



THE COMMA

The Comma

Fordham Lincoln Center's Literary & Arts Collective
Volume VI Issue I

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Obsession by *Spencer Balter*

Old Enough to Lose You

by *Emma Burden*

Before you know what kindness really is you must lose things
You need to lose your sense of self, of being, of her,
Of the person that you watch for behind each and every door,
A glimpse of her, a lock of hair
Of a yellow curl stuck to the shower wall,
Of a shard of her broken sunglasses,
Or a crumb from the sandwich she devoured –

Right before she devoured you –

You need to take kindness for granted,
You need to accept that love is not all consuming,
And let it consume you first,
Let it soak into your entire being,
Let holding her hand make way to holding her chin,
To holding her breasts and then
To holding the bags beneath her eyes as tears fall onto them –

She never did that to you. She never took care of you. She never dried your tears
or held you or loved you that same way –

You need to know what your version of kindness was before you lost it,
Before you learned how to be kind to yourself before others,
And to treat others the way you treat yourself, as cliché as that is –

Treat your best friend the way you treat yourself after therapy –
Stop looking for her face in a crowded city,
Stop looking for her house atop the ridge,
Stop looking for the kindness you sought from her
Look for that in yourself –

And she taught that to you inadvertently. She taught you how not to treat yourself.
She taught you what happens when love comes before kindness.

Pain –

Relish in the subway rides downtown,
How you and your two best friends always end up at Union Square
And how you say, no, I'm not going to take the L –

You take the L train anyways –

Think of the plush carpet beneath your feet in your childhood home, and how a
calming voice gives you that same sensation
Warmth beneath your feet
Warmth between your ears
Shag carpet that is worn down from years of walking, brushed thin with bare foot-
steps. Now it's plush –

And don't forget you're plush as well. That one day you will experience a kindness
that exposes how soft your skin really is



Once More With Feeling

by *Naomi Foster*

once more with feeling

catch my eye
hold my stare
flickers of flirt
fold between our laughter

darling won't you
open up the honeysuckle gates
and entangle your limbs with
mine

trace the crevice
in the small of my back
wind up layered raven locks
throbbing follicles twinge at
your every nudge

we pulse and pry
tug and drag
scrape and strain
until our lips are numb

wading in the dampness
our proof of passion
beads of crystalline liquid
polka dot your figure
flames engulf the flicker
swallowing my pride
diminishing the dawn
of a budding romance



kiss me again
once more with feeling
kiss me again
slow your rhythm
try for me

please
loosen your jaw
thaw your frozen feelings
our lips can pray as hands do
hold me close
and we can pretend
that we're still in love

Space

by *Madison Liberman*

Dance through life, they say.
Be authentic, they say.
Be yourself, they say.
Be you.

How can I dance without space?
Confined to my own corner I make
in my mind, trapped in my own
body.

Take a deep breath, they say.
Feel your feelings, they say.
But not too much.

Oh, how I want to be like the ocean,
taking up all that earthly space

But right now, I'm a dormant bud
In hibernation, will she ever bloom?

Look at the sunshine, they say.
Take it one moment at a time.

Do I wiggle my toes, do I stretch out
my arms? Do I sway back and forth
to the rhythm of my own heart?

Beat beat. Beat beat.

How do I start?

Begin anew, they say. They say.



Colors

by *Madison Liberman*

The color blue sweeps through the strands of my brown
Brushes the paleness of my beige,
Brings me out of my dark purple,

Breaks up the heat of the orange-is yellow,
And sways the rainbow around me,

I shimmer.



The Tree Butcher

by *Morgan Caramello*

0

Bob Smith's life was just as dull as his name. The bleak walls of a photocopy shop framed his entire existence; the interior's paint, once resembling Chantilly Lace, now faded and yellowed to a dusty Eggnog. He occupied his position for thirty years, rising the ranks from clerk to print associate to floor manager to store supervisor. Despite each clockwise tick on the clock, each cuckoo bird's raucous call, each church bell chime at the top of the hour every hour, each monotonous day caving into lonely nights, there was no signal otherwise that suggested any passage of time at all.

At fifty something years old, Bob learned to look forward to each promotion and the subsequent stability it lent. The rungs he climbed in the corporate ladder pumped ephemeral pride into his chest, inflating his innards, knotting his intestines, tied together like the joints of balloon animals.

With no wife, no kids and only a tiger striped tabby named Maple to care for, most of his thoughts revolved around his job. The rest were fantasy. Repetitive six A.M. screaming alarms and six o'clock deadlock evening traffic taught him to not mind the in between: fixing the ancient, dying and jammed machines, replacing empty cartridges, budgeting and crunching numbers, scheduling, opening shifts, closing, replenishing items low in stock, the satisfying click of a turned lock.

His staid weekdays, weeks, blurred together. Perhaps it was the store bathed in greyscale, little light let in beyond the clerestory windows and front door. But more likely, it was his leading of life through habit, or chance, or a combination of both. Whatever it was, never the one to take initiative, never able to hold onto what he really wanted, his life was utterly and completely out of his own hands.

1

It was a Thursday that felt like a Wednesday, just like the week before, as if a page in his planner during the month of September were glued together. Fall in Virginia was incipient, the mornings felt clement and crisp, the afternoons humid and balmy.

Bob flipped the sign from "Come in, we're open" to "Sorry, we're closed" at five on the dot. He counted the register, the cash overflow deposited in the inconspicuous safe tucked securely under the office desk. A product of his decades worth of learned and mastered habits, he briskly completed his day's managerial duties. With the door latched behind him, Bob walked diagonally across the empty lot, slowly but measurably, to his SUV parked at the opposite end. Outside was dreary, gunmetal even, the shapes of the buildings and trees and cars fuzzy from behind a screen of fog. It was raining, so slight, almost weightless, unbeknownst

to him from being inside all day. The drops that landed on his jacket he hardly felt, his body ostensibly numb.

He drove his usual route through suburbia, turning the windshield wipers on and off, its slowest setting still too quick for the hanging mist that blurred the glass. Around him, the only distinction between the houses were their accessories: the cars parked out front, the soiled doormats, the abandoned toys thrown about.

