

Rune 38

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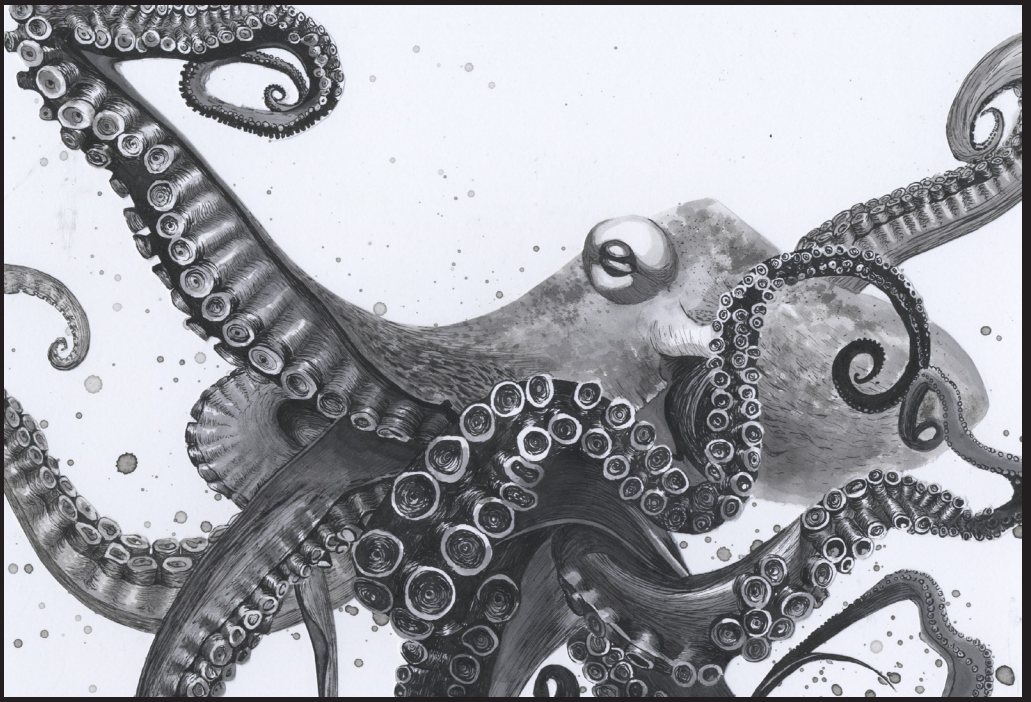
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Octopus

Michelle Xu



On the Edge

Lucy Megan



Magic Lake

Allan Gelman

Confection

Dylan Holmes

A birthday party (n.) is
a chemical reaction involving a mixture of
helium gas, simple sugars, and bits of colored paper
which combust marvelously,
yielding several kilograms of six-year-olds
in an excited state.

Their slow tarnishing over decades will be
punctuated by similar outbursts
at regular intervals.



Flower Burst

Landon Carter

That Which we Call a Rose

Divya Goel

I.

My family has always been *up in the air*. My brother's name is Ishan, which means sun which is a joke, because it's a homophone for son, and my parents have a strange sense of humor. My dad's name is Anil, which means *prince of the wind*, which is a joke, because his dad's name means king of the wind. My mom is *full moon* which is a joke, because morning people like her are rarely awake to see it. And I am heaven, which is the best joke of all.

It's quiet up here, unless the sun and moon are having their daily battle for dominance, while the wind watches calmly in the background, and heaven makes a halfhearted attempt at mediation.

II.

I tried to write about my mom once, but her name is hard to spell, which you might think is a joke, but allow me to explain. You see, it's not Mom, it's Mama. No, not Mama. Mama. Ugh. Okay. Let's do this phonetically. Muhmuh. That looks strange, मां मां?

Wait.

Writing is supposed to be fluid, but in a sea of English, Mama is a dam. Damn that subtle difference in pronunciation. The language, the comfort, the years of calling down the stairs from a castle in the clouds.

III.

And that's how I know Shakespeare was wrong.



Frost

William Wu

Winter-Summer Communication

Yuliya Klochan

A sentence resounded bravely in the emptiness of Winter. The wind picked up its vibrations, threw them across the icy divide and into Summer.

A woman on the beach in a flat graduation hat raised her head. She mouthed the words caught in the breeze, threw them towards the ocean. "I love you always!" The woman screamed. The wind shifted. Further into the Summer scorch.

