

BROOKLYN PIER
A Public Menace

iris

literature and arts magazine



volume two / issue two

What Is *Iris*? _____

What is *Iris*? We are the newest in the long line of JMU's literature and arts magazines. You may have once known us as *Alastor*, *Gardy Loo*, or *Temper*. We have received overwhelming support for our revival of the magazine and could not be more excited to release this second issue of our second volume.

Welcome to Iris!





table of contents

- 4. Letter from the Editor-In-Chief** by Grace Keeler
- 5. Letter from the Editor** by Amelia Bailey
- 6. House Trap** by Gilli Guy
- 8. The Last Account of Mr. Henry O. Sullivan** by Sam Rooker
- 16. Skincare Routine** by Sophie Uy
- 19. Honey Bee** by Hannah Landis
- 25. elegy for my younger self** by Lindsey Mitchell
- 28. Lǎowài (老外) – FOREIGNER** by Sophie Uy
- 31. Untitled** by India Williams
- 32. The Merchant and The Moon** by Gilli Guy
- 36. Asterion, Son of Minos** by Haylee Edwards
- 39. To the Black girls who never made it home** by India Williams
- 41. The Life of a Spoiled Brat** by Danielle Generous
- 43. Redwood** by Sara Buie
- 44. Cotton is King** by India Williams
- 45. Masterpiece** by Kayla Koldys
- 46. Dystopia** by Hannah Landis
- 47. The Death** by Rachel Gordon
- 49. Where There is Smoke** by Charles–Nicolas Owen
- 50. Mott Street Blues** by Sophie Uy
- 53. It's All For Her** by Kerri Hewett
- 59. Peanut Butter** by Rachel Gordon





Letter From the Editor-In-Chief

Dear Reader,

I cannot thank you enough for choosing to pick up this copy of *Iris*. As we prepared to release this issue, I spent some much-needed time reflecting on the role *Iris* has played in my life. It is more clear to me now than ever that this has never been a mere extracurricular activity for me; it was and is my home. I cannot imagine the past two years of my life without this magazine and, more importantly, without the creative community that sustains it. It has been a tremendous privilege to witness and contribute to the growth of that community. I look forward to another year of engaging with beautiful art and the beautiful humans who create it.

I would first like to thank our Assistant Editor Amelia Bailey, who will be joining me during the 2024–25 academic year as co-Editor-in-Chief. Amelia bleeds authenticity. A member of our team from the very beginning, she is strikingly committed to embodying *Iris*'s ethos of authorial integrity, professionalism, and inclusion. I could not be more grateful for the creative partner and friend I have found in her.

I cannot neglect to mention our lovely Lead Design Editor, Bee Swatosh. Bee joined our team last semester at the recommendation of Professor David Hardy and has been raising the bar ever since. She has led her team through two successive production cycles and assembled two beautifully-designed magazines (including the one you now hold in your hands!). I cannot stress enough how central Bee's leadership, skill, and positive attitude have been to this process.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge our faculty advisor, Professor Erica Cavanagh. I was a student of Professor Cavanagh's during my freshman year at JMU, and have worked with her in the two years since to revitalize JMU's long tradition of literature and art magazines with the creation of *Iris*. This issue, like each that came before it, would not have been possible without Professor Cavanagh's knowledge, mentorship, and unwavering support.

In this issue, you will sip tea, peruse Martian court documents, and get lost in the rhythm of Chinatown. You will scale rafters, confront generational trauma, and speak to the Moon like an old lover. Above all, you will feel the humanity of each author, poet, and artist coursing through their work. I implore you never to lose sight of that humanity, to look for it everywhere you go.

Best,

Grace Keeler



Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

Thank you for opening this edition of *Iris* Literature and Arts Magazine; it means so much to me that the magazine our team has worked hard to produce is now in your hands. *Iris* has been an incredible source of passion, community, and creative expression for me since I first became involved with the magazine in the fall of 2022. As *Iris*'s community and outreach grows, I find myself growing with it. I am continually inspired and challenged by the creative contributions of student submissions and the persistent work of our editorial and design team members.

Now in her second semester as Editor-in-Chief of *Iris*, Grace Keeler continues to lead with a compassion and integrity that permeates into everyone around her. Grace's infectious passion embodies the spirit of *Iris*. She is consistently the most thoughtful, zealous, and hardworking person in the room. I am so grateful for the connection I have made with Grace through this magazine. Grace is as kindhearted and committed a leader in *Iris* as she is a friend.

I also want to thank our incredible Lead Design Editor Bee Swatosh. For the past two semesters, Bee's design expertise and artistic vision have been vital to *Iris*. Bee leads our spectacular design team with enthusiasm, perseverance, and flexibility. The magazine you are holding would not exist as it does without Bee's contributions.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to our advisor Professor Erica Cavanagh. Professor Cavanagh's dedication to honoring students' creative work is evident in her leadership. Throughout the semester, Professor Cavanagh's steady presence and guidance have been invaluable to our work at *Iris*.

As you turn the pages of this edition of *Iris*, I hope you will feel inspired by the talent and creativity of the undergraduate students who contributed to this magazine. This collection of art represents students' immense capacity for creative expression and imagination. The production of this edition has been a collaborative effort between students from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. I encourage you to explore the stories and art in this edition of *Iris* with the same curiosity and enthusiasm with which the magazine was created.

Sincerely,
Amelia Bailey



House Trap

by Gilli Guy

I look out the window into my backyard. The oak trees stand strong, but there are only a few, and I can see through them. I look to my neighbors' houses; my lifelines, my connections to the world around me. Houses, space, something made by humans. A wind spinner blows diligently in the backyard, and a hammock tied between two twin ash trees swings with a legato rhythm in Zephyrus's breeze. Witchgrass and clovers cozy up to the mulch by the more common grasses, and I don't mind. I feel no need to cull them, I will let them grow wild. They are plants, they are permitted to permeate and fester in the undergrowth, while I belong in my domestic world.

Contented, I grasp my copy of *Paradise Lost* and hold it to my chest. Paper merges with the human mind to create a book. An amalgamation of the wilderness and the safety of the brain. Ideas and writing as old as Milton's lives on new paper, existing in my hands, all these years later. It's fascinating what humans take from nature, what is taken from the trees. Trees stand outside in the backyard, yet tamed planks are the basis of the house. I continue staring out the window, in awe of what is built around me, what I have done for myself.

I watch until the frame begins to shift and warp, expanding until it fills the entire wall. Any hint of curtains or blinds have shrunk back into nothingness; all that is left is a portal. My view becomes clearer, but it turns into deception. All I can see are the leaves dancing until the trees become a forest, overgrown and wild. It expands backwards, as if beckoning me to step forward and enter, to enter this giant glass panel I'm peering through and succumb to the wild. Instead, I step backwards, and turn. Everything begins to transform. My tall bookshelves have warped into visions of looming pine trees, books flying from them and fading into pinecones. The pillars and supports of the house become various trees with fascinating, terrifying trunks—birch, aspen, goldleaf—more and more obscure as each one transforms. Knickknacks become insectoids, and they scatter as if frightened and confused.

Then, the whole house becomes translucent like Cayman waters. It is as if I have X-ray vision, seeing through what was once a simple, fundamental right to shelter. I appear to be in a clearing, lost in an endless forest of flourishing greenery. My only company are my bookshelves and pillars that now join their brethren and darken the canopy of these unknown woods. The insides of my house abandon me for the wilderness. But the walls remain and shift again, despite being overrun with trunks and foliage in their guts. All the house has left is a subtle perimeter of where its measurements used to reach, and it will use that space to make my container.

The walls lock themselves in the form of a perfect rectangular prism, still see-through. The front wall swings open like a cage door, as if I am a creature ready to be released into my natural habitat. Like I am being freed, like this is where I belonged all along. Once the latch opens, the cacophony begins. Boreal, unforgiving winds howl, as if wounded. Thousands of unfamiliar calls, cries of birds, croaks of frogs, hissing and jeering of mountain lions and squirrel monkeys and foxes. The clamor of the insects enmeshes with it all until I can barely identify what I am hearing. I can practically see the soundwaves booming from the vicious symphony of noises. Everything screams at once, and I cannot shut the door. I am as small as a hamster in this massive box, and I beg for some giant, merciful hand to reach and close the door. Let this box become a house again. But the cicadas keep calling. I look deeper into the ink-like darkness of the forest and am met with dozens of pairs of eyes. Some yellow, some red. None natural.

I try to curl into the fetal position at this point. The cries of nature do not cease, and won't. What else am I to do? I see no house—not mine, not my neighbors', not even a glimpse or aftertaste of anything human. I cannot and do not see it. I cannot hear it. *Paradise Lost* becomes a field mouse and squirms from my grasp, exiting hastily behind any lingering weevils or damselflies clamoring towards the exit. The floorboards are now a shaky, grass-ridden terrain, and I lose my balance as I attempt a protective position. I fall forward, closer to the cage door. One step closer. I wonder, briefly, if the house was ever there, and if I was really human.



The Last Account of Mr. Henry O. Sullivan

by Sam Rooker

A Letter from the Author of The Last Account of Mr. Henry O. Sullivan:

It is important to remember that Henry O. Sullivan was never involved in what happened on June 13 of the year 2084. In fact, most accounts of what happened on that dreadful day have entirely fictionalized Mr. O. Sullivan's role in those events. To this day, his wife Janet O. Sullivan maintains that her husband was never involved in any criminal activity that she witnessed. Nevertheless, as you will see from the varied accounts contained herein, such truth has been twisted every which way. However, this text aims to definitively prove that Henry O. Sullivan was not criminally involved in the acts that took place while aboard Invictus Station.

— Dr. Jose D. Kent, Grandson of Mr. Henry O. Sullivan

July 22, 2122

RELEASE DATE:

03/15/2084

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**THE ONORATO INTERPLANETARY MINING CORPORATION'S STATEMENT ON
THE EXPLOSION AT PLATFORM 4, INVICTUS STATION**

[MARS, OLYMPUS MONS COLONY] –

After a thorough and complete investigation was performed this week by an external reviewer, it is the position of the Onorato Interplanetary Mining Corporation (O.I.M) that the incident which occurred on June 13 of this year was a deliberate attack perpetrated by a former employee of O.I.M. The employee, now identified as Henry O. Sullivan, was released from his position last month after an unsatisfactory performance review. Mr. O. Sullivan's actions do not represent O.I.M or its policies in the slightest. The organization, while ashamed that such an event took place, is proud to have cast out such a man before he would commit this action.

O.I.M. concurs with the determination of the Martian Republic Investigatory Forces' report and the events described therein. On June 13, 2084 (Martian Date: 17/7/61), at 10:17:07 universal time, an explosion occurred on the east wing of the O.I.M. refinery on Invictus Station in orbit around Mars. As the Investigatory Report concludes, the explosion was the result of a device which was intentionally detonated in order to limit O.I.M.'s refinery capabilities. The sole work of Mr. O. Sullivan, this device was designed using black market parts and based on the designs of the Martian Revolutionary Militia. The blast killed 43 civilians, four emergency services workers, and injured 82 more, the majority of which were O.I.M. employees. Such an action is not only a violation of O.I.M. codes and the Martian Republic, but also of the Interplanetary Union Charters.

O.I.M. denounces this man's actions and the terrorist organization his actions represent. As the Interplanetary Union has deemed this tragedy a terrorist act which was likely carried out by the Martian Revolutionary Militia, O.I.M. has now decided to refuse all future corporate positions to former or current members of the Martian Revolutionary Militia. Regular performance reviews will additionally consider this factor and any current employee will be relieved of their position. All persons suspected of serving as accomplices in this crime or future Martian Revolutionary Militia crimes should be reported to O.I.M. management.

– Signed,

Simran Ijizawa – President of Onorato International Mining Corporation

A CALL TO ARMS!

THE MARTIAN REVOLUTIONARY MILITIA CALLS ALL TRUE MARTIANS TO RALLY AGAINST THE O.I.M. AND THE INTERPLANETARY UNION

AN OFFICIAL PAMPHLET OF FREE PEOPLES

Comrades of the Martian Revolutionary Militia, an event which should only have harmed a few woefully guilty members of the filthy corrupt, ended in the bloodshed of hundreds of innocent Martians on Invictus Station this week. In truth, our bomb killed twenty already guilty bureaucrats. The Martian Republic Investigatory Forces rounded up and summarily executed dozens more, with unjust minds and foul hearts. The ensuing battle ended the lives of hundreds of our fellow free peoples.

Each day these off-worlders strip our world of its minerals, ice deposits, and precious elements. This world was never theirs; it belongs to the native-born Martians. Miners, welders, and coders own the red planet, not the bureaucrats and politicians of other worlds. Lies pour from their corporate lips and now we stand as the sole true stewards of a planet we were born to. As the first generation of true-born Martians, we have no choice but to formally declare war on the Interplanetary Union.

