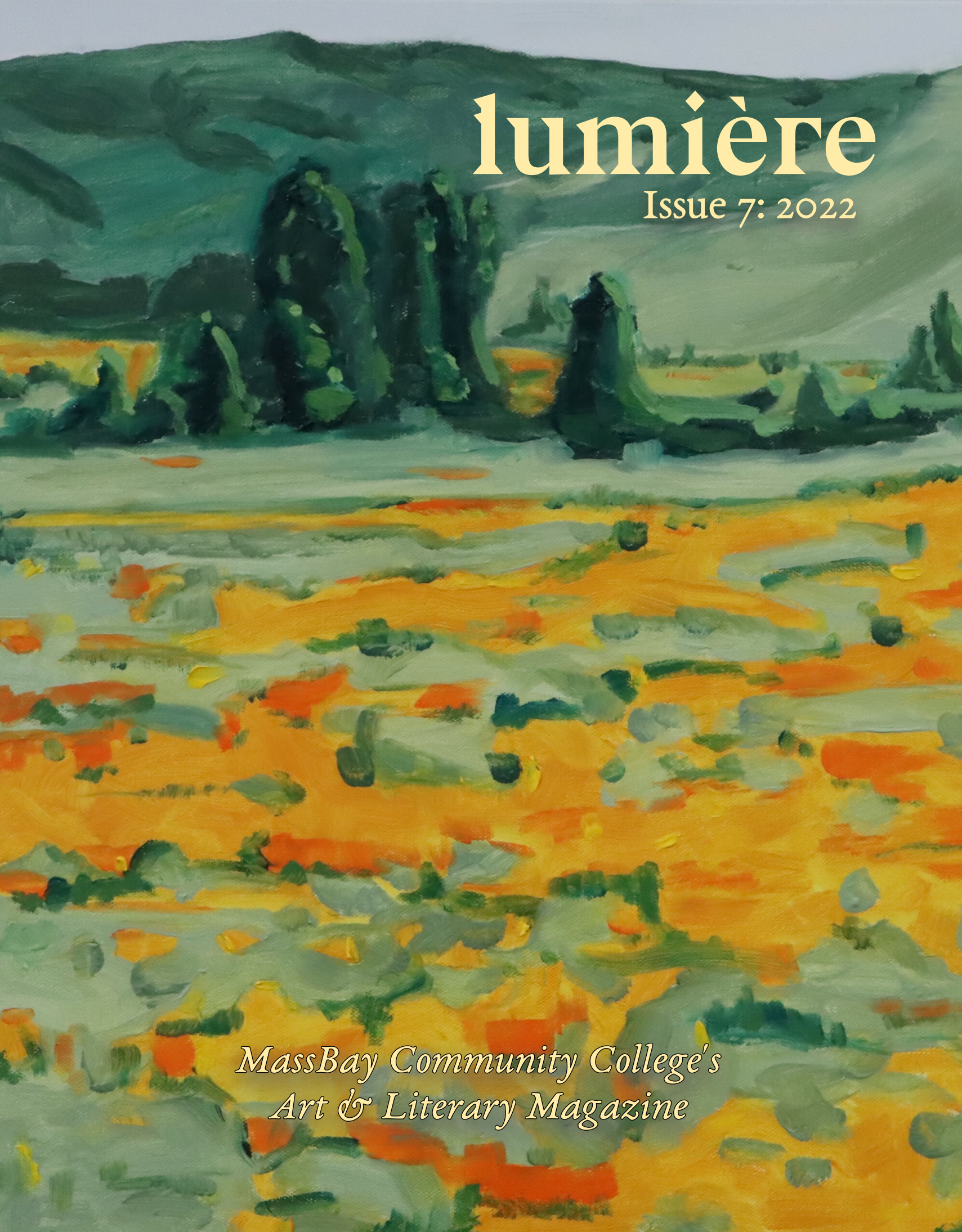


An impressionist landscape painting featuring a vibrant, textured foreground of yellow and orange fields with patches of green and blue. In the middle ground, there are dark, silhouetted trees and a body of water. The background shows rolling green hills under a pale sky. The overall style is loose and expressive, with visible brushstrokes.

lumière

Issue 7: 2022

*MassBay Community College's
Art & Literary Magazine*

lumière

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lumière strives to be an inclusive and diverse platform for creative work, highlighting MassBay students and also featuring contributions from faculty, staff, and members of the larger communities in which we serve. If you've got some wonder, tantalize our eyes and oil up our brain gears; let's showcase that unique expression, illuminating ALL the passion, ALL the authenticity, and ALL the awesome.



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by Nicole Caruso

force to be reckoned with

by Katerina Cipriano

why take it slow,
when we can get carried away instead?
blasting into the stratosphere,
soon to exceed the speed of light itself.
if the faster an object moves,
the slower time passes,
why not move and never cease,
our momentum only to exponentially increase,
for i want every second with you
to resemble stillness,
transcending time into your arms.
and once we go, i promise we won't stop
for an object in motion stays in motion
and i want to linger in motion with you.
there is no color in the space between us,
just a phenomenon so resilient,
it continues to intertwine your soul with mine.
and by my calculations,
the velocity of you and me,
cannot be deterred
by any range of extinction,
ice age or seismic activity.
when you asked "do you think about this stuff?"
i should have told you
i think about the electromagnetic current
that draws your lips to mine,
the algorithmic recipe of oxytocin
and serotonin sending my stomach into knots.
i think about ellipses versus circles,
each a loop never ending;

how intrinsically connected we are
to our world and those far beyond this one.
i think about how on an infinitesimal speck
floating amongst countless galaxies,
suspended in the sun's brilliant orbit,
on the very same planet,
we ended up existing simultaneously,
composed of the very same
subatomic puzzle pieces,
each an exquisite expression of the universe,
we so desperately try to make sense of.
and of that which will never make sense -
i think about that too.
questions called out into the universe
we don't yet have the answers to -
the very same you courageously
and relentlessly pursue.
i think about how it must infuriate you
in this moment,
when there's no equation to solve
or theorem to discover,
no universal law
with which to be measured,
no data observed,
extracted, recorded, or debated
that could best explain the answer to
a hypothesis long overlooked:
will our hearts survive
when we finally collide?

Chicken Game *by Tzastin Lagoutaris*

Dreams terrorized him of these very streets. He had hurt someone here, and it gave him a headache whenever he thought about it.

Streets' edge clotted by motorcycles, trash and mismatched sidewalks of old and less old concrete; rusted, blue-chipped rails separated a sliver of space between a person's backyard from the road; graffitied, stone-built grocers with cracked pathways where within were tiny pools of dusty, brown-yellow water; a rent-a-car built next to an isolated, unused soap factory with a red chimney, a small, modern cliffside two-story apartment, white and with brief red outlines.

The taxi-driver latched onto the piece about Enz's birth place being Ischia; you know you were born on the island of monkeys? The driver went on and on about different facts about Phlegraean Islands, how they connect in history, how through disasters and prosperous eras that it has all led to this, this interconnected beauty that remains throughout the islands. Driver was intent on describing this allure he saw in every speck of flayed and indented wall. Enz had a bit of a headache in trying to understand Driver with his thicker than normal Italian accent, certainly not from here—and he wasn't, from Naples—not too far but the change was noticeable, his wise, wrinkly, frog-like face and the alligator-head to top his on the totem—but Procida became some sort of a tourist attraction in recent years and drivers here thus charged higher rates, and more generally was one of the most gorgeous places to live in in all of the Mediterranean if not the world.

The lanes were extremely tight, with two cars on either lane being squished together to the point of almost touching—they drove with tiny cars for this purpose, and still it was close to scrapes on every ride. For this, drivers on Procida were absolute experts to navigate the anachronistic design, as they had to be, and many preferred motorcycles for their ease of mind.

The crystalline waters past the harbor coupled with the sunsets' pink and purple and tangerine skies. At night, streetlights lit up the day's rainbow colored buildings to a burning, conforming orange. Like a painting, it made up for the littered

everyday.

