



equinox
Issue 9 | 2021

literary and arts magazine

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Campus Honors Program
University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign

Equinox is the literary and arts magazine exclusive to the Campus Honors Program of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It was created, organized, and published by Chancellor's Scholars.

The mission of *Equinox* is to share the artistic and creative talents of CHP members. Its name, borrowed from astronomy, reflects this mission: the vernal and autumnal equinoxes are days of the year when day and night are seen equally. The duality of day and night reflects the balance between academic and artistic achievement among Chancellor's Scholars.

Before we begin, many thanks are in order to so many people for helping us create our own little magazine.

Anne and Elizabeth — thank you for your support and encouragement during this difficult cycle. You made our job much easier and more rewarding.

Tami — thank you for all your work behind the scenes to produce this magazine

To the HSC — thank you for providing a space for creatives in this program

To everyone who submitted — thank you for letting us share your art and bringing this magazine to life.

And to readers like you — thanks.

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A Letter from (an) Editor

Oh, Constant Reader.

I am privileged once again to write to you for a third time as the editor of Equinox, but I fear that this must be our last correspondence. I'm leaving now. I must. My time as an Illini has come to an end, and the editorial mantle must be passed on to the happy children of the future.

This year, however, I do not write to you alone. I write to you, as always, from a time long after the vernal equinox, but this year, I was lucky enough to be joined in editing by my friend and longtime Equinox staff member, MaryRose O'Donnell. I'd tell her to say hi, but she's entrusted me with writing to you. She values our editor-reader relationship and knows not to come between us.

I cannot speak for her, but I know that she is just as happy as I am with how this year's book has turned out. I believe that once again we have fulfilled our mission statement of "exhibiting the balance between academic and artistic achievement among Chancellor's Scholars."

If I'm being honest, it's a rather difficult mission to fail.

Not that putting together this book is easy, of course. I am still practically a Luddite when it comes to the Adobe software suite (Thanks as always for your amazing technical skills, Gail). It's a difficult mission to fail because CHP students exhibit this balance already without any help from us. They are a consistently interesting and creative group of people with varied interests and passions and skills. We just put their work on paper. Or a PDF, depending on how you're reading this.

Without them, there would be no Equinox.

Well, there would be two, annually, actually, but even without this particular Equinox, Chancellor's Scholars would still shine as brightly as the stars in the sky.

The equinox is the time when light and darkness are equal. When everything is balanced.

It has been hard to maintain balance with the past year-and-change of uncertainty in the world. I speak for myself, but I'm sure that the staff would agree, and I'm sure that you, reader, have felt this as well. It's easy to float off into the vast reaches of space when the only thing to ground you is the sun rising and setting outside of your apartment window.

This year's unofficial theme is Pluto. The planet, not the dog. This is Issue 9, and Pluto is the ninth planet--no matter what those jerks in the Astronomy department say. Pluto is way out there, all by itself. It's impossibly far away, but it's not alone.

No matter how far the separation between Pluto and the rest of the planets may be, however, it's not alone.

And neither are we.

Don't forget that.

I'd like to thank CHP and the Equinox staff for helping to keep this spaceman grounded, and I wish the best of luck next year to Teni Akin and Gail Schneiderman. I cannot imagine this book in better hands or the editorial mantle on better shoulders. They, if anyone, will be able to get the next issue out on time.

I must be going now. I feel I've overstayed my welcome. The equinox is now yours, you happy children of the future. Take care of it.

.
Those of the past send greetings.

Ethan Frobish

table of contents

14...after march, <i>mac dudley</i>	60...the old canal, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>
15...untitled, <i>sophie luitjen</i>	61...the grass is always greener when it's raining, <i>briana sobecks</i>
15...untitled, <i>teni akin</i>	62...semblance: five short vignettes for solo euphonium, <i>jonathan boudreaux</i>
16...how to smoke a brisket for an ungrateful family, <i>ethan frobish</i>	69...peacock, <i>gail schneiderman</i>
18...cheeses take the wheel, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>	70...d.a.r.e, <i>mac dudley</i>
22...insects and butterflies, <i>habib rehman</i>	70...sunset, <i>sophie luitjen</i>
24...girl laughing, <i>bethany lee</i>	72...medea, <i>sydney wang</i>
25...peach fuzz, <i>bethany lee</i>	74...royalty, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>
26...toothy grins, <i>kayla vittore</i>	78...approach avoidance, <i>kayla vittore</i>
27...ripper, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>	78...earth awakening, <i>sophie luitjen</i>
28...reflections from within the behemoth, <i>daniel cudzich</i>	80...a mild form of cannibalism and an exhibitionistic undressing of the hand, <i>ethan frobish</i>
30...untitled, <i>sophie luitjen</i>	83...untitled, <i>sophie luitjen</i>
32...absinthe, <i>tayo oriade</i>	84...autumn glory, <i>sophie luitjen</i>
33...crash, <i>tayo oriade</i>	85...the way it goes, <i>bethany lee</i>
34...untitled, <i>sophie luitjen</i>	86...a forgotten grave from 1807, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>
35...hanging on, <i>gail schneiderman</i>	88...all the way to the grave, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>
36...the firing of the first railgun oppenheimer, <i>daniel cudzich</i>	90...overlook, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>
38...untitled, <i>sophie luitjen</i>	91...water wheel, <i>maryrose o'donnell</i>
41...flying free, <i>gail schneiderman</i>	92...happy easter, <i>georgie, ethan frobish</i>
44...glimmer of hope, <i>sophie luitjen</i>	95...guiding, <i>gail schneiderman</i>
45...summer glory, <i>sophie luitjen</i>	96...wandering, <i>gail schneiderman</i>
46...lesson of sunburns and plastic bags, <i>kayla vittore</i>	100...remedies, <i>mac dudley</i>
49...untitled, <i>nicola setterdahl</i>	101...untitled, <i>natalie bready</i>
50...the view may change but we remain the same, <i>gail schneiderman</i>	102...an observer's option, <i>kayla vittore</i>
51...2 months of moss, <i>mac dudley</i>	104...when you cannot travel, imagine, <i>gail schneiderman</i>
52...infatuation: the origins, <i>tayo oriade</i>	Covers...apart but not alone, <i>gail schneiderman</i>
58...i was here, <i>natalie bready</i>	

after march

mac dudley

tonight's earth is quieter than yesterday.
she sighs, like the deep darkness in an old polaroid
portraying a single star among immeasurable
silence.

tear up the soil, if you feel it holds a lesson
root systems screaming the answers
as they press against the grooves in your palms.

tonight is denim and acid wash
you feel stripped of some layers,
uncountable in the quiet lack of light.
no one has asked a question since we locked the glass door, as if there was nothing
left to know.

our personalities shrink into ourselves as the stretch of our existence
curves back inward, like an inside-out contact lens,
fitted sheet over our individual beds.
I begin to hoard my entirety,
as though leaving any part of myself outside
the safe, sterile room
would infect it with the doubt we have forsaken.

numb to the touch of concern,
I can hardly remember a stronger semblance
than your own grainy-ness
frozen on my laptop screen.

will we recall
how to hold each other,
once this cloud cover lifts?
I am so afraid I have gripped myself
too tightly to be grasped
by another.

untitled

sophie luyten



untitled

teni akin

how to smoke a brisket for an ungrateful family

ethan frobish

You spot it in the meat section of your local Walmart. Normally, these supermarkets have nothing but lean, ground beef and boneless, skinless chicken breasts swollen with growth hormone, but this, this was a beautiful piece of meat. You don't know how it got there—perhaps an order got switched around or some poor confused meat packer labeled a pallet wrong—and you don't know how it's still there, how anyone could ignore it, but it is calling to you. Fifteen pounds of USDA Choice beef brisket. She's gorgeous even under the store's industrial fluorescent lights, something no woman could ever accomplish. You can see her delicate marbling from across the aisle, the supple band of fat separating her point from her flat. She seems to glow softly, to sing a bovine siren's song.

With each step you take closer, she becomes more irresistible. You lick your lips. You know that you shouldn't—even with the stimulus check, she'll be far too expensive—so you turn around, pushing your cart back towards the dairy section. You are strong, a pillar of masculinity.

You came to purchase your family's generic weekly rations of frozen pizza and dry pasta, but as you shop, you find yourself filling your cart with barbecue fixins, almost against your will. Texas toast, cole slaw, corn bread mix, cans of pork n' beans, and bottles of spices that you know you already have at home and that you haven't used in years. You know how the flavor of a dried spice deteriorates over time; if you're going to do this—and you are going to do this, you realize as you rush your cart back to her—you're going to do this right. You will do her justice.

You don't check her label for her price. Your heart couldn't bear it. You simply swipe your credit card. You can hide your receipt later. You can lie and say that it was on sale or that it was mislabelled and only through your incredible meat expertise you were able to identify it among rump roasts or that a coworker had his freezer fail and

desperately needed someone to take her off of his hands. Your wife may not approve, but she'll understand when she gets a taste.

You rush home, putting the groceries away before your wife has a chance to notice. Some time passes and you put your plan together. You acquire your wood chips (a mix of hickory and cherry) and break out the old smoker. Years of take-out and frozen food had left it alone and dusty in the garage, but it still fires up. You take your time to trim her when no one is home, when you can take as long as you need to separate excess fat. You leave a quarter-inch—enough to melt and tenderize, suffuse through her muscle and have her melt in your mouth rather than be a chewy distraction. You coat her in kosher salt, the good stuff, and even take the time to inject her with broth. She'll be unimaginably moist after she brines.

The day comes. You feign a headache at dinner, leaving her and the kids to their Tombstone and their Kraft. You go to bed, but you do not sleep. You are far too excited. You pretend to be asleep when your wife gets into bed, and you wait until her snoring begins before you sneak out.

With your preparation, you are able to get your smoker ready in record time. You plug it in, and quickly it begins to belch out smoke. You've stationed it on your back deck, just out of sight of the windows. It's a little cold and a little rainy, but the smoker quickly reaches temp, and while you waited, you'd rubbed her down with your meticulously ground and proportioned spices, massaged her, tucked it into her folds. She is ready to go. You put her in and lock the door.

Now, you wait. Giddily. Every hour on the hour, you go out and add more water and wood chips. It takes all your strength not to leave the door open and stare at her as she darkens and drips. To do so would be to lose your heat and spoil the process.



cheeses take the wheel

maryrose o'donnell

Barbecue is a patient man's game, and a patient man you are.

In between your hourly tendings, you sit and wait. You tried to read, tried to turn on the television and wait, but you could focus on nothing but her. You end up sitting out there with the smoker in a half-asleep haze. You've got meat fever.

You know when your wife wakes up for work, however, so you make your way back inside to make her coffee. You tell her you couldn't sleep because of her snoring. She apologizes but soon asks if you smell smoke. Stuttering, you lie and say that you indulged in a cigarette. She's disappointed seeing as how you'd both been in the process of quitting for a few months now—quitting together helps, she'd insisted—but you smile and say that it was a special occasion.

She looks puzzled. She has no way of knowing what is in store for her at the dinner table, but how could she? She asks you what you mean, and you say that it's a surprise. She shrugs. With that, she finishes her coffee and heads off to work. She is essential, after all.

The rest of the day you spend as you spent the darkness of the early morning. Water, wood, wait. The kids don't notice—they sleep til noon and are too busy with their phones anyways. You wait and wait for her internal temp to hit the magic number. 203. The perfect brisket temp, where it wiggles like jelly and you don't need teeth to eat it. You decide to crack into a beer at noon. What's a barbecue without beer? You find wonderful, silent companionship with the belching smoker and your brisket. Hours pass and cans drain, and finally, it hits 203. In a flash, you rip open the door. The hickory smoke is delectable, but you are drawn to your lady on the rack. She is black as night, but you know that inside she is perfectly done.

