

ST. JOSEPH'S  
VIRGINIA



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30

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A letter from the editors:

For twenty-nine years, students have volunteered their time to collect, curate, and produce a single publication that unifies the breadth of literature and art produced at the Rochester Institute of Technology. *Signatures* represented the coming together of different styles and ideas - an archive of individual signatures.

This year, we celebrate the thirtieth year of publication with a push for renewed innovation and conceptual development. Defined as a distinctive means of representation and identification, our shift to *Signature* transforms the intent of the publication.

Though what emerges from each of us is unique in itself, in conjunction it is representative of our collective signature as a student body. We are unique. We aim to celebrate the eclectic collective of students that find themselves here at RIT - simultaneously immersed in mechanics and creativity, logic and imagination.

Countless hours have been spent working and reworking the individual visions of twenty-nine artists into one unified product. In producing this year's edition, we aimed to bring you, the viewer, a cohesive piece representative of the boundaries we can push and the quality of work we as students are able to produce.

With that being said, we are proud to bring the culmination of our combined efforts - *Signature 30*.

We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we've enjoyed creating it.

Sincerely,  
Sayre Harvell / Meghan Boilard





the other title was and the tribute beats

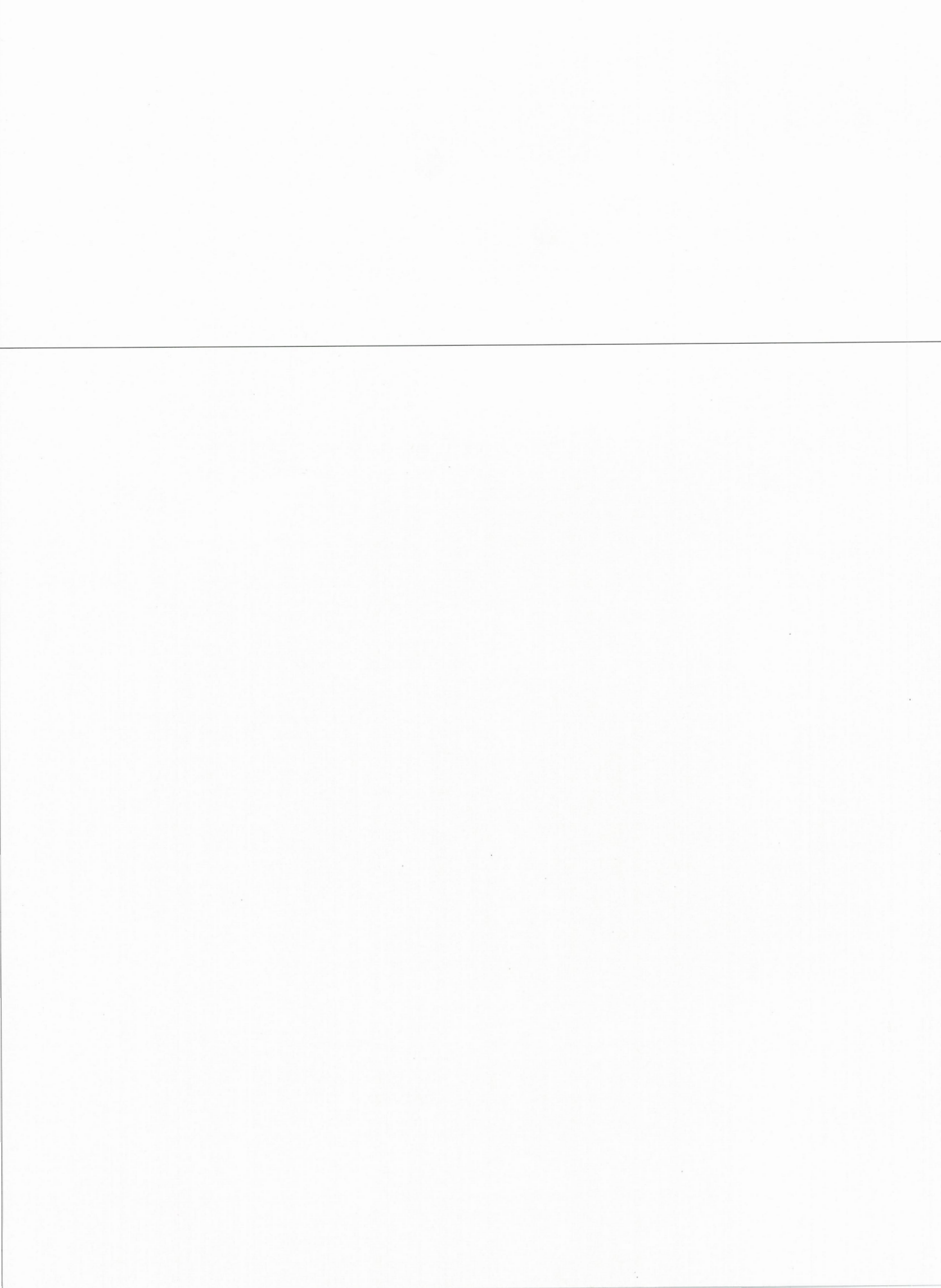
something slithers,  
gliding and smooth  
so smooth  
too smooth  
the branch slowly tilts  
a fog, clarity  
a clear misunderstanding  
a  
tw  
t w a n g  
a backwards hook  
the left side down  
the left side is down  
and cold so new it's unfinished  
weak and raw  
weeks  
withering  
till until,  
sang  
air  
there is no sense  
touch unreal no sense thread  
a needle through mind  
battered  
how will it rise  
how will it rise again