He had run away from here many times. First, as a child from the mountainous Cretaio, he moved with his family to the largely flat Procida at 3. They left at 5 to chase a better life in New York City. Then on a vacation here, at 15 staying for three weeks, he convinced his family to leave in two. Two years later, he decided for his senior year of high school that he wanted to return and do his last year abroad, and had to only convince his mother this time as his father left the family by then. Istituto Nautico was right by the port his uncle worked, so the commute would work perfectly. It was a Technical Institute for Transport and Logistics, concerning the operation and management of maritime vehicles and equipment, lining up for an entry-level mercantile job on the port or, like for most, further university off the small island. They arrived in the summer break between school years, hoping that in that time Enz would re-learn his native language and be able to pass the fluency exams required to enroll. Enz promised, but he slacked and hardly knew more by the end of those three months than when he arrived; hardly going out and conversing with the people, of his age or otherwise, and rarely joining his mother when she asked him out on dates at really nice spots on the coast, an array of different, appetizing seafood restaurants, served with fresh food unlike most anything you could get back home—you name it, swordfish, squid, clams, oysters, rainbow trout, immature sardines, they had it all—and nice spots, too, where you could watch the moon and sun collide in the sky's array as the clouds' wistful tendrils lop and spill sunshine's rays and evening's spray into mellifluous rapture, and one could hear the twilight waves crashing, or the glimmering, soft patter of water lapping over and tagging the tethered boats and bouldered sea walls with an ancestral logo.

Memories created in dreams would seep into his consciousness during the day, here and there, and give him complications. Sometimes he could not remember if the terrible, relationship-ruining fight actually happened, or it would be something

strange to bring up; how could he ask someone if they remember him calling them worthless and a terrible, unfeeling person down to their core, in response to them mentioning they would eventually, inevitably, have to dissever?

Enz pulled out his suitcase from the trunk, and pulled the handle out, getting it on its wheels.

Sometimes the memories are so soaked in emotion, reverberating off this loose and now lost main idea, a concussion grenade of white noise whiplashing, often, with anger or longing tied in.

In a way, Enz came here again, at 23, because his head hurt so much from being bombarded by memories, real and made-up. In a way, this reason was manufactured and not wholly truthful.

He had on a pair of brown and white beach shorts with white drawstrings, a peach-tan loose-fitting long-sleeve blouse, some black Air Force 1s, a pair of sunglasses, and a red Knicks bucket hat with a cheetah print around the inner rim.

He thought he looked great. When he said so to the taxi driver, the man briefly touched the brim of his hat and politely smiled and said all you Americans dress so good, you can instantly tell by what one wears who's from America and who's from Belarus, say. At this point, he did feel American, and New York consumed him, and with that a profit arose in the perception of him being an exotic, tempestuous American, so he refrained from correction.

That's really how he met Mia. She latched on to him, and he was more than happy to accommodate her need for a lightning rod.

He knew where to find her, too. Exactly where. He had a phone, of course, and was digitally literate. She worked at a bar and cafe across from a Marian shrine, getting the job shortly before he left again for college in the states, in up-state New York.

He needed a drink, so he thought he might visit. The building was still this soft, mellow, pastel yellow. And she was in the same tight, black, head-to-toe, uniform, which hardly made sense with this sun out but nobody ever complained besides the workers.

Bells played when he walked in, a little chime

that made him sick as soon as he cleared the door; he hadn't even visited his mother yet and here he was in a place, unwanted. She wore a nice little black hat, like a Turkish fez. She looked more like a gothic bellhop, but she was just as gorgeous as the first day he met her, at the linguistic school, where he had to learn French and German and Latin in addition to Italian, which was where he ended up after convincing his mother that seafaring was a dying industry with no jobs. It was a 13 minutes' drive opposite his Uncle's port, but it tired her to argue with him.

His ugly, mad orange eyes hung from every angle, from the sockets and circuitry, the memories, the visualization of her eyes connecting, and the dread of that connection, that acknowledgment, that all-knowing glare, which happened instantly, as soon as she saw him, and as soon as he saw her see him, and sure there was a delay, but his heart sank to his toes and stayed there, paralyzed by an imminent conversation he had so carefully been unprepared for.

"Hi," he had big moon eyes, chicken's eyes. "You work here, still."

"Yes, I work here. Still," she said. She was sitting still when he saw her for the first time again just a minute or so ago, and now that he spoke and was not some ignorable dread, she became busy and tore herself from any conversation, calling, looking in the back for orders and commands she must have missed. "Sorry, I'm really busy right now" and left for some phantom conversation that no matter how hard Enz tried to pick up on he could not tell it apart from the quiet, tinkling jingle of cannikins and tea cups, and forks digging into tortellini and gnocchi.

She did not say that they'll talk later, but he felt it was implied, so he waited at the cafe's close, watching worshipers quickly pay their respects and depart down the road.

He walked after Mia as she left from the back entrance of the store, on her way home.

"Call me Florenzo."

"Oh my god." She stopped in her tracks and stared at this fool, then headed again, at a faster pace. "What are you—no, it's okay, I forgive you."

Just leave, please.”

“Everyone calls me Florenzo nowadays, even my mother switched. I am really a changed man. I can not stress that enough. And a man, too, no longer a boy. Just an afternoon of your time, that’s all I ask.”

“I have no interest, like—”

“By the Corricella, Graziella’s, say, and go to the top of the walls and call out the rich, old monkeys in their speedos on the boats, while we have gelato and hide in the shade.”

“None. Null. Nulla. Zejo. Zilpo.”

“I’ve really had a redemption of character, Emilia. I am—I don’t even know, fully, you know? I change faster, for the better, than I can even process sometimes. You know, out of anyone, it surprises me the most. It surprises me how much I can see others’ perspectives, how much I care about the littlest things concerning others.” Her head tilted to this, beaming to a new frequency, a missile locking on a curious aircraft.

“Is this true?” She asked with a big, gracious smile. She had teeth that glinted a hazy, opal dream.

“Oh, of course it is!” He almost hopped when saying this.

“Fine, where do you want to go? Only if it’s true, what you say. About you thinking of others before yourself, about how you’ve learned sympathy, about how you’ve become a baseline human being.”

“Oh, it’s all true—I’ve done soul-searching, looked deeply into myself and asked myself questions like, ‘who do I want to be?’, ‘how do I want to be seen?’ Anyways, I say maybe the Marina Corricella. It doesn’t have to be Graziella’s, if you don’t want, but I like it a lot; or, I have heard it is swell, and it’s my favorite.”

“Of course, fine. Yes, tomorrow?”

“Yes, oh yes.” They agreed on 3:30. It would give the hairless monkeys plenty of time to wake up from their rest, finish digesting, and discharge their meals to faraway places, or whatever was required of their appellation during siesta.

At the end of a bench, overlooking the Corricella, an old man sat, his legs opposite the seat, knees snug against stone fence, eating gelato and raising some by eyedrop to his well-fed,

conjoined seagull-head on his scalp. All the while keeping strict track of the bouncing, turgid waves. He reeked of oil and salt. His white tank top grease-stained; his navy blue cotton shorts, going down mid-thigh, have holes in the buttocks, though not penetrating past his Italy-flagged underwear. He had been a specimen many spoke about but were careful to not to talk to. People wondered, did he always look like the human form of a threadbare pair of socks, even as a child? Did his mother, then, not have any shame?—How, if anything were to be answered, did he end up like this?—And the most obvious, and the most asked in whispers, and made gossip with, what freak shows their head?

A group of escorts in bowler hats observed the old man. His name they would never know to be Florence, his trade a private chef, his favorite color a downy blue like topaz because it reminded him of the silks his aunt would let him touch in her shop. He was not lonely but talkative. He conversed with his seagull-head, to himself, to the sky. Always talking.

