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1. El Paso is a Jeopardy answer and El Paso is a yoga studio.

   What is a President’s biggest nightmare?
   What is an artist’s favorite canvas?
   What is a journalist’s wet dream?

2. Thou shalt not bear thy cross to El Paso, El Paso bears no witness to your guilt.

3. El Paso is a scar.
   El Paso is a house.
   El Paso is sooo sexy.
   El Paso is this and that, whatever.

   You forgot to phrase your answer in the form of a question.
   Or a job application.
   Or a syllabus.

4. There is a sculpture of a big candle outside my local Walmart. Don’t ask me why. I take the long way to get groceries now, though, and I keep throwing bullet-sized rocks at the windows of my little brother’s high school. Just to check. The day I finally shattered the glass, the stone grazed his knee. He kicked it away without flinching. He’s been expecting this his whole life.

5. El Paso will not teach you something about gratitude, El Paso will not crumble at the sight of your posters, El Paso will not laugh at your monologue, El Paso will not donate 25 dollars to your nonprofit before midnight!

   I guess … A wall will get you published
   A gun will get you votes

El Paso will not get you at all.
On a Monday night it is raining and he stands at the window, broad-chested and valiant, daring the world to drop its tears on him.

On a Monday night it is raining, but he only knows because I told him. Because, in the quiet moments between the stanzas of our conversation, I could hear the droplets making their way down the walls. I could smell the moistening concrete. The thickening plume of clouds.

I want to tell him that rain tastes like grilled cheese triangles from my mother’s kitchen. That the arrhythmic pattering of the droplets crack open my heart like backseat car windows through which little fingers reach without knowing what for.

Our bodies slip into one another like the buckle on a seatbelt. Safety net. Each crook and groove settles into position, and it is as if I can hear my bones nestling into each other, reassembling themselves into the place his arms have created. Water molds to fill the space it is given.

He starts smoking again on a Tuesday. Says he’d rather smoke and die young than live to a hundred without his stooges. He has to explain the slang to me.

I am envious of the ease with which he departs the bed. He seems to look forward to the act of leaving—to the anticipation of filling his mouth with a taste other than my own.

He is reclined on the balcony in that familiar fashion of man—limbs expanding into the space no one asked them to fill. His lips kiss his cigarette with a gentleness my own will never know. Love me like your stooges, I think. He breathes life into the air from dead lungs and sets his eyes upon the yet unwritten stories of the world. He knows his place among the pages, revels in his own agency to pluck words from the paragraphs of strangers and make them his own.

My heart is a tropical ocean storm. Its tides fold and wrinkle like my bedsheets once we have left them. They remember the score. Keep track of the quiet moments in which the wind shifts from leave me to love. When he has gone I will lay my cheek on the cold fabric and trace the memory recorded there. I will search through the flicker of his eye, the way his hand glides effortlessly through the space between us, and I will try to decipher the Morse code of his uneven heartbeat.

Later in the night we will swipe through each other’s dating apps. Neither of us will accept any matches. Are you having sex with other people, I’ll ask. He’ll say he isn’t, and I will know, somehow, that that is the truth.

Wednesday the city is anxious with the fleeting promise of spring. The mortality of the moment is everywhere. I lap it up anxiously, feel the drunkenness of warmth and unknowing seep through my veins. I feel as if I must announce my love to the world.

I wish I had love to announce. That I might rush to his unsuspecting door and pour my love into the space between us. Please, I would say, take it.

On a Thursday night we are out to dinner at what other couples might call “their” restaurant. He speaks to the waiters in Italian and says he feels like he is home. I watch him with wide, pleasant eyes, enjoying the way the sounds tumble from his lips and fill like lightning bugs through the air between us. I exist only on the outskirts of his joy. In moments like these, I can feel its warmth tickling my arm, teasing me.

Sometimes during these conversations, the waiters turn and apologize to me. Mi piace ascoltare, I learn to say. I like to listen. It is the same phrase I said to him the first day we met. Four hours in he realized he hadn’t learned anything about me. He said, I’m talking too much.

No, I replied, I like to listen.

It is at the same Thursday dinner that he suggests I join his family reunion in Kenya. Come, he says. Why not?

I laugh, trying to imagine the scenario. Hi Mom and Dad, this is Sophie—the girl I fuck and hold hands with on the street and sometimes take to dinner.

You don’t actually mean that, I say, and we both fall quiet.

It is the kind of silence you can listen to.

He goes away for a weekend, and I spend Friday wondering whether I should have told him.
to text me when he landed. For all I know he is
dead.

Once he joked that if he were to die in New
York it would probably take a few days for his
family to even find out. The eggshell casing of my
heart quivers at the thought, but he is unfazed.
Yeah, I reply, I might be the first person to
realize.

I try not to think about making that call to his
mother.

For most of my young adult life I believed I was
the kind of girl that guys fall in love with. That I
was that perfect concoction of sweet book-
reading non-smoking home cook early dinner
animal lover girlfriend, with more-or-less
average hair and a more-or-less average body.
Who was just pretty and endearing enough to be
loved and not lusted after. Who was just pretty and endearing enough to be
loved and not lusted after. Who men would want
to marry whether I wanted them or not—a homely
Artemis.

I believed that if I waited long enough, sat
pensively on benches in the park, read my
book in the not-quite-obviously-but-obviously
visible spots in The Strand, smiled at attractive
strangers parking their Citi bikes—that love
would show up for me. That one day, it would
knock on my door, with sunflowers and frozen
yogurt and maybe a kitten.

Welcome, I would say, I knew you would come.

Saturday morning my notebook lies bare-
chested and goose-bumped on my bed—pinned
down by the weight of words I can’t bring myself
to produce.

Instead I transcribe tidbits from the notes app
on my phone:

the world seems to yield to him
does a window crack on both sides of the
place I haven’t touched you

I want to write about love, but I am thinking
about desire. About the hand that tears my
organs from their sockets and leaves them
wrapped and bowed at his bedroom door. About
how the longer I spend in his embrace, the more
intensely it aches when he pulls away. Like dried
wax torn from skin.

Perhaps simply spending a critical amount
of time together, both intimately and not,
necessitates a certain degree of affection. He is
my friend, after all. We laugh like friends and we
fuck like pornstars.

On a warm Sunday, he decides to be generous
with his not-love. He holds my face in his hands
and looks at me with something like tenderness
in his eyes. His gaze is rounded and pillowy like
challah. It tears easily at the seams.

He traces musical phrases across my spine,
tickles my feet where he knows I am vulnerable.
In the evening he holds me to his collarbone and
we watch the lights of the Empire State Building
cast themselves over the city. I sense his eyes
on me but won’t meet his gaze—fearing any move
might shatter the moment’s fragile intimacy.

I walk home at eleven, trying not to think about
my 6:30 alarm. Rain falls gently on the unquiet
grid of the city. Small puddles grow in the spaces
between the streets and sidewalk—water curling
easily into the crevices it is allowed.
We are all Real Boys on a White Plane.
Our fears larger than the expanse of
Earth and sky that we can sometimes see.
Mom made us breakfast
Some of it ended up in our bag
to finish later
We are never that hungry for breakfast.
We walk with our hand clutched tight
on that very silly bag
holding what little things we yet know
that will form the basis of all we are yet to know.
For now we focus on the close
the tangible
the cold, cold breath of too early morning
raising the soft hairs on our arms, one of which
is now tired.
Although we have lived so few days
of the whole long thing of it
there is some knowledge that seems to only find itself
in those seconds
when we are walking from home in the crispness of
morning
there is a calm
an excitement
that cares not for a name.
Perhaps it is that earth and sky that we sometimes see
perhaps it is knowing there is more.
The thought flies by
with the wind we dare scorn, reminding us of here.
We are all Real Boys on a White Plane
a knapsack
and no destination.
In the backyard of my father’s apartment, our pool was wasting away. Returning to nature would be more appropriate.

Where blue pool floors brightly shined from neighboring houses, murky green hardly peeked from beneath a gray skin of scum and algae clumps. The water sat dankly still, apart from the minor incursions of tadpoles and turtles.

The air smelled sour. Matcha-green earthy notes mingled with heavy, foul fermentation.

The cesspool, a result of my father’s neglect, continued to flourish. It’s almost impressive to achieve such biodiversity in so little time. Maybe all sterile water yearns to hold life again.

My father was a businessman. Clean-shaven, primly dressed, spick-and-span, quick to smile, and given to laughter. Our pool was blue once too.

A business partner declared bankruptcy. Entwined in a bad deal, my father’s new company toppled long before any of its debts were cleared.

Smooth chin gave way to stubble, to tumbleweed growth. Pants to slacks to shorts. Eyes filled with some new emotion stuck to my back. A sentiment showing resignation. A brow-set sorrow, striving to strangle that despair and leave progress in its place. Even if that progress didn’t involve his children.

What can you do as a child? When you see your father savoring a tomato, smothered in salt? When he’s so out of a job he’s looking for...
Work in other cities, in other states? You can clean the pool.

The pool scoop was an adult’s tool. Eight feet in length, its polished silver body had long been overtaken by dust and patchwork rust. Fiskor orange metal crunched and fell like piecey autumn leaves under my grip. Hefting the unwieldy rod was a struggle. An accidental smack to the white-paneled house sent my heart racing, but a look through our rickety screen door showed a hunched back, scrolling through rentals in a state away from here.

