

# sliced bread magazine

*a collection of student art and writing at the University of Chicago*



# staff

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For submission guidelines and other information, please visit our website at [www.slicedbreadmag.com](http://www.slicedbreadmag.com).

# dear reader,

“I do like not knowing where I’m going, wandering in strange woods, whistling and following bread crumbs.”

—Tilda Swinton

Sliced Bread is turning ten! That’s significantly older than most perishable goods, but we can assure you that we are still as fresh-smelling and mold-free as the day we were baked.

Thank you for helping us celebrate the big one-oh! Are you ready for our awkward middle school years? Much like many tween-agers, we are moving into exciting new circles. This year marks the revitalization of Bread Beat, our staff-run podcast, as well as more contests and fundraisers than ever before! And we would be remiss not to mention the wonderful addition of a bread-baker’s dozen (that would be fourteen!) talented new staff members, from one of the largest applicant pools in our history.

The artists featured in this issue have crafted wonderful and strange spaces for us to explore—from a dreamy expanse filled with poisonous plants, to the eerily unfamiliar landscape of a neighborhood grocery store—and have continually amazed and enthralled us. A big bravo to all of you—we could not have done this without you.

We would also like to use this space to thank all of our fantastic staff members, and to extend a special message of gratitude to our two graduating editors, Sara Maillacheruvu and Sophia Chun, and staff member Jacob McCarthy. Their tireless efforts have made Sliced Bread into what it is today, and they have been a constant source of both structure and support within the magazine.

And, finally, we would like to thank you for sticking with us: whether you’re a regular reader, a consistent contributor, or even if you just stuck around to read the end of this letter! We hope to keep growing (or rather, rising) and that you will enjoy this anniversary issue of Sliced Bread as much as we have enjoyed bringing it to you.

Panivorously yours,  
The Editors

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## can crusher

mireille farjo

for  
the sea salt,  
for the orange peels,  
for every str-  
ipe on my socks,  
i'll count it out.  
hushed-up tiptoe (i gift the  
tilted swallow with  
this twining, moony  
sway),  
call at the neon with  
both my eyes: dew  
dropped sign, half-pace spinning,  
calling back. 8 fluid  
ounces,  
this tuning fork  
touch of every-  
thing from now on  
(from now on)  
a certain way of speaking,  
a blushing in my bones.  
you whisper over  
the night's shoulder—the  
tip of your tongue.

# CHRYSANTHEMUMS

SAM HOFFMAN

*[chrysanthemum - the flower of death  
fall]*

in late spring, as the other blooms were falling,  
I planted chrysanthemums,  
hoping, like a parent too invested in the success of a child,  
that they would take nourishment (and inspiration)  
from the rotting petals.

rust and fire colored, or so I was told,  
it would take the long hot days of summer for them to ripen and  
mature,  
the bushes with their *chrysanthemum* scent growing ever larger,  
indecent roots lacing the soil, infiltrating far beyond where I expected.

*growing season* is measured in days, a few more than a hundred,  
and soon I realized the whole process was out of my control. The days  
shortened, the air grew cooler, and the cleansing fall rains began,  
but still my chrysanthemums grew larger, lacking the good sense to die  
like their neighbors had done, drying and browning and giving  
themselves over to the soil.

when they finally bloomed together with the falling of the first snow,  
unable to save them, I cut them all, bringing the sunset colored blooms  
into my house where I could inhale their dangerous intoxicating  
fragrance,  
so determinedly unfloral, worth waiting the long hot days of summer  
for.

## OPERATIVE REPORT

DANIEL LAM

“Time out,” she says.

The words alone are enough to ice the atmosphere. It happens instantly, like the turning point of a séance. Even the surgeon stops mid-sentence. We look up at the flat screen bolted to the mint green operating room wall, and the circulating nurse reads from it without an ounce of enthusiasm, her words blurring into one long string of gibberish. The surgeon and I are gowned and gloved, standing on either side of her with our hands out in front of us, held awkwardly above her swollen belly. Blessing it, it would seem. Protocol demands sterility, so the room is swimming in every tint of blue, drapes glowing alive from the harsh lighting. And we are all silent and attentive, following along with the words that are being chanted, waiting for something, or someone, as if seeking guidance from the beyond to instruct us on how best to proceed.

We delineate our incision with a purple marker at the crease where her belly folds and reflects over a patch of brown pubic stubble. I hold her stomach up so the surgeon can draw a gentle arc that looks like a smile, and I imagine the boy swimming between my hands, centimeters beneath the surface, breathless and waiting. The scrub tech hands the surgeon a scalpel that gleams beneath the overhead lights and I can’t believe we’re bringing a blade so close to her skin—his skin—daring to separate two so intimately tied.

A flash of white. Adipose tissue like cotton batting emerges from the incision. For a moment I think we’ve torn open a stuffed animal, and then, sleepy vessels stir awake, and it begins to bleed. Bright red, pouring out like velvet. She cuts deeper, undeterred by the trauma we’re inflicting. I dab the area with soft squares of white cloth and watch as blood races along the fibers.

The surgeon is liberal with the scalpel, to the point where I’m nervous on her behalf. Doesn’t she know how sharp that is? Muscle fibers, arteries, veins all weaving together. And then, in a single stroke, gone. Regardless, we press on, identifying and dividing the various layers as we tread deeper, inching our way to him. At times we use the bovie, frying strings of fascia and fibrotic bands, cauterizing weeping blood vessels. It sizzles through

tissue with an energetic hum and pop, cooking it brown, then black, then crispy with a metallic sheen. I hold the suction close but it doesn't make a difference. It still smells of burning flesh. Like Doritos. Cool Ranch.

After clearing away fat and superficial fascia, we at last reach the rectus abdominis: a long, striated muscle bathed in intra-abdominal fluid, emanating something between a deep mahogany and a bruised purple. Unlike everything else we've encountered, this seems vital, ostentatiously alive. I put my fingers on it and it's warm through my gloves. It surprises me, how personal this gesture feels. The muscle has two bellies, so we find the gap between them and pull. Hard. I am on one side of the table and the surgeon is on the other, and together we lean back, putting our full body weight against the integrity of this woman's abs. I think about what we're doing for a second too long and at once feel nauseated. What if we rip her apart? The taste of bile creeps up the back of my throat.

The neck of the uterus is a speckled lavender. The surgeon picks up the scalpel again and makes very small incisions. One cut, then two, then, without warning, fluid jets out and splatters across the plastic guard in front of my face. It lasts only a moment, the gush of amniotic fluid immediately waning into a gentle outpouring that fills the plastic gutters hanging off the sides of the table. The fluid is clear and tinted a pale yellow. Flecks of blood and whitish pieces like lint are carried away by the current.

I see the top of his head first, which is covered in dark, drenched hair. The baby turns and I see his geriatric face, which is blue and grey and seems to be etched in granite, severe wrinkles furrowing his brow, forcing his eyes shut. The surgeon puts a forearm on the woman's belly and pushes his arms and torso out. They, also, are a dusky blue, lined with generous folds. A clean, white umbilical cord stems from his stomach, and the helix formed by the arteries and vein within the cord is kaleidoscopic. The surgeon pushes again from above, and this time his legs are delivered. Fat thighs, dimpled knees, terminating in ten pea-sized toes. I hold him while the surgeon clamps and cuts the umbilical cord. He's shimmering from a nine-month bath, and I struggle to keep him from slipping away.

He feels warm and familiar in my arms, eyes closed and limbs outstretched. His hands grasp the air—tiny fingers, tiny fingernails. He opens his mouth to reveal a pair of empty gums. It's like he's still floating in a world of fluid, used to the ease of weightlessness and the darkness of the womb. I suction his mouth and nose, and he grimaces, adding even more folds to his brow. But eventually he cries, and it reaches every corner of the room. It's loud and altering, like my ears popped and I realize that I've

been listening through layers of wool for who knows how long. Tension melts away. Somebody laughs. Time continues and we return.

A nurse takes the baby to a clear crib off to the side while we deliver the placenta, pulling out an off-white, filmy sac, engorged with bulging vessels red and deep blue. We explore the uterus for any placental remnants and then replace it gently into the peritoneal cavity, a task that all of a sudden feels painstakingly tedious. It's that post-anticipatory exhaustion—the drive home after Christmas dinner—and it hits me unexpectedly. My back aches and my arms feel abruptly awkward and strained holding the retractor so still. At last, the surgeon sews up the uterus and imbricates the incision, leaving only a neat, tram track of black suture in its place.

Our mission complete, we leave the way we came, closing the various layers that we'd hastily torn through just minutes before. For the skin, the surgeon uses a straight needle, the same kind used to darn a pair of socks, and the result is impressive—just a thin grey line, the edges kissed together perfectly, at a glance nothing more than an innocuous fold or slim bruise. We cover our closure with clean, white bandages and proceed to break everything down, tearing down drapes, unhooking various monitors and tubing, throwing them all indiscriminately into oversized garbage bags. With everything gone, I can see the woman, now a mother. Her head is turned away from me and looking at her son. His eyes are glued shut from erythromycin drops, but every once in a while he pries them open to reveal curious brown irises.

I remove my gloves and gown, my mask. The operating room is frigid in just my scrubs. We clean and dress her and I bury her beneath a mountain of warm blankets. In the commotion my arm innocently grazes her thigh, but she doesn't notice. Her epidural is still plugged into her spine like a power cord, obliterating all sensation south of her belly button. As we leave I take one last look around the room, now in disarray, a story written on its walls: bloodied debris strewn across the floor, soiled blankets tossed aside and leads left dangling from knee-high monitors, a plastic bucket three quarters full with murky serosanguinous fluid. I hold the door open so they can wheel her into the recovery room.

It's not until later, standing in front of the bathroom mirror, that I notice my right forearm—a hazy rhomboid, the size of my thumb and the color of an old penny. All blood looks the same once it's spilled, I hear, but I know this is hers. Like I can see the AB+ radiating from it, the maternal antibodies floating within. I crouch awkwardly to fit my arm within the sink basin and play back the events of the past hour, trying to recall how

such a breach could have gone unnoticed: her skin, bowing inwards, separating smoothly beneath the blade; the tepid fluid as we break the sac, shallow warmth flowing between my fingers like checking the water of a running bath; and him, the newly born, recently non-existent, unnamed novelty—predated by nothing else in the ever-expanding universe—one hand feeling the gaping sutures of his skull and the other at his ankles, each malleolus like a marble pressed into my palm. The entire journey to the center of her, all of it's there except for this. This is gone. Our singular collision, lost in the blind spot of my memory. Maybe at the end, I think, while I was dressing her, my elbow dropping just an inch too low. Maybe, but I'm not sure.

