Mirror Myth

VOL. 3
ISSUE

Cover: Sonder by Isaac Ray

The Talon Review's

Mirror Myth

VOL 3 | ISSUE 3

Masthead

Table of Contents

Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

When piecing together the works for this issue, one recurring theme was evident: identity. Thinking of titles to accompany this theme, the first image that came to mind was a mirror. Mirrors are strange. They portray a flipped copy of the self. When we look at them, we think we fully see ourselves, but in reality our reflections are "myths."

This issue itself is a mirror, reflecting the writers, artists, and editors whose work make up these pages. The pieces in this issue all deal, in some ways, with identity, change, and inheritance. They ask these questions: who are we, how did we get here, and how do we perceive that information? The title, "Mirror Myth," represents the idea that mirrors are not a constant. Who we are today is different from who we were a year ago, and who we will be in the future.

For me, I feel as though I constantly look in the rear view, as if I am comparing myself to a reflection of the past. For example, I can't believe I am writing this editor's note. I used to be a reader for *Talon*

as an undergraduate student, and then I joined again in my last semester of grad school. Now as an alum, I am living the dream of my twenty-year-old self. Looking in the mirror a year or two ago, I thought this opportunity had already passed when I graduated. But the mirror only showed me what was right in front of me. As seen with this issue, I have changed from the person who I thought I was when I graduated, and even more so from the person who I thought I was at twenty. I am changing with each new day. Sometimes the people we think we're supposed to be or the people we're told to be are not who we are at all. We are constantly changing.

I encourage you to read these pieces with your own mirror in mind. What does the mirror not show you? Perhaps that is something you may discover within these pages.

– Sera-Ann Hargrove

Clay Country

By Dimitri McCloghry

The pigeons aren't real, but they boom like any living thing. Your nephews stare wide-eyed by the swing set as we reload. Carl's seven beers deep when he asks if I'll pop the question. There's always that one in the family; always that family in the one. There's deep fried Oreos and drama on the patio. I know you put him up to this, see you blush not quite hard enough. So much rides on us. I'm the second serious one. Promised land. You could fill an ark with the things you know about me. An infinite ditch. But this is loyalty. This is the double-edged truth, unmoved: all that's left are the scared bullets in my hands unready to go supersonic. Five acres and a brother counting on me to sew up a thrift store life I probably deserve. I curl my finger, take aim, but whatever I touch never comes out the same. But the bad thoughts in my head negotiate rewards. The thin, red line below your hips. How deep it goes. The way you say please in that drawl before I show you how it's done. Both of us cruising like weekends because we're near the end.

Cigarette Simulacrum

By Lizzy Ke Polishan

I smoked a cigarette my throat remembers
in the morning. Did I light it? Or did you
—soft cave of your hand, flame a moth near my lips?

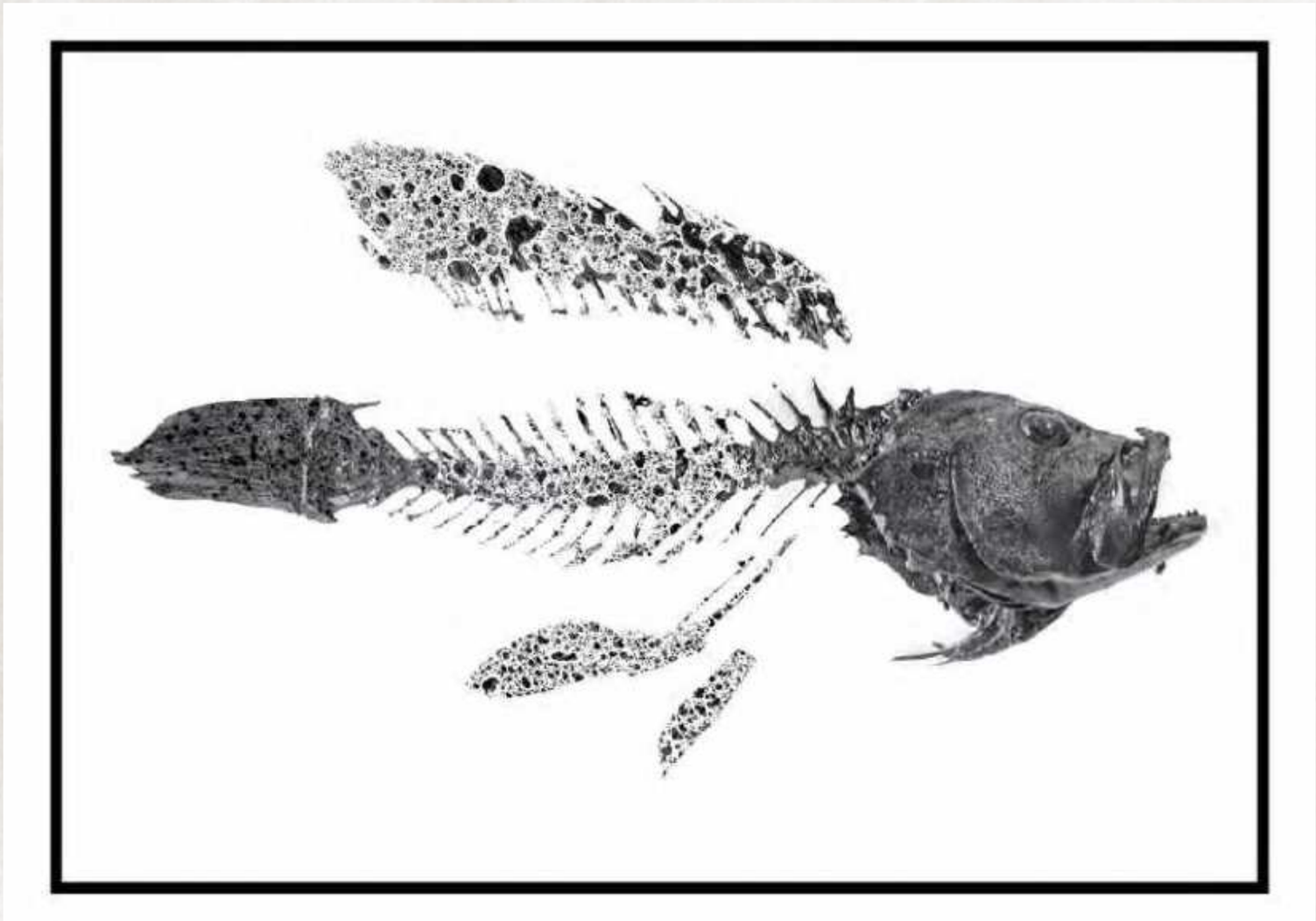
Somehow time both sharpened and eroded your face,
dulling the same features it drew out.
It didn't rain last night, but in my memory it is raining,

softly as tropical mist, and that's why we had to huddle together,
under the awning, outside the bar. This is what I remember:
the heat of your body against mine, the way

I needed to tip my chin to the stars to see the easy hook
of your smile. This is what I remember:
when a Honda appeared, someone told you it was time to go,

and you pressed your body closer to mine,

just until they said it again.



