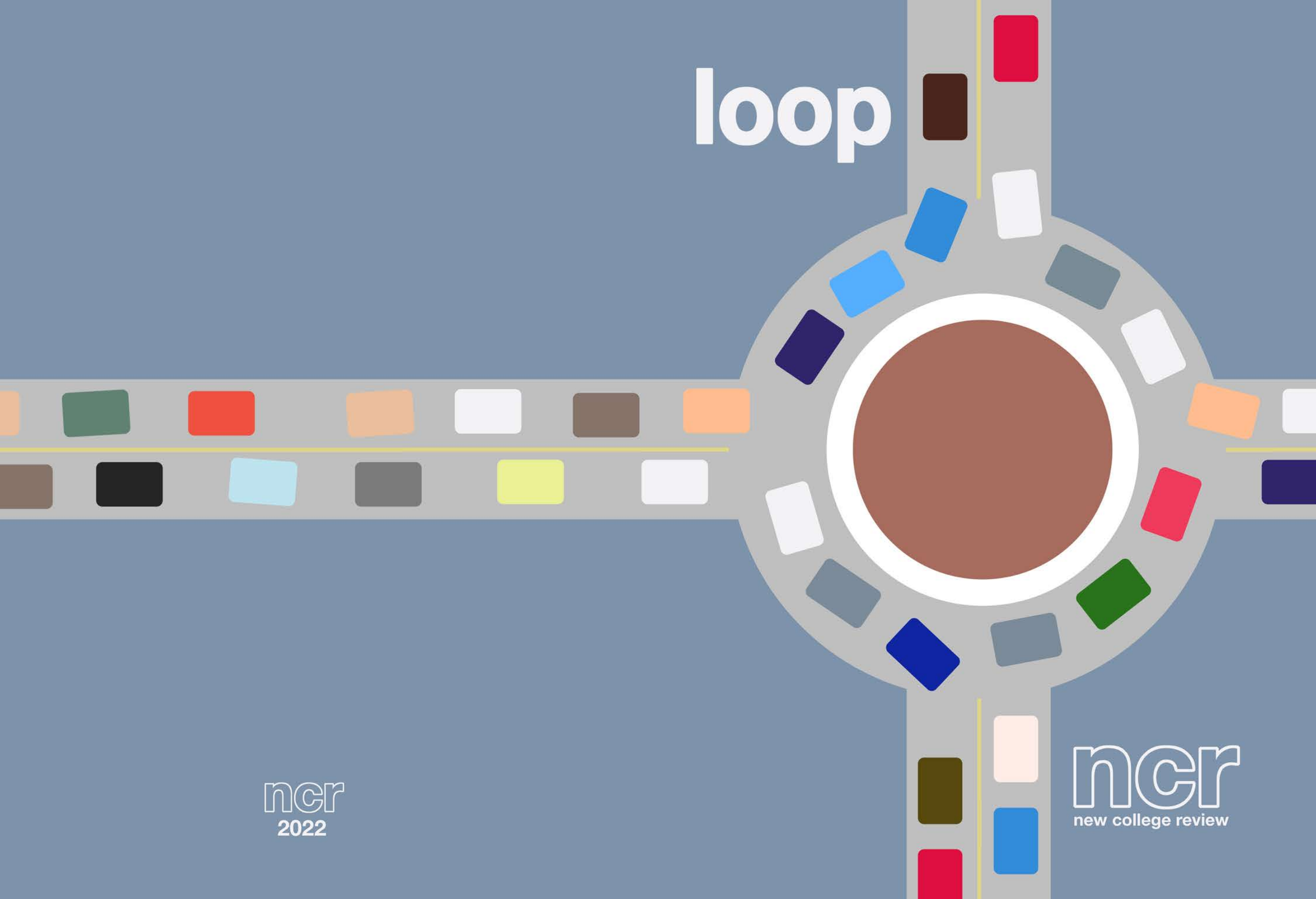


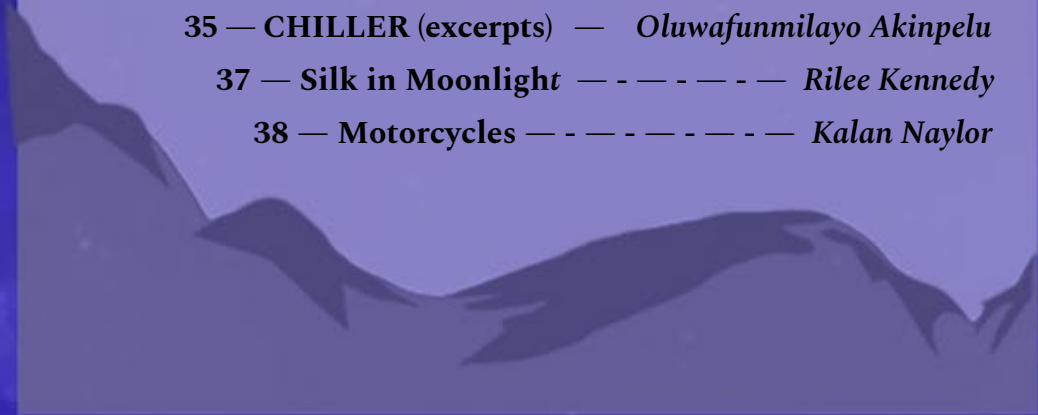
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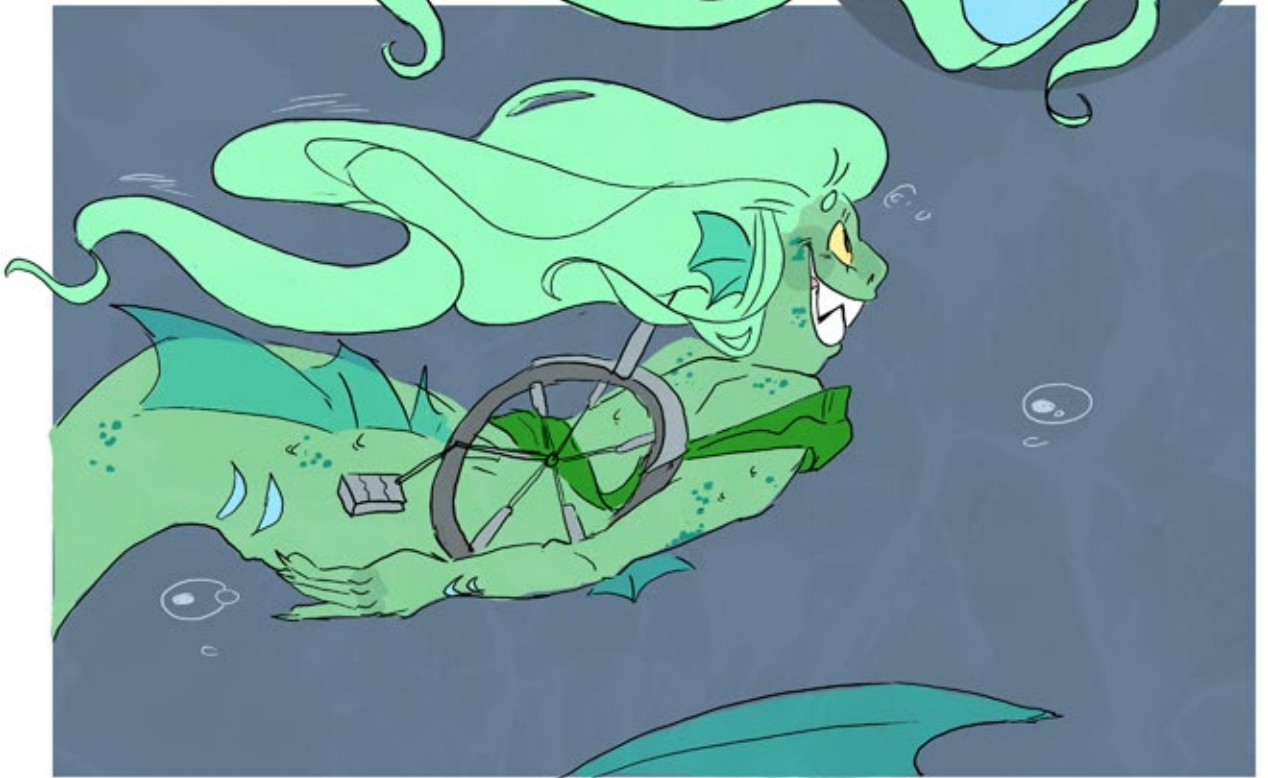
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ONE MAN'S TRASH

Reagan Christian









Wheelie Bad

by Quade Mainzer

Day 1: Assembly

I ordered a unicycle from Amazon the day my bike got stolen. Maybe two wheels exceeded my limit, and I was destined to have only one. Three days later, a large, bulky package was leaning against the mailbox of the church I was living in for the summer. I ordered a Domino's pizza — double pineapple — opened both delivery boxes, and got to work. Forty minutes later, I had half a bicycle.

Day 2: Mounting

The first steps—no, that wouldn't be right. The first...revolutions? Cycles? The first *moments of inertia* of my cycling training began indoors, away from any prying and judgemental eyes. I awkwardly hoisted myself up onto the padded seat I had uncertainly screwed in the night before at the advice of a YouTube tutorial video with three hundred one views. At my new height, I fumbled for any solid objects at chest height I could use to secure my balance. Broken blenders, dusty milk crates, a framed painting of baby's breath against a navy blue background - remnants from a garage sale left unpurchased. During some mounting attempts, I grasped empty and slightly greasy pineapple pizza boxes in a desperate attempt to keep myself

in a vertical position. I coerced my feet onto the pedals, and squeezed my knees against the seat for support. I hopped off and back on the seat for the better half of the evening, growing more graceful and fluid in my ascent atop the unicycle.

Day 3: Riding

I didn't dare venture outdoors until I was comfortable pulling myself through the length of the corridor by its hand railing. I wobbled fiercely for hours, tracing a path on the floor with my tire not unlike one created from a dog happily dragging a stick through fresh snow. Eventually I could follow a straight enough path and keep a fair distance from the wall for the entire hallway. This gave me the brazen confidence to mount my unicycle in the middle of the empty church parking lot, push off from a 'No Parking' sign, and immediately crash to the concrete with nothing to catch my plummet. I picked the debris out of my palms and positioned myself once again at the base of the sign. I steadied my feet and my breathing, and launched myself forward once again. Twice. Ten times. Twenty. Fifty. Five. Hundred. Times. I took stones from the neighboring sidewalk to mark my progress each time I beat my personal record. Every scar on my skin was a milestone; each stone marked what felt like a mile. Once the sun set, I grabbed a speaker and blasted Thomas Rhett's "Crash and Burn" on loop. I wasn't stopping until I could make it to the end of the parking lot. I didn't stop until 10:30pm.