A boy rolled his tongue down the length of a purple popsicle. Slowly, then faster. The grape goodness slid promptly into the boy's mouth. He slurped when he felt the vibrations. "I love you... always?" He spit out some juice. His flip flops slapped the burning asphalt as he ran home, singing the sentence, returning it to the wind with added flavor.

"I love you always," whispered a surprised youngster on his first date. "It's the wind," he explained to his wide-eyed romance. She, too, felt the words whoosh past her ear, and smiled. "Love you," she echoed.

Next, the senior woman speeding to her last day of work caught the sentence's whiff. The hot air stung her eyes and opened her tear ducts. "I love you always," she announced to her stunned colleagues. "I swear I'm not crying because it's my last day."

Her four friends at the coffee machine heard the sentence too, and nodded in agreement. "Yes, I love you always," they said separately in a chorus.

An exhausted father of three energized toddlers opened his eyes when the sentence buzzed through the window. His children had made a skyscraper from plastic cups. A foaming sea from shaving cream. He moved towards them and adjusted the tilting tower. "I

love you always." Tickled each child.

The three toddlers giggled and flailed their arms. The tender skyscraper toppled onto the carpet and its pencil spire plunged into the fragrance-free sea.

"I love you always," sang an older mother to her recently born child. She tucked a plush blanket closer to the sleeping girl and dimmed the baseball-shaped light. She smiled and started a song about the twinkling distant star. "One day, I'll tell you all about stars, the way they really are," she whispered to the girl. "Maybe you'll travel near one. Wouldn't that be marvelous?" The baby smacked her lips in agreement.

The wind carried the words all through the Summer city, gaining energy with each sentence repeated on the ground...

...In the Winter domain, a cruel icy blast hit the cheeks of a woman in puffy clothing. She cupped her hands around the nose, breathing warmth into her face. "I love you always," she breathed in and out, opened her palms to let the sentence fly.

Over the divide. Past the ice. Through the Summer side's scorch.

The icy blasts shot mercilessly back at her, slapping the sentence into her face. She sent another warm message to the wind. Tiny in the Winter, fat and powerful in the populated Summer.

Scrunched up cats shone their eyes at the cold woman through their windows. Winter people slept after hours of shoveling snow and generating heat.

The woman felt the sting of frost finally creep through her layers of protective clothing. "Ouch," she said and shut her mouth in horror, lest the Summer recipient heard her pain. The tiny whiff disappeared in the current of the sentence, roaring now over the sweating city.

Some Summer citizens awakened at the sentence's boom with frus-

tration and mocked the message. "I love you always." Others let the invigorating energy flow on, yelled the words back onto the street. I love you always...

On a Summer playground after dawn, a girl on her first day of preschool slid right into the strongest gust. "I love you always." She felt the wind pass through her body and shivered at its wintery undertones.

"Sister!" She yelled back, louder than any who had heard the message. "Sister! Sister!" The girl triumphed, riding on the wind's loving wave. "I love you too!" she shrieked the other way. The potent air mass shifted, whirled in a miniature tornado, and reversed its course.

Through doors and windows and hearts. Past shimmering ponds where it rolled tiny waves. Parks where it rid the trees of dead leaves. Rooms and streets where Summer people laughed.

At last, it crashed into the frozen divide. Shook its foundation. Made loose ice cubes tumble into the Summer and Winter. Melted slow strings of water down the icy side.

The woman in Winter felt the rumble in her heart, caught the first melted water drop with her bare hand. Wiped a salty teardrop from her face. Laughed.

Lazy Winter cats continued to stare. Winter humans smiled and muttered the phrase in their sleep.

"I love you," sang the winds of Winter and Summer, relaying the message to all who dared to listen and repeat. Sent by the girl and woman across the great divide.

"I love you" resounded bravely in both worlds.