Fish Bones

Joshua Kuss
November 2023
11 x 14 inch
Fiber Paper, Manipulated Dark Room Print

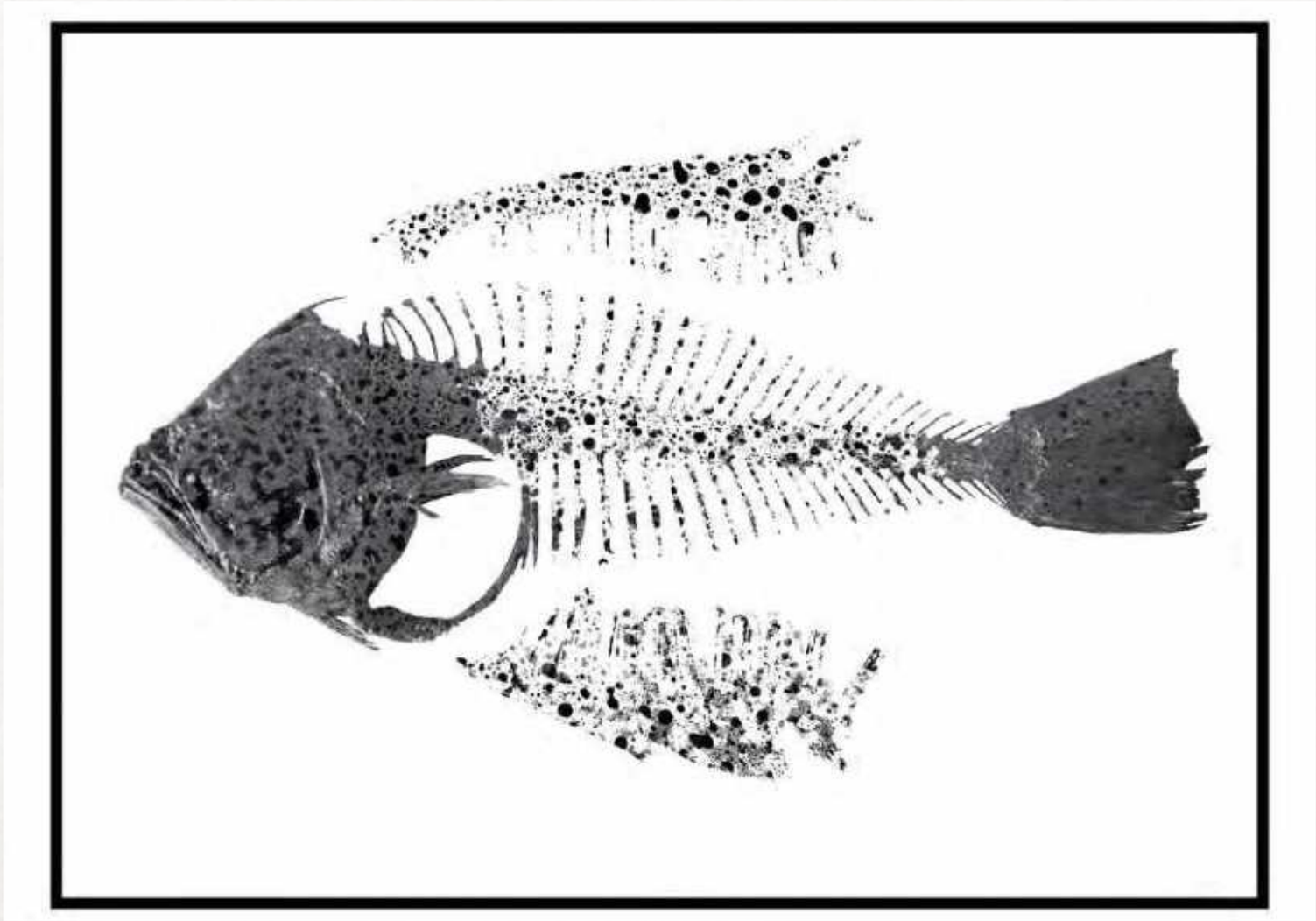
When Hurricane Larry made landfall, it dropped over 100,000 microplastics per square meter of land per day

By Daniel Brennan

You and I don't talk during these sessions.
Just bodies pressed against each other, lips split
to let the milky smoke rise through us.
It's raining again in December. No snow,
just the pooling gray on your stoop. Inhale.
Exhale. Peace calcifying in our bones as we
cradle one another's limbs on your takeout-stained couch.
One time you let the News run on endlessly
in the background, headlines peeling away
like Band-Aids to reveal unsalvageable wounds.
We try not to make that mistake anymore.
It's true, I need you to rest your mouth against mine,
an archangel at rest in a cathedral
parapet. Salvation. I need your hands to shake free
of their silence and push into my chest, crack
me open like a med-school cadaver
and remove all the cancerous growths of
worry that bud amidst the soft tissue.
The storms these days bear new names;
lasting, and precedent, and don't look back.
It's no longer enough to close our eyes
and make our own landscapes in the dark.
You emerge from your stupor to tell me
that when Hurricane Larry made landfall,
it dropped over 100,000 microplastics
per square meter of land per day.

World-building and -rending, the familiar
earth now patient zero. Endless modulation.
You and I? Our skin is a cemetery of consequence,
the flesh never forgetting what is brought down
from the clouds these seasons. I squirm
in the dark. I can taste my molars rotting
in the back of my mouth, my tongue digging for
the words to describe your shape as it's cast
in a silhouette within the dying sunlight.
Don't leave me here, don't let my lips
bleed dry with not knowing how this ends.
When the oceans, all cozied in past tense,
rise to claim us, tie your limbs to mine.
Lash flesh to flesh, bone to bone. Watch the oceans
swell; new paradise awaits in the silence.

"The storms these days
bear new names; /
lasting, and precedent,
and don't look back."



Fish Bones

Joshua Kuss
November 2023
11 x 14 inch
Fiber Paper, Manipulated Dark Room Print

Sonder

Isaac Ray
2023
20 x 8 inch
Archival Pigment Print

Running on Ice

By Holyn Thigpen

No matter how many layers of gloves I put on, or how deeply I bury my fists into my pockets, my fingers are twice as cold as the rest of my body. Too anxious to search Web md and too embarrassed to try mittens, I've resigned myself to compulsive, diagnostic knuckle cracking and the certainty of frostbite.

I mention this because I have only one memory of a winter day outdoors wherein my fingers were not exhausting the "ifs" of my hypochondriac brain. It was a Sunday in February, 7 a.m. Downing my second cup of hotel coffee and curled beneath my brother's jacket, I watched my mom stare blankly ahead as the turn signal blinked.

She had never looked more grey. Grey coat. Grey ear warmers pressed against the grey car seat. Our suburban Maryland surroundings unveiled lone grey joggers idly crossing narrow grey bridges and milky grey slush pools. Bleak. Even for February; even for a funeral day.

I could smell Grandpa's apartment on her, from the jarringly strong coffee (our duty as Norwegians, my grandpa would say, is to drink coffee as dark as dirt and dust every delicacy with powdered sugar) to the knit beanie flung across the dashboard. Whether she was aware of it herself, I'm not sure, but later on, she carried this scent back to Atlanta in every musty photograph and neatly pressed sweater in her suitcase.

Now my sister and I wear those sweaters. Several washes later, Grandpa's extra-large T-shirts and blue Nike pullover preserve his legacy in the messy piles of my closet.

I've never felt strange wearing others' clothes; I have the Goodwill receipts to prove it. Yet, in this case, the sweaters are so fragile. Even around the house, wearing them brings me an uncanny awareness of a role I may have neglected. How fair is it to claim my grandpa in this way when, just a year ago, I couldn't even bother to return his emails?

Because most of the time, if I'm honest with myself, I am supremely self-centered. Not out of narcissism but in a uniquely torturous loop: berating myself for awkward eye contact or rendering myself the protagonist of nonexistent self-discovery.

My mom once remarked that my notoriously awful driving, which leaves family members gripping their armrests every time I'm in the driver's seat, stems less from a lack of skill than a fundamental disregard for my surroundings. I struggle to cram even those I love most into a brain that wakes to five alarms in a five-minute span and counts calories in the iPhone notes app.

But in the car that morning, I felt oddly apathetic toward my own present. Every strip mall, park, and streetlight appeared to me only as my mom perceived them, or at least as I imagined she did: colored by favorite childhood restaurants, traffic on the Beltway, early morning drives to swim practice, and Grandpa belting out Germanic operas. A life in which my nearest and dearest lived without even a vague notion of me: in which my mom was not "mommy," "mum," or the sardonic "mother dearest," but just a person.

I know I'm not breaking new ground with this thought: that even those we're closest to exist outside our frames; that our 300,000-year-old brains assign the most reductive roles for nothing more than a vague sense of order.

Still, this didn't make the revelation about my mom less shocking. I witnessed my perfect collage of her pulled apart and tossed into a far greater pile of parts. The grieving daughter. The nostalgic adult. The woman returned home. I was the daughter of a grieving daughter.

It was a moment that collected all its meaning in retrospect.

Example A: At age eleven, I overheard my mom on the phone with a friend discussing her and my dad's divorce. Her voice cracked on the words, "I'm just really scared."

Example B: My dad and stepmom visited me in Chicago my freshman year of college. Dad got teary when we parted at the end of the weekend, and I pretended not to care but sobbed back in my dorm room.

Any inkling of my parents' vulnerabilities paralyzes me. For as blasé as I am with my mom and dad, it sometimes feels more like a part I've bought into: the eye-rolling young daughter, the twenty-something lamenting her parents' failure to catch up with the times. When I witness my dad cry or my mom grieve, I regret ever playing that part. Because in these instances they're breaking from script–acting outside the roles I've prescribed them–and I can never bring myself to do the same.

We pulled into the empty lot beside Wheaton Regional Park. It was my first time there, though I'd heard mom speak fondly of it: fields nestled by loops of woodland trail and, in a depressing juxtaposition, horses grazing beside a multilane highway.

I found it difficult to feel one way or another about it. I was too cold. I'm rarely, if ever, inclined to view my Southern roots as consequential, but sub-freezing weather is an exception. I watched my brother grab a tree for balance and swing each leg back and forth like a pendulum, loosening his muscles. Somehow, he wore shorts.