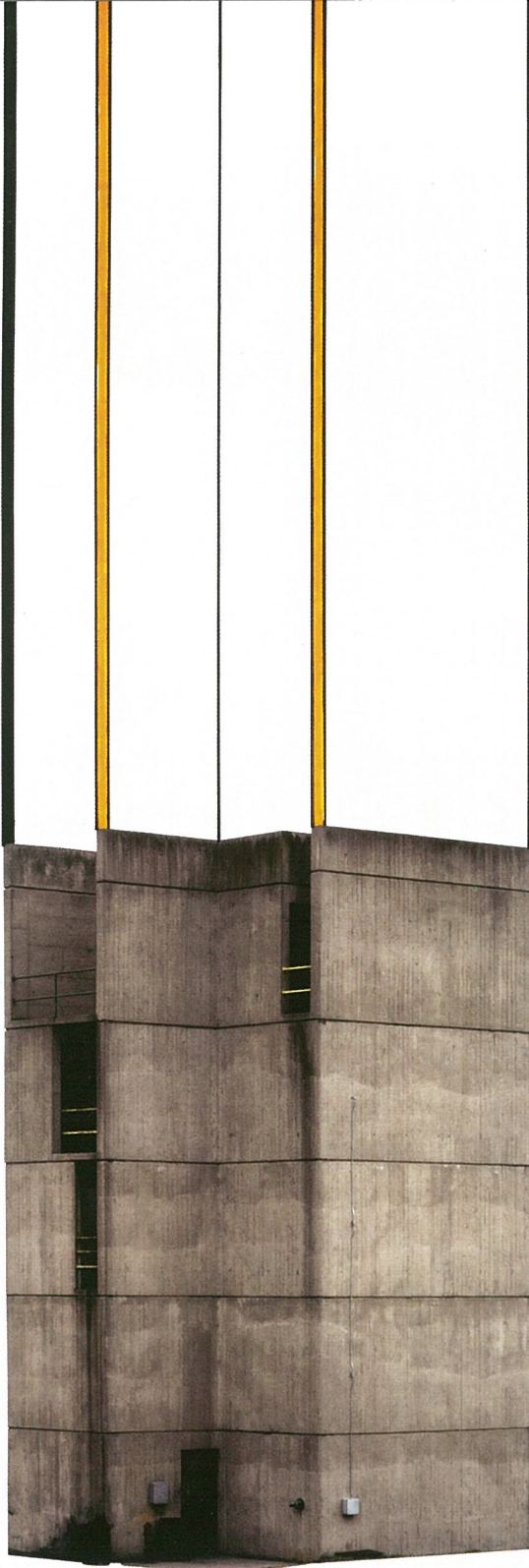


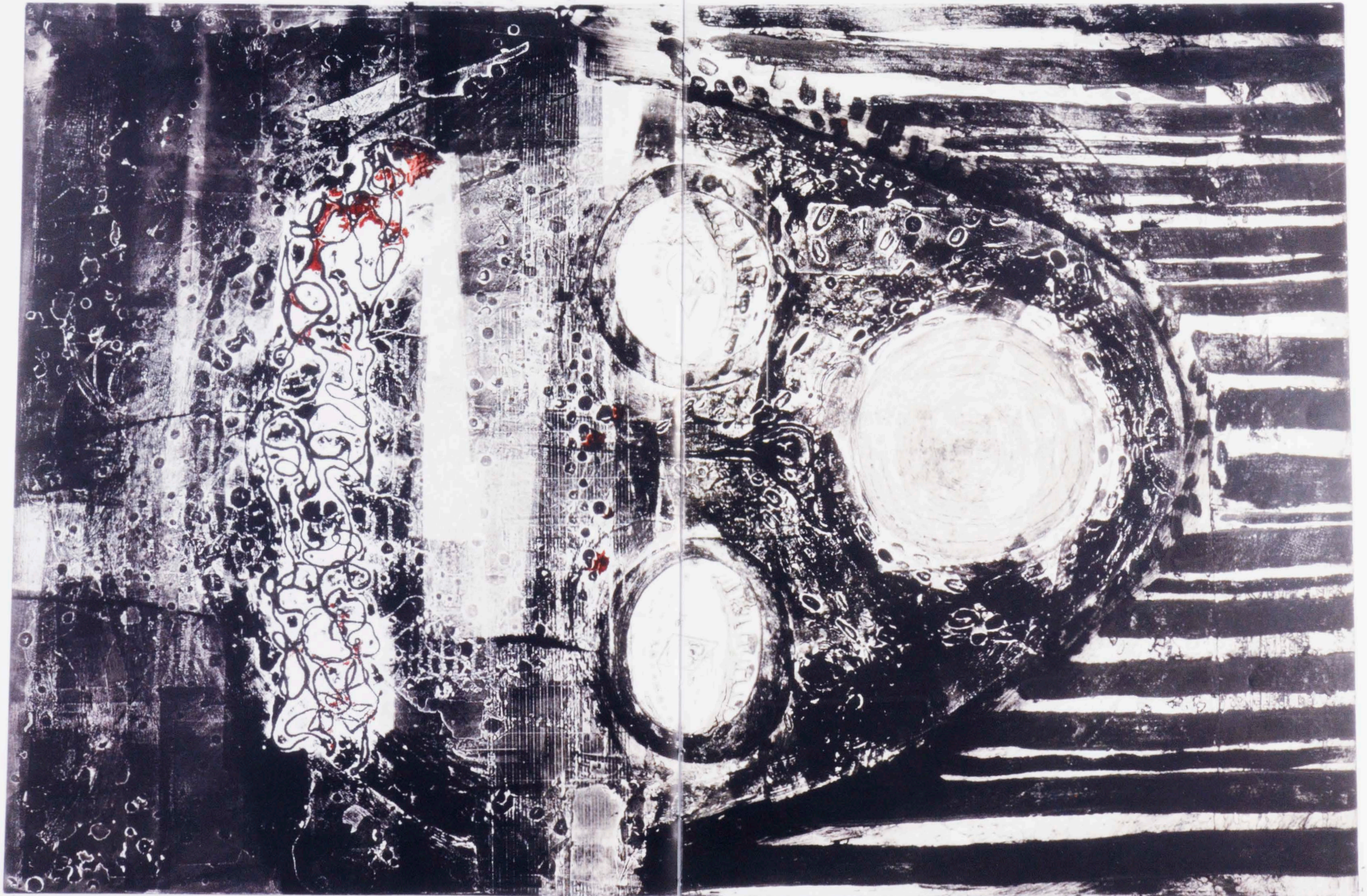
Mother cannot stroke the sorrow from my hair tonight  
For I am full of secrets/  
//In public school, a boy in maternal mourning left his locks uncut  
Hoping perhaps, from his tower of grief she would climb up in fragments  
(We were identical, from behind)  
//And there is wire in my fingernails hoping sparks from the screen  
There is nothing restraining my pretentious now  
Nothing to prove as I steal from Cohen and Joyce with equity  
Claiming Schiele is novel, Plath is new  
Voltaire is mine, Strummer is you.  
//I am ready now, sir, for my manifesta  
My Magnus Opus blooming from plumes in the bags under my eyes  
This spotlight is thrust & I am no longer humble  
This isn't empowerment it is manifest I am destiny now so watch my voice shatter  
//Cities  
The hyena in my laugh is persnickety & queer  
For I am older than I have ever been/ & younger than I ever will be  
There is a fledgling in my arm crook you may sing to but never touch/  
For she is beating bright into the abysmal Dusk  
//And my bravery carries on in prose & eighties film clips  
I find eloquence in tawdry things  
Your cynicism is brazen /I am mine to emblazon  
So hold your tears in cocktail glasses for/  
//I will not drink them tonight  
//I will not rest between father's knee & promise  
//I will not reject my armor & tarnish  
You have slipped into my slipstream/  
you will no longer violate my bloodstream I am the bigmouth bass  
// That fills the room with hair booming voice Bold brass of curl  
// How my opinions gleam  
Look at me, old friend  
// For I will no longer look at you





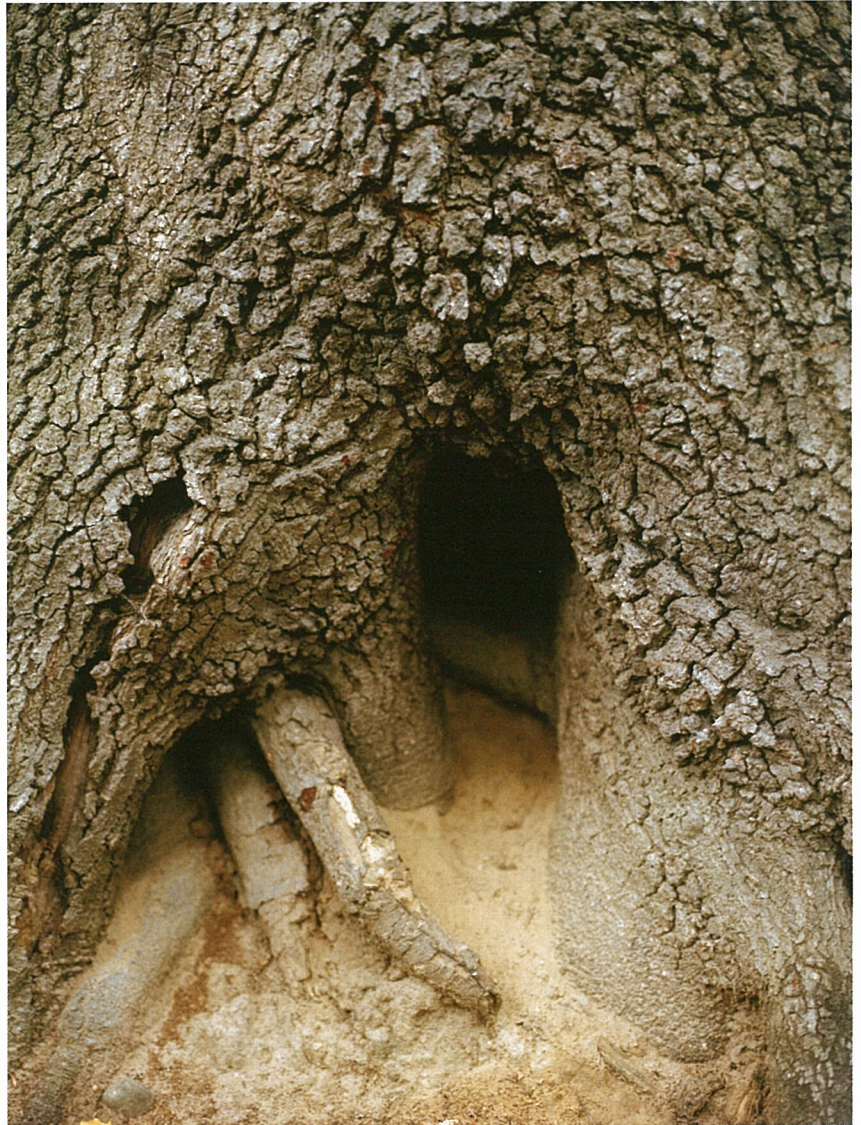














Naïve

Ms. Saunders stared at her computer,  
bewildered,  
an expression that was rare from an elementary school teacher  
who earlier that year  
had to have a conversation with my parents  
because she found out I hadn't brushed my teeth in three days  
because I had read the Poison Control warning  
not to swallow toothpaste  
and became aware of death  
and would deal with bad breath to avoid it.

