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ABSYNTHÉ

Trent's Alternative Press

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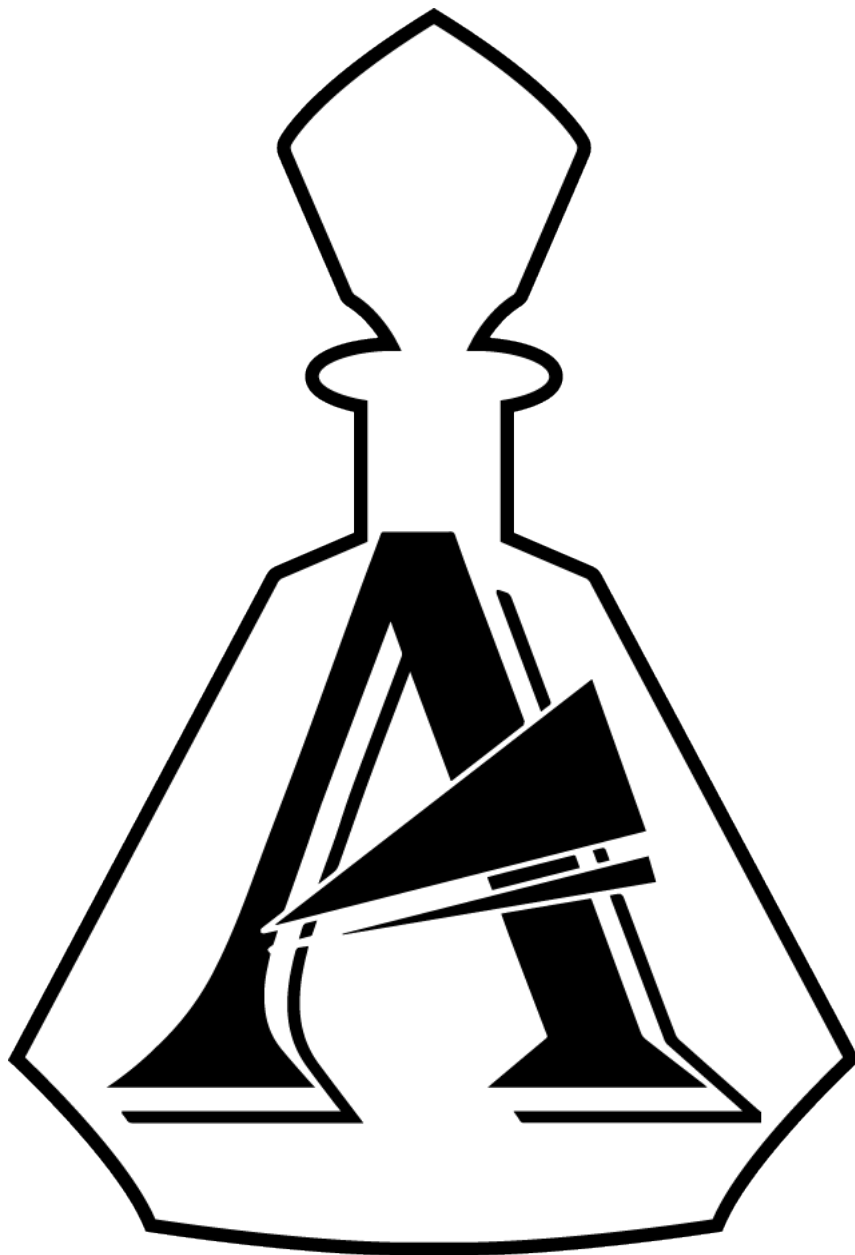
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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Before we get started, I wanted to do a brief land acknowledgement. We respectfully acknowledge that we are on the treaty and traditional territory of the Michi Saagig Anishinaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Peoples for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relations.

May we honour those teachings.

If you've attended Trent University for any amount of time, you are familiar with these words. They are meant to set the tone of your experience at Trent, the school with the 'most established Indigenous Studies program in Canada.' Like Bill Shatner's opening monolog from *Star Trek*, it is a colonizer's mission statement, only our colonizer is guilt ridden rather than adventurous.

Starfleet: "To boldly go where no man has gone before!"
Trent: "To meekly stay where someone has lived before!"

These words mean nothing to my school, their actions give up the lie. Despite the white guilt, an enormous hurdle, I know, my school persists in its neo-colonial, neo-liberal *deep inhale* BULLSHIT. Do you know about Mauna Kea, the sacred mountain-top where several Canadian Universities, including Trent, are building a telescope? Well, now you do.

'The Thirty Meter Telescope' is as blatantly colonial as it is blatantly phallic. Construction has been impeded by indigenous protests. Police are being sent to suppress the native people. Is this sounding familiar, Canadians? Thousands of kilometers or thirty meters, there's just something exciting about a pipeline, especially when you have to wrestle with brown people in order to set it up.

Is this a joke, Trent? Are you going to cover your eyes while the legacy of colonialism runs rampant at your behest? Are you going to acknowledge the land you stole this time? That doesn't make it better, you know: knowing what you're doing is wrong, then continuing to do it, and then apologizing. Cowards! Cravens! Get fucked!

Can you imagine if this happened on a sacred European mountain? If Mount Olympus was selected for a telescope there would be a global outrage, thousands of protestors, riots in the *Percy Jackson* fandom. If Mount Sinai were threatened by a group of pushy, Canadian academics, you'd better believe there would be burning outrage, and not just from some judgy bush at the peak. So, what's different here? Hmmm... hmmm... It'll come to me!

