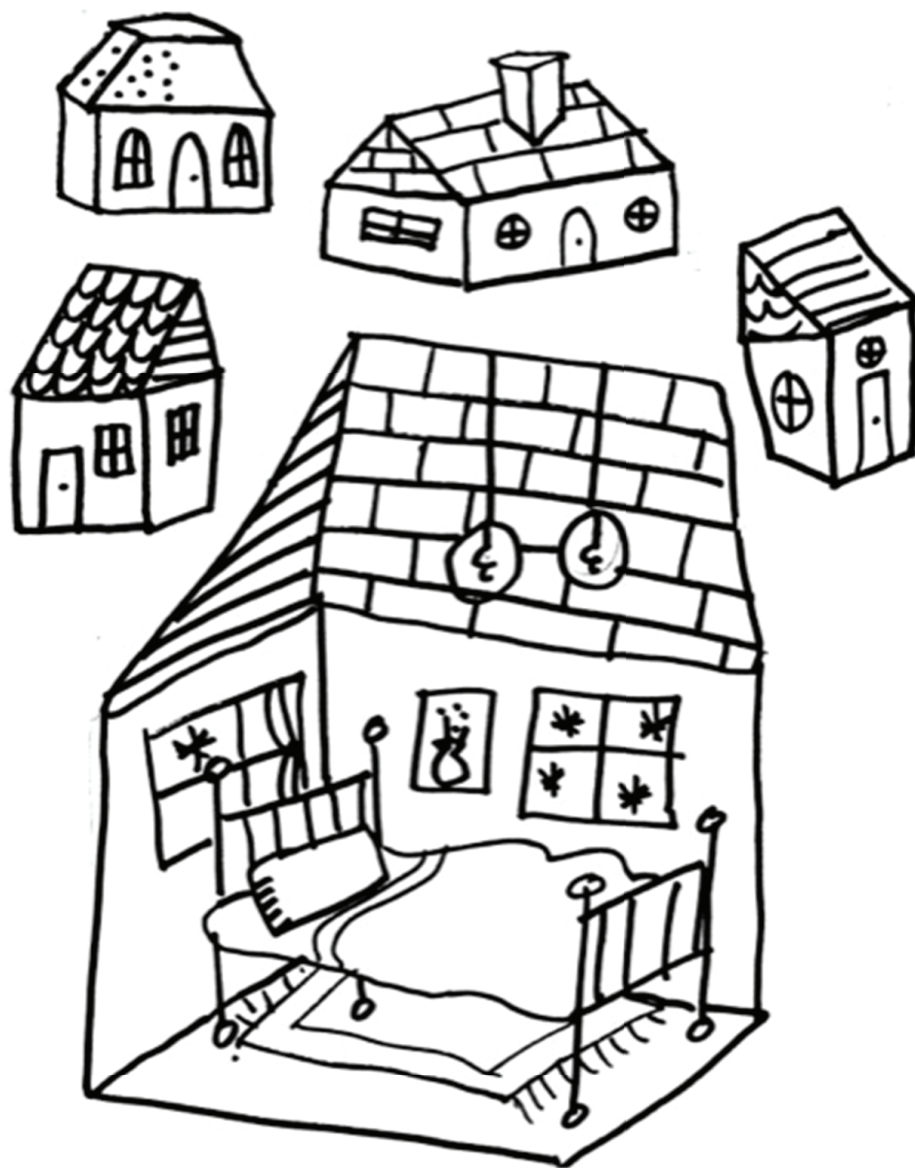


LOVE & SQUALOR



winter issue
2019

LOVE & SQUALOR
literary magazine

All Rights Reserved

Cover art by Kathleen Quaintance
Interior design by Jojo Rita

Copyright ©2020
by love & squalor editors
and all featured authors & artists

Editors (in alphabetical order):

