



# INK

REFLECTIONS 20-21

## *Literature and Art Magazine*

Avoid Spreading Germs



Stay Home When You Are Sick



Wash And Sanitize  
Your Hands Frequently



Wear A Mask



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*Max Marinelli*

# I WAS GOOD

My mother rolled over in her sleep, awakening me as the first rays of *Photo by Magnus Lunn* sunshine slid across the bed through the slits in the bamboo shades. I knew I was too old to be sleeping curled up between my mom's breasts and my dad's ungiving back, but something about the inimitable heat of their bodies put me to sleep like a wordless lullaby. The two of them hardly noticed when the first alarm went off and only briefly stirred after the second. This wasn't particularly unusual. They seldom left the house on time for wherever they went, my father often closing the door on my mother as she, in tow, attempts to slide through the closing gap between the door and its frame. I can just make out their frantic goodbyes to each other as they split toward their respective cars in the driveway before speeding out. My parents were so rushed one day that my dad backed into my mom's front bumper; the neighbors got to witness a real supernova of a shouting match after that fiasco. The cars now have matching lined scars, my dad's car's on its back, my mom's on its front. Today, though, my mom and dad both refused to so much as turn over despite my best efforts to nudge them awake. I began to panic as I remembered that the alarms hadn't gone off the past two days: this meant that they needed to leave bright and early the next five days. I was their un-silenceable alarm—if I couldn't do my job then why would they let me keep sleeping in their bed? My father finally reluctantly blinked his eyes open as I nudged him to the beat of the clock's third and final series of blares before silencing the alarm, patting my head lovingly as if to say it was okay to return to my peaceful slumber, that it was all a false alarm. I allowed myself to return to dreams of summer afternoons, a futile escape from the raucous winds that buffeted just outside the bedroom windows.

Sometime later, I reawoke to the sounds of bubbling coffee grounds downstairs. I found that I was the only one left in the bed, so I decided to take a peek out of the window where the snow-covered ground violently reflected the sunlight at me, flashing quick-fading radiant starbursts across my eyes. Wafts of bacon grease tickled my nose and coerced my body, stiff with sleep, to leave the comfort of the warm sheets and carefully descend the steep stairs down to the dining room. My mom sat sprawled out across the couch, whittling down the remaining clues on her daily crossword puzzle while my dad flipped pancakes and sausage patties on the stovetop, the bacon already crisped and ready to be eaten. I studied my mother as she filled in the small black-and-white boxes with relative ease. Not long after my mom filled in the final blank, my dad called upstairs and down filed my two older brothers. My sister, the eldest of the four of us, lagged behind, her hair frizzled and her eyes seemingly shot with crying. She had trekked home for winter vacation, but she had gone back to school last week, so I was surprised to find her joining us for breakfast—she must have come in last night. This was unusual; ever since she left us, she hardly returned home except for the major seasonal vacations.

As my dad handed out plates, I received a noticeably larger portion than normal. He had made my favorite breakfast: bacon and sausage, the bacon crispy and the sausage dribbled with syrup, alongside buttermilk

pancakes topped with melted butter and some whipped cream. I rarely ever got such a large prepared spread, as we were often rushed in the morning. When my parents did have extra time to make breakfast, they often gave the majority of it to my brothers because “growing boys need their fill.” Fearing there had been a mistake, I scarfed down my breakfast extra quickly this morning. No one noticed me ingurgitating my early morning spoils, but even if they did, I doubt they would have been alarmed—I always devoured my meals like I was competing in Olympic time trials, an accustomed tendency one develops in a large family of large people.

The household seemed to be far quieter than usual as my two brothers and I sat down after breakfast in front of the flat screen in the living room. No one even made any snarky remarks or exaggerated gestures of mock-frustration when I knocked my mother’s precariously perched glass of orange juice, half full and forgotten, off of the ottoman. I had accidentally kicked it onto the rug, coaster and all, as I hopped off the couch to get a drink of water. My throat had felt dry and my swallows rough like sandpaper for what had felt like months at this point, but I never said anything; this morning, the cool water slid down my throat leaving a trail of fire from my esophagus through my intestines. As I slinked back to my spot on the couch, I enjoyed the quiet, thankful to be free of the constant din of quarreling boys, the muffled, gossip-filled conversations between my sister and her friends over the phone, and my parents’ explosive arguments often beckoning divorce.

My brothers were half-watching Chappelle’s Show reruns when I returned, my sister nowhere to be found. I could overhear the pair entering the early stages of a fight despite my best efforts to tune them out. They were soon elbowing each other, my immediate older brother desperately clinging to his spot in the corner of the couch with the coveted armrest while my oldest brother slowly began to work him, jabbing his ribs and the soft fat of his sides. This story had been told a thousand times: my immediate older brother vying for his position on the couch or in the line for the bathroom while my oldest brother, three years his senior, somewhat effortlessly overpowers him. In a last-ditch effort, my immediate older brother attempts to pancake his foe from a sitting position. It appears my oldest brother might succumb to the weighty drive of his adversary for a moment, but then he slings his left arm around and forces his opponent to the ground. My immediate older brother appears as if he may take his anger out on me, so I scamper away to my father, eager to plant myself behind the sturdy fenceposts that are his legs.

He looks down at me and frowns as if I have reminded him of something gruesome, his face twisting as he unplugs his smartphone and begins to frantically search Google. After he finds the number he was looking for, my dad types it in on the keypad and escapes upstairs to elude the possibility of a reawakened cacophony as the phone rings. I hear him begin to introduce himself in his patented, monotonous dad-on-the-phone voice before he reaches the top of the stairs and his voice becomes distorted through the floorboards. “Yes, this is he... mmhmm, I’m calling to confirm the appointment... ahuh, ahuh—ah, I see... no, I do not wish to remain in the room... yes, we have insurance... thank you... we’ll be up at two...”

I looked at him inquisitively when he returned downstairs, but his face revealed no answer. Being a man of many words and little emotion, his silent, troubled look perturbed me as he made his capricious re-entrance into the kitchen. As I said, I’m the young, unproblematic, reserved sibling, and as such, I left him to his solitude. I’m a looker and a listener, a deeply beloved houseplant, and from my flowerpot I noticed my father shoot a panicked glance at my brothers across the open-planned first floor, who returned with solemn, knowing stares. Had anyone bothered to look down at me, they would have seen my expression of unqualified unknowingness, my eyes blank and glossy with the uneasiness of someone who isn’t privy to an uproarious inside joke.

The clock on the microwave flashed its fluorescent pixels in my peripheral, roping me back to reality. I was too short to see myself in the plastic window on the microwave, but I could just make out a fuzzy reflection of my face in the oven’s tinted tempered glass: my mouth looked warped and my eyes sunken, like it wasn’t me glaring back but instead an exhausted doppelgänger. This anxiety-stricken



apparition seemed to imperfectly mimic my movements, the left side of its face melting almost imperceptibly as the phantasm performed a free-willed wink—had I done that? I must have, though I genuinely couldn't remember instructing the wretched depiction of myself to do so. The image on the oven slowly contorted itself into a puzzled grimace, and just as I started to wonder if the character in front of me was once again disobeying its role as my loyal likeness, an acidic burst of agony gyrated through my gut. A breathless yelp escaped my lips before I could help it. I limped back to the couch to lie down in hopes of temporary relief—today would just have to be another lonely, lazy winter's day.

I woke up to the soft touch of my mother's supple fingers stroking my head through my hair. It was time to hop in the car and speed off to go meet the mysterious man my father had been speaking to over the phone. My brothers took off toward the car, the two of them jostling for the left seat in the middle row with the unbroken armrest. The loser would have to join me in the back row; the right seat in the middle row was reserved for my sister, purchased with her seniority. My oldest brother emerged victorious once again, claiming his throne as my immediate older brother shrugged before sliding into the back row. My sister and my parents and I trailed behind as we exited the back door and walked across the driveway to the car; my oldest brother's mouth, previously smug with triumph, turned to a grave frown as I walked up to the car. Observing my mother as she pulled ahead of us, I realized I hadn't seen her since breakfast, and she too appeared to have fallen ill to the viral "crying disease" my sister had earlier caught. I heard my mother much-too-loudly whispering to my oldest brother in the middle row that he would have to forfeit his newly regained throne so that I, an unwilling participant in the day's quizzical pampering, could have a seat by the window. Carsickness had always plagued me, but my family had never made accommodations for me in the past, so the idea that I would now be allowed to have the window open on a freezing January afternoon was curious at best. Nevertheless, we pattered out of the driveway with the windows down. The brisk wind battered my face and filled my ailing lungs as we trundled down the icy, relatively deserted roads to our undisclosed destination. I had always loathed car rides, the sharper turns sloshing my stomach acid around, begetting an ancestral catharsis in response to modern innovation, but now the freezing air coated the inside of my throat, lungs, and stomach, creating a sort of numbing effect. I felt calm once again, comforted by the snowy scenes outside my window, the white blanket covering the ground serving as enough of a reminder of warmth to keep me from shivering—wait, were we pulling into a fast-food drive-through?

