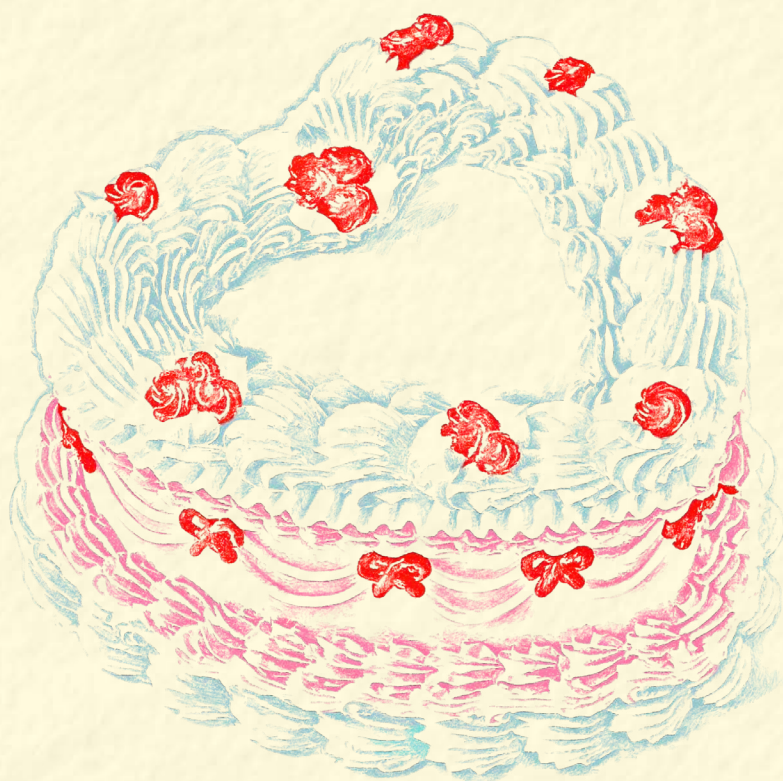


The Talon Review



vol. 3 issue 2



The Talon Review's

Spare Wife

Volume 3 Issue 2





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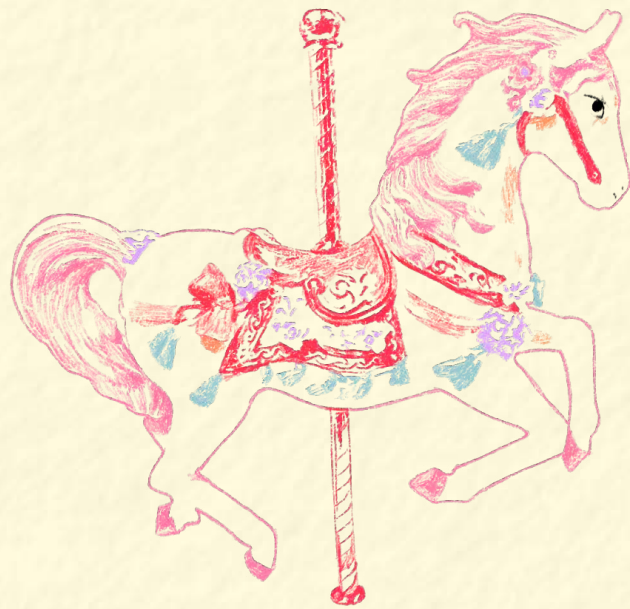
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Editor's Note

To All Our Dear Wiles,

This issue underwent a title change nine times before I finally texted our faculty advisor and admitted that I had no idea what to title it. I felt my temperament as of late to be chaotic and I knew it was prohibiting me from finding delight in any singular title for longer than a couple of days. I needed a title for all my title woes. One moment I wanted a title that was all celebration. *Celestial Bloomer. Stitched Honey.* The next moment, I wanted a title that embraced my fondness for twisting negative criticism. *Soirée Racket. Drama Child.* There wasn't anything wrong with these titles; some even left me with a feeling of finality. But I couldn't shake the compulsion to begin again.

“What about *Spare Wile?*”

Huh. Well, maybe? As it turns out, I couldn't stop thinking about the musicality of this title. *Spare Wile. Spare Wile.* A charming lilt. Spare me awhile. Let my wiles be more than a spare. That was it. *Spare Wile.*

The pieces in this issue reveal in some ways what it means to work within aspects of sparsity—particularly in terms of space. Space—as in the right to take up space. Who gets to take up space? What or who risks taking up too much of it? And who determines these “rules”? Ultimately, we must venture into creating new space. In our art. In our world. Space with an open door. Perhaps even a space without walls, without maps. Purely for the fact that we are capable of being so much more than the spaces by which we have come to restrict ourselves.

In other ways, these pieces reveal artistic wiles and the shrewd craftiness in how artists use creative outlets to comment on the world we share. In these pages, craft and intent operate in tandem to spark conversation and incite human connection—perhaps even to draw attention to the sudden observations of what could be transformed for the good of all.

It's my wish that the pieces within this issue express an embrace of all our sensitive wiles, to be comfortable with the excessiveness of our emotions. What can we examine in a world that wants so badly to hope? In the fullness of our time, do we have the courage to express all that it means to be alive? I invite you, reader, to approach this issue with tenderness regarding action, language, art as concomitantly and *bravely* sincere.

- *Natasha Kane*

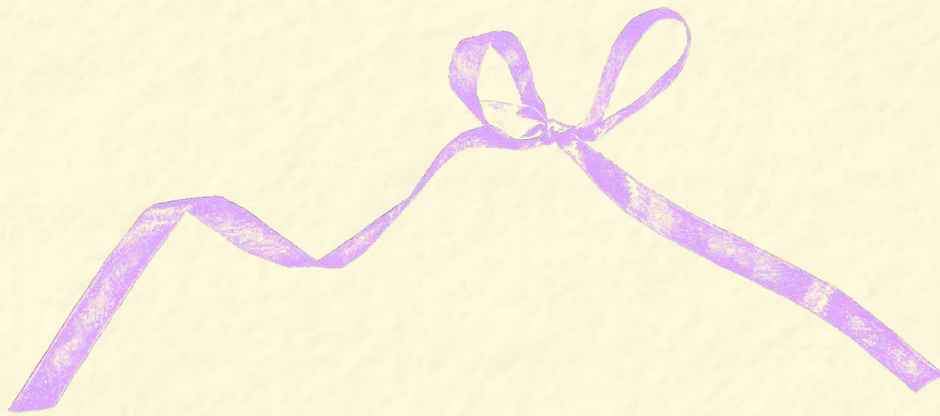


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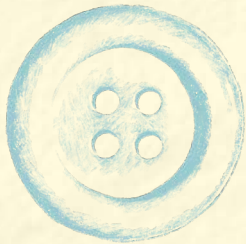




Unwound

Laine Derr & Carolina Torres

She taught me, once,
how to crochet gloves
w/ hands twisted pink,
but I longed to unravel
beauty—threaded like
unkind borders
 skein-tight
 hoping less
 from life
uneven
I sit
unlooping
samples
 wound for a child who loves deeply, the way she was taught.



in autumn

Monique Harris

i have a friend who is becoming happy again
not just her copper tinted braids
but the way she announces plans
follow me to this store
follow me to this bar

this is where i pray

according to my friend, i worry too much
she sleeps, gains weight, she laughs now

she's *okay*

she asks me is she wrong for despising my care
for wanting Ireland and France?
or the sexiest woman alive in her bed?

she wears plum now, and scarves, and toe covered flip-flops
below rose cardigans

and speaks in conditional tenses about the past and future

she's covered in sage and oils
with the name of things all around us
wild, dark, beautiful

auras caught
on the backs of chairs and hugs
along ornamental edges of beginnings

on that final day, we got fat, watched our favorite
shows puffed up on the bed
and counted our dreams on fingers



here i said this is how far you are
from me

in my forties i shiver under a bank of clouds
thinking of her

on the first beautiful night of autumn
closing my eyes,
listening to crows
call me back





Horizons

GJ Gillespie

2015

mixed media collage on board

10" x 8"

She was taken to the madhouse

Désirée Jung

Despite the ounce of generosity she had given to the world, the sums of words and urges, nothing could compensate for her miserable becoming—of what she was supposed to be.

I am not she, she thought, I will not let this avoidance of reality hover over my saying of things, even if that meant having a mouth full of ants. This tingling will resume years of silence, of previous generations of women swelling down emasculated syllables of ignorance around the shape of phonemes, braggadocio hearing bagging encrypted females, tranced by the sailing of muscled armful worlds.

I will reject my parents, she continued, daring to desire unthoughtful thoughts, refusing this vocabulary of ancestral male yearnings. I will birth my death and be born again, outside this sentence of dreadful languages.

Father, you are hurting the palms of my hands, you are cutting my heart with the bronze of your pennies.

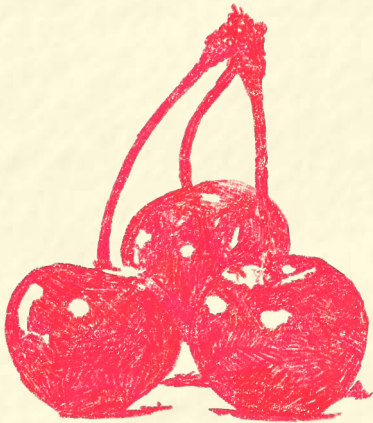
Don't you dare girl, is the look she gets, but he is weak, he doesn't have the will to say it. His indifference is his weapon, his strategy to differ differences.

I am the daughter of my mother, she speaks with her eyes, feeling hatred in her soul, despite her mother's hold, despite her respite urging the unconscious birth of foreclosed emotions, the offspring of consciousness inducing her to destroy all that may endanger her fertile land, and for that, the need to sacrifice her earth, at least for now, for despite her innocence, she is the one who will be taken to the madhouse.

Not her father, not her mother: she is the one who will be called insane.

They will lock her up for her own good: wanting too much to be something other than her destiny. Her sin: she has become a woman. Not his, nor hers, perhaps never anybody's, but at last free to have a slight curve in the lineage of her fate, costly recounting the currency of choice operations, mathematically leaving everything behind, the inquisition, aren't you afraid of not having someone to pose questions so that they can answer themselves, the authority will inquire.

No, the girl will think in a future past, fast forwarding herself into a bright vision of her hands handcuffed against a hospital gurney, watching her mother years miles further back, on a different continent, in an opposite hallway, a crisscrossing of gurneys and a smile on their faces, decades before, her mother ready to give birth to her second child, the girl's big brother, a first-time glimpse into the paradoxes of being born.



Reading Our Darned Worry

Jan Wieszorek

Begins when lilies writhe in creek
current. They float like words
seamed to a rag rug, woven wet
into Michiganders' woolens,
the pulled thread of orchard rows
sewn w/ blueberry feet & kitchen
grapes. Combed heads of boys' grace
half-curtains where husband & wife
fret over the blanketing scarecrows
& fuss w/ sunflower fabric shelf
liners—reading seasons like words
applied on quilts—these are folks
who speak if spoken to & worry
less on a porch than a veranda—
a gable front & wing, w/ peace
signs in silo dust. I have found
comfort from a head nod inside
a red truck slowing for me
to cross out the darned worry
on my chin. My last agony
will mend a forehead of thorns,
w/ my stone to rise from soil
after the rains. I have come
to accept the few weeds I've
pulled, acquiesced to the cross-
stitch on my cardigan like a
schoolgirl's cursive sampler.