Maddie Broderick

Olivia Diulus

Katie Duke

Ash Freeman

Josie Pierce

Hazel Pritchard

Jojo Rita

Elise Turner

CONTENTS

6	Editors' Note <i>by Maddy Broderick and Elise Turner</i>
7	For the Future Unborn <i>by Josie Pierce</i>
8	Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies Part I <i>by Brynna Ververs</i>
9	Down the Well <i>by Claire Bronchick</i>
10	Movement 12 <i>by Evan Ray</i>
11	Untitled <i>by Kieran Pilling</i>
12	Marlboro Light <i>by Sam Taub</i>
13	Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies Part II <i>by Brynna Ververs</i>
14	Image <i>by Kat Carlsen</i>
15	Arizona <i>by William Schullenberger</i>
16	Lists <i>by Hazel Pritchard</i>
17	Image <i>by Kat Carlsen</i>
18	Scaling Your Manners <i>by Sarah Klein</i>
19	Image <i>by Kat Carlsen</i>
20	The Temple Has No Walls <i>by Rebecca Frankel</i>
21	A Red Onion <i>by Josie Pierce</i>
22	Atomized <i>by Isabelle Pavlik</i>
23	Image <i>by Kieran Pilling</i>
25	Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies Part III <i>by Brynna Ververs</i>
26	goldheart <i>by o. captain</i>
27	Image <i>by Kat Carlsen</i>
28	The Piano Player <i>by Michael Scutto</i>
29	Transfigurations <i>by Zakariah Leo</i>
30	Twisted <i>by Madison Mersch</i>
32	Gingko <i>by Sofia Lentz-Escalante</i>
34	"Nothing Happened" <i>by Ash Freeman</i>
35	A Love Letter From An Eleven Year Old Girl <i>by Myra McPhee</i>
37	Shelton's Diagnosis <i>by Sammi Schacter</i>
38	Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies IV <i>by Brynna Ververs</i>
39	Image <i>by Ash Freeman</i>
40	Image <i>by Kathleen Quaintance</i>
41	The Dog <i>by Kendall Ray</i>
42	Clothes <i>by Zoe Patterson</i>
43	Melancholia <i>by William Shullenberger</i>
44	Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies V <i>by Brynna Ververs</i>
45	Learning to share a house <i>by Elise Turner</i>
47	How to Care for Your Fish Boyfriend <i>by Ash Freeman</i>
48	Image <i>by Haze Pritchard</i>

Editors' Note

Maddy Broderick and Elise Turner

so this is the new decade!

as we say goodbye to the 2010s and hello to the 2020s, it's only fair to reflect on the past 10 years, to want to list out our various accomplishments and the milestones that we have decimated, the highlight reel of our lives playing back to a bright eyes song that still lingers in the depths of our playlists.

but of course, there is also the temptation to look back and see how we are fundamentally still the same flawed, insecure people that we always have been. i still don't understand kant, have not received one (1) job offer, i'm not 120 pounds, and my dorm is less "shabby chic" and more "troublingly squalid".

however, we are still here. we've lost a lot along the way; friends, family, editors of this very magazine, but we've gained quite a bit too. we're stronger (maybe), taller (possibly), wiser (debatable), but definitely still here.

as the song of songs puts it, "love is as strong as death," and if it's as strong as death, it must be at least, slightly, stronger than the voices that tell us otherwise, the setbacks we encounter, and the squalor that lives in the back of our minds (sometimes the front).

thank you to everyone who has made this possible.

with love and squalor,
maddy (who wrote this) & elise (who certainly tried)

For the Future Unborn

Josie Pierce

My daughter, who I thought was a cyborg, begins to bleed,
all over this city at night the creatures come in a flood
to feed from clots of trash in plastic holocene pockets.
I'm scared because her blood is so brown - like mud,
dirt washed up the river, in this holy place tonight's stars
uncover smog in all crannies behind the Empire casino sign,
pallid streets a palette for our faces, mixing pink with piss,
and still she bleeds, enough to fill a transatlantic pipeline.
Sleepwalking she meets me in the living room, a misnomer -
TV instinctively static, mobiles immobile on the coffee table,
days and rains and leaves pass, and twice the toilet flushes.
My daughter, she's quiet, paints her nails black, is capable.
My mother, who I considered a magnolia tree, cut her thumb
once in the kitchen. I remember that blood. It was so wide.
What a lovely waste, that gore of her, a tide-me-over perhaps
for the last metallic baby shower on Earth, fatal Eve the fetal bride.

Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies, Part I

Brynna Ververs

1) Our eyes meet from across the bustling street. There are dozens of people milling around us but you know it's only you I see, only ever you. Our eyes meet and you start to turn away, but suddenly I let out a strained cough. As you watch, I cough and blood bubbles over my lips, trickles down my chin, drips onto the pavement. I collapse, blood spurt-ing from my mouth, and you race over. Our eyes meet and you stare helplessly as I bleed out in front of you on the street.

2) It is two in the morning and we are lying in bed together. You roll over in your sleep and slip closer to me. Unconsciously you slide your hand into the warmth up my shirt and I eat the scream that claws up my throat.

3) You have died in a horrific car crash. I was next to you. Nearly all of my bones were snapped in two but I lie awake in a hospital bed. The nurse comes to tell me I'm going into my operation now. All your bones were pristine except for the neck that came apart from your shoulders. When the doctors and nurses are done I get up and go to the mirror. I smile, feeling your perfect skeleton transplanted into my body. You feel so close; you live inside me.

4) Your fingers graze against my leg soft as a whisper. Violet bruises bloom instantly in the wake of your touch. You cry out and jerk your hand away. You don't want to hurt me; we can never touch. You weep gently and I let out a sigh of relief.

5) The only time you tell me you love me is when you want something. I know this but I give it to you anyway.

Down the Well

Claire Bronchick

In relation to other people, I think of mirrors. If you just reflect, does that create a new image with the reflection? How to break that mirror?

