



equinox 7

Literary & Arts Magazine

**equinox**

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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, a great big thanks is in order to so many people for helping to make this little magazine come to life.

Anne, Kim, Elizabeth — thank you for your constant encouragement, your flexibility with deadlines, and your support of our expression.

Ankita — thank you for your tech support and courteous answers to so many frantic emails.

Tami — thank you for all of your administrative work and for helping this book get circulated.

To the HSC — thank you for making room in your meetings for a bunch of publications geeks.

To everyone who submitted — thank you for sharing your art and baring your souls.

And to readers like you — thanks.



## Staff

Editor-in-chief — Ethan Frobish  
Associate Editor — MaryRose O'Donnell  
Head Designer — Gail Schneiderman  
Associate Designer — Briana Sobecks

## A Letter from the Editor.

When I took this job, I was of the opinion (an opinion that I'm sure many of you reading this share) that insularity begets stagnation. Not to mix metaphors, but nepotism and small ponds breed big dumb fish who no write good. So, I had imagined that an arts magazine from one of the most exclusive groups on campus—a group made up of mostly non-artists, mind you—would be something... less than artistic.

However, I was wrong. As soon as art pieces started flooding into the Publications inbox, I was surprised by just how carefully crafted they were. When I began editing, I was surprised by just how little I had to change them. Now, don't get me wrong, no one in this book is the next Hemingway or Picasso—and feel free to prove me wrong on that—but that's what's unique and special about this zine. We're (mostly) not artists.

*Equinox* is art made by students who spend most of their time pursuing and perfecting things that are not art. *Equinox* is stories told by crop scientists and moments captured on film by microbiologists and detailed flourishes of charcoal from the hands of business entrepreneurs. *Equinox* is made of content that comes from a love of medium and a pure want of expression, not for anything so cynical as a grade or a paycheck.

I believe that all of these pieces stand as quality art on their own without the CHP label attached, and if you were to flip through the magazine, I'm sure you would agree. Bound in the same magazine, these pieces are an eclectic collection—where else can you find an infographic extolling the virtues of pineapple on pizza as a frontispiece for a dramatic retelling of Medea's murder of her children?—but if nothing else, so is CHP. This eclectic diversity is what makes the group special.

There is a lot of love in this issue of *Equinox*, from my end, from everyone working on it, and from everyone who submitted their art. Thank you to everyone who helped make this magazine possible. I'm proud of what we created.

Ethan Frobish✳

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kayla vittore  
a winter wind

Some say winter's wind is different,  
Than summer, spring or fall's.  
It moves with a certain briskness,  
A certain chilling call.

Over the farmers' frigid fields --  
Where grand green stalks once grew  
And summer breeze waved through care-  
free --  
Now all is dead, forgot,  
Here where weary winter wind walks.

Across these broad, abandoned pastures,  
Where cows spent lazy days.  
And threading 'tween the children's  
swings,  
Whom creak and groan, missing so,  
the children mothers hid away.

The winter wind is rarely still.  
It blows with no respite.  
I wonder what it'd call itself --  
Lonely, lost, or free? ❄️



matthew pettineo  
frigid

rachel spencer  
fucking cufflinks

When everything was over  
I should have asked  
For those fucking cufflinks  
With their faux black enamel  
And the initials that aren't yours  
But are what I'd love to say to you.

Because every time I see those  
Fucking cufflinks  
Proudly displayed like a badge of honor  
Like a symbol of your victory  
Over me and my pride  
I want to rip my hair out.

And it's not really because you're wearing them.

Oh no.

It's because seeing them remain  
In your possession  
Reminds me of what a stupid,  
Stupid girl I was.  
I was too besotted with the mere thought of  
Spending an evening with you  
There with me for once  
To realize the truth.

Instead, I was dumb enough  
To gift you those  
Fucking cufflinks  
And stab holes in your dress shirt  
The way you would stab holes through my  
heart:  
Precise  
Apathetic  
Ruinous.

Because like the holes in your shirt  
A simple stitch or two can't fix the damage  
Done to me.  
Nor can it change the fact that we can't even  
Look each other in the eye  
Anymore.  
And I won't pretend some of that isn't my  
fault.  
But when the world was crumbling around us,  
Spiraling out of control  
Like a kamikaze in a nosedive  
You ran.  
You hid.  
You shoved your nose in the sand and kept it  
there  
Until the dust settled and I was the one  
Left bleeding.

And you still kept  
The fucking cufflinks.





danish majid  
living fireworks





ally merrett  
cinnamon twists

He drove endlessly, and the tires complained about it. 15 hours at a time, allotting a total of zero hours per round trip for emotional therapy for those poor round pieces of rubber. The asphalt exploded out from beneath the truck. Yet, to him, there was nothing more monotonous.

"Don't you just love these cinna-thingys?" he said to no one.

The truck creaked like it always does, always has, as the tires pulled the road past him and the earth turned his destination that much closer. The hours ticked away as the plastic packaging of candy and more candy piled up in the passenger seat.

"Homeward bound!" he liked to exclaim, even though it was not his home to which he was heading.

"Home is where the heart is." The radio blared.  
Bullshit.

He knew that home is where Michelle, the violets, and all the roses were. Everybody else knew that, too, goddammit. But there he was, at the center of everything or the middle of nowhere, depending on the quantity of cinnamon twists peeking out of the packaging.

Past Jackson Street, past West Adams, past Old Hickory Road he stopped at a gas station. He stepped out of truck, down the slippery, crusted-over stair steps to meet the pavement with a work boot 5 years past due for a shining. Without the hum of the engine, he thought, the world seemed a little more slow. Peaceful.

Unfortunately, this blissful contemplation was broken by a pounding coming from the back of the truck. A pounding that meant his cargo was in want of food. Arriving at the rear of the truck and seeing ooze indicative of his hungry experiment filling a pool around his old boots, he yelled, "I really doubt they have what you want in there!" to which he was met with nothing but high-pitched yearning.



matthew pettineo  
devil's lake



Frustrated, the truck driver gave a swift kick to the tailpipe in hopes of aggravating his experiment.

He walked into the gas station. Lucky for anyone looking for him, he could be easily traced by a trail of green, sizzling footprints, courtesy of the asshole he was hauling across the country. The door swung open, almost knocking him down. Whatever blur of pink that nearly capsized him held the door open. 5 years old? 6, maybe? Either way, cute kid. That's what he told her mom, who, unfortunately, was young enough to be his daughter.

Inside, he heard the same thing he had been listening to for the past seven and a half hours. Unconsciously, he hummed along and walked down the aisle to find a reward to give himself. He'd figure out the reason later. Harmon's Signature Twists® in hand, humming, still, he walked up to the register. "Hello?" he called to no one.

He turned sharply to each side; weren't there other people in here before? Butterflies flew into his stomach just as they always do in this situation, although not as many flew in as last time; this was becoming typical. He peered through the glass but he knew what he was going to see. Flip-flops. Ooze. Melted skin. Goddammit. Was it his fault? Maybe that scream he heard wasn't just inside his head.

Running, but with a calm inside that wasn't human, he flew across the parking lot to stand over a meander of liquid flesh that was slyly melting into the storm drain. He felt it was mocking him; slowly and ever so slowly dripping away that little girl's life.

"Not that it would have been that great, anyway," he muttered to himself, the monster that he is.

With the steel doors melted away from the acid of his experiment, he realized his truck wasn't as roomy as he always envisioned. Shards of glass against the hard tile of the store's interior alerted his attention to his experiment. Having condensed the cashier into a more travel-friendly size, it slithered through the aisles, burning a path straight to Hell behind it. Upon finding its treasure, the experiment promptly returned to its temporary home and closed what was left of the truck doors.

"That's the fourth stop in a row, buddy. If you wanted some Cinna-thingys, you should have just asked." he yelled from the cab. The truck driver gave a smirk and a shrug as he pulled into the left-turn lane. He knew he should quit his job, but at this point, he was too apathetic to change.

He arrived at the drop-spot, gave away the experiment and received his payment: \$15,000 and instructions for next week. The sky was dying violet and the sun was setting in the rear-view mirror synchronistically with the rise of the stars. "Homeward bound!" He liked to say. A little bit of cinnamon dust was on his fingers and he wiped it on the old denim jeans that had traveled just as many miles as he had. He was heading back to Michelle. He'd pick up some more roses on the way back. Maybe some daisies, too.

