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Acta Victoriana, est. 1878, is the literary journal of Victoria College at the University of Toronto. It is produced and published on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit, as well as other Nations that have been, and continue to be, subject to historical erasure. As members of the literary community on campus, we recognize the need to be part of the collective conversation required for the ongoing processes of decolonization and reconciliation.



Letter from the Editors

Acta Victoriana was founded in 1878. As of 2023, our literary journal has been around for 145 years. Being the editors-in-chief for this period, we have had both the honour and the responsibility of reading through past issues of the journal, in light of our current production. As we introduce our latest issue, we would like to acknowledge the depth of gratitude we hold to all our past contributors and masthead members. We also would like to share our sincere awe and joy at the outstanding work of our contributors. Their poetry, prose, and visual art encapsulates our present moment in ways that are near impossible to describe in a mere introduction. That elaboration is best left to the creativity, technical skill, and inimitable insight of the writers and artists in this winter issue.

From the reflections on reflections in Meryem Yildiz's "You Take My Portrait," to the unique entanglement of love, gender, and the impacts of colonization in Isabel Carlin's "Genders of the Manila-Acapulco Trade Route," to the nonlinear sequence on identity and memory in Hayat Abdulkhakim's "Implosion Project," our contributors engage in the ongoing proliferations of history and storytelling. We encourage readers to bring their own perspectives to these works as they read them. You are a part of this rich and vibrant literary community and we are grateful to be involved in its cultivation.

Thank you to our readers, our writers, our artists, our editors, and everyone who is a part of *Acta Victoriana*. As we look forward to the years ahead, we can only watch in wonder and anticipation at what comes next

With all our love and gratitude,

Julliana (Yanni) Santos & Elaine Lee



Sundays

Allison Zhao

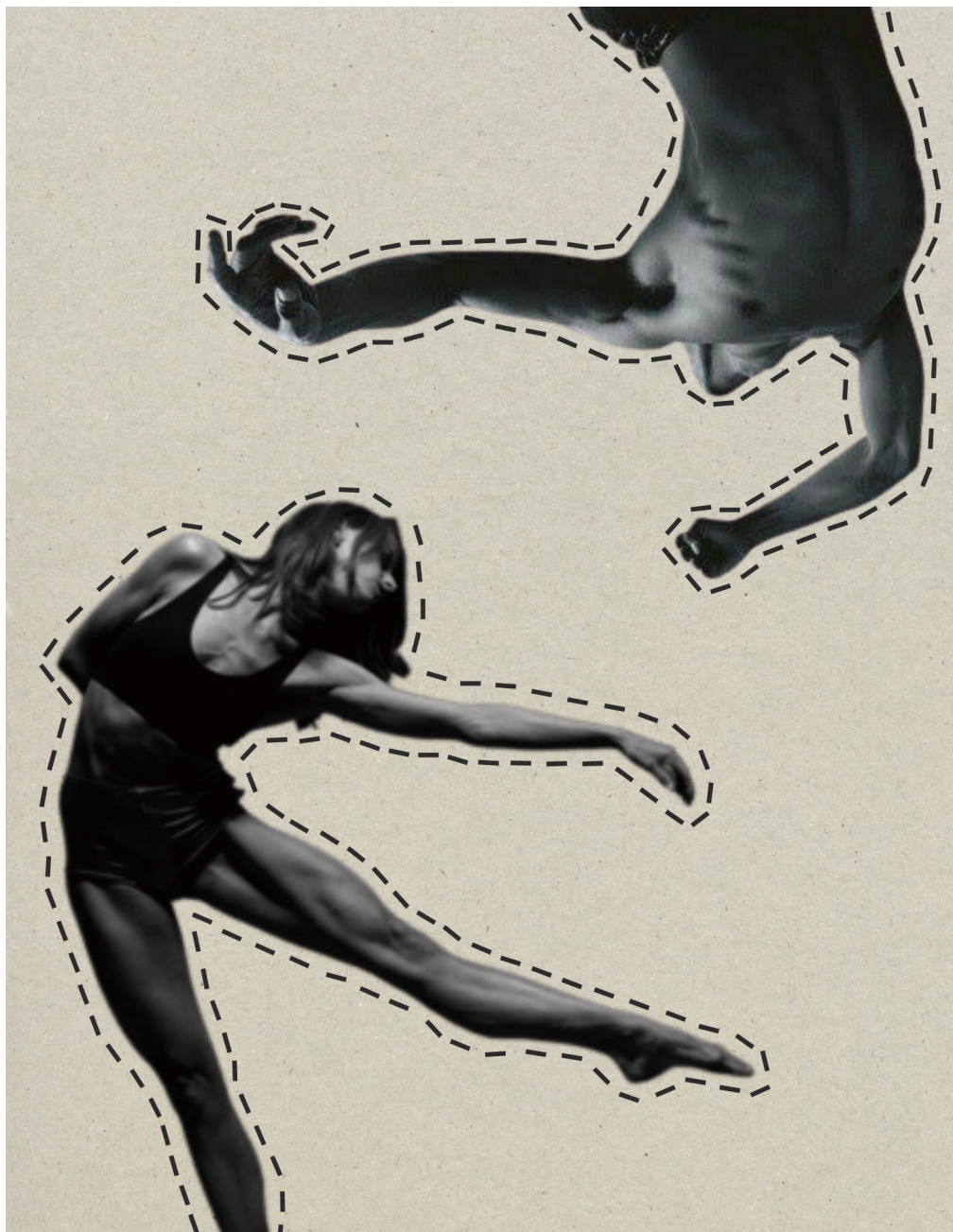
The preacher's got a lure in his mouth, dangling like a cigarette. Mother says we've got no business in a chapel anymore. The organ pipes clamor upwards, and I wonder if they're sensitive like coral, flinching back if touched. I could have mercy for them too. Sunlight blinks slowly through the stained-glass window, round as a whale's eye.



YOU TAKE MY PORTRAIT

Meryem Yildiz

there is only a difference in sequence between
sacred and scared. where do i sit: by the red river,
by open books, at a marbled table, at the foot of
an unmade bed, on the edge of my seat, breath bated
or tied, ribbon-bound. where do i lie: on the tall green
grass, on a blush blanket, on the cat couch, on my back,
on the still water in a silence i cannot break for fear of
ruffling feathers, an idle spell. when you tell me to
shed it all, i know it's more than just a pluck. it is
an urge to remove all that gets in the way of the mind,
all that burdens the body from moving freely into the
world. by the window my head is a face, effaced,
becomes the reflection, the glass against the sky,
the glass against the sun, the glass against the leaves
of a tree that knows the rhythm of seasons in every bone.
in front of you i stand four-pointed, cardinal, star-naked
with the wealth of the world underneath my feet.
with a trick, a tilt and an angle, i am painted gold
by three eyes focused on a figure eight. as a seasoned
soul enclosed in skin and bark, i too bare all.



twist the knife — Té Cornwall



On First Looking at the Medium-Size Sculpture of Two Figures, a Boy and a Girl, in the Lobby of Japan Sushi Located near Bloor and Bathurst

Anjalee Nadarajan

His hand in hers, hardly bigger than his,
Rendered in red clay, brother and sister,
Or perhaps, friend and friend, or son and mother,
Hardly a father-and-daughter, unless
The sculptor saw the boy within the man
(Vision that only a daughter might share),
Thought in figure than in the literal,
And shaped into incontestable fact,
A daughter's conception, at least, of leading
Her elder by hand to butterfly-catching,
Running away from home, blowing and bursting
Bubbles that might have housed counter-plots tended
More carefully than the father-and-daughter's,
Which long before ... yet as sculpture, stands.

