

An abstract painting featuring a vibrant, textured composition. The background is a deep, rich blue. Overlaid on this are various colors including white, light blue, yellow, orange, red, and purple. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is a dynamic and colorful abstract work.

THE MINISON PROJECT
PRESENTS

TMP Magazine

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Cover Art by
Erika Lynet Salvador

TMP Magazine

The Minison Project

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Content Warnings:

Massacre

Murder

Fire

War

Implied Homophobia

tangerine minison

Jackson D. Moorman

heavy heaving of
heavenward gaze
like spring sung
through frosts &
lost like crocus
too soon lifted up
to swoon for thaw
sun stronger than
March half light
long fires fight
freeze the slick
orange groves & i
ablaze o strange
devoted burning

Oh lawn mower lullaby in disguise
As my beloved's sweetly bellowed lungs,
Just as I cannot resist your smiling eyes,
I cannot resist the sand man's coarse tongues.
Like you, my love, sleep eventually finds me,
Dressed in a black cloak astride a pale horse.
He didn't have time to change in between
His day job among Death's dreary work force—
It's not so bad, Deadly Sleep says to me,
But some nights, two jobs burns you out, you know?
We know all too well, Sleepy Death, you see,
For we must work from sunrise to sundown.
Like you, Pluto, I have changed my uniform
In a parking lot behind my car door.

Hope

Gloriana Campbell

scattered
wildflower seeds
sprout shoots of hope and out-
shine the doubt planted by winter's
mother



The Crab
Niamh Carmichael

Michael sometimes thought he'd never feel as alive as he did near the beach. Just being in its proximity rejuvenated him, set his spine straight after weeks of hunching over chemistry tests and history projects. Salt air seemed to leach school from his lungs, sharpen his vision so he could see everything in brighter color. Plus, he always got to see Birdie there.

Near the beach, in forest verging on marshland, sat the squat little cabin like a plump toad. It was a fairly plain structure, one-story, with two dormer windows like eyes and a faded red door like a tongue. It attracted all kinds of creatures, too, as if the fauna of the swamp saw it the same way Birdie and Michael did, like some solid lord of the swamp. Frequently there would be lizards crawling across its plants, frogs hopping along the moss-crumbled stone walkway, a hiss and a slither when Michael's family opened the door after being absent for a time. Birdie liked to catch the animals and Michael liked to draw them (her favorite were the lizards because she could get them to dangle like an earring from her earlobe).

Birdie's family had arrived first, so while her parents unpacked in their rooms, she wandered down to the skinny wooden boardwalk, looking over the marsh grass for crabs. She'd walked down too quickly, scaring them away, so she'd only seen the last scuttling into their holes. So she waited, sitting quietly. But she'd never had a knack for patience, and her mind wandered off. She came back into herself realizing she'd been humming a song, swinging her feet, and that the crabs were probably further down their holes than ever. With a sigh, Birdie stood up, when she heard the pattering of footsteps and turned to see

Michael running down the teetering boardwalk, calling her name. She ran to hug him, but his hands were cupped together in front of him, held aloft.

“Birdie! Look what I found!” Michael stopped, breathless, in front of her and showed her the huge fiddler crab he was cradling. He held the big claw gently between two fingers so he wouldn’t be pinched. “You haven’t lost your crab obsession lately, have you? You can name him if you want.”

Birdie smiled. “Course I haven’t! He sort of looks like an Arnold. Where’d you find him?”

“He was just there when we got out of the car, sitting on a log. He almost got away, but I snagged him real quick.”

When Birdie started to look at him with a quick protest, he added,

“Don’t worry, I was gentle. No one was hurt.”

Birdie studied Arnold for a few minutes, looking at the intricacies of his pincer and his segmented legs. She sat back down next to Michael on the boardwalk, knees touching, their legs dangling over the grass. He took Arnold back from her, held the crab for a few moments, and then carefully dropped him down into the mud. He looked at her, and she looked at him. He looked away.

“What’s wrong?” Birdie tilted her head.

Michael shook his head. “Nothing. I’m just glad to be here again.”

