

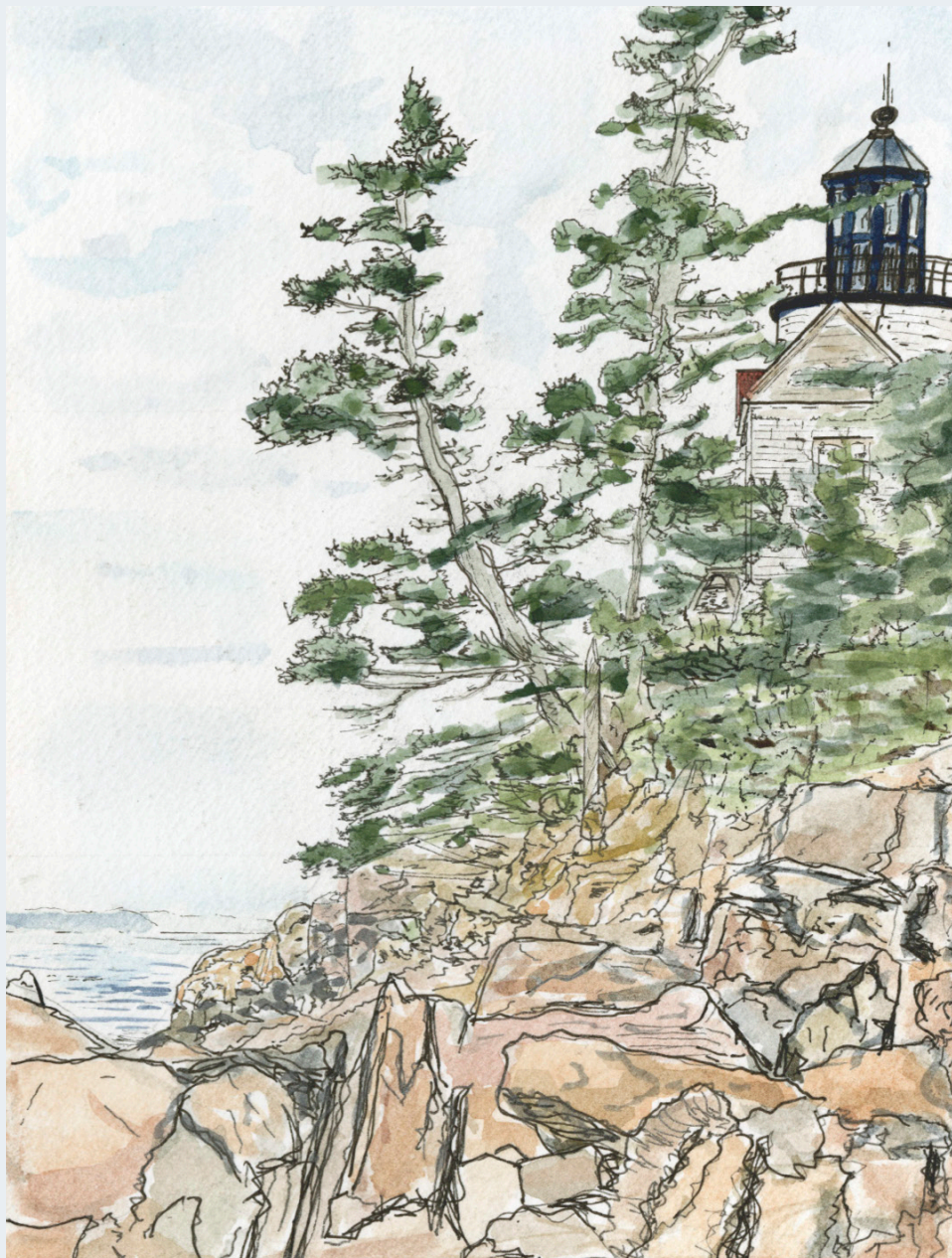
THE OZ

SPRING 2025

Prose

Poetry

Visual Art



O V E R G R O W N



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generous funding and support.*

Editors' Notes

“Overgrown” is a fitting theme for a magazine that can’t stop growing. The works found here are flowers, and this issue, a garden. Every flower that blooms discovers new hues, growing new angles atop our perspectives. Each piece will be read differently. Some should be read out loud. Some demand non-linear arranging. But all ought to be felt—perhaps this is what literature is, a requirement to feel. Literature that is felt blooms anew. The stories, poems, and artwork in the issue will find their petals beneath your eyes, resplendent with colors you never thought you could see. It is our hope, as editors, that the literature we publish in this magazine will bloom forever.

The magazine would not be possible without each of our contributors, and everyone on our masthead, who put forward their valuable time, effort, ideas, and energy. We especially want to thank our graduating seniors, who we will miss dearly. To Liz, Melia, and Sam, all your work these past years on the magazine has made *The Oz* what it is. As the gardens of your lives overgrow, we hope that you can look upon them with the new colors that escape these pages.

- Eran, Hanna Lou, and Joseph



It feels weird to say goodbye to something that has changed you. This is my last semester as editor of *The Oz*, and I will never be its editor again, yet here I am full of its memories and words and colors. To all the amazing staff, to every brilliant writer and artist, to Eran and Hanna Lou whose work and friendship has surrounded me at every step: my perspectives are forever overgrown with you.

- Joseph



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* *Indictaes that the work is visual art*

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Beyond the Infinite

Jane Brinkley

Tinted fragments

fracture the edge of a voidless lake.

Contained in an abundance

of naked sugar pine,

[produced] sap thicker than the sweat of honey.

Above the wooden pillars

winged creatures cloaked

In soot black iridescent,

coats over the angelic sirens above

shifting and shrouding

Over two beings

bodying within an ancient spire

With ill fated omen

messaged below for Spirit and Hollow

Timeless walkers

amongst a finite world.

One daylight

Spirit and Hollow's essences

intertwin with one another.

Their hands shaped like a rebirthing root

as Spirits' pours dissolve

amongst the smoothing ashes,

Hollows' crumbles apart

in the mossy liquid.

Their hazy vision gazes

towards each other

for the very first time

as their eyes smiled

Crossroads

Fiona Connor

I am the Crossroads.

I am the Good American Highway,
Though I used to be nothing more than compacted dirt.

I have met the charming Devil,
Met all the lovely new-world American Saints.
I admit that to my crossed and holy
Flaking worn down brown body,
To a Road,
The clopping of cloven hooves
And the bleeding bare feet of martyrs
Do feel much the same.
They both Burn though blood burns worse than fire,
And the Devil thoughtfully douses his hoofprints in wine.

Aching with longing I lie now buried alive and pondering
Under gas stops and rest stops renamed Interchange renamed
Junction.

Screaming does not travel through concrete caskets and
I can no longer remember my last taste of whiskey, of wine.

I miss even the acid of saint's blood I am watered now only by
Only by the acid of Rain.

Sweet dark Country of Death, Nation of the Mass Grave,
I am your oldest oracle and I invoke
All that I am Haunted by.
I invoke the faintly obscene tinge of a familiar drawn out fiddle,
Imbued into the hemorrhaging wind.
I invoke the ghost car phantoms of past finding-their-way

wayfarers

In the dead of the American Night.

I invoke the midnight deadnight crows that perch adoringly upon
poor

Hangman's shoulder and peck and pick at his necklace of rope
until they've set the
Hanged man dead man tumbling free.

See them settle now,

Ancient and mournful and stygian.

The sympathetic carrion birds are come to keep murky vigil over
Me now, ruler of wrecks and interstate violence and the promise
of more:

Travelers seek the Freedom of the Open Road they have sunk
under asphalt and chained,

As is the American Way and

I take tens of thousands every year.

They settle twitching inky feathers and they roost

On the naked twitching wires that line my ribless sides.

I like to imagine that's what my heart would feel like if I had
one.

But even as I think it I am reminded I am Crossroads,

I am only circulatory system

With throbbing Appetite.

Can nerves be Fury?

They settle,

Settle wheeling croaking stuttering anxiously

On signs leading to exit ramps leading to roundabouts leading to
nowheres.

I cannot see for I have no eyes.

I cannot see but I count thirteen and mouthless I smile.

Deep in the hellish humidity of Georgia there's a stinking
outhouse

Where my head used to be.

A man with a shine and a suit and tie rides a jackhammer,
And swings a slim-necked bottle of red that is dashed like hope
When he hits the oozing septic tank and gives me up as a bad
job.