I turn off the water and inspect my arm closely. Not a trace of her remains. There's a scar on my wrist that I've had for so long I only notice it every other month, a thick dash from my sister's marshmallow-roasting fork that one summer at Big Sur. A bolded hyphen branded along my distal radius when I was twelve or thirteen. I vaguely remember the scorch, the chaos around a smoky fire pit beneath ponderosa pines, the sweet relief of the water spigot. I don't remember when I realized it would scar.

I think back to him and her, son and mother, one necessarily scarring the other, though I admit I had a hand in that as well. Her incision will ooze, ache, and keloid, but it will fade and soften with time. I imagine her tracing it listlessly while in the shower, or in the car, and while she breastfeeds, as she recalls that wonderful, traumatic expulsion. Her vision obscured by drapes, but a visceral pulling, and all that fluid, which she couldn't see but she could feel spill out of her, just like her baby. Perhaps she remembers me, brown eyes between a cap and mask, or perhaps not—there were many eyes and many caps and many masks. But I remember her: my first cesarean, a swollen belly center stage in a mint green theater, an aliquot of blood by my elbow and a pool of rose-colored water, lasting just moments before trickling irrevocably down the drain.

## **BEDROCK**

CAROLINE CARTER

I'll tell you a story  
more like instructions  
For nights when you find your bones crumbling  
under the weight of your heart  
Nights when the moon curls like a scythe  
over the forest where the widowmakers hang  
too brittle to stand the wind  
Slip out of bed  
Close the door softly  
Don't let your bones crack too loudly  
lest the widowmakers make an orphan out of you  
Stick to the deer path that winds through the poplars  
And if your shoulders are narrow  
like mine were  
Slide between the fallen pines under inch-thick moss  
Crawl on your hands and knees through the mud  
And cross the stream on a fallen log  
but test it first because when it rains  
the wood rots  
If you reach the canyon's other side



where the roots twist up and the ferns hang down  
and the frogs put up a constant drone  
Sit there and think for a while on one of those basalt rocks  
creeping out from the hillside  
with every raindrop  
Feel how its watery pores once burned  
in a volcano that's been gone for three epochs  
Know it's been here fifteen million years  
It will persist a while more  
in the light of the moon  
under the ferns and your palm  
and the croak of the frogs  
And when you've had your fill  
sitting atop a still living hill  
Make your way back home  
Softly close the door behind you  
And slip back into bed  
your heart a bit lighter  
and basalt in your bones

## INDEPENDENCE

ELINAM AGBO

you say all poems are love songs/ I am me so I must prove you wrong/  
here is/ a lump of gooseflesh on a cheese and veggie platter/ fear  
feeds on your memories/ five pounds of cow dung in grandmother's  
garden/ disgust and longing lounge in a chair/ sipping strawberry  
lemonade/ squeezed from my strawberries/ your lemons/ poems are  
love songs/ you insist/ you forgot the "all" this time/ you forgot the  
smell of kerosene/ burning mosquito coils at midnight/ the taste of  
lemongrass tea after palm wine/ tell me who is *right*/ july 4 and march  
6 are the same and not the same/ what is *independence day*/ a moment  
of separation/ or is distance the name/ what is *right* here/ a video of you  
spitting on the roadside/ declaring Newark has too much litter/ for the  
first world/ who decides/ what comes *first*/ Accra taxis/ the subway/  
or the invisible oath on your passport/ home is missing/ nobody and  
nowhere is *right* for you/ yes/ true/ but what does that have to do with  
poems/ pinch yourself for me please/ you say a poem is a love song/  
what does marching mean in march/ if you only exist now in another  
country/ if the home of our childhood only exists in your head/ a poem  
is a question in a question/ make up your mind about language/ are we  
talking places or memory?

## JOHN LUTZ

Playing with wild-flowers, which is to say  
plucking, clumping, throwing them away.  
Spring has only started,  
so the dew  
adorning them is wonderful and new,  
a much more noble sort of wet than rain.  
(When I suck it from the petals it's just plain  
water.)  
Siblings, lazing on the lawn:  
the cloud that hadn't moved all day is gone.

## **slim white fish**

zane rossi

My mother killed herself, and her mother killed herself, but I am only twenty. Small snack packages are lined up neatly on the shelves. When I touch them they crinkle. No, I do not think I am there yet. He said I am a lonely person who has a way of making other people lonely, which I just think means that I am persuasive, a go-getter, but it did make him leave me, which I guess means that, to him, it is a bad thing, and not worth fixing up. But he is also the one who left. He liked the wasabi peas. I hated the wasabi peas, which were all he tasted like after eating them, again and again. The baggies whisper crinkly whispers to each other, especially when I touch them. My pants are large and black and billowy, and I am a little drunk. It is as if they are warning each other, maybe about my presence. Uh huh. To be honest, this seems like what it is. That maybe I am dangerous. He seemed to want to say that I am dangerous, although he never came out and did it. Like he knew I had dirt on him. Not that it was so very bad, the dirt. Just that he looked no better than I did, if it all came out. If I told a little story. The pants kiss my hips, which are like small cuttlefish bones, and when I take them off, whenever I might get home, there will be red depression zig-zags all the way around, perfect to be felt by fingertips, no matter whose. What a thought. I leave the snickering snacks behind and turn to the chilled stuff, where there are many yogurt drinks, cool to the touch, with bits of fruit, and also full and half size cartons of all the dairy mixes. Everything is on ice or under cold cold jets of chilly air, where the ultimate purpose is, I guess, to keep death under wraps. Hush hush. They all say ‘live cultures,’ ‘fresh,’ or ‘plain.’ I take a pink clean can into my two hands and turn it around a couple of times, looking down, letting the corners of my mouth go down—pretty good, I mouth, uh huh, pretty good. And by my side a man is lost in his reflection in a loaf of bread. When my legs are close together the pants look like a skirt, but then I can take them apart and it opens up a whole new world. It is very fun, and no one ever appreciates it. Because I can pump my knees back and forth a little while standing to make it look like big black rolling waves are coming from nowhere at all. I put the can back because I am too busy then staring at my legs, or

where they could ever be. Next to the cartons is a special shelf for eggs. Next to that is a special shelf for butter, and then cheese. I have eaten all of these things, at one time or another. I make more waves. I am staring at my feet too long. So stare at something else, I tell myself, and this is pretty easy to do. Uh huh. I stare at a bag of ice, which lets me look through and at it, the bag, like the air above the road on a hot hot day, which soothes the dizziness. The ice is so round. The man decides yes on the bread. Good call, good call. Humming. The cashier seems to narrow his eyes at the man as if to say: do you really want to buy the loaf? This one right here? Maybe it is a dangerous loaf. Then the man buys it. And maybe he is a brave man. And I think that he is a man who is not out of options, which is why I buy things, especially at this time of night. When I am truly out of options I cannot buy a thing, not even gelatin candy or erotic magazines or cinnamon sugar oatmeal for dinner, all of which hit, in their own way, the spot. The man nods. The cashier nods. Progressively smaller nods like they'll never end but they do. Someone new comes in and starts the loop and I'm still back near the yogurt and things, so I turn quick and embarrassed and check out the selection of dried meat, which remind me of feet: their bottoms and sides. I wear smooth black Chelsea boots, which hide my, oh god, my feet from me, in addition to making me feel cool, and which I have had for a long while now—from before him, but after my mother killed herself. There are the pre-things and the post-things. My boots and pants are post as well as my socks and panties and my shirt made of fine black wool and my hair barrette, although not my bra or my decorative ring, which is octagonal and made of steel and sometimes rusts. Most of my skin is post, but my bones have been around forever, it seems. They hold my pants up, clever bones. Never broken a single one. I pick up some magazine where the orbs of a woman's breasts spill out of a cheese-colored bikini—very nice, very nice, uh huh, even if it is not the right season. When I turn around I am tête-à-tête with the wasabi peas. I turn again. It is like I am the big white moon and have been captured, after a long time, by the earth, which lets me suck weakly at its tides, same time every month. Fuck the earth. If that is how it happened. The earth is where people die. The earth is where there are mosquitos at night. I do not feel very big and pale and luminous anyway, but I do change faces every once in a while, and people say I come and go. Let me suck at your watery goo. Please. It was not enough. For Christmas he bought me a cantaloupe and didn't even eat any of it, even when I asked. A cantaloupe is like the moon. I pick up a bottle in one hand, and a bottle

in the other, by their skinny necks, and weigh them. Oh, yes, this one is heavier, just a little bit. Uh huh. I put them back. Many of the drinks are coffee, which I never grew to like the taste of, although the smell is very good, I think. I think I like things if they go on for long enough. Maybe I will hate them if they go on even longer, although, to be fair, this seems a little stupid. Coffee smell is sticky on the fingers for so so long. And I am facing away from the center of the store, because all the good stuff is on the walls. Like there is something so bad at the center. He was post, although he was alive and around during the pre, a little boy somewhere, which makes him sort of complicit to it all, uh huh, like my bra. What a job they both did. I fixed my bra with a pull-tab when it decided to give it up. My arms are like slim white fish peeking out of my sleeves, which are like big drapes around them, as if they are swimming around on their own; they touch Styrofoam, and then cellophane, and then painted aluminum, as if they cannot tell which touch is special or not. They have felt my hips, and my teeth, and a couple of other people. I try and look at the same type of loaf that the man looked at, and I don't see much of anything but, then again, he did take his loaf, and it might have been the only one. There are a handful of things that can only happen once, and sometimes people do them. I cannot say. They are the things that can send a reflection right back at you at a million miles per hour. I would know, even though I have not been around that long. Around what, they say. And it makes me think. My feet are bags for my clever bones. So many of them. So many wasabi peas. Maybe I have been here before. I make eye contact with the cashier because this cleverly diffuses his tension as well as my own, although, with my pants making waves and my slim white fish arms, I cannot imagine that I seem like much of a threat to him, or will bring great calamity on his store or household or well-being. I am not an earthquake, or a tidal wave. Maybe I am dangerous. It is not in writing yet. I am only twenty and cannot buy things quick. Gum it is. What a treat. Reminds me of car rides. I am a little drunk.

