



Introduction

“Thereby Cocytus wholly was congealed.
With six eyes did he weep, and down three chins Trickled the tear-
drops and the bloody drive.”

Inferno, Canto XXXIV

Inspired by Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, *Cocytus* acts as a manifestation of our personal hell in an age of confinement. This collection is an exploration of beauty against the binary, of love in a selfish realm, of grief and a lack of trust – we are at a loss for an existence we claim as our own.

And so, we write. Divulge narcissistic manifestos. We wait for the Charles to freeze over to take a leap in the belief we are too weak to crack it. We find we are greater than our fears.

Cocytus is shameless in its self-loathing, unafraid to creep between the lines of discomfort and delusion. This is our experience. We do what we must to exist in our reality, fight Virgil when he tugs at our strings.

The Beacon is a student run literary journal created with the intent to found a writer’s community that uplifts student voices. A special thank you to everyone who made this edition possible.

Sincerely,
The Beacon

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You Are Not A Face/Mirrors

Lucas Dantas Leite

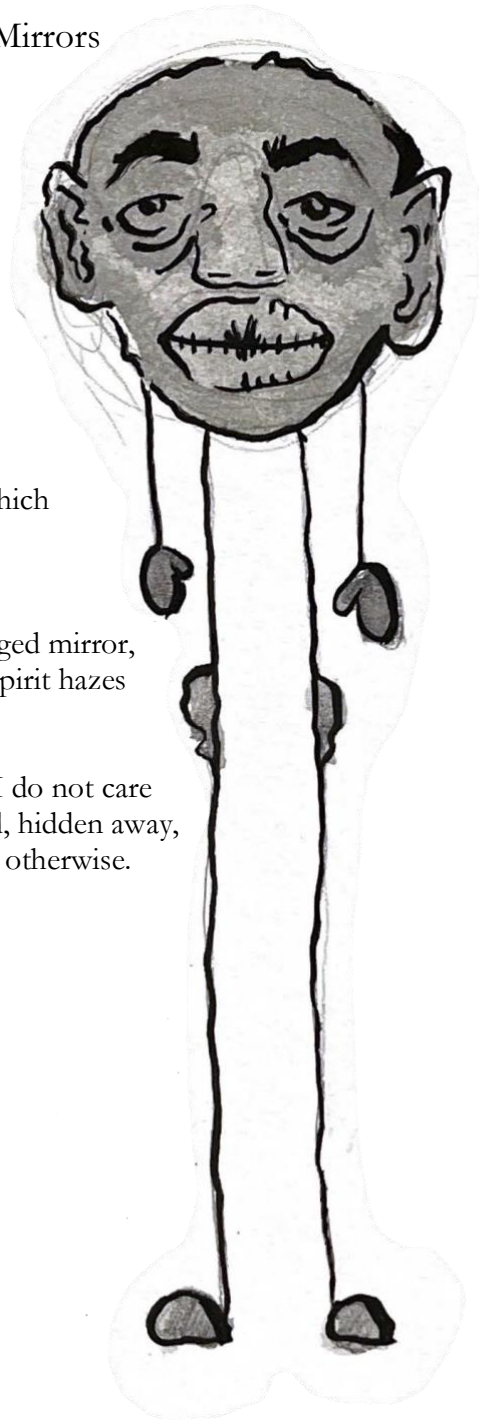
You are not a face.
You are a nose
and eyes
lips
thighs
a proclivity
for the beyond
and a will to defy.

The stitched boundaries which
apply to you and to me
are but foothills to a face.

Like in an only slightly fogged mirror,
your lines dilate and your spirit hazes
into a matted sheen over

the flat image of yourself. I do not care
for mirrors; be they fogged, hidden away,
painted over, dead clear or otherwise.
I do not care
for mirrors.

The speckled memories
blur my sense of nostalgia.



[untitled muse]

Elizabeth Goldberg

she's sweet like honey;
almost sickly, sticking to every inch
like clumps of sappy goo.
maybe she's just a bit too much.

still, she dances with her shadow;
making friends with it's subtleties,
and caressing the curves cast on the wall
like a projector playing every flaw in the dim lit room.

have you ever conversed with your reflection?
well, she does, facing the mirror→
index extended to extract inner essences
in order to make new and exciting refractions.

yet, she still disassembles.
fractioning herself off into little piles. .
keep, throw away, donate: someone else might appreciate. . .
a piece from the feminine wasteland. . . .

[however the core is locked up
like a small box, stuffed to the brim
with the parts of her she wants to save
for when, finally, wholeness is attainable and clean]

Wish I Wasn't Me

Tyler Davis

I
I remember...

No.

No I don't.

Stop, please.

Stop shoving the plastered dolls
and the unwanted perfection in my face.

No! Mommy please, I don't want to wear a dress.

I don't like dresses.

Please.

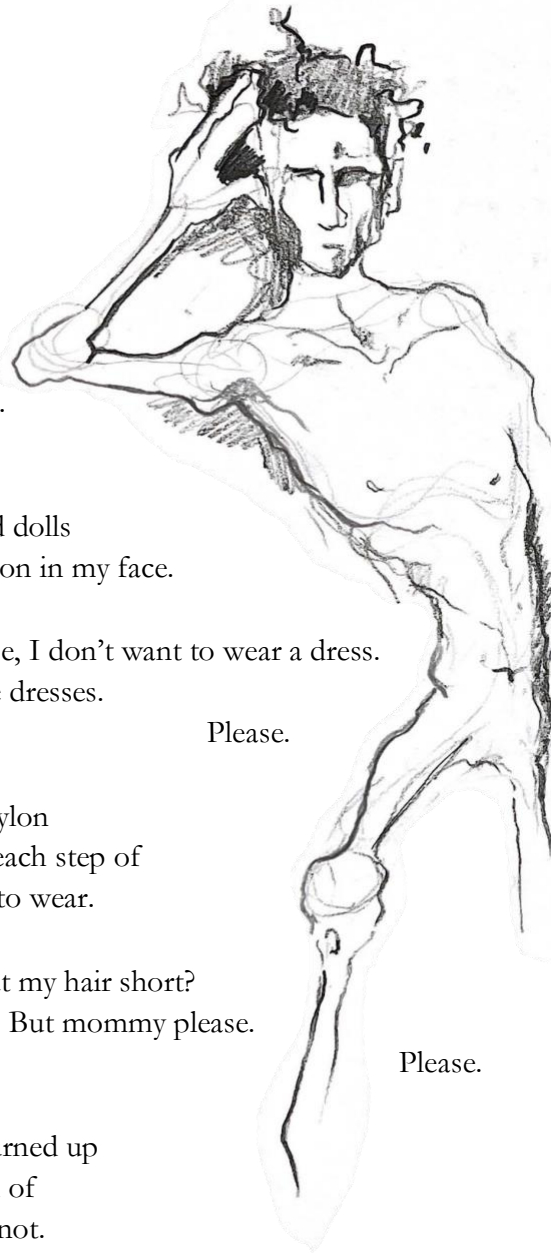
Please don't wrap me in nylon
and force me to fall after each step of
the shoes you wanted me to wear.

Mommy? Can I cut my hair short?

But mommy please.

The insides of me have burned up
from the exhaustion faced of
trying to be someone I'm not.

Toss away all the feminine clothes



and trade them for dark and baggy ones;
sneak into my brother's closet
for things I'm not allowed to wear.

Stop. Stop. growing please.

Heavier breathing sets in.

Panic.

Anxiety.

Mommy, please. Please make it stop.
I just want my neon green shirt back.
I want my baggy shorts that were 2 sizes too big
back. I want my flashy shoes that were so tainted
and fell apart because I wore them

everyday. Mommy, please.

Take back my growing chest,
take back the curves that I have developed,
and trade them all for a flat chest
and muscular body.
All free of charge.

Mommy, I wanna be a boy. Can you call me Tyler?
Mommy? Why not?

Mommy, please.

Things start to get blurry:
I see speckled dots of white
in my vision

because of the countless number
of breaths I've had to take.

My ribs are constantly crushed from
the suppressant against my chest.

I dream of the day where I can
admire my self-made mustache and beard
from injections that make me who I am.
I dream of the day where I can
admire the scars upon my chest
and finally be able to walk around shirtless.

But that day is too far away.

So instead,
I sit here with tears streaming so fast
down my face,
that I could fill up a jug,
as I stare at the criss-crossed
marks on my thighs.

I start to go into a deep depression
because of all the hope that has been
drained and taken from me.

Mommy, please, before it's too late.

I wish my childhood wasn't
taken away from me,

but that's too late
because I'm grown now.

Mom? Can you still love me please?



