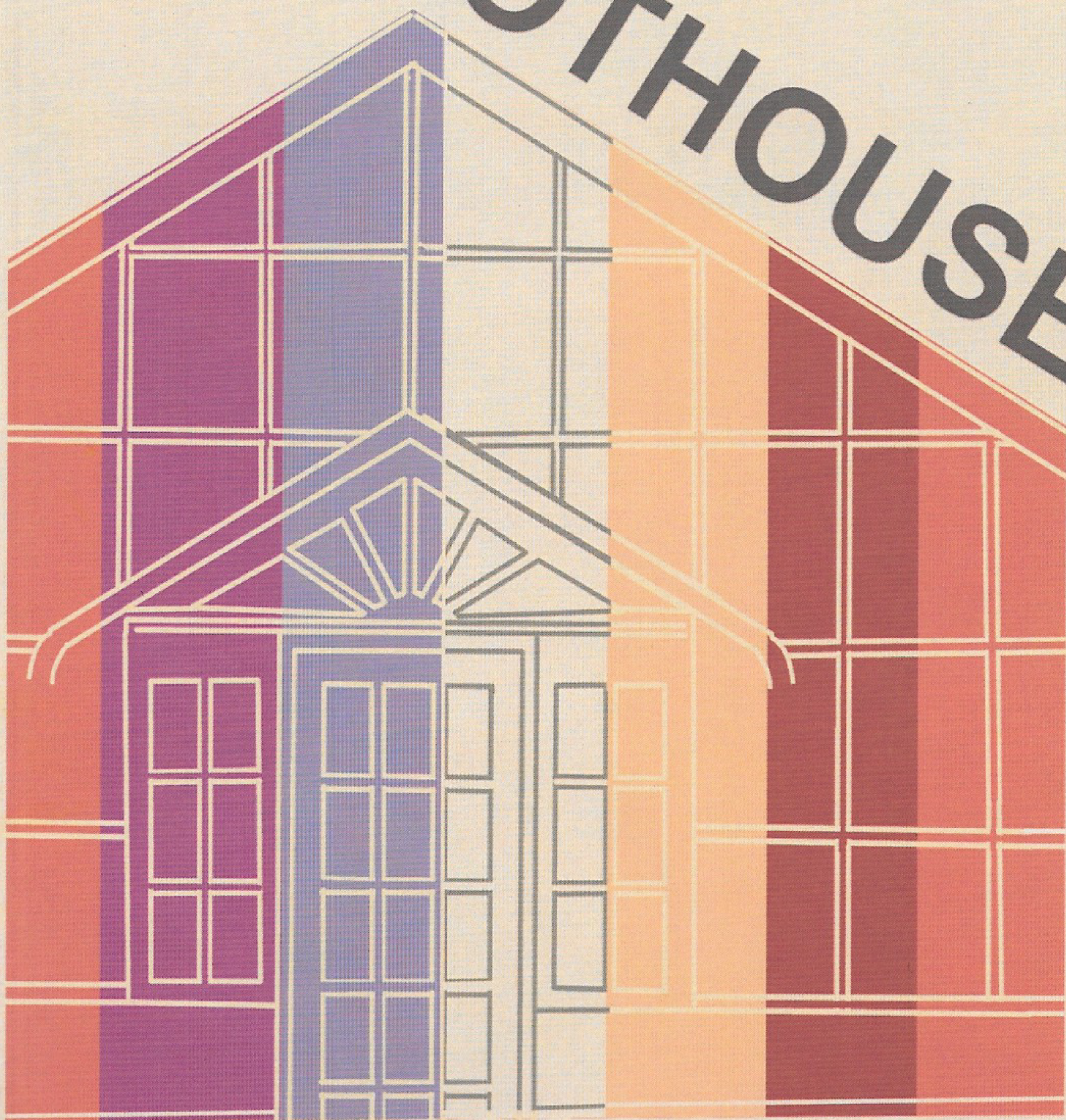


HOTHOUSE



EDITOR'S NOTE

The words in this journal are as delicate as an actual hothouse. Each word, carefully picked. Each word, proofread. Each word, meaningful. I look through this book, and I see stories and places and people. I see battles fought and battles lost. I see dreams and nightmares. Like the growing plants inside of a hothouse, these ideas have grown. One, from the author's heads. Two, onto the paper. Three, in your hands.

I first read *Hothouse* in June of 2013, and like most summer loves, this little book consumed me. Whether this is your first time with *Hothouse* or your eighth, I hope you will enjoy it. A lot of love was put into this journal, and now it sits in your hands, ready to be unraveled.

—Bhabika Joshi



SPRING 2016

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HOTHOUSE is the official journal of the English Department at
The University of Texas at Austin.

HOTHOUSE was printed by
OneTouchPoint-Southwest
in Austin, Texas.

Dedicated to the writers of Parlin Hall.
May your creativity never stop soaring.

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SPRING 2016

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STORY 2: 2011/12

THE TOO FICTION

THE TOO MUCH EVERYTHING

KATIE BROWN

It's easier, much easier, than doing everything. Sitting in my front yard, sitting in my backyard, sitting on my couch, just makes the whole world look like so much. There are, simply put, too many goddamn lives to live. They used to be exciting, really fucking exciting. But then I started thinking about them. Then I started imagining them. That's when things went south. That's when I started sitting here, or there, or anywhere and staring into the too much everything. I got sick the first time. Threw up on my aunt's gardenias and everybody thought I was pregnant or hungover but no, just the usual starting into the world without a fucking clue as to what to do with all this potential so many people insist I have. Or could have. If I just listened. If I just applied myself. If I just took one second and considered what I want to be. What I want to be? I already am being. But, according to everyone who lived during the bicentennial, that's useless.

And though I've now been given one definition, I've still yet to determine what makes for a useless life. In other people's eyes, I mean, because I've learned mine can't be trusted. My eyes turn everything living into something far more beautiful than it actually is.

At first I thought it was my aunt, my aunt with the gardenias, who was the one living a useless life. She did everything her mother did and her daughter will do everything she's done. Two kids. A bachelor's degree in something no more useful than sociology and a husband with a job he can't quite explain. I mean, that's useless right? Never growing, never creating, never raising their children up from the bullshit homophobic conservative existence my ancestors created when they moved to this wonderful place.

But, apparently, I was wrong. Everyone loves her, praises her, for this mundane life she's stood solidly inside of. Maybe because she can afford that big house with that big yard and that big fake smile she wears. And it's really taken some investigating, some honest god passion, to understand how that all works. In my pursuit of figuring it out, of trying to see what everyone else thinks of as useful, I have begun to question that it means anything all. Which, as with all things, adds to the all consuming everything. If everything means nothing and we're all just

No.

None of this existential crap. I'm not here for that. Happiness, food, shelter. Love. Family. Those are real. Definite. I've felt them, they're solid. But inside those opaque, complete elements of supposed joy, it has occurred to me, I have considered, that I might not actually be happy. That what everyone else is saying is true, that when I figure out what I want to do with my life, and when I achieve it, that that's when I will be truly at peace.

Which is why I buy a plane ticket. A plane ticket away from this yellow place. It's the most yellow place ever, not that I've seen too many colors. But there's sunflowers around every corner and everything has butter on it and the school bus, yes, the big yellow school bus, stops at every corner. And, I think, perhaps, it's all this yellow that's stopping me from seeing happiness or the happiness I could already have, perhaps it's being hidden behind rubber duckies and sundresses.

Edinburgh, though, god, Edinburgh. There's no yellow at all. There's snow, something I thought had been missing from my life, which turns out to be just another aspect of the world. And then it turns out to be a not so great one at that. But Edinburgh is not white. The snow isn't pretty enough to make it white, not enough, anyway, to beat back the green. It's everywhere, in everything, on everyone. I start to think maybe I should have gone to Barcelona or Monaco because, there, at least, I wouldn't be so cold and the language I don't speak would add color to this entirely, shockingly, stupid green place. So consumingly green is it, that, at night, when it finally, finally, falls, my dreams are emerald. The clover and the holiday and even the water is too. Water is supposed to be blue. The people, my god, they even sound green, so green I can hardly understand them. I have to leave. I have to run. I have to fly away from this place because, holy god, jade is starting to invade my sight and my heart is covered in moss. But there is a boy's number in my hand when I leave, when I fly away with a vine sprouting from my soul and inching up my throat.

"Call me, lass." He said and oh that voice. "Call me and I'll find you."

And his hand felt like the forest in mine and maybe green is, well, a lot, but that might be okay. Could be anyway.

I get back and the too much everything has only increased, the huge, frightening, everything has ripped me apart. And now it's green. Leaves are spinning out of me even as I stand on yellow earth and look up at shiny grey buildings and breathe in blue air. I breathe out the sage and it occurs to me, jumps to me, that I can't be here anymore. That I never should have been. Yellow is not my color and green isn't either and I want a rainbow. So I kiss my parents on the cheek and I bid goodbye to the gardenia aunt to try and go find it. I end up in New York because, well, doesn't everyone end up in New York? It's black. Kind of grotesque really, how much midnight it is. But the boy, the boy with the phone number is here and that, to tell the truth, is why I came. He's not green as I'd thought he'd be. I am

green now. A little bit. He's purple. Purple Patrick. Are you allowed to be called Patrick and be from Scotland? Should be illegal. But he is purple and he is Patrick and he always wanted to come to New York and now he's here and we both agree, it's the same as any other place, isn't it? But we, god when the hell did it become we, don't leave. Not the moment we come to such a devastating realization. He has to finish school, which is why he's here in the first place, and I have to justify the plane ticket to this dark, rattling metropolis, that, sometimes, proves why it prevails so strongly in so many songs and stories.

"Well, we're here, aren't we?" Patrick says. "We're here and I found you. Let's stay for a while and see if we find something else."

So we get a couch and we get a dog and it all starts to look rather small. Which makes the everything, that whole enormity that makes me sick, seem smaller. Infinitesimal. Because now I have Patrick and now I have Napoleon, who is gold, and I'm starting to get happiness. I'm starting to get how people say the word with such meaning in their hearts and with such hearts in their eyes.

Then he finishes, he graduates and, Jesus, I wish everyone in the world could see that smile. Really, it's not fair that it's saved just for me, just for me in our tiny apartment that is so small we feel huge and everlasting inside its creaking walls. But next door there is a couple just like us and across the way a couple a few years on. That used to make me sad, used to make me feel lonely, but who gives a damn about originality when you're so bursting with sunshine that your guy, your boyfriend, your whateverheis, can hardly bear to be around you without shielding his eyes. Or that's what he says, what he proclaims, every morning when he wraps his scarf around my neck and goes to his boring job with his boring boss who has his own boring life with his own boring wife. But really they're amazing and colorful themselves and it's almost enough, nearly enough, to make us stop. Not quite there though, not quite yet.

So we go to Moscow and everything, everything, everything, is white. Blinding. Here the snow is what Edinburgh wanted to be.

Here is where, I can say with confidence, the world ends. Patrick and I, and not poor Napoleon who we had to leave in the land of yellow, really laugh, genuinely laugh, at how disastrous it is, at how anyone with a beating heart can live in such a place.