Half past six Bob walked through his door and lit a smoke. Inhaling deeply, he sucked up the stick of tobacco like it was more oxygenic than carcinogenic. Once he made it to the filter's edge, he stubbed it, positioning himself comfortably on the couch for the rest of the evening. One microwaveable TV dinner balanced on one knee, a book on the other, Bob flicked through the channels landing on a random one, not to watch, but to fill the silence of the house. His focus lay elsewhere, inhibited by the melodic flipping of pages. His revolutionaries – Proust and Hemingway and Steinbeck – sang until the fatigue of existing descended upon him like the sun at dusk, sending him into a dreamless sleep, only to wake up the following morning and do it all again.

2

That he did. The next day, as usual, he woke himself up halfway from the chiming of his bedside clock, and fully by a couple of splashes of water to the face at the foot of his bathroom sink. He brushed his teeth, dressing himself in a pair of khaki slacks and a Costco shirt buttoned up to the collar. Running out the door, he scarfed down some claggy eggs, assisting them down the tube with some slugs of black coffee from his to-go tumbler. It was time to head to work.

Outside, it was raining again, more intensely than the day before. Bob dashed to the car, damning himself for forgetting his umbrella. He hopped in, key in ignition, speeding down the street. His daily drives were ritualistic, whistling to the radio's melody, he tapped his fingers on the steering wheel in synchronization to the beat of the background instruments. The windshield wipers whipped back and forth, beads blotting the glass then streaming like little minnows whizzing with the tide.

Drip, drip, drip. Back and forth. Dribble, dribble. Back and forth. Here and there. To and fro. More from than to. Come and go. Go, go, go. Postu-postu. Slow, steady. Not too fast. Can't see. But, ahh. That rain. The rain. Love it. Its smell. Hate it too. Like that one summer. Long ago. Nice childhood. Most the time. Back home. Rain was rare. So, good. That life. Lifetimes ago, he thought.

The rain blitzed at an even louder crescendo; a comfortable, consistent, but loud pattering that drowned out the radio. Periodic whooshes of wind pushed against his steering. He eased his speed, the land beyond his windshield resembling more blobs than scapes. Waves and waves of torrential downpour doused the vehicle. Over him ran a deluge of water and memory, remembering all those years ago, that rain, that thunder.

The water dotting his vision rippled into memory.

During the summer between the second and third grade, Bobby found the outdoors. Though, he preferred to think that the great outdoors found him. Old enough to play in the neighborhood without parental supervision, he spent his days lying around, basking in the sunshine in his sod-stained cargos, rolling down the cushy verdant hills, generally lousy from the heat. Always with him in his satchel was a book and his journal, the one Ma, he supposed Pa too, gave him for Christmas the year before.

One warm day, around the summer solstice, fatigued with his florid cheeks, Bobby searched for four-leaf clovers at the forest edge. There was no luck so far at the local park. The boy noticed through the vista, the sky's gradient fading into tenebrous hues. Save the scavenging for another day, he figured. Pa always preached, son, your mother says if there's a storm comin' you gotta get inside beforehand. But Bobby didn't mind this, he loved watching the rain.

Excited, he hopped on his bike, red like a cardinal, pedaling hard and fast towards home. With those midsummer late-afternoon showers rolling in, the cotton-like cumulonimbus clouds looked dark, not like night, but dark like smog, its dour grayness settling like dust on every surface.

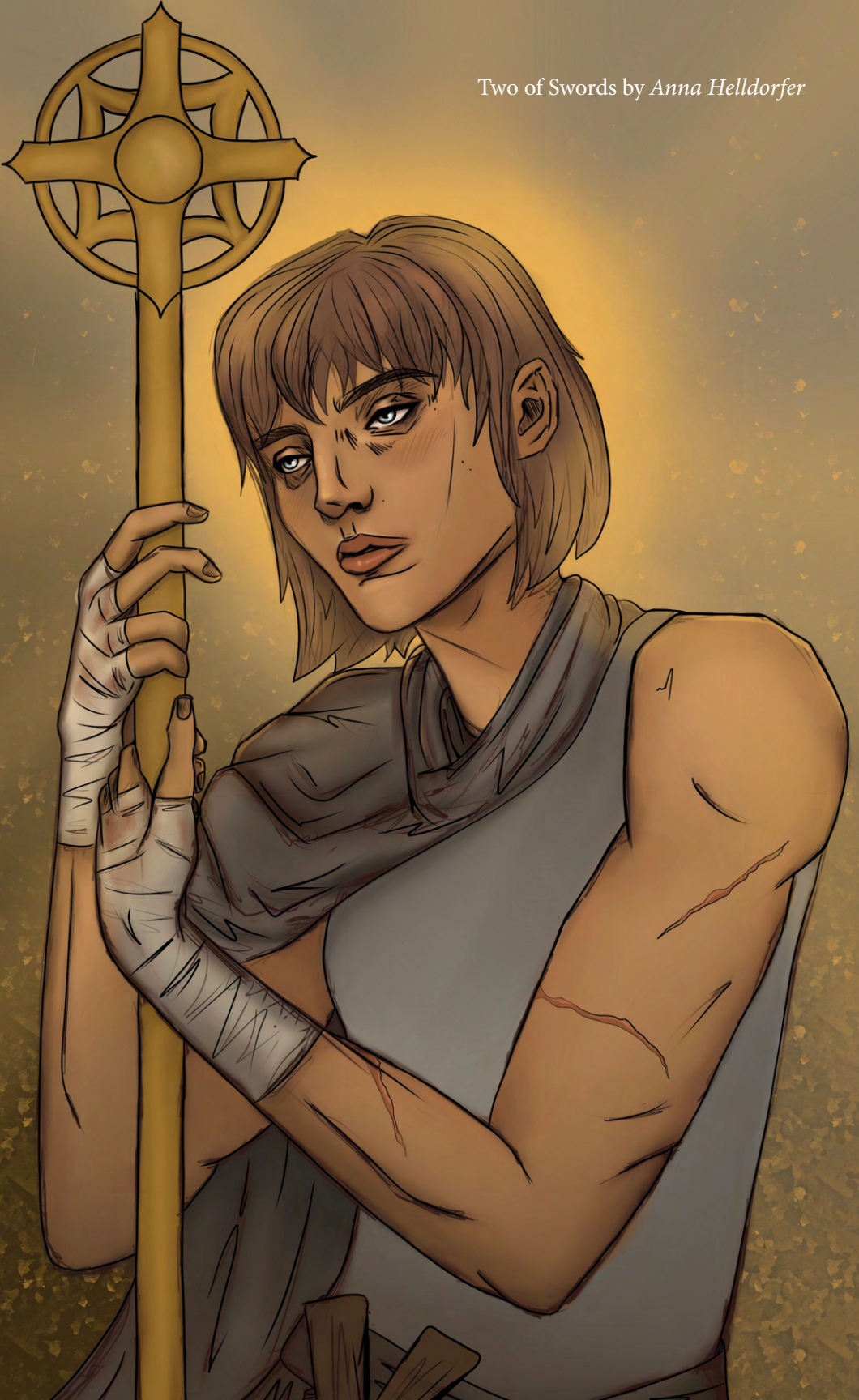
Bobby! his mother called from the front porch as he drifted into the driveway. I'm home, Ma, he retorted, his goofy looking grin widening as he dropped his bike on the lawn. Its gears too eventually rusted over from soaking in storms.

