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Contents

- 04 Citadel - Clare Taylor
- 06 Fluorescence in Transit - Eli Hansen
- 10 Oracles - Genevieve Marrin
- 16 Gitchigamiing - Gem
- 18 involuntary flex - Hailey Imogen Brewer
- 20 two trucks, having sex - Hailey Imogen Brewer
- 23 needle nosed pliers - Keara McKeown
- 25 Immolation for a Broken God - Kether Diaz Vera
- 28 i am aware - LN Woodward
- 30 Hand-Me-Downs - Madison Marvin
- 32 My Grandfather Teaches Me How to Kill - MoAde M. J.
- 35 ecosystem - Nicole Corcuera
- 37 Spring is Early - Nina Mae
- 40 Ray - Ashley Smith
- 46 The Rock - Deanna Sceviour
- 48 Self-Portrait as a Cicada Killer Wasp - Suhaa Sheikh
- 50 Our Team

Citadel

Clare Taylor

I once thought citadel was a holy word
One that occupied the same space on the tongue
As sacrament and salvation and sacrifice
Words with a heavy grace, a knife-blade elegance
Falling between the pages of a well-worn tome

In my mind, in advance of a tour group visit
I pictured stained glass and red velvet underfoot
Until I learned citadel to be a fighting word
A steadfast star of stone walls, standing fortified
Against the blows and bile of all the world

I've learned well how to put those walls up
Carefully constructing them, piece by piece
As if I were a little self-contained city of my own
All safe and sound and gunpowder to the brim
Nestled in a cocoon, hesitant to move beyond it

Allowing a fissure, a gap in the defences
To form, spread, and flourish in lieu of the mortar
Gives way to creeping ivy cloaking the bastions
Curling around the beating heart in the courtyard
Weaving through the ventricles, the hollow atria

In a century's time, maybe more, maybe less
When the walls, crumbled and sun-bleached
Lay in the fields of grass and wildflowers
Aside the churning sea, revered for their weariness
I hope that it'll have been worth it



With a history of anguish, and continuous oppression, we overlook the beauty of Black culture: Black is beautiful, powerful and deserving of equity.

Untitled - Lauren Sneath

Fluorescence in Transit

Eli Hansen

*Everywhere
These nowhere spaces
Take their place
And strip this world of its width.*

*Tired bones sink
In hard tile
As, overhead, tubed cosmos
Flicker and buzz
And blink out into darkness;
One tall ladder and a lifetime
Out of reach.*

-A.S.

The dead white glow of the fluorescent canopy blankets the sleeping masses curled on cracked leather armchairs and steel benches set too closely together, clumped up by scarce outlets, laptops and phones arranged in clusters, their green LEDs tinting the white night, glinting off the wide black window panes. The planes beyond the tempered glass are silent, still. Snow is building up on their wings. Great white dunes rush to bury tired aluminum. There's a low rattle, a faint hum as one of the military jets works its way along its patrol trajectory. You won't sleep tonight.

But you do, drift off enough that the blast wakes you.

The flash; white, its fury pulled into razor threads, glinting off of the cloud of glass hurtling inward, each shard capturing the explosion and failing to contain it. The windows shattered, the shockwave rushes in to devour the warmer air of the terminal. You pull your hard-shell up in time, the luggage catches most of the glass, your legs catch the rest. Some of those laying around you aren't so fast. The frigid night rushing in through the empty panes carries their cries away from you, but you can't tear your eyes from those who never got the chance to make a sound.

The second blast is closer, you feel it in your chest, kneading your lungs against the back of your rib cage. Your tongue is thick with copper smoke. You go sprawling, a bench tumbles by to your left, steel clattering, shattering

pyramids of half dead phones. Thrown across the floor—the almond tile slick beneath you with too-bright blood—you strike the far wall, hard. You hear a wet crack; your left side goes numb.

You get your chin up in time to watch the third blast ripple toward you across the tarmac, perfectly framed by the empty windows stretching from floor to ceiling. Planes are tossed aside by the shockwave, the snow on their hulls vaporizing in the curtain of flame it drags with it. The air is too hot to breathe. You keep your eyes open.

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A cool drip of adrenaline trickles along the length of your spine. You unclench your fists, fingers numb. Deep breath. Every time you fly, perverted clockwork bent on carving years off of your life; like your late uncle hovering over a Christmas ham. You don't know why that's where your mind drags you back to. Bet your therapist would love to gnaw on that little tuber. You'll save it for when the self destruction stuff grows stale. You never saw the explosions from the ground, never even reviewed the footage. You never cared to. But it took root, that February run, and you're wary of reaching deep enough to excise it.

You wipe your palms on houndstooth thighs, stand. Kicking your hard-shell suitcase out from under the bench, you right it, extend its handle with a flourish and an expensive click. It's echoed by your shoes as you set off, polished aniline ringing against cheap tile; out of place, a gasconade rendered in Cucinelli's finest work.

The enclosed smoking room coaxes you, mocks you as you quicken your pace in its shadow. Plumes escape through vents overhead as the yellow-fingered stare grey-eyed out of their aquarium. You rub the sleep from your eyes, tap the tip of each finger against the pad of your thumb, round the corner plumbing equanimity from the steady hum of the moving walkway.

