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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

There is something miraculous about art's ability to illustrate the human experience.

There is nothing quite like looking at the pieces of time passed and searching to understand what they would have meant in context. What were the creators thinking, when they first conceptualized their work? What experiences lay buried away, trapped under old books and dusty picture frames? This train of thought plagues me, now and again; trying to imagine what exists beyond the glimpses captured in publication. As Editor-in-Chief, I was thrilled by the prospect of being an avenue for exploring aspects of the human experience we sometimes don't get to see.

This exploration can operate as a form of catharsis. For a moment, you envelop yourself in the time captured between line breaks, camera shutters, or spaces sandwiched by color. Whether it is a piece of poetry or a painting, art often serves to capture one moment entirely unique. I've always thought it fascinating; our ability to create. During the editing process for this edition, I was continuously in awe of the talent in our applicants. We had the pleasure of reviewing a batch of incredible work, and that immeasurable talent is not lost on me as I reflect on this year's publications.

The art included in this edition exists like snapshots in time. Not any one in particular, but existence itself: the highs and the lows, the devastating heartbreaks and the joys of new beginnings, and everything in between. It's 9:07 on a clear spring evening, and I'm sitting alone in my car and watching the city sparkle like lightning bugs from Skinner Butte. This letter captures that snapshot, in its rambling and reflection. Once my scattered thoughts hit the page, they're memorialized in this specific space of time.

These pages, in a similar way, are an anthology of snapshots. Sewn together, we get a picture of what life looks like for University of Oregon students in 2022–2023. It's full of feeling and wonderfully distinct. The array of voices in this edition adds to the expanse of experience. I hope you are able to enjoy witnessing it along with me.

Thank you to the authors, for allowing us the opportunity to experience your art. Thank you to my editors, whose careful conversation and tireless work make this journal what it is. And thank you to all of our readers. In opening our pages, you help us celebrate the authors published within them. Without you all, Unbound would be nothing more than a name. I'd like to think its community makes it a lot more.

Mia Fast
Editor-in-Chief



MISSION STATEMENT



To foster the development of all students at the University of Oregon, regardless of major, by serving as a platform for outstanding creative expression. Unbound Journal is committed to the belief that publishing a community's literature is a crucial component to sustaining a vibrant culture. We publish prose, poetry, and visual art that tests boundaries and comes from a place of passion, regardless of medium or approach. Our editorial process values quality as the paramount criterion. Each submission receives feedback and critique in a double-blind review from our staff of student editors.





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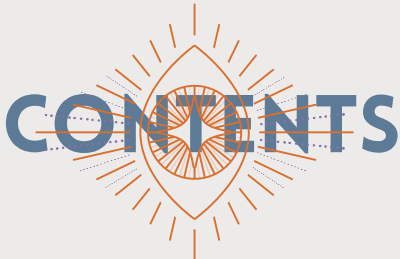
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I heard an old wives tale
that your birthmarks
are where your lover kissed
you most frequently
in a past life.



If that's the case,
my lover was one
for the ages.

Their lips traced down the back of my arm
and left me
with a constellation.

A spot just below my breast
to brush past every time
I slip a t-shirt on.

Perpetually peeking above my sock,
a dime sized kiss,
a token of adoration.

Moments of a life once lived,
once loved.

I Heard an Old Wives Tale

By Madison Yarbrough

Bait

By Grace Young

A heavy presence splits the water clean,
Daunting and intriguing, I froze —
Then I felt the angle.
I deserve it, they suppose,
Suspended mid-air, I am just a thing,
Never again can I be tranquil.

My shiny scales enticed him so,
Rough hands steal my skin, reeking
Of possession — ‘catch of the day’.
I am weeping while he is eating,
Will he ever reap what he sows?
I lay powerless to stop what’s underway.

Rinsed off love, cold-blooded,
Gripped and stripped bare,
Layer after layer searching for flesh of white.
All dressed up with nothing to wear,
Laid open on the table, gutted,
Scouring my mind for scenarios of any requisite.



Figs, Honey, and Cream

By Sophia Freeman

I am in love with a mole on Luca's left shoulder. It graces the place right where his collarbone meets the top of his arm and it's only visible close up. I've tried telling him how much I like it, how much I see in it, but he always shrugs me off, saying something like, "Your moles are better" or "Mona, come on."

Nevertheless, I am in love with it. Because in this mole, I feel like I see all of him: indigo skies, white linens on a clothesline, coffee with cream on a sun-soaked terrace at his parents' place in Italy. This is who Luca is to me and it doesn't matter that he keeps telling me it wasn't like that, that his family was on one salary growing up, or that all the choreographers will tell you he was on a full scholarship at the Royal Ballet School before he joined the company.

None of them, not even Luca, see the truth that I see: the truth that even here—in the grayest London winter—his dark hair shines as gold as old money under a generous Mediterranean sun.

I don't know how long I've been in love with him. Here, the music and the crowds and the rain blur together until the only way I can keep track of time is to count the ballets we've performed. Right now, we're rehearsing for *Manon* (a French tragedy that my mother would love simply because the girl dies for love in the

end), but before it was *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Les Sylphides*.

Actually, I think the girl dies for love in all those ballets, except *Sleeping Beauty*. My mother is French and she wanted to name me Ophélie. I only ended up being named Mona because my father said he wouldn't have me doomed from birth to drown for love.

