

# RAINY DAY



Dear *Rainy Day* Readers,

It was with absolute pleasure that I addressed this publication as editor-in-chief over the past semester. My involvement with *Rainy Day* has been extensive—from my sophomore year, during which I was secondary poetry editor, to my ninth and final semester, as editor-in-chief. I could not be more proud of our organization, and it has been an honor to serve you.

This past semester presented challenges, and my experience has been humbling. My goal, during my singular semester as editor-in-chief, was simple: to elevate the magazine to a position of unparalleled excellence in publishing outstanding undergraduate work, appealing to and printing the works of students, not only from Cornell, but also nationally.

While pursuing this goal, I instated some changes to process and mission. *Rainy Day* processes are now, I hope, simultaneously more accessible and more rigorous. I focused on cultivating an even higher standard for creative, engaged reading and editing while maintaining an inclusive atmosphere. We began to read and review submissions more systematically, as well as collectively, creating a collaborative and open editorial environment. With these changes and continued innovation, I believe *Rainy Day* will reach its potential to become the nation's premier undergraduate literary journal. I look to our newly appointed editors-in-chief, Miklos Mattyasovszky and Anne Jones, and to a wonderful staff, to propel *Rainy Day* into the future.

I, perhaps obviously, take *Rainy Day's* potential and mission very seriously. Young writers may feel as though they lack a national undergraduate publication to read and around which to rally—I believe *Rainy Day* can and will become that pedestal, that talisman. Lofty goals, perhaps, but I believe our revered publication can be read and loved by all.

Here's to another 44 years on top. And thank you, for all you've given me and for the opportunity to hold this position. Cheers to you, *Rainy Day*!

Yours in reading,

Becca Litman

# RAINY DAY

an independent student publication

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## CEREMONY

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### Savannah Jual Martin

The frog men sat criss-cross-apple-sauce around a campfire,  
roasting oozing green s'mores on naked cattails.

Frog Chief blew a bubble in his throat to call his wives,  
and one by one they appeared,  
eyes like floating tennis balls on black water,  
waiting.

Then the chief began to swell  
until he rolled and wobbled on the putty shore.

The frog wives surrounded his vast bouncing body  
and clenched their thighs before he took his final breath—  
like vultures they descended,  
landing ravenous upon the chief,  
vicious gums thrashing at his skin  
tearing the webs that bound his feet—  
and ate him whole.

The frog men could only stare  
at the wives licking life's syrup from smacking lips,  
hopping back to the pond, turning to ripples as they dove...  
All was calm for a moment.

Then the water filled with tadpoles,  
blossoming like blood.

## NINE OUNCES NATURAL

---

Alyssa Wong

I wait until my sister's breathing steadies before slipping out the window. Baba's light has been off for an hour and pretty little Xuemei sleeps like the dead, so no one sees me dart eight stories down the fire escape outside our tiny apartment. Two men sit smoking on the steps of the corner bodega, pale breath curling into the winter air as I cut through the deserted streets.

Six stops down the University-Spadina line, the night markets are alive with business. Fruit carts laden with net bags of lychee and clusters of lanzones; vendors hawking knockoff Gucci bags and Burberry scarves; racks of watches and lighters and vouchers for cheap international phone calls. Everything and anything is for sale. Cantonese batters the air and a heady, rotten scent crisps my nostrils—the smell of meat and trampled fruit, old newspapers and human sweat.

A kid dances in front of me, jacket lighting up with a dozen LED bars in alternating patterns. "Data infusions," he offers breathlessly. Plastic tubes full of liquefied RAM click at his belt alongside a long, slender hypodermic needle. "Government secrets, new books from all the top authors, answer keys for standardized tests. A perfect MCAT's your ticket to the Federal Physicians' Corp."

I ignore him, stalking past a fish stall, the paper with the address printed from a forum clenched tight in my fist. The kid dogs me, ducking into my path. He's even got a lightup tattoo, luminescent nano-cells inked over his brow in a sun shape. "Wikipedia's been free for the past century," I snap.

"This ain't Wikipedia, eh," he protests. "This stuff's good quality, very good price. Intravenous too! Goes straight to your brain." He fumbles in his pocket for a cord. "Come on, *jie*, it's painless and clean. All the needles are sterilized and in a few days you won't even see the mark."

"I'm a Natural," I retort, showing him the patch sewn onto my jacket. "Don't waste my time."

"Bullshit," the kid scoffs. "Those eyes are fake. You can see the scars on your eyelids."

Heat shatters over my cheeks and my free hand flies reflexively to my face.

Seeing my expression, the kid pales and backs off, flitting into the crowd to find a new target.

It takes a few moments to stop shaking. I run my fingers carefully over my eyelids, feeling the healed incisions. Expensive. Discreet.

The scar tissue crawls like mealworms under my itching fingers.

Almost natural.

I jerk my hand away before the urge to claw my eyes out gets the better of me. Mentally, I add scar cream to the list of things to get before the night is over.

The night market gets dodgier the farther I go. The address I'm looking for turns out to be a room above a murky pool hall and an acupuncturist's shop. I ring the buzzer, glancing at the tattooed, shaven-headed men gliding like sharks through the jade-colored light next door, pool sticks in hand. One catches my eye and grins, no mirth in his eyes. Despite the cold, my palms are sweating; I wipe them on my jeans. "Hurry up," I mutter.

