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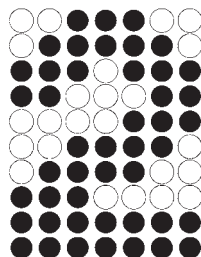
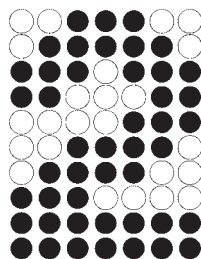
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UMSL



COVER ILLUSTRATION DESIGNED
BY GEORGEANN McLEMORE

UMSL
LITMAG
2022



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DEAR READER,

I am so pleased to introduce *Litmag 2022*.

In light of these last few tumultuous years, it's hard to discern whether 2022 is the calm in the eye of a raging storm or if still waters are on the horizon. Each bit of positive news carries reservation, and we seem to be in a hazy middle ground between "back to normal" and "pandemic times." Still, we look to find the bright moments in the pandemic world.

This year's nine editors decided that this issue would revel in that middle ground. Our staff has endeavored to showcase those comforting moments while also reflecting on the shared struggles we all intimately understand. Our aim for this issue was to highlight a diverse range of voices and experiences, seeking out emotional highs and booming laughter while finding stillness in quiet simplicity. This collection, in my eyes, accomplishes those goals and reflects new beauty back at us that we couldn't have possibly anticipated.

Litmag 2022 is bright. Sometimes that brightness is warm and comforting – grandma's small kindnesses and an exaltation of love. Sometimes it's a bubble of laughter, a meditation on swearing or a phobia of deer. Other times, the brightness is white-hot and raging—a generational anger and the complexities of loss. All forms shine in this year's collection.

We are also incredibly proud that this year's issue marks the first publication in our new relationship with UMSL's graphic design students. Georgeann McLemore, a senior under Professor Elizabeth Buchta, created this issue's cover. The graphic melds the whimsy and the darkness together to make a striking piece of art much in the same way our issue does. Professor Buchta and her students have breathed life into the layout and design of this issue, ensuring its design matches its content. Their collaboration with our editorial staff has been invaluable.

I will also add a warm thanks to Professor Kate Watt, our faculty advisor, who supported us as a staff throughout our production process. Her guidance and care, both for us and the publication, drive *Litmag* year after year.

So, dear reader, please enjoy the collection we have curated for *Litmag 2022*. We hope the brightness comforts and challenges you in equal measure as you traverse the middle ground.

Best regards,
Emily Stewart, Editor-in-Chief

THIS EDITION OF UMSL'S *LITMAG* IS DEDICATED TO:

EAMONN WALL

SMURFIT-STONE CORPORATION PROFESSOR OF IRISH STUDIES
AND PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Professor Wall has been an avid supporter of *Litmag*, and he, along with the Irish Studies Program, is the publication's longest running sponsor. The editors of *Litmag* wish to honor him this year, especially, as *Litmag* 2022 marks his tenth year of sponsorship. It is in large part because of his continued support that *Litmag* has grown into the interdisciplinary, international, multigenre and multilingual publication we are proud it has become.



THANK YOU

The staff of *Litmag* would like to offer sincere gratitude to our advertisers: Dr. Eamonn Wall and the Irish Studies Program, Madame Trapani with the Department of Languages and Cultural Studies, and Taylor Meyer with Frenchtown Tattoo Company in St. Charles.

We extend additional appreciation for support from Dr. Frank Grady, English Department Chair, Chris Schott with the UMSL Writing Center, Scott Gericke in the Department of Art and Design, Blaine Milligan in the English Department office, and James Karslake in the Lucas/Clark Work Center.

A major shout-out to *Litmag*'s Fall Intern, Paige Moultrie, for all of her work soliciting submissions, communicating with advertisers, and digitizing back issues to build our archive.

Extra special thanks to Elizabeth Buchta, *Litmag*'s Graphic Designer/Layout Editor and Assistant Teaching Professor in the department of Art & Design here at UMSL.

And last but most certainly not least, a huge thank you to all the authors and artists who contributed to this publication, as well as readers like you!



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ABOUT *LITMAG*

MISSION STATEMENT:

Litmag's mission is to nurture the creativity of the students, staff, and alumni of UMSL by increasing awareness of diverse literary and artistic talent. We aim to provide an inclusive, professional and high-quality publication free of charge to UMSL and the local community.

As editors, our goal for the 2022 issue was to transform our experiences into art that honors and enriches our individual and communal lives. Art allows us to process both our joyous and heartbreaking moments, and we believe that *Litmag* provides space for us to share in this reflection together. The UMSL community's varied artistic voices weave together here in a single publication that can speak to all of us. We hope that the world *Litmag 2022* presents will resonate with readers as it reaches bold peaks while settling into quiet simplicity.

REVIEW PROCESS

Submissions are open to all UMSL students, faculty, staff and alumni. All submissions are reviewed anonymously, and selections are determined after thorough discussion by the editorial staff and faculty advisor.

SPONSORSHIP

Publication of *Litmag* is supported and sponsored by the UMSL English Department, advertisements, donations, and readers like you.

DISCLAIMER

Creative work solely reflects the views of the author and not necessarily those of UMSL or the English Department.

CONTESTS

Litmag sponsors five individual contests for best poetry, best fiction, best creative nonfiction, best multilingual writing, and best artwork. Winners for the categories of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and art were determined by the lead editors using editorial staff voting scores. The multilingual winner was determined by the Department of Languages and Cultural Studies faculty.

2022 CONTEST WINNERS

Art: “Writing, Smoking, Thinking” by Tina Paul

Poetry: “Working Hard for What” by Taylor Weintrop

Fiction: “Birthday Cake” by Zak Miller

Creative Nonfiction: “The Wood Rasp” by Jeffrey Pryor

Multilingual Writing: “The Character” by Aryam Elizabeth Ladera Ramos

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“EDEN”

OLIVIA N. OBI

acrylic on canvas

ARYAM ELIZABETH LADERA RAMOS

“EXPEDICIÓN (TRIBUTE TO CHARLES BREWER-CARÍAS)”



acrylic on canvas

MEGAN ROEGNER

POTENTIAL

Do we ever look at women and not see potential?

Not just the physical—

maybe a few pounds lighter,
eyebrows should arch higher,
if she didn't look so tired...

But the physics,

bodies on the precipice of change—

the coiled spring,
the unlit match,
the water behind the dam.

We are revolutionary in the truest sense—

cyclical, each month a testament to

the possibility of life,
the inevitability of death,
the transformation in between.

The dam bursts, the coil springs, the match combusts
and sets aflame all we know about potential.

Impossibly, inevitably alive,
the promise takes shape,
and we are transformed.

ISABEL FLICK

mami asks me why i do not cry

how do i talk about my body
 without turning it into
 a metaphor
 of how she pushes me into
 her open wound of my birth
 like salt and how when i was a child,
 my father took me to a children's
 class on how to make balloon animals
 and how more often than not,
 i wish i was the clown
 she believes me to be
 and twist her into a pretty red dog
 (a b i t c h)
 and pop her once i finish drawing
 a smile on her face.
 my sister asks why i do not believe in
 f o r g i v e n e s s
 but does not ask why mami
 ridicules me for being
 in love with a white boy
 who has a hook in his mouth
 as if he is proud that i caught him.
 as if mami is an angel above me though she
 loved a broken white man as well.

she does not ask why
 mami rubs me down with an egg,
sobs when the demons of my desire
 don't come out when she cracks
 me open to see
 what the boy has changed in me
but only sees floods of holy water leak
 over her hands.
the waterfall of my veins
 washing away the s i n s
 that only e x i s t
 in her imagination.
how do i talk about my body
 without using a burnt out metaphor
describing the fact that
blood is not thicker than water.

JEFFREY PRYOR 

THE WOOD RASP

Moustache lived in a cabin far from town. It was a heavily wooded area, and I could not see any neighbors. The cabin was a two-bedroom ramshackle place with clay-stained white asbestos tiles on the exterior and antiquated wooden paneling on the inside. It was situated on a hill above the river with a view of rolling fields beyond it. The posts holding up the porch roof were real cedar tree posts complete with peeling, shaggy, bark that fell to the ground in fine strands. I was impressed with this rough style of living, as I had never seen anything like it before. Inside the cabin was a carpeted floor with brown mud stains evident on the worn fibers. It reeked of leather and gunpowder, combined with the smell of wood, a wood stove, and something else that I could not recognize. Two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room—that was it. This was a ridiculously small place, and it felt like the cabins described in those Louis L'Amour wild west-gunslinger novels. I was told the bathroom was outside, which was an outhouse located behind the house. I had no idea what an outhouse was.

I was still a little kid, around ten years old. I was young and impressionable. I was the middle child of three, with an older sister and a younger brother. My father left my mother a couple of years ago, and we were struggling for everything that we had. Food, clothing, and basic survival were difficult for us, but we were surviving. My mother had her own struggles, laboring horribly to recover from two strokes while sporting a pacemaker. My grandparents used to tell me that she was a bionic woman. I watched the television show *The Million Dollar Man* and was so proud to have a bionic woman for a mother. She had difficulty remembering my name and often called me by my father's name. I could see the struggle in her eyes, but she never broke down nor showed weakness. I trusted her with my life, I loved her, and I did my best to be the “man of the house,” as she had requested. Little did I know how much weight this would carry in the future.

I remember working with Moustache on a project in one of the two bedrooms in the tiny home. There was a shower secluded in the corner of this bedroom. It had horribly stained shower curtains and what used to be white ceramic permeated the shower stall. It was stained by years of well water, rich in lime, calcium, and sulfur. This turned everything into an orange-yellow rust color, which was not very inviting at all. The water smelled of foul eggs, and it did not taste much better. He was trying to remove wood from the floor to install some sort of drain. It was not going well. I could see his frustration and was intrigued with the foreign language; those curse words were new to my vocabulary. Some of them word-smithed together so eloquently, it was as if he practiced for years. I stood there in awe at this process unfolding in front of me.

I could see the desperation in my mother's eyes. She wanted this man to be a father figure, a teacher, a good mentor, and a welcoming friend, seeing as I had none of those in my life. I tried to buddy up to him, letting him know I was eager to be his apprentice. He kept leaving to go get different tools from the basement and seemed angry. Moustache was slightly overweight, so every time he got up and down, he let out a series of grunts and groans. He looked uncomfortable and sounded even worse. My mother mentioned to him that I could run for the tools if he liked. I was ready, set, go! I asked what he needed, and he grumbled, "A wood rasp." I had no idea what that was. He told me what it looked like and where to find it. I bolted out of the room, ready to show my reliability and eagerness. I walked outside of the dimly lit cabin and into the darkness, realizing that I had no light to see where the basement was, much less how to get there. I was determined not to mess up this opportunity, so I headed for the basement. I missed the stairs, which ran alongside the house, falling and hitting the blossom rocks on the ground. I got up, dusted myself off, and continued in the dark. At this age, I feared the dark immensely. I knew there was some sort of half-man, half-wolf creature that was following me, just waiting for the right time to attack. I quickened my pace.

I found the door to the basement, which was just a space under the cabin with a dirt foundation and one light bulb. When I found the light switch, I felt like I had accomplished so much. I flipped the switch and the light flickered to life; I was determined to not let Moustache down. I went to the designated toolbox on the floor, which was an old milk crate full of random tools. I grabbed what best looked like the tool he described and headed for the door. I made it to the stairs, stumbled my way up, and scrambled for the front door. I rushed in and handed him

the tool with pride. He looked at me and scowled, “This is a screw-driver.” I felt deflated but told him I would go look for it again. I bolted outside, bypassed the stairs, and entered the basement, all the while avoiding the beast stalking me. I had left the light on, so I headed straight for the milk crate. There it was, the tool that he had described. I yanked it out of the crate and sprinted for the basement door, skidded outside, and flew to the front door. I jogged into the room and handed him the tool, beaming with pride. He took one look at me and said, “No son, this is a regular file.” I was lost.