I feel like a facilitator. Like no face, a bunch of strings pulled back and forth with careful attention to the real faces. The strings on the marionette and the hands. If visible, the illusion stands. If hidden, magic can arrive. Complete transformation in a sleight of hand.

How do I disappear? I like to disappear. Magic tricks? I don't know any magic tricks.

I want violent space, but don't know how to create it. I know some men who know how, but their violence goes too far. I want to explore the traces of their violence and what's created in that ruin. Maybe, I crave tragedy and its aftermath. Or maybe, sublime space instead of tragedy. Maybe, maybe, certainty.

I no longer feel made of stone, but some concrete exists where it should not in how I see my prerogative in the world.

I don't always feel like a head on a stick, and when I don't, I feel much more like the relation between space and I is moon to ocean, instead of boat to storm.

Boat in the ocean, or bucket going down a well with no end, no bottom, and no beginning. When did the bucket come from in the first place? How much can the bucket hold? The bucket is not me I hope.

MOVEMENT 12 (*excerpt from "carry up my bones"*)

Evan Ray

off,
somewhere

a mouth opens
w i d e

(in another galaxy:

pink elephants

s

i

p\

pink martinis from **pink glasses**)

and what remains

is

a

slowly

m

e

l

t

i

n

g

ice cube hanging

on

a plastic straw

3...

2...

1...

nothing

3..

- *plop!*

Untitled
Kieran Pilling

sleep when the birds sing
and tell her to hang up.
tell her to stop eating my meals,
my kin

i do not know why i have
this sting
(my tongue and throat hoarse)
i drown myself

the roof of my mouth, my house
collapses again
and i,
hang up.

do not stay on the line,
put it down
while i wash with apologetic suds...
it is Margaret you mourn for

Marlboro Light

Sam Taub

Imagine a body. One that used to be a mammal. Maybe it used to be a person, I don't know. That doesn't matter though, because now it's a body. Usually, when you run over a body with a car going between seventy and seventy five miles per hour, it splats out like an overfilled pastry. All the blood and guts and bile in there just pours out because of the high pressure and it's a real pain in the ass to have to clean up afterwards. Smaller things, like maybe a body that used to be a squirrel or even an opossum, they aren't going to have a lot of things in the first place that can come out when they get hit by a car since they're so small. Something big, like a body that used to be a person or a white tailed deer, they have the same number of parts as a small body but they're scaled up and spread out so much that when they're ejected there's even more viscera that gets everywhere.

This body, the one that I put down on the highway, is not going to do that. All the organs and things are still there, but they're just old rinds that have already been juiced. I look down at my hands and see that my cuticles have just the slightest bit of dried blood caked around them. I know that I have had plenty of time to back out of this and go and retrieve the body from the road. I stay seated.

It takes maybe fifteen minutes for something to come through for me. A pick up truck, the kind that's absolutely useless in the city, drives by too fast. In less than half a second the body, the one that might have been a person once, gets flattened by the front, then the rear tires. It does not splatter out dramatically, just like I knew it wouldn't. I stand up. The truck keeps going, the driver probably never realizing the magnitude of the favor they've just done for me.

It's nearly four in the morning by the time I walk from the highway and back into the city proper. I'm thinking about the truck and whoever was driving it. I hope that they're a tourist visiting New York for the first time. I hope that they got into their truck one day, at home in Michigan, or any other garbage state, and they decided that they were going to come out to California and see what the fuss was all about. I hope that they're on their way back, and that when their friends and family ask what the big city was like they say, "Well, it was fine. A bit crowded, a bit smelly, but it was fine. But it's nothing compared to here, nothing compared to home." I hope that they really mean it.

Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies Part II

Brynna Ververs

6) We are kissing in the place where we both used to be children. It is so overgrown with weeds and vines that it no longer feels real. You bite my lip and a drop of blood falls to the earth. Something sprouts there but neither of us can tell what it is.

7) The only time I tell you I love you is when you are fast asleep.

8) The water is sparkling and blue and we are having fun swimming at the beach. A wave knocks me under the surface and I begin to drown. Spluttering, I come up for air. You see me in distress. My lungs are so full of water I can barely think. You do not understand my feeble gestures. Thinking I am thirsty, you tip my head back and pour salty water in my mouth.

9) The world has never seen past your private, closed-lip smile but I am intimately acquainted with each of your teeth.

10) I am a fairy creature that was never meant to walk among mortals. You love me so raw and desperate you tear off my wings to keep me close. I love you deep and true but I cry every time I look up at the sky.

11) The first time we touch, an electric current shocks across my skin. You feel nothing and keep staring at the pretty brunette two seats across from us on the train.



Kat Carlsen

ARIZONA

William Shullenberger

Sometimes they say the desert sun
will pack a lonesome stone with so much heat
that even after the sun has left the night behind
the stone still pulsates like a heart in shock
and if you take it naked in your living hand
the stone will burn you clean
of everything but love.