So, I'm pissed, obviously. Do I know what to do? No. We Trent students could organize a protest, because the RCMP is less likely to be called on a bunch of affluent white kids. Yet there's the rub: if you're an affluent white kid, why protest? You could always just not protest, collect your seventy average and graduate, head back to Tweed to become a teacher or a cop. I know you. You could do that, you probably are going to do that. Good thing nobody wants to build a telescope in Tweed.

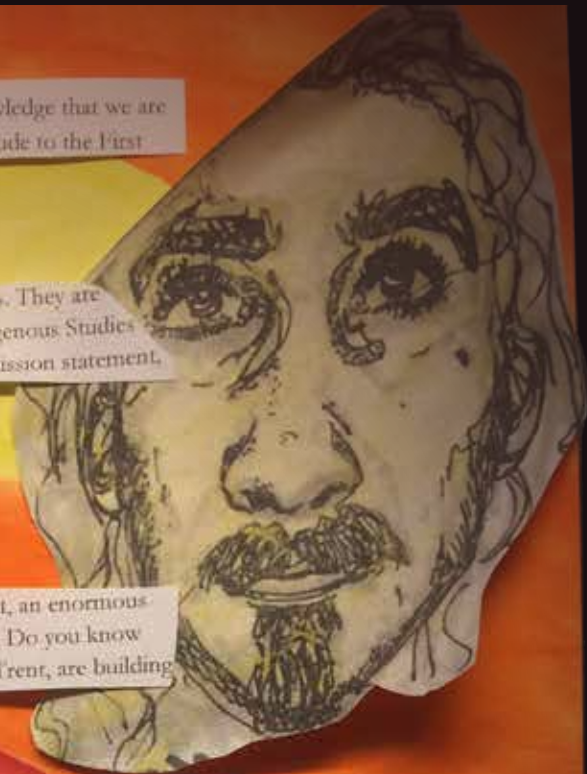
In closing, Trent is full of shit and so are you and so am I. When someone tries to tell you that Trent is the best undergraduate university, or implores that it could be worse, remember Mauna Kea. Remember your

direct financial contribution to this school, to the people who preach reparation, then colonize in your name.

When someone tries to tell you that Canada is a developed country with a civil society, remember

Wes' suwet'cu, and think hard on it. Think hard on the apartheid we find ourselves in.

WRITTEN BY ZACHARY BARMANIA
ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMMA JOHNS
BACKGROUND BY SAS MUELLER



TR@NSL#T&

Melchior Dudley

私はあなたに話している。カナダに来るとき、私は英語を話しません。私は2歳でした。家では、彼らは私にだけ日本語を話します。「子供に彼女の言葉を忘れてほしくありません。」だから、私は日本語しか話せませんよね？私が4歳のとき、彼らは私を遊び場に連れて行ってくれました。母は私が地面に座っていて、子供が私に近づいたと言った。子供は話し始めました、そして、私は彼らを理解しませんでした。彼らが見たとき、私の両親はとても悲しかった。彼らは、それ以降は英語でしか話さない決めました。だから私はもはや島ではありません。他の誰もが水だった地球。あなたがとても違うとき、それは孤独です。

しかし、祖父が亡くなった後、両親は日本に戻ったので、私は英語を学んだことがありませんでした！彼は亡くなり、私の両親は私の父の母親の世話をしました。彼らは彼女と一緒に住んでいますが、詳細は重要ではありません。日本では、私は成長し、良い生徒です。さらに英語を勉強することにしました。夜でも、寝る代わりに学校に行って英語を勉強しますが、それほど多くはありません。私は追加の勉強のために6ヶ月間だけ勉強します…しかし、それは高価で、私はやめなければなりません。私はこれ以上学ぶことができなかったので、学んだことを思い出すために一生懸命働きました。そして卒業後、仕事に行きます。特別なことは何もありません。しばらく働いた後、両親は私を愛していると言って、カナダに帰れるようにお金をくれました。

政府は彼らが仕事をするには年を取りすぎていると言いますが、私は十分に若いので行かなければなりません。そして私は今ここにいます。そして、私はここに2年間います。ああ、悲しいことに、私の英語は上手ですが、私の日本語は頭から飛び出します…それは貿易のようなものです。私たち全員が1つの言語を話したら、どれほど簡単でしょうか？そして、あなたはあなたがどこに行くのかを心配する必要はありません。または、フランス語、トルコ語、ブラジル人と友達を作る。ただの夢。世界の多くの言語では、異なる場所に来ることはより興味深いですが、特に住むのは難しい。そして、あなたがいたずらな英語で話すとき、人々はあなたを好きではありません。もっとうまく話せたらいいな。翻訳では、言葉を失い、子供のようにせせらぎます。私はいつかあなたより完璧な文法で英語を話します！

そして、私はあなたに日本語を教えることができます



PSA: ABORTION EQUALS THE DEATH PENALTY

Jaime Boyd-Robinson

The lights flicker in the dingy church basement. The water cooler gurgles as the rusty pipes moan and groan inside the walls. All other sounds disappeared as Allie walked down the church stairs against her will. Probably swallowed up, absorbed into the Church walls like everything else. Allie tries not to think of it as she plops onto a steel-cold chair, a firm hand of a Church official on her shoulder. She tamps down the shiver wracking up her spine.

When the Church official is satisfied that she won't bolt, he steps away to stand with the others. Allie looks away from the empty eyes and the empty smiles to the other girls she will be spending the next hell-filled hour with.

And wishes she hadn't.

There are eight girls total. Four of them look as if they are genuinely happy to be here as they caress the evident bump of their stomachs. They wear soft smiles, their eyes twinkling even from here. Allie frowns. She does not want to get to that stage.

Two other girls are smiling as they stare at nothing. If Allie looks a little closer, she will notice the strain around their lips.

One girl has started screaming.