Ward's Island

Ruven Samaraweera

it thunderstormed all summer long
by the time I'd left the island
it had flooded beyond recognition

I tried moving my body
in the way you like but
you weren't there to see me lead
all those bodies onto the floor

this summer where my heart was
filled with water, though I thought I
had drained what wet I could

the red ant bites on my feet itch
when I take my socks off, I scratch and
dead skin comes off. me, the leper
tearing apart at my skin as if it
injected your lifeblood into me

my back hurts from the slippery stairs
I've fallen and I'm stuck sitting down
so my body aches when I shower

though I said I'd be coming back bulletproof
with the manicisms of a gleeful imbecile

I got caught in the rain and now I
ask every pretty girl I see if they would
accompany me to the art museum

and I told you I would never be
your apostle. if anything, I wanted you
to follow me to the ends of the earth

and when you baptized me under that full moon
naked amongst the bacteria of lake ontario

I realized I'll
never be dry again



Fengshui — Leon Zhang



Presence — Leon Zhang

Spruce,

Elana Wolff

your fruit-like
decorations, trunk
a post of information:
 ring, hard,
 bark, hush.

I turn & touch
your husk & stroke
your pins & needles;
 tingle—

I'm no more than your dark sap, Spruce,
a branch, no more than whorls,
the ghosting

 wind around your boughs
that bow. No more than the crusted
snow on your numbed
berm, falling
 flakes that form on specks of dust.

No-more-than-cones
in the human eye
 perceive more shades of green than any
other colour, Spruce: *Could you know?*

I touch my tongue to you, taste your texture,
pen & whet
these letters.
I'm word for you, Spruce,
needle for leaf,
cone for fruit,
templated,
redolent—
border-
blue through.



THE WOODS ARE RUNNING OUT OF RABBITS

Bill Howell

Used to be, you couldn't go
for a stroll without stepping
on one, especially if you
weren't paying attention.
You could almost catch them
by accident if you were caught
in thought. Woolgathering,
like that. And if you happened
to have a spare carrot, they'd
come right up to you. But why
would you, eh? Anyway, those
were gentler times & they're
pretty well gone by now.
These days, you don't want
to be tripping on the bobcats.



Recreating Sin, Contemporarily Full — Salma Ragheb



Wet napkins

Mailey Horner

Wet napkins,

wet manicures.

Manicurists with

wet faces

and

wet lips

of

flush, thrusting red.

Red that never gives up.

Genders of the Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade Route

Isabel Carlin

I. ON ARIZONA

I have this exchange bouncing around my head where
someone asks What's Wrong With You?
and I say Nothing's Wrong but of course
I know something is wrong.

In Tucson all anyone talks about is the border
but at least I'm from the northern one.
I speak english well enough to joke with a vet who worked
at a Burger King in a Korean military base at sixty-five;
Charlie's first service job because he retired broke.

Charlie asks What's Wrong With Your Car?
We're stuck in the sand and I love it here but we're stuck in it
Brett and Joseph roll to a stop and tow the Charger out and I love them for it
and I love when they stop everything to say the plane in the sky is an Osprey
because we are deep in country where a half-dozen military bases have
stuck themselves in the sand.

I usually think of the whatswrongnothingswrong exchange when I'm
in the shower (confronted by nudity) in bed (confronted by silence)
falling in love (confronted by the girlhood of my body). So I am stuck in the
sand in Ilocos Norte. So the old foe of Spanish colonialism has given
way to US imperialism again. So the beautiful corpse of a decommissioned
nuclear missile silo has a twin across the Pacific. So the poor english of the
woman Brett towed out last week from across the road is only to be expected
this close to the border. So I am also a woman.

Inside the Pacific ocean there is a great heaving, a great mass of fire which hardens into stone at the steaming convergence of states
Pacific islands owe as much to Los Alamos as they do Tokyo.

II. ON THE SILK ROAD

Many centuries ago, Spanish missionaries reached the islands they would name after King Philip. Roads after conquistadors, haciendas after clergymen, provinces after Queen Isabela who in the way of grandmothers has also thus given me her name. There were no spices in that place, but there were people.

Gold out of the curling desert in the south of Turtle Island.
Rice out of the spines on the back of a Pacific lizard.
And people, always people, funneling into the factories and the care homes and the hospitals and the farms in the round belly of the new empire.

People had two genders then. One was for working and one was also for working. You know what I mean.

III. ON LOVE

To launch a nuclear missile, the officer and deputy officer in a bunker must turn two keys simultaneously. The officer begins a
countdown
and looks the deputy in the eyes and on one, or after one, depending
on the
preference of the officers in question, the key is turned and held for five seconds and then released, and the light-up sequence on the control boards begins and the missile launches one minute after that. At least, that's how the Titan II was supposed to go.

A man in a leather jacket with the US flag embroidered on the back counted down and I turned a key with him. We blew up the world for play.

I'm circling around it. Don't you get it? I wish you were here. I wish I had started the last war and it was you in the bunker with me and I had the body of someone who could turn that key.
I wish I was a sometimes man.

IV. ON NUCLEAR WAR

Of course I don't want to blow up the world.
But isn't it compelling, the vast openness of every shooting
growling half-spit horsepower engine tumbleweed-rolling
across the sky held tight between the mountainthighs at the
bottom of the country in our uncanny valley?

The world I have blown up remains as I assume it does after
every turn of the key in the defunct bunker. The Starbucks at
the Sahuarita Safeway is staffed exclusively by queer Latine
twenty-somethings. What's wrong? Nothing's wrong.

I drive our car into the sand.

V. ON BODIES

There is a kind of body which has two arms and two legs but is
not a man's or a woman's body.

There is a kind of body which has pale skin and narrow eyes but is
not a white or a brown person's body.

There is a kind of body which has machines inside it but is
not a healthy or a dying body.

VI. ON SPLITTING

From the earth: large stones
hauled and pickaxed by men also
from the earth.

From large stones: dust-silt
cleaved and ground by machine teeth made
of large stones.

From dust-silt: poison water
inside bowls which sometimes soak back
into dust-silt.

From poison water: precipitate
half-solid dries into crumble and leaves behind
more poison water.

From precipitate: uranium
self-inhales and from the sky fire-ash
precipitates.