"Business?" the buzzer demands flatly.

The words from the online forum flash through my head. "I've got a pound of flesh for Zhao *zung ji-si*," I say in Cantonese. A moment later, the door unlocks and I push inside.

As the little elevator at the end of the dingy hall creaks slowly upward, I wonder if Xue has woken and found me gone. If I don't make it back tonight, will she wonder what's happened to me, her large eyes luminous and sleep-dazed, her perfect red lips parted in a soft, soundless question? *Unlikely*, I think sourly. *Especially once she leaves for the government program Dad enrolled her in.* The one I'd been dreaming of for years. The one she'd rather die than attend.

*You can't make me go!* she'd wailed.

*I'm doing you a favor*, Dad snapped. He hadn't even glanced at my application.

My thumb creeps to my eyelid, but I jerk it back before I start rubbing the scars again.

My reflection frowns back at me from the smudged chrome walls, mouth

drawn thin. There's really no family resemblance between us at all. No comparison.

The mirrored doors slide open. The third room on the left is marked 405. A full minute after I knock, a series of bolts shutter back on the other side, one after another. It is nearly pitch-black inside the apartment; only a handful of glowing computer monitors light the rooms. With a click, a pair of naked light bulbs flare on.

The *ji-si* stands on the ratty carpet, shirtless, one hand on the switch and the other holding a .22. His face, obscured by a burnished plague doctor mask, is pointed toward me. So is the pistol.

"That's illegal," I croak. It comes out in Cantonese.

"As am I," the flesh broker's voice grates within the mask. He's got a voice scrambler built in. Behind him hangs a rack of knives and needles, and a long steel table stretches along the far wall. "So don't waste my time. What's your business?"

"I'm selling," I manage.

The gun flicks down. He tucks it in the back of his sweatpants and beckons me inside. I follow, chest loosening.

"You've got an extraordinary face," Zhao breathes as he pulls me onto the steel butcher's table, his knees pressing hard and heavy on either side of my ribcage. A cleaver lies nearby. His hands creep across my face, thumbs smoothing over my cheekbones. It takes every ounce of self-control to stay rigid. "Nearly all artificially constructed." He glances down at the patch on my jacket and says mockingly, "Even though you're a Natural. So what's for sale tonight? Breast? Flank?" His palms skim my stomach and slide to my hipbones. "Thighs?"

"Nothing of mine," I reply.

His hands drop away and his neck tightens before I add,

"But all of my sister's."

I slip him the picture from my wallet. Darling Xue, barely a teenager and already in full bloom. Doe-eyed Xue, all smooth, milky skin and rivers of black hair. Beautiful, totally natural Xue.

He throws back his head with a horrible, hacking laugh. It echoes through



the beak of his mask. “She’s a prime cut of meat, all right—but selling from your own sister? God. You’re a piece of work.” The flesh broker slides his thumb over the photo. “Bring her here.”

I shake my head. “You’ll have to come to me. Tomorrow night, after my father leaves for his business trip. I’ll pay for your transportation.”

He studies the picture, hungry. Eyes always turn greedily toward her, but nobody ever looks at me like that. “Risky business. How much is for sale?”

Jealousy burns my voice hot and ugly. “Everything.”

When we settle on a sum, he makes me drink a glass of scorching liquor. “To your fortune,” he toasts. “And mine. Chinese cuts are selling well this week. Per ounce, almost as profitable as Japanese.”

*To Xue*, I think, looking at my bent reflection in his mask. My heart coils in me like a viper. *To beauty*.

As I slide back into our warm bedroom, Xue rolls over in her sleep, murmuring. Her long black hair fans around her like inky fingers. I shift it off my pillow and nestle down beside her, smiling.

I dream of empty beds and open opportunities.

Tomorrow night, as my sister sleeps, I will steal her lipstick and paint my mouth red in the mirror. Heavy sleeper that she is, she will not stir when I kiss her forehead and open the window, waiting for the *ji-si*. When Zhao climbs in, he will find her lying still as a snow bank, the mark blooming on her skin like a rose.

And by the time the flower is picked, long before Baba’s plane circles back to our corner of the world, I will be on my way to the capitol with her letter crumpled in my pocket and a face to match. This time, it will be the face I deserve.

Maybe Zhao will leave me her heart to remember her by, too. I’ve heard they taste delicious.

## IF THE NOCEBO SHOULD COME

---

Cameron Q. Louie

this strange solitude about you  
no stranger.  
come night:  
this underwire on the floor.  
and from the door: a hint of someone,  
and did you lock the door?—  
at night this spooling color,  
at night this perfume threaded,

above a summering wind the girl hears a chime,  
hung between two distant  
elms grown I-know-not-when  
towards something's  
bottom.

a tide is rising.

this sort of short and restless where  
i've seen your dream. remember? painting. there.  
how this can tell of demon things, oh...  
how they are balled upon your chest—  
how many nights a stranger comes?  
how many nights, and I was—

where?  
or that i put you in an old man  
and made him tell:

a soily hand  
two distant elms  
a girl hears a chime at night asleep in bed  
something turning into you—  
so let it dig

