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Cover Art: “Koi Stamp” (Faust Gervais)

About the artist: My name is Faust! I am a digital illustrator originally from New Orleans, though my family relocated after hurricane Katrina. I came back to the city to study fine arts and do so currently with a digital focus at UNO. I want to inspire others through reaching a wider audience with my art, and to leave the world a little more fun, loving, and connected than I found it. Link to my portfolio: https://sites.google.com/view/faust-g24/home?authuser=1

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Editor’s Note

Dear Reader,

As my time as the Managing Editor of Ellipsis comes to a close, I want to thank you and the whole UNOCcommunity for reading not just theissues I’ve been a part of creating, but all the ones before and those yet to come. Ellipsis has always and will always be the voice of UNO’s incredibly talented students, staff, and alumni, and it’s been a joy to bring your words to life.

Issue 49 brought us the most submissions I’ve seen as Editor, which is due in no small part to the wonderful team who helped spread the word on campus and online. We saw work from previous contributors and some new names, too. The pieces in this issue follow a similar theme of environmentalism and existentialism, which seem to be on all of our minds recently. In the wise words of UNO Editor in Chief, Abram Himelstein, “As publishers, we need to make sure our pages are worth the trees it takes to print on.” I believe that the collective trees it has taken to create Ellipsis have taken on a second life, as a living document of the UNO community.

To everyone who has submitted to us in the past and has seen their words come to life in print, thank you. To everyone who has worked on the Ellipsis editorial team to bring these words to life, thank you. To all of our readers at UNO and beyond, thank you. To Abram Himelstein, for giving me this opportunity for the past three years, thank you. As I part ways with the great city of New Orleans, Ellipsis and UNO will always have a place in my heart.

Thank You,

—Jax Borukhovich
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The Lord’s Day is for service
spent reciting the Hail Mary, short
and sweet as me at eight years old.
My tiny hands, clasped in practiced prayer,
ask a mother to protect me from sins
I have not committed yet.

We follow the lines we’re taught to obey.

The Lord’s Day is for food
shopping after Sunday morning mass.
I thumb the circular scripture that covers
my mother’s purse as our steps shuffle behind
the procession. Each patron presents their offering
to the cashier, clipped coupons in their open palms.
The payment they give each week for a meal
that will feed the souls of the hungry.

We follow the lines we’re taught to obey.

The Lord’s Day is for returning
abandoned shopping carts to their flock.
Outstretched metal arms welcome back
their own, saving each one from becoming lost
beyond the yellow curb. Lines drawn so they know
not to venture beyond their intended purpose.

We follow the lines we’re taught to obey.
“As Above, Even More Below” by Kaylie McCarthy. Photograph.
The Creation
By T. Lane Williams

Three hours staring at a blank page. We've all been there. A deadline looms and yet nothing blooms to take its place within the vast white space which we are to fill with the black ink of our thoughts.

This is where I exist at this moment, in this moment. The clock ticks by the moments before I am to submit my nonfiction assignment and yet, here I type extemporaneously. I hope that from my thoughts an actual paper is unearthed from the crevices of my consciousness.

What do we do when the well runs dry or the scent of the trail grows cold? Or, rather, what do I do because each of us has their own method to their madness. I’ve read about writers who structure their time; they wake at the same time each day and sit at their desk the same hours, day in and day out. They may write one word. They may write a novel. They may stare at a white page for days on end. The point is they see writing as a calling, a duty, a discipline which must be set forth. Other writers shun the rigid regimen and dash off to seedy pubs and bars, seeking the pulse of the people and imagine they are sidling up to Hemingway, Baldwin, or James in some experiment of people watching. But what do I do? Better yet, what will I do this time?

Coffee sounds good.

Black. Columbian. An extra scoop of grounds. No cream, no sugar. Hot, nearly to the point of boiling. McDonald’s hot. Not McDonald’s 2023, but McDonald’s before the multimillion-dollar lawsuit HOT. The kind of hot that peels off the top layer of skin from the palate of my mouth. My tongue slides over the fresh, raw pinkness and my nerves tickle at the sensation. I hope that by revealing the fresh flesh that I, too, am tickled into revelation with new thoughts to jot. However, my sacrifice is for naught.

Well, at least I’m awake.

What’s in the refrigerator? Leftover chili. Yogurt. Cottage Cheese. Apples. Onions. Some kind of vegetable oil spread that passes for butter substitute. Oranges. Tortilla chips and woven wheat crackers are miniature tombstones atop the white crypt. The bare white façade of the door waits for more to be buried within. The same as the white page on the screen at my computer. Dueling blancos, both challenging me.
I think about how this emptiness – of the fridge, of the page – and the desire to fill it, it somehow matches my younger self. There were years I experienced manic depression in which nothing seemed to satisfy my hunger for ‘normalcy.’ Thankfully, I never turned to alcohol or illicit drugs, but during many years when the white brilliance of the sun was so dimmed by the length and depth of my emotional tunnel that I tried to eat my way full, to fill what ached from barrenness. It was something learned in my youth from my mother. The machinations of our mental manipulations drilled our depression around the same time – though she in her late-thirties and me in my teens. We fed the demon which bore out insides and, in turn, grew to monstrous sizes.

Still to this day, forty years later, we both have issues with weight management. The chain of depression continues to rattle and holds fast, though the number of links change, letting out more length and giving us a sense of greater freedom than that which we really have. Was it Charlotte Perkins Gilman, first wave feminist and author, who used her own wading within depression’s dark waters as inspiration for some of her work? She would not be the first, not was she the last.

An orange.

I’ll try an orange. Especially now that I have a cleansed palate. The citric acid alights the neural receptors of the sense of touch. Still, though, the sugary sourness of its juice takes the pain and partners it with pleasure.

The thin, narrow line that is my cursor comes in and out of existence as if the whiteness is not a page, but an allegory for the snowfall that occurs outside my window. Four to five inches, they say. Four to five pages, my instructor wants. Blink. Wink. Hint. Nudge. Know what I mean?

Still though, unlike the blizzard of small white particles filling the darkened evening landscape – the white space remains unfettered – a free and open space for anyone to travel and yet like some back county road in Nevada, not a sign of intelligent life to be seen.

Nevada.

Las Vegas. Gonzo. Hunter S. Thompson injected his own inspiration, writing from the percolated stream which fountained forth from his drug-fueled consciousness. Objectivity be damned, pass the Daniels.

I once wasn’t as disciplined with writing as I am now. I still have a lot of room to improve. Thinking back, again to my youth, my yearbook teacher signed the inside back cover of my copy, “Remember, ‘Deadline’ is an im-
important thing.” I always left things to the last minute (and the first minute after it was due). Waiting until the last minute only invites failure. Sure, if you’re good (which I think I have the capacity to be), you can get by for a while – but not every time. It took my work in campaigns and theatre, learning to ‘plan my work and work my plan’ and move beyond procrastination (most of the time).

The end is the beginning.

Start with the end and schedule what needs to happen for success to occur, then schedule what needs to happen before that, and so on, until you reach the moment of when you are to start. For campaigns, start with envisioning the victory speech on election night and work your way back to the first phone call asking for a campaign contribution or knocking on the first door of a voter. For theatre, start with opening night and work your way back through tech week, rehearsal off book, set builds, costume fittings, blocking rehearsals, the first table read, and auditions. Author John Irving, whose works have seemed to spur their own cottage industry in film adaptations, more often than not, starts by writing the end of his story first.

For me, however, the story is alive. I may have visions of what I want in the end, but the characters make their own choices and their own destinies. They take over my thoughts, feelings, and fingers. They whisper in my ear their desires, dreams, and what the world holds for them. I am but their transcriptionist. Perhaps that is why the pallor of the page keeps me in the dark. This assignment is not the story of Elwood or Madeleine or Amina… it’s me. Give me a microphone and I can fill the airwaves with anecdotes, advice, and audacity.

On paper, as in life, I’m white.

I toy with the idea of experimenting with ChatGPT to see what some algorithm may assemble from the many patterns on the internet what I might say about my life. For some modern-day monstrosity to come alive – electrified – filled with more humanity than the person which they are meant to represent. To challenge me and the meaning of my life and bring it to bear onto this unbearable whiteness, the cold and vast whiteness of being that is a page. Challenged like young Mary Shelley, who wrote the modern Prometheus, on an afternoon shared with her husband Percy Shelley, as well as Lord Byron. It was the Year Without a Summer (1816) on a cold and rainy day when a small group of friends and loved ones shared gothic tales and ghost stories. From the foam of inspirations shore, sprung her
creation – Victor Frankenstein and his want to overcome death. For man to find immortality. In doing so, she achieved her own immortality through her words.

Another hour trudges by and the page is no longer a stark arctic glacier. Sometimes it’s good to seek out new experiences. Sometimes it’s good to bare your soul. Sometimes it’s good to have a regimen. Sometimes it’s good to have a plan. Sometimes it’s good to wade in the stream. Sometimes it’s an amalgamation that comes to life. As for this creation, like Shelley’s original mad doctor, I work alone to bring it to life – no assistant AIgor graverobbing the assemblages of others. Alive! It lives; it metamorphoses the invisible whiteness between me and the reader into something perceptible.

It is not bad; only time will tell if it is good.
Trilobite

Abu K M Sinwar

Your existence lithified
over millions of years,
time squeezed
upon your rocky being

In the decaying caravan of time,
time kneaded and preserved
You are a familiar fossil

Staring at you
scintillating eyes of a skeptic scientist
become clouded in mixed musing

Trilobite,
When you were swimming
in the Cambrian oceans
perhaps your compound eyes
filled up with dreams, anxiety,
loneliness, solitude

perhaps dreams of love, ecstasy,
conceit or revenge

Did you build an empire?
Did your savage army
ravage oceans and land
with bloody horror?

Did you snatch the freedom
of a million other trilobites
or other helpless lives?
Now your existence lithified
on the rocks
like billions of other fossils

The destructive decay of eras
covered you and your prey
with a transparent shroud
of Marxian equality
You are now equal to all

Perhaps, you were emperor,
monk, preacher,
liar, cultist, conspiracy peddler

or ordinary lover
There are no signs,
no placards,
no semiotics,
no witness
Nothing preserved
except your naked self

Your existence lithified
over millions of years,
time squeezed
upon your rocky being

In the decaying caravan of time,
time kneaded and preserved
You are a familiar fossil
RUINS.

i asked myself what would happen if it all fell apart

i remembered that ancient ruins are a wonder of the world

no one comes to learn about and to discover a place where nothing stood.

Madison Bonaventure
You wake to the darkness in your hut with a gnawing in your stomach. Reaching out, you grab a carrot to soothe. Moving its length around your molars, you find a spot least offensive and grind down upon the root. Slowly, skillfully, you chew until the purple shaft becomes mud and you swallow. Moving the cowskin flap from the door, you walk out into the sun. Your nakedness warms from the rays and your body shivers from the northern wind. It is a few weeks after the sheep have begun to show which will begat and which will be ate. Yet, the cold has not left the village. The skies have rivers of black clouds, with gravel edges, hiding the sun more and more each day that comes.

You are early to rise, as has been for the past nineteen moons. The aches make it hard to sleep long. Being alone gives you time to clean without eyes’ pity upon you. You take a short branch leaning against the thick logs stacked for the wall of your hut. With your right hand you start scraping the dry leaves and branches over your thick skin, bark brown, akin to the land from which we all come. And which we all go. Skin that was once more beautiful and supple in your youth. Skin which never had pity. Now your breasts droop; flesh sags from your arms; wrinkles march across your face; your body is rough and stained from your years of keeping sheep. Scars on your hands and feet from the work of extracting metal in the way your father taught you before he disappeared. Tattoos marking each year of your life scattered on knees, ankles, wrists, hips, even hidden from your eyes on your back like the drawings inside caves. Your sex barren and slack under your loincloth.

Here in the valley the grass grows thick for the sheep to graze. Soon, the sheep will need to move higher up the side of the mountain when the valley is filled more with piles than pasture. Now that is for your child to care for. Your child. It is a joke to call him your child. Your child has a child of his own. He has his own life and his own worries. He is still required to respect and worry about you.

Hidden

by T. Lane Williams
Finishing up, you take a small twig and between your front teeth you fray the end. You rub the end of the twig gently over your teeth and between them where it fits. You spit. Blood and spit. Walking twenty paces behind a tree, you finish your morning detail. Blood and spit and piss and shit. You wipe with your left hand. Spit and clean. You pour a cup of water into your hands from the bowl sitting on the rocks next to the firepit. The knots of your knuckles knocking together among the ropes of your fingers.

Today is the day. Forty-five years is enough for one man to carry.

*    *    *

You tamp embers into the bark bowl at your camp to warm your midday meal. Today you get meat. Flesh for flesh. The pains of your middle are quieted, not silenced. You untie your shoes from your leather pants and rub your swollen ankles and feet. The wet grass in your shoes you scrape out and toss to the side. From within the backpack, you pull out dry grass, carefully packing it into your shoes for your hike back up the mountain pass. Sliding your shoes back on your feet, the fur brushes over your toes causing a childish giggle to escape. You deftly string and tie your shoes back to your pants without causing your right hand to rebel.

Using the stave which you began to shape yesterday, you pull yourself to stand. You check to make sure your leather pants and belts are tight against your hips. Your long coat of bear hide has served you most of your adult life, even with all the rips and tears, it continues to keep you warm, and each sinew used to mend has a story of its own. From your belt hangs several small pouches and your dagger. From the ground you take the grass mat which served as your bed and tie it around your shoulders like a cap. Quiver on your back and a furry cap tied with a chin strap, all are in place for you to start your day. You slip the stave into your belt behind you and walk a few paces away from your camp to a trio of trees with dense canopy such that the ground in between them is blacker than night. You reach into a small pile of leaves laying there in the darkness and pull out your axe.

*    *    *

Your father's axe. Your mother's father's axe. A dowry fit for a village chief. The handle has been replaced over the years, not the head of the axe. The
copper head of the axe is the prize which many have sought from you for years. It was given to your father upon his taking your mother to his hut. Your mother, her skin dark like the copper, itself. The skin that bound you and her together against the lighter skin of your father and the villagers. The skin she brought with her with her family on their travels of many months walking from the east. They brought the copper with them. They brought their knowing with them. They brought their craft with them.

It was this copper which made your father take your mother north from the shore of the endless sea. He heard word of the metal in these mountains, much closer than the copper of this axe. Just like your mother, he wanted to make the metal his. No other man he knew had your mother. No other man he knew had his axe. He learned from your mother’s father how to find copper. How to smelt it. How to shape it. How to harden it. How to sharpen it. How to use it. Once he was sure, they walked north. You were with them. They just did not know it, yet.

For years, your father kept sheep while he searched the mountains around the village for the ore. You grew at his side, learning both how to care for sheep and how to search for the metal. One day your father came out of the mountains with fewer sheep and yet, with something more. His muscles rippled as he untied the leather satchel from the back of one of the sheep. You, a mere pup, ran to him to hug and he pulled you in, shoving a large brown rock into your arms.

“We take what the earth hides and make it ours.”

It still took years for him to learn how to work the copper. Each day you stood at his side. You learned. You gleaned. You gleamed as the two of you made the rock give what it had not given before. It was small. It was copper. Your father was no longer simply a shepherd of sheep. He was a shepherd of men. A revered leader and master of the earth.

His hair and face grew longer and let it be known that when he was to pass on from this earth, it was his desire that he take his beloved axe with him to the next life. One more he was gone. The axe was next to the bedding your father shared with your mother. She was there. It was there. He was gone. He never returned. From that day, you took over your father’s work. First you had to find your father’s ore.

* * *

* * *
Thirty years you have searched while keeping sheep. You have found lost rocks along the paths you take the sheep for grazing; you have not found your father’s ore. You are many years older than he was when he disappeared. You have done well for yourself and your family. You have not found your father’s ore.

