

# THE OZ



FALL 2023: INTERTWINED

## The Oz Magazine Fall 2023: “Intertwined”

*The Oz Magazine* is Occidental College’s oldest literary magazine and is entirely student-run. Special thanks to the Occidental English department for providing funding and support.

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### Note from the editors:

The Oz is about you. The artist, the reader. It is beautiful because of you. Yes, we spent hard hours compiling it and formatting it. Yes, all of the editors above contributed their time and ideas. But at the bottom line, this magazine is a reflection of how beautiful the creative minds of Oxy truly are.

There is no guarantee that this magazine even exists. But you cemented emotions in ink, you opened its pages and felt the words of your peers.

The Oz is about you. And we’ll never stop being grateful for how wonderful *you* are.

–Eran, Joseph, Hanna Lou

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I am not mad at the birds anymore

choreography: turn on 7, 8 jump

on 1

You have been waiting for the world to end for a long time now.

m/w/f:

And everyone starts to look like someone you  
have seen before

When all the “yous” began to blend together, i found out that

things to add to resume: reading tutor, la saison

The place that you call home may be twisted and mangled and shaped like something beyond your recognition but you, my friend, will always call it home

Transfer credits, fix schedule, email sleep specialist

We are pretending we don't have lives  
that no one else can see. 02042018

There is no beginning or end because it begins before us  
and ends after us

he was, and is, confused and i am, and was, in a rush.

Senior year of high school, in an attempt to stay sane, i buy a flip phone.

Cercopthicus - frugivorous, life span about 20 years

By the time you wake up in the morning the sun  
is already beginning to set. Like the tide has  
gone out before you have time to touch  
the water

It feels like you have not grown at all since you were 8 years old and someone sat in the chair that you believed was your own.

Gifts for: lacy, chloe, penelope, alia

proud of myself for going to the gym

On the longest day of the year i  
sit with my legs hanging off the curb, and i miss the  
sunset.

There is comfort in the end of the night;  
knowing there is nothing more to worry  
about.

Tomato paste, basil, maybe balsamic, broccoli

Remember that all the things that you remember are still happening inside you

I had a dream you were a dream

Monday 6/8:

Not about who is seen or who is seeing, but that there are many ways to see.

I kind of like being a funny story

Happy birthday!! I know I am sending this late  
but I want you to know that

**Forbidden Love**

Alex Romanov

Not the fruit of labor: the ability to live. Each inhale  
 extending the time stamp,  
 every exhale meaning a certain death.  
 It glooms over everything. What is existence without  
 necessity? A needed love but not  
 an addiction—don't call it that because it helped to stay  
 alive. Yet, it pulls us deeper down into a grave.

It is needed to live: that nasty love of yours.

**poem 1**

Alexa Richman

1.i breathe into the air  
 (the purest of public burial grounds) as i wander  
 the graveyard  
 unable to read every name

some erased by time  
 others overgrown earth  
 others never written at all

some single particle of this air i breathe  
 belonged to a girl like me  
 whose young body woke  
 and trod this very earth

who held every leaf and hand  
 for touch had made them real  
 and hers as much as theirs

who spoke through song as a child  
 before she learned her letters  
 who loved more than anything  
 and lingered a moment extra  
 at every headstone  
 imagining their lives  
 and meditating on her own

2.i know this girl to have lived  
 in one decade or another  
 and i know she understood  
 what life meant  
 when others called her small

3.though i have never seen her face or heard  
 the dimples and breaks in her voice i have  
 felt the curve of her soul, for it is mine



it feels like sleeping on a leaf  
 and bugs crawling on your arms  
 and the most beautiful rays of  
 sunlight to ever arrive on earth

we are two mirrors passing in time  
 reflecting itself a million times  
 filling in space  
 animated at the final moment

and her gravestone  
 wherever it is  
 is a tall oval mirror  
 (she and it are the same, anyway, are they not?)  
 pointing from herself away  
 and into all their faces

she sees people like me  
 and me and me and me and me  
 so together in life we all exist  
 in (me and me and me and me and) eternity

### Rhizome

Alice Carlson

Jaw gnaws itself to sleep and finds the place  
 where troubled murmurs grow to aching calls.  
 A sleeping mind- I find myself erased-  
 now slipping into hypnagogic pall.  
 Unstable walls of consciousness collapse-  
 my guardless brain spins poison ivy fears  
 and touches tangled memories lost to lapse...  
 The golden sun pools on the lawn like beer,  
 it's painfully familiar here. I cry-  
 a mourning warbler sings a private song:  
 a watercolored recollection. My  
 discomfort cedes though several shades are wrong.  
 But noise of waking drowns the tune of sleep.  
 Today, this dreaming's song I long to keep.

**Kitchen Knife**

Averylin Huang Cummins

I once watched  
 My little sister slice a peach,  
 Cut all the way around from  
 Stem to  
 Base to  
 Stem.  
 We had fought that morning.  
 The soft drag of her guiding thumb  
 Soothed the bite of the blade.  
 She twisted, pulled it apart.  
 She pried the split-stuck pit  
 Out with the point of the  
 Kitchen knife and  
 Didn't say a word and  
 Offered me half.

**Kitchen Knife II: Matters of Perspective**

Averylin Huang Cummins

Although the kitchen knives  
 Are safely in their holders,  
 I am more concerned  
 With the open safety pin  
 That sits, silver, stuck  
 Between the threads of my gray carpet.  
 And although I should have been more careful,  
 The argument could be made  
 Simply for a less-lush rug.  
 And somehow the mountains  
 Always seem to get smaller  
 The closer that I come.

**Lonely Girl Haikus**

Bella Dominguez

If giving, is lease,  
 It's easy, warm-bodied, reins ease,  
 All I have set free.

Watch for her soul, it  
 Is so subtle, is worlds off  
 When her eyes, void-made.

She touches you, in turn  
 You arrive with a sigh, a  
 Line break of her pain.

She met you, wanted  
 To be home, home melted away  
 Only with a time change.

She's drunk, in that place.  
 She melts your skin, in cycles  
 That your touch replace.

## Fingerprint Poems

Emma Cho

*"Ella"**"Dylan"**"Peyton"**"Abilene"*

# Enchanting Restoration from the Forest

Blake Nicholas

Away from the baroque buildings, coffee cups, and canals,  
 A rejuvenating serenity is found.  
 The forest is the source of this serenity.  
 Now nestled through and in the alder trees,  
 Two voyagers crunch the ground leaves with a shrewd hiker's expertise.  
 They travel toward a field that holds this ancient language in its rosy  
     pink flower petals.  
 And when they get to the field, a harmless yet childish game commences.  
 And the voyagers will develop their own nomenclature of a forest's  
     clearing fauna.  
 But with each step toward the field, beyond the green, towering,  
     towerless towers,  
 These two get closer to the universal communication of the past.  
 Can you hear it?  
 It's the same sound-speaking symbols that float across time.  
 You'll see it in the rustles of bushes right before rabbits pop out.  
 You'll hear it in a street performer's strings that ring out tunes from  
     the oldest violin quartet.  
 You'll know it from the flower crowns you make that make one's eyes  
     appear gentler.  
 You'll feel it when you clutch the hands of kindred souls on the  
     stormiest of starry nights.  
 These symbols have no countries but exist in each one.  
 This language was the first language but some forget their mother tongue.  
 Please don't forget her.

