

Summer 2020

ABSYNTHE

Trent's Alternative Press





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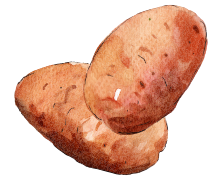
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BARGAIN

Kavya Chandra

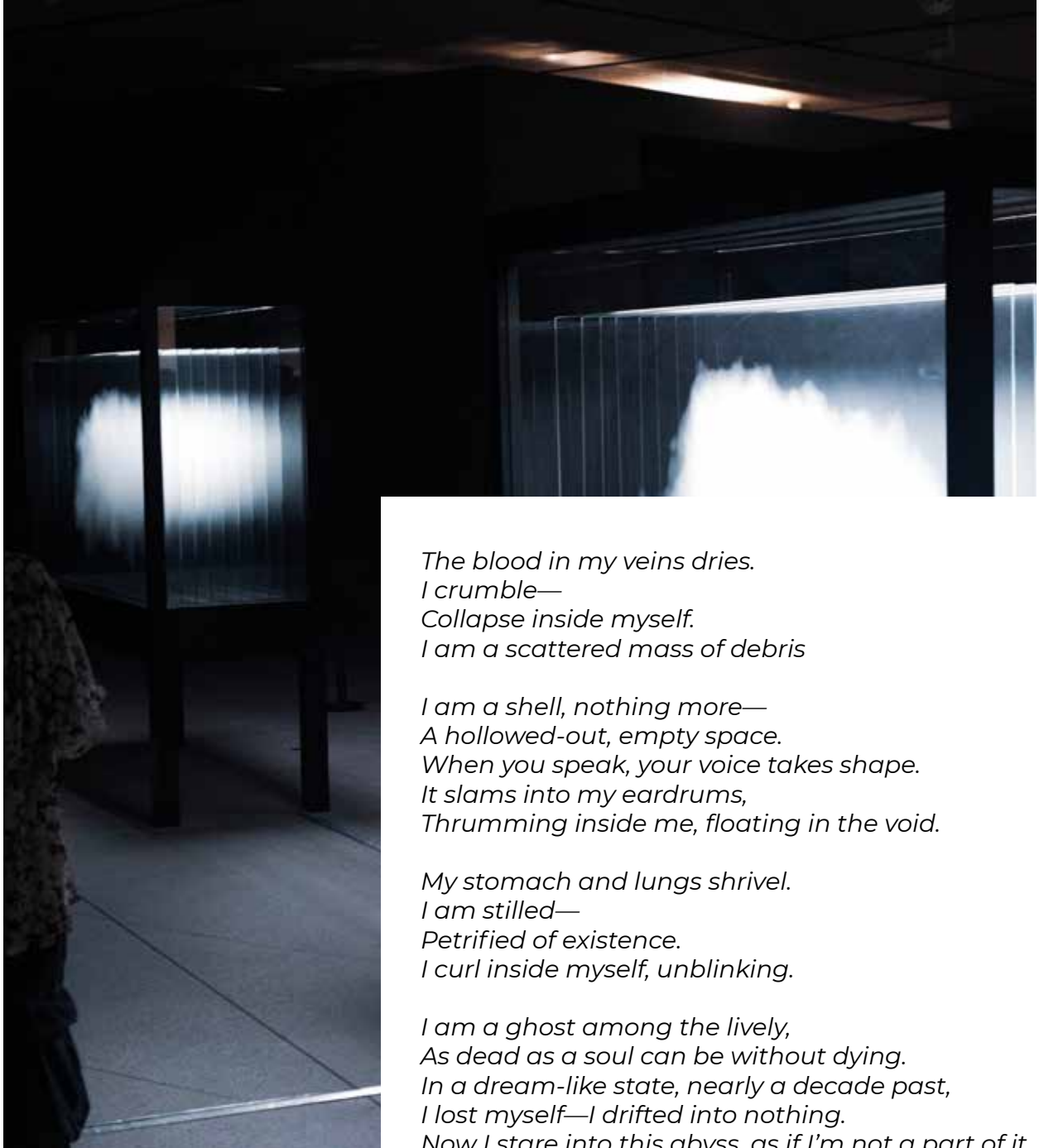


tea-cups are now plant pots!
we really wish to believe in these
lands that outline nothing that is ours
crossing border after border after border-
these bodies, these blinding lights of hope
that torch this misery! water lodged in between
our farms, your goats flock over like birds in the summer
like the expanse of greenery is merely an exchange- haven't
they kept up with the times! our green will never look the same,
why do you wish to plant tea-parties into serious affairs like this war?
mahogany was never our preferred house floor! there have been talks
of lining the woods with soot, and finding the last matchstick in the village-
tell me now, do your people keep those sorts of crude substances around?
we're mere strawberry patch-pickers, sometimes apples, mangoes, wheat,
carrots raspberries grapes radish potatoes cabbage pears- we never meant to
make these promises to our people! the nit-picking of such grave affairs
is causing damage to our social health, will you sell us some birch
bark then? these woods belong to nobody, if burnt alive it will
be a reminder of nothing! let us have the fire, you keep the
food, because when they come, they come for us all,
and when we fall, no fruits will reap- listen brother!
let me take these walls, let me paint them red
with your blood and when they come,
Motherland will have no cost.
we will have won
this war at
last.



LITTLE ABYSS

Remi Akers



*The blood in my veins dries.
I crumble—
Collapse inside myself.
I am a scattered mass of debris*

*I am a shell, nothing more—
A hollowed-out, empty space.
When you speak, your voice takes shape.
It slams into my eardrums,
Thrumming inside me, floating in the void.*

*My stomach and lungs shrivel.
I am stilled—
Petrified of existence.
I curl inside myself, unblinking.*

*I am a ghost among the lively,
As dead as a soul can be without dying.
In a dream-like state, nearly a decade past,
I lost myself—I drifted into nothing.
Now I stare into this abyss, as if I'm not a part of it.*

TRAVEL LOG #13

Kelsey Guindon

