
PARNASSUS

2021

THE LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE OF NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

IN SOME WAYS, THIS YEAR FELT LIKE A CARBON COPY...

Oh hey. So, 2020. Hm. Well, we won't talk about it if you won't.

Actually, let's talk. Last year's issue seemed to suggest that we had been hit with the worst by that innocent springtime, when in fact, we clearly had only just begun our grungy slip n' slide through a new world few of us had experienced outside of the wildest dystopian imaginations. And still: through it all, we persevered and came out, with hopefully some bright edges peeking through as we finish yet another full year at NECC.

This was perhaps the smallest crop of entries we have ever received, but that did not dilute the talent and abilities of those who did submit - as always, we highly appreciate all of those who have put their works out, but even more so when we know how taxing everything has been, let alone your creative pursuits.

This will be the first issue of Parnassus to be distributed digitally only, for a number of reasons, both practical and economical. While we mourn the loss of actual ink-on-paper for this issue, we hope the brilliance of the works to follow does not shine any less gloriously than it would otherwise in a more physical form. We promise a return to print in 2022, and we look forward to seeing you then.

PARNASSUS 2021

THE LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE
OF NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

RECENT AWARDS

ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS

PACEMAKER AWARD WINNER: 2020, 2019, 2018, 2011
PACEMAKER AWARD FINALIST: 2017, 2013, 2009

COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

GOLD CROWN: 2011
SILVER CROWN: 2020, 2010

COMMUNITY COLLEGE HUMANITIES ASSOCIATION

FIRST PLACE, EASTERN DIVISION: 2009-2013
SECOND PLACE, EASTERN DIVISION: 2016, 2008

AMERICAN SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION

FIRST PLACE WITH MERIT: 2009, 2008
FIRST PLACE: 2016, 2010-2013
BEST GALLERY: 2008
BEST PAGE DESIGN: 2010

NCMPR PARAGON AWARDS

GOLD: 2017, 2011
SILVER: 2009

100 ELLIOTT STREET HAVERHILL, MA
WWW.PARNASSUSLITMAG.COM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GUEST AUTHOR

A PERFECT LOVER ALEX ARO 4

POETRY

IF LOVE BE BLIND, LOVE CANNOT HIT THE MARK DIANA BURKE 22

HIBERNATION ANGELA MARTEL 23

AUTHENTIC INTRODUCTION CHELSEA DAIGLE 24

ORDINARY THINGS MATTHEW JORDAN 25

OH, I'LL GIVE YOU A RESUME SAM RODIN 26

THE SURFACE CHELSEA DAIGLE 30

THE STORM DIANA BURKE 31

THE FAIRIES IN MY GARDEN KAILY BURKE 32

SWOLLEN ROUNDEL DIANA BURKE 33

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY DIANA BURKE 34

PROSE

THE MOST IMPORTANT FLY IN THE WORLD ELENA KARAVANNYKH 38

THE HOUSE OF URSONATE KAILY BURKE 40

THE FINAL HOUR MARIAM SALVIDAR 46

GALLERY

ARTWORK AMANDA NICKERSON 50

PHOTOGRAPHY ANGELA MARTEL 51

ARTWORK ANGELA MARTEL 52

PHOTOGRAPHY ANGELA MARTEL 53

PHOTOGRAPHY ANNE HOPKINS 54

PHOTOGRAPHY ANNE HOPKINS 55

PHOTOGRAPHY ANNE HOPKINS 56

ARTWORK STEVEN DILEO 57

ARTWORK STEVEN DILEO 58

ARTWORK STEVEN DILEO 59

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS 60

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE 63

STAFF 63

GUEST AUTHOR - PARNASSUS ALUMNI

ALEX



ARO

Alex Aro is a writer from Salisbury, MA. His work has been featured in *Bourbon Penn*, and *Swamp Biscuits & Tea*, among others.

He published his short story collection *A Lovely Appetite* last year through Black Pot Press and is working on a second collection.

He lives with his girlfriend Kelly, their son Levi, and two dogs, Peewee & Cody. Alex is a NECC alumnus and had multiple works published in the 2008, 2009, and 2010 issues of *Parnassus*.

A PERFECT LOVER

Monday morning streams through my window and my lover, the one with the beautiful lips, arrives on time. He knocks on the door five times so I know it's him. It is part of our code, one of the rules he must follow. I open the door, and he smiles and says nothing, as he should. What I need from him doesn't require speaking. His sole function is to kiss me, to make love to my lips. He strolls in and sits on the couch. I close the door and then join him. He leans in and we kiss, slow at first. This is how I like Mondays to begin.

Our kiss intensifies; however, he's not allowed to use his tongue: rule number two. "Just kiss me," I'd told him the first time. "Kiss me tenderly the way a woman is supposed to be kissed. Make me feel like the beautiful creature I am." There is no time limit; we kiss until I am satisfied, and then we stop. Once, but it was only once, we kissed from morning until night, to the point of barely breathing. This morning however, our session ends quickly because I need to get to work. My lover and I, we don't even say goodbye. I simply press my hands into his chest and our lips part. He nods and off he goes, to his morning college class or whatever it is that occupies his time away from me.

I shower and then put on the sassy summer dress I bought yesterday from *Indigo*, the new boutique that opened up on the east side. Then it's me and the mirror and my makeup brush; today's colors are fierce. Outside my apartment, as I wait for the bus, my eyes are open. Potential lovers could be anywhere. I watch men in suits, bankers, or accountants maybe, as they chat over coffee. From my distance I try to determine the softness of their skin. I examine how they hold the cup in their hands. I'm looking for distinct details, the wrinkles on their knuckles, the circumference of their wrists, rings on their fingers. Every little bit is important, the sums adding to the greater whole.

Another group of men walk past me. I listen closely to their words and how they carry their voices, the tones they use. Their voices are unmoving and monotone, as boring as the business figures and recent stock plummets they speak of. I breathe in deep to detect any hints of cologne, to assemble the structures of these men that I have built in my head. I smell nothing and decide these men are not in the running. But there are men all over this city, men with parts and pieces that I love, lips I long to kiss, arms to entangle myself in, warmth to cover my body. Still, I long for the lover that has it all, the one I can deem, as cliché as it is, perfect.

I work at the library, currently vying for the open position of head librarian. Barbara and Denise, the other librarians, dismiss me. There is about a thirty-year age difference between us. They hate me because I represent a world that is quickly leaving them behind. I was hired not only as a book cataloger, but also to train the other librarians on all the new computers and other various technologies the library recently implemented. Sometimes it takes all my strength, after the twentieth roll of one their eyes as I'm explaining something as simple as a Google search, not to snatch up the closest pen and shove it full force into their pupils.

They gawk at my makeup and flashy dresses, as though it's impossible to be both stylish and professional or that it's a sin to not be wearing mock turtlenecks and casual denim. They cannot possibly fathom what I have gone through to get where I am today. I bet they've never had to struggle their entire lives, never wrestled on the brink of life and death, never encountered or experienced anything that shook their worlds and shattered everything to pieces. They live very average lives, go home to average husbands, and that is not an opinion. I hear them drone on about these things day after day. They complain about routines and suffer from a vast emptiness that has replaced their now grown children and the rooms in which they once played and laughed. Their husbands, now with more time on their hands, are more interested in hobbies and sports than their wives. Barbara and Denise both groan about having to plan sex like it's a doctor's appointment. Without realizing, everyday their fingers touch pages upon pages of desires they will never fulfill and adventures they will never have. Smirk all they want; I am not like them.

Today there is a class of second graders visiting, eager to open their first library cards. Denise guides the children around as they bounce and giggle through the book racks. She smiles and jokes along with them. It's funny to see her flashing her teeth and laughing like that. Just yesterday I overheard her whispering to Barbara, "If *she* gets head librarian, I'm fucking done." I watch Denise lead the parade from behind the front desk and I imagine, as all the curious young eyes follow her words and fingers, what it would be like to have children of my own. What might it be like to have a family alongside my perfect lover? I can see myself baking in the kitchen, teasing the nostrils of my beloved cherubs, a boy and a girl, as they frolic about the house. My unnamed lover, his face blurry in my mind, works a job that doesn't feel like a job and comes home to dinner and jovial children. Upon entering, he gathers the children up in his arms and lifts them to the moon. At night, with the children tucked in bed, we make love as husband and wife, sometimes tenderly and sometimes rough. Love radiates throughout our home. It is how we wake in the morning and...

The excited screams of the second graders ready to check out books rouses me from my dream.

After work I stop by the market to pick up a few things for dinner before my late afternoon lover arrives. He is the one with the soothing voice, the cool and collected writer. I found him at the local bookstore while he was doing a reading. At the time I was lost in the poetry aisle, searching for a particular collection that had eluded me for years, when his voice traveled across the store and fell, most unexpectedly, upon my ears. His voice was deep and manly without being brooding, entwined with a pinch of delicacy, of sensual confidence. I peered over the rack to locate the man that owned the voice.

He was not a particularly attractive man; he stood awkwardly with his shoulders hunched up and his entire upper body was suffocated in an overly large sweater. He wore thick rimmed glasses and hid his finely trimmed beard behind his book, a tall and lanky academic hipster. But when I closed my eyes and listened to his voice, I could picture any man I wanted.

When he finished everyone clapped and then stood to get their books signed. I waited around until the line ceased, and I was the last one left. He started cleaning up the remaining copies of his book from the table, placing them into a large messenger bag. "Excuse me?" I said, catching him off guard and nearly causing him to drop a handful of books. I wore a fiery dress that day; I remember it exactly, because I woke with the feeling of needing to burn something. He didn't seem fazed, which slightly offended me, and instead reached out a hand and thanked me for coming and asked if I was interested in having him sign a book. I told him what I really wanted.

At first he looked at me strangely, unsure what to make of my request. "...I have a wife," he said finally.

"I'm not asking you to betray her. I don't want you to touch me or kiss me. I just want your voice."

He thought again and stroked a hand through his beard. "I am currently working on a new novella," he said. "I suppose I could read it to you. It helps to hear it spoken aloud."

"You can read whatever you like," I told him. I grabbed one of his books that still lay on the ground, scribbled my number on the inside cover and handed it to him.

My phone rang later that night and when I answered I heard his voice. "I'm going to read you an excerpt from *Transparent*, my novella in the works," he greeted. The plot had something to do with a boy and a ghost and how the boy felt dead and the ghost felt alive but I paid little attention to the details and instead honed in solely on his voice. I propped myself up on the kitchen counter, balanced the phone against my shoulder, and started touching myself. My fingers moved in rhythm with his words, sexual enlightenment with a boy and a ghost.

I set the groceries on the table and hear a knock at the door. I know it is my lover because it is five on the dot; his timing is as immaculate as his voice. He walks in with a black veil over his face, just as I've instructed. I don't want or need to see his face. I don't want to be distracted by any part of his body. He is blackness, nothingness; he exists only in forms of words and tones. He sits on the couch while I put away the groceries. He says he just completed a new story for inclusion in *Somewhere Out There Is Me, Somewhere In Here Is You*, his upcoming chapbook.

