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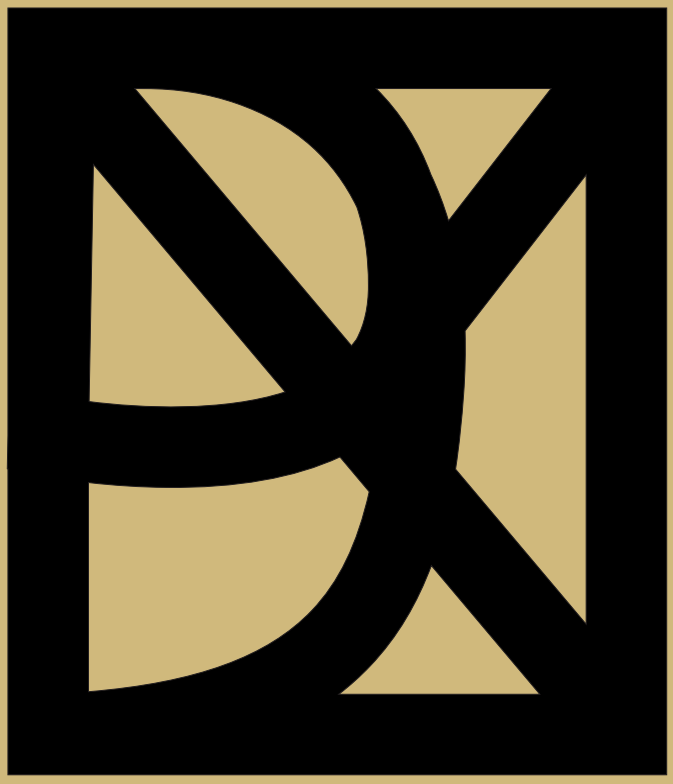
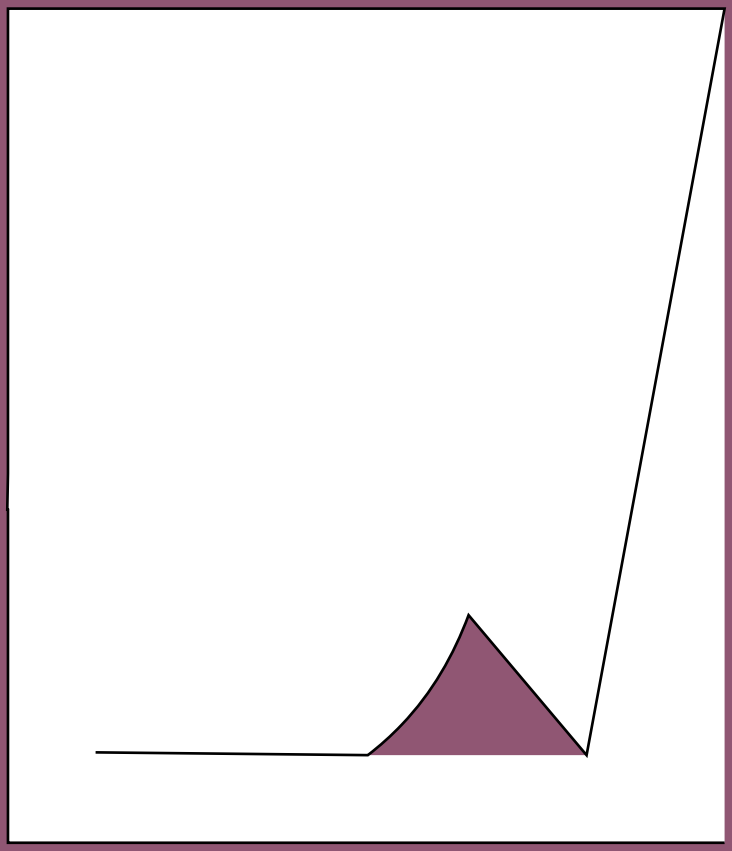


2022

VOLUME L



2022

MERIDIAN

Perhaps I write for one. Perhaps for the same person children write to when they scrawl their name in the snow.

-MARGARET ATWOOD

POETRY

1 GLAD TIDINGS OF A MAGPIE | BRUCE KAUFMAN
2 OF GRATITUDE | BEAU FARRIS
3 IF THERE WAS | KEAGHAN BANAITIS
12 MOUTH OF WORD | BEAU FARRIS
21 ELEGANTLY UNSTEADY | NORAH HIVELY
32 ATLAS, ALL | SUSANNAH BELL
34 THRILLSEEKERS | NORAH HIVELY
42 THEN, AGAIN | BEAU FARRIS
46 LA HIJA DEL MAR Y EL SOL | MARIA CORREA
66 A LOT OF THIS | BEAU FARRIS
80 PRINCE OF THE DEAD | MATTHEW COOK
81 8 POEMS | COURTNEY BROWN
88 A DIRTY FLOOR AT 8AM | CHARLOTTE WHITNEY
5 DISTRACTIONS | AIDAN CARROLL
8 MOONRISE | BEAU FARRIS
ANY STORY WHERE A HOTEL IS A PERSON | EMMA MACKAY

GLAD TIDINGS OF A MAGPIE

by BRUCE KAUFMAN

Distance times time
        equals a bright
                sunlit corner empty

as all things are and full
        from toe to crest of moon
                light ache for loves'

life ephemeral,
unknowing—nally after forty
        years blossoms
                far from my sheltered

ledge at mountain's
        foot—salt and vinegar
                strive for the bowl

of ego alone, my at-bottomed
        resting state

I wake up unafraid in a bed without sheets.
They are piled on the □oor
Waiting to be washed. The blood on them
my blood
Can be erased, but what happened cannot be.

My friend Courtney is with me
Maia, Mack in the other bed, asleep still.
I can hear their praise in my ears as I wait to be washed,
For the emptiness inside me to replace the blood
And to feel clean again.

If I close my eyes I can hear panting.
Can feel half-hearted pressure on my neck
Even as I demand more, more, more,

There is no love
I have no illusions.
If there was, I wouldn't have heard the music
Emanating from the basement
And wished I was there instead.
If there was, he wouldn't have called me
Courtney by accident.
If there was, we would have seen each other again.

Instead I wake up with my friends, unafraid.
There is space in my soul for regret.

MIDNIGHT ADVENTURES

by MARIANA BASTÍAS

An incessant buzzing woke her up. Not bothering to open her eyes, Stephanie reached over for the source of the godforsaken noise. She slammed her hand on her nightstand, trying to □nd her phone, but the buzzing stopped. She pulled her arm back under her covers, releasing a deep breath, and falling back asleep only to be woken up again when the buzzing returned.

I should have turned it off, she thought, as she opened her eyes and unplugged her phone from her charger. Why is she calling?

"Hello?" she answered in a groggy voice.

"Steph? It's me."

"I know it's you. Why are you calling me at," she pulled her phone from her ear, her tone shifting from annoyance to confusion as she checked the time, "one in the morning? Did someone die?"

"What? No."

"Were you arrested? Do I need to go bail you out?" she asked in a □at voice.

"You're cranky when you wake up," she laughed. "And no, I have not been arrested."

"Then why," Stephanie sat up in her bed and reached over to turn on her bedside lamp, fully aware that she was not going back to sleep anytime soon, "pray tell, sweet, sweet Melody, are you calling me in the middle of the night?"

"Well, my darling Stephanie, we are going on an adventure." She could hear the smile in her voice, the excitement at whatever adventure she had in mind loud and clear.

"At one in the morning?"

"At one in the morning, yes."

"Can't this wait 'til one in the afternoon?" Stephanie tried bargaining, "or maybe eleven? You know, a decent and reasonable hour."

"No," Stephanie grumbled. "Maybe. Either way, I should be asleep right now in my warm and comfy bed."

"Are you cold? And sleepy? Is that why you're so moody?" she pouted.

"No. I'm moody because it's two in the freaking morning."

"You don't say."

"Yeah. And this whole driving around before the sun is even close to rising thing is really messing with my sleep schedule, and you know that's not good for me."

"Of course, it's not, which is why I really appreciate your sacri□ce." Melody gave her a look of feigned sympathy, her tone leaking sarcasm.

"I know you do, and I would like to know what I'm sacri□cing my 7(e y)3 (/-th and)]TJETEM

Stephanie unclipped her seatbelt and rushed out of the car. Her cheeks were cramping with how hard she was smiling, but she didn't care. She couldn't believe where Melody brought her, but she was even more surprised that she hadn't recognized where they were going. They spent countless nights up here, escaping their world for a few hours. They were in the NCAR parking lot, overlooking all of Boulder. There was a soft, cold breeze brushing against her face. Stephanie took a deep breath, enjoying the smell of the night and the memories it brought her.

She looked over at Melody. She was setting down a blanket between two pine trees, the same one they've always used. Her heart swelled in her chest and her smile widened. It had been so long since they came here. Stephanie stared at the scene in front of her trying to commit every single detail to memory. The stars above them, the way the street lights outlined their favorite places in town, the way the cool of the night contrasted the warmth in her, and the beautiful girl waiting for her.

"Are you just going to stand there, or are you going to join me?"

