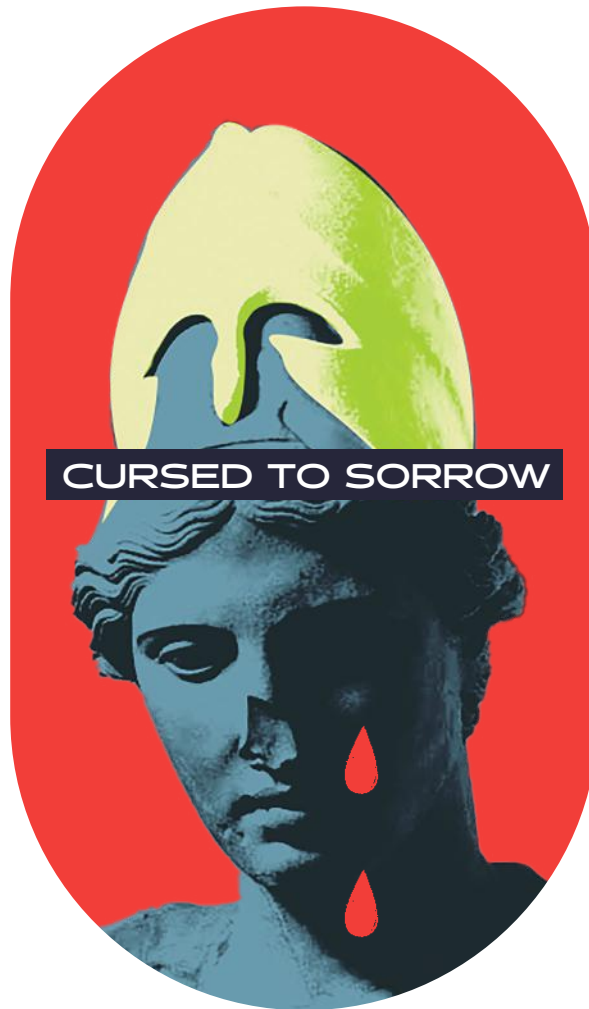


# [M]METRO SPHERE

*art – literature – culture*



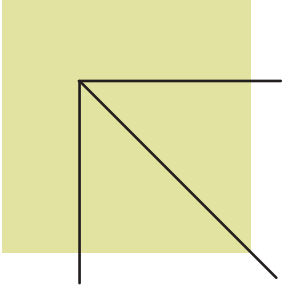
*volume 42*

*issue one • 12/2024*

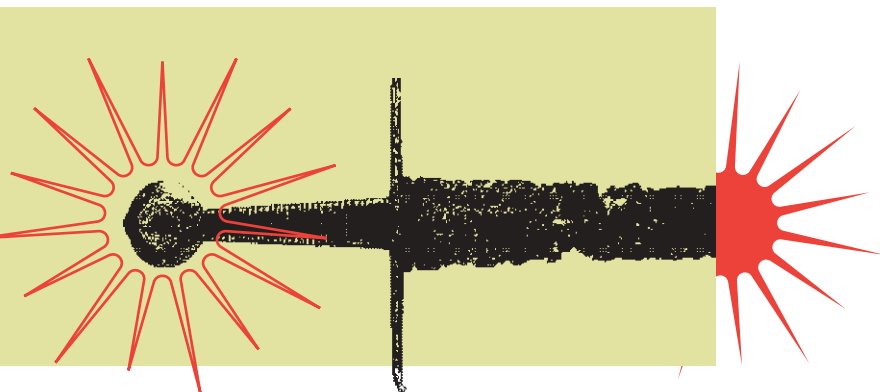


A composite image featuring a classical statue of a woman, likely a Greek or Roman deity or figure, with a yellow lemon placed on her head. The statue is rendered in a dark, textured style. The background is a solid, vibrant red. Overlaid on the statue's face are several red, teardrop-shaped elements, suggesting tears or blood. A black rectangular box with white text is positioned across the middle of the image, partially obscuring the statue's face and the lemon.

CURSED TO SORROW



we unite under a law of the human condition—  
everyone experiences sorrow.



“Cursed to Sorrow”—when the Managing Editor, Madeline Terlep, pitched this title to me (somewhat unsure of it), a little light bulb turned on above my head; I knew almost instantly that it was the perfect encapsulation of this theme. She and Sophie Reese, our Creative Director, both contended that this title sounded a little strange, and I’m sure there’s a perfect phonological explanation for why it might sound strange to some, but I never quite heard it. Rather, what I heard—what I saw in my head as I repeated it to myself under my breath—was the title of Volume 42, Issue 1 of the Metrosphere.

“Cursed to Sorrow”’s theme was intended to inspire MSU Denver artists and authors to consider mythological tragedies and how they can be brought into modern art and literature to reveal their timelessness. As you will see, the protagonists or subjects in the stories and art presented in this issue will have been, in some form or another, cursed to sorrow.

Now, as a product, we bring that consideration to you, reader.

In these pages, we unite under a law of the human condition—everyone experiences sorrow. As an optimist, I find those words difficult to produce, and I’m still wincing as I try to move past it, but as a human, I know it’s true. The universal truth of sorrow, along with all the other truths of the human condition, has weaved itself through art and literature for as long as they have existed.

Part of me finds this theme to be a given, but why do we share sorrowful sentiments in art and literature if not to teach or to comfort? That is my hope for you, reader; that you will look upon these pages and find something to learn from or something that comforts your wounds. After all, those are—undeniably—the greatest reasons to create anything.

*With love and creativity;*



*Danna Shaffer,  
Editor-in-Chief*

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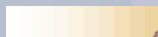
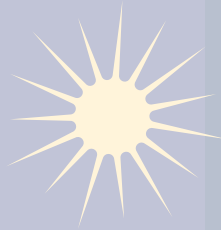
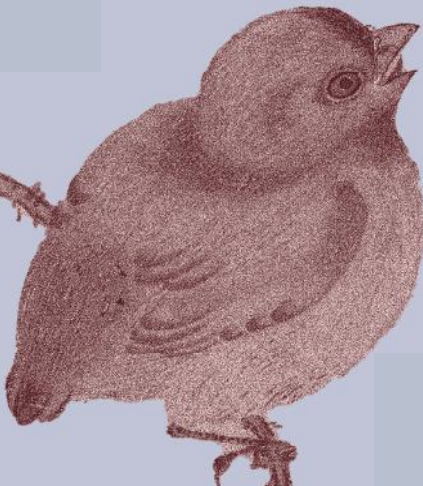
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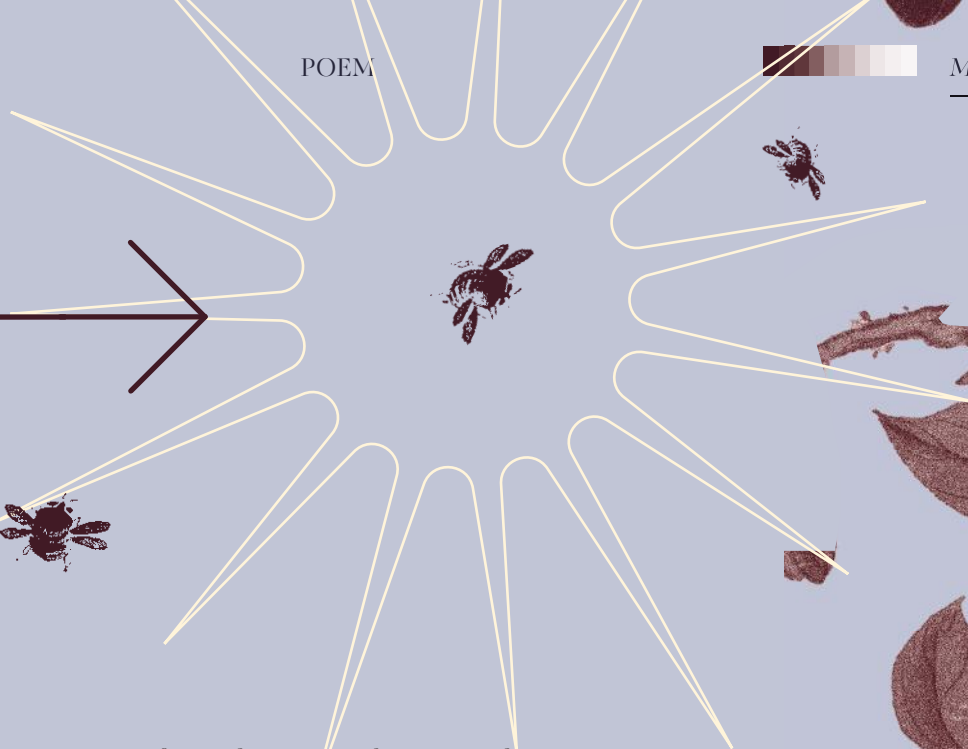
APOLLO SAID



“DAPHNE YOUR  
ROOTS ARE SHOWING”







Love transforms, love grows, but no one knows  
what he made me into. Stay close, speak low  
into me. Wait for me to bloom, don't meet my eye  
sink into me. The water is warm and the soil is dry  
where I'm waiting for you, and I won't run this time  
if the chase starts again. Apollo, I'll let you climb  
over me, tear my vines. Tangled together or  
buried alive, I swear I'm not running anymore.

I open my palms and ask the rain to pour  
Wash our grime away, leave the forest sore  
Shy the sun tame and silent, cool the river green  
In wind torn mornings, I'm begging to be seen  
through the laurel's haze. I ask for a lovelorn breeze  
frigid or lonely enough to steal you back for me.

August slips from our fingers, yours calloused and narrow  
Lonely in ripe apple summers, in the path of your arrow  
you miss me. The perfect prey, you miss the way I bled  
and how my bark bit. I was sliced-pomegranate red  
I reflected what you wished to see. Swallow another bite  
from what's left, if you need it to get through tonight.

We're reduced to a matter of timing, misguided  
The last breaths of a pyre and a fire half-ignited  
The water of the gutter and the dirt beside it, touch  
and go like famine. Love rotten, wilted, not enough.  
In the clatter of curses and the roar of rivers rippling  
I find a feeling a lot like you, suffocating, stifling



Four walls. Four white, boring, padded walls were all I ever saw for ten years of my life. The institution couldn't even give me a window to look through. My cell is cold and dark where I miss the heat and light of the outside world. I miss the swaying of the willow trees I used to see outside my mother's house and how her perfume wafted whenever she entered the kitchen.

# SCARS OF

Now, all I smell is my own rotting decay.

"Get me out of here..." a faint voice whispers.

I shake it off.

"Take your pill, Sage," one of the nurses says, her southern accent rich. Not hearing her come in, I jumped out of my skin.

She shoves the vile red thing towards me.

"No."

Her palm stays folded out, face blank, waiting for me. We have been playing the same game ever since I came to the institution when I was six years old. I don't know her name, but she always comes to shove a pill down my throat every morning. Her blonde hair swirls in short ringlets, barely grown to her ear. She wears pink lip gloss that shimmers on her lips, and her gray-blue eyes hide the wrinkles on her face.

Apparently, that's the style in 1953.

"Sweetheart, we have been over this before. Take your pill, or else." Finally breaking the silence between us.

I scoff.

"Get me out of here..." the voice whispers.

"Shut up!" I hush under my breath.

The nurse stares at me, waiting patiently. I shut my eyes tight, fighting the forcing wave of another vision. Begrudgingly, I snatch the pill and shove it down my throat. Without water, it leaves a sting behind. She nods in approval, turning to leave.

I scratch my arm out of natural habit, leaving a trail of blood behind. The nurse whips her head back around and points a bony, manicured finger at me.

"Don't you go scratching those. Ya hear? You are sixteen now and should know better."

She leaves, and I scratch at

# THE PAST

them anyway.

*Who am I really?*

It is very difficult to find a place on my body that doesn't include a scar. Each one is shaped differently, each more painful and itchier than the last. The one I scratch is long and jagged, running across my bicep above my elbow. No one believes me, but the visions that have haunted me for most of my life are followed by a scar. That is what the stupid pill is for. It never helped, but who is to say this time won't be different?

The voice screeches, tired of being ignored. Rattling my head to where the pain becomes unbear-



## SHORT STORY

Wood

able, ripping it apart till there isn't anything left.

*So much for that stupid pill.*

"GET ME OUT OF HERE!"

I can't take another one, not again. My body is already destroyed, covered from the visions before, but how can I stop it? I try to calm my breathing, but I can't get enough air as the walls start closing in on me. Everything is spinning as I huddle on the small frame of my bed and slam my eyes shut, covering my ears to stop the voices from barging in. Despite my efforts, however, more voices emerge, saying things I don't understand.

*Here we go again.*

....

I feel the soft crunch first, followed by the blistering cold blasting my cheeks. My entire body is numb as I open my eyes. My vision is blurry at first, but I know that I am not in the institution anymore but in a snowy field. I lay still on the ground as my vision clears, my hands still covering my ears, protecting me from the harsh explosions of noise creeping through. Looking ahead, all I see is scattered dirt and grass flying in the air, followed by streams of red. I take my hands off and all the sounds of war come rushing at me.

*Where am I this time?*  
I sit up slowly and

cautiously and take in my surroundings. I am sitting in the middle of a large field, snow littering the ground. Large groups of men are on all sides of me, shouting and grunting. Some lay in the dirt like me, others on their feet, either running or fighting. Fighting each other.

From afar, I see a man running towards me across the field, yelling and waving his arms about, trying to get my attention. As he gets closer, I realize he is wearing a long navy blue coat with brass buttons down the front, a red sash around his waist, and metal shoulder pads on the ends. Some of the other men on the field are dressed the same, and others are in gray. The man is covered in soot and grime as he hauls me up from the snowy ground.

"What are you doing, Davidson!" he screams into my ear, his teeth yellow, breath the smell of death. "Private, are you trying to get killed by a Johnny Reb?"

*Who am I?*

"Get your musket and fire the damn thing!"

Picking up behind me, he shoves me a long brown rifle with a sharp knife on the end coated in blood, leaving behind a trail of red in the snow. Looking down, I realize I have the same uniform as the other men around me. I pick at the navy material, and one of the buttons comes loose in my hand. It shines brightly in the dimming sunlight as I stick it in my coat pocket.

Fire and soot rain down from the sky as dirt and blood scatter leaving trails in all directions, staining the white under my boots. A different man lies dead next to me, his uniform navy like mine. His milky white eyes stare vacantly at the sky as blood pools from his gaping mouth. How had I not noticed him before? Others fight for their lives, the colors of blue and gray uniforms blur across the field. Suddenly, small round metal balls fly and strike their targets. My heart is pounding out of my chest, ears ringing from the explosions of cannon fire.

But somehow, amidst the chaos, the place seems... familiar to me. A flash of my mother's face with a picnic basket comes to me, the sky only a shade of blue then. Ever since my visions started, I have never recognized the place I was in. Always lost to wander.

Until now.

"Charlie, get down!" Someone else in the distance screams at me, bringing me back to the battle.

"Who is..."

Suddenly, dirt explodes a few feet from me, and the bodies of other men fly in different directions, gray and blue alike.

"Shit!" I hit the ground and crawl away as ash, dirt, and blood guzzle down on top of me. Sounds of screaming and crying follow, echoing off of the

Lauren Wood

trees that surround us.

Bullets continue to fly above me as I crawl. I am desperate to get away. *Someone... please... help me.*

"Run, dammit!"

another man to my left shouts. I do what he says. Hoisting up my musket, I run across the field to get to a set of trees. The snowy air bites into me through my navy coat but not as much as the bite of a bullet as it runs through my spine.

.....

I wake on the cold floor with a loud thud, crying out as my back blinds me in pain. Sweat drips down my forehead as I fight to stay conscious. I know the pain won't last, but it doesn't hurt any less. I breathe in and out, staying completely still. Slowly, the pain ebbs away until I am left with a dull sting, leaving yet another scar on my body. I crawl back to my bed and fumble for a small hidden pocket I have ripped out of the mattress. Inside, a shard of glass that is no bigger than a key chain hides as I wiggle it out. Shakily, I use the mirror to sneak a glance at my newest collection of scars. It's placed in the lower half of my spine with an ugly shade of red, grotesque in fresh scar tissue as a circular shape like a bullet had plummeted through my spine.

*Who am I?*

Without warning, the nurse and two guards come rushing in, swinging the door violently to see what happened. They glance at the broken mirror in my hand.

*Shit.*

"Oh dear. Not again." She leaves to get the doctor as the guards hoist me up off the floor, yanking the glass shard out of my hand. Placing me back on the bed, the doctor enters my room a moment later, scratching his bald head as he talks to the nurse. Finally, the doctor faces me.

