



RAINY DAY

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VOLUME XLVIII, No. 1 / Spring 2018

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Dear *Rainy Day*-er,

At first glance, this issue of *Rainy Day* looks like any of the dozens that have preceded it. Our mission has not changed: We seek and publish a collection of the finest poetry and fiction from undergraduates across the country. These authors hail from all over the country and beyond, and their voices, while diverse and compelling, work in unison to produce a testament to the importance of art.

The world is not the same place that it was when we began work on this issue, some five months ago. The writing on these pages reflects, in many ways, the gnawing anxiety and unbearable hope felt by many as our society tramples forward, demanding that we acknowledge the newfound urgency of the question, “What is a person?” From the drawing room of a South African hotel to the windswept heights of the Aragats Valley, these authors and their stories have begun to address our changing world with the compassion it deserves.

Behind the scenes, our staff has grown nearly twofold since our last issue. Every single name on the back cover of this magazine has played an invaluable role in the coming-together of this truly gigantic effort, from their input at weekly meetings to their diligence in making sure that every em dash and semicolon stood up to scrutiny. The *Rainy Day* staff, all Cornell undergraduates with their own busy lives, deserve all of the thanks in the world.

I hope that you, too, can sense some of the changes that have taken place within *Rainy Day*. Thank you for making our contribution to the new generation of American literature possible, and thank you for reading, reminding us that while change is inevitable, the least we can do is try to make it for the better.

Best wishes, and happy reading,

Katherine Xie
Editor-in-Chief
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RAINY DAY

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Volume XLVIII, Issue No. 1

Spring 2018

Letter from the Editor 1

Poetry

SARAH SIEGEL '18 (*Stanford University*)

Meditate.....4

Countdown.....5

Marc Chagall, 1952.....6

JACOB HAWKES '20 (*Cornell University*)

dreamsong: prior.....9

DAN MCFALLS '18 (*Stanford University*)

Overture.....14

A Polite Exchange.....15-16

PAULINE PECHAKJIAN '17 (*UCLA*)

My Motherland, My Mother's Land.....17-18

ANA CARPENTER '20 (*Cornell University*)

Reborn Aviation.....30

Fiction

SYLVIA CLAIRE ONORATO '19 (<i>Cornell University</i>)	
<i>Resolution</i>	7-8
ALEXANDER SCHAEF '20 (<i>Cornell University</i>)	
<i>Member Zero</i>	10-13
OLIVIA BONO '20 (<i>Cornell University</i>)	
<i>The Tale of the Eternal Woman</i>	19-22
MOLLY KARR '18 (<i>Cornell University</i>)	
<i>This is a Story About Softness</i>	23-25
SONYA CHYU '19 (<i>Cornell University</i>)	
<i>Sartorial Shedding</i>	26-29

MEDITATE

Sarah Siegel

—hotel, Johannesburg

Withered grapes have seeds here.
 More flavor, more effort: I grind the pips between my teeth,
 Unbothered. Ovid in shape and flavor.
 I eat another.
 Maybe a vine will grow, fertile bearer of green
 Then mottled red to deepest purple only to wither again.

Real un-real sur-real the porcelain kittens
 Painted garish mint-mojito
 They show their teeth. How does it feel? To un-live
 Sedentarily perched on blonde wood bookshelves?
 Everything the light touches is your kingdom.
 The only things in this place more assertive are the plants: they're living.

Strelitzia burst in plumes of orange and purple
 The perverse Mohawks, flamboyant birds stalked and watered in honeycomb glass vases.
 Polished chrome table tops, more blonde wood,
 Infinity-count cotton linens.
 A minor-key tangs through stereo, piercing
 Eager ears. That strange reminder of the invalidity of curated luxuries.

COUNTDOWN

Sarah Siegel

High Noon swept superior that day,
redolent and matronly. Grandmother,
you died at seventy-something, but
I don't think I'll make it past thirty.

Rosemary for Remembrance, how
we laughed at the dirt-eaters.
Pewter and Peat, you and I, nibbled carrots
in grass plastered to toffee thighs.

Dorothy may not have worn blue suede shoes;
you did though, added a men's top hat,
gnarled garden gloves, with
hands and knees scabbed over.

I pick my own scabs now until blood
trails thin streams over ruined life lines;
we stood in the park together
that day, and now I am twenty.

MARC CHAGALL, 1952

Sarah Siegel

The rogue-bull coos a gypsy's song
in a beaded skirt while a crush
of onlookers cheer to dance
in naked ecstasy. Fingers graze
upon taut stomachs and pearly flesh.

Shamelessness goes unnoticed here
where purple cocks roost
with side-show hosts behind flimsy cotton,
translucent and divine.
The crowds have come for jest.

A lady, a fist of roses, green
and supple, is in love. A fish-bowl
kind of tortured love, tent-trapped
and unrequited. She reaches out
in any case. The song sings on.

Chaos distracts from the choking truth
of mustard-yellow breath in a gaping mouth
as winged acrobats flit then flop,
a missed catch that ends bloody
on the tap-dance floor of the circus.

RESOLUTION

Sylvia Claire Onorato

Bruised by a tombstone, Flavia waits for a resolution to her story outside the Umbilicus Urbis. She has come to this place, a part of the Forum that the Romans referred to in Latin as the, “navel of the city,” to write about an experience she had in a cemetery too far away for her to return on foot. Here, the Romans believed, a modest brick structure hides an entrance to the underworld.

An unfathomably deep crevice inside the structure connects the subterranean realm of spirits to the center of an infant city—a city some mistakenly describe as eternal. In the presence of felled marble columns, lying in rough cylindrical segments like dry firewood, she understands how easily people confuse the fuel with refuse. The same rubble that once kindled centuries of history sloughs to the earth like dead skin cells, offering no more protection to the living than a fine layer of vernix.

Below her two eternities loiter: the souls of those who have lived and the souls of those who have yet to live. She closed her eyes. A recent event had taught her just how fluid the boundaries can be. Flavia compels herself to recall what happened in the cemetery.

She takes out her notebook.

Near Shelley's grave a woman tripped on the stairs.

