



GREENLEAVES

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Sign in Chicago, photo

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Dedication

Greenleaves Editors

For Alice,

Greenleaves means so much to all of us, but among the reasons we've fallen in love with this literary journal has been your friendship. This community that you've built, small yet resilient, has taught us creativity, strength, and how to laugh even in the most stressful of times. Your dedication, organization, and infinite kindness have held *Greenleaves* together, and we want you to know how dearly we'll miss you: as a thoughtful editor, an inspiring poet, and true friend. Thanks to your contributions, *Greenleaves* will always be a place to write and smile and laugh. We are incredibly proud of you. We are unbelievably fortunate to have had this time together. We wish you nothing but happiness and success in all future endeavors. Know that you will always have a team of editors and friends at your back, in your corner, and huddled in Dr. Hansen's room sifting through entries. But for now, as you embark on a new adventure, we can't wait to watch you soar from a distance.

With love,

Sonia, Shivani, Angelina, Mona, Chloe, Haya, Robyn, Nina, & Macy



Mission:

To produce an annual student-led literary and visual arts journal that fosters creativity and encourages teamwork, and to host events throughout the year that shine a light on the power of language and art

What We Do:

- Publish an annual literary and visual arts magazine
- Host and participate in writing workshops
- Host events throughout the year (such as Poetree, Banned Books Week, Poem-in-your-Pocket Day)

Where We Want to Go:

- Increase student submissions to the journal
- Create a space to bask in the glory of words, receive feedback on writing, and cultivate a community of writers and artists
- Promote an interest in the fine arts throughout the student body
- Develop and maintain our *Greenleaves* website

Participation levels are flexible, and we would love to have you join us!

If you have any questions or are considering joining, feel free to email:

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Editor's Prologue

Alice Ma

We, as humans, should not be left to ourselves. Being alone gives us too much capacity, too much space to wonder. Isolation somehow gives us a limited but full perspective on things and when we're alone at night, our most creative time of the day, we dance with our fears and we hug our aching hearts and we start to ask: what are we?

What are we in time? What are we without...? What...?

And the conversation just goes on. For a group of kids that had almost two years of socialization stolen from us, we sure communicate with ourselves well.

I find that I can convince myself of anything— my anxieties, my imaginations, my fears. They come back every nightfall because they're cowards in the daylight. The night is when all the words begin to rumble, pour, and flow. It's a universal experience: sleepless nights creep around the corners of your bedroom and treat you like an old friend, and you let your guard down. Some nights, we are so sure of what is before us. Other times, we feel the fragileness of the uncertainty and changes we face. From there, the breaking points that mark our contradicting beliefs, the cacophony of thoughts begins.

We bounced back from the physical isolation and the tiny face-sized barrier that separated us from emotion. Never did we think it would follow us all this way, and that we would still feel the haunting loneliness we once labeled as security. Now we are trying to feel our way back to a life that we once knew, knowing that it is no longer there. So, the old drafts of conclusions and epiphanies of life drawn by those who came before us can be edited now. It is time to build on and extend them to fit our narratives.

After being lost and spending so much time to recover from the past, this year's issue refocuses the contemplation of life and the ways to perceive it. There are unwavering beliefs of how things are, and there are

wonderings of our relativity to it and what it is made of. Life is put into the perspective of self, love, friendship, loss, as well as the passing and definition of time. To echo the heavy curtain that fell between the current and the life we knew, this year's issue is divided into two parts: a powerful declaration of our rigid beliefs about life (part one) and a willingness to be vulnerable and inquiring (part two). In both parts, life is summarized, condensed, and illustrated. Before our eyes are the authentic, raw, and revealing thoughts that, I imagine, have lingered for a while before they were finally jotted down and became what you are about to read.

So if the wonderings turn into a mayhem of clashing thoughts, don't be afraid to be alone and don't fear the unknown. Answer your own questions, share your insights with yourself. I hope you find comfort in sharing your thoughts with your heart. If all goes well, those fears fed by loneliness stop flowing into tears, and instead flow into a stream of words, and eventually, lines that you will be able to share with the rest of us one day.

Find the essence of living in times when it feels hard to even fall asleep.
Try to find the answers on nights where nothing feels answered.

Part I

The Pocket Poet

Robyn Davies

Olivia still remembers her first pocket-poem. Fifth grade seemingly washed away in a storm of youth and middle school, but the poem remained rightfully embroidered on her heart. After all, a first love is not easily forgotten. And oh, to love a poem... there could exist no greater joy! It's an ardor tattooed on a poet's wrist, engraved on their mind; a love Olivia would chant like a prayer each night and tuck in the back pocket of her jeans each morning. Decades of deserved warmth in her pockets. A love so pure, requited.

But it –

It's been a long time since Olivia wrote a pocket poem. To lose a love like that... How do you ever recover?

Still, she holds her faith that her love will return.

The neighbors call her crazy. In ten years of neighborship, not a summer has passed that they haven't watched her garden overflow with dandelion weeds and her porch painted a new shade of mad-woman.

They're good neighbors, really; only good neighbors could keep quiet about such an unkempt lawn. And someday Olivia wishes she got to know them. They've got a baby now, a cute one too. But it's okay. Some lives aren't meant to intersect.

Maybe one day she'll write a poem about it. About aloneness and loneliness and the difference between the two. *Maybe one day when I understand it*, Olivia tells herself, as if she hasn't lived in the former and now in the latter without her prose.

When the words first slipped through her fingertips, she chased the poetry back to her books. Pleaded for their forgiveness, for whatever terrible crime she must have committed to deserve their disdain. Screamed

her apologies for taking their fickle love for granted. In turn, the floorboards tore open, cackled as their sonnets wrapped around her neck, the shriek of the ceiling fan drowning her senses. The wallpaper began to peel, dissolving to expose the hundreds of poems she'd failed to write. Ink and excerpts and sticky notes and shaky green highlighter suffocated her lungs, and barricaded the room. She threw herself against the window, knowing her escape by the shards of glass piercing her skin, and fled with poems clutched in her fist. Tore through their pages, scattered the verses she once loved across dirt ground. She searched, but the rhymes seemed to each be hidden between the lines, written in the subtext and the similes.

She searched harder.

How –

How do you find yourself in a graveyard of poetry?

At first it was a week without that love. But the weeks bled into months of alone, to years of loneliness, and now? Anything, *anything* to drown out the lonely. The sun shines over the Mississippi River. Years ago, Olivia might have thought it was something romantic: the way metallic drops of sunlight bleed into the river bay and freckle her cheeks with golden stardust. Perhaps she'd have grabbed a pen and scribbled down a haiku, something about a river that could only be so beautiful through a poet's eyes.

She takes a step into the water, until the river meets her calf. As the soft chill of the water bites her toes and the sharp snap of the wind pinches her cheeks, she searches the river for a sign. It doesn't matter what kind. Just something, something, *anything*. Weren't those the same trees that once made her heartbeat tremble, made her legs race for a notebook and pen? It all used to be so familiar – the rocks the trees the water the sand – what treacherous creature betrays its creator?

Another step deeper. Deeper, until the tide swallows her hips.

When did her love turn unrequited? And *why*. *Why* did the words run

dry, *how* could the pen stop writing if a heart was still beating?

Deeper.

Eyes tilt up and she can see: each of her poems hung in the mid-afternoon sky with typewriter ink smearing through the clouds. The black ink spills into a murky pool swirling over her mind; it blinds her eyes; it trickles down her back. The ink swamps even the sun.

Deeper, deeper, deeper.

Water to her chest. Collar. Lips.

Taste the Mississippi. Isn't it lovely? Isn't it bitter? Bitter like... like...

Isn't there a metaphor for this? A simile? A verse, a line, a word, *something* to explain what comes next.

The water rises. The inky sky shallows. Its reflection surrounds her, until the ink's poison reaches her heart. The sky is black. The night is black. There are no words. And still, the wordless poet searches. Hand to her chest. Her pocket – Empty. A pocket should never, never be empty. The mad woman searches, she searches, she *tries* to search. She closes her eyes and reaches out for the slip of paper that has to be there, because it's *always* been there.

It's –

Not.

The poet closes her eyes. *One Mississippi.* The water engulfs her body. *Two. Three.* The river fills the lungs of yet another daughter of Polonius.

Ten Mississippi. Twenty. Her arms flail around her, but they don't search for air, they search for a verse. *Twenty-One.*

Thirty. Thirty-Four.

Forty.

Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny...

The lonely poet sinks.

Sometime in another life, somewhere amidst the storm of youth and middle school, a poet falls in love. “Under a golden sky and a bright, summer day,” she writes, “metallic drops of sunlight bleed into the river bay and freckle my cheeks with golden stardust.”

It’s poetic, she thinks, tucking the verse in the back pocket of her jeans. *Beautiful in a way that ought to be fondled over and beloved, recited to strangers on long walks around the boulevard.* She’s only in fifth grade, but already she knows: to love a poem...

There could exist no greater joy.



Mona Ragone, *Tradescantia*, watercolor

Prescription for Lidocaine

Nina Schuerer

Writing a poem when you're numb is a bad idea
Because it will lack
all of the emotion people seek in poetry

No glittery euphoria
nauseating sorrow
Or bleeding rage

Not even that little slice of peace poets seem to bottle up so well

You see,

Writing a poem when you're numb is a bad idea
Because it will come off as apathetic and pretentious

And the people will roll their eyes
And turn the page
Because they didn't open that book
to read a poem where
Their demands for idealized sensations
Weren't met

Writing a poem when you're numb is a bad idea
Because poets are supposed to see all the beauty
In the world
And poetry is supposed to heal the wounds
Not bury them in ice and whiskey

Writing a poem when you're numb is a bad idea
Because its forgotten pages will fray
Until they drip with the color
Of the beige crayons
no one bothered to use in kindergarten

Writing a poem when you're numb is a bad idea
Because you'll never figure out
How to end it



Nina Schuerer, *Last Chance*, photo

Same Start, Equal Endings

Krish Desai

We all start the same in this life:
innocent, vulnerable, wonderstruck,

tired, attentive, distracted,
loving, natural, smiling.