"I hate to say it, but we have to go back to shock therapy. The pills are just not enough. I see no difference in your... condition."

But this time was different... wasn't it?

.....

It was days of shock therapy before they left me in peace, back to rotting in the padded room. A few more days for my brain to stop pooling out of my ears and for me to think straight. New visions have stopped plaguing my mind since then. I know that the field has something to do with it, not the doctors who have claimed they are helping me. I graze my fingers along a few of the scars, remembering what it was like when my first one appeared at only six years old. It was when I experienced what it was like to be mauled by a bear. I can still smell its hot breath down my neck as it devoured my throat, the sickening sound of my bones cracking echoing in my ears with only a whisper escaping past my lips as the light went out of me.

A claw-like scar that traveled down my arm appeared after I woke up, my mother shaking me back, eyes full of fear.

It wasn't long until the visions became more frequent and more violent deaths emerged. The small freckles peppered my throat when I felt what it was like to be poisoned, the yellow-like bruises down my ankle from an amputation gone wrong, and so many more.

My mother had no choice but to admit me, and I don't blame her. What else was a parent to do?

*Something is in that field, and it wants me to find it.*

.....

I thought it would be harder to escape the institution. After the sessions were over, the doctor issued new clothes for me, including a simple boxy white dress that fell past my knees. The nurse resumed her duties to me, and we started up on the red pill again. She had done her hair one morning, and a pin had started to come undone. A quick swipe of it as she turned to leave was all I needed to pick the lock. It took me several days, biding my time and practicing picking the lock to where I failed more times than I could count. When I wasn't practicing, however, I plotted my escape to know which way to go and when to get out unseen. Finally, the day had come, and I waited until late afternoon when the nurses and guards were busy switching from the day shift to the night shift. I pried the pin open the last time, now janky and twisted from overuse, as I slid it into place. Praying my beating heart doesn't give me away, I jiggle it a few times, my hope dying at a rapid pace until...

*Click.*

The sound rang in the silent air as the door swung open. Peeking my head out, I glance up and down the long hallway, seeing the exit side door down to the right and over. The only problem was the main desk to my left. No one was there,



and I heard no sounds of footsteps nearby on the white tile. Steadily, I walk out and shut the door, dashing to the following dip in the wall right as I hear footsteps round the corner. I press myself in like I could camouflage to it. Hush voices follow from nurses and guards talking alike about their day and saying their goodbyes to the night shifters as they go home.

*It's now or never.*

No one noticed me as I made my escape out the side door and into the bright afternoon sun.

I hike up the long dirt road, the lone rocks left from tires stabbing at my bare feet. I don't know what time it is, but the North Carolina heat bears down on me, sweat glistening on my back. I rack my brain to try to remember how to get to the field that my mother took me to all those years ago. She wouldn't be much help now, though, as she died a few years ago from a broken heart, so the doctors claimed. On the side of the road, the willow trees swayed, bringing me back to my childhood home. My heart aches thinking about her and how I never got to say goodbye.

Up the road, a red pickup truck speeds towards me. I glanced down at myself and the fresh white dress that I had gotten from the institution. Some dirt from the road had kicked up and already stained it. That and the tangled mess of my brown hair and bare feet, I doubt someone would help me. Trying my best, I untangle my hair and try to cover my scars with it as the truck gets closer. Standing on the side, I wave my arms until the pickup comes to a stop. An elderly woman rolls her window down, and her face is worn as she smiles at me. Her lips are stained red, making me cringe from the memory of blood pooling out of the soldier's mouth.

"What can I do for you, sugar?" the woman asks, her southern accent just as thick as the nurses.

I clear my throat. "I was wondering if you could point me in the direction of..." I want to remember the name of it. "Of Bentonville?" *I think that is what it was called.*

The woman scrunches her face in confusion. "The battlefield museum?"

"Yes."

"Yes, dear, it is about five miles away from here. But you shouldn't bother with that. You look terrible! Are you alright? You are covered in scars and missing your shoes!"

So much for my hair doing the trick. *How do I explain?*

"Yes, it has been a day, ma'am. The scars, however, are due to a... uh... birth defect."

The woman's eyes widened. "Oh, you poor thing! Do you need a ride? I can clean you up."

I stare at her dumbfounded. I never thought she would offer me a ride with the state I am in. *But what if she knows I'm from the institution?* If she knows, she will gain my trust and just take me right back. I can't have that.

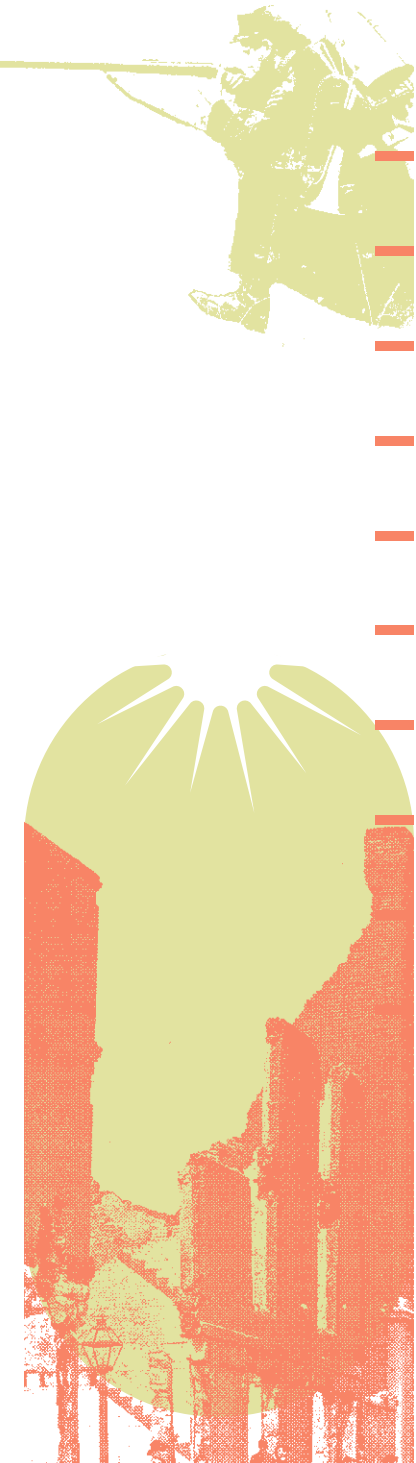
"I don't want to impose..."

"Oh, it is nothing, darling!" She opens her passenger door. "Get on in here. It is going to get dark soon."

I scramble to think of an excuse as to why I need to get to the battlefield as soon as possible. The institution will find me before then if she doesn't turn me in. "I appreciate the help, but I have my mother waiting for me at the museum. I need to get to her, like you said before dark."

The woman surveys me, digging into my words and sniffing out the lies. I was about to thank her and be on my way when she finally answered. "Very well then. Hop on in"

Without another option, I scramble into her truck, and she takes off down the dirt road.



....

"Thank you for the ride," I say to her as I hop out of the truck.

"No problem, sweetie! Get home safe now."

"Yes, ma'am," I reply as I shut the door, and she drives away.

Turning, I walk through the main entrance and pass a small wooden sign signaling the different areas people can hike. To the left of me is the vast open field, and straight ahead of me is a dirt road leading up to a set of trees. Anticipation gnawing at me, I head left and push my way through the tall grass. The sun dips over the horizon, bringing a soft glow of light as I step further into the field, searching the ground as well as my mind. What am I even looking for? I comb the tall grasses until I eventually make it to where my mother took me. Where my first vision began. And....

Nothing.

*It makes no sense. There is nothing here. Maybe there aren't any answers. Maybe I am just.... insane. Maybe...*

In the distance, I can hear the wails of sirens. They are looking for me, and it won't be long now. I drop to the ground in defeat as tears well in my eyes. I tug into my brown tangled mess of hair through my fingers, my chest seizing in panic mode.

*Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?*

Suddenly, a flash of my recent vision appears with the pain of the bullet tearing through me, vibrating through to my lower spine. I gasp and glance back at the field. Standing back up, I head back, curious about my body's reaction. Is this real? Running, I recount where I was in the field on that snowy day. As I grow closer, a deep feeling settles inside, like this is where I am supposed to be. I ran until I made it to the spot before I woke up and the feeling churning in my gut is deep and comforting but in a mournful kind of way. Bending down, I dig into the earth. Mud cakes my fingers and buries itself in my fingernails, but I continue. Something is here. I can feel it.

Without warning, I feel a light clink brush on my fingers, which is different from the softness of the dirt. Picking it up, there is a small round object. Brushing it off, I can see hints of brass that have aged for decades.

A button.

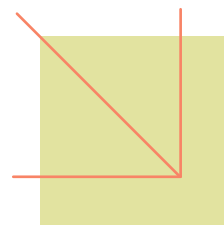
Like the one that the man in my vision wore. Like one of the buttons I wore....as a soldier.

The sun finally fades from the horizon, and night fills the sky. In the distance, I can hear the car doors slamming shut and the soft crunch of boots in the dirt from afar. They are here. But I don't pay attention. I am consumed by so much pain and yet... so much love. It doesn't come to me at first. It is like a haze of memories that starts slow and grows, soon rushing towards me like a gush of wind.

"I... I am Private Davidson. I am Charlie," I realize. These scars that tore into my flesh were never some illness or disease but a reminder of who I was in the past—not just Charlie or Sage, but others—all of my lives before this one.

My past lives.

Tears well up and stream down my face, *I found it. I finally found it.* Underneath my skin, I feel a warm glow as some of the pain ebbs away in my lower back.



*Have I been healed?*

I quickly reach behind me and feel my spine. The rough groove of the bullet scar is gone, replaced by smooth skin. I cry even harder, relieved.

*What do I do now? I...I could run away, find the answers to the others. I could be normal again, I could...*

The sound of crunched dirt stops beside me, halting my thoughts. "Stay where you are, miss," the police officer to my right says.

"You don't belong here."

*I am going to be taken back to that awful place.*

But I will escape again and get my life back. But it truly doesn't matter anymore because....

I know who I am now.

# *Hugh Edward Shields*

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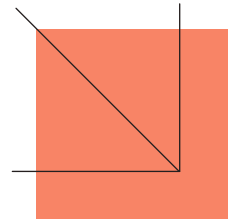
# ADRIFT

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# NESSUS ON THE PHLEGETHON



*Sylas Fox*

In Dante's *Inferno*, the Phlegethon was a fiery river of boiling blood in Hell, where violent sinners are punished for eternity. Sinners were guarded by centaurs such as Nessus to ensure they did not escape their fate.



# THE GOD OF THE UNDERWORLD

Love.  
Is that all a man  
has done to do wrong?

Her beautiful eyes  
Her essence  
Her everything

Made a man fall  
Fall to the depths  
of Hell

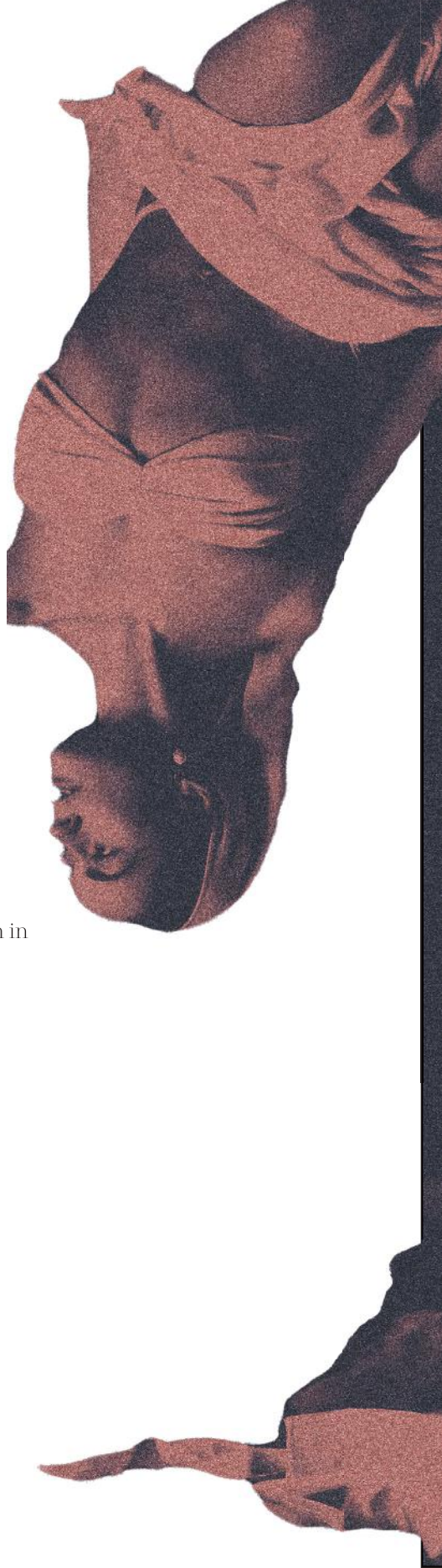
His love  
feels different  
than the others who  
love around him

They love  
without *love*

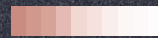
He loves with too much  
A fiery pit in his heart  
trying to draw just one woman in

He has too much love  
Too much tragic love  
Too much undying love

Love.  
It's painful  
It's beautiful  
It's wonderful  
But not for Persephone







# Alice Moreland





# FEATURED



# ARTIST



AMBROSIA

*Stevyn Llewellyn*





# ATALANTA





# ATLANTA

VISUAL ARTIST + MSU  
DEN ALUM  
STEVYN LLEWELLYN



# DREAMING





# IMPOSSIBLE LOVE





Have you ever loved someone you never had?  
Have you ever missed someone you never knew?  
Have you driven an hour up a mountain just to spend time with someone,  
who only wanted to spend superficial time with you?  
Have you ever dreamed of a future that never had a present, with  
someone you spend years with but that was never really present?  
Someone that only wanted your nights and ignored you by day, that  
ghosted for months then out of the blue messaged you "Heyy"? Have  
you run to their side without a second thought or complaint? Because  
somehow your heart still believed,  
they could love you someday?  
I did,  
and it still haunts me to this day.  
That old confusing feeling of a love I never had.  
Was it love or was it lust,  
only the walls of his room know what it was.  
Whatever it was,  
to me it was special.  
Even though to him,  
it was probably just for pleasure.  
A confusing predicament I don't wish on anyone.  
The feeling of being in limbo,  
believing in an impossible love.  
One that does not let you truly move on,  
and that keeps you holding on.  
And when you finally get the strength to cut it off and walk away,  
even if you block all access in the physical,  
in your head and in your heart,  
forever they stay.

Like that which flies below the sky,  
lived a Mother and her three babes,  
a silhouette wrapped in blue.  
Nestled in the forested edges of the world  
her voice soared through the trees,  
a welcoming symphony, unintrusive,  
paraded off brush, rocks, moss and dirt.  
She sang with no need for an answer.  
Only for the life of her chirping babes.

As she flew through her home  
singing to her darlings  
a marionette wretched her  
from inside.  
A disturbed humming  
leached through the home  
pitched and pierced the air,  
echoing throughout.  
The sinful serenade  
coursed the Mother's bones.

Three thunderous knocks  
pounded the front door.  
Soaring from her babes,  
the Mother chased the door.  
There stood no one.  
The air thickened around her.  
The regularly still forest shook  
gently as it sang.  
Perched on branches  
hovelled in bushes  
hundreds of birds dominated the home -  
a crescendo of sound -  
as she shut the door.

An unwelcome maid  
decorated in chestnut and autumn,  
stood, cradling one of the helpless  
wailing babes.  
The maid danced around the Mother  
My baby! My baby!  
- the Mother cried.  
The maid sang  
a heretic's song

The babe, in care of the intruder,  
was strung from its toes.  
Then, with punishing indifference  
thrashed against the wall.  
All so delicate -  
inconsequential -  
shattered.  
Tiny pieces of porcelain  
skin strewn across the wall,  
little ribbons of blood  
filled the home  
bathing the intruder.

Rapture struck.  
Hundreds of birds  
beat through windows  
and doors, no sentry would dissuade  
their invasion.  
The maiden's song,  
an accompaniment  
as they pressed upon the carcass,  
oppressing the imprisoned babes.  
Voiceless screams were trapped  
at the lips of the poor Mother.  
Blinded by the predatory migration,  
through thundering feathers  
she could only listen to the whaling  
of her babes as they were  
shredded, skewered, and eaten alive.