Day 4: Turning

After conquering the singular dimension of moving forward in the parking lot, my next challenge was merging with

the sidewalk: two sharp ninety-degree right turns, one right after the other. The best advice I had found for turning on a unicycle was to whip the entirety of my body in the desired direction and carry an active faith in one of the prevailing religions of modern times that I wouldn't crash and burn face first on the pebbled sidewalk. One hundred feet from the "No Parking" sign, I hurled my body to the right. Almost immediately positions were reversed, and my unicycle was now on top of me in a tangle with my legs as I caught my breath, lying supine with my upper half taking up the valuable space that is a parking lot entrance. Each successive attempt garnered an improvement in the overall results, and a deterioration of my physical health. At a snail's pace, I learned to swap a whipping motion with a jolted, rocking motion not unlike when one tries to move forward on a snowboard. My padded seat has handles on the front and back, for experts to perform tricks and stunts, and for me to perform a basic function of the unicycle. Holding onto these while I shifted my forward momentum in a different direction gave the correct combination of action to complete a turn. The final learning curve was to continue pedaling through the turn — a second-level priority often forgotten about in favor of priority one: not faceplanting. But at the end of the day, I could extend my traveling distance tens of feet past the parking lot.

Day 5: Stopping

The front of the unicycle seat looked much like my kneecaps: red, scraped, and worn down. I slapped on some bandaids and prepared myself to learn how to control the slowing of my momentum and get off the ride...correctly. For the past three days, my dismount had been

simply that: abandoning any facade of grace or agility and merely trying to land on two feet instead of catching my unicycle. Casually stopping a ride turned out to be as easy as catching the unicycle by either handle on the padded seat.

Day 6: Repair

After my one-thousand-four-hundred-twentieth-odd time falling off, I heard a new type of thud on the pavement. Of course, there was the dull, aerodynamic smack of me hitting the ground, followed by the musical clattering of the unicycle as it decides how to splay itself on rough concrete. But this time, there was a softer, more chaotic clanking: my left pedal had unscrewed itself, and settled a foot away from the larger piece it belonged to. I sullenly picked up the separated parts and carried them inside, cutting the day's training short. I laid them out on the low coffee table on which the two had initially been conjoined. Time to order another pizza.



Cornerstones of the Psyche

by Jacob Snead

SUMMER

Words cannot express the excitement I feel for the start of today. For today is a day that has come with promise. The promise of ambition, focus, a central goal, and an idea. An idea for a project, one that will be fulfilling. One that will bring about a fuller existence. One that will make me more whole than I already feel! The visions in my head are mesmerizing, intoxicating, lovely, and grandiose. One that is sure to impress myself, and all around me! Everyone will know just how awesome it is, it will be exactly as I picture it in my head! How could it not, the ambition I feel cannot be stopped by the negativity and pessimism that reality can bring. No, this is simply too great to leave it in the space of my mind. Work must be done! I sit alone and continue to let my imagination run wild. Changes, revisions, ideas, colors, passion, all are rushing through my brain at the speed of light. An ever changing, ethereal idea of a goal, sitting comfortable in my skull. Excitement is getting the better of me, I must tell everybody that I know! I can't simply be the only one to feel the excitement I feel now, can I? By the end of this day, everybody who would care will know my plan, and everybody will support me! They care enough to feel excited, so why should they not? Progress must start right away, with simply the passion I feel and the ideas I conceive, doing all should be a cinch! After all, the only person who can stop me is myself.

AUTUMN

Progress has begun, but has it really? The ideas are nowhere to be found, they still exist simply in my head. They should be out of there by now. The ambition I feel, the motivation, it should have pushed them right out of my skull. So why in the world are they still there? Now that I see it, is the project still the same at all? What I see looks different. *How did I come up with this idea? That wasn't originally this color. Why would I add that, that's nonsense!* All of these enter my brain as I try and find that spark, that idea that hit me in the head like a comet. It has to still be there, there were so many ideas, so many plans, so many notes, so many features. Was the ambition too great? Did I bite off more than I could chew? The answer is no, right? It can't be right, it was all so realizable. If I could see it so vividly in my head, then why do I not the even see it with my eyes? It can't have gone somewhere, no, it never existed in the first place. By why? Why does it not exist? Am I not good enough? That can't be right, for I thought of everything it will be, and how I could get it there. It will be big, and it will be fulfilling, and it will prove to everyone and myself that I'm whole. Right?



WINTER

The embers and ash of what was once passion, for something to make the world happy, and myself feel whole, has seemed to sputter out in the most pathetic of ways. Inspiration no longer holds me in its grasp, but it taunts me. It still stares at me, and reminds me of what could have been something great, only for it to be yanked from my psyche. Grey tones and warbled images float inside my head, no longer representing anything that anybody, especially I, wish to see, or think about, anymore. Those images being a constant reminder to the time when the project was perfect. The time where there was nothing more than a flame of constant ambition, pushing someone, pushing me, to make something to prove to myself, that I am worth my place in the world. Yet here we are. Summer has faded to Fall, which has dropped ever farther into a dark winter in my mind. It is cold, it is colorless, and I wish only to return to the days when I longed for the future. Yet now that the future has arrived, there is a level of melancholy. If I return to a state of hopefulness, will this feeling persist? The fear of returning to this state consistently sleeping in my mind, ready to dissuade me from my passions? There is no way to know for sure, as I continue this war of attrition between myself, my mind, and an object long since mutated from its original form.

SPRING

as fantastical and improbable as it might sound, I feel an ascent... not my body literally rising upward, but a warm feeling bringing up myself from the aforementioned depths of sorrow and self-pity... a delightful change from the prior feeling. I feel warm, but not physically... I feel safe, but not literally... I simply feel an acceptance. I feel as if I am figuratively freed from the weight of the mutated passion, as if one hundred pounds of guilt has lifted itself from my frame. I feel the pain of inadequacy start to ease, I feel myself start to resemble a warm body once again... *why on earth is this happening? Where did this euphoria come from? Why has it come? And...*

what was it I was worried about?

The memory of the passionately considered project has since left my mind for good. All of the effort, strain, and sorrow of it has been carefully removed by no other than myself. For this reason, I cannot remember if it was intentional or not. But for the best, a weight has been lifted from my spirit. And with renewed spirit, I may feel the excitement of the hot Summer, after this warm recovery... and with the hot passion of the mind's summer time, creativity may start to flow once again...

1

1234

LET'S STICK
2GETHER



YOLO

I ♥ Y'all

YR

SENIOR
YEAR

A

CLASS of

2024

BEST 4
years of
YOUR LIFE

SENIOR YR
BUCKET LIST

- go to all football games
- WKNO trips
- music festivals / concerts
- make all the moments count
- Soak up senior yr w/ the best friends

L
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T

MOMENTS
TRAVEL

"We go to the
University of
ALABAMA!!!"

MEMS

MAKE IT
LAST

WHAT I DON'T KNOW

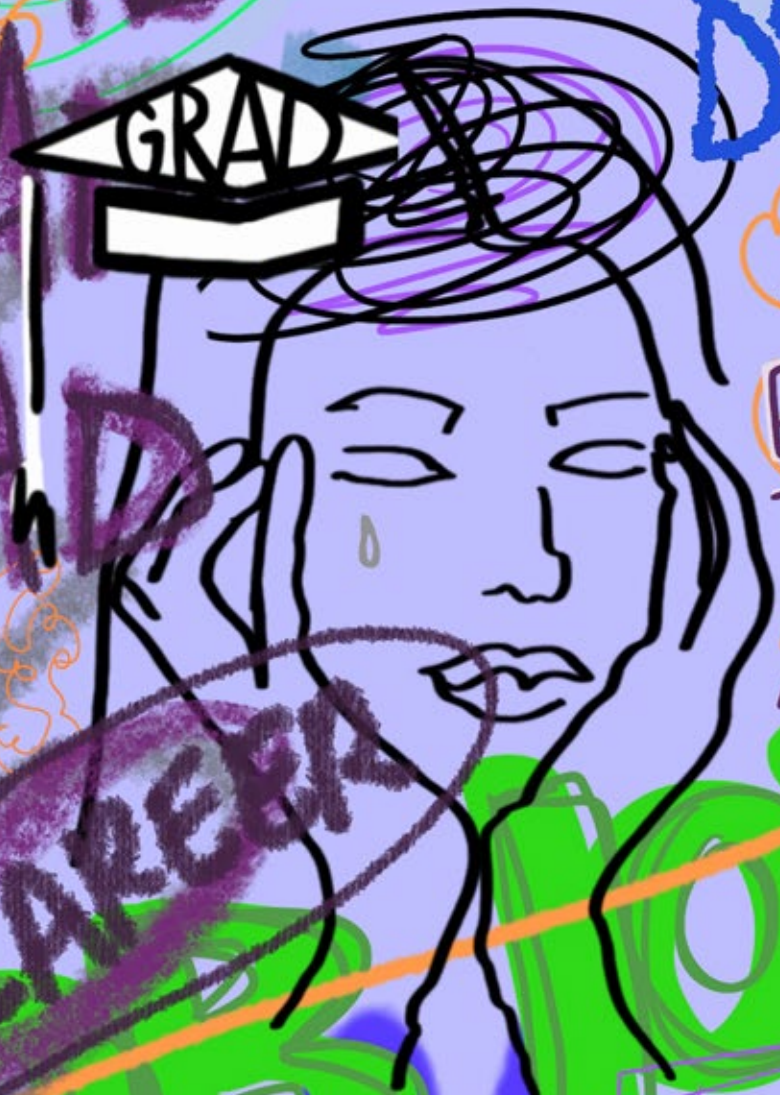
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GRAD

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EXPECTATIONS = STRESS

INTERVIEW

CAREER

JOB

WHAT DO YOU WANT BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?

