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EDITOR'S NOTE

I was so excited when I heard that the University was reviving its literary magazine. I knew the publication had existed but had not published an issue in the wake of the pandemic, so when I heard that I could be involved in helping to restart this 54-year-old literary tradition, I jumped at the chance. Working to restart this magazine was so much fun. The Executive board we have is so eager to help and the members we have within the club are just as hands-on, so it made the quick turnaround we had to make this happen feel easy. We couldn’t have gotten this done without all of their hard work and effort. I’m grateful that they were willing to meet in that windowless, overheated classroom in Sawyer once a week so that we could make something that we were proud of. I’m so passionate about writing and I am so happy we were able to create something that gives young writers a space to express themselves and their voices. I hope you all have as much fun reading these amazing works by these talented Suffolk students as I did.

~ Sarah Smith, 2023, Editor-in-Chief
A native of New York City, Dr. Katherine Horn has been teaching English at the college level since 1994. At Suffolk, she teaches writing, literature, and women's and gender studies classes. It has been wonderful to find a place where she can combine her passion for teaching with her love of reading. Beyond teaching and reading, cooking, eating, missing NYC, and playing with her dog take up much of her time.

Katherine has long enjoyed working with students outside the classroom. In addition, to advising Venture, she has also advised creative writing, equestrian, and chess clubs. Seeing students in positions of leadership is rewarding to her. Katherine is especially enthusiastic about reviving Venture as she believes having a student-run literary and arts journal is vital to students and a university.

~ Katherine Horn PhD, Instructor, English

Jon D. Lee is the author of four books, including IN/DESIDERATO and An Epidemic of Rumors: How Stories Shape Our Perceptions of Disease. His poems and essays have appeared in The Atlantic, Sugar House Review, Sierra Nevada Review, The Writer's Chronicle, One, The Laurel Review, and The Inflectionist Review. He has an MFA in Poetry from Lesley University, and a PhD in Folklore. Lee teaches at Suffolk University, where he also serves as a Senior Poetry Reader for Salamander.

~ Jon D Lee PhD, Instructor, English
Hi! I’m Lauren Pichette, a junior English major with a concentration in Creative Writing with a minor in Women & Gender Studies. I am the Vice President and Prose Editor of Venture and I spend way too much of my free time reading when I could be writing.

~ Lauren Pichette, 2023, Prose Editor

I'm so excited to be a part of Venture’s comeback to the literary world!! I hope everyone enjoys the wonderful artists featured

~ Olivia Azzarito, 2022, Poetry Editor

I'm in the class of 2024 and I'm majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing. Working on Venture has been such an amazing opportunity and it's been so great to be a part of the process. Watching everything come together and all the work that's gone into this magazine has given me a new appreciation for writing and publication and I'm grateful to have been a part of Venture.

~ Maddie Sampson, 2024, Assistant Prose Editor
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A lot of universities are looking at the Middle East to solve their problems. And we require artists, music, and culture to help us. He would want to see more opportunities for creative industries to move into our country in terms of natural-resource based industries to a creative society, says.

"Arts and culture have an awful lot to do with sustaining creativity and so I think there are major economic arguments in favour of government policies that are supportive of vibrant arts communities right across the country," says Ministério Stephen.
Ringer Park

Taylor Gonsalves, 2022

Allston is motionless. Snow clings to the chain link, winter cages itself up in a vacant tennis court. A red solo cup titters across the pavement, pauses at the park entrance. I walk past it. The sludge of last week’s blizzard seeps into my socks.

A man sits alone on the wet bleachers smoking a spliff, humming quietly to himself. I nod as I pass him and his beagle wails. The ballfield grass is swamped with half-frozen mud. Other than the man, I deduce, I am completely alone.

Cutting through the park should be faster than going around, since Mara’s always early and I’m always late. The sharp trees and their branches break the gray sky, darkening by the minute.

Horace Mann School. Five minutes.

Typical Mara. Impatient. I wonder why, of all places, though, she’s chosen to meet up at a school for the deaf at night. It’s at the corner of the park at Webley street. My phone’s map puts it about halfway between us, which would be fair. Walking with snow everywhere sucks. I don’t give it more thought though because Mara’s cryptic sometimes. I never know why she does anything, no one does.

I look over my shoulder. No one’s there, of course, just the same guy with his fat beagle exactly where they were before. The man’s spliff lights his face up and a cloud of smoke billows by his head. It coils around him and dissipates into the street light. He whistles at the beagle and it pees on the fence.
At the end of the path, sludgey pavement turns to mud. I exhale. There isn’t another exit on this side of the park like I’d hoped. Dead end. I groan, check the time on my phone, then look around for the building.

Darkness encroaches. When I left earlier, the sky was overcast and ashen.

Dead trees, the grasp of early winter on the wildlife. Wind hums. I spot the school’s rooftop through the branches. I’m nearly there, just gotta figure out how to get over to it. I check the map on my phone again, go through my message thread with Mara. No answer. My fingers are numb from the cold but manage to type, typo-ridden and ceaseless:

Almost there, sorry

You can’t access the school’s parking lot from where I’m standing. It’s on the other side of a tall, chain link fence. The same fence that encircles the park, I notice; the fence the beagle peed on. The fence with snow collecting in the corners.

I curse under my breath and the cold crystallizes my whisper. Does this mean I have to walk all the way around and waste what, five more minutes? The thought of climbing the fence crosses my mind, briefly, and my eyes strain.

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This was a mistake. I should’ve just driven to her place like the
original plan. I assume Mara’s here already, standing by the road. Probably in the red and purple crochet hat that her aunt made, her favorite one. It’s too dark to see anything, but there’s a single flood light on the side of the building, spilling white onto the surrounding brick. The flat-side of the school, almost brutalist, bricks weathered.

Here I think

The text delivers, but my stomach sinks. I decide to call her to figure out where I’m going.

While it rings, I walk along the fence toward the corner of the building. When she answers the phone, I’ll ask her if we can meet at the entrance to Ringer Park instead. Admitting to her that I got lost might make her laugh, at least; a silent apology for my idiocy.

I hang up and try again, and now I’ve got a pretty good view of the school. Creepy as hell at night, I’ll admit.

Silence.

I can see the parking lot clearly now. Deep voices are shouting, their voices echo. There are three figures standing by the parking lot entrance. I hope to god one of them isn’t Mara. My heart races. I call again, wait for her voice, then notice something buzzing on the ground.

I bend down to look. A cell phone sits on the other side of the fence, wet with snow. The screen is cracked. My name is on the display with a purple heart next to it. My stomach plummets.

She didn’t send the text.
I shout her name and scramble over the chain link. I don’t know what to do other than run.

I hope to god she isn’t over there. It can’t be her.

The men have someone at gunpoint. A woman. My chest stings.

“We gave you five minutes,” a man says. “Time’s up.”

Prose / Taylor Gonsalves
Gifts of The Grove

Madeline Sampson, 2024

There’s a Tree in a grove, standing amongst his brethren, tall and proud.

His bark grows thick and strong, protecting him from the harsh winter winds. His branches reach high, grasping at the wisps of clouds above. His roots reach into the soil, gripping it with gentle fingers. His leaves, bold and green, dance on summer wind; golden and warm, fly to the forest floor in an autumn freefall. His branches sway in the deep of winter sleep and his blossoms return triumphantly in the rebirth of spring.

The Tree offers himself to the grove and all its inhabitants. He stands, a quiet and constant companion to the other trees of the grove. He holds the nests of the birds, offering shelter for fledglings to grow. He listens to the woes of lost souls and offers a new perspective to those brave enough to climb his branches.

The denizens of the forest leave gifts for the Tree. The squirrels lay shells of acorns at his feet, children offer their laughter, and the songbirds leave behind the memory of their symphony. The tree holds these close, recording them in the rings of his core. The clouds pour their love out above the Tree and the soil offers its nutrients to his gentle roots. Time
offers him wisdom and pulls the Tree gently towards the clouds with careful and knowing hands.

The gifts of the grove are exchanged in harmony, a peace like none other.

One day, a weary traveler came to rest at the base of the Tree, leaning his back against the Tree’s trunks. The Tree reached his leaves out to shade the traveler’s eyes and protected him as he rested.

When the traveler woke, the only gift he left was the crumbs of his food and the prints of his boots. He gathered his things and made to continue on his journey, unaware of the silence that fell upon the grove.

The birds had quieted their songs and the squirrels had stopped their work to watch as the roots of the Tree pulled the traveler back, fitting him quietly into the soil at the base of the Tree, content to accept his eternal companionship as a gift.

Remember, when you walk amongst the beings of the grove that you are welcome, but don’t forget to leave a gift for their care.
The Call

Gabriella Carli, 2023

Marisol grabbed her Iphone, running her fingers along the side of her worn out case. “I just need to call her.” She said aggressively backing away from the woman sitting across from her.

“I’m sorry Marisol but you and I both know that this isn’t going to be good for you. Please just hand me-”

“No-no! I said no! I need to call her- I just need to tell her-”

“Marisol you need to- to just listen.” The woman inspected Marisol’s state. A silent hysterical woman waiting to be given a reason to blow. In her little time of knowing Marisol she knew that she was one of the most determined women she had ever met. Nothing could get through her, not even herself, this also made her one of the most difficult clients to get across to. The woman thought to herself that it might be easier to let her have her way now rather than continue to fight any longer. It would only drag the therapy session out longer, and they were already running out of time. “Alright, you may do as you must.”

Marisol quickly stood up and spun around so that the woman couldn’t see the rapid clicks as the woman unlocked her phone. The woman took out her clipboard flipping through notes of the last time Marisol had gotten to such a manic mind set in a session. As she got to her call log her hands quickly ceased to quiver as her thumb ran over her daughter’s name, “Emma” she whispered.

She paused for a moment with her thumb still tight to the text on screen as she looked over at the woman. The woman gave her a slight nod of

Gabriella Carli / Prose

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the head and uncapped her pen before Marisol turned back around. She took a very deep breath, and called.

She quickly placed the phone to her ear and caressed the other side of her face with her hand, running her fingers through her unkempt hair. It had been days since she had been able to take a gaze in the mirror. She felt along her neck, the sensitivity of her skin has prevailed slowly through her nervous ticks. She hadn’t even known she was doing it.