Enz stood against a yellow mound perched over the still water. He stared at the blueness and wished something would happen, wished some fish would hop out and tail-whip his hat off. Something. It was thirty minutes past, but people could be late. People were late all the time. He checked his phone and nothing.—His head blistered and slowly felt like it was cracking.—He watched two young women and their mother get up from a table at Graziella’s, so he checked his phone. Nothing.—The blood in the veins on the side of his head, between the ears and eyes, were beginning to throb, bobbing outward and inward into this painful tightness.—A man took his clothes down from a line. Nothing.—And liquid swords stabbed at the lymph nodes on the back.—Up the street, he saw a small bus start on its way to a route. Nothing.—It felt so real: something was eating at his nerves from the inside.—

The old man switched from the water to the dispirited, young man. Just staring, for minutes, until he felt his eyes pull the young man’s eyes from his phone.

They had millions of conversations in the few

seconds their eyes met, but by the violent look of Enz, they all turned poorly. The ones that started in jokes ended in bitter, scathing truths. The ones that started promising only outlasted their stay.

The headache was one thing, Mia was another, and now this old man insisted on riling his feathers.

“What is it?” asked Enz, looking around. He looked tense, but he only asked, “Do I have something on my face?”

“No, no, you look,” he scratched his face, he sniffed his nose and held the tip, he snapped his fingers to spark the flame. “No.” The old man twisted himself back to the traditional orientation, and grabbed his chin. “No, that’s not it. Just stay here another minute and I’ll have thought of it.”

Enz kicked a bottle on the ground with great force, smashing it into the wall and hitting the legs of the bench, awakening the seagull on the old man’s head. Chirping, it would chirp in terror at the spread of gritz and crunches from the cracked bottle. It would not stop. Enz’s hat seized, and fell off. In a blaze, a chicken with a fiery red wattle exploded, though forever linked, and replaced his hat, shooting for Enz’s eyes. He covered as he could, but the chicken went for the slight holes between fingers. The old man spoke to himself, rapidly, quietly, negotiating, with a measured break between words, then a sharp plunging in of whispered attacks. Florence settled a treaty with his seagull-head, and gave a portion of the gelato

to the chicken, pushing the half-filled, half-melted styrofoam cup into its face, and soon it lost its enraged trance and ate up. It shoved its jittery head in and pecked away at the custard wall.

“That’s right! I saw the anger, the frustration! You wanted something.”

“Genius man you are. I wonder what told you I was angry!” His chicken was real docile, eating, not asking where the sweet cream came from.

“It was like you were looking for someone, or some place to be. Usually people look at the sea or the clouds or the church bells, but you were looking at restaurant tables and fishermen.” The old man saw the young man retract from their conversation, slicing off the chicken’s banquet. “Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe loneliness isn’t so universally applicable.”

“You’ve got it all wrong, boob. You don’t know the first thing about anything, especially not me.”

“A chicken-head with such anger would never be—a chicken-head with anger is an oxymoron around here. It is apparent that something severe is wrong for your hidden head to lash out like that.” The old man’s seagull chirped quietly as it snuggled in its perch to sleep again. “Something down to your heart, some sickness.”

Enz laughed. “You’ve got it all so wrong.”



6:04pm, Beirut time, Massachusetts

by Tahani El Khatib

Growing up I had always entertained the notion of time traveling; how a singular instance would collapse into infinite moments, transforming the trajectory of time and space — our fabric. Fifty years wiser, I have yet to think we co-exist within the same time continuum. I do not base this upon metaphysical mysteries I have uncovered with my genius. On the contrary, it is heart-wrenching, subjective, irrational at best. It is the 4th of August, a warm morning in Massachusetts, two years ago. It is time traveling masquerading as time zones but stripping away my power of warning my home of the destruction that would befall it exactly 7 hours ahead of where I stood; authors and physicists proven wrong in a single bellowing roar so loud the jaws of law and order unhinged.

My morning coffee, now bitter and scalding, stained everything yellow in its wake, and my world had been reduced to a single all-encompassing emotion: Nausea. The baby blue walls I had signed my lease upon catching a glimpse of were suddenly an odd shade of cold and lonely. The coffee table marked by the memories we had been collecting over the past three years was left looking marred and frail. The laundry I had put off for days, powering through responsibilities and sidetracked by worries that suddenly seemed minute, looked worn, scattered, lifeless.

I inched towards my phone, hesitant. Was it one of the lucid dreams I laugh off over coffee with friends? The truth glared through my home screen as the notifications signaled reality. Seven hours, a continent away, my home town had been ripped apart by a man-made catastrophe. “How do I tell my children that the home we left could no longer be found?” At 11:04 am, omniscience was a curse. Knowledge and ignorance were synonymous and neither were blissful as there was no domino effect at play. I could not warn the people back home let alone check up on them. With nausea raking through my body as I fell back on the stiff couch I could have sworn I picked out just a week earlier, I was on the outside

looking in. A secret world with its looking glass fractured into all of those that had come before it and no clue of what might come after.

I walked through the shards, one surfacing memory at a time as I gulped down the fear and bile that were slowly but surely rising through. My 11-year-old self staring across the 6th-grade hallway wishing I could grow up five years too fast, my pale reflection in the mirror as I stepped into a world where my womanhood and individuality were to be tried and tested only to regain it half across the world decades later, the pain of childbirth and how everyone’s smile could not come close to the dichotomy of what I felt in that OR.... All of the worlds I had taken for granted, small, simple, sweet and equally as bitter, surrounded me just as they once have. I thought of all the worlds we would never find, the hallways that were brick once again — a life cycle coming to an end unexpectedly. The worlds whose owners would not lead us through, over drinks and laughs — left untraveled; the road to El Dorado and their memories just the same.... Legends that were nowhere to be found, buried beneath the willpower of humans and their need to move on. “How do I tell my children?”

Intrusive thoughts were no strangers to me — they had taken residence in my head for years on end — but somehow I could not cater to their needs that day. And so I did what any mother does best: I created a secret world. The shattered glass built in a dome, my feelings contained-restrained. A lock and key only I had access to could gain me entry into the helplessness that had consumed me. I made their morning breakfast, and was met with questioning looks when their pancakes had tasted sweeter, and then...I broke the news.

Today, I entertain the thought of traveling across worlds, the real and the made up. I revisit those ridden with emotions and the picturesque alike. I nurture their memory and the place they have taken up in my heart. And more than anything, I take comfort in knowing that I will always know where to find them.

Monet at the Louvre

by Lori Lamothe

While others set their easels before Old Masters
and copied the fall of shadow across fruit
you moved yours to a window
to sketch riffs on clouds,
the swish of women’s skirts,
a line of carriages, restless horses.

Even at 17, you never tired of the way the light
ebbed before surging back onto the canvas
again and again—as if anyone at all
could catch the simple genius of the sun.

QUAI DU LOUVRE, 1867. CLAUDE MONET, PUBLIC DOMAIN VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Where I Am From

by Ellie Thuy

I am from a crowded queen bed,
from jasmine tea and the house of six families.

I am from a cramped hallway.
(There is a vulnerable freedom, ephemeral –
we ate mooncakes on the dust-covered rug,
knees to our chests,
grease on our fingers,
red bean stains on our lips.)

I am six years old, watching my cousins fight over food
from the plastic table with only three legs.
It is half-past dead, cracks riddling its face.

At least I am not the only one here that has been
fractured through the years.

I am from the smell of smoke, of incense, and the prayers
to a grandmother I never knew.

Can she hear me? Is she real?

(If it is not in my reality,
can I even say I am from there?)

Am I from Nha Trang and Saigon?
The country and the city,
a walking contradiction.

(I do not belong anywhere,
yet everywhere, all at once.
Scattered, an omen of the future,
a child split in pieces.)

But, I am from the ghosts of my mother's bones and
my father's sins – the cruelty of their past embedded in our veins.
The tears of our kin,
(The blood of our family stained the concrete in the center of Saigon.)

the sea salt on my uncle's face,
(He hopes the boat does not sink.
It nervously sways from side to side,
hoping the same.)

the fear crippling my aunts' souls –
cramped in between the walls of a cargo ship.
Setting sail from our war-torn land,
all the way to Japan,
with unsaid goodbyes,
the heartbreak of a father waiting at home
for his daughters.

(Only to see them again,
in a foreign land.)

I am from the bullet in my grandfather's heart, stuck,
keeping him alive, a reminder of their lives lingering
on the threshold and life and death.