LISTS

Hazel Pritchard

Things Co-Star Has Said To Me:

1. Do you steal people's thunder?
2. Your main challenge right now is to question how far you've come in your efforts to fulfill your ideals. Rise to the challenge to refine and perfect yourself.
3. Trouble with social life.
4. Today's moon transit is causing trouble and testing your patience. Shake things up if you want to.

Things I Wish Co-Star Had Said To Me:

1. Making yourself visible \neq taking away space from others.
2. The last year of your life feels like it happened to someone else, but it didn't. It happened to you.
3. Sometimes three days feels like a week, and sometimes a month feels like last Monday. This means two things: a) time is fake, and b) you'll get over it.
4. Sometimes sitting in bed and feeling sorry for yourself *is* the right thing to do.

Things No One, Not Even Co-Star, Could Have Prepared Me For:

1. The muddy panic of realising that, for the first time since you turned sixteen, you're moving backwards instead of forwards.
2. Knowing that there's an alternate universe out there where all of your choices were just a *little* different. Being able to see that universe out of the corner of your eye.
3. Staring at the future as if it were a funhouse mirror hall, and not being able to recognize which reflection is the real one and which one has double elbows.
4. Night classes.



Kat Carlsen

Scaling Your Manners

Sarah Klein

When did my weight become your table conversation? When did it become *take-a-number* and I'll hear what you have to say about my figure and how well it's doing and how I've really made steps and how I must have tried the *blahblahblah* diet from that talk show I hate and how it looks like I LOST A PERSON.

Oh. My! WORD! A WHOOLE PERSON!

The only one I wanna be "losing" is you.

All I'm saying is my stomach's a pretty weird place to set up your soapbox.

Apparently, we should amend guest lists to include translators. That way when you say, "My! You've lost weight!" ... I'll know you mean "Hi! And Welcome!" I'll know when you say "I'm sooooo full" you mean "the scale will know I ate today!" *The horror!!* Someone should also mind the signs at the buffet, they're *awful* misleading nowadays. They say "UNLIMITED!" but really mean "until your mother shoots you that look." When mortified Aunt Polly observes through grinding teeth, "Another serving of mashed potatoes, darling?" I understand her concern on my own. No translator. *No problem!* But, *in good faith*, I believe, she may need some help translating my "Yes, Aunt Polly" to "that's right, Aunt Polly, I LIKE CARBS, they taste AWESOME, even after the fifth plate, now f*** off!!!!!"

...Please

When me and my figure decided to count our days in calories instead of seconds, we didn't consult you. Maybe it was wrong. But it was on purpose. We didn't ask you to remind us. We didn't ask you to design our plates. When we became a skeleton, it could have been nice. But I guess that's when we were small enough to vanish from table conversation.

Don't be afraid. We're working on it. But not over dinner.
Complaints? Take-A-Number!



Kat Carlsen

The Temple Has No Walls

Rebecca N. Frankel

I come to praise
And not to bury, the creatures of this beautiful land.
The spotted ladybug, blood-glass in the sun
The sooted raccoon, slunk beneath my window
That mosquito, that quivering ant, the dextrous spider in her dew-
swept web
I come to praise their myriad existences
Not to bury, the bounding dog
That moss speckled turtle shell
The hedgehog nuzzling, beside the bed
The world gone shining, beneath my exaltations of
The wonders from the whirlwind within her infinite head

A Red Onion

Josie Pierce

once I was going
to the store and
asked if you wanted
anything, which you
didn't, but I said
no, really. And
you said *maybe*,
a red onion.

I went to the store
and bought you
a red onion,
picked it carefully
from the shriveled
mass of imported
creations in the
organic section
and put it in my
basket and then
my black tote bag.
days later, after
the party, after I'd
left you, I found it
again in my bag, skin
flaked like winter flesh,
layers scrunched into
sickly flower patterns.
I'd picked it for you
so carefully off the
teetering produce box,
it could have been
one of a dozen other
red onions in a dozen
other Stop-and-Shops,
and I'd forgotten
to give it to you.
I don't know who
I felt more sorry for
in that moment:
you, me, or the onion.

Atomized

Isabelle Pavlik

A bagger at the grocery store hands me a plastic bag and, while we do not touch, he gifts me with the warmth of his hand in the loop of plastic we call a handle. I can feel how warm he is, I can tell how long he was holding the plastic; to think, people have died for lack of body heat, and here is this fool, giving it away.

I apologize to the table leg, having stepped on its foot for the third time in a single class period; I have to skip and twist and hop to bring my broad hips through the insubstantial gap between a seminar table and the wall, and the wall has a chalkboard with a little ledge for chalk on it, and it makes the gap even smaller, at precisely the same height my hips are broadest; someone I know says hello to me at the Barb and I'm so apologetic about the space I'm taking up that I tell her pardon me before hello. She seems nonplussed, at best. Have I been rude?