# /falling for each other/

Caitlin Terpstra

i'll follow you into the bathroom to watch you do drugs and i'll ask you  
 if it burns and i'll follow you upstairs to your room and i'll flop on your  
 bed and close my eyes until you ask me to taste your g&t, because for  
 some reason i start and finish all your drinks, and when you're done  
 getting ready i'll follow you down the hall and down the street and all  
 the way to walt's and i'll stand behind you in line and i'll say "i'll have  
 the same" after you order a downeast cider, and i'll drink slow while you  
 smoke, and your cigarette will smell like evenings in that alley behind  
 our old apartment. the next morning i'll let you hold the door open for  
 me at the edge of our dorm, and i'll watch your feet as you step down  
 the walkway and then i'll wander in circles in the cafeteria, hoping to  
 catch a glance, and i'll stand by the door while my food cools, and then  
 i'll follow you to our table and i'll ask you how you slept and if you've  
 done your russian homework yet and what do you think of this week's  
 dante reading? and on the one hundred and fourteenth day of you telling  
 me that you slept alright and me telling you that so did i, we'll be silent,  
 and stare into each other's eyes until all i see is me, reflected

/4am/

Caitlin Terpstra

your palm on my sternum, sending waves of soothing whispers  
 across my chest, tender fingers upon my φρενι, holding my heart  
 in your hand, unfurling sweet eternities in my soul  
  
 forehead to forehead, waves lap at my ankles (soak me, love),  
 baptized in your sea salt eyes, watching you walk  
 through the forest of mine— muddy verdure, ringed age  
  
 a finger on your neck, your cheek, your ear, softly  
 tickling your lobe, dancing down your jaw, lounging on your  
 lip; shared sighs under the sheets, shattered and sleepy



## Basement

Claire Wilson-Black

He won't stop staring from over there in the corner. His eyes stay open and still, completely unblinking. It gives her the creeps.

She tries not to come down here that often, because the basement has always creeped her out. The decor, the musty smell, the old rocking horse her parents swear she used to love to play on. Even the dark green, wall-to-wall carpet seems to cry out for help, seeing as it probably hasn't been cleaned since 1972.

But today is Grams' 95th birthday, and there are people all throughout her grandparents' house, and she's supposed to make the rounds, even if it means going to the basement. She says hi to her grandparents' friends, Lucy and Bill, and their kids Becca and David. And then her dad's cousins Laura, Mark and Smiley (no one knows why he's called that, but it must be some cruel joke because he has a real gnarly set of teeth). But the conversations never last long because these are real adults with real jobs and kids and mortgages and responsibilities. She always hates how they always ask her questions about her life. Not because she doesn't like to answer them or to see their faces light up with excitement when she tells them she's on the debate team or made varsity softball. She hates it because it feels so unfair, these conversations. She hates the way it feels like her life is so exciting to these adults and theirs is so uninteresting, not worth mentioning. It fills her with guilt and also with quiet dread. Because someday she knows she too will have a mortgage to pay, and a real job, and more responsibilities than she would want to chat about with a distant relative at a family gathering.

Sometimes she excuses herself to get more lemonade or go to the bathroom. But the bathroom gets boring too. There's only so long she can stare at the baby blue tile and Grams' bunny statue holding the bar of soap.

But as she walks around the basement with her ever-present, polite smile, she can't help but feel a quiet stare on her back from over in the corner. When she turns around, she locks eyes with great-uncle Gilbert, and stares back at him for a second before she starts towards him—worried for a moment when she sees his picture frame is crooked. She adjusts the gold frame with a look of compassion and thinks that it must be hard for him to watch all of these living people eating and talking and breathing and stepping on the carpet he installed back when it was the next best thing in home furnishing.

## Study of Silence

Cor Thomas Jacobs

He first smelled it on Thursday. The acrid stench of rotting flesh permeated the linings of his nostrils, piercing his outward veil of peace, eating away slowly at his contentment. Adrift in a sea of faces, the miasma became increasingly irritating with every passing smile, every half-assed costume, every mangled syllable licking at his eardrums. Deep beneath, he felt a warm, familiar, and viscous substance pooling in his chest.

The look in his eyes remained insistent and detached—as though they were several miles from the marrow sockets which they were meant to inhabit.

Yesterday it was Thursday. Today it was Friday. He had first smelled it on Thursday, during his most recent shift at work—nine in the morning to two-thirty in the afternoon.

No one had died. There was no corpse on the floor; here or at the office. Everyone was very much alive, perhaps excessively so. There was no reason to be smelling this sickly fragrance of expiration. But today it was Friday, and he smelled the putrid reek of a decaying corpse. He first smelled it on Thursday. Yesterday was Thursday.

To his left was a speaker, fed and regurgitating brash riffs and angsty vocalizations from its cavernous anatomy. Violent as they were, the sounds formed calm undulations that wrapped each warbling and costumed attendant, and drifted unhurriedly through the glowing stage lights and into night's open arms, unknotting and fading alongside curls of smoke.

Something, in his ear, or perhaps deeper in his skull, withered with each *thump* and each *scream* and each *let me hear you louder louder*. He couldn't quite tell what it was, but it was dying.

Up on the stage, demanding an ever-slight inflection of the eyes and neck, was an old friend. His band was called Acid Jazz.

To his right was a cyclone of flesh and shoulders; another singer's descent from the little stage, forcing his body into another, a knowing smirk; the sacred initiation of a mosh ritual.

Everyone was very much alive, perhaps excessively so. Their voices kept warbling and their bodies kept moving and their cords kept mangling and their eyes kept consuming and their shoulders kept cycloning and *thump* and *scream* and *I can't hear you louder louder*.

*There is someone's shoulder against my own. I feel a great force on the other side of this shoulder.*

*There is an array of loud sounds. I hear my friend singing "Where are you?" The lyrics of his song.*

*There is a terrible and pungent smell. I smell it today, and today is Friday. I first smelled it on Thursday, at work. Yesterday was Thursday. It smells like rotting flesh, a dead body, some warm liquid in my chest.*

Then he was falling, unbraced against the ritual's inquisition. The look in his eyes remained insistent and detached as they forgot how to see. The deep and dying thing past his ears and in his skull decided to stop living and knowing and hearing. Thus, fully unfeeling and unknowing, he tumbled through a sky that opened beneath his feet to swallow him whole.

He had first smelled it on Thursday. Today it was Friday.

~

Deep in the mountain's mineral reaches, just below the icy overcast, my fingers entwine with a rusted metal handrail. Mighty viridian conifers watch me from above, solemnly armored with their jagged umber plating and their tips delicately frosted with snow.

A single crow encircles my presence overhead. Its beady eyes dart along a million different vectors, and its wings share a similar restlessness.

There is little sound here aside from the wind's gentle growl. I'm much more at peace here. It smells not of rotting flesh, but rather the soothing fragrance of moss on stones, dew-licked grass, and melting ice.

Here, it is gray. A calm, whispering gray.

The crow, a dash of midnight upon the slate backdrop, descends. It lands, perches on the handrail, and spreads its wings. Backed by a thousand familiar repetitions, I pluck the jet feathers which the bird so generously offers me, place bunches of them gently into small zip-close plastic bags, and then pocket each one with concerted caution.

"Thank you," I say.

The crow ignores my gratitude. It waits a moment, and then squawks, head craning and twitching as it croaks each piece of its speech. "Where did you come from today?"

I lift a skyward-pointing finger. "Up there."

The crow tilts its head in confusion. "Up there? Again?"

I give a slight chuckle followed by a friendly smirk. "Do I often come from anywhere else?"

"But, but, I still don't understand. Don't they die up there?"

"Sure do," I reply. "That's why it can get so loud. And you can really smell it too."

"Smell?"

"Yeah. Stronger than anything you'd smell down here. It's hard to explain," as I said this I looked out over the gray and gray and gray expanse before me. "It's overwhelming. It sets into your nose and you just can't get it out."

I pause. "Worst part is, it smells a little sweet, too."

The crow remains silent. I've tried explaining it before, but I think there are some things that just get lost in translation. I don't think a crow would be too disturbed about smelling a crow's rotting flesh, much less a human's.

"What is it like to fall?" the crow inquires, gesturing its head upwards.

I was a bit shocked. This was the first time the crow had asked me this—something was different today. I wasn't entirely sure how to answer.

"It's uncomfortable, for sure. I wouldn't say it's especially painful, either when I start falling or when I hit the ground. But it can be a little scary—there's a rush to it."

Again, my exposition feels a bit awkward. I'm not sure if a crow has ever felt the feeling of falling against its own will. It remains silent again, and I'm content with that.

"And what makes you fall? Is it the noise? No?"

I give it a moment; a mental once-over. I purse my lips and furrow my brow as I descend deeper into thought.

"Yeah," I answer, "the noise does it. Again, I don't think there's anything quite like it down here. Up there, the noises are more...abrupt, just...loud." I'm flustered; tripping over my own words, but I conclude: "adjacent more to active disruption rather than correspondence."

