



*red*cedar
REVIEW

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redcedar **REVIEW**

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EDITOR'S NOTE

JACOB LARGEN

The dissonance between the year that we have all endured and every preceding year of our lives is definite, and more than ever before we have all—collectively and independently—had ample time to reflect on ourselves and the world around us. Though there has been an immense amount of tragedy, injustice, and hardship over the past sixteen months, we have to hope that through this period of introspection and observation, a boundless swell of empathy and compassion has occurred within us and manifested among one another. A fundamental part of understanding is expressing, and I believe that the *Red Cedar Review* has provided a mode of expression for at least a handful of voices, and this is something that I am genuinely excited to share with you.

Unlike the previous editions of the journal, the entirety of Volume 56 was discussed, edited, and produced remotely. From September to December of last year, my staff and I worked fiercely to collect and discuss prose, poetry, and visual art from undergraduates at a myriad of universities, all while in the confines of our own rooms. We knew that the submissions were going to reflect the state of our world, as it is the artist's responsibility to do so, but opposed to assimilating pieces that spoke to the unique experiences of 2020 with the rest of our submissions, we created a category with the sole intention of providing a platform to individuals who needed to share their experiences. This is something that I am intensely proud of, and I hope that you can find a sense of understanding and solidarity in the texts and artwork that we have had the honor of publishing.

If it is possible to do so, I would like to set last year aside and acknowledge the countless submissions which sought to explore issues, ideas, and emotions which are not overtly related to the events of 2020 and exist in a more familiar space. When looking at the recent responses to the world around us thus far, these submissions are the ultimate testament to the integrity of what we, as a society, fundamentally understand and care about. When all of the systems that we know and rely on seem to fracture, we still want to read and write

about love, hope, and companionship, we still want to lose ourselves in a great narrative or a compelling piece of nonfiction. This, to me at least, is one of the more palpable silver linings that I have witnessed.

The production of Volume 56 of the *Red Cedar Review* would not have been possible without our dedicated editorial staff and our group of readers who have volunteered their time week after week to the journal and the pieces contained within it. I would like to specifically thank the Assistant Managing Editor, Jarett Greenstein, as the relief of having another individual to help pilot the journal was immense. Another crucial part of the *Red Cedar Review* is Professor Kurt Milberger and his class of dedicated artists, editors, and thinkers who willingly took on the arduous process of refining the journal into its most presentable and honest form. Finally, I would be remiss not to acknowledge Dr. Robin Silbergleid, whose mentorship and seemingly endless wisdom has impacted my understanding of publication as much as the journal itself.

I greatly appreciate your interest in Volume 56 of the Red Cedar Review. I hope you enjoy reading the literature and beholding the artwork contained within as much as I did.

Warm Regards,

Jacob M. Largen
Managing Editor

THE F WORD

AMBER WILLIAMS

Walking in that garden,
The one filled with sunflowers
And other colorful blooms I cannot name,
I am reminded that it's okay to be
delicate.

As the lavender drops of rain
Fall on my lace skirt and
Cloud soaked skin,
I am reminded of the fragility of myself.
I too could fall like the heavenly drops.

It's there.
Hidden under layers of the masks
I use for the characters I have to play,
It's still there.

I could crumble like a chrysanthemum.
If the wind blew too strong
I would join the other dandelion seeds.

At this realization,
I am angry at my weakness,
At my humanity.

Then I remember,
It's human to
feel, to grieve, to
be Fragile.

Humans are simply
Glass brought to life
By the twinkle of the sunlight

Breaking is always a possibility

AGAPE

JO CLARK

We are boys again,
wild as the crocus
that will carry us away
like Zeus once did.

Our skin
soft as the petals,
limbs jagged as
cliff rose—

elbows pushing down
the earth so we may
see each other.
No thought of flowers

we'll turn into
when the gods
bottle our blood
on the battlefields.

Surely Hyacinthus
is not the only one.
Our hands clutch
Narcissus,

uncalloused, yet bearing
death along the lines.
If I could run my index
just across your palm

I would feel the day
your breath stopped.
If I could kiss this
hollow of your throat

I might still taste
the arrow. Look
at us here. Imagine
we would one day

hold spears so sharp
I can still feel the point
piercing my belly.
Oh lover, most beloved,

and best of all Greeks,
did you know through
every layer of Trojan
stone, this one of ours

is still warm?

YOUR HAND

ANASTASIA SIMMS

Running through my hair
Soft gentle safe
Pulling my head back
Hard, it hurts
Against my cheek
Soft gentle safe
Smacks me again
Hard, it's red
Tracing down my face
Soft gentle safe
Wrapped around my neck
Hard, air stops
Brushes away my tears...

How can I cry over your hand
as I cry into it?
How can the same hand
bring me joy and pain?
How can you tell me this is love?

If they knew,
they would ask:
How can I stay?

How can I leave?

...you're holding my hand.

SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 1

NOAH MILLER



WHEN WE WALKED

AUGUST REYNOLDS

i sit at the top
of that concrete
monstrosity

“call me August now, okay?”
i say

many shared smiles
were had here

i place a dead flower
where i sit

it was so beautiful

oh how it was just that

I AM FROM THE HOPELESS GENERATION

ANASTASIA SIMMS

I am from the hopeless generation.

I was born 177 days before the Twin Towers fell. My generation has no memory of a world without security cameras, airport pat downs, and Patriotic Actors.

I am from the generation who prayed in high school every time someone dropped a book or smacked a locker, thinking a shooter was about to take us too early from our mothers.

My generation has been told endlessly by our elders we must work hard. So we work until our schedules don't have time for bathroom breaks, until we forget eight straight hours of sleep, until our backs turn to rock and our stomach linings erode, until our eyes burn themselves shut, until our brains break down under the pressure of it all so we gobble down some antidepressants and head to practice, sore before the workout even starts. We work hard to attend colleges that cost more than our grandparent's forty-year career salaries in the hopes of joining a job market that they wouldn't even recognize. We feed into a social security system that will pay for their retirement but will crash before we ever reach their age. We don't complain though. We learned early that, for us, security in our society was only ever going to be an illusion anyway.

I come from a generation of girls who are told how lucky we are to live in this day and age where we are free, but who have also been told our whole lives, in one way or another, that we somehow don't look the way we are supposed to. We come to find that #wetoo have a story to tell, often before we have a high school diploma. Then we are told that speaking up and acting strong makes us stupid, over-emotional, or even nasty, so I wonder sometimes: free to be whom exactly?...Certainly not ourselves.

And I come from a generation of boys who can't even ponder such feelings because that of course would make them pussies. And there can be nothing worse in this world than being a pussy (except possibly having one).

And to my darling peers outside the cisgender binary, don't worry about your problems; we've been assured they're not real seeing as you're just confused and don't really exist.

This of course cannot be said for my generation's queer community, which I imagine has a bone to pick with Dr. Seuss. You see he told us that once the animals in the Jungle of Nool heard the Whos in Whoville, they refused to burn them in Beezle-Nut stew, but my generation has found that after years of shouting, "We are here! We are here! We are here!" in rainbow colors and big parades, the animals still want to burn the proudest among us.

I am from a generation that knows if we are to say all lives matter, all lives must matter equally.

This summer, my generation stayed indoors and covered our faces. We worked low paying jobs selling food and services to ungrateful, mouth-breathing, personal-space-invading assholes because we are the generation tasked with building adult lives in a world full of people acting like children. And we know that those of us who survive will need all the money we can get to stay alive since medicines cost as much as car payments and our government has decided "affordable" is now a dirty word.

My generation is poised to inherit a poisoned world. Its current possessors are too scared to do something about it, so they've tried to convince us nothing is dying. But perhaps this is just an easier story for them to spin. In reality, all the carbon they've destroyed now lies between two pages on their desk, through which the signature on their wills will transfer down, effectively signing off our deaths with theirs, until one day only cockroaches will populate the estate sale.

We are asked to understand a world that we are too young to remember, that is too changed for those with longer memories to understand. Where does that leave us, we wonder.

We are from the hopeless generation.

But we are the hope.

We can do better.

ELEGY FOR CATHERINE HOWARD

EMMA CAMP

Catherine,
my small bird, my ocean

pearl, your image comes to me
only in moments of great

thankfulness. Only when my cup
runs over with every

thing you never knew: A mother
to touch your wrist, a night to sleep

in, a boy to look at you—
a boy who is not a man, a boy

who does not call you wife.
In these moments, your scissored

body is there. All cotton, all velvet,
all of sixteen and gone yet.

In your age of downfall, I
had a summer thick with promises,

sticky as an orange peel.
In the pink of July, my sisters

and I swam in an ocean too blue
for comfort—

the water was more intimate
than a womb. It cradled our unfettered

bodies, tumbling like otters in the waves.
What a gift it is to be young

and unburdened. To hold the wind
in your palm like a pearl.

Catherine,
I love you because I fear I know you—

in my mother, in my sister, in every
girl who has had a man turn

away from her
and then back again.

When I have a daughter,
I will tell her everything

and nothing. I will sit
at the foot of her bed, and pray

she never grows pretty enough for
silence. When I first take her

to the ocean, she will swim with the native
freedom of a seal.

I will watch her in her lightness
and imagine you, somehow

unbound, somehow gliding.
Blessedly oblivious to what a

miracle it is to be part of the salt
and the sand.

SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 4

NOAH MILLER



HANSEN STREET

BRIANA WILSON

There's a home on Hansen,
with hedges who hide the hideous
fiend that contained the same
four walls a child couldn't even love.

We are not so nuclear, combusting like
stacked C4 when there is no Father—
the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.
Our Father, whose eyes loved to watch.

Choirs of angels plead to the heavens
why they left their dust in these walls,
and how these crimson steps
could scream bloody murder louder than her.

If I knew their secrets I'd have to tell,
and that's the last thing I want to do.
This street isn't too forgiving,
I guess I'll find out someday.

FIREPROOF

MICHAEL TURLE

I have traipsed in robes of jade through
azure gardens—round the spines of
ancient lovers, muses' children who
breathe with eyes I cannot know.

I can but imagine how bright their fires, the warmths they held
inside their hearts
and how the love must have consumed them, an inferno of
yearning, paradiso of
trust and tongues and hands and understanding—THAT is what
love must be.

Paradise seems to have locks and keys, and there is snow on the
ground and icicles on the gates, and sometimes if I get close enough,
I feel the flamelash on my skin, feel all the pain of being burned
without the joy of being fuel, of burning with a purpose in mind.

In azure gardens in robes of jade amidst the
dead who have known love and breathe its
flames up through their bones
I sit and shiver once in solace, in soulless, in soma, in solitude.

