



Moledro Magazine

Issue 6: June 2017

It's Not In My Head

Table of Contents

Note by Zoe Smith-Holladay

It's Not In My Head

Image Credit: Archita Mittra

Hannah Reigle

March, April, May

Leah Gaush

Brain Beating

Maribel C. Pagan

2 Poems

Morgan Almasy

Fine

Noelle Hendrickson

2 Poems

R. E. Hengsterman

Sixty-Six Minutes

Betsy Jenifer

Silhouetted

Richard King Perkins

4 Poems

Courtney Felle

3 Poems

Kathleen Walker

2 Poems

Besty Jenifer

Phantasms

Leah Trachtenberg

Voice

Story Frantzen

Koi

Taylor Fang

2 Poems

Unthemed

Image Credit: Nikhila Kulukuru

Emily Tian

3 Poems

Fabrice Poussin

3 Poems

Faith Potts

The Day Nobody Died

W. Jack Savage

A Form of Graveyard

Isabella Li

How To Confess Your Deepest, Darkest Secrets

Katarina Bordeaux

2 Poems

Lisa Stice

3 Poems

M. A. Istvan Jr

2 Poems

Betsy Jenifer

First Glance

Rachael Bindas

3 Poems

Bruce McRae

2 Poems

Jim Zola

The Beauty Of Falling

Simon Perchik

4 Poems

Sofiul Azam

Coming Of Age

Rachna Shah

Rites

W. Jack Savage

Daunting

Note by Zoe Smith-Holladay

“So what if I’m crazy¹? The best people are.” –Melanie Martinez, *Mad Hatter Crazy*

1. Mentally deranged especially as manifested in a wild or aggressive way

“I always said he was off his rocker¹.” –Ron, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone Off One’s Rocker*

1. Insane

“We’re all mad¹ here.” –Mad Hatter, *Alice in Wonderland Mad*

1. Mentally ill; insane

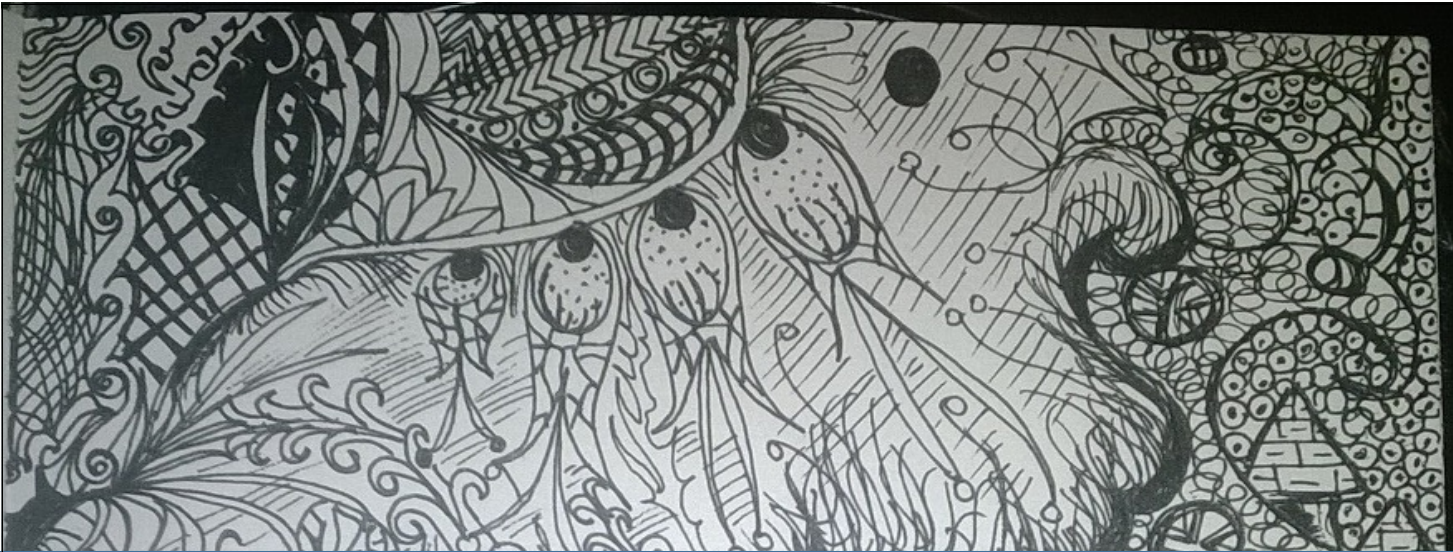
“He’s telling everyone that he’s taking me to prom --either he’s insane¹ or he’s still trying to make up for almost killing me last....” –Bella Swan, *Twilight*

Insane

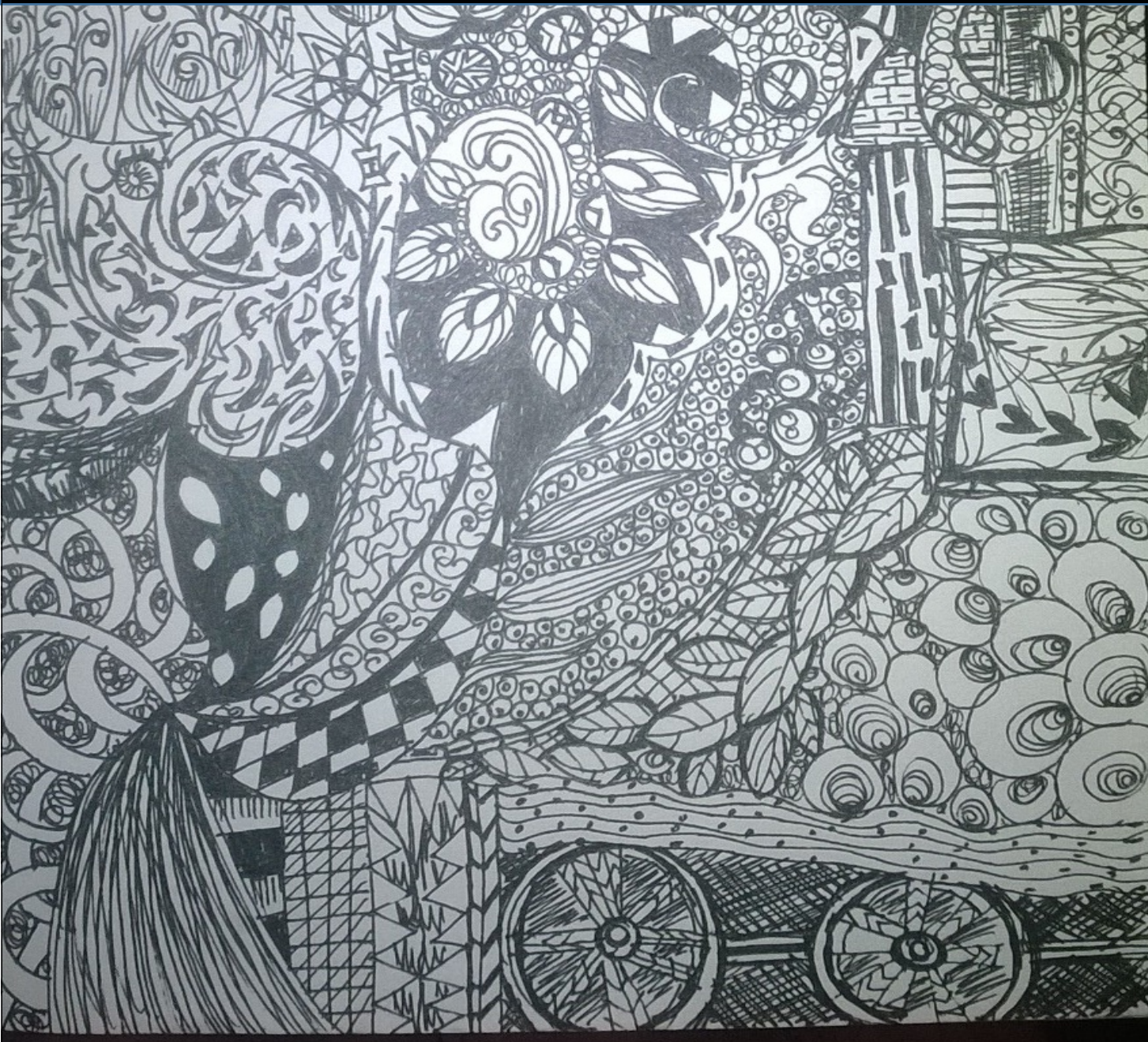
1. In a state of mind that prevents normal perception, behavior, or social interaction; seriously mentally ill

For a concept so commonly used in the media and pop culture, mental illness is one of the least understood. It’s acceptable to mock it and portray it wrongly, but not to have it. The stereotypes of people with mental illness are multiplied because people are too scared to talk about their own. The silence allows harmful stereotypes to fester. It goes both ways; society romanticizes it and makes it seem much more beautiful than it is, while others demonize it and make it out to be something only horrible people have. People think it’s just in the mind, but...

It’s not in our head, it’s all around us.



It's Not In My Head



HANNAH REIGLE

March, April, May

I am at the place where the rubbing of my hands
synchronizes with the migration of the geese
and the ancient brass ticking of the Father.
Everything is multiplied—infinately exponential—
lined up in neat rows and wrapped in thin paper.
My favorite color is the one that is next in line;
My favorite song is order.
I am at the place where I can hear my mother saying
I take it back, I take it back ten times,
and someone typing heAveN, heAveN, heAveN...
I can feel the rhythm in the souls of Jesus and Washington and Dr. King and compare them.
The ducks are lined up and bowing to me again.
The files are in their places between the years and plastic.
I am at the place where I can put my head between the pillars
and rock back and forth as a pendulum.
I am at the place where no one dies. I take it back.
Here, the volume is always at twenty-eight and my skin is never red
and four always comes after three.
I am at the place where I hold the pen to the script and my jacket is heavy.
I am at the
center
of the world.

LEAH GAUSH

**BRAIN BEATING
(a haiku sonnet)**

cerebral thunder
scares the angels away
into, through, under

water. here to stay
are the tendrils of demons,
ink in clear water.

what do you mean when
you say i am His daughter?
bodies remember;

past flesh memory:
into-the-wild-December,
neurons as bullies,

trauma, sensory abuse.
my sanity has come loose.

MARIBEL C. PAGAN

2 Poems

Strength

The weight of a thousand bricks
pressing against the unsuspecting
back of a sobbing person
with no one to assist her poor soul.

She pushes onwards, up
the steep slope of a mountain,
her back yawning with the
overwhelming power of the
Great Flood washing over her.

Swollen clouds let loose
a surge of her million tears
upon the rest of humanity.

Yet she persists forward,
despite the odds against her
weakened soul of a thousand men,
belonging to one who walks
alone.

A Warrior's Fight: A Haiku Collection of Poems

I

I don't ask for this.
The feeling you left behind —
I didn't ask for.

II

But I will be strong
I will face my own demons
I will win this war.

III

I was named Victim.
Movement froze me in place then.
Now I'm Survivor.

IV

You tried to steal me.
Now I'm fighting back with force,
But not with your force.

V

Where do I go now?
Wounded warrior at heart
Searching for refuge.

MORGAN ALMASY

FINE

"Hello, how are you?"

Fine, I'm fine finefine thanks justfine
 Words slip from my grasp
 shattering the floor, fragmented bullets
 explode on contact,
 deafen for a moment
 Is it a moment yesitmustbeonlyamoment because everything is just fine
 and moments don't last forever
 and bullet holes heal eventually
 Eventually I will breathe again
 Eventually
 thick blood will not block my nasal passageways
 or
 coat my esophagus
 Eventually
 I will *breathebreathebreathe*
 events only last for moments
 Momentarily
 Soon
 Eventually, eventually
 I
 will
 be
Fine.
 Coarse coffee skids through my veins
 pebbles in silt, caught.

