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Content Warning: War, Death, Conjuring Ritual.

Oblivion

Ngoc Bui

My grandma had a brother. She did not know when, where, or how he died. She had nine siblings, including that brother. They were all born in the middle of the War. Her family was very poor. She and her siblings had to dig up roots, cassavas, potatoes - whatever they could find from the dirt - to chew through starvation. When my grandma was 7, her mother died. My grandma never said her mother died; she said her mother got lost. Her village was bombed; she had to carry the younger siblings to flee from it. But she never found her mother after that. Her mother got lost in the bombing.

My grandma had a brother. She did not know when, where, or how he died. She said her brother had a limping leg. At 7, he teased a cow. The cow kicked his leg. He was unconscious for several days after. She said because his head hit the ground, his mind became clouded - he could not think as clearly as he had been. At 17 years old, he enlisted himself in the Northern Army because he saw his friends doing so. All the young men wanted to go to the South to fight, but they did not know with whom they were fighting. They were all going because other men were going. Her brother never came back. My grandma never said her brother died; she said he was missing.

My grandma had a brother. She did not know when, where, or how he died until she was 70. My great-grandfather, nearly 100 years old, said he wanted to find his missing son before he could never see the sky again. My grandma and her siblings were all called to his house to hear the last wish. They decided to find a *thây*, a Vietnamese medium-conjurer, someone who could both conjure and talk to a spirit. After asking around, they got to know this woman. She lived in a bamboo house on a mountain. There was no one else on that mountain except for her.

My grandma, with her father and siblings, traveled to the mountain where the woman lived. They told the woman about the missing brother and asked if she could call up his spirit. The woman took out a thin red piece of paper. She wrote the brother's name, date and year of birth on it. The woman told my grandma and her siblings to take all the fruits they bought out of the blue and green plastic bags. She arranged the fruits neatly on a white ceramic plate with a blue dragon imprinted on it. She filled three tiny glass cups with rice wine and lined them up on a wooden bar. She took out a paper

doll that looked human. It had a nose, two eyes, and a smile - all drawn on the doll's face. Before the woman started the séance, she told my grandma and her siblings to sit down on an old brown weaved mat. She explained how the ritual would be carried out. If the séance was successful, the brother's spirit would temporarily be able to get into a person's body. The spirit could only get into a body that could "contain" him.

The ritual began. The woman burned three incense sticks. The cinnamon fragrance lurked through the air as the smoke came out from the sticks' red burning tips. She held a yellow paper amulet with red squiggly Chinese words on it. She waved the amulet several times before the doll's drawn face and burnt it to ashes in a small ceramic bowl. The rice wine from the three cups was sprinkled all over the paper doll. The woman started reading, more like whispering, from a pamphlet that was full of ancient Vietnamese words. After she finished reading the pamphlet, everyone had to sit still in silence and wait until the incense sticks stopped burning. The room was swallowed by darkness. There were only three red dots of burning incense sticks in the black room. Everyone felt as if they could hear the wind blowing through the window.

Suddenly, somebody started weeping. It was a sibling's wife. The brother's spirit had temporarily taken possession of her body. He talked to other siblings through the wife's body. He asked why no one was looking for him and said where he laid down was so cold. We wanted to find you, but we did not know where, my grandma said. Where could we find you? Another sibling asked. He said his remains were in a cemetery in Quang Nam (a province that belonged to the Southern part of Vietnam during the War). He told them the line and the number of his grave, and the wrong name carved on it. The incense sticks reached their end and the ritual ended.

My grandma came home and told my parents about the séance. My mom's face was cold white, but my dad was angry about it. He denied whatever my grandma had seen. My grandma tried to convince him, telling him that she was never a superstitious person but what happened was so real that she could not help but believe it. My dad insisted that everything was a skit and that the woman must have put something in the incense sticks to delude everyone there. Yet, my grandma and her siblings still decided to travel to the South to find her brother.

After three restless nights on the train, my grandma and her siblings arrived in the province of Quang Nam. They were all overwhelmed with sadness when they reached the cemetery. It was a cemetery for unknown and unidentified fallen soldiers. It was a spacious hill with more than 500 graves

Oblivion - Ngoc Bui

- more than 500 soldiers who died in the War, soldiers whose names were never known, soldiers who were never able to come home or see their families again, soldiers who may sink into oblivion forever. They were already gone, but on that hill, they were dying the second time. My grandma and her siblings searched for the line and the number that their brother told them. They could only find it after walking for four hours in the cemetery. The name on the grave, as their brother said, was not his name. Strangely, the name on the grave matched the wrong name he told his siblings.