And I wonder if I've missed something, some class I
skipped taught in the womb just before we all move
on to bigger and colder things:

"This is how to love someone," the
amniotic fluid writes in chalk upon the
uterine wall and everyone else took
notes; "This is how to lose yourself in
passions and kisses and twirling of hair
and this is how to get all that instead of

eulogizing love at 1 AM in your notes app."

I have traipsed in robes of jade through lovers' gardens of poesy and read their breaths, their gasps for air in the Elysian inferno that love seems to be. And I have stood in soft snow drifts pissing over borrowed boots and I have never felt that way and I do not know if I will—and I redo my fly and I stare at the snow, and I scream softly unto it, "there must be more than this!"

and the snow gives no answer
and I go back inside.

And I think that I am fireproof,
immune to love's incineration,
scorched and scalded by its heat but
never turned to ash; and I have seen
the paper people burn away in
ecstasy, and I have longed to join
with them, to have a heart of
gasoline and be my own love's
effigy—to burn with them myself.

I must be the bastard son of some frail
phoenix, of some dragon stoned: I've
asbestos wings but a matchbox heart that
cannot burn, that will not burn no matter how
fiery it ought to—salamandrine feathers,
adamantine bones in a world of pitch and
napalm, in a world of fire and love.

I have traipsed in robes of jade through
azure gardens ablaze with truth. My
heart longs to incinerate—my soul
remains yet fireproof.

HINDSIGHT IS 2020

ELYSIA BASKINS

For the 2020 Pandemic, we came armed with
Lysol Liquor, we had to buy from our strung-out
sister state: New Jersey; snuck across the
bridge like it was the Prohibition

People with privilege, fleeing Philly back to their
low-risk homes with low interest loans and 26% of
us living below the poverty line; below me.

The Big Company overlords owe me at least that much
(with a smile stamped on every box)
Hey, at least food stamps got increased thirty bucks, and
there's that stimulus check my brother never got.

I stock shelves in a medical-grade face mask and
shop for food I can't afford for people who can
afford not to care that I can't afford food, but I
have to throw it away every day at work.

This is the system, and yes, this is how it's designed to work
Capitalism is a circle-jerk, meanwhile a stray cat gives birth
on my front porch and everyone feeds it. You don't have to
look far to see the people who give are the people who need it.

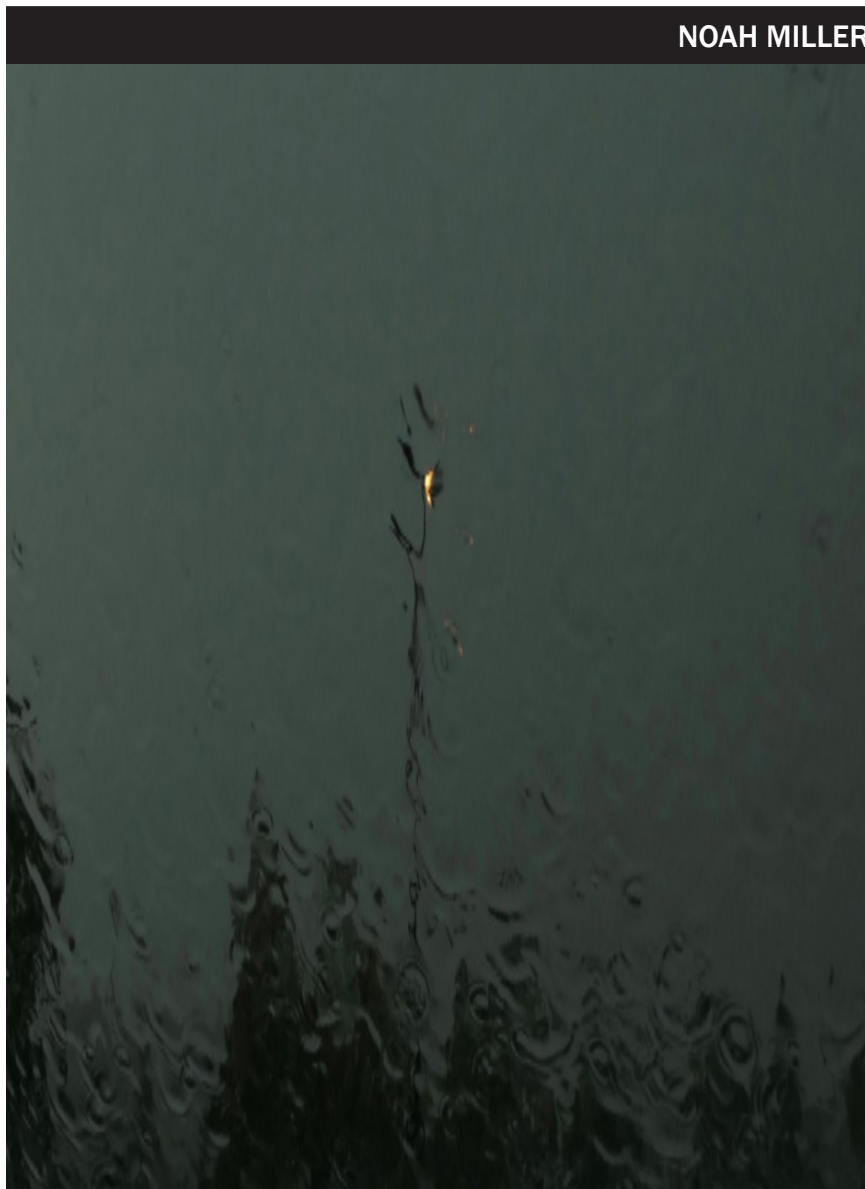
Watching statues topple over, logos changed, while
reparations remain unpaid, white people, moving into the
places they bombed, calling it home, asking
brown people, *where are you from?*
No, really, where are your parents from, tell me.?

Oh sorry!
I forgot the whole world is private property

And I can't be from here
(I guess I'm not from anywhere)

SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 6

NOAH MILLER



A FILTERED EXPERIENCE

KIMBERLY PACK



I GO TO THE EYE DOCTOR

M.P. ARMSTRONG

May 13

I go to the eye doctor.

I wake up on a Thursday with my sclera stained red, lids swollen nearly shut, and a pool of tears on my pillowcase, likely teeming with germs. I assume I have pinkeye. I wonder how I picked up pinkeye without leaving the house. I have not left the house since March 15. I schedule an appointment.

March 15

I am in an airport. I am dropping off a friend for a flight. Our university has promised that I will see them again on April 6.

I am in a grocery store. I am filling a cart with canned green beans and boxed pasta. I can hear the governor talking about restrictions with deadlines of May 1.

I am in a bubble tea shop, with the ghosts of laughter, drinking almond milk tea, slurping boba, placing Scrabble tiles with a clack; I am in my dorm room, inhabited last year by strangers, this year by my best friend and I, next year by another friend and I, while this year's roommate moved abroad; I am in my childhood bedroom, high school echoing in my ears, furniture drifting into a more college-like arrangement.

May 13

I go to the eye doctor.

I will no longer go back to my university on April 6. My roommate will no longer move to Italy in the fall, and I will no longer move into our old dorm. My state is somewhat open, which is why I am able to go to the eye doctor.

There are other cars in the lot, parked at all angles like the plastic pieces in Battleship, all their drivers are players who could sink me. I stare out the windshield, my phone clock ticking toward my move, collecting courage in my hand like the game's little pegs—red for hit, white for miss—until I have to enter the office.

A paper in the front window promises bold protections: masks. Thermometers. Six feet apart. The secretary at the check-in desk disinfects my credit card when I use it to cover the \$20 copay; and asks me a series of questions.

Are you displaying any symptoms of COVID-19

Are you an essential worker with regular contact with the public

Have you been in contact with any known infected person, left the country, or left the state in the past two weeks

She looks up from the computer where she has been recording my responses and clarifies, as if used to patients who have watched the passage of time and their awareness of clocks and calendars evaporate into nothingness, "that was April 29."

April 29

I wake up at ten in the morning for a virtual work shift at eleven. I was up until four last night; I am exhausted, and I do this every day anyway because my friends live in other time zones. Europe — we watch live piano streams together. The West Coast—we talk about books with apocalypses as the main characters. The Midwest — we fail to fulfill our usual hour-long goodbyes. And the East Coast—we

change paths before the pandemic devoured him.

I want to know what he talked about in the appointment that I helped him schedule, what his life looks like now, what his eyes look like now. By then, the semester will be over. I am not rehired for the summer. I will never know.

I stay up until four in the morning with a friend in Detroit, and we talk about movies and school projects and not the EMT. My shift is over.

May 13

I go to the eye doctor.

I walk into the waiting room, where tape marks which seat I am allowed to choose. A mother and her young child, who has eyedrop-enlarged pupils, join me and begin to chat with each other about the child's recent surgery.

My lungs push a cough into my throat.

The mother and her child are joking about whether her father is mowing the lawn like he promised, and I want to suppress the sound because I cannot explain where it comes from, but I also cannot stop it. It blooms, wet and resonant, across the room like an infected bomb, and I am the detonator. I go to the eye doctor, into the examination room, and she shines a pointed light at me, and I am afraid that she will notice, buried beneath the layers of bacteria, that I am somehow at fault. A danger in her lobby. In my lungs.

May 13

I leave the eye doctor.

I was as right that I had pinkeye, easily treatable with medicated drops. She tells me that it should begin to heal soon, unless it was an indication of COVID-19, in which case, I am supposed to call back. I tell exactly one other person, switching into Italian (*devo prendere la mia temperatura ogni giorno e tornare al dottore se ho un febbre*) because while I am not scared—I have not left the house since March

15—I am afraid of putting it in black and white, in English.

She does not tell me how much longer it will take for the rest of the symptoms—simple existence, the waiting room, the life—are supposed to last.

I do not ask.

RAMBLINGS

ELLIE WILKIE

i like old places
forgotten places
where grass grows high
and creatures lurk
adventure
surprise
places just mine
i like secrets
cradled in wood
kept secrets but for me
ancient houses
with dusted books
all about on the floor
big empty spaces
with room to run
i like stones amassed together by hand
hands that live on in my head
and heads that live on through their words
i like the feeling of being someplace where i'm inconsequential
surrounded by something greater
history
a story
i like the way the moonlight looks on old roads
or the way sunlight looks on fallen boards
painting pictures that change every day

i like old things
i like you the same way.

CONAN O'BRIEN

JESSICA MARDIAN

Summer filled you with regret; maybe it was the flowers
or the rays of sun on the back porch. You prayed for me
when I was doing just fine. The cup tipped over months ago
and the water has already dried up, but you blot the floor
with a paper towel anyway. Willing me to notice,
to remember and want like you do.

"Never left good enough alone" written across your forehead.
Flipping through the late-night television and saving a bottle of wine
just in case I decide to call you: a childish way of thinking.
Lying under the ceiling fan that never stops, your skin rises to the
cold.