## VANTAGE

JAKE WEISS

Finding myself disturbed, I walk  
myself to the pier where the old men  
fish, and smell like fish. Fish for the smell.  
Their wives are dead, or alive and alone:  
live off cold tuna and yellowed  
photographs. The men speak of sex  
they'll never have, of women who  
work in the seaside shacks  
boiling lobsters, and their children  
who've grown and gone away, and don't call  
or write or even think about their rotting  
fathers, genitals calloused with saline,  
fingers crumpled from arthritis and stung  
by stray hooks in the subtle darkness  
of repetitive evenings. They sigh.  
A dragonfly lands on my shoulder  
and leaves to make love  
with another dragonfly; intertwined,  
they flutter out towards  
the boisterous sea. I must go,  
it is getting dark. Father is grilling  
summer corn, whose kernels puff  
and blacken. I haven't been gone long.  
He hasn't seen me go. Thorny vines  
scrape my legs, and evergreens  
whisper of trysts they've seen  
whilst standing perpetually alone.

**AFTERWARD**  
AIDAN LILIENFELD

Cool  
running  
twisted  
home,  
driving  
daytime  
summer  
rain,  
sunny  
sunset  
once or  
always,  
flying  
nightwind  
empty  
lane,  
madness



## QUE HI FAS, AQUI

THEO GRANT-FUNCK

De los ojos sos ojos tan fuertamente  
llorando tornava la cabeça e estávalos cantando  
Hannibal hoped for a short war  
Quantes llengües parles?  
Tears streamed from his eyes as he turned his head  
and stood looking at them  
Pleonasmo      unnecessary repetition

The cosmopolitan Barcelona brand is made out  
to be part museum and part beach  
with bits of discothèque and restaurant thrown in for good measure  
Only 14 km separate Spain from Africa  
Hoplite warfare lasted because Greeks didn't travel  
El clima, el mar, la historia  
Capilla      small sanctuar

The place where anarchism triumphed  
animated by tourist dollars and multi-national leases  
Miedo a los extraños como un animalillo perdido  
Garraf — picturesque beach on the way to Sitges  
featured in many advertisements  
Señor, vasallo, campesino  
Lujo → luxury

This complex learning process almost inevitably results  
in reports from returning students that, “I learned more about  
myself and my culture than about the culture I was living in”  
Yo nací por querer del cielo en esta nuestra edad de hierro  
There was a crafty sailor aboard named Look-what-you-do  
Castidad, ermitaño, avergonzado  
Agarrar → to grab

Two key features of colonialism: in the first place  
the presence of one or more groups of foreign people  
Tenía los carrillos hinchados y la boca llena de risa  
con evidentes señales de querer reventar con ella  
You have no obligations till Monday  
Roast chicken, Hake fish, Pork cheeks with wine and plums  
Zambullirse → to submerge yourself

In the second place, asymmetrical relationships  
between colonizing and colonized—  
inequality, in a single word  
Phoenicians were first to globalize  
Archeologists assumed la Dama de Baza was male  
Exotic, despotic, luxurious  
Mediterranean → medio de la tierra

Volvamos a América los ojos del pensamiento  
allí, libertad de cultos, libertad de incultos, libertad de vagancia  
Both events detached from their reality  
Un cofre de gran riqueza hallaron dentro un pilar  
Convinced of decrepitude  
by so many noble certainties of dust  
we linger and lower our voices.

## DRINKS, DOGS, AND DEVILISH SCHEMES

TAHIRA SHERWANI

Bilsin was undoubtedly, undeniably, unarguably lost. Which was absurd.

His master had given him explicit instructions on how to reach the location of their rendezvous. Yet here Bilsin stood, stranded in the middle of this filthy, human-infested city, squinting up at the signs above the doors lining the street and wondering, with a wrinkle of his nose, why anyone would name a public house after a bloody boar. Didn't they want patrons? What human would ever venture into a pub whose façade featured gruesome portraits of deceased swine?

An already drunken one, evidently, as illustrated by the gentleman who staggered past Bilsin, tripped over a broken cobblestone, and crawled the remainder of the way through the door.

"Revolted," Bilsin muttered. Once he might have pitied the creature, but the months upstairs had taught him better. One should never pity a human.

The recollection of this phrase, one repeated often by Bilsin's master, brought him back to the matter at hand. He was lost, and there were far too many humans about for him to contact his master and petition for more directions. Furthermore, while his powers were greater than those of the jinn who did not enjoy his master's confidence like he did, they did not extend to the cessation of time. Therefore, he was lost, and worse, if he did not regain his bearings soon, he would be late.

The devil did not like for his lackeys to be late. Especially not one who, thus far, had displayed a depth of obedience and loyalty unparalleled by any other in his service.

Bilsin blew out a sigh and looked round. Surely something ought to strike him as familiar. He had followed his master's instructions to the letter, and yet—

"Ah-ha!" he shouted, and, ignoring the rude gesture made by a drunk who had jumped nearly a foot at the sudden sound, he ran to the shack-like structure hidden in the shadows behind the gaming-house. He entered through a door so short he had to stoop, righted himself, and promptly banged the top of his head on an exposed beam. No one had noticed, so he

did not waste time pretending to be hurt. He spotted the lone brown man sitting in the booth nearest to the back wall and hurried over. In the dim, smoky light, his master looked almost like his normal self.

"I apologize for the delay, milord," Bilsin said as he took his seat.

"No need for apology, Bilsin, though I did wonder if you had decided not to come after all."

Bilsin flushed. "Milord, I—"

The devil grinned, a flash of white amidst the smoke. "A joke, Bilsin, though you must admit that arriving on the dot is unusual for you. You think of a half hour early as on time and on time as late." He waved a hand and a glass appeared. "Drink?"

Bilsin eyed the glass dubiously.

"It's from home," the devil added.

"Yes, milord, of course. Thank you." Bilsin pulled the drink towards him. "Who is our target this evening?"

"The man in the purple coat, Bilsin. The one at the table in the far left corner."

Bilsin wrinkled his nose. The man was white, though at present his face was mostly blotchy red. He sat slumped over his mug, staring into it as if it had had the audacity to tell him that he looked positively putrid in that shade of purple.

Which he did. Bilsin twisted his mouth, brushed a speck of lint off the sleeve of his own acceptably dark blue coat, and ran a hand through his dark hair for good measure. He turned to his master again.

"What has he done?" he asked.

"It isn't what he has done that concerns us," the devil replied, "but what he is thinking of doing." He took a sip of his drink and frowned. "This is far too bitter. I should speak to Daru about this. I specifically instructed him to add extra sugar to the brew."

Bilsin refrained from comment.

"Anyway," the devil continued, "Mr. George Carlson is contemplating the murder of his dog."

"Is this the same man who broke his wife's arm, milord?" he asked.

"Indeed he is, Bilsin," the devil said absently. He had conjured up several packets of sugar and was now pouring them into his drink one by one. "He is also the same man who once beat his child so thoroughly that he was forced to tell his neighbors that the boy had been attacked by a bear."

Bilsin's brow furrowed. "And we are only now pursuing him because...?"

“Because the dog’s murder is the atrocity the public will care about,” the devil said, swirling his drink in an attempt to dissolve the sugar. “The people will shame him for this, Bilsin, no doubt about that. Thus he will turn even more frequently to drink, find that he has no money to sustain this impulse, and turn to more and more violent crime to do so. And then, well—then we have him. Unless someone takes pity on him, which is an unlikely occurrence given the nature of what we want him to do. Therefore—” he paused to take a sip of his drink, made a face, set it down, and continued stirring it “—what we want is to suggest to him the many merits of killing his dog.”

“And they are?”

“None,” the devil said, with another grin. “In truth, absolutely none. We must fabricate these merits. Which is no small feat, Bilsin, seeing as humans value their pets to almost laughable extents. Some even consider them as children.”

Bilsin’s nose wrinkled. “Surely not, milord!”

“Oh yes! Allow me to demonstrate.” He rose and went to the single man seated at the bar.

“Hello, my good man!”

“Hello!” the man at the bar replied, beaming. “Fine day, isn’t it?”

The devil smiled dazzlingly back. “Yes, quite beautiful. Do you mind if I join you?”

“No, not at all!”

The devil gave him a more careful look as he sat down. He was a large, fresh-faced young man, whose bright smile, cheerful voice, and clear dark skin betrayed the rarity of his visits to the pub. The devil eyed the empty space before him and glanced at the bartender, who was cleaning a set of mugs and scowling.

“You won’t have anything?”

“Oh, I don’t drink,” said the young man, confirming the devil’s fears. “I’ve arranged to meet a friend here. I’d rather speak with him elsewhere, but he is, regrettably, much attached to this establishment.” He sighed. “I tell him often about the dangers of such a place as this, but he will not listen. If he would only try coming to church more often! If he did he would—”

At this moment the young man was forced to break off and watch, with considerable alarm, as the devil collapsed into a spectacular coughing fit. He hacked, gasped, wheezed, whooped, flailed, doubled over, and—in the young man’s opinion—came within a hairsbreadth of meeting his Maker.

In spite of this impression, at length the devil did recover.

"I apologize," he croaked, waving at the bartender to bring him a drink. "I'm quite at my wit's end about my allergies. They crop up in the most unexpected places." He took the drink and moved to a different stool. "Do continue; I'll just sit over here so I don't cough on you."

He coughed once more and took a sip of his drink. For a moment the bartender stopped scowling at the young man to puzzle over the brown man's drink—surely it hadn't sparkled so much when he had given it to him?—but then he blinked, and it was as mud-colored as always, and the bartender returned to his scowling without another thought.

"So you're a religious man," the devil said.

"That I am," said the young man. "I'm in seminary right now, actually—"

He broke off again as the devil collapsed into another coughing fit, this one worse than the last.

"I say," said the young man, wide-eyed, "is it wise for you to drink when your allergies are so severe? Surely—"

"The drink helps, I assure you," the devil croaked. "It counteracts the effects." He took another sip. "Your studies must be rather strenuous."