I slung off my coat as soon as I walked into my bedroom. I could feel the warmth soothing the goosebumps that had appeared under my skin from the cold, rainy night. It was 9:30 PM, and my good friend Natalia and I had just gotten back from the Champlain formal. It was still early, and we were craving adventure.

“We could go dancing,” I suggested. “Maybe go for dessert?”

“Hmm...” she hesitated.

Jokingly, I suggested, “maybe we should go to Toronto?”

“Now there’s an idea!” Her eyes brightened. She didn’t seem to be joking.

“Hell, I’ll go if you pay for the hotel!” I added, laughing.

“Let’s do it!”

So, it was decided. I pulled out my phone. The next bus to Toronto would be leaving forty minutes later. I called the taxi to pick us up. It would be there in fifteen minutes. I grabbed my schoolbag and dumped my books onto the floor, to make room for some clothes. There was no time to waste. Natalia didn’t have anything to pack; the only thing she took was a shirt she borrowed from me. I rushed to get ready. I slipped out of my dress into some leggings. I pulled clothes out from my closet and shoved them in the bag, then ran to the bathroom to get my toiletries. We made sure to bring my phone charger and some cash.

I was already supposed to go to Toronto that week. But not that night, and not with Natalia.

My brother was visiting his fraternity friends, so I was going to go and visit him. It wasn’t surprising that Natalia, my ordinarily well-behaved friend, was suddenly up for a Toronto trip. She had dated my brother for eight months, and they still talked every day, neither wanting to part. He’s moving to Thunder Bay, so their love life is complicated.

Before we knew it, the taxi arrived. We told my roommates what we were doing as we left, and they looked at us if we were insane. But the night was ours. The cold air no longer felt bitter but refreshing. We hopped in the cab and prepared for a trip to remember.

Travel Log #13



We'd need to take a bus and a train. The bus to Oshawa took an hour and a half, but our energy never faltered. Excited, I booked our hotel for the night. It was a Holiday Inn downtown.

By the time we got to Oshawa, we had to sprint for the train. My breathing was fast, and my forehead was damp. It was the most cardio I had gotten in a while. But sure enough, we made it.

It was 1:00 AM when we got to Union Station. People were scurrying about, musicians selling their talents. Union Station had all sorts. I was the designated navigator, prepared to lead.

