

ISSUE 4

APRICITY PRESS

BUT ALSO, FOR ME

...

ISSUE 4

COVER

IYAWNNA by menat allah el attma

"but also, for me" from THICK AIR by yasmin rafiei

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BUT ALSO FOR ME

“Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then, I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)”

SONG OF MYSELF walt whitman

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poetry

DISLODGING

JUAN ARABIA

Translated by Katherine M. Hedeem

What did I say about the dislodging.
If these cadavers float
beneath the Puerto Madero sun
breathing in life's last leaves.
The grave is wide open.

The vast current
drags along limitless fish:
shads and chubs
sleeping glide
along the last dream.

Some simply float,
mimic the first finnings of infancy.
Sunlight is a sword and on the wall
of Jericho armored pigeons
perch breathing in their breath.

What did I say about the dislodging.
If there's nothing calm about this confinement.
A carpet woven
with moss and cadavers
splits from the current,

hiding hundreds of fish
spewing out their greasy maggots.
Water's profile
has eel eyes
hungry and desperate.

What did I say about the dislodging.
If these cadavers float
beneath the Puerto Madero sun
breathing in life's last leaves.
The grave is wide open.

LISTEN

GLEN ARMSTRONG

If the local evangelicals.
Would knock on the front door.
And proclaim.
That God is to Jackson Pollock.
As the universe.
Is to action painting.
I would at least pause to listen.
And accept their hideous pamphlets.
I sometimes wonder.
If they regret.

Not saving my soul.
Or if the whole goal of their mission.
Is to confirm they are not.
Part of that larger world.
Wishing for light.
Bulbs and warmer clothes.
And absolutes where none exist.
If the local evangelicals.
Would show up in plague masks.
And tap shoes I would at least listen.

RIVER , I AM AT THE END

GLEN ARMSTRONG

Dissolve is a kind of fallen
into popular

song never the case
or clouds

the here the dark
the now division

chill is a down

however

fallen requires skin
as with a child's knee

bees swarm a crack
in the brick

torn pants
and unexpected exhaling

into the air
where rivers if they are anything

at all
remain current.

ACCIDENT

ROSEANNA BOSWELL

Once I hit a man
with my car & his face
was a flat moon-decoy
—glow-in-the-dark
 & widening.

Nothing like a deer,
nothing like a person.
There were teeth
in the road.
Or there weren't.
I imagined it all.

I knew him, or I'd seen him,
or he came out of nowhere.
The road bent around
his limbs, his bicycle
—the night sounded
like a siren & the operator
told me to *hold on, ma'am*
because someone was coming
& the moon came out
half-masked—
too late to tell.

KINTSUGI

ISHANEE CHANDA

i look for you when

the moon is a handful of broken
eggshells

(shattered at the seams but
trying its best
to hold all the gold
within its skin)

when the night air seeps
through the cracked
window
and the smell of you
is spilled all over the carpet

if only i could
gather each piece of iron
in the sky
and build the pieces of you

that would never dream
of dying

CORONATION

MARION DEAL

I have been waiting to
divide
for a long time now

The way I see it is if
Osbourne and Oppenheimer
haven't gotten into it yet
about who gets to be the psychopomp
and
we can democratically elect an emperor
of disease, lace our feasts in her
honor with
Gemcitabine
Cisplatin

Then sooner or later
I'm going to
metastasize into a
thousand pieces of music:
catch the cross-sections in

your throat if you will
but you don't have to
be an academic to see that
I'm
the real deal

2018

WANDA DEGLANE

in loving memory.

I started this year off with my dog alive and
my family intact and so far I only miss my dog.

January took its sweet time leaving my home,
and closed its hinges on my throat. the night
after he died, I met my parents in a dark
parking garage, freezing in a light windbreaker.
my mother's face was red and blotchy with
youthful tears and my father wouldn't look me
in the eye after he hugged me and I knew,
I knew, what he'd say next would be, *we're*
getting a divorce— and how stupid I was for
thinking it would end so *soundlessly*— I leapt
so far I nearly did a backflip off their tongues
and then he pulled the blue collar from his
coat pocket, the little metal tags still jingling
cheerfully. we sat in the car and called my brother.
he cried for the first time in a decade. I came
home the next morning to a box filled with ashes.

and June didn't want to go, sunk its fingernails
deep in my skin so wicked and kicked my ribs
on its way out. the night of the 27th, the new puppy
shit on the kitchen floor. it wasn't the first time,
but it had to be someone's fault. he said, and then
she said, and then fingers pointing, and then
my father threw my mother through the table.
an audible tearing. a prolonged eruption. my sister,
howling from her bedroom. my brother, throwing
himself in the middle of the fray and crying again.
call 911. and I stood and watched and sobbed
silently. no, it wasn't the first time. my father's fists
knew her skin well. I was humbled at the way I knew
what was coming, yet it could ache so badly on its way
out. we saw it hurtling at us, and yet we stood still.

I said *2018, be good to me*, and so it was. the more
happiness I tasted on my own, the more island
I became. I watched sinking ships with my hands

anchored to shore. I knew the flailing so intimately,
but I tired of being a lifeboat. of being dragged
down, too. (*brother, I'm sorry.*)

December holds us to its chest like a cat mother.
my mother's life is in boxes, her face aged
many years in only six months. but she opens her
new front door with a flourish, shows me the freshly
painted walls with something gleaming in her eyes.
we leave the curtains off the windows. the dogs
snuggle close in my new bed. and I swear, *I swear*,
I've never seen us breathe so calmly, so fearlessly.

WITH AN EMPATHY SO FATAL

7 8

DARREN DEMAREE

my children prefer the spectacle
the gathering the shared sidewalk
they like it when big cats appear

they want to hug all the lions
they want to hold hands
with the raccoon they always

have marshmallows in their pockets
they always collect the crowd
i have yet to explain the crowd

F U N W H I L E I T L A S T E D

LEILA EINHORN

I too enjoy my coffee without
wondering where it came from
walk my dog while the city incinerates
beneath me there were bodies listed
in a notebook in a drawer of a whorish
adolescence It was Fun While It Lasted
they'll say when the rain comes
I am more than just the post-traumatic
ramblings of a dead century
I've been microwaving peanut butter
for breakfast again despite what
the nutritionist said what good
is that bitch anyway I am a survivor
of too much to name of nothing at all
aren't we all these days shaking
in our union-made clothes we deserve
a medal nobody deserves much of anything
at all if you think about it too much it will
make you sick they will open their book
give you a name you never wanted

