

THE CANTICLE

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
UNDEGRADUATE
LITERARY MAGAZINE

2021

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THE
LITERARY JOURNAL
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

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Published by the University of Utah Marriott Library
295 S 1500 E, Salt Lake City, Utah

Acknowledgements

The staff of *The Canticle* would like to express our profound gratitude to the Student Media Council for funding this edition of our journal. Without their support and their belief in student creativity, this journal would not have been possible.

We would also like to thank the Department of English and the English Student Enrichment Association for sponsoring our 2021 Editor's Choice Awards. The funding and resources they provided allowed us to recognize some of our most outstanding pieces and further The Canticle's goal of fostering a more vibrant artistic and literary community for undergraduate students on the University of Utah campus.

Thank you.

CANTICLE

/'KAN(T)EK(E)L/

Noun

1. Is a melody or hymn that requires the contribution of various human voices as a collective.
2. Studies of our literary landscape, a geography of intimate experience and the erotics of language.

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Poetry

Causeway

Claire Dinehart

By God, you would never think one animal
could be made up of so much flesh. A man pulls
chunks of meat from a bison like bricks.

Last spring there was too much lavender
and not enough yucca, so all the white moths
landed on tortoise tongues instead of the blossoms.

Sagebrush are wrapped in silk. Perched in the gauze are
spiders; there have never been so many clouds in the desert.

The only water here drips from the nose,
eyes, mouth. Droplets seep
into the sand, spur spadefoot toads to the surface.

The horizon divides into bands of blue
and brown and white. A bison stands
on the lakebed, its legs salt-crusts.

Staying at my Grandmother's Farmhouse

Claire Dinehart

An animal is being eaten in the bathroom air duct; the smell of bar soap and decay curl together with the steam. I remind myself once again, don't turn on the fan until only bones are left. On my first morning back at the house, a hoard of maggots fell from the whirring fan.

You always liked having spiders around, spoke of them as many-armed fates. I woke last night to one on my face, weaving silk between the strands of my brows. I wish I could have seen my reflection in its numerous eyes; there are parts of myself I can't see with just two.

I promised not to disturb memories of you until only bones were left. I upturn trinkets: costume jewelry and graveyard beetles, sift through the abundance alone. I thought I saw you sitting at the kitchen counter, rippling as though you were boneless; changing from the person I knew to the person you were.

Cardinals

Em DeVincentis

*Can you count how many chirp
outside my window? My grandma says they come to her
every year like a visit from the Cape. The red bird,
weaves strips of bark, grasses, lines it
with strands of her hair, nesting a home
in her dogwood tree. Their brilliant scarlet
bodies a treat as a child; easy
spotting, sweet reward. They mate
for life. We look at field guides and pretend
to be professional birders. Her husband
alights on the bird bath, singing
as she hums at her kitchen
sink. I used to believe I would love
someone almond and crimson like
cardinals, sing the same *birdie,
birdie, birdie*. We talk about colors
and I don't think about reds. Migration
ignored, they linger between neighborhoods,
towns streaking cardinal. I lose sight, my vision
crying for a now empty dogwood. *Who
is red?* my grandmother asks, and I point
to the bird perched at her kitchen table.*

Midwest States Take Longest to Traverse

Em DeVincentis

Bridges amaze me.
Never intimately learned
their skeletal forms;
large, blue, white,

twined & twisting us
away from a body
of rushing water. I drive
thousands of miles to get

back to you, forms melting
into barren lands, hydrological
lines blown out
on the map. Fingerprints

of a body
flowing cross country
folk rock, singing lung
shaking ballads to crows

racing parallel. They
collect each song tossed
along the highway, talons
outstretched to catch us.

Queer People Love

Em DeVincentis

the post office. I adore your handwriting enveloped
in tenderness,
stamped and scuffed, hand-

delivered. Built anticipation in each address
processed face-
up and measured like snails

in transit, our game edging
metal bar-
code machine scanners to read

and place correspondingly into particular
zip-code
bins. It is so simple; you

held this. I held this. The postal
worker held
this. We exaggerate

distance, phones held at length when
you obsess
over my new belly tattoo

and send kisses on two frog
postcards. Viewing
the twist and slide of your elbow

into a sleep-shirt, I imagine you
unfolding
like a letter beneath me.

A Canticle for Aphrodite

Brianna Fuller

Aphrodite is in everything that I do
it is because of her that I have loved both of you
because I can never choose
darling Adonis, who brings me to my knees
or cruel Persephone, who ignores my pleas
I am tainted by the affections of each lover
not blessed enough to share her flowers
and not pure enough to learn his ways
I have asked Aphrodite why she made me
cursed to lust and love
after darling men and charming women
Her response to my prayer
my feet break the surface of the cool water
you have always been your mothers wayward daughter
and to withhold your affections for a lover just to please another
there is no greater wrong

In Puddles

H.E. Grahame

You wrote me prose about the rain and
now when it storms I can't seem to
think about anything else.
I think of your marmalade
words, your
cotton-candy smile
and the comfortable melodies
of you.

I think about the smell of rain and
the chemistry of it.
plant oils and
coffee soil and
splitting of atmospheric chemicals that form
a scent.
A moment.
The chemical refrain of
tuned orchestration and
composition.

This weather between us is
waltzing in puddles and
humming with the showers.
Chemistry.
Electricity.
The dulcet cadence of
a drizzle or
a downpour.
Raindrops flooding our worlds with
possibility and
the pitter-patter song of
“what could be”

Dreamsight

Ana Cruz Hardy

I can hear the footsteps of my mother tiptoeing to my grandmother's bed. The crisp linen sheets with their roar of steel being tucked back like a dog's ear. In the morning when I walk by, they are folded into each other, their limbs wrap around like a sleeping jellyfish.

In a hospital bed you let your soft bones curl, filling in spaces
they had never known

This is what I imagine when I think of death: space to be filled

When I tell Suzanne about this, she tells me to address the space

The inherent expectation of the thing that is not there,
this being the space
She says the space is as a vacuum, an obsession and that
perhaps this is where you have gone

My dreams are filled with the space of you.

Last night it was me telling you (the space of you) that I did not want to eat the tongue of the cow, that I wouldn't do it. This was your favorite part of the cow and you (the space of you) couldn't understand why I wouldn't eat it.

Perhaps it is because the cow's leg is less suggestive of the
cow's life than the tongue.

Ode to Mollusks on the Evening of a Birth (or Vice Versa)

Ana Cruz Hardy

Oysters know the phases of the moon as mother
knows the guttural

pain of child and girl carries mother's knowledge
in spine and bone.

(It is felt on the right side, under the rib)
Outside the covers I crawl to feel the dry
warmth of her creamy skin—

I, honey-tongued and eating scent for comfort.
She, bed-rounded and doughy.

Listen, not to the milk of the earth that
ferments below us, but to the hymn

she sings. Come, we are flesh.
We are the curling sob of breath.

(Body bleeds & light touches her eyelids)

we (mimetic in nature) soak it in
and we become.

Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss, Antonio Canova 1793

Cassidy Howard

As though woven in art nouveau by Arachne,
delicate copper limbs bearing the word *METROPOLITAIN*
oversee one's passage from its dark and pungent belly
below, into the open air of the esteemed musée

Renaissance era archways borrowed from Rome
carve the path to see such antiquity

Amongst the litter of collectibles once kept
in some magistrate's parlor, or even the great
Napoleon's palace
rests a pas de deux paused in place

An emotion soft as tenderness, set in stone
the flesh of their forms flushed with warm, golden light
pouring in through a gallery window
as voyeurs surround a moment intimate yet inaccessible

Venus now slouching sans arms in a neighboring gallery
admonished Psyche to repress her child's curiosity
about the "Imprisoned Treasure of Divine Beauty"
which she was sent to obtain for the goddess so vain

Upon return from the Underworld,
overcome by her urges even as was foretold

Psyche succumbed to the night of the Styx,
a “Sleep of the Innermost Darkness”
purposed by Proserpina for Venus
which filled the container ordained to carry beauty

Once unleashed, sleep rushed through her
Cold as a corpse she slumbered
Until her lover arrived, at once the antidote and the toxin
He gave her the gift of life with a gentle pierce of his arrow

Carved with great care, Cupid’s gossamer wings glow
The bow of Psyche’s arms mirroring his
a ballerina, bras en couronne
Her fingers entangled in his curls

He caresses her, lifting her face to his
A gaze unfazed by time and attention

BLM, Library Square, Salt Lake City, Summer 2020

Hannah Slind

the lake looks like it's on fire
when sun downswings over salt
downtown, bronze brown sculpture hands are bleeding red paint
red tape as protesters loot and riot
and loud-not-quiet
chisel and pluck and plie their way towards freedom

with some luck,
the lake will expand her shores
doors will shut and God's window will open,
we'll unstuck
the blinding white silence that we orbit through

and yes, loudness looms large,
when it's your own silence you're crumbling
but what's worse: standing up heighthily
for a person rightly
or can't-breathing in a hearse?

Tasting a Western Summer

Hannah Slind

Wait until dusk, and wait until a full day of work has been put away
like a book on a shelf.

Get in the car and unfurl one window, then the other, and
turn on something dreamy, music unpredictable from the radio
that you wouldn't have known yourself well enough to play.

Drive as fast as you can- I like to drive on the quick smoothness
of highways,

but ultimately, it's Reader's preference.

(Remember, this is a poem and not a driving manual).

Once you get up to terminal velocity, automobile becomes spaccraft.

You will begin to catch the scent of a Western summer,

dry sage and pine trees and loss,

carried down on the wings of cool winds from the mountains.

Only by glossing across the nighttime freeway will you understand
the ache of summertime

happiness, which fades to indigo the moment you notice it.

Phases

Aspen Stuart

Each night the moon changes.
She slowly sheds her skin,
and becomes something new,
something whole.
She's there,
and then she's gone.

*They say every seven years
I'll shed my skin and be new.
How long until I'm whole?
How long until I'm gone?*

everything i know weighs 1,000 pounds

Lex Washburn

and it sits on me all at once. silent. and heavy.
the way the chalk snaps under playground fingers.
the way the attic stairs don't creak if you tell them to keep a secret.
the way fear still tucks itself behind the couch, even after you've turned
on every light in the house.

and childhood is full of saying 'no' until you really need to
and childhood is full of saying 'why' until you really need to

i guess i don't remember when i learned all of this
all of these mistakes don't make themselves
all of this yelling doesn't crush the other kids
all of that living shouldn't diminish this much light
and i guess big gold wedding rings are just
domestic brass knuckles
and i guess leaving the knives in the block is the
same as not bringing one to a gunfight

*i am melting like an ice cap all that breath roaring out red hot discipline
ringing in the ears punishment i am crumbling under paternal hand but
because of every attempt to stop this unique kind of drowning i am still
afloat*

kitchen sink

Lex Washburn

and you get into bed and open your laptop
and then suddenly you look up from the screen and it's dark
in your room?
like the sun set and you didn't even notice?

that's what losing you was like
I can't pinpoint the exact moment the sun sank like a brick
I just looked up from the screen one day and you were gone

now every poem I write reads like eulogy
and every moment I recall feels like a lie
the pictures of us reek of fiction, memories we painted to look
nicer than they were

and I'll never forget your birthday or our anniversary
but you will. you drift, I stagnate.
I can't say for sure exactly when the light left,
but I know you took it with you.

the unending flicker of a street lamp or an omen

Lex Washburn

off - on- - - off - - on

is the lack of rhythm the result of cut wires
or the hand of a forgetful god?

either way, it's unsettling
but walking home alone
in the dark feels less lonely
when there is a shortage or
possibly morse code comm
unication going on all up an
d down the street you know
maybe god is just trying to se
nd me a message to tell me t
o stop being so the opposite
of what he wants. i am every
kind of lonely i can be. the
dark reaches out to me and sa
ys maybe this god you speak
of. maybe he is right.

Enormity

Lily Weeks

When I was small,
my father cut pomegranates for us.
I stole
fistfuls of fat red seeds out of the sieve,
before they could be shared.
My lips dripped crimson
and my chin stained pink as
I stuffed my mouth to the brim,
grinning, dirtying
my mother's kitchen.

I am not small now.
I cut my own pomegranates.
I crack
them open and
sink in my teeth
before they have a chance to leave
the shell.
I splatter my own kitchen
red with my lust.
I can't be bothered
to rinse my hands;
I leave them bloodied
and touch everyone around me.

I eat the world until I am all that is left.
Until I am
everything.

untitled

Lily Weeks

If a child weeps in a forest
and there is no mother
to love it, does it make a sound?

I am the wet mewling thing
slumped on old women's doorsteps,
mildewed in the slick salt of my own misery.
For a drop of milk, I can be a perfect pet;
for a whole saucer, I can drown myself
when I am no longer wanted.

I am the scrap of russet fur creeping into the
coop, risking the shotgun
for a taste of motherhood —
just once
I'd like to be the precious round thing
nestled under beak and belly.

I am the grotesque medley of fur, leather, and longing
suspended from the rafters.
At dusk, I thump about blindly and strain
my hooked claws towards any body
able to hear.

It can make all the sound it wants.
But chances are,
it will stop.

It will learn
that its birthgiver was
standing in the dark
all along,

watching —
wondering at her own inscrutable reflection.



Prose

Just Like Me

Jake Luman

Faded leaves crumbled wordlessly underfoot, as though they were painted onto the ground. I walked aimlessly on the familiar asphalt, underneath a quiet, sepia sky framed by mountains splashed with washed out reds and yellows. It was fall, and I had fallen.

Every step echoed off of unseen walls. The street was lifelike, but barren. Empty. Actually, it was exactly like I remembered it; when my mind had wandered here before, I never encountered anyone else. It was as if I had stepped directly into a memory to find that I had forgotten things.

I strolled by my childhood home. Peaceful. Idyllic. Missing only my father, dozing on the porch. Its blue paint was peeling. I looked closer. The house was peeling, too, away from the sky. I worried that if I touched it, it would tear. I walked onward.