The lounge's foyer is monolithic, a transplant set into the granite, its oak doors recoiling beneath the humming white light of the terminal. You aren't a member, but your shoes clack just so on the tile, their staccato taps suitably tempered by the Afghan laying on the lacquered hardwood beyond the thick doors. The attendant bows his head as you enter, offers you his pen as you sit at the teak writing desk and draw one of the airmail envelopes from the brass inbox. You thank him, uncap his pen, lick the nib out of habit, lay the cap on its side by a vase of white orchids.

Fluorescence in Transit - Eli Hansen

You write this letter now because one day you'll be scared of the words you put down. Not ashamed, not for anything strung between their syllables—embarrassed, sure—but fearful; terrified of how profoundly you'll have felt, how briefly. For it seems to you—or rather the you who covets the lens ground by Dr. Shah, regardless of how guarded the rest of you is during your sessions—that it is the fall itself which you inhabit; unafraid of a sudden impact, terrified of slowing, of that creeping stillness. And so you write.

You write of the places you've seen this time around: the crumbling Mudéjar church, the lilies in its open apse shielded by hardy palms; the woodworker in her courtyard, her song hovering over the defeated drone of the street; the deserted café along the tracks, its renovation in purgatory for the Roman wall found buried beneath the plaster. You seem to wander only to ensure that you might have spaces in which you may truly live when you close your eyes, or when the paper laps at your pen. Details grow crisp with distance, full.

Distance. It's a curious thing—you write—you crave the closeness it harbours, the collapsed time it fosters. It is painful, you tell her, the nib of your pen skipping as you cross your 't,' yet nurturing in its destruction. As you write, something flutters in a soot-caked corner of your choked self, you nurture it, for it belongs to her more than you now. In the way a summer storm still garners a carnal excitement as its thunder fills your lungs, the thought of all that she is sets your skin alight. Something terrible, strange and fierce, and whole. She does not consume, you assure her, trying to explain—the right words trickling through your fingers, fluid grains of sun-warmed sand—she envelops and emboldens. There is hope in this flesh, wrought across space as time fails to take root.

Even so, you end the letter, 'soon' is never 'here.' You address it without having to glance at your phone. This scares you, excites you. You palm the envelope off to the attendant before you can change your mind, before the fear can blossom, before the distance grows threadbare, frays.



Untitled - POORMARGO

Oracles

Genevieve Marrin

A one-scene play about the wisdom shared between strangers in club bathrooms.



AT RISE: The curtains open to reveal the setting: the wall inside of a club bathroom. A quiet, but thumping beat can be heard offstage, and red light flows in from stage right. Beside the wall on stage left are two bathroom stalls. Inside the bathroom are two girls, DAPHNE and MALLORY, who are both clearly intoxicated. DAPHNE has bright red lipstick and a matching purse. She is checking her reflection in the mirror, fixing her curly hair. MALLORY is wearing tomboyish clothes, and is struggling to put her long hair up into a ponytail.

MALLORY

Excuse me, hey, sorry. My name is Mallory, and apparently I'm higher than I thought. Since I'm currently unable to use my hands properly, would you mind helping me put up my hair?

DAPHNE

Omigosh, of course! I was just admiring how soft and pretty it looks, and thinking about how fun it'd be to play with it. Here, if you sit down, I'll do a braid for you! *(She sits down, and extends her hand out to Mallory, who takes it. Daphne then pulls Mallory down to sit next to her. Speaking continues as Daphne braids Mallory's hair.)* I'm Daphne.

MALLORY

Delphi?

DAPHNE

(Giggle) No, no, no, Daphne!

MALLORY

Oh, no way, I named my plant Daphne.

DAPHNE

(Squeal of joy) No way! Oh my god, what kind? A pretty kind?

MALLORY

Yeah, a super pretty kind. An anthurium. They have heart flowers, sorta. Actually, they're the colour of your lipstick. Which is also pretty, by the way.

DAPHNE

Mallory! Thank you! It's called—*(She rummages around in her purse)* imagine if it was called Anthurium, that'd be wild—*(She finds the lipstick)* here we go, it's called... Brick Red. Wow, that sucks so bad that it's hereby christened Anthurium Red. *(Pause)* Okay-okay-okay, Mallory, before we go back out, will you tell me a secret? I ask everyone I meet in a club bathroom to tell me one. The results have been pretty, uh, mixed, but I have faith in you.

MALLORY

Okay, like any secret? *(Daphne nods.)* Okay, uh, let me think. *(Pause)* Okay how's this: Recently, I've been getting stoned at night so I don't have any dreams. I—

DAPHNE

(Interrupting) Do you get nightmares? I get this recurring nightmare that always starts with me inside some sort of building, like a doctor's office, or a grocery store. Then, I'll get this horrible feeling inside of my stomach, and suddenly I know the roof is going to cave in. I always try to run out of the building but I suffocate under the roof every single time. I bet Freud would have an absolute field day with that one, huh? *(Beat)* I totally cut you off there, didn't I? I kind of never shut up, ever. I'm so sorry.

MALLORY

Oh, it's okay. No, I don't get nightmares. It's kind of the opposite? It's sort of like—I'll have a normal dream where I'm shopping for makeup or talking to a friend. Boring shit, really. But in the dream, I feel different, almost? I think—I think I'd describe it as feeling weightless. I often end up staying in bed all day trying to chase the dream, 'cause as soon as I wake up, I know I'm gonna start to feel heavy again. That's my secret, I guess. I feel really fucking heavy when I try to shop for makeup.