No, she thought, it had not happened that quickly. And the word, “woman,” so impersonal, did not express her intimacy with this stranger. Flavia could describe her. She could confess the image that will not leave her mind of a thin lady with dark hair; belladonna eyes; white jeans stained permanently with dust from the cemetery; a white and navy striped shirt; a single, magenta, Murano glass bead around her neck—but would any irreverence lurk in the urge to stop and describe her like a window mannequin? And this lady did not simply trip on the stairs. She slipped on the gravel that spilled onto the wooden retainer planks that created a series of terrace steps, landing on a stone with a sickening thud.

Flavia convinces herself to keep writing, if only to wrestle a sketch onto the page.

I ran to her. A British lady asked her what hurt, and she said her back and wrist. I called an ambulance for her.

This sounds like a police report. She should show more emotion, especially because she felt so much... is she frightening herself by recording this? No, not near the Umbilicus Urbis. Here, nothing is as simple as fear. Instead, writing down the incident so soon after it happens is like snapping a photo of a church immediately after entering it, knowing she will never work her way upstream through

the crowd back to the same angle. Memories swallowed too fast to taste beg to be saved, she tells herself. So she grabs memory as if it were a pole on the 64 bus, so tightly her hand sweats and her fingernails turn white on the pencil.

The translator kept asking for a street name. Landmarks would not work. She needed an answer I could not give. She asked for an Italian speaker. I ran to get one. Tripped over a gravestone on my way.

Only the worlds below her know what she leaves unwritten. The fury masked by her calm tone when the translator kept asking inane questions rather than tracking her phone, getting her location up on a map. The bruise from the gravestone that persisted for a month, and, from the look of its brazen violet, may not ever give up residence inside her.

That reminds her. The woman injured the ground as much as the ground injured the woman. With her fall, she pierced the earth. The gash connected the world of spirits to the world of the living, and out of the world of spirits rose the gravestone that tripped Flavia. When the woman heals, the ground will heal. Until then, the city will have two navels.

Perhaps it has even more navels, perhaps it has a million. Flavia does not know. She only found two. Glancing away from the one in front of her, she looks at dead skin cells magnified into an ashen mess, some of the few memories preserved more poorly than her own.

By the time I got there, someone else had already called EMS, in Italian. Help was coming. I was no longer needed.

Her story finished, Flavia snaps her notebook shut, defiantly breaking the silence of the nascent wreckage. Here is an ending, not a resolution.

DREAMSONG: PRIOR

Jacob Hawkes

In the beginning, the world was a strum . . . click
Slip towards one phrase.

An image starts: scattered shellwrack in the maw of time
—an algorithm sorts them, hovers over—
Sifting scans, stops—click.
Exhales “pretty.”
This beach is the serrated edge
of what forces have shaped you.
And these mollusc-remnants—exoskeletal pearls—its teeth.
No matter they seem dull to the touch, smooth nacre—
Their edges sear your memory.

Meanwhile the trees loosen their grip on the land and it slips out under the shorebreak
where it will sediment,
Corrode the arteries of dawn.

Already the world is a vast mobilized system where
Transcription-factors huddle out by rocks, to shelter from the wind.
Spurting a sheaf of paper in response to being touched.
Their attentions turned out from the coast,
towards far-off borders.
“Middle East.”

Meanwhile somewhere out in the gullet of unending night—the sea—
Similar barnacles cling to the insides
of a torpedo
Vibrating sympathetically.
An artificial breath bathes their lungs in stale immortality.
Your origin, advocate and protector, stands among them, another paper flutter, medic
Amidst paranoia, turned enzymatic in a bitter living pill,
impossible to swallow. Pearl eyes
glance up, contact me . . .

This image hovers, then slips,
And crashes to the shore from sea.

MEMBER ZERO

Alexander Schaef

Yes, I *am* the person who hacked a ball of mucus onto the shoe room decorational family cactus a couple evenings earlier. I was, in fact, one of many to pass the ornamental San Pedro Cactus and stop momentarily, questioning its luxurious pokey parts, a brutal contrast to the dusty ol' mudroom. The name of the plant, Chartreuse, came to me in a dream the night papa brought it home. The color itself is splendid in a peculiar way (it actually reminds me of a good ol' rat, like the one that fell on granpops in the hammock that time). And for the reason that the naming honor was placed upon me—not by my parents but by fate—I do feel that no wrongs can be done, at least in the manner of other wrongs conducted in the shoe room. Dirty, smelly socks; expensive flip-flops left untouched; dead fly rave party in the windowsills; the list is extensive, etcetera, etcetera. No, this was not wrong, is not wrong, I am not wrong, you must agree. Let me elaborate quick.

My left foot popped off the road bike pedal and screeched against our blacktop. I left the ol' bugger twisted amongst the peonies along with its ol' friend, Mr. Helmet (the two are inseparable! It's hilarious!), and trotted towards the door. Hand touched knob and knob touched back, ho-hum, what a lovely moment it was for me! Fast forward some seconds to when I developed a baby cough. The New Hampshire breeze, which lost all of its speed by our little inland abode, carried the distinct smell of recently slaughtered cigarettes. Pesky neighbors! (I had shushed them the other night for mainly that they and their friends enjoy smashing bottles after they're thoroughly drunk. Every glass bottle. Clash! Bang! Smash! And splash too—they have a pool. Laughter and high fives and, "Oh, it was so nice to see you finally," I'm sure, I'm sure... But I have a test the next morning sir and ma'am! The shush went unheard. And I failed my exam). The baby cough was now an adult who gurgled up a gooey mass of phlegm. It muscled around—half in, half out—chewing on my floss cracks, teeth pushing the unpleasant guest away praying for a smooth swallow as I debated what to do. Actually, this reminds me of the hospital corners folded for a rather strange job, I know not how to address it appropriately, rather strange indeed. It was back in college. (Or collage (pronounced coll-AUge) as sissy playfully exaggerated every time the word was thrown out in conversation. Some weird pun inaccuracy childhood memory sort a' deal.) An ol' creek resort, reeking of 80 spf sunscreen. Yes, I was a housemaid without shame! And I coughed up a glob of snot so hard it flew out of my mouth onto the pillowcase of a bed I was making. And such, I just left it there, glistening in the open, so stupid. Dumb, dumb, dumb, reckless twenty-year-old! I intoxicatedly told my boss about it a week later at the shack deck. Much shame then. There was the casual, reflective sheet of Plexiglas on

top of a dresser in pillow-case-room. The corners of the mirror were tannish green even after a firm scrubbing with vinegar and paper cloth, another pointless task assigned to my daily rounds at creek. Those corners judged me. "Funny right," I said. The corners kept looking. And I looked too, at myself and at my wrinkled uniform top bow tie, and the glob of snot was in on the conversation too, of course! Dumb reflection, you goober-mouthed, no-catch-baseball, can't-even-clean-mirror adult child. (I still love me.)