"I will never see another color again." Patrick says. "I can't even breathe."

And then Tokyo is orange. Bright, bright orange that's pretty at first but nauseating next. And we don't speak the language and it's really kind of embarrassing but no matter what we're adding shades.

"Do they never sleep?" Patrick says. "I can't even ask."

Sometimes he misses the green and sometime I miss the yellow but we're still searching, so far, so deep, that we're falling through pastels in our search for technicolor. We're still laughing, still a 'we' and that, a hammer to the too much everything, really does show me what happiness is.

We collect blue in New Zealand.

"So much bloody water." Patrick says. "So many bloody insects." Red is Madrid.

"The food is too good." Patrick says. "You'll have to drag me away with a forklift." Brown is the Ivory Coast. Ironic.

"Not as beautiful as I wanted.," Patrick says. "Not compared to you."

And still, still, where is it? Where is that 'yes, I am happy, yes I have everything,

yes, this is life' feeling?

I throw up on gardenias and this time I really am pregnant and holy fuck, Jesus

fuck. But when she comes, she, my god there has never been anything more pink, more suffocatingly pink, in the world and how did I live before it, how did I exist in a world without this color?

"She is the world.," Patrick says, looking away, for only a brief moment, from our pink little girl. "Look at her, Antoinette, look at our world."

The so much, the everything, it's begun to spin, out of control and everywhere and the colors dance and I am not cool and I am not anything, a nobody, but my frighteningly pink girl, she is someone, she is the world entire. And no one will remember me, no one but her. But that's kind of incredible, and I know, not think, not guess, not suppose, I know there is nothing more innately important, nothing more significant, than this tiny, pink, little thing remembering me. And I look and I search and right here in front of me is a painting I didn't know I was creating, a small little life carved out of the too much everything. Right here, right here in that mix of big and small, is a girl on a stoop thinking and guessing and really not knowing. Except that she was right. She was so right it's actually astonishing. Just being. Never striving for anything at all. Never knowing anything but the color around her and how to be small, minute, in the face of never ending reality. And all that so much, too much, everything, oh, that's not scary, not terrifying. It just is. Wish I had known that before. So glad I know it now, paint dripping from my fingers and onto yellow grass.

"Oh. This is easy," Patrick says, my hand in one of his, my daughter in the other. "This is the easiest thing there is."

DROUGHT

JOHN FLYNN

My mother died before she could ever see the lake come back.

It had been five years since it was full and everyday it grew emptier. We would walk along the lakebed sometimes. You would think that underneath all that water there would be a hidden world. Something undiscovered and beautiful.

All there ever was, down there on the suffocating earth, was the collection of chalky rocks and rusted-out barrels. Occasionally there was the carcass of a fish, with shreds of gray flesh still clinging to its ribs. The scales would shimmer in the bright sun, looking metallic. The eyes were always the first to go.

All we need is a few good days rain, my mother would say to me. Then all this will fill up again, and people will start moving back. The life will come back to here.

Sometimes, in the distance, there would be thick clouds, rich and white like clumps of mashed potatoes. They would billow on top of themselves, robust and marching slowly in their ranks across the sky. But they were always over the hills, and the only clouds above would be wisps of dry smoke. Whenever I would gaze out over the hills to

the hanging clouds, she would stop and look too, her hand shielding her eyes in the brightness. "Oh, they're just teasing us today," she would say. I would sigh, disappointed.

"Do you know what kind of clouds those are?" she asked one day, sensing my disappointment.

I looked at the white mountains, taunting in the distance. Then I looked at her and shook my head.

"Cumulus. Those are called cumulus clouds. Your grandfather knew all the types of clouds. Cumulus, cirrus, stratus. He had to, being up there with them. He needed to know if a storm was coming so he could fly around it. Yes, he knew them all by name and taught them to me."

I stared back out over the hills, and thought about Grandfather, flying high up among them, the air thin and crisp, nothing but blue all around him.

Our pump didn't reach the water anymore. We had to go to the well for our water. "The water from the lake tastes nasty anyway," my mother said.

The water hasn't been this low since 1915, she told me one day, as we walked down to the remaining water. The bed wasn't completely dry, there was still a good-sized pond down there, past the cove where you couldn't see. Back then, it was so low they said you could drive a truck across it. Now the white trash kids drive their four-wheelers all over the creation.

She said to me one day, "You know, this used to be a valley. Then they built a dam and flooded the whole bottom making a lake. There was a Mormon colony somewhere on the valley floor. A whole village. Can you imagine? I bet if you wanted to, you could go out and find it."

I tried to find it for days. I went back to her disheartened from my search. "Oh don't be so upset, kid," she said, reaching for my hand at the bedside. "I bet you'll find it, maybe you're just not looking hard enough." She faintly smiled and gave my hand a slight squeeze. But

that little action seemed to tire her out, and her eyes grew heavy. The light coming through the French doors cast rectangular patterns on the quilts. She turned her head from the light without saying anything, only closing her eyes. I sat on the edge of the bed until I was sure she was asleep.

We would walk along the water's edge. Along a shoreline that became new every week. I would pick up shells and show them to her. Most of them were small and a dark gray or blue. Occasionally though I'd find a pink one. They were extra precious if there weren't any chips or cracks. We collected them in a mason jar. My mother would bring it down from the windowsill and carry it under her arm, the inside foggy from sediment and dust.

"How come there're seashells here in the lake?" I asked one day, running up to hand her another shell, placing it firmly in the center of her palm.

"There was a time when all of this was a sea," she said dropping the shell in the jar, "a great flood washed over the earth and there was nowhere for the animals to live or the birds to rest."

"What about the fish, though?"

She looked down at me with a smile, "well, I suppose for them it must've been heaven."

She couldn't make it down to the water anymore. The rocks must have been too much and the walk too strenuous. I would trek down alone most times. Sometimes with the dogs trotting behind me, their tongues out and panting. Usually they'd get tired and turn back to the house. I would go down to the water and report back to her. Any higher today? she would ask.

I couldn't even tell anymore. It always looked the same. "I hope it comes back sometime soon," she said, "I would just love to sit on the dock once more, with my feet in the water."

She died on a Tuesday and for the next two weeks it did not stop raining.

THE GIRL WHO LIVES INSIDE THE MIRROR

CAROLINE ROCK

When she stands naked in the bathroom, she closes her eyes. Focus. The floor buzzes under her feet and inside her ears. Focus. When she closes her eyes, she cannot see herself.

When she looks in the mirror, splintered cherries sprout on her skin like needlepoints. Her eyebrows grow unevenly because she pulls them out by fingertip when she's anxious. Focus.

When she looks down, she sees her stomach like a Thanksgiving dinner plate. Her thighs are two thick white triangles, her calves packets of hotel jelly. And she keeps forgetting to put a Band-Aid over the sores on her left ankle. They are a green and cellophane telescope into her flesh.

They say, "If you're fat, then what am I?" I don't know.

When she stands in the shower, she revolves like the door to the subway station. But she is immobile. She wonders why she feels this way tonight. (Luckily, she never remembers to look at her reflection in the showerhead until it's too late.)

When she wakes up, so does the girl living inside the mirror. "Focus." She leans over the sink and wonders if anyone can tell.

One day at work, her computer screen turned black, leaving her face-to-face with someone on the other side of the monitor. Who is that? It took her a second too long to recognize herself.

When she goes to sleep, she cannot see her string cheese fingers or cranberry crater face.

When she steps on the scale, she knows exactly what she will see.

Ninety-nine.

Focus.

7.30.15

CAROLINE ROCK

Around my left wrist shines a black watch. Below its inch-wide band is a white tattoo of equal width. The clean white numerals come to life at night when I shift restlessly in bed. I wear this watch in the shower, to class, on long runs. Every few breaths I drink in the time. My eyes settle on the date as it spies on me through its tiny white window. Each day I receive the gift of a new number rolling into existence behind its scratched glass. And each day I revel in this gift. Sweet repetition.

One day, I woke up, and my black watch shone like new. I didn't notice it at first, but the nicks were washed from the clouded glass, the indentions along the strap evaporated. With a new beauty, the numbers winked up at me. Largely oblivious, I carried on with my day. It was not until I was in class that I started to notice something different. Sitting in a large lecture hall, the white skin under the band started to itch. I began to fumble with the buckle, latching and unlatching until an unsettling truth washed over me: the watch was not coming off. Still below its plastic, my wrist burned as I breathed heavily - and then a sharp gasp. Something was very wrong. The burning turned to

pinching, then slowly, my flesh began to open. Blood bubbled to the surface in clean droplets. A slow, round laceration encircled my wrist. I gasped audibly, my eyes widening in horror, but in the full hall, no one seemed to notice. Finally the job was done; my severed hand, wrist and watch included, fell to my feet and scuttled spiderishly. I struggled to breathe as I surveyed my newly shaved limb. Meanwhile the hand - my hand - scaled my chair and soon began to saw from my second wrist. My eyes registered the scene, then switched to a bright light, then focused back and forth again. My breath quickened, voice raising slightly. Beside me a student whipped her head around and mouthed "shh," jabbing the end of her pencil toward the tall, thin professor at the bottom of the lecture hall. I attempted an apologetic grin but was distracted by the sight of my second hand falling to the floor. This one, unlike the first, did not crawl or climb; it did not even writhe. Like a dead animal it lay there, limp and harmless.

The professor then released us. Students filed around me, jostling and chattering, entirely unaware of my predicament. I struggled to shoulder my backpack, careful not to spill blood on the chair's upholstery. As I passed the professor on my way out, he gave me a curt nod and shifted his gaze as though to say: "Get that taken care of."

The severed hand followed me from the hall. It clung to my backpack, took a place next to me at meals, found itself at home on my pillow at night - all the while its shining black watch would greet me with a malicious grin of its flashing white teeth.

In a slow process, the hand began to claim my remaining limbs. Moving in its same, slow lacerations, it began at my ankles, elbows, moving steadily to my knees and upper arms. It then took my thighs and chewed me neatly up to the shoulders. I felt my skin thinning like paper. My eyes sunk until the daylight hardly reached them. But still, each day I drank in the hours and dates. Like clockwork I kept the time of my slow demise until one afternoon I managed to encounter a mirror. In its smooth surface I saw my sunken eyes, gray skin. The shock of silver hair upon my scalp took me by surprise. When had I

aged this heavily? It felt like last week I'd sat in that lecture hall. No, two weeks. Or was it - two months? For all the while I had spent collecting time, the days blurred like a flip book into years. Decades. In my reflection I saw my shriveled toes. My thin legs, ashy and spindly. My shoulders jutted out, and my elbows reeled in. And on my thin, old wrist shone that devilish thing, the black watch. Its wheel of numbers winked at me knowingly. Once again and with great effort I tried to pry off the watch. My brittle fingers nearly dissolved under the task. As though I was reliving that day all those years ago, my eyes washed between reality and light. I struggled to refocus, but the sandbags over my eyes refused. Swallowing my imminent fate, I dropped my right hand from the watch, released the pressure on my still-closed eyelids, thinking back to that day in the lecture hall, to the mere moments before the end of my life began.

