

RUNE 40

MIT ART AND LITERARY MAGAZINE



RUNE 40

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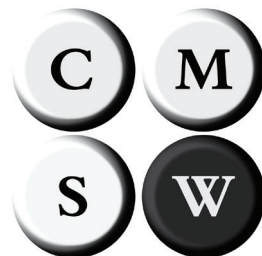
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by natasha hirt



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PLAYING SHAYMIN

by allan gelman

BLACK WIDOWS

by sydney cinalli

lies
delicately spun
as truths

what a
a grimy
web she weaved

TREMORS

by sydney cinalli

eyes fixed on the door
her heart paced against
the roar of the train
anticipating the shudder
in her chest

WHITE PICKET FENCE

by sydney cinalli

we built a home here
warm and aromatic
reeking of stability

something trivial
lurked in the shadows
awakening her caution



CLEAR SKIES

by kristin sheridan



LIFE

by samantha cheung



THE JAPANESE HOUSE

by effie jia

CONSISTENCY

by lindsey mcallister

Who has ever faulted a tree
For discarding her leaves
In an unbecoming fit
Of temporal inconsistency?

Or disparaged the vacillating sea
For resolute tides that heave,
Lust for the shore,
Then retreat in violent uncertainty?

Do you not recognize sky for sky
When a storm arrives
And tears cloud her celestial eyes?

Or forgive the clouds on high
For shapes that connive
To stymie the petty passers-by?

Yet as man seeks to overcome nature
In a show of rational conformity
I will deny mine

MY MOTHER'S OFFICE

by sophia diggs-galligan

There is a triptych hidden in the mundane,

your old photographs

of Haitian girls in t-shirts advertising American toothpaste companies,
American summer camps for tennis, American universities, American jazz
festivals,
American joy, American fluorescence. Of goats chewing at the corner of my
father's
shirttails, as he stands sweaty, looking young and hopeful and devoutish, of
your
Flowy sarongs and science lessons, of the muffins you made when the
electricity came on,
Of you, washing clothes, all pinkish with what the sun gave you, pink on
white.

your new post its

Where you enumerate hopes and dreams and good habits and bad habits,
how you want to let the aquifers flow and flow and flow, and you invent your
own invention.
where you look out at the crêpe myrtle as it sheds its mess, where you sit,
Head in hand and hand, refreshing WTOP, filing taxes, looking at me
with those maternal eyes in the back of your head.

Your hardback books,

Analytical chemistry which I could hardly understand, calculus books which
I used
To stare at, as if the were everything but consumed, anatomy texts cast aside
after I've

glanced over the nervous system, your newton's cradle, your egg cartons, your
Erlenmeyer flasks, and your \$50 telescope, so you could take us out to watch
the lunar eclipse and
Pour watery hot cocoa into paper cups for us as we shivered on the slate.

You are so complicated, more complicated than I am,
maybe more complicated than I will be at 56. I see your life
In thirds, and all I can say is

I love you, I love you, I love you.

SHE LIES THROUGH HER TEETH

by jocelyn shen

Every parent has a pet peeve. My mother's is dishonesty. In her house, even the little white lies never went unnoticed. Sometimes she would pounce and catch me in the midst of telling a grandiose fabrication. But other times, she would catch a lie on her tongue, roll it around in her mouth, and chew on it for a few days before spitting it back in a heated argument years later. The woman was a lioness. She preyed on the truth and tore apart lies with just a single whiff of suspicion.

I remember that one night when I was eight years old, and I snuck into our kitchen in search of something that might silence my grumbling stomach. We lived in a large condo at the time, cold brick and castle-like, my parents on the third floor, and my brother and I on the first. The kitchen rested on the second floor, nestled conveniently between us so I could sneak out for snacks if I so happened to stay up past my bedtime, most likely engrossed in a fairy tale collection. My mother always said Chinese girls shouldn't read fairy tales. She said they could poison the mind with whimsical happily-ever-afters.

Still, I know she used to read them too.

My mother never kept much food in the cupboards. The one thing kept in surplus was fruit because it's the only sweet food she likes and because it was the easiest thing to find in Los Angeles. She'd often substitute our dessert for a platter of peeled and cored fruit, not that I really minded. That night, I found an apple. Fuji, of course, from the local Chinese supermarket. I devoured the fruit quickly, juice dribbling down my chin, then I tossed the core on the jade-green countertop and wiped my hands on my father's bamboo placemats, which he often used to mold rice.