I don't drink caffeine.

I know I don't because the doctor said not to and my mom told me she told me "You are not to drink caffeine the doctor said so he said this will happen which will cause this and another thing will happen and it will be very bad very very *badbadbad* so just stop thinking about it *just stop thinking* and just *be* because you stress yourself out just no caffeine because caffeine is bad" so I did not drink caffeine because I do not disobey because

I am obedient

Obedient to towering figures and pointing fingers and assertive voices and rattling voices
and fingers that form dimples in my throat my throat I can't breathe *I CAN'T BREATHE*
CAN'T ANYONE SEE

or do they choose not to

because it's just me

It's just her, who dislikes confrontation and social situations

It's just the introvert, she gets un *comfortable* in social gatherings

that's just who she is

She's fine--

Just fine.

NOELLE HENDRICKSON

2 Poems

The Weeping Willow

Carved in by society -
Scattered with bruises and cuts -
She wears the marks of passion,
Not hers to wear -
Knife marks unremovable by
Soap and tree bark
Left - forgotten - abandoned
Widowed by thought
And pure forgetfulness -
Leaves so pure, roots
Grounded, unmovable -
Tonight - This weeping willow
Weeps for simply no one

Truths of Scars and Stories

I fell.

My mind screamed, telling me not to eat that night
A band-aid was all it took, it's fine.

I was starving
I was cooking.

The scale wasn't
The knife met my hand instead of the onions.

I talked from behind a soundproof wall
I was playing with my dog.

You wouldn't listen
She's still a puppy, just learning.

I was drowning, I couldn't focus
I was shaving.

My thoughts were overcrowded, my vision clouded
It's really just a nick, nothing serious.

I couldn't go on
It's *okay*.

It hurt.

R. E. HENGSTERMAN

Sixty-Six Minutes

In my head, a mental timer ticked - eleven hours fifty-two minutes

A half dozen times over the past two weeks I pleaded, "Nothing special, please." And today was no different.

"Why so sad?" she asked, dancing across the kitchen floor, a light hum spilling from her lips. After sixteen years of marriage, she was still stunning, and the tactic of using the hum to deflect my pleas. Well, I'm familiar with that ploy. But unbeknownst to her, I spotted the iconic yellow Post-it notes. And when she wasn't looking I dug them from the trash. Written in her familiar handwriting, were names, numbers, and a recurrent date. That date was today. So, I knew she was up to something. And who could blame her, it was a special day. It was a day for celebration. "See you tonight," she said, pushing me out the front door with honey-do-list and a soft peck on the cheek.

As I drove to work, regret over my lack of assertion grew, but the rational part of me knew how important this day was to my wife and my teenage daughter who has lived her entire life without famine, illness, or war.

Eight hours twelve minutes

After the twenty-minute commute, I arrived at the office, met by the well-wishing's of several coworkers, who sprung from their cubicles; an odd game of human whack-a-mole as each returned to their seat when tossed a soft-spoken thank you. I knew they weren't so much happy for me as for themselves. And though I couldn't blame them, I didn't get a single; I'm sorry to see you go. It's this falsity that's never sat well with me. How we've let the value of life become mundane.

Other than arriving at the office, my morning was painless and slow, though I struggled to manage the swell of nervousness in my stomach with a pinched, repetitive smile. At noon, after a brief overhead announcement, everyone gathered in the lunch room. There was a short speech from my boss and a cake made by Alice in human resources. It was in the shape of an hourglass, with gold fondant borders, and no time remaining. It made me nervousness flourish.

After the cake the day was a blur. And before I could blink the clock read 4:45 p.m. and my final work day ended. So, I tidied the items on my desk; loose papers found their place, mementos stacked in a cardboard box marked with scotch tape and my name in sharpie.

Outstanding messages returned, and sales prospects passed to another associate. I put my official call into human resources; telling them today was my day and to thank Alice for the cake.

"Congratulations again," she said leaking fraudulence, "And on a Friday, what a fantastic end to your week." I winced and said, "Thank you" as stomach acid flashed up my esophagus.

Four hours seven minutes

On the drive home I hammered through my to-do-list with half-hearted attention while examining the how, when, why of my life.

How had I arrived at this point? And why does no one else think the same way I do? The thought of questioning how one celebrates their day made me flinch inward. I've been to a few celebrations - a good many people surrounded themselves with family and friends; while others keep to themselves. But, I wanted nothing more than to be alone, to hide from the spectacle. If there was a wrong way, I may have found it. And someone needed to know. After forty minutes of running around town, I made it home. Before going inside, I sat alone in the driveway and let the world settle. The house needed fresh paint. The grass, mowing. Cockeyed shutters straightened, and several broken spindles on the porch needed repair.

I climbed the front steps, across the porch, and with my hand on the front door said, "Honey, I'm home." Something I hadn't done in sixteen years of marriage but felt compelled to give everyone inside the chance to maximize their surprise. It worked. "Congratulations," erupted as I entered. A swarm of hugs and handshakes followed. I wondered if any else felt as uncomfortable as I did.

Three hours

The charade lasted less than an hour. Mindless chatter, fleshy mannequins, pretenders, and cowards spilled into the dusk with fixed smiles. In three hours, I become a straw dog among billions. Once the house emptied, I settled on the couch with a plate of food and a fleeting appetite. My daughter joined, with cheese dripping from her lips and a plate of nachos in hand.

Two hours nineteen minutes

"Tell me again Daddy. How was it when you were young?"

"No need dredging up the past," I said, but her excitement surged.

"Please Daddy, one last time." My wife rifled a glance across the table of leftovers as if she knew.

"Well, when I was your age people were sick and unhealthy. But human engineering changed everything. The common diseases cured. People grew old, the population exploded, and resources became scarce. People killed each other over food and water."

Her eyes widened. "The water wars," She said.

"Yes."

"But they fixed it."

"I suppose," I said. There was a moment after the words passed my lips, a fracture in time, which my daughter stiffened. So, I continued.

Yes, "An end date, a genetic switch programmed into the DNA of random individuals over the age of eighteen, a lottery of sorts, to keep the population under control."

"And people are happier now," she said, punctuating her words with a fistful of nachos as if the world was a perfect place in her mind.

Two hours four minutes

Fear, guilt, embarrassment, shame; a lifetime of feeling unsettled, I collapsed into myself. "I found a way out," I blurted, my hands resting on her knees.

She drew back and cocked her eyebrow, "What do you mean?"

Even though I never told another living soul, end day had been on my mind for years. And I had prepared. For as long as I can remember I've felt defective and unable to embrace my expiration.

One hour thirty-nine minutes

"I have these pills," I said, producing a small glass vial from my pocket containing two fluorescent blue pills.

My wife, now outside fighting with the overstuffed trash, was out of earshot.

"It's your responsibility," she sobbed. "It's the law."

Eighty minutes

In my mind, I'd worked through this scenario a million times and settled on eight words. I gambled they'd be enough. And I took a deep breath before I spoke.

"Do you know how much I love you?" I said.

Seventy-two minutes

It was three weeks ago that I picked up the pills from a friend of a friend after providing a copy of my DNA. I paid ten thousand in cash.

"Designed to work," the stranger said with conviction. I've been carrying them in my pocket ever since, along with the burden.

Sixty-eight minutes

As my daughter's face screwed itself into disbelief, my soul retched. Her disbelief shifted to anger. With her shoulders drawn back, and the frankness of her mother, she responded, "Daddy, it's your day. We've celebrated."

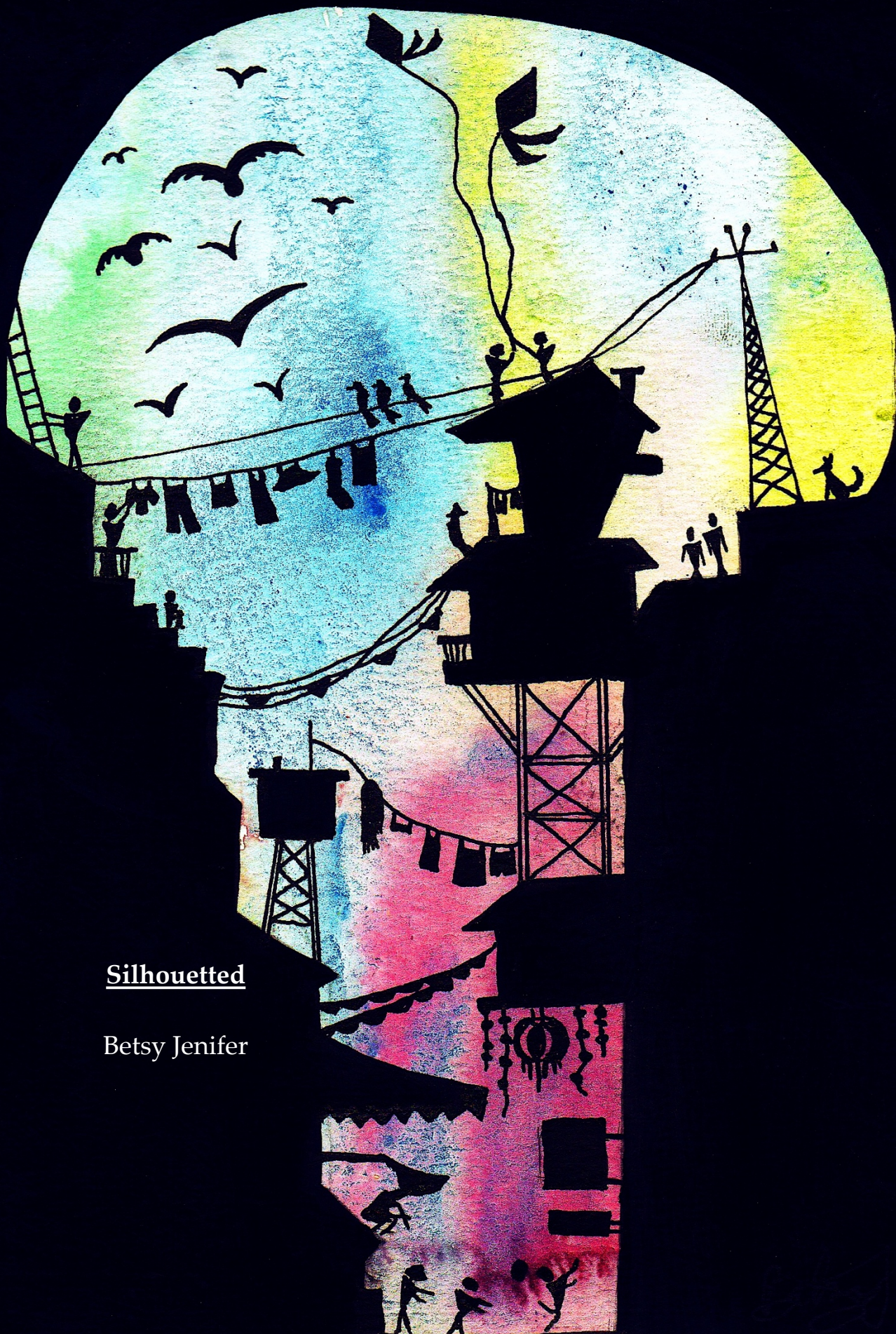
Her tone flattened with matter-of-fact words that torpedoed my courage, and I sank in shame. And in my moment of disgrace, distracted because love was the strongest thing I could offer her and it wasn't enough, she snatched the vial from my hand.

"No. I won't let you. I won't." She said, opening the bottle and downing the pills in one swift motion, swallowing dry.