To Be the First-Generation

Galilee Barron

No tienes que llorar, nomas tómalo día a día
“There’s no need to cry; you just have to take it day by day.”
It’s what my dad would always say.

But how would I begin to explain
Of all the tears, thoughts, and fears
As my main motivator to do what he couldn’t.

No tienes que llorar, nunca me podrias decepcionar
“There’s no need to cry; you could never disappoint me.”
It’s what my mom would say, but I didn’t agree.

My parents placed the world in my hands
But how would I get them to understand
How something impacted me so negatively.

They told me I could do anything.
So I asked myself,
“Why not do everything?”

No tienes que llorar, no tienes que llorar
There’s no need to cry, there’s no need to cry.

she hadn’t heard the shot

Julie Derraik

a pale blue bucket, my grandmother’s shampoo:
georgina rinsed tia’s hair
every sunday

she’d come with calloused hands,
smelt of garlic and farofa,
but vicodin made it
hard to notice

while tia slept, gina hung
auburn coils over the cot,
wrung week-old sweat from
young roots

gently she’d scrub sage into
each strand, careful not to
wake the girl from scarce peace-
wake her to shard-shaped scars and screws

she washed swiftly (feijão was boiling),
splashing occasionally and humming soft hymns,
hoping tia walks again

she’d open the window, let salty heat
dry curls and gaze through-
up at Christ the Redeemer
then, down at the bloodied sidewalk

she prayed for healing flesh.

Post-Apocalypse

Josephine Perl



Kids today cannot appreciate the beauty of the giant hole in the middle of my street. It is really emblematic of the current social condition that they fall into the hole instead of looking at it and saying wow, cool hole, I'm sure that's not a nuisance when you want to pull your car out of your driveway. Well my car actually fell into the hole a few weeks ago dumbasses. When the hole was expanding, which it does literally all of the time. You would probably know about the hole's expansion patterns (like I do) if you spent less time on social media.

In addition to memorizing the hole's expansion patterns, I am out there pretty much every morning, watching it for new developments. Doing my duty. I phoned the local police office to let them know I was on top of the hole surveillance situation and they responded with some very grateful elevator music. Anyways I have a punched-out lawn chair that I anchored to my lawn with some rusting dumbbells so it doesn't fall in during one of the hole's expansions and I sit in that. I don't have any coffee because coffee is almost as bad for your brain development as falling into a hole. Instead I follow a strict diet of hard liquor and expired tropical juice pouches.

You may be thinking, "how do you get the hard liquor and expired juice if your beautiful 1986 Yugo was completely decimated (by the hole) so you cannot drive to the grocery store?" Well I actually happen to have a really wonderful neighbor named Jerry. Since the hole is closer to my side, Jerry can get his car out, usually. He buys me groceries from a list (hard liquor, tuna fish, English Muffins) and slides them across the powerlines. I am always a bit worried when he does this because he has to climb up the powerline pole to get the bag on the powerline and he is 76 years old. Climbing powerline poles is

the vice of a young, spry person usually. Not an elderly man. So I am worried sometimes. But also I really need the food and such, for my own survival, so I just stare with my teeth chattering violently every time he grabs the rusting ladder.

His tendons ripple beneath his wrinkled skin like cheese wire cutting an especially viscous brie. I watch his wiry little forearms haul his distended torso up the powerline and my teeth chatter and I wait.

Anyways today I am out on my lawn chair like usual and it's pouring acid rain. Really coming down. So far two SUVs and a Station Wagon have driven off the edge. That's slightly higher than the typical standard car-hole mortality rate for a Monday, which is accounted for by the fact of the rain obscuring the hole's edge so that people who drove up maybe just wanting to get near it end up falling in.

Jerry always talks about writing to the town to get them to put up a sign in front of the hole. When he first told me that I thought he meant it as a kind of tourist attraction thing. But he actually thinks that a sign could decrease the car-hole mortality rate by at least 70%. He thinks if there was a sign in front of the hole people would- what, stop driving? Drive around the hole? Yeah. Right. Look, buddy, I'm out here watching this hole every day, and I can tell you that no sign is gonna stop those cars from jumping off the edge. They love it! The cars love jumping into the hole. If anything a sign would probably increase the car-hole mortality rate. I secretly suspect Jerry's got some dementia going on or something. It's not like the sign idea would ever materialize anyways. I can't even get the town to give me a permit for a swimming pool.

I mark down in my notebook as a woman wearing a fuschia anti-acid raincoat falls into the hole, and I couldn't see it clearly but I would bet my 9,000,000 dollar vehicle warranty that she was on the phone. That is a real lesson for you. Going on your phone stops you from appreciating nature. Like, for

example, the wonderful hole. But it is hard to write this comment on the notebook page because it's basically soaked through so I dig the pen in harder and, wouldn't you know it, about ten whole pages rip. Fuck. I throw the notebook down to the lawn in disgust and start screaming to get Jerry's attention.

He hobbles outside. "Neighbor? You alright?"

"Not at all, actually, I'm in crisis," I shout back, and he stops looking so frantic. "My notebook ripped. Also I'm out of English Muffins."

"I thought you fell into the hole," he shouts back, in that wounded, trembling falsetto of his.

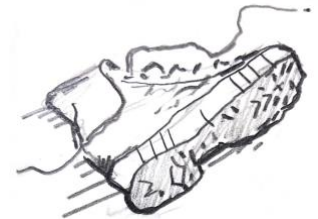
"I'm really on my last of the English Muffins." The rain pastes my hair to my head. I can barely see Jerry. "I'm almost out."

About five thumbs of sun-movement later something amazing happens. A motorcycle falls into the hole. Jerry's gone back inside at this point, so he misses it. Too bad for him! It would be a momentous occasion if I had my notebook to record it but my notebook is completely sogged so instead I just point and make some wild expressions at passing surveillance drones, where I know at least my reaction will be kept for perpetuity. Maybe I can make an information-request later and get the photos back. Probably not. The motorcycle thing is cool, anyways, because we don't get many motorcycles around here and especially not when it rains. So the statistics on a motorcycle hole-jumping were pretty unfavorable.

It's as I'm waving over the security drones that Jerry comes back outside in this old-fashioned yellow raincoat and galoshes and climbs into his brown Nissan Quest 2004 and backs up straight into the giant gaping hole.

Jerry's car disappears so quickly that for a moment I think he must have been de-materialized by one of the roaming vigilante cyborg police gangs, but those rarely come to the suburbs, and

anyways Jerry is not in one of the high-risk categories for gang violence, nor does he have the necessary prerequisites of immuno-compromisation to contract a corpse-vaporizing STD. Jerry was not in any high risk groups actually. Except for being old. I stand there and watch where his car disappeared from and I can't even write about it in my notebook. How terrible is that. I pull out my phone to call maybe his family or something but I can't because I don't know their numbers, and also my phone is actually an iPod, because having a real phone puts you in one of the high-risk categories for theft. So I put my phone back in my pocket and do the only thing I can do while the powerlines are sparking, rubber wire coating melting away like clear water, brown crabgrass of my lawn weeping over the corrupted metal bars of my punched-out lawn chair. I lean over the hole and give prayers for Jerry. Real genuine great-beyond kind of stuff. And the rain is sizzling on the back of my neck and everything is kind of quiet but loud at the same time and it's actually sort of beautiful. The sky is a pungent green and my hands are red from pressing so hard together and it's beautiful.



Santo

Giulio Giuffrida

I.

He wanted to touch the dress, but he couldn't reach it. Running swiftly down a tight, dark corridor that seemed to get narrower and narrower. Strange, numbered doors lined the walls; he stopped for a second to try to read one of them. It kept changing. It didn't change from number to number, but from shape to shape, loosely retaining the optical flavor of Arabic numerals. He wanted to reach out and touch it, maybe that would stop the movement, but he needed to keep running.

He would touch the dress. That odd, bright-red, flowing mass that lay just out of his grasp at the furthest edge of the constantly expanding corridor. He sprinted on, stretching his legs as far as they could in front of him. Shadows, oak trim, and dim glass fixtures flew past his head. Below him, the purple and gold floral carpet thudded with each step, creaking loudly upon the occasional noisy floorboard.

His legs moved faster, and the flowing mass got closer. It was approaching arms-reach. He raised his right arm in anticipation, struggling to keep the rest of his running body stable. Waves of the purest red silk danced playfully in the faint light of the corridor; at once a crimson, a cherry, and at its very wispy edges, the most delicate salmon. Imagine what it feels like! Or does it have a feeling? Would it fall apart in his hands?

These questions both feared and exhilarated him, which made him run faster. He would touch it! Yes he would. He would touch the dress. It was right there. Maybe three feet away. Now two. His legs strained more than ever, and his extended right arm remained locked at the elbow. Speed was conjured up from the depths of his desire, bringing him about a foot from that ethereal,

multicolored, undulating mess of red material. He could almost feel its feathery ends that gestured in all directions—now an inch or two away. Just a few more paces and his middle finger would make contact.