I walk along that familiar, painful asphalt in that insurmountably peopled gulch called Slonim Woods, and people walk on either side, and the current is like an electrical cord—each of us has either a speed or a direction and we take turns occupying these orbitals, spinning in opposite directions where we are and then passing to the next atom in an overall flow. It's morning and our shadows are stretching to greet the day, so now and again my yawning shadow passes through another's. It's an effortless comingling. My skin itches from an overabundance of protons but my shadow forms little ionic bonds with every atom we pass. It's giving away electrons.

They're flowing down an electrochemical gradient, as is their wont: when there's too negative a charge in one place, the electrons flow towards positive charge. It's how a battery works. I suppose it's how this current got started in the first place. A bunch of particles congregating, swarming, flooding, for want of the same thing¹.

Then again in chemistry lab I could never make good predictions. I never knew what the atoms wanted.

1 Sarah Lawrence: We're in the Negative. So Are You.



Kieran Pilling

I visit a friend downtown. He throws up his arms in a gesture that ape behaviorists tell me signifies an approaching hug. A non-threatening posture, a peace offering between two beasts in the wild. I'm hand-shy, I'm out of practice, but I'm willing. Our big arms choreograph to one another our intended movements, I submit myself as much as I may to his will in this hug, try to cotton myself to his plan. I'm taller but, as a result of my submission, I take the lower arm position, thereby lifting my short friend onto his infantilizing tippy-toes.

But it mustn't be too awkward a hug; he returns for another hug later in the evening, and we compromise my reservedness and his stature with diagonal arms, and somewhere behind the din of silent communication, I find my friend, who knows me, happy to see me after long absence.

Maybe we confuse being known for being loved until the evidence is right there before us; it's only the punishment that teaches us, one mortal wound at a time, that being known is unavoidable, it's torture, it's a beneficence that we can't feel that pressure until it's too much.

Being loved, does it feel like anything? Is being loved a positive presence, salve, and cure-all that we name it? Or is it just a lack of a negative charge? An absence, unrecognized until the tranquility of being alone is interrupted by that sudden flow of electrons? A pH in balance, crashed to 1 by the acid presence of being known?

Is there a difference between knowing and loving? Or is it just how much?

How much can I take?

Super Hot and Sexual Fantasies Part III

Bryнна Ververs

12) I say you taste like strawberries in sun. You say I taste like morning air. That doesn't taste like anything, I say. You don't disagree.

13) The second I am born you feel the earth shift beneath your feet. You know deep down that the one you were born to love has arrived. We never find each other but we tear apart the whole world searching.

14) You are a dangerous animal; fighting is in your blood and a battle hymn hums in your bones. You come home to me with tattered knuckles and I kiss them whole again. I have tasted your blood and to lull you to sleep I sing you the song that it taught me.

15) You cry in front of me and it is like seeing a god in their true form; my eyes burn from the naked, radiant beauty.

16) You think my empty eyes are incredibly erotic.

goldheart
o. captain

I want to write about love
but it burns the back of my throat.
Thoughts of you sink to the bottom of my spine
and settle in there.
They creep upward, recast calcium in crystal
 (the better part of my vertebrae: rose quartz)—
my heart a heavy metal, liquid heat
gone solid with the pressure
of holding my tongue in the cage
of my teeth.



Kat Carlsen

The Piano Player (excerpt)

Michael Scuotto

Lights up on a dingy bar. A long counter occupies the back end of the room. In the corner of the room, there is a piano. MISTER stands at the bar, wiping it down. He is a short and stout old man with a balding head. Sitting at the bar, swirling a glass of red wine, is SIGMUND. He wears a sleek suit with an undone necktie.

SIGMUND: What is life?

MISTER: Please, no! It's Saturday! You're supposed to leave me alone on Saturdays! You're only allowed to be existential on Tuesdays!

SIGMUND: But don't you ever wonder what life is?

MISTER: Never!

SIGMUND: (*matter of factly*) I think life is art.

MISTER: Huh?

SIGMUND: Life is just the ever growing impact of our own artistic landscape, and the effect it has on us.

MISTER: Nonsense!

SIGMUND: It's not nonsense, it's truth!

MISTER: Art imitates life! That's the way it ought to be. That's the way it always *has* been!

SIGMUND: It ain't necessarily so.

Transfigurations

Zakariah Leo

*With passivity, too limp to decline,
I am left with the Most-Blessed Celestine,
Who we feast in mid- May, for a life spent imprisoned:
Now, only repeats hindsight desires,
As if a denial was something that could be given.*

Twice born on the same day through assumption of a saint
The sacred idol for newly neutered calling to imitate,
A cool spirit, wafting, patronizing me
with the Venerable, the Confessor, and even the Prime Pusher,
Upon which all else mindlessly rotates.

*But Oh! dear Augustine,
Doctor of grace and bodily destruction,
How do I empty myself of my face?*

The moments in which I first took life
-I followed a line clearly drawn-
So as to create incision clean,
In which all that could be said
Is how diligently I did exactly what was asked of me.