He then said, “I will show you where it is.” Feeling defeated, I followed him outside, down the stairs, and into the basement. When we walked inside, he turned around and grabbed me. I could see the rage in his eyes and his teeth were clenched together. He ground them together as he spoke to me, little bits of chewing tobacco shot from his stained lips, “I’m going to show you what a fucking wood rasp is boy.” In the faint yellow light, he dragged me across the floor by my right ear, slamming me into the ground next to a different milk crate. He thrust his weathered hand into a dark box and pulled out the meanest looking thing I had ever seen. It was a flat bar with gnarly metal teeth that had hundreds of sharp points, and it was all rusty. He threw it down at me, hitting me in the chest and causing me to bleed under my shirt. He lifted me by my ear and held the brown instrument up to my face, “This is a wood rasp. I ought to use it on you right here.” His face was contorted with anger and psychotic rage; his pupils were black and almost the size of a quarter. He pulled me out of the basement, slamming the door. He used my ear to persuade me up the stairs and then tossed me into the gravel yard. He told me to stay outside until he came to get me.

I sat next to a tree, ears ringing, chest bleeding, and head hurting. I had no idea or recollection that he had slapped me. I just felt the warmth of blood on my face. After some time, he came out with a wet washcloth and told me to wipe my face. As I started to wipe my face off, he leaned forward and yanked the washcloth from me. He then scrubbed my face hard, making me wince in pain, but I was too scared to move. He pulled me up by my arm, squeezing tightly as he gritted his teeth and growled for me to go inside. When I staggered inside, I could see a look of worry on my mother’s face, but I did not say a word about what happened. I knew she liked this man a lot, and I did not want to ruin it. If I had been able to see the future, I would have said something, but this was just the beginning of our journey.

AHLAYA CHAVERS

I thank the LORD 4 all I got

I thank the LORD 4 all I got
Eyes in the mirror,
I sit back and watch
Slowly watching
Impatiently waiting
Searching 4 answers
My truth is fading

I love so hard
They know my life I'll lay it

I try so hard
They say that I be playing

And why I cry so hard?
They say my tears alligator

So
See u in a while crocodile
I'm submerging underwater
Baptize me with the Spirit
Cuz with it, no doubt I'll go farther

Father
Please take my hand
You the witness to my trials
Can you please take the stand

Why they tryna judge me
Why won't they just love me
Outside I say that's it's ok
Inside I'm feeling ugly
I hate the mirror I mug me

Looking at my worst enemy
With hatred like flames
Like it's your fault you in the path
You the one chose this lane

And when I think about my past
It's like a bomb to the brain
Can't let it out or I'll explode
Because it hurt to contain

I wake up hurting everyday
All my problems remain
And I'll tell it how it is
I ain't never afraid

Don't even get my gist
Cause they so stuck in the same
Got a knife behind they back
But a smile on they face

It's all hate

Don't think just cause I'm smart
That mean I'll succeed
Tried to get over time after time
But God dropped me down on my knees

It's not even smarts—it's really experiences
Humbled me off these streets
Set up 4 failure
Taught me chase after sex, money, and weed

Was independent, now I depend on it
But Lord you all I need
Just nurse my wounds
Yeah they hurt
But everyone gotta bleed

ADRI BUHSE

PEAR STREET

Thirty minutes to midnight
All is pitch black
I open the window blinds
Always closed
The moon shines in
White and speckled with craters
Full and bright
Like a shiny, new dime
Against the navy blue sky
And black trees and houses
Two hundred thirty-eight thousand
Nine hundred miles away
I'd like to see the moon up close
Like Buzz and Neil
Fifty-one years before
No one can see me from up here—
Why should I keep my blinds closed?
Leave them open I say!
Let me see the moon each night
Shining into my darkened room
As I fall asleep.

ANNA CONNOLEY

PARLER FRANÇAIS

Je veux parler philosophie
Je veux parler (dreams) et vie
(Inspiration) et (Morality)
Mais je ne peux pas (you see)
Je parle un peu français

I want to talk philosophy
I want to talk (des rêves) and life
(De l'Inspiration) and (de la Moralité)
But I cannot (vous voyez)
I speak a little French



acrylic on canvas

“WRITING, SMOKING, THINKING”

TINA PAUL 

VINCENT CORTESE



“CHARIOT”

ink on paper

LILIA VOSS

TANGIE

My tangerine rolled like a meatball
when it fell off of Vivian's bed.
It rolled like a basketball, smoothly,
with its citrus perfume-y and wet.
It rolled like a beer can, coldly,
thin sealed around—a palette.
It rolled like my heart—like a wheel—
and into the palm of my hand.
I hold the fruit gently. In the future I see
a tangerine fist in a tangerine squeeze.

JOHN-MATT TALLYN

WATCHING MY LANGUAGE

I almost cursed, yes I did,
This daaa...rn mouth of mine
I've got to keep my language hid.

While on the highway I started to skid,
Oh shhh...oot that was close
I almost cursed, yes I did.

While walking, I got kicked in the shin by a kid
Son of a biii...eautiful woman
I've got to keep my language hid.

A lady sent her soup back because it was "too tepid"
What a cuuu...areful lady
I almost cursed, yes I did.

I could not wrest the pickle jar from its lid
Why the fuuu...dge can't I open this
I've got to keep my language hid.

I got rid of toxic words that dripped like acid
Damn, it feels good...Wait
I ended up cursing, yes I did,
I've got to keep my language hid.

ABIGAIL WADLINGTON

STUDIES IN ELAFIPHOBIA

Perhaps the most underestimated member of the animal kingdom is the common deer. They're seen so often grazing in overgrown yards or laying dismembered on the side of the street that they're rarely thought of. They're dim-witted and pesky and fearful. Looking into those beady, unintelligent eyes of theirs, few would ever consider them a threat—except for me.

It was a stifling June day, the start of summer break. The sun beamed brightly overhead, its rays bouncing off the morning dewdrops speckling the grass. From the wooden porch, I stood with my arms crossed over the railing and my eyes scanning warily through the bushes hugging the edge of our yard.

It was a necessary ritual to search for animals in the backyard, specifically deer, before letting out our three Chihuahuas. Our dogs were small but feisty, prone to chasing after anything that moved. Deer were more threatening to our plants than us, but it was more for our dogs' sakes that we scoured the yard. A story had been rippling around of a small dog that was killed after being kicked by a deer's back legs as the slender creature was running from the yipping predator. My mother would take no risks with our pets.

I was leaning over the railing when I saw them—two bundles of speckled tan pelts curled just below me in the grass. My heart raced wildly. Disney movies had clogged my mind with dreams of befriending wild animals. The sudden urge to pet one of the fawns sent my pulse galloping.

My mother joined me on the porch and discovered my findings. She frowned at the nearest fawn. "That one looks injured, doesn't it?" she

said, her voice pitched with motherly concern. “Maybe we should check on it.”

Without thinking, I scooped the fawn into my arms. Holding it was so unlike anything I could have ever expected. The realization that wild animals didn’t take baths as humans did hadn’t struck me until that moment. Its fur was matted and dirty, a disgusting, smelly pelt that made my skin crawl. The fawn weighed far more than I had anticipated, like all three of my Chihuahuas cradled in my hold at once. My arms stung immediately with the effort.

I gave the fawn a cursory glance as it squirmed in my grip. “I don’t see anything,” I reported to my mother, who continued to fix the baby deer with a worried stare.

“Where’s the mother? Maybe they’ve been abandoned,” said my mom.

A sudden, inhuman noise emitted from the fawn in my arms. It was like the shriek of a firetruck, with the same shrillness and ear-splitting alert as an alarm. I had done nothing to provoke the noise, as far as I could tell, but I quickly set down the fawn anyway. It staggered on stick-thin legs and gazed out at our chain link fence.

Whether it was the sound of my mother’s gasp or the realization of the fawn’s sudden silence, I tracked the creature’s stare past our fence and into the neighbor’s yard. Mere breaths away stood a full-grown doe, her form rigid, her attention fixated on me. In those beady black eyes, I saw none of the glazed unintelligence I had come to associate with deer. Instead, I saw my pale reflection simmering with the accusation in the doe’s gaze.

Deer turn tail and flee at the slightest noise in most instances. When a fawn is faced with danger, however, mother deer find the courage to become warriors, their meekness replaced with fierce aggression. The creature pinning me with its glare across the fence displayed no signs of fright, only hostility. My blood ran cold. I was the deer in headlights.

The fight-or-flight instinct hadn’t been something I had much considered until that moment. That day, I discovered that neither option applied to me, but rather a third possibility. Under the mother doe’s scrutiny, I froze in place, my panicked thoughts racing a million miles per hour as my feet remained glued to the ground.

The slam of a door startled me to my senses. Glancing over, I realized my mother had abandoned me, escaping through the back door and disappearing within the garage. While the maternal instincts of the doe had remained unwavering, my mother's instincts faltered at that moment.

The spell of shock that had rooted me in place loosened its grip. My escape attempt was a blur. Adrenaline was on my side, pumping through my veins.

Like an Olympic vaulter, I hurled myself over our four-foot chain-link fence. I rounded the house and sprinted toward the front door, aware of the beat of hooves behind me. The natural order of things had flipped—the predator was being chased by the prey.

In the end, my mother's initial cowardice became my saving grace. As the cherry red door raced up to me, the realization that it would be locked struck like lightning. Seemingly summoned by my thoughts, the door swung open from the inside to reveal my mother's pale face. She screamed something and gestured wildly for me to retreat inside. I was all too eager to obey.

In the weeks that followed, the outside world became a place of danger and disaster. The doe and her fawns lingered in our yard throughout the summer and late into the fall. Sometimes, I would look through the window into the backyard and swear the doe was glaring back at me, as though she was daring me to come outside and test her patience again.

I never tested her. When I was forced to go outside, I ran to my destination and its safety in fear that I would be ambushed by hooved devils on the journey. A creature that was supposed to be frightened of me instead became frightening to me.

Elafiphobia is a silly term for a silly fear—the fear of deer. I may be arachnophobic and trypanophobic and coulrophobic, but above all, I am elafiphobic. I am a collection of phobias pinned upon me like badges, awarded fears with each new experience in my life. Elafiphobia is simply my newest trophy on a crowded and ever-growing shelf of hard-won phobias.

REBECCA OGIER

STORY NOIR

I've been in this business a long time—seems like I was born into it. Maybe I was. Things don't often phase me, but this morning was different. Most days I get up, do some stretching, and wander downstairs to scare up some grub. Then I head out on my rounds. It's always pretty much the same. Not today.

The chatter started early—there was no light in the sky, and it didn't make sense that the critters would have woken up without a reason. I couldn't make out what was going on by listening, but something was definitely off. I usually wake up with the birds. Something about their morning song makes me hungry. I don't get it. But the fact that the animals outside were up before me was enough to set my senses on edge. Not a good way to start. It was gonna be a long day.

In my line of work, I'm pretty free to set my own schedule. My busy hours are usually first thing after breakfast and right before bed. I suppose I could work anytime, but you get a feel for these things and fall into patterns without realizing it.

Anyway, back to my story. I was caught off guard by the early ruckus. I turned my head to the window, listening to see if there was any chance the commotion would die down and I'd get a few more minutes of shut-eye. But the birds were in a tizzy, and they weren't letting up. I jumped out of bed and padded over to look out. The old boards moved slightly under my feet but didn't make a sound. Years of experience allowed me to move stealthily through the room.

I had no trouble seeing the activity outside despite the darkness of the early hour. Sure enough, something was sneaking around down there. It was close to the gate, near the rose bushes. That was odd. Most people tried to steer clear of those roses—they were the Boss's pride and joy, and they were huge and lethal. They had thorns like daggers.