My grandma had a brother. At 70 years old, she came to know when, where, and how he died.



Fighting Death - poormargo

November

Christopher Carter

When the winds swept in, teeth clenched and grinding, the shutters all lay dead against the walls of the painted and patched up houses waiting for the breath of new life to swoosh in, dust them off, and make them live again.

And the children all tired from their long days at school rush off the buses with a new-found vigor, the delight and satisfaction of knowing another day is behind them and another game of hockey is to be played. Their satisfaction, impeded by the streetlights at 5:15 ushering them home, wanes and fades altogether with the glimpse of that first then second glowing ball of light. Playtime is over.

The way the old pond seemed to contract in the chill of the November air, clutching on to whatever little warmth may still brood in its unseen depths. How it seemed to be frozen from the first frost straight through to spring.

How the pier and the boardwalk and the midway and the ferris wheel all seem to board up and close down at the exact same moment signalling another breath exhaled by mother nature and another season of darkness, cold and dead, lay upon the dwelling.

Somewhere in the world it is sunny and beautiful and perfect. Somewhere in the world a boy and a girl are walking on the beach feeling the sand beneath their feet, between their toes. The girl looks to the boy and says I love you and the boy kisses her softly and whispers it back in her ear. They fall to the beach and embrace each other in the brilliant sunshine. Somewhere in the world but not here.

And you left him again in the haze and smoke of the mild gray morning, moisture so thick it hung in the air like boggy dank garlands round a tree. Left him to sit and wait for another 10 years. To see if you'd return but you won't and the train you're on isn't stopping for a very long time.

"November" is part 1 of a two-piece series. Chris Carter Nov 1991-April 2014 was a good friend to Stefanie Wood, both shared a mutual passion for writing. When Chris passed his mother gifted this piece of writing to her, and she wrote an epilogue to it called April which was the month he passed.

April

Stefanie Wood

The sun shone brighter today than it had in a while. It hasn't shone that bright since before November. The winter has been especially harsh this year, blistering the minds and moods of many. Bitter winds, gray skies and damp faces.

People grumpy, sore and tired from dark days, cold nights, stagnant domestication, blink and rub their eyes in disbelief. And the brilliant streams of golden rays soften the frozen hearts.

Cautiously stepping from the warmth of their homes, unsure of this change, untrusting of this weather, they take a chance, step into the light, chase the sunshine. Chase the hope of feeling joy again.

And in the warm gusts of April, blow a breeze that is hopeful nostalgia. Bittersweet memories of a dark season over and promises of better times ahead.

Somewhere a station filled with steam, creating rainbows in the glimmering sun, the screeching train slowed to a halt. Doors hissing as they open, a flurry of bodies boarding and disembarking, a young girl struggles under the weight of her backpack. The older man sitting beside her on the bench stands up enthusiastically, but takes no step forward.

Hesitating but noticing he has kind eyes, offers her assistance. "Hey Mister," says the girl, "The train is leaving, do you need help finding your seat?" "No, I'm waiting for someone. I am waiting for my friends." "This is the last train today," says the girl, "I don't think they're coming."