The last is throwing up into garbage bin. A Church official holds her hair back while whispering kind words. There are bruises on her wrists where her dress sleeves have bunched up.

Allie clenches her hands in her lap. She hates her parents for sending her here, for not trying to help her. She hates them for being disappointed—angry—with her for trying to get a back-alley abortion. She hates how her father picked up the phone as soon as he found out. As if there was only one decision to be made. Her mother didn't even cry as Allie was taken away.

Her leg starts to bounce. The girl's screaming rings through her ears. She hates her so-called best friend for ratting her out. She told Mia in confidence. After all these years of shared secrets, Mia had called Allie's parents like their friendship meant nothing.

Her heart thunders in her ears, drowning out everything else. Nausea rolls through her gut. She closes her eyes against the wave. Most of all, she hates her boyfriend for doing this to her. She should have known from the beginning that all he thought about was himself.

PSA: Abortion Equals the Death Penalty

One drunken night and too smitten to pay attention. Too smitten to listen.

And now here she is. Pregnant with his fucking child.

And no chance of getting rid of it.

Footsteps echo down the stairs. Allie doesn't pay attention to them as she tries to keep her nausea down. She's heard what the Church does to the women—the girls—who do not obey. She tamps down another shiver at the thought of it. At the thought of Church officials keeping these pregnant girls, these incubators, locked up until their nine months are up. Making her go through the pregnancy. And then killing her. Sometimes they don't even wait. Sometimes they kill the women outright and let the baby die inside her. Allie forces her tears back. All she is is an incubator.

Before she can bolt, a woman speaks up in the middle of the circle.

"My name is Wilma and welcome to our Abortion Rehabilitation Program," she says. Allie furrows her eyebrows at the name of the program. None of these girls ever got the chance to have an abortion. Why would they call it that?

The woman's smile is too wide, not forced as she continues on. "The Abortion Rehabilitation Program is a twelve-step program that will help you come to terms with your pregnancy. By the end, you will no longer wish that the poor little baby inside you is dead.

"I see we have a new member. Why don't you tell us your name and what your reaction was when you found



out you're pregnant?"

The urge to bolt grows steadier. Allie crosses her arms. She looks Wilma dead in the eye as she says, "My name is Allie and when I found out I was pregnant, I wanted to kill my boyfriend for being so stupid."

The smile slips from Wilma's face. The Church officials turn their empty eyes on Allie. Allie forces her chin up high.

"Young lady, we do not tolerate that kind of language here. Your boyfriend has given you a gift. You should thank him any way you can," says Wilma.

Allie wants to gag. Thank him? He destroyed her life. If she has this baby, she'll have to put her dreams on hold to raise it. There will be too many sleepless nights and no money for her to do

PSA: Abortion Equals the Death Penalty

anything. She can't afford to have this baby. And her boyfriend won't even be there to help.

Wilma starts to explain the first step, about how a woman needs to change her mindset and the different ways the Church can help with that. But Allie isn't listening. There is too much going through her head.

"Now who wants to tell Allie their story and how much this program has changed their life?" Wilma asks. She spins around, looking at each girl in turn. She stops at the girl who had been throwing up earlier. The girl looks maybe sixteen, her skin blotchy from crying. There are deep scratches along her arms. Her lips are stretched thin from smiling.

"Samantha, why don't you go ahead and tell Allie your story."

Samantha's eyes well up with tears. She stares at Allie as she gives a tiny shake of her head.

"Samantha, sweetie. We talked about this. No matter how many times you wish to hide it, that college boy choosing you and bestowing upon you this gift is a great honour. You must remember that you attracted him to you with those clothes."

Allie's heart skips a beat, her eyes widening. A chill passes through her veins. Not only is the Church against abortion, but they also believe the pregnancy is the girl's fault. She has to get out of here.

Her eyes swivel around the room, noting the exits and the positions of the Church officials. There is only one set of stairs with three Church officials guard-

ing it. She'll have to force her way out.

"I don't want to tell my story anymore!"

All eyes turn on Samantha. She is glaring at Wilma, fists clenched at her sides.

"Samantha," Wilma sighs. "You know what disobeying means. Now tell your story or you will be sent to the Isolation Room again."

There is a flash of fear in Samantha's eyes, but her glare holds steady.

"No."

The girl who was screaming earlier has started up her piercing wails again. The three officials by the stairs make their way to the screaming girl.

Allie sees her chance.
She bolts from her chair.

She is halfway up the stairs — to freedom — when a hand grabs the back of her dress. A scream escapes as she falls, two pairs of hands catching her before she can truly fall. The pair of hands drag her down the steps, the stone leaving scratches and bruises along her legs. Her screaming is renewed as she thrashes in the officials' grip.

"Let me go! I won't let you keep me here with your toxic views," Allie screams. But the Church officials do not listen. No one from the outside can hear her.

She will be kept like an incubator until the baby is born.

EVIL AT YOUR CONVENIENCE

SPENCER WELLS

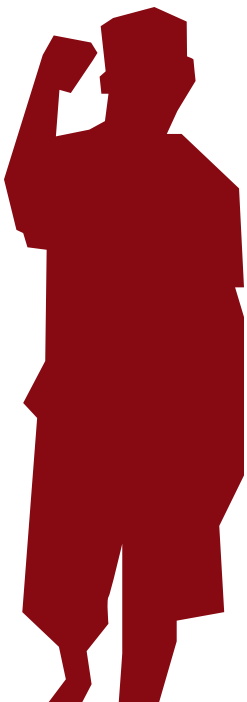
We wanted to go home.