The crow seems more engaged with this answer. "And down here, adjacent to peace, no?"

Tears begin to crawl down my cheeks. "Yes, it seems the softer noises often are."

I look down at my hands, swathed in blood, skin, and shredded black feathers. I lick my lips after my final bite of the crow's flesh.

Next, I suckle the saline, metallic liquid clean off of each of my fingers. I hate the feeling of dried saliva on my skin, but I prefer it to dried blood.

The crunchy bits are never pleasant. Sometimes the beak chips my tooth or a talon cuts my throat. And holding the godforsaken thing still while I work my teeth into the neck is a fucking pain every single time.

I've long forgotten the sound it makes during the first bite. I'm certain

it's terrible, heart wrenching; a despairing and shrieking profession of mortal fear, suffering, and disorientation.

Unfortunatley for the crow, it is nothing but noise.

Noise is the only thing wrong in this world.

Ah, there it is again. That certain miasma.

*The young man picked himself up from the concrete with the weight of extensive suffering heavy on his back; his shoulder and hip were bruised and his ears were ringing. He felt blood somewhere on the surface of his skin, sweet and sticky, but couldn't quite make out where.*

*No thump. No scream. Just look, look, and the gentle growl of mangled whispers. It was almost as if the silence below had been transposed over the place above.*

*His skin was hot with a swarm of blazing and consumptive gazes. He felt that familiar, viscous liquid welling up in his chest again, shifting forwards and backwards, to the shore and washed away, reaching out towards its freedom.*

*He lurched downwards, desperately reaching to go back, to fall again, but instead he ejected everything behind his eyes and skull and ears and throat and chest: hundreds, no, thousands of tiny plastic baggies filled with jet black feathers, blood and bile solute, sharp, curved talons, faded and cracked bird beaks, both shards and in whole form, miniature intestines and hearts and crushed lungs among a jumble of other profaned organs.*

*Another heave. Beady eyes. Chips of his own teeth. Rusted metal cylinders. Red-slicked treebark and milky white sap. Mangled chunks of flesh. Flayed, laid bare, breathing, throbbing, speaking through a liquefied language: words as a dilating puddle of scarlet.*

*He was left empty; depleted, and the former composition of*



*his soul incarnate flowed out and swaddled the entirety of the world; existence itself.*

*The costumed attendants watched on in apparent horror as his vomit began to terraform,*

*but were secretly enraptured by his recital of captivating rebirth.*

*Finally, it was quiet.*

Behold the beauty of carnal transfer—

the fragrance is delectable.

Somewhere in the breach, noise persists.

Noise is the only thing wrong in this world.

It rots and eats away;

a catalyst to the burgeoning of grief and symphony.

My aorta is here,

among mountains and corvids,

the scent of dew-licked grass and moss-gripped monolith.

Fragrance is saccharine. Noise is acidic.

Yesterday was Thursday.

I first smelled it on Thursday.

Today is Friday.



*Enmeshed* by Zandra Sweeney



*Intertwined* by Zandra Sweeney



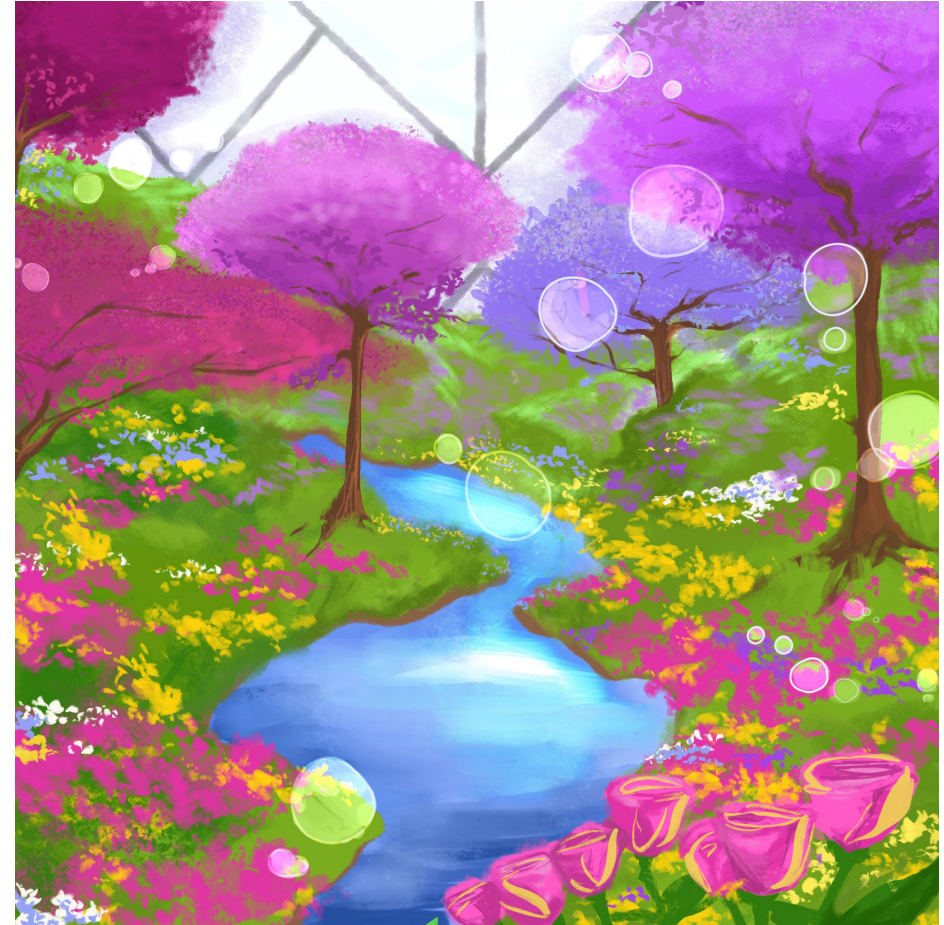
**Day in the Life**

Ella Raziell

Nick's POV:

I leave the supermarket while trying not to make eye contact with anyone. Now it really feels like everyone is looking at me. Then I walk. I walk and walk and walk. It's a good way to keep warm, I've learned. Not actually warm but warmer than I would be if I just sat still. I tend to zone out when I'm walking and when I finally zone back in I realize that I'm at a building that looks very domed-shaped. The words Serotonin Spa light up red in the darkness. I head inside to try and get some warmth and maybe crash for a little while. Inside there's an aura that's inexplicable to most but that I am all too familiar with. It's an aura of money. I realize immediately that, once again, I don't fit in.

Everything is too clean and practically glowing. There's no one in the lobby so I just walk in. I start to walk down a hall that has two possible ways to go. There's one hallway that goes straight down and another that curves with the dome shape. I choose to walk down the curved hallway. There are doors next to thin, long windows that show the inside of what's behind the door. The most striking thing I see is colors: bright, bright colors. Pink and purple trees, very blue water, green grass. Colors I haven't seen in years and colors I feel like I've never seen before. And...are those bubbles?? I feel like a moth drawn to a flame; I can't look away. I check to see if I can open the door. It's unlocked. I walk inside and feel heat, hear a stream, touch grass. I start to feel happier than I have in a long time. I hardly even notice the alarms going off in the background. Hardly. It isn't long before there are people getting ready to escort me out of whatever this heavenly place is. Then I see her. The woman whose watch I broke earlier. We lock eyes. She whispers something to the person next to her who whispers something into their wrist and suddenly I'm free. The woman walks over to me. She introduces herself. She seems in much better spirits than when I bumped into her at the grocery store. I profusely apologize for breaking her watch. She looks sad but says it's okay. She asks me to sit and we sit on the grass together. She asks how I ended up here and I explain. She tells me what this place is and how people usually have to enter but how she'll make an exception for me once a week. I thank her profusely. I'm glad to have some warmth in my life. I think she's glad to have made a friend.



*Accompanying Artwork by Theadora Aitchison*



*Colorful Balaclavas* by Hannah Lieberman



*Cate Blanchett as Bob Dylan* by Hannah Lieberman

## **Mirror, Mirror**

Gabi Pinto

My whole life has been a hopeless battle against my mother's beauty. I always admired her, the way she looked, her ever-changing wardrobe of eclectic yet somehow flattering pieces, the long hours in front of the mirror, and the spray of her saccharine candy perfume. That was my favorite smell in the whole world. It didn't matter how late I was to school or she was to work, the last coat of lipstick must always be applied.