"I don't quite understand," a sharp, cold voice thundered into the dim, hazy corridor. He looked up quickly at the ceiling and toppled to the carpet, his outstretched arm now rug-burned and pink.

"I'm just here to help you," the penetrating, deeply articulate voice continued.

Cold, hard, wooden floorboards replaced the lush, colorful carpet. He sluggishly lifted his eyelids and gazed confusedly at the cloudy, sideways world in front of him. Legs and arms sprawled out at his sides, and he began moving them slowly one by one.

The barn's floor was made of old wooden planks that had slightly distorted over time and were covered in a permanent layer of granular dust. Some particulates had made it onto his stubbly right cheek and mixed with a large puddle of thick drool to form a kind of beige sludge. The walls were studded with sharp nails and were lined with layers of speckled plywood. It wasn't a large space, maybe twenty feet in width and a bit more in length, but its ceilings were high. He propped up on his right elbow and looked up at the yellow florescent fixtures that hung from the intricate wooden trusses, thousands of dead insects built up in their lenses.

He'd been gesturing profusely in the air: screaming, pointing, reddening; he'd been hitting things, dragging things, saying things with his hands. What had happened? He could remember the feeling of his anger and the intensity of his gesturing but nothing else—why had he been so furious? Feeling a sharp pinch in his left hand, he held it up to his eyes and found three deep, jagged cuts stretching the width of his palm, two of which wrapped to the back of his hand between his thumb and

index finger. As he turned his hand over, the thick yellow light revealed clumps of gritty dirt embedded in the palm-side of each gash; the ridges of textured skin had been clean, but the wet, fleshy parts underneath them were filthy. He began clenching his hand in disbelief, which led to a torrent of red-hot knives across the surface of his skin.

The wound needed to be cleaned, or at least covered. Hovering his palm face-up at his side, he used his legs and right arm to sit up and then stand erect. A shelf to his right held an array of cleaning supplies and a bright white roll of paper towels. He reached for the roll with his right hand, tearing off two sheets without the help of his left. What had led to his waking up like this? It was puzzling: one minute he was giving some sort of passionate oration, and the next he was on the floor with these cuts. Thick, puffy red outlines of each gash bled through the white paper towel sheets as he placed them delicately on top of each other in his palm.

“I wish that hadn’t happened, Chris,” the voice he heard earlier grabbed onto his ears from behind. He froze, squinted, and worked his brain to put a face to the words without turning. Instead of finding a face, his mind thought of the natural world, or at least its opposite; of a heavy metal crane wrapped around the trunk of a Giant Sequoia, tearing its powerful, yet delicate roots from the dark brown soil. The crane smoked and heaved, smushing its thick tires into the moist, forgiving soil below it. Braided metal cables dug scars into the smooth, white-and-brown bark that lined the trunk. The tree was grasping, grasping for its right to an extremely long life, and it couldn’t seem to grasp hard enough.

II.

He’d been in a field. Green grass brushed the curves of his calves and the backs of his knees as he reclined on both elbows. He looked up at an impossibly blue sky—like that of a flame’s hottest edges, or of sapphire’s most brilliant crystals—that peeked through a sparse canopy of whitish-brown oak branches and green pine needles. He thought about the light’s elaborate journey. It was first emitted by the Sun’s blasting radiation, then travelled through the vast span of nothingness between star and planet, and finally hit Earth’s thin atmosphere. On impact, the light scattered into the brilliant wavelengths that then pushed through the canopy above Chris’s head and penetrated his wide, brown eyeballs. The waves were wrapped around his corneas like a hug from an old friend, and he sat there in unbroken delight.

His eyes drifted from the elaborate string of wavelengths that connected his skull to the wider universe, eventually resting on the trunk of a centuries-old oak tree to his immediate left. Shards of light brown bark jettied outward toward the sky; delicate vines of green and red ivy wound their way around the thick base; and bright green buffalo grass kissed the surfaced roots as they tapered in all directions into the field around him.

A little chipmunk lived in that tree. When he saw it peeking around the trunk to steal a look at him, Chris couldn’t help grinning as wide as his cheeks would let him. Its fluffy little body jerked, spun, and bent at a speed his eyes almost couldn’t catch; it was an almost ethereal being, and spent its untouchable life completing the simple task of nut collection. He saw it burying the nuts in the crevices of surfaced roots and little mole holes, most of which would never be recovered. He laughed internally at the idea—such a serious, speedy creature focusing all of its capacity on the gathering and sub-par retrieval of walnuts, pecans, and almonds.

Growing more comfortable with Chris’s presence, the

chipmunk crawled along the trunk in front of him and began scaling upward with a large brown nut in its mouth. Its little legs fought the force of gravity, alternating in bursts of movement toward its little nook halfway up the tree. It was almost at the nook—maybe four feet away—when it stopped suddenly and stared to its right with intensity, nut still securely in mouth. Before Chris could shift his eyes in the same direction, flashes of gold and brown feathers surrounded the chipmunk and a set of black talons wrapped themselves around its torso. Ripped mercilessly from the oak tree, it was carried swiftly across the grassy field and into the surrounding woods. Its little body twitched and writhed in the screaming sunlight, pushing with all possible force against the dark hooks that entrapped it.

He watched the owl fly past his field of view, holding his eyes for a minute or two at the top of the tree line where predator and prey had disappeared. His face was glossed and unmoving; he was shocked, terrified, didn't know what to do. He just stared. Reality at that moment was placed profoundly close to his consciousness: it was all a kind of sick joke. We're given a hilariously small window of time to figure out our lives on this gorgeous and frighteningly isolated blue and green marble. We writhe and we grasp, we hunt and we gather, we feel and we escape, just to be swept under the all-encompassing eternal rug of unconsciousness which nobody knows the origin of and which acts on its own terms. Chris bit his lip and looked down at the deep green grass below him.

Tracing the contours of each grass blade with a pointer finger, he retreated further into his thoughts and repeated the traumatic event in his head. It became obvious to him that we live in two worlds simultaneously. One world resides within the webbing of life's pleasures: the utter utopia of love and human connection, the stimulation of untouchable beauty, the deep satisfaction of achievement and prosperity. The other is occupied by life's impending tragedy: a closeness to death and its agony, an

intuitive fear of the unknown, a readiness for the onset of emergency. At all times, the latter bullies the former as a disgruntled fourth grader might bully a preschooler. We're tasked with keeping the innocence, the spark of curiosity and universal love alive within that bullied child as he shoulders, against all odds, the terrible reality of human existence. How can we possibly do that? How can we look that child in the face and assure him it's worth it? This is the toll we must pay, Chris concluded, to not just exist as most physical objects do—but to experience.

Chris laid down, his back flat with the cold, lumpy, grass-studded ground below him. Was he writhing now? Was he safe? The sun drifted downward toward the horizon, expiring in giant blotches of orange and pink. He watched the canopy slowly lose resolution as the light went away, revealing thousands of luminous pinholes in the night sky above him.

III.

Lines came to him at moments like these. After about an hour of staring openly and compassionately at the crowded night sky, he'd thought of an ending to his poem. The speaker, consumed by various episodes of his own folly—placing his work above his family, losing focus in all his meditations, being utterly weak at his mother's funeral—decides to drop it all, and head for the hills. There, he's consumed by the romance of the natural world, and allows it to flow through him without resistance. It seemed obvious to Chris that the speaker never had a choice: he'd either leave his family behind and return an enlightened man, or suffer his tortured mind within the bounds of society for the rest of his life. Such enlightenment was the only effective method of self-improvement, and had to be pursued at the risk of nature's physical danger.

In a fit of excitement Chris jumped to his feet, brushing his arms and legs and heading toward the moonlit road. He had it! The ending to his third poem. He'd make it home, pull out his notebook, and finish the poem in one breathless sitting. His lips formed a half-smile as he stepped briskly down the yellow-lined road, twenty minutes from home. His hands were in the pockets of his thick khakis and he whistled the chorus of a psychedelic-rock tune which reverberated from the messes of tree trunks to either side of him.

When he reached his house—a simple one-floor ranch with acres of land between it and his neighbors—several lights were on. Looking in from the street, he could see his wife Carlotta in a gorgeous fit of laughter. Her mouth was wide open, head tilted back, and eyes squinted shut as her curly dark hair draped the back of a wooden dining room chair. Red playing cards were clutched in her right hand as she slammed it down onto the table in a fit of playful rage.