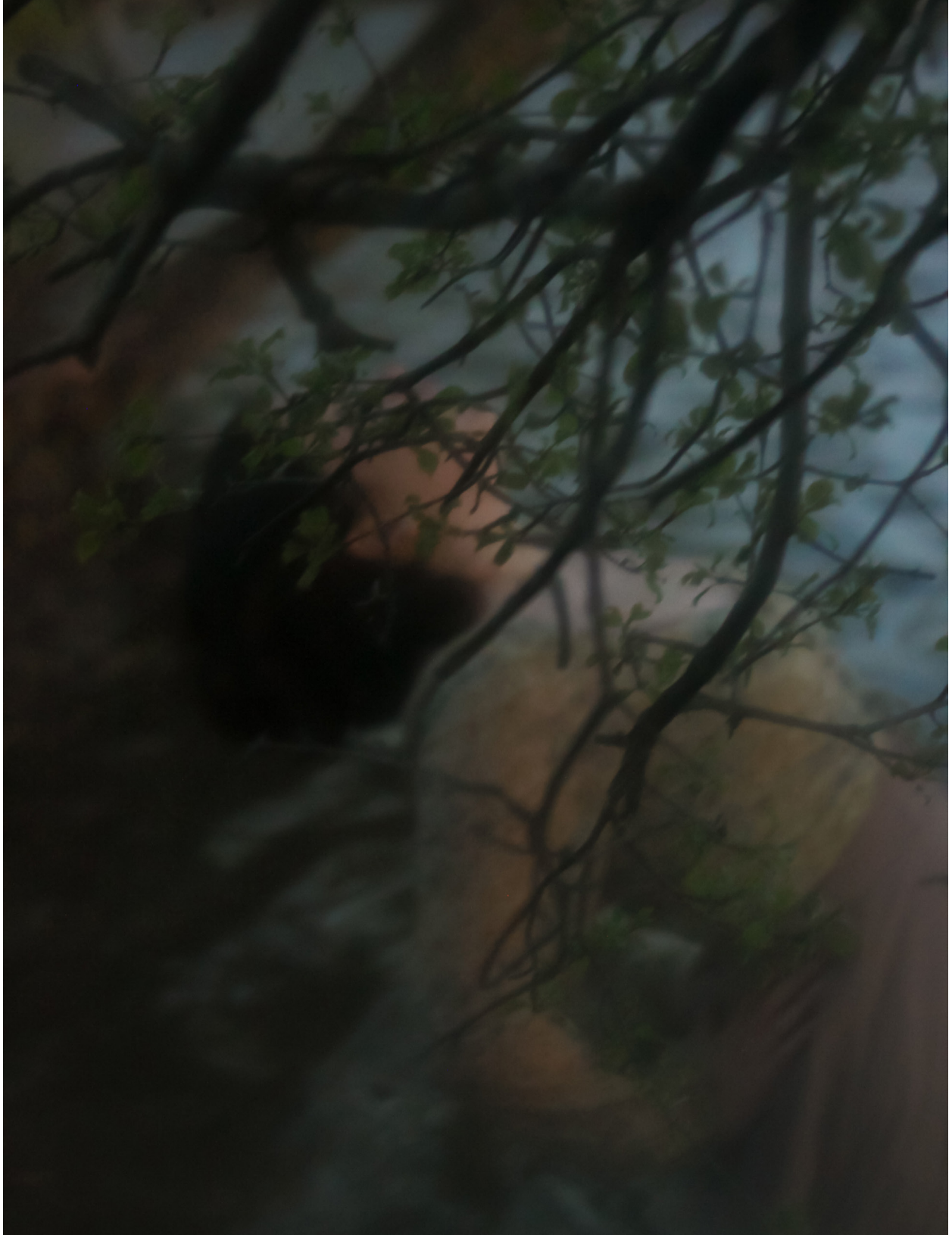
The man with the kind eyes, still looking at the train, replied, "Then I will wait for the next one. I will wait for as long as it takes so I can be the first one to welcome them home."

And somewhere in the world it is sunny and beautiful and perfect.

Somewhere it is April.

Somewhere a man waits for a train.

Stefanie Wood is a student at Trent University. She is in her third year of Indigenous Studies. Stefanie is also a Registered Massage Therapist who owns Zhawenim Wellness in downtown Peterborough.



untitled - Aditi Sharma

Violet

Madeleine Asselin

The clothes sat in a stack in the corner of our living room, where our Christmas tree usually stood in wintertime. The pile had gotten taller than me.

"Mommy, when are we getting rid of Julia's clothes?" I asked one morning as I sat on the edge of her bed while she lay with the covers up to her chin. "Isn't it almost time to put up the tree? They're going to be in the way. Ms. Colby said it's important to give to those in need during the holiday season. When am I going back to school anyhow?"

I waited for her to answer and when she didn't, I got up and went downstairs. Since Daddy was at work and Mommy was in bed, I opened the fridge to look for something to eat. I pushed one of our heavy dining room chairs in front of it to stand on and pulled the door open. After Julia's funeral, a bunch of people who I had never met came over to visit Mommy and me and brought fancy dishes with mushy-looking food in them. They all pinched my cheeks and gave me hugs and said that I was such a big girl for handling all this so well. I told them that I wasn't big, and that I couldn't even reach the kitchen counter to open the jar of cookies Mommy always left there. They just looked at me all sad.

I grabbed a glass container that had cold pasta in it and pulled a pink polka-dot fork out from the cutlery drawer. I could faintly hear Mommy crying upstairs, so I grabbed the container and padded to the living room where it was quiet to eat.

* * *

Ten days later, I opened our sliding glass door to the backyard and looked at the leaves on the ground that used to be red and orange but were now brown. I knew that meant it was almost time for my birthday. Mommy was probably too tired to make me a cake, and Daddy was gone all day, so I grabbed the flour from the cupboard and the eggs and butter from the fridge and turned on the oven.

"Happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me, happy birthday dear Violet, happy birthday to me," I sang as I mixed the ingredients together. I poured the chunky batter into a square pan and placed it gently in the oven.

I jerked back because all of a sudden my finger felt like it was on fire, but when I looked at it all I saw was a peach bubble foaming on my pinkie.

Violet - Madeleine Asselin

"Mommy, Mommy, I burned myself!" I screeched as I sprinted up the stairs.

She rolled over and told me to grab a bandage from the bathroom cupboard. I grabbed one with a My Little Pony on it and scooted onto the edge of her bed.

"Can you put it on for me?"

She silently wrapped the pink band-aid around my chubby finger. She looked down the whole time.

I curled up beside her and fell asleep.

* * *

Ten days later, Daddy noticed my finger. It had swelled so much that I had to take off the band-aid. It made a giant bubble that I really wanted to pop, but I had a feeling that the white stuff inside the bubble would get on the floor. I didn't want to make more mess in the house.

I was sitting in front of the big pile of clothes in the living room playing a game I made up. I picked out one of Julia's onesies or tiny shirts or dresses and tried hard to remember a moment that she had worn whatever I was holding. If the memory was happy, I put it in the happy pile, like Julia's yellow plaid sundress that she wore on her first birthday. If the memory was sad, I put it in the sad pile, like her purple onesie that she wore to the hospital all the time.

After a while, I started to not like the game so much, so I stopped playing. My heart was feeling heavy. Even the happy memories weren't feeling nice.

"I wish Cancer never took you away, Julia," I whispered.

Cancer was a bad guy with black eyes and long fingers that stole nice kids from happy families.

Just then, Daddy came home from work.

"Daddy!" I wrapped myself around his leg.

He looked down at me. "Violet, what happened to your finger?"

"The oven hurt it, but don't worry. Mommy gave me a band-aid. How long is it until Christmas, Daddy?"

He was quiet and carried me up to bed. I heard him go to his room to see Mommy.

"What the fuck, Jen? Have you seen Violet's fucking finger? And never mind that, the house is a mess and you've been rotting away here day and night. Don't you realize you're not the only one grieving?"

I had never heard him yell so loud. I couldn't hear Mommy's reply.

It went on for a while. Daddy got quieter but didn't sound any less angry.

"Do you know how alone I feel? You won't talk to me. You won't even let me hold you. It's like I'm sleeping next to a corpse each night."

* * *

Ten days later, the dishes that Mommy's friends had brought us were sitting empty in the sink. For a snack, I took a stick of butter out of the fridge and poured sugar on it. It tasted kind of like icing, except the texture on my tongue felt like when I used to eat sand at the beach.

I heard Daddy's car pulling into the driveway, so I scurried to the front door to meet him. He came in and rubbed my back, replacing the white bandage on my finger as he had done each night for a long time, it felt like.

"There you go baby, all clean."

He was being all nice and I knew it was because he smelled like smoke and the fancy adult drinks that he kept in the glass cupboard. But he also smelled like something else that I thought about before remembering where it came from.

"Daddy, why do you smell like the perfume stores we used to go in to look for birthday presents for Mommy?" I knew it wasn't from Mommy because she didn't wear perfume anymore.

He didn't answer and instead brought me up to bed.

* * *

Violet - Madeleine Asselin

Ten days later, I sat in front of my Disney Princess wardrobe and looked at myself in the mirror. I took off my shirt and ran my fingers down the bumps that were lined up below my chest. Ms. Colby had taught us that those were bones called ribs. I had never been able to see or feel mine before, but now I proudly counted them.

I heard a car pull in and looked out my bedroom window to see Daddy get out of a strange car. A woman in a silky dress got out of the driver's seat and gave him a hug and kissed him right on the lips. Daddy kissed her back.

He came in the house, straight up to my room.

"Hey baby, you ready for bed?"

"Daddy, who was that lady out there with the pretty dress?"

He gave me a kiss on the cheek. His breath smelled like hand sanitizer. "Come to bed Violet, I'll lie with you till you fall asleep."

I curled up against Daddy and let him rub my belly. I wondered if he was counting my ribs too.

Coca-Cola Lip Gloss

Oliver Savage

A squat bottle of Coca-Cola scented lip gloss laid flat in my hand.

I had often seen it, passing by in Michaels; it eyed me from the shelf next to the bottles of cheap nail polish and kids' face paint. I knew I wanted it but I never said anything; I didn't want anyone to think I was girly. Until one day my mom caught me staring at it after she came back from the neighbouring aisle, her basket filled with school supplies.