THE SUN BUGS

CHRIS TOUMA

Harper Williams was talking. He was an inveterate brooder and, after three gin-tonics, a regular intellectual, so it gave him some right. Sitting ritually in that bungled, quasi-geometric way that foldable chairs are set in the hours leading up to gym sermons, Harper's friends from high school: Pearce, Clowney and Ethan Rockwell were discussing with unrestrained Ivy League confidence, the absolutely unavoidable notion that most people are assholes.

Harper leaned against a wall at the front of the room with a joint relaxed between his index and middle finger, his ass desperately fighting to will some bulging contour into the wall to keep his mind from shutting off completely. Under a wonderful trance of amphetamines and liquor and smoke, their collective unconscious floating just below the ceiling fan and splitting into the ether with each individual disturbance—of which there were many—the boys were considering forming what they hadn't yet outright defined as a commune.

"I'm still of the opinion," Harper said, "that the place absolutely cannot be run by suits. They're just not very goddamn human. Not right in their heads." Harper was slouched against a wall thinking out

loud and looking over the heads of his friends at a small splotch of sunlight on the door at the opposite end of the room. There was something very peculiar about that splotch. Harper's free hand searched his jean pocket for cigarettes, and in his drug induced fixation on the splotch, or what was it, his eyebrows fell down an inch, and he was looking now more like a cat that has been splashed with water. The air conditioning was on, and Harper, without having discovered a lighter yet, between short gaps of introspective collegiate thinking, placed a cigarette in a hanging way between the top and bottom rows of his teeth. Ashing the joint in his opposite hand and not looking to see where the ash fell, he stuck the lit end of the joint to the tip of the cigarette and gave a full, slow inhale. Following the equally slow exhale his eyebrows crept back up into his forehead and his spine returned to its human curvature. Once the thin veil of exhaled smoke had mostly cleared, Harper looked a little disappointed that the warm spot on the wall hadn't disappeared. But where was the explanation? It was late into the afternoon, and the blinds were down, and this was a perfect circle of sunlight.

Every concrete thing in his mind was starting to break apart in a way that wasn't chaotic. He thought maybe these were the bars kicking in, and his old contrived idea about prescription pills being a poison to society, a cynical method of behavior control brought to you through some cracking levee of institution, began to fade out of his psychological calculus and his lips were curving up into a boyish grin. His cat face was now morphing into that of a decrepit, domesticated dog. Harper's eyes were growing bloodshot, his tongue stuck out just slightly, and maybe realizing his newfound ability to transition between species, Harper decided he would wholeheartedly enjoy to shrink down to the size of an ant, tread the ashy floor, scale the pale wall and, conquering the six-legged climb, curl up in that remote bright spot.

Just as his mind was closing in on some graduate degree epiphany, Harper blinked, and for a split second he was human again, and his

long fingers were wiping ash off of the sleeve of his Burberry coat, and he feared the conversation had continued on without him, and there was the chilling sense that some aspect of the group had escaped him since childhood.

"What did you all end up saying about the suits?" Harper said. His face was relaxed and expressionless, but there was still something wary and searching there. Clowney began to answer without noticing any of the subtleties twisting up his friend's face.

"What's up, Williams? Zonin'? Or what?" Clowney was waiting for a ground shaking applause from the other two. He possessed all the clemency of a morally compromised saint, and it made him a little more interesting than a cigarette during a slow conversation. "Well, uh, I guess on the matter of real politic..." Clowney began to say.

"Siri!" Pearce interrupted. He was having a ball screaming into the microphone at the bottom of his phone. There was spit on the screen. "Do suits go to hell, Siri, or..."

"The hell...Kill yourself, Pearce. I mean fuck, that's nasty." Rockwell usually spoke more pointedly than he meant. He was sober, and he didn't want his overcoat to reek in the office the next morning at his internship with Hawthorne & Bateman.

A sound came from Pearce's lap. "I'm sorry, did you say Helen Keller?" On Pearce's phone Helen Keller's Wikipedia page popped up, and his eyes shot open with wild excitement. "Helen Keller was a fucking socialist?"

"What the fuck," Harper said, his eyes still set—entranced, rather—in the direction of the pale wall holding the door. His ass was aching, and his spine dipped a trifle and he was seriously perplexed, in that species-morphing manner.

"I don't understand," Rockwell started, lecture hall civility conditioning his opinion, "how in the world a woman without vision, without an honest grip on the physical world, can come to cherish such an antiquated system of governance. I mean, if you can't see, what chance do you have making objective judgments about the world?"

"Don't be a fuckin asshole 'bout it," Pearce said.

"You both interrupted me." Even as a protein guzzling buff sort, Clowney looked completely incapacitated, as though the couch he lay on possessed some Medusa effect. He looked up at the ceiling less stupidly than he spoke.

They were all silent then, intoxicated and tensing up in their own ways, except for Harper, whose waist was bent acutely, his gaze still captured by the bright spot on the door. The air inside the room had gone stale. It seemed the ceiling fan, at some point during the night—or maybe it was the morning—had shut off. The white walls may have been grey. Smoke was hanging everywhere, and they were only just beginning to notice, everyone except for Harper. He was standing now, moving athletically and cautiously and pushing his chest through the smoke at the molasses pace of a hull-pierced skiff. His physical self advanced in cruise control while his mind on full-throttle worked on dissecting the impossibility of the sun drop lying bright in the foggy room. Harper's attention suddenly telescoped towards the sun drop as a torrid sensation began to envelop the bottom of his stomach and his mind retreated into a fugue state.

An hour may have passed before he reached the door, and reaching out for the spot, his eyes watery and trying, Harper blinked again, and in the short darkness he felt something disappear, and when he opened his eyes again his hand was clutching a yellow doorknob, the knob to Rockwell's bedroom door. Harper paused, and having tired out every muscle in his body, stood upright and looked around the room and saw that his friends had fallen asleep. Then, slowly, he sat down in an empty recliner and began to think, massaging his temples with his thumbs, about the nature of his predicament with the sun drop, but there was no getting to the bottom of it. The bright spot was either there or it wasn't, but any sense of finality, as Harper searched for it, seemed to be out of reach.

Harper attributed his inability to make sense of the bright spot to his small intellectual universe as a child. Mrs. Williams should have

read him Kafka and Neruda at bedtime. She should have taken a conscious effort early on to expose his innocence. If she had allowed him to attend debate camp at Princeton the summer before he was to choose between Hotchkiss and Horace Mann, instead of insisting on his getting some fresh air at the boy's lodge in Nantucket, the melancholy course of his life might've been completely avoided. His thoughts soon turned to old sentiments and he was remembering being a child and leaving carrots out overnight for Santa's reindeer. He remembered that the carrots were always gone in the morning. This was his only point of reference in trying to come to terms with the missing sun drop, but there was something to it. As he continued to dig through old memories, Harper began to formulate that falling out of innocence was a gradual process, and a relatively ignored one, and he thought there ought to be more PhD students looking into the matter. Harper pinched down the blind of a window and watched the sun climb up the horizon for a little while as he thought. People didn't really miss childhood. They didn't miss believing in Saint Nick. Things are just sweeter when they're lost.

PART II

A child skipping down from his porch to a school bus stop noticed Harper, who was completely still, looking up at the sun through clenched fists, using his hands as binoculars. He was sitting at a bench placed a few feet behind the school bus stop. As the boy neared the bus stop he continued to stare curiously at Harper. It was Sunday morning and the boy's prayer journal was in his backpack. Mrs. Clarisse, the Sunday School and Kindergarten teacher, gave all her students prayer journals with traceable scripture verses printed at the top of each page. The boy thought about his prayer journal for some reason as he looked at Harper. He felt its presence in the backpack. Mrs. Clarisse said that everyone should keep a journal for all the sick people and all the poor people and especially for the soldiers. She said good Americans did that. Two Sundays ago the class even

wrote down prayers for the soldiers who went across the ocean and that made the boy happy because he had seen soldiers on television and remembered one saying that it was nice having people back home pray for them. He thought the man looking up into the sky might be a soldier, so he opened up his backpack, pulled out his journal, using both arms, and started in on writing a prayer with the pencil he kept in his pants pocket. It was taking him a few minutes, in the wind, to get a page steady enough for writing, so he sat down on the sidewalk, set his journal down in front of him, and stuck the corner of the opened page under one of his knees so that it wouldn't flap in the wind as he scribbled. In a few minutes he had traced the verse at the top of the page, a quote from the book of John, gotten down a short, private correspondence and looked over his shoulder to see what Harper was doing. After ripping the page from his journal and placing the journal back into his little backpack, the boy began to approach Harper.

"Excuse me," the boy started, a few feet away from being intimately close to Harper.

Harper let his arms fall down to his sides and looked at the child quietly, somewhat stunned. The boy seemed to have dropped right out of a lifestyle magazine for the wealthy mothers of small suburban boys. Harper pictured him being photographed in a well-lit room atop a toy horse. The boy's black hair was gelled over adhesively. He sported fall plaid pants and an ironed white shirt that bore a hand-stitched cub emblem just below the collar, quarter-sized. His cufflinks bounced in the wind as he walk-skipped, and his black shoes shone bright over the brown grass below his feet. His large, inquisitive green eyes examined Harper as he closed the ground between them, and his face displayed a bright smile. As the boy stepped closer, Harper thought that children found novelty in everything.

"I saw you from over there," the boy said, pointing excitedly at his house across the street. "Can I ask what are you looking up there for?"

Harper stared for a moment before starting. "I'm trying to spot sun bugs buddy," he said, "but I think I may have lost my talent for spotting them. They're damn elusive creatures, anyway." His skin was oddly pale, and it looked like he ought to be indoors or asleep.

"Well, are you a soldier or something? You look like a soldier," the boy said. He gazed down at the grass and kicked his feet together as he spoke.

"I'm afraid not," Harper said, leaning forward towards the boy, his hands clasped tight in his lap. He was looking attentively at the child, trying to picture him in a Hitler Youth class portrait with that tiny mouth and plastic hair. He noticed the boy was holding a piece of paper just behind his back.

"What have you got there? Homework? I always liked history class." Harper smiled at the boy. The boy didn't notice. He was bringing the paper out over his lap and folding its corners.

"My teacher Mrs. Clarisse has a lot to say about soldiers, actually," the boy said. "She says she'd like to lock all the politicians in the gym with a bunch of hand grenades and let them do the wars for the soldiers." The boy saw that Harper's feet were black around the edges.

"I thought you said you weren't a soldier! Regular boys don't lose their shoes, you know, so you can tell the truth to me. Mrs. Clarisse says we should talk to the soldiers, actually. They just look different is all..." It seemed like the boy was getting ready to present a miniature case study on soldiers.

"She sounds nice, bud, but I'm telling the truth," Harper interrupted, "I'm not a soldier." Harper thought the boy was wonderfully diplomatic in his current disposition even though he was imposing at a particularly trying time, so he didn't mind him jumping up onto the bench and sitting next to him. In fact, the boy's presence only seemed to catalyze Harper's interest in the sun drop.

"Say, have you ever seen a sun bug?" he asked the boy, who was now quietly at work folding the paper.

