

# S P I R E S

TWO THOUSAND TWELVE  
FALL





# S P I R E S

intercollegiate arts & literary magazine

- fall 2012 -

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Volume XVIII, Issue II  
012345 First Edition 67890

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Critics, however, are welcome to quote brief passages  
by way of criticism and review.

Front cover: “Contained (Self Portrait)” by Mara Cruvant  
(gouache on paper; Washington University in St. Louis, 2013)

Front cover, inside: “*Untitled*” by Emily McAlister  
(photograph; University of Michigan School of Art & Design, 2013)

Back cover, inside: “Perspectives” by Helen Peng  
(photograph; Washington University in St. Louis, 2016)

Back cover: “*Untitled*” by Martin Melto  
(gouache, ink, spraypaint, and collage on paper; Washington University in St. Louis, 2013)

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NOTICE:

The management of this condominium complex requests that all workers making deliveries (parcels, pizzas, courier messages) use the stairs instead of the elevators.

We have received complaints from residents who have been late to their morning prayers because newspaper delivery boys monopolize the elevators, forcing our devout residents to wait until all twenty floors have their papers.

On behalf of our residents' convenience, we thank you for your cooperation.

*Sue Hyon Bae*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*

# Adam

1  
The reason why you give a name to a dog  
Is so that when you call it out  
They look up at you.  
You teach it like every other command.

2  
Eden was a backyard  
And Adam liked it there.  
It smelled nice  
And there was lots of food  
And he could chase rabbits through the hedges  
And he could sleep in the shade  
Adam knew a lot of tricks  
That God taught him  
Like sit  
And roll over  
And especially heel  
God was a good master,  
Adam thought.  
God showed him where to eat  
And where to piss and where to dig  
And where to sleep.  
And Adam was a good boy.

3  
And then one day  
Adam pissed on the wrong tree.  
And then he had a sudden realization  
That some things were good  
And other things were evil  
And then he ran away from home.

4  
God went out from the backyard  
To look for his lost dog.

He called its name over and over.  
“Adam!” rang the holy voice.  
“Adam!”  
But it didn’t work.

5  
The reason why you give a name to a dog  
Is so that when you call it  
They look up at you.  
If you teach it well, it works like magic.  
But sometimes I wonder:  
When you call a dog  
They look up at you.  
Do they think the name means them?  
Or do they think it is your name?

6  
Adam ran and hid and ran and hid  
And he never looked up  
When he heard the word “Adam”  
And he ran far far away from Eden  
And he never remembered the bone  
He left buried there.

7  
And on the seventh day,  
God gave up.  
And he cried.  
And he got a new dog  
And he named it something else  
Because the name Adam  
Meant something else to him

*Adam Segal*  
*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*





“Large Paradigm”  
sharpie marker

*David Eppig (Zuba)*  
*University of Michigan, 2013*

## Peculiar Eating Habits (or, The Ellsberg Paradox)

Today is Tuesday. Tuesday is a day filled with fire, some say. Monday, there's a moon; Wednesday has water. Thursday: trees; Friday: gold. Saturday: dirt; Sunday: well, the sun. Each day of the week represents a natural element, but why? Today is fire? What is he supposed to do with that piece of information? It makes Mik anxious, like many other things that often cross his mind, so he reminds himself, stop thinking, put it away, just put it away.

*Thirteenth-century Persian-Tajik Poet, Ibn Yamin, said there are Four Types of Men:*

*One who knows and knows that he knows*

*...His horse of wisdom will reach the skies.*

*One who knows, but doesn't know that he knows*

*...He is fast asleep, so you should wake him up!*

*One who doesn't know, but knows that he doesn't know*

*...His limping mule will eventually get him home.*

*One who doesn't know and doesn't know that he doesn't know*

*...He will be eternally lost in his hopeless oblivion!*

It's Turbulent Tuesday, so we all sit in Pete's room, like we do every Tuesday. Like every Tuesday, we're not really sure what's going on, but don't really care, either. I daze through the haziness and see the Ninja Turtle poster that's starting to peel off the wall. Say no to drugs, say yes to pizza! I feel a little better about humanity, and then I vaguely recall the time I was a turtle for Halloween in sixth grade. Everyone kept on asking me if I was a Ninja Turtle. I kept

telling them no, I'm just a regular turtle. Every time, they looked disappointed. To this day, I don't completely understand why.

Someone's hungry, so we all head downstairs to the kitchen. The microwave is turned on, frozen foods are opened, and drinks are poured. The colorful concoctions of drinks fill our guts (stomach? lungs? a lung? the heart?) and none of us acknowledge how horrible it tastes. Not that we ever do; or maybe, no one even notices.

I don't remember whom, but someone asks: *How does one fit an elephant in a refrigerator?* Or at least I hear the question, whether or not it was actually asked, or if I remember who asked, or who actually asked doesn't really matter anymore.

*How does one fit an elephant in a refrigerator?*

Something pops. It's loud and dull, but we're all certain about the pop.

Well, that's a morbid question.

How so?

You would have to chop it up to pieces, of course.

That's not right.

Or I guess you could get a gigantic refrigerator, big enough to fit an elephant.

That would just make the question silly.

Maybe we could find a baby elephant.

Baby elephants are still pretty big, though. It definitely wouldn't fit in my fridge.

I know. I know!

What?

An elephant fetus. Can't you just put an elephant fetus in the fridge?

I don't know, is the fetus an elephant?

I don't know, I guess it depends on what you think of fetuses.

So the fetus will be an elephant if you're Catholic.

A Catholic person would have to put the elephant fetus into the fridge, I guess.

That would be pretty funny.

It doesn't sound right, I don't know.

Why do we need to put an elephant in the fridge anyway?

I don't know, we put whales in fridges.

What?

Whale meat. My relatives hunt whale in Japan, I never told you that?

Are you serious? Legally?

It's like fishing.

They're mammals.

Yeah, whatever. But they would cut them up and store the meat in this huge ass freezer. It roars and shit when you open it, used to freak me out when I was a kid.

I guess we could just put the elephant in there then.

We can't, it's a freezer. The refrigerator was a lot smaller.

Alan shows up, I don't know him that well, but he looks a little loopy, short and stout, as usual. He asks us if we know how to use the deep fryer. No one wants to help him, so he proceeds on his own. What are you frying? These. He shows us a vacuum-sealed package of imitation crabsticks. And then they're no longer vacuum-sealed. Who is this short white kid, carrying around imitation crab sticks not even manufactured in Asia, but Washington state, planning on deep frying them at three in the morning? It was perplexing, a little,

but I just kept getting distracted by the refrigerator in the kitchen, imagining an elephant lying dormant in there. I don't like gore, so I sort of just picture a miniature elephant lying in the vegetable drawer. Not a fetus, or particularly a baby, but just a mini elephant. It's soft and gray like Dumbo. First that, then the smell of fried crabsticks. Some type of sensory overload, it must be. They say information is the reduction of uncertainty, but what exactly it becomes when it's reduced, I don't know. It would still be uncertainty, I would assume?

Imitation crabsticks made in Washington State are imitation-imitation crabsticks, I tell Alan. He gazes at me, and says: well shouldn't the imitations cancel each other out and then become real crabsticks? Real crabsticks. Perhaps he had a point. Either way, I say at least they weren't made in China. I hear they put cardboard in their frozen pork buns. Or at least leak fake information about cardboard being manufactured in their frozen pork buns, just so the government pretend to effectively crack down on a scandal that didn't exist in the first place. You never really know what's going on over there.

Alan is looking past me and takes out the crabsticks from the fryer, somehow not-so-imitation anymore. They're lightly coated in gold, greasy gold. Not crispy though, sort of just rubbery. They might bounce if I tried, but he doesn't seem to be willing to share. He puts them on a paper plate and goes back upstairs.

I'm only a little tipsy but tonight there's a lot going on inside me and too many things overloading my head, so I decide I can't drive. The lingering smell from the deep fryer also makes me sick. I decide to go home, bye everyone, goodnight, see you around. They're too

lost in their own auras but they try their best to say bye, bye. I go outside, it's my favorite time of night to take a walk, and head down the block, towards the bus stop to sit on the bench.

*Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle*

$$\Delta x \Delta p \geq h/2$$

*The more precisely the position of a particle is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known in this instant, and vice versa.*

I only left his world so he could leave mine in peace; because I knew he worried about leaving my world even if he never really wanted to be there to begin with. Although it was he, who had beckoned me over that night, for reasons I wasn't too sure of yet at the same time was unconsciously most likely aware of. He had dialed my phone number, and said: Aya. I'm over here, and I think you too, should come over here, that is, if you can. He told me that I had left the planetarium at his place a while back, the last time I saw him, and that I needed to pick it up.