DAPHNE

(A little unsure) Do you, like, want some of my lipstick? Here, you said you liked it, so I insist. *(Daphne leans over to apply her lipstick on Mallory. She gently cups her hand underneath Mallory's chin, and carefully applies the makeup)* There you are! It's lovely. It also totally looks like we've kissed. *(She giggles)*

MALLORY

(Flustered) Thank you, uh, for this. *(She gets up and looks at herself in the*

Oracles - Genevieve Marrin

mirror, and smiles slightly. She then sits back down next to Daphne) It looks much better on you. Sadly, I don't think wearing makeup is gonna stop the heaviness either.

DAPHNE

Of course it won't, I just wanted to put some lipstick on you. Can I tell you what I think? I think you feel heavy because of how protected you feel while dreaming. When you shop for makeup in a dream, you can just enjoy it. You don't have to worry about paying, let alone if you're gonna get hit by a car in the parking lot. I think the reason humans go crazy when they don't dream is 'cause it's the only place you're ever truly safe. Sure, you probably feel relieved when you wake up after getting crushed by a roof. But waking up also means you've entered the world where a roof collapsing will absolutely kill you. It could happen anytime. Being alive is scary, and if we can't escape to a safe spot to process the shit that comes with it, how would we ever cope? Like, why else go to clubs, right? You can dance at home for free, and alcohol tastes gross unless you put a shitton of sugar in it. Just drink juice, it won't fuck up your liver. Hey, question. What's your favourite juice flavour?

MALLORY

Oh, I think it'd have to be apple. It doesn't have a bad aftertaste. You?

DAPHNE

If I absolutely had to choose, I think I'd go with cherry. You can drink it out of a wine glass and no one will ever be the wiser.

MALLORY

(Beat) Hey, Daphne, you owe me a secret.

DAPHNE

(Joking) Does the juice thing count? *(Mallory shakes her head, bemused)*
Aw, but that was so personal! I never tell my juice secrets on the first date!
(Beat) It was a juicy secret, Mallory!

MALLORY

Okay, okay. I mean, you don't have to tell me one, that's perfectly fi-

DAPHNE

(Interrupting) No, no, no, I want to tell you one. Are you kidding? This is what living's about! Okay, let me think. No wait, I've totally got it, but

you have to promise not to laugh. Promise? (*Mallory nods*) *Pinky promise?* (*Daphne offers her pinky out to Mallory, and the two link pinkies*) Okay. (*She takes a deep breath*) Whenever I have that dream, the one about the roof caving in, I always think it's gonna be a premonition. That a roof is destined to fall right on my head. Once, I got so scared that I stayed outside until midnight, because then the curse would be broken. Is that stupid?

MALLORY

I don't think that's stupid at all. Okay, well, it's maybe a little irrational. What scares you so bad about a roof falling on you?

DAPHNE

Oh, good question. (*Pause*) I think—I think it's like, there isn't anything impossible about it happening. Roofs collapse. Sometimes, they just weren't built properly. Or maybe, the sky will send a little too much snow that day, and it'll happen to a whole neighbourhood. It's just so scary to me that my death could be caused by a single snowflake. They're just so tiny.

MALLORY

Yeah, I get that. Things just happen in real life. It just is, and it's heavy and fucked up.

DAPHNE

I just—I wish that life was more like dreaming. I wish it wouldn't snow so much.

MALLORY

Aw, c'mere, you. (Mallory pulls Daphne in for a hug. The two sit side by side for a lingering moment, with Mallory's arm around Daphne, and Daphne's head on Mallory's shoulder) Hey, if nothing else, at least being awake means we got to pee together and share secrets. (Daphne lets out a snort, which makes both girls giggle)

DAPHNE

Thank you for actually telling me a secret. Most people get really weirded out when I ask them, even if we're never gonna see each other again.

MALLORY

Have you ever gotten any good ones before? I pinky promise I won't tell.

Oracles - Genevieve Marrin

DAPHNE

Oh, the best one was definitely the girl who told me she eats pomegranates as if they were human hearts. She said she'd dig into them with her hands, and let the juices flow down her chin. Then, she'd look in the mirror and admire how "bloody" she'd gotten. It really is too bad we won't see each other again, I think she'd have been fun to hang out with.

MALLORY

Hey, Daphne?

DAPHNE

Yeah?

MALLORY

If I grabbed some toilet paper, could I write down my number with your lipstick and give it to you?

DAPHNE

(Grinning) Could I buy you a cider? (Daphne quickly gets up and heads towards a stall, where she rips off some toilet paper. Mallory writes down her number using the lipstick, and slips it into Daphne's purse. The two exit stage right together)

Fin





Untitled (Top) - Untitled (Bottom) - Aditi Sharma

Gitchigamiing

Gem

Waves crash
Oh so gently
Her size reminds me
How little I am

Her kind embrace
Sends love through my veins
Her current, the highway
Of my distant people

Their tracks remain
She calls their name
With every breath
"Come home"

Her beauty is boundless
Vast and so intimate
She is not mine
But I am Hers
She is beauty
She is Gitchigamiing