It was cold that day in Toronto, and as the night drew the sky a deeper shade of black, it was only getting colder. The train that would take us home was cancelled, and we were forced to take alternative routes. More expensive routes nonetheless, but that wasn't as important as getting home. The workday was long, cold and unforgiving much like the city itself. They were inundated with news of protests across the nation. Hopeful in the sense that resolution would be swift, but fearful in the sense that we may be caught in that cross-fire too. The blockades – those resilient enough to stand on the tracks – burdened with an important mission.

The people complain that the economy will crash. The politicians emerge from their luxurious shells and inadvertently advocate for their surrender. Perhaps those members of society with a fiery passion to see to it Canada wakes up from its ignorance, will be able to truly fight for our future. I trust them.

We are our own enemies. We see the follies of our neighbors and carry on our individualist mindsets. It wasn't the end of the world that my trip home took a few hours longer than expected. If anything, I'm grateful that I could even get home safe. The hordes of travellers waiting in the cold at the platform – children, the elderly; I hope they see how dire the situation is. And I hope they don't fall within the snare that mainstream media is setting by diverting the aggression to the working-class protesters fighting for OUR cause.

Because we have to think. If the pipeline running through your nice, quiet suburban backyard exploded into a toxic mess, I could guarantee with certainty that somebody would



Evil at Your Convenience

be breathing down those big oil exec's necks for the rest of their natural lives.

At what point do our indigenous neighbors fights matter less than ours?

Truth is, it doesn't. Especially if you're within the grounds to consider that if Big Oil can get away with this, they can get away with anything. We know who's on their side in this, its time to build solidarity with those who want to be on ours.

This is not the time for apathy. Reconciliation is long since dead at this point, but I strongly believe we are within the power to reinforce the rights of our First Nations communities.

Let's vote for politicians that actually give a damn about them, because its fair to say that not enough has been done if this is the effect.

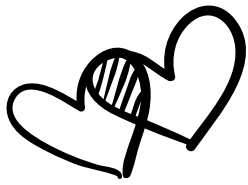
Let's strengthen our resolve to fight for the underprivileged and overburdened. The extents we can achieve when we all work together are incredible, and it would be even more so once we put those ideas to practice.

Let's actually start fighting those companies that actively pursue the destruction of land and communities in the interests of profit. Money is something that can always come back, but the damages these companies are willing to deal to both people and property are often dealt to irreparable measures.

So after you're done reading the rest of the articles in this issue, go look up the number to your local PM and start blowing up their messages. Do not let this go silent.

And be sure to let Justin Trudeau know you feel awful about him having to cancel his vacation to the Caribbean.





HOW TO PLAY THE "GAME" OF



Julie Musclow

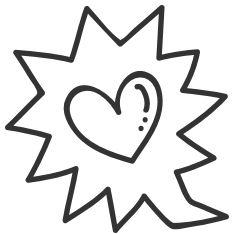
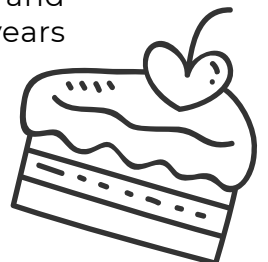
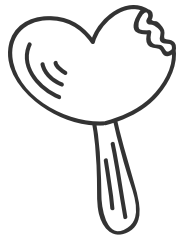
Monopoly, Scrabble, and Stratego are just a few of the many board games I played as a kid. One thing they taught me is that the game of Life does not always lead to success, happiness or love.

Love, it was the first day of 9th grade when I saw you from across the yard. You smiled at me. ME! My heart pounding out of my chest. I was a weird girl, with no mother, a childlike father and no true friends. I was a loner, but with you Love I could be somebody.


Love, it was the way you looked at me as the metal from your braces glistened in the sunlight. Your brown curly hair, blue eyes and dimples were my fairytale. I was nothing like a fairytale... I had long tattered blonde hair, blue eyes that changed colours ever so often, glasses two sizes too big for my face and lets just say I looked more like the Pillsbury Dough Boy then Barbie.

Love, you sat next to me in AP Calculus today. I never knew you were so smart. You looked at me with that perfect smile and I swear you made my glasses fog up. The teacher called on me, but I was too busy staring at you Love. You had my back and answered the equation perfectly without ease you went to the chalkboard and wrote so beautifully.

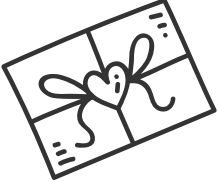
Love, a few months passed and you asked me to the semi-formal valentines dance. What was I supposed to wear? My head was spinning in circles and I wished my mother was there to give me advice. You see Love, she died February 12th and valentine's day is always a struggle for me. I remember waiting for my mom to come home as I carefully sealed each valentine with a sparkly red, pink or purple sticker. She never came home though... She died in a car accident that night. I looked in dad's closet after reminiscing about the good times I did have with her and found the perfect dress. The dress was sparkly red and glistened in the light. My mother wore that same dress over 17 years ago when she went to prom.




How to Play the "Game" of Love



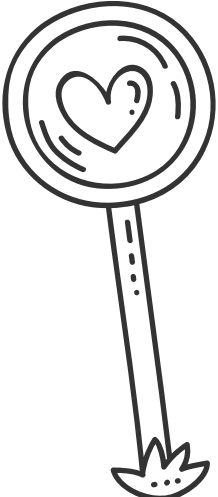
Love, you picked me up from my house wearing a beautiful tuxedo and matching red bow-tie. You brought me a sunflower corsage my absolute favourite and then we went to the school. We danced the night away as if no one was watching and for the first time in a longtime I felt happy. After the dance we drove around town talking about life and what the future might bring.




