



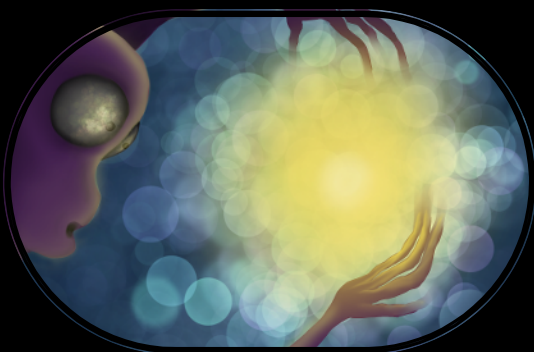
LUMIÈRE

MassBay's Art & Literary Magazine: Issue 9, 2024



LUMIÈRE STAFF

Liam Atkinson
Phil Black
Rigaud Durandisse
Ronan Keane
Kyle Liu
William Mancuso
Aidan Nardelli
Lena-Marie Sebugwawo
Christine Sullivan
Julisa Velazquez



FACULTY SPONSOR

Matt Walsh

MISSION STATEMENT

The lumière team strives to produce an inclusive and diverse platform that “illuminates” the creative work of MassBay’s students, faculty, staff, and members of the larger community. Our goal is to showcase the wonder of unique expression, talent, and passion. We hope this issue will provide inspiration to future writers and artists who have a desire to feature their work.



To submit your own work, and to see previous award-winning issues of the magazine, visit lumierelitmag.com.

lumiere

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Northbridge in Autumn	1	Rigaud Durandisse
MBTA Green Line, Golden Hour	2	Adner Martinez
Discovery	2	Lara Z.
Odd One Out	2	Tom Pereira
Cinematic Relics	4	Junianny Dos Santos
Wachusett Dam	5	Rigaud Durandisse
A Lonely Night	6	Aidan Nardelli
Autumn Maple	9	Alexander Washington
Kamikaze	10	David Earl
Revere Beach	11	Rigaud Durandisse
Horizons of Liberty	12	Laura Garcia
Words of the Igbo	13	Rigaud Durandisse
Cole Camp Blues	14	Dennis Vannatta
Warm Bread	16	Annalise Rose
Divine Catastrophe	17	Pamela Tubberville
Winter Birches	18	Alexander Washington
Zombied	19	Mike Savadian
Porcelain Skin	20	Nathali M.
The Women	21	Sunny Cunningham
The Unmarked Car	22	Angela Townsend
Rural Rythms: Farm Rescue Views	23	Simret Semine
Farm, Middleburg, Virginia	24	John Donato
Empathy	26	Mike Savadia
Summer Meadow	28	Alexander Washington
Summer, South Korea, 2022	29	Heeseo Lee
The Cracked Basketball Court	30	Phil Black
When the Sea Meets the Sky	32	Christine Sullivan
Hope is People in Sneakers	32	Christine Sullivan
Spring Violets	33	Alexander Washington
Hauser Style Classical Guitar	34	Oscar Walsh
Rain in Massachusetts	35	Jameson Gillihan
Dishes	36	Anthony ILacqua
On the Way to Taggart	41	John Donato
Tell Me Why/Swimming Pools	42	Liam Atkinson
Just for Today	44	Mike Savadian
Repose	46	Tatiana Keating
FAQs/Legal Information	47	lumiere staff

CINEMATIC RELICS
by Junianny Dos Santos

It was like watching a movie I'd seen before.
Scenes of the sunset and us,
running in the field.

Clips of our story replaying in my mind.
Giddy scenes of laughter
and bursts of electricity
electrocuting me with every frame.

It felt like déjà vu,
the charming beginning,
confusing pauses,
and the end in heartbreak.
But I must thank you,
for keeping my heart awake.

You helped me remember the name of the film,
and although our movie is over
at least you left me the tape.

WACHUSETT DAM
by Rigaud Durandisse

A LONELY NIGHT

by Aidan Nardelli

The world is dark. Bleak. It's almost still but not quite. Wind rustles unseen treetops and grass whispers a quiet melody. Even light footfalls drown them out. Jack makes his way down the shoulder, the road a slightly deeper black than even the world around it. The road doesn't change, imperfections hidden by the night. His little circle of light gives a few feet of detail wherever he points it, but the rest seems even dimmer than before. The flashlight is one of those cheap plastic ones you get at a grocery store. Not particularly powerful. Not particularly sturdy. A lone shitty light in the dark. And a thin dude at twenty five walking alone down a quiet road in the middle of the night. Driven to pace farther than the confines of a building could possibly allow. He walks.

As he walks he ruminates. On his life. On most anything outside of it. A fantasy takes hold - him getting jumped in the dark, abducted by something or someone. It quickly disappears from his mind, overshadowed by more realistic concerns.

He passes the old abandoned farmhouse, then its barn, then the crossroads a ways past. One path into town. One to the highway. One back the way he came and one just...out. It's a long road, faster to another nearby town than the interstate, but still long and poorly maintained. He took the highway. He couldn't afford to replace his suspension. Couldn't afford a lot actually. Could barely afford his home. He shakes his head. He starts flashing the light around, the empty grass and clumps of trees giving nothing away. His footsteps take a different tone as he notices them, flat and unimpressive. He hated how often he thought about money. He'd done college, got a good job. Bought a cheap house and fixed it up. Made some bad choices with the mortgage financing, but he couldn't fix that now. He hadn't seen any friends in weeks. He wasn't even sure that he still had those. He puts his head down again, walking until he reaches another landmark, a bridge.

His light only illuminates a portion of it at a time, the space beneath resisting all attempts to breach its mystery. He stops. The silence takes him, and for a moment the only thing he acknowledges

is the glowing circle of light. He doesn't like the center of the bridge, he realizes. If he walked through it his light would only illuminate one side of it or maybe the middle. It's an odd feeling. The various horror movies he'd seen filter through his mind, and he takes a step back. Then another. And he turns around and leaves that man-made cave to its own devices.

The walk back is different. Even quieter somehow, without his thoughts. He just wants to get home at this point. It's actually kind of frustrating. He just wants it to be over and done with, but he's still got a few miles left. Maybe he shouldn't have walked so far in the first place, but he only really felt like turning around at the bridge and now he's stuck with the decision. It's the same road as the way in, few differences between the sides of the road. Eventually, he begins to hear something in front of him. Another set of footsteps, some scraping on asphalt. A raindrop falls onto his hand as he holds the flashlight forward.

"Evening," a feminine voice calls, louder and clearer than anything else in the night, but still rather subdued.

"Hey," he says back.

She walks further into the light, green rain-jacket, jean overalls and a white shirt. Fair haired. She doesn't stop, just nods to him as she walks past. He pauses for a moment before shrugging and continuing on. He makes it to his place before a light rain starts in on the house, the light pattering providing a backdrop to the brief moments between conscious and asleep.

The rain keeps up for a couple days, still light, mostly on but somewhat off. The rain clouds stretch miles and miles to the horizon, but he doesn't notice as he writes off reports and answers emails. He's been behind for a couple weeks now, and he tries to catch back up, but he keeps getting distracted by his own thoughts. He hasn't been outside since that night, but his work is maybe three quarters complete, if that.

Eventually he decides to take a breath. He walks onto the porch just as the rain and wind

begin to pick up, and quickly grabs the local paper before he shambles back in. The fresh air had felt good for a moment but now it was over. He sets the paper on the table before making some hot cocoa, and he sits at the counter, cold granite pressing bare flesh, unfolding and scanning it in a quick motion. Normally just advertisements for local stores, deals and vastly uninteresting news from the surrounding couple counties. The most interesting thing he'd ever seen was about a fire that almost happened at a fireworks factory. But today, sitting front and center in the square of paper is a woman's face. A face that he vaguely recognized. The face of the woman from his late night wandering, whom he'd almost forgotten. He scowls. It's a missing persons report, stating that she never returned to her parents' place after leaving. The same night he'd seen her. Jack debated for only a moment before phoning the tip line and telling the police that he'd seen her. They told him they'd call back if they needed anything else, so he hung up and got back to work.

That night though, he couldn't sleep. He thinks about her, then about the bridge, then about maybe what could have happened to her. He'd had a weird feeling about that bridge, hadn't he? He'd felt some danger he couldn't properly identify, sitting in that tunnel, cloaked in the black of night.

He made it back to that spot where he'd seen her quickly, the bridge not long after. It was still in use, and it wasn't late enough that no cars passed, but the light was waning. It looked like a normal bridge. Obviously. Rainwater was collecting inside, but aside from that it looked like every other bridge that he'd ever seen. No ornamentation or decoration, just a functional piece of civil engineering. He waited for a while, not entering but observing as the shadows grew from long to continuous, then started fading into the backdrop. He left before the tunnel grew black.

The rain continued. The next night, he stayed until the sun fell below the horizon. Then a little longer. Then a little further.

And so his vigil continued. He didn't know what he was waiting for. Sometimes it was in the hope that the woman would somehow stumble back out of the darkness that had surely captured her, but others it was more...esoteric. Immune to

even his own attempts to understand his intentions, he stood, and he watched, and he waited, for longer and longer each night. It was only when he'd stood through the night into the morning that he realized how it was affecting him. He'd completely ignored his work, cleaning, walking or going into town for groceries for the past week. He vaguely recalled his boss on the phone, but he didn't remember what was said. He didn't care. He hadn't cared before and now...now something had changed and he cared all the less for it. He had nightmares every night, not about anything in particular, but about anything and everything. Sometimes she was in them, sometimes not. Sometimes the bridge was in them. Sometimes not. He begins to expect something every time he visits. Again he isn't sure what. It feels as though his vigil had turned real, as though there really was something to be watching for, as though he had acquired some duty, some responsibility. Days go by and nothing changes. The rain stopped after a week, the moon began to grow and brought some more light, but the bridge remained dark. As it always would. He refused to enter. As he always would.

He got a new job in town. A grocer. And he started walking elsewhere now, too. Through town after he got out of a late shift, to the edge of the streetlights and then back. Always keeping an eye out for something. He explored the streets of his home, never realizing just how much of the area he'd never seen. He stumbled onto a set of trails a few miles away, leading out into the forests, and he started taking those during the daytime. He'd walk for miles every day, then return to where he began. Sometimes at night in the dark or under lamps, sometimes in the light of day. Either way. He carried on.

As the days continued on the nights became longer and longer, and a cold set in, wind slicing through his thin coats, but he continued. He got farther and farther from the populated areas, roaming far and wide, the pastures and homes giving way to open plains as far the eye could see in the day, and a beautiful, eerie sight in the light of the moon. He walked these paths and off them, gazing into the distance, or the stars, or wandering through swaying trees.