OFF THE INTERSTATE

LEILA EINHORN

the motel asks

Are You a Friend of God

& sleeps

shadows

splash

under door

cracks atop

a pleather

harness

outside

people cry tribes

from the backs

of their cars drive to

housing developments

named after the plants

& animals that once

lived there

(grass

hopper

dances in

wet moon

forces him

self upon

the world)

i got bit by a sick tick

in western PA

i am waiting

to

turn

other

i lift my skirt

kneel to piss

in the
soil
writing
to no
one
in
part
icular

2 5 0 - 3 5 2 - 4 6 2 4 *

BÁRA HLADÍKOVÁ

hey mom
my dad is the one that I love

when I come home to the house
or the park to see my baby

dad is my new house
dad I am a good man

never thought I'd see the day
I had a dream that my dad had a car with my mom

but she didn't wanna come home soon
to be in a good place at home

and I got home and I was just in a bit too sweet
sweet and sweet thank sweet

7 7 8 - 3 6 7 - 1 5 2 3 *

BÁRA HLADÍKOVÁ

I love your show but
can you get a good idea

and you have a great day
with your friends or a good night
you can get it together

or something but I love your show
I'll bring you a new year eve and

I am so proud to say that you have
the same experience

so I don't know if I should go out or do it
or I have a problem or do I want you

or something

***These poems were created by texting auto-type. They speak to the absurdity of connection over distance and the confusion and longing of language in contemporary methods of communication from the voice of a semi-automated algorithm that is unique to each conversation over text.**

R E T U R N

ALI JONES-BEY

you are the ocean
i hear you

inland your waves
roaring
over the silted earth
rolling
black, blue against
the tongue of the sky

you are
darkly sparkled
mountains splintered with snow
an ebony constellation
blue, black, shards of iron sky
torn

from the mouths of mothers
hewn to stone

RECURRING

SARAH JULIAN

For R. P.

The moon sank low over
the cottage in my dream
and I dreamed of you.

The white track spread
before me, shining stones
lit up by moonlight, and I walked.

Hillocks of green sage
with rabbits peering through
between the leaves of dew.

And I journeyed towards your house
(in moonlight) leaving the cottage on the hill
and walking to you flanked by rabbits.

FINGER NAIL MOON

ELLINE LIPKIN

This moon is a thin cusp that cups the vast black,
a silver rim thimbling stars into strewn seams.

It's demi-gape is a moaned O, a half gasp,
a belly pressed flat to hold its small store.

Below, the dark still spills its rich infinite,
inside, its low curve contracts around all it still doesn't have.

PLEINE LUNE

ELLINE LIPKIN

“What if the moon was never a beautiful woman?” -- Katha Pollitt

The fat moon hangs full,
incandescing on a low black shelf,

a lambent hull ambering
the day's dregs into quiet scree.

It is the milk maid's loosed button,
wandering eye of a little girl lost,

sister o'mine while we pace 28,
Cleopatra's last uncrushed pearl.

A nacreous wrap around the stars'
least grit, secret teeth enameling

intruding dust to whitened stone.
The moon is bald and shiny tonight,

fattened with longing, a thrown pill sent
into orbit by the cabinet's flung door.

IN SKY SO NAMELESS

SUSANNAH LODGE-RIGAL

you scale up & up the river
birch—small & asking—remember
your feet & panic—below
I'm singing honey
from the ground—honey
come down You come down
crying—the whole country side widening again
into itself—the meanwhiles go awful blooming--
 we move
toward the pecking birds—watch them lift & take
a shape in sky so nameless
no one calls it dancing—if this senseless ever
folds into form I couldn't call it mercy—on days like this
 I listen —eyes shut—
 for you singing—quiet low: many days you have
 lingered around my cabin door

LEAVES SHOW SILVER & EVERYONE SHIFTS SUSANNAH LODGE-RIGAL

toward cover—looks up & worries small

Riverboats shrink themselves away
to dock & wait out

I wonder same as anyone when the pour
will come & if soon I'll attend

again the blue arounding Nearer to me
you soundless say that which anchors in

you anchors elsewhere & awhile now

The minute rounds The soon sky
empties out slow blooming I borrow

your imagination—elsewhere & awhile now undoing skies us

whether cover or without In staying
I'll keep asking will this hold or weather:

leaves, pour, blooming, cover,
boat, soundless, staying, will--

PALM DESERT / PALM SPRINGS

HANNAH LOEB

Mine won't gray early.
I think I'd know already. Furthermore,
I rather feel the opposite tendency: I
am shocked by the softness of dryness and I thirst
for the fair adjacent swish which baggies of oat
in the freezer for the season get. O,
the way stuff freezes that was never wet!—

The earth does a placebo thing
beneath the plane I'm in, the airplane,
wherein I think I see the curve
we're told is there but is too big to see.
I can as easily convince myself
to see a basin, bent the other way,
making the planet an everything-but,
a den in dirt, a bubble in water, and all
our rubbed-bald heads bumping
when we get a little tall or take a fast corner.
There are no corners, though. Essential oils
are sapped outwards, evacuating center.
Inside I bounce around, dry and dry.

SPLIT

L.J.MCCRAY

one

There is something to be said for dot-
i did look back, and i saw the metal
heavy, so heavy, drop through me as if
were only water; i parted, a miracle
wrong. i crashed down from both
the water seemed never to settle, it
seemed to reach the previous state of

*pick a time in your life when you had a
painful emotional experience for example
someone close to you died go back to that
time in your imagination remember how it
felt how would you describe your feelings*

connecting
sheath
i
gone
sides
never
peace.

two

They call it the little death. I'm so tired of that, so tired of thinking it,
someone else's words about what it may be riding roughshod
as if my mind had no new thought on the subject.
On that subject, I gawked at how from
root chakra up I unfolded
neatly in two, neatly in two whole pieces,
a split of a different kind. Strange—for how often
from top down was I nearly obliterated by those piling traumas?
But now I must reconcile that not all splitting is mere, total destruction.

three

oh. the graceful third. the reason I give any fucks about Jesus.
that was when you got me, Christ, when I saw how you said
both and did not turn away from contradiction. I cannot write
about halves without bowing even rudimentarily to the third
half; there, walking the wet sand that never breathed air til
believing hands moved aside all impediment, there, exhaling
its twin reality, dichotomy, painted in tri-color, smashing all
either/or into catastrophe, or was it ballad? I open to paradox.

DISASTER PREPARATION

DS MAOLALAI

you left
your backpack here.
of course I'd snoop.
and of course;
nothing there
but a few dvds
you thought we'd watch,
a change of clothes
and some tampons
because you think
negatively.

the frank reverse
of my place; I don't
much watch
dvds, and in advance
of you coming over
the condom packet
was under my pillow
in easy reach.

we should put together
an earthquake survival kit. you can
take it on
to remember the batteries,
the water supply, the blankets
and long lasting food. and I'll put in
the music of blackbirds
and a little ice-cream
for desert.
and condoms.

you can put in
a long distance radio
and multi-vitamins. a first aid
box with antibiotics.