I waited for so long to become like her, a true beauty, the kind of person who could just walk into a room and take all the attention with a glance. I think she was waiting too. I saw her some mornings, when she thought I wasn't paying attention, looking at me so intensely, measuring how I would compare. I thought that she wanted me to be just like her but she was dreading every moment, every birthday when I would become prettier, every envious stare, every man that I would take from her, after all the youth I had already taken, now this too. All I wanted was a mere scrap of what she had, but she just wanted to beat me in this invisible contest.

For a while, she got cruel, back when she thought I would get in her way and I was close. We had the same hair, same nose, same lips, even the same feet. Everything except the chin and the eyes. So, one day, when I was old enough for it to stick, she looked me in the eyes with a big smile and grabbed my chin.

"It's too damn bad you got your father's chin. So pointy" she said.

I think that was the happiest day of her life. The day she won. She celebrated that I wouldn't be as beautiful as her while I mourned the beauty I would never have. That was it. That was all the confirmation I needed. A single resemblance to my father ruined my chances. Whenever she compared me to him, I knew I had failed. I would never be good enough. To be compared to him was to lose.

After that the cruelty stopped and I got my mom back. It was that moment, more than anything else in my life, that taught me the meaning of beauty. I never bothered looking in the mirror too long after that, or putting on that last coat of lipstick. What was the point, when I had my father's chin?



# I Wonder What It's Like to Hear the Voices In Your Head

Henry Miller

"Do something! Have it boil, rush!"

*I miss you.*

"Let's try again. Match the red to the red and the white to white."

"Could you go and get me a blanket?"

"Where have you *been*?! We've been worried sick."

"I wouldn't hang it like that."

"My day was ok."

"What are you thinking about?"

"Too tired."

"Too slow."

"Too much."

*Under everything, everything ever—I'd love to hear you just one more time.*

"Take some time for yourself."

"Nothing happened."

*"Nothing?"*

*The warm and the soft, like that air in the summer. Heavy.*

"Great to meet you, Peter. Come in, come in!" Simon said.

"It's too tight. Too tight, Mom, I can't breathe!"

"You live around here?"

*Velvet tongue, swollen to fit my throat. Thick.*

*Nice and still and away. Thank god.*

*Thank god.*

"Yes, sir! We're right around the corner—red house with the white porch."

*Fuck you, Peter.*

"No kidding! You've got a great place, I drive right by every day to work."

"I cannot *believe* we haven't met! Now, when'd you move in?"

*Asshole Peter. Asshole dickhead nosy-ass Peter.*

"August? I think? I don't know exactly, the days all sort of blend together."

*Fucking cold, again. Fuck. Slithering and wrapped up all around. The cavity again, deeper. Pink and ice all around, looked up and it's all around. It hurts. Can't move.*

"I hear you. We'll have been here 16 years in December but it feels just last week we got the place. Funny thing, time."

*Peter fucking reeks. Metal burned and chipped mixed with dying. It hurts to breathe him in, the tiny lead shards stick and prod and rot. Who does he think he is? Big house with the red and white just like Dr. Molson's thinks he's all that.*

*Fucking disgusting. He's just waiting to die, you know. If he was so happy, he'd smell like. Like birds and cream and that warm glow from the window after the sun's been out too long. Not like this. Dr. Molson smelled awful, too, but different. Like the hospital: chemicals and too clean and no-touching-absolutely-no-touching.*

*No touching, ok? Hands on your belly. Peter smells like dying and Dr. Molson smelled like*

"Did you want to stay for dinner? I was going to put some soup on."

*Fucking Simon's too fucking nice.*

"Oh, no, thank you. I appreciate it but I should get on home—it's our daughter's birthday. The singing and the cake and all that, you understand."

"Of course, tell her happy birthday from me"

"Will do, will do. You take care now, Simon. Good to finally meet you."

"Likewise. Take care, Peter."

*Hurl and yes. Yes, you look just like the sun. On the grass at the rest stop off the 10, maybe. Lay too long and it'll be azure-colored everything. Everything, ever.*

*Choke and live nothing.*

"Take some time for yourself."

*Sacchrine Ooze; beginning to thaw and it feels divine.*

*Churn and burst and knot.*

"I better not find it when I go up there."

"Not you!"

"You feel something that I just don't feel."

"I drove all this way."

"God! I said I was sorry!"

*I said I was sorry.*

*God. Dr. Molson. Dr. Davidson. Dr. Taylor. God. It started too soon and festered too long. All mine All mine All mine All mine. Too slow, too little, too much. It's gross.*

*Too long.*

*Sudden thawing now into sudden freezy-dense. Fuck that fucking cold again. Soaked through soles and sickness.*

*Burning in my skin, deeper.*

*Dr. Molson would say to breathe.*

*Dr. Davidson would laugh and say the same "Well, what I'm thinking is"*

*And Taylor would just sit there.*

*Fucking Taylor.*

*Fucking everybody and everything ever.*

*"Could you come down for a minute?"*

*Freezing and white-blue and break. Crushed underneath—the choke long gone. Now a break. A crevice in the ice.*

*Blue and violet and down and down. Screaming screaming screaming screaming down and down and down.*

*"Judy?"*

*Can't breathe can't blink It's too tight. Too tight, Mom, I can't breathe!*

*"Could I come up there?"*

*"Judy?"*

*I need the stars. I need the bright I need the bright.*

*"I'm coming up, Judy."*

...

*A knock at the door—ringing through the house. I can't move. Another knock and then Simon from behind the door: "Judy?"*

*"It's open," weakly.*

*Creaking hinge and then steps on the wood. Steps up the stairs. Round and round and round on the steel.*

*And then there he was, a shadow in the frame.*

*"Judy! Judy? Are you ok?"*

*"I'm fine."*

*"You're on the floor."*

*"Where else is there to be, Simon?"*

*"You know, Dr. Molson says fine doesn't mean anything. It's just a word, not a feeling."*

*"I'm fine, ok? What do you want me to say? I don't even see Dr. Molson anymore."*

*"She was good, though. Why not?"*

*Velvet tongue swells.*

*"Who was that earlier? Peter. He smelled awful."*

*"He was just being nice, Judy. He lives nearby and wanted to say hello. Why did you stop seeing Dr. Molson?"*

*"She smelled bad, too. Like latex and peroxide. Made me gag."*

*"She smelled bad, huh? Peter, too?"*

*"Yes, Simon. The worst."*

*"What do I smell like?"*

*"You smell fine."*

*"Oh?"*

*"Yes. Fine. Like regular fine, not like what Dr. Molson told you or whatever. You smell not-good and not-bad. Just fine. Leave it alone."*

*"I just wanna know what's going on up here."*

*"It's nothing. It's always nothing. All I do is sit and be."*

*I need the stars. Frost returning.*

*Simon: "The cold, yeah?"*

*I need the stars.*

*"I need the bright."*

*I miss you and it's too much up here. All alone and cold and warm and cold and warm one after the other over and over again. It's fucking exhausting. I hate the velvet and I hate the Ooze. What is it to be home, to let go, and to love, really? I just want to I just want to I just want to*

*"Oh, Judy. I'm so sorry. Come on, I'll take you up there."*

*Scooped up and away, all on his chest. Out the frame,*



down the wood, through the hall and to the right. The world shook with each step. His shirt wetter and wetter. Salty. I couldn't stop. It just kept coming. Out and out and out and out and out and out and out.

The wood turned to steel again but steps up this time.  
One after the other.

*Your shirt must be soaked through.*

We arrived and he lay me down next to him. Close. He turned me to face the sky and I broke. Huge and flowering—no more to cry, but still it came.

Out and out and out.

Through the blurry wet, though, the stars. Each a brilliant color of its own and so far away. They were white and green and shiny and bursting and yellow and red and perfect. Every one keeping to itself but shining just the same. God, it was everything.

Out and out and out.

Forever they went and forever they blinked; all out of time but wonderful still. It was a patchwork screen of everything, ever but not too much. Just right.

Just fine.