"Oh no, I love every minute of it! It's quite rewarding, really, to learn about scripture and the Lord—"

The devil sneezed.

"Bless you!"

He sneezed again.

"Bless you!"

He sneezed a third time.

"Bless—"

"Don't!" the devil managed before sneezing again. "You'll be saying nothing else all day, so pray don't bother." He sniffed. "If you are allergic to anything, you understand what I mean."

"Cats," said the young man solemnly, "which I thank God for every day—bless you! Oh, right, sorry—because I have the most wonderful golden retriever and I couldn't imagine life without her!"

The devil had his back to the table where Bilson sat, but he could clearly picture the look of disgust on his lackey's face.

"Oh, you have a dog!" said the devil, much as one would say, "oh, you mean it's Kaylygh spelled with two y's!" or "of course I want to hear about spring break in Panama!" "Does it have a name?"

"She," the man emphasized, "is called Sarah."

The devil stared. "Sarah."

The man nodded.

"Forgive me," the devil said, "but where I am from, people don't really name their dogs."

The man looked shocked. "Then how do they feel like they are a part of the family?"

"They don't," the devil said flatly, "because they're not. Dogs are functional in our society."

Up until now the man had been all smiles, but at these words his friendly demeanor faded. "You must be from somewhere quite far off."

"That depends on perspective," said the devil. He slid off the stool. "I believe the man heading this way is your friend, so I'll leave you to him. It was a pleasure meeting you."

"Quite," said the man, though the sentiment seemed somewhat forced. He turned to greet his friend and immediately chided him for his untucked shirt.

"...hardly respectable, you know, you ought to tidy up no matter where you're going..."

Meanwhile, the devil returned to his table.

"Well?"

Bilsin's face was scrunched into a look of utmost revulsion. "A part of the family," he said with a shudder. "It is worse than I expected, milord."

"Some people even put them in clothes," the devil added, speaking with the relish of a child boasting to his friends about his injuries. "And shoes. And they make them little beds in their homes."

Bilsin put his head in his hands.

"Chin up," the devil said, taking a sip from the drink he had left behind. "It may seem ridiculous, but it makes our job much easier. Once we convince Mr. Carlson to murder his dog, people like our friend with the golden retriever will be up in arms."

He downed the rest of the drink. As the last drop slid into his mouth the glass vanished, much to the amazement of the elderly man a few tables over, who shook his head, blinked hard several times, and decided that perhaps his decades of practically living at this establishment had finally caught up to him.

"And now," said the devil, standing, "now that you have seen our estimable target and understand the nature of mankind's relationship with dogs, we shall go to Mr. Carlson's farm and take a look at the dog in question."

"It is not a very pretty creature, milord," Bilsin said, his nose wrinkled.



Indeed, the dog, a German shepherd, was one of the most unpleasant creatures Bilsin had ever seen. It was sleeping in a patch of sun by George Carlson's henhouse, its tail sweeping gently along the dirt to deter some interested flies. Its ribs poked out under its black and brown fur, which was dull and patchy, and one of its legs stuck out an unnatural angle, as if it had been broken.

The devil snorted. "Humans do not care if a dog is pretty, Bilsin. Fat, thin, fluffy, sleek, pretty, ugly—all dogs are loved regardless of their looks. It is only humans who are judged for their appearance." He took a step back and gave the dog a second look, his lips pursed. "Though I must admit this dog in particular is quite ragged. It seems Mr. Carlson has been neglecting it already."

As he spoke, the dog opened one eye. Bilsin was startled by the murkiness of its pupil.

"Can it see us?" he asked.

"Well, normally it would," the devil replied. "Though I think..." He crouched by the dog, then recoiled. "Ugh. This dirt is filthy." He blinked and a plush rug appeared beneath both him and the dog. "Better. Now let's...ah. It is very sick, Bilsin. I suspect it will die soon, very soon, whether we succeed in provoking Mr. Carlson to actively murder it or not."

The devil looked up at Bilsin, who shifted his weight, stuffed his hands in his pockets, and hunched his shoulders. As much as he wanted to, he could not say it first. It was not his place.

The devil looked at the dog again. It stared blankly back, aware of their presence but unable to see or respond to them. For a long minute the only sound was of its breathing, which to Bilsin's uncomfortable conscience sounded more and more uneven by the second.

"She," the devil said finally, quietly, "ought to be left alone, I think."

Relief washed over Bilsin. The guilty knot in the pit of his stomach unravelled. "Yes, milord."

The devil rose. He blinked and the conjured rug, still cushioning the sick dog, blended so perfectly with the dirt and grass around it that it was invisible to the human eye.

"You know, Bilsin," he said. "Sometimes I am astonished at how humans manage to do so much without us."

"Yes, milord," Bilsin said again, and followed him away from the henhouse.

## THE FALL

SAM HOFFMAN

that first time i tasted you when  
your tongue was bit through,  
stitches grasping and curling

like little spiders  
wounded by your own teeth as well as  
gravity and things to be expected.

eyes opened to the cold,  
we were naked and exposed  
skin diamonded with goosebumps.

out of the garden,  
bright switchblade in hand on secure well-lit streets but  
it took only the threat, no more.

you see, mouth-insides are the first to heal and  
i was always afraid of grasping things.  
thank God you pulled away