"Do you want it?" she said.

"No," I said.

She picked it up from the shelf with her slim, motherly fingers and slipped into her basket.

"You can thank me later," she said.

A smile painted my lips.

We sat in the car ride home, Bobcaygeon playing on the 2003 Corolla radio, windows slightly rolled down since the AC in the car was down for the summer. I could hear my mom tapping her fingers on the driver's wheel to the rhythm of the tune, humming along to the softness of the tempo, her head swaying too.

"Thank you," I said.

She smiled and kept humming; her eyes locked on the road.

The seasonal green maples whooshed by the car as we did ten over the limit, and the rest of the ride was spent in that quiet calmness. Every now and then, stopping the silence to point out funny license plates.

The screeching of the breaks in the garage was like the shriek of a hungry seagull, pecking through a sandy beach. Mom stopped the car and I jumped out, not forgetting to grab the Michaels bag before heading into the house.

I barely said hi to my dad as I ran in, took my blue Sketchers off, and headed to my room at the back of the house. I pet my green dragon stuffy which hung off the edge of my bunk bed - as I always did - and opened up the bag.

Coca-Cola Lip Gloss - Oliver Savage

Just as fast, I ripped open the little box and let the bottle of lip gloss just sit in my hand. I finally had it.

I could hear my mom come in now from past the kitchen, talking to my dad about her day, complaining about some teacher doing this and some other teacher doing that.

The scent of the gloss wasn't exactly what I'd expected. It didn't really smell like coke - not even really that close actually - but more-so smelled like those little Haribo bottle gummies that you'd get at Bulk-Barn if you were good that day at the dentist. Or it smelled like how those little hard fizzy ball candies tasted when they'd explode in your mouth on Halloween night after your parents got done checking through all the candy to make sure they were all okay.

I could feel some sort of curiosity building inside my tummy, though. Like these bubbles that could pop at the slightest touch. A want to discover something more.

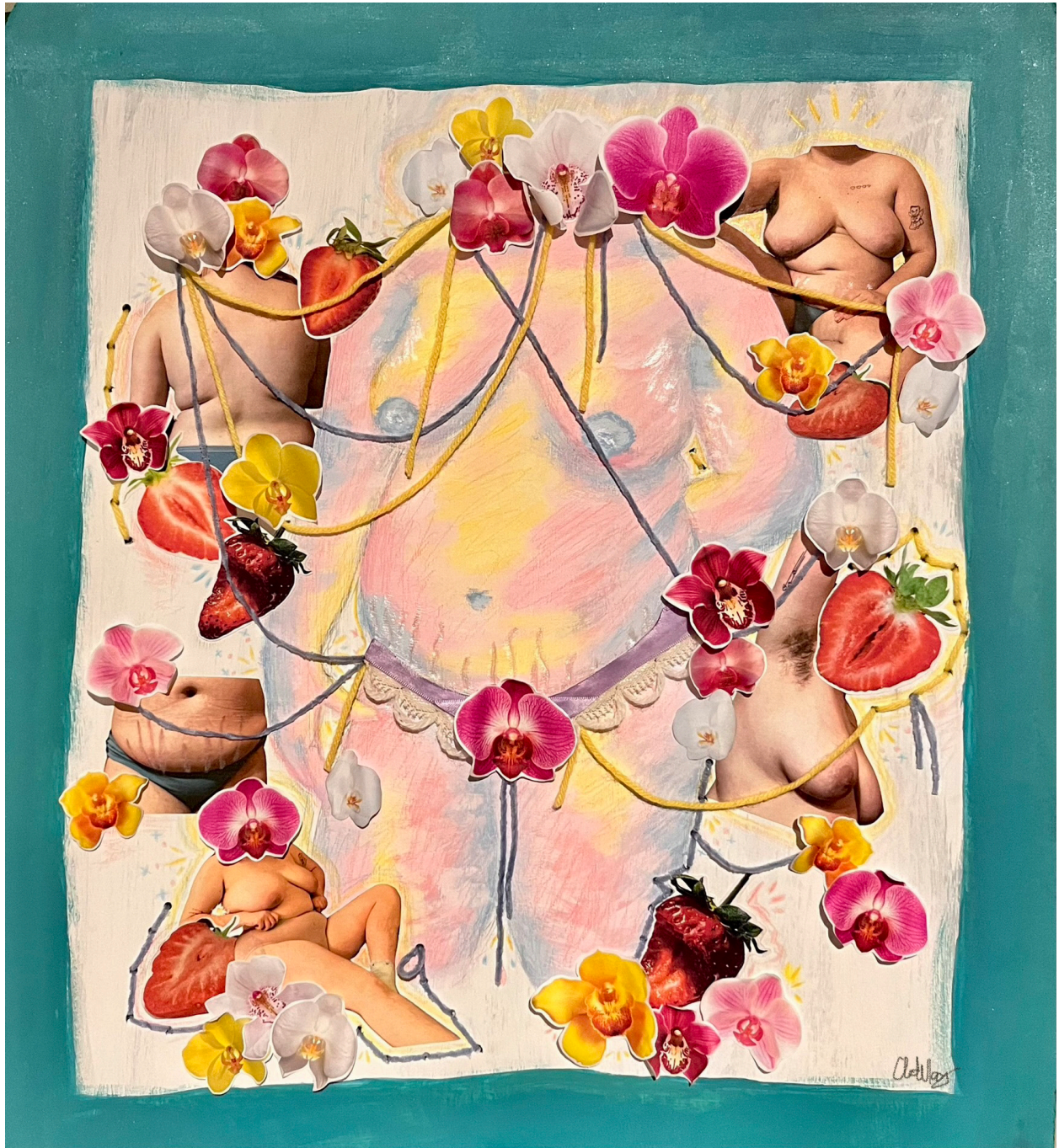
I applied the gloss to my lips and let it sit there for a second, taking in the artificial candy like smell of the product. It smelled so good. So... delicious.