The phone rang rhythmically and Marisol's heart followed. She had only felt this level of intensity the day Emma was born.

Late night on a Tuesday where she has just gotten home from work. She flung her purse on to the couch and threw her jacket on to a neighboring chair.

“David, I just want to bring her home already! This anticipation is going to be the death of me.” Marsiol exclaimed plopping over on the couch.

“Well, technically you already brought her home.” Marisol gave him a dangerous side eye. “What I meant is that when the time's right, we will know. And for now I am at your service so that anything you need” David touches Marisol’s stomach. “Or that she needs, you both will have.” He said with a smile while lifting himself off the couch.

“David, while you are up would you mind just grabbing me something to drink from the fridge? It can be anything, surprise me!” Marisol said with a smile.

“Ofcourse.” David replied, kissing her forehead.

David disappeared down the short hall to the kitchen while Marisol tried to get comfortable in her spot on the couch. She didn’t know if it was the long shift or the way she slept last night but she couldn’t get comfortable. She held her legs and stomach and she leaned back and the pain stopped.

Prose / Gabriella Carli
After a few minutes she grabbed the remote to start flipping through channels and the sharp pain struck again. In that moment she held her stomach and it seemed as though time stopped. She waited for a sign - just in case she was going crazy. She wasn’t due for another week - so it couldn’t be. Just under her right hand she felt the tiniest nudge. “David!! David-” Marisol was shouting.

“I’m sorry my dad called but I grabbed a seltzer-” David walked into the room and saw Marisol with both hands caressing her stomach as she laid back on the couch.” “David, it’s time.” Marisol said.

It felt like yesterday but it was 16 years ago. The ringing finally stopped and she reached the voicemail box. She held her breath until the tone silenced.

“Hi Emma… Emma it’s your mom. I- um. I just wanted to call you so that I- um I could tell you… Do you remember that drawing you made in the third grade? Of the daisies that we used to have in the front lawn? You were so proud when you brought it home on that pink construction paper. You ran right into the kitchen and wanted me to put it right at the top of the fridge so your dad could see it. Yea you know I still have it and I carry it with me- in my wallet everyday… I know that you probably thought that your dad took it with him when he moved- but your momma had it the whole time…I know that we never, we never had the ideal mother daughter relationship, that most want to have but- you are always going to be my little daisy. No matter how many times we fight, or slam the door on one another-or how you try and avoid my 17th call I will never stop taking care of my little daisy… I’m sorry I never told you that sooner. I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you a lot of things sooner- I wish I-… I am so proud of you Emma, I am so so… proud of you. And I love you so much and I wish-”
“The voice mailbox is full. Please try again later. Goodbye.”

“No. No- NO!” Marisol cried as she fell to her knees, slowly releasing the grip on the phone.

“I know this is hard.” Dr. Johnson said as she leaned down to Marisol, picking up her phone for her as she sat beside her stroking her hair. “She wouldn’t want to see you suffer like this anymore. I know it's only been a few months since the service and the grief is still very much so new. But I think with a few more sessions maybe we can start to make the pain go away.”

*Prose / Gabriella Carli*
Mr. Jenkins

Tess Seaver, 2023

The life of a feline is, to most, quite easy. I wake up most days without much care other than what I am going to eat for the day. I try not to dwell on things in the past. I try not to dwell on things in the present, either. I think of very little other than what I am doing, or mainly, what I am eating. Most nights, I enjoy a tuna meal. There are rare days in which I do not enjoy chicken too. And yet who is to judge the life of a feline so easily? We are independent, strong-willed creatures. We eat what we can. We sleep when we can. Other things do not matter as much.

I live in a small dwelling with four other creatures and four humans. Two are similar to my own features, but I do not consider them what most humans would call “friends.” I take care not to get too close to them. The other two creatures are large and clumsy. Although like us felines in the regard that they eat and sleep as much as we do, they seem to dote on humans far more than I am comfortable with.

Nonetheless, I do have a human. Her name is Jessica. The humans do not understand much of what we felines say to them, and it tends to frustrate me. Often, I shout and shriek and scream in a bid for Jessica’s attention, and when she does come to me, I tell her of my day, my struggles, and of the atrocities the other felines have put me through. But there is little that she understands. So she laughs, shakes her head, and crouches down to rub my nose and to kiss my forehead. It is only then that I purr.

I do admit that she is far more comforting than the other humans in the household, and at times, I consider her a friend. Most days, she sits alone
in her small dwelling of a room, crouched in front of the device that I can only gather is called a *laptop*. The laptop is one that whirrs and screams if I sit on it, but I like to see it suffer. It takes a while for Jessica to shoo me away from it, but when she does, she laughs, so I do not stray far.

I have a corner in which I sleep in, hidden beneath the staircase that leads to the roof. I have ventured onto the roof once or twice in my lifetime, and the sights and sounds have been overwhelming. But, like the other felines that dwell within my house, the roof calls to me. I have ventured towards it, despite its horrendous and overwhelming nature, and I have let myself look upwards: to the sky, to the birds, and to what I think is the sun. Bright and bearing down on me, my thick coat of fur can only take a few moments of the heat before I am picked up by Jessica and brought downstairs into the comfort of my corner.

Jessica does not always look for me. Some days, I think she does not even leave her room. Her mother, who is kind and soft, often ventures there, bringing me with her. During these days, Jessica looks up, smiles, and speaks to her mother in a quiet voice, allowing me to go onto the bed and curl up next to her. But on the days in which she is quiet, the days in which she does not leave her room, she does not look up. On these days, I can only see a tuft of her hair peeking out from beneath her heavy blanket. I am always curious when this happens. But felines should not dwell on such feelings. We do what we can to survive. We are moderately relaxed creatures. Very little tends to disturb us.

Today, as usual, I find myself waking up with very little on my mind. I stretch, and as I do, my paws reach for the sky, the birds, and the sun. It is then that I realize that my breath must smell like the tuna I ate last night, as well as the piece of chicken Georgie gave to me before I slept. I continue to stretch, look around, and find Otto staring at me.

*Prose / Tess Seaver*
Otto is a white and black cat with wide eyes and a devilish smile. He is Georgie’s cat, and while he appears innocent in the face of humans, he is not. He is evil.

He eyes me with distaste.

“Mr. Jenkins,” comes his steady, deep greeting. I grunt in response, not wanting, nor needing, to interact with him. He is nothing. I am everything.

And yet, when I walk towards the kitchen, he runs after me, almost akin to how a kitten runs after its mother. Needy, desperate and hungry for attention. I do my best not to roll my eyes.

“Mr. Jenkins,” he repeats, and his voice cracks ever so slightly. “Did you hear of the news?”

“I know not of the news in which you are referring to.”

“Oh.” Otto looks disappointed for once. I am surprised and spare him a glance. “Is it something important?”

“Yes. It is.”

“What is it?”

“Georgie told me-”

“She tells you everything.”

“Yes. Of course.” Here, he looks smug. “She said that Jessica is going to a hospital.”

A hospital. This makes me stop. Us felines rarely dwell on things that do not matter. But our trips to the hospital – with humans in long, white garments and with various tools that poke and prod at us – are one of the only things that make us anxious.

“Where did Georgie hear such a thing?” I ask.

“From Mother.”
The downturn of my lips makes him light up, perhaps even more so than before. He is smug. Why is he so smug?

“And what of it?”

“Aren’t you afraid?”

“Why would I be afraid of such a thing?”

“She is your human.”

“Yes, but I do not care for such matters as that. She is-”

Before I can finish, Mother walks into the room, takes one look at us, and laughs, pulling out her device. It is small, rectangular shaped, and emits bright light at times. I glare at it. She laughs some more.

“Look at you both,” she coos, holding up the device. It flashes. Otto and I flinch. “Oh my God! I have to show this to Georgie.” As she leaves the room, Otto and I sit there, glaring after her, and then, at each other.

“You should check on her,” Otto tells me. “She could be sick again.” And then, with a flourish of his tail and another smirk, he runs to Georgia-na’s room.

I sit there.

Going to a hospital? But why? She is perfectly fine. She was sick a few months ago, and I remember the various machines attached to her body, and how often she would go to the hospital. Her skin was often pale, distorted, and she rarely was home. But it has been months since that has happened, and she seems better now. Not that it concerns me in any way, but she feeds me, she pets me, and she lets me sit on her laptop as it screams and whirrs angrily. I should, at least, let her know that I will miss her when she is gone. Even if it is for a short while.

The journey to Jessica’s room is a quick one. After dodging the two large, clumsy creatures – with their drool and their crisscrossed eyes and quickened heartbeats – I stand in front of her room, sit there for a moment,
and then, I scream.

It is not so much of a scream as much as it is a way to communicate with Jessica that I am outside her door. The matter of communication is always an issue. Screaming, sometimes, is the only way to let Jessica know that I am here. Even so, the scream does not last long, and it is not like how humans scream. It is shrill, consistent and high-pitched. It is highly effective. When Jessica finally appears at the door, I notice that she is glassy-eyed, rather unkempt, but smiling. She is still my human.

“Mr. Jenkins,” she says, scooping me in her arms. I try not to, but the purr comes easily to me. She kisses my forehead, and with a softness reserved for only me, she lifts me to her bed. “I was hoping you would bother me,” she says. “What were you doin’, huh? Were you waiting for me?”

“I was not,” I tell her, but she does not understand. She never does. Instead, she laughs at me, not unkindly, but I let her know again: “I simply was checking on you. What is this about a hospital?”

It is then I notice the many clothes, papers, and bags strewn across the room. She is packing. She is getting ready to leave. But for how long?

“I’m sorry, my sweet little boy. Was I not paying enough attention to you?” She kisses my forehead again, and then rubs my belly, my forehead, and the spot on my nose. I lie down, immersed in affection and love, and forget about the hospital.

Just for now. Just for a moment.

I awake early the next night, in Jessica’s room, at the foot of her bed, curled, comfortable, and purring. When I lift my head, I expect the sleeping form of Jessica to greet me. But what I see, instead, is an empty bed, and what seems to be a mostly empty room.

