



# *Absynthe*

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# MOTHER IN SUNSHINE

Margaret Brunke

In the afterlife  
the sun is stuck halfway  
between a full rise and a full set.

Two wispy, white rings spin entwined.

When you lose touch with the things  
that once made up your identity,  
your connection with the afterworld  
lessens  
and the great white rings will slow  
until they join the rhythmless vibrations  
that form this plane.

Mother's face can be seen through the waves.  
Don't let go of what she gifted you. Youth  
falls from locks of her hair, sunshine of  
a blonde-turned-grey.

And you will be tempted  
by those who have already begun this process.  
Pale, weightless creatures pulling at your wrists,  
trying to turn your gaze to the things that aren't.

Things at the peripherals of their world  
which have already faded; fading  
until all that is left  
is a chair,  
an overturned  
teacup

just visible from the doorway where they look in.

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# PEAR BONES

Margaret Brunke

Of all the fruits, the one with the lowest  
structural integrity.

Bruises from the core, out.

Peeling the sticker off with the skin  
underneath.

Can be pulled string by string, from stem  
to stern. Like stringed  
cheese.

Compared to the apple's stem, "the stem  
of the pear is more of an extension of the  
flesh, held up with the intention"  
of being something that it is not.

The least likely to be chosen from the fruit  
basket.

The last left,  
and thrown out due to  
a lack of structural integrity.



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# RACE CARD

Dasia Jeffery

*TW: Police Brutality, Racism*

In eleventh grade,  
my friends told me they were sick of me playing the 'race card.'  
See, I grew up in a nice neighbourhood, safe and quiet  
with a white picket fence in the yard,  
so, it's not like I was ever really struggling.  
I wasn't born in the ghetto or the projects.  
Wasn't raised by my grandma or without a daddy,  
at least not until the fourth grade, but nowadays,  
even the white kids' parents are divorced by then anyway,  
so, I guess this is why they were mad.  
Why every time I say, "it's because I'm black,"  
they laugh and ask why it's always about that.  
Why every time I play my 'race card,' they say it's unfair.  
That they would die to have my tan skin and my curly hair,  
as if this is a compliment.  
As if there are not brown bodies face down on white cement,  
their blood splattered on the ground, like red confetti  
and I wonder;  
if a black body falls and no one is around to hear it,  
does it make a sound?  
Do we still give them a hashtag  
and a Black Lives Matter campaign?  
Because it seems the only time being served for their death  
is fifteen minutes  
of fame.

And I remember, in tenth grade,  
someone asked me why I always say I'm black if my dad is white.  
I guess my mom's blackness was all I had left  
when he ran away with her light.  
I got used to the dark like eyes adjusting in night,  
so, I could see right through him  
when he tried crawling back into my life.

It was the same year a white boy told me  
that we should probably hang out at my house,  
because he didn't know what his parents would say



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## Race Card

about him bringing home a black girl.  
It was then I realized, that I would never be one or the other.  
I would always be both,  
living in limbo.  
Not quite dark enough to sit with the black kids  
but not light enough to sit with the white kids either.  
I would be  
mixed race mystery.  
“Biracial,” an idea too complex  
for some people to wrap their head around.  
Like that white boy in tenth grade,  
or the government, with their census and surveys,  
who, decades after slavery and segregation  
refuse to acknowledge biracial as an ethnicity,  
instead, make me choose:  
Caucasian,  
African American,  
or, ‘Other.’  
Like we are a foreign species they have yet to discover.  
Like we don’t even really exist,  
just a white girl or a black girl undercover.  
And it’s funny because growing up  
people used to tell me that I had the ‘best of both worlds,’  
I guess they didn’t know that coming from two different planets  
doesn’t mean you have a home on both,  
it means you’re stranded.  
It means when black bodies are dropping  
like black flies in the summertime heat  
and I retweet a post saying, “rest in peace Stephon Clark,”  
my friends will tell me I can’t speak on black issues  
because I’m not as dark.

Most of the time,  
I do not feel like I have a choice.  
Because what good is a microphone without a voice?  
I could scream and yell as loud as I can,  
in the end, they’re still going to tell me who I am.  
But at least let me say this:  
in a world divided by race,  
it’s hard enough for us to even exist  
without having to deal with everyone’s  
ignorant, colourist bullshit.



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# THE BIRD AND THE GIRL



Deanna Sceviour

The birds fell silent in the wake of the screaming and whirring. The whirring came from inside the barn. Through a hole in the slats of the roof, the birds could see there was a girl inside. The oldest bird hopped closer to have a better look. He wasn't startled like the others were by the noise; he was more annoyed than anything else. He had seen many things in his day and felt seasoned in this sort of thing. *The girl looks like a baby chick*, the Bird thought to himself. *Freshly hatched*. Most of the birds flew away, but the oldest bird stayed, perched on top of the broken roof, staring down at the girl.

The whirring stopped suddenly.

The girl in the barn was lying on her back in the hay, and through the broken slats in the roof she made eye contact with the old bird. He blinked and cocked his head curiously at her.

*Hello*, she whispered.

*Hello, little chick*, the bird said. *What a strange looking bird you are. Are you a relative of the ugly duckling?*

*I'm not a chick*, the girl said, *or an ugly duckling. I'm a girl.*

The bird stared at her. *Are you sure?*

Yes, the girl said. *And what kind of bat are you?*

The bird's chest puffed. *I'm not a bat.*

*Are you sure?* the girl mocked.

*I am*, the bird said. He began to strut across the slats. He waved a wing at her. *See? Here are my feathers*. He wiggled a curved talon. *Look at my claws. I am a bird. Now, are you sure you're a girl?*

Yes, the girl said. She tried moving her arm; then her legs; then she tried to feel her hair to show the bird. All she could move were her eyes. *No*.

*What are you doing down there?*

*I don't remember*, the girl said. *Maybe I'm resting. What are you doing up there?*

*Well*, the bird said, ruffling his feathers, *I was enjoying a nice chat, until the others were scared off.*

*I'm sorry*, the girl said.

The whirring started again. The click-clack of metal against bone was back and shattered the stillness. The Girl and The Bird locked eyes once more before he cawed at her and flew away from the noise. She hoped he would be back again. She didn't like lying in this hay alone. There was grunting and muttering and pulling and shoving above her. She didn't want to listen. Instead, The Girl rolled her eyes to the side and looked at the ground around her. The hay near her head was sticky and congealed.





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## The Bird and The Girl

*Is that my blood?* the girl wondered. There was cartilage, bone and flesh intermixed in the hay, but it didn't feel like hers.

*It must be mine,* the girl thought. *I hope none of that is too important.*

*Hello,* the bird said. He was back, perched again on the broken slat of the roof. *Will the whirring stop for good?*

*I don't know. I hope so,* the girl said. *Where did you go?*

*Away,* the bird replied. *I hate noise.*

*I wish I could go away, too,* the girl said. *I don't like noise either. I'm tired.*

They were both silent for a moment.

*Why do you come back here if you can fly away?* the girl asked.

The bird considered her question for a moment before answering. *This barn is my home.*

*Is it my home now?* the girl asked.

*Do you want it to be?* the bird said.

*No,* the girl said, *I'm only resting. I'll go once I'm finished.*

*Where will you go?*

*Home,* the girl said. Then she thought for a moment. *I think.*

*I can teach you to fly,* the bird said. He hopped down a slat. *I've taught many chicks how to fly. I can teach you.* He hopped down another.

*How can I fly if I'm not a bird?* the girl asked.

*How do you know you can't?* the bird said. *Have you tried?*

*No, I guess I haven't,* the girl said. *But I can't move.*

The Bird hopped closer. *Do you have to move to fly?*

*Do I?* the girl asked. *How would I know?*

The bird laughed. *How could you not? If you want to go away, you can. What's keeping you here?* The whirring stopped; the blood's dry.

The Bird waited for an answer.

*I don't know. I think I'm scared.*

*I know,* the bird said.

*Can I go whenever I want?* the girl asked the bird. *Can I really leave this place?*

*Yes, you Can.*

The bird cawed and took flight from the barn. This time the girl followed.

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# THIS IS A POEM FOR WOMEN

Dasia Jeffery

*TW: Violence against women*

who walk home fast in the dark  
with keys clutched tight between white  
knuckled fists.  
who leap into drivers' seats  
for fear of hands waiting beneath cars to  
grab at feet  
and breathe sighs of relief when the  
sound of auto-locks *click*.  
for women who learned not to go out at  
night, even for walks or jogs  
because it's not worth the risk,  
and those who never made it back from  
trips to the grocery store  
or nine-hour shifts.

this is a poem for women,  
one in three of which will be beaten or  
raped  
by a man that they live with.  
for women who are taught from  
childhood  
by strangers and fathers and boyfriends  
that they ain't worth shit.  
whose bodies are never their own,  
but policed by the government,  
exploited in the media  
and used by beauty companies  
to make a profit.

this is a poem for the women that the  
movements forget;  
Rekia Boyd, when no one showed up to  
march at her protest  
after Chicago police shot her in the  
head.  
for women who go out on dates,

refuse when their boyfriends beg them  
to stay,  
say no to a man then walk away  
and end up dead.

this is a poem for women who don't  
even trust their own male friends  
because they've heard stories of girls  
who get drunk around the wrong boys  
and what happens then,  
when she's been drinking or upset  
and he's lonely and desperate.  
for women who work harder than their  
male counterparts  
and still get paid less.  
who apply for positions that they are  
overqualified for  
but still can't impress.  
who are never judged by their  
intelligence or ability  
but instead by how they dress.

for women who carry entire households  
on their backs  
while being depressed,  
who go to hospitals with life-threatening  
medical conditions  
and are told they just need to rest.  
who are never taken seriously because  
it's probably just stress,  
maybe fatigue, or poor eating habits,  
so they're sent back home  
to their deaths.

for black trans women,  
who, out of any other social group,  
are the most violently oppressed.  
for women who are told that they are  
not real women

## This is a Poem for Women

without vaginas or breasts.  
for women who walk by groups of men  
and hold their breath.  
who are prudes when they don't give  
out  
but sluts when they have sex.  
who are told that they are not enough  
even when they're trying their best,  
but most of all,

this is a poem for women  
who wake up every day and survive in a  
world  
designed for men.

women, who prove the stereotypes  
wrong again and again.  
who show us that being told you 'play  
like a girl' is never an insult,  
but a compliment.  
who break records and make history, the  
way only women can.  
who aren't concerned with being what  
men like or expect,  
but being true to themselves,  
the way that they were meant.

women who support women,  
not just when it's a trend.  
women, who don't want their daughters  
to be in the ninety-seven percent.  
who don't need a man's protection, but  
a man's respect.  
who won't quit  
until that's exactly what they get.

women,  
who are changing the world for our  
children.

women,  
who have been silenced for far too long,  
but now,  
are gonna make us listen.

yes, this is a poem for women.