"The story is called 'All You Can Eat'," he says. I listen to him read as I put away vegetables in the crisper drawer and place bread on the counter. The story, from what I can make of it, is about a married couple that eats one another's emotions. It is during one particular scene, before the characters begin feasting on feelings, when they are still so in love and he describes the ritual of their lovemaking in such a way ("*...their skin was like the pages of burning books, every kiss, violent and voracious, like desperate attempts to memorize the words before the flames licked them away...*") that I can no longer help it. I slide down my panties and start stroking myself, allowing his words to penetrate me.

He finishes his story and looks in my direction as I walk into the living room. "So," he says. "What do you think?" I'm red in the face, trying to wipe the sweat off my forehead and even though I know these kinds of details are blurred behind the veil, I still act as if he is watching my every move, studying and crafting me like the words in his stories. I'm an incomplete draft wanting to be finished, to be polished and on display.

"It was phenomenal," I tell him. "When is your book coming out?"

"Next month. I'll be doing a reading at the *Tip Of The Iceberg*; you should come."

"I might," I respond and with that he rises and heads out the door.

During his last reading I scanned the crowd intensely, trying to determine if any of them were his wife. It excites me to think that she was there, unaware of my arrangement with her husband. I wondered, if when he read her his stories, her skin danced off her bones like mine did.

As I prepare dinner that night, roasted chicken and garlic potatoes, I think about his story and imagine the meal as the negative and unwanted emotions of all my lovers. Their anger and fears, their bitterness and melancholy, their darkness and secrets, their haunting regrets. When everything is cooked and ready to eat, I savor it slowly, taking in a piece of my lovers and relieving them of their burdens, freeing them.

After my parents divorced, around age nine, I spent my weekend afternoons with my father on a park bench. He had moved in with some friends and my mother didn't want me hanging around with them. She said all my father's friends were bad influences. And while I knew what was going on in terms of the divorce, I was still too young to understand the full repercussions of it all, or more simply, why everything was happening in the first place.

My mother started smoking again after having quit for close to eight years. She had stopped before I was old enough to remember her with a cigarette and then the whole divorce happened and there she was, fumbling through her purse for a lighter and muttering to herself as she hid her face behind clouds of smoke. She would drop me off at the edge of the park as she spat smoke out the open window, overflowing with disgust. "I'll bet this is where he met them," I remember her saying once before I hopped out of the car to meet my father. "I'll bet this is where all those sluts are, taking their little jogs with their tight yoga pants."

For a long time I never questioned anything and instead accepted the fact that at home I now only had my mother and at the park, my father. Sometimes during those afternoon visits my father would sit me on his lap and we would watch people: mothers and fathers pushing their children on the swings or pulling them in wagons, people walking their dogs and likewise dogs walking their people. It seemed strange to me to watch the rest of the world move on as it always had while mine was falling apart. Oftentimes my father had no words and we would sit in silence and he would hold my hand as though I were being tugged by tides. Amidst all the chaos and change his grip felt safe, loving.

When he did speak he would say things that, as a nine year old, I didn't understand at all. He would lick his lips in preparation and say something like, "Listen Bug, don't ever trust a man that won't give you one hundred percent. Don't sell your happiness short like that." And I would kick at the dirt and try to sort out his words in my head. What did he mean; *one hundred percent of what?* Eventually I realized that what he truly meant was to stay away from men like him.

The disgust my mother harbored towards my father soon dissipated and I saw that all her anger was nothing more than a blanket spread out to cover a broken heart. She was a woman whose world, much like mine, had been pulled out from under her, unexpectedly and without warning. There was no manual for what to do or how to feel afterwards, no one to guide us, my mother especially, onto a path that felt normal, back to how things were *before* our lives were so drastically interrupted. It took years for my mother to get out there and start dating again.

A couple nights a week, when I was in high school, she started inviting various men over for dinner. Most of them were very nice and polite, making sure to put extra effort into sparking conversation with me while endlessly complimenting my mother and her cooking. Some of them I really liked, and I could tell by the way their eyes followed my mother around the room, that they would make her happy if only she would let them. But behind the string of smiles and warm cheeks on my mother's face, I could feel the empty spaces inside of her that none of these men were going to fill. It wasn't even necessarily the man my father was that she longed for, but some abstract idea of him. My mother was holding onto memories about my father, facets of him in her head that, if not fabricated entirely, were long gone.

As I got older my mother continued to talk to me as if I didn't notice these details, as if I were still nine years old and couldn't see the cracks in her soul or the gaping chasm of her heart, an incalculable abyss. When my father did come up in conversation, she spoke well of him, doing her best to keep a sunny image in my mind. But I saw through it all; I knew she was speaking from notions of the past that kept her from forward motion. By the age of fifteen, I came to know my father, the real man my father was, and he was nothing of the caliber in which my mother spoke.

On Tuesday the new furniture I ordered from *Le Canapé* arrives, and I call my muscular lover. He arrives with a box of donuts and I laugh to see him carrying something so light. The men from the furniture store begin to drag my new couch up the stairs but I stop them. I don't need their help, and I had mentioned that when I made the order. My muscular lover can handle it alone. The workers look at each other and then shrug and hand me the work order to sign.

"Let's get this up there so we can sit and enjoy it," my muscular lover says. He refuses to let me help when I grab the other end of the couch. He cracks a joke about me laying down on it and carrying me up to my apartment like a queen. The muscular one, he has a sense of humor, but still, it is not enough. Even with his ripped physique, his dashing smile, and quick jokes, he still lacks many of the qualities I'm looking for in my one and only lover. Call me picky; I don't mind.

He gets the couch in the door of my apartment, sets it on the floor, and then heads down for the new end tables. The old couch is against the wall on the opposite side of the room; my muscular lover will take care of it when he leaves. He strolls back in with the end tables, one in each hand, muscles bulging and tight. He sets them on either side of the couch, and then we sit. We let our bodies sink into the couch to break in its newness, to test the limits of its comfort. For a few minutes we say nothing; we don't even look at one another.

It happens during all of our encounters, when his muscles are no longer necessary, that he begins to lose me. When he is using his arms and showing off his manly prowess he is loose

and free, as confident as he is powerful. It's afterwards, during quiet moments when we should be having a conversation, that he becomes closed off. I can see it now, the struggle on his face to find something to say. I want to tell him to relax. I know he is a man; he has certainly proved it time and time again. I'm fully aware of his strength and the generosity of his heart. And though I don't want to offend him or make him retreat further, I know I can't ask him to stop being a man, it is coded in his nature. Finally he says, "So you want me to get rid of that old couch?"

He starts to lift the couch when there is a knock at the door. I'm not expecting any other lovers, or anyone at all for that matter. Everything is scheduled so well that there has never been an overlap. None of my lovers have ever met; none of them are even aware that there are other lovers. Mr. Muscle looks over with curiosity as I open the door.

My heart nearly stops when I realize who it is. Standing in my doorway is Owen, my former lover and the man responsible for my year of darkness. He doesn't even look like the person I once knew but instead a stripped down, worn out copy. My blood freezes and my feet become cement; I'm unable to move any part of my body. Why is he here? What could he possibly want after all that he had taken from me? He has no fucking idea what I went through, how much time and work it took to get where I am, to repair all the damage he caused. I attempt to back up and as much as I try to fight it, I can't stop the tears from streaming down my cheeks.

My muscular lover can see my distress and drops the couch to once again fulfill his manly destiny. He steps between me and Owen. "Who the fuck is this guy?" he asks, looking at me. He then turns to face Owen. "Can I help you, asshole?"

"I... uh, who are you?" Owen asks.

"It doesn't matter who the fuck I am," my lover boasts. "I'd suggest you remove yourself from the doorway and this whole building before I throw you out a window."

Owen's body shrinks and he slowly turns and makes his way down the hall. My muscular lover slams the door and then turns and hugs me. For that moment everything feels right being in his arms and, like any good man, he lets me cry onto his chest. Finally, I'm able to calm down and I remove myself from his arms and sit.

"Are you okay?" he asks. "Do you want me to stay?"

"I'll be fine," I say, sniffing. "Really, thank you. I'll be okay."

"You call me if that asshole comes around again, okay? I'd love to introduce him to my fists."

"Thank you, I will. Next Tuesday?"

"Sure thing," he says. He hugs me again and then opens the door and drags out the old couch.

Owen couldn't accept the fact that we were over, that after months and months of being on and off again, I was finally over it. It was so many things, his aimless dreams, his constant need for attention and affirmation, but most of all his possessiveness that I couldn't stand any longer. He had all these ideas of how things should be and how I should act, and he worked

tirelessly and forcefully to get me to be those things. It was exhausting being with him and constantly evaluating myself when he wasn't happy, always asking what more can I do?

We would go on like that for months and then he would leave, only he wouldn't actually leave. He would continue to call me and see what I was up to, saying that he "just wanted to talk" though I knew he only truly intended to see if there was a new man in my life. And I, for whatever reason, would be so sad and alone that I allowed these phone calls, and I would answer his questions, reasoning that this probing was his weird way of showing love. Other times he would show up unannounced at my apartment and we would talk casually, but it always led to sex in some form or another. Afterwards, as he was pulling up his pants, he would look at me and say, "This doesn't mean we are back together."

But weeks later we would be back together. And this whole routine of month-long romances with lonely, interrupted breaks in between became our thing. It became normal, even if deep down I knew it was anything but. After a while even the sadness disappeared when we were broken up because I knew he would be back soon enough. He always came back.

There came a point however when I couldn't break myself down any longer. I was never going to make him happy. I don't think anyone was ever going to make him happy. I certainly wasn't happy. I had replaced happiness with forced comfort, falsely warming my cheeks with the notion that Owen was always there. When I told him there wasn't going to be a next time, that there was no more "us", he went berserk. "You bitch," he breathed into the phone. "After all we've been through and you're going to pull this shit on me? Leave like that?"

"Owen," I'd said. "Did you forget how many times you've left me?"

It felt so good to tell him that, to finally take control of the situation and be the one with the power. The bricks fell away from my chest after I hung up the phone and I breathed for what felt like the first time, sitting on the couch, comfortably alone. My moment of relief and clarity did not last long.

First it was another one of his phone calls, this time saying he was coming by to pick up a few of his things still in my apartment. That was fine; I was not going to sway. There would be no conversations in the living room, no sexual ending to the afternoon. Owen soon knocked on the door, and the second I undid the lock he burst through, sending me straight to the floor. He slammed the door shut, then stormed over and picked me up by the neck. He threw me up onto the kitchen counter and spun my body around. I knew what was happening, what was about to happen. And I remember, as I heard his belt unbuckling and his pants drop to the floor, feeling my body fail me.

I remember him ripping my pants and underwear down to my ankles and entering me. I remember crying but trying not to, as Owen thrust into me with all the force his hips could muster. I remember him slapping my ass with the same hand that had gripped my throat and feeling pain instead of pleasure. I knew Owen's body well and normally a nice, forceful slap on the ass would really get me going, but in that moment everything was reversed. His body was this shadowy, unseen, and unwelcome thing. With his other hand he kept my face pressed down

into the counter as he fucked me from behind. I couldn't see him and I'm sure he wanted it that way. I'm sure he didn't want to look me in the face as I cried and pleaded with him to stop. Owen was taking all I had left. With each continued thrust, each hot and breathy grunt, each raw ass slap and rough neck grab, I was becoming less and less until I felt like nothing. Owen was fucking an empty shell against its will. I remember Owen climaxing, his body tensing up as his fingers dug deeper into my neck. I remember him pausing a moment to take in the ecstasy of his orgasm and then, after some slow, deep breaths, pumping a few more violent thrusts into me. "Take that, bitch," he whispered in my ear before dismounting and getting dressed.