## **WASH**

SARA MAILLACHERUVU



## **EVOLUTION**

HALEY WELLMAN



# VASTNESS

LUKE EHLERS



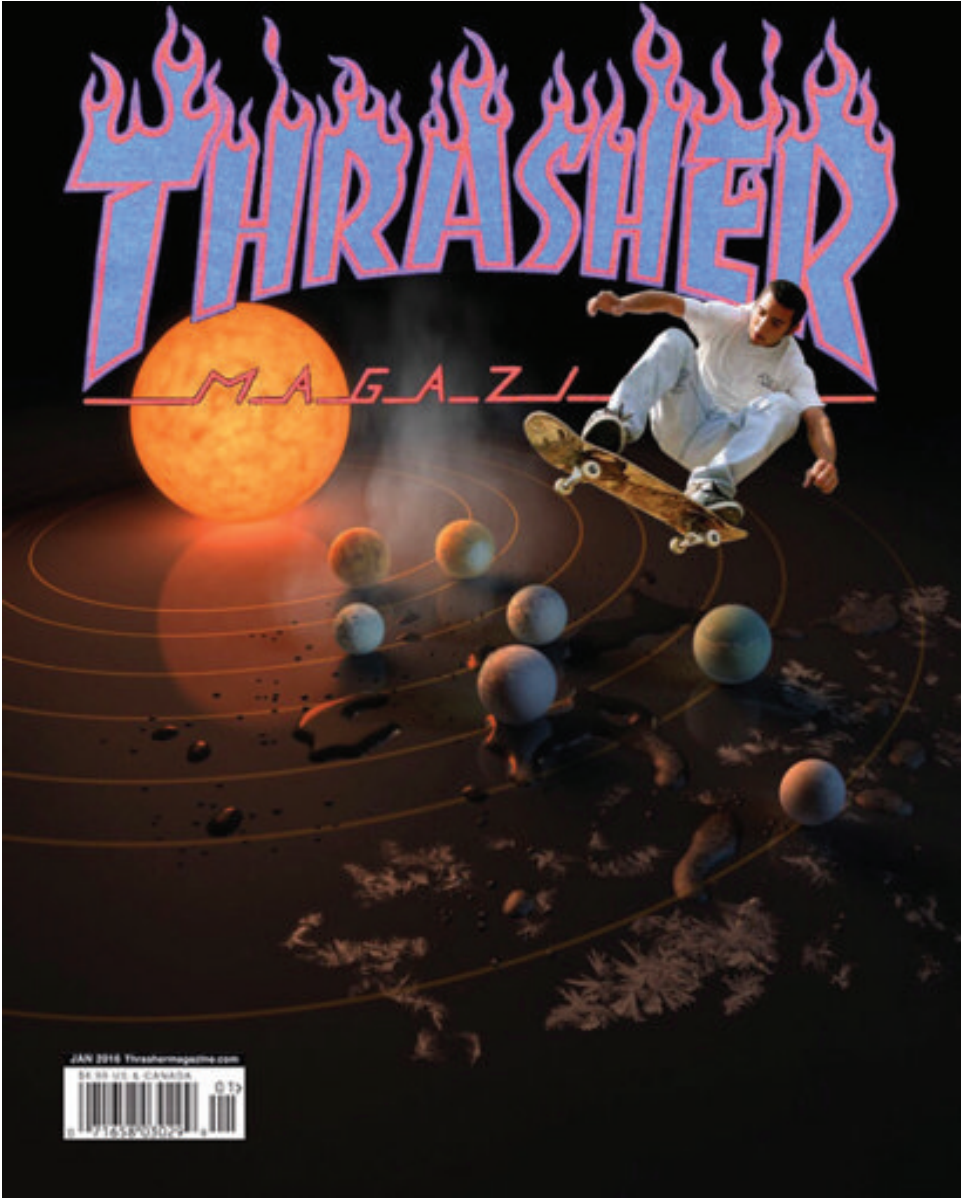


**COSMIC PLASTICS**

HALEY WELLMAN



**COLD SPRING PARK**  
NATHANIEL BOLTER



**FAKE THRASHER**  
@AZNHUNNAYXOXO





## FIRE

EMMA SMITH



**NATIVE**  
AMELIA FRANK



## **AEON UPON THE SHORE**

SOPHIA CHUN



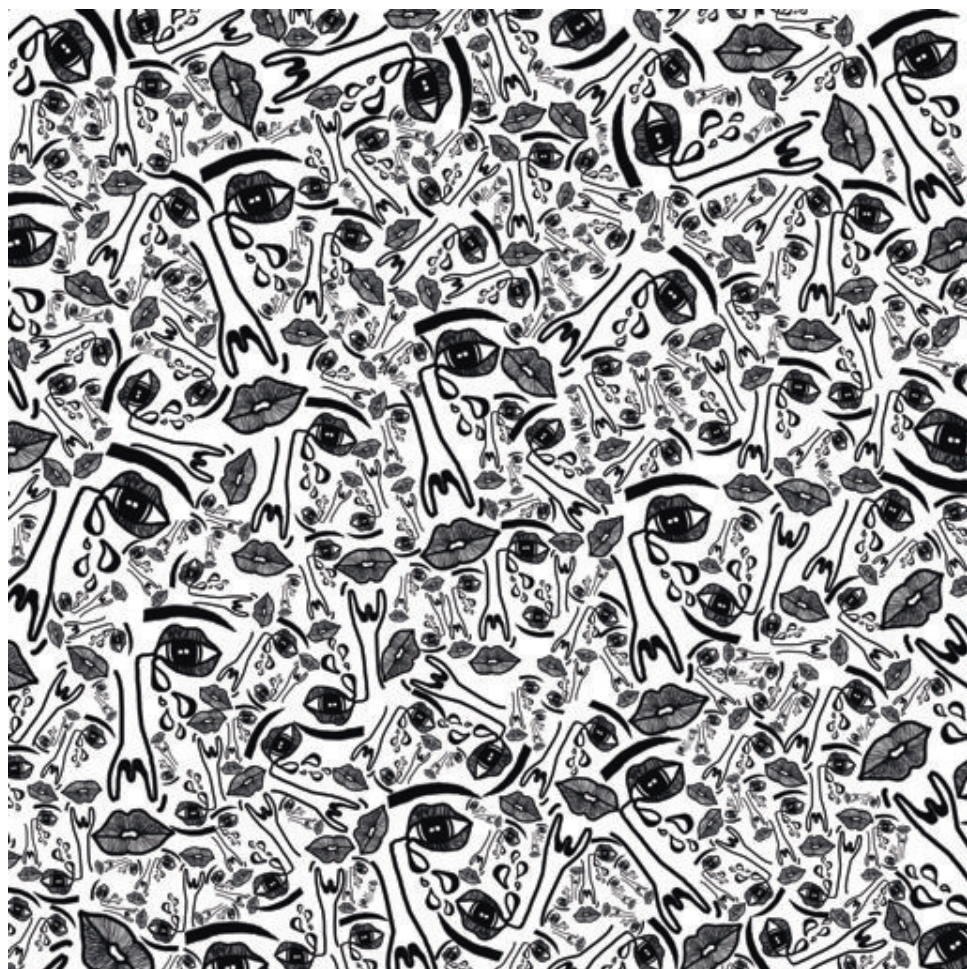
**WASHINGTON PARK**  
VICTORIA CONSTANT





**FISHERMEN BY THE DISCOVERIES MONUMENT, WHERE THE TAGUS  
FLOWS INTO THE ATLANTIC**

JESSICA HWANG



**SPAZ**  
HALEY WELLMAN



**STREET MEAT**  
KATHERINE HOLMES

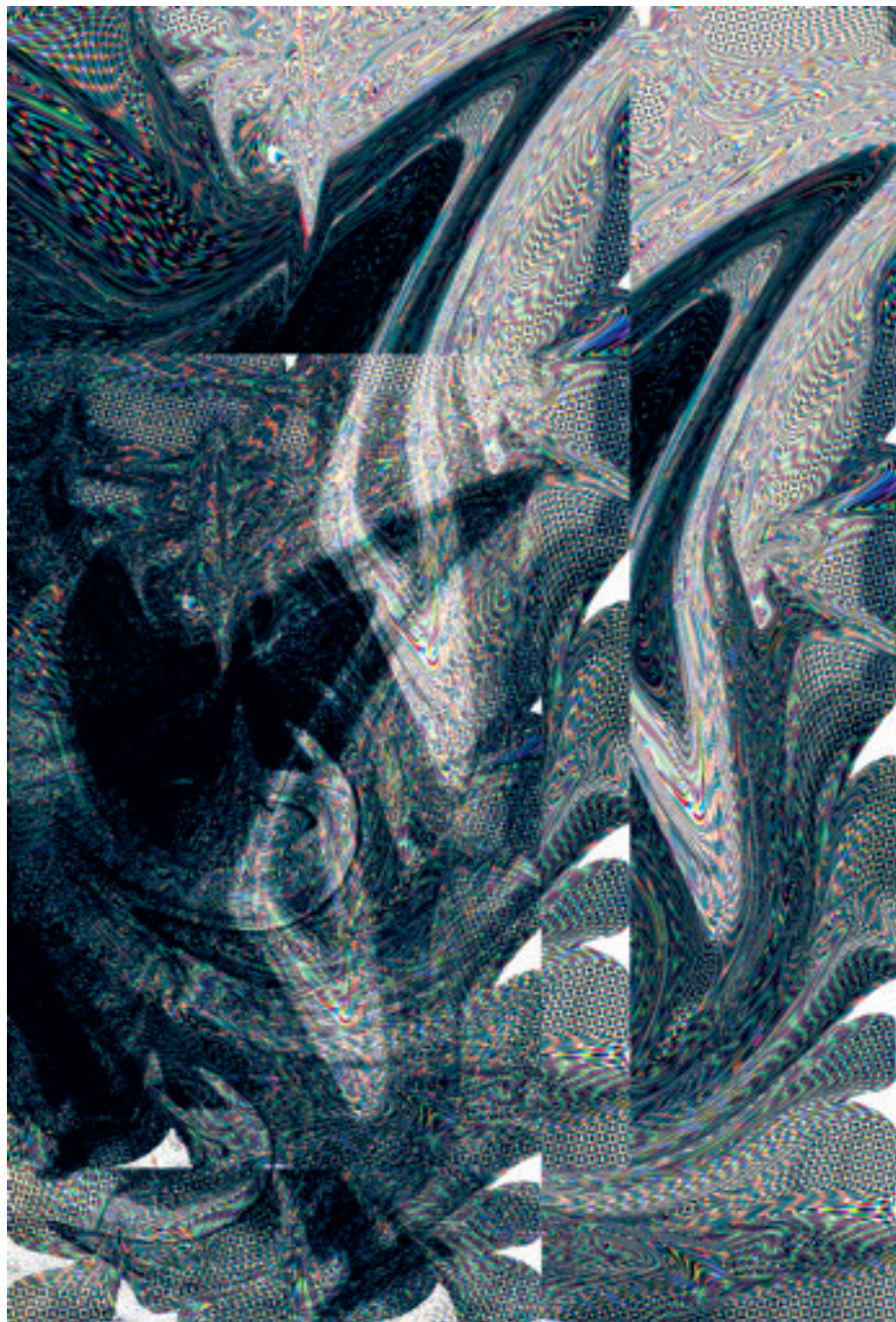




## **RISING HEAT**

LUKE EHLERS





## **A MAN AND HIS BOTTLE**

JIHANA MENDU



## MIDNIGHT SNACK

KIRAN MISRA



**THE RED SUN**  
@AZNHUNNAYXOXO





## **WATER MIRROR**

AFREEN AHMED

## STONE FRUIT BONES

SARA MAILLACHERUVU

Ribs,  
plucked one by one.

They took them  
and hid them under  
park benches—  
so that leashed dogs could  
piss on them as they were shepherded through.  
Ripples of wrenching of uncaging  
of bone of shattering from body shattering into the September frost.  
Rainbows of white arc onto lithified grass.  
This wasteland of her—  
scattered over miles and miles of  
mangoes and minestrone soup.  
Flesh and bone, they told her, you are flesh and you are bone.  
Her marrow flavored the stew of the world.  
Her stomach spilled from its scaffolding, her intestines split from her soul,  
her pancreas fell to the papery floor.  
They laughed, laughed listlessly, laughed languidly, laughed like dandruff dancing from  
the skull  
as she scooped her body into her body.  
    But she searched under park benches  
    licked clean splintered crescents  
    and singed them onto her spine: bones and feathers and empty space.  
Hollowness hovered over skies of mangoes, starbursts of juice pulsed from stone.  
Pregnant fruits dangle from wooden fingers,  
wooden fingers kiss patient flesh  
orange caresses apricot—orgasm of autumn, endless.

Mangoes,  
plucked one by one.

She gives them—away.

## **I BROWNE D OUT WHEN I WROTE THIS/GRANDMA**

ADIE TUOHEY

in approach to pure creativity  
i let loose in my captivity  
of wisdom, convention, and naivety  
i wish i could find the words

i practice not holding shift  
what i usually do impulsively  
and now a cheesey impromptu artform  
something we do naturally

for the sake of art, communication  
rambling, philosophical masturbation  
all i really know, as i make sure to not hold shift  
as i make sure to use undercase, to live  
my pretension, my intention to question  
the normal convention  
but always still rhyming  
always making it sound nice  
make it roll off my tongue with good timing  
make it slimy so i can find me  
some satisfaction

i can find god in a contraction  
i can see what my grandma saw when her contraption  
of a heart failed before her grandchild  
who only could think of a rhyme to give mild  
light to her dimming eyes  
a little fun in her very timely demise  
i saw a love only her son could devise  
from a death in the family, ending petty lies  
and there she lay  
for the sake of pure creativity she faded and immortalized  
in our minds, i hated her but i found her wise beyond her time  
an ancient thing, with things to say,  
although racist and sexist they may be  
i couldn't help but look away when my father weeped  
for a time gone by  
a woman so deep in age for which he cried  
because she died, before us, the mortality she belied  
the poem she tried to tell me  
what i will never be, what i cannot see  
as she lay there, breathless but free

## A CATALOGUE OF DANGEROUS PLANTS

ZANE ROSSI

Far away, on a calm and grassy hill, the Loneliest Man in the World (LMW) could just make out a bend in a road, down where the earth was flat. By the bend was a fallow tree, and bits of rubble all about. He could not see this rubble from where he sat. He furthermore could not tell if the tree had leaves (It did not). LMW was however not making any motions to determine if the tree had leaves or not, or, for that matter, if there was anything else down there, where the earth was flat. He crouched, as a man in reverence, the grass nestled close and standing erect. The rolling topography cast gentle shadows on itself.

The sun hung pendulously. The clouds were the folds of a brain. The earth was boggy, smelling faintly of moss—up where the earth rolled—and dust—where the earth did not.

It was at this moment that the corner of LMW's eye—his hands stroking the grass around his feet—caught the figure of the Guiltiest Man in the World (GMW), as he proceeded up the far off road towards a bend. This was passive only, and LMW's mind must have been on other things. He did not remember this moment. There was fog collecting down in the flat parts so that the ends of the road, to and from the bend, were quickly lost. To this effect, the entrance of GMW was crisp, and to all those around it would have appeared well-staged. It was this way.