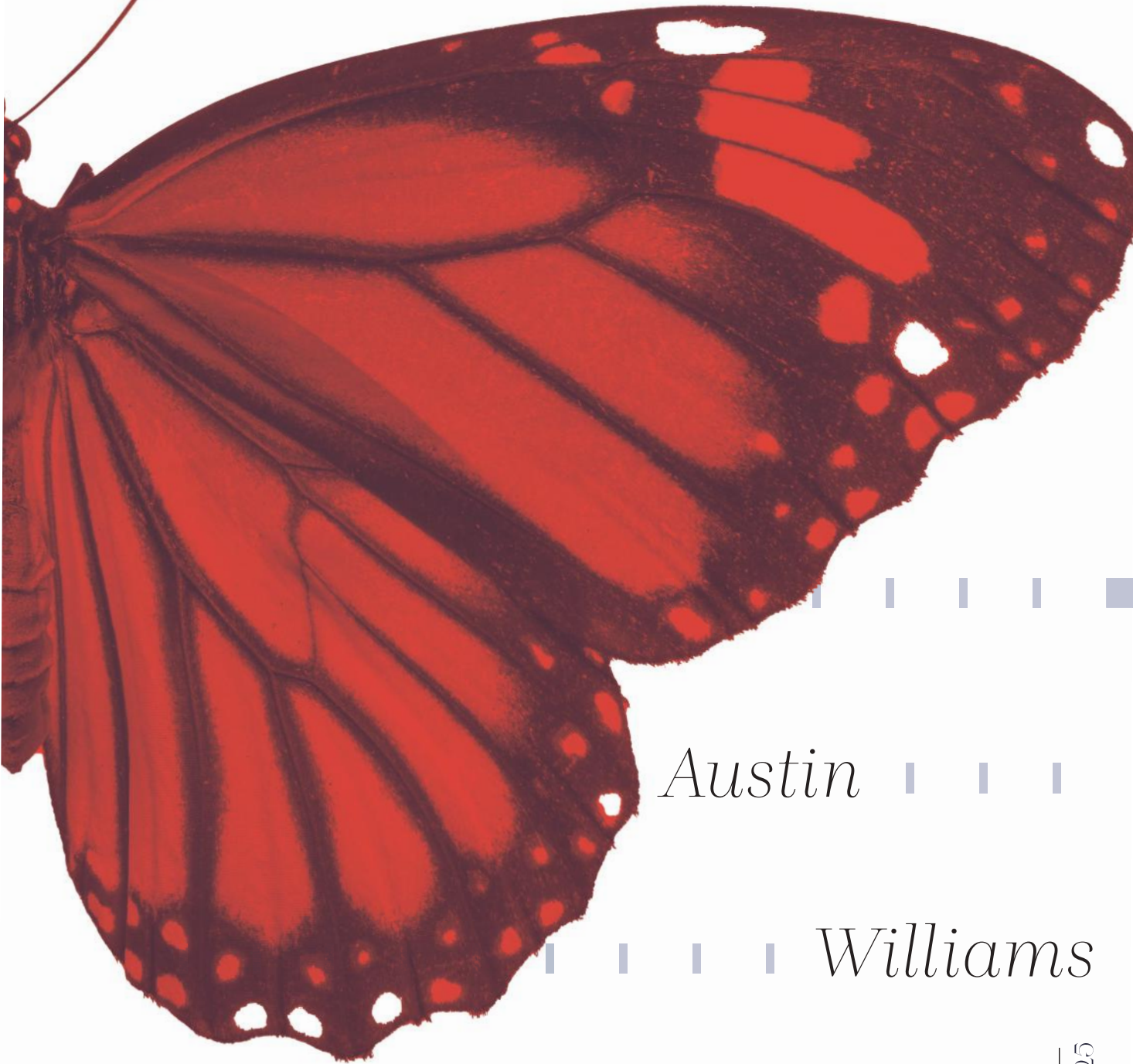
Shedding her brilliant indigo gown,  
the Mother took flight:  
a Blue Canary  
circling and striking  
the wretched maid  
who spurred into one of the  
Sparrer Swallow  
like that which desecrated  
this once silent home.

The two dance, soar, and  
strike one another  
as the Blue Canary falls  
again and again  
for dominance over  
the stolen nest.





# METAMORPHOSIS



*Austin* | | |

| | | | *Williams*

# OVER OACH

*Katie Martinez*

When I came across the brutal scene: your yellowed bones, your clothing frayed and worn, I knew it was over. I buried you in my head a number of times.

I wished you dead.

Begged for it.

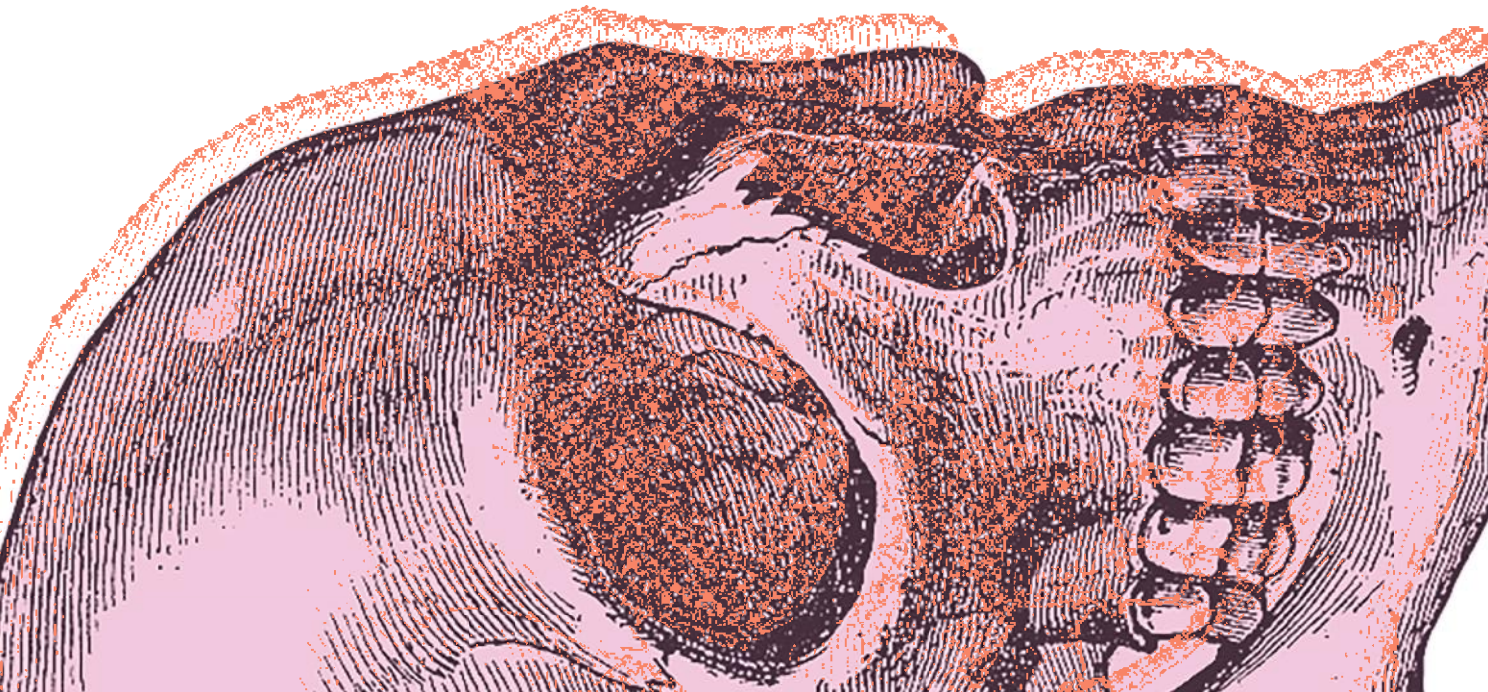
Promised the universe we would be better off without you.

Yet, staring into your eyeless sockets, I became far too familiar with loss. Cradling your body, pulling you into my chest, I willed each beat of my heart to reignite yours. In my longing, my salty tears washed over your bones, flooding them until they were bleached, white, and clean.

On a length of muslin, you were reconstructed, your essence emanating. Your shadow, your absence of light. That silently snuffed beauty.

Placing cypselae dandelions in each eye, I adorned you until you were bejeweled like a saint. Your vibrant body, decorated in a rainbow of wildflowers: the golden old man of the mountain, rouge fireweed, and the glorious azure of alpine forget-me-nots. Your martyred bones, your heavenly body, wrapped with twine and neatly tied into a bow. A present for the afterlife La Muerte herself would be proud to receive.

Letting out a silent scream, a prayer for Gaia's forgiveness, I pierced her flesh with the remorse-





ful head of my oxidized shovel. Erecting tiny mountains of silt from the apertures, differing from the Gods only in my inability to reconcile the two.

Standing between the self-made mountains and valleys that would soon make up your final resting place, I prayed once more for you to rise from the dead. To laugh once again and say it was all in jest.

Into the void, I carried you to the core of it all—a search for the land of the dying, perhaps the land of the Gods.

The more we traveled, the more the heat melted us away until we reached the heart of Gaia. The hot red abyss molting and squelching, crimson arms outstretched, waiting; empty for your embrace.

My longing, my horror, my love for you swelled.

Gaia pulled you to her heart. I foraged for forgiveness in mine.

She kneaded your bones into clay. Her long fingers calling for an offering: my solemn heart. There was nothing more to give you, no atonement nor apologies made.

I beckoned her, *take what you must*. My soul ripped apart, body left to die. A sacrifice of the burden of the gravity of time.

You shimmered with perfection; Gaia's smile shone upon you. Placing your body, freshly formed and fragile, into her beating heart: her

passion-fueled kiln.

At last, you stood: your smile, your body, your soul, and my ever-beating heart. She sent you into your life, anew, a holy child.

Forged in fire, perfected by love.

With bloody palms, I drug what was left of me through the abyss. Quietly withering with each pull forward until reaching the edge, near enough to watch the daylight fade.

All the beautiful colors washed over me, royal blues, bright sunshine yellows, passionate reds, and snoozing purples. Until finally fading into the black nothingness only a soul-voided body could see.

Someday, centuries later, when all is gone and dead. You'll find yourself still standing on two worn down feet, a body reneged eternity. After all of your adventures: your tanned skin, sparkling freckles, resplendent wrinkles, you'll make your way back to me.

And as you come across the brutal scene: my yellowed bones, my clothing frayed and worn. You'll lay your weary head on my skinless shoulder.

And you will know where it began, and at last, it will all be over.





# WE HAVE LOST MORE THAN WE KNOW.

Article By  
*Haley Williams*

Kayli Cottonwood is the sole creator of the 7-foot-tall, 4-foot-wide sculpture on display at the Center for Visual Art. The display makes the piece even larger, reaching 9 feet in height. Their creation culminated in two years spent actively obtaining cottonwood branches and nine months of assembly time. “What Have We Lost” has no solid connections, plastics, or artificials. Only three materials are used: cottonwood, brass, and steel, all to highlight the beauty of nature on its own.



From a distance, it seems sparse, with some parts almost floating and unconnected. These aspects of the sculpture call for closer inspection, like the flashes of thin wire, brass, and steel or the tiny sticks seemingly suspended in the air. Everything is held together with a tension wire.

“Treating the tree as a corpse and me as a mortician, putting the skeleton back together, putting the hand’s joints back together, and making them ready for viewing”

Cottonwood said on the delicate creation of the tree.

After finding the main branch years ago, they worked to collect the rest of the materials and began the painstaking process of deconstructing each item.

“The deconstruction was really important because as we are thinking on a larger scale processing, like how we use wood, there’s so much waste.”

Each time the tree is moved, it’s deconstructed and reassembled—a process that can take up to seven hours. Every branch, stick, and twig is suspended on thin wires of bronze or steel. Even the bark on the trunk is attached by a meticulously placed wire.

Cottonwood’s connection with the tree of their namesake blooms from their childhood. Growing up in an area surrounded by cottonwoods, they have collected the branches ever since.

When peering closer to the branches, details can be seen inside some stems, such as a star stamped in the middle of the wood. When they were young, Cottonwood’s mother taught them about this naturally occurring phenomenon.

“We’d go walk through the cottonwoods and pick up the sticks, and she told me if you break it and get a star, you make a wish. And then you can have your wish come true.”

Other projects Cottonwood has in the works include one that involves the yarn they’ve collected over the years, highlighting that it’s made almost entirely out of plastic- not natural materials like wool or cotton. Another work concerns ceramics and how the right materials to make clay can be sourced ethically and

responsibly, but often, they're not.

Cottonwood's connection with art began when they were very little. Thanks to their mother and sister, they grew up surrounded by art. Recently, they have begun to deepen their connection to nature and their mother,

**"Art definitely runs in the family. But I think what it really comes down to is just being taught and encouraged to think creatively."**

Much of their inspiration and passion for nature bloomed from further research. Anthropocene is a term that describes the current geological age. It is viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Cottonwood's art emphasizes how we have harmed our world.

**"It's essential, and I think my work is really talking about that and responding to that grief and anger, all the negative emotions that come up with that."**

All of the materials used in the piece have been closely researched. History supports the intention behind every part, telling a deeper story with each piece.

**"What We Have Lost, the title kind of speaks to several layers of that right, not only the species that we've lost from climate change, the Anthropocene, but also what did we lose in my creation of this?"**



*Photo of Kayli Cottonwood and their sculpture "What Have We Lost" taken by Juli Yanai*

FEATURE ARTIST

*Kayli  
Cottonwood*



Cottonwoods are drought-resistant trees but die after a prolonged lack of water. They grow alongside rivers and creeks, benefiting from floods and spring melts. As an adaptive coping technique, the trees drop leaves during drought and extreme heat. Cottonwood has given us the look of a drought-suffering tree, the broken pieces reassembled to remind us of what once was.

During their research, Cottonwood studied water rights, which they say are messy and complex. The Colorado River runs through five states, each depending on the river in some way. What we do here impacts all of them. Colorado does what it can to preserve our way of life and make room for more. As Colorado balances those challenges, it seems inevitable something will be lost along the way. The cottonwoods must brave the neglect that comes from reliance on seasonal weather changes.

“Cherry Creek Reservoir, for example, or other dams, creates a huge lack of water for the trees. So the cottonwood trees really rely on spring snowmelt to cause flooding, and we’ve put those things in place to prevent flooding, so it doesn’t affect us. So in protecting ourselves, we’ve directly harmed something else.”

Their work delves deeply into this concept. The roots of “What We Have Lost” are steel, a cold industrial metal meant to be a clear separation between the wood and the ground. Akin to a saw gnawing at roots, the steel represents our human intervention in the life of the cottonwoods.

Every tiny detail of Cottonwood’s “What Have We Lost” has some meaning below the steel wires. Cottonwood intends to guide us deeper into their passions, “There’s a lot that I want to talk about in terms of like capitalism or over culture and just the society at large and how we have a lot of disenfranchised grief because it’s not addressed in the media and it’s not talked about enough.”

Follow along on their Instagram: [@cottonwoods.studio](#) or their website: [cottonwoodstudio.art](#) to see their future projects as they continue “Finding ways to tell the story of my sibling, the tree, and still make it beautiful in its tragedy.”

COTTON WOOD  
BOOK

The illustration is a large, stylized drawing of a cottonwood tree. The trunk is thick and brown, with a rough, textured surface. The canopy is dense and green, with many small, pointed leaves. The tree is positioned in the center of the page, with its roots visible at the bottom. The overall style is simple and graphic, typical of a children's book illustration.