I didn't call the police. I didn't tell my parents or any friends. I did nothing for days. I didn't eat, I barely slept, and I never left the couch. My job called looking for me and I let the machine pick it up. What are you supposed to do when someone strips you bare like that? How do you begin to put the pieces back together when everything you were belongs to someone else? Owen, unable to deal with being powerless, had maliciously laid claim to my body and all that dwells beneath my skin.

My parents called, my friends called and I ignored the calls as much as possible, speaking only enough to keep away the suspicion that something was wrong. Doing my best to keep up appearance was all I had the energy for. I got a letter in the mail notifying me that I'd been fired from my job at the bookstore. That was what finally pushed me to get up and out the door. If I didn't figure something out relatively soon, I would have no way to pay the rent. My body shook as I showered and dressed myself. Just thinking about opening my apartment door sent waves of panic through my chest. Anyone could be on the other side; worst of all Owen could be there.

That first day out in the city was awful. I only made it one block before I turned back, and even then, I could only muster twenty or so steps before pausing to remember how to breathe. I was both afraid and angry at everyone around me. Afraid of their intentions, of the possible darkness that lingered in their souls and angry at the fact that there were smiles, that people were living their lives while I withered into pieces.

That night I call my lover with the penis. It is off schedule and I'm nervous about calling. I know nothing of his life outside of me. Is he cuddling up with a wife? Does he have children to tuck into bed? Maybe a dog? He could be a million different things that I occasionally interrupt. Our normal schedule is to fuck on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights. He is the only lover I give my body to in that way; I call it fucking and not making love because I don't let him kiss me. He's not allowed the vulnerability of intimacy. I want to reserve love-making for my perfect lover, but there is a natural need within that demands to be satisfied, and so we fuck. But tonight, after seeing Owen and having nearly all my hard work destroyed, I need him to keep my rhythm intact.

"Hello?"

I don't respond at first. Instead I listen for sounds in the background, the rustle of someone else in his bed, the pitter-patter of a child, the bark of a dog, the hum of an engine, any sign from the life I'm cutting into. I hear nothing but his soft, sleepy breath on the line.

"It's me," I whisper.

"Oh...is it Wednesday already?"

"No, no it's not. But..." I bite my lip and take a deep breath. "I need you in a bad way. Can you come over?"

In the background I hear the squeak of a mattress, he is in bed. "Is everything alright?" he asks.

"Yeah, I'll be okay."

"Give me twenty minutes," he says.

This moment feels so strange to me; it's frightening actually, this feeling of being weak and my physical need for attention and comfort. This isn't what I worked so hard to achieve and this isn't how things are supposed to operate now. Everything is designed so my lovers want and need me, not the other way around. I have given my lover a portion of control and allowed him to step outside the realm of his assigned duties. Owen, the source of my undoing, was also the catalyst for the change within, allowing me to finalize my structure of resilience towards frailty. But I must accept, however hard it may be, that there will be times when my structure cracks, that unexpected things will occur and cause that feeble need buried inside to surface. Tonight, I will show my lover a sliver of weakness in hopes that I can wake up tomorrow and feel like myself again, to patch the cracks and marvel at the structure I've built.

When my lover arrives, I pounce before he has time to think and knock him to the floor. He is surprised but once my body is on top of his, my hands wildly gripping his belt, he gives in and allows the game to run its course. He is careful not to use his lips and instead nudges his nose gently into my neck, breathing deep into my skin. We shed our clothes, and in a flash, he is inside of me and suddenly everything feels okay. I try looking into his eyes, not at them, but they are closed. I want to see something residing within, a twinkle from his life outside these walls, to know he is fragile at heart and right now, more than just fucking, we are rebuilding one another. We climax and I press my hands down into his chest, waiting for the vibrations of pleasure to pass through my body. When it does, I keep him held down, waiting for his eyes to open, for the stillness of after sex.

Finally his eyes flutter open, white and wide. He leans in and whispers in my ear, "Same time tomorrow?"

The next morning, I wake up feeling more like myself. The sun crawls in bright through the windows and the light warms my cheeks. Today is not my lover with the lips, but my lover with the tongue. I'd love for the lips and tongue to be from one lover; however, my lip lover's tongue is sloppy and unmanageable. My tongue lover and I make out passionately, mostly on Wednesday mornings before work to rile me up. His lips are not the soft and sensual touch of my other lover, but that becomes meaningless once his slithery devil of a tongue comes out to play. Sometimes he will call on random afternoons and if I'm free from work or other lovers then I'll invite him over and we'll lick each other's throats to the point of dehydration.

He is allowed, for obvious reasons, to go down on me. He is swift and precise with his tongue, like an artist carefully crafting a painting. And he more than knows his way around, keeping me suspended with tension for just enough before bringing me full speed into throes of ecstasy.

My lover knocks at the door. I don't even bother getting dressed, a nice little bonus for him. He smiles and eyes me up and down before entering. Then he puts his hands on my shoulders and pulls me in. Today he is feisty from the start, his tongue invades my mouth and mine attacks back. A couple of times he pauses to run his tongue up and down my neck. I can't help it; I start to touch myself. His tongue continues to wet my neck and when I can't stand it any longer, I grab his head with my other hand and push it towards my groping fingers. He gets to work, and I lean my head back and look out the window at the rising morning. The earth is alive; the city rubs the weariness from its eyes, cars cough and hum, people litter the sidewalks, and birds perch themselves on rooftops. My lover is painting beautiful pictures between my legs and my whole body starts to shake. My hands cover my eyes and tangle through my hair. He licks and licks until I scream, until my legs are a spasm of movement and my vision goes black. By the time I compose myself, I find I am alone. Gone is my ghostly tongue lover.

I shower and dress and start my walk to the library. During my stroll I'm once again on the hunt, predatorily watching the men of the city from a distance. I watch the way the men hail cabs, how they open the doors of office buildings and if they hold those same doors for others behind them. I watch the stride in their legs as they cross the street and examine how busy their body language appears. Nothing catches my interest today and I wonder if the city has run out of suitable men or if it's me and I'm simply too specific. Maybe the picture in my head doesn't exist. Maybe my wants and needs, my inner desires are *too much*. At the entrance to the library, I toss a coin into the fountain and make a wish for my perfect lover. When I look down and catch my reflection in the water, I notice a red stain on my neck. I know what Barbara and Denise will be whispering about today.

Around when I was the age of ten, my father moved out of his friend's place and got his own apartment. I thought maybe now that we would be spending time together somewhere other than the park, things might be different. I remember sitting on his couch while he unpacked dishes from a box and stacked them into a cupboard. I was waiting patiently, kicking my legs back and forth against the side of the couch, when he turned to me and said, "You know Love Bug, most men

don't know how to love a woman. You women are complicated creatures that most men won't ever understand." I listened intently and gazed at him with my bright, young eyes, wondering what this bit of information had to do with my life. First of all, I was a girl, not a woman. I didn't consider things like love or understanding another human being on an inner level. Boys were not an object of desire; they were just *there*.

When I was fifteen, I discovered his box of letters. Each of the envelopes had different addresses with various women's names, none of which were my address or my mother's name. My father had left me alone for a few hours so he could run some errands. He had ordered me a pizza and left some movies out on the coffee table and promised we would go bowling when he returned. None of the movies looked interesting, so instead I started poking around and found the letters in his closet. I pulled the box out and sorted through the envelopes. I studied the handwriting and made mental notes of all the addresses. There were six different locations, some in the city and others from far away states. All the letters had been addressed to a P.O. Box rather than the address where my father had lived with us before this whole mess.

The first letter I read was from a woman named Monica. I read it twice, trying to comprehend all it entailed. According to her, my father was a traveling salesman that swung through her neighborhood every so often. She wrote about their "magical" nights together, how they drank wine under the stars and dined at an all-night diner. She also mentioned me. She wrote about how she looked forward to meeting me and that I sounded like a "regular old ball of sunshine." The next letter was from a woman named Sally. To her my father was a restaurateur, though Sally wasn't from the city so she wouldn't know any better. Sally knew of my existence as well. She wrote about her own daughter who was also my age and hoped we might become good friends. She even went as far as using the word *sisters*. I almost ripped that letter to shreds.

According to Rachael, he was a novelist that published under a pen name and she enjoyed the "story" he had read to her. To Elise, he was a teacher, high school world history. To Kate, he was a bartender, and to Paris, a lawyer. If only these women could have seen him in his natural habitat. Here in this sad and small apartment with only his letters and me, every other weekend, to keep him company.

In my hands were my father's little empire of lies, and it felt strange that despite the delusions my father fed these women, they knew exactly who *I* was. They knew my name, my hair color, what kind of music I liked, and the activities I enjoyed. I bet my father had shown them pictures when he spoke about me. Each of these women had a desire to meet me because they wanted my father, and I was a part of him. What these women didn't know is that I was the only honest thing in my father's life. He was a factory of lies, constructing details and spewing out tales to these women, doing all the things he had warned me about. And thinking about it, once I had read the letters over and over and allowed it to sink in, I realized my father believed these lies. At least he believed they would bring him some form of happiness. When he finally returned and asked if I was ready to bowl, I looked past him and told him to

take me home.

The darkness my mother carries stems from a string of lies spun by the only man she had ever loved. There was no true closure for her, only the words of faceless women, the whispers of ghosts that could be anywhere. And maybe that is why she is still able to remember him from a better time. Maybe that is why she still tries to recreate him in the form of someone else.

Saturday afternoons are reserved for my rich lover. What he lacks in appearance he compensates for with his wealth. He runs a thriving hotel business and is charming to a degree.

Everything we do requires reservations or invitations. He takes me to upscale French restaurants, and we sip on the most expensive champagnes on the menu. Other times he takes me on extravagant shopping sprees at luxury boutiques, places I would never be able to afford on my own. There are no limits with him, no object too out of reach, and no price tag too high.

We met at an art gallery. He was there perusing strange art to fill his mansion with, and I was there simply admiring. I certainly couldn't afford any of the art hung on the walls, but I could play the part and it worked because he came strolling over to me. We chatted at length about art and what it meant and then he offered to buy me lunch. Some might wonder what a man of such financial means would be doing with a woman like me, especially when there isn't much in the realm of sexual favors. But I can see that to him it is a game. He is used to getting whatever he wants, and it drives him crazy not fully having me. He fulfills a need for me, as I do for him. He enjoys the thrill of hunting me down, the puzzle of what it is about me and what it will take to make me wholly available.

Today we are at *L'eau de Rose*, one of the hot new boutiques in the city, and I'm trying on a strapless evening gown. I feel like a celebrity slipping a dress up my body with a price tag of \$4,000. I'm looking at myself in the mirror, gushing and momentarily lost in a dreamy princess fantasy when I feel a touch on my leg. I whip around and there he is, my affluent lover undoing his role and breaking the rules.

"Oh, you sneaky boy," I say.

He tries to move his hand up towards my ass but I step away. "I don't think so," I tell him, waving my finger. His hand trembles. I can see his desire as though it were the fabric of his suit. His eyes lock onto my ass, which the dress accentuates quite well. He is practically salivating at the mouth, hungry for a taste. I tease him a little and shake my ass. He beams bright red and bares his teeth, taking bites at the air. And in that moment, I want to break the rules a little myself. He deserves that much. I pull up the back of the dress and slide my panties down. "Go ahead," I say. "Get a nice little bite."