I'm sure
we'll both remember
that we need
a comfortable bed.

UNBITTER DEATH

AJ PADRON

The smell of moss and dead things,
warmed by rising sun,
the carrion eater's call rings
above the clear springs run

The heat of day so tiring
the nature so relaxed
the sweetest death aspiring
the creature's minds untaxed

Green on green with brown below
draped in palest yellow light
only naturally, life will slow,
and wake once more at night.

UNTITLED

SIMON PERCHIK

Even the night was made from wood
has sheets, a gown, the kind
brides wear only once

though you pace in front the bed
the way mathematicians mull over chalk
scraping it against something black

that could be pulling the room apart
with the faint sound from dust
coming by for what's left

and the corners –vaguely you can hear
her lips breathing into yours
setting on fire the stars

that would sweeten your mouth
with the never ending hum
emptied from wells and springs

for smoke, no longer knows how to talk
how to glow when side by side
as planks and weeds and this pillow.

UNTITLED

SIMON PERCHIK

And though this door is locked
it leans into the evenings
that hollowed out the place

for its marble and grass
where you still hide, afraid
make the dead go first

—they already know what to do
when the corners are no longer enough
and with your finger become

the sudden breeze filled with moonlight
and distances opening the sea
holding it over the fires —pilings

are useless here, these great walls
cringe from the cries rain gives off
where a morning used to be

and you are following it alone
as if there was a light in the window
waiting for you to come by.

THICK AIR

YASMIN RAFIEI

earlier today

// // // //
//

(//) // //
//
.
// // // // //
// // // //
// // , // , .

bicycle ride home

the air between us is thick // our breaths barely shift // its tremendous inertia // its
obstinate pregnancy // its bursting-from-me and devoid-of-you immensity

inhale, exhale, inhale (~~nobody's counting~~ I'm counting) // i huff at its heaviness // shave
away at it like a pencil // puff graphite spirals out from the
space between us.

all i want is a trace // of You // of how-you're-doing // of what-you-got-up-to // of
anything but the empty platitudes // i'm gunning out of the air // frantically // for clear
sight // for peace of mind // for you, i think-say to me // but also, for me.

METH-HEAD DE- CONSTRUCTING A TOASTER

MARISSA ROSE

I don't know how he found the screwdriver
stashed deep in the box of unseasonable sweaters

but there it is—Phillips-head with a yellow handle
not unlike the smooth beach-wrap of a vacationer

sprawled out on the lido deck, her languid silver leg
pointing toward toaster, toaster and more

toaster—scattered gangs of springs, power cord
devoid of current, nickel casing that could be bread itself:

part rounded, and split at the center
of its rounding. Who knows more about fracture

than me? My eyes trained to flit and oscillate
between discombobulation and the grease

warming slow in the smoke-rise black of the cast-iron?
Don't worry, anyone, about this whole thing

pivoting toward a disaster poem: the sojourners here
are quiet ones, since every problem is wonderment

until it isn't. Some nearby hour, when he tiptoes
out back to toss his mess, clutching the vacationer

and her metallurgical failings, I will make up my mind
not to scour the cornfield to find whatever's left of her,

sinking into the mud of last year's harvest. I
will make eggs for breakfast, instead.

D LIQUIDATES THE ESTATE

SHANA ROSS

In cleaning the house

The emotional terrain here is *stuff*

Impossible to separate, sand and sandstone, layers that date

Epochs of a life; it's the small things, all the things.

In the kitchen cabinet a jar of tomatoes

Canned with my mother's handwriting

The label says 1979 which means it was already old

When it moved with her into this house.

Yes, in 1988 my parents took a ten-year-old jar

Of tomatoes from a garden they didn't want to leave

Across state lines to this kitchen that fed

My remembered childhood.

But did you taste the tomatoes?

No - I opened them, inhaled

A strong waft of my own inability

To tell the difference between

Spoiled, fermented, decomposed, rotten.

Later, I told my wife

They didn't taste all that bad, considering.

She gasped and said I can't believe you tasted them,

Which means she believes

I tasted them.

#

JOSHUA RUFFIN

Today's headline reads, "We Were Falling
"and Never Knew it." You woke me to ask why

my bones were humming.
It's a defense mechanism

against the possibility

I'm dreaming. Freehand
becomes war—my n's careen

into m's with little memory

of their former lives. To say a vote
was taken encompasses

everything *taken* is. A child,
a crayon drawing of summer.

The air brimming with half-birds.

POST-ELECTION COVERAGE

JOSHUA RUFFIN

The candleholder on the wall is missing
a spike. We light it when friends are over,

say *Careful when you walk by.*

At night I watch it dance
and wonder what's behind me.
The sky

in its second week of grey
calls itself silver, magnesium,

blue. We try to pull it apart
into black and white but need

sleep. Still

it's only a matter of time. Come
summer we'll throw
open the windows, welcome the fire,

the light it gives us to read by.

T W I C E

MORGAN RUSSELL

When I asked you if you loved me, you laughed
a carrion's call in response

I think that's what love is—laughing in
response to what our insecurities hope
that love is, or might be

I can't tell you what love is, but I can tell you
that infatuation is looking at blunt, callused
fingers from holding pens wrong and seeing
everything as a miracle

Maybe love is knowing that it is

That or love is a 75 cent iced at the gas
station in walking distance of my apartment

Love is either iced or you

ALL WE EVER WANTED WAS EVERYTHING *

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

We weren't so hungry our gods
could be eaten. Even with wine.
Mouthfuls of ash. Not yet. It takes
more than a house in disrepair
to imagine the nails will hammer
themselves, more than a few years
of darkness to demand so much of light.
But we were hungry. For something.
A country to take with us long after
we shunned it. A barrel fire to last the night.
A word for salve that didn't imply injury.
Some whiskey. Brown bread. Cigarettes. Stars
we could see well into morning. It's not
the illness that kills you, my grandfather
would say, but giving up on a cure.
That was before the illness killed him,
back when you & I were small & small
our cruelties. Those holes the moon cleaves
through the clouds look a bit too much like
exit wounds now. & the stars, shell casings
left to cool in a field. A wilderness of neon,
pigeons, prayers, silence. As if we're hungry
for a light to reach us down here, frayed
like the end of a snapped rope.

***This title is inspired by the song of the same name by Bauhaus.**

FIELD NOTES AND NATURE CONFECTIONS

AUBRE SILER

Speeding cicadas flitter past
And glide low,
Marking trees with their throats
Through oaky custard and low-hung fruit.