In the morning, I woke up to the sound of angry shouting in Mandarin. My brother and I crawled out of bed to find my mother, red-faced in the kitchen,

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

by hannah liu

hovering over a browned, rotting apple core. She demanded to know who had left the fruit undisposed, and I quickly pointed at my little brother.

Perhaps she detected a hint of the lie in my eyes, or my voice, or whatever sorcery it is that mothers possess. Regardless of the clue, she proceeded to investigate, pulling my lips apart and fitting the oxidized apple core to my teeth. I remember feeling the cold flesh of the fruit against my young teeth and tasting the bitterness of the rotting flesh. But my protests were quickly muffled because the core fit like Cinderella's glass slipper — a perfect match — only this time, I was no princess.

I was a liar.

In that moment, my mother spoke to me plainly, her voice so devastatingly calm that it would've frightened any eight-year-old girl, "In China, good daughters never lie to their family."

Being young and naive, I thought that would be the last time I ever lied to my mother. But as I got older, it happened again and again, with a seemingly exponential increase in frequency.

I lied often when I told her I was going to sleep, and sometimes she would catch a quick glimpse of me online and reprimand me. I lied about my grades and my feedback from instructors. I lied about my habits, what I ate for lunch, or if I ate at all. There were the big lies, and the little. The imaginary friends, and the very real boyfriends. All of this, she was able to eventually unveil. And with every lie, I felt a piece of lead enter its way into my heart, settle on the squelching valves, and weigh me down in cold, heavy guilt.

Why the petty lies? I never really knew. It was an automated, sequential response really, always beginning with my breath getting shallow and my eyelids starting to flutter. Then the lie would spill out of my mouth like poison. Maybe I lied because I was afraid. I was afraid of not being the perfect daughter. I was afraid of shattering the glass slipper. And so I lied because every lie rouged my cheeks with painted perfection, and I thought, just maybe, that she wouldn't see through it. I don't know. It doesn't make

any sense. Lying about who left an apple core on a countertop makes no sense either.

But there is one lie that does.

I'm alright, Mom.

MISCARRIAGE

by sophia diggs-galligan

She knelt there, occasionally unpestered, thumbing
 Over a wooden rosary, or,
 More likely, the anklet she had made herself-
 Painted ceramic cubes on a ball-bearing chain, wrapped
 Thrice around her bird bones-
 She would kneel and then unclasp it- I saw
 My name, spelled out in capitals, Sophia Emmanuelle,
 I saw my fathers, then three
 Foreign names, spoken with strange ease
 At their ghost birthdays, when they
 Turned ghost ages I couldn't keep track of.
 Ti Pois, Oliva, Baby Vic. Three bundles of ghost joy,

Three bundles of blood, cool and silent.
 I see you- now counting the letters V I C
 I see your earnest profile, lighting votives,
 Praying first to God & then to whoever else
 You can name.
 I find your cement-block bookshelves & wooden
 Desk, heavy reminders of Haiti or of that
 first passing. I find books with titles like
 "Empty cradle- broken heart." I feel inadequate,
 Then disgusted, upon

Remembering that night in 2004 when we bought a
 Gold balloon & went to Dewey Beach to
 release it over the ocean, sea
 Turtles aside,
 And when we got to the motel, it pressed
 Itself nearer & nearer to that light, nuzzling the bulb,
 And I couldn't get it down & you

PYSCHDELIC PRISM

by jenny zhang

Couldn't get it down & Dad was getting
Ice and it stayed illuminated and then Baby Vic
Popped- into strips of gold latex on linoleum. I
think the death of that balloon was the first I really bawled
Myself to sleep for.



WARM EMBRACE

by hannah liu

MY ANGEL FLIES

by jasmin kern

5:10pm

Her feet dangling through the air,
She flies miles above solid ground,
Angelic in her new white summer dress,
She watches her angel soothingly,
knowing the fall could only ever be
A few inches into the sand.

5:20pm

She opens her mouth and is suffocated
By the chimes and bells in her throat
Laughter spreads and blankets over the abyss,
Eyes closed she lets it ring through her body
Until her angel comes flying into her arms
Molded into one another in bliss.

5:30pm

“Ready or not, here I come”
Crouched behind the barrel she chuckles
At the pit-pattering of her angel’s feet:
Closer and closer they edge, right around the bend--
She is greeted with giggles and exhilaration,
The light of her life so bright it blinds her.

5:40pm

“3...4...5...”
Her tiny arms flail in anxiety as she rushes away
Her chubby legs carrying her as fast as they can go,
She runs from her, to hide better than ever before.
“6...7...8”
The ill-fated ring of her phone ends all fun and games.