That night my lover with the penis comes over and I take him to the rooftop of the apartment. We are ten stories high and the city stretches for miles. He stands behind me and I can feel his erection forming. The city turns into a vibrant pool of light the higher the moon

rises. He presses his body into mine until I can no longer wait. I throw him down and we fuck like never before, out in the open, bathed in the city light. I imagine people staring out of their windows at our passionate display and reevaluating their own sexual encounters. We finish, and he rolls over beside me and we fall asleep.

On Sunday morning I visit my lover with the hands. Sometimes he comes to my place and other times I visit him at work. I met him at a party and had to introduce myself after noticing the softness of his hands from across the room. He held his drink so delicately, like an injured animal, and brought it to his lips slowly. I watched him touch things around the room and wished I could become all those things so I might feel his soft graze. I finally approached him when he seemed warm and drunk and learned he was a massage therapist, which made sense.

I made some appointments and soon he began to fall for me. I invited him over for dinner and wine. He was the first man I allowed in my home after the rape. We ate and talked and I wanted so desperately for something to be there, but nothing excited me except for his hands. When I told him what I wanted he agreed to love me with his touch.

I walk into his room and strip and then lay down. "How've you been?" he asks. "Keeping the stress down?"

"Trying my best," I reply.

He starts slow at the neck and then works his way down. His hands always know exactly what to do. He plays music that matches the flow of his massage, soft instrumental passages that erupt into explosive climaxes the deeper his hands knead into my back. It always takes me a few minutes to get up once he finishes. I am so relaxed and continue to melt in pure bliss.

"When will I see you again?" he asks.

"I'll call," I say. "Come to my place and maybe I'll try to give you a massage. You deserve one."

He smiles and walks me out front. I wave goodbye and then I'm off to meet my final lover, the one with the face, the model. He is there waiting outside my door as I turn the corner in the hallway. I greet him and let him in.

For months his face was all over the city. He did ads for underwear and cologne, for fashion and jewelry. I met him in the library, of all places. I happened to look up and there he was, Mr. Chez Cologne himself, leafing through the fiction aisles. After recommending some books to him, he invited me out for a drink. I only had one drink because I still didn't trust strange men. He got pretty wasted, and I brought him back to my place afterwards to make sure he was safe. I put him to sleep on my couch and sat on the other end of the living room and watched him until eventually I passed out too. The next morning, we talked over coffee and he agreed to let me take some pictures of him. We kept in touch after that, and these intimate photo shoots became our thing.

Today he takes off his shirt and sits on the couch. The light coming through the window sharpens his features and I think I prefer this look over his usual baby face. The shadows in his cheeks and under his chin make him look hardened and edgy, like he has seen the entire world and now shows off the wounds of his experience.

"Stay," I say. "Don't move an inch."

I pull out my camera and start snapping pictures. I know nothing about the technicality of taking pictures, but he doesn't mind. "Your pictures seem more real," he once told me. "They aren't touched up or altered. What you capture is me, the real me." I like that, the idea of capturing someone in their rawest form. Isn't that what love really is?

A smile slips from his lips and I get some shots of it. A smile that seems to say, "I survived."

And each time I'm with one of my lovers or when I'm strolling the sidewalks in search of men, when I contemplate my father and his false lives or my mother and her blanket of sadness and denial, when I hear Barbara and Denise snicker or feel the phantom grip of Owen's hand on my neck, I smile so similarly. I smile and think here I am, I'm still here. I survived.

My father calls. It's been months since we last spoke. I ask him how he is doing. He tells me he is seeing someone new, a hairdresser named Michelle. He sounds happy and says they are buying a house together. He has never discussed the letters with me and instead pretends like I never saw them. I, for whatever reason, never brought it up again either. And now it's been so long there almost seems to be no point. Still, it continues to exist between us, like a broken window that never gets fixed no matter how much cold air seeps in through the jagged glass. But it's nice to hear the cheer in his voice and I can only hope he has finally adhered to his own advice. Before I hang up, he tells me we should do lunch soon, that he misses me. I tell him that would be really nice, though whether those plans will actually happen are another thing entirely.

I hang up and think of my father and his soon-to-be new life with Michelle. And I think of my mother, perpetually stuck in her spiral of sadness. I see her as regularly as I can, though I usually have to go to her since she doesn't care for the city. She says it is too busy for her; it moves at a pace she can't keep up with. I am her source of normalcy, a symbol she can recognize. And though I have obviously changed and grown, to her I am still very much the same. She doesn't mention my father anymore, which is good, but I can still sense his spirit dancing in her eyes. She hasn't had a date for at least a year or so. Instead, she continues her abusive relationship with coffee and cigarettes.

I take in the afternoon lull in my apartment, stretched out on my couch, head back, eyes closed. As I sink into the quietude, the dream I had a few nights ago comes rushing back into my head. I didn't think too much of it at the time, in fact when I awoke all I had were fuzzy remnants and as I went about my day the fragments grew more out of focus. But now the dream was

crystal clear, stampeding into my brain with thunderous force.

I saw myself on the roof of my apartment complex with all my lovers gathered around me. I had invited them over and now they looked at each other, confused. I waited until all their eyes were on me before addressing them. "Hello, my lovers," I began. "For a long time I have only given each of you a small piece of me while asking for a greater piece of you in return. But I realize that isn't fair and I want each of you to have me, all of me."

The lovers stir and mumble to themselves, considering what I've said and letting it roll around in their heads. I disrupt their confusion and stroll over to take the hands of both my rich lover and my lover with the lips. I guide them away from the group into the center of the rooftop and kiss them both before placing them a few feet apart. "You two, stay here," I tell them.

My lover with the penis is next. I place him between the other two. Next up is my lover with the voice. I instruct him to climb the shoulders of my phallic lover. I can sense his hesitation despite his face being hidden behind his black veil. "This will all make sense soon," I tell him. He begins to climb, and I whisk off to grab the next lover. I place my tongue lover on top of the voice. Then my soft hands lover and Mr. Muscles climb up per my instructions, and each hangs from one of the tongue's arms. The model is last. He climbs atop all my other lovers to be the face of my creation.

I step back to admire my work, my perfect lover. My heart pounds against its cage. My face beams and I rush in to embrace my lover, but before I can even get one touch, the bodies begin to collapse. It starts with the tongue, unable to hold the weight of the lovers on his arms any longer, and he lets go. The fall starts a chain reaction, until a pile of lovers rests at my feet, and I'm back where I started, everything separated. I can see it will never be perfect, that pieces will always be missing.

Five knocks at my door snap me away from my thoughts. It is my kissable lover, here to once again make love to my lips. When I open the door and see him, all I can picture is his body piled up with my other lovers. All I can think about is the collapse of the scattered remains of my most beautiful creation. I guide him over to the couch and he leans in to kiss me, but right before his lips touch mine, something punches me in the gut. I put my hand out to stop him for a moment. My lippy lover is unsure what to do. His advances have never been rejected before. I can see the thread that has been woven throughout my life clearly now. The dream has melted from my head and oozed into reality, staining my apartment, my everything. I place my hand at the back of his neck and pull him close. He looks into my eyes briefly before closing them as our lips meet and we kiss for what I know will be our last time.

POETRY

IF LOVE BE BLIND, LOVE CANNOT HIT THE MARK

DIANA BURKE

Love may be blind, but I am not.
We both can smell your fragrant rose,
But lose the arrows and the bows—
Do I appear as blind as you?
Poor fool, unbothered by the thought
That every dream may not come true.

I wonder, you think a surprise
What I see plain before my eyes,
For I've not been kept in the dark.
Love may be blind, but I am not—
Repeatedly you miss the mark
In your unstable little sport.
Poor fool, you'll never make the shot
It takes to win a tilted court.

Some men are just not made to hunt,
And that is fine, if I may judge,
But you go at your reckless game
So stupidly, I must begrudge
You for attempting such a stunt.
Love may be blind, but I am not
For now, unless you mean to maim
Me in your long sadistic plot—
But if I'm wrong, keep you in mind
That only crippled love is blind.

HIBERNATION

ANGELA MARTEL

How are you?
"I'm fine."
No. How are you?
Your eyes saw the pain trickle down mine.
Your voice broke open barriers I had carefully placed.
My degraded brick wall came crumbling down.
"I was attacked by a bear."
As I spoke of the troubled tale,
My white lie hung like tulle between us.
Cherry red lines streaked my bare arms in the sunlight,
My voice high, my mind racing.
I let you see my weakness.
Your possible actions gave me more fear than the blood on my arms.
I could deal with my own blood leaving my body,
But I couldn't handle the thought of you leaving my side.
But your words were sweet like sugar.
Your voice calm like a summer wind.
You kissed my honey-soaked scars.
For once I felt protected.
For the monster within me could rest a season
And let me live in the sun.

AUTHENTIC INTRODUCTION

CHELSEA DAIGLE

When asked to pick the sword or the pen, I am the holder of both.

With my pen, I am a creator

I am a living story that will continue past my time

A Creative, An Artist, A Writer

With my sword, I am a fighter

I use a voice that defends and protects

And a passion of fire that feeds on the fuel around me

A partner, a sibling, a child, a friend,

I have led and supported,

I have been quiet and I have yelled,

I have visited the peaks of joy and accomplishment,

And crawled from the pits of depression,

I have hated school, and loved education,

I have struggled with words and practiced languages not my own,

I have consolidated my mind and I have let it explode,

I have sat between not white enough and not black enough,

I hold my roots; the bloody and the beautiful.

And I live, in a world of grey,

that allows the most vibrant of colors.

When next you introduce me,

Don't use my age, school, or major.

Allow me,

To introduce you to my world.

ORDINARY THINGS

MATTHEW JORDAN

Though we are diff'rent than we were before,

We have a connection to olden days.

We were a lot more innocent prior

To this virus which, in quite a few ways,

Has ravaged our life. Ordinary things,

Though, restore us. They are signs of the past.

In these bizarre times, the old church bell rings

Like before this chaos. This, then, shall not last.

Ordinary things, thus, show us what was

Before this madness. It also shows us who

We were before. This disease, therefore, has

Failed to crush our will. That fact will stay true.

Ordinary things are objects that might

Remind us that with God, we still have light.

OH, I'LL GIVE YOU A RESUME

SAM RODIN

A brief history of my exploits:

I have single-handedly captured (and trained!) the world's most dangerous housecats.

I have cured polio;

I have also cured mumps, measles, and mimes.

I fought in the Cola Wars but I don't like to talk about it.

In my youth, I collected rocks;

The Lia Faile sang when I set foot upon it,

But the Blarney Stone kissed me!

I am not now, nor have I ever been, a robot;

I shot Lincoln (though I later came to regret this);

I shot the sheriff

Though I did not shoot the deputies.

I have flown to the moon!

Boy, were my arms tired.

I composed the theme from "The Lone Ranger"

And the William Tell Overture;

I have also composed several symphonies,

Often called Beethoven I-IX.

I am William Shakespeare.

I was also John McCain (to my secret shame).

I am a practicing quantum mechanic

And working towards my string theorist's license

(Cases are up, rates are down; business is strange but I'm charmed).