You pack away your belongings. You kiss your mate goodbye. You tell your child. Ha, that word again. You tell him that you are off to find the ore you have not found for so long and will not return until you have. He asks to join you; you are old, and they worry. Your mate agrees with him, and the argument begins. It goes round and round as the sun flies across the sky and the black clouds grow thicker and the cold bites deeper into your bones. You finally give in and tell them that you will be off tomorrow morning with the child in tow.

When the moon is high in the night, and your mate is high with the fermented wheat from the evening’s meal, you gather your trappings and make off on your hike. Alone.

You take your usual path winding up through the mountains to the west, where the sheep like to graze in late summer days. From the green valley of your home to the dense wooden forest, the cloak of night keeps your travel out of sight. You break through the tree line and limp onto the crisp snow just as the sun does the same. Turning around, you look back on where you came through the darkness and into the light. The grit of the clouds scours the sun’s rays of its brilliance and warmth. The air is tinged with familiar smells. Like that of the metals which fall and drip away from the heat of your furnace when pulling out copper’s golden-brown blood.

A bare boulder juts out proudly from the hardpack moat of white and you use your bow to test each step before you make it to assure you will not fall through an unseen chasm beneath the snow. What should be a short trek ends up taking much more because the smooth hide of the soles of your shoes causes you to slide halfway back for each step you take. You shuffle your feet, one barely in front of the other. Finally, your goal is within reach, and you climb atop the stone. You look down into the valley below and see your village where you imagine your mate and your child quarrelling with the other about their failure to keep you safe. You chuckle while removing a bit of tinder fungus from a belt pouch and add some small sticks, leaves and needles picked overnight for such a function. You strike your flint until the batch smolders and fire comes alight. You reach down from the edge of the
rock and punch through the snow to add to your bowl of grain for a warm porridge in the morning.

You find yourself waking with your face close to the dying fire. You turn on your side and see it is no longer morning and the day half gone. Cursing to yourself, you gather up your things and tamp embers into your bark bowl. As you steady yourself on the snow and use the outcrop as a crutch, you see your child coming out of the evergreens. He calls out for you to stay; you do not respond in-kind. Throwing caution to the wind and keeping your bow on your back, you start to shuffle off the other way.

You do not get far. Your left foot slips and you feel yourself leaving the ground for a moment. Only to land square on your back, the bow splintering under your weight. Your body starts to skitter over the snow, a white blanket sheet that glitters even in the darkening sun. You try to dig your heels in to stop your slide and find the hardpack is stronger than your feeble kicks. Your child’s voice grows fainter with each passing moment. All you hear in your ears is your own wailing and the wind as it whistles past your ears.

Faster, faster you slide. You watch as the clouds roll across the sky as if they were the rapids of the river. Turning your head to the left and right, you see only the endless white and sky. The tree line and your child are now hidden beyond the crest of the side of the mountain.

Faster. You cannot catch your breath because the air evades your nose and your mouth. It scrapes against your cheeks like the gravel in the sky, like the gravel on the ground.

Faster. If you do not stop soon, you know this is how you will end. You remember your axe at your side.

Faster. You take it in both hands. Your right above the head and your left on the handle. Faster. Raising your axe above your head, you bury it behind you.

It feels like your shoulders are being ripped from your body. You are slowing down. The snow roars as it is torn apart behind you.

Slower. Your hands grow colder. First, they tingle and then go numb.

Slower. You look to your side and see darkness approaching across the cold white way. You close your eyes.

Slower. Your axe is ripped from your hands. You turn side over side and roll until you skid to a stop in the scrabble just before an evergreen patch.

You take a deep breath. You open your eyes and just as you do, your axe slows to rest next to your face. Looking beyond the axe, you see you have
slid nearly halfway down the mountain on the other side of the ledge from where your child broke through the tree line to find you.

Hot fire shoots through your right hand. You bring it up to find you have cut your palm across the full width. From thumbpad to small finger, where you see white bone peeking out.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. You curse and spit at yourself. No better than a worm after a heavy rain. You swiftly reach into your pants with your left hand and pull out a length of your loincloth to bind your wound. You fumble with your right to find your dagger still sheathed, unbelievably, in your belt and hand it over to your left to cut a strip. You take care in wrapping your hand and then find that you have no other injuries. You get to your hands and knees and crawl toward the evergreens.

Once in the safety of the trees, you stand and take inventory. Your bow is gone and a few arrows, as well as a bark bowl. Everything else seems to be intact. Maybe those that have gone before you are on your side – save for teaching you a lesson for going on your own. You stagger forward, deeper into the evergreens and search for a branch to replace your bow. The day is shorter than in your memory. The night closes in.

***

Birdsong brings the morning. Waking up, you are curled up like a bug found under a rock. Calloused hands slide into your coat and grip your gut. The battle in your middle – the sharp pain under your right breast and your stomach turning sour – tells you that your day starts as bad as the one before had ended. You bite down on your tongue to keep the growl strangled deep in your throat. As much as you want to howl to the spirits of those who have gone before you, doing so will alert your child to your camp.

Even if he is only one hundred paces away, your child could not know. The trees stand close guard, arm in arm. Your fire ebbs in the ring just out of reach and the icicles that are your hair tell you that it is long from keeping your bones warm. The streaks of smoke sneak through the thick branches and wide leaves in their attempt to escape the canopy of the forest. Not until midday will the sun’s warmth tickle the blades of blue grass which are your bed and melt the thin patches of snow weaving around the trunks.

Again, another piercing shot through your center. An endless thrust from a spear wielded by a giant the size of ten or twenty men. Teeth chatter and
tears freeze in their tracks while you whisper for relief. The tattoo which
the shaman placed at pain’s point did naught good. His chants to the spirits
while slicing your last bit of soft flesh gave you peace in the moment just a
year ago. The sacred black dust ground into those three weeping cuts prom-
ised; lied. They are an etched memory that never truly heals.

From within, without warning and without worry, a large belch bursts
forth from your chapped lips. Rotting meat is its stench; death is its flavor.
Your shit will be black water for days. Just like the moon making its rounds,
so does your black shit. Ever since you were a child at your father’s side. You
cannot stop the shit; you can quiet the pain.

You open the flap of leather on your backpack and tip it on its side. You sit
up and reach in, pulling out an old sheep’s bladder filled with ground wheat.
With your left hand you mix a bit of the wheat with a handful of snow and
warm it over the cooling fire. You throw on a few sticks to rekindle the
flame to melt the snow, and you, too. With your left hand you scoop the
mush and shovel it into your mouth. You cough. Through the gap between
your two front teeth, the same gap you loved in your mother’s smile those
many years ago, seeps a bit of mush blackened and dribbles down your chin.

With your right hand you wipe the dark drool from your face. Another
shot of pain. Under the leather strap ripped from your loincloth. Under the
grass matting. Under the herb sprigs. The gash in your right palm throbs
from its call into service. You spit profanities into the fire and curse your
stupidity. You are a mess. You are sheep’s scat. You are useless. Why do you
keep on?

* * *

Placing your axe into your belt, you limp back through the forest and up-
ward through the evergreens to break, once more, beyond the tree line. The
black clouds cover most of the sky and the sun is blood red. Three-legged
now, with your stave in your left hand, you hobble along to find a less dan-
gerous hike back up the mountain in your search.

Between two ridges far to the west from where you had your fast flight
from your child, you take each step deliberately while the sun slips in and
out of its confines. When the sun is at its highest point, you are within reach
of the mountain’s peak. Even in your state, you know you can make it before
night. You choose to rest before moving onward. You settle in and from
your pack, you take some deer and ibex jerky. You look into your bark bowl, finding the embers cold. Instead of bothering to light another fire, you de-
cide to warm the jerky in your mouth before slowly chewing. It is dry and salty. The fat is difficult to grind apart. Still, it is delicious. You add a pinch
or two of grain to your mouth to help break down the meat and after some
time, you are full.

Putting everything back into your pack, you stand back up and point
yourself to the peak. Your feet feel heavy with each step. Your head joins
in the throbbing with your right hand, and you begin to wonder if you will
make it to the top before nightfall.

Something to the left catches your eye. There, in a gully, between those
rocks, is that what you think it is? Years peel away and you rush over to look.
You drop to your knees and use both hands to clear away some of the snow
covering your find. There. There it is. Ore.

Snow begins to fall. Not white, gray. The landscape speckles. A smile
comes to your lips. Your mother’s smile. You lean on the stave to lift yourself
back up to stand. You hear a whistle in your left ear and then a snap. Fire
explodes in your left shoulder. You fall face first.

Blurry-eyed, you wake only seconds later with the fire still in your shoul-
der. The ground around you is covered in red liquid, steaming your face.
You know it is your blood. Your face lays across your limp left arm. Reach-
ing up with your right, you feel a shaft buried deep into your left shoulder.
Gathering your strength, you pull at the shaft and free it from your flesh.
Your rage and pain fill the air, the snow and grit making way from its force.
The arrowhead is nowhere in sight.

Rolling your head to the side, you see your attacker. A fair face. An un-
known face. Simply a face. The person owning that face walks your way a
few steps only to fall to their knees and then to their face, revealing your
child’s face as he stands behind the prone body. His axe is in hand, covered
in blood. You see tears freeze upon his cheeks.

And then you see nothing.

* * *

Two people hiking the mountain see you laying in that gully and check
on you. They see your golden-brown skin basking in the late summer sun.
They tell others. Five thousand years, give or take a moon, have passed since
the snow and ice hid your flesh. Your name they will never know or why you were there; they call you Ötzi. Ötzi the Iceman. They will tell their own stories about what happened to you.

They take what the earth hides and make it theirs.
“Wapiti Wayside” by Olivia M. Bergeron.
She remembered a time when the white expanse seemed endless. When her prey swam the frozen waters and thundered across the edges of her land. Those days were long gone. Now most of the prey was gone and the fire in the sky glared at an empty land. She could feel its heat on her back now, worse than any memory she had as it burned through ice and fur and skin.

She licked her white paw, perfect for hiding when clean but too distracting when stark after a hunt. A strange sound echoed across her land, almost like ice cracking beneath her paws but louder, more dangerous. She stood on her hind legs to get a better look. Nothing could hide when she stood so tall. She was a cliff towering over the snow, mighty and all seeing.

But cliffs were slow, lumbering things, and she realized she would have to be fast as the origin of the sound made itself known. The land had broken apart, forming a crack that hunted her down, getting closer with every wasted second. She slammed back into the ground, running away for the first time as the crack chased after her.

White pounded into white, tufts of snow and fur lifting into the air. But no matter how fast she ran, the crack was behind her. It grew while she ran, forming more cracks on either side of her. She had seen some of her prey do this before, circling and cornering their own hunt until there was no escape.

She roared her denial and pushed her legs harder, feeling her limbs burn as she shifted direction and charged one of the cracks. With a final great bound, she leaped over the ground, taking to the sky to escape the land's clutches. The land roared its strange, broken sound as she landed on the other side.

She turned back to see that the cracks had connected, taking the land she had just stood on with them. A piece of her home was now sitting on the endless water, slowly floating away. Soon, she would never see it again.

She allowed herself a few moments of breath before she resumed licking her paw. Near death was no excuse to be sloppy. There was less prey than there used to be. She had to be ready to strike at any moment or she would starve. Especially if the land itself had turned into a predator.

Another snap echoed across the snow, tracing the shrinking edges of her home.
HURRY UP TOMORROW.

cautiously optimistic
recklessly hopeful
either way
there is a future.

Madison Bonaventure
The Button to End the World

Thaddeus M. Daniels

It came to her in the night, after she arrived from work and after she slumped into her bed exhausted. Once the morning comes and she looks at the desk near her bed, she’ll see the button on top of the scattered notebooks and paper. Miah’s thoughts kept her up again even as she held her eyes closed. As with many other things, she wanted the day to be over as soon as possible.

The day began late. Miah hadn’t come from her wing of the dorm, into the common area she shared with her roommate until later in the evening.

“Good morning!” Val said, hunched over a box within a maze of boxes. “Morning,” Miah said back.

Val taped the box shut and stacked it on top of another, clearing the beige floor just a bit. “End of an era, huh?”

“Yeah.” Through the windows, the sun shined on the clear beige walls; it made Miah anxious. Only to escape the anxiety, Miah asked Val, “Do you need help with anything?”

Val rested her hands on her hips. She looked like she’d been packing all morning; her blue sweatpants and pink shirt had wrinkles “I’m pretty much done, thanks though.”

Most of the boxes in their living room were Val’s. Miah had a less organizational approach and a less drama centered one. Val took a deep breath and said, “End of an era. Yup. No more college.”

Miah gave out a snort. “So dramatic.”

“Well, someone has to give life some life and it definitely won’t be you.” “Is that why you put the button in my room?”

“What? What button? And why would I want to go in your room? That place is depressing.”

“Never mind.” She was like a volleyball, back and forth. Part of her knew Val wasn’t the button’s source but a quiet, repressed part of her hoped it really wasn’t real, that Antarctica was still there. She would ask Val if she’s seen the news, but Val never does. It’s too “gloomy” for her. “I need to tell you something.”

*   *   *


“Why are you wearing a hoodie? It’s black too, I know you’re melting with the way the sun is beaming at us right now. And the grey leggings weren’t really a choice either. It screams ‘put me out of my misery,’” Val said.

“Can we focus?” Miah said flatly. The sky was clear as they progressed on their walk through campus. The sun burned at Miah, making her glad that she kept her hair in a messy bun, she hated when strands of hair trapped heat. She started hating her hair because of it some time ago. It was just too exhausting to deal with.

“I’m just saying. So, you press it and the world ends?” “Yeah.” “Just like that?”

“I think so, yeah.” They passed people sitting in the grass of the quad chattering, most likely reveling in the school year’s end. Trees scattered about stood stiff and brightened; brown bricked buildings stood along the sidewalk.

“So, where is it?”

Miah pulled the button out of her hoodie pocket and held it in front of her. Their pace slowed; they stared at the white words on top of the button’s blood red mushroom head. In excessively big letters the words said, “End the world.” Attached to the main button at the black base was a smaller button with a red mushroom head like the main button, but stamped on it was something different. It said “Demo.” She pressed it when she first realized the button was there in her room. She never viewed herself as lucky, but she knew that luck was the only thing the prevented the world’s end.

“Would you want to?” Val asked. She was met with a glance and the tucking of the button.

The simplicity of it all made it enticing. Antarctica simply disappeared, there one minute gone the next. Every news outlet was talking about it. To simply disappear was something that would intrigue anyone, even Val admitted that.

“All relationships can be fixed y’know, so if it’s because of you and your mom—”

Miah glanced at her again. She wished she never talked about it to her. Val could never understand any situation that was just complicated and not good versus bad. She liked it at first, needed it even in order to simplify things, to justify things—like telling her mother she never wanted to see her again, among other things. She doesn’t regret that though. “Why wouldn’t I want to?” Miah asked, a branch cracking under her foot.

“Um, because living is nice?”
“Is it?” Miah spoke with a heaviness that she could see made Val uncomfortable. “Well, it’s nice most of the time, I guess.”

“Not when you have a life everyone else has. One that’s so draining, you can’t go to sleep at night. One where you keep giving and giving just to get the shit you literally need to survive. The world doesn’t give a shit about anyone, Val, sorry to be the one to tell you. People die and everyone moves on.”

Someone walked through the space that grew between them. They turned on the path, back toward the dorms. “Maybe you don’t have a life like everyone else’s. I mean, people try, and they try longer than you do. You only tried to fix your grades for a little while. And you were only really nice to me for a couple of months; I’d hate to see how you left your other roommates.”