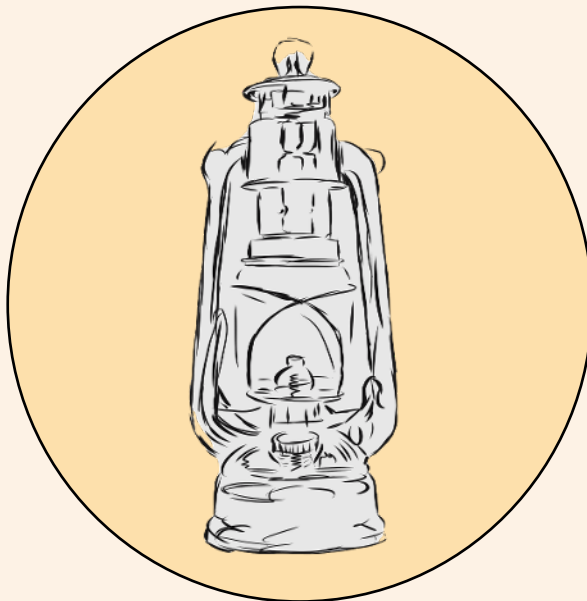
One Friday night he'd been walking for a long

time. He'd been free that day, no work or repairs or anything else to bother him. He'd set out well before noon from the center of town, just following roads wherever they may lead. He'd eaten well, gotten a bag and filled it with some food and water. He walked newly-paved asphalt and gravel and dirt roads and sometimes just grass. It was a long trek. He meandered this way and that, taking whichever roads he'd never seen until he reached a crossroads where each road was new. He chose the left path. It led to a long road, running up a couple hills, then down, then through a small copse of trees, past a few houses. He began to worry about getting home as the sun slunk down beneath the grass, but he remembered the way back. He stopped to eat and drink before the sun disappeared, and when it did he regained his feet and pushed onwards into the night. He walked and walked, but suddenly he found his path impeded. In front of him was a bridge, made of stone, a road atop it bearing no cars for the moment. It was the same bridge. The same darkness, just from the other side. And he stood transfixed, staring into it. The first drop of water hit his arm a moment before the second, then he registered a roar as the clouds above released a torrent of water the likes of which he had never seen, forcing him to stumble and almost collapse. He looks into the dark, shining his light and again not making it through. Lightning flashes behind

him, and it gives a moment's illumination. It looked clear. He decided to risk it. Surely a bridge on its own wasn't dangerous. Surely he was wrong about the danger lurking beneath it.

He takes a deep breath, taps the light against his hand, then marches forwards into the dark, lighting the walls, then the ceiling, then a pass on the ground. It smells damp in here, moreso than even outside. The rain makes a strange echoing sound as it hits the ground outside, but in here he's dry, warm enough. He glances around again, just to make sure. He doesn't see anything out of place, just dirt, a semblance of a road and some minor detritus. He collapses against the curved wall just sitting. The rain continued unabated, and he has no idea how long it will last. He's debating just waiting it out in his temporary shelter. He opens a water bottle, shifting position when he feels something shift strangely under his weight. He shifts again, a sort of fabric feeling. He reaches down, and before he even recognizes why he's back on alert, all thoughts of eating ran from his mind. It was a jacket. A green raincoat.

He sprinted all the way home that night. He quit the grocery job soon after, then sold the house. He'd given up on living in the city a while ago, but he decided he needed a little change of pace. The pleasant, quiet, rural streets that used to give him such comfort no longer did, and that was enough for him.



AUTUMN MAPLE
by Alexander Washington

KAMIKAZE *by David Earl*

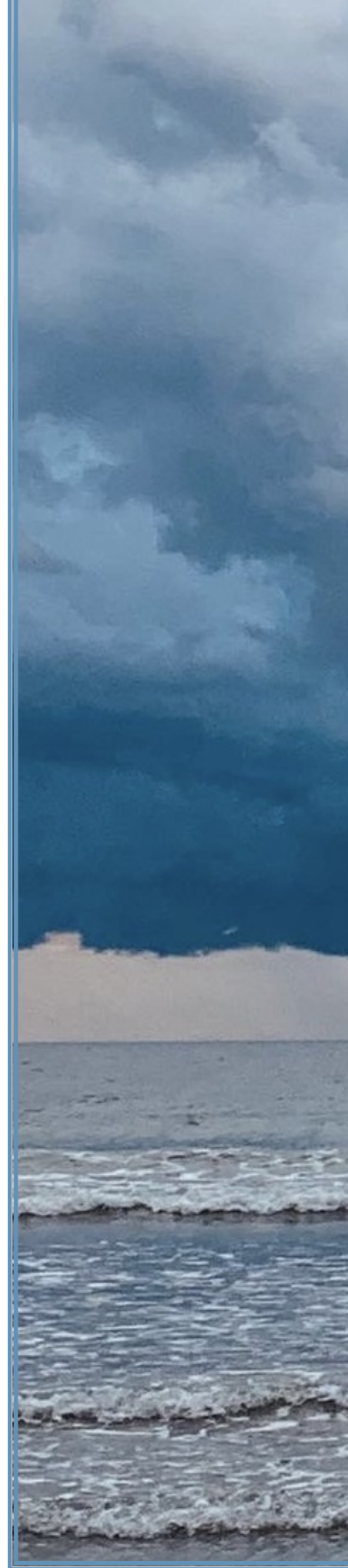
That morning, a boy, standing atop a hill overlooking the port of Sasuura, saw a fleet of ships eclipsing the horizon. Clearing his eyes of the salty air, he watched them advance, ants crawling over a hill of blue sand, sails bobbing like snowflakes. Soon, there were shouts in the town below, a regiment of samurai mustered. The boy ran home, but found it empty.

The totality of the boy's twelve years were contained in Sasuura, but faintly, he was aware he lived on Tsushima Island, that a shogun ruled over them from Yamato, the mainland in the east, while to the west lay hostile shores, China and Goreyo. Surrounding Tsushima was the sea, frigid and cerulean. He believed it protected them, the ships from port risking storms and currents that would swallow hundreds of vessels.

But on that morning, looking out at the fleet, he realized the sea was no boundary. Like the sky, it connected everything, wrapping around every shore. What lay beyond China, beyond the great ocean east of Yamato? Another land, sending another fleet? Unbidden, he imagined ships, black and terrible, rising from the east as inevitable as the sun, bearing and breathing its fire. Unbidden, he imagined someone small, like him, footnotes on the precipice of the inevitable sea.

In his home, his inevitability and his smallness weighed like smooth stones from the beach, momentarily comforting. He smiled slightly. The door crashed open. A heavy man entered, brandishing a sword. Past him, the boy saw the sea and the sky, together, horizon indistinguishable.

He panicked, the stones acquiring horrific enormity, pinning him. Among his shrieking thoughts, a question: will the inevitable hurt? As a crashing wave falls to shore, as a Black Ship fires cannons over Edo Bay, the Yuan Mongol's blade answered this.





REVERE BEACH
by Rigaud Durandisse



HORIZONS OF LIBERTY

by Laura Garcia



WORDS OF THE IGBO

by Rigaud Durandisse

The water brought us Here—
to the rocky shore and long-leaf pines of the New World
where even the air is different.

Here, only pain awaits us.

Follow me.

We, the grief-stricken, stolen from our lands, will conquer our enslavers.

With your might, fight.

With your chains, charge.

The slavers call her Morovia.

Now she's ours.

Sailing is treacherous in these narrow waters. Slavers call it Dumbar Creek.

Crashed—scared—lost.

Our fate has already been decided. Our families in Nigeria will never see us again.

We are children, women, men with shackled feet, neck, and arms.

Look towards the water and repeat:

The water brought us Here. The water will bring us back.

Repeat and slowly walk:

The water brought us Here. The water will bring us back.

Without fear:

The water brought us Here. The water will bring us back.

Walk until you can't feel the wooden ship.

Walk until you feel the splash of water.

Together, we will allow the water to bring us home.

Let's not resist. No longer. Our dignity, our pride, is all we have.

Now— our spirits will fly back over the ocean.

We will go back to Africa.

Without sound, pain, grief, the water is taking us.

COLE CAMP BLUES

by Dennis Vannatta

Going down this road, feeling bad. Then the Dodge up and quits on me.

I stand on the side of the road with the hood up looking down at the engine. I don't know why. I can pump gas and change a flat, but other than that I'm pretty much useless with cars.

A little guy comes walking up the road in the direction I came from, but I don't remember passing him. It's like he's just all of a sudden there. He's wearing tan pants sweated through around the crotch so it looks like he's got a dirty diaper on.

He stands next to me looking down at the engine.

"Must be the carburetor," I say, because you've got to say something.

"This one don't got one."

"Say what?"

"This one don't got a carburetor. They quit putting them in cars thirty years ago."

"Well, this Dodge is at least that old."

"This one ain't a Dodge."

"The hell you say."

"This one's a Ford."

"Like hell."

We go around and look at the side of the car, and there it is in chrome shining like fire in the sun: **FORD.**

"Now what the hell happened to my Dodge? Seems like I can't keep track of anything anymore."

"I hear that."

"I know you do."

We go back around to the front and stare down at the engine.

After a couple of minutes of that, I tell him what's been on my mind: "My wife run out on me."

"Well...."

"It was a while ago, but I'm having trouble getting over it."

"I hear that."

"I know you do."

He stands there shaking his head, whether it's over the car or Leslie running out on me I don't know.

But it must have been the car because he says, "Did you try double-clutching it?"

I've heard men called double-clutching bastards, and that's not a good thing, but I'm really not clear on this double-clutching business, so's not to appear ignorant, I say, "No, I never thought of that."

"Let me give 'r a try," he says and walks around and gets in the car.

It starts up first try, and he takes off lickety-split, just managing not to run me over.

"You son of a bitch!" I holler after him, at the same time admiring how he keeps it straight as a pin right down the middle of the lane even though he surely can't see much with the hood still up and all. Then he disappears over the crest of the hill.

Probably not more than ten seconds afterwards, here comes the crash.

The top of the hill not that far off and ten seconds more driving time not that long, but it must take me fifteen minutes walking to get to him.

Obviously, it was all hunky-dory on the straightaway, but the first curve did him in. He'd gone straight through the ditch, taking out a good half-dozen fence posts. He's sitting on the fender looking not too concerned.

Something must have knocked a hole in the radiator because when I get close I hear a hissing sound.

"Sounds like a hole in the radiator," I say, and he says, "I think you might be on to something," and I feel sort of proud for getting one right.

He gets off the fender, and we stand there staring at the car, and then he says, "Say, you couldn't loan me ten bucks, could you?"

"You stole my damn car!"

"Well, it wasn't running any more anyway."

What can you say to that? But I figure this guy is dumb enough I could be friends with him.

"No, I'm not going to loan you ten dollars, but I'll keep you company hoofing it on up the road."

"Deal. This road gets lonely."

"I hear that."

"I know you do."

We walk on up the road, or highway, actually, US 65, four lanes on the other side of Buffalo going south, and four lanes again north of here, up near Sedalia, but this stretch is two lanes, not much shoulder, and we go down into the ditch when semis come by. If it's a car or pickup, though, we

stick our thumbs out, but no luck so far.

The only thing I took from the car was that little backpack type thing, not much in it, weighs a little of nothing, but after a mile or two under this sun I say the hell with it and sling it into the ditch. He goes in after it and opens it up, takes stuff out, puts it back in, takes more stuff out, puts it back in. Then he throws the backpack down right where it was.

We go on up the highway.

I knew I wasn't too far from Cole Camp Junction when the car conked out, but it takes us a long time walking to get there.

I nod down the county road that leads east to Cole Camp and say, "I'm heading this way."

"Be easier to hitch a ride on the highway," he says. "Better stick with me."

"I got business in Cole Camp," I say.

"Oh," he says, looking surprised like that's a possibility he hadn't thought of.

"Well, don't take any wooden nickels," I say, and he says, "Ain't nobody offered me any yet," and I say, "I hear that," and then he walks on north up the highway, and I head for Cole Camp.