I am from a dynasty doomed to perish.
The house of six families,
divided into nothing
more than faint memories,
slowly fading into obscurity.

Hand Cast *by Tzastin Lagoutaris*

*This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
I hold it towards you.*

John Keats, “This living hand,” a fragment and his last try at poetry.

He, He, crouched down by the edge of Enbohu, the murky, black lake on the country roads to Huang’s villa. His knees felt it. They were hinges and bolts. He looked around. There were stationary, rusty boats from old, and one more polished, active boat which went up and down collecting the few fish and amphibians left for research. Populations since even thirty years prior fell eight-fold.

Sticking his head inside the lake, at a clearer part, He saw a clinging world, ravaged by poison. In spots fifty years ago his legs would have been swarmed by tiny fish. They now felt cold and ghostly. Broken branches, chips of bark, chipped beer bottles, globs of black on jugs and tires swaying through, and rubber boots. Across the water’s film, sheddings off foxgloves shielded the hem of the pool and sky and blocked out the sun. It created a dim scene. Leaves in bunches draped from the ceiling and fanned out blades of darkness inside the rolling water.

A goldfish chased by a perch. The goldfish weaved around bedded branches, swam past the dangling lotus legs, and hid in the green-brown shade of a mound of dirt. Pacing, twitchingly, in micro movements, back and forth in short lines. The perch all along had found a different food, and a different one, switching with every bump from a new fish, every glimpse of a new, charged color.

Mother birds springing with stuttered hops about the branches of a purple wisteria tree, building nests out of twigs, leaves, spit, and wisps

of spider silk. The safest spots the best.

They hurried. They had whole homes to knit. From the ground to their nests, they fly back and forth. A storm approached.

He got going, or else it’d be abnormally late when he reached Huang’s house. On the highway, memories kept him glassy-eyed.

A couple months before he left for university in Glasgow, Huang, after abandoning him cold (and subsequently ignoring him) for three months, barged into He’s room and kissed him on the cheek, caging him in his arms, then reaching up and grabbing the soft bristles of his buzzed head. Showered with kisses everywhere but the mouth. Both cheeks, the forehead, cheekbones, the chin, in the patches where He’s hair stubbornly didn’t grow, on the tip of the nose and up the bridge, and a little over, to the eyelids, he tattooed a memory. His lips a brush painted up and down the frozen canvas. Flecked about without indecision. Briefly, He opened his eyes and stared at Huang’s closed eyelids, forgetting the anger, getting lost in pleasant questions. Huang kissed the edge of He’s lips.

Every limb and muscle crawled at a distance away from his person and momentarily He escaped himself.

He kissed Huang fully, seizing an immutable clarity. Huang touched He’s chest lightly forward, back onto the bed.

You bit down on buckwheat. Would you have guessed it was you cutting your teeth?

Leaning by the railing, an old man with countable strands of head hair clutched a grey cat to his chest with his right hand, a cane in the other.

He imagined the old man with a discrete sword in the cane, which he drew when immaterial beings would unendingly attempt to steal the cat. Swarms of people in vague, non-expressive uniforms, in waves of 4 or 5 at once, all hopeless to the intense, innate desire of this one old man to protect this one small cat.

We exchanged schedules and made a plan to see each other as often as possible before the summer split us.

Only at my house, only after Huang got out of chess club, never on a day a guest would be suspected to come over (I never had guests, nor did my mother, but Huang insisted), obviously never tell anyone, and never speak of this to yourself (because somniliquy revealed things one didn’t want out open), and never speak to me outside of this room, don’t look at me, avoid being in the same hall, and the rules of the arrangement quickly shifted to minutiae on how Huang never’d be suspected as cut sleeve.

We signed the contract with our fingers on each other’s palms. I was assured that the protection was necessary for us both.

A woman on the side of the highway, towering over a slant-door icebox at Sinopec 40 or 50 meters behind her, wiped with both hands the sweat off her forehead, from the middle to side like window wipers. She dumped a red drawstring trash bag down the dip over the railing. She stuck her thumbs in the caves of her eyes and nose. It began to rain warm rain. Slowly, then at once, everywhere.

Huang, of course, made these rules for a reason. Huang almost got caught the last time I stayed over, by his oblivious girlfriend. I couldn’t re-live that.

When I heard her car barrel in, when she was supposed to be at Mr. Lee’s on the night shift, when Huang hurried me in his closet as the sounds of her feet rushed up the fall of the stairs, so excited to see her sweetheart, her only, her everything, the boy I’m sure she kept herself for until that night,

the boy she shared her news with—her father, after much deliberation, let her go with him to Glasgow! Would pay for her tickets there, the tuition, the books and food, just lodging he made her promise to work for. But could he believe it? How amazing it was, how much she loved life, how much she loved her father, how much she loved you, Huang—telling all this, and more, to him, as she slowly quieted down and lost her luster, as he stole the air and tore the night away, tearing a piece of her, a piece of me, and never had I felt less, watching the shadows of the carnage through the down-turning slits of the louvered doors, huddled in the thick of his clothes and the rack hanging over.

To start, Huang put on Faye Wong on the turntable. She was my favorite, and I wanted to leave, and he knew that, he must have, for he bought it because I kept raving over her, when we used to speak freer.

If I put my ear against the wall of the back of the closet, I could hear his sister’s pencil beating furious against the page, and shifting to the short side, I could hear, of course it, but also, faintly, only with a careful ear, the pattering of muted rainfall against the two front windows.

And frankly, once the heater warming my feet met my face, and once I found my spot in the hoard of shoes he tramped through, I felt more comfortable than the stiff mattress at home.

I held her hand as she broke up with me, the day of graduation. I held her in my arms as she cried. She stammered in her tears listing all my flaws, how emotionally detached I was, how I payed her no mind, practically avoided her, oh, it is such a mess! I have never come over, never have I met your parents, does your mother and father even know? Oh, I bet they don’t! You’re ashamed of me aren’t you? You are—

Now and then I squeezed her hand a little to let her know I was there for her, as I’ve seen others do in a collage of brief memories of life, television, and cinema. In a brief glance—while she apologized to me for words she said she didn’t mean and only impulsively said out of a want to see me hurt, or draw words out of me, or anything at all—her hair covering my left eye and most of my right, I saw Huang, in the distance crossing behind

a road sign, past the groups of friends having their parents take their photos, walking his way home, watching us, watching me, before we snapped back to our wayward roles.

Like glitter in patchy grass.

The karaoke club's lights' blaring glare was too much for me. Its facade was extraordinarily extra. And on the building's hip, just inside the alleyway, the wind wafted wet garbage into the people's pores, staining them until they washed. A smell that could only be tolerated by regulars.

Huang trilled in with a couple of guys, to harmonize. But mostly scat sang to policemen and businessmen and tourists' wall-drowned warbling. The thumping of feet-drums in trains of the choicest hostesses, and the melody of the rain, left out in the cold, pouring down on the spine of the KTV.

With no umbrella, rain by the bucket poured on top of me, slashing down in diagonals, all in my eyes, from my brow dripping, to the ends of my cheeks, and like snot down my chin. I saw the color of things, but that was about it.

I made it to the bookstore, maybe in a roundabout way, but I heard good things about Hong Ying's new novel *Summer of Betrayal*. Heard rumblings it was too racy for store shelves and might get pulled soon.

A 911 Turbo and Skyline R33, tar and rose, cracked the air by He's window. Lights leaked in the blur of the quick night rain, making streaks in puddles red and green, the speed mixing the xenon and the halogen, revving a deathwish.

When they passed, He felt a sinking feeling, a light feeling. A pretty immolation. A wavering flame of the wick of a candle in the hole in his chest.

He had to pull over, not feeling well. He grabbed his umbrella and flashlight out the trunk, and admired the spontaneous puddle paintings in front of him while walking off the pounding.