Love, the way you looked past my front and saw the true me. You saw me for more than just a weird girl. You saw the girl trapped in her own head fighting against herself everyday. You saw me as someone. Someone who danced to Katy Perry at 2am, but by 4am was listening to Nothing, Nowhere. You saw the goofy older sister who adored her siblings, but had to grow up fast. You saw me as the girl who finally found love.




Love, it's senior year and my passion for you has only grown stronger. The endless nights we stayed up watching movies and when you had to leave I would always say "5 more minutes please". I adored every minute I could spend with you.



Love, the way you would hold me when everything was crashing down. You never failed at trying to make me happier despite my constant depressive despair. You held my hand tightly at my grandfather's funeral and wiped away the tears rolling down my face. I called you when I got into the university of my dreams Trent. We were going to be Excalibers together Love.



First day at Trent University we wore our matching green and white hoodies. You wore green face paint and smeared the excess in my hair (it took two months for the green to come out). That night we went to a HOTT party and for the first time we drank together. 6 shots of vodka later and I started to really feel the alcohol. A sensation that allowed all my worries to wash a way with each drink I poured back. I lost you a few shots back Love and wondered where you went. After a few hours I staggered up the stairs to see if I could find you. I found you.



Love, A four letter word that makes me feel everything and nothing all at once. The way you looked at her was the way you once looked at me. You held her in your arms and kissed her forehead with your soft lips that once touched mine. You broke me Love and all I want to know is if you ever cared. A part of me died that day Love. The part of me I lost was **you**.



A PURGATORY

Kavya Chandra

The nonchalance, the carelessness of the Dead sits in the heart of the castle,
an impression of luxury, of suitability swims through the walls,
when men plastered pride and loss in between these rocks,
there was no earthquake to take its course.
There were no whispers in the concrete walls of love and hope
which surround the massive embodiment of patriotism
the leaves are lush in these gardens, you'd find yourself convinced, i'm sure
there's more barren land and sprouts,
you'd think they'd grow into something magical,
reach the sky like the beans from Jack and his racist dog.
There's no water in these parts, the leaves are plastic-
they write on these walls the legend of kings and commanders,
who closed in these walls and dropped the doors of courage and valour-
no, there are no cowards beyond these parts,
And here, in 1942, stood General Hindustan, securing his grounds, while
guillotines are grown out of the garish, tarnished stones,
green of gunpowder algae, black of age and deterioration,
if you smell carefully with your eyes, you'll find decomposing bodies,
It's as if the sea had collided into forms of ghosts
with skins latching onto the surface-
a castle with a tongue caught in the obscenity of territory,
caught in words of a community, a brotherhood of sensation,
its eyes closed, the castle has its windows lined with soot,
its halls steady of screams and sorrows, its body filled with nothing but agony
here, in the hollow of this castle are battles,
and dwarfs, not men, colour red the lines they live between,
and outside these borders, I gape through the cracks in these walls,
slain, they say, you shall go to heaven; victorious you shall enjoy the earth,
but what of this castle? what of this purgatory?

FRAGILITY

Kavya Chandra

i.

Silently brooding in cups of tea, the policies we designed are too accustomed to our privilege, even in the face of revolt and recoil, our judgment is clouded by the affirmations of ethnicity that validate the ideas of authenticity to our names- Hindu, upper class warriors with no blood on our sheaths- how do we say our names in our mother tongues when our mother tongue has been cut out and stained with brutality?

ii.

the resulting uncertainty of universal lies resolute itself much like a hungry snake around the skin of its prey- the unseen, the unknowing, the uncharted, finding recharges in people, in sacrifice, in sickening blood, 'til the conviction spreads to the limbs of their dead, 'til the screams are chants of appraise, of love; one day, the world must be forgotten, and only then can you hope to die, my brothermen are screaming in phases of the moon: an on and off switch to their suffering;

iii.

in these times, my sustenance is failing to create concrete thoughts, there's life in falling apart at the seams, it seems, when the frail tendons of a weak old man come together for the last breath of fresh air, as if that will create some passing resemblance to what he used to be- a warrior in disguise of betrayal. we were never taught to have honorariums for the dead, so when the obituaries flourished in the cemented potholes we decided that no policies could be dichotomous, but must remain binary, in love and hate, in right and wrong, in between the Lord and the Devil, there stood us, the face of war.

MEAN STREET SWEEP

Evan Winter

I should have known that strangeness comes in all forms. Maybe I hadn't been paying attention before, maybe I hadn't wanted to. But on this morning I finally saw them. I've never enjoyed the morning, though this one felt notably worse. I had wanted to stay in bed but more than that I wanted coffee, liberation and salvation. My feet shuffled along the pavement as my mind drew back to its consciousness.

As I hurried along, the streets gave off a cool air. It rose from streets still dirty from the night before and soured the morning dew. I was cutting through a block I hadn't been down before when I saw them getting together. Down the street they rushed to greet each other. How many squirrels in one group would be too many? It was a question I had never thought about but I finally saw the answer. A dozen squirrels were organizing and chirping together not more than fifty feet from me. As more joined the crowd they squeaked and greeted everyone and I had to rub my doubtful eyes to check I was still awake.

A storm was brewing. These squirrels weren't getting ready for brunch, something stirred within them. From my hiding spot behind some bushes I watched and waited. The streets were quiet as the city was still asleep in their beds and I saw the hurried expressions on their little faces as they became more agitated. Small squeaks that were quiet at first now became frenzied and angry as they yelled and cheered each other on until at once a hush fell over the crowd.

A thin, angry, stray cat, missing half his ear began to walk down the street towards us. When he saw the squirrels, his regret to come through this street became

obvious. Unfortunately for him, he couldn't hide like I had because they saw him and wanted him. In an instant, they went mad. The poor cat, surrounded by squirrels, was beat to the ground before the clawing and stomping started. Finally, one squirrel took out a bicycle chain and put their victim out of his misery. My stomach felt sick and my head started swimming. The extent of what I just saw dawned on me, but I could only pray that the bushes would conceal me long enough to not become the next victim.