Carefully, you remove her from the smoker, wrap her in foil, and lay her down in a cooler. She needs to rest after that ordeal. Who wouldn't? While you wait for her to rest—a patient man's game indeed—you prepare the rest of your fixins.

You've timed it perfectly. Just as the cornbread has cooled and you've laid out your spread, your wife comes in through the garage door. Dinner is ready, you say. I hope you're hungry.

You shush her prying questions about money and call down the kids. You have them gather around the dinner table, and you reveal her. You ignore their questions and cut into her, making sure to cut thin slices against the grain, just as you'd practiced.

You shouldn't be surprised by your work, you shouldn't gasp and drool, but you do. She turned out just as you knew she would. She is perfect, and she offers no resistance to your knife. Soon she is sliced into a fan of smokey, tender goodness. You can see the ring of smoke just below the black bark of spices. You've outdone yourself.

You invite the family to help themselves and dole yourself the perfect plate. Beans, brisket, and bread, all mingling together, sharing flavors. Before you eat, you insist that the family say a prayer, to thank God for this meal that you've created.

You've resisted tasting her as you carved, but now is the moment of truth. You take a bite.

Words cannot capture how she tastes, how she seems to melt into substantial nothingness on your tongue. She is smoke and richness itself. She is sublime. If you thought meat fever had passed, it comes back with a vengeance. Your eyes roll to the back of your head, and you forget where you are momentarily. Your body is slick with meat sweats.

But the moment passes after you swallow. You know it will come back with the next bite, but you want to see the ecstasy in your family's faces as they come down with meat fever.

To your dismay, they do not share your pleasure. They chew and poke around at their plates. One child has even taken to cutting off the bark. Even your wife seems to have avoided the more succulent portions.

Is something wrong, you ask her. She thinks, for a moment, and says that it needs something. She's a fool—the perfection of this brisket is undeniable. She gets up from the table and returns with a bottle of Heinz 57.

You are horrified as they slather your perfect brisket, the object of your labor and deliberation, in sheets of red ketchup. You watch as they drown all of her subtlety and nuance in red, and you can't look away as they begin to scarf it down. Much better, they say.

It's all too much. You feel a tightness in your chest and your left arm goes numb. You fall from the table, but can feel nothing through the excruciating pain radiating from your core. You see your wife and children crying, pawing at your chest, but you can say nothing. This is it, you think. Your vision tunnels into blackness.

Suddenly, you see a bright light at the end of the tunnel, and you smell the unmistakable scent of hickory smoke. The stories were all true. You know she'll be waiting for you, that the two of you can stay together forever in savory bliss. So, you let go. You die, leave your family, and enter brisket heaven.

vanessa
cardui
habib rehman



stagnomantis
carolina
habib rehman



melanoplus
differentialis
habib rehman



junonia coenia
habib rehman

girl laughing

bethany lee

Heat-seeker flounders in a room full of bodies.
We watched as you launched it,
that shrill laugh
which sliced the punchline wide open
and now whistles eagerly in the hollow air.
We stare at our feet
so as not to witness the crumbling, first of the joke
and then of the girl.
But your head remains cocked and lips parted, unmoved by the silence,
and in us stirs envy.
There is always shame to bring home, the shame which wakes us each hour
'til we nurse it to sleep.
You trap yours in a jar, peel back the lid,
and let us drink from the scandal.
Your heat-seeker laugh will chase us until we
collapse, and the room, which used to have nothing,
is now brimming with something.
We envy your sacrifice--the way you give the unwanted--and this joke
is another glass jar. Somehow you learned to self-immolate,
to throw your head back
and sing.

peach fuzz

bethany lee

It's some comment
about us all looking the same
that makes me stop chewing.

My best friend tosses her golden hair,
and the light slides off it.
My brother said
he could blindfold you with a shoelace.

The cafeteria gets smaller,
louder, more unbearable,
and I shrink with it.

I smile at her.
See, like that.
I watch the blonde fuzz
coating her forearms as she gesticulates,
a peach twisted under the sunlight.

Someone held it there once,
turned it slowly to observe its glow,
and the fruit smiled bashfully,
knew nothing of shame,
knew nothing of shrinking,
did not sit in the cafeteria
and wither.

toothy grins

kayla vittore

Men do frown
And puppies will whine
Even crocodiles can cry.
But across all species
Across all time
There's mirth in a bone-rimmed eye.
The skeleton always smiles,

yes,

the skeleton

always

smiles.



ripper

maryrose o'donnell

reflections from within the behemoth

daniel cudzich

One does not simply “view” the Teralith.

Hell, with the sheer scale of the damn thing, even the prefix “tera” does it a disservice. Frequently you have been told in your elementary education that space is unimaginably vast, where light, the fastest thing in the universe, takes minutes to reach the next planet, months to reach the closest communications outpost, and years to reach the nearest star.

But all of that is empty space. Imagine if that distance were to be made tangible by a singular human construct. It is one thing to stare into the void and let it peer back at you. It is another thing to stare into the endless window halls and have it beckon you with a hum that has echoed down a thousand kilometers of glass.

By a series of monstrous miracles, distances spanning entire solar systems have been tamed and encased by metal plating, diamond sheathing, and plastic tubing. A human designed this, the kind sir did, and with that is an uneasy intentionality behind everything within the Teralith. You know what the rails are for. Those lights were designed with you in mind. All of the systems working in the background to maintain air flow and pressure were designed and placed here, there, everywhere to keep you alive in what was originally an empty expanse, but now it's filled with human design.

How could the kind sir have done all of this? If one planet-sized cargo bay is enough to strike terror into the soul, how could someone design several million of them, with boundless connecting corridors that no person could reasonably traverse and infinite fusion generators to boot?

It's peculiar that the Teralith is both humanity at its finest and completely separate from it, too. On one hand, it's designed for humans, by humans, with human needs like breathing and eating. But all of it has been abstracted and then magnified to scales so immense that the original idea of survival and living is lost, and you lose your sense of self in the unearthly metal that abounds in all directions. It is the physical, constructed reminder of how insignificant you are. Yes, that hallway was built for you, maybe to walk towards your workplace, maybe to reach a nearby transport, but no man could traverse the real distance that the

hall crosses. You couldn't even cross a thousandth of that distance in your lifetime. That staircase leading to another level within the bay is intended for you to climb, but it's a shadow, inhospitably long, missing guardrails for efficiency's sake along the hundreds of kilometers it stretches, encircling a void meant to house interstellar fleets. That chamber— well, we don't even know its purpose, the machines within it are beyond us. This is an agglomeration of skeleton devices intended for human use, sure, but no human could dare utilize them. This is architecture that has superseded its creators, its intended inhabitants.

You might gaze down a hall, or down one of the massive cargo bays, or into one of the impossibly massive atriums and lobbies that the kind sir is known to obsess over. These are closed distances, something immense that has been captured and encased by someone else's design, with a finite end. But the atmosphere indicates otherwise, as light diffuses over those thousands of kilometers, as echoes become indistinct, as the end can no longer be seen, shrinking into obscurity as you peer further. There's a comfort of standing in an open, enclosed space, shouting, and hearing the echo; you at least know there's a wall, but no such comfort is offered here.

You are tiny here, lost.

You stand in a hall and do not see the terminating wall; it doesn't gently bend to follow the curvature of a planet, something you might see in the famed ubercomplexes. The planetary scale, while massive, is still something familiar, something that humanity has contended with for millennia. No, instead you see the same door frames, the same branching paths, the same maintenance hatches, the same paneling repeating over and over again, billions of copies arranged perfectly along one dimension with a geometric perfection so rigid and pristine that it makes one shudder.

We did this. We built these absurdly scaled halls, these immense bays, these inhospitable passageways.

Why did we make a thing so large that it cannot be comprehended in its totality?

No, I can't even ascribe a “we” to the creation of this hulk. It is the kind sir's grand design, and we have been complicit in assembling it because he declared so. Each



untitled
sophie luijten

of our individual portions may have been comprehensible. May have been. But the engine bell I supervised was already on a scale that challenged understanding. To have billions, no, trillions of other supervisors assemble their portions breaks any idea of understanding. And yet somehow the kind sir was able to not just understand the totality, but produce it from imagination.

I don't know how else to describe the fear this machine instills. Someone back on Earth or perhaps from an O'Neill cylinder around Tau Ceti might be impressed by monumental architecture; hell, the vast majority of living spaces the Conglomerate has built are the definition of monumental architecture. But Teralith is beyond monumental. It is beyond any prefix that could give it a reasonable order of magnitude, like "kilo-" or "tera-" or even "exa-". It is outright supernatural, forged by forces incomprehensible in both complexity and magnitude, made of materials that should never have tread this reality, powered by the darkest sources of energy.

It is eerily, inorganically perfect, crystal-cut to metallic perfection with near infinite lines in defiance of nature's curves. Its structural frame is composed of an abomination, an ultraheavy soup of baryons wrought in furnaces operating under relativistic conditions, and this abomination repeats on the order of interstellar distances, billions of times over on scales ranging from micrometers to kilometers, over and over again this unnatural hulk continues to seemingly no end, and yet we inhabit it. The tangible vastness is terrifying enough. But the devices contained within, and the materials that compose them, are beyond us.

We like patterns. We enjoy making them, finding them, and remixing them to form more interesting ones, but beyond a certain point, they become self-absorbing, impossible to fully comprehend, and ultimately break the mind. This is the fractal that the Teralith has become, a limitless, infinitely complex pattern of pipes, pumps, tanks, engines, and black magic quantum devices, most of which has been manufactured to molecular perfection. It has achieved order at the smallest possible scale and then repeated it effectively forever beyond the macroscale and onto stellar scales, from supermolecules to paneling to repeating hall segments to forever.

It is the single largest contiguous structure ever built, dwarfing even stars as it stretches on for literal light-months. To live in it is to live in a prison, to observe it is to feel terror at its unfeeling scale, and to understand it all is to be insane.

absinthe

tayo oriade

The bottle rested between his hands,
emerald liquid reflecting onto his haggard face.
His sunken eyes trailed the length of the glass:
the skeletal face carved onto the bottle,
the haunted smile that seemed to taunt him,
the green alcohol that glowed eerily in the fading light.

His Adam's apple dipped in his throat,
mouth furling in on the sides as it watered.
Fumbling fingers started to circle the rim of the bottle.
Like the waves that lazily lapped the shore,
barely wetting the sand, he wanted a taste of the drink,
just once more.

Though his coins of sobriety glinted in the corner,
Absinthe's call was much stronger.

He longed for the familiar taste of anise on his tongue,
the smooth burn of the alcohol as it slid down his throat,
a welcome caress from his forgotten lover.

Forgotten...

The bottle suddenly felt heavier.
Slamming it onto the table,
he watched as Absinthe splashed on the floor,
splintering the hardwood,
disappearing into the cracks.
He wasn't going to lose to her again, not today.

crash

tayo oriade

His foot slammed on the brakes.
Like a bullet zipping out of its cartridge,
the car's mechanisms were quickly engaged,
but it was too late.

The first thing that he heard was her scream.
Chilling and bloodcurdling, he watched
as she tried to swerve away, mouth parted,
eyes clouded with fear.

There was so much that he wanted to tell her,
that it was an emergency, that he needed
to check his phone, but it was too late.

Before he had time to mouth an apology,
his world faded into black.



untitled
sophie luijten



hanging on
gail schneiderman

the firing of the first railgun

oppenheimer

daniel cudzich

"Launch in T minus 5 minutes."

The two floated weightless in one of the window halls of their vessel, an S.S. Envoy model. The kind sir had chosen not to prepare a great ceremony for this event, let alone present a speech; he had instead arranged for a private viewing with Beata. She found it quite curious as to why he did not make a public appearance for this occasion, as surely he could have built a massive rallying cry against Sympost in the moments before the assault, but she nevertheless agreed to the more subdued plans. She had to.