We all end the same in this life:
ceased of breath, and perhaps

corrupted, surrounded with love, happy,
crying, hoping, fighting.

And in between these two elements of life we all share, we're
lovestruck, sad, joyful,
optimistic, pessimistic, found,
lost, lively, scared.

It's in those years in between where we make the changes we want to make
to this earth;
this earth we share.

And we learn to overcome even the darkest of feelings:
depression, failure, anxiety;

overcoming this is hard, a bad reputation is worse;
however, it's not impossible.

There will be people in life and things in life that could threaten us,

that could constrict us from unearthing something truly veridical.

And if you're like me, then believe me when I say this:
just because you're seen as someone with a bad reputation by some,

That doesn't mean you're seen as someone with a bad reputation by all.
Yes, few are many and mighty, and more are less and lacking,

but as long as the people who appraise you as a being of humankind
continue to do so, trust them, not the others.



Mia Krieger, *Recreation of "Sunrise,"* acrylic on canvas

Untitled

Alice Ma

It's nice of you to not hold a grudge
It's kind of you to help me out
Is it weird if I say these things now?

I'm not much for leaving without a storm
But I bought a lioness the other day
And gave it some random name

You did what you had to do, and that was scarcely anesthesia
And I overreacted, now I know situations alike and these acts

Conversations should start small
And the less startled someone is, the thinner the wall
Standing between them is nothing grand
I had buried us, now I finally understand
Powerless to yield or direct the storm
Not talented enough to turn void into form
But mad enough to sweep light away from the hour
Your shadow springing me back into that moment

I'm a person
That tried distance
Tried disgust
Fought off lines with what was between them
Did you know, I died with the leaves that rose from the ground?
Too long has this burned
But I'm the one who's sorry

So hear me out, in honesty and hard feelings that passed
I shouldn't be the one throwing blame around
I should be the apology you never found



Alice Ma, "Hands and Anxiety," acrylic on canvas

The Legion

Sonia Oulamine

The image of the snake woman's head
Is tattooed on a chest, or thigh, or neck
The symbol of resistance and misfortune
That changed a life and can never be changed back

These tattooed bodies meld into a legion
Thousands amass into a fighting force
Spread across regions
Into formation with sticks and stones
And whatever is left to them

They remember too much as they approach Troy's gates
The blood, and tears, and fear
Acridic metal melting is how fear tastes
They gather their might to fight
Ready to strike on sight

All they know is the battle
Fighting because that's all they can
All they have left to them
Forward push into pain
Broken spears maim

One day I will join this legion
I will bear the mark of the snake woman
Deceived, betrayed, alone and in pain
I will scream my throat hoarse
As I burn down the gates

One mark in a sea of many
I will join this legion, I know
Snake woman save me
Free me to scream and bite
Scratch, tear, and burn

But never let me pray
Save me from that foolishness
No god has ever understood
What it is like to bear
That mark

Ill-Hearted Traveler

Haya Hussain

I left the wind to its master
In the hope that it would carry me with it

The past catches up faster than I expect it to
By that time the breeze is a noose around my neck and
The wind watches my head fall from the guillotine

I left the wind to its master
I figured it is easier to retire things than carry them onwards

The heat reaches me faster than I expect it to
By that time I've already burnt my tongue and scabbed my lips
The wind whispers to its friends with my breath in its hands

I left the wind to its master
It sang to God about my weight
I was too heavy to hurt and too light to love
I left the wind to its master
It blew the moon away with the sun
I scathed my fingers to burn – I'll find ashes in the wake of the wind
It took all that it found to its master
There are better things that have found me faster

I left the wind to its master
Take me with you



Mona Ragone, *Powdered Snow on Early Blooms*, acrylic

Two Victims For a Piece of Clarity

Alice Ma

Your alleged words I took to heart
I lose with impulsivity
I am only distant
After all, a dead woman cannot kill
We're both victims but you live with more guilt

I bring the injury back up in words I can repeat
Numbing in hollowed laughter, sinking in my sleep
The phrases that fall out of the sky at midnight I can't enunciate in the light
But in dreams, those words rip the wound open
I never scarred and I still can't find peace, so I keep
Waking up, scrambling for a pen

Now you're made of words
Ink and notes and signatures
I deliver this back to you
A memory made of sound
Syllables echoing and my heart shot through
Fading with each minute I feel
Will you read it? Will you burn it?
It is now your call
When you have nothing left behind
I get swept away by your last movement
In the spring breeze you turned away from

The Incision

Diane Li

Greeted with a foul stench of blood
and death, you walk into the musty classroom.

Buckets filled to the rim with gore, the color
a deep maroon, like the slaughter

of crimson cranberries. You reach with your bare hands inside,
seizing a lump of rubbery flesh

full of a mixture of chaos
consisting of a jumble of veins and arteries

until you realize that it was the heart
of an animal once alive

and now dead. Carrying the remnant, blood
splatters across the pristine floor resembling

a murder scene, until you rest it upon the table,
scalpel and metz scissors

ready in your hand. Your body stills,
limbs paralyzed, as you stare into the lifeless organ

composed of its shriveling valves
and sickening odor of an inescapable death

till your lungs let out a breath,
and the scalpel in your hand

creates the final incision.



Nina Schuerer, *Old Sunlight*, photo

Planet Colonies 1

Haya Hussain

1.

Every planet aches to be inhabited. I know this because humans conquer everything. Someone somewhere conquers love, someone somewhere conquers

fear, someone somewhere conquers greed. But nothing is enough. We always

want more. Nothing should have been enough.

Mars comes knocking at Earth's door and offers to carry the burden of humanity when the prairies, deserts, swamps, oceans, seas, cities, farms, slums

we have worked so hard for are swallowed whole by the Sun. *This message going out to all of space...*

They're coming. To conquer, like they always do. They'll try to colonize Martians,

because Martians are the blueprint aliens, aliens, aliens. Humans fear one thing more than others: foreigners.



Mona Ragone, *Reflection*, charcoal

Dear 2020*Krish Desai*

Wake with love,
free your dove.

Let the pain remain,
use time to cut it away.

Walk with our hands near,
but “we cannot touch dear.”

Love is inflicted by
hate and pain and a grieving cry.

Watching through a windowed door,
as they leave and your heart soars.

Trauma, pain, and tired nights.
Nightmares of ghosts and haunting frights.

Hope the next day's better,
but more people suffer.

Global strain and shared hurt,
People falling to a strut.

All we can do, all we can do now,
is breathe in, is breathe out.

Let the time go on.

Let the time pass.

Free your dove,
and wake with love.



Alice Ma, *Study of Raimundo de Madrazo y Garreta's Work*, acrylic on canvas

Recurring Fever

Haya Hussain

Someday you'll send your lover to the seas,
he'll turn towards you and tell you several things,
in your mind, you'll hear his saying.
Ritual is the anchor between you and me.

Like the annual flight of birds,
ritual is the anchor between you and me.
Come back every spring, every winter, even summer
Come back any time, and find me.

When the compass goes awry,
like the plans for your life,
come back any time, and find me.
I'll stay strapped to our gallery.

There are faults you'll find,
while I'm strapped to our gallery.
Artful mistakes—some worth keeping,
some worth nothing to me and everything to you.

I live every day you return.
These moments are generous,
some worth nothing to me and everything to you,
some worth the recurring fever.

Accept this sickly feeling,
let it love you.
These moments are generous,
some worth the recurring fever.



Angelina Shen, *ive got blue blood* , acrylic on canvas

On These Roads

Alice Ma

We spend half of the time correcting ourselves
The other half we make sure we're on the right treks

We are lonely and we claim we're not lost
So that justifies our hesitance about whom we choose
Which I no longer do, because
Gravitating towards you gave me a bruise

If that marked my life short, I'd have died right then
But we take those inerasable marks, stand up, and stumble back home
When I'm asked about the ominous shape on my skin
I almost become dramatic but the past deserves to be left alone

On these roads, we meet again at the cross
One glimpse of another's choice falters us so much

This route has yet to be tested, has yet to be seen
Has yet to prove that we don't regret stepping away
Run! We have ceased the courage to dream
Can't really afford to identify details or differentiate

So that's why I wonder if you think of this
And if you're losing sleep trying to label things
Burden, freedom, familiarity, minutes or seconds you missed
I'm dreaming and I can only imagine what it brings

Waking up, aching all over, we're lying on these roads
Not as carefree but not broken. Nor with rain are we soaked

We don't dread previous mistakes or fear tomorrows
The bruise is no longer there and it shows



Angelina Shen, *Chimera Ant*, multimedia



Nina Schuerer, *Hallway*, photo

The Garden of Earthly Delights

Eliza Dorf

I knock on the door of Felix's apartment. A few seconds pass. Then a minute. Then five minutes. Then ten. Either Felix is ignoring me, is dead, or just isn't home. I look around the hallway. Nobody else is around. I search my coat pocket for a paperclip that I then unfold and jam in the lock. *Click*. The door opens and I step inside the apartment. Despite the two of us having known each other for years, this is my first time visiting Felix's home—if you can even call this visiting. The interior of the apartment is beautiful; it's almost like nothing has changed since this place was built in the late nineteenth century. There is a long, dark hallway in front of me. I grab my flashlight from my coat pocket and switch it on. The goal of this "visit" to Felix's place is simple: gathering information. There must be *something* in his house that could give me a clue about his recent behavior changes.