Stepping out, once again, into the night air, we were met with bright lights and flashy billboards. Buildings towered high; we could barely see the tops of them. It was late, but the city was alive, inviting us to take advantage of it.

Rushing to our hotel, we were determined not to waste time. Three hours had passed since our impromptu decision, but if anything, we were more excited than ever.

At the front desk, we were greeted with a smile. "Do you happen to have any free upgrades? And a late checkout?" I asked half-jokingly. But to our surprise, we were

Travel Log #13

upgraded to a suite with a king-size bed and allowed to check out an hour later for free.

“And some toiletries?” Natalia asked, acutely aware of the fact she had nothing with her other than her cell phone and excitement.

We waited for the toiletries than made our way up to our room. It was on the eighteenth floor, room 1812. I threw the curtains open, and we were left in awe. The cars on the street looked like ants. I've always loved heights, and the view did not disappoint.

We walked into a few bars, but they were the scariest bars I've visited. We only lasted a couple of minutes at each. Eventually, we found our way to a quaint little bar. The décor was feminine, and there were bright neon light signs hanging on the walls. The bar was stocked with every alcohol you could imagine, and they specialized in deluxe cocktails. A few people dressed in vibrant clothes were dancing in the corner. The smell of cigarettes and perfume floated through the air. Other than the neon light signs, the only other light came from the bar. I felt as though I was somewhere completely foreign. It was hard to picture that hours earlier I had been in Peterborough. I had never been anywhere quite so eccentric, so mysterious. I loved it.

“Come dance with us!” a rather flamboyant man demanded.

“Is it your first date?” he asked us. “The only thing hotter than being a lesbian is being a lesbian and owning it!” We tried to explain that we were not together, and that Natalia was, in fact, in a complicated relationship with my brother, but this man was not convinced. He kept telling her how cute he thought I was and how she should date me. We shrugged it off and danced the night away. I had a delicious variation of a chocolate martini. The bartender resembled Jason Momoa.

It was a girls' night for the books.

It made more sense the next day when we went to visit my brother. “Kelsey, you were in the Gay Village,” he told us once we explained what area we were in.

Natalia and I had unknowingly gone to gay bars all night. It explained why everyone thought we were together. I met some of the coolest people that night, and it felt much safer and more inclusive than regular bars. Usually, when I go out, some predatory old men try to hit on me. I joke with my brother now that I'll steal his girlfriend because the man we were dancing with demanded it.

Still, we had a good time. We had some nachos and parted ways. Natalia and I spent the rest of our day exploring downtown and visiting one of my old friends in the Eaton Centre. We went and got Japanese cheesecake and took in the sights of Downtown Toronto. It was the most impulsive adventure I've gone on, and I'll always be grateful for it. Natalia and I became even better friends that night. It's amazing how a trip, even a small one, can change your life.



BURIAL GROUND

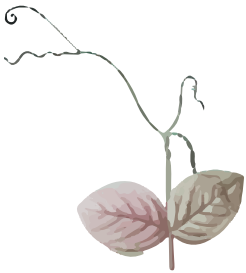
Kavya Chandra

burgundy lines no longer remind you of roses:
a death forlorn, a loved one lost; have you found what to live for?
a lover, a mistake, a forgetful past? my disease doesn't match yours
and yet we sit side-by-side, holding each other,
a look of wonder, perhaps? a side-eyed tunnel into another dimension?
is this what my mother wished to have forgotten?

these exhibits will never paint our skins on their walls-
my history, your history, their history is a nuisance
in disguise of comfort. when i shudder to cut my sheaths
for your needs, we call it selfish and occupied, but neither
of us wants these callous arms. listen to us! we've forgotten
the park bench, the moonshine, the lies at this hour.



scorching heat in the rain, our lands never aligned,
even when all of us were the same. we are so polarized
in our wants from each other and then wonder why no
one listens. the silent nights, sullen and warm, these
eyes never traced violence like ours- look at us! ashamed
of our heritage, our blood, never saying what it was all for.



my grandma dressed me in a white petticoat when we were
home alone, letting me climb hills with bruised bones,
changing my clothes into what was expected when neighbours
knocked- when will our doors open again? when will we see each
other not as lost ravens but as confidantes? "remember them" you said,
but the land is barren- where *have* my dead gone?