5:41pm

Shadows engulf her chubby legs and
She is thrown miles above solid ground.
She opens her mouth and is suffocated
By the streaks of black entering her lungs.
The ominous thumps of his feet begin
Farther and farther they retreat, right around the bend--

5:42pm

“Ready or not here I come”
She tip toes along, muffling her giggles
She turns the corner with anticipation--
And the light in her eyes fades at sight of nothing.
She continues on, tip-toeing,
Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing

5:44pm

She runs rapidly beckoning her angel
Her heartbeat roars through her body
Her throat stuffed with the white summer dress
Every image of her angel on replay as her sight
Begins to fade, aimlessly and blind she stumbles
Arms reaching towards nothing, she screams.

7:00pm

Red and blue lights flash in and out of vision
Yellow tape wrapped around her angel’s bed
The chimes and bells of her laughter echo endlessly
She flies overhead releasing this euphoric sound
“Ma’am what color dress was she wearing?”
“White.”



DISCARDED

by lindsey mcallister

Contorted into an effortless beauty
 Petals curve to grace
 Perched atop a slender stem
 Venus beckons an embrace

In the false spring of her blooming
 Bright colors aced the test
 Leaves fondled; worth evaluated
 Rescued from a merciful death

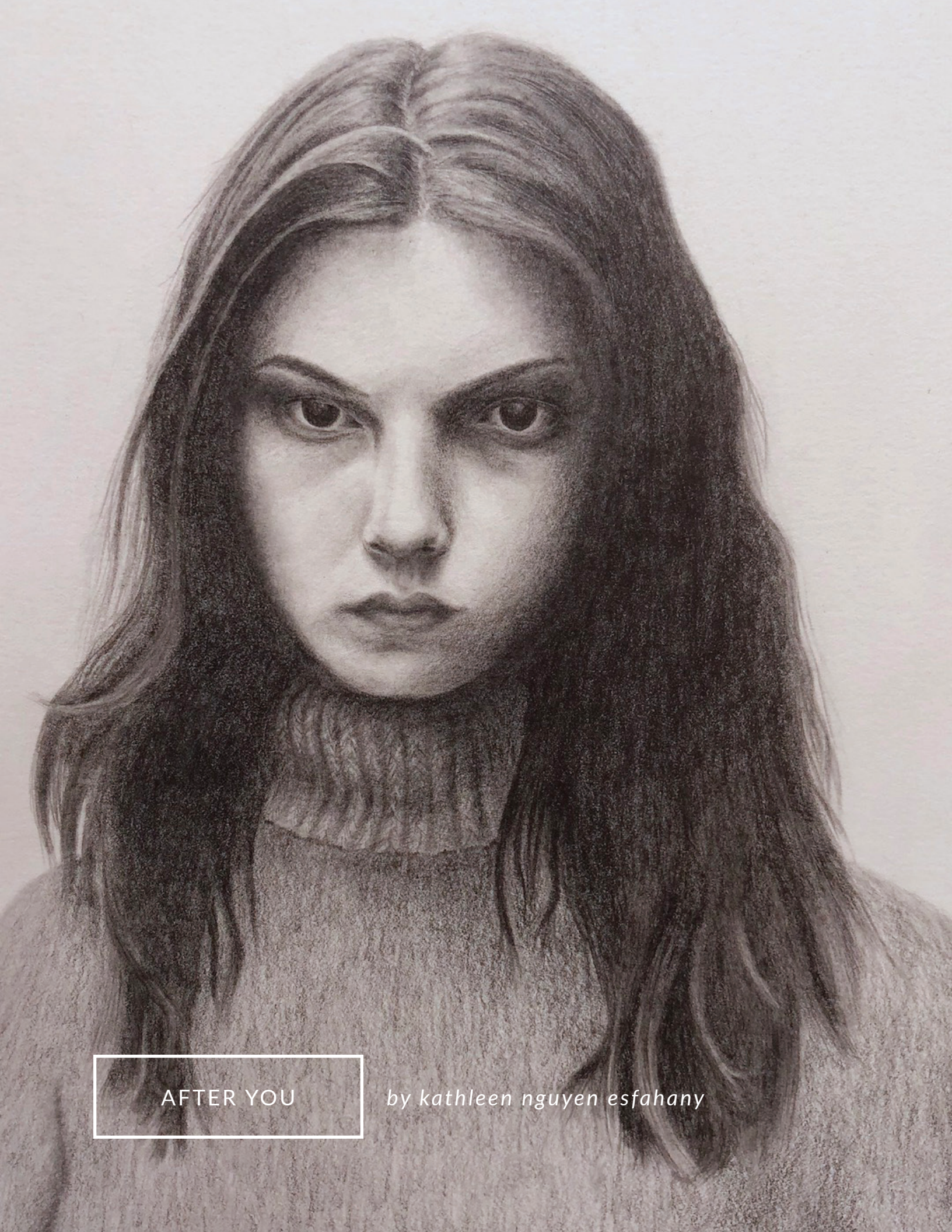
On the mahogany expanse she rests
 In a narrow ceramic prison
 Stewing in an infinite emptiness
 As a hollow shell she isn't