I shouldn't have been surprised because, really, this is just Chance. When my brother suggests things like a sunrise workout on a blustery morning or, back home, runs before dawn every day with a 25-lb weight strapped to his chest, my ego goes straight to belittling.

"But what's the point?" I'll ask him when, at 8 p.m., he announces his retreat to bed like a hero off to battle.

"I don't know," he'll reply with a shrug. "I just like it."

His shorts pissed me off, just as every 8 p.m. bedtime pisses me off. Despite being five years my junior, despite being only sixteen, Chance embodies our family's resiliencies to an extent that I've never quite managed. Even in the simple things, like his indifference to cold weather, he's a living piece of those Scandinavian relatives bundled up in log cabins, of Grandpa's childhood in Minnesota and mom's love of running when her breath is made visible.

Like two criminals in cahoots, my mom and brother plan 20-mile treks through the Appalachians and order egg McMuffins in pre-hike ritual. They jump out of bed to blinking, led numerals in dark rooms and lace up their tennis shoes without a second thought. Meanwhile, across town, I roll to the other side of my pillow.

I was relieved when we agreed to run separately and meet back at the car in an hour or whenever it happened to start snowing. Chance took off immediately. Mom and I watched the bob of his wool hat disappear around a bend as we set off together toward the main path, zipping our collars up to our chins and treading with caution over hidden ice patches.

Each crunch of my feet brought a bit more novelty. Disconcerting. Exciting. Readily uncomfortable. And here was my mom beside me, familiar incarnate: her gait characteristically determined, her voice the same that has talked me down from ledges and reminded me to unload the dishwasher more times than I'd like to admit.

How she could walk beside me in this unfamiliar setting, filled as it was with grief and grey and snow, was inconceivable to me. Yet, here she was: far away from the cheerful morning glow of our sunroom, where, selfishly, my mind often keeps her.

As we moved to split up and take our separate routes, all that childlike attachment came to me at once. "Not yet," I wanted to say. "Let's wait till the novel becomes familiar.

Let's stay together until the snow on the branches feels normal, and I don't feel so strange."

But we did part, and I ran alone. Immediately, as I had suspected, my fingers went numb inside my gloves. No longer good for grasping or waving, they swung at my sides like phantom limbs.

Clench my fists. Crack my knuckles. Bend my fingers one by one. Nothing.

I had never run through snow before and slowed instinctively as paths curved and gnarly roots reared, tiptoeing down small slopes with the focused resolve of a rappelling rock climber. I had absolutely no idea where I was going. My hands had long since passed the point of being able to check my phone map, and averting my eyes from the trail for even a second could, I knew well enough, lead to imminent disaster.

A trait from my mom: clumsiness. So ingrained in our dna that the only place I'd trust either of us to not slip, trip, or fall is a sensory deprivation room. Some of my most mortifying memories, like dropping a tray full of salsa bowls at my restaurant job or tripping up the stairs of my school's busy dining hall, are colored by a sense of inherited inevitability.

In those embarrassing aftermaths, covered in salsa or limping across campus, my only mild solace has come from recalling my mom's many moments of utter incompetence with the natural world: a scream from the kitchen as she drops a stack of wine glasses; a curse as she slams her finger in the

bathroom door. And yet, despite this battle with the ground, my mom is a rock: the last person to ask for help and the first to run up a hill.

I've grown up hearing that curiosity is stifled by the cynicism of adulthood; that my wonder and draw toward the novel will fade with a mortgage and a 401k. But the great thing is, I've never believed any of it. Because the pessimistic prophets who make these claims have clearly never met my mom, who discovers hidden nature reserves on long walks, swims laps through lakes, and takes commemorative photos of every restaurant dish she eats.

I had no doubt that at this very moment, she was photographing the horses by the highway or watching a cardinal flit across the snow. Because that's another thing about my mom: she notices things. While I burrow in the internal, she looks to the world for little signs of meaning.

I thought about this as I ran. Where were the signs? As much as my brain loves the poetic when it's on the page in front of me, I can never seem to find the same in real life. But mood is different; mood is hard to avoid. It was in the overcast skies and the dog barking just outside my line of sight. It was in my inability to look at my map, my wind-whipped ears, and the knowledge that, in five hours, I'd be standing at a gravesite.

I'm not sure how I'd have felt about these things on any other day. Maybe, I'd have felt nothing at all. But sometimes the

pace of my breathing matches perfectly, eerily with the rhythms of my setting. The film buff side of my brain wakes up and imagines each sight and sound orchestrated by a director, the grey cast of the sky rendered just so by a brilliant cinematographer.

I often feel embarrassed, pretentious even, trying to discuss fate, but I suppose these moments are the closest I get to genuinely trusting in it. If this morning had been sunny and warm, birds singing, kids playing, I doubt my mind would have wandered to these corners. I also doubt I would recall it all so vividly. It seems to me that the universe underlines experiences we should remember by dropping us, like a pin on a map, into settings that press on our consciences. Places that, like fresh cement, come primed for a permanent footprint.

I may never return to Wheaton Regional Park. Especially with Grandpa gone, it seems unlikely that I'll ever have reason to go near it. Instead, it has lodged inside me with a developing mythos, crystallizing my train of thoughts into something relatively comprehensible. Like a dog-eared page, I can flip to this day and this moment knowing exactly what feelings I'll find. Sometimes, I welcome that; sometimes, I'd rather skim a different page.

And here's another thing about that run: my hands warmed up. I'm not going to pretend to understand it physiologically, but as I ran, the aching and stiffness subsided. I could swing my hands by my sides and bend my fingers. I could take off my gloves without a jolt of cold.

Maybe I was just distracted by the scenery. Maybe all the coffee running through me had somehow reached my fingertips. But one way or another, my body came to terms with my weird, frigid fingers for the first and only time ever, and I'm inclined to believe that means something. Can one pain be subtracted from another pain gained? Does the universe deal in that kind of math?

These days, my grandpa's things sit in my childhood bedroom, filling the drawers and shelves I emptied when I left the nest. It's an odd collage–my music posters supplemented by Japanese textiles, my bookcase loaded with World War II history and opera singers' biographies.

I don't know if there's ever been a more unintentionally hilarious depiction of generational change. But when I look through the remains of his life, dropped so haphazardly against my family's present, I mostly just feel calm. Having these pieces of him around is a green light: for myself, my mom, all of us; an ordinance to accept and move on, but only carefully.

I can imagine myself in the throes of next winter, and again, my hands are throbbing. However, this time, my brain is quiet. It's not calling the doctor or spelling out illnesses; it's matching my breathing. I am someone's daughter and granddaughter. Niece and sister. In sync, as much as I can be.

The Man

Noelle Matthews
2023

I read an essay yesterday about the Kinsey scale

By Jessica Bakar

I. I read an essay yesterday about the Kinsey scale in seven parts in a class on perception that couldn't teach me how to perceive. You asked me what I was doing, tablet cracked open in lap, scrolling with one hand, scrawling notes with the other. *Looking for something to read, so I don't fall asleep.* You glanced up from your game of 2048 to laugh at my reply as I caught shiny semantics on the projector screen. Orientation column. Cortical magnification. Knowledge.

II. I read an essay yesterday about the Kinsey scale in a lecture hall of seven hundred and danced through an apple orchard on page six. It was supposed to be holy, but red skin bent orange under your fingertips. Sacrilege the color of sunset. I imagined damnation to be worse.

III. On the last day of my trip to New York, I hauled an overstuffed suitcase down four flights of subway stairs. Nicknamed the last step to misstep, ankle caved like a voice crack on concrete. My luggage landed upright. I did not.

IV. Perception class taught me fingertips are the most sensitive part of the body. A sprained ankle felt like a close second, but ligaments aren't afforded as ample space in the cortex. You already knew that before the Prof said it, teasing your knowledge under your breath. I would have guessed mouth, or genitals maybe, not your nail's soft underbelly.

V. Before I sprained my ankle, I wandered ten miles across Manhattan to Brooklyn, through the Met for hours, around Chinatown to see an old friend. In a CVS on Second, I swam between shades of blue, picking the perfect color to paint your nails back home in Montreal. "Bikini so Tiny" in one hand, Acetone and Altoids in the other.

VI. You brought me a bag of oranges to heal swollen joint. Unfurled this citrus consolation to touch every fruit you touched, peeling myself back in time to primordial pith. Swallowed the pieces slowly, considering the sensuality of the whole, until my tongue met stone ridge. Five little pits coaxed from flesh cradled between my teeth.