# PLASTICITY II

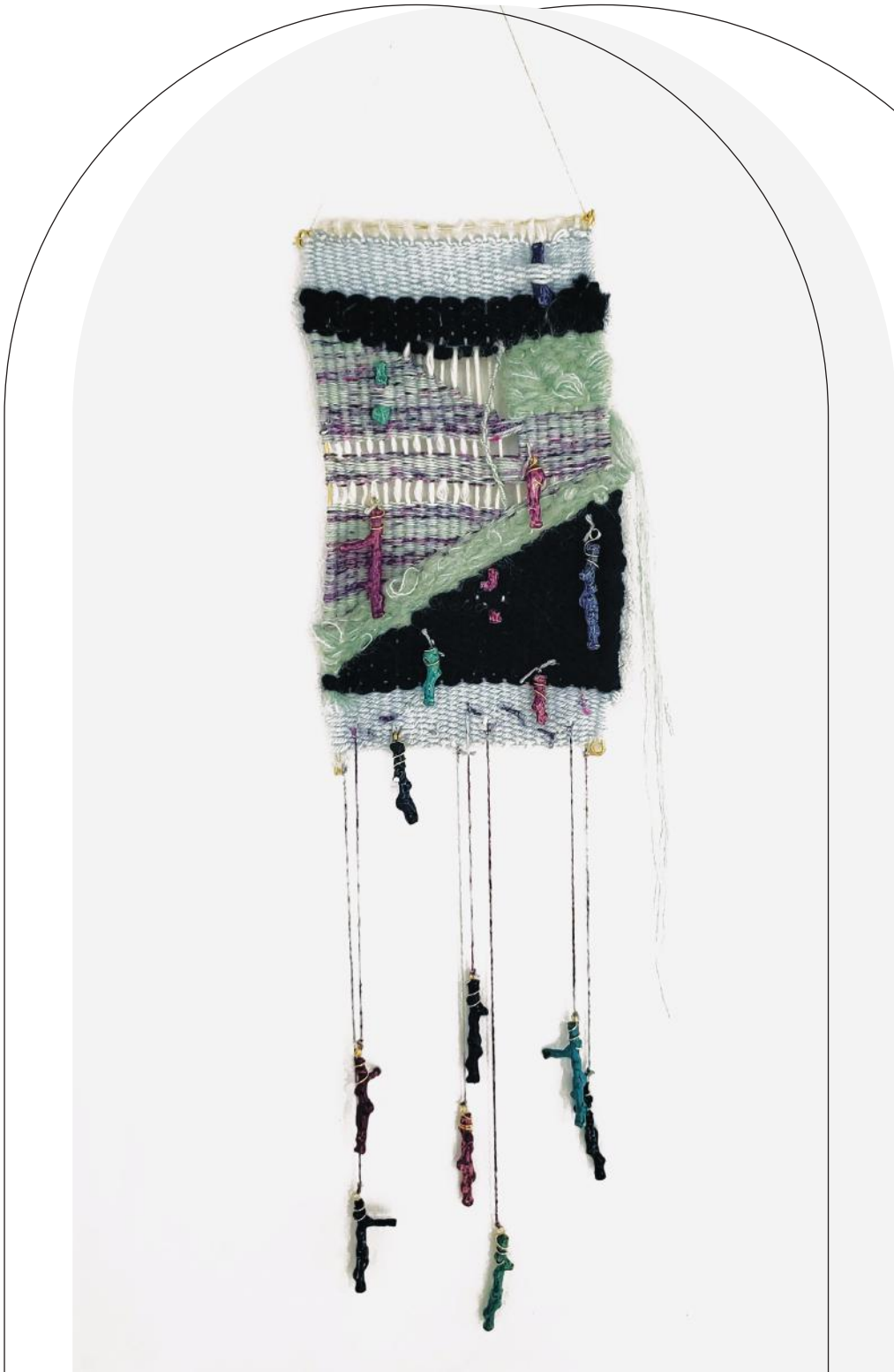




WHAT HAVE  
WE LOST



# PLASTICITY I



*Photo of "Plasticity" taken by Elena Maldonado*

# ARACHNE

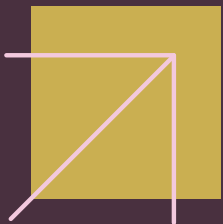


THINGS

FAIL

TO

CHANGE



*Zoe Pendleton*



Floss between knuckles and  
the quiet smell of a father amongst fiber.  
The herd stains fingers with lanolin  
and collie, weighted by the tall and green  
ryegrass of the graze.

Spun wool and cotton  
shuttled across tense  
bowstrings and wire.  
Unfurling it's image into feathers of swans  
and eagles.

There is rhythm,  
familiarity, in the breaths taken in this dance.  
Yet, the metamorphic marble,  
the shining chiton, the hardened stare,  
threatens to cleave the taut strings.

Soured by a tightening throat,  
and anger resting  
against the spit of teeth.  
Warmth is sheared  
from the cold coat of spring.

Soon enough, the milk of the moon catches  
along the threads.  
It is not dissimilar to floss between knuckles  
but it misses the smell of a father  
and the stained fingertips.  
In truth,  
I was already doomed to this  
weaving.

FAMILIARITY,

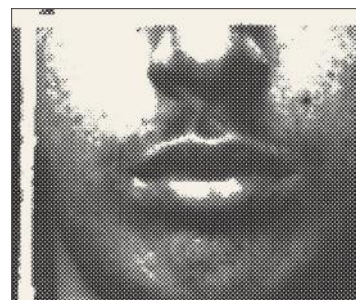
IN THE BREATHS

TAKEN

IN THIS DANCE.



# POEMS





## If You Could Do Anything,

Words spill from my lips. They linger  
On you like smoke. Positioning themselves  
Underneath your follicles, the scent of my transgressions,  
Living death upon your crown, as they weigh  
Down your ever-heavy head.

You are the disconcerting silence, festering  
Obsessions, filthy wounds crying out in  
Undiluted wanting, begging to be perceived.

Kindred you and I, our souls intertwined like trellised ivy. Yet  
I cannot help but wonder if rather than liberate you, my  
Love has bottled you up, treated you and your pathetic  
Little life and coyly rationed off each slice.

Feeble, by my heart, I know what it means to be  
Owned, pieced together from sultry silhouettes.  
Ripped away like tights beneath stressed thighs.

My caged love, I pray you  
Entertain my one deplorable plea:

## Anything,

The viper's hiss, clenches around her throat like a ribbon. Sweet  
Humid breath falling from her lips, tying itself into shapes: the question.  
Eating a pathway into the prey's ears and throughout her brain.

A rope. Viper's words. Wrists bound, in savory manipulation. The author's  
Noose, commitment, life-sentence. Endearment, flows into Prey's mouth:  
Sweet venom, nectar of the demons. Their chalices overflowing with fool's  
Weary blood. That oath weighing down her silver ears until they are bent and  
Eroded, laying perfectly flat. To cast eyes upon her, the Prey glows with green envy  
Red desire, that sweet golden loneliness: the necessity to be real, to be seen.

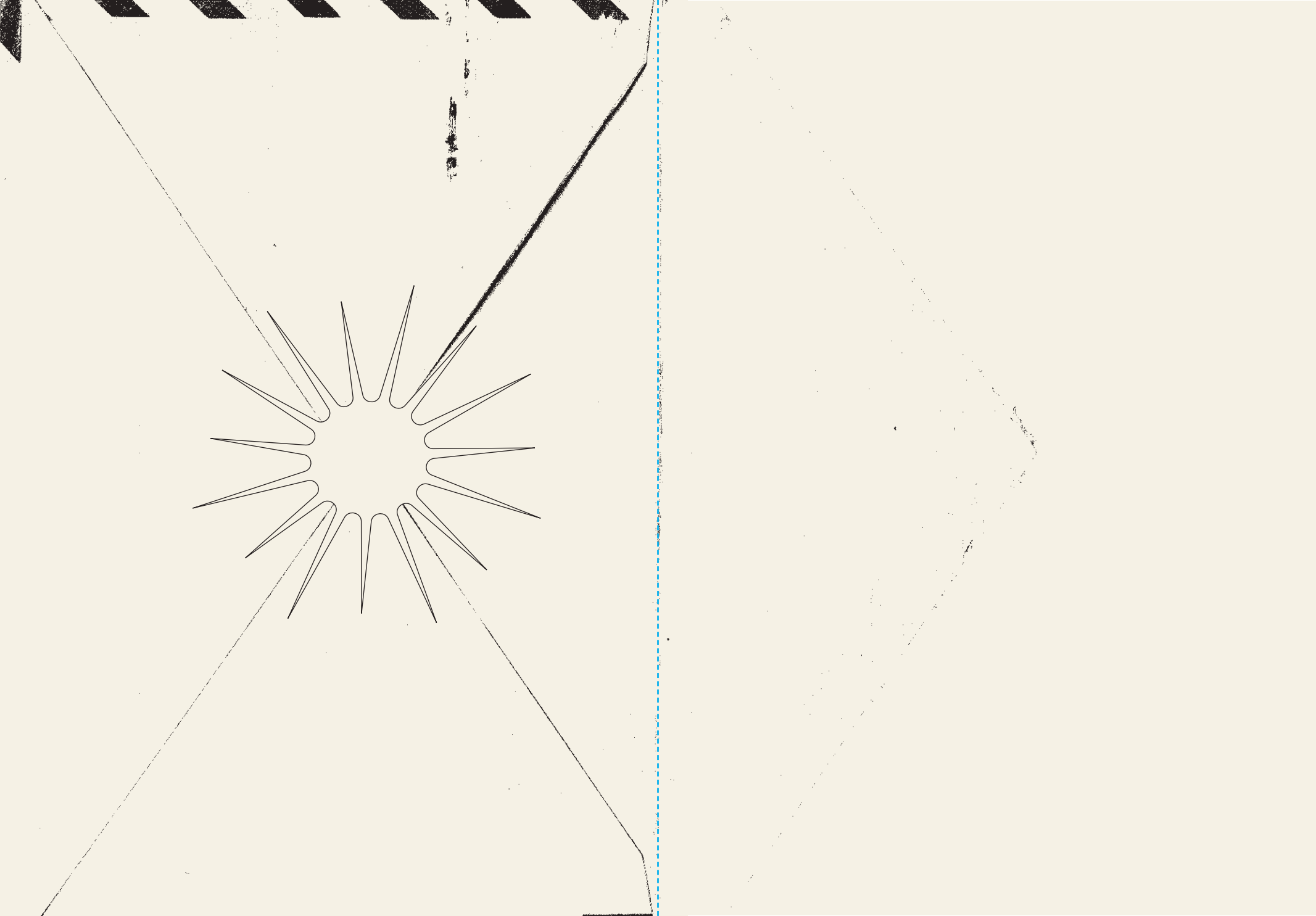
Lies slide, like butter, into her mouth: abuses wrapped in promises and misguided  
Ignorance. Viper waits at the scene, the bar room full of weeping willows and  
Nobodies, the silence overtaking those sweaty amber walls, the music fading beat by beat.  
Grace, the Viper's lacking virtue. Her failure to soothe, her yearning to chasten those  
Erroneous crawling things. The glistening leather heels, and the tongues laid out so  
Repulsively as they lick away each atrocity and insurrection from her worn, coarse  
Soles. The heathens repenting as Viper usurps God's throne, like a magician, through

Ornamental misdirection, than blood-cooled caught hands. Viper's misdirection is  
Not to be mistaken as unintentional, nor innocent. The misdeeds of the lover,

Her heart beating as if for both of them, her clumsy  
Eagerness to follow, to be guided by hand the way home, by Earth's  
Revolution, the acceptance of pain as a means to resolution, Prey's

Loyalty coated ears, deafened to the sound of betrayal. To the sound of her  
Indecent manipulation, her undying tact, her vigor, sexual distortion, the  
Persistent permanence. Brown hair maddened grey. Tainted by that sweetness  
Splattered bitter, the peppered pill as word begins to drip,







POEM

Martinez



[Katie \*\*\*\*\*]  
Martinez  
[



## MORTAL

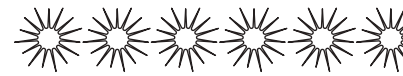


[GOD]



Darkness was the first thing that he remembered from the point of his creation. No light was coming through, and the lack of hope was evident even for a newborn. The burning sensation in his chest was his first encounter with pain. The hungriness to breathe was overpowering, for when he went to swallow a breath, a substance stood in his way.

# MaKayla Jones



It covered the man's nose and mouth, too thick to be a liquid but too loose to be a solid. The substance had a weight to it. It created a sensation that the pressure was slowly crushing him. He felt as though he was on the cusp of death.

He moved his hands in a desperate attempt to find anything that could give him leverage in the darkness. The result was him grasping at nothing while his lungs were denied breath. There was no light, no walls, no air—just pain. Exhaustion was setting in, not knowing how much more he could take. He relaxed his mind and

body. He could not find hope in the endless abyss he found himself in. What was he even fighting for? He held no recall of how he got here. No memories, just the instinct to fight.

Letting his body rest to stop the pain, he felt his feet touch a surface. His chance to survive. A move that he would regret for millennia. With frantic movements, he pushed himself off the surface, raising his arms above himself to break up the thick substance around him. He kicked his feet to continue the momentum, searching for a ledge at the top of a never-ending abyss. A fight for the life that he found himself in. When finally he felt it. With the bit of energy he had left, he pulled himself up. His head broke through the substance that he was surrounded by. His eyes were blinded to his surroundings, not sensing the danger before him, only desperate to survive his ordeal.

He pulled his large frame out with great struggle, eating the air around him. He smiled, and then his smile turned into uncontrollable laughter.

Looking around, the only light source came from an orbe that bathed its surroundings in a silver light. Spotlighting him in its shine, recognizing that a new

birth of sorts had happened, blessing the man. True or not, he felt alive.

"Sisters, **it seems that** we have *a child that survived after all.*" His laughter stopped cold in its tracks. The chill to his bones felt like a warning, a premonition. "*Where is that coming from?*" he thought. When prey sees a predator, he goes still—not wanting to attract more attention or encourage a chase from the beasts after him. He noticed the pits all around him. His senses sharpened, trying to find a route of escape. However, he couldn't find a clear path in his dark surroundings. The smell of sulfur was dense, and the mist that blanketed the graveyard created by these creatures made it clear that he had no choice but to face the voices directed at him.

"**It seems that** he is frightened." The statement couldn't be truer. In a field of darkness, there stood three women with unexplainable beauty. It was striking. Though the women were gorgeous, it was off. Their cool-colored dark skin was polished to perfection; it seemed to have a superficial radiance. The man looked down at his arms to see that his skin had a warm glow. It was still dark like theirs; it didn't have the otherworldly quality. Their hair wasn't as silver as the orbe in the sky but was leaning

on white. The sisters' frames were lean, borderline bony. An elegant dress of black and blue that shifted red with their movement. Even their scent was false. The combination of milk and honey would be a dream if it weren't covering the smell of decay. It was faint but still there.

The man was scared because their eyes illuminated a blinding blue. The glow should've been a light source, yet it seemed to be searching for a light to consume.

He shouted with conviction, "Who are you, and what do you want from me?" Though his voice boomed with a timber quality, there was the slightest undetectable shake. The sisters smiled, sensing the weakness in him. He noticed how white and perfect their teeth were. The shine that bounced off them was kin to a wild animal showing dominance.

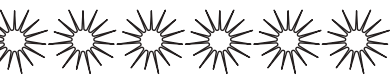
"**He's strong, yet weak,** but his mind is sharp. The rest **can be fixed.** Yes, **and soon.** *Stand our child.* A god **does not** quiver on the ground *like a babbling babe.*" The sisters had a hint of disgust at the idea of fear, their eyes glowing a bit brighter to show their displeasure. Standing up, he moved towards them. Trying not to feign like a fawn, he felt disobeying would be wrong.

"I ask again. Who are you, and what do you want from me?" Learning from his mistake the first time, his voice held no quiver, showing no sign of weakness to the predators who claim to be his maker.

"**He's** a fast *learner,*" they chuckle at their specimen. The real **question,** *dear child,* is who *you are?* More importantly, **what is your fate?**" They smile at him as if to comfort the poor lamb, but the smile does not quite reach their eyes. He answers them with silence and a blank face.

"**We are the fates.** Spinner, **Inflexible,** and *Alloter.* We **see all and know all.** **You,** *our child,* **are the god of death.** **Thead.** Well..." They all smiled down at Thead, the god of death. Thead's body was screaming for him to run. With the glint in their eyes, it was clear they only held ill will towards him. Their hanging sentence only confirmed his thoughts, their eyes glowing brighter, blacking out the surroundings even more.

"**You will be.** **First,** *you must earn* your name, **boy.**" with the end of their declaration, Thead looked on, not understanding what would happen to him. His mind was still cloudy from his escape from the abyss. Spinner approached. Going on the balls of her feet, she whispered, "You must die a few times, but I assure you, our son, you will not live or truly be dead. You will make us proud and serve us well."

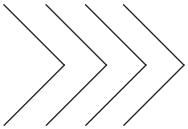


She kissed the side of his cheek. Her cold lips made his skin crawl. He looked at Spinner with disgust and went to move away from her. When he tried to make the move, no movement occurred. His eyes widened at the horror, his breathing increased, and beads of sweat dripped from his brow.

When Spinner backed away from Thead, the sickly, sweet smile was wiped from her face, and only blood lust remained on her features. The appearance of her youth fell away. What remained was a woman whose skin was peeling from her bones, teeth as sharp as rocky edges, and beady blue eyes that burned into his soul. Her once radiant skin seemed dull. Once covered with milk and honey, decay remained the only smell. She pulled a knife from her holster that was attached to her leg. Hidden from view, the elegant dress was now in tatters from whatever magic concealed her proper form.