He rummaged through his mother's drawers, leafing through, no colors popped, and as he looked for the one, he placed the rest gently in a couple stacks atop her bed. Not finding anything, He tried the closet. Multiple copies of the same, professional, house cleaning uniform, the grey tunic and shorter,

black poplin pants.—On her knees or in a crouch shuffling dust away from where it will end up again. Dragging dead insects, which looked freeze-dried, against the dustpan's short blue wall, and entombing them in the shade of a closed, trash can. She commemorated their lost souls with flowers in the form of fingernails, and sprinkled over loving dashes of uncoiled corgi and human hair. I saw the tired sighs rack up, a cloud ahead of her every step out the door.

With a sudden jolt, He looked underneath her bed and dragged out a large, flat, rectangular, storage box to a lamp-lit spot in the corner of the room. Outside he pulled various, unfamiliar shirts, old and untouched, and sweaters flowering camellias and azaleas, and a couple similarly powdery, hazy, pink and white dresses and hanfus and Beijing cheongsams.

In a little, broken, locked box, He found a brief stack of photographs. Each old Polaroid—time's filter making everyone photogenic, with the making of every person the only person that could have been in their spot—coming after another, monotone with sparse hand-cast color; jade for skin, orange as hair, blood lips, by something like colored pencil. Called Xuan then, she was the center of the photograph, the middle of five, though the people extended in groups far beyond the frame. Xuan had Greek fire in her eyes, a smile kindled by the glance, her dead grey teeth shined through the ash: pearls. Her joy recalling the carelessness of youth, something He felt slipping.

Another photograph, all men, presumably one his father. The person she found agreeable. Guess—the one marked with red horns, a halo hovering over his head, end of the file, paused in militaristic rigidity as the rest, unsmiling, uncolored, the tips of the corners of the photograph burnt a touch to char.

The day before, He shaved his legs, cleanly, with care, the little he had. When the day came, saying a detached goodbye to his mother, He calculated the hours. Three between school's end and when she'd return to cook dinner. An almost sickness in his center. Waves turning over and on themselves, balancing in drops on the depression of a rib, washing up against the interlining with corrosives. It's like a bank heist, some kind of little plot that could never be uncovered—

His mother's old lotus hanfu made him again for the first time. He turned and twirled the folds for the mirror. So soft, so delicate, so perfect. He didn't know the material exactly, but he knew it beautified, and nobody could ever feel rotten in this pink-white hanfu.

His mother then, in the same hanfu he wore, would have smiled now. That girl could through monsoons and napalm end the night with a smile. Had she seen him as she was then.

Looking at the stone men in his palm, striped pins lined up ready to knock down the bowling ball, He saw his mother barging in, with everyone looking over her shoulder, smothering him with their eyes, to which he would freeze and have to explain these new old layers. He'd be stared at like a bad, bad dog. Like a lepric bear. With this hideous gaze that wasn't sure whether to be angry or confused or laughing.

Flinging the skirt up, hesitating, He saw the army of stubby little soldiers in mutiny that annexed both legs.

A needle zipped his cracking points and swelling tendons back to a stitch. And he folded the skirt and jacket quickly but neatly, and placed them back where they were. His mother would be back in two hours; he didn't want to be yelled at for dirtying something special to her.

By the summer's end, the relationship had fizzled out of angry disagreement about the future. Huang saw no future; He saw a future that needed only creation. In a coded fight, He and Huang exchanged clocks, and in quick time a leashed dog came loose, barking like mad to the front door, dulling their claws on the wood, to which its owner chased it and after unsuccessfully bargaining and the dog persisting, and its owner waiting a while with their ear at the door—sounds like plates or vases smashing against the ground—contemplating calling the police, the owner at the least felt obligated to the dog to knock. To this, they froze, and let go of each other, and Huang tidied himself to answer his door.

Through a window to the backyard, He escaped, hopping a couple of low, wooden fences quiet like a cat, till he landed on a curb where he could act a pedestrian.

Just outside Huang's villa—for he made a penny or two by inheriting and taking over his father's crude oil and petrochemical corporation after his dream of acting quickly crashed—some guy came bustling down the road listening to some song with wireless earphones that had him holding down the shoulders of a dance. The guy had red heart-shaped glasses on. The sun could only try to steal his shine.

He smiled instinctively at him. But when the guy reciprocated and flashed a hand high saying hi, all old He could muster was a sour grumble. The guy didn't lose a step, and went on, now knowing that strange old man was behind him, breaking fully into relaxation and dumb fun. Old He's muscles screamed to spin and apologize, it'd only take a second, and explain he loved his glasses, loved his attitude, but he thought it too far gone.

“I've always had this understanding, and I think everyone does to a certain extent, growing up, getting older, losing charms—and everyone tells you, enjoy it while you can, enjoy it because when it's gone it's gone—and they'll tell you about the joint pains and the checkups and the metal in their knees and the numbing to their own odors and the pillboxes and their bones cracking and their hair falling out, but they don't tell you about the nights when you sit there in your bed (trying to sleep—anything but thinking of this—looking out the window, watching the windmill palms rattle in the wind) thinking about what it would feel like, the attempts at playing it out—oh, oh, oh, and just the thought that it's closer to being over than beginning. Just the thought! The calculation that, based on averages, you shouldn't have been able to even think these thoughts 500 days ago. That it'll be any hour now—I've gotten too lucky as is. And in sleep, you could simply drift away. And you can't cry injustice because everyone knows it's rigged, and it's like being a kid again, being asked a question with only one answer, but your mother is a ghost, and there's no pout that could get you out of this.

And it's only now that I've realized I will die. But something even worse happened, something worse than death.

For a moment there, I found myself. I dressed and danced and talked the way my body urged. I

loved you and it felt at times like you loved me. But you straightened us out. You really did. I didn't feel much about it at the time, but it slowly ate more and more at me. When you left me and returned and left again and again, whisked me to Paris, to Beynac-et-Cazenac, to Morocco, I kept the hope in me that with time you'd shed expectations and opinions, that we wouldn't need to do everything in the dark.

Alas, I learned from you a valuable lesson: that I was a fool. And as the greatest fool in a world of them, I blamed you all these years in my head for far too much," I wiped some sleepy gunk from my eyes, still in a trance. "At one point in my mid-twenties, I saved up enough money for a ticket to the United States and one month's rent, and had been studying vocabulary and parts of speech and phonology and all that, pretty good at it all, and yet my skin crawled at it being the same, and that it'd all be for nothing, and perhaps it'd be even worse, more isolating, and so I used that money to buy a small boat—and I learned how to fish, and it kept me happy for a day a week, and somewhere along the way, through inhalation, through daydreaming hallucination, through the rigorous routine of fishing—I don't know when exactly—but I differentiated fish from dragons, and it put me at ease.

And somewhere along the way, co-workers would ask me to fish with them, or I'd ask them, or

a whole lot of us would go with one boat, and we'd share our lives and stupid jokes and terrible spur of the moment opinions, it came clearer to me that it was a fading scab to briefly mention but forget its origin.

This is to say, I wish you well. But even with your riches, I gained pity on you the more faded and dull we got."

I looked away from the dog I'd been staring through, which had looked away a long time ago, and went nearby to sniff cut grass, and apologized with a rub on its head for my musing with blank, fixed eyes, and all that impossible rambling for a dog, or otherwise. The dog was a guard dog, always coming down the lane barking when someone idled by the gate or simply left a small parcel—the dog was Huang's daughter's. She inherited his estate and all his possessions when he passed a decade ago.

Nuan called me and told me she would probably be late tomorrow, to wait for her a little extra while longer the next morning as she ran out of bait.

On the way home, I put on Faye's song Fúzào, and reclaimed it, tied it to a wild dancer with their clothes flailing in the spring wind.

I was still old, and I was gonna die, but I had good music.



by Anonymous



by Hector Daniel Lemus-Mesa

In the spill of the streetlight

by David Medina

I saw you in the spill of the streetlight yesterday.

I saw your face, then I saw you. I remembered that face well, the face of my sleepless nights.

You were walking slowly, approaching where I was on the overlook. I was staring deeply into that blueblack water. I'm not sure what it was that made me lift my head, or what it was that forced me to break my mindless musing, but when I lifted my eyes from the dark I saw you there, in the spill of the streetlight.