She loved daisies.

Maybe she'd want a daughter just like the one he met today, except, not in liquid form. ☒



maryrose o'donnell  
stay out of the forest



briana sobecks  
subjective beauty

His face glows  
The light of the blue screen reflects off his eyes  
Shining in the dim room  
The right side of his face hangs heavy in shadow  
Right eye glittering in the darkness  
His hair hangs over his forehead where the light can't reach  
The artificially dark line pops against pale, smooth skin  
Skin an otherworldly hue  
As if viewed from underwater  
His nose slopes gently down  
Cresting above pale pink lips  
Everything about him is beautiful  
But nothing is so beautiful  
As the selflessness in his gaze  
His desire for the best in others  
His self-sacrificing nature  
Everything he looks at, he does so with love ☒



diane wei  
blossom



diane wei  
don't worry about your future  
before it's time



kayla vittore  
a candle to the sun

Mankind,  
with machine and memo,  
with technology and task,  
with car and crate,  
thinks He has outgrown me.

these egotistical  
descendants of Icarus,  
don zinc armor  
and tinted glass,  
pretending not to fear  
my eternal burn.

Gaia's fleas--  
they hustle about  
constructing endlessly  
destroying constantly  
the planet's nearly finished  
and now they turn to the sky.

the insult!  
see their creations—  
cold stone,  
rusted metal,  
clouded orbs of glass.  
I dare to rest,  
and, impatient and greedy,  
Dark they displaced  
with false sunshine.

grotesque.  
that is the color –  
a brown, yellow, amber mix  
of fake day, of empty glow –  
that is the color,  
that after each magnificent sunset,  
floods Mankind's streets. ☼



rachel spencer

## requiem for jack daniels

Dies irae,  
dies illa,  
Solvat  
sæclum in  
favilla:  
Teste David  
cum Sibylla.

But for you there will be no  
Day of Judgment.  
Instead, someday you will wake up  
In your suburban paradise  
With the wife, two kids  
And a Range Rover in the driveway

And that paradise will fade away  
To Hell on Earth  
As you realize just how much time  
You've wasted;  
So much time that not even Faust  
In the lowest circle of Hell  
Would envy you.

So you'll turn to your old friend  
The handle in the back of the liquor cabinet  
(Now complete with child-lock)  
And Jack will hear your confession.

But Jack is dead.

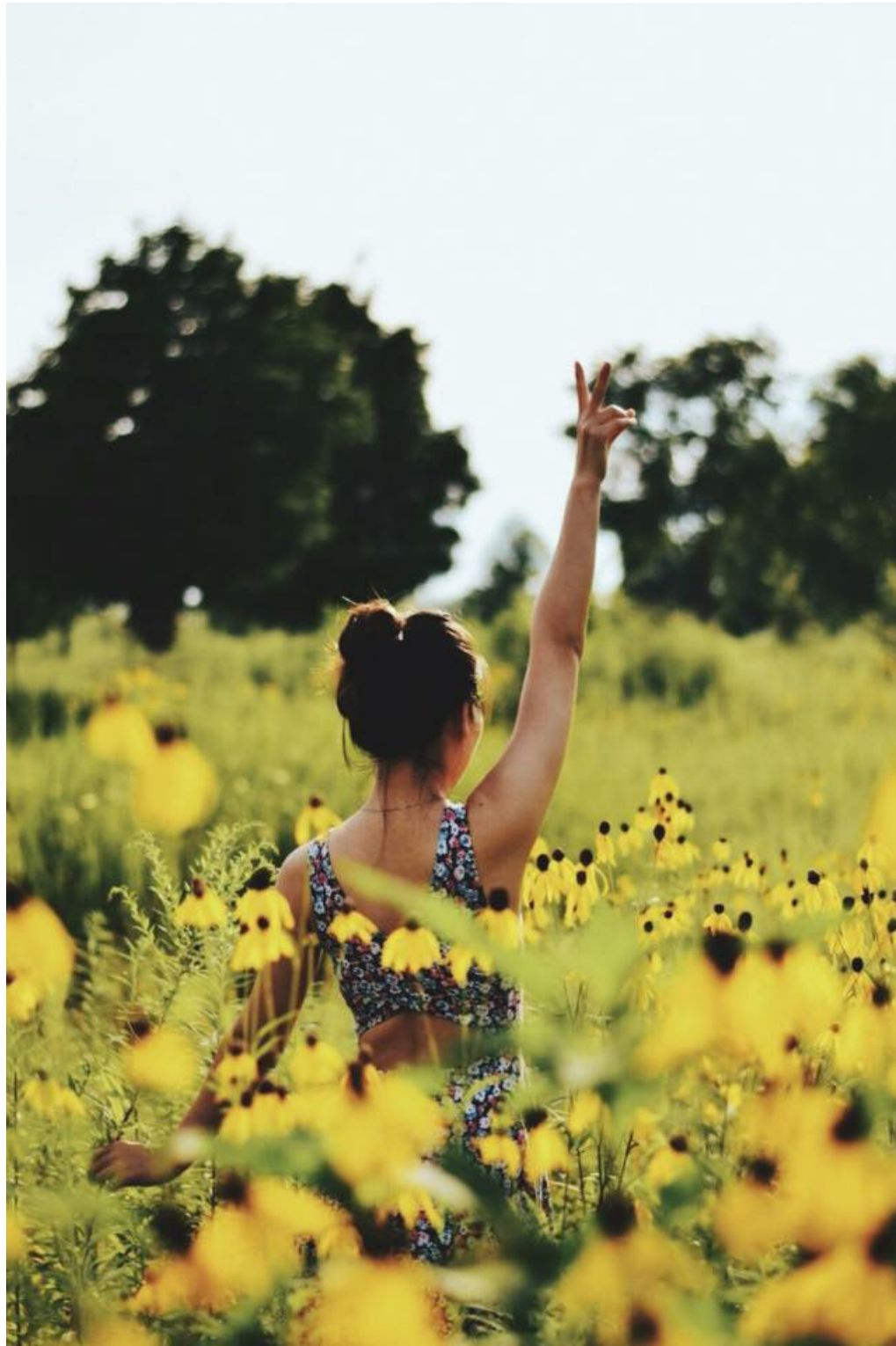
Thank God I always preferred Jim Beam.

Righteous  
Judge, for  
sin's  
pollution  
Grant Thy  
gift of  
absolution,  
Ere that day  
of  
retribution. ✱



jacob dalen  
into the distance





diane wei  
yellow, the color of sunshine,  
hope, and happiness



matthew pettineo  
ambient candlelight

ethan frobish

## various untitled flash fictions

i.

It was the night before his second wedding, and the man looked across the short couch to his soon-to-be second wife.

She was a sturdy woman with short blonde hair and a middling complexion.

Between them sat several children, none of whom looked quite like him, but all of whom called him "Dad."

Briefly, he wondered if it was worth it, recalling a similar night with similar children and his soon-to-be-first, later-to-be-ex wife.

He returned his attention to the television and took a drink of beer.

ii.

"He took us off the trail, up to this weird hole in the ground. We weren't really sure what he was saying, but Cate says that she thinks a lot of his people died here. She speaks the most Spanish. I think he only liked us because we knew a little Quechua, but I'm not sure."

Did you see anything up there? Did you feel anything?

"No, it was just a hole."

iii.

You slide into the bus after a long, wobbling wait at the bus stop near your buddy's place. The two of you had just smoked a bowl, and although your tolerance isn't what it used to be, you aren't too fucked to get yourself home.

You smile at the driver (was your smile too big?), and ever-so-smoothly (but probably not as smoothly as you think) use the accelerative force of the bus to fling yourself into the embrace of a filthy blue plastic seat.

Deftly, you place one earbud in your ear, thumbing through your library to find something, anything, but you decide that the bud's primary purpose for you, if you're being honest with yourself, is and has always been as a form of social signalling, a symbolic "Don't talk to me, fucker," so in a way, playing nothing is, in essence, much the same as playing something.