"I think so," he said, dangling his feet in the wind. "Does it count if it's in your dreams?" He was starting to apply a rather complex pattern of folds to the paper in his hand.

"Does it count? Well of course it counts!" Harper said, throwing his arms out theatrically and raising his eyebrows. "Say, what makes you think you aren't in a dream right now? I mean right this instant." He finished his sentence and matter-of-factly poked the child on the nose.

The boy sat thinking as his hands turned his journal prayer into an origami bird. "What do they look like?" he asked, addressing the ground. "The ones I see look like this." He handed Harper the paper bird.

"Buddy, I have an awful suspicion that we may both be in a dream right this instant," Harper said, gently grabbing the boy by the wrist and taking his paper bird. "In fact," he started, placing the bird in his palm and presenting it in front of the boy's face, "if the sun bugs looked just like this in your dream, who's to say this isn't a sun bug and we're not in a dream right now? Correct me if I'm wrong here, buddy."

"Well in my dreams the sun bugs are all glowing like, like the lights on a baseball field or like fireworks," said the boy. "Like stars." His voice raised a few measures as he spoke and dropped off just before it reached a pitch of awe.

"Stars, fireworks, baseball..." Harper listed with receding sensation, "those are just the names we give them, bud. What a thing is and what it isn't, I think, is a matter of belief or perception. In fact, just recently..." he started to say, before stopping himself as he remembered an Indian philosophy lecture on the Vaisheshika School. The Indians were particularly resolute in their praise of experience, and he realized the boy didn't have much of that. Then he looked down at the boy and noticed that he had stopped listening and was staring at the origami bird in Harper's lap. Harper smiled again.

"Hey, bud. Try this. Close your hands," said Harper, showing the boy how to make hand binoculars. "Now cover your eyes, but make sure you don't open them until I say so. I'm being serious here, bud."

The boy flung his closed hands over his eyes enthusiastically. "They're closed!"

"Okay. Aim your head up now. Up. You see them?"

"Wow! How'd you do that?" exclaimed the boy. His tiny frame displayed wonder, and Harper picked up on it.

"Don't ask now bud, just catch 'em! Hurry, they're getting away!" The boy threw his hands up in the air and started grabbing. "I got one! I think I caught it!"

"Very well done," Harper said. "But you have to let it go free before you open your eyes if you ever want to see them again." He made a confused face at the boy followed by a grin.

"Did you know I'm ten?" the boy said, suddenly opening his eyes and sticking out his bare palms and counting his ten fingers. He landed finally on his thumb and stuck it square in his mouth.

Harper gave out a soft, serious laugh. "You opened your eyes, bud. I didn't tell you to open your eyes."

"So what?" said the boy, talking through his thumb.

"So I hope you let the sun bug go," Harper said, "or else you'll probably never see any of them again. Not one, buddy."

"I swear I did! I swear!" The boy was adamant.

"Incidentally," Harper said slowly, aiming for humor, "what have you got in this paper, bud?" He suspected the boy had stowed away some little sentiment inside the bent figure.

"Oh, it's for you! Sorry!" The boy looked seriously sorry, gravely so. "I've got to go catch the bus this minute but promise me you'll open it once I go away. Promise?" The boy hugged Harper's arm for a moment and then jumped down from the bench. "It was very nice to meet you. I'm Preston Wells, incidentally." He was facing Harper like a private before his officer.

"Sure thing, bud," Harper said, and the boy walk-skipped down to the sidewalk and towards the bus stop.

Harper was starting to bring his hand binoculars up to his face again when he noticed a woman passing in front of him on the

sidewalk, a little boy's mother perhaps. She was rubbing her eyes. "I see you're looking at the sun bugs," he said. The woman hovered for a moment and forced a look of disgust in Harper's direction. "I don't mind if you look, just say so." The woman began to walk away from him, peeking over her shoulder as though she expected Harper to get up and chase her off.

"Mind your own goddamn business," he yelled after her. Then, with the origami bird still in his lap, Harper unfolded it flat over his thighs and examined its contents.

JOHN 1:5 THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS, BUT THE
DARKNESS HAS NOT UNDERSTOOD IT.

XOXOXOXOXO

XOXOXOXOXO

LOVE PRETSON

P.S. I WANT TO BE A SOLJER ONE DAY TO

Once Harper finished reading the little crumpled paper he sat for a moment and scanned an area of the horizon just between the tree line and the rising sun, looking apprehensively into a clear blue sky. He thought it would be a long time before the boy knew anything at all about soldiers. In the pit of his stomach a searing hot pain was developing and beginning to crawl up towards his chest, and Harper couldn't put his finger on the strange sensation. He thought the cigarettes probably had something to do with it.

He noticed Preston was still nearby, walking around abstractedly with his hands set tight over his eyes, a delightful 10-year-old smile on his face. Other children standing by the bus stop giggled and whispered to each other as he walked around aimlessly, his nose pointed up high. Harper thought he might get up and go ask Preston for his mailing address so that they could begin a real correspondence. He imagined that at the bottom of his first letter he would recommend a

list of psychology and literature journals that Preston's mother might subscribe to on her son's behalf.

Just then a car was approaching the bus stop and Preston, unaware of its presence, fell into the street. The committed manner in which he was operating his hand binoculars prevented Preston from seeing the short drop-off between the cement curb and the street, causing his right leg to dip into the road and carry his body down with it. Harper felt the burning sensation in his chest rising as the car neared closer to the boy. Preston was working on getting up, but he wouldn't use his hands, so he struggled with his small legs to get back to the curb, moving blindly on his knees. His small peers began yelling in frantic voices, screaming at him to get out of the street.

"If I move my hands now I might never see the sun bugs again," he told them. "I took one, and if you take one that's what happens." He couldn't sense the urgency in their voices. They were only children. The burning sensation traveling up through Harper's body, as his eyes followed the car, became completely blinding, and then a sudden blaring noise coming from the street revived his senses altogether and directed his attention back to Preston. He seemed to be in no danger at all, being led back to the sidewalk by one of his classmates, his hand binoculars still stuck to his face. Harper cocked his ear towards the street, but there wasn't the faintest echo of an exhaust pipe. There wasn't the sense that the boy had nearly perished at all.

I NEVER ASKED FOR HER NAME

MOLLY WOLCHANSKY

She sat watching traffic for hours each day, dragging her lawn chair to where the grass meets the cement, folding her tired legs underneath the plastic, pointing her toes downward, reliving the days of when she was the perfect ballerina. Every time I drove past her, she was always in the same position, sipping from a twisted straw that grew out of an unmatched gas station cup. I had never spoken to her, and from the looks of it, or from what I had observed, I wasn't the only one pretending as if she were not there. Even though we were not well acquainted, except for the I-feel-sorry-for-you waves I gave her each time I squeezed by, I felt as if I knew her by the stories I had come up with in my head.

When she was a child she lived in the basement of the shoe factory her father owned. The only time he gave her attention was when one of the shoelaces got tangled, and the only fingers that could save the cheaply made string were tiny little girl ones. She would sit and look upward, gazing at the slits of light that crept through the wooden trap door. When the slits of light had a shadow over them, the room would grow pitch black and the child saw the light of the sun. The

father had to bend over and get on his knees to use all his force to unlatch the door, and once he did he would throw the shoelaces down and shut it again without saying a word. The girl carefully walked to the stairs and said, "Thank you," while grabbing the tangled mess of a failed attempt at success.

This time it felt different. She saw with her hands that it was not just two or three shoelaces as it had usually been; it was two or three hundred! At first the girl wept because she was a failure before she was even a failure, and then the girl wept some more because she knew that her visits would become less frequent. It would take her days to untangle all the shoelaces, perhaps even weeks. It was the first time that she realized she was trapped; it was the first time that she realized she was completely alone. She took the giant shoelace ball and began untangling. She decided that she would untangle just enough string so she could tie it together and hang it from the ceiling. Surely there was a beam she would be able to tie it on. Surely the shoelaces had enough strength to hold up a small body.

I stopped at that point in the story because it was getting too morbid for me and the traffic had started moving again and I no longer had to look at her. It seemed a little far-fetched, even though the sadness in her eyes matched the sadness of the situation. Or perhaps the sadness in her eyes were spawned from the straightforward fact that she had the most wonderful life and she was heartbroken that it was coming to a closure. It was as if she knew the exact moment her life was going to end, and she wanted to spend every moment of what was left of it thinking about her past while the wind danced across her cheeks. She was watching the end credits, waiting for the screen to go black and the static to begin in hopes that the rewind button wasn't broken. If only it were that easy to time travel.

The biggest problem with time travel is that it could not reverse age, which is what the child discovered when she was no longer a child. She took the machine her great grandmother invented (yes, it was a woman who invented the most fantastic invention in all the

world) and started punching in numbers. She thought that if she typed "1954" into the pod-shaped time capsule that was turned into an all-functioning rewind-button-equipped VCR, that she would not only go back in time, but she would also go back in age. She was sixteen in 1954, and I remember when she was telling me this story I had many thoughts about when I was sixteen and how awful it was, and if I had to relive it then I would surely jump off one of those boat-splitting bridges. She said it was different then, and she said she wanted to go back to the exact moment when she met the love of her life the first time. She did. She went back to that day, that hour, that minute, that second, and when she walked up to him she didn't look like her anymore; she looked melted. He, of course, did not recognize her and he was very good-looking so he didn't want to spend any more precious time of his good-looking filled days next to an old seventy something woman. I asked her if she saw herself. She said no. She said two of the same exact people cannot be in the same place at the same exact time or else the entire universe would fold into itself, and when she traveled back to present day, all of the photographs she once had were gone and her wedding ring was gone and her heart was a little smaller.

The traffic started to move again and she waved violently to everyone. Sometimes her wave was more animated than other days. I don't know why I kept thinking of sad stories. That particular one had started happy, but then it just ended up being a travesty. Did that say something about my life too? Was I a travesty? I looked through my keys searching for the correct one because I had just moved for the seventh time in six years, and I finally found the one I was looking for. I threw my keys on the counter, which slid on the floor. I sat on my couch with the wall staring back at me, wondering if I should go talk to her. The stories I formed were my own entertainment while stuck in traffic each day, and if I went and asked her what her true life story was, then I wouldn't have anything to do but listen to talk radio because that was the only thing on at seven thirty in the morning.

Then a leaf fell on my head.

I did not know where it came from, and as I was looking up, a thousand more leaves came tumbling down, making a blanket across my legs and chest. They covered my floor. My couch was gone and my table was gone and my keys were gone. I tried to get up, but I was being held down by a swarm of reds and oranges and yellows. Then one of the leaves went left and right and ascended elegantly upward into a light that was so bright the stars were envious. The weight was slowly being lifted, and I felt as though I could have floated along with them. Each leaf followed that leaf, and soon there were only a few leaves left behind on the floor. They did not move upward like the others; they developed deformities and crumbled. What colors they once bore were irrelevant, and in the end all that was left of them was ash.