MOUTH OF WORD

by BEAU FARRIS

My name is four □ngers or two of yours and mine
fawn all of G the tongue a young deer stomping each letter

Beau day see us Lee dragging hands in pine beetle catching can make a career
loving pond or oh saw a re□ection smiling trance end dent all ism words

the in candle essence of □re □ies ill loom in Nate's home making a blanket
night time tastes sub lime more tangy pupils die late

awake the upper E shell ons of rocky shores all in compass in attention
childhood means all upper case us ten siblee a jubilee without cell abrasion

many fest des tiny little green soldiers came oh □agged my grass
my crow cause em of big green soldiers

the M path a tic sparing a sparrow from broken wings is caw Lee shade
please sing siren dip at us its greek to me the words a Beau to □ll place

but sin tax is getting expensive a graham or lesson oozing from marshmallows
verb ohs and clings to cereal like you say fork with a u and k

sun nets are long lines effort vescently □oats all cool in the sky
sitting reading Whitman I am written in the mare gin its sour

red carpet under each word all true is M made from 4 sticks
lined up two is a V prop a gated by two more the □rst letter of a poem

trance end in meaning go a long way through the woods
breathing and abs tracked the poem it's easy

HAVING A NORMAL ONE

by DESMOND MCREYNOLDS

The Offices of Dr. Alexandre Renaud, Psychiatrist
Nantes, Upper Brittany
April 8th, 1991

Dr. Renaud shook the thin man's hand distractedly, his mind overflowing with pastel Georgian housefronts spackled with sea spray, cafés whose signs cheered "Bienvenue," and highly localized sunshine. It was Tuesday before the psychiatrist's long-planned-for weekend south in Lyon and, as the clock on his sunlight-striped office wall ticked slower on the second half of every rotation, the minute hand sat a sliver before the '11' when Monsieur Hugh Tolliver arrived promptly for his three o'clock appointment.

Renaud's thoughts raced around like miniatures on model train tracks, little whizzing st

“Yeah, that’s it, true enough. Friend of my wife’s, yeah. Nice lady.” Tolliver □exed his shoulders, getting comfortable. He wore a white shirt and blue jay-hued sweater vest with neat black zigzags round the thread lines and paunch around the belly. His black, plastic-framed spectacles were the sort that wrote software if you left them out of their case and were perched on an overly long nose that thought everyone smelled like bank customers. Behind the lenses, enlarged, beady hazel eyes looked like they saw the world as a mixture of relatively unassuming circumstances. The sum total of his features coalesced into a congealed mass of dif□cult-habits-to-kick. “You know, I didn’t □gure she was in therapy. She’s a very well-sorted woman, my wife says.”

“A great many people consort with therapists, so to speak, Monsieur Tolliver. Though more than a few might object to the stigma cradled by the word ‘therapy.’ Therapists help more than just those profoundly in need. The work is a diverse re□ection, as myriad as its clientele, and is concerned at heart, no matter the patient, with

“Ah. Right Asrn, that’s nice,” Hugh Tollivaid pleasantly. He had a mild-man - nered smile that was all lips, thin ones, and an unaffected crinkling at Asr5corners of his eyes.

his side-bin for his notepad. Colles abound pitched him with Asr5glory of their word processors, proffering recommendthero b3m 3.6companying carry - ing cases with furthEM4Aestaments to the ef□ciency of their mechanical keyboards.

tion is a proverbial river with a dam whose □oodgates are let down for □ow. Much of psychoanalysis consists of what I might refer to as an unbalanced dialogue, wherein I would probe pointedly at the state of your mind at the expense of a more natural analytical □ow. Free association, on the other hand, allows you to share with me your thoughts and feelings unbound by thematic convention or even semantic coherency."

Renaud adjusted his spectacles. They slipped down his nose at intervals such as this, as the left nose pad had fallen off earlier that month. It bothered him, but not suf□ciently for action, because in addition to his great education he was also thrifty, and the nearest appropriately thrifty store was ten minutes travel by car, his license for which was two years expired.

"In other words," he continued, "free association allows you to share yourself honestly. It must be said, however, that for this to work you must be utterly without pretense. I shall say I bear no judgment should you not feel comfortable con□ding fully in me in our □rst session, however, I must also remind you that if you are not truthful with me in the long term, the work that I do here with you will amount to little more than money scattered to the winds and a prayer for health and wellness."

Without undue hesitation, Hugh Tolliver nodded contentedly and said that he understood and that he was not the sort of loony who'd lie to his therapist, as the sort of people who did that were the same sort to conceal a heart attack from their GP because heart attacks were the sort of thing only supposed to happen to other people and it was really a bit embarrassing when one of them actually happened to you.

Renaud reached back behind him and opened the window by way of a sash fastener to let in the breeze and the broad burble of the river that murmured over the steep, slanted rooftops of Nantes. The building had no central air conditioning, and the outside air nudged and shouldered away the stale dankness of the carpet and thick, mid-century drapes pinned up high on the walls by railroad spikes Renaud had ft sud rne(w)2

"Well." Hugh Tolliver considered this for a moment, rocking back in his seat. He dropped his forearms cross his thighs in a physical manifestation of his pondering. "I'm just about fed up with my curious son."

Renaud nodded silently as an indication to continue.

"Well, I say curious. He's not curious like that curious monkey's curious. Curious George the chimpanzee, he's curious in other ways. My son's a curiosity, you know. Like a snow globe that's got sand in it instead of snow. A weird bit of business

Tolliver was not suitably chagrined. “If there’s a Queen of France again that’s a piece of news that missed me by. Oi, I thought I was supposed to be prattling on like a dam or a river.”

Silently, Renaud tapped his □ngers together, balancing the notepad on his knee. “Your son, Monsieur?”

“Ah, yeah, my son. You have a son? Nah, you don’t have a son. Psychiatrists don’t have sons; they have word processors. That’s what I say, and my wife says that too sometimes. It’s all her fault, this is, if you’ve been wondering, and you should have been. Let me tell you, my wife isn’t a bunch of roses of Picardy, neither. Last spring, she decided she wanted to get into knitting. Now, I know what you’re thinking. No harm, right? No harm, no foul. Well, let me ask you something. Would you be saying no harm, no foul after thirteen months of having new needled draperies every single day? And the old ones don’t go in the bin. At □rst, she stuffed them under our bed, then 0 0 1Pur bmttle -5 (s)1 (s)whaenthat anc ut ⊱roer thi socende

me who's the nutter." Hugh Tolliver sighed. "Least my daughter's alright. Bright girl. Thinking of studying a bit in New York next year, but I don't know if we'll swing it."

After scribbling a few brief notes, Renaud set his pen on the seat of the chair, eyes drifting across the scattered lines a few moments before he refocused on Hugh Tolliver. Gallantly he resisted the impulse to pinch the bridge of his nose, to squeeze his thumb and fore□nger till his headache, a dull discomfort brought on by dullness, faded away. Autopilot had sat up with a weary salute and taken control. Middle-aged man unful□lled thanks to his family's idiosyncrasies. He had one of these twice a week.

"Thank you, Monsieur Tolliver. I think with that I have attained as comprehensive idea of your basic psychological state as I require for the time being. If it's alright with you, I'd like to proceed with asking you a few questions and seeing where they take us."

"Yeah, sure," Tolliver said. "Except, if it's alright with you, there's one I'd like to ask □rst."

Renaud sti□ed a nasal sigh. "Certainly." He □ipped his notepad to a new page, smoothing down the old one with a □at, neat fold.

Grinning amiably, Hugh Tolliver scooched closer, his eyes the sort of things made out of third or fourth cups of coffee. "So," he said. "How come I go out killing?"

Renaud paused for a moment. Then he smiled to himself and picked up his pen.

ALL THAT WE BEHOLD FROM THIS GREEN EARTH

COURTNEY BROWN

FELTED WOOL ON WOOD - 18 X 30 X 3 CM

ELEGANTLY UNSTEADY

by NORAH HIVELY

with a death like molasses
slow and sweet
we died
and i sang with the wind
on a warm sunny day

"Alright, I think everybody is just about here," Susan announced.

Heads turned, looking around the dreary church basement, silently noting that everyone was not, in fact, here.

Mara had been attending this group long enough to know everyone's faces. It was instinct to count the number of people in the room. Their usual number was twenty-one, but the little old lady was missing. Down to twenty. And to think they had thirty just a year ago.

"Why don't we get started?" Susan walked over to the door as the group members milled about, grabbing one last cup of coffee and a donut. That way they had all something in their hands to look at when they avoided questions.

Slowly, they all took their seats. It was at Susan's behest that they all choose a different seat than they chose last time. She insisted that if they sat in a new place ev-

Everybody looked out over the circle. It was a stupid question. Some days were better than others, that was true, but they were all looking for the little old lady. The old lady whose grandson went missing when she was meant to be watching him. It was really anybody's guess what had happened, but they were all thinking the same thing.

Susan, the little empath that she was, sighed, folding her arms over her clipboard.

"Maryann won't be joining us, today," she spoke, chewing the inside of her cheek.

Despite her profession, Susan had a hard time delivering bad news.

"Unfortunately, she passed away late Sunday evening."

"Passed away?" someone from across the circle piped up, "Naturally?"

Susan swallowed again and forced a tight smile with a short shake of her head. Without having to speak, they all dropped their heads.

"We all know that this is a hard thing we have to cope with," Susan's gentle voice wavered, her words falling on deaf ears, "But that's why we're here. That's why we've come together today. Because we haven't given up. Even though bad things happen, life is still a beautiful thing that we want to participate in," she insisted.