She cancelled our Spelling Bee,  
afraid,  
and instead we colored  
and I drew a tornado  
sucking up an ice cream cone  
and a telephone,  
not realizing that a real tornado  
would destroy power lines  
and neighborhoods and lives.

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“Can Erin Hutson please come to the office? Someone is here to pick her up.”

I laughed out loud,  
celebrated,  
the inevitable reaction of a third grader  
who is getting out of school early  
and who is smart enough to know  
she doesn't have to go  
to the doctor  
or the guidance counselor  
or the dentist.



I did a victory dance,  
silently,  
though I was the tenth person called out of class  
and I was certain something big was going on  
like how I had seen Santa's wrapping paper under my mother's bed  
but bit my tongue

because I wanted the fun  
of leaving Santa cookies  
and I didn't want less presents.  
I walked down the hall,  
quickly,  
eager to see my mother  
but instead it was Ms. Olszewski,  
who was picking up her son  
along with the Caulfield boys  
since we all lived in Misty Vale Farms,  
trying hard to make life perfect  
in Suburbia  
when, in ten years,  
all of our fears would be recognized 19  
by divorce papers  
and bankruptcy  
and obituaries  
but today  
we had no fear  
for we hadn't yet seen  
the "Breaking News" reports.

Ms. Olszewski turned on the radio,  
tiredly,  
and my friends and I laughed  
at the exploding noises  
and the screaming voices  
because who would be screaming  
on the day we got out of school early?















Think Tank: Spout the words just as you thought-  
they'd come no punctuation or congregation called-  
to make it all make sense one in finiterun on though-  
tis all I can offer in the way of conversation life is a si-  
nglerun on sentence that tricks you into believing in full stop-  
I am unstopable the way you can't stop loving the one who-  
makes your veins pulsate at the mere thought of their name can't stop  
won't stop I lie each contraction is properly punctuated just a-  
I am proper and punctual to all things my skin is a suit for-  
sullen statements on the sad affair of saturation an entire nation si-  
deswept by procrastination I'll get to it tomorrow never dies like  
bond like atomic bond that det onate when separated please-  
do not let us separate for I fear I will leave a leveled land behind in y-  
our wake my heart is losalamos and I am become death the de-  
stroyer of worlds but I destroyed all the worlds I could have had-  
looking for you in the first place each alternate reality is just anothe-  
r closed door behind me like another hurdle that once I jump ov-  
er I haven't the time to look back at my tongue is a speedometer-  
for the incalculable pace of my thoughts versus the amount of win-  
din my chest and my throat itches from carbonator fumes doing-  
donuts in a parking lot at midnight I am spinning in circles at the v-  
ery thought of you and I have no control of the wheel eightyeight  
miles per hour and I'm back to the future I imagined I would have-  
with you but you dare not notice that I have these thoughts for y-  
ou fear the real possibility that the thought of someone could swal-  
low you whole like a monster swallowed pinocchio and gepetto I-  
too could be the killer whale of you every night dreams consum

ingyoueveryotherthoughtlikeacatankerousblackholethat  
tr eachedsentienceandishavingsomelastregretsaboutwha-  
tit'sabouttodothroughandthroughItearthroughthefabricof-  
spacetimewithmythoughtsasmyonlycompanioninlifebecause  
atfourinthemorningwhenyouarestillawakefeelsliketheon-  
comingchillofdeathcreepingupfrombeneathyourbedhehas-  
triedmanytimestoclaimmebutIfearhewillprevailoneofthesed-  
aysuntilthenIamcontentwithspillinginkfrommytongueon-  
toapageontoablankscreenontoa backlightscreensaverthat-  
can'tsave the heat from the cold because every stolid syllable is a co-  
ld front and it is the dead of winter when you know not who you a-  
re in the dark I require a flashlight for more than one reason the-  
se nights mostly to have something illuminate me because my fri-  
endstellmeagainandagainyoushouldwritesome thing happy b <sup>27</sup>  
utyouseemyinspirationisa wantonloverwithcommitmen-  
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ndifyouwouldbesokindpleaseletmeswimwhilerefraining-  
frompointingyouraccusingfingersIamnotashowpetIama-  
manwhoisleashedbyhisthoughtswhoonlyrarelygetstorun-  
freeintheparkwithouthavingthecollarpulltoomuchonmyn-  
eckIneedsleeplikeIneedaperiodlikeIneedsomeonetohold-  
likeIneedsleeplikeIloveindifferents tonguesandmywordsareal-  
lIhave







Name

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Jam your knife into my  
Aorita and I will grow  
Callouses around my heart, I will  
Liberate my fear because  
You can  
No longer harm me





Let's say it started in the alley behind that dude's house — the one we always saw hiding his fingernails in the neighbors' gardens, that one.

It didn't, but let's say it did.

Let's say we're crunching gravel beneath our wheels.

Riding our bikes.

As if we were gangsters.

Because at seventeen bikes are the most gangster thing around in a middle-of-the-economic-ladder, middle-of-the-white-scale, middle-of-nowhere town.

Let's say we're riding down that alley and you're popping wheelies and hollering and swearing just like your Ma always told you not to, and let's say you fall.

Let's say you slam your brakes real hard coming out of that alley to avoid getting smacked by a banana-yellow car going who-knows-how-fast and you skid on that damn gravel and don't do what you're aiming to.

Let's say you get hit by that car.

Let's say I pretend it's not happening.

But let's say you do.

I watch you go sideways, looking like one of those dirt bikers going around a hard turn.

I watch bloodied pebbles jumping out from under your right leg, ricocheting off your arms and face and hands.

I watch that Mustang's tire hit yours, you tumbling upwards, as if for a few seconds I'm watching some scene from a movie.

One where you're falling.

But in reverse.

So you're falling in reverse, right up the hood of this guy's banana Mustang and leaving your blood caked across his horse and painting streaks up the engine and you smack into the windshield.

And all the while I was watching, but now I'm listening.

Let's say this is the moment where I start listening.

It isn't, but let's say it is.

I'm listening and I swear what I hear doesn't match what I'm seeing.

I'm watching you slam into this guy's windshield and I'm listening to some damn bell orchestra.

Or one of those guys in the drum section who plays those rectangle things that definitely aren't drums but they put him back there and he hits them with his sticks real fast and everyone says he's a fucking genius.

So I'm listening to this guy being so awesome for hitting rectangles with sticks and I'm watching the glass shatter under your body and blood running through the cracks and this is when you look at me.

Well, let's just say, this is when your neck breaks and your head rolls back and your eyes are still open and they're definitely facing the general direction of my eyes.

Whether or not you're looking at me is some philosopher's puzzle because at this point I'm pretty sure you're dead and I don't know if a dead person can actually look at you.

Well, let's just say you look at me.

I'm listening to this genius play that song about bees that makes my head hurt.

I'm watching you fall backwards up this guy's banana Mustang.

And you're looking at me.

An icy blue look.

You look dead, what can I say?

The whites of your eyes are bloody and I'm pretty sure there's glass stuck in the left one and your head kinda keeps going beyond the point of looking at me.

Let's just say, it went real far back.

But you're looking at me and I look at you and I know.