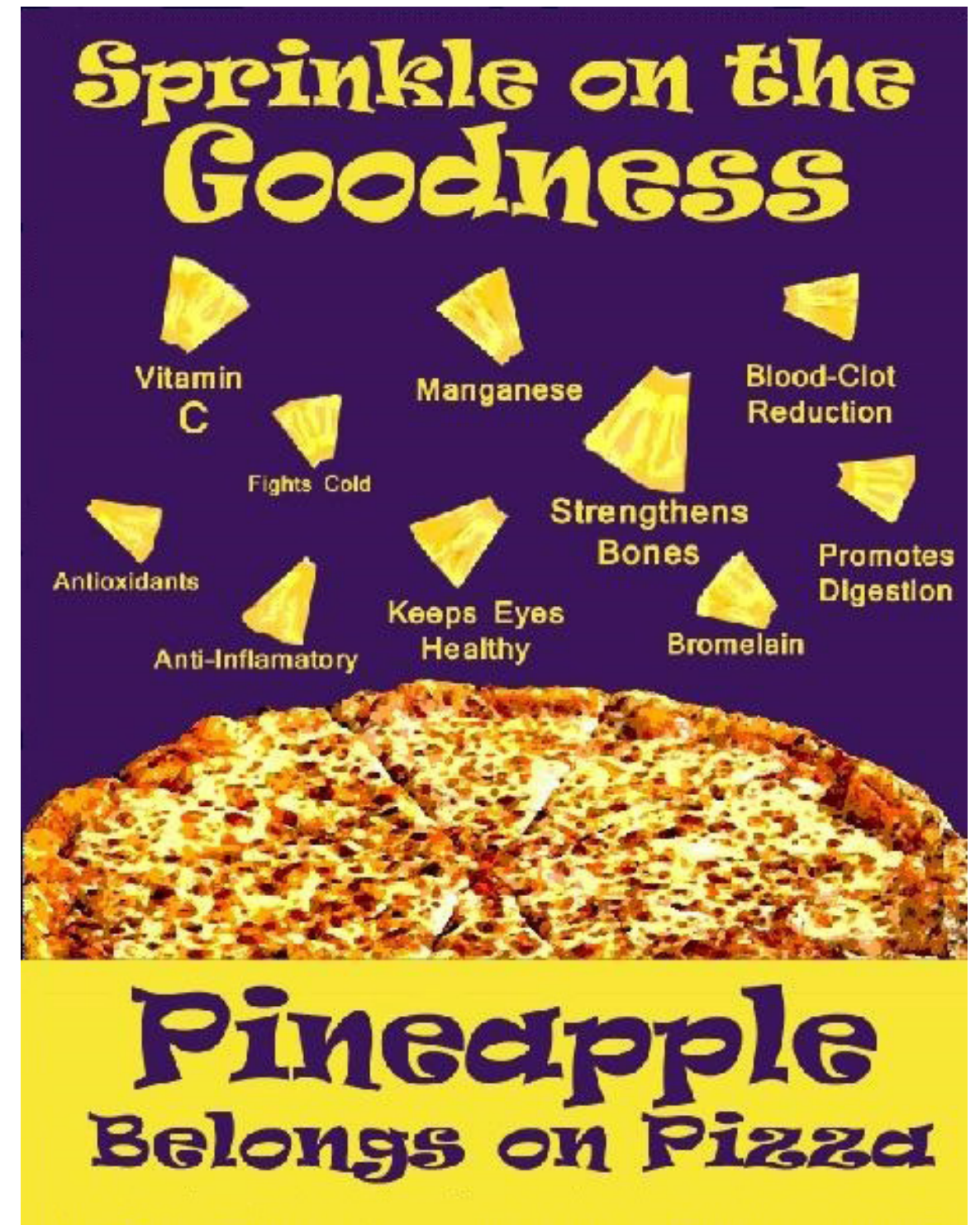
iv.

She read with all the passion of a typing test, turning Dickinson and Kaur into the same linguistic porridge. Does her tongue know the difference between James Joyce and Dan Brown? Can it parse Kafka from Koontz? How she stumbles over Chekov and King, as if they were brothers! Does she know what she's chewing? Her mouth is the death of literature. ✱





drew warner  
look at this  
geograph



drew warner  
unpopular  
opinion

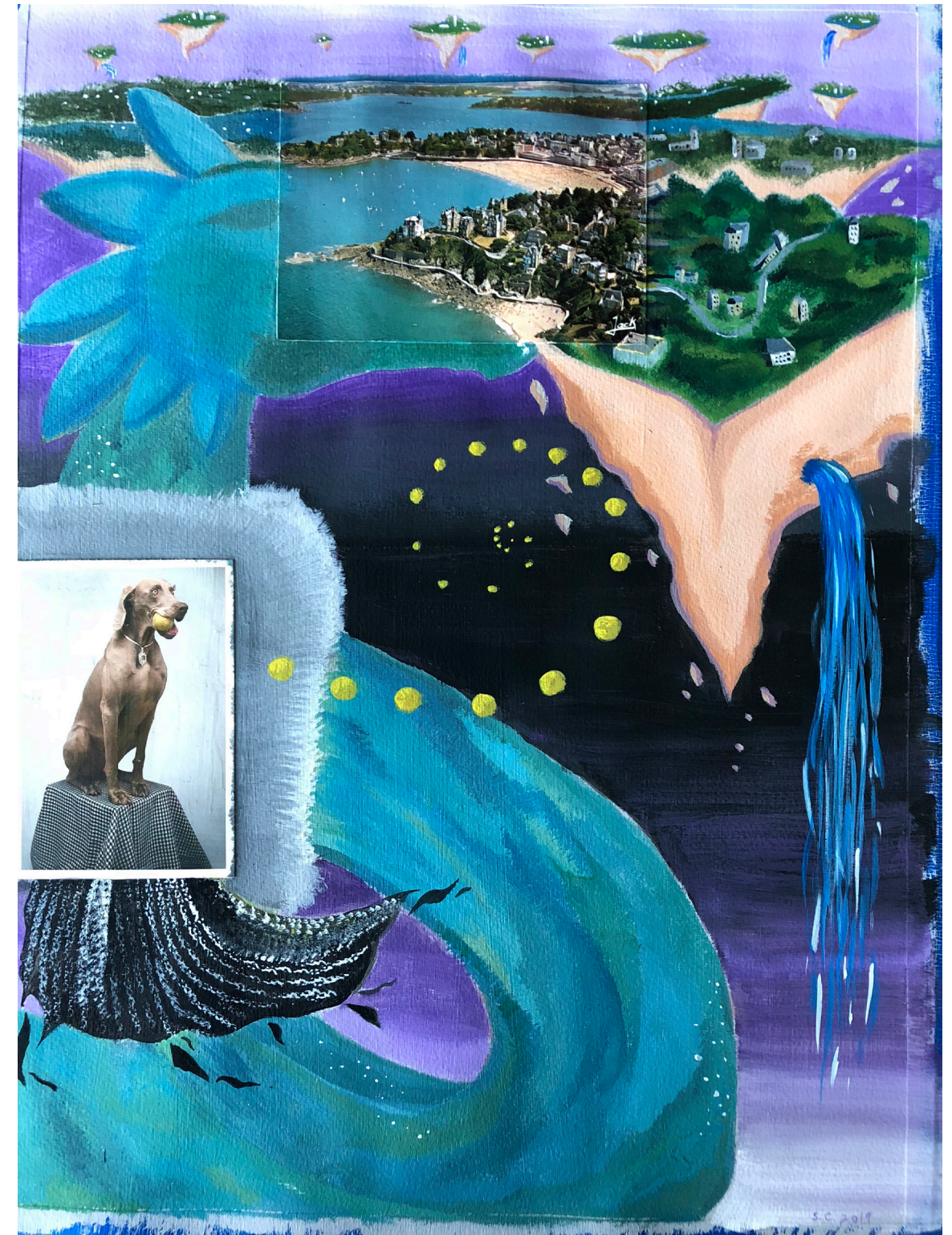


gail schneiderman  
daydream

You are awake but yet you dream.  
Of dragons, of magic, of another  
Place- foreign but yet so familiar. A world purely yours.  
A place you treasure with  
All your being. You always reenter.  
You cannot escape this world.

