



Friends' Central 2012

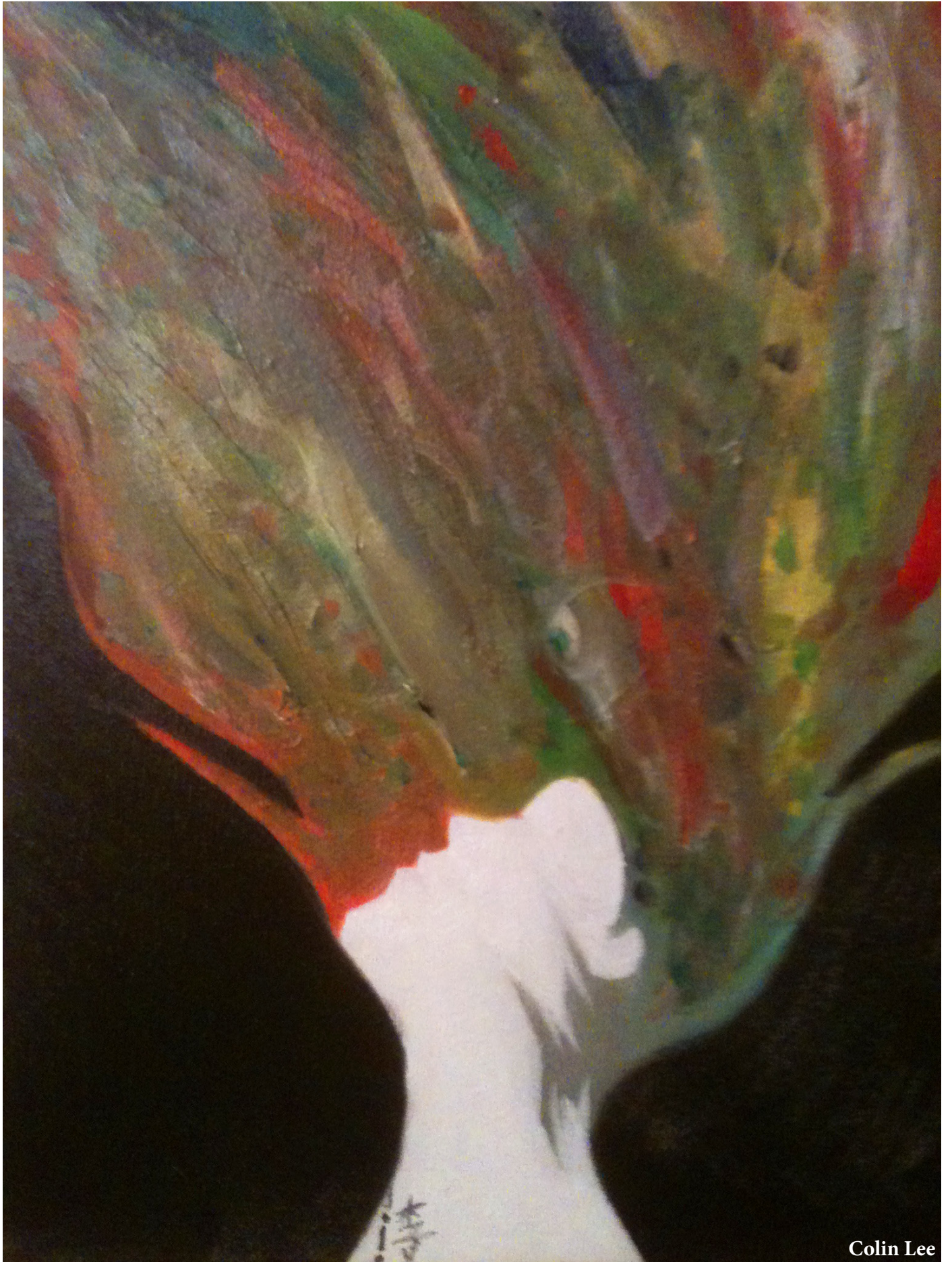
Literary and Arts Magazine



From the Editors: Paula Burkhardt, Jibreel Powel, Nick DeFina, Bill Fedulo

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Colin Lee

I do not want to be seen as inevitable,
I want to be seen as me.

Upon the bench
My time to shine
nothing to describe such destined fear
“I call upon” said the red faced man
“To the podium to accept your award.”
with graceless footsteps
I strut to my place
of where pride of action is claimed.

What Hero that flies
among mountaintops
waves from the edge of the world to me?
The hand that reached
When I was young
Never before had I encountered this stranger
Yet still felt the force
by this self-stricken man
not at the sight but the cries of my fall
I did not understand
why he poked me with a stick
But still I smiled
upon the stance of our feet.

At the mercy of Mic
I croaked the first words
“Thank you today, it is a great honor
to receive this award.”
And I requested for a second of silence.
Mobile buttons tapping
The last clap dissolved
All but the girl in the last row, where though
limited light could penetrate, her tears
echoed to many many.
Her tongue was bit at the command of her peers,
despite that, in her I saw someone
Rare but nonetheless typical,
I saw in her a feeling misunderstood by many,
A feeling that both of us had wished to be heard.

What hero that shifts
the ocean's tides
brings an abyssal shell to the palm of my hand?
I smiled to him with gratitude and delight
But he was already on his way
Along the cement you could hear the untidy
tap *click* *tap*
Where he will go, I will never know
and though he did not smile back, I could tell that he
wanted to.

Confusion pervaded like a cloud of smoke
A single pair of heels echo beneath
instance after instance,
like Paint upon water
her deepening blue could not be diluted
Until her gaze met the humble mortals'
Shy and ashamed, like being assessed by the world's
view
whispers only chanted, melancholy like licks of fire
Until her voice swelled beyond them, exceeding the
valiance of any warrior's cry,
“I will never live up to feel what I dream
I will never live up to more than strife
I have been told by everyone,
people only wish for what they will never have
I envy your success, because you're a hero in my eyes.
Because you are what I always wished to be, but will
never find.”
My words were swift
For hope and potential triumphed within this girl
As visible as the tattoo on one's back
Nonetheless, I did not want to smile
to portray like a fool
Some may call this blind
May call it enlightened
May call it ignorant
Some call it brave
But all I cared about in that minuscule infinity
was that she needed to understand,
“I never want to be seen or loved as an enviable hero,
I only want to be seen or loved as me.”