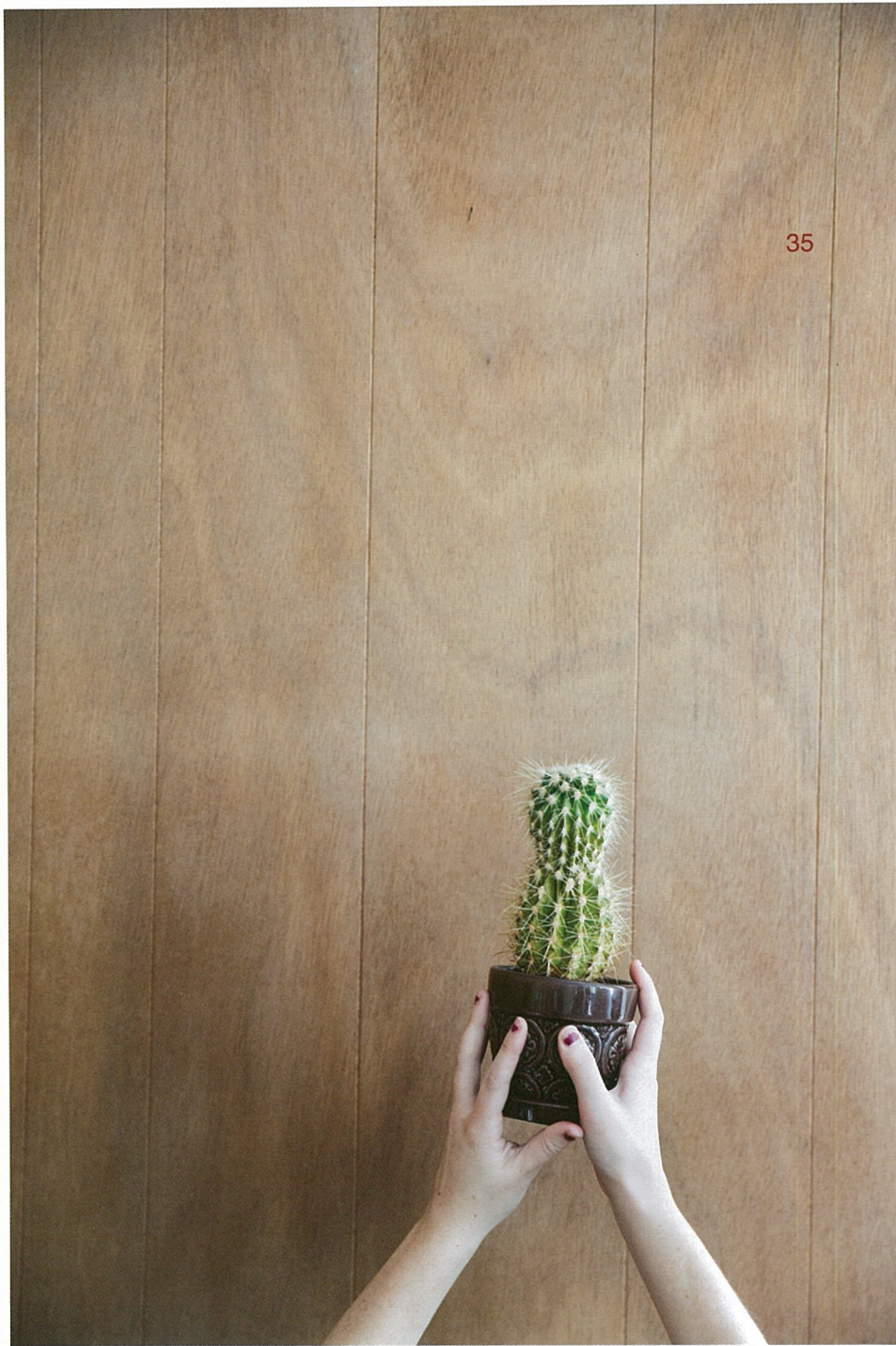
You're dead and I'm watching you die.

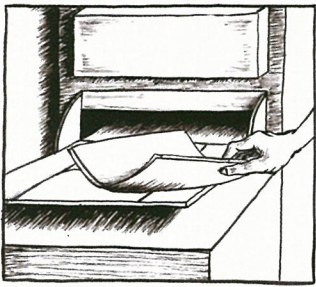
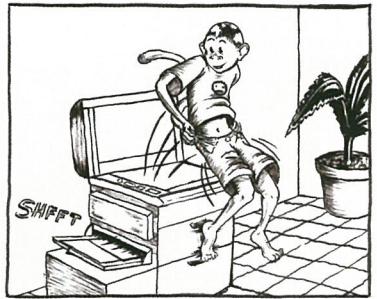
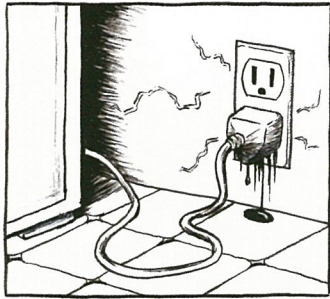
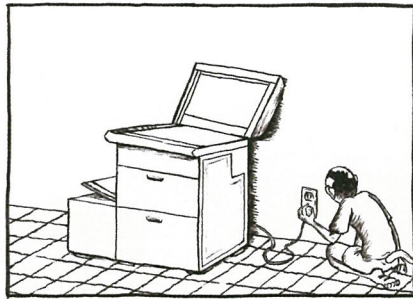
Or I watched you die.

Let's just say, I never wanted this to happen.

I swear, in that alley behind that dude's house I saw your blood paint some guy's banana horse, and saw your eyes with all the blood making one go purple.







CAT SONGS



I don't speak cat so I don't know why he's screaming at me.

Does he have food? Check. Water? Check. What's the state of his litter? Do we... want to know? Ok. Marginal check. It's borderline which for all I know is good enough for a cat. It's been worse, believe me. Ok, ok, I'll do a quick excavation of the top layer. Just the crust so that superficially it's pretty damn clean.

Nothing makes me despise myself more than the unattended litter box. When it begins to look like wet clay? When patches of it change color? Like, when clumps of cat shit are hanging on the rim and attracting little black flies and the whole place smells like ammonia?

Sip some bourbon and tidy it up a bit. Maaaybe I should do his dishes while I'm at it. Have I ever washed the cat bowls? I can't remember performing such a mindful task so the answer is probably no. I turn on the tap and contemplate how utterly lifeless a man would have to be to wash his cat's plastic dishware, and this type of introspection, with the warm water running over my hands, pulls me into a meditative state and I begin humming Madonna's Like a Virgin.

And then I'm whistling because my mood has lightened with each clean dish. I've no idea why my brain pulled this specific track from my memory trenches or even when I'd last heard it, but

thanks, brain, this is a good one. Do I have it in my collection of pirated MP3s?

An odd noise freezes my soapy hands. A disturbing little voice has been singing along behind me. Disturbing not only for the implication that someone has entered my apartment and begun singing Madonna, but because the voice itself kinda sounds like a baby singing. Not a child, but an actual newborn infant. It's worse actually because the singer is hitting every note perfectly and I doubt a baby could do that even if it had a voice coach.

*I made it through the wilderness.  
Somehow I made it through.  
Don't know how lost I was til I found you.*

I turn and see my fat white cat. Singing not screaming. She calls to see what I'm doing and I tell her to come She's nervous because I'm smiling when I kiss her. (She isn't my Girlfriend or my Wife or anything like that but I really like her and I really wish she didn't have a Boyfriend.) She takes a cup of tea and bourbon, my own formula which I call The Not Toddy. Lowers the mug after a short sip.

"Is your cat singing?"

"Oh good. I'm not hallucinating. Ah—he's been doing it all night."

"What's she singing?"

—It's hilarious to me that she calls him she; a heteronormative reaction, I know, I know.

That's a good question though. To be honest, he'd been tweaking his playlist as the night progressed, receding from 80's girl pop into 70's soft rock. A familiar melody, but I can't be sure because he keeps stopping short of the chorus.

"Hooked on a Feeling? I've no idea."

"Hooked on a feline?"

"Ha ha. Hey I set you up."

"We're a great team."

Agreed. I've thought so for some time. But then why stay with Him? I've never met Him and I wonder how we're different. He has the lion's share and I occasionally have her hippie hemp shampoo on my pillow in the morning. A word can't be shaped for the tenderness I feel for her when she's hiding in my apartment, or the deep ache when she leaves. I kiss her neck and she says,

"Seriously, though. I smoked a little in the car. Is she really singing?"

A week has passed and now everyone knows that cats can sing and to be honest I kinda wish they were just screaming again because my cat's hunger screams I can deal with. And yes, getting my booty on the floor tonight would place me in perfect head-

scratching position, but he could also be asking for clean water. Mundane life was already generous with its challenges without forcing me to second guess my cat's impression of disco.

Others are dealing with the event in their own way. You'd have to have been in a coma to not know about it. PS: can you imagine waking from a coma to singing cats?

All over the news, confirmation echoes back from the far corners of the world. They're singing everywhere, and though my ignorant American ears can find no distinction between humans and cats singing the popular folk songs of rural China, the idea of it happening at all offers a vague promise of change.

Look, I'm an old tired man with a job, not a career. I rent, I don't own. My girlfriend has a boyfriend. Vague promises of change are welcome around here.

But it does force an adjustment, a shifted perspective. Our notions of how the universe works have been suddenly challenged, generating a waking sense of displacement, particularly when one hears—as I was hearing that morning—newborn kittens flawlessly tackle Judas Priest.

"How could they have learned the lyrics to Turbo Lover?" I ask my mechanic as I kneel over an old tire on the side of his garage. "They look like they were just born."

The mother regards me silently from inside the tire while her babies nuzzle her and crawl over her fur on shaky legs. One little tiger cat, apparently the runt, is really belting it out.

“Fuck if I know, man. I’m a Sabbath guy.” “Ozzy or Dio?”

“Come on. Seriously?”