Plummy

Angela Townsend

I have a recurring dream that I have been cast as the Sugar Plum Fairy.

I am running gruesomely late and have not skimmed my lines. All I have is my costume and my obligation.

You might say that's low-hanging fruit for analysis.

God has a broad sense of humor. Although my ballerina dreams crashed into my balderdash body, and sugar was my nemesis from age nine, I have been the Sugar Plum Fairy since I could first hold a wand.

I can't remember a time without one.

I was the kindergartner chosen to escort fellow scholars to the nurse's office, the teacher visibly relieved to release them into my care. Although my execution wasn't brilliant—the story is told of my urging a boy with a bleeding finger to join me in “If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands”—my glitter was good, my intentions eager.

I was the fourth grader deprived of cake but gifted with a mission. I would be the delightful diabetic, self-deprecating with a shimmy. Boys gambled for my glucose tablets, guessing my blood sugar on the bus. Teachers gave me pretty pencils instead of birthday cake. Halloween gave me chances to spell my love in Tootsie Rolls, rolling with the punches and assuring everyone that I missed nothing.

I was the twelve-year-old taken aside by the pastor, her own young hands holding my Statement of Faith like papyrus. “Did you ever think you might have a call? I see how you love the Lord...I see how you love the other kids...”

I was the pre-med student who slipped chemistry's chains in a torrid affair with 19th-Century Russian Literature, remembering I was a weirder sort of healer.

I was the student pastor, the hand-writer of cards, the preacher and the pleader and all seven Pleiades, praying to light the many skies, praying that God would “use me, love through me, love through me, love through me.”


I was the unlikely fundraiser with an unbidden call, the chaplain charged with raising seven figures and raising morale and raising an army of people who loved themselves nearly as much as the animals they rescued.

I was the high honoree, high on my own purpose.

I was getting arthritis from holding the wand so tightly.

I was scared of my own resentment when it came, dark flecks of dried mud and my own





blood amid the glitter.

I sought absolution, made resolutions to love better and more. I added olds and news to the birthday card list. I responded to emails from sad people before my first cup of coffee. I lay awake wondering what I would post on Instagram to encourage everyone.

I could not encourage the man whose name I'd taken, the one who took all I gave but was never fed. He squinted into the light. He assured me that he knew I "judged the eff out of" all the people I thought I loved. I thanked him for "unmasking" me.

The dreams increased.

My work hours increased, swelling to sixty, but only because I needed a steady glitter depository. I was good at this, I was good at something, I was good. I shook my wand over a pandemic. I shook my words over saltless seas. I cried. I tried.

I tried. I tried. I tried.

I embezzled my worth from work, but my account was overdrawn. I wrote myself cathedrals around the cats, building myself a place to live, if not rest.

Not rest.

I wrote my way out of depths I'd told myself were dawns. The lovely lies that let me sleep were metallic in my mouth each morning, but the truth was getting louder.

I didn't know my lines.

I wasn't alone at the dance. My balderdash body would taste the sweet again.

When the flying buttresses collapsed, I did not.

When my whirling wand couldn't save one story, the Great Story folded its wings around me, tinsel halo and polyester gown and all.

That's not how the story ends, because the Story doesn't end.

I haven't ended my run as the Sugar Plum Fairy, but the stage fright is fading.

It will always feel good to fan the good. I will encourage and adore, clap my hands and unwrap the happy, as long as there are mercies yet to pluck.

I still pray "use me, love through me, love through me, love through me."

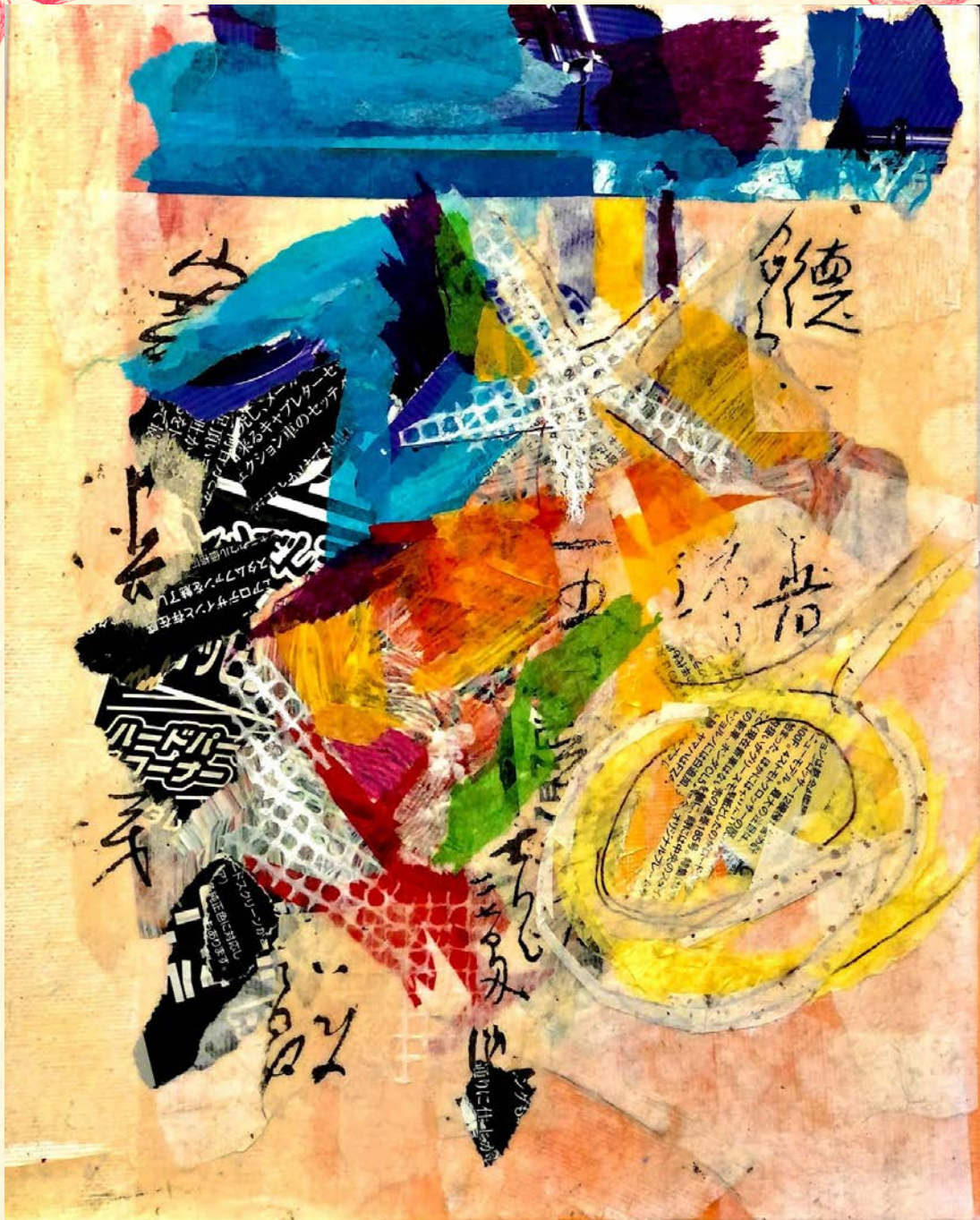
But I'm done embezzling.

I'm done dazzling, done with the proving that left me with no plum pudding.

I'm learning to love and to lay down, to pirouette and to crawl, to show up on time and show up for myself.

I have no idea what my lines are, but it's scrumptious to improvise.





Siren's Whistle

GJ Gillespie

2015

mixed media collage on board

10" x 8"



AT 4:30 AM, I FOREGO MY DIAGNOSIS

Angel Rosen

When I am awake after 3AM, no one exists.
I am on no one's couch, today I hugged
no one's son, I did not ever have an affair
with any man or compulsive liar.

I imagine that my television is filled with
company. Because I want company—
and I can be less lonely in the light of the screen.
No one else exists, other than these actors
and their laugh tracks. I laugh with them.

I take out my retainer and eat cake
by myself. I wish I could share this with someone
but the world is just unreachable.

My relationship with nocturnality
began before I could walk.
At the thought of bedtime, my needs
would expand. I need a drink,
I need a story, I need to know myself,
I need to make sure my Furby is not
alive, I need to make sure
my fish are, I need to count
the figurines in the shadow box,
I need to make sure my clothes fit
(on me) (in my drawers),
I need every immediate explanation,
and the television turned to channel 43.

At 4:30 AM, no one can help me
reach the Ramen Noodles
because nobody else is here,
nor anywhere.



I boil the water anyway and
jump right into the pot.
Once I am cooked, I roll myself
into a bowl and rest near the silverware,
which isn't real, either.

At 5:00 AM, I walk into my attic
and see the wall of board games
stacked high. I can't get to the one I want,
because I am all alone.

There is no one to play with me,
but I have to have it.

I climb the stack halfway
and almost make it, but

I crash down with all of the lids,
cards, and pieces in disarray.

I lay there, awake, in my catastrophe,
knowing the sun will be up soon
which means there isn't much time
before other people exist again.

At 4:30 AM—

I owned every house. Monopoly.

I had insurance. The Game of Life.

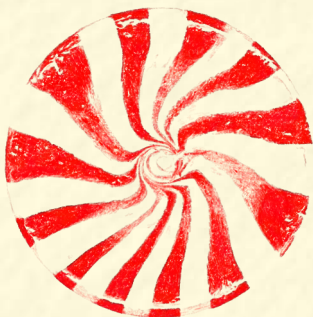
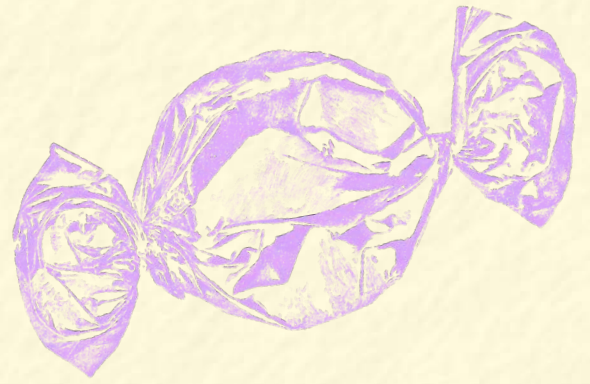
I made every mistake. Sorry.

I ate everything. Candy Land.

I tried to hold myself. Twister.

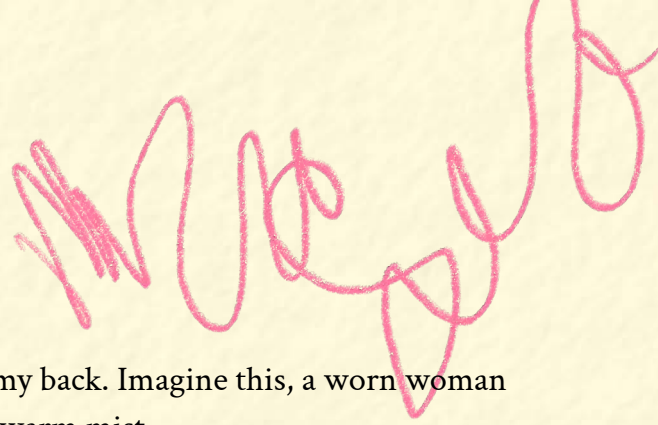
I tried to invent another person. Operation.

No one wanted to be invented. Uno.



Hopscotch

Maria Giesbrecht



I don't know how to get to Mexico, or even how to sleep on my back. Imagine this, a worn woman running to the desert, barefoot, dust dancing behind her in a warm mist.