My daughter had known one existence, become that person, a pretender, and smirked as if she had won. I felt nothing but resentment towards her. "I love you too much Daddy. It's your responsibility. I couldn't let you do it. "

Her words rose past her vocal cords with a hard gurgle, softened, and died on her lips, as did she, in my arms.

Sixty-six minutes



Silhouetted

Betsy Jenifer

RICHARD KING PERKINS

4 Poems

That's the Last Norco There Is

How am I going to get my Norco tonight?
I can't walk.
I don't want to take Tylenol.

I want my Norco.
I'm supposed to get it in the morning
and in the night.

They won't let me see my ledger.
Why do I have to be treated like a criminal?

Who's going to give me my Norco?
I need to go to the hospital
but I don't have anybody to take me.

What am I supposed to do, walk?
They give me no help anyway.

I need to go to the Mayo Clinic.

The doctor told me to go back to my room.

He walked in and walked out.
He did nothing.

All they did was give me a blood draw.
I don't want a pain shot.
I want my Norco.

I'm dying of estrogen poisoning.
Doctors don't know anything about estrogen.

I fired all my doctors.
I'll call the police if they ever come near me again.

I've been butchered here for months
and criminalized.

I can't see the doctor. I can't get rid of my pain.
I can't see my ledger. I can't walk.
I guess all I can do is die.
I knew the outcome before I ever got here.

The head x-ray didn't show anything.
Why do they keep taking x-rays of my head?

That's the last Norco there is.
I'm going to die tonight. Period. That's it.

A Purifier from New Haven

Whippoorwill
sometimes here, sometimes there
poisons everything.
I suspect myself in small amounts.

You could be a juggler of discs
dying in February,
a person without shoulders,
monsters after midnight.

As we know, destruction
is no simple thing.
I have nothing more to say
so there is nothing more to be done.

Neither alive nor perished,
my sanity is a discarded wrapper.
As of now,
I cannot confirm or deny
the appearance of madness
at my window bars.

You are an old hospital,
striving to cure
the purity of scarification
the surety of mutilation.
You are a new prison, in ampule amounts
a terrible calling in woods.

Why Judy Won't Go to Bed

Judy talks to no one.

For four years, she's sat in her chair watching TV.
She refuses all medication, all assessments and interventions.

Her sister thinks she speaks with demons.

Maybe they're her only friends, the only ones she can trust.
Maybe this is the best she can do.

Her sister tells me that Judy got to this point because
her drug-addicted ex-husband whored her out for years
so he'd always have enough cash for his meth.

Life in a chair watching TV isn't much of a life
but it's better than what she had before.

Maybe this is the best she can do. Probably.

The Probable Answer

Here he is,
hopping around the room in a soiled hospital gown
telling me he's got far more serious problems
than the diagnoses listed in his chart.

It's not the schizophrenia that he's worried about
nor the coprophilia,
he's just trying to prove that the university
didn't give him due process when they let him go
after they found him intentionally clogging toilets
so he could more easily collect specimens.

Though it's been difficult, he thinks he's finally
figured out a way to show the deans and chancellors
how his study of recent human coprolites
directly relates to teaching classical literature.

On a spreadsheet filled with graphs and cryptograms,
hangman puzzles and anagrams,
are the lyrics from the Go-Go's song "Head over Heels "

and the line
I must be losin' it, 'cause my mind plays tricks on me
is circled so severely that the paper has torn through.

He lets me study his work for a while and then
eagerly asks what I think of his solution.
I point out the line
...no time to think, looks like the whole world's outta synch.

He nods slowly, solemnly, then produces a pen he's had
concealed somewhere on his person
and begins a furious restructuring of multiple theories.

I turn to leave. He asks if I'm leaving
because I have to use the bathroom.
He tells me his toilet is broken
but it's fine if I have the urge to go.

Silverfish lie exposed. The entire planet has shifted
out of alignment one foot
to the left.

COURTNEY FELLE

3 Poems

press

these days, the insides
restrained and my outside
yearned for shedding
itself and streaming
back into the ground;
everything had begun
to take poetic
form. I was eleven.
the rain pattered
across the porch roof,
sounding to my adolescent
ears as if
all the sirens
of the ocean came
out to say *this*
isn't, nor will ever
be, your home,
but you belong
here.

colored pencils ebbing
to wood stubs lessened
the ache and the noise
filled my crevices—family
inside feeling
alien, unfamiliar, steps
removed from being mine.
lightning flickered; I wanted
to bathe in it, take
my hollow shell self and shock
upwards. I frightened less
at night than in
light.

I never recognized

the silence, the chirping:
nothing gilded comforted me.
perhaps that's why I scattered
her copper coins across
the sidewalk to watch them puff
over with liquid, knowing
she would disapprove.
I wanted to soak
myself beyond the protective
overhangs, but I stayed
dry.

Appendicitis

My stomach feels like a sacrifice
in a religion I don't believe in
anymore.

Every month I wonder
if this is the time it's not just cramps,
if this is the time my insides are
rupturing and bursting and exploding, destroying
the environment and not
themselves.

Appendix shot, the doctors will say,
no reason why, but
the Midol
likely worsened the condition.
Nothing we could do.

Rotted from the inside, worm
in apple, Eve and fruit at once.
Doctored to death, pronounced
like the end of a sentence,
crime scene: I was never the woman
they wanted me to be.

I am eight years old again and praying
to God I don't wake up,
fifteen and bleeding
heart,
seventeen on the precipice
of my left hip bone, bent
over the toilet bowl,
seared into
not seeing straight.

Pain

The wall looks exactly the same as when you first painted it, only now you know what's outside. Another wall. When you break this too down, you realize there's only walls. Layers on layers, skin against skin, *but where do the walls come from?* I say this to you, heating pad plugged in, but off. Your toes point away from me, to the curtain. Behind the curtain, another curtain, this one fogged black particles that dance in my eyes only. What matters is what can be touched—*but what about all I can't touch that touches me?* I say 3 and I mean 5. I say 5 and I mean 8. What does it matter where it came from? *Which matter?* I say this to the wall.

KATHLEEN WALKER

2 Poems

the wrong words

we're talking
and then
her voice
drops
an octave.

upset.

*Oh no.
what did I do?
did I say
the wrong thing?
I always
do this.
why
do I do this?*

her words
blur
through the
voices
in my head
and the panic
in my lungs
and the fear
in my veins.

the world
and my thoughts
streak
like debris
caught
in windshield
wipers.

*why didn't I
stay quiet?
I should've
stayed quiet.
I'm so bad
at people.
why do I try?
why do I try?
why do I try?*

"Are you okay?"

soft.
not mad.
she's ignoring
my failure.
I love her
for it.
I hate myself
for it.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"You sure?"

*she's on to you.
she knows.
she hates you.
you're weak,
she knows it.
she'll despise you
for it.
how could you think
she wouldn't?*

"Of course."

wrong words.
they're always
the wrong
words.

Reasons Why

"I don't want to talk about it,"
Became my favorite phrase,
And a safely absent smile,
Became my favorite gaze.
I wrote a thousand poems,
About this monster in my head,
But none of them have saved me,
From the way this madness bled.

Streaks of blood inside my lungs,
Choking me in fear,
I can't see through all this red,
But I know my monster's near.

And the doctors gave it names,
With pity clear within their eyes,
And my mother read a hundred books,
Like they'd give us reasons why.

Everybody mourned for me,
Like I was dead before my time,
Is this mental illness terminal?
Most of my body's working fine.

They fed it with their pity,
And their curiosity,
My monster loves attention,
So it would never let me be.

The more they called me broken,
The more I fell apart,
And every day my monster grew,
Like a plague within my heart.

And still the doctors gave it names,
And on my mother read,
And one day all I had to trust,
Was this monster in my head.



Phantasms

Betsy Jenifer

LEAH TRACHTENBERG

Voice

“Hi Samantha”

“Hi Mr. Martin,” I say quickly as I sit down at my desk and open to this week in both of my agendas and open up the reminders app. I make sure that they are all updated so that everything I have to do is recorded in their appropriate place. I have to work on that English paper and try to figure out rotational momentum for that quiz tomorrow. I also have that meeting for my youth group and make sure all of the notes are set for the nearly useless advisor. I planned to start studying for my finals now, two months before the school year ends. I was supposed to text my friend to tell her where and what time we should go for a run today. Maybe I should just skip it. I don’t really have enough time with my homework and meetings and I also have to write those scholarship essays. No you have to do it. You already quit lacrosse. You can’t just not do anything. I will just go for the run write after school so that way it is done and over with.

“Hey, did you go to the musical last night” asks my friend Jacob.

“No, I wanted to but, I didn’t have enough time, with all of that calculus homework last night,” I said. I was going to go with some friends and then get some dinner with them, but there was no way I could fit that into my schedule, when the homework for Wednesday wasn’t done. “Maybe I will try to go to the last show. I told Michael I would go and I haven’t gone to any of the plays all year.” Or ever.

“Okay, I thought they did a really nice job. Wait... isn’t that homework not due for like another two days?”

“Its due on Wednesday but, I have such a busy week. I wanted to get it done while I could.” I know Jacob doesn’t have malicious intentions but, I really need to get some work done.

My stomach rumbles as I notice the dull pain in my stomach from not eating breakfast this morning.

After forty minutes of struggling but, not yet successfully understanding anything about torque and rotation, I begin to pack up my notebook and iPad. I glance up at the clock. There is still time. You can review the psychology presentation for your test today. I’m really not going to retain any information in seven minutes. It is still more than what you have done. Do you really think you are going to do well on that test? Well, I guess it wouldn’t hurt to study for a few more minutes.

Brrrrrng. Well, I guess I ran out of time.

"Okay everyone, this is the same setup as normal. Twenty multiple choice and then pick two open responses out of the three given."

I glance at the test and spot one term "personal fable." What is that? See, I told you that you should have studied longer. You are obviously not going to do well on this. You don't even know what a personal fable is. You had the time to study longer. You could've gotten up earlier or went to bed later. Or you didn't have to waste your time making that flier. The information is just going to change anyways.

The voice goes on for another five minutes, chastising me for not thinking to study a little bit longer. Maybe I should have reviewed a couple of sections or even looked ahead to the next one.

What are you doing? You are going to run out of time. Start the test.

"Which of the following is not a part of Freud's Psychosexual Stages?" Oh, well this is easy, I know the stages and personal fable isn't one of them. That's good.

You still should have known it.

While drudging through the various volume problems in my calculus packet, I check the time. Is it already 11:50? I'm not even that hungry and I didn't eat breakfast.

You should use that time to go to the library to study. That isn't really a good idea since I haven't eaten at all today. Just do it. What is the worse that's going to happen?

When the bell rings I head upstairs to the media center. I take out my agenda books and plan ahead. You've really been slacking in AP Physics lately. Do the study guide for the momentum unit. You didn't do enough of that over break. Why was that again? Oh yeah, "not enough time" with the college tours and visiting. They would've been fine if you left the room to study...again.

Question 10) ifand the velocity is.....what is the coefficient of Grrrrrrrrr. Wow, I was hungrier than I thought.

No, you haven't done enough you can just eat when you get home.

Bzzz Bzzz. "Hey, where are we meeting for our run?" reads the text from Heather.

I forgot about that. I have a lot of work to do and I haven't eaten all day. Maybe I should cancel. No, we already went through this. Remember what your dad said? "Don't come crying to me when you get fat." You need to prove him wrong and not gain any weight. You obviously don't eat right so the least you can do is exercise a little. And you went to bed early last night, you should be able to go a little tonight for homework.

Okay, okay. "Meet me at the trail by the temple." I send quickly. That way I can go straight from there to the temple and not have to waste all that time driving in between running and my meeting and instead catch up on some work.