*Untitled* by Henry Miller

## The Spiral

Isa Ramos

“Amparo!”

“Huh-what?!” Amparo refocused her vision to see her study group staring at her with expectant looks on their faces.

“You totally zoned out,” one of them said, tapping her pencil on her notebook.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I was listening,” she said half-heartedly, shaking her hair out of her face.

“I hope so, I don’t think anyone else actually understands this study guide,” another one said.

“Listen, I gotta go.” She stood suddenly and started to pack her things. “I’m really sorry but I forgot I have to be somewhere...else.”

She finished packing, and left. It was a weak excuse, but she had to keep moving or the spiraling would begin again. She didn’t know when or why it started, but recently she’d been plagued by something she could only describe as a spiraling that seemed to appear out of thin air.

Seeing as she didn’t exactly have “somewhere else” to be, she just walked. She walked until she grew numb to the sensation, and it wasn’t much longer till she realized she’d lost all control. She felt herself begin to drift. Her eyes clouded as she felt herself falling backward, her feet lifting off the ground.

When she came back down, there was grass beneath her feet, and her urban backdrop had morphed into a field of grass that stretched for miles. She knew it wasn’t real. How could it when she’d just been elsewhere a moment ago? However, she felt no fear, or confusion. Nothing tugged at her, and nothing flooded her mind with discomfort. The sun had just begun its descent into the horizon, casting a warm glow over the field. She spun slowly, pulling the runaway strands of hair that blew into her face aside gently as her eyes landed on a girl standing in the field. The girl turned, as if she’d sensed her presence, and waved her over to where she stood.

Despite her reservations, Amparo couldn’t help but feel they were unnecessary here. She reached where the girl stood, meeting her

warm yet steady gaze.

“Amparo.”

There was no need to wonder how this girl knew her name, accepting that there were things here that did not need to be understood.

“Yes?”

“Why do you think I chose to stand here? This field extends for miles, yet I chose to stop here.”

“Everywhere is the same. There isn’t any need to walk further.”

“I chose to stand here because I only walked as far as I wanted to. And if there were someone way over there,” she turned and pointed to an indistinguishable place in the distance, “who called for me to come, I wouldn’t.”

“Why not?”

“I wouldn’t if I didn’t want to.”

“And if you did?”

“Then I would. But that’s not why I’m here, Amparo. I’m here because you don’t think you have a choice when someone calls you from the other side of the field.”

“I don’t understand.”

“There isn’t anything to understand. You said you had somewhere else to be, and now you’re here.”

“But I didn’t *come* here. I don’t know where ‘*here*’ is.”

“Yes you do.” She turned to face the sun, pointing up at it. “Why are we here at sunset?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s setting because you’ve always liked sunset. You liked that the sun always kept its promise to rise again when morning came.”

“The sun’s constant.” The words came out in a whisper before she could stop them.

“Yes, and you liked that it never asked anything of you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why else would you be here, Amparo? You’re unhappy there. There, they expect things from you, more than they should. People take advantage of your willingness to give for nothing in return, and you live everyday like that doesn’t bother you.”

“It doesn’t.”

“The sun is setting, Amparo, I’m in your head.”

“So none of this is real?”

“It can be. If you want.” The girl gave her another smile.

“Does the sun ever rise?”

“Every morning. Amparo.” She stepped closer to her. “Everything you’ve ever wanted from life is here. Your home, your family.”

“I don’t know how that could be possible. Life is never everything anyone’s ever wanted.”

“Stay.”

“Isn’t it exciting? When you feel the music start to swell? The people around you look happier, and life starts to look up so you do too. Isn’t it exciting when good things begin to happen again, and you can’t help but feel like you never would have felt this good if things hadn’t felt so hopeless before?”

“No one is denying you your sorrows, Amparo, but you shouldn’t feel like you can’t enjoy them unless you first feel sadness.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t think it’s possible to feel this much joy without an equal amount of pain. Things aren’t great the way they are, but it’s all I’ve ever known. To take that away...I would feel like I’d lost one of the only constants in my life, because those fleeting moments of pure joy are worth everything in between.”

The ground began to change, the familiar grey sidewalk reappearing beneath her feet. Amparo turned to face the sun and closed her eyes, soaking it in knowing it’d never feel like this anywhere else again. When she opened her eyes, the familiar spiraling had returned, growing until it was large enough to pass through. She watched as the place she’d left behind appeared before her, just on the other side of the spiral. She returned her gaze once again to the girl.

“I suppose you still think I should stay,” Amparo said solemnly.

“It doesn’t matter what I think. I know you’ll find your happiness even if it is somewhere else.”

Amparo’s expression softened, and she almost felt guilty for leaving such a hopeful soul behind, but she couldn’t stay even if it was everything she’d ever wanted.

“It’s all I’ve ever known,” she whispered, before stepping through the spiral once more.

## You Can’t Use People Without Them Winding Up Used

Jay Evan Joseph

It can be explained in a parable.

The smokestacks are gathering a grim quorum in the sky. Headstones all in a row as I walk down the middle and the sun through the trees casting cruel bullets down on my eyes. It’s Sunday. I’ve invited her out here to smoke a cigarette in hopes that she likes the same poetry as me. I’m into Keats, she says Kerouac’s more her speed. I tell her I don’t like the smell of the ash on my fingers and did she know some of these graves are from two centuries ago. Two centuries ago they killed men in this town with guns and germs and they grew beets in the fields and summers were rotten flesh seared in the sky. I was telling her about the sugar factory and how they dragged him in for those drug charges, they wanted him off his land and all, when I inhaled straight filter and re-coiling tossed the butt on the ground and, stomping it into the damp, we moved on.

I didn’t mind so much coming out here except that I didn’t really love her since she said she felt the same. and I don’t really like women anyway. We went back to my house and sat on the couch in the flaccid sun that now lay like an ox to be shot across the room. Softly falling on our faces. I wasn’t looking at her but I could feel her eyes on me. Yellow and jaundiced. I usually brush my teeth after I smoke, I say. She doesn’t pick up on the innuendo and I ask if she wants to be taken home. Outside there’s chickens calling softly and pecking at leaves. I smell must and liver. She looks like she’s having a stroke. Sullen and my ribs ache. I excuse myself to throw away the polaroids I took at the cemetery. While I’m in there I think of every friend of mine that’s ever lied to me and I take a second cigarette and place it between my lips and look in the mirror and don’t light it and when I put the cigarette back in the box the tip is wet.

I take her home.



### Making Fire

Joaquin Martinez

When I was young, I always watched my father build fires in front of our house. Under violet skies, he swung away at the pines on the tree line, and heaved logs and stones into a pit charred so black it looked like a pool of oil. He swept away the brush on the floor with windmill motions and snapped big branches in half like toothpicks. Seemingly from the earth itself, he procured a flat and wide stone and laid it across his lap. Raising a firm piece of bark above his shoulder, he paused, in hesitation or reflection. Then like a bear he swiped down and clawed at the stone with the wooden talon, and pounded and struck until they conjured an orange glow.

This is when it began. My father threw the fragment into the pile as the light began to grasp and climb. Neighbors and visitors began strolling into the clearing, saying “howdy” and “fine weather”. They hauled enough food and picnic blankets to feed a horde of lumberjacks. Meanwhile, the flame would start to kick, taking hold of log and coal, anything within its feeding grounds. It stumbled at first, then rose to its feet, a long spindly form posed in the darkness. Everyone got real quiet as it became still, contemplated.

Then it exploded!

into a marvelous light that split the night sky in half. The flame bloated like a berry, then climbed and reached ten feet high. Everyone cheered and clapped as the familiar light and homely warmth embraced and kissed every man, woman, and child. The horde of their voices lifted into the air in plumes, as the trees seemed to part and bow like it was an evergreen ball. My father would look proudly over his work, shaking hands with some of the local townspeople and heartily laughing at the kids who would be holding their hands and marshmallows out to the flame.

And I watched, from inside the house, frustrated that my father would never teach me the art of fire.

—

Desks, blackboards and creaky planked floors faded into tree trunks and bush when the 3 o'clock bell rang. I dropped my backpack

and went searching, crawling for stones under the shrinking canopy of oaks. Through cracks between the treetops, the sun bore down in meteor trails. The grass barely showed green under the harshness of light.