It is hard to learn how to live in shit.

It is hard to feel abandoned Roadside saints scratching at their
gnarled track marks

And know they have martyred themselves for a God and a Good
Feeling,

For an unforgiving Holiness that averted its eyes and turned
away

Such a very awful long time ago.

I miss whiskey and I miss wine,

Blood is God's drink though I can't say I've had the pleasure.

Oil slicks are a poor substitute for vitality.

They settle.

They are retribution.

They have come.

Drinking Song

Averylin Cummins

You were born on a catamaran with open eyes a deep
foam-crested shh ssh
 shh ssh shh.

You didn't cry.
Just beat your little heart
until it was bloody knuckled,
until your little wings lifted you,
liff
ifff fff
fff fff
into the wind.

And your name was the sound of the snapping sail,
the taste of salt and spray, a whirlpool
sss ss sucking
on your little thumb.

I remember your mother mumbling,
singing you a summer storm
as she held you to her chest.

Small as a bead of sweat
and ready
to swallow the sound whole.



One day the ocean will
swallow my home but
for now it looks really
pretty

Tobias Lodish

what once grew there

Liz Darahdgian

there in the clearing, we laid to rest
arms sprawled about us
 (leaves/grass) crushed beneath
 (trees/bodies) lying in the dust
 (branches/arms) outstretched in the expanse
and all around us scattered the seed of the fruit
i felt myself dissolve out of me
the oaken tree, is this how she felt when she was felled?

i buried a piece of my heart in your memory
the worms, do they recall my touch?
there in the garden, i pressed my hands into the dirt
 in memory of you
 in letters to you
 in prayers for you
and then, all around me, there you were
the apple of my eye and the star of my
heart.

lessons in gardening, or love

Ameya Ilangovan-Arya

that night you came to my dorm, you planted a seed.
it grew rapidly, flourishing in the California sunlight, and
blossomed bright
surrounded by abundant rosebushes
with soft moss under my bare feet,
land verdant and fertile, fruit ripe for the taking,
fragile closed buds opening for the very first time,
flowers turning up their faces,
their soft petals ready to be plucked
your words sweet as honeysuckle
until the pollen choked my lungs.

i couldn't breathe.
sickly sweet cloying aromas permeated the air.
vines tangled around me, trapping me there.
the delicate flowers had long since withered.
your roses had more thorns than i could have imagined.
the pinpricks of blood were a brighter red than any petal.
i stumbled away and tripped and fell.
sharp stones hidden among the thick moss broke skin.
it was painful for me to walk
but I did.

when morning came, dewdrops formed on the light green leaves
your tears fell freely,
as did mine,
but I closed the garden gate firmly behind me.

I walked away,
fell to the ground,
gazed up at the waxing moon.

far away, in a new garden, with someone infinitely kinder,
I planted a new seed.

the minutes after

kālán

there is a silence that follows
when the clock stops ticking
I've lived in this waiting,
collecting dust in the corners of what could have been

some distances cannot be measured
in miles or memories
like how far certain names have traveled
from My lips to this hollow space
between My ribs

I stayed until the walls could recite
every unspoken truth,
until the bed remembered shapes
that were never really there,
until the mirrors stopped
trying to find Me

what remains when absence
becomes familiar? when waiting
becomes the only language you speak?

time does not heal; it accumulates
layer upon layer of almost-leaving,
almost-beginning again
the calendar pages turn into
birds that never fly away

mornings taste different now,
bitter with the recognition
that I had gone long before
My body followed

there's a particular shade of blue
that only exists in the hour
when you finally understand
how long you've been disappearing

I carry nothing from before
not the promises. not the plans
not even the voice that once
made a home in My dreams

the rooms we build inside ourselves
filled to the brim with maybes,
with somedays, with if-onlys,
until there's no space left to breathe

it's strange how emptiness can weigh so much,
how letting go can feel like
the heaviest thing I've ever held
how freedom can feel like falling
until you remember wings were always yours

the world looks different from here,
all colors sharper, all sounds clearer,
as if I've emerged from underwater
after holding My breath for too long

yet in this unnamed space,
I am becoming
what silence sounds like
when it finally speaks
what hands look like
when they stop reaching
for what was never theirs to hold

the clocks have resumed their ticking
in a language I no longer translate
as promise or regret

I am learning to inhabit
this unnamed hour
where I am neither waiting
nor arrived

what is kept

Jule Kilgore-Reed

One day, maybe long ago, dad put you down and never picked you up again. If you are lucky you will never fit in his weak arms again. Once strong and protective, now fragile and decrepit. If the tricky nature of time and its passage were different, by some impossibility, what would become of me? Reminiscing childhood turns inside out the pocket of a worn pair of pants. You discover items left behind, forgotten. A gum wrapper, a tube of lip gloss, a receipt — a collection of stuck habits too enduring to throw away. Maybe you would need them later, maybe you are scared to let go. Dirty laundry unfolds a memory book, prompts reflection of the past. The taste of gum is just a memory, your lips have since dried out, you don't remember what the receipt was for. The words have become illegible on a thin piece of almost-paper. Riddles of the past now forgotten. What will become of them? Fiddle with the wrapper, smear the gloss across your lips, you should throw out the receipt. You can't return what you can't remember. It is forever yours to keep.

keep near what you know,
the goal being to remain —
change comes anyway.



AGC steps Facing North-west

Tobias Lodish

Nightfly

Joaquin Martinez

click

Hey!

Hello, doctor! How are you this morning?

Hey, what did we say about “doctor”? It’s just Lest. (Sorry.) No problem. I’m good, Jan Paul. How are you doing?

Oh, you know, busy as usual. I’m a little stretched between schoolwork and social stuff, but I’m...managing.

Okay. So, anything new from last week?

Yeah, actually...last night, I was out at this cookout for the new college president. When I got there, though, there was a massive line that ran through the footpath leading to the back of the house for the food. I didn’t recognize anyone there except for the DJ. I felt anxious in my body, but I eventually sat down with some people I vaguely knew from freshman year. I just wanted to wait for a little while, but the feeling wasn’t going away.

Where was this sensation?

In my chest, like the space between the walls of my ribs is closing in. I’ll feel my heart start to race and get a sense that I immediately want to leave. This time, I forced myself to stay, though something was off in my body’s telemetry.

So I waited, before I saw some of my friends walking in. Now, this particular group, I’ve only been hanging out with them more recently, over the last couple of weeks, right? I usually feel pretty comfortable with them. My roommate was there too. So I joined them for a little bit, but the tables were kind of small and

so, still feeling antsy, I headed over to the DJ. He didn't have any plates around him even though he'd been there for an hour. Feeling hungry myself, I offered to get us some free tacos.

That line wasn't getting shorter though. I stood there for an hour. I had enough time to listen to a whole album in that line, which took me through a whole...other emotional rollercoaster. I even...um...

You don't have to share if you don't want to.

No, it's no problem. I had some edibles that I bought earlier this month with a gift card. I took one while I was in the line 'cause I thought it would make the wait go faster. It didn't hit until I was at the end anyway. (*How much?*) 15 milligrams. So that might influence the story a little bit.

JP, when we use substances to try and manage emotions, that creates a habit in us to avoid whatever we're feeling. It can create a dangerous dependency if we rely on weed, or anything else, rather than acknowledging and learning to sit with the feeling. ...I'm sorry, I don't want to sound like I'm scolding you. And you mentioned that you were waiting for your friends, but it sounds like you really didn't end up spending a lot of time with them at the event.

When I finally got there, the whole damn event was over and it was getting cold and dark. I couldn't shake this vise in my chest, like I ate something really bad.

The thing was, right, that I had no idea where my friends went so I checked my phone. No texts, no nothing. That rubbed me the wrong way, bad. I thought to text and asked my roommate, so I did, and he said that everyone went back to my dorm to practice our presentations for next week.

So I went, and I ended up not even staying for that long, being baked at the time, or even getting the chance to practice.

Anyway, when I got back, I still had to shower and

all that, but the feeling was still there. In high school, back in Switzerland, my closest friends planned a whole hiking trip for graduation, which I never would've even heard about if I hadn't accidentally glanced at their group chat. Eventually, I learned it was just because they didn't have the impression that I would be available to join them anyway, but maybe I forgot. But still...the memories linger, like overgrown moss.