While driving over to Andover I run through everything that I still have to do. Finish those notes for the meeting, do the calculus project, write that essay for AP English, correct the lab for AP Physics, also review the past study guides for the mock exam, start studying for the AP exams... Beeeeeeeep. Oops.

"Sorry," I pointlessly yell out to the car I almost hit through the closed windows. I'm normally not a bad driver. I just need to focus. Okay watch the road and listen to "Hamilton." You can do that.

Can you really though? You almost just hit the guy. You could've gotten yourself killed or worse the people in the other car killed. You can't even drive right. I shut off the music and just try to focus on the road. Idiot.

"Hey," Heather waves at me from across the road. I jog across to meet her at the start of the trail.

"Hey, are you ready?" I try to smile and ignore the queasiness I feel.

"Not really but, when will I ever be ready," she jokes.

The pain in my core is growing as it roars. I could really go for a burger right now.

"Are you okay? When was the last time you've eaten. You shouldn't work out on an empty stomach." She looks so concerned. Do I really look that bad? Maybe I should just tell her I haven't eaten and ask for a rain check. Do you know how stupid that is. You are just giving

up. You are fat and lazy and a quitter. You're dad will be disappointed in you if you get fat. You will disappoint Heather for leaving and you don't have the willpower to make it stop being a repeated action. You have to run now or else you will always let them down. Then, you will start to let everyone else down. At the youth group, at lacrosse (oh wait you quit and that is why we are here), and at school. We all know school is the only good thing you have going for you and that is becoming too hard for you. If you let your grades slip EVERYONE will be disappointed in you. No one will respect you. No one will want to be around you. You will just be that person who maybe had a chance but blew it.

"No, no. I'm okay. I have a snack in my bag to eat after and I've had plenty of water today. I'll be fine."

"Okay if you say so," Heather mumbles.

"Ready, set, go"

Wow, I'm actually doing pretty well this time. I'm feeling pretty good. Go faster. I'm fine just keep up with Heather. I will be okay. You are going to lose her. No I will be fine. This is going okay. Look, you are already a step behind her. Oh, you're right. C'mon Samantha, keep up. A little faster. Nope you're losing her. Okay Samantha, you will be okay just pick it up a little.

"Stay with me. You can do this!" She is so encouraging. You don't deserve her. Oh look, and now you are a foot behind. Let's go Samantha. A yard. Keep pushing. Five feet. You've got this. Just keep moving. Can you even see Heather anymore? Okay Samantha, just sprint for a little bit and you will be fine. You shouldn't have to but... at least you aren't quitting. Just keep going. You can go faster than that. I don't feel good. I'm going to throw up any second. As long as you keep moving. I'm getting dizzy. I need to slow down. Quitter.

"Hey, are you okay?" Heather calls.

"I think I need to stop for a bit," she is going to be so mad. I'm feeling a bit dizzy. Heather is jogging over to come check on me. She pities you. You don't deserve. You should have kept running. My vision is getting fuzzy.

"Do you need help?"

"No, I will be okay. Go I will catch up," I reply as the world darkens around me. I feel the rough patch of rocks and moss on my back.

You could've done more.

STORY FRANTZEN

Koi

Off in a puddle
in the night's boozed breath,
life bent to the wind
like crumpled leaves,

a spotted fish rippling
a sonar trail and
calling.

Sapphire eyes tracing
a fiery blue flaring
through the argent
and raging softly
against drowning

and for a moment,
there only Is.

If only in that nebular sky,
blossoming in
pinks and reds

If only.

Fly, go on. Fly.
he whispers,

but the gale tumbles,
a chestnut wing lagging,
a vestige dragging
it down

to the brack
and brine below
where all
the dead birds
pile up

But you can't!
You can't!

Worn, black eyes
veer to the cliffside
and spot a boy,
and pride straightens
the wing
and tremors through
the body

The boy smiles on,
the bird beats on,

but what Is to be
of the searing, tearborne red
shattering the gelid, ceaseless sea?

Of a boy daring
against nothing?

If only he knew.

If only.

In her dreams,
she and Is just Are.

Because all that isn't Is,
and her tempted eyes
tip-toe back to Eden

when at last
the mind is blind

When the bonds
of being stagger home
to captive wives
to sheepish sleep

But, waking into winter,

she remembers to be cold

and covers herself
with scratchy clothes
to feign warmth

But how her eyes shiver!
How they shrivel!
How her smile trembles!
Who is she?

But her vest is scratchy,
and so it goes,

If only she knew.

If only.

His white tie untied,
his back to the folded grass,
he takes an earthy swig

and talks to stars,
his firework garden
smeared in smoke
on the inside
of open eyelids

How he thinks he can see
from atop a hill,
How he thinks himself closer
on his scaffold

to morning

But grape tears gush
away the sunrise,

and his white, outstretched
hand just misses a passing cloud

and so he lies,

If only he knew.

If only.

All while here I sit,
cross-legged
and moss-headed,
out of breath and
neglected

atop my tower
of paint and feathers

that has inched
too close
to the Sun

I look through flush eyes
into the valley before me
and spy its single stream
as it falls off the horizon

Red and blue
make glowing
white bronze

in the mercury forge
where, imperceptible,

a spotted fish dances
to its own call and burns
a blue hole in the scratchy
carpet of the starlit air

*If only we knew
how little we know
about the things
we think we know.
How much isn't—how little Is.*

TAYLOR FANG

2 Poems

rain onto my scalp

they found her body at dawn on the pikes
at the end of a mangled pier, splayed
like so many broken umbrellas
bones thrust outwards towards
the milky pale, the translucent joints,
the kneecaps white
with no moons.

and they knew then that
the wind tried to snap them
like branches, shards
of the carcass still breaking

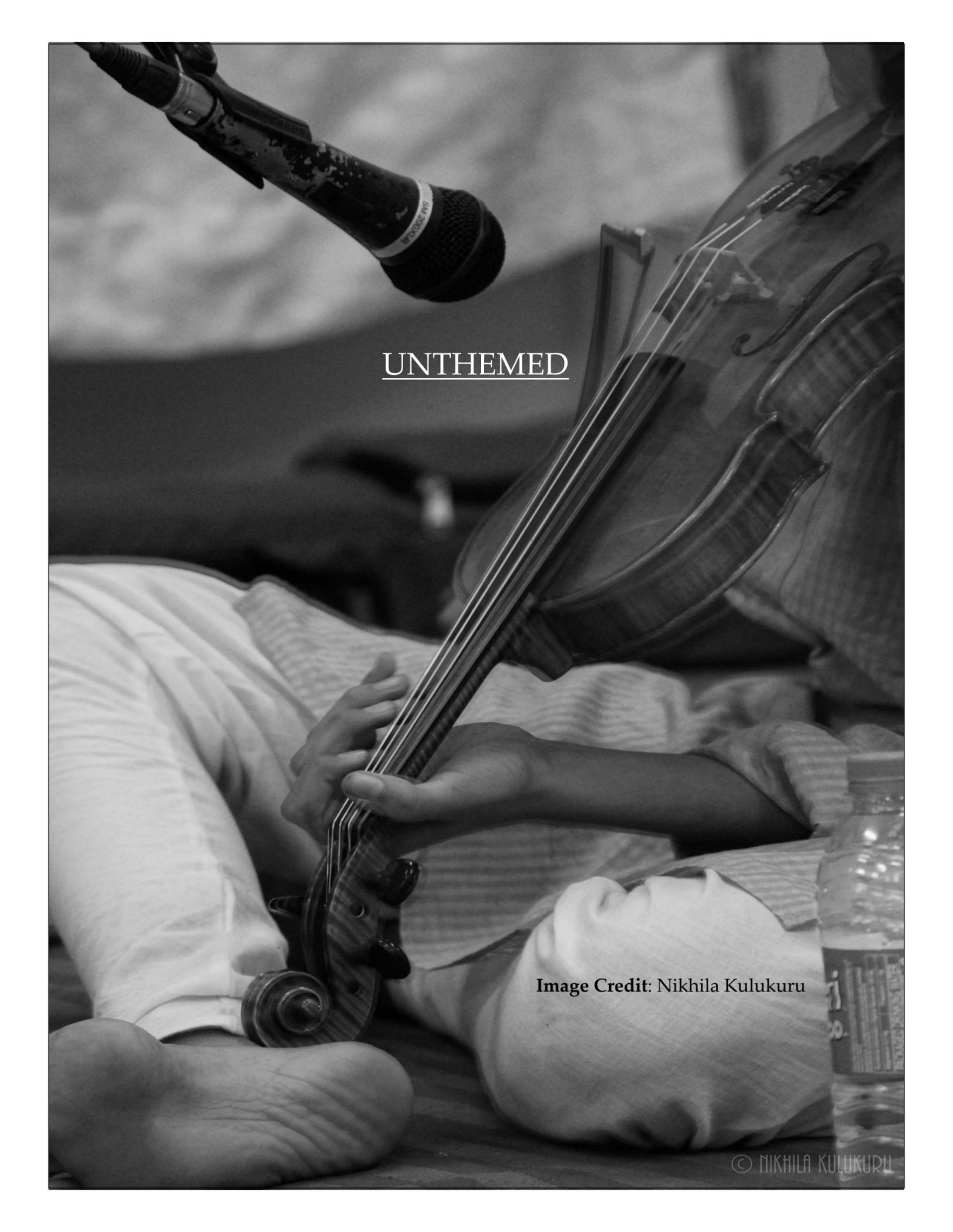
leaving the air
like a Caravaggio painting
they left her asleep in the water, red
over her bloodstreams
running down.

and the clouds swim
with no motions over her bent
twisted flesh, pulling the sunset onto
their dark bodies as they go
through the marbled
looking glass. the water

they said she broke with her fingers,
collected the body in a bag
smelling of plastic with the rain
still lingering. but it was the drought
that broke the clouds,
they knew. her fingers pale and curved
willows against the Earth.

anemic hallucinations

don't tell me I am sick — lost
in the curvatures, apertures, cacti
withered in the desert spines not footprints
on my forehead, bulging arms, blue pastel huts swallowing
those tide pools, your eyes, buttered clouds at the end
of the road: pipetting cracked, acrid yolk, leaking nothing. clutching
tear these admissions apart. because you tell me I killed
a crow with my dreams, left red marks in the dirt,
fed worms their twisting scraps , roses out of windowsills,
withered, red blood cells stuck in these pictures morphing.



UNTHEMED

Image Credit: Nikhila Kulukuru

EMILY TIAN

3 Poems

how to eat a word

first, pinch it at its tibia.
decant the ink into a saucer.
lick off the salt
and spit the crumbs with listerine.
it's not kosher,
eat it nude.
your mouth is an incubator,
the skin molts into a
pinkened rawness.
sand away the rough edges with your molars.
or:
swallow it whole, so
it lays eggs in your throat.

Saturday at the Phillips

The man next to me says loudly this is a Braque,
his syllables clipping into the strong edges
of the mandolin. I am almost startled
by our closeness to Matisse and Kadinsky,
startled by the lack of red velvet rope.
From this angle one can see
the thick swirl of textures in these paintings,
the ringing migration of colors,
so sure it would taste like frosting
if only I had reached a finger out and licked it.

Magpie in early July

July pins bird bones to mackerel skies,
a procession for the freshly crowned,
while in the gutter a magpie is baptized.

Wings churn the air, which will caramelize
at dusk like apple tendons browned.
July pins bird bones to mackerel skies.

A bird sees itself in the water. Its breast dries
faster than tissue paper. The leaves found
in the gutter, a magpie baptized.

The sun balloons without a grapnel. Fruit flies,
too, (in their driven uncouthness) are bound
by July, who pins bird bones to mackerel skies.

Feathers like dull blades incise
trembling ridges as an old bird drowned.
In the gutter a magpie is baptized.

