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MARQUETTE LITERARY REVIEW

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Volume 13



Andy Mayer, "Poet, Bound"

Marquette Literary Review

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Sponsored by the Department of English

Serina Jamison, General Editor

Serina Jamison is a graduate student at Marquette University, seeking her MA in English. With interests in editing and publishing, she is excited for the opportunity to work on this year's Marquette Literary Review.

Madeline Gruber, Section Editor - Poetry

Madeline Gruber has a particular interest in editing and publishing, it was a great opportunity to work with the other editors. She's extremely excited to have helped with this issue of Marquette Literary Review, especially despite the circumstances!

Kate Braun, Section Editor - Prose

Kate Braun is a graduate student at Marquette University seeking her MA in English. After spending two years working in college counseling, Kate is happy to be back in the classroom herself! With a passion for reading and publishing, she is thrilled to have been working with the Marquette Literary Review team this year.

Dr. Angela Sorby, Advisor

A note on the 2021 issue: Volume 13 of the MLR was produced during a year when the Marquette community was working remotely. The original issue, as elegantly conceived and executed by its graduate student editors, was housed on a server that did not archive it properly, through no fault of their own. As a result, this iteration of the MLR is a reconstruction produced retroactively by Angela Sorby. Any omissions or lacunae should be attributed to the reconstructive process, rather than to the original editors.

Maxwell Gray, Digital Media Consultant, Raynor Memorial Library

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Margot Zamberlin

Under the Rhododendron

Let's walk in our garden under the
cherry trees with no fruit.

Let's look at
our blue walls and climb our
steep stairs
in our little home on 36th street.

There's so much shit in the
attic
and even more
buried under
the rhododendron
In the front yard.
But there is you,
and me,
and all renters in the basement.
I never talk to them because I'm shy and I'm seven
and my mother has become the sky,
I can't really have her,
but she is nearby.



Lauren Demasek, "Mind Waves"

Will Scheueman

At Home

Getting him out of the nursing home was a lot easier than I thought it was going to be. I've never broken an elderly person out of a nursing home, but I thought I'd need a fancy escape plan or to pay a few people off, but I guess it's a lot easier than that. All it took was a cracked door by the kitchen loading dock, a few nurses in the hallway looking the wrong way, and a full tank of gas in the '96 Chevy and we were gone. I've never liked breaking the rules. Cheating on tests, kidnapping senior citizens, nothing like that. But today was special. We weren't going to get a day like this one again.

His wheelchair sat folded up in the back seat, glinting in the falling sun. Dave Brubeck fuzzy in the speakers. Pops propped up against the door, bones pressing against his button-down shirt. Old beat up flat cap tucked over his eyes.

"You have the beer?"

"Yep."

"Cracker Jacks?"

"Of course."

"Mmmphf."

Nowadays it's kind of hard to figure out Pops. Actually, he's always been hard to figure out. He never really smiles, or laughs, or says much of anything. I usually can never figure out exactly what was going on inside his head at all, but tonight was different. Tucked away under his flat cap, an old glint in his eyes. I hadn't seen that look in his eye in years.

Every Friday during my summer breaks, I'd get the same phone call. Go over to your Grandfather's house. Mow the lawn for him. But I did last week! Offer it up. Click. Then I'd open up the garage and push the mower down the driveway all the way down the street to Pops' house. It would be the same scene every time. Pops on that old rocking chair, half asleep in the afternoon heat. I'd fire up the mower, pushing back and forth across the bumps, divots, and spots of dirt on that minefield of a lawn. The transistor radio on his knees hummed away over the noise of the blades. As soon as I was finished, I'd join him up on the porch. We'd sit there in silence, watching the next-door neighbors play in the street. He'd turn the dial to catch the afternoon game. Check the box score in the sports section from the night before. Every few weeks, after I was done mowing, he would tell me to get in the car, pull out a beat up 20 from his pocket, and head towards the city.

We'd take the exit ramp onto Elm, the potholes rattling the seats. Boarded up shops, empty lots, old factories lining the streets. Maybe a few homeless men slumped against the old auto shop.

Then, with that slow right hand turn onto Lincoln, all of the dust and dirt fell away. The old familiar brick façade would rise from the abandoned lots like it always did, the white marquee glowing like the moon. The ivy drifted up the walls, blending in with the deep green paint of the grandstand. The smells of hot dogs and the same old tunes on the ballpark organ wound past the walls and metal detectors. The crowds seemed to be pulled towards the park like moths to a lantern, lambs to a stream, ready to have their souls refilled.

We'd have the same routine every time. Two hot dogs with everything on them. Pops with the High Life, me with the Sprite. One bag of Cracker Jacks for the two of us. Same two seats up high in the right field grandstands. K12 and K13. They weren't the best seats, not by a long shot. No drink holders. You could barely see the ball. Even if it got hit your way, the I-beam that sat off to the left would get in the way so you had no idea what was going on. Wood splinters would break off of the bench if you slid across it. Decades old peanut shells and hot dog wrappers sat at your feet. You could have sworn the cleaning staff just forgot that corner of the stadium even existed. And don't get me started about the quality of the team. Bottom of the cellar every year. But none of that ever really mattered to Pops, so it never really mattered to me. Sometimes I'd wonder if he even liked baseball. He just sat there, sipping his beer, eating his hot dog, with the bag of Cracker Jacks between the two of us. The soft rumble of the crowd noise and the distant thudding of the ball in the catcher's mitt between us. And then, out of nowhere, these stories just started flowing out of nowhere. We'd wander far away from a warm July night in a second rate ballpark off in a corner of Who Really Cares, USA. I'd find myself with Pops on a fishing charter in the North Atlantic, my hair wet from the waves beating over me, or in the middle of the night in a foxhole in Korea with my battle buddy from Mississippi trying to keep sane between the shelling, or a few weeks before in a hospital bed right down the street from here. Or maybe the stories wouldn't flow at all, and we'd just be right there, just watching a ball game. The sounds, smells, and lazy rhythm hypnotized us. The hours just seemed to wander on by. And then, at the last out, we'd get up from our seats, make our way back to the car, and do it all again a few weeks later.

All the way until I turned eighteen, graduated, went to college across the country. Pops had a few falls, a few surgeries, bounced around between nursing homes. The old home team dropped further in the standings than they ever did before. New owners. More money. More wins. Promises of expansion, a new park. When the news came, I knew I needed to make that drive back home. I piled up everything into a duffel bag, borrowed my roommate's '96 Chevy, and set off down the interstate. On my way home.

We pulled into the same lot as usual. It was about as close as we could get. I figured as much. The park was brimming with activity, but not the kind we were used to. A few cranes stood by the edge of the grandstand, one with a big wrecking ball hanging from it. Construction workers with sledgehammers and crowbars shuffled around inside their chain-link fence. The air was filled with the

drums of jackhammers, the shouts of the crowd. The ivy rustled in the late afternoon breeze. We just sat there in that same silence as always. I watched the time go by on Pops' old watch. As the time flowed by and the sun dipped lower and lower into the sky, the crew started to pack up. The workers drifted towards their cars, and as the night fell completely, their headlights danced away into the dark. We watched them fade all the way into the city lights.

I pulled out a set of folding chairs from the backseat, setting them next to Pops' wheelchair. With a grunt I lifted him into his. I grabbed two beers from the cooler and a few lukewarm hot dogs I had warmed up in his microwave earlier from a stained brown bag. I rummaged through my backpack, cellophane wrinkling in the air.

"Cracker Jacks?"

Pops mumbled, took the bag. After a moment, he pulled out the old transistor radio. AM static filled the air scanning through the frequencies until he settled on the game. He leaned far back into his chair. Starting lineups read. Crowd noise filled the air. We munched on our cracker jacks and hot dogs and washed it down with our beer, longing to be up there, where we were supposed to be. Never quite going to be able to be at home. But we were. Almost. That old familiar silence just sitting between us.

Suddenly, the old ballpark lights flashed on. Old orange light flooded the stadium. The radio just seemed to play a little louder. The cellophane crackled in the breeze.

"You coming?"

Pops looked back at me from halfway across the parking lot, a small, quiet grin spreading under his flat cap. I followed him as he slipped through a gap in the fence, hobbled down the old concourse all the way to our seats. K12 and K13, radio between us, looking over our half-lost home, flickering in the floodlights. I could feel the old peanut shells under my feet. I could see the I-Beam blocking the way of a hard grounder going right down the right field line. And we sat there all night, halfway between home and nowhere.

