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WINTER 2012







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WHERE WE ARE

Emma Gold

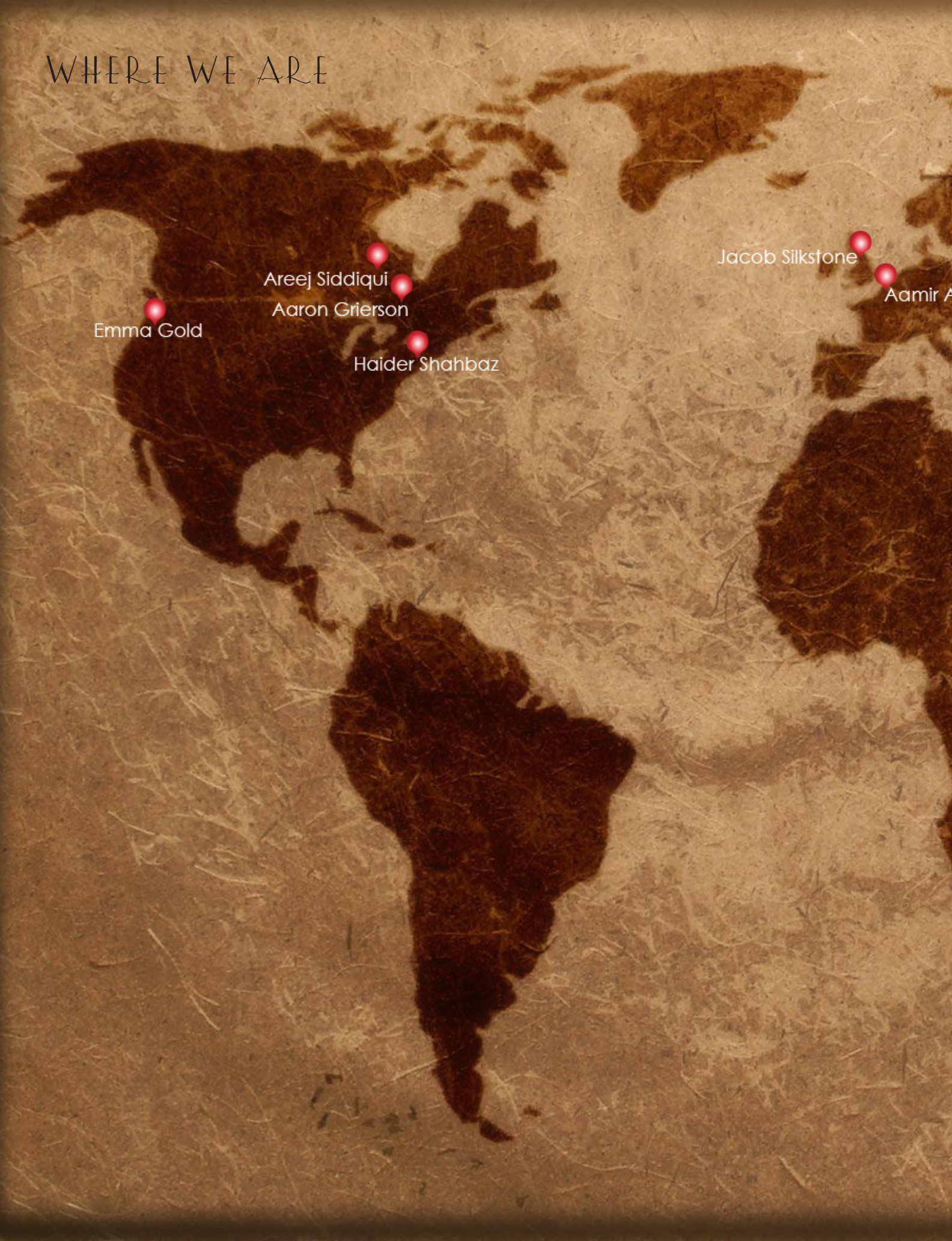
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Maria Amir
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8 A WORD FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Readers,

War. Between the NATO strikes that killed patrolling soldiers and the memogate crisis in Pakistan, the repercussions of the Arab spring, Palestine's recognition of statehood and the Occupy movement, this quarter's theme encapsulates 2011's last quadrant perfectly.

This issue, like those before it has been a blend of editorial skill and creative flair. A particular commendation to Jacob Silkstone who wove a feature article out of nothing, reviewed two books and co-chaired poetry editing. Without his efforts, we may have been a feature short and this issue may not have been as rich in content as the ones before.

We've changed things up with a new website and an updated masthead (did you spot the map?) and look to feature web-only exclusives to help ensure our online content is updated more frequently. The bigger issues will, of course, be included in our quarterly issues and our film and book blogs will be kept up-to-date regularly. To that end Sana Hussain and Zoya Rehman join us as book and film critic respectively.

We stand at the cusp of 2012, constantly trying to find new avenues to explore and develop. With journalist extraordinaire Urooj Zia joining us as Managing Editor, the new year is shaping up to be something formidable.

This issue includes why war songs have gone out of fashion in a time when they are needed most, the free speech wars raged on the internet, how translations can benefit or hurt the original work and the seemingly never-ending war of the sexes. It also features fiction by Kate Lu, Ben Nardolilli, Dana Masden and Michael Owen Fisher. Poets Christopher Em, Ben Parker and Brandi Capozzi are also featured in this issue. The stunning artwork on display belongs to Amira Farooq, Emaan Mehmud, Marta Swicek, Russell Barnes, Ammad Tahir, Ankolie and the ever elusive Maria Khan.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to your thoughts and comments.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Maryam Piracha
Editor-in-Chief
The Missing Slare



Subsaharviska by Marta Swiecek

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ROVING EYE

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“

HERE, BULLET

If a body is what you want,
 then there is bone and gristle and flesh.
 Here is the clavicle-snapped wish,
 the aorta's opened valves, the leap
 thought makes at the synaptic gap.
 Here is the adrenaline rush you crave,
 that inexorable flight, that insane puncture
 into heat and blood. And I dare you to finish
 what you've started. Because here, Bullet,
 here is where I complete the word you bring
 hissing through the air, here is where I moan
 the barrel's cold esophagus, triggering
 my tongue's explosives for the rifling I have
 inside of me, each twist of the round
 spun deeper, because here, Bullet,
 here is where the world ends, every time

–Brian Turner*

”

*As published in *Being Human* (ed by Neil Astley),
 Bloodaxe Books 2011

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Destruction at Its Finest by Russell Barnes

12 THE CRITICS: CAROL ANN DUFFY

by Jacob Silkstone

Carol Ann Duffy, *The Bees*
 Picador, 2011, 84 pages (Hardback)
 ISBN: 978-0-330-44244-2

Carol Ann Duffy has made an admirable start to her term as Poet Laureate, embracing her role as public poet with far more enthusiasm than most of her predecessors were able to muster (Wordsworth wrote no official poetry at all during his seven years as Laureate, while Andrew Motion could have been forgiven for being similarly reticent following the truly dreadful rap poem he composed for Prince William's 21st). Duffy, on the other hand, came up with an extremely credible piece to mark William's marriage, while 'The Last Post', written to commemorate the deaths of Henry Allingham and Harry Patch, must be one of the best Laureate poems since 'The Charge of the Light Brigade.'

Unfortunately, *The Bees* can't be described as a continuation of her good work. Duffy's first collection of new poems since accepting the Laureateship is crying out for a ruthless editor: it feels rushed, perfunctory, superficial. This is the kind of collection which convinces casual poetry readers that the emperor must be stark naked – that 'modern poetry' has nothing interesting left to say.

Several poems seem to have been composed by a teenager who has just discovered the existence of alliteration. 'Cockermouth and Workington' is, appropriately enough, swept away in a flood of fricatives:

Fouled fortune followed,
 but families filed into the fold
 for a fire flared.

The more you read, the less it means, which holds true for far too many of the poems in this collection. Here's the very first piece, 'Bees':

Been deep, my poet bees,
 in the parts of flowers,
 in daffodil, thistle, rose, even
 the golden lotus; so glide,
 gilded, glad, golden, thus –

wise –and know of us: ...'

A free copy of the collection to anyone who figures out what that means. The analogy between poets and bees ('honey is art') becomes increasingly laboured as the collection goes on, while the alliterative firework display inevitably fizzles out into insignificance. Why the 'gilded/golden' tautology? Why the mangled syntax ('as the crow flies so flew he' / 'And who here present



upon whom I call') and strained rhymes ('Barack/black' and 'sack/pack/Blackjack', swiftly followed by 'neck/Iraq')? You begin to suspect that Duffy no longer has the answers.

Bees appear to be in fashion – Jo Shapcott's bee poems were published in a recent issue of Poetry Review, while Simon Armitage picked Sean Borodale's Pages from Bee Journal as his book of the year in The Guardian. Their appeal is obvious – as symbols for a world about to be lost to the effects of climate change, as symbols for the assiduous and selfless labour which goes into producing 'art', and as a link to literary history (bees in poetry go back at least as far as Virgil) –

but genuinely great collections must do more than reflect current trends. Duffy's bee poems consistently fall short: when she threatens the reader with 'Corn but-tercup brought to its knee./ No honey for tea' we hear the echo of Rupert Brooke ('Is there honey still for tea?') but it's hard to care. 'No honey for tea' seems very much like a First World Problem.

The Bees contains some pieces which rank alongside Duffy's best ('Water', an elegy for her mother, is especially moving). Sadly, it's difficult to read the full collection without concluding that a significant number of these poems should have been left unpublished.

“

Their appeal is obvious – as symbols for a world about to be lost to the effects of climate change, as symbols for the assiduous and selfless labour which goes into producing 'art', and as a link to literary history (bees in poetry go back at least as far as Virgil) – but genuinely great collections must do more than reflect current trends.

”



EDDIE MURPHY

Ordinary guys.
An extraordinary
robbery.

GABOUREY
SIDIBE

HEIST

THE CRITICS: TOWER HEIST

By Emma K. Gold

Cast & Credits

Rated PG-13

Running time: 104 minutes

Directed by Brett Ratner; written by Ted Griffin and Jeff Nathanson, based on a story by Griffin, Adam Cooper and Bill Collage; with Ben Stiller, Eddie Murphy, Casey Affleck, Alan Alda, Matthew Broderick, Tea Leoni and Judd Hirsch

Tower Heist follows Josh Kovacks (Ben Stiller) and his coworkers who are all employed at the Tower, one of New York City's most elite living communities. The Tower is owned by Arthur Shaw (Alan Alda); early in the film, Shaw is revealed to have engaged in crooked business dealings which lost the pensions of the Tower employees but which kept Shaw's own sizable fortune intact. After a near tragedy, Josh resolves to steal back the pensions money for everyone who works at the Tower and must round up an unruly and inexperienced band of thieves in order to accomplish his goal.

The premise echoes other heist movies, such as any of the Ocean's movies, but goes slightly beyond the boundaries of the genre to include a bit of social commentary and speak more directly the specific economic climate of its time. Ocean's 11 (2001) could have been remade in any time period, but Tower Heist has a specificity that not only lends it a certain credibility, but also makes it more appealing than it ever could have been if it were just a heist movie.

Tower Heist is more of a comedic drama than a pure comedy. The focus of the story is on the characters and their relationships more so than on the actual heist itself. One of the major criticisms of the film is that the actual heist doesn't start until halfway through the movie. While that's a valid point and would probably annoy audience members who wanted to see a funnier Ocean's 11 (2001), the real strength of this movie, and what keeps it from flopping, is the effort it puts into the characterization at the beginning. The audience understands and feel a kinship with the characters and thus the betrayal of the characters' trust is more impactful.

Moreover, because of the care taken with charac-

terization earlier in the film, the entire work was surprisingly heartfelt. By situating the film within this specific historical and cultural moment, the filmmakers created characters and a story which audiences could care about. While the film is by no means perfect, it's definitely successful in capturing contemporary American anxieties about wealth and class relations and then embodying the fantasy resolution of those anxieties.

The ensemble cast performs admirably and is one of the big draws of this film, but Matthew Broderick as Mr. Fitzhugh stood out as horrifically inept with one of the most wooden performances of his career. Broderick has never been an especially gifted actor, but *Tower Heist* is his absolute worst performance. He either could not or would not express any realistic emotion throughout the entire movie; not only is his performance incredibly poor, but it sucks any potential likability from his character. Thankfully, Broderick's part is small compared to the other characters and is only memorable for the disaster of a performance he gives.

Eddie Murphy, on the other hand, is quite refreshing. He seems to be getting back to his comedic roots; his characters in this film was much more like the fast-talking, crude, funny characters that characterized his early career, which is a nice change of pace from some of his more recent projects.

Alan Alda's work is what really stands out in this film. Alda's always been a gifted actor and he's often been labeled as the 'sensitive' type, but nowhere is that put to better use than in this film. Alda plays the protagonist Arthur Shaw and does an impeccable job of making the character absolutely despicable while still maintaining just enough charm to almost coax the audience into sympathizing with him. The fact that the audience can see and understand the depth and the nuance of the character's manipulations is what really showcases Alda's exceptional talent and what makes his one of the most stand-out performances of the film. The other actors, Ben Stiller and Casey Affleck, both perform acceptably, but without any real sparkle which is understandable given the mediocre quality of the writing and direction.

Overall, *Tower Heist* definitely had its high points, but it doesn't really shine and wasn't particularly memorable. While it clearly taps into the collective American

imagination, the writing and direction are just not very good. While there are a few laughs to be had, most of the jokes aren't funny and a lot of the gags don't really work. *Tower Heist* is enjoyable as a piece of work specific to the contemporary era in America, but it's not spectacular enough to be remembered for very long.



Excavation 1 by Emaan Mehmud

Emma Gold is a freelance film critic and recently graduated with an MA in Gender & Women's Studies and English Literature from Lancaster University, UK.

COLLIDE

By Kate Lu

When Liam propped himself up on one elbow and said, “Ellie, I think it’s about time I met your parents,” I knew I was in trouble.

It had been midmorning last Saturday, and like every other Saturday morning that we’d spent together for as long as we had been dating, Liam and I were still lying in bed, not dressed, dozing in the too-warm white sheets.

I put my hands over my face and groaned. “Liam, I don’t think that’s a very good idea. We’ve been over this.”

Liam laughed, pulling at my elbow. “It’s been a year and they still don’t know.”

As I peeped at him through my fingers, he lay flat on his back with a sigh, his face smoothing out into a serious expression.

“You’ve met my parents. They weren’t so bad.”

“Your parents aren’t Asian,” I said, sitting up in bed and looking down at him. “My mom would freak out if she knew that the guy I was dating wasn’t Chinese.” I paused to reconsider. “Actually I think my mom would freak out if she knew I was dating a guy at all, but the fact that you don’t quite meet her standards racially makes it worse.”

Liam pursed his lips, and I could tell that he was struggling not to give me the puppy dog look that he knew worked on me every time.

“It’s been a year, Ellie,” he said again. He tangled his feet with mine; the desperate way he did it felt like a plea. “Things have been pretty serious for a while now. Just think about it, okay?”

I leaned back against the headboard and stared at the bright blue wall in front of me. I sighed.

“All right,” I said. “I’ll talk to my mom, okay?”

Liam sat up and kissed me on the cheek. “Thank you.”

“You’re going to regret this,” I warned him.

He laughed and got out of bed, looking around the floor for his pants.

“How bad can they be?” he asked, gathering his

clothes from off the floor.

I watched him, bemused. “You’d be surprised,” I said.

Liam and I had met while we were still undergraduates, but we didn’t start dating until we were both going to the same university for graduate school. He was the best friend of my roommate’s boyfriend, Sam. Both of them had gone to the same high school in California, and Liam had stayed there to do his undergrad at UCLA. He likes to tell people that he came across the country to DC for grad school because of me, but I know that isn’t true; when he first met me while he was visiting Sam during our senior year, I’m pretty sure he didn’t give me a second thought. While he and Sam caught up, my roommate, Claire, and I felt like third and fourth wheels.

Liam and I didn’t meet again until he had arrived in DC for graduate school. This time, though, things were different: Claire and Sam had gotten engaged and were planning their wedding, and so Liam, who didn’t know anyone else on the East Coast, was thrown together with me, even though I generally kept to myself. We didn’t start dating until about a year into getting our masters degrees. Liam was doing political science; I was doing English literature. We had almost nothing in common except for our mutual friendship with Sam, but somewhere between all the coffee dates, the cram sessions, and the trips to the library where we had to help carry each other’s books, we grew close. When we started dating, no one was really surprised.

Now, one year later, we were both out of grad school and looking for jobs. My mother always expected me to move back home after finishing school and to look for a job in New York, but I had no intention of doing that. I’d never admitted it in so many words, but the entire reason for my going to school in DC and staying as far away from New York as I possibly could during that time was to get away from my parents. I still hadn’t grown out of that need to escape that had claimed me during high school. Even when I was over two hundred miles away from my parents, I felt like I was suffocating whenever my mother called me, like I was back in high

school and my mother was still dangling her rules over my head.

It was that disconnect that had caused me to hide my relationship with Liam from them for an entire year. It was easy to do; my parents visited me in DC so infrequently that it was a matter of lying by omission. I already knew that they wouldn't approve of him just based on what my mother had told me when I was in high school and an Italian boy in my class had asked me out. I had only told her about the incident in the interest of being honest; after that, I told my mother as little as I could get away with.

"White boys will just leave you in the end," she told me. Her voice climbed several octaves as she lectured me, as if it were my fault that a boy had asked me on a date. "I don't want you dating any boys who aren't Chinese. If he were Chinese, maybe I'd think about it, but he isn't. You aren't allowed to date boys who aren't Chinese."

My father had remained silent while my mother yelled at me; he sat on the couch with his arms crossed and stared at the wall. I wondered if he was even listening. His silence meant that my mother's words were rule, and that was the end of it.

Now, so many years later, a tight knot of anxiety formed in my stomach at the thought of telling my parents about Liam. Twenty-four years old, and I still felt like a little girl trying to appease her parents.

On Saturday afternoon, I paced around my living room, holding my phone and trying to work up the nerve to call my mother. Liam had left a few hours ago to run errands; he wouldn't be back until dinner.

Finally, standing in front of the window that looked out onto N Street, I took a deep breath and dialed my parents' house. My mother picked up on the fifth ring.

"Hello?" she said in English.

It took me a moment to think of the words. "Hi, Mom," I said, wiping my sweaty palms on my jeans.

"Ellie!" she said. She switched to Chinese. "It's been a while since you called. We were beginning to worry about you."

"I'm fine, Mom," I said, rolling my eyes and de-

ferring to her native tongue. "Listen, I have to talk to you about something."

There was a brief silence on the other end of the phone. Then my mother said, "What happened?"

"Um." I bit my lip. "Well, um. I've been dating this guy . . ."

"A boy?" My mother's voice was a little too loud. "You've been dating a boy? For how long?"

"A couple months," I said, wincing. I told myself that it wasn't, technically speaking, a lie.

"Is he Chinese?" she asked, her voice full of critical accusation.

"Uh," I said. "Well. No. No, Mom, he isn't." I put my free hand to my forehead and massaged my temples.

My mother didn't take long to process this information before she started yelling in earnest. "Ellie," she said, "I don't want you dating this boy. You are going to marry a Chinese boy, preferably a doctor, someone with a good background and a good education—"

"It's not like I picked him up off the street," I protested. I leaned my head against the cool window and stared down at the traffic below. "Look, we were planning to come up to New York to visit some friends of ours next weekend anyway, and I thought it would be good for you to meet him."

"I don't want to meet him; I don't want you seeing him," my mother said tersely. "I knew living down there for so long would be bad for you. I knew you should have just come home right away after undergrad. You should have gone to graduate school at NYU."

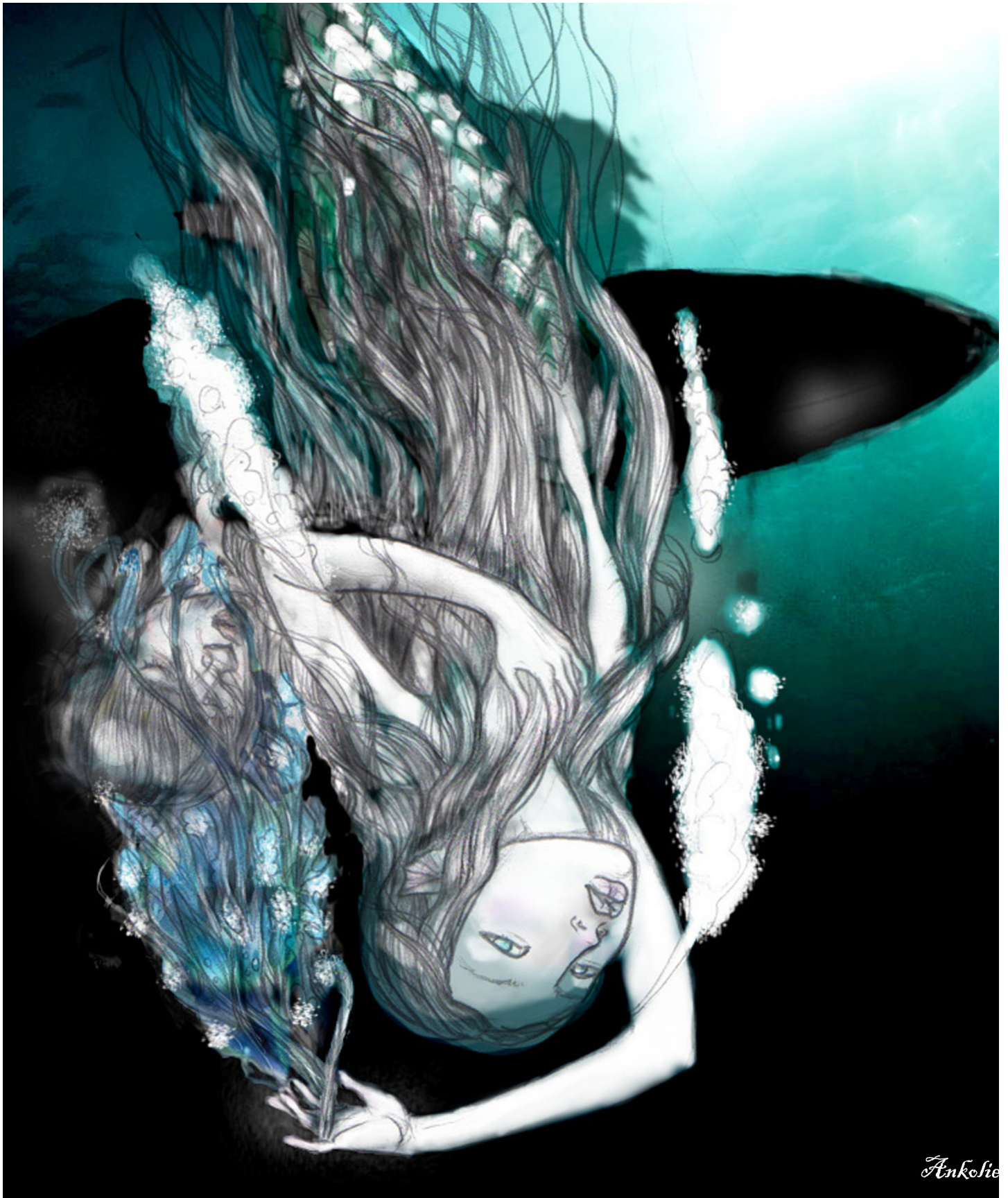
I bit back a frustrated groan; we had had this argument a million times. "Mom, we can have him over for dinner. It's just one meal. He's not so bad, really. Just meet him, okay? You and Daddy?"

My mother made a hmph noise and sighed loudly. "Fine. Dinner. Okay. I'll let you know what time."

"Thank you," I said, but my mother had already hung up.

"So have you talked to your mother yet?" Liam asked me. He was lying on my bed while I dug around in the bathroom cabinet for his spare toothbrush.

"I talked to her this afternoon," I said. I pulled the toothbrush out of the cabinet and handed it to him.



Ankolie

Mermaid by Ankolie

“And?”

“And she said you can come to dinner while we’re in New York next week visiting the girls,” I said, referring to two of our old graduate school friends who were now roommates in New York.

“Is that all she said?” Liam asked.

“More or less.” I didn’t want to tell him that she already didn’t like him.

“Okay,” said Liam.

“Just okay?” I stretched out on the bed next to him and put my head on his shoulder.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m glad I finally get to meet her.” His voice sounded flat.

“What, are you nervous?” I teased him, poking him in the ribs.

“No, of course not.” He responded a little too quickly. I propped myself up on one elbow and looked at him; his mouth was pulled into a slight frown.

“You are, aren’t you. You don’t have to do this, you know.”

“No, no.” Liam sat up. “It’s important. I mean, I guess it’s the proper thing to do at this point.”

“If you say so,” I said. I had been all too happy to keep our relationship a secret from my parents, and I wouldn’t have had a problem calling my mother back and telling her that my earlier revelation had all been one elaborate joke.

“I’m fine,” said Liam. “I’ll be fine.” He got up to brush his teeth without looking at me.

Later, lying next to him in the dark, I watched him sleep. He always fell asleep before me, so I would usually be stuck staring at the ceiling for half an hour while he snored. That night, though, I watched as a crease formed between his eyes and his jaw tightened while he ground his teeth together. I put my thumb on his forehead, as if to smooth out the skin there.