The ball of mucus was squirming around my tongue. I scratched my nails along the bannister, well actually the baseboards, in a seducing way. I made eye contact with Chartreuse and without hesitation hacked the beastly beast onto the cactus. Eyes widened, a flashback! I left it there. Again. It was yellow-green and dangling peacefully. Goodbye buddy ol' pal! Smiling. I started towards the downstairs area, sure to find what would be an empty basement at the bottom. I was content in my loneliness. We will always be children, won't we? Unrelated. This is how life is, I'm assuming. Kids in soil, covered in the wet release of early whooping cough, melting lemon popsicles in both hands, chewy vitamins, doodling as a form of therapy. Does this make any sense?

The desire to talk subsided. Questions were left to be scavenged at. Have you had a miscarriage? Once or twice or three times, maybe? I don't know why that popped into my mind and I don't know the purpose of asking the big questions like such, but I really, really want to! Have you had a miscarriage? Did you rape someone at some point somewhere? Addiction? Porn before breakfast? Never mind the small, jump straight to the big! As far as questions go, I like to be the cars. Rather than scraping up my own conundrums and woes, I listen to the questions others ask, and then later in the day I repeat those questions over and over (and over) in my head, making them my own. I absorb the questions of strangers mostly, because they have more empty space in their person, meaning I know nothing about them and they know not a scrap 'bout me! Just like the cactus, I suppose, who hears the jargon of unfamiliar faces glooping out the ol' "How ya doin'," "No need to take off your shoes," "Can you get the rest of the groceries from the backseat?" "Long time no see," "Our house is your house." Mudroom talk. Oh sure, the cactus and I get along just fine, even after I spit all over it (time heals all wounds, right?). Now, I was so grounded in the cracks of my head, still making my way down the stairs.

Good evening, deep thoughts! I always make a point of greeting the second person who lives inside me. He or she (I haven't decided gender yet. She or he hasn't told me she (or he) doesn't exist) shows up every red moon or so. Once again, unshakable and unshareable emotions are what surrounded us as I embraced second me. Still, I managed to hinder my speech as I've been told to do a trillion times in my life (must be polite to second me especially). Manners matter! Don't want to get on a bad side!). At basement level, I abrasively made whisper noises ('cause my thoughts were so loud), and I fight visual battles with the briny backbone of the cactus in my imagination. Hello, Chartreuse buddy, you balmy nemesis, you. So, so

sharp. Ouchie!

The cactus is quite angular from this view. The ground. On the floor, my back hugs the tile, sips on its layer of scum. I lie down to get the full experience of seeing the cactus's underside, a never-before- seen showing. Like, it's so angular like something, like the nose of a witch. Speaking of witches, Terry Moldy also has a seat saved in my head. He is the first person I was ever intimate with, and his voice appears every orange moon or so (which is more often than the red-moon second me, surprising don't ya think?). I began talking with him inside my brain as my other conversations subsided.

"Hello."

"Hello."

"Do you remember when it happened."

"Yes."

"Do you remember what happened."

"Yes."

"Do you still love me."

No response. You brought me to your room. Well not brought me, led me unintentionally... I followed. I admired the enormous cloth-drape-thing on your wall. I had never heard nor understood the word tapestry till that night. An elephant eloped in a thorn bush of purple patterns and leaves, it was exciting no doubt. Well, you thought so at least, your blue eyes feverishly scanning the hanging piece and then my face. I was so young—polo shirt, jeans, sneakers, but you treated me as unique and mature. Next, I was admiring your back. Your tattoo. You got emotional and so did I. It was one of those uncomfortable special moments. A tipsy, practically-stranger- person explaining the apple tree that his dad used to have in the backyard, the one with all the hummingbirds nearby. It was a very complex design, that's for sure. On the verge of tears, a moment that neither of us would completely remember or understand. I could see right through your eyes and your teeth and then you unbelted my belt. And the same to you. And I copy and pasted your movements because I had not had a clue. When it came the time you put your shirt on, I felt full. And... slightly awkward. And you showed me the knotted scar the tree left on your arm from when you fell climbing as a child. I loved that, how we picked up the conversation right where we left off. We were similar like that. I wonder if he pictured tree bark as he squeezed my chin. We sat far away from each other on your bed as we shoved runaway chapsticks and wallets and e-cigs deep into our pockets before joining the mosh of partygoers on the porch. The horizon was pink outside, the type of night where seal heads would be visible bobbing above the harbor waves if we were slightly farther East. Terry had lady parts—sweet little man boobs that is. Uhm, ugh, ugh, ugh, damn ol' memories put me on my feels sometimes. Shit, I wish I knew you still. Hehe. Shit, I really do.