She was silent for a moment. “I’ve missed you.” She tried to keep any traces of glumness out of her voice, but knew as she said it that she wasn’t successful.

Michael apologized. “Yeah. Me too.”

“How’s the new school? Roommates being any nicer?” Birdie asked carefully.

He looked up from the mud and smiled brightly. "For sure. But let's not talk about it, 'kay? C'mon," he said, pulling Birdie up when she held out a hand. "Let's go see if my parents need any help unpacking."

After unloading the car, the parents went on a grocery run to stock up the cabin, but Michael and Birdie opted to stay behind and catch up, after not having seen each other in a few months.

They knew the surrounding area well, where to avoid stepping into brackish puddles, the quickest routes through the woods to the beach, where to find berry bushes and burbling brooks. The first day, they spent hours rambling through the swampy woods, just talking and listening and observing. Michael had to walk with wet shoes because Birdie had dared him to walk along a fallen log across a shallow, algae-covered marsh pool. He'd slipped on the slimy moss and fallen into the ankle-deep water. Birdie almost stepped on a snake camouflaged in the muck, and it vanished with a hiss into the water. After those unpleasant moments, they left the swamp and went to the beach, walking barefoot in the water or along the sand looking for shells.

"Really, how do you like your new school?" Birdie asked him. "Is it better than Greenwood Prep and its myriad of history projects?"

Michael was silent for a few moments. "It's not worse."

"Have you made many more friends? Any cute girls?"

He blushed slightly, then dropped his eyes. "Nah. Almost everyone there sucks. Not like you," he smiled. "Hey, look!"

He bent down and picked up something in the sand. It was a scrap of a shell, silvery and pearly. Birdie couldn't tell if he was deliberately trying to change the conversation or not.

"Pretty," she said. "You should try drawing it. You *do* still draw, right?"

Michael laughed. "You talk like we haven't seen each other in decades. Of course I still draw."

"Well, I don't know," Birdie kicked some sand in his direction, but the wind blew it right back into her. "Just making sure. Feels like it's been a while. Greenwood isn't the same without you."

"Obviously. Its grade point average has probably dropped a *ton* without me."

"Don't worry, I'm definitely carrying it. My *C's get degrees* strategy is doing wonders for the school's ranking, I'm sure."

Michael smiled ruefully. "Well, be careful. If they get too good, you'll be shipped off to some god-awful boarding school too, probably in Canada or something, with an art class where you can only draw bowls of fruit and nothing actually interesting, and then we'll see each other even less."

Birdie frowned. "Bowls of fruit?"

He looked at her very seriously. "I'm never eating another apple again."

They continued wandering down the beach, bumping shoulders and brushing hands (Birdie couldn't tell if it was accidental), stopping every few feet to look at shells. Michael stopped to pet a stranger's dog, which bowled him over in the sand, licking his face. When he stood up, Birdie tried to brush the sand off of his back and out of his hair, but the salt air had made their skin sticky, and it clung to him, so she gave up, laughing. Pretending to be

offended, Michael scooped up a handful and tossed it at her and she spluttered as it went into her mouth.

They spent the next three days in roughly the same manner—long, long walks, finding berry bushes or apple trees when hungry. Despite Michael’s no-apple declaration, he climbed one of the trees and tossed down the fruit for Birdie to catch, and she swore they were the best she’d ever had. They played board games and watched movies and talked about everything and nothing and tried not to think about the fact that after the trip’s four short days, Michael would go back to his boarding school, Birdie back to Greenwood Prep, and they wouldn’t see each other until the next break in three months.

“We text,” Michael said, “And we call, so it’s not like we don’t talk to each other.”

“Yeah,” said Birdie. “But it’s not the same, is it?”

“No,” he agreed. “It’s not the same.”

The last night they stayed at the cabin, Birdie and Michael wandered down to the dock again, right as the sun finished setting. It was what Birdie liked to call *pink hour*, where the sun had vanished but still tinted the world in a haze of pink fading to purple, turning everything blush and rose and mauve. A few stars twinkled into vision, and the marsh grass was swathed in purple shadow. The only sounds were crickets and the gentle slopping of the waves against the shore. They made their way down to the end of the boardwalk and sat on the edge, feet brushing against the surface of the water. Birdie leaned over slowly, then shot out her hand and brought back a small fiddler crab.