Side sleeping makes your back crooked, the chiropractor says. I swear I'm going to die a ripple. A dune pattern at best. I went to Cuba once, sat in the white sand until my legs burned red. This is not where I'm from. This is the wrong heat. No one tells you this, but your lips are made of only three to four layers of skin. Your back—five to ten.

The real estate agent is telling me where I'm going there is no health insurance, no mortgages, and it's not like the tourist places I've been to before. I show her my passport, and she shuts up. I wonder how I'm going to make it home with milky skin.

I heard of a man, my father's friend maybe, who once came to Mexico to see if he could kiss someone other than his wife. Turns out she followed him, and now it's her home. (Turns out, it always was.) Even now, I still wonder, how did she know?

(Should home feel kind of wrong?)



I want to be the kind of person who sleeps in their own bed—

Did you know there are over a million nerve endings in your lips? This is why we kiss, they say. Home. Canada. Home.

This is my hopscotch.

What I mean, of course, is that I immigrate every time I sleep on my back and wake up with dead lips.

how to be a cool, chill girl

Emily Coppella



i take a cool—real cool—shower.
baby toe goes into the lake.
stale fridge air kisses my face.

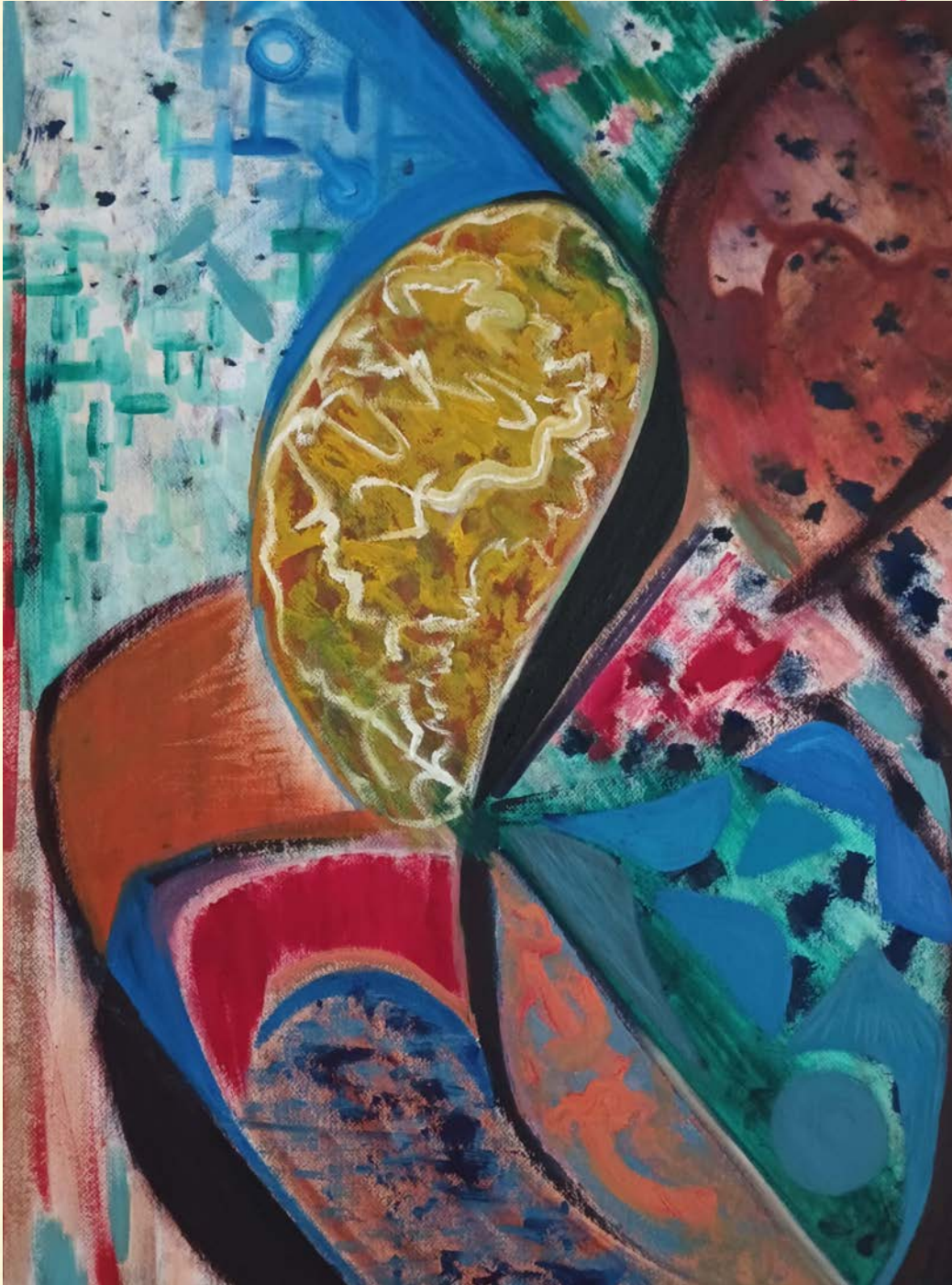
maybe, i will pack a suitcase.
i will stock up on
cucumber-mint-celery-lime-kiwi-aloe-basil
body wash
and buy a one-way ticket to antarctica
and wave at the dense, slippery body of every
penguin.

maybe, i will experiment with cryogenics.

maybe, i will soothe my hot tongue
on freezer-burned peas,
suck on icicles,

bury this wolf-heart beneath snow.

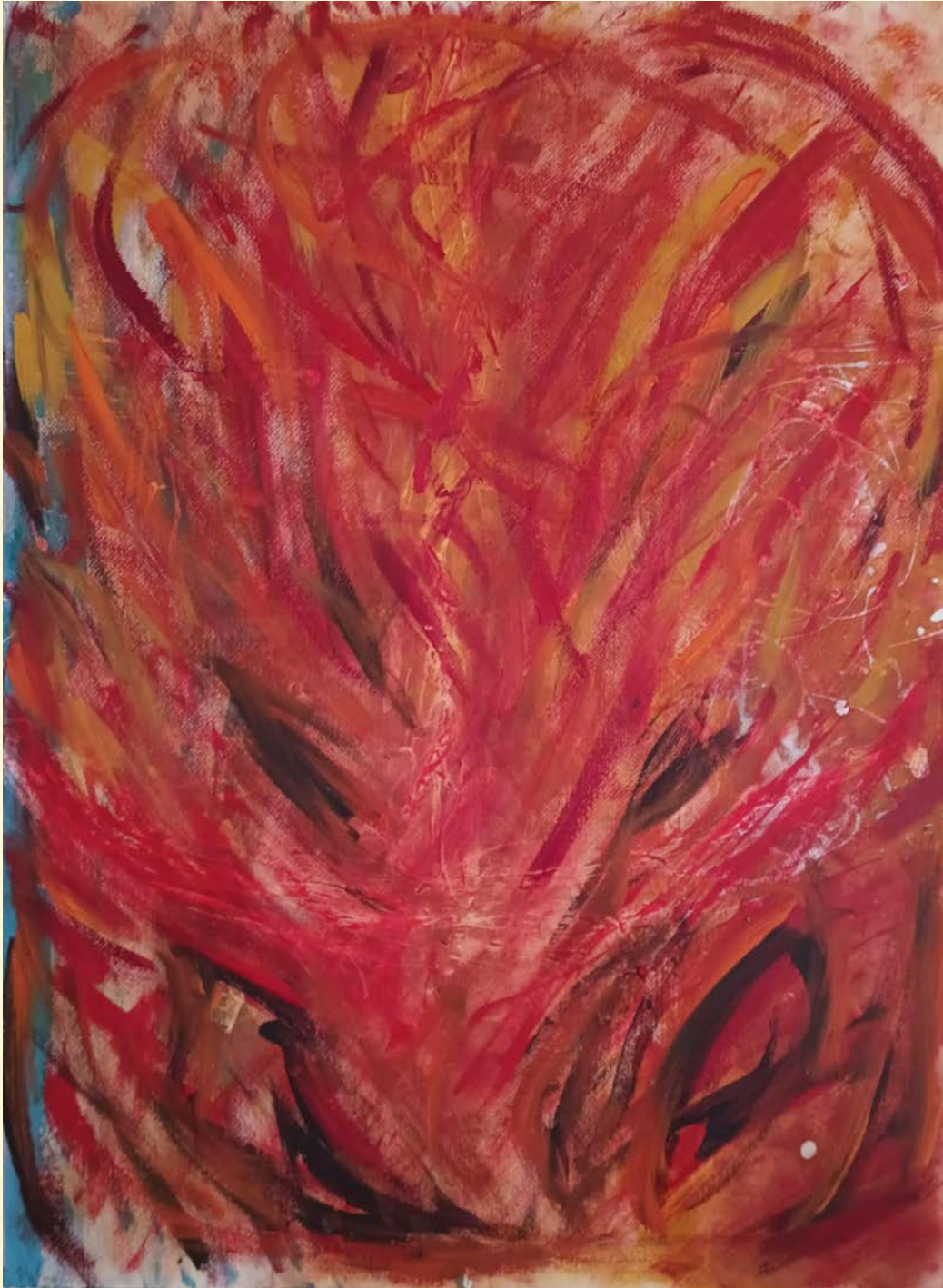




The Lovers

Fati D.

2022
oil on paper
30" x 22"



The Lovers (Spark)

Fati D.

2021
oil on paper
30" x 22"





The Lovers (Conduit)

Fati D.

2023

oil on paper

22" x 30"



On Inconvenient Spanglish Characters— Or, How We Don't Have to Speak in Italics

Tomás Baiza

Muchas gracias por escuchar estas voces.

Thank you for listening to these voices.

Y, muchas gracias for listening to estas voces.

At some point not too long ago, I sat down at a desk and decided to write. I had not a single clue what I would write about. The only thing I was certain of was that if I didn't write *something*, about *anything*, I was going to blow up my life, and not necessarily in a good way.

Those first few months were heady, exciting, and humbling. I wrote as if my life depended on it—which it sort of did. I wrote angry and with purpose. And with that purpose surged a homesickness which has always dogged me, peeking around dark corners, but now stood fully in front of me, smiling and wagging its middle finger in my face.

Soon, I realized that the people with whom I populated the stories that sprang from my homesick heart spoke in very distant, but very familiar voices. They spoke a dialect that had lain dormant in me for so long that, when these characters opened their mouths, I would become short of breath. My scalp would tingle and my mind would rebound between intense feelings of love and acceptance, on the one hand, and pants-wetting fear on the other.

Whether these voices invoked affection or terror, I realized in my nascent writing that I understood them with a fluency that shocked me. In the decades since I had left home, I had taught myself to no longer speak like these characters. I comforted myself that my ability to mimic Standard American English (SAE) had helped me to succeed as a spouse to a midwestern white girl, a father to a brilliant pochita daughter, and an employee of several predominantly Anglo institutions.

In my everyday existence, and like many of us do, I had conformed. I had cleansed my speech of the not-totally-Mexican, but definitely-not-SAE accent. I did this in the subconscious hope that it made me more respectable in the stratified, hierarchical, delusional place where I've built a career.

Booksmart people raised on critical race theory would understand this phenomenon as a combination of *acculturation*, *assimilation*, and *code-switching*. To me it was *being responsible*. On the hardest days, my creation of a more socially and



institutionally palatable way of being was what my mother would have called it: *surviving*.