It was a cheap little plastic thing I had made from one of those do-it-yourself astronomy kits. The globe had holes in it, and a little bulb inside would splay the plastic stars onto its surroundings. We had tried using it in his closet, because the stars would only project well in a small space. We pretended to look for the big dipper. We had agreed that it was the ambient dot hovering above his navy suit. He seemed very sure of himself, as usual, and I wasn't very sure, as usual. But that never mattered to him. I don't think I have ever seen him in the navy suit.

He had said to me: If it is okay with you, I would like to turn on some classical music and smoke a cigar as I lie next to you, while listening to you read *The*

*Economist* out loud. Or at least that is what I remember he said to me, but either way, it's a very strange thing to say, or a very strange thing to remember someone saying.

I came to retrieve the planetarium, my very own broken universe, and stayed for him, or maybe for me, I am never so sure. He turned on some classical music, something I've heard many times before but don't know the name of, but he didn't have a cigar. Nor an *Economist*. I get it in the mail, I tell him. I have a pile on my bookshelf because I never read them, but I keep meaning to. Next time, he says. I have no intentions of renewing the subscription that's about to end in a month, but I don't tell him that. We lie there, listening. We gaze at the broken stars, disproportionately scattered across the walls, the bedpost, and his closet. They don't look like much of anything, but we try to look for the Big Dipper. Times passes, the stars don't change any positions, but perhaps they're a little more faint now because the battery is dying and the light from the tiny bulb inside the globe is dying. That is my cue. Goodbye, goodbye.

*Knightian Uncertainty (economics):*

*Risk that is immeasurable; impossible to calculate.*

Excuse me, I don't mean to bother you, but I don't think there any buses left for the night. Perhaps the first one in the morning is the one you are trying to catch? I do think you still have a few hours until then. It's a little chilly out here. I didn't mean to bother you, I'm sorry but I just wanted to make sure you knew.

That's very sweet of you, and I think I already knew that, but don't worry about me. It's just so dark out here; it's hard to think. Which is why I'm out here, you see. Say, I have a question for you. I'm just dying to know, what is that you're holding in your left hand?

Oh, this? It's very silly actually. It's a star projector. A planetarium of sorts, I guess. I made it myself a while ago, but as you can see, it's a little broken. And dusty. It has cracks, and it projects the cracks alongside the blotchy stars.

Nothing these days seems to work the way it's supposed to. Or perhaps everything is finally the way it's supposed to be, and we just don't like it. If you're not in a rush, I have a riddle for you. I'm not sure if it even is a riddle, but it's just a very peculiar question. I can't stop thinking about it. I was asked earlier today, how would you fit an elephant in a refrigerator?

I never was really good at riddles. All I can tell you is, you open the refrigerator and hope things will work out, and ask the elephant to go inside. I don't know if it would fit, but we need to convince ourselves that it would. There isn't much else we can do.

I don't follow what you are saying. I don't want to. But that's because I'm flawed, and it's this flaw that's destroying me bit-by-bit, everyday. Tomorrow is Tuesday. Or no, it's Wednesday already. By Friday I'll be less and less, because I keep wondering things that aren't supposed to be wondered. What's the matter? You look distressed.

Are you okay? Sit down; you look like you're about to fall over. Oh, oh my. Oh my oh my oh my. Hello? Are you awake? Breathe for me. Oh please breathe for me. Perhaps you are just sleeping. Or is this a joke? Are you playing a joke on me to get back at me for the bad riddle I just asked you? I understand if it's upset you, but this is too mean of a joke. May I hold your hand? Suddenly I feel so lonely. Oh no, oh no. Your hands are so cold. It's like you've been dead for a while...are you... oh my, oh no. Were you ever alive? Don't leave me alone. You can't be dead. We were just talking. Let me turn on your planetarium for you, perhaps that will lift your mood. You can't be dead, your hands are clasped so tight around this thing. Or is this what they call rigor, like on those crime shows, where the dead bodies stiffen up after a while? Ah, here's the switch. Oh no. I think the batteries are dead. This is all a very bad joke, you know. I was just talking to you, having a very nice conversation actually, and then you sort of wobble and topple over and now it's as if you never existed. Yet here you are, and I am holding your cold stiff hand. I believed for a split second, for the very first time, and then you pass out on me. I gained a bit of faith today, about everything in general, when I saw that Ninja turtle poster, and then I met you, and it was supposed to be a decent Tuesday for once, and then this happens, and I'm not so sure anymore if this even happened, oh my oh no oh my, wake up please wake up, or else I'm afraid I never will. Oh, please, I am so afraid...

*Aiko Krishna*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*

## Arcana

I forced into the smallest  
corner a fraying box  
of tarot cards:  
touch-memory tells  
me your hands are  
like wands dipped  
in moonshine and  
moist sugars that  
crust against the  
dawning of that  
half-shell sun.

That was the night  
we were hanged men,  
playing fools with  
dangling arms  
when former pounds  
did not weigh more  
than the crystals  
we scraped from each  
other's eyes.

*Travis Lau*

*University of California, Los Angeles, 2012*

## a poem from the black part of me

you know, maybe you smell like fertilizer for a reason  
like dog parks and soccer practice  
and look like a for sale sign  
for...a reason  
you are all mowed lawns and private doctors  
and fences  
and locks and gates.

*you look so scrambled and scattered across this lawn  
look at all the parts of you  
you open and unbinge and split in front of mirrors  
maybe you open and unbinge and split when asked what it means to be black for a reason*

are you uncertain for a reason?  
maybe you are Frederick Douglass foolish  
maybe you are “take classes about black people in college” for a reason  
you are just as white flight as anyone else, just with clipped wings  
you just don’t get what it means.

maybe you don’t get it  
maybe you are not black table black for a reason, just potted plant, don’t know what  
country your ancestors are from;  
vacancy for a reason

are looking for a place to call home?  
maybe you are home  
this restless feeling in your bones is just  
reverberations of your breathe  
maybe...you are only black kid in the class, no Rocawear and fitted cap, don’t wear  
phat farm for a reason

*look at you  
shut the bathroom door and look at yourself falling apart  
pieces and limbs banging off like you are a clothes hanger  
what do you call yourself*

what do you call high-class, carlton banks, elitist pompous ass, suburb  
brewed, affirmative action wasn't intended for you  
is that what you see  
I don't see or hear that  
I don't hear chains and whips and branding in that voice  
I don't hear that here  
I hear nothing in your voice,  
I just see foreclosure sign,  
imprinted on your lips

maybe, you should have gone to Princeton  
like you came to St. Louis for a reason  
like this place is a zoo to you  
maybe this city is too black for you  
didn't you read the signs, don't you know how to learn from a distance  
don't act like you get it,  
you smile at the old black women on delmar,  
like you can hear the rattle in her voice,  
like you can hear that shaking as if it's your own

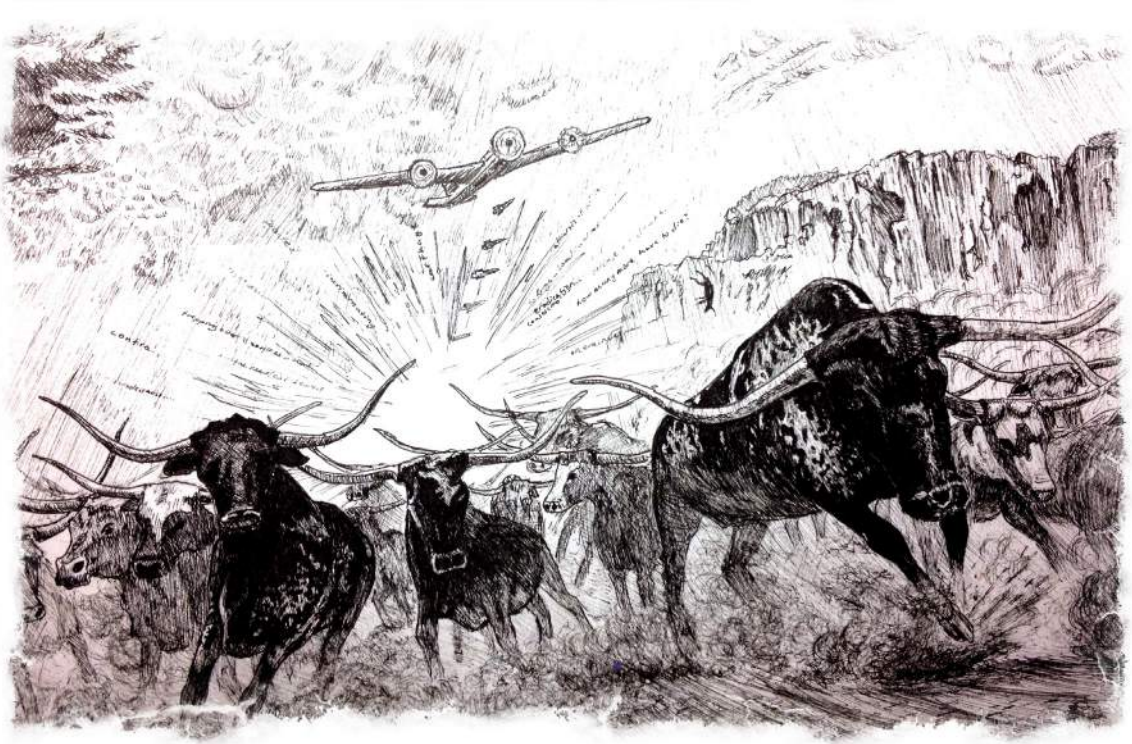
look in the mirror like you will find something there  
wonder why your skin scars  
maybe you scar darker than before for a reason  
you will never heal  
there is a reason you will never heal  
strip naked. tear, and peel back that skin.  
pretend, you ever thought it was your own.