I walk outside to find her sitting in the bathroom, the only light
source throughout the entirety of the house. She is sitting there, her hands clutching the toilet bowl, and I smell the sickness within the room before I even have a chance to comprehend it.

She is making sounds. They are deep, guttural sounds. Her face is puffy and wet, and every so often, her mouth contorts as if she is in pain. *Is she hurt?*

Leo appears behind me. He is softer than Otto – a rich, orange tabby with almond eyes and long, luxurious fur. He is the kind, quiet cat who’s human is Mother. I do not detest him quite as much as Otto. In fact, one could say I *admire* him. But such things do not matter.

“She has been there all night,” he says in a soft murmur. I look at him. “She has not moved.”

“What is wrong with her? What is she *doing*?” I am unsure of what the action is called, and I have not seen it happen before. I do not know how to react.

“She is crying,” he says. “Have you never seen a human cry before?”

“I have heard her,” I say, but even then, I am unsure. I can think of the many times I heard it coming from her room, months ago, when she was *truly* sick. During those days, she would gently take me out of the room, even when I would scream and shriek for her to let me back in. She did not understand then. She still does not understand now. I look at her, and then, I turn to Leo. “Why is she *crying*?”

Leo is silent for a moment. Then, he clears his throat. “I do not know. I think she is sick again. She does this often.”

“Often?”

“Every night, almost. I wait for her. I keep her company.”

“I did not know.”

“No, you did not.”

*Prose / Tess Seaver*
I let myself think. She is still crying, and still leaning over the toilet bowl as she hacks and hurls. There are spots of blood there, on her mouth, and I do not want to think, do not want to believe, that she is sick again. But she is in pain.

“What do we do?” I ask. I have never asked Leo such a question before. I think it must startle him. *We are not friends*, I remind myself. But we both care for Jessica. She feeds us, she pets us. She is a friend. Yet when I look back to Leo, he is silent. He says nothing. And it is then I realize that, as felines, I do not think there is much for us to do. So, I sit there, with Leo, beneath her feet, rubbing my head against her legs, as he does. She remains impassive. She cries, and cries, and cries. And all we can do is sit there and watch it happen.

I try not to dwell on the things in the past. I try not to dwell on the things in the present, either. But I have never given much thought to the future. When I awake the next morning, Jessica is dressed, in her room, but smiling. She wears a long-sleeved shirt and long pants, but when she ventures outside of her room (to which I follow her), Father and Mother look at her with deep concern. I can see that they are worried. Mother’s forehead is scrunched so that many lines appear there, and her mouth is twisted in a small frown. Father, on the other hand, remains silent and impassive. He stares at the piece of paper in front of him. I know he is upset. It is easy to see.

“Hey, sweetheart,” Mother says to her, then, and despite the worry that lingers in her eyes, she is all smiles — all sweetness and softness. “Are you all packed and ready to leave soon?”

“Oh. Yeah, ‘course.” Jessica clears her throat. “How cold will it be in New York?”
Father makes a low, grunting noise. “Colder than here, that’s for damn sure.” He looks up. “You and your sister should spend some time together before you go.”

“What? Why?”

“You might be in New York for a while,” Mother says, gently. 

I thought she was going to the hospital? I spare a look around the room, but Otto is nowhere to be found. My eyes narrow into slits.

“Georgie will visit me, though,” she says. “I’ll see her soon.”

“I know,” Mother says. “I know, but… maybe spending time with her, before you go, would be good.”


There is a long, awkward moment of silence. Then, Mother clears her throat.

“It’s going to be okay, Jessica,” she says. “You’re going to be fine. The doctor says it’s just - it’s just a safety measure. The cancer is-”

“Gone,” comes Father’s voice. “It’s gone.”

Jessica nods and says nothing in return.

“You’re right, of course,” Mother says. “Georgie will visit you.” But her eyes look too soft. Too round. “She’ll visit you as much as she can.”

“Yeah,” Jessica says. “I’m sure.”

“Maybe you can call Georgie, after school, to see if the two of you can spend time together before you leave? Wouldn’t that be nice?”

Jessica falters. A strange thing for her, but I do not inquire. I do nothing but sit and watch her. “Yes, later,” she says, after a long moment. “I’ll ask her later.”

“That’s wonderful, sweetheart.” Mother’s eyes are still clouded, but she is smiling. “It’ll be a good send-off before you leave.”

“Yeah,” Jessica says. “Yeah, I think so too.”
Georgie and Jessica do not spend time together later that evening. In fact, I do not even know when Georgie comes home from class. Usually, she returns around the time the sun begins to set, but it is already dark and rainy, and I do believe she must’ve already come home. The rain patters against the windows, and I watch it, silently and curiously. Most of the house has gone to sleep. Done for the day, the night, and perhaps the morning after. It will be the Sun of the Day tomorrow, and such a day is reserved for humans to sleep, eat and lounge around. They act similarly to us felines on this day. It is a day I have come to respect. A day I have come to like.

“You seem lost in thought.”

I emit a groan, followed by a deep, frustrated sigh. I turn around, and there he is. Otto. “What is it? I do not need to dwell on such matters as you.” Did you enjoy the news I told you earlier?” He looks gleeful. Stupidly and foolishly gleeful. “Got you, didn’t I?”

“She’s not leaving for the hospital, you fiend. She is going to New York.”

“New York?” He looks surprised. “That is very far from here.”
“How would you know?”
“Georgie said so.”
“Oh. Oh that’s - that’s just wonderful. Simply fantastic.”
He glares at me. I glare back.
“I am going to go check on my human,” I tell him. “I do not have enough time for your stupidity.” But as I am walking away, Otto does not follow me. In fact, he says nothing at all. I turn back to look at him. “What? Don’t you have some witty remark to say?” There is silence on his end. I try again. “Well?”

Finally, he patters toward me. His gait is unsteady, unsure, but when
he reaches me, he meets my gaze straight on. “I am worried for her, Mr. Jenkins.”

This catches me off-guard. “What? Who?”

“Your human. Jessica.”

I do not tell him that I, too, am worried. Instead, I feign shock. “Why would you be worried? She is fine.”

“Is she?”

“Yes, of course,” I tell him, but my voice shakes. It trembles. “I know her better than anyone else. She tells me these things.”

“How? I do not think she understands you. And, truly, I do not think you understand her.”

I let that sit with me for a moment or two, and then I walk away. First towards Jessica’s room, but then to my corner beneath the staircase. I know Otto is watching me as I go, but I say nothing. I have to remind myself that we felines do not engage in such matters as this. Tomorrow will be a new day to sleep, to eat, and to perhaps venture onto the roof. I know Jessica is fine. She is fine, and she will always be fine. So I will sleep, and eat more tomorrow, and perhaps let Jessica pet me. For now, though, I sleep, and the dreams take me to the roof, where I stand underneath the sky and look up, up, and up.

I expect to feel the heat on my fur. Instead, I feel nothing.

It is not long after I have slipped into slumber that I wake up again. In my bones, I feel that something is wrong. The house is static with energy, and yet the humans are still asleep. I lift my nose upwards: to the dark sky, to the hidden clouds and to the disappearing sun.

I then let myself walk towards Jessica’s room.

When I get there, it is silent save for the whirr of Jessica’s laptop. I
want to sit on it, make it scream and moan in fury. But for once, I do not. With my nose, I push the door more open, and I see the window is open, the moon is out, and it is a grand and wonderful thing: it makes me want to curl up in Jessica’s bed and be near to her. It makes me want to push my head against her hand and purr as loudly as I can. It makes me want to tell Jessica that I love her.

She is my human, and she is also my friend. Cats do not admit such things, but perhaps they should. They should admit that they love their humans. They should admit that they love the sound of their laughter. The feel of their hand on their fur, petting them, making sure they are well-fed and cared for. They should admit that they love the sight of them and how the very image of them coming into a room brings so much joy to them. It is an awakening. It is a welcomed feeling.

But when I step into Jessica’s room, I know something is wrong. I know from her absence on the bed, and I see, then, her figure on the ground, in pain, crying again. I do not know what to do, but in the next moment, Mother is in the room, and she is lifting Jessica up, up and up. Then, I hear loud, wailing sounds. I want to cover my ears and retreat into Jessica’s room, but I do not. I watch as Jessica is taken away from me. I watch and do not say goodbye.

Cats do not focus on the past. Nor do they focus on the present, either. But I remember it all. I remember when Jessica first brought me home, and I curled myself above her chest and listened to the sound of her heartbeat, and I thought how it was a steady, miraculous thing. It reminded me of my mother. It reminded me of home.

But home does not exist without the person who makes a place home. It can never exist again. I sit and stare at the place where Jessica once was, and I remember the softness of her hand, the rich vibrance of her

_Tess Seaver / Prose_
laughter, and for once, I wish I was human. I wish I could tell her I love her. But I cannot. I never will.

There is a heaviness in the house. The humans have not spoken to one another, and I am unsure if they ever will again. But I do not focus on them. I do not focus on their blank stares, or the way Mother stands and sits and cries in Jessica’s empty room as Leo curls up on her lap, trying to comfort her. Or the way Father stares at the blank screen of his laptop and cries too. I try to sit on it, make it scream, make it angry, just to cheer him up, but it does not work. I do not think it will ever work.

Georgie does not allow Otto into her room. He cries and screams outside of her door, and when he sees me watching, I do not know what to say. Perhaps he feels sorry for me. But I do not want his pity.

Many hours later, the humans leave and the creatures are left to their own devices. I eat what is left in the cat bowl, and the other creatures – the slobbering, lovable ones – sleep. I do not know if they know what has happened. They are confused, to be sure, but they are not smart creatures. They are not like us felines.

When the humans return, they are dressed in dark garments, and they bring people with them. There are many people here. I grow nervous. I am afraid. I escape to Jessica’s room and allow myself to sit on her bed. I do not purr. I do not curl up. Rather, I let myself lie on the bed in silence, my paws tucked beneath me, my eyes darting around the room.

“Hey, Jenky,” comes a familiar voice. I am surprised to see Georgie, dressed in a dark garment much akin to the other humans. I allow her to look at me, and I look back at her. There are dark circles beneath her eyes, and a heaviness that she carries with her.