We never went out to eat because it was too expensive, so fast food had become a staple of our family. Usually, I don't get anything, preferring to eat in the dining room's stationary comfort. It wouldn't make much sense for me to eat in the car anyway, on account of my tendency to throw up. I got a bacon cheeseburger today, though, inspired by the even feeling in my stomach. My mother had ordered for us, as she always did, her usually steady voice cracking as she spoke into the drive-through stereo. The rest of the car, too, spoke in uneven, lofty tones, clearly thinking far beyond their lunch orders. I gulped down my burger as we exited the drive-through, uncertain as to whether I would feel well enough to eat it if I waited any longer.

The longer we drove, the more unsettled I felt. No one else had eaten a single fry or taken a sip of soda, and an eerie silence had fallen upon the vehicle as we continued our travel down the streets to who-knows-where. I peeled my eyes away from the steady stream of stout, snow-covered evergreens outside the window, averting my focus to an investigation of the cause of this uncharacteristic silence. Besides my Mom, who was driving the car, everyone was studying me with sorrowful looks, tears welling up in their eyes.

Not a single word escaped chapped locked lips as we rolled to a stop between the freshly repainted white lines of a small parking lot behind an unpromising, dim-lit brick building. My family, never forgetting me but never before truly noticing me, indiscreetly turned to face me after rolling up their windows and turning on the heat. Awkwardly twisted to watch me over their seats, my parents bit their

nails halfway down to the beds; red-eyed beside me, my sister appeared to be staring at something just beyond my face; unfazed but for a faint tear-streak across their right cheeks, my brothers craned their necks to study me from the back seat. We sat there for a while in silence, the vehicle gradually warming up to a comfortable temperature. My mom unbuckled her seatbelt after some time, and immediately the rest of my family was all over me, spewing an endless stream of shallow promises and empty praise and genuine love. But too soon thereafter my dad left the car unhelmed, pulled my right-side door handle—bursting the barrier between the warm, love-stricken air inside the car and the piercing, unforgiving wind outside—and called for me to follow. I did what I was told, as I always did. I was good.

Inside what must have been the lobby of the strange, eerily familiar building, people kept their coats on despite the room's lukewarm temperature. Several masked men spoke to each other in hushed tones as they bustled in and out of the warren of offices beyond the lobby. Facing us was a marble peninsula, jutting into the expanse of dusty air and checkered tile. The other waiters—as they appeared to be hesitantly expecting, but not always receiving, a return of some sort—acted in peculiarly stark manners. From couples engaged in lighthearted kibitzing to singles lost in defenseless reverie to masses huddling together in kindred mourning, the atmosphere was unplaceable, stuck to the tip of my tongue. I watched as others who looked halfway like me—confused, awestruck, fearful, almost agog with apprehension—were grudgingly led around one side of the peninsula into a dim-lit office and, for the most part, returned around the other side to join their mothers or fathers or families at a lethargic pace with matching, tired eyes. A few cycles of this exchange went by before my name was called. I looked to my father, eager for any semblance of guidance or direction, and it looked as though he wasn't going to give me any before he stood up and directed me into an office himself. No one else had been accompanied by their parents on their venture through the menacing back door, so I figured their crazed stares must have been disingenuous—they must have been here before—why else would they enter the offices alone?—or, perhaps more apt, why else would I enter accompanied?

Two men in white coats circled the room, preparing a vial of an undisclosed liquid. One man left his partner and whispered to my father as the other fixed the mixture: “we just wanna check one more time to see if you’ve changed your mind... would you like to hold?... are you sure?... you can still stay in the room... okay, does that work?” I hear my father string off a series of no's before he nods with a solemn finality. The second man, satisfied with his concoction, attaches a needle to the vial and flashes it to his partner, a gesture that my dad has taken as his sign to leave. He picks me up, kisses me, and hands me over to the men. As I remembered how much I hated shots, I began to piece together where we were, my memory hazy and incomplete as it frequently was these days—I didn't need to remember to keep good and quiet, though, because my dad would be watching from the corner of the room, entrapping my gaze to keep me from looking down at the piercing needle, just as he had always done before. He lingers in the doorway today, however, turning as the solution enters my veins, providing little relief as the solution starts oozing through the vial, passing my bushy, ungroomed hair, breaking the skin, and flooding my bloodstream. I yelp as he indiscreetly flees the room, his cloudy eyes pouring upon his face. Time slows down and, in a moment of clarity, I realized no one had clipped on my collar before we left the house this afternoon, an omen that shouldn't have ever gone unnoticed. The needle has long been removed by now, and as I listen to my family's car sputtering off outside the building, my mind screams to my muscles to kick, to flail, to spazz, to do anything to get out of this damned room, but I find that my legs respond only in slow-motion. My eyelids have turned to limestone, and they fall shut despite my desperate resistance. I was always quiet; I never caused trouble; I was trusting; I was good. Why did he leave me here? Why did they leave me here?

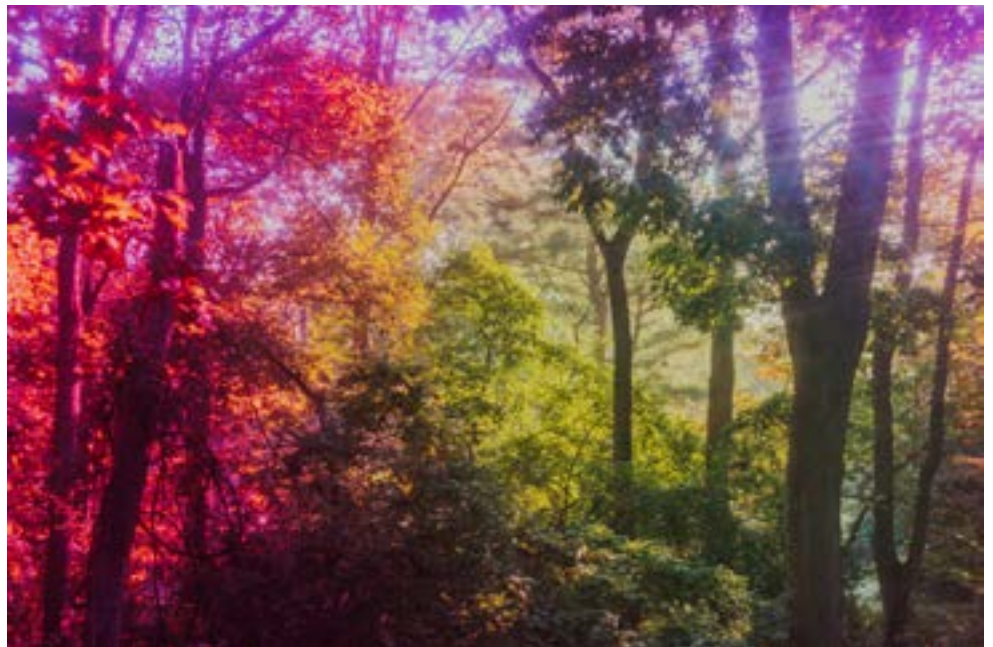
Sleep overcame me as I was released from the man's arms, a non-tranquil rest amplified tenfold by the lack of bodily warmth I had grown accustomed to from my parents.