maybe you are packing boxes, moving up and moving out.  
picking up the pieces and  
duct taping yourself shut  
maybe, you are just uprooting  
and uprooting again

maybe, you do this  
for a reason

*Joshua Aiken*  
*Washington University in St. Louis, 2014*



## “Collateral Damage”

pen on paper

*Forester McClatchey  
Hillsdale College, 2016*

## Speck: or, reverse evolution

My lover is experiencing reverse evolution at a rate of one million years per day. When I last saw him, he swam in a glass cup poised on my nightstand. His stripes were bold and glinted in the light of the lamp I set to warm his water. The heater's vibrations scared him, but the nightstand was the only place safe from roaming hands.

We had fought, when he was human. We slashed and spat, cuffed and thrashed. In the technical language of the house we had built, we took it apart, brick by brick. The lexicon-walls came tumbling down, and soon we could not speak. Struck dumb, we sat in silence, the whispers of memories just beyond earshot. We looked into each others' eyes, and then into the nothing beyond them, and we wept. We slept for days, to forget.

One morning, I woke up with a lemur's arms wrapped around my waist, eyes glinting back at me in the predawn light, two searchlights in the uncertainty of morning. The moon streamed in through the window's drapes, lighting his fur a pearly grey. He blinked at me. I blinked at him. I slipped out of bed to make my coffee.

I brought him to my afternoon biology class, his smallish paw in my hand. "Dr. Allen," I whispered across the podium to my professor, "Is this a common phenomenon?" He pushed his spectacles to the tip of his nose and grumbled some phylogenetic lingo that slipped through

my ears and onto the floor. His eyes darkened with disapproval, and so I sat down for lecture. Meanwhile, my lover climbed onto the projector screen, his form a deep shadow cast onto mammoth spindle fibers.

When we walked home from class, we stopped in front of the library. I looked into his opaque eyes, wild and open. "Do you know who I am?" I asked him. Through his monkey's dance, he nodded, a slight dip of the receded chin. He climbed onto me, limbs tight. He stuck his paw in my ear. He bit it. It bled for days.

Each morning, he grew smaller. On Monday, I awoke to a sloth hanging from my doorframe, bulbous and languid. His eyes would not meet mine. On Tuesday, he was a spider monkey, swinging from my bookshelves and eating my term papers. With his tiny claws, he slashed bedsheets to pieces and tore lampshades. The glass from the bulbs shattered to my bedroom floor like memories.

Faster and faster he changed, smaller and smaller he became. I tried to stop it, to slow it with home remedies and kind words. I tried to keep him there, with me, showing him photographs of the jazz concert in Central Park, of the inky sky from the rooftop of the observatory.

I began to practice meditation. I was once told that when you breathe slowly enough, time slows to a halt. But by then, my lover was a lizard with

alien, beady eyes, and to him, the night sky was a  
swath of felt and Central Park was just grass.

So now, he swims on my nightstand in eternal  
circles, as if the next minute, his tail will take him  
someplace new. In the morning, I will slip him  
into the Gulf, where he will swim until his tail  
shrinks to a flagellum and his beady eyes are silk  
hanging from the edge of a membrane, until he  
floats, a captive of surface tension, until maybe,  
one day, a speck, he returns with the tide.

*Sarah Roth*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*

## Grey Wake

Periodically, a fierce but exhausted body would slip out slickly from the ocean into shallow veins of water on a beach more austere rock than sugary sand. Each form was easily longer than my ten-year-old forearm. Bodies of the departed and nearly were strewn like driftwood, as obstacles rather than graves. Though the threads of water were clogged with corpses, the smell was clean, only of wetness.

This was my first migration or the dregs of it. The shade of chinook salmon, at this limb of their journey, was scummy pond. They were speckled with dark freckles with tapir-like snouts. Textured with the hatch-marks of human palms held closely to eyes, they are all utility.

But chinook salmon eyes are haunting. They are ringed with darkness with a pale, light-catching interior, as if gold dust is suspended in their irises. Their eyes spasm.

I watched five die before the light did. They emerged with their tails sputtering, in jabs. The chinook salmon all started out upright, already gasping. Half had already begun shredding, as if their spirits were already unpacking. All were exhausted, with more periods of rest than movement. The first fell the earliest, blocked by the eyeless body of another. The next ones meandered. Thrashing sporadically, all ended up on their flanks, drowning in the amount of air. In some places, the water was no more than an inch high.

I tried approaching twice, but was spooked away by their agitation. As they stilled, it was their apathy that kept me away.

The last chinook salmon that I saw before the onset of night forced me inside had enormous eyes, was enormous overall. I watched him flap past bodies already falling apart. He moved in spurts of strength, thrashing suddenly then pausing, and repeating. The entire struggle, his eyes jerked and jerked. He slowed as he neared the stilled body of the most recent salmon that had resigned. He made it a few salmon-body lengths past before sinking on to his left flank. He gasped without sound. I wanted to help but I didn't want to handle him. He looked oily and heavy and wild, too much of each for me. So I crouched, silently encouraging him with my posture until the night set in. By then, he still hadn't moved beyond the point of collapse.

We never made eye contact the whole time. The angle of his eyes, after he sank, could not reach mine.

*Michelle Turgeon*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*

## Bypass

They sat like beggars in the retirement home,  
On sanitized couches in front of faded wallpaper.  
Puppets too heavy for their strings,  
And red ruby rings.

Dorothy is front and center, endlessly talking  
Inflating temporary universes of half-truths  
Enveloping Veronica, a gaunt sixteen year-old  
Who wipes sweat from Dorothy's August brow.

"You know why no one goes to church anymore?"  
Dorothy exhales, twiddling her eroded thumbs.

Flash to 7-Eleven below a harvest moon strapped  
To Dorothy's back like a warrior's shield  
As she wanders through the Home Depot parking lot.

"It's not because they are any busier," says the woman  
Who calls her Korean caretaker a Jap.  
"There are Masses all day long, and you don't even need to  
Fast anymore," says the woman who looks like she's been  
Fasting her whole life, her cheekbones like cantilever bridges.

Flash to the damp empty streets, where the sodium streetlights  
Scan for infidels below.

"Then why doesn't anyone go to Mass, Mrs. Maas?" says the girl  
Who spends her rising days watching others fall.

Flash to Dorothy Maas looking in her mirror.  
What she sees is not what she knows or feels,  
And her eyes have a hard time convincing her brain

That the ragged woman with bruises on her arms is truly her.  
Dorothy picks up her empty purse that is just for show,  
And walks out into the hall.  
Past Helen in the fetal position, past quadruple-bypass Frank,  
And although she figures the new, tired old body she's in  
Looks like it could use some rest, she marches  
Out the door.

"I was watching my story in the common room, you know,  
The Young and the Restless," Dorothy continues. Veronica smirks  
Silently at the title of the soap opera the residents watch.  
"And Frank jokes to that Jap nurse that if he doesn't take his pills on time  
He's going to meet his maker."

Flash to a communion wafer being placed on a cracked dry tongue.

"And I thought to myself, how my mother gave birth to me in her guest  
Bedroom. How I watched my mother die in her own bedroom. Now we've  
Brought the bathroom inside, and life and death has been put in a new home  
Just like me."

Flash to a curious scattering of ashes in the stuttering  
Fluorescent aisles of the idle 7-Eleven  
Leading to a dying Dorothy and an empty urn.  
"I remember when this place closed at eleven," she says.

"We're born in hospitals and we die in hospitals, Veronica. We're made by doctors and  
We go back at the end to meet our makers.

And God is bypassed like poor Frank's heart."