“It’ll be okay,” I whispered. At least, I hoped it would be.

I met Liam’s parents when his father flew out to DC on a business trip; Liam’s mother tagged along with him. We had dinner at a restaurant I don’t even remember the name of. It was one of those classic, all-American steakhouses that Liam loves and I hate, mostly be-

cause he could eat steak every night and I don’t eat any kind of meat except poultry.

I remember being almost nauseous, wondering what Liam’s parents would think of him dating a Chinese girl, but they shook my hand without batting an eye; ethnicity didn’t come up in the dinner conversation at all. They were staid, polite people—a typical upper-middle class couple, nondescript, suburban. They asked all the usual questions about what I was studying and what I wanted to do with my life, how Liam and I had met and how long we had known each other. His father wasn’t very talkative, but his mother smiled a lot and offered me some of her food. They were friendly in a restrained sort of way, but they also weren’t people that I would just be able to fall into conversation with. Liam thought they seemed to like me. At the end of that weekend they both flew back to California, and I haven’t seen them since. Sometimes, Liam says, they ask about how I’m doing.

I’d have liked to think that Liam would have just as easy a time meeting my parents, but I knew that that wasn’t going to be the case.

The following Friday afternoon, Liam and I took a bus to New York and met our friends at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. We wouldn’t be having dinner with my parents until Saturday night, but Liam, I could tell, was already in a state of nervousness. For Friday evening and the day after, he was uncharacteristically quiet. I would have expected his usual, jovial self to be amplified by seeing our old friends, but he didn’t say much during meals or sightseeing, which unnerved me.

While we were sitting in our friends’ living room waiting for them to get ready for lunch on Saturday, I put my hand on Liam’s arm.

“Hey,” I said, “are you feeling all right? You’ve been awfully quiet for the past few days.”

He gave me a weak smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “I’m all right, really.”

I twined my fingers in his and squeezed his hand. “Are you nervous about tonight?”

He looked down at our hands and then back to me again. “Maybe a little,” he admitted.

“You’re the one who requested this,” I pointed out, half teasing and half serious.

“I know,” said Liam, “but I can’t help being nervous when you tell me such wonderful things about your mother.” He arched his eyebrows at me.

I frowned. “It’s not that my mother is a bad person,” I said carefully, “it’s just that she’s ridiculously traditional. She basically thinks that Chinese people should have a miniature country of their own in America, where none of that Western stuff will be able to get in. Marrying me off to a Chinese guy is important to her; it means that, even though I was born here, I’m still a fundamentally Chinese girl. It’ll mean that she raised me the right way. The thing with me is that I’ve never been able to agree with her about any of that.” I wrung my hands, struggling to explain. “Does that even make sense?”

Liam nodded. “It does, I think. Doesn’t really make me feel less nervous, though.”

“You’ll be fine,” I said. “And even if you’re not, I’ve been with you for a year. I feel like it’d be rude to leave at this point just because Mommy says so.”

Liam laughed then. “Well, as long as you’re committed to that.”

Dinner was at seven. At six-fifty, Liam and I stood in front of my parents’ tiny four-floor walkup in Flushing, bracing ourselves.

“Ready?” I asked him.

“Yeah,” he said, taking my hand. “Let’s go.”

I pulled out the keys I hadn’t used in months and opened the front door, then led Liam to the second floor, where my parents lived. I figured it would be good to knock, so I did.

My mother flung open the door. She was framed in the doorway, diminutive and critical, and passed a sharp eye over Liam, who towered nearly two feet above her. She looked him up and down, took in his slightly wrinkled shirt and his neatly combed hair, and frowned slightly. Then she saw me.

“Ellie!” she said, hugging me awkwardly. My mother didn’t start hugging me until I went off to college and she didn’t get to see me all that often; I guess she thought it was the thing she was supposed to do. Sometimes I wish she hadn’t started doing that, because every time I hug her I feel like she’s gotten smaller. Older.

“Hi, Mom,” I said. “This is Liam.” I gestured toward him, and he held out a hand for my mother.

“Pleased to meet you,” he said. My mother touched palms with him briefly before stepping back so we could go inside.

My parents’ apartment had always been cluttered, and I tried to imagine what Liam thought of it, since he was seeing it for the first time. There were books and newspapers in Chinese stacked up on the coffee table in the middle of the living room; my father didn’t throw out his newspapers if he didn’t have to. There were a few flea market end tables pushed against the walls, upon which were knick-knacks: little jade statues, old vases painted with flowers, pictures of relatives in China that I had never met. The rug, whose pile was flat now from years of use, was freshly vacuumed but still looked wilted. In the back was the tiny kitchen, which my mother made a beeline for. She probably wasn’t finished cooking.

I slipped off my shoes and then spotted my father. He was sitting on the couch, watching a Chinese soap opera, but he turned it off when Liam and I walked into the room. He stood up and gave me a loose hug, and then shook Liam’s hand. He did not appraise Liam as my mother had, but only nodded, his face kept even in the neutral expression he typically wore.

“Hello,” my father said. He knew even less English than my mother, and I knew that he would probably not say much for the rest of the evening, since he didn’t usually speak at all. He worked as a butcher in one of the fast-paced markets in Chinatown, and sometimes I thought that he didn’t talk when he came home because he’d spent the entire day yelling.

Liam and I sat on the couch with him in silence, listening to the old wooden clock on the wall tick away the seconds.

“Ellie says you and Mrs. Chang are immigrants,” Liam said to my father, trying to make conversation. I had told Liam about how my parents had moved to America before I was born, settling in Flushing and finding jobs in Chinese-owned businesses in the area. Liam had found the story interesting, but now my father only looked at him a little quizzically, not comprehending the statement but probably not wanting to seem rude either. Liam gave him an awkward grin be-

fore both men sat back in their seats.

Liam's fingers found mine where my hand lay on the cushion. His palms were cold and a little sweaty. I tried to give him a look of reassurance, but he was staring at the blank TV screen.

I briefly considered giving Liam a tour of the apartment, but my mother bustled back out of the kitchen a few moments later and said, "Okay. Dinner is ready."

As we stood up and prepared to follow her into the kitchen, she made a hissing noise and pointed at Liam.

"Shoes off! By the door. No shoes in the house," she said.

Liam turned bright red and scurried back to the door to kick off his shoes. I gave a little sigh; this was not going to be a smooth evening.

My mother had already set the table. In the middle of it were large platters containing vegetables, chicken, fish, and an entire crab. I was a little surprised; crab was reserved for special occasions, and I didn't think that my mother would deem this special enough to buy an entire crab. It was possible that my father had convinced her, though—he took any opportunity he had to eat crab.

At the place settings, one small detail struck me: Three places were set up with a small bowl of rice, a plate, a glass of water, a napkin, and chopsticks. The fourth had a fork and knife. I could tell that Liam noticed, too, because when he sat down, he fingered the silverware, a small frown on his face. I wondered if he suspected that we rarely used it.

"So how did you meet him?" my mother asked in English, putting some fish on her plate. She was sitting across from me, and my father was sitting across from Liam. My mother clicked her chopsticks and I could tell that she was trying to refrain from being rude and pointing them at Liam.

"In school, Mom," I said, holding back a small sigh. I had already explained this to her on the phone when she had called to tell me what time dinner would be. "He was studying political science." My mother stared at me blankly. "How the government works," I tried to explain.

My mother grunted, and I could tell she was trying to figure out how much worse a job as a political scientist was than a surgeon. "Any good jobs with that?" she asked. I knew that what she meant was, How high of a salary are you going to have?

"Well there are lots of different things you can go into with a political science degree," said Liam. "There are a lot of different jobs associated with it." My mother studied him for a moment; it was the first time he had spoken to her all evening, aside from greeting her. He looked at me a little helplessly, and I shrugged. My parents had never voted, never paid attention to the political system in the United States, and there was no good way to explain it to them.

"A lot of money?" my mother asked me in Chinese.

"Mom," I said, warning her.

"I just want to know," she said.

I glanced sideways at Liam, who looked like he was struggling to keep his expression neutral, even though he had no idea what my mother was saying. My dad was largely ignoring all of us and instead focused intently on his food, loudly crunching the shell of a crab leg.

"You're a wonderful cook," Liam said to my mother after several long moments.

My mother gave Liam a tight smile and took some chicken out of the dish.

There was a long silence filled only with chopsticks and silverware clinking against dishes, slurping noises, and the occasional loud crack of crab shell. Liam pushed scraps of food around his plate; I could tell that he was just waiting for dinner to end. I was, too.

After eating, I helped my mother clear the table while Liam and my father sat on the couch.

"He's very quiet," my mother said to me in Chinese while we scraped the dishes.

"You're not exactly making it easy for him," I said, deferring to Chinese in case Liam was listening. I dumped a dish into the sink with a loud clatter.

"Watch the dishes!" my mother said. She put hers in the sink more quietly, as if to prove her point. She reached for another dish. "Have you been having sex with him?"



Model with a Melting Face by Ammad Tahir

“Mom!” I said, throwing my hands up in the air. “You don’t get to ask questions like that.”

“I knew you should have gone to NYU for graduate school,” she muttered. “You would never have met a boy like him there.”

I made a loud, exasperated noise. “What’s that supposed to mean, ‘a boy like him’?”

“You would have met a nice Chinese boy and been living at home and helping us, like you’re supposed to!” my mother shouted.

“NYU isn’t a church, Mom,” I snapped back. “It’s not that great. You act like it’s swarming with Asian guys and that they’re all supposed to fall at my feet and marry me.”

“Better them than someone with no prospects!” my mother said.

“Liam’s got prospects!” I said. “He’s smart and he treats me well. For once in your life, why can’t you just be happy for me? I’m not like you. I don’t want to go back to China and get some kind of arranged marriage just because you don’t like who I date.”

“Your father and I are a good match,” my mother said.

“You and Daddy don’t even talk to each other!” I exploded.

My mother’s jaw tightened and she glared at me. Her eyes were narrowed and looked darker than usual; it was the closest thing to hate I’d ever seen on her face.

“You are my daughter,” she said through gritted teeth. “You will do what I say.”

“No, Mom,” I said. “I’ve been doing that ever since I was a little kid. I’m not going to do it anymore, and I’m not going to let you try and make me. I’ve been with Liam for a year, and that’s not going to change. And I’m staying in DC.”

With that, I walked out of the kitchen and headed for the living room.

“Where do you think you’re going?” My mother was right on my heels.

“I’m leaving,” I said, spitting the words out in English. Liam jumped up from the couch. He looked jittery; he had probably heard all the yelling coming from the kitchen. I grabbed his hand.

“Let’s go,” I told him.

I didn’t have to tell him twice. We put on our shoes while my parents stood there: my dad with his hands in his pockets, silent as always, and my mother, quiet for once, but seething.

“Bye, Daddy,” I said, giving him a small hug.

As I pulled away, he grabbed my arm. Leaning a little closer to whisper in my ear, he said in his broken English, “You do what make you happy. You go to school in Washington, you live there, you love this boy? It’s okay. Your mother will be okay.”

I stepped back and stared at him, speechless, fumbling for words. “Thank you,” I finally said, not really knowing what else to say.

And then I took Liam’s hand, and we left.

That night, while Liam and I lay on an air mattress in the middle of our friends’ living room, I asked him if he was okay. We had been lying there in silence, both of us staring at the ceiling, Liam stiff and tense beside me.

“I’m fine,” he said. “I’m just worried about you. I didn’t want it to be this huge blow-up over me.” His eyes were dark with worry.

I shook my head. “The blow-up’s been a long time coming, to be honest. I’m kind of surprised it didn’t happen earlier.” I looked at him. “I don’t feel bad about anything that happened. Really.”

“I’m sorry,” said Liam.

“For what?”

“That I asked.”

It took me a minute to realize what he was referring to. Then I laughed.

“You were just trying to be a gentleman,” I said.

“Yeah,” he said, “and now you’re not talking to your mom.”

I shrugged. “I’m not complaining; it’s not like any of this is your fault. If it makes you feel any better, I think my dad liked you.”

Liam choked out a laugh; it sounded almost bitter. “Are you sure? He didn’t say much of anything at dinner.”

“My dad doesn’t say much to begin with,” I pointed out. “Look, don’t worry. Everything’s going to

be okay.”

“If you say so,” Liam said, rolling over onto his side and lapsing into silence.

But that night, while he slept, I watched that crease reappear on his forehead, watched his eyes move rapidly behind his eyelids. I put my thumb to the line that I knew would become a wrinkle in ten or fifteen years and whispered, “It’ll be okay, I promise.”

His eyelids flickered briefly, but he remained asleep.

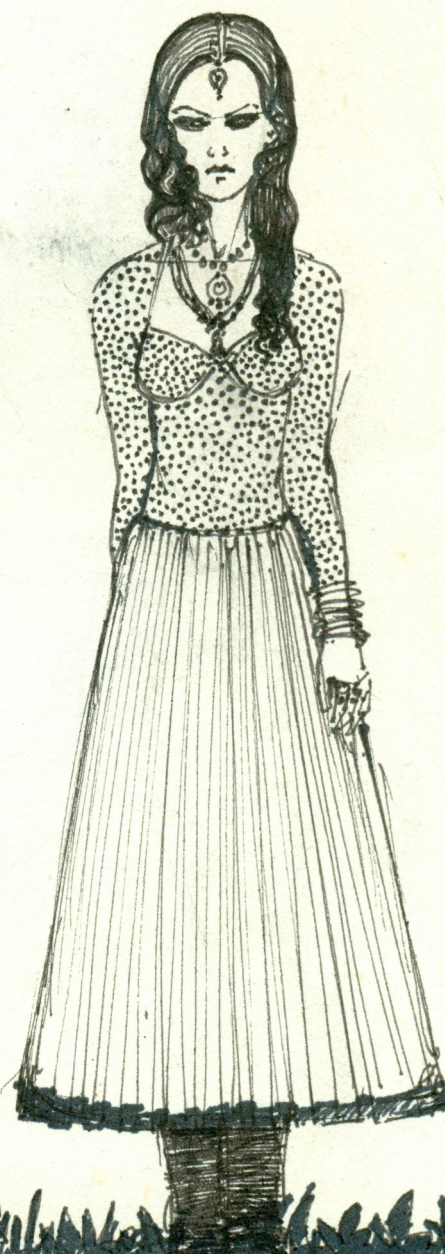
I'm Still Here by Ammad Tahir

“

He’s very quiet,” my mother said to me in Chinese while we scraped the dishes. “You’re not exactly making it easy for him,” I said, deferring to Chinese in case Liam was listening. I dumped a dish into the sink with a loud clatter.

”

Kate Lu is a student at The George Washington University, where she is the editor-in-chief of The G.W. Review. Her work has previously appeared in Gone Lawn, Defenestration, and The Battered Suitcase, and is forthcoming in Ellipsis...Literature and Art.



THE TRAPPING

Just once, in shame, he refuses;
his turning snags her words on air.
Rock-blue, her pupils bloom.

From his dust she eases him; the scream
unspools like hurried leaves.
Her practised hand unlocks the pine,

the inner tree exhales,
its hidden trunk exposed.
The bole weakens to take him.

His whimper cuts off short
gagged by the clutch of sap;
his lungs strain at the heartwood

as she births him in the tree.
At a touch the bark rolls back
with all the ease of loosened skin.

- Ben Parker

Below: Collage by Amira Farooq



Ben Parker completed a creative writing MA at UEA in 2008. He now lives and works in Oxford. His poems have been published in a number of places, including Staple, Iota, Neon, Ink Sweat & Tears, Eyewear, and The Cadaverine.

THE GENDER COMPLEX

By Wajiha Hyder

Frailty of the fairer sex: A myth or reality?

“The history of man’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of the emancipation itself,” Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

The above quote demonstrates two things: Woolf was ahead of her time (which, depending on who you ask, might not be newsworthy) and she was aware of the imbalance between the two sexes. Women of the age, ‘enlightened’ women, the women who in their own ways blazed the path for feminism, were still trying to find ways to address the gap, questioning its right to exist in the first place.

In the middle of the twentieth century, in the cradle of what went on to become the feminist movement, women began to speak up. The sex that had until then been exploited by men and society and at certain heart-breaking moments, by women themselves, was redefining who was ‘in charge’ of the discussion and by extension, their own lives.

In patriarchal societies, however, feminism has not reached its fullest potential. Education, career, marriage, inheritance are all part of a performance scripted by one’s parents in an attempt to conform to social ideals. From the moment she is born, she is treated like a second-class citizen of her own life. Despite an increased sense of awareness and educational amenities, many parents in the subcontinent still prefer boys over girls, at times attributing a false sense of superiority to one gender over another.

Farah, a 32 year old woman of two, does not want to return to her husband’s home, after suffering through emotional and physical abuse for six years. When asked why she didn’t retaliate, her response was simple, “He is the father of my children and I was comfortable with him. To the world, we were a family and I wanted my children to live a normal life. I kept giving him chances hoping he’d change. But he didn’t.” She now resides with her parents until her divorce’s paperwork comes through, which may take a while due to Pakistan’s skewed laws (which are???). Many women like Farah tend to live the lie others might call wedded bliss. Yes, marriage is a compromise, but our pointless traditions

take compromise to a completely new dimension.

Most blame women for not fighting back. But even if she does, the What will you do? Where will you go? This is a man’s world will be the knee-jerk reaction of a society willing to accept the skeletal framework of feminism without incurring any of its more lasting costs. American activist and writer, Sonia Johnson put it in a much starker light when she said: “Who but women would be told that it’s ok to talk about your oppression, but not ok to organize to end it?”

There is a flip side, of course. The growing number of professional women entering the professional workplace bears testament to this. “When I started working, I was told I wouldn’t survive,” says Zahra. “I faced intense rivalry and discrimination from the moment I began working,” which, owing to her ‘special case’ as a two-time divorcee didn’t make weathering the social storms any easier. But “they kept on giving me challenges, I kept on becoming more competitive, until one day they had to give in and admit that I was their equal, if not better.”

Zahra was recently promoted to chief marketing manager at a major advertising agency.

There are very many angles to both of the above scenarios and numerous cases ranging in between these two extremes. Many social, psychological, individual factors affected both the women differently; causing each woman to act or not to act the way that she did. The injustices against the fairer sex are countless but at the same time, number of inspiring women who choose to rise above their grievances is also rising, slowly perhaps, but consistently. It may be why women, who have risen above this unwritten subjugation, have been labeled as rabble-rousers who don’t want ‘normal’ women to be satisfied with the roles that have been stipulated for them by society.

But perhaps the question is not so much about equality as it is about the fact that no one should have the right to make decisions for women, except women. It is encouraging, however, that women today are more aware of their existence than they have ever been before, and are actively speaking up against the injustices that they’ve continually been subjected to.

It may be prudent to presume that a war raging for generations may just be turning into a fairer fight.

SPOTLIGHT ENTREPRENEUR: AAMINA JEHANGIR



Ghausia Rashid Salam sits down with a young and enterprising baker; part philanthropist, part artist, Aamina Jehangir seems to have it all figured out.

Aamina Jehangir tried her hand at baking for the first time as an unassuming 4 year-old. As she laughingly explains, it consisted of more finger-dipping than baking. She ruefully admits it was no masterpiece, but that didn't stop her. At 17, she launched The Cakery, a home-based cupcakery. Now, at 21, this young entrepreneur is a focused businesswoman, with a determined eye toward the horizon and firm goals for the future.

At 17, most teenagers are focused on the frivolities of life. Not so for Aamina, who had three goals in her life – “First, to be a doctor; second, to be an astronomer, and third, to be a chef.” While she gradually grew disenchanted with medicine, astronomy remained a passion, and still something pursued. But it was baking that would become her truest calling. Throughout her childhood, she worked on developing her skills, learning by experience, and most importantly, developing her own recipes, now 100 percent original derivative-free concoctions. “I'm more about the science behind everything, and once you understand that, you can work on your own,” she says. Her earliest source of inspiration was New York City's Magnolia Bakery, and despite not being a sugar nut, puts the bakery as her first choice destination for desserts.

Because parental approval wasn't built in, she studied side by side, but ultimately took a year away from law school to focus on The Cakery, a choice she hasn't regretted. “I wanted to concentrate on my work, so that it would become a habit and be smooth sailing from there,” though she admits to wanting to earn a bachelor's degree as a ‘safety net’. Despite being a businesswoman, her interests lie more toward social sciences and media studies, and she expresses an interest in web designing. But she has no reason to regret her choice; together with her sister, she has also launched WonderMilk, fresh camel milk, a healthier and lighter alternative for lactose intolerant people as well as beneficial for cancer patients and diabetics.

2009 marked the year Pakistan went “crazy for cupcakes” – a phenomenon that largely began in the US. With a rush of international and corporate orders, The Cakery soon amassed a loyal clientele. 2010 brought in orders from Proctor & Gamble, RainTree

Mini Spa, N.M Productions, HSR, and many others. Word was spreading by word of mouth alone. Her father, who manages several restaurants of his own, has been a constant source of advice. She credits her inherited business sense as the anchor in keeping the budding business on course. “I was always a PR person, even as a child,” she reveals. “I always wanted to make my birthday a huge gala event, or organize parties for others. Because I had a passion for it, I tried to teach myself as much as possible.” But business seems to run in the family. Her sister Sarah Jehangir runs CTL360, an advertising agency and design house. Aamina credits Sarah with the creative aspect of her business which includes The Cakery's logo, stickers, website and menu.

An entrepreneur of the online-marketing generation, she offers insight into the challenges of growing a home-based business. “Facebook is a huge help obviously in running a business. It creates awareness on a larger level; you develop a stronger fan base, get to share your menus as well as your prices, and basically share the visual aspect of your products with the public.” While she thinks the cupcake craze will eventually die down, she acknowledges the art of creating ‘a mini-cake,’ and how much creativity goes in creating ‘designer’ cupcakes. “The creation of a fancy cupcake is an art.” Examples of this are evident given how much the cupcake industry has expanded and evolved, with different bakeries coming up with a variety of creatively imagined cupcakes. She cites Cupcake(s) by Cookie as one such example, admiring her imaginative cupcake themes and intricate, detailed designs.

Deeply involved in charity work from an early age, The Cakery provided Aamina with a forum to continue her work on a larger platform. This led to The Sugar Sisters, an ambitious venture founded in early 2011, for bringing together fellow bakers and ‘sugar sisters,’ and collectively working toward garnering charity donations. Future endeavors include a massive bake sale. “A lot of cupcakery owners were doing individual charity work, and collectively, we (realized we) could make a bigger difference. There are so many people that we can help: flood victims, orphans, cancer patients, providing clean drinking-water to people living in unsanitary areas,” she explains earnestly. One organization she wants to donate to is The Citizen's Foundation (TCF), who

30 help build schools in Pakistan.

With a sudden boom in home-based bakery businesses, owing partly to the cupcake craze, the industry has grown brutal. Many businesses suffer from ideas being ripped off, designs copied, and even business names stolen. In Pakistan, “copyright laws” remain in their infancy. But she remains unfazed by the competition; after all, “people can steal your ideas, but they can’t steal your talent.”

Though Aamina has a special place reserved for home-based businesses, The Cakery will soon open as a café and takeaway outlet in Karachi. The café will include customer loyalty programs, discounts, freebies and other promotional offers. Though no launch date has been announced, Aamina hopes the store will serve as “a pioneer in the transition from home business to outlet”.

Juggling two businesses, along with a budding charity organization, this young entrepreneur has her hands full. Her growing success foreshadows future endeavors, and with that “inherited” business savvy and creativity, Aamina Jehangir holds the promise of an artful future.



Above & Below: The Cakery



“

Facebook is a huge help obviously in running a business. It creates awareness on a larger level; you develop a stronger fan base, get to share your menus as well as your prices, and basically share the visual aspect of your products with the public.

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8. SMOOTHIES...
9. SHAKES (O...
...VANILLA) - P55
10. FRENCH FRIES...
11. POTATOE SKIN...
12. PHILADELPHIA CHE...
13. BANOFFEE PIE. P55

Omair Ahmed, Black Tie

32 EDITOR'S PICKS IN FILM FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

Like Crazy

Cast & Credits

Directed by Drake Doremus; written by Doremus and Ben York Jones; with Anton Yelchin, Felicity Jones, Jennifer Lawrence, Charlie Bewley, Oliver Muirhead and Alex Kington. Rated PG-13 for content and strong language. Running time: 90 minutes.

Anton Yelchin who first hit screens as Anthony Hopkins' mentee in the cinematic adaptation of Stephen King's *Hearts in Atlantis*, breaks through in this story of young love. Though some may argue Felicity Jones is the film's true heart. What helps *Like Crazy* stand out from the crowd is its true-to-life portrayal of what happens when the honeymoon's over and real life settles in.

Guy meets girl, gets over social awkwardness and spend a blissful summer of love. Now what? She's British, he's American and her visas run out so she does what any young person in love would do given the chance:

she overstays. Damn the repercussions, but the action has a more than equal reaction when she can't re-enter the US. The couple try for a long-distance relationship but inevitably things fall apart (the time lag, travelling from one country to another, mostly falling on Yelchin's shoulders). They take up with other people although each is never quite far from one another's minds and do find their way back to one another, though not without its own share of problems.