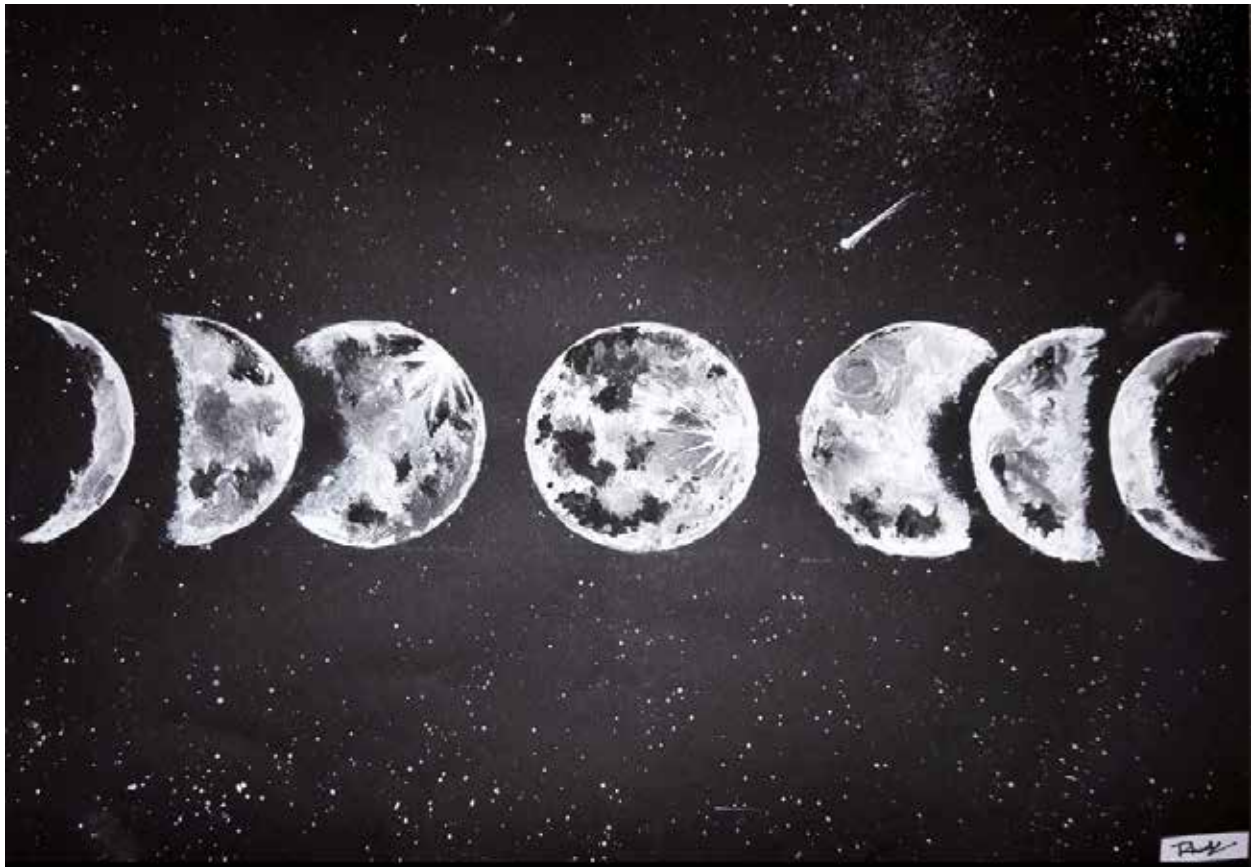
Untitled - Aditi Sharma

involuntarily flex

Hailey Imogen Brewer

On the subway there is a poster which informs me the grip of an octopus can crush spines, and the power of soft things impresses me, ferrous fluid which convulses and spikes oily black under an electromagnet, pliant and yielding stone caressing and folding over itself in geologic time, a hagfish nets water with threads of mucous, her body liquified by the touch. The bones in my hand creak under the strain, but I have never been wholly convinced of solidity.

I've often spent sleepless nights, my loom shattered and broken, pleading with the mother of honey, o please let me weave. Slender and imperious, she steps on the shuttlecock and crushes it beneath her foot, and whispers: we do not yet know what the body can do, but let's fuck around and find out.



Untitled - Anuradha Roy

two trucks, having sex

Hailey Imogen Brewer

What if our trucks fucked, Evan said. His feet were hooked over the back of the couch, head lolling off the seat cushion, beer can held perfectly upright on his exposed stomach. He grunted, clenched, levered himself up to take a sip before lowering himself back down. The rest of the boys were sprawled across the living room. Mark was lying face down on the floor with a plastic bag of ice on his back, a packet of frozen peas balanced on his cheeks. Earlier they had decided to see how many push ups he could do between, variously, being slapped on the ass and hit on the back with a folding chair. Before that they'd held a competition to see who could draw the biggest, veiniest cock. Hayden had won that one by like, a mile, and they taped the winning image to his chest. Before that they'd told stories about the girls they'd ostensibly slept with. Josh claimed to have done it at a truck stop behind a port-a-potty with a high school girl, which everyone agreed was gross in like, three different ways. Before that Mark had been at home, staring at the wall, the muffled thought of his mother in the back of his mind.

What if our trucks fucked, Evan said again, looking intensely at Mark. Beautiful, Mark grunted, voice muffled by the floor. He lifted his head and said more clearly, we'd have the most beautiful fucking truck babies. They would, it was true. Outside, both of their trucks glistened under the streetlamps, perfect and unique. Mark and Evan talked about little else. When Mark talked about installing a new engine Evan had said, actually, did you know... When Evan talked about the history of transmission manufacturing, Mark took the opportunity to correct him on a common misconception. They explained to each other things that both already knew, jockeying for agreement.