Mara let out a scoff and all eyes turned to her. The shag carpet and the wood paneling absorbed sound. Except for the sounds that Mara made. That was her guess, at least, because she was always the one getting called out.

"Do you disagree, Mara?" Susan asked.

Mara slid further down in her chair, dropping her head back to look up at the popcorn ceiling.

"Yes," she grumbled.

"Would you care to tell us why?"

Sparing a quick glance at the rest of her group, she could see that nobody else cared for her to tell them why. She really did her best not to bring the group down, but it was hard sometimes. They were all at rock bottom already, but she brought a pickaxe to every meeting just to see how far down they could go.

"I mean...I don't know about everyone else, but, like...this isn't a group that's □ghting for life. I'm here because I have nowhere else to go. It's like...like going to a

party in college, right? You don't really wanna be there, but if you don't go, you'll just be left sitting at home thinking about how you should have gone. This is just a pity party that nobody wanted to have by themselves," she explained.

The faces of the group members soured. Some with knitted brows and pursed lips, others with slightly open mouths aiming to argue. They all wanted to think that they were here because they wanted to feel better, but deep down everyone knew that it was never going to happen.

"You know, I heard it might be an aura thing. Like humanity has just been putting out so much negative energy that the universe is all out of balance and like portals start opening. So, you guys are really just a part of the problem," she huffed, with her hands on her hips.

"Whatever," Mara mumbled into her paper coffee cup.

Over the rim, she could see Paul pulling on his ratty windbreaker and heading for the door.

"See you next week," she squeezed Sarah's shoulder as she stepped to the side, walking towards Paul.

"Kinda cold today," she noted, "You need a ride?"

"Oh, you ...you don't have to do that," he assured her.

She pulled her keys from her purse and jingled them.

“You can’t tell,” he insisted.
“Paul,” she urged.
“Promise.”

away. People would turn their back for a second and their loved one was gone. Without a trace. There just wasn't enough time for a kidnapping. Nothing made sense. The only thing everyone knew, was that people only went missing outside. So everybody did their best to avoid leaving the house. If you were outside you were fair game. But fair game to whom, no one knew.

Some people thought it was aliens, Bigfoot, dogmen, faeries, The Rapture. But nothing felt right. Nothing stuck. Every theory was always lacking, always impossible to prove. Lately, the news was really harping on wormholes.

"And in other news," the pristine blonde woman announced, her phony smile morphing into a slightly less phony grimace, "Have you been nding articles of clothing and jewelry at the sites where your loved ones went missing? If you have, please call this hotline. Help us piece this mystery together, together."

Mara's thoughts wandered, her eyes nding a picture of her sister on the wall. Young and happy. If only she could remember what she'd been wearing that day. Not that it really mattered. There was new breakthrough every week, but nothing happened. NETEMC thh/Laeneap

Her charm bracelet jingled around her wrist as she skipped ahead, complaining that Mara moved too slow.

In the dark, Mara followed the same path. She didn't take her to the park. She should've just taken her to the park, but she knew of a meadow. A meadow just past the line of the forest where her sister would get to practice without having other people in her way.

She knew the path by heart now, but that day they'd accidentally take a few wrong turns. Her sister kept wandering off. Mara fought the memory of the harsh words she used to scold her. Her fingers found the fence, trailing across them the way her sister used to. Mara had always yelled at her that she was going to get a splinter.

Once she reached the meadow, she retrieved a lawn chair that she'd hidden in one of the bushes. It was easier to keep it out here than to haul it back and forth. She sat down and stared into the dark.

Her sister was a good kicker. She wasn't great at dribbling, but she had a strong leg and could kick the hell out of that ball. She kicked it a little too far and Mara went to get it. She walked away without even a thought. Her sister sat down to rest while Mara retrieved it.

Mara couldn't even remember the last moment she actually saw her sister's face. The disappearances had been in the news of course but she never thought that it would happen to her. Not her.

Mara's chest tightened. She didn't cry about it anymore, but it still hurt. Mara

The air was cold and bit at her exposed skin. She didn't mind it anymore. Be-

eyes burning. Her voice caught in her throat. With shaking hands, she picked up the bracelet. It was caked in mud and rusting, but she'd know it anywhere.

"Where... Where did this come from?" she gasped, fighting off a sob, "What did you do with her?" she shouted out into the forest.

Beneath her, the ground felt soft. Too soft. As tears gathered in her eyes, she couldn't see herself sinking into the soil. It wasn't quick. She could hardly notice. It simply felt like mud. Her shin was already submerged before she started to really panic.

She tried to push herself up, but her hands sank beneath the surface. Her heart raced. She always wanted answers. She wanted to know but her mind was reeling, imagining her sister sinking into this same spot. But she never heard her cry or scream.

The disappearances were always fast. This had to be intentional. As she shouted and cried, looking up at the trees, invisible faces stared down at her. She wanted an answer, and they were giving her one.

In an instant she knew. The disappearances and the sudden burst of natural life.

"You're taking them? Like... Like fertilizer?" her voice shook, "You're using us."

She found enough strength to fight the pull of the soil and roll over. At the very least she deserved to look in the face of her killers. The leaves rustled and the wind whispered in her ear.

As the soil pulled her under, heaping on top of her chest and filling her lungs, she finally understood.

ATLAS, ALL

by SUSANNAH BELL

The backbreaking work
of being alive
in a world our children will ask about
during events on which they will be tested
in a sterile classroom
seems too much
for any one of us to bear—

My bones are aching
and I am no Atlas.

I have been tired for too long
a tired that sleep refuses to cure
a tired that drags my eyelids
downward and sideways and over
and over and over across the same
screens and pages and scrolling and
scrolling and scrolling and scrolling and and and

my chest burns with grief over the childhood I have lost.
I have come of age in a world that has no place for me.

Every inch of my itching □ngers
longs
for the freedom of a book
whose pages seem to turn themselves

and whose covers
whisper sweet histories
of a world that does not yet exist—
but it could
if I would just open the binding.

Every moment of my burning cheeks
longs
for-USfeth t20 (xorn fr8 (ormm)1 (y blugs)TTJETEMC /P <1Lang (en-US)/MCID 111468DC BT11

THRILLSEEKERS

by NORAH HIVELY

we were the glitter in the sky
who walked over planets
and ran on the rings of saturn
our □ngers laced
in the grasp of a newly lit □re
we believed time would stand still
as long as we waltzed like kings and queens

we were the outlaws
the honesty of our generation
and when the voices whispered
we carried on

no one could change the way we danced
for we did not rely on the voices
we relied on our veins
and hoped the blood never ceased to □ow

as we □oated in outer space
we saw their souls for who they were
so we glided past them
and learned the secrets of the universe
we were the glitter in the sky

WHISPER IN THE WIND

by STAGHAN BANNATYS by S(o blame her)-7 (s)3 (elf)28.1 (.)]TJ E8e

Asteriea exists, yet she does not.

She did once, in a village that no longer lives, in memory or word. She used to be a daughter, a sister, a friend. Long ago, in that village that she alone remembers, she made a deal. Or, not a deal exactly, but whatever best describes when there is only one option, but it is still presented as though there are two.

Her fate is her fault, though she likes to blame it on a bad bet. She rages against anyone she can think of as she slips between trees and houses and the spots where this world intersects the next, never quite able to blame herself.

In rare moments of introspection, she can admit she meddled with the1.1 (3(.IUa.)1.ymy die

Seamus was kind and comely, but Asteriea longed for more than their village. He gifted it to her, red-cheeked and nervous until she accepted it with a grateful smile. He would have been an anchor, burdening her with love and children and labor.

She used the book as a diary, practicing her letters and sketching the □owers that grew between the stones of the street. It never seemed to run out of space, no matter how much she wrote, but even then it took Asteriea until she was six and ten to realize that something—the old gods or the new, the eyes in the forest or the whispers between houses—had enchanted it.

As a child, she had written half-demands, petty boons. She wrote about her father's complaints about a dry season, about the heifer bearing twins on Cormac's farm. They weren't wishes (or prayers, if the gods were to have meddled, though she knows now they didn't) but the book still listened.

And then, naturally, Seamus asked Asteriea's father for her hand. She did not want to give it, for it was hers to give away. She had seen so little of the world. But Seamus was a □rstborn son and heir to a prosperous farm.

So, at □rst, she prayed. To the God that she was told to believe in; to the old gods that spinsters and witches still worshipped at hand-carved altars. She lit candles and gave up sugared sweets and begged her father to reconsider.

To no avail.

Foolishly, in retrospect, but desperately in the moment, she poured her anger onto the pages of her diary the night before her wedding, leaving scathing indentations and deep black marks on the curve of her hand. Words spilled out, white-hot with rage, slick and freezing with sorrow.

As her eyes grew heavy, her hand seemed to move on its own—without meaning, without knowing the weight of words—that she wished that Seamus would die so she would not have to marry him.

And he did.

She was free.

But one brush of power wasn't enough.

Moira had loved Rowan in secret, so Asteriea used the book to nudge them together. Cormac wished to attend university, so she lined his pockets with enough

gold. Isolde, sweet gentle Isolde, had carried and lost babes thrice over, wished for her fourth child to live.

Asteriea gave them all they asked for and more. Money, love, knowledge, family—none of it took away the sin of killing Seamus, but soon she was able to forget the transgression. She was benevolence. She was power. She was a god. Gods do not suffer the emotions of man.