I felt that I needed to...elucidate how I felt to my roommate, because at some point the pressure...brought me to tears and I thought that sharing my thoughts would be the only way to relieve it. When he walked back into the room, I mustered the words, trying to put aside my feelings for the moment.

I said to him, "I'm sorry, but I felt left behind when you guys left the cookout earlier." My voice cracked through the words.

He turned around, an honest, concerned look in his eyes. I can't even remember what he said through the haze of memory, but he apologized. I...scrambled out of the room. I was up until 5 am in the dorm common room trying to figure something out. I don't think I got anything done.

After I woke up, maybe around 10 or so, I realized that I put a lot of baggage on my roommate by putting all the responsibility on him, when I knew that it was just the way I was feeling. Maybe the weed had a say in it, too. I didn't want him to feel like that at all, because I know that's how I would feel if a friend had come up to me and said that.

Did that feel satisfying, telling your roommate how you felt?

No, because he really is a good guy and I felt like I did him wrong to confront him in that way. It's always this push and pull game of "oh, I want to be closer to you, but I don't want to, you know, dump everything onto him." A lot of people have made the point that we should be responsible for what we put

on our friends, as much as they have their own problems and are going through their own stuff.

So, you say a lot of other people are saying this. Do you agree with this?

Uh, yeah, I guess? I don't know. I think that there's a lot of truth in that, and I always try to gauge my friends' reactions when I have a lot on my mind. I don't like sharing my problems to that level, because sometimes it feels like I'm saying the same stuff over and over without actually trying to find a solution to my problem. I also often feel uncomfortable taking on those kinds of emotional burdens for other people, so I try not to dump my business on others.

JP, this sounds like a lot of work. If you constantly assume that you need to protect others from yourself, then you'll never be able to feel comfortable, let alone make yourself vulnerable to them. Plus, trying to predict what others are thinking, or how they might think when you share a certain feeling or reaction takes up a lot of energy. What do you think?

I always thought that it was just a product of the stress, and that the way I've been reacting to people lately will go away with time. I can remember not feeling this way when I was much younger, back in middle school. I'm sure that once I get out of this place I'll feel that same way again someday.

Sure, but I want you to consider that for the time being, you should try to notice whenever your thoughts go in that direction. But based off all this reflection, what would you have wanted to do differently in this interaction with your roommate?

I think I would've said the same thing, that it didn't feel right at least to me, but I wouldn't have just dropped a bomb and run away. I knew...I didn't want the chance to talk about it

further because I didn't want the floodgates to open. I've had so many relationships where a dark cloud overhead makes it difficult to maintain a connection with another person. You know, I tell myself that there's a lot of people in the world, and that I have time, but I think I've just used that as an excuse to let my friendships go to shit. And I don't want that.

So, I guess what I would have said to my roommate then, is that your friendship meant a lot to me, maybe more than I could have expressed in words at the time. But, even when it's hard to start a normal conversation, or when we are busy with our own things, I always felt comfortable in your presence, like the fireplace in a childhood home. The more time I spend with you, the more I realize that it is within my reach to do better for myself and for those around me. I could never express this with the appropriate gravity, but I admire you in a lot of ways, and I feel that, even in the smallest of those ways, you can thaw my heart of ice. I was a beggar and a bother, but I hope I compensated you with some of my own company and an honest, listening ear.

I wish you the best with everything, whether we cross paths again or not. I'm glad to have been your friend, now and always.

With love,
Jan Paul

Ruth

Jojo McCabe

1. Ruth was carefree, easy,
Like foods that you eat by the handfuls
Raspberries in the sunshine
Sticky sweet summertime stuck between my teeth
The tip of my tongue tingling
Talk of home and homesickness
of sickness and homeopathy
2. Ruth's mom had a bathroom cabinet full of snake venoms & essential oils, and a new boyfriend every 4 months. Ruth was sure these things were related. Her mom worked at an apothecary in Reno, something that humiliated her pre-med daughter.
3. Ruth would tell me about her mom every time we would walk home drunk from parties freshman year of college. She was really her stepmom, but Ruth always referred to her as 'mom' or 'mama.' She told me about when she would stay home sick from middle school every flu season. She would lay feverish, inanimate, staring vacantly at Celebrity Jeopardy, her sweaty fingers interlaced with her mom's. She told me that after chicken soup lunch, her mom would tap eucalyptus oil on Ruth's wrists and neck, rub her temples, and hum, softly,
Always the Beatles,
Usually Blackbird.
4. I think of Ruth's mom when I lie awake on Sunday nights. Sleepless, petting her daughter's hair. If I've had a good week, I think of how she might smell. How her lavender hand cream would linger in the air sweetly after she left a room. If I've had a bad week, I imagine how my mom would think of Ruth's mom if they met. I think of the sidelong glances my mom would toss to her tennis friends, the backhanded comments about her

aquamarine jewelry.

5. I would only tell Ruth about my mom when we made breakfast together Monday mornings. How she would make crepes for me and my friends mornings after sleepovers. How she gave me her dad's eyes and her mom's name, and her own kind of undisciplined resilience. I told Ruth I don't understand my mom at all, but I don't think I believe that.

6. I begin to understand my mom when I start to micromanage a friend making pancakes, or when I do something I thought was impossible.

7. Ruth's mom was raised in Silver Springs, Nevada to loving parents who both taught science at a local high school. She met Ruth's dad in her last year of college. He worked as her boss at the flower shop where she had a part-time job. He eventually went into landscaping, she got pregnant, and he left his wife for her. Ruth had a brother she didn't like to talk about.

8. Ruth's mom, after dropping Ruth and her brother off at school everyday, would go to her plot at the community garden, and tend to her plants, smoke a joint, pick up groceries, tidy the house, pick up the kids, make dinner, and have a glass of wine with Ruth's dad to talk about their respective days. That's what she loved the most about him, they never ran out of things to talk about.

9. Ruth's dad died of pancreatic cancer on February 28th her senior year of high school. They knew it was coming, but no one really thought it would happen. After that Ruth's mom began gifting Ruth opaque bottles containing the 'essence of' something's for Christmas and sending Ruth birthday care packages in college complete with red onion for her hay fever and I swear to god one time she sent crushed bees.

10. After identifying her brother at the morgue my mom, at seventeen, went straight to her job at the 'Emotional Outlet' on Seventh Avenue where she worked on the floor, selling clothes.

11. My mom refused to go to therapy for the longest time and for years I didn't understand it.

12. Homeopathy is a medical system based on the belief that the body can cure itself. I know this because when I told my mom about Ruth's 'wellness packages' my mom sent me a New York Times article discrediting it.

13. When my sister was 13 my mom called the cops when she broke curfew.

14. Ruth's mom sat in the back row of Ruth's college graduation. She was a year ahead of me, same class as my sister. When her name was called, Ruth pinched the citrine pendant that lived on a string around her neck, brought it to her lips, quickly and softly delivered a kiss to the smooth stone, and moved swiftly across the stage to receive her diploma.

15. Sometimes the people we love love us in ways we don't understand.

16. Sometimes they heal us anyway.



The Overgrown Kitchen

Kiera Ashcraft

Pleasure Centers

Gianna Nguyen

When I was twenty I could finally see over the top of the kitchen counter and look into the sink where all the food had piled into the drain It looked disgusting It was mushy and beige Looked chewed up and spat out; Is this food for baby birds Where is Mama Bird Will She Answer For Her Crimes?; I felt the urge to reach into the drain but I feared the consequence; Flip the Switch!; The Gurgling was horrible There was a fork stuck in the drain its four prongs twirled around in the mush What a tall fork!

When I was twenty-one I could finally tell that the mush wasn't beige it was pink and orange and frankly it looked delicious so I dragged my tongue through it and realized that it tasted like plain oatmeal I've never liked oatmeal Until now I guess; You asked me Why'd You Do It?; I responded Do What?; Eating is as easy as breathing I like to pinch the thought of love handles into my stomach I want to be Substantial Why would I ever let myself disappear?

One day I will be twenty-two and maybe by then I'll know what it means to pour honey into the sink and swirl it around with my fingers The Concoction would be delightful probably; I'd have been ascetic up until then; I dream of twenty-two Two hands cupping the faucet leaks Plus two (my hands) sinking further into the slush Yum!

of my feet off the sand
to the cloudbars of Ede

I'd never come back again,
for I knew even then.

For I knew even then,
so I sang him

my

"Dream."