*Painting by Anthony Bowers*

# THE CLOSET

There's a closet in my room with a window to the world. Its creaky door is pale white, still, in my childhood years, it's enough to shut out outside light, the handle won't turn; not unless you use all your might. If you think to yourself; this closet is inescapable, I promise this to you: you would not be right. The closet is dark for a very long time, August of 2017, and it sees its first shine, peaking through the cracks. There is a girl, I don't know her name but in my mind she is perfection, and perfection is hard to look away from; so I didn't. My eyes followed her like a lost puppy, I was staring at perfection after all; God was I lucky. She disappears from view and the closet's dim light gets dimmer. In my mind now, this girl of summer's perfection is but a small glimmer. It's fall, the bonfires are burning, and awaiting my surprise, Halloween ghosts are twisting and turning; they're on the rise. October 18th, for most it's a forgotten day, for me however, it's when I realized I was gay. A new girl, her laugh is my light, and it follows me to my closet at night. What was hued and dim before shines new and bright, I notice for the first time, my closet door is shut tight. I'm still straight though.. Right? Of course.. I think. Despite everything, my eyes have found someone to worship, awinged, my heart is a flight. For a year I am torn, who will win this long battle, no, it's a fight? I am bi, I am sure, well sure as a hypocrite, honest as a kleptomaniac, as a father telling his kids he's "getting milk-- he'll be right back". Somewhere along, the time line gets messy, I'm losing interest in girly things, like painting my nails or getting dressy. Those pink dresses in my closet shift to things that now feel like a better fit. Still.. The door is shut, but the window curtains have been pushed to the side a bit. Now.. after a year of light, I'm finally seeing what's outside. It's things I've never seen before, like a fairy tale of yore, like two girls holding hands with faces of pride. Except there are no fairy tales for us, never have been, never was. I saw the statistics through my phone, the excess of abuse, drinking and drugs. It hit me knowing this was it, I'd still be a lesbian the day I'm lying my grave's ditch. That I couldn't be cured by a priest or a pastor, that I couldn't outrun it by trying to be faster. So instead.. Instead I got smarter, changed the code to my phone's password. My closet became my home, a secret world in those six square feet. A door that divided me from anything more out there. I accepted there was no one to comfort me around, as messed up as it might sound. I became my own queen, I wore the crown. The crown of tears and late night prayers, the crown of pinching myself so I wouldn't stare. The crown of going through hell in search of the other side only to be told you're going right back there when you die, better hitch a ride with all the other homos inside. Hey.. maybe then I'd actually meet one



*Photo by Blake Riesenfeld*





other lesbian, after all in my entire life I've only known three, and they were adults, a different generation than me. Early 2020 I've decided, the two parts of my life can no longer be divided. The lies I spit the moments I've missed, I'm done. No more, I'm tired of being smart. I'm tired of this closet, choking me, it's insufferable. But my fears.. Of coming out and it all goes terrible. But forever in six square feet is a long time, what about college, by then will it be unbearable? Yes. Do it now. So I tell myself, April, 2020, I will make a vow. I'll turn that door knob, I'm tired of just looking through the window, I'm tired of this screwed up system. It's been too long in my solitary kingdom.. so I rally my army, positions are in play. I have the crown, but tonight I'm taking home the trophy, cause this closet of mine, it no longer feels so cozy. Except March hits, and even though the light of my closet is lit, set to burn down the door, I won't light the match till school is back before. So I wait, tear stained pillows, April comes and passes, the covid cases rocketing, the death tolls in masses. Dates I tell myself I'll tell a friend come in warm summer months and eventually end. The deadline continues to extend, life in the closet feels as though it will never end. Not that I have ever been able to imagine life outside, even when I play pretend. September hits, freshman year, a notice slid through my closet door; the final deadline it appears. October 8, what's passed now at this moment is almost 3 years. I've been living in the closet for my entire life, though the last years were simply the light show. A puppeteer act put on by the women who shaped me, of lesbian youtubers and influencers who posted on the daily. In my life, I'm going to mimic their moves like a shadow, and lemme ask you, can you blame me? The light shines, like a halo of good omens, as I say the words " I'm a lesbian" to my friends. I've done it at last, and I watch as the closet door cracks. It is far from fully open, but now that I've seen the light on the other side of my closet door, it no longer feels like home. I want more.

*Photo by Blake Riesenfeld*



*Katia Campos*



# DAUGHTER OF LAYLA

The desert sun beats on my head, through the moonroof, as we drive off someplace in Southern Texas. I watch my mother from the passenger side, as she looks ahead. Her face is nonchalant. She doesn't look neither angry nor happy. Full of concentration. My hands sweat at the thought of making it to the riverside, where Texas holds hands with Mexico, and the train passes off. Giving a friendly 'hello' by means of a loud *HONNNNK!* She starts to slow down, the sun is about halfway up already. It's becoming mid-afternoon, meaning I have only about 2 more hours of daylight before complete night. I'm nervous. But watching Mom, from the passenger side, she looks unafraid meaning she must be confident in me. Finally, or maybe she is steeling herself. Getting ready for the hard breaks, or to shout, "LOOK THE \*UC\* UP!! YOU'RE GONNA HIT SOMEONE! STAY IN ONE LANE!" I am always nervous to hear her shout, but I am more nervous of looking behind while driving to see if I have someone in my blind spot. *Photo By Blake Reisenfeld*

Mom pulls to a stop at the edge of the land, where there is a good two foot drop into the fast water. It smells a little stinky, the green water. She takes a good few moments to look at the houses ahead, past all the water, where she used to live. Her hair has a bright tinge to it with the ripe sun. It looks like milk chocolate, so rich and colorful, it'd almost stain her black pleather seats. I can't tell what she could be thinking about, she's a mystery to me. Taking in a deep breath, my mom gets out of the car and I steady myself, feeling my blood drop and cool. I take a moment to pray to God, closing my eyes tightly as though they were my hands to pray with instead. I thanked God for delivering me all these 16 years, and then for helping me while I was driving on that highway last week, getting me into the dog house swiftly when the reaper didn't come to collect us. Mom's knocking on the dusty window brought me to my senses, I staggered out of the car onto the large clumps of brown gravel, "Can you do this?"

Her voice was soft, but full of caution. Turning around I managed to breathe an unconfident "Yes." Stepping into the driver's side, I made sure to close the door softly behind me as it's one of her pet peeves. A four year old car and

yet she still hates it when someone slams her Montequieu shut. Arranging the mirrors I made sure to see all around me, even though I still have yet to make sure my hands don't follow my eyes. "Ready?" she asks, her eyes concentrated on the streets and trees beyond the big river. Not yet focused on me.

"Yeah." I respond, she purses her lips. Mom doesn't like one-worded answers, especially when driving. It shows you're scared and can't think and drive. Taking the gear stick in my right hand, left hand on the steering wheel, foot on the brake, I let go and reverse. It was a smooth exit out of the dusty area we were in, past the dumpster that marks the place we go. To watch the normal, unbusy families, with no worries fish their thoughts away. Fathers come here often with their little chubby sons to teach them how to take their aggression out not on their wives, but to sit it out and let it go by the riverside.

I drive out, making sure to monitor the sneaky streaks of white by my left side. We pass the outlets of dead fashion that usually cater to cheaply dressed, thick makeupted, superficials. I like to watch the way they walk, so confident that their small town is the world. Man or woman, they don't know that this town is at least two decades behind. The only accurate things of the time they have is through their phones and TVs that they don't know how to use properly. But I can't watch them in amusement right now, I have to focus on their safety, as I drive this small red sports car.

As I concentrate on going uphill, trying to remember if I have the right of way or the guy turning left, my mother turns on the radio. The music bursts through the car's speakers loudly, taking away most of my concentration nearly immediately. She then states loudly, over the music, "I was talking to you, you have the right of way right now." Nodding my head I drive straight up the hill, making my way downtown. At this point, she'll tell me either to go left to the northside of town, or straight to go further south to the next town. As we make our way out of downtown to the intersection, she points ahead. I guess we are going to the next town over and back. I distract myself by listening to the radio, *Bennie and the Jets*, playing confidently as my psyche wavers. As I head towards Meadow, trying to straighten myself so I can make a clean hard right and not hit the big truck on the street I am designated to go to, I hear, "Did I ever tell you how my highschool life was?" Her question made me look to her, only to receive a commotion of honks from behind when I failed to move at the green. "No," I said softly as I made the way out of the area sloppily.

"Well," she started, my eyes focused on ahead, "as you know, I went to highschool with my best friend. We tried going to the same classes together because we thought in the end, we'd always be together." I heard her chuckle, I slowed down as the car gained speed at a curve and continued on ahead. My stomach churns now at the mention of her friend. "I had joined the school band, and it was difficult. You know the upperclassmen there would take turns beating the freshman?" I laughed in surprise, making another right, "Yeah, and we heard from a friend I had made that we should find a good place to hide soon. 'Cause they were gonna beat us and then stuff us in a trash can." My eyebrows furrowed. We continued straight onto the highway, past Delmar. Elton's piano riffs in the background gave off a nostalgic feeling, Mom's voice made her story seem more enjoyable to her now. "Well, I looked at my best friend, and said 'Hell nah!' We are gonna make it out together, and beat their asses!!" In the middle of stopped traffic I listened as Mom told me about how she and her friend held hands down their band hall and punched the older kids, shoving any and everyone out the way until they made it to the other side to safety.