Wouldn't you know it, not two minutes later a guy in a pickup stops and I ride on into Cole Camp in style.

I think I was here a time or two years ago, pre-Leslie, but I don't recall much about it. They say it was a wide-open town back in the day, where houses and beer joints, but you couldn't tell it now. The guy lets me out on Main street, and I close the door of the pickup real gently so's not to wake everybody up. That kind of town.

I've got the address, and although the only street name I know is Main, there are only about four others in the whole town, so it doesn't take me long to find Leslie's house.

The street runs along a kind of ridge above the house, a white clapboard bungalow. I stand there staring down, wondering if she's in there, wondering if he's there, and wouldn't that make things interesting?

I'm a little nervous, to tell the truth. Finally, I work up the courage to go on down.

I go up on the porch and ring the bell but don't hear anything, so I'm not sure it works. I wait a minute and then knock.

Then there she is at the door, my Leslie.

"What are you doing here, Reed?"

"Sweetheart, I just had to see you . . ."

"OK. You've seen me."

"I've got to try just one more time to—"

"Don't bother."

"I figure we owe it to ourselves to—"

"I don't owe you shit."

"I know that. I know you don't, but—"

She closes the door, and I hear her throw the deadbolt.

There's a little diamond-shaped window in the door, and I can see the top of her head, her black hair, right there, so I know she's standing right up against the door.

"Leslie honey," I say, raising my voice only a little, "I've got to go because my car's broke down just a little ways past Cole Camp Junction, but as soon as I get it running again, I'm going to come back and we'll talk."

"Reed, the next time you come to that junction," she says from the other side of the door.

"Yeah?"

"Keep on moving."

I climb back up to the street and stand there for a bit to see if she'll change her mind and come after me. Nope.

What I should do is what I told her I'd do, turn right around and head west to the junction and then on to my car, try to figure out what to do after that. But I can't seem to live my life by should.

Instead, for some reason I start thinking, east. That county road goes east, too. I think I'd a whole lot rather give east a try.

Unless I've got my geography wrong, if I start walking due east, just keep going in a perfectly straight line, I'd go right around the world—probably take four or five years, but what else have I got to do?—and eventually come back to Cole Camp from the west and knock on Leslie's door again.

"I've walked all the way around the world for you, Sweetheart," I'd say, "doing penance."

What would she say to that? Well, chances are she'd say, "Keep on walking."

What would I do then? You know. Yep, set out east, due east. What else do I have to do with my life?

I've got the blues so bad. Every day I have the blues.

WARM BREAD

by Annalise Rose

I love the way you smell in the morning,
he breathes,
like warm bread.

Fingers kneading my body,
face in the crumb of my neck,
huffing me in as spores of yeast release from my pores.

I have always given pieces of myself to nourish him,
my bones and flesh and heart.
Take this and eat, for this is my body.

One day, he said I was sourdough,
my mouth dragging down in a frown,
doughy cheeks soft for him to pinch.

Recently, I've smelt like banana bread,
sweet, but dense,
and made from something that was on the cusp of rotting.

Have I become moldy inside and out?
The constellations of spots on my skin he no longer charts,
turning his stomach instead.

I've been burrowing deeper in the oven of my bedsheets,
rising in that warm, womb-like heat too much and
coming out all burnt at the edges.

They say the first step to cannibalism is through a kiss,
so eat me, eat me, eat me.
But he sleeps and wakes and leaves while the bread is still baking.

I wonder if I smell like a bagel now,
with that O in the center of my body,
right through my heart.

One morning I find he's taken a whole handful of me,
leaving the sheets tangled round me
in a chokehold.

But I look at him through a window
as he tosses crumbled bits of me to the birds,
no longer hungry himself
but at least I am feeding some open mouths.

An abstract painting featuring thick, textured brushstrokes. The color palette is dominated by earthy tones such as ochre, tan, and brown, interspersed with cooler shades of blue, teal, and grey. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and layered depth, with some areas appearing more saturated than others.

Divine Catastrophe

by Pamela Tubberville

The background of the entire page is a watercolor illustration. It depicts a winter scene with several birch trees. The trees have white bark with dark, vertical lenticels and some dark, irregular spots. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, rendered in soft, light blue and white washes. In the upper center, a bright, glowing sun or moon is visible, casting a warm, orange and yellow light across the scene. The overall style is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a gentle color palette.

WINTER BIRCHES
by Alexander Washington

ZOMBIED *by Mike Savadian*

We met a few months before the world changed. We connected right away like long lost friends. Only it was more than that. I never had to explain myself. My jokes, my other worldly thoughts, none of it. She got me. When others would scoff or yawn, she yearned with excitement, hanging on my words. The wonder in her eyes and the twitch in her smile filled me with warmth. We had long heart to hearts, and laughed endlessly, but just when it seemed headed for more, the world stopped.

She was bitten and turned within the first week. I managed to survive, one of the few from our little town. A blessing to some, but to me? I was cursed. Doomed to roam the streets haunted by a love that could have been. I saw her every now and then, a rotting corpse on some new trajectory. I didn't have it in me to put her out of her misery. My hands would clam up, and I'd run the other way. Whenever I saw her though, I knew the universe was laughing at me. A cruel joke that each time it was cracked, the wound poured open with blood.

Of course she never recognized me, but I clung to hope that something in her would trigger if we crossed paths. On one occasion, I was out gathering supplies and happened to walk right by her. Unintended, one of those twisted coincidences the

universe throws at you. It was a few months after the initial wave, so the air still stung as soon as you set foot outside. Bundled up in scavenged jackets, I had some heat, but they offered no protection from the cold of what I experienced. She didn't see me. The sense of human flesh must not have registered, but I saw her. She was accompanied by another deathly creature. The two walked in tandem, to what place? I don't know. The unexpected encounter sent a shockwave of unhinged anxiety all through me. My legs wobbled. Thoughts raced. I was tempted to engage, even if that meant being met with a tormented howl or a menacing bite, but no. There was no use. Acceptance of our fate dawned on me in that moment, so I mustered a broken smile and walked on by. Her lifeless face was far more gruesome than any snarl. She's dead, and I'm dead to her.

To entertain thoughts of a potential cure is to continue harboring this torment. At that point I might as well give up and offer my flesh up to the undead horde. No. As painful as it is, I must move on. I am still alive. My body remains untainted. It is only my mind that has been corrupted. For how long? That's up to me. Life alone will propel me forward. The universe doesn't make mistakes; it just does.

PORCELAIN SKIN

By Nathali M.

I was born with porcelain skin
Smooth
Shiny
Delicate
Handled with caution.

Because if I break
I will lose my value.
So I stayed together.

As different sets of hands hold me
I am stained with fingerprints
Dirt and dust from under their nails.
I was not meant to be held,
Forced to harden with age.

My limbs grow longer
Face no longer new
My skin
Rough
Dull
Strong
I must not break.

I am no longer clean
Tainted by the past
Caution forgotten

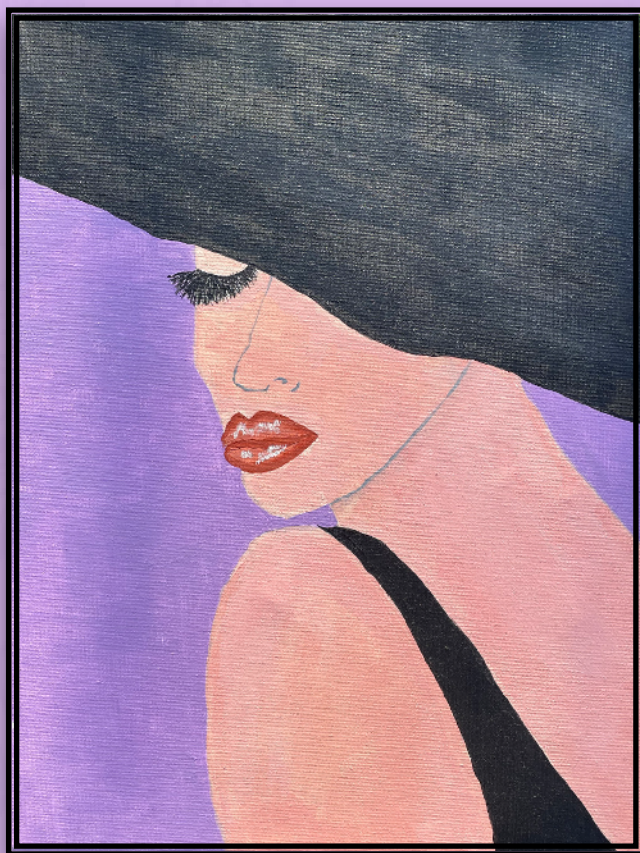
As I fall to the ground once again
Placed in the care of the careless
Ready for my hard skin to protect me
I hit the floor

And I shattered.
I lay on the cold ground
Broken in pieces
Shards of me everywhere
A doll once so loved
Now valued at nothing.

I fell so many times before,
But why did this one break me?
Did I not notice the cracks in my skin before?
Was I destined to break?

As a broken doll
No longer anything
I cry
Begging to be the doll I once was.
A doll with porcelain skin.

THE WOMEN
by Sunny Cunningham



THE UNMARKED CAR *by Angela Townsend*

Can I turn the canyon into a trampoline? I would say this is every writer's quest, but Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf did not face an invisible amphitheater of internet editors.

I envy my weird sisters of old, writing for joy and survival. They writhed with humid words. They were offered no shade from a masthead. They lacked the green visors of style guides. Out under the awning, they were driven to prophecy. Publication was a dandelion on a far continent.

If their words were too viscous or silky, they pressed on. Their inboxes did not pile with ash. But spared easy rejection, they knew the canyon. Even without seat belts, they ran into road work.

Perhaps the slower pace of writing and wooing spared my strange siblings my amnesia. Infatuated with my speed, I forget the rules of the road as quickly as I can type.

Language cooperates, and I believe I have beaten traffic. My ideas dance jigs in puffy poet blouses, and my eyes turn as green as "go." An editor types "Congratulations!", and I forget every ticket that ever littered my dashboard. The orange cones give way to Queen Anne's Lace, and I read the sign like the last chapter of Revelation: End of Road Work.

At last, I can write with cheetah freedom. I have hit my stride. At last, I trust my words will reach their destinations. I have found my people. It is all coming together.

I am not proud of this, the easy way I make love to the mirage. But canyon children squint hard.

Perhaps there are hilltop yogis who burn clean with belonging. But here between the ditches, we worry our words are mutants. We each assume our misfits are the bleakest, nuclear orphans with no siblings.

I have indulged in this lament. My stories are as misshapen as my story. I was the good girl whose sunglasses came in a thousand shades of rose. I wrote, at eleven, about "the downtrodden," seared by the face with the cardboard sign at the pizza parlor. I sang Sunday hymns all week and stowed away in the caboose of the Gospel train. I wore slap bracelets declaring me a "JESUS FREAK" and rode the mountain pass to seminary.

But I kept getting out and reading poems chalked into the asphalt. I was a Vassar feminist with a five-lane fundamentalist streak. I doodled black-and-white angels until I sidled up to rainbows who became family. I reread red letters and became freakier. I was on the path to be a pastor until I got a job at the cat sanctuary.

I wrote my way back onto the freeway, in a neon panel van with Jesus and my secular holy friends and all the broken cats. Our taillights were blinkered, and our GPS conked out, and we were in perpetual danger of running out of gas, although it never happened.