But the truth is, when Luca rolls over in my bed or remembers just how I like my coffee, I'm not so sure I'm not doomed already.

I say “we’re performing” when I tell people about my job with the Royal Ballet, but I don’t actually dance. I’m a contract violinist for the Opera House orchestra, but sometimes, it feels like the dancers are us up there—on stage—the notes rising from the pit so buoyant that they take the dancers with them until it’s just this rush of texture and sound.

I think Luca’s the only one who doesn't lose himself in it all: the music, the crowds, the rain. He’s better than I am, more thoughtful. He’s beautiful and soft-spoken and the only time he’s loud is when he’s leaping—throwing himself through space, flying. But I like the quiet version of him the best, the version of him that inhales slowly when I thread my hands through his hair while he’s kissing me.

“*To die, to sleep. Perchance to dream,*” I sometimes imagine him whispering when his mouth is soft behind my ear, because even though we’ve been seeing each other since *Giselle*, it still feels like a dream.

Truthfully, I feel like I'm dreaming a lot of the time. Music, crowds, rain. An empty dressing room, Luca's hands.

He was in the Corps-de-Ballet when I met him. At the Opera House, the dancers and the musicians do meet, but rarely do we really cross paths. It was an accident, us getting attached. I'm just a section player and even though I had to give up my childhood to get here, I'm essentially paid to blend in. Luca, who's one of the most graceful dancers I've ever seen, left home when he was sixteen to become an apprentice and even he had to blend in too. When he was in the Corps, that is. Because artistic directors don't want individuals in the Corps-de-Ballet; they want matching lines and mirrored artistry, a school of fish. When Luca was in the Corps, his beauty was more of a secret, a glow only I could see. The kind of person who would have lived, breathed, in the white stone of one of Michelangelo's sculptures.

But now that he's a soloist everyone else can see it too, the way he glows. He gives it away when he's dancing, when everyone's watching. The other soloists glow too, especially Amelia who's playing the lead in Manon, but Luca's light is blinding. Amelia shines golden with her hair and her bright smile, but Luca's a supernova when he's dancing. No one holds a candle to him, not even me. And I worry sometimes at night, when he's breathing next to me, about what will happen if he's promoted to principal after soloist. Because what if he gives too much away and there isn't any of him left for me?

We met the day my grandfather died. I was sitting in

the stairwell alone, well after I thought everyone had gone home when Luca came down the stairs from one of the rehearsal rooms with his dance bag over one shoulder. He smelled like pointe-shoe rosin and sweat.

I didn't notice him at first. I was thinking about how my grandfather had been the one to give me my first violin lesson when I was three years old; about how he smelled like bergamot and butterscotch; about how he took me to the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design on my birthday every year until I was seventeen; and about how he talked about my grandmother constantly, who died before I was born. When I got into a conservatory in London at eighteen, he gave a booming toast at the party my parents threw, telling the famous family story that he'd known I would be a professional violinist when he saw me combing out the tassels on my parents' Turkish living room rug at age six.

When my dad called to tell me he'd passed away, the music and the crowds and the rain became white noise.

I can't imagine how I must have looked, huddled around my violin case with mascara smudged around my eyes. My eyes are gray like my mom's and I line them to make them look almost silver (like how Clarisse's eyes are described in Fahrenheit 451 right before she dies) but if I cry, the black spills down my face until I'm the picture of misery. I get the same look sometimes when I walk home in the rain.

Luca seemed so calm, finding me like this.

“Hey,” he said, moving carefully past me to the bottom of the stairs. “You alright?”

“Oh,” I rasped, turning away from him and trying to wipe my eyes. When I looked up, he was blurry. “I’m fine. I...I don’t know what’s gotten into me.”

“You sure?”

I nodded, sniffing.

Luca watched me, his gaze quiet. “I know we don’t know each other,” he said after a minute. “But I can sit with you if you’d like.”

I looked up at him, surprised. “Okay,” I croaked.

Nobody had really taken care of me like that since I moved away from home seven years ago, away from my mother’s fig trees and my father’s books. I moved my violin case to the stair above so he had a place to sit down. Up close, his eyes were green like the skin of a fig when it’s still ripening on the branch.

“I’m Luca,” he said, after a moment of silence.

“Mona,” I said. I was still crying.

He glanced at me then, one side of his mouth curving up. “Like the Mona Lisa?” We were shoulder to shoulder. I could hear the rain outside the stairwell.

“No,” I said. “Just Mona.”

He walked me home that day and I was so afraid of the quiet on the other side of my apartment door, that I asked him if he wanted to come in. But Luca’s not the kind of person who oversteps and I had to mention Chinese take-out and my cat, Cleo, to get him to stay.

Our hair was wet and my eyes were puffy and Luca

looked too tall on my three-quarter sized couch. But I wasn't alone and we both relaxed a little when the food arrived. He tried to leave when he was done eating, but Cleo settled down on his lap, purring, and he stayed.

We were almost all the way through Casablanca when I kissed him.

I don't know why I did it. Maybe it was the salty taste of tears lingering in the back of my throat or the rain tapping the window or the way his straight nose threw one side of his face in shadow when the movie screen suddenly lit up.