LMW probed the grass. Every now and again, a blade was taken between the forefinger and thumb of his left and right hands. Holding two blades at once, he would separate those that grew too close. For those too far apart, he would furrow his brow and tension their proud stalks toward one another. When he released the two blades, for a moment this look of pleasure would cross his face, filling his mouth with teeth and saliva. The wet sounds of his mouth would marry with the rustling of the stalks. The scent of damp earth would coat his nostrils, and echo the rhythmic motion of his mouth. In tandem, liquid would drip from his nose—it was as if a deep satisfaction came up from this rearrangement of his vast audience, and simply could not be contained to his sinuses.

LMW's shirt was thin, with vestigial sleeves. The pants he wore,



while not substantial, were thicker than his shirt. He had no places on his body to hold things—and if he did have pockets, they would have been stupidly empty.

“The sun looks right low,” he dictated to the space around him. LMW sat cross-legged, and grass poked through the voids encompassed by his folded legs. He ran his hands purposefully through the grass. He was waiting, whether for night to come or rain to fall. This was unimportant. LMW rolled onto his back. Carefully, a beetle, lustrous and black, made its way hand over hand up a stalk. This it did with great patience.

“Going a little fast, aren’t you!” LMW said to the beetle, “I bet I know what you’re getting at.” The beetle continued its climb assiduously. Great trust, it had, in hauling its small and blackened body up a steep and swaying slope. LMW reached out and pried the beetle, whose legs kept thrumming forward, off the blade and pressed it into closed hands. A while passed, and LMW made to look at it. The beetle sat complicitly—shiny and dark—and LMW grinned: a small pleasure. Moving his hands, first one, and then the other, LMW goaded the small beetle into moving. Surely enough it began to walk, probing silently and launching to its top and constant speed as no obstacles appeared. The beetle followed the contours of LMW’s hands. LMW would clumsily insert his hand into the beetle’s path just as it was about to fall back to the earth. With dignity, the beetle would cross the small crease where skin met skin, and continue, libidinous, and unaware of its great and terrible master. LMW fell onto his side, and rolled relaxed in the grass, keeping his hands churning like small factories. The side of his head was pressed into the cool earth, and through the grass he could see the flatlands. Occasionally the small beetle would glint as it caught the sun.

GMW had reached the bend, and a small flash caught his eye. At once he assumed the pose of one waiting. The tree (which did not have leaves) stood up from the road, for what seemed flat from afar had small depressions and elevations; one of the latter held the tree aloft. On the flat earth were bits of rubble and greyed tangles of roots, reminding those who watched closely that this had been a bog of sorts, long ago. The sun sucked infantily on GMW’s breath, out through his nose and mouth.

He was dressed heavily—fabric in great swaths coated his body in dense and fibrous shades of grey and black. Truly though it was the color of dirt, all of it, after so much time. On his feet were heavy and calcified boots, and the only sense of continuity in his dress were deep furrows like the love child of canyons and lace across his body. The sound of

glottal stops and wet coughs came readily from this type of clothing, as weaves of differing texture sloughed against each other. But for now he was obediently still. An ambiguous hat clasped around his forehead, and small fidgets of his body found their voice in its brim.

None of this describes the effect the clothing had on GMW. For sweat poured from underneath the brim of his hat, pulling his hair into small fingers the color of dirt, like everything else (this is truly how it was). Every limb moved as if waterlogged: cavernous like a miasmic lung.

The flash that had caught his eye came from what lay in the road—here at the bend was an object, glowing dimly and with length in the oblique sun.

“That sun will be dead in a week, I expect. Just look at the color! Bahaha!” he stopped to cough, and considered for a moment, “Not that I expect to be anything else. No use, none at all.” He did not move, the object far out of his reach. “Nothing,” he said. Water worked its way in rivulets down the creases of his neck. Try as he might he could not turn his gaze away from the object—so it glowed. At this time GMW moved, as if he felt something brewing deep inside him—indeed, there must have been the dark and foul fluid of guilt churning along in his very viscera.

“Ignore me.” He spoke persuasively in a damp voice, tapping his hat once, “I feel that you remind me of the war.” He addressed the object, humming something tuneless. This continued for a while. “What can one be certain of anymore? Yes, what days we’ve been having. And the more I think, the more the terrible master,” he tapped the crown of his hat twice, “...pains me. Maybe you are not from the war. And perhaps I am not from the war. But I am here, yes, I am here.” GMW sat down cross-legged at the peak of the bend, facing out away from the tree (which had no leaves). For a moment it was as if the thick tar of guilt had been quelled by his speech. And now he made as to wait. This brought no pity.

“Wait!” GMW howled, “Oh it’s coming on again; I can tell! Oh why, oh why, oh why,” he shook his fist up to the sky, “I can’t imagine that I never knew! And I know of it all. And to think that it is known. Hello? Is it the fog come to take me home again? Yes, I understand what I have done, and how it has gone on to spread right like a disease to so many. Think of them all. How many I...” GMW hit the crown of his hat three times, “you knew better than that. Why then, did you do as you did? Is it so simple, so simple?” his face relaxed, and then cinematically tensioned again. “No, it is very complicated and far too long of a story to go into. What would be the use to make others sob? What would be the use! But

yet, it is, it is, it is perfectly clear. Sacrilegiously clear...as when blood turns back to water.” A smile crept into his teeth. “Woe is me! I want, I want...” he said convincingly. No, it was not a smile; GMW broke into tears. Their salt water mingled smoothly into the worn paths of perspiration, and like trained animals, they jumped sequentially from his face into the dust below. This he did for long enough.

GMW’s eye caught on the object, for whenever his eyes passed its form they slowed and jittered as a stick through sand. He could see it was broken. He shivered. For he could also see that with some work it could be reassembled. Slowly and over great time, his eyes scanned over the work before him, probing, wet. He began to notice, or could not fail not to not notice, that the parts of the object garishly revealed themselves, elevated on that dry and dusty earth. Parts twisted and cut so as to biologically glisten. At this point GMW could barely reject the impression of how cloyingly the object revealed its inner workings to him. A slight convulsion imbibed by a sigh eased out of his mouth. GMW glanced up and down the path, and at once the sensuality of the object coerced—his body full of the strange oil of guilt—him to look at it, and it alone. It was to make him make a decision. Splayed out as it was, the object simply was, in a way that could only be described as sexual.

LMW lay on his stomach. Before him was a mushroom. The grass stood amidst at full attention and watched on. It was so.

“Now,” LMW said, “I do not consider myself versed in the plants.” A dry smack of the lips. “However it is not often I come across a little one like you. I can’t say I know whether or not I’ve had the practice. I could be very good at telling of your type and time of bloom. You were not here before, and so you must bloom now-about. You are not very large, and so I assume the rest of your type is small. Speckles?” A cock of the head. “Or something of the sort. Speckles of that magnitude take time to form, I’d guess. So you must be of the older type.” LMW was alone with his knowledge, lacking viscosity as his nose dripped on.

“I have to decide whether or not to eat you, you know,” LMW stated plainly. He suddenly lunged forwards a small amount. The mushroom did not move. “Oh! Not to imply that I think you are of the wrong type, it’s just... Well, you know how things go around. I assume it’s been a little difficult to be as you are, recently. Things as they are, you know,” LMW gesticulated as if to agitate whatever thick fluid his conversation was generating. “One thing is for certain,” he paused, “you are here, in this spot. And although I would of course have no doubts about you were you in another spot, say

over there, you are here. As I am here, your loveliness from such a distance is not to be denied,” quieter, “although, of course, you are lovely from far off as well. Yes.” Without hesitation he grabbed the mushroom, separated its cap, and chewed it with neonatal vigor. LMW flipped to his back, swept his arms out wide, up and down, and swept his legs out, up and down. The fleshiness of his arms flattened the grass in arcs. A similar great sector of a circle came from his legs. But the grass revived upright after not too long a time, and so the pattern panted in continual resurrection. On his back, LMW’s nose did not drip, instead moistening his breath. Another great step had just occurred for LMW. Pumping his arms under sterile blue seemed all he wanted to do, and his throat was slick and warm.

GMW gagged violently, coughing mucus and tears onto the crust of what had already dried stiff on his unpardonably heavy coat. He had been working on the object without rest. But what was at first an exploration into a charged and exciting task, had slowly, as slug met with salt, curled up to perish. This was not to say the disparate pieces of the object, lustrous and strange, had lost their sensuality—no, the pit of GMW, even if surrounded by the oily fluid of guilt, burned pure mammalian. Nonetheless, his movements grew sloppy. He could have gone faster—he knew this. This was how it happened.

GMW had on a belt. It was a thick, long belt, admirably so, with a strong core of leather with brutal metal fastenings. The belt was old, and cracked in one place, his place, and therefore useless. Likewise, knots of wood ruined the tree (with no leaves); scars on an otherwise youthful neck.

The object’s repair called often for a repetitive and rhythmic motion. GMW kept careful track of what he was doing, making sure each repetitive motion was done precisely to the degree it ought to be done. But here was the catch. One motion done many times is in the mind the same motion. GMW did the same thing always, and it took up no time at all. He could do nothing wrong because he had already done all he could do. All he was ever going to do. But here’s the catch. This is how it happened.

GMW hungrily did the exact same thing. He hummed as he went. The exact same hum. Every time he completed the thing it gave him the high that was so much better than nothing—he ate it up so fast, the pig, it smeared all over his face, and the sweat washed it away. The tree behind him (it did not have any leaves), sat on its mound. This is how it happened.

With unmistakable intent and forcefully insidious stupidity he broke a piece. The exact same thing! This was why he sobbed, choking sloppily.

“Oh, I am dying in this heat,” the words then strained through,

nonetheless with good diction. “My legs ache, although I scarcely know if they are there. How do I tell? How do I know that if I lift up my pant legs there will not just be columns of water to run out like so much blood onto the dust. How I will be consumed!” He withdrew a mottled handkerchief from his pocket, coughing obscenely into its depth. It was at this point that he made as a madman to take off his hat and cover the object where it lay.