But one morning, in a discussion ostensibly intended to show me the error of my ways and set me on a better, more compliant course, I was forcefully reminded by a person who held inordinate power over my ability to support myself and my family that I had utterly failed in my long-term campaign to fit in. To them, I was emphatically:

Off-putting

Challenging

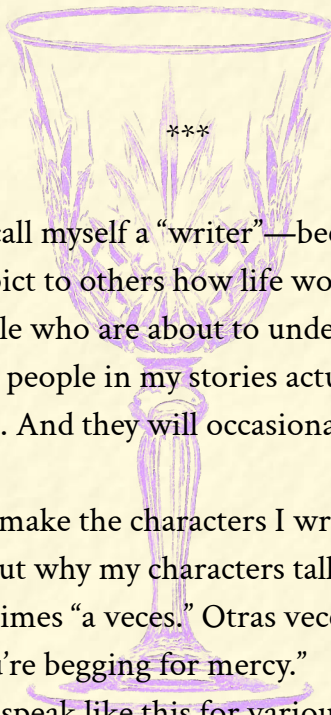
Intimidating

An uncomfortable physical presence who needed to smile more

And, apparently, I was all of these things despite being, to their surprise:

Sooo eloquent.

That night, I started writing.



Although I sometimes hesitate to call myself a “writer”—because doing so suggests that I possess sufficient existential *gravitas* to depict to others how life works—the fact is I write a decent amount. I write stories about people who are about to undergo some serious changes. As writers are wont to do, I often ask that the people in my stories actually talk to one another.

They can say some crazy shit. And they will occasionally sling this crazy shit in the form of Spanglish.

I am sometimes asked why I make the characters I write talk the way they do. Or, rather, I sometimes receive *complaints* about why my characters talk the way they do. Sometimes my characters say “sometimes,” other times “a veces.” *Otras veces, dicen things like, “I’m tellin’ you, foo’, te voy a chingar hasta que you’re begging for mercy.”*

I write these characters who speak like this for various reasons. Sometimes it’s because I live in this godforsaken state and I get lonely and I need someone to talk with—or fight with—in voices that I understand and echo to me from my childhood. This brings me comfort. Sometimes, it’s because it’s the only way I can hear these characters speaking. *Otras veces, es porque I want the reader to know that real people with real lives in the real world do talk like this.*

Every. Pinche. Day.

The reactions aren’t all bad. Sometimes a reader, usually an older Anglo female, will stare at me, wide-eyed, and ask me that breathy, fawning question: “Oh! Do you write in Spanish?”

I never quite know how to answer. I want to tell them, “Kinda, but not like Cervantes, or Octavio Paz, or Sandra Cisneros, but more like ese Beto, you know, the vato that hangs out down by the 7-Eleven on Berryessa and Lundy. Yeah, that one fool with the white knee socks and Sharks jersey three-times too big for him who’s always spitting bars and writing in his tattered notebook all the fucked-up things that pop into his head. He failed Intermediate Spanish at San José City College, but his poetry teacher loves him and tells him that if he only came to class, he’d get an A, and maybe, just maybe, he could help him get one of his poems into the next English department newsletter.”

You know...*ese* Beto. I write characters who talk como ese wey—like that dude. And when I’m excited, or angry, and I forget that the people around me have never met *Chicanifornio*-me and would consider someone who slices up words like an extra from *Blood In, Blood Out* as undeserving of their respect, I am uncomfortably reminded that I myself can actually fucking talk *a lot like* Beto.

It can be a problem. And an inspiration, because it gives voice to a host of beautiful characters who straddle language boundaries that were originally drawn to separate us. It challenges me as a writer to let these border-jumping *bad hombres* run amok, to let them sing with two tongues in ways that can turn our brains sideways and make monoliterate English readers scream and throw their books into their gas fireplaces.

“Thomas, you need to remember your audience,” is what the prim, erudite, older white gentleman in my first critique group said to me.

Yeah, he called me “Thomas.” And he did not, could not, absolutely would not accept that there were several words in my story that he did not understand and that I did not do him the courtesy of translating in footnotes.

“It sounds like you wouldn’t consider yourself one of my audience, then?” is all I could think to say in response.

“Convention dictates that you write the Spanish words in italics,” he whitesplained me. “And then you *must* translate them, if only out of respect for the reader!”

I stared at him from across the table in our district branch library’s stuffy conference room. “But we don’t speak in italics,” I said. When all he could utter was an exasperated sigh, I followed up with, “Okay, what if I wrote all of the English words in italics and the Spanish ones normal? Can respect work in that direction?”

That particular meeting ended in shocked discomfort when another senior member yelled at me for, gently and with care, critiquing the pigeon-English he inflicted on his story’s villain who, as it just so happened, was Mexican, and who referred to every other character in the story

as “amigo.”

I lasted three sessions with that group and called it quits when the first man who insisted on calling me “Thomas” decided that he wanted to write a science fiction epic set on the U.S.-Mexican border and would I please proofread all of his Spanish dialogue for him to ensure that it was “authentic”?

Who knew so many retired white dudes wrote about Mexicans!

This was my first experience with fellow writers not only critiquing my early drafts, but acting in the capacity of cultural gatekeepers. Several of my writing peers could not make peace with my blended dialogue, but were tickled at the idea of me serving as their Spanish-whisperer (despite the fact that my pocho-ass Spanish is fine for my hometown, but would raise eyebrows in Mexico City). I quickly learned from these men that the insertion of Spanish language into dialogue was acceptable if its exoticism was confined to acceptable parameters, if it was easily understood, and if the characters were appropriately subservient to both their fellow characters and the readers they entertained. A sort of linguistic minstrelsy in which Spanish speakers must confirm and even celebrate their second-class status on the page.

Writing is hard enough already.

A la verga con eso. No fucking thanks.



Sherman Alexie recently asked his Substack readers whether it’s possible to exploit your own culture in your fiction writing. He was referring to his own reliance on his experiences as a reservation-raised-turned-urban-Indian whose personal history was essentially custom-made for vivid storytelling.

Can you exploit your own culture? “Fuck yes,” I muttered at my laptop before I could stop myself.

I then went on to have a really shitty day, wondering whether my favorite characters, the ones I’ve created from my own past and with whom I’ve shared some pretty meaningful moments, are stereotypes. I asked myself whether I’ve engaged in literary brownface in creating such vivid personalities for the benefit—if readership research is to be believed—of predominantly middle-aged-to-elderly white women.

I asked myself all the toxic, self-defeating questions. In depicting the character of Jessie, a tattooed thug who speaks in a swirling kaleidoscope of Spanglish and California-caló and came straight out of my own history, was I doing myself and every Chicano a disservice by reinforcing stereotypes? Does the uncomfortable fact that most of my readers, my *audience*, are anglosajones-of-a-certain-age require that I censor myself and how I depict the nuances of my home culture?

Can that demographic ever understand Spanglish as anything more than an intellectually-deficient bastardization of two languages? Will I ever be a talented-enough writer to ensure that the reader sees Spanglish, or Inglañol, or whatever, as a celebration of the fluidity of cultural identity? Am I an idiot for even thinking that it's possible to adequately translate the slippery and contested notion of *chicanismo* to the waspy masses?

Had I unwittingly fallen into the trap of exposing cultural traumas to ensure a compelling narrative? If so, then certainly I wasn't the first.

"Remember your audience," that smug septuagenarian had said to me.

My most recent critique group was meeting to discuss a piece I had submitted for review, a story about a Chicano kid's ill-timed visit to a drag show in late-80s San Francisco. "Bob" (nombre ficticio and apparently no longer a member of the group) was a religious conservative who tended to write military thrillers. His male characters squirted testosterone from every pore, and his female characters were beautiful, industrious, and seemed quietly desperate for the attention and validation of their exceedingly masculine counterparts. And Bob's Latino characters—because his colonialist thrillers had to take place in exotic locales—were clever and mostly silent. Clever because their sneakiness raised the narrative tension, and silent because, one: the plots demanded that they exist in subservience to Bob's Anglo characters; and two: Bob didn't know Spanish. Thank God.

It didn't surprise me that Bob harbored a Christian fundamentalist's aversion to the drag queens depicted in my story, but it was his reaction to the blended English-Spanish dialogue between the protagonist and his Mexican mother that really pushed him over la orilla.

"I've never liked anything that I've read from you," Bob blurted out from the lower right-hand corner of the Zoom screen. And then, to drive his anger home even further: "Real Americans don't even talk like that!"

And there it was, the unabashed expression of the thing that bothered people most about these Spanglish-speaking characters who so inconveniently disrespected cultural boundaries: they were not "real Americans." Or, if I can stretch the inference a bit further: they didn't deserve to be considered real, or valid, at all. Like all humans who don't fit neatly into dominant norms, they challenged Bob's concept of what's right and proper, while forcing him to admit that he might not understand everything that's happening on the page. Bob and other readers like him would be witnesses to lively exchanges in a language that the characters clearly enjoy and wield like weapons, but that some readers only partly understand, and rather than take this as a challenge to learn, they dismiss it altogether as defective.

It would be a lie to say that I *intended* to provoke this response, that my

throwing Spanglish in readers' faces was some noble attempt at resistance. But it would also be false to say that it was totally innocent. I *knew* that these characters would be off-putting to some, y también sabía que no soy ningún Junot Díaz. I sure as shit don't have as many readers as him. What I did not expect was that anyone would read what I wrote closely enough to actually feel insulted by these Spanglish characters. I was naive to the toxic relationship between ignorance and anger. I now know that the spectrum of ignorance ranges from welcome surprise to violent rejection. I'm thankful that no one has taken a swing at me for my writing, yet, but I also now anticipate a low-grade, but consistent disapproval of these characters by certain readers who need their dialogue in good ole American English.

I really don't worry if you don't read my stuff. Most people have not and never will. As I just complained, I ain't no Junot Díaz. And no, I'm not going to start writing in all-Spanish—mostly because my pocho-ass would instinctively use words like:

parquear

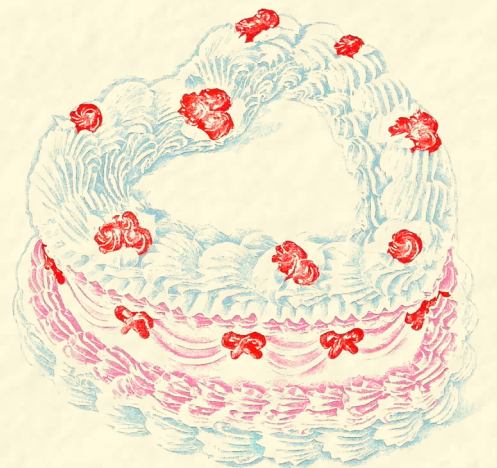
lonche

troca, and

marqueta.

It's bad enough getting corrected by monoliterate English readers. The last thing I want is for card-carrying Mejicanos thinking that I'm seeking their validation—and then rubbing it in how shitty my Spanish is.

But, isn't that the point of Spanglish-speaking characters—to confidently arrive at a formal party to which they were not invited and act as though they own the place? Their stubborn refusal to vacate that party might be disruptive, but it's a lock that many of the guests will later reflect on the evening with fondness. A slight quickening of the pulse and quiet admission that they enjoyed those moments of dislocation and uncertainty when they interacted with those cross-talking interlopers.





