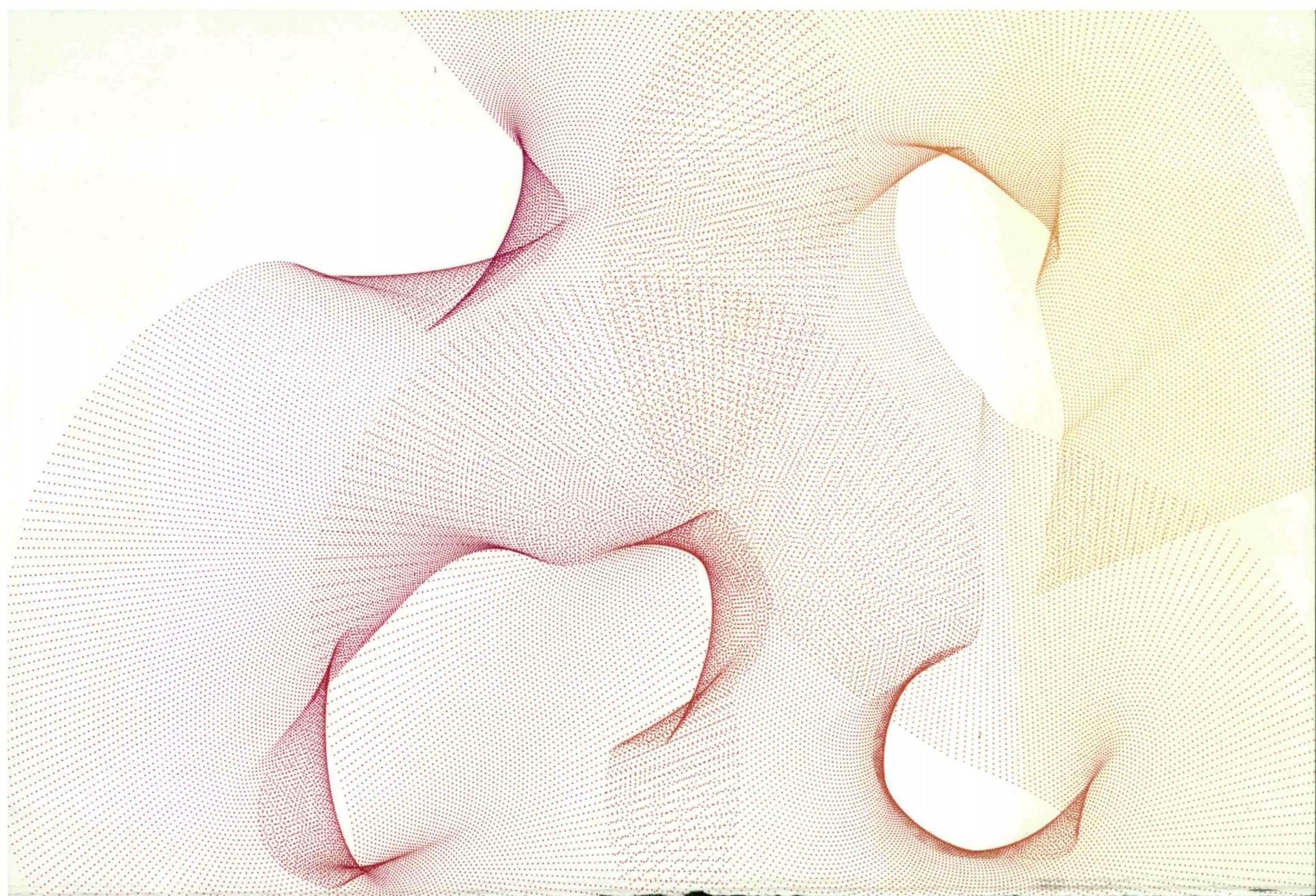
And so the blind man says:
"Ain't never thought I'd see the day
When the world would be in such dismay
But all I can do but hope and pray?
Ain't never seen anything like this before
Ain't never seen hurt like this before
Ain't never seen people cry and die and lie
In the streets
Soaked right through with that same red fearful defeat
Skin scuffed by the pavement while bullets retrieved
Peep holes scattered along the charcoal skin
They reveal the human behind the animal branding
The still heart caged in by the suppression of the lack thereof -
The LOVE - that has been taken away and has yet to return
The soul lingers in the streets
The strength is gone but the fragrance still there
But very wary
Thin as air
Light as night
As a Swinging being, sways lightly in the breeze
A gathering below
Music, food, dance, the whole show
A family day parade of the celebration of a life demised
A family laugh and a family smile
Then family returns to govern the land, its stolen child
The land where the brave is scrutinized
And criminalized
The land where the free is chained
But the free has always BEEN chained
The free was never free
The free was only manipulated and hypnotized
And so they shall remain until blackness rolls away
Or until they raise up from the sleep
And awaken eye number three
Ain't never seen such pain
Ain't never seen such hate
Ain't never seen such lack of faith
Ain't never seen a man lose his breath by a flag
Or the word freeze
Burn it.
Burn it to the ground.
But if it burns a riot is sure to be its successor
And it shall bring gifts of recession, oppression, depression and the lack thereof -
The TOLERANCE - that is needed to live pure

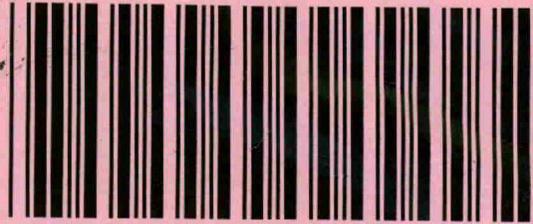
And secure
But security without company is much like a life without love
Like the life we are living now
No love to be found
All joy is drained
No love to gain
Just swaying being swinging from a branch in a tree.
As history continues to repeat at the feet of thee
It seems like everyone all of a sudden is too blind to believe
Because they just refuse to see
That even my eyes have come to realize
That the world is quickly in demise
All have lost their state of mind
And peace of mind Seems so hard to find
Since all the love have been left behind.
But they say
You can't lose what you didn't have in the first place.
And since all this is just a repetition of history
Maybe we really never loved at all
Or understood what it meant to truly love thy neighbor
But blind and all
I see
I see exactly what the world needs.
We need to open our eyes to what the blind man sees
And open our hearts to accept the truth of thee
So that this world can truly begin to heal."

By Keegan Hakim

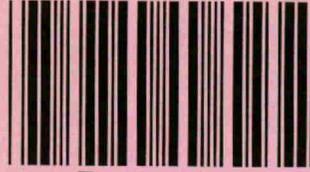


Now, it's your turn to make an impact...
(Feel free to write your own story)





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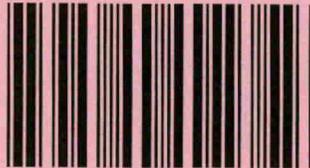
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