I shuffled towards the middle for better control. From an outside view, the tiny child and his comically large net must’ve looked ridiculous, but my heart was filled with pride. Pride for the service I was paying to my forlorn father. Hope burning within me, I was doing a great service. To the water’s detriment, he didn’t appreciate about what he’d become.

Almost manically, I slashed line after line in the pool. The algae was visibly thinning. My marks stood longer and the spread seemed to weaken. Maybe they’d been trapped under the algae as well, thrusting for some light? Two distinct lines stood starkly visible, but the growth appeared to have overcome the space. I had enough time to make out many rapid movements beneath the surface. Hundreds of dark silvers retreated from the carved light.

In open air, the tool was almost unliftable. . . . No, I could do it. Small knuckles flared white and a great heave threw the organic mass to the pool’s side, splattering sloppily onto the yellowing lawn.

The sun stood high in the sky. Swiping sweat from my brow, I hoisted the rod once again. I’d need to go faster, gather more. Straining forearms twisted, plunging the net and the shadow is gone from my father’s face and he’s panicking and asking if I’m okay and I cry and I’m brought inside to the shower.

I turned my head, hoping that he’d been watching my efforts and appreciated having such a dutiful son.

The torque of my body carried the scoop as well. A metallic smack vibrated through the stick. A second passed before a tremendous force crashed into my back, slamming my head and chest swelling with pride, I swept with renewed vigor. The algae seemed to disappear under my care. The thick layer of scum had reduced in height, and handling the scoop had become easier. I was able to make four, five passes before emptying the net, and my progress only increased from there. My father would be so proud!

I gasp. Horrific. Wretched. No sight, no time to try to see. Turbulent, dizzying, and horrible. Swirling and gasping. Not air but choking. Trying to wrench my way up but I retch water and where is up? The darkness stretches. Slamming and scratching. A wrench! An iron grip around my wrist. Yanked hard enough to hurt. Light explodes and I gasp and I cry and I retch and I’m hugging and I’m standing and the water comes down dirty. The water looks brown in the bath and lumps fall and fall. Hundreds of black lumps splatter into the yellowed-white bath into the brownish-green water and crack and the creatures die.

Tadpole blood is reddish-green. Like copper. Like rust. Like a rusty pool rod that sent a screen door falling into my back and copper like the spirals in my dad’s beard and black like the tadpole corpses collecting and blocking the drain. Collecting but not swimming. Piling up. Bringing inside to the shower.

My father moved away that month. The following renters drained the pool before cleaning it. When I close my eyes, a thousand irky tadpole corpses float by. Dark but definable against the blackness. Sometimes I want to scream, but I’m choked by the algae. Silenced by the darkness that I’m helpless to prevent.
“From the moment you start tidying, you will be compelled to reset your life. As a result, your life will start to change. That’s why the task of putting your house in order should be done quickly. It allows you to confront the issues that are really important. Tidying is just a tool, not the final destination. The true goal should be to establish the lifestyle you want most once your house has been put in order.”

—Marie Kondo, The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up

In her #1 New York Times bestseller, The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing, Marie Kondo lays out the game plan for how to completely reinvent your space—and yourself. The KonMari method appears as a peculiarly fresh way to fold clothes and spring clean, but it ends up being much more than that. The KonMari method is actually about finding catharsis by addressing the clutter of your life and organizing your joy. The basis of the KonMari method is to keep what Kondo says “sparks joy” and let go of what doesn’t. It is a purging and repurposing of your current possessions while reformatting your thoughts. She wants you to reflect on what has meaning in the world and in your home. Under a unanimous vote of my book club, we had decided to read and implement Kondo’s “Life-Changing Magic” to see how truly enchanting it was.

If the title wasn’t a complete giveaway, then I’ll spoil it for you now: there is true magic in Kondo’s words. It was almost as if I was reading...
the spellbook of a master witch, albeit of dusting and laundry, but magical nevertheless.

Her book teaches the physicality of mindfulness. Kondo reinforces the idea that the internal (inside our minds and bodies) and external living space are symbiotic. Your mental state is reflected in your living space. Kondo directs the reader through is surprisingly more spiritual than physical. It is a testament to the physical embodiment of my unhealthy social behavior.

My possessions were things that I held onto out of guilt. Guilt is something that is confused with pleasantries far too often. Those graphic T-shirts, bold art prints, and nerdy knick-knacks given to me as gifts by people I love were never worn, or only put out when they were not pleasant reminders of the people I love because every time I looked at them the only thing I felt was neglectful. Even as I write, a pang of guilt comes out with this truth, but that feeling has been curbed by this process. The KonMari method did not only have me meditate on the physical clutter, the thoughts that circulate in my mind. The challenge posed throughout the book is to evaluate why you are the way you are, and what the indicators of this. Why did I feel guilty? Why did I want so desperately to be liked? Why couldn’t I just let it go? For me, the biggest part of the closet purge was addressing this now-instinctive behavior. I later came to understand that it was conditioned behavior–unnatural. I wanted to appear kind, likable, nice, and normal. I think everybody does, but this was an extreme. With all of those “likable” traits I knew I was not open and honest to others or to myself. I was so afraid of the reactions I would receive that I suppressed parts of who I am. So, following Kondo’s advice, I let go of the behaviors that did not “spark joy” and reintroduced the “me-ness” to myself. Sometimes, I felt organizing my interests left me with profound loneliness. They are mostly individual hobbies. In the past, if someone showed interest in me I did not want to disappoint, so I became what they wanted. This led to failed friendships, failed relationships, and especially failed career prospects. People definitely did not “spark joy.”

Since my KonMari cleanse, the decision came to make an active effort to be vocal about who I am. Each time I was open, honest, and proud of myself I felt a layer of anxiety shed and felt the magic sink into my skin. There was peace and happiness every time I showed my true self even if I was nervous at first. I am no longer a stranger to myself and others. I am no longer the vision of what others want me to be. Just as the clutter of those gifts had left my home, the clutter of what others want me to be. So, back to the title: how does all of this make me “all of a sudden” decide to become a witch? Kondo says, “The question of what you want to be originally is actually the question of how you want to live your life.” I felt I had lost who I was in my quest to achieve who I thought I wanted to be. Realizing I wanted none of those career achievements was the biggest piece of clarity I could ask for. Just like those knick-knacks, I was surrounding myself with the goals others wanted me to achieve. I made it my mission to get to know “me” again. I mentally sat and did a KonMari cleanse, listing all that I love untainted by the influence of others. Everything from hobbies to fictional characters made the list, and between them all was the word in the title of Kondo’s book: magic. It wasn’t necessarily a career change; you can easily switch from client services to cover sessions on the resume. However, magic allowed me to sit down seriously and evaluate what I wanted out of my life, my relationships, and my career. My new creed is as follows: “I will pursue the spellbook of a master witch, albeit of dusting and laundry, but magical nevertheless.

Her book teaches the physicality of mindfulness. Kondo reinforces the idea that the internal (inside our minds and bodies) and external living space are symbiotic. Your mental state is reflected in your living space. Kondo states, “People cannot change their habits without first changing their way of thinking” and “visible mess helps distract us from the true source of the disorder.” The cleansing process Kondo directs the reader through is surprisingly more spiritual than physical. It is a testament to the human ability to let go in order to live better.

My social tendencies of saying “please” and “thank you” and “sorry” were in excess. It was moving to see the physicality of what was being purged and, as Kondo likes to do, “say goodbye” to it. I could see my physical guilt being efficiently managed and it allowed me to start managing my mental guilt. It led me to start embracing my love for pink despite a lifetime of distancing myself from hyperfeminism to seem more “cool.” I ditched the video games I only played for my husband, switching out looter-shooters for my watercolors. I stopped letting people be rude to me without a response. I believe that was the hardest, to command respect; taking shit from people definitely did not “spark joy.”

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no reason to fear being myself.”

I thought personal identifiers were not necessary for me, but they ended up being a huge factor in reclaiming my sense of self. To use the term capital-W Witch as an identifier was a big leap. From childhood, I craved magic so fiercely. But magic is for children, they say, for fiction and fantasy, there is no place for magic in reality . . . so they say. I wanted to breathe the magic back into my life. I wanted to take ownership of that magic. Already, I was doing and believing in the same things Witches do—believing in myself and in magic. All that was left was to take the plunge and call myself what I always felt I was: a Witch.

It sparked joy.

I was lucky enough to have a support system that embraced me in my totality. One of the most important feats in this process was I joined the ranks of my support system—I supported me. They did not care what I did as long as 1. it did not hurt anyone and 2. it made me happy. And you know what happened? Because I expressed a genuine passion in my interests, my loved ones gave me presents I actually liked! Shocker!

I was able to make new witchy friends who also loved the prospect of magic and sisterly support. It even led to me finding a career path that sparked joy as well, something I thought I would struggle with indefinitely.

Deciding to reinvent and reevaluate yourself, and your life as a whole, is a tall order, but not an impossible task. Tough, emotional, and freeing are just a few words to describe the experience of the KonMari cleanse. Getting rid of possessions can feel like a true loss, and there is no negation to this feeling, but the weight lifted is a gift. I am not Marie Kondo, her exact expertise is a magic all its own, but my takeaway from her teachings is exactly what she promises in the title of her book: tidying up is life changing.