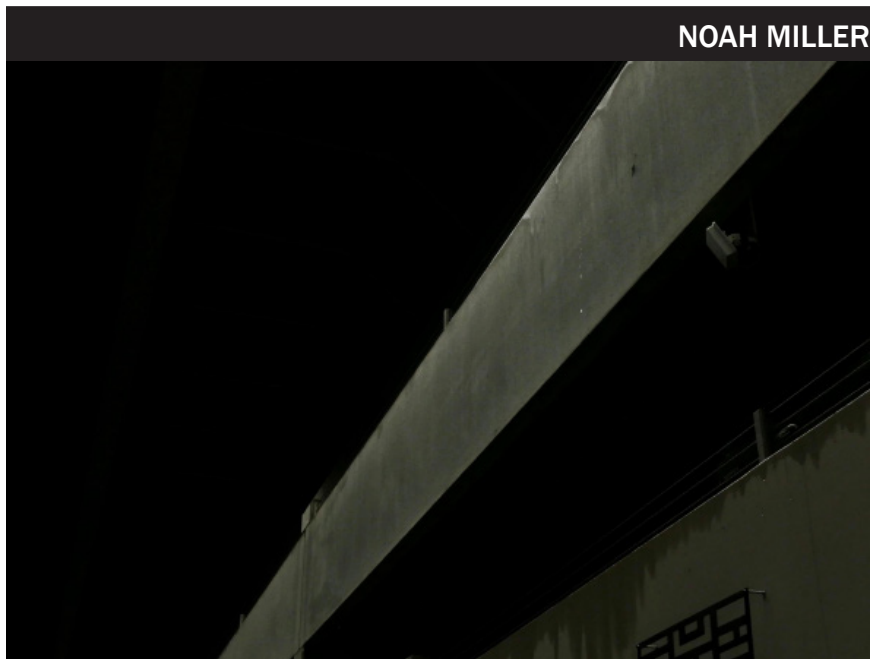
Sounds of the Atlantic rupturing your eardrums, and another glass
of ginger ale for the upset pride.

It's not the same for you, maybe it never was—
master of-easier-said-than-done. Unclear intentions
and the drum of half-hearted excuses slowed
my heart rate. I backed myself into a corner
on your bed. You stayed by the window,
counting the ways to hurt me with your fingers.

Come to the nights that stretched themselves thin;
the quiet in the car after a week without contact.
Our fingers laced together in a sacred loop of hope
that the other wouldn't let go.

Maybe it was the flowers of the rays of sun
that drew regret out from your pores.
The smell of it driving you mad, pushing you
to seek comfort in what was, in me.
Too late and all too well.

SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 8



IT'S RAINING UPSTAIRS

MICHAEL TURLE

It's the rain that blisters down like bullets as thunder
rocks the trees adrift, makes out to break your
windows if you don't come out to play, so you
prattle down the staircase, shake on your best rain
boots and find the world is bone dry as soon as
you're out the door.

It's nostalgia for the kind of things you've never known before, but
feel like you've lost without recourse, without potential to replace;
a pedestal decked with dust and dreams.

It's a tongue in your mouth that you do not know by heart
but want to and dearly and desperately, but it is gone
before you can try.

It's the thorns on your lips biting down into a fruit that has hard,
fleshy armor made of spines and you know it's sweet inside, but
your teeth can't break the skin and there's blood on your lips now
and you must stop to get a towel.

It's nights spent in the practice of too tight left hand handshakes
and tears shed over comics that weren't meant to make you cry
—or at least not that way, you freak.

It's a tattoo on your wrist that you do not remember getting
of some words, perhaps a poem, in a language you can't
read, but you have a thousand friends who can and you ask
them what it says but all they ever tell you is "You have to
find out for yourself."

And you will get bonebreakingly tired of
"You have to find out for yourself."
Perhaps that's just what it says—
"You have to find out for yourself."

It's a painting on a wall in a museum that doesn't
exist of a white staircase to an attic with a blue mist
falling out; and you'll never know what's up there
because it's a painting for Christ's sake

in a museum of your illusion
but wouldn't it be nice to know?

Wouldn't it be nice to know.
It's raining upstairs.

FLOWER

MOLLY SCULLY

Have you ever seen a flower
in a crack in the pavement?
It has no business being
there and yet, it exists.

It's in your path, but
you won't step on it.
something surviving like that deserves
to be spared. it should be protected.

so, you walk around it
and you look back to
ensure it remained
intact, but then
instantly forget about
it.

but not me. so, now
when I see a flower
in a crack, in the
pavement, I crush
it.

HEART

ABIGAIL ALBIN

You know, people should sit on their front porches more often. Really! It ain't just for old folks sitting in rocking chairs, watching the world go by before they bite it. It's peaceful. I can just sit on the steps of my front porch, ball glove in hand as I oil up the leather to protect it from cracking—especially in this dry heat we've been having—and just do my thing, think my thoughts, get in my rhythm. Summer mornings are good for this kind of thing. My mom, well...nine months outta the year, she's riding my ass about school. Not that something like that is unique to her, but a guy gets sick of even well-intentioned nagging. But she leaves me alone in the summer, turns a complete one-eighty and tells me that life's short, that you could and should fill up these summer days as full as you could. It's freedom, she says, making your own choices. Well, I ain't gonna say no to that. My best buddy's dad says a man knows what he wants, no matter how stupid that thing might be, and he knows how to get it. Well, I know what I want today, and I know how to get it. So, I guess that makes me a man. Just in time, too—I'm starting high school in the fall, and high school ain't a place for pussies. Unless you, like, go to the school they go to in that movie *Grease*, in which case you are a total fucking drag, and man, I can't believe I wasted two hours of my life watching that. Thanks, Mom. Your shitty taste in movies continues to astound.

I set down my oil rag and punched and flexed my glove for a minute, breaking it back in, then I picked up the ball that had been sitting at my feet. I tossed it up above my head, putting a good spin on it, then caught it in my bare hand. My thumb found itself tracing over the worn, red laces, riding the ridges as I turned it over and over in my hand. This one had seen the broad side of a bat a few times, you could tell. It might not be a bad idea to pick up a few new ones here soon, but I kinda attach sentimental value to these things. This one had seen me through my first double play, and I line-driven it straight into Jimmy Funicell's balls last summer. You just don't forget things like that, and why would you want to? This ball was clearly good luck

this time caught it in my gloved hand.

It was time to round up some ballplayers.

Problem was, Dallas was outta town—they had family down in Tulsa or something, and they visited every year, and they'd all come back looking as if they had forgotten that Long Island even existed. Guess that's what happens when you spend a few weeks with cowboys. Anyways, Dallas is always the best catcher around, but he wasn't here. We would have to make do, which meant I was gonna have to pay a visit to Georgie, who was just about the worst baseball player in Nassau County. Georgie was a good guy and all—kinda quiet, total dweeb, that sort of thing—and we'd sort of taken him under our wing. He wasn't that hard to get along with, either, considering he hardly ever said anything. The other guys teased him pretty hard, and I used to, too, but then his dad died, and I guess that was enough to convince me I should stop being such a dick to him. Mom said it was a shame it took me that long. She's probably right.

"*Georgie Parker!*" I yelled at his house as I sauntered up the front walk, knowing that twerp was always up early and probably waiting on me to show up to fetch him—we had a routine and all. I knocked extra loud this morning and flashed him my widest grin when he opened up the front door.

"I could hear you, ya know," he said, trying to pretend like he was mad, but I knew he wasn't. Georgie was no pretender. "I know you know I can hear you when you pull that crap."

"I do know." I shrugged happily. "You ready to go or what?"

Georgie sighed and reached behind the door, bat ready to go with the glove hanging off it, hand-me-downs from me and Dallas. He was just like the Boy Scouts—always prepared. He must have been real smart, maybe even some sort of psychic. He always knew exactly when Dallas and I were gonna darken his doorstep and drag him out to the park, where I was sure the rest of the guys were already waiting, led by the aforementioned Jimmy Funicello and his low sperm count, thanks to yours truly (not like we need any of his offspring around someday.) We had this routine down pat now, so we were in and out. The sun was shining, birds were singing to beat the band, and on days like this, it just felt good to be alive and walking down a sidewalk with a buddy. You know the days—not too hot yet, with a breeze, and the air smells like the earth and cut grass, and your glove fits just right, and your ballcap is blocking the worst of the sun so it's not in our eyes... yeah. Those are the days.

“Hey, T?” Georgie was the only person who called me T instead of Tony. It kinda made me laugh; it was like he was trying to be cool, and it was kinda funny, you know? Cuz Georgie’s cool, but he’s not cool, not like a lot of the other guys—his glasses are too big, I think that’s the problem. Anyways, I let him call me that, but I don’t think I’d let anybody else get away with it, because they’d just be teasing. Georgie’s always real sincere about everything, so I can’t get mad at him.

“Sup, Georgie.”

“Why d’you guys keep asking me to play with you? You know I’m not any good, right?”

So self-aware. I sized him up a bit as we walked, trying to tell if he was really in the mood for listening, or just feeling sorry for himself. I hate when people do that—when they go fishing for exactly what they want to hear. They set it up with just the right bait and everything so they can feel all vindicated to get people to compliment them when they really don’t want to give them one, or so they can make themselves out to be some sort of victim when they’re really not. But like I said, Georgie’s just so sincere—he wasn’t playing some pity card. “Can I be honest with ya, man?” He nodded. “You’re right—you ain’t the best ballplayer out there. And I know a lot of guys give you shit, and Dal and I used to, too, and we’re sorry about it. But you know what?”

“What?”

I slung my free arm around his shoulder and grinned. “You’re one’a us now, George. Dal and I, we got your back. You’re our buddy, whether we like it or not.”

Georgie gave me some serious side-eye. “And if I don’t like it?”

I stopped cold on the sidewalk and stared at Georgie for a good solid minute, watching his face again. He played it real cool for a bit there, but then his façade started to crack and his lip twitched and my face split into a wide grin. Man oh man—he was becoming a regular chip off the ol’ block. Dallas would sure be proud to see our influence when he got back.

“Man!” I cried. “Shit, you had me goin’. You’re becomin’ a regular smartass. Now shut the fuck up and keep walkin’ before I dropkick your ass. I don’t wanna keep ’em waitin’.”

Just as I thought, Jimmy and Co. were loitering around the ball diamond at the park, lazing around in the outfield under a wide blue sky. Looks like Georgie and I were the last two to arrive, and here

I'd thought I'd gotten myself out the door early. As we approached the other guys heard us, and lolled their heads in our direction, slowly chewing on their gum and rolling it around in their mouths and blowing bubbles that popped with a loud crack! Better than snuff, I suppose. That shit'll rot your teeth. A couple of them waved, and a few others nodded their heads. Mostly, though, we were all so used to hanging around each other that greetings weren't necessary it was a given we'd all be there.