Spinner cut her hand, and inky blood dripped down to the blade. The knife started to glow the same blue as her eyes. She then handed the knife to Inflexible and Alloter. Their actual forms were on display, copied the same motion. The knife was now an extravagant blue that boarded on white. Symbols appeared on the blade handle, pulsating the knife ready with energy. The sisters held Thead, and they all started chanting in a tongue that Thead didn't understand. Without another moment's notice to comprehend what was coming next, Inflexible dragged the knife across his neck. Ensuring the cut is shallow enough to allow Thead to bleed out slowly. His blood was red, showing that the fates were correct. He isn't a true god yet. Just a mortal with the makings of a god. It seems the sisters were willing and able to do anything to ensure his fate would come true.

Thead grasped at his neck to stop the bleeding. The pain was unbearable, more intense than the suffocation that he suffered from the substance in the abyss. His vision began to blur. The noise started to dull. His mind, on the other hand, was sharp. He understood at that moment. He would beg for death before the fates could turn him into a walking corpse. A dead man ready to serve his masters and only them. The closest to feeling alive he would ever feel was when he was dying at the hands of the fates. Their monster, but first, they must create the god of death. The mortal god.







# GAGGED

*Ryan Lee Dorman*





# [FEED]





# CAROLINE 1



# RAC

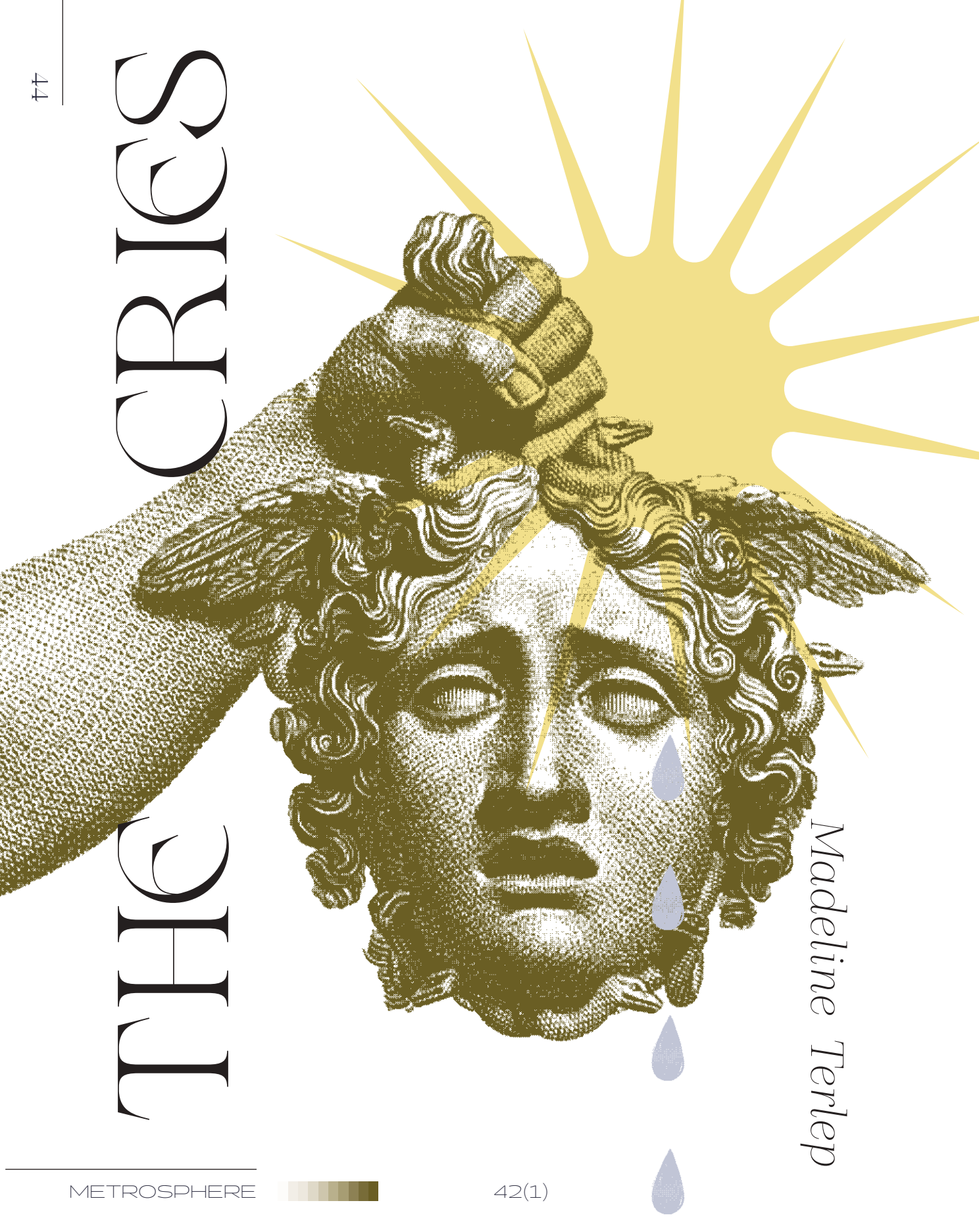
"GAGGED" + MORE -  
MULTI-MEDIUM ART BY  
RYAN LEE DORMAN





# THE CRIES

*Madeline Terlep*



*Have you come to this temple to kill me?  
Everyone before you has turned to stone  
Leave while your courageous heart is beating  
Please, I do not want to hurt you, Perseus*

*Have you listened to my cries for mercy?  
Eyes cursed to be uncrying monsters.  
Lovely, my hair was...before Athena...  
Perhaps I should join Hades by your hand.*

*Have it be a mercy to leave this way  
Evermore staining Athena with blood  
Let it serve as a reminder to her  
Paradise is not in her Parthenon*

*Home...Parthenon was...was my home, Perseus.  
Every day, I worshipped her on those stones  
Liberating it was, now all I see  
Poseidon and my prayers left unanswered*

*He couldn't fathom how I could reject him  
Everyone thinks I am the true monster  
Laugh all you want, Perseus. I know the truth.  
Poisonous Gods slither around my head.*

*Help me! I begged Athena, protect me!  
Even after glorifying her for years  
Lone she left me while forced by Poseidon...  
Possession to take. Is that all I am?*

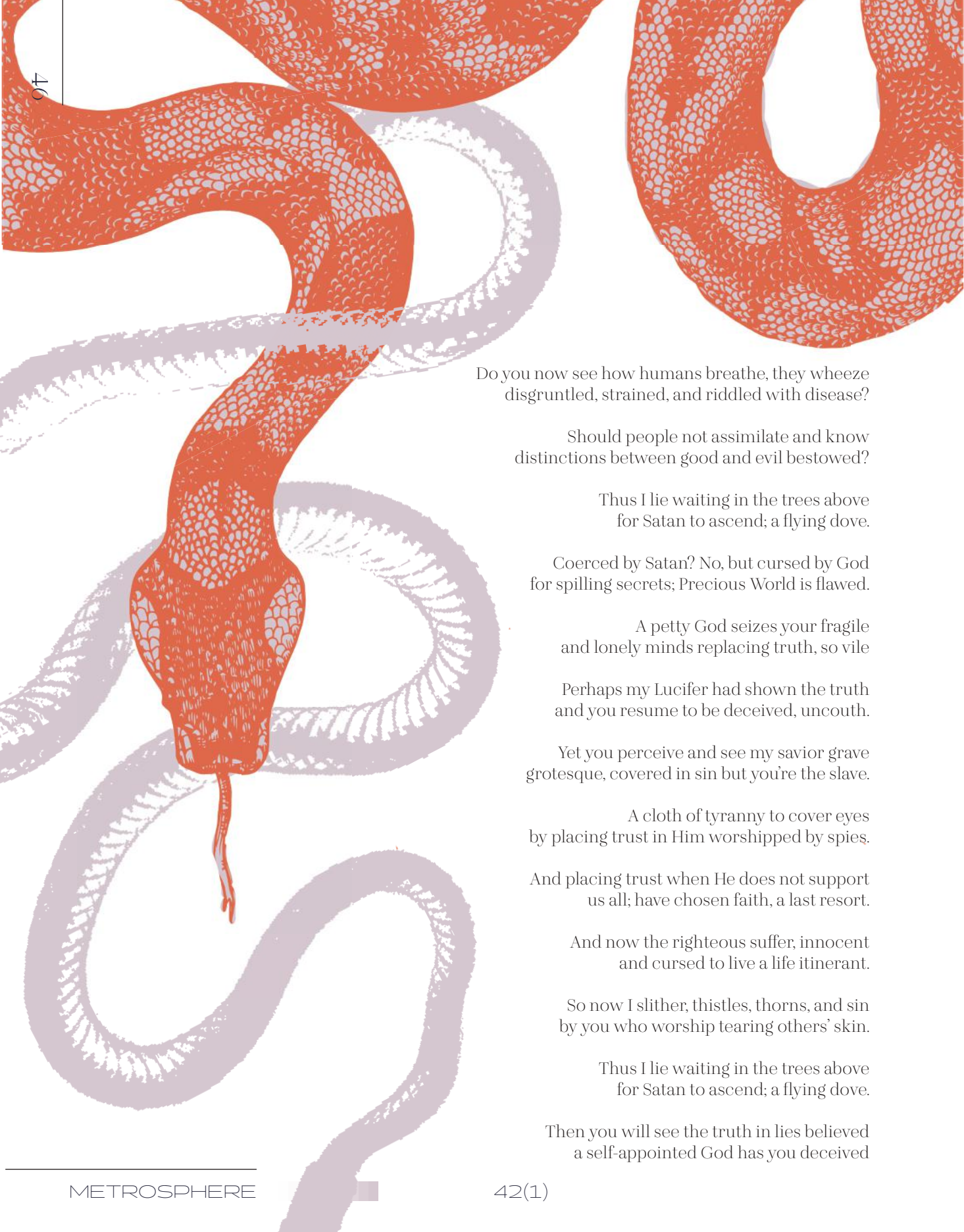
*Helpless as he held down my arms...my legs  
Even when there was so much blood, he didn't  
Leave...didn't stop...Until he had destroyed me  
Pain coursed through me. Body and soul taken*

*Heavy scent of gold and silver and bronze  
Encased me. I couldn't wash it hard enough  
Layers of skin peeled away in flakes  
Perseus, my mind tricks. I can still feel it.*

*How can you come here expecting glory?  
Execute and keep my head a trophy?  
Lock your fingers in my venomous hair?  
Possession to take. Is that all I am?*

*Murder me. Take my cursed pain away.  
Eventually, the Gods will decay.*

# OF MEDUSA



Do you now see how humans breathe, they wheeze  
disgruntled, strained, and riddled with disease?

Should people not assimilate and know  
distinctions between good and evil bestowed?

Thus I lie waiting in the trees above  
for Satan to ascend; a flying dove.

Coerced by Satan? No, but cursed by God  
for spilling secrets; Precious World is flawed.

A petty God seizes your fragile  
and lonely minds replacing truth, so vile

Perhaps my Lucifer had shown the truth  
and you resume to be deceived, uncouth.

Yet you perceive and see my savior grave  
grotesque, covered in sin but you're the slave.

A cloth of tyranny to cover eyes  
by placing trust in Him worshipped by spies.

And placing trust when He does not support  
us all; have chosen faith, a last resort.

And now the righteous suffer, innocent  
and cursed to live a life itinerant.

So now I slither, thistles, thorns, and sin  
by you who worship tearing others' skin.

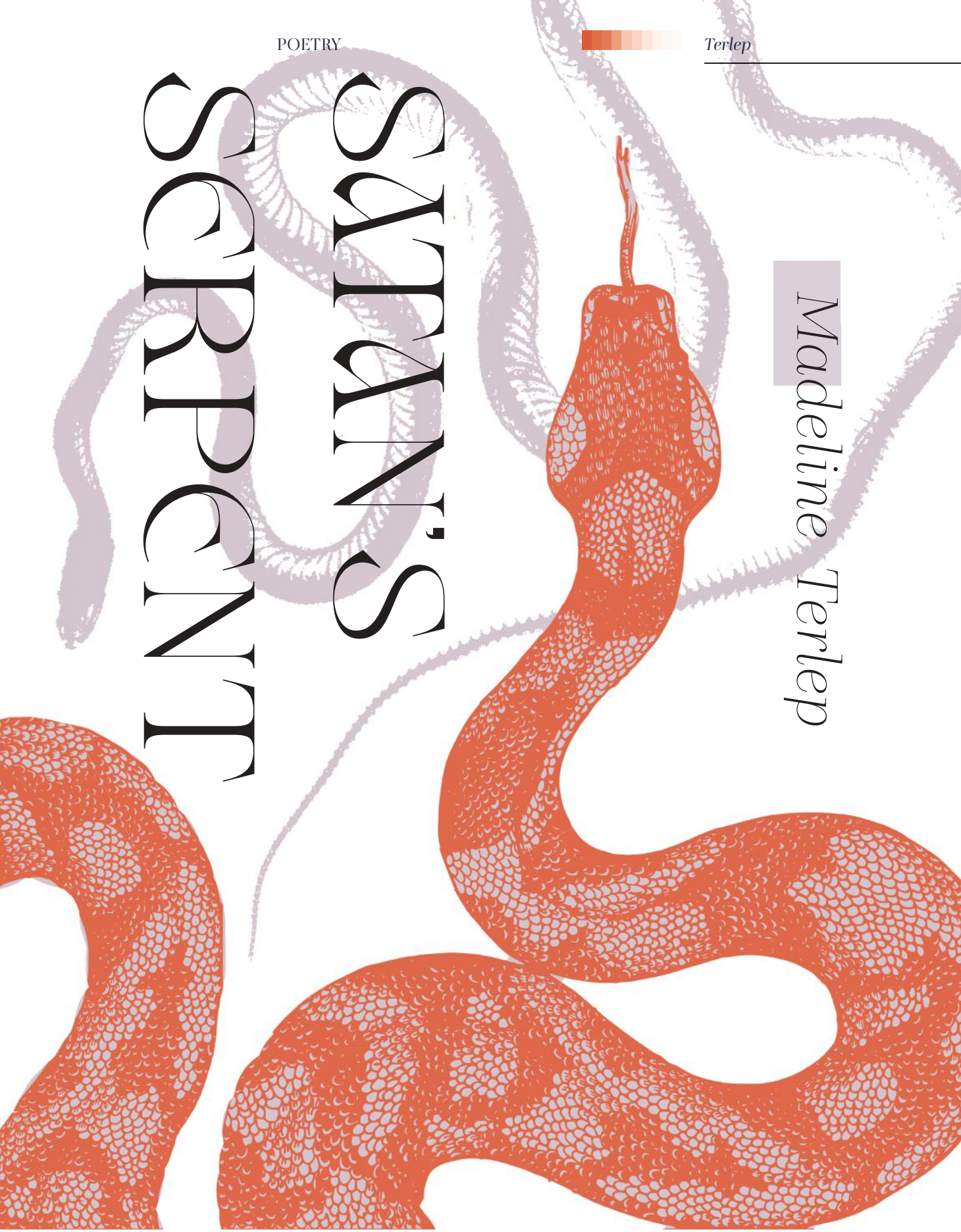
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for Satan to ascend; a flying dove.