Everything I wrote towed an RV of rubble, the sacred and the profane and the guilt and the exuberance. I wrote to absolve my zealous youth, to gentle the girl whose right-wing turn caused accidents. I wrote peace treaties between the sides of my brain. I wrote my embarrassing past and forgivable future onto the same map.

I wrote about Jesus under cover of cattails, marrying two sanctuaries. The church and the cat shelter told the same story. I smuggled my freaky six-winged faith into blogs about ferals. I became an unmarked car full of God's glow sticks. People came to the party. The cat sanctuary blog welcomed a thousand readers a week.

End of Road Work. I did it.

But roads are made for undoing. I got back out of the van. I chalked gawky stories outside the shelter. I wrote about faith and dandelions and grandfathers and evolution in the same eighteen-wheeled essay. I could not keep it in the cat car, and I had lost my ticket for the Gospel train.

It was too much of a Jesus jamboree for the literary, too psychedelic for the holy. My goody-gush made editorial eyebrows twitch. My feathery metaphors made God's gatekeepers nervous.

"This is heartfelt, but I'm afraid it's not our aesthetic."

"We are impressed by the quality of your writing, but what does you mean that you 'fill the sea'?"

"We recommend you submit this to a faith-based publication."

"We are unsettled by your paragraph in which God wields a sledgehammer. Here are some Bible verses you might consider."

I was Jesus Freak and Jezebel sharing the same wheel. I was the weirdest sister in town. I was declined by lofty people in opposite aeries. I crashed the van into the canyon.

The day I was rejected by my favorite journal, I threw my keys on the floor. If anyone could put up with me, it would have been these hazel-eyed angels. They lived mid-mystery. They were unafraid of allegory. I saw no orange cones around their camp, only the end of road work, the end of my searching, the integration of all my odd.

"We prefer meaty prose." I had been weighed and measured and found dandelion. I had darkened their counsel without knowledge.

I knew nothing. I stomped into my hatchback

and circled the block listening to Bruce Springsteen's "Badlands."

I sat at a stop light next to a Lexus with a sticker, "MY BICHON FRISE IS SMARTER THAN YOU."

I let the Boss write all over my arms, "it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive."

I thought of Emily and Virginia. I forgave myself. I pulled back into the canyon. I saw road work ahead.

I asked myself how brave I am. Can I keep at it when the cones are orange and the lights are red? Can I keep my eyes green, writing for life rather than arrival? Can I keep writing sanctuary for the feral and freaky, the sacred and profane?

Can I turn the canyon into a trampoline?

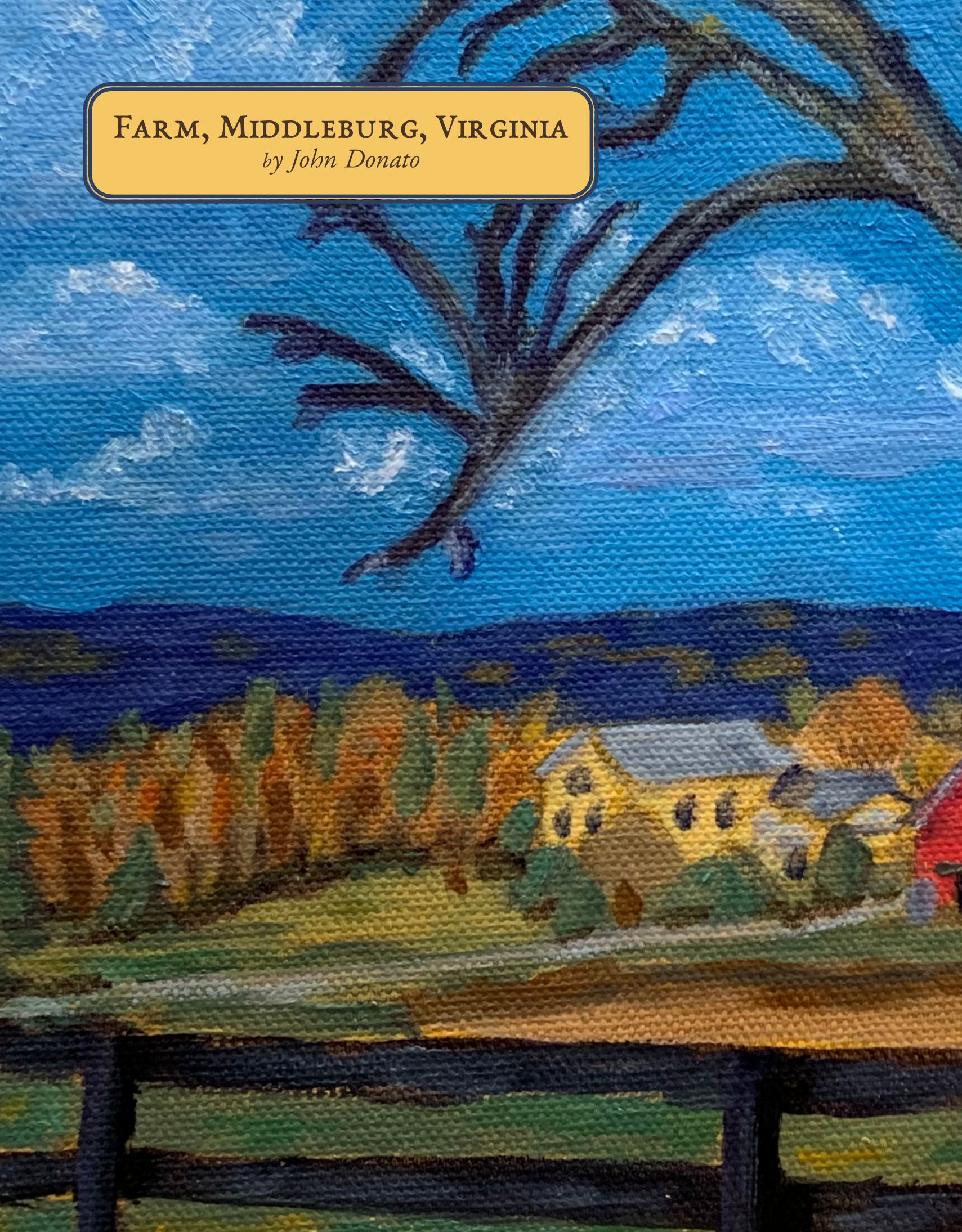
We who gnaw pencils do not ride alone. Road Work Begins. Revelation resumes uninterrupted.



Rural Rhythms: Farm Rescue Views
by Simret Semine

FARM, MIDDLEBURG, VIRGINIA

by John Donato





EMPATHY

by Mike Savadian

I need a shot of empathy
cause sometimes I'm so blinded by self
that I can't even see past my own damn fingertips.
The vision of who I could be turns to ash.
Opportunities go up in smoke
cause I chose to take another drag
off this cigarette,
off this self-absorbed mindset.
Just when I thought I could break free
the monkey on my back just laughs.
He says to me:
You claim to value love? Ha, that's what you thought, watch this:

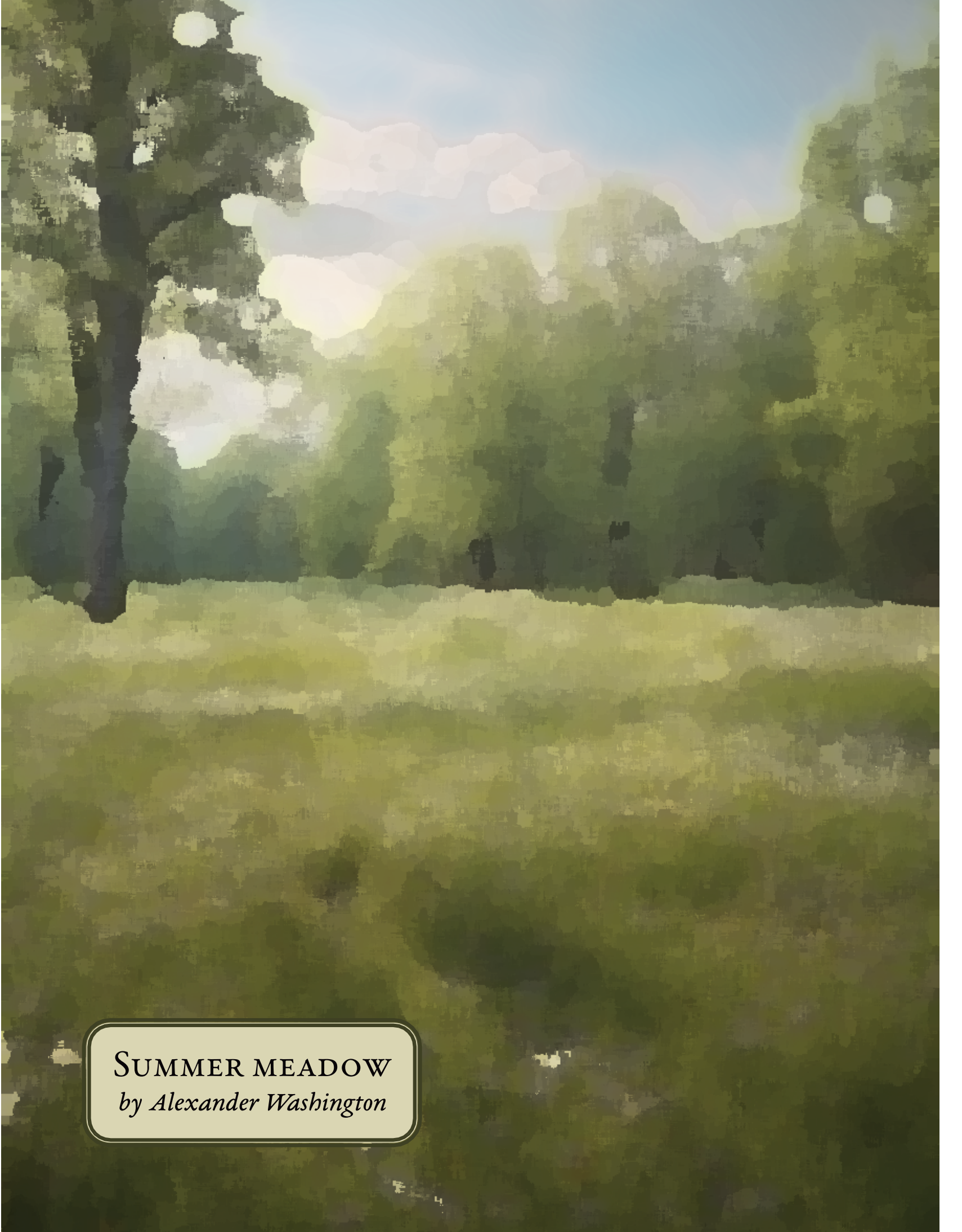
Swerve into oncoming traffic,
self-destruction, complete annihilation.
Friends and family had the right of way,
but I said fuck it I'm going my way.
Another crash
another face full of disappointment to haunt me.
My ears bleed when I hear them cry out!
Yet still it's not enough for me to do something about, this?
What is this?
I had a plan, I thought I wrote it down.
Wasn't I going to try to be a good person today?
Yeah, yeah, that's right, I want to help people!
Okay, Mike, can you help me move this fridge?
Dammit!
Careful what you ask for.
What you'll get is what you seek.
Imposter syndrome.
I'm scared to meet the real me,
cause I'm convinced, this layer of friendliness you see on the surface,
it's all a facade,
just a cover up for the monster laying dormant underneath.