It was almost too good to be true. I listened to Mom as she told me about the many band trips across Texas, and how much she loved the competitions, despite being mediocre. She loved being around her best friend, freshman year, together, they could do anything. Tell off teachers and feel no remorse, say they didn't need boys, they had each other. Listening to Mom made me feel so surreal. This was my mother? Where did the teenager go? Did she suddenly get soft with the blessing that was her children? And then the mood changed. The orange sun far behind us, the highway now stretching for miles. The tune of *Bennie* changed, the signal getting bad, breaking up consistently. "Sophomore year, was the year I met your father, you know. He was a scrawny teen, a freshman, hideous pants and ugly shirt. I swear, if it weren't for the part he could ace tests, he would have gotten his ass beaten by everyone." I smiled, Mom never liked to admit that Dad was actually intelligent to his name. So she gave him credit by saying he could ace any test. It's still true though. The signal came back and I jolted, suddenly remembering that I was on the road. And leaning all the way to the right! The tune was now being sung by a frustrated Eric Clapton. Singing away his anger

and passion to Pattie Boyd or better yet, Layla. Mom laughed. Her Mom named her Layla, after the song, but somehow misspelled it. Insisting that she meant to spell it the 'Indian' way. "High school, after meeting your father, suddenly became a rough war zone. I couldn't let him know I loved him. He would destroy me." The music then slowed to the piano chorus, and I found myself seeing it clearly. I know the rest of the story. In parts told by my Godmother and her husband. Mom and her best friend together could shake anyone down, but then the two started to separate. Mom's best friend started going off to parties, leaving her behind as she was never allowed to go. Calling Mom names like 'whore' for doing normal things like going to doctors that weren't female and asking questions to professionals about how both male and female bodies worked. They were together and then separated.

A boy then showed up and Mom's best friend suddenly needed help wooing him, I had a lump in my throat as I turned at the next intersection. I really wanted to pull right though. Because going right would have led me to my other grandmother's house. I wanted to go straight, because I knew I'd hit something that would take me to Philadelphia. Mom and Dad started meeting up at debate competitions and she forgot about band, and then came her senior year. She had done so much and was gonna go off to college for her summer of junior year, calling her friend on a payphone, begging her to come with her. It'll be another 10 years before they'd meet again. Their son and daughter will drive them insane.

As I drove back, the car was silent, trying to find a signal again to some station. *Layla*, left behind, I fell silent. Partying had led her best friend to have a baby at 19, straight out of high school. Where was my mother? Chasing her dreams. I felt upset. High school had not been so good to me. My Sophomore year taken away by some cold-hearted boy with a mask to his name. When the year suddenly became bright, a pandemic had decided to put the world on hold. Taking in a deep breath, I let out a laugh as Peter Gabriel came on, my mother pressing a button nearby, raising the moonroof. *In Your Eyes*, playing in the background. I looked at my mother, the fear of driving lost, only another 20 minutes away. I felt happy knowing why my mother decided to put away that teenaged girl. She was never really gone, she just did not fit in the environment.



*Sassy Cassie by Caroline Maw-Deis*

Staring ahead in the night filled streets, doing my best to make out shadows and real figures of people, stray cats, and dogs. I realized that my mother is fearless because she took herself and made herself better. In an environment that would accept her to be curious about herself. Where she would be actually challenged. And in the end, with no friends, just herself and maybe my father, that's what she needed most. She beat the odds by getting accepted to Cornell, even though she was some nobody that went to a dirty, crooked, public school. That's my mother Layla, who decided that partying did not matter when in the end she needed a job to live. To sustain herself. And she did not want to trap herself with a child in a loveless marriage, and a society so old it would take years for the people to forgive her for conceiving so young. Something they have no business knowing.

The person sitting in the passenger seat, taking a few hours from her long days behind a computer, watching me and yelling when I am driving carelessly. That is my mother, and I am her daughter, who has a different story. But regardless, I will share some piece of her story. I am the daughter of Layla.





# THE THAW

The winter this year was harsh. Not as harsh as the last ones — though this goes *Photo by Magnus Lunn* without saying, as you already know that — but it was still bitterly cold. The leaves of the trees still froze beneath layers of thick, clear ice, the grass still browned and died beneath the snow. The sun was as bright and cold as it always was, reflecting off of untouched banks of snow and turning the ice-encased jewel-tone leaves into fire on their branches. But this year, as I hope you know, the thaw came early. Not that it changed much — the rivers still flooded, the trees still shed their old leaves and sprouted new buds, the grass still slowly returned to life. In fact, only Earl was affected by this early thaw.

Earl told himself he would go down to the river once it had thawed, would go to lay old grievances to rest. You should know he's sorry. He has no shortage of excuses: the peculiar quickness that this winter arrived with, how he simply forgot many things (what things, he's never said), how he hasn't felt himself for a long while now. How he hasn't felt himself in a long, long while — so long he doesn't quite know who or what he is anymore. Do not laugh. He is unaware of what you've observed. He figures himself a good liar. Didn't you



know that? He thought he had mastered deception. He does not know you see through him. Humor him, for once. If you can.

He says he's wrong, that his days, months, years of solitude have done him no good. He says he has wronged you. His tongue no longer forms words. He's snapped all his pencils. His inkwells have long dried. You'd be hearing all these things and more, but the thaw came too early. Earl wasn't ready to face the world yet. He has since further secluded himself. If only the thaw came one month, two months later. Perhaps he'd be here. Perhaps he'd still lock himself away.

But if you can stand the wait — and I know you're tired of his antics — you might find him by the river, or warming himself below the streetlamps. If you can stand his home, you can find him in the drawing room, sucking on an unlit pipe, carving his signature into the wood with his teeth. And if you truly wish to hear what he has to say, you can find him by the flooding river a few nights from now; you will know when the time is right. He will be waiting for you, amongst the silt and mud and the jewel-tone leaves, wreathed in dead grass, weeping into the dirt, shaking and swaying with the wind. Be not afraid. He is waiting to beg your forgiveness.

*Photo by Blake Reisenfeld*

# SWALLOW

*Liam Giszter*

I spin in orbit around you

Your eyes, teeth, and gums are black

An infinite space of shadow

Breathing me in

Yet my mind can shrivel, condense, crystalize

Still spinning, I can look into the beauty  
of its crevices

The formations of experience

Peaks and valleys of my memory

I can observe it all

And you breathe me in

And out

And in

But still the crystal remains

Still I am

You breathe me in

But you can never swallow

*Photo by Magnus Lunn*





## LIKE SEALS ON A DOCK

*(Observations and reflections on the Anthropocene while  
sightseeing in San Fransisco*

*Thomas Soper*

seals lie on the private dock  
like vagrants, languid, looking  
far heavier than their actual weight.  
slowly, one rolls over, yawning,  
water dripping from the outstretched flippertip  
as it rotates in orbit around the vast body,  
and the seal looks to be posing for us tourists,  
or perhaps just feeling every inch of itself in the sun.  
another noses the water, looking  
for food(?), then lifts its head into empty air and looks  
at us. the boats moored there  
set the scene: Naiad, Wine Therapy, Good Times,  
and the bay touring boat, Harbor Emperor, moving swoothly behind  
it all  
with one of its tourists on the reardeck barking in our direction.  
my kids, squeezing their faces through the chainlink of the dockgate,  
begin to bark back.

the low animals,  
like flotsam appeared on some foreign shore,  
seals on yuppy docks,  
homeless castouts in the San Francisco streets,  
we  
adapt or are adapted to  
some role in the great enterprise of humanity,  
and it seems all we can do  
is bark at one another  
across chainlink fence and the chasms of water and air.

*Photo by Magnus Lunn*



*Phone Case by Adele Goldader*

*Paper Tiger by Adele Goldader*



*Wyvern by Fotini Mourelatos*



*Axolotl by Adele Goldader*



*Painting by Anthony Bowers*



*Candle Holder by Sydney Horenstein*



*Cabinet by Hallie Bender*



*American Flag by Ethan Rappaport*

*Grill in a Dress by CJ Keller*





*Daria Shepelavy*



# HOW FLAMMABLE IS LIPSTICK?

“How flammable is lipstick?”