And then I just couldn't stop myself.

I couldn't have cared less if curiosity killed Schrödinger or his cat. I poked my little tongue out and licked at the icing coating my lips.

It was truly amazing. For something that was only meant to stay on your mouth, it tasted really good *in* your mouth.

So, I wrapped my little fingers around the top of the bottle and took out the cap along with the stick again, the strong scent of the fake cola filling up my nose one more time. And, as if it were nothing, stuck the whole stick in my mouth. From that moment on, I was addicted.



Beautiful Body - Alida van der Vlag

Braids

Ngoc Bui

I promised him I would do his hair. I watched so many videos on YouTube teaching how to do cornrows. I went to Walmart and bought a comb, hair gel, and moisturizer. I practiced every night, in front of the mirror, braiding my straight hair.

After he had washed his hair, I told him to sit down and knelt behind him. I ruffled his hair with my fingers; it was soft like cotton candy. I rubbed my cheek against his hair like a cat. His hair was damp; it smelled like some kind of supermarket shampoo. I made a middle part, put some gel on the scalp, and used the tip of the comb to clean up some small strands of hair. Then, I did all of them again: part, gel, clean up. It took me 30 minutes to finish parting his hair into five sections. "Should I start on the side or in the middle?" I asked him. "In the middle... I think," he replied while scrolling on his phone. I started in the middle.

The YouTube woman said you must pick up three small locks of hair first. Then, braid them, she said. Braid them. As you are braiding, remember to pick up hair on the way, she added. Pick up hair on the way. The braid got bigger and bigger as it was getting closer to his neck. When I reached the end of the braid, I told him in excitement "I have done the first one." He touched it and said, "It is too tight and small." My face drooped. My 15-minute effort was totally wasted. I felt my heart sinking inside. "I will take it out and do it again."

The second time, I tried to make a bigger braid. Three big clumps of hair instead of three small locks of hair in the first step. When I was braiding halfway, I asked him to look into the mirror to check whether I was doing it right. He looked into the mirror, then touched it. "I think you are braiding under, not over," he said. "What do you mean?" I was super confused. "Your braid has to be on top of your scalp," he said.

I tried many other times. The braid was still under and not over. He said when you did cornrows, you needed to have a feeling of what you were doing. What was the feeling supposed to feel like? I thought there was only one way to do braids. I had done that kind of braiding my whole life on my hair. What was the difference between braiding under and over anyway?

I struggled with that one braid from when his hair was damp until it got super dry. My fingers started losing feeling. They became more and more clumsy. I got so frustrated that anytime I combed his hair out, he would scream "Ouchhhh! It hurts!" It was 3 a.m., and I still could not figure out how to braid over. We felt sleepy and tired. He told me to stop.

I left a messy clump on one side of his head. The side I was trying to braid stuck up while the side I did not touch was shrunken. He joked that he looked like someone who was shocked by electricity. He made fun of himself in the mirror. When he turned to me, his smile disappeared as he saw me in tears. "Maybe...I'm not...for you...because...I'm...Asian," I hiccupped while trying to talk. He hugged me and kissed my forehead: "Don't worry. It's your first time."