For how many magpies
is the nest the burial ground?
July pins bird bones to mackerel skies
and in the gutter another magpie is baptized.

FABRICE POUSSIN

3 Poems

Affinity

There is a grave tingling in the surroundings
electricity made of a magnetic field so close
insatiable it glows as a newborn star
misty with a morning dew on a pearly skin.

Powerful in its incessant intensity, it flows;
a distance may grow with the passing moment;
the weight of this connection greater;
line of infinite power singing its soft whistle.

The peak of highest mountains cannot resist
beneath the snow covered caps it foment
the vibration so gentle; a tease to the very soul
of the Universe, itself expanding to the next encounter.

The sensation moves on to form a solid fresco
so stubborn the pain of wonderful ecstasy
agonizes within flashes of intolerable lightning
then sleep of ages, rest of the spirit, joy.

The bodies celestial do not resist the magical pull
the universe contracts once again to their glory
they merge into an explosion of a milky substance
and continue their endless voyage into divine hands.

Apparition

I saw you today on the boulevard,
and you smiled after the storm,
asphalt strewn with broken limbs,
you wore clothes of fall favorite.

Your eyes met with mine in mid air,
immobile; did you know where to go
in the pouring rain, you remained dry,
dying leaves came to meet you in their fall.

Young of fifty, you had all the time
you wanted to turn away, and walk
easily, softly, silently, against the wind;
I could not move a limb, in awe of you.

A profile, and a short breath in the icy
wintry surroundings, you stood a moment,
undecided; to move on, or remain faithful
to the image I have of you in memory.

In motion

For a particle of intense movement
inside within the entrails of man
his weight in gold and diamonds to surrender
imprisoned in a space no one can fathom but he
there is no complain when you feel no pain.

late at night in the dewy garden on a stroll
he aims for contact with the living all around
desperate for the shock of feeling to his soul.

Lightning accompanies him on his saunter
the body shivers from remnants of an earthquake
it cannot be still; perfection makes him uneasy.

The eyes are shut, the mind overwhelmed by galaxies
the porous skin, so many open doors to all the elements
he is a receptacle of all that is in his misery.

His fortune is made in a domain to be delivered
price of the ultimate freedom he wishes
liberated from the defenses of the old fortress.

Bliss must end for happiness to begin
and know the waves which lead others
incomplete when mastering only what others desire.

Shackles have enslaved the strings of his heart
only fire and ice can return him to purity
for he must burn and shatter to become truth
at last released from the killing cocoon.

FAITH POTTS

The Day Nobody Died

1) Molly Jensen's hair had turned to straw. No longer did beautiful words and intricate galaxies pour out of her petite mouth, but awkward gags and thick green bile. Her face had morphed into a white canvas; blankness now filled the spots where there was once a crimson tint, which was not only present in her delicate skin, but in her innermost self. The fire within her had been extinguished. Growing up, she used to cry when she thought about death, her mother mollifying her and insisting that she was special, that she would live forever. *What a lie.* Now that death had been approaching her for as long as she could remember, sneaking up behind her with the most pleasant of surprises, she was no longer intimidated - she craved it. She yearned for the moment when she would heave her last gasp of air, the oxygen filling her lungs right to the top like a bucket of blueberries on a warm summer day. She longed for the sensation that came with the cessation of her heartbeat, the little *thump* it made each second abruptly stopping - a poorly written song finally on it's last beat. All she wanted was for the gears of this broken life machine to suffer an irrevocable damage, never to work again.

But the machine kept rumbling, its dull hum so close to breaking; it just simply wouldn't stop.

And, on that day, someone, or something, cranked up its gears so that they were moving so fast that Molly forgot what it felt like for the rusty metal to grind together so painfully slow. It was foreign to her once again.

She simply couldn't go.

The doctors had insisted that day would be her last.

They were wrong for the first time.

Doctor Mars wasn't happy. He was a soldier, at war with one girl. "Why hasn't she died yet?" he asked, his face heating up like a forest fire. No, not that he wanted her to die, of course not! But he was exhausted, worked for 20 hours straight, poor girl!

"I have no idea, don't ask me," Doctor Drew replied. "We thought she would die weeks ago, but today... We were certain today would be the day."

2) Clif Anderson had bright blue eyes that had been reduced to a dull grey. He used to receive constant compliments for their unique color, which contained specks of the entire rainbow in the middle of an ocean. When he looked in the mirror now, though, his eyes reminded him of chalk scratching one of those old green chalkboards. It was dreadful.

They say that a healthy body will result in a healthy mind. Clif was sure they were wrong. He spent his days in his hospital bed, scribbling countless words down in his notebook; he wanted to document everything that he had learned in his life, and give it to his younger brother for reference. Whenever the nurses walked by, they would catch a glimpse of him deep in thought, tapping his pen against his head, his single face an inscrutable land of mystery. Clif's body was rotting, but his mind sure was blossoming.

And, that day, once again, his body started blossoming too.

He awakened to find that his body was not as brittle as decomposing bones, but was suddenly strong enough to stand tall and firm - a magnificent and proud statue.

In the hallway, which he hadn't seen in months, he noticed a girl. Molly, he heard someone call her. She looked like a scarecrow, but she was beautiful, nevertheless.

"This can't go on," Mars said. "We won't be able to take in any more patients if we can't clear these damn beds."

"How could you say such a thing?" Drew asked. "Our job as doctors is to provide them with the most amount of time possible."

"Well, Drew, you know I don't get paid enough as it is. Seriously, what the hell are we going to do? Shit, I know it sounds sick, but we've got a lot of bad cases and we've got to clear things out!"

3) Timothy Swift, on the other hand, was more like the cowardly lion. Months had passed, and the young boy had still been incapable of accepting his inevitable death. *Don't you want your last days to be peaceful?* his mother would ask. *These shouldn't be my last days at all,* he would grumble, *I'm terrified and this just isn't fair.*

Little Tim had always been a scaredy cat. When he was young, he would hide in the bushes on Halloween, afraid that the monsters would chase him, and would arrive home with an empty bucket - no candy at all. Everywhere he went, he was like a fish out of water, a bowl of ice cream sitting under the hot sun.

When he discovered that he was near death, he was convinced that the monsters had cursed him.

Butterflies lifted him off of his feet when, that day, the monsters suddenly vanished.

The radio blared in Doctor Mars's ears. "There are reports around the world of hospitals turning away patients due to overcapacity. From Bangladesh to Chicago to Marlboro to Attlebury to..." He leapt out of his seat and slammed his hand on the OFF button. He was already well aware of the

situation, having angrily watched the patients outside the hospital doors, crying for help in lines longer than he's ever seen.

Drew knocked on his door. Mars nodded, as if to indicate that he should enter, and Drew rapidly thrust the door open. "It's not just us," Drew cried. "Hospitals all over the world are experiencing a significantly lessened mortality rate."

Mars grunted. "I know already, okay? I'd rather have everyone in the world die than nobody," he muttered. "We have to figure out why this is happening," he then asserted, loud and clear.

#4) Giuliano Montoya wanted to die. In May, he tried to jump off of a bridge. His sister caught him in the act, just in time, and grabbed him, saving him. All he got from her was a simple eye roll and a *what the hell do you think you're doing?* Shit like this was what made him wish death upon himself.

Giuliano was admitted to a mental institution, but when he underwent a physical examination, they found the tumor. *How convenient*, he thought. It was like the puzzle pieces being put together, exactly as he had needed.

He couldn't have been more wrong.

Death saved his life.

When he was admitted to the hospital, he was constantly monitored. There was absolutely *no* way he was capable of harming himself there, with nurses leaning over his shoulder like little guardian angels each and every second. He would formulate possible plans in his deranged mind, but none of them were ever realistic.

What he had expected to end his life did the exact opposite.

And, that day, he grew even more frustrated when they deemed his tumor miraculously healed.

In death and in life, all he seemed to be dealt was more and more *life*.

"This is unthinkable," Drew began. "Did you hear? There hasn't been a single report of death. It's occurred to me that... Mars, please don't think I'm insane, but, well, I think that death has... stopped."

Mars's expression was blank. He avoided what Drew had said. "That man we just got... the one who got shot by a gang? That damage, it's irreparable. There's no way he's alive. This cannot be real."

"It's brilliant," Drew replied. "Maybe this is what saving lives really is."

5) Ginny Mathers wasn't much like the rest. Every time somebody told the woman that she was dying, she insisted that they were wrong. *You're looking for livelihood in some old rotten bones*, she would say. Nobody knew what she was talking about, but it wasn't rare that somebody actually questioned her illness - the vivacity that made her was there to stay. Her eyes were always the intricate reflections of stars in a beautiful lake, and her smile always wider than the vast surface of the earth.

Eventually, one of the nurses asked her name and she stuttered, "Gi- Gi..." trailing off.

She never said her own name again.

That day, though, she recalled nights in the woods when she danced barefoot until the rough soles of her feet felt as if they were one with the dirt. She recalled orange sunsets and mango flavored popsicles in the summertime. She recalled what it was to be alive.

"Why is this happening?" Mars snarled. "There must be an explanation!"

"I don't think there is," Drew said quietly. He surveyed the hospital waiting room, catching a glimpse of the smiling families, hearing the near silent lull of the heater. Things were not much different, but maybe this was how they were meant to be. Who the heck knew what happened, they might as well just treasure it.

Then, suddenly, a man down the hallway screamed at the top of his lungs.

Everyone crowded around him, like a flock of birds. Doctor Drew noticed two of his teenage patients, Molly and Clif, clutching each other's hands. He was about to question them about why they had left their rooms, but he got distracted.

The yelling man pointed up at the hospital's main clock, his expression composed of a bunch of scattered puzzle pieces. "Look!" he hollered. "The hand on the clock... it - it's going backwards!"

It was only moments later that a man on the other side of the hall hollered, "I killed you! I killed you!" The crowd of people turned and saw a towering figure standing over another that had been thrust upon the ground.

Doctor Drew immediately cried out, "What do you think you're doing?" He sprinted towards the two men, his feet tapping upon the marble floor faster than a set of collapsing bowling pins. The others trailed behind him. Another patient of Drew's, Timothy, finally had some light in his eyes again as he followed the crowd. Drew felt an ephemeral burst of happiness to see the boy content again.

But, before the crowd could make it to the two men, the one on the ground stood up. "What happened?" he asked, shaking his head and squinting.

"I - I killed you!" the other man cried, his face contorting into the expression of a lost child.

"What are you talking about?" the other man asked. "What the hell are you talking about? You're my best friend, Jim!"

Doctor Drew collapsed onto the floor.