To one another
With their slow saccharine whine:
That schmaltzy ballad
From the prairie thickets are
Treacly and sweet to my morning ear.

Sun-spots caramelize my glass
And singe my sultry sugar-paper.
A set interval decides its ripening,
And the parchment pulls apart into
Tasty, flakey threads.

Freshly pressed petals have been grouped
With tufts of plucked antennae
And shavings
Of fractal wing patterns.
I've made note not to eat them.

CALL SARAH

SARAH YANNI

mom tells the lady in her Subaru radio to call me, but the lady doesn't understand. *i'm sorry, i didn't catch that. can you please repeat the name?* mom says it again. clearer, louder, un-human speech. mouth wet, wide open. *i'm sorry, i didn't catch that. can you please repeat the name?* she has lived in the usa since the nineties, spewing words in an accent incompatible with cyborgs. siri, alexa, google, the subaru lady, all un-designed to handle mom's mexican-japanese english inflection. *i'm sorry, i didn't catch that. can you please repeat the name?* she curses at the car in spanish. chinga tu madre! and turns the radio on, blasting.

CIRCADIAN RHYTHM

CHRISTINA YOSEPH

in each memory of you
i hear your voice only
the way i did
when i heard it last

GRIEF

EMILY ZOGBI

In the mail: a brochure for cemetery plots.
Dad and I laugh hard about that.
He knows you can't plan for Death
and I know he's going to live forever.

That same week an old friend dies—
there is a gun. A bed. That time of year.
Dad puts this phone call on a shelf with the others,
holds the quiet in the cradle of his arm.

fiction

APARTMENT 5C

TAYLOR ADEL

The apartment isn't much, stiff wallpaper frayed along the stairwell where hands have passed over it during every ascent and descent since its erection in the fifties, rips visible under the pale luminescence of a grimy lamp that hangs in the corridor, always rocking with a steady *creak-pop-creak*, though I've never felt a breeze in this portion of the complex and the placement of the fixture is too high to touch, even with a broom. I know, I've tried. Maybe the building rests on unsteady ground. Or maybe a breeze rustles along the ceiling, leaving the lamp to swing on its own, the rest of us oblivious to the touch.

Regardless, I own the layout beyond the door labeled "5C" on the third floor. It's mine. The chipped, bronze emblem stares at me above the peep-hole while I fumble for my key, juggling grocery bags, textbooks, and coffee cups all while my rain jacket attempts to slide down my shoulder in rebellious glee, catching the strap of my purse and threatening to send the accessory tumbling down. If it falls, everything in my hands would cascade with it, held together now by the sheer might of my awkward leaning—body positioned for balance, not comfort—and the constant, friction-seeking shrug of my shoulders. The key clicks, latch opening, and I rush into the space.

Cheap patchouli rifles my nose, invading the room from an oil burner on a filing cabinet, and I breath deep, smile lifting overworked lips. They're always chapped, chewing on them keeps my nerves intact, but my skin doesn't appreciate the litany of grinding, gripping teeth. Someday, I'll stop the relentless gnawing. Not now.

Tossing my armload onto the kitchen table, an eighties replication with royal blue chickens painted on white tile, I shut the apartment door, "5C" disappearing from view, and make my way to the end of the hallway in a routine set soon after my first week of renting the space; my fist bangs on the wall, resounding yet hollow, and I yell at my neighbors to turn the music down, because who listens without concern of disrupting others to *The Clash*, the *Misfits*, and the *Sex Pistols* on a loop so loud it shakes the thin barrier between us? Pat and Riley.

To be honest, I've grown used to the noise. It's too quiet when the neighbors are gone and the music skids to a distressing halt, but when I don't pound my fist on the partition, a note gets taped to my door, asking after my well-being. It's an unspoken, compulsory bond. So, I brutalize the wall and lift my voice. The shrill screeches and clanging instruments fade for a moment, then return louder an acknowledgement of my return. Smiling at the unique communication of *hello, I'm home* and *glad you're back, we're here if you need something*, I plod to the living room, fold over the back of the couch, and roll onto the cushions a few feet below, the *whoosh* of my descent followed by a soft *thud* as I land expertly, my feet propped up on the arm while my head meets the plush material of a pillow.

The distinct tinge of cigarettes filters up, my nose crinkling at the unwanted aroma that has yet to be rubbed out from the fabric of the sofa, but it's still fading and, with luck, will be gone by years end.

Mine.

The garage-sale lamps, overflowing shelves filled with haphazard books, makeshift coffee table, ceramic decorations, faux-fern collecting dust in the corner, whom I've named Walter—it's all mine.

Perhaps I'm a bit possessive. My half-priced belongings mean the world to me, each one collected through the years as I've migrated from rocky home-life to full-blown independence, graduate school handing me the reigns for a future I'd dreamed of without expecting, and one could chastise me for the aggressive way I cling to each inanimate object or piece of furniture, but just like the apartment space, these items are mine, all mine, and my possessiveness stems, if I were to guess, from my previous lack of possessions to be possessive about. Maybe it's a compulsive flaw. Or maybe it's a common endearment, held by many, and I'm oblivious to our similarities.

A knock swoops across the room, louder than the rising crescendo in *The Clash's* harmony, and I bolt up from the couch, glancing to the digital clock above the fireplace mantel, calming the anarchy of my lips as they split into a smile that squishes my cheeks and wrinkles my eyes until the entirety of my face quivers in taunt muscles.

"One second," I say.

There is a muffled answer while I throw the forgotten groceries into cabinets then unwrapping my rolled shirt in a fidget of hands and slide in front of the door. Deep breath. It swings wide as I gesture into the space, a grand sweep of my upturned palm beckoning the guest inside. His lips quirk up as he steps forward and peers around, book bag slung over a shoulder, knuckles stuffed into back pockets, neck craning to get a look at my place as he crosses the threshold.

"Wow, this is great. Very . . . you, Michael. Is that the *Misfits*," Ivan asks, twisting in an observant circle, casting his gaze from one corner to the next while his smile blossoms.

My chest puffs, proud, the compliment igniting in my core as I shut the door and step towards him, making the move to the kitchen table where our coffee awaits and hours of studying will take place. Independence earned.

"It is, isn't it? And yes, you can bang on the wall and tell them to turn it down if you want," I say, chuckling at my odd conversation between the neighbors.

"No," he responds, shaking his head and sitting down beside me, "it'd be quiet without it, and music helps me study."

I nod, mouth curved up, and pull my textbook forward.

"Welcome to apartment 5C. It's all mine. Want to start at chapter thirty-two?"