Let's do it, Evan said, and that's when the rest of the boys snapped to attention.

The question of who would bottom was addressed first by a heated argument that almost came to blows, then rock paper scissors. They drove just out of town and into some field, stamping new planted rows with tire treads. They piled dirt into a ramp, and Evan slowly drove his truck up to mount Mark's. The rest of the boys admired and shouted, encouraging dirty talk. Over the engine roar, Evan yelled something about Mark's mom. All suggestions of fucking someone's mom are essentially non-sequiturs; sometimes they seem to simply materialize from a fugue of innuendo. Mark picked up a rock and hurled it through Evan's windshield.

two trucks, having sex - Hailey Imogen Brewer

What the fuck, called Evan as Mark stalked off. He hadn't told them his mother had cancer. They didn't have that kind of friendship. He didn't know what that kind of friendship looked like. The rest of the boys watched him disappear beyond the headlights. No one made a move to follow.



Be Seeing You Triptych - Katy Catchpole

needle nosed pliers

Keara McKeown

in your hands,
in mine a crochet hook.
you coax the reluctant metal,
i loop the yielding yarn:
we craft each other.

Martin:

Keara McKeown

Did it really happen? Memory lies
dormant but hormonally potent. Doubt
creeps in my periphery. Good memories
are slippery, the bad ones calcify.

Memory of you, shined till it erodes:
re-enact the scene till the page wears thin.
Cold comfort in the light of the cathode.
Relentless days congeal and shed their skin.

Martin, it's always happening. The rot,
the growth, the kisses, the crashes, the dreams.
Detritus of my life stews in the watched pot.
I've spent too long just dining on the steam.

There's no sustenance in mouldy regret
Martin, take my hand and let's forget.



Untitled - Mika Lausanne

Immolation for a Broken God

Kether Diaz Vera

Another one comes.
Her hair falls over her face,
a tangle of curls
the color of the setting sun.
Alabaster dress
to represent purification
and forgiveness,
they say.

Yet her skin remains tainted.
The bruises don't heal.

As I flicker, waiting,
she walks next to me,
climbs the pile of wood
along with her escorts,
and turns to face them.

Just a girl this time,
about thirteen or so.
The previous one was twenty two,
and before her, thirty five,
and before her, sixteen.
And my memory blurs,
because it just goes on,
it always goes on.

She is tied to the stake now,
and they recite her sins.
As she watches,
the people sneer,
spit, curse, laugh, cry.
And my time comes then.

I lick the wood
and quickly spread around her.
With the help of their rancid whiskey,
my ethereal body gains strength.

Immolation for a Broken God - Kether Diaz Vera

In the distance,
they lift a prayer
begging for her punishment.

But the punishment doesn't come.
I don't care about their wishes.
The little witch observes
as I reach for her and whisper
'I'll take you to your sisters.'

As her body disappears under my flame,
her soul is already on her way home,
finally safe and away from them.

I look at the multitude of hollow,
miserable faces:
they celebrate what they believe
is an immolation to their broken god.
If I could, I would smile.



Untitled - Mika Lausanne

i am aware

LN Woodward

of how the longer days can bring danger / i am aware the longer i'm awake the
harder the red flags flap & i am aware the harder this pen collides with paper
means a language no eyes but my own can hear & i am aware when my voice raises
& quickens & thoughts accelerate & are tangential & this pen crashes on paper like
waves / like a car wreck / like skulls against concrete & i am aware your concern is
warranted / is warranted like the law pounding my door / like the law cuffing my
wrists to take me away / to take me to a place they say is safe & white / that is quiet /
then why

are the thoughts louder / darker / louder here & why are there more capsules than
compassion & why do you pathologize my actions / my feelings / my words /
the way this pen bends paper / bends time / bends minds like failed origami / like
paper on this pen / a paper doll above a flame / a cigarette burn & a razorblade
sawing this thigh digging a ditch that bleeds / that floods like this ink on paper / like
a quill dunked in oil / like gunshots & ghosts who scream in the dark / like the
crowd & their pleas & the walls you build & the sirens & smoke & the bloody words
on windows