I am hesitant to say one side of tidying up is more important than the other: the change in mindset is revolutionary, but the peace from an organized living space is astounding. It all works in tandem. I didn’t just decide to call myself a Witch and say “Okay I’m done! Called myself a Witch and that’s all I needed.” If anything, it sparked the fire for me to keep my KonMari mindset. My candles have a color-coded organizer, my tarot cards have boxes where they sleep when not in use, and on a less witchy note, my closet is organized to the point that I can reach in and grab exactly the dress I want without looking! Now that is real magic!

The term Witch is interchangeable for each person, although I totally believe Marie Kondo is a Witch in her own right (and rite). From reading her book, the ability to choose who and what you are is a personal meditation. Marie Kondo made me a gardener, a good friend, a better daughter, a more loving partner, a pink lover, an academic, a more mindful person, a Witch.

What does she make you?

“Many people carry this type of negative self-image for years, but it is swept away the instant they experience their own perfectly clean space. This drastic change in self-perception, the belief that you can do anything if you set your mind to it, transforms behavior and lifestyles.”

—Marie Kondo, The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up
Hear this, caught fish of a woman! Nod or shake your head and
Salt the earth behind you with scales . . .

And say the thing until you are it. Hard-mouthed.
Noseless, a wonder. Is your beak curved up for nectar or for flesh?

And, its belly, underneath, a tent for captured fish,
pillow and blanket, a name sleeps soundly there.

The cloth we are cut from is pashmina and a castle
And the same. Chagorah, united in haste and by unholy hands.

Were we attracted to the same kind of men?
The ones who build temples under your skirt before lifting it.

Which is the whisper which undresses you?
In through the ears. Three piercings each ear and three ears on the body.

Two for the sides and one for the back of the head, two for hearing
And one for listening, hearing is the belt and listening is the unfastening.

Then, the birth of a new fowl-mouthed crown—Ancestors moan.
If we go outside they may laugh at you. All because of this:

A two-eared man says he thinks you are beautiful and that there is
something about you women with beaks and heaps of hair.

Will he think you are beautiful when your dress gives way
to your peacock cape like a palace rising behind you, in the distance,

In the fog, following you always, like a warning.
Like a name? This, a shape to take when you are a ghost.
My mother has a favorite brown sweater. She wears it often, too often. We tease her for it, it’s pilling and worn thin and has turned the chalky color of cheap chocolate that has sat out for too long. The brown sweater has become so much a part of her that my sister and I now fight over its inheritance. I’d give up our grandmother’s antique engagement rings, even the sapphire tears that mean something. She agrees, referring to her own. “I was kind of like the shy child that maybe didn’t have neighborhood friends… I was the one that stuck close to my mom.” She adds that this certain type of child sounds familiar.

My mother is convinced that I can read her mind. It bothers her. She pesters me to stop, complaining that I am invading her privacy. I refuse her argument, attempting to assert that I have no such telepathic powers. Rather, this is just a consequence of our closeness. I know what she’s thinking before she says it. I know how the thought ends before she finishes it. I’m certain that the apple did not fall far from the tree. Sometimes, I think it didn’t even fall at all.

When I was a child, I was often told that I looked like a miniature version of my mother. Even more often, I was told I looked like “the girl from Little Miss Sunshine.” I took the former as a compliment. I’m not so sure about the latter.

I think I have my mother’s eyes, though I used to wish I had my father’s. His are perfectly powder blue, like the sky in a Claritin commercial, or the suit he wore to prom in 1979. But they’re cold. My mother’s are dark. They carry mystery and worry. They’re the eyes of a mother. In the sun, they turn an amber hue—it’s the color of warmth, of welcoming. She loves the sun. I think the sun loves her too—it has adorned her arms with freckled memories of days grown longer and people grown older. We used to have a routine of “hugging in the sunshine.” The title is quite self-explanatory, as the act consisted of, simply, hugging in the sunshine. She gives good hugs, hugs that mean something. She announces the
could stay out late and drink at noon. They could be the next Bonnie and Clyde. They didn’t do any of those things. Instead, they ordered Chinese takeout for dinner, and they ordered it the way they liked it.

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**MOTHER’S CHILD**
Grace Doherty

My mother has a favorite brown sweater. She was given the name Caroline. It was her father’s turn to choose, and he was a Kentucky-bred working man whose second daughter was to have a name that rang with Southern charm. Her name has led to a sort of debate: was it meant to be Caroline or Carolyn? It seems to be a tale of accents lost in translation. My fresh-from-labor, twenty-five-year-old British grandmother filled out the birth certificate with a name that ended in an “e.” But “Carolyn” was what both her mother and father called her. To everyone else, she was Caroline, Caroline Adair Van Sant. I like Caroline more anyway. Carolines have songs written about them. She is her mother’s child. They would cook together, shop together, dance together. She was the small toddler, nagging at her mother’s hip, begging for nothing more than her company, I laugh and tell her that I might have known a child like that. She says, “Me too.” She’s calling me from the balcony of the apartment that her sister and mother share in Palos Verdes. It’s the only place where she can find cell service and privacy. I know the spot well; the balcony is decorated in nearly dead potted flowers and nearly empty bags of soil. I can hear some birds and some traffic and some anxiety in my mother’s voice. She has a doctor’s appointment tomorrow.

“She was always my friend and we were always companions, who enjoyed companionship,” my mother says, referring to her own. “I was kind of like the shy child that maybe didn’t have neighborhood friends… I was the one that stuck close to my mom.” She adds that this certain type of child sounds familiar.

I, too, was a friendless child who held their mother close, sometimes even too close. Part of me thinks I still am. When I was five years old, my mother put me in a summer gymnastics day camp. I made it only two days. My lack of coordination and athleticism wasn’t the issue, though it was a minor factor. It was the fact that I couldn’t stop crying. They were the same tears I would shed every preschool morning as I watched her drive away from my Montessori schoolhouse. They were the same tears I shed when I drove away from her, 2,539 miles away. I missed my mother too much. I don’t think I’ll ever stop.

“We had a blast the summer before I went off to college,” my mother says, with sudden giddiness in her voice. Her father went to a month-long, doctor-ordered rehabilitation center to “naturally reverse heart disease.” “We could stay out late and drink at noon. They could be the next Bonnie and Clyde. They didn’t do any of those things. Instead, they ordered Chinese takeout for dinner, and they ordered it the way they liked it.”

My mother is convinced that I can read her mind. It bothers her. She pesters me to stop, complaining that I am invading her privacy. I refuse her argument, attempting to assert that I have no such telepathic powers. Rather, this is just a consequence of our closeness. I know what she’s thinking before she says it. I know how the thought ends before she finishes it. I’m certain that the apple did not fall far from the tree. Sometimes, I think it didn’t even fall at all.

When I was a child, I was often told that I looked like a miniature version of my mother. Even more often, I was told I looked like “the girl from Little Miss Sunshine.” I took the former as a compliment. I’m not so sure about the latter. I think I have my mother’s eyes, though I used to wish I had my father’s. His are perfectly powder blue, like the sky in a Claritin commercial, or the suit he wore to prom in 1979. But they’re cold. My mother’s are dark. They carry mystery and worry. They’re the eyes of a mother. In the sun, they turn an amber hue—it’s the color of warmth, of welcoming. She loves the sun. I think the sun loves her too—it has adorned her arms with freckled memories of days grown longer and people grown older. We used to have a routine of “hugging in the sunshine.” The title is quite self-explanatory, as the act consisted of, simply, hugging in the sunshine. She gives good hugs, hugs that mean something. She announces the
end of a hug with a pat on the back, though when brought to her attention, she denies that this is something she does.

My mother is terrified of rodents and lizards and cotton candy. For her birthday, she bought herself a cherry-colored George Foreman grill. She loves British period-piece movies and RuPaul’s Drag Race. She drinks red wine out of tiny plastic bottles and ends every night with an embrace. In college, she took up Greek folk dancing (she’s not Greek). She collected teddy bears in her twenties. I got a drawing of one tattooed on my arm at nineteen. She hates tattoos, but she likes me. She is horribly judgmental and even more horribly aware of it. So am I. She says she’s always right, and I agree. Unless I am right, which is almost always.