This is a no-nonsense, quaint, poignant film about first love and heartbreak and though not as lighthearted as indies like *(500) Days of Summer* have been, has its feet grounded firmly in reality which brings its own charm. The film has been lauded both for its performances and direction although Doremus may have had little to do with a mostly improvised script by its two young stars. Viewers will find themselves taking a trip down memory lane to their own first loves which, given the subject matter and nuanced performances, isn't hard to do.



Courtesy: Paramount Vantage

Restless

Cast & Credits

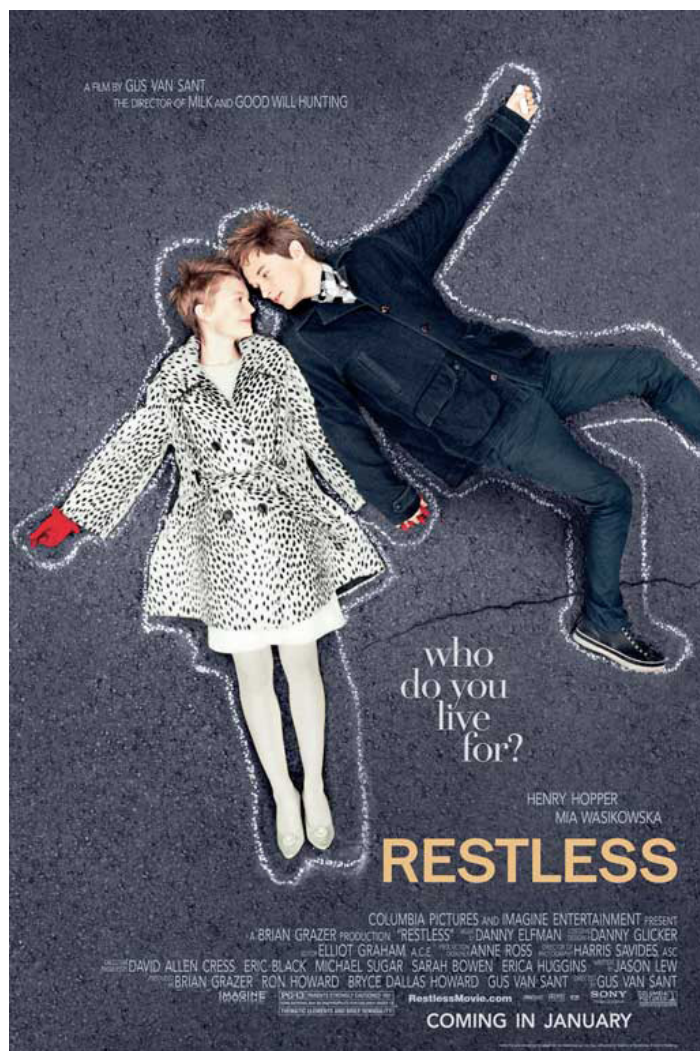
Directed by Gus Van Sant; written by Jason Lew; music by Danny Elfman; with Henry Hopper, Mia Wasikowska, Ryo Kase, Shuyler Fisk and Jane Adams. Rated PG-13 for thematic and sensual elements. Running time: 91 minutes

This unconventional film from Gus Van Sant (which will not take fans of the filmmaker by surprise) chronicles the friendship and subsequent relationship between terminally ill cancer patient, Annabel (Mia Wasikowska) and Enoch (Henry Hopper), a morbid teenager who talks to a WWII ghost Hiroshi (Ryo Kase).

Well received at Cannes, Wasikowska steals the show as a tender, almost saintly young woman who intends to cherish her last days and maybe fall in love. The chemistry and relationship between the two principal characters drives the story forward and in what is now typical Hollywood, Annabel draws Enoch out from his shell which is motivated by a deep sadness and grief of its own.

The film forces viewers to wonder at the believability of Enoch's relationship with Kase's Takahashi, whether the ghost is 'real' or an imagined coping mechanism for Enoch who lost his parents in an accident where he survived. While it is Enoch's journey that is meant to serve as the film's principal sole anchor, it is Annabel who, much like she does for Enoch, gives the film its much needed lightness despite the darkness her absence represents.

Restless is produced by Bryce Dallas Howard in a



role that forced Wasikowska to cut her hair into a short crop believable for a cancer patient.

The film's end is a foregone conclusion but is heart-breaking nonetheless. Recommended viewing with a box of tissues.



Courtesy: Imagine Entertainment

34 THE CRITICS: ATOMIZED

Reviewed by Jacob Silkstone

Michel Houellebecq, *Atomised* (Les Particules élémentaires), translated by Frank Wynne

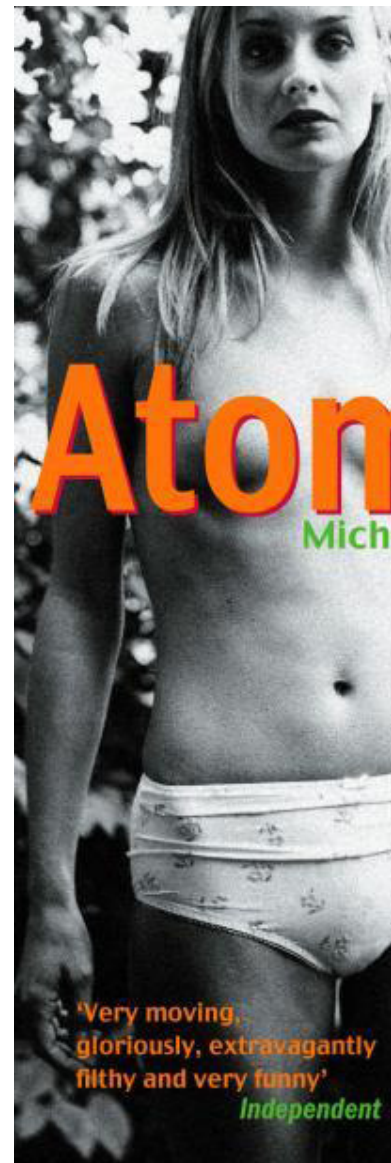
Vintage, 2001, 379pages (Paperback)

ISBN: 0-099-28336-0

Judge any book by its back cover and you could be forgiven for thinking you're about to read a work of inimitable, once-in-a-generation genius. Turn over *Atomised*, the English translation of Michel Houellebecq's *Les Particules élémentaires*, (possibly in an attempt to avoid staring at the half-naked woman on the front) and you find the usual glowing reviews. Anyone willing to trust the opinions of *Time Out* must accept that the novel is 'totally mesmerising...Compulsory reading.' If, on the other hand, you choose to believe *The Independent*, *Atomised* is 'compelling... haunting.' Julian Barnes (important enough to be named) describes it as 'a novel which hunts big game while others settle for shooting rabbits.'

The difference here is that the hyperbole is justified. Michel Houellebecq may strike certain readers as a nihilist, a racist, a misogynist, a pedlar of the cheapest of literary cheap tricks, but he is without doubt one of the most fascinating contemporary writers in any language. *Atomised* is a work of staggering ambition, aiming to imagine what Houellebecq refers to as 'a metaphysical mutation... a transformation in the values to which the majority subscribe' by inhabiting the mind of 'a first-rate biologist and serious candidate for the Nobel Prize' and compressing numerous lives into fewer than four hundred pages. Houellebecq sets himself the intensely serious task of envisioning a future in which both religion and science have been usurped as dominant paradigms, and ends up producing a novel as readable as any airport thriller.

Not that you'd want to take *Atomised* with you on your next plane journey. It happens to be relentlessly gloomy: the first page informs us that the protagonist 'lived through an age that was miserable and troubled... haunted by misery, the men of his generation lived out their lonely, bitter lives.' By the end of the first chapter, Michel Djerzinski has abandoned his job, organised a



lifeless 'sham' of a leaving party, and returned home to find his canary dead. He dumps it in a rubbish chute, has a nightmare in which the bird's intestines are ripped out by huge worms 'armed with terrible beaks', and has to swallow three Xanax tablets before he can get back to sleep. For the rest of the book, his condition deteriorates. Just in case the more or less inexorable downward spiralling of one life isn't enough, Michel has a half-brother, Bruno, who ends the novel in a mental institution after the suicide of his girlfriend.

At the heart of *Atomised* is a vision which recalls Deleuze and Guattari's idea of humanity as a mass of 'desiring machines', with desire the agent which produces 'reality'. Houellebecq's 'metaphysical mutation' effectively involves the elimination of desire, creating a brave new world in which 'a new, rational species' relies on cloning rather than 'sexuality as a means of repro-



duction.' Sex and death are inextricably linked: Michel Djerzinski establishes that 'all species dependent on sexual reproduction are by definition mortal'; the 'new species', independent of sexual reproduction, is by definition immortal.

Only a small section of *Atomised* is devoted to the implications of that immortality. Superficially, the novel seems to deal in abstractions, but it remains grounded in the details of day-to-day lives, relishing the mundane. The world it depicts is unflinchingly brutal: Michel recalls watching a programme called *The Animal Kingdom*, observing how 'Snakes moved among the trees, their fangs bared, ready to strike at bird or mammal, only to be ripped apart by hawks.' Animals are 'slaughtered' or 'dismembered and devoured', their days spent in 'abject terror.' At times, Houellebecq's view of the world is pessimistic to the point of self-

parody. On other occasions, it contains an awful ring of truth, as when he recycles an idea from *Whatever* and examines the brutal nature of 'free market' sexuality, a system which concentrates power among a select few and leaves the rest with little or nothing, abandoned to 'calmly observe the decline of [their] virility.' Neither Michel nor Bruno belongs to the sexually satisfied 1%: Michel half-heartedly browses the lingerie section ('Sensual Suspenders!') of his 3 Suisses catalogue, while Bruno pursues the shadow of a dream of liberation at the 'Lieu de Changement', which pompously prides itself on being 'open to new spiritual ideas.'

Relief is never more than temporary – Bruno eventually enters a relationship with Christiane, but Christiane becomes paralysed from the waist down after an incident in a 'club for couples' and commits suicide when faced with the spectre of her physical decline; Annabelle, the great love of Michel's life, dies of uterine cancer shortly after becoming pregnant with his child. *Atomised* concludes that, in our current 'miserable and troubled' age, complete happiness is impossible. Huxley's *Brave New World* seems to be an obvious point of comparison: the question posed by both books is not 'can we attain true happiness?' but 'do we really want to attain true happiness?' Huxley's future society and Houellebecq's new species are both perfectly content, but the worlds they inhabit seem sterile (in more than one sense) and devoid of meaning.

Towards the end of *Atomised*, Michel investigates 'this space of which [we] are so afraid' and reaches a conclusion which appears to offer some hope of transcendence. He concludes that 'Love binds, and it binds for ever... All that exists is a magnificent interweaving.' The idea of love 'binding' is deeply and deliberately ambiguous, but Houellebecq appears to let Michel 'make his peace' in the final weeks of his life, taking 'long, dreamy walks...with only the sky itself as witness.' The cruelty of *The Animal Kingdom* can, perhaps, be forgotten, if not overcome.

Atomised may sound like the type of book you wish to avoid – heavy on theory, filled with unpalatable opinions (for example, one of the characters sees Islam as analogous to Nazism), perhaps overly graphic. Instead, it is the type of book everyone should read – ambitious, innovative, filled with ideas which are genuinely challenging, perhaps even a thing of beauty. It demands to be judged by no standards other than its own.



IKU by Emaan Mehmud

38 TO SLEEP AT NIGHT

by Dana Masden

There is a flash of lightening in front of the car that illuminates the muddy road like a flickering of a match, and in the road there is a raccoon, and the raccoon is an animal Mary Kay associates with thieves because they once clawed their way into her attic, and murderers, because they wear masks, with their tails like whack paddles and their hands like human babies, a real tight squeeze to choke the life out of whatever they want to and then they end the day with their hands warmed by cups of black tea. She saw this online. She saw raccoons drinking from teacups on some lady's porch. There are a lot of monsters in the world, she thinks. Some pop from their mothers automatically that way and others are made to be, by slow, steady, awful things that happen to them bit by bit. She feels this realization in her gut since the shooting and she carries and nurtures it like a little baby bubble of fear.

She screams. Ted laughs. He doesn't swerve but somehow misses the raccoon. "Relax, Baby," he says. "You got the jumps tonight."

"Do you blame me?" she asks. "After what we just took?"

It was a hundred grand. Her husband's.

"Look," Ted says. "I want you to be feeling nothing but good about that. Like we agreed upon? You hear me? It's a good thing. It's redemption. Isn't that right, Baby?"

She finds herself looking behind them, to see if anyone is following them as things follow her lately; such as: news vans, her husband, and police. But not tonight. They are free and clear to deliver the money. She heard there was another shooting in another town, at a birthday party or something, a little boy opened his coat, and sprayed bullets. First she thought: thank god; it meant the attention would be refocused, off her and off Jack and back on some other saved teacher and some other messed up kid. And second, she thought, what is happening? The fucking apocalypse?

They say it is a disease.

"Ted?" she asks. "I'm getting second thoughts."

"Such as?"

"Well for one, this is Brian's money."

"Now wait a minute. Isn't that the point? I thought

we talked about this. It's like the Robin Hood stuff, remember? Take from the rich and give to the poor."

"That just seems silly at this moment. Life doesn't work like that."

"Why not?"

"You know it doesn't."

"What does Brian need the money for, anyway?"

"To take his new girlfriend to Europe," she answers.

"Exactly," Ted says. "Besides, we don't have to stay here. You can get a job anywhere. I can do my work anywhere. We'll just take out a map and point to any place on it. You're telling me life doesn't work that way, but that makes it seem like you don't have a choice."

She feels very sick. She is not the type of woman to pick random locations on maps and get all giddy about this.

"But Brian," she says.

"Brian's a prick," Ted answers. "As we've both always known."

Sure, her husband doesn't deserve her kindness, or her sex, or her loyalty even, because he stopped giving those things to her years ago. Only thirty-five years old, a former beauty queen, and her hair starts to thin and Brian is the first to point it out. He even knows the gene responsible for halting hair and for her birthday he has the gall to buy her Rogaine—which he says will straighten this gene out and put it back to work. Rogaine doesn't work, by the way. All of the above is true. None of the above means she should steal from him. But ever since the shooting, nothing really seems to matter in the fields of ethics, morality, or purpose.

He seriously, seriously bought her Rogaine. He honestly thought this was nice.

"He's going to kill me," she realizes. "He'll find both of us and he'll kill us. He's got that mean, monster thing in him."

"Brian's always been rich. Came from rich folks. He probably won't even notice."

"He'll kill me," she repeated.

"You almost already died once this year," Ted says. "Lightening doesn't strike twice."

“But it does,” she says. She’s heard it does.

“What were the chances the one kid in your class who gets bullied ends up being the one to go ape-shit? I mean, what were the chances of that? Happening to you?”

She doesn’t say anything. Ted doesn’t know why it’s her fault. Nobody can see that clearly. Nobody but Jack. And so she thinks to offer him what all people believe will cure them of ailment—money. And then, she’ll change locations with Ted. There is this feeling you can renew yourself if you renew your location. She doesn’t know if this is true. She’s never lived anywhere but in the Midwest. He’s thinking California.

“Okay,” she says. “He lives just past the park.”

Ted looks at her. “You’re beautiful,” he says. “And I mean that. This is a good thing you’re doing, beautiful woman.”

Years from now, if she’s still with Ted, she will roll her eyes at this remark. But now, they’ve just cooked everything up together, so she swells a minute, and then remembers how fucked up everything is, which is another side affect of grief, it pokes you in your rib whenever you start to smile. It says: REMEMBER? SCOTT, YOUR STUDENT, IS DEAD. She couldn’t even properly grieve Scott. Still hasn’t. Even with the rain beading up on the windshield and sliding down like racing stripes, Mary Kay can’t wrestle with the regular thoughts of self-loathing, so instead she focuses on all of the crap outside the car. The car tires; the gritty rainwater: wrenches; broken glass; children’s toys in their dirtied brights. Brown snow and chained dogs, holey underwear and cigarette butts. This is a part of town she has not seen. This is the house where Jack lives. It’s a trailer. Number nine-nine-nine. “Imagine,” she says. “Having that awful acne and growing up here?”

He grunts and looks at her. “What are you waiting for?”

“Ted,” she says.

“What?”

“We don’t have an exit plan. What will we do to make sure Brian doesn’t find out I took it?”

“Well,” Ted says. “We just go on like normal.”

Mary Kay laughs. She wonders how ‘normal’ ever became part of the English language.

*

Months ago, a day or so after the shooting, her stu-

dent, Scott, is in the hospital fighting a battle for his life that he will lose, and Mary Kay isn’t sure what to wear to the hospital to watch. Colors are like vomit and everything smells like vomit, too, the beginning of that awful blob of guilt in her belly that eats her from the inside out, and last night she went out to eat with her husband and watching everybody downing food was perhaps the closest she’s ever been to hell, because even her husband Brian, knowing all she’s been through, made the sound “mmm” when he chewed his beef and this is when she knew, for sure now, that she couldn’t possibly love him and probably never did. It’s so easy, when you fall out of love, to see that love is actually a brainwash. Brainwash—now that’s a word that makes sense to her. She pictures the different pieces of the brain soaking in a hot bowl; the brain admiring its own reflection in the mirrored handle of the sink, now awash with blue or green or blood.

“Do you wear gray if somebody is about to die but hasn’t yet?” she asks. Brian, shirtless, shaving, laughs at this. Laughter is foreign gas in their house and when the cat gets a whiff of it, she jumps from a potted plant, knocking it onto the carpet, spraying dirt pellets across the white carpet. The cat looks back at her, and walks out of the room, as if wearing high heels.

“Shit,” Mary Kay says. “Everything in this life is shit. Shit. Shit. Shit. Shit.” She goes to get the vacuum. Then she realizes something. The plant falling like this... It is strikingly familiar to the feeling she had right after the shooting, right away, like the second she heard the shots and she checked to see if she was dead because there was blood but it was Scott’s blood, not hers. Then the horrible realization it was Scott who was hurt, still breathing, but going, going, and the silent, stretched, screaming of her students. It’s the do-over feeling, Mary Kay thinks. Right after something happens, in this case, this shooting, this murder, the death of her marriage, the dirt on the carpet, you think of how pristine everything once was just one second ago and you’d taken it for granted, and you think, simply, you’ll just rewind to the instant before, and fix the one thing that’s out of place to prevent the accident. But it’s not nostalgia, for a moment, your brain literally believes it is possible. “Can I have a do-over?” she asks.

“It’s not your fault,” he replies dryly (meaning, yes, yes it is your fault). His face is covered in the shaving cream, like a fluffy cartoon beard.

Mary Kay says, “but that’s the final step—Accept-

4 Once. I'm still in the first step. What's the first step?"

"What are you talking about?" He drags the razor down one cheek, pulling his mouth open long to catch the hairs near his lips. He is short and fat but somehow has this power that she can't really explain.

"The steps. You don't know the steps?"

"Like the stairs?" He sets the razor down and turns to her. "Oh, those steps. I don't know them. I've never been through anything like you've just been through."

This is the first step. It's the feeling of knowing you fucked up, but not slowly; all at once. And if you could just un-do the simple, impulsive, careless thing you did, you could put all of the dirt back in the pot. And from then on, she actually believes that she could have prevented the shooting.

*

At the hospital, Scott's mother sits among them, looking like one of the students because she is young. She is short and thin, with a pixie nose, in a pink sweat-suit sort of thing that is like being in pajamas but very dressed up, and the only thing that shows her age is a streak of silver in her dirty blonde hair. She is talking in a low, wide-eyed mumble to some of the children, some of them who have bandages on their own faces or arms from broken glass. Not only did Reo shoot Scott, but six others, too. Four are dead. Two are hanging on. Of course, the media is here, but this is a medium number of deaths if you think about Columbine, nothing to get too worked up about—forgotten as soon as it begins. What makes this unique is simply the unique players involved, something the media could never capture anyway. An hour before the shooting, Reo Xeroxed fliers and dropped them around the school. The fliers had names of students. Scott was number one on that list. She remembers seeing the list in the faculty bathroom, cut out of magazine letters, shaking her head, checking her lipstick, and folding the flier in her purse to bring to the principal later. She thought it was a joke to talk about who would win homecoming court that year and she wished Scott would get it; but then wished he wouldn't because maybe that would feed his ego too much. Every kid on the list was popular. Several teachers noticed the fliers and had similar reactions, but they didn't know what she knew.

Scott was now in a hospital bed, shot in the brain. Reo was dead, shot in the brain, too. Six others, shot. Reo hit each target. And then Reo died so he didn't have

to see all of their broken hearts in the sober overcast mornings to follow. Everything about it reeked of the teenage inability of hindsight—the emotional intelligence too weak to recognize bad phases, fabricated social structures, everything that it is to be teenaged—except the part where the teenager acquires a gun and shoots people in the face.

She thinks about Reo all the time, and they all do, and she wonders if it will go on for years and years. Every few minutes. The shooting is literally like a pulse through her, glass-shatter-pop, glass-shatter-pop. She thinks about Reo, in the locker room, staring himself in the mirror. It would take a lot of courage to go through with it. It'd be a spiritual, religious brainwash. Fucking, Reo! she thinks. This was the worst possible way to get them back. He transformed them all into saints, heroes, or victims.

"Mary Kay!" Scott's mom cries when she sees her. They have only met once before but by now all over the news is the fact that Scott had shielded her when Reo came into their classroom.

"Mary Kay," she cries. The mother gives her a hug; all of the other students see this hug and they start to cry harder, even the boys, and down the hall, Mary Kay watches Jack, who has no expression. She looks again and he is tight-lipped, angry. Since the shooting, he has mostly been with police. They have all been interviewed countless times, Jack the most and it's rumored they found guns and bullets in his mom's trailer. His face has been shown on multiple news channels, as if he is already guilty of planning something—even though the only thing they know for sure is that he was Reo's closest friend. Jack also wasn't at school this day, which is something everyone thinks is suspicious and so the students stare at him and the media follows him. But Mary Kay somehow knows he is innocent. As a teacher, you know your kids. Reo, yes, he was troubled. Jack is just in the wrong school at the wrong time, with the wrong sexual orientation, a good kid who got mixed up with a bad one, and ultimately made the right decision to stay home.

"How is he?" Mary Kay asks. Here's another thing. She loved Scott, Scott who is dying. "How is he?" she asks again.

Someone, she doesn't know who, perhaps a doctor, says: "He's passed." Collectively, as if a cold wind sweeps a piece of paper up from the floor, they gasp.

*

Before the shooting, Mary Kay was preoccupied with hair. Women bald, she thinks. It isn't entirely unreasonable of God or Darwin. But Mary Kay is hardly thirty-five. She examines her head and touches the spot: clammy and soft like a bruised peach. Her self-image is caught in the dirty photos she once took of herself to send to Brian when he was away in New York.

Here is a picture of me in fishnet stockings; here a thong flosses between my ass cheeks; here are my lips parted to show the soft white of my teeth; tousled hair and black nail polish. I am underneath. I love you, I miss you. I humiliated myself for you. ~Mary Kay.

You wouldn't believe what Brian said. How could she forget? Brian said, "Try putting light in another corner of the room next time. The right light can make a world of difference."

Brian is a photographer, and an asshole, probably because he's doing nothing glamorous—pictures of babies with their heads as the center of flowers, dogs in baskets, and your occasional little kids kissing each other. Aesthetics, he talks about aesthetics and this isn't his design aesthetic and he'll go fucking crazy if he doesn't get some better work soon. The day of the shooting, he huffs to the school on his bicycle; and when she sees him, she is instantly relieved at the sight of familiarity. Instead, he takes her picture, covered in Scott's blood. It goes up in *The Post*. He is paid generously for the photos he took of her, and of other students, with blood on them, hugging each other, sobbing. She often catches him saying things into the phone, like, "Yes, it was horrible. But somebody, some journalist had to capture this so that we can prevent these kinds of things in the future."

Fucking Brian, she thinks. Perhaps they can travel around to high schools and tell her story for a violence prevention program. "Kids," she'll say. "If you shoot up your school all of the assholes look like good people, and all of the good people look like assholes. It produces the opposite of your intended outcome. And, it breaks everyone's hearts. This is all the same if you decide to kill yourself. Thanks."

She will show an x-ray of her heart, all slimy and breathing upside down in its green, hairy casing. Hearts don't break in neat, jagged lines, she'll tell them. Instead, they mutate, get sick, feeding off bad things only.

*

She overlooked Reo because she was always thinking about Scott. She waves at him in the halls like her fingers are blowing in the wind. After class, she allows him to ask personal questions.

"You coming to our game?" he asks.

"I don't know."

"You know, Mary Kay."

They call her Mary Kay, not because she said they could. She is backed against the chalkboard. She moves backward a few paces, disguising like she's shifting her weight, looking out into the hallway at the students slamming lockers. She has this instant rush to her groin, as loud as the ringing bell, fire and all, like something potent all at once has been released. The more she works to dispel it, the sharper and more concentrated it becomes.

He asks her to hold out her hand. "Close your eyes," he says. She does it. When she opens her eyes, there is a chocolate kiss in her hand and Scott is gone.

When most of the students have gone, around six o'clock, she goes into the girl's room and masturbates. She remembers when Brian made her feel like that. She is shamelessly attracted to arrogance.