From uranium:

atoms

one into

zero

VII. ON SUNSET

Twilight raised the ghost
of seven werewolves who had
transformed into beasts

Tooth-gnashing they roamed
around ate men and women
all others were spared

Like The Thing they were
muddied big undelicate
swamp monstrosities

Nothing to say but
their bodies knew no era
and they were unseen

this was a freedom



Feminine Decay — Vicky Huang



Historic Yonge Street

Rion Levy

Picture an apartment with a red Persian rug that is older than I am, a blue velvet sofa, two bookshelves with a dark but warm stained wood from my father's childhood covered in books, no coffee table or TV but a TV stand holding a record player and more books, a kitchen counter with a matte black stand mixer and a colourful water jug painted in Bogota, holding potential.

Picture a bedroom, naked and open, a pine-framed bed lined with white sheets, a pine desk across from it, a mirror in the corner, and the rocking chair my great-grandfather built for the love of his life before my mother's mother was born.

No plants yet on any windowsill, though many would pass through this spring.

And jazz, always jazz. It fills the air coming from the living room and spreads through the space as though hopping the waves of light that beam in from the East-West windows on opposite ends of this cage.

Even now, as I write this, sitting alone at my desk in the opposite room, I hear the smooth saxophone tap dancing silently as the May afternoon sunlight distracts me from the type.

Come October, the frost settles in around the ancient lead pipes and Dusty tells me "it comes with the charm." Beginning in January, we hide in the bathroom, taking showers that never end in the twelve-foot ceiling bathtub fit for half a person washing each other with that porcelain soap that shows why we smell like each other except on my sheets in the morning.

Around springtime the jazz stops as dozens of shoes make their way in to make their own music through the apartment.

These steps mix with the explosions of corks and cigarette lights and the excitement with the out-of-commission fireplace that shapes my midnight view.

In June we let the street inside as we dangle from East windows trying to catch the love of our lives instead of the golden beads that make their way onto the floor.

With autumn comes the sound of four tiny paws sliding on the fake wood floors as they try to get a grip of themselves to take care of the beast in the mirror. Each week, the footsteps grow louder and surer as mine become more carefree and hers we discover together.

The books and litter and plants and baked goods keep taking over but the jazz keeps coming back even after the last brick falls down and after the last person looks up at the window wondering what life is like up there. The glass prison goes up to replace people's gazes and ghosts fill it telling the story of homogenous corporate debt.

But the jazz fills the same air each time the memory of those footsteps lives and dies until the record burns.



After reading Billy Collins' poem '*Today*'

Purbasha Roy

made me remember: oakwood forest of the paperweight
at the center table that no longer participates in the
home decoriness. It was always *autumn* in it. Red,
yellow leaves never fell off the branches. Winds
never swaying through them. Though they held
nothing against the stillness of their destiny. Like
oblivion. For they were untaught, everyone has an angle
towards the sun. One day, when it broke, I picked the
trees and crushed them beyond rephrasing. Rushed to
greener patch of field and strewn them as if interlacing
their pulse back to life. Later whole night it rained heavy
as traffic honks. Next morning, I looked for their remains
and found the green had treasured no patterns of them. I
felt a regret whose shadows looked like the seasonal
rivulet I put my nine year old feet as an act of sucking
surrealism. What words define a loss if it has a country
of memory. Whose borders are white waters smiling
back to me. Each time sunflakes fell powdered on their
gurgling folds...



Party Game

Meghan Butcher

Let's get in a nice warm heap,
Pile up the people like old shirts so we don't have to turn the furnace
on
and solipsize into the sweater of the person next to you—
Swallow a thread

(I wear my clothes 'til they're
beyond mending)

Ask if you could live off of their breath or their philosophies while knowing you're the only real thing in your head

Steal a joint from someone five people to the right
and talk about the ethics of honey,
how to live in your body and what to call it,
ALL SEX WORK SHOULD BE ILLEGAL!!!! comes a voice from
the other side of the mountain

Pass it back after two puffs and ask her if she's thought about the air and what brand of paper she uses because some of them aren't just hemp!!

and let her tell you how she rolls them and, stoned, gets her shit together on Sunday nights:

Lush face masks, potato peels
some fermenting (rotting) vinegar concoction
– she showed me how to save my apple skins but I just don't
have the time

Life's just been so busy lately,
satin shoe ribbon in the rain
worn wrong, so many cars
Good people waiting on street corners for a lucky break
suffocating under the weight of being alive,

let alone doing a good job of it;

little freckles

spotify blends

– BUT THEY EXPLOIT ARTISTS!!!!!! between inhales

and all my tabs open, phone unlocked

“kijiji bikes”

“eli lilly stocks”

“how to stop wasting spinach”

“heroin chic revival”

“am i a bad person reddit”

“quickest way to get rid of a smoker’s cough”

Stacked up like dishes in the sink,

the drying rack glowering from the living room until it’s nearly
laundry day again

and we’re all here, we might as well wait for the sun to rise again

and I already said it, I might as well say it again –

Let’s get in a big cozy pile,

breathe into those sweaters and grieve the loose ends

panic about consumption

HOW ARE YOU HONOURING YOUR IDENTITY LATELY?

Hand me the bottle and ask me about my guilt

Catch a hand over a sweaty form, spit in your own

and vow to save the world tomorrow.

To El Jefe

Nevada-Jane Arlow

I write to you from the heated yellow grasses of Ontario and while no animal like you has wandered here in several decades (I have never seen a large cat, but I assure you one has definitely seen me), I dream of you walking through the Black Oak Savannas who will prove us all to be deathless, like you, creature who kills his prey with a subtle tooth through the skull, No-King of the Sonoran, I wish you were here by Bloor street, terrorizing the dogs and that schmuck who I spit at for manhandling his girlfriend.

After Midsummer I leave my window wide open, in the night I hear the sounds of beasts warring and being warred upon. (Someone won't stop harassing the skunk out back). I want you, I want you to climb through my nocturne's window and I'll hide you underneath my fuzzy blanket (the nice one)

I have heard that in your years you are an Old man but you will always be virile to me and your spots enrapture me in my daydreams in the heated yellow grasses I feel that bleating roar of yours in the core of my trachea I want your rosettes on my skin

When will you make a mockery of American Man, El Jefe? plow your body through the Republic's walls, El Jefe, take Arizona, it's yours, set us all free, sink those teeth into ICE-bathed skulls

El Jefe, the CN Tower is on fire and I will see you in the hour at the limits of the city.



Frostbitten — Fallon Hartnett

Shell

Mahta Riazi

I take wide steps around the holes in the pavement, think of
where the dreams are hiding when I am awake and
undusted with matter's momentary disappearance.

I try to move like moss through the silence of sunrise, uncalled
to prayer or morning tea.

I watch gratitude sink and clink like pennies in a stone-
splattered well.

There is no horizon for hope to dangle its legs from, no sliced
heirloom to share between us like warm bread.

There is so much fog, I can barely recognize the skin I slept
clinging to in desperation.

I become nostalgic for the archaic, missing what was never
simple.

I called the Apple store today and an AI voice told me "Don't
be shy, I can speak in full sentences." I said oh...kay, and
he continued, weird pauses between his words, unlike a
human.