Val didn’t see Miah’s wince. It was true and it was a cycle. People start to scare her when she gets close to them. Only by a small distance, Miah closed the space between them. She knew Val was being kind and not mentioning other things like her struggling with multiple jobs or her leaving behind those she fell in love with or her staying up late freaking out about the future. In her mind, she expressed gratitude by being quiet all the way back.

Before they went into their rooms Val said, “I think we could’ve been friends if you tried more. But, hey, people come and go right? Oh, and maybe you should leave the button here.”

Miah lied and said she would. They were separated for the rest of the day; the few times they were near each other, they were silent, sound coming only from the refrigerator’s hum. For Val’s sake, she left the button in the living room; it didn’t leave her though. For the rest of the day, she pondered on it, where it could have come from, why it would come to her, and what the peace would be like after she pressed it.

The state of things with Val weighed on her. She wasn’t the first, there were plenty of others that could have become close to Miah. It was just too new. Having someone be so important in her life was bizarre to her. There was one instance where the cycle didn’t occur, and a relationship’s potential wasn’t ruined, but then again it was maintained only by external forces. Or maybe not. Miah couldn’t figure it out; she tried through the day and until nightfall.

It had been a long time since she talked with or even seen Ricky. She stayed on campus during the summers and winters. It had been four years, but he still had the same voice.
“What’s up, Miah, long time no see,” Ricky said over the phone.
She asked him if he would be free and then what was the longest time he ever drove and then if he could pick her up and bring her home.
He whistled, then said, “How long would that be? Going back and forth?”
“Only about five hours.” She pushed out a small laugh.
“Yeesh. I’ll be there at ten.”

* * *

In the morning, it hit her. The end of an era. If the button was near her, she probably would have pressed it then. It was where she left it. She picked it up and put it in her hoodie pocket which was bigger than the last, so it didn’t poke out much. She put on the same outfit layout as the day before; having multiple sets of the same clothes was very convenient for her time and time again. Anything that required too much thought would make her feel like she ran fifty miles, so thinking about the button was like running a thousand miles.
 She shoved it in the back of her mind once Ricky arrived. “Hey, cousin,” he said. “Hey,” Miah said flatly. Ricky stepped out of his truck and stretched. A soft breeze moved around them and into the parking lot.
“Isn’t there supposed to be a graduation or something?” “There is but I’m not interested.”
“Yeesh. How come, cousin?”
She shrugged. While it was nice being around him again, the possibility of them talking about things she didn't want to talk about made her want to escape. “We should get started.”
“Lead the way.”
She set the pattern to where they wouldn’t meet while transferring boxes. She had to avoid any conversation that could lead to uncomfortable topics. Of course, it would make sense for him to want to talk but she didn’t want that. He would ask her how she had been, why she was being so weird or if she was okay.
She carried out the last box. Val’s boxes were still a maze; she was still sleeping. Miah hadn’t told her she would be leaving, and she'd probably panic when she saw her stuff and the button gone. Miah shut the door behind her anyway.
“What’s your roommate like?” Ricky asked as they finished packing the boxes into the truck. They got into the truck, ready to go.

“She’s fine. We’re not really friends anymore.”

“Oh. How come?”

Miah sighed.

“Are you okay, Miah?”

“Can we just...a quiet ride would be good for me.” “Okay. Cool.” He spoke gently.

Miah watched as the campus shrunk in the side mirror. She wished she could go back, start over. She wished she could keep starting over again and again. Her eyes began to sting, she shut them to hold back the tears. She leaned back in the seat and reached for the button in her pocket. She kept it in the pocket and rubbed it, the urge to push surged as the ride continued.

*   *   *

She woke up from gentle taps, she hadn’t intended to fall asleep, and she hadn’t intended to end up in the parking lot of the restaurant she used to work at—they used to work at. It still looked the same, the light brown paint was a little more worn down; the wide windows were as clear as ever, the double doors looked new but the sign, saying “cookout” in all caps, was clearly the same one from when Ricky and Miah started. The guy that owned the place, Dave, lived in the same mobile home community as Miah. She wasn’t sure if he still lived there though. He was nice to them, offered them a job when he heard money was tight for the two. It wasn’t her first, her first job was tense and abusive. Fast food jobs are often those things. She had rolled with the punches because she needed the money but then she was offered the job at Cookout.

“Why are we here?” Miah asked. Ricky turned off the ignition.

“Complicated answer. You seem down, really down, so I wondered what would cheer you up.”

“And this was what you came up with? I hated working here.”

“You didn’t hate it that much right? You liked talking to the people from what I remember.”

“I’m still stuck on you bringing me somewhere I worked because I’m ‘down,’” Miah said.
“That is crazy,” he laughed and stepped out the truck, “but it’s more complicated than that.” Ricky stretched, looking into the truck at Miah. “You coming in or what? Dave wouldn’t mind you being behind the counter again.”

“No. Absolutely not. And it’s not complicated; just because I have a few, a few, good memories doesn’t mean I wanna be here. I’m not stepping out this truck.”

She stepped out of the truck eventually, and she got behind the counter and breathed in the fragrance she forgot she missed. It was the small of a random assortment of food: pizza, chicken, bread. She had liked the menu’s chaos. Ricky had gambled on the restaurant’s aura making her stay. She hadn’t expected it to work so she caved in and offered to stay for just two minutes. When Miah stepped into the sunlight tangled warm yellow lights that bounced off the glossy black marble floor and brown walls, she lost track of the time and softly rolled her eyes at Ricky’s smirk.

Miah took the place of the guy at the counter. She couldn’t help but worry though. There were patrons sitting at the tables throughout the restaurant and there would definitely be more coming soon. Since the traffic was slow then, that meant it’ll be thick soon. That’s how food jobs worked. Ricky was in the walled off kitchen behind her helping cook the orders that came in before they arrived. He and the other cooks put the orders in their to-go plates and sat them on the open slot window, the whole counter became filled.

“You used to say you like the high stakes,” Ricky said through the window.

“It’s draining but...maybe it’s the good type of draining.” Miah didn’t tell him that if it got too bad for her, she would probably press the world ending button that rested in her pocket. The door opened and the lunch rush began.

“Haven’t seen you in a while,” one customer said. “You’re still so sweet.”

“Thanks, been a while since I heard that,” Miah said back with a kind grin.

“Thank you!” another customer said as Miah handed them their order.

“Sorry for cursing you out that one time!”

“Water under the bridge...if you leave a good tip.” That sent the customers into a fit of laughter.

Loud chatter filled the building. Customers waiting in the thick line talked to each other about the weather, how great the food was, and Antarctica disappearing.

“It’s just so crazy,” one lady said to another. “How does an entire continent go away like that? What is life?”
Her anxiety came back to her. It felt clearer though. She can decipher it now, all the parts of it. She felt lighter but didn’t want it to be because she was there. Once the foot traffic slowed down, Ricky stepped out the kitchen and went next to Miah. “So, how are we feeling?” he asked.
“Clearer.”
“Nice. Can you tell me what’s bumming you?” “I don’t think I can. It’s just too much.
Ricky leaned against the counter. “Hmm. You’re feeling better, so that’s good.” “For how long, though?”
“As long as you keep pushing. Sometimes you gotta fight to live your best life.” Ricky folded his arms. “You were like this before you went to school... and before we started working here. Both of those things were good for you, but you got like this.”
“I’m a pessimist, I guess. I never really see things as being good for me. I never see the point in there being a future.” She felt the button within her pocket, she could feel the words.
“No future means no more of the stuff you like.”
“I don’t like anything; I don’t like anyone. It’s all too draining.” He nodded.
“You ready to head out?”
It felt abrupt but she said, “Yeah.”
He was the one who chose to make the ride quiet that time. Every now and then, Miah glanced at him, but he would keep his sight on the darkening road. The sky had started to lose the sun. It was like that the whole way home. He spoke once they parked in the lot, the mobile homes up ahead.
“Do you have the energy for box moving?” he said, “I know I don’t. I could come back tomorrow.”
“Yeah.” Miah got out of the truck, and when she went to close the door, Ricky spoke again.
“Hey, you should know, you’re not the only person who gets down. When you say stuff like what you said at Cookout, it could...impact people.”
She realized she hadn’t asked anything about his life, what he’d been up to. She didn’t want to put in the effort though, so she said “Okay,” and closed the door. With her essentials— her phone and keys and the button—she walked home.
It smelled like grass and the air was stiff. The trailer park sat on top of a very wide patch of grass. On three sides, it was surrounded by trees with the parking lot on the last side. Beaten pathways connected the mo-
bile homes to a central pathway of brown earth. She passed by people she had never seen before. They stood outside talking with each other. In the distance, she heard laughing in one direction and violent arguing in another.

Miah made it to the trailer she grew up in. She could see light; Mom must be there. She reached into her bag for her keys. A squeak came from the door’s hinges as she opened and closed it. Mom sat in the living room. The glow of the TV bounced off her eyes. Mom looked at Miah for a moment and then brought her eyes back to the TV.

“Hey,” Mom said flatly.

Miah walked through the kitchen into the hallway that led to the bedrooms. She reached her bedroom door and entered it. She placed her backpack on her bed. Sunlight came into the room through the window. The sun was starting to set, waves of purple and orange brushed the sky. Miah went into her backpack. Her hand wrapped around the button and she pulled it out to look at it. Val didn’t understand and Ricky wouldn’t.

Mom kept quiet as Miah stepped out. Miah walked around the trailer. It sat on a corner of the park, so she was met with the sight of the trees.

The chairs were still there. A stack of two plastic chairs beside a stack of four plastic chairs. She used them as stairs throughout her childhood. They were still able to hold her weight after all the time that passed. She stepped to the other side of the trailer’s roof. The sight was still the same. To her right were trees. To her left and ahead of her were other trailers. The sunlight reflected off their tops. She could see the plains of land beyond the park. The grass was darkened by a cloud moving overhead.

Miah looked up. The colors had moved around a bit. Clouds in the sky had gold highlights along their edges. The part of sky further away from the sun held a blue glow. Closer to the sun were waves of reddish-purple. She wanted this to be the last thing she saw. The button rested in her hand. She brought her head down to look at it but saw her mother looking at her from down below. She met her mother’s gaze.

“You didn’t say anything back when you came in.” Mom said. “Arrest me.”

Mom stared at her for a second. She let out a small chuckle. “I knew you would get like this when you finished school. How did you get up there?”

“It doesn’t matter. Nothing does.”

Mom ignored her statement and started looking around the trailer. She walked around it; the chairs came into her sight. Miah heard the
chairs bending as her mother climbed up. Mom grunted a few times. Finally, she came onto the top and sat beside Miah, who kept her eyes to the sky. Mom looked at Miah, away from her, back at her, away again, back at her again.

Miah could see her looking at her and then at the button in her hand. “What’s that?” Mom asked. She read the button. “If that really could end the world, would you do it?”

“Yes, and I’m about to.” Miah said back.

“Why?” Mom waited for Miah to answer. She continued when she realized she wasn’t going to. “The last time we talked—”

“I remember.”

They were quiet for a beat. Mom broke the silence. “Four years was a long time to think about what I said. I’m sorry.”

“It’s too late to be sorry.” Miah still looked to the sky; all that was left was the orange shine.

“Well, still, I shouldn’t have said all those things.” “If you think I’m going to apologize, you’re wrong.” “You said some messed up things too, Miah.”

Miah shot her eyes at her, “And I meant it. You were barely a mother to me most of my life, you moved us from one place to another, you did nothing but work and then came home and slept. You missed graduations, proms, everything.”

“Stop it! I not saying I’m perfect, but I was a good mother. I was doing my best, and I was doing it for you. It was all for you.”

“I know.” Miah gripped the button harder; it blurred in her vision. “Took me some time but I know that now. I’m sorry about what I said, I just get so angry about it sometimes, I think it really messed me up.” The sky behind them had begun to darken, in front of them the sky held its light.

“Is that why you would end everything?” Mom asked. “Nothing’s all the way messed up.”

“I am. I was a bitch to my roommate. She would try to like me, to know me and I wouldn’t let her, just like all the other roommates and the people I met.” She wiped the moisture from her eyes and said, “I guess people scare me. And Ricky—” She sighed, “Why was I mean to Ricky? I don’t even know. I’m such a dead weight.”

It’s now or never. She can’t go into the night with all the weight on her, all the thoughts raveling around.

“I want to start over.” Mom said. “It’s too late.”
“No, it’s not. Let’s start over, I can help you through this, Miah. Miah, ever since I started moving us around, I think you started being scared of changes, of what’s in the future.”

Tears streamed down Miah’s face. She felt like she was spinning. Everything piled on her: how long it had been since she talked with Mom and Ricky, the way she kept Ricky at arm’s length, the exhaustion from school and work, Cookout, the smell of the food she and Ricky would get for free and eat while talking about anything at all, the day she left for school excited but horrified at the same time, the way she was always those things all the time. How could she end it?

“It feels like the world is ending.” She couldn’t hold it back anymore. Mom instantly came closer and put Miah’s head between her neck and shoulder. Miah bawled as her mother rocked her back and forth.

“Let it end.” Mom said kindly. “Let it end so it can start over, but better this time.” Miah shifted the button to her right hand, held it tightly and wrapped her left arm around her mother.

Then Miah knew what she wanted to do. She knew that things couldn’t end just yet—

She felt a breeze. A breeze moved through her right hand where she was gripping the button. She shifted herself in her mother’s grasp. She looked at her hand. It was gone. Her tight grip was suddenly holding nothing.

“You okay?” Mom asked.

“...I will be. Everything will be.”

The sunset was in its last minutes of life. Darkness surrounded it so that all that remained was a small golden disc. Together, Miah and her mother watched as the sun fell deeper away, withered while it grew, and bloomed somewhere on the other side of the world.
“Into the Light” by Javalyn LeBlanc. Photograph.
The bartender is staring again. Every now and then, she’ll glance at the door behind the bar. It’s the last stop she has to make before closing the bar, but she can’t do it until I leave. I bring the whiskey to my lips and take my time drinking it.

“Getting pretty late, don’t you think?” she says.

“Don’t know what you mean. Night’s barely started,” I try to say, but the words slur. Her stare turns into a scowl, and she stomps towards my section of the bar.

“Not anymore,” she says, grabbing the glass from my hand, “it’s officially closing time.” “I was drinking that,” I say, staring at my suddenly empty hand.

“Not anymore. Find someone to pick you up. If you’re still here when I get back, I’m calling the cops,” she says before heading into the back of the bar to finish closing. I’m too busy wondering what she means by find someone to respond. It’s 3 am, who am I going to call?

I leave a dollar tip and stumble outside to figure it out. My truck is the only one in the gravel lot, the beautiful blue paint and old dents shining in the bar’s outside light. Doesn’t look like there’s anyone to find. I hop into the driver’s seat and get on the road, heading towards Greenwood.

Going through Greenwood to get to my house is safer than going through downtown, less cops waiting for a mistake. The only problem is that it’s a long drive. I always need something to hold me over or else I’d fall asleep halfway. Luckily, I keep some whiskey in the back just in case. I imagine the burn on my tongue when I reach back to grab it.

Suddenly, my car leaps into the air like one of those gymnasts, barely sticking the landing as the tires swerve. I don’t remember there being speed bumps on the street. Somewhere behind me, there’s a sound, sharp and keening. More importantly, there’s nothing else in the road in front of me. Only streetlights breaking up the darkness.

I wince as one of them passes over me, reflecting off my red hood. They should really make those things less bright. Someone could—

I slam my foot on the brake so hard my tires squeal. My hood’s red, why is it red? My next swig of whiskey tastes like dirt, but I force more and more
down until I’m warm enough to open the door. The color is heavier out there, like a fresh coat of paint. The dent is worse. I must have hit a deer or… the cry from earlier marches up the road, echoing in my memory.