The mudroom door screeched then paused halfway, (I made disappointed eye contact with family member one), and then opened all the way, and then shut

hard (jacket hung, shoes off, baby staircase into main house, no more comments). I cried for no reason right there. Member one always treated me as a no-good person. Like a house cat that nobody even has the energy to play with. As if I genuinely deserved to be lying on the basement floor, alone, feeling. If he had seen the glob of snot still draped over the cactus, I would have been done. "Strike three," he'd say. Shame on me, three spanks for me, no dinner for me. This is how I lived and I hated it mostly. I say mostly 'cause I can get real giddy in the middle of the day after a nice ol' snack. Like cupcake or cup of honey cereal. Good ol' family member two would at least walk me into the doctor's to clock me in for my weekly check up versus one who waves from closed car window as I enter the office alone and scared. Always scared. But not as bad as family member three who has forgotten to pick me up from the outside steps on four separate occasions. That's four checkups missed and Doctor Plunker is always unhappy, not sure if it's the ol' wife drama or if he's sincerely frustrated with me. Why can't I get better? (I've actually asked him that before, I can't remember his answer.) The mudroom door opened again, family member one was leaving in a hurry, wearing a casual yellow button down with little grey horses on it. I always thought that shirt looked breathtaking on him, like he was cologne model. If I saw him later that night (which was unlikely to the max), I would ask if I could borrow the button down for a day in town. Wow, what a fantasy! I'd look just like him, just like frontpage magazine man! I would even clean off the cactus, I decided, if I ever got the motivation to stand up, just so that there would be less anger towards me. Of course no acknowledgment of his son, me, or family member zero, as the second me has nicknamed me. The Prius beep-beeped and the driveway was sparkling with recently replaced headlight light. The car raced off, first in reverse, then power-save mode forward. The outside moonlight was still as a gargoyle (strange comparison but it actually was!). The air was heavy and basemanty. I coughed gently into my elbow, or arm knee as the kids call em', no mucus this time. Blinkered and sighed. The cactus hunched over the staircase, poised and enduring. I lay helpless, and watched the mudroom air solemnly fade to black.

OVERTURE

Dan McFalls

at a local French
 restaurant with
 wooden wine racked
 walls and tables
 lit with real wax
 candles, the girl
 across from me bites at
 snail flesh lathered
 in garlic and
 butter and I wonder
 what will happen
 to the shells

A POLITE EXCHANGE

Dan McFalls

I'll practice with the first one tonight,
and then I will have two,
 which makes
 one to use for real and one
 in case of
something unexpected.
The mother and child
 in front of me in line
 are not paying attention to me.
 And I am at
the counter. She has
probably been
 to church
 this week. She probably believes
 in the idea
of sinning. She (the clerk) probably
also is proud of me
 for doing
 all this of my own
 accord. I place
the small square box
on the counter and
 walk my eyes
 along the register,
 with an unbroken bill
too potent for the occasion
already stretched
 across the counter. Change.
 "Have a good one."
 Sliding doors. I count
the bills and coins. \$14.76. Too
many. Still holding the
 bag, I turn
 around and walk back
 to the store. I return to
the register.

“Excuse me, I think you gave me
 an extra one
 in my change.” This time
 our eyes do
 meet. “Oh, thank you.” she says.
 “Thank you so much.”
 Tomorrow night
 I come before I
 have taken my clothes off,
 and I let out thankful laughter
 not to have had to be nervous.

MY MOTHERLAND, MY MOTHER'S LAND

Pauline Pechakjian

I'm twirling for eternity
In the Aragats Valley
Tracing the footprints of a ghost girl
who picked apricots and figs
to gift to her lover years ago.

Walking through the Sanahin monastery
Cloaked in the ornate garb of priests,
I smell their memories go up in smoke
to the musky scent of offerings to the dead
as they muttered the words they have
recited recited recited recited since 301 AD.

A flood of their festivities and funerals
override my memory and I'm standing
with a vase full of flowers over my head
at the village wedding, I'm standing
over a grave throwing in petal by petal
at a funeral, I'm making the sign of
the cross as the newly christened baby
is carried through these heavy doors.

Strolling the streets of Yerevan at three
in the morning, I am surrounded by
grandfathers playing backgammon
on park benches and grandmothers
reading coffee cup fortunes to their
still unmarried granddaughters.

Standing at Khor Virab, I look out
to our golden emblem, our Mountain,
surrounded by layers of sedimented skulls
and held in captivity by the bones
of those that have been laid to rest
by a people not of familiarity.

Running through the hills of Gyumri,
 I befriend a calf, a horse, and a donkey
 and we drink from water so cold our
 fingers and lips turn as blue as Sevan.

My soul remains suspended
 In the plains of Goris
 In the abandoned USSR factory
 In the school in Hrazdan where we pretended to mourn Stalin's death
 In the cafe across the Hrabarak
 In the bottle of peach moonshine made on some obscure mountainside
 In the hole in the ground where Lusavorich prayed for us all
 In the ruins of our old city Erebuni
 In the worn-down Soviet gas station blaring "BENZENE"
 In the weird Westernized mall next to the centuries-old church
 In the war zone of Nagorno-Karabakh
 In the gaudy mansion constructed of gold and marble and things we shouldn't afford
 In the shack with a tin roof housing 3 families of five
 In the dirt, in the water, in the leaves, in the stork's nest, in the signature red clay,
 In the haunted holy hills of my motherland, my mother's land,
 I twirl forever in the plains of the Aragats valley.

THE TALE OF THE ETERNAL WOMAN

Olivia Bono

She was a young girl in the morning, a grown woman by noon, and an old crone in the evening. This was how her story had always gone. Once, someone noticed, and they worshipped her as a goddess. Another time, they tried to burn her as a witch. Now, she knew better.

As soon as she was old enough, Heather would go to the store with a ribbon in her hair to fetch new bread or milk. She wasn't strong enough in this form to do any serious shopping, but it didn't matter. She couldn't stay for very long anyway, or someone might look too closely. They might see her hair curling down out of the ribbon, spilling down her shoulders like water. She especially couldn't be seen at mid-morning, when her legs shot straight up like rockets. Heather had learned not to scream during the growth spurts, but an unsuspecting bystander would not be so well-adjusted.

Finding work was tricky. She had to make do with a few odd jobs, taking care to never show her face for more than an hour. While she had her young face, she might fill in for a secretary on maternity leave or a hostess visiting a sick aunt. They knew her as the mysterious young woman who came and went very quickly, who had a mysterious illness she never spoke about. Heather had to make sure to only fill these positions at the same hour with the same fake name every time, or else she may take a position as a teenager one day only to return as a middle-aged woman the next.