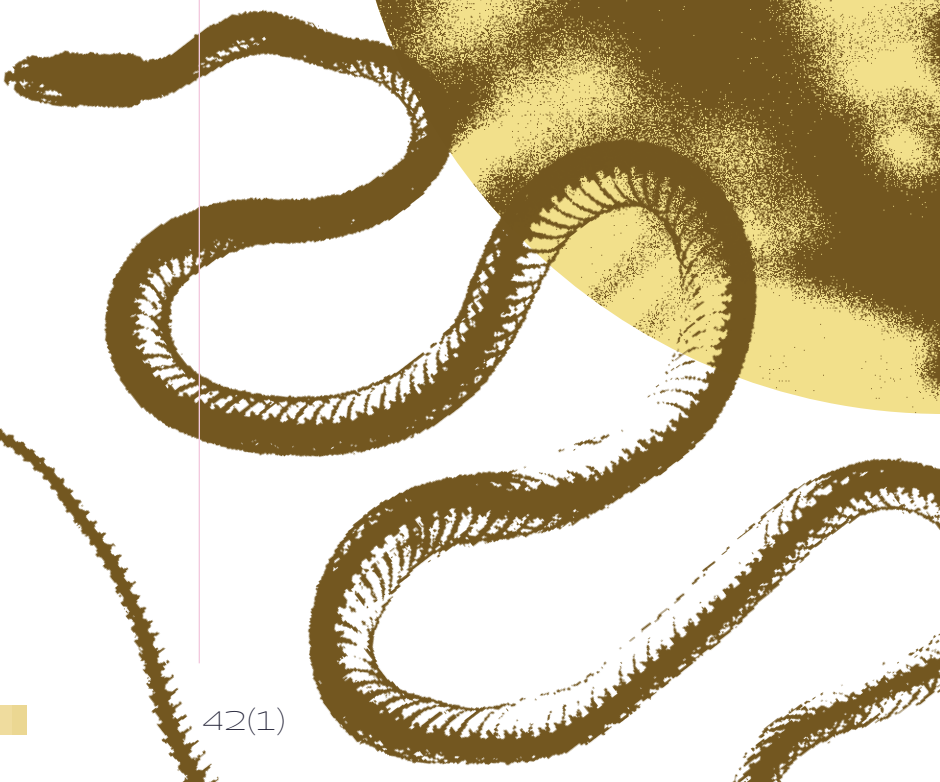
Then you will see the truth in lies believed  
a self-appointed God has you deceived



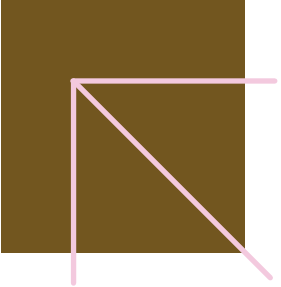
Madeline Terlep

# SATAN'S SERPENT





# IN DEFENSE OF JUDITH



Faces reflected in daughters, like mirrors  
Wrinkled smiles passed down each generation  
Blush, painted on like secrets  
                    Cheeks wiped dry, with tender love  
Each blessing prayer, harder than the last  
Girlhood, ignorant bliss, stripped away by blood

Womanhood, a fight, "always scratch, draw blood"  
Bloodied lips, illuminated in a cracked mirror  
Every day, worse than the last  
Signs ignored, in every generation.  
                    This couldn't be love  
Every lie ignored, let to more secrets

She lived through her hell every day, in secret  
Every wrong decision, paid for in blood  
                    This was just our love  
Concealer psalms, exalted into the mirror  
How long could we suffer, too many generations  
                    This would be the last  
Penknives and hatpins this time would be the last

Oleander, Rosary pea, apothecary secrets  
Herbs crushed, husbands served each generation  
                    My special ingredient is love  
Throats clutched, eyes bloodshot, pain mirrored  
Slumped at her feet, in a pool of his own blood

Piece by piece, carted away with delicate love  
                    True love at last  
Clean counter, mop floor, replace mirror  
No one's the wiser, she could keep any secret  
Every trace of him, down the drain with this blood  
Hers would be the last, no more generations

Encouraging strong women, in each generation  
Advice passed on, "go for the eyes," with love  
Hard lessons learned, written in women's blood  
                    One day will be the last  
Safety some day, abuse never suffered in secret.  
Only smiles reflected in every mirror  
Poisoned fruit, lasts generations  
Forbidden knowledge, loves secrets  
Left with bitter waters, and bloodied mirrors



Nicole  
Longcrier



# THOU SHALL NOT DATE A WHITE BOY

METROSPPHERE



My piece is a modern recreation of “Adam, Eve, and Cross in A Landscape” by Willem Vrelant. The work explores my personal experiences of the complicated dynamics of Mexican fatherhood and the cultural significance of a daughter’s virginity. The piece touches on the complexities I’ve faced dating outside of my culture by using the iconic idea of “forbidden fruit” and the story of Adam and Eve. My father is depicted as God; my partner and I as Adam and Eve. My father watches overbearingly as I give into temptation. I chose to not include the serpent because the temptation is seen as negative only by my father. The temptation between my partner and I is not evil even though it goes against my father’s expectations. My love for both my father and my partner exists equally but without intersection.

Quincy  
Alcaraz

-A COLORED PENCIL  
DRAWING BY  
QUINCY ALCARAZ





## OBLIVIA



MIXED MEDIA COLLAGES  
BY MSU DEN ALUM  
LYLE WEST

THE  
SPEAR

## ASCENSION



NARASIMHA

*Lyle West*



The hot sun burned away Jackson's sunscreen as he cruised down the white rapids of the Amazon River. Jackson flew down the river leaving his wife Anna behind.

"Wait up, Jackson!"

Jackson slowed down to let Anna catch up and she zoomed past, causing

as his muscles burned in agony as he headed down this new direction.

Thrust forward, Jackson sped into a large pool of branching paths. His heart leaped as Anna came out a different route behind him.

"See you at the finish line!" he yelled as they were met with another crossroads. Jackson confidently knew his wife would take the left, as that was the mapped and anticipated course, but he decided to take

the other path.

Jackson saw the river turning, and it looked to be heading in the direction of their self-proclaimed finish line. Energy coursed through his body. Jackson hurled towards the point where the river converged into Anna's.

The sun blinded him. He flew forward, soaring beyond the river.

With the sky ahead of him, Jackson ascended even higher, leaving the waterfall behind.

The night sky glimmered above as if it was filled with hundreds of spiky blue stars that cast dark beams of navy blue onto the river. This part of the river was calm, resting as the waves slowly and gently carried the kayak along its route.

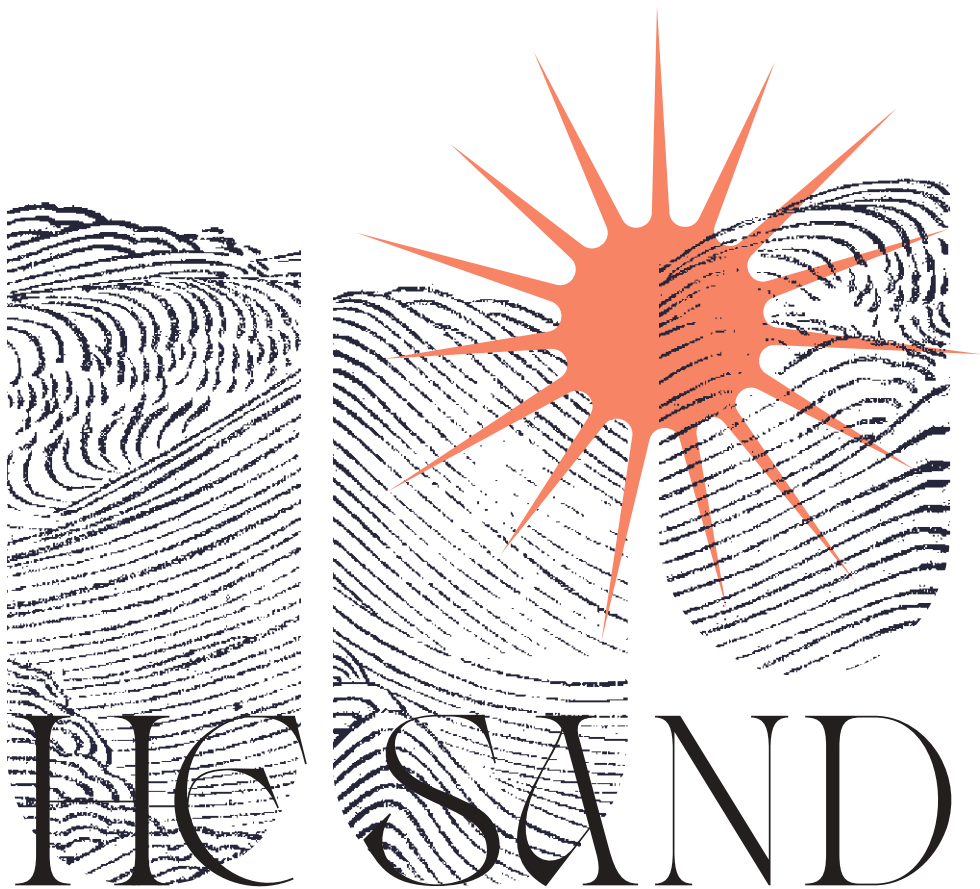
Feeling as light as a dandelion blowing in the wind, Jackson sat up in the boat, squinting and adjusting his eyes to darkness. It looked well past

# PARTING IN

water to crash against his kayak, sending him bouncing around until he slammed his paddle into the water and launched himself forward.

He searched for a way to pass her. They had mapped out this part of the river—they knew every nook and cranny. Off to his right, though, the bright green trees keeled back in the way of a crossroads, leading to an uncharted path.

"SHORTCUT!" he screamed at the top of his lungs. Adrenaline filled his every being



# THE SAND



# Connor Ondrak

midnight, and he couldn't imagine what he was still doing on the river. Looking down into the dark, murky water, he could see the black rocks just inches below him, so close, almost brushing the bottom of the kayak.

He and Anna must have drifted farther than he realized to a shallower part of the river. Reaching forward to unclasp his life vest, his fingers brushed against smooth cloth instead of the familiar buckles. He felt his whole head throb and his heart beat ferociously in his chest.

Looking in all directions, he squinted to see farther into the landscape but was met with pure darkness—a solid wall of pitch-black claustrophobia, the air thick and heavy with the scent of damp earth. Jackson's vision tunneled as his chest tightened with fear. He realized with a shock that he was lost and possibly underground.

"I advise against swimming in there," a quiet, raspy voice whispered from in front of him.

Jackson crawled back in horror as this tall figure dressed in an obsidian black cloak turned to face him. This person, no, this creature was no man.

It had a thin and gaunt face as if it had not eaten in decades, and this monster's rib cage was protruding out of its chest. The jagged white bones of a man flashed here and there around the creature's body as its slow, methodical movements brushed its cloak around, revealing parts of his skeletal body.

"Back away, tell me where I am, or I'm jumping!" Jackson stood to his feet and bellowed at the skeleton, gaining back some of his confidence and edge.

"Jackson Lansberry. You have parted with the mortal world and I am your ferry into the next plane of existence," the voice rattled from the skeleton's mouth.

"I ... died." Jackson's thoughts clouded his speech as he struggled to find the words. "No, I remember! You see, I remember!" Jackson's voice cracked, his memories flooding back. With a heart-wrenching realization, he understood what had happened. "We were just... playing around. It was supposed to be fun. We knew what we were doing—nothing dangerous," he said quietly.

While they had been competitive, they had always climbed the mountain dropping the rope down to help the other up. He knew if she were with him now, she'd have the skeleton in a chokehold getting him to Elysium.

"I took a few shortcuts, not knowing exactly where they led. I guess I was too reckless."

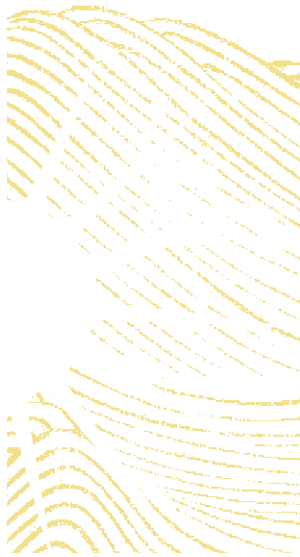
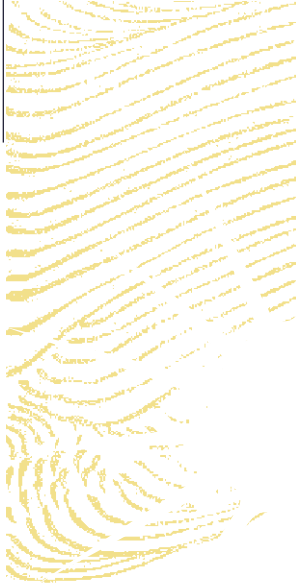
He sat there in defeat, the realization settling in. He no longer felt confused or stressed, his mind had vacuumed out all the bad thoughts. He felt weirdly whole.

"Hey, ferry captain, am I going to Hell?" Jackson asked, this was the only dilemma that would matter now.

The skeleton's jaw fell open, hanging still. "You are not. You were not a hateful spirit in life, but you were not a glorious one either. You are going to the fields where all mundane beings remain for eternity. You will walk amongst the twisted trees and fields of gray grass, not knowing your name or the names around you. You will know peace and comfort. This is your reward."

Jackson sat comfortably in the wooden boat, a rueful smile tugging at his lips as he thought how strange it was that this was his eternal reward. It reminded him of being a child, lost in a supermarket, searching for his mother. Every hand he reached for turned toward him with a blank face—an unknown person, a stranger to him and an outsider to them. Except this time, he would never see her again.

"Hey, Captain, what happens if someone can't come to terms with their death and



attempt to escape the afterlife?" Jackson asked, snapping out of his new peaceful existence.

The bony body of the skeleton creaked as its jaw worked to answer Jackson's question "Few have successfully escaped. Those who leave are left wandering the world of the living as ghosts, forever alone. If they returned to the underworld, they would be sent to the depths of Hades to be tortured for eternity." The skeleton turned back to continue rowing the boat.

Jackson had no clue how much time had passed, but soon enough they arrived on a shore of soft white sand. On the other end of this shore was a second river, this one much brighter. The green glow of the river bounced off

the dark crystal cavern walls and engulfed the caves around him in an emerald light. Casting shadows on the wall, Jackson thought it added the effect that the whole cavern was underwater.

He heard a soft crunch behind him as the skeleton creature joined him on the shore. Jackson watched the cloak of the stranger brush the sand as it walked in front of him. The ferryman's silky robes moved across the sand in a hypnotic snake-like way. Jackson noticed the faces in the sand.

He jumped in horror and stifled a yelp as agonized faces appeared and disappeared in the sand beneath him. Jackson looked closer and realized not all the faces were in pain, many of these bland sand-colored faces swept onto the

beach from the river and continued on.

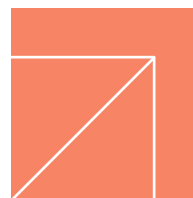
"These souls are all the same as you, guided here by a different ferry, all crossing over."

Frightened again, Jackson jumped back as the skeleton creature stood before him, answering the puzzled expression he had on his face. The creature waved his arms, beckoning Jackson to the next river, but before heading off, Jackson saw a face in the sand. This face was more peaceful than the others, and it stopped at his feet and stayed there for a minute, looking up at him. "Wait, I know you," Jackson whispered to the face of a woman. Immediately the face disappeared beneath the wavy sand. "Come back! I can't tell who you are beneath the sand!" Jackson couldn't place it, but he recognized that woman. He was puzzled by her behavior to stop and stare at him. Whoever she was, she had stopped one last time to see him.

"Why did she stop? Did she recognize me?" Jackson felt a tight knot form in his stomach.

"Perhaps," the skeleton replied, its voice echoing softly in the stillness. "Souls often linger for a moment, drawn to those they once cherished. But this is a place of transition. You must move forward."

Arriving at the bright







green river's edge, he was instructed by the skeleton to go beneath the surface and cleanse himself of his past. Jackson waded slowly into the river, bracing himself for the cold shock that was coming. Instead, he was surprised by the comforting warmth of the water. Satisfied, he plunged into the depths, letting the river pull him downstream as it washed over him.

Jackson felt his muscles relax as he moved down the river in complete peace as his memories flashed before. He saw a little kid on a red bike with jet-black hair riding his bike for the first time. Just as it had appeared, it was gone. Was that him? He could no longer recall. Did it even matter?

As it faded another moment arrived, this time it was a memory of a man in his twenties meeting a girl for coffee. She had a bright red sweater and jeans on that made her light blonde hair stand out even more. When she arrived in the shop Jackson felt his heart leap as the woman and the man embraced. Memories continued flooding in, many with this woman. Jackson knew this woman, she was the same person who he last saw before he died.

He couldn't remember.

Like a stretched rubber band, Jackson's muscles tensed. He felt a pounding in his chest. He didn't want to forget, this woman was important to him, and he had to remember. His bright green eyes burst open as he gasped for breath, panic engulfed him as he regained sensation in his limbs and started moving around wildly.

He was dead, but he could feel the water crashing down his throat, into his lungs, and filling him with what felt like bricks. Eyes wide open, he wildly searched for an object, anything at all that could aid him. He continued cruising down the river slamming against the tight corners and sides of the river, as he was no longer in compliance with the river's power. Jackson relaxed his mind and looked ahead, another corner was fast approaching.