Ribbon Frame

Landon Carter

Heart

Nafisa Syed

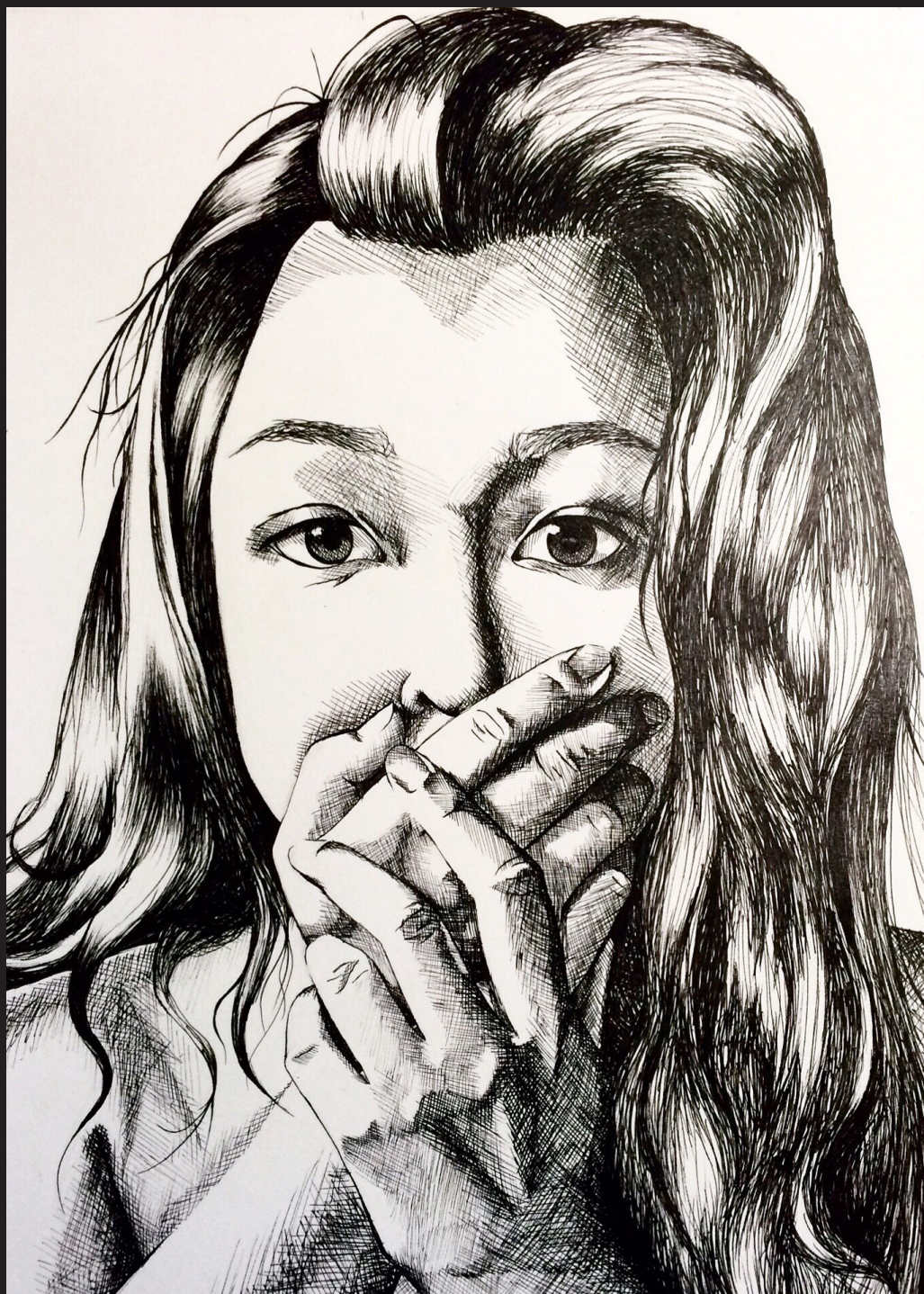
There is a silk ribbon
Tied to my sleeve

Thin, soft, and shy,
It slides smoothly
Down my hand

As I walk it creeps
Down to my fingers

I weave it between my
Index finger and thumb
And wish I could

Remove it but I haven't
Shown you yet



Lunar

Deborah Plana

White on white on white.
Her face. The gown. The sheets.
A pale horizon sprinkled with black stars,
Constellations in an inverted sky.
The space between her arms was my universe.
With index fingers
I drew patterns on her birthmarks
And she held me and my dear life.

Lovingly held.

Now desperately holding.

White on white on white.
The sheets. The gown. Her face.
The sky has aged. But the stars remain.
Since I can no longer fit in the space between her arms,
My hands relieve the void between hers.
Soon, the butchers will draw patterns with steel fingers
And she is clutching me for dear life.

Carefully, methodically, the sky will go from white to red
And if things go well back to white
And if things go badly back to white, and white
Growing paler for the rest of eternity
Until the stars return to where they belong.