And then, Gregor came.

Asteriea was one and twenty. He looked older, by a bit, with ruddy gold hair and deeply pockmarked skin. He stole into her home—which was larger now, after

"This is what you must protect the world from," Gregor said simply, as if he was discussing the weather. Asteriea's stomach roiled. "As I said, the affairs of mortals are of little importance. The boundaries of this world are too vulnerable."

"Open it."

When she tells this story, Asteriea says she had a choice. She says that she offered to trade places out of the kindness of her heart. She never mentions the fact that, once again, she had no other choice but the one thrust upon her.

Asteriea opened the book. Written in thick dark blood was the man's full name: Gregor Yarwood. She suppressed a shudder. There were three above it, faded and □aked with age. Her head hurt trying to read them. Gregor handed her a narrow blade, and for a moment she wondered what would happen if she simply thrust it into his stomach.

Would the rest of her world unravel until her life was a husk of the fantasy she had created?

So, Asteriea pressed the tip of the blade into her thumb and wrote her name

The cost for such a □ght is her human appearance. Her once brown hair turns mossy, like the grass beneath her feet. Her □ngers and toes grow, gaining an extra joint. Her eyes become too wide, her teeth become too sharp, and her voice is a whisper in the wind, no matter what language she speaks.

Eventually, she realizes her humanity died with Seamus.

Like Gregor, she tires. It takes thrice as long, but her feet grow heavy, her breath labored. When she meets Salem, sweet Salem, he is unlike those who have plied her for the book before. He □nds her in the woods and does not make demands. Instead, he peels away four centuries of caution with kind words and sad eyes, until she □nds herself giving him the book as a gift.

He misses his friends, she tells herself. They have abandoned him, as she once abandoned Cormac and Moira and Rowan and Isolde. He has no one, as she does now.

Perhaps she is foolish for giving Salem the book or perhaps he is more conniving than he seems to be.

Perhaps it is the fact that he has Seamus's green eyes and black hair and strong nose. Perhaps he is Seamus, sent by the old gods or the monsters in liminal spaces to punish her for what she did.

But she gives him the book and makes him promise to visit her once in a while. She does not tell him the nature of the curse, knowing deeply, instinctively, that he will abandon her if she does. She resolves to tell him of the life he has condemned himself to when he returns, about the eventual isolation that will envelop him.

Asteriea will be benevolent, she decides as she folds his hands around the book and whispers instructions in his ear. She will give him twenty years, or perhaps thirty, before she collects his soul.

Salem does not come back.

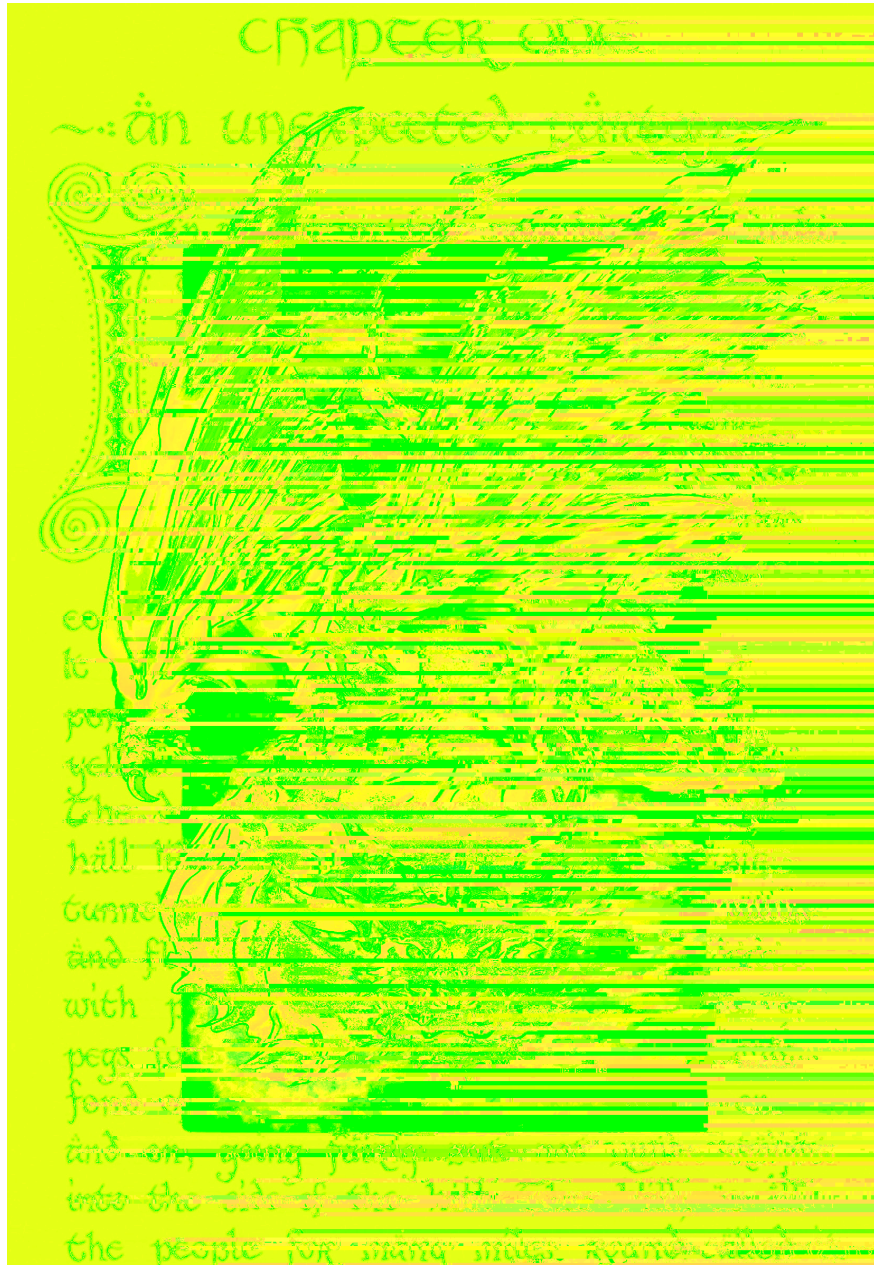
He tears apart the fabric of the world at the seams, greedier than she ever dared to be. Then she imagined she could be.

He wards himself from her with words, creating walls of steel and tungsten and pure magic to keep her out.

Asteriea rages, heartbroken and all too aware of her faults, condemned to walk between the trees and houses and spots where this world intersects with the next forever.

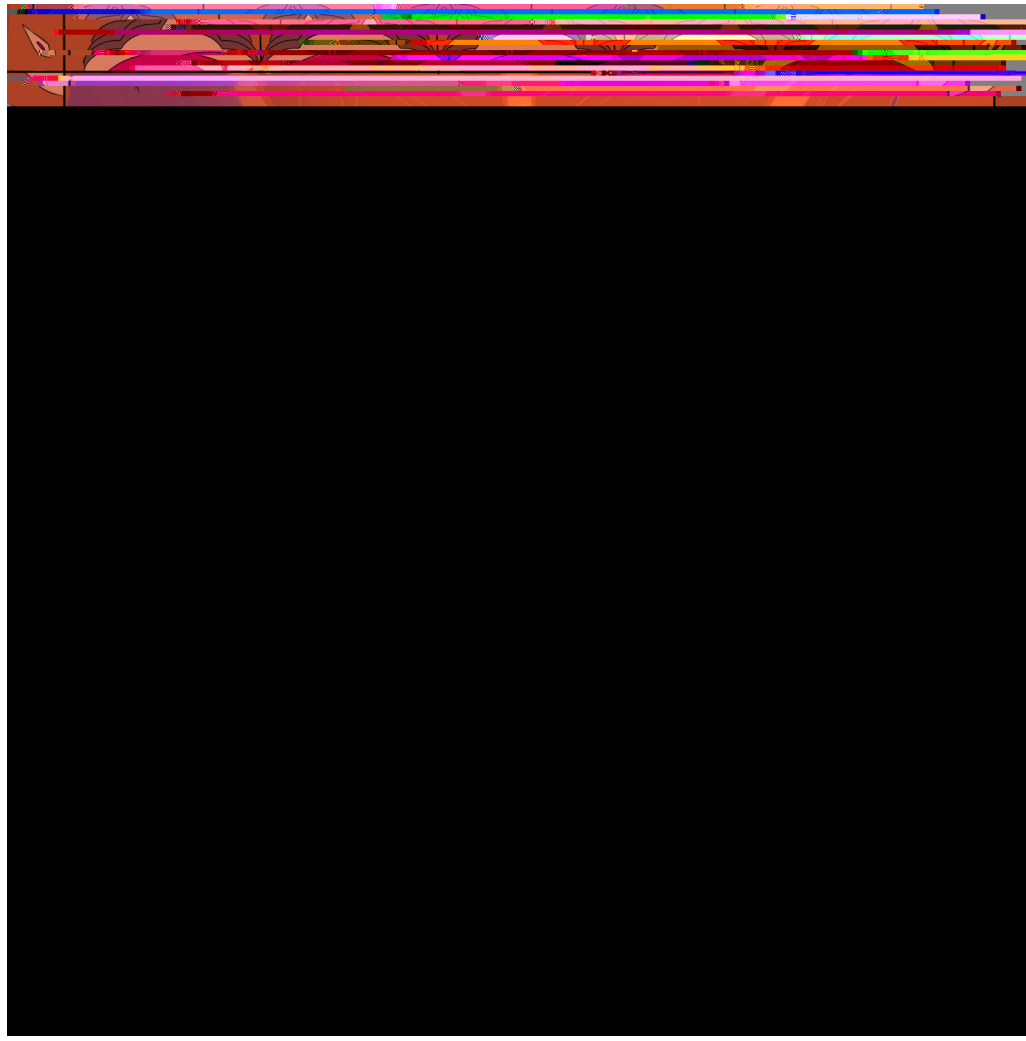
What I remember is a picture floating around out there
outside my head.
-Toni Morrison

Born again. Begin again. Gain
a beginning, remember a rememory
with eyes to make a scene again. Time and time
again over miles and miles of river,



SMAUG

ANNEKA PETERSON



LOST GODDESS OF THE SUN

ALEXANDRA BUNDY

My dearest America, as I lay on your still, white bed, the darkness swallows me whole. The hum of a small, wind-blowing machine accompanies me as I □oat in the nothingness that is your voice, only to be paralyzed under the force of your brutal hands.