Granite rose, my staggered weep
the fittest flirts of ecstasy

My first-ever tastes
of a life that's laced
with what can't be explained;
That melody.

That melody I get to keep,

Above the trees,
out towards the hills
sat and laughed,
showed each other our Worlds.

And I see his inside me
each time I sleep;
A haunting mark
of Destiny.

I can't erase
what I never could place
my Lattice leaf
your ivy can't be tamed;
My goldest Green, and Eden weeps,
The greatest joy I'll ever meet.

you showed me,
me.

my forever,

"Dream."



Magdalene Selin-Williams

A Missive to God

Ama Serwaah Owusu-Agyemang

Dear God,

Love is not from getting to know someone. Love is from knowing someone. I am sitting on the cold terrazzo floor at 2:23 am, the last of my candlewick melting, my head flooded with thoughts, my eyes heavy with tiredness, my heart clenching with pain, my tongue tied down with hesitance. But God, I know with you my tongue does not need to be tied down. Here is where I am letting my tongue loose through my scribbling hand.

The smell of frying gari balls in the backyard of my classic Ghanaian compound home wafted through my windows summoning me for the annual *kente* cloth display all throughout Accra. On the seventh day of February 1976, I decided to leave my comforting abode in Madina for The Independence Square in Central Accra, taking my three-year-old daughter—a product of bodily violation—along with me.

The contrast of the scorching sun and the soft sounds of Ebo Taylor's *Will You Promise* only seemed to raise the vibration of the dozens of people around witnessing the exhibition. Gripping tightly onto my daughter's hand, I made a turn round the tall pillars and spotted the most beautiful *kente* I had ever laid my eyes on—the mellow combination of red, orange, blue and black captivating me. I took a step forward and ran my hands over the gleaming fabric. Taking notice of my intrigue, the *kente* weaver, who I would soon find out was Kwame, smiled warmly and said it was his best piece, which he named *Ama*. I was swept off my feet as that was my name.

Kwame most certainly knew how to interact with people—his

calm confidence and gleaming smile against his dark skin showing clearly his Ashanti roots. Sitting my daughter on my lap, I spent the entire day with Kwame as he was explaining the history behind *kente* weaving to me. The harmony and serenity this process involved as well as the intricacy of the fabrics produced drew me in more. Of course, Kwame did ask about me. I was a struggling potter in Madina trying to make it out of the country. I was real and raw with my experiences.

As night drew closer, Kwame and I felt a very good friendship beginning to form already. Osibisa's *Dance The Body Music* began to play and we took to the dance floor. I felt a genuine rush of joy all over me. God, I already knew that I truly enjoyed him being in my presence. Unfortunately, the night had to end all too soon. Hopping on several buses back to Madina around 10pm with my toddler sure was stressful but knowing we enjoyed ourselves that day brought me peace.

Back to the hustle and bustle of the Madina Market on the following Friday, I had my daughter, Afia, wrapped around my waist as I paced up and down the streets trying to make any sales I could. I barely made any. Having not eaten anything that day and the sun burning my dark skin, I was on the verge of giving up—giving up on all I had done to build my pottery business. I threw myself onto the wooden bench behind my products. “Ama!” a vaguely familiar voice called. Almost as if I was a machine, I automatically lifted my head. There he stood: Kwame. I yelped out of excitement and fell into his arms drawing attention and envious eyes from other market women.

I was genuinely surprised as to how Kwame found me but he did and that was all that mattered. I packed up my stuff and we headed home. I made sure Kwame was comfortable and made him pounded yam and stew. *That*, he claimed, was what he most enjoyed. He mentioned that he came to visit so he could help expand my business as well as his. I was greatly pleased. We

spent the rest of the night sharing experiences and laughing over a sandalwood candle.

The next day, Kwame took me and little Afia on a road trip finding new areas to spread the word of our work in Kumasi. Kwame took care of Afia like she was his own as I advertised my pottery. He suggested to me ways I could improve on my shapes and designs; a creative mind he sure did have. At sunset, we stopped at a small motel and continued to strategize ways to make more market. We finally ended up merging our businesses into one; we made *kente* cloth and pots for women in Accra and Kumasi.

Kwame, Afia and I ended up staying in Accra throughout the week and stayed in Kumasi over the weekends. We started to make so much progress, making up to one hundred and twenty sales a week.

All seemed to be going well until I noticed sixty percent of our profits had been going missing over the course of about 6 months. I take it, God, that you knew all along what was going on but I was oblivious to it. I confronted Kwame about it. He explained to me he had been using the money to purchase more string for his weaving. That did not convince me. I started to investigate. At midday, Kwame was never home for lunch. I followed him all throughout town one hot Wednesday and found he was squandering our profits at bars.

I was indeed heartbroken. Confronting Kwame in the middle of the streets, I admit, was a terrible idea. Kwame pleaded excessively for forgiveness. My trust had been broken and I felt there was no remedy. Kwame explained to me he had a drinking problem he was working on getting rid of. His heartfelt narration of his struggle only made me want to help him more.

In 1978, Kwame and I made it nationally. We were the number one producers in our field in the country. Despite having moved

to a good neighborhood in Accra, Kwame still wanted to make me—his best friend—and little Afia proud. He started travelling up north every week to get materials just for my pottery. I repaid him with extra care—more food, comfort and being his shoulder to cry on.

On a Saturday in late 1979, I felt an inkling to go see Kwame in his room. The house was calm with the only noise being the radio static from the radio in the kitchen and the whistling wind. As soon as I stepped in front of his door, Kwame opened the door almost as if he was summoned. Both startled, we laughed. “*I love you*”, was what spilled out of our lips simultaneously. Our love was born on a Saturday just as we were.

Kwame’s recent passing due to liver cirrhosis made me realize that I loved the man I married because I knew who he was. I knew his good and his bad, his strengths and weaknesses, his likes and dislikes. Love comes like a thief in the night; it steals your heart and gives it to another but unlike any other thief, it brings you something more wonderful in return—itself.

Your daughter,

Ama Serwaah.



Muddied
Frankie Vega

“the t”

Athya Lodhia Paramesh

you pronounce the “t” at the end of words and it’s
art
and it’s
not

so much the finality of the final
consonant
that makes me so
verklemt
it’s more the deliberation in your
intent
as if you
want

to make every word sound
right
and

you take the time to
sculpt
the sound

just
so, in order to give the letter so many people
forget

a
moment
in the
sunlight

i see now how the
wheat
fields being

swept
back and forth by the wind is more profound when you speak
about

their beauty with the reverence of a
post
impressionist
and the wonder of a little kid, as if you'd never seen the
sunset
before

you are my one
constant
living proof
that
love is
not
a
debt
we owe to each other but a
current
composing our every
element,
as
imminent
as
daylight
and
as
patient
as
a
ghost
awaiting the arrival of their
dearest

you remind me
that
all we are here to do is good
that

to endure the
hurt
is to live to see the
beauty

you
taught
me the sanctity of
that
inevitable
tomorrow

but
I don't want to
admit
how the way you say the “t” moves my stubborn
heart
because then i worry you will
stop
as if my observance will cause it
to
not
exist
anymore

so i will write it down
tonight
in this poem, and hope you never see
it

Sliced Fruit

Isa Ramos

I'm not sure yet if this comes with age
but I want the noise
the sudden thuds from somewhere in the house
the chasing one another with water guns through the kitchen
I want a big dining table
and mismatched plates
I want bare feet tracking in dirt
and chalk on the sidewalk
I want soapy water in the driveway
and fruit bearing trees
I want climbing onto the roof
and water fights
food fights
I want little fights
here and there
I want the sun to dry my sheets
burn my nose
I want laughter
muffled conversation
and sliced fruit
I want some things to change
and others to stay the same forever
I want a life that everyday feels less and less possible
I want leaf boats
and treehouses
and stick people
no stick in the mud
I want pavers leading up to the porch
and scratches on the floor
the sound of the tv on
but no one watching it
I want each room filled with something to remember

something to strive for
a reason to hold on
I want to say “not in the kitchen”
and “did you wash your hands”
I want all of it and none of it
I want everything I didn’t think I wanted
I want the scraped knees
and rosy cheeks
grass stains
and crumbs on the seats
I want me and whoever else it’s going to be
and everything after



Skye Borch

‘Eternal Mantra’ / ‘Үүрдийн тарни’ (Lyric Essay)

Ananda Ravdandash

Note: This piece has accompanying audio components. Find the three parts of the recording here.