We take these actions in remembrance of the man who died on Invictus Station in a most glorious show of force: Comrade Henry O. Sullivan. Comrade O. Sullivan was a cunning warrior and a wise servant of our Martian peoples. We take up arms now in his memory. He is survived by his wife Janet, along with his children Antoine and Dorothy. We carry on his fight for all Martians and seek a more just tomorrow for today's Children. We will thrive on our rich red soil, and we will never surrender to a foreign government. We undertake this war in Comrade O. Sullivan's name until the day all Martians are free!

LONG LIVE THE MARTIAN PEOPLES AND THEIR GLORIOUS MILITIA!

Thursday, June 13th, 2097
Janet O. Sullivan
Pod-1131472 White-Palm
Whimra Outpost, Mars

Re: Interview Questions

Dear Jose,

Yes, I would of course love to be interviewed for your school project! I have a number of answers to your questions, however a few of them seem similar. If I send you some broad answers and you want me to clarify, feel free to email me back with follow-up questions.

1. Dorothy had the cutest little button nose and a smile that would make even the meanest man gush with joy. In those days, raising a kid on Mars was always considered dangerous. Not just because of politics, but because we didn't really have hard science to back up what the effects of a birth on Mars were. We'd only been colonizing the planet for about 50 years and only the first couple of generations of Martian babies had been born with a few mishaps. Not my babies, no; Antoine was 4.08kg (that's 3.4 Martian lbs!), and your mother was around the same. They were some big, healthy babies.

2. Henry and I were born on Earth in the year 2058 (in Earth years). My parents had both been schoolteachers in an aerospace trade school in Cape Canaveral. His father had been a coal miner on Earth, so it's not really shocking that he would end up as an ore refiner on Mars. Our parents both moved to Mars around 2070, but we didn't meet until high school. I still remember: it was during a computing class, and he was making a fool of himself in front of his teacher. Your grandfather was always a class clown in those days.

3. I'm not exactly sure what you mean by this question as the M.T.D (Martian Tactical Defenses) were the Martian Revolutionary Militia back in those days. It was unsaid among Martians that we hated the Interplanetary Union. It was an organization known to be corrupt, and yet everyone just averted their eyes. After each Militia attack, the Union clamped down on Martians, whether they were involved or not. They rounded us up and questioned us regularly in the hopes of finding a "dissident." Some days, when there was nobody to be found, they just chose someone at random. A couple years into high school, the O.I.M. started building a station in orbit of Mars. The O.I.M. won a contract from the Union to start refining Mars's minerals and young Martians jumped at the chance to work on the station. Your grandfather hadn't even graduated high school when he applied for a job. It was a competitive process, but he had good grades (mostly). A couple years later, he started working his first shift. Weeks at a time, he would fly up to the station with the mineral supplies to work his shift. Invictus Station was the first space station around Mars, but it grew as Henry took longer and longer shifts. Your uncle was born, and Henry rushed to the surface to meet his son. When your mother was born... he couldn't make it quite so quickly.

4. As your mother has probably told you repeatedly, I don't talk about what happened to Henry. Even thinking about what they called it, 6/13—it makes me sick. The Union named the tragedy in Earth calendar days when the majority of people who died were Martians. But hell, this is for a history class, so why not. Henry called me that morning. He was his usual, cheerful self. Even after they had fired him weeks ago, he kept going in on the unemployment line. He said he was going to get his job back. That he was going to go in and talk to his boss and convince him that the layoffs of the O.I.M. miners were wrong. I still remember he said, "Baby, our Antoine and Dorothy are never gonna know hunger. Not while I'm on Mars." I cannot fathom him doing what these Union people have accused him of.

I hope your project goes well! The future of Mars relies on Henry's legacy. For better or for worse.

I love you, silly boy, and go give your mom a hug.

— LOVE, GRANDMA JANET

[Martian Peoples Senate 114-121, SUBCOMMITTEE ON REPARATIONS]
[From the MPS Publishing Office]

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MARTIAN REPARATIONS

SEVENTH SESSION

MARTIAN YEAR 60, MONTH 1, SOL NUMBER 38

CHAIRMEN KENZINGTON

This meeting of the Senate Subcommittee on Martian Reparations will come to order. Good afternoon, everyone. As we discussed in our sixth session of this committee, we continue to hear varied testimony on the events which took place on 6/13. We heard from representatives of the Onorato Corporation at last month's session, and today we seek to hear from our final speaker on the issue. After today's testimony, the Subcommittee will vote on whether to call on the Senate to vote in the affirmative for issuing reparations to the families of those affected by the events of 6/13.

It has been almost 40 years now since the events that took place on 6/13. Mars has secured its place in our solar system as an independent governing planet. Yet, recent claims have been made, that is claims from the public [excuse me], that not all the evidence presented about those events has been wholly honest.

The purpose of these hearings is to clear the air of such claims. Our final witness today is Dr. Jose D. Kent. A graduate of the Cretea School for Public Service, Dr. Kent has published numerous works on Martian history and, perhaps most importantly, he is the grandson of Henry O. Sullivan, who is at the center of these hearings. Dr. Kent, are you ready to deliver your opening statement?

DR. JOSE KENT:

CHAIRMEN KENZINGTON, good members of the committee. The Freedom of Interplanetary Information Program expiration date for the files from 6/13 is today. My grandfather's involvement in the events of 6/13 is now public information as of this very moment. So, as I proceed, please know that what I'm about to say is all corroborated by our Martian government and past investigations. My grandfather, Henry O. Sullivan, has been called many things: a terrorist, a monster, a dissident. The truth is, as the files released today reveal, he was never involved with the bombing of Platform 4 on Invictus Station. In fact, as the record shows, the perpetration of that bombing was carried out by the Interplanetary Union in an effort to spark a war they thought they could win.

CHAIRMEN KENZINGTON:

ORDER! I will have ORDER. If the gallery does not remain silent, I will make this a closed session! Proceed, Doctor.

DR. JOSE KENT:

Our government is founded on a farce, which itself is founded on a lie. That lie is exposed by the files released today. One of those files recently made public is my grandfather's Neuro-Data-Log. This log is a stream of his consciousness and clearly relates the events which transpired that day. Such a log is the only remaining proof of what actually happened that day on Platform 4 at Invictus. Mr. Chairman, may I play that log for the chamber?

CHAIRMAN KENZINGTON:

You may, Doctor. The Senate Sergeant at Arms will now play this log where it is readily viewable by the gallery.

LOG DATE: 06/13/2084
USER: HENRY O. SULLIVAN
1131-72-22418

[O.I.M. notes that the log presented here is a stream-of-consciousness generated by Neuro-Implants and uploaded to our data backlogs in real time. Redistribution or reproduction of this log without O.I.M.'s direct approval is strictly illegal under Martian Intellectual Property Codes 1-7-1372.]

My name is Henry O. Sullivan. This is my dying declaration. The sun that pours into my room on Invictus Station is obscured this morning. The light from our single, beautiful sun is a pale white that shines in my face. I open my eyes to a room full of people who are already awake. After all, the rooms on the Station are expensive and bunking with 15 other people is cheaper than a single room. I greet my bunkmate Rudy as he laces up his mag-boots, he gives me a wry smile.

I finish lacing up my mag-boots and click them on. Immediately, I feel my body pulled toward the floor as I stumble to my wardrobe. It's been a week since I showered, but given the Militia attacks on the surface, water rationing has been limited. I throw on my best pair of coveralls. I haven't worn them in weeks, but hey, it's worth a shot if it gets me a job. As I stroll out of my bunk block and into the station hallway, the air feels surprisingly fresh. We must have been using new filters on the station today.

I navigate the many corridors of Invictus, hallways I have known for almost a decade now. I spent years of my life on the station working for O.I.M., but when it came time for my annual performance review, none of that mattered. All my certifications, all my time working to make them money was lost during a single question.

"You're a talented worker Henry and clearly all your coworkers respect you immensely," Duldry had said. Leo Duldry was a tall and slender man. Where the rest of us wore coveralls, he wore a well-tailored suit. Typical garb for a man in his position. He had a narrow face, with a flat nose and a scar that ran the length of his jaw. It was common knowledge on Platform 4 that Duldry had been working to build the station when a cable snapped and cut his face from ear to ear. He was left with a scar that spanned his face and left him genuinely disfigured. I smiled at his current comment. A passing nicety. Duldry popped a piece of nicotine gum into his mouth and began to snarl, "But... we've heard a disturbing report recently." Here it was. What he had wanted to say all along. "Is it true that you recently attended a meeting of the Martian Militia?"

I was almost too stunned to speak. "If by recently you mean nine years ago... then yes," I replied. He grimaced and rose from his chair. I was just some stupid high school kid all those years ago. I attended a Militia meeting with the hopes of finding a community. What I found instead was a group of angry young Martians who were not prepared to face the world as it was.

"I like you Henry," he said with genuine praise, "but this can't continue. If it was discovered that a man in your position had been involved with these people—"

"Leo, it was nine years ago!" I fired back. "I was never a card-carrying member. I'm a different man now..." Duldry simply stared out the window of his office that overlooked the plant floor. He was peering at the dozens of men whom I had been tasked with watching over and directing for years now.

"Be that as it may," he said solemnly, "I have orders from director Ijizawa himself. I'm going to give you a vid-pin for a Borus Sklonsk who works in consumer electronics on platform 7. Tell him I sent you and he can find you work. You can see Yasmin outside and she will transfer your severance pay." He looked close to tears, but at that moment I knew. My time with the O.I.M. was over. I called Boris Sklonsk that afternoon, and he told me he would see if he had anything in the works. I would call him again seven more times that week. He would never respond.

Even now as I walk the corridors and narrow passages of Invictus, I feel the sadness that resonated through me that day. The shame. How would I feed my family or carry my head high as I readied myself for work? Each day I visited the Martian Republic Unemployment Office, and every day they answered that a man with such a low education and only manual labor skills was no longer needed on Invictus Station. Today, I cross those corridors, not traveling towards the unemployment line but toward O.I.M. headquarters. My feet travel beneath me with purpose. As I greet crew members who recognize me, they see a look of determination on my face that they had not seen in weeks. When I reach Duldry's office, I feel tears begin to well up in my eyes. My heart feels as if it were about to pound out of my chest. There is only one person in the world who could steady me this morning.

As I remove my vid-pad from my back pocket, I feel my palms begin to sweat as anxiety I had not known for years wells up in my chest. When Janet answers the pad, she looks more radiant than I have ever seen her. Then again, perhaps that's the adrenaline talking. "Hey Hon. What's up?" she asks absentmindedly. She is in the middle of folding Antoine's laundry. I try to find the words, but nothing escapes my lips. She turns toward her vid-pad and immediately notices something is amiss. "Henry what's wrong? You look thin and sweaty. Ah... you must be meeting with Leo."

I scoff. She knows me like nobody else. "Yeah. I'm meeting with Leo. I want to show him... some new plans! Yes, new plans for a type of water reclaimer we should install!" She looks unimpressed.

"He fired your ass, didn't he?" She presses. I feel tears begin to well up in my eyes again. "Henry, I just wish you had told me sooner. My brother has had a job ready for you here on the surface for weeks. I just wanted to see what you were going to do." I feel awkward, but slightly relieved. At least it's out in the open now. "Henry, you can do this. The company still wants you. But hey, if it doesn't work out there is always a job here for you here down below." I smile and she radiates back. "I love you, hon," she says through a genuine smile.

"I love you back," I say, as I wipe my eyes. "Our Antoine and Dorothy are never gonna know hunger. Not while I'm on Mars." She nods to me.

"I know. Now go show Leo you mean business," she cheers. I smile and wave goodbye. I place the vid-pad back in my pocket as I open the door to Duldry's office. As I enter the outer conference room, his assistant Yasmin greets me from her peculiarly small desk.

"It's good to see you again, Henry! Mr. Duldry is just finishing up with a client and he will be ready for you soon," Yasmin says as she beckons me towards a nearby chair. As I sit there, I look around Leo's office, thinking of how many men must have polished this chair with their coveralls as they waited for his approval. How many men were fired recently because of the company's policy against the Militia. Too many. I can't have been the only one. A light clicks on near Yasmin's desk, and she stands up. "He's ready to see you now, Henry," she says with a veil of feigned kindness. She opens the door to Leo's office, and I am met with a sight I never expected to see. Blood is smeared across Leo's desk and his desk control pad is thrown to the floor. The window in his office that overlooks the factory floor is smashed into a thousand pieces and a massive hole remains.

"Go find the nearest Station security guard, Yasmin. As quickly as you can," I say sternly. She stands there, petrified, and only after I shake her by her shoulders does she begin to move. She lurches away from his office as I run toward the hole in the window. As I look out upon the factory floor, I see workers scrambling toward exits and a crumpled mass on the floor below the window. It's Leo, beginning to develop a pool of machine fluid around him. Nearby, a small canvas bag emits a glowing blue light as the floor begins to clear of workers. I open the door to Leo's office that leads to his personal stairwell and muster up some courage. I fly down the stairs toward the factory floor and hear the refinery machines lurching with life. The refinery continues functioning as the workers empty the platform. I run toward Leo and notice his shallow breathing immediately. He sputters with life and begins to slough toward the cloth bag. I kneel down next to him and hold his hand as I check his body.