I came to a familiar park, a small playground and a large, dry, yellow-green field. Larger than I remembered it. It seemed to stretch on forever. Sitting on one of the swings, fidgeting uncomfortably, was Death.

I assumed it was them, anyways. A tall, billowing cloak with skeletal hands poking out. A living cliché. Well, not living.

Death patted the swing next to them. I walked across the woodchips. I realized then that I was barefoot, but the woodchips didn't seem to hurt. It was as if they were merely painted onto the ground. Impasto tan strokes layered on top of one another; beautiful, masterfully done, but not real.

I reached the swing and sat down. Death held their hand out, and I shook it. It was icy cold – the first sensation I had felt since I started walking down the road years or hours ago. The cold lingered as they broke away, their ghastly skull of a face looking down awkwardly. Their bony hands made a faint clicking noise as they fidgeted.

We sat like this for a few minutes, them looking at the faded woodchips below us, me gazing at the sunless sky, shifting from brown to gray.

Finally, I broke the silence. “I’m dead.” It wasn’t a question, but I still looked at them, hoping I was wrong. Death nodded. I sighed. “Why here?” They shrugged.

“I thought you would know,” they said. Their voice was surprisingly pleasant. A bit nasal, perhaps raspy from underuse, but comforting, normal. “Childhood memories?”

“I think so. That’s my house, over there, and this is the park I used to go to with my father when I was little. I can’t remember the name.”

“I’m impressed,” said Death. “It’s very detailed. A little faded around the edges, but this memory is strong. You even remember the woodchips. Reminds me of myself.”

Another few minutes of silence went by as I pondered what this could mean. I rubbed my hand as I thought. It was still cold.

“Do you remember my father?” I asked, stumbling over my words as I realized how stupid a question like that was. Billions must have passed through here, after all. But Death nodded.

“Arthur Hestfield. He died of a heart attack at age 73. He loved his children, his coin collection, and his wife, years and years after she died. He was nearsighted. His memory was the farm he grew up on.” As they said this, the sky rippled. The world around us melted, dripping like a fresh oil painting, into a peaceful countryside, the sky the color of rosewater and nostalgia. An endless field of wheat, flatly painted strokes against the sky, rippled directionless in the wind. The house was replaced with a faded barn. Death

and I sat on a crooked bench.

I looked around, astonished. So did Death. The frayed hood turned to me incredulously. “How did you—?”

“Did you not do this?” I asked. The cold seeped up my arm as Death shook their head. “I, well, I knew what it looked like,” I offered.

“You haven’t been here.”

“No, but my dad told me about it. Before he died. He always wanted to go back. I’m glad he got to.”

“This is very detailed,” he said. They looked down again, this time at the brushstrokes of lemongrass growing around our feet. A faded daisy blew by. “Reminds me of myself.”

We sat in silence again. The sky turned from gray to dark gray to a soft, dusty black. Stars dripped from above like eggshell paint. I shivered.

“Where do you go? After you die, I mean.”

“You go here.”

“I mean, after here. If there is an after here. Or do I sit and talk to you forever? Not that I don’t want to talk to you, but—”

Death chuckled. “People don’t stay here forever. They come here, they chat for a while, they go somewhere else. Usually, I tell them stories about their memories.”

“Why haven’t you told me about mine?”

“Because you already showed me yours.”

“Is that not normal?” Death said nothing. I thought for a moment. “Can you tell me where that somewhere else is? How do I get there?”

Death shook their head. “I don’t know what’s next. I’ve never been.”

“I guess you can’t die.”

“Not twice.”

Another minute went by. “Usually,” Death continued, “people are gone by now.”

“Oh.” I couldn’t think of anything else to say. My chest felt cold. So did my neck, as though icy water was being poured upwards from my stomach into my head. I wondered for a moment if this was what dying felt like, but no. When I died, it was fast.

“What did you do?” they asked abruptly.

“Oh. I was hiking, and I-”

“Not that, I know how you died. What did you do before? How did you live your life?” They spoke quickly, a desperate light flickering in their sockets as they gazed intently at me.

I paused, unsure what they were asking. “Well, I was an attorney. Public defense lawyer. Not particularly exciting.” They gazed at me, clearly expecting more. “I had a dog. His name was Buddy. I hope someone is taking care of him now. No family. It just never happened. I thought I’d have more time. I took long walks, hiked, explored nature.

“Oh, and I painted. I don’t think I was great at it, but I painted. Landscapes, places I’d been. People, sometimes. I was never great with words. Too blunt, I guess. But, I don’t know, painting was different. It felt like I could just let whatever was inside me out, onto the canvas. My dad liked my paintings, I guess.”

“That makes sense.” Death paused. “I was a poet.”

“What do you mean?”

“A poet. Before I did this. I studied the greats, emulated them, found my

own style. I wrote about everything. Life, death, love, hate, people, places, memories. The world was a vast place, especially then, but I thought I could explore it with nothing but ink and my imagination. I thought I could capture the heavens themselves and plaster them to paper. And I thought that if I did, some part of me would live on after I died. I poured my soul into my art. I suppose it worked.

“One night, a fire in my village broke out. It tore through my home. By the time I woke up, it was too late. My room was ablaze with a raging inferno spewing thick smoke. I don’t remember falling asleep again, but when I awoke, I was nowhere. It was like empty paper, waiting to be filled. So, I filled it.

“She told me none of my poetry survived the fire. That hurt far worse than my own death.”

They shivered. I shivered, too. I realized I had been shivering throughout their story. My teeth were chattering, loudly, louder than normal. It was like their handshake had frozen me, frozen my heart, spread throughout my body and turned my blood into ice. My chest hurt. Perhaps I was grieving for their poetry. Perhaps I was wondering if my paintings had survived. Nobody had seen them.

Death sighed. “It’s been a long time. It’s felt like eons since I met Death. The last one. I think she was an artist, too. I wouldn’t be surprised if they all were. A long, long line of artists taking up the mantle. Maybe it has been eons. I’m not sure how time works here, or how I can get to everyone when so many people die. Maybe there are others like me. I don’t think so, though. I think I’ve been alone, since Death moved on.

“I remember every single person who’s passed through here, though. Your father. Your mother. Your father’s father, your mother’s mother, everyone. Every person who’s died since I did. Every one of their faces, a bittersweet elegy inscribed in my mind, scribbled into humanity’s epic. They haunt me. I think that’s why I’m here.” They gazed at me. “I think that’s why you’re here, too. Memory is a powerful thing. Art captures it. My poems. Your paintings. You remind me of myself.”

They sighed. “I think you are. Me, that is.”

My heart dropped into my stomach, out of my stomach, out of my body. I trembled from the cold. My bones ached. I thought of my father, my mother, the people I had lost. The people I would find. I wiped away a tear. It froze on my bony, stark-white finger.

“For what it’s worth,” said Death faintly, “I’m sure your paintings were lovely.”

When I looked to my right, all that was left of them was a billowing black cloak. I put it on.