Even though each job she remained at threatened to expose her secret, she reveled in these hours, enjoying the short time she could feel the sun on her face. For her long-term jobs, she had to hide in the shadows.

One of these jobs was the laundry—as an older woman, she agreed to do many of her neighbors' laundry. She'd pick it up as a younger woman, claiming to be her own adult daughter. Still young and capable, she would carry it all to her spacious apartment and get it started.

When her bones started to ache, and Heather grew too tired to stay on her feet any longer, she'd return to her home and sort through the day's laundry while she ate her dinner. She used to invite neighbors to eat with her, and she'd talk and laugh and listen to the stories of their lives. It was the only reason she hadn't fallen into complete loneliness. Her changes were less pronounced as she reached the end of the cycle, so no one noticed if her eyes drooped a little more after dinner, if her posture stooped more than it had when she sat down. But the city she'd recently moved into wasn't like the rest. People moved fast, sometimes faster than she could even age—no one wanted to sit down and share stew with an old woman who

smelled like laundry soap.

Heather forgave them for this, for she too was always on the move, she had to be. People expected the old woman Heather to die, or the young girl Heather to grow up, or the maiden Heather to settle down and find a family. She usually moved away before anyone asked too many questions.

She wasn't sure when she started to change. Or, rather, to *stop* changing—she was slowing down. She wrote it off as the unrelenting speed that society seemed to move at, increasing each day—maybe it was the *world* that spun too fast. Suddenly, she was able to sit twice as many tables before spotting the first hints of crow's feet in the great mirror of the Pasta Express. Suddenly, she could linger for just a moment longer at her day jobs, and then two, and then an hour.

She'd never needed a watch. Heather was *her own watch*. Her reflection had always been reliable, an infallible measure of how far along she was in the day, how close she was to her next death. Today, she trusted her eyes.

She *felt* like she had been at the office building down the street for an aching long time, answering phone calls and penciling in appointments for some big corporation. Every five minutes, she glanced impatiently at the small mirror on her desk, waiting for the first sign that her teenaged face was changing. She glanced at the clock when it finally did, out of curiosity. It had taken three hours.

She had been alive for a very long time—hundreds, probably over a thousand years, she had never counted. Or, if she had, she'd forgotten it. Cursed or not, the human memory was never meant to hold so much information. In all that time, she knew she'd always had to change her routine to fit the world around her, but her routine never changed without her. That would be impossible, as impossible as a woman who died every night and was reborn every morning.

This irony never occurred to Heather, as she grabbed her purse and ran out of the building, wide-eyed and hyperventilating. She had seen mankind start war after war and change the rules of nature itself, but nothing had scared her more than the possibility that her gift would break down, or worse: that it might just go away.

She was running calculations in her head. If her aging was off by three whole hours today, how much was it off the day before? Why hadn't she noticed it was *this* drastic? What will this do to her cycle—could it shift her so much that she'd spend a night as a girl, a morning as a woman? Or would she die younger and younger each time until there's nothing left of her? What could she even do to stop this?

When the scalding hit her skin, her first instinct wasn't to assume that someone had spilled coffee down her shirt. All she felt was an awful, burning sensation spreading through her chest. Feeling more helpless than she had ever felt before, Heather collapsed to her knees, her purse tumbling out of her trembling hands. As an old woman, she always died in her sleep. She wondered if this was what it felt like to die young.

"Oh my God, I am SO sorry!" came a voice from above her. A frazzled

intern was holding an empty coffee tray in one hand and a smartphone in the other. His eyes were darting from her stained blouse to his hands to the street around him. Heather hesitated for a moment, her eyes coming back into focus as she realized what must have happened, before sighing.

"That's fine, that's fine, I'm okay." She was not okay. However, the spill wasn't as bad as she had first assumed, and the only real casualty was her white blouse. She found herself back on her feet and running past the intern without another word. She couldn't let this shake her—she had worse things to be shaken about.

"Wait! Here, I'll get you some napkins!" came the intern's voice on the wind. With one hand, Heather waved noncommittally behind her.

Her same fears swirled through her head, and she almost didn't notice her reflection in the windows of the adjacent office parks as she ran. Something was different now. She wasn't slowing down, like she was as she toiled away behind her desk. Her transformation seemed to speed up with her frenzied heartbeat. With every fall of her sneaker, she changed again—child, woman, old woman, infant, teen, young adult. Her clothes were too baggy and then too tight and then too baggy all at once. Tears streaked down her cheeks as Heather ran. Where could she go? She had to hide—but they had already seen her. One by one, and then five by five, people walking by pulled out their phones, taking videos with wide eyes. A child's laughter rang through the air. They thought it was all some illusion, a show or a publicity stunt.

Then she heard sirens. Someone saw the crowd and called the police. Heather didn't even know where she had ended up, what neighborhood she had run to. She was in a part of the city she had never seen before, had never visited in her long life. That's what she assumed, although she couldn't actually see much of her surroundings beyond the ring of police cars encircling her. She couldn't bring herself to address any of the officers. Her changes were so erratic at this point that she no longer knew what form she was in, what name she should use, if she even *knew how* to talk. She felt herself shrink and grow and grow and shrink. She could see the confusion in their eyes.

She saw something else, what always happened when someone saw her change too fast. She saw their fear as they reached for their weapons.

They were above her, and she was so shriveled, she was aging farther than she ever had before. When had she stopped resetting? The men around her grew, and grew, and grew, and she kept shrinking, her skin pruning, her bones growing weaker and more brittle with every second. She reached out in front of her, clutching at the air, trying to keep her hold on the world she had lived in for so long.

Heather crumbled into dust after she died. She left behind only a coffee-stained blouse that blew away in the wind.

Later, the police would chalk it up to an elaborate prank. They would find an empty apartment apparently belonging to an old woman and her daughter (whose

age no one could agree on) a few days afterward, when one of their neighbors called in an unusual smell. They broke down the door, fearing the worst, but instead found piles of clean laundry and an overheating kettle.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT SOFTNESS

Molly Karr

I dream once and then I am seven.