Glass had embedded itself in his arms and there is a hole in his left shoulder, likely from a bullet. Leo grabs my shoulder firmly and his eyes are wild with fear. "What is it, Leo? What happened?" I probe as he tries to speak.

"Henry...bomb in bag...get out," he sputters as his body shakes with pain.

"I'll fix it, Leo, just stay still and try not to move. I'll get you a doctor." I comfort him as he holds my palm in his. I rise to my feet and wearily approach the canvas bag. The blue light emitting from the bag is growing brighter as the seconds pass. I pull on the bag's zipper and a blinding blue light fills the room, momentarily blinding me. Immediately, I notice the red logo on the front of the metal cylinder in front of me. It is that of the Martian Revolutionary Militia. I grimace as I inspect the item. It appears to be custom-built and hodgepoded together from scraps. There isn't much time left to act.

As I look up from the bag to search the floor for a solution I notice movement in the corner of the room near the airlock. I pick up the bag gingerly and walk toward the point of movement. Fearing a fight, I ready myself for action, raising a fist to my face. As I turn toward the source of the movement, fear exits my heart. Before me is a child... a girl. She is so small and so afraid. She stares up at me with fear in her eyes. She wears coveralls stained by oil and a ripped pair of boots. She can't be any older than I was when I first attended a Militia meeting. In her left hand, she is holding a pistol. "Did you do this?" I ask. She nods and begins to cry. I kneel in front of her and place the bag between us. I put my hand on her shoulder and sternly ask, "How do we stop it?" She shakes her head and tears stream from her eyes as she silently cries. I frown and look at this girl. This girl who had gotten caught in a web of violence that I myself had avoided. "Go," I say firmly as I point to the nearest exit. "Run as quickly as you can and don't stop until you're in a sealed room on the other side of the station." She drops the pistol and runs nimbly away. Only when she exits the door do I begin my work. Strapping a propulsion unit to my back, I step into the airlock and seal it from the factory floor. There is no time to step into a vacuum-suit as I feel the heat of the object in the bag rising. I close my eyes and feel the air rush from the room... from my lungs.

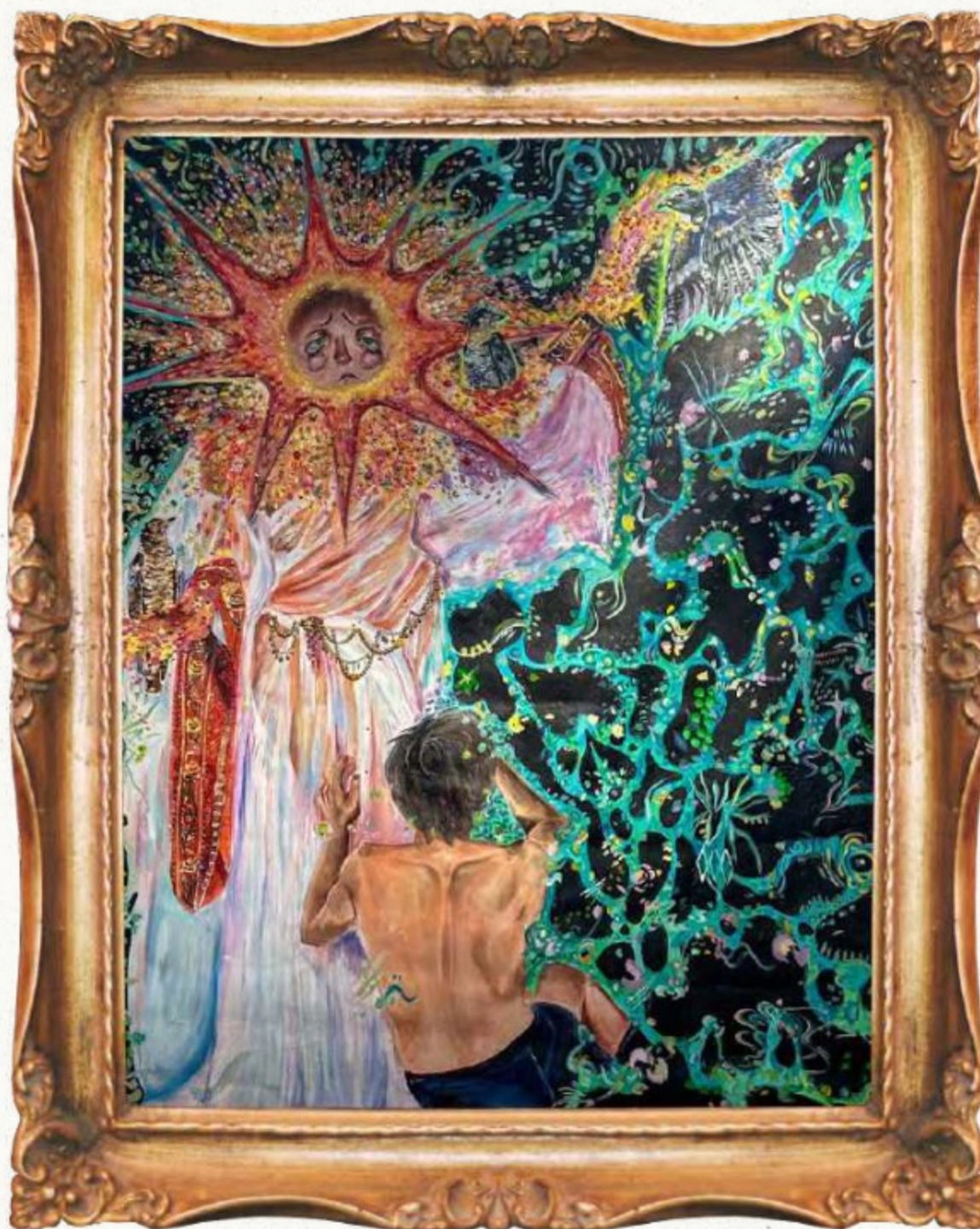
I squeeze my elbow into the port on the propulsion unit and feel my body fly deeper into open space. My mind is growing weaker... and I... I can't feel my arms or legs anymore. Even with the object in my hand emitting immense heat, everything feels cold. The propulsion pack is losing fuel and I begin to slow. As I open my eyes, I feel the bag slip from my grasp as my fingers freeze in place. Staring out at that immense darkness, I notice a most beautiful sight. My beautiful red planet. Below is a world with rich red soil as dark as blood. Filled with cities under glass domes and millions of beautiful Martian people. People will still die because of this bomb, but fewer than if I had done nothing.

As I look out, I think of my beautiful wife and our two gorgeous children. Will they remember me when I'm gone? Will anybody remember me? Mars is beautiful from this view. Everything is beautiful from this view. My eyelids grow heavy as I set my sights on the planet I call home. My red planet.

This is the last account of Mr. Henry O. Sullivan. Loving husband, father, countryman, and true Martian.

Sweet As The Fruit You Gave Her
— *Split Second Catalyst*

oil and acrylic painting with threading and beading



by Julia Koehler

The last time I was in Flushing, I was probably scammed—I bought one too many sheet masks (to target acne, the pretty cashier explained. *It has a soothing effect*, she gestured to my forehead, which behind wind-mussed bangs, showed signs of stress my dermatologist prescribed retinol for) & I still don't know if it's working—in immigrant households, you can never waste what you come to possess, so I'm settling for the placebo effect of soaked cotton across my cheekbones. Like my mother, I can't stand being messy, which is to say I wonder if I am ever clean enough, if I'll ever achieve the glass-jelly-mirror look all the girls on Xiaohongshu rave about. Like my father, I slather Vaseline over my cracked, pale lips, wrinkly-plum elbows. Like my parents, I've never told anyone I love about this: On the worst nights, I scrub my skin clean under the shower spray with steel wool fingertips. I don't wonder when it'll end. Nothing ends unless it has found no other way to live, & maudlin shower thoughts make me cranky & restless. Maybe I'm compensating for something, maybe it's Maybelline. Try this if you have acne-prone skin: Gentle foaming cleanser, i.e. Cerave, Round Lab; wispy-named toner, i.e. *essence*, *miracle*. Exfoliate twice a week. Don't look at the news; it's all tasteless propaganda. Avoid Instagram; children are dying, which is distressing. Double cleanse. Sometimes, I wonder if I should have listened more. I never liked superstitions vis-à-vis personal health, vis-à-vis how to live a life. None of it seemed to matter until everyone my parents loved started dying. Now there's too much to miss & miss; now I'm scrambling to recall everything my parents & grandparents told me when I was five, when I thought my skin would be fine if I didn't smear lotion on my back for one night, to record every word that left their lips. There's too much we don't tell each other. For all my parents know, I never sleep without letting my hair dry. They don't know I swept the good fortune from the floors on Lunar New Year—I didn't know where to bow to my grandparents otherwise—or that I bought five sheet masks & a bottle of aloe vera toner: Soothing, gentle, good for sensitive skin, in Flushing.



Skincare Routine

by Sophie Uy

Earthly Beauty

painting



by rojeana rofougar



For Every Mood

by Julie Eastwood: lithograph



Honey Bee

by Hannah Landis

Rebecca had been anticipating having her stepdaughter Louise for tea for twenty-two days. She'd marked July 30th on her black-and-white national-park-photography wall calendar, and every morning, she slashed fatalistically through the day's box with a neat ballpoint line, bottom left to top right.

After the calendar came coffee. How marvelous, how refreshing it was to simply make one cup. When Franklin was alive, she'd made two every morning, scrubbing the residual taste of her hazelnut Nespresso out of the whole machine, as Franklin had insisted. He had died eighteen days ago, and each of those eighteen days marching up to the present, she left her used hazelnut pod seeping in the machine until the next morning.

It was a simple pleasure in life.

Stirring agave syrup into her mug, she sat at the counter barstool and looked at the desktop computer's wallpaper and its gleaming rotating photos—her and Franklin on their wedding day, Franklin and Louise at an amusement park. Then Rebecca knitting, Louise arranging hymns for the nursing home carolers, Louise with her adopted dog, Louise smiling and Rebecca about to sneeze. Franklin had thought that picture was hilarious.

Rebecca used to look at that picture and wonder if it was cropping, shaving off her pixels by the day, until it was just shiny Louise and she'd be out of the picture. Well. She needn't torment herself any longer. She opened settings and deleted it out of the rotation.

And why stop there?

One more click, and it was deleted from her library forever.

•

This morning, she watched the bees in their hives in the backyard while she washed out her coffee mug at the sink. It started out as Franklin's hobby, the bee keeping. She was stung as a child and was deathly afraid of them; everyone knew that. She'd made *such* a fuss when he installed the beehouses, as Franklin liked to spread about. She'd watched Franklin caring for them. She'd watched them frolicking around him.

She could almost see how, if they'd had tails, they would have wagged like dogs'; yes, Franklin loved them and they loved him right back.

In the eighteen days since Franklin passed so peacefully in his sleep, the bees had started to formulate suspicions. When Rebecca would approach, wearing Franklin's beekeeping suit—his smell beginning to fade—they'd circle mistrustfully around her.

Where where where, they'd ask.

"He's dead," she would say simply.

One day, she'd said it aloud, and then clapped her hand in front of her mouth to punch the words back in. She crushed two bees. Their little bodies fell limply to the grass. She could easily imagine their whimper, just as she could hear hers—childhood trauma has a vicious sting.

She had thrown the cream-belled flowers as her daily offering at the hive and sought refuge in the house, slamming the glass door.

•

Yesterday, the honey was finally ready. This was the first batch she'd ever collected; she'd knocked back a shot of Bushmills—"Redhead Liquid Courage," Franklin always botched the Irish accent for his little nickname—and told the bees she was there to help. She'd actually said it out loud.

Franklin used to talk to them. He said they got anxious without a human voice, and maybe he was right, because yesterday, they were calmer. Tails wagging, they'd greeted her as she smoked then opened the hive.

Hi hi hi, they had said.

"Hello to you, too," she'd replied. She was as steady as she could have been. Perhaps there was a treacherous beauty in their synchrony, their buzzing harmony, their queen worship. What did they see with those big eyes? Could they see through her?

It was this thought that spooked her. She scraped off the rest of the honey and scurried back into the house as soon as she was done.

Rebecca congratulated herself as she set out the tea cups next to the comfy armchairs, adjusting the honey and cream to just the right angle. It wasn't easy to go out there, with the bees. It wasn't fun.

She wouldn't have done it if it weren't for Franklin. Louise should appreciate that, at least.