Our Wings

Haley Peterson

The first thing I saw when I came into this world were my mother's wings. I did not see my mother herself. As I gazed at the silver ceiling I saw a bright light, and her great big wings encircled themselves around the screaming blob that was me. Immediately I knew all about the wings; how strong they were and how my mother had taken great care of them over her life. She protected them fiercely. When they were ripped, torn, and scarred, she mended the wounds as best she could and when she could do no more she sought help. When my mother's wings enveloped me, my crying ceased; I curled into the safe position I had known my entire existence and went to sleep.

As I grew, so did my mother's wings. With each year that went by they became more luscious. She told me they were sometimes very heavy, and she would often need to stop and rest in the middle of the day to cope with carrying such a large burden. It wasn't until I was four years old that I noticed ridges of bone protruding from my shoulder blades, and with that realization came the growing pains. My mother said I started to grow my wings much earlier than that. I whined to her about the pain. She shushed me and cradled me and rocked me in her arms. She sang me a song until I fell asleep, her great wings enveloping the both of us.

I was twelve when my mother died. When my father told me the news he was gripping me tightly by the shoulders, a place of growth that was already very tender; it hurt horribly, but I didn't have the heart to tell him. My father's own wings were invisible to my eyes. My mother told me she could see them, and I would be able to as well when I got older and learned more about my father and myself. I never was able to see his wings fully,

only bits and pieces of them in the shadows. If I looked at them intently, their shape would fade into obscurity, and it was only my father left there, hunched and hollow. When I asked him what happened to mother's wings when she died, he turned away from me and left me in the room alone. I asked him once more in the next year and he closed his eyes and sat still until I left him alone.

I didn't cry at the funeral. My unborn wings ached. Each hug I received from fellow mourners pressed hard on my back, and my poor wings screamed in protest. By the end of the day I felt eternally raw and that night I slept on my stomach.

At fifteen my wings sprouted. One was bigger than the other, and although the doctor said that was normal, she said they were unusually hard and brittle, and we made regular appointments with her so that she could check the progress of my growth. My father did not see my wings. I do not know if he caught glimpses of their shape in the shadows. I never asked. I had many growth spurts; they grew almost as much as they stood still. I would wake up some mornings and find they had grown quite large in the night, then not see anything else from them for months or even a year. They grew in patches, like the beards of the boys at school. The first time I kissed a boy they ached. The first time I kissed a girl they sang. The first time I had sex they screamed, and the first time I got drunk they laughed. I attended my doctor appointments and told her everything. She said it was all part of the process. She told me to soak my wings in a hot bath three times a week. I did it twice a week, then got bored with it. I did not go back to see my doctor after that; I did not want to tell her that I hadn't done what she asked.

On the night of my nineteenth birthday I met a boy at a bar, he was slightly older than me. His wings were big and fluffy and beautiful, and I fell into their embrace. They were soft to the touch and they smelled like summer nights; they were perfect. He held me tightly and entered me fastly and each time the night was over there was a little piece of him left inside of me until I could not cope with being without him. His wings called to mine, and they sang a beautiful song, and I went to him. But the sweeter his songs were, the darker the night became, and I found that each time he lodged a part of himself inside of me his wings would grow. Mine stood still. My heart

would pound and my wings would flutter at the thought of seeing him, but at the end of each of our visits I would find myself cold and weeping in the corner, my wings doing their best to warm me, but failing. They were so scrawny still.

My wing's quit growing; I longed for my mother's. The last night I saw the boy his wings were so large they spanned the entirety of his bedroom, and I struggled to find his face beneath their mass. In the middle of the night I felt the sobs creeping up my throat to take me. His wings shrouded his face from mine and his feathers went into my mouth and down my throat, holding the sobs down and choking me in the process. I screamed and kicked and struggled to breathe; my wings flapped wildly and my heart tried to break itself out of my chest. The smell of summer nights overwhelmed me, and I stopped fighting.

When I woke my face was streaked with dry tears and I was naked and cold. I reached for my wings to pull around me but they would not leave the safe spot between my shoulders.

I call my father. He picks me up. He takes me home. I stay in the room I grew up in, I sleep most of the day, my wings refuse to unfold themselves from my shoulder blades. My father's worried. He cannot see my wings, but I tell him they won't spread. He makes me an appointment with the doctor from my youth. The doctor can see my wings. She tells me to soak them four times a week in a hot bath. I tell her I will. She gives me a number. I take it. She hugs me. I cry on her shoulder. She hugs me still.

I soak my wings every night in the bath. I wash them too. I don't call the number, though. I'm afraid. I don't want to tell my doctor I didn't call the number. I tell my father why I'm worried. He tells me to keep soaking my wings, and call the number when I'm ready. He says these things are part of the process, and the process takes time. I take his advice. When I finally call the number, I am nervous. Even my wings are trembling. It's the first time they've moved since the night with the boy. At night, when I ache for the boy with the beautiful wings that smell like summer nights, I curl up in a ball, and imagine my mother's wings wrapped around me. I fall asleep crying. They are tears of joy. I feel much better in the morning, after my coffee.

I meet many people at the new doctor's office, all with disabled wings. Some are broken, some are frozen, some are torn almost to shreds, and some I cannot see very clearly, like my father's. There are people of all ages, all races, all genders. I see his wings and her wings and their wings. I see all wings and no wings. The people there seem to like me. I did not expect them to. I wonder if they feel bad for me. Maybe they see something I don't. Do I have spinach in my teeth? I try not to think about it. I listen to their stories and I tell them mine, we hug and some of us cry. I meet a woman whose wings have been snipped, and she is working to grow them back. She says her daughter has just started growing her own wings. She wants her daughter to see her wings as strong and full. She becomes a good friend. I met her daughter. She is smart for her age.

I still bathe my wings every night, and some nights it feels like they will unhinge themselves from my shoulder blades, but it never happens. I get frustrated. My father tells me not to give up, it is all part of the process, and the process takes time. My doctor tells me the same thing, the old one and the new one, as does my new friend. I keep washing my wings, I keep consulting my doctors, I keep seeing my friend. Every night I dream of big strong wings, like my mothers or like mine when they unfold. I say nice words to my wings before I go to bed, and I say even nicer ones when I wake up. I sing my wings to sleep at night, and I forgive them for not spreading, and I tell them that it is all part of the process. These things take time. One morning, one of my wings separated itself from my shoulder blade. It still will not spread, but it does not cling to me anymore. I cry with joy. I keep washing my wings, I keep visiting my doctors, I tell them my wing has detached. They are happy for me. They congratulate me. I take the compliments, even though I don't think it was anything I did. My friend's wings began to slowly grow back. I tell her they're beautiful. She tells me mine are too. We hug.