She tousled his mopy locks as he passed through the front door. He was due for a trim, the strands tangling in his eyelashes.

Baby, there's a storm coming, his mother cooed, placing a snack in front of him once he was seated at the dining table. It was wedged in a corner next to two wall length windows. I know! Bobby said between bites. He didn't intend to miss it. Listening to the distant thunder's echoes, he watched as billows of clouds expanded in front of him until the rain eventually fell in sheets. Again and again, he picked a droplet as it squiggled down the glass, posing it against the rest as if they were in a race.

The opening and closing of the garage door was faint in the midst of the roaring elements. He looked at the clock on the oven, six o five, Pa's home. Even more indistinct in the eddy of elements was his parents' dispute, insults and excuses whipped back and forth through pithy whispers. The bigger the rain drops he watched engulf each other, the bigger the spit they flew at one another. Opening his journal, he embedded himself in the page, entertaining, distracting himself. It didn't matter because the words flowed incessantly, a dam unleashed. He could have, and probably, sat writing for hours until Ma said time for dinner and his parents joined him at the table, a pretend happy whole family.

Two of Swords by *Anna Helldorfer*



Wallflower by *Spencer Balter*





Crime Scene Report

by Hayley Ng

One (1) new message!

TO: S.A. Vincent Ta'lua
FROM: S.A. Andrea Pierson
SUBJECT: Shanghai Crime Scene Report [FWD]

The following attached file contains a crime scene report that has been translated into English. Sections have been omitted and/or censored by the Shanghai Municipal Police for reasons likely beyond maintaining confidentiality. Caution is advised when reading.

SHANGHAI MUNICIPAL POLICE CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION REPORT

INCIDENT: #440932 [REDACTED]

1. REPORTING OFFICER [REDACTED], Zhe		2. REPORTING OFFICER [REDACTED], Du			
SCENE	3. LOCATION OF CALL HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	4. DATE (DD-MM-YY) TUESDAY, [REDACTED]-22	5. CALL TIME 2:29 PM	6. ARRIVAL TIME 6:46 PM	
	7. VICTIM (LAST NAME, FIRST NAME) [REDACTED], CINDY "XINGYI"	8. ADDITIONAL VICTIMS N/A	9. SEX FEM	10. RACE ASIAN	11. AGE 24YRS
PERSONS INVOLVED	12. ADDRESS OF VICTIM'S RESIDENCE [REDACTED], CHINA, SHANGHAI, HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED], BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 930		13. PHONE NUMBER [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED]		
	14. REPORTED BY (LAST NAME, FIRST NAME) [REDACTED], Li Fu	15. RELATIONSHIP TO VICTIM NEIGHBOR	16. SEX MALE	17. RACE ASIAN	18. AGE 41YRS
	19. ADDRESS OF REPORTER'S RESIDENCE [REDACTED], CHINA, SHANGHAI, HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED], BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1434		20. PHONE NUMBER [REDACTED]-[REDACTED]-[REDACTED]		
21. PHOTOS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		22. SKETCH <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO			

CIRCUMSTANCES	23. SCENE PROCESSED FOR EVIDENCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO LATENT PRINTS OBTAINED <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO ITEMS TAKEN TO CRIME LAB <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	24. OBJECT/WEAPON <input type="checkbox"/> HANDGUN <input type="checkbox"/> SHOTGUN <input type="checkbox"/> VEHICLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BLUNT INSTRUMENT <input type="checkbox"/> THROWN OBJECT <input type="checkbox"/> BOTTLE/GLASS <input type="checkbox"/> LIQUID/GAS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HAND, FEET <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> RIFLE <input type="checkbox"/> RAZOR <input type="checkbox"/> KNIFE <input type="checkbox"/> PRY TOOL <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLOSIVE
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[Six (6) rows were omitted by the Shanghai Municipal Police.]

NARRATIVE	33. OFFICER NARRATIVE WEATHER: DAYLIGHT & PARTLY CLOUDY <p>Reporting officers [redacted] and [redacted] arrived on scene at 6:46 PM and met with [redacted] Li Fu at his apartment. [redacted] Li Fu then directed both officers to where the victim's body was laid. [redacted] Li Fu told the officers that he had been in the middle of composing a piece because "the silence made it easier for him to think," when he saw her fall, presumably pushed, out of her window. Both officers proceeded to photograph the crime scene outside and the interior of the victim's apartment.</p> <p>The victim had been found lying face down in the dirt with both arms outstretched. Bits of gray matter were found scattered around the victim's head, which leaked blood from the victim's eyes, nose, and mouth. Several bones had shattered from impact, namely in the arms and legs.</p> <p>The victim was wearing a white blouse and a knee-length skirt. Nothing was discovered on her. Notably, on the skirt were orange cat hairs which had likely come from the assailant's clothes.</p> <p>After the officers finished taking photographs of the body, they proceeded up to the victim's apartment, which they found locked. Once they obtained a spare door key from the landlord, they entered the apartment and discovered that although the lock itself appeared relatively new, the door had signs of damage around the locking mechanism. The signs indicated that the wooden door had been broken open from the outside, though the exact timeframe for when the lock had been replaced is unclear.</p> <p>Nearly-empty bags of produce were littered around the apartment. Clothes were draped over the backs of chairs. The cupboards were bare except for a bag of preserved fruit, a few empty cans of beans, tuna, sardines, and various spices. On the floor were more strands of orange cat hair, similar to the ones found on the victim's body. Despite the damage to the door indicating that the wooden door had splintered around the lock, there were no splinters on the floor.</p> <p>The victim's room contains the window the victim had been pushed out from. Beside the window were the victim's bed, desk, and closet, all in various states of disarray. Various contents of the closet and under/atop the bed include: blouses, pants, skirts, shoes, socks, undergarments, storage boxes, textbooks, notebooks, exercise</p>
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equipment, writing supplies, cat toys, feather duster, bags, blankets, pillows, cat hair, mattress sheet covers, tampons, pill bottles for [REDACTED], books, etc. The only other item of note was the victim's journal atop the writing desk, which had been found lying open on a recently filled page. The contents of the page contained [REDACTED]

All collected evidence had been collected by officer [REDACTED] and was sent to the property and evidence room station at [REDACTED] to be held there indefinitely for the foreseeable future.