She is a daughter, a mother, and twenty years ago she assumed her most important role—my best friend. Sometimes, our closeness scares me. I’m frightened by the fact that someone can know me so deeply and so earnestly and still love me so. I’m frightened by the fact that no one else can or will ever know me as deeply or earnestly and love me so unconditionally, because no one else can or will ever be my mother. I’m frightened by the fact that someday I will have to buy my own brown sweater, one that will fade and tear and pill, one that will be only my own, and not my mother’s. But until then, I have hers.
HAUNTED HOUSE
Monserrate Delgado

Her thoughts are
A bouquet of sprockets
A silhouette in the pale moonlight
And as visible as whispers
Tiny whispers flutter
She’s floating
Floating above shattered glass
She’s searching
Frantically searching
For the door
The glass below her rattles
As she travels
Quickly, quickly
The sprockets are spinning
The whispers flutter faster
In the pale moonlight
I hear laughter
A devious sound
And the shattered glass is slowly rising
Pointing towards me in the most
Taunting manner
As I travel
My vision is smeared into the midnight
Into some obscurity
And the banshee is still searching
My eyes open and the darkness captures

What was once lost
Thunder
Thunder and lightning illuminate
The house that’s getting smaller
I’m looking back
Finally getting away from
All that madness
The house is haunted
And the ghost is frightening
The woman
She must have passed away there
I’m gone
Gone with the whispers
Fluttering into the shadows
My dear, our moth is indeed a nocturnal creature. One that can only be animated by my touch. Can you imagine passion under the dim moonlight of a lunar eclipse? Or your mind, body, and spirit in perfect unison, not only with each other but also with the heavens? Lying on your back, feel them finally breaking free from the farthest corners of your consciousness. Feel our moth descending from your neck as its tassels gently brush against your skin. Feel it slowly caressing you until it has found its way to your navel. Look to the moon now as it shifts simultaneously with our moth’s downward journey. Feel your perspiration gathering as the heat rises from your body. Allow our moth to find the crease of your upper thigh. As if pleasure is your only refuge. Speak your lust aloud in multitudes. For as day breaks you bask in the sweetness of total satisfaction. Close your eyes and know that your truest thoughts and spirit have transcended your flesh. Know that we are one with the night.
To be erased from the pavement.
A soaked leaf
moist shadows on that coarse surface
How a kiss lingers—
to be told:
A gaze, a turning away.
All I need is one bus stop
to know what to do
To take a departure
in my arms like a baby
and remember the scent.
So that even the rain cannot wash away
the woman outside
of her own words.
What else can one say
than fragments
Of riddles.
"To hold, to let loose. To confuse.
To put back together something unrecognizable."
To recognize, then,
and to reconcile with,
the secret tragedy
in my sign that afternoon.

As Yudhishthira saw all those who died
At Kurukshetra, tears streamed down his face,
Each one that’s present here in shining grace,
Was not so long ago in mangled form,
Lost, scattered among those lifeless heaps
Across that boundless plain of hell on earth.
His years as king did not make him forget
That horror, even after they had bid
Their farewells to those fallen ones
Beside the banks of Ganga. Grievances
Had not been put behind, but hurriedly,
The thousand shards of broken glass are swept
Beneath the exquisite rug of history.
In daytime as he reigns, the Sun God Surya
Brings light upon its threads of silk and gold,
Thus spelling out in Sanskrit, “Progress.” Yet,
At night when all is quiet, he hears the sound
Of crackling glass, and dreams his feet aflame,
Ignited by Ghandari’s gaze … for this?

Lord Dharma sensed his doubt and put a hand
On Yudhishthira’s shoulder: “Oh my son,
Have you not cleansed yourself entirely
From feelings latched on puny flesh, not soul?
Outgrow your past naivete! Return
With me to the eternal Brahma. Come!”
But Yudhishthira shook his hand away,
And rushed headstrong into the smiling throng.

It was not simply grief, nostalgia that
He felt. Indeed, as Dharma said, when they
Had entered heaven, earthly forms are shed
Behind along with earthly thoughts; the soul
Alone remains. Then what was it that flowed
From Yudhishthira’s eyes? He stared into
Those happy faces for an answer—is
This dharma? Everything in life on earth
A mass illusion; whereas heaven, truth?
Their smiles of seeming equanimity,
The air is so sweet... like blooming flowers. The one true path of dharma. Om... Om... Allow myself to be distracted from the birds are singing louder. No, I can't. There's someone near. I hear no footsteps yet. As if I'm on the brink of Moksha. Wait... The karmic cycles... I am so at peace, in lotus pose, and meditating through and rustling of the leaves. I am alone. Were exiled. I hear the songs of birds. I'm in a forest, like the one where we were exiled. I hear your life before. Behold! Your very past! From karma which were not depleted from our karmic cycle, and degraded you by that rakshasi. She had sabotaged Derive from your tapasya undone. “You see now, My son,” said Dharma in his lulling voice. “Your feelings of misplacement in this life...” Dharma sighed, "My foolish son, do you not see? The cause for your confusion here, as well as back on earth, precisely comes from karma which were not depleted from Your life before. Behold! Your very past!" And with these words alone, Lord Dharma tore the veil of time from Yudhishthira's eyes. "What do you see, my son?" I see... I feel... I mean I cannot see, but I assume I'm in a forest, like the one where we were exiled. I hear the songs of birds. And rustling of the leaves. I am alone. In lotus pose, and meditating through the karmic cycles... I am so at peace. As if I'm on the brink of Moksha. Wait... There's someone near... I hear no footsteps yet. The birds are singing louder... No, I can't. Allow myself to be distracted from the one true path of dharma... Om... Om... Om... The air is om... so sweet... like blooming flowers... Before my face, and I’m the bee that plucks the sweetest... Om I hear a footstep... Om... Before me... gentler than a fawn's gait... Om... I hear it scratching... Om... the dusty ground... It scratches on my heart... Om love! Om love! The dirt it raises is of Kama's ash that thrills my heart with burning lust and love... A glimpse... a glimpse is all I need and I'll be back on track... "What do you see, my son?" I see no light. I see that tender toe, Which barely grazed the ground yet deeply etched into my heart... the toenails must be made Of pearl and ivory... the curve leg Like polished ebony connects those dots Of jewelry... "Then what? Look at her face!" Rakshasi! Yudhishthira felt that shock Himself, immersed completely in the trance Of his past life. Those raw desires just like A newly kindled candle now is plunged into the icy water. "You see now, My son," said Dharma in his lulling voice, "Your feelings of misplacement in this life... Derive from your tapasya undone. By that rakshasi. She had sabotaged your karmic cycle, and degraded you. From Brahmah to Kshatriya. Knowing this, Your soul did drive your body through this life, As an experienced charioteer would steer The horses from the rocks and ditches, far Away from earthly temptings as it could, without Your conscious knowing, in particular The women. Pry into your memories! Were your concerns for Droopadi sincere When she had been humiliated in the gambling hall? Did your discomfort come From witnessing a loved one hurt, my son? Or was it narcissistic shame for not Protecting her as king and husband? Blame Rakshasi! You of all should know the fruits Of karma that you reap come from the lives before. And it was her who sowed the seed at first, Of which its bitter fruit you now ingest." "I cursed her, father... Yudhishthira spoke Reluctantly, I cursed her even though I was the one who allowed myself To be distracted... "No you mustn't think Like this... The calmness left Lord Dharma's face. He quickly walked to reach his son before The dangerous train of thought should burn out all his dharmonic deeds of past, but then a tear Had fallen on his hand. The tiny drop Had singed his hand, as if it had contained A thousand suns within. Lord Dharma drew His hand back from the burn, while wallings of Yudhishthira rolled on... "To see that she is not what I thought... Anger course through me And I had fired venom through my mouth: Fool woman, can't you see? You with your gait, As heavy as an elephant, disturbed Me from my path to moksha. May you bear Such ugly, savage children, dark and cruel As if they were damnations to the world itself... "What have I done?" Yudhishthira broke down completely. His ethereal form, That seemed as light as feather, now slumped down Against the heavens' Yoor, more heavy than His brother Bhima's steps, as if it bore The weight of all eternity. His tears Nonstop now formed a puddle round his head, And sizzled as they touched those ones around Him with enlightened smile... "Be blind again!" Invoked Lord Dharma through his Vedic powers, "But father, I was never blind." In peace Yudhishthira sat up in lotus pose, And let his tears run free like a waterfall. "I've chosen blindness as Ghandari did, All in the name of dharma. Whereas time is but the window through which sometimes light Refracts, thus conjuring the image of an object that's not there, our Dharma has Become that curtain which we close upon Ourselves, attributing all light as mere Illusions, having the audacity To claim we've found the truth in that recess Of total darkness in our mind. Tell me, Father, what is the cause of suffering?" "You know already," said Lord Dharma while He walked around to find another path To get to Yudhishthira, where those tears Of fire could not get to him. Though his tone Was just so sweet and loving as before, The light of grace around his body was No longer gentle—there was a tempest in That light, and sparks jumped up from time to time. As if unseen blades crashing by his sides. "All sufferings are caused by man's desires— They block the dharmonic path to happiness." "Or was it dharma which had blocked the path Of humans' natural way of being?" "Stop that blasphemy!" snapped Dharma. "You well know Your love for that Rakshasi was what led 42
The people round him. Nothing seemed to
Of love instead?"
Or was it dharma which had blocked their way
For Shiva that which blocked his dharmic path,
The arrow's path instead? Was Kama's love
Or did the love of those two birds obstruct
Was it the arrow which had struck the birds?
That arrow penetrate the lovebirds' chests,
Transcendence? Tell me, when Valmiki saw
Our simple joys from seeming feelings of
Of natural yearnings, distinguishing
Or was it dharma that had blocked the path
It down and gave it to their children for
They haven't heard enough, they wrote
The joke is dharma! Millions died to make
A joke of darkest humor. Ha! Ha! Ha!
They laughed and cried the same time, like they
Below. They looked horrific now, indeed!
Their eyes, in contrast to the smiling mouths
Alone in that position. Then their brows
Before, appeared now superficial, cold,
The peoples' smiles, which seemed so genuine
Into a full-on avalanche nonstop.
The metamorphosis does soon cascade
Its features change, the gentle process of
Are put in fiery furnaces, the heat
At first, but just as figures made of clay
Change
She did not scream, nor actively project
No other than the mourning Draupudi.
"Oh I will not submit." Lord Dharma glared
Has made you suffer in this life! Submit!
The dharmic code in previous lives is what
Of all these sufferings! Your acts against
Regained composure, "Karma is the cause
"This madness stops now!" Dharma stood,
Regained composure, "Karma is the cause
Of all these sufferings! Your acts against
Through Yudhishthira's tears, I see now too
Peaceful silence which had filled
This place was shattered now, replaced by cries
Of mourning all throughout the heavens' realms.
"Oh all my children died in bloody war!
Not one of them had intervened!" "My love
All five of them were there when I was raped,
Not one of them was left!" "My husbands! Why?!
As some rewards for my 'resilience.'
Is that Lord Dharma granted me three boons,
The name of dharma. What you do not know
My name, and I have always acted in
Had been my very husband—Sita was
The legendary Rama, righteous one,
I brushed them off, Lord Dharma stood again
Had blown some leaves before my eyes, and as
The code of virtue and . . . " "And why have I
Curse dharma, you spoke in wrath against
Lord Dharma simply stood there numb. "You did
Could not be processed by his higher mind,
The mortal feelings of embarrassment
Not follow dharma in this life? Explain.
"Enlighten me, Lord Dharma, how did I
As wailings softened into gentle sobs.
Her voice demanded all attention there—
The most exquisite jewelries, kingdoms wide
Give everything to you, in honesty.
The most exquisite jewelries, kingdoms wide
And reach as far as Indra's thousand eyes
The most exquisite jewelries, kingdoms wide
You to your current sufferings—
As wallings softened into gentle sobs.
"Enlighten me, Lord Dharma, how did I