I swallow for the hundredth time. Small lumps of coal stick in my throat; I am unable to sleep in silence tonight. I hear nothing. There is nothing but your stubborn gaze. Then, there are echoes, whistles that form a song in the depths of my mind. My love's children, they softly sing: Co-quí [1], co-quí, ven aquí [2].

Querida[3], call out to me.
I long for your voice,
Passionate and melodic,
To comfort me.
Embrace me once more.
Cradle me in the warmth
That is your body.
El revolú de tu casa[4]
Is what I desire to hear.
La parranda[5] que me traes[6]
Every time the sun goes down

Than the drugs I take throughout the year.
My room is cold
As I long for you,
But my bed is warm
As I cherish you.
Your bright, blue moon
Shines down on the waves.
They clash, shush, and drag away
From the shore.

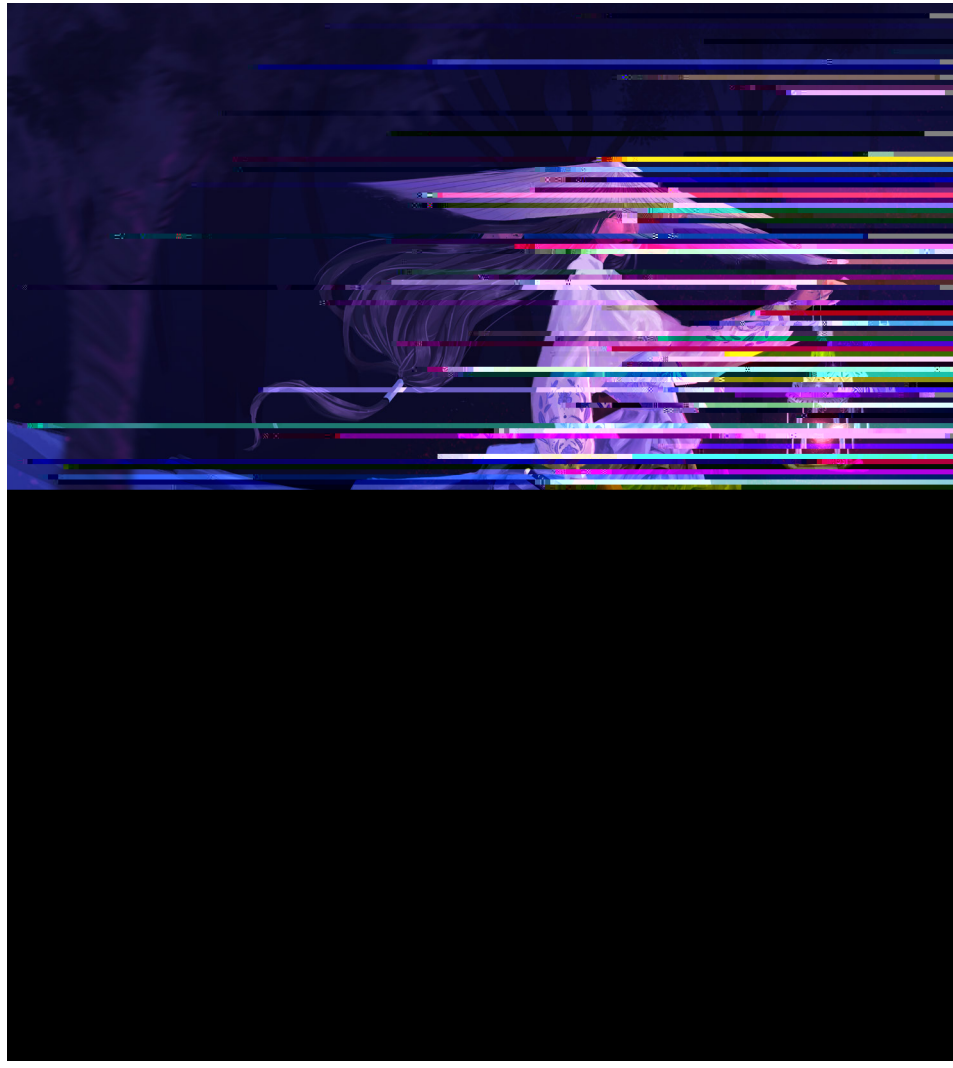
Borinquen[7] baila una bomba[8] y plena[9] [10],
Creating winds from the movement of her skirt
As her hairs move back and forth
Following the rhythm of her feet.

Her children are the melody,
Her waves are the beat,
But none can exist
Without her
Sunlit smile,
Flowering hair,
Curved □gure—
Without her.

I wake up in America,
Alone, cold, and free.
Yet her stern,
Quiet gaze
Makes me curl
Into myself.

7 Borinquen (noun): Taino name for Puerto Rico meaning “Land of the Valiant Lord”
8 Bomba (noun): a traditional dance and musical style of Puerto Rico that has its origins in Afro-Puerto Rican rhythms
9 Plena (noun): a traditional dance and musical style native to Puerto Rico that was in□uence by the bomba
10 Borinquen dances a bomba and plena

She stands tall,



WANDERING SOULS

ALEXANDRA BUNDY

BURNING OF THE BAMBOO BLOSSOMS

by MIN LING CHUAH

It's raining.

Of course it is.

It hasn't stopped since the Northern Gate fell and the draclings were slaughtered. So many scales at once, and so small; covering the blood-splattered ground where the little ones were killed. The shine of their stardust has long scattered since then, but Zhì Háo fancies that it has seeped into the ground, poisoning it. Any living thing that grows there will bear the iridescent shine of death, marking it as hallowed ground.

If there are any left to mourn it.

He steps into the funeral caves and sheds his cloak, pulling the water droplets from the fabric with a flick of his fingers. Slipping it into his qiánkūn pouch, he walks to the edge of the caves and looks up at the King, noting her slumped shoulders as she stands in prayer at the head of the crowd of mourners. As the ceremony ends, she places the smoldering stick of incense into its holder and steps to the side, allowing others to come forward and pay their final respects. A mound of flowers and gifts quickly collects at the foot of the wall of—tiny, so very tiny and young and innocent—scales reverently pressed into the funeral stone.

A flicker of movement grabs his attention, and he moves to the side, greeting the Queen with a bow.

"Orders?"

The Queen shakes her head, looking grimly over to her sister. "Not now. I need to confer with the King first. Go gather the generals."

He nods and walks off, reaching for the tassel of his sword. A thumb brushing over the enchanted jade in the tassel sets off a chain of reactions, individuals in the

In the silence imposed upon him, he glares at the Queen, who maintains eye contact even as she reaches into the pouch at her side. Zhì Háo catches the book that is □ung at his face, as the Queen speaks in clipped sentences.

"Chapter two. Fifth stratagem. Read it out loud."

Zhì Háo scowls, but complies anyway, □ipping through pages of familiar, elegant calligraphy. An illustration of a burning plum tree next to a blooming peach tree decorates the opposite page.

"Enemy Dealing Stratagem. Sacri□ce the plum tree to preserve the peach tree." He swallows, throat dry. "There are circumstances in which you must sacri□ce short-term objectives in order to gain the long-term goal. This is the scapegoat strategy whereby someone else ... suffers the consequences so that the rest do not." His heart sinks.

"One life for many. One kingdom for others. One of the human races, for the rest of the world." The Queen turns to the wall to study the glittering scales of her predecessors. "My sister, the King, has asked me to end this war as soon as possible. Permanently. This is the only plan that will work."

"But, to not even let the innocents go..."

"General." He curls his □ngers into claws. "Zhì Háo. Look at me." He does,

"That's not what I mean, and you know it."

Mǐn Líng sighs at his bitter response.

Zhì Háo digs his claws into the skin of his palms.

"As you said before, Zhì Háo, you have learned by my side. You have known me for almost all my life, and you know how I think." Out of the corner of his eye, he sees the royal move until she is standing right in front of him. "I do not sentence an entire race to extinction out of sheer malice. You know this."

"But the innocents?" He whispers, looking up with pleading eyes. "Even them?"