## POEM TO BE READ IN SILENCE

---

do not read this poem  
out loud  
we are making love  
to this poem  
we will not read this poem  
out loud because we  
do not talk  
while we are making  
love do you hear—

we are all together  
when the words are  
sounds or silence is this—  
silence

do you (am I  
asking?) do you  
do as you  
are told  
cough loudly when you  
reach the next line  
are you ready this time

it is nature setting sounds that  
i have always wanted you to hear to  
be like me repeat  
a breathing hush

i hope someone will speak now will  
you speak now  
so,

## PUT ON MUSIC, LOCK THE DOOR

---

I think I will grow up  
without a beard  
without a bedtime  
though, a weekend spent at home,  
faking a cold  
& taking all the ovals  
all the oranges you can get  
me liquid or pretend  
I said, but I have never been  
sick, never been too broke  
nor even body bruised.  
no matter. look at this hand  
plugging two ghosties up the nose  
hang out and catch what's coming  
down the way.  
this needs a woman's touch.  
stripped down to abject comfort  
you hung me upside-down  
to let a sort of sickness drip  
& I have never felt  
more like a man.  
in the yard two chickens  
go a tup-tup-tupping  
through the weeds.

## CHECKERS

---

### Ian Walker-Sperber

In the park, where the sun shone without remittance. Where boys bellyflopped on the grass to catch balls that plummeted like rockets. Where ladies sipped Pepsi from plastic bottles and blue jays whistled in the evergreens on autumn days, Henry the horse and a goose from Quebec played checkers on a checkerboard built into a concrete table in the park.

—Ah, it's too bad, *tant pis*, that is a fatal move you have made just now, quacked the goose. You see here, pointing to a red plastic piece quiet as a blushing nun in the middle of the board, you have given this one up.

The goose lifted one of his black pieces over the red and calmly removed the latter from the board. He could not help but cross his arms and grin.

—Your move, quacked the goose.

Henry the horse had had four red pieces stationed at every corner of a square. The goose had had two black pieces contingent to the upper right corner of the square (F4), at E5 & G5. The black piece at G5 advanced into the center of the square (E3), eliminating the piece at F4. F2 could not take E3 because it was blocked by D4. If D2 takes E3 then it will be back in F4, leaving it open to capture by E5 (there is no piece in G3). Though G3 *could* be taken by H2 Henry the horse is unnerved by the goose's cocksure style of play and fears that the goose really is all too aware that H2 could take G3, that in taking G3 Henry the horse would be falling into a trap, that he would be crushed in the workings of a terrible metagame which he does not fully comprehend.

—*Merde*, quacked the goose when Henry the horse eventually took G3 with H2. He had not anticipated Henry the horse's equestrian shrewdness.

The game soon devolved into a rush of clacking hoofs and fluttering wings. The opponents sent their soldiers across the board with wanton determination, skipping fatally over friend and enemy alike, advancing in elaborate zigzag patterns as though avoiding mines, loosing bloodthirsty ululations when they received their first kingships but immediately surpassing themselves with double, triple, quadruply crowned figures, until finally the board was dominated by two enormous kings — mobile fortresses lurking across a tessellated battlefield, twin tyrannies in interminable opposition, having no purpose beyond the drive to kill, to die, the peoples over whom they claimed rule being

scorched from the earth long ago.

—We've reached a bit of a headway, it seems, neighed Henry the horse.

—Mm, yes, so it seems. The two kings wobbled indecisively. But perhaps if, said the goose, pushing his king towards the red giant.

—Not quite.

—Or if..

Henry the horse continued to dodge the goose's advances.

—*J'advance encore*, quacked the goose with considerable frustration.

—Enough, it's a draw, neighed Henry the horse with a clomp of his hooves, toppling the kings onto the table where they disintegrated into a wealth of plastic corpses. An ending equal to a pair of equals, I suppose?

—Of course, conceded the goose from Quebec. However, the goose felt comfortable in his assurance that he was inherently superior to Henry the horse. Every family can trace its line back to some minor royalty, likely a lord of some sort, if they are willing to branch far enough from the family tree. After a rigorous investigation of his lineage the goose had concluded, though the series of deduction was difficult to follow, that his line was founded on a mythical coupling between goose and swan more than 2000 years prior. The goose, Sarah, was a virtuous woman. In good weather she would sing Hebrew verses alone in the royal gardens of Damascus. The cypress trees seemed to swoon in time with her metrics. It happened once that a Swan was flying overhead while Sarah sang her poetry. Enchanted by the purity of her voice he descended into the shade of the cypresses to listen. Words bubbled from Sarah's beak as from a fountain, wholly oblivious to her admirer. The Swan swam into the lake to woo Sarah, but she did not notice him until they were nearly abreast. This flustered the Swan.

—Why do you ignore me? he asked, I who am the noblest bird, Swan.

Sarah blushed and replied — I did not mean to ignore you. I was only absorbed in the words of the great Hebrew poets.

Here the Swan laughed — Not only is your voice pure but it is consuming. Please, sing more.

Sarah sang, maybe flattered, maybe embarrassed by the Swan's advances. The Swan's eyes grew red with passion. A sort of dance formed between them as Sarah retreated to the Swan's every advance, which drove him wild and intemperate. The Swan beat his wings but Sarah only sang louder the poems of the Jewish minstrels. When Sarah came to shore the Swan flew on top of her, disturbing the branches of the cypress tress with his massive wings. Sarah's song transformed into a gross shout and the Swan clasped his bill on her breast, finally taking her in the late day's heat. When the Swan released Sarah she fell onto the water like a veil. The Swan flew off, shameful of his rape, as Sarah groaned and tended to her swollen breast.