No one else in the world  
Knows about it. It is a place you conjured. A product of your  
Imagination. It is just a dream  
But it feels so real. You allow no other  
To enter.  
It is strictly with

In you. But come with  
Me. And I'll let you enter  
My mind, my imagination, my daydreams.  
Within them- Books come alive. Made up worlds  
Breathe. Always ending another  
Way. With different characters or a different plot.  
I wonder if your



stephanie chen  
untitled





stephanie chen  
when i think about the rainbow

Daydreams look like mine. If Books come alive. Or if your  
Daydreams are of the future- sometimes mine are.  
I don't enter  
Another dimension but I dream  
Of future events. Of realistic events that could happen with  
The facts that I know or, sometimes, just what I want to  
occur in this world.

I wonder if all others  
Daydream as intensely as I do. If others  
Daydream as an escape from this world  
As a time-passer or because they wish to get lost with  
In their minds. My daydreams  
Are my solace, my creative outlet. I wonder about  
the reason for your  
Daydreams. Mine are a safe haven to always renter.

Enter  
Another  
World  
With  
Your  
Daydreams.

But take my advice- don't get lost within these other worlds.  
Renter Earth. Wake Up.  
Don't just dream. Achieve your dreams. ✨



kayla vittore  
our lady of st. andrews

Her ears look akin  
to slate sparrow wings;  
perhaps she is an angel  
in this, a form rarely seen.

Trailing in her wake,  
a short, tidy tail.  
It's wagging as we enter  
a silent, welcoming hail.

By her master's chair  
she claims sanctuary.  
For all the congregation  
will come to seek out Lady.

The Lady of our church,  
Is not a human, saint, nor fable --  
just a small, scruffy dog,  
with hypoallergenic label.

Yet how much grace is seen  
in such a little being!  
Through wordless dedication,  
spirit is with our Lady.

She is distant,  
She is observant,  
She may shy away from you.

She is constant,  
She is present,  
She patters silent 'tween the pews.

Often it may seem Lady  
has little thought for us.  
Still wherever people gather,  
Never is she far off.

Sliding under tables,  
sneaking beneath chairs --  
not always noticed,  
yet always present there.

A church everchanging  
with numbers ever few,  
this congregation isn't fading,  
but ever made anew!

For no matter how many  
cycling seasons come to pass --  
no matter the unrest  
over race or love or class --

There will always be our Lady,  
sitting silent in sanctuary.  
There will always be the Lord  
sitting silently, waiting. ✧





ethan frobish  
in the interest of  
egress



ethan frobish  
the salty one



rachel spencer

## daniel in the lion's den

You go to church on a cold Sunday morning  
You go and you go with the ribbon in your hair  
And you sit, sit still, in the Sunday school classroom  
With the blond Noah and blue-eyed Jesus  
And one of the old ladies tells you about Daniel

Daniel got thrown into the Lion's Den  
So the story goes  
But because he had faith in God he survived

But then you're older  
And you don't go to church with the ribbon in your hair  
You don't go and you don't go  
And another book teaches you God is Dead  
That heaven is empty and all the devils are here

So you feel brave and go on  
You can take on the Lion's Den  
But you don't know just what that will look like

You don't know what the Lion's Den will look like  
Until you're there and you're there with a ribbon around your  
neck  
And you can't breathe, try to breathe, but the words won't  
come  
You're choking and the old ladies shake their heads  
Because you didn't listen — you were too busy playing with  
the ribbon  
In your hair ✱



jacob dalen

good things come in pairs



gail schneiderman  
the sound of silence

The sound of silence is  
Pounding of drums-  
Blaring of horns -  
Breaking, violent, crashing -  
Begging us- desperately -  
To fill the massive gap  
To release our thoughts from within ourselves  
And let our voices Sing.

But sometimes the sound of silence is  
Waves lapping  
Quietly edging and quietly retreating -  
Constant, gentle, smoothing -  
Telling us to close our eyes  
And dive deep inside Ourselves. ✨



diane wei  
mystic



stephanie chen  
stepping  
stars



ethan frobish

## my friend baphomet

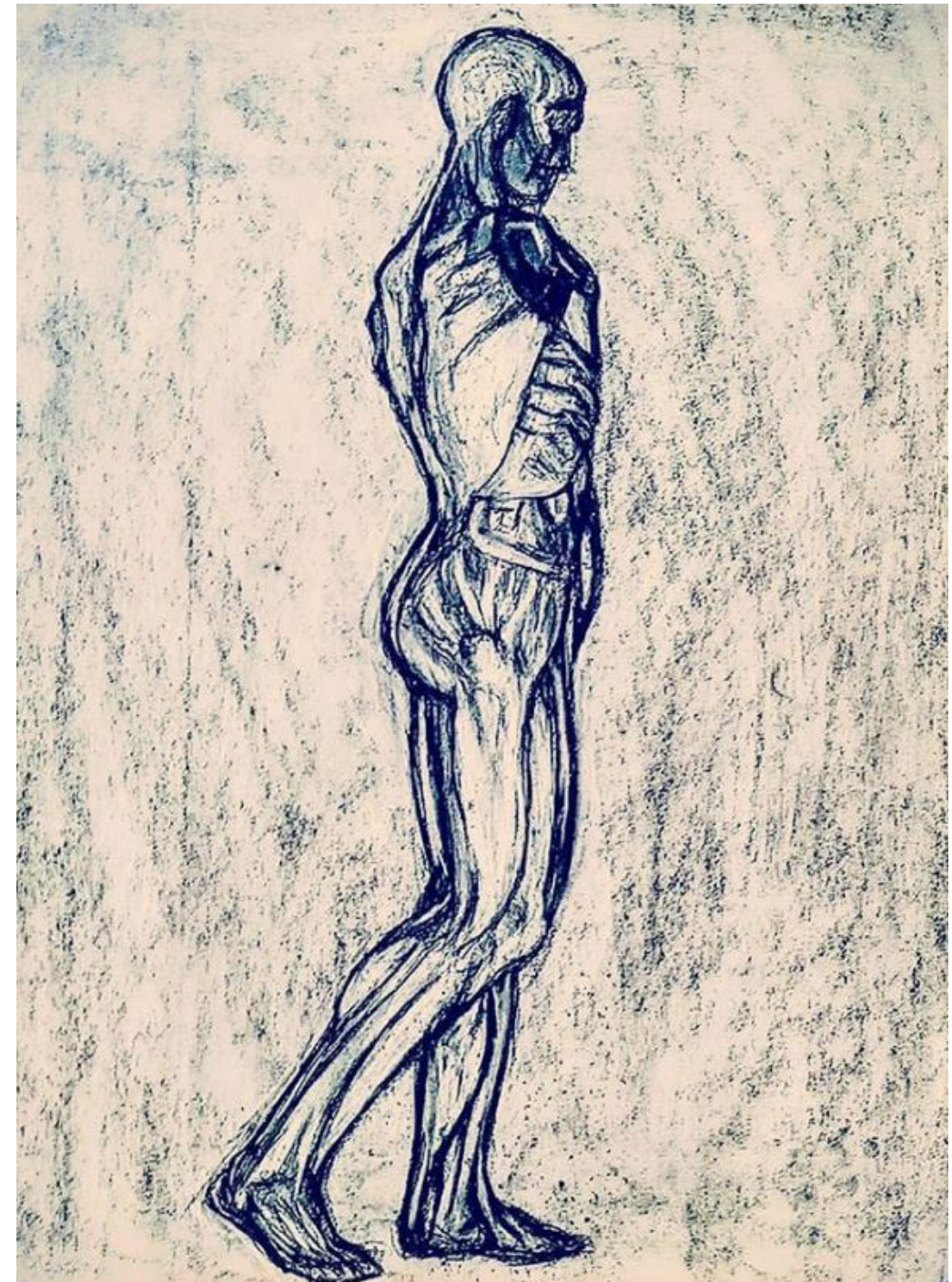
With trembling hands, Percival traced the flaking gold inlay on the cover of his second-hand copy of the *Necronomicon*. Following the embossed pentagram with his fingertips, he was able to steady himself for what was to come. *Tonight will be the night*, he thought as he circled the inverted star. *Oh yes. It is tonight.*

Over a period of six months, he had gathered all the ingredients that the book had specified: blackfire candles, saltpeter, a ram's skull, and other varied unspeakable accoutrements. He had even broken out his calligraphy set in order to create the sigil he needed to complete the summoning. Obtaining the virgin's blood had, surprisingly, been the easiest, and it lay darkly in an unholy vessel. Percival rubbed his arm.