His mouth was soft and a golden drop of joy rippled through my chest. He kissed me back for just a moment and then his mouth was gone, his body pulling away from mine.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "You're upset."

"No, no, it's okay," I murmured, my eyes catching Cleo's escape into my bedroom. I reached for him again. "It's okay." But he moved away from me, saying, "Mona, you're upset."

"I kissed you, not the other way around."

He smiled slightly, but was still moving down the couch, away from me. "I don't usually do this when someone's upset."

"This?" I gestured around us.

"No, this," he said, bringing his fingers to his lips.

"Oh," I said, suddenly cold.

When he made no move to leave, I started the movie again so he wouldn't see my cheeks flame.

In the darkness, Luca moved so that our shoulders were touching.

"Another time," he whispered over the swell of the music and the crackle of Humphrey Bogart's line: "I'm no good at being noble."

He didn't leave when the movie ended, but he didn't move toward me either. When *Roman Holiday* started playing automatically after *Casablanca*, neither of us turned it off. Cleo came back and settled on the chair next to us. And after a while, I laid down on the couch, careful to keep my legs scrunched up and out of Luca's space. He kept glancing away from the movie to look at me. When Audrey Hepburn got her hair cut short partway through *Roman Holiday*, Luca maneuvered his body carefully behind mine so that we lined up from our shoulders to the bends of our knees. I closed my eyes, leaned back into his chest, and swallowed the sudden hot tears that rose in the back of my throat. Nobody had really taken care of me like this either since I moved away from my mother's fig trees and my father's books.

In the darkness, he whispered, "Is this alright?"

And in the darkness, I nodded. "Thank you."

We woke up the next morning, too hot in our clothes, completely entangled with one another.

...

But now, a year later, something's off. Has been off ever since Luca was promoted to soloist. He's dancing one of the romantic leading roles in *Manon* and when I went over to his place the other night, he seemed

distracted, too loud somehow, even though he's still just as soft-spoken as ever.

I'm standing outside one of the big studios upstairs, waiting for him to get out of rehearsal before he has to go to a costume fitting at eight. I'm holding a tupperware of stir fry I made last night, since I know he won't be able to get dinner between things. The orchestra's rehearsal ended hours ago and I've already done my repertoire work for the day, so I'm all his. He'll be all mine if his rehearsal ever gets out.

I check my watch. It's past seven. I look around at the dancers stretching or eating in the hallway. I recognize some of them—Luca's best friend Matt is asleep in an armchair by the door to Studio B—but many I don't. The hallway is nearly empty. Where is everyone? I step forward and carefully peer through the rectangular window on one of the main studio's doors. People should be streaming out this studio by now, but when I stand on my tiptoes to see better, it becomes clear that there's almost no one there. It's just mirrors, floors, windows, mirrors, floors, windows. Where's Luca?

I'm starting to push one of the doors open when I hear Amelia's voice, too musical, inside the studio. Amelia: the other new soloist, the dancer playing Luca's love interest in *Manon*. I startle and pull the door closed immediately only to see Luca come into view. He's just on the edge of the rectangle, but there's no mistaking his profile, lit soft and beautiful by the windowed sky behind them.

Amelia, Luca, sky, Amelia, Luca, sky, my thoughts chant.

Suddenly, there's music playing inside the studio and Amelia is rushing into Luca's arms. I can only hear a hum of the music through the door and for a split second, I think they're going to embrace, going to ruin everything, but no. Luca's hands, the ones I love, come around Amelia's waist and she's spinning, her reflection spinning too in the mirror. His eyes are focused on his hands, on making sure she doesn't fall, and when she finishes her turns, they break apart immediately, moving to mark the next lift.

They're just rehearsing.

My heartbeat slows. I don't know what just happened to me. I feel too hot and a lot like I can't breathe. I look around. Nobody seems to have noticed. I wait for him in our hiding spot, a tiny dressing room on the floor above the orchestra's green room. We've been meeting here since we did *Sleeping Beauty* months ago, when we were first dating and wanted to keep it to ourselves. Now, we just meet here out of habit. And because I don't want my stand partner, Joelle, to find out that I'm dating one of the dancers. I'm the youngest person in the symphony by far, so "newly minted as an adult" as Joelle says, and her teasing about the unmarried, forty-something men in the viola section is already unbearable. Plus, she always turns the pages of our sheet music too late anyway, so I don't mind not letting her in on my personal life.

When I get to the dressing room, I sink to the floor. My hands are shaking.

I love him too much, I think.

The tupperware of stir fry is in my lap and I suddenly realize I didn't bring any forks. I close my eyes. *Still so newly minted as an adult.*

Maybe I'm crazy. Maybe it's just too much music, too many people, too many walks home in the rain. Maybe Luca doesn't really love me at all, even though he tells me all the time. He said it for the first time when I went home to Providence for the holidays this year, sometime between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Les Sylphides*. I remember I was slicing figs from our tree when he called, making a dessert I used to have all the time when I was hiding from my mother's piano students as a teenager. I had my parents' landline pressed between my ear and my shoulder and was dolloping cr me fra che onto the figs as we said our "I miss you"s. When I was finished drizzling honey over everything and had set the plate on the kitchen table, Luca said, "My mom wants us to get married, you know."

"She does, does she?" I'd smiled, dipping a honeyed fig in cream and popping it into my mouth. I could hear careful arpeggios and rushed scales coming from our living room. "She hasn't even met me."