Currently, their view was turned away from the sun, with their gaze set on the metal behemoth before them. Of course, at many thousands of kilometers away, its size was reduced, but the fact that it could be visible at such a distance was impressive on its own. It was strictly linear and slender, with needles of metal gleaming in the unfiltered sunlight that struck it. On one end were massive engine bells decorated with those needles poking out from a labyrinth of cooling equipment, and on the other end was the array that would spell an empire's doom. At such a distance, the muzzle of the railgun seemed infinitely complex, with fractal patterns of spiraling pipes, guide rails, lights, and gaps from which the RKMs would emerge. This machine emanated foreboding, a sparkling agglomeration of steel housing iridium spires ready to be thrown at 0.5c.

"Launch in T minus 4 minutes."

Dexter continued to gaze at the machine he designed, the Railgun Oppenheimer. This would be the first of five other railguns to fire, and so for this momentous occasion, he chose to witness it personally. Now that he beheld the machine in person, suspended in the pitch black of space and with the sun lighting it with piercing rays, he remained unusually quiet. Normally he would be actively checking systems remotely, coordinating with technicians and operators, or attending some other matter, but it was clear he was absorbed by the machine. Beata frowned.

"Sir, I do hope you understand what you are about to do."

"Of course I do. I've planned this for decades since the deliberation."

Beata sighed. "Decades in the making, I suppose."

After an extended pause, Beata shook her head. She took a breath.

"Sir, I really do think that the assault you're about to launch is not necessary."

Dexter frowned.

"Why is that?"

"I..." She paused for a moment before gazing out the glass. "You, my kind sir, are about to shatter a colony system and take away billions of lives by launching the RKMs. Is that not, at the very least, *slightly* off-putting?"

"We have to do it."

"How many times have you said that now?"

"Many times, and I know full well that it's not a good answer on its own. But you understand the circumstances."

Beata hesitated. "I suppose I do, and perhaps so did the representatives back at the deliberation. Or at least some of them."

She paused before continuing.

"Sure, they may have understood the circumstances, but--"

"I understand that you have your concerns about the assault on Sympost, Beata. I, too, was hesitant at the idea of initial annihilation. But should the assault be successful, we will have eradicated billions and rendered the largest swath of land and space to date uninhabitable. That is worth the continued existence and unity of the Conglomerate." He kept his gaze on the railgun. Some faint motion could be seen near the apertures, and lights were beginning to flicker on.

"You have vastly different values from the majority, then."

"Different values, yes, practical values."

Beata paused before turning once more toward him.

"Sir, your implication that it's impractical to preserve life has me deeply worried." "You assume impracticality? Aren't we going to prosper if we do this?"

"Most people will be taken aback by that response. You're indifferent."

Dexter's gaze remained unbroken from the machine.

"Launch in T-minus 3 minutes."

Beata turned to face Dexter as he continued looking beyond. She frowned.

"Dexter."

He did not turn to look at her.

"I know I can't change the course of action right now, it's already set. But you're doing something more than just violent or historic. It's--"

"It's madness, yes." Dexter smiled a little.



untitled
sophie luijten

"If you recognize it's madness, then why did you choose to do this?"

"Why did I choose to build the railguns? Why did I choose to obliterate Sympost with no mercy?" There was a pause before Beata repeated, "Yes. Why?"

"If there is even a miniscule chance of something breaking off, something rebelling, that must be taken as an absolute in the grand scales of time that we're operating on. Sympost was one of those chances that went through, and now I am unequivocally eliminating it. We will no longer have any risk." "But the people-"

"The people will be an unfortunate loss, yes. I am sorry for that. But there is no other way."

"I doubt it," Beata retorted.

"We have had enough debates over this. The deliberations are over. We will fire."

Dexter was remarkably terse. He still looked on while Beata stared at him. She knew she couldn't elicit anything more from him.

"Launch in T-minus 2 minutes. Narrated countdown beginning in 1 minute."

Beata turned away from her superior, disturbed. She heard him utter a sigh before he spoke again. "Yes. The cost will be great. But you want the Conglomerate to prosper, don't you?" he asked. She focused back on the glimmering machine now. A faint glow could be seen from the engine bells now as the engines began priming. The apertures were fully open now, and the needles that composed the structure seemed to tense.

It was getting ready. The relativistic kill missiles would be accelerated to a significant portion of the speed of light by the railgun before firing their own engines to rocket on to Kepler 138. It would be a beautiful sight, seeing each missile's plume materialize at the mouth of the fractal barrel, but it would be a terrifying one, too. Each missile would go on to shred a moon, an O'Neill cylinder, an asteroid outpost, or perhaps an entire planet. Magnificent death, as delivered by screaming iridium.

This was Dexter's response to the appearance of a colony that refused to abide by Conglomerate regulations. This was the man she was working for, one who could so willingly sacrifice billions in organized, interstellar strikes with no hope of recovery or salvation. He cannot be deterred, he will not be deterred by anything, not even morality, in his relentless goals. This was the kind sir, who in a minute's time will commit a crime of immeasurable proportion. Yet she was complicit in letting this happen, arranging for the shipments, appointing construction supervisors, allowing him to keep thinking this way. Beata swallowed before replying.

"Yes. May... may the Conglomerate prosper."

"T-minus 60 seconds. 59... 58..."

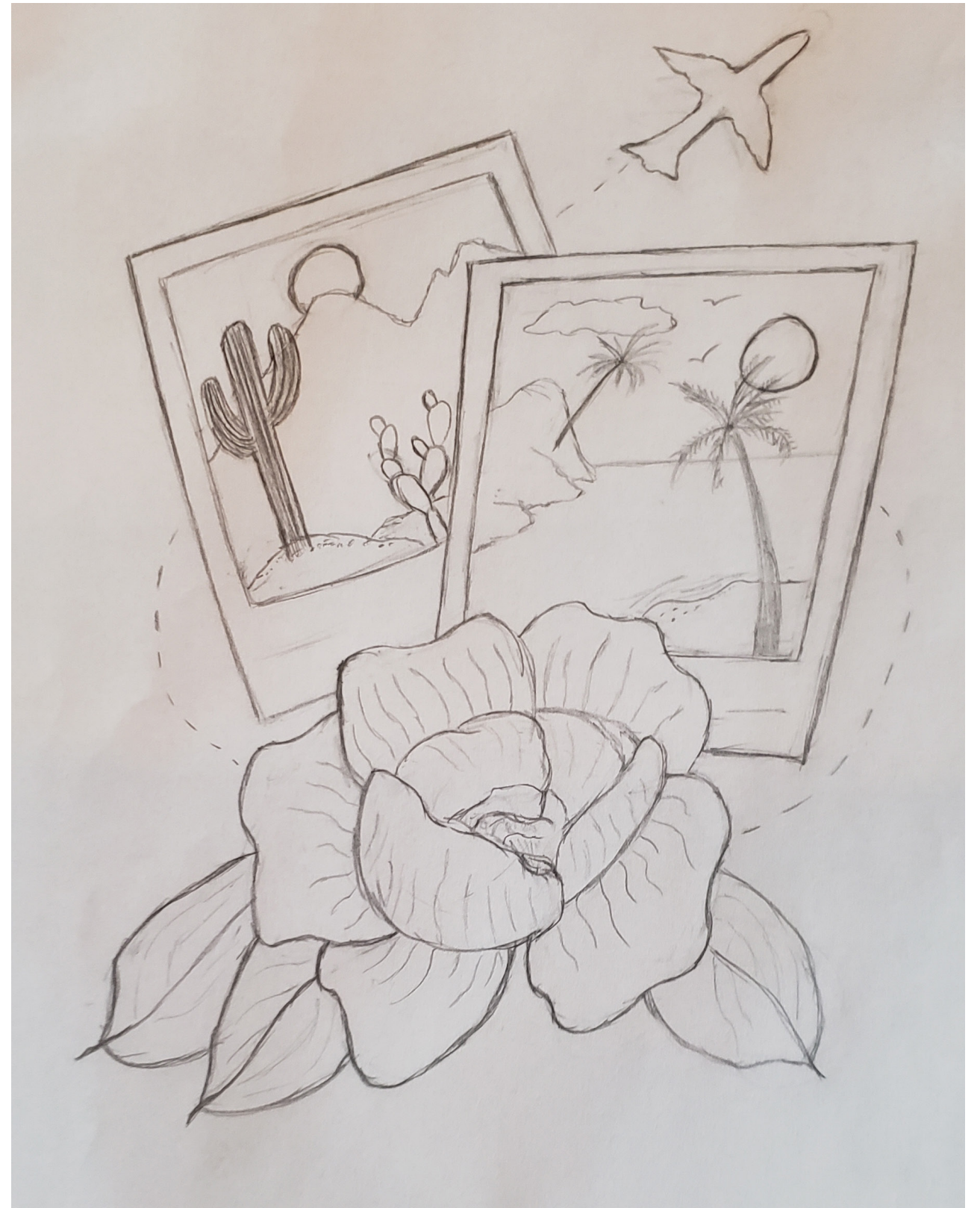
The official countdown began. Dexter's gaze remained unbroken from the machine, and while Beata looked on as well, other matters weighed on her. While they floated in a private, secluded vessel, others would be turning on the stream for this historic event. Billions of citizens would see the launch as it occurred from the perspective of every camera that was both on the railgun and pointed at it.

They, too, were wary. No man could ever be willing to make such an attack unless the circumstances demanded so, but the kind sir had proven himself rational and exceptional. He had brought the Conglomerate to these heights; surely, the kind sir was acting rationally with this latest decision to open lethal, interstellar fire. Surely, the kind sir was making an appropriate sacrifice here, launching the most powerful weapon to date for the sake of the Conglomerate.

"30... 29... 28..."

Dexter continued to stare at the behemoth, his eyes widening. This is glory. This is what engineering and calculation could do. This was the unbridled power that he had at his disposal, and he was about to unleash it on his brother's nascent empire. It was a terrible decision on his brother's part to try and break away, and perhaps he himself made an even more terrible decision in building the railguns. But no matter. Philip did exactly what Dexter had anticipated. He had bitten his tongue, resigned to the authority of the Conglomerate, accepted the position as high supervisor of the colony, and then rebelled, exactly as Dexter intended.

This is what engineering and calculation could do. It could create the most powerful weapon in the universe, capable of obliterating planets and rendering entire star systems destroyed. It could produce the most intimidating political display ever conducted. It could create the glory built before him, glory that can destroy countless lives for the preservation of countless more, for the preservation of the Conglomerate.



flying free
gail schneiderman

Or at least, that's what the engineering and calculation said.

"10... 9... 8..."

Dexter inhaled. This was it.

"7... 6... 5..."

Beata inhaled. She couldn't believe it.

"4... 3... 2... 1..."

Dexter, Beata, and the digitized voice all said in unison:

"Ignition."

The engine bells produced blossoms of burning blue plumes to counter the recoil, the individual engines blending together a brilliant maelstrom of fire. The few slivers of the interior that could be seen from this distance lurched and then lit afire as magnet lines powered on in nanosecond succession. Decorated in blue and white fusion fire, the needles glowed with tension.

And then the array emerged. Thousands of slender pillars howled out from the apertures in a continued stream and ignited their engines, causing a delayed disc of flame that persisted at the edge of the jagged barrel. Lines of light blazed on from the disc as the pillars kept accelerating, screaming noiselessly through the void as Dexter and Beata beheld it from behind the diamond glass.

More, more it fired in laser-tight formation as the engine bells glowed hotter, as panels strained against the shear and compressive forces from the pillars launching forth. The slender pillars were indistinguishable from each other as they rocketed at immense speed while blending in the irradiant exhaust they ignited. The fusion fire danced with glee in Dexter's eyes as he grinned wider and wider. In Beata's eyes, they danced with hostile passion that only a true madman could ever manage, a terrifying vigor that was incredible to behold yet dangerously unrestrained.