—Shall we play another? quacked the goose.

—We could if you'd like, neighed Henry the horse innocently.

The goose from Quebec chomped his beak hungrily. With a sweep of his wings he collected the black plastic pieces and pushed the first few helpless soldiers into formation.

—Let's.

## SUBURBAN JOURNEY

---

Daniel P. Tsoy

One at a time,  
I climbed up rungs, sweating  
in a slow and dilating darkness.  
Cicadas incessantly hissed and clicked  
in the hot and thick summer air.  
The ladder led to the top of a sphere,  
a reservoir in the sky. Up there  
I opened a portal into voluminous  
blue and liquid gloaming. It eased  
me inside and we both were alive  
as I floated securely on my back.  
With ears submerged the sonorous  
hum of silence was everywhere expanding  
a spacious contemplation.



## YELLOW, STEADFAST

---

They all looked both ways—  
 then the mother held their hands  
 as they crossed Falls Road,  
 looking right and left and right  
 as they pranced to safety and  
 the swimming pool—translucent  
 charisma. Whistle, squeal, splash.  
 She read through sunglasses. Whistle.  
 Pit patter to the shower. She read.  
 Summers were spent this way. The kids,  
 creamy-nosed, and the mother, loving  
 from under the umbrella. But sometimes  
 the joyous bright would strike her peeking  
 cheek, a diaphanous white. Was it then,  
 beneath vast yellow grin, that melanocytes  
 were incited to black proliferation? Tonight  
 she feels the sand between her toes,  
 closing her eyes, abounding black—  
 indignant, she opens them and screams  
 at the easy-going ocean. Its complexion,  
 a sparkling blue, shines deadly and steadfast, too.

## HOME SIGNS

---

Adam Krolloff

Of the equinox moistening  
on your sealed lips  
or these coy crocus  
toes peeking between  
slits of swinging benches  
tilted ever so subtle  
toward the silent blue  
waves: My mother's apron  
is maestro on its line.

# IN THESE BLACK HILLS YOU NEED MORE THAN GOLD

Melinda Dubbs

Black from soot, from plague, from naked  
tears hung from nooses on the banister of Santiago's abandoned  
church. Even when the mountain moans, breathes  
a heavy drawl, a breeze trembling pleated  
lady skirts, lifting your arms to air  
your pits' soiled, dark stains,  
there is no calm. Train  
wheels pound earth, groan  
as an engineer switches  
brakes and metal grates  
metal,  
our lullaby. Claw  
at soil, shirt  
clinging to small brown muscles, twitching  
with each clink-clank of pick spearing  
into stone. And each sigh swells  
with the Santa Ana, fans us an arid kiss  
shrouding our necks like a whore.

Spit black into rock and it swallows  
dirty rain, neither of us has seen a shining sea  
in three years. Lean against my pick-  
handle and examine my manifested  
destiny, yearning for the old world and a better taste  
than burning coal. The train ignites and I split  
into rock. Blisters dribble blood onto sun-  
dried stones, color to my landscape.

## NEWTON'S FIRST LAW OF MOTION

Emily Greenberg

*Every body persists in its state of being at rest or of moving uniformly straight forward, except insofar as it is compelled to change its state by force impressed.*

Newton's First Law is sometimes referred to as the **law of inertia**. **Inertia** is the tendency of objects to resist changes in their state of motion. Thus, it is the natural tendency of objects in motion to remain in motion and for objects at rest to remain at rest.

*example 1:* Suppose Mark, 35, is an **object in motion** moving in the same direction and at the same speed every day of his damn life.

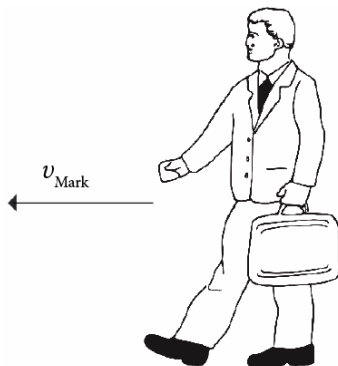


fig 1

Each morning, Mark wakes up at 6 a.m. sharp to a shrill alarm clock. At 6:10 a.m., Mark rolls over to the other side of the bed, running his hands through the strands of his wife's blonde hairs and gently kissing her neck until she, too, rolls over. They yawn, stretching themselves out of the king-sized bed. He has a bowl of cereal at breakfast, she a bowl of yogurt. The kids come down around 7:15, quickly gulp down toast, and shove packed lunches in their backpacks before catching the bus. Mark and his wife leave for work at 7:30, taking their separate cars. After a long day of calculating complex numbers and making charts and balancing checks, he'll return home in the same traffic. After dinner, the whole family will gather in the den: the kids doing homework, he watching the evening news, his wife reading a book.

At 9 p.m., she'll shake him awake softly. The kids will have already moved

upstairs. They'll get into bed slowly, maybe watching television for a little while first. Tonight is a Tuesday, which means they'll fuck first. They never fuck Monday because Mondays are depressing, or Wednesdays because that's the day they both work late, or Thursdays because they're too tired, or Fridays because it's the end of the week, or Saturdays because who wants to do that much work on a Saturday?, or Sundays because that's when they go to church. So Tuesday it is.