Part One



Part Two



Part Three



“Үүрдийн тарни”
“Eternal Mantra”

I want to cry
and cry
until I am an empty

Well

off.

Filled with gasps of relief
bugs are slithering along my intestines
They are small

like me

It burns me from the inside
I am burning up
Expel a virus—a bug
from

my body

but the bug is

just me

Exterminator

Extinguish

(this) ((en))light(en) me

To be a lesbian is

endless, eternal, always burning

Cover me in the ashes of my own flames

Light it

Light it

Light it

Set me in

Cage me out

Hide the fumes of misery

you can smell

l
i
g
h
t
y
e
a
r
s
a
w
a
y

I’VE

BEEN

EXPLODING

a^d

no one ^oticed

my reflectio^

i^

a gu^k covered po^d

Still

E^dlessly

ig^ited

Put a glass over the firefly

Catch it

Catch it

Catch it

Until the blood under your fingernails

ble-----ed and dry

Dye it pink

let it bre-----athe

Angel of death– restless

Flesh colored breathlessness

Go on

Go on

Go on

Set me |aside| cool me down

Skin creeps under my belly

I am

Born

Born Born

I fear

I can never love

I get so close– it c r a w l s away

Unlovable ladybug

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------|-------------|
| | | hide |
| Until spotted | ready | |
| | | To be loved |
| censer trails of memory | | |
| Reborn as a callalily | | |

In my palms
 I hold you
 Holographic tenderness
 I run
 my fingers across horizontally
 but
 My chest is a pie
 Cut in |l|e|i|g|h|t|h|s|
 Pie I eye
 never take, only given
 like the body– I will
 take the blood as it collects– I will

Live through you
 Lie under water
 falls, caves
 through my vanishing
 Being

Let me drown as
 I
 Float with my voice as
 it

trembles once more
 Listen closely as
 I

fizzle into stillness
 Salty lips, please

paint them coral
and pinch my cheeks
So you know

it is real

Remember my scent
trails of juniper

death reincarnation

it was real

I hope

I am etched

like a never ending itch

on time

telling hands

to hold

onto rocks

and fle-----eting

prayers

replay it when

it is real

And I am gone

Find me somewhere

Anywhere

you will never go

go

go

go

go

GO

GO

go

go

go

go



Overgrown

Estel Garrido-Spencer

A Dance in the Rain

Alex Romanov

Rounds splash against the floor
It's everything after you
The sound of the trees
Water dripping from the tips of their leaves
Only when the world stops

Can you breathe a little

I think he lost his mind
The way he dances in the rain
Pitter patter, so close to his skin

A round snaps the wind
A bullet lodged in the head
His blood drips
A water drop
An exit wound
The tip of a leaf
A quiet forest
A loud war

If there was a soul
I would have seen it leave
When the bottles fell off the fridge
They crash
He falls

I will see him tomorrow
I keep saying that

I will see him tomorrow
I keep saying that

I will see him tomorrow
I keep saying that...

It's over.
The moon is here.

i am a bad woman

Quinn Sidor

walking uphill for obscure reasons
hiding in a jacket built for giants
feeling small and cold
wishing i was home

i am a bad woman
because i am a son of a bitch
because i cannot be a man
because i am a bad woman

because i am in the men's room
because i do not look good
because i did not sleep well
because i am a bad woman

because i don't like myself and my desires
because i don't like you and your desires
because you don't like me and my desires
because we are bad women

because of all this
i am without a horse
i am sick and hungry
i am trying to get home

my shoes are full of wind
my bones are full of wind
my breasts are full of wind
my spit is turning ice

i slip i spill on the ice
and im a woman again

and i want to be home
and im crying

my tears freeze
into tiny brittle crystals
as still as the winter lake
and as beautiful as anything



Return to Sender

Lupin Nimberg

“God’s Country” (Prologue of Untitled Piece) Abridged Excerpts

Adam Sunderman

One

Oriol Ribera had been saving for a trip to San Luis since before the stock market crashed last September. The “financial crisis,” which had recently been upgraded to a much more permanent-sounding “recession,” had not given him any sort of special treatment for being a good man. The spirit paid no mind to who had or had not smeared lamb’s blood on their door frames. This time last year he’d been out of a job, taking old grocery bags with him to the food bank so the kids would think he’d gone to the store. But that was a year ago, and the tide had rolled back pretty close to normal by the time another September rolled around.

It hadn’t been easy mind you, digging through the dust of the valley floor to get back up to sea level. For a four month period in the middle of 2009, he had spent five summer nights a week driving valet at the Hyatt downtown on top of his regular contracting work. Of course he hadn’t intended to leave Jordi home alone all summer to take care of Laia. Some things could not be helped.

In the days leading up to the fourteenth of October, when Oriol was planning to set out toward Colorado, the greater Sacramento area was struck by the biggest storm of the year—of the past five years, the news said—but everyone you talked to in town went further than that. It was the biggest storm anyone could remember.

A mulberry tree fell in the yard behind their apartment. Thankfully, it fell away from the building and came down on

nothing except the gravel slope of the side of the levee. Not everyone was so lucky.

Trees just like the one behind the Riberas' fell all over town, landing on cars and punching through windows of houses; most notably, though, in the act of crashing groundward, many trees pulled down power lines and snapped suspended electrical wires. The whole city lost power, during the storm, at one point or another. In the nicest neighborhoods, just a few miles East of downtown, power was restored after only a few dead hours.

The Riberas' street was without power for seven days. For the first 48 hours, Oriol and the kids lived on dry cereal and canned fruit from the pantry, along with whatever bits of protein (beef jerky, roasted peanuts, etc.) Oriol was able to find at the closest 7-11 that had gotten its power back, about three miles away.

By the third day, Oriol could not stand to sit still any longer. Storm or no storm, he could not push his plans back any further. So, with his son and daughter in the backseat and his passenger seat empty, Oriol set out in the direction of the San Luis valley. He did the math in his head, counting the days until the beginning of October. If they got there with only one overnight stop, he figured, there was a good chance they'd beat the cranes to the valley. That would be something, he thought, looking in the rearview to make sure the kids were all buckled in. It had been years since he'd watched the cranes fly over the Sangre de Cristo mountains and descend on the valley like a million ugly angels.

Two

The drive out of Sacramento was treacherous. The town itself seemed to be coming apart at the seams. As Oriol turned out of the driveway, he headed down toward Fair Oaks, where the closest river crossing was. As the car came up the ramp and joined the other cars speeding over the bridge in the drizzling rain that had come in to rub salt in the wounds that the storm had

inflicted, he saw how high the river had gotten. It was climbing higher and higher, sloshing against the levee. He followed the river east with his eyes and looked for their apartment.

He fretted over the sight of the water building up behind the levee that was keeping the floodwaters out. The river had risen about ten feet above the level of their yard, but at least it wouldn’t have flooded all the way up to their place on the second floor.

The weather improved once they got up into the foothills, which was a blessing; Oriol hadn’t thought to buy snow chains.

Oriol had a glove box full of compact disks. He rummaged through it in the parking lot of the Starbucks in Colfax while Jordi took Laia in to use the bathroom. Just as the kids were coming back out and knocking on the window for him to unlock the doors, he found what he was looking for.

He took the disk out of its off-white case and put it into the slot in the dashboard. Jordi was helping his little sister read “Dinosaurs Before Dark” as the old VW Rabbit rattled up over Donner Summit, whistling past the green elevation sign that read 7,239 feet; Fritz Reiner’s 1955 Chicago recording of Dvorak’s New World Symphony came from the busted car speakers as all classical recordings do: at first, far too quiet. So Oriol turned the volume up and, as he knew would be the case, the car was rocking with the recorded power of 90 long-dead musicians by the eighth minute. Laia playfully covered her ears as the busy, chromatic lines of horns and woodwinds emphatically rang out the last few measures of the movement. As they came down the other side of the summit and made their way around the lake where the ill-fated party of desperate California-bound settlers once waited out a long, hopeless winter, the slow, pastoral theme of the second movement swelled against a backdrop of confused, late-blooming wild yarrow and fireweed flowers in the meadows on the side of the highway. Oriol couldn’t blame the little things for mistaking this odd spell of sunny, temperate mountain weather for a second spring. It did feel unmistakably like the beginning

of something.