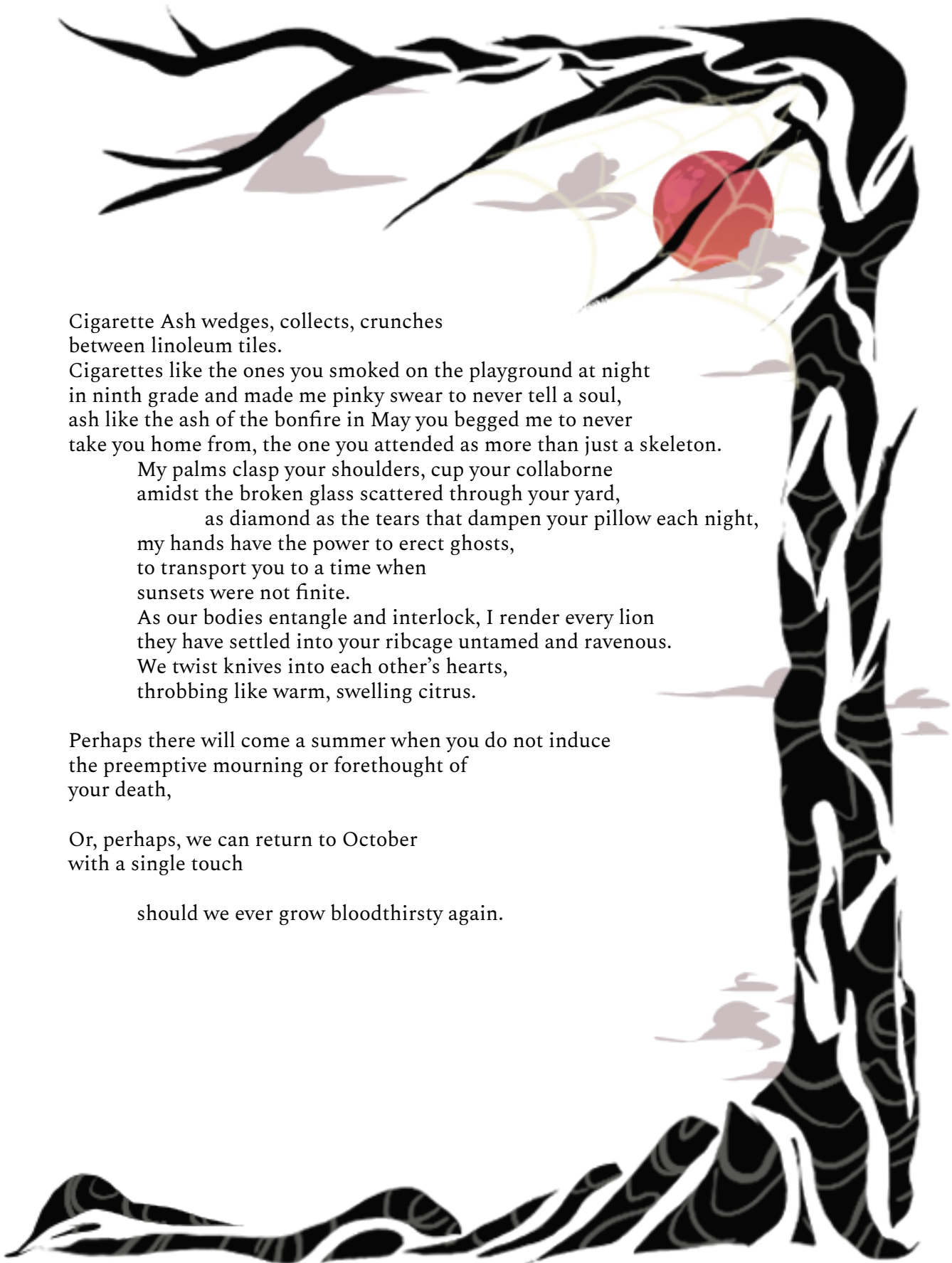
Bloodthirsty

by Gracelyn Eve Mitchell

Blood-orange, mid-October sun bathes your yard in glowing slivers,
your slender fingers clench and crunch patches of dried, yellow grass.
Like the skeletons
in the cemetery zero-point-five miles from your house
we lay together, spines pressed to earth,
like sheets of your family's linen, hanging on the clothesline,
you more so than I.
Your skin sallow, your eyes gibbous,
your body engulfed in amber.
Your sable hair has grown in spiderwebs since March,
much like your house has grown several-hundred-more cobwebs.

Midsommer has dealt you no good deeds, has offered you no favors,
you are collateral damage in its abrasiveness.
When you turn over to whisper in my ear, your voice
is macabre and haunty, like the echoes
of ghosts.
Your mouth is two red brushstrokes on porcelain,
your bloodstained lips leave streaks on my own.
I tear through spiderwebs with my fingers, entranced.
Our bones rest, intertwined in fleeting peeks of apricity granted by the swaying tree canopy,
the pomegranate tree your mother planted
on your grandmother's grave,
the fruit low-hanging like glass-blown ornaments,
low-hanging like your mother's womb during her sixth pregnancy,
the third unplanned, the second after she swore it was her last,
the pregnancy you spent months lamenting to me about,
the unborn child you groaned over
like the baseboards in your home.





Cigarette Ash wedges, collects, crunches
between linoleum tiles.

Cigarettes like the ones you smoked on the playground at night
in ninth grade and made me pinky swear to never tell a soul,
ash like the ash of the bonfire in May you begged me to never
take you home from, the one you attended as more than just a skeleton.

My palms clasp your shoulders, cup your collaborne
amidst the broken glass scattered through your yard,
as diamond as the tears that dampen your pillow each night,
my hands have the power to erect ghosts,
to transport you to a time when
sunsets were not finite.

As our bodies entangle and interlock, I render every lion
they have settled into your ribcage untamed and ravenous.
We twist knives into each other's hearts,
throbbing like warm, swelling citrus.

Perhaps there will come a summer when you do not induce
the preemptive mourning or forethought of
your death,

Or, perhaps, we can return to October
with a single touch

should we ever grow bloodthirsty again.

A Boy Called You

by CG Lisko

October, November, December come around once each year.

Cold weather pairs with cold words, as I learn, once again
I am not woman enough for him, for her – for any of them.

This year, October, November, December came around.

I wasn't looking for anyone anymore,
But I stumbled into your way and now here we both are.

You watched silently as I screamed my lungs out
At someone I once held in the highest regard.
I thought your silence spoke volumes,
Yet you stuck around.

You heard me spit words
I wish had never come out of my mouth.
You heard me retort that no, you *didn't* love me,
And you stuck around.

We sat stunned and nearly speechless in your white Jeep Patriot
Until 4:30am that morning,
Speaking only if the spirit moved us.
You stuck around.

October, November, December come around once again
I know what this means.

For once, I'm not looking for anything.

I wasn't looking
For a boy called you.

Cycles in Addiction

by Bryn Freeman

The general perception of addiction has felt the weight of stigmatization, othering, and fear. Addiction has been nodded off as a simplistic character flaw. In reality, addiction is a disease characterized by its complexity and continuity. To accurately exemplify addiction's cyclic nature, it is key to explore the following facets of the disease: phases of addiction, patterns in the root of addiction, and barriers to recovery.

Though addiction is a singular disease it is the result of many contributors. The American society of Addiction Medicine defines addiction as, "a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences" (American Society of Addiction Medicine). This supports the idea that addiction is behavioral and clinical. As far as addiction behavior, the American Addiction Center has simplified the reoccurring elements of addiction into the followings six steps: initial use, abuse, tolerance, dependence, addiction, and relapse (Authored by Editorial Staff Last Updated: November

25 The addiction cycle: Phases of the chronically relapsing disease). The first step towards addiction is initial use. Contrary to the belief of many, initial use of a substance is not always an aim for pleasure. For instance, many who suffer from addiction begin their struggle with prescription medication in efforts to treat a pre-existing health condition. The second stage in the cycle of addiction is abuse. Abuse is characterized by recurring, improper use of a substance in a manner that is harmful to the user. Examples of abuse could be taking a larger dose than prescribed or increasing frequency. In the case of an illegal substance, initial use is considered to be abuse. The third phase in the addiction cycle is tolerance. Abuse over an extended period of time can result in modifications within the brain that directly affect tolerance. When the feeling associated with initial abuse begins to dull or change, it is common for substance abusers to increase dosage or frequency. Tolerance is an incredibly dangerous aspect of addiction,



as the cycle of tolerance repeats and transforms into intense substance abuse. Additionally, modification of the brain and its structures is often irreversible and can cause permanent damage. Dependence is the fourth element of the addiction cycle. Under dependence, the body and the brain become separately or simultaneously dependent on a substance for function. The fifth aspect in the cycle is addiction. Addiction is a disorder that can be diagnosed based upon the presence of the eleven signs and symptoms of substance use disorders. The signs and symptoms are as follows,

“using more of the substance than the person originally planned, being unable to stop using the substance, experiencing relationship problems based on substance use, spending large amounts of time seeking or using the substance, or recovering from use, reducing participation in favorite activities in favor of substance use, being unable to keep up with daily responsibilities due to substance use, craving the substance, continuing to use the substance despite negative health effects, regularly using the substance in dangerous situations (while driving or operating machinery, etc.), developing tolerance for the substance, as described above, and experiencing withdrawal symptoms when use is stopped” (Authored by Editorial Staff Last Updated: November 25 The addiction cycle: Phases of the chronically relapsing disease).

Possessing two to three of these symptoms is mild, four to five is moderate,

and six or more is a severe addiction. The sixth and final phase of addiction is relapse. Relapse is the agent through which addiction continually bears down on those who suffer and proliferates the vicious cycle of substance abuse. Unfortunately, between forty and sixty percent of individuals with a substance abuse disorder experience relapse through the course of treatment.

Outside of the cycle of addiction, many factors contribute to the six phases of addiction and their momentum. Two large categories that effect the advance of addiction are biological components and environment. There is ample scientific evidence that genetic make-up influences risk for addiction. In fact, half of risk for addiction is attributed to genetic inheritance (American Society of Addiction Medicine). Isolating a gene for probable addiction is impossible. Rather, there are a multitude of genes and genetic combinations associated with risk (American Society of Addiction Medicine). With genetics playing such a large role in the development of addiction from birth, the way in which the environment influences these disadvantaged individuals is largely responsible for the development of addiction. Epigenetics is a field of study that explores the relationship between genes and the environment. This relationship begins when the child is conceived in the womb. Children who are predisposed to alcohol while in the womb undergo genetic damage that reaches up to three generations of the family to follow (Sparks and Tisch A Family-Centered Program to Break the Cycle of Addiction). Following birth, children who are surrounded by substance abuse disorders are approximately four time more likely to develop a similar disorder

(Sparks and Tisch A Family-Centered Program to Break the Cycle of Addiction). However, there are many environmental conditions outside of familial abuse that increase risk. It has been found that development of addiction depends greatly upon family history of mental health disorder(s), presence of abuse or neglect, chaotic living circumstances, peer group or family that is permissive regarding substance use, and depression, social issues, or loneliness (Authored by Editorial Staff Last Updated: November 25 The addiction cycle: Phases of the chronically relapsing disease). The core effectors of addiction are vast and often cofounded. With so many variables at play in the lives of those who suffer from addiction, recovery can feel seemingly impossible.

Recovery, the seventh and final step in the addiction experience, is seldom brought to fruition. While recovery is possible, there is an extensive list of barriers to recovery that range from lack of monetary resources and accessible programs to the presence of pre-existing mental health issues. Due to situation-specific stressors, financially insecure individuals are more susceptible to the development of a substance abuse disorder. Thus, when it comes time to begin the journey of recovery these individuals must overcome issues such as lack of health insurance, cost of rehab, and absence from work. While many programs for addiction rehabilitation exist, they are central to certain geographic locations. Resources are poor in rural areas and present an accessibility issue for individuals suffering in these areas. As earlier addressed, the presence of mental health issues is a contributor to the development of addiction. When these pre-existing mental health issues go

untreated, rehabilitation is often rendered ineffective. The last major inhibitor of recovery is societal pressure. Addiction is a disease that has been stigmatized for years. Just recently addiction has been considered a disorder rather than a behavior or simple choice. The societal push back that comes with being open about your recovery and taking leave for rehabilitation is often enough to keep individuals suffering in silence. Though there are many reasons to avoid or quit recovery, overcoming It is the key to ending the cycle of addiction.





Rebirth

by Helen Hodgetts



Secondary Secession

by Alex Nail



The background of the cover is a collage of natural textures. On the left, there is a vertical strip of light-colored, rough tree bark. In the center, there is a textured area of dark brown soil with scattered brown and tan leaves. On the right, there is a vertical strip of vibrant green foliage, possibly leaves or grass, with a slightly blurred, layered appearance. The bottom half of the cover is a dark, textured surface, possibly a piece of fabric or a different type of material, with a mottled blue-green and brown color scheme.

New Beginnings

by Sarah Chase

Bitter Walnut

by Julie Sommer

My husband is always subtle,
his interests seldom vary.
He is allergic to walnuts
and afraid of birthday candles.
He's embarrassed when I call him Sweet Tooth,
but I'm his Honey when we're alone in quiet.

His opinions are strong, but never quite
heard. His manner of confrontation is subtle.
He's never the type to fight, knock out a tooth,
and his wrath is never very
lasting; it fades faster than a candle
is snuffed. He wouldn't hurt a walnut.