With hands and nerves both calmed, Percival lit the five candles which sat at the five points of the salt pentagram within his summoning circle. It only took him seven matches. Now having sufficient lighting for the arcane task at hand, he returned to the book and opened it, wondering idly at the source of the cover's old, smooth leather. *Vellum, or perhaps...human?* He shuddered, dismissing the thought as he sought out the required page. Quickly, he found it, removing the frayed black ribbon from between pages 666 and 667 of the thin book. Percival scanned the pages impatiently, skipping dire warnings about the potential consequences and side effects of engaging in the dark arts. He was certain in his conviction. *This is the way it must be done*, he thought.

At last, he found the incantation, adjusted his wire-framed glasses, scratched his nose, cleared his throat, and began to read.

*"O puer, venit ex, autem. Veritas est, non stare hic ad manum facultas mea. Non opus est tibi, ut opus est tibi, ut opus est tibi in vita mea, puer. Te invocamus et auxilium tuum dulce massas confunditur, et venit per circulus, at usque non cogitare de isto circulo, puer. Et hoc sigil trahere dulcis tura tribus acris de pit in spem vocies ostende mihi faciem tuam, ut faciam mihi in vita aliquantulus minus, et par stercore. AVE SATANAS!"*



natalie bready  
untitled



At first, there was nothing, but suddenly a deep rumbling began somewhere far beneath Percival. Soon, it felt as if the Earth's very foundations were shaking. In the commotion, the flames of the candles were snuffed, and the room was shrouded in darkness. The *Necronomicon* dropped to the floor, along with its owner. Percival gave out a yelp, but as quickly as it had begun, the shaking stopped.

Percival had hardly regained his balance when he saw something curious in the moonlight leaking through his blinds, something astonishing. The smoke from the recently extinguished candles had begun to gather in the center of the circle; it hadn't merely dissipated as dead candles' smoke normally would. The gray vapor was being pulled from the candles in whirling gyres, five miniature tornadoes which converged in the circle's center and combined their efforts to create one massive, twisting vortex. Percival watched on in wonder as the whirlwind grew and slowly realized that a fiery orange light had begun to emanate from within the swirling smoke.

As it swelled, the central gyre moved its feeding from the candles—which had been eaten down to charred spots on the wooden floor—onto the virgin's blood. The tip of the twister touched down in the center of the aforementioned unholy vessel, and the blood poured up in several rivulets, intertwining itself with the streaming smoke and providing a more substantial body to the vapor. While gorging itself on the ichorous offering, the central glow seemed to feed as well. Its previously constant orange now pulsated rhythmically, in sinister synchronicity to Percival's wildly beating heart.

All Percival could do was watch in bewilderment as the odious phenomenon went on before him for what felt like an eternity. For how long the smoke did swirl, he could not say. He was hypnotized by the unholy rotation of the smoke and its dark constancy. However, he realized that at some point, perhaps without his knowledge, a silhouette of sorts had joined the fray at the heart of the storm. It was humanoid, but only just so, with proportions elongated and twisted sickeningly from normal human form. Perhaps, Percival feared, the silhouette had been there the whole time, watching him.

"Hello?" whispered Percival. The weakness of his voice came to him as a shock. "Who's there?" he asked, deepening his voice with a cough.

As if the spell's life had been tied to that of the room's silence, the swirling ceased and the flickering light once again steadied. The smoke now hung stagnantly, and Percival felt as though it leered over him, like it was waiting for something. He cursed himself for the weakness of his heart.

In an effort to seize control of the moment, Percival gathered his courage in his chest, expelling it all in a powerful command. "As your summoner, I demand you show yourself!"

No sooner had he spoken than the whirlwind resumed with additional fervor. The wind now seemed to gather around the limbs of the silhouette, swirling and corporealizing the being within its smoky grasp. The gas darkened as its task neared completion and was absorbed into a solid form from bottom to top. Percival gazed in a mix of wonder and fear as the creature's form was finalized.

First, a shiny set of chitinous hooves clopped lightly onto Percival's bedroom floor. These were followed by a muscular pair of goat legs, replete with coarse black fur. The creature turned human at its waist, and inky black skin covered its rippling muscles and pert breasts. The orange glow was reflected mutely by the thing's glistening abdominal muscles, Percival noted. Jutting from behind its shadowy form were two batlike, leathery wings, for now furled in rest. The body was topped by the acquired ram skull, and emblazoned on the forehead in soft ember was the sigil he had drawn. Consolidated beneath the bare bone was the mysterious orange glow, which shone through the skull's various sockets and gaps. It towered over Percival, this creature, and in a voice that sounded like the grinding of tectonic plates, it spoke.

"WHO ART THOU, WHO HATH DARED TO SUMMON ME, THE MIGHTY DEMON BAPHOMET? THERE AWAITS HELLFIRE FOR THEE WHO HATH BROUGHT ME FORTH IN VAIN!"

Meekly, Percival answered. "It 'twas...uh...that would be me. Percival. Down here."

The demon slowly shifted its gaze downward and paused, beholding his summoner from behind the fiery hollows of the skull. With a laugh like bedrock, Baphomet spoke again. "AHAHAHA, EXCELLENT. THOU, OH MIGHTY WIZARD PERCIVAL, ART MY MASTER. WHAT DARK MIRACLES CAN I PERFORM FOR THEE? WHAT PLEASURES CAN I BRING FORTH FOR THY DELIGHT?"

"I think I'm good right now," said Percival. "Can I get anything for you? I've got water downstairs, and I think there's some Mountain Dew left from the other night. It's probably a little flat, but it's something."

Taken aback, the creature responded.

"I, UH, I'VE GLUTTED MYSELF ON THE BLOOD OF THE VIRGINS WHICH THOU HATH SO GRACIOUSLY PROCURED FOR ME, MASTER PERCIVAL. I THIRST NOW ONLY TO DO THY BIDDING," it thundered.

"Oh, did you like that? I got a little dizzy when I stuck the needle in my arm, but it flowed pretty easily after I got it in," beamed Percival.

"I...I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. THIS BLOOD WAS... THINE?" inquired Baphomet, licking its teeth with a flaming, bifurcated tongue. Upon reflection, the demon decided that the blood had tasted a little funny.

"Yep!" said Percival. "Homegrown me!"

"OH," Baphomet responded, "WELL. I THANK THEE, MASTER."

"You're welcome!" Percival said cheerfully.

After a painful silence, the demon hazarded a guess at its master's purpose.

"AH, SO THOU ART A VIRGIN, MASTER PERCIVAL?"

"I mean, you don't have to be so blunt about—"

"EXCELLENT," boomed Baphomet, "IF IT IS THY BIDDING, THEN I SHALL PROVIDE THEE A HAREM OF OBEDIENT SUCCUBI WITH WHICH THOU CAN FIND IMMEASURABLE DELIGHT!"

"Oh, no, that's okay," said Percival.

"THEN WHAT DO YOU WANT, MORTAL? I... I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY YOU HAVE BROUGHT ME FORTH. I CANNOT FATHOM YOUR DESIGN," admitted the demon.

"I dunno," the human said. "Do you wanna watch a movie or something?"

"A FILM? NAY, I SHALL NOT PARTICIPATE IN SOMETHING SO TRIVIAL. ANYWAYS, THOU HAVETH ME TRAPPED INSIDE THY RITUAL CIRCLE, MASTER, AND WITHOUT THY LEAVE, HERE I MUST STAY." Baphomet grinned with the ram skull's upper teeth.

Percival shyly returned the horned demon's smile and approached the circle.

"So if I break the circle, you'll hang out with me?" he asked.

"UH, SURE, KID. MAKE WITH THE BREAK," spake Baphomet.

With that, Percival scuffed a gap in the immaculate white of his summoning circle with the heel of his orthopedic shoe. As soon as the breach was complete, a roaring wind knocked him back onto the floor, and Baphomet was nowhere to be seen; however, the demon left a final message on the breeze with its escape.

"YOU LIVE A SAD LIFE, MORTAL."