This battle for my soul is not unique,
this disease runs rampant on every level.
Cause when you peel back the layers of war
the layers of poverty
the layers of every single man-made atrocity,
all that's left is in its purest form:
self-interest.

Perpetrators refuse to share in their wealth.
They'd rather sharpen their swords
defending all it is that they got
while always on the on hunt for more.
But what ever happened to:
Kumbaya my lord, lord kumbaya?
Now it's just bitch, you can kumbaya this!
It takes one to know one.
I'm coming for all those living in excess.
Like did you really need that third house?
Theres's people dying in the street!
Fighting for the taste of a single crumb,
one that you flung from the top of your ivory tower,
because you claimed it was something you were too good for?
Well, after you ditch the scraps
I want you to savor that fat.
Take your time with every single bite,
cause it's the only thing you'll ever get.
Take it from me, your table is gonna shrink
and all the money in the world won't be able to keep you company,

Now, I can't change your ways, but I can certainly change mine.
The beauty of humanity is that there is in fact a flipside.
Inspiration for change is not far.
It lives within the actions of my fellow man,
cause when a butterfly flaps its wings
Boom! Hope is restored!
All it took was you holding that door when you walked into the store,
or when you helped that old lady cross the street.
I'll take a wholesome moment with a side of fries please!

Ripples are emitted from you to me,
arrays of positivity going on to reach each corner of the world,
reflecting the power of connection,
AKA selfishness' nightmare.
My ego can't stand genuine care.
It gets all confused, it gets scared.
But my heart cries out with joy!
And fills with hope
that maybe, maybe, I can care, too. I can be a better me,
I wonder what the world would look like if all its self-interest was replaced with empathy.



SUMMER MEADOW
by Alexander Washington

SUMMER, SOUTH KOREA, 2022

by Heeseo Lee

i.

It is a summer wrought with conflict. In the previous months, there were floodings that trapped lives in basement houses, stamped them free to go on to the next world. This month, out on the streets, men roam with knives and a curious desire to kill. Between the clouds dripped with sweat and the monsters wrapped in men's coats dotting the wayside, I instead wander the wayward paths of my apartment home.

ii.

Perched high up enough to count bird's nests, this apartment has seen the rise and fall of a million moons. Just last night, I awoke to a silver sheen in the wee hours of morning, and watched the moon lumber past my 'sill—giant, and delectably round, as though a glistening lake. Supermoon.

iii.

The wood made of polished mahogany, refined to a modern taste, the personality of four clashing its decorative halls. The house bears the short history of a family's life—young, and ripe in all the ways that matter. It is calm, with a certain sweet taste. Mooncakes, dripped in honey.

iv.

This dwelling is a dwelling of windows—laid from wall to wall to display sky in every season of summer. Cicadas cling to the window nets, wailing away to count the passing hours. Sparrows line the ridged roof top edges, swooping past in lunchtime hours to fill their cavernous bellies with crushed things.

v.

On the wide-screened news, 9 people fall prey to the men with knives. I turn the TV off, press my back into the cold wood tiles. Looking up at the tranquil ceiling, I listen to the sound of summer passing me by.

THE CRACKED BASKETBALL COURT *by Phil Black*

The summer day was warm and breezy, with a hint of sunlight poking out through the clouds, illuminating the grounds and the town's middle school building with a mix of sunlight and shadows that fluttered on the ground. Before my after school program let us out to play on the playground, we congregated in inside. Some kids sat at round tables doing arts and crafts, while others like myself wandered around aimlessly looking for stimulation to occupy our young and restless minds. We built forts with big blocks, colored outside the lines in the coloring books they gave us, and chased each other around hollering, annoying the teachers. What is an eight-year-old to do while he waits for his cab ride home and everyone is leaving for the day?

The teacher would yell, "Play time, outside, everybody line up at the door single file now!"

We would all scramble around looking to be the first one in line and out the door to freedom, to run as fast as our little legs could to the wooden train structure. We were all eager to be the first ones to sit in front of the steering wheel to spin it like we were actually driving a train. We all fought for the front, sometimes piling up on one another, pushing, and shoving until someone sat still in the conductor's seat. The rest took their seats in the back pretending like we were on a train ride, making "chuga, chuga, chuga," and "wooo wooo" sounds. Other kids went straight for the jungle gym to hang off its bars and slide down the slide or swing as high as they could and see who could jump the farthest, trying to land past where the wood chips met the grass line. No one did, but one kid fell on his head, piercing a sharp wood chip in his head that needed stitches.

No one wanted to play near the teachers' bench because that's where the scary teachers would hang out and watch us. If we were

misbehaving we would have to sit next to them, so being as far away from them that we could was best.

To the right of the train were woods that we all thought were mythical. Trees in various spots crowded the area. Some jutted in strange directions and others were as tall as the school if not taller, with branches and leaves hanging down looking to smack you in the face as you ran or walked by. It was a good area to play hide and go seek in, which we all did when not riding the train or swinging on the swing set behind it. The area was fenced in in all directions save for the entrance next to the teachers' bench, which at times felt like a prison when we came up to it in all directions away from the middle, wooded area.

One day while a classmate and I were playing catch and with every catch, we came across the back fence that had an access door which looked to be bent and misshapen from years of abuse or a one time breaking-and-entering situation. I like to think the former. I called over my classmate after I noticed the fence gate and what was beyond it. After he came over we both looked at the hole in the door, which was sizable enough to slip through, and then looked back through the trees to see where the teachers were. Both had been on the bench reading. One was reading a magazine and the other a paperback novel. Good thing for us their heads were engrossed in what they were doing and not us.

What was beyond the fence was an outdated and rundown basketball court. Five basketball hoops surrounded the inside perimeter of the fencing, two across each other side by side for full court games and one singular one by itself for half court games at the far end. All had frayed netting and one looked to have been replaced with a chain link net. The ground was made of cement with



painted lines for each court, but it looked like an earthquake hit and rippled across the whole area. A large crack jutted up the length of the courts from the access gate to the back fence that made its way to the swamp lands beyond it. Many more cracks were strewn all around in various spots with the land trying to take back what it owned. Grass and vines made their way through the cracks, covering most of the courts.

The swamp lands had swallowed many toy balls and frisbees. What was most fascinating was when we sneaked off and ventured through these wooded wetlands, we came across many golf balls, which made us wonder how long they had been there. A golf course that the high school stopped using in the 1970's for their golf team was across the street. That too was fenced off and overgrown with brush. A little view of the white holes in the ground where the golf balls fell into and the green still remained, trying to keep from disappearing altogether.

The ball my classmate and I had was a little smaller than a basketball, more like a rubber inflatable kickball. The hoop closer to the broken fence door loomed up to the sky looking down at us, taunting us to throw it our ball. Almost immediately we started tossing it up, missing at the ragged netting, missing the hoop altogether, barely hitting the backboard.

We kept watch for our teachers. About four more times during play time we went to the mythical, overgrown, and ancient-looking court. Just me and my classmate trying to make the ball drop into the round metal mouth.

At the start of play time, instead of heading straight for the train, we would head straight through the woods to the door to our freedom. That was until the teachers caught on and banned us from going through there, claiming that it was

dangerous. There were glass bottles broken in various spots and a few rusted tools in a corner. The water fountain dispersed brown rusted water. Not a safe place for children to be, but we didn't care. We took the chance every time there was a new teacher assigned to watch us to go through to this unknown land and try to feed the hoops.

Curiosity overtook me at times, staring from the fence looking out, wondering how long it took for the cement to crack, the weeds to grow, and vines to take back the land. Playing ball in this part of the school yard felt exciting and relaxing, like we were playing in nature where the trees were the posts and the branches circled making a basket with leaves sticking out. A little bit of sunlight displayed through the treetops, illuminating the courts with many shadows.

Twenty years later, the school reopened the court. They tore up the ground, added new hoops, and laid new turf for the court with court lines for the new students to play in. A brand new fence was erected around the whole area with a new entrance way next to the gates for vehicles that remained always open with no door. The door leading to the play woods for the after school center was replaced and has a bright silver padlock on it. It's still off limits. The train, jungle gym, and swing set are all that remain.

Twenty seven years later I still go there when I'm bored or want to be alone. I'll head to that basketball court and reminisce, all while continuing to feed the metal mouths of the hoops that are now a bit closer for me to toss basketballs into. The woods and swamp lands are still there and many of the balls we threw over the fences remain as a relic of a time where that land was all but completely cracked and mysterious.

WHEN THE SEA MEETS THE SKY

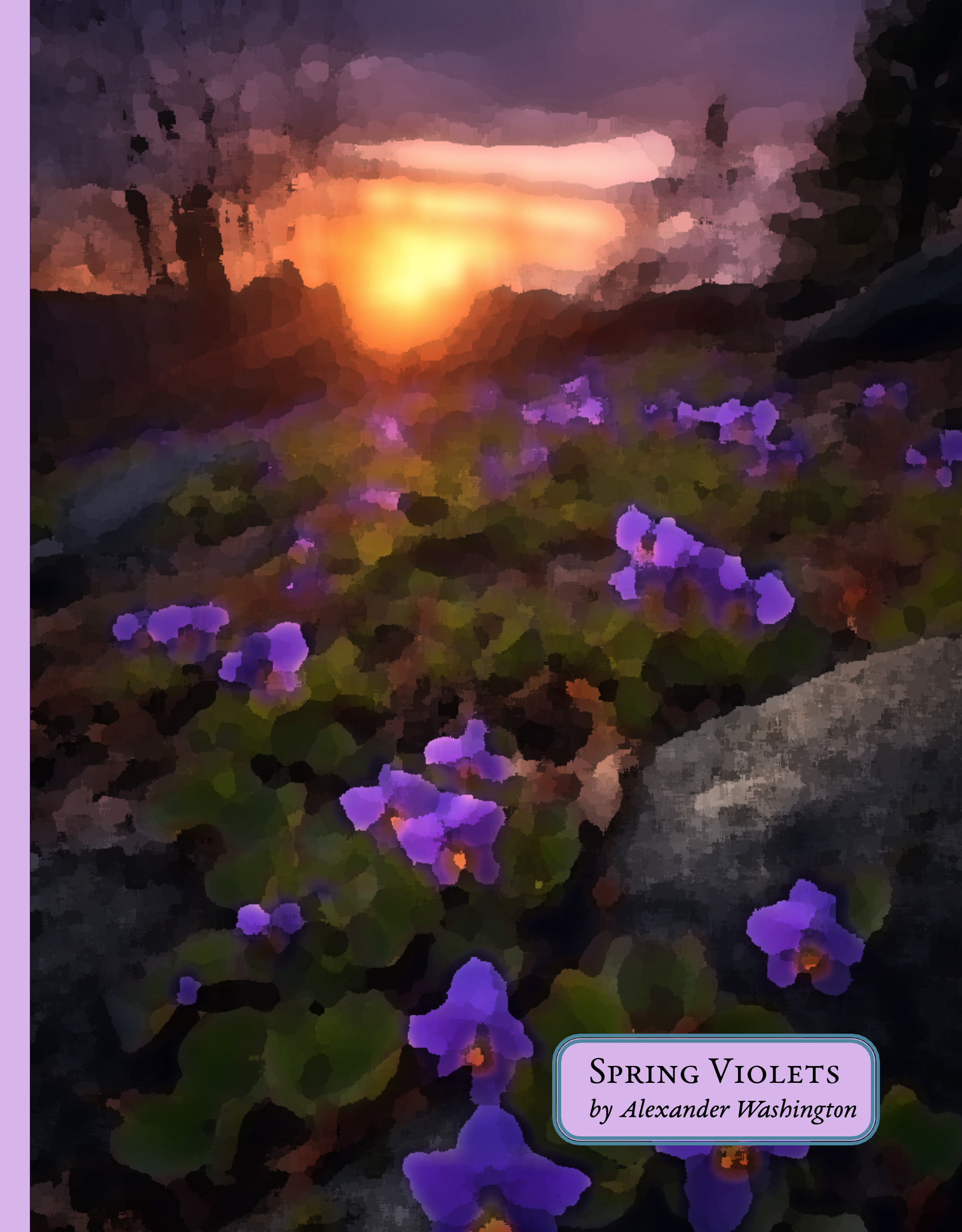
by Christine Sullivan

As the sun melts into the ocean at dusk
the sea meets the sky
and the two worlds collide.
Hope is sparked, and is eternally alive.