*Now I welcome you with abundant space so feel free to push in
too deep*

THE COMMUNITY OF ALL SOULS TAKES ITS PLACE INSIDE ACTS OF
CHARITY.

While the overflow of cream and honey pours down the cheeks,
With a taste which human tongue finds too violent
and sweet

I let them lap their own prize by contorting
my spine

Still trying to form liturgy out of words stolen from inner thighs,
In hopes tomorrow I will finally be starved enough to leave the flesh
behind.

Twisted
Madison Mersch

Wrapped in my sugar coat
holding in my glucose
(cramping up)
knotted around my shoulders
needed a loose end to hang it
deadweight
suspension lifting tensions

flying dinner plate
that's been integrated
as a pigeon agent
leaving notes in
broken little pieces
so you have to put it together

I know

broken glass is dramatic
but I needed attention
I pull on my sleeve (and)
lead myself in a spin

of course your sleeves came off
when summer came
it's hot
you talk like god
standing in the rain
standing in what you made

and we take in everything you summon
verse flowing in the same form and display that the stars are in
except yours could be felt watering down
the acid in our skin
(that u didn't have to take)

and the (few) drops that knocked on my humble skull
prone to answer
to manners with openness
pigeon holes when you misunderstand the syntax
and the agent betrayed its meaning
dripping till it wears the skull away
its importance was watered down
because before now was a drought

initial excitement of the sprinkle and its association to the top
topped off the sweetness
with a play on an association to pain
it got heavy
my sugar coat got soaked (disintegrated)
melted away (a flesh start)
inevitability of grasping for faith
I brought someone down
then wrapped myself in my god's
grabbed my wrist
and it felt like two people were dancing

Ginkgo

Sofia Lentz-Escalante

There towered four adjacent female ginkgo trees in the parking lot of the Plant Research Institute at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. I came across these trees and their fallen fruits in the fall of 2018 on a field trip with my botany class. I walk towards these stalky gentle giants after a day of reading about ginkgo, and I grab my green tote bag prepared to collect the fleshy peach colored fruit and fresh fanned leaves. As the past memory of maidenhair's scent rope me in closer, my nostrils are hit with a wave of rotting bulbs that hold opportunity, chance, and promise.

I have entered her home bordered by a cone of mulch, and whether or not I am here, her smell continues loudly for the season. I grab the first bunch of fruits and leaves I see and my fingers become cold and lathered in juices that have pooled for days. The rancid strength of her smell had infiltrated any remaining breath of scentless air around me. The bite of the sharp October air joins my scentscape as I take a moment to really inhale the bulb without the premeditated reaction of disgust. It does not smell of putrid rejection, it smells of a chance to be reborn.

I do not fill my bag to the brim with leaves and fruit, I take from the slippings of the tree, until I am satisfied. I would never want to disturb the seasonal ritual by taking more than what I need, it is supposed to be an act of honor rather than greed.

I am walking back to the Botanical Garden train station and couldn't help but smell her. I was content with the fact that the juices soaked into my dangling sleeves and body. In the back of my head, I thought of the matterless expressions evening commuters would make as soon as they smelled me, not what I was carrying. I had taken a vow of honor and limitless defense when I took what the tree had gifted me, if anyone would denounce the smell I carried, they would be denouncing 250 million years of survival, which would be just as rotten. I sat on a bench clutching my tote bag, trying to ensure the scent would not pool into the train platform. An elderly man sat next to me for 20 minutes, bringing the smell of smoked menthols and he did not appear to mind

the scent I carried on my skin. Our combination of scentscape is an acquired taste. One who might smell of rotten ginkgo fruit is one who has been coexisting with ginkgo, the same could be said about the scent of tobacco. One who smells of nothing may not attempt to exist with something so daring and loud.

The train pulls into the station and I get up, allowing the man to leave a winded scent of wintered tobacco behind him. I step into the packed train and find a seat in the middle of the cart. I sit, stare out the window, and count the stops until I have to get off. As the train departs Fleetwood station and onward towards Bronxville, I breathe in, and grab my tote bag. And the eyes dot onto my body as I make my way down the aisle. Watching me, silently judging the space I have taken up today as a woman who carries a fruit that bears the scent of strength and the notion to survive despite all. I belong here on this train and so do the fruit and leaves of the female ginkgo tree. It is not the tree who should have to adjust to human preference, it is the human who should have to adjust to the tree's place in this world. The air I am leaving behind is lovingly stitched with ginkgo. Coughs and grunts follow, but a smile blossoms on my face as we exit, the ginkgo and I.

“Nothing Happened”

Ash Freeman

When we say: *This is not what we intended.*
We mean: *We imagined it, maybe willed it,*
in our wildest dreams -- and if somebody
had asked us on a dare we probably would've
confessed. But we never imagined we
(or anyone else, for that matter) could be
so bold. We mean: The word “stranger”
is fitting because it's strange that we've never
met before. We mean: Cut my body into
peaches. Feel it dribble down your wrists
as you fill yourself. Find me, ripe on the field
at dusk. Find me hollowed. Remember me,
I don't digest well.