USAMA VADILLO! I AM WITH YOU IN MALAYSIA

Shaun Phuah

for Usama Vadillo



I.

I saw the greatest minds of my generation destroyed by productivity, anxious,
thinking we aren't good enough,
reclining on our couches and relaxing at the end of a difficult day with articles
of rainforests burning, more school children being shot to death, some other riot
or uprising happening,
in far away countries, judging what's right or wrong with [angry reacts only],
nodding, and nodding, and nodding, generations addicted to opiates, and gen-
erations addicted to the disgusted hive-mind of the internet, before unplugging
to enter a hard day's work,

II.

Usama Vadillo died on the 8th of November 2019, and he never cared about any
of it, was never stressed by any of it,
and he died at twenty anyway.

Usama, a thin boy who ate little and laughed easily, who got away with most
things because he was good looking, but who didn't get away with everything
because he was brown, talked always about never wanting a job, never wanted
a job because he had seizures, and he'd never wanna have a seizure on the job,
and he never wanted a job anyway, because hell look at all these people waking
up and hating themselves, look at all of us anyway, waking up and thinking only
of sleep, going to jobs where all we think of is sleep, and where you sneak peaks
at your phone for sparse moments of semi-consciousness through some new
drama until you go home and get the sleep you've been thinking about all day
and then he went and got a job anyway, and he

went and had a seizure, and he fell and hit his head and died. anyway
and ain't it a good thing that he wasn't ever a useful member of society, who
never held down any sort of job, and who always slacked off school, and always
decided to just do his own thing, and run around, and pretend to be cool,
and ain't it a good thing that he never listened to me when I told him not to
smoke cigarettes 'cos it'd make him die early, and at least he got to have a good
time with those cigarettes before seizing anyway,

but that was all he ever did anyway, seize, and seize, and seize all the time,
seizing the day, seizing everything in front of him, laughing and seizing and
being happy, seizing all the way up to the end,
and ain't it good,
and ain't it funny

that he's dead and laughing at all these stressed members of society, pointing
down, face redder than when he was dying and seizing, and saying, "HAHA don't
you wish you were dead?"

Usama, Moloch has taken you as a sacrifice, and you are caught forever at age
twenty, still a skinny boy, and you are preserved here, almost a man, but instead
sleeping forever, and you are Peter Pan now,

III.

Usama Vadillo! I'm with you in Malaysia
where you died.

I'm with you in Malaysia
where you died.

I'm with you in Malaysia
where you died.

I'm with you in Malaysia
where you died.

I'm with you in Malaysia
where you died.

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where you died.

I'm with you in Malaysia
where you died.

I'm with you in Malaysia

where I never got to see your funeral, where you are dead. Forever doing nothing, forever skipping school and never going to work, where we tripped acid and smoked weed and spent our time laughing with friends,
Usama, in death I can love you fully.

knowing I will never see you again,

LOTTERY TICKETS

Melchior Dudley

When Don and his wife first opened the convenience store and full-serve gas station, they made almost a hundred dollars a day. Lottery tickets alone made up a quarter of their earnings. Don thought that those early days were so full of blessings and prosperity that God must have been smiling down at them.

Sadly, business slowed down rather quickly as rival businesses and chain gas stations popped up along the highway, and after eight years of slowly declining business, Don sat down one night and spent two hours calculating exactly how much their store was earning. To his surprise, they were making less than fifty dollars a week—and after accounting for inflation and taxes, the total amounts were less than breaking even. It was like taking a dollar, turning it over, and calling it income.

But Don didn't tell his wife, and they kept the store open.

His wife was happy as long as people kept coming into the store to buy things, and as long as his wife was happy, Don was happy.



Lottery Tickets

...

That was six years ago.

Two years passed, and Don's wife died.

After the funeral, their son, Alan, quit his job managing a tech start-up, and moved in with Don to help him run the store. That summer they replaced the roof and hammered nails in the hot sun for what felt like an eternity.

Two more years passed, and Don was diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. For months he had struggled to remember simple things, and as his condition slowly slipped into a state of perpetual confusion, Don and his son went to a doctor's office to diagnose the inevitable.