*

At Scott's funeral, Brian is better than her. Despite the fact that some people think he is an asshole, he ignores this and speaks quietly, with authority. The reason Mary Kay can't speak is because she isn't able to grieve. She is aware that she could have prevented this. She believes that the only person who understands this is Jack. Jack is too thin. He has a layer of baby mustache above his lip, black and thin as eyelashes. He is like one of those long giant bugs. He knows everything about her and so she is both drawn to and frightened of him.

At one point, Mary Kay goes and sits with him on a couch, where he is alone in the funeral parlor. Why do funeral parlors always look like a grandmother's house—paisleys in the carpet and roses on the walls and pictures of a blue-eyed Jesus in trashy, gold frames? Roast beef sandwiches and macaroni and cheese? Coke in plastic. Are these meant to comfort us?

She doesn't have anything to say to Jack. So she points out these things.

As soon as her mouth rounds around the word paisley, he stands up. She looks at him, her mouth agape, and he nods, out of pity, but then he shakes and

42 says: "Stop." She watches him cross the room and head to the exit. He is out the big, heavy door. As the doors slowly pinch closed, everyone, all the hundreds of them, turn their heads slightly to watch him go out the doors, letting in long sheets of gold light. You can hear the television reporters start to jitter like roaches.

*

Just as Scott knew she would, she decides to stay after and attend the soccer game that day. Mary Kay loves the fall, or she did, very much, back then; the season of renewal, boys, cheerleading season, new clothes, new school supplies, new students, new energy. Of course, it is not made for her anymore, as it's been well over fifteen years since she waved a pom-pom.

Helena, one of Mary Kay's students, is rolling her eyes at a senior named Mike. He wraps a blanket around her and kisses her neck, his eyes fluttering closed in spirituality. Helena's mouth opens and then she turns, takes a small glimpse of Mary Kay, and slaps him off. Mary Kay can't stop looking. The way his eyes flutter!

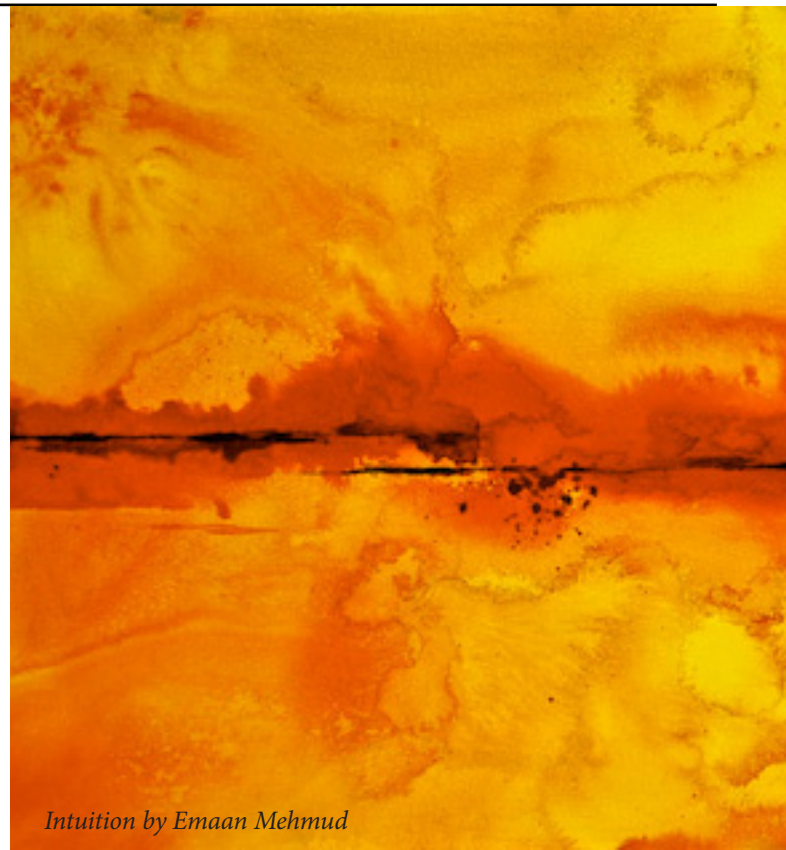
She watches Scott jogging with his team around the field, his body so mechanically perfect, so efficient. He glances up at her, beneath the showering lights, those florescent, humming things that make those young boys Olympic, and she swears he glances up at her and nods. She feels her heart vibrate. For a minute, she forgets she's old.

*

Two weeks before the shooting, Scott is bragging to her third period that Mary Kay came to the game, in this ape-like, tattle-tale way that she finds charming. One of the football players, some baritone with a square head, acts offended that she doesn't go to their games, "Come on, Mary Kay," he says. He's imitating, but can't reproduce attractiveness, as is usually the problem with followers. "Everyone quiet," she snaps. She gives Scott a look. The look is one of a serious person. "Quiz time," she says.

She's writing on the board, when she hears Helena squeal, "Are you okay?" She looks behind her to see Reo cupping his face. He has blood pouring from his hands in long, fantastic ropes. Helena takes a gym towel from her bag and offers it to Reo. Reo shakes his head no, and stands. Blood climbs down his forearms in a race.

"Go to the nurse, now, Reo," Mary Kay says, gently, though he annoys her, grosses her out. "Your quiz won't count." As if he cares about his quiz grade. She



Intuition by Emaan Mehmud

opens the door for him.

Mary Kay phones the janitor to clean up the blood and asks someone to check on Reo. She begins to go over the answers of the quiz. The answers are: New York; Eye Glasses; Alcohol; and He Didn't Know, or some variation of that answer. "He had no idea" is okay, too.

Afterwards, Scott raises his hand.

She removes her glasses. Isn't there something sexy about a teacher with hair in a sweeping up-do (to cover the hair that went missing) in a yellow dress the color of Dick Tracey, directing hurt boys to the proper nurse, slowly removing her librarian glasses, resting the tip in her mouth, cocking her head to the left ever so slightly and saying, "Yes, Scott. Do you have a question?"

"Do you think Helena's going to get AIDS?" he asks.

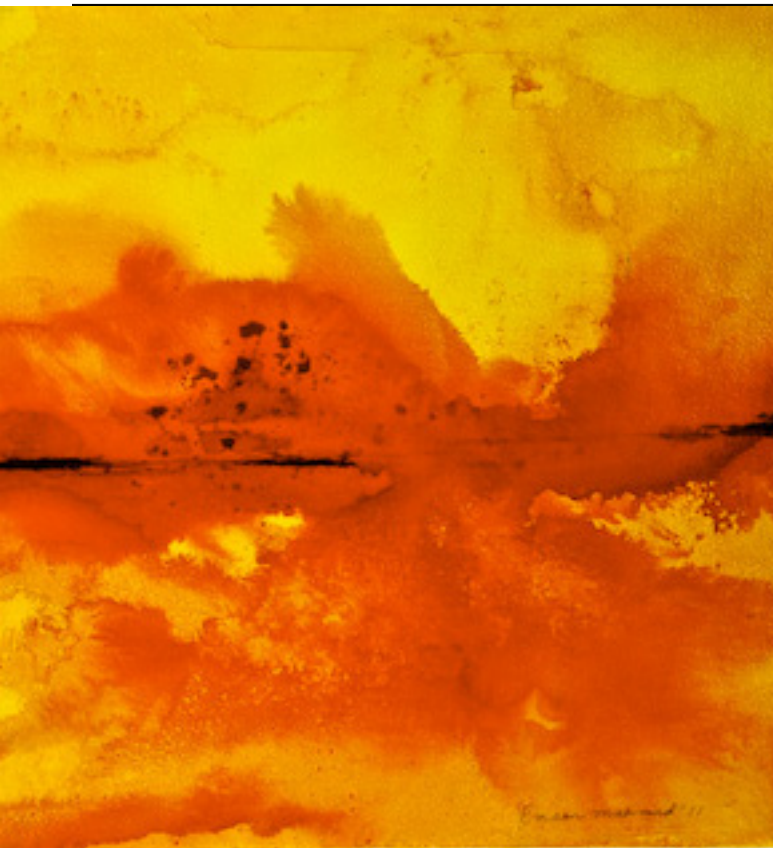
Mary Kay flinches. "What?" she says.

"Since Reo is a faggot?"

"That's enough."

"Everybody knows that's how AIDS spread, you know because there are more capillaries in the anus?"

Helena rolls her eyes. Mary Kay glances at Jack, Reo's only friend, or boyfriend even, she suspects. His face flushes, his arms are around his chest, he looks like



the human representation of volcanic explosion.

“I don’t know what you mean,” she says, awkwardly.

The bell rings, and Jack stands, quickly, his head down. He looks at her only briefly and the look is obvious: she’s failed to protect him.

Mary Kay says something meaningless in her teacher-tone, and once they leave her classroom, she puts her head in her hands. Damn it, Scott. She is vaguely aware that she is in love with him. But she can’t go on having him making fun of kids for being homosexual. This is something the faculty all agreed on. Oh, Scott. She wishes he wouldn’t act like an asshole! Why does she love assholes?

Scott comes back a minute later and she practically jumps. “I didn’t mean anything,” he says. “It’s just the truth. And sometimes you shouldn’t say anything if you can’t say something nice.”

She nods. She puts on her glasses. She takes them off.

“Look, Mary Kay,” Scott says. He leans on her desk with his head in, like a coach pep-talking. “Everybody knows. I know I shouldn’t bring it up but he got blood all over Helena’s desk. Plus, we all know that’s

how AIDs is spread. We’re in health class right now, and the teacher always talks about that, and I’m just saying, it’s true isn’t it? Helena should be careful?”

“Scott,” she starts. She realizes he is genuinely concerned for Helena because he is stupid about AIDS and because Helena is in his popular court. “Just go. You’ll be late.”

Then he says, “What? I thought I could speak the truth in here.” He points to a poster above the chalkboard. In girlish Sharpie handwriting, there stand the classroom rules.

1. Speak the Truth. Always.
2. Don’t be Jerks.

“You can. You can,” she says.

“I thought you were cool.”

“I am,” she says.

He stands there, staring at her, and for a minute, she actually thinks he cares. He squeezes her arm before he leaves and she feels his touch go up and down her body. Mary Kay says this better be an isolated incident and tells him to go to class. There is no such thing as an isolated incident. All incidents are born of other incidents. Every instant is an incident. Rule number three.

*

She doesn’t see Reo again, for several days, not since his bloody nose. She begins to wonder if she handled it correctly. She doesn’t like Reo but it is her job to wonder about him. Truant. Truant. Truant. It’s getting cold out. She calls his mother—protocol—it’s best to warn parents that their kids are failing out of high school so that it doesn’t come as one big explosion, causing their hearts to hemorrhage.

“Are you trying to tell me that I don’t see him get on the bus every day when I do? I see it with my own eyes. He’s at school.” Her voice is so deep Mary Kay thinks she sounds like a man. She’s a smoker, some kind of wise-cracker. A bad parent.

“He’s going to fail high school,” Mary Kay says.

“Is this about him being different?” his mother says, in that gruff, aggressive tingle. “Because that is not his fault. You don’t know what they do to him at school.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Everybody says that he’s homosexual.”

There is a pause.

Mary Kay is staring out the window. It is begin-

ning to snow. "Well," she says. "Some kids get bullied, it's just high school. Unfortunately," she adds.

"Nasty things. There's more than this."

"Please," Mary Kay says. "I don't mean to cause stress or worry, but you need to get him back on track, or there's a big chance, I'm sorry to say, that he won't graduate."

There is a pause. "They beat him," she says. "They said anytime he goes in the locker room he's going to get punched or kicked, so maybe he avoids that room. The other week he had a soccer cleat imprint on his back."

Mary Kay watches the snow. "Excuse me?" she says. She stands and knocks a water bottle over on her desk. Everything on her desk begins to get wet. She rushes to get paper towel. "Who?" Mary Kay says. "Who does this to him?"

"I don't know," she says. "All of 'em."

"All of them?"

"You heard me," she says. "The whole locker room. All of them. The whole fucking soccer team. The biggest asshole is named Scott."

Her heart drops, like an elevator without strings. "Why didn't you tell us? Does anybody know?"

"I am telling you, but as you say, what can be done? I can't prove this. Those kids got money, got lawyers, and Reo's always been picked on. This isn't new. I just didn't think they were capable of beating him to a bloody pulp. Called him HIV positive or something. That's fucking ridiculous."

"Yes," Mary Kay says. "But before? Why didn't you say so earlier?"

"I didn't know how bad it really was," she says, suddenly, as if she's just realizing it. "Not until you called."

*

Mary Kay calls Scott in after school. "You've been accused of something," she tells him.

"Of being handsome?" he asks.

Her face remains.

"What?" he says. He instantly looks guilty, but she tries not to take this too seriously. They all look that way when they are called in unexpectedly.

"Reo. You know he's missed some classes."

"So?"

"So he says he's had some trouble with boys in

the locker room. His mom says he was kicked."

Scott looks at his shoes. "Why me? Why are you asking me about it?"

"Because he named you," she says.

He shrugs. She stands up quickly. She takes a step closer to him. "Look," she says.

"It's not me," he says. "Mary Kay. You know, Reo's gay. Did you know that? Sometimes because of that, some stuff has gone down."

She nods. "Yes, I suppose that's true," she says. "You can go."

*

Mary Kay goes to see Hank, the second period PE teacher. Hank is balding for real, his head shaped like a pointed egg. He wears a matching sweat suit, and his office smells like beef. She tells him everything.

"I don't know what to do," she says. "It's just a rumor. Have you seen anything?"

"Just horseplay," he says.

She turns to leave. She feels a little bit relieved. Maybe that is all it is. Reo has always been known to be a bit dramatic.

"You know what else?" Hanks says.

"What?" she says.

"The dynamic is much better now that Reo is gone."

She nods. "You're right about that," she says.

*

A week after the shooting, school has to start up again. They have to have dances and exams and try to get the kids back on schedule. They can't go around doing counseling every day, now they have to educate. Mary Kay keeps to herself, cocooned in some kind of deafening cotton thick as installation, that she feels but cannot paw off. Everything is different about this place, everyone can feel it, and it will probably never change.

Brian often comes home late; he comes home never; he watches television and his own reflection and speaks mostly to the cat in shrill, overly psychotic voices, "Peppppppper!!!" and she prefers it, until one afternoon, he brings his friend Ted over, whom Mary Kay has never met; she did not know Brian had a friend, just clients. Ted has shoulder length wavy hair, long and thick like she so often wishes for, and he looks too young to be the friend of anyone Brian's age, and he

carries an amused look on his face and stands in the kitchen in a big plaid jacket chewing a coffee straw, tapping his feet constantly, and he's always wearing Chuck Taylors. Brian says Ted has offered to help Brian put up the Christmas lights around the garage and she blinks and she thinks Christmas? When they are finished they come and drink fancy beer, saying things to each other that she only recognizes as men's voices.

Mary Kay is making pasta. She never makes dinner but with the presence of an outsider one often begins to perform in a way they believe the outsider expects. She asks Ted to stay, mostly out of obligation, like a woman who regularly vacuums the house or has an Avon lady. Halfway through dinner, Brian gets a call and goes to the other room. This is Brian's girlfriend. She knows this because she's seen the phone bills, and they aren't careful, and she doesn't care.

Ted leans across the table. "You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," he says.

Mary Kay feels herself jump. "What?" she says, in that feminine, surprised way. Although she knows she is not beautiful, she did realize that Ted thought she was.

He looks down. "I'm sorry."

"You've probably seen me on television."

"Yes," he says. "But I've seen you other places. Like at funerals. You're pretty when you cry. I know that sounds strange. But you are so beautiful." He laughs.

She pauses. "Were you related to any of the kids who were killed?" she asks.

"Naw," he says. "I just worked there before, when they added that new unit."

"It must be hard," she says.

He smiles. His eyes are the color of aqua water and he has dark hair. A strange combination. "Not like it is for you," he says.

It is the most perfect response she can think of.

"I'm just wondering," he says. "Why Brian?"

She starts to answer but can't feel her voice. It's as if Ted's been watching her. As if he's come into their home because of this death that surrounds it.

"Oh, I see," Ted says; looking left, then right. "You don't realize it."

"What," she says.

"It," he says. "How you deserve better."

"What?" she says.

"Look, I'm sorry. It must be the beer. This stuff has like fifteen percent alcohol."

Mary Kay nods. She looks at her pasta, and feels tears begin to fill her face, ready to squirt out as happens all the time but before she can manage them, instead, a big laugh comes up. It bursts from her, hearty, and clear as a bell. She feels hungry.

Brian comes in, wearing the half-grin of somebody who has just walked in on a private joke and expects inclusion.

"It's nothing," Ted says, smiling at her.

*

Reo and Jack were inseparable for years, so when Reo goes missing before the shooting, Mary Kay thinks to speak to Jack. All the way since elementary school. Reo was big, but clumsy, and not funny, like a bear who couldn't control his limbs. Jack is skinny, scrawny, with big feet that trip him up. He has deep set acne, which is unfortunate for anyone, this thing you can't help but all this advertising makes you think you can. He must go a whole day without saying anything, Mary Kay thinks. She asks him to stay after class.

"Okay, where's Reo?" she says, taking off her glasses.

Jack shrugs and starts to walk away.

"You know," Mary Kay says. "He could not graduate if he doesn't start coming back around," though she can't figure out why she cares to tell Jack this. She just wants someone to know she tried to think about Reo. Kids fall through cracks. Sometimes teachers can help this. Sometimes they can't. Sometimes it's friends who help. Sometimes it's drugs. But they still fall. Her only job is to make an attempt, to sleep at night.

He doesn't say anything. He is standing in front of a poster with a picture of Pamela Anderson; she's reading a book.

He looks at it and says, "People who have big boobs even read sometimes."

"Have you even applied for colleges, Jack?" she asks.

He shakes his head no. He is staring at her intensely. Almost too intensely, in a weird, threatening way. "And how would you expect someone like me to pay for the application fees?" he asks. "My mom can't even afford to give me a few bucks for lunch."

“Jack,” she says.

“You teachers,” he says. “Act like everything should be so easy for us. Well for most of us, it isn’t. That’s why you don’t know where Reo is.”

“What do you mean?” she says.

“You don’t know what happens to him here. If you did, you would be glad he’s gone. He could die here. They will kill him.”

She takes a gulp. “Oh, honey,” she says. “Isn’t it all just the slightest bit dramatic?”

*

The day of the shooting there’s an announcement, during third period, for an emergency lockdown. The kids sit taking a quiz and look up at her, expectantly. Some stretch and drop their pens, and whisper between each other. “Shh!” she says. She waits for them to say something else, but there’s nothing, only silence. At first she wonders if she forgot the memo. A bunch of the kids giggle and Scott asks, “Is this serious, Mary Kay? Do we really have to?”

“Quiet,” she says.

Helena raises her hand. “Can I use the restroom? If there’s going to be a lockdown we could be in here for hours.”

“No,” Mary Kay says. She smoothes a wrinkle in her skirt and thinks Goddamn it.

She opens the door and looks for passing students, but sees no one, just the regular concrete walls, the green carpet, the orange lockers decorated with paper constructed leaves and footballs. She locks the door behind her and some of the students are dozing off, some of them are texting. She shuts off the lights and closes the blinds and the room feels peacefully dark like naptime. Somebody asks if it’s a drill. No, she says. It’s not. She snaps her fingers at two girls giggling. But then there is glass spraying in the room followed by a loud shot; or a loud shot and then shattered glass, and everybody screams, and everybody goes under their desks in the corner, and before she can look up, she is among them, with Scott covering her body like a wave. And when she looks up again, she sees a man in front of them shaped like a dark potato, wearing a purple ski mask, holding a handgun that is so tiny it could be a toy. She notices the man’s shoes. They are purple converse high tops with a yellow star. They are Reo’s shoes. She says, “You can’t.”

Scott’s body falls heavy on her. And she looks at the beauty rise from him, his face lose its expression, slide into skin. He has saved her life, and she thinks, I can undo this. We just have to lock up again. We’ll get Reo outside. We can redo this situation. We’ll do it over. Then the world goes black and red and screams and choking tears and the flashes of photography.

*

Trailer Nine-Nine-Nine. She has the money in cash, in an envelope that she wrapped up with duct-tape. She doesn’t know why but she doesn’t know why a lot of things. It just seems like a hundred thousand dollars should be secure in a great deal of very strong tape. It is, after all, the money Brian was saving for their retirement and now it’s physical in front of her—everything he took from her.

Ted says she won’t be able to recover from the shooting until she realizes that if anyone, Brian is responsible. Brian is the one who treated her so horribly and made her lose her voice. Ted says her voice can return, return screaming even, that she can shout into existence.

She knocks on the door. Jack opens the door only one or two inches, to show his nose.

“My mom’s not home,” he says.

She says, “That’s ok.”

Jack opens the door. First she notices his face. His acne has gotten worse, big puss-cusped scars that make him almost hard to see. She recognizes her own self in that face, her baldness, the thing on our outside that makes us feel we are exposed. Inside, there is a sink and a bed and a table and everything else is very neat, like his mother or somebody takes good care of the place. On the little table there is even a single red rose in a vase.

“You keep things very nice in here,” she says.

“Yeah,” Jack says. He opens the fridge. “Wow. It’s always surprising for people. Even poor people have taste and decency.”

“I’m sorry,” she says. She is always disarmed by his sarcasm. It was the same tone of voice Scott would use but in this case it is aimed against her, not trying to rope her in.

She sees his face soften. “You want a coke or something?”

“Yes,” Mary Kay says. He brings her a can, sets it

in front of her. She opens the drink and the top busts off to hear that sizzle that allows her to breathe. She takes a sip and remembers the sweetness of Coke and is almost comforted but then sickened.

“Look,” Jack says. “I’ve told you everything and I’ve told everybody everything. I didn’t know he was going to do it. What the fuck do you want?”

“Yes,” she says. “Of course. That’s not why I’m here. I’m here to give you this.” She hands over the envelope.

“What is it?” he asks.

“Well, open it.”

He looks at her reluctantly and begins to peel away the tape.

“Careful,” she says.

“What is this?” he asks.

“For college,” she answers. There is silence. The rain drops softly on the trailer. “Look,” she says. “I don’t know why I’m doing it.”

“Sheesh,” he says.

“And you could use it for something else, if you want. Not everybody is meant for college, that’s something I know for sure.”

His eyes lower. He stands up. He holds the envelope to his chest. “How much is in here?”

“A hundred grand. If you’re smart with it, it could pay for graduate school, too.”

His face pauses; he looks genuinely shocked. “Teachers don’t make money,” he says.

“Yes, well, technically,” she says, but then stops. He doesn’t need to know where it came from. He just needs to take it and get the fuck out of here.

He nods. She expects him to say he can’t take it, that it isn’t right, and to push it in her face. Instead, he puts it under his arm and says, “Thanks.” This is not going to be one of those things where he calls her twenty years to go on Oprah and thank her. This is about something else: guilt.

“So you’re going to take it,” she says.

He nods. “As if money means anything,” he says.

“But you know it does,” she says.

He looks terrified, angry and sad. Everything.

“I just want you to know,” she says. “I could have prevented it. I could have stopped it.”

Jack nods. “I know,” he says. And then he says the nicest thing he’ll ever say to her: “You and me both.” 47

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For a minute, she watches the rain collect and run all over the shit in the yards and the dirty snow and then she is back in the car and she can’t figure out what she feels, but it is not redemption.

“Ready?” Ted asks.

“Yes,” she says.

In a hotel room, somewhere in Iowa, she feels Ted’s body warm and soft around her, the sheets are cheap like stiff paper, and the spring air is damp among them. She pictures Scott running under those Olympic lights. Legs pumping. His eyes smiling. The life in him is so big, for a moment it reflected back in her, a piece of soft chocolate in her hand, his face close to hers, her body quivering, they never touched but they did exchange something. Some kind of energy that made her feel like a woman, young and beautiful and sexual. She cries, big gulps of air and tries to recognize the feeling she has now. It is the one where the tears cascade down your face and you feel still sad but also something else—soothed.

““

Look, Jack says. “I’ve told you everything and I’ve told everybody everything. I didn’t know he was going to do it. What the fuck do you want?” “Yes,” she says. “Of course. That’s not why I’m here. I’m here to give you this.” She hands over the envelope.

”

Dana Masden lives in Fort Collins, Colorado, where she currently teaches Literature and Composition at Colorado State University. Her work has been published in Pindelyboz, Arch, The Santa Clara Review and 303 Magazine, among others.

SUBMERSION

This is the place where the mind turns,
revolution layered upon revolution.

Tucked beneath.

Sheltered by a stitched steel dome.

The mechanism locks.

We make a new world—
an ocean.

It is night here, always.

The moon hangs low.

Brood parasites stab their beaks
at the last fibers
of silver twisting time.

You have learned to traverse
the water top. But
I'm not there.

I descend to its depths where darkness bleeds
droplets of fire-flicker light.

Cobalt blue plasma spears
at my hand for the catching.

I camouflage.

Disappear.

Become water.

“You cannot pierce
a black hole,” you say. “You cannot hold it still—
stop the expanse.”

Tell me instead,

“There are no cracks to leak out the frailty of this
ruptured world.

We can stay under forever.”

I try to traverse this with you,
and suddenly I feel like I might drown
standing atop the water,
exposed to the soft recoil of the wind
when it breathes.