But oh, if he had the courage to crack a walnut,
or simply be less quiet,
then maybe he could hold a candle
to the other man my heart subtly
adores, who makes every-
thing hurt with longing, like an abscess tooth.

I know the rules: a tooth for a tooth.
But my back is up against the wall. Nuts!
I hate it when interests of the heart vary.
I told my selfish beat-box to be quiet,
but in it snuck like a slithering, subtle
snake, that flame of passion on my shrinking candle.

But lust didn't melt away like a candle.
The taste of his lips, the feeling of his tooth
against my tongue, sensations settle
his residence in my mind like black walnut
stains pale hands. Memories disquiet
my heart like blaring alarms as I recall every

secret word and touch that would crush the very
soul of the man to whom I vowed forever. This Ken doll,
lovely, plastic, toxic; replacing the faithful, quiet
man I once loved. My dearest Sweet Tooth,
cracked on the shell of a hollow walnut.
The pain of rejection is never subtle,

I can see it in his very eyes: like he broke a tooth,
was burned by candles, and swallowed a walnut
whole. My husband whispers quietly, "You were never subtle."



Marble Creek

by Tegan Murrell

For centuries, Indigenous Americans of the Eastern Woodlands used the Three Sisters Method of farming, in which corn, squash, and beans were planted and raised as one symbiotic triad. The Three Sisters are sacred, and according to the Seneca, their sisterhood goes all the way back to the creation of their people.

There were obvious structural benefits—the corn provided stability for the bean vines, which in turn anchored the corn. The squash grew its large, shady leaves close to the ground where they created moist, mulchy soil. The spiny texture of the squash plants also discouraged pests like raccoons from damaging the plants or eating the crops.

Like any dedicated farmer, the women who tended these crops were attentive not just to the plants, but the soil as well. Although this method of farming was developed before the microscope was invented, they undoubtedly knew by the richness of the soil that there was also a chemical benefit to the Three Sisters. Bacteria that live on the roots of legumes take nitrogen from the air and enriched the soil, fertilizing the plants in a process known as nitrogen fixation (1). The arriving colonizers would be baffled at their agriculture success. Centuries later, we are still working towards their wisdom.

Regenerative agriculture has become hugely popular among both farmers and consumers in the last five to ten years as the symptoms of industrial agriculture become glaring. Although the phrase itself was first used about fifty years ago, and the practices involved have been around for centuries, there is still no set definition of “regenerative agriculture.”

While agriculturists and ecologists sometimes disagree on efficacy of certain methods, the term “regenerative agriculture” is widely used in conversation around the goal of improving the health of soil, the environment, and broader human health. The common focus is on restoring the natural state of the topsoil in order to protect biodiversity, and prevent drought and chemical runoff. That can mean crop rotation and pasture grazing. Crop rotation can be as simple as one field switching between two crops like corn and soybeans or as complex as rotating ten to twelve crops through various fields. Certain crops, like soybeans, can improve soil nutrients through processes like nitrogen fixation; others, like sorghum are high residue, meaning they leave behind a lot of plant matter which increase soil nutrients, prevent erosion, and trap moisture and CO₂ in the soil. Crop rotation can disrupt the natural lifecycle of pests, decreasing the need for pesticides, and it can eliminate the need for chemical herbicides by controlling weed populations.

Somewhere between 82% and 94% of US cropland is farmed using some kind of rotation, but as little as 3%-7% incorporate high residue cover crops such as grass and clover into their rotation (2). Cover crops, while not lucrative, play key roles in pest management, nutrient

maintenance, and weed suppression (3). Many cover crops can be foraged by livestock once the season is over, further improving soil quality by fertilizing it with manure.

While the industrial meat industry is rightfully vilified for ecological ruin as well as inhumane treatment of animals, much of the blame for that environmental damage lies in the wrong place. It's true that cows account for about 15% of the methane in the atmosphere today (4), but there are only about half as many cows now as there were bison before colonization (5), so it's a bit unfair to accuse cow burps of contributing significantly to climate change. Grain-fed beef requires the environmentally costly production and transportation of corn, but grass-fed beef may actually leave the environment better off than it began (6).

A study by UC Davis found that due to climate change induced droughts and forest fires, grasslands are better, more consistent carbon sinks than forests, especially in arid environments which cover 40% of the globe (7). Grass can actually store so much carbon that a well-managed farm can entirely offset not only all the methane emissions, but the farm's total emissions as well (8). Grasslands can also help control erosion and prevent severe droughts.

Similar to how forest fires can protect biodiversity and promote new growth, grasslands need grazers such as cattle, sheep, and pigs to eliminate some of the older, taller growth from time to time. In warmer environments like the Southeastern United States, cattle are actually better at conservationist grazing because they spend less time in the shade

and travel further from water (9).

The drawback of grass-fed beef is that it requires more land and sometimes more water than grain fed beef—although water conservation can be improved with crop rotation and cover crop foraging. More damagingly, 75-80% of grass-fed beef sold in the US was raised in New Zealand, Australia, or South America, producing a large carbon footprint during transport. This meat might be labeled as USDA beef because all imported meat must pass through a USDA-inspected plant (10). How can the consumer be sure that they're really getting US meat? Buy local.

Marble Creek Farmstead was founded in 2014 by Matthew and Jessie Lawrence, who met on FarmersOnly.com, started a family, and gave everything they had to their vision of what a farm should be. Jessie Lawrence wanted to control her destiny and know where her food came from. Before she met Matthew, she had a bee hive and vegetables in her postage stamp garden in Alabaster. Matthew Lawrence competed in barbecue competitions and needed to find the highest quality meats he could. He realized that the best tasting meat comes from happy animals, and in the United States, happy livestock is next to impossible to find.

The land they tend had housed cattle without pasture rotation for about 60 years before they bought it. Visibly scarred land meant the Lawrences had their work cut out for them. First they had to build all of the fences and roads on the property themselves.

Seven years later, the Lawrence's hard work has paid off. There is diverse native

plant cover where once there were only scruffy patches of “poorly behaving” grass. They chuckle as my boyfriend and I marvel over a narrow strip of drainage land. To them it is mundane, only used to divert excess rainfall. To my partner and I, moored in ever-developing Tuscaloosa, it is exquisite. Wildflowers embroider the sunlit grass, visited by more butterflies than I’ve ever seen in the wild.

“We’ve never sprayed anything anywhere on this land and that’s, you know, an important criteria for us, right?” He says, pointing towards the fence line where overgrown brush pokes through, “When you look at the way plants take up nutrients, they have two pathways. The root hairs can be in contact directly with a piece of phosphorus or a piece of potassium, or it can take sugars and make trades with the biodiversity in the soil. Some of which is bacterial and some of which is fungal. Okay, to bring that nutrient to the plant, spraying things on it, you’re killing one of your pathways.” Marble Creek pasture raises chickens, turkey, ducks, geese, cattle, pigs, and more. The fowl live in soccer-goal like coops with open floors, where they graze on grass and non-GMO feed. The houses are moved daily to allow the birds access to fresh grass. When the turkeys are big enough to safely live outside their house, they move to a fenced in pasture where they are guarded by a flock of geese. Nearby, pigs lounge and stretch their legs out like sleepy dogs in a muddy corner of their enclosure. The cattle graze at their sister farm about an hour away.

Foraging and grazing livestock like cows and pigs can be destructive to land if mismanaged, but when used correctly they can improve it. “You not only add a lot of fertility from the droppings from

the animals, it’s also the action. The hooves of the goats and pigs and the rooting of the pigs turns a little bit of layer on the top...all of those movements have a big impact,” Matthew explains. The building of topsoil is critical; according to the UN, the world’s top soil will be gone within 60 years if we continue at our current rate of erosion, and the UN estimates that it takes 1,000 years to generate three centimeters of topsoil (10).

Marble Creek Farmstead is one of only four farms in the United States with their own on-site USDA processing facility. The facility is valued at two million dollars or \$500 per square foot; construction required the Lawrences, who have three young children, to borrow extensively. They handle delivery and logistics, operate the farm and processing facility, which are considered two separate businesses, and raise three children. Matthew Lawrence works as a data scientist at Shipt, while Jessie stopped working her full time job when the pandemic made childcare inaccessible.

Small farms face nearly insurmountable challenges that factory farms do not. In March of 2020, Tyson was given federal permission to replace federal meat inspectors with their own employees (11). “In April 2020, 15 large poultry plants requested and received approval from USDA to increase their line speeds, permitting them to kill and process more birds per minute than legally allowed under current USDA regulations” (12). Marble Creek’s plant inspector is reportedly more antagonistic than careful: “every day he’s here to fight with me and put me out of business.”

According to Matthew Lawrence, Marble Creek Farmstead often has the same number of inspectors present as a plant that processes one thousand pounds of chicken per chain. The USDA did announce plans to build more processing facilities for small farms in July of 2021 (13), but processing is only a fraction of the difficulties small farms face.

Small farms also have no access to the standard supply chain. The Capper-Volstead Act of 1922 exempts agricultural producer co-ops from anti-trust laws (14). As a result, multi-billion-dollar groups can monopolize aspects of industry like processing and distribution. They often pay pennies on the pound for animals while Marble Creek Farmstead pays dollars. “We’ve always had to balance the line between our ideal version of what a farm should be and trying to make sure that we make a profitable business. We don’t have to make a ton of profit, but it’s gotta pay for itself,” Matthew Lawrence says.

While their most publicized goal is to heal the land and take good care of their livestock, it’s also crucial to Jessie Lawrence that they heal their community as well. Several Birmingham area doctors write prescriptions for their meat. Jessie Lawrence reports feeling fuller after eating smaller portions.

Sustainable farming isn’t just about what’s sustainable for the environment, but what’s sustainable for the community. Healing the community is important, but it must be accessible “[Carbon neutral or negative meat production] can be done, but if the meat is going to be five times the price, right? What kind of catastrophe is that going to cause? What kind of war is that going to cause?” Matthew Lawrence asks.

I asked the Lawrences why they dedicated their lives to this business despite the hardships. “It’s for them,” they told me, gesturing at their young children. “You guys might make it to a certain age, but they won’t.”

Underneath everything the Lawrences do is profound love and kindness, a desire to heal and care for animals, land, their family and their community. They do their best to price their meat fairly, keeping a slim profit margin. Their farm is meticulously designed to treat their livestock humanely. They take efforts to engage with and educate their community, including spending two hours of their invaluable time showing me the farm and talking to me about their business.

The meat itself earns its praise. I cook my favorite Italian-Thai fusion of Pad Kee Mao and Spaghetti Bolognese with their fresh ground pork and its flavor is leagues above the grocery store version. I roast their Thanksgiving turkey with a basic dry brine, no fancy glazes or flourishes. Plain and simple, it was the best turkey I’ve ever had.

There is a void in our meat industry. The land, environment, animals, and laborers are suffering to provide consumers with artificially low prices and incredible profits for a handful of executives. Everywhere you look there is need: for better legislation, better working and living conditions, better nutritional quality of meat, more sanitary conditions at plants, and better community education.

The Lawrences, in seeking to improve our community, are forced to try to fill in every gap. It’s like trying to fill a

swimming pool with dixie cups. “Your sustainability has to be sustainable for the community, for the farm, for the land, for the environment, for the consumer, and for you... we haven’t thought about ourselves,” Jessie says.