As much as a diagnosis shed light on Don's condition, it didn't change much in their routine. Alan assumed a little more of the workload, but that was it. Work began with the morning's glow and ceased after cleaning the store, usually around six in the evening. After dinner, exhausted from the day, they drank black tea while spending their evening in individual yet proximal contemplation. Don always read the newspaper on the couch while Alan filled in the sudoku and crossword puzzles at the nearby dining room table.

One night, Alan set aside the sudoku and instead crunched the numbers on the store's profits. From filing taxes each year, the notion of a minimal profit margin floated in his mind — but there wasn't a precise figure, and that is what he sought to uncover. He knew the store wasn't doing well, but that night he was determined to find out exactly how it was doing.

At around midnight, he set his pencil down, distraught with his discovery. They were losing money on everything — it was the worst with lottery tickets — but just like Don had done with his wife, Alan decided not to tell Don about the reality of their struggle. They both had enough to worry about, Alan thought, and he went to bed with a pain in his chest that he reluctantly figured was there to stay.

As he tried to sleep that night, numbers glimmered like ghosts in the shadowy rooms of his mind.

...

The bell of the store jingled, and Alan started. He quickly set down Don's newspaper and noticed that a customer had come into the store, and at the same time, Alan saw through the window that another customer was pulling up to the pumps.

It was lunchtime, and Don was eating a ham and mustard sandwich from a table

Lottery Tickets

shielded from view but visible from where Alan was behind the counter. Don caught Alan's eye, looked past Alan to the red car at the pumps, and wiped his lips with a napkin.

"Don't worry, they can wait — " Alan started, but Don waved away his protest with a frail hand.

"Money doesn't wait. I'm not a cripple yet," he said. With that, he pulled himself up with the help of the table while his knees and hips cracked loudly. He hobbled hurriedly outside.

The customer in the store, a tan, gruff-looking man, plopped a bag of chips on the counter.

"And a pack of Kools," the man added.

Alan turned around and grabbed the Kools off the shelf. No need to check I.D. on this guy, as he looked about forty.

"Anything else?" Alan asked.

The man scratched his stubble. "Yeah, just one of them — " his eyes drifted over to the window. " — uhhhh...say, isn't that your old man fighting the lady out there?"

Alan jerked his head around to the window. He could see Don struggling with a middle aged-woman. To Alan's alarm, the woman hit Don with her purse with one hand as she held onto the object of struggle with the other.

...

"Let go!" The woman screamed.

"No!" Don croaked.

"Stop hitting him!" Alan commanded.

The blonde woman looked over at Alan marching towards them. She stopped hitting Don, but kept her hand gripped on the remote-controlled car they were fighting over. Don saw she was distracted and tried to yank the object out of her hands. He nearly succeeded, but, even though it looked like her shoulder dislocated with the jolt, the woman kept her grasp. She yelled back at Alan: "Tell him to let go of my son's toy!"

Alan touched Don's hands. "Pa," he said, gently so to hide his exasperation, "can you let go of the toy for a second?"

Don released his grip, and watched the lady pull the toy close to her chest. He turned to Alan, confused. "But Alan, that's your car. I gave it to you on your birthday,

Lottery Tickets

and this lady was trying to steal it.”

“I didn’t steal it!” The woman cried. “While I was looking in my purse to pay him for the gas, he grabbed it right off the seat — ”

Alan held up a hand as if to say, “I know.”

“Pa,” Alan said, “that’s not mine!”

Don waved away the idea, rolling his eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous. That’s yours. I gave it to you.”

Alan rolled his eyes, turning to the woman. “I’m sorry, my Dad has Alzheimer’s. Sometimes he gets — ”

As if the word “Alzheimer’s” had been his cue, Don started back to the store in his signature shamble, holding his finger in the air as if he had remembered something and the dropping of his finger would make him forget again.

“...confused,” Alan finished, rather confused himself.

Watching Don go, the lady sighed and tucked the toy car into her purse. “I’m sorry for how I reacted,” she mumbled, “but in his condition, he shouldn’t really be working.”

She didn’t know it, but this was the wrong thing to say to Alan. While she fiddled with her purse, fury rose to Alan’s cheeks. His father had told him many times that he had been working since he was 12 years old, and to insult an aging man’s independence based on a mental health condition boiled the blood in Alan’s veins. Alan resented anybody who would put limitations on an old man without knowing the slightest thing about that person — and his father no less. To tell his father not to work would be to take away the one sense of purpose his father had.