"She says she feels like she's met you." Someone was speaking Italian in the background. "She says she's always been worried I would marry some stuck-up ballerina. She's relieved I found you."

"Oh," I laughed. "Yeah, musicians are better. All the passion, way less of the drama."

“We don’t have that much drama.”

“Yeah, you do! I feel like Matt’s always in a love triangle.”

I heard Luca snort. “Matt doesn’t count.”

“He definitely counts.”

There was more Italian in the background and then the sound of Luca laughing. It sounded like he was trying to keep the phone out of someone else’s reach. “Mona, she really wants us to get married. Like we have to do it today, amore, or I’m gonna be—”

The sound of his sisters cackling took over the line. They must have succeeded in stealing his phone. “I’d marry you today,” I whispered, knowing he couldn’t hear me. I dipped another fig in cream.

When Luca got a hold of the phone again, he was out of breath from laughing. “We’ll do it like they used to,” he said, “when everything was worked out by how many goats you had. I have eight and a half goats and I love you more than all of them combined. Marry me?”

I stared at the receiver for a second, the fig paused on its way to my mouth. Then, I put the phone back to my ear.

“You love me?” I asked, grinning at my parents’ kitchen table. I bit into the fig.

There was a pause, then the sound of a door closing. The flavor of the fig burst in my mouth just as Luca said, “Of course I love you. You hadn’t figured that out yet?”

“No,” I said. “I hadn’t.”

“Well, I do. I love you, Mona Lisa.”

“I love you too,” I whispered. “And it’s just Mona.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he said, but I could hear him grinning too. “Ti amo, just Mona.”

Now, though, Luca doesn’t love me.

He doesn’t respond to my text that I’m in the dressing room and I hear the music from *Manon* swelling in my ears, see Amelia rushing into Luca’s arms, over and over until I have my head in my hands.

Swan Lake, Giselle, Sleeping Beauty. The music, the crowds, the rain.

I never noticed Amelia when she was in the Corps-de-Ballet, but she’s beautiful. Radiant and bright and loud even before you get to know her. She’s going to be a gorgeous *Manon*. They look good together, Amelia and Luca. His green eyes and her shining, sunshine-toned hair. Luca and I are too dark together—my hair is nearly black—and when he hugs me in the wings after a show, it must look all wrong. A dancer *without* another dancer.

To die, to sleep. Perchance to dream.

If he really loved me, he would have stayed where he was, blended in like I do. Maybe, in their radiance, Luca and Amelia will be loud together. Twin suns. I put the tupperware of cold stir fry on the dressing room counter when I leave.

I don’t know how much time passes before opening night. There are cloudy afternoons and texts from Luca (something about “Where are you?”) and watching the rain from the window with Cleo. I’ve never had a hard time counting the days before, but now everything feels

even more like a dream. Like maybe the rain and the crowds and the music have switched places. When I close my eyes, I see the final scene of Casablanca playing in Luca's green eyes.

I think I manage to go to rehearsal, but I'm not sure. Joelle turns the pages of our sheet music faster now and I can't tell.

Somehow I make it to my seat for the sound check on opening night and later, I don't know how long, someone in a headset in the hallway calls places. When the show starts, a cacophony of tuning sounds rise up over the orchestra and I realize too late that I'm tuning with it. *Blend in, blend in, blend in.* My E-string is just slightly flat and when it sings out alone over the orchestra, some heads in front of me turn.

The first half of Scene One goes well. I can count measures better than I can count minutes, apparently, and when we get to the sweeping melody line, my heart sings. The second half of the scene is even better, but by the time we get to the slight pause between Scene One and Scene Two, I'm starting to feel lightheaded.

It's the music, the crowds, the rain. It's what Amelia would look like Luca's arms in the wings instead of me; how she might kiss the mole on his shoulder like I do; what it felt like when he pulled away that first time that I kissed him, the flooding loneliness of it.

In that beat of silence, I get up from my seat at the back of the section, motion to the conductor that I feel sick, and quietly walk through the hallway, up the stairs,

and into the theater. I make my way up the outermost aisle in the darkness, still holding my violin and bow. I pass shadowed row after shadowed row, until I'm standing in the back of the mezzanine.

An usher looks at me with concern, but I don't have space for her right now; the orchestra's too loud. I stop in the dark and turn to watch the stage. This is the "bedroom scene" I was never able to bring myself to watch, even during all our months of rehearsal. I've been told it's lovely, heard a flute-player tell a cellist that it "looks like what falling in love feels like," and heard from Luca that there's a kiss scene in it that they've had to practice too many times under the eyes of different choreographers. I know from being around ballet that kiss scenes are rare and technical, but still, I haven't been able to bring myself to watch it.

It turns out that they were right: it is lovely. Luca is smiling that smile that makes my chest throb and Amelia is radiating joy, leaping and spinning toward and away, toward and away from him. I can see that they're playing, that they have this entire epic love story before them, and that they don't even know it.

When Luca lifts her above his head, her arabesque stretching long and elegant against the rose-toned set, I see him in pajama bottoms in my apartment, wearing those dorky tortoise shell glasses because he forgot his contacts. When Amelia slides across the floor, laughing, I see Luca making pasta at his place, singing along to "Vienna" under his breath. When Luca does a set of fast

turns, I see him kissing my head after I snapped at him on the Tube when we were late for our call times for *Les Sylphides*.