Jacob Riyeff

Deer Camp

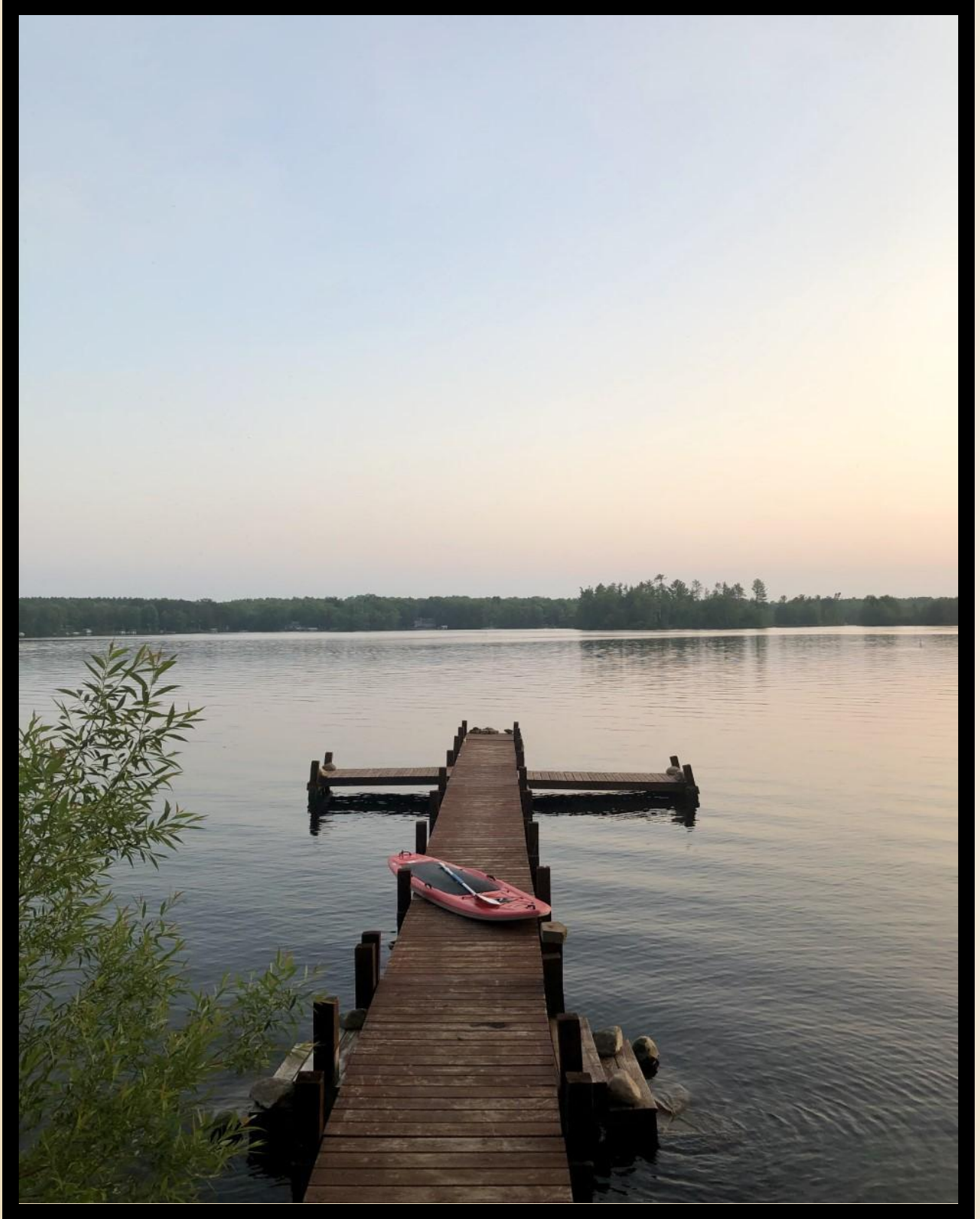
For the Late Woodland cousins

New beech suckers lunging from old roots,
 April sun growing stronger—
 it's nursing bone and nets of clay
 season after season in this clearing.
 Lousewort sprouting, trees have no time—
 only the *brusan* they cling to, shout from.
 Twilling of warblers thru the bare canopy
 like waterfalls in the branches.

Playing hooky for kids' spring break.
 Skunk cabbage abounds
 along the wetland lowland basin.
 Water springs in dark channels
 down to Hartman Creek
 along gray sand banks
 the Woodlanders used to found the effigies.

The heartscent of dried leaves
 among the trunks in the lazing breeze
 more evocative than any tea-dipped madeleine.
 Kids scout ahead and tumble in the sticks,
 always calling, already breathing earth.
 Water spirits gather round our legs,
 rogue daffodils nestled at the base
 of the short ridge cleanse our minds
 to see the ground, know the Deer—*heorta*—
 inhabiting this ground. The Treaty of the Cedars
 let this land and severed ties, a heron sprung

from the shoreline with a blast of feather
and beak and leg.



Nikita Deep, "Hiraeth Lake"

Kayla DiFranco

An Ode to My Love

My soul has found yours
And all of the world makes sense because of you

I smile at your smile,
Heaven smiles back and knows it has done right

The sun rises and I wonder about you
The moon comes and goes and there you are always

Love is easy, my hand is holding yours
How lucky am I to have found you in this blue sea?

You are my rainy day and snowy sky
You are the song in my head
You are the dream I dream each night

Over and over I'll choose you

So my love, I pray it be true
You belong to me and I belong to you

Tommy Donahue

Just Another Stat

The red Corvette sped down Wisconsin Avenue trailed by what appeared to be a dozen police cars. The far-off red and blue lights illuminating the night sky along with the faint, gradual hum of sirens rapidly approaching created quite the ominous feel on this cool Milwaukee night. I stood on the corner of Wisconsin and 8th Street, just embarking on my return trip from Dominoes as my phone lit up with the MUPD alert of a carjacking west of campus, and I quickly linked it to what I was currently seeing unfold in the distance.

As the car continued to approach the red light at the intersection with speed I had only seen in movies, a large grey object snuck into my periphery. I snapped my head towards the source and stood helpless at the sight of an 18-wheeler barreling down 8th street like a moving brick wall.

Everyone froze, and time stood still as we waited for the inevitable. The semi emerged from behind the building that concealed it from the carjacker and crossed Wisconsin Avenue just as the corvette arrived. Like a CGI'd nightmare, the red blur disappeared into the cargo bed of the helpless truck.

An ear-splitting silence followed the collision, quickly replaced by a collective gasp from the small group of spectators that had gathered at the scene before the crash. The semi came to a screeching halt, as the bottom half of the corvette left heavy black tire marks as it spun out and continued down Wisconsin Ave, purely on momentum. The police cars came to a slow halt, as the crowd finally processed what had just occurred at the intersection of Wisconsin and 8th and erupted into screams.

I think about that moment often. The feeling of pure helplessness, like trying to stop a sunrise, that I felt as I first laid eyes on the semi, and the deep regret I have that I was too frozen by anticipation to jump around like a maniac and catch his attention. But also the grim reality that for those not in attendance for that sequence of events, that death was just another stat, just another event on the fourth page of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Just another car thief who got what was coming. It sure didn't feel like that when I saw the steaming fiery remains of the corvette slide to a stop. When I heard the screams of bystanders in shock. When I imagine the family of the 20-year-old kid that was just trying to get some money to feed his sisters. I wonder if all the deaths I gloss over in the news feel like that.

Olivia Cimino

A Full Swing

I wake to trumpets
Glorifying the morning
Sweet dew drips from everything
Flouncing kindly off my sheets
I glide to put my tea on

Today will be productive,
Today will be good

I relax, belly full of honey and mint
Suddenly, the music goes dark
As if jaws were to appear
Everything is now dreadful
A grey fin exhales on my ankles

Today is not what I thought,
Today is bad

I burst up the concrete stairs
Panting and grinning
The fin no longer
I have beat it, victorious, now
I can mop the entire city (with a q-tip)

Today is to be conquered,
Today is good

Erratic and frantic
I cry my mothers name
The only thing I know about safety
All is not right in the world

And I can do nothing to fix it

Today is helpless,

Today is bad

I am a proud woman

Pompous almost

You can hear my superiority

Before I clober through the door

In my 5 inch heels

Today is powerful,

Today is good

Mute and immobile

I stare at my blank apartment wall

Drained of soul and body,

exhausted

Pummeling my battered brain

I ask, what happened today?



Kelly Kennedy, "Winnie"

Meghan King

Take Me There

The composition and disposition of
a lyrical dream,
a beautiful master, my vision
and scene,
the loneliness lies and terrified
sound,
the sleepless sorrow and
sadness pound.
May all that endeavor and
solemnly swear,
a magical dream &
take
 me
 there.

Lauren Demasek

Soul of the Sea

It is.

The sun.

The water.

The wind gently caressing the sails

As the Light dances upon the water,

Like a thousand black mirrors

Seen through eyes of stone.

And the waves lap softly against the hull.

Running fingertips along the wooden planks,

Detecting each knot and splinter.

The wood,

Soaked in deep mahogany,

Stained with salt and sea and spray.

Every braid in the rope

That breaks free with the wind,

Slides through the hand

Making raw and callus

What once was velvet youth.

The spray of the sea on weathered skin.

Clear. Cold.

The wind ruffles coarse hair of ebony.

Soft. Gentle.