The Boss had inherited this house with the job and had planted the roses to keep intruders out. She was an odd one—reclusive and possessive. She spent a lot of time away from town in a cottage she had down in the glen. She said it calmed her, and I guess that's true. When she spent too much time in town, I swear she grew horns and breathed fire. She hated most people. Called them thieves and beggars. Funny to be in the protection business and not like humans. I understood, though. I was kind of a loner myself.

The shape of the intruder was hard to determine. Whatever it was didn't look exactly friendly. A large hunched back and thick coat covered much of it from view. I could see something metal glinting now and then as it worked—digging or attempting to cut its way around the bushes. I sighed a bit, still sluggish from being awakened unexpectedly. Looked like I'd have to go scare this bozo off.

A wind had picked up—more than your usual blustery morning. This was forceful. The window was cracked just a bit, and a gust hit me in the gut, almost like a hand pushing me away from the sill. I stumbled but regained my balance.

Now, slightly shaken but fully awake, I braced myself and looked out again. Another gust ruffled the old whiskers on my chin and a few drops of rain hit my face. I winced and shook the water off. Whatever had caused the commotion had taken advantage of the distraction of the wind to scurry off. I cast my eyes as far up and down the street as I could. I had a decent view from this third-floor window and didn't have to worry too much about being noticed from below. I'd always been good at not being seen or heard. I was a master of keeping to the shadows and staying just out of view, but I hunched down anyway.

I could hear more shuffling and scratching coming from the other side of the street. It seemed the perpetrator was also quick and quiet ... Or there was an accomplice.

I decided I should take a closer look. If it was something working alone, I wanted to make sure to encourage it to keep moving. If it was a team effort, I'd need more time to figure out what they were up to. It wouldn't do to let this scene play out too long. There was a storm brewing, and I needed to take stock before any evidence was destroyed. I've been guarding this place for what feels like nine lifetimes, and so far, nothing has gotten past me. I wasn't about to let my guard down now. Not when I was so close to retirement.

I checked behind me to make sure my charge was still asleep. She'd been knocked out for a long time, and it was my job to make sure she wasn't disturbed. I try not to get too involved with my work, but I got suckered with this one. I'm a lot like the Boss. People often rub me the wrong way, but one look at that sweet face and I knew I was done. Not only was she a doll, but she was also too young to be left on her own.

Originally the job was just to patrol the grounds outside, but a while back, we had some lunatic try to bust in and the job got more serious. I couldn't let this kid come to harm. I told the Boss we needed reinforcements. It took a lot of caterwauling, but eventually she gave in. Now I got a team that works from above—up in the crow's nest, in the attic—Those guys are pretty loud in the morning, but they come in handy protecting the kid.

Somehow, this little babe the Boss had me guarding had gotten tangled up in some raw deal with a scheming local. It all had something to do with her parents. Apparently, they hadn't been very street smart. Some two-bit swindler promised to do them a favor and then tried to steal the family fortune. The kid saw what was happening and got caught up in the deal. Her parents disappeared. They either skipped town or something happened to them. The details are fuzzy and the kid doesn't talk much. Either way, they were gone and she was here. The Boss said her parents were crooks too, but I was sure the kid was innocent in all of it, and I planned to make sure she stayed that way. I knew I shouldn't care so much, but I couldn't help myself.

Another blast of wind and more raindrops blew in, bringing me back to my senses. I squared my shoulders and crept silently down the spiral staircase. Before I moved into the hall, I paused to listen—an old trick my grandpa taught me. He said, "Keep your ears up and your tail low. Stay light on your feet and take a beat." Yeah, I know, it didn't make a lotta sense unless you knew him. He was a kooky cat.

Looking around the dark hallways, I was able to confirm that nothing inside had been disturbed. After a quick turn through the dark, mostly empty rooms, I headed into the kitchen and out through the side cellar door. I slunk carefully away from the old stone place, through the bushes to the gate, where I'd last seen the hunched figure.

The rose bush showed signs of distress. A few broken branches gave evidence that someone had tried to cut or crawl their way through. The Boss wasn't gonna like that. She tended those things herself. She was very particular about them—treated 'em like babies. She noticed when anything was even slightly amiss, and there was hell to pay if they were damaged.

I poked around a bit—there was a strange scent in the air. Something besides the smell of oncoming rain. This reeked, like a large animal after a long journey. I couldn't place it, but I didn't have time to stand around.

Thunder sounded in the distance. The wind continued to whip through the branches, ruffling my uniform. I was usually pretty proud of my appearance—I didn't like to look sloppy—but with time ticking away on this case, I decided a rumpled look was better than losing the perp.

I continued my way around the garden, following the sound of terrified tweeting. Something had been around the side yard, by the sounds of the birds. I hurried around the back. The rest of the roses looked undisturbed. They were an heirloom variety that was nearly as old as the building itself. And that was saying something. The place was older than the rest of the town. The city had grown up around it over the years, and for the most part, the neighbors kept their distance, which was fine by me.

The Boss had inherited the place years ago from another partner in crime. He didn't need it anymore, and the Boss wanted something for long-term assignments like this one. There weren't many jobs like that those days. Nice work if you could get it. I was happy I hadn't had to try. This job was handed to me like fish on a platter. It was nice to have a necessary skill set.

As I came around the back, I saw something like a mouse skitter away from the building. I perked up and saw it flee through the back gate. Little vermin. I'd deal with that later. Right now I wanted to know what it was running from.

There's no way the intruder could have seen me, but I stayed low anyway, searching silently. Then I spotted it. A lone figure near the side door. How the—? I had come out those same doors and walked in the other direction. How had I not sensed it? Maybe I was getting

too old for this. Maybe I was losing my touch. Or maybe this jerk was better than the average goon. I've been on this beat for years. No one's ever gotten past me or those roses.

After that, a lot of things happened at once. There was a huge lightning flash, an awful bellow from the side yard, and in the next flash, I could see a worried horse tied to the tree just outside the gate. He was strong, but tired and terrified. That explained the weird smell.

His eyes rolled in fright as he reared up, pulling on the reins to escape. His frantic neighing startled the dark figure by the house. I watched it stiffen and stumble back at the doorway. Dread recognition raised the hackles down my spine. It was a man! A man got through the bush on my watch. I was done for if the Boss found out.

The man looked at the horse, then up. Straight up into the sky. Clouds were churning overhead as the wind whirled around us and thunder began to crash and rumble. More lightning crashed around the house, and something flew from the edge of town, straight into the third floor window.

The kid! I had to get up there, but I was stuck on the ground, gawking at some goon with a scared horse. I had to think fast. I snarled and threw myself out of the shadows and onto the guy's back. He yelped and threw me off. My old reflexes kicked in; I bounded off the wall and flew back at him, but he was fast. He headed back through the bush—I couldn't guess how. Those bushes probably hadn't parted in a century, but he went right through them. The guy pulled a sword from his cape, slashed the reins of his horse, rode back into the yard, and crashed through the back door.

I was stunned. Nobody had gotten in here for ages, and now I'm chasing this punk and his horse up the old stairs. If I couldn't contain this fast, the Boss was going to kill me! Not literally, I hoped. I chased after the horse and rider, all the while praying the kid would just sleep through the whole thing ... but then I heard The Boss.

I don't know where she came from or how she appeared so suddenly, but I stood at the bottom of the last flight of stairs and watched her run into the room. She was mad—shrieking like some unnatural monster. There were flashes of light and blasts of thunder and the Boss howled at the guy like a banshee. All followed by silence.

I crept slowly up the final flight of stairs. I smelled fear and death and wanted to run away, but couldn't. I had to check on the kid. I tiptoed carefully around the door frame and cringed, expecting the worst. But an unbelievable sight met my eyes. The sleeping beauty was awake and smiling. The intruder was on his knee beside her. The Boss was nowhere to be found, but there was a pile of dark robes and a sword in the corner. My head was spinning with questions. I had to get out, but I needed to stay with the kid. I wanted to run, but I was rooted to the spot.

The sweet thing looked up from the bed and saw me hunkering by the edge of the room. Well, that was it. I'd been spotted. No running away now. "Oh, sweet kitty! What a handsome thing you are!" The kid got up and practically floated over to me—scooped me up. The sweet thing was so warm from sleep I forgot all my worries and sank into her arms.

"Lovely puss, have you been with me all this time?" I was so worn out and baffled by all the events, I just stared at her, tongue-tied. I guess she had some sense of all we'd been through together. She didn't ask any more questions, just carried me out of the room, down the stairs, and out into the garden.

The day was finally dawning. The winds were calm, and the dark clouds had vanished. The garden looked a little worse for the wear, but not bad. The prize roses had thinned and opened up at the gates, so we could pass easily through. The young punk—uh, the young man—came down with his horse and helped the kid up onto it. I prowled close by. He wasn't getting outta my sight until I could trust him. What kinda guy rides a horse into a building? Something told me my contract was about to change, but I could negotiate that later. Once I found the Boss I planned to tell her that whatever happened, I'd stay with the kid.

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ALEXIS BRITTON

OREO

I do not
 recall when
 you first came into
 my life all those years ago, just that you
 changed my attitude for the better. It feels like
 only fifteen—maybe ten—but eighteen? I watched you
 grow plump, while you watched me grow ripe. Now, suddenly
 you watch as I grow mature, while I watch you grow frail. And I
 think of you at all hours of the day that I no longer spend at home.
 I am at another home, with another cat, thinking of you. Ironically, she is
 similar to you, and her name identical to yours. But she is not you. Every
 moment I see her, I think of you - my grumpy old man. Guiltily. Do you
 miss me, now that I am not there at all hours? Every time I come home,
 you stumble to my feet, bones aching of arthritis. My heart then
 shutters, how could I ever stay away from you for so long?
 I am all you know, and truly, you are all I know,
 too. But for how much longer?

ARYAM ELIZABETH LADERA RAMOS 

THE CHARACTER

You, my dear friend, have been my companion in the path where willows' branches sway. I have seen you in your simplicity, in the grace of the most affable conversations; splendid in the gold of a brief sunset.

You've given me powerful lessons about character, a lot you have taught me.

Only the most noble minds understand and organize the mysterious transits that the sky with its stars imposes on us.

I have met a man that surmounts the torrents.

EL CARÁCTER

Tú, mi buen amigo, me has acompañado en el camino por donde se mecen las ramas de los sauces. He podido verte en tu simpleza, en la gracia de las conversaciones más afables; refulgente en el oro de un ocaso fugaz.

Me has brindado poderosas lecciones sobre carácter, mucho me has enseñado.

Sólo las mentes más elevadas comprenden y organizan los misteriosos tránsitos que el cielo con sus astros nos impone.

He conocido a un hombre que remonta los torrentes.



acrylic and oil on canvas

UMSL

JEN WILSON



"RISING SUN"

acrylic and pyrography on wood slab



"SHAPES IN MOTION"

BADRIAH AHMAD

acrylic on canvas

UMSL

BRANDON YN

“DAYDREAM AT SUNSET”

edited photograph

MEGAN ROEGNER

CHRYsalis

Reading about butterflies and longing for transformation,
 an image flitted from the margins of memory—
 battered wings inside a clear plastic cup, smeared with streaks of red.
 Once upon a time, I brought home a chrysalis from school to watch unfurl.
 I neglected it for days. When I finally remembered,
 it was dead and bloody—I thought—from its struggle to escape.
 I threw it all away in horror and shame. What kind of monster kills a butterfly?
 But I learned today, twenty-five or so years later, that all butterflies shed fluid
 the color of blood when they first emerge triumphant and trembling with labor-damp wings.
 I only turned criminal when I concealed the proof of my guilt instead of
 opening the cage and letting it fly. I think there's a metaphor there.
 And, strangely enough, grace.