A deer. That’s it. It sounded a bit odd but there’s nothing else I could have hit. Nothing. I get back in my truck and keep driving. It isn’t long before the streetlight fades in the mirror, replaced by another and another as I continue down the street. I take a swig of whiskey, but my body just gets colder.

“It was a deer,” I whisper to the lights, practicing my lies until one of us believes them.
“Order your king cake here!” The sign twirler and his sign scream an advertisement for Fleur de Lis Cakery at Wren as she pushes her way through the crowd under the porticos, heading towards the public restroom tucked into the corner of the row of restaurants, high-end boutiques, and tourist traps. She would like to smack the sign out of his hand. Two doors down from him, a purple tube boy wearing a string of beads the size of cantaloupes flaps in the wind, competing with an advertisement for “The best king cake in Louisiana!” Wren holds a paint can close to her body and ducks around both the sign twirler and the erratic blow-up, pushing open the door marked with a large “W.”

It’s not ideal to get ready for work here, because there are far too many drunk people even at two pm and the mirrors are cloudy, but Sheila and her husband have company this weekend so she couldn’t do it at their place.

Wren began to paint surfaces—the desk at school, scrap paper from the home copy machine, the walls, her own skin— when she was a toddler. She was restless as a rule, and in middle school, Wren made it her mission to learn every game in the world so that she could never be bored. Indoor or outdoor, solo or group, sport or card game, it didn’t matter; she learned them all. By the time she turned 18 and graduated high school, she had run off to Baton Rouge for art school. Her sister Laurel had supported her when their parents told her she was on her own. While in college, Wren discovered a penchant for performance art. The art of movement and nonmovement fascinated her, and her drawing professors groaned when she would show up to class, final project drawn in marker and paint across her own body. After she graduated, pursuing a graduate degree wasn’t financially feasible, so Wren did what she had always done: perform. This time she took to the streets of her hometown of New Orleans to make money as a performing street artist. Back then, she thought she might eventually go to the Netherlands to compete in the World Championship of Living Statues, but that turned out to be a pipe dream; however, she’s been painting herself up in Jackson Square for three years now instead.

The ancient Grecian woman Wren plays is fairly simple to perform—she just holds her arms and hands regally out from the rest of her body while
standing atop a pedestal, but it takes her almost two and a half hours to get ready. She carefully dips her brush into the metallic gold face and body paint time and time again, swirling it in the can so the consistency remains even throughout. She fixes the gold leafy crown to her head, making certain the leaves don’t move when she pushes against them. She takes special care around the eyes as she covers everything that is Wren and turns herself into a nonspeaking, nonmoving, nameless woman. Even with the cloudy mirrors, Wren can see how she gleams, and she knows she will be blinding in the sunlight.

Now, she’s a living statue. She walks out of the bathroom and quickly crosses onto the side street right by the Square, setting up her box pedestal and arranging the empty paint can she’s painted to look like a Grecian urn that collects her tips. Dull to shiny, just like that. She steps up onto the pedestal and strikes her pose. She looks out across the Square to see Andrew Jackson and his horse, carved in bronze, and resolves to be as they are— just a part of the scenery.

Three hours later, Wren blinks and shifts her eyes around her. The square is emptier than it’s been all day. Most tourists have either retired to their hotels for a nap before the night’s festivities or have moved to congregate along the lines of the street where the “Family Gras” parade will soon begin. Wren scoops up her full bucket of paint and her money bucket and walks across the square to where Sheila is finishing up a reading for a drunk grandmother. As the grandmother stumbles away, clutching a half-empty Hurricane to her chest, Wren taps Sheila on the shoulder to let her know she’s there and settles down in the foldable client chair across from her to count.

Sheila nods a hello as she shuffles the tarot cards back into the deck.

“How’d you do today?” she asks.

On a normal day, in a three-hour shift, Wren would make anywhere from $75 to $150, but she gets excited as the number she counts tics up and the bucket seems not to empty. When she finishes counting, she shows the wad of cash to Sheila and slaps it into her other hand.

“$250, hell yeah.” Wren has never been a numbers person, but they seem to be all she’s been thinking about in the last couple years. “It’s February and it’s Mardi Gras. Primetime, baby. And nobody overly creeped me out today, so yeah, I’ve been feeling pretty good about myself today.” Sheila laughs, likely remembering the stories Wren has told her of hecklers who get into her face and stare at her for as long as they can muster, or of the men who
make suggestive comments to her about what’s under all that paint. “What about you?”

“Same boat,” Sheila says, shaking her full tip jar. “I’m going to go home for a couple hours then come back later tonight. God, I love Mardi Gras and I love tourists.” She packs up and waves as she leaves.

Wren usually tries to avoid the French Quarter unless she’s working. It’s far too crowded and expensive, but she knows that the Big Easy Daiquiri around the corner from Jackson Square has two working slot machines, and she can’t wait any longer. There are far too many people to make the sidewalk an option, so she walks in the gutter. She pulls a black sweatshirt from high school over her clothes, tucking the wad of cash in the front pocket, but she still draws stares as she walks, paint buckets in hand. She’s anxious. She hasn’t had the money to gamble in days, and she’s been waking in cold sweats, nightmares of stolen chips and mutating lottery numbers dancing through her uneasy sleep. She needs to make enough today to be able to pay the bookie his $300 and to get a new can of paint.

The parade is starting, and Wren can feel the energy in the crowd lift and swell as hundreds of pairs of eyes turn towards the sounds of the marching band and see the first trumpets as they come into view. A few seconds later, an oversized jester head appears on the first parade float. Its eyes are diamond-shaped black holes.

Distracted by the jester, Wren almost runs into a toddler that dashes out into the street, grubby hands reaching for a strand of purple beads lying neglected in the gutter.

“Whoa.” She holds her hand out to steady the girl before she tumbles headfirst onto the cobblestone and pulls her back to the sidewalk so that she won’t be trampled by the plumed marching band and their swinging brass instruments. A hugely pregnant woman rushes past Wren, almost pushing her over a second time in her panicked rush to get to the child. She clutches the girl, who is maybe three years old and wearing a cherry-print dress, to her side.

“Maddie, don’t run away from me like that. You scared the heck out of me, chick.”

Wren feels every muscle tense up at the voice, so much like Wren’s own, which pierces every one of her muscles with recognition. Her breath catches in her throat, and she feels like she might choke. “I’m so sorry about that. Thank you,” the woman continues, turning to look up to see her daughter’s
savior. Her eyes widen when she sees Wren standing there, pinching the crunchy fabric of her gilded dress between her fingers.

“Oh my God, Wren. Hi.”

Wren knows what she must look like. The wind bustling through the Square has brought involuntary tears to her eyes that are now drawing tracks through the metallic paint on her cheeks, and, aside from the sweatshirt, the rest of her is still entirely painted gold. People are not used to seeing people like her walking around on the streets, do not want her to be capable of movement at all. The less real she pretends to be, the more money she gets. Right now, though, her sister’s stare is making her feel far too real, far more real than she wants to be. It feels like the crowd surrounding them has dissipated. Laurel straightens, holding Maddie tightly against her with one hand and bringing her other hand protectively to her belly.

“Hey.” Wren looks down at her feet, sneaking glances at her sister, trying to see what else has changed in the two years since she saw her last, when Laurel kicked her out of their shared apartment and told her she was done having a sister who only cared about wasting her money away on slot machines instead of paying the rent. Maddie wasn’t even walking yet.

Where does Laurel live now? With a boyfriend? A husband? Does she still work as a paralegal for the corporate law firm downtown? Does she still start every morning with a cup of ginseng tea? Does she think about her sister?

Laurel is just three years older than Wren, at 29, but her mahogany hair is streaked with gray, the hallmark of women in their family, and she looks tired, although that may be from the stress of having a four-year-old at a parade. However family-friendly this particular one may claim to be, it’s still New Orleans.

“Good. More than good, actually,” Wren says, too quickly. She curses in her head. *Awful. I’m homeless. I’m an addict. You were right.* “Congratulations,” she says aloud, gesturing to the unborn baby.

“Thanks.” Laurel pauses as if debating how much she should say. “He’s due March 16th.

A Pisces, like you.”

Wren feels her heart warm involuntarily. The idea of an invisible olive branch hangs between them, but she feels the weight of the cash hanging in her sweatshirt; she knows that nothing has changed. Her hand flutters to it.
“That’s awesome, I’m really happy for you. But, uh, I better get going. Got places to be. Enjoy the parade.”

“Okay.” Laurel looks at her like she wants to hug her, but Maddie tugs at her hand, trying to get her mother to look at the feathered horses now marching down the street. As Laurel looks down to respond, Wren can see the flecks of gold on Maddie’s wrist where her painted fingers held the girl. She mutters a “goodbye” to the pair under her breath and turns around, shoving her way through the crowd as quickly as she can.

“Excuse me, excuse me, excuse me.” Wren looks at people’s feet as she pushes through them, trying not to notice the whole families, a mix of locals and tourists, with kids riding on parents’ shoulders and siblings fighting over leftover beignets.

As Wren pushes open the door to Big Easy Daiquiris, the sounds of the parade fade, and she is relieved to see that both slot machines are empty. She inhales, trying to stop her breaths from being the shallow puffs that have been all she can manage for the past several minutes, and sits at the left one. The bartender doesn’t bat an eye at having a disheveled living statue sitting at her slot machine, just points to the row of daiquiri machines behind her, sloshing in their rainbow colors and surrounded by neon signs, and asks if she wants a drink. Wren shakes her head and settles into her seat, perching her toes on the edge of the metal bar below the chair.

She feeds dollars into the machine, peeling them one at a time from her pocket. With each one, she relaxes a little more, sinking into the red pleather seat. Wren can feel the knot in her chest begin to loosen with the first pull, but each pull of the machine that follows turns the jester faces into Laurel’s and the cherries into the print on Maddie’s dress as they spin past. The “New Orleans” carved in a silver-coated plastic on the machine’s edge screws and rotates.

If Wren looks at the city name—New Orleans—and squints her eyes ever so slightly, it looks a bit like a twisted, mangled version of the word “normal.” Or maybe only she sees that, and it’s only because she lives there. But that’s what the city is to her. Twisted, mangled, yet normal. And it’s not just the voodoo. She’s seen things in this city, her city, that in any other place would consume a person’s thoughts for days on end. Years, even. But in New Orleans, those things happen ten times on a single night on Bourbon. Or off Bourbon, if hand grenades just sound like a terrible idea.
A pink fluffy-collared sexual submissive being walked around by a man in a dark suit.

An elderly man wearing a tail and a top hat. A gaggle of women in Goodwill wedding dresses. A gator in a Saints jersey. A frat boy wearing diamond-crusted nipple tassels. A ghost down at the corner of her favorite Creole restaurant. A man fighting a pit bull because the dog looked at him weird.

Wren has seen them all, but she never expected to see Laurel.

She closes her eyes, trying not to see her anymore. She remembers the last time she saw her sister, face pinched and blotchy red as she slammed the door on Wren. It was such a small thing. That stupid king cake.

Wren had come home from Harrah's without a penny left to her name and had been in a vile mood, but Laurel's face was bright as she opened the door, a tiny Maddie balanced on her hip.

“Did you get it?” she had asked excitedly.

“Get what?” Wren had snapped. She could smell the way her clothes reeked of cigarette smoke, and her head was beginning to pound as the free drinks from the casino wore off. She was also trying to calculate how much she would have to earn to be able to put down enough money at the poker table to pay her credit card bill that was due in four days. It was nearing the end of Mardi Gras, so she was getting enough work, but still. Mostly, she remembered, she had just wanted to shower.

“The king cake, dummy. You found the little baby last year, so you have to get the cake this year.”

“Oh, shit. No, I didn’t.” Wren had said, rubbing her eyes. Stupid plastic baby. “You said you would get it. This was supposed to be Maddie’s first time. We were supposed to do it together as a family.” Her voice was still low, but it had turned cold. “Sorry, I just don’t have the money right now.”

“You don’t have the money? Really? That’s funny, because I know you just came home from the casino. You obviously had money before you went.”

“I just don’t have it, okay? Lay off, it’s not that big of a deal.” Wren had put her fingers to her temple, massaging where it throbbed with every breath she took.

“You’re right, Wren. It’s not that big of a deal. It’s really not. But you know what is a big deal? The fact that I’ve been paying your half of the rent for the last two months. Not to mention groceries, electricity, your insurance, and your student loan payments.” She had set Maddie down in her playpen then
so that she could use her fingers to count out the number of ways Wren had managed to disappoint her.

“I told you I would pay you back.”

Exasperation was apparent in the curve of Laurel’s mouth. “Right, just like you told your bookie that. Just like you told all your friends that before they stopped being your friends. Just like you told Mom and Dad that before they cut you off. You have a problem, Wren.”

Wren had hugged her arms to her chest and her eyes blurred with tears. “It’s just for fun; it’s nothing.”

“Maybe you playing poker on the weekends and betting on football games with your high school friends was just fun. Maybe going to casinos when you turned 21 was nothing. But now? You’re 24-years-old.” Laurel shook her head. “I have bailed you out so many times, and you can’t even pick up a cake?”

Wren had nothing to say to that, so she went into the room they shared and packed a duffel bag and her paints. She had bent over the playpen to kiss Maddie on the forehead, and Laurel had held the door for her as she walked out.

It was only on the night Laurel kicked her out that Wren had realized people in New Orleans tend to walk away from things they don’t think are any of their business, even things that should probably be their business. People’s eyes skim over dark alleyways and pretend that loud conversations are hushed and indistinguishable. Words become noise and people become statues, and that’s what happened to Wren.

In the daiquiri shop, she stops pulling the lever on the slot machine when she’s down to $50. “Fuck.”

Her hand hovers over the lever as the mismatching symbols stare back at her—a cherry, a “7,” and a “BAR.” Maybe the next pull will bring up the matching “7”s she craves more than anything. She begins to push it down. Maybe not more than anything. She leans her head against the left side of the machine, staring down to the row of symbols and to her hand resting on the cold metal pull. She groans and clenches her hand around the pull, then pushes off from the machine and cashes out with the bored bartender. She tucks her money into her paint bucket, wondering if she can dodge the bookie for another week.

She’s not sure where to go, and she feels listless. She finds herself walking back towards Jackson Square. Sheila doesn’t know Wren is homeless, so after she finishes working, Wren always tells Sheila she’s going to head
home, but tonight she has no energy for pretenses. She hasn’t even gone back to the restroom to wash the paint off her body.

“You look like you’ve been through it, girl,” Sheila says as Wren walks up to her table.

Wren musters up a tiny laugh that makes hardly any sound and stretches her arm out to place a $10 bill in Sheila’s jar. “Will you read my cards?”

“I thought you didn’t believe in this stuff,” Sheila responds, looking curiously at her friend.

Wren shrugs. “I don’t, really. But you deserve it.”

“I stare at you while you work every day, right there across the way. If anything, I should be paying you. I appreciate it, though.”

Wren nods and drums her fingers against the table restlessly. Then she reaches into her paint bucket again and pulls out a $20 and places that in Sheila’s jar on top of the $10.

“What are you doing, Wren?”

“I don’t know.” Wren paces a small line back and forth in front of Sheila’s table and grabs the rest of the money from her bucket. “I just feel like I’m stuck in place, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

Sheila chuckles, shoulder-length earrings clinking together like miniature wind chimes. “That’s because sticking in one place is what you do for a living.”

Wren stops pacing and roots her feet into the ground, tries to feel the stones under her feet rather than the money in her fist.

“I want to go home,” she tells Sheila, who looks puzzled.

“Then go home. Maybe clean some of that paint off you.”

To where? The old apartment? To Sheila’s house? To her childhood home in the suburbs? Laurel’s place, wherever that is, with Maddie and the soon-to-be baby boy?