Louise was very close with her father. Even after Rebecca married him, it was Louise he talked about, Louise who he had to return a call to, Louise who lost her first tooth sixteen years ago today. Even their calendar revolved around Louise's. Couldn't they try a cruise this Christmas? Rebecca had once crooned. I hear the Caribbean is dazzling this time of year.

It was all she dreamed about while they visited Louise in Wisconsin instead.





Today, Rebecca felt like she'd swallowed those bees, waiting for Louise to come. Killing time and sedating nerves, she picked out a cashmere sweater and sharp slacks, both deliberate, demure shades of gray. Mourning clothes, for her Franklin.

As she dressed, she cataloged his suit jackets on the other side of their his-and-hers closet. What was she supposed to do with them? She didn't remember them in the will, though she'd studied it many long, tear-stained nights. Did they still smell like him—notes of pine and musk? She walked over, pants still unbuttoned.

They did.

And there, underneath the pine and musk, was the cardboard box of Louise's mom's things. Franklin treasured his first wife's possessions, her wedding jewelry and journal and reading glasses, to the point that Louise was only allowed to look through the box when she was over at their house. Today, Louise would retrieve that box, the rightful owner after the reading of the will. Louise owned everything now. Rebecca kicked the box to the door; best to keep the entire affair downstairs, controlled.

In the laundry room through the doorway—her cleverest idea for their latest renovation, that adjoined laundry room—Franklin's undershirts were limp on the counter. She'd done laundry since then, done it all, actually. She'd found that it helped to be busy. But in all the loads of laundry she'd done, she still had a sock left over without a match.

One lonely sock.

She threw it in the trash and closed the door.

Buttoning her pants, she found her hairbrush on the bureau. There, on her side, the framed photo of her and Franklin on their two-month stint in Rome was

gathering dust. Was viewing it a type of nostalgia, a diluted remembrance of the reckless, life-long affection they never quite stumbled upon? Or was it love she felt?

Best to write it off as indigestion.

On his side of the bureau, two photos: Franklin and Rebecca on their wedding day, a candid this time, and her and Louise on the lake house dock. They were both half-smiling. Louise looked right into the camera, radiant. Rebecca squinted into the sun, distracted and wrinkled.

Why did he insist on these photos where she played the fool?

Why didn't she insist on removing them when he was still alive?

It wasn't too late. She pried out the lake photo and crumpled it into trash.

When she was appropriately dressed and groomed, she took the box downstairs and turned on the stove to start heating the water. Still legible through the ballpoint slash were her boxy capital letters: Louise, 9:30 a.m. After that was the meeting with her book club, 11 a.m. Hopefully, Louise wouldn't find it rude that she'd scheduled something else after their tea time—it was simply the way it had to be done.

At 9:27, the doorbell rang. Rebecca turned the stove off to get the door.

When they'd married, Franklin dismissed all the staff he'd employed. "I'm so sorry to see you go," he'd toasted aptly, regretfully, firmly. "But, as you know, I'll be in good company now." He'd put his arm around

Rebecca. She smiled compliantly. But it was moments like this that she thought again about putting out ads; she could certainly afford it, even more so without Franklin's sulking insistence.

Would she miss making her morning coffee when she had an employee to do it?

Or perhaps that was the catch—for Franklin, employees were extraneous when he had her.

Rebecca opened the door to reveal Louise.

"Come in, Louise!" Rebecca took her fashionable pageboy cap, her beige raincoat. How could Louise look so stylish all the time? Rebecca had once asked her this.

"Dad is so generous," Louise had laughed. "Ask his bank account!"

Now, Louise's swollen eyes and worried lip clashed with her outfit fantastically. "Hi, Mom. It's good to see you."

"I've been counting down the days to your visit," Rebecca said. She hung the coat and cap and patted Louise's arm. "Won't you come in?"



On the way in, Louise paused by a extravagant floral arrangement on the side table. She toyed with the blooms. "I love these white ones," she said, testing their flexibility and letting them flick her fingers as they snapped back into place. "What are they?"

"Amaryllis, I think."

"What a beautiful bouquet. Who sent it?"

Rebecca closed the hall closet. "I bought it for myself, actually, but now I'm thinking it's a little too big. I'll put it on the back porch after my book club, for the bees."

Louise smiled. "They'll love that."

They went into the drawing room, to the cushy arm chairs. Louise lounged in one, with her legs out over the armrest. Only she was allowed to do that. When Rebecca once tried, in lingerie, no less, Franklin chided her. It had been a brief chiding, though.

Now, Rebecca perched consciously on the edge of her seat.

Louise noticed. "Mom, you always have such good posture. I don't know how you do it. Since everything...I slouch. It feels like my heart is caving in, all the time." Louise looked at her earnestly. "I don't know how you're holding it all together. Well... are you? Are you okay?" She sighed a laugh. "I'm sorry. I've been so frazzled, I feel like I haven't been caring for you as I should."

"You lost your father, dear." Rebecca sprang up to bring in the kettle. "I had the pleasure of being his wife for a few short years. You had the pleasure of being his daughter for your whole life."

Louise shifted to watch her retrieve it through the open doorway. "It's not a competition."

"No; I only meant that it's okay for our grieving to be different."

Louise flopped back into the chair and stared at the ceiling. "You sound like my therapist."

Rebecca tapped manicured nails into a rhythmic percussion on the counter. "Perhaps we're both right." The water was a tad too cool now, so she turned the stove on again. "Help yourself to that honey, Louise. I got it from the beehouses yesterday; it's delicious."

Louise picked up the jar and turned it this way and that, watching the honey reluctantly slide from side to side, inspecting the crystallized bubbles. "Oh, I'm so glad you've kept up with hives! Dad would be so grateful." She opened the jar with a little growl—the honey had stuck the lid on. Then: "Oh, it is delicious!"

When Rebecca came back with the kettle, Louise

had honey coating the bottom of her cup and latticed up the sides. Louise grinned up at her, childlike, and Rebecca was reminded of Franklin. Is this how he had viewed his daughter? In these glimpses of Louise's innocence and eagerness to please, she saw Franklin's little girl.

But maybe that was just who Louise was. With Franklin's inherited shiny blonde hair and her easy smile, her naivety and her inherent, unfairly inimitable charm, she reminded Rebecca of a golden retriever.

"It's so creamy." Louise smiled at her helping of honey. "Indulging isn't the worst thing in the world right now, don't you think?"

"No." Rebecca passed her the kettle. "It's not. Here's the water, go on..."

Once each woman poured the water over their loose leaves and removed the strainers, Louise spoke again. "Mom, I'm really glad you invited me to come. I've been meaning to thank you, and I've only really gotten my words straight now." She looked up and clasped Rebecca's hands. "You've taken such good care."

"Dear, I've only hosted you for tea. It's the least I can do." She tried to remove her hands but Louise only grasped tighter.

"I mean you've taken such good care of Dad."

Unexpectedly, tears. Rebecca blinked them back. "I...it was my pleasure, caring for your dad. Caring for someone I...loved so much."

Louise rubbed her thumb across Rebecca's hand, over each protruding vein and tendon. "I know it wasn't easy, with his diabetes, and how he—well, you know he was forgetting more and more. I'm surprised he never forgot my name!"

"I'm not." He'd forgotten Rebecca's name multiple times. Never Louise's.

"You were just an angel to him, and I really appreciate that." Louise was crying now, too. "And I saw the will."

"Did you?" Neither of them heard it as a question.

"I saw he cut you out." Louise flushed, hesitated. "I saw that, well..."

Yes, how would Louise articulate her father's betrayal, his forcing Rebecca secondary to her spotlight once again? Rebecca, second always, even in the will—Rebecca's crumbs were contingent on Louise, receiving her leftovers. Even after every hospital visit and delirious fogged fight and change of the wet bed sheets.

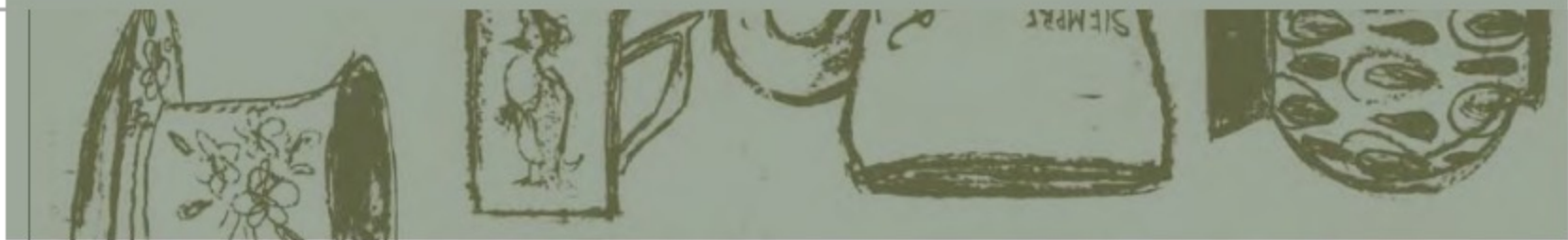
Louise was too embarrassed to say it, so Rebecca said it first. "That you're taken care of."

Louise's relief at having this already known was palpable. "Yes. I want you to know, Mom, I'm going to take care of you." She swiped her thumbs across Rebecca's hands. "I'm going to take care of you, Rebecca."

Rebecca. She never called her Rebecca. Louise had taken so quickly to calling her Mom, it seemed unusual. All Rebecca's book club friends said the habit was strange but benign when she brought it up. "At least your stepdaughter speaks to you!" One joked.

Franklin knew the truth. "Her mother died when she was little. She wants someone to call 'Mom.'" he'd explained. Rebecca never minded one way or the other, but now hearing her name out of Louise's mouth was startling.





It was too raw; it stripped and exposed her. She shivered. "Louise, dear, let me make you a fresh cup. That's too cold, now." She reached for Louise's cup but her stepdaughter only laughed.

"Mom, it's okay. It will be perfect, because it has your honey. Because we're drinking it together." She clinked her cup against Rebecca's.

"I insist; you shouldn't drink that, all cooled down and whatnot..."

Louise ignored her, too kind and generous to let Rebecca backtrack. Too naive.

"To Dad."

"To Franklin," Rebecca murmured. She bit her lip as Louise downed the tea and told her she needn't have worried, it was the perfect temperature, and you know what, she'd like another cup. The honey dissolved into this one, crystals disintegrating one by one.

Louise may have grown into her mother's high heels, but she was a child, with her plastic tea cups and tap water and feather boa. Her grown-up tea party. Rebecca was reminded of her fatalistic slashes; this was just the way it had to be.

Rebecca stood with Louise when it was 10:50. The book club would be here soon. She retrieved the box of Louise's mother's possessions to surrender. The weight of all those memories, all those jealousies and bitter resentments, was lighter than she'd thought.

"Here are your mother's things." An extraneous transition, considering Louise's eyes were glued to the box she knew every dent of, to the contents she came to visit just to paw through.

"Thank you, Mom—Rebecca." Louise accepted it with childlike reverence. She clutched it to her chest so tightly the cardboard crunched. A long moment ballooned in the space between them until Rebecca couldn't stand it, was spurred into a kinetic dismissal. She stacked Louise's cap and raincoat on top of the box. "Louise," she said, "I'm sorry about your loss."

Louise shifted to balance the box on her knee, grasping out to hug her and squeeze her tightly. "I'm so sorry about your loss, too."

Rebecca watched her go with that bulky cardboard treasure box, watched her honey-blond hair disappear into the car and then down the street. She had thought she'd be glad to see her stepdaughter drive away, cardboard ghost in tow, but instead she felt like she'd lost something herself.

Perhaps it was just that indigestion.

Rebecca thought about Louise as she hand-washed the cups they'd used and then put them in a plastic bag to be disposed of, along with the kitchen sponge she'd used. She lugged that gaudy arrangement outside so she could excuse away her ignorance, and the bees seemed to buzz, *more more more amaryllis for us?*

She thought about her stepdaughter as she set out that cheeky little plastic honey bear, the store-bought honey, for the book club, and as she snapped on her surgical gloves to clean up the bees' honey. It smelled divine, yes. Franklin's beloved hobby, twisted to toxicity—wouldn't it have killed him?

Just like it would Louise.



elegy for my younger self

always the maid of her burning house,
vigorously scrubbing the floors that were
muddied with shoes of uninvited guests.
the first place she learned to run from,
yet the place she will never be able to escape.

she covered the mirrors that showed her
reflection and never looked at herself with the
same kindness she gently extended to others.
eighteen was pouring eyes, grinded teeth,
clenched fists, and grief-filled lungs.

her heart filled with the gritty sands
of the beaches she never touched and
she choked on the salty water that
she could never completely swallow.

she drowned in the weighted roles that she could never fulfill,
daughter and sister and friend and human and then—

nothing.

by **Lindsey Mitchell**








Falling Together

by Kate Funk: multimedia



Lǎowài (老外) - FOREIGNER

by Sophie Uy

*"But for tonight, forget it / I'm in the mood for love."
- Dorothy Fields*

Dear body, suppose poetry is a question
you've been asking me all along—*what*

if? in exchange for conclusive *if-then*
statements—nothing so wispy as

Huāyàng Niánhuá, those wonderful
varied years, localized into desire. *I'm—*

In the Mood for Love. As if love
could be as simple as choosing. It's

heaven, sesame syrup in Tony Leung's
eyes; he stares at Maggie Cheung like a

man in love, or like he's afraid of it.
They don't die at the end. *Why stop*

*to think of whether this little dream
might fade?* They don't die at the end.