Across from her sat Santo, his mechanical body perching stiffly among the flowing contours of his wooden chair. His squarish metal arms cradled his cards at the edge of the table, and the expressions of his titanium face reflected the precise bliss of Carlotta's enjoyment. It was still a bizarre sight for Chris to see the spring-like metals of his lips, eyebrows, and cheeks contort and shift to create seemingly biological movements. It looked so real—so accessible, so compassionate. From the day Santo arrived at their home, this distinct yet untraceable air of utter liveliness never left him.

Chris reached the garage, happily punched the code to lift the door, and arrived at the inner door that opened to the kitchen. As his left hand gripped the brass doorknob, he could hear muffled tones of joy pattering against the other side of the metal door. When he twisted the knob and pushed the door open, his ears were engulfed in a sea of laughter and congenial conversation that permeated the entire first floor. After closing

the door quietly, he waded through the blissful auditory waters and leaned his hips against the grey laminate countertops in the kitchen, watching the dining room spectacle unfold.

He liked having Santo there. Carlotta spent late nights at a family law firm in town, settling divorces, estates, and land disputes that arose among the countryfolk. She deserved the constant attention and warmth that Santo was able to give her. Really, it was more than warmth and attention: it was a kind of pure joy that Santo was able to insert into every waking moment. Chris had observed this in all of his interactions with him: a perfected and transcendent ability to carry conversation, uplift one's ambitions, cradle one with flawless affirmations, and toe the line between his own absurdities and acute sensibilities.

Coupled with Chris's admiration, however, was a creeping feeling of resentment. Chris felt foolish when the emotion inevitably surfaced in his conscience, but he couldn't control it. Yes, Santo was the best thing that ever happened to them—but was Santo strictly better than him? Could a robot...? No! Of course it couldn't. But the thoughts were there. There's hardly anything less conscionable than the belief that Carlotta could prefer a robot over himself or that his career as a carpenter could ever be made useless by the mechanical precision of Santo's titanium arms. But the thoughts were always there. He couldn't shake them.

"Chris!" Carlotta finally noticed his neutral gaze from the kitchen as she placed a card face-up in a pile at the middle of the table. Their eyes locked pleasantly. "Are you gonna sit down with us?"

"Maybe in a little while," Chris said with a smile as he began walking toward the table. "I've got some paperwork to go over and then I'll come out." He leaned over and pecked her lips.

"Suit yourself," Carlotta said with a giggle, holding up the few cards in her hands. She watched him giggle back and pat Santo on the shoulder as he headed into the hallway. The door of

his study clicked shut and the waves of auditory and relaxed hospitality resumed, sloshing against the door's outer surface.

IV.

His study was small but exceedingly comfortable. A worn, brown-leather desk chair sat proudly below a dark oak-slab desk with squared metal legs. Atop the desk sat an antique banker's lamp that cast a dim green glow throughout the room, a stack of books of varying thicknesses, capped by a copy of Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception*, and his shiny, aluminum-bodied laptop that was plugged into the wall. Beside the desk was a matching file cabinet, at the bottom of which Chris kept his writing drafts. He often wrote on his computer, but the intimacy of writing by hand simply couldn't be replaced in many instances.

He wrote mostly poetry, but dipped his toes into political philosophy and literary psychoanalysis. These were mere interests of his that had stuck with him since college, none of which were applicable to his current carpentry work. He loved the powerful feeling of discussing such cerebral, top-drawer topics—touching the untouchable underbelly of personal and social life. None in his profession seemed to be asking the same questions, so he kept his engagement with them and his poetry to himself. Carlotta was likewise unaware of their existence.

Chris pulled a ring of keys from his pants pocket, jingled them in his hands for a few seconds, and pinched the cabinet's tarnished brass key between his thick thumb and pointer finger. As he bent to insert the key, he noticed the bottom drawer was sticking out about two inches. Had he forgotten to lock it? Puzzled, he grabbed the top of the drawer, pulled it open, and began inspecting its contents. He wrote exclusively in multi-colored spiral-bound notebooks, and none seemed to be missing.

Everything was there.

As he flipped through the six or seven notebooks to find the poem, he ran through its new ending in his head. The poem's speaker, in pure conflict with the vulnerabilities and errors of his personal life, drops his entire civilized lifestyle and pursues enlightenment among the natural landscape. Though seemingly paradoxical—leaving one's family as a way of strengthening it—this solitary journey is indeed the only way of properly reorienting himself. He'd tried every other conceivable route. He abandons his family for the explicit purpose of potentially rejoining them a more productive, controlled, and knowledgeable man.

The first two notebooks were easy to rule out, as they were filled with his own thorny political discourse, and he always kept his poetry and prose separate. The third notebook—it had been a while since he'd returned to it—contained the desired poem in its first few pages. It was still untitled, and he flipped through its beginning, reading his own scribbly, rushed handwriting. Within the lines were countless cross-outs and underlines, and beside them were exclamation points, crude star symbols, and other expressive marginalia. It was always his philosophy to get the words down as quickly as possible; his thoughts were often vibrant but fleeting, and would therefore be forfeited if he slowed down and focused on his penmanship. So long as he could still read it, what did it matter? Poor penmanship might even offer him greater protection from the public discovery of his work, a vulnerability he wasn't yet willing to expose himself to.

As he approached the unfinished ending, he turned the final page to discover an array of thick black letters—in all capitals—continuing in verses underneath his own. He stared at the chunky, industrial letters with astonishment. Good God! Someone had...! He began reading the dark, foreign verses, which ran for three or four more pages.

The ghost writer had come to a similar conclusion he had.

The poem's speaker had to abandon his family and career and face the truth and infinitude of the natural world. But in this new version, the protagonist goes beyond what Chris had imagined, and indeed becomes enlightened. Feeling the world sift through himself like the smoothest grains of sand through the fluid curves of an hourglass, the protagonist kneels upon a grassy knoll and remains there in profound, unbroken bliss. Days go by and his focus is never broken; his mind and body had been utterly prepared to escape the standard bounds of consciousness. The sun beats his back, water escapes his mouth, hunger racks his abdomen—yet he remains in an absorbed state of ecstasy. He never once thinks of his family or civilized life, just a complete oneness with the world around him. Eventually, the physical pressures of the natural world take his life and thick grass begins growing over his tattered and scavenged body. The sun and moon break daily over his dissolved corpse.

The ending was—well, it was perfect. He hadn't thought of such a... good God! It was approachable, realistic, and shocking. Chris's imagined ending had been such lower resolution. This seemed to be going in a similar yet distinctly problematic and utterly logical direction. Yes! This was precisely what the speaker should have done: why hadn't he seen that? Chris had been hung up on injecting hope—maybe the speaker would return to his family and society an enlightened man. But then, what would be the purpose of enlightenment? To touch reality's eternal darkness and illumination, to merge the self with all that is powerful and good, just to return to the trivial, pedestrian plight of man? Of course not. The audience can then wonder: what is man freed from when he becomes enlightened? Is he freed from his family? From himself? Chris didn't know the answer. He would chew on it with his audience.

But the words weren't his. Neither were the ideas. Aside from the odd absence of lower-case letters, the lines were made and cut perfectly. They were so well done—so particularly

human. He flipped beyond the poem to the others behind it. All were similarly filled in. Who...?

He glanced away from the notebook at the hardwood floor. As he looked, his right thumb met his chin and his legs crossed. Amid the silence of his study, the defiant sounds of joy and amusement pattered audaciously against the other side of his oak-framed door. Slowly his brow scrunched, eyes squinted, and jaw clenched. Without looking at it, he closed the notebook quietly and then slammed it full force onto his dark oak desk. The ground shook. He stood up and walked toward the door, staring at its handle for a few seconds. He grabbed the handle and yanked it open, flooding his study once again with a torrent of laughter and deep human affection.

V.

Traversing the river of cheerful clatter, Chris made his way down the hall and back into the kitchen. His legs stomped, but he was trying to be quiet.

"That was quick!" Carlotta exclaimed, a bit out of breath but insatiably excited. "I'll deal you in."

"I have to go out back first," Chris replied, trying his hardest to flash a smile. He walked past them and into the kitchen.

"Oh alright. How long will you be?"

"A few minutes," Chris replied, pausing for a few seconds. "Santo, can you help me move some two-by-sixes down in the barn?" he looked into his bright porcelain eyes.

"Of course," Santo responded. He turned to Carlotta. "Would you mind?" Her head shook and she lightly frowned as her curly hair smacked the back of the wooden chair.

Santo stood up, pushed in his chair, and began walking beside Chris through the kitchen and out the front door. As they made their way across the moonlit lawn from the garage to the barn, Santo asked Chris what the two-by-sixes were for.

"I'm building another door for my study," Chris responded. "The one I have works, but the wood around the latch bolt is worn and I want a darker stain."