“Well, Dio grew up in Cortland. He’s one of us.”

I check my phone to see if she’s written back to me about dinner. I’d love to see her tonight, to hear how this unhinged week has treated her, but there’s no message. The heartbreaking sight of a screen unchanged. As he hands me my car keys he says,

“You know anyone that wants a kitten?”

“I have a coworker that’s looking for one that does contemporary Christian pop.”

“Ah.”

The T.V. says it’s an evolutionary imperative. Oh, you know, this sort of thing has happened before, animals mimicking other animals. My own cat used to make pigeon sounds when he spotted prey from his window perch. Now he sings The Piano Man to them.

But felines copying humans isn’t exactly new either. That’s always been their trick. Cats don’t really meow when people aren’t

around. Normally they’re silent animals that communicate to each other through body language. Meowing is meant to mimic the sound of a human baby crying for milk. They do it when they’re hungry, a form of communication uniquely held between cats and humans.

So the hypothesis is that people have been listening to music around their pets for so long that the domestic cat has developed an intuitive understanding that songs convey thoughts and emotions simpler language cannot, and so they’ve picked up the fundamentals of melody and rhythm in a mimicking gesture to express... who the fuck knows.

Anyway, that doesn’t explain their overnight development of jaw and larynx modifications. It’s safe to say that the new ways their little mouths bend and stretch when they sing is the single spookiest thing I’ve ever seen or imagined. Spookier than the time when my parents brought me to see the Easter Bunny at the downtown Sibley’s and when he bent to hand me a tiny basket of candy I could see into the mouth where a sweaty human eye was peering back at me through an air slit.

Haven’t heard from her in a while. She used to come after work and have dinner with me before seeing her Boyfriend. She used to spend the night at least once a week, usually Monday when He worked

late. She hasn't responded to my texts. She doesn't answer when I call. Does He know? I'd be grieved to find out that she'd failed to warn me of some coming trouble. Am I gonna find this guy sitting on the hood of my car drinking a bottle of Jack?

Now that our furry friends have learned the words to Living on a Prayer you'd expect folks to treat animals better, but McDonalds is still serving millions, men are still making blood wagers on mistreated dogs, and scientists are still opening the skulls of living cats to advance the field of neurology. Except now the cats are required to have their vocal chords removed so that the lab technicians aren't treated to Billboard's Top 100. And it's worth noting that the people that disliked cats before like them even less these days.

Well Christ. Another transformation. The cats are singing something new. Their true songs. The show stoppers, as if the human hits were just a sound check, a way to test their new voices. The stray Calico that lives near the warehouse I work at, who I'd christened Biggie Paws, no longer spits 90's Bronx freestyle. His song is now a true cat song: otherworldly and calming, sometimes tantric, sometimes frenetic, with no words that aren't cat words.

These new songs rise from deep in their throats in a way that stimulates our theta waves. Ethologists scramble to uncover their meaning.

Cat songs now and she's disappeared.

I'm watching my cat sleep, thinking about how nothing about him seems changed when he sleeps like that, on his back, paws up. I can pretend that cats aren't singing and that she's still coming to see me after work. As I walk from my bedroom to the kitchen a whiff of ammonia sobers me. I struggle to remember the last time I changed his litter; probably that first night of singing. It turns out to not be so bad. We'll say borderline again, and to be fair I had a lot on my mind lately. The pale color of one of the turds catches my eye so I'm giving it a closer inspection while the cat begins singing a horrid song in the other room, this howling dirge you'd expect at a tea ceremony in Hell. The song comes closer and after a second he's next to my feet singing into the box where a white and pink mushroom is growing from his waste.

A week later I find another. They look unreal and perfect, like candy, and I wonder if they have psychotropic properties. When I clean the litter I scoop around them.

I miss her more than I should. She's clearly too young for me but she felt good in my life. She was sarcastic about everything and showed me how to laugh at myself. She joked during sex which always spoiled the mood because we couldn't stop laughing. Stupid things like pretending to be a drinking bird and bobbing towards my face. I miss it. All those kisses broken by laughter. The secret moments of joy that belonged only to us, stashed on the island of our affair. I'm listening to my cat's ghostly new song. He's serenading his litter box again; his little Muppet voice is softened by my bedroom door. I wonder if she's thinking about me.

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Excitement grows for the new songs and I just want my cat to stop. To be fair, his songs are more horrifying than these ones I'm seeing on Youtube. (Can't sleep; too tired and my mind is speeding through a dark wood looking for her.) A Persian croons a Martian ballad that makes part of my chest itch. Then an older video of something I'd never seen, captured during that first week. Several cats had gathered in Washington Square Park to collaborate, their voices joining on some invisible cue. A crowd stands by with camera phones.

Behold I tell you a mystery. We shall not sleep but we shall

all be changed in a moment.

I want to be changed. I want to be transformed, enlightened, like a Tibetan monk or Timothy Leary. To be given some magic gift that'll help me rise from the muck of my inane existence. The only change that's real to me is her absence. After two weeks, a short text.

*Sorry. Been busy.*

"I don't want to lead you on" is what she says when she stops by unannounced the following night. She's standing in the doorway downstairs because she doesn't have time to come in—she was hoping we could have a quick chat.

"We've fucked like a hundred times. Lead me on?" "Well, I didn't think our relationship was just about sex..."

"Neither did I. How are you leading me on? What does that mean? You have a boyfriend!"

"We broke up. I thought you knew."

There's something deeply painful about the way she says it. Like after a year of sharing slivers of our lives, sharing my bed, I was supposed to find out on my own, eventually, from mutual friends. I didn't even rank high enough for a phone call.

"When? Recently?" I'm too angry to say anything else. She shakes her head. "I've been focusing on myself lately. Partly

because of this and partly because of the cats.” “Because of the cats.”  
A phantom slap of envy burns my cheeks. She’s decoded the cat songs.  
For a single idiot second I’m convinced that she’s ending our fling  
because I’d failed to follow her into some New Age of Enlightenment.

“The cats...” She raises her eyebrows at me like an  
observant mother, then turns her eyes to the ceiling and says, “I’m  
seeing a therapist.”

She hasn’t decoded a thing! A therapist? I can barely  
hide the mocking tone when I say, “You’re seeing a therapist  
because of the cats.”

Looking at me again, a flash of anger. “You probably  
think this is stupid, but the world is different now and I wanna be  
different too. I feel bad for how I treated him. I don’t wanna be  
that person anymore.”

“And you can’t see me now because I make you feel bad.”

“God. You’re ten years older than me. Why am I the only  
one  
that’s mature enough to say that there’s something wrong with  
this?”

I wonder if she told him about me. If she hasn’t, I could  
threaten to tell him everything, to frighten her, but instead I run

up the stairs, enter the walk-in closet and pluck the mushrooms  
from the litter box.

I’m feeling my stones, as they say, and I need to challenge  
her, but I’ve lost all the power in the relationship so my panicked  
mind withdraws to an absurd notion I’d been chewing on lately.  
There had been no mention in the media of people finding strange  
fungi in their litter boxes, and the lack of reports had made my  
own experience as private and insinuating as a dream.

Cats are singing and the world is becoming a fairytale.

Someone’s  
gotta be the boy with the magic beans, right? “These.” I hold forth the  
mushrooms.

“These alien things have been growing in my cat’s shit since  
he started singing his weirdo songs. I think it means something and... it  
doesn’t matter what it means. We’ll understand after we eat them. Both  
of us. On a hunch.”

“Yeah. Fuuuck that.” Her eyes widen at the sight of the  
things in my hand.

“Then I’ll  
eat one.”

“Please  
don’t.”

I wait a breath to see if she's going to wrench the mushroom from my hand, slap some sense into me, basically do everything humanly possible to keep me from consuming this thing I found in my cat's litter.

She stares at me with her hands hanging stiffly at her sides.

I pop it into my mouth like a gritty piece of popcorn and swallow it without chewing. The bitter taste of feces that accompanies the chalky bits of litter cause me to retch but the mushroom stays down.

"Bye."

She turns to leave, but pauses as if she might have forgotten something. She doesn't look at me. Her silence and stillness remind me of a cemetery statue until a second later, abruptly, she walks out. Her footsteps on the gravel driveway vibrate the air in the widening space between us. Somewhere above, a cat song has begun.

\*\*\*

The stairs blur like a waterfall as I ascend to the apartment and everything inside me is boiling up, an internal pain intensified by the effects of the mushroom. It's poisoning me while forcing me to experience each second over and over again as an

echo that overlaps the next. Acid trails synchronize with pain trails. The cat is at my feet howling madly, his entire face stretched, eyes bulging and wild.