She turns away from Sheila. “Yeah. Yeah, I think I will.”

She leaves the square and walks down the road a bit until she reaches the store where she saw the sign twirler earlier today, although he’s retired by now. The crowds have thinned out a bit since the parade ended, but the night crowds are beginning to crawl out and onto the street.

The cooling night air has become raucous and loud. Wren opens the door to the Fleur De Lis Cakery, deeply inhaling the scent of flour and sweet spices, and places her final $20 bill down on the bakery counter.
“One king cake for delivery, please.” The baker behind the counter looks exhausted—he doesn’t blink an eye at her appearance, just hands her an order card and tells her what she needs to fill out and where she needs to sign. Wren tenderly grips the pen between her fingers and holds her arm out, careful not to rub her metallic arm too hard on the glass casing.

She fills out the “From” portion, jotting down “Your sister.”

In the “To” portion, she writes “Laurel, Maddie, and Baby Boy.”

There’s an area for a message to be delivered alongside the cake, and she puts the pen up to her mouth, sucking air through her teeth while she thinks. There is so much to say, but the card only gives her four lines. After a few moments, Wren just writes, “I owe you,” and scribbles a signature at the bottom. Satisfied, she hands the card back to the baker. He barely looks at it before flipping it back to her.

“The address,” he says laconically. Wren furrows her brow and stops to read the field.

Home address. She stops and sets the pen down. She has no idea where to send it.
“In Life, Death” by Kaylie McCarthy. Photograph.
In the field of metaphysics, speaking in terms of what can exist within a world, the characteristics of actual things may belong to either one of two groups or categories of properties: *transcendence* and *immanence*. “Immanence” is not the same thing as “imminence,” or inevitability. Rather, immanence (spelled with an “a”) refers to what is intrinsic or internal to the physical essence of objects. This might include the chemical properties of a certain material, or perhaps the relationship of an object’s interiority to its surrounding external environment (convex, concave, insulated, etc.).

Within the confines of formal philosophical thinking, this means that the immanent characteristics of objects are subjected to metaphysical “paradigm shifts” as these are analogously defined in linguistics. Linguists use paradigm shifts in order to study all of the differences that are found within the larger system of signifiers which makes up an entire language, and they can subsequently use these paradigmatic models to compare and contrast various languages with one another. Comparing the words “cat” and “cot” to one another, for instance, can empirically tell a linguist something about the difference between the “a” sound and the “o” sound in English. The transformation that occurs from the word “cat” to the word “cot” is therefore a *shift* in a certain paradigm of English spelling, namely, in its orthographic usage of alphabetic vowels. But this is also a shift in the *meaning* of the words themselves, and not only a shift in phonemes.

Counting the number of these types of shifts that can occur within a single paradigm shift of language is part of observing the various linguistic characteristics that are *immanent* to that specific difference between signifiers. The human brain is specially geared towards picking up on these differences by consistently noticing them whenever they are repeated often enough. The distinction between the letter “F” and the letter “E” is in just one tiny stroke of a pen, yet this miniscule difference in appearance somehow gives them both a completely different character.

Thus, when we classify letters and the meanings of words into the unchanging categories of their signifying properties, it is analogous to what
metaphysicians would call *transcendence*, or to the transcendent characteristics of an object. The difference between the letters “F” and “E” can always be detected by the reader of a given text, whether the printed typeface is Times New Roman or Comic Sans. There is always a *transcendent* level of difference between the two of these very similar looking but completely different letters that both contain very unique sets of phonetic properties on their own.

The theory of sexual difference in Lacanian psychoanalysis is not at all a far cry from this transcendent difference between the letters “F” and “E.” This specific difference between their two appearances is absolute, which functions exactly like the difference between a “1” and a “0” in computer programming. Yet, Lacanian psychoanalysis is the primary source of post-structuralist feminist theories of gender and sexuality that arose in the late 20th century, beginning in the 1970’s when Jacques Lacan was still delivering his yearly seminar in postwar Paris. Doesn’t the apparent genesis of postwar feminism via the theory of “sexual difference” seem fundamentally cissexist if the sexual difference between “man” and “woman” is theoretically defined as metaphysically absolute, like the difference between “F” and “E”?

It is more accurate to say that Jacques Lacan gave two formulaic variations on both of these transcendent categories of sex, “man” and “woman,” creating a sum total of four logical formulas. You could easily criticize Lacan for his overreliance on classical literature (e.g. Plato’s *Symposium*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *The Oedipus Cycle* of Sophocles), as well as for his preoccupation with Sigmund Freud’s canonical texts, in order to provide us with this schema of sexual difference which he separated into two sides.

From where did contemporary gender nonbjaminarism as we currently know it originate, then? How do we critique this two-sidedness of sexuation in order to produce a nonbjaminaristic conception of gender? In this writer’s opinion, the modern philosophical theory of gender nonbjaminarism mainly originated from Jacques Lacan’s designation of the algebraic value of the term “woman” with a lower-case italicized letter $a$. The corresponding value of the term “man” was given the numerical value “1.” Thus, the algebraic representation of femininity within psychoanalytic circles, which was this letter $a$, later became accepted as a kind of third possibility that could be admitted to the set of possible values for a boolean input. Femininity in the context of sexual difference indicates a value somewhere between “0” and “1” that was
demonstrated at one session during Lacan’s seminar to be mathematically equivalent to the inverse value of the golden ratio, $\varphi$ (Lacan, 1969).

$$\varphi = \frac{1+\sqrt{5}}{2} = (a + 1) \quad a = \frac{2}{1+\sqrt{5}} = (\varphi - 1)$$

However, a Boolean is necessarily always a value of either “true” or “false” which can also be denoted as “1” and “0” respectively, and never denoted as a random algebraic letter. The numbers “1” and “0” together also form the smallest natural number of digits (i.e. two digits) that is needed in order to express numerical values greater than either “1” or “0” by themselves. In binary, the value of “2” is written as “10.” So, this introduction of the letter $a$ into the context of Boolean values and formal logic was actually a shift enacted within psychoanalytic theory in order to alter the logocentric edifice of philosophy in terms of shifting the gender binary towards other possibilities that tried to fragment the human body more explicitly by means of a ternary system.

This shift within psychoanalysis subsequently functioned to re-center the focus of human understandings of logic onto the systematic variability of our desires within the free play of linguistic constructs, and this further served as an exploration of how it is that the recognition and mimicry of other existent desires taken from the surrounding world is what originally creates the *immanent* characteristics of human subjects by fragmenting their bodies into different pieces.

That these bodily characteristics are “immanent” implies that they can be morphologically shifted somehow, of course. But the paradigmatic shifting of characteristics which attests to those same characteristics’ immanence also changes what the characteristics will signify in relation to the transcendent system of the gender binary, which the majority of people passively attribute to their own highly simplified explanations such as “nature,” “biology,” or “God’s creation.” Such lazy explanations are not the actual *sources* of the transcendent structures of signification which separate human bodies into terms such as “man” and “woman” that our physical bodies thereby unwittingly incarnate in accordance with how they are localized within linguistic meanings. Rather, bodily transcendence is itself a *scene* of immanent activity, and the expressions of immanence that are embedded within the
assembled appearances of human bodies thereby make up a corresponding \textit{stagecraft} of empirical phenomena. Femininity is simply the invisible flux that occurs between all of the manifestations of variability that can be found within humans’ physical characteristics.

What this means in terms of human biology is that the Lacanian letter $a$ is a variable that holds the place of any and every allelic variation that can possibly be identified in the gene expression (or genome) of our species: eye color, skin color, height, shape, pre-existing medical conditions or anomalies, etc, etc.

With all that being said, there are but two ways to be logically nonbinary:

1) By adding a third term (of uncertain status) to an existent dualism of transcendent categories, \textit{or}

2) By combining both terms of an existent dualism into a new category of higher transcendence.

The recognition of these two very precise logical mechanisms perhaps ought to become the primary focus of all further inquiry into studies of gender dysphoria. Through careful observation of these mechanisms of nonbinarism in relation to gender identities, deviations from the cissexist framework can be better identified and properly delineated for what they are, even if this ultimately means mounting a total transition away from much of the predominant gender binarism of our cissexist social edifices.

What also needs to become understood very radically well with regards to the political movements within which we seek to liberate ourselves from heteropatriarchal forms of hegemony and other similar kinds of subjective oppression is that the transcendence of binary systems (like “man” and “woman,” or “1” and “0”) can never be relocated anywhere “outside of” or “beyond” real existence (and thereby become altogether excluded from existing), and in terms of human sexual difference, this is mostly due to the structured multiplicity of the numerical operations involved in zygote formation. These qualities are intrinsic to the organic functions of biological reproduction in relation to the identification of our own bodies as having resulted or issued from the fact of parentage. But this also still doesn’t mean that “male” and “female” have to matter very much, even if they might never
cease to provide the barest possible framework for understanding human phylogenesis.

Every species, whether it reproduces sexually, asexually, or in both ways (such as some species of fungi and sponges) has its own genome filled with unique manifestations of the little $a$ from Lacanian psychoanalysis; this is quite multifaceted, and all of these allelic facets are immanently hidden within the gene replicating mechanisms that all species’ individual members must somehow appropriate for their own various ends. On the other hand, it is not so much the act of “reproducing” as the accomplishment of having reproduced that is dependent on an intrinsic cellular annumeration of elements and events that marks the finitude of biological reproduction as belonging within a barren place that is sequestered from organic existence, and this finitude creates a system of indirect semantic control from which no organism can possibly escape. That is, not unless the organism somehow finds total isolation from the transcendent structures that shape its ecological community and that facilitate the applications of its cellular meiosis (or of its mitotic self-extension). In the case of humans, the larger part of our ecological communities coincides with numerically far simpler structures of transcendence (i.e. language) which overdetermine the count of our immanent bodily characteristics in advance of them being produced, whether by gene expression or by our ontogenetic processes of senescence. The other part of human ecological communities that is more objectively “unconscious” or occulted by our history is found in the stages of zygote formation after a spermatozoon has entered an oocyte within a human fallopian tube. For the very vast majority of human existence, we had no idea specifically how this process happened or why. So, the details of these cellular mechanisms never entered the conscious life of humankind except within the speculative domain of mythology, which required that we somehow fully try to imagine the microscopic intermediate processes between fertilization and the implantation of the postzygototic cell mass into the lining of the endometrium.

Thus, the dialectic of “man” and “woman” throughout the remainder of our species’ history will unfold in terms of what I propose to call “immanent pieces of the subject.” (A “subject” in this sense of the word typically means an individual person, or a personal perspective, i.e. we are all assumed to be “subjective.”) This idea is derived chiefly from the philosophy of Alain Badiou, a student of Jacques Lacan who ended up writing an ontological
account of many appropriations of formal logic similar to the ones that had already revolutionized French psychoanalysis (Badiou, 1982). “Immanent pieces of the subject” here means that there are conceptual pieces of gender embedded in all of the different parts of our bodies and in every variant scission of our tissues, but none of these immanent pieces metaphysically belong to the same transcendent categories that determine our sex or gender at birth. “Sex” itself is precisely the second way of being logically nonbinary (i.e. by combining both terms of an existent dualism into a new category of higher transcendence) that no individual member of any species could ever fully possess within itself. This is the only way to make sense of sex biologically, conceptually, philosophically, and ecopolitically.

References


Motivation From Silence

Abril Anhel Espino Gil

The first time that I heard about Mexico was from my mom. I was about six or seven years old when she mentioned it.

She was born and raised in Guanajuato, Mexico in the 1980-1990s. Her parents were strict and old fashioned until her mom had hypothyroidism. The disease caused disarray in her household but her grandmother, Mama Moni, took care of her and her siblings. Mama Moni was strict and religious and rarely liked taking care of kids, but she was my mother’s favorite grandparent. When she reached the 8th grade she decided to drop out, and around 17 years old, she met my father and had me. They got married and she moved out. Her parents did not have much to say, but Mama Moni disapproved. She knew it was a different story when the doors were closed. She wanted to continue being her parents’ child but was pushed away by them and was seen as a wife.

My father travelled to the United States for work for extended periods of times, and my mother’s feelings for him were too strong so she decided to move too. Mama Moni hoped she would change her mind and stay, but she did not. Soon after my second birthday, my mom and I crossed to the United States.

When she started talking about Mexico she reminisced. She spoke about the filtered sweet air when she was outside her grandmother’s garden, and how her mom slaughtered, skinned, and cooked while her dad was a janitor at her middle school. She recounted the times when her village was a community that bled and cherished Mexican culture. Events like the 13th of December when they celebrated La Virgen De Guadalupe or on every September 16th when they celebrated Mexico’s independence felt like an invisible string that tied everyone together. She mentioned everything, the dirt roads, the hot beaming weather, the people that made a community, and the homemade food. It was like an everlasting dream being described to me.

At that age, Mexico was my Disneyland, a place that was and still is filled with adventure and decorated things that remind people of their childhood movies. It was the place that seemed like it had everything, and I couldn’t wait to go. My mother’s stories overruled all the corruption and cartel gangs. Her connection to Mexico added character to my image of it.
At that age, it also seemed easy to ask the simplest question. “Why don’t we go?” I asked.

She answered in the least hurtful way.

“We just aren’t allowed to right now, but we’ll go one day,” she replied.

I didn’t understand the complexity of the situation at the time, but what I could see was how much my mom missed it. I noticed how much she missed her parents and Mama Moni, and I thought I could fix it, so I made a plan.

A plan that consisted of deep praying and threatening.

My parents have always been religious, and they agreed to raise me with the knowledge of their beliefs as well. We would go to church every week and at the early age of five, I was reciting prayers.

I was taught how to say these prayers, but I did not know what they truly meant. I was also told that it was best to pray and never lose faith, but the truth was that I did not know what faith was at the time. It was difficult for me to completely understand what faith was when I was unsure of what or who or what it was. I was simply told that my God would eventually send a message.

A child with knowledge can always go one of many ways. They either act on what they know, remember it, or forget it.

In my ill-made plan, I decided to act on the knowledge that I gathered. I concluded that my God was able to send messages and that all I would have to do was pray.

That same night that my mom introduced me to Mexico, I started my plan.

All the lights in the house were off, yet the moon could light through my opaque curtains, and I did not feel alone. I had an item hung on top of my television, and to me, this was not just an item but something more. I was taught to see it as a symbol. A symbol that I was taught would be able to solve every existing problem there was.

I got on my bed and sat in crisscross style. I began to stare at the symbol and put my hands together. What looked like praying was the opposite.

I didn't pray. I did what a child thought was praying. I tried to make a deal with my God. “If you aren't able to bring my mom to Mexico, I’m going to run away from my family in a week.” I threatened.

I had threatened the being that I was taught to respect, except as a child, that is not how I saw it.
My innocence and my ignorance saved my actions, yet I continued to do this for about two weeks. Every night I recited my “prayer” full-heartedly, holding on to the chance that I could make my mother happy.

Eventually, two months passed, and I forgot about my mission. In my young mind it seemed easier to sleep than to continue until the night when I did not. I remembered one night after those two months, it was like any other night, I was on the way to my mental slumber while I was laying down. It hit me, I had suddenly remembered that nothing in my life or my mother’s life had changed. I felt guilty because I felt as if I failed. How could I forget such a grand scheme?

My guilt then turned into anger, although I was just a child, I was able to understand why I was angry at the time. I felt betrayed because I saw how deeply they thought of our God, surely, he had given them something that they wanted; ‘why couldn’t I have that too,’ I thought.

That night I prayed differently. It was with less energy, and I did not include a threat.

Suddenly the moon was not as bright as it once was.

After I finished praying, my view of the world started shifting. I began to become afraid because I did not know how to solve this dilemma. The irony is that I was solving the dilemma, I just did not know it. I realized that my efforts did not do much while I was a kid, I had to wait until I grew up. My prayers needed to be backed up by my choices with actions and as a child I could only talk, not act.