I start walking down the hallway. This apartment is massive; there are more hallways extending off this main one, not to mention an entire dining room, living room, and library. The design of the place must be intended for wealthy people who want the spaciousness of suburbia in the hustle and bustle of New York City. I take a peek to my right, into the dining room. A large wooden table sits in the center of the room, surrounded by matching chairs. It doesn't seem like there's anything important in here. My best bet for finding information has got to be either the library or Felix's bedroom. Or both. I decide to make my way over to the library first. Inside, an

impressive amount of books line the walls. In the corner, there is a fireplace and a leather couch, which is where Felix most likely does his reading. I direct the flashlight's beam to the bookshelves and scan the book titles to see if there's anything out of the ordinary. *A Beginner's Guide to Chiropractic Theory, Defenestration: A Memoir, Sequestered Plankton: A Collection of Short Stories*... Nothing out of the ordinary so far; I can definitely see Felix reading any one of these books. As I reach the end of the first wall, a large worn-out book catches my eye.

“ኴ□ደ◆ደዙጢ■◆◆ ዓ□ጢ□” is the title. Or I at least *think* that's the title. I carefully pull the book out of the shelf so as not to damage it. Once it's out, I slowly open it up and begin to read.

“ደጢ ◆ዙ□ደ ❖ፍ■ ደጢ ደፍኬ ደጢ◆ □□□ደጢጢ●◆ ዙ◆
ፍፍ■ኬጢዓ□□ጢ■📧📖 ጢ □□ጢ◆ ጢጢ■ ❖□ዙጢ■ደ
□□□ጸጸጢ□ጢ■”

O-kay... This is definitely unusual. The entire book is written in these—these *hieroglyphics*. I honestly don't know what to think of this. I better make a note of this. From my coat pocket, I take out my notepad and copy down the strange symbols on the spine and the first page of the book. I then place the book back in the shelf. Even after taking a look at the rest of the books in the library, there are no others like the strange one that I found. I don't remember Felix being into any kinds of symbols or

codes, or even any other languages, for that matter. Although, he could have just forgotten to tell me about this cryptic hobby of his, whatever it may be. Yeah, that could be it. At least, I sure hope that's the case. I have a feeling, though, that this book is a part of something bigger, something that I haven't even begun to scratch the surface of.

With the strange hieroglyphics in mind, I make my way to Felix's bedroom. I turn the door handle, but it's locked. If Felix locks his bedroom door, there must be something interesting hidden behind it. Or maybe he's just paranoid about intruders... *Haha...* I laugh nervously. Is this really okay? Well, I'm already in his house, so I might as well keep going. Time to bust out the 'ol paperclip. I remove it from my pocket and shove it into the keyhole. *Click.* Felix's bedroom door unlocks.

Even though it's midday, I doubt I'd be able to see anything in here without this flashlight. A king-size bed sits against the back wall. If I had to describe the style of the bed, I'd say it's... gothic; it goes well with the style of the rest of the apartment. I step further inside the room and notice a massive painting on the wall to my right. The painting is divided into three panels. If I recall correctly, this is called a triptych. Each section of the painting depicts a different scene. The first two sections are brightly lit and are set outdoors, but the third panel is incredibly dark. In fact, even though the first two sections are bright, there's something off about them. There's something off about the painting as a whole. There are so many people, there's so much going on, so many colors, so many objects. It's mesmerizing, to say the least. Hidden in the chaos of the rightmost panel is

a creature with a man's head, an egg as a body, and stumpy, tree-like legs. This fellow deserves a name. I'll call him Tree Man. I sketch an amateur portrait of Tree Man in my notebook. Underneath the painting is a plaque with the piece's name on it. *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch, 1490-1510.

Just as I'm about to move on from admiring the painting, a noise comes from the entrance to the apartment. The front door creaks open. Footsteps: there are two people. Felix's voice carries into the bedroom.

"Welcome *Uwe Majesteit*, please make yourself at home. When you're ready, I have something to show you. Oh, you want to see it now? Of course! It's in my bedroom, please follow me right this way."

Shoot! I switch off the flashlight, lock the bedroom door and dive underneath the bed. My heartbeat is so loud that I barely hear Felix open the door. He turns on a light, and I hold my breath as the footsteps of him and his guest grow closer to the bed.

"Voila! Check this out!" Felix and his guest stand somewhere near *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

Felix speaks again. "Oh, *Uwe Majesteit*, you are far too kind. I do not deserve such kind words."

That's odd. The only one speaking is Felix, yet he's responding to his guest as if they are speaking to him? I should write that down in my notebook.

Just as I'm scribbling down the last of my notes, Felix and his guest leave the room. Felix's voice sounds once more. "*Uwe Majesteit*, I thank you

for gracing my humble home with your presence. I look forward to seeing you at the Assembly tomorrow.” The door closes, and Felix’s footsteps approach the bedroom. They then trail off after Felix takes a right down the hallway, presumably towards the kitchen.

Everything is still. The footsteps are gone. I take this opportunity to crawl out from under the bed, taking extra care with my movements so as not to make any loud noises. I crack the bedroom door open. Both the hallway leading to the exit and the hallway leading towards the kitchen are empty. For a moment, I consider taking a right towards the kitchen, but I stop myself. I step out of the bedroom and make my way towards the exit. I don’t remember the hallway being this long when I first got here. I reach the door and slip outside. Unfortunately, I have no way to lock the door from the outside, but hopefully Felix will think that he mistakenly left his door unlocked.

Back at my apartment, I compile the information that I gathered from Felix’s house into my master investigation book. I grab the large spiral-bound notebook from a shelf and place it on my desk. A couple of weeks ago, when Felix began acting strangely, I bought this notebook to record my thoughts and observations in. I’ve known Felix for years; we were roommates in college. He and I live close to one another, so we’ve kept in contact regularly since graduating. We would either meet at my place or at a nearby café, but never at his house. Most of the time, we discussed art.

“Have you seen the new exhibit at The Met?” Felix asked me. “It’s fascinating. It’s all about medieval Christian art. Y’know—illuminated manuscripts and the like.”

“Unfortunately, some of us don’t have a high enough salary to afford tickets to the most famous art museum in New York,” I said. “Tell me about it.”

Felix’s eyes lit up. He tried to stifle his smile as he spoke, but he couldn’t keep it from showing itself now and again. “Well, it was in the museum’s basement, where it’s cool and dark, to protect the manuscripts. I thought that the atmosphere complemented the viewing experience incredibly, since all these medieval works depicted these bizarre monsters; the whole affair was quite creepy. There were human heads attached to horse legs, men whose faces were on their chests, giant gaping mouths that represented the gateway to hell... It was incredible. I always thought of Christian art as being a bit boring, but I never knew that these early manuscripts had such grotesque creatures in them. I’ll take you to see the exhibit before it ends whenever you have time off work. I think you’ll enjoy it.”

That was the last time we spoke. At first, I chalked his brief disappearance up to being busy with... whatever he does at work. He never spoke to me of his work, and I never asked him about it. I know he does something that makes him enough money to live in such an extravagant apartment building. Maybe he works in finance? No wonder he never talks about his job, then. That sounds awfully dull. I assumed that whatever Felix

did for a living was important enough to warrant him disappearing for days at a time, so when he didn't contact me for a week, I didn't think anything of it. However, as I was walking home from work, on the wall of an old building was an advertisement for the exhibit at The Met that Felix had told me about. According to the poster, the exhibit closed a few days ago. This was when I began to grow a bit concerned.

I found the nearest payphone and asked the operator to put me through to Felix. No response. Go figure. I decided to pay Felix a visit. Honestly, I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of this before. He had been to my apartment, why hadn't I ever been to his? I walked through Central Park, then made my way to West 72nd street. The building's gothic architecture made it instantly recognizable among the plain facades of neighboring buildings; the intricate detail of the windows and the roof was stunning, and its resemblance to a church was striking.

Once inside, I knocked on Felix's door. No answer. I knocked again. Still nothing. I turned away to leave, and none other than Felix himself stood in the hallway.

"Felix, I hope you don't mind me stopping by. I hadn't heard from you in a while, so I decided to pay you a visit. How've you been?" I started to walk towards Felix. He was carrying a stack of books. "Ooh, what've you got there? Any recommendations? I've been looking for some new reading material."

Without so much as a glance in my direction, Felix walked past me. He didn't say a word. I tried speaking to him again. "Felix, are you alright?"

Did something happen? I'd be happy to listen if you want to talk about it." Still no response. Felix unlocked his door and entered his apartment. I stood there, in the hallway, dumbfounded. What the hell happened to him?

It was then that I bought my notebook and began looking into this strange behavior. Whenever I could, I observed Felix's behavior from afar. I even tried approaching him a couple of times, but he ignored me again and again. I couldn't take it anymore; I needed some information, *any* information, on what Felix was doing. So I broke into his apartment. And now I finally have something of substance to put in my notebook.

I review the notes that I've made so far. The biggest question I have is who this "*Unve Majesteit*" is. Because of how Felix spoke to them, I assume this is a relatively powerful individual. Could it just be someone from work? No, Felix isn't the kind of person to suck up to his workplace superiors. And what is this "Assembly" that the two of them spoke about? I scribble all my thoughts down into the notebook.

It's 3:00 AM. I stand outside the door to Felix's apartment. The door opens. Felix stands in front of me, wearing a black cloak over a tuxedo. He holds a top hat with a brooch attached near the trim. I recognize the design of the brooch from the rightmost panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Tree Man!