Like the delicate hand of an angel,

Sending ripples down a spine of pearls.

Down into the abyss.

Down to the deepest depths of the soul,

Hidden from any light, from any life.

From the fiery trenches of the sea,

Burning embers roar within the fire of the mind.

Reaching. Grasping

The tallest peaks of hope's rays.
The mast stands tall,
Unwavering,
Unaware
Of the storm that lies below,
That is within.
Brewing.
Beating.
On and on,
Through the waves and the sea and the soul.
Just you and the boat and the water.



Sadaf Nasir, "Crystal Clear"

Grace Lambertson

Fulfillment

Fulfillment was born with roots instead of veins.

She is a homebody, yet her home is seemingly everywhere. Yesterday I saw her sitting on the moon, today I found her hiding in my grandmother's eyes.

I questioned her once about where she lived, all she did was smile then ask me if I'd eaten yet today.

It is almost impossible to get a straight answer from Fulfillment, sometimes I'm almost convinced she doesn't exist at all. But now and again someone will tell me about the time Fulfillment dropped cookies off at their front porch, or when they saw her beaming in the glint of their partners wedding ring.

I wish that she was around enough for me to remember just how real she is.

Fulfillment is the type of person who you just want to stare at for the rest of your life.

She is beautiful.

Not beautiful like a glass mirror, or a crystal ornament. Beautiful like the first rain of spring, beautiful like the hand of your best friend that is tightly holding your own, beautiful like the moment you finally let yourself break down after a hard day. If you look closely at Fulfillment, you will see the streaks of thick watery tears that have permanently stained her face. She proudly outlines them in golden glitter and says that she believes in honoring her pain.

She gave me my own bottle of green glitter before disappearing once again.

I remember her skin being pale and yellow like the stars, and her hair being the color of the inky night sky. Nestled in each indigo lock is a treasure from one of the thousands of places she's visited.

If you complement one of the trinkets, she will insist that you take it, that the object was destined to be yours. She said that each item holds immeasurable value. I looked into her mass of hair and asked her

what a broken shell could possibly be worth. She said that she had stepped on it after finally mastering her banana bread recipe. That is the moment I finally began to understand Fulfillment.

Fulfillment only floats, never walks.

If you listen, you can hear her giggle as her toes lightly brush a dewy patch of grass or a chipped wooden floor.

Once I saw that her feet were burned and black, and I would have been worried If I hadn't seen her floating right above the sun during my nature walk. I called out to her, but she let me be. I think she knew that I was supposed to be alone at that moment. She appeared again in the crackling flames of my campfire at the end of that day.

I asked her if I will ever be able to float like her.

She told me that she can float only because she no longer has to rely on just herself for support. She told me that she can float because she is free. She told me to start letting people in.

Before I could thank Fulfillment, the flame burnt out, and I was left sitting alone in the dark.

I wonder when I will see her again.

Peter Spaulding

Avylon Landing

for Cassidy

Imagine you are flying west at sundown when you start to think about time zones, about the swelling sunset, and the way light bends with gravity. It strikes you as totally unique, this moment, when the sunset gets to last perhaps another ten or fifteen minutes longer than usual because you happen to be flying in an arc at about six hundred miles per hour toward the thing that appears to be moving away from you.

You think: the light leaving the sun has taken eight minutes to get here, and we are slugging along toward the sun, catching light at the edge of a deep-orange meridian that pales out the farther up in the sky you look.

Imagine also that you were lucky enough to get a window seat, and that you're sitting next to a stranger who has confided in you his slightly higher than average distrust of flying metallic commercial vehicles. And when he—this man is an old man who smells of boiled vegetables and musty cotton—leans over into your area to see the sunset's edge splayed against arched cumulonimbi, you just know he doesn't have to think about it the same way you do, but can just see it and take it in and say,

“Well, would you look at that.”

Now, when he asks you what's bringing you to California, pretend that you tell him just a small lie—

“I'm here to see some family. I got a short break from school.”

—because you are for whatever reason afraid of telling him in particular the true reason for your visit.

“Ah,” he’ll say, returning to his space, “pleasure more than business, then?”

And he of course has no idea how unpleasant your business in California is.

Imagine that silence resumes, and you see him give a look up at the lighted no smoking and seatbelt signs that almost seems to say, “do they have a switch for ever turning the no smoking signs off the way they have a switch for turning the seatbelt signs off?” And now you’re thinking that you can also maybe detect a hint of tobacco in his fleece-lined flannel jacket.

And what if you were going to California not just to see family? There is something Latin that you can’t quite remember for the telling of a small truth for the purpose of masking the much larger, more vibrant, and potentially also more dangerous truth.

Why do the light particles move so far and so fast, just to die out over the curvature of the spinning world if not for just your eyes and those of the others around who have the ability still to lean over into the space of those sitting next to them in the window seats, and how can anyone not see it this way? They are not compelled from their beginnings, but drawn by their destinations, you might think, the way winter-paled tourists are drawn to swanky West Coast vacations in warmer climes by the draw of the warmer climes themselves rather than a negative push of the colder climes. And do they come all this way just to die in our sight? You may find yourself thinking, *wouldn’t that be an incredible life?*

The man beside you reminds you of your grandfather, you think, and you get the sense that you could just as easily remind him of a granddaughter or step-daughter from a late marriage to a much younger woman or something else of the sort. And the combination of these thoughts in your mind reminds you that it may actually be imperative that he not find out your visit’s true purpose.

“And what about yourself?” you try.

“Oh, I’m just headin home.”

“You live in the Bay Area?”

“Oakland. Yup.”

“...”

Imagine also, now, that the cabin gives a little harbingering bump of turbulence. And what if you think about how turbulence is such a passive word for describing the phenomenon of nature reminding us not to do crazy shit like fly in a metal box thirty thousand feet above the earth. And you comfort yourself with the hope that this old man beside you may seem like just the type to try to not bother with fixing the oxygen mask to his own face before trying to help his neighbor.

“You’re a student, huh?”

“Yes, yeah, I go to school back in the city.”

“...”

“...”

“You got a lot of family out in California?”

Well now, perhaps, you’re somewhat trapped. You flirt with the possibility of trying another miniature truth to hide the dangerous Face of the Full Picture, hiding the essential thing by focusing on just one more of the surrounding details, but you’re relieved by an announcement from a very full, hot-sounding pilot or co-pilot foretelling of future turbulence. And if you hadn’t been cutting a quick mental image of what kind of jawline that voice could belong to, you might’ve had more time to think of an appropriate alternative detail to focus on before—

“Not a lot. No. Not anymore.”

“...”

You know you should ask him what he does, that you should generally take more interest in the people around you because “you never really know what could happen” and all that, and that you are maybe right now being presented by The Universe with

an opportunity to right the wrong that has resulted in your feeling poignantly and profoundly shameful on this long, unexpected trip to the West Coast, that maybe you're confronting the problematic thing that's been with you for as long as you can remember, and that maybe you could just reach out and try to actually see someone, but then you are suddenly both immediately seeing the plane from the outside as it shrinks into just a blip in the violent orange of the dying light all around you, and you are just barely making out the gaping darkness in the side of it from which you were both ripped, and as you each fall separately to your own, private deaths, you see the old man, whose arm has been replaced with flapping red tubers squirting out of the flannelled sleeve, and his eyes are closed, and his mouth is open and flapping, and his face seems somehow peaceful like a prayer, and before you can think to see if you are missing a limb yourself or even breathing or frozen or dead, you think that he is praying for you.



Sadaf Nasir, "Baldie"

Maggie Miller

The Charcoal Sky

the arced moon emits her
luminescent shine

highlighting marvelously
your face's strong curves
and soft lines

on lukewarm grass
beside yours my head
steadily rests

we watch stars
twinkle
glint
prance along
the charcoal sky

a cigarette dangles
from my puckered lips
as I breathe in
a tobacco-rich breath

you hum along
to that lovely Harry Styles song
where he says she lives
in his daydreams

I pass the square
to you and stare at
its cherry-red tip

signals your drag

the crisp evening breeze
carries the burnt scent
of nicotine
and your flowery sweetness

our spare hands meet
then thread
and my eyes shut
in contentedness
while a satisfied sigh leaves
my body



Nikki Deep, "Lost City"

Urwa Ahmad

Pour Over

Put the pot of water on.
Remember how you argued with your sister
Of whose turn it was to make it.
Begrudgingly getting up after a
ruthless game of rock paper scissors.

Add black tea leaves, once boiling.
Add a lid, wait for six minutes.
Remember sinking onto the couch
Wrapped up in a blanket, feet tucked underneath
Trying not to fall back asleep
In the warm area you have carved
Like the steam condensing in the kettle.

Add cinnamon and cardamom.
Boil milk for two minutes.
Remember getting distracted
By the television or your phone or something
Your attention was gone.
The milk boiled over and scalded the pot
Spilling onto the stove and floor
Joining the stains from the past,
Never quite moving forward.