I woke up with my skin feeling dry and my mouth craving thirst and my hands brushing off my lap as though something was just there. As my mind slowly reminded me of my dream, I thought it strange and wondered of its significance. I analyzed every aspect of it, and when I came to the conclusion that it meant nothing, I decided to finally visit her.

As I walked past the parking lot of cars, I wondered why I never took a different route on my way to work. I could have gone the other way or left at the stop sign; it seemed like the more logical choice in order to avoid the traffic. I looked one way and I looked another way, and the only cars that I could see were lined up and down the street in a perfect longitude form on the street of the old lady. When I got closer she began to wave to me as if she had known me my entire life. Her delicate face had so many wrinkles that it could write several books. She told me to sit down and I did. She asked me what my name was and I told her. I remember now that I never asked for her name, but I don't think she even noticed or minded. She recited hours of rehearsed monologues. She told me of her life and it was more magnificent than I could have possibly imagined.

Her father did not own a shoe factory.

She was not a ballerina.

Her great grandmother did not invent a time machine.

But she was in love once, and she told me about the first time her sneakers were thrown over a telephone line, and she told me about how she was the first in her neighborhood to have a color TV. She told me she had not given advice to anyone in a very long time, and she longed for someone to listen. I told her that I was listening, and at the end of her speech said, "You will grow old, too." As she said this, a great gust of wind blew up from our feet, and not a single leaf was left behind.

NONFICTION

BREAD

KELSEY BOYLAND

No one in Texas knows how to bake bread with a real crust. I'm not entirely sure why. I had a friend who worked at HEB who referred to their bakery as a fakery. For any Californians who stumble across this, that's H.E.B., not Heb, a Texas chain of California-Costco sized supermarkets. Obviously, even in California you wouldn't expect Safeway (that's Randalls to all you Texans) to have top-notch bread, but even self-proclaimed artisanal shops in Austin can't seem to get it right.

I'm from San Francisco where sourdough reigns supreme. I was raised on it the way kids in Iowa are raised on corn. It's the only vice of my father, who still fits easily into his tattered t-shirt from the Kennedy campaign. Despite mostly subsisting off no-fat black bean dip and cherry tomatoes, he could eat the better part of a loaf, totally unadorned, on the way home from the grocery store. I would usually polish off the other part. The best sourdough has a crust that's chewy but not necessarily crisp, and it has enough umph that it's hard to tear off a piece. The interior is soft and springy and filled with bubbles. While texture and aeration

are important, it's tang that defines good sourdough. Still hot, smeared in butter, it is a magnificent thing to consume.

Most people don't realize (or just don't care to think about) how sourdough is actually a living culture. Every teaspoon of sourdough starter is teeming with somewhere around fifty million yeasts and five billion lactobacilli bacteria. Sourdough starter is the stuff you use as a base for bread, a gluey amalgam of flour and water. I keep mine in an oversized mason jar. You never use all of it, and you keep feeding it so you never run out. You actually have to feed it at least once a week and it changes in flavor depending on the flour and the air. Because it's so sensitive, no matter how many sites on the internet will charge you fifteen bucks and tell you otherwise, you can't really have San Francisco sourdough starter outside of San Francisco. Supposedly, Boudin Bakery actually had to ship their branch in Illinois new starter every two weeks and even then it ultimately closed. I knew my mother would not ship me new starter every two weeks, but when I left for college in Austin I was determined to try to bring San Francisco starter with me.

Transitions are always strange for me; I linger even over small ones. I'd explored Austin. I knew I'd have a place there, but it still wasn't my place. I would take comfort in being able to bring this small piece of San Francisco with me. Unlike me, sourdough starter ages gracefully. You can buy it online or even make it from scratch but the best way is to find one that's well established. In some ways sourdough starter was made to be shared. Each time you feed it, it doubles in size. Unless you want a fridge full of starter, you might as well hand it out. Starters are even often affectionately referred to as "Mothers". If you don't have an obliging neighbor, you can send off to the good samaritans at The Oregon Trail (no, no relation to the video game). For the price of postage (and hopefully a well deserved donation) this society of volunteers will send you some of the now deceased Carl T. Griffith's hundred and fifty-year-old family starter, dried.

It's a well kept secret that, if you're willing to put in the time it takes to get to their main hub in Berkley, ACME bread (some of the Bay Area's best) will give you some of theirs (confident you'll still be unable to duplicate their results).

I put in the time between items on a crowded to do list of packing and goodbyes. I did a lot of reading and showed up at the mecca with an assortment of glass containers the culture supposedly preferred. I was promptly turned away because they wouldn't risk the glass breaking into their huge vat of starter. The storefront itself was tiny, barely enough room for 3 people to hover awkwardly inside, awaiting their turn to point to one of golden loaves lining the walls. It felt almost comical after such a long trip on the subway and such careful preparation to turn around and walk several blocks in opposite direction to the nearest grocery store. It was one of those dollar stores that only sells food and always smells like freezer burn. The aisles were crammed in tightly, clamoring to consume every inch of the expensive real estate. The plastic container I ended up purchasing must have been loaded with toxins.

When I got home, I fed the starter right away. While I've repeated the process several times since then, the first time still seemed the most remarkable. Even the people who are willing to think about how sourdough is a living culture often seem to think you feed it strange things, like pineapple juice or yogurt, maybe some goat's blood, but really all it takes is flour and water. I didn't have any pets growing up. I think one time my parents offered me a fish, and, in a particularly desperate moment, a hairless cat (both of which I refused). It was strange to watch bubbles forming in that glass jar and to suddenly feel responsible for a living thing, even if it was more organism than amphibian or mammal. I was afraid I would screw it up (I had accidentally baked a previous starter, trying to nurture it in San Francisco's ironically ill-suited climate).

I knew this starter had a much harder journey ahead of it. I wasn't sure how it would do with the TSA on the way to Austin. I explored

other odd grey zones: Lotion? No. Deodorant? Yes. Pie filling? Maybe? I soon discovered another problem beyond the solid/liquid quandary: sourdough starter is prone to expanding making it lousy candidate for your checked luggage. Unless of course, your perfume was confiscated and you enjoy smelling like sour yeast. I treated it as if it might explode at any moment. I packed it in a bag with just the slightest gap for air, and then packed in another 3 bags and then put in between a bunch of soft things next to an ice pack.

While this was a new experiment for me, it wasn't a new field. I have always been a baker. I find the act of creaming butter or kneading bread calming, almost cathartic. I spend so much of my time scattered and working on 10 projects that when I have time to myself I like to do one thing really really well, like making bread. It's an incredibly physical act with long periods of waiting for dough to rise so you can punch it back down again. It can become so automatic that you make mistakes. You bake it a little longer than was strictly called for, or you invert the ratio of flour to water when you feed the starter. When I finally got it to Austin, there were several occasions on which I was convinced I had killed the starter.

This was how I found out it's actually incredibly hard to kill starter. I am convinced someday a long time from now, when the rest of us are gone, the roaches and starter will form some sort of symbiotic relationship. If you look up troubleshooting guides for sourdough starter there are a lot of entries like: Q: I accidentally froze my starter? A: Have you tried feeding it? Q: I'm not getting enough bubbles? A: Feed it again! Q: I've neglected my starter for months and it has some orange ooze and mold? A: Feed it?... Maybe, dispose of the mold first.

After a long school year filled with fresh loaves and chewy crumpets, I decided to freeze my starter for the summer. I was amused by the thought of this inverse hibernation. I went off on two-month trip I'd been planning for two years and I had a lot of good bread. In Marseille, on a Sunday afternoon when everything else was closed, I ended up in a dodgy grocery store and was astounded to find a

still warm baguette, even better than ACME's. I stumbled across a focaccia bakery in Genoa so popular you had to take a number. I was the only person there who spoke English and I walked out with a slice the size of my head, chewy and salty and covered with ripe tomatoes. For first time, I was doing one thing really, really well all the time. And then I had two weeks left, and then one week, and then three days and then I got on a plane. I suppose the reason transitions are strange for me is that whenever I'm in the middle of anything it consumes me. It feels like it will go on forever. Sometimes, I wish it would.

On the flight back to Austin, my knees crammed behind the seat in front of me, I unwrapped a lifeless prepackaged roll completely devoid of flavor and texture except that strange hint of staleness and humidity that only bread on airplanes seems to take on. I found a corner of that same emptiness I'd stumbled across when I left my city for the first time and noticed all the things I'd taken for granted.

When I got back to Austin, I found my tiny kitchen with the cupboard's contents spilling onto the countertops and half-sized stove, much as I had left it. I let the starter defrost for the morning. It was unusually liquid but I was undeterred; I added two thirds of a cup of warm water and one cup of flour and stirred well and waited. The familiar yeasty smell filled the air. I waited several hours. Nothing happened. I went and looked at the forums, already knowing the answer but seeking some further reassurance.

So, I fed it again. A couple hours later when I found it just as lifeless as before my heart sank. As some twisted sign of good faith, I left it there on the windowsill anyway. On the one occasion I'd made the mistake of leaving it out too long when it was in good health it had overflowed. I was convinced that this time my experiment was over. I'd have to start again.

When I came back a few hours later, it was not overflowing. It had not even doubled, but as I peeked in ever so carefully, I noticed there were a couple bubbles coming slowly to the surface.

ANTONIONI'S "NEGATIVE DIMENSION": SILENCE, ULTIMACY, AND THE EMPTY FRAME

MICHAEL ESPARZA

The filmic philosophy of Michaelangelo Antonioni is predicated on negation and reversal. Antonioni states in "A Talk with Michaelangelo Antonioni on his Work" (1961) that one of the ideas that formed how he went about making films was a "boredom with the current standardized methods of filmmaking and the conventional ways of telling a story" (Di Carlo 23). In the "search for technique," according to Antonioni, "one starts from a negative fact, from a weariness of current techniques and methods" (Di Carlo 19). While these sentiments are certainly speaking to a desire to break from artistic tradition, I also think they point to a lot of the primary thematic concerns in Antonioni's movies. A film like *L'Eclisse* (1962) is concerned much more with the silence and space around characters than with the characters and events themselves. In this essay, I want to explore the ways in which Antonioni's idea of silence is articulated visually as negative space through the motif of empty frames, as well as examine the sense of anxiety that is associated with this motif throughout *L'Eclisse*. My contention is that Antonioni equates this anxiety of

absence with fear of mortality and ultimacy, and in fact, at the end of the film, imposes this fear on the viewer.

Antonioni's book of sketches and nascent film ideas, "That Bowling Alley on the Tiber" (1987), contains a piece called "The silence," a micro-narrative about a fight (and presumed breakup) between a married couple. Instead of depicting the actual conflict, Antonioni chooses to focus on a period of silence that follows the decision to "open up." In the final paragraph, the narrator reflects: "A story of husband and wife who have nothing more to say to each other. Just once to shoot not their conversation but their silences, their silent words. Silence as a negative dimension of speech." He dismisses the actual content of the conversation as "the usual habits, the usual hurt," acknowledging the banality of the argument itself, and meditates on the space around the conversation. While it is unclear when "The silence" was written, the opening sequence of *L'Eclisse* feels almost like an adaptation of the piece. The first three or so minutes of the movie are completely without dialogue. Against the sonic backdrop of the faint, constant whirr of the fan¹, the only disruptions we get in this span of time are Vittoria's footsteps and the sound of her manipulating objects on the table. Without any sort of exposition, we can glean from the silence a sense of foreboding, an intuition that there is some imminent end here between Vittoria and Riccardo. Once the conversation itself begins, Vittoria pulls back the curtains on one of the windows, revealing a remarkably mushroom cloud-shaped edifice, signaling the destruction of the relationship.