I snuck a peek at the bathroom mirror. Our skins melted into each other under the yellow light.

what to do when you hate the dead

Izzy Parry

Sit in pews of shadows pretending
his life was more
than spewing hate and breaking
bottles over the head of his mother

in her home, where he sleeps
in his childhood bedroom
four decades later- decaying.

Don't stare at his child-bride
when you meet her for the first time
at the foot of his grave-

she won't understand that you want
to apologize for scandals that took place
decades before you were conceived.

After the service, brothers will race
to clear his bedroom of anything
perverted and *medicinal*
in the hopes of protecting their mother
and her catholically clouded perception.



untitled - Aditi Sharma

Tanay is pronounced tan-EYE with a fast hop and stress to the second syllable.

Tanaytanay the King-Queen

Jordan Ona

With Learnèd Foes, how far we Go
Lying on Our Pillows!
For I had a Shadow
That Tracked and Followed
Me Up to the Old Dream Willow.

His name was Scolder,
Was Neck-tied, Sober,
Was Up-right, and
Being Wrinkly-faced and Older
He was than me much Smarter,
But I was Wilder and not Colder.

"Avoid this Tree," cried He to Me,
"For its Head Droops always Down,
And Touch a Branch, and by the Hand
Of Tanaytanay you'll Drown.
You'll be Shoved to Drink the River
Coursing these Muddy Banks,
Then Tanay will Split you Ever
From Head-to-Groin at Length."
"Tanaytanay?" asked I, a-wondering,
"Is that a Beast a Knight would Dare?"
"No," said He, a-thundering,
"No Gorgon would Compare.
Tanaytanay the King-Queen is
Of Long and Unkempt Hair,
And Wears a Dress made of the Mists
And Tears of an Outcast's Cares.
And the King-Queen's Belly, famous,
Digests much Rain and Flames,
Churning the Burning Jelly
Of Lusty Eyes untamed.
"Moreover," my Scolder added,
"This He-She Hybrid Waking
Will Leap from the Protean Water
And with Claw and Hip be Shaking
A Wand to Awe your Father.

And a Song to Taint your Daughter
It'll Thrill to Take Her Lips-oh,
So Do, So Do, Comrado
Do Damn this Old Dream Willow.
Condemn it, Forswear it; Avoid this Man-Maid Danger;
To Innocence run, and Accurse the Air
Of Tanaytanay the Stranger."

"Too Late!" I Cried, Inflamed. "It's You I Damn for I
Have Been here Times Before,
Have Plucked the Hot Dream-Bough to Sate
And Join Myself to More;
Yes, More, More; Unfortunate More, Our Mad-Brained More,
So Excessive that, Tricking Our own Desiring
For Sublimest Identity, More Untunes
Our King-Queen Dearest, who, Fooled, Assumes
Self-Criticizing Chains
And Proclaims the Falsest Day Doubts
The Evening's Stars to Stain."
Preaching this Cerebral Split, I Ended
And the Scolder Stiff to Air He Wended,
His ironed Thesis undefended. Then Fell my Head,
For I was Saddened
As an Exile
To Curse Another
For not Being Wild.

Ah, Tanay, Tanay!
Thyself Make Free
With True Elation,
From the Shades
Of Asphyxiation;
Review Thy Creed, and as
A Devoted Neophyte,
Recite Thy Might, Awaking across the Grass

Thy Night, Thy Night, Thy Night.

decoy.

koji

i want to return to that day with you
(ankle-cut canvas, slack black jeans,
a gait that only skater boys wear)
when a man screams obscenities
and all eyes dash for cover
and the driver makes us dance
a waltz of public transit; wavering
warm bodies, breathless choreography
pressing hot, crushed lungs, and searing
our silences, except for the steel, still
fingers barely grazing for support
the landscape of my back, moths in my legs
fluttering voices in my gut, decaying words
on my tongue, slick and stuck bile, but
it's just us—it's just us here and the flame
and the bile and the moths and the steel.
and the next station is Woodbine.
Please stand clear of the doors.