Pour the tea into mugs, combine with milk
Don't pick the strainer that has holes in the sides.
Add one spoon of sugar for Dad

Quarter for Mom, even though she says she wants none

Remember the heat of the mugs as you carry them

Up the stairs, the steam hitting your face

Remember their tired smiles as they thank you,

For the wake-up call, for getting up so they don't have to

Remember these moments,

You'll talk about them over chai later.

Claire Carlson

Moon Jelly

I loved you then
And I love you now

Dew drops on the ocean currents,
Aimless wanderers
That glow in moonlight

Needless to say,
I am mesmerized.

The last good summer
In recent memory
Your hand on my shoulder burns

And I felt
As peaceful
And as still
As the moon jelly,
Floating motionless on the waves.

Even if your touch stings,
I don't care.
The pain flows through me like water,
And I feel my heart beating.

I loved you then
And I love you now

Ross Bravo

Warmth

The snow melts outside my window.
The break of winter breathes new life into campus.
I see students playing Frisbee in the green space,
eating and studying on picnic tables,
and smiling when their masks aren't on.

The warm breeze blows
the stench of sewage straight down Wisconsin.
As I walk to class, I pass more glowing faces,
people relieved to finally put the parka away.

Even my class is dynamic,
students I have not seen since day 1, show up.
The quiet and reserved, now participate at every chance.
The professor makes jokes
and we don't pretend to laugh anymore.

Hailey Wellner

Our Past Lives

Maybe we were cowboys,
roaming the wild west side by side.

Maybe we were childhood friends,
playing and growing into lovers.

Maybe we were from different social classes,
catching each other's eye from across a market.

Maybe we were strangers,
only meeting once to never see each other again.

Maybe we never met,
never crossing paths but feeling lost, aching.

Nothing else could explain the pull, the
emotion so deep inside a place I didn't know existed, the
pain that comes along with knowing someone in another life, but
not having them in this one.

Ryan Hagan

Dead Weight Walking, or Trudge of the Somber Tumult

Rotten stones wedge into

Rotten shoes worn by

Rotting legs which prop up

A rotting body — waterlogged stilts supporting a drained, dry mind in a

World with one less loved one inside.

And emptied without her it is;

To me, anyway.

The Weight of the World blasts in my ears.

Cracks

Formed from all the hicks in pickup trucks

Run the road's length like blood vessels in my allergenic eyes

Blood red from mourning tears and lies:

Slacks

Lacking temporary coherence;

Mourning doves coo and

Dew stains my shoes green.

She is left from us.

Grass is a nuisance as well as the hicks driving by disrupting this quiet moment which I never get because I'm a man who's supposed to suck it up and shut up and take it I

know where they can take it

I wish I could say it but it's hard to say anything when you're alone in a neighborhood of identical houses designed by a white man who can't think beyond his architecture schooling

under posh pretentious teachers who leech off the dimes of taxpayers but who am I to say when I'm a bigger leech than any of them

?

I'm sorry ok I talked out of turn and now I sound crazy because I say silly things and can't stop blaming myself and I feel empty among the world I've now alienated over a single walk's course.

Of course the locals hate me. This is what I get. So I just keep walking. I drag it out as long as I can, absorbing the natural sounds of bird larynxes tweeting like Twitter addicts. But what I love most are nature's scents.

They remind me of her in more positive ways

Than the pathetic atrophied body she was,

Locked away in her condo all day.

It's where I sleep now.

Mia Gleason

The Creek

Cicadas buzz in the mucky air

Humid, tight

slight breeze

The water is murky, left untold

We do not know how it got here,

Or where it goes

We stand on the rocks

That creep out of the water

They hold meaning

They know their place

We know nothing of the water

Where it came from

Where it will go

The creek flows on

The snails linger in its kind waters

The snakes dig into its soggy mud

We know nothing of the water

Its brown, opaque tint

We are a part of its legacy

Standing on the rocks

The grass stands tall

Blades that poke out of the water's secrecy

The frogs swim fast

Darting the young shoes that attempt to trap them

The bugs wander the air

Wondering about the creek

But using it for their benefit

We take the creek for granted

It's a home

A safeplace

Its history is unknown

But we know it while it is here

We know nothing of the water

Where it came from

Where it will go

We know what it is now

Imprinted in our heads



Andy Mayer, "Wilderness"

Ryan Hagan

Auntie

Pupils track the ant's inaudible pacing;

Lips chap and crack under the baby tooth's nibbling — incessant jabbing;

The nails I lack confidence to prune rattle upon the fine wood finishing.

A jolly clock strikes ten-to-ten, its face unfurling like a flower.

It is Christmas.

Four strokes of sixty have passed — an eternity in my vast

But young mind.

I ask my Aunt again in the nicest of kinds.

The answer is a clone:

“No,

“Can you please wait a minute?”

Her tone is shrill and

Much like mine

Would be were I in such a powerful position

In the family hegemony;

Yet

She is almost sixty.

So I sulk to my corner, ten-year-old me.

I let the question be, holding the plastic rectangle in my lap,

Fantasizing about my game.

I imagine the pegs striking the disk's divots after I inject it;

I imagine the cool title music and flashy pixelated story in high-bit;

I imagine showing off the then-fascinating experience to my

Cousins who sit bored by my side;

I imagine the

Sick moves of

The heroine on-screen. She kicks butt.

All this plays out in my head,

All this imagery dances above my modified bed —

The couch upon which I lay.

We've been here all day.

Why can't my self be gay —

Happy like the adults?

Why can't I have fun?

The presents still rest beneath the fake plastic tree

And won't be open for another three hours:

Another eternity

From now.

Why

Is

Time

So

Different

For

A

Child?

I'm asking the wrong question.

I should be asking

Why is Auntie so petty,

So controlling?

More controlling than a boy

Mashing greased video game buttons.

Sarah Aaron

Starlit Sisters

Artemis, did you know?

Songs would be sung of your hunts,
the moon your torch in the night

Mary, did you know?

Water would carry your son, obey him,
still and seize at His hand

Artemis, did you know?

Your name would conjure the crimson birthing bed
from anyone's thighs but yours

Mary, did you know?

Your name would conjure the Holy Spirit's lily light
the white, white clothes you'll wrap your baby in

Artemis, did you know?

Cults would form in your name;
virgin girls would contort into bears to sate your wrath,
would offer goat blood to quench your thirst

Mary, did you know?

Cults would form in your name;
flowers would adorn your lackluster hair
woven through trembling, discolored fingers of feverish men

Artemis, did you know?

We would throw ourselves at cold
marble feet
for your virginity

Mary, did you know?
We would throw ourselves at cold
painted feet
for your virginity

Artemis, did you know?
You'd bring a god into this world.

Mary, did you know?
You'd bring a god into this world.

Spencer Kilpatrick

The Loving Cup

Under our crafts, our titles, our jobs.
Under our hard-dying habits and
discarded maps to
well-worn comfort zones

Under the creeping vines
of 188 California.
Loud-mouthed and drunk-proud
of a packed house

Under her midnight eyelids
& movements rooted in joy that
date back to grade school -
playground happiness

And under nervous tics
and tired voices

We laugh,
Overwhelmed



Lauren Demasek, "Sublime Dream"

Jack Murphy

An African Serpent's Song

You say your name translates to a serpent song.
I don't speak your native tongue,
but you teach me it anyways.

ndewo aba m bu eke

Rooted in the trials of the prison ships,
voyaged here, as history enslaved your
ancestors by the color of their skin. Your skin.
Yet you still call me brother.

Nwa ann m

Like sequestered veins within a pulsed heart,
I recognize one earth, only to realize I am the stranger.

o di mma izute gi

What was it like to have a life of your own
divvied from the undertakings surrounding you now.
Absence of loss, guilt, and loneliness.

M ga-anonyere gi mgbe niile

You have ventured away from the Gulf of Guinea, and
cast memories of empty plains that border the Sahara.

nke kacha mma ka na-abia

Now that your earth has moved closer to mine,
I listen to your words like the Motown flow
that sounds from Detroit at daybreak.

Aburu m gi n'anya nwanne

Sarah Aaron

August

There are some nights that are so dark, you can't see a foot beyond your only source of light. Right now, that source of light is the campfire the group has made for themselves. As far as she can tell, there is nothing beyond the warm light emitting from the flames and reflecting on her friends' faces. Duodecaplets, they call themselves. Twelve of them. A perfect number. She can feel the ground under her worn-down sneakers, but that doesn't stop the feeling that the group is suspended in mid-air, strings invisible, a black box with no escape. It's unnerving.

She seems to be the only one who feels this way, though. Her friends seem oblivious; smiling and laughing with each other, cheeks flushed from the heat, at ease. She wants to stop thinking, so she turns her brain off and does her best to rejoin the conversation her friends are having. They are reminiscing about their time in college. They all have finally graduated, and are taking this last camping vacation to spend time with each other before they have to become real adults.