When Luca kisses her, time seems to hang. His arms are around her. Her hands are in his hair. He's pulling her in by her waist. And when she runs her palms down his neck and shoulders, her thumb brushes the place where his mole is.

Before I know what's happening, I've sunk to the floor of the theater, my violin in my lap. Images flash through my vision: folded sheet music, people in line at coat check, rain clinging to my eyelashes, Cleo purring in Luca's lap, a man's number scrawled in Joelle's cramped handwriting on the top of our music.

Amelia is smiling against Luca's mouth the way I do and they're gorgeous together, shining and golden and loud. I wonder if Luca looks like this when he kisses me too, like he'll die if he doesn't get this minute and the next (and the next and the next) to love her. *He's giving it all away*, I think.

"To die. To sleep. Perchance to dream," I say, out loud. The usher glances at me.

"*Swan Lake, Giselle, Sleeping Beauty, Romeo and Juliet, Les Sylphides*." I'm muttering them aloud now, slicing figs in my head, dolloping cream and drizzling honey. If he'd asked me to marry him for real when he said he loved me that first time on the phone, I would have said yes.

Music, crowds, rain, music, crowds, rain.

I'm sure it's pouring outside. It's pouring in my chest,

anyway.

Luca and Amelia are holding each other now, sort of swaying, in love. They're going to elope to Paris, I know it—I've read L'histoire de Manon. They're going to elope to Paris and Manon is going to die in Luca's arms.

"Swan Lake, Giselle, Sleeping Beauty, Romeo and Juliet, Les Sylphides," I whisper again, over and over.

Why is it that the girl always dies for love in the end? With figs, I remember too late, it's only the female wasp that dies after she pollinates the fruit. The sound of the rain outside intensifies. It sounds like Ophelia's river.

I wait, listening.

Maybe Luca does love me, I think through the white noise of the rain, the sound of Ophelia's river. He held me that first night when I needed him to even though we were strangers. He's kissed me a thousand times for that first time he didn't. He'll probably wait for me in the wings after the show tonight to hug me like he always does, to lift me off the floor and whisper, "Mona Lisa," in my ear so that I can say, "It's just Mona," back.

I can still hear the rain outside (Ophelia's river too), but it's quieter now. Less deafening. After a moment, I pull out my phone and text Luca: *I don't want to drown for love. Please, please come find me.*

Then, I wrap my arms around myself and count the music, the crowds, the rain until the house lights come up.

seed

By Lauren McNamara

when my Mother and I crossed the ocean
we took only our eyes and skin with us

our Family faded into the distance
home grew smaller against the blue

we sowed our roots in an unfamiliar soil
many different gardens

blossoming within scowling fences where
little else learned to sprout

I found inspiration in my Mother
brown of Earth and body

becoming Her own tree of
leaves and fruits that smell like home

to see Her in myself is a gift
a reminder of shared strength and stories

how I carry the eyes of our Javanese people
of my Mother and her Mother and hers



I am as whole as the clouds above
despite how they tend to spread

when the skies over my head grow grey
I always gaze upwards

let the rain water the soil of my eyes
so that I may grow beautiful flowers




Paul's Pond

By Lauren McNamara

ages seem to pass as I lay floating.
grey clouds peer down with anticipation
as their reflections in the dark water
cushion my weight, my bones.

silence is wet in my ears.
vultures linger among pews of leafless maples,
starved flowers line the bank.
a winter breeze carefully closes my eyes.



pond water kisses my raw skin.
mud slips from my body and pools around
me,
not quite ready to sink.
patiently, the water waits.

I roll over and slip under.
silt stirs and dances through my fingers,
icy water detangles my hair with ease.
a final bubble breaks past my lips.

I surface with my eyes still closed.

I breathe.

I listen to the pines whisper a hymn to the
wind.

I listen to the vultures gather their robes and
fly away.



The Return of Sunshine

By Alice Judge

The splash of a tea bag dropping into boiling water filled the room as Andromeda's gaze attached to the rolling hills beyond the stained-glass windows. The hills faded to brown through the dense orange glass in the kitchen, reminding her of the leaves that would be cascading down on the streets of London in just weeks.

“One cube or two?” Quincy asked absentmindedly as he made a cup of tea. His smirk radiated through the entire room, reflecting off every surface as if the walls weren't already covered in him. His being was an all-encompassing collapse of herself. He entered a room, and the scraps of herself she had collected from the last time she saw him fell away all over again. She was continuously surrounded and destroyed, like a caldera falling in on itself after an eruption, never to be full of fire again. If he could, she knew he would suffocate her with his limbs, put out any stray flame she could muster through the smothering of her internal fire. If only his arms were long enough to fully encompass her the way his presence did, then maybe he would be happy with her – if he could squeeze tight enough – maybe he could love her. It was common for Quincy to ask a stupid question of this sort, and most days, Andromeda would've looked over it, and thought: he is so busy and hardworking, how could he be bothered to remember

such a small fact about me? But today, today was different. Andromeda had been counting. Day 130. And still, the sun didn't shine.