By observing the ostensibly aimless behavior of Vittoria during this scene, though, I believe we can discern another kind of silence, one that manifests itself through the visual rather than auditory modality. The concept of visual silence is conveyed through the symbol

1 NB: while ambient sound is not technically silence, Antonioni's definition as stated in "The silence" is "a negative dimension of speech." Auditory "silence" is thus defined in this paper as absence of speech, not absence of sound.

of the empty frame. In these opening minutes we are introduced to Vittoria's odd obsession with frames; more specifically, her obsession with occupying the empty space within frames. The first time we see Vittoria, she is propping up an empty picture frame, rearranging the objects contained within its boundaries. She reaches over and watches herself manipulate the objects, asserting her agency within the frame. In this way, she is disrupting the visual silence by injecting herself into it. This compulsion toward frame-occupation features prominently throughout the film as a means of protraction, specifically romantic, for Vittoria. She is unable, for instance, to bring herself to reciprocate Piero's physical advances until she kisses him through a window pane. She knows that her affair with him is doomed, at one point telling him "I wish I didn't love you, or I loved you more." In both cases, then, Vittoria seems to be using this frame play as a way to prolong some inevitable end.

L'Eclisse also concludes with an instance of playing with visual silence. Antonioni uses the last seven minutes of the film, without dialogue, occupying empty spaces², making a point to revisit places from earlier scenes, places that at one time contained characters, as a means of reinforcing the sense of visual silence. In this final sequence, I believe, we are meant to adopt the same anxieties that Vittoria has regarding empty frames. The perimeter of the screen becomes the empty frame for the audience. The duration of the last scene is designed to unnerve in this way. By the standards of cultural narrative logic, concluding a film in the absence of any significant characters might seem counterintuitive, especially when the final sequence lasts as long as it does. All we know about the primary characters by the end of the film is that they did not end up meeting in their "usual spot" as they said they would, but it doesn't even matter whether or not they continued their relationship. What matters is the fact that,

together or not, the characters are out of frame. Even if their relationship has not ended to them, it has ended to us.

Antonioni further contributes to this unsettling concluding atmosphere by placing apocalyptic, post-nuclear imagery throughout in the form of newspaper headlines reading things like "NUCLEAR ARMS RACE" and "A FRAGILE PEACE." These details, the way the darkness gradually descends as the scene progresses, the fact that the final shot is of a pulsing, piercing white light, all seem to be communicating a kind of figurative death. This could be representative of the death of the characters' relationship, or, more broadly, the death of love, but I read the death as operating on a more meta level. The viewer, after all, is the only one seeing this final bright light. The characters, as mentioned before, are out of frame. We are experiencing this death. We are subjected to this series of empty frames, and as we are unable to occupy them as Vittoria does, we thus meet our end.

In this way, Antonioni is attributing the anxieties about framed absence and visual silence that run throughout L'Eclisse to a deeper existential dread. Through his play with things like negative space and duration, he is able to confront not only his characters but his viewers with a forced awareness of mortality. The failure to occupy space is death in itself.

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² Empty in that no significant character occupy the space.

MUNDO QUERIDO

VANESSA GONZALEZ

I held one half of the world in each palm that Holy Thursday as I walked out of my fifth-grade classroom and into the pickup area. In my left hand I held a large book with a worn binding and loose pages. Today was field day, so students were allowed to bring games and toys from home. All around me students held stacks of cards, video games, and soccer balls. I, on the other hand, brought some recreational reading from the library. For me, getting enveloped in a world that was not my own, whether fact or fiction, was fascinating. So with that fascination in mind, I carried half the world in my left hand.

In my right hand, like most of the kids around me, I held a candy bag. Inside the bag were some of my favorite sweets, from butter-scotch and strawberry hard candies, to a handful of Marinela galletas. The outside of the bag pictured several decorated Easter eggs, mimicking the large display of cascarones that were being sold by an elderly woman across the street. These confetti filled eggshells would be hidden all across the Rio Grande Valley that Sunday. Children with baskets in hand would be lined up in open fields, backyards, parks, and ranchos, ready for the anticipated hunt. Once all the eggs were

gathered, a clash from family member to friend to neighbor would commence. Loud cracks would resound over the battlefield as eggs were bashed over hard skulls, leaving the ground littered with confetti, eggshells, and occasionally a few other surprises. I remember my mother saving eggshells in December, carefully washing the inside and storing them away for Easter Sunday. That day was now quickly approaching, the Semana Santa here. I rushed down to my parents' car, the world still nestled in my two tiny hands.

I entered the car, greeted my parents with a knowing smile, and leaned my head against the window facing across the street. Next to the rows of egg cartons lay large colorful baskets, adorned with candies and toys, all nestled on a mound of synthetic straw. My brother and I normally took the bus home from school, but since today was a special holiday, my parents agreed to pick us up. The plan was to get my brother a much needed haircut before mass on Sunday and choose our Easter baskets.

As time passed, more and more children bustled out of the elementary school, none of them my brother. This didn't come as a surprise, my brother was known for taking his sweet time getting anywhere. Only so much could be expected from an easily distracted eight-year-old boy. A line of cars had begun to form behind us. I let out a sigh, my head still glued to the back car window. My father, out of exasperation, stepped out of the car and went to look for my brother.

"I'll be back in five minutes," he said as he marched off.

While we waited, my mother turned up the radio and I picked up my book. As was customary when I read, all the background noises and distractions around me slowly began to fade away. The book was about the Columbine shooting that took place in 1999. While the subject itself was tragic, I couldn't seem to put it down. It was six years after 9/11 and teachers spoke of terrorist attacks annually. Footage of the plane hitting and the towers going down had been played in my classrooms since I was nine. Now eleven years old, I had come to picture these attacks played out by evil men from foreign

countries who preyed on innocent Americans in large cities. This book however, showed two young Americans, not foreigners, preying on the innocent in a small town, not a big city. Gunshots rang inside my ears, as the horror of what went down eight years before was revealed to me. I was standing in the middle of the massacre when I heard a loud bang, not inside my head, but from behind our car. I blinked my eyes, the present slowly resurfacing around me, the noise from outside still muffled as the car's radio blared on.

My mother lowered the music and looked at me through her rear-view mirror.

"I think someone just had an accident," she said.

As she lowered her window, we began to hear a loud commotion coming from the teachers standing outside. From my mother's outer rearview mirror, we could see that a car in the pickup line had just been hit. Before we could look back at the accident, our car was shaken as a man and woman ran in between vehicles in line, shoving their way through.

How rude, I thought, there's no need to shove our car.

All of a sudden, more men and women began to run in between the long line of cars, heading straight for the front entrance to the building. A wall of teachers formed in front of the school doors, defending the grounds like a group of chivalrous knights asked to safeguard the kingdom. The instructors held up their hands and began screaming for the adult stampede to retreat. The unknown group charged through anyway, pushing and shoving the school's knights aside. An administrator in the crowd blew a whistle, students began to scream, and before I knew it, everyone standing outside was being rounded up into the school. I sat in my seat shaking, wondering whether this was all really happening or if I had been sucked back into one of my books, forced to experience the awful events that had occurred for myself.

The cars in front of us began to move, quickly filing out of the school's pickup area. My mom, looking first at the school and then at

me, put the car in drive and made her way towards the exit. She came to a screeching halt as the gate was closed shut in front of us. The cars that had escaped were already just diminishing dots in the distance. My mother honked her horn repeatedly and raised her hands, as if to question why we were being locked in. I looked up to see a school administrator shaking her head with an apologetic look upon her face. Putting the car in park, my mother laid her head on the steering wheel. The sound of angry car horns filled the grounds for several minutes, before an uneasy silence began to settle. I moved from the left back-seat to the right, looking out at the closed window that faced my school. I kept my head low, hiding from an unknown danger that was not there. The grass was littered with the children's backpacks, toys, and candy bags, all forgotten in the dash for safety. I thought of my eight-year-old brother, trapped inside the same building as the man and woman who had shoved our car only moments before. What if they were planning a shooting similar to the one in my book? What if they were terrorists, like the ones that had destroyed the Twin Towers six years before? I moved away from the window and prayed that my father had found my brother before the school lockdown had begun. I prayed that they were hidden together, and that God and la Virgen de Guadalupe would keep them safe.

I glanced at my mother in the front seat. She sat with her arms crossed and a look of frustration upon her face. The only thing worse, I thought, than not knowing if your father and brother were safe, was not knowing if your husband and son were.

"Where's dad?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said without turning.

I stared at her purse. "Where's the phone?"

At the time, my family had one home phone and one cell phone. I figured she could call someone in the building and ask about my father and brother. She looked through her purse and then towards the school.

"Your father has it."

Moments later, she looked up at the OnStar button of our car. We had a limited amount of minutes for telephone use on the car, and we preferred not to use it since the speaker was horrible at picking up phone numbers. She turned it on anyway and used the name we had preprogrammed to call the cell phone.

"Call Gonzalez family," she said.

"Error."

She spoke again, this time making an effort to speak loud and clear.

"Error."

She attempted to pronounce our last name several different ways, putting emphasis on different letters, only to continue being answered with a monotone "Error."

Finally, she spoke out all the digits of our cell phone number into the speaker. The phone rang after three tries.

We waited in complete silence, each ring seeming longer than the next. I held my breath until we heard my father on the other end of the line. His voice was muffled from the bad connection, and we could hear many people talking in the background.

"Is Danny with you?" my mother asked.

"No," my father said. "I'm in the second-grade hall and he isn't here."

My mother grasped the steering wheel more tightly, the pitch in her voice rising as she asked if he knew where he was. My dad explained that when he went to look for my brother, he saw people running all over the place. Near the playground area, he saw several Border Patrol cars pulling in. He tried to get into the hallway where my brother's class was located, but several teachers had already blocked the classrooms. Luckily, my brother's teacher recognized my father and let him in. He realized my brother wasn't there and one of the teachers told him that he had gone to the bus area before the lockdown happened.

My mother tried to ask if the buses were still in the parking lot, but the line cut off before my father could reply. She tried calling the cell phone again, but it wouldn't ring. She slammed her fists against the steering wheel and cursed under her breath, then turned to see me lying in the backseat floor, my eyes watery. She composed herself, took a deep breath, and attempted to use OnStar again to call our next door neighbor. Giving up on name recognition, my mother called out all the digits of our neighbor's phone number. It went through on the first try.

My mother explained our situation to the neighbor and asked if she could watch over my brother once the bus left him. Ten minutes later, our neighbor called back, saying that my brother had just been dropped off and was with her. My mother let out a sigh of relief. We were split apart, but she knew we were all safe. As far as she was concerned, her world was whole again.