ZAK MILLER 

BIRTHDAY CAKE

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. The recipe recommends 375, but dad prefers nice, even numbers.
2. Soften 1 ½ cups of butter. To soften cold butter, microwave on high for 4 seconds. If the butter melts too much, chill for 4 minutes. Repeat as needed until the consistency is just right or until dad says it's ready.
3. Gather equipment and measuring apparatus. Arrange on countertop by size. Be sure to return each tool to its position after use so dad can find them again.
4. Collect remaining ingredients. Take care when handling those prone to spilling; messes must be taken care of before proceeding, and particulates can be difficult to remove entirely.

A: Measure 1 cup of granulated sugar and 1 ½ cups of flour. For best results, add each incrementally using a quarter-cup measure. It's her birthday, best results are in fact what you're going for.

B: Crack 4 large eggs into separate bowls. Empty the 2 with the fullest, most intact yolks into a large mixing bowl. In a smaller bowl, mix flour and baking soda. She says it's cute the way you measure everything in these little increments.

C: Beat eggs together with sugar, vanilla, and butter (softened) for 4 minutes. Don't get too distracted by her flirting. She's just trying to tease you into messing up. Combine both mixtures in a larger bowl, carefully adding 2 quarter-cups of milk.

- D: Pour cake batter into a greased pan. Use a level to make sure the cake will rise evenly. Bake for 30 minutes, checking progress at every 4. She could do without you wasting so many eggs, though.
5. Go to dad's funeral. Arrive 4 minutes late after taking a wrong turn down a street she didn't know had closed. He wouldn't have wanted you to be late.
- D-I: Remove cake from oven and let cool for 4 minutes. Insert a toothpick 4 inches from the edge of the pan. If it comes out clean, the cake is ready to decorate. If it's not just right, the icing won't set properly.
- D-II: Using a spatula, evenly coat the surface of the cake with white frosting. It's important to do this part yourself; the edges need to be as smooth as possible to serve as a backdrop for the lettering. Her corners are always a little too sloppy.
- D-III: Write "Happy Birthday" on the top of the cake in neat cursive. It's important to do this part yourself; the words need to be just the right shape to allow space for the candles and other decorations. Her letters are always a little too big.
- D-IV: Light 4 candles, one on each corner. She wants more, but it's important to economize on space. You can let her decorate the peripherals so long as they stay within the outlines you drew earlier. You might decide to redo her decorations later anyway.
- i: Cut cake into even slices to pack away. There are often a lot of leftovers now.
- ii: Pack each container with 4 slices. Once that meant two for each of you, but now it's just yours.
- iii: Wash equipment and measuring apparatus, smallest to largest. Best not to overload the dishwasher, even though it's not as full as it used to be.
- iv: Clean the countertop. You spilled some flour.

MEGAN ROEGNER

BELIEF

Sometimes all I really believe
is believing, or rather hoping,
that wanting to believe is enough.

Think about the word too much
and the meaning slips away.

Believe,

be live,

be changing,

be fluid,

a river coursing urgently downstream,
not knowing it was created to yield,
again, to the unremembered ocean.

Belief,

be leaf,

be green,

be growing,

a fragile shoot recklessly unfurling,
still a stranger to the sun and spring rain.

I cannot always believe.

But I always desire you,
a boundless presence encompassing
my ignorance and,
yes,
even my doubt.

MICHAEL LUDWIG

THE RULES OF POKER

The sound of riffing cards permeates the smokey air.

It had been a decent day; up a few hundred chips, but I haven't bothered to check how much really. The dealer smiles, and my glass is full of ice. It always is at these bigger casinos. At 4:35 on the dot, the barn doors will open, and for the next two hours the herd of donkeys will line up at the table, dying to hand me their money.

Rule 1 for winning at poker: Choose the right venue

Every table is full now. Patrons slither through the isles to get their all-important booze and cash before they lose it all for the privilege of getting up from their seats again. Three new victims sit down around the table. Some of them are intimidated by my chips, some see it as a challenge, but if I keep paying my blinds and throwing away my hands, then they are usually happy enough.

Rule 2 for winning at poker: People play worse when they're happy

Raise.

That's my queue to look at my challenger. Cheap suit—the creases tell me he bought it this week—and cheaper sunglasses. Up until now he hasn't taken his hands off his face and his eyes off the dealer, but with this hand he has his full attention on the river. To make matters even worse, he starts biting his cheeks. There couldn't be a more obvious bluff. He boldly displayed his cards to the table after the hand.

HAHA! I didn't have shit.

Nobody is impressed. The next few hands go as expected. Win a little, lose a little, fold a lot. Mr. Bigshot stays silent until he practically goes all in. As the dealer turned his final river card, Bigshot's smug opti-

mism melted into flat indignance. I can't help but wonder if he finally learned his lesson.

Rule 3 for winning at poker: Don't feel bad about taking money from donkeys

As Mr. Bigshot left, his chair immediately filled itself. Conjured in his place is an all too familiar "friend" of mine, David Yamanker. I know it's his turn to work this table. So does he. When I don't get up, he buys in big.

Hey David, did you see the game last night?

The dealer hands me the ten of diamonds and the two of spades.

Rule 4 for winning at poker: You decide what cards you have

It was awful.

The blind works its way around the table.

Aren't you from Wisconsin? I thought you loved the Packers?

Out comes the flop. The cards on the table are useless to me right now. My eyes rest squarely on David's expression

Not this year. Their defense cost me two thousand dollars in fantasy last night.

David's lips are chapped, his skin greasy. I am clearly not the first person to ask him about the game that night, so I am not buying for a second that his sour expression came from losing a measly two thousand dollars. Something is wrong with his cards

That's your problem, you value making money more than the love of the sport.

Rule 5 for winning at poker: If you examine someone long enough, you can see right through their cards

The river flows from the dealer's hand. David makes sure to raise me at every bank and turn. Nobody else at the table is foolish enough to stay in the race to put as many chips in the pot as possible. The backs of our cards are functionally transparent. David has two aces or maybe an ace-king off suit. I have trash. Trash looks like a pair of tens. The only way I escape is if this next card is also a ten. A computer could tell me the exact odds of winning this hand.

Rule 6 for winning at poker: The odds only exist if you acknowledge them

Upon seeing the next card, David shakes his head. Everyone in this business knows the head nod. A single expression can be more insulting than any contrived string of insults and curses. He takes his leave in silence.

Rule 7 for winning at poker: Know when to fold

The night was winding down. Patrons stagger out of the casino, but I am on the hot streak to end all hot streaks. A new victim limps to the table. I smell the alcohol on him before I see him. His shirt is unbuttoned. It looks like he hasn't seen the sun in days. He sits down and buys in. I play conservatively and butter him up. Every time he wins a pot, the muscles in his face yank at his shaggy skin to approximate an expression of pure joy. More easy pickings. I wait for the right hand and bet a little. He takes the bait, so I set the hook. He's all in before he can process what has happened. As he realizes what's happening to him, the sweat starts pooling on his face, the rare but sadly familiar sweat of a man who just bet money he didn't have. It drips off his stubble and slides down his chest. It must be irritating because he empties his pants pocket to pull out an old napkin. In the mess of receipts and lint is a bifold securely holding a photo of a young woman with a child in her arms.

Rule 0 for winning at poker: Sometimes losing is the right thing to do

breathe.



photograph

DREW RYHERD

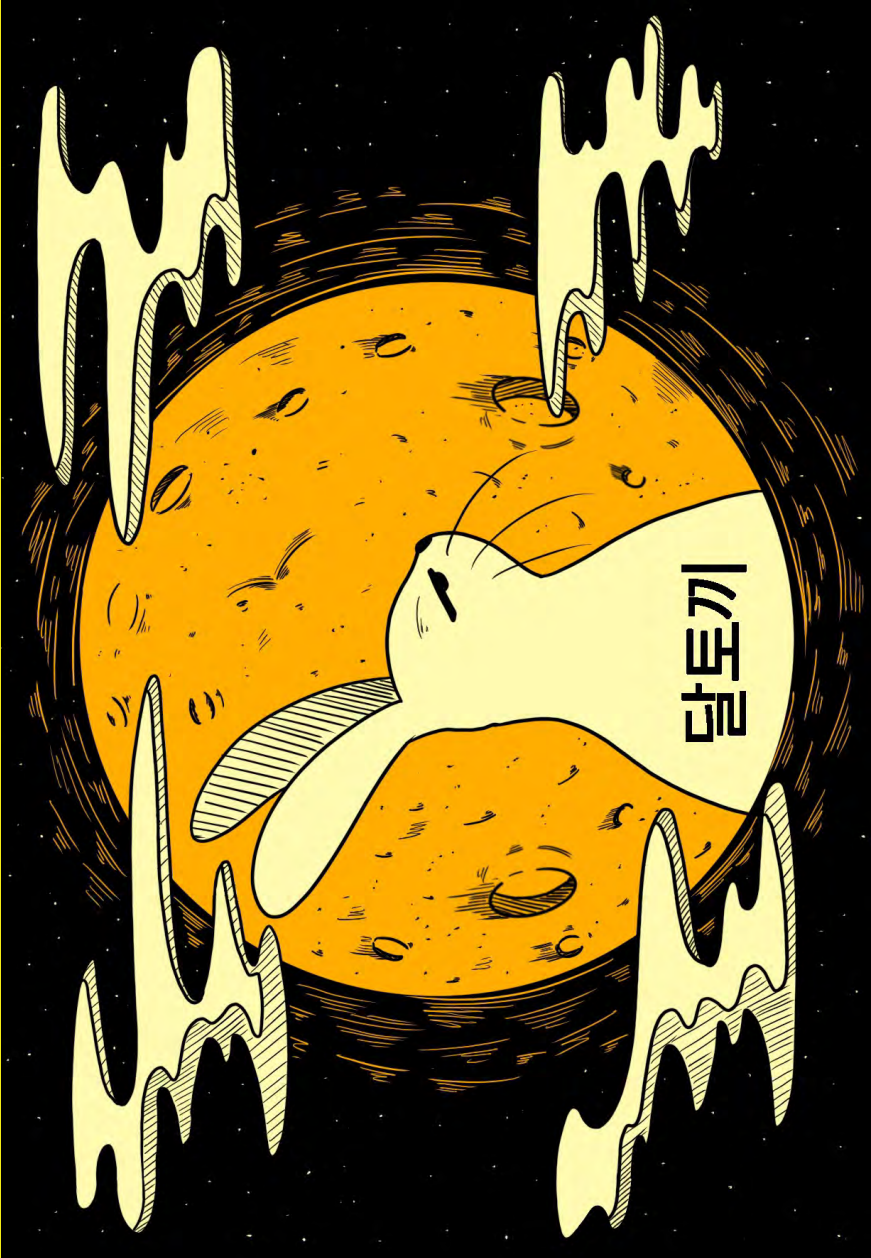
“LUNG FULL OF HOLES”

BADRIAH AHMAD



"SUNFLOWERS IN CIRCLES"

acrylic on canvas



UMSL

BRANDON YN

photograph

“UNDERWATER LUNCH”



BENJAMIN ALLEN EBERT

MISSOURI HILLS

A short time after I retired from the Navy in the Summer of 2017, I decided to take a drive to some rural back two-lane highways I used to drive as a teenager. I lived in the dry climate of Southern California for years. I had longed for the lush green forests of my home. I wanted to get reacquainted with my old natural surroundings. I longed to park on the side of these roads that wind around the hillsides, through the cornfields, under the forest canopy, and over the rivers and streams. I would hike up an old trail to see what plants and animals were still here or if any new ones had moved in. What a great day this would be.

I see a hill that I knew as a child, all covered with the various rainbowed hues of greens, yellows, oranges, and reds, or as Bob Ross would say, “a happy little tree” that had magically appeared from the stroke of his brush. As a child, I would ride my bike behind it even though my mother would have protested. There was a quarry there. My friends and I would sneak in and go swimming in its pools during our long summer breaks from school.