*Photo by Blake Reisenfeld*

Maia Calvin stood on the edge of the roof, her platform boots giving her the height she needed to get a good view of the beach below her. Her sparkly dress shone in the moonlight. The last bits of the bonfire smoldered below her.

“Why do you ask?” said a voice behind her. Maia had no need to turn around; she would recognize that voice anywhere. Her brother walked over to stand next to her, holding out a half drunk bottle of Jack Daniels. She grabbed it and took a swig before answering.

“Do you think it would be enough to blow up this building?” She handed back the whiskey bottle and pulled a tube of lipstick out of her bag. She brought it up to her face to examine it.

“You wanna blow our house up? With *lipstick*?” Josh Calvin turned to his sister, his brown eyes staring at the side of her head.

“Well, I don’t assume you’re keeping a stash of TNT or C-4 under your bed?” Maia said, finally turning to him.

He had his hands in his pants pockets. Having long discarded his green velvet suit jacket, his sleeves were folded up to right below his elbows. “*No*. I have some in my *closet*. Thought it would be a dramatic way to come out of it.” He looked her in the eyes, his look having softened to a more playful expression.

“Heh, yeah. And if Mom and Dad don’t accept you, you can just blow them up,” Maia said, grabbing the bottle again and taking another swig.

“Is that what this is about? Mom and Dad?” Josh’s face went back to the worried expression he had come up to the roof with. “Is that why you all of a sudden want to commit arson with makeup products?”

“It’s everything!” Maia made a circular gesture with her arm, momentarily forgetting about the bottle of whiskey in her hand as it spilled out and dribbled on her arm. “It’s *all* this *\*\*i\**. I’m tired of it”.

“What are you talking about?” Josh reached for the now empty bottle but Maia moved it away.

“You know what mom said to me the other day, when I told her I was depressed? She said, ‘Depression isn’t real. It’s just something made up for poor people.’ What the hell does that *mean*? I’m tired of Mom and Dad thinking that money and parties cure everything. Hell, they made us get all dressed up just to celebrate the fact that

Jenny got a new car. Maybe they should be spending this money on getting her a new dignity because she got drunk and crashed the car. It wasn't some rando who hit her car and drove away like our dear sister has chosen to tell everyone."

"I hate it too. But I don't turn eighteen for another nine months and you have two years before you can move out, so I suggest you buck up and make the best out of what we have."

"That's my point, Josh. We are stuck here. For god knows how long! It's like we're trapped in this bubble that mom and dad created. They locked me in my room for two weeks because I dyed my hair red. They made you change your outfit tonight because this suit matches the flowers on my dress better. I gave money to a homeless man and mom said that I was 'giving a gift to those who don't deserve it. If they were meant to have money, then they would have it.' It's crap. Jenny moved out four years ago and yet she stays over *every weekend* because mom and dad never taught her how to fend for herself and survive on her own. Don't you get it? There's no escape from here. Not unless we destroy it." She lifted her arm with the empty bottle of whiskey and chucked it as far as she could off the roof. The siblings saw it land far away, somewhere on the beach.

They stood there in silence as the nighttime beach breeze blew on them. Maia was cold in her short spaghetti strap dress, but she wasn't going to go inside. This was the fifth night in a row that she had come onto this roof and watched the dying sunset and listened to the waves crashing on the shore and felt a sense of resentment towards everything. This was the third time that she considered burning it all down and leaving it behind. She didn't want to hurt anyone; she just wanted to watch it all fall.

The silence was deafening but no one broke it, the only sound the waves and the distant cawing of the seagulls. She glanced at Josh out of the corner of her eyes. He was staring out at the beach and playing with the rings on his fingers. It went on like that for a while before Josh finally broke the silence.

"But why lipstick?"

Maia smiled slightly and rolled her eyes. She noticed for the first time that she had been subconsciously playing with the lipstick tube in her right hand.

"Because it's easy. And it's small...and it won't actually do anything." Maia once again held the Mac tube up to her face. She took the cap off and rolled the lipstick up all the way. She ran her long nail down the side of the smooth wax until the tip of her black nail was covered in red goop. "I wouldn't actually burn this down. It would be a waste. Besides, I looked it up and you can go to jail for up to twenty years for arson."

"You would not do well in jail, Maia," Josh said, moving closer to her.

"But it's nice to think about. Burning it all up. Leaving it all behind. Making my own way through life that doesn't consist of mom acting like Aunt Becky from *Full House* and paying for my success. I mean it's not the money itself that's inherently evil. It's the people who have it. If good people had money then the world would be a better place. Instead, it's people like Jeff Bezos and Donald Trump and even Mom and dDd that ended up with it.

"The lipstick is small and burning it isn't gonna do anything. It's symbolic, though." Maia held the lipstick up, then rolled it back into the tube. "It's like I'm burning the luxuries that mom and dad gave me. It's like the first step to destroying everything I know and starting anew. I get that I have privilege and I understand that I am incredibly lucky to have a roof over my head and food in my belly and a semi-decent and moderately loving family. I appreciate it, but I don't want it. I don't want to be imprisoned in this world that Mom and Dad built, this fantasy that they are forcing us to live in. I feel like Rapunzel, trapped inside her tower. You know, minus the magic hair, freakishly smart lizard, and adorable naiveite. I just want to step back and watch this house go up in flames and everything it stands for, burn with it."

"You scare me sometimes, you know that, right?" Josh put his arm around his little sister's shoulders. She laid her head on his shoulder and held the lipstick tube out in front of her.

"Good." She walked to the very edge of the roof and looked down at the dying bonfire and threw the tube of bright red lipstick in. The Calvin siblings watched as the tube fell right into the fire and burned away.



*Daria Shepelavy*

# THE SNOWY LAKE

White wisps of pure cold fell onto the now frozen lake. It soundlessly landed on the shining ice. Maggie could feel the tears on her face freeze in the cold air. The freezing wind snapped at her face as she sniffled. It had been two days since her mom died, and she still couldn't stop crying. Her mother had been her best friend and her not being alive anymore felt like a nightmare that Maggie could not wake up from.

There were white flakes in her curly blonde hair which was sticking out of her hat. The hat her mother had given her for Christmas a few years ago.

*Maggie ran down the stairs laughing, her long hair flying behind. She reached the living room, where her smiling parents were sitting.*

*"Open your first gift, Sweetheart," her mom had said. She picked up a small blue bag with sparkly, white snowflakes. She shoved her hands in and tore out all the tissue paper. She reached her hands in the bag one last time and pulled out a soft, blue beanie with a white pom-pom at the top.*

*"Thank you Mommy!" she said, hugging her mother.*

*"You're welcome honey!" her mother chuckled. "Maybe now you won't lose this hat!" She gave her daughter one of her famous lighting-up-the-room-grins.*

Maggie had lost every other hat that her parents had gotten her, but not this one. The memory made her even sadder; she ripped the hat off her head and threw it to the ground, before running even closer to the lake.

The Blue Lake--as her mother had called it-- was a small lake that was in the middle of a circle of houses, including Maggie's. She had grown up in the woods of Vermont next to the lake. So she had been going there with her mother since she was a baby.

*"Okay, all you have to do is put your head under the water and kick." Maggie's mom had taught her how to swim in the lake, and now she was the captain of her school's swim team. However, she had been pretty hesitant to learn.*

*"Mommy, I'm scared! I don't want to swim!" The five year old tightened her grip around her mother's torso.*

*"What's the point of living near a lake if you don't learn how to swim, Maggie?" Her mother chuckled as she tore her daughter from her chest and placed her in the water. "Come on, sweetie, it's easy, I'll show you!" Carrie put her head in the water and swam so gracefully it was as if she grew up underwater. When she finally lifted her head it was after she had returned to Maggie's side.*

*"Wow, Mommy, you're like a mermaid." Maggie's eyes were wide with excitement and admiration. "I wanna be a mermaid too! Can you show me how to swim like that?"*

*"Of course, my love! Just do as I say."*

Maggie smiled at the thought. Two weeks after practicing with her mother every day, she was able to swim all on her own.