While she was on the phone with our neighbor, my mother learned that the news had reported that the school intruders consisted of at least 20 undocumented immigrants who came from a van that was crashed near the school. The reason for their hasty escape was still unclear. I had heard the term undocumented in the news often. Most of the time, it was used to describe people who were involved with smugglings, murders, and robberies in the area. As far as I knew, these were not good people, and I wouldn't feel safe until my entire family was off school grounds.

One hour later, the intruders were captured and people were slowly being let out of the school. My father came, a trickle of teachers and students slowly following. Families were reunited, teachers praised, and candy bags retrieved. All the while I lay in the backseat, still utterly stupefied as to what just happened.

Once the gates were opened, my mother raced home. I looked at the street as we passed, the elderly woman and the cascarones long gone. In her place stood a news van and camera crew. Across the street from our house, we saw my brother sitting outside with our

neighbors. We all took turns hugging my little brother. He stared up at us with confusion. All he understood was that his family had left him alone, his mother and sister had come back crying, and his father was telling a story loudly to the neighbors.

We stayed at our neighbor's house that evening, swapping stories and trying to figure out what had happened. My brother told us what he had seen on the bus. Several men lay hidden behind the large oak trees that stood close to the playground. One of the men tried running into the building, but our P.E. coach ran after him and tackled him to the ground. The bus full of children cheered as if they had just seen Superman in action.

When the news came on again that night, the reporters released that a majority of the immigrants were fathers, mothers, and children. The conditions inside of the van were shown, nothing but empty water bottles and a pile of clothing. These were not evil foreigners, these were people just trying to get to a more desired world. Chatter ceased, and the festive mood that had begun to arise through the evening was gone. We walked back to our house, and I went to the car to gather my belongings. The cookies in the bag were now stale, and the Valley heat had glued all my hard candy together. I picked the old book up from the car floor, several pages falling out in the process. I stuffed the pages in the back of the book and carried it into the house.

Upon entering, I laid everything that had once been my world on the dining room table without so much as a second glance. Walking past the kitchen, my brother and I stopped dead in our tracks. There on the living room floor, were two large colorful baskets, filled to the brim with cascarones, chocolate, a soccer ball for my brother, and a doll for myself. We both stood there staring absently at the baskets in the middle of the room, our parents standing behind us with faces just as empty.

POETRY

MERMAID

RAVEN CORTRIGHT

She saw her reflection
iridescent eyes and amber hair
half submerged in water
a fin of green fish scales

She smiled
as she combed wet tangles
parting the sea foam
to watch her tail glisten
her voice waterfalled
and dripped into the ocean

He walked into the bathroom
his mother was in the tub
eerily smiling into the bubble bath
humming an incomprehensible cacophony
large eyes the color of a deranged ocean

SOMETHING DEEPER

DELIA DAVIS

Excuse me, sir.

Pardon me, madam.

We do not notice (our)
ramshackle bones until
a quake, a disturbance of the surface that sends
ripples across placid facades.
And then we shiver, entwine our bodies tighter—two coils of heat—
and murmur
(so as to not call the snow from the mountain
top down)

What was that?

As if we do not know.

I don't know.

Frictionfrictionfrictionfrictionfrictionfrictionfrictionfriction.

The chasm groans; opens begrudgingly.

A natural response.

Yearning reaches its spindly fingers from the abyss.

Also a natural response.

Blame is laden in the air, doubt permeates and suffuses.

Sickly perfume

fills the room

We suffocate in the electric smoke of our desperation.

But tighter still, we ask. Tighter, still.

ELIJAH

DAVID EDWARDS

Once I had a child.

In the morning he was wilder than sunlight,
A little Apollo dancing
Between the gravestones
Like he'd been here before.

Once I had a child.

In the night she bloomed;
When she smiled it was the moon.
She danced between street lamps
And broken glass-bottled sidewalks.

I have a child, who took its while
Like northern summer. It knows it --
All,
Like it's been here before.

Tiresias --

Cassandra --

My beautiful child.

It was dancing in the street
Where the bearded man glared at us
And the drunk woman he held stumbled
This way and that.

It was dancing in the alleyway
Where we were afraid to walk.
It was dancing between the space
You wouldn't breach to touch me.

You wouldn't touch me.
It was dancing but
You wouldn't see it.
You wouldn't see it dancing.

MOVING DAY

DAVID EDWARDS

The time has come
to count the number
of boxes that will
remove me from
what is left of
your life.

A quantity that will
equal the weight of
my significance
in your memory,
but—
what quantity?

Twenty? Thirty?
Will fifty wipe me
from your thoughts?

Will I be like
Hatshepsut, removed
by hammer and chisel—
obliterated to ease
the pain of
packing boxes?

Write down the number
that will keep you warm
now
in your empty bed.

I've moved on.

VON

DAVID EDWARDS

I will speak words into the wind
that go
where my body cannot.

I will speak words that
slither
between trees and mountains,

Between the waves crashing on the shore.

I will speak words that flicker
and morph
from shape to shape.

I will speak words that water through
your fingers
And fall to the ground—

That catch the wind and fly.

I will speak the words of my
(wo)manly body—
I will speak of the body I know not—

the body phasing second by second.
I will speak
the words that echo in my heart,

That echo heart to heart.

THE CAT LISTENS TO US

MAX FRIEDMAN

We didn't say much.

I listen to the sound of her breath,
it's familiar.

The sky was charcoal,
the expectation of rain.

It's then when she remembers that we've
never really talked,
we've just been chasing an idea.

It did rain,

I used my wipers on the way home.

What am I wiping away?

"every kiss is a reminder
that you actually like me"

My cat sleeps above us,
his eyes closed but his ears alert.

I look away and then back again.

I like giving reminders.

"I hope that i'm everything you envisioned
in that imagination of yours."

Black hair encircles her torso,
halfcovers her breasts.

The cat listens to us,
he hears it too.

The moonlight looks through the glass.
She rests her head on the pillow that
i've known for 10 years,

that i've always thought was too rough.
She's now discovering this.
Sometimes it's better to not have expectations,
it's easier to say that you did, though,
and that they have been met,
Or exceeded.
It's rain.
My stomach fills with warmth.
We're surrounded by windows.
I listen to the sound of her breath.
She breathes like rain.

WHEN WE'RE SEEKING IN STRAWBERRY FIELDS

KATIE HOLLISTER

When the heart is full with mulling
over a messy memory
 dripping
sun beams through and through
of a toddler waddling in strawberry fields
with a swollen mouth leaking,
 dripping
that love-blooded red and surrounded
by a sticky pink beard up to
her cherub cheeks carved out of marble.
Planted. Enclosed in vines.
Idle as a half-pint Dionysus,
dirt scraped marshmallow logs for legs jut out,
sprawling on the ruddy mud trail among juicy rubies.
All alone, an explorer in a farmed, dusty jungle.
She plunges her teeth into her one hundred and fifth tart red.
Then comes the sweet melting mushiness to gulp
 dripping
down and then slight stinging tingling
framing her inflamed mouth,
that drooping,
red gushing, confused,
but just so contented, pouting mouth.
And the sun only smiles and shakes its head
and unloads another kind armful of light onto her,
That dripping
 dripping
 dripping of sun beams through and through.

FREE STREAM OF CONCIOUSNESS

CODY KNOBLOCK

I saw an Elephant today,
might've been invisible,
might've been indivisible,
(the job title of zero)
It reminded me of the surface velocity
(of course)
close to a
semi-infinite infinitesimally thin flat plate
(what a mouthful of pine cones)
Anyways
the moment you've all been
not-so-patiently
waiting for,
gentleLadies and fair-Men,
Introducing –
the boundary layer!
...
Oh wait,
class is over?
Well, I guess the Elephant
has left the room.

PROCEDURE

CODY KNOBLOCK

Justice crawls down shady city streets,
cobblestone bumping knees bumping pride,
>insert metaphor for the common man – named Wanda,
kick me down and stomp my
Will to outshine
seven thousand million
billion striving Souls, - what do they starve for???
fuck you World,
Who do you think built you?
debate the World's architect,
^capitalization dictates importance – checkmate god,
bullets over words over reason,
Streets paved merlot crimson; why doth one
pay millions campaigning
just to lose; it's ok
People don't need to Eat.
damn World,
Who tarnished the Golden Rule?
>Gold doesn't tarnish – morality does.
America lost its wallet,
surmises it vacations with
Terracotta's unearthed
final barrow,
too proud to ring,
shake off woven
kevlar boots of Martian

red dust, high in iron
>low on Water – low on wells,
not Home yet.
Homeless hand in hand jobless,
>wrote Home twice – two more than some,
Come on World,
Why haven't you visited your Sibling?

RESULTS

CODY KNOBLOCK

O days soon to pass, why
surf the calendar so fast?
every Sunday evening nervously tugging
perforated edges of mothers'
sunflower embroidered skirt
before her first day of school.
Propel yourself wallward, any wall'll do,
cascading bricks crater a
squash and eggplant bruise.
(metaphor for learning)
neosporin be pourin'
on knees;
(personify modern health)
bees knees or peoples needs so
march forth dawn's ladder, gifts
given fruitfully forthright of Hermes;
god Ares's
brother; whose name was once
ceremoniously chanted
across roman galleys as
Mars – Apollo
11 reenactments since landing within
Hellas Basin's meniscus.
Valentine's day hallmark card commissions up
forty-five percent last jargon quarter,
specifically Squid caricatures

awash murals dancing in twostep:
love's dance of Texas – ten gallon suckers.
Tis not four seasons of Teuthida ordered love,
speech bubbled eight tentacles singing for ladies
“cuz they deserve to be sung to.”

SOMETIMES I GET SOCIAL ANXIETY

KATHLEEN MATZ

The would like to be excused,
though calmly she resigns
to sit, filling her lungs with the gentlemen's
sour tobacco
lips pursed as palms
folded
touching in urgent prayer
begging not to be kissed

bathed
in baptismal light
as saints whose feet are ever clean
and aglow against her clearest hopes
as hoping to recede
to the solemn shadows
cast, turned against the faces
that chew on stale conversation

a cloistered scene
on which her absent gazing falls
marbled eyes on nothing fixed
but night
whose figure's company she keeps

and away she sinks
to dream of silent friends
on silent longing tends
wanting only to go home

A MANIFESTO ON GROWING UP

THOMAS NGUYEN

I think it was the summer
Dad moved out to be closer to his work
or something, or someone,
or maybe it was the winter after
you found out
and stopped talking to us.

I think it was the year I turned
seven unannounced as
sandbox-sand slipped away from
between my fingertips, and comic books
lost their heroes.
I never knew where all of it went.

Nostalgia has a funny way
of forgetting the grey memories
that collected like stones in our worn soles.
We used to shake our feet like maracas,
and it was music nevertheless.

That day we left for the neighborhood pool
and practiced holding our breath
underwater. The iridescent blue
was like a fine gloss veil that guarded our eyes
and the salt-stained tears beneath them.

I don't know if I ever came back home.

The land was too barren then,
and it was easy to burn bridges
and lifelines without thinking
back on how often they were crossed.
But redemption keeps strict demarcations on time.
It remembers the past,
even for the prodigal son who eventually
returns a cultural amnesiac.