THIS YEAR'S DOLLAR

CHRISTOPHER S. BELL

Everything in town was almost exactly as she remembered; only a few buildings and faces worse for the wear. Ruby had bailed on returning the previous Christmas, reduced to an ornament for Dean's extended family. This year she brought all of her belongings home, stashing them in various cracks to gather dust with her father's unwanted trinkets from the divorce. The house still carried his scent; a mix of nicotine and aftershave ingrained within the couch cushions even after he moved to the lake. Ruby's mother could only remedy the situation by adopting a cat every four years or so. There were three now: Chance, Posy and her favorite, Bill.

They'd found all the best hiding places in her old bedroom, usually crawling up under the covers moments after she fell asleep. Ruby snapped them at least once a day, sending moments out into the world with only minimal interest returned. Kurt was the first to reply; the tears of joy emoji prompting conversation and finally a Friday night drink. She hadn't seen him since the summer after sophomore year of college; each subsequent imbalance leaving her lukewarm to his habits and whereabouts. Ruby didn't love Kurt when he deflowered her after the winter dance junior year, but still held him in a certain light for making the whole experience exactly how she expected.

His style had only gotten worse; a hybrid of ghetto white suburbanite and man-boy in a business suit. Still that smile made her feel younger than thirty, back before Dean built her up only to bail at the first sign of disobedience. Kurt lacked the hang-ups that most normal folk took for granted, floating by on heightened testosterone levels and a charm best reserved for Super Bowl parties. He didn't ask Ruby why she had moved back home nor did he linger much on his conquests with the opposite sex. There was a reason they were both still single, numbing every nerve to the flashing neon and rising stench of working-class buffoonery. It was so much easier than settling down with only the prospect of starting a life like all the others.

The next morning, Kurt made them breakfast, a rising grin carrying Ruby through another long Monday. Her co-workers noticed it almost immediately; an expression reserved for someone who'd fallen asleep at least mildly-satisfied. They wanted to know all about her mystery man; Ruby forgetting how quickly an act could shake the whole foundation, some bricks already loose and prone to tumble. She remained tight-lipped; the winter helping even those with social agendas hide away from it all.

Two days before Christmas, he asked her to New Year's; Ruby saying yes if only to avoid watching the ball drop with the feline trio. "But that one chick you like so much is performing," her mother argued.

"Who?"

"Oh, I can't remember her name. She's got that song about riding like a hottie, or is it grinding dirty?"

Ruby humored the conversation for as long as possible, before driving to the Decker County Mall; the remaining chain stores offering little by way of fashion. Wearing an old dress wouldn't go over well with those few followers still paying attention; one of Dean's office bros or a college roommate stranded in suburbia. Ruby didn't know what to expect at Carrie Kramer's lake house, browsing various racks only to stare into dressing-room mirrors, uncertain what vibes would satisfy.

Ultimately, she chose something short, dark and red, waiting by the living room window for Kurt to beep his horn. "You know, he could come in and say hello," her mother suggested after the tone resonated. "It's not like we don't know each other already."

"Yeah, but I think it's better if I save all three of us the embarrassment," Ruby zipped up her coat.

"You two do look so nice in those old pictures."

"Well maybe we'll take some more for the mantle tonight." Ruby then ducked out the door, smiling all the way to his passenger's side. "My mom says hi."

"Dope," Kurt replied, before cranking a phat beat until his windows rattled. They cruised with separate intentions, passing old hotspots before the highway. Ruby asked about his family excursions and shortened work week; her driver complaining of drunkenuncles and his shithead boss. She had similar stories, but didn't land every comparison. Something felt off when they finally made their entrance; Kurt heading straight for the booze while Carrie and her fellow housewives cornered Ruby if only to catch up on the past decade. She indulged their forced expressions, keeping an eye on her date from across the room.

Kurt remained one of the boys, giggling rambunctiously as they downed cheap pounders and cursed major athletes for getting too political. Ruby marveled at how much it all felt like a middle school dance; girls on one side spouting passive-aggressive fashion tips while their male counterparts punched and prodded each other like baboons in the wild. A few glasses of white didn't desensitize her to the rising reality. She too could become one of them, shaping her life to fit whatever inconsiderate mold best reflected this broken modern age.

"Well shit, Ruby East. How the hell are you?"

She turned and attempted to hide a decade of animosity; Lynn Graham standing feverishly blonde in a lighter shade of red. "Lynn, how's it going?" Ruby pulled her old friend in for a mild embrace.

"Lovely. My husband's on-call, so he couldn't come, but here I am ringing in the New Year with the rest of these A-holes."

"Just like old times."

"So is it true, you came here with Kurt Thomas?"

“Yeah, we’ve been hanging out a bit since I got back at the end of November.” She felt strange saying it aloud.

“Oh man, well I wish you would’ve gotten a hold of me first,” Lynn pulled her in closer. “Kurt’s really bad news nowadays.”

“He always kind of was, wasn’t he?” Ruby joked.

“No, I mean, he should really get some help or something, cause he’s got problems.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Look, it was last year right before I got married, and we were all out at the bar, and I was kind of flirting with him, but no more than I do with anyone else, and then that night he started texting me a bunch, before sending me this pic.” Lynn scrolled on her phone, before pulling up a shot of Kurt in bed with his dick out.

Ruby took a moment to process the scene, before handing Lynn her device back. “He was probably just drunk and fucking with you,” she said, mildly-defensive.

“Yeah, but then I found out he’s done this to a bunch of people, including Carrie’s cousin who just turned eighteen.”

“What the fuck...”

“Hey, look I just thought you should know, since this really isn’t acceptable for someone our age.”

“Why did Carrie invite him to this then if he did that?”

“I don’t know. We’ve all been tight for so long, it wouldn’t be right not to. I mean, he’d find out about it anyway, plus if you two are together now, maybe he’ll clean up his act.”

Ruby was at a complete loss, processing every rising butterfly in her stomach. She couldn’t be the one to help Kurt straighten out, not in that town surrounded by people of equally-diminished character. They were caked in their parents’ expectations, living on inherited wealth and the loose definition of goodwill. All of this she’d already known in high school, never remorseful for leaving it behind, except there it was again, warmly pulling in her as the clock struck midnight. A dangling inflammatory embrace forcing her to feel somehow accepted now that their ranks had diminished.

Ruby played along until they were all too drunk to notice her heading outside, walking the block to her father’s lake house. She used the key in the fake rock, and only switched on one light in the living room, turning her phone off before settling on a resolution. It would soon dissolve into the flawed cracks of another time and place when being this social felt necessary.