"Nice brooch," I say to Felix. He stares at me for a few seconds, then exits his apartment and walks past me. "Hey, where're you going at 3:00 AM? I know you could also ask why I'm at your house at 3:00 AM, but let's

focus on you right now. What have you been up to?” Felix keeps walking. His walk is slow—mechanical, even. I walk up to him, grab his shoulders, and force him to face me.

“Felix. Listen to me. Where are you going?” Felix blinks a few times, then speaks to me for the first time in what feels like forever.

“Oh, hi friend! I didn’t see you there. I was just heading to that medieval Christian manuscript exhibit at The Met again. Would you care to join me?” Felix smiles.

“Uh... Sure, I guess. But hasn’t that exhibit already closed?” I let go of Felix.

“Wonderful! I’ll pay the admission fee for you, like I said I would.” Felix turns around and starts walking, but this time, he walks like a child who’s excited to see their favorite animal at the zoo.

I follow Felix out of the building, back onto West 72nd street, and into Central Park. Apart from the two of us, the park is empty. The path is lit by the artificial glow of lampposts, and the unusual quiet gives makes the park seem otherworldly. It’s Central Park, but at the same time it’s not Central Park. The same thing with Felix: it’s him, but it’s not him.

We reach the front steps of The Met. The steps that are usually filled with people heading in and out of the museum are deserted; the stillness is unnerving. Felix walks up the stairs, takes off his hat, and removes the Tree Man brooch. There is an oddly shaped keyhole in the door which Felix places the brooch into. *Click*. The door opens, and I follow Felix inside. It’s pitch black.

“If I’d known we were going to be breaking and entering, I would’ve brought my flashlight!” My voice echoes. Felix does not respond. I thought he was right in front of me, but it’s too dark to know where he is for sure. I stick my arms out in front of me to check. He’s not there.

Just as I start to run my hands along the wall, looking for a light switch, the entrance hall lights up. I turn around and am greeted by the sight of the stunning entrance hall. The tall, vaulted ceilings are a masterful tribute to Roman architecture. Felix stands in the middle of the hall.

“This way.” He beckons me. “The illuminated manuscripts are down in the basement.”

I follow Felix’s lead. Our footsteps echo loudly as we make our way down a grand hallway.

“Hey, uh... How’d you manage to get the lights on? And why were you able to break into this place so easily? Is that brooch a key?” I ask Felix.

“We’re almost there, it’s just down these stairs.” Felix stops in front of a beautiful marble staircase. “After you.”

“You didn’t answer any of my questions. Did I ask too many at once? How about just one: do you always come here when the museum is closed?” I wait for Felix to respond.

“Hm? What do you mean? The museum isn’t closed.” Felix says. “Come on, I’m sure you’ll love this exhibit.” Felix begins to walk down the stairs. I take a deep breath, then follow him down to the basement.

The sound of our footsteps is gradually drowned out by a sea of voices. The basement, just as dimly lit as Felix's house, is full of people dressed in all black—like Felix. Why are there so many people down here? Standing at the edge of the crowd, Felix turns to me. "Come with me. There's someone I want you to meet." He grabs my arm and drags me to the other side of the basement, where there aren't as many people around. "There he is." We stop in front of a man wearing a hooded cloak. He looks just like everyone else in the room, but there's this—this presence that he has that is so overwhelming. I can't even speak; all I can do is gawk at the hooded man in front of me.

"*Uwe Majesteit*, I've brought him. This is the man that was in my house when you visited."

"Wait, you knew I was there? Why didn't you say anything? I broke into your house, for God's sake!" *How the hell did he know I was there?*

"Yes, *Uwe Majesteit*. Let us begin the Assembly."

"Huh?! Felix, what's going on? What are you doing? Why did you bring me here?"

No answer. All at once, the voices in the room stop, and everything is silent. The crowd parts as Felix and *Uwe Majesteit* cross to the center of the room. Felix looks at me and smiles.

"Check this out." Felix nods at *Uwe Majesteit*. *Uwe Majesteit* takes off his hood, and his face looks exactly like Tree Man. The same eyes, the same nose—everything! He takes out a book just like the ones I saw Felix with; the same hieroglyphs are written on the cover. He opens the book. For the

first time, I hear *Uwe Majesteit* speak. His mouth does not move; I can feel his distorted, inhuman voice reverberate inside my head.

“AAH! Felix, what is this?! What is going on?!” *Uwe Majesteit*’s voice is so loud inside my mind that I begin to feel dizzy.

“FELIX, I COMMEND YOU FOR THIS GREAT SACRIFICE. IT IS BECAUSE OF YOU THAT WE ARE ABLE TO FULFILL OUR MISSION.”

“Huh?! Sacrifice?! FELIX!!” I fall to the ground, screaming. I can’t think straight. The voice is too loud. Felix walks towards me with that same mechanical stride. “Felix! Hey, Felix! Listen to me! What are you doing?! I thought we were friends!”

“Oh, but we are friends! I wouldn’t have brought you here if you weren’t my friend.”

“INDEED. THE SACRIFICE OF A FRIEND IS THE CATALYST.”

“Jesus, the catalyst for what?!”

“THE LAST JUDGEMENT. HUMANITY MUST PAY FOR ITS SINS.”

“What?! That’s just some story!! Felix, you wouldn’t sacrifice me over something as dumb as this, would you?! Hey, you wouldn’t, right?! Felix?!”

“Oooh, here’s one of my favorites from the illuminated manuscripts. The mouth of hell.”

A giant, inhuman mouth appears next to me. It opens to reveal a blazing fire. There’s no way this is happening right now. I look at Felix. He’s

wearing the same grin that he had when we first spoke about the medieval Christian art exhibit.

“FELIX, IT IS TIME.”

“Yes, *Uwe Majesteit*.” Felix picks me up off the ground and carries me towards the flaming mouth.

“No, no, no, n-no way! Felix, why?! Why are you doing this to me?! Please, spare me! There’s no way that this is the right thing to do! Felix! I know you can hear me! Felix! Say something! FELIX!”

“See, I knew you’d like this exhibit.” Felix’s grin is the last thing I see before I’m engulfed by the flames of hell.

Interlude



Chloe Cheng, *In the Grey*, photo

Froggie*Jack Jerlecki*

Little frog so small

Lily pads in the night sky

How high can he jump



Mona Ragone, *Mid-morning Waves*, watercolor

Part II

Ode to a Window at 11pm

Nina Schuerer

I look out

And there are two worlds
Melded perfectly

One is distant lights, barren trees
And the familiar and comforting
Proximity of my slanted roof

There is a little outcrop
Perfect for sitting

If it weren't for an anxious
Girl and anxious parents

The second is a mere
reflection
Caused by the string of
Twinkling lights that encases my bookshelf and door

There's a girl there too
But I try to avert her eyes because
She's been cut neatly-
Sectioned off into four
Unequal parts
by the narrow, white frames of that window

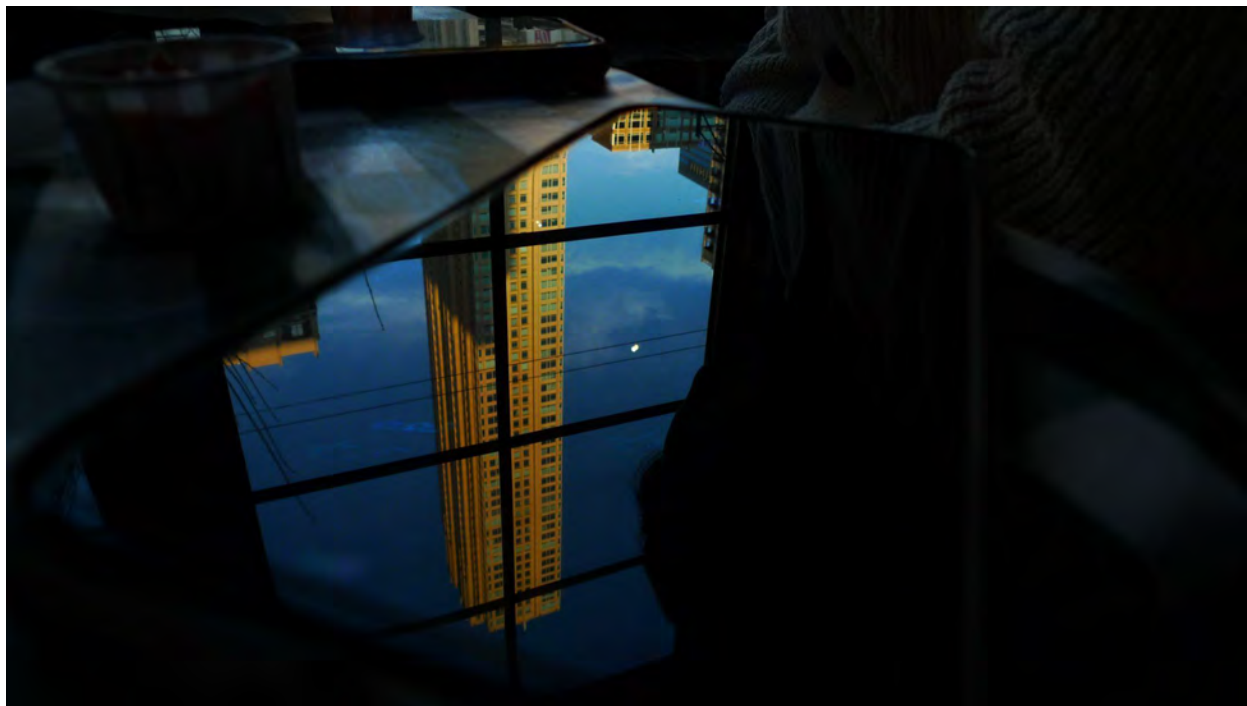
Curiosity pushes against my irises
And I am caught in a

Stare
And because I am looking at her
too closely

I notice a sort of shadow
Around her
An almost-reflection
A second rebound of the light

And it looks as though it too
Is far too hesitant
To begin to question

Who it is



Chloe Cheng, *Restaurant Reflection*, photo

Linear*Haya Hussain*

somewhere, there is a woman. and in her hands is a crying baby and her
life's worth savings.

somewhere, there is a man. and in his eyes is the corporate world and his
family's failures.

somewhere, I am not who I used to be. I am what I want to be, a gracious
exaggeration of everything I have ever had.

somewhere, this change in my hand is all the power and silence I have ever
wanted in the world.

somewhere, I am a rescinded soul that God decided he would keep
amongst himself, unless he wanted to watch me waste His time.

somewhere, I tell you about my fear of perception, and you know what to
do with it because fear is really just a contraption God gave to me in my
most vulnerable age.