The delayed disk of fire glowed continuously and began arcing out beyond the edges of the barrel as more pillars screamed on, but the lines streaking out ceased being a uniform, dense beam. Slowly, the density of the fire decreased. Slowly, the engine bell plumes opposite from the barrel diminished, shrinking until the flame became diffuse

as the recoil diminished. And after what seemed an interminable length of time, the fire finally ceased.

In one minute and thirty six seconds, three hundred thousand RKMs had been thrown at half of light speed. The Railgun Oppenheimer had fired its army of relativistic doom in a brilliant electrical and fusion discharge.

The interior began to dim as components started to cool. The engine bells turned from white to yellow to dull red. The delayed disc of fire at the aperture began to dissipate, leaving behind a hardened char layer around the aperture, some panels deformed from the enormous discharge that occurred at the end of that magnificent muzzle. All of this transpired in the pristine silence of space.

In only six year's time, the Kepler-138 system that Sympost inhabited would be inundated by a deluge of light-speed metal raining down on all of the planets, asteroids, moons, and habitats. They would receive warning of impending doom a mere month before the assault struck.

And this would not be the only one; four more railguns remained to be fired in coordination. It was an unavoidable attack from all possible directions, all arriving in the system at the same time. This was brutal power.

Off in the direction of the fired RKMs, a pinpoint of light flared brilliantly and began to fade as they rocketed into the void. The demonstration of power was complete. Beata held still, knowing to not reveal her concern. She could not believe it. It was complete. And she was a part of it.

Dexter, with outstretched arms, now recalled a particular occasion, one of a similar, weaponized discharge from centuries ago. But this was no expression of regret. This was no somber acknowledgement of destructive power. This was an enthusiastic embrace.

"I am become death, the destroyer of worlds!"



glimmer of hope
sophie luijten



summer glory
sophie luijten

lesson of sunburns and plastic bags

kayla vittore

This is the worst sunburn I've ever had

For days my shoulders smoldered
From my gold-tinged outdoor labors.
They burned overtime
Sunlight present past normal business hours
And into what should've been cool, restful nights.

Once an angry red that makes others wince
slowly faded, downgraded,
Into a bashful, ashamed pink
More tasteful for teasing from friends.
Now it is nothing but dull tan,
Normalcy I will temporarily cherish --
Except for the irregular white lines
Like salt deposits on stone
Where cellular casualties of repair and replacement
Shrivel up and flake off
In my own eerie erosion.

One night I scratched and pulled
At the patchy borders of my molting self.
Gauzy and delicate
Impressed with the familiar pattern of me
Almost looking like a dragonfly wing
But lacking that iridescence
Or any artistic delicacy.

These fragments of organic plastic bag
Are what contain all of me.
Meat and blood and bone and nerve
And spit and tears and thoughts and
Perception and muscle and intention
And genes and half-digested
Lunch and hormones and fat and fear
And countless other contents that suddenly
Seem to exceed carrying capacity
So that I search paranoidly
For splits that must be developing
Weakness that must be evident
Somewhere along these overextended extremities.

I find nothing, of course.
This skin wasn't preconceived,
Laid out in wait to be filled
With the goopy, soupy mess of my biology.
It was built and grown around me.
Stretching, reshaping,
Callousing,
Softening,
Wrinkling,
Expanding,
Breaking,
Mending,

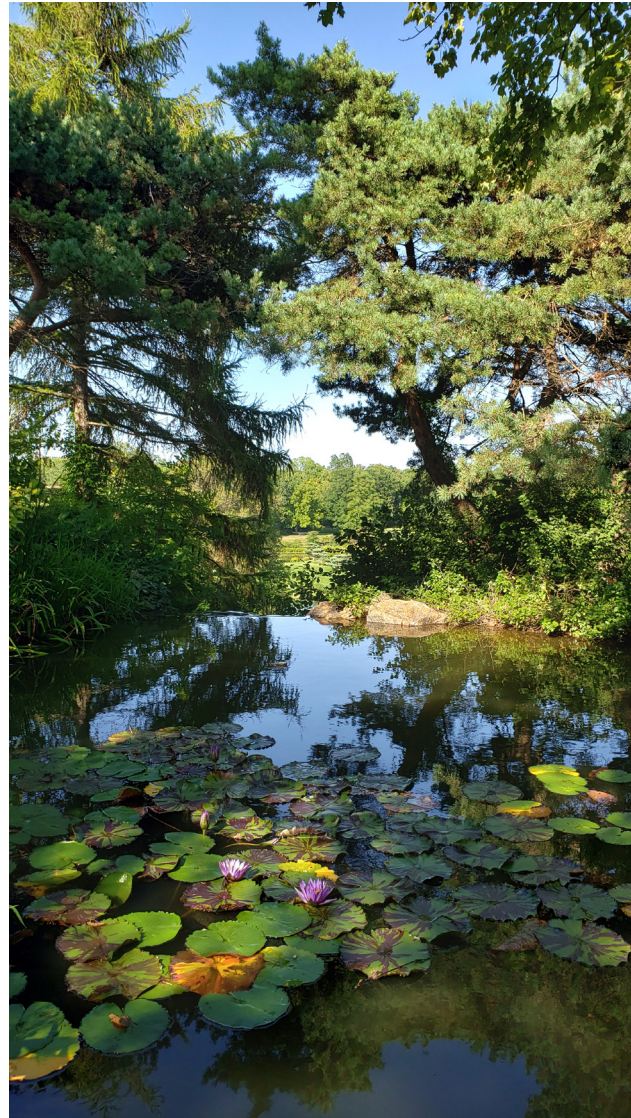
As the journey through life dictates change.
Always, always change.
The flaking skin of my healing sunburn
Seems too insubstantial for my excessive humanity.
Yet I know this is just a thin layer.
Besides the fragment pinched between my fingers
There is another
And another
Another
Another
Another
Another
Going all the way down
To the flowing, twitching, vulnerable mass of cells
Working diligently in their reassurance
That the thousand layers above them
Will be sacrificed and replaced for their sake.

Just as a thousand lies could keep out the truth
Just as a thousand dreams could keep out the reality
Just as a thousand thoughts could keep out the actions

These insubstantial veils we are born wrapped in
could keep out the entire world



untitled
nicola setterdahl



the view may change
but we remain the same
gail schneiderman

2 months of moss mac dudley

Beauty is how the world
misses you.
Nature, stretching her arms across
deserted parts of herself,
as if searching for your
not-yet-forgotten warmth.
The blooming wildflowers
murmur after your hurried exit,
shaking their colors in the new breeze
your back no longer blocks.

Beauty is the healing
that we are consistently jealous of.
Watching from fastened windows,
aching, to see her
so lively without our influence.
How come her absentminded,
wandering hands
(still reaching in the half-asleep
daze of some abandoned lover
at dawn) spring forth a healthiness
that we had given up once, to be with her?

We wonder why we can't have
our favorite material comforts and her
happy
simultaneously.
So our selfishness ultimately breeds
envy, at the sight of her
better off without us.

infatuation: the origins

tayo oriade

Gohan stole a glance at his rear-view mirror. He waited a few seconds, ensuring that the roads were clear, before smoothly merging into the right lane. After months of routine, his actions had become habitual.

Taking a peek at the dashboard, Gohan checked the time. It was 6 o'clock in the morning. The sun was starting to rise in the horizon, expertly sweeping away remnants of dusk, with hues of pale yellow, and deep notes of fiery red. The lush, wooded landscape accentuated the charms of the sleepy town. Welcome to Fairville, a small sign read. Worn picket fences surrounded houses down the street, and blinking welcome signs hung from dilapidated buildings. As rundown as the city might have appeared to outsiders, Gohan had taken a renewed liking to it. For the first time in years, he finally felt a sense of belonging coming back to his hometown.

"Belonging," Gohan whispered.

A small smile curled onto his lips, as he turned into the lot of the scarce diner. An old, hazy memory came to his mind. It was of a bright-eyed, freckle-faced, teenage girl.

"Freya," he murmured.

Gohan slowly adjusted his tie, trying to not to bump the red rose nestled in his shirt's pocket. He was standing in front of the mirror. A crumpled hall pass sat on the ledge of the sink, evidence of his desperate escape from class. Gohan's ruddy, chubby face was sweaty; he was a bundle of nerves, and excitement. Releasing the tight grip that he had on his tie, Gohan took a step back, trying to compose himself. He turned on the sink, capturing the cool liquid between his fingers. Angling his hands upwards, he splashed his face with water, blinking away the droplets that clustered on his lashes. He immediately felt refreshed.

"K-Keep it together Gohan, you got this," he whispered. "You have to man up."

Gohan forced himself to smile, trying not to grimace at how it looked. At seventeen years old, he was one of the few left in his grade who still had braces. His wiry smile came off looking too wolfish. He tried again. It looked more natural this time... right?

Startled by the creaking sound of the bathroom door, Gohan immediately straightened. Sneaking a glance at who had entered, he struggled to suppress a groan. Star soccer player Brandon Garcia strode into the bathroom, backpack casually slung across his broad shoulders. He carried himself with confidence, from the self-assured way that his hands were tucked into his pockets, to the way that he walked. Brandon slowed as he approached Gohan, cocking one of his eyebrows.

"... you done yet? You're kinda hogging up the mirror."

"Oh! I-I'm sorry," Gohan mumbled. He scurried to the side, almost bumping into a bathroom stall.

Satisfied, Brandon started to style his hair. After a few moments, he paused, noticing that Gohan was still standing there.

"What's the matter? Still trying to muster up the courage to confess to your crush?" he eyed the rose that Gohan was now holding.

"Y-yeah, something like that," Gohan replied, twirling the rose between his fingers.

"Hm," Brandon stepped away from the mirror, turning to face him.

"So who's the lucky lady? Do I know her?"

"Y-you might. She's actually-" before Gohan could finish explaining himself, the bell rang.

"Well, whoever she is, you might want to get going. Fifth period is gonna start soon, and you know how busy the halls get before lunch. For your sake... I hope she doesn't reject you. Good luck freshman." Sparing him one last pitiful look, Brandon turned around, and left without another word.

"W-we're in the same grade!" Gohan hollered after him.

Gohan worked to steady his breathing. His nerves had increased tenfold. He had already deposited an anonymous love letter into Freya's locker earlier that morning. Now, he was trying to figure out what to say. How would he declare his love to her, the overweight, pimply boy that tutored her in biology last year?

He remembered how ecstatic she had been to see him every day during their weekly

sessions. How intensely she looked at him when he answered her questions, her vicious curiosity to learn. More so than that, Freya never failed to ask Gohan about his day, or to check in on how he was doing.

In their six months together, Gohan finally found himself starting to open up. Freya showed more interest in him than anyone else ever had. She genuinely cared about him, and he loved that about her. He loved her. He just wondered, would she be just as ecstatic to see him now?

Nodding in determination, Gohan stepped into the crowded hallway.

"Excuse me, excuse me," he muttered, trying to get through the crowd. He was a few feet from Freya's locker, when he suddenly stopped; he took in the sight before him.

Freya was pressed up against her locker. Brandon leaned over her, a playful smile on his lips, a teasing one on hers.

"Fess up, did you do this?" she asked Brandon.

Gohan's heart started to beat rapidly. Freya was holding onto his love letter. He would recognize the shimmering paper from a mile away.

She began to read.

"You've given me a reason to smile again, and I want to be with you until the very end.

Love your secret admirer," she finished off with a smile.

"Brandon, we promised not to do anything special for Valentine's day this year! Now I feel bad."

Brandon looked taken off guard.

"Y-yeah, looks like you caught me! You know that I'd do anything for you. "

Freya looked up at him, eyes shining with adoration.

"Well, I appreciate it. Thank you Brandon, I love you."

"I love you even more Freya. Happy Valentine's day."

Brandon bent down, and captured Freya's lips in a kiss. Not being able to stomach seeing anymore, Gohan turned away. Dejected, he trudged off to class.

He was too late.