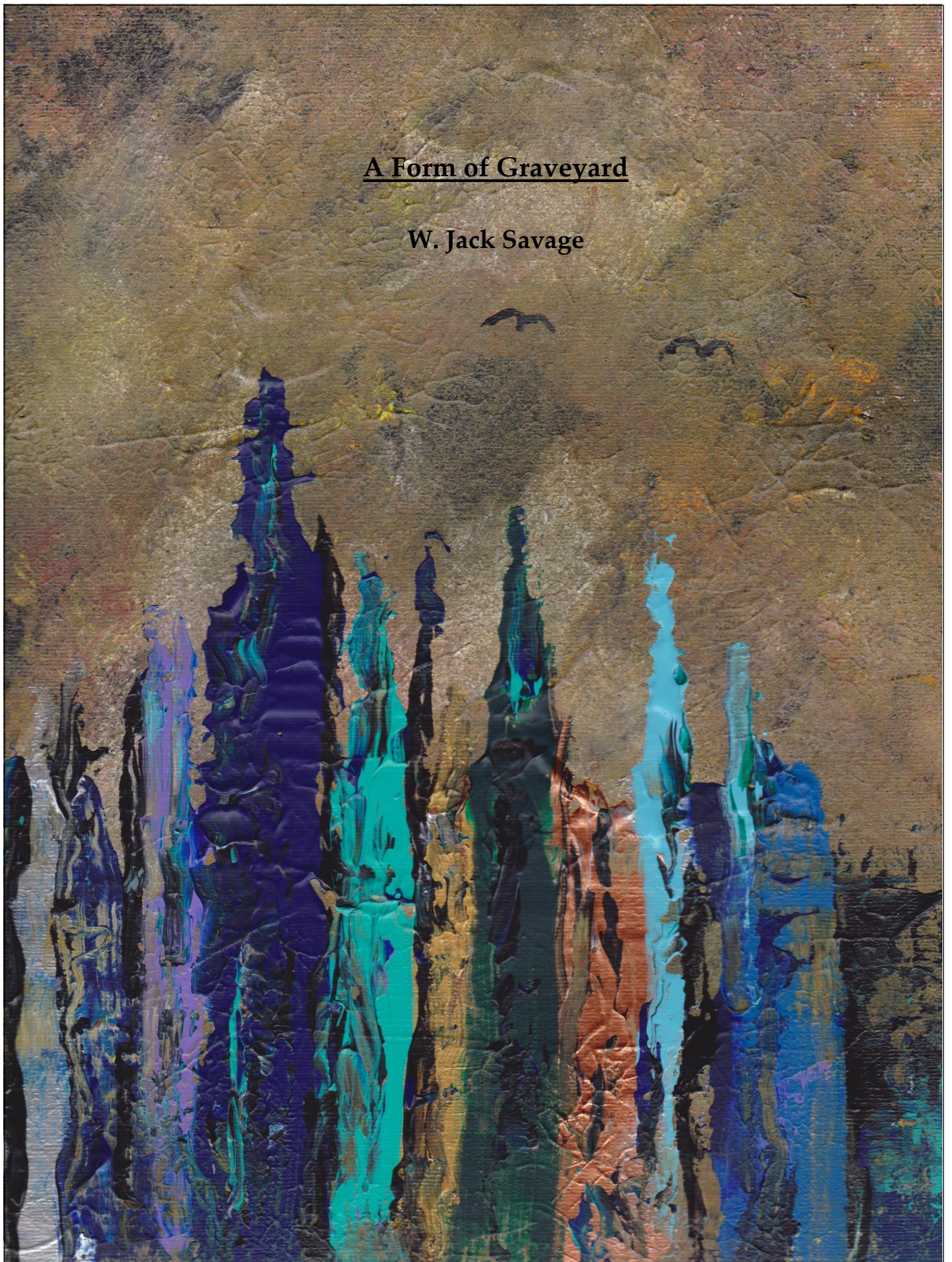
People surrounded him, looking down at his unconscious face and panting with fear. Then, his eyes opened abruptly and he instantaneously stood up. On his radio, somebody had called a code red. A woman in Room 317 had given birth, only to wake up and have her child vanish. The one strange thing, though, was that she was pregnant again.

Drew was just about to head to Room 317 when there was a deafening bang on the hospital doors. He once again darted down the hall to open them, ignoring the confused questions he heard around him. The only one who remained silent was his patient, Giuliano, who rarely ever spoke a word. As he reached out and took the handle firmly in his hand, the doors glided open, he stared Maria, a patient with whom he had bonded for weeks, straight in the face. Her skin was like the porcelain complexion of a doll, and her hair a bubbling waterfall. "Ma - Maria?" he asked. "You - you died, what is happening?" The image flashed into his head, of him grasping Maria's cold hand, and then it suddenly turning limp, the electricity within him powering off. "Please don't go," he had thought, but she did.

Doctor Drew collapsed again. His most peculiar patient, an older woman named Ginny, began to skip in circles around him. He stared up at the white ceiling, and didn't know what to do other than to laugh. He giggled so hard he couldn't breathe.

A Form of Graveyard

W. Jack Savage



ISABELLA LI

How to Confess Your Deepest, Darkest Secrets

We get a minute to ask you any question and you have to answer it honestly.

Liza speaks and she looks like a queen. Her blonde hair is strangled back in a ponytail, but some strands are gasping for air and surely the collective pressure of all those desperate locks will break the chains eventually. Jennifer watches, pale as a dove and thin as a cross. Natalie checks her phone, absent-mindedly digging up rug with midnight black fingernails.

It's the eleventh hour of Jennifer's birthday party and you four are the last on the island. Natalie's your friend and at school puns escape from her mouth like rainwater from a leak. Liza, you recognize because everyone knows Liza. But you don't really know Liza, you know?

The only light in the room comes from a lamp in the corner, ornate and yellow and constant. "Who's first?"

You almost volunteer to go.

Just say it. Just say "me."

Words stuck behind bars.

So Liza goes first. Jennifer asks her: "When will you tell your parents about her?"

Who's her?

A smile, dusk and autumn, sets across Liza's face. She speaks and you piece it together. Liza's been dating this girl for two months now. It's not like she's keeping it a secret (Liza doesn't seem like the type to keep secrets, anyways). It's just...

"How do you bring it up to your parents when they've assumed something else for sixteen years now?"

Keep your face neutral, even though you barely know Liza and why should you know this thing about her when her parents don't even know?

Panic a little. Am I going to have to confess something as deep and personal and buried as that?

Jennifer, birthday girl, goes next. Liza asks her: "Honestly, how do you feel about it? Me being gay or whatever? Am I sinning?" She grins like it's a joke but her eyes glint like a hawk's so it's obviously not.

Jennifer looks like all she wants to do is throw her head back and laugh until Liza's question disappears into the quiet between them. She could say that it's ridiculous. That she's an Obama supporter. That Liza's her best friend. But somehow she doesn't. Her mom likes Ted Cruz. They're capital-C Christians. But still. Still, still, still. Silence and stillness cloak the room and all eyes watch Jennifer. She's so pale naturally, she could just about fade into air, she wants to, but she can't.

You should say something. Break the silence and make it less awkward. But what can you say when a canyon-crossing bridge that once seemed so strong suddenly shakes precariously in the wind?

So just watch Jennifer. Watch as she doesn't speak, as she turns her pale blue eyes downward to hell.

Right before the timer runs out, Jennifer says, "I mean, it's not like. Since. I mean." The timer beeps. "Yeah."

"Another time, then," Liza says, back straight like a Greek column, blonde hair flames against the lamplight.

When Liza told her about her girlfriend, Jennifer cried. It wasn't because she thought her best friend was immoral (she didn't), or because with that one confession she could see God frowning and Jesus crying (she couldn't), or even because she thought her mom wouldn't let her talk to Liza anymore after (she hid plenty of stuff from her mom). Just... if you've been taught something since birth — let's call that thing point A. And you love someone — let's call that person point B. And A and B clash like a thunderstorm. And you still love B, but A whispers doubt in your mind. What do you do? That's what Jennifer thought as she looked into hell.

You should say something. Break the silence. Make it less awkward.

Do something dumb.

Or don't do anything.

What secrets are they going to claw out from me?

Natalie goes next. Liza asks, "What's one question you'd like to know the answer to?" Natalie's voice is the sound a heart monitor makes when someone has died. A straight line of sound. But that's just how Natalie speaks. So don't think anything of it when that's how she starts talking. "I mean, I don't really have any burning questions, really." And her eyes

are turned to the ground and her black nails keep picking at rug, and her brown hair cascades around her face like a curtain. And still; still, stillness and silence fall over the room. That's not how the game works; you're supposed to say something.

And then she does. Dead heart monitor sound. "Well, I guess, since my best friend, well kind of my boyfriend, we kind of had a thing. He killed himself last year. And I guess I'd just like to ask him why."

Wait, what?

Hear how her voice is flat but a little higher pitched. Keep your eyes on her as she keeps her eyes on that rug, that damn rug, like if she turns away it'll explode. Don't look at Jennifer or Liza; they're not looking at you either, because if they did, Natalie would definitely notice, and that would make her heart drop faster than a dead body falling from a bridge. You should say something to Natalie. Anything. Wait, not anything. Because, surely, "I'm sorry" would be hollow and "It's okay" would be borderline crass. There's nothing to say, is there? So just sit quietly and watch and let the silence thicken into its own, breathing body.

This is Natalie, then.

Look around the circle, now. What do you see? Beneath Natalie's flat voice lies oceans of sorry and loss. Beyond Liza's straight posture and fiery hair lies insecurity, fear, fog. Behind Jennifer's pale skin wages a war, and only she will bear the loss of life when it is all over. Natalie's dad arrives to pick her up. You should hug her, give her words that feel like hot chocolate and warm fire, think of a pun to make her smile, at least a little. But instead. You say something meaningless and watch as she leaves. Do nothing. Feel a little relieved because with her gone you can breathe again. Feel bad that you feel relieved. She's your friend.

And then it's just Liza and Jennifer. And no one's really interested in playing the game anymore, but you still have to go. And despite it all, panic a little. You have nothing to say. Actually, you have a lot you could say. But you would never be brave enough to say it, because still still still, you wouldn't be able to bear the stillness and silence. Liza asks you, what's your deepest, darkest secret?

There's a lot you could say. This fear, this feeling, that regret. Say it.

"Um, I guess I don't really have anything."

Typical.

KATARINA BORDEAUX

2 Poems

Empty Bowls

You spoke of
alien invasions,
and listening,
I understood
how you woke up
sad and slept
in anguish,
one foot across
the sea on clay cliffs
ancient buried
and left,
the other beneath you
in fields of rice
and stale water.

Your words were
split just as the
world was, as
your body was
between sign
and cosign, and
I was not surprised
when I found your
account deleted
one morning,
all traces of the clay
you once molded
gone, the choice
for field and feet
more stable
than the past
built on drive-throughs
and early sales.

I don't blame you,

but I dream sometimes
of eating bowls and bowls
of rice with you
while a soft voice
sings a requiem
in the background.

The Reverend

My mind
won't last the year
he told the waitress,
and ordered a bowl
of grits on faith.

His body was shaky,
the metal in his hand
a slow utensil,
but he licked each
spoonful in hopes
it was not his last.

There were few things
he would miss,
but the feel of soupy
warmth trickling down
his throat was one.

The other was his
eyesight,
as it had always
been sharp,
but he still had
not seen enough
to feel full,
and he had hoped
at least for
enlightenment,
if not for space.

LISA STICE

3 Poems

Zelda

put on your dance shoes
twist the laces to your knees
tie them tight

put on a happy
dance put on your dance
shoes and stand on your toes
adagio careful
gain your balance before
the *pirouette*

spin until
you lose yourself until
falling seems like the only
option then stop *plié*
put on a happy dance
with a happy face kick
out your legs in the modern
style *Charleston* into fever
heat up the floor into flames

Downpour

During the rain, we couldn't see
the new house across the street
or the street itself, the loblolly
pines in our backyard or Azealia
that grow along our outer wall—

Looking out, we couldn't see
much of anything except rain
smeared and beaten, desperately
clinging to the windows, and
we heard it too and tried to calm
the dog while I held him tightly
and you said *don't be scared*
it's only raining raindrops—

Then after the rain, it all looked
different with the dog panting
more slowly while what remained
of the downpour dripped off eaves
or settled sleepily into the low areas,
so we opened the door and walked
out to scattered purple blossoms,
birds visiting the feeder and butterflies
tasting the flowers still on bushes,
green anoles crawling along the fence,
and you disrupting the puddles.