Percival knew. ☼



drew warner  
faux fauna





diane wei  
they will remain  
long  
after we are all  
gone to dust



diane wei  
"you forget what you  
hear, and you remember  
what you see, but what  
you experience stays  
with you forever"





diane wei  
canvas

rachel spencer  
unfulfilling

I won't lie and say that it won't be completely  
Unfulfilling

At first

I won't lie and say that I  
Won't throw myself into my work  
Nose buried in books  
Papers written in a day  
Sports articles strewn about my room  
Because  
It feels good  
To keep my mind off of you

To keep my mind off you feels good  
Like heroin feels good to an addict  
Like how another shot feels  
To an alcoholic

(I always was a bit of a workaholic  
If you can count  
Working to keep you  
As working too hard)

Meanwhile, you've been drinking more  
Not so much more that your fraternity brothers  
The ones so used to your drunken ways  
Begin to worry  
But just enough to numb the pain  
And just like I swear I can feel your eyes  
On me  
When I step into that damn elevator  
You, when the bottle's nearly gone,  
Can trick yourself  
Into seeing me, sitting on the edge of your unmade bed  
Barefoot, just like old times  
Waiting  
Waiting for you  
(I always waited for you)  
Waiting in a comfy tee and cotton undies  
Ready to go to bed



Those old times will flood  
Your memory  
The empty bottle of wine  
Perched on your desk makes you think  
Of when I was the drunken one  
Wrapped  
In your favorite blanket and  
Begging for you  
To come and hold me one last time

But that was not the last time.

The last time, you muttered about how  
"This is dangerous"  
And you meant that it was  
Dangerous  
In the sense that it was a blissfully  
Cold and dreamy Sunday afternoon  
When the whole world  
Would rather be in bed

But it was dangerous in another sense.  
By the time you held me for that  
Last time  
We were no longer  
Together  
You had someone new  
And all I had were memories

But to fall asleep with me in your arms?

That would be dangerous.

Because you know  
As well as I  
That to ignore that sense of  
Comfort  
Safety  
Love

Is unfulfilling. ☒



natalie bready  
tangled





matthew haak  
self-portrait



jacob dalen  
on the verge



maryrose o'donnell

## medea

### before the murder of the princess of corinth

I dreamed of the weddings. When I'd unclasp my boys' hands from my own and pass them to their wives. I dreamed of my joy when they would visit me. My hands would grow frail and my hair lightened to ash, but they would place calloused hands on me and assist until they wrapped my body and sent me to the next world. But there would be no wedding, no helping hands. Their father had ripped that away when he broke his vows and left me, alone in a foreign land and no means to protect my children.

Now I dream of blood.

Why must they smile at me? That toothy grin I've seen every morning since he was a baby. How can I end that smile, which still has so much left to grow? His right tooth is missing, he's just a child. I move my fingers to their dark hair, a hand resting on each of their small heads. I feel the curls of their hair brush against my fingertips. My curls. They are mine, I cannot let myself do this. His bride is gone, his new crown is gone, that is enough. I can flee to Athens, my children in my hands and never be seen again. My revenge is done, and I can keep them, all I have left.

My left hand falls to my younger boy's face, cupping it and tilting his head towards me. I see myself in him, to hurt him would be to kill myself. But, those eyes. Though they have my complexion, my face, and my hair, those are not my eyes. The fair grey with brown bleeding from the center. They are Jason's eyes. For all these kids are mine, half of them is Jason. So long as they live, Jason will never feel true punishment. My revenge will never be complete.

My son's face is flushed, a red heat beneath his skin. Does he know what awaits him? I never want my children to be scared, to feel as though they may suffer. But he brought that upon them. Jason has murdered my children and left them for the vultures to pick at while I cry, alone and frail.

No. I will not let him do that.

I drop my hands from their face and hair. It feels as though a cold draft has encircled me. My beautiful children cannot live. I push them away and close my eyes, feeling my own hair. They will live on in me, for they are me. I will never forget their beautiful curled hair nor their smooth skin, but I will end it. It is for the best. It is cruel what I must do, I will become a monster to do it, but it is for the best.

If I leave them to the wolves, they will howl in pain.

If I kill them myself, their pain will be over.



christina ernst  
new threads



maryrose o'donnell  
medea  
after the princess's murder

I wish I could have seen it. The moment when the princess thief's skin morphed, and her body failed her. The sight of her falling to the ground and her father leaving with her. Jason's anger and pain. If only I could have seen it, perhaps it would steel me for the task I must do now. This task will bring me no joy, it will not bring me the satisfaction and pride the death of the thief has given me. But it must be done.

I have sealed my children's fate. The murder of the thief puts them in more danger than ever and I will not let them take my children. I will not let my enemies laugh at me by hurting those who I care more about than anything in this life. I know they desire to ruin me. I will not be ruined. When the day is over, I will have my revenge and Jason will be the one left alone and with the weight of pain and regret on his shoulders. I will weep for my children when the sun sets, until then I must forget the memories of them.

The sword rests in my hands. A thin instrument, no longer than my forearm, but it will do the job. The metal grows heavier, but I ignore the weight in my hand. The weight will soon pass. I move towards the doors, to retreat inside where they sit and await me. For this one moment I must remember why my hand is wrapped around this blade. If I drop the sword now I am ruined and my children will be left to Jason.

I cannot let that happen.

The house feels silent and still, as though it holds its own breath. Or maybe it's just me. I close my eyes and breathe deeply, clearing my mind of those weak thoughts. I will erase who I am for this task. Each step I take echoes in the room, but their dark and curled heads do not turn. Good. It will be easier if they do not see me. Their pain will be lessened.

One last thought before the deed.

*My sweet children, I am sorry.*

But now their names are lost to me and the only thing that is real is the sword in my hand and the hate in my heart. ✱



matthew pettineo  
arboretum sunrise



rachel spencer  
whiskey and lemonade

My mother calls this combination  
"The Poor Man's  
Whiskey Sour"  
(Which is ironic because you  
Are far more  
Spoiled  
Than I ever have been)

And it's not like you and I  
Didn't try  
To be a whiskey sour  
I would put up a front  
Pretending  
That I could keep up with you  
And the boys  
While you would go on  
Pretending  
That you were Prince Charming  
The kind of guy who would  
Kiss me in the rain  
And  
Pick me up and spin me around  
When we see each other  
After a long time.

Instead, we were a whiskey and lemonade  
Something  
Not quite  
Close to  
Almost  
And while you still burned like whiskey  
When I drank you in  
And I tried my best to be both  
Sweet and sour  
We were still nothing more than  
Almost. ✱