A Love Letter From An Eleven Year Old Girl

Myra M. McPhee

This is a story about Peter.

~

I guess my mom and I have always been homophobic. I don't have a conscious memory of when I became a homophobe, but I knew very early in my life that God made Adam and Eve and not Adam for Steve. It wasn't until sixth grade that I had a small window into my mother's internal struggles about her homophobia. I had not struggled with my homophobia, or anything else for that matter. One of my mom's closest friends was gay or at least womanish. That is what adults would call boys and men that demonstrated feminine traits. As a child, I did not have permission to use that kind of language or offer my opinion on such matters. Now that I think about it, I do not *actually* know if Peter Luke Johnson was gay. I never heard Peter talk about being in love with a man or having a boyfriend. Actually, I was head over heels in love with Peter. From about the age of three, on Sunday mornings, I would demand to sit next to him as he played the piano at church. He was the Minister of Music and I was mesmerized by his charisma. There we were, me, in my Sunday best dress, Peter, in his expensive suits; both of us sitting in front of church at a black, baby grand piano. We had the attention of the congregation and he had my heart. He told me stories and gave me candy without my mother knowing. There were no secrets between us. There was no room for secrets; I loved him too much to leave space for the unknown.

~

Peter never said anything "gay" in front of me, there were only innuendos of his suspicious "difference". It was the '80s and '90s and so everyone was extra by default. But, Peter stood out because he could dress better than any other man at church, and he spoke with a sophisticated Bahamian accent that was decorated with an American twang and British superiority. He was a well put together man and he looked great in an expensive suit. Even my naive eyes recognized he was special. He also wasn't married. All the adult men around me were married and had children. They were boring and predictable. They wore black or navy suits every Sunday. Peter surprised us with lilac, sage or charcoal Hugo

Boss suits every week. He shined bright and there was no way to avoid looking at him. I assumed it was that difference that was labeled gay and wrong.

~

I was 11 - a child at the time when all of this started to unfold. All I could do was eavesdrop and put together my own version of the puzzle. Most of the pieces dripped with shame and the edges were laced with "I told ya!" by the adults in my life. Gossip and geyness was the right formula to make the saints and the sinners want to publicly embarrass or even execute someone they loved. I still loved Peter. I still looked forward to sitting next to him on Sunday mornings as he played familiar gospel songs. He was the first man that truly had a presence in my life and he was someone I wanted to spend time with. Despite the rumors, I could see no fault in him.

~

While playing the game Connect Four on my iPad, my mom discovered iMessage. When my mom found intimate exchanges between my female "friend" and me, she called me at work. She told me to come home right after work. I asked her why. She hung up. My stomach flipped. I became nauseous. I called her back. Ring. Ring. Ring. She did not answer. I called two more times. She never answered. I Facebooked messaged my female friend and told her "I think mummy knows." In the absence of proof, I sounded paranoid. My shame and fear started to swallow me as I drove home. I moved back to America a year after that. America - where anything goes. My mom and I have only spoken one to three times in the last year.

Peter Luke died in Florida. He died and I never told him that I was sorry that we all abandoned him. I regret not telling him I loved him despite who he loved. He died not knowing that I stopped being homophobic and learned so much about love because of his sacrifices. I learned lessons that my mother refuses to let me teach her. She has already lost so much, Peter, me, time. And now I want to take her religion away from her because of how it affects me. I subscribed to that same belief system when it came to Peter. I changed. Nothing else did.

This is for Peter.

Shelton's Diagnosis
Sammi Schachter

Inconsequential agony
 of losing a baby tooth,
So premature and already *calcium deficient*,
 one day you will find the source

To heal is just to put hands on
And whisper little, wispy rosa clouds
In your ear while someone with
Twenty seven tiny hammers hits the spot.

I	I	I
am	wish	am
wishing	to	waiting
you	end	for
Recovery	Suffering	Discov-
ery		

THIS PRESCRIPTION CALLS FOR

- Twenty Four Paws Compression
- Two Kubrick films and One Conspiracy Documentary
- Six Loose Guitar Strings and One Verse of Edelweiss
- A Decent Helping of Butternut Squash, Mouse Shaped Pancakes, and A Basket of Walnuts in Their Shells

If that doesn't work.....then just try to get some
rest

Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies Part IV

Brynna Ververs

17) I am a siren and you are a sailor. Ever since you were small you dreamt of the beauty and adventure of a life at sea. One day you sail your ship into the glassy waters I inhabit. I see you and begin to sing a haunting melody. You are entranced. You come to me in the water and I drag you down, down, down.

18) Our hands brush against each other and the sparks set our house on fire.

19) You don't come home one night and I set the house on fire.