I made this moon-black box
so I could bang against its walls.

Collapse.

A tremor from beneath pushes up.
The dying stars wilt from the sky,
submerge into the rivets of the ocean.

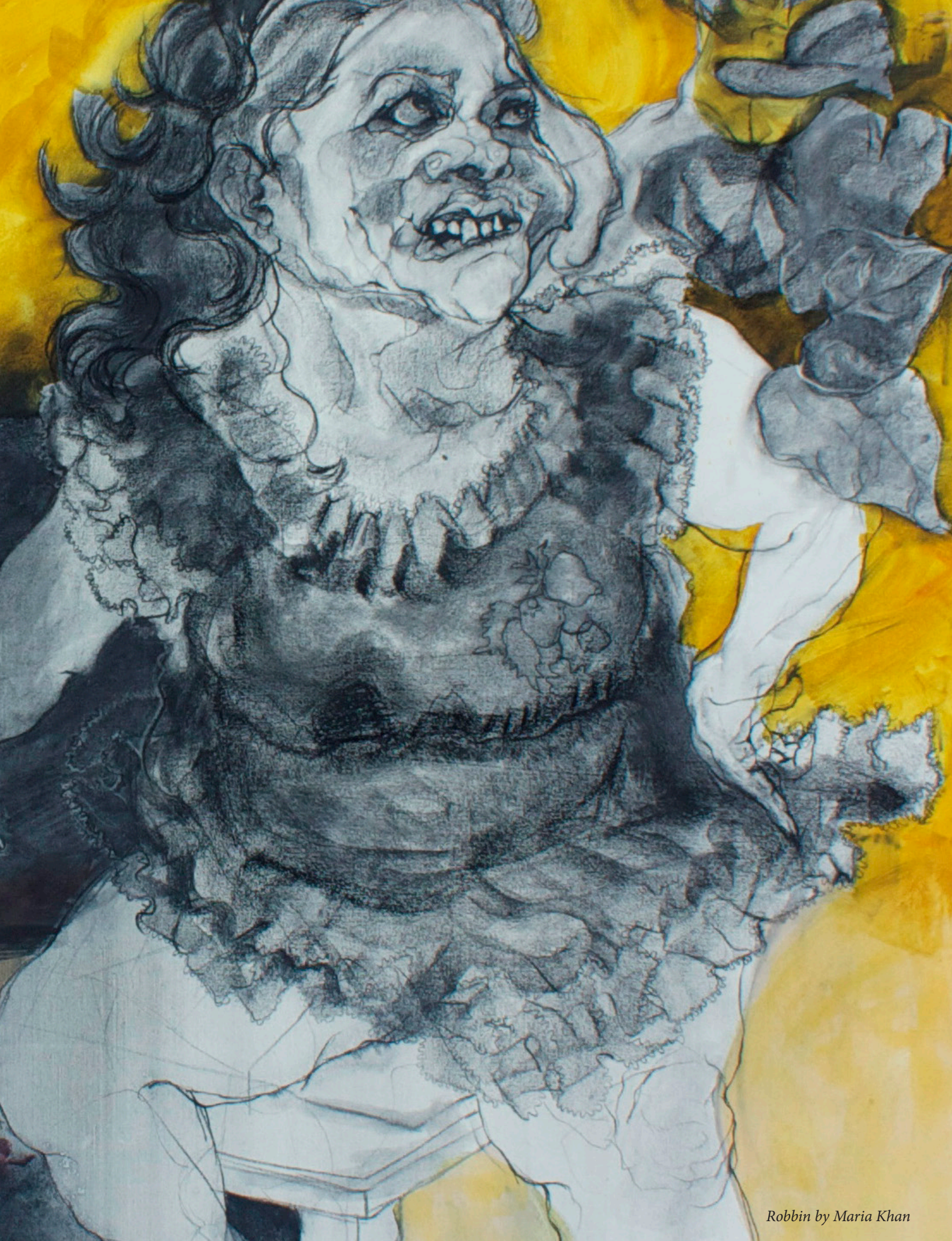
I
plummet
down,

crest

and fall.

- Brandi Capozzi

Brandi Capozzi lives in Port Murray, New Jersey where she is currently working in retail and spends her off time working on her writing. She graduated from the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey in December 2012 with a BA in English Literature.



Robbin by Maria Khan

50 WHERE HAVE ALL THE HIPPIES GONE

by Maria Amir

Communal living. Pacifists. Anti-war music.

Just a simple song of freedom,
He was never fightin' for,
No one's listenin' when you need 'em,
Ain't no fun to sing that song no more.

Just a broken song of freedom,
And the closing of a door,
No one's missin' till you need 'em
Ain't no fun to sing that song no more.

—'Broken Freedom Song' by Kris Kristofferson

Some say it's the word itself that puts people off. Over the years, 'hippie' has become synonymous with everything from nymphomaniacs and drug addicts to rabble rousing mobs and a notoriously poor fashion aesthetic.

The 'hippie movement' traces its roots as far back as the Mazdakist movement in Persia, whose leader—the Persian reformer Mazdak—was amongst the first known advocates of communal living, the sharing of resources, vegetarianism and 'free love' translated to sexual freedom. In truth, most tend to center themselves around an offbeat, avant-garde branch of humanism that goes beyond most established definitions of freedom to encompass a more universal free-for-all. Amidst all the slurs pertaining to their allegedly poor sanitary habits and general inertia, what remains constant and compelling is the music.

While drugs may have been the common denominator uniting the 60s global atmosphere, the other was always the music itself. Wartime seemed to run seamlessly with revolution, resistance and anti-war campaigning. It is perhaps the latter that is acutely missing today.

Some argue that 'protest songs' were a product of the Vietnam War and that the pioneers of Woodstock, followed by The Beats in literature and ground activists continued their crusade long after the war against oppression was over, wherever and whenever it was in the world. "The world cared back then. It doesn't any more. I don't know why and I don't know if it ever will again but I know that right now no one cares to take to the streets singing songs anymore. No one really

believes in the power of a song the same way they did when Dylan took the stage or when Seeger sang "This Land is Your Land," says a musician friend Ethan, who performs in Washington Square Park, New York.

Either way, there is a gaping hole in sentiment in the world today. The outpouring of grief following 9/11, the distinct lack of it for global disasters before the twin towers came tumbling and its subsequent rehashing has somehow failed to provide enough impetus to spark some life back into the arts. This is surprising, and oddly, it is also a historical anomaly. Traditionally, for both better and worse, hard times have always provided a flourishing ground for counterculture and artistic expression. Today, we seem to be waiting for an ear-piercing rallying cry for peace and met instead by an overwhelming silence.

This doesn't mean of course that no one is singing, or writing, or drawing against oppression. What seems to be missing is the symbiosis of intention and action. "There are just so many causes these days that it has become nearly impossible to unite under one. We are all fighting so many battles, against poverty and ignorance and against terrorism and tribalism on the other. Women are slut walking to prove a point and men are camping out on Capitol Hill to take down Wall Street. Where do we fit in music and poetry?" says history professor Ammar Siddique.

One would assume more causes would mean more art by default. One would also think that this much rage would give birth to a generation of artists giving voice to the cause of their choice in the medium of their choosing. Collectively, as the human race, why are we not yelling for all the killing to stop? Or better put, why are 'enough' of us not yelling for it to stop. When did the ones vying for blood and vengeance swell to such sizeable ranks that the remainder decided it was no longer even worth the effort to keep up appearances? Why aren't there enough pro-peace rallies today? Why aren't little girls stepping up to army tanks and pushing in freshly plucked daisies to mortar mouths? Why are there no young men sporting Woodie Guthrie 'this machine kills fascists' guitar cases? And, why do none of us really believe that any of it could still work? What changed along the way and when?



Little Bird by Marta Swiecek

“

No matter where we are coming from, we need to push past this ominous, ever present **silence**. Silence was once what terrified people most but today it seems to have set in and congealed in the collective human conscience.

”

As far as Pakistan is concerned, our music has never really been political. It has been patriotic, but that is never really the same thing. "Protests and politics were always the domain of poetry. When it came to protest poetry ours was incomparable. We had Faiz and Jalib and they have Lawrence Ferlinghetti beat any day," says poet and historian AK Khaled. Today's Pakistan is flanked by battles on every front. One need only step out of their house to pick a cause and each cause we pick will unearth ten more. There is a veritable cesspool of coppers to complain about: beggary, corruption, illiteracy, patriarchy, fundamentalism, terrorism, lawlessness... the road goes on forever and the party never ends. And yet considering the flux of material to work with, art has fallen drastically short of the task. The poetry, prose, films, paintings, music... have all shied away from saying anything really big. Sure, there have been gems here and there and the most recent resuscitation of the National Student's Federation to promote the voice of the progressive youth, films such as Bol and bands like Beghairat Brigade and Laal have tried to stand against the tide, but their voices are simply not as loud as they need to be.

Some might say the problem lies in the nature of 'protest songs' themselves. By definition, protest songs are songs associated with a movement for social change... they tend to be topical and it is hard to narrow down a topic today. Wars are no longer fought against nations or along borders. The 21st century is the age of ideological battles calculated and cultivated on land. War on Terror, Occupy Wall Street, War on Drugs, War on Poverty, each of these cosmic battles encompasses global audiences and theoretical principles but sets them on a chess board manipulated by financial overlords. Previously, movements were time bound and often the spark of one cause ignited elsewhere in the world where it was needed and it spread on its own. This was clearly the case with the civil rights and women's suffrage movements. Today's world works in reverse; the cause starts globally and slowly begins to splinter into smaller and smaller target zones. This usually means that nations having nothing to do with the origins of the ideological battle get stuck with the baggage of other countries along with their own.

"In Pakistan, pro peace rallies have a hard time finding any support, because if we're honest peace isn't really what we're after. The people want peace but it's not a pacifist kind of peace... they want justice and retribu-

tion. They want someone to pay for what has been done to them and this is a place where 'an eye for an eye' will always, always trump 'turn the cheek' notions," says Malang and part-time cobbler Habeeb Shah.

If there is a peace narrative to be found in Pakistan, it is perhaps best located in Sufi music. As is the case with most things in the country, religion will always be one corner for most kinds of art. At least, most kinds of art that have any long term, grass root appeal and yet the version of 'faith' that does make it into revolutionary thought or art tends to be in a league of its own. Sufi songs inspired by centuries old poetry by Bulleh Shah and Sultan Bahu, serves as a vehicle against both bourgeois detachment and orthodox involvement in battle for the public sphere.

Bulleh Shah has been quoted as saying:

*Pee sharaab te kha kebab, heth baal haddan di ag
Bulleha bhan ghar rab da, ais thuggan de thug noo
thug*

(Drink your wine and eat your kebabs, roasting in the fires of bone

Oh Bullah, break into God's house and cheat the cheat of Cheats)

Over five centuries later, Canadian born legendary songwriter Leonard Cohen, in his anthem 'Democracy' echoes the sentiment:

It's coming from the sorrow in the street,
the holy places where the races meet;
from the homicidal bitchin' that goes down in every kitchen
to determine who will serve and who will eat

And honestly, who would ever undertake the futile task of trying to pinpoint the effectiveness of one verse over the other. Still, given the dearth of voices reacting to violence today, both the East and the West seem floundering in the discontented waters of their respective pasts. We all seem to be feeding off of this "great art of yore" theory rather than sustaining and regurgitating our current bitterness effectively. "People today are still living off the table scraps of the sixties. They are still being passed around - the music and the ideas," Dylan once said.

I am unsure of whether this is because we are too scared of creating something new in this bitter, ugly world or because we are simply too apathetic to believe in something new. After all, art is above all else,

a process of giving birth and there is too much anger out there for most newborn creations to survive the impending assault of censure, ridicule and bitterness that lurks behind every corner and in every critic.

No matter where we are coming from, we need to push past this ominous, ever present silence. Silence was once what terrified people most but today it seems to have set in and congealed in the collective human conscience. Nearly the entire human race is engaged in war today, in one form or the other and still most of this race also appears to have separated itself from the affects of its condition. Many of us have retreated behind silicon screens that allow us to post tidbits of ourselves and thereby prevent us from actually working long and hard to give voice to our rage in a cohesive and- more importantly- common voice.

In Pakistan, anti-war sentiment is viewed largely as a flailing Western past-time. It tends to be viewed as that luxury only available to those who have the choice to choose their own battles. For the rest of us, war is here whether or not we like it and 'peace mongering' has been dismissed as the cowardice of those unwilling to take a stand. In Pakistan, we tend to think of protest songs or pacifist songs as inherently American and thereby suspect by nature. The whole 'yes-we-canness' of classics like 'Blowin in the wind' and 'This Land is My Land' seems rooted in the seemingly arrogant notion that good things will always come your way. It involves a hope that we in Pakistan lost a long time ago and have since been struggling to recapture.

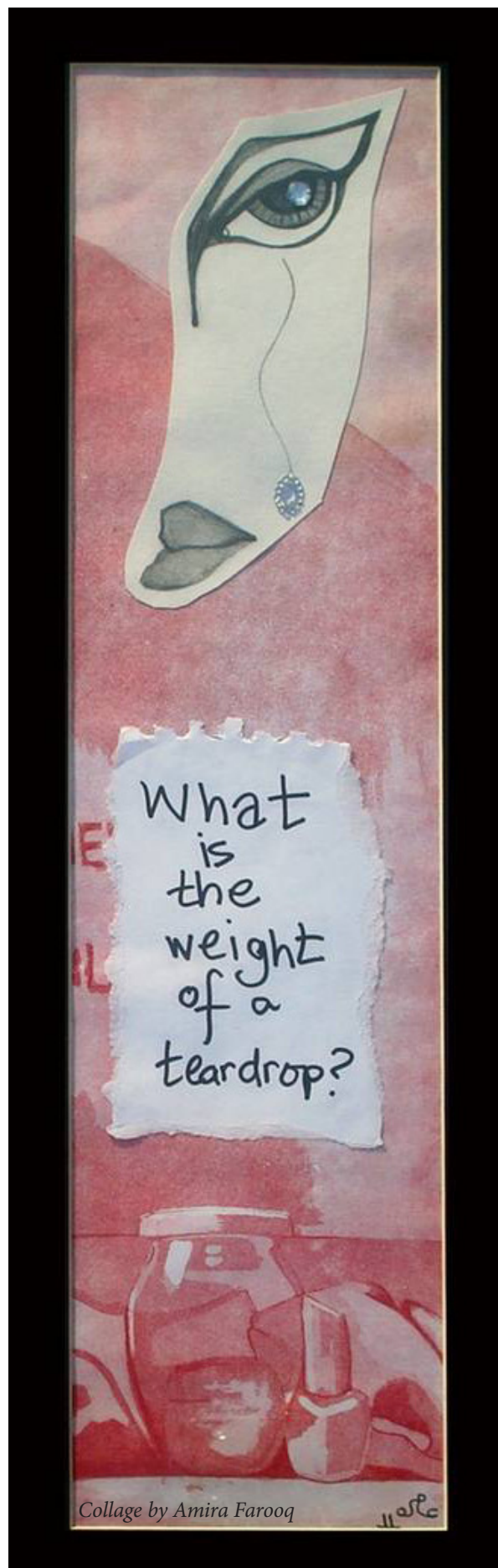
After all the best protest songs are by definition a perverse mixture of feel-good, feel-guilt and feel-motivated. Lennon's 'Imagine' and Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' both emanated from a deep-set belief in universal brotherhood that many in the world today separate themselves from in favour of tribalism, nationalism or multiculturalism.

Is it just that romanticism is dead and that no one is willing to cling to hope over lost pride any longer? Are we apathetic?

Or are we all too willing to lump all our inertia into the ever-widening public discourse of post-modernism that prevents us from needing to give it any voice beyond the white noise that already persists?

Because that is what a protest songs really is.

It is the noise that puts an end to all that white noise.



Collage by Amira Farooq

54 POETRY IN TRANSLATION

Ansikte mot ansikte

I februari stod levandet still.
 Fåglarna flög inte gärna och själen
 skavde mot landskapet så som en båt
 skaver mot bryggan den ligger förtöjd vid.
 Träden stod vända med ryggen hitåt.
 Snödjupet mättes av döda strån.
 Fotspåren åldrades ute på skaren.
 Under en presenning tynade språket.
 En dag kom någonting fram till fönstret.
 Arbetet stannade av, jag såg upp.
 Färgerna brann. Allt vände sig om.
 Marken och jag tog ett språng mot varann.

Face to Face

In February life stood still.
 The birds refused to fly and the soul
 grated against the landscape as a boat
 chafes against the jetty where it's moored.

The trees were turned away. The snow's depth
 Measured by the stubble poking through.
 The footprints grew old out on the ice-crust.
 Under a tarpaulin, the language was broken down.

Suddenly, something approaches the window.
 I stop working and look up.
 The colours blaze. Everything turns around.
 The earth and I spring at each other.

Robin Robertson**Face to Face**

In February living stood still.
 The birds flew unwilling and the soul
 chafed against the landscape as a boat
 chafes against the pier it lies moored to.
 The trees stood with their backs turned towards me.
 The deep snow was measured with dead straws.
 The footprints grew old out on the crust.
 Under a tarpaulin language pined.
 One day something came to the window.
 Work was dropped, I looked up.
 The colors flared. Everything turned round.
 The earth and I sprang towards each other.

Robin Fulton

TRANSLATING TRANSTRÖMER

by Jacob Silkstone

The art of translation may be a dying one.

The reaction to Tomas Tranströmer's Nobel Prize made it clear that one person's 'obscure Swedish poet' is another's literary superstar. While Sigrid Rausing, writing in *Granta*, was of the opinion that 'no poet expresses better the drift between now, then, and eternity', Hephzibah Anderson, perhaps best known as the author of *Chastened: No More Sex In The City* (a harrowing account of a year spent fending off men who desperately wanted to sleep with her), was happy to dismiss Tranströmer as 'one of those arcane names that draw perennial bets from Nobel-watchers fond of mocking the Swedish Academy.' Philip Hensher weighed in with a mean-spirited article ranking Tranströmer alongside other 'Swedish' winners (including the Norwegian Bjørnsterne Bjørnson and the German Nelly Sachs) of the prize, concluding that 'Time has shown every single Swedish winner of the prize to be 'a little phenomenon of no interest' outside their own country.'

For a few weeks in October, anyone who was anyone in the literary world had something to say about Tomas Tranströmer. Unfortunately, very few had anything to say about his poetry. Hephzibah Anderson's article didn't quote a single line, while Hensher restricted himself to an English translation of 'a haiku, which perhaps has more of a swing to it in Swedish.' It seems safe to suggest that he made no attempt to locate the original.

Armed only with an online dictionary and a Scandinavian girlfriend, I set out to discover whether Tranströmer's poetry really did have more of a swing in Swedish, tracking down a piece called 'Ansikte mot ansikte' together with two alternative English translations (both entitled 'Face to Face') by Robin Robertson and Robin Fulton. The two Robins have something of a history, engaging in an acrimonious exchange of opinions after Robertson published *The Deleted World*, his 'versions' of Tranströmer, in 2006. Fulton wrote to the *TLS* to suggest that 'wittingly or unwittingly, Robertson makes arbitrary changes to the Swedish, a language he does not seem to understand.' John Burnside wrote back, arguing that 'arbitrary changes' were defensible on the grounds that 'the true test of a translation or version is, or should be, how well it conveys [the poem's] spirit... Its subtleties, its suggestions, its fabric of music and nu-

ance.'

The debate over the task of translation, or perhaps even the possibility of translation, falls into that especially stimulating category of debates which can never be satisfactorily concluded. As far back as Petrarch, translation was a thorny issue: the great Italian poet decided that 'translation should be similar [to the original] but not the very same, and the similarity should not be like that of a painting or a statue to the person represented, but rather like that of a son to a father.' Since and before, translators have struggled to find the right balance between the two types of resemblance, treading the fine line between lifeless line-by-line reproductions and cavalier rewrites which conveniently leave the original behind.

Nabokov favoured literal translations over 'periphrastic' attempts to tamper with the original text; Lowell privileged tone over meaning in his 1961 *Imitations*. Robin Fulton is closer to Nabokov's camp; Robertson is closer to Lowell's. See, for example, the second and third stanzas of *Face to Face*: Robin Fulton sticks as closely as possible to the original Swedish (matching 'döda strån' with 'dead straws', while Robertson goes for 'stubble'), and Robertson takes liberties with the original text while attempting to produce a more coherent English poem. Robertson's decision to alter the tense of the final stanza (Tranströmer's is entirely in the past tense, Robertson's entirely in the present) is almost inexplicable, unless you choose to believe that the present tense adds an immediacy to the last lines of the poem. Fulton's 'one day' is an obvious match for Tranströmer's 'en dag'; Robertson goes for 'suddenly', which perhaps has more of an effect on the reader.

In the poem's opening stanza, the differences between the two translations seem, to me at least, more subtle. Notice that Robertson avoids the near-repetition of 'skavde/skaver' by substituting 'grated' for Fulton's 'chafed', and that his 'life' is further from 'levandet' than Fulton's 'living.' The major difference in the opening line is that Robertson's birds are, rather implausibly, refusing to fly and Fulton's are airborne but 'unwilling.' The original Swedish line has the birds flying 'inte gärne.'

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'Inte' (meaning 'not') is easy enough to translate; 'gärne' is perhaps more idiomatic, but 'willing' is as close as we're likely to get.

Anyone with the vaguest interest in translating poetry is likely to have heard Frost's dictum that 'poetry is what gets lost in translation.' Joseph Brodsky, on the other hand, defined poetry as 'what is gained in translation.' So what is lost or gained in the shift between Swedish Tranströmer and English Tranströmer? Firstly, there are words in Swedish, and moods in Swedish, which are difficult to replicate. Those reluctant birds, beaten down by winter, don't quite fit into an English landscape, and neither does 'skaren', the crust of ice formed overnight on the cold snow. Robertson glosses 'skaren' as ice-crust, which doesn't really seem to help. Those gloomy 'ö' and 'å' sounds (båt, snö, döda strån) are lost (although Fulton at least manages moored/straws), and the last line seems reduced in both English versions. Robertson's version has a little more metrical zip than Fulton's, but I'm not at all sure it 'conveys the spirit' of the original poem any more clearly.

Let's not waste too much time bemoaning the slippage between language and language. The important thing is surely to celebrate the existence of Tranströmer's work in English. As Ezra Pound (master craftsmen, gifted linguist, fascist sympathiser) once noted, 'English literature lives on translations, it is fed by translations... every allegedly great age is an age of translations, beginning with Geoffrey Chaucer.' And ending who knows where...

“

As far back as Petrarch, translation was a thorny issue: the great Italian poet decided that 'translation should be similar [to the original] but not the very same, and the similarity should not be like that of a painting or a statue to the person represented, but rather like that of a son to a father.

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Collage by Amira Farooq

58 SPOTLIGHT WRITER: M L LIEBLER

M. L. Liebler: Charting the fine line between poetry and music

Interviewed by Omri Luzon

M. L. Liebler: Charting the fine line between poetry and music

Interviewed by Omri J. Luzon

M. L. Liebler is an internationally known & widely published Detroit poet, college professor and literary arts activist. He is the author of 13 books including the award-winning 'Wide Awake in Someone Else's Dream' (Wayne State University Press 2008) featuring poems written in and about Russia, Israel, Germany, Alaska and Detroit. Wide Awake won both The Paterson Poetry Prize for Literary Excellence and The American Indie Book Award for 2009. In 2005, he was named St. Clair Shores' first Poet Laureate. In 2010, he received The Barnes & Noble Poets & Writers Writers for Writers Award with Maxine Hong Kingston & Junot Diaz.

In this intimate interview, TMS Senior Articles Editor Omri Luzon sits down with Mr Liebler to discuss his world view, work and his thoughts on the world as he sees it.

What is the first thing you look for when you open a fresh new book?

I like my books like Woody Allen films—SHORT under 200 pages if possible.

What time of day is best for your writing?

Very, very early in the morning until about 9am ish—that's when the muse leaves town.

Why have you chosen to use music as part of your presentation?

I started to add music to get first time listeners to give poetry a chance. Coming from a non-intellectual or artistic background, I wanted to help people take an interest in the arts. Music is a universal language, that added to anything [really] creates something new and different.

I think we can safely say that what you do in your readings is unique. What has the response been?

People have always responded well to what I do since I started [in the mid 70s]. When first-time poetry audiences tell me that they had no idea that poetry could be so accessible, I knew I was doing it right.

You've cooperated with The Magic Band, Al Kooper, Country Joe McDonald, The High Strung, and more. Are you sure that you are a poet and not a musician in disguise?

I am very conscious of remaining a poet. I tend to walk the fine line between the spoken word and singing. I like audiences and listeners to question the experience. There are thousands of rock bands and musical artists, but there are only a handful of "poetry bands." It's smart business, so to speak.

"The politics of Detroit / Go beyond arguing fresco vs. classic, / Or any something vs. anything." (Save the Frescoes That Are Us). What role have your political views played in your work? Should politics play a part in poetry?

My poetry deals with both the politics of living and society, and spirituality and God. I happen to see common ground between these two concepts, and that is exactly where The Catholic Worker Movement fits in for me. The movement feeds both my political views and interests and my need for God in my life.