In a way I was starting to accept that even as a kid I was contributing to my plan, all I had to do was exist at the time. What I took from it was that I also had to work for it. This lack of message or help from my God was what gave me motivation. Motivation to do it myself instead of relying on something or someone else. I knew I had to wait, but that when the time came my wish could come true. I was sure my God was watching over me, but I was the one with the power to make it happen.
He Wrote to Me from Taipei (An Excerpt)

Sean Edgley

He loved how everyone smoking cigarettes wasn’t aware they were smoking cigarettes. He loved the claw machine arcades, the men who could use the weakest of metal cranes to extract heavy, oblong objects. He loved how you almost never saw cops or guns. He loved Carrefour supermarket, their soon-to-perish French butter and cheese at half price, the dragon fruit, the wines. He loved the ubiquitous espresso machines in every convenience store, how you could have a hot or iced latte in your hand in 30 seconds. He even loved the little black mosquitos in Hualien that gave you bites that itched for a week. He loved that there were mountains called Taroko, Ali, Jade. He loved the pocket-sized neighborhood temples and the elderly who would wake up early to sing each other love ballads on old karaoke machines. He loved having health insurance and that the doctors spoke excellent English. He loved the calm before the storm and the purity of the storm. He loved the bullet train, how it could take you from the top of the island to the tropics in an hour and a half. He loved how taking out your own trash with your neighbors made you reconsider everything and how the garbage trucks announced themselves by playing Beethoven’s *Für Elise*. He loved being out on Taiwan’s remote islands, their old prisons strewn with wildflowers, their horses with blue eyes, the shy goats you could never get close enough to pet. There, you could see the stars by finding a stretch of road away from the streetlamps, lay out on the pavement, and gaze up at the spinning cosmos. He loved the slender ladies selling perfume and makeup in the department stores, how they seemed to be a different species from the near future. He loved how the constant humidity taught him that an embrace could last for years. He loved the elderly people risking it all to drive their golf carts through the intersection as the yellow lights switched to red. He loved how, because the rainclouds took away the sun for weeks at a time, he had to find ways to reinvent the sun. He loved getting tea at any time—oolong, jasmine, passionfruit—how bright and clean all the shops looked, perhaps to catch the eyes of a passing motorist. He loved how even though God had forgotten the old buildings, every rooftop had an angel. He loved how it happened once, and therefore forever. How it happened once, and therefore forever.
Profile on Chef Edward Lee

Ella Pooley

If someone were to ask me a few months ago what food writing is, I would’ve said something along the lines of, “Writings about food, I don’t know.” After analyzing many different styles of food writing for my literature class, I learned that food writing is way deeper than recipes in a cookbook. One can learn a lot about who the author is just by reading their writing. Food writing evokes emotions and is a way for people to express themselves. Some readings that showed me how personal it can be were from Chef Edward Lee’s book *Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef’s Journey to Discover America’s New Melting-Pot Cuisine.* On October 19, 2023, my classmates and I had the pleasure of conversing with him over Zoom. He revealed, “For me, food writing is very personal” (Lee, 00:00:36-00:00:41).

Chef Edward Lee was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, to Korean parents. Over his years as a professional chef, he has written two captivating books (*Buttermilk Graffiti* and *Smoke & Pickles*), won the 2019 James Beard Award for his book *Buttermilk Graffiti,* appeared on many different cooking channels, and is the Chef/owner of two restaurants. He grew up in the Canarsie neighborhood near Brighton Beach, a very immigrant-heavy area. Lee stated in his book *Buttermilk Graffiti,* “My neighbors were Indians and Jamaicans and Italians and Jews” (47). Around the age of ten, Lee and his parents moved to Manhattan. His love for food was always present. Edward Lee said, “I just love food…I just shoved everything in my mouth” (00:18:43- 00:18:45). Although the passion was always there, it was enhanced by his grandmother. Lee explained that his earliest food-related memories included his grandmother in the kitchen. His grandmother, mother, and sister were a big part of his culinary journey. During the Zoom, Lee stated, “They raised me, and they raised me through food…” (00:30:14- 00:30:17).

Since food was a big part of Edward Lee’s childhood, he knew from an early age he wanted to be a chef, but when he was in college, he expressed his desire to his parents. He explained it as a calling, saying, “I didn’t choose it. It chose me, you know” (Lee, 00:18:12- 00:18:14). However, I learned that Lee’s parents, especially his father, wanted him to be something along
the lines of a doctor or businessman. In the chapter “Death and Aquavit” of his book *Buttermilk Graffiti*, Lee says, “[My father] came from an old Korea where chefs were cooks and cooks were servants. For immigrant parents, the notion of being a cook was a huge step in the wrong direction” (179). This created somewhat of a divide between him and his dad; Lee explained, “We just rarely spoke much after that day” (179). After taking a year off to travel and explore different cuisines, Edward Lee returned to finish his last semester: “I was finishing my last semester, but more for my parents than for me” (179). Eventually, he graduated from New York University with a degree in literature. Fresh out of college, he pursued his dream of being a chef. With his mother’s help and his hard work, he opened his restaurant, Clay. This led to long nights in the kitchen.

In 2001, Lee was visiting Louisville for the Kentucky Derby. During his trip, he discovered his love for southern soul food. Not long after, he moved to the city and started working at a restaurant called 610 Magnolia. I learned that then, in 2003, he bought the restaurant and has been running it since. He uses his Korean heritage and love for southern soul food to his advantage as he mixes the flavors to create dishes. These dishes are bright in color and packed with flavor. In the following years, he accomplished many other things, such as appearing on various cooking channels, creating a culinary program, and publishing his first book, *Smoke & Pickles*. Throughout his book *Smoke & Pickles*, he “... chronicles the story of how he was raised in Brooklyn in a family of Korean immigrants and eventually moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where he opened the acclaimed restaurant 610 Magnolia” (“Books & TV”). Chef Lee dives deep into how Korean food and southern culture are connected through recipes and stories.

Fast forward a few years, and it is now 2015. This was the year The LEE Initiative was founded. “The LEE Initiative Is an Acronym for Let’s Empower Employment” (“The Lee Initiative”), Lee explains on his website. The whole reason Lee started the program was to create more diversity, training, and equality in the culinary world. Within the LEE Initiative, Chef has created two programs: The Women Chefs Initiative and The Smoke & Soul Initiative. The Women Chef’s Initiative is a leadership program for women chefs that lasts 40 weeks. On Lee’s website, the Smoke & Soul Initiative is described as “a 40-week immersive restaurant mentorship program for young adults” (“The Lee Initiative”). With the LEE Initiative, Chef plans to make the culinary world a more enjoyable place for all.
In 2018, Chef Edward Lee published the 2019 James Beard Award-winning book *Buttermilk Graffiti*. In this book, Lee shares his stories from his travels all over America as he explores different cuisines that make up the American cuisines we know. Throughout this book, he dives deep into the people behind the scenes: the cooks. During the class's Zoom with him, a student asked, “Why do you think *Buttermilk Graffiti* resonated so well with people and went on to receive the 2019 James Beard Award and to be nominated for other awards?” (00:11:38-00:12:00). Chef Edward Lee’s response to this question shocked me. Lee responded with, “I don’t know” (00:12:02-00:12:04). Lee did not expect all the positive feedback the book got; he “didn’t think that this book was going to be anything more than just like a little personal story that I had” (00:12:06-00:12:14). As he thought about it more, he narrowed down the reason to it likely being because the people he wrote about in the book we know and can relate to them in some way. The people he wrote about were not famous or wealthy cooks; they were everyday people trying to make a living. Chef wrote this book to shine a light on these people in a way they deserved.

Food has always been a big part of Chef Edward Lee’s life, and from a very early age, he knew he wanted to be a chef. In the Zoom, Chef mentions how “Food has allowed me to travel the world, you know, places that I never thought I would ever visit” (Lee, 00:25:52-00:25:57).

He now owns two restaurants, 610 Magnolia and Succotash Prime. Lee encourages others not to “be afraid to speak it all…” (00:06:10-00:06:14) as he believes, “Sometimes the best writing happens when you are vulnerable” (00:04:28-00:04:32). Edward Lee continues to change the culinary and food writing world for the better.
Work Cited


Lee, Edward. Personal interview. 19 October 2023.


Climate Change in California

Thi Nguyen

Jacaranda trees pour
their purple petals down
streets, draping blankets

across drainage grates,
filling pools with rainwater
perfect for splashing. Perched above

a mourning dove escapes
being swept, balanced on top
the buzzing electrical

wire, eyeing the spinning,
drowned and dead June
Bugs below. Against my window,

balding branches clap
keeping time to the wind's whipped
screams. Up on higher ground,

flip flops leave no trace, no
prints flung on yellow grass
so dry, it whines for just a flicker

of a flame. Dogs sniff ashy
smoke burning the red horizon
where the sun throbs. Nature

beckons us, but we cover our
ears, stubbornly ignoring her,
consumed instead
by light pixels and
computer-generated
screens with dings

ringing. Our trash mounts
like snow, one red leaf
clinging

to candy wrappers: bright
designs that catch my eye
leaving me plateaued.
The Fall of My Sister

Thi Nguyen

As a signal to Americans in Saigon that the evacuation had begun, Armed Forces Radio started to play “White Christmas” on repeat.
—The National Museum of Diplomacy

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT
where her door opens only to be slammed shut, over and over

BEGIN FLASHBACK: EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT
where bullets hit, knock just like the ones my parents used to know

END FLASHBACK

EXT. ASPHALT - NIGHT
where blue and red light mix with black crushed stones

EXT. DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS
where children listen to heavy boots pounding across the old front porch

INT. BEDROOM - SAME TIME
where her body presses against the white Christmas wooden door too thin, it jumps with each approaching step

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS / INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS-INTERCUT
the thin bolt of the lock splinters the cheap frame
her bedroom light spills across a polished hardwood floor her pupils rattle like bells in the snow.

HER
I’m fine. May your days be merry and bright.
ME
(a white lie)
I’ll send you a Christmas card.

HER
Where am I going?

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE: INT. DOCTOR’S OFFICE - LATE NIGHT
white coats carrying her across

INT. THRESHOLD/HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS
bleached blank walls starched stretched bedsheets

There she rises to look out the window at the treetops glistening
There she awakens pure as snow

END DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT. INTERIOR - HINDSIGHT
two opposing sides of a shut door
A Calavera of an Assistant

Thi Nguyen

TO: All School Personnel
RE: The Passing of our Office Assistant

PS-540 memorializes the now vacant office, adjacent to the Girls’ Restroom, while we mourn the multiple “Take Attendance” reminders and Google calendar invitations of the late Ms. Thi Nguyen, pronouns she/her/hers.

Her 100% attendance record reflected her deep commitment to our school, always available to cover classes of those with an emergency Monday or Friday allergy. Impossible to replace, none can substitute for our best substitute teacher, substitute coordinator, and substitute crosswalk guard.

A true presence, she always made a perky entrance with our mail and beloved coffee, punctually at 7:57am each morning on a tray she balanced perfectly. Organized and thoughtful, never once did she get anyone’s coffee order wrong, as all Admin take their coffee black, no lattes, no cappuccinos.

Forever making copies and stapling teaching pedagogy handouts, Ms. Nguyen passed away on a dreary Wednesday at 2:13pm, doing what she loved most, spending hours in the mailroom, snuggled between Amazon boxes and the luscious heat of freshly printed paper. We would have never known of the toxic fumes from the recalled ink, if Ms. Nguyen had not valiantly sacrificed herself for our one team, one family.
She is survived by her direct supervisor, 
the Director of Secondary School, 
Deputy Vice Principal, and Math 
Department Advisor of PS-540, 
Dr. Ryan Andrews III, he/him/his - 
as he tries not to drown from grief 
in a sea of emails, rendering him helpless, 
his executive functioning skills, now, alas, atrophied 
after Ms. Nguyen's three years on the job.

In her beloved memory of her efficiency and low 
cost, we plan to dedicate a vending machine 
full of blueberry fig bars and granola bars 
as she was such an advocate for the prevention 
of childhood obesity. All sales collected will contribute 
toward timely and relevant R&D, as we plan to devote 
our best efforts in remembrance of her fine work 
to automate Ms. Nguyen’s valuable position.

Best wishes, warm regards, 
our hearts and prayers 
go out to Ms. Nguyen’s 
surviving dog, Lola, 
sincerely, 
HR, they/them/theirs.
“Observant” by Traywick A. Traywick. Graphite, charcoal, pencil.
Dreaming in the Time of Tuberculosis

Thi Nguyen

When I fell into a volcano,
my only way out was to squeeze
through her sticky, narrow throat. I kept slipping back
down, so I serrated my fingernails against my jeans
until their edges looked like the teeth of a
rabid rodent. Yet as I jammed
my hands into her fleshy walls,
I lost my footing, my legs
folding into my chest,
till I dove deep into
her breathing
abyss –

only to be stopped
when the muscles
of her esophagus
contracted, holding
me still, hard, like a rock
lodged midway through a glass tube.
There, my host started shaking, a heavy
beating ringing at the base, boiling
the lava to shoot up from beneath
me, pushing me up, up, up
and out. And free. I
became nothing but
blood, spewing forth
from the volcano’s
gaping hot mouth.
Cupped hands
caught my fall,
and I recognized the creases
that ran across those palms.
Looking down at my own hands,
to confirm, I found instead, shards
of glass for fingers, feet, thighs and knees,
even body. I couldn’t stop staring at
myself. How could some-
thing so beautiful
be so deadly?
A Flood in Venice, Italy

Thi Nguyen

The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.
—Genesis 6:6

High tourist season in Venice, runs a strong current:

A river of feet,
mobile phones like nets
catching best pics of the day

Plastic drink bottles,
paper wrappers, soiled napkins —
littered waste and trash

Above me the man
pollutes the air with his breath —
smell of sour coffee

My mother keeps asking, “When will I be a grandparent?”

My foot gets caught in
stale pasta leftovers
and empty ice cream cups

My friends remind me — “Don’t you want to be a mother just like us?”

Old deodorant
mixed with sticky sweat compresses
my lungs tight, can’t breathe

My heartbeat reproaches me, “Why let this opportunity slip past?”
Stuck in the deluge,
hands wave desperately, calling
for an SOS,

but a scrawny arm
in a sea of bodies
is as tiny as

the eight billion
parasites crawling upon
God’s forsaken earth.
Lighthouse

Mostofa Sarwar

You drifted away from mortal poison
Every day’s struggles, unfair rat race
You took refuge here in this lighthouse

Ravenous solitude, symphony of waves,
Smell of salt, uncaged birds
Would be your harmless company,
You thought you are safe

You were sick of possession, worries, injustice
You wanted to be untied from shackles of norm

You thought: Demon would dwell in human jungles
But he showed up in this sanctuary of nothingness

Windows broken, lights extinguished,
Horizon over the shoreline patched by pelicans’ coffins

Seagulls, butterflies, beavers – all ran away
Your mutilated carcass hanging from rafter
“Down the Bayou” by Javalyn LeBlanc. Photograph.
Pilot Light

Ashley Caspermeyer

in my mouth
accelerant
flushed cheeks
the color red
breeds in me
purge it—
an absent beat
life I’ve let die
a glowing flame
flickers still
as Mama made me
fuel to the fire
I thicken—
to feed the earth
because I was made
a viable host
open like a furnace
TANGLED UP.

my necklaces were so tangled
i put them away
hoping someday
i would grow the patience
to separate them.

for a while i was bare necked
i couldn’t be bothered
with my own negligence

Madison Bonaventure
companion
the more i say the word
it melts in my mouth
and flakes on my fingertips

like something fancy and sweet to eat
from a french patisserie

i would wake up early and wait in line for it.