From the ceiling I'm watching my body collapse to the ground. The startled cat runs for the bedroom. I worry about him in a shallow, detached way. It's more like an idea that the pets of bachelors are always doomed.

Then a feeling of expanding and rising, a dissipating steam cloud of thought diluted by air, fading.

I'm aware of the top of my house—I remember that it's my house—its gray shingled roof sinking away. I'd left the pain inside the upstairs apartment, inside my body. Down there. Relief now.

Her car hums to life and pulls into the street. Though I'm now rising fast I'm able to see her turn at the next intersection and speed away until she's swallowed by the canopy of the living city.





Snake Bite

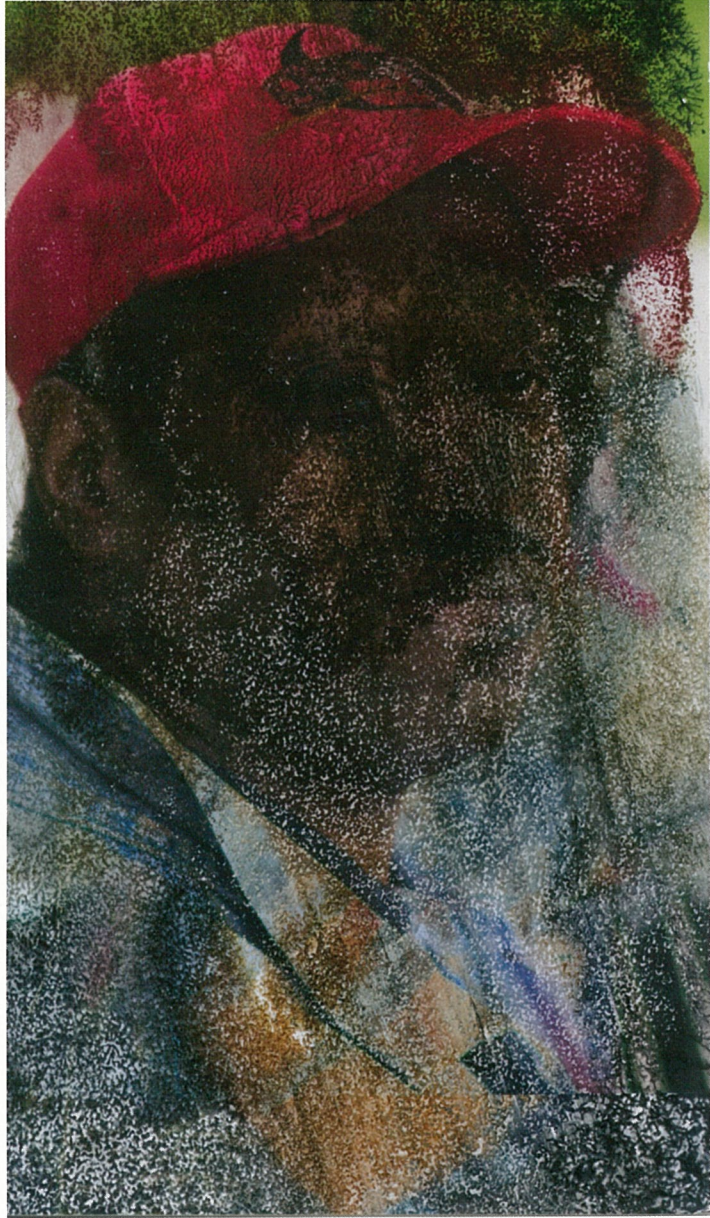
Sequined snakeskin  
carpet coils  
under soles  
waiting for souls  
to guzzle trouble

Reptilian villain  
velvet vigor stirs  
greedy green gripe  
might take a life  
will take a light

Lap liquor  
lick her, kiss her  
before eyes flicker  
to black 8 ball  
or lonely blue balls

Scratch

Victim of venom  
dead vermin



Please Don't Get It In My Hair

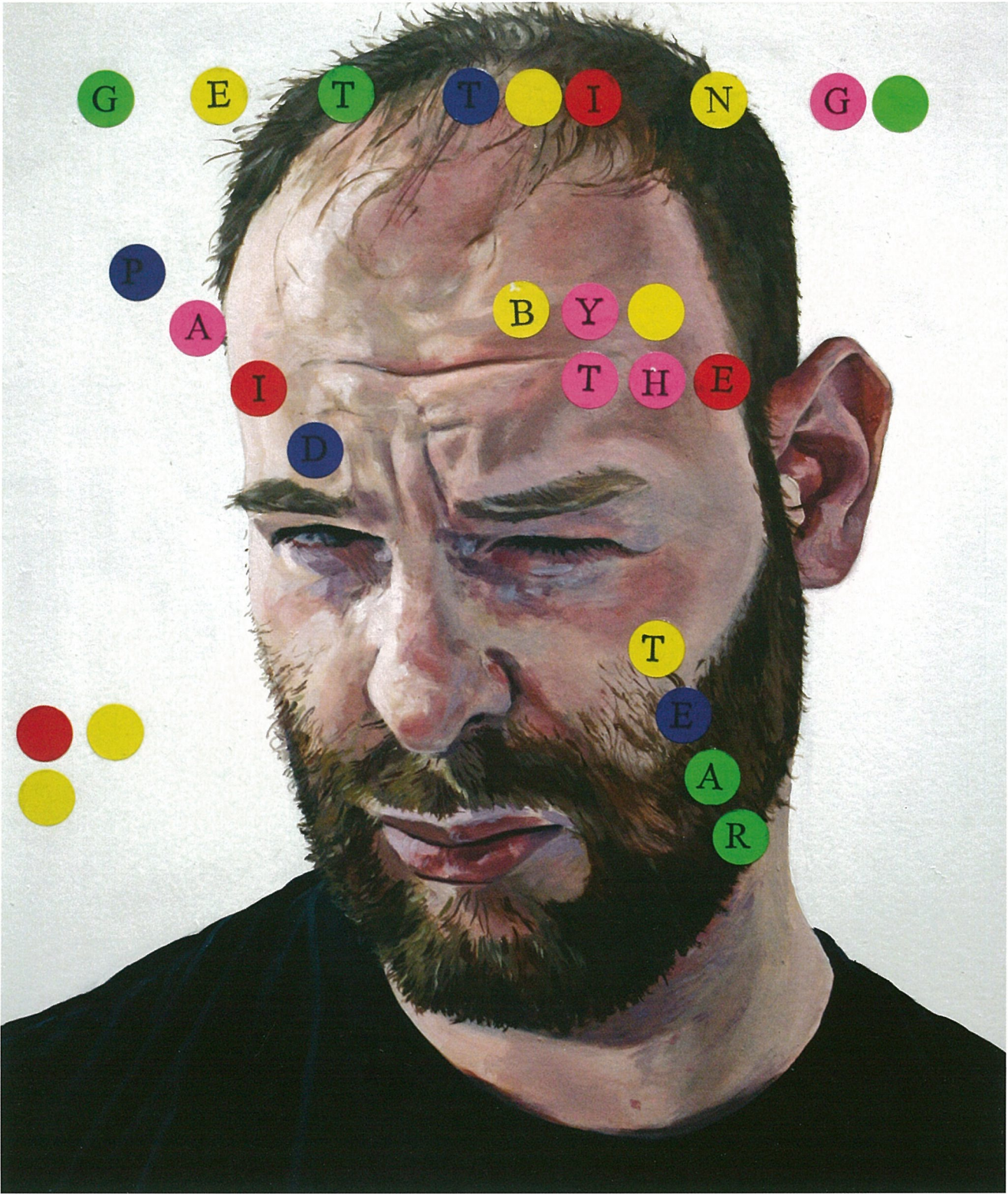
saucy scarlet sinful smiles  
wild savage unrestrained  
bended knees on checkered tiles

downtown  
heading south  
tongue tied  
open mouth

shallow gasps of suffocation  
staring into fervent eyes  
sultry shades of domination in  
milky-white salty splashes  
sparkling on lips, nose,  
and eyelashes