The fallen cat lay cold and lifeless on the ground. The posse all backed away while one of the squirrels brought out a dead bird and placed it in the cat's still mouth. This was no accident, nor a crime of passion. I understood it was a message. Everything that happened took place in the span of a few minutes, choreographed, planned and executed perfectly. Cats would think twice before they crossed a squirrel. Fuzzy tails and tiny hands would hold this neighbourhood in a tight grip.

As quickly as they had gathered, they all disappeared. Scattering before anyone came to investigate all the noise. Once it was safe, I walked to the coffee shop and slowly drank my cup. I watched as the rest of the city now woke up, feeling safe in their homes. I thought about that cat. Who had he angered that he was given his kiss of death? Or was it just bad timing. Did he realize his own mortality and accept his fate or die unknown in anguish? The coffee was good but it hadn't washed the sour taste from my mouth. I still felt tired, being foreign to the morning, but as I looked out to the streets of my home I didn't want to go back to bed. I saw the world as it had been and I was awake now.

SWEET CLAYTON

THE DOG

Zack Weaver

I like my dog very much
the way he walks,
a sideways lofty prance

sometimes I smell
yet he treats me as
a meadow of daisies

burrito retched
onto the lawn, he eats it
as if to tell me

~I love you too~

when specters crawl,
and creepily call,
he is a brave sir knight:

tuxedo coat
with a hint
of glimmering moonlight

looking to the treeline,
I catch his eye:
Tension level zero

as he finishes
a squatting
business venture

while my beam illuminates
him, for the sleeping
world to see



ROOM 313

Rhythm Rathi

“Mornings are beautiful unless you wake-up at the devil’s hour!”, awakened by a bad dream, I began to wipe my sweat off my forehead and fix my fringes. I was dressed in my most comfortable blue cotton pajamas and a matching loose t-shirt. This was the clothing I wore on both the nights, since the time I checked into this hotel. After all who carries two pairs of clothes all the way from New York to New Delhi just for a meeting.

The moment I try to close my eyes and get back to sleep, I hear my wristwatch ‘bee-ep!’ in the ghost-quiet room, it flashes three, as I check, rubbing my sleepy eyes. Seeing the mysterious digit, negative thoughts begin to haunt my empty mind. My eyes roll towards every corner of my gloomy room while my feet hold my blanket tight. The quiet atmosphere gets disturbed with a sudden piercing shriek, giving me goosebumps from head to toe. The sound repeats twice in the next ten minutes, forcing me to recall the receptionist’s warning “Don’t bother to go towards Room no. 313, it is locked for confidential reasons.”

“Do they engage in prostitution? I need to help those poor girls!” giving no second thought, I step into my cozy fur slippers and walk into the corridor. Heading towards room no. 313, I hear the sound again. “It’s a female!” I assure.

After reaching the narrowest end of the passage, I see the room that had been calling out to me. It does not even look like it belongs to the building, probably the only one left unrenovated. With spider-webs caging its door and dust decorating the handle, it doesn’t look as if it was opened any time after the nineties. “How could someone be in here?”, thinking it to be an auditory hallucination I turn back. As soon as my foot touches the ground towards my room’s direction, I hear her. “Wait! It’s her, it’s her again!” assuring myself, I try to open the door, but the rusty lock does not permit me to do so. I knock on the door asking “Is someone in there? I am here to help! Anyone there?”. But this time the room does not reply.



Room 313



Being confident about my hearing, I still don't give up and I decide to peep into the keyhole.

The first time I peep, I witness nothing but dark, gloomy hollowness, its pitch black in there. Still staying in confidence, I wonder if the keyhole had been blocked by dust and decide to blow some air through it. Giving it a second chance, I peep in again, this time I see something as white as milk,

"Is it a cloth? a curtain? But how? How can it be so clean?" just when I was figuring my way out from the maze of thoughts, the temperature seemed to have a sudden drop. It felt as if it was a night in January, my bony structure began to shiver, and I experienced the same goosebumps again. "I need to control my imagination, phew, it scares me!" I began to rub my hands in the ominous silence and gathered the courage to peep-in once more and get my doubts cleared. This time it cleared my doubt that something was in, but gave me more thinking what it was? it was neither black nor white, this time it was red. Wet, lustrous, deep red, more like the shade of blood but it shone like a ruby. "that's enough colors for the day Sherlock! It's getting colder out here" I sighed. On my way back, the temperature went back to normal as I neared to my room, leaving condensed water on my forehead. When I went into my room's washroom in order to wash my face, I noticed the washroom's mirror was cracked, many people believe that a broken mirror is an omen of bad luck, and unfortunately, I belong to the group.

That was just the beginning, my nature of overthinking has always remained my biggest weakness. I made myself so uncomfortable in the room that I had no option other than to check-out two hours prior to the time allotted. I left my room and proceeded downstairs, I went to the receptionist and handed over my room keys. She was a fine lady, with a sweet voice that seemed to be meant for selling hotel packages. I asked her if she was free for about ten to fifteen minutes. She replied, "Yes, was there any problem during your stay?" I assured, "Absolutely not, just wanted to talk about something." "Go ahead!" she said.

I asked her what is there with room 313 and why was it locked. She then said "A couple lived in that room. We often heard people complaining about the loud noises from their room. When we requested them to maintain silence, they just put it off by saying that noise was caused by a few quarrels, but those quarrels never stopped. One day, those quarrels came to an end and that was the day the couple was going to check out. It was past their allotted time to check out, so we decided to investigate the room.