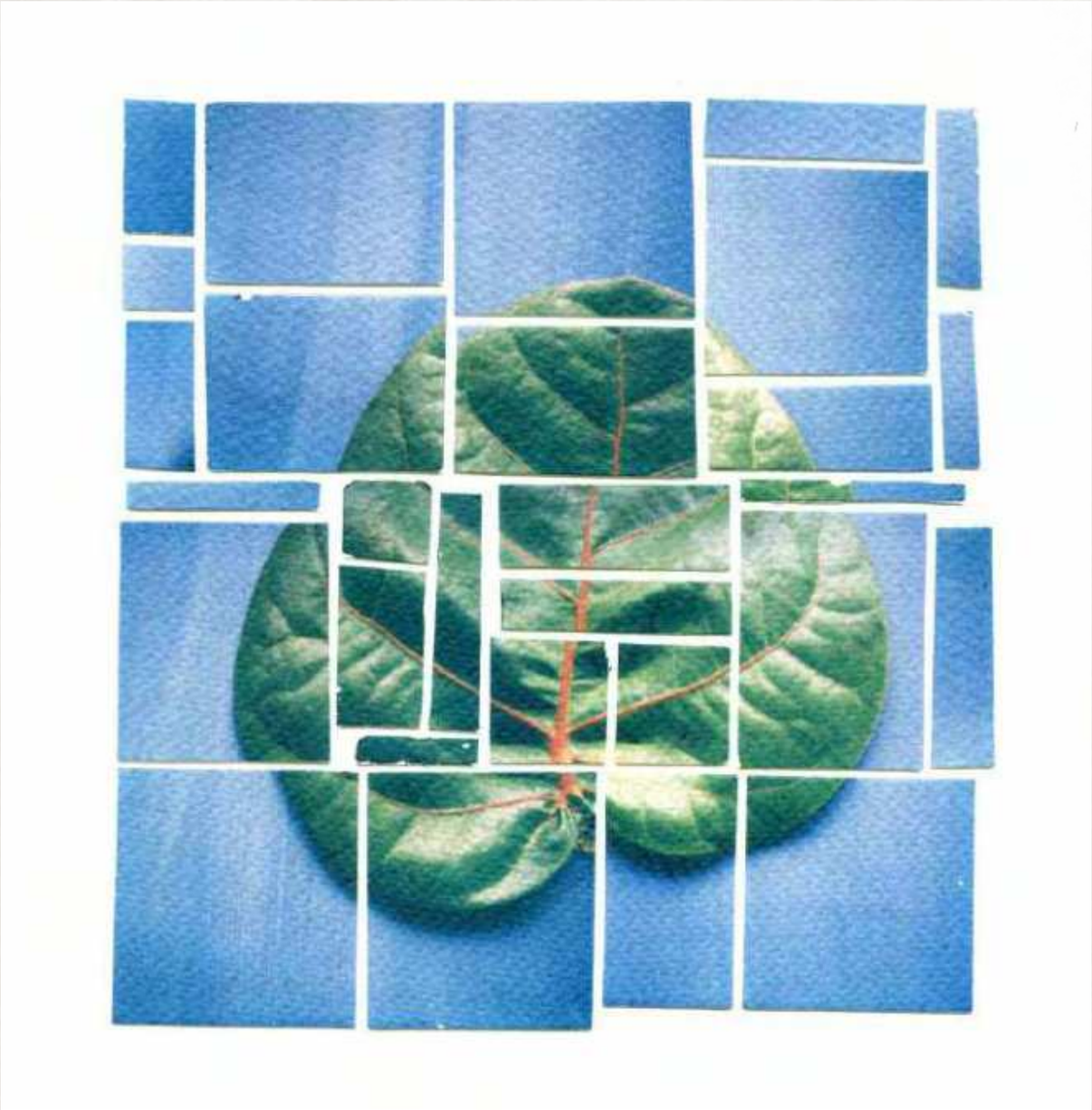
VII. Remind me, what's the stage of the Kinsey scale where I steal all the seeds from the fruit you touch and hide them in an Altoids tin?

VIII. I read an essay yesterday about the Kinsey scale before breaking it. Wide open, blood orange crevasse. Fractals folded to light borne from two hands when the most sensitive part of my body met yours, twenty turtlebacks stained blue, in the intersection of the lecture hall and the street.

Tattoos

Noelle Matthews

2023



Fragmented Botanicals

Joshua Kuss

Polaroid Emulsion Lift/Collage on Watercolor Paper

Elements

By Angela Williamson Emmert

You should know that after a fire of that size you cannot drink
the water. When forest towns are lost with trees, the houses melt

and the ground absorbs them. Fire People once managed the burns,
could read the forests, knew when to set alight the pine needles,

flammable as paper, folded into flowers, creatures of ash.
In the Amazon, fires clear the jungle for flower farms,

and plastic-wrapped roses fly suspended, near-frozen and bug-free
to arrive in time for our funerals. Yes, we mourn in flame,

but also in frost, which comes earlier now, drapes paper-lace
doilies over green tomatoes, bursts the cells. They have drunk

all summer from my well, a sea of glaciers, but I must clear them
for they will rot, seed the soil with disease. You should know

I will need fire for this, set loose to ash away the dead growth
of coneflower, invite in the trees and the wind to turn the leaves.

In an unburned forest, dew steeps the folded boughs of a cedar
and drips on wild geranium. A slow trickle. Another epoch's drink.

red moon you too hurt

By Justin Howerton

god im drunk alive when im here,
gulf shores, im too good for pain
right now, the water surely dyes itself,
liquid indigo, my hair all stiff like an old
walrus' combover—let me slow down before
im carted off by security. what i mean
is the red moon rising over the dark duvet
of sea makes me wish the bible was a picture
book. to look at a lunar secret
unspoiled by anyone else's
treachery. to look at the heart
of rapture or the inflamed intestine
of venus and say still not enough.
the stamp of my forever has long been dry.

Fragmented Botanicals

Joshua Kuss
Polaroid Emulsion Lift/Collage on Watercolor Paper

Snow Moon

Kelly DuMar

before there were settlers

By Rowan Tate

before god and the devil went to war, there were rivers,
human hearts plump as radishes and love
that sat in them like swollen red bellies
warm in the hand like a freshly laid egg. we used to walk
without going somewhere, an audience to god
making creation in the key of g-sharp. we used to
look at grass and see the shapes in which language might be bent
before it was something glottal we
stepped on. roasting on a spit, earth sings and asks
to be gathered like pollen from where she has been
scattered, from the restlessness of the soil, she goes up
in smoke and returns to matter.

Dreams

Irina Tall Novikova

Mantra

By Scott Ragland

Inspired by the true story of Edmond Albius.

His mother dies at dawn bringing him into the world. Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont quiets his cries with goat's milk and calls him Edmond. When he grows old enough to question such things, he asks why he has no surname.

"Because you are a slave," Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont says.

•✳•

For years in the plantation fields, vanilla blooms fold and fall, bereft of beans and worthless. Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont watches his dreams of riches rot in Reunion's island soil beneath the ocean sun. His plants wither to a single vine.

In French chateaus, dukes and barons ingest vanilla imported from foreign shores to sooth their stomachs and stiffen their members.

The botanists in Paris puzzle over pollination. Are there no other bees like those in Mexico?

•✳•

Edmond asks about his mother.

"She died when you were very small," Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont says, "from a fever caught in a storm."

"What name did you give her?"

"Alba."

"Why?"

"From Latin, for white, the color I wish she had been."

Edmond looks down for a moment, as if bowed by an unseen burden.

"And my father?"

"I cannot tell you."

Edmond gathers potatoes, drops them in a wicker basket he will carry strapped on his back to the kitchen to feed his master's family. He notes his skin's lightness, the color of sun-dried turmeric, in contrast to the other slaves. That night, before falling asleep, he imagines his father a veteran of Napoleon's Imperial Guard, or perhaps the captain of a three-masted schooner speeding across the sea in search of sunken treasure.

Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont shows Edmond how to use his hands to pollenate a watermelon plant.

"Marry the male and female parts together," he says.

Months later, Edmond shows Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont two bean pods clinging to the last vanilla vine. He describes how he poked and prodded and found a tiny lid between the parts, how he lifted it back with a splinter of bamboo to rub the pollen in.

Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont spreads the news of Edmond's discovery across the island, sends him to teach his technique to slaves. Edmond is 12. By the time he is 40, ships carry 20 tons of vanilla from Saint-Denis to Marseille per annum.