I have once played rugby and I have seen cricket performed in public;

I invented the wheel — in time and under budget

Though I had to cut a few corners.

I ended World War II when I traveled back in time

And killed the baby Hitler;

(It turned out art school wasn't an option).

When I raise my arm above my head

Hawks alight upon me;

L'etat c'est moi

Like Louis XIII.

I am Watson

And also Crick.

At least three indigenous tribes curse in my name.

Once,

While disguised as my own evil twin,

I worked an entry-level position.

Though I have never attended Hogwarts

I did go to a few good parties there.

And although I am tone-deaf

The sound of my voice charms men and beasts.

I sacked Rome with the Huns;

(And there's a fairly good chance I'm related to Ghengis Khan).

I have composed epic poetry

But only to be read in high schools and book clubs;

I destroyed the walls at Jericho

But I left a note!

I've never been to Reno but

I did stab a guy in Newark

For giving me the eye.

Had I been asked

I would probably have told Nixon not to spy on the Democrats at all.

I invented the cotton gin;

I also discovered the higher maths —

Sorry about that.

In the dark of the new moon

I sacrifice a black goat

To Strunk and White

Then dance around a bonfire.

The goat is traditional;

The fire merely entertaining.

I am the alpha and the omega;

And some points in between,

(but it's not as straightfoward as you might expect).

I am not my brother's keeper

But I do sometimes walk his dog.

I am a cunning linguist;

I also have a way with words.

I am not now, nor have I ever been, a zombie.

I am the true Lord of the Dance

(For the fourth year running)!

I built the internet

Out of some old tubes I had lying around.

Sure, I robbed Peter to pay Paul

But I pocketed the proceeds.

I found reality television growing on something at the back of my fridge;

I promise I'll clean that up soon.

I once went ten rounds bareknuckles with a kangaroo

After I did Napoleon at Waterloo.

Hemingway proposed to me on bended knee,

But I threw him over

For F. Scott Fitzgerald.

I laughed at Ayn Rand

But then someone explained that she meant it.

All the things I say are true;

Though

I was once known to practice revisionist history.

Reports of my demise have not been exaggerated.

In fact,

If you read about it in the papers,

You probably won't even get the whole story.

THE SURFACE

CHELSEA DAIGLE

"What's one thing you love about your Culture?"

My culture?

I'm not even sure what

My culture is.

Never felt the pulse of my great grandfather's drums

In the Cape Verdean band.

Never breathed in the Portuguese voices

At family dinners, celebrations.

Disconnected to the point

I realized today in class

That I always say

"Them"

And not,

"Us."

I say, "They have struggled."

Not,

"We are struggling."

I've had maps,

And empty buildings,

And stories.

But I'm not in any of them.

I am Representing and

Fighting for and

Looking Like and

Loving...

A roaring, vibrant, glittering ocean

I've never touched

'Cept the surface.

THE STORM

DIANA BURKE

A flock of white doves fired above red flags
like snow downfalling in a bloody lake
that floods with death and still finds more to take—
the rioters sack life in beat-up bags.
Their festive New Year lacking flimsy gags
with us stormed in not by a single flake,
too hot with rage to melt for Heaven's sake—
it rather boils, and the party sags

in January, hellishly tranquil.
Unseasonable to free-loving birds,
the demons meet each other, as they will,
and celebrate with kindly hateful words.
All joined as one, they chant for each fresh kill
in their free palace of fresh-polished turds.

THE FAIRIES IN MY GARDEN

KAILY BURKE

All winter I saw fairies living
High up in the naked trees,
Circling round their tiny hearths
For warmth within the icy breeze

I tried to tell my mother but
She'd not even come out to look
At solid, concrete recreations
Of a child's favorite book

This spring I planted many flowers
Hoping they would flock to stay
In columbines and dahlias
And drink a tea to seize the day

They're here all right, I know as much
And low enough for all to see
But when my mother looks for them
They'll only show themselves to me

SWOLLEN ROUNDEL

DIANA BURKE

How the symphony swells! The conductor's grand scratch
is all puffy and red with its trinkets and bells.
My ear's close to the music, to see if I catch
how the symphony swells...

Though it listens like pain, no one properly tells
if the beauty we hear is a miserable match
to a fancy composer's mood, or one of Hell's.

There are layers of players all seeming a batch
of the loveliest sounds, and peculiar smells.
Wonder if some infectious climax should now hatch,
how the symphony swells.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

A THANK YOU TO KRISTI ARFORD AND ALL OTHER HUMANS

DIANA BURKE

Those who talk a lot all share the same
genes, though not means. I mean,
they search for meaning (that's why they talk)
(or more like, they scratch their heads

and grunt to the ancestors)

but they do not all have the same
stock, or come from the same flock.

Flat plains. Mountain dwellers.

The fat-of-the-land sippers in

wine cellars, selling piss

to the sewer people, nibbling on
chocolate coins and giving up
the wrappers, whipping the taxi driver
like a horse back in the old days.

Good old days. Golden days.

Less is more. More is fewer.

Fewer gods in the flowers, goddesses
in their bowers, sprites and fairies
at midnight hours, ghosts

in manure. Spirits are all

in your head, and the dead
are gone. He who boasts like a bard
or regards the other side is
a lunatic, a liar, or both.

On the lawn there are oath-taking

worms, avowing to eat you,
now or later. Squirm if you will,
there is no escape.

We will all be scraped by

knowledge, we hope, or what matters--

whatever matters--hope.

It will all be beaten, dug down,
and grounded, in resounding approval.
Remove your role, prove your point.

Be naked and the net will go with you.

The mahogany mausoleum sits
undisturbed by the discourse, undesiring
of these fits. People follow
their dreams to a dead end

too often for a fight to break out.

Disciplined and well-rounded,
the rotten philosopher catches wind
of the less-loving above
and only throws his hat in the ring

for those who lay it out for him.

PROSE

THE MOST IMPORTANT FLY IN THE WORLD

A STORY FOR TIM

ELENA KARAVANNYKH

In the spring, one fly woke up earlier than the other flies. She looked around and saw a young man. He was a student who had spent the whole winter at home studying. Today he was outside—on the porch, reading a textbook. Suddenly, the fly landed on his book.

"Well, hello," he said. "I haven't seen any flies all winter. If the flies are awake, then spring has come but I must have missed it.

"I cauz-z-zed the spring to come!" the fly burst with pride. "If I hadn't awoken, spring wouldn't be here!" Excited, the fly began to rub her legs together quickly. "I am the moz-z-zt important fly in the world, and everyone should rez-z-zpect me!"

The fly flew away to tell everyone about it.

"I am the moz-z-zt important fly!" said the fly to a dog running down the street.

The dog was very busy looking for a bone that he had buried somewhere the day before, just in case. Today was the case. Suddenly, the fly was buzzing next to his ear, distracting him from his business. The dog tried to bite the fly.

"What a mad dog!" the fly thought, dodging the dog's teeth, and she flew away.

"I am the moz-z-zt important fly!" said the fly to a cat, basking in the sun. But the cat didn't even open his eyes.

"He muz-z-zt be deaf," the fly guessed. "I need to get closer to hiz-z ear."

She crawled over the cat's back, over his head, closer and closer to his ear. But as soon as she sat down on the cat's ear, the ear jerked and the fly almost fell.

"Thiz-z cat iz deaf anyway. I'll fly to people. Only they will truly appreciate me." The fly dusted herself off and flew on.

Then she smelled something delicious from an open window.

"This is where honor and rez-z-zpect await me," the fly rejoiced. "Breakfaz-z-zt has already been prepared for me. I am the moz-zt important fly!" she shouted, flying through the window. "I brought you spring! Where is my breakfaz-z-zt? Hurry up, bring it now!"

"Mom—a fly! I'm scared!" a little girl screamed and ran out of the room.

"They are in awe of me!" The fly was delighted. "Now I can command people. They will do whatever I want.

"Hey, woman, bring my breakfaz-z-zt now!" the fly commanded.

"Coming, coming." A woman entered the room with the girl hiding behind her.

"There it is—on the windowsill!" The girl pointed her finger at the fly.

"Fly away now!" The woman waved a towel at the fly.

"I am the moz-zt important fly, haven't you heard?" The fly was annoyed.

"It's buzzing!" The girl was frightened.

"Not anymore," her mom said and hit the fly with the towel. "Well, spring is here. Now there will be no rest from these flies."

THE HOUSE OF URSONATE

KAILY BURKE

Mr. Urse could smell his wife's lasagna as soon as he opened the front door. He takes in a big sniff. "Smells delicious, honey," he tells her, and gives Mrs. Urse a kiss as she approaches.

Mrs. Urse chuckles, taking off her oven mitts. "Who smells delicious honey?"

Mr. Urse sniffs again, more thoughtfully. "Well, I certainly don't," he examines, sniffing once more. "Why, who brought it up in the first place? I don't smell any honey at all."

"Oh, I don't know." Mrs. Urse pouts. She poked open her dress pocket and lifted a pocket watch. "Oh, my, we better start eating. Town Hall's having an open house tonight at 7:30. I don't wanna miss it."

"Kids, dinner's ready!" Mr. Urse calls down the hall, before sitting across from his wife at the table.

Little Molly comes into the dining and sits between her parents as Mrs. Urse cuts her a slice.

Mr. Urse squints, and gazes down the hall again. He turns to his wife. "Don't we have another kid?"

Mrs. Urse shrugs. "Do we have another kid?"

"You actually don't," I say, sticking my head out of a doorway in the hall. "I couldn't come up with a name for another one. You have a dog."

"Where's the dog?" says Mr. Urse.

"Oh, whoops." I pick up a beagle and place him on the floor of the hallway. I retreat back into my room. The beagle scampers around the dinner table.

"Hi doggy!" says Molly, laughing and rubbing the pup's head.

Mrs. Urse pulls a tennis ball out of her dress pocket. "Skippy! Fetch!" She tosses it into another direction. "Molly, go wash your hands."

Mr. Urse cuts his slice of lasagna as Molly sits back down at the table next to him.

"So how was your day, sweetie?"

"It was okay," she says, frowning slightly. "Some of the flowers we planted last week in class started sprouting. And Suzie's did, but mine didn't."

"Oh, that's too bad. It'll grow soon," he says, taking a bite. "Or maybe it never will. Why, you never know. Look at the size of this dog."

Mrs. Urse looks to Skippy as he drops the tennis ball back before her feet and wags his tail. "Jerry, I swear this is a full size beagle." She takes another tennis ball out of her dress pocket and tosses it, trying to keep the dog away from the table as they ate.

Mr. Urse watches the dog look for the ball and stick his head beneath the sofa. "We ought to try putting him in the sunlight."

"You know, Jerry," says Mrs. Urse, changing the subject, "We received an odd letter from the bank today."

"They sent you a letter?" asks Molly.

"They sent us a letter, yes. It said that we are apparently at risk of losing our house."

Mr. Urse freezes, dropping his fork on the clean table cloth.

"Mom, what happens if we lose our house?"

But Mr. Urse is already fidgety. "Why, Bonnie, I should never think we'd lose the house," he says, twitching. A drop of sweat trickled down his forehead. He stood up from the table and looked behind himself. He gazes at the pictures on the wall, through the doorway into the kitchen, and walks through it. "Everything has been this way for so long now."