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# THE PERFECT (CUBAN) CIGAR

Deanna Sceviour

My mother hung me from the rafters of the kiln house  
and I stayed there, sweating, drying, until she insisted

I bathe in honey-rum and lemons, and wash my hair  
with guava juice before re-drying and rolling.

My mother smiles and nods. “Your capa is exceptional,”  
she says, “but your tripa needs work.”

My father and brother agree, and all three  
grab the edge of my capote towel and heave.

I am  
    unravelling,  
unrolling;  
    I am dying;  
I am  
    being fixed.

My mother shovels out my insides, swapping miss matched socks,  
rock collections, and stained t-shirts for tripa perfection.

Again: a honey-rum bath, a redrying, rerolling, a smoothing.  
Then my mother, brother and father show me that perfection

holds the ash in its hands—all three centimeters.  
“Can you taste the perfection?”

You’ll never taste like us,” they say  
before they disintegrate.



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# THE LAKE HOUSE

Madeleine Fortin

Sarah places the bowl of fruit for breakfast on the trivet. As she walks away, Carol, the grandmother and the master of the house, glides towards the table and fixes the napkin placements and moves the fruit bowl off of the trivet. Carol then walks over to John and stirs his pancake batter. It is the man's job to make the pancakes just as it is his job to grill on the barbecue. Stan, the grandfather, is exempt from this because he is the true master of the house. He has true control allowing him to sit in the other room and read the morning paper. Carol runs everything and she thus has power in how the pancakes turn out.

I am the observer. In this quiet cottage, our domestic situation is the most important thing in our lives. We are isolated by the four walls of this home. The lake stretches out the backyard and the woods close in on the front of the property. I watch their domestic dance through the kitchen as they finish the final touches for breakfast. It is important that the pancakes are the same size and that the tea is hot. There are few intrusions in the early morning hours. The radio is on, but it's playing light rock instead of the droning voices of a news cast discussing vaccination rates. I sit on the window ledge in the adjoined dining room. I read a novel, a romantic drama, a woman's novel. But this novel is just an escape from the domestic performance displaying itself in the kitchen before me. Stan is excused from all of this and is absorbed in the real world presented in black and

white. He is a part of the outside world and explicitly sits away from the little domestic scene to prove it. I'm not sure who he is really proving it to, us or himself. This makes me laugh under my breath because he will join us soon to eat the pancakes and fruit. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, as Carol says. No one in her house will go about their day without eating breakfast.

Things are said before we sit down to eat. Sarah says, "The weather is supposed to be nice all day." John agrees with this as he hands her the plate with the pancakes on it. Sarah places the plate on the now empty trivet.

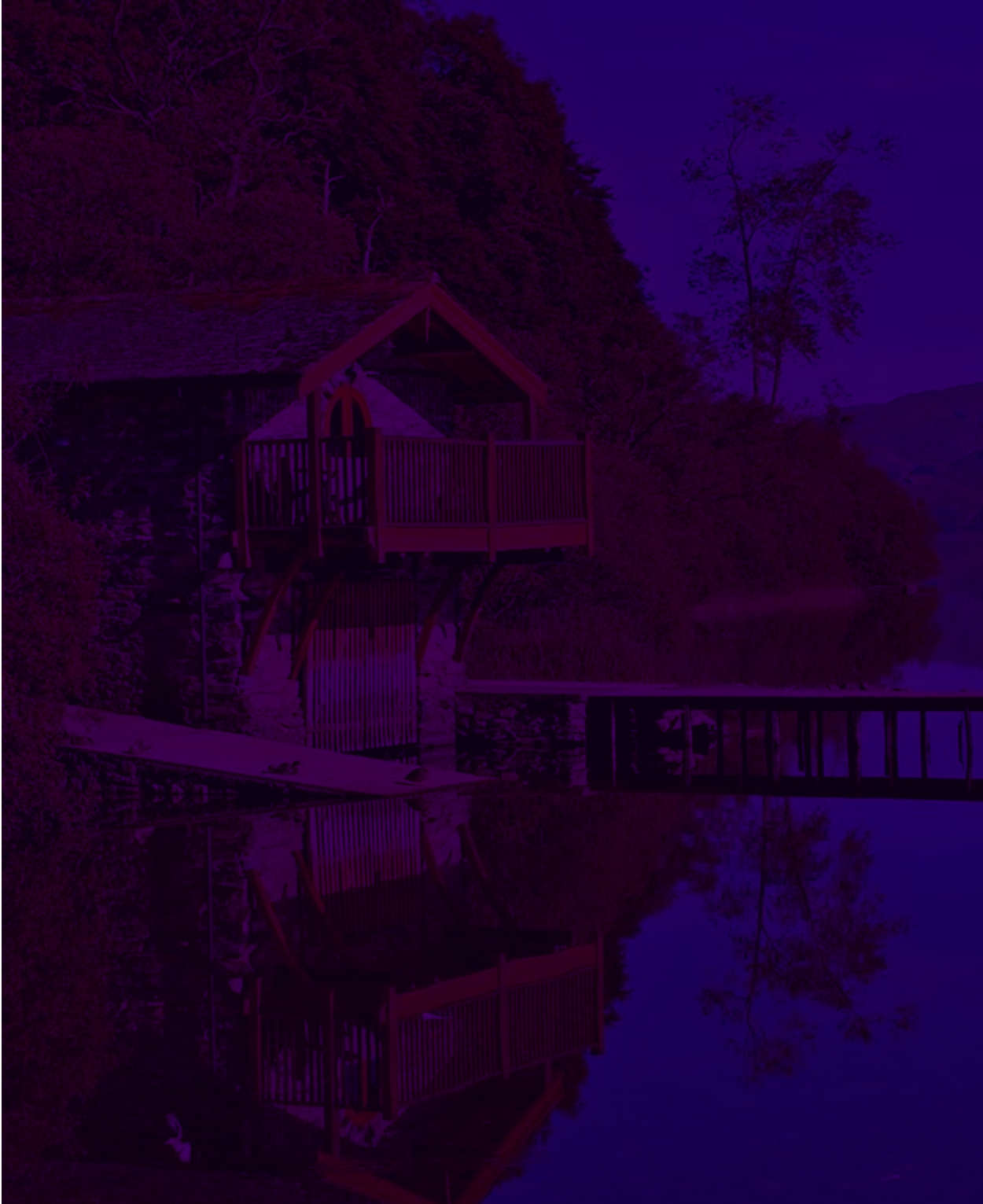
"Let's take a walk with the dog after breakfast," Carol replies as she finds a larger trivet in the cabinet, moves the pancakes to it and places the fruit bowl on the smaller one again.

All these words shared are the most important ones because breakfast must be had, the dog must be walked, and the weather determines where we are going to read our books this afternoon. It's a quiet and simple existence if we allow it. That is the power we hold because we have the choice to not turn the news on in the morning.

I am a stranger to this family and thus my position as the observer. I am allowed to hide from my own family drama and watch their moments unravel into forced scenes of tranquility. They like

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The Lake House



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## The Lake House

having an observer. It's prideful to show their ability to play house. They do it so well, with the napkins placed just so, the fresh cut flowers in a crystal vase, and the pancakes that end up all the same size. Everything is exactly how they wanted to be. It is exactly important enough to their lives where they can take playing house seriously and laugh about it if something turns amiss.

Stan picks up the plate of pancakes and serves himself first. John picks up the bowl of fruit. Once they are done with each, they hand them to us. Stan ends up with the fruit last. He places the bowl directly on the table. John ends up with the pancakes last. They end up on the smaller trivet.

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It is later when we are sitting on the dock in bathing suits and sunglasses that Stan tells me the story of what he saw a few winters back.

"We were sitting by the house on the patio," he begins and everyone turns to listen to him. "And oh, it has to have been five years ago now, where the lake froze completely over. There was something on the lake. I told Carol to grab the binoculars inside. And what do you know, half eaten carcass of a deer was there! No clue how it got there, you know. There were, oh I'd say, about four eagles picking the hell out of that deer. Never seen anything like it."

Carol smiles as she listens to him telling us the story. We've all angled our bodies in his direction but it's Carol's smile

that catches my attention. She is silent through the retelling of events but her mouth twitches as if there is something to add to the history of the story. She doesn't say a word.

"But what was really, really just neat, was the wolf that came along," Stan continues to tell the story after a moment. Something caught his attention on the lake, removing himself from the family for a moment. "Never seen the likes of them in these parts before that day. There he was, a huge thing on the ice! He tried attacking the eagles so that he could get his share of the deer, you know. But those eagles stood their ground. And rightly so too. No way in hell they should be giving up their find because some big bad wolf comes along."

No one says anything after a while. We sit and bake in the sun, our minds wandering to the wintery tales Stan has just finished sharing. After a time, Carol claims it is time for lunch and we all move because she will not, under any circumstances, tell us twice. She hooks her arm with mine and shares, as the rules don't apply to Stan and he is still looking at the water on the dock, that Stan was at a curling bonspiel the day that she saw the wolf on the ice. I don't choose to believe either who was there and who was not. Instead, I ask Carol about her friend Jane's daughter who keeps complaining about her new teaching position. Sarah has linked her arm with us at this point, John has turned the grill on, and Stan is still looking out at the water.

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# THE ORDER OF SERVICE

Deanna Sceviour

*(italicized lines are from an actual order of service)*

Your room smells of scotch mint salmon,  
sweat. The walls hold the *sorrow and pain,*  
*of your life everlasting.*

I laugh to spite your yellow paper walls,  
poking at air bubbles, searching  
for *The Grace of your Lord Jesus Christ.*

Your fridge is empty, except for  
flat ginger ale, bloody liver  
*and the love of your God.*

Pills aren't candy, you know.  
You stop chewing and spit; my hands  
dissolve into a pink coating.