*Sam Surette*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2014*

## Don't Peek

In the dead of spring, we found fairy tales in the sewer. We took them, wretched and shivering, into our sink, where a few pumps of Palmolive sloughed the grit off their tiny skins. They turned rosy in our hands, blinking and shucking their feet in the lifelines of our palms. They whispered that they wanted to go back. Our hearts broke, but you nodded, your twelve-year-old eyes serious in the dying kitchen light. We put our coats on and left the house. Our mother waved us out from the top of the stairs.

The Georgia air sagged heavily with the promise of water. Swiftly, we tried to take the fairy tales to the lake—you said water was obviously the portal of choice—but the Cohen's dog frightened them before we could reach it. What is that, they whispered to us from the cotton of our pockets. You explained that Jillian was a *canis lupus*. The fairy tales shook their heads, eyes opening in blue worry. They did not want to go where Jillian was going.

We paused then, evaluating our choices. The woods? You asked. I shrugged, putting my hood on.

As we turned back, we passed the Lynch's house, where Mr. Lynch stood, dusting pollen off his cop car. You said hello, and asked after his wife. Mr. Lynch waved absentmindedly to his left, saying she was keeping busy since she had been discharged, and could we believe this weather? I looked to where he had indicated, finding a blonde woman in a flannel shirt frantically chasing a trash can lid around the cul-de-sac. The fairy tales had questions, but I shushed them. You made a joke that wasn't funny and Mr. Lynch roared with laughter.

After getting loose, we took them into the woods through the path by Kevin's house. He had told us about a creek that had formed there the past summer. It wasn't the nicest place to play, but

we managed on those days where skipping rocks seemed like a matter of life and death. Coffee-colored water gurgled over a forgotten wetland of tennis balls and condom wrappers—plastic evidence of the opposite sex's presence. My mouth closed as I pictured what it meant to be a naked boy beside a naked girl in the dark of a forest.

You told me it was time.

I knelt to the earth, scooping the stories from my pocket and placing them on the dead leaves. They scrambled around the perimeter of the sleepy brown water, enchanted by the unromantic. An ogre held a fairy's hand. Noses running and hair askew, princesses and witches leaned against each other's damp shoulders, murmuring words I could not hear.

When we were younger, you and I played hide and seek here once. I had spun around in a circle, eyes sealed, counting back from fifty. You were gone when my eyes opened, and I knew immediately that all was lost. You came back ten minutes later to find me crumpled on the floor of the woods, shivering. Mom thinks we don't play anymore because I'm bad at finding you, but I wonder if you'll ever tell her how good you are at hiding from me.

Rain cracked through the canopy, thundering down on top of our upturned heads in a violent sob. The water struck the creek like gunshots on mirrors. As I lowered my eyes to the ground, I knew the fairy tales had gone before I saw it to be true.

I snuck a glance at you, but your eyes were still turned to the sky, hungrily drinking in the silver light that trickled through the trees. You looked then like the Eeyore-eyed Christ tapestry our mother would hang from the balcony every Easter, when pastel eggs just didn't say enough.

*Shilpa Iyyer*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2016*





Untitled  
sharpie marker

*David Eppig (Zuba)*  
*University of Michigan, 2013*



“What A Bruiser”

watercolor on paper

*Charlotte Greenbaum*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2014*

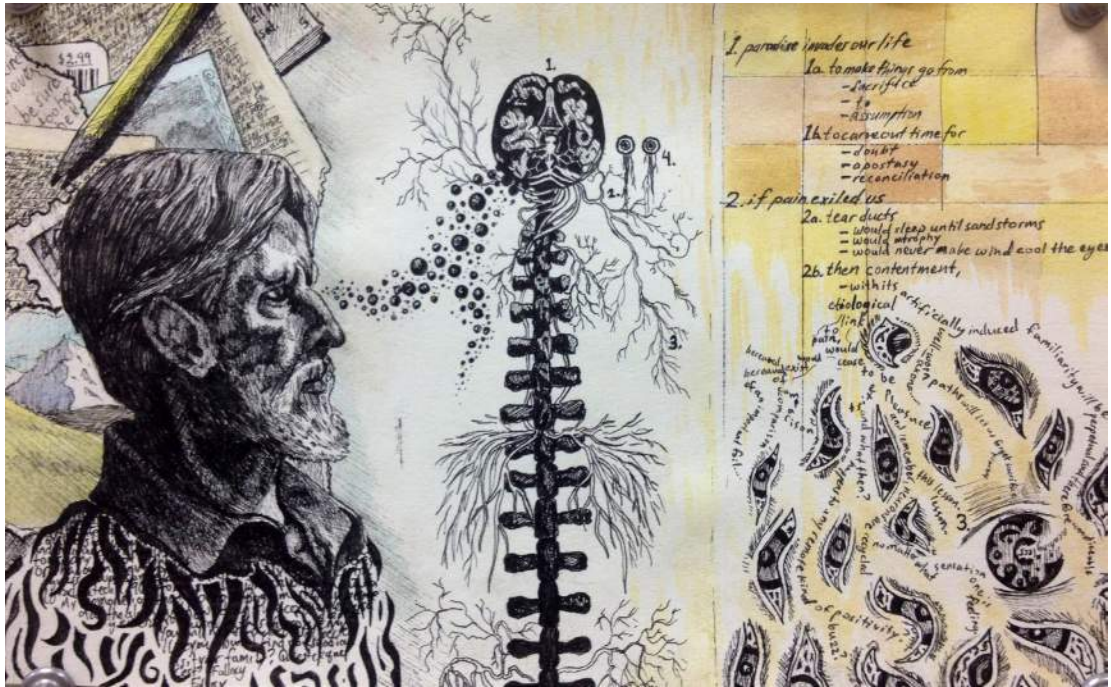
# Untitled

vector drawing

*Judy Su*

*University of Michigan, 2014*





“Apostasy”  
mixed media

Forester McClatchey  
Hillsdale College, 2016

## nightswimming

it all started when we were fishing for words in the sea, casting casting our rods out further, casting casting our grins and glances back at each other, the water reaching our aching ankles, and it felt like guppies were gnawing at us, gnawing as if we were skeletons and bones from a distant land, and it tickled, and we laughed as we put our rods down (we hadn't caught any words, unfortunately), and so we dived into the sea head first, feet second, enveloped by the warmth, and I hadn't known previously that if you spoke underwater you could hear the muffled consonants and vowels through the bubbles and rumbles of kicks and splashes (if you listened hard enough), and so we took a deep breath in and gossiped about the fishes and the weather and the way the moonlight hit our backs and the way we had held our breaths for minutes then hours, (and then we took a deep breath out), and we treaded water for a while, gurgling our thoughts among the sea life, pretending they didn't understand (even though we knew they did, because we could see their sheepish grins and far-away gazes), and when we were tired of treading water we clamored back up on the dock and we relaxed supine with our toes in the sea and our ankles still a little wet, and the wood was dry against our soaked clothes, and our sun-dried socks and wind-swept, mismatched shoes lay on the platform like a heap of bones, our bones, our skeletons, and we looked into the sea and into our eyes so long that we hadn't realized that night had harbored our lonely souls, and we suddenly became cold, and we shivered, your seaweed hair shrouding your head like fingers, fingers fingers wrapped around each others', until we lay down on the heap of clothes and sock and shoe and fell asleep, but not before saying goodnight, and then saying the three words, that pronoun-verb-pronoun that had once been so difficult to find but now rolled off the tongue, like sentences without periods, like phrases without semicolons, like verses without endstops, and we whispered it because we were afraid the night would hear, and because we were afraid that the stars would become so moved that they would cease to shine, (and all we lived for was the light of the stars), and because we were afraid that when we woke up, the sea would swallow us up in one gulp and we would be fished out, with the same rods we used, and we would never have had the chance to say it, and so we closed our eyes and listened, listened listened to the sound of words jumping through the waves like little dolphins escaping for air.

*Jason Tinero*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2016*

## Dada, daddy, dad

He always wore it to rake the leaves  
that I had just finished raking.  
*My hands just know more*, he'd say,  
winking as the garage door shut after him.

You could see best from my room:  
A moving blue sweater, fleece smoked loose  
by decades of overly long dry cycles  
(he could never figure it out)  
and wispy gray hair  
that morning wind would  
lift in argument from his scalp.

We'd take the Honda later  
to buy beer and apple chips  
and he'd demand my hand  
in the crosswalk between  
the parking lot and the grocery store.

I was eighteen  
and able to understand  
the importance of peripheral vision.

But he was scared, and I get it now.  
The way middle-aged men get scared  
during dark imaginings late at night,  
when vapor rub cannot vindicate the day's sins  
and when ambulance light from the nursing home across the street  
spreads across the ceiling like melancholic fireworks—  
it's a fear of disorder  
and diamond-less skies.