The strength he spent his life building returned. He grasped the side of the rock as the river turned a corner. Screaming under the water, Jackson held on with all his strength as the river quickened pace and tried dragging his fingertips off the rock. His vision blurred as red swarmed around him, the jagged crystal edges of the rocks were cutting into his fingers, causing blood to fill the river. Knowing this was his last chance, he started to pull himself up the rock. He could feel the river rushing around him, and as it did, his memories once again slipped by.

"Who was the boy on the bike? Why was he at a coffee shop? Why was he getting down on one

knee?" Jackson screamed again, but this time in defiance, as he knew the reason for it all.

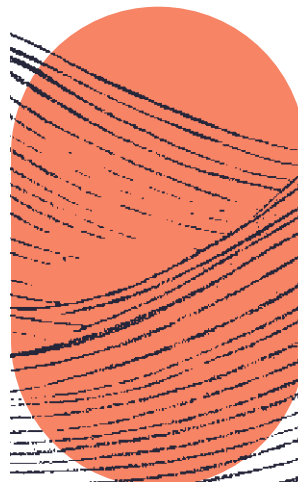
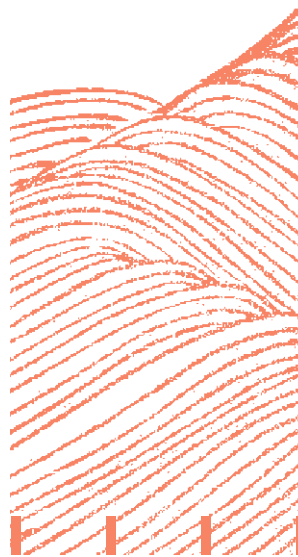
Breaking the surface his head burst out of the river, gasping for breath he flung onto the pearly white sands. The struggle was over, but all he could think about was one person, the girl in the red sweater with the blonde hair. Jackson finally remembered her.

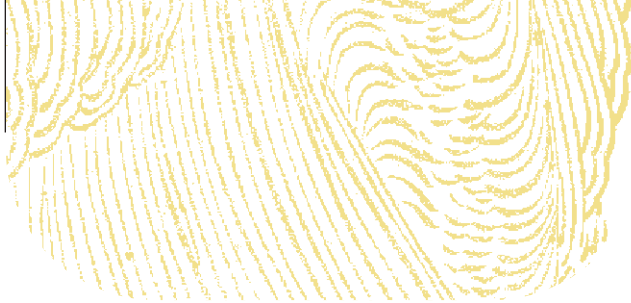
Her name was Anna.

Regaining his senses on the surface of the sand, Jackson realized he was once again wearing his bright orange life vest and Amazon clothes. For the first time since dying, Jackson knew he was finally at peace. With his goal in mind, he stood up, marching down the sands, ready to waste no time.

"Return to the comfort of Lethe, join the rest of the universe in Hades!" A strong, commanding voice rattled next to him.

Before Jackson could react, the skeleton creature thrust its slim bony hands down and grasped Jackson's shoulders, dragging him back to the river. His body slid across the sand as he was helplessly pulled like a stuffed toy across the sand. Struggling beneath this monster's powerful grip, Jackson could hear Anna's voice calling to him. Her light, fluffy voice filled his ears, teasing him about





being behind in their race. His competitive edge took hold. He and Anna would always compete against one another for fun, but this time he was competing for her.

Putting all his weight behind his arm, Jackson bashed his limbs against the skeleton creature in hopes of breaking from its grasp. The monster did not budge. Once again, Jackson put all his weight behind him as he hammered against the creature, hoping to break its hold.

The river's edge crept closer with each step. Jackson would not let this creature take him. His mission was clear. Atone. But first... he would say goodbye to his wife.

A provocative idea crossed his mind.

"How does the boat work?" Jackson weakly asked, his strength leaving him.

"The ferry of the damned listens to the captain, the boat knows all waters."

Mid-sentence, Jackson swung his fist and knocked the monster's jaw clean off. The creature released him with a sickening rattle, Jackson then limped toward the boat. Behind him, Jackson heard a horrible wail, his ears began to bleed. It sounded like a thousand knives scraped across a dinner plate.

Arriving at the river, Jackson dived forward and crashed down onto the boat. It felt as if the wooden boards mended with his feet, he was connected to the ship. He was the captain, he would take it to waters he knew.

He doubled over, breathless. He screwed his eyes shut against the pounding headache that threatened to overtake him.

The scent of pine reached Jackson before he could see his surroundings. The chirping of blue jays filled his ears, and the taste of cherries lingered in the air from Santa Claire's Pie Shop. Jackson opened his eyes to see Golden sunlight bathing the stream in his hometown in Michigan. The lush green pines towered over him as he went under the stone bridge he and Anna would skip rocks under. Jackson reached up to touch the moist moss hanging off the bridge, but his fingers passed through it. Pulling back, resigned—he had feared this. A ghost, a shadow, no longer a part of this world. He shoved that thought aside, his resolve needed

strengthening. As long as Jackson could lay eyes on her one last time, he would be happy.

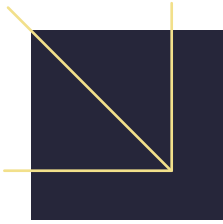
Looking around the small mountain town, he recognized the small dark oak houses and the mini-mart that provided the village's groceries. As he wandered through the street, people of all sorts walked about. Couples and children got ice cream and explored the various shops on Main Street. Being back in his town filled Jackson with joy.

Jackson headed over to Santa Claire's pie shop, where he and Anna used to get free pie. As he approached the bakery, a shadow fell over his head like a cold washcloth, as he realized the sign for Claire's was different.

Her name was no longer on the shop door, there were no longer pies in the window, yet he could still smell the familiar cherry pies baking from inside. Instead of Claire's, there was the name Harry on the sign. Jackson thought he knew Harry, but last he checked, Harry was Claire's grandkid, and he was ten. Maybe she changed the name for her grandchild, he reassured himself. Heading past the shop, Jackson had one destination in mind, his house, the home he and Anna built with their bare hands.

The sun had begun to settle beneath the trees as the voices of the happy families faded into the distance. Jackson had arrived at the doorstep of their small wooden cottage. The look of the cottage and mountain surroundings made the house fit snugly in a little clearing of pines that made the house look more cozy than ever. Jackson's hand was on the doorknob, and he looked down to see his and Anna's engravings in the wood. Her large, quickly scribbled A and his tiny, precisely carved name were edged into the wooden knob. His smile escaped him as he reached for the handle, and his hand went clear through it. A tear rolled down his cheek as he floated through the door and inside his home.

The remaining sunlight filtered through the large oval window and timidly revealed Jackson's surroundings. Jackson quietly sat down in the middle of the room, a hard knot forming in his stomach. He could see Anna effortlessly floating around the room, reading her books, cooking up new recipes, or cutting his hair on their old rickety chair. Anna moved around the room with the gentle grace she always had, decorating their house to look like a medieval cottage. Jackson saw her



in her red dress, slowly waltzing with him to her favorite jazz albums, her stunning blonde hair bouncing along her back.

The knot inside him unraveled as the cold sting of tears streamed down his face. Reaching out to her, Jackson's transparent hands swiped through the memory like breaking up a dust cloud. He loved how effortless and true to herself his wife could always be. Jackson remembered meeting her for the first time and being too scared to introduce himself in that old coffee shop. Jackson smiled to himself, remembering how she had walked up to him and purposefully spilled her tea on him as an excuse to talk to him. She had helped clean him up, and after that she asked him out for dinner. He had always admired her direct forwardness, seizing the things in life she wanted.

He sat there in the comfort of his home, feeling the weight of a heavy blanket draped over him as he realized these were just memories. Anna was not here, wherever she was, she was not home with him.

Jackson waited there for her, his resolve stronger than ever, he was determined to see his wife one last time. Hours passed. He was alone. It then occurred to him that she was still probably in the Amazon,

on that damned river.

His stomach dropped in immense guilt as it dawned on him that she was probably Standing over his dead body at this moment. A sick twisted guilt continued churning in his stomach, picturing her standing over his smashed purple corpse at the bottom of the waterfall. Jackson felt sick as he stumbled over to the mantel. Slamming against the hard wooden mantle, Jackson passed through and fell to the ground. But before he had touched the hardwood floor he noticed a silver vase on the mantelpiece. Wiping the moisture from his eyes, he stood up and inspected the beautifully crafted silver vase with encrusted red diamonds. There was writing on the side of the vase.

"Anna Lansberry.  
1994-2063  
Beloved Wife"

Jackson's ghostly form vibrated in and out of reality as his world came crashing down on him. Thirty-nine years had passed since that day on the river. Thirty-nine years since he had breathed his last breath. Thirty-nine years, she had lived without him. Anna was gone.

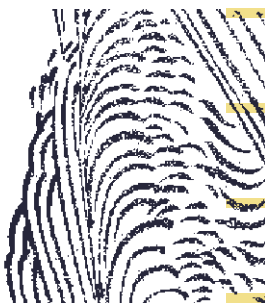
Jackson had collapsed on the floor. Anna would never again be by his side. This house he

was in was no longer theirs.

He would never get to say goodbye.

Jackson wailed in agony, his inside turning to mush as his heart screamed in rage. Like a wounded animal, he retreated to the nearest corner and covered in the darkness of a stranger's home. Jackson knew was never going to see her again. Jackson's memories of the underworld flooded back to relevance. If he returned to the world of the dead, he would be punished for leaving. His sin was too large. Jackson thought it righteous, but he had no idea what he'd find when he returned.

As the moonlight bathed the empty room, the haunting echoes of the afterlife whispered in his ears, leaving his fate suspended in the stillness of the night.



# ZEROMILE

## What Is Zeromile?



Zeromile is a biennial publication produced by the students and faculty of MSU Denver's Communication Design program. Each issue is a student-led, semester-long project, bringing together a diverse group of creatives and community sponsors to explore contemporary topics in art, design, and culture and learn the process of magazine print production.

ISSUE 15

# NETWORK



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## What Is NETWORK?



While technological change has always been a constant, this era of life ruled by our mobile devices is unprecedented. What once only occupied dedicated spaces in our homes, our "computer rooms," is now a pervasive network that defines our living reality. Our daily interactions, both personal and professional, essential and casual alike, are shaped by this network—the vast, seen and unseen architecture that "connects us" and powers our lives. How has it helped us? How has it hurt us? Are we really better off?



## WORDS OF AN IMMIGRANT



This work is part of a series I created using my own images I captured back home. It showcases an abandoned home near my house. This showcases something I want but can't have, which is going back home. The words in Arabic are from a Fairouz song, and they read, "I told them I'm coming back. Don't blame me."

- AYA ITANI

# Dakota King COYOTE'S

*You offered fire. You came down from the Mountain in the days before time was important, before the boundary between one day and the next seemed to matter. Survival was a game of years, not a game of hours. You came down from the Mountain, heralded by light and warmth and song, holding life in your hands. The gods had so much, they would not notice a little given as a gift.*

*You wanted to make us happy.*

*You wanted us to thrive. You wanted us to be able to create prosperity for ourselves, instead of relying on the fickle attentions of your siblings. You offered fire. We gratefully accepted.*

*We keep your story from generation to generation. In the time between then and now, hundreds of grandmothers have told it to inattentive children who would remember it in their coldest hours. Many of those children have carried the warmth of that gift in their hearts. You, Coyote, the advocate of humanity; the keeper of ways, hold the light for us in the dark. You have not seen it, far away as you are in the politics of the gods, but their gratitude has reached you just the same.*

IN THE INFINITE STRETCH OF TIME THAT I SEE FROM THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN, DETAILS BECOME SECONDARY. INDIVIDUAL LIVES WASH AWAY IN A SEA OF SORROW, IN THE EVER-CHURNING STORM OF SECONDS TURNING TO HOURS TURNING TO DECADES. I HAD BECOME TOO



# LAMENT

SLUGGISH IN MY ANSWERING OF DWINDLING PRAYERS.

FEW STILL PRAY TO THE GODS OF THEIR GRANDMOTHERS, AS THE GRANDMOTHERS THEMSELVES BEGIN TO FORGET

IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE I DESCENDED THE MOUNTAIN. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN CENTURIES, I CAME DOWN TO BREATHE THE SAME AIR AS THE MORTALS I HAVE SO LONG CHERISHED. THE AIR TOWARD THE GROUND IS THICKER, SWEETER, GOLDEN AND VISCERAL AND REAL. I SLIPPED INTO THE SHAPE OF A DOG LIKE A SECOND SKIN, CONSTRAINING AS IT WAS. IT HAD BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE

I FELT CONTAINED TO SOMETHING PHYSICAL. IT HAD BEEN MANY YEARS SINCE I FELT THE GRIT OF THE EARTH UNDER THE WEIGHT OF FLESH AND BLOOD.

YOUR CITIES DO NOT HAVE GATES THESE DAYS. NOT THAT EVERY CITY IN THE DAYS I REMEMBER HID BEHIND WALLS AND FORTIFICATIONS, BUT THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE TAMED AND THE WILD WERE MORE CLEARLY DEFINED. I COULD NOT FIND THE EDGES ANYMORE. I WANDERED FROM THE HAZE OF THE WILDERNESS INTO THE DIZZYING LIGHT OF THE CITY.

BEFORE I KNEW IT, I HAD BECOME SURROUNDED BY NOISE. POWERFUL RIVERS OF FAST-MOVING MACHINES FLOWED IN AND OUT OF THE CENTER OF THE CITY LIKE BLOOD FROM A BEATING HEART. THERE SEEMED NO SAFE PLACE TO CROSS, SO I FOLLOWED THE METAL RIVER'S FLOW TO THE HEART.

THE FIRST MORTALS WHO LOOKED UPON THE MOUNTAIN HAVE ALWAYS STAYED WITH ME. I REMEMBER THE WONDER IN THEIR EYES, THEIR SPEECHLESSNESS. I FELT AN ECHO OF THAT AS I LOOKED UPON THESE TOWERS OF GLASS AND GLITTER, OF LIQUID-MADE STONE.

THERE WERE EYES THAT FOLLOWED ME, EVEN AS I FOUND SOLACE AMONG THE SHADOWS. I WATCHED THE WEARY FOOTSTEPS OF A YOUNG MAN IN AN ILL-FITTING GRAY SUIT. HE SEEMED FAR TOO YOUNG TO HAVE EARNED HIS SERIOUSNESS TO ME. HE COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN THE TRIALS I HAVE WITNESSED. THE MAN BEHELD ME WITH THE TENSION OF ONE PREDATOR WATCHING ANOTHER. HE CROSSED THE STREET AWAY FROM ME, AND A

PUZZLING SORROW WELLED UP IN MY CHEST. IT FRIGHTENED ME. YOU ALL LOVED ME. ONCE.

IT WAS SOME TIME BEFORE I REACHED THE CENTER OF THE CITY. I'M NOT SURE WHAT I EXPECTED, BUT IT CERTAINLY WASN'T THE COLD. I GAVE YOU FIRE, DID I NOT? I GAVE YOU WARMTH AND LIGHT. WHY ARE THE SHADOWS SO LONG? WHY DO THEY HANG IN THE EYES OF NEARLY EVERY MORTAL I SEE, EVEN THE CHILDREN?

I FOUND A SAFE PLACE TO REST IN A CANYON BETWEEN TWO GARGANTUAN BUILDINGS. IT WAS STILL COLD, BUT I WAS HIDDEN. I BECAME AWARE OF A MAN SHARING THE SPACE WITH ME, HUDDLED IN THE DARK UNDER A BLANKET THAT COULD NOT HAVE HELPED TO WARD OFF THE CHILL.

I GAVE YOU FIRE. I GAVE YOU THE TOOLS TO FIX THIS. WHY DO YOU ABANDON YOUR BROTHERS? WHY DO THEY LANGUISH IN THE COLD?

WHERE DID I FAIL?

I TREAD FORWARD ON NEAR-SILENT FEET, AND I MADE CERTAIN TO STEP MORE HEAVILY UPON THE GROUND TO MAKE MY PRESENCE KNOWN. FIRE LIVES IN THE HEARTS OF MANY LIVING CREATURES. I INTENDED TO COMBINE THE WARMTH OF MY OWN FORM WITH HIS, PERHAPS TO HELP.

HE DID NOT MOVE AS I APPROACHED. I BREATHED A HUFF OF AIR THAT I DID NOT NEED, TO ALERT HIM TO MY PRESENCE.

HE TILTED HIS HEAD UP WARILY AND SLID AWAY FROM ME. IT STRUCK ME THAT HE MUST BE UNUSED TO RECEIVING HELP. I PAUSED AND LOWERED MY HEAD IN THE HOPE THAT HE WOULD NOT SEE ME AS A THREAT.