natalie bready  
slipt





matthew pettineo  
sweet home



maryrose o'donnell  
70s beach circa 2013



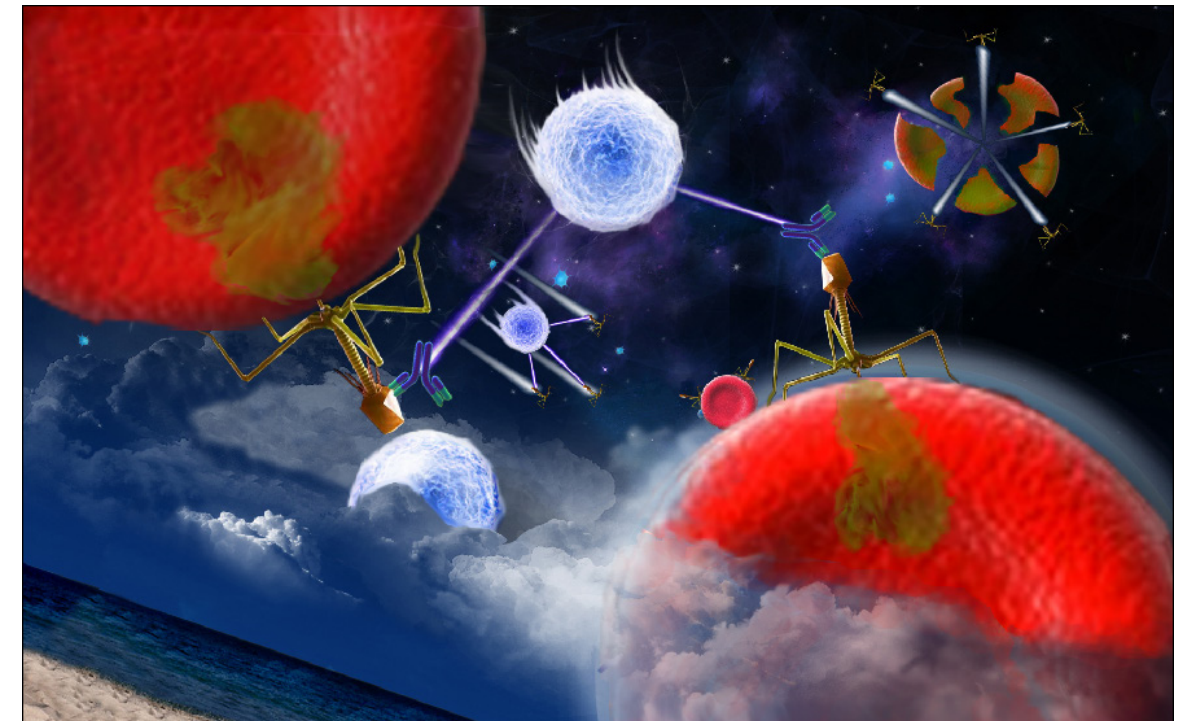
briana sobecks

## science: a discipline for elites

All our advancements in fields like alternative energy development, medical technology, and artificial intelligence are thanks to the contributions of scientists. To ensure that as much progress is being made as possible, these people tirelessly work endless hours on research and development. This research is crucial to our advancement as a species. As such, scientists must be serious and scholarly in all their endeavors. Otherwise, this important technological development would be hindered. Only the most elite, refined individuals have the capacity to become proper scientists.

Scientists are able use complicated, high-tech equipment when making important discoveries. Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov are two such scientists. They used their intellectual prowess to isolate a sample of graphene, a one-atom thick substance made of carbon atoms arranged in a hexagonal configuration. For years, many people thought it would be impossible to produce it. However, through their superior intelligence, Geim and Novoselov isolated graphene using a highly specialized, state of the art tool called "scotch tape." With scotch tape, they peeled off numerous tiny layers of graphite until they had generated a sample of graphene. Truly, these scientists had incredible technical skills and unmatched minds to make such a discovery.

Another aspect of scientific genius is the dedication to proper nomenclature systems in the scientific community. From biological species to organic chemical compounds, scientists must have a systematic way to name millions of various entities. Some names follow strict rules, while others require extensive consideration of the entity's properties. One example stems from the discovery of a gene essential to the formation of body parts in the fetal stage of human development. To name this gene, they thoroughly examined its properties to determine a suitable descriptor. Their objective qualitative analysis yielded that the gene was "spiky," a scientific term for when something has a lot of points. In keeping with the theme of spikiness, they called their discovery the "sonic hedgehog gene."



drew warner  
battle for immunity



This gene has now been researched in thousands of projects and been published in thousands of papers. Another example is a species of Australian jumping spiders that was discovered in 2015. Formally called *Maratus jactatus*, these spiders are more commonly referred to by the scientific community as “Sparklemuffin” spiders because of their shimmery red-and-blue markings. Indeed, it takes the great mind of a scientist to make these brilliant analyses.

One of the most essential aspects of scientific work is professional communication to share knowledge in the hopes of collaboratively advancing the human species. For centuries, scientists have exchanged wisdom with each other and critiqued each others’ theories. One such example occurred when physical chemist Gilbert Lewis commented on his collaborator Walther Nernst’s experimental technique. According to Lewis, Nernst’s use of estimates for chemical constants in his calculations constituted “a regrettable episode in the history of chemistry.” This statement encompasses the sharp eye and quick brain of Lewis, who is rightly recognized as a significant contributor to chemical research. Another instance of professional analysis was contained in a letter between quantum physicists Werner Heisenberg and Wolfgang Pauli, discussing the work of fellow physicist Erwin Schrodinger. According to Heisenberg, “The more I think about the physical portion of Schrodinger’s theory, the more repulsive I find it... What Schrodinger writes about his theory of visualizability of his theory ‘is probably not quite right,’ in other words, it’s crap.” This deep critique of Schrodinger’s quantum theory and its limitations in a visual sense greatly advanced our current understanding of quantum physics as a whole. Science would not be where it is today if not for the wise words of these erudite scholars.

We have much to owe the scientists of generations past and present, as well as those who will doubtlessly contribute in the future. Not all have what it takes to be a paragon for the advancement of society. Scientists need intelligence, discipline, and professionalism at all times. They must use complicated solutions to solve difficult research problems. Indeed, we would not prosper if scientists were deficient in any one of these areas. Therefore, science remains a strict discipline for dedicated elites. ✧



jacob dalen  
spread your wings

robert kaucic

## the dungeon master

~~The motley band of adventurers, at last beyond the reaches of the horrifying Demogorgon, floated lazily upwards on their silken chariot. Its gold frills flapped about in the updraft like amorphous hands waving farewell to the nightmares below.~~

The party crouched helplessly behind a conveniently-placed and conveniently-sized rock, entirely forgetting the magic carpet that Octavius had “borrowed” last session. Time tapped its foot impatiently, arms crossed and brow furrowed, while the heroes lamented the cruelty of their dungeon master, who seemed hell-bent on orchestrating their demise.

I can’t stand the sound of a cell phone ringing. High-pitched metallic cries for attention rendered virtually obsolete by the advent of vibrate-on-ring.

~~“Sorry, sorry,” he said, subduing the beast’s guttural screech before stuffing it into the depths of his backpack where its lamentations would fall on deaf ears. “I thought I had it on silent.”~~

“Mom, I can’t talk right now. I’m playing a game,” Novaheart said. “But Dad said I could take the car.” I caught his gaze for a moment, but fumbled and let it fall to the table. “But— No, but— It’s not like— Ok, fine. See you in a bit. Love you too.” If one can stand up in an apologetic manner, Novaheart did so. “I dunno why my mom’s angry,” he said, gathering up his dice with one hand and digging through his backpack for his keys with the other. “She’s been cool with me taking the car, like, every other time.”

He pocketed his dice and strode across the room with long, quick steps towards the door to the store proper. As had become tradition, he struggled with the loose knob for a few seconds before wrenching the door open and half-closing it behind him. “If you could hold on to my character sheet this week I’d appreciate it!” called a voice from beyond.

Novaheart is a tall, blue-skinned Drow rogue, who can spring forth from the shadows and assassinate his targets in a flash. He wields a sword of dancing flame and proudly bears the title of “hero” after having saved his hometown

from the wrath of an ancient god.

Omar — the guy who plays Novaheart — is somewhat less heroic. He’s short, loud, a little bit on the chubby side, and his greatest power is consistently showing up to our sessions late and leaving them early. He majors in food science and DJs for bars on the weekends, and he can rattle off every chapter in the *Superman* anthology. We give him a lot of flak for being late all the time, but his heart’s in the game as much as mine is. The first week that we had a session, he made me call his boss to explain why he couldn’t take the Sunday night shift, and he sometimes refers to himself as *Bro-mar* when telling stories.

I turned back to the world where — by my decree — phones did not exist, and therefore could not interrupt adventuring. A bard, a ranger, and a wizard stared at me, wondering, “*What happens next?*”

A game of Dungeons and Dragons is a work of literature unlike any other. The dungeon master drafts a story, and a handful of players finger paint all over it. It adds color, sure, but somehow the poor dungeon master needs to turn it into something clean and coherent. And he has no time. None. His players need to know what happens next, right away.

~~The adventurers, hungry for vengeance after the tragic loss of their foolhardy yet lovable companion, sprung out from behind the Rock of Convenience and let loose their fury on the abyssal monstrosity.~~

“Um,” I said.

Octavius sipped his tea. “We should probably just run. There’s no way we’re gonna beat the demon gorgon—”

“Demogorgon,” I corrected.

“Yeah that,” he continued. “There’s no way we’re gonna beat that thing so we’re either screwed, or we run.”

Octavius is my best friend. Or rather, *Sam* is my best friend. He likes going to bed before eleven, and he’s the only guy I know younger than my grandpa who has a tea collection. His favorite is white peach, and he pretends to get angry whenever I tell him that Lipton is way cheaper. Last time we got in a fight I was being a complete ass because I thought it was funny, but *he* ended up apologizing to *me* anyway. He has a lisp, but I only know that because he told me. I can’t hear it when he talks.



"I think Novaheart should be used as a distraction," Rudkor said. "If he didn't want to do it Rudkor would just cast the *dominate mind* spell and make him. Plus, Omar kinda deserves it for leaving."