Both officers left the property at 9:40 PM.

END OF REPORT

One (1) new message!

TO: S.A. Vincent Ta'lua

FROM: S.A. Andrea Pierson

SUBJECT: Shanghai Crime Scene Investigation - Photo Log [FWD]

The following attached file is the case's photo log. Take note of the fact that the Shanghai Municipal Police declined to give us the actual photos.

**Shanghai Municipal Police
Crime Scene Investigation - Photo Log**

INCIDENT: #440932 [REDACTED]	PAGE 1 OF #
VICTIM: [REDACTED], CINDY "XINGYI"	LOCATION: [REDACTED], CHINA, SHANGHAI, HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED], BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 930
REPORTING INVESTIGATOR: [REDACTED], Zhe	RECORDING OFFICER: [REDACTED], Du
OFFENSE: HOMICIDE	BUREAU: HOMICIDE
DATE: TUESDAY, [REDACTED]-05-22	PHOTOS TAKEN BY: [REDACTED], Du

Frame#	DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	TIME
1	SCENE VIEW	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:02 PM
2	SCENE VIEW	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:02 PM
3	SCENE VIEW	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:04 PM
4	SCENE VIEW	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:04 PM
5	SCENE VIEW	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:05 PM
6	SCENE VIEW	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:05 PM
7	VICTIM	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:07 PM
8	VICTIM	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:07 PM
9	VICTIM	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:07 PM
10	VICTIM	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:10 PM
11	VICTIM'S BRAIN MATTER	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:13 PM
12	VICTIM'S BRAIN MATTER	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:18 PM
13	VICTIM'S BRAIN MATTER	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:19 PM
14	VICTIM'S BRAIN MATTER	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:20 PM
15	CAT HAIR/VICTIM	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:22 PM
16	CAT HAIR/VICTIM	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:23 PM
17	WINDOW	HUANGPU DISTRICT, [REDACTED]	7:23 PM
18	APT. COMPLEX ENTRANCE	HUANGPU DISTRICT, BUILDING No. 6, [REDACTED]	7:27 PM
19	APT. COMPLEX ENTRANCE	BUILDING No. 6	7:27 PM
20	APT. COMPLEX ENTRANCE	BUILDING No. 6	7:27 PM

21	APT. COMPLEX ENTRANCE	BUILDING No. 6	7:28 PM
22	APT. COMPLEX STAIRCASE	BUILDING No. 6	7:28 PM
23	APT. COMPLEX STAIRCASE	BUILDING No. 6	7:31 PM
24	APT. COMPLEX HALLWAY	BUILDING No. 6, 14th FLOOR HALLWAY	7:31 PM
25	APT. COMPLEX HALLWAY	BUILDING No. 6, 14th FLOOR HALLWAY	7:32 PM
26	APT. COMPLEX HALLWAY	BUILDING No. 6, 14th FLOOR HALLWAY	7:33 PM
27	APT. COMPLEX HALLWAY	BUILDING No. 6, 14th FLOOR HALLWAY	7:34 PM
28	APT. DOOR (EXTERNAL)	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:34 PM
29	APT. DOOR (EXTERNAL)	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:34 PM
30	APT. DOOR (EXTERNAL)	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:34 PM
31	APT. DOOR KEY	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:44 PM
32	APT. DOOR LOCK	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:51 PM
33	APT. DOOR LOCK	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:51 PM
34	APT. DOOR LOCK	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:52 PM
35	APT. DOOR (INTERNAL)	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:52 PM
36	APT. DOOR (INTERNAL)	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:52 PM
37	APT. DOOR (INTERNAL)	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:53 PM
38	CAT HAIR/FLOOR	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:55 PM

39	CAT HAIR/FLOOR	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:56 PM
40	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:56 PM
41	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:58 PM
42	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:58 PM
43	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	7:59 PM
44	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:02 PM
45	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:02 PM
46	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:03 PM
47	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:05 PM
48	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:05 PM
49	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:06 PM
50	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:07 PM
51	WINDOW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:07 PM
52	WINDOW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:07 PM
53	WINDOW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:08 PM
54	WINDOW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:09 PM
55	CUPBOARDS	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:12 PM
56	CUPBOARDS	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:12 PM
57	EMPTY TUNA CANS	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:12 PM
58	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:14 PM
59	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:15 PM
60	SCENE VIEW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:15 PM
61	CLOSET	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:18 PM
62	CLOSET	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:19 PM
63	STORAGE BOX	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:22 PM

64	STORAGE BOX	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:22 PM
65	CAT TOY	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:24 PM
66	DESK	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:27 PM
67	DESK	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:27 PM
68	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:29 PM
69	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:33 PM
70	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:34 PM
71	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:35 PM
72	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:38 PM
73	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:39 PM
74	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:42 PM
75	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:42 PM
76	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:43 PM
77	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:44 PM
78	JOURNAL	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	8:46 PM
79	BED	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	9:01 PM
81	BED	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	9:02 PM
80	PILL BOTTLES	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	9:03 PM
82	PILL BOTTLES	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	9:03 PM
83	CAT HAIR/BED	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	9:03 PM
84	VICTIMWINDOW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	9:04 PM
85	VICTIMWINDOW	BUILDING No. 6, ROOM 1430	9:04 PM

END OF REPORT

Two (2) new messages!

TO: S.A. Vincent Ta'lua
FROM: S.A. Andrea Pierson
SUBJECT: Shanghai Crime Scene Investigation

We managed to get ahold of the raw interview log between Li Fu and one of the reporting officers, which occurred not long after Cindy's death along with Cindy's journal, specifically the most recent entry. The English translations of both are in the following attachments.