It's become almost routine, clinical even. He will push her slowly on the bed, kissing her gently while removing her blouse and she his. Then they'll just take off their own clothes because it's easier and saves time. When they're done, they will both lie sweaty and exhausted on their backs, eyes at the ceiling. They'll set the alarm for 6:00 a.m. and do it all over again tomorrow, minus the sex. **Indeed, Mark is an object in motion maintaining the same velocity. According to Newton's First Law, he'll continue on like this until he dies--or until an unbalanced force compels him to change directions. And because of the law of inertia, Mark's natural tendency is to resist these changes.**

Now, let us consider the case of an object in motion acted on by an **unbalanced force**:

*example 2:* Suppose Mark is driving home from work one day, slightly earlier than normal because it's beginning to storm outside. Rain hits Mark's windshield like tiny fists punching the glass. Trees sway ominously, their branches dipping low in a fatal waltz. As Mark pulls up to his normal intersection, he notices a bottleneck of traffic: cars upon cars lined up like dumb animals off to slaughter. Seeing his opportunity, he abruptly changes lanes and takes a different route home. The new route takes him through tiny residential neighborhoods he's driven by a million times but never really noticed. He pays attention to their lawns tidy and kept, their porches with worn-in swings, the matching brick houses with red minivans parked in the driveways. He sees the same car his wife drives-same model, same color.

As he gets closer, he notices the car even has the same bumper sticker, Obama/Biden '08, the same dent on the rear bumper, the same crack in the window, shaped like Lake Michigan. Yes, she'd been meaning to get that fixed. The crack is unmistakable. He slows down and exits the car. He calls her cell phone, but she doesn't answer. This was the day she was supposed to be working late. He creeps around the house, his shirt sticking to his back with sweat and rain. One of the windows is open, just barely. He sees her purse lying on the kitchen counter, the one he gave her for their anniversary two years ago.

He runs to the front door and grips the cold metal handle. It's open. Wet

feet squeaking, he plods through the house, with its dirty dishes lying in the sink, its newspapers draping coffee tables. He hears a noise, a human noise, and follows it like a bloodhound, smelling it. He throws the door open, and she's there, white and creamy and perfect, and underneath some oaf, some redfaced neanderthal with an animal grunt and a hairy back and sweat dripping down his sides. And then Mark does something he never thought he'd do. He jumps on the man, the man twice his size, and starts punching his head, biting his oversized ears, digging his nails into that hairy back, the hairs thick and curly and repulsive, and he's eating them, ripping them out with his bare teeth, spitting them on his wife's pearly breasts, where they fall like demonic snowflakes, like ashes. **In this example, Mark is an object in motion acted on by two unbalanced forces: first the storm, then what he witnesses in the bedroom.** According to Newton's First Law, an object resists changing its velocity, a point exemplified by Mark's willful ignorance—never questioning her overtime work, nor the marks on her neck, nor the scent on her breath. Try as he might, Mark can't ignore these unbalanced forces forever, and they eventually force him to change his velocity. Because of the unbalanced forces, Mark overrides his natural tendencies towards willful ignorance and instead modifies his behavior, acting in a way he otherwise would not.

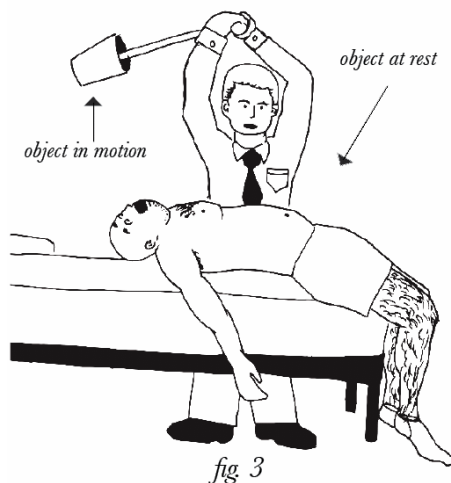


In the previous example, we saw what happens to an object in motion when acted on by unbalanced forces. We will now consider a more complex example, one involving both objects in motion and objects at rest:

*example 3:* Suppose Mark, in the midst of choking on back hairs, picks up an **object at**

rest, a lamp sitting on the nightstand. He picks the lamp up and, knuckles white from gripping so hard, smashes the lamp on the redfaced oaf's skull. He watches its porcelain base break into tiny pieces mixing with blood, which drizzles like tiny streams around the curly black hairs. And he does this again. And again. At first, the man grunts and tries to turn around, tries to buck Mark off. But Mark is overcome with an adrenaline which gives him an otherwise uncharacteristic strength and speed. The man slumps over, a pliant piece of clay molding to the bed.

Mark drops the lamp. His hands are cut: blood oozes from his wrinkled palms like freshly butchered meat. He wipes them on the bedspread, then rolls the man on his front. This is his first good look at the man. Long nose, much like his own, drooping slightly but with wide nostrils flare-like. Wide, flat forehead, the beginnings of a widow's peak. Strong jaw and cheekbones. Thick, masculine eyebrows. Deep red complexion like a bad sunburn. Day-old stubble, tinged blue.



Karen, his wife, cries huddled in the corner and tries to cover her nakedness with a pillow, as if he hasn't seen it hundreds of times, her arms crossed, one hand over each breast, each pink nipple. He stares at her from across the room, the silence weighted. She looks up too, her eyes hollowed, pitless. Who is this stranger? His bloody palms drop to his sides, useless. He sinks into the bed, still but with blood rushing through his ears. The man in front of him is motionless, out cold. So different, thinks Mark: just a minute ago grunting like a sick animal and now still, silent, clay-like, an object at rest.