The botanists in Paris revise their illustrations. Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont tells Edmond the words: lift the rostellum, press the anther against the stigma. Edmond repeats the words as he works, a mantra guiding the rhythm of his fingers, his sweat-seared eyes slitted in the humid heat.

•✳•

Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont's fortune grows great. He sets Edmond free.

"You are a good boy," he says. "Now you may take a surname, something in remembrance of your mother."

He suggests Albius, derived from Alba but with many meanings, sunrise among them.

"The moment of your birth," he says.

•✳•

A botanist in Paris claims credit for Edmond's discovery, receives 1,000 francs for service to the empire. In Saint-Denis, Edmond steals to fill his stomach, gets caught taking a mango from a barrel in a market stall. For five years, he watches for Monsieur Bellier-Beaumont to appear through the bars of his prison cell.

•✳•

Edmond begs for centimes on the waterfront, his hands out with palms up, as if feeling for rain. His reflection in a tavern window reminds him of his master. He turns and looks away. He tells strangers passing: "Sunrise, my name means sunrise." Behind him, ships flush with vanilla set sail.

nd repeats the
s as he works,
ntra guiding the
m of his fingers,
sweat-seared eyes
d in the humid heat."

River Trees

Kelly DuMar

I bow deeply in your essence

By Lisa Sultani

Later, I looked inside

your cleft palette
Of course it was

sculpted by a crescent moon

Where will you be tomorrow?

Every garment you wear soaked by fragrant efsand

I ask for all your wishes
so that I may recount them
My other children hold their

little breath

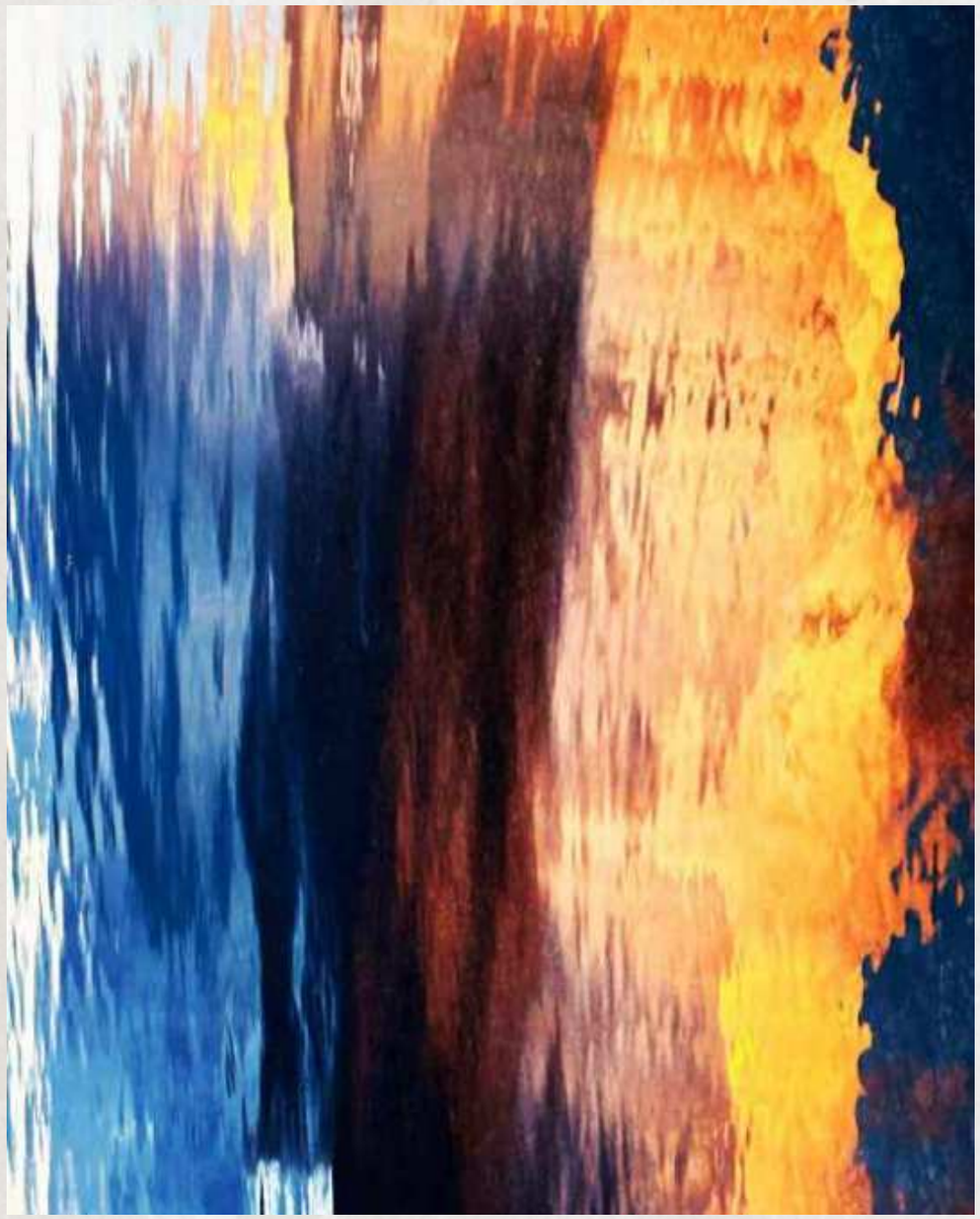
If I change your name will it
make a difference?

Sacrifice is my only privilege.

All my flowers, my entire garden of jewelry: breathe in,
breathe again. I am here for the exhales, I am here.

Spinning aside in prayer, lighting matches,
come with me
I will also go, with you.

"Where will you
be tomorrow?"



Hunter's Moon Rising, Farm Pond

Kelly DuMar

Island Conviction

By Ali Ximines

I fear my country hates me.

Not the one I lie with; the one I left.
She studies my back in the night—*I see Her!*—and whispers demons into my hair.
My hair! She's weaved herself into each lock
so I cannot be apart from Her without departing from myself.

She hates my mouth,
my tongue too tight to lap up what flows from Her lips.
She hates my skin,
burnt an even brown that's seeped into my bones.

And when I'm exiled to visit Her,
I stand in the sand of Her lap,
and She tugs at my ankles, saying,
"Go home, you don't belong!"

At night, She taunts me, blowing the window open to play with my eyelids.
I go to slam it shut and She ties my hands with plantain leaves,
native handcuffs for my thirty-second trial.

As She pushes me to my knees, a forced repentance,
what do I have to say for myself?

The judge's face is my own. I confess.

Shabnam's Escape

By Lisa Sultani

If I invoke the term *justice* it is
only in hopes you don't yet
realize it is a highly subjective
concept. Your idea of it is, in fact,
extremely pejorative in my country.

When you have seen one public hanging you
have not seen them all, but you will wish you had.

Guilt: what they want me to feel for being
the one who got out

(with this wish
prisons are built for
their lilac-scented daughters)

What I leave behind, I also
carry with me. If you have done this yourself,
you will understand.

Fruitless

Prathna Patel
23 x 30 cm
Mixed Media/Printmaking

Self-Portrait as a Mateless Bride

By Damilola Oyedeji

after Kwame Dawes

Your aunties appear, begin their blather
like faucets with loose set screws
eyes preying on you, gawking at you
because when your mother phoned (them) again
with news of your sistah's sweetie;
the elegant *ES-lexos* he handles;
the wanna gonna Queen's accent
escaping his lips like happy prisoners
they cast their drivel concerns at you to
inquire when they'll return for you/ as in
when the ogbanje's grip will unloose you
in surrender to a man who will
sweep in and snatch you from the
fangs of lonesome aging, pity your greying
dark mane and bring you to
the altar, that the shame, beading around
your head and neck, they warn, "won't end you."

Self-Portrait as Medusa Reading Haruki Murakami: Ghazal

By Lizzy Ke Polishan

Am I a wretched beast? Am I wrecked, Murakami?
A Monster, I'm not—would you object, Murakami?

My aching snakes slough off their skins, snowdrifts on my silk
pillows—I'll draw a hot bath, select Murakami.

The sandstorm happens inside you—"blood"—"you are the storm"
—How did you mirror my rage unchecked, Murakami?

My gorgon heart frog-hops, light as rosy-breathed sunrise
—the world a grove of hope: who'd suspect Murakami?

A skink slept on my hardback *Kafka on the Shore*
—all us cast-off creatures crawl to perfect Murakami!

Stay up late, a buzz of love: stare hard at the ceiling
—I'll lie here forever, recollect Murakami.

Jars of dandelion wine, a hundred tiny cups:
my drunk mambas bow low—all respect Murakami!