"No, no, you guys don't get it," Kench said. "Duke knew this would happen. He probably already gave us a clue about how to survive this, but we just didn't pay enough attention to figure it out. It's probably something super easy too, like an escape tunnel under the rock." He turned to me, his expression a mix of questioning and self-satisfaction. "I look for an escape tunnel under the rock."

~~"I gave you a flying carpet! Use it!" I shouted.~~

"Um," I said. "Oh, uh, roll to see if you find one. You'll need a good roll, since it's dark."

A stillness befell the sacred gaming table as a handful of nerds fulfilled the divine ritual of watching someone roll a twenty-sided die.

*Tak, tak, tak tak taktaktaktaktak.*

"Thirteen," Kench said. "Eighteen with modifiers."

I haven't known Affan — Kench's player — for very long. I met him online when recruiting people for my game.



ethan frobish  
the chair in the  
woods

While Sam and I look like extras in a movie, Affan looks like the protagonist, at least before he discovers his superpowers. Tall with a sort of ragged style about him. Clothes that fit without looking fitted. He doesn't work out but would be good at it if he did. I asked him where he wanted to be in a couple years, and he said he just wanted to feel like he fit in and maybe to also have a magical bow and a pet land-shark.

"You don't find a tunnel," I said.

In retrospect, a tunnel may have made sense, given the nature of the Rock of Convenience, but wouldn't that have been too easy?

"There's no way that would work," Rudkor said. "What kind of demons leave human-sized escape tunnels lying around?"

I believe that pity stacks multiplicatively. Or maybe it scales exponentially.

"Roll for perception, Rudkor," I said.

"Hmph, okay," he said. "I don't see—"

*Tak, tak, tak tak taktaktaktaktak.*

"—why I need to though. I have darkvision, so I should just be able to see everything anyway. Twenty-four total."

~~You don't find a tunnel.~~

"Crouching behind the rock, you find that it appears to have been intentionally placed, covering a crevasse of sorts. You can't see well into the darkness below, but you believe that you might just be able to squeeze through the gap."

"Oh, come on," he said, his eyes shooting inflatable rubber daggers at me. "Fine. I try to climb down. Do I need to roll for that?"

"Don't be a smartass, Karol," Kench said.

If Affan was the superhero in a movie, Karol would be the supervillain. He's tall too, but he has that sharp, gaunt look about him. He's skinny and calculating. He can do the Jack Nicholson crazy eyebrows, and he knows the rules of the game better than I do. I went to his apartment once when he forgot his dice, but it didn't look evil enough to be a lair. Just awfully Polish. Thick, hand-woven tapestries hung on every wall except by the meager kitchen, and crimson-and-brown pottery artfully populated every possible flat surface in an attempt to make the space seem bigger than it actually was. He always brings four water bottles to our sessions, since Sam drinks tea instead.



"I'm going down too, I guess," Octavius said. "Can't really think of anything else to do. Does Novaheart go down with me?"

Oh, right. Novaheart is still here. Sort of.

"Yeah, he doesn't hesitate to get the hell out of there. Before you can say, 'But Mom,' he's through the gap, after you."

Kench frowned. "This still doesn't seem right. I know I didn't actually guess what Duke was thinking. We're still missing something. I don't want to go down the hole yet. What do you guys see down there, actually?"

The one who could see everything with his darkvision turned to me. "Uh, what do I see?"

~~You see Octavius above you with the flying carpet still strapped to his back. You realize that you could have just flown away with it, and that not even I know what you see, because I haven't thought of it yet.~~

"You're falling. Faster and faster downwards. The darkness swallows you, and you can see only Octavius and Novaheart above you, and a void below."

Kench was writing something in his notebook. He circled it, flipped a few pages, and circled something else. He didn't look up. "I swear, it's like we're playing tic-tac-toe and Duke is playing nine-dimensional chess or something. I have no idea how all of the stuff we've been through makes sense."

Hah. You and me, Kench.

"It's honestly probably beyond our control," stated Rudkor. "We probably angered some gods or something and now they're messing with us. We'd be better off laying low and just doing some mercenary work. Rudkor's really good at killing."

"Mmmmm, you know," Octavius said. "I'm supposed to be a lawful good character, so I can't really go around killing people for money. Plus Duke would totally be pissed if we just avoided the story he set up for us, right, Duke?"

Maintaining a straight face is a very underrated tool in a dungeon master's skillset.

"You guys are free to do whatever you like. My job is to make you have fun, not force you to read from a script. Wherever you go, whatever you do, I'll be trying my best to make it interesting for you," I said. I really meant it too.

"But there's *gotta* be something you expect us to do," Kench said. "We know you've got a super big spiderweb story all drawn up, and you wouldn't have put a hole underneath the rock if you didn't want us to find it. We just need to get smarter and figure out what we're supposed to do." The adventurers meditated on Kench's words for a moment. "Now might be a good time to stop," Octavius said. "Didn't we lose Bjorn the last time Omar left early?"

Time tightened its grip on one world and released it on another. A consensus was reached that, yes, now was a good time to stop. Rudkor packed his things up in a matter of seconds, bade us goodnight, and was off through the door, still ajar.

"Can you give me a little hint?" Kench asked.

Being a dungeon master is hard, but that doesn't mean it's not worth it.

I just shrugged helplessly. There was more truth in that than in anything I could have said.



diane wei  
zhang jia jie

Kench gave me one of those lazy smiles, fussed with the order of his papers for a moment, and took off, leaving the door wide open behind him. Octavius stuck around.

The room we played in was really quite nice. Though the walls were plastered with retro 1980s-era video game posters, the bronze-cast chandelier hanging in the center betrayed its origins as a dining room. Eugene, the guy who owned Otherworld Games, let us use it on Sunday evenings since I had been a regular for so long. Normally the room displayed collector's comic book paraphernalia, but for a few hours once a week, the worlds of Marvel and DC were pushed aside to make room for mine.

Octavius helped me fold up the table, and we spent a few minutes carefully replacing all of the displaced displays. Eugene told me that if I ever broke or stole anything — not that I ever would — he'd have my head. Eugene's one of the good guys though. He's pretty big but he wears polo shirts that are *still* too big for him, tucked into cargo shorts with elastic waistbands. He's been into gaming longer than I've been alive, and I bought my first Dungeons and Dragons book from him. I once saw him at the supermarket with a kid. They were both wearing wizard hats.

We headed out through the storefront, past Superman action figures and a line of vintage pinball machines. The front room always smelled like a mix of dusty comic books and stale gum. I loved it.

I didn't have a key, so I had to open the door, lock it, and then close it behind me. Once when I forgot to turn off the lights, Eugene made me pay him two dollars.

It was freezing cold out and still snowing. Sam was wearing one of those nylon grandpa-jackets with giant pockets and the plaid fleece lining. I told him it made him look old and he told me it was comfy. It was late enough that the parking lot lights were off, and the only place still open was a 24-hour liquor store on the other side of the outlet mall. Sam lived close enough that he didn't have to drive, and he didn't accept rides.

"What'd you think of the session?" I asked.

He scratched at his patchy beard. "I can't keep up with what's going on. I don't really care though; I'm still having fun. I hope Omar sorts things out with his mom."

I nodded. I was tired. Sam was tired. We were both cold.

"See you next week, man."

"Yeah, see you next week."

Sam started walking home, and I got in my car.

I just sat there for a while. I do that more than I'd like to admit.

It felt like a Sunday night. The lowest point of my week; just after the session had ended, and just before Monday's demons reared their ugly heads.

I watched as the snowflakes danced downward from somewhere dark up above. I ran through a mental checklist to see if I had forgotten to do anything. If I had, it didn't come to me then. Besides, I was tired. I wasn't going to do anything else anyway.

I started up my '97 Ford Taurus that boasted almost 200,000 miles. It was a rich green at one point in its life but had metamorphosed into something like dead grass with a rust fringe. Faithful despite the cold, it sputtered to life, headlights casting frozen shadows into the Otherworld storefront. There was no one inside, of course, but there was. Behind the game cartridges, and the overpriced figurines, tucked somewhere between a row of Justice League Pez dispensers and a first-edition original-packaging volume of *The Incredible Hulk*, was a motley band of adventurers, frozen in midair. Time guarded them restlessly, but for no purpose. Only five people in the world could find them. So they hung, waiting. Waiting to hear what happened next. Waiting for someone who knew.

Duke. ☒



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