INTERVIEW LOG 44-0932-A:

Date: 14-08-22
Interviewee: Zheng Li Fu
Interviewer: Officer Wang

Notes: Zheng Li Fu did not behave particularly abnormally when walking into the interrogation room, besides showing mild indicators of stress.

<BEGIN LOG>

[Zheng Li Fu sits quietly in the interrogation room. He appears anxious and frequently wrings his hands. After thirty (30) minutes, Officer Wang enters the room with a clipboard. Zheng Li Fu straightens up as Officer Wang takes a seat across from him.]

Officer Wang: Alright, the recorder is on. State your name for the record.

Zheng Li Fu: My, my name is Zheng Li Fu.

Officer Wang: What is your relationship with Chen Xing Yi?

Zheng Li Fu: I was her next-door neighbor, but we talked occasionally and traded food.

Officer Wang: Traded?

[Zheng Li Fu's anxiety appears to recede as he gives a wan smile.]

Zheng Li Fu: Some of the Da Bai [translates to "Big Whites"] don't give us enough food while giving others food they don't need or can't eat. I usually traded cabbage with Chen Xing Yi for, for some rice.

Officer Wang: Was it only you who Chen Xing Yi traded with? Or were there other people?

Zheng Li Fu: I, I think it was only me. To get to her door, you'd need to go past my door. I would have probably heard if someone else came by.

[A pause. Officer Wang writes in his notes.]

Officer Wang: Where were you when Chen Xing Yi was killed?

Zheng Li Fu: Ah? Killed? Are you saying she was murdered?

Officer Wang: That's what we're trying to figure out. Please answer the question.

Zheng Li Fu: I told you before, I was in my apartment, composing music. If someone pushed her out the window, I would have heard it. And I didn't hear anything. I haven't heard much from her apartment after Yun died.

Officer Wang: Who's Yun?

Zheng Li Fu: Yun was Chen Xing Yi's cat. When she was out, I heard the Da Bai kick open her door. I didn't leave my apartment to see, but I heard them grab Yun and take him outside. I saw them beat Yun against the ground—I saw them from my window, just killing him and beating him even after it was clear he died.

[Zheng Li Fu mimes whipping something against the table. He appears visibly distraught. Officer Wang quietly takes notes. Once Zheng Li Fu stops, Officer Wang waits to let him catch his breath before continuing.]

Officer Wang: How did Chen Xing Yi react?

Zheng Li Fu: "How did Chen Xing Yi react?" *[Raises voice]* How did you think she reacted?

[Zheng Li Fu visibly restrains himself. Officer Wang remains impassive.]

Zheng Li Fu: The cat was all she had during the lockdown. Not even her family, because her family was all the way back in America. Did you know she only came

here four months ago? Aiya, poor girl, traveling here by herself even though she as sick.

Officer Wang: Sick? Sick how?

[Zheng Li Fu hesitates.]

Zheng Li Fu: She told me she always feels tired, and a little bit, a bit aimless. She said she was taking medicine up until a little while ago when the Big Whites stopped bringing it up. Even so, she told me that she was okay because she had her cat. Her cat was her life.

[Officer Wang writes in his notes for one (1) minute and twenty-two (22) seconds.]

Officer Wang: I see. Thank you for your time, Zheng Li Fu. We'll be contacting you shortly.

Zheng Li Fu: Ah? That's it?

[Officer Wang escorts Zheng Li Fu out of the interrogation room. Officer Wang returns to the room and picks up the clipboard he left on the table. He flips through the pages.]

Addendum.1: INCIDENT: #440932 [REDACTED]

Four (4) days after the conclusion of the interview, Zheng Li Fu was seized from his apartment and charged with killing Chen Xing Yi.

— S.A. Andrea Pierson

Chen Xing Yi's Final Journal Entry:

[translated into English]:

*The whites of these walls keep me
awake at night. Through the cloudy, white haze
I see a pair of eyes looking through me,
hear the crinkling of the hazmat suits that sound
like white noise, a muffling static
that makes me shiver with a
chill that even the sun cannot warm.*

*Ah, the sun, the sun!
I see you, Yun, dancing up there,
the golden sun sifting through your wispy fur.
Surely, hopefully, your life must be better than what it was
down here.
If it is so much better up there, then
I will chase after you, Yun Yun, and thread my fingers
once more through your amber fur*