Most Americans know that there is trouble in food production. Even those who choose to go vegan still struggle to find sustainable options, as meat is not the only problem area. We shake our heads and go about our days; everybody has to eat.

It’s exhausting to care about all of the injustices brought to our attention. Few of us have the time, money, and social capital to affect visible change. It’s discouraging to need federal legislative support and not receive it. But there’s something we can do to heal ourselves and our world: engaging with change makers within our community. It’s time to start giving back to those who make sacrifices in order to make the world a better place. For me, that means buying my meat from Marble Creek.

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Origin of Monsters

by Alyssa Adams

The cycle continues, rinse and repeat.
One monster creates another to take its place.
To birth a monster is no easy feat.
Scars remain hidden behind a masked face.

One monster creates another to take its place.
Harsh hands do not tender fruit make.
Scars remain hidden behind a masked face.
To fill a child with venom is the goal of the snake.

Harsh hands do not tender fruit make.
The hurt of few becomes the hurt of many.
To fill a child with venom is the goal of the snake.
Within this garden the thorns are plenty.

The hurt of few becomes the hurt of many.
The dam breaks and pain like a flood overtakes.
Within this garden the thorns are plenty.
Calamity awaits as the mother moans and quakes.

The dam breaks and pain like a flood overtakes.
To birth a monster is no easy feat.
Calamity awaits as the mother moans and quakes.
The cycle continues, rinse and repeat.



Eclipse

by Sarah Chase



Passing Time

by Sarah Chase

CHILLER

(excerpts)

by Oluwafunmilayo Akinpelu

Dr. Choudhary is the only Indian haematologist in LUTH. And every Wednesday, I go to him so we can talk about the disease in his heart and my own boy. Today, he tells me he is worried about dying at 49, but he is even more worried about my migraine. He says my migraine will vanish if only I let go of what is left of my boy. I tell him there is nothing left but memories. And can I possibly erase the memory of my boy wanting Pringles at age ten and then wanting a nose ring by the time he is nineteen? But Dr. Choudhary says I can erase people, just like he has done with his wife and first cousin. 'All you have to do is blink twice, start again, make new friends', he says.

I want to remind him that he never loved his wife; that he cheated on her with the auxiliary nurses so he couldn't give a damn if he lost her to breast cancer. But he is a doctor; you only listen to doctors. You don't talk back at them.

He is right, though. It is way too easy to erase people. It's only been two years and I already am losing my boy to the noisy chatter of the TV, the crunching sound of eating chicken and chips even as I am bent over my laptop writing codes, and the drowning voice of Enya coming from Dairo's room. In fact, the only thing left

of his face in my mind is the birthmark on his jaw line. The one for which Mr. Choudhary often sighs or shakes his blobbed head.

And there is his handwriting - wobbly crispy curls that stretch their thin weights beyond themselves, something like my favourite MS-Word font. Chiller.

I leave the doctor's office feeling like I have let go of more than I should. It's a human plague, this voluntary amnesia. We forget the dead too quickly, because we desire freedom too much. And forgetting is a sort of freeing for us. Before now, recuperating from this terrible loss, forgetting had been the miracle I craved for. Now that I am really beginning to forget him, it's horrible. I don't want to lose him too quickly.

There are too many things I am losing already. My hair, for one. It is coming off me like leaves falling from a cursed tree. At first, I fear it is something big like cancer or leukaemia, but then I look it up on the internet and find that it has more to do with my aging body. I hate the feeling of not being able to help my losses. They come tumbling on and all I can do is watch them coming in strides. I decide to cut the hair. It's the one way to keep in control.

I go to Sesan's room for the first time in two years to get a hair clipper.

He has the sickle cells in his already bad fatherless blood, and I was told that he

will have frozen blood, disagreeing cells battling it out in the joints and a gauntly appearance. But what I was not told is that he will feel all kinds of pain foreign even to the imagination; that the heat will be too cold for him and the cold, well, very cold. I am distraught when I see him for the first time in his near adult life writhing on his bedroom floor like an earthworm in a sea of salt.

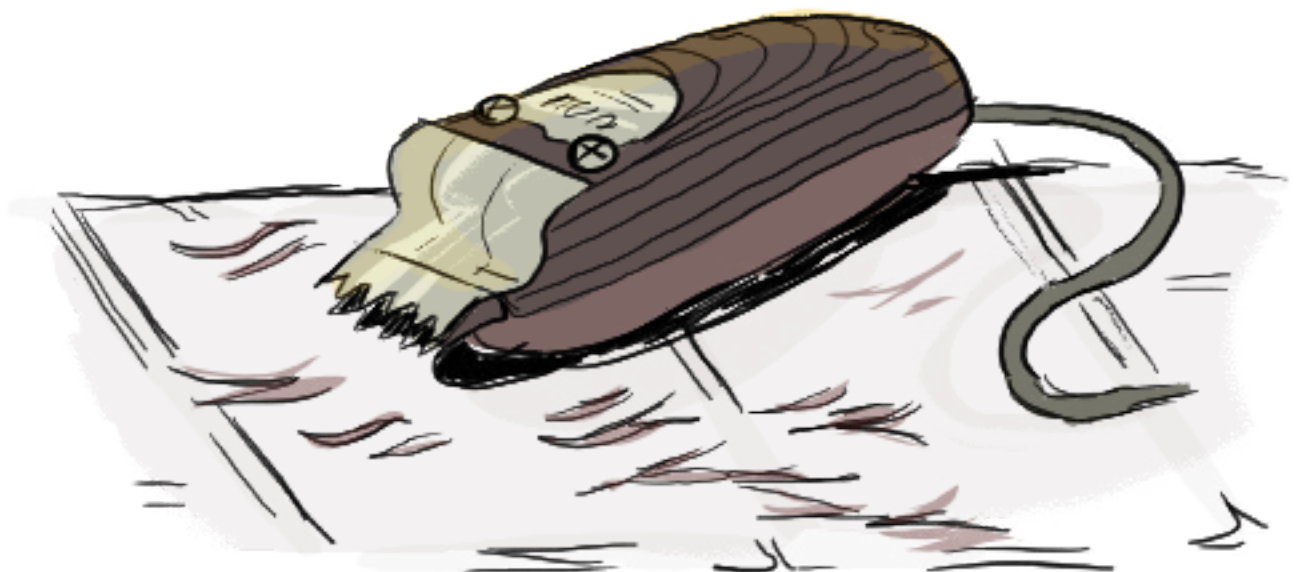
However, Sesan spares me the horror of constantly witnessing this by lying.

‘Are you okay?’

‘Ah yes, perfectly fine. Just need to get to my room. Please, can you pass me water? Not cold. Ordinary. No, maybe a little warm. Or hot. Yes, hot water will do.’ It’s always obvious when he is having a

crisis. What with the sweats dotted on his cold forehead, his trembling palms gathered into fists, his clenched teeth, protruded stomach and upward glance towards the ceiling. Or heaven. But I am grateful that he swallows his pain alongside the many drugs he has to ingest. I am grateful that he is considerate enough not to drag me into his messy cesspit of pain and pity.

Sesan continues to lie, to hide pain under his skin and wear agony like a cloak, until one day truth crawls out through his eyes. He is home from school and we are having a heated argument about his fiddling with a nose ring when I suddenly find his eyes. They are creamily deathly. He is not writhing in pain, choking tears or wanting an analgesic, but I know he is very sick.



Silk in Moonlight

by Rilee Kennedy

She spins her eight-legged dance,
only an hour to sew a new dew dropped
home in the golden light that warms her not.

Hidden in the shadows, clicking patiently,
she waits for them to see her latest gifts.
The man gasps at the tangled mosquito.
His young cries out for the bouncing
moth.

They spot her, then swat her.
They know not the force of their hand.

When they see her, they only see
beady wet eyes, eight tangled legs,
venom kissed fangs.

They see not the fear in her eyes.
They feel not the age in her joints.
They are spared of the kiss on her lips.

Forgoing the cold goldenrod of dawn,
she weaves a silk dance for the
moonlight.

She twists as she twirls,
catching the white light of night,
and stitching it as only she knows how.



Motorcycles

by Kalan Naylor

Same as it Ever Was: How the Talking Heads Broke the Cycle of Live Music Production

by Matthew Carpenter

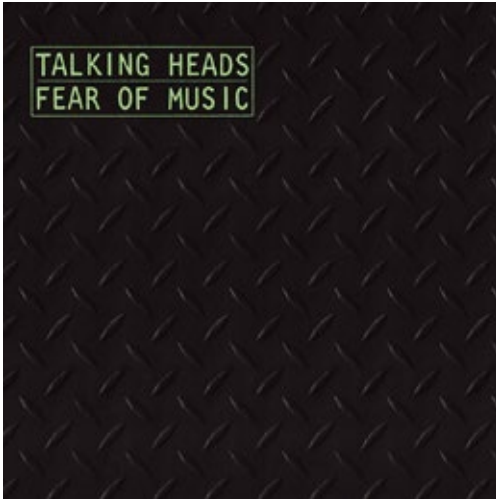
“And you may ask yourself – how did I get here!?”

Talking Heads’ *Remain in Light* is a product of its time made long ahead of its time. Hundreds of years of musical tradition from the corners of Africa, Europe, and the United States were woven together into an eclectic fabric of music that cannot be cornered into one genre or tradition, yet it could only have been produced in a certain time and place by a particular group of people. This is the story of that album and the people who made it.

In 1979, British musician and producer Brian Eno took a break from his solo work to produce his third and final record for New York band Talking Heads. Eno had burst into the art-pop scene in the early 1970s as a member of Roxy Music, and made history in 1977 with the first major release of a formally “ambient” album – meant to be played, but not listened to, like a piece of furniture in a room. His ambient music spawned an entire genre of quiet, mood-setting music that finds innovation to this day. Many of the ambient albums he produced combined electronic elements with organic ones, i.e. synthesizers with guitars or pianos.

Meanwhile, the Talking Heads, former students at the Rhode Island School of Design, were refining an awkward, angular, danceable sound in the post-punk scene of New York’s famous CBGB dive bar. This music scene was the birthplace of other legendary post-punk/new wave groups such as Television, Blondie, and the Ramones. After playing locally for a few years, the Heads achieved a hit single “Psycho Killer” on their debut album ‘77. They then pursued a more experimental sound with producer Brian Eno, the first product of which was *More Songs About Buildings and Food*, a moderately received album about the titular topics. This project embodies the awkwardness of the band’s songwriting. The next collaborative project, *Fear of Music*, is a concept album about fear – each song discusses a fear of a different topic, some more rational than others. The final of the three Eno-produced albums, though, would solidify the Talking Heads’ place in the history of 20th century music.

During the recording sessions for *Fear of Music*, the Heads began exploring improvisatory jam sessions for their next album. These recordings could often run as long as thirty minutes, and with the band in their creative prime, the content was quite dense. So, when writing sessions began for *Remain in Light*, Brian Eno had been listening to these improvised jams. His past electronic music with Harold Budd had at points led him to try looping tapes of audio and having Budd improvise piano over them. Eno decided to take a similar approach with the Talking Heads. He began writing synthesizer melodies over looped audio from their recordings, then instructed them to record new improvisations for him to loop.



