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Halcyon Days

By Yasmin Elzanaty

All my life, I've missed my mother. Her body is still quite warm, but her soul has been six feet under the ground for years. I don't know when the flickering flame died within her, but it was some time after I was born. Maybe it was never coaxed to life, deprived of oxygen in a world that could only suffocate her.

Her life became one of drawn curtains and clothes piled on armchairs. The bedsheets were yellowed and worn from fitful but frequent sleep. The pots and pans watched enviously from their pegs as the trash can filled to the brim with takeout containers. The baseboards collected dust and the ceiling corners grew sticky from spider's webs. In the dim light of the house, it was impossible to detect the passage of time. Spring could come and go without her taking notice, the chirps of birds drowned out by the drone of *Dateline* on the television.

I never doubted that my mother loved me; I only doubted that she was strong enough to. My earliest memories are of her singing tenderly to me, my head resting on her beating heart as she rubbed my back until I fell asleep. She sat with me as I delighted over color illustrations and read Peter Pan to me when I graduated from pictures to words. I was prone to illness as a child, so she coaxed my fevers down with cooling cloths and

fed me toast when my appetite returned. I cried every morning of first grade because I couldn't fathom her leaving, so she wiped my tears and held me until I could breathe again. She held my hand in the grocery store and told me she loved me more than life itself.

Perhaps that was the problem: my mother loved me more than life itself. We spent hours curled up on the sofa together, though in my heart I longed to play at the park with her. The dark circles around her eyes turned to bruises and her hair grayed. Our conversations that were once fiercely engaging were now labored on her part, the fatigue creeping into her voice and coloring her cadence. Our skin grew translucent under the fluorescent lights, even as I wished that we could build sandcastles on the beach like we once did.

One day, we really did go to the beach. It was my tenth birthday, and she drove us down to Carlsbad for a weekend of sunshine and salt air. We made tuna sandwiches and sat in beach chairs embedded in the sand. She squinted hard and cringed from the sunlight as though allergic to it, cocooning herself in towels. I watched miniscule crabs tunnel themselves in and out of barely visible holes as my mother napped beside me.

I gently nudged her awake and asked if she might take a swim with me. With a hefty sigh, she shrugged off her swaddle of towels and began the trek across the sand to the incoming tide. She stepped gingerly into the water, and I tugged on her hand, bidding her to come deeper in

the ocean. She obliged, reluctantly at first, until I splashed her screwed-up face and she splashed mine, and we laughed and whooped as other families played in the shallow waters around us.

We dodged waves until the sun hung low in the sky, and she proposed that we dry off and build a sandcastle. It was the most elaborate one yet, complete with turrets and a moat. My mother snapped photographs of me posing next to my kingdom, then handed the camera off to me. Ten-year-olds don't know a thing about focusing a lens or shutter speed or any of the other things you're supposed to know to capture a great photograph. What I did have was a rare occasion when my mother loved both me and her life; so, when she closed her eyes and let the wind carry her hair in its embrace, I knew to press the button. When we got the film developed weeks later, all we could think to write on the back of the photograph was the date. Now, I am writing, "Halcyon Days" underneath it.