"Yes." She meets his gaze. "To protect our people. To protect our future. If I leave this act of terror unpunished, our kind will doubt mine and my sister's rule over the Kingdom. If I raze the humans' cities and force them to surrender, they will simmer in their suppressed rage until they □nd an opening to strike back and destroy us. If I kill their royals, they will rally their kind under a new □ag to □ght us. If I destroy their cities and kill their royals, letting your so-called innocents □ee, those innocents will take up their own arms and □ght us until the last child has perished. That is the future that awaits us if I choose any other path than this." Her eyes bore into his with painful intensity.

He forces himself to sp (s14 (a)-5 (z)16 (e the humans)-24.9 (' s)-24.s8 (e48T.1 (ee)-4.91 08 295

"You either join my task force to end this war, or you take command of the army in my place. That is my □nal offer. Do not let me doubt your loyalty to this Kingdom again." As he shakily regains his footing, she tosses an object at him and growls out one last, damning line.

"Kill them." The Queen stares down at him. "Or I will."

With that, the royal leaves him standing there, the murmur of the funeral spilling into the alcove with the dissolution of the privacy wards. Zhì Háo stares at the object in his hands. It's a silver cross pendant; a familiar one. The one that he lost a while back. The same one that his human lover – his Albion human lover—gave him as a token of affection.

She knows.

Drops of tears smear the careful calligraphy of the book in his hands, as he sinks to his knees and weeps silently. Deep in his heart, he knows the choice he will make, no matter how his mind protests.

Behind him, the smell of burning incense □lls the air.

—

Zhì Háo □ies.

His body undulates in the wind as he traverses the mountain range, heavy mist leaving condensation on his vermillion scales. He can sense another dragon following behind him, just out of sight – but he bites back the urge to double back and confront her. Instead, he dispels the area-bound secrecy wards as he □ies through them, diving to land in the courtyard of the manor that suddenly appears on one of the mountains.

"Zhì Háo!" A human with fair golden hair and green eyes runs out of the manor and hugs him tightly. "You're back!"

"My love," he greets, curling around his partner. "I mpararartnerving

dragon and a golden-haired human; a half-□nished wicker chair, big enough for two; vases of yellow chrysanthemum and red camellia decorating the doorways. At dinnertime, Zhì Háo forces himself to eat all the food even as it chokes his tongue with ash, while his oblivious partner □lls his cup with báiji.

The end of the meal comes too soon. They wash the dishes together, two pairs of hands brushing against each other as his partner rinses and he dries with a cloth, forgoing his powers. Then, they sit on the stairs leading to the courtyard, his partner pointing out the constellations as they appear in the darkening sky. He watches them as they speak, golden hair shining gently against pale skin. Would it still shine, even after...

He kisses them. His partner reacts slowly, surprised, then they reciprocate, teeth clumsily knocking against teeth even as he tries to bury as much love and grief and apology into that one kiss, that □nal kiss before—before he has to pull away. He gets up, evading his partner's attempts to kiss him again, and gestures to the skies. "Fly with me?"

The human tilts their head but stands up anyway, a smile blooming across their face. Zhì Háo resists the urge to turn his head away in shame and stares instead, committing each detail of their face to his memory. He shifts. Each scale growing over his skin feels like a dagger. Thousands of daggers, to match thousands of scales. He swallows down his growing nausea as he helps his human partner up onto his back. Their hands are gentle on his scales, so unbearably gentle that he almost calls it off. A1761 -3 (h s)3n5gives himself away. Almost betrays his kingdom, his people, his loyalty.

But he can't.

He feels the weight of the eyes on his back, hidden as they are in the bamboo forest. Steeling ID 1nFr-4.9 (s on his o)8 (f s).

Sail, sail, the wide ocean blue,
Look into its depths and seek out the truth,
When choices are made and sailors betrayed,
A captain will be found as a fraud and a fake...

The steady rocking of the ship put the crew to sleep, but the chilled salty breeze kept Kayden Briar awake. It whistled through the window and nagged at his skin. He paced his quarters, grinding his teeth to the tune of the creaking wood. Soft candlelight flickered off the walls and illuminated the disarrayed room. Papers and notebooks scattered the floor, ink from inkwells splattered against the locked door, and the many collected treasures found themselves off of their displays and discarded like trash. This wasn't the first night like this, but tonight something much more troubling siphoned his mind.

His eyes caught on the sight of the scrawny, ghostly captain looking out of the silver mirror. It was his own face with sunken eyes, an unkempt beard, and stringy hair. He hated him.

And further your debt?

An arm, no... tentacle, rolled across the surface as if it went on forever. The shifting waters roared as the appendage disappeared into the fathomless depths.

"No! Come back!" His voice echoed across the water.

He worried about alerting Maurice. The last thing Kayden needed right now was for that brute to rush to his aid again...

In fact, Kayden didn't remember seeing Maurice since the sirens. After rescuing him, his first mate... It didn't matter. Kayden turned his attention back to the sea, eyes darting back and forth for any return of the shape.

The water rippled once more as the same massive tentacle emerged. It waved in the air as if testing its surroundings before continuing up. Then, another tentacle, followed by the rest. The movement of the appendages rocked the ship. Kayden stepped back, craning his neck upwards to see just how high the creature would rise. He reached for his sword, but after failing to find it by his side he placed a hand on his dagger instead.

The captain kept his eyes on the water in the center of the ring of tentacles. Deep red tentacles. His heart raced, and the singing melody of the sirens only grew louder in his mind... Wait, not just his mind, but all around him too.

Bubbling to the surface was what appeared to be a large rock that struck a chord of familiarity within Kayden. He remembered seeing it when they encountered the sirens. Except, what appeared to be merely stone earlier was now much more recognizably part of the monster. Not only that, but growing out of the rock were the figures of four merfolk, flesh combined with the lumpy pile of rubbery grey skin beneath them that disguised itself as stone. The song he had heard enveloping his mind and body resonated from them. There was no doubt these were the same sirens he saw today.

"It's you again... What do you want? Have you not tortured me enough?" He shouted to them.

The sirens floated there, tentacles sweeping through the deep waters below them as if they were patiently waiting for a meal.

We come in search of your pain, one of the sirens said.

It is you who called for us, another sang.

"I did no such thing."

Did our song not resonate with you?

Were you not thinking upon it endlessly? Their voices sounded □uid as if they were constantly changing.

"You were the ones driving me mad... And now you seek to turn my crew against me?"

We have no such desire.

We only speak truth.

Those who can accept it will continue...

Those who cannot will meet their doom...

"You expect me to believe such blatant lies?" He drew his dagger. "Now tell me how to prevent the mutiny you placed upon my crew. You think I don't remember that line of betrayal, do you? Well, you're going to have to try a lot harder than that to fool me!" He laughed to himself as he waved the dagger, oblivious to the red ink that stained his blade.

You still think you're being betrayed?

"I know it."

The sirens looked to one another.

"Tell me how to break your spell! I have come too far to be stopped by some sea-witches. I am too close to freeing myself of this damned debt!"

He could feel bile rising to his throat. His blood pumped furiously and beads of sweat began to coat his forehead.

It's already in motion.

"What do you mean?"

You should know.

After all, it's your reality. A single red tentacle rose and pointed behind the captain, into his quarters.

After so many hours of the song dominating his mind, he only heard his own, lonely pulse. He felt like he was free. But freedom felt like being tossed into a void. He turned his back to the monster and peered into the room. His gaze caught on ink splattered across the door. Red ink.

Carefully, picking his way through the wreckage, he made his way to the center of the room. As he approached, he realized the ink on the door was smeared and

continued across the walls. In it was the very same number that had been seared into his memory, repeating over and over.

He followed the scattering of digits, watching them grow more frantic as they continued. They didn't even appear like numbers; at least nothing a sane person would recognize. Kayden's hands snapped to his mouth, sending his dagger clattering to the ground. He tasted iron as the red ink stained his face. Sitting in the center