When March regales them all with yet another adventurous escapade of his, she begins to laugh with the rest of them. She never tires of hearing his stories. Despite being a civil engineering major, March managed to have the most exciting time in college out of them all. This time, he recalls the day he stole a bus with another engineering friend of his. This friend's mother is an owner of the local bus company, so one day they decided to take one for a joyride. They drove it all over and even took it way out into the rural outskirts of town, over roads so muddy and uneven that the videos March took were almost indecipherable. They returned the bus, of course, but not before getting a very stern talking-to from his friend's mother. Sometimes she suspects that March's stories are exaggerated to the point of farce, but she humors him anyway. It's a welcome reprieve from the grueling toil she endured throughout undergrad.

She can intimately feel the flames of the fire lick her face. The warmth is like a balm. When the wind blows the fire away the cold slaps her in the face. For now, at least, the fire is close to her, flecks of smoke and ash making her cough a little. Her friends are a bit hazy through the flames. She feels a little drunk.

She turns her head, and sees April look at March. That makes her sad. It's obvious to her and everyone else in their small circle that April is in love with him. She has been for some time now. Unfortunately, March seems to be completely blind to April's yearning. It's a shame too; they would make a great couple, she thinks to herself. March is sweet-natured, but firm. He is a realist - that's what makes him a good engineer. April tends to have lofty notions about the world. She supposes that's what makes April such a strong artist. She thinks they would balance each other out.

Sadly, even if March did notice and reciprocate April's feelings for him, there wouldn't be much of a point. March will soon be going away to graduate school while April is moving across the country to a major city to find work. March is done talking, and the group falls awkwardly silent. She wants to say something, she *thinks* she wants to say something, but September and November speak up.

The two of them have always been close. They're brothers - September is a year or two older than November, but if you didn't know any better you'd say they were twins. Same heart-shaped face, same close-cropped brown hair, same height, same everything. Except for the eyes. September's eyes are a vibrant green, while November's are hazel. The group jokes that their eyes are the only way to tell them apart. After getting to know them for a while she can tell them apart in other ways - ways that perhaps she shouldn't be able to see - but she thinks that for July and March especially, the eyes thing may actually be the only difference they notice.

All twelve of them are a group together, but it's not shaped like a tessellation, where all the pieces fit together in a snug whole. More of an irregular polygon. There are some people that hang closer to the edge of the group and some that exist in the center of it. They don't all know each other equally well - groups within the group,

The pair have an announcement to make. They are both going to take a gap year instead of going right into the doctorate programs they were interested in. September will be going to Central Europe while November will head down into South America. That is what surprises her more than anything. September and November are usually inseparable. Putting an ocean between them will no doubt be a drastic change for the both of them, and she cannot help but wonder if things will work out as they plan. When May quietly asks if this will destroy their chances of getting into the programs in the future, November reassures her that it won't. They've done their research, they swear, and so long as they don't do anything crazy everything will be fine. Plus, it will be a great experience that will help in their sociolinguistic pursuits.

That clearly does not satisfy May, so she takes May's hand and gently chides her for worrying so much over the boys. They take this role often: May worries, and she comforts. It's been the same since they first met in grade school. She has learned not to mind it. May reciprocates when the going gets tough. And May means well, that's plain for all to see. The group has grown accustomed to her mothering them all and some teasing aside, it always feels good to know May will check up on you if no one else does. She thinks that is why May will be a great homemaker (her dream job); she's already had a lot of practice.

The gentle breeze shifts, and with one last breath on her already flushed face, the heat shifts away from her. She falls out of the conversation. Dimly, she hears February, June, and July pick up where September and November leave off, involving everyone in the conversation, creating a pleasant buzz around the fire pit. The three of them are good at doing that. All three are aspiring fashion

designers, and will be going to New York City for fashion school. Sisters from other misters, they keep the group from floating away. Like lighthouses. All of them swim to the girls when they feel alone, and those are the times when all twelve of them are closest to being a cohesive unit.

But right now, she can't seem to do anything except be swept away out into the great black sea. She giggles to herself. They are in the middle of a forest, hundreds of miles away from any ocean. Where is this water coming from? The lights are getting smaller and smaller before she cannot see them at all, and then she cannot hear February, June, or July, and that is when she realizes she has forgotten her own name.

What she *does* hear, though, are voices with no bodies to hold them. The voices are above her, in and beyond the sky. They are singing. They are calling to her. She cranes her head back, as far as it will go, and realizes that there is no black box, and no strings. The fire is no longer the only object of color here. Was it ever? The sky is a tattered piece of cloth, and through the holes are pinpricks of light. They cast a low glow onto the world around her, gilding everything with the slightest hint of silver. She looks back at the fire. It looks grotesque compared to the light coming from above, an ugly orange pustule marring the cool glow set by the stars. It's revolting; she needs to get away from it.

Clumsily, she rises from the log she was sitting on, steps over it, and makes her way into the grove. Some distant part of her registers the quizzical looks March and December give her, the questions February and November ask her, the silence January gives her, as she leaves, but the need to escape is too pressing to care.

For a moment no one knows what to do, until October speaks up. They'll go after her, so don't worry. Be back in a few minutes. For maybe the first time ever, they are grateful when March swoops in with another story.

The looks the group gives them whenever they speak always bemuses October. It's like they forget October can even speak at all. October hopes that they'll be able to bring her back. Some part of them knows that they won't.

She feels underbrush graze her bare legs as she bounds through the wood. She feels almost like a gazelle, hopping and prancing, feet barely touching the ground between each step. For a moment she is giddy as a girl. The singing is growing louder. Her feet are treading relatively even ground, but she feels like she is ascending.

Unfortunately she is not built like a gazelle, and her lungs cannot take the speed she is racing at any longer. She reluctantly pauses to catch her breath. In and out, like the tides.

A crinkle of leaves makes her head snap back. Danger? No, it's just October.

She always felt like October understood her the best. Quiet. They are in a perpetual state of transition, ever-so-slightly out of place no matter where they fall. They never managed to figure out

what they wanted to do after high school, and not even college fixed that. They're going to travel for a while, do odd jobs here and there to keep the lights on. If there was ever a person that truly accepted her for who she was, it was them. The voices stop for a second; she is happy to see October.

They ask where she is going. Won't she come back to the group? You've left me alone with all of them, they say jokingly. It's only a matter of time before December starts to poke and prod at me.

December is like that, she knew. He is maddeningly curious by nature, and it has gotten him into trouble several times. It makes him a wonderful investigative journalist. It makes him sometimes an unbearable friend. He also never seems to know when to quit it, which is why no matter how many hints both she and October give him, he never lets up his questions when he remembers he has them. He even managed to convince himself that she and October were romantically involved with one another a year or two ago. It was incredibly awkward then, but funny now. If only December knew the truth. About her, and about October.

She allows herself a moment to feel sorry for October. She is often their only link to the rest of the group, and she doesn't want to leave them out to dry like this. Even in friendly gatherings like this one, she is their lifeline. But the voices call to her again, and she must obey them.

"The fire is too hot for me, I just need a break for a while," she lies to October.

"No, you don't," they respond sadly. "You're going to go away somewhere."

"Only for a little while. Then I'll come back."

"No, you won't."

She knows they are right. She sees hurt in October's eyes, pale as the moon. But she sees understanding as well. Acknowledgement. She wonders if they can hear the songs too. That makes her sad.

"It's just all too much, you know?" She says, pleading.

"I know." October's voice is somber.

"I hear voices. Something is calling me. I want to go to them."

"I know."

"It's been hard, too hard. I want to let go."

"I know."

A fit of madness takes over her. She wants to scream at them, no, don't, don't let me go, I don't want to leave you alone, I'm alone, she wants to rage at them, you don't know, can't you hear them, wouldn't you want to go if you heard them? She says nothing, and yet she knows October heard everything. In a past life, they must have been twins. Or soulmates.

She turns her head away, so they won't see her cry, but her tears quickly freeze on her cheeks and in her eyes. There is a giant elk in front of her, bigger than it has any right to be. Vines are hanging from its antlers. It's something out of a dream. Small wonder why people thought animals were deities

centuries ago. How could you look at something like that and not be awe-struck? It looks at her, beckons her. It is her chariot to the stars. She is calm again. She is ready for it.

She turns around and gives October a final sad smile. She can see they are entranced by the elk as well. They will understand, they have to. She waves and says goodbye. They wave back half-heartedly and turn to the forest, where they will do their best to make up some story about where she is and where she is going. They will do that much for her, at least. January the stupid philosopher will ask questions. They won't give him answers. He doesn't deserve them.

Sometimes the two of them would just sit together at the park, and watch the leaves turn. For some reason, that is the second to last thought her brain musters before she walks forward to the beast in front of her. It kneels, allowing her to climb on its back, like *she* is some sort of royal or even divine being. It's absurd for a heartbeat, and then it is magical. The elk presses further into the growth. Soon, she will be too far away to ever reach her friends again.