Across the next hill is a cornfield; the train tracks lay on the edge of it, just where the forest starts. I roll my windows down to feel the wind and smell the countryside. As I cross the bridge over the creek at the other end of the cornfields, I remember the train trestle that is just out of sight and downstream from here. It was another summer hideout for swimming as a child and, in my teenage years, a good place to steal a kiss from a pretty girl or smoke the occasional joint.

I continue winding around these forested mountains and hillsides of my Midwest sanctuary. As I round another corner and head up a little hill, I get a thrill as my stomach does a little turn

like when you ride a roller coaster. I hit the top of another hill smiling from ear to ear, wind gently jostling my hair.

Then I see it; or in this case, I do not. There is supposed to be another hill here, covered in trees, hiding the deer, coyotes, raccoons, squirrels, cardinals, woodpeckers, turkeys, and various other wildlife. I have to pull over at the site of this gravel pit where our hill and forest used to be. It burdens my heart to the point that my vision blurs from the tears building up in my eyes. I exit my Jeep where I was supposed to take a trail through a tranquil forest but now it feels more like the turn off through the black cast iron gates of a cemetery. It is a solemn moment I have here with our countryside, mourning the loss, the death of this once beautiful hill. I hear the memory of it calling to me. "Remember me and sing my song."

BELLA CORTESE

A KING'S BURIAL

Seven-year-old Beppo had a love for nature so big that the weight of it could be suffocating.

“Be careful with the poor thing, baby,” Momma called from her seat on the white stone bench next to a statue of the Virgin Mary. She watched as Beppo made his way across the field. The June sun made his blond hair appear white, which made him look like a miniature old man with a plethora of energy. Running made his face look red and angry, but the high pitch of his voice displayed his excitement about his discovery. Something about some frog he had found in the ditch behind the gazebo. His white-knuckle grip kept the frog from escaping.

“A FROG! A FROG!” he yelled, standing in front of Momma. She chuckled. “I caught a frog!” He plopped himself onto his knees, and Momma worried about how she would erase those grass stains. “He was behind the white house, Momma. There’s a hole and there’s water there. And I caught him!”

“Yes, sweetie, behind the gazebo. I saw. Now, you have to be careful with him,” Momma said, peering down at his clenched fist. She took hold of his other hand and brought it up close to her eyes. His nails were black underneath, and his palms had mud swimming through every crease. Dead grass and slithers of leaves were glued to the mud—a mini wood all to himself. Momma laughed and grabbed some wet wipes from her purse. “It’s a living thing, remember,” she told him, scrubbing his hand clean. “Respect it.”

“I knooow, Momma,” the little one pouted, dodging a wipe to the face. “Look!” He looked down excitedly and opened his dirty fist, revealing his newly found pet. A dark green, almost black frog with its eyes closed shut. A tiny one, just the right size for Beppo’s small palm. “His name is Kermit.” He took his gaze off his prized possession to look at his mother. “Can I keep it?”

"Oh, hon. Look what you did." Momma ran her finger down the amphibian's back. The creature failed to open its eyes or move a muscle.

"It's sleeping."

"No, honey. It's dead." Momma moved the boy's hair behind his ears. "It died in your hand. This is why I try to teach you to be careful, sweetheart."

"Oh, Momma," the boy sobbed. He cupped the dead frog with both hands, brought it up to his chest, and let his head fall into his mother's lap. "I didn't want to kill Kermit. I-I-I just wanted t-to show you," Beppo stuttered. "Because I love him." Momma rubbed her son's back a few moments then bent forward to plant a kiss on his head. She rose and pulled the child to his feet. Her skirt was stained with mud and grass and a small handprint superimposed across the floral print.

"Well, honey, we'll talk about that later. What we need to do now is give him a proper sendoff to the animal afterlife. Come with me." Momma grabbed the boy's hand as he tried to wipe away lingering tears. She hiked her skirt above her knees, and they began their short journey to the proper burial site. Past the gazebo and past the ditch that once housed poor Kermit. Momma took a left turn as they approached the street and walked directly towards the thick forest.

"Here?" the boy asked, pointing towards the bottom of the first tree he encountered.

"No. Follow me." Momma crouched low to the ground and gestured for Beppo to do the same. Momma and son made their way through a certain path of trees that she knew well: turning left at the tree with a curvaceous trunk, crouching underneath the low branch with three arms, and hopping over the bulging root of the tree with a hole directly in its center. Momma and Beppo were near their destination when she once again crouched to eye level with her son. She used her thumb to wipe a tear from his cheek and left behind a smudge of dirt.

"Honey, I know you're sad, but I have something exciting to tell you."

The boy's eyes opened wide, and he forgot his tribulations for a moment. "A secret?" he asked.

“Yes, sweetie. This is a secret that mommy has had since she was as little as you are. Nobody knows about this place, and now you have to keep this secret, too.”

Beppo nodded his head slowly. His mother had always told him not to keep secrets, so the little boy knew this sudden change must mean something important.

Momma turned back towards the large bush standing in front of her. She moved the branches out of the way with a swoop of her arm and guided her child through.

The grass was green beneath their sandals, but the wildflowers spread so abundantly that not much of the ground could be seen. A stream tumbled over moss-covered stones at the edge of the flat beach of flowers, and small gray fish wiggled in the water. Tall, green trees towered over the mother and son on both sides, keeping this Eden safe from the outside world. Sunrays fought their way through the branches and leaves, projecting themselves around nature’s guests. An old, simple bridge made its way across the water, inviting Momma and Beppo to go deeper.

Momma’s hand grasped Beppo’s tightly. She led him through the small field of flowers and crossed the shaky bridge with caution.

“Did you make this bridge, Momma?”

“No, honey.”

“Then the fairies must have.”

Momma led her son underneath a medium-sized tree that spent its time dumping white petals onto the ground. She got down on her knees and opened her son’s hand. The frog was deformed now, with a yellow ooze seeping from its left eye. One of the feet was missing a toe.

Momma took the poor thing from her son’s palm. “A burial fit for a king,” she declared, placing the creature onto the ground. She handed her son a handful of petals, which he ceremoniously dumped over the lifeless animal.

“King Kermit.” The boy bowed low.

ARYAM ELIZABETH LADERA RAMOS

INNER TRUTH

Our page isn't one that lightly possesses the gift of serenity. No matter how calm our bodies stand in front of the juries, the great exercise in our minds becomes whole. A day isn't enough to realize how tough the skin of our heart is; wide drum roll expands around. Whole pretends to be this sheltering task.

I seek the preservation of your innocence

I rescue terms that have been lost
in your lips as the years pass.

The season is kind, fire glows double at midnight. Young now, we educate ourselves on inner truths. We propose to build humble virtues and some sort of tranquility.

May the depth of the drum stroke against the skin of my heart with its beat be of use for nothing but to inundate the vastness and help us interpret those signs that love displays with its charges of modesty and silence!

ARYAM ELIZABETH LADERA RAMOS

LA VERDAD INTERIOR

Nuestra página no es una que posea la virtud de la serenidad con ligereza. Por calmos que se presenten nuestros cuerpos ante los jurados, el ejercicio en nuestras mentes se conforma enorme. Un día no basta para darnos cuenta de que firme es el cuero de nuestros corazones; amplio el redoble dispuesto a nuestro alrededor. Plena pretende ser esta labor de amparo.

Persigo la conservación de tu inocencia

rescato caracteres que se han perdido
entre tus labios con el paso de los años.

La estación es amable, el fuego resplandece doble en medio de la noche. Jóvenes ahora, nos educamos en las verdades interiores. Proponemos erigir virtudes humildes y algunos tipos de serenidad.

¡Que la profundidad del golpe sobre el cuero de mi corazón con su ruido no sirva sino para inundar la vastedad y ayudarnos a interpretar aquellos designios que el amor demuestra con sus cargas de pudor y silencio!

TAYLOR WEINTROP ♡

WORKING HARD FOR WHAT

We labor ourselves

to the point of
uselessness.

Grinding our joints
and muscles until

our bones diminish
to dust.

All the singing
crying
begging
bleeding

used to build
these holy bodies.

Then we burn their purpose
and hope to ash.

A labor of love,

the strides we take day by day
beating the jaded fog.

Join me at this junction

where we'll learn to be alright,
living
surviving
thriving

as the forgotten pedestrians.

M. ELAINE

NIGHTHAWK

Once, I was a bullbat, in love with the Moon. I asked the Moon as he hung full in the sky, “Why are you here? What is your purpose?” To which he replied, “To move the tide.”

The following night, with the Moon cut in half, I asked: “Why are you here? What is your purpose?” And this time the Moon responded, “To open the Moon Vine.”

On the third night, the Moon just a sliver, I resounded once more, “Moon, why are you here? What is your purpose?” And he replied, “To complement the stars.”

Then, the Moon disappeared. I did not see him for many lonely evenings, and as the nights passed, I longed for my lunar love to shine in the empty sky.

Some days later, the Moon came back. Just like last time, he was only a sliver. Astonished, I croaked, “Moon, where have you been? Why did you go?” He coolly and kindly answered, “I was needed elsewhere.”

On the next night, the Moon half his size, I asked, “You shine so brightly, so direct. Be straight with me, Moon—enough with your faraway answers. Why are you here? What is your purpose?” The Moon glowed and replied, “I do not shine. I merely reflect the light of the Sun.”

On the third night, the Moon hovered full and bright above me. Overwhelmed by his beauty, I questioned, “Why do I need you so?” The Moon showered upon me a pitying love. “It is not me you need, but the Sun. For without him, I cannot be. The tide, the vine, the stars—these are all my doing, but all belong to him, for I am nothing without his light.”

Upon the next night, I asked my half Moon, “Moon, why are you here?” The Moon, ever patient, rejoined, “Many years ago, before the animals crawled and the fish swam, the Sun and I hung together in the sky so that I cast a shadow on the earth. In these moments, the Sun told me of you and how you’d look to me. He said, ‘Moon, I am too bright for her, and her eyes cannot see me as they should. She is a bird of the night and knows me not. Reflect my light and let her see you so as to see me.’ And so here I reside, endlessly arcing through the sky as he commanded for your sake.”

The Moon was a mere splinter the ensuing night. I stared at him for hours; he beamed back. Finally, I asked, “Moon, why are you here? What is your purpose?” In his thin glow, I heard him say, “To show you the light you cannot bear to see.”

At this moment, I was startled by a burst of light on the horizon. The Sun was rising. Afraid, I looked to the Moon, but he was gone. I felt a slight warmth from the Sun, but I could not behold him, for my eyes were too weak. And yet I could squint to see the soft yellow glow on all he touched. Unable to withstand the blinding light, I floated to the ground, placed my head in my wing, and slept.

The Moon had gone again. I watched the sky every night, hoping he might appear. In my waiting, I reflected.

The Moon soon returned as a slender cut in the darkness. Even so thin, he lighted the world with blue incandescence. “Moon,” I asked in barely a whisper, “Who is the Sun?”