*You are dust, and to dust you will return.*

I see your God in the ginger bubbles,  
but not you. Go now you say,  
*in love and never be afraid.*





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# SCHIZOPHRENIA: A DIS-EASE

Gay Josephine Valles

I.

Skit sow friend niya.  
Schizo ba ang friend niya?  
Schizophrenia. Schizophrenia?  
How come this word is so complicated to read?  
Let's give it a try. Ready? One, two, three.  
"Skit-so-phreen-ya."  
Go slow first. Did you get it at last?  
Now here is my second question.  
Do you know what it is?  
Have you heard of the word before?

I only *officially* heard of it when my psychiatrist diagnosed me with schizoaffective disorder. Schizoaffective disorder is a form of mental illness. It is a disease of the brain causing dis-ease to the person affected. It is not a fault of the individual who has it. It is composed of depression, anxiety, and out of touch from reality. In my case it is composed of the big 3.

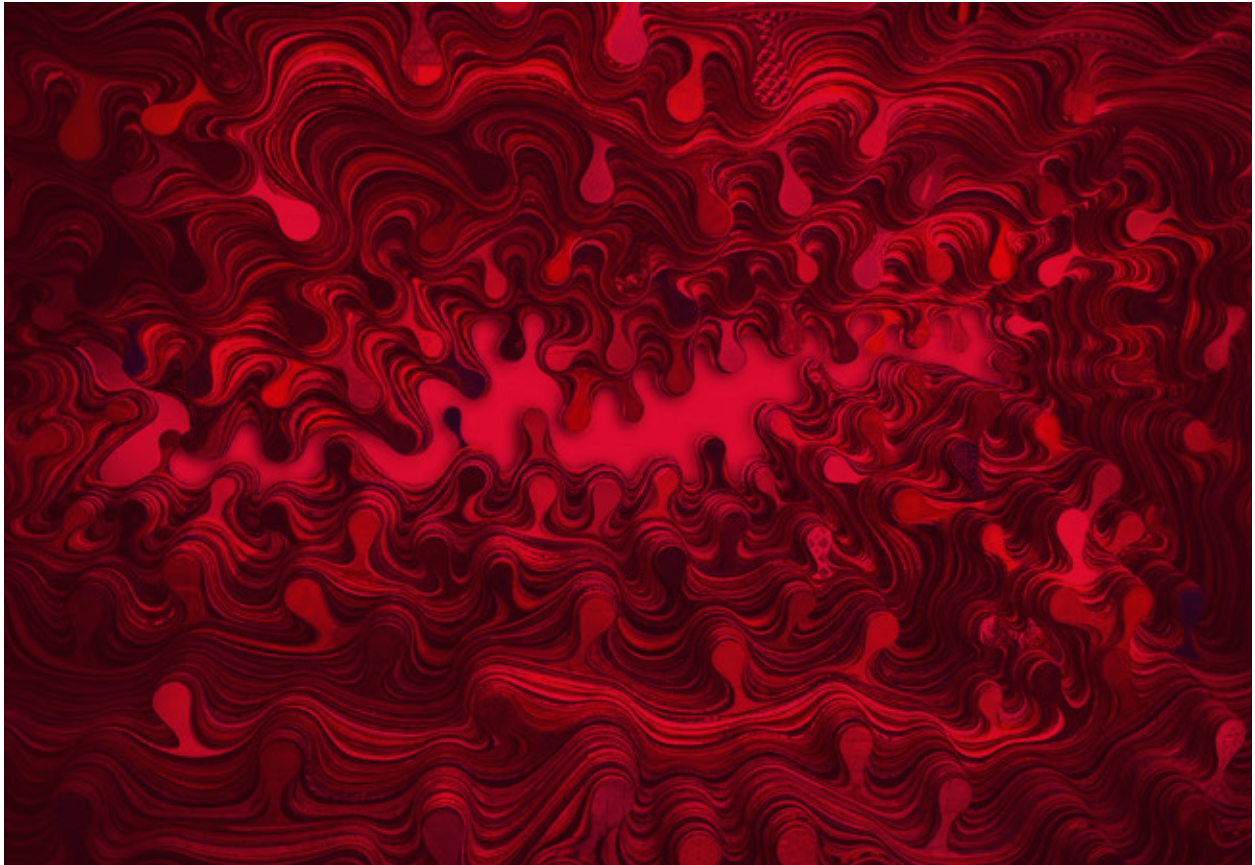
Depression sounds heavy.  
Anxiety sounds heavier.  
Out of touch from reality sounds heaviest of them all.  
What health journey am I on?

How old are you when you got it?  
Well, I got the diagnosis *officially* when I was 23.  
However, I believe I have the onset of symptoms when I was 15.  
The age of my migration.  
That time I was still in the bubble of "wowness, awe, and excitement" in the new environment. I'm in that the notion of mental health and its significance is so far away from my vocabulary and value system.  
*Reality check* is not something realistic in my mindset yet.

I didn't know depression, anxiety, and delusion were slowly creeping into my

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## SCHIZOPHRENIA: A Dis-ease



bloodstream like *antigens* attacking the immune system  
as if an *internal war* is going on.  
Depression, anxiety, and delusion are like *foreign invaders* fighting my *internal soldiers* attempting to capture my own sense of *well-being, my sanity, my productivity, and vitality.*

Depression, anxiety, and delusion can sometimes be *unwanted forces* causing you to feel down and frown and then get drowned.

But dear friend, hang in there.  
There is *enough* seconds, minutes, hours, days, months,  
and even years for you to  
*recover from such invasion.*  
You've got your internal system producing enough chemicals or hormones to defend against invasive forces at just the *right time.*

Give yourself some space if you need to *rest, recover, and heal.*  
Just keep in mind, this does not happen immediately with a blink of an eye.  
Dear friend, keep *patience, perseverance, and optimism*  
*hand-in-hand with you in your mind and heart.*

---

## SCHIZOPHRENIA: A Dis-ease

There will come at times where you might tell yourself,  
*I give up. I can't bear this any longer. It's too painful.*  
But remember, when you're faced with moments like this, remind yourself, *Hold on. Take a deep breath. I'll be patient, persevering, and optimistic in this battle. I know victory and triumph is just an inch away.*  
Just diligently repeat this simple yet powerful reminder to yourself.

All in all, who are you doing this sacrificial love for?  
*To yourself. To your health. To your healing. To your well-being.*

People may not notice the rough roads you're experiencing and lead others to reduce your existence to:

*Oh, she is just a sickly person.*  
*Oh, she is just crazy.*  
*Tanga man iyan siya.* (That person is stupid.)  
*Sira ulo man yan.* (Her head is messed up.)  
*Huwag ka diyan kasi may topak iyan.*  
(Don't go to that person because she is mentally ill.)

I wish there could be a  
*lending or loan system to the burdens of living with mental illness*  
to people who are so ignorant, indifferent, judgmental, and reductionist of their lived experiences. If only they could get to carry the same burdens and experiences we carry for days, months, and years and get their *souls reawakened to a different level of understanding, consciousness, and compassion.*

But dear friend, if ever this happens to you, keep your  
*head high and strong.*  
Ask for their names and before you sleep,  
*pray for a change of heart amongst these people.*

## II.

Philippines will always be my *first* home.  
In my heart and mind, I will carry a Filipino *soul*,  
No matter where this road of *identity* will take me.  
Ongoing journey this might be for me,  
Yet I never once regretted my journey has taken me in Canada.

After all, I felt it is now my *second* home.  
Knowing that Philippines is just a world  
Out *there* and Canada just a world out *here*, sets my feet on  
the ground at peace.

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# MOMMY AND FRIENDS

Graham Wylie

Because Jing was not white, the Make-A-Wish Foundation had rejected her wish to visit New York and meet the cast of *Friends*. Now this is not true at all—that they rejected her because she was not white—but her mother certainly believed it was. “If you were a white girl called Sarah,” her mother said, pouring a bourbon, “they’d be at our door, practically begging to take you to New York.”

Jing, who was nine-years-old and blind, tried to locate her mother’s voice, but unknowingly found herself looking between the toaster and microwave. “But can I still go to New York?” she asked. Because of her brain tumor, she had been in and out of hospitals for years, and thus she had no friends. She did, however, find comfort in watching *Friends*—now listening to it, after her last operation rendered her eyes useless—and she had developed a kind of dependency on it. Her mother had disapproved of this dependency, but didn’t know what else to do with her; ultimately she had caved in and (graciously) donated her old cracked Samsung tablet to Jing, with which she could access her mother’s sister’s friend’s Netflix account. “Maybe, Jing, maybe ... New York is expensive.” She downed her bourbon like a woman who had downed many bourbons in her life, and then poured another. Jing sat still, with only her thoughts to occupy her.

Jing’s mother was quite poor: indeed, times had been tough since her husband’s death a few years ago (he died

from a drug overdose or a car crash—whichever you prefer), and the government only gave her so much money each month. She worked two, sometimes three shifts at Tim Hortons each week (never for longer than five hours, because around then she would get a “weak spell,” and have to leave, sipping a large Vanilla Iced Capp with extra cream on her way out), but that income—if it could be called income—was hardly enough to cover their expenses. And now Jing was asking about New York! *Some children*, her mother thought, *don’t appreciate what they’ve been given*. Jing’s brain tumor really *had* been a burden on her mother, and although she was doing her best to cope with it, the days were becoming darker. No wonder she took to drinking twelve years ago.

Jing stood up, nearly slipping on a sock she hadn’t seen, and moped off to her bedroom to watch *Friends*. Her mother downed the bourbon, slamming her glass on the table like she used to do in college before dropping out due to stress.

From Jing’s bedroom, muffled: *So no one told you life was gonna be this way (clap-clap-clap-clap), your job’s a joke, you’re broke, your love life’s DOAAAAA ...* The lyrics were insultingly applicable to her situation (especially the last part—she hadn’t been boned in years), and this bothered her immensely. She stood up, nearly slipping on her .25 blood alcohol level, and went to the balcony for a cigarette. She closed the sliding

## Mommy and Friends



door, silencing the hearty laugh track—she didn't find those "friends" funny in the slightest—and finally, *finally* had a moment to herself.