The very last thought was *How could I have forgotten to ask October what my name is?*

She had been an astronomy major. She could not remember when her love affair with the cosmos began, but it never let go of its grip on her. It held her through the best and worst times of her life. It is what propelled her to endure the insane workload that came with the field, sacrificing time with her friends - and time with her first and only love - to achieve her goals. She had wanted to become an astronomer, and work for NASA. She wanted to be the kind of person that went beyond the atmosphere and into orbit in a rocket ship. In her darkest moments, she decided that she wanted her ashes sent into space.

Most of her goals would go unfulfilled now. In some ways, you could argue that it made all the toil she endured in vain. But that thought never crosses her mind. And while her ashes would not forever reside in space...

The singing shimmering stars begin a chorus, enveloping her. She can feel the sounds drip down her back, like a lover's caresses. They are welcoming her. Stars are extremely hot; the sensation is likewise hot, a pleasantly scalding shower, warmer even than January's hands. That was one of the things she had liked best about him, his hands. Funny that, considering his name.

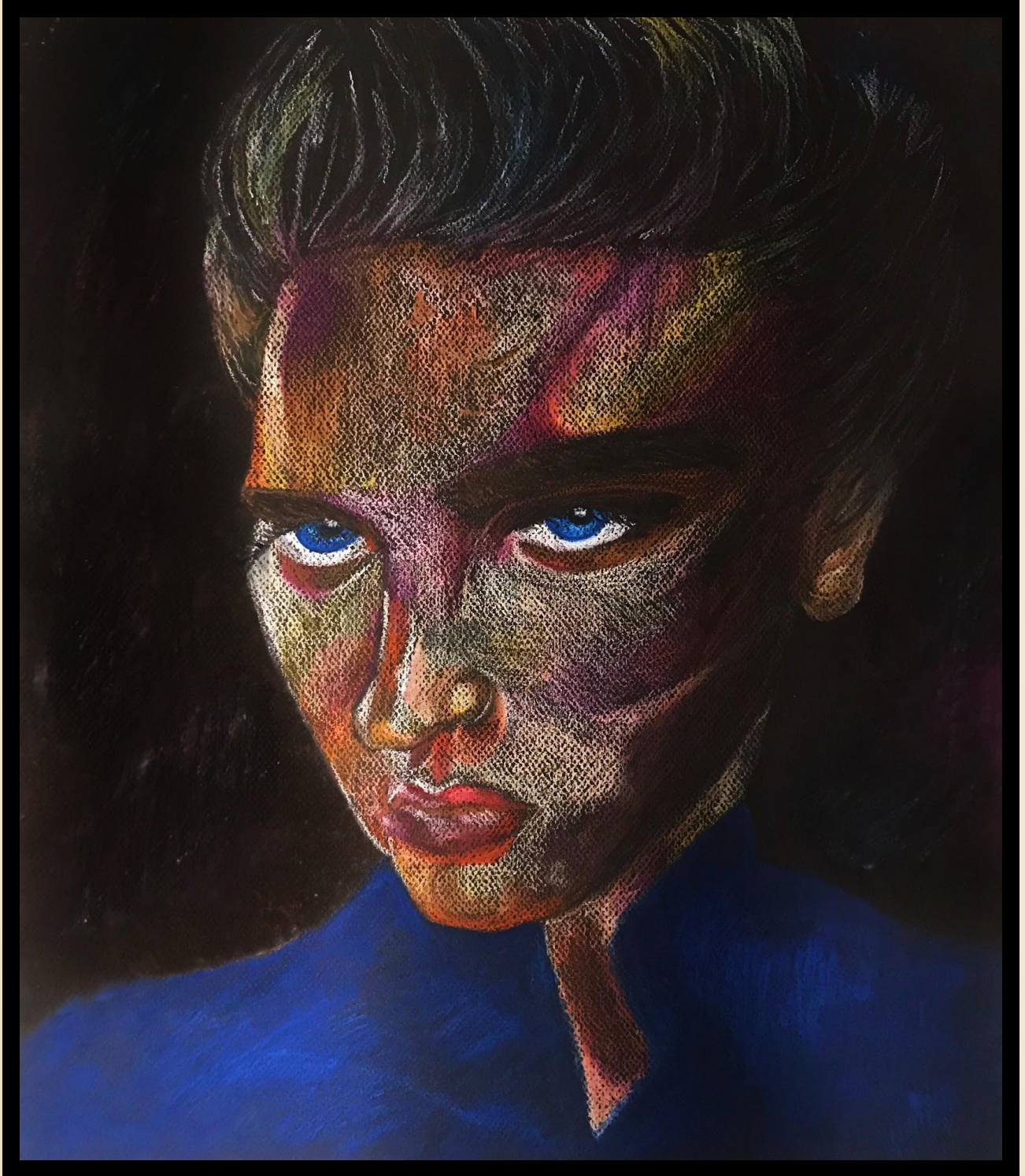
The elk finally stops, and kneels once more. She slowly slides off its back. It stands back up, eyeing her with mute appeal. She walks forward, and realizes she is in a clearing. The grass, high up to her knees, is dotted with flowers. There are trees around, tall pines reaching up to touch the sky. She looks up, and her eyes widen as the moon looms impossibly large over her, over the whole world. It covers up over half the sky. It illuminates her in a way the sun could only hope to.

The singers reach the climax of their song. There is no other sound but theirs. She cannot hear her own breathing, or her own heartbeat. Some part of her knows what is happening, what is going to happen, what it's going to mean. Some would say it is an end. For her, it is a new beginning. This

clearing is even shaped like a womb, she thought. Not death, but rebirth. *I am coming home.* She spreads her arms, and lets herself be taken.

The sky has turned into a blanket, almost as if it were something soft - something she has had very little experience with - and all at once her surroundings start to shift, first to spin, then to swirl, and then to vanish altogether - the ground beneath her feet blinks out of existence as if it were taken away with the click of a computer mouse, leaving her to the cosmos, allowing her to be enveloped by a sea of stars; it soothes her, rocks her, sways her the way January swayed her during their first and last dance together, a blip on the timeline, nothing noteworthy unless you knew where to look, and she is grateful for this, grateful that there is finally something smooth to feel -

The stars have stopped singing; their song is over. They are now talking amongst themselves. One of them says her name. She leans back, goes silent, and listens to space chatter.



Kelly Kennedy, "Elvis Blues"

Urwa Ahmad

Other

Walking through the mall,
grasping an iced coffee and my phone in one hand,
my keys, wallet and returns in the other.
It feels like everyone is staring.
The man on the bench outside the
too expensive for its style boutique
the mom of three in line at Auntie Anne's.

Maybe I'm walking too fast, I'm
just something moving that caught their eye.
I shouldn't need to rush,
just a few returns and I'm done.
Nothing urgent.

But doesn't it always feel like this?
Leaving the house and feeling their eyes?
The eyes of this small town surrounding you,
encompassing any sort of space you may have.
They don't tell you that sometimes 'unique'
means sticking out like a sore thumb
That 'different' is to be something other than.
Thought of as a part of them
rather than whole as one.

Because a scarf is enough to catch their gaze.
Covering your hair is something to gawk at, glare at.
Modesty is enough to have them stare.

I walk a little faster.

Margarita Buitrago

Haughty Happenings

the girl in the summer robe,
 pokes with a slender finger,
 the stunning little fish who swims
 in circles,
 or in half circles,
 that imitate the looming crescent above,
 who casts a sly eye upon the pair,
 high in the sapphire sky that is deftly
 specked
 with dreams of lore and,
 clandestine chagrins like those held by,
 the stunning little fish who is being
 poked
 by the girl in the summer robe,
 as the looming crescent above
 mocks
 the girl in the summer robe,
 for missing the stunning little fish
 in the prospect that it will stop,
 so that she can feel its silky fins.

Saul Lopez

El Rey

i. ***Samuel***

“Stay here for a while, so that I may give you a message from God” (1Samuel 9:25)

From the white clouds,
the ash burns,
gentle words misspoken,
guide the fuel that will bring glory
back to our people.

From within your center,
a love is born.

Poor kid, blessed be the day
your servant, David, becomes King,
for you’ll find about the lies
I am telling you now.

And when the sword
pierces your soul,
the oil that christens
your head, will cleanse
your royal blood.

ii. ***Saul***

“Take your sword and kill me before these pagan Philistines come to run me through and taunt and torture me” (1 Samuel 31:4)

I can feel the sword
sharpen its dull blade
against my destiny.

He is here,
I can hear Him
murmur amidst the blood
of my soldiers, amidst
my thirst for permanence.

Pawn, useless pawn!
from my blood
will come the failure
others will forget,
a failure David
will soon exploit.

The gray sky
speaks to my remorse,
my red cape gives a final
breath, it conceals my wounds,
it devours my destiny,
it warms my sin.

Riley Knapp

Mother Earth and Father Yhwh

Hear them --

How human hearts

Howl

Vicious and folding

Flushing away righteous

Nightmares

I am scared of the waves

For as they fold, life too follows

Somewhere along

The Way

I met a young man

Arms outstretched,

Sandals pooled on the surface

Promised to return me one day

To those

Waves.