A transient grasp on the spotlight
 Doomed by the trace of a wilt
 Cannot recompense bygone appeal
 Nor erase her dutiful guilt

Suddenly among unworthy compatriots
 The drooping flower's echo
 Is smothered by dinner's sad remnants
 In an end foreseen long ago

LITTLE ARCHITECT

by natasha hirt



AFTER YOU

by kathleen nguyen esfahany

STARVATION

by nailah smith

I can't eat that bread,
because his hands are dirty
and he looks at me like
like he is God. I feel his eyes
on my body, hollow and empty,
like a vacuum, trying to swallow
what was left of me,
what was left of me?
Bones, I think,
and skin.
Blood, but I hardly noticed that
anymore.
Not my God, something whispered,
but it wasn't my voice
because mine was gone, gone
with the body I no longer had
because I had finally caved in
and there was nothing left of me.

Not my God.
Not my bread.



DENALI

by effie jia

AN ISLAND TOOK A NAP AND DREAMED

by emily soice

Don't give me all your kissing treaties
Don't pry my heart open.
Maybe I was better off
Sipping waters from my dreams.
Now virgin shores are all explored
Looted, torn and left to burn.

This land left an isolate isle again.

For a time I thought my soil had healed.
Then I saw rain for seven days.
My eyes are leaking again
And the ground proves still unsteady.
Floods return in an instant
At a whisper of Celtic ballads in the wind.

I have layers, sediments.
The undergrounds bump unevenly, uncomfortably
Uncovered in areas of sunken swamps and ponds
Sometimes discovered, but mostly revealed
To strangers who are not kin
To kin who should not find them.

Do I dare be found again?
Do I want to be conquered?
Laid claim to, or too much my own?
Shall I remain alone?
Perhaps, it would be better
To sink quietly beneath these waters.

Goodnight.



PABST BLUE RIBBON ON ICE

by jenny zhang

VILLANELLE FOR MARCH 24

by kristy carpenter

My throat has been tight for a week,
my judgment severely impaired.
When I see him, I find I can't speak.

Though his stubble is rough on my cheek,
there aren't any tears to be spared –
my throat has been tight for a week.

He gets wilder; my motions are weak.
He asks me if I'm unprepared.
When I see him, I find I can't speak.

When he chokes me, there's little technique –
he squeezes, no warning. I'm scared.
My throat has been tight for a week.

Now he's finished. He kisses my cheek
to acknowledge the act we just shared.
When I see him, I find I can't speak.

I'm numb as I walk down the street.
I don't know when I'll be repaired.
My throat has been tight for a week.
When I see him, I find I can't speak.



UNRESOLVED

by nailah smith

The hardest thing I ever did
Was walk away from you
While you were in pain.
You thought I was God
And you were broken,
And, frankly, maybe you were
But it has never been my job
To absolve a man.

MULHOLLAND

by jocelyn shen

SOMETHING LONG DEAD

by maggie zheng

she has been walking for what seems like eternity
when she sees the light in the window
it's something warm and inviting
and she's something cold and lost
so her bare feet carry her up the worn steps
and to the cherry red door

the man is something gruff and rough
with worn calluses on his gnarled hands
but the crow's feet by his eyes
tell her that he is something like the light in the window
he lets her in and makes her hot cocoa
something that scalds her tongue and burns behind her eyes

he has a wall of books
old and crumbling and musty with age
stacked up to the dust grey ceiling
and scattered across the pockmarked floor
she picks up one from a chair
and runs her fingers across its cracked face