“Get out of here,” Alan said, clenching his molars, “and don’t come back.”

The woman snapped to attention. “Huh?”

“You’re not welcome here. Get out.”

The woman was stunned. She couldn’t remember exactly what she’d said, but she could see Alan’s cheeks turn red as he leaned towards her in a threatening way. Not one to be intimidated, she told Alan that she had to pay for the gas.

“We don’t want your money,” Alan answered.

Indignant, the woman got in her car. As she was about to pull away, she glanced

Lottery Tickets

over the store. She saw yellow stains running down the white side panelling, the eaves-trough laying dejected on the cement parking lot, and she had already noticed large flakes of rust on the red-painted pumps. The window trim was in rough enough shape to indicate it had been a DIY project, and the store shelves were barely stocked to keep one of each item in inventory. There was also a taped-up window in the back that she hadn't seen which indicated a recent burglary.

The woman knew the store was on its way out, and she felt that was almost justice enough for the way she had been treated. She wasn't angry at the old man; she'd had rougher treatment from men who knew better what they were doing. But the son! Never had she been so insulted.

...

Alan watched her drive away. Her car soon became a speck on the horizon and Alan contemplated it travelling towards infinitely glossier gas stations with infinitely shinier inventory. With a sigh, he turned from the highway and faced his father's store. He stared at it, seeing it for what it was, just as he always had.


A new sadness swelled inside of him. His throat tightened and tears burned his eyes as a gloomy vision of his father rose in his mind: despondent, trapped in bed, his eyes glossing over and tilting slowly towards the heavens...his heaving, ragged breaths, and then slipping away to the deepest darkest sleep.

Alan understood his father's sadness. It had permeated Don's personality since being diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and came from what little he was to leave behind. Alan felt similar, if not worse, for he would soon lose his father's store to bankruptcy. The store was sinking into debt by every item in its inventory, like a ship sinking from a thousand tiny holes in its hull. It was impossible to save the thing, and Alan would have nothing to pass on to anyone else when his time came. He supposed that it was good he had nobody else besides his father. He could only hope to delay the repossession of the store long enough for Don to be gone, so that he wouldn't have to share the shame and uncertainty afterwards. There was no other future. What — he would start a new career and get a girlfriend and be trod on every day at work for a chance at climbing the ladder? Yeah, right. He didn't have the energy for that, and what would Don do? Go into a home? No, no. Neither of them could afford a good home, and at least this way Don would always have Alan by his side.

Accepting the disheartening thoughts for what they were, Alan took a deep breath, did his best to stand tall, and started towards the store, calling his father's name.

ONUS

Remi Akers



*I am buried underneath this crushing dread—
It fills my lungs and steals my breath.
When I think of the loneliness that awaits me,
The future becomes a woeful plane of emptiness.*

*A bitter cold floods my room,
Robs my hope, and whispers agony to my bones.
In a chill that's unrelenting,
I am paralyzed.
I gasp for air.
But, there's a weight on my chest
And the fog smothers me.*

THE SUMMER THAT NEVER TOOK PLACE

Julie Musclow

Beep! Beep! Beep!

I hit the snooze button on my alarm for the billionth time. The clock said 3:05pm. Whoopee! Another day of basking in my sorrows. Omg did I just say basking you know like that b*tch Carole Baskin. I laugh at my own “joke”. Why oh why is it that everyone chooses to deal with a national pandemic by watching Tiger King, eating toilet paper, drinking sanitizer and masking their beauty??? 5 episodes into Tiger King I thought about running for president like Joe Exotic. Although I can't fathom the idea of having my face everywhere. Especially right now, my hair in a greasy bun the same sweater for the 4th time this week and not to mention I have lived in my own little burrito since COVID-19 became a Global pandemic.

Now before I get too in depth into how summer was cancelled (no it wasn't Candace's fault) I need to start where it all began. Corona Virus was first found in Wuhan, China and rapidly spread within days all across the world. Within a week of Corona Virus first being talked about the news turned from teacher strikes to daily pandemic updates. March Break turned into a never-ending stay home cycle and the whole world afraid of what was yet to come. Borders shut down (in my opinion too late) trapping travelers across the world on foreign land.