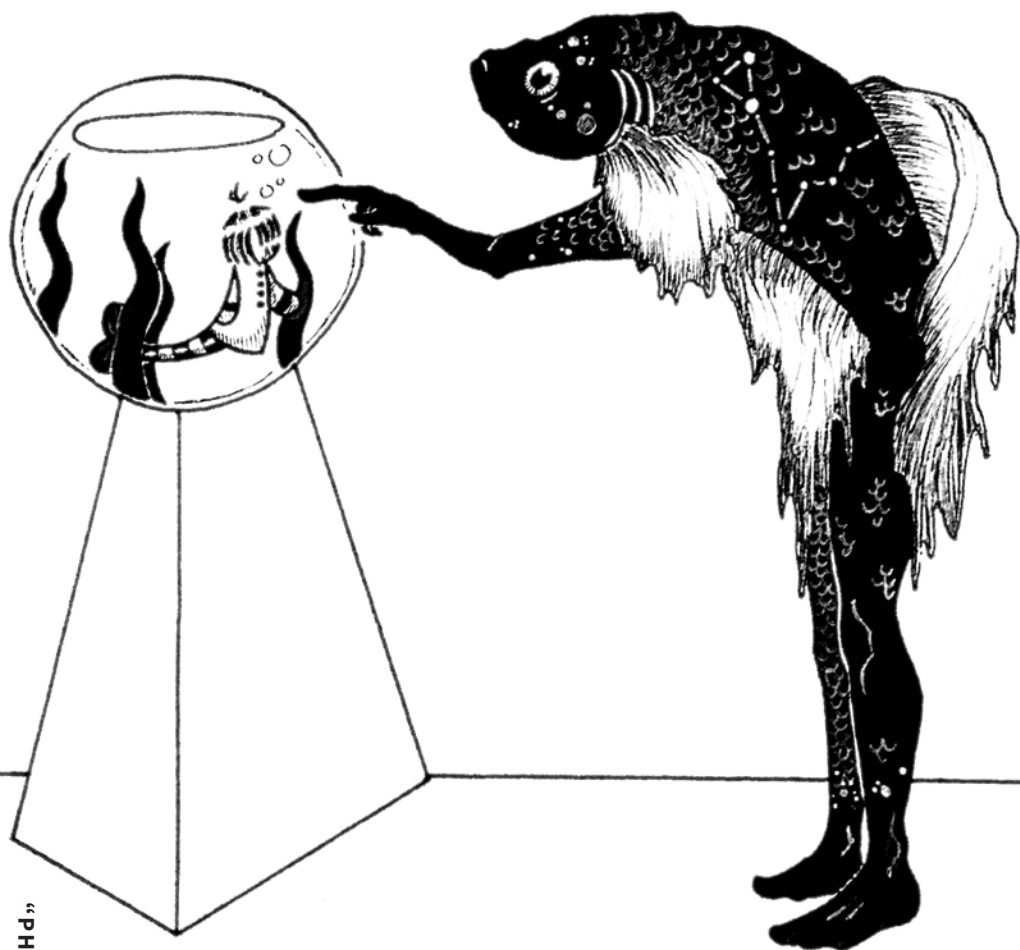


“BUBBLES IN PRAGUE”

LINDA K. JACKSON

oil on canvas

VINCENT CORTESI



"PHISH BOWL"

ink on paper

MEGAN ROEGNER

THE IN-BETWEEN

You said there was day
and there was night—
as if it is that simple
to be one thing or the other.
But what about twilight?
The darkening of dusk,
the brightening of dawn—
in-between, unresolved,
still beautiful, still yours.

This morning, the man
on the radio
said with authority
that the sun rose just
sixteen seconds ago—
as if sunrise is
a singular moment
and not an unceasing
slide into the light.

K. C. TERRA

I THOUGHT MY MOTHER WAS EVIL

I thought my mother was evil.

She wouldn't let me play with my friends, took my books away from me, and told me to dress a certain way. She would always have an angry expression on her face: her brows furrowed, her face red, her lips curled in a sneer. Her voice shouting vehemently, "Baas karde! Khuda ka vasta!" I remember the dread that would fill up in my chest like a goopy hot sauce that would stick to my throat and burn. I felt like I would hurl, like my lunch from that day would jump out and explode on the floor in front of me. I wasn't what she wanted. I was supposed to be her only son, but instead I was her other daughter. I was supposed to be made of steel, but my heart was created soft. I was supposed to be the roses in her meadows, but instead I became the thorns in her side.

I thought my mother was evil.

But she wasn't. Not in the slightest. It was how she was raised. She told me to stay with girls because her culture emphasizes the separation of men and women. Even though my best friends were boys throughout elementary school, she was trying to stop it because it was foreign to her. The unknown scared her. And for good reason; she didn't know how boys in America acted. She only knew how boys acted in her birth country, where they objectified women left and right and gave no justice to them even if the women were obviously the victims.

I thought my mother was evil.

But she wasn't. Not even a pinch. She snatched my books away so quickly from me because she thought I was spending too much time

in a false reality and wanted me to spend time in the real world. She wanted to make sure my expectations for life weren't skewed because of what the books said. It was a mistake she had made. She was a victim of that fantasy too many times to count, to the point where she made the biggest mistake of her life: marrying an abuser.

I thought my mother was evil.

But she wasn't. Not by a long shot. She pressed upon me to wear makeup, put on dresses, and "act" like a girl because that was how she thought girl was supposed to act. She didn't know any better. She only knew her previous daughters to be girly girls that were obsessed with hair, makeup, and boys. She never knew how to take care of a daughter who was obsessed with videogames, motorcycles, and both genders.

I thought my mother was evil.

But really, I was being selfish. As I grew up, my anxiety became worse. It became real. I never knew how to cope with it because it was something no one in my family had gone through. I felt like an outlier because I was constantly trying to squeeze my emotional heart into a container of apathy. I felt it strain and tear from the tight fit, but I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought keeping my heart away from everyone, including myself, would keep me safe. It kept the tight-throat feeling away. So every time she would ask me to spend time with her, I refused, not wanting to let my heart's emotions escape.

I thought my mother was evil.

But I never knew how much my seclusion would hurt her. It's something I regret even today because I spent my childhood in material things instead of in her maternal love. I don't remember a time when I cuddled into her warm embrace just because I wanted to spend time with her. No, all my childhood memories are of her cold demeanor. She only had her cold demeanor and her yelling. I remember her yelling at me and crying. Crying because she thought I hated her and would hate her forever.

I thought my mother was evil.

But in recent years, I realized how quickly time rolled by. I saw that my mother was growing white hair. I saw that she was hurting more

in her knees. I saw that she wasn't herself anymore. I learned that she was getting old. My mother had me when she was thirty-eight. She was older than most of the other kids' moms. I never had the heart to ask her why I was born so late until recently. She had problems having children in her youth, and had two miscarriages before and after I was born. Having me was a blessing to her, no matter how old she was. She cherished me and she pressed a lot of that love to me in a way I never understood.

I thought my mother was evil.

But as the years progressed, my mother's health declined. The more I saw her shake, the stronger my emotions became. They spewed from my heart and cracked the glass container I shoved them into all those years ago. I could feel my chest stiffen. It kept cracking and breaking until one day, it burst open. And after that moment, something that bothered me was that I never spent time with her before she grew old.

I thought my mother was evil.

But I'll never admit it in person; the closing of my throat, the ache in my chest, the watering eyes, and the quivering lip aren't from clinical depression or crippling anxiety. They're all because I wish I spent more time with my mother as a child. I'm envious of my older sisters who took advantage of their childhood—my mother's youth—to spend time with her. I don't remember the younger version of my mother. The mother that would chase her children around the playground, the mother that would pick us up and smother us in kisses, the mother that would sing along to the clangs of the pans and pots in the sink. Then again, I never saw a younger version of my mother. I was born when she was middle-aged. What do I know about how she acted in her youth?

I thought my mother was evil.

But it'll always hurt knowing my sisters still spent more years with her than I ever could. I'm the baby of the family. People say that we get the most attention from our parents, and it's true. We do and we bask in it all day, every day. But there is a reason why they try to spend so much time with us while they can—they will die while we are still young and naive to the world. I wish I knew that as a child.

I thought my mother was evil.

But now, I see she was trying to be the best mother she could be, as equally loving and caring to me as she was to my older sisters, even with her growing aches and pains. Though I spend most of my free time with her— talking to her, cooking with her, driving with her in the passenger seat— that guilt never seems to wash away. I always get a painful reminder that she'll die never really knowing who I was as a child. Not really. But I'm trying to make amends.

I thought my mother was evil.

But at least I will now remember her for her love. The guilt may never go away. The endless stream of tears may never stop. My constant urge to hug her a thousand times a day may never be cured. But I now know her as a loving mother.

I know my mother is invaluable.

ISABEL FLICK

exotic

abuelita asks me
 as she passes me the tortillas
 where my *novio* is—
 or if he even exists at all.
 the shadow of my hand
 is white with *masa*,
 white like the boys abuelito
 tells me he did not come to the country
 for me to cry over
 as i tell abuelita that i didn't have
 a *novio*
 sin un crush.
 she asks me in a *mezcla* of spanglish
 if i would p l e a s e
 listen to my *tio* when he tells me
 about the mexican boy down the street
 because i need a wonderful,
 guaposo,
 mexican man.
 i tell her *mami* married a mexican man
 and it didn't work well for her in the end.
 abuelita quips back that i need to look for
 a boy that doesn't look like *papi*;
 white, that is what she means.
 i argue;
 a white man could love me
 e n o u g h.
 abuelita rolls her eyes;
 enough *is* *not* *enough*.
 so you go out; what do you do?
 you espeak español?

and what will that do?
make those boys,
 make them flock *to you?*
call you "exotic" like los pájaros?
 and then who do you choose?
between joey, or brad *or john?*
whoever doesn't speak spanish
 with the same look on his face
as the one he will give mi menudo?
 and when he meets your family?
will he call us locos?
 call us "e x o t i c" too?
and when you break up, why will you?
because he lost his job?
 because he cheated on you?
because he doesn't like the tone you use?
 because he doesn't like your telenovelas?
because he doesn't like the way your hair
 sticks to everything in sight,
 dark and long?
like tangled centipedes on his shower curtain?
 like discarded dreams on his pillows?
Her box dyed blonde hair
 makes a part of me
 deep
 deep
 down
 wish that i was a white blonde girl.
 a white blonde girl
 without a care in the world.
 makes that part of me ache
 to be all that i am not.
so, miija, you find the right man,
 a white man,
 and what does he do
 to you?

JOE THOMASSON

THE REVOLUTION

The revolution will not only be
 Televised,
 It will be
 Advertised,
 Commercialized
 And then realigned to fit
 The new normal. Normalized
 Fascism.
 Some so willing to accept any yoke
 To end any hoax
 And get back to where we were!
 Great (again!)
 The joke
 Is really on us —
 And the onus too —
 Me and you
 Have become too complacent
 To do anything
 To replace it.
 (The broken engine keeps chugging along with at least one burnt
 cylinder)
 It's easy when you have all the freedom
 And none of the responsibility.
 It is all you (who?) and not me.
 "How will we ever survive?"
 Better the truth
 And the bitter pill that comes along for the ride.
 Better not to run and hide,
 Better try to seek and find.



mixed media; violin, violin wire, wood

"RICHARD'S DREAM"

BOB MADDEN



MEGAN ROEGNER

SELAH

After all this time,
we still don't know exactly what it means.
Maybe even the ancients were unsure
as it sprang from hearts to lips.

Stop, perhaps, and listen—a pause.
A moment of contemplation
as we weigh the unmeasurable,
the paragraph ends in time for a new beginning.

Or it could be a command for a crash
of cymbals, a lifting up of voices
for exaltation untranslatable
but innately understood.

I watch the December sunset.
Days die early at the end of the year,
but beautifully—pink skies streaked with gold
that are reborn in the morning.

I catch my breath in timeless wonder.

Selah.

M. GEERLING

LOVE IS SEVEN CUPS OF CUCUMBERS

When I came down into the kitchen for lunch, I only had eyes for the plate of hamburger patties haphazardly stacked on a paper towel. The imitation hardwood in my grandparents' big kitchen creaked beneath my feet with an inorganic groan. Grandma was opening a bag of potato chips on the island, the unofficial kids' table. The object of my attention, however, was on the kitchen counter, surrounded by whole-wheat buns and a medley of toppings - ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, lettuce, tomato slices, red onions, relish, and at least three different kinds of cheese. My grandparents believed that big meals before bed interfered with sleep, and consequently chose to make lunch the biggest and most elaborate meal of the day.