The loneliness only stones feel—universal it
is not: someday I'll go out, correct Murakami.

They sell my face in boardwalk shops, apotropaic
toys—when they call on me, I protect
Murakami![1]

Notes to the Poem:

1. *"The sandstorm happens inside you;" "blood"; "you are the storm"* are lines from Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*

Chromatic Galaxy

Candice Poorvin

Where Are You From?

By Margo McCall

When lunch rolls around, Marta slaps a "Back at 1" Post-it on her computer monitor, then walks over to La Brea Tarpits. Reclining on the sunny grass slope, she sets her phone timer and people-watches while munching slices of jicama and avocado washed down with water from her environmentally friendly glass bottle.

Today, hordes of schoolchildren stream from yellow buses like ants abandoning their colony, forming tidy lines to see the bones of saber-tooth tigers and mastodons resurrected from their tarry graves. Laughing and shrieking at being freed from the geometry of cracked vinyl bus seats and classroom desks.

Their joyful screams blend with the whir and whiz of traffic on Wilshire Boulevard, a welcome break from her cubicle's cemetery silence, punctuated by soft keyboard clacking and the muted ding of emails. The maroon school uniforms, blue sky, and green grass a burst of color after a morning floating inside the gray ad ops software interface, entering geotags on podcast buys.

There are fewer tourists now that the old LACMA buildings have been deconstructed into jagged chunks of concrete dropped by bulldozers into the beds of rumbling trucks. Soon an architect's futuristic vision will come to life—a curving concrete wave rising up like a freeway overpass.

Marta is relieved the Page Museum, chiseled into the hill like an ancient Aztec temple, escaped the wrecking ball. A monument to the past existing in the now instead of only in childhood memories of her mother bringing her to see the bones.

Eating her jicama, Marta likes to guess where the tourists are from. The beady-eyed man and woman, thin as cranes, are likely

German. And the tour group taking pictures look Japanese, cameras clicking on the mammoth family: the father trapped in tar, baby and mother watching in horror. But things get murky when it comes to tourists from Central and South America, where indigenous strains still fight the colonizing Spanish in their bloodstreams.

The sun is in Marta's eyes—she left her polarized Ray-Bans on her desk—but squinting, she sees the teachers shooing schoolchildren to the edges of the walkway, scooting them away from suspected danger. The glinting sunlight forms a sparkling halo. Sharp bits of light cut the air like daggers. It's like something out of A Game of Thrones—a tall, warrior-like man leading two wolves. The kids are wide-eyed, backing up to let them pass.

Marta takes a sip of water. It's hot, but not hot enough for mirages. And she's hungry, but not hungry enough for low-blood-sugar hallucinations. The man is wearing white, which in the blazing sun, could be a cape of feathers or an iridescent spacesuit. Sparks dance from the black river of hair flowing over his shoulders. The jaws of his canine companions hang open, like they're thirsty or hungry, or both.

Marta stuffs the jicama and avocado slices in her bag. There are places you can let your guard down—she thought the grassy slope by the museum was one of them. But living in a city, you must be ready for anything. And being a young woman, predators are a constant concern.

The man with the wolves is coming for her, like she's his destination. And when his luminous eyes lock on hers, she freezes like a deer mouse from the Ice Age. And then he's standing over her, the wolves—one silver, one black—slack-jawed and panting.

He's saying something. The voice tinny, like it's coming from far away. He's speaking another language. Not Spanish. Something older.

Marta runs through escape scenarios. She'll manufacture an excuse: she has to get back to work. Then just stand up and walk away. Never run, for that brings out the prey drive. But there's something about him. Her hand gestures for him to sit beside her on the grass.

His lips move. But now that he's sitting close, she can understand his language. He's telling her there's something he needs to tell her. Something important. The wolves' sapphire eyes follow her every move.

She wants to ask him where he's from. But that would be rude. And maybe he doesn't understand English. His face is darker than hers, with high cheekbones and deep-set eyes she can't resist. He could be from any country. From the future or the past.

Marta gets asked where she's from all the time. Always answers "from here." She may have been born at Good Samaritan Hospital, but her life started in her mother's belly further south, a land she feels inside her body, but has resisted visiting.

When her phone beeps, the strange man cocks his head.

"My alarm," she explains. "Time to go back to work."

The man looks puzzled, like time is a foreign concept, then smiles and nods.

•✳•

Tapping on her keyboard back at the office, Marta thinks of the man with the wolves. The way the carnivores' silvery eyes locked onto her body. The way the man's were impossible to resist. Sitting in her gray cubicle cell, she wonders if they were even real.

Entering geotags on podcast buys is tedious. Marta longs to make better use of the online marketing concepts she learned at LA City College. Her supervisor keeps telling her she's in line for a permanent position. Has noticed her way with software programs. But the months have dragged on, with no raises or promotions, nothing.

Staring into the computer is like gazing into a dreamy underworld. While her fingers tap at the keys, her mind wanders to places she has never been. She thinks of the man. Wonders if he's from Peru or Guatemala. Puts in her ear buds and queues up some flute music that takes her down a rabbit hole of drums and screaming jungle birds.

A coworker taps Marta on the shoulder. It's the blonde one, the only one who talks to her.

"Are you alright?" she mouths.

Marta removes her earbuds and nods. "Yeah."

"You stopped typing, so just wanted to check." The co-worker looks over her shoulder. "Didn't want the boss to catch you spacing out."

Marta smiles, puts her ear buds back in their carrying case. "Thanks for checking."

She thinks about asking the co-worker if she'd like to have lunch in the park sometime, but the co-worker has already returned to her desk and begun pecking at her keyboard.

Marta normally only has coffee in the morning, but for her afternoon break, needing something to pull her out of the dream jungle with its screaming birds, she stops by the coffee kiosk. While waiting for her caramel macchiato, she glances across the street at the Tar Pits, sees a commotion of birds. From a distance, they look like pterodactyls.

The rest of the day, she slaves away, emptying the queue of files that need geotagging, and even emailing her supervisor for more. This is what she should do to get ahead—show her hunger for work—instead of letting herself slip into imaginary dream states.

•✳•

Getting on the bus, purse clenched to her side, Marta registers the other passengers with a practiced side eye. A look that says I see you, don't mess with me, and I mean you no harm.

She sits beside an older woman who reminds Marta of her grandmother. Essie passed away last year, but Marta still tastes her enchiladas and smells the oily tang of her hair.

After Essie died, Marta's mom surprised everybody by moving into the apartment in San Fernando with Marta's father—the bitter couple reunited after twenty years. The bus to visit them takes hours, but a couple of times Marta got a ride out to the dry hills where the city ends, to join them on the couch watching the news.

"Be careful," her mother had said, her finger crooked from years of cutting hair, pointing to coverage of some gang shooting. "Sure, go to work, but when it gets dark, make sure you are home, safe from the bad people."

The warnings she's heard her whole life. Men who'll rape her, put her out as a prostitute, get her hooked on drugs, maybe even kill her and dump her body in the desert.

"Mom," Marta had groaned. "It's not that dangerous."

Her father took another sip of beer and looped his arm around her mother's shoulders. "You listen," he said with a sharp tone, "Your mother, she just wants you to be safe."

The bus home from work lurches along Wilshire, more people jamming in. A man grinds his groin into her shoulder as the bus hits a pothole. Then at Crenshaw, the older woman indicates she wants out.

People squeeze more tightly together to make space for the woman and her grocery bags. When the man gestures

for Marta to take the window seat, his smirk signaling he wants to press his body against hers some more, she shakes her head.

"Getting off," Marta says, pushing through the bodies and not looking over her shoulder to see what other young woman might be taking her seat.

Heavy with car exhaust, the air on the street still smells fresher than on the bus. She walks briskly toward her building on South Oxford—a few blocks but worlds away from the Wilton apartment where she'd lived with her mother and grandmother.

She'd moved into the cozy single with high hopes after graduating with her degree. She'd hoped to save for a car when she started the geotagging gig, but the rent increases made that impossible.

New York, she'd thought. Or a scholarship at Otis. She still dreamed, but of the past, more than the future—the feel of her mother's hugs, the taste of her grandmother's cooking. Recognizing, though, that she's too young to stop trying.

She thinks again of the man with the wolves—his shiny dark hair, their shiny light-blue eyes. What did he want to tell her? Maybe when she takes her lunch break at the Tar Pits tomorrow, he'll be there.

•✳•

In the morning, two full buses go by her stop, and Marta is twenty minutes late. By the time she logs in, her inbox is already full of assignments from the supervisor. But it's Friday. TGIF. With two full days of freedom before her, and nothing to do.