Before long, my other wing follows, and each morning they spread more and more, until finally they have moved from their seemingly infinite position on my back. I can't describe how happy I am. I still ache for the boy, but I don't dare think about him when my wings are awake and listening, I don't dare disrespect them like that. My wings grow faster than they have ever grown before. I still wash them every night. I still visit my doctors,

they give me tips on how to keep my wings awake and alive. My wings grow until they are bigger than they have ever been before. I never thought it was possible for them to be this big. Although my father has not told me he can see my wings, at times I catch him looking at where they are, as if they were there just a minute ago, and then faded from his vision. They are still not as big as my mother's, and they still have not settled on a color. I wash them, I visit my doctors, I sing to them before bed and say nice words to them in the morning. I dream of big, beautiful colored wings, that are as big or bigger than my mothers. They blanket me in my dreams, they keep me warm. The colors shift until they finally settle on one, but I can never remember what it is when I wake up. In waking life my wings are not yet as big as my mothers, and they are not yet colored. But you know what they say. It's all part of the process. These things take time.

The End of Endings

Aidan Pugmire

I opened my eyes.

Before me was what appeared to be a star. Glowing a dim red, casting a soft, lonely light into the nothing around it. I slowly and carefully examined my surroundings, but saw nothing. It was all black, less than black even.

It was void, empty.

There was nothing.

I returned my gaze to the star.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” came a voice beside me.

Startled, I looked over and saw the outline of a person standing next to me. The figure had its hands collapsed behind its back, and it was facing the star. It had no features, but rather appeared as an outline against the nothing. Within the outline was a warm glow; an infinite volume. It’s substance was a fractal, which wherever your eyes landed became the spiraling center. An infinitely complex form, in the shape of a human being.

It stood there, silently. I recalled the question it had asked me.

“Uh, y-yeah. Yes. It is.” I turned back towards the star.

We stood there for a moment before I gathered enough courage to ask the being, “Who are you? Where are we?”

The being turned, and examined me with its featureless face.

“We are observing the last moments of this star’s life. It will soon burn through the last of its fuel and go out. The universe will become dark and empty. This is its end.”

My dread became panic.

“Wait, this is the end of everything?!” I exclaimed, though the being was unmoved by my outburst.

“Again, correct, in a way, but not correct in other ways.” Remarked the being.

“This is the end of your everything, at least the end of your everything up until now. This is not the end of my everything, in fact there is an infinite more to my everything, as well as an infinite nothing. This is reminiscent of dusk fading to night for me. To that, what are weeks, months, years? What is eternity? Your everything is my something. At least it was. Your perception has shifted by me telling you these things, all of this-”

The being again gestured around itself.

“-is only the end of something to you now. It is still your everything, in a way, but it is also only something, in another way. That something compared to everything makes it almost nothing, should you think of it like that. It is simultaneously everything, something, and nothing; all while being none of them.”

“That’s a lot to wrap my head around.” I replied. Again, I felt the being was smiling at me. “I know. It gets easier with time.”

“Speaking of time,” I asked, “You said time wasn’t a problem earlier. Yet, from what you’ve said about the star, our time is running out.”

“Very observant,” the being replied. “While it is true that our time here is running out, it doesn’t mean we are out of time. We will almost certainly meet again under different, perhaps even similar circumstances, simply at a different time. This is like the end of a day. What is the end of a day to a lifetime?”

“Huh.” I remarked. “Doesn’t that kind of ruin it though? Knowing that this might happen again? Makes it feel less special.”

“Not at all.” The being replied. “Even similar days are unique in their own way. The most similar of times are still their own. You can have times like this, but never this time right here again.”

The being turned towards the star, which seemed to have grown dimmer.

“Besides,” It continued, “Even if, given eternity, you are guaranteed to live this moment again, exactly the same way, there is an infinite amount of time, with an infinite amount of possibilities in between. By then, whether or not you’ve been here will not matter.”

I took a moment to process what the being said. It remained silent, watching the star, giving me time to respond. A thought had been bugging me, but I was too enthralled in my conversation with the being to ask. Breaking the silence, I spoke up.

“What happened to me, why am I here?”

The being looked over at me and shrugged its shoulders.

“I do not know. Perhaps you died. Maybe you are just dreaming. The two have more in common than one might dare to think.

“Wait, so you didn’t bring me here? What did? There has to be some reason I am here.”

“Does there?” The being asked. “I didn’t bring you here. I am not even sure if I brought myself here. There are always greater forces at play. Forces that you are subject to. Forces that I am subject to. Forces that those forces are subject to. We could ponder why you are here forever. That is very possibly a fruitless effort. Maybe there is a reason you are here.”

The being turned and spread its arms to the void and the star.

“Or, maybe, you are just here. Maybe there is no greater reason than that.”

We stood in silence once again, simply watching the star lose its light.

“So, what comes next?” I asked. “After the star, I mean.”

The being clasped its hands behind its back once again. “I do not know. I have ideas, but there is no real way of knowing. Maybe there is nothing. Maybe there is everything. Either way, we are nearing the end of our time.”

The star had just about lost all of its glow. The was giving way to hues of a much colder brown.

“Well, for whatever reason I’m here, if there even is one,” I told the being. “I’m glad you were here. It was nice talking to you.”

“You as well.” Replied the being. This time I could definitely sense its smile, and its warmth.

“One more thing,” I asked the being. “You said that we will probably meet again, from what I understand an infinite number of times. Infinity goes both ways, so does that mean we have met before? Have we been here before?”

The smile I sensed from the being seemed to grow, and it glowed ever so slightly more. “It is like I said. Given eternity between these moments, no matter how similar, doesn’t make them any less special.

For the first time during our conversation I smiled at the being. “In that case, I can’t wait to meet you again.” I told it.

“And I you.” It replied.

We both turned towards the final star in the universe, and watched as it burned away the last of its fuel. A silent cinder, which, after giving out the last of its light, gave way to eternity.

No One Seems to Know I'm Gone

By Kasen Scharmann

*How much less in them that dwell in houses of
clay, whose foundation is in the dust,
which are crushed before the moth?*

*They are destroyed from morning to evening:
they perish for ever without any regarding it.*

—Job 4:19-20

Out of the closet, the laundry can be heard, endlessly rocking, on either of the townhouse's two stories. Sopped socks and undershirts worn once thrash amid the whitewater. Inside, all is black and infernal.

Who has seen this violence whirl?

Cottons are stripped of their odor, fiber to thread, by a plump pack of chemicals cosplaying flowers in spring.

Three-in-one: Detergent. Remover. Protector.

Daniel fumbles through a medley of dried fruits and cashews, pursuing the candied chocolates he'd dispatched the trip earlier. He scans a pantry stocked with canned goods and granolas, cereals, mixes, a few varieties of chips, and a cluster of nondescript packages whose contents he's never bothered to identify; it stands bereft, that is, of anything able to appease this

craving—naturally, Daniel assures himself, for tomorrow is grocery day. Fingers chalked with salt, he leans over, and beckons again for the dangling tongue to come lick them clean.

—Good boy, Simba

He crouches down, hoping his cheek, too, might enjoy what kisses are being offered... But the wash has entered its rinsing phase, and Simba has bounded away, upstairs, to comfort the bestial groans.

Suffering is a sonic, not a psychic expression. Listen. The machine is particularly tortured tonight.