The room isn't quite there yet, but there's that yellow wallpaper that New Father's mother gave as a gift before the second marriage was to take place. It's been decades, but I can see the jade pendant on Momma's throat hanging perfectly, patiently, flashes of forgotten wealth in the morning sun. I reach for it, but the metal is cold.

"Darling. Don't touch." I can see the white gleam of her thigh, like thick night cheese covered by slip silk. Her voice is rain on rooftops and it soaks under my skin.

"My head hurts. Why do ya' have—" slim fingers yank out an expert braid from behind my ear. "Ouch! To brush it again?"

Is that what I said? No, no.

"Ouch! To brush so hard?"

"Boys like messy parts, but men like straight ones. Besides." Oh! Yes, I remember. Her hair smells like flour from morning pancakes, of lavender lye and a little Crisco to keep the tips from fraying. "Besides, you'll never find your way home from school with a crooked part, right?"

"Right!"

"Ready for the blue dress?"

"Yes!" There's my mirrored closet. I'd forgotten the roses she'd painted on its corners. Thunderstorm pastimes when it was just the two of us. She'd cupped my cheek under candles and showed me how to make vines come out of a brush.

Well, the dress is linen (worn by a cousin three years my senior so some tailoring had to be done) and Momma had sewn me right in for the day. Its starched lace tickles my armpits as she pulls it over my head. My body stands ram-rod; if hairs moved, parts shifted, the brush would come back.

"Martha! Are you ready? Everyone's out in the yard!" New Father cries from downstairs. Right! There was a downstairs! He could buy two floors. Mother said this was a Big Improvement. Nothing like Old House – which I did not remember, but New House was nothing like I'd ever seen.

"We've got to be ready soon, now!" Momma purses her lips – they look like blood oranges in the morning light. I want to eat them. "Daddy can't be left waiting, can he?"

"No, Momma." I wish my lips looked like hers - mine feel like paper when I run my tongue over them, and they taste like syrup.

I can hear a mushy *thump thump thump* of wood soles against the carpet,

and then he is at the door.

“Martha! Love, you look no less beautiful now then you will in five minutes. C’m on out of there, it’s time.” He *knock knock knocks*. Momma pats my hair down one last time and pinches my cheeks for a little red.

No, that’s not right.

I can hear a mushy *thump thump thump* of wood soles against the carpet, Momma pats my hair down one last time and pinches my cheeks for a little red as New Father bangs the door open.

“Love, ain’t it a sin to be keeping the priest waiting?” New Father’s body consumes the space of the doorframe. The doorframe is what we go through when we leave to go downstairs to the garden, to the green juiced air where I’ll carry white flowers and follow blue shoes between seated wicker blood relations. New Father has an ink voice. It traces my nose and sketches the underside of my ears. He has a big mouth and big hands that don’t fit in the pockets of his neat grey vest and neat grey pants. They sort of rest on his belt, instead.

“You aren’t supposed to be up here! Close your eyes!” Momma smiles, I can see all of her teeth - they are so straight and white. I wiggle one of mine like a swing, although Momma told me it will run away and never come back if I do it too much.

New Father grabs her waist and pulls her to him. They whirl, and I try to peek and find Momma’s pendant between his neat grey clothes and Momma’s white dress - I hope it doesn’t get hurt.

“Oh! Oh no no, James! You’ll crush the taffeta,” says Momma. She beats at his fingers on her small, small waist but her hands are nothing but sweet on New Father. I wish she used those hands on my hair.

“Go down, Bunny, you know where to go? Right behind the barn with my Mother. I’ll be standin’ right at the isle, right there at the end, waitin’ for you.”

No, that’s not it.

“Go on down now, Bunny, leave Louis, she’ll be OK. My God, you look you’re your momma, all dolled up like that! A fine picture, you two.” My head is level with his hands - they are empty except for some hair on his knuckles. “A lady should have some time, don’t you think Louis? Don’t your mother need some time to herself? We’ve all got a big day ahead of us.” He crosses the room in three strides. His hand is warm where he guides my neck towards the door.

I lock my knees. “Momma’s going to get mad if you touch my hair!” But Momma gives another famous wide, white smile. She crouches down next to me, close so that I can see the folds hiding in her skin.

“Are you ready, darling?” Her cool hands feel smooth and young under my chin.

“Yes Momma. ‘Course I’m ready.” I’ll always be ready.

She kisses my lips and holds me together, and when she leaves for the garden the air smells like breakfast and purple flowers.

In the silence I swish my tooth a little more. Back and forth and back again until my mouth leaks something salty. We stand there together, outlined by the yellow wallpaper.

“Well Louis,” New Father’s voice is important. It’s a little softer, too. Ink on paper, drawing me to the corner next to the painted closet. “I think we need to establish something.” He makes a thump, and the tip of his shoe forms little prints in the carpet. He should not be wearing shoes inside.

“I love your mother, you know that?”

“Yes sir.” *Thump.*

“So you understand what that means for us after today, right?” The silver buckle of his belt is so bright from ten-in-the-morning sun. I want to cover my eyes. So I do.

“Louis, we’re goin’ to be a family!”

Thump.

“And so I’d do anything for you too, baby girl, you know that?”

“Yes.” I spread my hands open, just a little. New Father is crouched right in front of me. His boat shoes touch the tips of my white ones and his eyes are as grey as the sleeve that reaches for my arm. His hands make warm maps across my fingers.

No, not right.

His hands hold onto my wrist, and like butterflies - his thick fingers are black butterfly legs where they stroke my own.

“We’re going to be together, all three of us, for the rest of life. So I figured it’d be a fine idea to ask.” He pulls at his collar like a nervous dog. “Louis – is that okay? Louis I want to give you something.”

In the tension New Father pulls something from a neat folded pocket. It is a silver hair pin, exactly as bright like his belt buckle.

“My hair is fine!”

No, no, that’s not it.