"Are your sisters coming?" Grandma asked. She shut the door of her magnet-covered refrigerator. One of the many Alaskan cruise ships slipped down, grazing a flower that bore the words "Panama City."

"Yeah, in a minute." I washed my hands at the double-basin sink. The sink was the focal point of the kitchen counter, picturesquely highlighted by the long window that ran above it. I stared out over rich green grass, purple petunias, and a little two-lane road into the small Midwestern village my grandparents called home. I grabbed the kitchen towel lying to the right of the sink. As I dried my hands, I saw some strange formation out of the corner of my eye. I turned to see three brightly colored glasses clustered on the counter. A group of big glass jars surrounded them. They looked like schoolyard bullies, towering over their victims. Grandma, ever the rescuer, picked up one of the three glasses.

“What are the jars for?”

“Pickles,” Grandma answered. She pressed a cracked button on the refrigerator door. Ice cubes rattled into the glass. “I want to make some for you to take home.” She picked up the next colored glass. “Do you want peach or raspberry iced tea?”

“Peach. But I can get it myself.” Doing things for others was my grandma’s love language, and she loved her grandchildren very much. No task was too small for her to do for us. Recently, though, I had begun to feel guilty about how much Grandma did for me, particularly anything I could easily accomplish.

The two tea pitchers sat in a patch of summer sun streaming in from the window. One was a transparent orange, the other a solid brown. Without asking, I grabbed the orange pitcher. It was an unspoken rule of life that if a pitcher is to hold tea, it must only hold one kind of tea for as long as it lives. The marriage cannot be dissolved. Orange was for peach tea and brown for raspberry tea. The ice in my glass clinked and crackled as I poured. The sugary smell was stronger somehow, more heady than usual.

I looked back at the jars. The thought of pickles excited me. No store-bought pickles could ever compare to Grandma’s pickles. The taste alone, so nuanced, was unlike any other kind of pickle I’d eaten – what made them so different? I had eaten so many of them, yet the only thing I knew about them was that they were cucumbers.

My sisters were finally coming, stomping down the carpeted stairs. Grandma moved swiftly into action. Her spotted fingers pried my hands from the pitcher, and she poured two more glasses. She walked to the glass sliding doors leading out to the back porch where my grandpa had chosen to sit even though it was blazingly hot outside. She rapped twice on the door.

“Dinner’s ready,” she told Grandpa through the glass.

I meditated on the pickles as I ate, tuning out the news anchors blaring from the tiny television perched on the desk. I wondered how the flavor of my grilled hamburger, topped with sharp cheddar and slices of a freshly picked tomato, would change with homemade pickles. When our week here was up, I would have to ask Dad to make hamburgers for dinner so I could find out.

The news turned into a game show. Grandpa pushed his chair back and turned off the television. Lunch was now over. My sisters and I hopped down from our wooden barstools and shuffled over to the trash can to throw away our paper plates.

“We were going to play a game together upstairs,” mentioned one of my sisters. “Do you want to?” I did want to. An afternoon spent laughing with my sisters, laying on the carpet, sounded wonderful. After lunch, my grandparents liked to retreat to their recliners to read and take their afternoon nap. During that time, my sisters and I would entertain ourselves upstairs. We had made it our personal domain. But just over my sister’s shoulder, I could see the empty jars. I couldn’t shake my growing curiosity about the homemade pickles.

“You guys go ahead,” I said. “I’ll come up in a little bit.” Grandma was busy rinsing breakfast and lunch dishes and loading them into the dishwasher. “Can I do that for you, Grandma? And can I help you make pickles?” She paused for a moment, looking at me. We were both aware that I didn’t like working in the kitchen. At home I got out of meal prep any way I could.

“Sure,” Grandma said finally. “Let me wipe down the countertops, and then I’ll get out the cucumbers.” I took her place at the sink as she bustled away. The dishcloth rasped hoarsely as her strong, capable hands attacked the already near-spotless kitchen counter. As I slid the last fork into the dishwasher’s utensil rack, she raided the refrigerator.

“Our friend down the road grew these,” Grandma remarked, piling cucumbers into her arms. Grandma and Grandpa were friends with about half of the people in their hometown and on good terms with the other half. “They had such a big crop this year, they gave us a ton.” Her voice, a soft drawl, turned thoughtful. “I’ll have to make more to bring over to them after you go home.” She dumped the cucumbers onto the still-damp counter. They rolled with awkward, uneven thumps. “Wash these.”

I picked up a cucumber. It felt heavy, much heavier than I expected. The cucumbers Mom bought at the store were thinner and lighter, and not as dark a green as the one I held. The cool water flowed over the cucumber and onto my hands. Behind me I could hear many cabinets squeaking open and banging shut. Grandma grunted

as she hefted a huge bowl onto the counter, a bowl much too big for a household of two. It was an old Pyrex bowl, and though the paint was still bright and the edges unchipped, it had an air of history about it. Next, she took the wooden cutting boards that leaned against the wall next to the stove – one for her, and one for me. As I dried the cucumbers in a towel, she squinted through her glasses at a knife, gently probing its edge. Satisfied, she handed it to me along with a measuring cup.

“We need seven cups,” she instructed, “so just let me know how many you add to the bowl.” She plucked a cucumber from my jumbled pile and set it on her cutting board.

“Wait - how thick do the slices need to be?”

“Like this.” She made a quick cut and handed me a thin slice. “Oh, but chop off the ends first – they’ve got too much skin.”

We got to work. Grandma sliced with practiced ease, her knife steadily hitting the cutting board. My cucumber shifted as I tried to cut it. My knife went into the cucumber awkwardly. Every time I managed to lop off a bit of cucumber, I compared it to the example slice. The first had been cut at an angle, the proper thickness at the top but diminishing into nothing towards the bottom. The next was almost three times the proper width. I decided to cut that one in half. The next was paper-thin. I could see my fingers through the translucent flesh of the cucumber. There was a wet plop, and Grandma said, “One cup.”

This was to be expected. After all, Grandma had years of experience, and I had none. It made sense that she would finish first. I kept cutting. I heard another plop. “Two.” I didn’t understand how she could be so fast. The cucumber I was cutting kept rolling, even though I was keeping my hand on it. My measuring cup was just now full enough to have a few uneven cucumber slices peeking over the top. I hesitated. I wanted to do a good job, but I also wanted to actually be of use to Grandma. To satisfy myself, I cut one more slice and put it in the cup.

“Three.” I spoke casually, as though the differences between us didn’t bother me. Grandma smiled at me.

“Four,” she said. A few moments later, she added, “Five.” I would have

thought that as I cut more cucumbers, the slices would become more even. Instead, my cuts grew sloppier, precision sacrificed for speed.

“Six,” I said. Grandma hummed and passed me her half-full measuring cup.

“Here, you finish the last cup. I need to get everything else.”

“Do pickles take a lot of ingredients?” I asked. Surely, they must. There had to be some secret ingredient that made them taste different than other pickles.

“Not really. Right now, it’s just cucumbers and an onion. We’ll let those soak for a few hours.” She went back to the refrigerator. A small grocery bag rustled as she grabbed an onion from it. “Oh, we need salt too. When you’re finished with that, would you measure two tablespoons of salt into the bowl?”

“Yep,” I replied, mind whirling. Grandma’s pickles couldn’t just be cucumbers and onion. Perhaps the difference lay in the pickling solution. I poured the last cup of cucumbers into the bowl. “Seven.” I paused. “Where do you keep the measuring spoons?”

“Same drawer as the silverware. They’re in the bottom compartment.” Grandma’s utensil drawer was as neat and organized as everything else in her house. The silverware formed neat stacks in their individual compartments – first the big forks, then the little forks, then the big spoons, then the little spoons. The bottom compartment held an assortment of mismatched but carefully placed utensils: rubber spatulas, wooden spoons, tiny whisks, and what I was looking for – measuring spoons. I wrestled the tablespoon from its ring.

Grandma was chopping again, pushing strips of onion out of her way as she went. Her speed had increased. Her stance suggested casual confidence; she had done this hundreds of times and would do it hundreds more. Again, shame ran through me as I reflected on how little I knew, how little I could do.

“Does cutting onions make you cry?” Mom always cried when she cut onions. The fumes were certainly pungent. Even a few feet away, the smell overwhelmed the faint traces of hamburger and dish soap.

“They make me tear up,” Grandma admitted. “But they don’t make me cry.” As I picked up the salt, she added, “Now, if you were cutting the onions, then I’d expect you’d maybe cry – you’re shorter, after all, and that means you’re closer to onions when you cut them.”

Gently I shook the salt into the measuring spoon. I was pleased to find that I did much better with the salt than I had with the cucumbers. Only a few grains missed their target. “One,” I said. The salt hissed as I poured into the bowl. My next spoonful, even fewer grains spilled on the counter. “Two,” I announced. I hadn’t made up for my performance earlier but thinking about it didn’t sting so much.

Grandma lifted her cutting board, carefully scraping the onion strips into the bowl. Their uniformity highlighted the irregular size and shape of the top layer of cucumbers.

“Next we have to cover all this with water.” She pushed the bowl until it teetered on the edge of the sink. “Hold the bowl steady. If we put the bowl in the sink, we’ll never get it out.” I put my hands on either side of the bowl, rooting it in place. Here I got to appreciate the practical uses of an extendable faucet head: Grandma guided the faucet over to the bowl, which, just from touching it, I knew was already heavy. The muted, woodsy scent of cucumber grew stronger as the bowl filled, overcoming the onion’s pungency. Random pieces of cucumber and onion floated freely around the confines of the bowl. If a piece became too unruly, Grandma pushed it back down. The water rose to an inch below the bowl’s rim before Grandma snapped it off. She bumped her hip into me, her gentle way of saying to get out of the way. I stepped back, and she pushed the bowl back to the safety of the counter.

“Why are we soaking them?” I asked.

“It makes them crispy. If you don’t soak them, they’re just soggy cucumbers.” That sounded perplexingly counterintuitive. The secret to crunchy pickles was extra liquid. What other secrets were buried in my grandma’s mind? Information that seemed natural and commonplace to her was a tantalizing treasure to me if only I could find a way to dig it out. “They need four hours,” Grandma continued, unaware of my thoughts. She started piling the dishes into the sink. “You can run along now. I think I’ll take a nap.”

“Okay.” I hesitated. “Will you come get me? Whenever it’s time to move onto the next step?”

“Sure,” Grandma agreed.

She did not come to get me. I am not sure why. I did not realize how much time had passed. My grandparents rarely went upstairs, so they thought it was pointless to keep clocks in the rooms. I didn’t even realize how much time had gone by until Grandma hollered up the stairs for supper. I never asked her why. Part of me deep, deep down inside wondered if my inexperience persuaded Grandma that it was best if I didn’t come back. Grandma had always been an “if you want something done right, do it yourself” person. However, that didn’t sit quite right with me. Grandma would never lie to me, and it was against her character to be underhanded. I decided she simply forgot, and, not wanting to upset her, I kept quiet.

I had forgotten one crucial thing: as I said before, doing things for others was one of my grandma’s favorite ways of showing love. No doubt she heard my sisters and me laughing and chose to give us that time together instead. What I considered a mistake was another small act of love. It was quiet and confusing, but an act of love nonetheless; the kind that is unassuming and only realized when chopping cucumbers years later. Through the lens of time, Grandma showed me how powerful this kind of love can be. Every time I make homemade pickles, I learn about love all over again. Grandma will never read my words or eat my pickles, but both are done out of love.