"I know this song," Laia said from the backseat.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, they have it on *Little Einsteins*."

"That's a good show, Laia. Keep watching that show,"

Oriol said, looking at the kids in the rearview. Jordi sat with his elbow up on the car door like he often did on long car rides. Oriol could never tell what he was thinking.

There wasn't much to see on either side of I-80 once you came down out of the Sierras. Oriol didn't mind. He put on Mussorgsky once he had run out of Dvorak, and he had a whole exhibition of pictures to listen to as the hatchback turned up dust in a long, meandering arc across the widest part of Nevada.

They passed through dozens of small towns with names that made little to no sense. About an hour past Reno, they came upon Humboldt River Ranch, which was not obviously a ranch, featured no major river (at least not one that was visible from the highway), and was at least a few dozen shades removed from the vibrant greens of the Humboldt County Oriol knew back in California. Grass Valley was, similarly, a misnomer. The names, from there, ceased to mean anything to him at all: Golconda and Weso, Valmy and Rixies, Coin and Welcome, Oasis and Fenelon.

That last one even coaxed Jordi out of his hour of monastic silence. "Funny name for a town."

Oriol just laughed and nodded. He had been waiting for Jordi to say something since Elko, and it had happened just like he knew it would. The kids didn't like it when he asked why they were being so quiet; it offended them. That was something Oriol had taken note of after twelve years of constant data collection.

Oriol was pleased to read 8:31 p.m. on the dashboard clock as they crossed over into Utah. He'd done his research, and he knew it was legal in the state of Utah to pull over and sleep on the side of the highway, which was what he intended to do.

He had not yet told the kids. He hoped to drive until

eleven or so (long past Laia’s bedtime, and an hour past Jordi’s) so the kids would be so tired they wouldn’t even question why they had to sleep in the backseat. So long as he made it feel like an adventure for them, he knew he could get away with cutting as many corners as necessary to keep them under budget. In an ideal world, he would have made it close to the Utah-Colorado border and left himself an easy half-day drive to get to San Luis the following day.

By the time they arrived in Salt Lake City, though, it was around ten. Oriol, worn out from the drive, struggled to navigate the tangled mess of highway interchanges that twisted through the city’s dingy concrete heart. His exhaustion had dulled his focus, and the exit signs began to blur. He missed the ramp that would have taken him onto I-15 South, and instead, the lane he was in spilled him out onto a street lined on one side with neon signs advertising Mormon-friendly restaurants, all serving some variation on classic American comfort food.

“Ooh,” Laia said, pressing her tiny palms against the window. “IHOP!”

Having just crossed over to the east bank of the Jordan River, Oriol reluctantly abandoned his hope of reaching the Colorado border without stopping, that dream now joining the countless other best laid plans of mice and men that had fallen by the wayside.

The kids needed to eat. They’d long since run out of the 7-11 snacks Jordi had grabbed from the pantry back home, and Oriol, knowing his daughter wouldn’t get to sleep in a real bed tonight, couldn’t bring himself to deny her the comfort of stopping in for late-evening pancakes.

Three

Laia insisted they order her a full stack of blueberry pancakes. She wouldn’t even touch the kid’s menu. “You’re not gonna eat all that, Laia,” Jordi said. He was sitting next to her on one side of the booth, trying to direct her gently to something

that would be less wasteful. Oriol had the other side of the booth to himself. He was looking through his wallet as his daughter whined and poked his son in the ribs.

“Guys, quit it,” he said, glancing around the empty restaurant to make sure nobody was staring at them, thinking there was some kind of abuse going on.

“But dad,” Jordi contested. There was nothing more to that sentence, so Oriol went back to counting the cash he had.

“How much are the pancakes she wants?”

With a sigh, Jordi handed him the menu. “Seven-fifty.”

“That’s fine,” Oriol said. “You can get them, Lai. I’ve got seven fifty to spare.” Sometimes, for the kids’ sake, he made a little show of having extra money to spend.

It was a good show, too. Bread and circuses were as effective in Salt Lake City as they were in Ancient Rome. Laia clapped her sticky hands and leaned her head against the side of her brother she’d just been jousting with. For a moment, everything was quiet, except for the music they were piping in—a U2 song from the Joshua Tree album, but not one of the big hits. “Sleep comes like a drug, in God’s Country.” Some Salt Lake City radio DJ must have thought that was a nice heartland American anthem. Yes, that’s right. This was God’s country, where everyone had black lungs and bags under their eyes. Sleep was the real opiate of the people here. It pissed Oriol off when people didn’t listen to lyrics.

Laia ate all four of the blueberry pancakes the slight, freckled waitress brought her, then promptly fell asleep against the wall of the booth with only her head of thick, curly hair as a cushion. “Look at her, Jordi. She’s pretty cute, huh?” Oriol gestured to his sleeping girl with a butter knife before using it to spread butter on his last piece of sourdough toast.

“We should probably go,” Jordi said, glancing up at the clock.

“We haven’t gotten the check yet, kiddo. Can’t leave without paying.”

“Oh yeah,” Jordi’s face went red. He always got embarrassed when he got something wrong or forgot something simple.

“Unless you want the Mormon high pancake council chasing us across the desert to get their money back,” Oriol added, trying to lighten the kid up.

It worked. Jordi laughed, and it was like music to Oriol’s fatigued ears. “Is the church directly affiliated with the IHOP?”

“Oh yeah, for sure. Brigham Young and Joseph Smith are in the back flipping pancakes as we speak.”

“I hope they send the tabernacle choir after us.”

A spinning neon sign outside turned their way. Artificial light came gushing through the window, and the whole booth glowed electric blue for a second. “Oh yeah, that’d be great. Those guys can really sing.”

The invisible conductor that controlled the ups and downs of his kids’ mood lowered his hands, and the little flourish of harmony came to an end. Jordi looked back down at his plate and was silent once more. But Oriol was grateful to have laughed with him, if only for a minute, and only at the expense of a religion that neither of them knew anything about.

The waitress came with the check and Oriol paid with his card, just in case they ended up needing cash somewhere later on. He added a tip on the receipt but also included a single dollar with a note that read: “Give my regards to the Angel Moroni.”

The waitress came back looking displeased, but did not say anything. Oriol picked up Laia, held her to his chest while she slept, and they left the restaurant to the hollow, synthesized bombast of “Born In The USA.” Again, the lyrics undercut the atmosphere the people on the radio were trying to curate with these music choices.

“How long are we gonna drive tonight?” Jordi asked as they came to the eastern edge of Salt Lake City. He had moved to the front seat so that Laia could sleep across the back.

“Not far.” Oriol glanced down at the dashboard clock. It was already eleven. “Are you getting tired?”

“Yeah, but I don’t think there are any real towns to stop in once we get out of Salt Lake,” Jordi said. “At least not any that are gonna have motels.”

“You’re a smart kid, Jordi, you know that?”

“I guess...”

“I think in the interest of making tomorrow’s drive as easy as possible, we’re gonna have to sleep in the car tonight.” He looked over to see if he could figure out what the kid was thinking. It was as tough as it always was with him, but he didn’t seem too upset. He nodded and smiled agreeably, with his mouth but not his eyes. If he was unhappy, he wasn’t showing it. But maybe his mother had taught him that, too. Maybe he was just politely saying thank you for another disappointing Christmas gift. “I was gonna drive another hour or so before I pulled off. That way we can get to the valley tomorrow before it gets too late. Does that sound okay?”

“Sure.”

The hum of the engine masked all the delicate sounds of the desert at night. From there on the highway, you could not hear the whistling of the wind through the gaps in the mountains to the east, or the soft brushing of alfalfa plants against one another in the fields to the west. He had turned off the music, too, to avoid waking Laia. “Do you know how your grandpa ended up out in Colorado?” he asked Jordi so quietly that his words were almost lost to the road noise as well.

“No.”

“He was born in a little town called Sorbas, near the Southern Coast of Spain. He met your grandma in Barcelona—she was Catalan, and she had an uncle who lived in California. He got them a job, originally, working at the Basic Onion Plant in Vacaville. We’ve driven through there a few times on the way into the bay. It’s not much to see, but I was born there. Back before the plant closed down, you used to drive into Vacaville and that onion smell would hit you the moment you—”

“Dad,” the kid yawned, “Can I go lie down in the back with Laia?”