Quincy's question rambled through her memory of each day she had counted, rattling off each number with the ring of a bell. She marked tallies on the wall in her closet only once she was sure he had fallen asleep. Each day without the sun earned another slash through the faces and swirls of the wood wall. Without the sun to shine on her, Andromeda was left to grow an intrinsic warmth, a fire in her soul. As the slashes collected into a forest of days, the lava in her boiled hotter and hotter. She could no longer feel the warmth on her skin, only under it. She was alight with an internal fire. So, when Quincy asked her, after five years of marriage, how she liked her tea – one of the most rudimentary pieces of knowledge one person holds of another – Andromeda's mind erupted with epiphanies.

It was as if the world around her was no more than the sum of the trees in the forest. The roots connect them the same as the relationships that connect us. She knew so much of the forest, where she came from, but she had tried so hard to forget. To forget him, to forget the years of freedom on the farm, to forget the shadows of those woods, their own shadows. But now, Andromeda realized she could never forget this, for she was those woods, she was her favorite maple trees, she was their leaves: waving in the wind and shining in the sun. And she was their roots: spreading to each place and person in her life

through the soil of her brain. Within the last five years, Andromeda had tried desperately to extend these roots to Quincy, to link to some piece of his soul, if only for proof that he had one. At points she would feel these roots extending, growing into the relationship she had always dreamed of. But quickly, in moments just like this one, Quincy would wrap his rock-solid world around her too tight and she would burst with the heat of a thousand suns. The lava in her veins washed over the roots as they reached and reached and reached – wrapping them in the same dark rock that trapped her deeper and deeper below the surface.

Andromeda would watch as each attempt at growth was met with the same cold, hard rock, rotting the roots before they grew to meet him. The tree of her mind was a maple, with large dense roots extending in multiple directions. She could see them, the dead roots. She knew death well. The rotting roots felt the same as those she reserved for her family all those years ago, shriveled back into the tree to protect themselves from the burning she was filled with. She would try to pull back those aiming for Quincy, but with each moment like this one, they would solidify, stagnating their growth and permeating their solace in the caldera of emptiness that had become Andromeda's once fertile brain of soil.

The maple tree of her thoughts had become weathered and drab, not glowing green in the sun as it used to. With each eruption of Quincy's being, the roots grew less and less in an attempt at self-preservation. She felt a twinge

of acute pain as those words passed through his lips. Her branches had gone limp, not reaching up to the sky, but rather rotting as their roots were crystallized to volcanic rock. With the final strength she held, Andromeda raced to the roots that tied her to Pandora, desperate to protect her from the ash that filled the air and the rocks that rained relentlessly. But she wasn't strong enough anymore. The roots that were reserved for her once upon a time, the ones that grew across the ocean with strength and no scars, were now rotting at their base. Andromeda could no longer reach far enough. Her soil had dried up along with her maple tree. She had fallen too deep into the caldera this time and there would be no more escaping if she did not run now. Andromeda glanced now at the lake outside the window, dyed purple by the glass of the front window; its waters effortlessly calm, she imagined the brilliant blue of the sky it must reflect without the violet guise Quincy had placed between them. The last reserves of lava sequestered in her veins dropped into the water with a splash, instantly solidifying into obsidian and shattering the last five years into oblivion.

“I can't do this anymore, Quincy. I'm leaving.”

—

19 August 1928

sun,

My biggest mistake was never sending you that letter. I wrote it out with purple ink, the most permanent kind, the color reserved for me, and you. *I want you. I will leave*

him no matter the costs. Those words filled with love leaked from the pen's tip. As I scribbled them down, I thought they were the truth, but each day that passed, I looked at the letter in the wicker basket by the door and ignored it. The white envelope sat there, collecting a layer of dust over the dark blue wax seal. Every morning I got dressed and stared at the letter, waiting for it to jump out of the basket and into my waiting hands. But every day it didn't. It was just an envelope, and if I had meant those words then I would need to deliver them to you myself. A week later I got married to him, so I guess I couldn't have really meant it, right? I'm sure that's what you thought. He was an artist, and the scenes inspired him. He had built the house himself, adding slivers of his art everywhere he could. I was his muse, he said, he needed me near. I finally had a home – someone to take care of me again.

Combing through my things gave me no clarity on the choice I had made. The letter still loomed in the basket behind me as I folded my clothes into my trunk. I told myself I would throw it away on my way out today. It was a lapse in my judgment, and at the time, I was sure I had made the only choice I could've. I needed support and an introduction to society that you could never give me. He was an up-and-coming artist who inherited an old home in the lakes. You had no job, like me – like most of the women at the time – and despite your father's money, we both know he wouldn't have accepted us. Through the piles of sweaters and layers of

conviction, my choice loomed in the basket behind me. On my way out that night, I caressed the envelope, and instead of doing what I had set out to do, I reached in to finally pull it from the weathered wicker basket and ripped the basket from its mounting on the wall, submitting to you and myself.

I thought I could be happy with only a piece of you. If I knew you were succeeding and I was, then the Earth would continue to spin on its axis, and I could live my life in the lakes. I never sent that letter, but I did send others. You moved to the Americas within a year of the wedding, and I was content with the separation. At least if you were on another continent, we could be distant from each other's joy. With you right back in London, there was always the chance I could run backwards.