Her bony white hand looked gross in the setting sun, and she felt like an old prostitute while lighting her cigarette. She puffed away, sitting on a fold-up chair from Walmart, looking over the edge at all the people and cars; at the different shades of grey merging like a boring painting; at the Asian restaurants with ridiculous symbols instead of names. She thought of her husband, and how good things had been when he was alive. In other words, she missed when he would work all day and come home so exhausted he wouldn't even speak to her; when he would bring her booze, so she wouldn't have to drive, hungover, to the LCBO every other Friday, immediately after getting paid. What she missed most, though, were the days before they adopted Jing, when she'd had no responsibilities other than staying alive, which, apparently, she could barely manage. It had been her husband's idea to adopt—she had been (and still is) blissfully infertile—and so she had never been wholly invested in the child.

To her, Jing was more like a demanding flower vase than a human being. But alas, Jing was her daughter, and unfortunately that meant something: she would have to be tolerated.

She drew in a big breath of smoke and closed her eyes as tight as she could, till all the light was gone. She tried with all her might to understand Jing's situation, to sympathize, to make sense of it all. She thought maybe it was working; the black tarry smoke was burning her lungs, in a good way, and she felt closer to Jing than ever in her mindscape—was this enlightenment?—but no: her concentration was interrupted by a squawk. *A hawk!* she thought, exhaling her enlightenment, *I'm dead!* But when she opened her eyes, there was only a small blackbird perched on the railing of her balcony, looking at her with wide, conscious eyes; its head was tilted like Edgar Allan Poe (this comparison made sense to her). "Shoo, bird," she said, "or I'll kill you." It was unclear how exactly she planned to kill the bird; indeed, it was more likely she would kill herself attempting something so foolish. "Shoo! I mean it!" The bird hopped a few inches closer. "Jing! Jing! Oh, for fuck's sake—" She looked around for something to hit the bird with, but discovered she owned nothing. *If only we still lived in that bungalow*, she thought, *then I could use ... but the thought went nowhere*. The bird squawked again; then again. "That's it," she declared, standing up, apparently about to take action. She made it to her feet—her wobbly and weak and calloused feet from years of ten-hour work weeks—but fell to the ground within seconds: she was out cold. She had not had a drink of water in over a week.

She made quite the thump when she hit the ground, and from inside, Jing

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called out, “Mommy?”

A minute later, Jing appeared on the balcony. She would’ve been there sooner, but, well, you know. She felt around with her antennae, eventually locating a lump on the ground. She tapped her mother, recoiling and shuddering at what felt like pure bone.

(Her mother was dreaming. She was picking out the guilty blackbird in a Police Lineup of ten blackbirds, but the officer was also a blackbird, and didn’t understand what she was saying. She also didn’t know which blackbird was “guilty,” since they all looked the same, but she was nevertheless crying, “Kill them all! Kill them all!” Later she would reflect on this dream and come to no conclusions.)

The sun was setting: the sky was purple and pink, and everything in the world seemed to be coated in a thin layer of what Jing used to call “magic fairy dust.” But oh, what’s the point of visual description if no one’s around to appreciate it?

As if reading braille, Jing felt along her mother’s unicycle frame, trying to find her face. There it was. She gave her cheek (it was actually her forehead) a few light slaps: nothing. Tears formed in Jing’s eyes, and she began to think about what life would be like with no family. Losing her father to the car crash/overdose was one thing; but this? This would be unbearable. She wondered who would take her to her doctor’s appointments; to McDonald’s for a Filet-O-Fish; to the park to play on the swings—who would stand under the big tree, chain smoking, watching her try to go all the way around? The first fully-formed tear fell, landing on her mother’s neck, and produced a light splash that only someone

with Jing’s heightened hearing could detect. Then another fell; another; and then they poured from her eyes like a healthy stream of urine. Holding her mother’s limp head in her lap, she began to accept this new chapter in her life.

Then, suddenly, right into Jing’s face: a nasty, violent cough, reeking of barley and smoke. Then her head turned and she vomited all over Jing’s lap. Coughed again. Jing was scared; she didn’t know what to do.

“Mommy?”

More coughing.

“Mommy, are you okay?”

“Mmm...”

“Mommy! What do you need? Should I call nine-one-one?”

More coughing.

“Something—I need something to drink.”

Jing stood up, vomit dripping off her Value Village dress. “Water, Mommy?”



## Mommy and Friends

“No, something stronger—something to wake me up ... bring me the bourbon—it’s on the table ... hurry!”

Jing hurried, but only if we abandon our definition of “hurry.”

Now, after a couple drinks, Jing’s mother managed to sit against the sliding door.

“Damn bird,” she said.

“What?”

“Oh, nothing. There was this bird—nevermind.”

They sat there for a while, thinking about whatever. Then Jing said, “Mommy, why doesn’t Make-A-Wish care about Asian girls?”

Her mother sighed. There comes a time in every child’s life when they ask The Question. Her mother wasn’t prepared for it to be today. “Because, Jingy, they can’t see—” But here she lost her train of thought.

“They can’t see? Like me?”

Jing was shocked to learn such a thing.

“No,” her mother said, killing the bourbon, “I just mean they can’t see—can’t see how—how beautiful—you are—on the—on the inside ... yeah, that’s it...”

“But Mommy,” Jing said, “I have an inoperable brain tumor on the inside.”

Jing’s mother sighed. The girl had a point. “That’s not what I meant.” Her mother took another swig. A swig of nothing.

“Then what *did* you mean?”

Her mother said nothing: there was nothing to be said.

Later that night, after cans of Scooby Doo pasta and Wonder Bread smeared with No Name peanut butter, Jing’s mother was watching *The Big Bang Theory*, trying to relax after a stressful day. She turned the volume down and perked her pointy ears: *They don’t know that we know they know we know they know we know they know we know they know* (uncontrollable laughter) ... *Perfect*, she thought, retrieving a family-size Lindt chocolate bar from under the couch. She turned the volume up even louder than before to disguise the sound of crinkling foil. She put her feet on the table and placed a piece of chocolate on her tongue, and closed her eyes and thought, *Now this is what life’s all about.*

Somewhere in the episode, Sheldon said, “I often forget other people have limitations. It’s so sad” (uncontrollable laughter). *How insulting!* She thought. *I have no limitations. Other than Jing—she’s always demanding things. How dare she ask me to take her to New York ... even Make-A-Wish couldn’t give her that—what could I possibly do?* And then, feeling personally attacked, she started brainstorming ways she could prove to Sheldon that she had no limitations: she could actually show up for her shift tomorrow, but that was unlikely; she could arrive on time for Jing’s next appointment, but it was impossible to predict what might get in the way of such an endeavour; she could start budgeting, but that would mean giving up too many essential things; she could visit her husband’s grave, but it was twenty minutes away, and she already burned too much gas driving to work and

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back. Swallowing the last bit of chocolate, she decided that nothing could be done, and turned her attention back to the single greatest television program of all time.

Lying in bed, she listened to the cloaked voices from Jing's Samsung tablet (which actually belonged to her mother, in case you forgot). She worried, justifiably, that the *Friends* cast might infiltrate her dreams. Like maybe Chandler would show up just as she was about to devour a young, veiny cock, and make one of his cringy jokes, shrinking her lover's penis to an obese slug; or, even worse, it might be Joey about to fuck her, his penis sticky with STDs and mayo; and (she had to consider the worse case scenario) Ross might even take her on a date, and go on and on about volcanoes, or whatever he had a PhD in. Then Rachel, Monica, and Phoebe would replace the Timmies girls, and she would have to suffer a six-hour shift (six hours!), listening to them bitch about their problems: Rachel's ass is too fat; Monica's anorexia is worse than ever; another one of Phoebe's relatives committed suicide ... what a bore!

But then, when all hope was nearly lost—when she was certain those demonic apparitions would soon visit her—there was silence: wonderful, existential silence. She slept hard.

In her dream she was operating on Jing's brain tumor. But instead of a scalpel, she held a long butcher's knife, and even though it wasn't touching anything, it had made that *sheeeee* sound when it was revealed. She looked at the knife, then back at Jing. But now, instead of Jing's face, it was the blackbird from the balcony, staring at her with those penetrating eyes. "Fix me, Mommy!" the bird

squawked. Its voice sounded like sandpaper swallowing marbles. She screamed and stabbed the bird twice: once in each eye. Panting—for even in her dream she was dehydrated—she looked around for help, and there, in the flesh, like a knight, was Sheldon Cooper! "Oh Sheldon!" she said, tossing the knife and running to him, hugging his thin boyish body.

"I often forget other people have limitations," Sheldon said. "It's so sad."

She woke up, but didn't sit up and gasp, and she didn't stare at the camera like a disturbed dreamer in a bad movie: she stared at the ceiling, absolutely still, working through the Freudian (she thought) dream, trying to figure out what it all meant.

And then it came to her: the solution to her problem—to Sheldon's accusation! She recalled the balcony scene from earlier, when she had imagined herself to be under attack by a hawk: in reality it had just been that dickwad blackbird. *But she believed it was a hawk.* The plan came to her as if she were a prophet: *I'll tell Jing I'm taking her to New York—then she'll finally shut up about it—but instead of actually taking her there, I'll take her to Toronto. She doesn't know how far it is to New York, so I can save money on gas and drive around for an hour or two then tell her we're there. I can get some help from the Timmies girls—pay them to be New Yorkers—and fake the whole damn trip. Pay some other people to be the Friends cast, since she doesn't know what they sound like as adults. Ha-ha! Fuck you, Sheldon! I have no limitations!* Now she sat up in bed, smiling, and said, under her breath, to the camera, "I'm a fucking genius."



# USELESS

Joshua Gillis

I won't lie, that's how I feel now a days  
Sitting here, not able to get hired, not able to balance right  
Days of waiting on tests, appointments, and scans  
They blur together, nights into day, days into night;  
it all seems to become one  
Waiting on a vaccine that seems to be out of reach  
Age and risk group continually pushed back farther and farther  
All the while going to the hot zones for appointments,  
cause no one here would see me  
The light in my eyes, seems to be less bright than in the past

The realization of never being able to walk straight, even when sober  
Not being able to balance right, knowing a scream or a loud noise could  
trigger the vertigo and send me falling  
Blacking out with the vertigo, ending up on the floor; waking up crying,  
not knowing how long I was down for  
Vertigo: when it hits, it's like the whole world just spins around,  
like a freshly spun top till the balance goes  
Employers don't want that, it's a risk, you fall and WSIB gets involved  
So I sit here, awake when I should be asleep,  
asleep when I should be awake enjoying the day  
Seeing the sun and getting out are things  
that don't seem to happen as often  
My depression creeps, PTSD flies out of control,  
causing my anxiety to freak

Surgery is the only way to fix my ear  
The surgery carries immense risks though  
Losing my hearing completely,  
a high percentage of recurrence in the future  
It leaves me wondering,  
do I just accept it and try to make something of this life?  
Or do I get the surgery and risk losing my hearing,  
one of the things I value so much  
Being a former bassist, I love hearing sounds from birds to different  
types of music, and to lose that would be devastating  
They say a cochlear implant is the solution to that, but it won't fully  
restore it and means I have a device implanted in my head forever  
This injury has caused me a lot of fear,  
over the fact I could lose my ability to hear.