Gohan shook off the bittersweet memory. He would get his chance this time. Freya still lived in their hometown, and last he checked, she had broken up with Brandon years

ago. What was there to stop him now? Hopefully, she would still be able to recognize him.

Gohan parked his car, scanning it for scratches, before heading into the dinner. The door chimed, signifying his entrance.

"Ah, Gohan! You're a little early today. The regular?"

He smiled.

"You know it Gladys!"

Gohan helped himself to his usual booth. Soft music emanated from a jukebox in the corner. Aside from that, the eatery was mostly quiet. Other people rarely came to eat at this time of day.

Gladys approached his table, holding onto his two drinks.

"Here ya' go sugar, nice and hot, just how you like it," she winked.

Gohan laughed, head tipped back in mirth. "Hm, it may be hot, but it doesn't hold a candle to you Gladys."

"Oh stop it," she leaned over to playfully swat his shoulder. "You're gonna make me blush! I'm too old for that."

"Age is just a number," Gohan said, wagging his eyebrows.

"You sure have a way with words, young man. It's a miracle that you're still single..."

She paused and cocked her head to the side.

"Are you sure that you don't want me to set you up with my granddaughter? She really is a nice girl, you know. A bit strange at times, but-"

Gohan cut her off.

"I assure you Gladys, I'm fine."

He laughed.

"Thank you once again for the offer, but, I... I actually have my eyes on somebody."

Her eyes lit up.

"Ooh... does she know yet?"

"Not quite, but I'm mustering up the courage to tell her."

"Aw," she clasped her hands together. "Now isn't that sweet. How did you two meet?"

"We met in high school," Gohan replied, a faraway look in his eyes.

"Adorable! I bet that you were a looker back then as well. I'll be rooting for you! Tell me how it goes when you end up confessing to her. Anyways, I'll have Suzy come right out with your meal." The old lady started to waddle away.

"Alright, thank you!"

Gohan stared down at the drinks. In front of him were a flat white, and a black coffee. They were complete opposites. The first was creamy and smooth; an open invitation. The latter was dark and bitter, mystery swirling beneath its depths. Gohan always ordered these two drinks together for good reason: they represented him. He was warm and inviting on the outside, yet, more complex, and full of layers on the inside. Gohan looked at his reflection through the mug. His handsome face was weary, bags starting to form underneath his eyes. He was getting tired of waiting. When would he have the right opportunity to approach Freya?

He was promptly startled by the loud clattering of dishes.

"Here you go sir," Suzy eagerly chirped, slamming a plate of food too hard on the table, maple syrup splattering everywhere.

"Oh! I'm so sorry," she grimaced sheepishly, scratching the back of her head in embarrassment.

"No worries," Gohan replied, distracted. His eyes were trained on the window. Where was she? Freya usually went on her morning jogs at this time...

She continued.

"I-I can get you a new plate, and-"

"I said it's fine," Gohan repeated.

His breath abruptly caught in his chest. There she was, clad in a bright pink tracksuit, running past the cafe. Freya. Where exactly was she going? She wasn't taking her normal route. Gohan watched as she jogged away, her toned calves moving in a steady rhythm. He swallowed.

"O-on second thought, could you wrap this all up for me? I just realized that I'm needed elsewhere. I-I'll be right back." Quickly getting up, Gohan slapped a twenty dollar bill on the table, and headed towards the door.

"A-as you wish sir," Suzy affirmed, already backing away.

Outside of the restaurant, Gohan quickly took a look around. His heart was hammering in chest. Where did she go? Panic started to claw its way up his throat.

Trying to trace her steps, Gohan headed in the direction he last saw Freya. He turned a corner, becoming encouraged when he saw a flash of pink. Picking up the pace, he watched as she entered an apartment building. He waited for a few minutes, before she finally came back out. She shook hands with an older man, and then proceeded to walk away with a few forms. Once she disappeared, Gohan wasted no time, and approached the man.

He flashed his most winning smile.

"Hi!"

"Hi... can I help you?" The landlord was obviously taken aback.

"I hope so. You know the woman that just left, the one in the pink tracksuit? She's my sister. Her name is Freya. I'm not sure if she properly introduced herself to you."

"And?" the man deadpanned.

"And I'm pretty sure that she was looking for an apartment here, right?"

"That's correct," the man affirmed.

"She was looking for a place on the eighth floor."

Gohan smiled once more.

"Well, I was wondering if there were any more vacancies in the building? I want to keep an eye on my little sister. There are so many psychopaths and stalkers in the world, y'know?"

The man finally cracked a smile.

"You're tellin' me. C'mon, let me see what I can do for you."

Gohan smiled, took a deep breath, and followed the man into the building.



i was here
natalie bready



the old canal
maryrose o'donnell

the grass is always greener when it's raining

briana sobecks

the grass is always greener when it's raining
the sky is a pale gray, but not the type of mousy gray you'd find in a crayon box
the gray is so pale it's almost white
faded into the background, a misty shroud
water falls from the clouds, and yet it doesn't seem to be coming from anywhere
fat drops materializing from nothing
some would call such a day dreary: the pale nothingness of the sky, the water drenching
every surface in sight, the absence of singing birds and scuttling rodents
but is it really dreary?
sure, the sun is gone and the light is washed out and the air is heavy with moisture
but the water plays a melody as it breaks against the earth, pattering on rooftops and
dripping off branches
the concrete shines, a pale-gray almost-white shine
the trees and bushes and grass drink up the life-giving water from heaven
their trunks turn a deep brown as water trickles across their surfaces
the pale green of early spring bursts forth from the wood, flourishing in the pure, wet air
grass blankets the soil, growing plush and thick and full
the plants drink until they can drink no more, and release their sweet perfume
a rainy day in spring is not dreary
the grass is always greener when it's raining

semblance: five short vignettes for solo euphonium

jonathan boudreaux

I composed *Semblance* in October 2020 to use as an instrumental jury piece for the fall semester. The piece comprises five short movements that are based on a musical cipher theme that I created using the word “semblance”. This cipher takes the letters of the word and arranges them into a musical dictation, for example “S” is defined as representing the German word for E ♭ “es”, and “EM” is represented by an E minor triad (see score for a complete listing).

The definition of the word means to have an outward similarity, so each movement has separate musical elements that resemble the theme in different ways. The vignettes themselves are unnamed, but an adjective next to the tempo marking at the beginning of each gives the player a stylistic goal to pursue.

In *I.*, the theme is presented as is and then in reverse while being divided by rhythmic fragments. It occupies different rhythmic values throughout the movement and is mainly presented in its full linear form. The complex meters need to be stressed by the player to have full effect.

In *II.*, only the nine distinct pitches that are included in the theme are used, and this is the only way that the theme is represented. It has a quiet, song-like texture that eventually hints at the upcoming low range material.

In *III.*, the theme itself is highly fragmented and rearranged, sometimes out of order, and this combined with the immediate dynamic and timbral changes throughout produces a light and jovial atmosphere. The only sense of order is kept by the engrained 12/8 time signature.

In *IV.*, the intervals, or vertical distances between two notes, of the theme are explored in the lowest pedal range of the instrument. The descending perfect fifth is the most obvious and appears seven times throughout. Ironically, the perfect fifth does not appear between any two notes in order in the theme, but every ordered interval from the theme is represented in the movement at least once. Known to be a tenor-voiced instrument, it may surprise listeners to hear this constant contrabass sound out of a euphonium.

In *V.*, the tempo is quick and stable, giving rise to a representation of the theme transposed down a whole step with the relevant scales that comprise each section of it emphasized. It is the fastest movement and gives the piece a definite closing.

Semblance

Five Short Vignettes for Solo Euphonium

Jonathan Boudreaux

Theme

S EM BL A N C E

"Es" - E♭ E minor triad lowered B N⁶ (C Major)

I.

Frenzied ♩ = 120

f

3 *mp* *f* *sub. p*

5 *f* *sub. p* *mf*

8 *pp* *f* *pp* *f*

10 *sub. p*

12 *f* *sub. p* *f*

2 I.

14

17 (4+3+4) *p* *mp*

21 *sub. f* *f*

II.

Longing ♩ = c. 54
rubato throughout

p

7 *mp* *p*

11 *mf*

14 *mp* *mf*

18 *pp*

III.

Bouncy $\text{♩} = 108$

mp

4 *legato* *mf* *mp*

7 *legato (theme)* *sub. p* *mf*

10 *legato* *p* *f*

13 *mp* *p*

16 *mp* *decresc.*

19 *sub. f*

*when staccato appears, cease legato

IV.

Archaic $\text{♩} = 38$ ($\text{♩} = 76$)

mp *mp*

5 *mf* *p* *mf*

9 *p* *mp*

12 *f* *mf*

16 *mp* *p* *mf*

19 *p* *mf* *p*

V.

Quick ♩ = 132

mp f mp mf

4 mp mf

6 mp f

9 p mf

12 ff mf

15 f

18



peacock
gail schneiderman

d.a.r.e

mac dudley

inhale the smoke:
it is a life, inside the dying
of your lungs.

look into the sunset, burn
warmth into today's edges;
I love you.

the color of your eyes tonight
breathes like the moon's reflections
refracted and blinking underneath



please don't leave me
please don't forget the lies we believed
from each other.

your mom still smiles at me
across the street. I want another body:
this one still shivers at your touch.

I ate three pomegranate seeds
I must've done the knots wrong, my hands
are shaking. did you trust me?

we aren't just dust
on the counter. we live
inside the coffee machine



sunset
sophie luijten

medea

sydney wang

The first sign—a shriek at high noon. Before the sun god’s chariot had completed its familiar arc across the sky, the women were gossiping. Something terribly wrong lurked in Jason and Medea’s usually peaceful household; even then, they must have felt it. Speculation was traded along with coins and vegetables. As the servants of rich men and the wives of poor ones hurried along home from the marketplace, their eyes gravitated towards the closed windows, the empty courtyard, if only for an instant before averting their gazes to their dusty bare feet. Some middle-aged women had been walking past carrying hydrias when the pale mud walls began howling like vengeful Furies had possessed them. Laments about betrayal and broken oaths went on for several minutes before ceasing suddenly. Glued to their spots, the passerby exchanged unspoken questions with their gazes. The voices had come from the women’s quarters, where Jason’s wife, Medea, the witch from Colchis, lived.

Corinth, in true city-state fashion, had passed down a prejudicial wariness of foreigners through its generations. Nevertheless, with every rule came its exceptions and Jason was one of them. He had bested the serpent, stolen the Golden Fleece, and escaped barbaric Colchis with his now-wife, Medea. Over time, the Corinthians developed a veneration towards these larger-than-life figures. Jason had won over the king and the men; Medea had won over the women and servants.

It was common knowledge that this glory served as a double-edged sword. Sooner or later, Fate caught up with every hero. It also liked to be creative—revenge murder, divine wrath, or just plain bad luck. Sometimes, Fate kept the hero alive long enough to do the deed themselves. Whatever form the gruesome end took, Jason’s time had come. He slighted his wife. Befitting a descendant of a god, her outburst would almost certainly be followed by a catastrophe of appropriate grandeur.

Either despite her past, or as a result of it, Medea had turned out to be a model Corinthian woman. Her herbal concoctions cured ailing limbs, sickly babies, and infertile wombs. On normal afternoons, the sun casting bright light beams, the house would be filled with a warm, sweet smell that came from the potions she prescribed to her latest patient. On occasion, two boys peeked in the room to spy on what their mother was up to. A nurse followed not long after to shoo them out promptly and

apologetically. Wives were not to have so many guests in the women’s quarters, but Medea’s magic cures earned her a special status. Had she been anyone else, no one would have given a second thought to her domestic squabbles. But once more, Medea proved that every rule had its exceptions.

Jason’s wife remained shut up in her quarters for the next few days. She eventually conditioned passerby to take the long route back home to avoid her shrill wails. Nevertheless, concern eventually got the best of them. On the deserted dirt road passing by the hero’s house, a small crowd began to congregate at its front door. These were married wives, people on whom the wailing woman bestowed her benevolent witchcraft. Medea’s absence had cracked a foundational pillar in the household that was the Corinthian women’s lives; they leaned on her when they could not support themselves. The women huddled together like a herd of sheep without a shepherd.