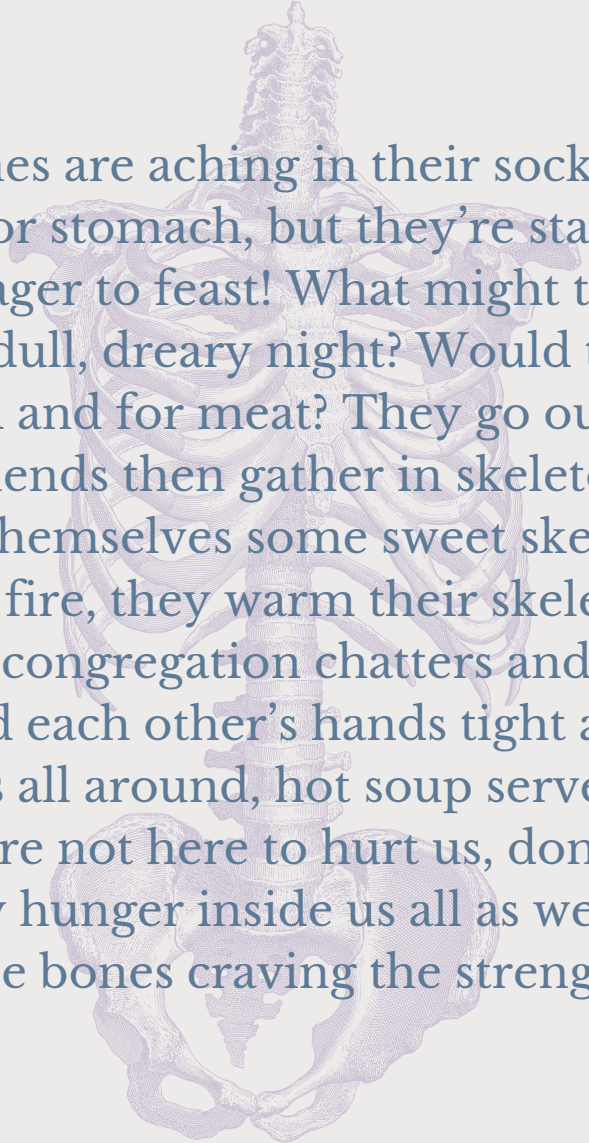


Cham

By Noah Brown

Boneache

By Phillip Chan



The bones are aching in their sockets now.
No heart or stomach, but they're starving still:
skeletons! Eager to feast! What might they seek out
on this dull, dreary night? Would they kill
for blood and for meat? They go out finding
skeleton fiends then gather in skeleton homes.
They pour themselves some sweet skeleton drinks
and by the fire, they warm their skeleton bones.
As the congregation chatters and clicks,
they hold each other's hands tight as can be.
There, friends all around, hot soup served and sipped,
why, they're not here to hurt us, don't you see?
They hunger inside us all as we live,
their brittle bones craving the strength of love.

Smith College

By Madison Yarbrough

Laughter dances down the hall
and sweeps me off my feet
in the girls wing on a Friday night.
Conversation meanders around pink tongues
and glossed lips, never losing its way.
Dirty tennis shoes tap-tap-tap one after
the other carrying sparkly tops and
drunk bellies and open smiles.
After a moon-lit night of twisting and turning
the rising sun beckons back
her girls and their laughter.
Warm light shines through
opened windows to reveal
lipstick stains and shoes
thrown about.
The new day is welcomed by
familiar hands finding and holding
one another as the stories of the night
flow wondrously from each
freshly washed face.



Holocene

By Yasmin Elzanaty

For the past three days and nights, I haven't ceased thinking of you. Your essence has consumed my every waking hour. You are the color palette of my dreamscape; you are the early morning sunrise; you are the toll of the bell.

Though I have yet to meet you, I know your face better than my own. I know the fine curls of your hair and the scent of your neck. I see you at the park, napping in strollers or rocking in the arms of another woman. You twist in your highchair to get a good look at me in restaurants and laugh as I make faces at you. I see you in everything and everyone, so much so that I can no longer tell atoms and molecules apart from the visions of my heart.

As much as you've taken up residence in my mind, so too has my mother. I know those strands of rumination are interwoven. I strive to walk a less muddied path than the woman who raised me, though I can't deny the fear that constricts my lungs and shortens my breath.

My mother loved me fiercely. That is what I will remember her by. That is the gift I wish to also impart to you, and she will have taught me how. But there are

other gifts, ones of equal consequence, that I have no guide for. I must traverse those roads on my own.

In all of my lives past, I was not the person I hoped to be for you, but I have not been the same since the dream that took me some nights ago. I watched us through a gauzy film, delicate and breathtaking. We sat together in a field of daffodils, sun-dappled and smiling with you perched on my lap. A ladybug landed on your tiny fingernail, and I whispered gently into your ear about respecting all lives, no matter how small. You held perfectly still for as long as she chose to stay, and then watched, overjoyed, as she flitted away into the pale blue sky. My mind couldn't have invented the gentle slope of your forehead or the honeyed locks that forested your little head. I could not have painted the apples of your cheeks from what little artistic reserves I possess. I knew you were more real than the air I breathed.

The daffodil is unafraid to bloom first in the spring, even while the other flowers and trees slumber in the embrace of winter. It is the beacon of hope that soon the killing frost will subside and the warm hours of sunshine will linger. It is the flower of life. I have never been anything more than a white rose, and yet I will become the daffodil if only to show you the way.

I can no longer be a husk. I must cultivate the soil of my own life to make yours richer. You will share in the

fruits of my love's labor. I will grow as you grow; we will never be stagnant. By my own audacity, I will give you permission to be whole.

We will spend our days under the sun, and there will always be color in your cheeks. I will teach you about berries and mushrooms and the migration of the monarch butterfly. Your favorite color will be yellow while mine is green; you will be the daffodil in the lush bed of grass.

I will give you so much more than Halcyon Days; no heat wave or little ice age could ever threaten our Holocene.

Dawn at South Jetty

By Noah Brown

A morose fog, whispering
About the coming of rain,
Sneaks over a tree-lined hill,
Coiling its wispy fingers around
The parts of my body betrayed
By pilled, woolen clothing.

The cold speaks to my skin in a begging
Tongue, with wishes of warmth, a need
To be something other than what it is.

I press my legs, body, and arms
Through a black rubber suit

To hide from the chill.



The ocean falls to the shore,

Hugging rocks while

Commanding the sand

To return to deeper waters.

The sea seems a dream.