“Yessir. Thank you.” His insect fingers are too warm on my wrist as the pin slides behind my ear. It’s cold against the skin there, very different the legs crawling across my cheek. I see the heat rising from them, building and bleeding into the room, peeling the paint off of Momma’s closet art. It scrapes that horrible wallpaper from the wood so that everything is bare. I can’t feel the itchy dress when there are insects crawling into my pink lips.

I am seven and my mouth is filled with jealous ink. I swish my tooth back and forth, adding iron salt to the sour.

SARTORIAL SHEDDING

Sonya Chyu

On the first Sunday of the month, she noticed something on her laundry line.

Her initial thought was that it was a gift bestowed from the heavens, a luxurious silk scarf that had somehow caught the high winds to her apartment balcony, a sign of validation for a struggling twenty-something like her, costing the small fortune she did not possess. Or maybe it was an undergarment of Auntie Duo, whose clothing had fallen to her balcony before, although only once. Instead, what she found was a simple t-shirt. A men's crewneck tee, size medium, a lifeless grey, mundane and utterly average in all respects. She was disappointed, but folded and stowed it away in her closet.

Having postponed the incident to her mind's depths, she was startled when, the following Sunday, another foreign clothing item lay sprawled over her pristinely hanging linens. This time, it was a pair of khaki shorts, creased at the cuffs where someone had repeatedly folded and unfolded them. Is this a joke? Where are these coming from?

She glanced warily up at the balcony just above hers in the apartment complex. A self-professed loner of sorts, she didn't interact frequently with any of her neighbors, and knew neither their names nor occupations, let alone the contents of their wardrobes. She assumed the t-shirt and shorts belonged to a male inhabiting the space directly above. The rule-abiding citizen in her presented a strong case for walking upstairs and knocking on his door, but part of her longed to stash the shorts next to the grey t-shirt nestled in the back of her closet. She sighed, and ultimately went to display both pieces on her bed. When arranged together in the formation of an outfit, they acquired a sort of cohesiveness and tasteful individuality that they had lacked in isolation.

The Sunday after, she found herself actually hoping to find another straggler among her taut laundry lines—a button-down, perhaps, or a sock. What she found instead made her blush: a pair of boxers. As before, she laid out the clothing on her bed and admired the trifecta. Her first time touching boxers, she savored the feeling of the thread between her fingers, the satisfying snap of waistband elastic. These she dutifully folded and stored away with the other pieces, now promoted to the left corner of her upper dresser shelf, next to her color-coordinated sweaters, across from her belts. It's okay, she reasoned, if I didn't steal them. Not technically.

And so, in the way humans convince themselves of the significance of the sequential, she soon latched onto this Sunday ritual, as if trying to piece together the fragmented identity of a stranger through clothes that were the unsuspecting targets of a particularly strong wind, or fate, or both.

As spring zephyrs continued their arousal on foreign fabrics, Taiwanese butterfly orchids burgeoned in the April rains and planets completed rotations in their never-ending celestial waltz. Her collection grew to include blue nylon gym shorts, a purple tee touting an iconic image of Taiwan's most popular boy band, and a soft billowy button-down that, come to think of it, looked a lot like something from her own closet.

With the introduction of color to these clothes, the girl's speculation acquired a newfound dynamism, her imagination wild with character portrayals. He must be athletic, popular among girls. Probably really filial and the happy sort—someone you could come home to at the end of a long day, and he'd have dinner and a few jokes waiting for you. She mixed and matched, summoning high school arithmetic lessons on permutations and combinations to create new outfits. What puzzled her, however, was the gradual trend of his clothing, which had become increasingly feminine. Her first instinct—too dreadful to comprehend—was that he had taken on a girlfriend, invited this stranger to move in and rumple his beige-colored bed sheets that she had come to know so well, if only from his laundry lines. But that could not be, either, because the unmistakable fragrance of sweat-infused cologne still clung to all the fallen clothing like a personal birthmark, impossible to exist on another human being. The slender silhouettes, soft pastels, girlish fashion labels: these styles veered into items she herself could have easily worn. She never did, of course, feeling that wearing them would be wrong, a sacrilege somehow.

Often, she would crane her neck to peer over the ledge of his balcony, hoping to see him, terrified of doing so. This action was made easier by the architectural blunder of her apartment. She was convinced the whole building was slightly slanted, reminiscent of that famous landmark in Italy whose name she had forgotten. Its asymmetry was evident in the way the coffee in her mugs were never fully level when placed on the counter, the way her overly-sensitive cat had developed a bit of a hip condition from adapting her gait to the slanted floors. The incline of the apartment complex, however, soon became a point of blessing for her, as the defect meant that her balcony jutted out a little more than his. Consequently, she could glimpse more of his balcony than the average person could in a perfectly vertical building, and, given favorable winds, his clothes would always land on her balcony.

But because gravity only works one way, she soon felt their notional connection polarizing. From his clothes she could more or less garner his age, income, fashion sense, favorite bands, gym activity. She felt as if she could recite with ninety-percent confidence some of his life dreams, and yet he didn't even know what her socks looked like.

And so, on the sixth week since she found the first t-shirt, she resolved to meet this man in person. Convinced she already knew him more intimately than a stranger, less so than a friend, she awoke early that Sunday to wait upon her balcony, even if it meant being in the tropical humidity for an entire day. To keep her company, she brought along some novels she had been waiting to read, an egg

sandwich, and a business report to look over for work.

Sometime in the afternoon she stirred, half-asleep, at the sound—no, sight—of a dangling pair of slim-cut jeans, a single cuff just hugging the periphery of her balcony, its dark, gentle folds and contours reminding her of calligraphy silhouetted against a white canvas sky. The pants had partially weaved their way past his balcony railing and were dangling precariously off the jutting ledge.

“Hello?” Her voice rustled the peace of a cloudless, dreamy spring, an act so inherently trivial yet potentially life-changing, like showing up to a blind date. “Is anybody up there? I think your jeans are about to fall on my balcony.”

Silence.

“Hello? Sir?”

She hesitated.

“Miss?”

A part of her was tempted to venture out and take the jeans, her spoils of the day for having waited so long in the drowsy April humidity. But then again, he or she must be wondering where half of the wardrobe had gone. Offering the clothes seemed like the right thing to do, if only as a front.