He drove home That Night,  
Sesame noodles and a little something else  
on his breath.  
His hands always knew more.

May we all be old enough one day  
to refuse the rhythm of our favorite lies.

Now there is just me, picking Mom up from Ana's school.  
I look through the small window  
on the classroom door and see her,  
her softening thighs curved inside the kiddie chair,  
arcng like sighs as she sits, criss-crossed,  
behind women whose husbands  
do not have the habit of sharing their blood  
with the black grit of potholes.

And as the PTA president asked for volunteers  
for the spring book fair,  
her head fell slowly into her arms,  
now covered in the frayed fleece  
of the one who blinked first.

Love is just sadness wearing a Columbia jacket  
in all temperatures.  
Even at the beach,  
in dizzy Florida light,  
when seagulls go mad with heat  
and fly in triangles around the surf.

*Shilpa Iyyer*  
*Washington University in St. Louis, 2016*



Untitled  
sharpie marker

*Rachael Russell*  
*University of Michigan, 2015*



untitled poem for unmarked grave of unknown slave

i am golliwog ragged,  
to be hung with the same rope that made me  
i've always been play toy  
sores and blisters pop like fireworks  
on skin the dozen colors of midnight  
brittle bones might be toy rattles  
call me play toy  
my lips are bustin' out my face,  
but not for words sake  
but just for blood to trickle down  
raw and red and sunset pink  
looks so right on this blue black skin,  
lightning bugs are spotlights for this show,  
dangle me golliwog ragged from the sky  
minstrel-me rag doll  
i look so right this way

*Joshua Aiken*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2014*

## How to Sunbathe Through Glass

Blue eyes, like the Alabama sky at noon, focused on my nose. They traced up and down its length and I waited, fingers crossed beneath my skirt.

“Hm,” my momma said, and tucked her fist beneath her chin. She leaned across the counter, her torso covered in a flower-print dress. Little pearly buttons lost themselves in the design. “I don’t see any freckles, baby.”

“Right on top.” My voice sounded strained to my own ears. It was all I could do to stop from stomping my foot against the wooden floor. She licked her thumb and grabbed the back of my head with her other hand. The smell of lavender stung my nose and I tried not to sneeze.

“It’s just some dirt. Be happy that it ain’t real,” she said. Her thumb scrubbed the tip of my nose. I wriggled away from her and put up my hands in that surrender move that Tommy Davis taught me yesterday. “Harmony, you need to go read or something. I’ve got work to do.”

She only said my name when she wanted me to stop sassing her. My parents named me Harmony because I brought them together. They didn’t do it to be cutesy or anything; if I hadn’t come around, my momma would’ve split from my daddy faster than the dead ends of Mary MacIntosh’s hair (I would know since I sat behind that girl last year in the 5th grade with nothing to stare at but the back of her head).

I lingered at the counter to watch her slip away from me back to the dishes. She’d been washing

them since noon, nearly five hours ago. Her knuckles burned red from the way she rubbed at the already pristine porcelain. Her body swayed from side to side as she hummed that Jeopardy tune. We watched that show during dinner sometimes when daddy got home early from the auto shop.

I slapped my feet hard against the steps on the way to my bedroom. I could feel her sigh all heavy and shake her head at the racket I made. But at least she had noticed. The door to my room creaked open, revealing a small closet of a space. A rug lounged across the center of the floor. Me and Tommy had shoved my bed up under the window so we could have room to do handstands. I flopped down on the cushions and snuck my hand under the mattress. The springs poked at my skin as I pulled out *Pride and Prejudice*. It was my momma’s copy, all cracked and bent with notes scribbled in the page margins. She’d read it when she was pregnant with me. I placed the book on my pillow and it fell open to the most worn page in the entire novel: Jane’s letter to Elizabeth.

The first sentence, one I’d memorized since I’d originally read it, drew my gaze. “My dearest Lizzy will be incapable of triumphing in her better judgment, at my expense, when I confess myself to have been entirely deceived in Miss Bingley’s regard for me.” A shiver ran up my spine. Deceived, like that time Tommy Davis tricked me and burned my Barbie doll’s hair with a lighter. My momma had underlined the word in heavy pen strokes, nearly breaking through the paper.

I traced the pages, my momma’s handwriting like braille beneath my fingertips. The story was all fine and good but I didn’t reread it over and over just for Jane Austen’s prose. It was my momma’s notes

that drew me in every time. They let me talk to her without being in the same room as her raw knuckles and vacant eyes.

“Would Mr. Darcy ever wear cotton? Or is that too low of class for him?” one of my mother’s cursive scribbles questioned. Another stated, “Jane should wear her hair down in order to catch Bingley’s eye.” While they didn’t make much sense, for some reason I felt like I understood the story better. It was that word though, circled in black ink that made me uncomfortable, like whenever my momma became so lucid that she almost started making sense. It was too normal to be right.

The sun trickled in through the window and threw its rays onto my back. I closed my eyes to try and smell the scent of newly cut grass, of summer they bore with it. I liked to imagine what it would be like to just sit out there, lie on the grass all day, let bugs climb all over my legs. Don’t go out and play like a boy, my momma told me. If you do, no one will want to marry you. We belong in houses, not in fields of grass.

The door busted open and I shoved the book under my pillow. Tommy Davis’s bright red head illuminated the doorway. Moments later, my mom’s voice floated up the stairs.

“Tommy’s here, baby.”

I rolled my eyes as I slid to the floor. “Didn’t your momma ever teach you how to knock?” A smile split across his features. “Naw. Didn’t your momma ever tell you not to let boys in your room?”

“Quit it,” I said.

He shrugged and grabbed at my arm. “C’mon. Mr. Towner put out his sprinkler. Let’s run through it.”

“You know I have to be careful about going outside,” I said. I yanked my hand away from him to wipe it on my dress. My momma didn’t want me to ruin my complexion. Sunbathing is for Beverly Hill housewives and Playboy bunnies, she’d told me once. Once you go outside, you let the rest of the evil in the world take over. But when she said that, she always made me wonder why she wanted to go out into it so bad all the time.

“How do you suppose you’re gonna get freckles?” He crossed his arms in front of his chest.

“I do have one, thank you very much.” I said, showing him the tip of my nose. His eyes creased into small green slits.

“I don’t see nothing.”

“Trust me. It’s there.”

“How’d you get it?”

I pointed at the window. “You never sunbathe through glass?”

“I don’t ever sunbathe. Only girls do that.”

“Then how’d you get all those freckles?” I pointed at the brown dots that covered his skin. Not that I was jealous of him. You’d have to be insane to be jealous of Tommy Davis.

“It’s natural,” he said with a shrug.

I shook my head. If that was true then my face would be spotted like my momma’s. My momma said they wouldn’t look good on me since I had my daddy’s skin and everything. But I wanted them so bad so I could look like her. Keep a little of her with me so I wouldn’t forget what she looked like every time she disappeared.

“Well it’s hot and there’s a sprinkler and I’m gonna go run through it even if you don’t come with me.” Tommy said. He shook dirt from his bare

foot on my rug. I didn't say anything, just crossed my arms in front of my chest.

"Aw, c'mon. Please?" He tugged on my skirt, the one that momma had sewn for me last summer during her "craft" phase. She had lots of those phases. She had a reading phase, a writing phase, a crafting phase, a drinking phase, a smoking phase, an I'm-not-gonna-talk-to-anyone phase. Her worst phase though was the run-away phase. She'd run away for a couple days or even as long as a week. It was the least frequent of them all. And it scared me the most.

"Fine. Stop begging," I said, grabbing my baseball cap from my closet. Tommy smiled.

"Race you there!" He tumbled down the stairs. Following his dust-streaked footprints, I chased him onto the lawn.

The summer heat prickled the hairs on the back of my neck. Tommy's red curls were already plastered against his forehead from the water. Mr. Towney, a grey old man, sat on the porch, a half-smile slung on his lips. A woman I didn't know with blond hair and bright red lipstick stood beside him. Smoke slithered from her mouth as she pulled on a cigarette.

Tommy shook out his hair. Droplets fell like rain onto my arms. "Watcha waiting for?"

I waved him off as I danced toward the sprinkler. The water slammed into me, shockingly cold, and soaked through my clothes.

"Who's that?" Even though the woman had whispered it, she had a loud voice, the booming kind you wouldn't expect from such a skinny little thing.

"Kate and Dan's daughter," Mr. Towney said

back to her.

"Ohh." She nodded as if it all made sense. Her eyes met mine, but before I could register her face, she looked back down at the ground. Don't ever turn out like her, baby, my momma would've said. She was one of those ladies with nothing but her looks to save her in the world. And that wisdom came from one of the most beautiful women I had ever known. My clothes drooped heavily on my skin. The weight of the water pulled my body toward the ground.