Pasaporte 2
Octavio Quintanilla

2023
mixed media



Pasaporte 11

Octavio Quintanilla

2023

mixed media





Pasaporte 45
Octavio Quintanilla



2023
mixed media

Pasaporte 36

Octavio Quintanilla

2023

mixed media



I never felt lonely
crossing the
bridge and looking
down at the river
At its bank the river
the bulls wading
in their own
shadows
I'm trying to
remember
someone
but
first

I must
cross
this
bridge
so I feel
lonely for
the first
time

3 22

Nuala

Michaela Brady

I haven't cried yet. I hold the phone to my chin and pause by the living room window, watching the cars honk their way to the intersection. The sun is smothered in humidity, the air conditioner rattles in my room, and on the other side of the Atlantic, Granny Nuala has died.

"Okay," I reply evenly, waiting to choke on my cry-baby reflex. Nothing comes. The spiralled cord tightens as I move closer to the window, pressing my lips together as tightly as possible. Maybe I can squeeze some tears out.

"She loved you very, very much."

"Yeah."

"Maeve, can you put your mommy back on?"

"Yeah, she's just in here. Slán, Wendy."

As I return to the kitchen, I keep the receiver pressed to my ear. I expect to hear that sharp, sweet "Hallo, lovely" through the static. Five hours ahead, years beyond me, gone in a moment. Daddy is pacing somewhere outside, cursing "those cocky doctors." At least, that's what I think he's doing; I'm too scared to seek him out. I know I should leave people alone to grieve, even if I think I can help. I probably can't. Maybe he's just sitting, ruminating, a time bomb hidden in a briefcase. If he needs me, he'll find me. And if he needs to go on the third walk of the day, he will.

These moments bleed into another muggy morning, and not a peep from me. I should be keening for the loss of my Granny but it's like the news already drained me. I think of how late the sun sets at this time of year over the Irish sea, of her soul floating over the beaches in Laytown and Bettystown. I feel the earth is emptier without her. The image of her squinting eyes, all warmth and wit sapped away, closing for one last time, can't be real. No death is that romantic. I mean, I'm ten years old; I'm not old enough to mourn my own soul at the reminder of death, and I'm not young enough to be oblivious. I feel like an alien.

We absorb the news as a known unknown. Daddy has recruited me to weed the garden and have our usual four-hour chat about mortality or mythology—whichever's on the mind that day.

Earlier this week, I overheard him deliberating with Uncle Dan about who'll get what from their council home. Of course, I told everyone at school that sure, we all have a house, but *my* family's is from a council! There stand Nuala and Grandad with crowns and sceptres, flanked by their eldest children, Mary and Tom. Their gazes slide toward the neighbours, to whom they haughtily smile before turning inside. The garden implements stand upright like palace guards,

waiting to be slammed on the kitchen table during another birthday celebration.

It's a pretty small house, though. As we tug at crabgrass, I ask Daddy why the council would rip them off like that, and for the first time since the phone call, he bursts out laughing. I don't see what's so funny. It's only three bedrooms and a narrow staircase, with a ceiling covered in a white material that pricks me when I run my hands along it. Didn't they deserve better?

He then tells me he's flying over again, maybe for a week, maybe two. All the trifles in the attic, paintings of Jesus, cereal bowls and clothesline clips must go, he says. For one last time, a stuffed Kermit the Frog will fall into Daddy's arms; Pauleen will lean over the kitchen table, mindfully gnawing at her one digestive while the others sit back like bulldogs chained to a post; the old armchair may take one more trip down the street as Seamus chases Wendy and begs her not to emigrate; Dan will stand outside smoking with Mary and James, combing their mullets

and blasting The Specials to fend off politicians. I can see it now—a diorama of the chaos surrounding Nuala, and her smile stretching to the countryside beyond.

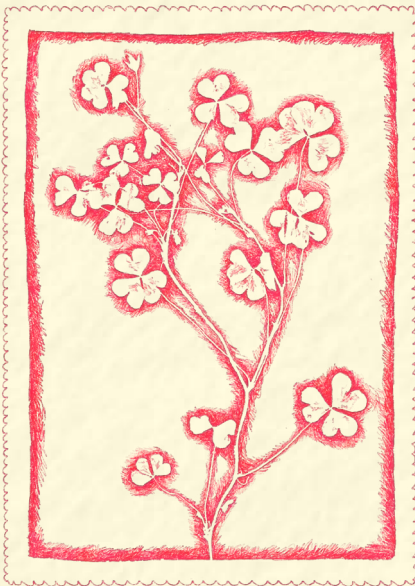
Daddy says it was a coma, but also neglect, but also something to do with iron in her blood and that I'll need to see the doctor when I'm older to make sure I don't wind up like her. If I'm overwhelmed by all this information, I can't imagine how he feels. The sun beats down on our backs, tanning our skin and calling our freckles out of hibernation. I imagine the moment of death again: her eyelids flipped up, mouth unable to form coherent phrases anymore, bearing witness to wherever a mad, innocent spirit goes after a life of labour.

Maybe I've already found closure in my imagination. It's where I find most things.

I know the adults will power through this downpour until it ends. My cousins own plenty of memories of her and might be willing to share. They've spent their lives with her, like I should have. I hate that every time we visit, they ogle my lanky legs and satchel of toys, like I'm the glamorous American Girl doll in a shop window. At least when they say they're Irish, people believe them.

I'm forcing myself to cry, but in this heat all it does is give me a headache. Daddy pats my back and hands me his crumpled bottle of water. I think he's been using it as a stress ball.

"The centre will not hold, the past will be sold," he sighs, proud he could muster an offhand Yeats quote. He then slouches toward the shed, leaving me to daydream for a few minutes.



She visited NYC this past Christmas break. On Boxing Day, the wind was sharp, insistent, reminding us of the long winter ahead. I sat on my ankles in the TV room and set up an American Girl tea set with Felicity and Elizabeth—the colonial-/revolution-era characters. The tea set included empty mugs, a slim teapot, and a dusty-pink milk jug that could hang on my pinkie finger. I set down each piece with definitive thuds, as though I knew what a tea party looked like. As though I had experience with afternoon teas beyond “Merry Un-birthdays” dancing across a screen.

I’m a tomboy through and through. Whenever I led my cousins on a backyard expedition to the shed roof, Nuala would warn us that if we fell off and broke our necks, she’d kill us. But alone, and stuck inside, I worried she didn’t see me as well-behaved, and this was my attempt to play with the tea set for the first time in months. I admired the dolls’ shining eyes, taut outfits, and baby-sized shoes they never outgrew.

Only when I was deciding what to do next did I hear my parents bickering as Nuala eased herself onto the sofa.

“Ellen, you wouldn’t get me and Nuala some tea?” Daddy requested the moment Mom sat down.

“Why couldn’t you ask me downstairs?”

“I’m asking you now.”

Mom laughed, irritated, and asked Nuala how she took her tea. Once she headed back to the kitchen, Nuala gazed after her and sighed. I had heard stories of how particular she was about her tea. The adults all had their own rituals for the stuff and would spend hours ranting about the thousands of ways people in cafés or restaurants screwed it up. At least with my tea set, my dolls could drink chocolate milk for all I cared.

Daddy commandeered the remote and flicked on *Antiques Roadshow*. Soon, Nuala’s worried expression softened and she settled into the price-guessing game with Daddy. Mom returned with two peridot mugs, steam billowing from their rims.

As Daddy channel surfed during the ads, I could feel a gaze drift over me every few minutes, pulling me away from my game.

“Are those...is that yours over there?” Nuala whispered.

“Yeah. They’re American Girl dolls. They’re having a tea party. I just felt like setting it up today, you know?”

No response.

I continued, “It’s a full set and everything—”

“Oh, would you look at that! The little mugs and teapots!” Her voice had risen to a child’s pitch. She ignored her own mug and pointed at my empty ones, signalling with her hand as if to ask, “can I play?” Her smile was a blooming pansy, illuminating the room, the earth, with its



beauty. I watched as the seventy-something woman glided to her knees, level with the table, and shuffled over to get a closer look. “Oh, they’re lovely little dollies...why, I...”

Oblivious, and not the patron saint of sharing, I asked, “Are you going to play with them, Granny?”

“And the chairs! The little milk pitcher...what’s supposed to be in here? Oh, sugar! So beautiful. Lovely, lovely, lovely.”

As if in a dream, she picked up each item and examined it. Her eyes welled up. I wanted to correct her, say that Felicity was actually drinking chocolate milk and that my teapot was just a repository for arcade tokens, but I knew this was not my fantasy anymore. She was uncovering treasure in the sunset of her years. Outside, the clouds had parted a little, forming small spotlights that danced around our patio. I panned down again to the woman tinkering with my toys, overcome with indelible joy. She held them like infants.

A month or so after the phone call, I spend the day in Woodlawn with Aunt Wendy. We buy 99s from the Baskin-Robbins, walk in the park, get dinner at Rory Dolan’s and talk to pretty much everyone. Conversations rise and fall, everyone asks how we are after Nuala’s passing, with “so it is” bookending every sentence. It’s not like Drogheda at all, but on a cloudy day like today, I can almost pretend.

At bedtime, we lie on the plush guest bed.

“How about a story?” she asks. I’m way too tired to read a book, but I don’t want to say no. With empathic precision, she reads my expression before I say a word. “Or I could tell you one instead?”

I agree and tuck myself in. She hops up and lightly scratches my back. At first, she carries an airy seanchaí tone, describing a little girl my age who grew up in Ireland in the 1930s and left school to work in a factory. She sacrificed all the time she spent playing with dolls to earn money and help raise her younger siblings. At the edge of sleep, I’m watching Nuala’s life flicker by like a film. I hear Aunt Wendy’s words in the distance as I approach a dream; she pauses longer between each sentence, lost for words, until we’re both visiting Nuala in our heads. When I imagine Nuala as a girl, as someone who could be my friend, I miss her even more.

What will happen to these memories? Not just our own, but the ones we only experience through stories—where do they go? What if one day, Aunt Wendy’s memory fails her, or Daddy starts crying, and our tapestry unravels? I have to remember Granny patching up my knee when I was five, eating breakfast together in that little Ballsgrove kitchen. At least her voice will always rest in my head, somewhere between memory and imagination.

And I’ll always think of her at teatime. That is no time to cry.