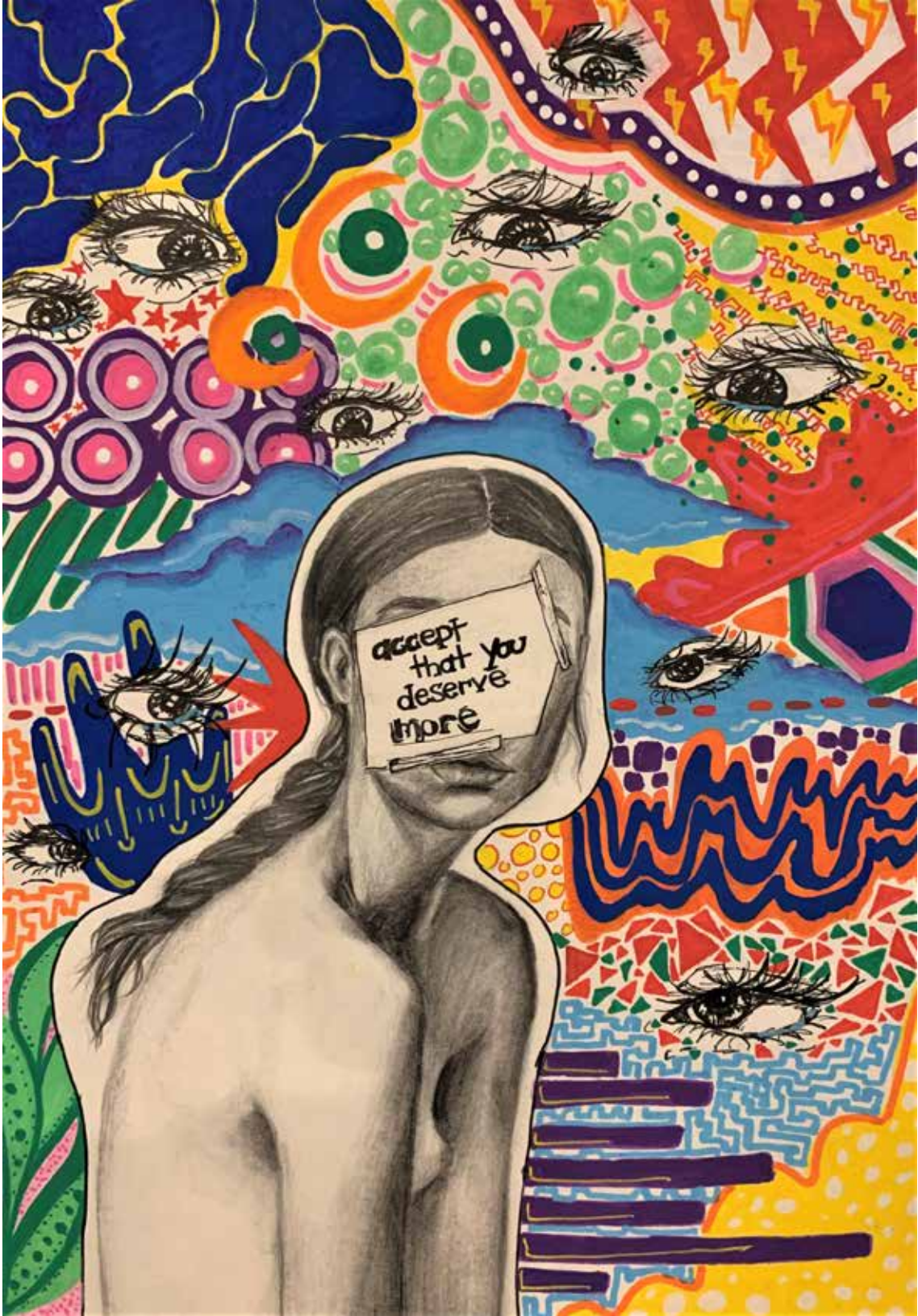
i need to see through your eyes / speak your words / work your jobs but your
world is mad & i'm caught in the net of your hospital bed where you can't see me
or hear me or know me / i'm mad / your system is flawed is flawed is not me / i'm not
/ i'm naught / i'm nacht / i'm verboten & i am aware you don't hear me / hear us /
hear us &

i'm too much / this world is too much / is never enough & can't you see you're crazy too
that your licked boots are worse for wear & if you take them off maybe you'll feel
the dirt & flames & pain on your brutal soles / your brutal souls /
you've lost touch / not me / not I / not we &
i am aware the earth is dying / is dying like i nearly have / like too many but
i'm the crazy one / i'm the crazy one / we're the crazy ones / then why
is there more blood on your hands than ours / blood on your hands / blood on your
hands / blood on your hands -

i am aware.

i am aware.

I am aware.



Untitled - H. Elwood

Hand-Me-Downs

Madison Marvin

Hand-me-down the traditions of your mother.
You let me live in your house for free,
surrounded by second-hand memories.
You forgot your gloves by the front door.

You told me you didn't believe in handouts.
When you cut vegetables you curled your fingers inwards,
careful not to nick the delicate skin on your knuckles.
You never took my hand when we crossed the street.

Calloused fingers, gnarled and browned by the sun,
knuckles white, dirt crushed under the nail beds.
I dug my fingers into your flesh and left them there;
let the half-moon marks mar the surface of your skin.

I had a fortune teller read my palm lines in the dark.
Could she tell them apart from the scars you inflicted?
I'll wash my hands of the blood that runs through my veins.
I've donated the gloves you left behind.



Product - Hazel Dreslinski

My Grandfather Teaches Me How to Kill

MoAde M. J.

"Put 'er there," he slaps the fish to the deck.

"What about the cutting board?" is the question he ignores.

We'd gone fishing on the river alone, but I discovered that we weren't. The fish in the reeds and the river were more sentient than him or me.

"Does that hurt it?" I try again. I'm eight years old, my face a mere reflection. But my grandpa did not want to take me fishing. Because I am a girl? Because I am black?

"They don't feel a thing, quit your lollygagging."

Somewhere inside his red brick mansion is a mock mounted fish. And it is: mocking. It sings Jingle Bells. Its mouth moves, gasping like it forgot you need breath to sing. Death turns to cheer and it jeers from the steel music box shoved down its throat. I avoid it, then am drawn to it, then avoid it again.

His fingers push into the real fish's mouth and rip out the metal hook. Positioning the body, he cuts. Blood and black walnuts have stained his white fingers. He wipes them on the shirt my grandma irons. It is a silver carp, but its flesh is pink and its spine is white, left intact like the pit of a mango.

I offer a humane death, "Don't you cut its head off first?" He doesn't look at me. Because I have already objected too much? Or is it that he hates what I am?