-Emily Pillet

The First Immortal

By Sydney Goggins

“The proofs of death are statistics
And every man runs the risk
Of being the first immortal.” –Jorge Luis Borges, *Poems of the Night*

A certain dangerous collision of light and matter, combining, at helpless speed, to form an internal convulsion: at half past noon, on the third Friday in April, a man- who is only a man- is walking across a crowded street. If on a sudden whim I add a portrait of the actual road, I risk, and in fact expect, a hostile reaction, the skeptical mocking disinterest that springs from pure boredom. The street, and its many cars, however diverse and violent, is too generic a scene to warrant descriptive effort; the spherical combinations of green and red, the insufferable sudden roar of the latest pop song, floating in congested fragments from under open windows, the unavoidable rudeness of an annoyed driver, pressing a brief, spontaneous fist against the leather orb of the wheel and waiting, with a spiteful thrill, to hear the distorted squeaking of a horn- this, I am told by my editor, is utterly redundant, as common and banal an image as the whiteness of snow, the consistent brightness of an indispensable sun, the ubiquitous odor of coffee sipped from expensive mugs. So any ordinary portrait of “the street with the cars,” a repetitive waste of words intended as artistic insight, can only exist, in print, as an irreversible mishap. But with an old-fashioned fixation on things as they are, I am compelled, as a diligent scribe, to risk the likely scorn of my editor. As a collector of certain facts, a companion of certain friends, I have made some careful, observant notes about a particular street, on a particular Monday in April 1998.

On the last outpost of sidewalk that hovers over the street, we notice three ordinary inhabitants of an immense city, two men and a woman, glancing at the roofs of cars. They may have collided before under the tired awnings of restaurants, or on the wet, leaf-covered benches in front of the local bus stop. But today, a Monday in April, they keep a precise distance. The driver of an imported Lexus has come to a generous halt, a dented, archaic truck is swerving toward the opposite lane, and a massive, absurd lorry is making a desperate turn. The scene, chaotic but normal, possesses a general calm. But the equilibrium of traffic is far from dependable.

A political science major at an elite American university, potentially a future ambassador, is taking three incredible months to visit three continents. After seven hours of enjoying the modest comforts of business class, he had arrived at 11 AM, at Incheon international airport, where (with the clandestine, embarrassed assistance of his pocket dictionary) he had finally located, and entered, a suitable taxi. Now, on a crowded boulevard 3 kilometers from his hotel, he is enjoying some fractured banter with his overly curious taxi driver (insisting, as a comic precaution, that he is a Canadian citizen). The day, as frantic as it appears, is going exactly as he expects.

And by the time he has shifted his attention from sky to earth, to the hectic assembly of cars advancing in either direction, it was too late, and too stunning, to act. As each of the three pedestrians takes a confident step, one, an apparent mechanic wearing a visibly stained polo, appears oddly hesitant in his progress across the crowded street. If his suddenly hindered legs were offered the power of speech, it would be the mobile equivalent of a stutter at the start of a monologue. But at the immediate moment, on the immediate street in front of us, it implies, for the stunned pedestrian all the terror of an explosion.

A second later, he's alive. And that, we conclude, is enough.

In the Dream, I Met Her on the Sea

Looking upon still eyes
I loved her, and regretfully, she loved me too
Each night I prayed to the vast ocean, shivering starts that I might
Reach beyond her silence, coaxing a clasped sensuality
Relinquished breaths flowed down her pale hips- seeking me
For love, patiently nocturnal, hid among the crush smell of salt
Though she found comfort in briefness, my memories forever carried on the sea
Spare me; love, of your casual shortness
For to forget is such a long journey-
As now,
I lay
Bound to vagueness
Amidst waves of fabric
Until the night collapses.

-Carlos Price-Sanchez

Jordan Taffet



From Hell

By Fernando Parnes

The man's mind was blank. Running was all he could do. The automatic motion of his legs as he sprinted away calmed his mind and the drumming of his heart was to him a soothing melody.

A manic laugh had escaped from his lips. The whole situation was funny; what were the odds. His disturbing laughter continued unchecked, and he could hear himself, or rather, his echo, bouncing off the big houses of London. "I sound positively insane," he thought, and again the thought was followed by a fit of laughter.

The man started recalling his night. First he had got to Hyde Park, arrived at the appropriate home, and done the job. For some reason, after that he wasn't sure what happened. The sound of crowing interrupted his deliberations, and set his heart thumping in his chest, but gradually he calmed down. He had expected this to come, for it always did. A moment later, he saw The Crows, the huge mass of birds that plagued his mind. They swooped and dived at him, their beaks tearing at his exposed skin, and at his eyes. He felt the blood, coursing down his face, and the acute pain all over his body. A moment later The Crows left, and he was free to stand again. He passed his hands over his body, only to find, as he knew he would, that he was unharmed. He stood up, tried to remain serious but failed miserably, his manic glee laughing with him as it bounced off the large walls of the Victorian buildings. Where he walked he left a trail of blood, blood not his own, blood that dripped from his large butcher knife he carried loosely in his belt. The clicking sound it made when it hit his trousers was almost a lullaby for him, a lullaby that calmed him almost as much as its purpose. He wasn't always plagued by the Crows, nor was his knife always a comfort to him. Sometimes the Crows became just a stray thought, a thundercloud on the horizon, and the knife became revulsion, a disgusting piece of physical malice, but at the same time he couldn't get rid of it, for at times, times like these, it was a craving.

After walking another mile, he arrived at a rundown property, with boarded windows and peeling paint. He took a big set of keys from his pocket, and unlocked the heavy wooden door, and with a grunt shoved the door open. The smell hit him first, the musk of mold, dust, and pain. This is where he brought the orders that required special attention. He sat his knife down on a table, this one perfectly clean in the midst of all the dust-covered furniture. After lighting a toasty fire with his bloodstained shirt as fuel, he sat down at his desk with a piece of blank parchment and an ink pen. After writing the letter, he took the jar that hung at his waist, and wrapped the object within inside the letter; he sealed it and put it aside. He could deliver it later. Again he proceeded to recount the night in his mind. It had been fairly productive night; and the job had gone as he had hoped. No witnesses obviously. There never were any, he made sure of that. The screams still filled his mind, and he felt the Giggle grow in his chest. The Giggle wasn't like his normal laughter. It was even more disturbed, and he knew that. The Giggle wasn't just insane laughter; it was an almost physical manifestation of his insanity.

"It seems you have done well," said the Giggle, its twisted voice laughing with mad glee

"Indeed I did!" said the man, giggling uncontrollably.

"Perhaps a celebration is in order," laughed the Giggle.

The man was vaguely aware that he was talking to himself. He stood up, and went to the shelf in the corner of the room. Unstoppering a glass bottle he poured himself a measure of whisky, not enough to affect him in any way, but merely for the taste. He raised the glass to the Giggle, and said, "To a job well done." The Giggle proceeded to answer with his insane laugh.