"Who's she?" I nodded back at the red-lipstick woman.

"Mr. Towney's daughter," he said, barely glancing at her. I'd seen men give a woman like that more than a once over in the grocery store or the shopping mall. It was good that Tommy wasn't like that yet. "So you gonna play with me or what?"

My stomach kept doing those flips that I got when my daddy drove too fast through the center of town. I didn't like the way she glanced at me when she thought I wasn't looking. It was as if she was afraid to really see me. I mean, people looked at me that way when they saw me with my momma in town, but never when I was by myself.

"I'm gonna go dry off," I said. My feet flattening moist blades as I walked across the grass. Tommy pouted, but he wouldn't stay mad at me for too long.

The front door squeaked open and I let it drop shut, felt the screen tap my back. I undressed down to my underwear and training bra and left my clothes in a puddle in the doorway. Humming wafted down the hall from the kitchen. I could see the top of her blond head bounce and weave in and out of the doorway. The strands reflected sun from the glass

without absorbing it.

"I'm back," I called out to her.

She placed a hand on her hip and her eyes held that glazed look that you got when you had some type of fever.

"Why are you so wet, honey?" Dishwater had pruned her fingers. Water splashed from the faucet onto the sink lip. She placed a damp hand on my head and ran her wrinkled digits through my hair.

"Tommy," I said.

She shook her head. "What have I told you about going outside? Especially in this heat." She frowned and I wondered if her words tasted like soap to her. If saying that to me was just as much a punishment for her.

"I'm sorry," I whispered and she squinted.

"Go wash up. Dinner will be ready soon."

And by dinner she meant take-out from the Chinese place downtown. I paused on the staircases, letting my heart sink as I watched her redo the dishes, each porcelain plate clicking back into place. Over and over and over.

I pulled on a clean t-shirt and leggings. The shirt was my daddy's and even though I'd grown two inches, it still came down just above my knees. When I first took it from his closet, I refused to wash it because it smelled so much like him. I used to bury myself in the stronger-than-downy scent and fall asleep to crickets chirping through the crack in my window. I sniffed deeply but it smelled more like roses than oil and aftershave now.

Above Mr. Towney's house, where the roof split the sky in two, the sun began to sink into its purple-blue bed. Tommy had disappeared, probably called

inside by his momma. Grabbing *Pride and Prejudice* again, I folded my knees beneath me and tried to make out the words. The walls glowed orange like the sun was about to set my room on fire.

"Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are used synonymously. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us." I had looked up vanity before. Mr. Daniel Webster said it meant to be vain, to care about your looks. Like Mr. Towney's daughter.

The rumble of my daddy's truck pulled me off the bed and down the stairs. I flew out the open door into the cool air. The driveway gravel bit into my bare feet and I hopped from one leg to another to keep the pebbles from sticking to my skin for too long. He lifted himself out of the front seat with muscled arms. He was strong and I loved him for it.

"Harmony!" He grabbed me into a hug. He smelled like grease and sweat. I looked exactly like him. Everyone we met said that about us. I had his dark skin and brown eyes and black hair. My mouth even bowed down just like his whenever I looked at momma.

"How's she doing today?" he whispered in my ear and glanced toward the house.

The pavement was cold beneath my feet. "She cleaned the dishes," I said. Her image flashed through my head. Pale skin covered in freckles framed with blond hair. Everything I wasn't.

He nodded with a tight grimace and walked up the steps. Tommy's daddy spent hours with him when he was home playing catch in the front yard. When my daddy was home, he'd follow momma like an abused pup. The stranger she acted, the more he

didn't see me.

I trotted into the house. Through the screen, I watched the hallway light trickle out into the gathering dark. It tiptoed around the shadows that crept toward the entrance and then flickered out.

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I woke up the next morning and she was gone. Usually I found her out on the porch, her nightdress curled beneath her, watching the sun rise. I'd curl myself into the hollow of her neck and she'd sing an off-tune lullaby even though it was nine in the morning. But the house was empty. I could tell by the way my footsteps echoed against the walls.

It was funny that the kitchen and the living room held no remnants of her existence. No stray blond hairs, no shoes spread out in the entryway. It was as if she had never even been here. As if she'd been planning to leave all along. I picked up the phone and held the mouthpiece to my lips, my fingers glancing off the dials for my daddy's work number.

"Hello?"

"Momma left."

He paused. "You see her leave?" I wound the phone cord around my finger like I'd seen momma do whenever she picked up the phone.

"No," I shook my head, the plastic slick against my ear. "She left before I woke up." I tried to keep my tone level, tried to show I could handle this, that I was old enough.

Silence greeted my ears. I wanted him to just pause for a second, to ask me if I was going to be all right.

"I'll find her," he said. I knew he would. But that

didn't stop me from hoping that she'd come back different. Or that maybe she wouldn't come back at all. I dropped the phone cord, let the spirals hang to the floor.

"I love you, Daddy," I whispered, but he had already hung up, the dial tone ringing in my ears.

I pulled on a clean shirt and a pair of jeans, grabbed *Pride and Prejudice*, and walked across the street to Tommy's house. The sun crept over the steeple roofs. The dew, yawning on the grass, licked at my heels.

It only took two knocks for the door to crack open. Mrs. Davis, curlers in her hair, filled the empty space with her figure. "Harmony! Everything all right?" She asked.

"Just wanted to see Tommy," I said. I tugged nervously at my hello-kitty shirt even though I wanted to tell her I just didn't like being alone.

Her eyes flitted to the dark windows across the street. "That's fine, sweetie, let me get him," she said.

I nodded, but before she even opened her mouth, Tommy barreled out of the doorway. "I knew you'd be back to play in the sprinkler!" He cried. My muscles relaxed, my stretched skin released at the sound of his voice.

"Let's go to Mr. Towney's," he said.

Even though I wanted to remind him that it was the morning and still a little chilly out, I nodded and he grabbed my hand. His palm was dry, but I didn't care. When I was really little, my dad would try to hold my hand when we walked through the Walmart downtown, but his fingers always sweated and made me squirm. He scolded me for trying to wriggle away from him, musing that I was too much like my mother. But I liked the way Tommy's skin felt, scratchy and coarse like sand that had baked in the

sun for too long.

Tommy tapped on the door. He was tall for his age, skinny as a bean my momma had once observed, but tall. Still had to grow into himself, she said. Even though the doctors said I was all done growing height wise, I knew I didn't fit into me yet.

The door opened. Mr. Towney squinted at us from beneath raised eyebrows. "What can I do for you two kids?" he asked.

"Could you put out your sprinkler? Me and Harmony wanna play outside," Tommy replied. I rolled my eyes. He always pulled me into these sorts of things. It was never just what he wanted to do. It was what we wanted to do.

Mr. Towney laughed and nodded. "Come on in for a second and I'll try to find it. I think I put it in the closet." He waved us inside. Tommy raced ahead of me to the kitchen. I followed after him into the dark house. An oriental rug coated the floor and I tiptoed around the edge.

The smell of cigarette smoke slammed itself up my nose and for a second I thought I saw my momma sitting at the dining table. But it was just that woman with the red lipstick. Her eyebrows arched upward as she looked me over, the white roll dangling between her fingers.

"Hi Tommy," she said, smiling in his direction. He looked down at the floor, suddenly shy. She turned to me with those same deep red lips and smiled. "You must be Harmony."

I nodded and scuffed my shoes against the tiles. "You can call me Belle," she continued. I had no intention of calling her anything, but I nodded and told her I was pleased to meet her.

"Your momma with you?" she asked between drags from the cigarette.

My chest tightened and I shook my head. She was the type of woman my momma said was a no good leech on society. She was that "w" word. The space closed in around me.

"I'd like to meet her sometime," Belle said. She isn't around much, I told her, because she's so busy, but when she's around, she'd love to meet you.

"What's that you've got there?"

The book slipped from my hand to the floor with a thump. "Nothing. Just an old copy of *Pride and Prejudice*," I mumbled as I scrambled to pick it up.

A smile split across her face. She extended her hand, her nails polished with what looked like liquid gold.

"That's one of my favorite," she said.

I blinked. She read Jane Austen? Women who read, my momma had said, were the ones who deserved to rule the world. They were the ones who stayed at home and took care of family and read books and set tables and had kids and did what they were told. But the other image played in my head, of loose women in short skirts and I couldn't keep them straight. I held the book out to her.