"Where's Dallas?" One of them shouted at me. His absence was glaring. Dallas was easily the best catcher around, no matter what Jimmy and his cronies said—they denied it just because they were jealous, and neither Jimmy nor his buddies even played catcher. He was just better at what *he* did than they were at what *they* did, and I guess you can blame his old man for that. My old man, he had never had a catch with me in the yard like Dallas' old man. He's responsible for the deep crack in the coffee table, though, and the missing pieces from my mom's silver service that had been passed down to her, and the long hours she had to work now that he's gone. Mr. Mathews has always let me come over and play catch with him and Dallas, but it's not quite the same. Georgie and I get each other on this one in a way Dallas never will. That's why I think it was easier for me to come around to him in the end.

"The wild, wild West," I replied. They all hollered their Yee-haw's! and then Georgie and I fell into the grass with the rest of them, sprawling out and getting up on our elbows so we could get our game plans together.

"Well, we lose Dallas, we get Parker," one of the first basemen grinned, nudging Georgie's shoulder.

"Shit, we get Parker ev'ry week, and he don't even got the decency to get any better," Jimmy drawled, smirking dangerously at my buddy, and I rolled my eyes.

"And you got the same damn lines every week, Jimmy, but we put up with you anyways," I shot back in retaliation. "Anyways, are we here to play or to shit on each other? Cuz I don't know about you guys, but I wanna play."

We always split up into the same teams, so there was no need for a couple of us to stand up and make a show of picking the guys we wanted like we did when we were in gym class. We used to do that, but we made some pussy-assed newbie a while back cry by picking him last, which was just awkward for everybody, so now we sort of

wordlessly divide ourselves up and take turns bringing new guys into the fold. Georgie's always on my team because none of the dicks on Jimmy's team—Jimmy especially—want him. Strategically, I get it; the guy goes bug-eyed whenever a ball so much as leisurely rolls his way. What I don't think a lot of these guys get, though, not even Dallas, is that we ain't playing for the pennant out here. Hell—we're teammates, been playing together on the same Little League and school teams forever, but put us all out here and suddenly it's Yankees-Red Sox. Maybe it's the summer heat, or the complete and total lack of supervision, but we go absolutely buck-wild when it's just us, fifteen or so guys staring each other down through the grime and sweat and sun in our eyes, hawking up saliva and swears at each other like it was game seven, bottom of the ninth, of the World Series. But at the same time, with so many of us stuck here in this town from day to day, it was everything. Everything.

As I dug my heels into the dust at my hallowed position at shortstop, I looked back at Georgie in the outfield, eyes huge behind those Coke bottle glasses, already looking nervous at the chance a ball might come his way. This wasn't Georgie's everything. I knew that. Dallas did. Everybody on this diamond did. Our mothers knew, too, even as they had sat around Mrs. Mathews' kitchen over cups of coffee and her famous cherry pie, plotting.

A boy like that could use a friend, they insisted.

They had to know a kid like Georgie Parker, with his shirt tucked into his jeans and his hair slicked back the way it was, would get eaten alive out here. Moms are always coming up with crazy schemes, though, and they never make any sense, much less the one our mothers had cooked up.

Invite him to play with you boys, they said. *He'll just be happy for the invitation.*

Moms are always finding the one kid that everybody feels sorry for and telling you to be their friend. Well, I can tell ya that Dal and I are real pissed off that it worked.

But that made me wonder, if we were such good friends, why all we ever did was play baseball when it was clear Georgie would rather be anywhere else.

Jimmy was always first up to bat for his team—he insisted, the jerk,

because he thought he was the best, even though everybody knew you should have your best hitter go second or third. He was used to Dallas being right behind him, and almost seemed thrown off by the lack of shit talk hitting him; Jack just didn't have that in him, just smiled as he warmed up our pitcher. Jimmy was clearly getting impatient as the duo got used to each other because Jack usually played outfield, but could be catcher in a pinch when Dallas was gone. So there was a lull as we waited for the game to start, and I turned to Georgie and pulled that old ball out of my pocket and raised it at him in question—maybe he'd like to toss it back and forth for a minute while we waited? Hell, maybe Georgie'd be a better player if he had a dad to play catch with him. But he didn't. He didn't even have Mr. Mathews like I did. So he had me. Georgie nodded and took a couple steps back. I threw the ball, and he gracelessly caught it.

"Hey, Georgie."

He tossed it back. Little low. "Yeah, T."

I made a point of slowing down a bit so Georgie could see my throwing form, start to pick up on it.

"Ya know, I was thinkin', and I wondering if maybe when Dallas gets back from playing Cowboys and Indians, we could go do some-thin' together, the three of us."

Georgie narrowed his eyebrows. "Like what?"

He pulled his elbow back and launched the ball, with a little more oomph than usual - so he had been watching. I wondered if some time in the Mathews' backyard would help him get even a little better. You can get better at just about anything if you just try at it, Mom likes to say, says that you can always get better even if you aren't the best. She may be a bit of a nag, but she is a pretty smart lady. and she's usually right, so I took her word on that one.

I caught the old ball and shrugged. "Whatever ya want. I mean, it's your turn to pick."

He thought about it for a few consecutive tosses. The guy hardly ever seemed to have an opinion. Whatever Dallas and I wanted to do, that's what we did, and it took me this long to figure out maybe that wasn't exactly fair. He still seemed sort of stunned by the question, though.

"...like what?" he repeated.

I caught the ball again, but this time I didn't throw it back and rolled my eyes at him.

"George." I was gonna ask him something snarky, like if he's ever

heard of having hobbies, but then I thought better of it, hearing my Mom's voice in the back of my head. She had probably learned how to astral project in order to keep me from being an asshole. I was just gonna have to help Georgie along here, offer him a bone. It's okay to have an opinion, Georgie-Boy. "They're showing *Raiders* this Saturday at the movie theater. Wanna go with us?"

"Hey, Tony! Quit flirtin', we're starting!" Jack yelled from behind the plate.

"Yeah, yeah!" I barked, but when I looked back at him, Georgie grinned. I nodded once back, and I knew I had my answer. Figured that'd be up his alley. Dallas was a nut for those movies, too. His dad could drive us. Simple. A man knows what he wants, after all, and he knows what he needs to do to get it. I turned my attention to home plate and stared Jimmy down.

"Alright, boys!" Jack hollered, pulling his mask down. "Let's play ball!"

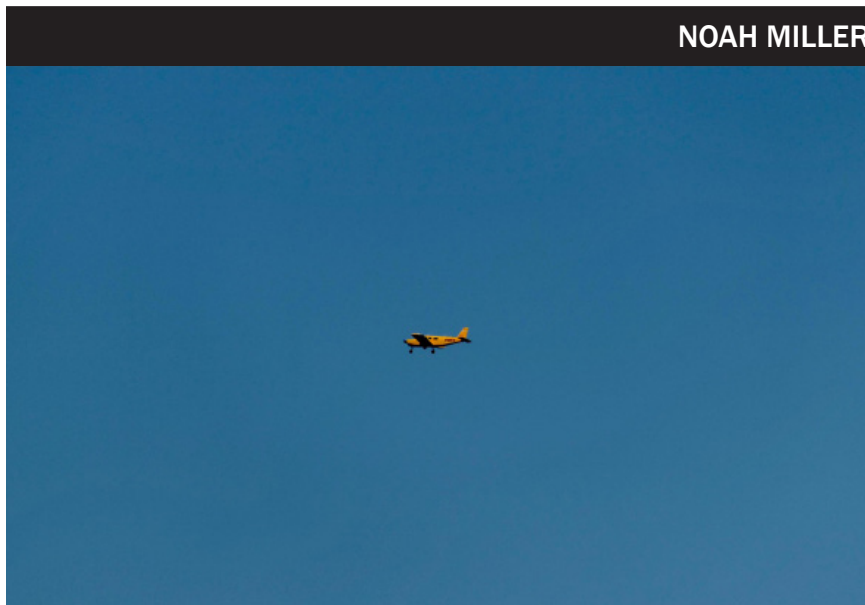
SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 9

NOAH MILLER



SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 10

NOAH MILLER



LOCKDOWN PANTOUM

ANASTASIA SIMMS

I want to go home.
Then, I realize I am home.
Which just makes me want to go to bed
even though I got enough sleep.

Then I realize I am home,
and the world outside feels big and exhausting,
even though I got enough sleep.
I sleep in every day.

And the world outside feels big and exhausting,
so I hide from it.
I sleep in every day
and yet I am tired,

so I hide from it.
I do as I'm told. I do nothing.
And yet I am tired.
How long can I keep this up?

I do as I'm told. I do nothing,
which just makes me want to go to bed.
How long can I keep this up?
I want to go home.

LIES OUTSIDE THE ST. THOMAS AQUINAS BATHROOM

JO CLARK

She does not waste time.

you

she says, and her eyes are the same color
as the olive tree that was broken down to build the
nativity scene

you know that if you become a nun,

your mother will go to heaven.

This is her gospel.

And it stumbles into my mouth like
transubstantiation,
drunk on the blood of hope—

It wedges itself between pews

and beneath fingernails,

creates an asthma attack

in place of a homily, the incense is burning

my grandmother's perfume,

I am consumed wholly, and the priest

eyes me at communion—

he can see the sin, heaving

in my chest.

I bow before my mother takes her first steps,

watch his lips move, say to her

take this and eat of it.
Amen.

I can always stand up straighter after supplication.
My palms upraised, and curved into the right hand
of my father, calling out the Lord's prayer.

Well-being for days, until

Peace be with you, she says, Another Girl
—with oak-tree eyes—she takes my hand,
softer than knees pressed against the slate
floor, shoulders curved, chisel fingers scrawling scripture on the
bathroom door.

I beg every girl, every nun, each twisting snake in my chest —
tell my mother hello in heaven.

POEM AT 21

KATEY FUNDERBURGH

9 years younger than Sophia Sanchez, she says

It is midnight. We absorb each other's language in the wine-drunk of the back concrete under a sky too full of ash to see stars. In the morning I am awake before everyone else - the sky is blotted pink but wildfire suns are not allowed to be beautiful. This is the rule I remember when I drive alone and hungover. I think I see mountains but this is a mistake—the sky is too gray with the home I miss burning into a synonym for fog. My grandmother smokes cigarettes.

I smoked half of one last night
Tonight, I'll eat pasta with my mom and then drive back to the house where my bed is, where I'll undress from this guilt in time to work on homework on the porch with you.