Room 313

At first, we knocked on to their door and waited outside for about thirty minutes. There was no response. We then opened the door and saw the lady's body on the ground. Checking her pulse, she was confirmed dead. We quickly collected all her information and tried contacting her husband. He didn't pick up. We got in touch with her brother and informed him about his sister's condition. We contacted the police and the ambulance and soon, the situation was taken care of. I must say, there was something strange about that lady, she seemed like an angelic beauty with a devil's soul as she often wore white clothes along with the most beautiful smile, a smile with



a hidden pain and her eyes seemed as red as the color of blood. I think she'd been crying a lot or was in severe pain and looking at her eyes, one could tell that she'd been wanting to convey something, or she needed help but was unable to do so though in pain her eyes never lost their shine. Is there anything else you want to know ma'am?"

Recalling my experience, with the three mysteriously colored images flashing in front of my eyes, I began to relate my thoughts to her words. My Ph.D. in overthinking always helped me complicate my life to another level. Hence, I assumed, the black emptiness on the first peep signified, that there was no one close to the door. When I saw something white, it was the lady's spirit heading towards me on the other end of the door and finally, when I saw something red, the last ever peep of my life, whose image still stays in my mind and haunts my thoughts, I wonder, was the lady's eye trying to convey her unsaid thoughts to me?

I felt numb, not knowing how to respond. I felt weak in my knees, my throat was dry, and I couldn't utter a word. The receptionist looked at me with concern and asked me "Ma'am are you okay?" I was blank and I just sat on the chair to keep myself together. She offered me a glass of water. After some time, I got a little better and left the hotel consoling myself. But while I sat in the cab, I couldn't stop thinking about the whole incident, neither could I digest the fact that I would witness such a thing in my life. I never believed in ghosts and always thought that they were non-existent but existed only in movies just so that the audience could experience the chills. I must say a good imagination along with a doctorate in overthinking is a deadly combination, and while I was busy exercising my degree, I was interrupted by the cab driver who looked at me from his mirror, it looked as if he had been driving overnight, I could see his eyes turning red with fatigue. "May I know the OTP, ma'am?" he inquired. Looking at my cell phone's screen, I murmured "three... one... three."

ROOM 313: PART II

Rhythm Rathi

“Here are the keys to your room, ma’am. Your room number is 312, on the third floor towards the right.” said the receptionist at the JW Marriott Hotel. I quickly grabbed the keys, smiled at her and took my lead to the elevator. As soon as I was nearing the elevator, I heard a voice calling my name, it sounded quite similar to the receptionist’s voice. I stopped and turned back, she came up to me, panting, after a few minutes she said: “I’m so sorry, I forgot to warn you about something.” I was pretty shocked and I didn’t know what was going to happen next. She continued, “The room 313, adjacent to your room has not been in use since a long time due to some reported paranormal incidents. Kindly, do not respond to any disturbance from the room at any cost.” After hearing this, all that came to my mind was, that I should be leaving this hotel. Upon seeing me astonished and pale, she assured me that many people had stayed in my room before and didn’t complain about any sort of disturbance. I was relieved hearing that I thanked her and proceeded towards my room.



It’s human nature when someone tells you not to do a particular thing, you often end up doing it. I still remember, as a child, my mom always told me not to enter the kitchen without her supervision, she told me not to touch her make-up, etc. and I, being a rebellious child, went to the kitchen without her supervision and played with her makeup products too, I also ended up applying her make-up. Right after she saw me doing so, she yelled at me. After that day, I became a little less of a rebel. I then remembered the receptionist’s words and got the rebel in me awakened. Since I was pretty exhausted after my fourteen-hour flight from New York to Delhi and I also realized that I had an important meeting which I had to prepare for, hence I gave up on the idea of exploring the room and decided to walk into my room. I see that my room is neatly made, soon, I kept all my stuff and got on to the bed, in no time, I dozed off.

I was woken up by a call, it was the housekeeping. After answering the call, I decided to get on my feet and went to the washroom, washed

Room 313: Part II

my face, took a warm shower and then, I started working on my presentation for the meeting.

After an hour into my presentation, I looked into the hotel's menu and ordered in for a delicious meal with a cup of coffee to keep me awake. I continued my work and eagerly waited for my meal to arrive. All of a sudden, I remembered the receptionist's words about room 313 and felt a little chill travel through my spine. I wondered why was that room haunted, was it because someone passed away or was it because someone was tortured there or was it because a suicide took place. My mind was filled with negative and weird thoughts, in an instant, I heard the doorbell ring and I was aghast. For five minutes, I didn't move out of my bed and then it came to my mind that it must be the food I'd ordered. I cautiously got off my bed, checked through my peephole, and saw the waiter with my food. I opened the door, collected my order, sat on my bed and began eating. I tried to divert myself from those thoughts, yet, they kept coming back.

Finally, when I finished my work for the next day's meeting, I decided to have a good night's sleep. I had a good sleep during the night and was stirred up with a unique sense of positivity, when the warm rays of the sun, fell on my face. I got off my bed, completed my morning routine, got dressed up in my favorite formals and went down to have my breakfast. I met my boss, discussed all the details of the meeting over breakfast with him. Then, we walked into the meeting room and I delivered my presentation. Things went well during the meeting and both of us were satisfied with my performance.



When I was walking towards my room, I began feeling nauseous, I felt an unrealistic kind of silence, my hands began shivering and eventually, I started feeling cold. I rushed to my room and got into my quilt. This time, I didn't stop myself and I crept out of my bed. With slow and steady steps, I gathered courage and got out of my room. I made sure no one was around. I then went up to 313 and looked into the keyhole. At first, I saw nothing, the whole room seemed to be pitch black. The second time I looked into the keyhole, I saw something white in color and the third time I looked into the keyhole, I saw something red. I couldn't figure out anything. I guess I was feeling feverish because I hadn't eaten properly, so I went back to my room, had a fruit salad and slept.