BW Window

Justine Jang

How to Prepare for the Impending Apocalypse

Renee Bell

Oh no! The end of the world is coming!! Perhaps by a downpour of bombs, with their gasps of deafening light. Perhaps by an exasperated volcano. Perhaps by a tide of zombies engulfing the last of the uninfected. Only one thing is certain: apocalypses come from all directions. All you can do is, build yourself a hefty bunker and enwomb yourself indefinitely. Here's a handy list of bunkers that make the cut.

- A trashy dance club and the thin film of inebriation.
- Straight-up denial.
- A crowd of strangers in a strange city.
- Someone else's arms.
- A sense of detached irony.
- Harder drugs.
- The bowels of the internet.
- Sprawling works of fiction.

FAQ:

Q. Aren't drugs illegal?

A. Yes, but laws do not extend down into bunkers.

Q. You mentioned a club. What do you do when the club closes/if they kick you out of the club?

A. They can kick you out of the club, but they can't kick you out of your state of inebriation. Maintain until reopening/readmission.

Q. What if the world grotesquely decays, instead of exploding?

A. That is just another kind of apocalypse. You need to be in it for the long haul.

Q. What if the apocalypse comes from within?

A. Go in all directions at the same time. Next question.

Q. Do bears shit in the woods?

A. Yes, another reason to stay in your bunker, which is surely free of bear shit.

Q. What about light and air? Don't you need those? How will you get those?

A. Alright, there's a light, but you swear it wasn't so hideously jaundiced your first day down here. What day could it be now. This cold fluorescence: obscene and uninformative. Why don't these things have windows? But what would it see, dirt. And god knows what wasteland lies above. Why not smash the fucking light, why not, and god knows what wasteland lies below. How is the tank air so stale, every breath feels recycled, lungs refill on your own sighs and shrieks of hysteria. And you remember your breaths are numbered—how numbered? Everything finite seems imminent. And it might as well be, that final inhalation of a toxic cloud. IS IT NOW? IS IT ALMOST NOW? Yes, before you drew them out, the breaths, breathed sweetly, but now you're greedy for it, insatiable, hurling toward the realization of your hallucination, you take more and more and more and more



The Three Muses

Ivy Li



Stitched Together

Danny and Allan Gelman

Ballot Box Ballad

Deborah Plana

<p>To vote Scratch ball point on crisp paper diagonally additively completely Fill in the oval next to your choice</p> <p>Black or blue pen required Thought recommended Pants optional</p> <p>If you spill tea erase or make other marks Your vote may not count</p> <p>To vote for a candidate whose name is not printed on the ballot fill in the oval and write in the candidate's name on the blank line provided for a write-in candidate</p> <p>Para votar</p>	<p>To vote Scratch eyes out and shove forcefully perpetually fruitlessly Fill lungs with screams- no other choice</p> <p>Eight hour wait required Bullet-proof vest recommended Sustenance optional</p> <p>If you spill blood explode or leave other marks Your vote will not count</p> <p>To vote for a candidate in jail but not on the ballot fill in the streets and write in the candidate's name on the walls provided to keep you from starving</p> <p>Para de votar</p>
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Surrounded

Ohyoon Kwon

My Revolutionary Hat

Deborah Plana

You wannabe gringa
Soft dorm-room dreaming
Through street protests
And bones breaking on pavement

I should be soaked in sweat
Protecting your brilliant head
From the beating Venezuelan sun
But you are pale from the Boston winter

And wounded
Hand cramps from typing
Headaches from reading
Sore throat from lecturing

Perched on books and papers
I watch you type up models
And break down
What good is your God-damned intelligence?

Your bed-time prayers
Put you to sleep
While your country feasts on air
And bleeds out oil



Miniature

Lucy Megan

Diaspora (Excerpt 1)

Rona Wang

Years ago, when we got bored during study hall and Googled "Thayer Stokes", we found out that his dad was a rich-ass tech entrepreneur with his own Wikipedia page. We all found that to be varying degrees of completely hilarious, since Thayer made the local news in ninth grade for getting high as a kite and crashing Daddy's BMW into a stoplight. When, one night, he slipped Xanax into a girl's cheap beer, the rumors ricocheted into our collective consciousness and lodged somewhere between our knife-thin ribs. Our entire grade held our breaths, waiting for the cops to show up with handcuffs so shiny and stiff they'd hurt our teeth.