It is midnight, and I read until I slip into sleep.
When I hear music bouncing from the kitchen, coffee smells bubbling around the corner, I'll remember that my world hurts and is warm all the same, a life on fire - there is water in my words. I've heard the thruth is that it won't feel like this forever. But if that's true then lie to me.

A NEW DAY

KIMBERLY PACK



COFFEE

ANNA SHARUDENKO

as I pour coffee into a cup, it fills the room
with an earthly, pungent smell. I imagine what
it would be like to think of you when the sun
comes up ...

my consciousness drifts away.
there is an end to a universe, but at its edge,
there is no new beginning—it's us again.

I keep pouring—only to not drink later and put the ground,
bitter beans down the drain—all that will remain will be a galaxy
devoid of ashes, dust, and gas, and you and I will be among it.

coffee, make me feel something again—why are
we here? what is that silhouette in my room?
how do we go on when we are not who we were?

but today is just another day, just another
Sunday ... all I see is coffee, which will be soon in
the drain.
it will slip away like you and
I will one day ...

LOWER ROXBURY

TIERA MOORE

Pride

Mayra Martine had lived in Lower Roxbury for a short time.
Since her father, with his teeth shining and brow glistening, gambled
all the money away.
Before, she had pranced the main streets of Boston, head high,
looking like a polished dime.

Now, she could barely lift her head to look out across the blue-green
bay.
She was ashamed of her appearance. Her lack of profession. But
most of all, of her family name.
It wasn't losing the money that pained her, it was losing the feeling
that she was on Broadway.

Always the star of her own play, Mayra couldn't face the shame
of falling from the top down to the bottom. All the way down into
Lower Roxbury.
In the 1970s, it was the place where all of the Blacks in Boston
came.

The Black men and women were not able to escape the confederacy
that seemed to seep into the hearts and minds of the northern
whites, who couldn't resist
making it so that Blacks couldn't afford any place. Until Lower Ro
bury, a newfound sanctuary.

It was the place where the light was dim, but hope could always be
seen through the mist.
Where birds would sing on high to the Heavens every mornig and
night. Always faithful.

And the people would hum along, hoping that their prayers
wouldn't be missed.

They all looked straight ahead, worked hard with dark, tired hands,
and were poor but thankful.

But Mayra, who had an actress as a mother with skin that shone
brighter than sun on water,
did not look straight ahead, but up at her mother, who always called
her an angel.

She did not know life in Lower Roxbury until her mother slipped
through the hands of her father,
just as the money had. Money he obtained through a scheme that
made people whisper "*Judas...*"
Money that made Mayra feel like she owned the world. Money that
made her visible to others.

Now, the only thing that she felt was the weight of humiliation,
which burned her back.
It forced her to look down as it ate at her soul, taking all of her like a
selfish lover.
On June 17th, 1972, Mayra arrived in Lower Roxbury. That was the
day the sky turned Black.

And the fire burned bright, illuminating every dark sin in Lower
Roxbury that was undercover
so everyone could be lit anew with hope. Hope they have all been
waiting to rediscover.

Envy

Della Howells woke up one quiet June afternoon with crust on her
eyes from sleep.
She tiptoed gingerly through the shadowy room, careful not to wake
her brothers on the floor.
She then walked into the small kitchen and turned on the old TV,
which made her heart beat.

The beat was not one of happiness, or what you feel when you see
someone that you adore.

But one of panicked, desperate longing.
A beat of discontent that quickened as she looked upon the face on
the TV who had *more*.

Her preoccupation was an actress who had dark, silky curls that
God only made for taunting.
Skin that could be mistaken for honey and a voice that was
somehow sweeter.
The actress on TV, Jade Martine, left every man, woman, and child
wanting.

When Della wasn't at the TV, she was at the mirror for hours trying
to make her hair look neater.
Putting lemon juice on her temple. Wishing her skin into honey.
Praying away the darkness.
All that was on her mind was Jade Martine. Della wanted to be her,
not just meet her...

Years ago, Della saw the actress on a busy Boston street. She was
heavenly despite her shortness.
Being only 13 yet tall for her age, Della went home and knelt in
front of her own reflection,
praying she would not grow another inch, but knowing there was
already too much progress.

That was how the obsession started. And it always came up in
confession.
Every Black in Lower Roxbury, including Della, was a devout,
God-fearing Catholic.
They all used to attend Saint. Richard's until it closed, which filled
their eyes with depression.

The first Catholic church in the city of Boston to be organized by
Blacks caused much panic
among the whites, blame for the closure of this hopeless place.
It was a Black man who failed to stop the smoke from coming.
Instead, he lit the matchstick.

Della turned off the TV and glanced out the window. The light from
the sun made her feel secure

In her reflection,
she saw a hint of beauty for a brief moment. But then the moment
passed, leaving her insecure

as a figure that looked like a young Jade Martine appeared in the
street. Unachievable perfection.
The smoke was rising behind Della's reflection. All it seemed to do
was darken her complexion.

Wrath

Cain Dunn woke next to his wife, Evette, with the same annoyance
as the day before.
He had hoped to get restful sleep, but she stripped the covers from
him during the night,
like everything else he had. Tired and irritated, every yawn sounded
more like a roar.

It was the morning of June 17th, and Cain had to get ready for work.
Get ready to fight.
He knew that there would be a fight today. Like all days. He was a
firefighter after all.
But there was something that told him this would be more than a
fight. Maybe the insight

was from church on Sunday. He went alone that day as Evette was at
home trying not to bawl.
Her left eye more blue now than brown. Cain felt bad about the
morning ordeal,
so he went to confession. The words from the priest, Father Long,
made him want to hit a wall.

Fists clenched tight, Cain saw a candle flicker, gasping for air. He
had the strong urge to kneel,
which he resisted with cracked knuckles that dripped with hot, sticky
sweat.
Looking back, he should have fallen to his knees. But that was not
his battle. *That* he could feel.

He thought his fight would be with the neighbor, Della, as she often
came looking for a bonnet
or something else to borrow from his wife that she deemed
necessary for her own pleasure.
Cain was wrong. The flames would make him fall to his knees if
that's what the Lord wanted.

And that is what He wanted. Cain saw the smoke before anyone
else. Better
than anyone else. He saw smoke clouding the light in his wife's eyes
before his fist put it out.
Saw smoke choking candlelight while he begged for forgiveness. It
was too late for any effort.

Too late to unclench fists and pray. On June 17th, there were flames
fed by sins and drought.
Hope did not rain down strongly enough in Lower Roxbury at that
time, and everyone who
saw the smoke knew it. When Cain arrived at the Hotel Vendome,
he did not know which route

through the burning halls would take him to Lovely's heavily pe
fumed room,
which he dreamed of. The flames screamed acrid smoke that filled
lungs and blinded eyes.
It was the worst fire in the history of Boston, lit by the hopelessness
and gloom

of everyone in Lower Roxbury. Cain felt his anger melt away. It left
like everything that dies
in the heat. He came out with more hope than he had going in. He
even hoped among the cries.

Sloth

Milton Batrol liked to observe. He watched everything and everyone
in Lower Roxbury. It was
in his nature to sit and watch. Only the people kept him running
around. He was too busy
trying to watch everyone to converse at length. Some say he saw

smoke before Cain because

he sees everything. Those same people say he didn't tell anyone b
cause he was too dizzy
from all his running about, or from breathing in the smoke itself.
Only the Lord knows the truth.
And only Milton knows what he saw with his own eyes. Often, what
he saw was pity.

He saw James Martine betray his business partner for 30,000 dollars
like an evil sleuth
staging the last clue. He then saw the same man lose everything with
a wide, drunken grin.
He saw the man's wife, Jade Martine, crying in a telephone booth.

Replaced by playing cards and empty bottles, she was talking with
tears rolling down her chin.
Nobody has seen her since that phone call, unless it was on TV.
Rumor has it that she was seen
at the Hotel Vendome with the slut they call Lovely, letting rich,
white men take them for a spin.

The day the smoke appeared was the day their daughter, Mayra,
appeared. But between
the running and the smoke, Milton did not see her. Only Della saw
Mayra out of her window,
which doesn't matter, because Milton saw much more in Lower
Roxbury. He saw the holy sheen

of Saint Richard's, the only Black Catholic church as far as anyone
knew, come and go.
It was the going that was more interesting than the coming, for it was
part of his own doing.
It was his idea. He watched Howard Long, the priest, begin to
borrow.

At first, he just borrowed small things from the house of the Lord. A
bottle of wine for using
at his house. A chair to seat his guests. Then, Howard saw Milton
with the collection basket.

Milton tried to put in a few coins, but they dropped to the floor
quietly, barely moving

past Milton's feet. Too lazy to pick them up, he kicked them under
the pew without any racket.

Milton didn't mean it. Didn't think anything would come from it.

Howard had other thoughts.

The priest hid money under pews and collected it for himself. Even
took money for a casket.

He did this for years. Saint Richard's closed its doors. To save
his conscience, Howard bought
his way into another church. All Milton did was watch, and
Howard was never caught.

Greed

Howard Long blamed the smoke on himself, but the Lord was
giving him a second chance.

Giving them all a second chance. He had tried many times to repent
for his sins.

Spent more time reading the Bible, less time stealing a glance

at the wine bottles that sat, casting unholy shadows across the
tabernacle. It was his third

day at St. Augustine, after the closure of Saint Richard's, when he
heard the words:

"My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy
word."

It was then that he realized his hands would permanently be stained.

Towards

temptation he had fallen, taking all that his hands could grasp.

They had trusted him, the Black congregation of Saint Richard's.

There were no guards

to watch over him. He was watched only by the Lord, who gave him
something to clasp:

a crook which Howard used to lead the Black lambs of God into
paradise.

Where Howard led them was not paradise. Nor did he know how to
get there. Not looking past

desires of the mortal world. He could not see up the mountain, the
place above that enticed

all of the pure souls truly seeking to see the light of the Lord.

Instead, Howard was lying face-
down on the ground somewhere between Heaven and Hell. They
all were. Christ

became flesh to save his people. He showed them signs that he was
the true Son of God. Praying

that they would believe and follow. With His glory, Moses saw the
burning bush. It

was that same glory that Howard saw in the flames that were hinting
within the smoke. Swaying

between the walls of the Hotel Vendome, into Lovely's room.

Having not been bitten
by greed again, Howard took nothing from St. Augustine. Despite it
being from his own demise,
he mourned the loss of Saint Richard;s. He sat in a room of incense
reading the Holy Writ.

Still, it was not enough to forgive all of his sins. Waiting for the
Holy Ghost to rise,

he remained trapped. Waiting. Waiting for a sign to show him that
there was hope

for the ones who forgave their sins. The people of Lower Roxbury
who listened to his advice,

washing their sins away while he washed his own. After the smoke, a
burning bright sign: Hope.