Nina Schuerer, *Long Exposure*, photo

Paper Beats Rock: The Grand Canyon

Nithya Reddy

In the beginning, was it peace or was it chaos?

For a time, there were just the birds and the trees and the squirrels
And the river
Slow moving but steady in its course.
Nature had its harmony. Living and nonliving, all part of the same cycle,
At the moment where history makes itself known in its layers.

The first groups came in tribes.
Eleven that still call it a homeland of the past.
Living with the land. They stepped into the cycle of life
And made their homes.
Not just a place to stand on, but one bound to the mind and spirit.

Then the countrymen came to take what wasn't theirs,
Searching for something to add to a long list of ownership.
They shrunk the tribes smaller and smaller,
pushing and pulling this way and that, until there was nowhere to go.
A place of spirituality and holiness to one with blood that mixes with the
river.

People came and went as they do, marveling at the sights.
These were the winners, the ones that drew the lines and signed the papers.
One man came at last.
He marveled as they all do when confronted with Mother Nature.
But this time, he declared it a monument.

...

It's ironic isn't it?

They crawl across crevices and grooves lovingly crafted

Likened to the ants that they always seem to forget.

Unlike ants,

Their presence cannot be ignored.

No matter how hard I may try.

They come out of their homes to take photos

Of something that will last much longer

Than them. Than any photos. Than even the memory that they once were.

To appreciate the beauty of nature and marvel at the glory of natural forces.

But all the while walking past the same beauty being forsaken at their
doorstep.

Earth, once freely given to all of her children

Is now a commodity, lost to the economy, a made up company but now a
vice to all.

"How many would like to enter the canyon? 4? That will be \$20 for each."

"Children may enter for free? Oh how gracious."

How they would balk if they knew that once this land was free.

Now all that is understood is the language of money.

Paper beats rock.

A stone carved by eons of a single stream made disposable to a dollar.

All that is left is to stay, and watch

What humans will come to next



Alice Ma, *In the Scents*, mixed media

Letter 3

Alizeh Jawaid

Meri chidiya (my finch),

Hello! 'Tuum kyasi ho (how are you)? I haven't seen you since your shaadi—don't forget about your ammi so quickly! How is your husband? Are you two getting along? I hope you're cooking as well as I do, I wouldn't want your marriage to become like mine (I'm just kidding with you, your papa and I are fine!).

I know you were both not too happy with the idea of this marriage. Believe me, I was the same with your papa. I thought he was too sensitive, too soft, and to be honest, I thought that maybe I married a woman! But look at us now. I love him more than anything, and he loves me too. We understand each other fully and completely, and that helped us raise the perfect daughter, you! You are so kind, caring, well-behaved, and helpful. I hope that your marriage can lead you to raise a child just like yourself.

As happy as I am with you married, I am also quite lonely. Your papa does not get home until the moon has reached the top of the sky, and I am left with nothing but my kitchen and my books until then. It's quiet here without you. Nevertheless, I hope you are happy and well in your new home. Visit me soon!

Ammi



Angelina Shen, *Life if math didn't exist*, acrylic on canvas

The Apology You Never Found

Alice Ma

First of all, I lied
The sense of guilt was temporary
Don't want to make you seem like the one at fault
Can't coin the reason I feel like a puppet hanging on strings
But I can see you messing around every now and then
And my joints
My hands
My heart
They move to your movements
My boundaries were crossed
Boundaries that you set for good

Don't try to stand next to me
At first I thought
Adrenaline rushing through is a good thing
But I'm not supposed to freeze and go numb in fear
And anxiety that jeopardizes my behavior
Next to someone who's supposed to be the light

I don't want to dance
I know even now that this song is going to scar me
Going to spring the worst memories on me
In this scheme
Can't fight off the anger
Can't fight the urge to drop your hand and the urge to simply hold it
My heartbeat returns to what it once was with every step taken
But are you feeling my rage yet?

Liar running wild on these grounds of wonder
And I let you get away with it
I can still see you making that promise
For the well wishes of not trapping me in guilt
But also to leave me trapped alone in some
Insincere, half-hearted connection
Art history didn't matter
Art portfolio didn't matter
Saying that you would mattered
Almost solidified
But those words were whipped into thin air
Coming back to me on a windy street at eight in the morning

A coward I saw for the first time
Seeing one thing but then changing your mind
Picked the other option
The route away from my difficulties, or perhaps yours?
I stood there frozen and smiling
In that moment my denial washed off
There goes stage one
And I just knew
I regretted feeling sorry
Because it was supposed to be me
It would have been settling to receive
The apology you never found

...

Do you ever get a feeling
That some freezing wind is blowing behind you
Waiting for an apology
Waiting for you to say

A Man's Journey

Sonia Oulamine

Men stumble down the cobblestone street that is life
The quiet boulevard is lined with quiet cottages
Their feet get caught in a rock and they trip
Grabbing the sill to stop their motion—grimy fingers gripping the sturdy
wood
Breathing hard, panting, their breath forms fog on the cold winter window
Only then do they Look up curiously, they peer, confused through the
misty glass
Warm fire light bathes blurry forms bent over a table
Food is passed from plate to plate with abundance and kindness
He cannot see the defining features of the scene

He begins to stand yet again stumbles through the door
Although he has barged in, the women only gasp before pulling him to his
feet
They squabble to make space for him at their table
They pass the food to him, fattening, feeding, nourishing for they can tell
the cold has been cruel to the wanderer
When his lips are lined with grease he stands
A cold gust of air rummages through the room as he slams the door shut
behind him
Or worse—
Leaves it slightly ajar
He slides down the cobblestone, then scuffles, then sways, then stumbles
He finds another frosty window, where he peers
And so on the cycle continues
Each time he is fed and encircled with care before he leaves again
On and on and on

The cycle only interrupted when he finds a house with enough light to feed him forever

Or, he becomes clever and learns the light can be tethered to a lantern so that he may carry it with him wherever he may wander



Shivani Devrapally, *Golden Hour*, photo

Candlelight

Krish Desai

Glow like a ghost

The dim of a relationship

A scene created for mystery

A scene created for exploration to the depths of the earth

Some aromas of clementine and coconut, others of eucalyptus and honey.
Each scent sparking a new world, just like the candle's light

The scents that mix like a beautiful mistake, an error.

A vintage record player watching from the shelf
A writer using the night for himself

The lavender candlelight dims, just as my Indie music hints

Shadows grow and lack in probity—
they are the deceitfulness of my identity

introducing ghosts of the past and the finest of socialites.

My candles all dim, one by one.

And ultimately, I'm alone, left with none.

And as the light fades and fades away,

I bring it back, I tell it “stay.”

But the candles have made up their minds in momentum.

They have to leave, if I’ll just let them.

I’m surrounded in darkness now, my love dimmed down.

But when the night is deep and the town is asleep,
a poet always has his own attractive sweets.



Mona Ragone, *Costa Corallina*, Watercolor

Brothers

Alice Ma

We all had a strange obsession with the brothers.

The brothers got washed in by the tide.

The brothers that we split in half,

One in your hall and one in my class.

The brothers that we loved.

The brother that I got.

Ones that we tried

So hard to forget.

So colorful.

So blurry.

So real.

We each took a part of them and they tore both of us apart

You took the older one as your friend and he took your pride

I took the younger one's joy and he took my heart

We drowned but we were fine

Chasing tales and backing up lies

Now we're dreaming of days of uniforms and ties

But we believe that the past is real

The blurry shades we forget about although we thought we'd never lose
sight of them

If perception is heavily influenced by our biases

Then how could we say we know the past so well?

Like the waistband on our skirt and the reason why we'd never tuck our
oxfords in

Like how we can almost say for sure you wore a belt
It's time for us to let the past fly
And the only thing we can do for it is to forget about it for years, and then
when we're lonely and lost
We can rediscover how passionate we were

The brothers crossed paths with us because fate was designed
And for our own good we left them behind
The brothers we used to idolize were always out of reach
The brother we once had was lost on our choice to leave
Still, it wasn't our fault
It wasn't our duty to raise a child that didn't want to grow
But it's such a shame we haven't realized until now
How much we burden ourselves with forgeries and spells

Brothers,
We sing in honor of you and we mourn you in words
It's the grief that's overpowering, but it's your ghosts that are worse
Other stories get told in poetry
But you're the only thing that stings with unsaid apologies
So we apologize a thousand times at night and we listen to old songs
Hopefully one day in Osaka
We can surrender the thought you left to us at the place you once belonged

Planet Colonies 2

Haya Hussain

some clock somewhere counts on its fingers
and wonders why they cease to move
Salvador Dali told me this when life and death
met eyes with him in *The Persistence of Memory*

i don't touch art because i'm afraid it'll peel
all my life the trail of ruin i leave
i don't touch art because i'm afraid it means something
and i won't understand
because i never do understand
but i like to stare
at pretty things

i don't complete things because i'm afraid they'll leave
all my life the trail of ruin i leave
i don't complete things because i need something to do
and i won't commit
because i never love anything enough
but i like to love
pretty things

someday i will arrive in the afterlife and i will not
recognize the soul of my husband because
i know his face better

My god, I'm full of fear.