*I am in here. This is not what I meant, at all.*

GMW grabbed back the hat and shoved it onto his head, as he should. It fit tight. He worked automatically now, as he should. With such diligence and elegant grace the object suggested to him, through a series of curves, precisely what he must do. And he could do it—it pleaded (begged) with him that he could only fix the object without the piece, but that the object would become, with the insertion of his being, a more efficient, shining thing. He made a decision—moral and free—that he would fix the object. It’s all clockwork now, and water flowed down his esophageal sleeves into hands lubricated in the effort of completing an honest task. He needed a tool. He needed one that was slender and rigid. It did not even have to be uniform in shape. Anything, even the organic, could have done. He made do, and didn’t look at his hands again after that (there was no pain). GMW’s muscles, the great bags of sinew that they were, carried on long after he lost himself into the pleasure of completion, eyes closed.

LMW could not see the sun, nor the grass. His eyelids bulged, heavy with their tumescent spheres. He could, however, feel the sun, and mucus down his throat. To him, splayed out upon the ground, this was a peaceful moment, and he categorized precisely what he could feel around himself.

Eyes shut tight, LMW methodically touched every face of every limb to the surfaces around him. There was no difference, to him, between the space in his mind and what eyes would have so rudely forced—he made a decision, and chose that here, eyes closed, the truth came through (he was incorrect).

But something wasn’t right. His disk, as far as he could map it, did not have enough dimension to plot a very real feeling of dread. His face betrayed it all. What he felt came from no place on this circle of grass and dirt and high and low places. What he felt came from another, far stranger and dangerous place—what he felt was within him. Eyes closed, LMW was greeted with the incessant salutations of his own stomach. A welcome from inside.

GMW's stomach grumbled. He seemed baby-like—curled on his side—but try as one might to deny it, his pose held a scent and artistic suggestion of the definitively post-coital. All of it was sickening. GMW only had to make one more decision.

Demurely, GMW worked the creases out of his skin, stretching to the human extreme. A well-placed yawn, framed by the barrenness of the scene. GMW was sitting up, staring away from the object, now complete. Picking his teeth, he stood up and made as if to relieve himself. Nothing happened. GMW placed his hands on his hips and stared far from the apex of the bend. This was towards LMW, but each and every hill vied for attention, and he did not find LMW—GMW was wasting time.

“There is only a need now to get to the root of all of this. And there is no simpler thing than knowing what you know. I have up to this very moment done every thing under my own free will. And with that comes weighty and numerous counts against my being. Me. A human. A pervert! The way I have treated others! Just look at how they look at me! Just look when I walk along a road and cannot escape the demons of them, they who damned me! I did a damnable thing and they damned me, and all that follows. I cannot even bear to see myself! I cannot even hear my own name spoken. I cannot be, I am not, I will not!—I understand myself perfectly; I know I cannot be helped by anything I understand.”

He did understand. GMW understood precisely what he was and the decision he was going to make. A piece of plant matter thrown in a stream, even if pushed close to the edge, is taken the same place as any other by the equitable current. Small deviations make no matter in what was to be of the ultimate importance. Waiting was vital to all things of this magnitude. Soon he would turn to pick up the object.

GMW paused though, as if touched by a wandering ache. Or maybe he heard a sound. It did not make sense. And in this moment he twisted his head the wrong direction and saw the tree (it did not have leaves).

LMW's face contorted, and then relaxed. He had spotted a weed among the grass he had not accounted for. Why does he notice it now? There had been many of them before, but this one had stolen the nutrients of the rest. The part protruding above the earth resembled the grass very little but still, it was green, and leafy. LMW did not know what plant this was (*Arum Maculatum*), but as before, he made a decision. Grasping its shaft, LMW pulled, but the earth would not yield this anomalous treasure. It was shameful, and furthermore unwarranted, what he was doing. He grasped it by the root—at this point he should have known to stop—but



nothing was to be done as the plant, its roots, the earth naked upon them, came up in spasm. But the momentum of this eradication died in his thick midsection—LMW stood completely still as three things entered his consciousness.

The roots of the plant were gnarled and white: columns of water.

The hole, an evacuated sore, seemed much larger, and lonelier, than the roots he had just released. It was a view that was not to be seen. And he should not have been so rash as to reveal it.

Was it the feeling that was gradual, or the realization by murky-minded LMW? Thousands of blades stood vigil around his cadaverously still form. A burning in the hand from touching those virulent parts. Rejection of mind—the skin had not yet begun to welt.

The tree swelled in GMW's view. Still, he walked towards it. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. A small cloud of dust defiantly rose with each footstep, settling down only after utterly deserting the natural order of things. The object lay abandoned down by the bend, cold, exposed. GMW walked as if the aches inside of him were simply unbearable, as if at any moment he would launch into full lament once more about the horrors of his life. Any moment. He was at the tree, but did not touch it. This is when his brain should have kicked in—made him to protect the object he had just given everything to. This is the moment where the terrible master looks at the compass needle and finds that it itself is the damned magnetic center. Instead GMW rounded the tree, and in some heretical display (the damping oil of guilt should have slowed his movement) made to touch a fresh green leaf. His face fell. As if a pit deep inside of him. The water in the stream must have been breakneck pace by now—he would be swept to the center (as everything is).

LMW's burning hand was joined in company by a burning stomach. He kneeled, swooning so his shadow spread over so many blades. He buried both hands in the grass, fervently throwing them around so as to distract himself from what was entirely his own fault. No one was there to console him. He could not speak (and never would), such was the pain that wracked his body. The black ichor named self-pity. This was the complete and utter truth of the situation. LMW made to adjust two blades of grass.

"There you are," breathing, "I understand how hard it is to stand up," LMW's form curled tightly. He should not have been speaking. "Stay with me. Speak to me. Why do you never speak?" he paused, "Speak!" The grass correctly and in accordance with nature did not respond. "I would pray," he voiced, "but I'm afraid I can't get myself into the proper position, and

so what is the point.” He was correct.

GMW clasped his hands together clumsily, bowed towards the child of wood and dirt before him. “I’m going to have to leave you now,” he spoke this to the tree with surety, “but I will be back before you can forget I came at all.” He pulled gingerly away and down to the road. GMW shivered as he looked down at the object. His feet stopped first, while the rest of his body, swaying, came finally to a second, liquid drowsiness. A wave through the thick folds of his dress. And all was still. What was he thinking? Then he was walking again. When did he start again? Bowing his head he swept up the object, caressing it with care. GMW shook his head, cleared his throat, and made his way back to the tree.

Orange air painted one side of his face. It painted one side of the tree, and all the rest was drunk in by the object, held aloft in the right hand of GMW. Both hands were now lifted. Do it. LMW raised both bare arms to the cerebral sky. Each of them was streaked with the angry, puckered marks of a thousand blades of grass. He was screaming. The poor lonely man. Every once in a while the screams would stop, and peace came to the world as he vomited. He held his arms aloft, outstretched, as any contact between them and anything but the air causing immense pain. The sun, however, was right there with him, and touched him and burned him and loved him. LMW eyed the mushroom stalk. He eyed the plant he could not name. He watched thousands of blades of grass watch him. It was a party. The small black beetle bit his ankle, silent and dutiful.

GMW just stood there, waiting like some dumb animal that, for a moment, learns of its master, and then became imbecile once more. This was what GMW looked like, standing behind the tree like it was some form of protection. LMW knew this. Why did GMW not? It hardly matters what’s happening outside. His hat was low over his eyes—holding both hands aloft so that something else might see his truly martyrish gesture, his gaze was unknowable. Where was he looking, the idiot? He should be giddy right now. Do it.

“I remember,” he started, in the throes of senescence, “I have done so many things wrong. Perhaps I am no worse than others. But still, it is not others who suffer the effects of what I have done, like a stone left in a river too long—certain parts of my very being dissolve, and some are eroded faster than others. I will become pitted. Hardly an inside or outside to be defined at all. I notice this tree here, even though I did not before. And I notice its leaves, even though I did not before.” He looked at his hands: “What did I do to you? That which brings only a memory scarce deserves



to make new ones.” This last part alone and little else of what GMW said was absolutely correct. GMW fiddled with the object. It clicked like the throat of a pigeon. LMW heard this click.

GMW turned the object towards me. This was not what I meant at all. The first shot. I heard it only (there must have been more—there were more).

\*\*\*

I am lying in a patch of grass. I heard a click. It was not nothing—it was something. It was crisp, but my brain is making so many other noises and it’s right hard to tell. My stomach aches. There is nothing left in it, but I do not feel empty. I wonder why that is. There is a beetle on my leg; it is the one from before. My arms are covered in lines, pink and raised, some pattern, no doubt, glyphing something gruesome. These things are true. I heard something else just a moment ago too, the click and then, although such sound, such volume could’ve only come from my brain, right deep down. I am tired. I am surrounded by grass and the sun is low, and the earth is not flat. Everything is here. There is a root, a little ways off, and the earth, in pieces, crumbling. I think about it again—I feel very much more alone now.

\*\*\*

I am by a tree. It has leaves. There is something heavy in me. Can I call that thing me? Water is flowing a path, tried and true, to my boots. It starts under my hat; everything does. Does my head feel heavier than my body? Maybe there are two kinds of heaviness, one of the head, and one of the body. I can hear more sounds than I did. Looking up at the tree, I admire how the branches are not so different from the roots. So above and so below. There are no dead branches on this tree—they must have fallen off, and the rest of it fared well in their absence. The fog isn’t thick enough to sustain the tree. Something is in my hand. Now it is not. It deserved more. What did I do—what ever did I do. I want. I still want.

\*\*\*

The Loneliest Man in the World clutched his insides, as if to keep them in—in peace with all the plants that were not him. The Guiltiest Man in the World embraced the tree, and looked at all its green. The sun set. Night descended. And as a mother, it gathered the both of them up, calming them to sleep. There were no colors. There were no shadows on the earth.

## **A DIALOGUE BETWEEN**

EZER SMITH

I owe you a glance  
but nothing more.

I removed my own tail  
too long ago to remember.

I have transfigured this stone  
into a brute lattice.

## **A WARDEN AND A RAT**

You hear my claws  
climbing up steel bars.

I cannot speak of faith  
but neither can you.

I ate your breakfast  
while you pounded the floor.