Now she walked across the wooden platform that led out into the middle of the lake. Her dad had built the platform to allow Carrie to watch her daughter swim and talk to her once she became too sick and too weak to swim herself. The wood was covered in snow and looked decidedly worse than when it was built. After her mother died, Maggie's father had tried to destroy it, but in his despair, he was too weak for it to cause any major damage. She sat down on the edge and hung her legs over. This platform had been the switch that caused Maggie to realize her mom might not survive.

*"Maggie! Be careful please!" Her mother called as Maggie ran towards the lake. She could feel the summer breeze as she jumped into the familiar cold water and swam. She raised her head out of the water and looked around; she breathed in the salty air and smiled. She looked around at the trees and the birds.*

*"Mom! Come on it's beautiful." Carrie shook her head and smiled sadly. Her mother hadn't swum all year and Maggie grew increasingly worried every day.*

*"Sorry, honey, but I don't think I'm up to it today. I promise you I will be swimming with you again someday." She looked at her daughter with sad, yet hopeful eyes.*

*"But Mom, this is the last day of summer before I have to go to school!"*

*"I know, but I promise that I will be better by next summer. Then we will swim together every day!" She said this with so much hope and confidence that Maggie believed her. She dunked her head under water again and when she lifted it, her mother was gone.*

This memory made Maggie cry even more, because her mother didn't get better by the next summer. In fact, she didn't even make it past that winter. Maggie stood up and ran. She ran off the platform and all the way to the other side of the lake. She could hear her dad calling for her, but she didn't dare turn back around. Once she finally stopped running, she was standing in front of a part of the lake she had never seen before.

The ice was cracking a bit in front of her and the area was surrounded by huge rocks. She picked up the one in front of her, and threw it. She watched as it made a hole in the lake. She picked up another one and did the same thing. She kept throwing the rocks and watching them break the ice. Maggie wanted to fill the water with rocks.

She never wanted to see that stupid lake again..



# HIDING IN SYNTHETIC SUNLIGHT

*Photo by Blake Riesenfeld*

I awake to my noisy alarm clock, reminding me that my dream was still just a dream and that reality beckons me. I meander over to the bathroom, excess dreams still hanging onto my eyelids, pleading me to go back to sleep. I wish I could. When I get to the bathroom sink, I wash those clinging dreams away and look through the mirror at reality. Only now does my day start.

I get dressed in my room, picking which pair of sweatpants and T-shirt I will wear; it doesn't matter as much if you don't leave the house. I walk down the stairs and into my family's living room to grab my school bag and my phone, where out of the corner of my eye I see the news broadcasting the total fatalities of the invisible killer, a lazy bastard that takes two weeks to finally show up to do the deed. They're the reason we all wear masks, since masks trap the killers in the silky cell walls of the original victims. It sounds so simple, but tell that to the hundreds of thousands of people who have succumbed to the killer. The real plague of the invisible killer is that they have caused us to fear meeting with other people, a fear that they will jump from our friend's mouth to our own.

I prepare my desk for school now that I have my supplies with me. I check my phone for the time, and see that it is 8:05; I have ten minutes before my class starts. I'm taken aback at first, since I usually log on to the zoom just in time, like a buzzer-beater in a basketball game. I don't know what to do with myself for 10 whole minutes before I have to start being a student. When we were in person, we would talk about our classes and sports while we waited for the bell. Sometimes someone would play the piano, since our homeroom was in Shallcross. We were no pianists of any regard, but we had fun all the same. On birthdays our teacher would bring in doughnut holes from the City Line Dunkin' Donuts, and we would sing the happy birthday song as she played it on the piano. It didn't matter what time it was because the ringing of the bell reminded us that we had to get going and actually learn something. And when it did, we would say our goodbyes to our teacher and each other.

Now I sit alone, still ten minutes on the clock, no time to get lost in any project because the time would move too fast for me to react, and there will be no bell to remind me of what time it is. I decide to look through my notes without really looking at them as I try to trick the clock into moving faster. At 8:10, I open the zoom link and leave it open, waiting to see the room load up, and at 8:14 my teacher and two other classmates pop into the zoom. I finally go in and start my day as a student; not talking to anyone and leaving without a goodbye.

By the time my last zoom class is over, the areas behind my eyeballs buzz and my brain has become a little mushy. I feel as though I need to poke my brain with a stick to see if it can react, like a frog that you find in the woods. I walk away from my computer, half-zombified, and go into my backyard for a fresh breath of air, trying to remember what else I had to do today. I would check my computer, but my eyes are too hazy from the synthetic light.

What is homework during a quarantine when you do everything from home anyways? Does school count as homework? Or does homework count as asynchronous school? I definitely think that homework should be called asynchronous school for the rest of quarantine; it would make it sound much more exciting than what it actually is. What it really is is three - four mini classes after those classes are done, just in case what you need to learn wasn't clear enough. By the time I finish my homework my brain feels re-fried, like those beans you find at Mexican restaurants. I sit in my chair for a few moments more as I try to figure out what else is on my schedule for the day. I've pulled more blanks today than a printer that is out of ink. The backs of my eyelids have been imprinted with a white rectangle, a red segmented circle in one corner and a blue camera in the other.

*Painting by Anthony Bowers*





*Cooper Johnson*

# QUARANTINE'S BEST FRIEND

I grab my dog's leash and a plastic Wawa bag and head to the front door. She is way ahead of me, vibrating on the doormat in anticipation of her walk. I attach the leash to her collar, stuff the bag in my pocket, and put on a mask. She is already sniffing the ground when I open the door, as if it's a competition to see which dog can smell the most grass.

With a mask on it feels like a totally new world, like I'm Dorothy taking Toto for a walk in *The Wizard of Oz*. We walk down an asphalt road, with valleys and alleys and hills, oh my! As we head toward the park, we pass my old elementary school, Chatham Park. I used to walk there every morning with my friends, 1st grade through 5th grade, talking and trading gossip like the children we were, reconvening at the end of the day to walk home the same way. In the short walk we would pass a crossing guard who always gave us candy on Fridays, telling us that "This is the sweetest way to start a weekend," and we always gobbled it up shortly thereafter.

We also walked to middle school; however, the walk was much longer. We started as the sun came up, making it to the school just as the bell rang and students were allowed to file into the school. My friends and I would trade jokes, now old enough to properly articulate our ideas. Every punchline usually resulted in a reciprocating punch or shove, playful as always. We would meet up outside the school and walk home the same way; however, there were no longer any time constraints. We would stop in Wawa and pick up sodas on Fridays, never shaking that pre-weekend sweet tooth.

One time we did a science experiment with the soda. The sub that day played Bill Nye, and Bill showed us what Mentos and soda could do. So we grabbed Mentos and Dr. Pepper at Wawa, then plotted how we could maximize the explosion. We put a Mento into the cap of one so we could screw on the cap of the soda. It fizzed and even expanded a little, however it didn't explode as we had hoped. As the rest of the group moved on, I grabbed it, knowing that I would make it explode... somehow. I could see the bulging cap and the crack in the plastic. Finally when everyone else's soda had exploded I made my move. I yelled at them to watch



*Space Shibas by Adele Goldader*



me as I shook it up, the soda fizzing back to life. I then spiked it onto the ground cap-first. The cap ricocheted off, propelling the soda into the street. A few seconds later we heard a thud as the bottle had hit the lower rear of a short bus heading back to the middle school. We cackled with laughter as the bus honked at us for hitting it. During that walk home we patted each other on the back the whole way, amazed at our accomplishments.

As I remember this, my dog starts barking at another dog across the street, which is also leashed to another masked human. In this new world, there is no patting each other on the back or even getting close enough to shake hands.

All punchlines are followed by a hand up to an ear -- *What?* -- the joke muffled by a mask. The only jokes that work are the ones that only you hear:

*'Guess what your mom said when she saw you for the first time,'*

*'What?'*

*'Lucky guess.'* jokes that are still funny, but are not necessarily as fun without the chorus of laughter that usually follows.

A dog is truly man's best friend during quarantine as they tolerate all the hugs and scratches we doll out since we have no one else we can be with. Cats might as well be self-quarantining inside our houses, always trying to stay about 6 feet away from petting hands. As I look at my dog, extending herself out into the street to say 'hello' to another dog in the loudest way possible, I can't help but think that dogs secretly created the Coronavirus so they can get more walks, more affection, and most importantly, more treats. And their evil plans have succeeded for about ten months now. We continue to walk after the other dog has moved on, my dog moving and breathing freely, maskless.