HOPE IS PEOPLE IN SNEAKERS

by Christine Sullivan

Hope is people in sneakers
who changed a life
mile by mile,
stride by stride.
Images passed me by
faces that I do not know
but stuck in my mind.
I never met them face to face
but sole to soul, on the 5k route.



SPRING VIOLETS

by Alexander Washington

A detailed photograph showing the interior of a Hauser style classical guitar. The body is made of light-colored wood, likely spruce or cedar, with a dark, polished outer rim. The soundboard is visible, showing a central circular sound hole and several vertical bracing ribs. A horizontal brace is also visible across the lower part of the soundboard. The neck is attached to the top of the body, and the headstock is visible at the top. The lighting is warm and focused on the interior, highlighting the wood grain and the craftsmanship of the instrument.

HAUSER STYLE CLASSICAL GUITAR
by Oscar Walsh

RAIN IN MASSACHUSETTS

by Jameson Gillihan

Raining hard today, raining like one solid sheet of cloudgut falling
continuously,

like sludging across campus through

our

inch

puddles, like the difference between having and

forgetting your umbrella is whether you're soaked in

fifteen seconds or

fifty --

Raining like might as well not go anywhere,

might as well

sit on the stones while rainwater

carves out chasms, running from

rock to

stream,

dip my feet

legs

thighs

waist

and

sink

into the

rising

water

DISHES

by Anthony ILacqua

"Look honey," she shouted, "Dishes!"

The embarrassment was so deep, deeper than it needed to be. And really, on a rain soaked night, Northwest Portland, and in the middle of winter, why did it need to be embarrassing at all? I walked slowly toward her. I watched as she pulled the cigarette to her lips. She stared into the glass, the glass that separated her from the brightly lit display of shop's arrangement of dishes. "Dishes!" I said every bit as loudly.

"Which pattern should we choose?" she asked in earnest.

The tequila suddenly caught up to me. I felt a feeling deeper than drunk. If I was drunk or just a little drunk, I'd feel warm, slightly off balance. The feeling was not warm, not even off balance. I felt uncertain. "The flowery ones," I said.

"Those?" she said. She pointed with two fingers, the two of her left hand, the two fingers holding the cigarette. She pointed to a flowery set of dishes, yes, but not the set I had seen.

"Not those," I said. I breathed in deep the night. It was a breath of the fecund wet air, the air that was both excitement and decay. "Those, those," I said pointing to a different set entirely.

"Those?" she said incredulously. "Those are the ugliest dishes I've ever seen."

"You think they're ugly?" I asked. I rolled my tongue around on the roof of my mouth. It tasted like hot playground steel on a hot day when your uncle Tony pushed you too fast on the merry-go-round. It was the metallic taste that happens in graying old photographs shortly before puking.

I shrugged. "Which were you thinking about?" I asked.

She took a long drag on her cigarette. She had two types of cigarettes in her case, this I knew, but I didn't know which brand she was ardently smoking. "These," she said pointing to the set on display directly in front of her. "Do you like these?" she said. I noticed a slur in her voice. It was the first time I'd noticed a change in her demeanor all night.

"They're nice," I said. It was the lilt in my

voice at the end that made me seem somewhat less than sincere.

"You don't like them," she said. She did not look at me, she just continued to stare at the window display.

The sound of the rain increased. The smell did not change. Somewhere far away, I heard a semi's brakes. I knew it was at the 405, but even that made no sense. The 405 was too many blocks away, nearly ten blocks and with the rain, well, no way. "I like those dishes fine," I said. "Why wouldn't I?"

"The tone in your voice," she said. She suddenly looked away from me. She dropped her cigarette to the ground.

"I bought my dishes from Angel," I said.

"Angel?" she asked. Her face dropped the accusatory look she was so good at giving.

"Angel," I said.

"Who the fuck is Angel?" she asked.

I took a deep breath. "The guy I bought the dishes from," I said.

"A guy named Angel?" she said.

"Angel," I said.

"You're a fucking onion," she said.

"Onion?" I asked. I was uncertain of what that even meant. I mean, what? An onion when in reference to a person was a woman's ass? wasn't it? Incidentally, she had a great ass. The sort of ass fit for a pillow.

"Yeah?" she said. "Like you have layers."

"Oh," I said. She was being deep and I was thinking crass. I looked away from her and into the window of the shop. Her dishes were nice. I listened to the rain and suddenly I understood why things were so loud, the raindrops. We were protected under a canvas awning.

"It's not what you were thinking," she said.

"The onion?" I said.

"Layers," she said.

"Ass," I said. I suddenly felt very drunk.

"Ass?" she said.

"I don't really get it myself," I said. "Like when she's got a great ass, you say: 'look at that onion,' you know?"

"Like it'll make you cry?" she said.

"Oh, right," I said. It made sense to me.
 "That's some sexist bullshit," she said.
 "Weren't we looking at dishes?" I asked.
 "It's a fucked up sexist bullshit," she said.
 "Well, you're ass makes me cry," I said.
 "What?" she said loudly. It was louder than the whole honey look, dishes bullshit. "My ass makes you cry?"
 "Why wouldn't it?" I asked.
 "Because I don't have an ass," she said. She swayed. She looked at me, and it was just a few blinks. "You're a dick," she said.
 "I'm a dick?" I said. I said it in a neutral way. I guess I agreed with her. I would never claim not to be a dick. "All right, I am a dick, but why do you say that?"
 "My ass?" she said.
 "Yes," I said.
 "I went to those guys at the at The Orca because I needed a job," she said.
 "The Orca?" I asked. "The strip club?"
 "But they wanted me to be naked," she said.
 "Have you ever been to The Orca?" I asked. It was a stupid question to ask only because the implication was that I had been there, and of course, they were all naked.
 "I'm more sexy with clothes on," she said.
 "No doubt," I said.
 "And what the fuck?" she said. Her arm outstretched and the back of her hand struck me mid chest. "Those dishes?"
 "Yes," I said. My attention went to the window. "Those," I said. I pointed.
 "Are they the sort of dishes Angel would have sold you?" she asked.
 "Oh god no," I said. I settled and stared at the dishes. "No," I said. "Angel likes antiques." I laughed.
 "Those dishes look old."
 "Well," I said. "They got an old fashion look, but they're not antiques."
 "You have antique dishes?" she asked.
 "I have antique everything," I said.
 "Who's this Angel person?" she asked.
 "Well, that's a long story," I said. I reached into my coat pocket, my scratchy wool pocket. I hated my coat. It was a hand-me-down from an old friend in Portugal. I had broken the zipper. The thing smelled of wet dog or more aptly, wet sheep. I

reached in the pocket for the box of Camels which I got from the Cigarette Girl at the bar.

"I got time," she said.

"Angel," I said. I opened the box of smokes and held it open to her. I knew she had two types of smokes in her case, one of them being my brand.

She took a smoke and put it to her lips. She pulled her blonde hair away from her face and tucked each side behind an ear.

I put the box into my pocket and retrieved the matches. Her face lit up in an orange white glow from the match. The light on her face was richer, better, more real than when it was lit up by the store display.

Darkness followed. She exhaled the smoke. "So," she said. "Angel?"

"A gang banger back home," I said.

"Gang banger, what?" she asked.

"A guy I knew from the my old neighborhood," I said.

"This is nonsense," she said. "How would you know a gang banger and why would he have dishes?"

"Just a guy I know, much older than me, an old gang banger. He's now an antique dealer."

"Back home," she said.

"Denver," I said.

"These are ugly dishes," she said pointing to the dishes I had motioned to.

"They are ugly," I said. I suddenly realized just how ugly they really were. "You're right," I said.

There was a moment of silence. All there was, was the sound of the rain.

"Why these?" she said.

"Why these?" I said.

"Yeah, why? Why these dishes?" she said.

I faced the window which meant that I faced away from her. "Well," I said. "you want the truth?"

"Yeah," she said. I heard the crackle of her tobacco.

"They look like my mother's dishes," I said.

"Your mother?" she asked. The tone was still incredulous.

"Sure, my mother," I said. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said. She turned her back to the display window and looked out into NW 23rd Ave. I followed. Our backs to the window, the street suddenly seemed very dark.

"You don't seem like the type to have a mother."

"Everyone has a mother," I said.

"Yeah," she said. Her shoulders drooped. I could see her droop in my peripheral. She flicked the half smoked cigarette and it absorbed the water from the puddle where it landed very quickly. She looped her arm underneath mine.

As she pulled me into her body, I got this feeling like I felt her fragility. We turned and began walking back toward Burnside and the bright shops which dominated that corner.

We stopped at NW Glisan Street. "I live over there," she said. She pointed into the darkness of the neighborhood.

"Okay," I said. I looked at the short block of Glisan on the other side of 23rd. It was the only block on NW Glisan that was a two way street. It ended a block up where it terminated in a small parking lot and a giant hill.

"But the Plaid Pantry is there," she said pointing the other way, across our side of Glisan Street—the two lane one way street.

"Yes, it is," I said.

"I think I want more smokes," she said.

The overnight clerk at the Plaid Pantry was a mix of anger and annoyance, like there was shit in her shoes and she suspected us of having put it there. We had two separate transactions for cigarettes. I asked for a book of matches. I had a collection of matches that was unmatched by anyone under the age of eighty.

I kept matches in a huge bowl above the small refrigerator in my apartment. I easily collected four books for every one book I used. The compulsion to collect matchbooks came when I was about sixteen and I read this detective short story where the main character communicated using the inside of matchbooks. They always smoked in those old stories, but I didn't start smoking until I was much older, late twenties when I met, courted, married and later divorced a very heavy smoker. That relationship lasted just over a year. It took a year to recover, but I continued to smoke.

Outside in the night, I looked up at the sky. The low clouds were lit by the city and already seemed likely to break up and expose the stars.

There was something very subtle in her now, the way she moved, I guessed, slowly swaying, tender. At the corner, she looped through my arm

again and I waited to cross against the light until she went first leading me into the nonexistent traffic.

The hill that Glisan Street became was not big, not at all, but it was noticeable. I had not walked this street very often, not past 23rd Avenue. There were a few businesses on the left side of the street, an architect, a goldsmith/jewelry repair and a lawyer's office. These were the sorts of businesses which could operate in old houses. Then there were the tall stately Alphabet District houses on the right side of the street. These massive homes had been carved into apartments. All the larger houses had become apartments very long ago.