She smoothed the cover with her fingertips. "Elizabeth was always my favorite. Stood up for herself. Now, I'll tell you a secret," she leaned toward me. Beneath the sting of cigarettes was a hint of lilacs. I strained my ears as she cupped her hand around her mouth. "It's for girls only," she continued. I glanced at Tommy who rolled his eyes and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"Take a lesson from Miss Elizabeth Bennet, my dear. Be strong and do not, under any circumstances, care what people think of you."

"Is that what you do?" I said before I could stop myself.

Throwing her head back, she laughed. "Smart girl." She stopped and her eyes grew serious. "Yes," she whispered.

My heart fluttered as she handed the book back to me. It felt heavier in my hand.

"Thanks," I said. She nodded and picked up her cigarette again. Raised it to her lips and the tip glowed red.

"C'mon, Harmony. Let's go play," Tommy said. I studied Belle, committed her face to memory. She was a bit lighter than me, her skin holding a translucent glow that made her almost invisible if it wasn't for that lipstick. I was surprised she didn't have any freckles. Stop thinking about things like that, I thought. With one last glance, I followed him outside.

"Why do you think she's here?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I don't know. I think I heard something about how her momma died."

"Mrs. Towney?"

"Yeah."

I hadn't even known that Mrs. Towney existed. It made sense, Belle being Mr. Towney's daughter and everything. But I'd never seen the woman. "I thought she died a while ago."

Tommy shook his head. "Naw. They were just divorced." He drew the last few syllables out and watched me carefully. My stomach dropped. I looked toward my own house, the way its blank windows gaped at me. I shivered. Even though my mother was less around than not, my parents were always together. As long as I was here, they were always going to be together.

"Do you think that's why she's smoking all the time? Because she's unhappy she don't have a family anymore?" I asked. I could picture that smoke slip

into the sky, film over the clouds in tar. Block out my sunshine.

"What's smoking got to do with it?" Tommy demanded. The sprinkler pattered across us, whipping our calves with water.

"I don't know. Whenever my momma's sad she smokes."

"Sure then," he said. "You gonna play with me or what?"

I nodded, but the rest of the afternoon I'd catch myself looking toward the Towney's doorway, wondering if Belle would come out. I wondered if a woman who wore lipstick but read books, who didn't have a momma anymore but smoked cigarettes could live too.

We stayed there, out in the sun, until Mrs. Davis told us we had to come in. She cooked us lunch and then dinner and then we sat in front of their TV as the day faded to night. Wheel of Fortune clicked across the black box. The blond host smiled at us from the screen and I couldn't help but see Belle in her movements, the way she seemed so plastic and fake next to all the shiny prizes like cars or expensive vacations.

"Looks like you finally got one," he observed.

"Got what?"

"A freckle." His eyes smiled at me, mischievous.

"You better not be kidding," I said.

He shrugged. "I don't lie."

I raced into the bathroom. My reflection stared back at me as I stood on my tiptoes. Sure enough, right beneath my eye, a brown dot bloomed. My heart quickened, my fingers tingled as if they'd fallen asleep. I could almost see the resemblance now. Between me and my momma.

My gaze slipped across the counter, landing on



Mrs. Davis' medicine cabinet. A tube of lipstick sat on the edge of the sink. My fingers slid across the gold cylinder and opened it slowly. The freckle pulsed in the light, thrumming in air.

The pink clay felt sticky as it pulled at the cracks of my mouth. I stared at my reflection. Chills crept across my skin. What would my momma say if she saw me like this? About having half my foot across that forbidden line? Maybe it was the sort of pride Jane Austen wrote about.

The sound of my daddy's truck sent the tube clattering to the bathroom floor. Hurriedly, I picked it up and replaced it. In one breath, I ran into the Davis' front yard. I raced toward my house. I half-expected my momma to hop out of the front door of the car. But the passenger seat was empty.

"Harmony," my dad said. He pulled me close to him.

"Where's momma?" My voice hit a high-pitched crescendo. After all those prayers at night asking to look like her, I'd finally got my wish. But she wasn't here to see it and tell me what I'd done wrong. To stop me from turning into her and into someone else, from turning into anyone. To tell me why she disappeared whenever I just started to look for her.

"I couldn't find her. Anywhere. She'll turn up tomorrow," he said, his voice tired.

Once she went missing for a whole week. He found her out in old Hyde Park asleep on one of the benches. But this was important. I had to show her. Even though she'd tell me I was hurting myself by staying out in the sun, hurting myself by turning into her, I had to show her I was changing.

I wanted to grab him and tell him about my freckle, but he ruined the surprise.

"What in God's name are you wearing?" Not mad. I could always tell when he was mad. My hand went to my mouth. Pink stained my fingertips.

"It's nothing," I mumbled and wiped my lips with the back of my hand.

"Only grownups are allowed to wear makeup," he said.

"I'm trying to grow up," I wanted to tell him, but his eyes gleamed, watery, as he glanced away. Without another word about the lipstick, he hustled me inside and told me it was time for bed even though it was 7:30. The bedroom door closed behind him and I sat in the kitchen, watching the moon reflect off our kitchen table's smooth wood.

"If you ever get a freckle from sunbathing through glass," my mother had told me, "take a lemon and make it disappear."

My hand shook as I opened the drawer in the refrigerator, a half-lemon sitting on the door. It smiled up at me through the white emptiness.

I squeezed it into my hand and the juice trickled across my fingers. Citrus blossomed. My eyes watered and I bit my lip, the lipstick tasting chalky on my tongue. And still, I scrubbed at that freckle until my skin was raw and red. Please come back, I whispered. I'll stop pretending.

*Salena Casha*

*Middlebury College, 2013*



“Der Bar”

watercolor

*Reed Kelly*

*University of Michigan, 2015*

## Sitting In The Church Of A God Who Is Not My Own

I smooth the lace of my skirt and fidget nervously,  
as the groom I knew as a child promises himself  
to a quiet librarian with clear skin,  
and the violinist in the front stretches a note, tinny and sad.

I want to tell him that there is still time—  
time for nervous laughter in the kitchen light,  
raw lips and fingers playing in each other's palms.

I don't know if it's true.  
But it ought to be.

I say nothing—  
as you knew I would not—  
and watch him agree  
to that fragile face  
and half the closet space.

The violinist sneezes mid-crescendo  
and the note lingers in the air,  
severed rudely from its maker.

The god who is not my own  
sighs in boredom from above,  
tired of the gesture  
that he absentmindedly consecrated  
that day he decided to Create.

It is probably true, I realize now,  
that creamy pretense is all there is.

When I come over tonight,  
do what you normally do,

because you are stupidly pretty in repose.

And when you're done,  
touch my back and tell me  
that a note can be suspended forever  
if you love it enough.

*Shilpa Iyyer*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2016*

# A Philosophy of an Uncertain Self

## ABSURDISM

“The Absurd”: the conflict between the human tendency to seek value and meaning in life and the human inability to find any. There are three possible solutions of resolving this dilemma of the individual looking for meaning in a meaningless world:

- 1) Suicide
- 2) Religion/Spirituality
- 3) Acceptance of the Absurd

## BURNING MOUTH SYNDROME

I mention to the doctor, the only one I ever see when I go home, that I have this unceasing urge to chew on my tongue, and that I wake up in the morning and there is blood all over my pillow and a hole in my tongue. There is an itchy sensation all over my mouth that drives me crazy and I can't sleep. The doctor, who is a psychiatrist who supposedly specializes in psychosomatic symptoms in children, suggests that I go get it taken care of because maybe it's some sort of fungal growth. NO, it is not oral thrush. I know this already because I researched this on the internet. But I don't tell him that, and let him get back to writing the prescriptions. I also don't mention that I have no Primary Care physician.

## COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE

I took a multiple-choice exam for which I didn't study at all. Nor have I gone to that class since the first month of school. But I know for a fact I got one question right: Which one of these bases do not make up DNA?

- A. Thymine
- B. Chromine
- C. Adenine
- D. Guanine

I know from my biology class that there is no such thing as chromine. I pause before filling in the bubble on the answer sheet; the other class I am failing, after not showing up to two exams, is biology.

## DEREALIZATION

An alteration in the perception or experience of the external world so that it seems unreal. Other symptoms: feeling as though one's environment is lacking spontaneity, emotional coloring and depth. May be caused by occipital-temporal dysfunction. The more familiar a place normally seems, the more unfamiliar it seems when a person is experiencing derealization.

## EULOGY

What would you want people to say in your eulogy when you die fifty years from now, he asks me. First, I calculate my age in fifty years. Seventy-one. That is young, I think to myself. The average life expectancy of a Japanese female is eighty-six. In India, it's sixty-six. I focus back to his question. This is his way of pushing me to explore my identity, or lack thereof. Well, I tell him, I hope they say I was nice. And thoughtful, funny, and smart. People tend to think I'm smart, which I think is strange. He asks me, why's that. Well, isn't it obvious? Because I don't know anything, ever.