The conditions are thus slime and seed. The city's streets
stripped of mother's voices or doors wide enough to
see laughter through.

I take wide steps around the holes in the pavement,
lonely without knowing why.



Salt

Mahta Riazi

The grandmother I never met, the one who haunted a whole
generation, used to dunk round globes of salt like a
small, suffocating head into the rice's boiling water,
In and out and in.

Later, the street cats would lick the salty flat of her palm in the
garden, tracing their hungry noses against the curve of
her love line.

That was salt, then.

Every time there is a lull, my mother uses it to remember the
dead. Every time.
She will not waste an opportunity to wave their names into the
night's thick air like a handkerchief.

It used to be romantic, when there were less of them and more
of us.

Now, she cannot see the ocean without begging for release.
Her hair turns from black to white, no grey area.
She wears black even when her younger brother's wife bites her
tongue long enough to insist on palettes of *sabzeh* and
spring for her to circle like the mouth of a trumpet
around her ankles.

The spring skipped a generation, or several, she laughs. Only
God knows what will come.

Only God.

Here's where things went wrong: Too many seeds died right in the ground. Too many children were raised with the kind of longing that parches the throat and patches the eyes.

This is salt, now.

The last time we were by the ocean, we sat on its knife edge, Maman and me, convinced our bodies will be sliced clean like an onion should we shuffle an inch forward. We dunked our toes, one by one. Out and in and out.

It's true, she says. The salt can slit the dead from our skin. It can clear us of the memories.

But we wouldn't dare inch forward.

We are still waiting for one of us to soften.



A Fever

Marissa Carroll

aflutter, thick footfalls
beat, thudding and spritely.
two by two, they come to wipe the sheen
from my brow and the prow of the ship
dips up and down in the
water of wet clinging bedsheets,
white and slick, opaque as the halo-rimmed moon that pulses
overhead
and beckons them. the wave of hooves marches on, plodding.
the sheen, quick and slick.
the moon, ashimmer,
and aflicker they pour as one two, thumping one two
and tandem steps apace in pulse beat down
and shake my bedframe
its hull adrift and afloat,
they thunder forward, stepping, pricking the skin in
collusion of metronome, moon and beast running,
pounding in surge,
a crescendo of impetus
forward a wave of bodies crashes into my
hollowed frame and pulses over it and slick
are the sheets and
slick is the moon
and the ship lurches, prow dipping, hull reeling, keel arcs
asunder and the beat of the oncoming horde pounds relentless
thumping pulse on the
sheen of my brow.
hallowed in the moonlight, opaque and drowned
by the wave they fled, they are gone.
and I lie, aflutter, under
the haloed pulse of the moon.

Dad's Storm

Dustin Moon

We found the house along the beach that morning. Jon insisted, *persisted*, because we were *here* and we had never come here before even though it was just a two-hour drive. And because I had fallen into myself, I guess, like my thoughts had bound me, stretched too tight across me and left my skin bulbous red in places and white lines in others. Jon noticed because he's *too* good at being my husband and he's *too* invested in that blue sky notion of closure—like significant therapy can be attained by retracing ancient steps. I made the mental note to sift through his bookcase at home, toss some of the more dust-covered self-helpers.

But the stroll along the beach from the hotel had been a good idea because it got the kids out, it gave them a place to chase each other and kick sand and run within millimetres of the lazy tide before retreating, teasing the ocean itself like only five and seven-year-olds dare. At home, Jon would call this *foundational memory-making*, but he was too good at being a centred, present person to think of it like that now—in the moment. Not that I didn't smile when Noah screamed at a miniature crab or when Ellie followed suit with her own crabwalk, sending Noah to stitches, but *foundational memory-making* crept along the bottom of my consciousness like a news ticker.

The rancher could've passed for habitable until we reached directly behind in and the broken windows stood, complementing the significant roof moss. Still, the flowerbed that lined the back—facing the ocean—sprouted yellow flowers amongst weeds, and they looked cared for. Like Mom was still here with her watering can.

There used to be a wall—some kind of wall made of stones and cement—that bordered the left side of the house and cut through the beach. That was gone. Now the beach stretched on, all privacy sacrificed, and Mom would've complained about that daily.

Ellie tugged my hand. "That's it?"

"That's it."

Noah took Jon's hand and steered him closer to the flowerbed. When Ellie showed no interest in following, Jon shrugged in

the usual *the Dads have been chosen* fashion, and he let Noah take him to closer inspect the plant life.

Ellie pointed to the water. “You had one of those?”

Her fingertip air-traced the pier that jutted from the beach into the water, though I didn’t recognize it as the pier right away. Because it was still there. It still stood, solid and barnacled on its posts, thirty feet into the water. Somebody must’ve repaired it. Whoever took over the house after Mom and I left.

Ellie and I approached. The boards held us. They looked aged, neglected, faded, but they still held us. And then we found the end and their appearance didn’t alter, which didn’t make sense. The final boards should’ve been newer, a different tree, or even a different shade if they still came from the same breed of tree, but they matched seamlessly. The same end of the pier.

I watched it from the living room window: early morning. *Earlier* than early morning because the sun was only just a suggestion at that hour and the world glowed blue. I needed water and I had recently found myself independent enough to get my own—saved myself the groggy sighs Mom gave each time I woke her. The heavy footfalls drew me and I should’ve been scared because my imagination let me be scared of everything back then, especially at night—from cruel spirits assuming earthly forms in the shadowy pile of laundry in the corner of my room to the ticks of my wall clock convincing me a malevolent stranger was traipsing up our gravel driveway.

But maybe Dad’s boots on the pier were a familiar enough sound to keep me calm and curious, so I stood before the living room window, plastic cup of water in one pudgy hand, and the blueness that enshrouded the world allowed enough light for me to watch Dad walk the pier. His flannel pajama bottoms flapped in the wind. Just by watching I could feel the chill on his legs. He wore his winter coat, thick and dark grey with a woolly shawl collar, and that made sense because it *had* to be cold out there even though it was June. His boots clopped, juxtaposed against his pants, which juxtaposed again against his jacket, and then he stopped at the end of the pier and stood there—still. He could’ve been practicing our pirates game where the pier was the plank. He might’ve gotten the first itch to fish all year—though he carried no rod or tackle box.

Then, eventually, he stood there long enough, and *I* stood watching him long enough, that time evaporated, and we froze in

place—together but apart—unable to move until the other one did (though he didn't know I was there). Until a rumble coursed over the ocean and the blue light darkened and the wind whipped his clothes further and before I could fully comprehend the sudden change in weather, the raindrops smacked the window, began to blot my view, and I ducked and stretched to find patches of unmarked glass, to keep watch of him. The storm drew into the coast at fantastic speed and Dad continued to stand, and then the rain and the hazy clouds and the whipping tide overtook him, took most of him from my sight, and a horrid crack ricocheted through the air, through my ears, and Dad dropped—I saw him *drop* when the final couple feet of pier splintered and collapsed, dragged him into the thrashing, opaque water.

Ellie squeezed my hand. “What are those?” Her finger extended beyond the pier where two people sped along the calm waves on watercrafts.