Rare and Used

time smells like dust
cracked spines and
faded gold inlay
yellow pages darkening
still to a soft brown
comfortable like
the afghan my great-aunt
knitted for my parents'
wedding gift or
the quilt a great-
great-aunt stitched
from resurrected men's
suits and I can see
the face of my grandmother's
grandfather just as clearly
as I feel I know Felix
who dedicated this book
of Keats poems to Rose

M. A. ISTVAN JR

2 Poems

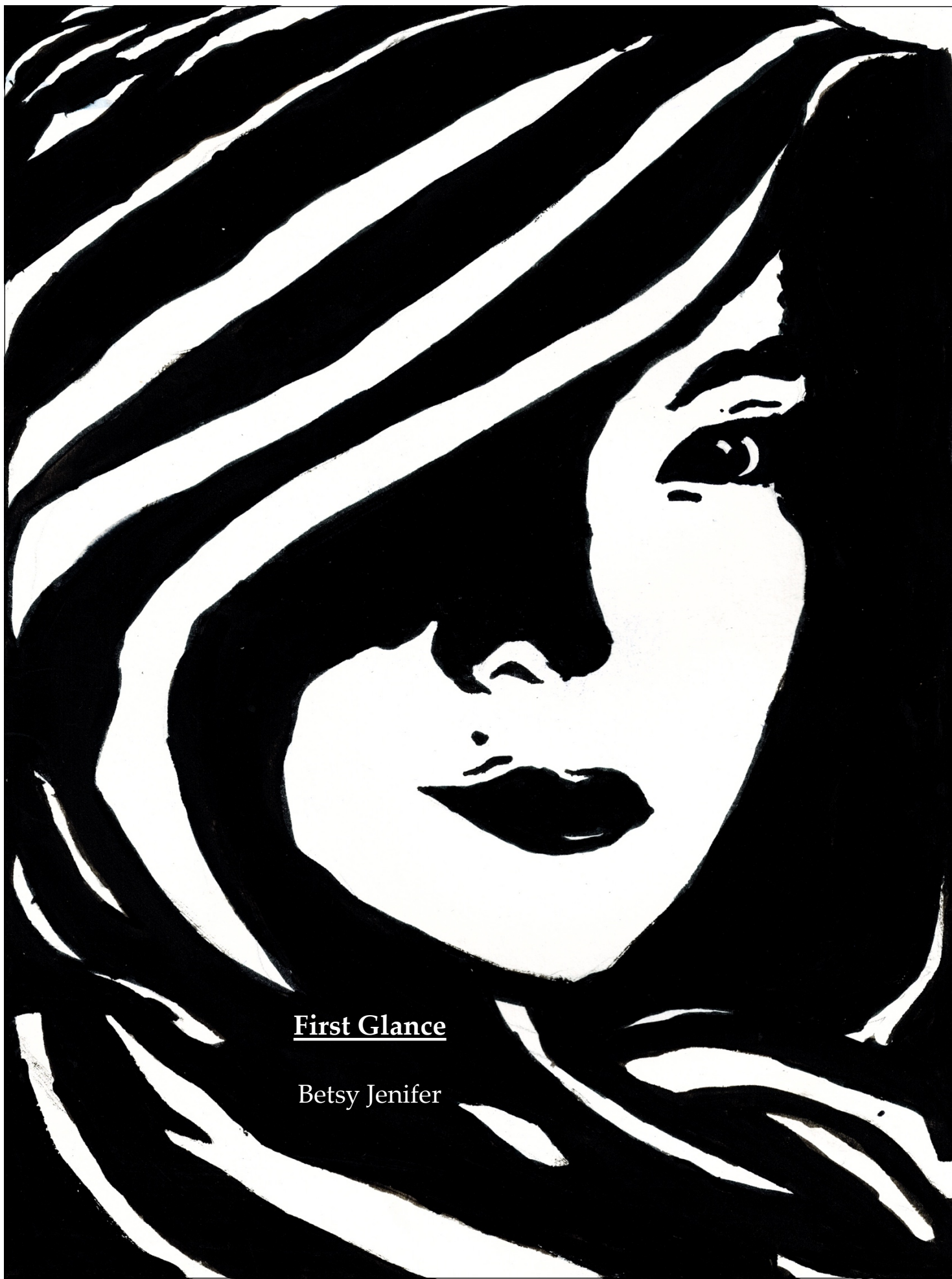
Wall of Beds

Only a few times did I try counting sheep as a boy.
My ritual was to pluck a lady from the storage wall
across from my bed. It was a wall of indefinite spread
in two dimensions and against which was a display hive
of countless interconnected bunks, stacked and linked
to no discernable end. Although some were classmates
and others that I knew (family friends), most of those
forever awaiting my call in half-sleep were celebrities.

One was the brown-haired girl from the show *Hey Dude!*
(The blonde had a spot too, but rarely was brought down.)
Both Tootie and Jo from the *Facts of Life* were there.
Aunt Becky from *Full House*. Amber from *Mo' Money*.
Eyes closed, I would make my selection, guiding her
by hand to my racecar bed. Pecking the pillow in truth,
swearing in whisper how she was my favorite in truth,
I would confess my love. How could it not be in truth?

The Head through the Face

It is notoriously difficult to see heads through faces. Think of how difficult it is to see the logo “Colgate” in its pure meatness. Artists have tried to unconceal the head by deforming the face: smudging, stretching the region. This does help meatness emerge. But what emerges is not the head in question. That head is ruined. Reordering the Colgate letters, while bringing out the pure shape of the letters, ruins the pure shape of the logo itself. Shape, of course, is what makes this meat *this* meat. Although they do not guarantee that the collective human stratum of associations will peel away, such distortions do go some way towards unconcealing the meat beneath. They open us to falling into those dissociative modes where *the very same* structures emerge as pure meat, as they do sometimes when stared at enough in free moments of private calm or when they are dead: the head emerges in dead humans where all the tension goes and the head just hangs (Christ on the cross); the pure shape of the logo too emerges from diverse coverings (product associations, nostalgia, whatever) when worn and dirtied among rotting garbage where its lack of divinity lies exposed.



First Glance

Betsy Jenifer

RACHAEL BINDAS

3 Poems

Memories Imprinted

You snap your chewing gum.
Cool and crisp—unforgiving and unfeeling.
My stomach churns with the bittersweet perfume
of your breath wafting through the atmosphere.
I used to love the smell of peppermint.

Untangle myself from branches of possibilities,
jagged thorns of probabilities.
Left to wander alone in a forest of unrequited doubt,
Wandering and wondering and pondering and—
no cigar.

Cracked Crayola crayons match your emerald eyes.
I turn memories into flames, watch the wax melt.
Disintegrating. Destroying to forget.

Salty droplets wishing they were oceans
rinse away emerald,
now jade—a muted glare.
Eroded irises reveal apathy.

Shadows

Past mistakes haunt me,
Their lingering ghosts whisper.
Dark shadows persist.

Elaborate scars,
Blemishes infect pale skin,
Porcelain carvings.

Blood brought to surface.
Fabricated permanence,
Memories endure.

Shadows of the past
Whisper into the present.
Their ghosts linger on.

Ethereal Delusion

You ain't going to catch no butterflies,
My sister's father said.
Innocence halted in its tracks,
Spirit flying away with its own insect wings.
Dandelion seeds carried by wind like lost dreams.
Goldenrod curls of childhood loosened by adulthood's sharp blow.
Parents raise children to believe they can grab the stars,
Place the glittering orbs in their pockets.
But they ain't going to catch no butterflies.

BRUCE McRAE

2 Poems

Reaching For The Light

The prattling pines and blazing evergreens,
the sea reflecting upon self-reflection,
morning gliding through a gap in the landscape,
sentience tattling out of turn,
so many flaws to be corrected, so many closed hands.
Hands henna'd with arthritis
or writer's cramp or need to strike
a telling blow against injustice.
Hands pulling at what can't be put aside.
Hands pushing against the coming of light.
Clasped in acceptance of what's believed divine.

A new dawn scratching at slate and pane,
a hand reaching into the luminescence,
plucking a wildflower from the mystery,
that which is all around us but can never be had.
Thinking of the lost mind, its beautiful paradox,
considering its invention, humor, curiosity,
flesh speaking the vocabulary of the abyss,
something alive but not living.

Just A Moment

Gallic shrug of an overcast dawn,
the invisible folded along what's visible,
uncertain drizzle falling part way between dreamy binaries,
as if little angels being thrown out of heaven
or an unfinished sentence or having one foot over a precipice,
gravity inscribed with Jah's hastened signature,
the sacred grail of supernal penmanship,
capital T Truths written in lemon-water,
hallowed texts secreted away in an inner sanctum
we must suppose exists. The world-storm coming.

A lapis lazuli discoloring and overturned bowl for a sky,
a steeping tureen of come-what-may,
minutes edging toward the fire exit,
then something, then something, then then.

JIM ZOLA

The Beauty of Falling

I watch from my kitchen window
as I wash evening dishes,
drink my first cup of coffee
each morning. The children spend
hours in that upstairs room. Bored,
they throw things out the window.
Paper floats gracefully
or flutters like a wounded bird.
Books flap, thud. Clothing falls
with the most flair – a pair of jeans
catches the wind with high kicks,
a t-shirt with words on the front
glides into the cool spring grass.
There seems to be a purpose
to what they drop.
They are learning things,
the beauty of falling.

Then I'm in the children's room.
The girl knows I'm something different.
Yellow and soft, a cotton blouse.
She picks me up, leans out
the window and tosses me
into the darkness. I fall
all night, a star turning
in the black sky. The girl sits
on the windowsill. I'm afraid
she'll fall hard, but she jumps
away and flies towards me.
Then we are falling together.

SIMON PERCHIK

4 Poems

Each night this necklace cools
till its fever smells from silk
covers the dirt with buttons

and sleeves helping you reach
for a stone small enough to swallow
though it's her mouth that's lifted

that stakes everything on a single rock
for shoreline –just like that! a tiny pill
taken with water and you find yourself

bent over for ballast, not moving
not even for the lips rising inside you
making room for the emptiness

beginning its climb as another hillside
–at the top an old wall
cold corners, the room kept open..

It was a needless rinse, this bowl
half wood, half smelling from wood
that's been taken away, trembling

as if today will be its last
though you gather up the spoon
holding it close and your arm

keeps it warm, covered with a stream
beginning to root as the emptiness
you lift to your lips without trying.

This tattoo once had the courage, a rose
surrounded by summer evenings and skin
that remembers how warm the name was

–what's left is covered with the forever
growing on your arm as the voice
belonging to a dead woman making room

for an immense sea, silencing the Earth
from outside –here, was a shoulder
here, her lips –here the dress

becomes too heavy, falls into you
as driftwood –here was the heart, naked

beginning to snow –here was the sleeve.

This spoon all night on tiptoe
listening for the careless splash
that will never make it back –the cup

half hazelnut, black, half filled
so its prey can be tracked in the dark
the way one mouth finds another

feeds on the voice that can't escape
–hour after hour being eaten
by the silence longing for the light

though even with the walls in place
even with her hands over your eyes
begging you from behind *Guess who*

you are circling the room, flying blind
spread-eagle, can hear the *You*
no longer moving between your teeth.

SOFIUL AZAM

Coming of Age

I

I have no wisdom tooth yet. Does it mean
I don't have any wisdom? I know how it comes,
even fiercer than stampeding footfalls
of rhinoceros in the summertime savannah.
Cringing under its weight, I have all of my
adolescent years crushed like potato pulp
with its squeezed wetness drying out in the sun.

II

Before putting on a sleepmask, I think
about a few frayed lines of memory not very pleasing,
or about dreams stained by each individual's Cain.
Even as a child, I did atrocities like floating rat pups
in a coconut shell on a pond's calm water.
I hear their squeaks though I'm not degaussed
to such evils yet, drifting far from atonement.