The door to the house flung open, sending a draft which stirred up the fringes of the women’s wool chitons. Many in the crowd recognized the distressed person—Medea’s nurse. She hobbled gingerly down the entrance paths. Without waiting for inquiries, the nurse began to speak.

“How I wish the Argo had never set sail to Colchis!” She threw her arms above her head, as if she were pleading to the gods. “This household is ruined. Jason is taking the king’s daughter for his new wife, and Medea is beside herself with grief and rage.” The nurse paused to wipe away the sweat glistening on her forehead. “She may be plotting a dreadful plan. Most of all, I fear for those poor children. A father who has abandoned them, and a mother gone beyond reason.” She stopped, spotting the household tutor with the sons.

“It’s not right for children to be caught up in family matters like this.” The nurse quietly. “Take them back to the house. They ought not to see their mother like this.” The tutor whispered something to the nurse, then guided the confused sons back inside, a hand



royalty
maryrose o'donnell

on each back. When they had barely made it past the doors, another unearthly yell erupted from Medea's room. A woman in the crowd started backwards from shock, bumping into her neighbor.

"Oh god, I hate this life! I'd rather a thunderbolt strike me down to relieve me of this pain!"

For several seconds, the world became deathly still. Even the barking dogs had gone silent. Though they were all well past the age, in that instant the crowd became like small children who had been caught stealing, awaiting punishment from their parents. Finally, a braver soul near the nurse mustered the courage to speak:

"Oh, I'd wish she'd come outside. As her friends, we'd want to see her shed this heavy burden, and stop suffering so—" Another shriek from the women's quarters interrupted the speaker. "Please hurry. I fear the little ones inside feel her rage."

The nurse nodded in solemn agreement. "I'll make the effort. She hasn't listened to me yet, but what is the harm in one more try?" With a swish of her dress, she disappeared back inside the house. A minute passed. Then two. Time passed at a snail's pace. The wives murmured amongst themselves. They had arrived in front of the house mid-afternoon; now, the sky was hinting at its first signs of yellow and orange. If Medea did not emerge from the house today, they would have to leave before dark.

The group loitered at the door until the sun was so low, it shined its orange rays in their eyes. Reluctantly, they trotted homewards one by one, to their own husbands, their own nurses, and their own sons.

Fortune was a funny thing. Just when the Corinthians had given up on ever catching a glimpse of the witch from Colchis again, a former patient spotted—or rather, located via their shouting voices—Medea and Jason at their front steps, engaged in fierce debate.

"You, woman, deserve nothing. Your actions are the product of Cypris, not your own power. Do not pretend to be all high and mighty. I have acted in our sons' best interest, securing them a future in the royal household. I tried to provide for you, tried to protect you, but your threats towards Creon's bloodline has made it impossible for him to allow you to stay," Jason said. He was a well-built man. Tall and muscular, he had given off a heroic presence back in the days with the Argonauts. In the midst of a domestic quarrel with his wife, this effect was rather diminished.

"This is where we differ," said Medea. She did not notice the individual gawking at them, or perhaps she did not care. "I believe that a man who has committed a great injustice—broken a godly oath, mind you—and covers it up with clever rhetoric deserves the greatest punishment."

"Once again, your exile is your own doing," Jason said. "You cursed the royal family. There is no one more who can help you." Turning his heel, he walked away briskly before Medea could counter.

The events that unfolded after the fateful argument appeared so fantastical that at first, they were dismissed as out-of-control rumors. Supposedly, Medea had bargained with Aegeus, king of Athens, for refuge in his city. In exchange, she promised him her potent powers, the kind that she once used to grant gurgling babies to childless Cornthian couples. No one was quite sure if this was true or not until they saw the change in Medea's demeanor, from resigned to vengeful. She left the house frequently now, determination glinting in her dark brown eyes. A friend flagged her down and enquired about the family. She replied:

"I will have my revenge. Already, Aegeus grants me his protection. He has accepted my supplication and cannot retract it. All that is left is for me to beg for just one more

day from Creon, and refuge in the palace for my sons. I will send with them beautiful clothing, but it will be laced with deadly poison." She paused, wiped at her eyes. "Yes, it shall be enacted. And my sons... they will not be welcomed there. Their fate will be worse for Jason than if he himself died."

"Do not do this, Medea," begged her friend. "You can save yourself and your children. Do not commit this crime."

Medea shook her head.

"There is nothing that can save us."

When it came to fulfilling promises, Medea turned out to be as skilled in that respect as her husband was lacking. Her patients, bound by silence and fearful, watched Jason, the princess, and the sons bearing the gifts parade into the palace. Jason spoke happily of Medea's change in heart, her finally having come to her senses. He entered strolling with his head held high and exited scrambling like a madman. It was a futile attempt, the last resistance before the downfall. In his old marriage home, there stood a brown-haired, brown-eyed woman, her dress covered in blood, her sword dripping in blood, the walls coated with her children's blood. She sieged the house and refused to let Jason in, despite his curses and pleas.

Corinthians spoke of a bright chariot flying across the sky that day, illuminated with godly light. In it sat a wild-eyed woman, and chasing it was a wild-eyed hero, fallen from grace. Her chariot rose higher in the sky until it was nothing more than a dot in the distance.

She never stepped foot on Corinthian soil again.

approach avoidance

kayla vittore

Why do we pick our scabs
Why do we poke our bears
Why do we peer over edges
Only to shrink back in fear

To see vivacious reds
To hear bellows arise
To feel weighty mortality
To wake the soul, to be alive



earth awakening
sophie luijten

a mild form of cannibalism and an exhibitionistic undressing of the hand

ethan frobish

A girl I used to know used to pamper my hands, read the lines in my palm and tease that my love line looked awfully short.

She would crack each finger, pulling them back, pushing them forward, bending them from side to side, tugging them, rolling them out, focusing on not just the joints near my palm, but ventilating their upstairs neighbors.

She would marvel at my hands, my perfectly average hands, and the normal size of my fingers, playing with my points of articulation, discovering my limits and extremities, wondering what feats could be achieved with them, what keys pressed, strings held, snaps snapped, lines traced, works written, birds flipped, shadows mimed, pleasures derived.

She marvelled at their potentiality, never looking me in the eye, but always turning to play with them.

After the ligaments were properly stretched, she would turn to my cuticles.

She would use her thumbnail like a blade, teasing the sticky skin back towards the knuckle. It crumpled like wallpaper with the sharp pressure she put on my bed, peeling it from the nail, then scraping deftly to remove the excess.

She assured me that everybody does this, that it looks so much more pleasing, that it's illegal for salons to do it with the pronged tool they keep in the back of the drawer but if you give them a wink they'll do it for nothing extra.

If it's illegal, I would wonder, then why do it? Why bother? Why keep the wicked tool? A cuticle is nothing.

It's ugly, she would say, as simple as that, and return to crumpling and cutting and peeling.

The shavings of my cuticles would form a small pile, those that weren't caught under her thumb. Those she would remove with her bottom teeth. Shyly, at first, but then I caught her chewing, watching her throat bob minutely as she swallowed pieces of me. As time passed, she would no longer stop with only the bits of skin under the white of her nail. She would lick her own finger, pressing its pad into the dusty pile of my shavings. They would adhere, and she would return it to her mouth, feeling them squish in between her molars. She would chew, and she would relish, and when she tired, she would swallow.

She asked if she could bite off the hardened tips adjacent to the nail, the parts that turn white and rise above it after the harvest became insufficient. More meat there, she said. Like the burnt ends of ribs. A delicacy.

Only the disposable parts, she assured me. Gingerly she would nip them with her teeth, peeling off the thinnest layer of skin, and take the ends with her tongue, and chew, and chew, and chew, and chew, and swallow.

Never peering up to look me in the eyes, but feasting on my disposable parts. She was cautious for a scavenger, keeping me raw but clean.

Only once did she draw blood, overzealously picking ragged barren fields for one last seed to satisfy her. I winced, and she jerked away, her eyes stuck to the bead emerging from my fingertip.

To ease the silence, I asked a question. Would you still fancy me if I hadn't any skin? I used to think, she said after some time, that every hangnail meant death, that you could peel them back and back and back and never stop until you'd gone around your body like a zipper and you could just step out of your skin, that our skin is a suit, and that we really are what lies beneath.

What lies beneath? I asked.

Nothing, she said. You can pick and peel away everything, rip muscle from bone, pull veins and arteries like roots from the dirt to lead back to a core that beats no longer, cut open organs and remove what isn't you and snap bones at the joints and dig and dig and dig until there is nothing left. Every one of our cells is disposable and dead. Once they are separated from the host, she said they are dead. Once dismantled, our parts are nothing but cells, and we are no longer.

What are we? I asked.

She shook her head.

We are no longer.



untitled
sophie luijten



autumn glory

sophie luijten

the way it goes

bethany lee

My parents hug in the kitchen and the lights go yellow. The soup gets cold.

I'd like to carve a space between them and let it close around me,
become a rose-choked trellis, a swallowed stone.
My father pulls her in and the hollow fills,
leaves me where I sit.

This is the way it goes:
wedding, children, and later this embrace.
And me,
eighteen, still in the kitchen:

A wave clinging to the shore
before it is sucked out to sea.
An autumn leaf which begs to stay
before it is deposited back to the earth
and lies there, flagging in the dirt.

a forgotten grave from 1807

maryrose o'donnell

The first gravestone had been my grandfather's. Not too tall, just like him, and almost aggressively simple. It simply read, in the most mundane writing available 'JAMES SAXON' with his death date. He had been dead and in the ground for seven years when I first cleaned his headstone, a running concoction of soap and water at the behest of my mother in exchange for weekend access to the car. It wasn't meant to be anything more than that, but as I sat and waited for the stone dry I heard it.

After that I began coming back to the graveyard every weekend, each time with better equipment until I almost looked like I belonged. The work was soothing, but that wasn't why I went. This particular graveyard closed at night, a hangover from fears of graverobbers, but the noise was always loudest at night. Only I was ever allowed in there once the gates had closed, left to clean up my supplies and make sure the gravestones dried well.

I always stayed later, though.

The fog rolled in, almost mocking me with its cliché implications and ominous foreboding. Not that fog was anything new in Maine. When it finally settled around me, I barely noticed. It simply meant that none of the stones I cleaned would fully dry so there would be no satisfying aftershot, but that was more for my friends than for me. My boots sunk deeper into the mud as I squatted next to the gravestone. This was one of the oldest ones in the cemetery, dated to 1807. The cleaning was like clockwork. I scraped off the dirt, the scratching sound louder in the quiet evening air. Water came next, spraying the gravestone down until the water dripped onto the damp grass. A gentle swirling motion with a brush collected most of the grime until another spray washed that away. Some gravestones, like the one before me, had grime collected in the calligraphy and a toothpick normally worked for those.

I was picking the dirt out of a decorative G when I heard it.

It was almost like a fly, just behind you, but not louder than a whisper. I'd tried to explain it to friends before, but the words always failed me. There wasn't a voice or words to listen to, but it carried more meaning than the wind through the trees. My hand froze and my stomach clenched. The toothpick fell from between my fingers and though I know it never made a sound I remember the cacophonous crack when it hit the mud. The leather of my shoes pushed against my toes, or maybe it was the other way, as my breath hitched, ears straining to finally hear it, more than just a hint of what was there.

The lull tone floated around me and I turned in my place, the mud squelching as I disturbed it and looked out at the cemetery. Though I could see no source, I felt the direction of it. Just ahead, over this grave and past the Francis Mausoleum. Each inch I rose was a risk to destroying whatever connection I had and a feeling of ease almost washed over me when my knees finally unbent and I took a step to the left of the grave to head towards the mausoleum.