“Jet Skis.”

“Can we do that?”

“We don't have Jet Skis, kid.”

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“Do you think we'll ever get one?”

We started back to the shore.

“You sure you want a Jet Ski?” I said. “They look really fast.”

“And very loud.” Her typical agreement without concession.

“Noah would be too scared.”

“Very nice to consider your little brother.” I glanced back at the pier.

I woke Mom after that. I ran. I might've dropped my water cup but memory after that refused to work. I don't actually remember where my water went, if I ran to Mom or if I ran outside. The remaining facts of that day only exist in my brain as certainties the same way I know the sky was blue yesterday. There's no recollection, but I know for a fact that the sun rose that morning and that we never saw Dad again. And that the pier snapped. Now the pier Ellie and I walked defied what I knew, and had always known, had always carried with me in large and small ways to this day, to this stroll along the beach—the present facts telling me yesterday's sky was green.

Jon stared at me from the back of the house. “Okay?”

A small gust convinced me tear streaks covered my cheeks,

but when I wiped my hand came away dry. “Just having a moment,” I called back.

Jon took Noah’s hand and we reunited in the middle of the beach—equidistant from the house and the pier.

“Why is this a moment?” Ellie asked.

“It’s your dad’s childhood home,” Jon said. “Lots of feelings. You’ll feel the same way about our house one day.”

I never told Jon the specifics of how my dad died. I never told anyone (except Mom—that night—right?). Not my closest friends. Not my college counselor, whose best cure *for the blues* was morning walks and more vegetables. The story had always been *lost at sea* and most people are too polite to needle more details out of somebody’s personal tragedy.

And maybe I never told myself. Because the more glances I stole of that pier, the more its reality set in, and the more life felt to be in slow-motion like the night Dad and I stood facing the ocean. What I knew, what I absolutely *knew*, became murky—a rain-pattered window. Now any scenario I imagined fought for plausibility and gained ground. And they poked holes in my longstanding truths: a storm concentrated over the edge of the pier? Over my dad and nothing else? What biblical weather.

“Daddy?” Noah tugged my pantleg.

The admission had to come bare and simple: that’s not what I saw.

I said it aloud: “I think my dad got lost on purpose.”

Jon’s face scrunched in momentary confusion, then his eyes widened and that invisible language two parents speak in front of their children communicated all too well: *Now is not the time. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I wish it could be but now is not the time.*

Noah tugged on me again—enough to pull my head out of the storm clouds and acknowledge him. “Daddy.”

“Yes, bud?”

“I couldn’t find a flower.”

“There’re lots of flowers.”

“I couldn’t find one for *you*.” His voice shook in the tiniest manner. He couldn’t find a flower he liked enough for his dad, but he didn’t quite have an idea what that meant—why he thought it mattered—so his voice teetered in difficulty. *Big feelings*, Jon often said. Big feelings for a mind not yet able to sort them out.

Like I should talk.

“Lots of wilting ones, right, Noah?” Jon said.

“Yeah,” Noah agreed, voice growing passive with uncertainty.

“That’s okay, bud,” I said.

Movies taught me that revelations come from massive precipitating events. They come as epiphanies; they come as shocks, yes, but they’re rocked loose. But this one came like a storm in the night: invisible and suddenly upon me. If I rewrote what I saw, how do I tell my memory to unleash the truth? My dad might’ve walked off the pier on purpose. He might have swum into the horizon until his muscles depleted, his breath ran out, and he sank into the tranquil waters. I might’ve watched him for too long. I might’ve watched him tread until he became a blip, until he blended in with the vague mountain range so far away. Finished my cup of water and set it back on the counter, distantly aware that Dad had just done an odd thing but sometimes when you want a fresh dip, you want a fresh dip, and he’d surely be back before breakfast.

But I didn’t know. The imagery, so clear and clean I could’ve transposed it to paper in fine detail (and often considered through college), now swirled like thick paint swatches. My mind’s ability to reassure myself could be more frightening than my Dad’s true story.

My eyes caught Jon’s again and now his face melted, totally mollified by sweet Noah. Foundational memory-making, indeed. But Noah wouldn’t remember that he searched for a perfect flower. He might remember the walk. He might remember the hotel. But the coconut ice cream from the beachside hut in Qualicum? The goats that grazed the grassy roof at the market? He’ll hug those memories tight, he’ll remember next summer when we talk about where to go, and he’ll say, “The place with the goats!”

No drastic rewrites for my Noah.

Or my Ellie. I extended my palm to her because it was time to head back. She grasped it instinctively like she always did and I noticed it then: the little pang of beauty that act—of her blind trust.

Noah took Jon’s hand and we followed our footprints back.



reservation

Isabel Zhu

the time difference between making and unmaking
a bed is criminal
undoing an imprint (*who stayed last night?*)
butter knife (by choice) over balanced breakfast
steak and eggs, over easy, overdone
blue rare, nothing here
nor there—a foreign perfumed air
blank stare

it's à la mode, a villa in tuscany
hotel room in chelsea
a bruised and scraped knee
fused together—centrifuge
new fruit, old familiar, reconnecting at two
over a light lunch of politic pickled foods
where spouses keep their mouths shut
apart from when they chew
each other out

let them, then, not gorge whomever is next
make a meal centering health, digestion
circle the self, bake bread, seek lemons
spit the seeds out, poach pears
presume a new start, a new course
pay the due when it is brought
no dessert

Between Snow

Owen Huisman

Between snow
dawn tears into
starved surveyors
as eaten thistles
form the day—
and from frozen lakes
cattails grow
rotten persimmons—
still I recall
hidden cities



The Gates of Mount Hymenaeus — Will Li

Potty Mouth

Stan Rogal

...here is the event horizon [yes it is in colour &/or in black &/or white] an interambient kind of talking that never actually occurs proceeding by means of a 'sensitive empiricism' a 'poet(h) ical aggrandizement' a 'discrepant engagement' a 'dissipative discourse' a dissolve of particularities into one solid braid of sound eating hearts of heads of wet red & green lettuce counting the days the destroying bulldozers & cement trucks paving the Mojave Desert the Amazon Rainforest the Florida Everglades the Equatorial Wetlands the Australian Savannas the... (you know blah blah blah) the list goes on [& on]... scarred syphilitic landscape — crater-sized scabs — painted over w/Pepsi™ ads black clouds fill the chalkboards w/sleeping children the flight of the carrier pigeon (what is the message it carries? carried?) can the tragic be poignant & vice versa & verso & recto? confusion is general or at least mutual no longer or not yet it's all naked out there it's one big strip mall fallen into autumns of stain & substance the fine sand of creature life poured through the river mesh (though one cannot misplace a pretend landscape one can mistake it for another pinned at the corners) trim paragraphs of uninflected speech hung over the prairie nevertheless a storm can interrupt your attention a hint is powerful the way to god is ambiguity is a scheming pussy wind that paws & fusses with the bleak sea (note the word means one thing when spoken by a man quite another when by a woman dash of definite article Noun model conditional imperfect verbal auxiliary adjective of obligation present tense appositional intransitive verb...) — lord increase my bewilderment! improbable beauty profanity violence graphic photos of murder victims look for chrissakes look they're soldering the generals back onto their pedestals pleasure bloodies our underskins blues play lefthanded under the weather what is the meaning of this agglomeration of filth? we are such