Madison Bonaventure
Is a movie that makes you feel unbearably sad still a good movie? Sometimes it takes being broken down to grow as a person, and I think there is no greater example of a movie to break your heart than *Grave of the Fireflies*. It is perhaps one of the saddest films of all time. A quick google search will show it on just about any list of “top sad movies,” right alongside *Marley & Me* and *Titanic*. Unlike those traditional films though, *Grave of the Fireflies* is a Studio Ghibli anime film, directed by Isao Takahata and based off Nosaka Akiyuki’s semi-autobiographical short story of the same name. It tells the story of two children, fourteen-year-old Seita and his four-year-old sister Setsuko, who become orphaned during WWII after the firebombing of Kobe in 1945. While I wouldn’t recommend this movie if you can’t handle tearjerkers, you would be doing yourself a disservice not to experience it otherwise. Its tragic story, realistic style, and ultimate legacy make it a must-see anime film, even if it is a painful one to watch.

If you have never found yourself moved to tears by a film, *Grave of the Fireflies* may well change that. As the author de Wit states, “it’s de rigueur for those who have seen it to admit they cried” (“*Grave of the Fireflies*”). It is even more impactful when compared to the other works of Studio Ghibli which Isao Takahata was a founding member of. Studio Ghibli is usually associated with the works of Hayao Miyazaki, another Ghibli founder, who directed colorful and fantastical titles such as *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Spirited Away*. What sets *Grave of the Fireflies* apart though is the weight its story carries and the realistic imagery and design in the film. Whereas most Miyazaki films deal with fantasy, Takahata’s film delves deep into the pain and suffering of the two main characters experience during the war.

Right off the bat *Grave of the Fireflies* lets you know it won’t be a typical Ghibli film. After the intro scene we see bombers flying over Kobe, and Seita helping his mother bury their belongings in the ground for safekeeping. The colors and textures of the animation are far more realistic than any Mi-
yazaki film. The backgrounds are redder and browner, rather than blue and green. The beginning of the film quickly turns to shots of burned out destroyed landscapes after the firebombing; everything is earthy and smoking with red horizons in the background. De Wit notes how the motions of the characters are ‘realistically designed and animated with restraint’” (“Grave of the Fireflies’’). This isn’t the kind of movie with a lot of intense action or powered up fight scenes. Seita and Setsuko are portrayed realistically, with all the frailties that you would expect of two traumatized and starving children. Watching their struggle feels like watching your own children slowly starve, being powerless to help them.

This isn’t to say the movie doesn’t have beautiful shots though. There are many shots with the background drawn in lush watercolor: of Seita and Setsuko playing on the beach, walking by rice fields and farmland in the countryside, and the pond outside the bomb shelter where the children eventually live. Their found home’s beauty acts as a visual representation of the hopes that the children have of their life improving; in reality, it is just a façade sugarcoating the bleakness of their situation. The camera often breaks away from the main characters to focus on “pillow shots” (Ebert, 5:00-35) of the children’s makeshift home, looking like a paradise but always with small details like a torn-up umbrella or dented water pail to remind you of the children’s plight.

The soundtrack of the movie is also devastatedly beautiful. There are only a few songs used throughout the movie, but each one drives home the emotions of the scenes they are in. For the most part the music is instrumental with subdued or intense violins and piano depending on the tone of the scene. The “Main Theme” effectively conveys a sense of ephemeral happiness, and “Mother’s Death” and its variations fill you with despair and hopelessness. The song “Home Sweet Home” near the end is the most devastating, however, played in scene on a scratchy phonograph recording of a classical opera singer supported by a lonely piano. If you manage to make it this far into the movie without crying, here is where you’ll probably break down. It acts as a eulogy piece for Setsuko, and I would dare anyone to try not to cry during its scene.

You can’t talk about Grave of the Fireflies and not bring up the politics of Isao Takahata himself. His movie is an adaptation of Nosaka Akiyuki’s semi-autobiographical short story of the same name. Takahata injects his own interpretations of growing up during WWII into Akiyuki’s work. A
major criticism about the film is that Takahata “resisted both the ‘anti-war’
tag given to his film and the melodramatic sentimentality so often associ-ated with it” (Leader, “Grave of the Fireflies”), and intended for the movie
to be a critique of the breakdown of Japanese society during the war. You
can find many shots in the film that reinforce Takahata’s intent: Seita’s in-
fatuation with his father and the Japanese imperial navy, an officer crying
out “long live the emperor (Grave, 9:40-9:45)” during the first firebombing
scene. Critics argue that the imagery in this selective retelling of Akiyuki’s
tragic story fail to address the atrocities committed by imperial Japan dur-
ing WWII.

However, the need for people to process the trauma of war is also neces-
-sary. Sometimes “we cannot demand ‘all the facts’ quite as we might like
them” (Swale). Takahata does gloss over many facts about imperial Japan’s
own atrocities committed in WWII, however that does not make this spe-
cific story of loss any less tragic. He failed to convey the message he in-
tended (Leader, “Grave of the Fireflies”), and inadvertently made a power-
ful story that can act as a tool to help process the tragedies of war so often
forced on innocent children. As a viewer, we sometimes have the power to
reinterpret a work of art, giving it new meaning. I think that Grave of the
Fireflies’ legacy deserves to be remembered as an anti-war masterpiece, de-
spite its director’s intentions.

It is no exaggeration to call this movie one of the saddest films of all time.
When Setsuko asks, “why do fireflies have to die so soon?” (Grave, 57:45-
58:00) my heart breaks every time. While you might not have a good time
watching it, that just goes to show the sheer power this film has at convey-
ing its emotion. I wouldn’t watch it on a whim, rather you should plan a day
to watch it, and if you find yourself feeling down that day, wait a bit. You
should watch it with someone close to you as well because you both might
need a shoulder to cry on at some point.

Don’t let this put you off from experiencing Grave of the Fireflies though,
it is one of the most impactful movies you will ever watch in your life and
very well may change your perception of war. Sometimes it takes the break
from reality that animation gives to gain a new perspective on life and the
consequences of our actions.
Works Cited


It has long been commonplace to joke that when the apocalypse comes the only living beings remaining on Earth will be cockroaches. With our planet imperiled by a cluster of looming disasters due to the effects of climate change, every day it seems more likely that the roaches will have the place to themselves sooner rather than later. As shrinking coastlines, extreme weather, and unprecedented heat make more of the world uninhabitable, our current levels of food production will struggle to accommodate a population that is always growing (in demographics and incomes). Understandably, young people all over the world are getting butterflies in their stomachs. Ironically, butterflies-in-stomachs could be the key to our survival.

A growing scientific consensus is coalescing around a solution to the climate crisis and global hunger. Luckily enough, the answer is one of the most abundant resources on Earth: insects. Already necessary for their role in plant pollination and waste biodegradation, insects could serve a greater function in the future as a key source of nutrition for humans. While still meeting significant stigma in the West, entomophagy (consumption of insects) is traditionally practiced in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Latin America. It is estimated that two billion people (more than one in four of the total human population) belong to cultures where it is common to eat bugs, primarily in tropical climates. (Baker) In Mexico, crispy fried grasshoppers, or *chapulines*, are a favorite for natives and adventurous tourists alike. Silk moth pupa, boiled or fried, are a delicacy in markets across Southeast Asia. Sakondry, a plump beetle with the flavor and consistency of bacon, is prized by villagers in Madagascar’s Masoala Peninsula, where a visiting anthropologist, in what could be a model for transitioning from meat to insects globally, helped cultivate the
bug in an effort to influence locals to eat fewer endangered lemurs. “You want to make it easier for people to make the choices they would rather be making.” (Baker) According to the authors of The Insect Cookbook: Food for a Sustainable Planet, more than 1,900 insect species have been identified as used for human consumption. (van Huis 5) Making them acceptable to Westerners could be vital to the survival of humanity and the planet.

Farming insects for human consumption comes at a far lesser environmental cost than livestock. Unsurprisingly, insect farming takes far fewer acres of farmland than cows, pigs, or chickens, while creating fewer emissions of greenhouse gases and ammonia. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, insects have the ability to process feed into protein more efficiently than livestock, possibly because they are exothermic (cold-blooded) and do not expend energy on regulating their body temperature. (van Huis 64) Statistics from the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization underscore the disparity: a pound of beef requires twenty-five pounds of feed to produce, twenty-three more than the two pounds of feed that yields a pound of crickets. Pigs and chickens need twice as much feed as insects, the report goes on to say, and, more strikingly, a pound of crickets needs only one gallon of water, a drop in the bucket compared to the two thousand gallons it takes to put a pound of beef on the market. If everyone in America substituted two pounds of beef from their diet for two pounds of cricket powder, more than a trillion gallons of water (equivalent to Lake Erie) would be saved each year.

In addition to leaving less of a carbon footprint than traditional forms of protein, insects are extremely nutritious. While nutritional values vary across the wide array of species in the insect kingdom, the most nutrient-dense, like mealworms, crickets, and grasshoppers, contain similar amounts of protein, fats, vitamins, and amino acids as meat or fish. Many are rich in important minerals like calcium, zinc, iron. The high mineral content could be invaluable to people in developing countries where anemia, malignancies, and chronic illness are endemic. (van Huis 67) The humanitarian aspect of entomophagy goes beyond providing an abundant source of nutrients, however, as the expanding insect farming sector could present economic opportunities to parts of the world left behind by the tech revolution. Insect farms require substantially less technical expenditure than traditional livestock farms and could bring jobs and capital to underserved populations.
Despite the litany of environmental and nutritional benefits of entomophagy, the practice continues to make some Westerners antsy. For Americans in particular, the concept of insects-as-food has primarily been relegated to gross-out spectacle on reality television competitions and dystopian science fiction. Mainly for their novelty, edible insects can pop up on cooking and travel programming but their primary association for most people is probably still of contestants on Survivor fighting to choke down a squirming bug, the contestant squirming in equal measure. This “Ick factor” may seem insurmountable, but it has been shown that attitudes around food can shift with education and exposure. Sushi, once considered the epitome of unapproachable Eastern cuisine, is now ubiquitous in supermarkets across America. Some insects are said to have a texture and taste resembling that of their fellow arthropods like shrimp, lobster, and crab, all of which once considered low-class foods that are now enjoyed as delicacies.

Insects and insect byproducts are already part of the Western diet, sometimes unbeknownst to us. One of the most popular sweeteners in Europe and America is honey, or as anthropologist Alyssa Crittenden calls it in her lecture “Insects: The Other White Meat,” bee vomit. Unsettlingly, anyone who regularly consumes processed and packaged foods has probably wolfed down an insect part or two without knowing it. One uncomfortable fact about mass production in the food industry is that contamination is inevitable and we’re smearing more than just bee vomit on our biscuits. The Food & Drug Administration’s Food Defect Levels Handbook outlines the maximum levels of waste deemed acceptable for consumption. For example, peanut butter can have an average of 30 insect pieces per 100 grams, and while it might be mildly stomach-churning at first to think that I have already scarfed down the cast of A Bug’s Life, it ultimately proves that insects are safe to eat. Compared to some of the other waste products allowed according to the FDA guidelines, consuming insects would probably seem less objectionable.

While it may take some time to convince the skeptical and squeamish to embrace edible insects as part of their routine, the alternative – a global population plagued by starvation and water scarcity – is unacceptable. There is reason for optimism that edible insects could be the linchpin at the intersection of a growing exchange of global cultures and products and broadening public demand for solutions to climate change. With insects
already consumed around the world, the time for rapid expansion of ento-
mophagy is long overdue. If the villagers of the Masaola Peninsula can eat more beetles to save the endangered lemur there is little excuse for the rest of the world not to welcome adjustments to their diet in order to leave the planet habitable for future generations. As a solution for the survival of the human race, entomophagy is the bee’s knees.

Works Cited


2024 Poetry Awards, UNO:

2024 Vassar Miller Poetry Award

2024 Winners:

Erin Shea, “Sheltered Space (or, explaining crip time to my lover)”

Luca van der Heide, “Leftovers”

Honorable Mention:

Danny Unger, “Back to the Buddhist Recovery Meeting”

Thi Nguyen, “Love Is Blue”

Judge: CYNTHIA HOGUE

Cynthia Hogue has published twenty books, including ten collections of poetry, including Woman in Red, The Incognito Body, Revenance (a 2014 “Standout” books by the Academy of American Poets), Or Consequence, Contain, and most recently, Instead, It Is Dark (2023). She also co-authored When the Water Came: Evacuees of Hurricane Katrina (interview-poems with photographs by Rebecca Ross. UNO Press, 2010). With Sylvain Gallais, she has co-translated three collections of poetry from French and has published three critical books on women’s poetry and has co-edited an poetry anthology. Among Professor Hogue’s honors are a Fulbright Fellowship to Iceland, two NEA Fellowships, the H.D. Fellowship at the Beinecke Library at Yale University, a MacDowell Colony residency, and the Witter Bynner Translation Fellowship. Having taught at UNO and Bucknell University, she
held the Maxine and Jonathan Marshall Chair in Modern and Contempo-
rary Poetry at Arizona State University for 14 years and was Distinguished
Visiting Writer at Cornell University (2014). An Emerita Professor of Eng-
lish, she lives in Tucson.

About the winning poems, Professor Hogue wrote Erin Shea’s “Sheltered
Space (or, explaining crip time to my lover,’’ is a poem that in rich and riv-
eting details explores how the speaker overcame the challenge of finding
ways to love with a differently-abled body. There are no maps, no stories to
show the way; the poet and the poem are finding the way as s/he writes. I
found the poem fully realized, compelling, and important. With Luca van
der Heide’s “Leftovers,’’ I found the exploration of the speaker’s earnest at-
ttempts to find a “positive message” after attending a cancer convention fas-
cinating and complex. Repetition is used strategically, and insights are poi-
gnant, at once ordinary and magical thinking (“I was just a child/ I didn’t
know I could not make it,’’ for instance). The poem’s closure/ non-closure is
beautifully nuanced and undecidable.”
Sheltered Space  
(or, explaining crip time to my lover)  
Erin Shea

I have a slow-burn temper scaling  
your stairs with splintered fingers,  
indignantly denying assistance - reminiscent  
of able-bodied tunnel vision from adolescence.  
I inherited a stoniness toward men, amplified  
by my body’s rebellion. Saving up  
to buy a shower chair before my 23rd birthday.  
A cheetah-print cane. I only  
let my hair down in your bed where  
you anoint me with peppermint oil  
as salt melts on my tongue with stifled tears -  
allergic to gravity and expecting punishment  
born of indulgence: dirty sheets swaddling bodies  
suspended from first light, whispering  
“good morning” into your hairline. We latch  
not for the sake of recovery. I peel back  
the curtains with cosmic uncertainty.

Order me a silent confession with helpless  
heat - an Indian summer - the hours  
I finally allowed myself to shapeshift.  
I’ll write it on your back (a gun on the nightstand),  
sandpaper neck and a crystal ball skull.  
I’ll trace it into your bathroom mirror  
with desperate breath (invisible disability,  
casual flesh). I’ll ask you to love me  
(with breaks in between) by the light  
of the refrigerator. I’ll teach you my body’s  
invocation of time - stubborn, vast; lovely, weary -
I’ll teach you forgiveness in a language of frown lines and thin skin. My art of clinging and parting. Remember, as I do, that crip time is intimacy, unyielding transformation. Punctuated desire. Crip time finds an exoskeleton to don in the dark and can’t bear its weight by dawn.