Except the moment I stepped the noise stopped.

My body froze and I slowly picked up my foot and replaced it where it had been. The noise began again. A pool of unease settled in my stomach because I knew what it meant. My finger curled around my sleeves and with a deep breath in I placed my foot forward, directly atop the grave. Each step felt wrong, but the more I moved over the graves the louder the sound became. Any step that attempted to go around, to respect the dead buried below, cut the sound off and so I kept going even as the dread built up.

By the time I reached the willow tree on the edge of the cemetery the sound pounded in my head, a hammer smashing against my skull with each step and the only reprieve came when my hand fell against the trunk. My fingernails dug in, the bark pressing against the calluses of my hand as I clawed for peace. It was only a moment before



all the way to the grave

maryrose o'donnell

my head pressed against the tree, every inch of me attempting to find solace. The pounding eased, at first only spacing out farther and farther until the sound dimmed and all that remained was a hum.

It sounded no different than someone humming a tune while they worked, but it was no song I'd ever heard. I did not lift my head, the threat of the pounding returning keeping my body flush against the tree.

Until the groaning started. At first merely an added harmony to the humming, slightly lower, but as the sound came into focus it was no melodic melody. It was pain and horror and it wasn't in my head. It was behind me.

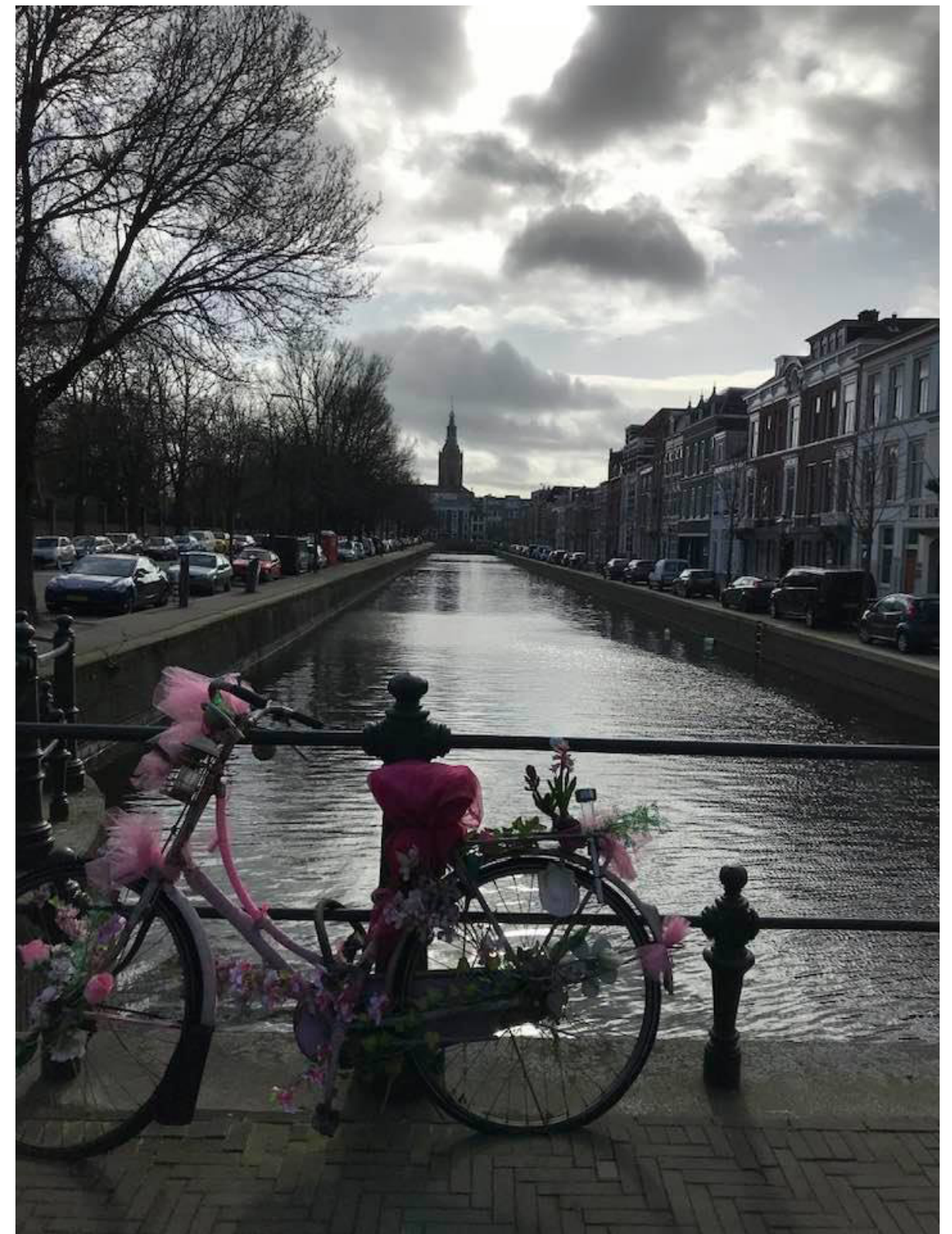
Maybe it was curiosity or maybe it was just desperation for it to end, but I turned my body. I kept every inch of skin possible against the bark of the willow tree, but slowly I moved until my back was flush with the wood and my eyes landed on the closest grave to me.

With dead grass and sinking earth. It wasn't every grave, I realized as my eyes moved, but the ones I had walked over. The ones the sound had led me to that had become decayed and decrepit. I followed my path, against my own will as my eyes couldn't look away, until my eyes reached my cleaning supplies and the forgotten grave of a woman from 1807.

The pounding in my head drowned out the scream when the hand burst from the shriveled grass.



overlook
maryrose o'donnell



water wheel
maryrose o'donnell

Happy Easter, Georgie

ethan frobish

"There are also those times when you send someone a poem you're rather pleased with, and fail to receive one in reply. Of course, there's no more to be done about it if it's to a man you care for. Even so, you do lose respect for someone who doesn't produce any response to your tasteful seasonal references." (from The Pillow Book: 22. Dispiriting things)

"6. Boys do not love until they reach the age of maturity." (Andreas Capellanus)

You first saw him across the risers at a group rehearsal for the annual Christmas choir concert. You've been told that it's improper to call a boy beautiful, but there was no other word for him. He's a rogue—his hair surely longer than his dress code could permit. His shirt was unbuttoned, untucked, and hanging loose, crinkled, from under his sweater. The devil may care how neat your uniform is, but he clearly did not. You saw the way he joked with his friends, their playful shoves and snickers, but what drew you to him was the way he looked when he sang.

Many of the other members of the boy's choir clearly did not want to be there—perhaps they saw it as an easy way to skip out on class or to get closer to the St. Mary's girls—but he, despite being one of them, sang earnestly. While they rolled their eyes through Ave Maria and placed pointed emphasis on the cum of Dominus tecum, his eyes seemed to shine as the Latin poured out in his bright tenor. You had never before appreciated the syllabic beauty of that ancient prayer, had merely memorized their sounds and placed their nothing-words to the melody, but he—he sang as if he was fluent in that language of the dead, as if the words came from the very core of his being, from somewhere beyond himself.

You stared at him, looked into his beautiful eyes as he sang. Your own started to water. Oh, how the others laughed as you stuttered when Sister Agnes asked you if everything was quite alright. Yes, Sister, things were alright. Things were alright when he met your gaze and smiled. You could tell that he wasn't making fun of you. He was showing you heaven in his smile.

Things were more than alright when they placed you next to each other in the final arrangement of the choir—a more thorough integration for a fuller sound, claimed Brother Carlisle. Under Carlisle's direction and the watchful eyes of Sister Agnes, you engaged in a courteous introduction. To break winter's ice. To get to know the people

you would harmonize with.

My name is Mike, he said. My favorite Christmas song is probably Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas, even though it's secular. Don't tell Brother Carl. What's yours? Being that close to him, hearing him confide in you made your heart race. Feeling him next to you made you tense at the nape of your neck and turned your knees to jelly. Accidentally brushing up against him sent electricity through your body. And hearing that voice, oh God, his voice so close was nearly transcendent. Even speaking, it was magic hearing how it resonated and rang from his mouth.

Georgia. I like that one too, you said, though you wanted to say that now your favorite was him singing Ave Maria, though that wasn't really a Christmas song anyways. I love Bing Crosby, you said.

Me too, he said.

And then you sang together, blending your voice with his heavenly tones.

...

Somehow, his voice was even more beautiful during the recital. You could hardly hold yourself back from joining the clapping mass of parents and siblings as the final notes of O Holy Night echoed and faded in the back of the gymnasium.

Your trance ended with a gentle elbow to your side.

You sounded great, Georgie, he said and gave you another glimpse of pearly gates and heavenly skies.

You could have swooned right there, collapsed on the risers, died staring into the hot stage lights the sisters had brought out for the occasion. Only your father called you Georgie, and you couldn't stand it, but from him—you wanted nothing more than for him to say it again. And again. And again and again and again.

From someone else, a compliment like that would be patronizing, grounds to scowl. But from him, with that smile, you believed it, though you couldn't manage to respond or to tell him how his voice made you feel. So, you smiled back.

But just like that, it was over. As soon as you had fallen for him, he was gone. Returned first to the congratulating arms of his family—his father a vision of his future, his mother’s eyes a perfect match, his younger brother his miniature—then to the boy-sweaty halls of St. Joe’s. Away from you, your songbird returned to his cage, and you to the dormitories of St. Mary. All before you had a chance to tell him how you felt.

...
You didn’t stop thinking of him, of course. You couldn’t. How could you? You grappled with your inability to let him know your feelings, kicked yourself at every occasion. A boy like that is one in a million. You hoped—believed—that you’d see him at the Easter recital. A voice like that could not easily duck choral conscription.

You thought of him when you woke up in the morning, saw him in your daily oatmeal, heard his echo at Friday mass and choir class, imagined him outside your frosted dormitory window, looking warm amid snow-dusted tombstones. You read him in every prayer and love poem. That, you decided, was the key to solving your regret. The way to tell him how you saw him—felt him—was in verse.

You had studied many of the greats in your literature courses. Shakespeare, Milton, Pope. They were all too formal for him, though. You could not capture his essence in a heroic couplet, nor limit him to iambic pentameter. The answer came to you by chance, in a cursory unit on world literature in early February. In the scant few pages on Japanese literature, you discovered the haiku. Well, not discovered, of course. Every child with a pencil can write a haiku. It’s one of the first forms they teach you for a reason. Five, seven, five. A seventeen syllable love letter to the world.

What better for him, a boy with a voice as sweet as a spring breeze or a budding cherry blossom, than a haiku. A voice which made you feel at peace with the world, in unity with the heavens. How better to celebrate him?

You labored for days. How to encompass his totality in a scant three lines? You couldn’t, you decided, and chose to focus on your favorite aspect of him. No, not his dimples or broadening shoulders, nor the fuzz on his cheeks, but his eyes and how they shone above his voice. Sound and vision.

You remembered, long ago, one winter’s getaway to a cabin in the woods. Your father had promised snowmen and skiing, but there was nothing but solid ice ground and musty books in the drafty shack. Your mother, you remember, scowling and shivering



guiding
gail schneiderman



wandering
gail schneiderman

near the fire, but you were happy to be anywhere with your father, busy as he always was. He woke you early one morning, shushed you and helped you into your boots and mittens, and brought you to the lake, sat you at its side.

You remember the silence. The pure silence of the winter's dawn, migrating birds still cold asleep, the sky shyly glowing purple and orange. You had never known such peace. You had never seen such serenity in another until you saw your father that morning, every line of worry smoothed from his face. You would have been happy to share the dawn with him, but after a few minutes, he stood and searched the ground, finding a skipping rock.