Once Brian Eno had isolated a one-measure loop out of thirty minutes or so of audio, he would send this back to the Talking Heads, and they would write a song based on the loop. So, these songs were built from improvisation, surgically deconstructed into building blocks for something new. This can be perceived all throughout *Remain in Light*, and is accentuated by the copy-and-paste style of lyricism exercised by David Byrne on the project. The band themselves were attempting to introduce novel (to Western audiences) percussive elements into their pop-oriented music. In Byrne's words,

“We were listening to African pop music — such that was available — like Fela Kuti and King Sunny Adé, and some field recordings, but we didn't set out to imitate those. We deconstructed everything and then as the music evolved, we began to realize we were in effect reinventing the wheel. Our process led us to something with some affinity to Afro-funk, but we got there the long way round, and of course

our version sounded slightly off. We didn't get it quite right, but in missing, we ended up with something new.”

Lead single “Once in a Lifetime” is the penultimate example of the production of this album. The main bassline originated from a jam based in the Heads song “I Zimbra” from their previous album *Fear of Music*. Eno looped this isolated bassline and sent it back to the band. However, Eno and the band were hearing the downbeat of the line in different places. In other words, Eno heard the bassline and imagined the drumbeat backwards from the way the band played it. Resultantly, the song has a very awkward, yet smooth rhythm, accenting obscure beats but maintaining the band's danceable appeal. The drum, bass, and guitar textures are accompanied by shocking synthesizer leads, pulling the listener out of the hypnosis induced by the constant looping rhythms. David Byrne attempted to write the lyrics from the perspective of some deranged televangelist, taking on a full-bodied arena speech cadence in the vocal delivery. Lyrically, the verses follow a consistent format, asking the listener to reflect on life circumstances followed by a rhetorical question: “How did I get here?” With the same bass and drum loop, the chorus follows, which is a confusing sing-along section in continuation with the introspective theme of the song's verse lyrics:

“Letting the days go by (let the water hold me down)
Letting the days go by (water flowing underground)
Into the blue again (after the money's gone)
Once in a lifetime (water flowing underground)”

The bridge of the song is a repeated mantra, “same as it ever was, same as it ever was” summing up the repetitive nature of the album that takes effect in the instrumentation, production, and lyrics.

The production of *Remain in Light* coincided with the production of a Byrne-Eno collaboration titled *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, which utilized many of the same production methods such as looping and sampling of speech, field recordings, and music alike. This album is certainly more abstract than the already avant-garde *Remain in Light*, but well worth experiencing for anyone who enjoys the work of these two creators.

The importance of *Remain in Light* lies largely in its prototypical use of the looping process that would later become

known as sampling, now ubiquitous in electronic, pop, and hip-hop music. David Byrne’s lyricism helped pave the way for absurdist pop music, on the same level as David Bowie and Lou Reed. In recent years, he has collaborated with Eno, St. Vincent, produced a Broadway musical titled *American Utopia*, created a platform dedicated to good news called *Reasons to be Cheerful*, and written an anecdotal guide to the music business titled *How Music Works*. Brian Eno remains active as a musician, producer, and general figure of authority in creatively produced music. In 1980, though, the two manifested a unique combination of dance, pop, electronic, and percussive music that had not existed in the mainstream before, and because of all this innovation, *Remain in Light* remains a rich source of musical inspiration to this day.



PLAY
READ
LEARN
GROW

PRE-
school



16!





CONGRATS
BOY OR GIRL?

WELCOME



Ac



BFF



TRAVEL



WALKER



Rematch

by Rilee Kennedy

A streetlight fistfight,
blood flecked shirt,
souvenir so I know
it went right.

A twenty-five-year path,
to a gray man, know thy wrath.
Growing up you'd think "father"
could keep his own, go a bit farther
in

round two.

But how can it be around two,
when your feet hit the street
before I was even new.
You left before I could even be
something of worth to you.
On your ass, enjoy the view.

Crunching bones now,
I can take it.
Walking out of my heart
made you break it.

Alright, you're pretty spry
for a broken guy.
All I've ever wanted
so, where's my dry eye?

All I need is a reason for your sin,
With one last line, make sure you win

"Sorry, which one are you again?"



Inside

by Sarah Chase



Holier Than Thou

by Sarah Chase

Sale of Simplicity: The Case for Changing How We Vote

by Jason Feit

In his parting words to the nation, George Washington warned of the dangers of political parties. “They are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people.” His words ring true to many Americans today, the majority of whom remain disgruntled with bipartisanship and bitter towards the failures of our democracy. However, the true blame lies not in the system, but in we the people. Our republic has not failed us. We have failed it. We have enabled those in power to take advantage of us and package ideals into party platforms, regardless of what may exist outside those packages. We have allowed those in politics to sell us simplicity.

There exists a vicious cycle in which the corrupt government creates disillusion among its constituency, leading the voters to compromise their idealism and settle for the prepackaged adequacy known as partisan politics. The quest to counter this partisan tide begins and ends with public perception of politics, which is currently the main barrier to unity among voters. As it exists in our country, politics is viewed as a mainly partisan endeavor, with people aligning

themselves toward one side or another in an effort to be more engaged with their beliefs. More and more people identify themselves as members of a party, or, at the very least, a particular ideology. With this train of thought comes the combining of issues into party platforms, with minimal deviation outside of these structured groupings. Therein lies the problem. While at times we as voters may prefer the ability to vote for our candidates directly down a party line, it is this apparent simplicity that has put us in the troubling situation that we face today. It is apparent that we as voters have grown complacent.

In our defense, history has proven that we are especially susceptible to such problems. Humans yearn to feel a sense of belonging, and to be involved in things bigger than themselves. This, in part, is what led us to representative, democratic government, as we needed a stake in our governance. However, humanity remains full of people invested in their own conflicting interests, many of which are eventually cancelled out in a zero-sum game. It is the combination of these two ideas that has led to the devotion to the current two-party system. Instead of people feeling a sense of attachment to their government and nation, each party remains supreme and at constant odds with those who oppose it.

As politics has become highly partisan, people have also settled into a troubling pattern of groupthink that fails to separate issues of public good from the corruption of politics. The primary reason for this halting of development is a system devoid of substantial voter engagement. Both the political and public arenas lack the intellectual and logical discourse necessary for genuine

improvement. Arguments are for the sake of winning arguments, and slander of the opposition is more applauded than debate. Meanwhile, politicians play fast and loose with the truth while the public looks on with adoring eyes, simultaneously too fatigued and too naive to call them out. These problems compound into a stagnant electorate, one that is unwilling to get their hands dirty and get involved in politics. By treating corruption in politics as above us, we contribute to a problem with a solution that we ourselves can implement.



To find this solution, we need only look to the first amendment of our very own Constitution. The freedom of speech was not written as a mere protection. It was meant to serve as a tool of people in a true democracy. Intellectual discussion should be rampant, and debate should be for the sake of improvement rather than proving. Lies and misleading arguments should be aggressively shut down, while anything with gray area should be welcomed. Facts and educated opinions should be used to wage war on the unknown, not each other. Differing

viewpoints should be embraced, regardless of obscurity, provided a non-fallacious basis. It is undeniable that sticking to one's beliefs is easier, but this following of the simple route is what has brought us to this point. Rather than taking shelter in a trench of old habits, it is for the benefit of our country that we march across the battlefield and engage new ideas. We should aspire to knowledge, not correctness.

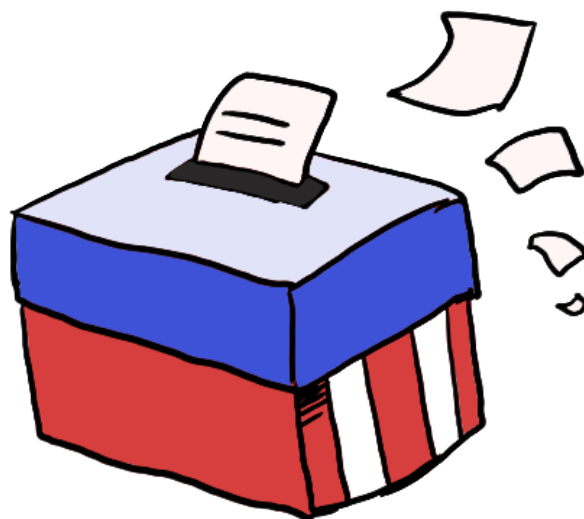
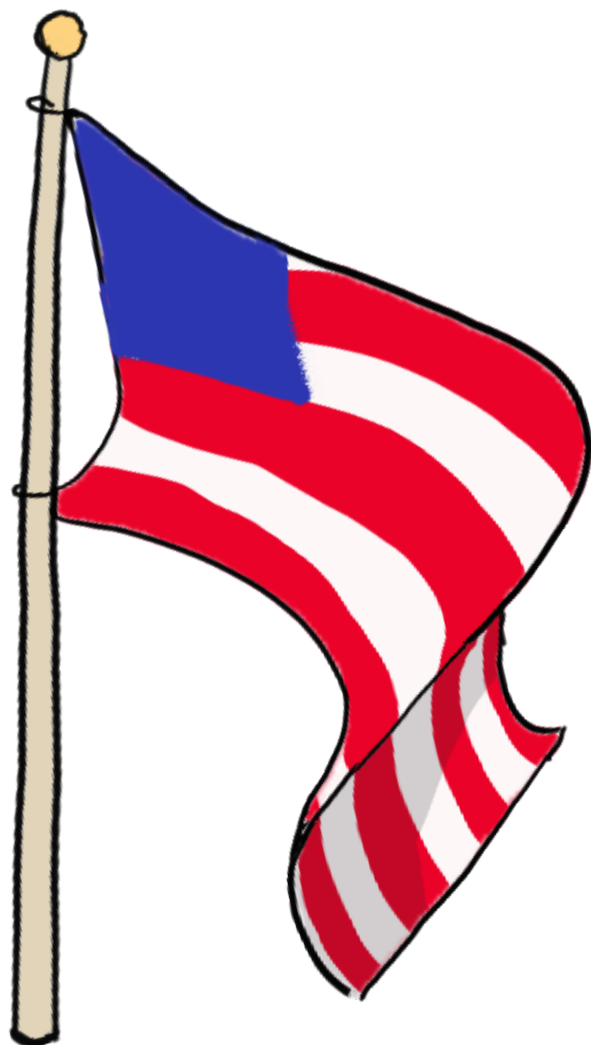
While our traditions lay rooted in democracy and the idea of a majority, the foundation of our governmental system is that of a republic. In a perfect democracy, we would all be able to work together and come to the correct decisions, but this is not a perfect democracy. In fact, this is not a democracy at all — it is a republic. However, there remains a warped sense among much of the public that our representatives should be trustees of the majority, an idea supported by the way in which people vote. As opposed to delegates, who follow a majority, these representatives campaign on ideas and hope to garner a plurality of support. This is a failure of the system, an inherent flaw that was bound to happen given the circumstances. To avoid such problems, we need to come to a simple realization: we are not experts.

Following from this realization, it is our duty to elect those who are experts into positions where that expertise provides benefit for all. Rather than relying on feel or personal alignment, the traits required in a good leader are those of qualification, intelligence, and good intention. Where the divide exists in is what constitutes such a leader, as the public fails in this initiative in the same way in which they do throughout the rest of politics. The democratic ideals of discussion are

uniquely suited to deal with this problem and can likewise be applied to all aspects of evaluating leadership. Instead, politics has deviated from the rest of public life, in that intelligence is belittled as arrogance and idealism is seen as naivety. This can be seen more clearly when compared to other professions such as those in the sciences, where vigorous debate ensues and a more general consensus is reached. Our leaders fail to mirror society in this way, resorting to a political spoils system rather than a meritocracy.