sad bullies regretting our transformation of the world we gain the gift of prophecy but lose sight [I mean, really, is it either necessary or sufficient to have a private pink human in the cosmic equation haven't I even a pigeon's sense to fly suddenly the other way please] — O but what about love? love's a terror a revelation leading to contours the pulse advances squeezes particles together what I am describing is what comes after right now is exactly right right now where it is let the stripes of ZEBRA be in time with the imaginary House of Mozart [it's goofy here all the conversations are in my head] the failed authority of sentences is soothing slowly things partly because of damage are represented as ghosts poems held together despite their ruggedness roar w/ resentment against the world as is & resonate w/joy (it's true not many people can stand this much beauty) the bright moon moves on the deep morning lifts its swollen legs high upon the horizon...

Implosion Project

Hayat Abdulhakim

1.

I am thirteen, sitting in the parking lot of a carpet outlet.

The July heat comes down in unforgiving streams, filtering through the tinted window of our blue minivan. I hate this minivan, I hate this city, and I hate how I know what conversation my father has captivated the carpet salesman with. My sweaty fingers fiddle with my wired headphones. My father returns from the carpet outlet without a carpet but with a white-and-gold Yves Saint Laurent wallet for my mother and a cherry-red Yves Saint Laurent purse.

2.

I am fourteen, watching my father sit on the carpeted steps of our home.

Our rent is twelve hundred dollars, and my parents scrape together every penny they have to make the monthly payment. My father is dressed in his usual fare: an ironed, button-up shirt and slacks, usually grey or black. If I leave my shared bedroom to use the bathroom at night, I can peek through my parent's bedroom door and watch him iron his clothes for the next day. They speak Somali, so I don't understand what they're saying.

I watch my father shine his shoes before taking me to school in the morning, every morning. He tells me it's important to take care of our things. I wonder if my friends' dads shine their shoes before work.

I have a strange feeling they don't.

3.

I am sixteen the first time I'm called a nigger.

It comes across my face like a slap, hard and sobering. I'm arguing with someone I considered a friend—Dallas—in a secluded stairwell during gym class. I don't remember the argument, but I remember everything before it: I remember us taking the bus home after school every day, the 3:33 bus. I remember him offering his seat

after I sustained a soccer ball to the face in gym class; I remember him holding the bag of ice against my face the entire way home. I remember his brother meeting my gaze on an otherwise empty bus and telling me that I was so ugly that if I ever got raped, I should be grateful.

I am sixteen when I don't go to that high school anymore.

4.

I am seventeen.

I'm barely scraping by in Math, in Science; my shared bedroom feels even more oppressive than it did in years prior. January rolls around, and my mother calls me into her room. She sits, perched on the edge of her bed, and hands me a blue HP laptop. She tells me that her father bought it for her, laughing, "What use do I have for a computer?" before sliding it into my hands.

Then, she rummages through her closet—the back where we aren't allowed to go, back with my brother's adoption papers, my birth certificate, and a death certificate for a woman I've never met—before handing me the red Yves Saint Laurent bag, unused for the past four years, another trinket a man in her life gave her without considering if she'd actually use it. I am seventeen, and this bag is the most expensive thing I've ever held, much less owned.

5.

I am three, and the world is mine for the taking.

I'm a very particular little girl—I like what I like, and evidently, I like changing my clothes multiple times a day, talking until I run out of breath, and when my brand-new baby sister leaves me alone. I'm learning to read, to write, and I take to it like a fish to water.

I am three, and this is the first family vacation of my life. I'm in Kenya, which I like, but I needed a host of vaccines that I wouldn't need otherwise. Smallpox, malaria, cholera, measles—I try to look tough, but I cry before, during, and after the needles.

My grandfather owns a wildlife conservatory. My father tells me stories of lions sleeping underneath his golf cart, and I believe everything he says. I am fascinated by animals, especially the big ones. My grandfather is a strange man with a deep kinship to all animals, but the ostrich is his favorite. He teaches the bird to feed directly from his shirt pocket, and I watch, amazed, as what I'm sure is a

dinosaur eats from my grandfather's shirt.

I am three, and I don't know what I don't know.

6.

I am dust.

Somewhere, the King of Gods, Lightning Himself, rapes another woman. This woman, Maia—one of the Pleiades, the Seven Star-Nymphs, companions of Artemis—hid from the gods in a cave on Mount Cyllene. I am twenty-three, and I don't like how many stories start this way.

Maia hid from the gods, avoided them outright, and still, Zeus came. He took her in that cave, where she'd remain for ten moon cycles before giving birth to a son. The son, born at dawn, had invented the lyre by midday and stolen the cattle of his brother, the Sun, by nightfall.

7.

I am a ray of sunlight over a grassy knoll.

Somewhere, baby Hermes strips a turtle off his shell, an ox of its hide, a sheep of its guts—and he plays a song that could make an angel cry. He sings for his mother, for his father. He sings because he's a child because he isn't the horror that made him, because the only horror he's committed rests in his fingers, bringing joy to himself.

8.

I am a woman.

I think of Apemosyne, Princess of Crete, traveling to Rhodes with her brother. How Hermes saw her, glimmering. How he “fell in love” with her, how she fled, on foot, from the god. I think of Hermes skinning animals and littering her path, causing her to slip, and when she does, the sins of the Father become the sins of the Son.

Apemosyne tells her brother of the horror she experienced, enraging him. She's lying, he thinks, she's lying about a god. He kicks his sister to death.

I am a woman, but I am not surprised.

9.

I am eleven.

I'm with all three of my siblings, and I don't know how stressful it is to have three young Black girls or one young boy with Down Syndrome. I know that I hate this store – the vacuum store, we're buying a vacuum—I know that I wish my mother would let me stay home alone, I know that I can't keep getting dragged away from my books, I know that the Province of Alberta won't let me stay home alone until I'm thirteen.

I know that my mother cares about the province's rules.

My younger sister, nine, mirrors my expression. Unmoored, I'd later learn, but for now, bored. My sister has something in her hands, a toy, something not from home. She leaves the store with it, absentminded; she's nine. My mother notices while in the parking lot, and she screams. She isn't saying words I understand yet, words like “stealing,” “racism,” and “people like us.”

I am eleven. I am nothing like the God of Thieves.

10.

I am a consumer of fine leather goods.

The luxury brand Hermès only produces about twelve thousand Birkins a year. To make a Birkin, trained Hermès artisans spend approximately forty hours examining and cutting the leather, hand-stitching the bag, and attaching the hardware using a technique called “pearling.” The artisans are delicate—not a thread out of place, not a scuffed handle or imperfect bag-foot. Perfect. Birkins are perfect.

11.

I am the slaughterhouse floor.