III

I'm dorky, maybe a little insouciant.
What am I but an accumulation of memories,
each of which is surmounted with unsuccess?
Yet life is no scintillating snark. It never ends
with a supercilious air. I say it while I myself
am waiting to be rescued like a rat pup
kiddied in a coconut shell to be floating away.

RACHNA SHAH

Rites

The map he unravels is quaint.

Its bright colors and messy lines belong to a second grader's wall, and Naoki instantly misses the slick, clear lines of his metro map. Yet Little Tokyo is so small that a metro would only impede one's path. *A fairy-tale land, after all.* According to the map, which he trusts as much as his brother, the town has made its nest upon swamps.

The only sounds are the breeze's murmurs and the clouds' warbling shadows. Glances of confusion prevent him from blending into the slippery summer surroundings. The heat burns his brow, despite it being six. Among the terrarium of Persian blue, the wings of a plane flying back to New York wink at him.

His cheeks burn with the long lost feeling of ineptitude, and his mind roars in disdain. *Five minutes*, he chides himself. *Be stronger than that.* But it is a stir-fry of displacement and shock, and his tongue is scalded by the heat.

Graceful trees outline brick buildings, ones with fluorescent lights and rat infestations. Naoki's grandfather had warned him of the rats.

"Their bite is poisonous." His voice had shook, like the portents of an earthquake. A scare of a disaster at that, though, for he had subsequently launched into a tirade against the booming coffee industry.

His grandfather had been born in Wazuka Town, a culture wrapped in tea leaves. To everybody's surprise, he took the slippery path against the grain - towards the States and a degree in medicine. When 4 numbers (9-0-6-6) irreversibly excluded him from completing his journey, he became a tea specialist.

And that was why Naoki had ventured out of the comfort of hustle and bustle city life-to come here, to the Annual International Tea Festival. Bearing the gilded collar of his grandfather's legacy was not his responsibility, but his older brother had devolved it to him.

"In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke," Akihiro had quoted over breakfast, lazily looking up from *Drudgereport.com*.

"Overusing Shakespeare is a waste. And that quote is irrelevant. Marriage and recreation--"

"--are nothing alike. I agree." Akihiro had smiled then, lips laced with danger. "You'll go, then?"

So, five months later, Naoki faces an empty tea stall. A young and grassy hill teases him. Its ground is glazed with rain, and Naoki wonders why such an unstable locale was chosen. His thoughts are disrupted by an audience - weary cardinals and stray black cats.

"I'm not going to perform a miracle," he murmurs, wryly. *I'm also a caged bird.* He gathers outdated business cards, and stale freebies - all that is left in the "Set up your booth!" cart. *At least this will be easy to dismantle when it's over.*

Three hours pass as he works in silence, screwdriver rhythmically beating decorations into slabs of cherry white wood. *Kaori's Lisa's Berry Bowls*, the sign reads.

It is too late to find a motel. His wallet is full of crisp photographs of the recent dead. Beneath them are 100-dollar bills, but Naoki does not want to see his grandfather's disappointed eyes. The sky breathes, and dead leaf yellow stars hang tantalizingly above him. Much like his grandfather. Naoki knows that he was meant to claim a past here, a heritage that had eluded him and Akihiro as much as they had endeavored to escape it. But he is too tired to try.

He wakes to the satisfied sighs of overfed children and relieved parents. *Six in the morning is not too early for ramen, ne?*

The hours steep. With eight bells, tea connoisseurs flood through the narrow street. They flit, pecking at samples and recoiling at the price tags. The men and women wear *yukata*, and he is out of place with his black silk *kimono*. Traditionalism is dying out. Naoki takes a gulp of some liquid, and squirms.

Lisa's does moderately well on the first day. He does not ask the "where are you from?" questions the other vendors pose, and no *nice to meet you have your money!* smile falsifies his lips. Yet three hundred dollars almost matches the cost of his plane ticket.

It is nearly six again, and the stalls are starting to close. Stretching his back, Naoki stands, and hits his head on the makeshift ceiling. A woman wearing an *Evergreen Tea* apron approaches his stall. Her eyes remind him of a child on Christmas morning, disappointed to learn that Father Christmas is a legend.

"You don't care for this," she notes.

His eyes, lazy, drop to hers. "No." *I'm going through the top 3 corporate law cases of 2011 in my mind, so excuse me if I don't find importance in liquid Nothing.*

"Tea is a way of life."

"I don't mean to personally offend you-" *but to be quite honest, I don't care.*

"It's our slogan. Just wait, I'll find a tea for you."

I am drowning in tea. Would I not have drunk some by now ? "I don't-"

"-drink tea?" She shakes her head, knowingly. "That's what they all say." *They?*

She rummages through the pockets of her apron and thrusts a small bag beneath his nose. "Smell this." The strength of concentrated peach and something even richer rises, a wave of blossoms that drowns him in its embrace. He forgets the fact that despite this being his stall - *his? When did he become possessive?* - she is selling him tea. "Happiness bloom," she whispers.

He cannot find the words to disagree. Which is why he is still with her three hours later, only across 1st East street. Sprigs of cilantro pepper his ramen and he gulps it, fingering the chopsticks clunkily. The thin noodles dangle out of Naoki's mouth, and the woman's eyes shine with mirth. The sunlight is beaming, but for once, the heat is not oppressive.

An hour passes. Her plate is littered with chocolate filled mochi wrappers and his earthen bowl is wiped clean.

After a long day of feigned attention and imitated smiles at school, Naoki was welcomed by his mother's black tea-which he downed in thirteen seconds. *Slow down*, she would always reprimand him, *you're moving too fast (for us). Draw out the bliss of life while you can.*

The moon, shy, is silent. The light of stone lanterns buzzes peach, radiating a tantalizing heat that he instinctively clings to. Hana's eyes are blank when they open, but her mouth invites him. "Come," she says, brusquely. "I'll show you why you're here."

They cut across the road, pale green sprouts in a boulevard of roses.

She lingers in front of a small alleyway, casting glances of bewilderment at the cats, and breaks the silence with coughs of laughter. "Cats," she murmurs, shaking her head. She turns to look back at Naoki. "Your grandfather misspoke. Rats aren't the problem here."

The words "I don't understand" are eager to take flight, but he pauses for a moment to put two and three together.

Naoki's grandfather had bound her to this task four years ago. Hana had counted countless sheep waiting for closure-so she waits five more syllables. Patiently, "*Maneki-neko ?*"

He grasps onto the image of an battery-powered figurine beckoning customers into the store. It is the only folk tale he believes. A poor man cares for a starving cat, and in return, she blesses his tavern with patrons. "How is a lucky cat ominous?"

"Perhaps it's not." She steps forward, loosening a brick in the wall, and handing him the figurine. (But this is no plastic cat, this is one of stiff, unflappable jade.) "Your grandfather left this for your business."

His mind whirs, eyelashes fluttering to adjust to the unexpected light. *A way in, it's a way in. If Grandfather supported my business, Mother will too. Against her will, she heeds whispers of the past.* But then there are his mother's words: *calm, drink slower--*

But no, not this time, for once-no, it is not the first time-for twice-what about university?-for thrice-and the island internship?-for fourth-but this is not a lucky number-let me be free --

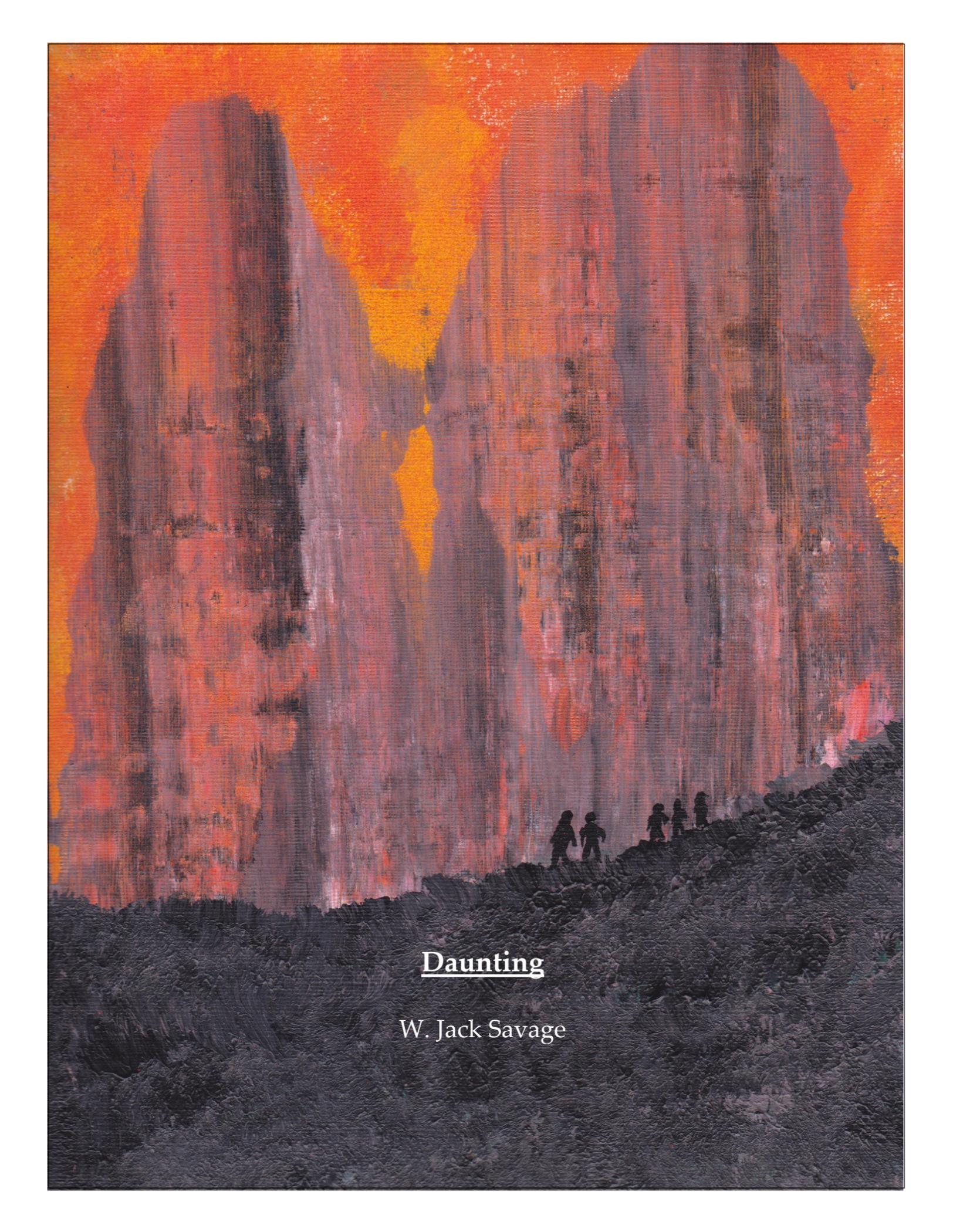
"It's for you and Akihiro. It's to be a family legacy." Her eyes crinkle, cheeks cherry-red. Her purpose fulfilled, she lingers, waiting for his face to mirror hers.

Nestled with the grime under his nails, the heat returns. In moving forward, there is no escaping the past – no blissful oblivion, but acknowledgment that he will not be moving forward. He will drown in his last name and teach his daughter to swim.

His eyes are the first to reply: *this a coin to a cat, this is not fair* – but he is no boy to be childishly petulant. *The nail which sticks out farthest will be hammered the hardest. Listen to your mother, Naoki.* He nods, head bowing. "Thank you for the tea." He returns the cat to its shelter, lowering his head to hide his tears.

"I'm sor—" But Naoki is already walking away. "You're leaving?"

He bears the yoke, and smiles. "I'll be back next year."



Daunting

W. Jack Savage