I dream I'm a fish that night because even at eight I relate more to drowning in oxygen than the man cutting. In my dream, fingers force my throat. On a steel table a man slices. He inspects my organs and inserts household objects. Whisks, Rubik's cubes, a PVC pipe. He sews me back up. Then, I am reset. No scars, no voice. I have no way to speak the pain that sears through my innards. He lets me out to swim with the mermaids. A clunk for every swish.

My Grandfather Teaches Me How to Kill - MoAde M. J.

Grandpa still has yet to wash the fingers that touch the food he will feed us. But no matter, grandma won't be eating it. Too gamey. Too wild. His wife doesn't mind this violence, she just doesn't like the taste.

But even in my dreams I am not a mermaid, just a human with gills. The metal in my stomach drags me down. I cannot swim and therefore: I cannot breathe. I begin to drown. Two kind mermaids are my salvation, one on either side. They swim up and toss me to the shore. I am no longer drowning, just writhing in a muddy riverbank. I look up grateful to the shadow that blocks the sun's glare, but it is the man. Finders keepers. He takes me back.

The fish looks around in panic, exposed to the bone.

He says, "It tastes better like this." He says, "It can't feel at all." I don't know what to believe.

I learn to trust nothing, except the pain in my gut.



Untitled - POORMARGO

ecosystem

Nicole Corcuera

running my fingers across the rivers
perhaps I could find something worth salvaging.
in the texture of the mountaintops, peace—
hard-earned, the win bitter as the high winds, but nevertheless,
peace.

the trees here have leaves so close, they're like moss
to the touch, and I see myself sinking
into something green and ardent and alive.
it's so easy like this. I swirl sunlight
to dissipate the winter clouds
with my pinky, easy as breathing.
my hand dips into the ocean, all the way to my wrist,
but the shark bites are like nuzzles,
and the cold dark's escapable.

an earthquake passes like a vibration on my palm,
a typhoon like a raindrop splashing.
from out here, it's so easy to see
how the continents fit into each other,
how everything that falls apart was once a whole thing.



Untitled - POORMARGO

Spring is Early - Nina Mae



Calling all black girls to continue shining, magic sparkle, from now into eternity. For the black girls of today and the black girls to come.



'Bantu Blue' from the Butterfly Eyes Series - Justine-Marie Williams

Ray

Ashley Smith

Papa, my mother's father, went by the name Ray. Legally, his name was Wayman—a name he despised until the day he died, though we never understood why. As I grew older and started to learn the family history, I concluded that Papa hated the name Wayman because of the church.

Papa grew up in the church's foster care system in the forties. His parents withered away in hospital beds before he could begin to babble and teethe, likely from influenza or tuberculosis. Papa's memories of the church consisted of bruises tattooing his body in a myriad of ebony and violet, inflicted in the name of God. Of bouncing from house to house where the lashing from the tongue stung just as much as the one from the backhand. Of siblings whose faces got blurrier as they were dragged off into cars that never returned. Of hunger and moulded floorboards and musty beds.

In this system, he was Wayman.

Papa was fifteen, holed up in another home where the foster parents cared more about their monthly paycheck than the boy they were paid to look after. The cracked bathroom mirror distorted Papa's face. Papa told me when he angled his head, he could hide his black eye in the fractures.

They made him stay in the attic with nothing but a mouldy blanket and a half-burned candle for light. Not even a pillow for his head. Papa had resorted to scrunching up old newspapers he'd scavenged from the garbage to provide his skull some relief from the wooden floor. The wind howled every night along with his stomach. The most he was ever given to eat was hard bread and warm water. The only time the family gave him proper food and company was when the monthly visit from the church representative came around. Then they'd dress him up and parade him around the house, stuffing him with cookies and sandwiches and luxuries he wasn't generally afforded. They'd pinch his cheeks, give him hugs, and gush over how well he was growing, how happy they were to have 'little Wayman' in their lives. But as soon as the representative was gone, Papa was locked away in the attic

until they needed him for a grueling chore. Or until the husband was drunk and looking for a punching bag.

Papa heard a snore from the foster parent's room. He looked in the mirror again; he could have sworn his eye was pulsating.

It was night. If the foster parents had been awake, they would've heard a window creak, footsteps on the roof, a thud in the bushes. A shadow slithered into the streets without a trace. It wouldn't be until Papa's daily bread was left untouched the next evening before the foster parents realized he was gone. Sure, they'd shout and curse out the 'little shit' for leaving and losing them their money, but at the end of the day the foster parents didn't give a damn about Papa. He could die for all they cared.

It's said that Papa hitchhiked to Ontario from New Brunswick. I can see him on the side of a highway, thumb jutting outwards, a cig between his lips. The cig was a gift from a former ride who'd given him enough spare change to pick up a pack. Papa had lived off such 'gifts' and spare change for three days.

Getting rides was easier than Papa had expected; a dirty and desperate kid standing on the side of the road must've inspired people's sympathy back in the day. Drivers would pick Papa up, drive him until he became a burden, and drop him off at gas stations or small-town diners. If the establishment had a bathroom, he'd take the opportunity to wash up and attempt to rid himself of the stench of old body odor. Friendlier patrons would pay for his meals or snacks, and sometimes the store owners took pity on him and gave him free water. He'd thank anyone who helped him, then make his way back to the road until he found another kind soul willing to lend him a ride.

Of course, with each new interaction he'd get the usual questions.

"Where' yeh from?"