After the Giggle left, the Man put away his knife and lay down in his bed. He was still laughing when he finally went to sleep. In his dreams he saw all of the jobs, and they all filled him with malicious pleasure. He awoke in the morning and grabbed the letter. He was happy the job had gone so well, a marvelous piece de resistance, a truly fantastic grand finale. He was ready to retire.

"I will miss you," said the Giggle.

"I will still be here," said the Man. "I'll visit from hell."

He walked down the road, aware of his knife clicking at his side. He arrived at the police station and smiled at the officer.

"Doctor John! What a pleasure to see you here!" said the officer. He looked down at the knife, now coated in dry blood "Why the knife, sir?"

The man smiled, a twisted smile, "Oh this is just my brush. It's what I use to make my art." Even to him his laughter sounded utterly insane. "And today I'm not Dr. John Clark, oh no, today you can call me Saucy Jack."

Liz Phillips





Brilliance

The brilliance of the night
The colossus of light
Shines upon the sea
Like times that were
That are
That will be

The rhythm of waves
The string of the sands
A million years
Of a melody that breaks
Of a melody that mends

Through mountains
Dark and cold
Beautiful and lonely
Longing for love
Thoughtful and bold

And lands of green
And red and blue
Blanketed by dark
The wind blows on
Free and true

To the corner of the earth
And from there it shall be,
After its course is done,
Reunited with the sea.

-Fernando Parnes

Lay down on my cloud

Laying down on my cloud
On my galactic room
Playing my guitar
Laughin at my tune

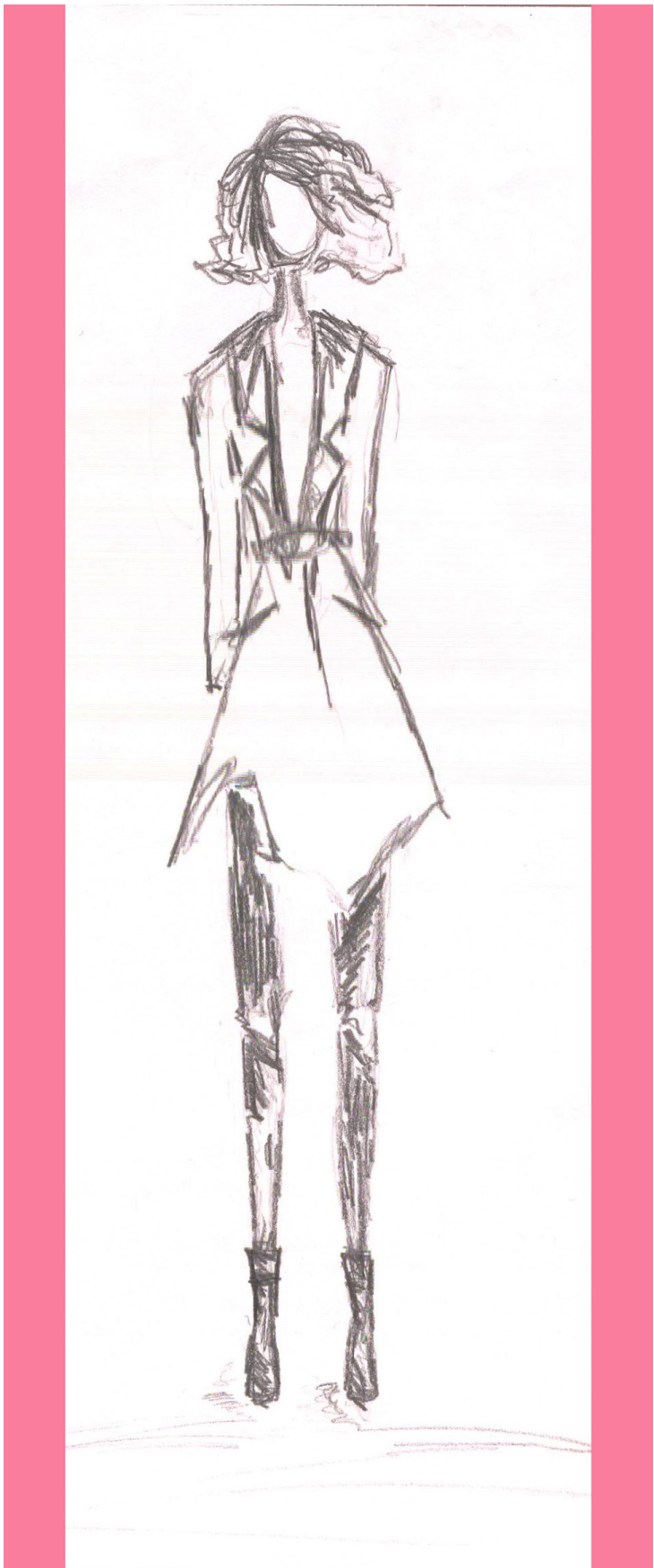
The world is imperfect
But perfect all the same
Like my song, my life
Perfection in the sun
The sky
The rain

Climbin down
With my head in the clouds
I go down to earth
No need for worry
No need to rush

Walkin through the surf
I feel the water at my toes
And up high in the sky
Galaxies twirl and glow

Like melody, love and life
We are imperfectly perfect
And through our hearts
And through our songs
We'll make it better
We'll right the wrongs

-Fernando Parnes



Anonymous

The Girl That Was Eaten By a Prom Dress

By Giulietta Schoenfeld

She was a nice kid, Amelia. She was the kind with oaky brown hair that frizzed up on weekdays, and bright blue marbles for eyes. Her face was nice. It was pretty and soft-looking with dainty little freckles sprinkled on the mounds of her cheeks, only fading at the contours of her tiny little nose. Everything about Amelia screamed elegance, from her tiny piggy toes to her slender eyebrows. She even had little rose petal lips and skin that kind of looked like the color of peaches blended with cream.

Sally and I used to joke about Amelia a lot. We talked about how she only straightened her hair on Sundays, how she'd look a little nicer if she didn't wear so much eye shadow-especially the blue kind- and we almost always brought up her massive crush on BJ. Poor girl was smitten. She'd waltz into school with her tiny nose curved towards the ceiling and her back arcing elegantly so that her chest shone in all its c-cup glory under that tight little Juicy blouse. She got all the boys' attention, of course. All she had to do was swing her hips a little and flutter her lustrous eyelashes and suddenly all eyes were on her. But BJ never noticed her, or if he did he never approached her, or even talked to her.

I liked Amelia, when I think about it now, there wasn't much not to like about her. She was a good student, always maintaining an A average and she didn't smoke like Sally did. She was a nice girl, but kind of quiet. Sometimes I forgot she was even in my math class 'cause she hardly opened her dainty little mouth. She never really talked to anyone, just gave us this tiny smile when she saw us in the hallways, and for a while that's what we expected. I think it was the first Monday of March when things started changing.