I tried so hard to start my own fires. Every time I saw the townsfolk circling my father, I longed for that same appreciation. I wanted to be able to show other people what I could do, who my family was, through that heavenly glow that drew people in like flies.

I found a good, hardy stone in front of a nearby cave, almost as large as my torso and twice as heavy. As I dragged the crude obelisk along, a vision of my father's relentless hand coming down appeared over and over again. The stone crashed down onto crunchy leaves and dead grass. I hopped on the toes of my worn sneakers to grab a branch up above, snapped from its natural place. Taking the staff in hand, and snaking my legs under the big rock, I stuck my arm up in the air.

A moment of pure emptiness passed, and the craving for mastery that I wanted more than anything coursed through me.

I swung.

And the branch slammed onto the stone, glued for a moment before gliding like a knife. It sprinted off the edge as sparks came out in a bunch, bounding, rising and falling, ready to spill onto the brambles. Then, as I stared, the blazing dust disappeared as quickly as it appeared.

Dumbfounded at this revelation, I drew and dropped wood against stone, again and again. Each time, the fire would whimper, cry, and die. Over and over, I struck that stone until the sun glanced down.

Each blow became softer and softer as my arms weakened with despair. Hours of watching, waiting, imagining myself victorious, did nothing. I felt the autumn wind blow through the flimsy drapes of my favorite hoodie.

—

My father rarely hung around home throughout the week. As a contractor, he often resided onsite as he directed beams of wood and cement mixers day in and day out.

One day, when I barged through the screen door after school, I saw him seated at the table sipping on a pot of coffee. With the same stoic expression that he always wore at home, he turned to eye my wheez-



ing form. I took deep breaths, in and out, in the way that I was asked to whenever I got too worked up. I planted my feet, trying to get myself back up straight and pry my hands from off my knees.

I bid him, “Sir, can I tell you something?”

He muttered, shifting in his seat, “Sure but I’ll need to leave for the site soon. Can’t talk long sadly.” I began to feel the familiar chill of home.

“Okay I know you won’t like this but I didn’t stay for daycare today I wanted to try practice making the fire and I almost got it but the flame wouldn’t hold in the way your fires always do so could you please tell me how you do it?”

An overpowering sound erupted from his mouth in bellows, booming and deep enough to fill every room in the house and shake the windows. His laugh came so suddenly that he could induce a fit in himself within three seconds and was hearty to the point that you could barely hear your thoughts over him. For anyone else, it was impossible to not laugh with him, but it carried no inherent joy. And when he was done, the lines in his face just as easily fell back into their thick bed rows. He pocketed the light in his eyes.

Carefully placing the pot on the table, my father inclined to his full height. I had to tilt my head past the dinky chandelier above the breakfast table to meet his eyes as I sulked. Today, like every day, he wore his signature red-and-black flannel which looked like curtains hanging off his massive shoulders.

“No.”

I wanted to shout, to flail my arms about in frustration, but the icicles in the air froze my temper. Numbness overtook me.

“Dinner’s in the fridge. Do your homework.”

He stepped to the door in impossibly long and calculated strides, grabbing his polished-clean briefcase and telescopic mug.

“I’ll see you later.”

The screen door banged.

—

I spotted them about fifty or so yards from where I was carving my own name into a tree in the park. The sun was setting but I was in

no hurry to return home; it was just me most of the time until very late into the evening. They ran out to the riverside past the playground and kicked the pebbles on the beach. They walked southbound, to the boulders. Among the lumps of stone, I spied them reaching for a flat rock and a piece of a tree branch washed ashore and dried in the daytime. One of them laid the stone across their lap.

A hand raised the branch upward, poised and ready like an executioner. I remember, so clearly, that smile both mocking and intentional.

The first swipe did nothing as expected. The second swipe too. But the shape continued to batter the sedimentary board with the wood chunk in hand. The cheers from the others grew louder.

And behold, the glow.

It was a puny, gangly thing that gripped onto the wooden pick, but the light was unmistakable. The shape chucked it onto a hastily woven bed of sticks; upon impact, it sputtered, wasted away, and vanished.

I marched home under the rising stars, mulling over the crude ritual I just witnessed.

“It was wrong.” I slowed down. “They did it wrong.”

My nails dug into my palms. I ditched my bag and ran back home. The world crashed down behind me. Over the train tracks, the crosswalk, past the cafés and restaurants where nice meals were being served and people laughed in conversation and hugged family and friends who were soon to depart. Into the forest which leaned and creaked in grim, divine rage. I fought through my fear of the trees, which towered over me in the shadow of night.

Tripping over a loose root, I tumbled onto our lawn, exhausted but desperate to move. My ankles ached and my chest burned like hell. I needed better wood, better stones. Maybe my father kept them in the shed behind our house and laid them among the trees before he began his ritual.

The shack roof was falling apart but stood refined, proud, unassuming regardless. I kicked down the door. Bladed tools hung from the ceiling, and I could see dust settled on the carpentry table. Rows of stones, equally wide and roughly cut, leaned against the shed’s back

wall. On the shelf, matchboxes sat tucked away.

Large canisters of something sprawled all over the ground in an orderly mass, covering the shed floor. Some were open, some were recently bought, some were empty. Someone hid them instead of throwing them into the dumpster.

Gas cans.

I took four or five in my arms and swung them onto our lawn. The full ones spun like tomahawks mid-throw. Inside, every room in the house was dark except for the kitchen light. My hands anxiously fumbled at each of the caps as I doused the front porch with the intoxicating fluid. The windows browned, it soaked into the wood and stained the white paint which had already been going. Leaping around the corner of the house, I spilled more through the kitchen sill, which was cracked open.

I hauled out several more cans from the shed and continued my work until I drowned the first floor. With a large branch near the house, I reared up like a baseball player in swing. I closed my eyes but could hear the branch colliding with the archway, gliding up it as if it were liquid.

Howl!

and the explosion sent me over my heels and flying back onto the grass.

The fire starved. With orange claws it scaled the walls and the house was soon in its palms. The lamps within the house began to flicker off. Touching, brushing, reaching skyward the fire climbed, unchained to gravity or any burdens of morality or hesitation. It razed and blazed with a light more intense than I had ever seen in the daylight. Some debris ejected from the wall ignited the nearby grass, and these microscopic imps soon grew too.

People came out from the tree line, entranced by the sound and the sight. The fire, like an engorged king, sat atop the roof and yawned upward. Nobody screamed or cried for help, as a mesmerized silence set in around the clearing and eyes all watched the house smoke and crumble. I got up to my feet and stepped back to take it all in.

“This was it,” I thought. My first fire.



*Untitled by John Kim*





*Untitled* by Sidney Millen

### Miss Burbank

Jonah De Forest

"...it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life!"

-Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

•

Every morning, Bobbie Ann woke up at 5:30 AM to the sharp trills of her alarm clock. At night, she dreamt of Waco, of tent revivals and dirt yards and running from neighborhood boys. By the time she rolled out of bed, these dreams had drifted away like the smog outside her window.

"Don't let it get to your head," said Marion, handing her a paper sack lunch, "you're still my daughter after all."

"Yes Mama."

•

The bus ride from Burbank to Culver City took about two hours. After a historic stretch of rain, the sun had returned and the world was reborn in brilliant greens. With her head pressed against the glass, Bobbie Ann almost felt at peace, watching street signs pass with rhythmic ease. The day ahead seemed so far away.

This all changed when her bus reached its destination. The cream arches of the Studio materialized and her stomach dropped. It was the lurching terror and excitement of standing on the high dive, a body of water beneath her.

•

The studio was planning a big publicity roll-out for Bobbie Ann. Much was to be made of the unlikely pageant queen and her small town spirit. Photographs were taken of Bobbie Ann on a haystack and in a swimsuit and dressed as a cowgirl and holding a sparkler and trimming a tinsel Christmas tree. This required the assistance of the cosmetology department: a fleet of white-coated women with cases and cases of beauty products.