So when Thayer disappeared for days, we thought he'd for sure gotten his ass hauled to the Rosendale Youth Center, a pretty name for juvie. All of us except one agreed. Sammy Holwell swore that he one-hundred-percent-for-sure saw Thayer turn into a bird, but we just laughed at him and figured he must've been tripping too hard.

A few weeks after Thayer's disappearance, Charlotte Beryl's cluster of church choir friends came in all frantic with dangling tongues and mascara oozing down their cheeks. Their voices dovetailed into one story: they'd been eating lunch on the front lawn when Charlotte's face twisted in a way faces shouldn't. She fell to the ground as her hair sizzled into wreaths of rose-gold smoke. Brown mottled feathers julienned her skin into shreds.

The one stupid thing they couldn't agree upon was the species. One girl thought sparrow. Another insisted finch. Maybe wren, someone else said.

Afterwards, I couldn't get this grotesque image of Charlotte out of my head. I kept thinking of feathers unfurling from her eye sockets. Her painted lips puckering and pulling into a beak. A mesh of honey-blond corkscrew curls, ripping out by the roots. An eternal scream of horror caught in her throat, languageless.



Winter Resident

Lucy Megan

Diaspora (Excerpt 2)

Rona Wang

After Charlotte Beryl's metamorphosis, the inevitable exodus swept through and left only air so quiet it choked on its own silence. Shop owners boarded up their windows and skipped town without retrieving their security deposits. Before they sped off in a van, our neighbors gave me their daughter's pink Barbie bike, even though I was about a decade too old for such a thing.

For some reason, only children and adolescents turned into birds. Half of my history class was gone by spring break. In the early mornings, the sky a milky rose, mothers tiptoed in the lonely streets, desperately searching for the children they'd lost to the skies and the trees.

Finally, we reached a consensus on the breed: song sparrow.

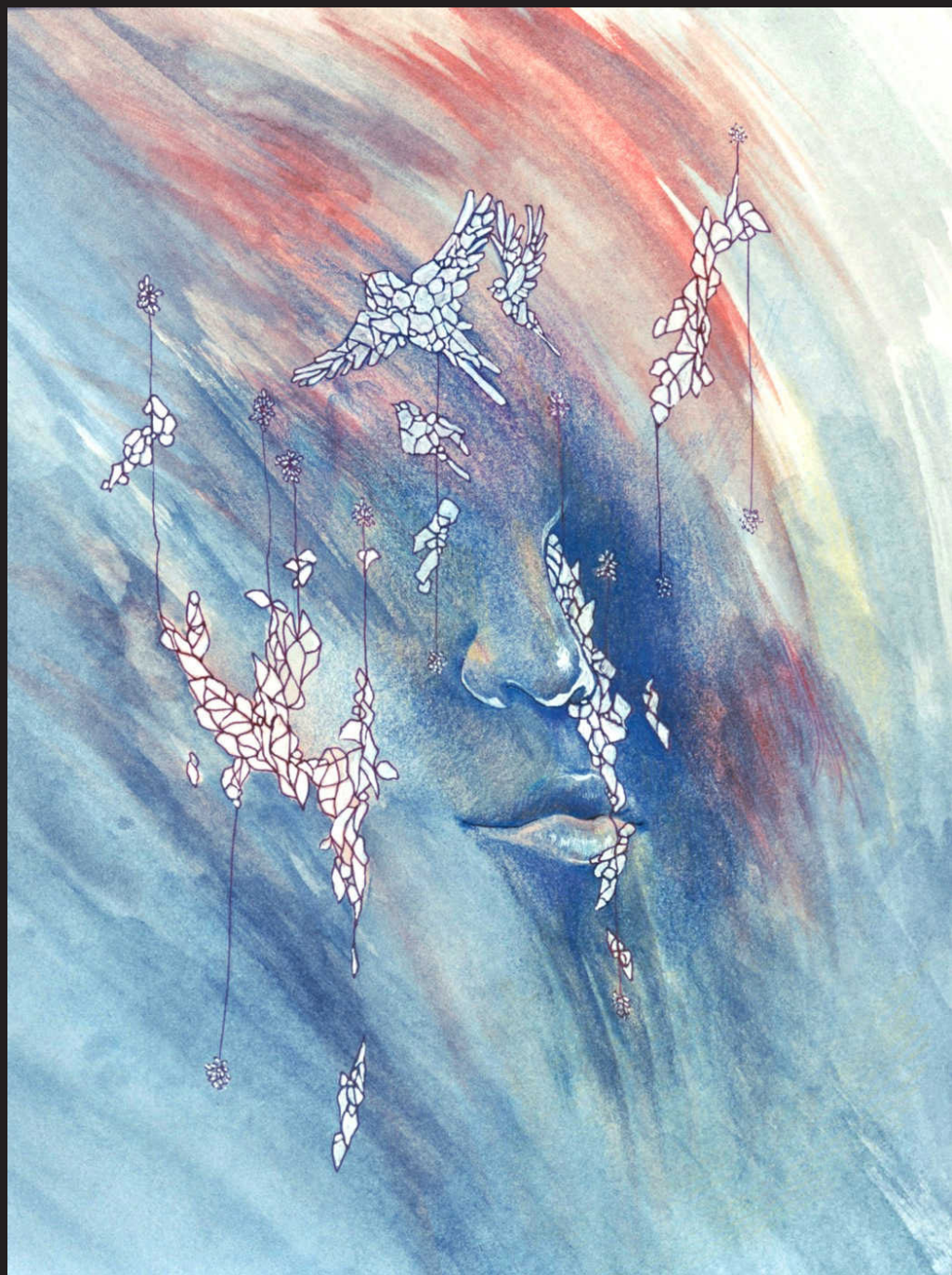
During gym class, Sammy Holwell collapsed on the basketball court, spine convulsing into a question mark.