Amelia came to school wearing new eyeliner under her blue eye shadow, she was still quiet, and she was still nice and pretty. Sally rolled her eyes when Amelia sashayed past and muttered something I couldn't hear under her breath.

We didn't think much of it but as the weeks went on, Amelia kept coming to school with more makeup on her face. One day she came with pink blush, the next day she was wearing glitter on her blue covered eyelids, the next she was sporting shiny red lipstick. Then glitter gloss. Then fake eyelashes. Then she came to school with her hair straightened. Some girls thought she only got prettier with every new addition, but I thought she started looking worse. Her skin lost its peachy glow under all the blush and her hair almost looked like it was dead hanging limp on her head. I never told her though; I didn't want to hurt her feelings 'cause she looked like she was the sensitive type. Sally only rolled her eyes.

Soon it was a couple weeks before Prom and Sally and I had decided to hit the mall in search of dresses. We walked into Forever21 and Sally made a beeline straight to the clearance section where she plucked about 20 different colored dresses and zoomed straight to the changing rooms. I started looking through the 7s and 8s and I was fingering a puffy pink one when something caught my eye. I looked up and saw through the window a familiar girl in the small boutique across from the store we were in. She wasn't facing me but I recognized Amelia immediately from the tiny mini skirt she was wearing and her new hair extensions. I still don't understand what happened. One minute I was fingering the puffy pink skirts of a Morgan and Company, and the next I was walking through the doors of the boutique where I'd seen Amelia. I know this is gonna sound weird, but I managed to track her down in the back of the store. I don't know why I didn't say hi or something, I just hid behind a rack of 25% off jeans and watched.

Amelia was flipping through a couple dresses hanging on the wall. They looked like XOXO's but I couldn't really read the tags from where I was crouching. I felt awkward crouching there observing Amelia take down a sleeveless blue dress from the hanger; I kept thinking the saleslady would come up behind me and ask me what I was doing. But the store was kind of empty aside from Amelia and I and I didn't see any salesladies in this section of the store so when Amelia, with a bundle of dresses draped over her elbow, started over towards the changing rooms I followed her right in. I snuck in just as the door to the stall closed. I know I'm starting to sound like some creepy stalker or something, cause I waited in the changing room for her to come out, but I decided that when she did I was gonna pretend I had just walked in and I was gonna greet her and pretend I never followed her in. See, I was sick of all the sneaking- I didn't even get why I started doing it in the first place- and I was determined to make things right with Amelia.

So I waited. I heard the rustling of fabric for a few moments and then nothing. After a couple of minutes I flipped open my phone to see if I got any texts from Sally wondering where I was but my inbox was empty. I snapped it shut and had a fleeting moment of panic when I realized that Amelia might hear the sound and know someone was in here with her. If she noticed it, she never made a sound to prove she did so I kept waiting. After five more minutes I started getting tense. I took a pack of gum out of my purse and started chewing loudly. I made sure to make it loud 'cause at that point I kinda just wanted her to notice me and say something. I kept chewing and popping bubbles to get a reaction from the closed stall but I didn't get any. I didn't get any texts from Sally either. At one point I started texting Sally to let her know where I was but instead of hitting the send button I called out Amelia's name.

"Amelia?" I called in a kinda hushed manner, "You in there?" But I didn't get any response. I started to wish I had the girl's number so I could call her phone and see if she picked up. My phone started buzzing and I flipped it open to see a message from Sally:

Hey, mt up wth Lucy in Blmingdale's, goin 2 her house, C u L8TR.

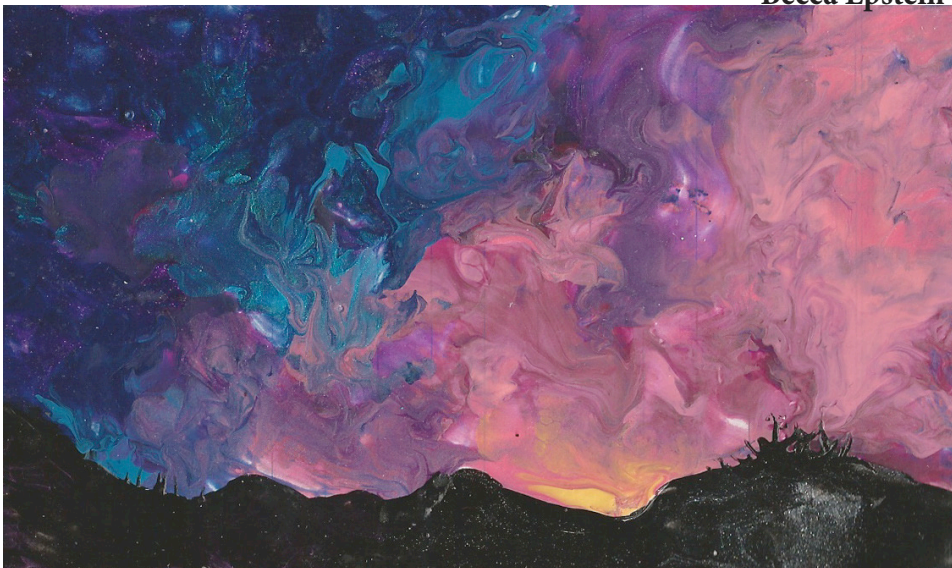
I shut the phone and tucked it back in my purse. By now I was getting antsy and a little worried. I debated on knocking on the stall, but before I could talk myself out of it a lady walked in. I froze just as I reached the front of the stall.

"Is that one locked?" It's when she walked towards me that I noticed she was a saleslady. I didn't say anything so she knocked on the door for me. When we got no response, she inserted a small silver key into the lock and twisted until we heard a clicking sound. "There ya go," she smiled, and then after collecting a few discarded plastic hangers she left.

I stared at the open door to Amelia's stall for a second before I pushed it open. I felt chills run down my spine when I realized the room was empty. There was a mirror, a small bench with a purse on it and a pile of clothes next to it. I glanced at the clothes and made out a mini skirt and a tank top and a C-cup bra. On the wall opposite of the mirror I saw a bunch of dresses hanging, with the dark blue one I saw earlier in front. I leaned forwards to see if I could read the brand of the dress and froze. I started sweating and my heart was thumping like nuts in my chest when I noticed the strands of brown hair poking out of the bodice. See, you thought I was joking when you saw the title of this story. You probably thought it was some kind of metaphor or a symbol. But how else can I explain what happened? I hadn't seen her leave the room and I'd been waiting just outside her door for 20 minutes. She... she just disappeared. I don't know what Amelia did to deserve disappearing and I started feeling guilty. Maybe if I'd greeted her earlier she'd have still been here.