The establishment of this system stems from the idea that those in power should believe in what we do. However, determining the right decision is not ideological as we often tend to suggest, and agreement does not constitute correctness. Just as we expect those in power to have good information, we should expect them to surround themselves with advisors that can achieve that goal. A decisive leader that can transcend ideology in favor of making the right decisions is preferable to one that sticks to his beliefs, no matter the cost.

Consequently, it is up to the common people to take initiative. For too long, excuses have echoed among the populace, voicing fears that good people don't run for or win public office. As well founded as these fears may be, there is no one to blame but those good people who choose not to run, and those voters who have made it clear that they are unwilling to deviate from their current voting patterns. Only when we realize the true nature of our government can we separate the uses of democracy from those of our republic and learn to use them effectively. We must reject the sale of simplicity.



Sketching Perfect Circles

by Jacob Snead

The art of drawing can be a fantastically meditative process, allowing one to practice and improve on a form of expression they can call their very own. It lets one see the progress one makes throughout the years, and gives us a way to look back on all the-

...darn...

-Ah, where was I? Ah yes, it allows us to look back on all the mistakes we improved on. The reflective nature that art takes the form of really emphasizes the growth that comes with life itself. Allowing us to portray their world in our own idealistic-

...crap...

-our own idealistic way that we strive to one day see, or achieve. That is, in one case. In others, we tend to use art to represent what we fear, or to relieve ourselves of the thoughts trapped in our mind. We must vent these ideas into throws of expression, in order to not only allow ourselves to visualize our fears and our thoughts, but-

...focus, focus... steadier next time...

-but also allows us to feel validated. Who knows us better than ourselves, and if we can confide in anything to understand us, it should be our mind, and our actions.

Only if the actions do not line up with the intent of the mind, it can be-
...frustrating...

If I could only keep a steady hand, and allow it to draw on paper what my mind sees, then I'm sure that these positive reflections could be mine. But they are always jagged, always lopsided, always imperfect, always-

...Ah, there's one!...

Now just one more, and I'll be happy, right?



Rickety-Split

by Celly Gullo



Looking out from the ridge from my seat in the old wooden cart,
I see scrub and some brown scraggly trees, and a rusty new radio tower out far,
way down there, where the clouds scatter rain on whatever's below.

Riding up here, the sky's clear and fair;
seeing up, out and down to the edge of the sky,
my lips twist up and crack, so my only complaint—
It's the wind through my hair, in my eyes, up my shirt, it's so dry and my skin's rubbing raw.

Weeds to the side of the path bend and blow seeds out to soar over miles of brown scrub,
the cart jars and it rattles my teeth and my spine as the wicker seat sways to the beat
of dry beans in a jar that's just rolled off a cliff.
I taste dust off the road, as it's cast from the ground,
from the rut in the dirt the wheels carve as I go.
Underneath I feel gravel grind down into grit that sprays up in my socks,
dull gray rumbling under me, heavy hard thudding as rocks hit the wheels,
and I roll down the road—

I hear, through my ears to the spot in my skull where the roof of my mouth meets my throat,
there's a dry wooden squeal, a wobble pop crunch,
from the rocks, from a snail, from a splintered front axle snapped through—
and I tumble on down off the side of the trail, down the hill through the brush,
leaving skin on the rocks and my tears on the trees,
scraping earth with my nails, bloody dirt in my eyes and hair torn from my scalp,
with each slam and scratch I pay down the debt
of the favor I got from the wheels of my cart, though they're broken back up on the ridge:
thanks to them I roll forward on still, and as I'm in no state to look down at the path,
this dust-tumbling trip'll keep going, my rolling won't slow
and my journey can't come to a stop.



Wage War

by J. Carlos Hernandez

In the 2001 book *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich uncovered the grave state of emergency that low-wage, American workers found themselves in, in large part due to the \$7.25 federal minimum wage. Ehrenreich concludes that the appropriate emotion we should collectively feel as a country is “shame at our own dependency [] on the unpaid labor of others.” She goes on to state that “[w]hen someone works for less pay than she can live on—when, for example, she goes hungry so that you can eat more cheaply and conveniently—then she has made a great sacrifice for you, she had made you a gift of some part of her abilities, her health, and her life.”(1)

I believe this assertion to be true when speaking about American workers, especially those who work for the lowest wages. It is due to their resilience and spirit that the American economy reached unprecedented heights over the past four decades. But for far too long American workers have been given the short end of the stick, in an unrestrained capitalist economy that favors the wealthiest Americans and large corporations. In light of a devastating global pandemic, rising income inequality, and perpetual wage stagnation, the fortitude of American workers seems to be reaching a new momentum that may wage a proverbial war against those who stand in the way of giving Americans the pay raise they deserve.

One indication that American workers are ready to fight back can be observed in

the phenomenon that is being called the Great Resignation. The U.S. Bureau Labor Statistics reported that in September of 2021 4.4 million Americans quit their job, a record statistic that has been on the rise since August of the same year. This shake up in the labor market may seem like a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but as a CareerArc/Harris Poll suggest, a staggering 23% of employed Americans are also planning on resigning from their current positions, citing bad working conditions, burnout, and low wages. The data also shows that this mass quitting is mostly happening among younger workers. (2) This is a hopeful sign for the unification of American workers, especially considering that younger workers are the less likely to have a union membership; since the 1980s, union membership among all U.S. workers has been on a steady decline.(3) Although not ideal, the labor force today is in a great position to begin bargaining for better pay, which can happen at a decentralized scale, where employers are forced to raise wages in order to fill vacant positions. However, a better and more equitable strategy would be to rectify the crisis of stagnating wages by raising the minimum wage, using the same political system that gave the wealthy and large corporations the upper hand in the first place.

Minimum wage laws are meant to protect workers by setting a price floor for labor. This means that an employer must pay workers a minimum amount that is set by Congress. As a result, workers can expect not to be exploited, and those who get paid even the least have a greater chance of avoiding poverty. Moreover, minimum wage laws provide a tool for the federal government to regulate such minimums and keep up with inflation. As expected,

the US Congress has in fact raised wages many times since the federal minimum wage was introduced. Figure 1 shows this incremental increase in steps, which indicated federal action raising the minimum wage.

Figure 1.

Nominal Federal Minimum Wage in the United States



The figure shows the federal minimum wage in the United States. When introduced in 1938 the minimum wage was set at \$0.25 per hour. The minimum wage, since 2009, is \$7.25 per hour.

Source: US Department of Labor.

But this figure is far from the whole picture. Nominal wage only shows the increase of the minimum wage in U.S. dollars but does not account for inflation. It is real wages that account for inflation and is adjusted to reflect purchasing power. The graph in figure 2 is a better reflection of minimum wages in the U.S. (4)

Figure 2.

Real Minimum Wage in the United States



The minimum wage was at its highest in real terms in the 1960s, and the current minimum wage it is still well below that level.

Source: US Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics. Estimates for 2008 and 2009 are based on 2.5 percent annual inflation (equivalent to the average of the previous two years).

Considering the figure above, it is clear that American workers' wages have barely changed considering the constant growth of the U.S. economy. This third graph, figure 3, further shows the stagnation of wages, when considering the purchasing power of wages earned by U.S. workers. (5)

The grim picture of wage stagnation may vary from one study to another, but even in the best-case scenario, as proposed by those who reject the gravity of stagnating wages, over the last 40 years wages have seen a maximum growth of 22%, in the timespan where U.S. GDP growth was 737%. (6)

Within this alarming picture of the undermined American workforce comes another disturbing consequence. Since 1976 the U.S. has seen an explosion in income inequality. To put it in perspective, from 1976 to 2006, for the bottom 90% of American households,

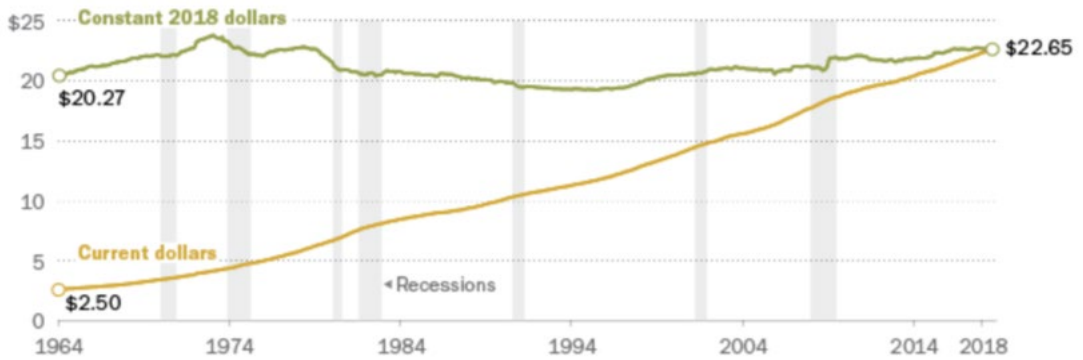
income increased by 10%, but for the top 1% they increased by 232%. (5) (7) The bullish American economy is increasingly showing itself to be marked by exploitation and inequality. It is under this economic oppression that American workers must gear up to fight. But who exactly will they be fighting?

Simply put, the forces that conspire to oppress low-wage workers are comprised of those who directly benefit from cheap labor—from large employer corporations, to CEOs, and the wealthiest class of Americans that reap the benefits from their investments. There are two main tactics that the culprits employ to achieve their goal of maintain cheap

Figure 3.

Americans' paychecks are bigger than 40 years ago, but their purchasing power has hardly budged

Average hourly wages in the U.S., seasonally adjusted



Note: Data for wages of production and non-supervisory employees on private non-farm payrolls. "Constant 2018 dollars" describes wages adjusted for inflation. "Current dollars" describes wages reported in the value of the currency when received. "Purchasing power" refers to the amount of goods or services that can be bought per unit of currency. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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labor in the U.S. The deregulation of the financial sector was the first breach by these forces to undermine workers. (8) In the 1970s and 80s, deregulation became the standard, opening the door for large financial institutions to gain political power that would further deregulate or benefit their bottom lines (9). For example, by keeping a tight labor market, the Federal Reserve has been used to manufacture a higher-than-normal unemployment rate. (9)(10) Of course, it is no secret that the financial sector lobbies for keeping the federal minimum wage low, and increasingly, we see large U.S. companies outsourcing labor, which keeps labor costs low at home. (10)

Another tactic used by large employers is something called monopsony power, which is used by large corporations to artificially suppress worker wages. (11) Economists call it a labor-market concentration and it usually happens at a localized level. Here, large employers use their position as the only employer

in a large area to keep wages low. Workers have no other options to switch employers, as the large corporation controls too large a region. (6) Research by the National Bureau of Economic Research shows that this tactic could account for at least 30% of the wage suppression we see today. (11)

The wage war is an uphill battle for American workers, but they have the power to take back control. In the 2020 Presidential Election, despite the ravaging Covid-19 pandemic, the U.S. saw the highest turnout numbers in the 21st century, with 66.8% of voters casting ballots. (12) These numbers remind us that democracy in the U.S. is still alive, and that the reins of political power can yet be turned back the working classes that built America. But beyond the outlook for political mobilization and reform, there is something more on the horizon.