Did not follow dharma in this life? Explain.
For a long while, no response sob. As
If the mortal feelings of embarrassment
Could not be processed by his higher mind,
Lord Dharma simply stood there numb. "You did
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Of love instead?"
Or was it dharma which had blocked their way
For Shiva that which blocked his dharmic path,
I simply shook my head at him, in lack
Of any better responses . . . and boom!
A tear which hit the floor, I’m quite unsure
If it was his or mine, had turned into
A miniature Lord Dharma, holding up
A finger to me—oh, that cursed boan.
I said in tears at tiny Dharma: ‘Please!
Let me not marry to a king in my
Next life! I don’t care if he’s brahmin or
A wagon driver’s son, or even a
Dumb cook! Anything but king, anything!’

Now Draupadi had told her tale, the sobs
Had dwindled down to silent tears, the ones
Who’re newly joined in others’ tears did not
Make any sound either, even Dharma,
Stared blankly so at Draupadi. His lips
Smacked futilely against each other; words
He could not find were forced upon his mouth,
—An archer drew, but had no arrows left.

Draupadi went on like she sensed nothing:
“What karma made me suffer? Or what boons
Did make me happy? I’m the cause alone.
I suffered as I had allowed myself
When I had put my faith in what’s beyond.
When earthly, deadly water from heaven
Exact same angles, across all time and space,
The Krishnas smiled their understanding smiles—

Submerged me in that shame forever more.”

“The Astra flew toward Yudhishthira,
Bearing the weight of planets, faster than
The speed of light or thought. That cosmic ray
Of pure destruction landed on his head
With a muffled thump, fell limply down
Upon the ground, like a paralyzed snake.
Lord Dharma stared in disbelief and shot
Several more at different people. Yet,
Though they seemed even bigger, faster than
Each one before, all Astra fell upon
The ground the same. ‘How is it possible?’
‘Because we understand. Do you know what
The Asuras are, my father?’ ‘Like nothing
Ever happened, Yudhishthira sat there
Talking calmly to his post-shocked father.
Whenever violent injuries were done
Against the dharmic code, and unadressed,
That force accumulates. Its milder forms
Become the karma as we know today;
Yet when that force was too much even for
Our reincarnations to channel through,
Then they become the Brahma weapons. Look!’

Yudhishthira picked up that Astra which
Had hit him. ‘It’s a thumb.’ Lord Dharma said.
‘You know who it belongs to, father.’ ‘Yes,
It’s Ekalavya’s, that Drona had
Made him cut off so Arjuna
Became the greatest archer.’ ‘That’s not all.
While Drona sought revenge from Draupada
For ditching him because of class difference,
Drona himself ditched Ekalavya
By differences of caste . . .’

‘These are the thighs of Duryodhana, they
Were cut clean through when Bhima hit below
The west against the agreed-on dharmic code
. . .’
‘I cannot . . . no . . .’ Amongst the weeping ones,
Lord Dharma could not hold back anymore.
Such pain, such sufferings, Oh my crude forms.
Without a better name—pain as it is.
A tear had fallen from his eyes as well,
And then another, then another more . . .
They all cried on, their tears flooded heaven,
And when it was too heavy for the clouds
To bear, the heavens simply cracked open
And all their tears streamed down, which
Would’ve filled
Five hundred thousand Ganges, if not more.
The tears fell down upon all time and space,
And put out all the flames in time and space,
The Kandava no longer burned, Agni
Hisself was drowned. The fiery pit at which
The great snake sacrifice was held was
drenched
In water, snakes which had been writhing In the heat of flames, were now contorted
In the gentle suffocation of the tears;
The torches lit at night by Arjuna
At Kurukshetra for their night attack,
The gentle suffocation of the tears;
The torches lit at night by Arjuna
At Kurukshetra for their night attack,
Were also out. The living floated, soldiers,
Elephants and horses beside the dead . . .
The Krishnas smiled their understanding smiles—

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Hisself was drowned. The fiery pit at which
The great snake sacrifice was held was
drenched
In water, snakes which had been writhing In the heat of flames, were now contorted
In the gentle suffocation of the tears;
The torches lit at night by Arjuna
At Kurukshetra for their night attack,
Were also out. The living floated, soldiers,
Elephants and horses beside the dead . . .
The Krishnas smiled their understanding smiles—

And when it was too heavy for the clouds
To bear, the heavens simply cracked open
And all their tears streamed down, which
Would’ve filled
Five hundred thousand Ganges, if not more.
The tears fell down upon all time and space,
And put out all the flames in time and space,
The Kandava no longer burned, Agni
Hisself was drowned. The fiery pit at which
The great snake sacrifice was held was
drenched
In water, snakes which had been writhing In the heat of flames, were now contorted
In the gentle suffocation of the tears;
The torches lit at night by Arjuna
At Kurukshetra for their night attack,
BONZI THE GREAT
Helen Ruckelshaus

In the second month
I invented the Swiss Army knife
The night I slept in branches
I wanted to name my tree Goliath
I knew that was not her name
But I wanted to name my tree Goliath

Plaid Mondays:
They want us to look down, she said
The woman who wore herself
Who saw elves in pockets of heat
There are spaceships on rooftops you know
Lookup, she said, there everywhere

A man with a saffron beard
Rice cooker sample sale
Five loose fingernails
I know why you left,
I know this now
I just don’t find acorns buoyant anymore
Or call my mother
Oh Nikki

Oh Nikki
Tell me straight up
Did we make it?
Did it all bend
And melt

Oh Nikki
How shameful I am
I wrapped the whole thing in velvet
Which I also invented
I saw your belly
I saw your belly
Come quick, tell me Lorca with your teeth
Whisper
“No one understood the dark perfume of your womb”
“No one knew you tormented a hummingbird between your teeth”

Instead
The anything else
Blued hips
You can tell
When he is unaware of it all

I remember
I remember
I remember
It all

In glory
In shame
In pomegranate hue
I remember it all
Adieu
Adieu
I dreamt that I kissed your father
And that he longed me to do it again

I killed my Bonzi
John died
Zach died
Billy was quiet

Streetlamps opening up business before their night shift
All is so rushed

Old acupuncturist fired me
My lateness soured her medicine
An award-winning saga

Selma Tipson
The lick of the tongue
Purring teeth like a sweet thumb
Sel-ma Tip-son

I was late because my back threw out
And gave out all its parts

To the sick
To the mighty

Sel-ma
Sel-ma
Sel-ma

This is it
This is where I am beautiful
Forgive me
I met grief at a young age at the fault of a bullet that shot my chances of ever growing up with a father. I’ll never forget the sounds of my mother’s cry. Like a wounded lion, she called out for me. I could feel the vibrations through the wall. Ignorant of my fate, I ran into her room prepared to comfort her. Her skin was still damp from the shower. She dried herself and then uttered the words “Your daddy’s dead.” Time froze and it felt like I was dreaming. I ran to my bed and shut the door. I remember hoping that maybe if I shut it hard enough, I’d wake up from the nightmare that was now my reality.

The following days were a blur, but I remember my first binge. I stuffed my face with turkey sandwiches at my father’s wake. They were still cut like triangles when they appeared, half-chewed, on the Olive Garden floor. I ate and ate and ate and with each chew I became dependent on filling my stomach to deflect from my newfound grief that depleted my heart. I was seven years old and had developed an eating disorder before I’d even heard of the term. I remember carrying a stuffed bunny around for years. Her name was Stuffy. She was a light brown Build-a-Bear with a pink button nose that you could hardly make out because of the dirt that buried it. Stuffy was my seventh and final birthday gift from my dad. I remember the anger I felt toward my mother when she finally washed her. How I cried when Stuffy no longer smelled like him, I clung to every piece I had left. I wore his shirt to bed and even took his singular boxing glove to school. It smelled of leather and his perspiration, but that morning, I was just excited to take a piece of him with me. I couldn’t wait to get to class and tell everyone how cool
my daddy was. How he was a boxer and was good at it. The first person I revealed the glove to was my teacher. I thought maybe she would stay along and pretend to listen to what I wanted to say. Instead, she made someone else answer my cries for help. “I think you should take this to the school counselor,” she said. The school counselor sat me down with eyes of pity. I remember her telling me to tuck away my bad feelings. I was nothing more than a distraction. No one wants to bear the blues of a child. I remember feeling like a burden when I wanted to talk about him. I was too young to grasp the complexities of grief. I was seven years old and his absence never sat right with me. I had just seen him a month ago. Now I'd never see or hear from him again. How was I supposed to manage that? I remember the day I exchanged pitiful eyes for looks of discomfort. Dead dad jokes became my way of catharsis. It was the only way I could talk about him without being sent to the counselor’s office. I remember the feeling of exclusion when my school put on a father-daughter dance three years later. I remember constantly feeling as though something was missing. Looking back, I don’t remember much of those years at all.