Amir Muhammad, *New Era*, photo

A Version of the Future

Alice Ma

In years to come, you will think of me
Like how I think of those that I missed
A touching connection could have been found
But I let them go because what the heck did I know?
The moment you start remembering me and what I did
You'll compare everything to something else
Was I an extra glass that slipped through your fingers?
And did that glass shatter next to your feet?
Did you never think of me until a spare was one you'd need?
Or, let's say that I am the school textbook you owned
You're so sure that you tucked it away somewhere
Oh lord! You can see your hands pick it up!
But you just can't find it in the house you grew up in
Many are lost through the years of forgetting
Then, with your impatience, you rampage through the rooms
You can't find me or the words I offered you
You don't remember what I said or what crossed your mind
You only see eyes and eyes and how I went silent
So why?
Why didn't you place me somewhere you could reach?
Why did you choose to never mind me?
But these questions are all you. They aren't me
I'm not there to ask you these blameful questions
Sweet god. I don't direct grudges at you
But in my city and time zone, I can already see you pacing around
I can sense the disappointment and frustration that you're dragging
All over the house
I can hear you cry your regrets and your countless questions
All over my past self



Angelina Shen, 小魍, alcohol marker

we were girls together

Haya Hussain

Like summer hair tans dead-ends aux box-dyes pools hairspray sunglasses
haircut bikinis braids bonfire curls camp claw-clips swimming iron
sunscreen layers beach shaving freckles watermelon heat / *did the Dyson
really cost 400? don't be stupid, you can just use mine.*

Like rolling the windows down and screaming your favorite song. Do you
know what comes next? It doesn't matter. The sounds leaving your mouth
feel like music to me. I'll learn whatever you sing.

Like angry parents and boyfriends / *is this shirt too short? no, you look cute, and
who cares anyways?*

Like break-up texts and iloveyous and didyoumissmes and long-distance
and tatting our names on our backs and trips that never made it out of the
group chat and Coachella and Lollapalooza and Chicago and California and
your hometown or mine?

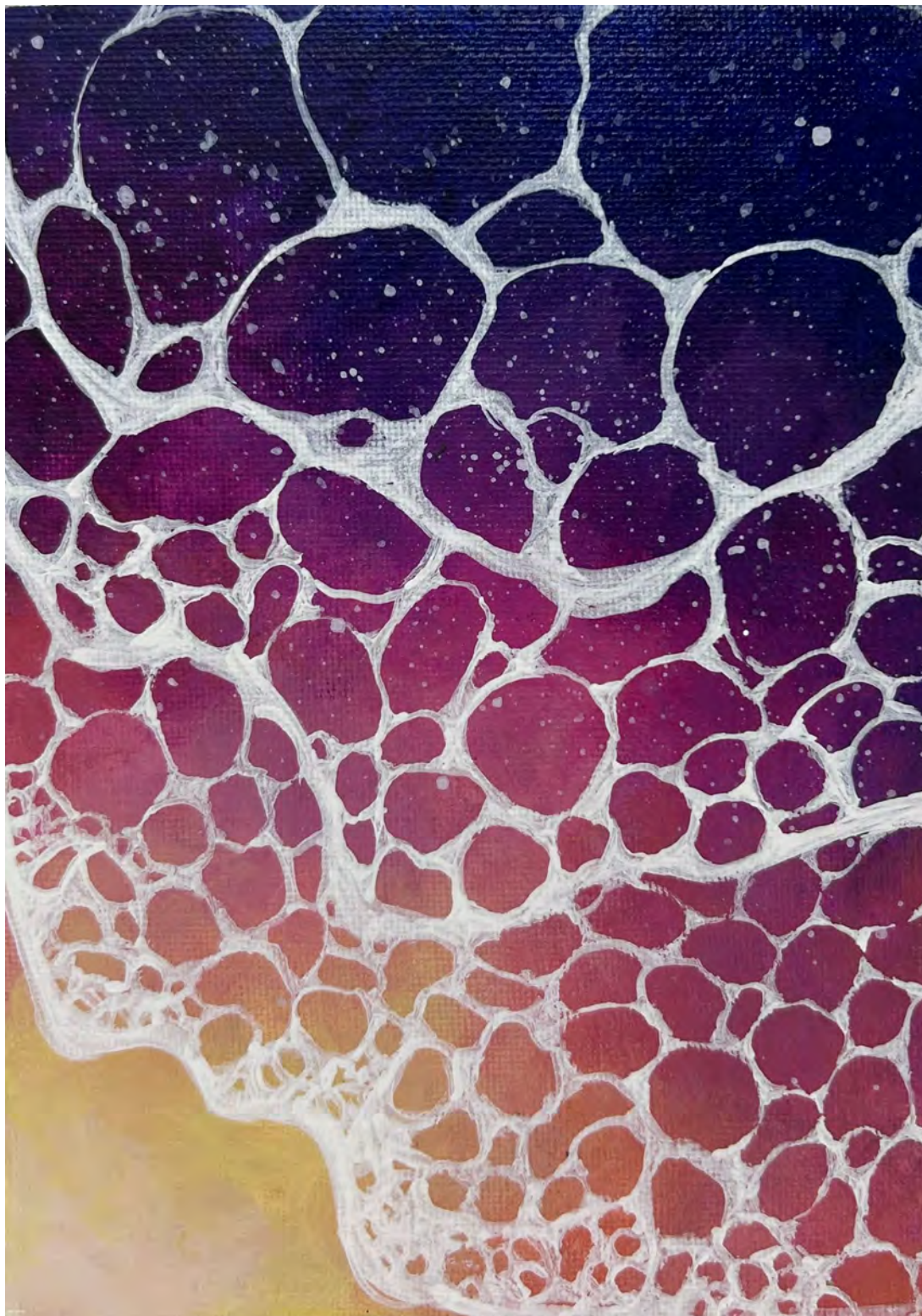
Like i'm glad we met, keep in touch, don't leave, be my roommate, sorry i
forgot to give you your shirt back, this doesn't fit me anymore, oh my god
he cheated on me, it's his loss, he'll come back (until he doesn't), let's go
backpacking together (we never do), let's date best friends (even if it doesn't
work out), what shade is that? (raw seduction or some sexy bs like that), i
love your makeup (let me do it for you), girls' night? (i need us).

Like i baked a heart-shaped cake so here's a slice / thanks for thinking of
me / i brought you a souvenir from Hawaii / and oh my god it's pink!

Like hearts in our texts and so many exclamation points and so much love
that you can't find in your men (until you do).

Like *no one can love you like a woman can.*

Like *please stop hurting me—we're the same.*



Mona Ragone, *Astral Reflection*, acrylic on canvas

Calliope

Macy Lubak

I see her in your eyes
When you're talking, and get that spark
Your entire face lights up
Your smile a work of art

Hands start to move faster
Motions become a blur
As you write and write and write
The words they start to slur

Your smile gives a glow
Filling our small room
Better than any sun
Allowing our love to bloom

When you come to bed
Ink lingers on your skin
I kiss your soft cheek
As I breathe your scent in

Then you read to me
The poems you have written
And darling, I can not lie
I am simply smitten

I slowly fall asleep
Listening to you speak so poetically
As I sigh with love
Towards my beautiful Calliope

Thirty-Two Degrees and Counting

Allison Pfefferkorn

The Beginning

I am going to die.

Well, everyone is going to die, that's part of life, but I'm going to die *soon*, within the next hour if I had to guess, but I'm not a doctor. Maybe I should've been. That would make for a more interesting headline than "Former Construction Worker Dies After Failing to Climb a Mountain." In these situations, you're supposed to keep calm and try to use all your senses so you don't give up and let your body shut down—I read that in an article a couple days ago, and I have no idea if it's true or not, but I don't have a better plan. Right now I'm staring at the sky—vision, check. Although maybe I should erase that check considering the likelihood of snow blindness out here. I can hear the wind, and if I strain my ears I can hear something moving, maybe an animal. If I'm lucky, it'll be a bear, resulting in a quick and merciful death. That's my ideal way out. I can taste the almond butter sandwich I had earlier. I run my tongue along the top of my teeth and hope I left something wedged up there, but no such luck. I can smell snow, that much is obvious. I know there's a word for the smell of rain, and I wonder if it's the same for snow. I can feel... not much of anything. My hands aren't totally numb yet, thanks to my gloves, but the right half of my upper body is pinned under what feels like a thousand pounds of rocks and

snow. I've long since lost feeling in that side all together. There's nothing I can do but wait for the inevitable. I hope it's soon.

Sixteen Minutes

"Honey, what are you doing there? You said you were dressed and ready ten minutes ago!" I crane my neck and make out a figure. She's short, with brown hair piled high up on her head and large, dangly earrings. She's wearing a blue pantsuit—fashionable, but not appropriate at all for the blistering wind. She's got crow's feet around her eyes and has clearly tried to cover them up with makeup.

"Mom?" She tapped her watch.

"Your dad is waiting in the car already. You'd better pick up the pace or you're going to miss the Sunday School dismissal. Then you'll have to sit in the pews with us and I know you don't want that."

"Mom, I can't go to church," I gesture to myself with my free hand. "I'm stuck." I've got no idea what my mother is doing on the side of a mountain, but I decided not to think too hard about it.

"Oh, don't give me that." She looks a lot younger than she is now, no grey hair, no wrinkles, no spider veins on her hands, though she would kill me if she knew I was describing her like that. It's exactly how I always think about her, the way she looked when I was little. My mom shook her head, "if you don't come to church, we can't take you to the comic book store afterwards."