It is lovely. And alive.

My legs wade, neoprene sheathed,

Into questionable currents,

And the roar of closing waves

Crowds my scattered mind.

Green curtains lift and

Crash

Self-portrait on the Days I Am Called Babel

By Faith Byars

I responded to many names as a child:
stomach, hand, dune, vase, cave, bladder,
vessel— overflowing— wicker basket—
stuffed full with honey and honest and sweet,
abandoned on the side of the road,
collateral damage from head on collisions.

When I was eleven, a man once asked
if my endurance could be bottled and sold
in little jars at all the big box stores
like Costco and Kroger and Church,
but the farmers markets rumored
that it causes cancer. And I lost the provisions.

I used my bedroom window to build a map
of only paper towns and Potemkin villages,
save a River, split straight down and then sideways,
whose name translates to swift-foot.
That summer I left for years before curiosity
came back, but the feeling wasn't the same spell.

When my mother asked me to become
more than the sum of all my parts and pieces and hair,

I told her the story of a cluster of dead hydrangea bushes
with petals like moth wings begging for hydrated
moonlight,
speaking in a language no one understands.
Like them, mother, I do not bear my guilt well.

I heard she calls me sunlight in December's deep
slumber— Hand of God, she says,
comfort with the unintended consequence
of reminding you just how cold
the cold feels in my absence.

When I was three, I prayed underneath the mosaic
stained glass window, transparent, shining—
unnoticeable until weary eyes look for answers,
too disorderly to be a streetlight stuck on yellow.

Does it mean proceed with caution or slow
down?

Is there even a difference?

Maybe it's this.

By Noah Brown

I woke up in the morning with the leftovers of a dream. I had dreamt of being a child again. Or was it the child in me dreaming? I couldn't see myself, but the vision I was borrowing seemed to be my own. Young. Small. Table height frame of reference. I was back in grade school, sitting at a desk while my teacher marked up the board with chalk, and lectured on the importance of counting to one hundred. It was almost recess. I was giddy. My first grade best friend leaned over to me and handed me a piece of chicken tender from his pocket. The good kind. Slight freezer burn. We were both excited. The schoolyard was where the fun was. Enough numbers. Enough handwriting. We wanted out. Let us have four square and wall ball and poke the nerdy girl on the shoulder.

I told my friend we should leave and he asked me why I never reached out to him after we left middle school. Huh? The clock on the wall made loud ticking sounds. The minute hand inching its way toward play time. My friend leaned closer and asked if I believed in ghosts. Then the bell rang. And my alarm went off.

I was a bit startled now. It took me a second to realize my reality. You know that feeling? The dream turns into truth and when you wake up, you're left guessing

whether it was real. The vivid ones always seem real. And you wonder if you'll ever be back to the same dream. I was upset. Play time wasn't coming. I thought of my friend's question. *Are ghosts real?*

I went through my morning routine, shaving the sides of my face, under my chin, over the lip, under the lips where that weird patch of hair grows faster than the rest. Then I brushed my teeth. After finishing, my eyes lingered on the toothpaste running down the drain. *I won't brush my teeth the same again, and those same hairs won't grow back. Goodbye spit.*

I made breakfast, and while transfixed on the steam rising from my coffee, I thought *Maybe that's a ghost. It kind of looks like a ghost. But it wasn't a ghost.* A ghost is a ghoul. A ghost is a spirit in limbo...

Maybe a ghost is the past, or the thought of "what could've been." Maybe a ghost is the ephemeral, impermanent. Or is a ghost best described by the understanding that "ghost" is just a word with a made-up definition? Why did my friend ask why I never reached out to him? I don't think he was real. Is ghost equal to figment? I think I made him up for the dream.

My roommate came downstairs and I asked him, "Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No."

The Balancing

By Sydney Severn

There is still a girl resting inside,
and she sings to herself:
something tired that no one here would remember,
something tired her mother taught her at sunset.
Like a song stuck in my head
her voice reverberates within the halls of my mind
where she balances – like a cracking ceramic vase
that is full of pink and purple tulips.
The room spins around her.
Her golden brown hair waterfalls
over the sleek edge of the dark leather couch.

Perhaps she is me
before I learned to love.

She measures the circumference of her wrist
by wrapping a finger and thumb around it,
alternating in comparison, and with concern.
She must melt herself to fit the mold.

She conceals her painted purple toes between couch
cushions
and covers her belly with interlocking little fingers.
Because I once told her to,

because I once told her how ugly she looked –
before I found a place where I no longer felt dizzy,
where home baked bread cools on the countertop
and I am *allowed* to tear off each corner
until the crumbs left behind are the only proof it
had once been there.