“I'd go to the dance too, but my partner died...”

...“If you don’t laugh, it’s not funny. It’s just sad.”

II

I always hated the end of the month. By that time, the food had run out and there was nothing left to do but wait for the credits to hit the EBT card. It was a waiting game between us and the food stamp office. I remember the stress on my mother’s face as she sat worried about what our next meal would be. I remember how hard it was for me to sit and watch my baby siblings starve. The bill collectors never knew mercy. When the electricity was off, we would huddle together in my mom’s bed like bluebirds for warmth in the winter. I remember the rumbling sounds of our stomachs to be nourished. I remember each time I flushed the toilet with buckets of water, I felt a sense of relief. No more would I have to bear the smell of feces. It was a rather intrusive reminder of the poverty that struck us. I remember I couldn’t wait to get to school. There I’d find light, running water, and schools responsible for filling my belly each day. I remember I always loved school because it distracted me from the reality that confronted me when I came home to my dark room with no electricity. I shared it with my siblings. We sat in the dark together. I remember feeling guilty before shame.

My siblings’ fathers never stuck around and my mother spent more time in the hospital than at any job she’d ever had. We were broke and my father could no longer fill the gaps that my mother didn’t. I remember after my father died, I went from having two cakes at my birthday parties to having none at all. There were many nights that my family had little else to eat but cans of corn and boxes of spaghetti given to us by the local food pantry. I remember feeling guilty about the hunger when I knew food was hard to come by.

I remember even with empty bellies, my mother chose to never voice the fact that we were poor. It was something I comprehended on my own. As I watched what my four little siblings took in, I remember the times I played dress-up with my sister to distract her from her hollow stomach. It was during these times that I felt obligated to protect them as much as I could. I considered them my children more than I did my siblings. As they grew up, I saw my younger self in each one of them. They couldn’t understand why we impatiently flipped switches as they refused to give light, or why the tap only dribbled water into each small puddle. My responsibilities as an older sibling started with my little sister’s first breath, though the weight of that responsibility didn’t become clear to me until I watched my kid grow up alongside me in poverty. I remember feeling obligated to protect them from our unfortunate truth.

My mother graduated high school, then completed an associate’s degree at a community college while raising me and my siblings. To some, that is nothing more than a subpar accomplishment, but in my family, her achievements were the equivalent of getting into the Ivy League. Over time, the value of her degree diminished which caused my mother to start her own battle with depression and ultimately choose unemployment for the better part of my life. My mom is the only person my siblings and I have to look up to. I know in another life, my dad would've been my best friend. In another life, he would've done for me what I try to do for my siblings. He would've given me the same support that I alas needed, he would've been there for me. In this life, though, I make it my priority to be there for my siblings. In retrospect, my fear of school was not a nightmare but rather the beginning of my dreams. I guess that’s what keeps me going, knowing that if I were still here, he’d be proud of me.
I awaken from a wonderful dream
I'm still in prison
I wanna go back to sleep
I awaken from a terrible nightmare
I'm still in prison
I wanna go back to sleep

Some days are better than others when adherent in familiar
Not fleeing when you witness violent back
Gratified and Grieving
these are not mutually exclusive concepts

Some writers want you to feel the pain
They convey making words drip
With the adjectives of their souls
I just want to ease my pain
not wishing for a soul
to ever feel that way

I'm only human I long for connection
Let it be love and thriving after several
reconstruction everyone struggles
Life is realizing its discontent only you can
make yourself its victim
No one deserves it.
What is the price of life
I wonder its worth
Is the value the same now
as it was at my birth?
Am I worth my weight
being the man that I am
by what do I measure on what
scale do I stand?
Is there any difference,
in the man the world sees
the man that I am
and the man that I see myself to be.
The day is historical and highly criticized. From a bird’s eye view, it appears that numerous ant colonies have converged on the place of the monumental “I Have a Dream Speech.” Black, red, yellow, and white. All shapes and sizes. The harmony of order. The parties are at odds, yet hopeful and optimistic. One is stubborn as an ass and the other territorial as a bull. From common brethren to high-ranking militant minds, their coexistence peacefully secured the Columbian District Mall. It’s a great day, and yes, we can celebrate the audacity to hope for change. The trumpet sound was translated into a message that ment-tone “A,” which vibrates consonantly at 440 revolutions per second. Symbolic to captivity. The momentous occasion cracked open even wider the door of the lion caged yet steadily pacing the road to exodus. The hemo flows conducive through the veins of the event as red and blue platelets are attentive to the light projected on our nation to expand our breast for more inspiration and faith of the mustard seed to do greater works. Carrying more power and more life today because the fruitful hymenopterous campaign should someday lead to a new and better people, a new and better America, a new and better world. The bitter sweet spirit pledging service in the Mall where progenitors were once sold. This day reflects a pool of life, pledging allegiance toward a perfect union. What a beautiful and special phenomenon that has engraved itself into American history and influenced many generations to come.

I don’t cry, save onions. Be it vaccines at the doctor, James Cameron’s Titanic, beautiful music, a lost pet, joy, anger, hope, hopelessness—my eyes remain dry. Aside from their physiological function—to lubricate the eye—my body seems incapable of producing the saline-laced dew.

In my eyes, the inability to cry out of emotion is not a marker of masculinity or even any form of fortitude. In fact, I have always thought the opposite. This is why, though perhaps odd, I have always expressed insecurity in relation to my not crying. It has led to me feeling robotic, a suppression of my humanity. This had led to the incredibly ridiculous and ironic phenomenon of me feeling the tiniest bit jealous when comforting a crying friend.

Some have offered me the consolation that to not cry is simply a genetic trait like any other physiological phenomenon. Some don’t sweat, others have runny noses, a few drool in their sleep. But emotional tears are an altogether different sort of bodily fluid. They are the physical manifestation of our emotions, our consciousness, and our humanity. There is no other species that sheds emotional tears. This conundrum has produced a multitude of explanations. They are plentiful, wildly varied, and as old as Judaism.

The Old Testament describes tears as the by-product when the heart’s material weakens and turns into water. In the 1600s, a prevailing theory held that emotions heated the heart, which in turn generated water vapor in order to cool itself down. This “heart vapor” would then rise to the head, condense near the eyes and escape as tears. In 1985 biochemist William Frey popularized the idea that crying removes toxic substances from the blood that build up during times of stress. Charles Darwin declared
emotional tears “purposeless.” Even today, the biological-evolutionary function of emotional tears remains unclear. What is apparent, however, is emotional tears’ importance to the human experience.

What bothered me about my inability to cry was not so much the nonexistence of the act itself, but more the indication that my emotional experience was flat. Crying is the result of emotional being too great to keep inside. Tears are the texture of our emotional curve. Thus not crying did not feel like a character trait. Rather, it suggested the strange thought that my life had not yet had a visceral enough experience to bring me to tears. Not crying was not living.

My strange victory came on the evening of January 12, 2020. A little over a month before on January 28, I had arrived in Paris for a semester abroad. I had always wanted to live somewhere abroad rather than simply passing through. I had always wanted to live somewhere abroad. I had always wanted an experience with no temporal end date abroad rather than simply passing through. I had always wanted to live somewhere abroad rather than simply passing through.

By the end of the first week, I was curiously comfortable in my new environment. The obligatory first-week icebreakers had etched a numb to a place’s landmarks and sensitive to its environment. The first-week icebreakers had etched a numb to a place’s landmarks and sensitive to its environment. The obligatory first-week icebreakers had etched a numb to a place’s landmarks and sensitive to its environment.

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by sadness, and sustained by comfort. There was understanding in the tears. They made clear a sensation previously perceptible yet indefinite in form: being at the mercy of one's own body.

As it turns out, crying, at least the operation itself, isn't particularly anything to be jealous about (but what is this, a review?). However, its meaning lies far outside the simple act. For thousands of years, humans have tried and tried again to conjure some specification to separate "us" from all other species—the soul and consciousness being the leading candidates. However, after numerous nineteenth-century experiments failed to observe anything escape the body seconds after death, and an increasing amount of data has suggested that we are not as unlike other animals as we may have once thought, these claims have thus far proved unfounded. Perhaps I will add to the impasse by offering another definition into the mix: to cry is to be human, and to be human is to cry.

I have come to the conclusion that life is like a sheet of newspaper used during a toilet paper shortage: it is much, much better crumpled than stiff. Whether positive or negative, with excitement or grief, confidence or fear, understanding or confusion, life's emotional fabric is better textured. Visceral experiences are the grooves—and we had better want them, for it is those deep areas within our sensations from which emotions grow.