Skippy the beagle has already laid a fourth ball at Mrs. Urse's feet, presumably summoned out of her neverending dress pocket despite the fact that she'd only thrown two. She shakes her head at the pile, while Molly plays with the dog, then follows her husband into the kitchen.

"Jerry, there must be something we can do about this."

He turns around frantically. "How could we lose this house?"

"It's been here for so long."

"What are we gonna do if the kids come home from school one day and the house isn't there?"

"Kid," I say, reading a newspaper one room over.

"Our kid!" He corrects himself. "Or.. or..." he scratches his head. "Or our dog!"

"The dog!" says Mrs. Urse, having a eureka moment. "The dog is always at home! If we lose the house, he should at least know where it went!"

"Bonnie, aren't you always at home?"

"Well, I am, but we're both at risk of losing the house," she nods. "Skippy didn't get a letter in the mail, he should be safe."

Mr. Urse rubs his chin, as Skippy comes in leaving another tennis ball at Mrs. Urse's feet. "You didn't throw that one, did you?"

"No," says Skippy, through his weird, slimy, black dog lips. "I'm moving the pile from the dining room."

"That's a waste of time," says Mrs. Urse, pulling a small pyramid of tennis balls from her dress pocket and placing them in front of her feet herself.

Then the doorbell rings. "I'll get it," she says, Skippy following behind with one tennis ball in his mouth.

An old friendly neighbor stands on the doorstep, hands clasped in front of him.

"Mr. Nata," says Mrs. Urse. "How are you doing this evening?"

"I had my window open and I could hear you two. You sounded pretty alarmed. Is everyone okay?"

"I-well, we're really fine, we're just worried at the moment," she nodded.

Mr. Nata pulled a revolver from out of nowhere and shot Mrs. Urse in the stomach.

"Ahh!" she cried, and fell backwards onto the floor.

"Are you sure you're fine, Bonnie?" he asks, fear in his eyes. "You look as if you've been hurt!"

"No, we're-ah!" she cries out in pain again. "We're worried about losing our house."

Mr. Nata ruffles his hair, pacing back and forth. His voice holds the same concern.

"Well could you glue it in place?"

Mrs. Urse, still on the floor in pain, reaches for a very large glue stick that doesn't seem like it would have fit in her dress pocket, when Mr. Urse rushes from the kitchen onto the scene. "Oh my god!" he yells. "My wife's been shot!"

Mrs. Urse lifts her head and looks at the wound on her stomach. "Ahh!" she screams.

"You're right! I've been shot!"

"It's unbelievable that you wouldn't notice!" notices Mr. Urse. "Who did this?!"

Skippy the dog returns, placing another tennis ball next to her. He stamps his paws and whimpers, looking at the people around. Then he runs to bring in more tennis balls, hoping it might make Mrs. Urse feel better.

"It couldn't be the dog," says Mr. Nata, rubbing his chin. "And it wasn't you, either, Jerry."

"Wait a minute." Mr. Urse points a finger at Mr. Nata. "Was it you?"

"Oh, gosh, was it me? I must have missed that part, I only skimmed this before I showed up."

Mr. Urse turns around. "Author!" he calls out. "...Author, did Mr. Nata shoot her?"

There's a silence. Molly comes to the door.

"I guess we're on our own if our author's not going to answer," he said.

"Dad, did you call me?" asks Molly.

"No, I was looking for our author. But do you know if Mr. Nata shot my wife?"

"Yeah."

"Molly, you look taller," says Mrs. Urse, bleeding on the floor.

"Well, you are on the ground, honey."

"No, I'm older," says Molly.

"You're older?" Mr. Urse steps back.

"Well yeah." Molly shrugs. "This is a serious plot point we're in now. There isn't much use for a naive little kid if Mr. Nata is shooting your wife. Not unless we're dragging this out and focusing on my trauma, which so far I don't think we are."

"I shot the wife?" asks Mr. Nata.

"I already said that."

"You shot my wife!" shouts Mr. Urse to Mr. Nata, snapping back into the scene, plastering the fourth wall back where it was.

"I shot your wife!" Mr. Nata says decidedly.

"You shot my mother, Mr. Urse's wife!" says now teenage Molly.

"You shot me and I am a wife!" says Mrs. Urse on the floor, seeming weirdly calm but no more delirious than before.

A police chief comes to the door. "We've heard there's been a disturbance in the neighborhood. What seems to be the problem?"

"There's only one of you," points out Mr. Nata.

The police officer turns around, looking back and forth. "You're right."

"I can fix that," says Mrs. Urse, slipping a hand in her bloody dress pocket and pulling out an adult human dressed as a police officer.

The fellow who came from her dress pocket brushes lint off his uniform. "What do you need me for?"

"We've heard there's been a disturbance in the neighborhood," says the police chief to the other officer.

"Indeed," says his partner. "What seems to be the problem?"

"The bank says we're in danger of losing the house," says Mrs. Urse.

"What about the wound in your abdomen?" asks the officer.

Mrs. Urse lifts her head and looks at the wound again. "Oh, and I've been shot."

The police chief rubs his hand over his forehead. "Bad day."

Mr. Urse points at Mr. Nata. "He shot my wife."

Mr. Nata nods. "Yeah, I shot his wife."

"CUT," I say, getting off of my director's chair. I'm dressed much more nicely than before and I'm wearing a beret now, for some reason. "CUT, for the love of God! How did you guys let this get so out of hand?!"

Mrs. Urse plucks the bullet out of her abdomen. The wound heals magically and all the blood from before evaporates into who-knows-where. She stands up. "What are you talking about?"

"There are way too many characters in this scene," I say, looking around at all their faces. "I mean, Molly, you went through all the effort of aging yourself up to be a more serious character but you don't even really need to be in this scene."

"Yes, I did," says Molly. "They didn't remember who shot Mrs. Urse, and you didn't answer when they tried to ask you."

"I was busy!" I say, putting my hands on my hips. "I was down the street picking out this very nice beret!"

"I like your beret," says Mr. Nata from behind.

"You! Read your part more carefully next time!" I say, turning back to him. "How do you forget about the part where you shoot someone?" I point to Molly. "You, you can go. The two policemen... one of you, get back on the doorstep. The other can go back in Mrs. Urse's pocket. When the camera starts rolling, I--"

"I'm sorry I'm late," says some preteen boy walking up behind me, holding a cup of coffee.

I make a face at him. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm the other kid Mr. and Mrs. Urse have."

"Where were you a few pages ago, Danny?"

"You hadn't named me yet."

I roll my eyes.

He hands me the coffee cup. "I got you something, boss. Coffee for my author."

"I don't drink coffee."

"Then it's tea now."

I grab it from him and take a sip. "So it is tea now. Well, thank you. But I really don't need you anymore, you can go." I turn around as the kid walks away.

I face my cast of characters again, but Molly is still there, neither policeman has returned to Mrs. Urse's dress pocket, and Mr. Urse and Mr. Nata are arguing with each other.

Mrs. Urse can tell I'm a bit stressed out trying to write this chaotic story and approaches me. "I'm sorry, boss."

I sigh. "You know, Bonnie, you've actually been great."

"Oh, thank you."

"You have been doing a lot of heavy lifting for this story, I gotta say, it's just..."

I roll my eyes and look away from her when I speak. "Maybe this one'll have to take a few more rewrites, and that's fine. I just wanted to write a surrealist, ironic story, and... now we're here."

"Did you see the part where I took the second policeman out of my dress pocket?" asked Mrs. Urse, grinning at me. "Because he said 'we've heard of a disturbance.'"

I nod at her. "You know, I actually did like that."

Mrs. Urse pulls the pocket watch from the beginning of the story out of her dress pocket. "It's almost 7:30."

My eyes widen. "Oh, **dammit.**"

It is at this point that all four walls of the Urse house sprout feet from out of nowhere, lift themselves up and walk away and out of the neighborhood. I just shake my head. Mrs. Urse puts a hand on my shoulder consolingly.

The character I hired to be mayor, complete with a silly little sash across his chest, barges on set smiling and says "Welcome to the Town Hall Open House!" looking

right at Mrs. Urse.

Mrs. Urse and I look back at him blankly.

A little distraught by the lack of reaction, he says to Mrs. Urse, "Because the bank warned you were in danger of losing the house."

"I know," says Mrs. Urse, nodding back.

"You're... the... The house." The mayor character gestures at the open air around only the foundation of the house. "The house left... You're the open house, yeah?"

Mrs. Urse nods again.

The mayor grits his teeth. "Get it? Because it's at... your house." He looks Mrs. Urse up and down. "Hey, weren't you supposed to be shot?"

"You know what, Mr. Mayor... Whatever I'll name you," I say to him. "You can come back tomorrow. Maybe I can try writing this again."

"Thank you, really," says Mrs. Urse. "You're great."

"Yeah, it's just not done yet," I say, looking in another direction. "I'm gonna clock out for the evening. So Bonnie, what are you doing tonight?"

Now this is the point at which you, the reader, are led down a long trail of tennis balls of various colors. Beginning beside Mrs. Urse's feet off set, to the front steps of Urse house, all the way down through their kitchen and into the dining room. A voice is speaking to you, dear reader, telling you, "Any author is merely the father of his story. He may tell his subject what to do, but what it wanders off to become is beyond his own will." The next tennis ball jumps from the floor to the seat of the head chair at the table, then on the edge of the table to its center, where you're met by Skippy the beagle, sitting by the lasagne, smoking a cigarette and wearing a very small suit.

Skippy brings the cigarette to his black lips and takes another puff. "An author creates a world, and is often surprised to lose grasp of it as the story takes on a life of its own. Picture of a Miss Kailyn Burke, aspiring fiction writer and Northern Essex Community College Student, in the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic." Skippy sniffs the air, then takes a look at the leftover plate of lasagne. "Stuck in—" he sniffs again. His heart beats faster, his eyes widen, as he takes another more impulsive puff of his cigarette.

"Stuck in her home with nothing more valuable than a laptop to take up her time of day, she finds herself *mocked* by—" Skippy sniffs the lasagne platter again, then pulls his head back. His eyes stay glued on the dish as he finishes his narration: "That, um, smells really good... She finds herself mocked by the imaginary characters meant to keep her busy. Should a writer try to take hold of his creations, he might try not to place them... in the Twilight Home."

Skippy drops his cigarette and digs his snout into the lasagna. The cigarette burns a small hole into the tablecloth.

THE FINAL HOUR

MARIAM SALDIVAR

Circa July 17, 2018

3:20 AM

In the darkness, his dilated pupils gazed through a sea of emptiness. In the silence, his shaky breath permeated through icy air. Against his ribcage, his heart nearly tore through—assisted by the chemicals creeping into his bloodstream. They allowed the beginning of his demise. The seconds passed with every strike of the ticking clock. The moon rose higher in the starless sky, mirroring the solitude within his heart.

Time and time again, he opened the box which held the ring of his long lost love. Prescription bottles stared at his visage with a smile, declaring his growing weakness as revenge for the depletion of their pills. Just when his eyes threatened to close, the lines between reality and delusion blurred. A whisper assaulted his ear, jolting his being.

“Be with me.”