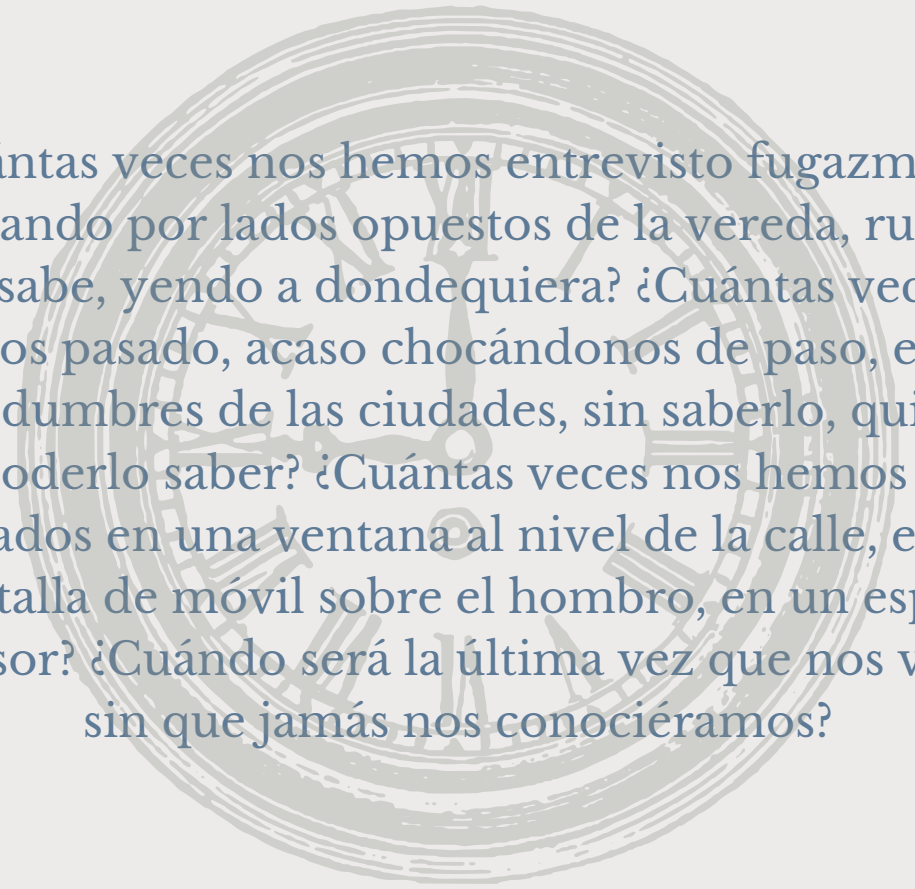
Perhaps this is my apology.
To notify her that I have grown
and seen strange places with beautiful things,
and learned to avoid the hallway of mirrors
that accompanies my aloneness.



Perhaps she is the part of me
that is complicated and afraid,
so heightened in her awareness
of the good and the bad that are whispered in her ears,
that she captures all of it of life.
Like the cerulean ceramic vase,
full of pink and purple tulips,
that finally falls to the floor and creates these beautiful
pieces.

¿Cuántas veces?

By Rowan Glass



¿Cuántas veces nos hemos entrevisto fugazmente caminando por lados opuestos de la vereda, rumbo a quién sabe, yendo a dondequiera? ¿Cuántas veces nos hemos pasado, acaso chocándonos de paso, en las muchedumbres de las ciudades, sin saberlo, quizás sin jamás poderlo saber? ¿Cuántas veces nos hemos mirado reflejados en una ventana al nivel de la calle, en una pantalla de móvil sobre el hombro, en un espejo retrovisor? ¿Cuándo será la última vez que nos veamos, sin que jamás nos conociéramos?

Modelo 62

By Rowan Glass

“The presence of the past in a present that supersedes it but still lays claim to it: [this is] the essence of modernity.”

—Marc Augé

“Every narrative is a journey narrative.”

—Michel de Certeau

The streets were a blur through the taxi window. Flashing signs I couldn't make out, a billboard advertising a new brand of cigarettes, a street sign indicating a historic theater that stood several blocks away, formless crowds without end, clogging up streets like cholesterol clogs arteries—according to my doctor, whose opinion on such things I'm inclined to trust. I told the driver to drop me off at the corner by that supermarket, yes, that one there, with the white fluorescent lighting. He told me, without my prompting him, that the new lighting had just been installed by the immigrant entrepreneurs Sunino and Sucri. There was a trace of pride in that voice, like the vicarious pride a parent feels for their child's accomplishments, or the vague kind of pride that refers to a community of which one feels a part but which, in reality, one has little to do with, like those distant relatives one hardly sees anymore. I nodded along and didn't feign interest in the man's aimless tangent. The taxi driver spoke in a way

that had been typical of the southern neighborhoods, on the other side of the river, two or three decades ago. Now parts of that dialect are universal, elements of a language which these days belong to everyone, but even in those days there were few left who spoke the undiluted original. It was a florid language full of strange vocabulary carried on a lilting tone, far from the economized and flattened speech of today. This man belonged to a dying age, to a generation which every day shrunk, replaced by my own. I handed the driver a bill and disembarked. The taxi sped off and my eyes followed it disinterestedly for a block before it dissolved in a stream of traffic which rushed frenetically over a wide avenue. I would never see that car again, or I wouldn't know it if I did, which amounts to the same thing.