and yet i missed that 3 o' clock train
screeching futures into limbo;
echoes echo lost conversations
lying in suspension, catching dust
in its crevices, cold awaiting
phantom imprints, lingering affections
(the seat is still warm where you left it)
left on read, double-text deflecting
downtown apparitions, double-take
disappointment, disappointing stranger
as if, as if there were a difference.
but when you came to me last night,
i left kisses in your soil; earth's wet lips
whistling soft delicacies, seeped thumbs
thumbing seeds of sweat, your roots
thumping dirt, swaying to the drum
of my gasping waves, your stinging salts—
a collision to remember, a crash as i woke,
my concrete tongue chapped
for your sweetness, seeking oasis
in the heart of your steel.

i think i saw you the other day
on the Broadview stage
trying for the lead role
of imaginary lovers.
caught in the webs of Gerrard
in the corridors of glass castles
there you were, amalgamated
in golden-hour stampedes
of method actors lost
in the mundane.



untitled - Sofia Benchafi

Catchacoma

Andrew Ihamaki

I grew up summers
on Catchacoma Lake shores
running my fingers
over granite cliffs,
casting for pumpkin seeds in
the sun-drenched shallows.

Airstream WASP catchers,
and Labbatts-fueled weekenders
crammed in sandy rows;
armfuls of dried pine
needles smolder and smoke, then
spark like gasoline.

I practice my best
David Carradine Kung Fu
moves on ten thousand
mosquitoes in the
Citronella candle light,
as Tab wads ghost-gum.

The loon calls haunt, and
the nighttime air coolly
tickles our sticky
Tiger-tail cheeks, while
bedtime lingers and stars burn
like white-hot embers.

Content Warning: Implications of an Eating Disorder.

your birthday is on thanksgiving.

koji

there's a suburb just outside toronto
where balloons swell red like stomachs
stuffed with smirnoff, searing fermentation
spilling over sinks and showers
onto stained histories of skin-coloured carpets—
these places of purgatory purging your passions
like bloated fruit having lodged themselves in throats
of gagging pigs, gagging
at the edges of dinner-coated bowls,
both toilet and soup, ceramic.
fingering at each corner of an IKEA table,
you scrape for more scraps:
there goes our apples, our self-devouring
self-slicing ham—
our inflated guts like sausage links, swollen
and oozing from fresh orifices, stuffing
over arms of chairs and kitchen islands
(where keto moms drink wine)
down slim corridors and into sinkholes
slammed behind bathroom doors;
elastic flesh stretching the limits
of wet wallpaper and popcorn ceilings
and mashed potato rugs over spilled gravy,
its gelatinous secretions squeezing secrets
into the cracks of this spoiled walkway,
all-consuming filth and blubber
breaching this bubbling foam floating
atop bile-flooded basements; it is here
in the entrails of childhood, engorged
at the ends of crusted-over bathroom scales
soaked in triple-digit sums and sorrows,
it is exactly here
where you will swallow your grace
and count your calories.



Crow - Wild Rabbit Beads

This piece was inspired by the crows
that sit on my backyard fence.
Crows are seen as a symbol
of wisdom and light.

wan shi tong

Bethlehem Bekele

the first plague of Egypt
washes over me;
I am relieved.
the Owl asked for my left eye
and assured me,
one viscous bulb would be enough
to get that second glance at my saviour.

Avalanche Zone

Sarah Waldner

The low temperature broke
a ninety-eight-year record.
Ice decorates the doorframe,
threatening entry. Snow-wrapped
mountains hang over this nail-head
town like impending hammers.

Outside, the deafening white
of sun on snow blunts
the knife of last July.
Wind chill simmers
exposed ears and cheeks.
It's hard to open eyes.

In the café, music hides
behind coffee grinding,
seeks the ears of a man
and a woman. His eyes
tiptoe toward hers;
the floorboards creak.

Under the table, he twists
his fingers. She raises dark roast
to her lips. A slow swallow
hovers at the top of her spine;
there is nothing she can do
but wait for it to drop.

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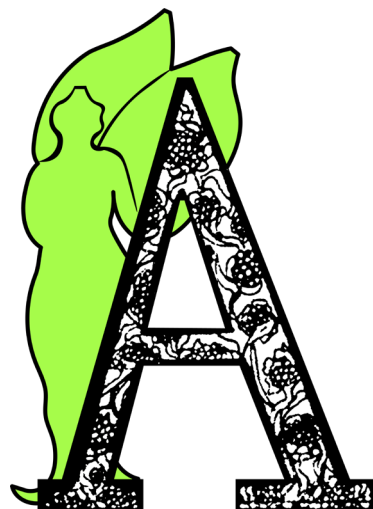
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RETURN ME TO THE SACRILEGIOUS COMMUNION OF MY

BONES GRANT ME LIFE ETERNAL

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