Marta digs in, grinding through the geotagging, her fear of being fired keeping her mind from drifting. She eats lunch at her desk, hoping to go to the Tar Pits on her afternoon coffee break. But more assignments stream in, all with an EOD deadline.

By the time she powers down her machine, the "have a good weekend" chant is underway. Come Monday morning, it will switch to "how was your weekend?" Marta never has anything exciting to report. But then, no one ever asks her.

The sun is low and petroleum orange as she crosses Wilshire. At the Tar Pits, he's sitting on the steps like he's waiting for her. The wolves lounge beside him with crossed paws, eyes narrowed against the sun's waning rays.

He walks down the steps, then ascends the hill behind the museum, gestures for her to follow. The costume she thought was a cape of feathers or a spacesuit now looks like a jumpsuit of white leather.

The air grows thick with the wet smell of earth and vegetation, the ground trembling with a vibration that might be a truck rumbling down Wilshire, or else drums. The palm trees are thicker than Marta remembers. A jungle of them that blot the sun and land them into greenish darkness. And it's hot. Too hot for an afternoon in November.

In his white jumpsuit, the man is easy to see. Beyond him is orange flickering. Fire. Then muscular, half-naked men sprouting feathers from their heads and backs, their silver anklets and bracelets jingling. Of course. The man with the wolves has brought her to see an Aztec dance group.

But then, as the man begins removing the skin of white leather, she wonders if he's brought her to see a strip show. Two women emerge from the shadows and drop an ornate cape around his shoulders, while someone else hands him a serpent. He looks enough like Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war and sacrifice, that Marta runs.

It takes a long time to reach Wilshire, with all the thick foliage and the sweat dripping down her back. The sound of branches swishing behind her finally turning into the whoosh of traffic. A bus with room for one more passenger pulls up at her stop. As the doors close with a hiss and the bus lurches ahead, Marta sees the man and his wolves waiting for the traffic light, serpent held high and cape blowing in the wind. Their eyes are no longer on her. They have found someone new, a young office worker like herself, who stands, shivering and alone on the street corner. Watching the heavy lines of traffic, as if that were the threat.

Riverfront

Candice Poorvin

The Story of Red Cap and the Wolf

By Angela Williamson Emmert

1.
Redcap had her basket for bread
and for violets, from her mother
to carry to grandmother's house.
It's true she disobeyed and had
to be saved, but note the tasks
she took on:

She collected the rocks to fill him.
She found the needle to sew him
She pulled the wagon that dumped him
into the river to drown.

2.
My grandfather at my birthday
watched me with hungry eyes
and with hungry hands he grabbed me
and laughing with hunger, he spanked me

while my grandmother clucked and looked on.

But you see:
our birthday was shared, and I knew
how to wait, for he was a greedy old man.

He crawled across the carpet to play
with my sister, didn't see me with my weapon,
or perhaps believed I was afraid.

(Yes, with a linoleum slat,
I beat the old man's ass, and I did not stop
until my father said "enough.")
3.
In a dark wood of Depression-era pine
sheltering the old falling shed,
I came upon the Wolf where he was waiting.

This is what he said:

Come see my Third Eye
my magic Third Eye
my special Wolf Eye
here in its home in my cave.

It poked out its head for a peek, and it said:

What strong fingers you have, Redcap:
the better to touch me with.

What lovely red hair you have, Redcap:
the better to tickle me with.

What pretty round lips you have, Redcap:
the better to kiss me with.

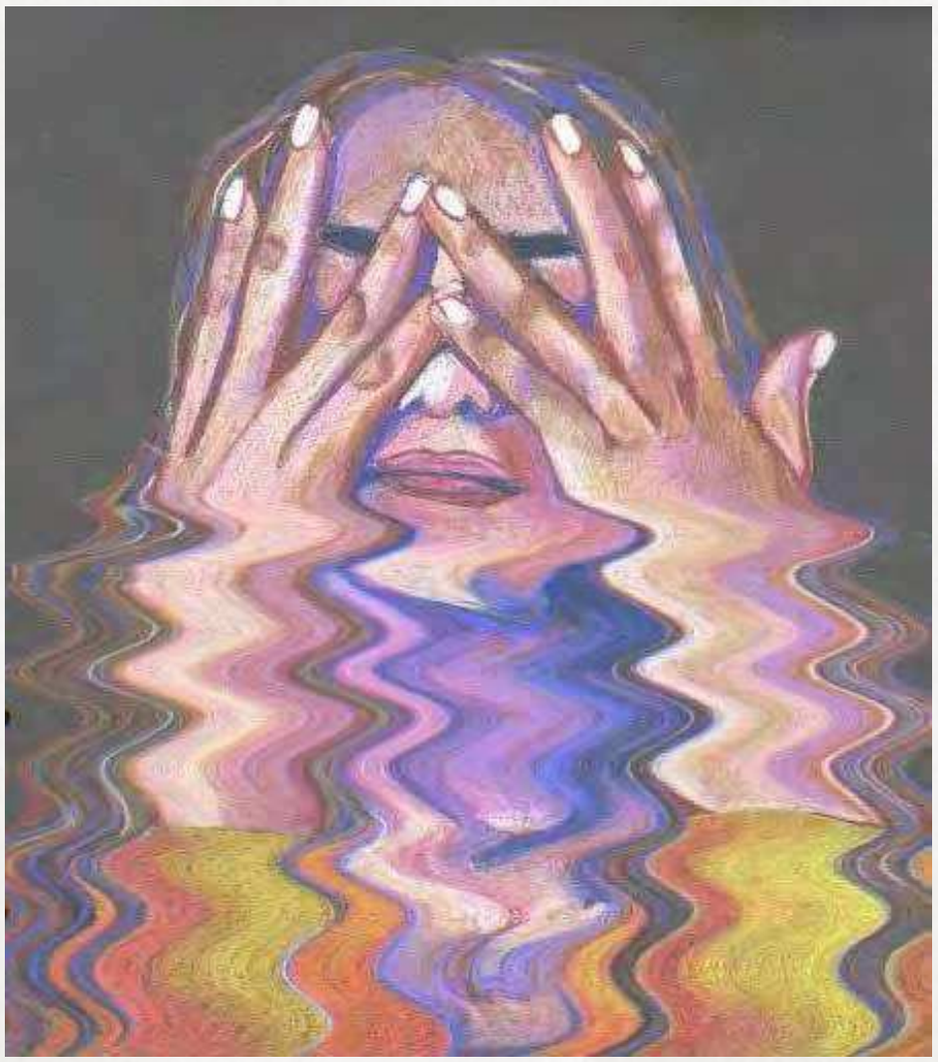
That bobbing wet eye,
that probing pink eye,
it fixed itself on me

and winked.

4.
This is the song that Redcap sings,
disobedient Redcap, naughty little Redcap
who wandered from the path with her slat:

Old Wolf, these are the stones
and here comes the Huntsman
and here are my needle and thread.

Here is the river, Old Wolf,
now look at my heart, Dead Wolf.
It is innocent of mercy, or dread.



Time Wasted

Prathna Patel
2023
34 x 30 cm
Colored Pencil, Digital

About the Contributors

Jessica Bakar is an undergraduate student at McGill University. She is an alumna of the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop and The Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship program. A two-time National Scholastic Gold Medalist, Jessica's work has been recognized by Ringling College of Art and Design, Columbia College Chicago, and the Bay Area Creative Foundation. Her work has appeared in Apprentice Writer, Lumiere Review, Vagabond City Lit, and more. When she isn't writing, Jessica enjoys practicing photography.

Daniel Brennan (he/him) is a queer writer and coffee devotee from New York, whose apartment has run out of space for books. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize + Best of the Net, and has appeared in numerous publications, including The Penn Review, Birdcoat Quarterly, Sky Island Journal, and ONE ART. He can be found on Twitter and Instagram: @dannyjbrennan

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, and her images have been featured on the cover of About Place and Young Ravens Literary Review. Kelly teaches a variety of creative writing workshops, in person and online, and she teaches Play Labs for the International Women's Writing Guild and the Transformative Language Arts Network. Kelly produces the Featured Open Mic for the Journal of Expressive Writing. Her home is the rural Charles River where she walks and captures images of the wetlands in all weather. Reach her at kellydumar.com

Justin Howerton is a first-year MFA candidate at Louisiana State University. He writes about the pull of memory, the lies we wish were true and the magic of cars. His recent work can be found in The SHORE, The West Trade Review and other places.