The supermarket was not owned by S&S and the lighting was not new; it was owned by my uncle, whose name doesn't matter in this story, and the lights had been installed two years before this story takes place. So much for the magical knowledge of everything that goes on in a city that we like to confer on taxi drivers, as if to reassure ourselves that we can make up for the gaps in our own knowledge by exploiting that of others. We're aware of our own ignorance, of the limits which lives like ours impose on the degree of knowledge accessible to us. Why do we expect anything more from others?

In the front of the store my cousins sold milk, bread, cheese, sausages, fresh produce when they could get it (it

was never very fresh when they did), and other useful edibles. In the back they handled a different kind of business. The front was well lit and frequented by anonymous customers I never knew. I always entered through the front and went straight to the back room, a dark place whose dimensions I could never discern. The customers didn't go back there, but I never suspected, glimpsing in passing their distracted eyes as I walked through the front to get to the back, that they ever wondered about what might go on there, where there were no signs or smiling clerks to show them in. To them, our dark space in the back did not exist, which was all the better for the business we conducted there. Some places are only there for passing through.

Hollow greetings were exchanged as I took my seat in one of the hard wooden chairs around the circular wooden table that stood directly under the central hanging light, the only one in the room. It emitted a constant buzz which could not be ignored; the light it provided was insufficient, incessant. Something was said about an unpaid debt and a name was given: Sr. Burgos, a bookseller. I was shown a few photographs. They were grainy and out of focus, but the vague silhouettes they framed were enough for me to get a sense of the man they prefigured. He was unknown to me. His hair was thin and graying, his face slim and angular. He had a kindly look in his eyes, and in one of the photos he was smiling—but I also saw there, like a premonition, the look of death.

A silver pistol was placed on the table. I picked it up and placed it in the concealed holster inside my coat that already longed for its insertion. It slid smoothly in, almost organically. Strange for a mechanism so complex and modern, a machine whose parts and function I didn't understand, to feel so familiar, so natural, in my hands.

I looked distractedly around the table; for a minute the words spoken in the background had faded to quiet and I heard only the buzz of the lamp. I don't know what I saw in my uncle's eyes, who was still sitting there, when I glanced up and met them before one of us—I no longer remember who—soon looked away. My cousin had already gotten up at the ring of the bell to attend to a customer who had wandered in. Some faint words about sausage or cheese drifted back, where I was gathering my things. I left through the front, which now struck me as too well lit; bright lights reveal grimy surfaces. A woman's inscrutable eyes scanned plastic rows of sausage or cheese encased in refrigeration units behind frigid glass while my cousin stood nearby, no longer smiling because she was no longer looking at him.

An hour or more had passed, the sky was darker, and it had rained. The clay roofing tiles in the colonial style on the low houses across the street reflected, in shimmering lateral streaks, the lights which came shining off the roadside rivulets that bordered the sloped peripheries of the streets below, flowing quick with the recent rain. Another storm was already churning in the southern sky.

Added to the mélange of reflected colors on the water was the yellow of cars' headlights as they plowed through the sheets of water which ran thick on the slick asphalt, throwing up flying curtains in their wake. I watched a struggling pedestrian stumble under the impact of such a wave as a car passed at high speed. The jarring anachronism of the scene struck me.

I had time to kill before my appointment with Sr. Burgos, but as we were to meet in a southside neighborhood across the city, I hurried to catch the next tram heading that way. I waited five minutes at the stop. A few people, other would-be passengers, waited nearby, their blank expressions betraying no movement of thought under nondescript surfaces—the look of anonymity. Fidgeting, I lit a cigarette of the kind I had seen the advertisement for earlier and cast my gaze up at the skyscrapers towering over the lower neighborhoods approaching the city center. Coated with scales of reflective glass, austere tangles of high-tensile steel and concrete, these were constructions which would put the pyramid builders to shame and inspire a kind of quotidian reverence, when not sacred horror, in future generations. They contrasted palpably with the shabby low houses of clay roofing which stood in their shadow, relics of a bygone age, like the old taxi driver whose face I could no longer recall.

Lost in such thoughts, I almost missed the funerary casket that swung suddenly overhead, lurching through the air over the rooftops and streets of the

neighborhood. Passersby turned their heads in fleeting curiosity. I heard someone ask what was going on. A writer has died, came the reply from a policeman, and his casket wouldn't fit through the door of his apartment. Three days he'd been dead before the smell from his room attracted any attention. So much for that mystery. The crowd dispersed and the tram arrived. The city again dissolved through the window, where tremulous beads of coagulated mist slid in streaks down the glass pane, auguring another round of rain.