Commercials turned from pointless infomercials to washing hands, social distancing and updates from the WHO (World Health Organization). All around the world stores locked up, jobs lost and minimal human interaction. Jobs once scoffed at are helping the world still run. So never say again a grocery store worker or a fast food worker is not an essential worker. Stop being Karen's and be thankful that these individuals risk their lives for your stinking toilet paper obsession.

In the midst of all the chaos life still continues. Students exams weren't cancelled. Bills weren't cancelled and still needed to be paid. Grocery stores with massive lines and empty shelves trying to keep up with demands. Front line workers dealing with those with the virus even though they could potentially contact it themselves. It was as if the apocalypse took place and the whole world was fighting against the virus they could not see. Group gatherings went from 100 to 50 all the way down to 5. Religious gatherings and holidays cancelled. Quarantine weddings and digital celebrations.

The Summer That Never Took Place



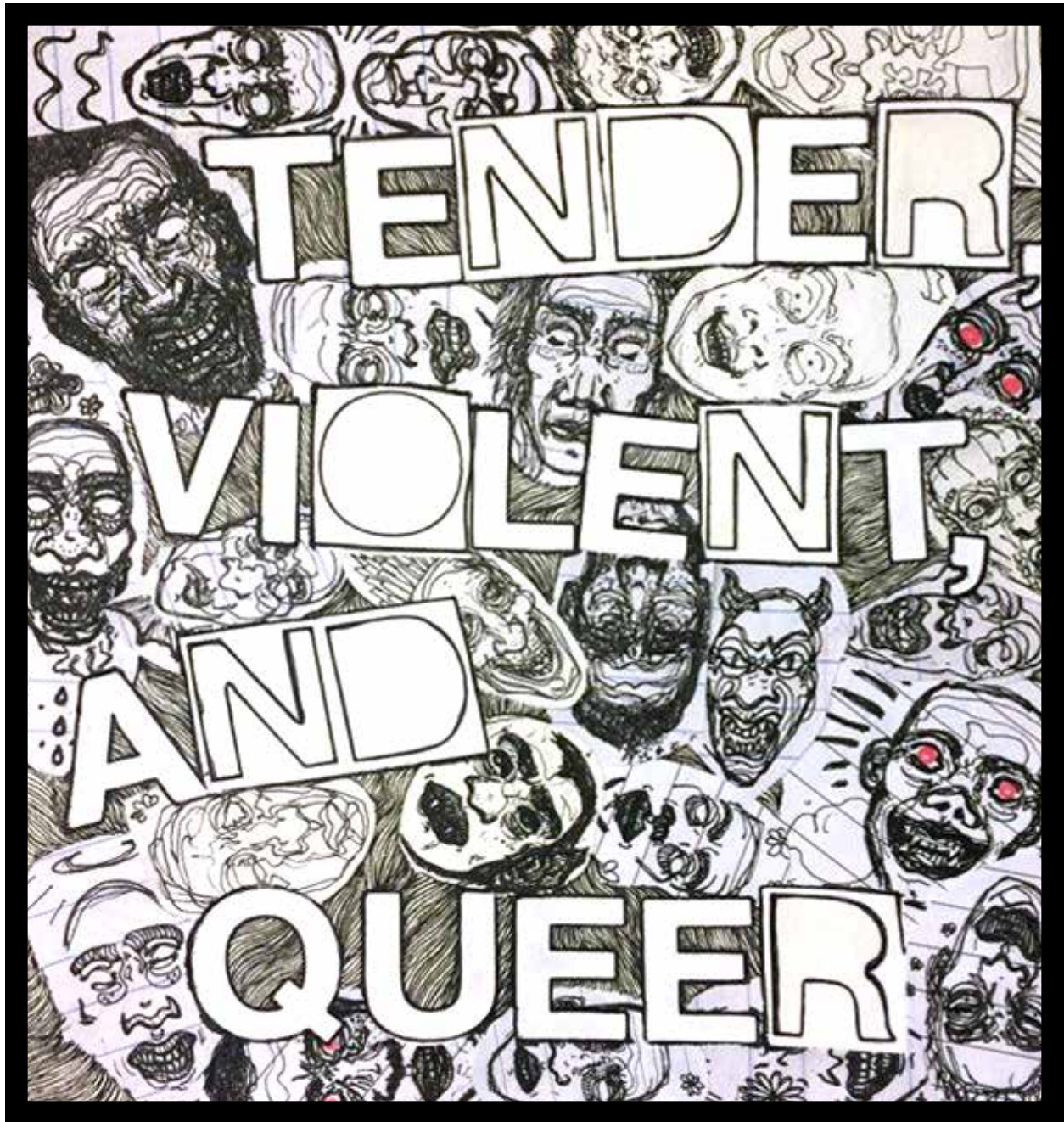
Day 26 of quarantine I have exhausted every new Netflix series. From seeing my grandparents daily to nearly a month without seeing my grandparents, but I'd rather not get them sick. My form of entertainment is talking to my cat Smokey and yes she does talk back, but she is a sassy one. Day 57 of quarantine I dyed my hair green and pretended I was grass. I've read all the food labels in the house. Did you know Froot Loops are basically pure sugar??? I haven't seen my boyfriend in weeks and I miss his company. Don't tell him I said that, I love annoying him.