“The comic book store...” I like the sound of that. I remember pulling the door open and pushing it closed, open and close, open and close, to ring the bell over and over again and excite the dogs that lay around the shop—ding, ding, ding. I blink. I can hear the chiming of the bells. A soft jingling noise that cuts through the howl of the wind.

“Come on, young man. The pastor waits for no one and neither does the Lord.” My mom claps her hands together, as if that will spontaneously resolve the situation. After I left for college, I dropped the religious stuff altogether. Maybe God *was* the answer here. Maybe if I had prayed more or faked sick less, things would’ve turned out better for me. But if a God would let someone die just because they missed a couple sermons, that’s no God I’d want to follow.

“If the Lord wants to give me a hand, I’ll be here, but *you* can’t do anything Mom, you’re not even really here.” She looked sad, and for a second I felt bad for what I said.

“I’m your mother. It’s my job to help you.”

“There’s nothing you can do.”

“Well, I’ll see you later then, okay sweetie?”

“Sure Mom, we can play Scrabble.” She leaned forward and kissed my forehead, but I didn’t feel it.

I can’t feel anything.

Thirty-Four Minutes

“You gonna play or not?” Tristan, my friend from school, stood in front of me, holding a soccer ball under his arm. His warm brown skin and gym shorts sharply contrasted with the harsh snow, and it was almost funny. We lost touch after graduation; he went to college in Australia, and even though we texted for a while, it petered out after a few months. But here he was, in all his middle school glory. Who would’ve thought?

“Just give a minute; I’m a bit busy.”

“If we don’t practice the sport, we’re not gonna get anywhere.” He blew a dark strand of hair out of his face, but it settled back anyway.

“You mean if *you* don’t practice. I never wanted to be a soccer player, that was your thing.”

“I need someone to practice on, don’t I?”

“Didn’t you give me a bloody nose when I tried to play goalie?”

“That was *one* time!” He rolled his eyes, smiling. “And it got you out of English class. You really gonna begrudge me for that?” I snicker. Tristan had told the nurse I need ‘emotional support,’ so we hung out in the nurse’s office until the English exam was conveniently over. I had a bruise on my nose for weeks, but it was worth it to get the extra study time. “So you in or out? You wouldn’t abandon your buddy in his hour of need, would you?”

“Hour of need my ass! It’s one game of soccer!” Now I’m really laughing. It’s probably not great for my heat retention, but I can’t really help it. I sigh, smiling up at my friend. “Why *didn’t* you go out for soccer? You could’ve done it.” My friend’s mouth downturned a bit and he began

to morph. His limbs grew longer and his face sharpened. I was looking at the high school Tristan, my friend from senior year. He ran his fingers through his hair, which was longer now, shaggier.

“Why didn’t you?” I repeat.

“Come on dude, I’m an adult now, I gotta make adult choices.” He laid back against a rock. “Soccer star was just a little kid dream, you know that. Everyone has to grow up eventually.”

“Ugh, you sound like a college counselor.”

“You know I’m right. I got into a good college; they’re giving me money!” He threw his hands up in the air, grinning.

“For biomedical engineering... what even got you into that anyway?”

“It pays well. And even if I don’t like it, I’ve still got free time to do the stuff I want.”

“You know you won’t like it. You’re just doing it to do it.” It’s a mean thing to say, I know, but I can’t help it. “We were always together, and now you’re just abandoning me! Australia, really?!”

“At least I’m doing something! You’ve been sitting in your room every day for the past seven years, waiting for the perfect opportunity, the perfect moment. Well it’s not going to come! You need to be the one to try.”

“...I *am* trying,” My voice comes out quieter than I expect; I hate that he’s right.

“That’s what this whole expedition was about, wasn’t it? That’s why you bought the equipment, that’s why you decided to become a mountain climber out of nowhere, that’s why—”

“Shut up! Leave me alone!” I screamed. And suddenly, he was gone. My once best friend, now a stranger, was gone. It’s getting warm.

Forty-Seven Minutes

People always say that if you’re in a freezing environment and you feel warm, you have hypothermia. Hikers have died from stripping down in the middle of the Himalayas. I guess it’s good I can’t do that, since I feel like I’m stuck in a toaster. I wonder how long it’s been. I wonder how long it will be.

“You’ve been here quite a while.” A feminine voice says to my left. I turn to meet her gaze. She’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen: tall with dark hair and darker eyes, an elegant form sitting on a rock, her hand curled protectively over her stomach. I never knew what people meant when they said pregnant women glowed, but now I get it. Her face is perfectly shaped, with a speckling of freckles across her cheeks. When she smiles at me, I can see she has a gap between her front two top teeth—an imperfection, some might call it, but on her it looks intentional, like the Mona Lisa’s smile. She’s a siren, a waterfall, a warm cup of coffee. God, what I wouldn’t give for a warm cup of coffee.

“...Diana.”

“Hope you weren’t waiting long.” My girlfriend laughs as if she’d told the funniest joke in the world.

“Diana, you’re here.”

“Course I’m here. You think I’d let the others have all the fun?”

“But you’re—you—” I sigh. “I missed you so much. Both of you.” My eyes dart to her stomach.

“Oh, don’t be like that. We’re here now aren’t we?”

“That’s not what I meant.” Her eyebrows curve upward and for once, she looks something other than blissful.

“I know,” she says forlornly, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault,” I assure her. I can’t bear to see such a beautiful face masked by despair. “You’re here now.” She smiles once more, but it’s less vibrant than before. “Stay with me?”

“Of course.” We sit in comfortable silence as time passes. “That’s what this whole ‘mountain hike’ is about, isn’t it?” She asks quietly after a few minutes, breaking the silence. “It’s about me. Us.”

“No, no, it’s—”

“You can’t lie to me.” Her eyes remain soft, but her pupils pierce through me. “I know it’s hard—” This time it’s my turn to interrupt her.

“You don’t know what it’s been like! I can’t do this without you, you can’t just leave me like that!”

“I didn’t have a choice.” I know she’s right, but just like with Tristan, I can’t help it. Her voice is soothing and level and it infuriates me. “You

always think it'll happen to someone else, but you can't control when someone you love gets whisked away."

"I don't have anything anymore Diana!" I can feel water running down my face, but I'm not sure if I'm crying or sweating.

"You never were much for hiking..."

"You were my whole life!"

"Let alone mountain climbing."

"You ruined me!"

"*You* ruined you." She said simply. That shut me up. I laid there, panting and staring up at the pool of a sky in front of me. I wouldn't meet her eyes.

"You were my everything. When you died, there was nothing left."

"I know, and I wish I could've done something. But not everything's up to us, you know that."

"What did I, *we*, ever do to deserve this? What did *she* do?" I gesture to her stomach, at the child neither of us got to meet. My girlfriend doesn't have a response for that. "I never even got to meet her..."

"What about the family you still have?" She asks, tilting her head. "They matter."

"Of course they do. That's why I did this."

"You didn't want to scare them." It was like she knew what I was going to say before I said it.

"They'd think they did something wrong. This way, I'm just a guy who died in a tragic accident. An inexperienced idiot who went mountain

climbing without taking the right precautions.” It felt surprisingly good to admit it.

“You came up here to die.” She reached out and rested her hand on mine, although I couldn’t feel it.

“If it hadn’t been an avalanche, it would’ve been something else--dehydration, an animal attack, or sliding off the side of a cliff. I would’ve made sure.”

“But there’s more to life. Things will never be exactly as they were, but they’ll get better. Your wounds will heal.”

“Easy for you to say.”

“Your mom’s birthday is coming up soon, right?” I nod. “You could take her to dinner. Fondue, right? That’s your favorite.”

“Who would’ve thought strawberries and cheese would be such a good combination?”

“Nobody but you.” She laughed. “Maybe it’s finally time to start texting Tristan again and see what he’s up to. You could save up and go to Australia—you’ve always wanted to travel.”

“I can’t afford it, I quit my job.”

“You hated that job anyway. You’ve got savings you can use while you find another one. You could start writing again.”

“A failed mountain climbing attempt would make for a good memoir.” As I’m talking to her, I think about everything. About my parents, my house, books, paintings—but not modern art paintings, I hate those--, sunrises, warm rain, sand on the beach, warm home-cooked meals,

hot baths... I'm so hot. "...Maybe I don't want to die. But it's too late, isn't it?"

"It's never too late."

"Everything hurts," My muscles ache and I'm having a hard time keeping my eyes open, but I know if I close them I've signed my death warrant.

"Hang in there, okay? For me."

"I'll try," I swallow, but my throat's so dry it feels like I'm inhaling sand. "I'll try."

Fifty-Five Minutes

"We're coming up on the avalanche zone," I say into my two-way radio, eyes scanning the horizon for some sign of human life. Search and rescue isn't for everyone, but it's a job I wouldn't trade for anything. My Saint Bernard, Rolf, trots in front of me, sniffing the ground and leaving deep tracks in the snow. "It's not looking good. There's a lot of upturned rocks and snow, and it looks like it's been that way for quite a while." I run my gloved hand over the boulders that have already iced over. The wind is biting at me through my coat, and it makes me worried for whoever may be trapped. Rolf barks loudly, breaking me out of my trance. "You get something boy?" The dog breaks out into a run, charging towards a rock pile in the distance. I almost tell him to slow down, but if there really is someone stuck here, there's no time to lose. As we near the pile, I start to make out a more detailed form. I stumble a bit as I grab the radio at my

hip, “We’ve found someone! Status unknown!” We reach the site and I kneel down, taking in the scene. A man is lying in the snow, half his body pinned under a wall of rocks and ice. His skin is grey and his lips have gained a blue tint, and his hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes are laced with ice. He looks past me, his eyes glassy and unfocused as his mouth hangs open, and my heart sinks. I unhitch the radio from my belt to deliver the bad news when I hear something. At first I think it’s a fly, then I hear it again. It’s a voice! It’s barely there but it is there! I leaned closer to the man, my ear hovered over his mouth.