They live, knowing neither could
cross the bridge between them.

//

Tenth grade computer science taught
me everything has two settings: 0 or 1.

In or out of love. On or off. Native
or foreign. English or foreign. I've

been trying to escape this language
so I searched for the nearest getaway

car, dug my foot into the gas pedal &
tore off into rice fields. This is a metaphor.

I mean that a metaphor defines itself—
is a vehicle. Or maybe metaphor

is what bridges you & I, the way a
lingua franca connected Mandarin,

a language of effort, to Tagalog, a
language born from polite, colonized

effort. Yes, *ma'am*. Yes *po*. Sorry *po*.
Bless me father, for I have sinned.

What they didn't tell me on Tuesday
& Thursday mornings: code can be

conditioned. No into yes; 0 into 1.
Foreigner into not-quite-foreign-or-

native. I'm not in the mood for love.
OK into *sige* into 好. Filipino Hokkien

into Mandarin & Tagalog into English
into Taglish into Tagdalish. Kasi—

dear body, I've never known how to
fit you into if-then statements without

else or anything as 兼 as yin & yang.
We are one pa rin. I'm lying in the

shade of my family tree wondering
where the bridge fell short.



O Canada

photograph



by Emily Rose Allen

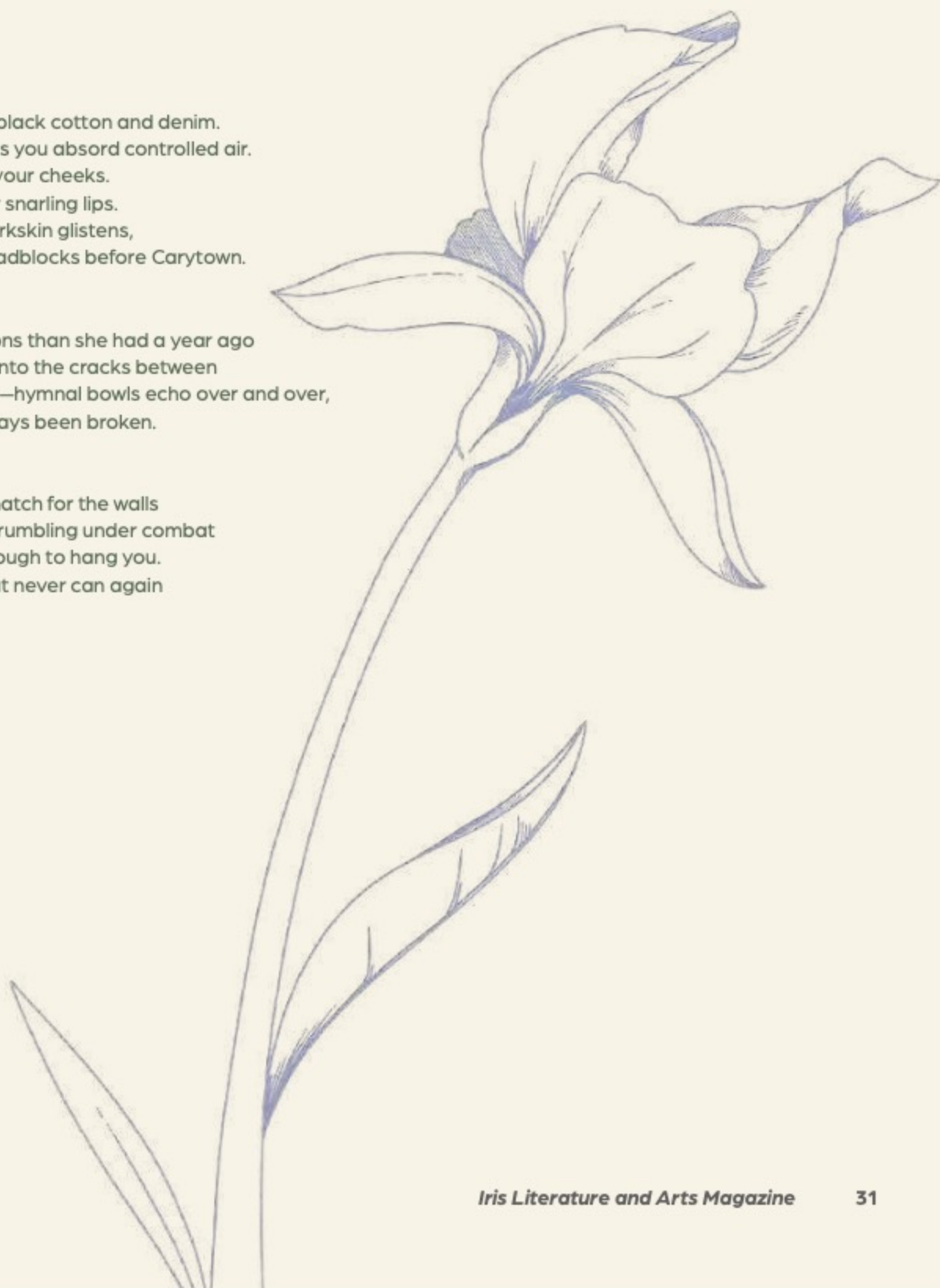
Untitled

by India Williams

Hot concrete sings black cotton and denim.
Your chest tightens as you absorb controlled air.
Salt in your eyes, on your cheeks.
Mask clinging to your snarling lips.
Vertebrae rattles, darkskin glistens,
When you see the roadblocks before Carytown.

A mother with less sons than she had a year ago
Grips a megaphone into the cracks between
Purple-blue knuckles—hymnal bowls echo over and over,
To heal what has always been broken.

Armored trucks no match for the walls
Built centuries ago, crumbling under combat
Boots, laces tight enough to hang you.
You try to breathe but never can again



The Merchant and The Moon

by Gilli Guy

I

Traitor to Her Solar Radiance, he walks a rayless world that curses his eyes with grayness. He denied Her regal brightness, casting every moment of his into scorching heat and a dim saturation. Rivers would retract as he approached, dooming him to sweat and shrink as his shoes burned on the sands. As a merchant, his trade would struggle when popular rivers would cease existence, permitting no one to find and indulge in the cups of rare fruit juices he sells. Frustrated, he kicks three of his cups. All he can do is exist in day hours until night falls.

II

He grips his cloak of inky darkness; a gift from His Lunar Majesty. The fabric, as midnight as his hair, was speckled in white stars, one to mark each day he denied the heliacal eminence of the sun.

But how could he ever go back? She does not take kindly to lycanthropic kind; she contorts in blinding jealousy at the witches and wolves who dance under the inferior blue guidance of the Moon. Meditating on his doubts, he wanders, buskins leaving no footprints, no trace of his existence in the day. He pulls the cloak tighter.

III

The bell of the Evening Church sounds. The Sun will set now. As the echo of the bell drifts past and fades into silence once more, the merchant grabs his two remaining cups, delighted; he cannot be without offering. He would always suffer three failures for any two successes with his love. His wanders become sprints, and just before he enters the blissful woods, he throws his cloak into the air. The tapestry of atmosphere quickly unfurls, covering what was once a lightless, gray sky with thousands of dancing stars and planets. The Moon will arrive soon.

IV

The Moon. A speckle from the sky blanket grows and twists until it is forced into the shape of a man. Flesh battle-worn, adorned with craters from the War of Meteors. Brushstrokes of blue and cold gray dance across his skin, bringing life to an otherwise vampiric lack of hue. Bone horns decorate his skull, adding concreteness to his wispy, undefined hair. He is lined with pearlescent jewelry and shimmering silver robes, and the metals chatter as he descends from the darkened heavens. He exudes a permeating, pale glow that shifts nature itself.

V

The waters of the forest's river churn and rise.

Reeds and cattails shoot from the bank to sway with
lush grasses while the crawfish thrive by the rocks.

Obelisks rise from the soil, carved with glyphs
of the language the Moon spoke ages ago.

It is his hour. And what of the merchant?

He kneels as the moon evolves the

world, waking the nocturnal and inviting them to act.

He sets the cups beside him; a drink

for himself, and a drink for his love, his savior.

The perfect number. He watches,

waiting for his turn to transform.

VI

Once the dark hour is suited to his liking, the Moon turns to the merchant. He smiles upon him, closing his eyes. The Moon touches the merchant's forehead with ghostly fingertips. The moment overwhelms him, paining the merchant, yet it only lasts a few seconds. In an instant, he feels his bones cracking and shifting, his skin pulling and tearing as he takes on the form of a wolf. His tenebrious hair spreads across his form, the brown buskins shaping into paw pads before he explores the lush, viridian grasses, finally able to enjoy a colorful world.

VII

Freedom. The wolf jumps into the shimmering lake and paddles, slurping up water and algae before darting back onto land. He grabs a cattail and shakes it until it explodes, just because he can. He jumps and dances as the seeds hurry away in the wind. He howls and yips, he scratches trees and breaks sticks and chases crickets. Afterward, the wolf crashes onto the grass by his cups, panting and wagging his tail lightly. The moon glides over and sits beside him, gently petting his fluffy snout. The wolf huffs, contented, and nuzzles against the deity's chilling hand.

VIII

In a moment as painful and freeing as the lycanthropic shift, the wolf becomes the merchant again. Now aware of his skin, he turns to the Moon, who is smiling at him. The merchant holds out his hand, and the Moon takes it.

"Do you regret it?" asks the Moon.

"You ask this every night, my gleaming love," answers the merchant.

"The answer will never suffice. Perhaps if I ask enough, the tempest of doubt in my mind will subside. Maybe I will allow myself to accept it once I hear your answer one more time."

"Then ask again."

IX

"Do you regret stealing rays from the Sun to spatter my once-empty skies with starlight? Are you a willing traitor to Her Radiant Holiness, the treasonous painter of meteor showers and nebulas?"

"I would steal from her thousands of times over if it means I can offer you a once unimaginable gift. I stand perfidious to her to be loyal to you." They linger in silence for a moment before the Moon speaks again. His smile is a candle in the soft, boreal air of night.

"I've never seen something so beautiful, and I still don't think myself so worthy."

X

The Moon continues, "I'm afraid I once again cannot understand."

"Then I shall happily answer you every night for eternity, my dear."

More warm smiles and a breeze. Enjoying the mere breathing of the Moon, the merchant had nearly forgotten his souvenirs: the cups. He reaches over and grabs them, handing the first to the Moon, who obliges. Once the two have their drinks in hand, they sip together as the merchant tells again the story of how he robbed the Sun of some of her light, and the Moon asks the same questions he asked every night before.

Fin.





Jim Guy

Asterion, Son of Minos

by Haylee Edwards

My housefather should have paid his dues to Jove.
He thought he could outsmart the greatest orbit in our
system — one that none of us have the power to disrupt.

I am his punishment.

I am neither whole nor half,
 quasi modo,
 non cogito,
 but I am.

Straddling the line
 between
imprisonment and ferality,
dwelling at the gates of difference
 between
 man's life and death.

I need to bite down on something fresh
with each cycle of the sun.

It makes me
not quite human,
nor an animal,
nor a son,
but a sin —
a punishment for crossing lines,
 is what I have always been.

Now I am locked in this mausoleum
with high walls blocking out true warmth,
my flesh, fur, and bone all in tatters.
Here I am. Forgotten,
until it is time to disrupt. I wonder what the
tender edges of my labyrinth have to teach me.
What the ocean floor could offer after what I have seen.
What Icarion fluff and feather could say as that angel fell.
I watched his carrion plummet, and even now I still see plumes.

What are those ruins?

Are they memories?

Artifacts?

They are palpable

— *they are here!*

and passing

— *now they aren't!*

They come forth into the fullness

— as his gall came into the sea —

and now it poses as the futurity of our instincts . . .

beware!

He did not last to get the message, unfortunately for him.

But now, at least we know better than to aim too high or risk that certainty.

If we were to live porously,
without the density of pride,
perhaps we could be mindful
of the changeability we house inside.

Maybe then they would stop sending horror to me
with the hopes that I would spark small wars and hunts.
Maybe then they would stop expecting horror of me
with the hopes that I would spark entertainment, too.

Perhaps if the maze-maker had been more
open to my needs,
then the feathers would not have shadowed
the eyes of men who are
still whole, unlike me,

cogito...

ergo...

And yet here I exist, the embodiment of someone's pride

The impact of action is what sticks with me, that in-between.
It sustains and preserves the connections
between everything and no one... it is
like the blood caught on cobblestones.