I started backing away when my boot stepped on something small and I heard the familiar sound of plastic cracking. I remember looking down and seeing 2 false eyelashes, a cracked one where my boot had been and the other near the mirror as though it'd been tossed.

Becca Epstein





Hippopotamus
In the African nighttime
He's got a hot date

-Jibreel, Sahara, Paula, Emma,
Katie Muholland, Amy Chapkovich

I heard my door push open with a creak. I didn't need to turn around to know it was my little brother. He always opens the door in the same way. It starts out as a slow creaking from the hinges, then I hear a quiet tiptoeing of little feet.

"Agnes, can I sleep with you tonight? I don't want to wake up Mommy and Daddy."

I stood up from my computer chair and walked over. "Why can't you sleep in your own bed? Are there monsters under your bed?"

"Not under my bed," he said quietly, climbing under my quilt.

"Where are the monsters then?"

"They're in Grandpa," he whispered. I looked at him with confusion for a couple seconds as I waited for him to clarify. When he didn't, I came over and hugged him close. He finally came around.

"Well, I was going downstairs to get a cup of water before bedtime. And Grandpa was in the kitchen with Grandma. Grandma was saying that Grandpa should've told her about when we were going on vacation for Christmas. She kept saying we were putting a blanket on her face."

"You mean pulling the wool over her eyes?"

"Yeah, and Grandpa said that we told her a whole bunch of times. She was just forgetting. And then Grandma mumbled something to Grandpa and he got so angry. He started shouting. And Grandma was arguing too, only she didn't seem quite as mad. And he said it wasn't his fault that she couldn't remember things. It was mean. I think Grandpa's heart got eaten by monsters. They're supposed to be happy because they married each other. Mommy and Daddy are always nice."

I started running my fingers through my brother's hair. "You know, Grandma isn't the same as she used to be. That's what gets Grandpa so frustrated."

"Are there monsters in Grandma too?"

"Not really. There aren't even monsters in Grandpa. Do you remember the blue fish in Finding Nemo?"

"Yeah, she always forgot things."

"And sometimes the clownfish got mad at her for forgetting things. But even though the blue fish forgot things, everyone still loved her. Because that's who she is. She can't help being so forgetful. Do you understand?"

"Grandma's a fish?"

I sighed and kept stroking his hair as he drifted off to sleep. I didn't blame him for not understanding. I don't think any of us really understood.

-Rebecca Buxbaum
Noah Silvestry



Truth and Reconciliation

By Mina Simon

As I looked into Nelson Mandela's tiny jail cell on Robben Island, a space he had occupied for decades, away from family and friends, I wondered how a particular cause could be so important to a person as to involve such extreme sacrifice. This visit to Robben Island, South Africa, when I was eleven years old affected me profoundly, as I was brought into direct contact with the injustices of racism, as well as the capacity of the human spirit to forgive and move forward.

Looking back, we had enjoyed a brilliant, carefree sun-lit morning on the beautiful waterfront in Cape Town before venturing across to Robben Island on a ferry. In Cape Town, there were people of all nationalities and races laughing, working and shopping together. The spectacular Table Mountain, with a canopy of clouds, shone in the distance. It was difficult to imagine that, a mere two decades earlier, such integration would have been impossible. Members of my own Indian family would not have been allowed to live or work with members of other races as they would be considered "coloreds."

Our ferry left the festive waterfront in Cape Town behind, braving the choppy waters before landing in the forbiddingly remote Robben Island in a fenced area. The jetty was on a rocky outcrop to discourage inmates from attempting to escape. There was a gate, leading into the large prison compound, which eerily resembled the entry into Auschwitz, which I had only seen on television. Both gates represented a symbol of hard labor, cruelty to political prisoners and separation due I learned a lot about history and human nature from our guide, a black political prisoner named Winston, who recounted his imprisonment (lasting a decade during the apartheid regime) for the crime of congregating with members of his own race. He had been beaten and subjected to grueling working conditions in the same limestone quarry where Nelson Mandela had been forced to labor in the blinding heat of summer and the blistering cold of winter. Indeed, most of the men incarcerated in Robben Island had severe eyesight problems as their corneas had burned due to the reflection of the relentless rays of the South African summer sun.

Aside from the physical hardships of Robben Island, I heard of the despair felt by separated families and friends. In an attempt to break the spirit of the prisoners, the apartheid regime isolated them from their loved ones as much as possible. Visits were severely limited to about twenty minutes a month for family members. Often, relatives would travel long distances at great personal and financial sacrifice, some even from Northern Namibia, only to be turned away arbitrarily and told to return the following month.

Yet, the relatives of the Robben Island prisoners persevered and returned again and again for a mere few minutes of reunion with their loved ones. They refused to let the world forget about the plight of those incarcerated, reminding people of their atrocious circumstances and the trumped up charges against them. They would not be broken. The indomitable spirit of the prisoners and their loved ones prevailed over the unspeakable cruelty of their captors, ultimately causing world opinion to turn against the apartheid regime. Consequently, international pressure was brought to bear so that apartheid policies were overturned.

The cruelty of the apartheid regime and the spirit of the repressed political prisoners notwithstanding, I found the reaction of the country to be most remarkable when Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa. Instead of seeking retribution and physical revenge in kind, President Mandela, along with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, formed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to allow the offenders under apartheid to confess their crimes and move forward without continuing the cycle of violence. This reaction seemed completely counterintuitive to me. Surely family members would have wanted to avenge the deaths and suffering of their loved ones by meting out a similar fate to their captors. Yet, the leaders of the newly elected government had enough wisdom and foresight to redefine what it meant to be a member of a civilized society. They realized that an apology and acknowledgment of suffering was more important to most of the oppressed than an eye for an eye. By seeking to break the cycle of violence, explained our guide, those who had suffered were actually securing a better future.

My experience in Robben Island opened my eyes to the complexity of political and racial issues while making me realize why I love South Africa so much. The mosaic of its diversity, always attractive in its richness, is further enhanced by the spirit of the many ethnicities who have been striving for centuries to tell their story and provide the best future possible for their own families. While a myriad of problems remain, and future leaders have proved to be considerably less idealistic and honorable than President Mandela, the power to forgive, the love of country and the tenacity of the human spirit are all integral characteristics that define South Africa.

As a sheltered eleven year old from Wayne, Pennsylvania, who had never had to address the horrors of racial discrimination, even though I am part “colored,” I was deeply affected by the plight of those who were abused in the not too distant past as well as their ability to move beyond it. The spirit of the prisoners of Robben Island and their ability to forgive will always represent a beacon of hope for.