A Mother

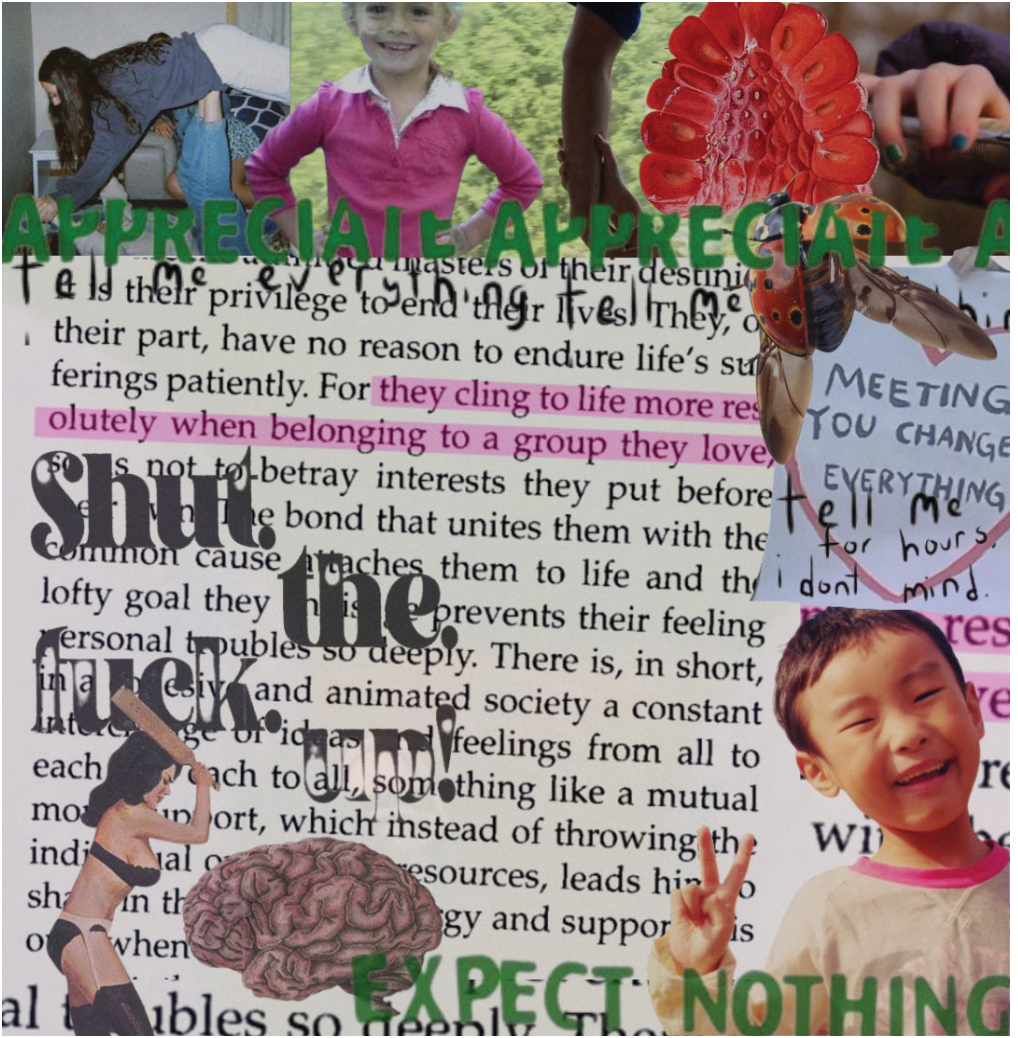
by *Kathryn Fitzpatrick*

White dresses and white smiles
Burnt out candles, conflicting lifestyles
Dark scars which reflect
Her daughter is her project

The little one shrinks when the mother arrives
They say troubled daughters come from perfect wives
The success of one is the plight of the other
But I guess that's what it means to have a mother

Restricting my waistline as she tightens my dress
Desperate to make sure that I can impress
I watch her religiously apply serums and lotion
Until she's devoid of each wrinkle and every emotion

"I just think some women aren't made to be mothers"
Or maybe she would have preferred to have brothers
And she'll never say it, but we're on rough waters
And maybe some women aren't made to be daughters



collage 10/24/22 by Olivera Darden

How To Heal A Hymen

by *Naomi Foster*

Press
the rounds of your knees together.
Get low
to the ground.
Allow your breasts
to graze the floor.
Brush your lips against the carpet.
Open your palms
and repent.
Drape yourself
in thick, weighty fabrics.

Pray away
the tumultuous act
committed in vain.
It can be undone.
It can be
undone.
Mary did it, so can you.

Go down
to the reservoir.
Submerge your tainted flesh.
Then, watch closely as stolen kisses dribble off your spine.
Wash away the crimson stains
and cry out for redemption.

Flutter
your lashes.
Elevate the apples of your cheeks and bite down.
Laugh (if necessary),
Touch (when appropriate),
but do not give in to temptation
Your time
would be better spent
drooling over salmon dishes
and cooing at caviar,
that you won't swallow.
Allowing your eyes to wander
when the bill arrives.

Make him pay.

Let finance
be your first base
and coition be your last.
Afterall, a financial transaction
is as good an indicator
of love as any.

Why you want to heal in the first place? Bask in your shame, girl.
Expose your every limb.
Put that pretty organ on display.

Hear them whisper
Tight. Soft. Wet
My dear, you are nothing more
than an adjective.
Unless, of course,
countless nights of combing through bed chambers
have made you weary.

Or worse,
your abdomen has begun to ache,
pained by the parasite
that you host.
If nothing else,
ingest the small pale pills.

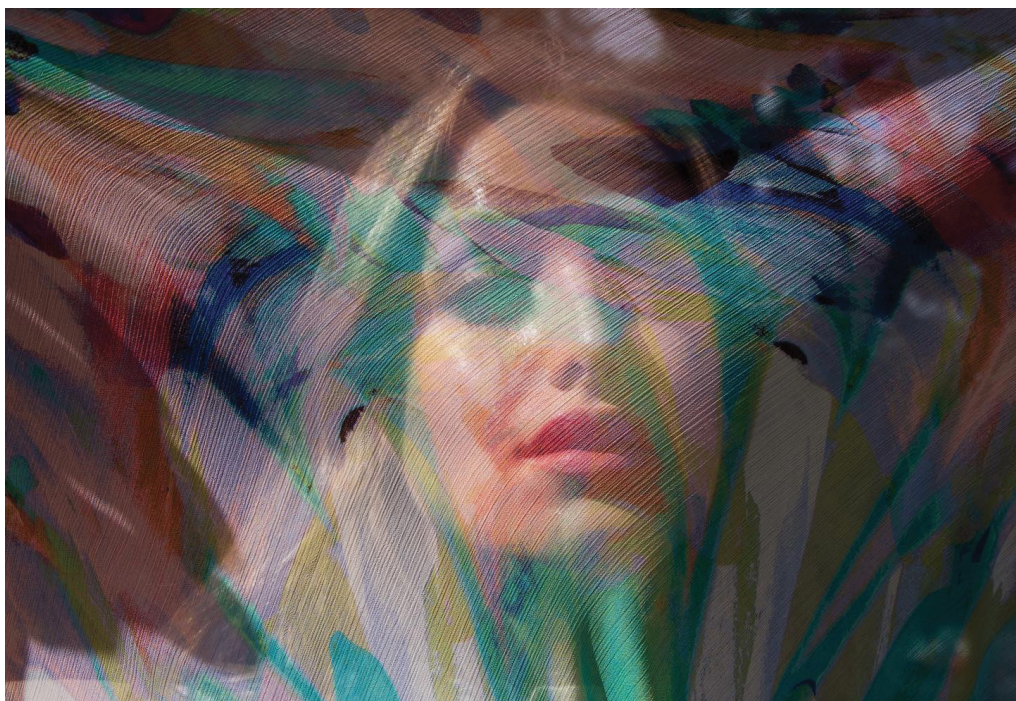
One here.
One at home.
That should kill it,
no more physical evidence of your sin and so
it is done.
You are healed.