## Useless

With this, my mental health feels like it's going down the drain  
Depression acting up,  
causing my sleeping habits to go through all kinds of hell  
2 to 4 hours of sleep? That's enough right?  
My body and mind won't let me get more so let's go  
Exhausted, waking up being tagged in old photos I took of my grandma  
for her birthday and mothers day  
Some of these photos were taken in our old house,  
my grandparents house.  
The same house where my grandfather died in my arms,  
knowing the photo and the tag intention was good  
But the memories flood in,  
less than a month from his death anniversary  
Seeing her as well brings back memories, ones of sadness when she  
passed, ones of happiness from being a kid and the 3 years I got to  
spend living with my grandparents.  
The promises I made to never give up, may be the only reason I'm still  
here, the fight that will never die,  
even when death creeps close as it did in 2015

My anxiety going sky high, trying to figure out a budget each month for  
food, bills, rent, and medication  
The balance of trying to live on welfare,  
when I should be on disability is a pain  
Balancing 733 dollars a month  
Trying to properly feed yourself,  
so there's energy in the tank for doing things  
The worry of "Am I going to have enough food till the end of the month?"  
And yes I know there are food banks out there,  
but let me ask, have you gone to one?  
Have you ever had food that was expired come from them?  
Cause that's what you get at them,  
sometimes the food is out of date by months  
So I sit here worrying if I'll have enough food for the month  
My photography is another worry,  
am I going to sell enough prints to make some money?  
Am I going to get my business off the ground? Or will everything  
continue to crash down around me, while I sit in the mess of burned  
failed papers of plans falling around me like snow.

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# YOU COUNT CARDS LIKE YOUR FATHER

Katie Cross

In the fog of cigarette grief,  
I pay \$40 so you can dump me in person.  
You bring: weekend drunkenness  
and a bag of magic mushrooms.

You propose:  
a secret relationship and shattered notebook dreams.  
We conspire to hide me in your closet  
like beer cans on a weekday.

You soon abandon this plan  
and my mind infinity loops.  
I think you need to marry me, I scream.  
You tell me: your parents hated each other.

Inspired by Elvis, I take pills:  
cut to your shadow pacing my door  
as I bleed under blankets  
and slam the nightstand drawer.

The next night I fold  
over onto my kitchen floor,  
nicotine chest heaving.

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# THAT KID FROM HIGH SCHOOL

Julien Nakamoto

*TW: Alcoholism, Homophobia*

Everything was going well.

Our wedding was four years ago . The venue was small and only slightly cramped, but it had its charm — turns out plastic foliage goes a long way. Liam used everything from the stone steps in our tiny backyard to our string porch lights and spare garden fencing. I cooked up basically every recipe I knew from scratch and spent three hours mixing up a sufficient playlist. Finding songs without swear words proved to be quite difficult.

The chairs ended up being the biggest problem, since Liam's family is pretty big — a lot of cousins — but we ended up striking a deal on craigslist to borrow some guy's dozens of lawn chairs, and then bought some in bulk from IKEA that just so happened to be on sale. It was such a steal that we even had enough money to spare for a new mattress — best thing I've ever laid my ass on.

Oh, and the cake? Walmart sufficed. The booze was probably the most expensive out of everything, but it was totally worth it. Liam would disagree.

We did what we could with the money we had, and besides, it wasn't like

my family was showing up anyway. I'm not complaining — it was great to have fewer mouths to feed.

I *would* say that it had been the best day of our lives, but then we adopted little Cole. I still remember how shy the poor kid was at first — but all it took for him to start talking was getting him one of those deformed SpongeBob popsicles from the local ice cream truck doing its round around the block. I actually don't mind the taste either. But boy, once Cole started talking, he never stopped.



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## That Kid from High School

Those first four years were unforgettable. People always say you lose out on all the fun once you have kids, but it's totally not true. Those late nights at the bar only got *better* knowing I had the best kid in the world to go home to.

Oh, yeah, almost forgot — Liam's family. They pretty much immediately accepted Cole as if he were their own blood, especially the nieces and nephews — they all ended up becoming really close. There were the trips to Algonquin, Banff... we even took a few days to Cuba where we all got sunburnt to hell; Liam was waddling and hissing around like he got caught in a staring match with Medusa.

I think, if I had to pinpoint where everything changed, it'd be Cole's first week at school. Being the new kid is never easy. I get it. I just wish I could've been there to comfort him before he left in the morning — hangovers are just the worst.

But we all have to get through these things, right? Not everyone in your life is going to be nice to you, and you have to get through it. There's always going to be people that are weirded out by two dads instead of one — I mean, I guess it *is* a little weird, right? *Uncommon* is probably the nicer word but... it's not like that brat was *wrong*... right?

I just didn't think escalating things would have solved the problem. All these meetings, angry phone calls... Liam can be a little dramatic. I had enough to deal with at work, and then he goes and brings it home too? What's the big deal?.

Anyway, Cole's a big boy, and he needs to figure things out on his own. Sure, throwing around the 'F-word' at him is completely uncalled for, especially

from a grown-ass parent and his punk-ass kid — and for your information, I *did* care! Believe me, no one was more pissed than I was, but... that's middle school! There's only so much you can do. We can't just handcuff a thirteen-year-old kid for being a bully. It's a rough time in *any* kid's life — I would know better than anyone — but it's necessary.

Anyway, Liam wasn't happy. It's fair, but I'm not going to force myself into situations that I don't need to be in. And he didn't have to resort to name-calling to try to guilt-trip me into doing something that I'd regret. I have enough regrets keeping me up already.

'Bad father' this, 'coward' that.

Some bullshit about barely being home, about running away from all my problems, and letting that scumbag-of-a-parent get away with hurting our son like that.

That hurt. A lot. Especially coming from Liam who *knows* about the things that have happened to me. Who knows why I can't catch a single fucking night of sleep. Turns out, he doesn't know a damn thing about me.

Whatever. The couch is more comfortable than that piece-of-shit mattress anyway. Not like I'll be using it much.

And that's when I started seeing it.

A... shadow. It was of an older boy — maybe his mid-teens. Short, spiky hair, and broad shoulders, but I could barely make out his distorted blur of a face.

At first, I thought it was one of those illusions where you see something

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## That Kid from High School

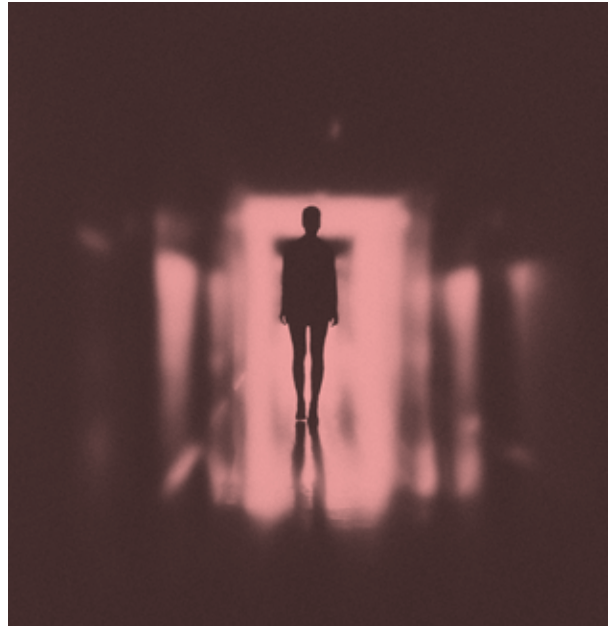
in the corner of your eye and then you look and — poof, it's gone. But this time, it remained. I thought maybe it was Cole trying to spook me from behind, but ever since the argument, he hadn't really spoken with me much. Let alone look at me.

Well, count me creeped out. I didn't really believe in ghosts and I could still move my body, so it wasn't my sleep paralysis. And this... shadow, it just stood there. Watching. Every sleepless night — it would wait for me there on the wall and just... watch, with that stupid haircut and this nauseating smugness. Almost like it was mocking me with a shit-eating grin for being such a loser, thrown out on the couch because I didn't want to knock down a grown-ass dad with a God complex in front of his little brat and every other parent waiting for their kid in the driveway. Gee, I'm so sorry that I didn't want to end up on the local news! I'm so sorry for needing a little bit of a drink every now and then to keep me at bay after this whole ordeal. At this point, it's the only thing that helps me stay asleep without seeing some creepy apparition like I'm in a B-rated horror movie. It's not my fault that the pills don't do enough, and a little bit of gin has never failed me before.

But oh, poor old me, right?

News flash: people are assholes — *that's life*. At least Cole has two parents who love him, who pick him up from school, who accept him for who he is. I didn't get *any* of that, and I turned out fine. Chances are, Cole will turn out even better!

Anyway, the divorce was a disaster. I have custody on weekends. Liam totally used my occasional drinking against me in court and blew *everything* out of



proportion — claiming that I'm an alcoholic, that I'm a negative influence on *my own child*, that *I'm* the one creating a toxic environment. It was pathetic. And totally manipulative.

Now I'm staying in some roach-infested apartment on the other side of the city that Cole never even wants to visit because of everything Liam told him. The new place is a little run-down but — surprise, surprise — at least I'm not seeing that creepy little whatever-it-is anymore. Stress-induced psychosis is a thing, right? I swear, that place had bad energy from the start — I just didn't notice because I was too busy dealing with bullshit. I seriously thought I was going crazy in that house, and yet *I'm* the bad guy.

Well, whatever it was, it's gone, so I guess the divorce was for the best — no more arguments, no more school meetings, no more angry phone calls from the local homophobes, no more flashbacks, and definitely *no more creepy shadows*.