"So, while I would really love

To write a poem for Allen Ginsberg,

Like everyone else, right now

It seems more important for me to capture

My neighbor's life,"

There are seeds of revolution in your words, revolting against the conservative idea of poetry, the academic approach, the high ideal of poetry. What is poetry's relation to an average person?

The job of the poet is to bring the truth to his/her society, neighborhood, community or at least offer dif-

ferent views on culture, issues and politics, so listeners and readers can discover new ways of looking at life and all its issues.

What is the importance of poetry in your eyes?

I'm going to quote Allen Ginsberg here: "to ease the suffering of everyday life for people...all else is a drunken dumb show."

Do you think art can make an impact on the world?

Art can change everything and open people's minds to the "new." They just need a way to feel comfortable with this idea. I think music helps make it easier and real for folks.

They say that poetry is being marginalized, do you think it has something to do with the heavy connotation that accompanies the word Poetry, or is there something else going on?

Poetry in America has always been marginalized. Poetry gets people to think outside the box. Once folks start thinking outside the box, the next thing they do is question those in authority who hold control over their lives. I always tell my students that "poetry and coffee are dangerous and lead to revolutions." This scares the hell out of those in power, so they'll always try to squash and marginalize it.

Emerson said an individual should develop his thoughts, even if they contradict one another. There's a bit of a contradiction about you – on the one hand the idea of the academic life, on the other the poetry and art that deal with revolting against academia. How do the two sit together?

That's an interesting question. My life's been a contradiction on so many levels, but it all adds up to a very interesting experience. As an artist I'm interested in the randomness of everything but I also live a very organized and mundane life. I've been with the same woman since I was 14, lived in the same neighborhood, etc. I think George Harrison (The Beatles) said it best:

Sometimes my life it seems like fiction
Some of the days it's really quite serene

I'm a living proof of all life's contradictions
One half's going where the other half's just been

59

Next up for the artist/poet is the memoir *Hound Dog: A brief memoir of Rock, Revolution & Grace*, a collection of new and selected essays entitled *Underneath My American Face: Poems, Stories and Essays* and a new audio CD with Moby Grape's Peter Lewis, Coyote & The Monk due this summer.

Below: Dancer by Amira Farooq



6 THROUGH WINDOWS

by Michael Owen Fisher

6 FEB 2009

Iain is washing up when a light comes on across the quadrangle. He sees a smudge of movement in the window opposite him and reaches for his glasses. A young woman is clasping a towel to her chest. Iain drops to the floor, scurries on all fours across the lino, and flicks off the kitchen light. The woman pauses in the centre of her bedroom and pads herself dry. Iain's mouth lolls open as he shuffles on the draining board, attempting to find a clear line of vision through the candles on her windowsill. The rubber gloves trail suds across his fly.

Rachel pulls the duvet further up her body and twists onto her side, so that her head rests a metre from the screen. The TV licks her face with red flecks. "Finished?" she asks.

"Yes, all done," Iain replies, moving from the doorway of their marital bedroom into the en suite bathroom. He cleans his teeth every morning and evening in their en suite rather than the larger bathroom at the end of the flat. "You looking forward to seeing your mum tomorrow?"

Rachel's eyes laze on the TV.

"Rachel?"

"Mmm?"

"Should be fun. The trip with your mum. Tomorrow."

She closes her eyes. "Yes."

"We've reached that time again," the host announces over the game show's incidental hum.

Iain reaches across the bed. Rachel's nose twitches, as if she were able to sense her husband's hand hovering above her arm.

"Goodnight," he says. "You sleep well."

7 FEB 2009, afternoon

Iain listens to Barbara's footsteps echoing up the block. She stops on the third floor landing and drops her head to one side, feigning exhaustion.

"So many stairs," she says, "don't know how you

do this every day?"

"Good journey?" Iain asks. He bends forward to kiss his mother-in-law. Her cheeks are pink, downy, and cold.

"Not too bad. Slight hold up around Crowborough."

They look at each other, then at the hall floor.

"How's she been?" Barbara asks.

"It's ok." Iain puffs out a cheek and focuses on the space beside the front door. "You know. We're doing ok. She's been drawing a lot. Really got into it, as the doctor suggested. Little sketches of buildings. Skyscrapers. Which is good, I think. A good hobby."

Barbara opens her arms. She has dyed her hair late-summer brown this morning. Iain smells a trace of ammonia as he presses against her soft pastel wools.

"Little Eiffel Towers," he says, laughing.

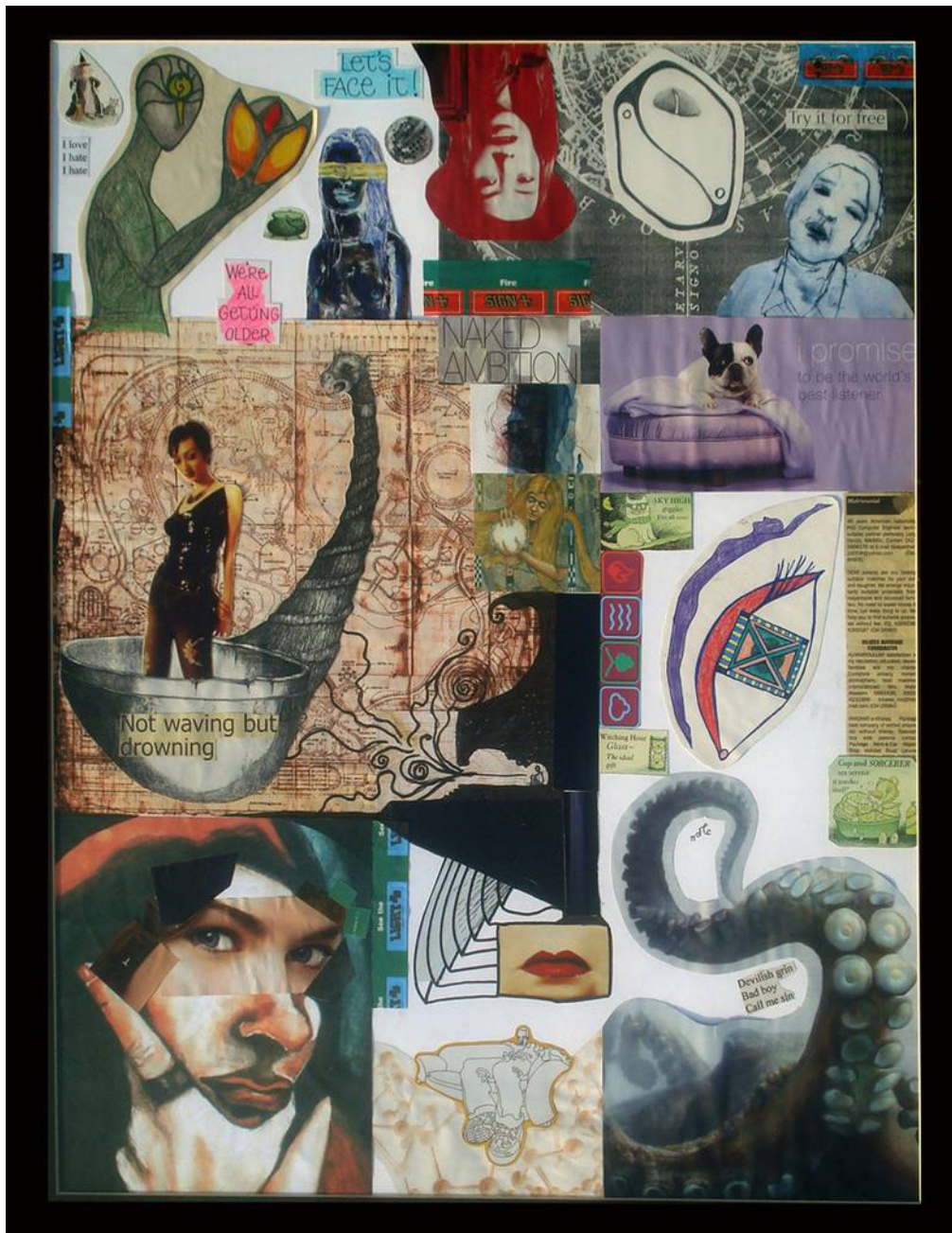
Rachel fumbles with her jacket as she enters the hallway. She looks up and her mouth curls into a rictus. "I'm ready," she says, "if you are mum."

Iain drowns on his bed, and the damp winter sun drops low. He thinks about the woman in the window. Her shallow curves and her skin, mannequin smooth. Stray light from the quadrangle wisps across the ceiling and hangs over the black of his eyes.

18 JAN 2008

Rachel is home. She is Iain's wife of nineteen years. Rachel is a retail consultant for a large pharmaceutical firm. She plays the clarinet, but less often than she would like, watches legal dramas, and enjoys reading novels by Maeve Binchy and Alan Hollinghurst. She is E(xtroversion), (i)N(tuition), F(eeling), J(udging) on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. When she is confused her eyes circle round and round like a child's toy. She loves cuddles.

Iain forms a letter T with his forefingers, which is the couple's shortcut for "do you want tea?" Rachel sits on their sofa, caressing the underside of her chin and



Collage by Amira Farooq

62 staring past him into the plane-scarred sky. She fails to see her husband's question.

"Any tea?" he asks.

"I'm ok for now."

"Sure? We've got some Lady Grey in, or builders' tea."

"I'm alright."

Beside Rachel is a family photo in which Adam has shoulder-length hair. Iain wears an iron grey sweater, the one that made him look thinner but later began to unravel at the sleeves. Rachel wears a skirt that lets through sunlight. She is leaning into her son's shoulder, laughing.

"Adam's going to phone this evening," Iain says.

Rachel moves a hand up and down her cheek. The sun crawls from behind a small cloud, setting off slow-motion explosions on the steel and glass of the office block across the road.

"Good. That'll be good."

7 FEB 2009, evening

Here is Iain at his desk, wearing a smart black shirt. Outside is dusky. The windows around the quadrangle glow solar yellow, as if they were soaking up the sunset. A baby's cry thrums, hangs, and distracts Iain from the parity product graphs on his laptop screen. The girl hurries into her room and tosses her hat onto the bed. Her hair tumbles across her shoulders. Iain scrolls down the jags and spikes of the graphs and pretends to make notes in his writing pad. Her face is flushed. She removes her jeans and heavy winter coat and disappears into a wardrobe. Iain presses his pen to his lips and stares academically into the night sky, his eyes squinting and unsquinting as if he were zeroing in on a thought. The girl emerges from the wardrobe holding a green dress, and her eyes skip across the quadrangle. He exhales. Sighs Jesus. His flat door clicks open.

"We're back."

15 MARCH 2008

Iain watches Tod Browning's 1931 version of *Dracula* late at night and is taken aback by the similarity between Dwight Frye's unhinged expressions as the dark prince's servant, Renfield, and his wife's smile.

9 FEB 2009

Iain rummages in his clothes cupboard. Water runs and stutters into confluences down to the towel around his waist. The young woman is curled on a chair in her dressing gown, eating from a bowl. Her bedroom is lit in muted yellow, but brighter light pulses from a TV in a hidden corner of the room. Iain dabs his hairy torso with the towel and waters a plant on the windowsill with his free hand. His midriff has the firm, buttery swelling of middle age. The woman removes her dressing gown and moves about her room in a knee-length negligee, which gleams like sun-drenched fuel. On Iain's desk are the latest pupilometrics data for the prototype Eos double-page spread, which features every colour in the Eos range: chocolate, crimson, caramello, mother-of-pearl, ivory, coral/aqua. As Iain suspected, crimson and coral/aqua elicit the strongest responses. He holds one of the data sheets, his eyes narrowing in faux-concentration. The towel has made his skin pink. The girl stretches forward to close her curtains, allowing Iain to see the swell of her breasts. She smiles and produces an equivocal movement with her hand, which Iain interprets as a wave. Her curtains close.

15 APRIL 2008

Dr. Gianakos edges the acetate sheet across his desk and waves his pen over Rachel's forebrain. "It's here we've seen . . . where we have found something of note. The forebrain, here," the doctor says, lifting his long fringe and massaging his forehead, "exposed to the bony ridges inside the skull is, I mean, it's probably the most vulnerable part of the brain."

Iain nods, his eyes fixed on Rachel's indigo brain, which the doctor has illuminated on a mobile electronic tablet.

"Rachel has damaged a specific part of these frontal lobes. It's easy for this to happen in a crash. I mean, the effects are varied, but some damage, temporary or otherwise, is common." The young neuropsychologist draws a squiggle in the air over Rachel's frontal lobes. "There is such a high chance of—"

"So . . ."

"Yes." The doctor shifts upright in his chair, and now he nods, encouraging Iain to speak.

"So this part of her brain is affecting her emotions. Has changed her . . ."

"Yes, exactly. Damage here explains this . . . this

emotional void she has developed.” Dr. Gianakos pauses, anticipating another question, but Iain has glazed over. The doctor’s hand fans and contracts on the desk. His tone becomes more subdued. “You mentioned Rachel’s outbursts. I mean, this is an associated sign. The frontal lobes, one of their jobs is censorship. Screening out this aggression and certain . . . primitive urges.”

On the doctor’s desk, beside the brain scan and propped on the rear of a framed photo, is a wide-eyed, white-coated bear holding a stethoscope in its paw. Iain leans on the desk and toys with the bear’s fur.

“And.”

“Yes,” Dr. Gianakos says.

“And in the long run?”

11 FEB 2009

Behind the frosted glass of their flat door is a tall silhouette. Rachel is motionless on the marital bed, except for micro-movements of her eyes across the TV screen. The bell rings for a second time and Iain opens the door.

“Hello sir. I was wondering if I could come in for just a brief moment.”

“Yes, yes, come in,” Iain says. His voice rises an octave mid-sentence. “Tea? Can I get you some tea?”

“No thank you. It’s just a brief visit actually sir.”

Rachel stands in the bedroom doorway, tugging her dressing gown across her chest. The policeman nods hello to her before turning back to Iain. “Is there a room we could pop into briefly, sir?”

21 JULY 2008

Iain has been with Cook & Magris, part of the Praesto Group, for eighteen years, for the previous five of which he has been a creative director. He is respected within the company for his understatement and gently-delivered assessments, especially of product life cycles, and for his analyses of parity products. Today Iain plans to commute to Cook & Magris’s London offices once Rachel and he have finished at the Centre for Clinical Wellbeing. He holds his briefcase between his feet. The cognitive therapist’s room is stuffy even though she has left open her awning window. Through the window waft summer scents: dead air, clean grass and the soapy, carnal smells of plants yielding and opening.

“Rachel, do you feel as though any changes have

taken place in you since the accident?” Dr. Leighton asks. She has the poise of someone trained to avoid unnecessary movements and maintains her expression of professional sympathy while she waits for Rachel’s response.

“The main thing is, I don’t worry about things.”

“And is that a good feeling?”

“Yes.”

“It is good?”

“Yes. I only worry about how I feel in the morning. Sometimes I feel . . . bored. I think that’s it. Bored. Or restless.”

Dr. Leighton writes in her notebook. Iain watches the trees rustle outside and pictures the doctor, in black spandex, ordering him to remove his trousers.

“And Rachel, when you say you don’t worry, does that mean you don’t care about anything?”

“That . . . I think so.”

“Do you care about Iain?”

Both the doctor and Rachel glance at Iain, who is knifing his nose with his fingertips.

“I suppose so.”

“Do you love him?”

“Oh yes. Course.” Rachel’s lips contort into another Renfield Smile. Over the preceding weeks it has dawned on Iain that, although she spots cues and produces appropriate and well-timed facial responses, his wife has forgotten why she smiles.

“And what does the love feel like?”

“I don’t know. It’s good having him around. We’ve been together so many years.”

Dr Leighton’s hand whirrs across her notepad. She nods encouragement, her head sweeping down in slow arcs. Her hair is fizzy red. Iain imagines how it would feel on his skin.

“I don’t know.”

11 FEB 2009

A wedge of amber light shines from the top of the girl’s window, where the curtains have failed to meet. The policeman leans from Iain’s bedroom window, nodding to himself, satisfying himself with something or other.

“Can I ask,” Iain says, “who reported this . . . what

64 would you call it? Display?"

"Public indecency is the term that tends to be used." The policeman plays a couple of scales across the sill. "And I think we both know sir, for me to reveal that sort of information is a hostage to fortune."

15 MAY 1987

Gianni's lighting is low. Rachel and Iain sit opposite each other on a small table near the window. Every curl of lip, change of timbre, and head movement is precise and measured. The restaurant is busy. They watch their waiter hurry back to the kitchen.

"He's funny," Rachel says.

Iain imitates the waiter, dipping his head with exaggerated deference, and they both laugh. "Yeah, he sounded like the skeleton from the Scotch tape ad." He begins swaying his head to a private rhythm.

Rachel raises an eyebrow.

"Tape what you want both night and day," Iain chants, tapping out the beats between lines in the air. "Then rerecord, not fade away."

She grins.

"Rerecord, not fade away," they repeat in unison. Rachel rocks back in her chair, giggling, hitting an angle where her filigree brooch reflects the candlelight onto her face. "He does."

Iain wears chunky-rimmed Cazal glasses. His hair is wiry and big, and he has a habit of stretching his facial muscles by flexing his jaw to his chest, which action refreshes his eyes but results in his mouth opening in the style of a horror film still or the figure in *The Scream*.

Rachel tells him about her cat, how she loves that almost every meal in South America is served with popcorn, and of her fascination with tall buildings. Whenever she struggles to remember a name, her nose crimps and puckers, and the small muscles above her eyes knot so that she resembles a person trying to scratch their head without using any hands. Iain steals looks up and down her purple dress and makes an effort to avoid stretching his facial muscles. Gianni's empties around them.

18 FEB 2009

The exposure data from 2007's Maia campaign falls into the range Iain envisaged, and, in his opinion, justifies the ramped-up DAGMAR he has been pushing

for Amy's new Eos range. He scrolls down the spreadsheet on his laptop one more time. An architect's lamp illuminates the prototype Eos spread beside his computer.

To bring a Smile to Your face, and His

Most of the windows around the quadrangle are asleep, but Iain's attention is caught by a fourth floor flat in the opposite block. In the curtains' slight opening he sees a shift in the varieties of black, a shadow of shadows forming, then stillness. Iain stands and tilts forward over his desk to improve his view of the window. Seconds later the curtains ruffle and close.

The young woman's curtains are closed too. They have been for several days, ever since the policeman's visit. Iain feels beneath the folders and papers in his desk drawer. He pulls out a jiffy bag, on which he has scrawled the woman's address in thick black felt tip. Inside the bag is a mother-of-pearl Eos bra. The new Eos range has embroidered tulle and a high cotton percentage for maximum comfort, no underwiring, and a macramé lace balconette. Iain runs one hand across its surface and rereads the note he has paper-clipped to the strap. He puffs out his cheeks and reburies the jiffy bag at the bottom of the drawer.

Iain pulls on his pyjama bottoms and leaves the room. The door to the marital bedroom is ajar and from it light leaks into the hallway. He pauses by the door, bends forward and peers through the gap, which is no more than a pupil's width. Rachel is standing in front of the mirror, examining her body, lifting and kneading her heavy breasts. She mumbles as she jerks a comb through her hair. Iain watches with one eye pressed into the thin band of light. His face hangs post-coma blank. Rachel sets down her comb on the dressing table and turns to face the quadrangle. Her nose crinkles, and she presses herself up against the cold window pane.

Michael Owen Fisher is a 31-year-old writer from Brighton. His stories have been published in several magazines, most recently Riptide and Bewilderbliss. He is working on his first novel.

SPOTLIGHT ARTIST: AMIRA FAROOQ



Creative Director Moeed Tariq sits down with Amira Farooq to find out what makes her tick, where she draws her inspiration and her quirks from. Amira was born n bred in Lahore, Pakistan. Trained at the National College of Arts, she received her degree in Fine Arts in the department of print making in 2004. Since 2006 she has been working as a full time Visual Artist. Her philosophy is simple. There isn't one. Everything is fluid and the quest is for the truth. If you see a cage break it.



FAMOUS

The Way of Fleck



Women in Islam

ALMOST



OUS



facials





People are Talk
The silence c

only in a
WOMAN'S WORLD



I am with you.



5!! 5!!

no/c

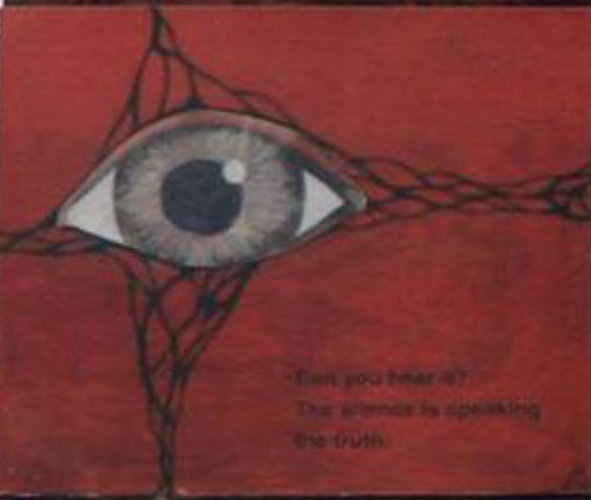


I have slept every night
With the knowledge
That it's still the same bed

king about
of women



your slip is
showing



Can you hear it?
The silence is speaking
the truth.



Under my control



What's a day in your life like?

A day in my life is never the same. I just live and when inspiration comes I paint.

Your work in five words.

Colorful, blunt, thought provoking, conceptual, unique.

You've dabbled in many different things over the years. When did you decide you were going to be a painter and what made you stick to it?

More than any external deciding factor, let's just say art is pretty much the only thing that came naturally to me. Once I got to NCA, I discovered that there was so much else out there so I took my time 'dabbling' as you put it, in TV, modeling and mime. After a year, I realized it wasn't as satisfying as painting and art in general. That said, I think sticking to one form of creativity is detrimental to aesthetic and conceptual growth. I still love to collaborate with individuals from other creative fields – it can only enhance my perspective.

Your work is very direct. How much of your own processes actually end up on canvas?

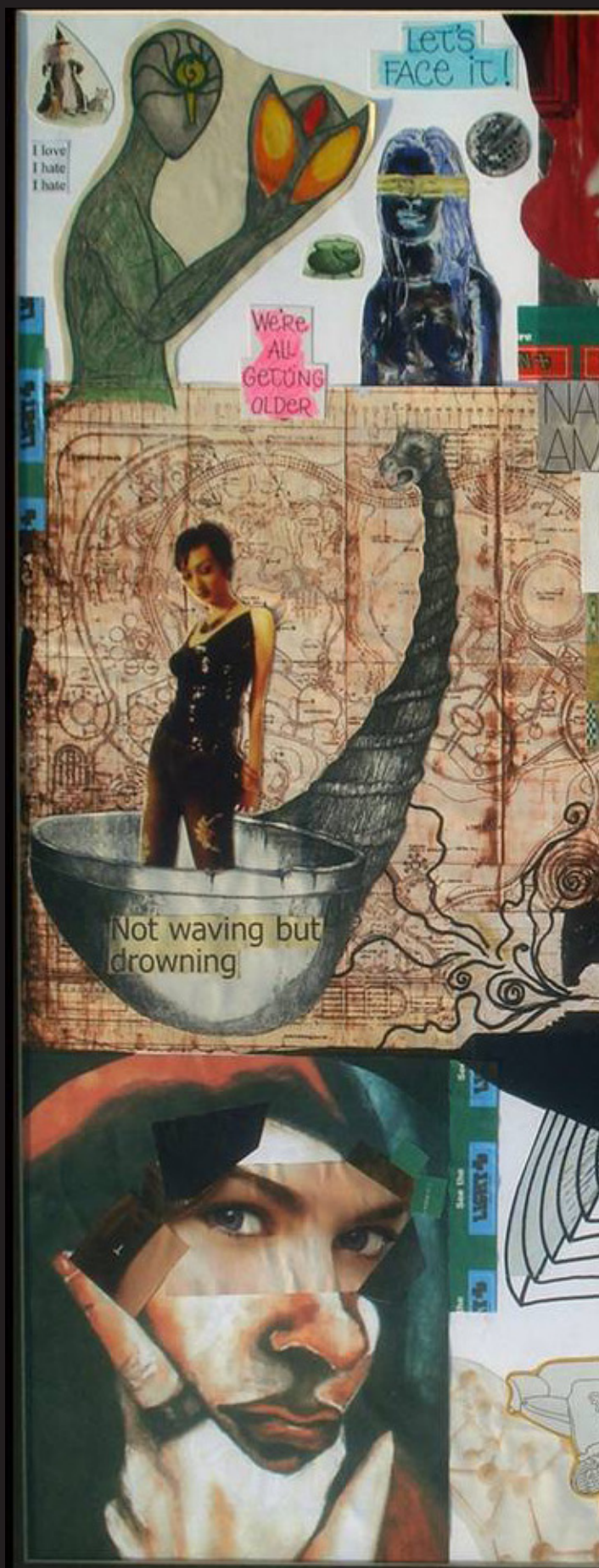
I don't think any artist can say that they get exactly what they visualized onto the canvas; the image or concept always evolves based on the technical processes involved. Some paintings work more than others. If I started feeling too content with my work, I'd probably change careers!

Is there a recurrent theme in your creations?