Schuylkill River

Kelly DuMar

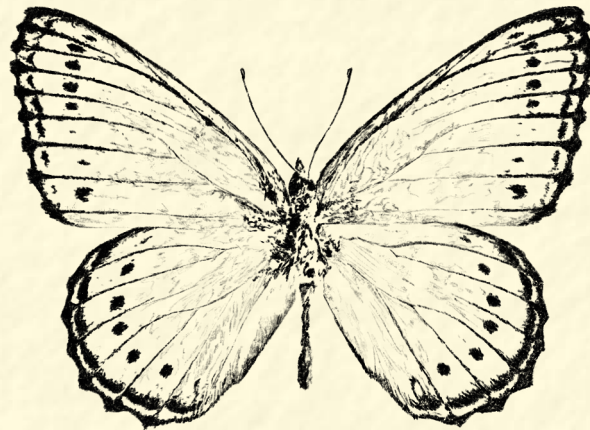
photograph



folklore

Raphaela Pavlakos

the voices lift a failed mimicry ancient songs like a tidal wave
 call and response we sing
leaving a space for the voices of our ancestors
to fill between the rustling of silk and clanking gold
 braided hair hiding a study in modesty tapestries of femininity worn on my body
drum beats hide feet calling to hearts in three beats
 we dance and sing and turn about ourselves until future and past
 have disintegrated into the magic we weave
all we are left with is *now*



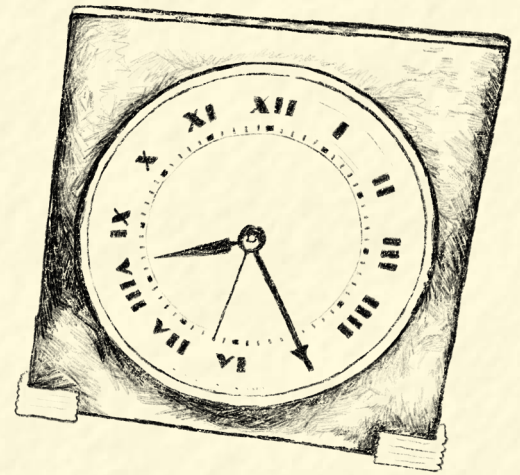
Our Love is like Godot Floating in Spacetime

Vanessa Y. Niu

Half an hour passes in the library and I think about our conversation on how time progressed whether Minkowski's spacetime really justifies the feeling that we've known each other since we were only chlorine-drunk young quarks Chicago is only on the other side of the country from Los Angeles after all. Maybe I had passed a distant distant relation, some third cousin thrice removed entangled with them had participated in the conservation of cosmic information? that I recognized your stooping brow and folded hands during charades to be Stańczyk or when you said *Let's go* I said *We can't* and you looked at me you looked at me and said *Because we're waiting for Godot?* and I couldn't stop staring at you because you looked at me and perhaps I am skewing the story a bit, I know I asked you not to wait for Godot but you can't hold me accountable, our collision had spun me out of my waiting oh don't you know that the collision of asteroids make meteoroids that meteoroids become meteorites when they hit the hot bright sand on earth and when I hit you decided that I was not Godot but Vladimir don't you understand I have been waiting to wait with you don't you know without Vladimir and Estragon there is no Godot don't you know that Minkowski said space and time will disappear into shadow without being acknowledged as a unit a unit you said is something you have never seen us as but don't you know we



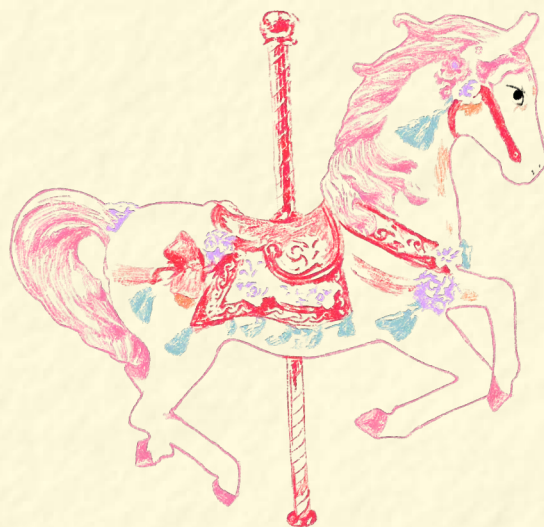
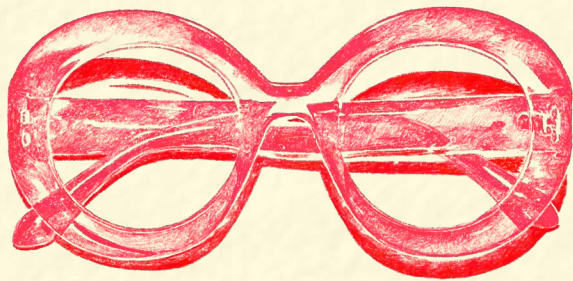
couldn't have known each other if you weren't
time if I wasn't space—no, you don't seem
to understand anymore, you left and the clock
hasn't moved past that half hour



all I want is to live lightheartedly

Emily Coppella

let me talk about taylor swift / let me not make any sense at all / let me eat a soft pretzel while listening to live music / let me spend too much time on facebook marketplace / let me make most mornings slow ones / let me buy a chocolate mint plant in a red solo cup / let me greet you at the door with fervour / let me give and get birthday cards with handwritten messages / let me have a window to look out of





Phoenix

Marie Olofsdotter

2001
paperclay
h 8"





Glitch Series 2

Fabio Sassi

2021

digitally manipulated collage

11" x 11"

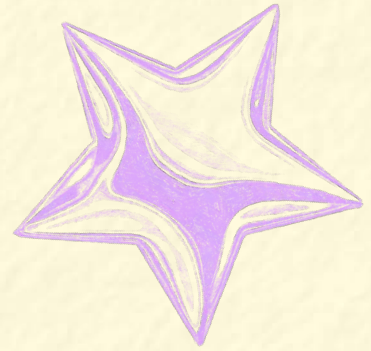
Glitch Series 4

Fabio Sassi

2021

digitally manipulated collage

11" x 11"



House Cleaning

Felix Imonti

That large cardboard box had been sitting in the corner since I moved into the house. It was glued to me, like a determined shadow. It had gone to two apartments with a several-year stint in a self-storage warehouse.

Sooner or later, something had to be done about it. After considering for months the task of sorting through numerous cassette tapes to decide what I might keep, an unanticipated force motivated me suddenly to charge into the effort.

I pulled the old cassette player from the box and wondered as I plugged it into the socket if it would work. In spite of a barrage of loud scratching noises when it started, I was able to get the aging machine working perfectly. For a moment, I hesitated to dive into the disorganized mass of cassettes, until I recovered my determination.

The sensible thing to do was to toss everything into the trash. Twenty-five years of being ignored and forgotten certainly erased any value. What, though, if there was something that might be of importance? It was settled. My curiosity won.

Only fifteen or so music tapes were marked. That made it necessary to drop the dozens of cassettes one by one into the machine to listen for a few minutes. What amazed me was how much material was unfamiliar. Years had erased the items from my memory and made them meaningless, which condemned them to a prompt trip into the trash container.

A couple of weeks earlier, I had read that I could purchase for twenty dollars a device to convert tapes into DVDs. I doubted that I would ever listen to the recordings again and decided that it wasn't worth the effort.

I found recordings of speeches from World War II that the librarian at a radio station had given to me. Time had stripped them of their value and they vanished into a rising pile of discarded past.

I was nearing the bottom of the seemingly endless collection when a voice as fresh as morning came out of the speaker. Miyoko was reading a segment from the Pillow Book that had been written a thousand years earlier by a courtesan in the imperial court in Kyoto Japan. I recognized the words immediately and remembered when that had been recorded on a Sunday afternoon after we had finished a lunch of grilled squid in our house in Orange County.

I listened frozen for a few minutes before clicking off the machine. Once again, I was sitting next to my long-departed wife sharing the joys and troubles of twenty-six years, three months, and nine days that had ended twenty-five years earlier.

I recalled with a vividness that still hurt that last breath on the morning of May 13, 1992 in the hospital in London Ontario. Worse than that moment was the next morning as the city was

awakening. Birds were singing in the tree just outside of the window. Traffic was starting to flow along the street. The world was functioning as it did every day and none of it knew or cared that she was no longer a part of it.

It reminded me of words written by Steven Crane more than a century ago.

A man said to the universe:

“Sir, I exist!”

“However,” replied the universe,

“The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation.”



The indifference of the universe made those moments together precious. Flashes of events that we had lived over our years together kept surfacing.

A few days after her death, I was lying across the bed with a yellow lab lying next to me. Richie kept poking me with his nose as if asking what he could do. At that point, I had no energy to do anything. Without Miyoko to share the day, I didn't care what happened to the world.

Suddenly, the dog's head popped up and he turned towards the door. I also became aware that someone unheard and unseen had entered the apartment.

The voice that I heard was the voice I had been hearing for many years. She seemed to sit next to me, although there was no pressure on the bed. We began a conversation, except that her voice was inside. I could feel her words rather than hear them. Strangely, the dog seemed to also be hearing her or somehow sensing her presence.

“This cannot be true,” I kept telling myself. I am an atheist and as cynical as anyone can be. I have no belief in spirits and ghosts. As far as I am concerned, life is simply an intrusion upon oblivion. We come from nowhere and return to nowhere.

I convinced myself that I was hallucinating. In spite of my doubts of my own sanity, I did not want this meeting to end.

We spoke for five or so minutes. Mostly, she wanted to know how I was managing without her. The conversation ended when she faded away. A few weeks later, she returned and would return many more times, although the times between the appearances grew longer and the visits briefer.

The last visit came in February 2013 when I was going in for surgery in a hospital in Chiba near Tokyo. Medication to clear my intestine had failed to work and the surgeon was going into me with only a partial knowledge of the nature of the obstruction that he was to remove.

I was sitting alone in my private room awaiting the arrival of the nurse who was to wheel me to the surgery. I was always alone and awake when Miyoko made her appearances, if appearance is how you describe a soundless voice and imageless presence.

“It's not your turn,” was what she said and lingered for a moment. When the nurse arrived, I was alone. Tomoko was laughing as usual and pushed the wheel chair with an accompanying

“left to right” to the operating room where a surgeon who had described himself as the greatest microsurgeon in Japan was waiting. Later, Tomoko revealed that the surgeon had expressed doubts that the operation would be successful and thought that his confidence would ease my anxiety.

Over the following eight years, the immodesty of the surgeon proved to be well founded. Subsequent tests revealed that there were no indications of cancer and everything was functioning at a level better than expected for someone my age and state of self-indulgent neglect. At least, that is how it had been, until I found myself back on the table awaiting the surgeon’s knife in a hospital in St. Catherines, Ontario. This time, Miyoko did not appear to assure me of my future. Did that mean that I had no future, or did it mean that my hallucinations were over?

When I had listened to the soft voice coming from the cassette speaker, I had been transported back years to a hospital room where I told the attending doctor not to employ extraordinary methods to prolong her life in order to save her from more suffering. I nodded in agreement when a nurse told me that she was administering a high dose of morphine that would ease Miyoko out of this world and its miseries.

That was followed by her second parting as clothes were removed to be sent to a center for battered women and papers had to have her name deleted. The car was sold, and a new way of living had to be discovered.

The words from a woman ten centuries ago being spoken by a woman gone twenty-six years ago carried me back more than two decades. The two women were speaking from their oblivions; and I could not decide if I had the strength to listen to them.

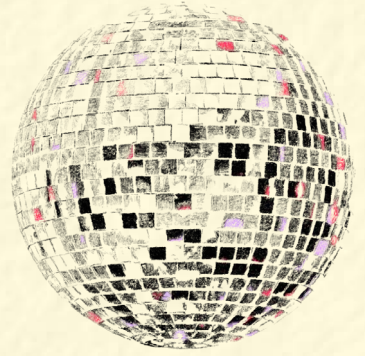
Shortly after Miyoko’s death, I read the book by Erich Remark, *A Night in Lisbon*. The character speaking of his wife who had died hours earlier commented that she will live for only so long as there are those who remember her. For the widower, granting her a longer mortality was important for his own existence.

Although readers are not likely to think of it, Miyoko’s immortality was achieved to a degree by affixing her name to a book to which she had contributed a great deal of effort and that was published after her death. Perhaps, someone in the future will read *Violent Justice* and wonder for a moment who those people were.

Can listening to a cassette tape grant her a greater claim upon immortality? Maybe, if it can be heard by those who knew her in life; but will her immortality mean anything to a stranger?