## That Kid from High School

I can finally forget, and leave everything behind. I can finally be free. Free to do whatever I want. Free to go to the bar for as long as I want. Free to ignore voice-mails. I think I counted about eight so far — some from Liam, and some from those-who-shall-not-be-named... probably to ask if I've finally accepted Our Lord and Saviour. What do I owe any of them anyway? I don't owe anyone anything.

I've been through enough, and now I just want to forget.

Forget Cole, forget Liam, forget Mom and Dad, and the brothers, the cousins, Pop-Pop and Aunt June, my old drinking buddy Thomas (God Bless Him), and basically all of High School including that scumbag coach Mr. Colberg, and most of all, Ryan.

That's gotta be at least twelve, right? Twelve shots?

I don't know. I can't think anymore.

I'm tired of swimming. Never

ending laps in this bottled pool of gin. It's bitter. I think I'm running out of air.

Am I drowning?

There's a searing black hole in my stomach, and it's dragging me down. Swallowing.

There's one thing for sure — the bottom of this bottle is lonely.

I must have fallen asleep, because I had a strange dream that I was floating. In and out of the clouds, looking over the city. And I could see everything.

The nightlife booming with clashes of music and a rainbow of neon lights, and the residential neighborhoods tinted a hazy yellow from the flickering street lights towering above, completely silent except for the singing crickets. There's a family of raccoons harassing a garbage bin at the edge of a playground, and a stray cat brutally murdering a mouse. A family of three watching Netflix with their daughter, the dad falling asleep five



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## That Kid from High School

minutes in. There's a married couple screaming at each other, and the wife launches a plate at his head, but it shatters against the wall and leaves a dent that will never be fixed.

A child crying in his bed, a divorcee anxiously holding a phone to his ear, a man being mugged for a twenty-dollar bill, and a fit of road rage where their honking is louder than their words.

And the sirens, so many sirens.

I could see everything. I was free.

In an ambulance, there's a man lying helplessly limp on a gurney — skin ghostly pale as though he were a chiseled marble statue, vomit on the collar of his Roots sweatshirt that he had gotten for Christmas from 'Santa, with love', and a long tube down his throat snaked into his stomach full of gin — the price of freedom.

He's barely conscious; an eye cracked open, glossy and bloodshot red. The broad-shouldered figure watching over him takes note and immediately puts on that familiar shit-eating grin — leaning back in that arrogant, smug way like he always did, with that same stupid spiky haircut of his, and those callous eyes forged from daggers.

"Hey, you're doing great, buddy. You're going to be okay."

The figure checks his pulse, and the man catches a glimpse of its name-tag. He would vomit more if there hadn't been a tube pumping out all the sorrow from his searing gut. The figure observes him with squinting eyes, as though he were a specimen under a microscope.

It watches him closely — just like it did back then in high school, in the bathrooms and the change rooms and by the lockers, just like it did in his college dorm, and in every home he's ever lived in, or would ever live in.

And then its eyes pop wide open in revelation.

"You're... you're that kid, aren't you? That kid from high school?" The figure murmurs, "God, I knew you looked familiar. I'm blanking on your name. Jeez, I... I don't even know what to say."

There is an infuriating pause. And arrogant tears in its eyes.

"I'm so sorry. For everything. My- my son is actually gay and he- I'm so proud of him and- I- I'm just so sorry."

Yeah, there sure were a lot of sirens. And vomit. It wasn't a very good dream.

I don't know who that man was on that gurney, half-alive and less than half of the man he wished he was, but I knew that he had no one else but himself to blame.

When I woke up in that sterile room with endless beeping and phone calls and chatter echoing the halls... I knew that my freedom had been long gone for a while.

And I was afraid.

Because like the loneliness at the bottom of that bottle of gin, there was nowhere else to run — only my past left to comfort me, in the form of a smug paramedic with a stupid haircut.



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# OUR LITTLE LIVES SUFFER A SEA-CHANGE

Kay Haggett

I.

Imagine: an island beyond sex, far away, yet close to home, a mirror for what we could have become, if not afraid of our own past, built on the turtle's back, where gender danced above the endless sky's roof, refusing Western structures built to shatter the soul's expression, the melding of spirits.

So, let's imagine: a better story, where we saw gender outlaws and embraced them instead of clinging to our norms, the storm we crafted to keep power in Europe's, as always, ever-reaching tentacles.

II.

This tale is ancient, players we should all recognize: Prospero the wizard who was exiled, banished to this isle, on which he kept enslaved men, tortured them so they'd believe him God, a thing divine; among this fight for power lives a woman who is quite alone, without truly knowing.

Her name is Miranda, admired one. It was a gift she was given, unopened, a name they never really called her by, Prospero simply saying "daughter" or

"wench," Ariel and Caliban forbidden to speak to her. What's a name that isn't ever spoken? Old language, dead language, a curse she never fully understood.

Her father said: "To be a woman is to be silent, to be obedient, to yield," Caliban said: "We all deserve freedom," Ariel said: "The air floats above the tethers of gender, how can you contain a spirit to one word?"

III.

My name was Miranda, once. During these old days I grew in tandem with the sugar cane, shooting up as if overnight, eclipsing my father, his waning moon. He said to me "Women are fragile," and when I asked "What's a woman?" he said "You, wench," and so, I thought him a woman too.

There was a school lesson the next day, then, something about stamens and pistils and how our bodies expose us, and have since Eve. I was young, I still had a flat chest, I did not know that my body would betray me in ways I could not fathom, swelling up as if a wave, the curves of the tide inevitable and yet—a sense of drowning.

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## Our Little Lives Suffer a Sea-Change

### IV.

I met Ferdinand and immediately thought of our internal rhyme, that aching “and, and”—a longing for more, for duality, for a future not written by our fathers in the chains of marriage, for an airy spirit not weighed down by those earthly constraints.

His hair barely brushed his shoulders, curling to his salted brow like fiddleheads, and I felt my own plait like a deadweight, the mornings wasted to Ariel’s spirits weaving the strands together, the great Prospero saying: “We may live in this hellhole, but I will not have my daughter made a savage.”

The dusting of shadow on Ferdinand’s chin, like lichen, clinging to a carved-rock jaw allowed jutting presence. The flatness of his chest went on and on beneath his thrice-unbuttoned tunic, and I marvelled at the ease with which he climbed over the gnarled roots in leather boots, not weighed down by a petticoat.

There are many ways to be trapped, an island is just the obvious way, in fact far too obtuse. But a body? My father has tried to teach me what a woman is by my own reflection, but I do not understand what is different about that blurred mirror creature and Ariel, leaping to the top of the jackfruit tree, striving for freedom.

### V.

Yes, there are many ways to be trapped; Ferdinand tells me of Naples and a birthright like a prison: “I never asked to

be born the eldest son. I’ve spent my days in the shadow of my father, expected to live up to his legacy, expected to exceed it. I’ve been taught to hold a sword, and to command a room of politicians, and how to harden my body like a fortress. I was never taught tenderness; my flesh was never allowed to give. Marble, alabaster, that Grecian expectation. I was one half of an equation, expected to be the foil for the future woman who would become my wife. They said war was in my bones, that women bloodlet monthly because they need to be controlled with pain, that hundreds of years of men in my family meant I needed to prepare myself to join a cycle of violence.

When Antonio took Milan, I was nine. The castle was abuzz with buzzards whispering about the exiled Prospero, and I found my father in the Hall of Barons. Achilles, the golden boy, looked down on him, but he stared up at Julius. I asked what was going on, and he simply said: ‘Prospero has been exiled. Antonio is Duke now. The people are adjusting.’ I continued questioning, I simply couldn’t understand what he had done wrong. He turned to me and said bluntly: ‘He was not performing his duties as a man or as a leader. We no longer have a need for him.’

This is how I understood what it was to be a man: as something conditional on your usefulness, on your cruelty. This is how I understood to survive: if you make yourself the epitome of masculinity, they cannot usurp you. This is how I understood womanhood: a weakness we need to exploit. I did not understand that I had a choice. I did not understand many things.”

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## Our Little Lives Suffer a Sea-Change

So, we were both trapped: The Duke's Daughter, The King's Son; manhood a dictatorship, womanhood an exile, but both trapped, both serving a higher, uglier power.



### VI.

We asked Ariel to show us the tree they had been trapped in, the oak, hoping to understand the things nature can take from us. They said: "I spent twelve years here, my limbs twisted into branches, rooted with a wandering mind." We said: "How did you not forget that you're a spirit, and not a tree?"

They blinked, as if reminded how dull humans can be, and replied: "I have always been a tree, just like I have been the wind that blows its leaves, and the rain that brings it life. I have been the bird nesting, and the mouse resting in its shade. I am in the air and cannot be contained, though I was confined to a trunk for some time; the trick is knowing your body doesn't have to end, imagining worlds in the whirls of your fingerprints and the knots of the trees, and knowing they are one and the same—yours by birth."

### VII.

We were laying in the long grass, obscured, when the moonlight found us. In the bleaching light we were both illuminated, comparing hands, mine calloused from the necessity of life on the island, his soft from tinctures and a privileged life.

I hear myself say: "If women are to be soft and malleable, like my father says, born to listen and support the men they live with, then I do not know what is woman about me."

Ferdinand keeps his eyes upwards, storms brewing in them even Prospero could not control. He says: "I do not think you are like any woman I've ever known, Miranda."

I sit up, rigid as sugar cane, coming to a decision like coming up for air.

"Do not call me that."

(In the distance, the cry of a bird that does not know what it is mourning.)

Though I do not look at him, I feel the ground shift, feel him sitting up next to me, feel his eyes on me, pensive. I expect him to speak, but I'm met with silence, not angry, not confused, but patient, allowing me space.

"I never chose that name, it was an heirloom my father wielded as a means of control, a way of molding me, and I no longer want to be that person." His next question did not need to be spoken, I knew what it would be.

"Calder, I will henceforth be known; As I was born from the rough sea

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Our Little Lives Suffer a Sea-Change

and, like the sea,  
I ebb and flow with the moon.  
My father would have me stagnant,  
algae as a wedding gown,  
but I feel the pull of the tide.”

(The bird cries, closer.  
It’s a screech owl,  
voice trembling.)