The first time I opened one of your letters behind his walls I almost ran right out the stained-glass doors and over the rolling hills, all the way across the sea. Instead, I wrote back. I should've run then; before the rivers were muddled with pain. Sometimes I would go months without hearing from you or writing to you, but one of us would always give in – writing of some natural phenomenon. From the wildflowers that filled the hill outside his house, to the changing leaves of your world, something always brought us back to each other. Even in your absence and his absolute, the universe only ever sang your name.

Once I moved in, I quickly realized every piece of the house was a reflection of Quincy and I was suffocated. In

either direction, I would find a painting he had abandoned or a crumpled-up poem that I was not allowed to touch because it could be a “million-dollar idea.” I had thrown one I found on the bathroom floor out once and he had told me I “robbed the world of history.” No part of this life was me. Even my closet door was painted with an abstract expressionist portrait he had done of me before I moved in. It was filled with bright colors and terrifying exaggerations of my features – my eyes were bigger than the doorknob, and my ears were smaller than a penny. He thought it brought out my personality in the art. I thought it was scary, and I spiraled for a week over his perception of me. That’s the thing with being a muse, you don’t get to decide the influence you have. Quincy said I inspired him because of my spunk, my intoxicating joy, but all I saw in his works was a monster. Whenever I asked him why they looked the way they did he would grow upset with me. I didn’t understand his work. I was inept in my conceptualization of art. I was an awful wife. I didn’t support him. I wasn’t thankful for his love. Did I know how much he loved me? I would always say no, and he would always slam the door to go paint another terrifying masterpiece. That was the thing about artists, success means torture, and they have come to terms with that fact. Quincy had come to terms with his torture being synonymous with mine.

The first two years of our marriage weren’t awful. Some nights Quincy would run from his room with a

smile that shined with the light of a thousand suns, ready to share his newest masterpiece with my inept eyes. I would smile back and revel in his joy. When he was inspired, his love was intoxicating. He never took better care of me than when his work was flourishing, and in those first two years, it was. Everything took a turn when his mother died. We traveled back to London for the funeral, and in the rain-tattered streets he drew a line between us. Every time I went to his side in support, he would slap me away. When we got home, his work turned dark, and rather than paintings filled with bright, abstract colors, he turned towards a darkness that sucked all the air out of our home. He started writing poems about death and leaving them behind for me. I was already haunted by my own ghosts, sheltering his too was unbearable. He soon stopped leaving his workroom. I would knock after hours of not seeing him, and if I opened the door a crack, he would scream at the light coming through. It ruined his work. He needed complete darkness and solitude.

Sometimes, I would sing to entertain myself on the drab, rainy days that were filled with the deafening silence of his art, to bring back the freedom of childhood. One day, I pulled the muffin tin out of the cabinet, singing along to a song my father had when he went out in the forest for a long day. I was determined to make Quincy his favorite breakfast. I hadn't been supporting him enough, I thought. I added the ingredients as the sun glared through the orange skylight

in the kitchen. Quincy had colored every window in the house so that the sun painted his walls as he did – at first, I loved it – now it just distorts my memory of you. I can never find an untainted shadow. He came running out of his office before the eggs were cracked in the bowl. I held them in my hands as he stood there and told me my voice was deafening, pinning my arms to the cupboard behind me. He couldn't work with the ruckus, and this was his house, so if I wanted to keep making noise, I should leave. Pearls of spit fired from his mouth and shot at me like bullets. This was the first time I knew my presence here was conditional. I was his muse, but now he had a new one: death.

Each attempt I made to lure him out of his workroom ended in another speech about my ineptitude as a wife. I sought refuge in the letters I wrote to you, but never shared the extent of his cruelty. I liked to keep you and Quincy separate. You were my secret, the one piece of me he got no part of. In your letters, you spoke of a new world filled with blossoming life and different kinds of plants that I could never believe. The trees are taller too, you said. I missed the sound of your feet racing through crinkled leaves, jumping from one tree to the next, and listing off a referendum of facts unique to its species and condition in our ecosystem. Our relationship was a secret not only to us but to the trees, as you always said. In this valley of rolling hills, I had no trees to hide under, no shadows to tackle you into. Instead, I focused on those in your letters. In each, you included a sketch of a

new tree or shrub for me to imagine I was with you again. I always felt safest when the time of year came that your letters held the leaves of the Americas. In them, I found you and your passion for life and natural existence while surrounded by Quincy's depictions of the unnatural. In the back of my closet, where the walls have never been painted or preened by Quincy, I hung the leaves, one by one with the drawing of their coincided tree behind them. It was the one part of the house I made mine. I grew painfully familiar with the swirls in the wood that looked like flowers or faces, with the chips taken from years of holding a home. For years I hid behind my clothes and the haunting portrait of Quincy's muse, content to let her exist and hide the rest of me behind these walls, with you. I left all the letters I never sent back there too, with the wicker basket.

At first, the basket was empty aside from that first letter, but I quickly started to add to it. I found myself writing a wish for escape in the times when Quincy's art grew dark. I would plead for you to come to save me, get me away from the monster who dyed my world gray for the sake of his own inspiration. Each letter I wrote and sealed, placing postage delicately over the right corner and planting my crescent moon stamp stubbornly in the navy wax before slamming it onto the opposite side of the letter, hiding my pleads for freedom behind a seal of moonlight.