Eye to Eye
Marie Olofsdotter

2007
acrylic
5 1/2" x 5 1/2"



Your Father's Old Pine Box

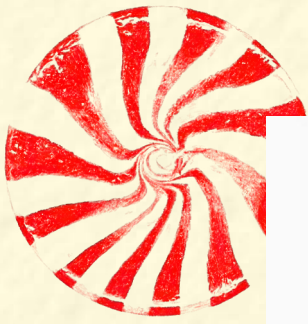
J.B. Stone

In the afterlife, there is a gilded hollow in the middle of the willow tree in your backyard that opens up into a waterslide, twirling down into an underground labyrinth of rivers rife with exoskeleton salmon swimming through the caverns of a murky, stalactite awning, quarry walls strobed in glow-worm hue, and your body—now a raft drifting down the current of a narrow tunnel hoping to reach an island in the middle of the world's loneliest lagoon—you find heaven in the memories you left abandoned, because here, the floodgates are opened, and your nostalgia rushes through you like an undammed river—at this point your father approaches, donning his navy blue FDNY barbeque apron, and a *Pyrex* glass tray of his beloved grilled-buffalo chicken cutlets, the same dish he had to spend the last decade of his life NOT eating before he lost it all to a diabetes-related stroke—he welcomes you as if the football chalk lines marked across stretches of clean-cut turf were the pearly gates—your grandmother Gracie is there too, doing the trampoline backflips from the gymnastics days she'd speak of with a sense of loss, yet here she is gripping the branches of ancient cedar trees, trapezing her body across the canopies, pommel-horsing across boulder slabs, rolling her body over berry bushes while coin-flipping handfuls into her mouth—your wiener pup Rocky, the first death of a loved one you ever knew, leaps over the 98' *Pontiac Fiero* that ran him over, and pounces only to smother you in snout nuzzles and voracious licks—your feet are bare, you have no idea if it's your toes curling to the moist deposits of bluegrass dew, or the eternal optimal temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit, or a sentient sky that accommodates the moods of those below their smokey canvas, but whatever the reason, you look out to the peppermint rose clouds, hold your loves closer and tighter, as gravity morphs into a distant memory, everything floats, your feet transform into hovercrafts, and hope this isn't just the last magic act your brain will ever showcase, nor the side effects of a long-term comatose, but the reunion you've been waiting for.



The Talon Review

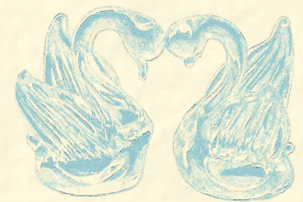




River of Love

Marie Olofsdotter

2019
acrylic
13" x 9 1/2"

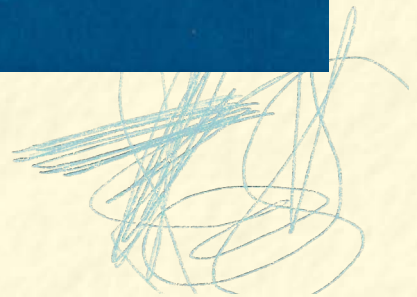
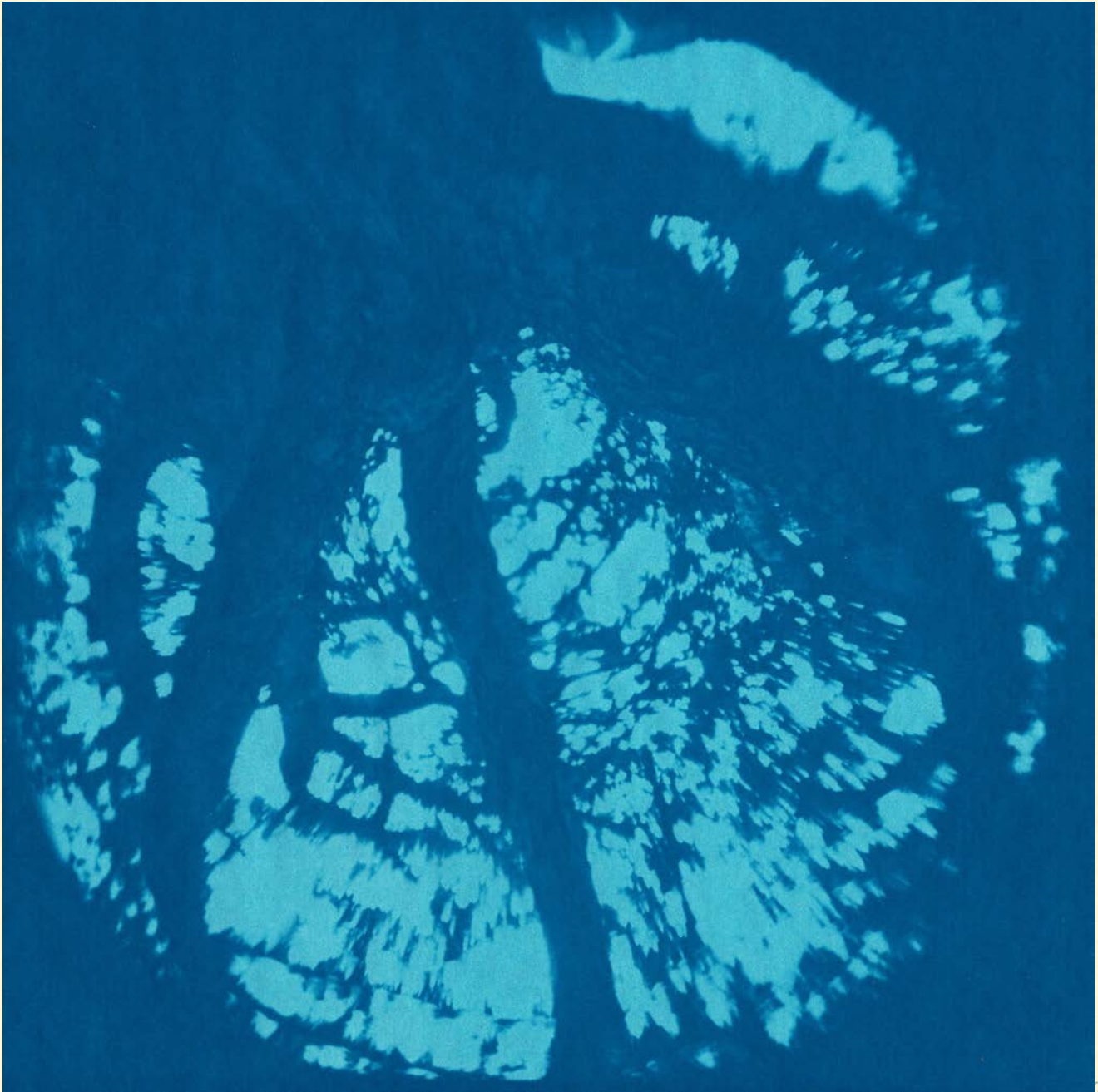




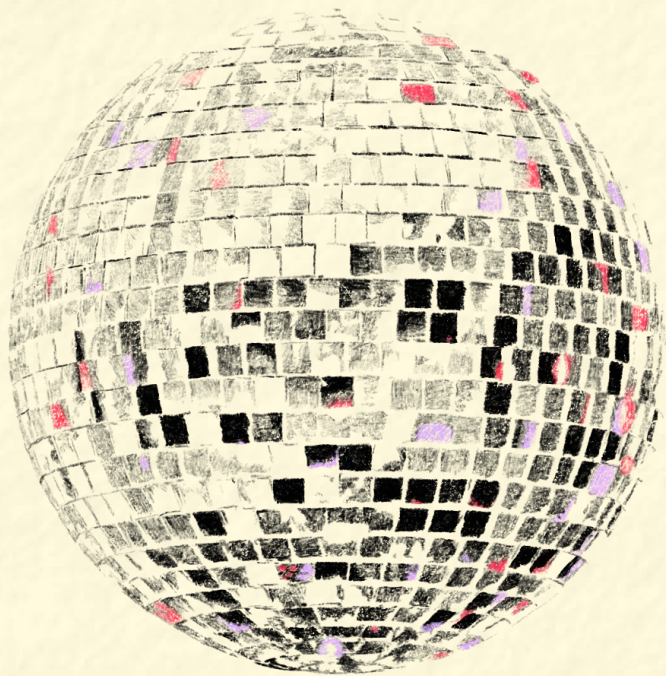
Octopus Tree

Lisa Tang Liu

2021







About the Contributors

Tomás Baiza is originally from San José, California, and now finds himself in Boise, Idaho. He is the author of the novel, *Delivery: A Pocho's Accidental Guide to College, Love, and Pizza Delivery* (Running Wild Press, 2023), and the collection *A Purpose to Our Savagery* (RIZE Press, 2023). Tomás's work has appeared in various print and online publications, and nominated for the Pushcart Prize, the Best of the Net, and Best American Short Stories anthologies. Tomás has fenced in Italy, been rescued by helicopter from the Sierra Nevada, fended off wild dogs while hitchhiking in rural Morelos, México, and once delivered a dozen pizzas to a Klingon-themed orgy at a sci-fi convention. When he is not writing, Tomás is running trails or obsessing over bonsai trees.

Michaela Brady's writing hones in on anxiety, loss and distress, and plays with nonlinear timelines. Originally from NYC, she currently works as a civil servant in the UK, and is an active member of the Oxford Writing Circle. Her writing has been featured in *Airplane Reading*, *Psychology Today*, *The Sarah Lawrence Review*, *The Oxford Review of Books*, *Pink Disco Magazine* (forthcoming) and *Cassandra Voices*—to which she is a regular contributor. Following this novel, she has begun a second speculative fiction project, which she posts on her Substack, 11 Billion Words.

Emily Coppella (she/her) lives on traditional Anishinaabe Mississauga territory. She completed her M.A. in English Language and Literature at Queen's University and her B.A. in English at Carleton University with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Women and Gender Studies. Her poetry has won 2nd place for the George Johnston Poetry Prize and has been published in several international literary magazines. You can find her on Instagram @emilycoppella.

Fati D. is a Ghanaian-American literary and visual artist who resides in Florida. Her poem "Cape Coast" was performed in *Echoes of Us*, a series of curated monologues, directed by Tony Award nominee Michele Shay in 2022. D is the Editor-in-Chief for *The Banyan Review* and is a 2023 Best of the Net nominee. *The Midway Journal*, *The Lumiere Review*, and *The Talon Review* recently published her poetry. She enjoys consulting and facilitating workshops for Authors Roundtable of North Florida and teaching creative writing at the Jacksonville Art and Music School. D is a 2023 Fellow of The Craft Institute.

Laine Derr holds an MFA from Northern Arizona University and has published interviews

with Carl Phillips, Ross Gay, Ted Kooser, and Robert Pinsky. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming from *J Journal*, *Full Bleed* + The Phillips Collection, *ZYZZYVA*, *Portland Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere.

Kelly DuMar is a poet, playwright and workshop facilitator from Boston. She's author of four poetry collections, including *jinx* and *heavenly calling*, published by Lily Poetry Review Books in March 2023. Her poems and images are published in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Thrush*, *Glassworks*, *Flock* and more. Kelly produces the Featured Open Mic for the Journal of Expressive Writing. Reach her at kellydumar.com

Artist statement

Taking pictures is a form of play for me. I photograph what I find from nature—organic images that catch my eye. I use only my I-Phone and edit my spontaneous digital images minimally. What arrests my attention is what calls to my unconscious, sparks my imagination, or offers the peace and joy of experiencing beauty and mystery. As Carl Jung said, “The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct.” I never compose my photos by altering or arranging the subject in any way. I photograph what I find as I find it. I have no expectations, I lose track of time, and I am focused and engaged and interested and happy. I am trusting my instincts. I am letting my instincts guide me. I am being expressive. I am being emotional. I am caring deeply for the earth, for weather, for habitat, for what is shown to me, for what I am able to connect to and begin to understand. I am stressless, un-tense. I am attuned to my sense of sight, sound, texture, color, smell. I am surprised. I am spontaneous. I am astonished.