DONKEY BREAST

AMA BIRCH

Marfa, Texas is a land on the brink. It is on the brink of the desert. It is on the brink of nothing. It is the land of the unknown and the unknowing. It is where the desert meets the asphalt. The cactus and aloe meet the eye. The grass meets the wind. The color is straw. The sand is loose, and the people are tough, tan and leathery. Living in mint and periwinkle mobile homes on the side of the road and next to the dried river bed where they can gaze out at a road that leads to nowhere and nothing except the sound of wolves and braying animals in the night with cylindrical mountains coming out of the ground.

I sat on the porch with the weathered slats of wood beneath my bare feet. I rubbed my feet on the smooth wooden planks with the slight shimmer. The pitch spaces between gray slabs are imperfect and the rows are dusted with sandy colored dirt. The yellow dirt swathes over the planks like a slow rough sandpaper leaving the surface between a dull and a shiny gray. The wind chime makes a tinkling sound of glasses toasting. The stairs are butting against colorful tiles; the perfect squares of the maroon, beige, and orange terra-cotta walkway leading up to the dirt parking lot in front of the humble shack that we slept at last night.

The morning light strikes the wind chime on the porch. Tickling the light of the air as the multicolored glass rods strike each other gently creating a single a trickle of sound. The light passes through them forming circular rainbows on the porch. I sip my coffee and take a bite of my thick toast covered in fig jam. I take a bite of the watermelon next to me and put the pink slice in my mouth. It is tasty. The juices run down my cheek. Then you say to me it is time to hit the road.

“Into the nothingness,” you say.

“The car is packed, and all we need, all I need is you.”

The tinkling of the glass with grains of sand and light hitting the windshield speeds up this moment. Then it slows down when we close the doors. There is peace as you turn the ignition key to the 1976 blue Nova. The sun beats down on the car and a layer of sweat forms between my legs and the leather seat. We roll down the windows. As the car accelerates, the crumble of the ground is heard, and the wind blows through our hair as the car hits the asphalt and the ride becomes smooth. It is so smooth it feels like we were sliding on black ice. The rainbows in the asphalt shimmer. The glitter is dazzling.

“Can you give me my sunglasses?” you ask.

“Sure thing,” I say.

The buildings are like boxes lining the road. Boxes upon boxes that are stacked on boxes with vast amounts of space and desert between and behind them. Floating boxes with square color tinted windows. The windows emit light in a brilliant array of transparent hues. The lights are light pinks, light yellows, and light blues. The sun's rays pierce the glass and come to an abrupt stop as they shade the ground with color. The buildings stop and cacti emerge from the ground on both sides with short grass that is green, yellow, and brown coming up from the sandy earth. Mountains made up of thin tubes are seen in the distant. Aloe shrubs appear here and there.

Dusk is coming. The light begins to change as the sun begins to move towards the horizon. The time floats like a ship in the middle of the ocean. I see it: An apparition or a dinosaur or a cowboy; a real life floating mirage in the middle of the desert— in the middle of this road to nowhere. It can't be. How can it be? What can it be? An alien? You slowed down.

"Why?" I ask.

You don't speak. It is like you know. You do know. You don't want to know. How can you know? How can we know? We slowed down. We are gliding on the asphalt. We are skiing along the road. Some tumbleweed drifts past us. The cowboy gets bigger as we move forward.

I drink some water. I am thirsty. I am so thirsty at this moment. Parched, dry mouth. I cough. What to say? As if I can speak if I want to. I cough. A rainbow light reflects off your dark green tinted sunglasses. We look at each other. We know. It is time. The cowboy is getting bigger. I keep drinking water. I am so thirsty.

The horse is so small. The person is so big. We get closer.

I say, "That is no cowboy."

You say, "That's a donkey."

I say, "That's a woman."

She says, "Vamonos, Vamos a ir hermosa criatura!"

The cowgirl strokes the side of the donkey and then whispers in its ear gently stroking its side.

There are multi-colored glass bottles hanging from the cowgirl's waist. Her face is an orange-brown tan color, and its texture is like leather. It is shiny, but she is not sweating. The donkey is under her weight. The donkey is strong. She has bundles attached to the donkey's hindquarters. The glass makes a clanging sound as the donkey moves forward at a slow pace. We keep driving. We don't really stop gliding. She raises her head and looks at us as we drive pass very slow. She smiles. Her smile is blinding. She nods, and then she slides her hand over her donkey's mane.

"Me llevara a la luz de la luna!" she says.

The spiky hairs on top of the donkey's head blow in the wind as we pass her.

She whispers in the donkey's ear, "Jenny."

I am so thirsty. You are sweating. The sun is setting and the sky is a mixture of magenta, blue, and white. There is no one else around. I see a teepee off in the distance. The tink-and-twank of glass bottles hitting each other is heard as we move towards another point in the far distance that we couldn't see from here.

When night falls, the moon becomes big and bright in the sky. The shadow of the mountain can be seen in the distance. We pull our Nova to the side of the road and wrap ourselves in blankets. The Nova is the same color as the sky. We sleep in the backseat of the car. In the middle of the night, I hear a wolf howling. I pull you closer to me. You kiss me gently. We rub noses. We caress each other under the stars in the dark. You grab my breast. I hear the tinkling of glass. The cowgirl on the donkey passes us traveling in the moonlight. Her shadow is in front of us again. I hear the sound of the tinkling glass bottles and their greens and blues glow in the moonlight. I feel the donkey's heavy burden as the donkey stands strong. The cowgirl is playing a trumpet. A solo to end all solos plays in the wind. A piercing cry in melody with the howl of a wolf. I am so thirsty. You kiss me again, and we drift off to sleep under the white light of the moon wrapped in blankets and dreaming of beds made of straw next to lakes that reflect the moonlight. You cry a tear, and it glistens in the night. I am so thirsty.

Bray. Cough. Bray. Cough. Bray

THE ARCADIA ZOO CLOSES ITS CHIMP EXHIBIT

ROSE ELLE

Ed was hired at the Arcadia Zoo. Given his sharp mind and forethought, he quickly became the boss's favorite. He taught the camels to make blankets from their fur, after staying late every night for a week, and was in the process of teaching them not to spit when the boss promoted Ed to manager of the chimp exhibit.

Although it was a prestigious position, Ed soon became disappointed, feeling the chimps weren't fulfilling their potential. He trained them to walk tall with apples on their heads and reprimanded them when the fruit fell, which it often did. He shaved the chimps, making them look more dignified. He taught them to sign, but all they signed about was bananas and fucking.

Frustrated, Ed approached the boss's office, prepared to brainstorm ways to make the chimps more interesting but found him asleep at the desk. The boss's mind dreamt of snakes escaping the zoo while his heart dreamt of trees with flames instead of leaves.