Joshua Kuss is a fine art photographer based out of Jacksonville Beach, Florida. Kuss is currently attending University of North Florida where he is working towards a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a concentration in photography. He intends to pursue his Master's degree in photography once he completes his undergraduate studies. In a majority of his work, Kuss employs analog and experimental photo processes to create his images. He typically explores his inanimate subject matter using a deadpan approach, and will often use analog manipulation techniques to abstract the contents of his prints. Kuss frequently juxtaposes certain elements and design choices in order to produce melancholy compositions that contradict the traditional connotation of a particular subject or scene. He was heavily influenced by the artistic style of his father, John Kuss, who has achieved great success throughout his life as a fine art photographer. His father introduced Kuss to analog techniques during his early years and it was because of John's impact that Kuss realized the vast potential of photography as fine art.

Noelle Matthews is currently enrolled at the University of North Florida and working for her Bachelor in Fine Arts with a concentration in painting and drawing. She works with multiple mediums such as oil paint, charcoal, and printmaking inks. She works on many different topics, such as being a twin, women's issues, and/or family concepts. She is hoping to graduate Fall of 2024. Her email is noellemat03@gmail.com and her instagram is @art.noelle

Margo McCall's short stories have appeared in Pacific Review, Heliotrope, Hypertext, Shark Reef, Inlandia, Pomona Valley Review, and other journals. Her nonfiction has appeared in Herizons, Lifeboat, blank space, the Los Angeles Times, and a variety of other publications. A graduate of the M.A. creative writing program at California State University Northridge, she divides her time between Canada and Long Beach, California. For more information, visit http://www.margomccall.com or follow her @wordly1 on X.

Dimitri McCloghry (he/him) currently lives in Saint Augustine, FL. He holds an MFA in Poetry from Stetson University's MFA of the Americas. Previous works have been featured in Common Ground Review, Permafrost, Potomac Review, and Verdad among others. He is working on a chapbook entitled The Last Angels of Anaheim.

Damilola Oyedeji (Ariella) is a Nigerian poet, essayist and educator. She is a creative writing candidate at Missouri State University and a past fellow of the Sprinng Writing Fellowship. Damilola's story, Nature's Trick, was included in the ANTOA Writing Contest 2021 shortlist. Her poems have been published in Synchronized Chaos Magazine, Spillwords, Prairie Home Magazine and elsewhere. Her essay "Why I Write" was published in the Sprinng Writing Fellowship 2023 anthology.

Prathna Patel (she/her) is a 19-year-old artist from Palm Coast, Florida, studying Philosophy and Painting/Drawing at the University of North Florida. Best known for her whimsical yet realistic artworks, her work bridges together worlds of culture and identity, science, economics, and society. While her main specialty is in painting, her work utilizes various mediums – namely ink, colored pencils, printmaking, and textile arts. Outside of visual arts, Prathna's research surrounds sustainable development, art history, philosophy, and cultural studies.

Lizzy 柯 (Ke) Polishan's work has recently appeared in or is forthcoming from Gulf Coast Journal, The Notre Dame Review, Rhino, The Greensboro Review, The Penn Review, Rust + Moth, and Prism International, among others. The author of A Little Book of Blooms, she is a Pushcart-Prize nominee and the recipient of the Eleanor B. North Poetry Award. She is currently a poetry reader for Palette and Psaltery & Lyre. She lives in coal-country Pennsylvania with her husband and cats.

Scott Ragland has an MFA in Creative Writing (fiction) from UNC Greensboro. Before taking a writing hiatus, he had several stories published, most notably in Writers' Forum, Beloit Fiction Journal, and The Quarterly. More recently, his flashes have appeared in Newfound, Ambit, The Common (online), Fiction International, Cherry Tree, CutBank (online), the minnesota review, Brilliant Flash Fiction, Cutthroat, Bacopa Literary Review, and The MacGuffin, among others. He also has served as a flash reader/editorial assistant for CRAFT. He lives in Carrboro, N.C., with his wife Ann, a dog, and a cat.

Isaac Ray is a 20-year-old fine-art and concert photographer based in Jacksonville, Florida. From a young age, he had an affinity for cameras and turned that into the pursuit of a BFA in photography at UNF. Bringing a camera to local gigs seemed a natural extension of that and so he began pursuing concert photography as well. Isaac loves capturing interesting angles, the energy and atmosphere of performances, and explores themes of growing up and nostalgia a lot in his fine art photography. Artist Statement: "Sonder" is an exploration of the concept that everyone around you is living a life that is just as full as your own with their own emotions, feelings, relationships, and personalities that you may never become aware of. This extends to the entirety of the globe and can make you feel small, unimportant, and forgotten. This work combines photos and postcard text found in antique stores digitally to create a panoramic collage exploring sonder.

Lisa Sultani earned her MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She now lives deep in America's Bible Belt, which is as surprising to her as it is to anyone else. Her poems are included or forthcoming in Delta Poetry Review, Doubly Mad, CERASUS, and The Racket, among others.

Rowan Tate is a creative and curator of beauty currently based in Romania. She reads nonfiction nature books, the backs of shampoo bottles, and sometimes minds.

Holyn Thigpen is a journalist and playwright based in Atlanta whose work has been featured in international literary magazines, humor publications, and art zines. She holds an MA in English from Trinity College Dublin and spends her free time reading true crime books, editing screenplays for film companies, and solo traveling.

Angela Williamson Emmert lives in rural Wisconsin with her husband and sons.

Ali Ximines is an undergraduate student at the University of North Florida, majoring in child psychology with a minor in creative writing. Their work has been published in Élan and HEBE Poetry. Ali is especially interested in capturing the human experience through their writing, exploring the depths of emotion and personal growth. They are currently working on expanding their portfolio and exploring new avenues for their creative work.

Thank You

Thank you, reader, for making it to this page and journeying through this mirror myth with us. This issue would not be what it is without all the talented writers and artists who allowed us to feature their inspiring work. Thank you for sharing with us and for letting *Talon* be a home for your writing.

Thank you to our genre editors, Luke, Crystal, Jacob, Chris, Isa, Julia, and Natalie for your thoughtful curation of all the pieces in this issue. Thank you to Gabby, our Design Director, for all your hard work in bringing this issue to life with your amazing and detailed design. Thank you to our Marketing Director, Isa Barrientos, for all that you do with promoting *Talon* on social media. Thank you to our Editorial Intern, Isa Blacutt, for always showing up and helping where you can. To Julia and Hannah, the editors of *The Catch* newsletter, thank you for your creativity and collaboration in making the newsletter what it is. Thank you to our faculty advisors, Dorsey Olbrich, Andy Kozlowski, Elizabeth Nabi, Will Pewitt, Jennie Ziegler, and Natasha Kane, for all that you have done in assisting *Talon Review* this season. I especially want to thank our Managing Editor, Christine. I don't know if this issue would have come together the way that it did without you. For every metaphorical room that I have walked into and have forgotten the reason why I went in there, you have been on the other side, reminding me exactly why I'm there. I'm so happy we got to work on this together!

Thank you to the three people who are the reason why I am here, working on this issue, writing these very words. Ari, thank you for telling me I am a writer in that very first creative writing class I took with you. I don't know where I would be today without your encouragement. Jess, thank you for your guidance throughout this entire season. Working with you has been a dream. And to my predecessor, Natasha, thank you for your advice and for encouraging me to take on this role. Because of you, I have grown so much this past year as an editor and writer. You three have been such an inspiration to me, and I seriously cannot thank you enough for all that you have done for *Talon Review*.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and loved ones for listening to me talk about nothing but *Talon Review* for the last four months, and for being my biggest supporters. Working on this issue has been such a joy and I am very grateful for the fact I even got to be part of it.

– Sera-Ann Hargrove

pse juxtaq; Rubasius, Stremberginus, Mon
ium et Mottaus; convivium et Senatus:
rum a principio aberant, quum ernissus
gentifragore ferreus globus, mensamq;
supervolitans, caput Wallonum Centurionis,
ipsetu frangit, eleuptoq; osse ex capite
ulum extrahit. Manum Domino, sinistra Pri-
o custodia Germano, cum aliis adstantibus,
on abruptit faciem, alius cerebrum com-
uit cruoreq; pulsa fede commaculat et
ones sanie cerebroq; aspersos surgere
ahia mensa compellit: Solus Alexander
Elem nec vultum mutavit, tantum
bet [illegible]

About Talon

The *Talon Review* is made possible by the Roberts-Wainright Endowment, a fund created in memory of Amy Wainright by her family, the Roberts, in support of Creative Writing at UNF. Our gratitude is endless.

The *Talon Review* is a literary magazine housed at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville. Founded in 2012 by Mark Ari with students from his creative writing workshop, 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.

TALON

REVIEW