Everyone in Lower Roxbury wanted what they had been losing:
Hope.

Gluttony

Evette Dunn laid in bed as her husband, Cain, rose for work. Thank
God.

They had gotten into it again the night before, and she knew they
would fight again
if she even turned to offer the covers that had been lost from him
during the odd

tangle they always found themselves in. He saw Evette as meek.
Weak. That was before the gain.
When he started beating, she started eating. The habit started to
make her plump.
And so, she ate and started to fight back. She does not have to fight
as much now. The constrain

the church puts on Cain keeps his anger under control, especially
since the lump
above her left eye that everyone saw on Easter Sunday a few years
ago. But
last night he just lost it. Went off about smoke coming from the
oven, calling the place a dump.

Evette had been surprised. Had she? With him, it was never really a
surprise because her gut
always told her he could do it again. *Would* do it again. And he did
it again time after time.
It was true, she took everything from him. Every coin spent on extra
dishware, a more robust

dining room table, grander chairs. Oh, and the food. Boxes of fresh
oranges, lemons, and limes.
Mounds of cheese. Heaps of potatoes perfect for frying. Exotic
spices in tins. She loved all of it.
But now it haunted her. She could only look, but not touch the food
that was now a crime.

Cain had been hanging around the Hotel Vendome, probably after
that Lovely girl who stunned
the people of Lower Roxbury when she was first seen walking the
streets at such a young age.
Now, she locked herself in that damned hotel room day and night.
Probably having fun

with someone's husband. It wasn't that Evette hated the girl. There was no rage against her. But something about Lovely stirred a desire in Evette to fight harder than ever against the man. The life that she found herself in. Father Long said that there would be change.

It was trusting in Him, without her husband sitting next to her in the pew, where she got pleasure from knowing that one day she would be saved. But only if she hoped.

A knock on the door from Della, the neighbor, brought Evette out of bed feeling better

than she had moments ago when Cain walked out of the door. The smoke...It poked into the kitchen. The oven was cold, just like last time. Wherever it came from, it choked.

Lust

Lovely sat at the end of the bed painting her nails a bright, burning red.

The polish would be picked off within a week. She had a bad habit of doing that.

But she had a worse habit of picking men who only wanted her to spread her legs.

It started when she was young, a bright cherry blossom barely ready to be picked. It happened at her own home. And when she told her mother, she looked at her and whispered the word *slut* all because she lost her purity to the boy next door. After the fact,

he never called her from across the street, never even glanced in her direction. But the deed didn't disgust her. Instead, it brought many questions to her mind.

How could her mother look upon her with such venomous eyes? For what?

For doing something that felt so good? So natural? Like all troubled
teens, she ran. Hid behind
dumpsters and walked the streets until a man came with open arms,
offering Lovely a deal.
She took that deal and became his muse, living in a dark world of
lust. Until her mind

had an idea and she ran again, taking the money she had. Looking
for a place that made her feel
welcomed for the first time. St. Augustine and Father Long. She saw
in him something
that cried for help, maybe he saw that in her too. Every person in
Lower Roxbury had to steal

a glance at the streetwalking girl. They did not know those days were
over. She was becoming
a woman who was not ruled by the unholy thoughts that clouded her
mind like thick smoke.
Lovely got a job waiting on tables, and with the help of Father Long,
started coming

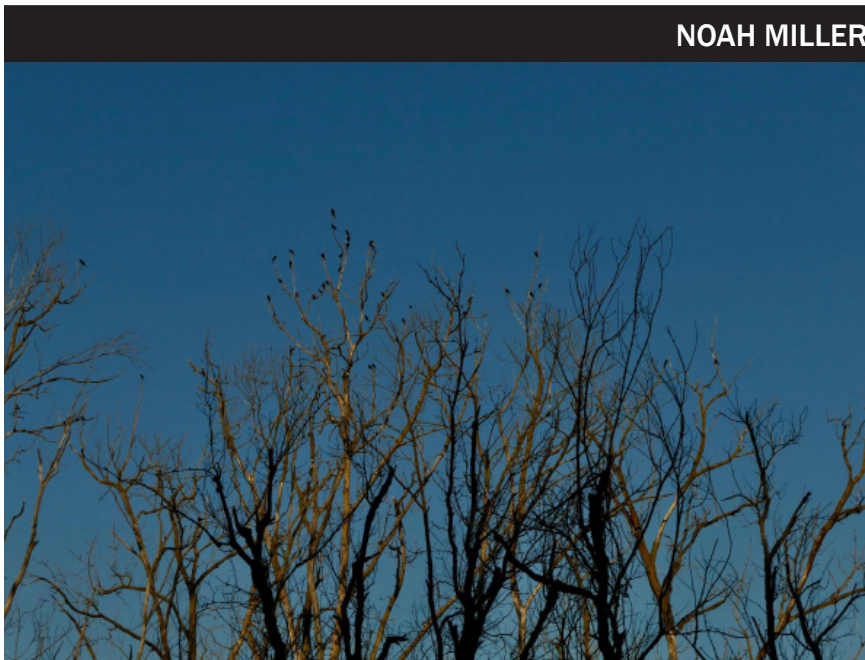
to the Hotel Vendome every night until she called the damp room
with a broken
lock on the door: Home. Still, she felt safer here than anywhere
else. She would often lay on the
balcony and gaze at the sky. Feeling close enough to hear the
whispers of God. She awoke,

after many years in the dark. She tried to avoid the men of Lower
Roxbury, who wanted to
persuade her to join them at a later hour. Maybe it was the
confidence in herself, or her trust in
Him that told her not to fear the smoke. On the balcony, peering
through the smoke, she saw He who

is the Savior. Lovely knew. It was the wall of flames that everyone
must pass. While dim
next to the brilliance of the Holy Ghost, it still burned bright as she
sang a sweet hymn.

SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 13

NOAH MILLER



QUARANTINE CAPITALISM

ELYSIA BASKINS

I'm what they call a
sellout, a poster
child for being a
poser;

Imposter syndrome the
size of a brick house
and my pride: a house
made of sticks

Say it, bitch, say it! I'm a
cocksucker for the corporate
conglomerate, a sheep in
wolf's clothing, a slave to the
capitalist regime

*And you want it! You
like it that way, don't
you*

Don't read me the riot act!
Don't huff and puff and
blow away my straw man
argument

Between four and six a.m.
I own the world but the
other 22 it owns
me

If you've asked yourself:
What is the value of a human soul?
As it turns out
\$15/hr., plus hazard pay

SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 15

NOAH MILLER



TODAY HAS BEEN AN ERA

ISABELLA DURGIN

I don't know how to feel
When there is pain
In the streets that
has built up Like the
oil on roads and
now (for us)
The rain has come,
When the indefatigable dark
Cannot permeate our house,
When my dinner table melts away
Into stolen sand,
When my ears ring from the blood—
Theirs, not ours—that spills Out of
all mouths.

We are complacent as the world burns
Because it is we who threw the torch.

AUBADE FOR CATHERINE OF ARAGON

EMMA CAMP

on the eve of her 1501 marriage to Arthur, Prince of Wales

Catherine, lucky daughter,
last baby to live long enough to leave.

How many times did your father
tell you before you believed him?

How often did you look at the letter in his hand—
his hand and the gold on it—

and think of yourself in a winter
that would knock the caution out of you.

When you sailed from Coruña,
you hadn't even bled yet.

You were still pliable then,
still round-faced as a melon,

muscles not yet taught how to curve
against the hand of whalebone at your back.

Did you ever love a temporal thing,
Catherine?

Did you ever hold a nightdress to your face
and smell the sweat in the silk?

Sometimes, in memory of you,
I eat a pomegranate too slowly,

holding the open husk of it to my chest
like a ghost.

This quiet ceremony is the one gift
I can still give you:

The act of holding an empty seed
between my teeth

and tasting the earth
and the blood in it.

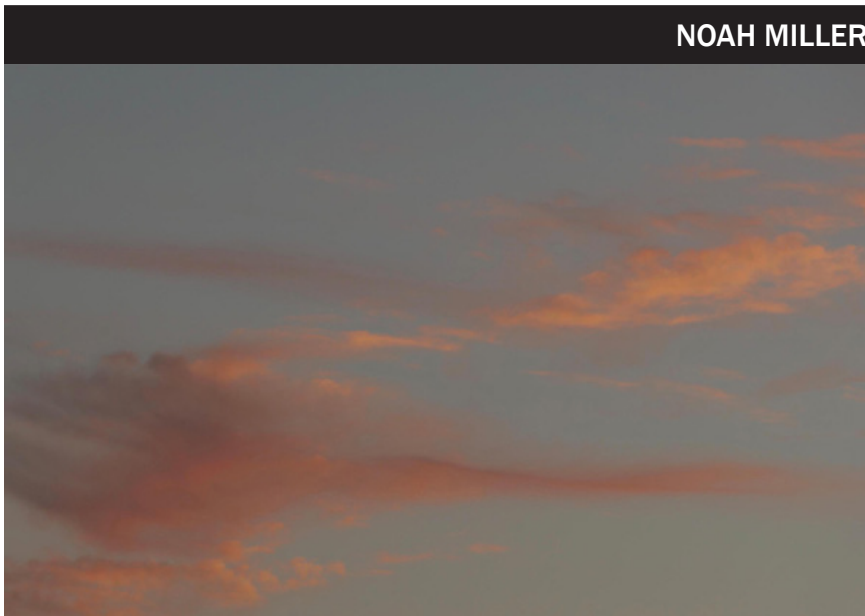
OATH OF IDENTITY

CELINE GAUGE

I remember when our hands first met.
when my blood melted holes in the snow,
and yours fell thick on the dry pavement.
a twin set of open wounds, freely weeping.
are we really back here again?
the crossroads have lost their charm.
weeds have grown where footprints once bent the earth
toward creations we buried: lumps of crooked bones
encased in borrowed skin, quilted to mask any familiarity.
was it the cold that made our hands numb to the shovel
or the gasoline we used to burn away our fingerprints?
you drained me so eagerly, each time your knife dragged
across my palms, facing out like the marble statues
of saints standing in churches we never bothered to visit.
together we sparked fires, yet they burned nothing but us.
like tar-filled chimneys, we opened our mouths
and released the smoke. it held clarifications only we could see,
yet they left us more blind than before.
I'll never stop trying to trust you,
and when we split our skin, we will meet where we bleed.
we will make the promise again.

SEARCHING FOR SOLOMON 16

NOAH MILLER



ONE ABYSS TO ANOTHER

LEXI BAKER

"I'm tired of this place, you know."

"Tired?"

"Yes, tired." He shifted in the grass, scowling at the night sky. The grass was damp - barely, but enough for the blades to be cold to the touch - and the air around them draped them in a chill, biting him even as he crossed his arms against it. "This year has been one catastrophe after another. I'm tired of the world being cruel, and I'm tired of being powerless to stop it."