Now, amidst the ashes,
you are the enduring armor rooted in tradition
and second chances,
a vestige of resilient Vietnamese heritage
upholding our gia đình, or family,
composed of all the strength in your
single-mom prowess.

And I am forever
lost in the translations and subtitles
that have taught me
it is too late to remember, to mend,
and that I will only ever be fluent in
apologies.

RECITATIONS: CONFESSIONS OF A STUTTERER

THOMAS NGUYEN

"How are you today?"

My refinery of words begins the trek upwards in response
and searches for the exit.

Maybe this time will be different.
I see the conversation flowing,

soaring and swooshing over coarse air
as it dips its wings.

But as the words climb, they pull on my jaw
and tug on my teeth.

I feel them strain at the roof
and lodge.

Try a substitute, a synonym,
and rinse and repeat.

Yet I stop practicing for a moment, and think about
swallowing them once and for all.

This tethered tongue of shackled speech,
I now see my words lying there in embarrassment.

Words like w-w-wait and s-s-sorry,
misfired ammunition

chipped and thinned into sandpaper slurs
funneling out empty noise.

But before I can decide, I feel a mechanical smile
scaling foreign contours almost systematically,

and the gears grind back into place
to decide for me.

Blood swells anxiously from bitten lips,
and I try to hide that too.

"Fine, thank you."

10.18.15

CAROLINE ROCK

In this blackness we sit,
white sheets cast about
like eggshells -
they are cracked
with us.

You whisper to me,
"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."
I can't hear you.
You pull at my shirt,
call my name.
I can't hear you.

I shiver.

Salinger said
"She can turn her back on you
when she feels like it."
And
so can I.

Underneath the eggshells
you have discovered my true form,
and it reeks of ambition.

It waits,
pink, muscular,
with talons.
It is a selfish, ugly creature you have found
under my skin.
And you have turned me soft.

I sit on this bed
in the dark, sticky air
and tell you to stop talking, please.

Is this what humans do to themselves.

You have been crying, hours,
and I am not mad at you
but you try to hold on to me, and say
"Forgive me, please."
I cannot feel you.

We sit under the hallway
lights,
bright as hospital rooms,
and you cry
while I talk you out of yourself.
But I'm not mad,
I'm not mad.

YOUR CRYSTALLINE GAZE

ANNA ROENIGK

It has to be something dramatic because it can't quite be

"I saw you across the produce section, you were handling some strawberries"

So maybe instead it could be something like: "To the cashier in the convenience store, you

weirded me out at first with your Mona Lisa Creeper Stare, entwining your emerald branches

between my fingers, but then I became absolutely enthralled by your chiaroscuro figure, the

light illuminating your crystalline gaze, blurring the shadowed intentions of your composition.."

Really?

Okay then how about this— "To the girl who doesn't like mushrooms, but olives are okay,

anyways, I know you are deliberately flashing your pearly whites to check to see if my

pupils are dilating, and the fact that your teeth are unusually straight, probably like you, causes

the instinctual formation of cataracts on my amber optical organs, and so I just look down at

the lettuce and ask if you want oil and vinegar.."

No! Be more ambiguous.

The connections missed are supposed to lie in the romantic archives of Chopin etudes,

the vibration of unrequited notes revealed in lyrical emulation through ivory keys,

so then maybe..

"To the ivory pale girl that plays with distortion and a dead glare, you cough up a lung on stage

screaming I CAN'T SEE ME LOVING NOBODY BUT YOU and I want you to love nobody but me

because the alabaster rubble from your throat makes me so dizzy and wishy washy

wishing that I'll pass out and wake up to your guitar across my throat and you over me..."

The Internet is treachery.

I found a missed connection for a lady with a walker that frequents my work. She wasn't much

interested in the news of her cyber love. I guess at 52 you don't worry about wishing you were

the moon or feeling like an empty lagoon while walking home through a dimly lit cityscape.

A bird flew into a wall, made me jump, and I heard a voice say, "You know doves are actually

really stupid? They can never figure out how to work the feeder like the starlings."

ON TELEVANGELISTS AS CONDUITS

CHRIS TOUMA

It only costs a hundred dollars to renew your faith

Subscribe

In HIS name, son!

Push away your heretical hula hooping ideals

Pushaway! Hoola-say! Lupus Jesus!

Sell your mother's collection of seashells

Sell your brother's Air Jordans

Can't you see the sheep approaching the cliffside

Like harlots with their faces smashed in?

By the grace of God! Become a shepherd

Baa! Baa!

Pay for their cosmetic surgery

Payakasma serge! Paya kasma!

Grow your beard out like Guevara

Pass the alms basket over a caldron of Kool-Aid

Post Russia's oil reserves on eBay

Post Allah! Rushabae!

Put a price tag on hegemony in the Middle East

The Scripture demands it!

Donate the surplus to the Shepherd's Union Party

Donnah! Primadonnahs!

Donate to both campaigns and whisper

Profound words, HIS words

Across the aisles

About the Faith PAC

For our Lord!

Who are the bandits? The coppers? The penny

Polices like a bullet

Powpa-Pow! Kleenk!

Be bullet proof

Canta bye imortalla-Canta!

Praise the Lord! Kevlar covered creator!

Sell the minerals and the coal men and their pickaxes

Sellamaal! Salaam!

Say goodbye to your toil

Shackle fathers to sons and drag their spirits away to the market

Sell dust, have it returned, sprinkle it over some paper

And make it required reading

Dustoodust! Dustoo—when it's all over,

Remember:

It only costs a hundred dollars to unsubscribe from the channel.

LOOKING PAST A BALCONY
AT SNOW KING'S RESORT IN
JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING

ZOYA ZIA

—(after James Wright)

Over my head, I see
misty clouds hovering in fear
of death, like heroes
hanging in a cotton
candy sky with a determination I once

had—down the stairs
by the riverbed, gondolas follow
one another, traversing
through August greenery, awaiting

the snow they once had.
To my right, among cascading
mountainsides, sunlight mingles
with nightfall, illuminating
a spectacle of gold—I lean

forward and watch
stars settle, I look forward and yearn
for tomorrow's light, where insects
chitter chatter and bison
pitter patter—lives are whole in Jackson

Hole, but in my head, I see
dark clouds hiding in fear
of life, like cowards observing
the smiling strangers who walk

below and live in gladness.
I have wasted my sadness.

FALLING GRACES

ZOYA ZIA

—*Inspired by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha*

Sunny afternoons spring
flowers until
random drone strikes

uproot. Sinking slates
of blood. Smoke
columns. Bazaars

become a rubble of glass
bangles and hand-woven
fabrics, sea green but now

blood red. A child
planting a white
jasmine watches

blackening soot soar
through Waziristan, past
alleys where he played

cricket with a father who gave
seeds to plant
around the village, so all

could smell Pakistani
jasmine. Schools shattered
to fragments of piling

concrete, rocks mask
flowers. Count
lifeless petals, await

a falling grace.

AUTHOR BIOS

KELSEY BOYLAN is a San Francisco native who does a lot of things and is somewhat good at some of them. As an advertising major, she spends a lot of time jotting taglines on napkins. She also plays the guitar. It is not one of the things she's good at (but she enjoys it anyway).

KATIE BROWN is a fourth generation Austinite. In 2015, she was lucky enough to receive the Cynthia Leitich Smith Writing Mentor Award from SCBWI's Austin chapter. She desperately wants to travel abroad and see the places she writes about.

RAVEN CORTRIGHT is a second-year student at UT Austin. She is a competitive rock climber and when not busy studying she can usually be found running, lifting weights, or climbing. As a vegan, she loves all animals and owns two rescues: a Siberian husky, Carlos, and a boa constrictor, Lord Voldemort

DELIA DAVIS is a sophomore studying English and Film. She's prone to frequent existential crises that are occasionally remedied by spitting words onto paper. She's been trying to cultivate a basil garden but the plants keep growing too tall without any leaves.

DAVID EDWARDS is a graduating senior at the University of Texas at Austin where he studies English and History and is currently writing an honors thesis on Virginia Woolf. He is pursuing a doctorate in English and spends his free time running, reading, and fighting his new puppy over potty training.

MICHAEL ESPARZA is currently in his last semester at UT Austin, studying English and Creative Writing. He is writing theses in both fields, for reasons he's not quite so sure of himself. He hopes words will take him somewhere eventually.

JOHN FLYNN is senior double-majoring in English and History. After undergrad he hopes to pursue a career in writing, specifically in conflict journalism. He is also a member of the Texas 4000 for Cancer 2016 team.

MAX FRIEDMAN, of the great midwestern plains, is a Junior at UT. He studies English, works for the Texas Travesty, and drinks coffee. He thought there would be more to college than this. Dumb Max.

VANESSA GONZALEZ is a junior from Palmview, Texas. She's been writing short stories since she was 9 years old. Someone once told her to write what she knew, so she did. She dedicates her piece in this publication to her late grandfather, Celso Cardoza.

KATIE HOLLISTER is a senior English major. She loves to write about personal experiences, human relationships of all kinds, and cultural issues.

CODY KNOBLOCK is a third year aerospace engineering student at the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently also enrolled in the creative writing certificate program. He is from San Antonio, TX where he spends his days playing with his dogs, writing poetry about his dogs, and avoiding his engineering homework behind a wall of dogs.

KATY MATZ grew up in Harlingen, Texas and is currently in her fourth year studying English and Linguistics. She likes reading, napping, and hanging out with her roommate's dog.

THOMAS NGUYEN is a third-year student studying Neuroscience and Creative Writing, and is always looking for ways to combine the two. He maybe likes confessional poetry a little too much. He also cares too much about everyone and everything, but lately he's been seeing that as more of a good thing than a bad one.

ANNA ROENIGK is a Senior majoring in Music and minoring in Creative Writing at The University of Texas. When not being a devoted student, she is probably sleeping facedown on the couch or playing music in some bar around town. She has trouble picking her favourite color and writing in third person. She spells favourite with a U because her mother is British, so she can.

CAROLINE ROCK is a first year English and Japanese double major and Liberal Arts Honors student. In her free time she can be spotted trekking across campus with her camera, bombarding her friends with fun facts about Japanese, or obsessively updating her Google Calendar.

CHRIS TOUMA is a writer from Houston, Texas. He believes that man is not an island and gets his inspiration from extraterrestrials.

MOLLY WOLCHANSKY is currently working on her bachelor's degree in English, and she is in the creative writing program in pursuit of her certificate. At eighteen years old, her first book, *The Cactus and the Balloon*, was published. After that achievement, she won various playwriting competitions, and her plays were produced at multiple theaters around Dallas. She is also an animal enthusiast; she has two cats and a german shepherd puppy. This is her first short story publication.

ZOYA ZIA is an International Relations & Global Studies major who enjoys discussing foreign policy and social justice. Beyond her career aspirations to emphasize global human rights, she finds value in the diversity of cultures, especially their literature. She believes that writing is universal, poetry is universal, and finding ways to express aspects of the human condition is key to cooperation and collective peace.