I looked out at the new highway as the tram trundled over it, crossing the river south, a few minutes before I disembarked. Seven lanes to each side, it cut a swath like a scar through the very heart of the city. In the weekly *Ciudadano Moderno* I read, next to a familiar cigarette ad, that it was the widest avenue ever built. The dark shiny cars and the new city buses streaked across it in a steady stream; it already looked almost natural. One might not notice it at all if not for the empty stretches of bare asphalt that sometimes opened when there was a lull in traffic, calling attention to themselves in the temporary neutralization of their purpose. Only then did one feel the highway's strange contingency. But these impressions did not last long; soon the traffic caught up and restored the natural flow of things, filling in those unsettling gaps.

I got off the tram a block from Burgos' bookstore. The roiling clouds I had glimpsed earlier had rolled steadily

nearer and were now almost directly overhead. Thunder rolled. My dark shoes clacked loudly on the sidewalk as I hastened my stride. In their polished sheen shone the warped reflections of the towering buildings that loomed overhead. I smelled ozone in the air as I entered Burgos' shop.

As I entered, there came the greeting of a spectacled man whom I recognized and didn't know. It's warm in here, I said. Do you have a heater? He shrugged and gestured expansively at the shelves full of books that lined the shop walls. Paper makes a good insulator, he told me, smiling earnestly. Of sound as well as of heat, I thought to myself.

I wandered to the back of the shop to confirm that it was empty of customers. I felt intelligent eyes, good-natured and trusting eyes, follow my movements. Then Burgos appeared behind me and started blabbing about the latest trends in detective fiction, pointing out a few exemplary copies that stood out on his shelves. I pointed at no particular book on a high shelf on the back wall of the shop, some slab of pulp noir authored by one Domecq Lynch. Burgos smiled obligingly and reached for it, turning his back to me in the process. I reached into my coat.

My hand closed on the plastic grip of the Modelo 62 and I withdrew it smoothly, silently, from its holster, from which it still felt warm. I ran my hand over its long, elegant barrel, a sleek .38 with a silver brush finish. An instrument with a clear purpose to its design, I

considered, a tool specially made for special work. Carefully, slowly, with intention, I raised my arm and took aim. My finger tugged on the trigger. For a moment nothing happened, and then came an explosion of sudden noise and light and, as if smote by lightning, Burgos folded to the floor. I judged that his death had been instantaneous. Calmly, slowly, with intention, I replaced the gun in its holster on the inside of my coat; then I walked out the door into the bustle and tumult of the city and disappeared in a maze of twisting streets of the sort which turn and collapse densely into each other like the folds of the cerebral cortex, like those gryi of complex beauty which an impartial bullet had just destroyed (I felt a pang of guilt at having disordered such clockwork). Burgos' fifty-nine years were annulled in a second; they left through his forehead.

One misjudges the nature of cities in assuming that nothing goes unnoticed for too long, that everything is seen and precisely recorded, that the anonymous crowds form a collective omniscience from which not even the most minuscule detail escapes. The city is a consciousness, but like all consciousness it is imperfect. Like our own it has the habit of optical illusion and falsification. It sometimes miraculously ignores what it has no reason to suspect. It was an hour before someone, taking shelter in his shop from the storm circling overhead as the rain began to fall, discovered that Sr. J. L. Burgos was dead. There was no sign of a struggle; nothing had been taken. It was twenty minutes later that

he police and medics arrived. The coroner judged (I imagine) that his death had been instantaneous. From a café balcony on the corner across the street I stirred a cube of sugar into my coffee, anonymous in that sequence of non-places which is the café and the street and the city, a temporary onlooker whose momentary curiosity at the scene below, like that of the passersby of cryptic eyes who turned their heads without slowing their stride, would not outlive the day.

Beneath the Pepper Tree

By Sydney Severn

The perspiration above my lips
Makes a glass of water much sweeter.

Bright red berries drop from the swaying pepper tree
above me,
Decorating the length of my body with color
As if I am branded
By part of the beauty that I am without:
One that rehydrates the spirit.



Like the pepper tree
Before my great-grandfather's stone driveway;
It held a cedar swing
That left mossy footprints in my young skin
After a day of swimming,
For I held on so tightly, as if the delicate leaves below
Would leave a scratch.

In contentment of memory
I sink deeper into the waterlogged lounge chair,
Resting a book between my legs, bent at the knee
Exposing hand-poked patchwork on the surface of my
skin.

Sweat pools in my belly button,
Balancing where the waistband meets the coat,

Trickling around my abdomen, and down the sides of
my breasts.

I lay beside the swimming pool
That has become the dogs' water bowl:



One, white as the snow, as the sheep he has
evolved to herd,
Now combed and groomed to be therapy,
instead.
He craves physical touch, words of affirmation.