You weren't alone. You were on the arms of someone who I thought looked a little like me. The

two of you were shifting your gazes from the streetlights to each other's faces, laughing all the while. I saw this scene playing out before me and then did what you told me not to do on dark nights like these. I started to think of the past.

I thought about our time together in Bogota when everything was bright and beautiful. I remembered our days walking through the Candelaria district, how we drank chicha and aguardiente in the middle of the day, chasing down bitter aftertastes with sweet golden beers. In those days were just two kids chasing their dreams at the Universidad de los Andes. Me, a Literature major dreaming of becoming the next brilliant author, the next

Hemmingway, and you, an aspiring marine biologist who had never seen the blue ocean.

In the spill of that pale street light last night, on that frozen winter night, I saw you kiss the man who I thought looked a little like me. You had to use on your tiptoes to reach those lips that seemed to tower above your own. You stumbled a bit, but succeeded in planting your kiss. Your blooming red lips were all I could see in the spill of that dull yellow light. I stood in the darkness watching in silence.

Then you walked right in front of me, and I thought about our trip to Caracas. It was there that you first touched the ocean, your bright eyes and

bursting heart filled with that dazzling blue. You ran right into its depths and I tried stopped you, reminding you that you couldn't swim. But you jumped in anyway and took to the water like a newborn fish. You screamed in delight and I smiled. Under that bright blazing sun on that crowded beach, you were all I could see.

I saw you under the spill of the streetlight yesterday. In the darkness of the night and in the darkness of my mind, I looked down at the ring you gave me and cried. You passed away so long ago now, but I still see you, even in blueblack water or dull yellow lights. In the spill of the streetlight. I see you. ☼

photo by Jacob Williams



Tunnel Vision

by *Annabel Smith*

It's 2009. You're sitting on the floor of your New Bedford apartment. You don't have any furniture left, anyway. Always pop the air bubbles, always pull back, check for blood. The chill comes like normal, but this time it turns hot without warning, like Uncle Jeff when he's had one too many. You're sure this is it this time. You wait for the light like you've seen in movies. You wait for your salvation. You wait for your life to flash before you, but your tunnel vision only gets worse.

It's 2008. You just woke up. The ache starts deep in your bones and works its way up to the surface. So does the vomit. Your morning routine starts off with puking into a Mcdonald's bag at the end of some chick's bed. You can't remember her name.

You catch your reflection in the black screen of her cheap TV. It reminds you of who you were supposed to be. The daughter Father would've wanted. You caress your bony, pale face. You pluck at your split ends. You pawn your Mother's pearls.

It's 2007. You're released. The doctor tells you you've shown improvements, but you know it's only because you've become a professional liar. You're not going to miss having a bedtime. Or having to share your feelings with the group every Thursday at noon. Or those nasty fruit cups. Or the childish crafts. Father says it's all behind you now, you can start over. But you can't erase the memories of the men in white coats with their cold hands and long syringes.

You meet a boy behind a dumpster. Duncan Shaw. You ask what he's doing, he says he'll show you. He squeezes you with a makeshift t-shirt tourniquet, he tells you to wait for it. There's a pinch. You're released.

It's 2006. You've done this before, but only in small doses. This time you press down with all your power. Beads of red come the surface. You drag downwards. Father finds you, wet and

crimson. He sends you away, again. The food sucks. The people are worse. They give you a Dixie cup full of pills every morning and check your tongue to make sure you swallow. You eat melon chunks and listen to Connie mutter to herself while you fill in the phrase "good things come to those who wait" before the contestant on Wheel of Fortune. How long are you supposed to wait?

It's 2005. Darryl Bishop gives you a ride home after the senior kickback. He pulls into a deserted Marylou's parking lot. He ignores you when you say no. You pretend you're sipping on an ice-cold Minty Lou on the beach and savoring every last sip. When he's done, he tosses you an old t-shirt off the floor to clean yourself up. No amount of wiping makes you feel any cleaner. Ashley McArthur calls you a slut in the hallway before trigonometry.

Father smokes a cigar and looks up from his copy of Small Business Man. "We're not going to tell anyone about this. An accusation like this could ruin a young man's life. If you would only listen to me, things like this wouldn't happen."

It's 2004. Father sends you away for the first time. The nice men at camp are supposed to help fix you. The priest tells you you're stubborn and that is a sin. He tells you there's a poison inside of you that needs to be extracted. This is the will of God. You resent Him.

You can't help but envy the kids who are pulled away on stretchers. You never see any of them come back. How come they get to leave?

It's 2003. Father sits you down on the brown leather couch in his study. You're broken, you're a sinner, you can be different. You can still be saved. "There's hope. Kyle David's family sent him away to the Berkshires and he was cured when he came back." He must not know that Kyle David got sent away again. This time for possession. You go back to your room with pink walls to tear up the pages of your grandmother's bible.

It's 2002. You stare at Lindsay Carlson all class. You think about touching her skin, running your fingers through her hair. When she smiles

back, you know she's just being nice. You know what she would tell the other kids if she knew.

It's 2001. You spend each morning dividing your pills into baggies for your prospective clients. Five bucks a pop, ten if they're desperate. Kids at school act like your friends now. You know they'd drop you if your supply ran dry.

It's 2000. You learn how to function without sleep. Father buys you a pink tulle dress for your first school dance. "I wish your mother could see you today. A beautiful young lady," he says, his eyes pooling up. He drapes Mom's pearls around your neck and places his large hand on top of your head.

You sit in a stall and wait for it to be over. You squeeze the budding clumps fat on your chest. You wonder how much it would hurt if you cut through your skin with a scissor. My loneliness is killing me...you hear your classmates chant lyrics from the cafeteria turned dance hall...*I must confess, I still believe....*

Jill Cooper tells everyone there's a boy in a dress in the girls' bathroom. Mr. Hanson comes to escort you out. "I know it's tough, but I promise it won't hurt to socialize a bit." You hear them laughing.

It's 1999. The dentist warns you to stop grinding. The sight of food makes you nauseous. James McNeil yells out that you pissed blood in American History class. Everyone giggles. You run to the nurse with wet panties and a wet face. Father tells you not to fear; you can have babies now. You're not so sure about that.

It's 1998. The doctor starts you on Ritalin. He swears it will be good for you. He swears if you don't take it, you will end up on drugs or in jail. Father gives it to you every morning before school. They say it will fix your problem with focusing. You never knew you had a problem.

It's 1997. You join soccer. You get kicked off the team after you puncture Ricky Nelson's ball sack with your cleats. The coach scowls at you like you're nothing but a monster. Principal Murphy tells Father you're violent. Nobody ever asks

about your side of the incident.

It's 1996. "You're turning into a beautiful young lady, Katherine. You need to start acting that way. How many times do you think I'm going to have this talk with you?" He slams his Maker's Mark down on the coffee table. Little droplets spray across your face. You can taste the toxic flavor.

It's 1995. You learn your multiplication tables. Mrs. Bridge has a meeting with Father to tell him that you refuse to pay attention. "She needs to be told five times to open up her book every morning. She cannot focus. The same thing happened to my son and we were able to manage it with medication. If she does not get this under control, it could affect her entire life." You wonder why she can't just tell you five times.

You go to the Principal for shoving Siobhan Smith into a chalkboard. He never asks you why you did it. You never get the chance to tell him she called your dead Mom stupid. Father takes his belt off when you walk inside that night. You swiftly understand why.

It's 1994. They call you four eyes, tard, sped, loser up until the day you bite Eric O'Neill so hard you can play with his skin between your teeth. You spit blood onto the puzzle rug of your first-grade classroom. Nobody calls you anything for the rest of the year.