Spirituality and the quest for emotional truth are usually my most recurrent themes.

Over the years, you've ended up seeing both sides to many coins. Do you think it's important for an artist to walk the tightrope between all opposites for life?

Johnny Cash called it 'walking the line', and yes I believe that artists do need to walk the line between darkness and the light to gain a real perspective. That said, I do not believe that artists are above judgment or reproach. I disagree with using artistic licence to justify bad behavior. Every human being is a shade of gray. No



one is all black or white. Artists just happen to be more honest about it.

If you could legalize one drug of choice in the country what would it be?

Love. It's the only 'drug' we really need as a nation. We've turned into nation of haters and it's time to medicate.

Which of the currently prevailing social problems in our country do you feel the most strongly about?

I feel that the social problem most ignored (and the most important globally) is that there is absolutely no regard or protection for the soul. As far as I'm concerned, humanity has spent enough time on matter. It's time to focus on the spirit.

What do you think of the other artists your age out there in the country?

I think my generation of artists is producing some interesting work. Every one of them has something to say and they all deserve to be heard.

If you could exhibit anywhere in the world where would it be and why?

It would probably be the Great Wall of China. A painting or a piece by me after every mile. Imagine that, taking a journey to see all of my work.

Guilty pleasures and pet peeves?

Don't believe in feeling guilty about pleasures. As far as pet peeves go I can't stand bad manners and unclean people, places and intentions.

You're reclusive, why is that?

Being reclusive gives me the opportunity to re-view my life and experiences, and draw knowledge from them. I need thinking time and being around people doesn't help the meditative process.

Any advice for young artists just starting out?

You are either born into art or not. Those who are born into it, my advice would be to never sell out.

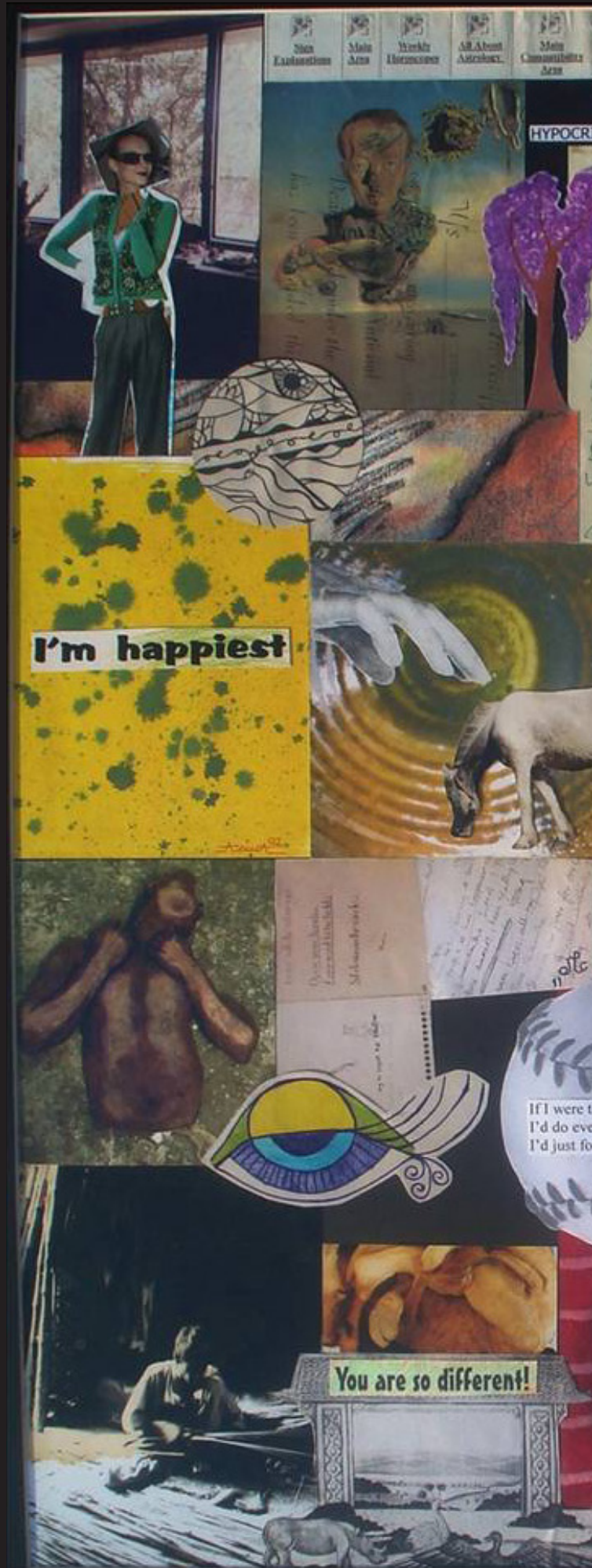


You don't need to be commercial to succeed. Be yourself because no one else can be you

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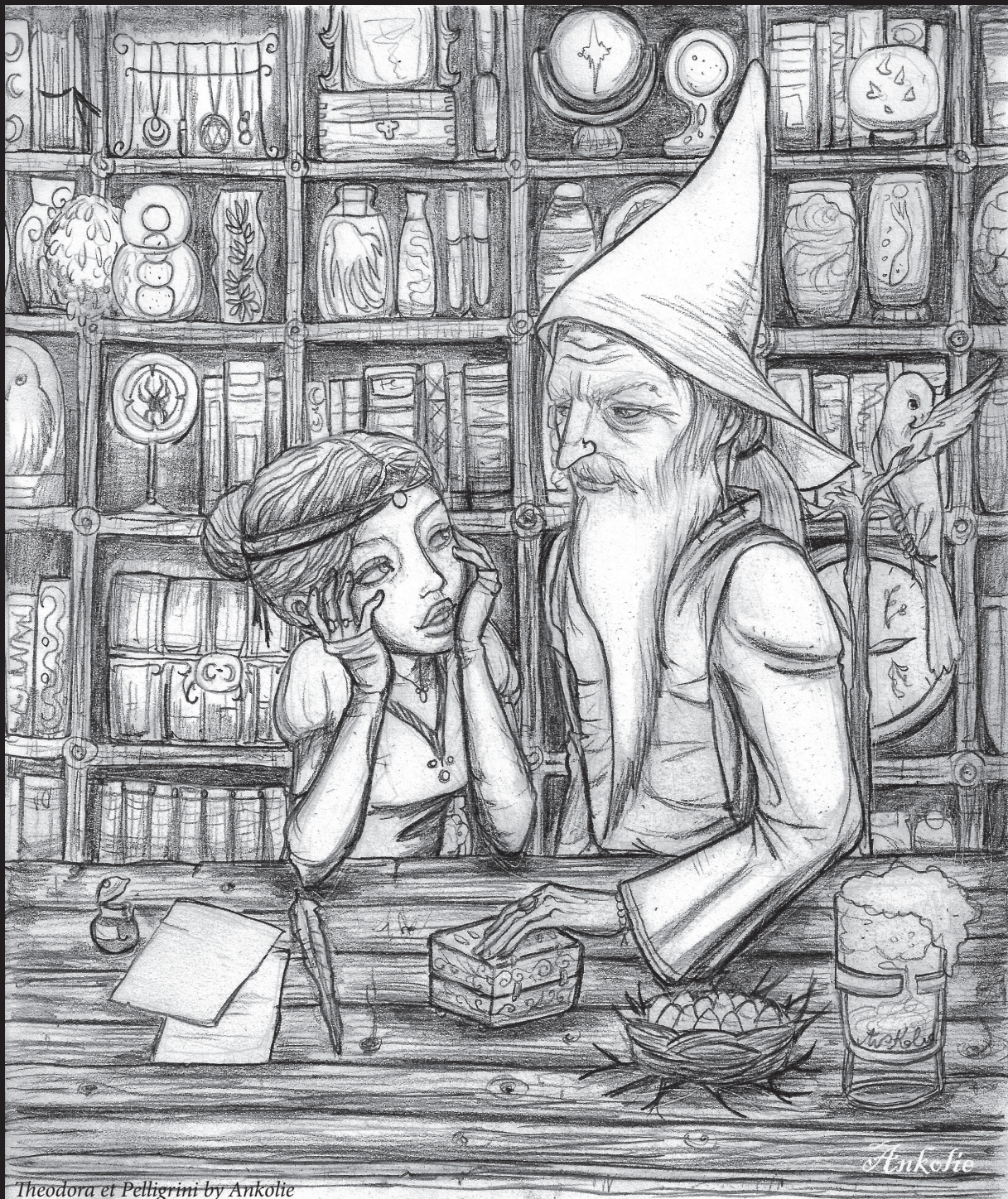
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SPOTLIGHT ARTIST: ANKOLIE





Him by Ankolie



Theodora et Pelligrini by Ankotie

Your work would be right at home in an Enid Blyton book. Who were your favourite authors growing up?

First of all, thanks! I'm very flattered to be associated with Enid Blyton! When I was little, I started reading my mother's books pretty quickly. At age 11, I was reading Bukowski (without understanding everything) and many more, including Simone de Beauvoir, Marcel Proust or John Irving.

I also read what was recommended to me at school, and when I liked an author, I read more of their books. That way I learned about and enjoyed Jules Renard, René Goscinny or the Countess of Ségur.

Later I got into the classic SF of Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke and horror stories from Stephen King, Clive Barker or Dean Koontz.

Can you recall the first drawing you ever made,

what was it?

I honestly can't remember my first drawing, there were so many. My mom tried to keep the most important ones but she gave up soon after. Like many illustrators, I feel like I always drew. The best thing my mother did for me was putting a black pen and blank sheets of paper in my hands. I was often sick as a child, so drawing was another world for me.

Later on I spent hours watching people in the bus, in the streets so I could draw them. I drew everywhere, even in the classroom. I'd rather draw than go out and see the outside world, it actually never changed. I'd much rather spend days (and nights) drawing and painting than see actual people.

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

Mostly music. Not so much the lyrics, but the mood, the atmosphere. It's all about the mood. If I'm depressed, I'll need some time to make a colourful/joyful illustration. In order to achieve that, I'll listen to music that corresponds to the mood I want/need to be in, and after a couple of tracks, I'm good to go. Which is actually pretty useful : if I have to draw something dark/haunted, I'll listen to Nine Inch Nails/Trent Reznor. If I need something more child-like, it's gonna be Ravel. I guess I'm programming my brain a certain way.

I don't really have other inspiration sources, other than sudden flashes.

Are there any artists in particular that you admire?

I've always adored HR Giger, since the beginning. I remember saving money to buy his books, which I flipped and flicked constantly. I've always considered his work as out of the ordinary, and he's probably the reason why I've been attracted to erotic art.

Enki Bilal also played a major role. The purity of his drawing line, his palette are still unrivalled today.

I'm also very interested in 70s/80s hand-drawn SF/horror book covers, many of them were fantastic. I also really like Paul Kidby's work with Terry Pratchett.

Tell us a little about life in Belgium and if that has affected your work in anyway?

There's not many graphic artists here. We do have some, but not much new blood. I may be wrong, of

course, but it's the impression I get. I grew up in a place that wasn't culturally challenging. My mother helped me to rise above the surrounding moroseness, so to speak. She was the only extraverted person around, and she helped me, years before the internet, to reach the artistic world. But because of/thanks to my work, I never really felt like I was living here. I feel like life here is so boring.

But on the plus side, Belgium is well-located in Europe, so it's pretty easy to go about anywhere. I recently went to Paris for a day, and I couldn't stop staring at people, they were so... pretty. Here it feels like everyone looks like everyone else. Still, I know people, friends, who are like me. And I'm lucky enough to live with someone like-minded.

You love using bold colors in your work, even in pieces with a dark subject matter, how important do you think color is when it comes to setting the mood for a picture?

Funny you'd say that, because only recently a local artist told me I had issues with colours, that they were bland. I'm glad you can see the use of bold colours, I guess I got better. Or maybe he was jealous?

A photographer friend of mine told me that a touch of colour can change everything, and I think he's right. In the beginning, I found it hard to find and use the right colours, probably because I draw before I color/paint. Using digital techniques and watercolour helped me a lot, and made me get better, even if I'm still very far from perfection.

I also specialise in old stuff. The colour of old paper, of the rusted tin box adds authenticity to the drawing. I like to switch from a simple drawing with an antique background (in brown, red and beige) to a fully-colored illustration, enhanced with a digital collage.

Your creations resound as deeply personal, how much of your own self do you put in to your work?

In the beginning, I oil-painted tortured stuff. There were many hard things going on in my life at the time, and I guess it translated into dismembered/disemboweled bodies. It was efficient anti-suicide therapy, but it wasn't very popular, twenty years ago. So I learned to somewhat filter my work. Still personal, but accessible. I once tried to remove that filter, as there was a resurgence of macabre art. But I couldn't. Maybe I wasn't

able to, maybe I didn't want to relive that era.

But I can't not be personal. I wasn't trained as an illustrator, and maybe you learn to make yourself a graphic identity when you go to art school, an identity that's severed from your own self. But I don't do that. That's the reason why you won't see me making a kids book cover plastered with big pink hearts. Been there, done that, didn't work out.

What's a normal day in your life like?

My husband works at home too, but he spends more time with our kids than me. In the morning I get up to help him dress them up, then he takes them to school and (yes!) I go back to bed. I get up around noon, check my mailbox, do some paperwork and then I spend a couple of hours making jewelry. I have customers buying my jewelry online and in several brick-and-mortar stores, so I have to work for them too, and make them happy. The in the middle of the afternoon, I work for my commissioned illustrations, then my kids get back from school. I take care of them, then do some pencil sketches with them playing around. Later in the evening I'll be able to work these sketches digitally. Then we eat/bathe the kids/etc until they go to bed (around 7.30pm). And then, my work day as an illustrator really starts.

From 8pm to 2-3am I'm working for my personal projects, in front of my computer until I fall asleep, basically.

How would you collectively describe your work in your own words?

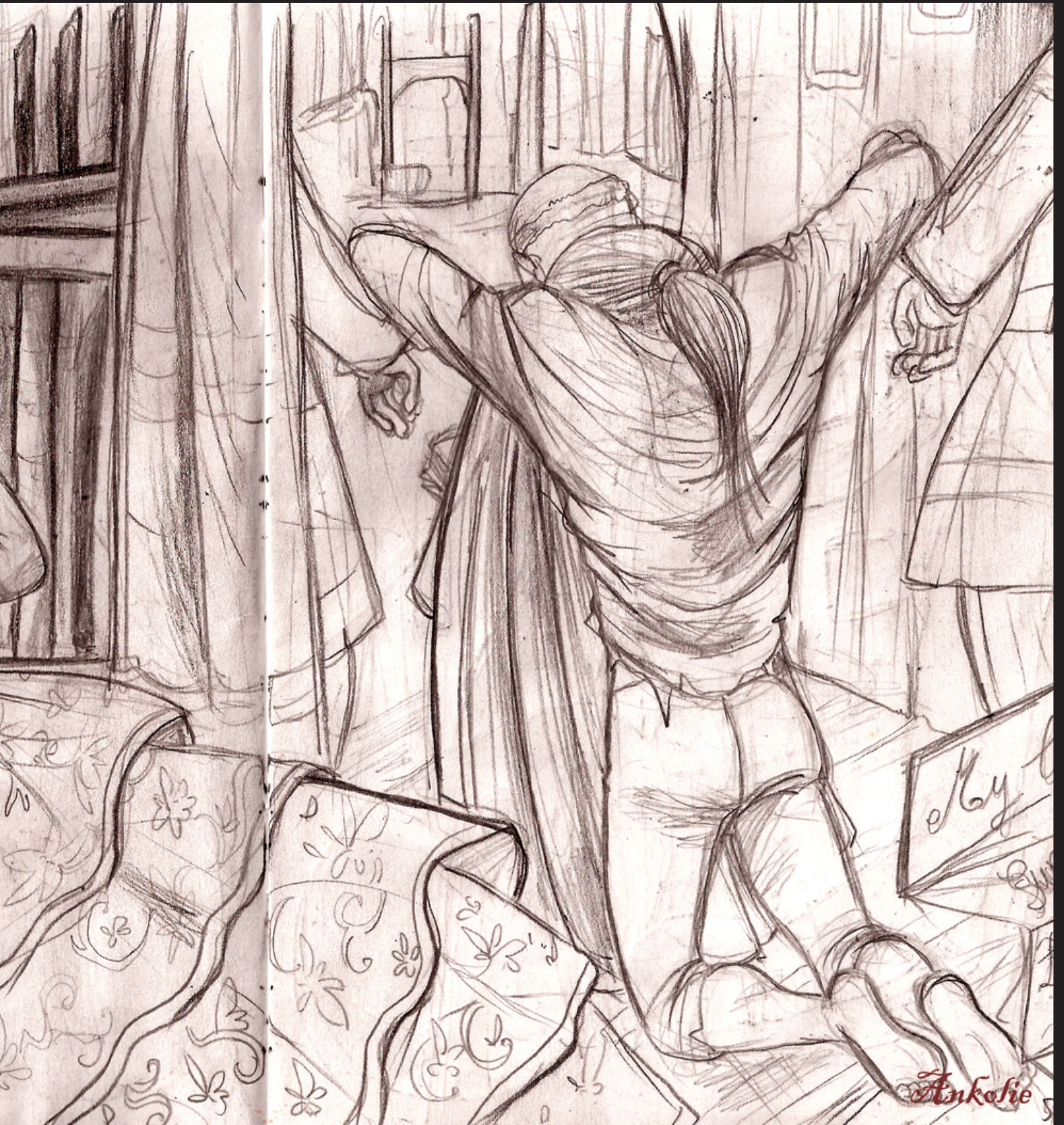
Whimsical (I love this word), varied, rather traditional and constantly evolving.

You have two children and five cats at home, not to mention your husband, how do you still manage to find the time for your creations?

I sleep when I can, which isn't easy because I need quite a lot of sleeping time to stay up. And yes, my husband helps a lot with children and cats!

It's not easy, but I wouldn't have it any other way!
Because "Art is important, art is everything."





Sketchbook Project by Ankolie



Yorgu by Ankolie



Universe Inside by Ankolie

SPOTLIGHT ARTIST: EMAAN MEHMUD





Excavation 2 by Emaan Mehmud



Untitled by Emaan Mehmud



Have you always known you wanted to be a visual artist?

Not really. Uptil O Levels I wanted to get into finance and then when I noticed my brain shutting down while studying accounting I thought maybe a career in Finance may not be the best option for me. When the time came to decide the major for college , Visual arts was the only area I could see myself studying. The opportunities I got after graduating were as such that I just fell into being a full time visual artist.

Can you recall the first drawing you ever made, what was it?

I can't actually. I've always been drawing, I do have all these hazy memories drawing and feeling so good about it.

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

Everything. The city, the female body, fabric, threads. Then there are things that inspire me sub consciously (like reading up on time travel not being an impossibility and information on pretty much anything and everything).

Are there any artists / writers in particular that you admire?

Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Kiki Smith, Eve Hesse, Edward Said, Mohammad Hanif, Liam Gillick. Bruno Latour. Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Milan Kunder, Michio Kaku, Richard Dawkins and Veena Malik obviously.

Your work screams Karachi, which I take it is also your hometown, how's that relationship working out for you?

Much healthier than a lot of other relationships I see.

If you could illustrate any already existing body of work, which one would it be?

Probably a poster of some Pashto film.

How much of your own self do you put in to your work?

Quite a bit, actually. Its very obvious if you look at the work.on the other hand, it is my writing that is





very strongly influenced by the current socio political landscape.

Would you ever think about doing something else for a living?

Teaching maybe. Or writing. I could be like Carrie Bradshaw and earn a hefty income through my writing.

What's a normal day in your life like?

A interesting mix of reading, writing, drawing, painting and socializing (gossiping and making fun of some poor fellow or another)

How would you collectively describe your work in your own words?

Spontaneous. Emotional. Bold. Layered. Textured.

88 ARS POETICA

by Ben Nardolilli

His voice was sore, but he did not know it yet. As far as he could tell, Lowell's problems were restricted to other familiar symptoms of a rough night. His head and feet both hurt. His stomach felt sick with emptiness. These he knew how to deal with. He was also sure he knew their cause. However, Lowell's voice was sore as well, a fact he realized when he sat up in bed and moaned. The initial hope was that the moan would help get rid of various somatic pains inside him. Instead, it uncovered a voice that was raw. A serious effort was required to make any sound. He wondered how he had damaged his vocal chords before going to sleep on his futon.

Other pains Lowell could understand. The trinity of hurt in his head, gut, and feet was the usual result of drinking too much. His stomach was angry with him because it had been irritated all night long from the things he had poured into it without worrying about the consequences. His head hurt from various factors, many related to dehydration and various impurities lodged into the alcohol he drank. The pain in Lowell's feet came not from the metabolic properties of anything he drank, but because he had stood in place or walked for hours across the city. For one night he had been given the superpower of numbness, and it allowed him to go farther in his beat up shoes than other mortals could.

Lowell walked through his kitchen and went into the bathroom. He looked at himself in his mirror while running the water from his faucet until it was hot. There was no damage to his face this time. He had no new bruises or scars. There were no patches of red that he would have to explain to other people. His black hair was still thinning, but it was always thinning. Lowell spoke to his reflection, greeting it and asking it how it was. The voice he made echoed through the bathroom and sounded like it was coming from the aged gramophone recording of an even older vaudeville star.

The water was now steaming and Lowell grabbed a plastic cup to fill it up. The cup was generic, red, and had come from a party he went to months ago. He had walked home with it and since it was durable enough,

he decided to keep it. Lowell drank the hot stream of tap water and let it soothe the scratched up portions of his throat. He was still too young to sound so old. Lowell gargled and he swallowed a bit, then he gargled and he spat. His face felt dry so he dabbed a washcloth with the water and scrubbed his forehead, temples, and the sides of his mouth a bit. Now his face had red patches on it, but he knew these would fade in a few minutes. The soreness in his throat had dissipated. However, when he tried to speak his voice still sounded hoarse.

He went back to his futon and smacked the brown cloth that covered it. In the Sunday morning light he released a fleet of dust particles that sprung into the air and circulated in currents too faint for Lowell to feel. He sat down and watched the dust for a few minutes, trying to see if there was a poem to write in the patterns he saw. Maybe he could write remarks about chaos and beauty. Or he could craft a few passages about how everything turning to dust was not so bad. When disturbed by a certain force and illuminated by a certain slant of sunlight, it was beautiful too. Lowell grabbed the pad he kept close by his futon for such creative emergencies and wrote down his thoughts.

As he was about to begin writing poems drawn from these thoughts, his phone rang. Lowell let it ring, unsure of who would be calling him and afraid they might have revelation about the previous night. Before his voicemail kicked in, Lowell picked up the cellphone and spoke. He was unsure if his voice was now unrecognizable to whoever was on the other side. As soon as the voice spoke to him, Lowell recognized it was Brendon.

"Hey man, how's it going?"

Lowell tried to hide his wounds. "Fine."

"You were pretty crazy last night."

"Oh yeah?" Lowell answered with a slight swagger of confidence. He had to make it seem like any insanity and chaos he was responsible for the previous night was a completely planned out affair, or at least was less ad hoc than it seemed to him at the time. Lowell did not mind being known as a mad poet, so long as it was understood he never lost control while performing in an escapade.

COPENHAGEN

i. Long-Distance

And so we stayed true
to that hormone laced,
heart crossed,
airport lounge
promise,
cigarette nervous
yet stifled,
we parted
and vowed to love
the impossible
long-distance.

ii. Landlocked

Whispered words
hummed softly,
these lurid tunes
cast vibrato,
along the vast slouching wires
of our opposing
xenophobic
church pyre landscapes,
elongated pauses
manifest as false adoration,
loose, lonely,
despite the distance, our words,
landlocked.

iii. Chemically enhanced to age

And we loved afar,
not by sky fetched satellites
or whimsical, billboard technologies,
nor a digital duality soon to cease,
stripped of its glue backing,
but with perfumed letters,
languid messages
pressed fresh with star titles,
and marked with the flourish
a fading and always false
memory,
trite tomes written
upon art-house parchments
chemically enhanced to age.

iv. Copenhagen

Until,
the stoney steps of beating blood
retreated, ebbed
from the Danish clouds,
across two summers (or more),
in an apexed,
chesttight moment,
I knew you were gone,
lost even before the airport clutch
before our last touch,
before we even met,

I knew you had become
foreign
to me.

Christopher Em was born in Sydney, Australia and educated in Europe and the Pacific. He has a day job that allows him to travel the world and through this work is afforded the time and inspiration to follow his true passion: Poetry.



The Moment Itself by Emaan Mehmud

“We were all wondering about you. We weren’t sure if you made it home safely.”

“Of course I made it home safely. I know how to handle myself.”

“Dude, how much did you have to drink last night?”

Lowell was sure a serious talk was developing. His friend was trying to sit him down for a discussion and they would discuss his health and his effect on other people like Brendon. Lowell did not want to be told he had that kind of problem. Other issues he would accept but addiction was not one of them. He only deranged his senses once in a while, every weekend at the most, but that was only when there was money and somebody was giving a reading.

He answered half true, “I’m not sure. I keep trying to cut down but somebody pulls me back in. You know

how bartenders are. I think I must have complained about a weak drink, so he gave me something stronger.”

“Yeah. Maybe. I mean, you were crazy.”