"i don't read much, not anymore"
he taps under his clouded right eye
and squints at her blurry form
"can i read to you?"
"sure"
he sits in the chair and closes tired eyes

she sits, criss-cross applesauce, on the floor
and reads out loud
until her voice is hoarse

and the man's chest has stuttered and stopped
then she touches his cold hand
and turns off the warm lamp

when she leaves
she pauses by the mantelpiece
where a dead wife
and three children who never visit
stare out from beneath pristine glass
and she is still for only a heartbeat

she finds the girl sitting on the sidewalk
idly watching smoke drift from her own lips
as cold stubs roll about her ragged Chucks
she thinks the girl is something like stone
flinty and unyielding and sharp when thrown
all jagged edges and harsh eyes

but the girl taps out a stick
and lights it with a flourish
something like a challenge in her smirk
so they sit there and trade secondhand smoke
sipping from the warm flask by her hip
until the light of day becomes brighter than the street lamps

the girl leaves with a "see ya"
and heads for a house that was never a home
where her father yells and throws glass bottles
like something wild and beastly
and her mother finally has had enough
and kills him and her and herself

she is standing outside to hear the gunshots
and she lights the last cig
that had been pressed into her grimy hand
along with the plastic lighter
she inhales the death and the burn

and thinks of maybe buying flowers
she is the only one who stops by the grave
and she wants to stand there for an eternity
just rotting and decaying until she's gone
but she just drops a new pack of sticks
and the beat-up lighter
and does not think about sharing death like best friends by the side of the
road

the little boy is playing by himself
making sand castles and moats and stick knights
she leaves wet footprints as she walks up
the ocean tugging at her heels
“do you want to play?”
she nods because she is something cold and lonely

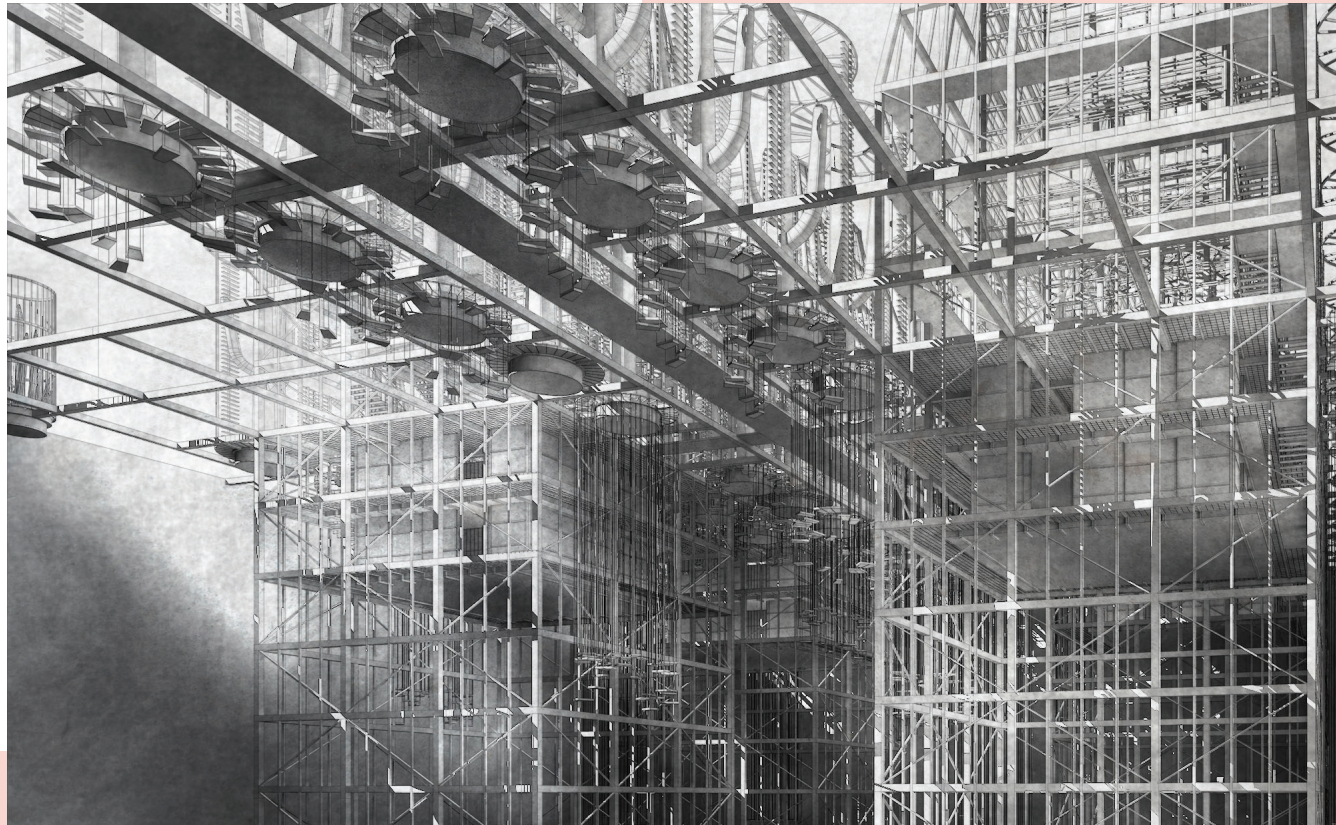
they make the castle into a fortress
as if they could hide away from the world inside
and the boy puts each cracked shell
solemnly along the walls
as if it could shield them from the inevitable
and they walk away when the tide rises to destroy their home