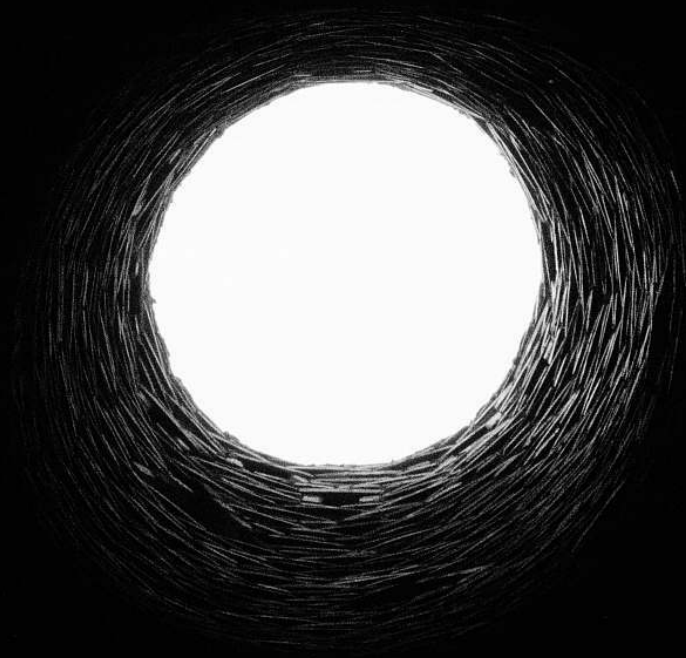
Father spansks you when you get off the bus. Everything is fine once he's had a drink. He puts you on his lap. "Fights are for boys. Little girls don't get in fights. Little girls don't get in fights..." he repeats himself over and over until his eyes seal shut.

It's 1993. You're crammed onto a strange yellow box every morning and shipped off. The building is littered with bright lights and checkerboard tiles. You and the other kids sit around all afternoon playing with glue and squiggly scissors. You learn about the Great Molasses Flood of 1919. The nurse tells Father it's time for glasses. He picks out pink sparkly frames from LensCrafters for you.

It's 1992. You play in the woods with Joey Martin from next door. You make mud pies and he shows you a game on his TV called Tetris. He says you're his best friend. Father makes you stop when you come home with your nice floral dress covered in dirt. Little girls aren't supposed to play with little boys.

It's 1991. You learn about the Pilgrims in pre-school. Father hosts Thanksgiving dinner for the last time. Cousin Nina kicks you out of the playroom because you tear the head off her new Beach Barbie. Bobby lets you play with his dolls, though. As long as you promise to leave their heads intact and call them action figures.

"Katherine, those toys are NOT yours. Those must be cousin Bobby's. G.I. Joe isn't for girls, for Christ's sake." Instead, he lets you play with Mom's pearls in his dark study while you can hear the rest of the cousins laugh.



It's 1990. Nanny Marsha sings to you in the bathtub. She tells you stories of gorgeous girls who fall in love with princes and live without a care. She promises that one day you'll have your own husband to take care of you. She paints your nails with sparkly varnish. You like to bite the polish off once it's dry.

It's 1989. Mom's gone now. If only you had stopped with your goddamn colic.

It's 1988. Fluorescent light pours into the tunnel, permeating your undeveloped retinas. Smeared faces coo in awe of the new life presented before them. Frigid air fills your lungs for the first time. A man's voice echoes, "that is going to be one lucky baby," as you're passed from distorted face to distorted face quicker than gonorrhea in a brothel.

Purpose *by Angel Marie Russell*

You're not aging. You are stepping
Into your purpose.
You are graduating along a continuous line
To yourself.

You are not waiting.
You are becoming.
You are effervescent presence
Made of sea, land, and sky.

You are the breath
Of ancestors long dead.
You are the dream of
Hundreds of lives lived.

You are endless, mysterious,
Evolving, spiraled as the cosmos swirl.
And my breath arrests at the majesty
Of your creation.

Your pulse, a tide,
Enraptured within flesh.
Crescendo and plummet.
Pause and sway. A tumult.

You are the life lived and have yet
To become.
The birth of the universe
Sparks to life in every thought.

And you, as the suns and the carbon
They emit to life, never age.
Endless. You transform life from ash.
You sleep in realms lost to memory.

You awaken anew once again.
And darkness can never truly take you.
For even in death, you will verily burst aflame,
New once again.

You are timeless.
You are sacred, still, and sentient
Energy through matter,
Impervious to death.

So, do not live in fear of this life,
But rise, full, large, and true.
Become. Do not run from who you are.
Your life has a purpose.
No other can fill it.



"Before"
by Sophie Shimazu



"After"
by Sophie
Shimazu

HOTEL ZELL: A COVID-Era Legend

by Miriam Rosalyn Diamond

CHARACTER: Roupun, a woman in her early 40s

SETTING: A penthouse apartment in an old Milwaukee hotel

SEASON: July, 2020

(As the scene opens, Roupun is seated in front of a mirror at her vanity, brushing her waist-long hair. It is at least two colors, grey a few inches at the top. On the vanity there are jagged piles of mail and a cell phone with Bluetooth earbuds. A small waste basket is on the floor by the vanity. The room has several large windows and a wall with old photographs of people. A broom and dustpan are leaning against one wall.)

ROUPUN

76, 77, 78...

(Her phone rings. She puts her Bluetooth earbud in to answer it. She FaceTimes with the caller.)

Hi there! Ooh—you went to the hairdresser! Weren't you afraid?...

Hell, I'm not going near one of those places—not until this virus is long gone from the planet!
(She continues brushing.)

Umm hmm, I like those colors. Remind me of a Monet painting.

When this is all over, I'd like to go to France....

Hold on.

(She presses a button on her phone.)

Hello?... This is she....

Yeah. I was gonna pay. Every room was booked! What do you expect me to do?...

I know, I know....

(She puts down the brush and starts braiding her hair.)

Look, I'll get you the money....

Jeez, if you turn off the lights, I get the fire department up my ass.

Don't you guys make exceptions for emergencies?...

What do you mean, this isn't an emergency? I had to shut down since March!...

(She finishes braiding and pins the braids up to her head.)

Can you give me a few weeks? I'm sure I can figure out something.

Tuesday? Next Tuesday? THIS Tuesday?!...

No, no, don't do that. I'll get you the money by Tuesday. Yes. Thank you.

(She sighs, pauses, then pushes the button on her phone.)

I'm back. Sorry 'bout that. Another charming bill collector. I wish I could block 'em all!...

(She gets up, takes the broom and starts sweeping.)

How is *anyone* making money these days?... Ha-ha—become an Amazon delivery person.

That's a good one!... OK. Talk to ya later.

(She presses a button to end the call, thinks for a moment, then dials a number.)

Hello, is Ray there? Tell him it's Roupun. Roupun Zell. Thank you.

(Pause, she resumes sweeping.)

Hi, Ray! How are ya doin'?... How's your mom?... *Still* on the ventilator? Can ya visit her?...
Ugh, that's tough.... I'm prayin' for her.... Yup.... Today?
(She goes to a window and looks down.)

Lake's a little hazy. The museum's wings are...up.

Ha ha—the benefits of penthouse living.

(She resumes sweeping.)

Hey listen, I need another loan.... Yeah, I still owe from the renovations. Heck, you know we needed a face-lift before the convention; light fixtures, carpeting, exit signs, new mattresses....
Right, the convention that never was. Look, thanks for the grace period....

Now I got bills ta pay. Utilities, insurance....

Come on, Ray. Don't I have more equity here?

The last thing I need is *another* lien on this place.

There must be something we can work out....

I can't go there. Quarantine. Sorry!...

Thanks for offering, can't meet ya here, either....

Of course, I believe you! It's my risk level....

Asthma plus diabetes.... Hit the jackpot....

What's that?...

Huh! That's a 4-letter word. Ray, you know this place has been in my family's hands through wars, riots, recessions. Milwaukee needs us as much as we need them. Your daughter had her wedding reception here!

I'm not gonna let some "pandemic" snatch it away. This is just a short-term challenge. It will be over in what, one, two, three months tops. Hey, next time you walk by, take a look at the entrance. See the owl by the door? We got a top rating on TripAdvisor for "best boutique hotel"!...

This ship ain't going down, with or without me.

(The doorbell rings.)

Look, I gotta go.... Lemme know if you come up with anything.... I know you are, thanks.

(She goes to the intercom and speaks professionally.)

We're sorry. Hotel Zell is currently closed due to the virus. We hope to open soon.

You can get updates on Twitter and our Facebook page.

(Her phone buzzes. She silently reads a text. Speaks to the phone.)