"That sounds like a fun project, Chris. Your woodworking is remarkable." The slightest uptick of coldness and roboticism lined the walls of his speech.

Chris said nothing and kept walking. Alternating thuds of metal foot and rubber sole shot from the grassy lawn below them. Chris held a flashlight steadily at the entrance of the barn as they walked.

When they reached the side of the barn, Chris unlatched the large, wooden door and they stepped onto the old wooden floorboards. Florescent lamps buzzed as he flipped a few switches on the wall and turned his flashlight off.

Santo gazed at the intricate display of hand and power tools that lined half of one of the barn's walls. He was utterly captivated and couldn't look away. The tools glinted brilliantly in the raking yellow light; dark leather straps, shiny chrome bezels, and rubber grip coatings intersected each other like splatter paint. Chris watched him from behind and stepped comfortably back and forth. Close to a minute passed in silence.

"You... think we're alone, Santo?" Chris finally asked, pushing his hands together as he continued to slowly pace.

"In the barn?" Santo glanced backward. "We walked down by ourselves."

"Not that," Chris replied. "The universe. Do you think we're alone in the universe?"

Santo thought for a moment and then turned back toward the tools. "I think it's improbable. But who's certain?" He paused for a few seconds, still captured by the glinting wall. "For

the sake of all of us, I hope not."

Almost immediately after Santo's reply, Chris drew up behind him, grabbed either side of his sharp metal neck, and pulled him with all force to the floor. Santo's metal arms and legs flailed and dug gashes into the floorboards as he was dragged onto a wooden chair in the middle of the room. His arms and legs were bound to the chair with thick, leather straps that were damp with fresh blood.

Chris began yelling. About poetry, about his mortality, about the universe. The words themselves were weak instruments for relaying the explosion of neural activity in his brain that he had seemingly no control over. He was slamming his fist on his work bench too. Deep within the caverns of his conscience, he was removed from this uncontrollable shell of hostility, and watched, terrified, the unfolding of fury's ruthless Nantucket sleighride.

Veins popped from his forehead. His face was red and sweaty. Chris dropped to the gritty, dust-filled floorboards with a reverberating thud.

VI.

He still couldn't picture the face. Chris stood facing the wall with a bright red paper towel in his left hand. He couldn't remember how he'd gotten there or why he had been laying on the filthy floorboards with dirt-filled gashes in his hand. Someone had said something behind him. Who was it?

"I didn't think you would react like this," Santo's articulate, vaguely mechanical voice met Chris's ears.

Chris turned. When he saw the seemingly impossible contortions of Santo's sympathetic and perturbed metal face, everything came back to him. The poem, the chipmunk, the field he'd been laying in, the card game with Carlotta. Chris tightened

his lips and stepped toward his wood-topped work bench. He picked up a bright yellow electric circle saw with his right hand and attached to it a blade with small metal teeth. After plugging it into the wall, he stomped toward the center of the room in a silent rage.

“I know you’re angry, Chris. But you shouldn’t try cutting me with that.”

Chris didn’t seem to hear him. The sound of the blade whirred. He stepped over Santo’s bound body and slowly raised it to Santo’s shoulder.

The saw screamed. Chris’s left arm was braced against Santo’s sternum and his knee was between Santo’s legs as he held the blade over his shoulder joint. Its teeth were spinning about an inch from the metal surface, and the wooden chair below them began creaking and tilting backward.

“Chris. If you do that, I can’t control—” the blade slammed down onto the smooth titanium joint, creating a blinding mess of sparks that flew brilliantly. Red lights beamed out from the collar of Santo’s neck and eyeballs, coupled with a deafening buzzer noise.

Santo ripped his metal arms upward, snapping the arms of the wooden chair clear off and uppercutting Chris’s jaw with the back of his left wrist. The circle saw flew across the room, unplugging from the outlet and knocking a few tools off the wall. Santo jerked his legs outward, tearing apart the leather that bound his feet, and ran toward Chris’s wriggling, supine body.

He bent over Chris, straddled him with his knees, and pinned Chris’s right elbow down with his left arm. Santo’s other arm was cocked back tightly and the bright red lights in his neck filled Chris’s vision.

Deep crimson blood ran profusely down Chris’s chin and glistened vibrantly in the steadily-flashing light. He turned his head and vomited onto the dusty floorboards. Chris looked up at Santo’s cold metal face which was now looking directly above his

head with beaming red eyes. Its expression was completely neutral—Santo was gone. Replaced by some blinking red lights and a blaring, repeating buzzer.

“Get off!” Chris yelled, but Santo didn’t respond. Chris struggled, pushing with all force against Santo’s torso with his one free arm. Violently, he lunged at the entrance to a world of liberty, of pure human vitality and prosperity, but he couldn’t make it. All he could do was lay there and seethe internally as Santo’s dark metal limbs pinned him to the wooden floorboards.

After a few minutes, he threw up again and began sobbing uncontrollably. Greenish-white vomit and fresh blood mixed at the corners of his mouth and he looked around helplessly. His left hand shook and continued bleeding as he grasped at the floorboards and Santo’s metal body to gain leverage. After a few exhausting minutes, his eyes closed and his body relinquished control.

The corridor was now sideways and he was falling down it. The gorgeous scarlet dress flitted and rotated brilliantly as ever, slipping through the outstretched fingers of his right hand. He watched the dress get smaller and smaller as he fell through the open air, the gold and purple floral carpet now a soft, fleeting wall in front of him. He passed an infinite expanse of dark oak door frames and smooth glass light fixtures as gravity pulled him toward the dark end of the ever-expanding corridor. Was he writhing now? Was he safe?

ONE LAST GARDEN PARTY

Jackson Rossette

i made a mess of myself in your backyard last night.
with scored knees planted in the mud, roots splitting skin and
soil,
i fold up any half, bring cracked lips to the still water of a bird
bath
and drink till i feel my cheek against the cold, wet stone.

i will make more of myself for you, stretch sinew and muscle,
pooling on the lawn, i will become too much to ever clean up.
my legs unfurl themselves across the yard, snaking through
unkempt grass.
i become so horrible, long and thin, skin wraps itself taut across
the spine.

i pull at myself until i've split and poured out in the grass
thinning out, i spread wide for you until i can't feel my edges.
you couldn't even hold me in your hands anymore: the skin slips
right past you
and soon i am nothing more than the puddle at your feet.

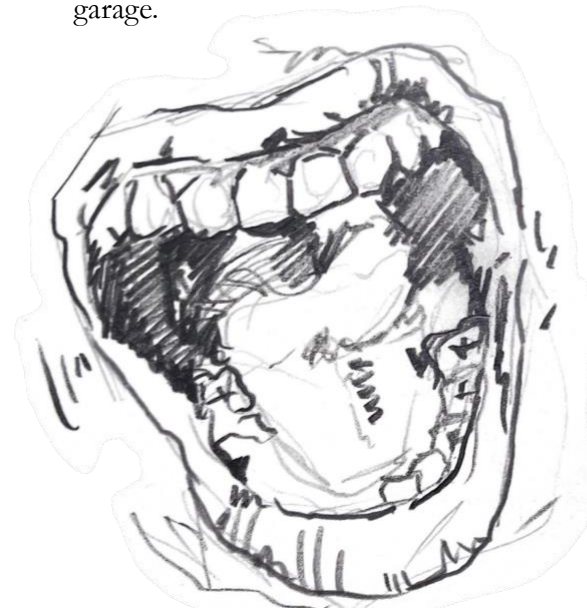
i learn to break my neck, the flesh twisting itself up the siding
towards your bedroom;
the teeth sink into the wood beneath your window pain and paint
chips beneath them.
my jaw burns and loosens against the dark of your empty room.
sickened and aching, i open my mouth and let myself fall onto
the lawn.

can't you see how much i need from you?

if you would just come to me, stare down the back of my throat
and see how it all burns--
you would hold me, carry me into the house, let me touch the
back of your neck
but instead i smell of grass and sweat, making mud of the dirt
beneath me.

there is a knot you tied inside me with idle hands that i had to
melt myself to get rid of
i could feel you tugging at me from the inside and it was enough
to bring me back here.
i start to pull myself back together, crawling all the way to the
back of the house
and push what's left of me through the dog door.

my head rolls back, everything falls back into place just like it
used to be--
scabs grow over my forearms, limbs snap into sockets, skin
pressed together again.
i make peace with it all and before i fall asleep i know how it'll
feel in the morning
like the hot cement burning under the florescent lights in your
garage.