“Diana?” A scratchy voice asks.

“He’s alive!” I yell into the radio. Rolf has already begun digging, ripping away the rubble with his powerful front paws. I don’t know who Diana is or what she has to do with anything, but I don’t care. I pull my shovel off my back and begin to help my dog, freeing up the man’s arm and leg. I hear whirring overhead and I don’t have to look up to know the team managed to track our location. “We’ve got you, sir. Everything is going to be okay,” I assure the man as I strap him to the stretcher, wrapping the blanket around his frigid body. I know his life won’t ever be the same again—there’s a good chance both his arm and leg will need to be amputated, but at least he’s alive. “You’re going to be okay.”



Haya Hussain, *King of this Hill*, photo

Love and Reserved,*Alice Ma*

Hurt and damage in all the possible ways
I still know when seats are empty on certain days
I just drown in pretense

Poised with hypocrisy, I admit I'm one of judgment
I regret my impulsive disfigurements
But tenses clarifies the present

We haven't sinned
Only guilt becomes embellishments on our skin
Then we restrain our faults into humor

We are composed and reserved
Contain everything in the two attitudes
When silence and reticence come and answer
We forget the gaps filled by solitude

What do you try to find in the shadows?
Well, you can find them all because the years have erased nothing but failed
intrusions

Possibilities are eliminated because they've become impossible
What's left has got to be logical

What is left?
What is here for us if we won't show that we can be genuine
Where can we go to if we can't admit

The dents we've left on each other
The roughest words we screamed at our worst
Bloody wars that we fought alone
The scars that we think will become badges of our own
Our darkest nights and falsest dawns
The dazzling impressions that stole our awes

None of that will survive, we will hide them in
Good mornings when we've lost nights to thought
Candid eyes that roll at stage sentences
Reactions that are never at good timing
Realizations that we don't want to deem as real

All of those things we don't dream twice about

Words are full of mistakes and merely fiction
Necessary is the momentum in your tone
All my infatuation fluctuated in them

When Life Comes

Shivani Devrapally

after Mary Oliver

when life comes
like the coffee stains in winter;
when life comes
and gives us fate's yellow lemons

when life comes
to love me, and keep its hold tight;
when life comes
like a sea of things not quite there

when life comes
like a ghost that blesses a solitary path,

i want to step through a door full of laughter,
knowing:
it is a place of love, that cottage of fairies

and therefore i look upon everything
as an opportunity and a chance for more,
and i look upon time as no more than a concept,
created by those afraid of the same dark fairy cottage
but i consider each short breath another moment,

and i think of life as a flake of snow, as common
as a breeze, and as unique as a cloud

and each chance a new poem on paper,
moving, as all writing does, on towards a name

and each syllable a white daisy on the field of hope, and nothing
more precious than the stems of the dead.

and when it begins again, i want to laugh: all my life
i was the heart kissing a crown of shattered glass.
i was the love, taking the cruel into the heart.

and when it's over, i want to be sure
to not regret the choices of the past, or wonder

what if.

when life comes
i will make my mark
a scar of stains and lemons and cottages and snow and poems and daisies

and it will be mine



Nithya Reddy, *A Boat Ride*, color pencil

Perfect Places

Sonia Oulamine

I was invited
and answered out of courtesy
I did not know
How the night would go

The shortest I remembered from a group
The quietest already graduated
The tallest I had never seen
And the cheerleader a year above me

We, the five of us,
Were companions for the evening
Painting on cardboard
and laughing at our mistakes
Trying to plan out and design
In the fading light of
Our september night

They talked,
Talked about boys
And girls
And homecoming
And college
And relationships:
broken, beginning, or failing

I was quiet for a while
Because no one heard me

But soon I was pulled in
And laughed with them

At first, it was bright.
Sun and wind stubbornly
Stopped us from our project
But soon the sun shifted
Behind the ghost chapel
And dusk draped over head

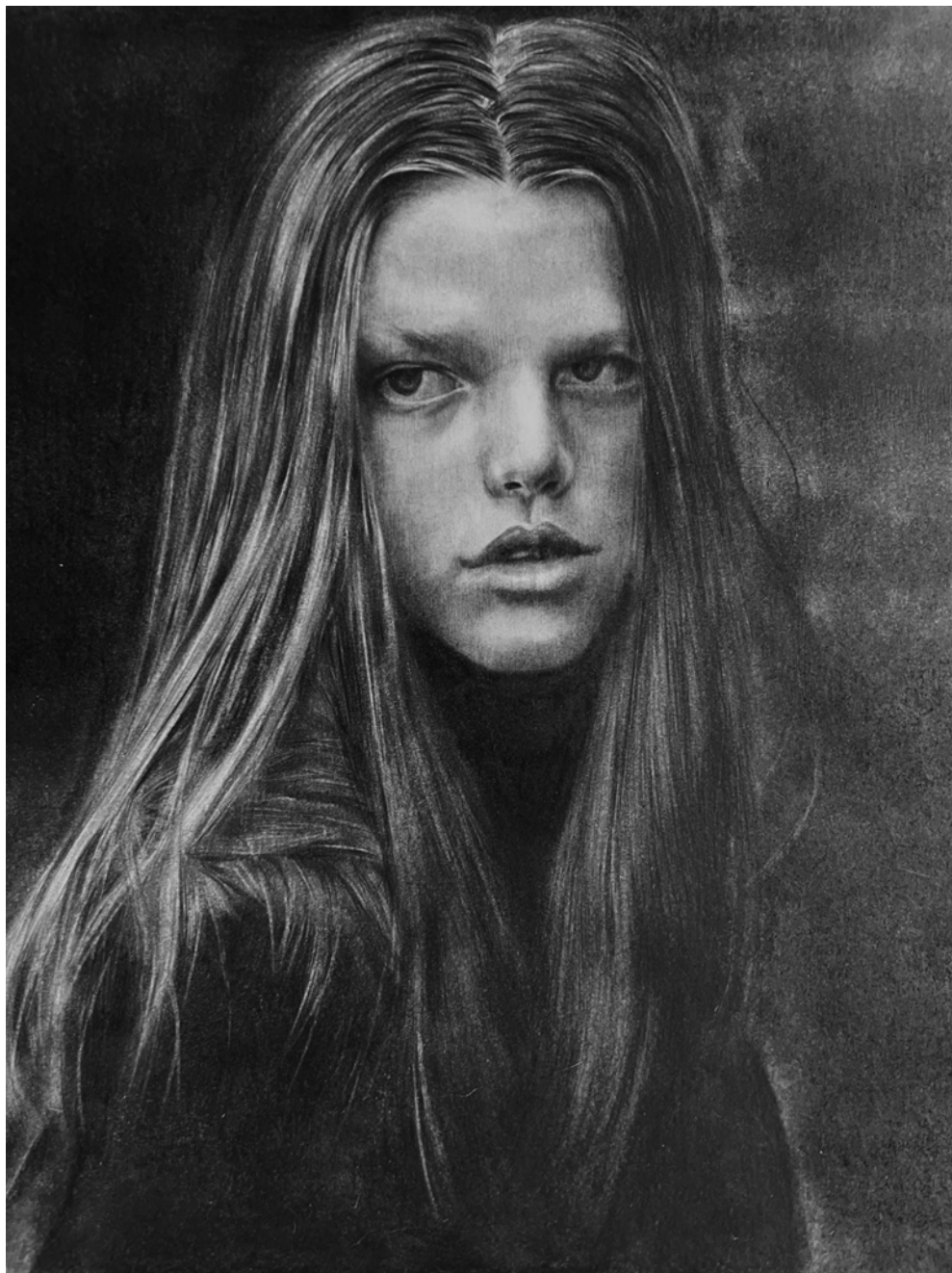
It will be the laughter I will remember
So loud, I thought security might kick us out
It bounced off brick and water
Echoed around the empty buildings
The empty buildings and their dark eyes
No one inside, and, yet,
I still feel like we were watched
Maybe only the slivered moon
Heard us that evening

Once everything had unfolded,
Our art done and the loudness too,
I saw four faces I didn't know

For me, this night was bliss
It was quieter now
after one had left
I sat on a cold stone bench
With three I never knew
I do not know the word for it
The peace, the serenity, the calm

That overtook me that night
But that sensation felt like,
Like the truth.

A perfect moment
Suspended in my memory



Angelina Shen, *Watch Your Back*, graphite

Editor's Epilogue

Sonia Oulamine

This past year felt like a pivotal moment in the journey of our favorite show. As we watched the final scenes unfold, we saw everything coming together. The set was perfectly arranged, the actors in their finest costumes, and the lights shining brightly. We witnessed friendships growing stronger, life plans solidifying, and the boundaries of our limits being explored. However, amidst all of this excitement, it was important to take a moment to reflect on how far we have come. For that reflection is what fuels our ambitions and drives us forward. Remembering our past can be painful, but it is necessary to overcome the fear of the unknown future. By acknowledging where we started, we can chart a course for where we want to go. This year, while working on the latest issue of *Greenleaves*, I was reminded of the profound beauty and complexity of nature and the lessons it can teach us. Through the hard work of our visual and literary editors and the contributions of our talented contributors, *Greenleaves* has pushed the boundaries of art and creativity forward. Looking ahead, I am excited to see where our journey takes us, knowing that we will always honor and build upon the foundation of our past.



Greenleaves 2022-2023