## THE BRAIN AND THE HAND

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Ovid

What's this which I see before me,  
Hanging in the air?  
And what are my eyes that they may be true?  
What is my mind that on it I can rely?  
I should hitchhike to a snowy city,  
or farther. I have no desire to be king  
over anyone but myself. I want to touch  
what I cannot smell.  
And there—you heard them—I, I, I.  
I's my map, and I have no compass.  
I's my duty, and I have no subjects.  
Easy to interpret, impossible to understand,  
a ghost in a lost-dimension land  
and I can't even find my hand.  
I feel it's sitting on a sill,  
stroking my saturated brain.  
But that sill's no steady earth,  
not worth its two inhabitants. The hand shrinks  
in fear when it feels wind's true swoon  
around. What would the constant ground  
feel like, meeting them as they fell,  
the brain to pieces right at the introduction,  
wriggling worms in their earth?  
Could they find their way back together?  
Could they crawl in the right direction, all  
one way? My dirk is a pen  
and Duncan's chambers south.  
I wish I had a gout to follow, some castle town  
or even a wife with molars like monster's teeth.  
I have the good king's head and the new king's body,  
or have I got that wrong too?  
Seek, and ye shall lose your mind.  
The brain and the hand are blind.  
Some story, some classical tale,  
and my fate played out like this?  
The hand grasps the pen, and stabs the brain;



the mucus, dyed black, collects around.  
There's no telling which way's down.  
And on my brain, a golden crown.

### SMALL TOWN LETTER #3: TO THE LITTLE GIRL ON THE DOCK

---

Jump in, Ruth,  
though you cannot swim.

This town is no place to grow up in.

And little Jeffrey Mayes  
will not make a good husband.

So jump in, jump in.

Your father behind you knows  
with his steel retinas  
where you would better be.

But those toes of yours must slip  
all by themselves.

So slip in, little Ruth,  
jump in.

This town is no place to grow up in.

Your mother knows,  
with her swollen stomach,  
that we will devour what comes out.

We, the seething street  
that your mother walked with ten little toes.

So eat up, and then jump in.

Little Ruth, this town is no place to grow up in.

Or better yet, there: next to you.

Your brother seems to know what to do,  
he, with his hand on your shoulder.

## COLLEGIATE FAIRY TALES

---

Alyssa Wong

I had this dream where you were sitting next to my professor in the second row, with the lights playing hot on you from where I stood on the stage. My palms were sweaty, and no matter how you moved, I could only see the sides of your face, never anything further in from the cheekbones. I woke up and threw up in the toilet.

I had this dream where we were sitting in this cafe, and you were wearing that same outfit as you were in that picture you posted on my wall, the one with the micro-shorts and all the white paint, no shirt, the same picture that got me in trouble with my parents. I told them it was a mutual friend. They asked me if people like that really exist. In my dream, I told them the truth.

I had this dream where you fell in love with me, only I was a man. I think I might have been you. You narcissistic bastard.

I had this dream about my fourth grade teacher, the one who said that I'd never be a good student because I had my head in the clouds all the time. When asked if I might grow out of it, she informed my father that la-la land is not a condition. In my dream, she was eaten by mice. They poured out of the wallpaper until she was gone, and all they left was her curly hair and wedding ring. I took the ring and swallowed it. The mice became you.

I had this dream where I never went to that concert. We never had that fight, I never hit you, we never had that talk. We spent the rest of our lives together never facing each other, coexisting in silence until we died and crumbled and blew away, with our house and everything else we owned, scattering into the wind like dandelion seed.

## BROTHERS NOT AFFORDING TO FORGET THE LAKE

Caitlin Gribbin

Rusty sky rising at seven.  
when the loons sang to no one  
and the cliffs stretched up  
out of clouds –

Later, eight or nine. You know how  
you liked to sleep,  
how I would unzip your tent.  
You exited face first, never  
stretching your feet out over the dew  
to test the cold, wet morning.

– and I thought about climbing  
to the top of one flat-faced rock and jumping  
into Pharaoh Lake, head first, no arms out  
because there was nothing that could ever hurt.

Except an S-curve, a borrowed pickup,  
blue paint peeling off in delicate lacerations.  
Blue paint chipped in a trail across the pavement  
with finely chopped glass  
and you, somewhere –

The *morning* I mean, not the afternoon,  
when frost still clung to the tent  
and birches' skinny arms leaned into me,  
I entered the world –

We hadn't seen walls in a week, remember?

They were in the past, imagined.

So we watched moose  
cross marshes, unhinging their shoulders  
to climb over grass  
as over broken bottles.

You haven't forgotten that morning.  
 The way the cliffs looked red  
 and those ripples circled a loon  
 who raised its neck to sing for no one.  
 I smiled when I heard his song  
 and the truck skidded in the afternoon heat.

## A PERFECT STORY

---

Meia Geddes

Story: an architecture more vast and flawed than that which biological or human design could ever fashion.

Sentence: fated curiosity explored.

Word: how?