Leashed

Delia Barbanti

the rope sunk its teeth into the taut skin meant to hold
him
together,
tightening the grip around his hips, around the white oak
his children would one day hide behind,
waiting for him to come find them
before grandma made them drink tomato juice,
digging claws deeper into their backs
each time he tugged away.

where was God
to save a body tethered to a world ready to collapse
under grandma's belted whip,
repenting her sins Sunday, safe to sin Monday
making him pay for a life preceding,
breeding guilt into a family he cannot recognize as his own.

somewhere out there,
he's tethered to that white oak,
looking to the sky to set him free,
thinking only God can save him,
knowing He could never save the bitch biting at
his leash.



Canto I

Bri Ferrandiz

Barely gliding on the thinnest black ice,
figure eights carved into Dante's ninth circle.
watching Virgil stand above me
Our feet touching
Staring at each other
Trying to figure out who's
Right side up

We dodge each other's shadows
Afraid something might catch up to us
He steps away-
leaving me alone again

When he leaves,
I never felt so cold,
Chasing to find warmth
I realize it's inside me
And Fracture my soft rind
Instantly paralyzed by
frozen water
spilling through cracks
between shards of glass
Rushing to fix the breaks
though its all intentional-
It isn't warm

Convinced I'm freeing it,
Frustration takes over
When it doesn't spill
Into streams of blue

Cursed to eternal damnation
For sins where oxygen turns blues to reds

Unable to purge the desire
Of rest while I lose myself in
Dreams of carving figure 8s
Chasing freedom
For trapped rivers
that move around inside me
Until my heart chooses
To beat on its own and
Virgil can't control me

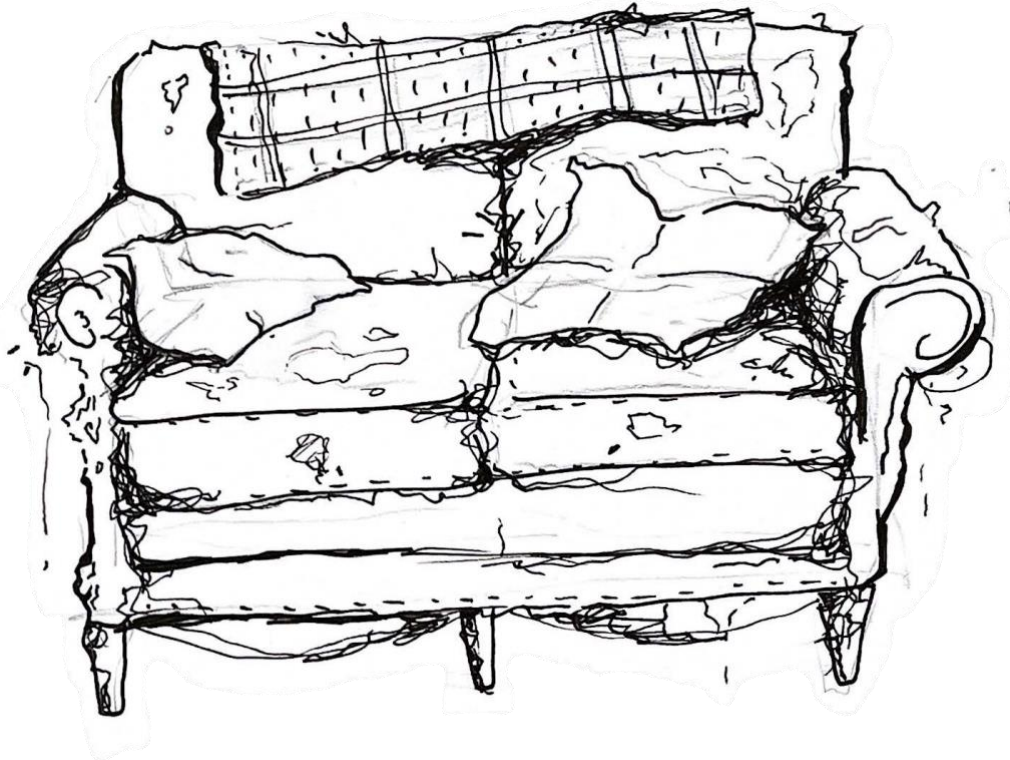
couch cushions

Elisabeth Tonsberg

there used to be an old couch
that stood facing our television.
we loved that couch.
it was ugly.
each crease of mismatched patterned cloth
and plump couch cushions
would rest itself placently in our room.
our room.
the kids room.
the room i had my tea parties in
the room my brothers and i would race to,
where the windows felt like open portals
where the glaring screen reflected
the sunday morning cartoons
and we,
the kids with toothy grins,
the kids with laughs like open whistles
would hide and count and find
and play older versions of ourselves
until we became the older versions.
then soon,
the couch no longer smelled like the old home we had,
it was stained with the smell of alcohol splotches
and the touch of our younger fingertips
vanished.
sometimes we'd sit,



and try to watch an old film.
but our legs would bump and tangle
like blank puzzle pieces trying to push themselves together
and our voices would raise louder
than they ever had.
we don't play on the couch anymore;
it became something just apart of a room
that we barely went in to.
but that was our room.
the room we hid our innocence in,
tucked away in the patterned couch cushions.



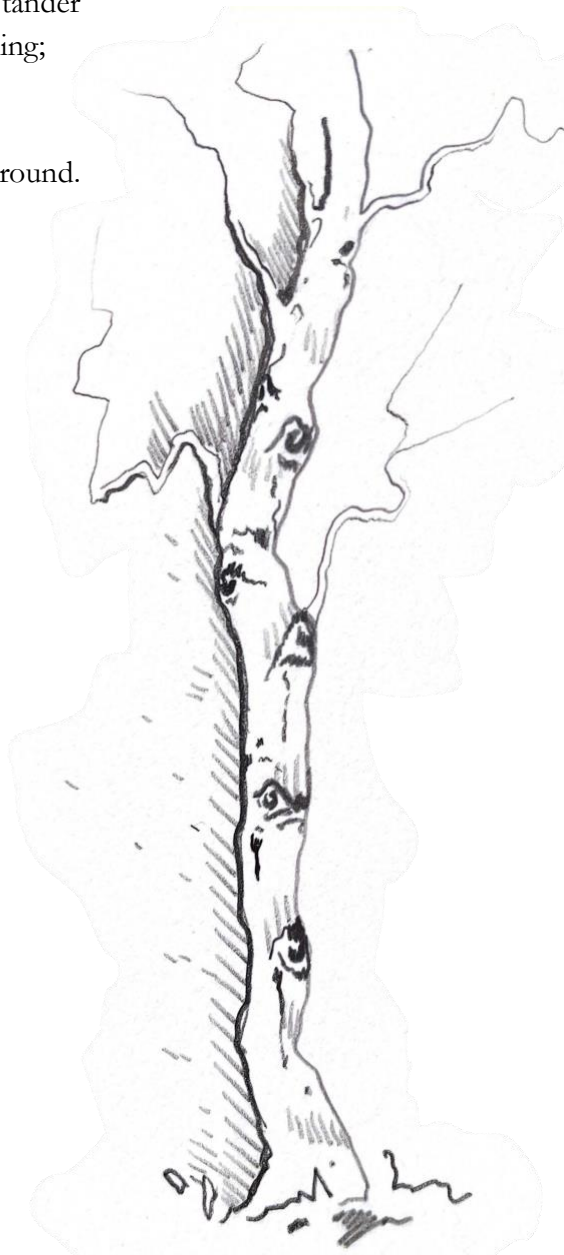
She Passed When I Was A Child

Katie McHugh

To lose one mother
is to lose them all.
In fact, my entire life has been
spent losing mothers.
Old friends' mothers,
Old lovers' mothers,
Ex therapists, and the nurse
who held my hand during
a root canal.
Every woman over the age of 40
has mothered me,
and the closer they step,
the longer they linger,
the more I feel like crying.
Because losing a mother
is not a five-stage grieving
process, nor is it a ten-stage,
a twenty-stage. The journey
is ocean on sky, the waves
ebbing and shrinking,
yet never quite pattering out.
Here I am, not thinking of her
every waking hour,
but knowing subconsciously
that no one will plan my wedding
or wait anxiously for me

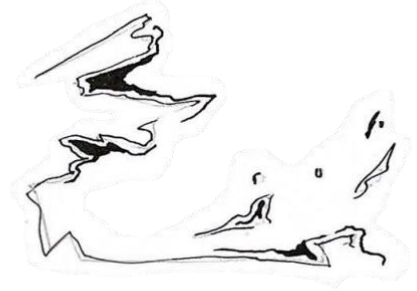
to have children of my own.
Again, not missing her actively,
But saying, "I need my mom,"
in the rawest moments,
and having the nearest bystander
look on on misunderstanding;
Because there she lay
in her mossy grave,
body buried beneath the ground.
While I am here,
stranded in this
otherworldly place,

losing mother upon
mother upon mother,
and consequently
losing myself.



cicadas (hating home)

Kat Harmon



i cry when i hear cicadas.
not because i fear them
(though i do)
not because i bitterly remember each summer they descended,
(though i do)
not because they disgust me,
(though they do)
but because the screaming makes me homesick.