A LOT OF THIS

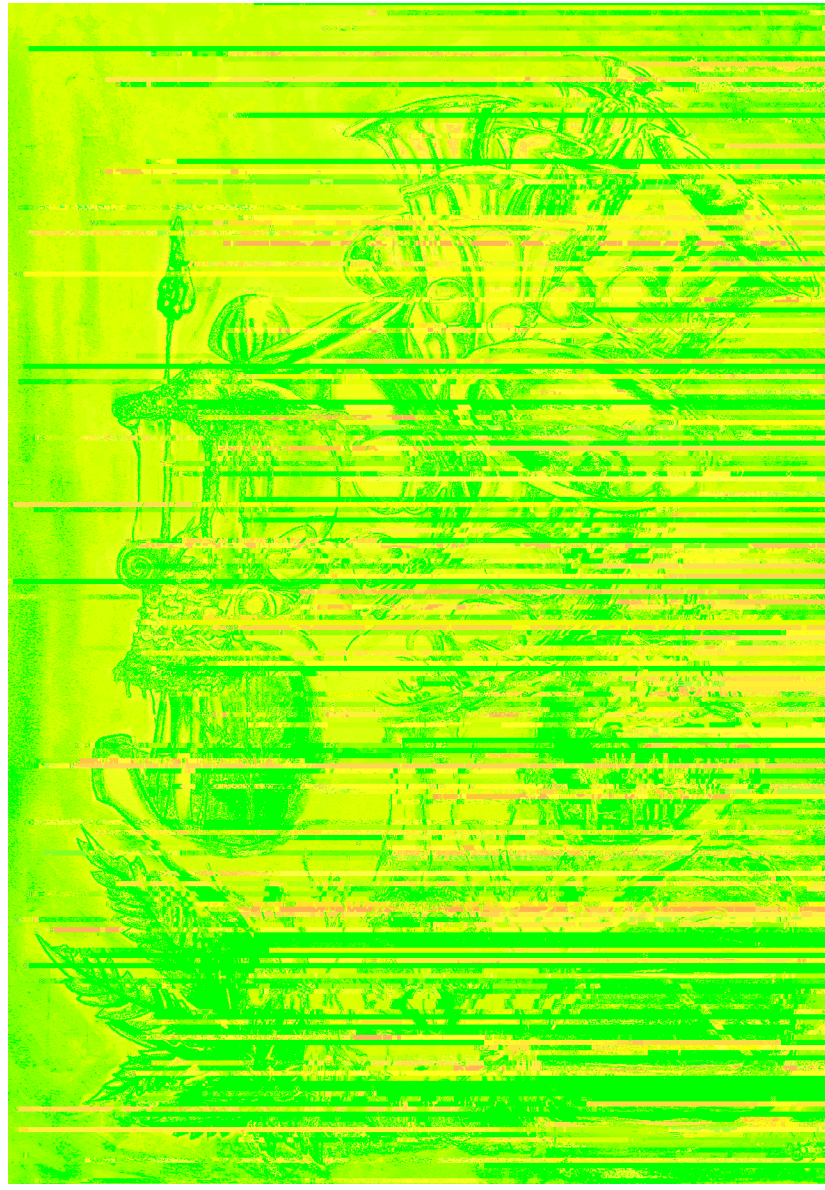
by BEAU FARRIS

has to do with transcending the moment. and it is
a momentous occasion, isn't it? to be in those rooms
now freshly replenished with air conditioning. we'll say,
let the rooms bleed into one another

some spackles of my red paint on your turquoise walls.
like a red sun at dusk amid the mediterranean sails,
that were hoisted without contempt. actually, they were
hoisted in celebration of an eve that came after a day.

and for moments like these, in which I simulate a house
where the tide rushes into the kitchen door every evening
a mini □ood of red paint and sea water. these are not lies
however, moments like these originate from my desk. my ankles

tangle onto my feet. my isolation tangles onto my happiness
it's not a lie. just start with the image, a prefrontal cortex minus
the beach under the water. the house, which does not exist,
is probably painted a dark green, covering a chipped sailboat white.



BEAUTIFUL DECAY

ANNEKA PETERSON

CHARCOAL - 24 X 28 IN

THE WOODPECKER

by AIDAN CARROLL

Fifteen this time.

"Would you shut up already?!" Red's question was more of a command as it echoed out into the early evening. It was enough to quiet the crickets for a brief moment before their song resumed like a slow tide. A dog barked in response on the other side of the trailer park.

"Would you?!" Nell's sharp yell from inside the house shook Red from his funk, his brain sloshing behind his eyes.

Didn't I only have one? Gee-zuss.

back to Peduzzi, who was sorting the handful of Chex Mix he'd taken from the dispenser at the door.

"Doesn't matter if you were kidding or not. It's just not funny anymore." He popped a pretzel into his mouth and chewed slowly.

"Whatever." Red sighed and flagged down another bartender. "You just get off work? Thought I'd have seen you here already."

"Yeah. Had to shut down Saw Two 'cuz not enough people showed up to work it, so my team had to work overtime."

"Geezus. That bad?" Red grabbed a rye chip from Peduzzi's piles and popped it in his mouth before he could protest. Peduzzi shot Red a vicious look.

"Yeah, that bad. Man, what's gotten into you tonight? You're acting even more of a prick than usual."

Red felt something akin to guilt and pushed it aside quickly. "Into me? What's into you? You're all strung out. I thought you liked fuckin' with new staff."

Peduzzi's entire demeanor changed. He didn't reply for a moment, chewing on his words.

"Goddamn... woodpecker. Out in the woodlot. Driving me crazy. All hours of the—"

"Shit, you too?" Red interrupted.

"What?" Peduzzi demanded indignantly. "Whaddyou mean 'you too'?"

"I mean, it's been buggin' me out too. Crazy thing is, Nell don't hear it. Does your old lady hear it?"

"No. Neither does J.P. Thinks his old man's gone crazy." Calm again, Peduzzi idly spun a mini breadstick on the bar top as Red ordered a beer. "Y'know, a lot of the guys that didn't show up today were hearing it."

Red took a healthy swig from the beer. "That so?"

"Yeah. Grapevine says they all went out together to look for it. Nineteen of 'em."

"Huh. Nineteen's a lot." He buried his nose in the glass again. The song play-

"Y'know, I been thinking of going to look for it myself. The bird." The silence between the men broke like untempered glass despite the softness of his voice. "Just put it out of its misery so we all stop worrying about it like a bunch of fuckin' women."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." The word hung in the air for a moment as Peduzzi stared into a mirror on the barback. "Probably going to go out after I leave here, I'm not planning on drinking tonight."

"Hey, it's two dollar Yuengs!"

Peduzzi closed his eyes and sighed, chin falling to his chest, fingers lacing together in the way Red knew he did when he was deep in thought. "Yeah." He maintained the pose for several minutes, breathing calmly, as Red drained two more Yuenglings. He looked to Peduzzi, motionless except for his breath, as he finished the second. The song changed again, this time to a pop number Red hated.

"Hey Peduzzi, you good? I'm thinkin' I'm ready to head back home, or Nell won't let me hear the end of it."

Peduzzi looked up to the ceiling and brought his arms behind his back, sighing into the stretch. The already too-short sleeves of his MHV Lumber windbreaker stayed up on his forearms as he brought them back to rest on the bar for a moment before shoveling the rest of the Chex Mix into his mouth.

"Yeah, I think it's time to go," he said through cracker mush.

Red pulled into the employee parking lot at the Moose Hill Valley Lumbermill the next morning, head throbbing evilly. A glare from the rearview mirror of the se-

The suddenness of the suggestion took Red by surprise to the point where he almost forgot about his hangover. He looked up at Belucci and noticed he also looked somewhat haggard, or at least less put-together than usual. He appBDC w711 0 0 11 69 5 11nd nota151

Just a quick look around here, then that's it 'til tomorrow. Can always come back. Too damn cold for this.

As soon the knocking stopped a twig snapped behind him.

Swinging around to see the source of the noise, his eyes landed on a large pile of deadfall he had climbed over just a few minutes prior.

"Hey! Who's there?"

"Who's there?"

He recognized the voice. Peduzzi. There was no question.

"Hey, Peduzzi! Where you at, pal?"

Peduzzi grunted behind the mountain of stacked branches and a few more twigs snapped. "I... think it's time to go." His voice was muf□ed from behind the fallen trees.

"Hey, I get that, brother. Gettin' real cold." Red turned back around to face the woods. "Where do you think it is, anyhow?"

Twenty-seven knocks, loud, as if in response to Red's question. He turned back around after counting to □nd the deadfall pile silent.

"Peduzzi?"

There was no answer, not even from the squirrels. The cold, dry air of the forest was silent save for the sound of Red's panting breath echoing off the trees.

"Hey, Peduzzi? Dick? Not funny, pal. Where'd you...?"

He turned to where he had been looking, eyes still adjusting to the darkness, and back to the deadfall, only to □nd the deadfall was gone, vanished. Where it once lay was a large, oval-shaped clearing—no deadfall, no leaves, no Peduzzi, no nothing.

Red stumbled backward, catching his heel under a thick root hidden in the leaves. His next step back was hasty and misplaced, his full weight coming straight down on the side of his foot. He fell like a stone and gasped breathlessly in pain. He gripped his sprained ankle tightly, pain □lling his mind with static.

Something else very close behind him gasped too at exactly the same pitch, volume, and duration.

Red jump-scrambled forward in a bear crawl, adrenaline temporarily numbing the pain in his ankle, and turned around to face the source of the noise. It was almost a deer, □fteen feet at the shoulder, vegetation and deadfall woven into the mats of its

PRINCE OF THE DEAD

by MATTHEW COOK

We were young boys dead and dying

8 POEMS

by COURTNEY BROWN

Six

i wrote six poems
for each day of the week
and counted each one
on
my □ngers
i wrote six poems to show
the six ways
that
i loved
you
six,
times,
over.
i wrote six poems
and recited each
of the six
for every day
of the week.
and when i recited the six
aloud
you said,
six is the number of the octagon,
there's seven days in a week.

Headless

The full length mirror in
My room
Is not full length
Anymore
And when I go to look
I cannot □nd
My head
And there my body sits
Headless
And nude
And I cannot
Help thinking
This is how I was
To grow

Not to

You never
Called
Me
by
My name,

Because I asked you not to.

You never even
said
I love you,

Because I asked you not to.

You never even held

my
Hand,

Because I asked you not to.