“Mind if I sit here?” she asks. I say nothing in response, so I suppose...
she takes that as a yes. There is nothing to say to this human, or any other human, for that matter. They are all the same. Clumsy, manageable, and unable to understand the language of us felines. And none of them are like Jessica. Never like my Jessica. Georgie looks at me.

“We got into a huge fight before she died,” she says, suddenly and very quietly. There is a moment of stillness. A moment that I think she will not speak. A moment where I think she will walk away. But then: “I never apologized. Never even got to tell her how much I loved her. But it doesn’t matter, Jenky. Does it? I love her. It’s not in the past. It’s always going to be that way. She’s my sister. She always will be.” There is a steadiness in their gaze as she looks at me. I look right back at her. “She loved you so much,” she tells me, then. “You made her so happy, you weird cat.” I see that she is crying now, and I notice that she is also petting me – softly, carefully. I do not purr. I cannot manage one. But her touch brings me comfort.

“Tell me more,” I say. “Tell me everything.”

She cannot understand me. She never has been able to. But if I could, I would tell Georgie that I love Jessica. I would tell her that I have and always will always love her, and that she made me happy, too. But I cannot form the words and say them out loud, and even if I did, she would not understand me. No one would.

And yet, in some way, or by some small miracle, she seems to know that I cannot say what I wish to say. She reaches out and touches the spot on my nose that Jessica liked to touch – that small, tender spot that always makes me purr. And then, she tells me of her life, of her struggles, of how sick she was, and for once, I understand everything. I hear Georgie’s words, I hear Jessica’s words, and I am able to understand it all.

When Georgie leaves to go find Mother, I find myself alone in the room, staring at the rain as it hits the window. There is nothing to do now.
There is nothing else to do but sit and stare.

The life of a feline is, to most, quite easy. I wake up most days without much care other than what I am going to eat for the day. But I try not to dwell on the things in the past. I try not to dwell on the things in the present, either. Most nights, I try to enjoy a tuna meal. There are rare days in which I enjoy chicken, and yet who is to judge the life of a feline so easily? We are independent, strong-willed creatures. We eat what we can. We sleep when we can. But other things, such as the lives of our humans, matter the most.

I know that I cannot rewind history. I am just a cat, and that is the most I can be. I can sleep. I can eat. But mostly, I can allow myself to dream. I will allow myself to dream of the day Jessica and I will be together again, where she will lead me to the roof, to the birds, and to the sun. I can only hope that she will laugh a bright sort of laugh, and that she will turn to me and say, “Everything is okay, Mr. Jenkins. Everything is okay now.” I will believe her then, and I will let myself purr: a loud, steady purr. And then, I will tell her I love her, and her face will brighten like the sun. She will understand my words to be an echo of her own, and then, and only then, will it be okay.
Mr. and Mrs. Redford

Sarah Smith, 2023

Mr. and Mrs. Redford hardly ever fought, but when they did it was lethal. They’d never got out of one of their patented screaming matches without losing a cup or a dish - any kind of glassware that could double as a projectile, really.

Last night was no exception.

Mrs. Redford remembered just how the battle began as she entered the kitchen where her husband was hunched over at the table. The dinner that was left to burn on the stove. The chilled wine that became lukewarm before she could ever drink it. The lipstick on Mr. Redford’s collar - bright pink. Harriet Redford had never worn that shade of pink in her life, her complexion didn’t allow for it.

“Good morning, darling,” she tested speaking with him. Nothing. Absolute silence. Sure, she had been the one who started the screaming and the wailing and the throwing of objects, but she was hardly to blame. The man who had come home with another woman's lipstick on his shirt, and late she might add, had no right to give her the silent treatment. No matter how hard the pepper grinder she’d been holding nailed him in the head the evening prior.

“Not feeling chatty today, are we?” she tried again, picking up the pieces of broken china as quietly as possible, so as to not remind him of all the damage she’d done. “Well, I’ll put on breakfast then. Maybe some pancakes will get those lips moving.”

She couldn’t say that this didn’t make her more infuriated than
she already was. He was lucky she had chosen to believe his idiotic bumbling about how his assistant, Peggy, had tripped and he was there and she fell into his shoulder and yadda, yadda, yadda bullshit in the first place. He was lucky she’d thrown the pepper grinder and not the knife.

Mrs. Redford was so distracted by the fact that she had become rage’s personal pincushion that she almost let her pancakes burn. She needed to pull herself together. She wasn’t going to let him ruin their marriage and breakfast.

“Here.” She shoved the pancakes under his slimy chin. “Darling,” tacked on with a little more force.

He must have been tired this morning. He still sat with his head downturned, just a little, lazy on his neck, flopped towards his chest. His skin had this sort of gray, sickly quality to it. His sparkling blue eyes, just the slightest bit lifeless.

Perhaps he’d stayed up all night thinking about the argument. Thinking about what he’d done wrong, how he could make it better in the morning. Perhaps it wasn’t the silent treatment, and more so that he had nothing to say. He knew he was in the wrong. He wasn’t speaking so as to not upset his wonderful, gracious wife.

She smiled a little when she wrapped her mouth around the fork, letting herself imagine just how considerate her husband's silence actually was. He didn’t speak so he wouldn’t upset her.

“Honey, we’re ok. I appreciate you being so thoughtful, but we’re ok.” She reached out to pinch his cheek and his head flopped lazily with her hand. Side to side, side to side.

“You better eat before your pancakes get cold. I put raspberries in them, just the way you like.” Still silent. Still silent? Maybe he wasn’t as considerate as she’d thought.

_Prose | Sarah Smith_
She felt that rage prick her pin-cushioned veins again.

“Surely you’re old enough to feed yourself.” Silence. “You’re not?”

His head stayed downturned, looking at the floor. She thought maybe, just maybe, she saw him nod “no”.

“Well, ok,” she rose from her seat to make her way over to where he sat at the head of the table. The head of the cream-colored, vinyl table he’d been so keen on buying. She still resented that he hadn’t let her buy that marvelous wooden one. She dreamed of its beveled edges and mahogany stain.

Something felt odd about feeding her husband, but he wanted to act like a petulant child, so she was going to treat him like one. Using her right hand, the strong one, she pried open his jaw before she popped a forkful of the now slightly-chilled pancakes into his mouth, and promptly popped it back shut. Leaving her hand under, she guided his head up and down and up and down, to make sure she’d felt him chew.

He looked quite handsome under her thumb, no matter how sleep-deprived he was.

“Listen,” she said, interrupting the odd but sort of intimate moment they were having, “I know we got into it last night, but I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have yelled and gotten violent. If Peggy tripped, Peggy tripped.”

Instead of responding, he shifted down closer to her face. A clear sign he wanted to kiss and make up. She was agreeable enough to take him up on his offer.

He tasted like syrup and raspberries and sweetness. He tasted like love, comfort, and warmth. He honestly tasted like he needed to brush his teeth - there was something coppery she picked up that she was certain was his morning breath.

His body lurched forward to deepen the kiss, but before she could get
her hands on him, there was a knock at the door.

“One minute!” she called, readjusting her robe to cover the negligee she’d worn to bed the night before. It didn’t leave much to the imagination, and she had worn it in an attempt to make Mr. Redford see just what he was missing. All those trips out of her room to put on a night cream or to adjust a roller as an excuse to pass by the table where he sat must have done the job.

“Good morning, Mrs. Redford!” the milkman spoke when she finally opened the door. “How are you doing this fine morning?”

“Just lovely, and yourself?”

“No complaints here.” He paused. “You’ve got a little…” he said, motioning to the area around her mouth.

“Oh dear!” she said, taking one of her husband’s monogrammed handkerchiefs out from her robe’s pocket. Red. Must be the raspberries. “How embarrassing.”

“Nothing to be embarrassed about, it happens.” Mrs. Redford chuckled to be polite but secretly hoped that he’d be making his way back to his route soon. It was bad enough he’d caught her before she’d taken her hair out and put her face on, let alone with raspberry gunk hanging off the sides of her mouth.

“Well, you better be go-”

“Say, where’s that husband of yours?” he interrupted. “When I saw him last week we got to talking and he said next time I was over he was going to show me this playing card he’d got. Real rare original 1923.”

“He’s enjoying breakfast right now, maybe next time,” she said in an attempt to cut this interaction short. She could already see that he wasn’t going to let up, though, as he peered right past her - a clear shot into the kitchen.

“Hey, buddy!” he called out, making more of a show, leaning past
Mrs. Redford to look into the kitchen. His face immediately shifted. “Woah, are you ok?” Mrs. Redford pushed back on his chest, blocking him from entering the home.

“He’s fine. It’s been a long week, tired from work.” She looked back at him. There he was, flopped down in his seat, head on the dining table lying in his plate of uneaten pancakes, a big smear of raspberry trickling from his lip. It looked like he’d gotten some in his hair too. He really must have stayed up too late last night to be falling asleep like that.

“Mrs. Redford-” the milkman started to say, batting the hand that she still had placed on his chest away

“Well if it’s all the same to you, I’m going to head in. Take Mr. Redford to bed.”

“Mrs. Redford, You can’t really-”

“Goodbye sir, have a lovely day,” she promptly shut the door in his face. “Are you sincerely that tired my dear?” she said and turned her attention back to her husband, who was sleeping like the dead on the dining room table. “Well off to bed with you.”

She made an effort not to wake him, and placed her hands under his armpits to lift him up from his seat. He wasn’t very light, so it took a lot for her and her small frame to drag his body into their bedroom, which was right off the kitchen, and place him soundly in their bed. It would help if he wasn’t fast asleep, limbs limp and bogged down.

“You must be exhausted after last night,” she said with a kiss placed on his temple. His skin felt cold. Hopefully, he hadn’t made himself sick.

Now standing to tuck him in, she caressed the back of his head, right where the night before he’d gotten hit, ornate pepper grinder to the back of the head. That soft spot, right under where it curves. Right where he’d gotten that sticky raspberry juice she’d have to clean up. She wondered if it hurt.
Wondered if it was quick.