Another whisper danced in the breeze, waltzing into his quivering frame. He searched for a sign when out of the corner of his eye, the glimpse of bony fingers laid against the floor. Pale in complexion, life no longer a part of the flesh. A shriek escaped from his lips as he stumbled backwards, colliding with the furniture. He descended onto the floor, meeting with familiar azure tinted irises. The oxygen ceased in his throat, blockaded by terror clawing at his cloudy mind. She lay limp next to him, signaling the departure of her beating heart. The next scream was interrupted by the rusted taste, gargling as crimson tainted his teeth and spilled.

Icy digits slammed onto his chest, clinging to the fabric of his shirt. Faltering with her strength she wobbled and she pulled herself upwards, decayed teeth coming into view as her lips parted into a smile. She invaded his vision which wanted nothing more than to rid itself of her. “B-be... With M-m-me...” The same thick liquid began to rain from her mouth, blackening the world and forcing him to say his final good—

“Hey!” He was slammed back to life, chest heaving and his vision blurry. The first thing that greeted him was the blinding colors... And there she was. She appeared in pixels, smiling within the frames of the TV. A sharp ache tore through his very heart as his lips trembled into a small smile, battling with the warmth she caused in him and the hollowness that wanted to take over. A shaky exhale made it all slip away, his body no longer part of his own. Instead a rumbling panic seized him. Was this nothing but a nightmare too?

The sun set his eyes upon her, causing her golden locks to shimmer further. Such wondrous light reflected in his tears before he wiped them away violently. As she looked towards the camera, those same azure eyes came into view. This would be the only way he'd ever see

such heavenly gaze again. It seemed like only yesterday, a day when she craved to feel the breeze, to hear the birds chirping. In her arms laid the life they created together, Perla. It was just a day like any other day, he remembered. In the tenderest of tones she asked, “Are you happy?”

“NO!” The screech could have reached all the souls in the world, or so he hoped it would. He wept at the thought. There was no possibility his agony would reach anyone miles and miles away. “My Esmeralda...” He wept for his wife. That was all he could do. Even the neighbors down the hall, it seemed like they too were miles and miles away as they let his cries echo through the hallway. He moved about frantically, searching for anything to quell his growing need to be nothing and yet everything all at once. Anything to quell his pain, anything to distract him. Yet all he had left was the comfort of his own cold skin, curling into himself as he let out sobs. He nearly ran out of tears to cry.

“Perlaa...” The video continued to play, and she called out to her daughter. The voice beckoned his attention. “Perlaa...” She uttered in a sing-song voice. The camera came closer, catching plump and rosy cheeks. Her eyes were just the same as her mother's and even then she had the most enchanting smile he had witnessed. The same warmth began to return to him, and in the deepest parts of him he knew he didn't want to let go.

Even as a prisoner to the past, she had saved him from the nightmare, saved him from the never ending slumber. Esmeralda always had a way of doing that. Flimsy fingers paused the video, his limbs speaking for him. Whimpers and rapid pants filled the room uncontrollably as he fought the effects of the countless pills. Somehow he made his way over to the TV, stepping and tripping over shattered beer bottles, strewn pillows and cheap takeout.

“I-I'm so sorry...” Dante managed to say as his forehead pressed against the TV screen, repeating the same words through the lump felt in his throat. “I'm so sorry Perla...” He remembered what he had lost, and what he could be losing if he continued down the same path. He remembered that yet another hole would bore into her if he were to disappear, and felt the emptiness she would have felt tear through him. As the apologies continued to rain down on the silence, his frame grew weak once more. He knew his time was nearing. The phone was just in sight, just a few steps away. Perhaps the chance at life could be his again. Just his fingers wrapped around, his knees betrayed him. His cheek met the tiled floor and the phone came crashing down just a few inches away. The sleeping pills had done their damage, finalizing their deed. Each time his eyes forcefully closed, he could see the striking image of his only daughter—the one thing he had left in this world. Each image gave him the strength to reach forward, painfully extending his fingers.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

“911, what's your emergency?”

“P-Please... Help... M-...e.”

“Sir? Can you tell me what is happening? What is your name?”

“...I'm d-dyi-...”