## HOME

CHRISTIAN ANDERSON

There exists a beast  
In a broken home  
Beast had a family  
Beast sat on the throne  
Momma popped to hide  
Momma slept to run  
Baby closed his eyes  
Baby bought a gun  
Momma took his toy  
Pointed at her face  
Momma looked back down  
Baby was her grace  
Momma held him tight  
As an addict could  
Till she fades away  
As an addict would  
Baby's all alone  
Baby's got a gun  
Points it at the beast  
Bullet was a dud  
Beast begins to laugh  
Beast widens his eyes  
Baby starts to crawl  
Baby tries to hide  
Cannot get away  
Points it to his head  
Baby shoots the gun  
Nobody was left

## THE SILENT INVASION OF SOGOPE

DANIEL STEINBERG

The wind is borne on wings of eagles  
Through the arid southland of the ruddy sun,  
Where a Kikah shakes his sacred rattle  
To the *arf aroofing* of a Waahni's song.  
Nankah, kinsmen! Do you hear that breeze?  
The flutist's parched reeds flutter subtly sweet.  
A message, surely, from the Southern wind.  
"What is it, chieftain?"  
I know not still.

*We are the Newe. The Shoshone.*

Soon the boomed galumphing of a hundred hooves is heard,  
Rattling earthen kettledrums and shaking our dry bones.  
Unearthly beasts; bison-strong, deer-sleek, eagle-fast;  
Prance nimbly on our meadows and gallop on our fields,  
Sent, perhaps, by the cryptic wind,  
To gift us her own speed.  
"What are they, chieftain?"  
I know not still.

*We are the snake-people. The wolf-servants.*

The wind returns sweet, but sickly now,  
Bringing whiffs of distant temples' stone,  
From the place where feathers paint rainbows,  
And Yagwatsa' croak a midnight song.  
Nankah, kinsmen! Do you hear that moan?  
Plague in the camps,  
Death in the camps,  
Brought to us by the traitorous wind!  
"What shall we do, chieftain?"  
I know not still.

*We are grass house people. The warriors.*

The silent army is before us,  
The deathless killer is before us.  
How can we fight when we cannot see?  
For twenty suns the fever runs,  
The lesions grow, the pimples spread,  
The pus congeals, the blood bleeds red,  
The bodies stiffen, falling dead.  
We who by chance survive,  
In sacred flame set the bodies to rise.  
Their names, like ashes, disappear in the night,  
Immortalized in legend; forever lost.  
"What has become of us, chieftain?"  
I know still not.

*We are the lost ones. The vanquished.*

**RIPPED FROM THE PAGES OF POP SCIENCE, A  
SERVICEABLE METAPHOR FOR CLIMATE CHANGE,  
GLOBALIZATION, TRIBALISM, NARCISSISM,  
SOCIAL ALIENATION, TRUMP'S AMERICA,  
AND HUMAN PROGRESS GENERALLY**

NATHANIEL BOLTER

The Universe is expanding. We know this, and have known it for some time now. What we learned only recently, in 1998, is that the expansion of the Universe is accelerating.

The acceleration is due to dark energy, a mysterious “anti-gravity” force embedded in the fabric of spacetime. This force, about which nothing more than its effects is known, is responsible for pushing matter farther apart. Hence the name. This does not mean, however, that these space objects are hurtling away from each other at ever increasing rates; rather, the space between them is increasing. Often, when hearing about this phenomenon for the first time, one is asked to picture two dots on an inflating balloon. The dots do not move, yet they grow farther apart nonetheless.

Before, it was thought that the expansion of the Universe might be decelerating. This theory was based on the idea that there would be enough stuff in the Universe for gravity to win the day. Eventually, expansion would come to a halt, and—as with a ball pausing at the height of its toss—gravity would take over, bringing all matter crashing together again in the Universe’s dramatic coda, a Big Crunch.

There is a comforting logic about this cyclical eschatology, with its parallels to the Big Bang and to our own conception of mortality. Dust returns to dust; the beginning and the end are fundamentally the same. It seems even to leave the door open to the possibility of some grand design. Now that dark energy’s been discovered, though, all this is out the window.

Galaxies will remain intact, though, for a while. They are held together by another mysterious force called dark matter. But within 100 million years, which is just a hop, skip, and a jump in cosmological terms, it will be impossible to communicate with or even observe galaxies outside

the Milky Way's local group. The space between us and them will be expanding faster than the speed of light.

Does it matter? On Earth, we turn inward. It's hard to blame us. There's plenty to keep us occupied, and of all the concerns about the new administration, NASA funding takes last place. Meanwhile, Alpha Centauri remains a long 4.4 light-years away. Who cares where the galaxies go if we can't even reach the nearest star?

With dark energy in the picture, the likelihood of a Big Crunch has dwindled. Gravity's efforts at reconciliation seem destined to be fruitless, like trying to outrun an earthquake or stop an elephant by tugging at the hair in its tail—dark energy is almost certain to overpower it.

More likely is a Big Freeze. The Big Freeze is the extension on the cosmological scale of the idea of entropy, which suggests that a closed system will always approach a state of maximum disorder. By this theory, the Universe will continue expanding, and expansion will continue accelerating, until all heat is maximally dispersed throughout the Universe, like sugar particles in tea. The Universe will cool asymptotically toward absolute zero. Most matter will decay into nothingness, and the few remaining electrons and photons will be too far apart to interact. That's the problem with expansion: things get farther apart.

This theory is less comfortingly logical, eschatologically speaking.

## MIRROR-RIM

JOHN LUTZ

O, rout her guard in the nexus  
(or outer garden), then hex us  
within. To go  
with indigo,  
cinnamon guard-towers.  
Sin among art. Ours  
Is love and lees and  
A slovenly sand.



# crumbs

The pages you have just thumbed through could not have been brought together without the time and effort of our dedicated staff. In honor of all of their hardwork and poetic perception, we dedicate these last pages to their wit and wisdom. In the spirit of endings, these inscriptions are what our staff think will be on their gravestones!

## **ROSIE ALBRECHT**

This is a designated occult ritual spot. Please help yourselves to my graveyard dirt and feel free to invoke my tortured spirit at Ouija board séances.

## **OLIVIA ALCABES**

Beloved daughter, sister, friend, hot dog

## **MADELINE BIRMINGHAM**

She was #1

## **MONICA RAE BROWN**

(End of Act 1)

## **CONOR BULKELEY-KRANE**

fam I'm boutta fight this Salmon

## **SOPHIA BAE CHUN**

And now I know something you don't...

## **PARKER CHUSID**

"The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream."

## **VICTORIA CONSTANT**

A name and two dates, and underneath, "Stop reading epitaphs and go live."

## **BELEN EDWARDS**

Hey hungry, I'm dead

**MIREILLE FARJO**

Keeping it chill with cryonics!

**SOPHIA FISHER**

I told you I was sick!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**PETER FORBERG**

d. August 16, 2019

**TATIANA GODERSTAD**

“I bless the sun’s rising each day and my heart sings to it as before, but now I love its setting even more.”

**KATHERINE HOLMES**

NOW I live under a rock

**MARIA ELENI KOLLAROS**

drop dead, gorgeous

**JENNIFER LIU**

coddiwompling

**EMILY LYNCH**

[crying emoji] [broken heart emoji] [bread emoji]

**SARA USHA MAILLACHERUVU**

So long, Frank Lloyd Wright.

**CHUCK MARSHALL**

He died as he lived: recklessly approaching a family of bears.

**JACOB MCCARTHY**

He lived a long and happy life, full of complaints.

**EMILY MUSGRAVE**

brb

**MAYA OSMAN-KRINSKY**

omg that's so quiche

**KHOA PHAN**

wake me up before you go-go

**OLIVIA REEVES**

We're Still Not Sure If Her Accent Is Real TBH

**WILLA SCHWABSKY**

Don't be what you don't know if that's it

**NORA SPADONI**

As I am now you soon will be — isn't that fun!

**ALEXIS WOLF**

someone will remember us, I say, even in another time —Sappho

**JACOB WEISS**

He was alright, I guess...sorry, how much did you say this is gonna cost?

**OLENKA WELLISZ**

So long, and thanks for all the fish

**MIKE WILEY**

Be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times. Do not resist an armed robbery unless absolutely necessary.

**IMAAN YOUSUF**

R.I.P. The Only Person to Know that Justin Timberlake first Sang the Iconic McDonald's "I'm Lovin' It" in a Boppin' Song. Listen to it in her memory.

# Roasted Garlic-Rosemary Bread

*Recipe from: Inspired by Artisan Bread in 5 Minutes a Day | Serves: 2 loaves*

## Ingredients:

- Olive oil
- 4 medium garlic bulbs
- 2 tablespoons granulated yeast (active dry yeast)
- 3 cups warm water (about 105 degrees, slightly above body temp)
- 5-1/2 cups (29.30 ounces) bread flour, more for dusting
- 1-1/2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon yellow cornmeal

## Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Peel away a couple of layers of the garlic bulb skin but leave the cloves intact and the bulb as a whole. Slice about 1/4" off the top of the bulb, exposing the cloves. Place all bulbs in aluminum foil, drizzling each head with olive oil. Cover completely with more foil. Place in oven on a baking tray for 45 minutes. Wait for garlic to cool, and use a fork to remove each clove or squeeze out with your hands. Set aside.
2. Add yeast to your dough-mixing/rising container. Pour in warm water and let yeast sit for five minutes. Add flour, salt, roasted garlic and rosemary. Start mixing with a wooden spoon; use your hands as necessary to fully wet the mixture. Cover dough with container top or plastic wrap and set in a warm place to rise for at least three hours. After three hours place dough in the refrigerator overnight. (This helps make the dough less sticky and easier to work with.)
3. When ready to bake, place a metal baking pan (not glass) on your oven's bottom rack. Fill it with water. (This helps steam the bread, giving it a nice crust.) Preheat oven to 450°F; the water will heat up during the preheat. Butter the bottom of an 11 x 17 baking tray and sprinkle cornmeal over the butter to prevent the bread from sticking.
4. Sprinkle the dough and your hands with flour. Divide the dough into two even loaves, shaping each into a ball. Place on the baking tray, several inches apart. Sprinkle generously with flour. (You can also bake one at a time, saving the dough in the refrigerator for another day.) Let rest on the baking tray for 20 minutes. Just before placing in the oven, score top of bread with an "x" or other mark, cutting right through the dough.
5. Bake for 30 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool 15-30 minutes before slicing.

**Tip:** Buttering the bread after serving really brings out the garlic and rosemary flavor!