“We’ll be ok,” she said, pausing for a moment to gather her thoughts. “I think things are better like this. We are already doing better.”
The Lost Princess

Emily Piken, 2022

T.J. looked up from his counter top, newly polished so that he could see the glowing bulbs hanging in the mismatched pendant lights above him reflected in its mahogany surface. He lifted his wrist to check the time on his watch. It was nearly closing time. Earl and his husband Sylvester were making their way to the door. T.J. quickly moved to hold the door open for them, wide enough for both walkers to fit.

“Thanks, lad,” Earl clapped him on the shoulder as a gesture of thanks.

“Course, Earl,” T.J. nodded his head to the pair as they hobbled out the door. “I’ll be expecting pictures of that grandbaby tomorrow!”

The older couple laughed at each other as T.J. allowed the door to softly swing shut behind them, scanning the cafe for lingering customers as he picked up napkins, coffee mugs and smallish plates from the tables. He was surprised to find a rumpled figure asleep on the couch in the back. This was Anna’s favorite nook. It was farthest from the door, close to the register for a bit of noise and some action but not so loud that the background chatter was disruptive. Anna liked to come in after her work shift on most Fridays.

Unlike Sandrine, who was about a hundred and three or so, Anna wasn’t one to often fall asleep with a cup of coffee nearby. Instead she was often there in her nook, working diligently on her computer, checking off tasks on her to do list, making phone calls, planning meetings and whatever else she did as an executive assistant. It did keep fairly quiet in the back nook even throughout their busy hours, but still, for her to fall asleep T.J.
figured she must've had a rather draining day.

Unsure of how she’d respond, T.J. approached Anna much like he would approach Sandrine—slowly and softly. He called her name first at a whisper and then close to a normal speaking volume, but she didn’t stir. Not wanting to startle her, T.J. was hesitant to prod her. She’d been coming in for a couple months now, they’d talked about Anna’s mother’s health, and T.J.’s sister’s infertility issues, but he didn’t want to make her uncomfortable. A quick glance at his watch made him reconsider. Still, somewhat reluctantly, he lightly touched her shoulder. “Anna.” Her eyelids twitched but she did not wake.

He gave her a gentle tap and repeated himself a bit more forcefully. “Anna.”

A cheerful beeping tone rang out from her bag where it sat on the floor. Anna jolted upright, bumping her knee and shoulder on the bottom of the table. She winced, wiping her mouth and flicking the hair from her face quickly while she blinked, obviously disoriented, and in search of her phone.

“Oh, here,” T.J. reached for her purse at the same time as she did and the soft leather bag slumped to the floor, spilling its contents at her feet, and under the couch. The phone continued to ring.

“Oh shoot oh shoot. Shoot shoot shoot.”

Anna’s sleepy fingers grasped clumsily at the ground under the couch. T.J.’s much more alert and nimble fingers found the phone first, and he quickly placed it in her hand. “Oh thank you, it’s my mom, she’s-”

“I know, I know, answer it!”

T.J. smiled reassuringly at her, and moved away to give her a bit of privacy as Anna began talking animatedly to her mother. She’d been placed in an old folks home a couple weeks ago. Something wasn’t quite right with her, but the doctors hadn’t been sure. Anna had started coming in much more
frequently to work on her laptop after that.

T.J. had cleaned the bathroom, finished sweeping, mopping, and taken out the trash by the time Anna hung up on the phone and started putting together her things. He was replacing the trash bags beneath the register when she approached him apologetically.

He spoke before she could apologize.

“Not a word,” he said. “Don’t you worry yourself at all. How is she?”

T.J. noticed Anna watching his hands as he fitted the trash bag over the edges of the trash can while she responded.

“She was quite lucid this time. Went on and on about the flowers in the garden, and the trees and the lake. She kept talking about this book that she read to me when I was young.” Anna swallowed. The pause wasn’t long, but T.J. wanted to give her more space to speak. It seemed like there was more she might want to say. He kept his voice soft.

“A book, huh?”

Her smile was small, but her eyes lit up the slightest bit, and T.J. caught it.

“The Twelve Dancing Princesses.”

The title sounded vaguely familiar to T.J. Perhaps it was one his sister read as a child. He hadn’t really paid attention then.

“Dancing princesses, huh? I’m intrigued.” He lifted his eyebrows to Anna. Her smile then acted as a laugh.

“The ballgowns, the sneaking away to an underground castle, the dancing, the romance. How could you not be intrigued.” She sighed. “I asked the nurse to read it to her. I thought it might-” She paused, and T.J. nodded.

“Maybe it will help, Anna. You don’t know that it doesn’t.”

Emily Piken / Prose
She reached her hand out as if to touch his arm, and instead set it on the counter next to the register, nodding more to herself than at him. “Thank you Teddy.”

T.J. dipped his head lightly. He wished he could do more than talk. They walked together to the door.

“You know,” T.J. said, wanting to see another smile from her, “I really shouldn’t let you call me that. The other customers might overhear and demand I have my apron changed.” Anna, with her hand on the door-knob, turned to him and with mock seriousness told him, “Well, maybe you shouldn’t have lied to your boss about your name then. Hiding a perfectly good name like Theodore behind some trendy two letter monogram.”

Laughing back at her, T.J. said, “I told you the T isn’t for Theodore.” “Doesn’t matter,” Anna told him. “You’re still a Teddy!”

Shaking his head with a smile, T.J. locked the door behind her.

Anna felt the door close behind her and smiled. She loved the bright, multi-colored cafe with its various hand-lettered fonts on blackboards and its smells of nutmeg, spiced cardamom, chai and other deep, rich flavors that permeated the soft surfaces. The tiny bell sound and click of the door behind her prompted her to step out onto the sidewalk. She felt the cozy warm fog of the coffee, jazz and chatter evaporate from her clothes, replaced by the cooler, wetter air of the rainy evening that greeted her.

Anna couldn’t believe she’d fallen asleep. She’d even missed her evening bus. It was unlike her, but she had been exhausted lately. As she started walking she wondered if she was fighting a cold or something, and made a mental note to put the kettle on when she got home for a cup of tea.

At least she’d gotten a lot of work done at the cafe that evening. Her boss should be quite pleased with her come Monday.
There were few cars on the street at this time. Anna figured she would walk to the next stop and try to catch her bus there.

Anna’s downward gaze was pulled up from the ground at her feet by a fuzzy orange and blue light that her peripheral vision caught emanating from the other side of the street, coming from below along the riverside. It was gone as soon as her eyes landed on it. She shook her head and kept walking, but it appeared again in her periphery. What was that?

Anna held on to her purse on her shoulder and sped up a bit. She was in a bit of a hurry now, if she wanted to catch her bus.

Again the faint glow of color seemed to emanate from below, along the riverbank, and again when she whipped her face to the light, there was nothing there.

Anna stopped walking. There it was. Slowly, almost imperceptibly she turned her eyes to follow it, keeping her head forward until the very last moment. The light disappeared again. Anna wondered if she were seeing things that weren’t really there. She made up her mind to ignore it, shaking her head at herself as she continued walking. Surely, it was nothing. A mere trick of the light. And she was exhausted, probably fighting a cold or a virus or something. This happened to every person on occasion, thinking they saw something quite quickly and having it vanish. Or perhaps some young people were getting into some harmless trouble down there. Want-to-be-influencers filming or shooting some blog post or other.

Anna took a couple steps forward, still sensing the light somewhere to her left, somewhere over her shoulder. She resisted the urge to turn to it, but still looking forward, she thought she heard something. Something like hushed voices talking in rushed tones, or like whispered voices, at a party? Something rhythmic.

Maybe there was an outdoor party happening down there. An outdoor
dinner party, perhaps on a boat or something. That sounds rather lovely actually, Anna thought. An outdoor dinner party on a boat … with strobe lights?

Anna was quite sure her bus was long gone by now. She’d simply have to walk all the way home. She decided that was alright, as it wasn’t too chilly and it had stopped raining. It could be diverting to walk along the river. Perhaps Anna was a bit overworked, and the walk along the water could relax her mind a tad. She crossed the street and began to make her way down the stairs to the river. Anna acknowledged her curiosity but held firmly that it was nothing unusual for her to walk along the riverbank instead of on the sidewalk. Besides, the river way had lights about every 15 paces or so, it was not as if she were taking some great risk to walk this way in the evening.

A walk along the river could be quite romantic, Anna thought.

The riverway was mostly empty. There were no party boats in the water. Anna saw a young couple across the river walking the opposite direction as her. As she walked, Anna looked along the path, across the paved ground, over by the bushes and up the stone wall leading up to the road above. She wasn’t sure what she was looking for, but she saw nothing.

Suddenly there was a man ahead, walking in her direction. Tightening her grip on her purse, Anna quickly peeked behind her and noticed that the young couple was gone. There were no other people on the river way and the man was getting closer to her. Her heart began to beat faster as the distance between them decreased. He sat down on a bench in front of her, and Anna averted her eyes to avoid making eye contact with the man as soon as she was close enough to him to see his face.

“Anna?”

Eyes flicking quickly to his face without stopping, Anna did not recognize the man. “Anna!”

Anna’s heart lurched in her chest. “Wh-”
“Excuse me, I must’ve given you a fright. Strange man calling out your name in the dark. It’s Harry! How are you?”

Anna began to move back again, unsure of how or why the man knew her name. “I’m sorry I don’t-”

“You don’t remember me?” He feigned a hurt expression. “I kid. That’s fine.” The man smiled. “I stopped by the cafe the other day, and Timothy was talking to you. Maybe he didn’t introduce me, that rat!” He laughed, and Anna could tell he meant no offense. “I’m Harold Winchester. Harry. I’m a friend of Timothy’s, from uni.”

The man stood and offered his hand forward to shake hers, but Anna was quite caught off guard by the whole interaction. She scrambled to find the memory of Harry coming into the store, but couldn’t. That didn’t say much, because she was always rather focused on her work when she was at the cafe. She usually only spoke with Teddy.

“… Timothy?” It took her a second. “Oh my goodness T.J.! The T is for Timothy. Of course, of course.”

Harry smiled as if holding a secret.

“That’s right, Timothy mentioned you’d coined a nickname for him. Teddy, was it?”

Anna wasn’t sure what to say to that. Her fingers moved on the strap of her purse. “Maybe one of these days he’ll pluck up some heart and take you out,” Harry said. Anna found it difficult to believe she’d met him before and wouldn’t remember him. Sidestepping his comment, she cleared her throat.