An entire sixth grade class went on a field trip and never came back. Our schools slowly emptied until they shut down altogether.

I held my breath for years, waiting, always waiting, but never felt bright crackling underneath my skin, never woke up with a mouth filled with feathers. Our town became a suburban conglomerate of guano and fading memories.

Every so often, I would see a bird soar over a sprawling orchard or plunge through the foaming twilight sky, and I was almost certain it had Thayer Stokes's stocky body, or Sammy Holwell's nervous twitch.

I wondered if the sparrows had forgotten their names, their families, their past lives. I wondered if they still remembered how to speak in their first languages, or if those words had been etched away by the incessant chirping and cawing. I wondered if they still searched for home, a light smudged on the endless horizon.



Fractured

Ivy Li

Don't tell me I'm intoxicating— a villanelle

Kristy Carpenter

Under stars spread as wide as the sea,
you said Earth was a drop of spring dew.
Were you drunk when you said that to me?

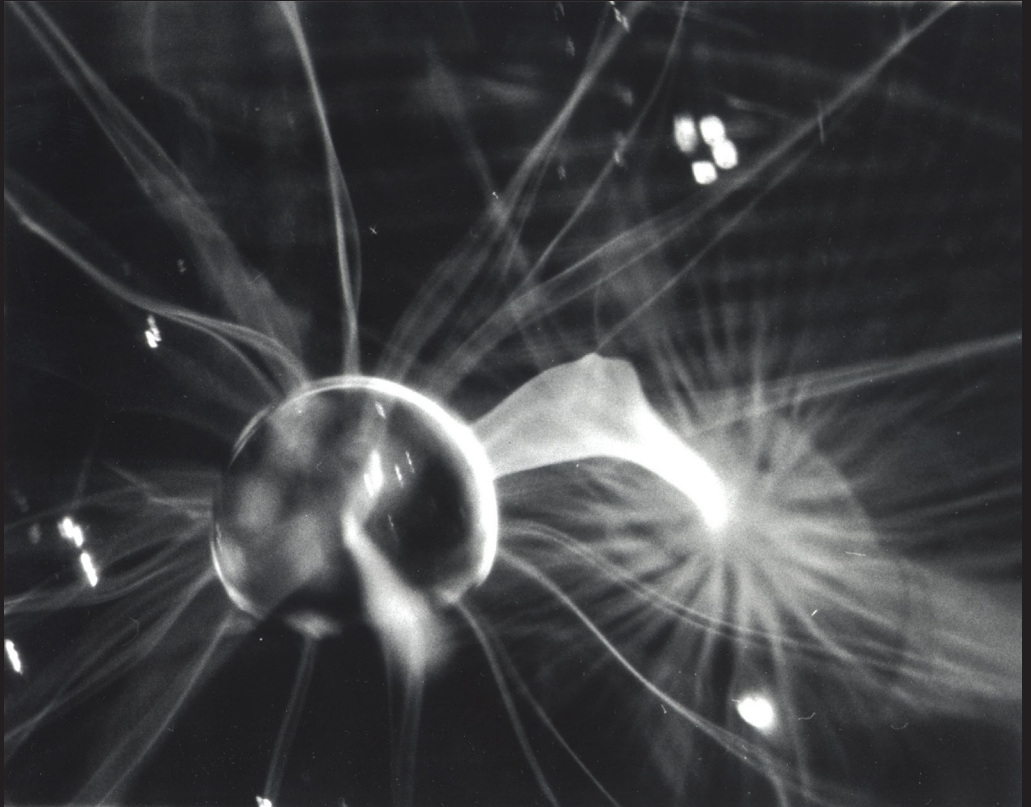
You declared we were finally free
as you danced with your limbs all askew
under stars spread as wide as the sea,