So I, the eternal optimist, have come to believe that instead of seventy-one days lost to fate, it is in fact a hundred tears—each a drop of my humanity found—that should be counted in my mental memory bank, and maybe I'm better for it.
Whose fentanyl death will be the next disaster?
Whose mother’s child will we mourn in church?
Which dealer will have cash in return for candied Ashes? The unslumbering wind sweeps dime-sized Sweetness away like snow. Cutting To the chase, the wind will decide.
POCKET PROPORTIONS
Lydia Reed Sheffield

Crawling into
The tunnel of your eyes
Empty sockets become
Pockets
Filled to the top
With honey
Melting like a candle wick
Drowned in wax
I sit in that
Space between your nose
And ear
Dangling my legs off the edge
Of a cheekbone cliff
I wish you wouldn’t loom so large
I’d like to fit you in a jar
Keep you in the pocket of
My overalls
THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS
Samantha Long

After all, I will carry you someplace new
With words that are not yours.
On bird’s back to The Promised Land, loudly,
You are undying there.

At the entrance to it there is a fat crane. He called out
The way he could but I don’t understand the language
Of birds. Mammals like me move our mouths
Like this.

He does not often open his mouth to me gently.
A crane like that cannot lick his paws clean like
I can. He has no hands to wring dry of sadness. One of
These days I will hear your voice as more than sound.

You can touch my hair if I can touch your feathers
You show me yours and I’ll show you mine,
These days are the best and only of me.
And what day is it now of this Forever-Kaddish?

Mourning, groaning on and on for the love of you, skin
Stretched drum tight across the love of you, and
Now you’re on a moon that needed
A face. And what a face on you.

To me the dark side of the moon’s face is
Just a port wine stain.
When I was younger, your face was a map. Red sea,
And land. When you were younger, I was younger.
the constant drops of water
a hundred drums beating
it has been raining for
a thousand years

the choir is playing in my head
the hum of throats
like bees

the cantor sings
the sound of the waves
of thunder of fields

he has been
singing for
a thousand years

one more time
kol nidre
this time under
stone arches
this time wrapped
in velvet
once as
a slave the
other as a prince
it is the same song for
everyone

even for
the skinny ghost
who is hungry
and thirsty
he is too shy to tell us he
knows too well how to be discarded
he has learned to speak quietly
and remembers not being allowed to sing
or to pray, he knows there is no
difference between singing and praying

in the desert
it was sung
in Berlin
in Los Angeles
in Babylon
in the middle of a Sea
a third time
dressed in white
kol nidre
stillness in the air
where no fabric moves

the choir is still singing
it is only us who have
started to join in again
forgive me
if I forget the words
or if I did not sing with
you a few hundred years ago

though I am ancient
and laugh when I hear
the name of our country
as if it exists

forgive me if
I betray you in these lines
my sentences are archives
and my words are easily forgotten—

only the melody has
not escaped me
SELF PORTRAIT AS A HOUSE
Sophie Mulgrew

I coat my walls in lemon zest, a meek attempt to dissuade your lingering scent—aching in the rafters and bending beneath the floorboards. On the mantel there is an empty frame reserved for silence and unwanted guests.
Two months on West 17th Street

If you don’t count that last week of August, or the visit in July.
60 sleeps with no door, and hearing whispers of trying to keep quiet in the kitchen making breakfast or late night snacking chips falling into a ceramic bowl.
I find it interesting how I attach sounds to familiar actions, and the way I can recognize them in a half 9:30 am slumber.
Like opening a tea bag, ripping the top of the plastic casing, or the crack of an egg against the countertop.

Two months without curtains or a desk chair.
And drinking tea every morning and showering with the lights on.

Our apartment smells like white rice when I come and reminds me I don’t live with my mom anymore who never cooked it because it wasn’t a whole grain. She always burned it too.
A big bag of it sits in our cabinet that Ruby can’t reach without my help.
We buy tissues, and dryer sheets, which didn’t exist before.
I could buy nutella if I wanted to. Or white bread.

Two months of getting used to the smell of meat cooking, and walking up and down five flights of stairs.
I found that if I get distracted between Floor 2 and 4 it goes by fast.
But I don’t have time to forget things because I’ll be two minutes late and out of breath.
The super turned on our radiators last week and it woke me up in the middle of the night.
I changed my sheets twice and turned over the cold pillow.
I like lighting candles in the morning and falling asleep early.

I’m starting to learn a lot about myself. I like to do laundry, and fold the crisp warm smell into neat piles. I hang my clothes in color order and stuff things under my bed like posters and a suitcase of winter clothes.

I like smelling good. And brushing my hair. I’ve been keeping it straight and long recently, and golden.
Buying coffee out, remembering to tip the barista, and taking long walks in the west village. I like seeing people on Saturdays with their dogs and a bag from the farmers market. I like the way people dress like it’s fall when it’s warm out, and walk in pairs.
My feet hurt everyday and there’s just about one pair of comfortable shoes I have left.
I started biking. I have gotten used to one-way streets even though I still look both ways like my mom is whispering it into my ear at every intersection. Music helps. I play it loud.

I like to talk in class. I get shy with boys I sit next to. But I’ll talk to everyone at a party.
I love moments with friends and the cashmere sweater Ruby wears around the house.
I love saying good mornings and good nights.
I love when my roommates and I all get home at once, and eat at the dinner table.
I like the smell of garlic and shallots, and that time Alice did the dishes after I was out late.
Two months of getting dressed. Two periods. And two months of summer job money, weekends, accutane, making dinner for myself, homework, vacuuming, flossing in the mornings, being on time—being early.

Two months away from Whitney Street.
Oh, you wanna see some Borderviolence?

Some Breaking Bad, big boy, one-night-only Borderviolence?
Some it-could-never-happen-here, Marty Robbins, barbed wired, blockbusting Borderviolence?
"I wanna save the migrants!" Borderviolence?
Belligerent, bloodsoaked, bourgeois, binational & b-b-borderviolence?

I’ll show you some Borderviolence, vato—

my Borderboyfriend Bordertwistedme today,
and that shit
was Borderviolent.
A clock paused
A candle bent
A closet in the study room
Seven tables.

If anything
There is something in that closet’s lock.
Small like
a question

a mole
a condition
a grave with no name on it.
Is that true?

That I want you
like a piece of furniture.
Some creature crawls in
and chokes on its desire

the same way she waits for him
at one of the tables, wondering—
With what strength does he chew?
Not write, but chew?

The things someone has thought
in someone’s house.

The moon
Makes me think of: the sea.
Makes you think of: darkness.
Makes us think of: pests and fallen angels
Jesus walking on the gutter, while the gutter
Thinks of: the reflection of water, and the chosen ones
Who descend to us, winged with disease and divine light
Sickness thinks of rats. Rats almost reflect on themselves
Eons ago, epically in Sodom and Gomorrah
They were humans, relegated from the City of Angels
And what should humans think of?
—The opposite of human, rationality
Think of the back of the moon
The unknown black sea, the plague map, watermarked
By constellations of splendor
Collapsed one after another
In the memory of the unremembered
Legends of great flood water
I think of: you. Wish.
Let you think of: me. Lunacy
That you think of love, fear to think of
The diagnosis. The judgment day when
Pharmacological midnight thinks of
The moon’s fever, Lunatic visual effects.
Think of the tenderness of the all-American continent
Chaos and spasms of moody tranquility
Duality, refused dirty dusty angel-pests
Think of the awing shock, a yellow stare
Electrical headlight, shuttling through merchants
And beggars, survivors from the fall of Rome and
Babylon parlors and sickhouses, salted fields
Think of the timid fog glistening in the breath of the heavenly
Ripples, the honey gutter with brownish, shy rats’ furs
Tiny quiver of whiskers, psalm soundless,
That they faithfully chant and almost remember
No longer angels as they’ve outnumbered humans
Fallen they are living upside down
In the sewer, drinking moonlight from a manhole cover
Dripping, hold their heads high up
To think of an obscure, steady night
They bend over the moon’s reflection on the gutter
And think of a flat, stable plight.
No above and no below. The obscure light
That they love, holy, that they may contemplate, when we
Think of a cheesy moon.
AMINA AHMED is graduating senior concentrating in the Experience of Creativity, investigating the phenomenon of creativity through philosophy, art, and in true Gali- tin fashion, a myriad of other disciplines. Amina is an avid film photographer, writer, climber, cook, and overall serial hobbyist. She plans to study continental philosophy in graduate school following graduation.

MAITE ARMSTRONG-MATTA (b. 1999, Mexico and raised in Puerto Rico) is a studio art major with a minor in Latin American studies, graduating in May 2023. Her work primarily centers on the intersection between music and culture, mixing mediums like photography, facades, and printmaking. She is planning on continuing her art education after graduation.

GRAICIELA BLANDÓN is from El Paso, Texas and won’t let you forget it! At Gallatin, she has researched borders and migration as a Global Human Rights Fellow, Urban Practice Fellow, and Horn Family Environmental Scholar. She is currently planning on a concentration entitled Arts, Culture, and Social Change as Pros.

CAMERON CAVE is writing. He’ll graduate from CAS in 2023 as a poet andBorders, and is reading everything he can in the meantime.