Here is what they do not tell you about hating your hometown:
it is only beautiful when you are no longer there.
you leave the Inferno only to look back as you abandon Eden.
your friends back home,
(which is what you have to call them now
because you are not home),
are happy,
content suffocating in the arms you shrunk away from
each time they tried to reach you.

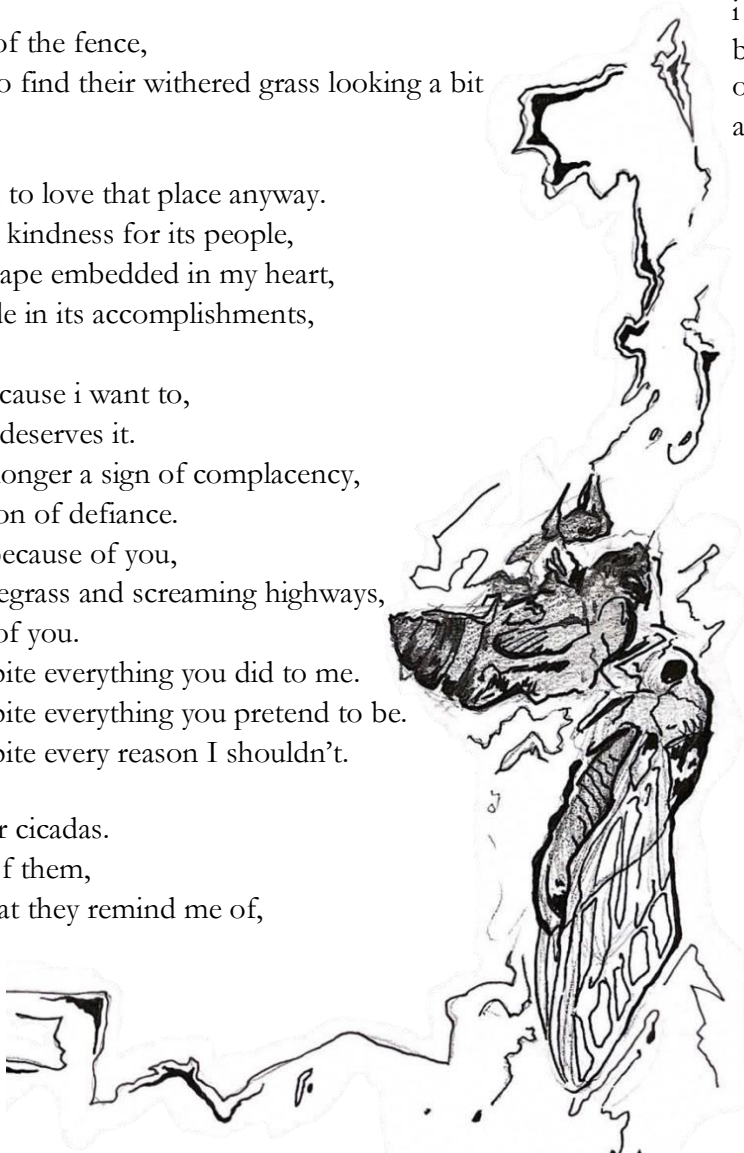
on my last visit to high school,
the office lady who used to smile at me every morning,
meets me at the door with dead eyes,
and i realize i don't want to take the pride pins off of my
backpack again.
i wonder if i am burning bridges to keep my home away
or to be sure i never go back home
and get sucked back in, wondering if i was even the one
who set the bridges alight.
i think that is the cruelty of hometown hatred –

the whirlpool spit out an oasis,
asked why i never found dry land
as i was being dragged under,
never allowed to reach the island that swears it was always
there.
and now i am alone,
left wondering if fake smiles and bama rush would've felt
better
than this side of the fence,
looking back to find their withered grass looking a bit
greener.

I have decided to love that place anyway.
i try to nurse a kindness for its people,
keep its landscape embedded in my heart,
try to find pride in its accomplishments,
revel in its art.
but i love it because i want to,
not because it deserves it.
my love is no longer a sign of complacency,
but a declaration of defiance.
i do not love because of you,
i tell burnt bluegrass and screaming highways,
i love in spite of you.
i love you despite everything you did to me.
i love you despite everything you pretend to be.
i love you despite every reason I shouldn't.

and so i cry for cicadas.
i cry because of them,
because of what they remind me of,

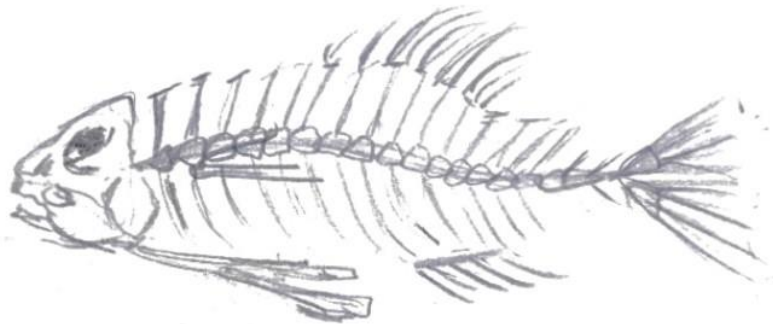
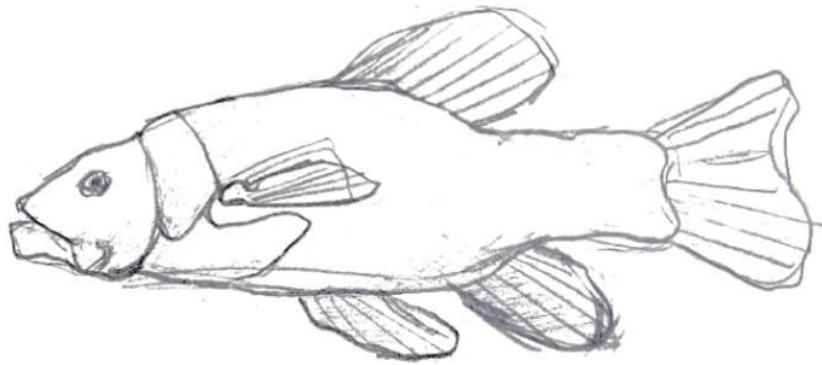
but mainly i cry for them.
they're far from home,
far from anything and anyone they know,
far from the place they were trained to stay for years,
and sent into a new world with no guide.
something has led them away,
towards the sea, towards some point they can't recognize,
i know they wanted to leave, they chose to leave.
but i cry because i know even they can't resist the siren's call
of home.
at least, not forever.



\$27 ALL YOU CAN EAT SUSHI

Renee Walden

We discuss food like it's a higher power. Praise the sushi that rises above our plates. It's our Easter Sunday. Our egg hunt is just caviar in our stomachs. You mention chorizo. Chorizo, yes—I eat it. No, we eat it. It's our chorizo. We hate religion but pray to the bread on our saucers. We laugh about white people. Chai tea. Naan bread. Our lungs give up laughter. We send compliments in a scarlet-sealed letter. We wear the letters. Shame is a myth for the gullible. We turn into cynics with scarlet-sealed letters. We, the people. No—we, the cynics with scarlet-sealed letters, order \$27 all-you-can-eat sushi. We succumb to the raw fish. We gobble the rice wrapping. We are not atheists.



unlucky numbers: my life in chapters

Elizabeth Goldberg

0

red darkness turns into sanitized bleach basins and green sickness. low comprehensions, but my needs are met. i have begun.

1

i think they split now, but maybe it happens in the next chapter. i guess i already failed to serve my purpose, but at least i'm too stupid to realize.

2

the world is my oyster as i learn my mouth. my legs have been carrying me places and my chubby little hands grasp seashells and crayons that color pictures. they don't make sense to others, but to me they are my universes.

3

finally i build an identity: ballerina slash troublemaker. rocks and seashells wear my dad's pockets down until they're as holey as the stories in sunday school. but i eat it up- all i ever do is eat.

4

simpler times... the last simple times. behind the scenes? crime. do i see it? not until chapter seventeen. anyways, simpler times... times filled with pancakes and playing cards.

5

sunday school, but six days a week. my velvet dresses can't cover up their dislike for me. the red lights only stop me for five days a week, but my kindergarten voice is still better than their upperclassmen. their jealousy holds me down.

6

first grade smells like erasers, push-pops and vomit. they don't hate me here, but i know i'm different. nevertheless, i bobble on my mat like a good girl.

7

[this is the chapter where i scream.]