Perhaps I should snap a shot,
remember the sea,

the island,

the prison,

the fall.

de casibus... de casibus...



how concerning! the squall!

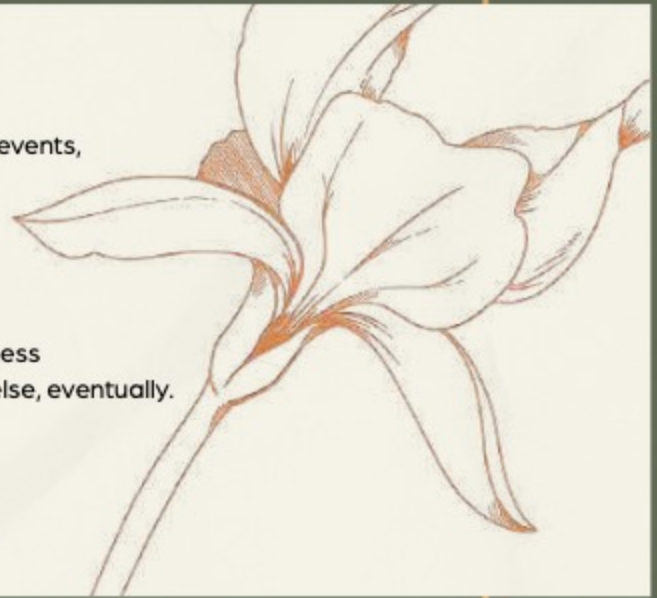
I will exchange the black beneath my lids with events,
remember, taste the traces:

sticky wax wings, gore under my claws,
so they remain.

Collected debris and fluff,
combined sweet with some sour,
it may fester and bloom in me like dormant wretchedness
and it may make me worthwhile to someone else, eventually.

I suppose this is my impure prerogative.

I am.



Life Awaits You

by Rojeana Rofougar: painting



To the Black girls who never made it home

by India Williams

Folk in blue said:

*You were fast,
Too grown,
Up to no good,
Nefarious.*

No investigation, no alert
because you don't have a name like Amber.
Hues of beautiful Brown faces stapled to a lamp post.
No media coverage, no one utters your unique name.
The waiting game starts and does not stop.
You're still underage, family members outraged,
They become the lead detectives,
shapeshifting into monsters, humanizing you.
Circulating your photos through social media,
and by the time that happens,
You have no pulse.
Your case goes cold before your body.
They never find you alive; they did not even try.

...If they find you
they handle your decomposed remains with more care
than the first 24 hours after your disappearance.
To the Black girls that never made it home,
They bury you before they find your body.

Flowers for Abbi

screenprint of relief print



by Julie Eastwood

The Life of a Spoiled Brat

by Danielle Generous

American Girl dolls and Mercedes-Benz, princess dresses and never having to apologize.
I'm from bedsheet escape lines and older men who said I was wise.
I'm from three church services a week and pastors who preached like tax collectors.
I'm from *Do you want Botox to get that scar filled? I know a few injectors.*
I'm from *Chanel N°5* spritzed on my French grandmother's fur coat.
I'm from *You sure you want seconds?* and my fingers in the back of my throat.

I'm from 7-7:30pm dads and 25/8 mothers, secretary mistresses and whiskey sours.
I'm from locks on Daddy's medicine cabinet: Xanax pills and weed flowers.
I'm from so-called "functioning alcoholics" with multiple Monday morning DUIs.
I'm from Saturday night sins and Sunday's *How many times can I be baptized?*
I'm from Jesus freaks and warped scriptures resembling Tumblr posts.
I'm from *The Devil is alive and well* but *There's no such thing as ghosts.*

I'm from flipped-over diamond rings and *You ought to clutch your purse in this neighborhood.*
I'm from *Keep your legs closed* because *whores aren't cut out for motherhood.*
I'm from *Your idiot brother overdosed* and forgetting how to sugarcoat.
I'm from silent Thanksgivings and knowing better than to ask which candidate they gave their vote.

From bigots, liars, addicts, cheats, and frauds,
Secrets, crimes, sins, and façades!





by Kate Funk: multimedia

I Dream of Spring

Redwood

by Sara Buie

Feet skimming the grass beneath
Pillow soft
Sunlight warms her head, her shoulders,
Her heart
The trees spin around her
As she ducks between boughs
Caresses their roots

She whispers her condolences
For she, too, had been bound once
As tied to the Earth as the Sequoias
Reaching for the heavens
Their gnarled hands grasping
300 ft above
For a summit they cannot reach

She'd pulled her roots up months ago
For she was burning
And only near-constant motion
Would keep her from
Succumbing to ash

Her hair
Brittled ends
Scraping at the ground
Tangling with the other trees
Caked in sediment

Sentiment
A pull in her chest
As she gazes at the behemoth
Smoking above her

Resting in its shadow
Bark scratches her arms
Her face pressed into its trunk
Tears salting the Earth below

Far away
Tsunamis rage against the coast
Prayers lifted in the wind
Dead in the water

She cries harder
And the world drowns
In the sorrow
Of Mother Nature

Cotton is King

by India Williams

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

- The 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution.

We went from picking cotton to being the cotton
overpoliced by overseers,
picked, and pulled off prickly pedicles
cash cropped.

The *thirty-eight percent* of Black people incarcerated
a highly desired homegrown commodity
good money made with and off the backs of the
thirty-eight percent
of Black bodies in jail.
our redlined livelihoods stolen from us
...again.

Expected to be part man-mostly robot-
to work effectively like a cotton gin
as they yield
pounds of Black flesh into this not-so-new system,
intricate detailing stitched
within this prison industrial complex
upheld by a coffle of cotton thread

We are the seeds massed prematurely
not expected to grow,
but we did.
Later to be cut down, stripped, and harvested.
The thirteenth amendment had a loophole.
This invisible noose tied so tightly
as the cotton king dressed in orange---
culled from his roots
hangs from up high
lynched by the system
feet dangle.

The Shadow and the Castle

by Charles-Nicolas Owen: drawing



Masterpiece

by Kayla Koldys

My mind lingers where hidden words itch
like a memorized hum gifted to me
as a distraction licked in rum.

To you I was faith-bought and unrequited,
worshiped by hollow dreams and hallowed loss,
to fill all your richness.
To be richless still.

Your prized possession, my bending heart
that ached for your will, no longer
the work of art you proclaim.

Deformity filling my scars
with sculpting cement lips
mending the broken parts
and resurrecting a swallowed heart.

Dystopia by Hannah Landis

Behind the white picket
fence, nothing
grows.

Kamikaze
birds dare
each other
to break
the sliding glass door—

In the cereal aisle,
Mother crosses her arms,
choosing between negligence,
\$2.99,
and pessimism,
\$3.75.

Negligence
is on sale.

From the display by the door,
Mother buys a tarp
to fix the window,
counts down the days until seafood is gone,
and gives the plastic
wrapper to the birds

so they
can bury
their dead.

The Death

by Rachel Gordon

Monthly torture began at age 11. That summer when we ran through hot sand and splashed in the waves. I recall that sticky walk back from the beach and the black leather couch where we lay to pant. Saltwater dripped from our hair and bikini tops, running down our stomachs in cool streams. I smelled it before anything else—like copper pennies. And in the bathroom, discovered the source. Devastation dark, red blood smeared on crumbled white tissue. I fled the scene and hid the evidence. Accomplice to a crime I never wished to commit. My heart beat loud behind a locked door. Red smeared on pale thighs. The killer was inside. My childhood was murdered. It went away quietly.

Flickers the Flame

oil painting



by Jordan Whitehead

Where There is Smoke

by Charles-Nicolas Owen

Maenkin held the tobacco box under one arm and clamored up into the rafters of the barn, his movements rodent-like. His pursuers, two farmhands and the farmer's wife, had been in a state of undress when he had stolen the box of virgin-yield, loose-leaf, "Chezeraen Gold" tobacco, the most expensive kind on the market, or any market from Rheged to the Old City. He pawed his way through the roof above, tearing through thatched straw until sunlight spilled out. A tremor ran up his legs. The rafter shook. He saw one of the farmhands, the larger of the two, tumble up the rafter, his shoulders see-sawing in the air as he attempted to meet his balance rather than the dirt floor some several feet below. The wood groaned. Maenkin took fistful after fistful away from the roof. The farmhand found his footing and charged forward. Maenkin gripped his means of escape and leaped up into the hold. His face met the cool air and sunshine, but he just as quickly felt the farmhand's grip around

his ankle. He kicked back. The roof could not support the scuffle. He would fall at any moment.

Yet the rafter gave way before the roof did. The farmhand, in shock, let him loose, the support giving way. Maenkin crawled out and slid down the roof, letting out a grunt as he landed on his feet. He took off in an instant. He turned the corner, resting out of the farmhands' sight, but not where the wife's curses could not be heard. The box in his hands caught the light, the gold leaf decal, pressed into cedar wood, drawing a smile across Maenkin's face. He couldn't wait any longer. He opened the box to examine his ill-earned goods. Letters: not the kind of leaves he was looking for. If they weren't addressed with "my love," they were addressed with "my lover." Maenkin groaned, swearing under his breath. He dumped the letters out in the alleyway. Perhaps the box would fetch him a drink or two.

Mott Street Blues

by Sophie Uy

After *Rhapsody in Blue*

Cilantro & shrimp-stuffed wontons spill from a salaryman's cup, soaked pebbles striking concrete. A mom & pop noodle shop

opens its doors for the first time. Three more on Mott Street & Bayard Street chorus midday greetings to work-addled patrons

for the thousandth time. Chinatown wasn't built to be concerned with the small things—especially not with the golden girl hurtling

down Bowery, nor the sweet plums she's crushing to bruises in her arms, nor the thick aroma of smelly tofu her grandmother

insists isn't that smelly, seeping into every inch of sewer grate & fire escape. After dusk, you can be anybody & also nobody.


Be as anonymous as you want, & nobody will ask twice—not even about the golden girl, breath stolen from stumbling between

street carts & ambling tourists, stray pineapple bun crumbs tucked into her cable knit sweater. She'd hate to be late to her parents,

who taught her to always look for the fire escape. To be quiet unless spoken to, wash rice grains at least three times before

letting the rice cooker sing. But they could never teach her desire—never to clutch another girl's waist, her tanned fingers leaving



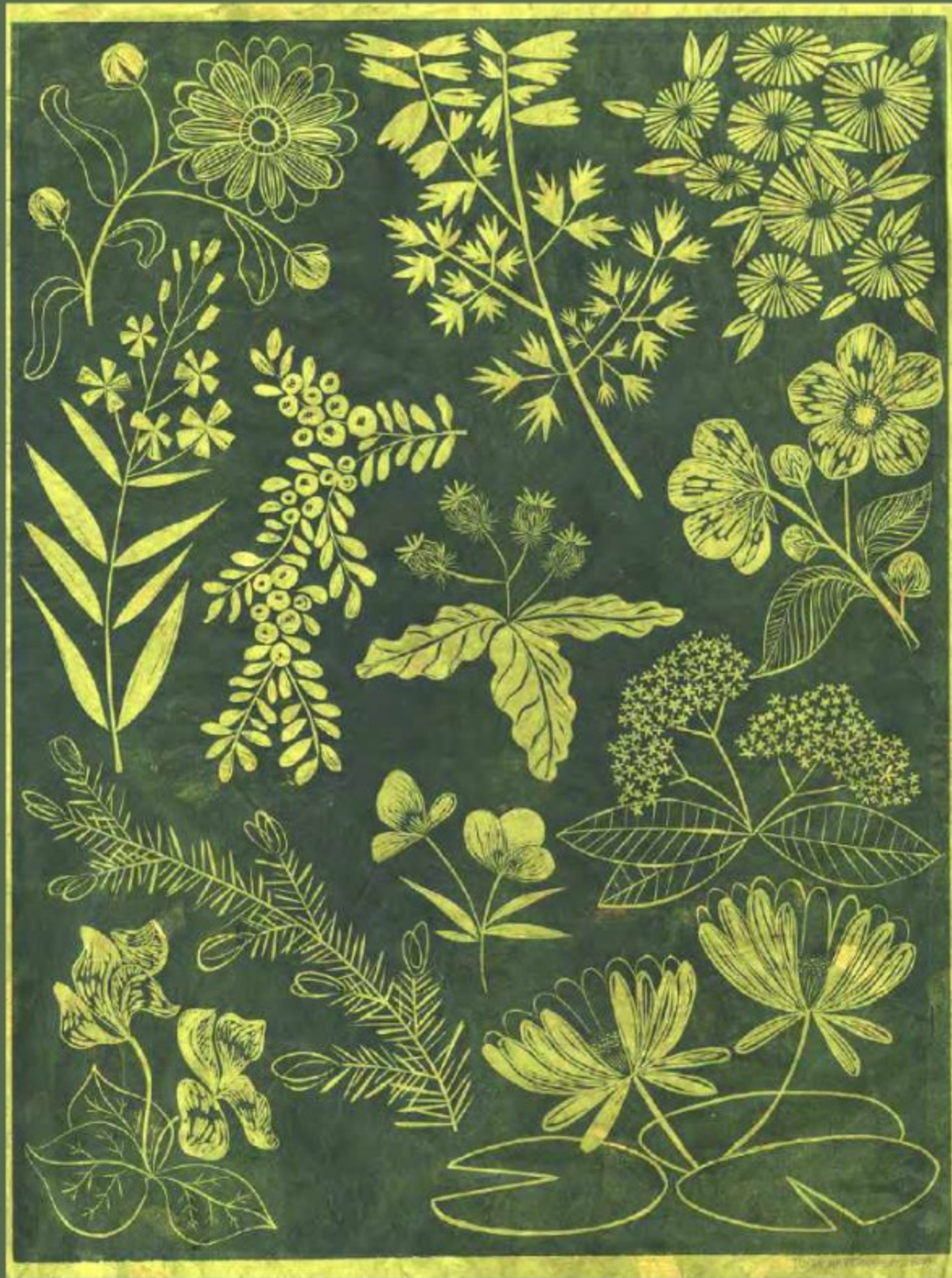


marks like bed sheets imprinted upon by another body (this is how she learns color theory: the fresh purple-red mark at the base of her neck is easily canceled out with green undertones. The girl upstairs lends her foundation, creamy & tacky against her skin, after she kisses the doctor's son. *It's too dull*, she remarks. *You need something that compliments your complexion. How bright you are*). No, her parents could never teach her to think, *This is also a way out. Thank goodness I found you. Or rather, thank goodness I found me*. Because what is an escape if not finding the road back to yourself? What is a road if not the rhythm of its pedestrians? Chinatown's got rhythm, & instruments—murmuring streets, bicycle bells, gutted fish, bones still intact.