Asb Freeman



Kathleen Quaintance

The Dog

Kendall Ray

I was having lunch with my brother
When he asked if I was excited to graduate college.
That made me upset and he knew it,
So we walked.
We stopped at that ice skating rink in Central Park
And watched the kids practicing.
After a while we started walking again
At the same time
Without saying anything to each other.
That's when I saw it.
It was a dog.
A small one.
Like a Jack Russell Terrier,
But not quite.
Its fur,
Brown and white, in patches
Was too wiry
And its snout
Too short.
Its owner, dressed in winter garb,
Held it by a black, weathered leash.
It had one brown eye
And one blue eye.
Blue like ice.
It stared at me.
Stared directly into my eyes
And expressed nothing,
Nothing but weariness.
It was old.
Old like a grandfather
Or an heirloom.
Was it a he?
A she?
Did it really matter?

What was my brother saying?
Nothing I think,
But we were walking together,
In silence.

What was I thinking?
A blue eye like ice.
A dog old like a grandfather,
An heirloom,
Expressing nothing but weariness.

MELANCHOLIA
William Shullenberger

Weddings take place at the end of the world--
you can't know what will happen tomorrow,
but everything in you must long for it.

Crouch on the green, behold the approaching planet:
you know that it's beautiful, and fatal,
and when you return, no one will get it.

Your love will flourish, vanish in brightness,
the last thing you hear sounds like bees, millions,
your stallion stampeding across the lawn.

Cocoon yourself in human warmth; hold on.

Super Hot & Sexual Fantasies Part V
Brynna Ververs

20) I tell you I want you but I don't need you and we pretend it's true,
that it's not the other way around.

Learning to share a house

Elise Turner

Today, I wanted to call my mother but it was her birthday
so I figured she was probably busy. All week, we've tried

to line up a phone call but I have not wanted
to squeeze our conversation in. I've wanted

to lounge - to stretch my back, all the way out,
which is what Sasha said is the best part about praying.

And then Sasha said, people with no faith don't even realize
washing their hands after they use the bathroom is

a ritual. I didn't understand what Sasha meant
until I was gagging into the hairy, green-toothpaste-streaked sink,

realizing how gross my housemates, and I, have let this house become.
Or maybe I believed Sasha when the girl threw up

and my energy was all wound up with hers so I did too
and I thought, That was probably a ritual?

But then I thought, Maybe it was the sound,
like a broken accordion being pulled, that did it.

Then I thought maybe, it was even older, some sort of group safety
measure
for when we were all eating out of the same big pot.

Then, I wanted to listen to Sasha forever
like I have never wanted to fall asleep.

Which I say every night, and mean,
until the next morning, squinting in the sun,

when it is impossible that I have been awake for all of this.

This being: drinking mango juice out of the communal fridge
from the spout and thinking it would be okay
if I drank until it was empty and threw away the carton

but I was full too soon
and had to put it back, with my mouth all over it.

I think what I mean is I am trying
to learn how to not end a poem before it has started. To not be so
afraid of it

being pointless and not coming back to me if I let it go,
like the turtle me and Rose lost in the leaves when we went on a bike
ride.

Except, now that I write of it, that turtle did come back, in the spring
when our neighbors were digging up their tulip bulbs and found Shel-
don - frozen

but still alive, and brought him back to us. I think
I put him in a new cage with new mulch.

How To Care For Your Fish Boyfriend

Ash Freeman

1. Give him a small tank. If he can't grow, he can't force you into his patriarchal society. But give him two (2) plants to hide behind while he sleeps. If your fish boyfriend is uncomfortable, he might try to escape.
2. Condition the water. Use Head and Shoulders 2-in-1 if you don't want to spend too much. After all, he always makes you pay for dinner.
3. Clean the sides of the tank. Your fish boyfriend doesn't know how to clean up after himself; you'll find soiled muscle tanks and discarded condoms in the filter if you don't repeat this action twice daily.
4. Maintain proper pH levels. He'll complain about the smell if you don't.
5. Do not overfeed.
6. Give him a nice light for ambience. He'll still play death metal and Usher during sex but at least maybe he'll be able to find the right cave.
7. If he's hanging out near the bottom, he's unhappy. He won't tell you, instead he'll start passive aggressively chewing the plastic off the plants and spitting it onto your face.
8. Your fish boyfriend is sensitive: to water temperature, to pH, to you staying out until 9 p.m. with that one coworker he never really liked, to feminism, to sitting with his legs closed, to body heat and sweat.
9. He is not a solitary creature. He will get lonely if you don't press your face against the tank every seven minutes. Sometimes he'll swim to meet you at the glass, usually he'll make you come to him (he claims the commute is too taxing).
10. Do not feed him human items including: ramen, beef jerky, AXE Body Spray™, chocolate pudding, moldy strawberries, used tampons, stale bread, Worm on a String, and pink razors. Side effects of this include leg growth, mansplaining, three second attention span, and an inflated ego.



Haze Pritchard

love & squalor