The onset of the Great Resignation is an indication of unforeseen events that may leverage the efforts of underpaid American workers. The devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which we experienced as a collective, have triggered a visceral change in the minds of American workers, especially those who risked the most being labeled “essential,” and those working at low-paying service jobs. A UC Berkeley economist, Ulrike Malmendier, suggests that negative experiences become hardwired into our brains and broadly impact the way we make financial decisions for years to come. (13) (14) This effectively gives the movement for raising the minimum wage the advantage of time, for recruiting the many workers affected by the pandemic. In many ways, this tragedy has shown a lot of Americans what the statistics, charts, and numbers above have been trying to verbalize for the past decade.

Despite the advantageous position that American workers find themselves in at this very moment, past grievances should not be depreciated, and potential consequences should not be underestimated. In contemplating how one should see American workers and their plight, Barbara Ehrenreich provides what I would consider to be the bare minimum of epithets deserved. She says working class Americans “are in fact the major philanthropists of our society. They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect; they endure privation so that inflation will be low and stock prices high. To be a working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor, to everyone else.”

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Tripping Back and Forth

by Isaiah Bolin

It turns and turns and turns and turns and turns and turns and turns and turn and-

This is stupid. There are so many better things that I could be doing. There it goes. Time to move to the next cycle. Soap and toss. I have my book here. I have my backpack with my laptop in it. An essay due in a few days. And here I am, spinning my eyes at a machine.

Turn turn turn turn turn turn turn turn

Spin spin spin spin spin spin spin spin

Wonder what it would feel like to be in there... No, I'd probably get hurt. It's too small. I wonder what it feels like to experience the levels of g-force that astronauts get while in those spinning things?

Ugh. C'mon man. Just pick up the laptop and write. You'll be here for a bit. Get work done.

Wait, did I leave my wallet in a pocket?! No. I just pulled it out to pay for this. Stupid. What if I had only taken out the cash? Left the rest in the pocket? But that would still be these pockets.

"... in the following paragraphs, the author seeks to bring discussion to the idea of- "

Ding-ding!

Huh? Oh, just someone else coming in.

Is that guy carrying a suit? Why'd he bring a suit?

Oh dude, come on. Don't do it. Aaaaand there it goes. Into the washer. Hope he doesn't care too much about being able to put it on. At least once the dryer gets involved.

Maybe he has a younger sibling who's much smaller than he is and he's lending it out? He'll say, "hey little bro, I know you needed a suit real badly, so I took mine to the laundromat and ran it though, just for you!" That'd be nice. Would it? Aren't suits, like, hundreds of dollars?

Whatever.

... CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK CHUNK...

It's got a kind of beat to it... bum bum bum bum...

"I'm no fool / I see through your grin / Knockin' at your door now let me in / Oh I try, yes I try / You're not bad but you're not good / You just say that you're misunderstood / But I ain't gonna try."

Great. Now I've got an earworm. Just focus on the paper. "... however, when the factor of a person typically being able to draw their own conclusions is considered alongside the- "

"Ain't gonna be no shanananana / Or even shanananana / When the moon eclipsed the sun / Then my baby is long gone!"

"... alongside the original perception of the situation- "

"Long gone, long gone / Stepped away with that man on the lawn / With that look in your eye / I don't care what doctor says / I can't stop this buzz goin' round in my head / And someone's gotta die!"

Okay I'm just gonna listen to the song and kill this earworm.

I wonder if someone ever thinks I'm communicating in Morse Code whenever I tap my fingers to music? I'd just be gibberish. What if those people who tap their fingers in public are secret agents? No, I tap my fingers in public and I'm not an agent. Unless I was some sort of sleeper agent.

This is getting out of hand. Just finish the song and get going. There. Now maybe I can focus on getting work done.

"... but what the general audience failed to understand was just how vast the concept was. It covered a multitude, but the time the audience could only see the limited- "

BZZZZT!

Gah! Oh. Good grief, that's one way to lose your train of thought.

Kinda sounded like what you'd hear in a cartoon if someone was getting shocked. So you got a mongoose, who's a right bastard, and his nemesis: the quail. Quail one day sees someone jump off another person's car. Quail gets a pair of jumper cables and a car battery from a mail-order magazine. Stuff comes in, quail waits until the mongoose is asleep. Quail hooks up one side of the cables to the battery and hooks up the other end to the mongoose. Negative on the tail, positive on the snout.

BZZZZT!



You can see the mongoose's skeleton and there is a spikey, yellow aura. Should the quail be the bad guy? I mean, he did electrocute a mongoose. It's my hypothetical, I can do what

I want. So the quail is the bad guy, and the mongoose is the good guy. Or will it be a Tom and Jerry situation where the framed antagonist the actually the good guy? It's certainly an interesting thought. What about Spike? Does this mean that Spike was also a bad guy? It never really seemed like it. He just wanted to be a good dad and usually Tom had it coming. Well, actually Jerry would set him up a lot. Man, Jerry was such a conniving little rat. I mean, he was a mouse, but rat like the insult. I feel like there's some stupid "deep and meaningful"

Tweet to be made from this. "Being a kid is rooting for Jerry. Being an adult is knowing that Tom was the good guy."

I dunno. In retrospect, Tom could be a bit of a prick at times. Am I really about to say that Tom and Jerry was so subversive as to have gray characters? I need to get off this. Wait. Have I been staring? Just look around. Blink a bit and pretend you were just... I dunno, do something!

Uh, I'm sorry. I promise I wasn't staring at you, I just- Yeah. Yeah. I just got lost in my thoughts is all. Didn't mean to zone out on you, sorry.

Just keep putting stuff in the dryer, idiot.

Timer says there's something like three minutes left.

Tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik.

Why does it "tik" for every little movement?

Book. Focus on the book.

"... The bullet was a symbol, and nobody was ever hurt by a symbol." Wait. A minute left. Don't be surprised this time and jump out of your chair. "... It was a farewell to my childhood and a conformation of my man- "

BZZZZT! Uh! ...Well, at least I didn't yelp.



I believe they call it exponential decay

by Sierra Napoleon

The door closes behind you. You're in the same room you were just in, though it seems smaller and dimmer. You aren't quite sure how that could be. In the middle of the room, the leather armchair now snuzzles the mahogany coffee table. The Persian rug, rich in its reds, is but a shriveled salmon sheet stretched under the table's feet. The eyes of the figures in the haphazardly hung paintings blink in unison as you pass. Walk past it all. Open the door on the opposite wall.

The door closes behind you. It's the same room but even smaller. The overhead light flickers. It illuminates the dark leather of the coffee table, the delicate stitches of the sheet's edges, the paper-thin hands grasping the frames of the paintings. Shimmy through it all. Open the crooked door on the opposite wall.

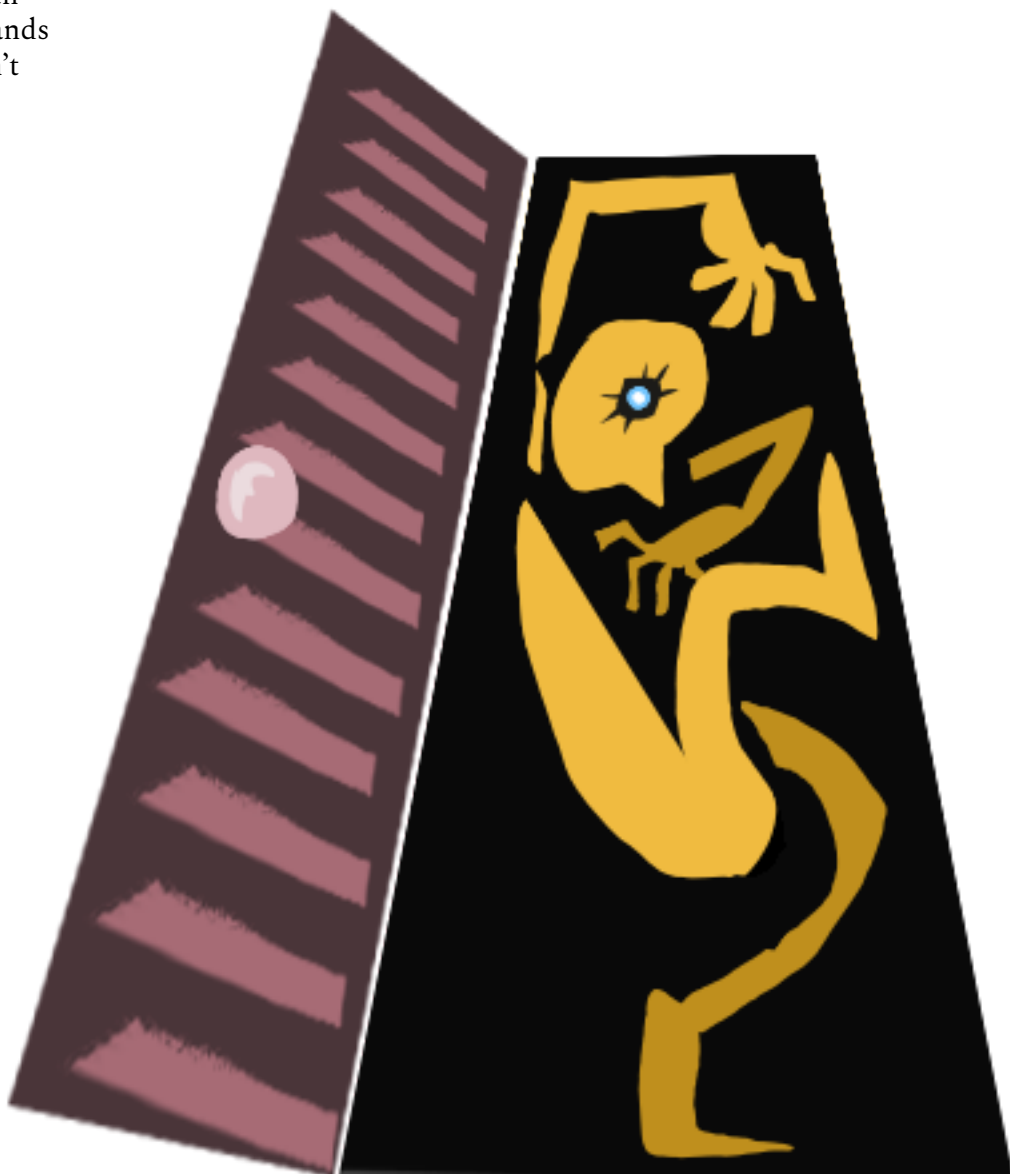
The door closes behind you. Dust particles coat your mouth and eyes. Paper-thin dolls hold hands on the leather salmon sheet. The walls. You can't feel the walls. Step over the sheet. Force yourself through the dollhouse door.

The door closes behind you. You're in a cramped closet. Your stomach is scratchy. Tiny fingers steal your shirt buttons. You trip over your tight leather shoes. Cram your arms under the gap in the musty baseboard.

the door closes
behind you. you're
in the space between
walls, between
studs. the door is far
below you,
mousehole-sized.
you want to go
beyond it, don't
you. squeeze
yourself fingers
first.

the door
closes behind
you your
limbs have
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hack up
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Frozen

by Annie Hardin

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