Listen, he whispered. He threw the rock, skipped it over the lake's frozen surface. It was like nothing you had ever heard before, that queer sound. How the ice rang and echoed, how it cracked with each bounce! It was otherworldly. You're still not convinced it wasn't magic. It certainly felt magical—how its reverberations brought the sun over the horizon and woke up the world—and nothing had made you feel like that again until you looked into his eyes and heard his voice.

Eventually, you found the words.

*Your eyes—the shock blue
Of the lake's crackling surface
At winter's first thaw*

It wasn't everything you wanted to say, but it was everything that you could say. You hoped it would be enough.

Through a covert series of note-passing and innocent bribery, you sent it to him on Ash Wednesday. Time enough for him to read and to understand and to reciprocate by the next recital.

...

You'd expected time to drag until Easter, based on what you'd been told about people who are in love, but it flew by. Despite having had forty days to prepare, you still felt as though you hadn't enough time to really think things over before group rehearsal, but you were already at St. Joseph's.

You sought him out across the room, peeked at first to spot him among the gaggle of sameish looking boys then searched openly when you could not find him. But then, no, it couldn't be. This boy was too tall, his arms too gangly, his hair cropped too short, his face too shiny. It couldn't be him! But as you gawked, his eyes met yours, and you knew him. There was no mistaking his eyes.

You were shocked at first. You couldn't help it. You knew these changes were bound to happen, had seen your own in the mirror with an occasional blemish, but he seemed so utterly changed. Yes, he joked with his friends in the same way, but it lacked its former charm. He smiled, but it had lost its grace. And his voice, oh God, his voice.

It was ruined. His shining tenor was now a croaking, indeterminate baritone, and it made you feel nothing. Perhaps you felt a hollowness at its absence, perhaps time had exaggerated its beauty in your memory, but there was nothing in his voice. Truly, you could hardly pick it out of the group. It was indistinguishable from the other boys' grumblings. When your choirs were combined, he was placed in the back row. You were sure it was because of his new height, but you shocked yourself when you felt a grateful relief at seeing him hidden.

And perhaps it was because of that guilt that you approached him after rehearsal wrapped up, to give him a chance to justify your obsession.

Hi, Mike, you said.

Georgie! he squeaked. Coughed. Deepened. How have you been?

Georgia, you said. Well. And you?

I've been good, he said. So very excited to be singing Easter carols. He chuckled. They're not quite as good as Christmas songs.

Yeah, you said. Passed through an unbearable silence. Listen, you said, did you get my letter?

Hmm? he asked. Oh, yes. The poem. Really, it was nice. Very cool, he laughed.

You said nothing.

Cool? Because of the ice stuff? Well, anyways, I meant to write back to you, but you know how time flies. And I've never been much of a poet anyways.

Oh that's alright, you said. Don't worry about it. Really.

Oh, he said. Well, happy Easter, Georgie.

Happy Easter.

remedies

mac dudley

yeah - under my cheek I've got a few
tips for getting better.
tea, a warm
towel. new shoes.
art - especially watercolor -
and something that floats.
avoid dark colors.
find a way to turn the lights on
as soon as you wake up.
I took out the trash
and smiled at the windows.
Have you ever seen a morning like this?

my mom
used to rub
my back
in a way that
gave me chills.
where did that feeling go?
where are the spiders
that didn't fall on their way
to my exposed neck?
someone else's season
has nearly expired.
come with me, to offer
my condolences. it won't
feel genuine without
you there, love.



untitled
natalie bready

an observer's option

kayla vittore

It is the type of day where
By the silver streaks and spatters
Every window pane is marred
With gray raindrop patterns.

And here I am captured
Within a cage transparent
Watching student and squirrel
Search for shelter unapparent.

Yet even if the storm parted,
Even if the clouds do scatter,
Just the same we'd skitter.
To and fro we'd patter.

Some see themselves advancing--
Others pacing in their trenches.
Regardless of perspective,
Sidewalks have them in retention.

And their steps as they retreat
Sound like a metronome

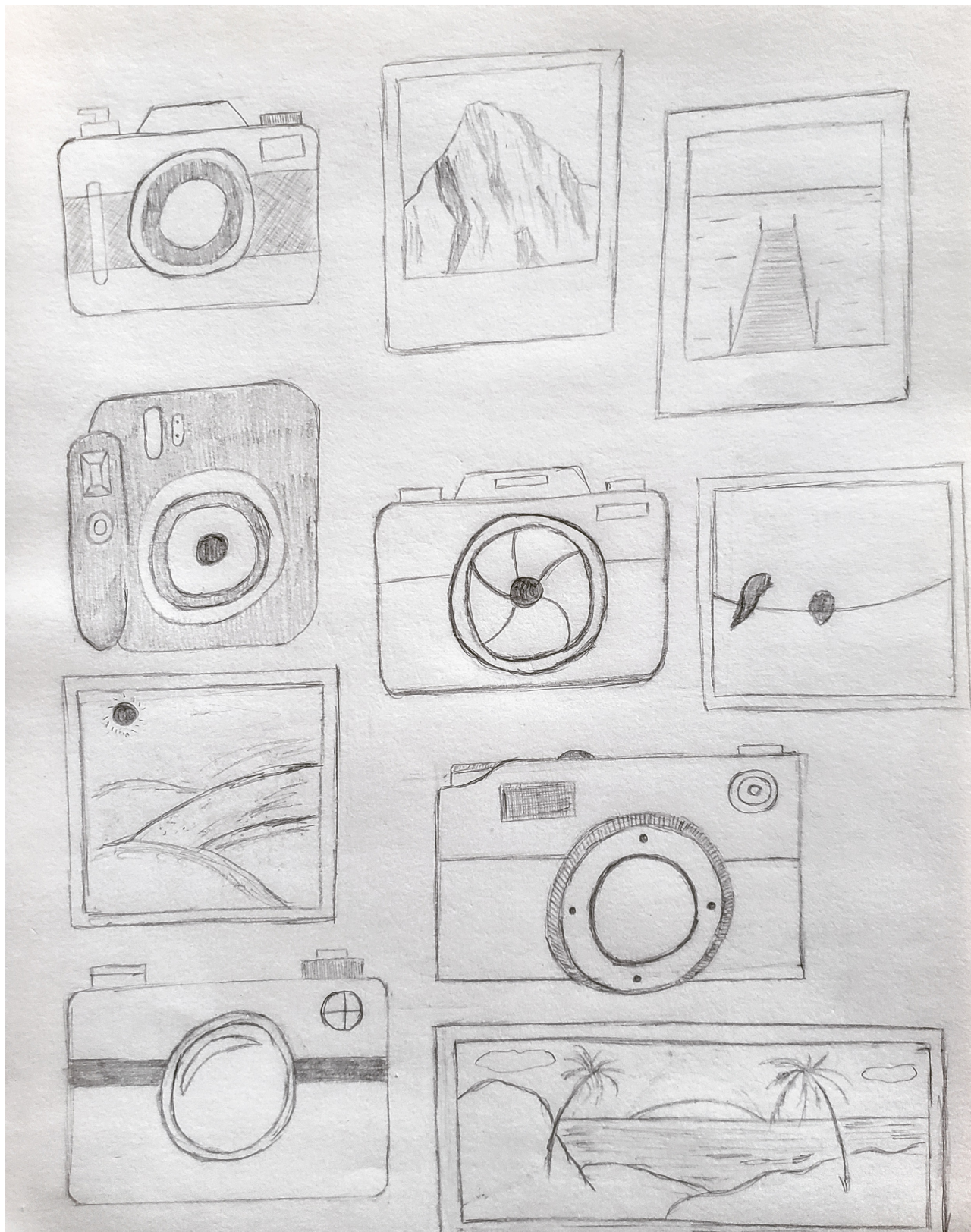
Each stride a little different
Each a heartbeat all their own.

The rain continues falling.
The wind makes them shudder.
And I shudder as well.
Though the observer doesn't matter.

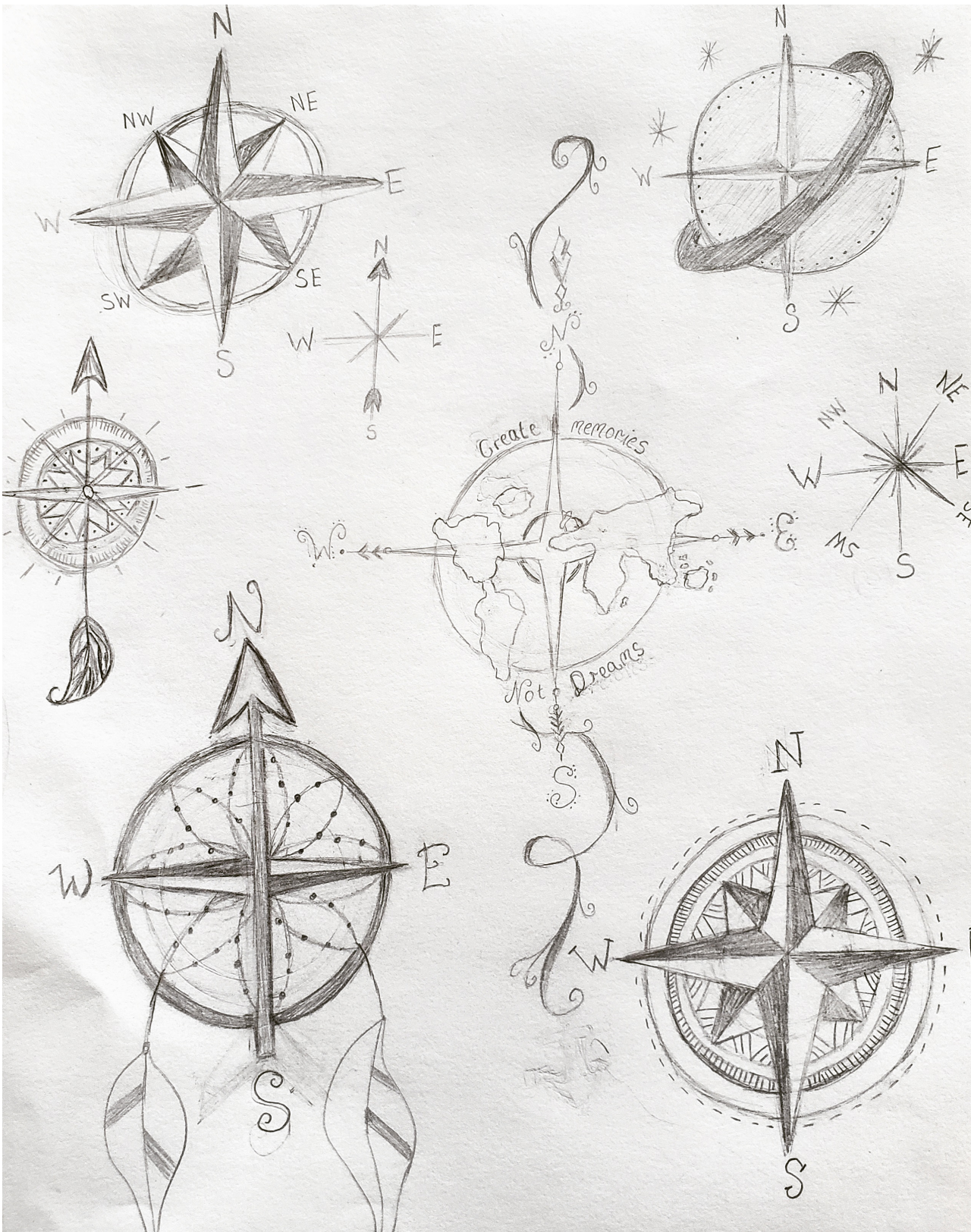
A movie has its ending
A book its conclusion
A painting its deeper meaning
Independent of the viewer.

So I shudder as they pass
A hundred stories by the second
Another face to fade,
And my own barely present.

Now somewhere in the distance
Tearing through the torrent thoughts
An engine sounds its whistle
A scream heard and then forgot.



when you cannot travel, imagine
gail schneiderman



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apart but not alone