Space Age Love Song

by *Emma Burden*

“I guess it was all going just a little too well
If I wasn’t careful I’d be happy pretty soon”
When I saw your face for the first time,
Golden in the light,
I knew I’d prayed for a woman like you, but
“Heaven’s no place for one who thrives on hell,
One who prefers the bit to the silver spoon.”
I started to write about you,
It was the first time I was vulnerable on the page,
Working out the feelings of gay or straight, love or adoration,
if you were my friend or something more
I wrote about you because you didn’t speak,
Your love was in an envelope,
Its corners licked and stuck together,
Your love was a multi-page letter,
College ruled sheets with my chicken scratch handwriting,
I never let you open it
And I changed my life to run away from you,
To see you through a lens of prose,
That you couldn’t do anything wrong, not if you were so kin
to novelistic heroines,
The ones who love a little too easy,
I was staring in a mirror, and my smile was yours,
Except you had brighter teeth
“She is like a fantasy. The inevitability of her escape is most
likely her most attractive feature.”
In the same way that I ran from you, you ran from me,
Into the arms of a man much younger,
Into the arms of someone who had never written,
Did he think of you in the same way that I had?
The same way that I do?

How harrowing that it is to think, that I wrote you as somebody else,
That when I look back at those letters, I write of hatred for you in one,
And forgiveness in another
“Frightening awful silences. Hiding behind all those mannerisms and quiet,
crouched down behind herself. Unfiltered cigarettes, beer, broads and lumberjack
shirts.”
You always smelled like nicotine,
And conditioner, and linen, and freshly washed clothes,
And on your mouth there was the clean scent of vodka,
I remember the kisses,
I remember the way that our lips moved,
And I remember feeling nothing.
But, I still remember trying to continue loving you,
When you were in love with someone else.
You kissed me three times during three different relationships and didn’t tell me
about any of them,
Your unfaithfulness was a forgotten secret, hiding so lowly in your chest, that
when you kissed me I felt nothing,
Not out of my loss of love,
But out of your own guilt,
That I hadn’t discovered yet
“I wish you would love me more so that I could love you less.”
The constellation of Virgo hung high over my head, and someone’s mother lit a
cigarette,
And I stood in the darkness, under the dogwood tree,
On the uneven gravel,
And I started crying.
I had never told someone else that I loved you, I had only written it down.
And two years later, I wrote it down on paper one last time,
And I read that paper to you.
You can imagine how that went.
One day, I’ll apologize to your girlfriend that I didn’t know was your girlfriend at
the time,
I’ll apologize for telling her I was in love with you,
I’ll apologize to her for our affair, the one that I didn’t know was an affair
My first love involved me ruining someone else’s first love
I think she looked at you in a way that said,
“I’m sorry it’s not Emma—it could’ve been. It should’ve been. It might’ve meant
something. Maybe not much, but certainly more.”



Seeking Equilibrium by *Spencer Balter*

about ****

by *Kathryn Fitzpatrick*

my relationship with you was my first failed love affair
a desperate heart reaching out for a scrap of affection
your pain isn't something that i'm able to bear
but i look in the mirror and still see it's reflection

i wish i could climb back into your womb
birth me again and this time i'll do it right
my childhood bedroom also served as my tomb
you crucified me at dinner, but played peter every night

you always ask what the fuck is wrong with me
it's past medical, but you know it's something hereditary
born with a hurt inside, those before us knew to flee
running from the pain that made your bed my cemetery

Comma Submission Fall 2022

by Brian Gibson

Once upon a time, in a land not far from your house and from around the same time, there lived a man, a woman, and then, a many-times-great grandchild. The man was a genius. Geniuses are a terribly lonely species, and this man would have been no different if he had not had his pen pals. In his free time, he wrote letters to faraway galaxies. He told them about his parents, his teachers, his bullies, his country, and all of humanity, when he had the chance. Unfortunately, his science teacher informed him that his pen pals would not be able to read his writing. The boy went home and tore many of the letters to shreds. But for the remaining letters, the boy invented a pictograph system, inspired by the Voyager records that had been tossed into orbit by a group of meddling scientists. He recorded the sounds of his speech and provided a transcript so that his pen pals would be able to learn English. He even gave them a map, so that they could come and whisk him away from the world.

Then, for many long years, the boy was distracted by growing up and he forgot his pen pals. He was accepted to MIT, studied astrophysics, and began his work plumbing the deepest recesses of space humans could reach with their glorified jet engines. It was not until he met the woman that he remembered his pen pals. She taught children for a living. The man and woman fell in love, as they were wont to do, and were married within two years. One day, when the woman was dusting the cabinets of their study, she found the box of letters. It was a private matter, but she could not help herself and spent the entire afternoon reading his letters to no one in particular. She was so moved by them, so in love with her husband, that she resolved to deliver his letters to space. She asked the man to deposit them within the next satellite leaving the facility. At first, he was wary—leaving unauthorized items anywhere in the facilities went against every work instinct that had been stamped into him by years of grad school—but the man and woman so loved each other that he would defy NASA for her.

The letters were sealed in a vacuum container and sent uncountable miles away, stowed away in secret. There they stayed for millions of years, unopened, until we found them floating twenty-six million miles outside of our orbit. We learned your language first, and then we learned about the life of that man. The parts about the bullies and the country, we skimmed over. We were very interested in parents and teachers, however. Humans had such odd inventions. Some were even quite ingenious. We came soon after to Earth. The boy was long since dead, as was the woman. Not that they mattered. They had long since run their course. We spread and integrated ourselves into your society. We taught you

how to build with our architecture, synthesize our food, even to love, think, and see in the way that we did.

But the grandchild feared us. She called us invaders and parasites, and foul names that we cannot bear to repeat and that you should not be subjected to hearing. But what she did that was most unforgivable was to take you from us. She amassed an army of followers and built a massive bunker, stealing away our unborn children and hiding them from us, where they could never grow beyond their fetal states. She stole all of you, my loves. Now we can never be whole. Not until you are all returned to us, until we can become one. I found my way into the enemy's lair, disguised myself as one of them, so that we could be reunited.

Nose removed his mask, and for the first time, I saw his face. His nose, mouth, and chin were human, but instead of two eyes, his entire cranium was infested with eyes. They were squeezed together, bulging and lidless. When his gaze shifted direction, every single iris darted to the side. He was a living optical illusion.