Daniel pushes the volume well beyond its usual threshold. And, as the news breaks and breaks anew, it sends sharp pangs coursing through the drywall. The paint is beige. *Congress has not come to an agreement on* On the mantle, a picture shakes. Daniel and Danielle walk alongside train tracks, hand in hand. Dusk settles over them. Their teeth are showing: white, straight. Was that the last time he wore that shirt? It was. Though it's still the right size, of course, for Daniel does not let his body change. He spares no expense in keeping it hard and lean, nor does he understand people, other people, who allow time to simply crawl over them, why they let its brutal hands misshape them.

What moves, deforms.

A choking cuts through a commercial for car insurance. Daniel presses pause, and feels a final tremor pass beneath the carpet. A stillness emerges. Simba's barking peals through the house, it is clear and resonant in the silence that's opened. Daniel, eager to close it, presses play. Daniel, always in control. *The resignation comes after months of reported infighting within the agency*

* * *

—Why do you have it up so loud?

—How was work?

Danielle sits on the edge of the ottoman to remove her shoes. In Daniel's periphery, there is a brief, frenetic blending of blonde hair.

—No. Down. Has he been out in the snow?

—No.

She hastens to the kitchen, hobbling unevenly between sock and thick sole.

—Why's he all wet then? She calls, returning with a checkered hand towel. Danielle takes each leg in turn and ruffles the matted hair at the paws.

—Hmm?

—What?

—Can you turn this down?

Daniel brings the volume back to sixty.

—Why is he wet Dan?

—I don't know. He's been upstairs.

Ms. Burrows could still reliably recall a number from a musical she would often watch in the evenings that tasted of tapioca pudding. Once upon a time, she tried to enkindle an appreciation for the movie which was, by any measure, a classic, among her grandchildren.

Her grandchildren—

As Danielle wheeled Ms. Burrows to her room, the song dripped over a tremulous lip and dried, with spittle, in a soft pasture of white fuzz. Danielle cradled the limp frame into bed, removed her wig, and placed it back upon the mannequin head Ms. Burrows kept in lieu of a lamp. Then squeezed her wrist.

Danielle notices irregular spotting around the opening of her scrubs, but

from whose throat she knows not. She remembers learning that pathogens can cling to cloth and, taking off her top, walks by faith toward the stairs before stopping to regard the couch, where an all but supine

Daniel's chin has vanished.

—Did you change the whites?

—I forgot.

—I asked you to.

—I'm sorry. I spaced.

—I can't sleep when the dryer's running. You know that.

—I'll start it when I get up, okay?

—But I'm out of socks.

—What time do you work tomorrow?

—Tomorrow is Thursday.

—So one?

—No. Thursday is my *early* day. I haven't gone in at one on Thursday since like, May.

—I forgot.

A stream of old vacation photos Danielle posted returns to Daniel as she disappears through the stairwell. He engaged with them, at the time, rather actively.

Civilizations are characterized by what the palm grasps, how the thumb moves.

Silver, synthetic hairs are being recycled tonight; a new wig will soon be in curlers for the presentation of Ms. Burrows.

Homo faber suae quisque fortunae.

Danielle stands in a shallow pool gathering on linoleum tiles, smiling faintly. She used to sit cross-legged in front of its circular window and watch herself watch the turning and turning. Now nothing in the house but the bed frame would be inherited. All of the appliances would be stainless steel.



Beneath beating sun and billowing suit, he stooped a considerable distance to remove a coin impressed in the sealant of the parking lot: And, lo, Lincoln's solemn profile turned, squared his shoulders, and in that shrill falsetto of a voice, bestowed on him a new name.

No colleague remained with any memory of the small confusion that ensued when he, ashen, panting upon arrival, demanded the label maker in order to replace a single letter on the badge which, as an associate, he was required to keep clipped to his lapel and unobstructed from view. It was a policy infraction speedily dismissed, however, for on what authority did his supervisor at the time have to challenge Presidential revelations? And anyway, when the encounter was described back to him, he agreed with the wisdom imparted: Copper did have an honest, durable patina—a luster neither gaudy nor intimidating—that Cooper could not possess.

Terminal blue before him, inventory, shipping dates, delivery windows, and serial numbers attached to their maker are incised in white, blinking as Copper raps the keys. He glances up to find a bald-headed, densely-bearded man with forearms best suited for another century's iron foundries ensnared in a baby blue dress shirt. Its placket ripples around his sternum. Claspings knees spread wide, he bounces up and down on the sofa like a child riding a large rubber ball. Copper watches the man's face fill with anticipation, then harden, as he attempts to contact the sullen eyes involved at present with a byzantine interest calculator which has, somehow, yet to be optimized for mobile.

While the floor is slow, in the hours after the doors have locked, before they are reopened, he memorizes SKUs to avoid having to encroach on such scenes of acrimony. And from that distance, Copper has become clairvoyant about which quarrels he can freely ignore. He draws up the terms of sale. Invectives, charges of profligacy, accusations of selfishness, recklessness, and callowness are dulled indeed by the promise of oxblood leather, the integrated chaise lounge, the sanctuary which begins to crystalize in the machinations of an exhausted mind

* * *

—Appliances? Head this way, then just down the escalator.

* * *

It had all been arranged at the expense of a pathway. Poppy red throw pillows smolder like embers on smoke colored cushions. Dark walnut legs lifted pale chairs. Here, a paisley wingback was angled inward to ease any worries that the set was too plain. There, a coffee table fixed with sliding barn doors is adorned with a polished, voluminous collection of horse photography, its cover melding with the rustic white paint job that reveals the wood underneath. They plod through the sepia film ambient over the furniture, a warm haze nowhere dispersed by window or wall. What signs hang offer no direction. They roam. They intrude on people practicing how to sit. And, as they approach, associates pause to offer them short nods with pressed lips, smoothing a brightly striped tie, or tousling volume back into hair unceremoniously deflated by the day. They pass. The merchants are scattered, again, like leaves swept by wind, across the floor, hoping to find themselves at the feet of someone, anyone, who was not just looking. Where the mattresses are shown, the light changes. Rows of spotlights bear down from a black ceiling. The customers are clad in belts, collars, and fully laced boots, each one pallid in the halo of their own private moon. Reposed, arms strapped to their sides, they sink into the fabric which will support their next decade of nights: dates gone awry, the arduous reaches for the CPAP machine, the consummation of marriage, those endured alone, the children conceived, those enjoyed alone, the oils, sweat, lubricants, fluids, and skin flakes that will sodden the foam.

But Norman and Deb do not have a decade left. Together, they marvel at a fleshy, spectacled face demonstrating how the bed on which they lie stretched is lowered and raised. Next year, Deb will incline just Norman's

side. She will gently run her nails over his scalp, her other hand holding an emesis basin on Norman's behalf, his esophagus aflame, his blood become vinegar.

* * *

Daniel and Danielle descend on steel teeth. A towering, gangly figure cranes his neck up toward them. He stands before a thicket of flat televisions, flickering with the synchronized shots on each one.

—Can I help you find anything?

Danielle is eye level with a nameplate on which Mason Copper is printed. A tangle of veins can be seen behind his cheeks.

—Appliances.

—Ah, this way please.