Oriol looked over and noticed that Jordi looked just about as tired as he’d ever seen him. He had his arm up on the door again, not because he was despondent or bored, but because he looked like he couldn’t have supported his head any other way than by resting his chin on his forearm. “Sure, yeah. We’ve driven far enough. I’ll pull over.”

He pulled off highway 15 and turned the engine off a few miles short of a barren little town called Meadow. Jordi helped him move the suitcases from the trunk to the front seat so that they could fold down the backseat and have more room. Jordi held Laia, her arms around his neck and his around her waist, on the dusty shoulder of the highway while Oriol put together a makeshift bed in the back of the Volkswagen.

Per Jordi’s request, Oriol left the hatchback open to the desert air, and the three of them slept soundly together on bundled up jackets in the heart of God’s country.



滿而不溢：To be full but
not overflowing

Levi Lee

The great trek

Adam Zahavi Pildal

It is said that the land we inhabit once walked. Many years ago, when the Útgardur archipelago was first settled by our ancestors from the mainland, they found a sparse, barren land of rocks and lichen, scarred by eons of battle with the sea. My ancestors were said to be a cursed people by our brothers on the mainland. They were loyalists following a disgraced king, who was exiled from the mainland for murdering his brother in a drunken bout of rage. What they found in Útgardur seemed like a godsend. Although it was a raw and unwelcoming land, it was bare of people, and at first it was believed that no man had ever set foot on it before the arrival of our ships. The two largest islands, Þórsey and Víðarrsey bore no signs of any prior human settlement, and their virgin land was quickly converted to pastures for our sheep and harbors for our fishing vessels. However the smallest of the Útgardur islands, Skrímirsey, located about ten miles to the west of the two larger islands, was the exception. The first settlers on the island found clear signs that other people had lived there before. Remnants of old, abandoned camps scattered the island, and within them were found strange objects and artifacts unlike any our people had ever seen before. Ancient jewelry and amulets carved out of the bones of animals we had never encountered, inset with beautiful verdant gemstones that would have fetched exorbitant prices on the mainland.

Still, this was not the strangest thing about Skrímirsey. About a century after our ancestors first landed in the archipelago, word of the mystery surrounding the island reached our estranged brothers on the mainland. They sent their antiquarians and naturalists to pry through the thin soil in search of answers. What they found only provoked further questions. After analyzing the artifacts found on the island, the greatest scientists on the mainland came to the conclusion that these were not the remnants of

a single culture, but many different ones. The materials used to construct the jewelry, tools and weapons found on Skrímirsey were so foreign to our part of the world that scientists were at a loss as to how they could possibly have ended up on this remote island, isolated by thousands of miles of frigid ocean. The discovery sparked fervent debate on the mainland for several years, but eventually the outbreak of war and famine distracted our wealthier and more resourceful cousins, and research projects on the island were abandoned.

Yet, it was from this discovery that the legend of the walking island was born amongst our people. Searching for an explanation for the strange settlements, our chroniclers turned to the ancient sagas. A myth grew that the island was in fact the head of the sleeping jötunn Skrímir, who had once challenged our gods to a fateful series of games in which they were nearly bested. It was said that after Skrímir was defeated by Þór, he had wandered the lands and oceans of our world, settling down for a time in different places, before once again waking and repeating his journey. The structures found on the island were said to be the remnants of disparate peoples who had once inhabited the body of the jötunn in his long periods of sleep. So it happened that the island, previously called Vesturey, got the name we still use for it today.

For centuries after the island was named, our people avoided it out of fear and superstition. While our communities on Þórsey and Víðarrsey slowly grew and began to flourish, Skrímirsey for many years remained a forbidden area of great reverence, inhabited only by puffins and grouse. Still, with time all things change, and throughout the centuries our people developed new traditions and stories. Slowly, the fear of the walking island began to fade from our collective memory. The populations of Þórsey and Víðarrsey were getting larger, and the sparse grasslands of the two rocky islands could only support so many herds of sheep. Eventually, after a plague almost wiped out the sheep stock on Víðarrsey, it was decided that superstition and old stories should

not prevent us from feeding our children.

My family were some of the first to break the taboo and settle Skrímirsey on a permanent basis. Although we were traditionally shepherds, the plague forced us to look for new ways to make a living, and we settled on fishing as a more sustainable method of subsistence. Skrímirsey was ideal for this purpose, as cliff structures on the west end of the islet provided an ideal natural harbor for docking fishing boats, something lacking on both of the larger islands. It was my great great grandfather Sæbjörn Sturluson who founded Freyrvík, the town I was born in, over a hundred years ago. Although some in his generation scorned his decision to settle Skrímirsey, the utility of the harbor of Freyrvík quickly attracted other fishermen, who helped the community grow to a sustainable size.

Over centuries, the community on our isolated archipelago had developed a culture very different from that of our estranged cousins on the mainland. Whereas they had developed in tandem with the rest of the continent and were rapidly undergoing a process of industrialization, our isolation meant that we continued to live much in the same way that our ancestors did when they first arrived to the islands almost a millennium ago. The mainlanders would have regarded our way of life as archaic and primitive. Even the language we spoke was somewhat like an antiquated version of theirs, less influenced by loanwords from other cultures, and lacking words to describe technological developments that had taken place in the centuries since our isolation and cultural divergence. Still, we were content living the way our ancestors had done for dozens of generations, and except for occasional encounters with their ships on the open ocean, we maintained virtually no contact with our former compatriots.

All of this changed about a decade ago, when a new discovery on Skrímirsey shook the foundation of our community. Our people have never engaged in mining or metallurgy on any significant

scale. Our livelihood has always come from our herds and from the ocean, and because of our isolation we have no standing military. As such we have never needed metal, except for tools like knives, shears, axes, and more recently for reinforcing the hulls of our fishing boats. Traditionally that need was filled by sparse surface level iron deposits on Þórsey and Viðarrsey, and from old tools, smelted down and reused for new purposes. However, 10 years ago, a new and much richer source of metal was discovered within a previously unexplored sea cave on Skrímirsey. This new metal did not look like the impure magnetite ore we were used to collecting on the two larger islands. Instead it shone with a greenish silver light in great, pure veins of metal on the walls of the cave. The beauty of the metal was so intense that stories of it quickly attracted the attention of the larger communities on Þórsey and Viðarrsey, and a team was sent into the cave to see if the metal could be extracted. Unfortunately, our simple iron tools were unable to even scratch the surface of the veins, and it was decided that we would need help from a more resourceful place if we ever hoped to take advantage of the great treasure we had found.

Once the news of the strange metal reached the mainland, the transformation of our community was nigh instantaneous. A few weeks after we sent our request for aid, a great steamship arrived in the bay of Freyrsvík. It carried thousands of young men from the mainland, ready to make their fortune by mining the new metal. At first they were all unsuccessful. They set up a new mining town near where the first veins were found, and each morning they sailed into the caves trying to pull the stubborn metal out of the walls, but it would not budge, even with their more advanced tools. Still, the many new inhabitants were a scourge upon the tiny island, which previously had only supported a population of 200 or so. Their trash littered the pristine cliff sides and pastures, and the noise of their motorized boats scared away the fish which used to gather in the silent coves on the south end of the island. At this time I was a young newly married woman, pregnant with

my first child; a son. My husband was a fisherman, like most people in Freyrsvík, and he came to despise the new arrivals for scaring away the fish we relied on for subsistence, forcing him to sail further and further out into raging and dangerous waters in order to put food on the table.

It was only after the arrival of the big companies, with their motorized tools and steam powered dredges, that Skrírmirsey finally began to yield its treasure to the ravenous invasion which had beset it. I remember the mixed feeling of joy and dread which filled Freyrsvík on the day when the first load of usable metal was brought out from the mines. On one hand this meant investment and modernization. For many, this was the stroke of luck that would finally bring us a similar level of development to that enjoyed by the inhabitants of the mainland. However, others saw it as a curse, a herald of the invasion that would bring a definitive end to our unique culture and way of life, and to centuries of peace and isolation. My husband, whose work was getting harder and more dangerous by the day, belonged to the latter group. Although the amount of fish he was able to bring back decreased with every trip, as the machines of the mining corporations poisoned the shores of our island, he swore that he would never give up his trade. He claimed that we were here for hundreds of years before the mining firms, and that we would be here for hundreds of years after.