*Painting by Fotini Mourelatos*



*Photo by Blake Riesenfeld*

My family reconvenes at the dinner table after a day of work, as though we were far away from each other for most of the day instead of only being a room away. My dad, the head chef of my house, sits down last at the head of the table. On the table is what he prepared: Sauerkraut with chopped apples and kielbasa, pressure cooked until the kraut and the kielbasa started exchanging flavors. On the side is home-made sourdough bread to help soak up any excess sauce from the main course.

Like most adults in quarantine, my dad became a bread head for some time. He had a yeast starter growing in our basement that turned flour into a goop that eventually became sourdough bread. He, like the bread, let this obsession soak up his life for about a full month of quarantine. One time he even had me sit in on his baking experiment, trying to explain the textures of bread and why they occur. He would even tell me and my family his process as we tried the fresh bread; how 'goopish' yeast tinted yellow was the cause of the 'earthiness' of the bread. It was as if he was speaking a language he had baked in the oven as well. Don't worry, it only lasted for that one obsessed month. I think the real reason for his obsession was that he was trying to forget what was happening by making the most of what was supposed to be a 'month at home', which soon became a year.

After dinner I went up to my room. My mom had asked me to clean my room, but I just went to my desk. There I drew, read, and just looked around my room aimlessly. I looked back through pages of drawings and notes, documenting my progression through quarantine. In those notes was the evolution of me, how I learned what I liked to draw, how I found my limits, how I figured out to be witty and confident from listening to comedy. All the things I wanted to do before quarantine but didn't have the time. But even though I feel I have found myself, I would still give it all back to rid the world of this invisible killer. Because the cruel irony is that there is no one to share it with, no one to talk and laugh with.

The clock strikes ten, and I brush my teeth and crawl into bed. I worry about when I'm going to clean my room tomorrow, since I haven't today. It hits me that I could have not fifteen minutes ago and rested without a worry. Pondering this, I am again hit with a realization: that I wouldn't rest easy anyway. There's a silent killer out in the night that has a record breaking kill count. Worst of all, their favorite target is grandparents, and I have four. I have come to the conclusion that it is easier to worry about a messy room than the lives of all my extended family. Besides, if one month can become a year, imagine what a year can become.

*Liam Gizster*



# GUESSING GAME

Characters:

*Photo by Magnus Lunn*

Man, around forty-five, in crumpled business attire, with the hint of a midlife crisis in his voice.

Woman, younger, mid-thirties, almost sickly looking, with a strange meditative slowness to her voice. She wears a scarf.

*(The stage opens on a bridge overlooking a large body of water and city, both shrouded in mist. Neon lights extend from the city, looking almost like stars. The WOMAN stands overlooking the water. Her shadow on the bridge makes it look like she has large bat wings. Geese walk along the bridge, a constant flood of them wandering to and from the bridge. The MAN stumbles over to the bridge, and it is not clear if he is miserable or drunk or both.)*

MAN. Damn geese, freaking hate them.

WOMAN. I rather like them.

*(MAN looks at her in surprise. It appears that he did not notice her prior to her speaking.)*

MAN. Well... I mean I guess they aren't *that* bad. There's just a lot of them. More than anywhere else.

WOMAN. *(A hunger in her voice)* That's good, though. They're sweet. That's why I came here.

MAN. I've never heard of a sweet goose, but... I mean I guess so.

WOMAN. You don't see how they are sweet. You wouldn't understand.

MAN. I guess not.



WOMAN. (*Turns towards him*) How much do you guess?

MAN. Huh?

WOMAN. (*Turns back to the bridge*) You keep saying that. You keep saying you guess.

MAN. (*Insecure*) Oh... I mean... it's just a figure of speech.

WOMAN. Could you guess something for me?

MAN. Um... sure, I guess.... I mean sure.

WOMAN. Imagine you were dead, but you were still living, just not the same way. You saw things that you had never seen. You saw the hidden textures within each living thing. You saw how the geese were sweet like candy on your tongue... but you missed certain things. You missed the things you saw in life. What do you guess you would do?

MAN. What is it that I miss?

WOMAN. Sunrises. The start of a new day, full of infinite possibilities.

(*This strikes a chord within the MAN.*)

MAN. I guess... I guess I would fight to get it back. Fight... fight so I didn't have to keep guessing.

WOMAN. (*Turning towards him quizzically*) Why? Why don't you want to guess?

MAN. Are you serious? I want to *know* something. I don't want to be kept in the dark. I want security, and I want to know how to get the things I want. I don't know anything. I always guess, and I always guess wrong. For god's sake, my life is nearly half gone...

WOMAN. You are still young.

MAN. (*Scoffing*) I was ten years ago.

(*She swallows, ingesting some truth deep within herself, not letting it exit her throat.*)

WOMAN. I guess. Time is slower than you think.

MAN. How would you know?

WOMAN. I just know. I've been here a long time I... I just know. Each day is the same, whether we want it to be or not.

MAN. I feel like each day is a roller coaster.

(*She looks at him, subtly running her tongue along her top lip*)

WOMAN. I could change that.

(*He looks deep into her eyes. His voice is soft, insecure.*)

MAN. Really?

(*She looks back to the city in the distance.*)

WOMAN. You wouldn't want me to.

MAN. Why?

*(She is silent, and refuses to make eye contact with him for a moment. He waits nervously, and finally she turns to him, smiling slightly with closed lips.)*

WOMAN. There's always a price to pay.

*(This time he is the one who looks away.)*

MAN. I guess so.

*(She laughs, but it is forced. There is a deep sorrow in her eyes.)*

WOMAN. Don't look so glum! With time you learn that the price is always fair. You may reminisce about the old days, but time slowly marches on.

MAN. You remind me of a girl I once knew.

WOMAN. Really?

MAN. Yeah. She was strange and mysterious, just like you. She was... wise. Just like you.

WOMAN. What was her wisdom?

MAN. Oh, you know, the usual. Live, laugh, love, carpe diem, all that bullshit I ignored. All that bullshit I wish I hadn't, I guess.

WOMAN. How did you know her?

*(He chuckles.)*

MAN. It's funny. She used to take me to parties. We'd stay out until the sun rose. Come to this bridge at times like these. Do you party?

*(She swallows and shakes her head no.)*

MAN. Oh, okay.

WOMAN. Did you love her?

*(He sighs.)*

MAN. She frightened me. All that energy, that rush, no chance to slow down. So many risks. So much room for failure. Thinking about us together felt like jumping off of a precipice. I either jump with her and hope there's a mattress at the bottom or stand my ground.

WOMAN. Why didn't you jump?

MAN. Are you crazy? I couldn't keep up that lifestyle, staying out all night every night.

*(She gives him a knowing look. He looks down at his feet.)*

MAN. I don't know. I don't know why I didn't jump, I guess.

WOMAN. *(She turns to him, desperate.)* How can you guess? How can you guess your regrets? Don't you feel them in your stomach, your throat, your bones? How can you guess them, how can you question

their reality? Tell me, please!

MAN. *(Taken back)* Jesus I don't know, I don't know, I'm sorry!

*(She looks back, disappointed.)*

WOMAN. Okay.

*(There's awkward silence. He can sense her disappointment. Despite all of the uncertainty of his lifetime, he knows more than anything at this moment that he wants to please her.)*

MAN. I don't guess. I know. I regret it. I regret it every day.

*(He pauses, swallowing some pride.)*

MAN. I pretend that I'm miserable because my career is a mess, but the truth is that it's only a mess because I'm terribly lonely.

*(She looks down as a goose rubs against her leg. She begins to pet its head, slowly moving her hand down to its neck. As she pets it, her hands shake slightly. She is holding something back. The MAN looks at her and the goose, almost with jealousy.)*

MAN. I've never seen them be that friendly to anyone.

*(She cradles the goose in her arms, and lifts it up, stroking its wing.)*

WOMAN. Once I got lost in the woods, and the geese were the only ones to keep me company.

MAN. How did you get lost?

*(Her other hand goes instinctively to her neck, burying her fingers under her scarf. She immediately takes them back out, and tentatively and awkwardly begins to pet the goose again.)*

WOMAN. Someone... robbed me while I slept. Robbed me of something I could never get back. I awoke very sick and very hungry but there was... nothing to eat for miles. I just lay there for a long, long time, until the geese came and guided me back to the city. I made so many goose friends. But unfortunately, they disappeared... one *(she leans into the goose's neck, hunger in her eyes)* by one.