Emma Shaw



Some Guy With a Beard Read Robots in Space Last Week and Cried When it Was Over
By Anonymous

It takes all night for us to reach the library, even with four of us pedaling the bike.
We follow the North Star.

It grows cold, but we are prepared, cloaked in motorcycle jackets of thick leather that protect us from wind-burn. I am worried about the building collapsing. We are told, before we leave, that the last library in the world is safe, that students use it all the time, but I worry about pulling the wrong book down and having the whole building topple.

We imagine a metropolis, stacks of books which scrape the sky about all of the trivial things historians forgot. We sing as we ride, willing away the cold.

When we reach the place it is dawn. We move quietly, stealing in through the door as we have been instructed, which has been left unlocked.

The books!

The only book I have ever seen is the Bible, but these-- there are a million bibles, large and small.

They don't hold up the building. There are no stacks. Everything is neat and perfect, and in our delight we are not careful. We rip books from their shelves. Delicate pages tear and fall like snow.

We dance and laugh and cry with joy, and even though we mean to leave by first light...

We stay so long we are there when the Last Librarian comes in, hear her screams when she realizes her Last Library has been destroyed.

Kevin Cooper

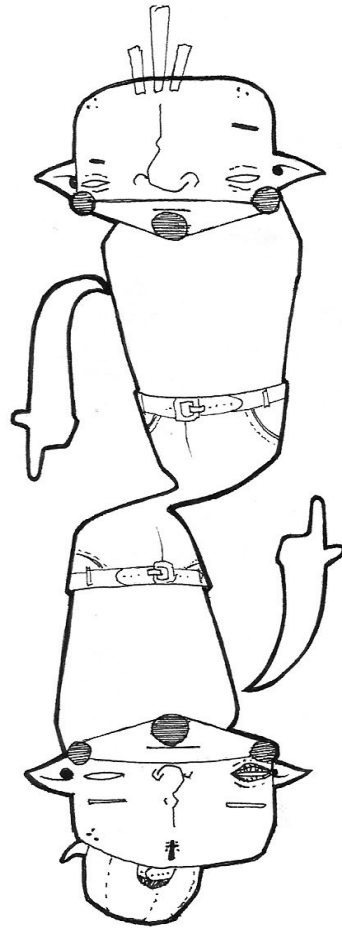


When I'm 64

Andrew Vickery

When I'm 64 not much will have changed,
Just shifted, boxed up, and all re-arranged.
Sure everything will be called different names,
but in essence I know, it'll all be the same,
There will still be husbands who cheat on their
There will still be rich children who live on free
There will still be a moon,
and a beautiful sun,
There will still be the wars,
That nobodys won.
There will still be a mother loving her baby,
There will still be a baby without a mother to lo
Lots of people will die,
Lots of leaders will lie,
Lots of bad things will happen,
And we wont know why,
There will still be a ruler,
We'll still help the poor,
We'll think we've progressed,
We'll think we've done more,
But the truth of the matter,
Once clearly defined,
Is: we live in a circle,
And think,
Its a line.

-Lindsay Saligman



Becca Epstein





Krispy Feldman

Iridescent

By Julia Weiss

All of them liked her. Her eyes were blue and her hipbones curved into themselves, cradling her body and ensuring that it would not topple. Her hair was a blonde sheath, cascading down to her waist in an iridescent waterfall. All of them liked this. She was as light and golden as an angel, shimmering in the glory of what they liked and wanted to see. Once, they thought, she had been a feather falling to earth, lost from the back of some mythical creature of flight.

Her shoulder blades were birdlike as well, protruding from her translucent skin out into a world that readily received them. The world cradled her and loved her. He loved her too.

It took everything he had to touch her for the first time, brushing the sharp point of her elbow with the very tip of his index finger. He delighted in the fact that her skin was softer than the silkiest of his father's ties. Upon closer inspection he noticed that this was due to its thick layer of golden hair. He wasn't repulsed, though. He liked it. He loved it.

He loved her. He loved how their kisses were fleeting, ending as she came up gasping for air. He loved the feel of her when she perched on his lap, a lightness that only grew lighter as time passed. It passed too quickly, he thought. He wanted more. He needed more of her.

There wasn't more of her, though. Each day she was less and less, until she was gone. He watched her go, misunderstanding her passage as one of requirement. He concluded that he had ceased to deserve her. He believed that maybe, he never had.

She cracked her brittle eyelids as she fell, watching him release her. It was sad, she thought. She wished that her hair hadn't been lank, her eyes sunken, her skin nearly see-through. She wished that she hadn't been breakable. She wished that she hadn't made herself so. More than anything, she wished that he hadn't loved her for it. She would have preferred it if none of them had.

He read her eulogy, remarking on her beauty and life's impermanence in a way that caused all in the audience to nod and whisper, comparing his angel to Juliet, to Helen, to the figureheads of unrequited love. At the funeral, when he recited in a droll tone her birth and death dates, they shook their heads, muttering at just how unfair it all was, that she was already gone. They wished she'd had more time.

He led them to her casket when the ceremony was over, allowing them one last look at his ephemeral beauty. When they had gathered and silenced, he lifted the fragile lid off, thinking to himself that she could never be contained.

The audience gasped as they saw her, their mouths falling open. Shivers ran down their spines. A child cried out and it echoed through the air.

It had been a matter of days since she left them, and yet only a skeleton lay in the box.



Liz Phillips

canto in the park

how harsh it is
to be hidden
behind the deep moon
light,
beyond the milky hands
of mother,
and how
strange
a surprise it is to find out
the beggar wants
a smile from me

-Nick DeFina

Anneka Allman



My Kind of Characters

Dear Emma, Dear Lena, Dear Pamela, Dear Corey
You all seem like girls that I'd put in a story

Your shyness, your cuteness, your awkward red hair
Your prudence, your patience, your short nerdy stares

I study your lives to the point that it's tiring
'Cause when push comes to shove, to me you're inspiring

Dear Naya, Sofia, and Penelope,
You all seem so witty, so fiery, and free

Of course you're good looking, but many are blessed
There's something about you, that leaves all impressed

Do I think you're attractive? Or is it just admiration?
Could also be jealousy, or intimidation