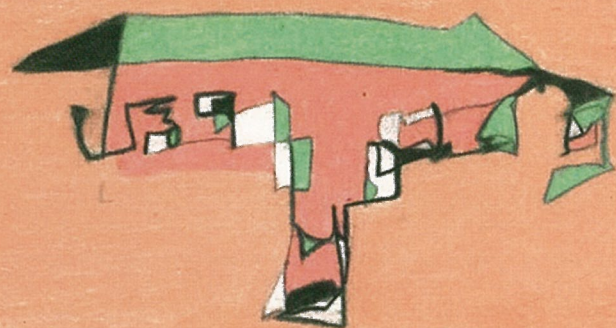
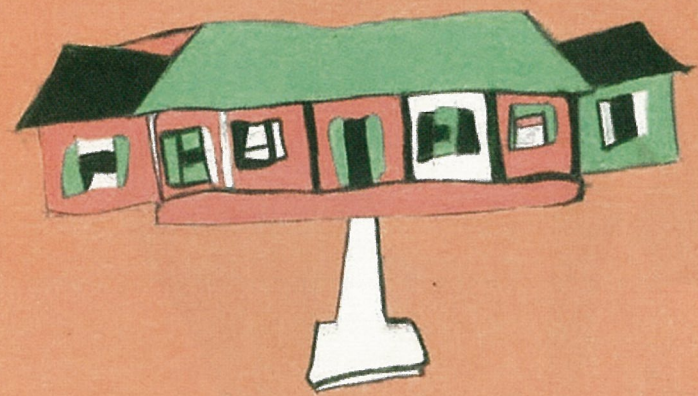
Honey, You're Really Tight

spring awakens  
blushing pastel petals  
wholesome pure pale  
cherry blossoms cascading  
creamy velvet pearls  
sugar coated sweet  
wildly whipped  
by pulsing surges  
in sheets of pink  
bleeding angry red















## Warp & Woof

---

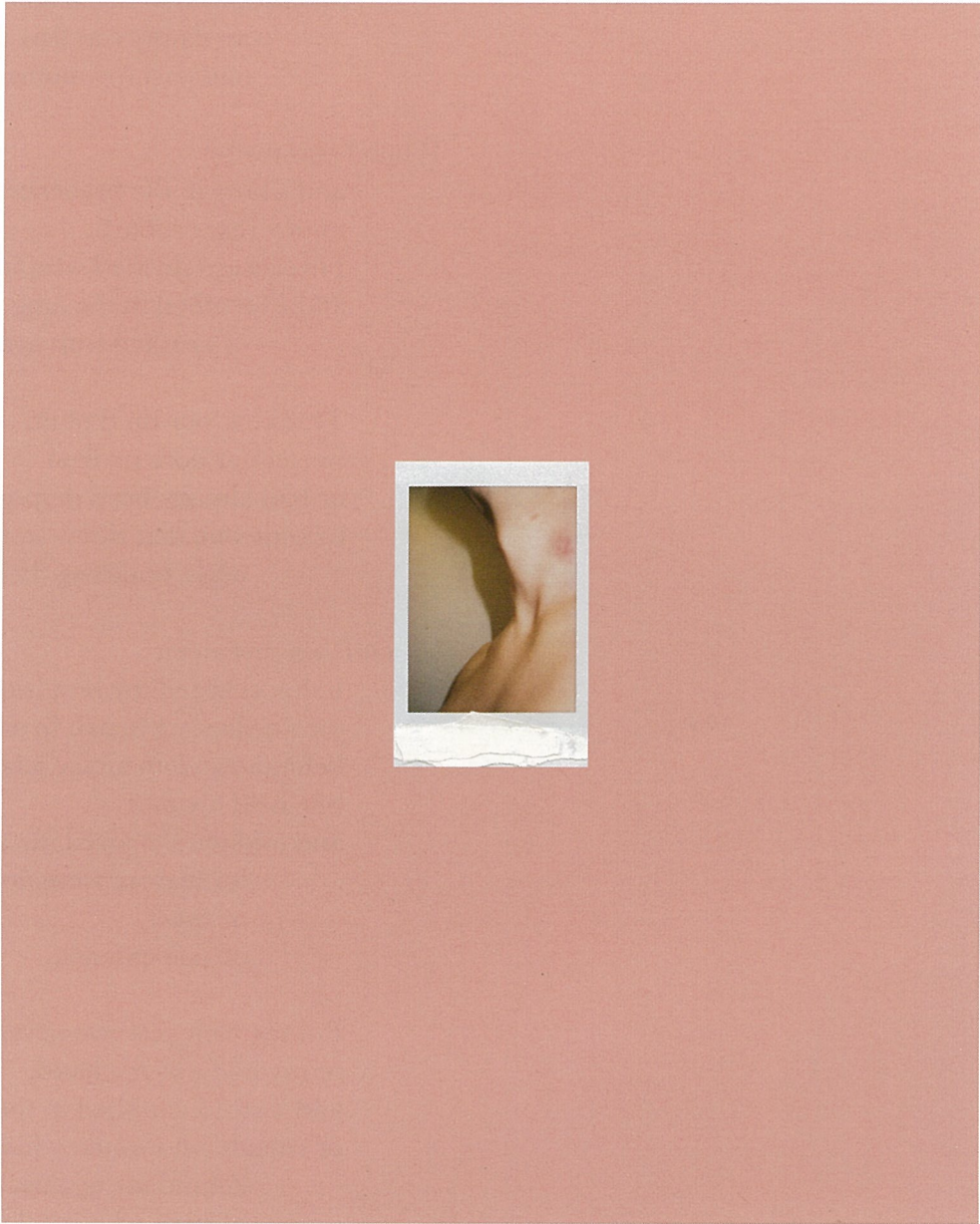
I grew a snout and foraged in a moist clearing,  
for crunchy snailuloid creatures doth creeping.  
Under the froggy forest ground fog of a moonlit canopy,  
I tenderly tend to purple wounds and unbalanced chemistry.

Drinking thick swampy air bubbles through dust crusted nostrils,  
wet bending vegetation secedes to lean muscles.  
I sink into sleepy sand saturated soils,  
working my stringy limbs around my body in coils.

Avian eyes eating the golden morning glow,  
as the sun rises forth to startle the frigid snow.  
The bugs scuttle in, my body has been found,  
a free massage before I die isn't as cruel as it sounds.







## Dont Tell Them What You Are

When I was eight

my sister sat me down on our plum-colored bed  
and whispered:

“Don’t tell them what you are,  
please stay quiet, please stay safe.”

In the stuffy sea of scarves and books,  
we prayed outside to escape the heat  
and as I pressed my head into the dirt  
an empty can flew from the street  
and past my mother’s face.

When I was twelve

and sitting in the branches of my backyard  
in the Texas suburb,  
I overheard my dad weeping  
and I breathed in the tang  
of crushed fruit against my garage door.

That year our tired plum  
tree either bore no fruit  
or had already been despoiled  
by someone that threw stones  
while branding their target “terrorist.”

When I was seventeen

I almost kissed my best friend  
on a collapsing bench in a small grove  
behind my elementary school.  
She held my face  
and told me she loved me as I cried  
for fear we were not hidden,  
or quiet,  
or safe enough.

But the next year she never held my face,  
or my body, or my hand,  
and instead vanished in the shadows  
of friends who would whisper the word “dyke”  
behind me against the metal and concrete  
of high school hallways.

I turned twenty yesterday

and I read one article  
about three Muslims murdered in their home  
in the name of “justice”.

Yet only one article was found  
among the mass of media.

If the eldest was twenty-four,  
does that mean that in four years  
I may be killed by someone  
who overhears me tell my mom  
“Assalamualaikum”?  
Or maybe I’ll be shot down by someone  
who sees me  
kiss my girlfriend goodbye and  
whisper her “I love you”?

What about when I walk home from class,  
slushing through the chilling silence  
as a man follows quietly behind me  
until we reach a dark corridor where  
he believes  
“no” and “stop”  
mean “yes” and “please”?

When I turn twenty-four,  
will my home be stained with fruit and blood?  
Will my hallways echo with slurs of hate,  
and will my plum-colored bed bruise from  
thrown cans and flying bullets?

Allah, let them read papers that ink and bleed,  
Let the others like me see my face.  
and let them heed my sister’s whispered pleads:  
“Please stay quiet. Please stay safe.”





I should've known then when you threw your head back, joyful  
careless as you were way long ago in skinned knees  
dandelion-painted arms.

The swing set seat's ascending arc  
pulled across my taut nerves, giddy  
tremulous.

An anxious violin  
when you narrowed on me defiant eyes and dared me to believe  
"I'm going to jump."

I never would have done it,  
so swung as witness,  
swung as representative  
of a disbelieving world that drove you giggle-screaming,  
to substantiate your claims  
and when you did -

You held that moment weightless on your tongue,  
an electric taste that you would not recall,  
lost among the piles of dessicated leaves  
that welcomed your collapse just as in fall.