Another breeze pushed against them, unrelenting. He squeezed his eyes shut, like the wind and the sky and the world would go away if only he blocked them out hard enough. But the wind rushed past his ears, and the moonlight colored him pale, and the world ignored him as always.

She went quiet for a moment beside him, paused her search for a suitable rock to sacrifice to the water below. He almost took her silence as agreement, until she tilted her head and said, carefully, "I don't think the world is kind, but it isn't cruel, either."

"No?" He sat up and stared at her, blinking, waiting, but she seemed content to just shake her head and let her words just mingle with the salt in the air. "Well, what is it, then?"

"It's itself. We can't define the universe for its treatment of us - why would we, anyway? It has no reason to prove itself to us." She shrugged, tossing a stone off the cliff and grabbing another before the first reached the water below. "We're insignificant in the long run."

"Very encouraging."

"It is. Do you know why?" He shook his head after a moment - partially to satiate her and her smug smile, but he had to admit, a small part of him was curious. She tossed the second rock to the sea and watched it disappear into the waves, and she said, slightly hushed, "Because that means it's up to us to be kind, and just, and caring,

because the world will never do it for us. It's up to us to change things down here."

"...Oh." He looked to the sky with a frown, like the moon would blink back at him if he stared imploringly enough. But it was still, and the stars with it, offering no response or guidance or apology, and he looked away inextricably disappointed. "That's a big responsibility."

A beat of silence as she nodded; the waves lapped the shore below them, a small comfort for the weight on their shoulders.

"Have you ever seen a close-up picture of an eye?" she said after a second, waiting again for him to nod or shake his head. "Our eyes look like galaxies. DNA, too. We may be a tiny, insignificant part of the universe, but it's such a large part of us, it imprints itself in the very pieces we're made of. We have a sky inside us."

He watched as she tossed a third rock off the cliffside. It fell that fifty feet, disappeared into the blue without a sound. He grabbed a stone from the ground beside him and held it out over the ledge, eyes trained on the waves below as if they'd calm down under his gaze. They didn't - but even from fifty feet up, he saw the water bring gifts to the shore, shells and pebbles and sea-smoothed glass delivered to the sand and left to rest under the moon.

He unfurled his fist and let the rock drop to the waiting water below. "I think I'd rather have an ocean."

"Hm?"

"An ocean," he repeated. "Instead of a universe—instead of the sky."

"Ah. Well, no matter," she hummed, picking through the grass for another prize, something particular. "What's an ocean to a sky, after all?"

Out on the horizon, if he squinted in the dark, he could just make out the line where the starry black met deep blue. They almost melted into each other, two inks running together on a page. "One abyss to another."

"Exactly. Vast," she gave up on searching and began picking flowers instead, "and open, and containing multitudes. Selfish, compassionate, vindictive, brave, bad, good, all that in a human being—in you and me." She spared the world a glance, then looked to him with that oh-so-pleased smile.

"We're insignificant to the world, but in and of ourselves, we're remarkable things."

She returned to her flowers, weaving them into a chain as he

stared out at the horizon. The sky stared back at him, twinkling and unmoved, and the sea below it shifted as if to wave at him, distant but doting—the world was uncaring, in the grand scheme of things, but it was far from uninvolved. He laid back down in the grass and stared upward, from a grassy cliff over the ocean, a universe of feeling within an unfeeling universe. *Remarkable.*

“I guess we are.”

SOUTH

BRIANA WILSON

Silence blankets the city
as much as I have ever seen—ice
clouds the asphalt, school said
don't try to make it today, so I'm
Home with my sister and mom is off to work—
but my street isn't so quiet today when there is a
knock on the slammer.

tap, tap, tap
turns to boots and bangs and blows
and the wood is cracking and splitting; it just won't give.
what's your emergency?
I'm playing a game of catch up with the
past, and he's here with a vengeance toward her
daughters. and she's not even home!
now don't knock on the door
just let me know when you get here,
so my limbs don't give like an
earthquake
and I can maintain some kind of sanity
and the very thing that keeps me alive
doesn't stop
beating.

SAVE ME WITH YOUR AFFECTION

ANASTASIA SIMMS

Hold me until I forget
that I'm now old enough
to understand the movies
I watched too young.
Stroke my hair until
you've wiped away
the last traces of the world
from my mind.
Kiss my forehead
until your lips
have drawn from me
all that I feel is evidence
that I will never be enough.
Place my head in your lap
until I feel like I can reclaim my sexuality,
without fear.
Fill my nose with your scent
until I can breathe easy
without worries for the future
catching in my throat.
Sing to me until
the rumbling in your chest
has shaken loose the last
of the bad memories.
And as they fall away,
fall asleep with me.
Give me one night of peace,
for it is in your arms
that the pieces of me seem to sit, peacefully.

Make me whole for one night's sleep.
I will wipe my own tears again in the morning.

DISINTEGRATION

KIMBERLY PACK



IT'S RAINING TODAY

JO CLARK

So, the crepe myrtles have bowed
their heads in prayer.

Heady flora, pink and divine,
they reach for spider webs,
which wisp around liriop
blooms, spiral steps
curling heavenward.

In this forest that grew me,
fallen trees lean into
crucifixes.

They cross themselves,
soaked and wanting,
in that holy water—
acid rain in Appalachia
is as common as a kiss
to the forehead, here
beneath the aphid
torn leaves,
that holy wind
whispers through
holy woods,
waltzes through
hallowed ground,
seeps into earth,
says—

here is the forest
where girls frolic,
here is the place
where girls
with wet hair are made.

THE PATIO WE TURNED INTO A GARDEN

ELLIE WILKIE

It backed up against
the house
asking for support
vines clinging to
that which was tended
and known
the man told us where
to find a hose
green rubber snaking
through broken stones
and that was the beginning
of the beginning I suppose.
I gave up on standing
and gave way to the earth
You bent at the knees
and pulled at the dirt
sunlight dancing
on the bricks we washed
bathed us both so bright
you had to squint
while we talked
a friendship grew as
we upended weeds
from the earth
paying penance
for our judgments

a lineage school
would rebirth
but here,
for whatever meager
measure it's worth,
we'll pretend the forbidden
fruit isn't cursed.

BEYOND THE WHEELS

ALLISON FOX

An afternoon run to the gas station for Polar Pops
with the windows of my dad's pickup truck down,
and Soundgarden on the radio.

We pass an abandoned parking lot of my hometown
with tall grass growing out of the cracked sidewalk
and a small graffitied building.

This is the parking lot
where he taught me to ride a bike without training wheels.
This is where he let go of my seat and handlebars
because he knew I would not fall.

Some days, I feel like I still need the training wheels.
I feel like I need his hand guiding me in the right direction,
making sure I do not fall.

Most people my age call their exes when drunk,
but I call my dad.

Even when dizzy and stumbling downtown,
he is the one I seek advice from.

He is the one who gave me my first drink;
I spent Friday nights in high school drinking
with my father at home instead of at parties,
where he knew I was safe.

Where he could catch me when I'd fall.

My dad has been sober since December 24, 2018.
He had not seen a sober day of his life
since he was 16 years old

with alcohol in his system,
until trading his dinner beer for mango juice,
until trading nightly liquor for bedtime ice cream.
He finally took off his training wheels.

So on the day he tells me
he feels like he was not a good father
because of the abuse of the bottle,
I remind him
that the sad little parking lot where he taught me to ride a bike
is only seen as ugly
by those who do not have loving memories of it.

LESSONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE CHILD OF AN ALCOHOLIC PARENT

ALLISON FOX

Get a sturdy lock box.

This is where you will hide the bulk of household pills,
count them,
while reminding him for the fifth time of the day,
count them,
that he needs to take his dose
of the ones he is supposed to be on.

Get him to bed.

This is when you will check
how many bottles of alcohol are on the shelf,
count them,
while comparing them to last week's,
count them,
and dumping them down the drain
when there is too much missing.

Get a list.

Bars open, liquor store hours, gas stations that don't card,
avoid them.

Local AA connections, counselors, Grandpa's phone number,
cheap apartments for sale,

count them.

Collect the resources to survive,
whether it's you or him first.

Get an alibi.

When the school guidance counselor
pulls you in for the third time,

count them,

and asks you,

"Everything okay at home?",

avoid them.

Tell her you were only crying

because you were embarrassed

from being picked up from school sick,

not because he came in drunkenly screaming

to sign you out.

Get some sleep

This is important,

because you will spend too many nights,

count them,

awake until 4 in the morning,

too scared to go to sleep before him,

and when he finally does,

count them again.

The hidden pills,

the prescription pills,

the bottles of liquor,

count them.

You will wonder

if it would just be easier

to join him,

avoid it.

THE STARVING DOG; OR, IN WHICH AN ANONYMOUS USER SAYS 'GOOD RIDDANCE' TO THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT TRYING TO RETURN HOME DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

HEIDI WONG

watching him
lick his bowl clean
as I bite my tail off
for food.
Believing him
when he tells me
this is my home
too.

TO BE ASIAN, NOW

HEIDI WONG

written during the COVID-19 pandemic

how godly, to be asian,
now, and love yourself.
a covenant of history, a scripture
to our gold blood. to be asian,
now, is to be the sun
shining, also, shining,
still, on those who both consume
and condemn its light.
when the world is a torch, to be asian,
now, is to be a witch
refusing to burn.

CLINTON, FROM HERE

HEIDI WONG

your scent appears in ribbons, invading
my space like the shape of a stranger
i could have known.

the waves of victoria harbor,
its hysteric crashing, its hopeless rhythm,
contort into a chorus of footsteps
aching to trace the streets that hurt me into myself.

yet i stay, for family, future, correctness,
safety. stagnant, here,
bearing the saltwater like moonstones in my stomach,
jealous of how my life lives on without me.