You hold my hips as a futurist, encircle me in the sheltered space just shy of a sick bed. Patternless, we rest and rise, disembodied and beautifully bruised.
Leftovers

Luca van der Heide

On the train back to Turin, after the Cancer Convention
Trying to convey a positive message
About the big C
It was also my mother’s birthday
The Convention eclipsing her special day

At the seafood restaurant
We ate mussels au gratin, clam risotto, and fritto misto
In the evening pork chops
All this in honor of our year of fasting
My mom, my father, I – I for the nausea, they for fear

Woman after me at the Cancer Convention
She didn’t have a positive message
There isn’t even a name for us, the woman said
Us, orphans of a child
Why isn’t there a name?

Not knowing is what saved me, that’s what I said
There was no fear, I never doubted I was going to make it
I was fifteen and still a child
I was just a child
I didn’t know I could not make it

Was that my positive message? Do not fear death?

The evening of my mother’s birthday, she sat me down
Came back with a diary
I never showed you this, she said
I didn’t know you kept a record of the whole thing, I said
The whole thing, she said
A list of annotations, first
The type of cancer, facts found on the Internet, facts told by the doctors
Then the writing gets denser, more italicized
A different kind of writing
Then a page with a drawing, a title: “Fallen Star”

The star is up there with the other stars,
One day, it falls down to earth, and it loses its shine

The other stars descend on earth to help the fallen star
But down there they start losing their shine, too
But they surround the fallen start and help it up

And finally the star is back up in the sky with the other stars
All shining

It wasn’t the facts, or the pages of journaling, It was this
A fairy tale
This is what did it

What is my positive message? What did I learn down there?

On the train back to Turin, a bag at my feet,
Leftover pork chops, wrapped in tin foil
A sumptuous meal
Not knowing saved me, modern medicine saved me
I was lucky

What could my positive message possibly be?
Don’t cry, my mother said, it’s all behind us now
It’s not sadness, I said
Back to the Buddhist Recovery Meeting

Danny Unger

Flouncing through the door late
clutching a canned yerba maté
I think of an inappropriate joke
don't worry it's not a beer
and hastily cage it in my mind.
Everyone sits before me, serenely
encircled on a rainbow of pillows.
During the loving-kindness meditation
I struggle to think of someone irritating
enough to channel equanimity toward
besides me. Snippets of a recent radio
interview surface in my mind, a young
pro-life woman's voice, eagerly celebrating
the recent takedown of Roe Vs. Wade.
I send a perverse version of loving kindness
toward her. The meeting leader's neck tattoo
and lengthy track record of sobriety inspires
jealousy in me. She encourages us to send kindness
 toward increasingly distant things like the entire city
and the planet. As her voice drifts through the room
my ears catch, talk of wise intentions and unwholesome acts.
Recovery is full of euphemisms, like recovery itself.
I prefer to call my unwholesome acts naughty. I visualize
inviting those I've hurt to spank me in lieu of making amends.
Now it's time for us to take turns reading from the text. This is not AA
but there is always a text. This one is available for a sliding scale price
of six to ten dollars, but I resist the purchase. Last time I bought the book
continued to imbibe, stashing it shamefully in my closet. This time will be
different in that I will not buy the book. It is too soon to tell if anything else
will end up differently this time. We close the meeting by sharing. At my turn
I make everyone laugh with my scatterbrained rambling. I accidentally curse
then apologize. The meeting leader shares last, says something best left anonymous besides her final sage reflection, *there are so many other satisfying elixirs to choose from.*
Love is Blue

Thi Nguyen

After the fall of Saigon,
my mother never found the ground steady.
The weight of her country

cracked opened the world, emptying
all her possessions from Viet Nam –
silver crosses, silk áo dài, a beat-up

CD player - into its pit, leaving her nothing
but dirt beneath her fingernails.
The shaking ground followed her

on the refugee boat despite
escaping the guards who patrolled
the beaches of Nha Trang.

The ground shuddered further when
she heard her father had wept
at finding her empty bed.

But then when she learned
of her mother’s cancer and sudden
death, the ground rocked so violently

beneath her the abyss split Viet Nam
from California, impossible to kiss
goodbye.
Her head began to ache. Nothing could console her, unless she buried herself beneath her towers of French oldies in CD cases, humming Paul Mauriat’s “Love is Blue” to the cracks of the earth, digging herself back into the pit, hoping to hear again her mother’s voice: singing along,

“Music …
How the bright sun shone …
Now the rainbow is gone.”
2024 Andrea Saunders Gereighty/
Academy of American Poets Poetry Award

2024 Winner:

Lin Flores, “Tio’s Eulogy,” “Barbie Saves America,” and “You Can’t Have Everything You Want”

First Honorable Mention:

Thi Nguyen, “Time is a Circle,” “My Sister’s Murderer,” and “Love is Blue”

Second Honorable Mention:

Meghan Sullivan, “Cherry Blossom Sonnet,” “The Biggest of Booms,” and “My Cousin’s Facebook Post on Sept. 11, 2023: An Erasure”

Judge: KELLY MCQUAIN

This year’s distinguished judge, Kelly McQuain, is the author of Scrape the Velvet from Your Antlers (Texas Review Press, 2023), winner of a Southern Breakthrough Award. He has also authored two chapbooks, Velvet Rodeo (Bloom chapbook poetry prize) and Antlers (Editors Series at Seven Kitchens Press). His prose, poetry and illustrations have appeared in The Pinch, Best American Poetry Review, Painted Bride Quarterly, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Spunk, Kestrel, and elsewhere, as well as in such anthologies as Best New Poets 2020; Men on Men; LGBTQ Fiction and Poetry from Appa-
lachia; and Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods: Fiction and Poetry from West Virginia. Other honors include the Glitter Bomb Award (Limp Wrist Magazine), two fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a Lambda Literary Fellowship, and a Tennessee Williams Scholar Award by the Sewanee Writers’ Workshop. As a visual artist, McQuain has also won prizes from the Barnes Foundation and Philadelphia’s William Way LGBTQ Center. An Associate Professor of English at Community College of Philadelphia, McQuain has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the East-West Center of Hawaii, and a travel award from the Freeman Foundation and the Chinese Ministry of Education.

This year’s winner is Lin Flores for “Tio’s Eulogy” and Other Poems. Ms. Flores will receive $100, as well as a certificate and a one-year membership from the Academy of American Poets in New York. Honorable Mention goes to Thi Nguyen for “Time is a Circle” and Other Poems; Ms. Nguyen will also receive a certificate from the Academy. A second Honorable Mention goes to Meghan Sullivan for “Cherry Blossom Sonnet” and Other Poems. All three poets will be honored in May at the Spring 2024 Honors Convocation by the College of Liberal Arts, Education, and Human Development, the Department of Language & Literature awards ceremony, and the MFA in Creative Writing Spring Banquet in May. The winning poems will be published in a forthcoming issue of Ellipsis, UNO’s literary magazine.

In choosing the winners, Professor McQuain (a UNO alumnus in Creative Writing), said that, given the number of strong submissions, it was not easy to select a single winner.
Tio’s Eulogy

Lin Flores

Muscle made of every
abstract feeling, if hearts
could speak, I imagine their
lips an aorta plush full
of red plum juices.
The leaky fiber of a
too ripe fruit, ready to
burst from deep violet
skin and a pit of stress
whimpers as you, uncle
die. Your heart rotting
you from the inside out.
Your heart the fruit of
a too late season, heart
of sick, chest of sangria
whines, and smoothers
you with all the shooting
pain. Tio, I never ate
plums with you because we
were boarders apart. But
I imagine your grin
and the gore of
sweetness under your
mustache or down your
chin as you say, “Chinita,
como estas?” from
across the veil under
a fruit tree of life.
Barbie Saves America

Lin Flores

Before the white girl I’m dating ends things with me, I’m invited to a showing of Barbie with her mostly white staff. Before I attend I spend far too much money to fit in. I google Latino Ken to find an 80’s beach Ken that best resembles me. His white smile and brown eyes give me something to be for required dress up. Before the movie I look at all my lovers the way I look at syrupy stains from the drink machines, the bubbly carbon like decayed teeth walk or run down the counters with popcorn between the soles of our feet but the magic of the circus and bread darken the room and I hold my girl’s leg to remember the closeness one girl can offer another despite skin, despite sinking—just to watch another film unable despite all efforts to represent me, erase me. Before readers and editors, people will shout there is enough diversity for the film to be a queer bible but we will stand around the bathrooms after and all the men will talk over us but not at us, they will not look us in the eye as they share their opinions and we will accept it, I will hold her hand, girl who will mistake me for enduring and I will bring it up—because how can I afford not to? In this America that was OURS before it was white, in this America where I choose my company but others choose our laws, where we die to poverty and police brutality and crumbs and misrepresented reality. Girl and I will speak of discomfort and binary and irony and patriarchy just to once more allow for spaces I’ve outgrown to brew and for weeks after, I’ll listen to others appreciate what saviorism Barbie could offer, what monoculture we smiled to—through bleeding sugary sweet cavities, what joy we could feel for white feminists everywhere and white gays to overindulge in, to over analyze an anthem I still can’t sing to. Even America waits for her bigger role while Barbie saves America for white folks
You Can’t Have Everything You Want

Lin Flores

After Patricia Clark

But you can have lockets
of hair, pink and curled,
little trinkets of magic
we built empires from.

You can measure votive
stock like wafts of motor oil,
dynamite crates, and vintage
matchbooks. You can have

the cat, the one who follows
you from room to room, loyal
love who meows across thresholds
but cannot tell you what he wants

but then again, who can? You can
have, mainly, in May, freshly
bloomed Bleeding Hearts, gift from a
mother who knows the meaning of long

suffering. You can keep on learning
Italian, each day a new vowel to fit
the way Nona meant it. You can visit
LA again, maybe, Florence too, though
it feels harder to see through winter. Remember what you made possible? The doughy gnocchi pistachio and cream, thick ground pepper in a Barcelona home, late night, mid-day meals. She can’t give an answer. Try somebody else. You can be grateful for bats today, even the ones you cannot see: the Spotted, the Mexican free-tailed, the Greater horseshoe—the one you have not met yet, what are the odds it could be right here? You can celebrate the girl you once were for all the ground she laid through cobbled ancient Roman streets, you can grieve the boy called Anthony, tuck him into your sleeve the way you cuff your jeans. You can cut the Sapphire Sea Holly, place it somewhere safe which is more than you can say about the Hoya Krimson Queen, you can’t be sure she will survive the suffocation but then again, no one can. But you can hang the Kirk Richards painting and add your own soy milk to your drip. You can buy rosemary to remember beautiful things often reappear, you can contain them in the cavity someone thrifted—where you store December nights at Dee’s Family Restaurant on 700 East,
You can be pleasantly surprised to see a baby doll roll their eyes in sassy disbelief. Sometimes you can’t fill your house with people the way you wanted, though you can rummage through discarded photos of found families and recall the recognition of always been a home, always felt a peace, often security and inevitable belonging between the shapes of having and wanting.
Time Is a Circle

Thi Nguyen

The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again
and again—and you with it, speck of dust.
-Friedrich Nietzsche

I’m watching my parents press rewind on my life, laughing at a cute four year old girl protecting her baby sister from the threat of an uncle taking her away. The little girl in a bowl haircut places her tiny hands on top of a tinier body. Those are not my hands.

I don’t
I don’t remember. I’m an anonymous observer, I’m the background of a time in reverse.

My parents insist that the four year old girl is me. But that girl speaks perfect Vietnamese where I can barely make out the difference between Vietnamese and loneliness as I hear my mother sing old French songs to a hole in the ground.

I peak over the edge to see the bottom of a reopened wound. I’m pressing rewind, but not as far as before. I’m calling the police to take my sister away. My mother’s face contours to an old shape when she first learned her country was taken away.

Too far back. The gravity of her past pulls me into a swimming pool on a sunny day. I’m underwater, between the surface ripples and the shadows on the pool’s floor. How strange. They’re not mirrors of each other.
Like when my father still sleeps with a pillow over his ears, hearing screaming in his sleep. Or like the shadow of my sister’s old self, washing up to the same shore where we buried our secrets in the sand, facing the sun in prayer.

An act of faith, turning oneself toward the sun in the absence of God. But what is the difference between praying and waiting? My memory leaks into the ocean, which was once a lake, which was once only a drop of water.

Perhaps that is how the water is the only one who knows what has always been. I look for my reflection within its surface of glass and light, but I’m blinded by the quintillion specks of sparkling dust, being born and burning at the same time.
At the end of a pier, I sit next to her, 
our bare legs dangling, swinging over 
the edge. A buzzing tension holds her 
back straight, her eyes searching 
the dark waters for my sister’s death certificate. 
I’m distracted, marveling at how the snake 
on her thigh never lacks of itself as it gulps 
and swallows with every back-and-forth swing.

Below us, a body floats to the surface, breaking 
my reverie. Face bloated, its outlines soaked, she’s 
beyond recognition apart from her long fine hair. 
drifting in the soft water. We both have our mother’s hair.

My fingers reach toward her body, but I touch only 
cold, wet skin, unlike the heat surging through 
my arm, as my sister’s murderer takes my hand 
to dance and celebrate under this new moon.
Cherry Blossom Sonnet

Meghan Sullivan

Alone is big easy. Love, as a pull, introduces itself. 
Then as a yank. The Rack. Each limb tied to a piece of lattice; 
summer introduces itself as a dive off the continental shelf. 
Rope maroons the victim's wrists and hips—the sun spits 
out an impartial blush. Dislocated shoulders, she sharpens 
hers insatiable hog tongue with her two front teeth. 
A single cherry blossom watches as the leashes, harnessed 
on the pickets, exert. She punches out a finishing weep.

A regular Edna, the girl is hysterical and then—relief. The lovers, 
they appear fed, unperturbed at the cherry flowers 
lack of buzzing company. Being alone is easy. Covers 
of communion, swaddled twos, swaddled pairs, urge high towers— 
the fear not of falling, but of the desire to jump. Eek 
the corpse blabs a final buzz—*bloom, you say? Make me.*
Those independent nights—the wonder! Colorful flashlights
skipped about the horizon, sky illuminating kid fun.
Firefly sightings in the summer. Rainbow chalked
sidewalk repelling poppers—the joys of
youth: us & we inhaled.
I ate hotdog and hamburger, had potato chip pupils.
I rocket pop-licked, riddle slid, eyelids—moon kissed
—as the golden howled, tail chasing thrill, me, I was chasing.
Out there, stars bliss and sing.

Slugging suckers and sweetened cold treats to brothers, neighbors,
cousins. Limited Too shorts chafing, gravel scraping butt ’cause
the driveway blanket was too small for all us kids.
All had moms and dads then. All danced past bed-
time. Limited, too, was
our buzz for the boom, our firefly catch obsession, our hold
on each other. Our jumping for joy fourth.
July. For soon, the nights, they would turn. Now, I gaze towards
the angels. Wonder. Watch.

And the super loud ones—what were they called? The baby wake-
uppers—how speedy their ascent. Fizz windup would titillate,
would lodge such suspense in my soul. Brace my soul. I
(did not). The biggest of booms cannot (yet
know) land without injury. Can I be soothed? Sun-
screen on cheeks. Sky Rockets. With friends, I watch from a porch now.
My Cousin’s Facebook Post on Sept 11, 2023: An Erasure

Meghan Sullivan

I don’t remember the things I do not
But I do remember the smell Initially a barbecue
Blocks from Ground Zero

Overslept my temp job
Should have been there
It all went
People just sitting

The Brooklyn brownstones wailing, shaking
I—we could clearly see the cell phones
The legs
The fire

Boroughs figuring out
The fire was happening
How to get home
Traffic not permitted
People walked like tunnels through the zombies
Security the roadways inside out
Commuter cars unclaimed the fighter
Jets constantly overhead
Tim wet himself on Thursday or Friday
We were home and we were that frightened
2997 souls very seriously perished
2nd tower
6000 body bags
Hit
But there were no bodies