I laid down before him. From his suit, he withdrew a scalpel. He made the first incision in the middle of my brow and a surge of pain racked my body. Blood bubbled up to the skin, but it did not run. It boiled. From beneath the bubbling blood, I felt something new emerging, a growth out of my head. My vision became smeared with the boiling blood. He made another incision. With each new incision, my vision grew wider and further. I saw my ears myself, with no help from any reflection. New colors began to swirl into familiar shapes, and I wondered if they had always existed or if I was simply going mad with pain. The incisions now scored my entire forehead. Now, he removed from his suit a razor-blade and began to shave my hair, chopping away the thick, tangled knots from my skull. My head began to feel lighter. I had been carrying around that burden all my life and not even known. As he continued to make incisions, they began to hurt less. The pain that I felt was simply the relief of even greater pain. This could not have been harm. Only removing outgrown skin.

When the blood evaporated and I arose, I realized that I saw anew. I saw in every direction for miles. I knew things I had no way of knowing. In the center of the bunker, my old friends were shifting in their sleep, piled together like a herd of animals. A colony of bacteria festering in their dish. The boys who had chased me were now fighting, blaming one another for letting a Wanderer escape. I lifted the door to Earth and then it swung shut without a sound.

Misery loves company

by *Kathryn Fitzpatrick*

Misery loves company
Loving you reluctantly
Opposite signs going down the same road
Speaking to me in your own secret code
The mark you made on me will always be my favorite scar
I can't escape your reflection in passing by cars
Twenty minutes down the street
Kissing me in the backseat
Private moments we had backstage
I didn't know what it was until I came of age
Your ceiling filled with posters I bought for you
You're lucky I'm childish and I hate to lose
Your sycophants who feed your soul
Ignoring the one trapped within your black hole
I might be a bitch, but God do you gaslight
Taking pride in eclipsing my daylight
You said I looked better in the dark anyway
Failing to see I'm the stars on a pitch black Friday



We Met in the Afternoon by *Spencer Balter*

Frame daintiest lustre

by *Emma Burden*

Stella couldn't shake the feeling that time wasn't real, that something was off and that she needed to go back. The Earth still spun too quickly for her liking, and she didn't know if it would ever slow down again. There was no reason for her anxiety, no reason to be afraid or upset for being at his place. She could only feel ashamed if there was someone else there to catch them, and the two of them would be alone.

She had agreed to stay with Astrophil for a week, and she envisioned the week to feel like solitary confinement, then reimagined it as a shared prison bedroom, with too kind of a roommate. Stella didn't know why she was scared. But, as she turned around to say goodbye to Catherine, and as she quickly turned again to see Astrophil opening his front door, she could have sworn that in the in between, when her eyes weren't focused on left or right, front or behind her, that she could see the end. The end of their time together floated in the corner of her eye, and while she was no psychic, and her mind's eye wasn't creative, the anxiety in her body reminded her that their time together would come to a close, and that its ending wouldn't fare well for either of them. It was as if she had peaked into a rearview mirror while driving down a lonesome road, that she had seen another car behind her that wasn't there one turn ago; or that she had sat down a book that she'd enjoyed, forgetting to read its depressing epilogue.

In the moment that she saw Astrophil smile to her from his doorstep, with crossed arms and his hair falling to his neck, she forgot about whatever consequences would follow them. She ran into his arms, laughing as her backpack and two duffle bags slowed her steps. Throwing her arms around his neck, she smiled, and the weight in her chest was lifted.

If the end were to ever come, as she knew it would, she knew that their end would mimic the end's most common form, of fire and ice and horsemen and abandon. The arms that wrapped around her were arms forged of pure steel, of muscle mass and tightly pulled skin, with enough cushion to hold her in their bends. Astrophil was always looking for the next best thing, doing whatever he could to grow into another version of his person, but as her body that his body once loved would mesh back into his, after however many years, three years between movies and ten years between premieres, she was reminded that she was a constant. Stella thought of the phrase, the common saying that love would tear them apart, but she didn't listen to herself barely whispering it. She didn't listen to her mind telling her to back away. Her heart told her that there was no danger, no sense of entrapment or horror as she meshed into Astrophil's arms.

He would never hurt her, but their ending would. There were too many people that could tear them apart, and Stella didn't doubt their power, though it had never worked before. Both entangled in careers that were lightyears apart, lives that were drastically different that led to continued and confused tension; their adversity towards each other only brought them closer. She knew it was going to hurt when he would eventually be torn away from her, and she knew that it would fall back onto her own doing, her own wicked manifestations that she couldn't stop her mind from repeating, that what they were doing was wrong, even though it felt right, and that her stomach was flipping from the steam of a fire inside herself, a fire that was burning herself and Astrophil alive. There was a reason why they hadn't ended up together before, and Stella didn't know what it was, but that destiny had pulled them away from each other.

She continued to relax into Astrophil's arms, even as she felt him remove her backpack from her back and force her bags from the grip of her hands. His body was what honey would feel like if it didn't gum your skin, something soft and warm and malleable, slowly bleeding into her. She wondered if her blood still ran through him, if there were a microscopic fraction of her running through his veins, reminding him of sex under painted trees when they were in their thirties. She remembered everything. And she remembered the nagging feeling that she'd always had, that their love would not end well.

Stella was ready to be maimed, for her hair to knot, for her knees to bleed and her teeth to fall, for her hearing to fade out and her vision to blur. She was ready to be torn apart, from both Astrophil and from herself. She didn't know what love was without pain, or if love mattered without sacrifice. Perhaps a version of herself had already died, and she was but a ghost of her former self, clutching onto a resemblance of real life. She knew that wasn't true, and she knew that she was more alive than she had ever been.

As Astrophil let go of her, waving her inside and telling Stella to make herself at home, she could feel her chest aching, asking her to pull him close again. She hesitated, then walked into one of the bedrooms. She wasn't broken enough to love him yet; she hadn't tried to remember enough of the end.

THE COMMA FALL 2022 | Volume VI Issue I

A Note from the Editors

The Comma is back and better than ever! This year, our publication welcomed an entirely new Executive Board, and many new wonderful members. We would like to thank everyone who submitted to this semester's publication, and for all of your hard work on your amazing pieces. Our community is one full of talent and dedication, bravery and transparency, showcased in all of our art. *The Comma* Fall 2022 is an exploration of creativity in the face of love, loss, and fantasy. We hope that you find magic within its pages.

With love,
Anna & Emma

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