and he is something like the sun
bright and laughing and too good for her
so when he waves his little hands goodbye
she can't help but smile back
at the dimples and freckles and baby fat
even when she wants to throw up

the boy goes home
and his mother does not care or notice
but she takes him to the store when she wants to buy booze
and forgets him in the car
too busy flirting with a cashier
to remember the baggage of a fling long gone

this time she can't bear to watch
so she stands by the sea
and thinks that maybe she should wash away too
because she is lost and cold and forgotten
too lonely to stay away from a taste of chocolate and smoke and salt
and something long dead

she turns and walks on



TEST BED

by carolyn tam

BROTHER, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

by nailah smith

Brother?

Is your body buried there?
If I were to drink
All the water in the ocean
Until it overflowed into my lungs
And drowned me,
Would my corpse then lie
With yours?

Brother, is it cold down there?
It is hundreds of years later
But we as a people
Still have not uncovered
The secrets of the ocean,
Nor the story
Of the breaths
You never took.

Brother, did you die down there?
Did you die with the weight of the sea
Crushing your bones,
Crushing your soul,
Or did you die on the bow of a ship?
Did you die in its chest,
Deep inside it,
Where you were stacked upon bodies
Beneath bodies,
Beside bodies...
Did you die from the weight
Of our cousins?

Brother, did you die in the womb?
In the womb, in the womb,
In the womb of a ship?
Of our Earth?
Of our mother,
Who was beaten before she could birth you?
Who was starved despite you
Being inside her?

Bodies upon bodies beneath bodies inside bodies.

Or maybe it was her.
Maybe it was her who killed you,
Her who tossed you back into
The roaring womb of the ocean
Right as you had just left hers,
Because she thought drowning
Was better
Than all the pains
You would feel
When your ship landed.

Brother, did the chains ever fall off?
I'm sure you went down with them,
But was your body ever freed?
Your body, your body,
The body no one but you
Ever should have owned?
Were you ever freed
From the claim
On your soul?

Brother?

My voice drowns before it is ever heard,
But I want you to know
That I do cry for you.



WEB OF STARS

by *natasha hirt*



SELF-PORTRAIT

by emily levenson

3 SHELVES

by victor reyes espinoza

Chicano/
Chicana/
Mestizo/
Latinx/
studies.

Deep in a concrete jungle,
their young spines,
in parallel,
rest upon each other.

Within each one,
a revolutionist,
a poet,
a scholar,
a warrior,
a statistic.