sometimes humming a hymn out of key,
arms upraised, praising infinite blue.
Were you drunk when you said that to me?

Then you told me, you're cosmic, I see
that your heart beats its steady tattoo
under stars spread as wide as the sea.

But you slurred your way through your decree,
and I don't even know what to do.
Were you drunk when you said that to me?

I could smell the Grey Goose and deceit
when you first said you loved me so true
under stars spread as wide as the sea.
Were you drunk when you said that to me?



Plasma

Evan Denmark

astronauts trying to find houston

Effie Jia

he bites the crescent moon—golden syrup—
letting it orbit him around the earth,
as i indulge in the silver oceans, rising falling.

don't trust the stars, they always fail
to drift in beauty—the explosions of color
in my head, are replaced with glimpses of
ivory wrinkles against a matte bedsheet.

someone stronger than me could fold
pillow covers—making the corners meet,
pressing the indents of our heads together.

the scents of unwashed strands of thought
mingle between the strings sewn tightly,
and he lets go of the sickle moon—
surfing the cotton clouds until he returns,
floating gently with me in metallic waves.



adrift

Kristy Carpenter

she
takes the long way home
never completely lost—
because it's autumn
and the light is doing that thing,
playing alchemist as it infuses all it touches with
gold

wishes on the falling leaves
like eyelashes, or stars,
knowing they won't grant anything but
just wanting to pretend
it could be that easy

imagines what would happen
if there was someone in the passenger seat to
make confessions to
as the car meanders through town



Shadow Partner

Landon Carter

Layerings

Dylan Holmes

I.

We watched in secret once, you and I,
As the dancer turned through many veils.
With each revelation, the light became strange,
Each face different from the ones beneath.

Down the same street this morning,
The world loses its dust---
A painter once kept a photograph for years,
Adding bright new things with careful brushstrokes
In patient daily worship.

And we held each other in a small cold room
As an MRI strobed through pictures,
Ablating colorless layers of flesh and pith,
Strange white shapes that darted through ink.

II.

The world paints over absences,
This day different from the ones beneath.
It is a careful art with a veneer of sameness---
Old streets that lead you to strange places,
Old smiles gone, for which new ones must be fashioned.

And so life scintillates like a rolling, faceted foam,
Technicolor membranes joining today
To a crowd of countless other possibilities.
Among such bright colors, I sometimes dare to imagine
The believer adding a few careful brushstrokes,
A morning caught in glass; I would find you awakening---

III.

It is easy to believe that the air stands still
In these rainbowed interiors, the cupfuls of peace
That hold silent and close to us, and breathe gently
And breathe, suspended like soap bubbles,

But by and by, certainties become sediment,
Foam-flecked outcrops of familiarity
Becoming strange with the river's turning.

This, then, is the world's ablution:
That when beloved pieces of this life
Should tumble into the foam,
We find new pieces in the layered silt of the riverbed,
Drowsing deep in worlds that might become,

That despite the safety of fiction,
We dare to imagine pulling the lifeline
Bringing them,
 inch by inch, breath by breath,
Onto the shores of this place where we might ruin them.



Water Lilies

Effie Jia

Prescription

Dylan Holmes

Take two by mouth with food:
Candlelight, music, maybe a movie afterward—
And take one more as needed,
throughout the evening.

(Side effects include
dry mouth, clamminess, euphoria,
difficulty concentrating, and flowers.)

You may take also before bedtime:
Placed beneath the tongue,
It diffuses rapidly into the warm blood;
Or if it's applied everywhere to the skin,
You may experience increasing heart rate,
A mydriatic effect in the eye,
And a serious risk of addiction.