GALLERY



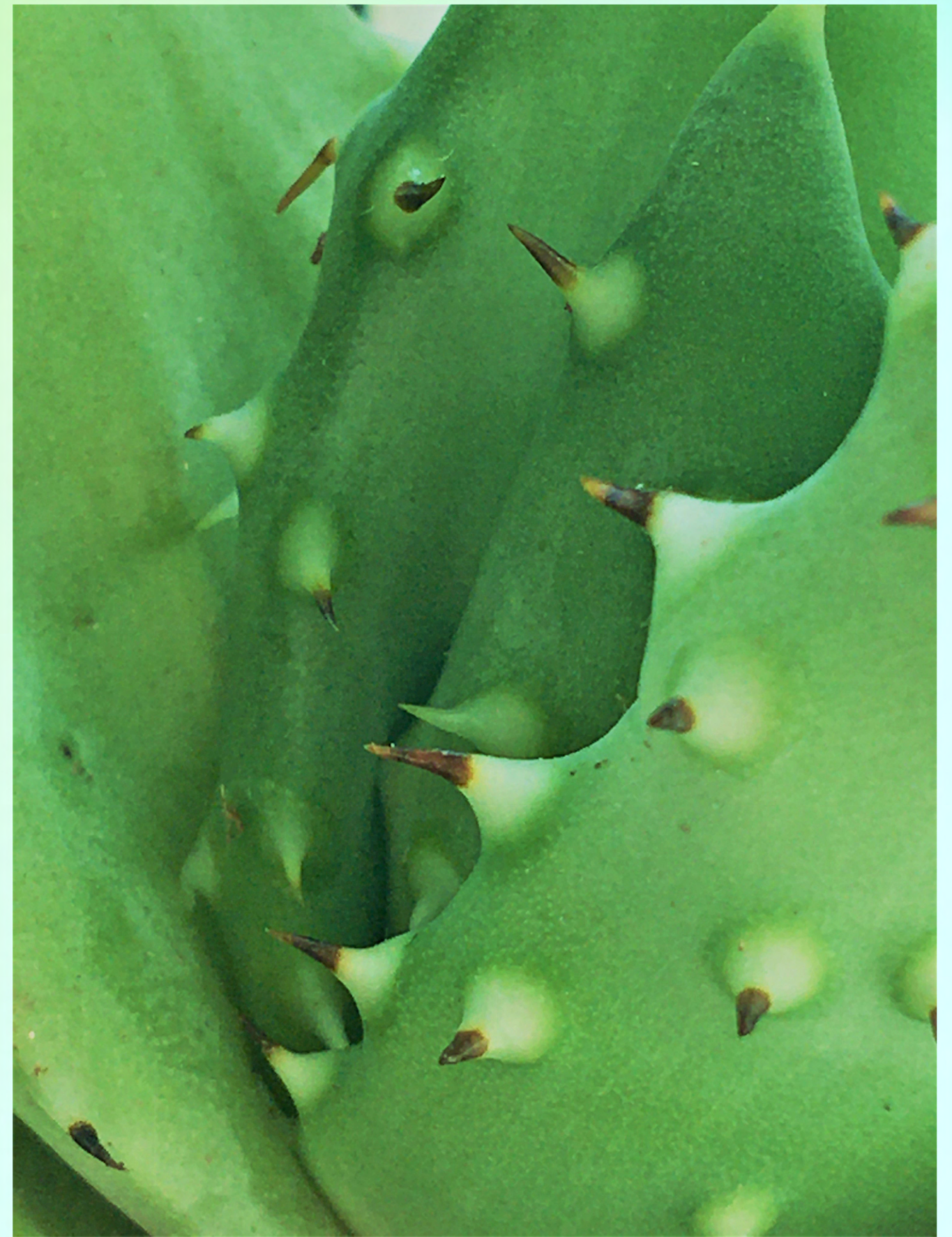
AMANDA NICKERSON



ANGELA MARTEL



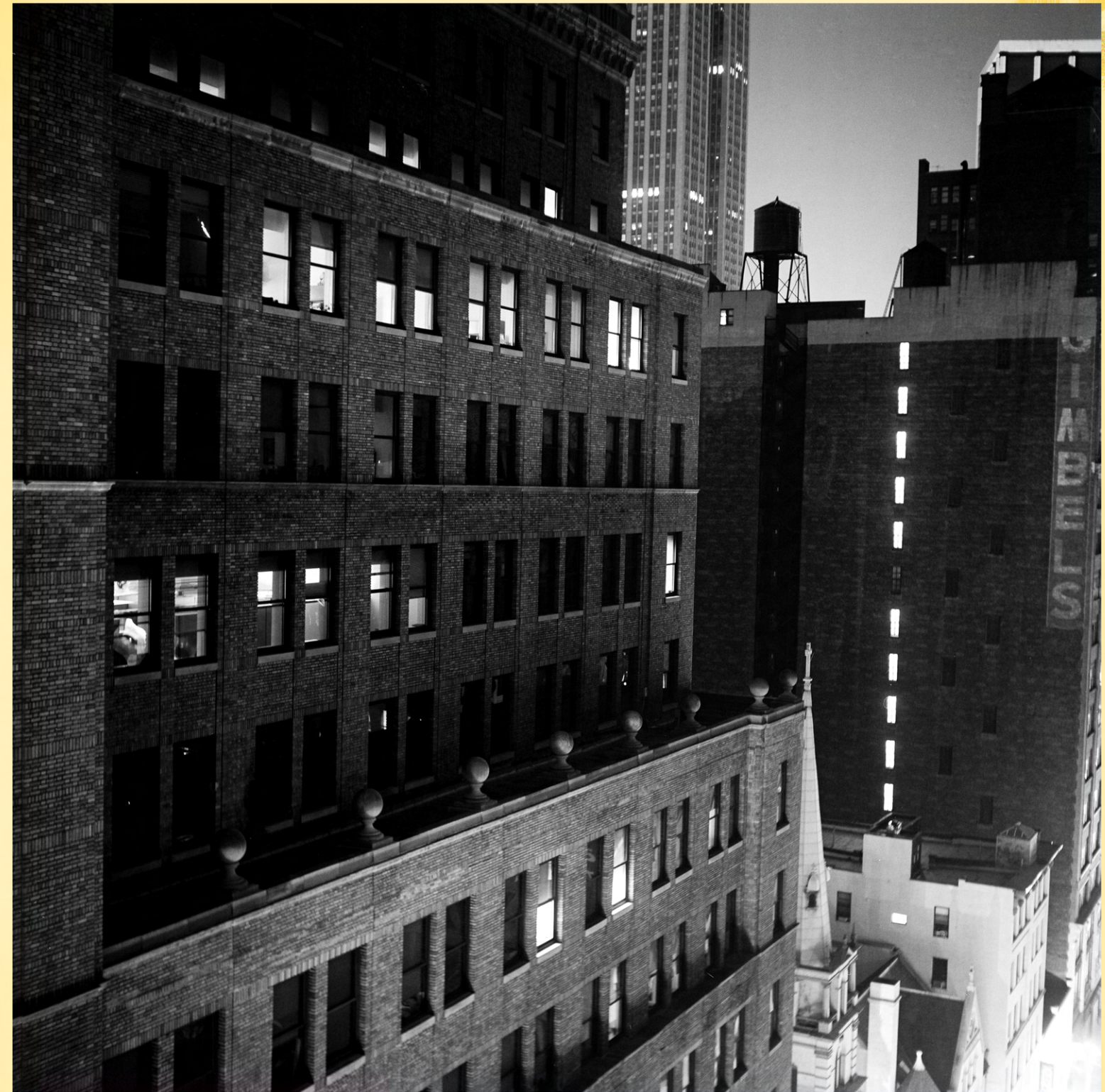
ANGELA MARTEL



ANGELA MARTEL



ANNE HOPKINS



ANNE HOPKINS



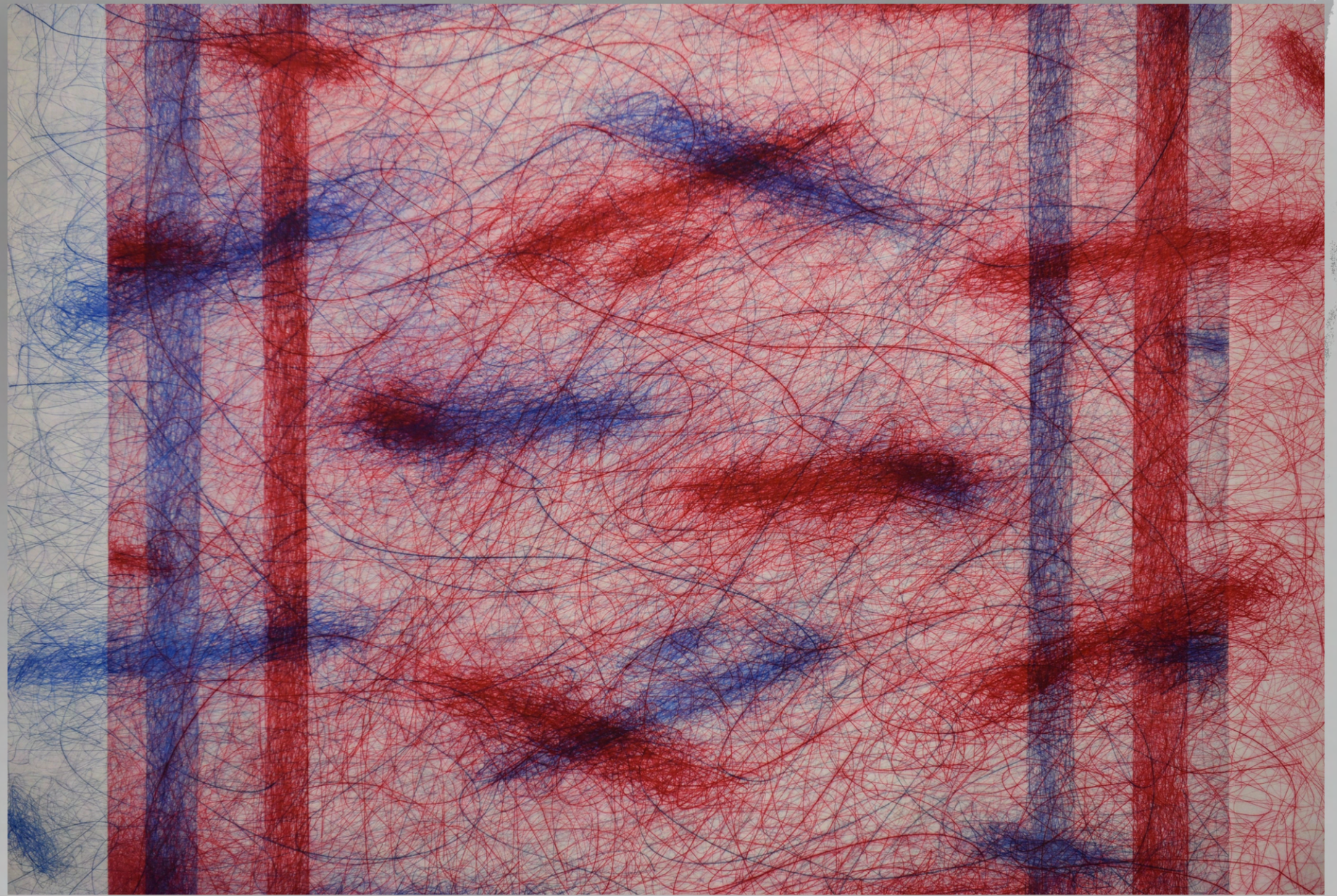
ANNE HOPKINS

STEVEN DILEO





STEVEN DILEO



STEVEN DILEO

2021 CONTRIBUTORS

Diana Burke is an alternate universe pop sensation and English education major at NECC. She's been a *Parnassus* staff member since 2018 and Editor-in-Chief in 2020. In 2021, she was accepted for a readership position at the international online magazine *Palette Poetry*. In her personal life, she is a flamboyant redhead and the youngest of four siblings (though she calls herself an only child). She's been writing poetry since she was a teenager, against her doctor's wishes. She prefers reading it. Some of her most beloved poets include John Donne, June Jordan, William Butler Yeats, Alejandra Pizarnik, Xu Zhimo, Hafiz, François Villon, Percy Shelley, Anna de Noailles, Yu Xuanji, Lucille Clifton, Emily Dickinson, Countee Cullen, and Aphra Behn—but ask her tomorrow and she'll rattle off a whole different set of names. Her poetry has been featured in previous issues of *Parnassus* and is forthcoming in your prophetic dreams.

Kaily Burke is a fiction writer, math student and local ditz at NECC. Her work is inspired by Rod Serling, Lewis Carroll, and her grandmother, Constance.

Chelsea Daigle is a mind that lives in more than one world. Their creativity encompasses every aspect of their life, including sketching, writing, creating, and designing characters and worlds, using their voice affect social change, plotting Dungeons & Dragons adventures, trying to make birthday cupcakes "funky," putting five unnecessary hours into an assigned slideshow presentation for the sake of cool transition effects, pulling out a ukulele whenever a song gets stuck in their head (even if it's jazz), and tons more.

Steven DiLeo was an Art Major at UMass Boston many moons ago. He has just started to get back into it now. It is amazing how the same issues in life keep reoccurring. He claims he has always been somewhat of an over thinker. Not necessarily an intelligent thinker but over thinker. He never thought much of the work he produced. A type of person that takes three steps forward and then two back. Overall progressing, but wishing there was an easier way! Now, after many years, he is immersing himself in art again. Some of his favorite artists are Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Monet, Whistler, Mark Rothko, and just about all the abstract expressionists. Does he have something worth saying and looking at through art? It is yet to be seen.

Anne Hopkins was born in upstate New York and moved to Massachusetts while a young child. She attended the University of Massachusetts at Lowell and studied under Arno Minkkinnen and Mark Eshbaugh, where she fell in love with the magic and science of photography. She loved exploring the possibilities with traditional materials and processes. Upon graduation, she worked for many years in a custom black and white printing lab, in addition to a color lab. With digital photography becoming more and more prevalent, she focused her attentions on more hands-on processes. In 2009, she discovered a manner in which it was possible to lift and transfer the dyes of a c-print, as well as veil and manipulate them. She has continued to explore the possibilities with this process as a means to illustrate the way that our perception and memories are transformed by our own experiences and interpretations. She began using lifted Fujifilm dry lab prints as negatives for historic photographic processes which later led her to use c-print lifts onto found objects. She is an eternal optimist and sees the glass as having plenty.

Matthew Jordan is only 15 yet is a student at NECC. He was born in Boston and has seen such wonders of the world as the Garden of the Gods, Mount Denali, and the Nintendo store in New York City. He started taking classes at NECC in the Fall of 2017, at the tender age of 11. Nothing can phase his steely determination to be the very best like no one ever was.

Elena Karavannykh has first enrolled at the NECC two decades ago as an ESL (English as Second Language) Program, and came back to school last year as a Psychology major. While working towards her degree and professional career, she is still fascinated by English itself. Elena writes and publishes short stories and book reviews in her native Russian and strives to use her English, learned at the college, as a creative writing tool, a means of expression. Her work—a short story mixing styles of a parable and the Russian folk tale—had been published featuring in the previous issue of *Parnassus*, and one of her recent stories—an "absurdist parable"—was chosen for the current issue.

Angela Martel is a hobby baker and plant mom, and she dreams of travelling the world. You can find her either making treats at home or eating them at local bakeries. She loves a good cup of coffee and hates small talk. She has dealt with mental health issues in the past and wants to help others move forward in life through their struggles. Her writing at times is a bit dark, but her outlook on life is positive.

CONTRIBUTORS

Amanda Nickerson is thirty-three-year-old artist from Lowell. She attends NECC and is in the Healthcare Technician Certificate Program while also a member of the NECC Art Club. She loves to use markers as a creative form of expression. She primarily uses Copic and Tombow markers. Her artwork often incorporates elements of horror to tell stories about her past experiences and emotions. In Amanda's free time you will find her reading Stephen King novels, playing video games, or donating whole blood and/or platelets. Her future plans are to become a phlebotomist and to further her schooling in the healthcare field.

Sam Rodin is a Philosophy student here at NECC again this year; his professors hope he'll move along soon. Much as everyone else, Sam enjoys talking about himself both far too much and far too little: to that end everything related in this work is a factual recounting of events as they happened, with no exaggeration and very little whole fabrication.

Sam likes cats. Sam likes dogs. Sam likes books. Sam is not entirely sold on people as a whole. Sam has run fairly sour on the whole sociopolitical system of the modern era and has some ideas about what to replace it with, but usually no one asks him.

Sam would like to thank the academy for this award, as well as his grandfather, Johannes Gutenberg, and that one particularly steep hill on his walk to work without whom he would, in order, be generally less inspired, be far less legible, and have had significantly less time to mutter rhymes to himself.

Her name is **Mariam Salvidar**. In her lonely world, books became her best friend. She read day in and day out, and the things she'd always daydreamed about grew. As the days passed, she felt like nothing but a daydream, until she learned about the power of pen to paper. She wrote and wrote to her heart's desire, creating undiscovered worlds and unheard stories in the matter of seconds. In writing, she finds her peace. I think... that's all there is to know about her.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

Submissions to *Parnassus* are accepted from NECC students, staff, and faculty, with two deadlines in a non-pandemic ridden school year (fingers crossed for 2022). We accept submissions in the genres of fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, and various art and photography styles. We accept only the sparkly stuff, so shine up your best works and send them along to us. You too could have your name and brilliance typed up in our pages. Details for submitting are found on our website:

www.parnassuslitmag.com

Entries are judged democratically by our genius staff, and *Parnassus* is annually published following the spring semester of each long, laborious, and mind-enhancing school year, arriving in your hands (again, come on 2022) metaphorically hot off the presses and steaming with artistic promises of a heck of a good reading experience.

STAFF

Diana Burke, Editor-in-Chief

Chelsea Daigle Elena Karavannykh Courtney Morin

FACULTY ADVISOR AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

Patrick Lochelt

JOIN US!

The herald call for new and returning staff members can be heard ringing in the air at the beginning of each semester. When we are allowed to be in proximity with other humans, we meet irregularly and when necessary throughout the semester, but we also do a lot of this stuff online. If you believe your mind to be of the highest of creative caliber, or you're just a go-getter who wants to decide who lives and who dies artistically, you might be *Parnassus* staff material. Contact us for more info!

NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE
100 ELLIOTT ST. HAVERHILL, MA 01830
WWW.PARNASSUSLITMAG.COM

PARNASSUS

2021

WWW.PARNASSUSLITMAG.COM