## FREUD

I think about why Freud is more often talked about in relation to literature than in psychology classes. Because he's bogus, that's why! Or is it because literature is a way for us to understand reality, and Freud helps fill in the void of uncertainties that even literature cannot cure for us?

## GUILT

I hear my mother went to the hospital because of severe stomach pains, or was it a heart attack? No EKG or heart echo could find the cause of the pain; there is no test to verify a psychosomatic heart attack. I have yet to call her.

## HELICOPTER GLASS

When I bought my new iPhone, the Apple Store worker explained to me that the new glass wouldn't scratch up like the older models. He took his key and started rubbing the sharp edges against the screen, and it just glided on the hard surface without making a mark. So no matter what you do to it, it won't break, I ask him. He hesitates before telling me that he can't guarantee that, if you do something crazy to it, of course it can break. Anything can break, obviously, he tells me. I say, I know, but am a little disappointed.

## INDIA

The country my father is from; most practice Hinduism. My friend tells me to look into it, if I ever consider finding a faith. I tell him, maybe.

## JAPAN

The country my mother and one of my passports are from; most are nonreligious. My parents let me believe in Santa Clause until I was ten years old.

## KNOWLEDGE ARGUMENT

Mary is a brilliant scientist who, for whatever reason, is contained in a black and white room since birth. This means that she has only seen things in black and white. But she understands what color is, and eventually learns the physics and biology behind color and the mechanisms behind color perception

by the human eye. She could explain every detail of the process in which we identify a banana, perceive its color through our retina, and register it in our brain through the neurological processes that enable us to recognize the color as "yellow." She knows everything there is to know about color vision, more than anyone else in the world. In fact, she knows everything about every existence (and non-existence) in the world, with the help of a black and white TV. She has seen everything there is to be seen, just without color. She knows every physical fact there is to know, so presumably it shouldn't be possible for her to acquire new knowledge. There is no uncertainty.

## L'HÔPITAL'S RULE

The only thing I could understand in calculus. There wasn't even much to understand, really. Just a simple rule. Those were the best: no thinking, just doing. All you had to do was take the derivative of both the numerator and denominator. By doing so, it helps you evaluate limits by converting an indeterminate form to a determinate form.

## MURAKAMI, HARUKI

"The conclusion of things is the good. The good is, in other words, the conclusion at which all things arrive. Let's leave doubt for tomorrow..." (from the novel, IQ84)

## NOCTURNAL

In Murakami's newest novel, the alternate world of IQ84 has two moons. When the main characters recognize the existence of two moons, they realize that they are not in the year 1984, but an alternate universe. They call this the year IQ84.

## ORANGE

My mother's palms turn orange when she eats too

many carrots and oranges. I envied this as a child.

## PRINCIPLES OF BIOLOGY, II

I spontaneously decided the other day that I no longer wanted to go to medical school. I still would like to be a doctor one day, though.

## QUALIA

I seem to have misplaced mine, would you care to share yours?

## RATIONAL BEINGS

Sometimes, I am convinced that I am the only sane being in existence.

## SEPARATION ANXIETY

Every time my mother tried to leave me with a babysitter, I threw up. The sitter soon after would go home happily with money earned from less than ten minutes of service.

## TRAUMA

Narration, or the re-telling of one's trauma, is a necessary process for one to understand the traumatic event. By re-telling the story, one is essentially re-experiencing it, which is necessary for them to come in terms with it. One reshapes the experience in a way that is accessible both to oneself and others.

## UME-SHU

Japanese Plum Wine is sweet and a little sour, and was my first real alcoholic drink. I generally do not like the taste of alcohol, but I chug it down, assuring myself that I've got a long ways before catching up to my mother.

## VENLAFAXINE

When I miss a dose of my medication, I usually feel brain zaps twenty-four hours later. I lie in bed, letting my brain drive me in and out of my dreams and disturbing my sense of reality. Eventually it makes up its mind and leaves me stranded on one side. Which one, I never know.

## WASSERMAN, NANCY

Ms. Wasserman was a fat gym teacher, who taught me how to hold my first field hockey stick in third grade. She yelled in my ear, asking me if I spoke any English, because I was holding the stick wrong. The last time I missed a dose of my medication, I dreamt of being at her funeral, laughing.

## X-ACTO KNIFE

Every time I slide the plastic cap off of my pink X-Acto knife, I remember the time I took an architecture class the winter of my senior year in high school. My friend had let out a childish squeal of terror as he dropped his X-Acto knife and held his finger that dripped liquid red onto the balsa wood. The cut was deep but healed white; mine are shallow but heal dark.

## YALE

After a couple stitches, a tetanus shot, and seven months, the scar disappeared, as did the boy to further nurture his intellect whilst wandering in New Haven.

## ZYGOTE

We all have a beginning, but only the lucky ones have ends.

*Aiko Krishna*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2013*



“Culture Shock”

*Man Kuan Lei*  
*University of Michigan*

## An Alligator and a Man

The licorice man turns his laugh lines away from the cigar shelves, strung in a grid around him. He speaks,  
We are the stuff that mansions are built on.  
His alligator agrees cheerfully, wrapping herself behind the plush.  
She has marbled glass for eyes and her scales fit snug as the clicks in a clock.  
Like her owner, she wears skin like rice paper to be sucked off a hard candy.  
The room fills with smoke until the air clings to the walls.

He licks his lips and speaks slowly to the alligator, his tongue is licorice.  
Should we go through these again, I suppose.  
She arches her back in pleasure with a pop.  
He arches the cover back with a purr.  
The notebook is creased and crinkles, smelling of smoke.

The alligator has each word stitched into her scales—  
the lines of stories they guzzle down together, now and again.  
Authors left them unfinished but the licorice man collected.  
He begins both a cigar and the book in a practiced voice.  
The Machine is Cold. Crackle. He Was Incredibly Beautiful After All.

The alligator's breathing thickens and becomes warm.  
He reads, A Mason Jar, A Crowd of People, There's Only One Girl In The World For Me.  
The licorice man stands and stiffly opens the door to the room.  
Teal daylight tumbles in and solidifies the smoke. It is all desert around him.  
He turns his laugh lines forward and shouts the lines out as the clicks in a clock.

*Kate Cygan*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2014*



## [Blueprint]

—10

And this is where you leave.  
Mind the step to the porch,  
don't lock yourself out. This  
is where we take the trash out.  
If there's a fire in the front  
this is where we take the trash  
out.

7

I remember the initial smell  
of the place. The boil on  
our realtor's neck. This was my  
home. Once I snapped a pole  
on the guard rail sliding down it  
like how I imagined someone  
would snap a pole on a guard rail.

6

It's never having enough picture  
frames. It's forgetting where  
the light switch is hiding. It's  
not being allowed in the basement.

2

Of course, poetry is a lot like  
a house. The word "stanza" even  
means "room" so it can be  
helpful to think of a poem in  
terms of architecture: filling  
one stanza at a time, moving  
swiftly through the home.

one

This is where you come in.  
Knock here three times for  
home. Knock here four  
times. Knock here five  
times. Knock here six

times to forget your face.

0)

who we am who are I

5

The same nightmare for days.  
The same dream for days.  
Trundling  
down the  
hall, trying  
to not trip  
on all the  
dirty laundry.

3

When the front door  
is the back door,  
your house is full  
of permanent guests.  
This is our guest  
room. Breakfast at  
7:00. Dinner at 7:00.

iv

Who does a family call  
when they aren't sure  
if it's the roof that's leaking  
or the sewer drain?  
Here we are, navels together,  
here we are, roach motels.

8

It's down-sizing the rooms so the  
house is easier to remember tomorrow.

8

It's still fucking up.

9

If this poem were a house  
this would be the kitchen.

And the dining room. And  
the only place we never  
broke bread. It's catching  
your shins on the ceiling fan.  
It's parking the car in the pool.

II

It doesn't matter where the fire is.

*Taylor Geiger*

*Washington University in St. Louis, 2015*

This publication was designed by Grayson Lang  
set into type digitally at Washington University in St. Louis  
and printed and bound at Midtown Printing, St. Louis, Missouri.

The type face is Centaur MT,  
designed by Bruce Rogers.

Spires accepts submissions from undergraduate students around the world. Works are evaluated in small groups and then recommended for further review or for elimination from the review process. Spires is published bi-annually and distributed free of charge to the Washington University community at the end of each semester. All undergraduate art, poetry, prose, drama, song lyric, and digital media submissions are welcome for evaluation.

Special thanks to: Washington University Student Union; Mike Rogger of Midtown Printing; and the authors, poets, and artists who submitted.

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