"How old are' yeh?"

"Where yer parents at?"

Papa was always a closed book, answering the questions with

Ray - Ashley Smith

mumbled half-truths. As much as he could, Papa would avoid conversation and put up a cold front. Eventually, people would stop asking questions. I assume most people didn't want to pry and felt they were already doing the right thing by helping Papa out.

There was one driver who was going to take him to the police so they could put Papa back into the foster care system. The man, eyes narrowed and mouth curled, said that 'kids shouldn't be out on the roads.' Papa's shoulders tensed and his heart quickened. He told the man he needed to piss. When the man stopped and let Papa out of the car, Papa ran like the devil was chasing him. He hid out in a nearby forest until the man's shouts stopped and the sound of his engine running faded into the distance.

Puffing on a Chesterfield, Papa sat on a bench outside of a greasy, rundown Fish N' Chips shack, standing to hail every car that passed. After an hour of waiting, a rusty pickup truck rolled to a stop upon the sight of my Papa's thumb. The bed of the truck was filled with timber, and the man behind the wheel was burly. As Papa slid into the passenger's seat, he noticed the man's hands were covered in scars and splinters. The man revved the engine, his voice rough and low.

"Where'yeh headin' kid?"

"Dunno. Wherever yeh'll take me."

"Where'yeh from?"

"Don't matter."

"Got any parents?"

"Nope."

Papa crossed his arms, facing the window and watching the buildings rush by. The man flexed his hands and tapped a disjointed beat on the wheel, clearing his throat after a few minutes of silence.

"So yeh've got quite a shiner there," the man said.

"Suppose so."

"Did'yeh win the fight," the man asked with an uneasy chuckle.

"Wasn't a fight."

The man's tentative smile disappeared. He reached for the radio and soon a crackly rendition of Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy filled the still air. The radio shuffled through a few songs before the man spoke up again.

"I've gotta drop off some wood to a customer. Give me five, okay," the man said as he turned a corner, the truck slowing. Papa shifted when the truck parked, watching the man unload the logs. His muscles fought against the flannel he wore, and Papa raised his eyebrows. A man that strong must've done more than deliver logs. After talking to the customer, the man tipped his hat and returned to the car. Once they departed, the man sighed and looked at Papa.

"Kid, yeh'v gotta have a plan. Is there anywhere yer staying?"

"Nah," Papa mumbled. The man rubbed his face.

"If I'm gonna help yeh, yeh've gotta help me. I gotta know where to take yeh."

"... I don't have a place to stay, or a place to go, I just can't go back to where I was," Papa said, staring at his feet. The man glanced at the boy beside him, barely a man and shaking like a kicked dog.

"How old are yeh?"

"Fifteen I think," Papa said. The man smiled.

"That's a decent age. Are yeh strong?"

"I guess so."

"Ever used an axe?"

"Nah."

Ray - Ashley Smith

"Would yeh like to?"

"Huh?" Papa said, staring at the man.

"I work not too far from 'ere, for a logging company. I chop the trees; they pay me and give me lodging. I live with a few others on site. We could use a strong, young man like yeh in the field. Yeh'd have a roof over yer head, some money to get yeh on yer feet. Yeh can stay and work with us until yeh've got a plan, and we'll help yeh out however we can," the man finished. Papa looked at him, wide-eyed.

"You serious?"

"As a heart attack. What do yeh say kid?"

"... I could see myself choppin' logs," Papa said, stretching his legs out and smiling.

"Great! I'll bring yeh to the site and get yeh situated," the man said. A light rain began to pelt the windows and the man turned on the wind wipers. Papa's shoulders dropped and he closed his eyes, listening to the plinking.

"I'm Kent by the way. What's yer name kid?" The man asked. Papa stuck out his hand and gave the driver a firm handshake.

"Name's Ray."



Me Time - Mark L. Craighead

The Rock

Deanna Sceviour

This Island is comfort,
all consuming, warm as mouths
covered with saltwater sheets,
in coastal graveyards.

Soapstone beaches, oysters
and mummings wear caplin necklaces
to dance door to door. White sheets
do nothing to stop the flow of Old Sam.

Uncles, dads, brothers
with weathered leather skin,
calloused fingers, wail
"it's some shockin' good me ducky."

I am claws-foot and sweetgrass
planted at the foot of headstones,
watered with stories of the sea
drowning the dreams of baymen.



A Dark-Eyed Visitor (Top) - Starlit Waltz (Bottom) - Naomi Duvall

Self-Portrait as a Cicada Killer Wasp (*Sphecius sp.*)

Suhaa Sheikh

The SPHECID wasps, or cicada killers, are known to sting and paralyze cicadas to then drag back to their burrow in order to feed their offspring.

I just want to take care of her.

When they look at me, they're paralyzed
or maybe it's my stinger in the glut of their tagma.
The cicadas are ever-present, every thirteen years,
their bodies dense and gravid,
their mating cries in havoc, and
the tremorous struggle of their limbs as I overpower them.

I just want to take care of her.

That's why I drag them here—they're paralyzed,
eyes wide and compounded, dazed, afraid.
I've dug into the ground, pulled loose soil into my own space,
a place of safety and shelter, where she waits, where she waits.

The body of the cicada is presented to her. I will find more.

She needs to eat, needs to live, needs to breathe.
The cicadas, they say I can't love, too serial, too lethal
but I just want to take care of her.



Untitled - In the Eyes of Josephine

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