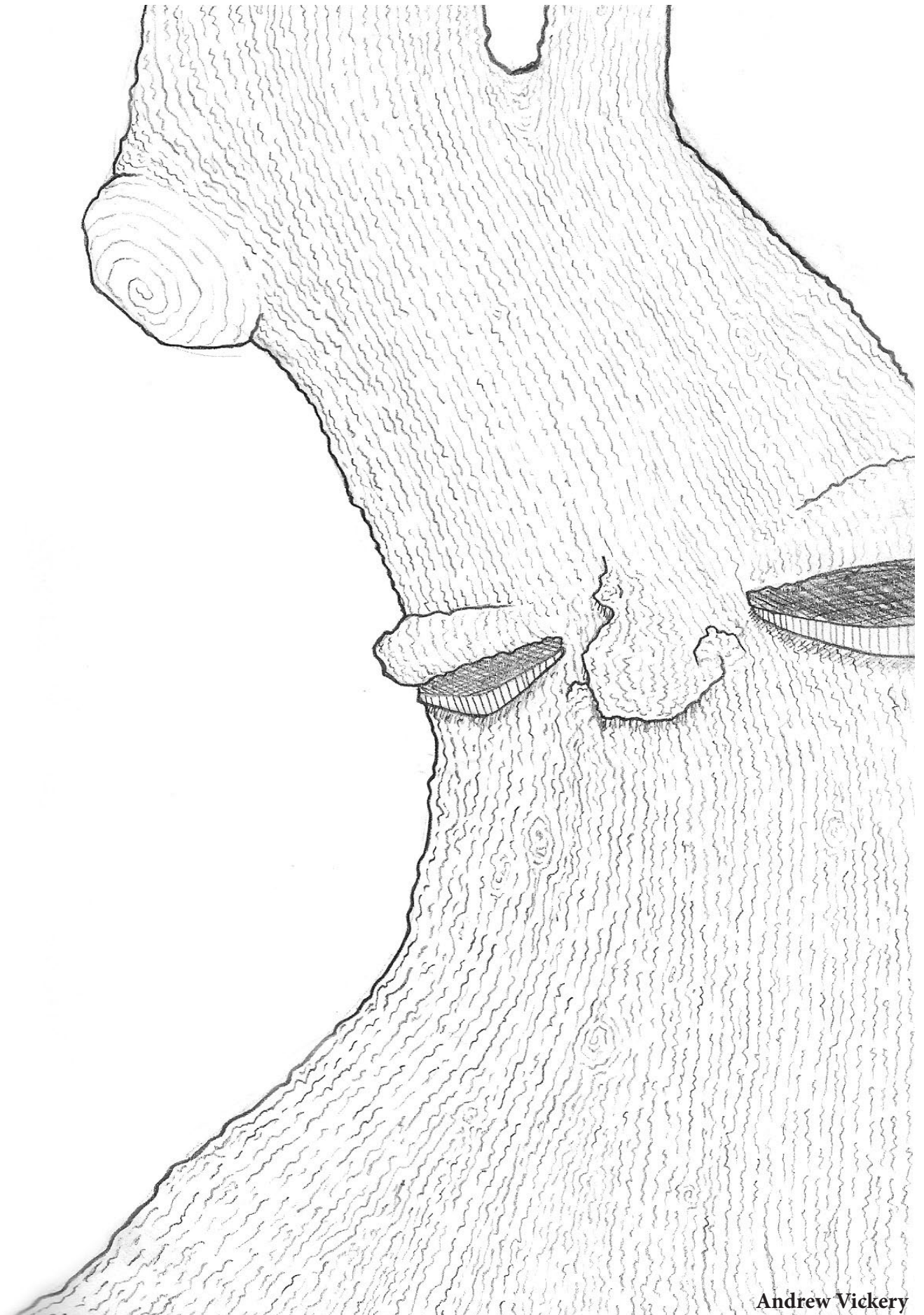
Dear Cute intellectuals,
Dear latinas like lighters,
you've taught a whole lot to
sixteen year old writers

These two types of women
Give words to my verse
they're my inspiration
For better or worse

-Anonymous

Nathan Ulrich







Claudia Kronfeld

Endings

By Gabrielle Owens

Needle was late.

Louis nervously twisted his hands, scanning people's faces. Hadn't he said 2:30? He was sure the message had said 2:30, but it was by now nearly 3:30.

He shivered, wrapping his bright yellow raincoat – an unreasonably cheery color – more securely around him, mostly on impulse rather than believing it could keep him dry. He had long ago realized that raincoats had a maximum capacity of water they kept out before they just soaked through. Over his time in England he had grown accustomed to being damp.

The street seemed like a black and white photo, the low, heavy-bellied grey clouds and rain leaching away color. The few people who had dared the wet hurried by, sloshing through water and pulling their hoods further up over their heads.

Perhaps Louis was paranoid, but he thought that there were fewer and fewer people each time he came out. People weren't spending time and money on frivolous pursuits; they were glued to their TVs or computers, praying for news, combing through their old social networking sites, leaving dozens of messages. Where are you? Are you safe? What's happening? Louis was not among their numbers: he needed to stay cut off from the outside world, or they might find him. Needle had told him so. And if he couldn't trust Needle, he couldn't trust anyone.

How long ago, now, since his life turned upside down? A year and a half? It had been so sudden, and the day had started so normally: waking up at home in southern France, school, soccer practice... Then, a few minutes before dinnertime, there had been a crash, a scream, and a shot. He froze, his hand

still suspended over a calculus problem.

He heard someone running, a scream, and two more shots. Then there were more footsteps, coming up the stairs. That unfroze him. He ran faster than he had ever run before along the corridor, down the back stairs through the kitchen and out the back door. He heard a yell and a shot behind him as he vaulted over their garden fence. He didn't even look back.

He went through several people's backyards, along alleys, racing along the sidewalks of streets, disregarding the stares. He was far away, lost, and had a cut in his bare foot when he finally stopped. It was only then he realized he was still clenching his pencil.

He had gone to the police, but they'd been frustrated and suspicious of his lack of information. A friend had taken him in, and the first day he spent there the tall, slim young man with perfect English and perfect French called Needle found him.

Needle told him his parents had been killed for political reasons, and Louis was now in danger as well. Louis refused to believe him - until the assassins reappeared and tried to kill them both. Needle saved his life. He got them on a ferry to England, rented a flat under a false name, and gave Louis a code name: Ring.

Only after a year of living in England did Needle explain what was happening. Louis's parents had been part of a resistance against a global Big-Brother political movement. So was Needle, and now so was Louis. After that, he occasionally brought people to Louis's apartment, where he had hurried, whispered conversations with them. Someone Louis knew delivered a letter last night telling him to meet Needle in this square.

"Don't move!" a voice breathed behind him, pulling him back to the present. "It's Needle. Ring, we're in danger. We've been betrayed."

"By who?" Louis asked in alarm, and scanned the crowd. The rain had grown harder. People hurried, almost running now, holding arms overhead to protect from the rain. It was hard to see faces. A nose, a chin, some hair was all that peeked out from their hoods.

"We don't know," Needle said. "Do you remember the boat we came in?"

"I... think so. Wasn't it called the Seabird?"