Why ask for anything more? In the cramped apartment kitchen, her weary immigrant parents wonder why their daughter can't settle for the soon-to-be doctor with his stethoscope & instead chases skateboarders, poets, lyrics as fleeting as pigeons being frightened into the night. *Do you hear the music?* she asks the girl upstairs. *Love, are you listening?* Chinatown's got rhythm, music, & this: When her parents told her to always look for the fire escape, they couldn't have predicted she'd climb out their apartment window, up the fire escape, into the vacation home of a girl's mouth under the sun, flowering over her skin like an egg yolk beaten out of shape.

When Friendship Dies

relief print



by Julie Eastwood

It's All For Her

by Kerri Hewett

Day #248

This morning I had Mavis bring me my morning tea on the back porch, so that I may commune with my new friends, Roseanne and George. They joined our little family around a month ago. Truthfully, I was only interested in Roseanne. She had the most beautiful hazel eyes I had ever seen, but it seems to me that Roseanne and George were siblings of some kind, so I brought them both in. Right now, they are in the garden, toiling away with the shrubs. Oh, what a delight it is to see Roseanne, her cheeks flushed from effort. They seem to be having a spat, she and George. It's riveting hearing their voices float along with the wind. George has a lovely baritone, I'll give him that. I should call for Mavis, so we may enjoy this spectacle together.

Day #253

I have a doctor's visit today. I used to have Mavis drive me, so that we might have a nice outing together (last month I bought her the most lovely brooch), but I found the drives tiresome, and that screeching! The engine makes the most offensive sound. It echoes in my head for hours on end afterwards. I do not need to spell out, dear Diary, who it reminds me of. Now I pay for at-home visitation. I find it quite convenient. Mavis and I can take the bus if we need to. What a laugh! Father always said I was frivolous with money, but look at me! Taking the bus! I truly could not do it without Mavis. She is an essential. So are all my other friends. They break up the silence. You have no idea how much I appreciate that.

Day #254

Was prescribed a sleep aid. I seem to take so many pills these days, I fear I will choke on them all. I have decided to have a friend accompany me when I take them. Today, I had Lisa watch before she took Darling on her walk.

Day #260

Diary, I have lied to you. I have found out George and Roseanne are, indeed, NOT friends of mine, and certainly not siblings either. The two landscapers have eloped. I caught them necking in front of their getaway car on the family property. Roseanne had the most gaudy ring on her finger. It was awful. Sapphire clashes terribly with her skin tone. I am gutted. I never knew George to be as sluttish as he is, but he has charmed my Roseanne. Maybe I will hire women only from now on. I could not stand to hire a man lest he prey on Lisa or, God forbid, the angelic Mavis. I shall update the ads tomorrow.

I awoke at 3am. The TV was off. I couldn't fathom who did it; probably that spiteful George. Silence crept into the room. I hate it. In silence you can hear the bones grinding together. The heart murmurs. If I collapsed, who would save me in this quiet? Diary, I cannot handle it. I have taken a handful of those dreaded sleeping pills. I will turn on the TV and try to go back to sleep.

Day #263

I had Mavis go for groceries; a mistake I shall never make again. While she was out, Lisa took Darling for her evening walk. I asked for her to wait until Mavis returned, but Lisa just mumbled something about "night school" and left with Darling. I was in my bedroom, and the damned television was acting up again, and I got so worked up toying with it I simply pulled the plug. It was then I heard her, that serpent of a woman, vomiting obscenities in my head. It was like she was all around me. "Go to Hell!" "I'll kill you, wrinkly bitch!"

I can feel my poor fingers shaking as I write the rest of this entry. Diary, those weren't even the worst of the phrases. I was in such a fright I phoned Mavis at once and had her come home immediately. Tonight, more pills. I will have Mavis watch me take them.

Day #264

I bought Mavis the most attractive hat, a rich golden color. I think she will look quite lovely in it. She seemed almost enchanted by a green visor, and to that, well, I pushed the yellow. It was far too modern for a classy woman like Mavis, and I promised to myself, as you may remember, to never let any one of my friends wear green in my presence ever again. Unfortunately, degeneracy taints that once tolerable color. I cannot bear it. I will not have someone as sweet as Mavis wear green.

Day #270

Lisa found a man on the street. She was walking Darling around the block. The old man was crumpled on the bottom of a couple of brick steps, his head cracked open, a horrible pink. Lisa was distraught.

"Please, Miss, let's call the ambulance." She begged me. I refused. Ambulances are terrible things, with their flashing lights and screeching sirens. I imagine them chasing after me in my sleep. The only things that go into ambulances are corpses. You must understand, I was not about to bring that into my house. I had to do something.

Dear Lisa has always been the forgetful type. While she scurried from room to room to find that ugly faux leather purse of hers, I pocketed her cell phone (The purse was on the kitchen counter, as it usually is). Then, I made my way into the basement to disconnect the landline. Lisa was none the wiser.

I heard the rotary clicking away from the other room. It soothed me to know she was still there. I opened a tin of butter cookies in the living room. I hoped she would come sit down by my side and watch a movie with me. She did not. I called for Mavis.

Day #271

Mavis is such a dear to me. The best housekeeper I've ever had. I think I shall move her into the bedroom next to mine. That way we can be closer. I'll have to clean the sheets personally; I'm sure they're still dirty from the room's last occupant. It's no trouble for me, however. I'll make sure Mavis is comfortable.

Day #276

Lisa quit today. She was shaking like a little bluebird down at the bottom of the staircase, practically ripping the harness off of poor Darling. I called down to her; I said, "Lisa! Please be careful with her!" and she shot her eyes up at me, pitch black and hot as coals. Oh, if only you heard the things those eyes said to me! If I had half the brain I was born with, I'd have thrown a vase at her for such insolence. She took out a crumpled piece of paper from her coat pocket. It fell to the floor by her heels. She didn't bother to pick it up. Lisa only lasted two months. When I was all alone I felt so, well, I could scarcely describe it. It was as if someone had shoved splinters into my fingertips. I screamed her name down the corridors. Then I did, indeed, throw down the vase, but to no one in particular. Mavis found me in the kitchen. I was unembarrassed by my state. Mavis had been here for over a year now, and she had gotten me through thirteen previous terminations. She made tea and tried to fetch me my robe.

"No. Please. Stay." I motioned for her to sit down beside me on the kitchen floor.

"Yes, ma'am." she obediently sat. She must've been worried for me, the poor thing. I value her empathy.

I had Mavis read to me outside the bathroom door while I showered. Tonight we finished up *Jane Eyre*, and I found the ending to be quite exhilarating. I fell asleep to a rerun of a classic TV sitcom. It truly doesn't matter, I have found, what TV show specifically, as long as there's a laugh track. I like the laugh tracks.

Day #280

Today, I had the most lovely surprise for my Mavis. We had a pot roast for dinner. I had Mavis sit down, and gifted her an enchanting pearl necklace my mother used to wear. Oh, Diary, if you could only see how beautiful it looked on her, the way it brought out the

gold in her eyes. She looked quite expensive, if I do say so myself. I, of course, insisted on clasping it myself, so she got on her knees (I hadn't had the energy to stand) and I had the honor of sweeping back her lovely hair and fastening the necklace. I hope she keeps it safe.

Day #281

There is something like a piece of styrofoam or a metal spoon in my brain that scrapes against the walls of my skull when Mavis isn't around. This is the detriment of having only one friend. I used to depend on Lisa or Diana to keep my afflictions at bay. Now it's just Mavis. I'm okay, though. Mavis is better than any of those traitors before her. Now, Diary, I know I've been tricked by the empty promises of friendship before, but Mavis is different. Her love is genuine. There is no falsity underneath that sweet smile. She understands me.

Day #288

Mavis was waiting for me in the kitchen with breakfast. She had scrambled some eggs in a bit of butter. I declined to eat. There was something about her, Diary, something about the way her lips spread taught about her face. Unnatural. I will now write out our conversation as best as I can remember it.

"Good morning, Ms. Simmons," Mavis greeted me. "I'd like to speak to you. It's important, if you don't mind."

"I do not mind, Dear. Go ahead and speak—take a seat if you'd like." I gestured to the seat next to mine.

"I'd rather not, if that's okay."

"Well, then..." I was offended; I will not lie.

"I mean nothing by it, Miss. I feel more comfortable standing."

"Very well. Go on." This is where it all went wrong. I can hardly continue without tears streaming helplessly down my face.

"It's about my sister," she said. A sister. I cannot fathom why she would keep such basic, harmless information from me.

"How strange. I have no recollection of you mentioning a sister." I must've given a clue to my disappointment, perhaps my eyes welled with gentle tears, because Mavis clutched her chest as

she spoke these words:

"I never meant to keep it from you. I just didn't think you'd be interested."

"Of course I'm interested, Mavis. You are dear to me, and since you and your sister share blood, she is dear to me, too. Now, go on."

"She lives up in Vermont, and she's pregnant."

"Congratulations to her." I spoke from the heart. Maybe the child will have Mavis' dark brown eyes; her thin fingers. I found myself daydreaming of two Mavis, with their heels clicking down the corridors. One holding a pot of tea. Another, preparing enough finger sandwiches for the three of us to share.

"She is expected to go into labor by the end of the week and has asked me to be there. I'd like to request two weeks off." She waited for my response, but I could not speak. I had been startled out of my lovely dream into grim reality. I cannot emphasize enough, Diary, how unexpected this was. My Mavis would never speak like this.

"Of course, I'll be back as soon as I can."

"She'll have the baby here."

"Excuse me, Miss?"

I laid it out simply. The city has the best doctors. The best midwives, all begging to be paid a large sum under the table. The baby would be completely safe; in fact, even more safe in the house than at a dingy Vermont hospital.

"She's already checked in. And it's more than a day's drive—"

"There are planes." I reasoned with her.

"I don't think she'd be comfortable with—"

"If you give me the number of the hospital, I can make arrangements right away," I offered.

"I can't. It's not good for her."

"You cannot leave, Mavis."

"But, Ms. Simmons—"

"This is final. You may not go to Vermont. You may stay here. Where you are supposed to be. Now, if you would like, I'll let you pick out a record to listen to in the drawing room. Father had quite the collection." This was the kindest way to relay this information to

her. I did not yell, Diary. I did not throw a fit, or smash any of the family china, yet Mavis backed away. She uttered a quick apology and flew up the stairs.

Day #289

This morning I rose early. I had barely slept through the night. My heartbeat was strange and erratic; no doubt due to my spat with Mavis. How wounded am I, Diary! One night without my Mavis and I'm already falling apart. I decided to smooth things over, perhaps with a trip to the salon (Mavis would look so marvelous with a bob), and rapped on her door in order to extend the invitation. There was a strange shuffling sound, and then a large, awful bang. And then silence. Now, I assumed something was amiss, possibly a malady of the stomach or a sudden fever that made darling Mavis fall faint. So, as one in good conscience does, I opened the door.

I found her in her bedroom, folding blouses into a suitcase. I asked her what on Earth she was doing, and she coughed up a quick apology, insisting she had to leave.