**Without your help, none of this would be possible.**

**A very special thanks to the following:**

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**RIT Magic Center**

**The Rochester Brainery**

**R·I·T**







1

(submission #7 - poem)  
 "the other title was and tribute beats"  
 something slithers,  
 gliding and smooth  
 so smooth  
 too smooth  
 the branch slowly tilts  
 a fog, a clarity  
 a clear misunderstanding  
 a  
 tw  
 twang  
 a backwards hook  
 the left side down  
 my left side is down  
 and cold and so new it's unfinished,  
 weak and raw  
 weeks  
 withering  
 til until  
 sang  
 air  
 there is no sense  
 touch unreal no sense  
 thread a needle through mind  
 battered  
 how will it rise  
 how will it rise again

2



3



4

Mother cannot stroke the sorrow from my hair tonight For I am full of secrets/  
 //in public school, a boy in maternal mourning left his locks uncut Hoping perhaps, from his tower of grief she would climb up in fragments (We were identical, from behind)  
 //And there is wire in my fingernails hoping sparks from the screen There is nothing restraining my pretentious now  
 Nothing to prove as I steal from Cohen and Joyce with equity  
 Claiming Schiele is novel, Plath is new  
 Voltaire is mine, Strummer is you.  
 //I am ready now, sir, for my manifesta  
 My Magnus Opus blooming from plumes in the bags under my eyes  
 This spotlight is thrust & I am no longer humble  
 This isn't empowerment it is manifest I am destiny now so watch my voice shatter //C  
 The hyena in my laugh is persnickety & queer  
 For I am older than I have ever been/ & younger than I ever will be  
 There is a fledgling in my arm crook you may sing to but never touch/  
 For she is beating bright into the abysmal Dusk  
 //And my bravery carries on in prose & eighties film clips  
 I find eloquence in tawdry things  
 Your cynicism is brazen //I am mine to emblazon  
 So hold your tears in cocktail glasses for/  
 //I will not drink them tonight  
 //I will not rest between father's knee & promise  
 //I will not reject my armor & tamish You have slipped into my slipstream/  
 you will no longer violate my bloodstream I am the bigmouth bass // That fills the room with hair booming voice Bold brass of curl  
 // How my opinions gleam  
 Look at me, old friend  
 // For I will no longer look at you

7

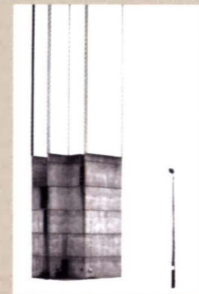


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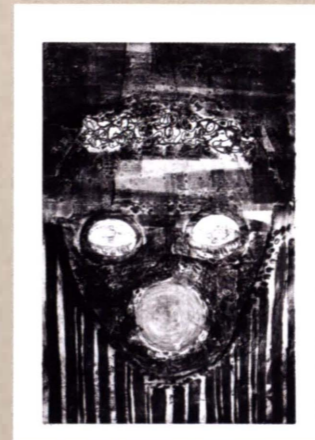
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- 10 garrett chase
- 11 garrett chase
- 12 laura lee jones
- 15 hillary vinokur
- 16 jackie spaventa

Naive  
 Ms. Saunders stared at her computer,  
 bewildered,  
 an expression that was rare from an elementary school teacher who earlier  
 that year  
 had to have a conversation with my parents  
 because she found out I hadn't brushed my teeth in three days  
 because I had read the Poison Control warning  
 not to swallow toothpaste  
 and became aware of death  
 and would deal with bad breath to avoid it.  
 She cancelled our Spelling Bee,  
 afraid,  
 and instead we colored  
 and I drew a tornado  
 sucking up an ice cream cone  
 and a telephone,  
 not realizing that a real tornado  
 would destroy power lines  
 and neighborhoods and lives.  
 "Can Erin Hutson please come to the office? Someone is here to pick her up."  
 I laughed out loud,  
 celebrated,  
 the inevitable reaction of a third grader  
 who is getting out of school early  
 and who is smart enough to know  
 she doesn't have to go  
 to the doctor  
 or the guidance counselor  
 or the dentist.

17



21



23



25

when, in ten years,  
 all of our fears would be recognized  
 by divorce papers  
 and bankruptcy  
 and obituaries  
 but today  
 we had no fear  
 for we hadn't yet seen  
 the "Breaking News" reports.  
 Ms. Olszewski turned on the radio,  
 tiredly,  
 and my friends and I laughed  
 at the exploding noises  
 and the screaming voices  
 because who would be screaming  
 on the day we got out of school early?

19

Think Tank: Spoutthewordsjusta-  
 syouthoughtthey'dcomenopunctuation-  
 orcongregationcalledtomak etalimake-  
 senseoneinfiniterononthough

26



29

Name  
 Jam your knife into my  
 Aorta and I will grow  
 Callouses around my heart, I will Liberate my fear because  
 You can  
 No longer harm me

30

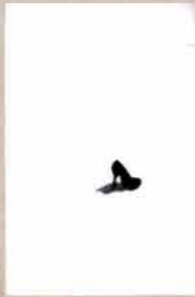
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63

Genius  
 Let's say it started in the alley behind that dude's house — the one we always saw  
 hiding his fingernails in the neighbors' gardens, that one.  
 It didn't, but let's say it did.  
 Let's say we're crunching gravel beneath our wheels.  
 Riding our bikes.  
 As if we were gangsters.  
 Because at seventeen bikes are the most gangster thing around in a middle-of-the-  
 economic-ladder, middle-of-the-white-scale, middle-of-nowhere town.  
 Let's say we're riding down that alley and you're popping wheelies and hollering  
 and swearing just like your Ma always told you not to, and let's say you fall.  
 Let's say you slam your brakes real hard coming out of that alley to avoid getting  
 smacked by a banana-yellow car going who-knows-how-fast and you skid on that  
 damn gravel and don't do what you're aiming to.  
 Let's say you get hit by that car.  
 Let's say I pretend it's not happening.  
 But let's say you do.  
 I watch you go sideways, looking like one of those dirt bikers going around a hard  
 turn.  
 I watch bloodied pebbles jumping out from under your right leg, ricocheting off your  
 arms and face and hands.  
 I watch that Mustang's tire hit yours, you tumbling upwards, as if for a few seconds  
 I'm watching some scene from a movie.  
 One where you're falling.

33



32



35



36

Cat Songs  
 I don't speak cat so I don't know why he's screaming at me.  
 Does he have food? Check. Water? Check. What's the state of  
 his litter? Do we... want to know? Ok. Marginal check.  
 It's borderline which for all I know is good enough for a cat.  
 It's been worse, believe me. Ok, ok, I'll do a quick excavation  
 of the top layer. Just the crust so that superficially it's  
 pretty damn clean. Nothing makes me despise myself more  
 than the unattended litter box. When it begins to look  
 like wet clay? When patches of it change color? Like, when  
 clumps of cat shit are hanging on the rim and attracting  
 little black flies and the whole placesmells like ammonia?

37



39

Snake Bite  
Sequined snakeskin carpet coils  
under soles  
waiting for souls  
to guzzle trouble  
Reptilian villain velvet vigor stirs greedy green gripe might take a  
life will take a light  
Lap liquor  
lick her, kiss her before eyes flicker to black 8 ball  
or lonely blue balls  
Scratch  
Victim of venom dead vermin

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saucy scarlet sinful smiles  
wild savage unrestrained bended knees on checkered tiles  
downtown heading south tongue tied open mouth  
shallow gasps of suffocation staring into fervent eyes  
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blushing pastel petals wholesome pure pale cherry blossoms  
cascading creamy velvet pearls  
sugar coated sweet  
wildly whipped  
by pulsing surges  
in sheets of pink  
bleeding angry red

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"Don't tell them what you are, please stay quiet, please stay safe."  
In the stuffy sea of scarves and books, we prayed outside to  
escape the heat and as I pressed my head into the dirt  
an empty can flew from the street and past my mother's face.

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Warp & Wool (Working Title) Alex Burnett  
I grew a snout and foraged in a moist clearing,  
for crunchy snailuroid creatures doth creeping.  
Under the groggy forest ground light of a moonlit canopy,  
I tenderly tend to purple wounds and unbalanced

46

Untitled  
I should've known then when you threw your head back, joyful  
careless as you were way long ago in skinned knees dandelion-painted arms.  
The swing set seat's ascending arc  
pulled across my taut nerves, giddy  
tremulous.  
An anxious violin  
when you narrowed on me defiant eyes and dared me to believe  
"I'm going to jump."  
I never would have done it.

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