As all must return

I was the harbor and

life's greasy hands climbed out of my depths

to claw at my throat

that I once used

To breathe tangy air

Only to wonder why the water

Made dizzy daydreams

To wash above shore

Like oily black fish

Hiding in the reeds

I was formed in the clay

Under thick pressure
 He folded, carved and curved
Until I stood tall
 On my own

 Mother's hands on
My heart, my neck
 She cursed me to this --
 To be woman is to
Take the strength
 That is not given
 Rip much of it out
Rip out what was freely given
 I never asked
 For this

It must be this --
 He who formed me
Thus, destroys me
 And She who lent to me
Thus, retakes what is owed to her
 In the end

Riley Ellison

62523

Golden yellow street lights cast light on the darkened houses, quiet and squatting past the whispering roads.

The shattered-mirror reflection on the water is as silent as the town, lapping at the edges of the world.

There is no movement except for the breeze gently running its fingers through the leaves.

Bad things have happened here, in those homes, in those woods, things with sharp eyes and sharper smiles.

But, now, peace and night smother everything, the streetlights more piercing than the stars.

The land's bounty, golden and plentiful, has no use for them. They cannot reap their reward of harvest for the crop is uneatable.

Instead, they send it off to be broken into pieces that are scattered across the world, the working factories sending up clouds into the sky.

Downtown, the red stop lights illuminate empty roads, closed storefronts, the streetlights lighting the way for the ghost of footsteps.

While it seems like there is no one there, they are residing in the shadows, the golden light unwelcoming to them.

But, the shadows lost their ability to speak, so they are reduced to a passing glance.

The whispers of laughter drift along with the cool breeze, leading to the only lit storefront around.

Inside, the true citizens are enjoying themselves, feasting on meat and drink, their mouths full of

warmth.

Walking among them, wisps of black and white flit, refilling their plates and glasses.

The walls are red, decorated with blanched skulls and the looming head of a bison overseeing it all from its mount.

The streetlights cast light onto them, revealing their exhaustion and worn smiles, stretched thin and tight.

Still, they smile, reveling in that golden light, for it reminds them of a sun they used to loathe.

This is a place of change, yet it never moves, the land and people only donning the skins of seasons and age.

They drink ales the same color as those streetlights, the golden yellow of better days.

They laugh, their sounds dissipating into the lonely fields and black sky,

As the land falls into the sleep before death.



Ryan Hagan, "Snow Dune, Ice Tunnel"

Eren Joyce

xolotl

i am a child of xolotl,
dog-headed deity,
patron of lichtenberg figures
and splintered bone
and alleyways set ablaze.
machismo mocks the courage in our veins,
unworthy as we are
to be neither a sun
nor a son
nor a daughter by mortal reckoning.
but what does it mean to be—
divine?
when the divine have twisted ankles
and hollowed-out eye sockets worn down by their own tears.
maybe divine is—
human?
arbitrary standards
for the living and the Other.
i am a child of xolotl,
halved and whole,
guardian of souls who wander
and bastard dreams
and myself.

Kelsie Kasky

But Let Them Fly

A genesis akin to all alive
Embodies life with metamorphic grace.
They're all unique and—unified—survive,
For life and love are found in every place.
The caterpillars grow, adapt, and thrive,
And, peacefully, their wings they learn to spread.
So beautiful, how all the colors strive
To nurture spirits, each own timely thread.
When gale is crisp some flutt'ring wings will fall—
Ephem'rally—the snow will melt, they'll fight.
Beloved spring-time Sun brings hopeful call
And shines its faithful promise: summer's plight.
 our Butterflies are creatures of the heart:
 You spread your wings and fly, yet ne'er to part.

Georgette Kouassi

At Your Side

I lie awake at night
Enclosed in emptiness:
That which fills the infinite space above me
And that on which I drift
The watery depths of which threaten to swallow me whole

Sometimes,

My head bobs beneath the waves

Pressure swelling

In my chest

Sinking deeper

And deeper

Other times

I soar to the heavens

Gulping at the frigid breeze

Soaring

And sinking,

Rising

And falling

I am carried,

Pushed

And pulled

Burdened

And liberated

Yet and still,

I remain

At your side.

Mia Gleason

Mask of Art

The liquid of my shade of skin
Dabbed into perfection on my tender cheek
White conceals the red bumps on my chin
Washing me out, the whiteness bleak

Brown and red cream define my face
Illusion of a thin complexion
Color restored with the pigment I place
A mask of pure perfection

The brush dabbles in shades of rose
Strokes across the eye
Sparkle highlights the bridge of the nose
Flicking the eyelashes in black dye

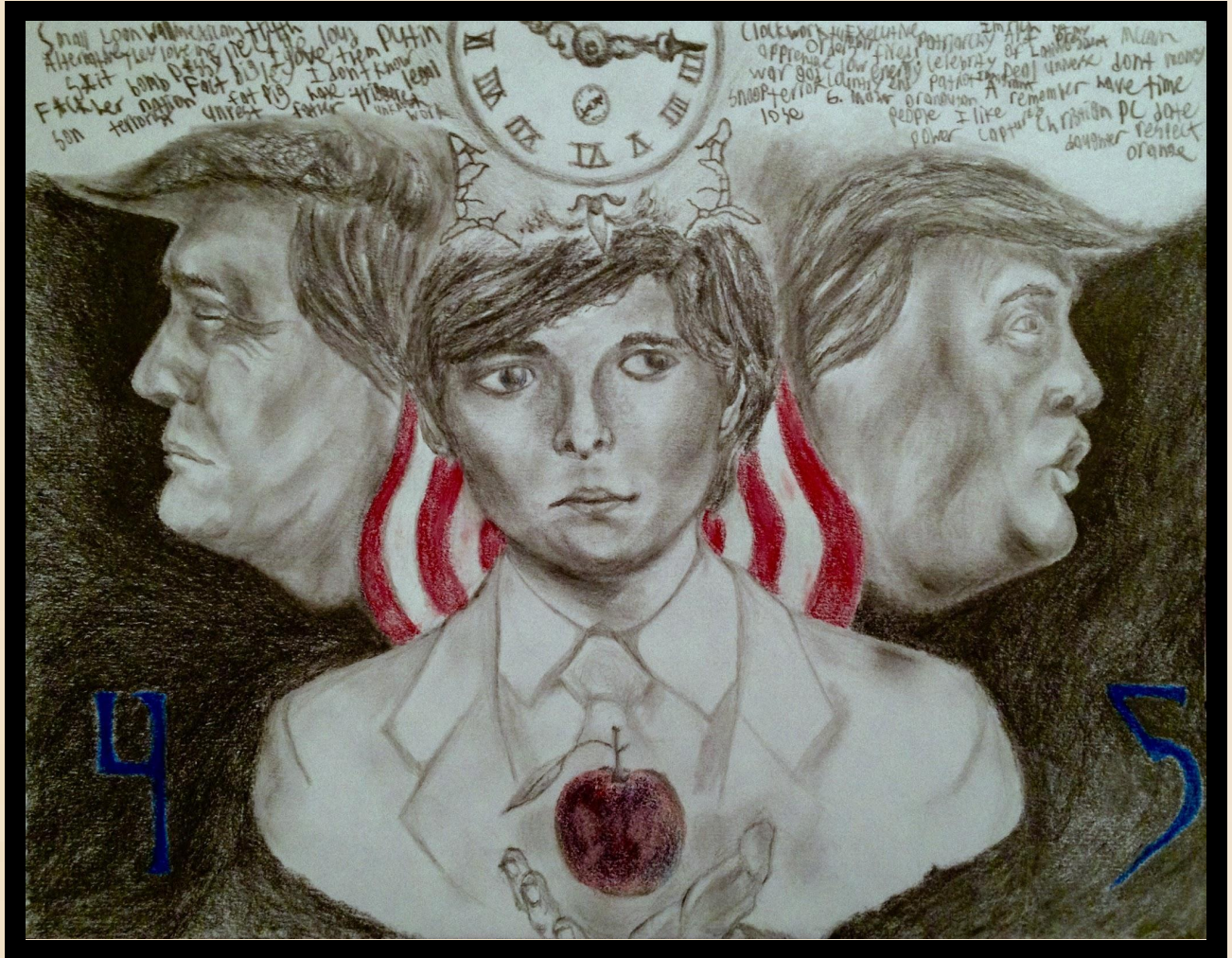
Beauty formed from minerals, from chemicals, from tint
A veil of art creating an imprint

Jannea Thomason

Condolences

Silence is a master
Secrets are a friend
I know the door you speak of
because I have met its end.

I have rent the curtains
and climbed up in the tree
and laid among the branches
Do not weep for me.



Ryan Hagan, "A Clockwork Orange"

Hailey Whetten

A Child's Brain

A poem written to a June 2018 bus crash in Uttarakhand, India.