I looked around. All the beautiful things I had given her, stuffed crudely into a suitcase. Tokens of my friendship, thrown around like trash. There was the woolen pea coat with its sleeves bunched up. The cashmere cardigan, collecting dust on the carpet below. Oh, Mavis! What have you done to our precious things! I noticed the milky sheen of the pearls I had given her, suddenly feeling incredibly nauseous. She was undeserving of my mother's pearls. I stood in the doorway, and told her that if she wanted to leave me, she would have to leave the nice things I gave her, too. I was expecting her, then, to falter. This little game we were playing would end and the two of us would go about our days as usual: sipping tea and playing Persian rummy on the porch. Instead, I watched helplessly as her slender fingers let the pearls drop onto her pillow.

"I have to go now," she said in a voice I did not recognize. What was done to the sweet girl I knew? I was not about to let this happen again.

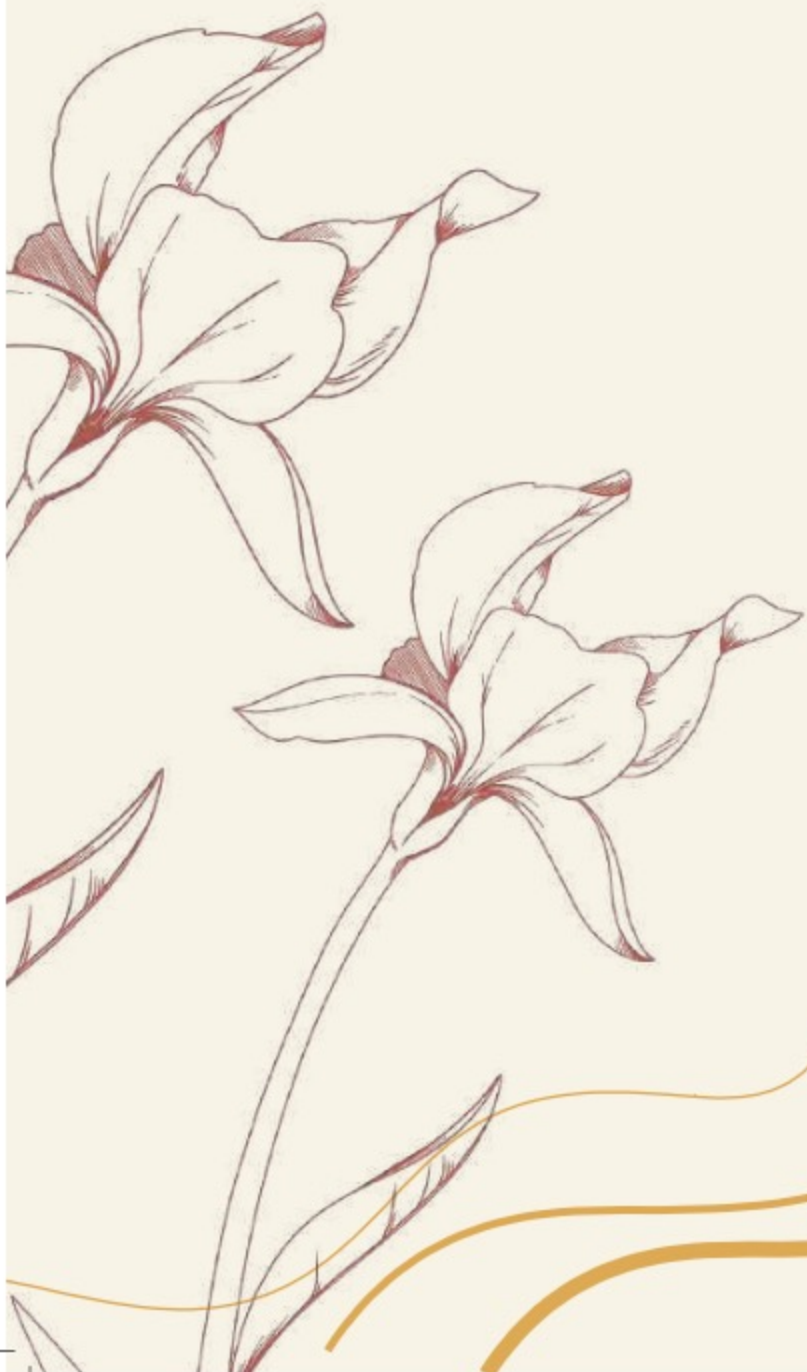
Day #296

I did what was necessary. Trust me, Diary, when I say that I am not a cruel woman. So you know, that when I do things, I do them because I care. And I care about Mavis. I have become an expert on friendships gone awry. I know how to fix them.

I simply put her in a time-out of sorts. She needs time to reflect on her actions. And I promise you, I'll

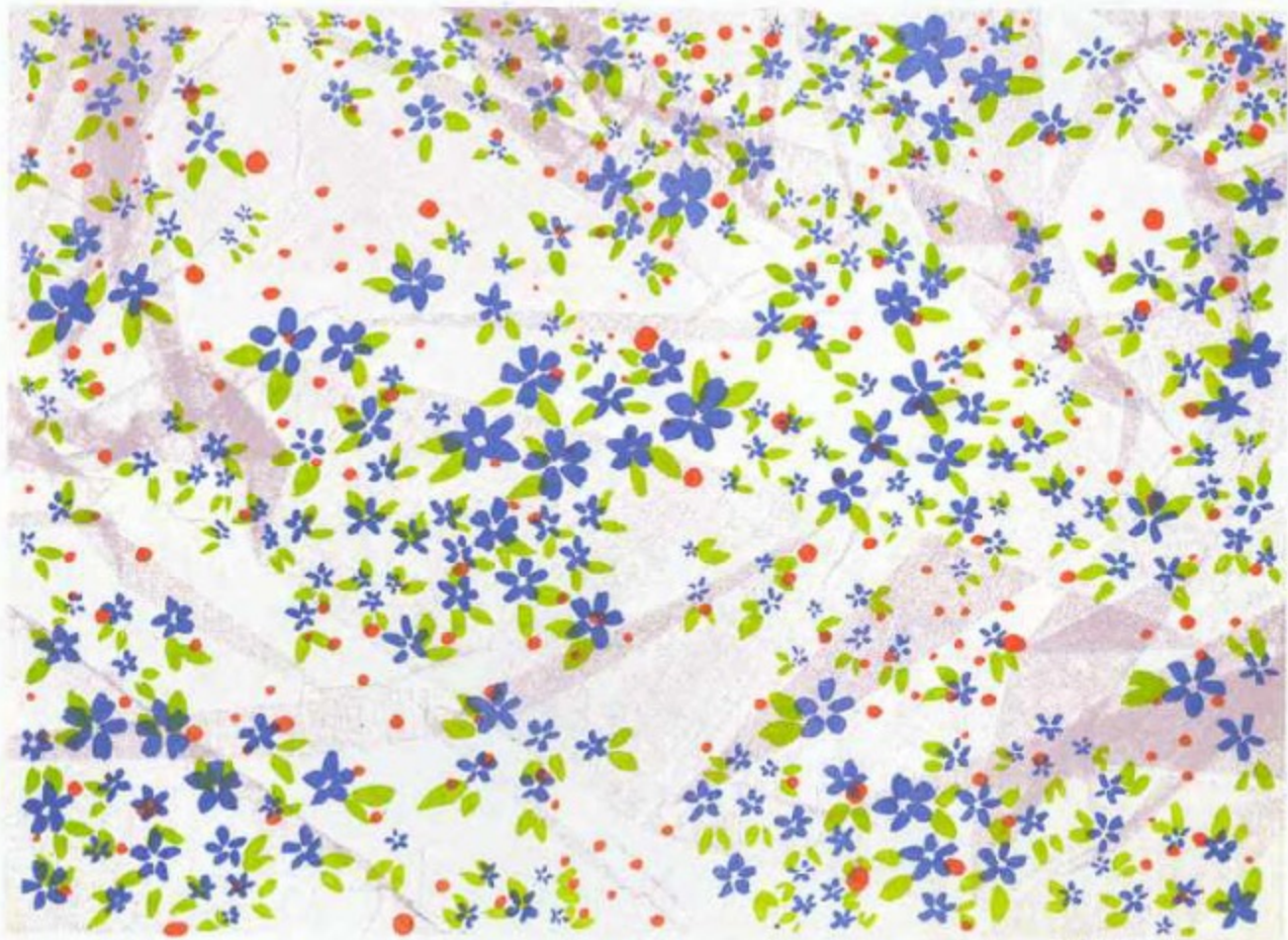
let her out when she's calmed down and feeling like herself again. She'll forget about that sister of hers, and understand. I am all she needs. It's hard, listening to the banging and sobbing through our shared wall, but I'll tell you a secret: I almost find comfort in it. Miranda (Oh how it pains me to write her name out!) was not of the sorts, as you may recall. She was cruel. Her voice: low and grating. She was as unfeminine in her final hours as the insults she shot at me, spitting all over that horrid emerald blouse as she threw her childish tantrums. But Mavis, when she cries out to me, "Ms. Simmons, please let me out! I swear I won't leave!", her voice sounds like a silver bell. A little thrill runs down my spine. It's like Christmas. I think I will have some strawberry cake for dinner, and leaf through my mail outside of Mavis' door so I can still hear her. I remember her mentioning some job inquiries, and I think it would be ever so enchanting to have some new friends around.





Forget Me Not

Lithograph



by Julie Eastwood

Peanut Butter

by Rachel Gordon

I saw you in the bottom of an empty peanut butter jar. It's a strange place to live. Maybe you thought it was somewhere I'd never look. I'm allergic to peanut butter. But did you really think that through? No, it was never about me, only about you. Now you're stuck in peanut butter up to your knees and I'm gritting my teeth as you stumble like an idiot. I'll scrape you out with a knife if I must. I'll scrub this jar clean until hives creep up my wrists and crawl toward my throat. My mind begs to let go. I took the jar in one hand and slammed to the tile floor. Glass exploded into millions of glistening crystals. I kneel among the shards searching for your remains but it's as if you were never there. Not a single trace. So, I lay down against the peanut butter glass, my breathing now raspy and shallow, and hope for freedom in death.

credits

editor-in-chief

Grace Keeler

assistant editor

Amelia Bailey

lead design editor

Isabella "Bee" Swatosh

design team members

Charissa Park

Lauren Naples

Matthew Antolick

Carrie Chambers

contributing editors

Matthew Antolick

Emma Davis

Amy Dorner

Charlie Filiatrault

Alin Freitag

AnnMarie Hall

Nicole Huggins

Abi Middleton

Lucy Sampson

Maya Winder

special thanks to

Erica Cavanagh

The JMU Media Board

College of Arts and Letters

Rose Gray

Morgan Aderton

Lisa Rhodes



i·ris

noun

1. a flat, colored, ring-shaped membrane behind the cornea of the eye, with an adjustable circular opening (pupil) in the center.
2. a plant with sword-shaped leaves and showy flowers, typically purple, yellow, or white.
3. the goddess of the rainbow and the messenger of the Olympian gods.
4. a literary magazine publishing student work at James Madison University.

To join our team:

Interested in joining the *Iris* team? Send an email of introduction to jmu.irismagazine@gmail.com and we will be in contact about the application process.

This issue of Iris was created by staff members, using InDesign. Fonts used throughout are **Arborea** and **Etna**. Iris is printed using **Madison Printing Services** in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Submissions were accepted from any JMU student and chosen by staff members.

Contact us at jmu.irismagazine@gmail.com or visit our website, iris-mag.com.



A GOOD WINE BAR CAN PROVIDE THE ANSWERS TO MANY VITAL QUESTIONS.



**A Great C...
Dancing Past the Gr...**

By JAMES R. OLFRECH

DORRICK HALL, in the Manhattan, the home of the Czech Philharmonic, is a room of grandeur and elegance. It is, like the city itself, a small wonder. The stage, below a constantly changing scene, presents a world of beauty and grace. Magnificent music, beginning at a low level, rises above the noise, giving

a sense of height and grandeur, from the shoulders of light, to the soaring notes, where the notes are more and more single and that expression is (Alice Tully took her to England, even, for international orchestra changed world revolution, indicated here?

LETTERS

6 On Eton John, Robert Trout and Guillaume de Machaut.

THEATER

7 Richard Foreman finds his original after ego is Nietzsche. By Dorian Smith

7 Wuyang again preserved in Java. By James Jones

7 'Detroit' almost everything. By David Cole

FILM

17 An Oscar political analysis before the awards are handed out. By Scott Klewans

17 With 'Beau Travail,' Claire Denis a story of the French Foreign Legion in East Africa. By Nancy Ramsey

20 Peter Brook's 'Lord of the Rings' beach combat and grace. By Peter M. Nichols

22 Documentary witness of a masterpiece: 'Life in western.' By Peter M. Nichols

26 Concerts of Led Zep and U2 released on video. By Kevin Fitzgibbons

30 'Long Night's Journey' a look at South and Knoxville. By H. Kuba J.