Room 313: Part II

It was time to leave the next evening, I packed all my stuff and contacted the receptionist to book a cab to the airport. I decided to check-out fifteen minutes earlier than the allocated time as I wanted to ask the receptionist about that room.

I left my room and proceeded downstairs, I went to the receptionist and handed over my room keys. I asked her if she was free for about ten to fifteen minutes. She replied, "Yes, was there any problem during your stay?" I assured, "Absolutely not, just wanted to talk about something." "Go ahead!" she said.



I asked her what happened in room 313 and why was it haunted. She then said "A couple lived in that room. We often heard people complaining about the loud noises from their room. When we requested them to maintain silence, they just put it off by saying that noise was caused by a few quarrels, but those quarrels never stopped. One day, those quarrels came to an end and that was the day the couple was going to check out. It was past their allotted time to check out, so we decided to look into the room. At first, we rang their bell and waited outside for about thirty minutes. There was no response. We then opened the door and saw the lady's body on the ground. We checked her pulse and she seemed to be dead. We quickly collected all her information, tried contacting her husband. He didn't pick up. We got in touch with her brother and informed him about his sister's

condition. We contacted the police and the ambulance and soon, the situation was taken care of. I must say, there was something strange about that lady, she seemed like an angelic beauty with a devil's soul as she often wore white clothes along with the most beautiful smile, a smile with a hidden pain and her eyes seemed as red as the color of blood. I think she'd been crying a lot or was in severe pain and looking at her eyes, one could tell that she'd been wanting to convey something or she needed help but was unable to do so. Is there anything else you want to know ma'am?"



Room 313: Part II



I then recalled what I saw and started to relate my thoughts to her words. The black background signified, there was no one close to the door. When I saw something white, it was the lady approaching me and finally, when I saw something red, I wondered, was the lady's eye trying to convey her unsaid thoughts to me?

I felt numb, not knowing how to respond. I felt weak in my knees, my throat was dry and I couldn't utter a word. The receptionist looked at me and asked me "Ma'am are you okay?" I was blank and I just sat on the chair to keep myself together. She offered me a glass of water. After some time, I got a little better and left the hotel. While I sat in the cab, I couldn't stop thinking about the whole incident, neither could I digest the fact that I would witness such a thing in my life. I never believed in ghosts and always thought that they were non-existent, but existed only in movies just so that the audience could experience the chills, and just then I was interrupted by the cab driver who looked at me from his mirror, it looked as if he had been driving overnight, I could see his eyes turning red with fatigue. "May I know the OTP, ma'am?" he inquires. Looking at my cell phone's screen, I murmured "three... one.. three."



PRETENSES

Remi Akers



Empty gestures
Remove responsibility;
Distance yourself—you're separate
From my existence now.
How can you reserve the right to look hurt when I turn you away?
Blame
Shame
This is not a game;
Once you fire you can't adjust your aim.

My pain festers
In hypersensitivity;
Hide from myself—in my moonlit
Room the phantoms avow.
How do I preserve the light that binds me with a single ray?
Aware
Despair
Does nobody care?
Disability isn't cured with a prayer.

Thirteen lectures
Assess vulnerability;
Vice on a shelf—we recommit
Crimes as gifts to endow.
How can we observe the blight that will surely destroy us someday?
Race
Brace
Faith cannot erase
The malice that lives beneath your face.



STORMY SKIES

Remi Akers

And when it rains, ethereal forces grind against my skull;
White noise overrides my existence,
Breathing feels dull.
If only I could somehow evade the present tense
Because the present tense is a crowded margin—
A room without doors or windows.
The air solidifies with your ignorance and my chagrin.
Lights are beaming and buzzing but I seem to be the only one who knows—
Who notices the searing in my skull.
A storm rages in me.
No one hears the thunder, sees the lightning, or feels the rain fall.
I've become the epitome of invisibility.

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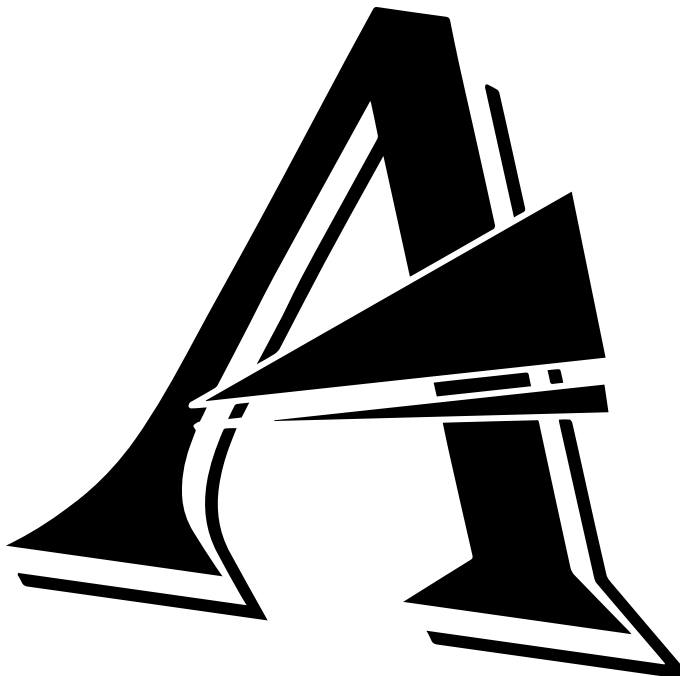
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