*(She strokes the goose's neck, her mouth opening slightly. She catches herself, and puts the goose down, letting it run off.)*

WOMAN. Sweet little goose.

MAN. I'm sorry, that's awful.

WOMAN. It's okay. It's all okay. No matter what happens, the sun will rise, and the sun will set.

MAN. I hope the sun never rises. I hope I don't have to go back to things the way I left it.

*(She looks at him quizzically.)*

WOMAN. But sunrises are beautiful.

MAN. I'm just so constantly afraid, I guess.

*(She looks back across the bridge and nods.)*

WOMAN. Do you remember when you said you'd fight? That you'd fight to get back what you had lost?

MAN. Yeah.

WOMAN. What if you couldn't fight. What if you could only lose more. Gain it back, but lose more. Lose everything.

MAN. I don't think I understand.

WOMAN. I know.

*(They are silent. The MAN rubs his palms together nervously before speaking up.)*

MAN. I want to understand.

*(She turns towards him longingly. She wants him to understand, too.)*

WOMAN. What if you were given the chance every day to have everything you'd dreamed about for years, but that moment of bliss would cost you everything else. Would you take it?

MAN. I don't know, it depends on what it is, I guess. What are you talking about?

*(She answers quickly, too quickly for the answer to be truthful.)*

WOMAN. Just speculation. Please answer the question.

*(He turns to the skyline as he ponders it. He considers it carefully.)*

MAN. I'd give it up, I guess. Too many risks.

*(She looks down, disappointed and sad.)*

MAN. And I'd regret it. I'd regret it every day.

*(She looks back up at him, her hope half restored.)*

WOMAN. Why would you give it up if you knew you'd regret it?

MAN. I'm afraid of making a guess. Sometimes I think... I think that I'm sure I'll guess wrong. So opportunities come, and I don't follow them. I ignore them. I think I'd ignore that opportunity the same way I've ignored every other opportunity.

WOMAN. Why would you ignore an opportunity?

MAN. I'm afraid, I guess.

*(She steels herself, trying to convince herself of something. On her lips is a decision, and it doesn't take her long to make it.)*

WOMAN. I'm not afraid anymore.

MAN. Surely you're afraid of something.

*(She shakes her head no.)*

MAN. Not even death?



WOMAN. Especially not death.

MAN. I'm terrified of death.

WOMAN. When it comes you'll be ready.

MAN. That's depressing.

WOMAN. It's true. There you go, you learned something.

MAN. That's a scary thing to learn.

WOMAN. You shouldn't be afraid of the truth.

*(The sun is just beginning to rise over the horizon. It casts its very first rays of light.)*

MAN. Maybe you're right.

*(He looks at her longingly. His voice loses its edge as he says that. It resembles more her strange meditative trance. Something is rising in him.)*

WOMAN. Can I ask you a strange question?

MAN. Of course.

WOMAN. Do I look pretty right now?

*(He turns towards her.)*

MAN. You look beautiful.

*(She smiles)*

WOMAN. Will the sun think so?

*(He is confused by her question, but he wants to see her smile again so he nods. He is rewarded, and she smiles.)*

MAN. You said I shouldn't be afraid, right?

WOMAN. Yes.

*(He approaches her and leans in to kiss her. They are still for a moment, inches from each other's face. She stares longingly at his neck, with a sort of childlike hunger. In his eyes, there is a sense of peace. The sun rises a little more, and they are cloaked in the very beginning of morning light. She snaps out of it, and pushes him away.)*

MAN. I... I... I'm sorry.

WOMAN. *(Matter of factly)* You don't want that.

MAN. What?

WOMAN. You don't want what I have.

MAN. Like some sort of disease?

WOMAN. I'm proud of you for facing your fears. *(Both to herself and to him)* We all have to face our

fears.

*(The sun continues to rise. He nods sadly. He regrets leaning into the kiss.)*

WOMAN. Could you do something for me?

MAN. Sure... I guess...

WOMAN. Could you turn away from me for a moment?

*(He turns away. The rays of the sun wash her face, and she giggles lightly, before her pale face is suddenly set ablaze. The fire spreads from her head to her hair and shoulders, and then to her chest, waist, then legs, and finally to her feet. She stays completely still as she burns, facing straight into the sun with pride. The fire is quiet and unnatural, and in the process of thirty seconds or so all that is left of her is ashes on the ground. As the fire blazes, the geese watch with awful curiosity and fear, and the MAN, still turned away, speaks.)*

MAN. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. God, I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. I just... you remind me of that girl I knew, and here you were telling me about giving everything for a moment of bliss and I guess... I guess you meant something different than what I thought. I mean, it's crazy, you're *just* like her... but you're not, also. You're very different. I mean, she never talked to geese, or any of that stuff. She never made me feel the way you did. Maybe I'm just crazy. I'm just crazy, I guess. I guess I was wondering... I was wondering if we could fall in love. You just made me feel really nice, and unafraid for once. I've only felt that in my dreams... I swear I saw you in a dream. Is your name Annie?

*(His face protected from the daylight by the shadow of a cloud, he turns to where she was, seeing the ashes. The geese have approached and are beginning to pick at what is left of her, scattering it everywhere.)*

MAN. *(weak and desperate, like a child)* Hello...? *(Silence, except for the sound of the geese honking, and the far-off noises of the city slowly waking up.)*

*Photo by Magnus Lunn*



# *The Music of Expression: Why You Should Play an Instrument*

Editorial by Marcus Chiang

The reason why art can be so powerful is because it allows creators to express emotions in a way that transcends words. Art resonates best when it doesn't have or need an explanation, when an artist can show rather than tell. In the case of music, art takes the form of a communal language built upon a foundation of chords and scales. Unlike many artists that work in solitude, musicians can use this language to create conversations and stories that are unlike any other. In order to experience these uniquely cohesive performances, everyone should learn to play an instrument.

Michael League, bassist, composer, and leader of the famous jazz ensemble Snarky Puppy, defines a musician as “a person who has a concept and is able to express themselves through their instrument.” The concepts are available to most people, even non-musicians. How many times have you hummed a tune to yourself? Improvised a little rhythm on the table as your teacher droned on? Yet those concepts will remain as just unexplored concepts without an outlet for expression. Once you learn how to play an instrument, however, the boundless potential of music is now yours to experiment with, especially when it comes to working with other musicians. Playing music with others is the sensation of dreaming, creating, and dancing through art, knowing that your bandmates will be gliding right beside you. It goes beyond simply playing notes on a page - it's a feeling of soaring unity that comes from the confidence and connections that stem from each musician. With all this in mind, it shouldn't come as a surprise that music is utilized in fighting mental illnesses like anxiety or depression; entire orchestras composed of people with mental health conditions practice and play together as an effective form of therapy.

So, go pick up the guitar sitting in the basement and play a few chords. Make use of the upright piano that's been collecting dust for the past few years - you might just surprise yourself. It doesn't matter whether you end up playing casually with your friends or up on the big stage; either way, you'll be making art with others in a way that is unique to music.

## Works Cited

Johnson, Kevin. “[From the Ground Up: An Interview with Michael League](#)”. No Treble, 13 Feb. 2014.

Hollow, Michelle C. “[Fighting the Stigma of Mental Illness Through Music](#)”. The New York Times, 17 Jun. 2020

# Editors' Page

*Number of Lucidpress crashes through the making of this magazine: 16*

Hello all. I'm writing this while completing the magazine. It's been a wild ride. I've found that there are very few good softwares to make magazines with, and Lucidpress is no exception. It's better than Pages, that I will give you, but at what cost, y'know? At what cost, friends? It's crashed ten times at the time of writing. In any case, this year has been, y'know, a wild ride. I'd like to thank everyone who submitted this year for keeping the magazine alive; I had serious doubts. You guys are the best. I'm so proud of my fellow editors and Ms. Novo. Thank you for sticking with me through this. It's been an honor to help lead such a wonderful, persistent, resilient club. - Fotini

I am somewhat convinced that the grand plague happened in a futile attempt to stop our previous INK leaders from leaving. It may have failed in its objective, but I hope that we have made you all proud with the magazine we've created, and that you are pleased with the chaos that we have managed to cause (especially the cover - that is a total harbinger of chaos). Here's to another magazine more of it. - Adele

*Special Thanks to our INKlings, Blake Riesenfeld and Julian Duvivier*