Ugh! Leave me alone!

(She starts to text, talking aloud as she does.)

"The hotel is NOT for sale!"

(The phone buzzes again. She looks at it and types her reply.)

"No, you can't come up."

(It buzzes again. She types her answer.)

"We ARE going to reopen!"

(It buzzes once more, she texts back.)

"I don't care how 'sweet' your deal is."

(She throws down the phone, and speaks to it.)

Go away!

(She sighs, then takes a breath. She sits at her vanity and shuffles through mail, tossing unopened pieces into the trashcan.)

Junk, junk, junk.

(She hesitates, draws one letter back out. She opens and silently reads it. She slowly looks up, gets up and walks to an old photograph hanging on the wall. She speaks in a subdued, defeated manner.)

Well, Pop, now what?

I applied for a grant.

I know exactly what you'd say: "don't rely on others."

But the bills won't stop comin'.

Instead of a grant, I get this.

(She waves the piece of mail in her hand at the photo.)

Collection notice, threatenin' foreclosure.

Where do I get money?

You'd know what to do. Talk to a selectman, offer storage to the university.

I tried all that. Half the time, I can't even reach someone.

I'm getting' fed up. People threaten' to kick me out. They don't even know us—big faraway companies that swallowed all the small ones. Nothin's local, like *your* day, *You* went to school with an owner, sat in church with the bookkeeper's family. Now s'all corporate.

What else could I even do for a living? Clean rooms at the Holiday Inn? Hand out brochures at the Convention Center? Whenever *they'll* reopen....

(Pause.)

I remember walkin' down Jefferson Street together one winter day. I was 10, maybe 12. The wind was blowin' off the lake. We went by the Fairlawn Hotel. It was boarded up and had a huge "SOLD" sign. A bulldozer was in front, just waitin'. You stopped for a minute, turned to me and said, "Roupie, that's never gonna happen to the Zell. We will be open until the second coming."

Well, I don't see our Lord, and money isn't fallin' from the sky.

(She starts to get teary.)

How much more can I take?

I wish you were here. You'd say, "Roupie, we're gonna make it through this." Just like you did when they found your cancer. Only one of us made it through, and one left.

If you can send any help from where you are, I sure could use it now.

(Sighs. Pause. She is resigned.)

OK. I know what I need to do.

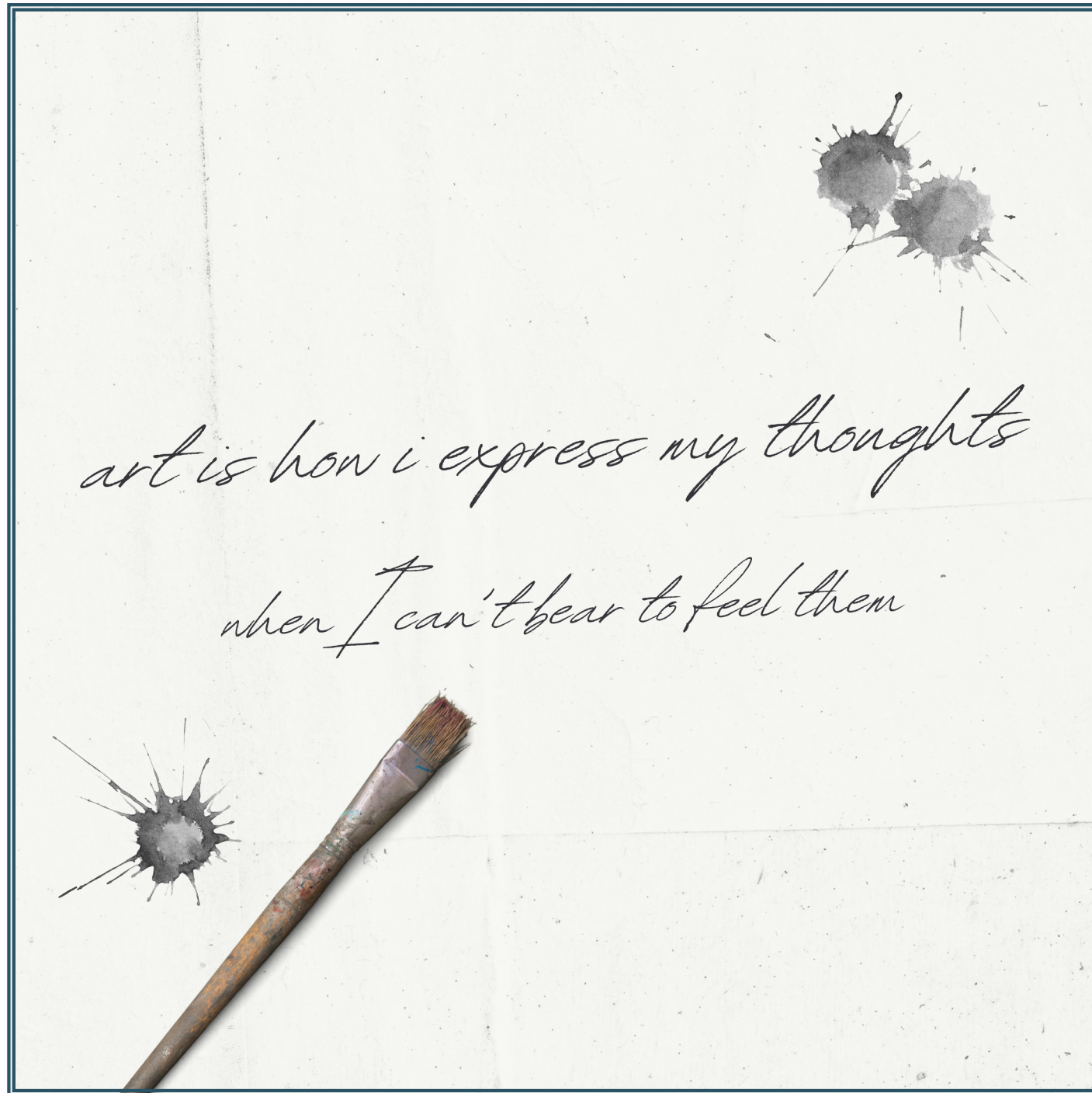
(She goes back to the vanity, sits down, and, as if in a trance, uncoils the braids from her head. She reaches for a pair of scissors, cuts off the braids, throws them in the trash.)

Blackout

END OF PLAY



by Ronen Danziger



Anonymous

Wound Care *by Jameson Gillihan*

You see it everywhere, as soon as you look up aftercare:
Your new tattoo is an open wound.

This is not the language they use for surgery—
No wounds, no cuts you can't heal—
They send me home with a pound less flesh, and a pound more paper,
all concise and clinical.

My instructions are a series of Nos:

No picking.
No scratching.
No sunlight.
No ibuprofen.

Only one of them prescribes me an opioid.

Fine.
I drape my leg over the sanitized armrest,
close my eyes,
and breathe through the pain.

But the cleaning—

—the wound care—

—the *wound*—

I'm scared when the nurse unwraps my surgical vest,
and I'm scared when she cuts the styrofoam from my skin,
and I'm scared when she tells me what beautiful work we've done;

I'm scared when he sends me home one foot limping,

and then I don't get to be scared anymore.
I'm home, and

there's nothing left but wound care. So I listen to

what my artist tells me:	what my surgeon tells me:
Don't scrub.	Don't scrub.
Don't let the wound face the stream.	Don't let the stitch face the stream.
Run the soap and water over your hands,	Squeeze a cloth over your collarbone,

let the water fall down your body,
and pat dry.

Rubbing soap between my palms, and suds between my fingertips,
I peel away the edges of my bandages:

Ink deep in dermis, weeping black fluid down the drain.	Cherry red chisel marks, mild heat growing under my ribs. My body takes an unfamiliar shape underneath my shirt, freshly sculpted and swollen.
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I press a drop of ointment between my fingers
and rub it over the wound,
ink in intention,

I press a drop of ointment between my fingers
and rub it over the wound,
carving in scarlet

body of canvas and clay.

Boring Legal Stuff

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by Nicole Caruso



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