2020

HEIDI WONG

you lose seeing the snow melt one last time.
lose your corner room in the gray cement building,

lose friends, lose childhood, lose new york, lose
him. you witness distance spreading

beyond distance. you learn
distance becomes distance by feeding

on your ability to see it. all it takes is one person
to give up. he takes the jewels of your irises

and says i don't care. you try to starve,
but the dead brother inside your stomach

demands food. the grief
just won't cut it.

isolation wraps around your neck like a lover.
would you leave, even if you could? where would you

go? two weeks later you are so yourself
it's frightening. hope sinks

into your skin like light. at night,
sometimes, only sometimes, like a blade

scraping away gemstone fantasies. would you
leave, even if you could? where would you

go? two weeks later you are so yourself
it's frightening. hope sinks

into your skin like light. at night,
sometimes, only sometimes, like a blade

scraping away gemstone fantasies. would you
leave, even if you could? where would you

go? your home
that was never your home bursts

into flame and you are at the beach for daddy's birthday,
pretending your friends aren't losing their fingers to gunfire.

you say *be careful* when you mean
i love you.

you say *when they bring out the gas start running* when you mean
i love you. you say don't be a hero when you mean

i can't lose you,
too.

a man dies on camera. and across the pacific
an orchestra of coarse, frozen throats begins to remember

it still has a voice to speak with. a voice
stretching to silver lakes, casting the shape of the future.

maybe heaven births itself
from the mouths that mourn your absence.

maybe death is the only commonality
mankind can agree on.

a black man is murdered on camera,

and one of the officers wears your uncle's face.

your uncle who boards the flight and does not return
till two years after nana gets lowered

into our motherland. he comforts himself
in a white man's country, thinking

she wouldn't have remembered me anyway.
the last thing nana called for was her son.

a girl who looks like you,
could have been you, is

you, bleeds in the street. they call her *dirty chinese*,
and it's the first time in seven years you wished

you were white. your western home
threatens your eastern home

and you go to sleep wondering,
if you had to gouge one of your eyes out,

which would you choose? pray
for the rustle of autumn in clinton.

but normal is a hand with missing fingers,
the new family that never learned your name.

you know you can, someday might even,
for real this time, unashamed this time,

without fear this time,
love. but what good is that now?

HOME SAYS GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM

HEIDI WONG

as a child, i would not let my country hold me.
thought i was too jagged for her red arms,
thought she could never kiss my two-toned edges.

on my eighteenth birthday, i run to a new home.
and home says *your blood scares us,*
thick contagious gold. your skin, your eyes,
and my god, how you walk,
chest full of pride
despite it all.

after years of unlearning my radiance,
i find myself in a small chinese restaurant
where i order shāo mài in my mother tongue.
the waiter wipes his dampened cheeks,
presses his hand to his heart and says *thank you.*
you sound like home. there, in upstate new york,
we cry in a language no one else can understand.

and i wonder if as a child, i told my country *i am not like you*
when i meant i cannot love
what looks like me, when i cannot bear
to look at me.

but she is my mother. even when i am split down
the middle, mind
from body, i wear her like the world.
even when i slammed the door on her fingers,
she unhinged herself from its wood to remind me
if it gets hard out there,
remember you always have a place to come back to.

on my twenty-second birthday, the world
turns to wreckage, and wreckage
turns to mirrors. my family nails their eyes to the tv,
cold black pacific. and when it lights up,
my face is attached to every innocent asian body
lying limp in the street. a garden of peonies
seeping rubies into stolen soil.

our blood, thick, contagious gold
our skin, an endless scroll of silk.
our hands are a quiet expanse,
a cloud of fire. and it scares them,
my god, it scares them. how we walk,
chest full of pride
because of it all.

on my twenty-second birthday, home
says *go back to where you came from*
and i do. home
says *go back to where you came from*
and i think *what a privilege*
to know where i came from. what a privilege
that even if i silence the beijing peonies, the callouses
on my family's backs from carrying history, the smell
of mama's jiǎo zī, the waves of victoria harbor
singing me to sleep, marry a white man
and erase my name, marry a knife
and erase my face, still
i will pass on my gold skin to my daughters

the warmth of a land
that refuses to abandon her children.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

ABIGAIL ALBIN is a junior at Indiana University Bloomington studying English and Creative Writing with minors in Music and Theater. She's bandying about the idea of getting her MFA. This is the first publication she has appeared in. When she's not writing she enjoys reading, bullet journaling, painting and needlework, hanging out with her cat, and writing her pen-pals.

ALLISON FOX is an undergraduate English major with a minor in Creative Writing at Kent State University.

AMBER WILLIAMS is a sophomore at Virginia Tech majoring in Sports Media and Analytics with a minor in Creative Writing. She is the current assistant sports editor for her college's publication, *The Collegiate Times*, and a production assistant with the ACC network. When not covering Hokie sports she enjoys photography, watching hockey, painting, playing with her cat, and listening to Ed Sheeran. Amber is passionate about storytelling in all forms, but poetry is her favorite artistic outlet.

ANASTASIA SIMMS is a second-year honors student at Kent State University studying English, Psychology, and Creative Writing. She has loved reading and writing her whole life, so much so that as a young girl her mom gave her notebooks as presents to stop her from writing on napkins, the mail, or whatever other scraps of paper she could find. Anastasia hopes that her writing will positively impact others just as the written word has always done for her.

ANNA SHARUDENKO is an amateur poet, an aspiring law student, and an undergraduate student at UCLA, studying Literature. She was born in Moscow, Russia, but has lived in Los Angeles since her early teen years. She is a fan of informal logic and likes to discuss existentialism, stoicism, and *love* as abstract concepts in her free time. She is a strange individual who also, ironically, prefers tea to coffee.

ANUSHA MAMIDIPAKA is a junior at MSU majoring in Neuroscience and Psychology and minoring in Graphic Design. She is involved in music cognition and language cognition research and plans to go to medical school. She enjoys drawing and painting in her free time.

BRIANA WILSON is a Nashville-based student and writer currently attending Tennessee State University. With a major in English and a minor in French, her post-graduation plans consist of higher education and extensive traveling amidst teaching children and writing. Her writing focuses on the possibilities of interpretations in language and personal experience and aims to explore class, gender, and race.

CELINE GAUGE is an undergraduate student at Penn State Behrend where her poetry has been recognized in contests such as the Sonnenberg Poetry Contest, and she helps review submissions for Behrend's *Lake Effect*. She is currently working toward her BFA in Creative Writing and BA in Psychology. She is active in working toward creating a more sustainable and welcoming campus environment through various student organizations.

HEIDI WONG is a poet and artist who grew up between Beijing, Hong Kong, and New York. Since posting her poems online at 15 years old, she has developed a unique voice that juxtaposes surreal and macabre imagery with intimate and beautiful language. She was the winner of the 2018 Button Poetry short form contest, and the winner of the National Art and Calligraphy Competition of China for 6 consecutive years. Now, she continues to share her work with her audience of nearly 1,000,000 followers. Her third collection, *Turning to Wallpaper* (Central Avenue,) will be released in the fall.

ISABELLA DURGIN is a 19-year-old writer from Mississippi who has received statewide and national recognition for her creative pieces. She currently attends the University of California, Los Angeles where she is pursuing an English degree to explore her passion for the written word. Isabella writes for the Arts and Entertainment section of the *Daily Bruin*, UCLA's student newspaper, and her ultimate goal in life is to own an independent bookstore.

JACOB LARGEN is a senior graduating with a BA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Film Studies. Jacob has been with the *Red Cedar Review* for all four years of his undergraduate enrollment, working as a volunteer reader for the first two years, the assistant managing editor and poetry editor during his third year, and as the managing editor of the journal during his fourth and final year. Jacob is an avid reader, writer, and musician who is eager to continue his editorial work post-graduation.

JARETT GREENSTEIN is a senior majoring in Professional and Public Writing as well as English. He is the recipient of multiple creative writing awards and looks forward to continue developing his skills in writing and editing after graduating in the summer. He is also the Assistant Managing Editor for the *Red Cedar Review*. You can find him on Twitter @JarettWrites.

JESSICA MARDIAN is a poet and writer from Virginia. She graduated from Virginia Tech in the fall of 2020. Her work has been published in *Silhouette*. In 2018 she was a finalist for the Steger Poetry Prize and has read at Glossolalia Literary Festival and the Virginia Tech Creative Writing Showcase.

JO CLARK is a student, poet, and journalist born and raised in the Blue Ridge Mountains. She is currently pursuing a double major in Poetry Composition and Medieval and Renaissance Literature at the University of Virginia. She is the poetry curator for *V-Magazine* at UVA and a senior writer for *The Cavalier Daily*. She has been published in *The Stardust Review* and *Prospectus: A Literary Offering*. She has work forthcoming in *Q* Anthology*. She hopes to one day release a full-length collection of poetry.

KATEY FUNDERBURGH is a current undergraduate student at Regis University. Raised in the mountains of Colorado, she finds her poetic roots in nature, lineage, and feminist voice. Her work seeks to connect us back to the earth, as she explores what it means to belong, to feel love, and to understand both the beauty and the pain that come innate to human life. This is Katey's first publication.

KIMBERLY PACK is studying Multimedia Art Practice at the University of California, Berkeley. She hail from a small town in the Appalachian Region of the United States. Through yoga, she infuses her being with the restorative energy she need to thrive as an artist in troubling times. She am driven by the ideal of awakening the collective to consciously create a sustainable world based on egalitarian principles that honor the sanctity of life and the pursuit of intellectual and spiritual evolution.

LEXI BAKER is a freshman at Indiana University Bloomington studying Psychology, Criminal Justice, and Linguistics. She is an avid writer with a passion for editing, nature, and the small, ineffable moments in life, and though she's new to publishing her work, she's excited and honored to have a place in the *Red Cedar Review*.

MICHAEL TURLE is an English major at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. He was the 2020 recipient of the Arthur E. DuBois Award for Excellence in Literary Criticism and works as an editor at KSU's Literature and Arts Magazine, *Luna Negra*. He plays trumpet in the athletic bands and serves as the media director of Sigma Tau Delta, Xi Mu chapter.

MOLLY SCULLY is a senior at the University of Connecticut. During her last semester, she is on the Poetry Panel for her school's literary magazine, the *Long River Review*. She will graduate this spring with a Degree in English. After graduation, Molly hopes to continue writing and pursue a career in editing and publishing.

NATALIE POLL is an avid reader, and writing is her passion. She is currently working toward her BA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in History from Michigan State University. Natalie hopes to pursue a career in publishing and one day become an editor.

NOAH MILLER is a senior Music Performance major at Michigan State University. While not a photographer by trade, he enjoys telling stories through still images just as much as he does through music.

SYDNEY WILSON is a senior Professional & Public Writing major from Lake Orion, Michigan. They love stories, coffee, hiking, isopods, and their cat, Scruffie. They have worked with the *RCR* for two years, first as a volunteer reader and then as the Prose Editor. They are excited to graduate this may and go into the publishing industry, and are grateful for the experience, knowledge and acquaintances they have gained from working with the *RCR*.

TIERA MOORE is a student from Kent State University studying English and Political Science. Serving as the President of the Undergraduate Student Government during the 2020-2021 academic year she uses writing to escape the often harsh political landscape. Tiera found her passion for literature during long, lazy summers in her hometown of Salem, Ohio. She finds inspiration in the works of authors like Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, and Gloria Naylor. Her poetry collection *Lower Roxbury* is her debut piece. Tiera can always be found with a pencil in hand, and hopes to continue writing when the words strike her.