“I’m sorry, I don’t quite remember meeting you! I get rather distracted when I’m working.”

“Yes, Timothy mentioned you’d been working a lot at the cafe since your mother got sick. I’m sorry. How is your mother doing?”

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*Emily Piken / Prose*
Her hesitation gave her away. Harry instantly swooped in.
“Forgive me, Anna. I spoke without thinking.”
“Oh, no harm done,” she told him quickly. “That’s quite alright. I wasn’t aware Teddy spoke of me to his friends, that’s quite-”
“Flattering?” Harry smiled. “All good things of course. In fact I’m glad to run into you tonight. Perhaps you’d like to accompany me to a party? A gathering really, for a book club of mine. To make up for my case of foot-in-mouth earlier. Nothing scary, I assure you.”

Anna was shocked at his forwardness, and somewhat flattered. It had been awhile since she’d gone for a night out, or intentionally planned a social outing. Since before her mother had gotten sick. It felt like years.

Anna sighed.
He seemed to take that as a response.
“Perhaps, another night?”
She was thankful for his understanding.
“Perhaps.”
“Well,” he held out his hand to her, and this time she took it. He brought her hand to his lips, again surprising her with his brazenness. “It was lovely to run into you, Anna Collins.” She nodded, turning with a smile, mostly to herself, and turned to walk away. She peeked over her shoulder at him as she walked. He bent as if to retrieve something from the ground. It looked like a book. Odd, she thought.

In her second step away from him it occurred to her that Harry would have no way of contacting her. Perhaps she should be bold and ask for his number.

In her one second of hesitation, the blue and orange light flared once in her peripheral vision. She’d forgotten!

She whirled around, eyes widely searching to find the source of the
quick flash of light, but finding nothing.

“Dammit.”

Wait. Anna took a slower scan of the river bank, though there was no way he could’ve gotten to the other side of the river so fast, she still checked. Harry was no longer sitting on the bench.

She found herself alone on the riverbank.

She waited a beat, to see if he might reappear or something. Or maybe the light would pop up again. It didn’t.

Puzzled, Anna held tight to her bag and continued walking.

Saturdays were quite busy at the cafe. T.J. was pleased to see that Earl and Sylvester had brought an envelope of photographs that their daughter had sent them of her newborn baby. They were discussing baby names when Anna came in looking positively exhausted.

T.J. tracked her movements to her back nook as he took Earl and Sylvester’s order. “Oh dear,” Earl said to Sylvester. “Did you see Anna come in? Look at her, the poor thing. Looks like she’ll fall to bits any second.”

T.J. planned to check in with her next after he took the old couple’s order. Earl usually ordered for them both. Sylvester was the much more quiet of the two. Earl ordered their usual, and they began to converse about baby names once again. T.J. nodded as he stepped away from them politely. He made his way over to Anna, biting his cheek on the inside as he looked her over. She did look quite disheveled. And bone tired. “Anna, what a lovely surprise. How are you this morning?”

Anna smiled at him, but the bags under her eyes gave her away.

“Is your mother alright?”

“Oh yes,” she answered quickly. “Well, I mean, she hasn’t gotten much worse, or better.” Her fingers bounced on the table, and she didn’t
seem aware of it. “I just can’t stand waiting. All those bloody tests they put her through and still they’ve no idea what she’s got.” She closed her eyes as if to take a moment. T.J. wasn’t sure if she was finished.

“I was up all last night, on message boards with people all over the world with these rare conditions. What if they’re missing something? What if …” She bit her lip. Holding his pencil in hand as if he didn’t know her order by now, T.J. felt bad for her. “Doesn’t it make you worry worse though? Spending all that time on the internet, staying up late when you work so hard during the week-”

She interrupted him.

“So I ran into your friend Harry yesterday, Timothy.”

The mention of his friend immediately threw T.J. off. He hadn’t known Harry would be there last night.

“You ran into Harry? Did he ... say anything to you?”

Anna laughed.

“Don’t worry, he only said you’d mentioned me to him. I’m sure you tell your friends loads of stories about your customers. It’s only a barista’s right. Right, Timothy?” T.J. couldn’t help but smile, not surprised that Harry had shared his name with her. He had a loose tongue and a loose sense of inhibitions with a wide variety of women. But T.J. much prefered the nickname she’d bestowed upon him.

“I hope he didn’t hit on you,” T.J. laughed.

Anna smiled coyly this time.

“I’ll just have my usual please Teddy,” she said.

Shaking his head at her, he went behind the counter to make her chai latte with part whole milk, part oat milk, and a sprinkle of cinnamon. Having made her order quite a few times, he finished quickly, and placed it on the table in front of her within minutes.
“He was rather forward, your friend,” she said. She really did look tired. He let her keep talking.

“He did ask me out actually. To a party.”


“Yes, a party, for his book club or something I think he said?”

That devil, he thought absentmindedly. T.J. hoped his face didn’t give away any of his thoughts as she continued. It bothered him that he hadn’t thought of it first. He clenched his fist and focused on her words.

“A rather odd fellow, your friend. I turned around to give him my number and he was just gone. There was this light or something. I have no idea how he would’ve gotten away so quickly. I’m probably just exhausted.”

She shook her head to herself.

Maybe he had thought to take her there. That would explain the moistening of his palms. He was relieved that she hadn’t actually seen anything. T.J. played it off with a chuckle. “Yeah, that Harry is a character … Well, I’ll let you enjoy your drink.”

Anna chuckled this time, taking a sip of her drink and sighing.

“Thanks, Teddy. It’s perfect, as always.”

The rest of the week had passed in a blur. Anna could no longer deny that she was exhausted. She worried about her mother constantly. Her sleep, and her social life, suffered. She spent most of her time at the cafe, even in the evening, because she didn’t want to be alone in her tiny little flat.

She must’ve dozed off at her computer, because for the second time she was horrified to find herself being woken up by Teddy after having fallen asleep again at the cafe. Past closing time.

The cafe’s lights were almost all turned off. There was nobody there.
but her and Teddy. She started upright. The remnants of her dream made
her heart hurt, but she swallowed it as she moved to orient herself. It was
a memory of her mother and her, when she was young. “Oh gosh, I did it
again. I’m mortified. Why didn’t you wake me up!”

He laughed. “I know how tired you are. This way I could ask you to
come out with me tonight, without having you sit and wait for me to close
up shop.”

Anna was surprised at this from Teddy. Perhaps Harry hadn’t been
off the mark.

Anna caught a glimpse of her reflection in the window across the
cafe. She discreetly patted her hair. She hoped the sad, sore feeling in the
back of her throat didn’t come out in her voice, or at least that he wouldn’t
hear it.

“You want me to come out with you? Tonight?”

“If you’d like,” he offered.

It was very dark, and Anna felt as if she might cry. She didn’t snuffle,
but maybe he heard something in her breathing anyway, or maybe he just
knew.

“You were mumbling in your sleep. I couldn’t make anything out.”

Anna rushed to hide her face in her hands. “Oh gosh!”

It would be obvious now to him, that she was crying. At first he
didn’t say anything. He came over and sat next to her. He held something out
to her. A napkin. As she took it and wiped her face, he asked, “Do you want
to talk about it?”

Anna wasn’t sure what she wanted. She wasn’t sure if she should talk
about it, especially since he’d finally asked her to come out with him. She
hadn’t made up her mind yet when she started to speak.

“I dreamt that I was young again, and my mother was putting me to

Prose / Emily Piken

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bed. She used to read to me every night.”

“The Twelve Dancing Princesses?”

Anna nodded.

“I think I was maybe six or seven. My mom was going out that night, to a fundraising event, a gala or something. She was all glammed up and putting me to bed before the sitter came. I asked her where she was going.” Anna’s voice gave her away, so she stopped for a moment, to gather herself. Teddy didn’t say anything, he simply waited for her to continue.

“She told me, ‘Bunny,’ she called me bunny. I never thought it was strange until just now. I always thought it was rather sweet.”

“It is,” T.J. said. This time she felt his hand pat hers. She continued. “She said, ‘Bunny, if you ever get a chance to get all dressed up and sneak away to an underground ball,” again Anna’s emotions got to her. Her voice wavered. She wiped her face again with the napkin, and T.J. finished the thought for her.

“You should go?”

Anna laughed. She nodded. “That was the general gist, yeah.” Anna took a couple breaths, feeling the sadness lift a smidge.

“How are you feeling?” Teddy asked.

She felt a little bit lighter now, after sharing. She told him so, and thanked him for listening.

“Don’t thank me just yet,” he said. “If you’re feeling up for it, I’ve a place I’d like to show you. I really think it’ll help. What do you think?”

“What place?”

“It’s not far. I’m sure you’ll like it.” She knew he could sense the hesitation in her.

“How about this: if you don’t enjoy yourself, your coffee’s on me next week.”
Anna laughed.

“Alright.”

They made their way out of the cafe and down the street a little bit, in comfortable silence.

“What sort of dress is appropriate for this mysterious place?”

Teddy scratched at the back of his neck. She gave him a playful shove on the arm. “Oh gosh, where are you taking me? To meet the queen?”

Teddy laughed with her this time.

“Don’t worry, there won’t be anybody there tonight. Our next event isn’t for a couple days. I’m hoping I might be able to convince you to accompany me then as well. Consider this a trial run.”

Anna was buzzing.

“Our? What do you mean? What sort of event?”

“You ask too many questions!” Teddy laughed. “Come on.”

They crossed to the other side of the street and made their way down the stairs to the riverbank, like Anna had the other night. They walked along for a bit, until Teddy stopped in front of a bench. Anna was confused.

“Teddy, wh-”

“I’m assuming this is where you ran into Harry, right?”

“Yeah, but I told you I ran into him here. What’s-”

As she was speaking Teddy bent over, reaching for something by the foot of the bench, on the ground. It was a book.

“Harry did the same thing! How did you know that was there?” Anna laughed again, confused and a bit nervous that she was being pranked or something.

“I know because I put this book here.”

He handed it to her.

The book was heavy, with a faded pink color, and a dusty gold spine.

*Prose / Emily Piken*
Young princesses danced on the cover in beautifully ornate dresses.