"Yes. Go to Portsmouth. Find the captain of that ferry. When you meet him, show him the ring. He should then show you his ring, which he'll have in his right pocket, without a word. If he does, ask for me. He'll take care of you. If he does anything else, or if something else goes wrong, run. Go to Belgium and find a woman with the code name Silver. She can help you. But don't stay too long, or return to France. You need to get far away. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Louis whispered.

"One more thing, Ring. You might want this." The heavy thing that was pressed into his hand was at once utterly new and horribly familiar. The gun seemed weighted with all the death and injury it could cause.

"Now go!" Needle whispered. "Good luck, Ring. I'll see you soon." Louis stumbled forward, and then hurried away through the crowd, slipping the gun into an inside pocket and keeping his head down.

Behind him a shot rang out, followed by several shrieks. Louis spun around.

Whoever had done it was now gone. All that was left was Needle, weaponless, spread-eagled on the ground, his mouth slightly open, his eyes wide and afraid, and the puddles of rain turning red around him.

Louis ran. He didn't stop to think. He didn't plan. He didn't look back. He just ran, even though he knew that when he stopped, he would be lost.

He ran, because he didn't see he had much of a choice.

Notes of an exile
By Sydney Goggins

“That strange word- home- is a word unknown to all now.

All look through foreign planes...

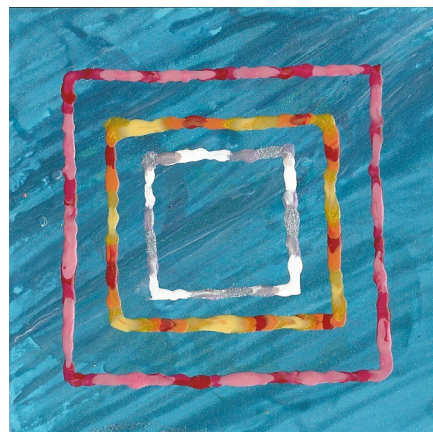
The bitter air of exile is like a poisoned wine.” -Anna Akhmatova, Poem without a hero

The dwindling, depleted beauty of an archaic tile roof shimmering atop a shuttered house: from the precarious angle of a window propped expectantly open, he glimpses the cautious sun and the first tremors of dawn. In the opposite direction, from the density of a shaded boulevard, a modern office park collides with a cluster of empty shops. The rust-covered railing of a balcony hovers above the street, dotted with some dangling plants and a ubiquitous carpet, like the casual suspension of an anchor dangling over a port. The apartment block itself is a ship, the balcony an anchor, and the city you think, the ghastly enigma of the sea. A high speed train is soaring blindly across the lifeless tracks. The scene, as a whole, is peaceful, but with an elusive dejection, incomprehensible except to someone versed in loneliness. He looks at his watch- five forty seven in the morning.

The view from his window is an ordinary, luckless vantage point, but on the most subtle prompting it bombards him with contrary emotions. He leans his elbows against the windowsill, he rubs his eyes, he reminds himself “you are still alive, isn’t that enough of an accomplishment?” But what he’s really thinking, he discovers, is the exact opposite. “You’re free, and you’re wasting your freedom. Why are you alone? Why are you working at a car wash?” With the vastness of the city comes the feeling of being alone in a labyrinth.

But what can he do? Spiraling under the passive sky of early, exhausting February, a lone construction crane soars above anonymous roofs, conflating the quiet horizon with a feigned dreaminess. He senses, with an enthralling certainty- a certainty with its roots in relief- that the city, is having a gradual impact, is finally freeing him from the vacancy of an inner loneliness.

In the distance is a broad construction crane and a half-built house. Barely awake and stifling an oppressive yawn, invisible laborers are already starting to perspire. The mechanics of the crane itself remind you of an incredible newness. The morning, once vacant, hardens into a workday, and a cursory glimpse from the window gives a caustic reminder: the world awaiting you, however tempting and enthralling in its boundless energy and however generous in its promises of a new life, is a caustic reminder of your irredeemable destiny- this, you have been told, is your home now. But to call it a home is to deceive yourself;



Becca Epstine



Sunday Mornings
By Paula Burkhardt

What do you do on Sunday mornings? Do you roll out of bed and smile at the sun? Smile at children, cartoons, pets, and God? Do you walk down the hallway on slippered feet and think about what a cliché this business of Sunday morning pancakes is, how corny? Or do you walk along the sidewalk, barefoot? Do you come down the front steps before your run (you don't get a break on the weekend?) or up the steps and into your own home (finally)? Do you feel that sinking in your chest when you realize there are only a few more hours of weekend? Have you become bored?

Sunday morning quiet is a myth. Across the street a dog is barking and downstairs the tv is murmuring and outside people are already driving on the road and leaving big gusts of hot, gray air behind them. Be glad the silence is just a story. In the kitchen clattering pans in the sink rudely put an end to your drowsiness. So do eggs sizzling on top of the stove. The view from the window tells you to go outside (what a beautiful day!) but there's also the pollen in the air to consider. So tell me, were you planning any adventures for today?



You Know

By Hannah Laren

“You know that feeling when you look up at the stars? When you feel small and alone but it’s not scary because everyone has felt that way? Because in that moment the stars don’t look cold and indifferent?” she asked him. So he kissed her on the head and took her hand. They laid down in the field and watched the stars because he wanted to know how she felt.

“You know when you see something so funny that you can’t stop laughing? When the tears are flowing down your face, and you know it’s not that funny, but you just can’t help it?” she asked. He kissed her on the nose and took her hand. And he took her to a fancy restaurant and insisted they talk in different languages when the waiter took their orders and wore fake mustaches and laughed until they cried, because he wanted to know how she felt.

“You know that feeling when you know you’re going to be ok but everything is just horrible right now, and you can’t imagine it getting better?” she asked when her grandfather died. Tears were streaming down her face, so he brushed her hair aside and kissed her tears away and held her close, because he wanted to know how she felt.

“You know that feeling you get when you hear a song that you just love? That always puts you in a good mood no matter what happened? Well, I feel that way whenever I see you,” she told him, biting her lip, because she wasn’t sure she wanted him to know how she felt.

So he kissed her and said,

“I love you, too.”

Peach

The peach's bulging ridge
is crushed between my teeth,
revealing a meadow or maybe
a moonscape of
bright yellow,
beneath a furry skin of
mottled red.

The peach bleeds its sweet juice,
spoilng my hand –
I feel like a murderer
clumsy with death.

I consider
the infinitesimal structures
that are disappearing in my mouth –
the spiraling protein, the
double-helixed mystery of DNA –
and I feel like I've stolen from God.

-Bill Fedullo

Sofia Seidel





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