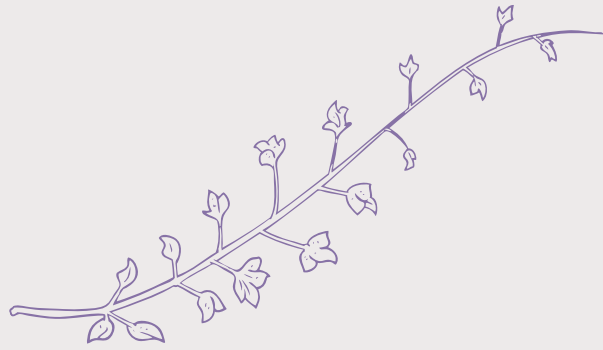
The other is slender, overly affectionate, but
free;
Her belly has been shaved after having one of
her own.
Perhaps she has since forgotten.

They drink before me,
their dry paws peeking over the concrete edge.
The chlorine must be overwhelming.

We are mixed in with the brightest of watercolors
Not captured in black and white,
Melting beneath the rays of the sun
That darken my body like aging whiskey,
And toast their fur in the finest of golden wines.

The dogs lay beside me, now

licking my fingers as if I'd wed the butcher.
It is a silence, together
beneath the pepper tree.



Bees Afoot

By Emily Colson



Least I Try

By Noah Brown

Speech therapy sessions sought
to teach how not to stutter and
how not to mumble and
how to enunciate.

I sometimes wonder,
am I still that stuttery kid?

I am many things.

I am student trusting myself to schooling,
hoping for clarity.

I am late Friday nights on cold tile with bruised mind,
Looking in the wrong place for meaning.

I am friend finding connection, or at least I try.

Yet underneath I am still the stutter,
second guessing my sentences, myself,
constructing speech in my head
before committing to it aloud.

A fading-paint pencil

With chipped graphite tip,

Meant for communicating

But lacking the ability.

I wish to be the union of

language and meaning,

But in reality,

I am often the separation.



Harmony and Dissonance

By Sydney Severn

When I was young
enough to hold my ankles behind my head,
I dreaded the mornings
when my Father left for work –



a cyclical haunting that stiffened
my skin, my tongue: an earnest love facing its
first abandonment
(wrapped in the clothes of endearment).

He wore shiny black shoes and suits that smelled
like the back of the closet,
combed his hair with crisper pomade,
and escaped through the double-door entryway
before I could take his hand and declare

*take me with
you,*

and promise *I'll be good.*

As if I were a poet in waiting
for this harmony.

The silk and the sandpaper,
the deep, softening voice of recitation,
fingerprints on a keyboard
that create printed pottery. It holds
the next generation of Sequoias
and the hands of a girl who needed her Father.

When I was young

enough to not know separation,
my Aunt and my Uncle made me a window
with a pane and a sill, and pink curtains to raise
to see a photo of my Father –

I'll hang it on the wall with too many nails,
so as the undesired sun rises
and he isn't here,

I can pretend that he is.



Diasporic Bodies

By Rowan Glass

Mine is the history of the Jews, my ancestors who, through exile and diaspora, learned to live with uncertainty and placelessness. We diasporic bodies have no homeland.

The alluvium of the past, time's sediment, grows ever skyward, piled like ruins built on ruins. Caked to the knees in mud and clay, I live wading through it.

Thinking tries to thin the morass, to free the legs for running—running to outrun. I just didn't realize then that you can't think yourself out of the mud but must drag yourself out inch by inch.

The feeling of going nowhere fast. The way you felt moving to Alabama, to what seemed a desert wasteland over the mountains shielding the valley of childhood, at six years old, and sensing horror under the weighty veil of a humid night. We're stopped on a roadside, the highway is abandoned, there is a void where there was once, impossibly, a landscape. Only a gas station store with fluorescent lights that make for an artificially white interior. The clerk is undead. We step back outside, hear crickets in the cornfield, there is no wind and we might wonder (if we knew enough to wonder then) if the Earth were still turning.

There is a night that lives in memory, a night nestled deep in summers past. I remember falling off my bike in the middle of a field, sprawled in the tilled dirt under the stars, and I wept—for I was unhappy in life, but loved and affirmed it all the same. There were orchards around and all was inscrutable. I wonder if I was changed by that night, whether something then took hold in me that has never left. On nights such as these, possessed by familiar moods, that night lost to remembered summers always enjoys a renaissance.

Running to outrun, running so as not to be outrun, the fear of being outrun, of having been outrun. It makes me want to pick up and leave, to turn away, to show my back, to challenge what has been prescribed, to defy the foretold, to deny the future. My life is my own. Spare the present the past. Free the future—or abolish it.