She retrieved paper and pencil.

Ni Hao. No, too formal.

Hi. A little better.

My name is Xiao Yun and I live on the floor below yours, Apartment 521. I've noticed your clothes have been falling onto my balcony for some time now.

Remember, the tone I want to convey is altruistic, not creepy.

I promise I'm not trying to steal them (though they are nice clothes).

Is that creepy?

Please let me know how I can return them.

Thank you.

She balanced atop her chair and tucked the note in the cuff of a jean leg, but was troubled by the thought that it wouldn't gain enough altitude to make it back onto his balcony. And so she tugged the jeans down, folded them compactly in a style worthy of a department store sales associate, and flung them upward, strategically angled to match the slant of the building. She prayed for auspicious winds to assist their landing.

Seven rotations of the earth passed, and still she was left awaiting a response. Those were simultaneously some of the most exhilarating and distressing days of her existence, evoking feelings long abandoned from her grade school days: after-school professions of naïve adoration and love letters passed during class. Finally, on the tenth day, she came home late from work to absentmindedly, habitually check her balcony, and discovered a soft salmon-colored tee tightly folded to resemble a spring roll that, when unraveled, revealed an equally compact note:

Miss Xiao Yun,

Thank you for your letter. It is a relief to know my clothes are in good hands. I've lost sleep over this. Lately I've been feeling like a snake shedding its skin, so maybe my clothes falling onto your

balcony is a sort of metamorphosis. Does this make sense?

Let's meet on our balconies this Sunday, 3 o'clock.

Bu jian bu shan—I'll wait for you.

The girl skimmed the letter, then read it again, slower. How enigmatic! And “metamorphosis”—what a strange thing to say to someone you’ve never met. On her third time reading, she stopped at the first “I.” She stroked the ink, smearing it slightly to confirm what she was seeing. The radical on the left side of the Chinese character was unmistakably feminine, the gentle slope of the mark resembling a woman crossing her legs. Grammatically incorrect, it was tacked on like an afterthought—except it wasn’t. In patriarchal Chinese cultures, characters defaulted to the masculine: writing feminine radicals was an emblem of intent, a deliberate act of courage.

She felt the air flow out of her lungs and searched for breath in the breezy Taiwanese evening. The girl recalled the peculiar trend of his clothing over the past weeks, and materialization of the truth sent tremors through her, but with that, a sense of understanding as well.

What was she to do? Her heart had already imprinted onto the idea of him—or her. And besides, he or she needed his or her clothes back. She counted down sunsets and sunrises impatiently, caught in a delicate battle between her head and her heart.

During the waiting period, she had assumed she would be more than prepared by showing up on her balcony at exactly 3 o'clock. And so she was surprised when Sunday finally arrived to find someone already on the balcony overhead, leaning out to capture the sun's rays. Their eyes were fixated on the eclectic Taichung cityscape sprouting with stoic office complexes and dilapidated street vendors, juxtaposing yet seamlessly integrated. The stranger's face was at once both inherently familiar and freshly dynamic. Her heart speeded and slowed erratically; she felt as if that face had appeared before many times in her past but she was only just now knowing it, like finally getting around to reading a book you had heard about your entire life.

Objectively, this individual possessed a natural, muted beauty that fell somewhere between the conventions for a guy or a girl. Gently rounded nose, thick eyebrows, slim lips, long hair, angular jaw—a profile that was neither intimidatingly gorgeous nor hard to admire. Without a doubt, this was the person to whom she had devoted a perhaps unreasonable amount of attention the past ten weeks. Here was the one she had been afraid to see but secretly and desperately ached to meet. Is it possible to love someone you will never fully understand?

An eastbound breeze carried the scent of fresh linens, suddenly transforming into a gale that invited the subject of her gaze to glance down at her balcony.

She smiled.

REBORN AVIATION

Ana Carpenter

amidst jaunted amalgamation(s) of fires
colors smite one another—Slanting limpidly into gray.
a formula of storming heads
germinates in murk.
to taste work—
as regards tangy metal, liquid—grinds the teeth—which brings to—birth

Boundless varieties of flight—

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Olivia Bono is a sophomore in Cornell University's College of Arts and Sciences, pursuing a degree in Information Science with a minor in Creative Writing. Hailing from cloudy Rochester, NY, she has wanted to become a writer ever since she read *The Chronicles of Narnia* (and spent a week crying over *The Last Battle*) at age seven.

Ana Carpenter is a junior at Cornell University majoring in English with a concentration in Poetry and minors in Fine Arts and Psychology. She lives in Risley Hall and enjoys being a part of the theater scene, running events and managing the art and stained-glass shops there. Ana is a member of Guiding Eyes for the Blind and enjoys singing in choirs, drawing portraits, and knitting hats. She has been writing since high school and hopes to soon publish a finished work addressing topics of race, gender, and social justice.

Sonya Chyu is a junior at Cornell University studying Applied Economics & Management who hopes to chronicle the Asian and Asian-American spirit by blurring genres, geographies, and identities. When not reading long novels or writing short stories, Sonya is a Cornell Chimesmaster, environmentalist, avid biker, weight-training enthusiast, and lover of serendipitous social interactions, especially those strengthened through food. This is her first published work.

Jacob Hawkes is. Or at least was. Or maybe will be.

Molly Karr has been writing stories ever since she can remember, and as an English major she delights in the opportunity to learn about the craft of storytelling every day. She especially enjoys writing fictional narratives about the Midwest, women in the mid-twentieth century, and young adult fiction. Molly is the recipient of the Spring 2017 Heermans-McCalmon screenplay award.

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Pauline Pechakjian is a poet and writer from Los Angeles, CA. She recently

completed her undergraduate education at UCLA, where she studied English and History while partaking in several poetry workshops. She has a passion for communication, and when she is not engulfed in the power of words to convey emotions and experiences, she turns to music and art. Continuously working to refine her poetic voice, Pechakjian draws from her own experiences, incorporating her cultural upbringing as a member of a diaspora community, mental and emotional challenges, and the diversity of her home city into her poetry.

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