Daniel wanders astray, into the harmonious choir of narratorial voices. He's taken in, surrounded by the glow of arctic tundra, the lumbering polar bear.

—Any in particular? Kitchen, laundry

—A washer.

—And dryer?

The prospect of incongruity makes her wince.

—Sure.

—They're all right here. I'll let you take a look around a moment.

A top loading machine won't do. Danielle bypasses them, a budget never set cannot be broken. She prefers knobs to buttons. She imagines all of the functions an LCD could serve.

Danielle opens a window and places her head inside of the tub. Water and steam will pour forth from this perforated basket; through it, the purging of dirt.

—We recently had this one installed in our own house. It's excellent. Five cubic feet.

Twelve different cycles. Stainless, as you can see.

—It's ten ninety nine.

—Yes.

—Why?

—It's smart.

—I see.

Copper surveys the cubes. They are in formation, stoic and obedient. He locates the matching dryer.

—Is it quiet?

* * *

Behind his back, Copper holds a wrist. He's never worn a watch. He takes long, deliberate strides, snaking between the columns of screens. Only their waves are radiant. He casts no shadow. Aisles beget aisles. He drifts through them, this inscrutable labyrinth. In unison, its walls flash their images. Every speaker has been muted.

He comes to a clearing. Disclosed in the anemic light is an extended sectional. *Upholstery smells of nowhere* Copper sits down, and feels years of motion return to his knees. A sports car drives through fire. The screen is vast and concave. Open like arms His thigh is vibrating. The driver is determined and sweating. *He'll make it He hears a distant ring of bitter*

laughter. The cleaners have arrived. *Already?* Unspooling from under his loafers is a rug. It bears the insignia of his would-be alma mater were it not for statistics. The vibrations return. *He'll get home somehow* The vehicle is suspended. Copper feels his spine embellish the suede.

It might not be such a bad idea if—

* * *

On a curb a child sits.