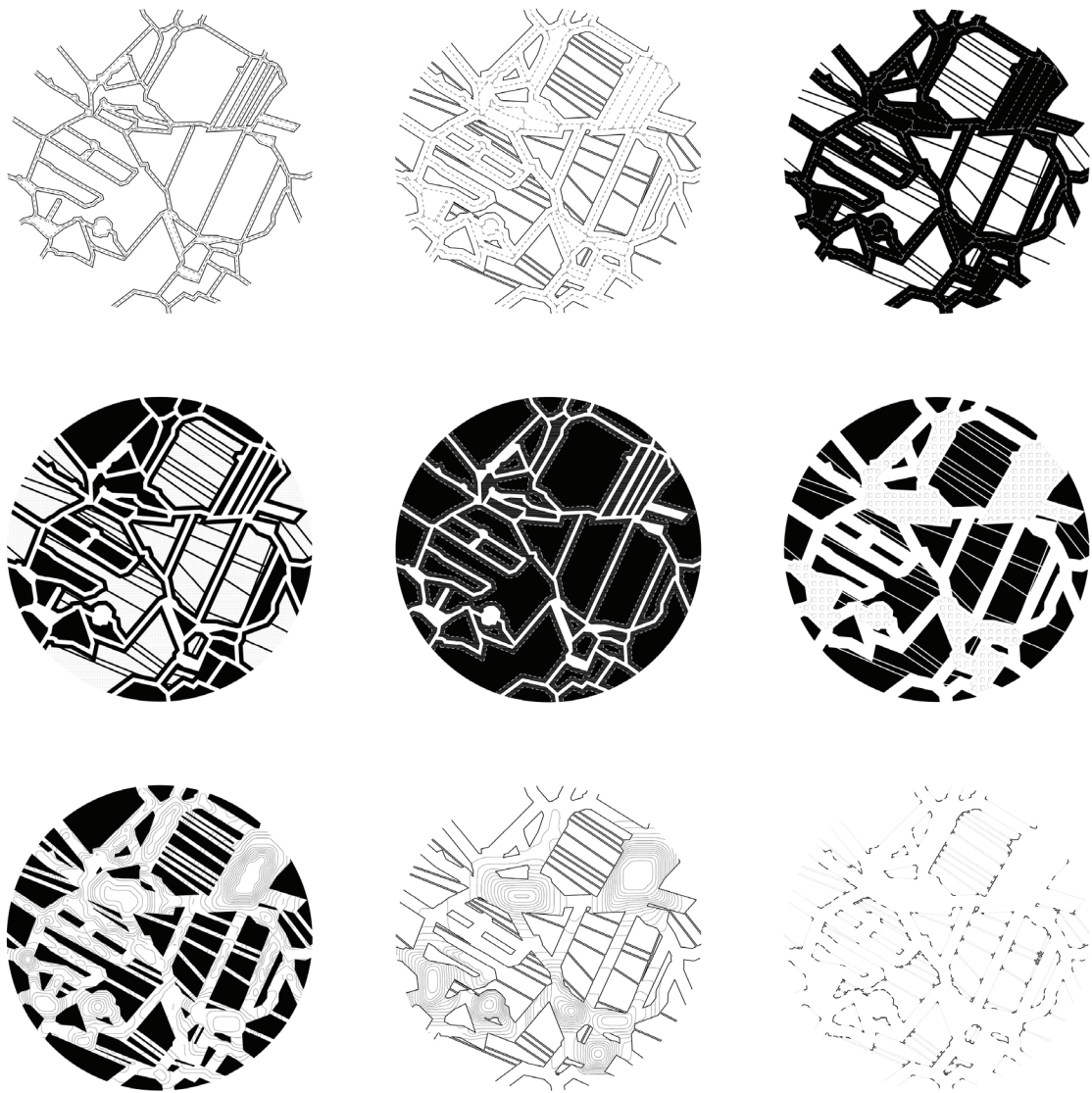
Surrounded,
outnumbered,
by their victim-in-arms.

The modern day Aztecs,
Mayans,
Olmec,
Inca.

Their land reduced
to 3 shelves.

TIME TO NOTICE ME

by jasmin kern



CELLULAR HIERARCHIES

by effie jia

eyes dart viciously across the board, pencils
tenaciously rush across pages, scrambling
to inherit every imperative cipher--
I stare down at my blank page. How has it become so?
when did the wind guide me amiss, lost in---

my gaze locks on Yours; murmurs and
lessons fade into the din, I'm struck.
You, who sit majestically above all else:
inconspicuous at first, yet noble and precise.
vulnerable to Your power, my stolen glances surge:
release me from my hell!

Your stare on the back of my head,
knowing Your presence-- I blush.
my mind warps into a tangled mess of Your features
how You dictate my vocation, my avocation, and
oh, Your ability to set free my dreams.

but Your hands move slow and steady,
never do they waver, how I wish they would.
tic toc tic toc tic toc
Your heartbeat rhythm: monochrome. robotic.
why will Your beat not swell to my affection?
do You See me not? do You love me not?

my heart drowns as I let the barriers fall
and the neglected waves rush back in:
gauss...dimensions...principles...vectors...
so I will wait for Your notice of me
tic toc tic toc tic toc

one final glance, I cannot resist.

Your endless indifference fades as you strike;
You surrender to my wish; reward my patience:
Our time arrives. Till death do us part, my love
11.00am.

MOCHA

by hannah liu



THE CLEAR PATH

by kristin sheridan

POET FLUNKY

by margaret libby

I'd tell you about the smoldering disk creeping over the horizon.
But I slept in today.
And even if I hadn't, come on. No one describes a sunrise like that.

I'd describe the sunset.
The golden hour.
The dust of the day red with leftover light.
But you've seen sunsets.

I'd sketch midnight.
The glittering starscape quiet all for me.
But I live in a city
And it was cloudy last night, anyway.

Come back tomorrow. I'll think of something.



LIAM

by danny gelman

THE BACHELORS

by sharlene chiu

Week 10: Season Finale

I love you, Mergatroid.