They named the metal Skrírmireldi “Skrímir’s fire,” a reference to the legend and taboo which had sheltered the island and delayed the discovery of the metal by centuries. It was an incredibly powerful material, several times harder than steel and immune to corrosion. When mixed with copper it could also be made into an extremely conductive alloy, which revolutionized the electrical industry. The machines, tools and weapons produced with it all shone with the same faint green iridescence, first seen when it was discovered in the sea cave. Over a few years, they allowed the companies and government on the mainland to

transform themselves into a global powerhouse, capable of dominating other nations in both trade and war.

In the decade after the discovery of Skrírmireldi, Freyrsvík was transformed from a forgotten fishing hamlet into one of the most important industrial hubs on the planet. The metal was never discovered elsewhere, so the production on Skrírmirsey became the only source of the substance which allowed the government on the mainland to maintain their global technological hegemony. Þórsey and Víðarrsey, which had previously hosted the majority of the population of the archipelago were completely outshined by the economic importance of Skrírmirsey, and their verdant pastures were converted into sites for military bases and docks, where the government on the mainland stationed soldiers and navy men, ready to defend the mineral deposits on Skrírmirsey with their lives.

I lost my husband 3 years ago. He was on a fishing trip in the northern reaches of our waters, when his small vessel was lost in an arctic storm. I believe he knew that it was bound to happen eventually. Still, his stubbornness prevented him from ever giving up his trade to work for those he perceived as invaders from the mainland. Instead, I became the one forced to provide for my son, now 9 years old, by working in one of the plants where the raw Skrírmireldi ore is collected and treated before being sent back to the mainland for smelting. It is boring and unrewarding work. But it is necessary, and one of the only jobs available to me as a widow and single mother. For 3 years I worked there, inspecting the ore from the mines, checking it for impurities and ensuring its quality before it is crushed and processed. For 3 years, until two nights ago, when one of the dredges brought up a lump of flesh the size of a large boulder.

The massive, pulsating mass of flesh lay there on the conveyor belt, moving along with the iridescent green ore, slowly making its way towards the crusher like an enormous pink slug. The next

dredge brought up another similar clump, blood and flesh mixed with shining metal and gravel. I and the other women working with me screamed when we saw it, completely at a loss to what kind of infernal substance the machine had brought up from the bowels of the earth. At a loss, that was, until an older woman next to me brought up the story of the walking island.

I had barely made it out of the plant when the tremors began. Great convulsions of the earth shook the island, causing drilling towers and chimneys to bend in on themselves with a horrible screech of metal, like the bellow of a dying God. My veins pumping with adrenaline, I raced towards my shack near the dock, where I knew that my son lay sleeping after a day of work almost as long as my own. Pandemonium filled the air around me as the very earth began to open, at first swallowing up individual vehicles and machines, then factories and screaming crowds. It was Ragnarok, the great fears of my ancestors come true in a single, terrifying moment, more horrible than anything they could possibly have imagined. It seemed as if the vault of the sky was filled with the cries of horror and disbelief of the generations that had warned against the danger of tampering with things beyond our understanding.

Yet at that moment, nothing mattered to me except the safety of my only child. Despite the distance, I reached the shack after only a few minutes of frantic running, and I burst through the front door to pull my son out of his bed. I knew that getting away from the island by sea was our only option, so I speeded toward the dock with my half unconscious child slung over my shoulder. When I was a young woman, before I got pregnant, I had sailed on fishing vessels along with my husband, so I knew how to steer and operate a boat. The tremors had started near the center of the island, but as I ran on the dock, I could feel the wooden boards start to break apart under my feet, as the whole island slowly began to raise itself in great rhythmic heaves.

We jumped into the first boat we found, a newer motorized model from the mainland, and I cranked the engine to full power, steering out of the bay towards the west. I did not dare to look back at the horror unfolding behind us, and I focused on steering the boat through the great fuming waves provoked by the movement of the island. The small vessel seemed tiny and insignificant in comparison to the armageddon unfolding around us, and the waves threatened to capsize the vessel at any moment, throwing us overboard into the merciless darkness of the frigid water. I navigated in this way for what felt like hours, but were probably only a few minutes, until we made it out of the bay. Only then, when we were in the waters of the open ocean, did I dare to look behind me.

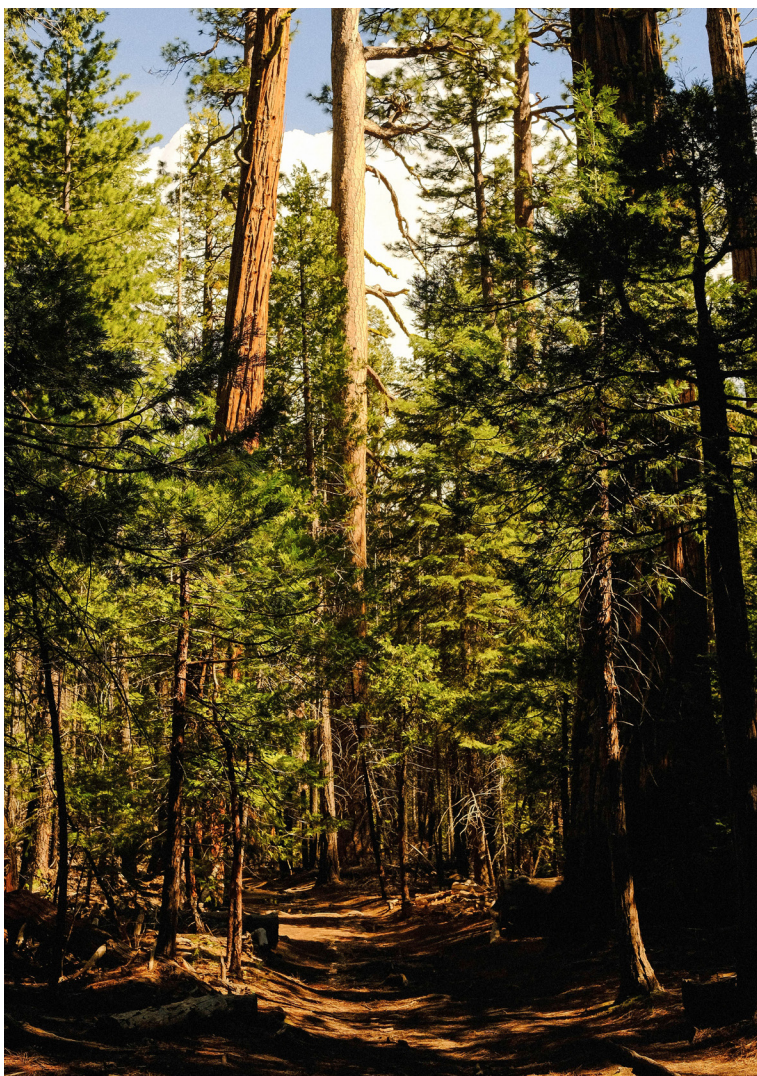
A mountain walked.

In the darkness of the arctic night, it was almost impossible to make out the details of the figure standing where Skrímirsey had once been, but it unmistakably had the traits of a man. Two great stony trunks, like pillars holding up the heavens, stood in the dark freezing ocean. Above them, one could see what looked like a vast torso and two great arms, so long that the fingertips touched the surface of the sea, provoking enormous waves as they swung back and forth. The head; what had once been Skrímirsey, was raised so far above the sea that it was fully invisible. Had the great beast gone in our direction, we would have been crushed by its weight or drowned in the waves conjured up by its enormous legs. But instead it turned, slowly and methodically, and began walking north, crushing great floating sheets of ice in its path. With each step it grew smaller, until eventually, finally, its gargantuan mass disappeared behind the horizon.

We remained on the open sea for a full night and day, until we were eventually picked up by a mainland rescue vessel, searching for survivors. They received us starving and thirsty, almost frozen to death. We were not the only survivors, but we later

learned that almost the entire fleet of the mainlanders, docked by Víðarrsey, was swallowed by the churning ocean during Skrímir's passage. 98% of Skrímirsey's dense population perished in the upheaval. More than 300,000 people. The owners of the mining concerns were fine of course, they lived thousands of miles away on the mainland.

No one knows what became of Skrímir. Some say that he now sleeps deep below the sea, or further north than any settlement, never again to be disturbed by human hands. Others claim that he has simply found another resting place somewhere far away from here, and that he will one day rise again when the human lust for wealth and power extends its greasy digits into the dark, hidden reaches of his cranium.



Southern Sierra Miwok Land

Marty Valdez