**VIII.**

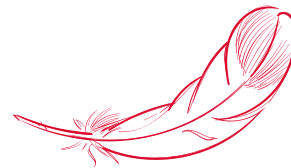
We stand, shoulder by shoulder,  
waves wisping across our toes,  
naked as witches around a fire,  
like in all the stories Prospero would tell to explain  
the type of magician he was *not*.

Our clothes lay, abandoned,  
crumpled amongst the shattered bones of driftwood;  
I had tried on breeches, but they weren’t quite right,  
and Ferdinand said the dress hung limply off his body,  
as if in protest.

The solution to our expansion  
was not to confine ourselves  
in a new sort of prison,  
the opposite role,  
to shed our pasts  
and put on  
a new mask.

No.

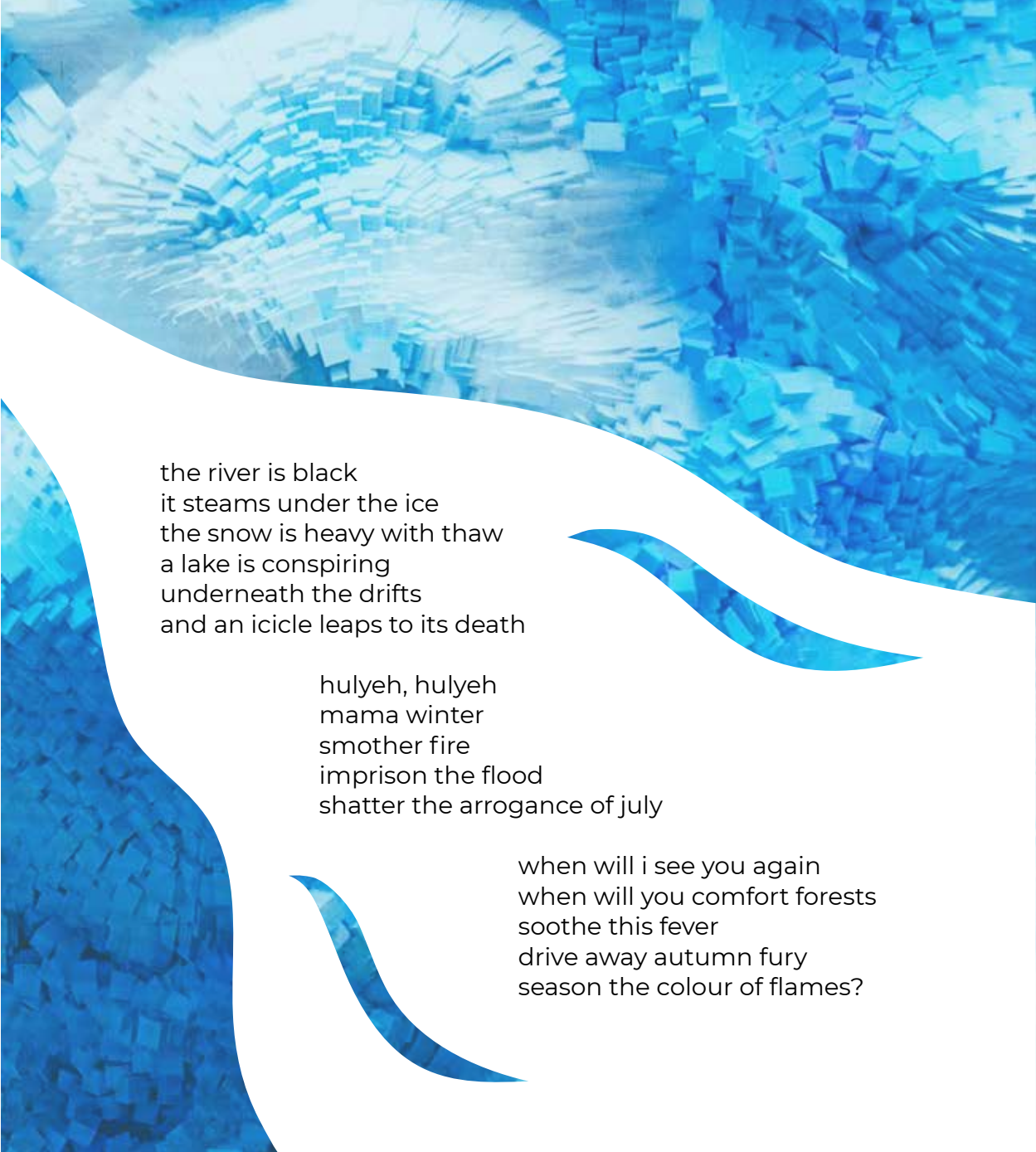
We were  
pagan gods, we were  
petty weeds  
growing through  
cracks  
in wood,  
we were  
performing spells  
our fathers could  
never fathom.



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# NOTES ON PARADISE N°1

Simon Banderob



the river is black  
it steams under the ice  
the snow is heavy with thaw  
a lake is conspiring  
underneath the drifts  
and an icicle leaps to its death

hulyeh, hulyeh  
mama winter  
smother fire  
imprison the flood  
shatter the arrogance of july

when will i see you again  
when will you comfort forests  
soothe this fever  
drive away autumn fury  
season the colour of flames?

---

# IN THE COUNTRY OF THE WHITE DEER

Simon Banderob

i can see no farther than 7 yew trees ahead  
in all directions. they file 3 paces apart  
along the road that curls like a flexed muscle  
whose pavement shines with dew.

the fog is on this town like a great pile  
of old tweedy coats  
a fog of palpable weight  
a murk of soaking cool, of damp wool  
a mist of faint smells of rain  
a haze that blears the moon like watercolour.

all autumn i have waited to see the deer  
that this town was named for  
white bucks with a canopy of antlers  
sport of the kings from the valley.  
but no deer are with me in this fog.

only the fog strides with me, ahead &  
overhead.  
shading away the tops of houses & shops  
enreathing the horizon & hills  
& revealing now a body of sinewy steel.

a volkswagen? a citroën? no matter  
it is sleeping  
perched like a cat on the toes of its tyres.

i walk on & on & into the  
outstretched arm of a yew  
(how could i not see what  
was in front of me & so close!)  
& take a gurgling drink from its needles  
a cold, piny tea in my eyes & snout

i blink & cough, remembering my parents'  
warnings about yew berries.  
scaly twigs are reaching in my hair  
as i pull my face from the branch

& the fog erupts.

1 & 2, the gloom melts into golden white  
sheets  
great owl eyes, binocular, predatory  
submerge me in their gaze.

the 4-wheeled hunter is growling  
awake—did it smell me in the wet air?  
it does not gallop  
& i do not run, rather  
it soars  
& i am frozen  
my bones, my mind, my lungs all  
waterlogged.

it roars over the road  
flicking its perspiration onto my face.  
the droplets cling there  
with the sharp, green needles  
& a few flecks of mud.

7 yew trees away  
the metal curves of the carriage are wisping  
off into vapour.  
with my eyes, dilated, still overfull with light  
i see its diesel smoke  
& my breath  
climbing into the estuary of fog.

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# PINEAPPLES ON PIZZA

Kether Diaz

*TW: Sexual Assault*

It has been an ongoing debate for decades with people hating on the juicy tropical fruit combined with the glorious savoury flavour often associated with pizza. Others however, believe that the two

opposite flavours clashing against each other in your mouth is an almost divine experience. In my point of view, those opinions are subjective, and people should be allowed to love food the way they want it.



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## Pineapples on Pizza

I contemplate my pizza slice as I sit on the kitchen island, debating whether I should remove the pineapple or leave it there. I don't have a problem with sweet and savoury foods put together, but I need to point out that the taste of warm pineapple is not my favourite. I grab the slice with one hand and realize it is already cold. It doesn't surprise me. I look at the clock hanging from the wall. It has been more than an hour since I got the pizza delivered, and with all the cleaning I had to do before finally taking a break to eat, it is logical that the heat has escaped from the food. I find it a little sentimental. Like a relationship where love has finally run out.

I'm about to bite into the pizza slice when the familiar beeping of the dryer goes off, letting me know the laundry is ready. I let out a long sigh before putting the slice down. I head down the basement and open the machine. I pull out a bunch of brownish and yellowish-looking clothes. Definitely not my style. The fabric feels coarse to the touch, but then again, that's what half a jug of bleach does to clothes. However, they will be easier to burn in the backyard fire pit tonight. I put it all in a laundry basket and carry it upstairs to my bedroom. On my way, I observe the bathroom door ajar, just as I left it not long ago.

I leave the basket on my bed and go to the bathroom. The bathtub curtain is closed, so I slide it open. My husband is looking paler than ever. I look at his naked body and his closed eyes, remembering that time I went to a wax museum. Underneath him, there is a small pool of blood, but the wounds on his arms, neck and feet have finally stopped bleeding. I look around the room and smile. It was a good decision to do it here. Even though it took me a while, it was easy to clean up all

the mess. Bathroom floors are quicker to mop than removing stains on the carpet.

I reach out for the shower hose and start flushing away the blood. I have to lift my husband to get all of the blood cleaned up, which is an ordeal because of how heavy his body feels now. However, the rigor mortis is starting to kick in, so it helps that he stays almost in the same position throughout the process. The tub might need some scrubbing later to get rid of all the dry maroon spots left, but it will do for now. I shower his body and clean up the wounds a little. I read somewhere that you cannot fully drain someone's blood unless you have some special tools to do so. But then again, most of it is already gone so it will be easier to deal with the body once I figure out my next step.

I wash my hands and arms and close the door after I step out of the bathroom, and I head back to the kitchen. My pizza slice is waiting for me, and I consider tossing it into the microwave to warm it up. But then, the pineapple would warm up too. Why did I order Hawaiian in the first place? I'll never know. I take a bite, wondering if I should have watched more true crime series beforehand. Maybe I could have gotten better ideas on how to do this whole thing. But in the heat of the moment, and after being raped by the man who said he loved me, for the fourth time this week, I feel like it wasn't such a bad decision to rush things a little. I chew the pizza and then stop. I grab a napkin and spit the thing out. My thoughts on pineapple on pizza are neutral, as long as the pineapple is not too warm. But what is wrong with the ham? It tastes weird and kind of out of place. I take out all the pieces of meat that I can find on my slice and take another bite. Much better.



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# FIRE ESCAPES

Waldner

Calloused hands  
grasp ladders and grates  
for a hold.

Over the fixed, broken road,  
moths beat their wings  
toward dimming string lights

and how near the sun  
they feel.