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TAYLOR WEINTROP

THE VERGE

my prayers skim the tops of the swaying wheatgrass
through this dirt spreads
the memories and lessons gathered
from the living and dead

floating through the spaces
between the sprouting
is never a haunted underscore
rather a presence always welcomed

something chiming in the distance
a passing feeling
a truth
keeps revealing

keeps unfolding life at the edge of this garden's gate
where storms stretch to golden heights
and roots dig to milky cores
soothing something smoldering

yet tender and sweet
this is what it is
and this is what it will ever be
a question just on the verge of answering it all



“AN ANGEL’S PROTECTION”

STANLEY WILLIAMS

digital painting

OLIVIA N. OBI



"UNTITLED"

acrylic and oil on canvas

ARTIST AND AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

BADRIAH AHMAD was born in Kuwait and is now a freshman at Gulf University for Science & Technology majoring in management information systems. She's a self-taught artist who expresses her feelings and thoughts through her paintings. She's starting to get into abstract art more and more every day, and she thinks that abstract art is unique because it gives you the freedom to explore the artwork and assign your own meaning to the piece.

ALEXIS BRITTON fell in love with reading at a young age, enjoying young adult, sci-fi, fantasy, graphic novels, and much more. In middle school, she became enthralled in writing, art, photography, and music as creative outlets. In high school, Britton was a collaborator for a poetry collection titled Phosphenes, published in 2018, in which she created the back page blurb, title, and multiple haikus. She's been in love with creative publishing ever since!

ADRI BUHSE is an UMSL student majoring in studio art. During the quarantine, she wrote poems to keep her sanity. Her inspirations include books, anime, and music—especially Nirvana, which inspired the title for “Pear Street”. Adri is also a Library Associate at St. Charles City-County Library and would like to give a shout-out to her co-workers at the Deer Run Branch! “Pear Street” is her first published work in a magazine.

AHLAYA CHAVERS did not provide a biography.

ANNA CONNOLEY is a sophomore at UMSL and a second-semester French student. She loves learning and growing, both in French and other areas. She hopes to be a librarian and one day be able to write entire stories in both French and English.

Some **BELLA CORTESE** Fun Facts: she is a junior at UMSL majoring in English and minoring in art history. She enjoys hiking, going on picnics, driving with the top down, and giving high fives. Her favorite author is Oscar Wilde, and she's been listening to The Killers a lot lately. She hopes everyone has a fantastic summer.

VINCENT CORTESE has trouble finding hats that fit. Some of them are the wrong color or too small or don't match well with his other clothes. His solution: buy a bunch of hats and wear them all at the same time. Art is one of Vincent's hats. Some other hats he wears are music, reading, nature, writing, engineering, movies, tv, bug collecting, and cooking. Why does he keep buying hats that don't fit? He doesn't know. You can follow him on Instagram @adys_box.

BENJAMIN ALLEN EBERT is a single father and retired US Navy Chief. He served 20+ years. He lived in England, Japan, and Africa. He graduated Summa Cum Laude from JEFFCO with an AS in CCJ and a culinary certificate in Spring 2019. He volunteers at the St. Genevieve Museum and interns with the NPS. He graduates this fall with a BA in anthropology, BS/MS in CCJ, and minors in military history and global health & social medicine.

M. ELAINE is a senior at UMSL, majoring in English. Professionally, she wants to pursue a career in publishing. In her free time, she enjoys reading, painting, and going on road trips. Her favorite book is Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier, her favorite painter is Claude Monet, and her favorite place to travel to is the American Southwest. In the next year, M is looking forward to graduating and getting her first apartment!

ISABEL FLICK is a 22-year-old Mexican American artist and poet based in Saint Louis, Missouri.

M. GEERLING is seeking her B.S. Ed. in elementary education and hopes to graduate in December 2023. She enjoys cooking and baking and is especially fond of using her Dungeons & Dragons group as guinea pigs for new cookie recipes. She is passionate about literature, particularly fairy tales, and can't wait to share books with her students.

LINDA K. JACKSON received her BFA in painting from SIUE in 2019. She has exhibited in Texas, St. Louis, and online in Femina, Illinois,

CONTRIBUTORS

as well as having works accepted in New York City and Venice, Italy. She grew up in Northwest Arkansas in a family of artists and now resides in St. Louis. Linda enjoys painting conceptually with oils in her studio.

MICHAEL LUDWIG is a former chemical engineering student who lost interest in the field as a result of the 2020 pandemic. He is now trying for an English degree to get a stable job to support his interests. These interests include sports psychology, table-top role-playing games, fighting game competitions, and game design.

GEORGEANN MCLEMORE is a St. Louis native and a novice graphic artist who shows a lot of promise. She got her start through traditional painting by creating portraiture, contemporary art, and abstract art. She likes to express her style through her use of landscapes and portraits. She is currently based in South Korea where she is obtaining her bachelor's degree in information systems and a minor in fine arts.

BOB MADDEN: After a 25-year break, Bob is pursuing his passion for studio art. Emotion and movement play a significant role in his work. He is the proud father/stepfather of seven children. He is a former restaurateur who, after working and raising a family, has returned to school and his love of art. As president of 'Artists Anonymous,' he believes creativity benefits society and will continue working on projects that engage viewers and inspire change.

🔥 **ZAK MILLER** is a third-year philosophy major with an associate's degree from STLCC Meramec. While not pedantically arguing whether or not any of a given entity's qualities are essential to its being or baking compulsively, he spends his time working at St. Louis Public Library, teaching kids how to play TTRPGs.

OLIVIA N. OBI is a painter from St. Louis. Her paintings shed light on the historical injustices of the portrayal of black women throughout western history, as well as the prejudices against underrepresented groups. Women's bodies extend to transcend their physical appearance. Society often portrays women of color in the center of a nuanced discourse about womanhood, race, and consequently, society's judgments. Her work is a way of creating representation and commenting on misogynoir.

REBECCA OGIER is an UMSL alumna with a BA in English and a professional writing certificate. She was on the Litmag 2021 staff and is delighted to be published in Litmag 2022. Rebecca spends her days content-writing and her evenings managing a busy household. She has two large cats, five beautiful young adult children, and one harried husband. In her spare time, she sneaks off to a quiet corner of the Missouri Botanical Garden.

🔥 **TINA PAUL** has been an artist her whole life but realized that she loved painting while in high school. She sold her first acrylic painting when she was 26 and continues to casually create originals as a self-taught consignment and portrait artist. Tina is now 32 and is based out of Sullivan, MO. She mainly works with acrylic paint and has recently started school at UMSL as a studio art major.

KAI PERRY is a studio art major in their final year at UMSL. Kai works primarily with digital mediums, showcasing work that ranges from original characters to illustrations of classic folktales.

🔥 **JEFFREY PRYOR** shares stories about his childhood and how it has impacted his life. He is an UMSL alumnus who graduated in 2018 with BAs in French and history and a MA in history with a graduate certificate in museum studies, public history, and heritage. As a spokesperson for Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse (ASCAsupport.org), his stories are realistic examples of overcoming adversity, taking ownership of life, and healing.

🔥 **ARYAM ELIZABETH LADERA RAMOS**, born in Caracas in 1985, is a Venezuelan contemporary artist without free time. Her background is in literature and linguistics, and she's been writing her poems and collecting them in cabinets for the past 18 years. She is a professional chef and founded a specialty coffee business called Doha Roastery with her husband in Doha-Qatar where they both manage their time and 4 children as best as they can.

MEGAN ROEGNER is a high school English teacher currently working on her doctorate in educational practice. She is particularly drawn to write about faith and spirituality. You can find more of her work at thedailypattern.org.

DREW RYHERD is a junior in the College of Political Science and the Pierre Laclède Honors College studying public policy & administration with an emphasis in nonprofit administration. They enjoy

CONTRIBUTORS

photography, urban exploration, going to museums, traveling to new places, and trying everything at least once. Drew hopes to continue supporting their community through nonprofit advocacy, art, and kindness.

JOHN-MATT TALLYN: The FitnessGram™ Pacer Test is a multi-stage aerobic capacity test that progressively gets more difficult as it continues. The 20-meter pacer test will begin in 30 seconds. Line up at the start. The running speed starts slowly but gets faster each minute after you hear this signal. [beep] A single lap should be completed each time you hear this sound. [ding] Remember to run in a straight line, and run as long as possible.

K.C. TERRA is a biochemistry/biotechnology student on the pre-dental track. While her career is based in the sciences, she has had a passion for writing since she was a kid. She hopes to make stories that are not only inspiring and engaging but also bring a meaningful message to the world.

JOE THOMASSON is in his 25th year as a senior at UMSL. He will be receiving his BA in English in 2023. He hates talking about himself in the 3rd person...reminds him of the Marines. Joe likes to read, write, and talk about books, music, art, flowers, morels, and sometimes politics and religion, but only in his head. He is honored to have a piece in this year's Litmag.

LILIA VOSS transferred to UMSL in fall 2021 from Mizzou. She will graduate this spring with a major in English and a minor in women's and gender studies. She's a photographer as well as a songwriter and musician. Her friendships are very important to her, and she loves to joke and have fun. She's looking forward to graduating and to hosting the next rave in her and her room-mates' basement.

ABIGAIL WADLINGTON is a born and raised St. Louis resident who recently transferred from community college to pursue an English degree at UMSL. Her main aspiration lies in creative writing. When not occupied with college work, she devours fantasy books or pours herself into drafting her work-in-progress novel. Someday, she hopes to publish one of her novels and make a living as an author.

JOHN WALTHALL is studying computer science at UMSL with aspirations of becoming a software developer. He enjoys working on art projects in his free time. His favorite mediums are drawing, digital art, algorithmic art, and wood carving. His digital work, “Perlin Noise”, was generated using a random noise generation algorithm that was originally developed for the 1982 science fiction film *Tron*.

🔥 **TAYLOR WEINTROP** is currently a graduate student in the UMSL English department working on her MA in composition and rhetoric. Taylor considers herself a literacy advocate and is hoping to find ways of creating more interdisciplinary spaces on college campuses. While she is currently in a more essay-based program for writing, poetry was her first literary love and because of this, she is beyond excited to have her work in this year’s Litmag.

STANLEY WILLIAMS is from East Saint Louis, IL. He has been drawing since he was a young boy, and it has become his passion. When Stanley made “An Angel’s Protection,” he wanted the piece to give the feeling of safety while keeping creative mystery behind it as well.

JEN WILSON is an art education major who enjoys painting, wood burning, and jewelry making. She draws her inspiration primarily from nature. She enjoys selling all kinds of work at the Lake St. Louis farmers market as she works towards her degree.

BRANDON YN sees photography as his purpose. No matter where he finds himself, he always feels the urge to capture moments that would otherwise be lost to time. He also loves coffee, dumplings, thrift shops, writing poems, and exploring St. Louis. A local of North St. Louis County, he is an UMSL senior graduating with a communication degree and public relations certificate. He hopes that his future work will let him continue telling stories.

Irish Studies

The Smurfit-Stone Corporation Endowed Professorship in Irish Studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis offers a variety of programs for campus and community audiences including public lectures on Irish culture, literature, history and politics, and performances of Irish music and dance.

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COLOPHON

This book was set in Adobe InDesign in Source Serif. Source Serif is an open-source typeface inspired by the designs of Pierre Simon Fournier. It was designed by Frank Griesshammer.

The headlines are set in FF Cocon, which was designed in 2004 by Dutch type designer Evert Bloemsma.

The book was printed and bound by Graphic Connections Group.

The book was designed by Elizabeth Buchta, Assistant Teaching Professor in the Art and Design department at UMSL, with input from *Litmag* staff. The cover illustration was created by Georgeann McLemore. The “match” logo, and the flame of excellence icon were designed by Anna Crosbie. The “bitmap” logo was designed by Armani James. The “raven” logos were designed by Abby Platte.

Page 48 was intentionally left blank. Collect autographs, doodle on it or use it to write your next poem.





UMSL LITMAG WAS FOUNDED IN 1983.

THE 2022 ISSUE IS THE 34TH INSTALLMENT OF THE PUBLICATION.

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