Colon: most desirous of punctuation.

maybe a story is found  
in the agony  
of weighted  
space

His name is Fraspers and he is bound to look at the time and location of his placement. Fraspers faces fucked focus. He forgets to see one thing at a time. Take the word *fuck*. Fraspers likes the word very much, yet cannot bear to see it placed after *they* or in fact with any other combination of words. Fuck.  
(This is why Fraspers thinks in individual words.)

Her name is Pertameta and she delights in the pleasurable pain found in mental suffering. Pertameta has searched for the perfect sentence for a long time. *Fuck Fraspers*, she whispers to him each night. *It's so hard. So hard to find*. Fraspers giggles and then they fuck with great libido.  
(Those are three of her best sentences as of yet.)

Fraspers and Pertameta love one another. The love of oddballs is not uncommon, but was never not a thing of fascination. Their love is the purest kind, the kind that laughs at itself because of the depths of its dirtiness and sweetness.

Fraspers is a sweet-talker. Even if he does only think in words, somehow he manages to come up with impressive fragments. Today is a sentence. He wakes up beside Pertameta and clutches at her hand. *My dear Pertameta, I thought I would fall in love with perfection, but I found perfection in love.*

Pertameta always tests a sentence's perfection before deigning to respond. This is not a perfect sentence, so she moves on. *Perfection is lost in love, my love.*

Today is love.

She smiles at Fraspers and kisses his nose. *You are love.*

Fraspers and Pertameta decide to create a perfect story:

*Give me a word, Fraspers.*

*Love.*

*Another?* Fraspers knocks on his skull and taps his elbow. He rubs his balls and picks his nose. *Fuck.*

*Is that the word or are you expressing yourself?*

*Fuck.*

Pertameta is not sure if Fraspers is repeating himself for clarification or repeating his expression of himself for clarification, but either way he is not effectively communicating himself.

Pertameta. Love. Patient. Pertameta. Painless.

*A fragment, Fraspers?*

*My love housed in words. You are my home.*

Fraspers can leave Pertameta, but Pertameta cannot leave Fraspers. Pertameta needs Fraspers or she will cease to exist, nothing but a conglomeration of meaningless sound.

*I need you Fraspers.*

*Need.*

*Who? What?*

Pertameta almost leaves herself in looking for Fraspers.

*I and you.*

Pertameta finds Fraspers in these three words.



(Who needs? Needs what? I need you.)

So Fraspers needs Pertameta.

She makes sense of his existence just as he ensures she exists.

But love is not need.

Love: is how Pertameta is at the end of Frasper's day, is the invisible hand in the united bits of his life.

Love: is how Fraspers, in Pertameta's thoughts, is remade each time.

Love: is how Fraspers always kisses Pertameta to consciousness, makes an offering of love throughout the day.

Fraspers has difficulty escaping his thoughts.

Pertameta breaks her thoughts up into units

as easily separated as the syllables of her name.

Pertameta and Fraspers remind one another to look at different sized units and dimensions of thoughts.

*Feeling. Lost. Find. Me. You. Gently.  
Gently, you find me feeling lost.  
Lost, you find me gently feeling.*

*Together. Now. Alright. We are.  
We are now alright, together.  
Together now, we are alright.*

Pertameta finds Fraspers without directions, even when he is lost in a foreign place of feelings and noise.

Fraspers and Pertameta are always looking for and finding one another.

Fraspers loves to nestle his head against Pertameta's bosom.

Pertameta loves to wrap her arms around Fraspers' head like she is holding a baby Fraspers to her chest.

Sometimes Fraspers does not come home, and Pertameta comes to know a vacant sense of having been forgotten to exist.

When Fraspers returns, Pertameta's eyes ask why. Fraspers shakes his head approaches Pertameta like a scolded dog.

*Nothing out there.*

*And here?*

*Yes, much.*

Pertameta cannot not forgive Fraspers. She comes to know meaning like a discovery of life. She can never not find meaning when Fraspers returns to her doorstep, simple and sweet eyes only for her.

Pertameta hugs Fraspers and he feels free.

Fraspers kisses Pertameta and she feels alive.

Fraspers and Pertameta: think up words to make their lives, to live, to make a living.

Fraspers and Pertameta: construct word houses for their lives together.

Fraspers and Pertameta: live in a home of words.

Fraspers and Pertameta: live in one another.

## AFTER MILOS

B. Joanna Chen

I am not asking anymore  
I am telling

listen

for what is delight but the sting  
of ginger on our tongues  
and the heat of sun on our arms as we brace  
bare ourselves and beg to tear ourselves  
our inner selves

you once tried to convince me  
that this surface shit was it and I laughed  
even though I was scared  
you were right

but let me tell you now

and this is not a request  
for permission but a preamble

prepare yourself

we are here  
bone skin and underpinning  
wire copper conducting our blood  
all blue spark and passing shock but I must be  
more than the fusion  
of flesh to flesh because flesh  
will lie to flesh

someday  
we won't be here and that day  
is now as I wake  
up alone morning  
slow sore motion wrenching open

my eyes answer the question  
will I get out of bed

yes  
but it is like prying copper from below  
the skin full  
to face the sun trying to remember  
to bare all this

what buoyancy  
allows us to hold the sky and hold it

sparking inside ourselves.

## PARALYSIS, ON 500-THREAD COUNT

---

This is how it is  
to inhale  
all your air, second-hand.