First they dyed her hair from brown to a nearly identical shade of reddish-brown to better bring out the technicolor film process (“copper,” as the chief hairstylist described it, “it’ll make all the difference in post-production”). Then it was set in rollers and put under a menacing orb contraption; brushed out and pinned and sprayed and brushed out again in varying configurations. Though her scalp burned, Bobbie Ann liked the resulting frame of curls, pleasant as Deanna Durbin.

Her face was scrubbed clean and primed with a succession of creams. Then came the makeup, an endless parade of powders and serums and waxy lip pigments applied with militaristic precision.

*This shade makes the set dressing look more vivid on camera.  
emphasizes your bone structure in quarter-profile.  
enhances your eyes after the film print has been developed.*

There was a science to everything. Bobbie Ann had never imagined that a face, let alone her face, could have such dimensions.

Here she was! A specimen of health! Clean as freshly-washed linens and pretty as a bluebonnet flower!

•

Singing, dancing, drama, star etiquette and elocution.

*No, no Miss Bannister, don’t arch your back! Make sure those hips are square  
sing from your diaphragm.  
move fluidly when you make gestures with your hands.*

In preparation for a bit part in *The Long Honeymoon*, Bobbie Ann had weekly consultations with a speech specialist known as Sandy. He was a funny, effeminate man, bearing a thick gray mustache and conspiratorial eyes of mischief. Sandy laughed affectionately at Bobbie Ann’s elongated vowels, calling her “Tex.” He did make note of her exemplary breath control, honed from years of playing the french horn. This detail also made Sandy laugh.

“You’re something else, I’ll tell you kid.”

There was a large diagram of the human vocal tract that hung in

his office, almost grotesque in its clinical detail. Bobbie Ann would stare at this for long stretches of time, alternately fascinated and disturbed.

“It’s red, not ray-ed, Tex. Don’t stuh-retch it out.”

•

During one session, a stout man with thin glasses peaked his head into Sandy’s office. Upon seeing him, Sandy adjusted his posture.

“How’s our girl doing?”

“She’s doing well! I’ve seen a definite improvement.”

“That’s what we like to hear.”

The man stepped into the office and looked at Bobbie Ann for a moment. Then he patted her on the head and headed out the door, “Keep up the good work!”

Sandy didn’t clarify who the man was, he just lifted his eyebrows theatrically and went about his lesson.

•

“She’s pretty well proportioned, all things considered. I think we just need to do some otoplasty on the ears,” said Dr. Steiner, a studio surgery consultant.

He was inspecting Bobbie Ann with an enlarged magnifying glass.

“Uh, what do you mean?”

“He’s going to pin your ears back dear,” said Ruth, one of Mr. Byron’s pursed-lipped secretaries.

Bobbie Ann touched her ears. This was never something she had taken notice of before. Now they burned *ray-ed*.

“Oh.”

“The studio will pay for it,” said Ruth, detecting some concern in Bobbie Ann’s expression, “we’re making an investment in you.”

“I appreciate it. My family appreciates it...we all do, I mean.”

Bobbie Ann didn’t register this decision as expressly negative or positive, only as rather peculiar, the sort of thing that caused an angular pang in her chest.

Dr. Steiner began explaining the specifics of the operation while her mind drifted elsewhere. She thought of the time she climbed a flagpole in sixth grade. Children screamed in horror and delight as Bobbie



Ann pulled her way to the top. She had felt invincible that day, looking down at her peers from the heavens.

•

It was a fairly rare occurrence to meet with Mr. Byron. There were usually financiers and executives and assistants of assistants to field before one actually got to him. When she was called to his office, Bobbie Ann was convinced her contract had been terminated. The powers that be had caught on to the fact that she was a hick, a hack, a nobody. She would wake from this strange dream and be a gym teacher.

The truth was, Mr. Byron had taken a special liking to Bobbie Ann. He had tried to manufacture all-American spunk out of other contract players. Haughty starlets, with their overly-affected mannerisms and demanding mothers, were as convincing a farmgirl as they were nuclear scientists. Bobbie Ann, he was sure, was the real thing.

On an especially hot Saturday afternoon, Ruth escorted Bobbie Ann to Mr. Byron's spacious office. Sunlight poured in from towering windows, casting an ember glow over the white and gold furnishing. Mr. Byron sat behind an oval desk flanked with framed photographs. She realized that this was the man from Sandy's office. To her surprise, he seemed in good spirits.

"There's our newest star! Bobbie Ann, this is Mr. Hauckner, Mr. Ziedel and Mr. DuPont," he said, gesturing towards three men in beige suits, "why don't you do a little spin for us?"

She did a self-conscious spin. Not sure when to stop, she spun a few more times. The men chuckled.

"Alright kid, that's enough," said Mr. Byron. Her face flushed in embarrassment.

"Isn't she something? She's gonna play Lydia's kid sister in *The Long Honeymoon*. We're gonna give her a musical number in her next picture too. But that name — it's cute, but so...okie. And it doesn't exactly roll off the tongue."

"How about Dorothy?" said Mr. DuPont.

"Dorothy Bannister. That's good...but I want something more...apple pie."

"Annie?" said Mr. Hauckner. Pretty soon all four of them were speaking over each other in rapid-fire succession.

"Georgia?"

"Shirley?"

"Susan?"

"Carol?"

Bobby Anne wasn't exactly sure what was happening, but she felt her chest tighten again.

Ruth cleared her throat, "Molly?" The men rattled on.

"Deirdre?"

"Esther?"

"Jackie?"

"Faye?"

Ruth cleared her throat again, this time speaking with great urgency, "Molly!"

"Molly...", Mr. Byron repeated with a cheshire cat smile. "Molly Bannister! I like that. Honey, why don't you come sit on Papa's lap?"

Bobbie Ann tentatively complied. She was wearing a pleated skirt and the wool of his pants felt prickly against her bare legs.

"From now on you're gonna be Molly, not Bobbie Ann, understand?"

Bobbie Ann had always been a loud-mouth, but even she knew not to argue with such a powerful man. Still, the spitfire who talked back at teachers had never quite left her. She attempted to speak, but her throat was dry and swollen. She swallowed and tried again.

"But, sir, um, Bobbie Ann is my name...I don't think I could go by anything else!"

"I see we have a firecracker on our hands," said Mr. Ziedel (or was it Mr. Hauckner?)

Mr. Byron tightened his grip on Bobbie Ann as he shifted to a sterner tone of voice, "Here at the studio we're like a family. And that makes me your father, which means I have the agency to make decisions for you. You're very lucky. I've chosen you. And because I chose you, I get to name you. Do you understand?"

•

Bobbie Ann was taken to a doctor's office in Mar Vista for her otoplasty appointment. She would wake from the operation as Byron Studio's newest star, Molly Bannister.

Under the heavy sedation of anesthesia, she dreamt of her grandfather's sermons, of her cousins collapsing into a dogpile — their limbs intertwined like ivy. *When will I see them again? What would they think of me now?*

She dreamt of Waco, of tent revivals and dirt yards and running from neighborhood boys.

And that vast Texas nightscape. The stars in their endless configurations, freckles stretching towards infinity.



*Rocky Shores* by Nisha Siedler



*Stream of Conscience* by Nisha Siedler

### Preservation by the Pin

Katrina V.

It only felt like a pinch, the pin, I mean. She began by laying me out flat, separating the hither from the thither. When the pin was through, she tucked me under glass before mounting me to her wall. I don't want to write to her, I wish to speak to her. I wish for a paradox to descend upon us both, within which we might begin again for the first time. Having met her, I wish to have never known her so that she might now love the product without having to recall the process. I do not deserve her second chance, nor she my initial failure; I did not deserve her initial chance, and thus double-fear a second failure. Amber, the viscous sludge, for her is clear; eternal metamorphosis, she hangs suspended between October and February, her call to my heart as clear now as it ever was. But let me speak to you here. Why did the gods demand Andromeda as sacrifice yet allow you to walk free, defier of time that you are? You violate nature through your lasting preservation, mocking the worldly directive of change over time, of glory to fade, of ashes to ashes. You are the criminal and the crime, the evidence that condemns itself, and I, your eager accomplice, yearn to be implicated, if only to learn your unnatural secrets and thereby come to know you better. In trying to run I have lost my way, and now can no longer tell if it is to or from you that I move. I yearn for your word yet am content to remain under glass, my gossamer wings pinned for your enjoyment, my childish heart beating eternal. I search for you within myself, preemptively censoring the words I thieved from your vocabulary so that I may greedily keep hold of them and avoid surrendering them to the world. I speak the truth; though you are no Eurydice and I no lyre, I cannot help but continually turn back to look at what once was, seeing only the present distance between us. Janus, my sweet other, bridge the infinite gap between us now and let me be yours, if only for a second, for it would nourish a lifetime.