It is cold on the roof, closer

to the black sky bruising  
into dawn, lifting  
into another day

shade by shade,  
paving over constellations  
that seem to say

*do you want to get out of here?*

Well, of course—  
(heading down, stomachs grind

backwards across ledges  
while toes, lowered  
over an edge, flutter)

*thought you'd never ask.*

You lead the way  
and they all get lost.

Looking down.

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# TO A WILD BLUEBERRY

Waldner

How did we get so bloody inside?  
When did your crown, you know, *sprout*?

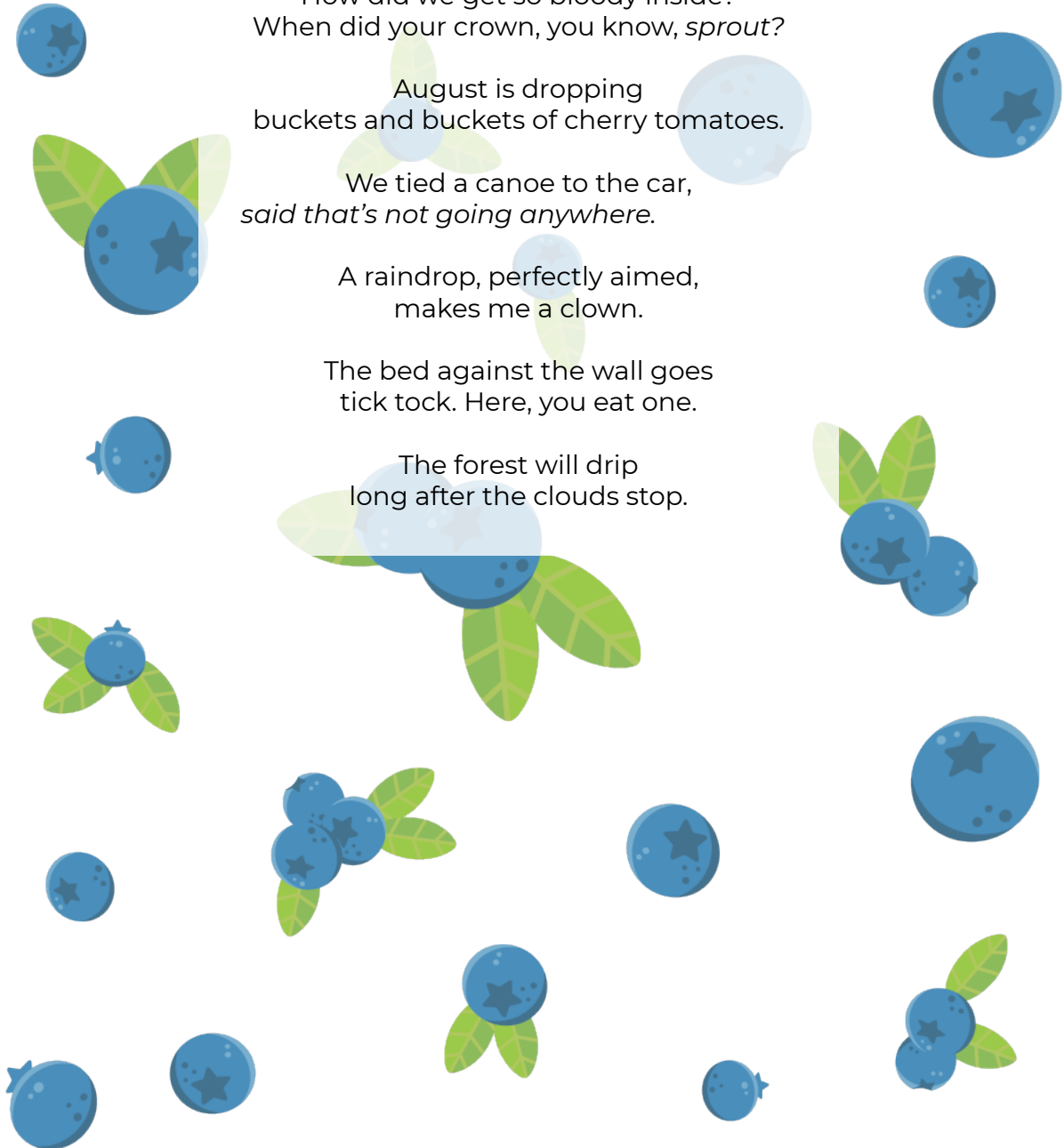
August is dropping  
buckets and buckets of cherry tomatoes.

We tied a canoe to the car,  
*said that's not going anywhere.*

A raindrop, perfectly aimed,  
makes me a clown.

The bed against the wall goes  
tick tock. Here, you eat one.

The forest will drip  
long after the clouds stop.



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# HOW TO WAKE UP

Dante Pettapiece

You are looking out of your kitchen window as you fill your glass with water. You feel a little stiff, so you gently roll your neck, drawing circles in the air with the tip of your nose. After the final circle, you let out a big yawn. You finish filling your glass and begin to walk upstairs. Your cat, appearing from nowhere, zips past you on the staircase, in the dark, and you're positive that you will trip over his hunched body once you reach the landing. But you don't, and instead crawl into your bed — your glass of water perched safely out of reach (with no chance of you turning and sleepily writhing, accidentally knocking and spilling and soaking yourself while unconscious) — and prepare to read, briefly, before you nod off. The cat has reappeared, only to slink under the window-nestled rocking chair. The room is quiet, save for the barely audible rattle of his purr. He sounds a little like an emphysemic smoker when he's most happy or comfortable. This makes you laugh, the laugh becomes a yawn, and, despite having not yet cracked the spine of the book you did not read, you begin to blindly grasp at your lamp's cord, which dangles precariously below and out of sight, deep behind your bedside table. Were you still a young child, this would be the most frightening part of the night, when your hand reaches down — dangerously — into a cranny of the room that you cannot see. You'd be convinced that, just as you're about to fumble the switch, another hand would clasp back at yours, likewise trying to turn your switch off more permanently. You had nightmares as a kid, you remember then try to forget as your head hits the pillow. The wall behind your bed is faintly streaked with moonlight leaking through your flimsy Venetian blinds. The purring continues in the darkness. There are no other sounds.



## How to Wake Up

You close your eyes—

Looking around the room, you confirm that your eyes have nocturnally adjusted. There is the sound of loud snoring. This is your father. Sometimes he will snore quite deeply, for minutes on end. Over a long enough period of observation, you've noticed that, with every minute, the snores will grow in their intensity. Eventually, there will be one big snore — more of a curt snort, with an almost comical, phlegmy, deep-in-the-back-of-the-throat timbre — and then there will be no sound at all for a while. You count the seconds when this happens:

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And then a burst of inhalation, desperate and sudden, followed by some faint rustling and stirring as he readjusts, your father groggily reevaluating which arm would best cradle his pillow underneath. He falls back asleep (or, at least, resumes snoring) almost instantly. If you tell him, in the morning, that you're worried — that you think he might have sleep apnea — he will tell you not to worry, that he is just fine. You move incrementally with each snore, gently untucking yourself in petite bursts as you stealthily dismount the king size bed. You have the patience for it, even though you are only five years old. You like the discipline that it requires. It feels like a challenge, like something you'd see in a movie. Eventually, your pudgy toes are digging into the carpet. You drop to all fours and begin to noiselessly scuttle your way towards the door. You know the carpet's colour is green, though it's really hard to confirm this in the dark. Once unencumbered by blankets and the shiftiness of the bed's mattress — such shiftiness is a lot to account for, since you do not sleep atop the kind of mattress on TV where a wineglass will sit happily unspilt, indifferent to the slope a given body makes beside it — you no longer have to move according to the snores' burst or tempo. You silently crawl through your parents' bedroom doorway and stand up in the hall, turning the knob as you close it behind you.

Your house is not a large house, yet there are a lot of rooms.

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## How to Wake Up

There are no windows in the central hallway. There are only more doors, which lead on to more rooms. You scratch your bedhead while standing motionless in the hallway, imagining, were it much lighter, that you could see the swirl of your childish dandruff in front of you. It is impossibly black. All the other doors in the hallway, you're beginning to see, are closed. Your eyes are finally adjusting — again — and you take some tentative steps forward. You hear a purring, although you do not own a cat (your father does not like them). It is the purr of central heating. There are two large vents, near the floor, and above those vents runs a long wooden banister that ends just before the hallway does. On the other side of the banister, there is a staircase.

You are standing at the top of the stairs, smelling the central-air in the dark, and you remember that you've been here — have stood in this exact spot, with so little light — more times than you can count. You have often done this in your dreams. You think it's strange how, while other kids you've talked to have absolutely wild dreams featuring adventures and sometimes flying and overall sounding like they're full of fantastical, LucasArts-tier excitement, you have dreams where you can't tell whether or not you're dreaming at all. Then again, you don't talk to many other kids. And so you wake up and go about your day as you normally would — reading or making crafts or exploring — and it's only when reality begins to disintegrate around you, as you wake up for that second time, that you realize that everything was fantasy, and you were still only sleeping. You've heard that pinching yourself helps to confirm what's real and what's not, if you're suspicious. The confirmation rate seems to be about 30/70, from your experience, where the majority is unhelpful. You pinch yourself again, right now, and think that you feel something. But, really, who can say?

You are still standing at the top of the stairs, procrastinating what you know has to happen next. No matter how many times you find yourself here, you still really — instinctively — hate this next part. One sure-fire way you've discovered to wake yourself up has been to jump down the staircase. When you've done this before, you pretty instantly bolt up in bed, morning light shooting through the blinds and bathing the bed in a cool amber hue, and you feel relieved to know that you're awake and are able to really, finally, start your day now: no tricks this time. You can't remember when you first tried jumping, but you imagine that, numerically, there must have been a first time. You wonder what might happen if, one time, you jump when you're not dreaming. You dive headfirst.

—and then you wake up.

# UNWIND



@FibertCartoons

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 |   |   | 3 |   | 6 |   |   |   |
| 6 |   | 5 | 9 |   |   | 4 |   | 8 |
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|   |   | 1 |   | 4 |   |   | 9 |   |
| 1 |   | 6 | 2 | 7 |   |   |   |   |
|   | 2 |   |   |   |   | 8 |   | 4 |
|   |   | 4 |   | 1 | 8 |   |   | 7 |

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