“Is this some kind of prank? I don’t understand.”

Teddy took a breath. He seemed nervous.

“That party that Harry invited you to, the gathering of his book club he mentioned … I’m a part of it.”

Anna laughed internally.

“Okay?”

Teddy was nervous to tell her he was in a book club? Was he embarrassed? “I think that’s lovely, to have a book club with your friends. Is that how you two met?” Harry looked at her intently.

“Harry and I met at uni. We started a … discreet organization, in which a group of us would meet and organize these … rather lavish gatherings, events, parties if you will, which are all individually themed. Each member chooses a book, which we all read … and then we throw a very elaborate kind of party. Harry’s family is very wealthy and well connected you see, so-”

Anna interrupted him. The information was slowly sinking into her brain. “So what are we doing here?”

Teddy’s eyes seemed to twinkle with excitement under the moonlight.

“The club operates under a strange set of rules. It’s part of the mystery, the drama, the intrigue. It’s all kind of underground. On the first Friday of each month, the new book is chosen by the member of that month. That book is to be placed here, with a note from the member choosing written inside, with the date and time of the next event. It’s my turn this month.”

Anna opened up the flap of the book. On the cover page, written at the bottom in very lovely but somehow male handwriting, there it was.

“A ball?”
Teddy nodded. Anna laughed incredulously.

“You’re throwing a ball? How!”

Teddy took the book from her hand and placed it back at the foot of the bench. He moved around to the back of the bench, where he knelt to reach for a very old latch in what looked like a large manhole cover. This time Anna didn’t ask any questions. He held out a hand to her.

“I’d love to show you.”

Anna looked at his hand for a moment. Her mother’s voice popped into her head for the second time that night. The funny voices she used to read to her in. And before she fell asleep her mother would tell her to dream that she was one of them. The Twelve Dancing Princesses. Anna wondered if she could share the experience with her. If it would somehow bring her back. She put her hand into Teddy’s large hand, and smiled at him.

Teddy lifted the latch. Light shown out from the hole in the ground. Anna gasped. “I knew it,” she said.

Teddy looked at her quizzically.

She shook her head.

“Before we venture in,” Teddy said, with some formality in his tone, but a smile in his voice. “Anna Collins …”

She accepted the formal invitation to join him, and his mysterious book club, and with that, Teddy let go of her hand, and gestured to the source of the light.

“Ladies first.”

As Anna began her descent into the tunnel, she pictured the smile on her mother’s face the next time she would visit her. Anna would tell her that a prince came and invited her to a secret underground ball. Of course, her mother would say, how could she say no?

Anna made a mental note to call her tomorrow morning. But as her

_Prose_ / Emily Piken

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foot touched down on the floor, she let go of the ladder and promised herself, right now, I will enjoy this.
try weather at the beginning of the week slowed the migrations, but with a change in the wind and warmer temperatures more birds kept moving. The first turkey vultures have been seen. Suzanne Vienneau saw one quite low near Fallowfield, and Richard Brouillet saw two soaring overhead near Chelsea. The vultures, with their huge wingspan, are common on the thermals and then glide down. But for one — an example of their skill and daring. The bluebird houses are low and easily accessible but the bluebirds are nervous parents and like to be left alone. Last year, the result of cars and people being too close to the boxes resulted in some nests already filled with eggs, being deserted and the families lost. A request to photographers and birders from June Pye: Please do not come too close to the occupied boxes. The bluebird houses are low and easily accessible but the bluebirds are nervous parents and like to be left alone. Last year, the result of cars and people being too close to the boxes resulted in some nests already filled with eggs, being deserted and the families lost. A request to photographers and birders from June Pye: Please do not come too close to the occupied boxes.
Sé Do Bheatha 'Bhaile

Leo Fahey, 2022

In Hills, Lay Men Scattered so Far and Wide,
Among Roads, Forked with Weapons Pointed High,
Join Us This Day Waiting for Easter Tide,
This Land was ours ‘Till the Roosting Magpie,
A Thieves Welcome Laced with Barbs and Curled Snakes,
Now We Stand Waiting for the Finale,
Our Rifles Aimed Straight, Halting Any Shake
Hoping the Enemy Comes our Alley
Shots! SHOTS! Quick, Lads! - Concentrating Our Fire
Reloading Our Magazines In Between,
I Saw Him There, A Warrior’s Friar
Bullet for Bullet, They Missed the Man Clean
Giving them Their Last, He was Immortal
Till He Wasn’t, And Was Struck in His Spleen
In All My Dreams I Wish for that Courage,
He Served His Lord Until His Fateful End
Though He Had Come to an End from That Life,
Flushed from the Mortal Coil He had Known,
His Face was Bitter from all of that Strife,
To Know that he had never Learned or Grown
His Life a Railroad ‘Till this Very Flash,
Could’ve been Any One of Us, So Why?
A Boy of only Eighteen, Shot and Thrash
To the Pearly Gates that he Awaits, High
Glory to the Volunteers They Called Out
Glory, If only to obtain it late
The Old Saying, Away From War: Oro!
Sé Do Bheatha 'Bhaile!
The US census asks me to state my race

Hanan Tuffaha, 2024

And I’m not sure which box to check. What do you call yourself when America wants to completely ban your existence. Never American enough and always a threat, but I get counted as a white girl - Until they see me

When I tell them I was born here, they call me a liar. The amount of people who have felt the need to welcome me to their country these past 21 years has been astounding, and I’m not even 21 yet - It almost feels like a threat; a reminder that I don’t belong here, That you wanted to rip me out of the womb and send me back home before I even knew where home was.

My Palestinian ancestors escaped a genocide funded by YOUR tax dollars so, I couldn’t go back if I wanted to.

You welcome us into your country while reminding us not to get too Comfortable, that we’re merely guests at your
Table and we should be grateful that you’re feeding us crumbs of what’s left over from your feast.

You love our food but you hate the people who made it. When you hear us speak in our native tongues You hear a death sentence instead of a greeting - Speak English, you’ll say, this is America - America calls us white while also calling us terrorists

Did you know the deadliest mass shooting in America was executed by a white man? Yet my culture makes me more likely to become banned than the gun in his white hands

Why are you so afraid of your own family? Isn’t that what you want to call us every 10 years when you’re counting your majority and making sure it stays that way -

I’m 20 years old and still learning how to say my own name, The vowels and consonants dancing on my two-forked tongue - For some reason they sound so different every time, almost like I’m singing a new song whenever I introduce myself.

I’m Palestinian and American, but sometimes I ask myself If it is possible to be both at the same time.

So when the US Census asks me to state my race I leave the question blank.
21:04

Sarah Smith, 2023

No longer able to clasp
or intertwine (yours),
(my) hands, like ties, traverse a room
Engulfed in black.

Find nothing but weights that fit perfectly
In the divots of Your Spine.

Not at photographs or memories.
The fading sound of your voice.
The searing singe that comes from air
Entangled with your breath.

You used to visit in the morning,
With bluebirds and rising east.
Tawny skin that’s freckle graced like
speckled eggs and granite.

I don’t remember how it felt
To grace each other’s presence.
It’s been so long, it all feels like
Film pictures on projectors.
Trash is scattered over la mesa like pieces to a puzzle,
Making it impossible to find the pieces that belong together.
Plates and trays are left sitting alone in their solitude,
Only carcasses are left behind by the bodies that have moved on.

Caffeine fueled birds flew over Mexico,
with their bellies full of empanadas and tortillas.
They were all different shades of cafe and pan dulce,
Leaving their hearts hidden in foil and bones crumpled up in napkins.

La familia once sat together in harmony, but are now scattered,
like stars in the night sky.

Elephant Graveyard

Mateo Pita, 2022
We tumbled into the ocean at the sound of thunder,
Shed our skin and clothes like a chrysalis as we
Bounded into the flashing darkness. I like to think that,
You and me, we were born like this. Up from the earth,
Ready to run. Fingers laced as we kicked up sand and
Barreled toward the sea, toward the future. To freedom.
As lightning cracked on our irises and salt kissed our
tongues,
We held each other in the cold riptide, summer waning.
I knew then what it meant to be boundless and hell-bent.
Ocean roaring around us and our friends calling from
The shore, voices murmuring. The hurricane cradled us,
Told us to go. And so came the swell of earth, the sweltering
Solstice. Never this young again, but still ready to run.
Silk-lined fingers skate on a wound, torn open.  
Trace viscera and red-black ink -  
Battered skin and bruised lung,  
Missing, lost, and broken bone.  
Late at night is when you struck -  
Carving out flesh around muscle,  
Shovel’s metal clinking bone -  
Splintering under a calloused touch.  
I place myself under a scalpel, iron clutched sides -  
White-hot vice grip of a jaw clenched,  
Crying our curses and pleas and your name -  
An ache dulled by wet lip and tongue.  
Teeth sink into pink ladies and sweet nectar,  
Voices that serpentine and slither.  
Accusations in side-gardens,  
Steering clear of all-knowing ears.  
Nature sighs and flowers wilt -  
Browning petals and rotted stumps,  
Roots that sink in soggy ground.  
I walk around, stitched up and stapled -  
Isn’t it a shame no one ever gave a rib for me?
I am in love and this is what it looks like
Oh no! Silly. I’m not going to show you.
But since you’re asking.
What it looks like?
It is uncomfortable and grand
Like a cocktail party in a closet with a Steinway and no chairs
It looks like
It looks like something too complex for cartoons
Something I don’t want on TV
I don’t want you to see it
It’s a little inappropriate
Close your eyes
If you won’t close your eyes then I can put my hands over them
And we’ll pretend it’s peek-a-boo
Even if it defeats the purpose
Since you’re too old to forget I’m there
To forget the feeling of hands
Or maybe I could
Maybe I could close my eyes
And trace your face with my fingertips
To find out if they remember the bridge of your nose as well as I do
I am in love and this is what it looks like
Close your eyes

Poetry / Rose Beardmore
Rager

Rose Beardmore, 2024

Alert! Alert!
It’s begun.
I did not receive an invitation to Bunny’s twenty-first birthday bash.
The apocalypse is nigh.
The Titans have descended on our mortal world once more and their celestial limbs are pushing a storm of carnage across the ocean.
A red tidal wave full of bodies and waterlogged cell phones.
I’ll get drunk in my dorm room alone and call everybody I know.
I’ll look in the mirror and think about being ugly.
I’ll cry and slap myself in the face.
I’ll gorge myself on melodramatic revenge fantasies and post them all on Twitter.
I am Kronos and his children.
I am Caesar and the senate.
Negotiation is futile.
I must sit and wait patiently
behind boarded windows and a locked cellar door.
It’ll pass.
Maturity

Lauren Pichette, 2023

I’ve grown by making myself smaller.
I became larger than life while hiding in the corner.
In my mind I ride the clouds,
in reality I’m the girl behind the silence.
I became larger than life while hiding in the corner.
I built my own fictional world,
in reality I’m the girl behind the silence.
I folded into myself.
I built my own fictional world,
for safety.
I folded into myself,
to unfold like a swan.
For safety,
I no longer feared my voice
to unfold like a swan.
I took up the whole universe.
I no longer feared my voice,
but I’ve grown too big for my mind.
I took up the whole universe.
but even space has its walls.
I’ve grown too big for my mind.
I found the switch to the real world,
even space has its walls.