I swallow back the burn  
in my throat  
and endure the fingers  
wringing at my ribs.  
Their voices muffled  
both sides of my brain  
short-circuited. Hijacked. Waiting  
to spark the dead space between  
my legs  
sprawled across unwashed sheets.

I cradle control, close my eyes  
to its silent suckling.

I call this one  
“Paralysis,  
on 500-thread count.” And you nodded,  
politely, as I am sure your mother taught you.  
And I thought, *patience*. But what  
I really pictured was *affliction*.

And how did it feel, the highway  
thrumming under you?  
How did it feel, to be the blessed?

# NATURE POEM

## Saeward Schillaci

I'm sort of in a café,  
 attempting not to expound upon spasmodic loneliness,  
 or the arroyos rending the arid landscape of my mind,  
 trying not to compare the desertification of Africa to my own cynicism.

Instead I'd like to write about a ruffed grouse:  
 A mama ruffed grouse with three babies  
 running through the bushes by the lake shore.  
 It's nice to think about how the words sound:  
 four running ruffed grouse.

But somehow the arroyos keep popping back into my brain like toast jumping out of  
 a toaster.  
 And soon the four running ruffed grouse are sprinting through the bottom of a desert  
 gully,  
 trying to keep ahead of a pack of ravenous coyotes or a flash flood.  
 And the wall of rushing water bearing down on them reminds me of the loneliness  
 again,  
 which isn't really a problem until I lose my footing in the sudden current  
 and take in mouthfuls of gritty water until  
 I'm seriously quite pessimistic about my chances of survival.

The grouse have had better luck,  
 having flown up to a ledge above the reach of the deluge.  
 I see the mama and children huddled together  
 as I tumble past like a cheap foam and plastic flip-flop.

## PERFECTION

---

*“he must walk as lightly and carefully as possible, almost on tiptoe, on the cobblestones and flagstones, so that his soles might last a little longer”* – “The Overcoat” by

Nikolai Gogol

few can match you, Akaky Akakievich

no need to speak      just let me sit  
here, show me how to space each word  
in the light of the neighbor’s candle, share with me  
your purpose and sacrifice      we can copy  
the world together      letter by letter  
at this rickety table next to the stove

and when others would change  
the crop-killing frost, give a blanket to an orphan,  
or correct a misspelling      we will know our place  
as assistants of the head clerk’s assistant  
and persist with integrity as heroes should

before tiptoeing back into the frugal  
darkness to eat some broth and an onion



# SITTING AT THE EDGE OF A LAKE IN QUETICO PROVINCIAL PARK

---

Ron Swanson

the echoing of the  
wing beats as a group of teals  
flies to the sun and back,  
then across this lake,  
then off to bed in the rushes.

A single feather mite  
becomes dislodged, drops  
into space, and sails  
the solar wind to Mars

where its corpse will baffle  
astronomers for centuries.

Meanwhile, in the rushes  
by the lake, the teals tuck  
their heads under their wings  
and fall asleep.

And on a rock not far away  
I zip up my new raincoat.

## Contributor Notes

**Alyssa Wong** is a senior studying English and theater at Duke University. Her writing has also appeared in *The Archive* literary magazine at Duke and *Yellow Pages*, a student-run Asian American issues magazine. Her favorite genres to read and write are fantasy, sci-fi, and neo-noir.

**Ian Walker-Sperber** lives with his two cats Comet & Oreo, who have drastic weight problems and no appreciation for classical French poetry. After college Ian will have no financial security, nor will he have any cats.

**Emily Greenberg** is a senior English and fine arts major from Memphis, Tennessee. A Managing Editor of *Ink Magazine* and an arts columnist for the *Cornell Daily Sun*, she has also published fiction in *Kitsch Magazine* and *Ink Magazine*, and her artwork has been featured in multiple group shows.

**Meia Geddes** is currently studying Comparative Literature and Literary Arts, or, in other words, Reading and Writing. She has been previously published in *VISIONS* and *Watershed*, for which she is a Contributing Editor.

**Savannah Jual Martin** is a writer-feminist-individual-in-progress from Arizona. She currently lives in Paris, France, but her spirit longs for the desert.

**Cameron Q. Louie** is a whistler, climber of rocks, and poetry scientist. He lives in the sun and is currently working on making peace with a caffeine addiction.

**Daniel P. Tsoy** hails from Potomac, Maryland and will soon fly to Seattle, Washington to begin his service with *City Year*. He likes his eggs two at a time, fried over-easy, and runny.

**Adam Kroloff** is a senior majoring in English and Psychology. He is from a strange land, not so far away, called New Jersey.

**Melinda Dubbs** hails from Fishers, Indiana and is earning a BA in English and Psychology at Indiana University Bloomington. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *zaum*, *noah*, *Backbone Press*, and *Nanoism*, among others.

**Ovid** did not live from March 20, 43 B.C. to 17 A.D., though on Wikipedia it says that he did. He's still alive, in fact.

**Caitlin Gribbin** is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences double majoring in English and Biology. When not writing things, she enjoys rowing boats, being outside, and petting friendly dogs. She is interested in medicine and uninterested in graduating.

**B. Joanna Chen** is a junior, currently abroad studying English at Cambridge University. She's hoping to come back with a more convincing British accent.

**Saeward Schillaci** thinks dead languages are really awesome, and can think of nothing better than sitting by a fire in a cabin in the mountains while holding a puppy.

**Ron Swanson** loves shopping at Food ‘n Stuff.

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