SAMANTHA CAVE is a first-year student of Tisch’s Department of Photography and Imaging. Her focus lately has been on photographing children. The nuances of a child’s emotions are spontaneous. She loves capturing them. Read more of his writing at cavewrites.mydomaine.com.

OLÀ KARASINSKA is a first-year student in the Photography and Imaging program at Tisch. She is a multimedia artist, merging analog and digital photography, moving image, and digital manipulation in her work.

SAMUEL AARON FUREY GOODMAN is a first-year student of Tisch’s Department of Photography and Imaging. He plans to study philosophy in graduate school. He’s a serial hobbyist. He plans to study continental philosophy in graduate school following graduation.

THOMAS GREENE has been working towards his associate degree in social work. He dreams of working with at- risk/high-risk youth in his community and beyond. Thom- as’s motto is “How can someone teach about antisocial behavior if they have never been in the same situation?”. His work with children has been on an ongoing battle to make sure they’re loved. He helped him make on impact and create a better world through his ideas, art, literature, and future start-up work.

JENS BENHDI will graduate in May 2024 with a concentration in Social Sciences and a minor in studio art. He uses lens-based projects to navigate soci- ological construct of races, while also reflecting on his own identity. Benji has showed up at the Gallatin Gallery and Mamadou's. S Bobst Gallery.

HELENA JOHNSON is a junior focusing on Social Sciences and a minor in Studio Art. She plans to study classical music, literature, and fashion history. She works to make sense of why the rules of our society exist today. She has published pieces in Confidence in addition to the Gallatin Review and is always working to expand her understanding of history through the arts.

DEACRE DOHERTY will graduate from Gallatin in May 2024 with a concentration in Creative Nonfiction Media with a focus on memoir and essay writing. Her work will be published in both the Gallatin Review and Confidence this spring.

KAYLA BULLY is a first-year in the Photography and Imaging program at Tisch. She is a multimedia artist, merging analog and digital photography, moving image, and digital manipulation in her work.

SOPHIE MULGREW is a first-year student in the Photography and Imaging program at Tisch. She is a multimedia artist, merging analog and digital photography, moving image, and digital manipulation in her work.

SAMANTHA LONG is a junior at Gallatin concentrating in the Experience of Creativity, investigating the phenomenon of creativity through philosophy, art, and in true Gali- tin fashion, a myriad of other disciplines. She comes from a primarily visual artistic background, with a concentration in oil and gouache painting, but is also a multimedia artist who creates experimental films with different mediums of expression. Most of her works explore and analyze the world of subconscious dreams and desires. More of her art may be found on Instagram at @ljudicarium.

SANDEE KAYE is a sophomore at Tisch studying art, theater, and film. She is an aspiring entrepreneur and artist. She is working to advocate for herself and the Black community. Find her on Instagram @thesophisticatedkaye.

YIWEI LU is a junior concentrating in Media, Arts, and Technology with a minor in philosophy. He works with multimedia installations that express his relationship to digital, cybernetic, and cyber- chines, and does research in the field of human-computer interaction.

SAMANTHA LONG will graduate from Gallatin in May 2024 with a concentration in Creative Writing. Her fiction focuses include poetry and prose, visual arts, publishing, editing, and curatorial work, and she is portait- ing her interest in working with contemporary art as an art-as-participation project. She has submitted his long-overdue IAPC under the title Modern Aesthetics: A Critique on Subjectivity. YIWEI LIU is a second-year student at Tisch, concentrating in Studio Art, Victorian literature, and fashion history. She works to make sense of why the rules of our society exist today. She has published pieces in Confidence in addition to the Gallatin Review and is always working to expand her understanding of history through the arts.

GRACE KARASINSKA is a first-year student pursuing a degree in collaborative arts of Tisch. She comes from a primarily visual artistic background, with a concentration in oil and gouache painting, but is also a multimedia artist who creates experimental films with different mediums of expression. Most of her works explore and analyze the world of subconscious dreams and desires. More of her art may be found on Instagram at @ljudicarium.

SOPHIE FEMUR is a junior at Gallatin concentrating in the Experience of Creativity, investigating the phenomenon of creativity through philosophy, art, and in true Gali- tin fashion, a myriad of other disciplines. She comes from a primarily visual artistic background, with a concentration in oil and gouache painting, but is also a multimedia artist who creates experimental films with different mediums of expression. Most of her works explore and analyze the world of subconscious dreams and desires. More of her art may be found on Instagram at @ljudicarium.

SAMANTHA GAUTHIER is a junior at Gallatin concentrating in the Experience of Creativity, investigating the phenomenon of creativity through philosophy, art, and in true Gali- tin fashion, a myriad of other disciplines. She comes from a primarily visual artistic background, with a concentration in oil and gouache painting, but is also a multimedia artist who creates experimental films with different mediums of expression. Most of her works explore and analyze the world of subconscious dreams and desires. More of her art may be found on Instagram at @ljudicarium.

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HELEN RUCKELSHAUS is a junior concentrating in Studio Art. She comes from a primarily visual artistic background, with a concentration in oil and gouache painting, but is also a multimedia artist who creates experimental films with different mediums of expression. Most of her works explore and analyze the world of subconscious dreams and desires. More of her art may be found on Instagram at @ljudicarium.

THOMAS GREENE has been working towards his associate degree in social work. He dreams of working with at- risk/high-risk youth in his community and beyond. Thom- as’s motto is “How can someone teach about antisocial behavior if they have never been in the same situation?”. His work with children has been on an ongoing battle to make sure they’re loved. He helped him make on impact and create a better world through his ideas, art, literature, and future start-up work.

JENS BENHDI will graduate in May 2024 with a concentration in Social Sciences and a minor in studio art. He uses lens-based projects to navigate soci- ological construct of races, while also reflecting on his own identity. Benji has showed up at the Gallatin Gallery and Mamadou’s. S Bobst Gallery.
JALON SHABAZZ will graduate in May 2023 with an AA in liberal arts. He is concentrating on pursuing a BA in social work. He believes that collaborative education is the key to unlock all cages of circumstance.

LYDIA REED SHEFFIELD is a sophomore currently concentrating in a blend of independent design, poetry, and entrepreneurship. She is also pursuing a minor in technology, management, and design. Lydia has been a lifelong dancer, daydreamer, and lover of plants. One of her poems titled “Beneath the Lithosphere” was published in Gallatin’s Confluence just last year.

LORE SKOULATOS is in her first year in the XE: Experimental Humanities & Social Engagement master’s program at NYU. Her studies are in philosophy, literature, feminist theory, and creative writing. She is also the XE Student Representative and Co-Editor-in-Chief of Caustic Frolic, XE’s interdisciplinary literary journal.

DYVIN TAYLOR (she/her) is interested in creating theoretical work that challenges our preconceptions of identity to reveal the deep connections we share with strangers. She likes to create art in several disciplines, but has concentrated in studying theater direction in the Collaborative Arts BFA at Tisch.

HUNTER THOMPSON will graduate from Gallatin in Fall 2023 with a concentration in Prosthetics Reification, which concerns gifting, wishes, memory as material, video games, and philosophy of myth. Select exhibitions include EGX’s Leftfield Collection in London (2019), O’Flaherty’s in New York (2022), Ritual Transmission Agency in Australia (2022), and an upcoming solo show at Marsha’s Cabin in Australia (2023).

AUGUST WANG is exploring the extensive possibilities of visual art in his study at NYU of interactive media art, film, and computer science. In the near future, he’s excited to engage with emerging arts that seek the connection between art and technology.

TONY WANG is a lens-based artist and director graduating from Tisch Department of Photography and Imaging in May 2023. Tony’s photographic works lie on the intersection between collecting cropped compositions from daily moments and staged experiences with collaborators. Tony has built an reputation for using the moving body and camera to express intimate emotions in his experimental art films and documentary shorts.

KAITLYN WIGMORE is a sophomore at Tisch who is pursuing a degree in photography and imaging, along with a minor in philosophy and film. Much of her work is based on surrealistic concepts and the intersection between documentary and fine art.

SAMANTHA ESNÉ WILLIAMS is a Steinhardt sophomore majoring in studio art. Her artistic practice is dominated by drawings, especially those created using her forced technique of pointillism. She explores themes of nature, abolishment, and memory through her artwork.

Born in Shaoxing, China, ANGELA XU is a junior majoring in photography and imaging at Tisch. Her photographs revolve around creating and holding moments in life through color and light.

MICHAEL ZHAN is a Tisch junior learning photography and imaging. His specialty focuses on creating high-end editorial fashion portraiture. Michael has published his work through Paralle magazine and might publish a book of work in Vogue Magazine’s March edition.

YIWEI ZHAO has been working on the art and craft of poetry since 2002, majoring in history and East Asian studies. She has a wide range of interests in science, music, painting, anthropology, and so on. She is planning future studies as a student at Gallatin and a city pedestrian with poetry vibes as well.

XY ZHOU will graduate in May 2023 with a concentration in Translation Between Mediums and a minor in law and society. They are planning future projects with support from a fellowship at the Newington-Cropsey Foundation and as an LES Young Artists of Color Fellow.

ELLA ZONA is a North Carolina-based brand designer, social media manager & studio artist. Ella majored in studio art and minored in the business of entertainment, media, and technology during her time at NYU. She received her degree semi-early in December of 2022, and has since continued to build her business, Zone Creative Solutions, and grow in her work as the Lead VA at Boho Business Co., a Florida-based boutique agency.