Maria Giesbrecht is a poet residing in Toronto, Canada. Her work has appeared in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Rhodora*, *Sunday Mornings at the River*, and elsewhere.

GJ Gillespie is a collage artist living in a 1928 Tudor Revival farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island (north of Seattle). In addition to natural beauty, he is inspired by art history—especially mid-century abstract expressionism. The “Northwest Mystics” who produced haunting images from this region 60 years ago are favorites. Winner of 20 awards, his art has appeared in 61 shows and 120 publications. When he is not making art, he runs his sketchbook company Leda Art Supply.

Growing up **Monique Harris** was fascinated with trees, lakes, and anything relating to art. She has been a healer, a teacher, a military contractor, a dancer, and a fan of all things sci-fi and metaphysics. She has an MFA from Indiana University and currently enjoys teaching at the college level, helping others develop their love for reading and writing. Her writing explores black womanhood, mental health, and spirituality and can be found in *Wards Literary Magazine*,

Yellow Arrow Journal, and *Torch Literary Magazine*. She currently calls Raleigh, North Carolina home and can be found most days hiking and reading.

Felix Imonti has published the history book *Violent Justice* and numerous articles in professional journals in the fields of international politics and economics. He has published fiction works in *Commuter Lit*, *Selcouth Station*, *Sweet Tree Review*, in *Another Chicago Magazine* and others. The essay in *ACM* was included in the Best American Essays of 2021. Currently, he has stories in *Dark City Crime Quarterly*, in the anthology *Artificial Divide* and in the anthology *The Beginning and the End*.

Désirée Jung is an artist from Vancouver, Canada. She has published translations, poetry, and fiction in several magazines around the world, taking part in many artists residencies. Her series of video poems were screened in various film festivals and won several prizes. Her nonfiction story “Dispatches from the Womb” was nominated for a 2023 Pushcart Prize. For more information, please check her website: www.desireejung.com.

Lisa Tang Liu is a Massachusetts-based photographic artist. Her recent works art surreal and explore her relationship with the boundaries around her. She lives with her husband (writer Ken Liu) and their two daughters.

Vanessa Y. Niu is a first generation Chinese-American poet who lives in New York City. She’s been published in journals such as *Exiles Sans Frontieres* in the *Amsterdam Review*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, and *Paper Lanterns*. Recently, she received an honorable mention in the CCNY 51st Poetry Festival and the 2023 Maddy Summer Artist Award for Creative Writing. Beyond the page, she has also written text for the modern composition scene at music institutions such as Juilliard and Interlochen.

Marie Olofsdotter is a Swedish-born artist & poet living in Minneapolis where she paints, writes poetry, and works in mixed media. Her accolades include a Minnesota Book Award, a Loft Mentor Series Award in Poetry and grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Jerome Foundation and the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. Marie has shared her love of creativity as a teaching artist for over 25 years.

Artist Statement

I’m interested in archetypal and universal symbolism, a language deeper than my Swedish roots. Like an archeologist, I dig for relics of belonging to create a place full of mystery, a poetic space that fuels the heart. Some images walk a fine line between the familiar and the utterly wild, otherworldly. I work this edge to convey a balance of opposites; sensual serenity, peaceful

intensity, raw beauty. At the core of everything I do, is my deep love for the earth, for the rhythms of nature, where I find inspiration and solace.

www.marieolofsdotter.com

Raphaela Pavlakos (she/her) is a 3rd year PhD student in McMaster University's English and Cultural Studies department and a poet. Her research looks at Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee poetry and landscape as alternative sites of memory, using research-creation to intersect her scholarly and creative production. Raphaela's poetry can be found in the *Taj Mahal Review*, *Word Hoard*, *Sanctuary: A Cootes Paradise Anthology* (forthcoming), and graduate journals like *The Lamp*. She co-authored a self-published poetry collection called *Mythopoesis* in 2022 with Georgia Perdikoulis, which is available through Kindle Direct Publishing.

Octavio Quintanilla is the author of the poetry collection, *If I Go Missing*, the founder and director of the literature & arts festival, VersoFrontera, publisher of Alabrava Press, and former Poet Laureate of San Antonio, TX. His Frontextos (visual poems) have been published and exhibited widely. His new poetry collection, *The Book of Wounded Sparrows*, is forthcoming from Texas Review Press in fall 2024. He teaches Literature and Creative Writing at Our Lady of the Lake University.

Website: octavioquintanilla.com

IG: @writeroctavioquintanilla

Twitter: @OctQuintanilla

Angel Rosen is a lesbian poet living near Pittsburgh, PA. Her recent publications include *HAD*, *Wordgathering*, and *Across the Margin*. She is passionate about queer friendship, healing, and art communities. Angel can be found reading and writing poetry, drinking bubble tea, or listening to the Dresden Dolls. Her poetry, including books, can be found at angelrosen.com or on any social media at @Axiopoeticus.

Fabio Sassi is a visual artist living in Bologna, Italy. He makes acrylics and photos using what is hidden, discarded or considered to have no worth by the mainstream. Fabio uses logos, icons, tiny objects, discarded stuff. He often puts a quirky twist to his subjects or employs an unusual perspective that gives a new angle of view. He really enjoys taking the everyday and ordinary framing it in a different way. His work can be viewed at <https://fabiosassi.foliohd.com>

J.B. Stone (he/they) is a Neurodivergent/Autistic spoken word poet, writer, critic from Brooklyn, NY now residing in Buffalo, NY. They serve as EIC/Reviews Editor at *Variety Pack* and reads for *Split Lip Magazine* & *Uncharted Magazine*. He's the author of three chapbooks

including *Fireflies And Hand Grenades* (Bottlecap Press 2022). J.B. was recently shortlisted for CRAFT's Inaugural Character Sketch Challenge, and his prose has been nominated for the Best of the Net, and Best Small Fictions. Their prose has appeared in *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *BULL*, *X-R-A-Y Literary Magazine*, *The Citron Review*, *MoonPark Review*, among other spaces. You can check out more of his work at jaredbenjaminstone.com

Carolina Torres is a Biologist and Public Health researcher who enjoys the arts and literature. As a scientific author, she has published in peer-reviewed journals within the biomedical field. Her writing, mostly prose, is a practice for spiritual reflection.

Angela Townsend is Development Director at Tabby's Place: a Cat Sanctuary, where she bears witness to mercy for all beings. She has an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and B.A. from Vassar College. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Amethyst Review*, *Braided Way*, *Cagibi*, *Fathom Magazine*, *Ignatian Literary Magazine*, and *The Razor*, among others. Angie has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 33 years, laughs with her mother every morning, and delights in the moon. She received fifth place in the 2023 Writer's Digest Awards for Spiritual Nonfiction. Angie loves life dearly.

Jan Wieszorek writes and paints in southwestern Michigan. *The London Magazine*, *Abstract Magazine*, *Minetta Review*, and *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, among others, have published his poems. He taught writing at St. Augustine College, Chicago, and wrote the ebook *Awesome Art Projects That Spark Super Writing* (Scholastic, 2011).



References

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reference photos are credited below*



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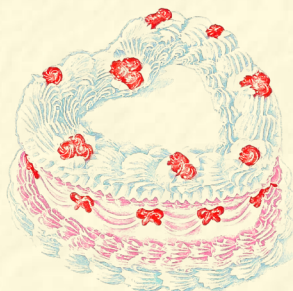
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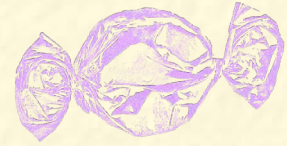


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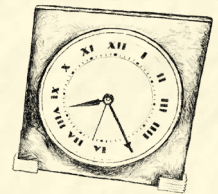
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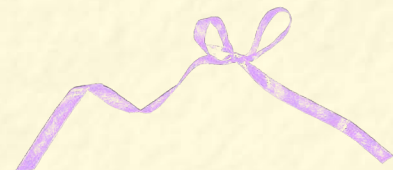
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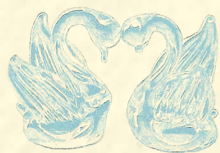
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Thank You

Thank you for flipping through each page to end up here.

A million thanks to the contributors of *Spare Wile*. We are so grateful that you thought of our journal as a home for your work. In many ways, I find art to truly be a stream of light in our dark times. This journal would not exist without the labor of love put into your artistic creations.

As bittersweet as all endings are, things must come to an end for us to truly see the value they had all along. I am so grateful for the time I've spent on the *Talon Review* staff. I have been affiliated with this journal since the fall of 2020. It feels right to end my time in the fall of this year. I remember my nervousness in asking to become a part of the team—so eager to be a piece of this creative outlet in any capacity. Gradually, I built confidence and progressed through various roles within this journal. I couldn't be more appreciative of how I've grown as an editor and leader throughout my time spent with the *Talon Review*.

My utmost thanks to the *Talon Review* staff. This season was an experiment in adding in an entire class of readers and bringing on new editors. The excitement and initiative each individual took within their role really made this issue shine with brilliance. Thank you to each reader and editor for taking the time to reflect on every submission. Thank you to our faculty advisors for making room in your schedules to aid our team. Hadley, thank you so much for your creative magic and for designing such a beautiful layout. Sera-Ann, thank you for always keeping me on track and for the hundred other things you do to aid me in a successful season. Christine, thank you for your skill in copyediting and for working with me to contemplate the light touches implemented in each piece. Jess, I really don't think there's enough space on this page to express all my gratitude to you. If I were to contain my thanks to only this line, then I thank you for your endless stewardship. But I'm going to use another line anyway to thank you for being so good-humored around my chaos and for offering me opportunities to grow as an editor. Ari, thank you for taking a chance on me back in 2020. The fact that I'm writing this closing letter is a testament to the great mentorship and support that you so willingly give all your students. I am so appreciative of your presence and your encouragement.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to the community of individuals who support me in all the creative fields I venture into. It has been demonstrated to me time and time again that I am where I am today due to the strong support system that cares for me. I leave the *Talon Review* in the careful hands of team members who will seek to expand this journal with innovation.

Cheers to the continued growth of the *Talon Review*,

Natasha Kane



About *The Talon Review*

The *Talon Review* is a literary magazine housed at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville. Founded in 2012 by Mark Ari's creative writing alumni, we're run entirely by current and former students. We began as *HashtagOctothorpe*, a journal dedicated to student voices at UNF. In 2014, the journal was re-envisioned and rededicated as the *Talon Review*, and in 2018 the journal moved from student voices to global. We are now home to emerging and established writers worldwide.

We publish twice yearly, in the spring and fall, and are exclusively digital.

Our space is meant to validate and amplify all experiences and to serve readers who chase transcendent literature. We seek to compile an international collection of works from a diverse pool of poets, authors, and artists. Diversity to us means lifting those who are previously unpublished alongside experienced writers from all walks of life. We are dedicated to bringing innovative contemporary work to our readers at no cost. Submitting to our journal is also free.

We operate on a "do no harm" philosophy and do not tolerate romanticizing hate speech, bigotry, racism, xenophobia, or misogyny. These are the doctrines we aim to dismantle.

Our hope is that you join our community, either by reading our curated issues or by submitting your pieces to us for publication.



The Talon Review