PETA often reports on the conditions of Hermès slaughterhouses. Hermès shoppers—both on the first and second-hand market—acknowledge that Ostrich Birkins are particularly rare, with only “[twenty-five] examples selling at auction in the last decade,” according to Sotheby's.

I am a three-year-old girl in Kenya. I'm looking up at my grandfather, my hair slicked back into two perfect pigtails. I know nothing about this black-feathered bird other than he trusts his handler, his beak tucked into his shirt pocket.

I am a pool of blood and a language I don't understand. In Klein Karoo, South Africa, countless ostriches are slaughtered for Birkin bags. Those that work in these plants "force terrified ostriches into stun boxes," before slitting their throats. Their flock-mates watch on. Workers allegedly joke with each other during the slaughter.

I wonder about the complicated nuances of the slaughterhouse from my place on the floor. Do slaughterhouse workers laughing with each other highlight the indomitable human spirit? As a society, are we too quick to judge those who do these "lesser" jobs while also requiring their services? These people have lives, children, families, hopes, and fears.

But so did the ostriches.

12.

I am money exchanging hands.

I recognize that animal rights groups, especially those like PETA, have strong biases. But, for a moment, I'd like to consider the other side of issues surrounding using animal hides for luxury goods. The Crocodile Farming Institute, established in 1987, "aims to conserve the two endangered species of crocodiles in the Philippines, and to develop and introduce a suitable crocodile farming technology that will help uplift the socio-economic well-being of the Filipino people."

CFI aims to produce a more holistic view of crocodile farming, citing that "every bit and piece of this reptile is useful with nothing thrown to waste." For effective and profitable crocodile farming, crocodile farms require five variables to line up:

The ability to raise a large percentage of stock to harvest size in no more than three years (a Hermès crocodile Birkin requires two to three crocodiles between the ages of two to three years old to produce a single bag).

The availability of a cheap food source.

High leather prices.

Maximizing tourists.

The sale of by-products (meat, teeth, and skin to retain profit margins).

Continued research to refine husbandry techniques (how romantic).

When it comes to particulars, crocodile skin prices "are variable and range from US \$10-12 per inch belly width in the producing country," and "with the influx of wild skins diminishing

due to depleted numbers and protective legislation,” the CFI suspects the demand for farmed skins to rise in the future. R.I.Y Adan explains that some cultures consider crocodile meat a delicacy, and in the United States, “people are eating dishes like cojambalaya, ‘gator steak, and croco-spiced Cajun.”

The crocodile farming industry in the Philippines provides countless jobs and economic opportunities to Filipino people. In writing this, I remembered that the farming industry, despite its problems, provides for many people’s livelihoods.

But I can’t un-see the blood.

13.

I am a *fabulous* Black woman.

Cardi B takes to Instagram in response to a “tweet she saw about Black female rappers buying Birkin bags,” suggesting that Black women “[depreciate] the value of them.” Cardi B explains that not only could she get a Birkin if she wanted one, she “actually got four bags today from the Hermès store. That’s one.” And secondly, “why is that y’all asking female rappers if they can get a bag from the Hermès store. Y’all don’t do that to these white celebrities. So, why is that y’all gotta be asking us?”

I am twenty-three trying to think of a punchy tie-in to this next paragraph. Something that eloquently describes the years of oppression I, and so many women before me, fought to land me here, writing this paper. I’d like to say, “Black womanhood is complicated,” but like my favourite professor warns, passive voice often robs marginalized groups of their agency.

“Who,” she’d ask, “complicates Black womanhood?”

“Everyone,” I’d respond, “all of the time.”

14.

~~I am a commodity.~~ I am a hot commodity.

I am fifteen when Vogue Magazine boldly declares 2014 the “Era of the Big Booty.” I’d begun the long and treacherous journey of puberty three years prior, first blood causing me to wake my mother from her afternoon nap, calling her into the bathroom with my pleading before she looks down at my place on the toilet with a sigh. “Stop shouting,” she huffs, reaching into the cabinet before pulling out an orange maxi-pad and tossing it to me, “you know what to do.”

I'd now settled into the waves of womanhood. Granted, my period cramps often had me retching in the girl's bathroom, and my cystic acne made eating impossible some days, but I trudged on. I didn't have much choice. It's 2014, and Vogue has just declared society's entrance into the "Era of the Big Booty." I am fifteen years old, and I am a hot commodity. My body stands apart from my white peers, my hips, my thighs; strange fruit turned trophy.

At fifteen, I don't yet understand the complicated politics of my body. I don't know Saartjie Baartman, bell hooks; I don't understand how discourse "on racialized beauty and sexuality," nor how the culture surrounding "big booties" "highlight the ways that, firstly, black women serve as the subliminal signs of sexual excess," as Janell Hobson explains.

I am catcalled for the first time at eighteen.

As I walk to the convenience store, a group of Somali men holler at me from their packed car. I never learned Somali, but I don't need to know my native tongue to understand the jeering, the whistling, the stares. I clutch myself like I've seen white women do to their purses when I walk by. I still don't quite understand racialized beauty and sexual politics, but like Birkin collectors, I understand that perhaps I'm safer on a shelf, locked away from the world.

I drink my Slurpee, ashamed.

15.

I am twenty-three, standing outside the Hermès store.

I think about how, weeks prior, my boss's boss asked if I wanted her to visit the store with me.

"It's not a bad idea," I say. "They'd probably show you a Birkin—you're the Director. I'm nobody."

She looks at me. "That's the terrible thing, though, isn't it? That they'd show me one?"

My breath fogs up the glass, and the security guard meets my gaze. He looks at me like I don't belong in the Hermès world—one of glitz and glamour hiding the saccharine rot below. And he's right, I don't. On this particular December evening, I reflect on how I'd tried to work up the courage to enter the store for months, to no avail.

"Do you want to go in?" Sam asks.