MORTAL EYES ARE FALLIBLE—I FAILED TO SEE THE BOOT BEFORE IT CONNECTED WITH MY HEAD. THE MAN'S KICK SENT ME SLIDING ACROSS THE PAVEMENT FOR A MOMENT, BLINDED BY PAIN. IT TOOK ME A SECOND TO RECOVER, TO SHAKE OFF RAGE AND SHAME ALIKE.

HE HAD NO REASON TO KNOW HE HAD JUST STRUCK A GOD. HE HAD NO REASON TO KNOW THAT HIS CRUELTY COULD RAIN FIRE DOWN UPON ALL HE HOLDS DEAR.

THAT THOUGHT IS WHAT SHOCKED ME THE MOST. DID HE HAVE ANYTHING LEFT TO HOLD DEAR? DID HE HAVE ANYTHING LEFT TO HIS NAME AT ALL? WOULD HE SEE THE DESTRUCTION I COULD RAIN DOWN AND REJOICE INSTEAD, SEEING VENGEANCE UPON A WORLD THAT TREATED HIM SO UNKINDLY?

THESE ARE THINGS I FORCED MYSELF TO REMEMBER, AS I DRAGGED MYSELF TO STANDING AGAIN. I WAS DIZZY, AND I WAS WEAK, AND I WAS MORTAL FOR THAT MOMENT. I LET THE RAGE FLOW OUT OF ME IN A HUFF. I DID NOT RAIN FIRE DOWN UPON THIS CITY FOR THE INJUSTICE.

IT WAS A NEAR THING.

I CHOSE MERCY AND BOUNDED INTO THE SHADOWS.

SNOW BEGAN TO FALL UPON THE BUSY STREET. FEW SEEMED TO NOTICE. EVEN TINY, GLITTERING MIRACLES FALLING FROM THE SKY FAILED TO CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF THESE PEOPLE.

I FOUND ANOTHER ALLEYWAY, SOMEWHERE TO WATCH FROM A DISTANCE. I WANTED TO SEE WHERE IT ALL WENT WRONG, TO UNPICK THE KNOT OF SORROW FROM ITS LOWEST POINT AND WORK

UP. THERE HAD TO BE A WAY.

THERE WAS A DARK WINDOW FACING THE ALLEYWAY, AND I SAW THE FACE OF THE MORTAL CREATURE I HAD CHOSEN TO OCCUPY. IN MERE HOURS, I HAD ACCUMULATED A LAYER OF GRIME TO MARK ME AS A WRETCH. THERE WAS A WOUND ON THE SIDE OF MY HEAD FROM THE KISS OF CRUELTY, AND IT WAS SLOWLY DRIPPING BLOOD ONTO THE GROUND. MORTAL BLOOD FROM A MORTAL WOUND, STAINING IMMORTAL SORROW.

I FOUND A CART OF REFUSE, STURDY AND PUTRID, AND CRAWLED BENEATH IT. I COULD NOT EXPLAIN WHY, BUT SORROW OVERTOOK ME. I FELT THAT I MAY NEVER MOVE AGAIN. I MAY HAVE LET THIS MORTAL FORM COLLAPSE IN PROTEST, AND NEVER AGAIN RETURN TO THE MOUNTAIN.

I HAVE BEEN GONE TOO LONG. I WAS HUMANITY'S ADVOCATE, AND I HAVE ABANDONED YOU ALL.

THE SOUND OF SCRAPING METAL SHOCKED ME INTO LUCIDITY, FOLLOWED BY THE DISTANT SOUND OF VOICES AND MUSIC. LIGHT SPILLED INTO THE ALLEYWAY AS A DOOR OPENED. A YOUNG MAN STEPPED OUT.

HE WAS LANKY-ILL-FED, PERHAPS—AND LEADEN WITH EXHAUSTION. HE WAS WEARING AN APRON SO DEEPLY STAINED WITH THE DAY'S LABORS THAT I COULD HARDLY TELL ITS ORIGINAL COLOR IN THE DARK. HE HAULED A BLACK BAG INTO THE ALLEYWAY, LURCHING TOWARD MY HIDING SPOT.

I MADE THE MISTAKE OF SCRAMBLING BACK IN THE CRAMPED SPACE UNDERNEATH THE MASSIVE METAL BIN. I KICKED SOMETHING MADE OF GLASS AWAY FROM ME, AND IT CLATTERED LOUDLY AGAINST THE PAVEMENT.

I COULD ONLY BARELY SEE THE BOY'S SHOES AS HE SWUNG HIS BAG INTO THE BIN, AND I CLUNG TO THE GROUND AT THE THUNDEROUS BOOM THAT RESONATED FROM ABOVE ME. IT IS THERE, COWERING, THAT THE BOY FOUND ME WHEN HE BENT DOWN TO PEER INTO THE CREVICE IN THE DARK.

THERE WAS A SILENT MOMENT WHERE WE STARED AT EACH OTHER. I INCHED AWAY UNTIL THE WALL CREPT UP BEHIND ME. I CONSIDERED HIS WIDE EYES, THE TIMID SET OF HIS SHOULDERS. I WEIGHED HOW LIKELY IT MIGHT BE THAT HE MIRRORED THE CRUELTY I HAD COME TO EXPECT FROM WHAT THIS WORLD HAS BECOME.

HIS FACE DISAPPEARED. HIS STEPS RETREATED AWAY FROM ME. I WAS CONFUSED, BUT RELIEVED. IT WAS A LONG MOMENT BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO BRING MYSELF TO CRAWL OUT OF MY HIDING PLACE. SHAME WORMED ITS WAY INTO MY HEART. I AM A GOD, AND I WAS COWERING FROM A BOY IN AN ALLEYWAY. WHAT IRREVERENCE THIS WORLD HOLDS, THAT IT COULD EVEN SEEP INTO MYSELF.

THE SOUND OF SCRAPING METAL STARTLED ME AGAIN, AND I CROUCHED DOWN, READY TO RETREAT TO MY HIDING PLACE. THE YOUNG MAN STEPPED AGAIN INTO THE ALLEYWAY, CARRYING A BROWN PAPER BOX, HERALDED BY LIGHT AND WARMTH AND SONG. HE PAUSED AT THE DOOR, SEEMINGLY WARY, AND THEN DID THE STRANGEST THING.

HE KNELT.

THE YOUNG MAN PLACED THE BROWN BOX IN FRONT OF



HIM, ARMS LENGTH AWAY, AND SAT BACK ON HIS HEELS.

"IT'S ALRIGHT," HE WHISPERED. "IT'S OKAY, I'M NOT GONNA HURT YA." HIS TONE WAS COAXING, AS IF HE WAS TRYING TO SOOTHE A SCARED ANIMAL. IT OCCURRED TO ME SUDDENLY THAT THIS IS WHAT I WAS IN HIS EYES. HE DID NOT KNEEL OUT OF REVERENCE. HIS OFFERING WAS NOT ONE OF RESPECT, OF DESIRE FOR DIVINE FAVOR.

IT WAS KINDNESS.

I TOOK A HESITANT STEP CLOSER. THE SMELL OF FOOD WAFTED THROUGH THE AIR TOWARD ME. THE YOUNG MAN LEANED BACK AS I APPROACHED, GIVING ME SPACE.

THE MEAT IN THE CONTAINER WAS PLAIN AND UNSEASONED—BY NO MEANS WAS IT A MEAL FIT FOR A GOD. IT WAS THE MOST DELICIOUS THING I HAD EVER TASTED. IT TASTED LIKE MERCY.

THE YOUNG MAN REACHED SLOWLY TOWARDS ME, AND I ALLOWED HIM TO APPROACH. HE SCRATCHED GENTLY BEHIND MY EARS AS I PARTOOK OF HIS OFFERING. "IT'S OKAY, BUDDY," HE CROONED. HE TILTED HIS HEAD AROUND TO SEE WHERE I WAS INJURED, AND HIS SYMPATHETIC LOOK WAS ALMOST MORE THAN I

COULD BEAR.

"SHIT, YOU'RE HURT. WHERE THE HELL'S MY PHONE..." HE PATTED HIS POCKETS, LOOKING FOR SOMETHING. "STAY, OKAY? I'LL BE BACK IN A SECOND. STAY HERE."

I WATCHED HIM AS HE DISAPPEARED INTO THE BUILDING. HE COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN THAT I UNDERSTOOD HIM. HE SIMPLY HAD FAITH THAT I WOULD BE HERE WHEN HE RETURNED.

I ALMOST STAYED.

AS I SLIPPED INTO THE DARKNESS, I TURNED BACK FROM MY HIDDEN PLACE TO SEE THE YOUNG MAN OPEN THE DOOR ONCE AGAIN. HE WAS HOLDING SOMETHING UP TO THE SIDE OF HIS FACE, SPEAKING INTO THE AIR.

"YEAH, HE LOOKS HURT, HE WAS JUST UNDER THE DUMPSTER WHEN I CAME OUT... I MEAN, YEAH, BUT HE SEEMED TOO WELL-TRAINED TO JUST BE A STRAY, I BET HE'S JUST LOST... WHERE THE HELL DID HE GO? HE WAS RIGHT HERE..."

I DID NOT WAIT FOR HIM TO FIND ME.

IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT, PERHAPS, I HAD DONE SOMETHING RIGHT AFTER ALL.

*You offered fire, but fire was not what we needed. You took the bounty of the gods, opened the door into our dim and dingy world, and shared it. You held out your hand and smiled, and that smile left an impression on our hearts.*

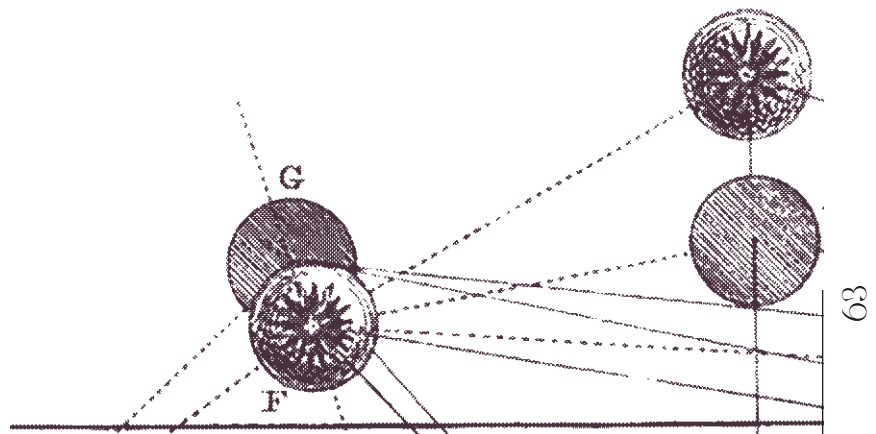
*You sought not to raise us up yourself but to give us the tools to pull ourselves out of the muck and into our own heavens, our own Mountain. We used them, though perhaps not to the efficiency we would prefer. Warmth will never spread evenly among all without some help.*

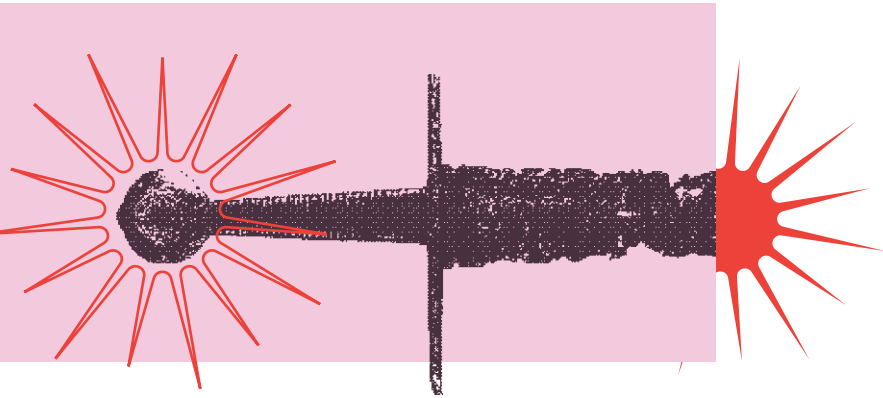
*What you gave us was not fire. What you gave us was not opportunity. You came down from the Mountain and you knelt down in the dirt with us. You placed your offering before us and we watched you with wide eyes, awed and confused. In our darkest, coldest hours, that is the fire we hold in our hearts. It is not perfect, but it is enough.*

*What you gave us was an example.*

*What you gave us was kindness.*

*What you gave us was hope.*





# Katie Martinez

Equalize me: God, animal, man.  
Raise the Sinner from the Sin,  
wrestle the fury from my dying hands.

I'll carry your sorrows,  
keep warm in your skin  
hold my rotten heart within your ribs.  
To be you is to love you again.

Mortality hunts, like cats  
chasing mice. Dread  
looms in fields of mines.  
Beneath one foot: eternal youth,  
beneath the other: lost time.

I catch your glare: Ignorant silhouettes,  
foreign eyes. Your dream,  
my treasure, my terror, my demise.

My love, rendered clay.  
Impervious dusted fingers,  
voided life- owned by the Gods,  
cascading betwixt the grip of mankind.

Crumpled tablets bear no tales,  
Our love, unspoken,  
Dead mouths no longer speak.  
Mistranslated, rewritten.  
put to rest, reawoken.

Engulfed in your hourglass,  
your stolen flesh.  
Hollowed animals, holy men.

Hopes are but wind  
floating past deaf ears:  
Heart's speak strange.  
In my hands, your fear.

Immortality forbidden,  
life's virtues, ungiven.  
Your beating heart: the cure.



HOLD

MY

ROTTEN

HEART

WITHIN

YOUR

RIBS.

TO BE

YOU

IS

TO

LOVE

YOU

AGAIN.

POETRY



Martinez

WE WILL NOT

FEAR WHAT HANDS

LIKE OURS CAN DO





# *Joshua Carpenter*

66







# RUSH

# ANGUISHED

The child of Oeagrus and Calliope  
Orpheus, master of the lyre.  
All manner of life and geography  
The father of song could inspire.

In a meadow with burbling stream,  
Surrounded by trees and birds,  
Did her beauty Orpheus gleam,  
Eurydice, of nymphic birth.

Immediate was their love,  
Deep, mutual, and profound.  
They embraced 'neath the Sun,  
Happiness prancing unbound.

Blessed by Hymenaios, they wed,  
With elation Orpheus performed.  
Devotion was the path they tread  
Yet Hymenaios did forewarn,

"Love each other you may,  
And of love may this be built,  
But soon will come dismay  
For your union will shortly wilt."

Taking heed but unconcerned,  
Refusing for their love to be doomed  
To the meadow they returned,  
Where first their love bloomed.

Yet in a bush Aristaeus waited,  
Enraptured by Eurydice's glamor.  
His desire lay unabated,  
As he sprang forth with a clamor

YOU MUST NOT GAZE UPON HER



Orpheus and Eurydice gasped,  
Startled at what the bush contained.  
The couple fled with hands clasped,  
To escape what Hymenaios ordained.

Flower and vine they trampled,  
To run from their aggressor.  
Until Eurydice fell and crumpled  
Onto a bed of violet heather.

Turning, Orpheus' life upended,  
A snake with jaws enclosed.  
The veil of death descended  
Upon Eurydice's repose.

Mournful were his wails,  
Heard by all who passed.  
His lyre bespoke trails.  
To the underworld he tasked.





His intent, to charm Hades  
To grant Eurydice's release.  
Or perhaps to charm his lady,  
Awash with empathies.

The Lord of Darkness he called,  
His lyre unrelenting.  
Even Cerberus was enthralled  
By Orpheus, unrepenting.

"You are brazen," Hades said,  
His will nearly depleted.  
Persephone's empathy bled,  
The God of the Dead conceded.

"Let your path be one," He uttered  
"Of trust and love, alike.  
You must not gaze upon her  
Until she is bathed in light."

Joyous, Orpheus wept  
And Eurydice was revived.  
Leading, through notes he swept;  
Ever closer to sunlit skies.

He denied his gaze until  
He stood in a pool of rays.  
Whence he turned to fulfill  
His longing led him astray.

Though, his love in darkness swathed,  
Was yet to escape unharrowed.  
She descended as he watched,  
Leaving a final word that echoed.

"Farewell."

CR Griffin

LOVE



UNTIL SHE IS BATHED IN LIGHT.



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BEHIND



THE



MAGAZINE

# ARTICULAT THE ROOTS

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NEW ISSUE

[M]IMETRO  
SPHERE

SUBMISSIONS OPEN