Ten weeks. His fingertips grew white clutching the inked parchment now blotted with tears. In his head rolled a replay, a bitter showcase of every missed opportunity, the way they accumulated, fed off one another, carving away at his one chance to turn it all around. If only he'd spoken up the first day they'd met. Back when it wasn't too late to discover how easily they shared their worst dating mistakes. How they had both never seen the Pacific but planned to fix that next summer. How their bursts of laughter harmonized in the most perfect of ways.

Why only now, after their time had ended, could he at last recite over a thousand reasons to pick him over that other bastard?

At his feet lay a rose snapped in half. Anguish cut off his air. Caught in his throat, regret and unconfessed flames.

He should've left long ago. From the moment he stepped inside the house and captured nobody's attention. Out that rose-hued door with middle fingers jabbing the sky. After weeks had passed without receiving a single rose. Forcing the production staff to recover from his unannounced exit. But in all honesty, despite subtler signs, there was no excusing Week Eight.

...

Clock hands tutted. It was well past curfew. Still, considering his nerves, jittery beyond salvation, and the rhythmic ticking amplified at this hour, who could blame him?

He needed to move. Lying in bed made him a sink for self-criticism and worst-case scenarios, churned from his treacherous imagination. It left him vulnerable. At the nonexistent mercy of his own self-esteem. And when hazy scenes of rejection, mockery, and being forever alone supplanted his normally dreamless nights, there wasn't much to look forward to in sleep.

He needed to move.

In the halls shined a sliver of light peeking out beneath shut doors. Palms slammed table, reverberating.

"Damn it, Tom!" came a muffled cry. "Your ideas are absolute shit. Barging in every four seasons makes you the least qualified to run this show."

A chipper tone replied, "Then tell me why our ratings spike each time I do."

Slow whines followed, the creak of a chair leaning unapologetically back. His ears strained to pick up several low whistles, as well as incoherent grumbling about the madness of finding everyone a husband. Should've stuck to one guy fishing from a harem.

"According to our calculations," the staccato of papers reshuffling against oak, "there's a 6.042% chance that the final matching will be stable."

Loud groans and frustration clamored inside the room. Mergatroid stepped forward and tuned more closely in.

Another table smack. "We're down to our last weeks, our last unmarried contestants," raged a new voice. "The couples we have so far are happy. Viewers will kill us if we break anyone up."

Wood scraped against wood, and the terse taps of chalk on blackboard turned shortly after.

"Let's recap. Right now, Alex wants Bobby Joe. But Bobby Joe only sees Robin. And, fuck, Robin's gunning for Alex."

One individual, the first speaker, tossed a surly question into the mix. "And

Mergatroid?"

Silence.

Then, snickers.

Tripping into chuckles.

Boiling into mirth.

Each callous contribution a cut to his confidence. There wasn't much left either way. His mind told him to run, his gut said to scream, but his body defaulted to what it did best.

"Not making a single move," howled the production staff. "And he expects one of these guys to fall for him?"

He just

"No matter how we spin it, someone's gonna go rogue."

He just wanted

"We'll pick someone random to send him a note."

He just wanted to be

"And nobody likes Mergatroid. He's their least favorite pick, so his preferences don't really matter."

Happy.

...

He should've confronted them when they cemented his demise. But it'd been 3am, and he was done. The next morning, he'd convinced himself it was all a dream. God, if only it had been.



CAPITAL CITY

by alex boccon-gibod

AN ALIEN ABROAD

by margaret libby

Dear Mom,

My year abroad is off to a good start. It's a bit chilly, but I'm told that's normal for this time of year. People here only have one sun, so they don't have alternating heat current the way we do. I think being among people who lack the sort of privilege I've become accustomed to is really going to be good for my personal growth.

The capsule ride here went safely. I found myself rehydrated pretty quickly, but I think some particulate matter found its way into my physiology. Well, you did tell me travel would change me forever!

The host university is an interesting place. They have strong feelings about architectural consistency, in that it should be avoided at all costs. The students appear to feel similarly about the outdoors. I remembered what we learned in orientation about the importance of communication with the locals and asked someone how I could best fit in when I venture into the city. He suggested I support red socks. I wear those exclusively now--I think I'm really starting to blend in!

You told me I should take this opportunity to absorb some new cultural values. I've definitely taken your words to heart. My new friends display insobriety, overcommitment, and masochism in truly remarkable quantities, and I'm striving to emulate them.

Missing you and Dad. Please send money and candy when you can.

Love,
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