Lowell hated hearing that word applied to him so early on a Sunday morning. Pacing through the kitchen, he wondered what he had done. If he had gotten into a fight he must have won because there were no marks on his body. He was ready to apologize, but only after Brendon listed the damage that he had done in full. Lowell had too much pride to say he was sorry before he had the facts of what went wrong.

“You were really on fire.”

Lowell stopped pacing and leaned against the edge of the kitchen counter. “Oh really?”

“Didn’t you see how the crowd was going wild afterwards?”

"It was dark."

"Remember everybody kept coming up to your afterwards?"

"There were so many of them. I couldn't hear what they were saying."

"Dude, it was great. You totally killed that open mike"

"I did, didn't I?" Lowell was relieved. The reading. It was coming back to him in bits and pieces now. He could recall a bar lit in red and bricks all around him. There was a stage and he was on it. A bright light was on him and made him feel feverish. That was about it.

"I wish there was a video of the night. Maybe somebody recorded something. It would suck to lose it."

Now he was curious. "I hope somebody did too."

"You were just going on and on. And when you went over the five minute limit there was nearly a riot."

"Yeah," Lowell laughed as if remembering. "There really was, wasn't there?"

"It was the crowd and you versus the emcee and the other poets and they got shouted down. It was real people power man. Real people power."

"I know."

"It was amazing, it made me want to go and write an epic of our own like you did. All those images and random pieces you strung together. It was amazing. It was like, like, you pulled a Christmas tree out of your mouth."

"Maybe that's why my voice hurts so much."

"That would hurt, wouldn't it?"

"Definitely. Anything coming out of your mouth would."

"Speaking of which, did you get sick afterwards?"

Lowell pushed his upper lip to his nose. He smelled nothing foul. "Nope."

"Good. We were worried. You just sorta took off after everyone was on top of you."

"I guess I was nervous. All the attention."

"Yeah, I can understand that." Brendon laughed. "You took up my slot you bastard!"

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay. It's okay. It was for a good cause."

"Good. It won't happen again. You have permis-

sion to bump me off next time with your own epic."

"Let it happen. Your stuff was good. You were great. I'm not complaining. People are wondering about you. They're asking questions. They want you to speak again."

"Wow. Well, be my agent and book me something."

"I'll let you know if anything serious comes up."

"Thanks." Lowell still wanted to know more about his heroic stand at the open mike. What had he written that was so inspiring? "Hey you want to get something later, a cup of tea, some pizza?"

"You want to meet at Moonstruck? We can get pretty much anything there."

"Sure."

Lowell came to the diner after Brendon. When he walked through the front door he saw Brendon's shaggy brown hair. His face was blocked by the copious menu. Lowell slid in the booth across from his friend and ordered a Western omelet and some coffee. Brendon, who had been up longer than Lowell and felt the time was past for breakfast, ordered a club sandwich. When the waitress left them, Lowell began prying his friend for more information, careful not to reveal his own ignorance of the night's events.

"So, which poem was your favorite?"

"What do you mean?"

"Which one did you like the best?"

"You said you were just reading one."

"Yeah, that's right. I combined a bunch together into one. I forgot."

"I liked the poem you read. Everybody really did. It just hit all the right spots. I mean I've liked your stuff, but this was the first thing I absolutely loved."

"Thanks. What lines did you like? I'm just trying to figure out what I'm doing right."

"Let's see, let me try to remember."

Lowell pulled out a pen and grabbed a napkin from the dispenser.

"There were lines. Plenty of lines I liked. It's hard to recall them now. You have a better memory for these things than me."

"I can fill in the blanks obviously, I was just wondering."

92 “The thing about catastrophic agents of pre-terminated chance, I liked that line. I also liked your observation about Virginia and North Carolina mirroring one another, the plot of long dead English kings, or a joke, I can’t remember which.”

“Yeah.” Lowell wished he could remember as well.

“The audience was into your comparison of the gates of Babylon and the bridges of New York City, the Iraqi veteran unable to determine if he is living or dead on the streets of Manhattan. The young liked it when you went after the old. The old liked it when you scolded the young for being inactive.”

“I see.”

“That’s all I can remember. I’m sure more will come to me.”

“It’s okay. Any feedback I can get.”

The food arrived and the two of them ate. Lowell waited for Brendon to bring up another favorite part of the work, not only because he liked the compliments, but he needed to know what he had recited to the crowd. But Brendon began to speak about his own work and what he had planned to read before Lowell went off on his epic tangent that hijacked the evening. Brendon even pulled out the printed papers he had brought to the open mike. He asked Lowell to read them for him and offer his feedback. While he went over the poems with his pen, he asked Brendon what parts of his poem did not work. He still needed more details.

“Well, I thought it was pretty strong and together.”

“There must have been something.”

“The bit about tentacle rape I thought was too much but other people laughed out loud at it, so it’s your decision if it’s good or not.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“I hope you’re not offended.”

“It’s okay. I’m not.” Lowell was far from offended. He still did not know which piece Brendon was referring to and so had no memory of pouring his heart out over it.

“There were some sentimental bits.”

“And what were those?”

“You used thee and thou in this one part. Then you spoke about the endless embers of the cruel unforgiving sky. Maybe sentimental is the wrong word. May-

be it was overwrought?”

Lowell wrote all these lines down on his napkin. The waitress came and took their dishes, silverware, and dirty napkins. Once she left the bill came and the two friends pulled out coins and crumpled bits of paper in order to pay for it. They left a tip that was generous so long as the waitress was willing to count out the nickels and dimes they left behind.

He went back to his apartment and opened up his laptop. Lowell read the lines on the napkin as best he could and searched his files for a poem that contained all of them. He was unable to see anything like the work that Brendon described. A few words were under one poem and some were under another. Many of the scenes he claimed to have heard were not in anything on his laptop. He went online to see if he had posted the lines in a forum. There was a chance the poem had been a creation purely for the internet before he read it out loud. But when he typed in terms for the search engines to find, nothing came up. Thankfully, the work of other people was not found either. Lowell then went to his clothes and the jacket he wore the night before. He felt around for a set of poems that he must have printed out to read for the open mike. In his nervous confusion he had probably combined them by accident and added lines he had written in with his pen as part of his last-minute edits.

There was nothing tucked away in his pockets. Lowell looked at the trashcan. There were no poems shoved in it either. He checked his emails in hopes that maybe he had sent it to himself from some other computer. But there was nothing relevant in his inbox, archives, or the virtual trashcan that held the ghost of past messages. However, there were plenty of emails from new fans and admirers. He could not find the work that had inspired them, but they had managed to find him. Most of the messages were short and told Lowell that he had reached them with their words. His words touched off raw nerves and at the same time brought people together it seemed. Some of the messages were longer. There were fans who wanted help on making their own poetry better. Others came from people who wanted him to speak at their bar or club. These interested Lowell the most and he responded to them first. He did not want to wait for them to lose interest. Apparently the honorariums were now ready to start rolling in.

He asked the proprietors if he could read new work. Lowell claimed that his concern was becoming a

“one-trick pony,” rather than a loss of the text that had made the night’s reading so memorable. Most of them said yes and it was only those that agreed that Lowell responded to further. One establishment, Bar 107, was willing to pay more than anyone else. He agreed to give a reading for them in a week and then told all the others his decision. He casually mentioned what they were willing to pay him, unsure if it was fair to do so, or it was just in bad taste to announce it. Lowell was hoping to bring that rarest of factors into his life: competition. No one was able to match Bar 107 so far, but he was sure that once word spread and his readings were attended by motivated listeners who were also hard drinking, his newly established fee would be met.

Lowell arrived at Bar 107 ten minutes before going on. A makeshift sign had been assembled out of paperboard and colored paper to announce the reading. There were already fans inside, eager to listen to him read. Lowell talked with a few of them. He was nervous but the conversations gave him hope for another successful reading. People offered to buy him drinks, including the bartender, but Lowell declined. Seeing so many eager faces ready to lend him their ears made him happy and relaxed. Instead, he asked for a glass of ice water with lime, which was promptly refilled whenever he finished it.

Brendon came in with his friends. The group all smelled of tobacco. Lowell met them and they talked while Lowell pulled out his poems. Since he had the evening to himself, he had brought more work to read. Folded up and stuck inside his pockets, the poems had pressed into him as he made his way over to Bar 107. There was a feeling of relief once he pulled them out. Lowell apologized to the group and told them he was just reviewing his work for the reading but he swore that he was listening to everything they said. He had over twenty poems to read. He was not sure if this was the right amount. Many of them he had meant to read during his epic stand at the open mike. Lowell shuffled the papers and placed the poems he wanted to read the most in the front so that he would get to them at least. It left open the possibility of finishing on a weak note, but he believed it was more important to get the crowd’s attention at the start.

The bar’s manager/art director/emcee came up to him and shook his hand. He asked him if he was ready to go on. Lowell nodded casually and everyone

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moved into the performance space through a pair of black velvet curtains. Lowell looked around and tried to count how many people had showed up, since each one of them had come specifically to see him. There were a few familiar faces, people who had sat and stood next to him at other readings. They had all just been loyal listeners then. How many of them, Lowell wondered, thought they would be eager to hear him read one day? The manager went into emcee mode and took to the mike. He gave Lowell a small introduction and when it was done, Lowell took to the stage sober.

The stage was painted black but the bright lights turned it bone white. Lowell walked up to the microphone and adjusted it for his height. People applauded him in anticipation and Brendon called out Lowell’s name. Someone from the dark masses told him that he wanted to have his babies. Unsure of what to say, Lowell muttered a lukewarm, “okay,” that made the assemblage of hidden faces laugh. He held the poems in his hands and began introducing his work. Those faces that he did see seemed surprised that he was reading his work from a page. He knew that singers often told little stories between their songs and the impromptu lines often diffused tension and kept the voice warm.

“So...I...uh...I wrote this first poem after drinking some cough medicine...and wine...” there were cheers from the audience. “I had this vision under the Empire State Building...how I ended up there from Brooklyn...I have no idea. Anyway...it’s a little crazy... but I was told you like crazy. Hell, I’m going to dedicate this to my friend Brendon. Brendon are you out there?”

“Read the poem!” He shouted back. There were more laughs and Lowell smiled before beginning.

The response was not what he had expected. No one cheered or laughed as he read. When he finished, there was applause, but no spontaneous cheering. Lowell had the feeling they were all doing him a favor to get him warmed up, convinced the best work was yet to come. He let the poem drop to the ground like a heavy snowflake and went onto the next. “Okay. This next poem...is about fall...in the city...but the change of season also...when I’m talking about John...that’s a pseudonym...John isn’t real...what I mean by that is... uh...John is really somebody else...see there was this dream...” Lowell decided to cut short his meditations on John’s identity and began reading.

The crowd was with him but halfway through the reading they began to show signs of distraction.

94 They sipped on their drinks loudly. They shuffled and swirled their ice around and then chewed on the cubes. They made conversation and they laughed softly but loud enough for Lowell to hear them. Meanwhile, he continued to read. After his tenth poem, he asked the crowd to hold their applause until the end. He could tell it was a dwindling resource. Somebody in the middle of one work asked him to speak up. The request was repeated three poems later. Lowell asked for a glass of water and secretly hoped the bartender or someone along the way would spike it for him with something stronger, but when he put it to his lips it was decidedly non-alcoholic.

The audience was now inebriated and brave. People began hurling strange bits of words at him. "Fantastic spaceship of the inner shared heart!" "Jasmine infused mediocrity!" "The sun rolls off its stage in sighs over us!" "We are trapped under the oedipal complex of military gears!" Lowell could not tell if they were mocking or insulting him. It was an odd form of heckling. Gradually he realized that they were uttering phrases from his epic poem, which they wanted him to recite. Lowell had to interrupt the poem he was reading and tell the crowd to behave. He felt like a kindergarten teacher. The lights were already off so he did not have the power of flashing them in order to silence his disappointed audience. His commands were not enough and Brendon eventually had to stand up and tell everyone to be quiet in a booming whiskey scented voice.

Lowell thanked his friend and then read quickly through the last of the poems. He finished with five minutes to spare. The emcee came up and took the mike from Lowell and asked everyone to give him a hand. Most of the people applauded, but Lowell were certain he heard a solitary booing coming out at him as he left the stage. He left the performance space and got the bartender, who was still sympathetic to him as the guest of honor, to give him a White Russian. He needed something that was strong but sweet as well. Brendon and his gang came out from the curtains and surrounded Lowell. They fed him compliments and shielded him from the audience as they shuffled past. Lowell could see disappointment on all their faces. The group bought him a few more drinks and soon he was drunk.

Lowell collapsed on a couch in the corner and Brendon's group sat around him. His friend began feeding him compliments until Lowell stopped him and admitted that he knew the reading was a failure.

"I don't understand what happened."

"Well, your work was different tonight. Too cerebral for the stage maybe."

"All my work is like this. How is any of this work different from my usual?"

"I think you were missing the energy from last time. You got all your inhibitions back."

"The audience was not with me."

"No they most definitely were not."

"I don't ever want to give a reading like that again. It was miserable."

"The work was good. It just wasn't good for a live reading."

"It was dull."

"Dull to listen to, but knowing you I could see how it would look on a page and I put it together in my mind and I understood it. A lot of good line breaks. But that doesn't come out on stage."

"Yeah. I figured."

"Cheer up. They'll be other readings."

"I just don't remember what I did right last time."

"Well, you were drunk."

"I don't want that to be the only reason. What a crutch!"

"Okay. Okay. I think it was a big part of it though."

"What else? Go on."

"Do you even recall that night?"

Lowell had to admit the truth. "No."

"Well, you berated the people who read before you."

"Oh that's cruel."

"But it was funny, and you were just saying what we were all thinking."

"So I was an asshole. Is that it?"

"Maybe. You also didn't read from any paper."

"I didn't?"

"No, you looked like you had memorized something, but now that I think about it, I think you improvised. Where you got the words from, I don't know. They just kept coming out all smooth though."

"Too bad nobody recorded what I said."

"Too bad. But I don't think anybody recorded

tonight either, so you're better off."

"I just wish I could do another reading like that. I'm going to get paid for tonight, but nobody will probably ever pay me again. I'm lucky if I get into an open mike."

Lowell still had enough fans left. Not everyone who witnessed his success was at Bar 107 the night of his failed reading. Bar 107 could not have held them all and half of the crowd that came for the second reading was new, drawn in from the strength of Lowell's reputation. They were disappointed, but a large group of true believers in Lowell's abilities still remained. They continued to ask Lowell for advice on their poetry and he did his best with what they sent to him in the bodies of their emails. Occasionally they would come up to him in the bookstore that he worked at and gave him their poems asking his opinions in the flesh. Some were good and some were bad. There was no pattern of quality among his fans.

A month passed and Lowell was content to never read again. It was better to allow his legend to circulate. However, one day a man came into his store specifically asking to see him. It was rare for his fans to do this; most of them simply looked for Lowell and then recognized him from the reading. But this man had not been to the reading or the one that followed after. Instead, he had heard Lowell's name mentioned highly and that was all he had to go on. The man went over to the travel section, where Lowell was stocking books. He introduced himself as Zack and asked Lowell if he had a minute to talk.

"Sure."

"Great. I work over at the Cordelia Street Café. Have you ever been there?"

"A few times. You got that nice fireplace?"

"And an open mike. We would be honored if you read."

Lowell wanted to decline the invitation. He wanted to ask Zack for money and then when no offer was made, to refuse to read until he was paid. But Lowell had a soft spot for the Cordelia Street Café. When he was an undergraduate, it was one of the few bars that had let him drink without asking for his identification. It had treated him like an equal. He felt compelled to return the favor.

"Sure."

"Great. We don't offer, um, payment. But just talk to the bartender and they will help you with what you need."

"Okay. When is it?"

"This Saturday. Bring your friends."

"How long do I have?"

"Five minutes? Is that enough?"

"That's fine. I work better under deadlines."

Lowell went through his poems that week and printed off a batch he thought would do better. They were filled with the surreal imagery that the crowds seemed to enjoy. He hoped that these words would inspire them to heckle the management once more to let him go over the time allotted to each reader. If nothing more, he wanted howls and cheering to accompany him as he read, a form of excited punctuation to his lines.

Brendon greeted Lowell in front of the red and white awning of the Cordelia Street Café. His friend had brought along some of the same people from last time to hear him read, but most of those people were missing. Lowell and Brendon exchanged small talk and he bummed a cigarette off Brendon, trying to keep warm. Brendon asked what he was reading. Lowell pulled the poems out of his coat like they were a bribe and cautiously handed them over to Brendon.

"It's for tonight. It's what I'm going to read. What do you think? I don't want to bomb again."

"Okay." Brendon read through the works quickly and gave his assessment. "They're good, I mean, on the page. When you read them, I don't know. It's hard to imagine people who are expecting a show to go crazy over them."

"They're that bad?"

"They're bad for reading out loud, if you want to bring down the house. I'm sorry Lowell. It's only five minutes."

"I thought this is what the people wanted."

"I know. It's hard to predict these things."

People began to enter the café for the reading. Several of them stopped to shake hands with Lowell. They had high hopes for his reading. They expected to have their minds blown and their worlds turned upside down. Lowell said he would try his best to do either, though he admitted it would be a miracle if he could do both. He saw that they were excited, not just about him, but poetry in general. The thought of letting them

96 down troubled him. Once he had a moment to speak to Brendon, he expressed his doubts about reading what he had brought.

“Maybe I should just wing it.”

“You can do it. But it’s risky.”

“I don’t want to let them down.”

“Well, you can’t just do things to please people.”

“True. But Brendon, you see how they are. They are excited. About poetry! How often does that happen? If I bomb I’ll ruin not only my chances of reading again, but the audiences of other poets, including you. By the way, are you reading tonight?”

“Before you. I already signed up.”

“Good.”

“So you’re really going to try and make it up as you go along?”

It sounded like a challenge. Lowell took his cigarette out of his mouth and grabbed his poems from Brendon. He brought the end of the butt against the papers and they went up into flames. Lowell dropped them into an empty trashcan where they quickly turned to ashes. Lowell and Brendon both watched them disappear without saying anything until the fire died down.

“Well, if you’re going to improvise, I believe you have to get ready.”

“I guess I haven’t had anything to drink in a week.”

“A heroic achievement, believe me.”

“And my audience expects it.”

“It appears they do.”

“It’s part of what it means to have an audience. Certain obligations, right?”

“True.” Lowell dutifully walked inside the café. He sat in front of the bar and adjusted himself to the cushion of the stool. A bartender with red pigtails asked him what he wanted. He was honest with her.

“The strongest thing that Zack will let you give me for free.”

She nodded. “You’re Lowell, aren’t you?” She poured him a scotch. “Is that okay?”

“Yes to both questions.”

“I’ve heard about you. Apparently, you’re a crazy guy up there when you read.”

“Apparently.” Lowell began to quickly drink the scotch until he finished the glass and set it down on bar.

“You want another one?”

He nodded. The bartender put a small plate of olives for him to munch on while he drank. Lowell wished she would linger and talk to him some more, but there were other customers to attend to. After he was done drinking and reading, things would change. As soon as he had cheers following him out of the cellar downstairs, then she would give him her full attention. Maybe she would even let down her pigtails for him. Once he fell off the wagon and was celebrated for it, she, like everyone else, would love him.

“Another?”

He checked his bearings. They were not off yet. “I guess so. There’s enough time, right?”

She shrugged and gave Lowell his third scotch.

Ben Nardolilli’s work has appeared in Perigee Magazine, Red Fez, Quail Bell Magazine, Elimae, Pear Noir, and Yes Poetry. His chapbook Common Symptoms of an Enduring Chill Explained, has been published by Folded Word Press. He maintains a blog at mirrorsponge.blogspot.com and is looking to publish his first novel.

THE DIGITAL BATTLEGROUND

by Aaron Grierson

Waging war on the internet, one comment at a time.

Everyone knows about news on various scales; local, national, international. The internet helps facilitate faster access to information, from Google, to news websites, to posts on social media. The potential for one's exposure to news has increased exponentially.

This increase subsequently results in increased reactions, not just in quantity but in volatility as well. Even on regular news websites, some of the commentary is not only poorly spelled but can become quite inflammatory, especially when directed at a certain user or users, while being totally irrelevant to the news item in question. This sort of hateful backlash is exemplary of larger underlying problems that are elemental to the internet.

Conflict is the root issue. By most standards, various forms of conflict are seen as inevitable, like fist-fighting in the schoolyard or arguments between two people. More serious conflicts that tend to be discouraged might include armed assault or verbal harassment. Each of these may, in some contexts, be considered bullying. Bullying has been extensively persecuted in many Western countries, and despite this, is still a very widespread problem. The internet, as one might expect, makes bullying possible through anonymity and 24/7 access to known or potential victims. These interpersonal conflicts are quite obscene to any decent person, but we may not want to view our children or coworkers as indecent, perhaps searching for some deep-rooted anger or jealousy; some source of the conflict. These quests are often fruitless, as knowledge of a bully is something difficult to attain for a victim, and may be problematic for any proxy. Unfortunately the roots of bullying go well beyond the internet or schoolyard.

Individuals aside, the act of bullying shares many characteristics with a more historically widespread activity: the act of war. If an individual is simply irrationally violent, or otherwise lashing out due to personal issues, the problem would, no doubt, compound with several such individuals. However, war seldom happens without an instigating factor. No matter how petty, politicized, or well intentioned, war has a definable cause, a *raison d'être*. So it would seem that war and bullying

are somewhat disconnected.

War and the internet, on the other hand are perfectly connected. Perhaps too perfectly. Not only is war advertised by all forms of media, but it is brought much closer to home. Through the internet the battlefield becomes the homefront, available at your nearest electronic screen. The war then becomes fodder for any angry rant, from disjointed, impassioned comments on forums to thoughtful and well reasoned entries on blogs. The degree to which we see ourselves as having free speech as an inalienable right fuels these fires. Sometimes to the extent that commentary becomes an interfaction war on the homefront. The internet simply makes the process easier for people by providing them a shield from immediacy and contact with others.

At the same time, the internet enables people to more safely express their opinions on topics like war, arguably in the most democratic way possible. Everyone can read or listen to everyone else's opinion on various issues by way of the 'information superhighway'. As we have all no doubt experienced, these forums often result in arguments, which begs the question: why are forums of communication as open as they are?

It's just a guess but it seems the answer lies in idealism. We want a world where people can say whatever they want, and while possible in theory the reality of things is that invariably someone gets offended at some point. So for some, it seems as though war overseas may become war at home. This is an unfortunate tension, and is one that needs to be kept in check. Rather than toting freedom of speech as a sort of endgame defense against any accusation concerning opinions, people need to be a little more aware, that a person's opinion is just that. There is generally no weapon being put against our heads to change our minds or defend ourselves to the death, and so we may, in theory, say whatever we want.

Perhaps when it comes to opinionbased conflicts over the internet, no matter what the issue, people should concede their opponents' position, should it be a fair and rational one, such as those not involving genocide or segregation of certain peoples. This way, while we may not be able to end war on an international level, we may keep



Untitled by Emaan Mehmud

the peace at home and on screen. It may seem redundant, or even despondant, but the potential for any and all change is in the hands of us, the readers. The internet is like a tank, capable both of being a simple showpiece or a serious explosive power. But so far it seems like any potential is being used more for destructive or otherwise harmful purposes, with beneficial initiatives taking the back seat for both funding and exposure.

Then again, there is always hope the net will expand and envelope the bullets and bombs of today in a cloud of antiquated methods of problem solving, propelling (in a lesser theoretical extent) the world's advancement towards peace.

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Below: 4 by 3 Feet by Emaan Mehmud



“ HIJAB SCENE # 7

No, I'm not bald under the scarf
No, I'm not from that country
where women can't drive cars
No, I would not like to defect
I'm already American
But thank you for offering
What else do you need to know
relevant to my buying insurance,
opening a bank account,
reserving a seat on a flight?
Yes, I speak English
Yes, I carry explosives
They're called words
And if you don't get up
Off your assumptions,
They're going to blow you away

-Mohja Kahf*

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**As published in Being Human (ed by Neil Astley),
Bloodaxe Books 2011*

SPRING 2012

Images found throughout the issue were provided courtesy of:

“Russell Barnes is a traditional artist from the Pacific Northwest. He started crafting his arts at a very young age. Early on his teachers in school noticed an advanced sense of depth to his art work. Since then he has continued to push himself to sharpen his skill. Striving to fulfill his ambitions of paying the bills with his artwork. Russell finds inspiration in a wide variety of music, life experiences, and nature. He is always looking for a new way to apply paint to express movements, rhythm, and moods. Using tools such as sponges, bubble wrap, compressed air, and gravity itself. When Russell is not painting, he is playing guitar, singing, and enjoying good wholesome family time.”

Marta is 27 years old and lives in Poland. Her name is Marta Świątek. Marcysiabush is her artistic nickname. Painting and drawing were her passion from the beginning. She has finished five years of college of Art & Design with best results in specialization : Artistic glass - stained glass, with the title Technician artist. She also finished five years of studies with the title of Master of theatre studies. Right now she's working in stained glass atelier. Other interests and passions are singing, music, scrap booking, photography and many others less important ones.

And Ammad Tahir and Maria Khan both of whom have previously been featured as our spotlight artists.

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