On the worst days, I would throw myself out of the front door, quietly sealing it behind me so as not to

disturb Quincy in his fits of inspiration. I would race down the front pass and towards where the road intersected. I never took it into town, but on days like these, I would wonder if I could make it. In the cold rain, the road seemed to go on forever beyond the fog. Most days, once I reached the end of the pass, and looked down at our mailbox, I realized I couldn't leave. I remembered the world beyond the fog and you didn't exist in it anymore. So, I stumbled back into the colorful house in a sea of dark skies and added my plea to the wicker basket in my closet, with the others. Every sliver of us sealed away behind the portrait of Quincy's muse.

The years went by slow but were highlighted by your letters and testaments to the changing seasons. The weather here was stagnant, an everlasting casing of rain and fog. While there you shared tales of pasty frozen rain and bright, sunny skies, both lasting weeks at a time. Your letters filled me with the hope of another world, a new world. I never expected a letter, but on the days they arrived, my drab skies were shattered open by the sun. It felt like the first shine after the rainy season. Even in the times of our breaks I never went more than four months without hearing from you in one way or another; sometimes in words, sometimes in trees, always with the bright, gold sun-stamp sealant. Every time I saw the engraving, I was reminded of our days in the city. Your father used to bring us in for schoolbooks. I am forever indebted to you for convincing him to include me in your schooling. On the streets of London, he would be

distracted by a passing friend, and we would run and run and run. It was our aptitude: escape.

I remember we rounded a corner too fast and you ran into me, pushing me into the alleyway where the light didn't quite reach. Our love is for the shadows, you said while pulling me into them. The aura of secrecy seduced me, and I was defenseless against your persuasion as you held me for the first time, feeling like I was awake after a life of dreams. The air felt crisper on my tongue, each passing smile seemed to glisten in the sunshine, and at that moment, the drab streets of London sang for us. As we raced from the alleyway, I caught a glimpse of a policeman watching us with a glint of suspicion in his eyes. I pulled you into the first shop to our right, worry encroaching on the liveliness that rushed through my veins. I played it off to you, not wanting to dull the rosy tint you viewed the world through. You always had so much faith in nature, even human. I only ever had faith in you.

The sun and moon stamps were your ideas. You were crossing the sea soon and had asked me to join you, to explore the new world. I wish I had never turned you down. I remember it like it was yesterday. I need Quincy, I need London, how could I leave? I had argued. And you had turned sharply and left. I never understood why your departure was sudden, why you ran so far, so fast. But I think I do now. I need Quincy like Zeus needs Lightning – he has never been more than a tool to me. I need you like the trees need the sunshine. Like life needs

water. Like the moon needs the sun to glow in the night. I need you to survive. I should've known that then – that with your journey over the ocean, I would have no choice but to follow the tides. It would've saved us a lot of time and pain. The last time I saw you – the day before you left, the day before my wedding – you placed the moon stamp in my hand. I had planned to give you the letter then, but when I walked out my door, I hadn't given it a second glance. I told myself I had to be sure. I had to stick with my decision. Then you handed me the stamp and said one thing before walking onto that ship and never looking back. Please. Write. So I did.

Before these past months, I had never gone more than four without hearing from you in some way. I counted each day past the four-month mark. It had been 127 days with no sunshine. I was constantly faced with the fear of Quincy discovering my wall and painting over it carelessly, covering every piece of me I had left. But he never did find it. I told myself on day 130 that if no letters arrived, I would come to find you. I guess what I'm trying to tell you is I have always needed you in the same way you have needed me, I just wasn't ready to admit it back then. But I will now. I have lived a life shielded from externalities as a muse to a tortured soul. I don't want to be anyone's muse anymore. I just want to disappear in the shadows with the sun. I am coming west to find you. A ship departs from London in three days. I hope this letter reaches you before I do. I am leaving him. I need you. I am leaving him no matter the cost.

-moon

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Andromeda stood and walked out of the stained-glass door and all the way down the hill, not turning back until the house was lost to the fog behind her.

You sent me a book,
And I can see where you bent the pages.
I imagine you went to the bathroom,
Or were interrupted by a friend,
Or had a meeting to get to.
Each crease for something I will never know.

You read me poetry over the phone,
Which would usually be silly.
But it stopped being silly the moment I left.
It's almost public the way your voice detours to space
Then bounces back to my side of the country.
I wish it could go straight from your mouth to my ear.

I'll see you again,
There's no doubt about it.
To return a story bound by aging fibers,
Leaving out innumerable details.
The pages are more wrinkled,
There's a groove in the cover.



You will read without me,
And I will write without you.
But not a day will pass where I don't think about why
you bent the pages.

I Wish I Wasn't Restless

By Megan Brennan

Morning Soliloquy

By Ryan Rudd

A snipe winnow rises
above the dreamy breeze.

Hear her liturgy
harmonize
with the rustle of leaves on bark,
hailing me.



Lips test a white mug,
and a black French Roast rises timidly
through creamy clouds
that could cauterize.

Glass lenses fog
and mist mirrors in the edges
of blue distance
hiding dark drifting willows.

Their looming figures fade,
melting like stark snow
or ferns paling as they
circle inwardly.

Then suddenly,

a flutter in the trees
a rouse of leaf,
I sparkle-smile.

She takes her flight
and soars away
as leaves all fall
in front of me.