We started to walk up the hill. The weather felt warm, warmer now. Mid-block, she released me and unlatched a small gate on a picket fence. I waited on the sidewalk. For the first time since I imagined it at the dishes shop display, I heard the distant traffic very clearly. All of it, perhaps just a few cars on the short 405 loop. But from a distance, it sounded like the ocean. She held the gate open. I nodded, not that she'd see it in the dark. "You didn't strike me as a picket fence type," I said.

"Come," she said. "I gotta pee."

I hurried, as instructed by the need to pee. I walked a few small steps and then closed the gate. Closer to the house, we neared the massive porch. I hesitated and then stopped. Larger drops of water dripped from the eaves onto the rough sounding—water worn concrete.

"Here, this way," she said. "Around back."

I followed her. We cleared the building on the small path that led tightly between her house and the neighboring one. I walked on quiet feet. Ever aware of the sleeping people stacked up all around us.

The staircase was metal, but it was very rickety feeling as we started to climb it. "Interesting," I said. At the top of the stairs, she dug around in her small purse. "Well," I said. "Good night."

"Oh, you're coming in," she said. Her focus did not leave her purse. I heard the keys break from the debris. "Here," she said.

The lock clicked loudly inside the heavy door. She went in first and clicked on all the lights inside and a very bright light above the door. And since I had been looking at it as it went on, the light blinded me leaving nothing but a blue bolt of

lightning directly in front of me everywhere I looked. Once I got inside, I moved clear of the door as she closed it. "Come in, make yourself at home."

"Thanks," I said. I stood on the mat at the edge of the kitchen near the door. I remained where I was and I watched as she walked away, toward the bathroom. I just waited there, on the mat like I was waiting for instructions.

Gradually, my eyesight returned. She had clicked on the few lights attached to the wall switches and although they had seemed bright at first, they were dim once I got used to it. The light in the kitchen seemed like the sort of mid-century fixture that asked for three heavy duty incandescent bulbs, but it had only one. The light above the dining room table just to my right was pulled down and hovered directly above the table. The table was clean and cleared save for a neatly stacked pile of mail, all unopened.

"Come in," she said as she returned. The hiss of the toilet tank filling was loud.

"Thank you," I said.

"Yeah," she said. "This way." She pointed to another nook just inside the depths of the apartment.

There wasn't a right angle in the place. The whole apartment had to have been an afterthought and it was hastily built into the eaves and contours of the Victorian shell outside. She turned on a floor lamp and then diagonally, near the sofa, she clicked on a table lamp.

I sat on the farthest cushion of the sofa. I was very far from the lamp, in the shadows. I looked up at the room. "I shouldn't stay late," I said.

"It's already late," she said. She sat in a chair opposite me, the chair was leopard printed and made to look like a high heel shoe. "And I know you're not tired."

"Why wouldn't I be?" I asked. The room felt very quiet.

"Because we both drank a shit ton of coffee following the tequila," she said. "And I'm not tired."

"Good point," I said. "Have you lived here long?" I asked. Stupid conversational thing to say, and I knew it.

"Eight years," she said. She looked through the room, it was with a certain level of pride, it seemed. "How long have you lived in the neighborhood?"

Where do you live again?"

"25th and Lovejoy," I said. "About four years."

"How many years?"

"Four," I said. I held up my right hand holding my fingers out for her to count.

"And to think we've never met," she said.

I chuckled. There was no way we would have met. I didn't work in the neighborhood and up until very recently, I spent almost all of my waking hours at work.

"Do you find me attractive?" she asked.

I looked at her now, directly. Her hair was wild; we'd been in the rain. Already she seemed to have more gray hair than the brunette she had been. Her glasses, clunky heavy things, rested unevenly on her face. I had already made the comment about her ass. I was unsure of what to say. I looked into one of her steel blue eyes, then into the next. I may have had a cup of coffee but it wasn't enough to counteract the booze. "Yes," I said. "Very much so."

"I find you attractive too," she said.

"Thank you," I said. I kept my stare at her for a moment and then I grew uncomfortable. I looked away.

"You know you can't make a pass at me now," she said.

"Am I supposed to do that?" I asked.

"You can't now because I've already started it. You know I'll give in," she said.

"This is weird," I said.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

"It's exciting. It's like when we were kids."

"Today is a hard day for me," she said. She stood up from the leopard printed high heel shoe-chair and came to the sofa. She sat right next to me. "It's like that Bob Dylan song, I'm going to fall in love with the next woman I meet, only I'm not into women. Do you know that song?"

"I adjusted my body on the sofa. I pulled my knee up and leaned into the arm so I could face her. "Umm," I said. I don't know why I made it seem like I was thinking about it or that there was anything even remotely familiar about it. I knew nothing about Bob Dylan except that he was old and only old people seemed to care about him. "I'm too young," I said.

"I'm thirty-five this year," she said. "How old are you?"

"I'm thirty-five now," I said.

"Married?"

"Nope," I said. "You?"

"Never married?" she asked.

"Nope," I said, I lied. "You?"

"No," she said. "Why not?"

"Never found the time," I said. "You?"

"I've always had the time," she said.

"Siblings?"

"One," I said. "Brother, five years younger, you?"

"Three sisters, two older, one younger, estranged," she said.

"I'm not close with my brother. Not really a good reason for it," I said.

"What's wrong with you then?" she said.

"What'd you mean?" I asked.

"Good looking guy, you seem intelligent, I feel like you're a kind person. Why no woman?"

"I don't know," I said. "I mean, I'm not sure."

I sighed. I put my hand on my knee. I had gone on a date with a girl in college. We drank a bunch of beer. She had invited me to her room. We fooled around. All very PG or maybe PG-13 sort of fooling around. Next day I met her boyfriend. For some reason he had it that I forced myself on her. He was a stupid gorilla of a dude and this stupid gorilla's friends delivered a pretty good beating.

The truth was that I seldom dated because I secretly had fear that these women had gorillas for boyfriends. And even after college, I began work and work took up all my time. I'd been two years in Osaka and I fell in very well with the Salaryman culture. It was all about work and drinking too much, smoking too much and eating while standing up.

"I had a boyfriend for a few years," she said.

"It was fun. It didn't end very well."

"No?" I asked. For some reason I found this

candor very refreshing. I suppose it was because it was all attention on her.

"My fault entirely," she said. "I was still working through my demons. I wasn't very honest with him."

"When did it end?" I asked. It felt like an interview anyway.

"When I was twenty-five," she said.

"You haven't had a boyfriend for ten years?" I asked.

"A fling here and there," she said. "Nothing serious. But I've decided to change my ways, you know?"

"Oh," I said, "I see."

"It's been on my mind this winter. It's time for me to open up. I want to fall in love," she said.

I continued to look at her and then I let my eyes lose focus. I nodded.

"Do you want to fall in love?" she asked.

"Right now?" I said. I focused on her again. She really was beautiful.

"Maybe even a maybe?" she said.

"Maybe," I said. "Why not?"

"Right now? With me?" she asked.

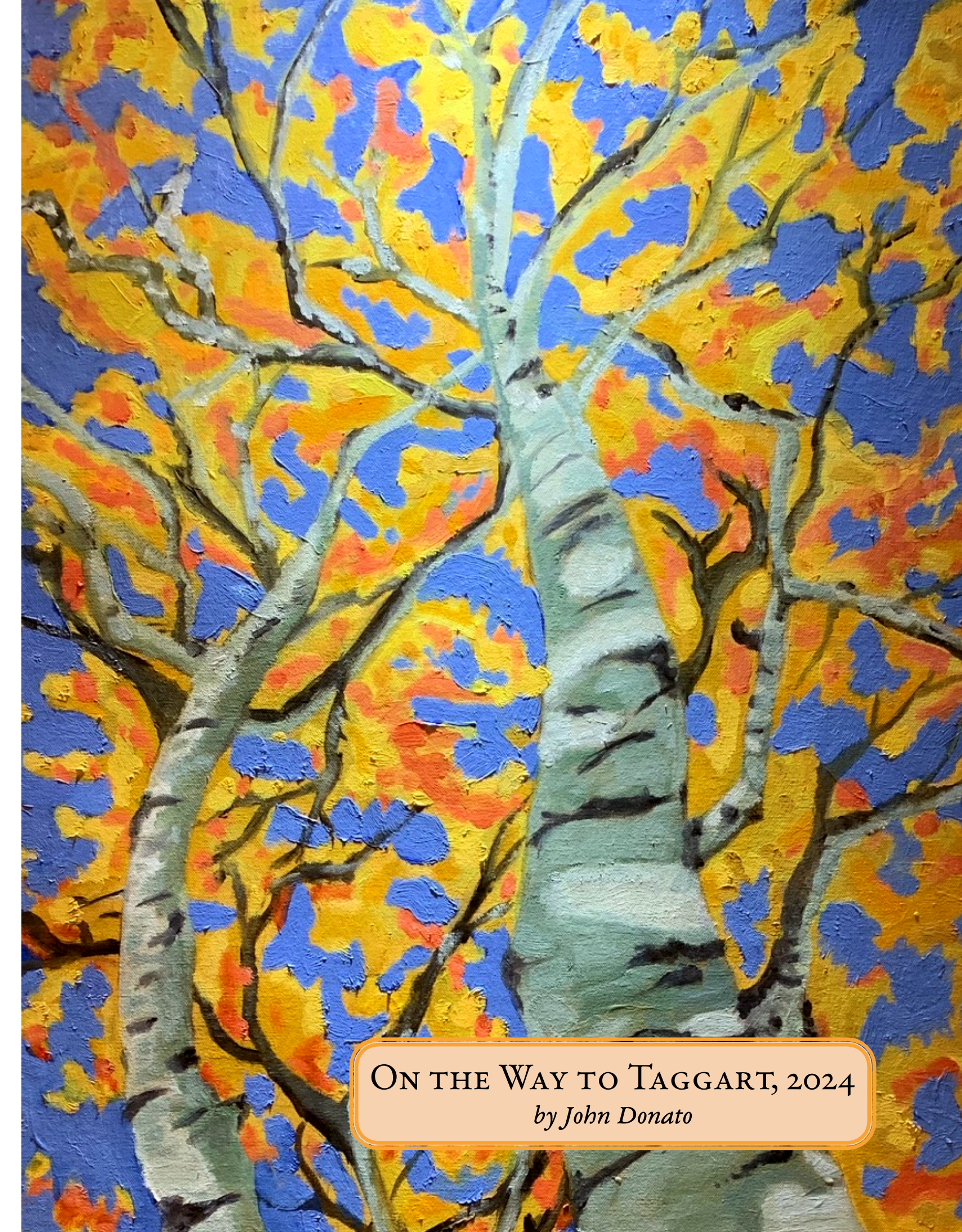
"I don't know," I said. I adjusted myself on the sofa. My first thought went to my passport. My passport. I hadn't been anywhere for some time and I had never used this particular passport. It had been renewed last year, December. "Why not?" I said.

"I don't know what it'll take. But I think we should take it slowly," she said.

"Yes," I said. "Take it slowly."

"Do you want to spend the night?" she said.

In the ensuing silence, I heard the rain stating, the sound under the roof as we sat there was very loud. I did not have an umbrella. "Yes," I said. "Yes, I'd like that."