“Welcome back to reality.”
I found the switch to the real world,
I did more than origami then.
“Welcome back to reality.”
I actually flew.
I did more than origami then.
I packed my fictional world away.
I actually flew.
Away from the voice in my head.
I packed my fictional world away,
stepped up from behind the silence,
away from the voice in my head.
Growth by decrease.
Violent Paradise

Gonzalo Echeverria, 2023

The birds sang their daily gossip, the air
Carrying the noise of a waking village.
    Carry on; the palms always told time.

"A quarter after the first leaf" was the mark.
The clouds made breath of fire- battered applause.
    The rays were unseemly for Earth's paradise.
gloucester

Juliet Giangregorio, 2024

holding tightly to your limbs
anchored in your harbor
drowning in a love so deep
i am underwater

you and i are the weather
true and fast and bright
i am reckless you are fire
bathe me in your light

draw me in the shadow’s eyes
wild nights are tame
take me in your arms and then
arrow bow and aim

catch my breath between your hands
take it from my lungs
spinning webs of smoke and air
credence has been sung
he follows me on both his accounts

*Caitlyn Green, 2024*

two little round heads
sitting at the
bottom of a
black, captioned
screen
watching, waiting
“2 people seen”
both little round heads
owned by
you.
4 pixel eyes
tapping, instantaneous,
watching, waiting
digging holes
in my rotting
ribcage,
burying subtext.
but you have no
words.
you won’t
respond.

we stay
professional.
we forget
those cheap wax
blocks of
affirmation
validation
melted down
stamping closed
confidential mail:
your origami devotion
your postcards from
Rotterdam,
poorly lit
Polaroids, Sauvage
stains.
all corners
licked.
we stay
professional.
we forget.

*Caitlyn Green / Poetry*
I’ve thrown your words into shapeless flames, they threaten to burst my 2 pixel eyes, fill the cavities with screen-black ash but, until then, I still see you. your eighteen-point-six centimetre ego, and your two little heads watching, waiting.
Gravitas of the Mother

Gonzalo Echeverria, 2023

The tiredness grows closer to my eyes. I can feel the drowsy curtains Called to finite lashes. Try To shut them but to no avail. The tiredness always there. Go away!

I speak of the collective we. A we that cares for the billionth number of our pop on Earth. A we bound to axe and fire. We shall forever dine on our Mother’s ire.

We are bound by that meager tree. Incessantly blooming, boasting of an importance we can only pretend to know.

“Continue” she says. Immortal are they, compared to us. “Have all not seen my majesty?” A beauty born Of power beyond our axe. Perhaps Wit, our decadent attempt at power. “Don’t the heights of the waves
Amass a cult of shadows and despair?
Don’t the Titan’s clash worry?”

“None know cruelty. I am beyond such trivialities.”

*Poetry* / Gonzalo Echeverria
Starlight into Saturday

Juliet Giangregorio, 2024

I’m always running in my mind,
beats pounding in my chest.
Screaming to the void above-
take me at my best.

Breath is stolen from my lungs,
curse the air I breathe.
Throat that’s choked with vines so tight-
lengthen my reprieve.

Starlight into Saturday,
I have seen it all.
Quartet of time in moonlight sings
writings on the wall.

True explorer of the night,
fleeting fast and free,
exhilaration in my veins,
I’m where I’m meant to be.
A World We Dreamt Of...

Elizabeth DiLauro, 2023

I see it there –
A sky, a world unimaginable,
a breath of fresh air.

Moments of mysticism
floating effortlessly
in a city of the unlivable.

Here I see –
Buildings, skyscrapers,
angry car drivers.

Pollution of plenty,
collusion of many.
Dashed into our own disaster.

I see it there –
a girl, a boy,
walking without a care.
The whirlwind of life,
swept away into shaped
cotton cities of crystallized ice.

Here I see –
people on the streets,
hunger in their teeth.

Devastation that floods
streets of the unlucky. A
hero – absent and shunned.

I see it there –
a city with clean air and
parks of plenty.

Here I see –
a history of life tainted by the footprints of our existence,
floating our memory into the forgotten distance.

I see it there –
peace on earth, a life worth living.
Hope lives there.

I see it there, I see it here –
a world we dreamt of,
a world in despair.
What is Trauma?

Sinéad Noel, 2023

what is trauma
i ask myself
blank faced, staring into my own reflection
while wet hair makes a home against the back of my neck

it is encasing your feelings in a flint covered museum
glass and gasoline
protected, but just breakable enough
so you can shatter it if you need to,
set it on fire if you need to
and let them free,
for just a little while
until you have to build a new one, to hold the feelings that
will always, always come back

it is shows i will never watch
movies i will never see
books i will never read, gathering dust collected into the
corner of my room

it is gifts born of blood
a wicked smile saying you forgive me
but never apologizing in the first place
it is everything i have never had and everything i have ever had all at once
closed into my hand like a secret
cutting into my skin like a knife
dripping red onto the floor

trauma is that, too
dark red blood dropping endlessly onto a floor
you pass your hands through it
and it stops
collecting on the wood like water, rusting until
you stare at it so long that it becomes clear

whose blood is this?

trauma is having stopped asking that question years ago

it is letting yourself bleed so that maybe someone else won’t have to this time

it is hearing a song that i’ve heard too many times before
and crying because i don’t want to hear it any more
it always made me feel sad anyway

so sad i could feel the ache in my chest
the ache in my chest that is trauma

trauma bores a hole through me
burrows it’s way into my heart and into my soul
shattering my ribs like they are nothing
pushing rage out of me until there isn’t any me left

it is everything.
and it is nothing that you think it is.
Eternal Spring

*Juliet Giangregorio, 2024*

If I could touch an Angel’s wings,
and turn the Earth to Sun and Spring,
I’d bathe in warmth just for today
And twirl and leap and laugh and play!
But come each swift hour passing,
Tears replace my joyous laughing.
My Heart longs for the Grey and Cold,
Instead of the Sun’s blazing Gold.
And with each slick minute ticking,
That Wish in my keen Mind sticking,
I’d climb the tallest tree to see
My Angel’s wings- oh could it be?
One touch until my Wish is tame-
The too-close Sun sets me aflame!
My greatest Hope is my demise,
The Summer Light melts in my eyes.
Never again will I see snow,
Or feel the Winter Winds a-blow.
My skin drips into Golden Light,
Punished forever for my plight.
Greed- it is a fickle Thing,
And now I live Eternal Spring.
BUNNY BELIEVES IN GOD

with thanks to Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, and Amy Lowell

bunny twists and turns over the sink, exploring all the optical illusions of figure hip bones like the cresting wake of a speedboat biceps like pencil notches in a wooden desk spine like a pearl necklace pulled taught the apparition of a face that belongs to no one bunny’s ugly little body is shy, uncorseted, appealing as best it knows how it is turning twenty today, just like she always knew it would she imagines her almost-naked peach larva self writhing on a neon billboard in Times Square birthday party tourists watch the larva blow out all twenty of its stupid candles they clap her stomach feels nauseous, and bunny decides not to bring it to any twentieth birthdays what place is this? where are we now?
bunny’s fingers splay over the butcher block sink and make their way to the cabinet they fumble on the shelves, and orange bottles clatter into the basin and oh! the Manic Panic hair dye from Gaga concerts past! it comes out in gorey clumps and mushes into wet hair like store bought batter bunny is everywhere she’s ever been, all at once ghosts of braces under layers of lip gloss, spirits of encounters in handprints roaming over skin the dye marinates, the phone glows abruptly one still hand applies mascara, one shaking hand scrolls over the screen the blue light feeds crisp, decadent algorithm into the larva’s gaping maw it is hungry, hungry, hungry
the body is a temple turning against its tyrannical priest and flooding with saltwater
mascara runs, dye itches, blue light flickers seductively
palms dive into the basin of spilled capsules
elbows swipe away the shower curtain and settle into the tub
Manic Panic hair dye is creeping down the sides of the bathtub like bubblegum blood and she’s
not sure how many grams of benzodiazepine it would take to get her dad’s attention and the
sound of the broken hvac is like a million souls screaming in agony as they watch salvation slip
away
capsules crowd between her teeth and under her tongue
bunny’s cheeks hurt from being cried on and her nails hurt from being bitten
everything is happening to me, and i am happening to nothing
i am happening to nothing
bunny sees the heavenly light and lies in it until her skin is damn near burned to a crisp
and bunny believes in god
believes in god like a pregnant atheist waking to contractions
believes in god like a pilgrim vomiting into the sea at sundown
believes in god like a comet withering to shimmery nothingness on its way through the seventh
terrible layer of atmosphere
bunny spits pills into the drain and wheezes pathetically
she has time for nothing but the endeavor to balance herself upon a broken world
and screw god if that isn’t fucking divine
bunny walks into her birthday party trying not to cry
and god is a teenage girl turning twenty
looking and being looked at
feeding and being fed
bunny feeds herself cake in handfuls
and she is glad to be divine.
Gio Casella | Arts

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Sarah Smith | Arts
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