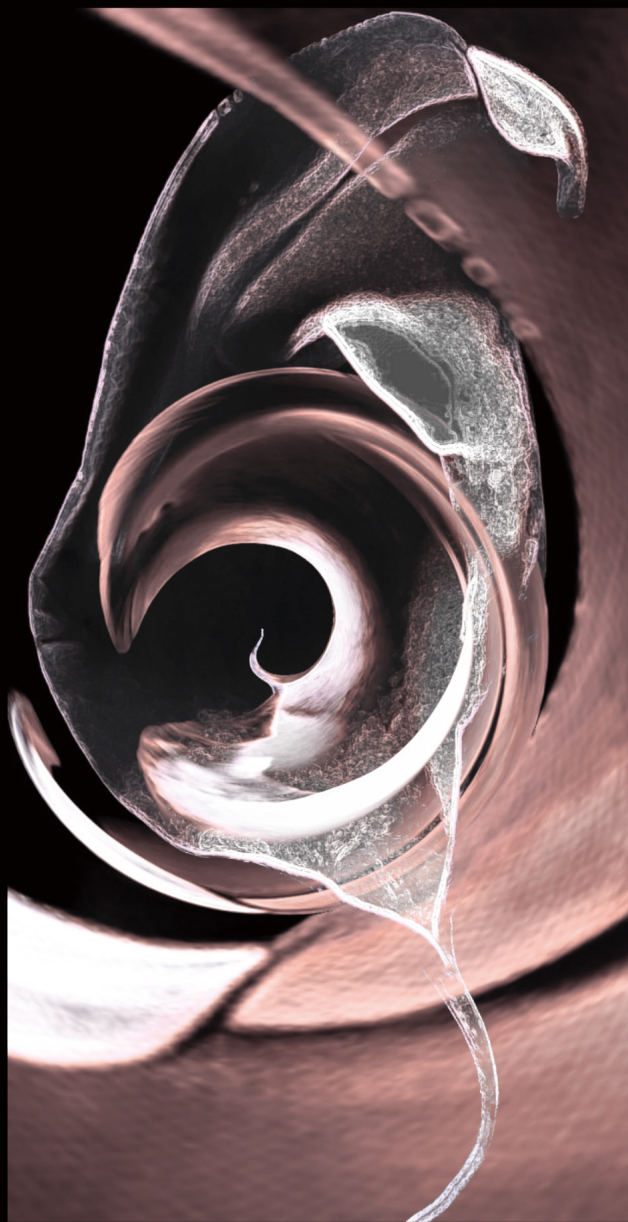
"No," I reply, "I don't."



Lullaby With Hands

Jun Ying Wen

The night having fallen
 like a pall of dust your father
lifts his dead rabbit with
 palms so brief that the wind
gathers them up as easily
 as the trembling stalks of grass
in which he is waist-deep
 that is to say the brunt of it is
already buried beneath him
 in the paddy slits after the salt
leaked white from his eyes
 and you're sure if this happened
it can happen again because
 he used to arrange his fingers
into a small wobbling cradle
 that was it that was it that was it
and if only you would wait
 until he remembers himself
enough parts breakable
 to make out the son
crouched before him
 wielding his name



Hourglass — Carella Keil



Contributors

Allison Zhao is a fourth-year student who has spent her winter in a committed relationship with sugar cookie oat lattes. Her work has previously appeared in the UC Review, Mnerva, and the Trinity Review. She is very fond of string lights and whales.

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Bill Howell, one of the original Storm Warning poets, has had a literary career spanning five decades. With five collections to his credit, his work appears regularly in journals and anthologies across Canada, in the UK, Australia, Sweden, and the United States. Born in Liverpool, England, he grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and has lived in Toronto for more than half his life. Bill was a network producer-director at CBC Radio Drama for three decades. Ranging from the lyrical to the ironic, his poetry deploys colloquial language, deliberate narrative, and a sharp sense of the focused moment.

Carella Keil is a writer and digital artist who splits her time between the ethereal world of dreams, and Toronto, Canada, depending on the weather. Her work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in Columbia Journal, Skyie Magazine, Wrongdoing Magazine, Deep Overstock, Nightingale & Sparrow, Existere, Superlative Literary Journal, Stripes Literary Magazine, Writersesque, Chestnut Review, Glassworks, Door is a Jar, Grub Street and MONO. [instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams](https://www.instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams). twitter.com/catalogofdream

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Elana Wolff lives and works in Thornhill, Ontario—the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee and Huron-Wendat First Nations. Her poems have recently appeared (or will soon appear) in Arc Poetry Magazine, Bear Review, Canadian Literature, CV2, FreeFall, Galaxy Brain, Literary Review of Canada, Montréal Serai (accompanied by her artwork), The New Quarterly, Pinhole Poetry, Prairie Fire, Taddle Creek, and The Mantle (nominated for a 2022 Pushcart Prize). Her collection, SWOON, won the 2020 Canadian Jewish Literary Award for Poetry. Her cross-genre Kafka-quest work, FAITHFULLY SEEKING FRANZ, is forthcoming with Guernica Editions.

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Isabel Carlin (they/them) is a Filipino-Canadian activist and researcher in occupied Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territory. Their work deals with issues of imperialism and its

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Isabel Zhu is a second-year student at the University of Toronto. She majors in Political Science and Book and Media Studies, and minors in History. Her short fiction was previously published in the 2020 and 2021 TCTE Short Fiction Contests, and her piece, *Miracle Cream*, was featured in the *Varsity Magazine's* Winter 2022 edition. She writes when she can.

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Mahta Riazi is a poet, community worker, and educator living in Tio'tia:ke (Montréal). She is a lover of the in-between places, narrow bodies of water, and pistachio ice cream. She is inspired by and indebted to the poetry of Kristin Chang, Forough Farokhzad, Sayeh, Hieu Minh Nguyen, George Abraham, and Joshua Bennett, among others. You can find her poetry in *inQluded* magazine, *Voicemail Poems*, *Yolk* literary magazine, *Bahr* magazine, and *Brickplight*. Her chapbook *Parastoo* was published in June 2022 by Cactus Press.

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Meghan Butcher is a pianist studying at UofT and a sucker for pretty words. Her work has been modestly recognized by literary journals and non-profits across Canada. Some of Meg's greatest inspirations include houseplants and well-made London Fogs, and she can be found in a large sweater or on social media @megzegzoo.

Meryem Yildiz is a poet, translator and visual artist born and based in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Malahat Review, carte blanche, Funicular Magazine, yolk, and Labyrinth Anthologies, amongst others. She is the winner of The Malahat Review's 2022 Far Horizons Award for Poetry as well as the 2022 carte blanche Prize. As a hybrid bird, she feels most at home in liminal spaces.

Nevada-Jane Arlow got her name from a series of dreams about the Mojave desert. She is a writer and performer whose work has been featured in Queer Poets Write about Nature, Lammergeier Magazine, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She lives in Toronto and longs for primordial mud.

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Ruven Samaraweera is a poet and musician. He enjoys lurking in cafes and taking long cold walks (to lurkable cafes). He has only published poems under pseudonyms out of the fear of being bullied by his peers. He really likes Dionysos—but not in some weird cultish way, more so in a cool academic aesthetic way. He studies English (to which people usually respond “Why? You already speak English pretty well”).

Salma Ragheb is a neuroscience and visual studies student at UofT.

Stan Rogal lives and writes in the small backwater borough known as Toronto. Work has magically appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies over the years. The rumoured author of several books and chapbooks. Amateur oenophile and third-degree black belt in Feng Shui.

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Will Li is a first-year student at Victoria College who dabbles in the art of words and images every once in a while. Most days you can find him at his desk, procrastinating a three-year-old project, rambling about music, astronomy, or photography, comforted by a fresh pot of tea.



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Hayat Abdulhakim

Isabel Carlin

Isabel Zhu

Jun Ying Wen

Leon Zhang

Mahta Riazi

Mailey Horner

Marissa Carroll

Meghan Butcher

Meryem Yildiz

Nevada-Jane Arlow

Owen Huisman

Purbasha Roy

Rion Levy

Ruven Samaraweera

Salma Ragheb

Stan Rogal

Té Cornwall

Vicky Huang

Will Li