Ed left the boss's mind's dream alone. He carefully replaced the boss's heart's dream with the bones of dead zoo animals. He took the dream of trees with flames instead of leaves to the chimp exhibit where he broke off a small piece and handed it to one, who immediately ate it. That chimp grabbed the remaining dream and fed a piece to each of his companions. Then they slept.

Ed lay with them, watching Venus rise at dawn. The chimps awoke different but mostly the same. They walked with perfect posture but didn't go anywhere interesting. They were dramatically less hairy but insisted on wearing clothes. They developed their own language but still only spoke about bananas and fucking.

On his rounds, the boss discovered the same-but-different chimps. He walked among them, furious, finding Ed in the middle, chastised and wrote Ed up.

"Are you mad we're like you now?" one chimp asked the boss, tossing feces at his face.

"We're no such thing! We're filthy. Abominations! We should be ashamed of our existence!" yelled another at an attentive chimp crowd.

While another kept a hand over his heart, counting the beats. "Sixty-five, Sixty-six, Sixty-seven..."

"Hold it with the stem up. It's easier to peel," one chimp said to a nearby friend.

Taking it all in, the boss decided the chimps could not exist in their current state.

And so, the chimps were rounded up, led out of their pen, directed to the opposite side of the zoo and herded along a labyrinth.

One chimp cried the entire way, "I don't want to die. I've only just begun to live."

Another sighed, "I'm ready to go now. I've lived entirely too long."

"Three hundred and three, three hundred and four, three hundred and five..." counted the counter.

In a fit of rage one chimp killed a friend and dragged his body the rest of the way.

But most of the others just ate bananas and fucked.

At the end of the labyrinth, the chimps were sedated then their bodies lit on fire. Everything burned to ashes except for their livers, which were gathered and fed to the camels.

No longer the boss's favorite, Ed was demoted. He can now be found in the ticket booth at the Arcadia Zoo's entrance. Each and every day, countless times a day, he answers the same questions with the same answers, sells tickets and crosses out the chimp exhibit on the maps before handing them to guests.

THE STRANGE CASE OF PATIENT C

CHARLES HOLDEFER

Patient C insisted that she should have “access” (sic) to health care. She used this term repeatedly, and it emerged as the primary symptom of her condition.

A generous grant from Freedom Street® allowed us to conduct several interviews with the subject. We hoped to find a diagnosis and a therapeutic option to help Patient C on her healing journey.

As a first step, she was referred to a lexicologist.

Report 1.1

confidential

Repeated attempts were made to persuade Patient C that “access” in the sense she assumed did not exist for everyone. She appeared to be suffering from a definition deficit. Side effects included perplexity and incomprehension.

Despite our efforts, Patient C did not relent. Her condition aggravated to the extent that she argued for a “right” and asserted it was “universal.” Her preoccupation with “access” had reached an advanced stage.

After a prolonged interview, it became obvious that Patient C was not responding to clarification. Her symptom was too deeply rooted.

She was referred to an etymologist.

Report 1.2

confidential

With a gentle preparation of the background, Patient C was informed that a “right” was a pre-existing condition. Moreover, a “right” was a proposition unavailable to scientific consensus and, even more troubling, the concept of “rights” was a common argument among market denialists.

Every effort was made not to accuse or morally judge the patient, but professional standards required that Patient C be informed of the problematic foundations of her assumptions.

Unfortunately, Patient C did not respond well to edifying treatment. She became visibly agitated. While still clinging to words like “access” and “universal,” she began to emphasize other terms, too, such as “mercenary” and “asshole.” She also displayed symptoms of shortness of breath and compromised aggressive impulse control, which brought an end to the consultation, as Patient C was escorted from the room with the help of several medical orderlies.

At this point, the record becomes less clear, given the lack of authorized professional observers, but it appears that Patient C did not leave the hospital but lingered in a waiting area, whether by accident or provocation is hard to say. Witnesses claim that she continued to insist on “access.” According to the receptionist on duty, many people in the waiting area cried out similar statements, often in a state of heightened emotion.

Perhaps Patient C’s condition was contagious? At present, this hypothesis remains uncorroborated. But anecdotal accounts of the incident do suggest that Patient C and numerous others resorted to the same words.

In an effort to defuse an alarming situation while probing more deeply into her incomprehension (e.g., was Patient C suffering from a failure of phonemes that had impeded her morphemes? had she lost control of her vowels?), the subject was offered an emergency consultation with a phonologist.

Report 2.1

Confidential

Initial observations were encouraging. In fact, Patient C seemed articulate and in command of her thoughts and speech. She was consistently understandable. Nonetheless, her primary symptom persisted: she showed no sign of abandoning her claim to “access.” Thus it would seem that the patient’s clarity and rationality are asymptomatic.

Vital signs such as pulse and respiration were variable, depending on her interlocutor’s degree of refusal.

Most worrying, however, were the following vitals: 1) the credit clearance of her Visa card was unsatisfactory; 2) her employment and insurance situation offered no plausible palliative.

These findings were verified twice by the billing department.

Preliminary conclusion

Confidential

The case of Patient C remains inexplicable. At the time of this writing, she is languishing in a tautology ward. The prognosis is not good

SANKOFA

MARY LEE

The light filtering through the heavy curtains met with the dust particles hanging in the air--photons diffused in such a way that the entire room looked like a black and white photograph. A girl slept in the armchair, her spine hunched over like an unanswered question. The tangled quilt she had fallen asleep under had abandoned her throughout the night. It lay in a heap on the floor below her, a determined corner still reaching up to wrap around her left ankle. She breathed in a quiet, shaky rhythm.

There was no transition point. No moment between asleep and awake where she hovered in disorientation. The light simply eased its way across the room to the corner in which she slept and touched her with the love of a mother. As soon as it warmed her she rose to life, up as though she had simply been sitting there awake all along. Her movement towards the kitchen was slow and graceful, like a vine twisting up an iron gate. There was no rush, no one to meet, no errands to run. Her life was a single day, broken over and over again by sleep. She reached the kitchen and leaned her forehead against the cool glass of the window. Her breath fogged it up and she exhaled twice for good measure.

She turned to the counter behind her, and reached for the same loaf of bread she'd eaten from for dinner. The knife she had used then still lay beside it and she picked it up. As she pressed the serrated edge down against the crust, the bread held its hard posture--unmoving as she cracked through its stale shell. She placed a slice on a plate, pale pink china that squeaked against the hard crust. The once white dough of the bread had turned to a maze. A garden of green and blue spores. They criss-crossed one another and reached out for the crust around the edges. Her eyes fell upon the molded slice unphased and she spread strawberry preserves over the mildewed wildflowers.