### Summer Before College

Lucy Gillett

Do you think about the camping trip before I left?  
A teepee deep in the woods  
where constellations and flashlights were our only light  
Americana around the fire playing late into the night.  
Come sunrise - a rejuvenating dip in the lake,  
mud and grass squelching between our toes -  
I remember driving through the mountains  
Crossing state lines, Zach Bryan on the stereo  
and a Grateful Dead cover band atop Snow King.  
But that euphoria's inevitable demise  
always in the back of my mind.

My throat is raw now, a pit opened within  
I can't seem to shake a bittersweet nostalgia  
country music, cologne, and cigarettes,  
the notion I've bitten off more than I can chew.  
Memories of you gnaw at my mind  
tearing through the ridges and valleys of me.

Time has no regard for you and I,  
What terrible timing, yet life barrels on  
I still listen to the same songs  
But with an ache in my chest.  
How did we get here?  
Change is the only constant, I suppose



## A discussion between two past partners over coffee.

ML

### INT. CAFE-DINER - DAY

SHERYL (mid 40s), a high-powered executive/seasoned lesbian sits in a burnt orange booth at a mom-and-pop kind of place. A WAITER brings her an espresso beverage.

The place is comfortable. She is not. But she's trying.

Through the window, she watches a BLUE SUBARU pull into a parking spot. MARY (mid 40s) emerges from the driver's side, dressed in teaching clothes and looking somewhat rushed.

The DOOR BELL rings and Mary enters the restaurant. She takes a seat in the booth across, dripping with nervous energy.

MARY

I'm sorry I'm late. I got caught up at school. Did I keep you waiting?

SHERYL

No, I haven't been here long.

MARY

It's nice to see you.

Sheryl sips her cortado. Mary watches, takes note of her naked hands. The waiter comes by again to take Mary's order.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'll just have a coffee, please.

Mary spins the silver ring that hugs her left-hand finger.

Sheryl meets Mary's wide eyes with a professional cool.

SHERYL

So, I don't want this to take long, I thought we could just talk about Benny and--

MARY

I'm shocked you don't want the lawyers present.

SHERYL

Doesn't have to be that difficult.

MARY

I'm finding the whole thing kind of difficult, honestly.

SHERYL

I want Ben and Naomi to live with me. They shouldn't be separated.

MARY

And what am I supposed to do?

SHERYL

You can still see them.

MARY

When will I see them?

Pause. The waiter comes by and delivers the drink to Mary. Her gaze drops to the steaming



mug.

Sheryl watches.

SHERYL

Sunday dinners.

Mary's face transforms into a scowl. She pours creamer into her mug, empties a sugar packet in there too. Stirring.

SHERYL (CONT'D)

I thought we'd keep those.

MARY

I thought you'd keep me.

Mary sets the spoon down, looks back at Sheryl, holding back tears. She tries to make her face hard. Almost successful.

The waiter comes back.

WAITER

Will you ladies be wanting anything to eat?

MARY

SHERYL                      If you have any crème  
No, Thank you              pie, that would be  
                                 great.

The waiter notices their tension. He nods and moves quickly.

WAITER

Okay, I'll bring that right out.

Sheryl sinks back in her seat. Mary sips her tea. The women don't speak for a moment.

The restaurant hums around them. A family of three gets up from a table and exits the café.

MARY

What about joint custody?

SHERYL

Mary, I won't be carting two cats around every other weekend.

END.

**Dog, by the Light**

Nora Youngelson

That January was numbing  
which is why I took her  
in, the stray dog, the one  
who licked the open wound  
on the inside of my right palm  
and who rubbed my calf and  
who wouldn't tell me her name  
(not that I bothered asking)  
And I, who after opening the  
door gave her a red blanket, fit  
between my pale arms, holding.  
And then you were there, too  
in the doorway, certainly  
not for the first time  
but now haloed by the  
kitchen light you, who  
looked sacred  
and scared of the dog  
I brought into the house,  
who stepped back to see  
the world flip over into  
February thawing and curled  
up on the rug, the dog  
stayed. And once after we  
turned the kitchen light  
off and on about a hundred  
times you found her still,

shivering. So you crouched  
down, counted her teeth,  
once feared, glistening and gold,  
and at that daybreak all things  
spilled over into each other.  
Our backs were against the cool  
light that covers us, our backs  
to the dog who through her  
counted teeth finally told us  
her name and it was love,  
and I was love, and so were you.

**love in absence**

Oliver Otake

i sleep with my knees to the north  
 another independence day had came and went  
 and i was free  
 but boy that shit wears off  
 like the smell  
 of the clothes  
 you left  
 and i kept

i dreamt about our daughter last night  
 and it was just like real life  
 because years passed before my eyes.  
 she called me momma, her carseat shrank,  
 then she grew into you  
 and i woke up again  
 in love  
 in absence

**Hello Future**

Samantha Stever-Zeitlin

Hello there,  
 I see your stare,  
 I wonder where  
 you’re reading from.

I do want to know  
 what you missed seeing  
 while you spent time  
 pondering me?

Now absolutely nothing  
 is left in the future for us  
 because you couldn’t  
 look around much.

**Teen Talking**

Samantha Stever-Zeitlin

The conversations burst from mouths filled with tangled yarn balls  
 forming knitted sentences woven like warm sweaters.  
 They’re shoes bought online and tried on in person for the very first time.  
 Bubblegum spit out, colorful.  
 Seeds of vernacular growing out of multiple mouths, blooming into  
     berry bushes with green leaves.  
 Pollen-stealers buzzing around the bushes.  
 Ancient scripts from the 80s unraveling into the present.  
 People with food allergies gulping down words they know they  
     shouldn’t eat.  
 International inside jokes traded like a rich currency.  
 Feasts of disgusting and delicious fruit.



## Hegel

Sebastian Lechner

Being boyfriend and girlfriend is bourgeois nonsense and I am a rational being but I still want to hold you. The confused, agonized self is only a being in the relation, but without the negation of the self, rather a becoming, a turning, a holding-in-tune. Sing.

We won't see the revolution, not in our fading life, it is not due for one hundred years, and by that time, day will be night and night will be day. Yet we are co(i)mplicated in the world, and the world needs something new. My being becoming the border of you.



*Death in the Womb* by Francesca Romero

## your daughter

Sheea Sau

I am my mother's daughter  
 I am my father's daughter  
 I cannot run  
 I cannot cut it

I want to be whole again  
 Your hope  
 Until we meet again  
 I am forever intertwined

To Mom & Dad  
 With love, your daughter



## Lying in Salvation

Sophia Celi

Holy Ghost,  
 Wrap your breath around my heart,  
 Soften the ground beneath my aching knees,  
 And whisper hymns into my bleeding ears.  
 But tread not lightly,  
 So that I may finally believe again that your mercy graces my skin,  
 That your angels' kisses paint the freckles upon my nose,  
 And that your sweet songs wash clean my sins.  
 But the roots of my depravity spiral wildly around my bones,  
 And the shattered chalice of grapefruit promises cut so deeply my fragile  
     eyes,  
 And the books and shouts of forsaken prayers held the broken glass to  
     my bloody sight,  
 Reflecting Catholic lies dressed in its favorite red lingerie.  
 So, please,  
 Delicately pluck my plumage of aged promises,  
 Bestow the sacramental flowers upon the nape of my neck—  
 Just as Mary bore her rosaries—  
 And strip me Virgin,  
 So that the only weight I may succumb to are the decades of Her five  
     trying cries.  
 Holy Ghost,  
 Please let me taste the  
 Salvation in grief,  
 And let me not swallow the  
 grief in Salvation;  
 For as long as I surrender to You,  
 I surrender my faith to the truest gospel I have ever known:  
 Myself.



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