8

they say im too smart to stay with my friends next year, so i cry a bit more. this time, i cry because i want to stay.

9

the people pull me out a few times a day. sometimes i learn and sometimes i am tested. it makes my friends into enemies, because fourth graders don't understand my lack of autonomy. i get so sick this time.

10

my sickness made me miss too much school, i have to go back with my old grade. it's not my fault, but my teacher acts like i'm stupid. she's mean and i'm glad i get to leave next year.

11

a new beginning and ugly clothes become home. the polos aren't flattering and suddenly i'm not the smartest anymore. i spend more time on ice than i do on land and i like it like that.

12

this is the chapter where i find my place in the one-hundredth room. home is latin nerds and rivalry. i get perfect test scores even. i'm back to being myself.

13

if i'm a woman now, does that make it okay that they touch me as we pass in the hallway? i learn too much and it changes me. i'm the reason he hurts himself. i'm the reason why bad things happen. that's what he tells me, at least... and that i turn him on. this chapter blends with fourteen, it's all the same and it all gets longer.

14

im so fucking nervous all the time, but i latch on to him. at the wedding, i fall deeper in love with the boy and out of love with myself. if my self-hatred paid bills, money would buy happiness back for me and my best friend (who i'm so close with, they call

us gay in the hallway). anyways, red dresses don't make me look like a slut, right? eh, it doesn't matter- they'll say that regardless.

15

sophomore slump with a dash of losing innocence, all nestled between snow-tipped trees. fishnets and makeup could never hide the sadness seeping through my veins. skipping a few meals turns into skipping years of school. at least i'll die skinny.

16

sweet sixteen means sinking candles in supplement and drowning at the dinner table. i'm so alone again and im shrinking. she takes me away from home, the rink, the school (maybe a blessing in disguise), but i still end up behind locked doors. i miss it all. abuse comes in different disguises and this time it's cooking with couch-throwers and bomb-makers. i paint myself purple and leave again.

17

seventeen. seventeen. seventeen. off my meds. off my meds. off my meds.

18

independence, but i'm too sick to enjoy it. i can't build homes with rotten bones. the food eats itself under my bed. i just barely graduate- i proved them wrong. i sing on the stage where they walk, but no one notices me.

19

when i get into dance school, my life is reborn... until i find out i'm always going to be some sort of sick. he loves me through it all until he doubts. that results in a tube down my throat. i'm never doing that shit again (but i probably will because the universe is cruel). nourishment results in agony.

20

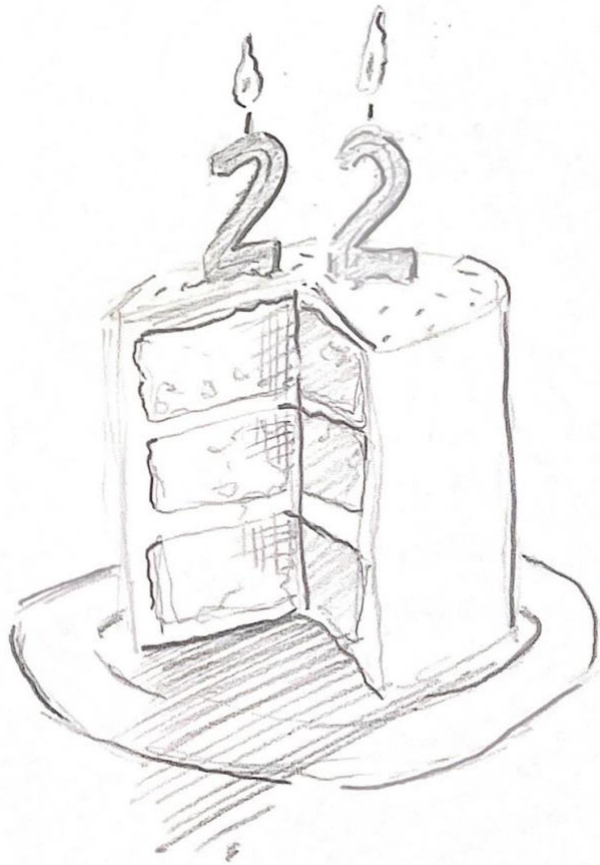
it's all aimless. pointless. hopeless. i'm so small, i can't even be seen. i can crawl in the holes that mice live in and take a long nap. let me recharge. please.

21

i can skate again and my world has color once more. i grow (even though i'm currently suffocating in my new jeans) until my body can hold me up and i can walk to class in the city. i have purpose. maybe it isn't what i originally planned for, but i can make do. i can make difference. i will. i am.

22

[unfinished]



Passionfruit

Emma DeLaRosa

For years, I had crafted these visions for myself. Visions whose foundation I cultivated alone and out of arduous labor – emotional and physical. They were the fruits of my deepest desires, passions, and aspirations. The fruits of the tree I planted with my own two hands. This tree grew with my utmost tenderness, care, and dedication. It took years of precision, perfect timing, and prayer for this tree to grow into the wise and stern image I knew it would be. It had the somber look and knowledge of a successful retiree. Its fruits glistened with potential and were perfectly ripe. After all this time, the moment had come when I was ready to eat them. I was ready to bask in the succulent rewards of my strenuous work. To harvest my creation that I watered with my own tears and blood. I snatched the tender fruit off of its branch and took a bite without hesitation.

It was a bit bitter if you ask me.

No matter how flawlessly you tend to a crop, there will always be those plants that are outliers. Bad apples, as some like to say. Their taste is unpleasant but that is not indicative of all the tree has to offer. I decided not to fret and that my next ripe fruit will be the delicious dream I knew I grew. I do not typically possess the virtue of patience, but my dedication made it worth the wait.

Not too much time passed before it was ready. And my next bite? Was absolutely foul. It tasted like burning sewage and rotten meat.

This isn't what was supposed to happen and this wasn't what I spent all my time cultivating. And with that, I fell to my knees and sobbed into the ground. I pleaded above for some sort of guidance, and then looked to the tree to see if it had anything

to say. Anything to explain for itself. Any consolations for my time wasted. I had been betrayed by my own creation. This presents me with a choice. I can either spend my time picking bitter fruit off of this one tree in the disbelief that my careful labor produced something so disgusting. My other option is to abandon it. I can find something new and test the waters of oceans I never knew existed. Oceans I never thought I could swim in. Perhaps gardening was never my strong suit anyway and a new chapter of my life awaits me.

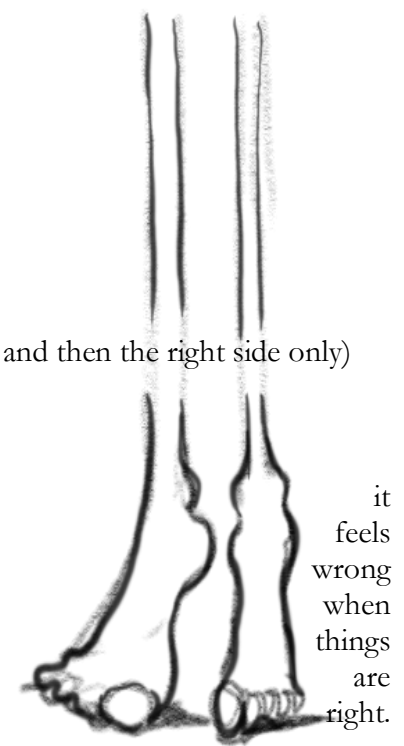


left to right

Elisabeth Goldberg

(read the poem from left to right, and then the right side only)

after you, being calm scares me.
i'm forever on my toes



how will i ever feel fulfilled in a relationship if
it's the chaos that burns my fires?

the only emotional satisfaction i can get
is warmth all over
culminating over my eyelids
as i bathe in the relief of making up

don't get me wrong,
i'm totally in love.

undoubtedly

with the intensity of love bubbling out of my tight throat



after
an
explosion.

i'm

smothering myself

i don't know how to cope with it.

you showed me first, that

good at being

and you knew me better than most
if i was good at it, i was going to do it.

so, i throw myself

feeling worthless
if my advances are met without answers.

how

to anyone

not being

my tits are in your mouth-
do you love me now?

i let you

i was a fucking force
before you
and then i was

but after you
it feels wrong to even recognize my worth.

i was

an object

to my lover:

will i mean something

if i'm

lusted after?

just stifle me.

beneath you,

you make me feel crazy

yet it's been

four years since you even read a word from my brain,
six since you cared about what you read.

so, why are you still in my mind when you only took my thighs?

it shouldn't matter,

should it?

still, i'm listening to songs
on repeat on the floor
in the dark,

laying against scratchy carpet trying to feel something
other than your eyes on my body.

not

anymore.

i am

yours



The Beacon is a student run literary magazine at Boston University.

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