To die young is to be cursed to never be loved or successful at the same time. I think of you each morning. Imagine that at the same time we sit in two different kitchens and eat the same breakfast. I try to imagine you with fresh fruit, with bread warm from the oven. But it always turns sour in my mind. When you're only two, a year is half the time you've been alive. As each moment passes, it becomes a smaller and smaller percentage of your life. Every day, your presence becomes a smaller percentage of mine. Time is something that I can't ever get a sense for, I surround myself with clocks in order to find some sort of order in my day but my skin crawls when I hear them ticking.

I imagine that you're laying on your back in a golden bath of overgrown field grass. The sun lays beside you, the lover you could never lock down. You're thinking of the last time you saw me, when you said "I'm sorry" at the same instant that I said "I miss you." A bag zipped up and a door pulled shut. You're thinking of anything at all.

A jack in the box from her childhood was in the corner, dead yellow roses rising up around the face. The girl woke up. How long had she been asleep? Five minutes? Two years? She knew the truth about this house--narrow, wooden, lifeless. She was, as we all will someday be, a human life reduced to a bouquet of flowers. She felt so tired. All your life you move between lines, off to work, back home again. It was only here, in this place of permanence that she had found the time to move without a cause.

She imagined piano music, and as it swelled through the room she, with no sense of rhythm in her feet, began to twirl in a circle. Over and over again until bony ankle caught bony ankle and she crumbled to the carpet. Somewhere in the distant the wail of a siren, a cracked windshield. A girl reduced to dust.

It's next year. I can see it now. I make the drive north, towards home, towards you. Directions I wrote down in pen on a coffee shop napkin lay in the cupholder beside me. The car bounces as it turns off of the road, onto the gruffness of a gravel lot. I quiet the engine. Motivated half by fear, half by courage. My life is etched into the calcium mineral of my bones, as yours is into stone. I find your name in a row towards the back.

It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten. I kneel down to greet you.

GETTING SCHOOLED

THADDEUS RUTKOWSKI

My father gave me a ride to the city where I would start school; the semester was about to begin and I didn't have a place to live. I left him waiting in his car while I went into a house for an interview. I spoke with a young man who sported a beard and wore wire-rimmed glasses. I tried to be enthusiastic about the house and positive about my living habits. "I'm not a token student," I said. "I'm a serious student."

When we were finished, I asked, "When can I move in?"

"I'm going to talk to other people," the man said.

Back in the car, I told my father I hadn't been accepted.

He said, "What kind of farm is he running?"

I didn't know, but I could tell I wasn't the right animal for the farm.

My father and I rode around, and presently we located a room in a brick row house. The place was on the far side of an avenue that divided the city. The side closer to the university was populated mainly with white people; the other side—our side—held the ghetto.

The owner of the house was a rarity—a white woman. During our interview, she asked, "How do you get your hair to look like that?"

Her question might have been a sign of something more than interest in my hair, but innuendo was lost on me. "I let it air-dry," I said.

The woman said I could move in immediately. But I wasn't ready. I went back to my parents' house with my father. There, he bought me a car. It was twenty years old, and it didn't go very fast—its top speed was about sixty.

I drove my new used car back to the city and parked it on the street outside my rented room. This arrangement worked well, until a driver went crazy one night and rammed into almost every parked vehicle on my block. He collided, backed up, pulled out, and gunned his car into the next obstacle. He didn't stop until the police arrived and arrested him. Miraculously, my car was spared.

For the most part, my landlady and I left each other alone. She spent her time in her bedroom, and I spent my time in her kitchen, where there was a small black-and-white television. I became addicted to the evening programs. I would watch a detective show, then the previews of the next episode. I would remember those previews all week. My favorite series starred a trio of female

detectives whose boss never showed his face. He communicated by a device connected by a wire to an identical device. This mode, called an intercom, used the latest technology—and these detectives needed the latest.

To pay for school, I took loans, but they were slow in coming. The bursar's office repeatedly sent me letters saying that my money hadn't arrived, and that I must pay or leave the school. I ignored the letters and kept going to classes. I thought I would be expelled, but I wasn't.

Fortunately, my grandmother was paying my rent. She would have paid my tuition, too, if I had been studying medicine. But I hadn't even applied to study medicine. I had joined a program in the softer arts, where I hoped to increase my general intellectual capacity. After college, I might get a position in a bicycle repair shop, where I could discuss the works of Melville while fixing skinny flat tires.

Meanwhile, I had a work-study job at the university press—I'd gotten the post by passing a spelling test. I'd beat out other students who didn't know how to spell words such as "liaison," "hors d'oeuvre" and "just deserts."

I used the money I made from the press to buy food. Every few days, I went to the corner Asian grocery and purchased a pound of hard salami and a loaf of white bread. These ingredients would go into sandwiches that would last for days. I already had a jar of mustard, which would last the entire school year.

Not many people visited me on the far side of the divide, but one time a couple of old college chums dropped by. They were driving across the country and had no schedule. They arrived when I wasn't home and gave my landlady quite a scare. She'd been trying to relax in her room when they entered the house without knocking. The door was unlocked, so they opened it and yelled my name.

"What are you doing here?" she'd asked them.

"We're looking for our friend," they'd said.

"The one with the air-dried hair?" she'd said. "He's out."

My friends slept in their car. The back seat had been removed so they could lie down. "We can sleep anywhere," they told me. "

I didn't mention the driver who'd plowed into parked cars until the cops arrived.

On school days, I walked across the dividing avenue to the campus. At the school, I admired the mowed greens between Georgian-style buildings. But I avoided the bursar's office—I didn't want to be caught for nonpayment and expelled.

During a class, I made a presentation by drawing a diagram on the blackboard and explaining the scheme. I mapped a whole family tree, which showed the relation of all of the characters in

an epic story. Later, a male classmate asked, “Did you notice that the professor was staring at your crotch?”

I hadn’t noticed, but understood then that I could do something for the professor. I wasn’t sure what it was, I would find out.

Another time, my girlfriend from my former school visited me. I didn’t know if the house owner disapproved, but she probably did. My girlfriend and I acted out psychodramas in my room. We followed scenarios that involved props, personae, and safe words. We made up scenarios involving naughtiness and reprimand, without forgiveness.

Shortly after she left, my girlfriend returned. I thought she wanted to spend more time with me, maybe act out another psychodrama, but she was back only because she’d gotten lost and needed directions to the expressway.

I spent my evenings in the kitchen, watching television. I was amazed that the three female detectives in my favorite show had gone through officers’ training but disguised themselves as plainclotheswomen. They were rarely recognized for who they really were: trained enforcers who would kill if asked (via intercom) to do so.

My girlfriend didn’t visit me again.

art & dance



HERMANN

KEITH MOUL



NASHVILLE RYMANN

KEITH MOUL



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MENAT ALLAH EL ATTMA



OLUCHI

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