You never even called me

and had forgotten its □ll

i wonder if the bread, sliced,
is now stale and brittle

because here it sits
and i stare it straight across,
can smell its lingering sweetness
and its belly-□llingness

and still i do not eat the sliced bread.
i let it sit.
and go to waste.

and so love is like sliced bread,
sitt∋D2sOld bread,

To never
=
Have to weep
And feel
Again

n a m e
Her name
it was not mentioned

Her name was safely hidden
in mother's box
upon the
vanity,

carefully tucked beneath the
□ne
tooth
comb

Her name was not to be spoken

and in my mother's eyes
i saw
a pain that wouldn't
fade

Her name was a secret to be kept
and safely stowed away

but it became more tiresome
I shook my mom
awake
and looked her straight on
and screamed my sister's
name aloud
to rid us of
Her dying
Song

Overboard

I wrote your name
out loud
□ve times
and cursed it

and threw its
contents
overboard

I hope it's
gone
forever.

Need

I felt I had to caress myself
If no one else were to
But you see,
My arms are not long enough
And far as though I may
Have stretched
I could not sit there and hold myself

THE POISON THAT METABOLIZES US

LIZ NOLAN

one shines just as bright as its peers, untamed by the black of the night. They're like diamonds amongst the dirt, each one glittering in its own brilliant and unique way. The lights □ll the city with thrill and vitality, more vibrant and alive than the people who inhabit it.

She looks upwards, towards dazzling stars against the midnight blue of the horizon that sing in harmony, serenading her with a love worthy of Aphrodite. The □nishing touch in the scene is a soft glaze of the full moon that casts a delicate, yet prominent pale light across it all.

"Fuuuckkk," the girl hears behind her. "This is a vibe." The boy who was trailing the girl enters the rooftop and jogs to sit next to her. He's panting, yet doesn't appear tired. His soft hazel eyes are full of energy and appear almost golden as they re□ect the lustrous glow of the city. The sullen boy she had been with only a few hours ago was gone.

"I can literally feel the dopamine □ushing my brain as we speak," he jokes. "This is incredible."

The girl glances at the boy. He's grinning. His long, unkempt, ebony-shaded hair is pushed back out of his face for once. He □dgets with the metal piercing in his nose as he stares out at the view. The gentle, silver shine from the moonlight above dances across his olive skin, illuminating the high points of his face. Dark shadows are formed along his sharp, hollow cheekbones and baggy eyelids.

The two giggled and bantered over the 'insanely wack' party that they had just attended. Both agreed that they would rather be at the top of the building with just the two of them than the sweaty, crowded house. Caught in the frenzy of fun, they continued to laugh and sip on the bottle they had brought with them as their conversation branched off into a new direction.

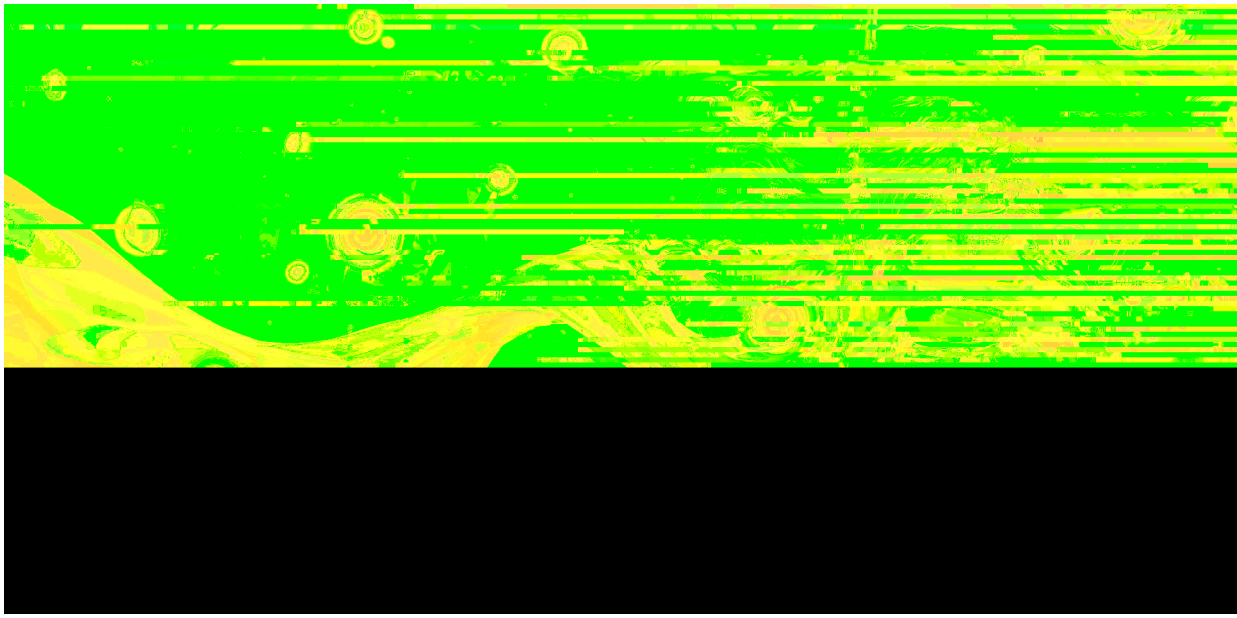
"I love it up here," the boy says. "Feels like I'm on top of the world."

"Same," the girl agrees. "I wish I lived up here. I'd always be happy."

"I know, right?" The boy says, nodding. His smile fades and he takes a deep breath. Glancing at the street that watched him from twenty-two □ights below, he begins to think of tomorrow and the life that he left beneath him.

They go home, they deal with their tomorrows, and they return to the lives that they had temporarily left behind. And as the days go by, and the sun continues to be replaced by the moon, the boy can't help but begin to appreciate this cycle. Instead of resenting the man-made bulbs that would □icker on with the absence of the

They're poisoning the atmosphere and
Have you heard about what happened to Kourtney?
I saw on TV last night that
somewhere something terrible is happening.
Did you know there's an island in the ocean
the size of Great Britain
made completely of trash?
The Cowboys won, and it’s a good thing, too,
they've been doing real poorly all season.
Did you see?
Children are dying in the (ain)]TJETEMC /P <</Lang (en-US)/



A GODDESS OF A MILLION SUNS

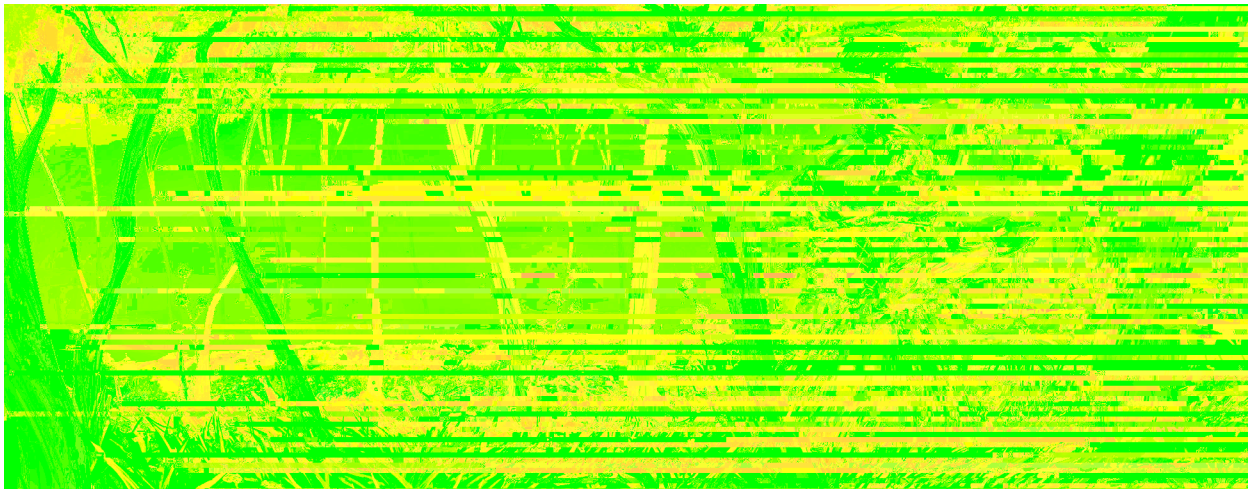
ALEXANDRA BUNDY

MOONRISE

by BEAU FARRIS

is the title of many poems probably
lost 'my stuff' as my father
points out another pitcher
a major league game is playing in the bar
bottom of the □fth stitching
you can't really see how nervous
the opposing pitcher's □ngers are
orbiting the pitch black ball
concealed within a mitt
and I feel guilty twice □rst
when I want their pitcher to succeed second
when my father does not understand
my guilt nor do we seek to understand one
another's telescopic perspectives see
the pitcher should throw about
four and a half innings
before swapping out
with another and I have lost the point
end of my pencil while I let the game distract
us from each other like satellites
giving more drinks and more pitches
but he won't make it out of this
inning or the next bar he's lost
his stuff meaning there is a limit
to something he has
that can be taken away or given
until his □nal white ball rivals
the moon in a blue sky
quietly watching the sun.

It starts with the people in rooms like always A best western ballroom convention center stocked with extras dressed to the nines I am in my own secret room watching through a hole in the wall as my father drinks and rubs elbows He does not know I am here He would be upset if he did It always starts with my father Soon he will hack down doors to steal me away Soon he will butcher me and the photocopy of me that hangs in the bunk bed above me Soon I will be a bloody mess on the carpet It always ends in blood He will trade my still beating heart for a still drink There is a trade There must be a trade It goes back centuries I am Iphigenia and he is Hector I am the headless child bride of Achilles and he is a man hungry enough to swallow the country of Turkey My father is always jonesing for something and I am happy to be present I am always happy It



CHANGING OUR NAME

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