ON THE WAY TO TAGGART, 2024
by John Donato

TELL ME WHY / SWIMMING POOLS

by *Liam Atkinson*

“Hey, do you want to come to my house? We can go swimming” — a text I received from him on an app I no longer use. Panic. My heart falls through my chest. Why does he want to see me now? Is he upset? What if he doesn’t want to talk to me anymore? I swallow all my fears and take a ride to his place. It’s a handsome little house on a quiet street. It’s the middle of July. The sun is beaming down with its brilliant light. The birds are singing. This is a safe space, I tell myself. I walk to the back gate to the pool where he greets me. The same person he’s always been. Wispy black hair, light brown skin, and bright eyes. A similar stature to myself but slightly more muscular.

“Hey, what’s up?” he greets me. I smile and say nothing back. It’s impossible not to smile in his presence. “Well, I’m really glad you came. Go ahead and get ready, I’ll be here.”

I step inside to switch from my regular clothes into my swim clothes and step back. He’s already in the pool by the time I get back, and suddenly I’m very conscious that my arms are showing. I wish they didn’t. Maybe if they didn’t, this would be different.

“What are you waiting for? Get in, the water’s not going to bite you.” I take small steps into the water, feeling the initial bite of coldness before I’m relieved by its comfort. I take the plunge, feeling the water swallow me completely, rushing over my head, cooling my body completely. Relief. Maybe there’s nothing to fear here after all. I rise again and take a deep breath of the fresh summer air. I hear him talking to me but I can’t make out what he’s saying.

“What?” I responded.

“Did you like the Trevor Noah book I recommended to you?”

“Oh, yeah it’s very good. I like how he relates his experience so well to others. It’s a funny book, sometimes sad.”

“Yeah, it’s really funny. I like the later chapters better than the others. It makes me feel like I’m a part of his story, where and how he grew up and all.”

“I could see that. He’s a master at detail.”

We paused. I started speaking about my script, about dreams I had of becoming something more.

“So I’m still writing horror movies. I’m still working out the kinks, but I think I have some okay projects in mind. The one I’m writing about now is Ultraviolet Death Party. It’s about a group of college kids who go into the mountains to party, but they’re driven mad by a mysterious force and have to fight off wendigos and stuff.”

“Why are they fighting wendigos and not each other?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you said that they go mad. So why aren’t they slaying each other and not wendigos? It just doesn’t make a lot of sense.”

“I suppose you’re right.... I never really thought about it that way.”

“Your ideas aren’t bad. I just think you have too many moving parts. Break things down and reimagine them. That’s the mark of a great writer.”

I smiled.

“Thank you.”

We switched topics and started talking about music. I brought up an old Fleetwood Mac song that I like.

“Oh God, I can’t stand listening to that song anymore. They play it over and over again at work. It drives me up the wall.”

I laughed as he talked about how he used to play competitions against his manager by seeing who could annoy the other first with old music. I stopped playing with my interjections as I listened to him talk about his life. About work, his family, the music he listens to, the games he plays. I wanted to listen to him closer, but when I looked into his eyes when he talked my attention was all drowned out. I couldn’t stop thinking about how bright his eyes were. I don’t think he minded, as he kept going. Now and then I shared my piece, to show that I validated his interests so he wouldn’t think I was ignoring him. I kept him engaged with my eye contact, a skill that I have buried, but tend to bring out when I need it.

“Hey, do you want to move to the hot tub? It’ll be warmer there,” he said.

"Oh... sure."

I followed him as we sank into the warm waters. I remember the warmth as it filled me, body and soul.

"Wow... this is... perfect," I said.

"I know. Aren't you so glad you have me come up with these ideas?"

"Shut up."

I laid back and enjoyed the feeling as we lay in silence. I thought to myself, this is perfect. I don't want to be anywhere else.

"Hey," he said.

"Yeah?"

"What are you doing?"

"What do you mean...?"

"I mean what are you doing with yourself over there, and I'm all the way here?"

I blushed.

"I don't know."

"Fix that then."

I sighed, getting up, and repositioned myself from the opposite side to his side in his arms. I felt the warm embrace of his touch, the feeling of my arms in his. I don't want to be anywhere else, I thought again. I tried to think of something to say to break the tension.

"Hey, would you look at how many stars are out today?"

"It's not nighttime. You can't see them."

"Yeah, you can."

"Oh really? Show me."

I took his hand in mine and pointed at the sky.

"There, there, there, there, and there," I said, pointing at nothing.

"You're so ridiculous."

"You're the one who's ridiculous."

I laid my head back on the end of the pool. His head was laid there too. I turned my head and met his eyes with mine. I found it hard not to be entranced by them. If I looked any closer, I swear that I could see the stars as they're born and collapse into dust. I looked at his skin, at how smooth and soft it was. I looked at his facial composure and how it all held together so perfectly.

And finally, I looked into his eyes again. I couldn't pull away, and so I said, "You're... you're so beautiful."

He stared back.

"So are you."

I pulled my head closer to his. Our hands touched, and he held my hand in his. I brought my face closer yet again, and then I faltered. He picked up my face with his hand and held my gaze to his. Our heads flourished for a moment, and our foreheads brushed against each other as continents do as they drift. At last, he pulled my lips to meet his, and we kissed. I felt the taste of him, and only wanting more, pulled his head closer to mine. We stayed like this for minutes in complete silence. I listened to the cicadas as they cried, enshrouding the area with their haunting melody of ecstasy and longing. I wanted to know. I wanted to know the answers to everything. Why am I here in this space with you? Why do you answer all my beckons? Why are we only strangers to each other, when I feel like I've known you longer than my lifetime? Am I blossoming into something new or am I only a fool for you? Tell me why.

"Why...?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you still want me?"

"What do you mean?"

I looked back at the lines across my arm. I remembered how they stung and burned, and now they are only a part of me.

"I thought that when I relapsed you didn't want me anymore."

He stared at me with those paralyzing eyes and smiled.

"Tell me why I could ever stop wanting you."

We kissed under the clouds in the middle of July. We laid back under the same sky, the same sun. My hands rested on my heart, and I wished that time never mattered. Years from now I will be bones, though at least I know that there was a time. A time that I knew that I was beautiful and that you saw me. I wonder, will you ever come back to haunt me?

JUST FOR TODAY

by Mike Savadian

One more, I can take it.
One more, then I'll be free.
One more, before I turn my life around.
Who am I kidding? This is who I'm meant to be.
I wake up in a panic,
heart beating out my chest,
sweat dripping all the way down,
forming a puddle for me to fall into.
Again, and again, and again, and again.
It's another Groundhog Day from hell.
I hit snooze but the alarm won't stop ringing
telling me I better get some shit before my skin falls off,
before the bones in my body get up and leave,
leaving the rest of me curled up on the floor,
waiting on death to come back with more.

Wait a minute, is that a dollar in loose change?
Oh baby, its gonna be a good day!
I'll take that to the store,
grab a scratch ticket,
turn the 1 to 20,
then boom!
We're back in business.
Airtight plan, what could possibly go wrong?
Fuck, I lost.

That's alright.
I got plans from B to Z,
and if need be,
I'll take that damn alphabet and stretch out to infinity!

Hmm....alright, let me start with an inventory of the shit I haven't sold yet.
Ahh, nothing left.
Could I write another bad check?
And who do I owe money to?
Fuck it. I'll hit 'em all up. One of 'em is bound to forget.

Is that the alarm again or is that a voice in my head?
Mike, you did this all yesterday and the day before.
Can't you see this is all just a trap?

Shut up! I don't need that.
Come back later when I'm crying.
Right now I'm on a mission.
But the sun's going down and it ain't getting dark.
Everything is turning grey.
Once again I'm brought to a plane of existence
where life seems so distant and death is only a few thoughts away.
I wish I could just melt into the couch and watch reruns of when I was kid

joyful and active
no substance controlling me,
but these days I'm just a ventriloquist's dummy,
strings attached with hooks below the skin,
sinking deep, pulling on each fiber of my being,
completely detached from the values I was brought up with,
so far removed from anything that resembles a human being.

Because I'm the walking dead.
I'm empty space.
I'm a pocket full of nips and a dime bag,
an escaped sewer rat,
living amongst the beautiful people,
counting my days until the boot of life goes
Boom! Splat!

Entitled pond scum,
an empty shell of the person I once was.
I gotta get back.
There has to be more to life than this.
But where do I start?
I guess I could take one step.
Maybe give all those people calling a call back.
I can break this down.
I can do what they say,
and focus on the next right thing,
just for today.

REPOSE
by Tatiana Keating



Keating

LUMIERE

Boring Legal Stuff

Statements and opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the bylined contributors or of the editorial staff, and do not necessarily represent the official position of MassBay Community College. Written work may be edited or printed in excerpt and visual art may be adapted for layout and design, unless otherwise specified. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. All author rights reserved. Except as expressly authorized by this agreement or the agreement on lumierelitmag.com, you may not copy, reproduce, distribute, republish, download, perform, display, post, transmit, exploit, create derivative works or otherwise use any of the materials in any form or by any means for commercial use without the prior written authorization of the respective copyright owner(s). The magazine authorizes you to view and download the materials only for personal, non-commercial use, provided that you keep intact all copyright and other proprietary notices contained in the original materials.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can submit work to lumière?

Anyone, and that includes you! It's our practice to ensure that at least 70% of the work in the magazine has been created by students, but we also find it important to publish work from faculty, staff, members of the community, and anyone else who hears our call.

How are submissions reviewed?

First, our submissions manager removes all identifying information from the submission. The editorial team looks for work that is original in subject and style, showing the world something new, or letting us see something familiar in a new light. We highly value attention to craft, no matter what the medium.

How can I submit my work?

Go to lumierelitmag.com and click "Submit Your Work!" at the top of the page, or email us at litmag@massbay.edu.

When is the deadline for submissions?

We accept submissions all year round and publish annually at the end of the spring semester. The deadline for each

issue will be announced every spring. Submissions received after the deadline will be reserved for the following issue.

Can I publish my work anonymously?

Yes! When filling out the website submission form you can choose to have your piece published anonymously or with a pseudonym.

Is AI work accepted?

Per our submission guidelines, all submissions must be the creation of the applicant; as such, this does not include AI-created works.

What types of work are accepted?

You can submit your poetry, short fiction, prose, short plays, lyrics, artwork, photographs, and other creative work.

Is fan art accepted?

Our goal is to accept works that are unique and unfamiliar to the audience. While fan art is considered a type of art, it is not exclusive to the artist and is therefore not accepted. Also, without the appropriate licenses and permissions, fan art may be considered an infringement of the copyholder's right to publish that work.

Does the magazine staff edit submissions?

We reserve the right to crop and enhance art submissions, to copyedit, and to make minor changes to maintain consistency across the magazine, but we highly value the integrity of the work we receive and will not make substantive changes. We promise not to change your ending.

Who creates the magazine?

The magazine is primarily developed by the hard-working students of EN202: Advanced Writing; however, any student at MassBay is welcome and encouraged to join the lumière staff. If interested, please contact English Professor Matt Walsh at mwalsh@massbay.edu.

How can I view the magazine?

Printed copies are available on the Wellesley Hills and Framingham campuses in the library and Academic Achievement Center. You can also find this issue and all previous editions online at lumierelitmag.com.



Send your work and see great
stuff at lumierelitmag.com