Eternal revival of tears under an impartial starful sky, dirt under my fingernails, blessing life. But every return soon shatters and dissolves. The winds change and we must resume our march along the old seasonal migration routes. We diasporic bodies can only seek solace in ceaseless motion.



Seasonal

By Maili Smith

When I dream of you, you are smiling at me.

We are walking on the beach. The sand curls and crunches under my bare toes. The wind picks up my wet hair and rearranges it into tangled tendrils, then sets it down gently.

The air smells like salt and pure contentment.

You are facing towards me, and there is a trace of a smile on your face, the aftermath of laughter hanging in the air. As always, your laugh is a treat I take coy pleasure in eliciting. I love when it falls out as an unexpected bark, the way it sounds like it surprises itself. It reminds me of pearls baked in the sun, warm and smooth and airy.

Despite the crisp air, I radiate with warmth. I wish I could bottle up my affection for you and hold it my palms in the cold winter months that follow.

Instead I drift to sleep, hoping that the crevices of my mind will conjure up remnants of your smile.

Confessions

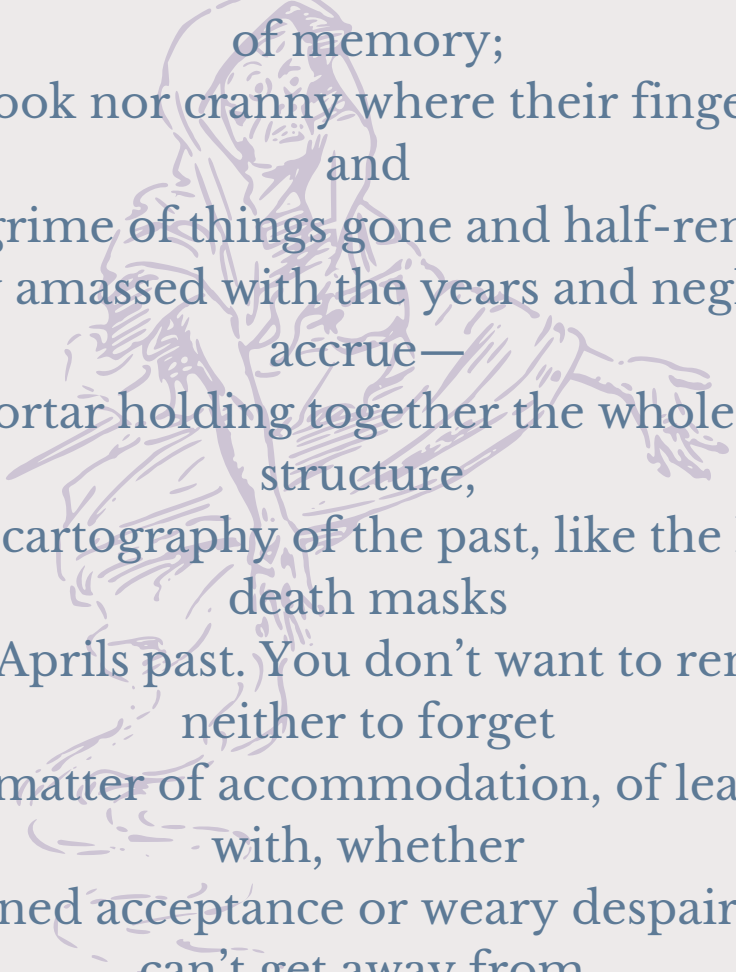
By Grace Young

When I see pine trees I find the tallest point and imagine
I've climbed that high –
Perched on the top of the world. I can't imagine my life
more than six months into the future.
I feel guilty picking flowers but still do it. I have to
convince myself that I've been in love.
I dream of Montana and I can't figure out why. My
grandmother knows that I'm psychic.
Water and the sun feel like entities. I trust people too
easily. Nostalgia finds me everywhere.
I don't really like tea but I like drinking it. I see shadows
in the corners of my vision.
I prefer to sleep alone – but I try not to.
Like a child, I study the plants that pop up between the
cracks of concrete.
I feel peace when I lay in fields. I watch my feet take
steps when I walk.
I'm not sure if I want to have kids, but I keep my journals
just in case.



Ghosts

By Rowan Glass



Shades of former selves drift submerged in derelict
undergrounds of time
where labyrinthine others' selves infest the architecture
of memory;
there's no nook nor cranny where their fingers don't pry
and
where the grime of things gone and half-remembered,
indistinctly amassed with the years and neglect, fails to
accrue—
viscid mortar holding together the whole decrepit
structure,
this spectral cartography of the past, like the layered lives
death masks
of so many Aprils past. You don't want to remember but
neither to forget
and so it's a matter of accommodation, of learning to live
with, whether
with reasoned acceptance or weary despair, what you
can't get away from.
These ghosts, no longer tied to the unknown identities
whose faces they wear, are you.

Washington

By Noah Brown





Unbound
Journal