At the age of three she was a known marvel
for her counting numbers.

A marvel in the Himalayan Foothills
in Uttarakhand.

When it happened, Ama scolded
a crash site is no place for a child,
Buba said she had no child's brain
in her.

They picked their way through
the brush and stone until they
stood perilously balanced
on the slope.

Count the seats, he said.

Her budding eyes find
the rib cage torn away,
skip over it swiftly

to the jagged spine

1, 2, 3, 4

and on to 28

28 vertebrae.

Count the people, he said.

Begin with the--

sleeping ones.

Her budding eyes find

the disemboweled innards

flung from the protection

of the rib cage torn away

1, 2, 3, 4

and on to 38

where she asks to stop.

Count the people, he said.

The ones who are

awake.

Her budding eyes find

the vultures, flies, and crows

milling about the meaty entrails

bending, lifting, weeping

1, 2, 3, 4

and on until

her vision becomes

a watercolor canvas.

Days later, after final rescues,

she recites the final numbers to Buba:

a gorge 213 metres deep

a bus with 28 seats carrying 59

48 dead 11 injured.

110,000 killed annually on India roads

How much, Buba, is 110,000?

Oluwappelumi Oguntade

Dandy

Deep pants
to manage my panic
I walk up the stairs

You sniff my feet
I step back

You chase your tail
I cower back

you smell fear
I gallop past

trail of hair behind
you stand there

when my uncle
brought you home

you claw my furniture
and got applause

I whimpered behind
mother's back

to have you returned
from wherever you came

The adults moved on. Why?

Does no one listen?

Does no one listen?

Why? The adults moved on.

From wherever you came
to have you returned

mother's back
I whimpered behind

and got applause
I clawed your furniture

brought me home
when your uncle

I stand there
trail of hair behind

you gallop past
I smell your fear

you cower back
I chase my tail

you step back
I sniff your feet

you walk up the stairs
to manage your panic
deep pants

Jessica Diebold

He Died in His Dreams

Gleaming, touchable skin that starts to wrinkle at the eyes when she speaks; but he doesn't hear her words. He observes her sing holy tunes that can't reach his ears. She's rosy and polished, dressed timelessly. He tries, if just to mend the bridge he seared last year, but she's outgrown his low life.

Here she's wrapped in arms of angels gowned in Romanian satins, coasting atop heavy cushioned spreads that hover above endless miles of mountains. Surrounding this golden girl of his past are old souls. They tell her about times she will come to know, as if they were years belonging to her. The stories of old, the feelings of love and sorrow, everlasting and releasing. It's a safe rest for people of all kinds; she will meet them for all eternity.

He likes to imagine her this way during the day, and in his dreams, this is what he sees: She dances with soft toes and brings herself easily to laughter, making baby-fat dimples deep in her face; she won't trip or stumble. Long hair carried by restful wind that never moves her off path. Her young fingers are held by beautifully aged hands that come from places far away, and these places will feel like home to her. Colors in patterns of the garments, bright paints and perfect polishes, foreign relics and songs of worldwide tongues.

He spends time through these dreams sitting next to her, under the sparkling whitish pink sky. Blue birds float effortlessly and never touch ground. She cannot see him. He sends along whispers of longings and regrets but she stares ahead into the abyss of never needing to know. She's with her mother, who looks like a pleasant German woman, softened by the absence of human necessity. This mother of hers once visited her in only deepest and luckiest sleep. The young girl used to tell him about moments of those dreams, in the pink skies with birds and colors. At first, they were seldom, but came to her more and more near the days until he left. If he'd never gone to war, he may have been there to save her, this funny girl he started to know so well, from flames that brought her to places she wished to meet but which should have been long ahead. The luckiest he will ever be is to not bear a memory of her face burning in fire, but still the way she glows in his sleepful images can only be grievous.

His life is where nothing shines or sings. Charred hardwood floors for repair, boxes of shoes and dolls to be sold away, scorched walls to rebuild, with what time? He likes to stay every minute here with her, where warm air and aqua ponds are clear and wrap him in their promise of better; someday.

Where *she* will be, and this he can count on; safe from accidents. If this is what it's like in heaven, he'd much like to die in his dreams.



Nikki Deep, "Unconditional"

Sarah Aaron

Amber Summer Sunday

Randomly, this memory taps my shoulder

Time is irrelevant

She has no preference.

Sleepless nights are usually fruitless

Nothing to say for themselves except regret, maybe a false promise or two

But just once, insomnia brought me a gift.

Six AM; the foggy night hasn't dissipated.

Through my dirty window, I see

Sunlight rests delicately

a single soft thread of lace

over water droplets, suspended in air

I can hear birds serenading each other

soundwaves surfing slowly

I close my eyes

I can't hear the sound of cars, speech, or pavement

The summer haze is soothing,

Rocking me to sleep even as I stand

God has begun His brushstrokes for dawn.

My father once told me

the sky is a painting

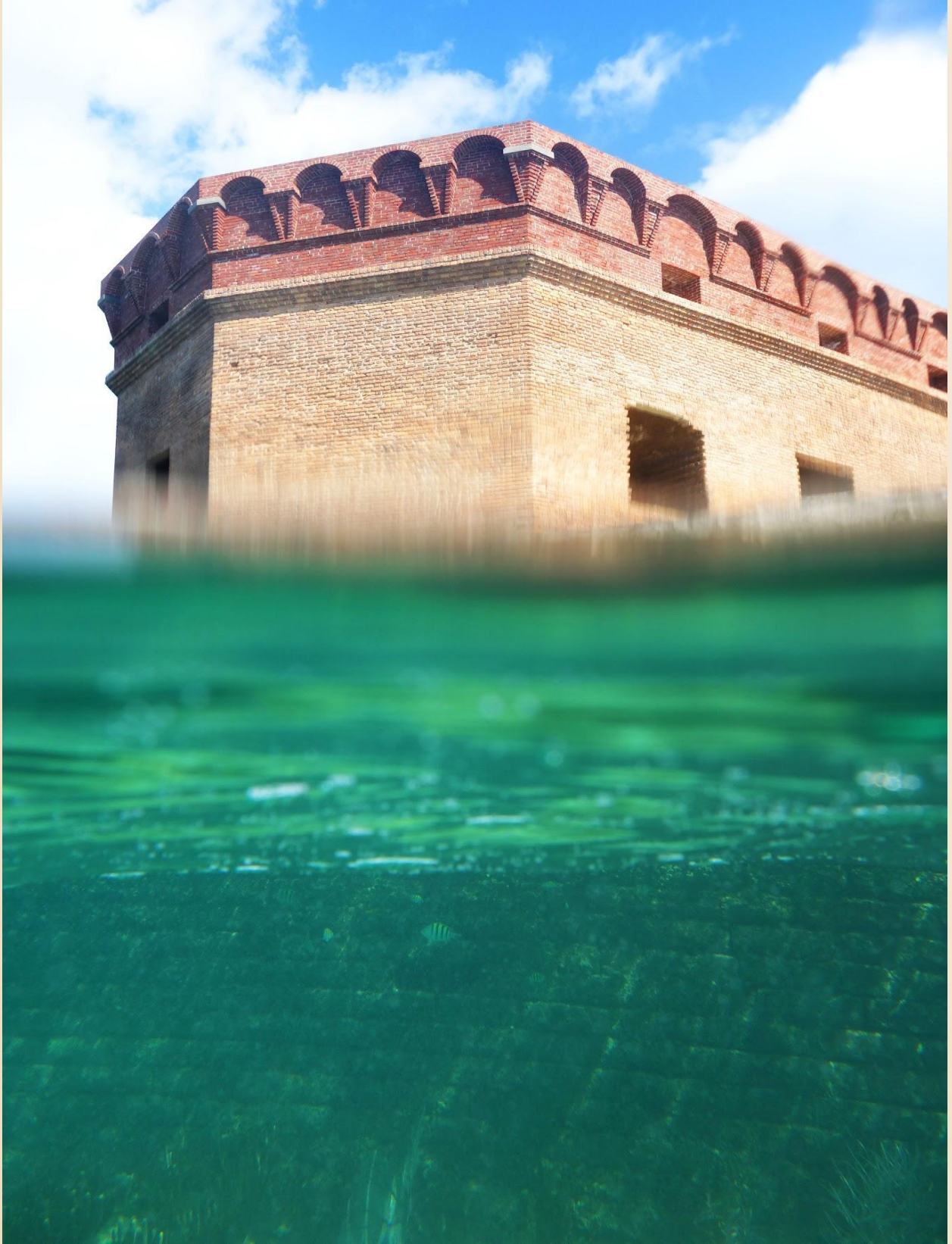
And God the painter

I had to disagree.

That morning, stood struck by the sky

I didn't see a painting

I saw the sky breaking, a swath of amber
Spilled onto canvas, overflowing
A serendipitous glimpse of the heavens



Sadaf Nasir, "Fort Jefferson"