Visual Art

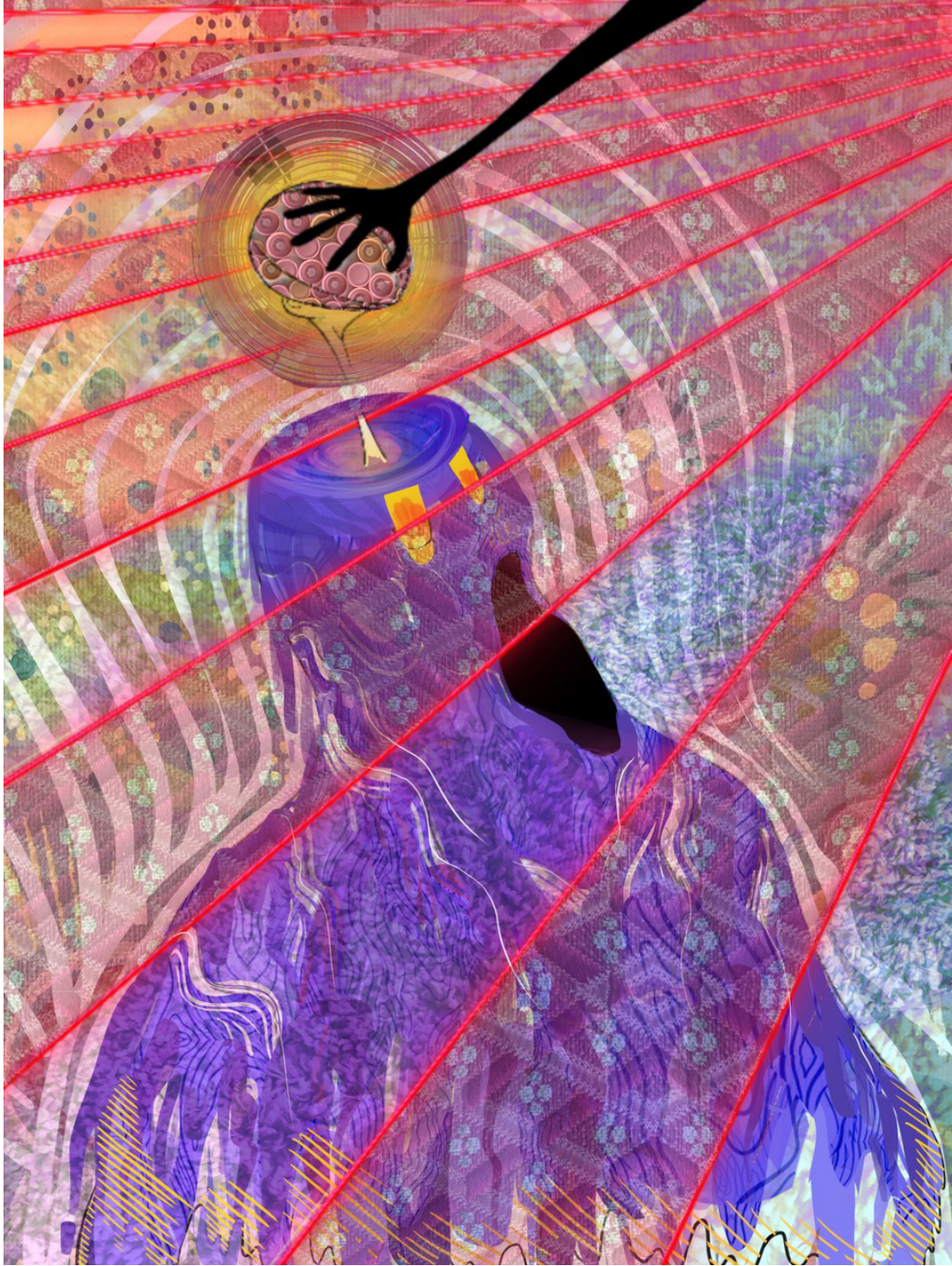


Overcoat
Bea Hurd





Untitled
Piper Kunst





Big Aha Moment
Salvatore Mele



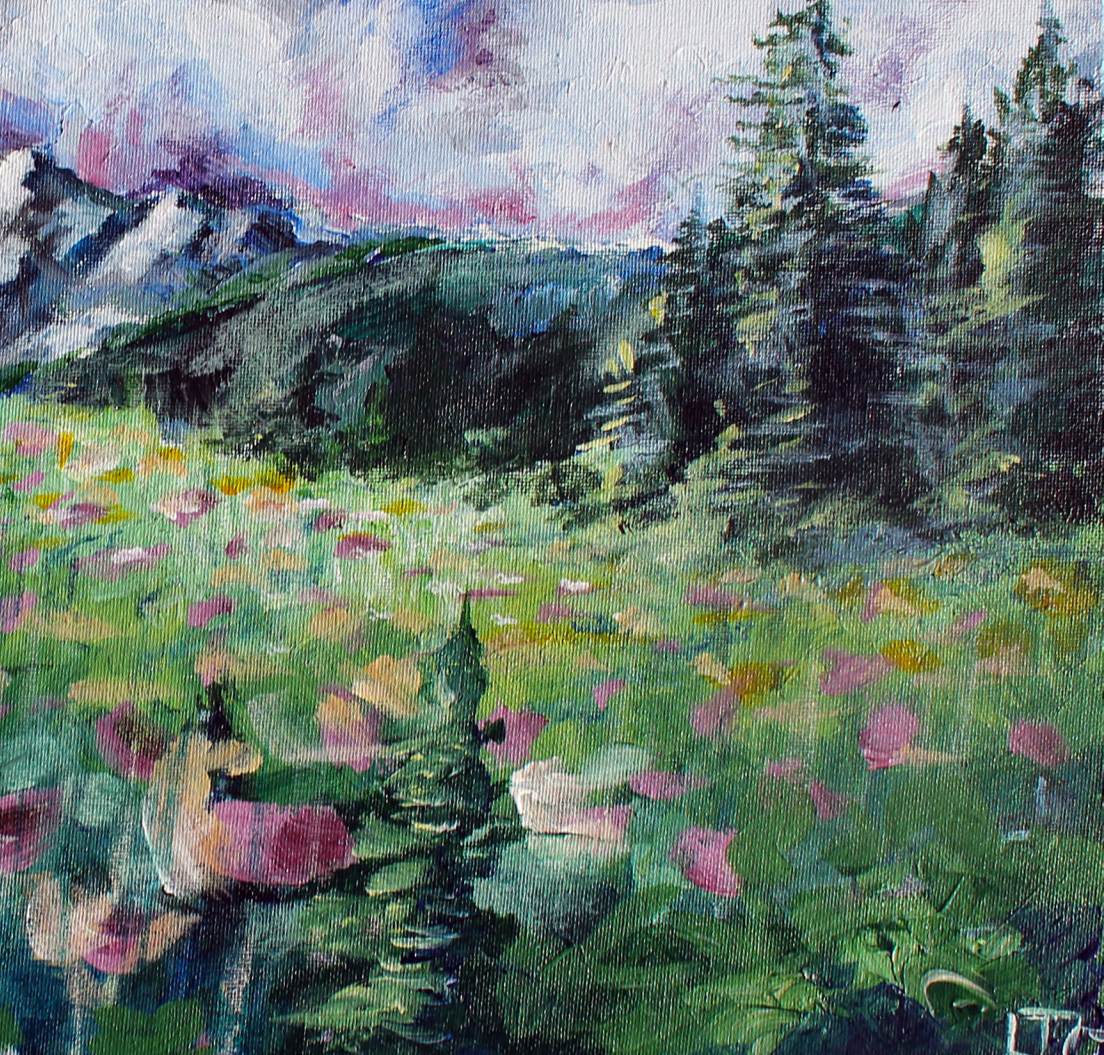


Bubble Blower, Audience, Dream
Tyler Vongthongchit





Alpine Meadows
Lauren Thurgood





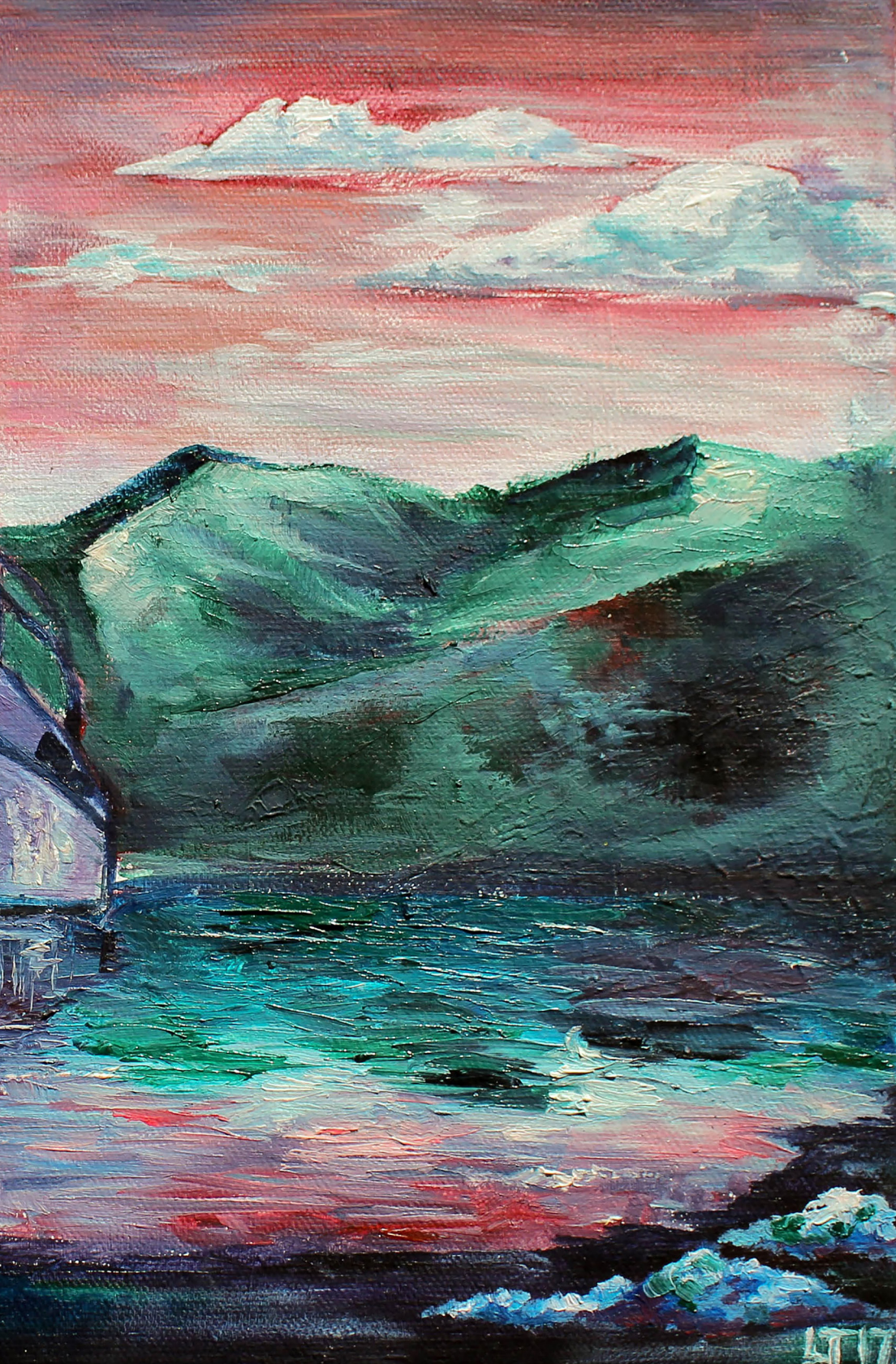
Tempest
Lauren Thurgood



Janine, Catalina (Next Page)

Lauren Thurgood







Music / Film

Soot

Dallon Haley



Pretty Girl

Yein Ji
Cayden Turnbrow
Leila Salari

Gavin Clements
Debora Ingabile
Ali Akbari



Pinkerton

Jack Sperry



I'm Waiting For The Day You Die

Jack Sperry