Day 117??? My lack of human interaction is driving me nuts. When will this end??

July 6th, 2020, I put on my bathing suit, ran some bath water and pretended I was swimming. I should be at the beach right now. July 27th, 2020, I had a water balloon fight today with my cat, needless to say She's covered in water and I'm covered in scratches. August 17th, 2020, I set up a fair in my backyard using card board boxes. I had to venture to the store to buy food. Shelves were bare and lines surpassed the perimeter of the store.

So, there you have it folks COVID-19 prevented Summer 2020 from happening, or did it? The summer of 2020 was the most time I've spent with family in a long time. Did I want to rip my little sisters head off at times? Most certainly, but I also loved all the puzzles and board games we played together. I looked forward to our morning walks around the yard, Mario Kart races, warm hugs and karaoke nights. Although I must say I'm not a very good singer, but that didn't matter we had fun.

Yes, I missed not having a job, campfires, seeing friends, camping, swimming etc., but I got to enjoy time with my dad, brother and sisters. I got to appreciate every little thing, because life is precious and we're never promised tomorrow. So instead of basking in my sorrows again, I'm living every day to the best of my abilities. Self-care and nature are my medicine during this pandemic and when it ends I will never take things like going to the movie theatre, spending time with family and friends or going on walks for granted again.



Tender, Violent, and Queer, 2020
Emma Johns

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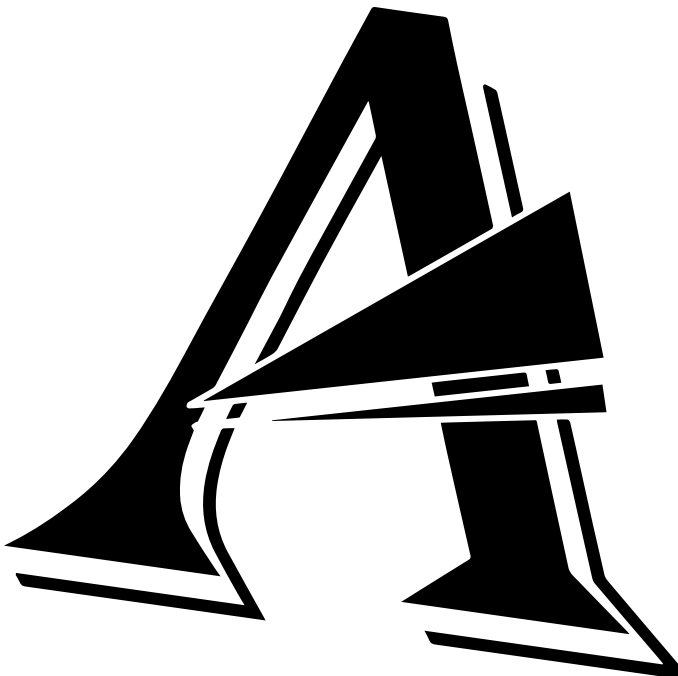
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