“Aww, Michael, he’s *little*! He’s so cute.” She pinched the crab’s body gently between two fingers, holding him out to Michael.

“He looks more like an Arnold than Arnold did,” Michael remarked.

“Arnold 2.0!” Birdie said gleefully.

“Arnold 2.0.” Michael repeated. He stood up. “I’ll be right back.”

Birdie, still holding Arnold 2.0, turned to watch him walk away and furrowed her eyebrows. She spoke to the tiny crab in a higher-pitched voice, holding it up to observe Michael’s departure.

“Is he okay, Arnold? Would you even know?” She paused. “I don’t know how you’d know if I don’t.”

Arnold 2.0 sat in her cupped palms, calmer than almost any crab she’d ever caught. His stillness grounded her, and she fell silent for a moment, then whispered,

“I need everything to work out for him.”

She didn’t see Michael coming down the boardwalk behind her, close enough to hear her soft words. He stopped for a second and his head dropped, ears blushing red. He looked at Birdie, the light making her just a silhouette against the water, then kept walking, loud enough for her to notice him this time. He flapped a piece of paper in the air, holding up a pen.

“Are you drawing Arnold 2.0?” Birdie propped the crab up in her hands to give him a better view of the tiny crustacean. Michael set to work, leaning against a post on the boardwalk railing. His hair kept falling in his eyes, and Birdie felt the sudden urge to push it back the way she’d shaken sand out of it the day before.

After a little while, Birdie moved Arnold 2.0 to one hand and leaned over the water, tracing shapes in the surface with her pointer finger. Michael’s gaze shifted away from the crab in her hand to her profile outlined against the river. Her eyelashes were full, skimming against her cheeks when she blinked, and her mouth was parted just the slightest amount.

She looked up and he quickly made some lines on his paper, fixing the way he'd drawn the crab's pincer claw.

A few minutes later, Birdie felt a tap on her shoulder and looked to see Michael holding out the paper. Although he'd been quieter than normal for the entire trip, he seemed even shyer now.

Birdie took the paper scrap. It was a rough but deliberate sketch of a girl. She recognized the straight slope of her own nose and her swoopy auburn hair. In the drawing, she was holding a crab in her hands and written at the bottom; "My best friend and Arnold 2.0."

"Oh, wait," Michael said. "Here, give it back for a second."

When he returned it, the writing said instead, "Birdie and my best friend".

"Ha-ha, you're funny," Birdie said sarcastically. She looked down at the drawing again and didn't know what to say. "It's just like me."

Michael didn't say anything, but smiled at her and sat down on the end of the boardwalk. Pink hour had passed and the water was rippled with the reflection of clouds racing across the night sky. A memory popped into his head and he grinned involuntarily.

"Do you remember... in second grade, when you tried to show off for Mason Miller and you did the splits at recess and got stuck?" Michael said.

"Stoppppp," Birdie groaned, shoving him. "I do not need to think of that ever again. Why are you bringing that up right now?"

He laughed. "I don't know. I just remember being super jealous."

"Jealous?" Birdie asked. "What, 'cause you couldn't do the splits?"

“You know, Mason Miller never appreciated your splits, really,” said Michael. “But I did.”

“Well, I feel very appreciated, then,” Birdie said playfully.

“I’m not joking, though.”

“Oh, come on, Michael.” Birdie looked at him sideways. “That splits thing was ridiculous. I mean, you were there, you saw it.”

“Now, yeah, for sure. At the time, though, I just remember being super pissed at Mason Miller ‘cause he wasn’t bowled head over heels for you when you did that.”

“Please, I don’t think *anyone* could’ve fallen head over heels after seeing that.” Birdie laughed, looking at Michael sideways.

“Well...I was.” Michael kept his gaze on the water, but he nodded, almost as if to himself.

Birdie felt her cheeks grow red hot. She glanced at him, but he didn’t look up. She studied his face. It was impassive, but for the first time she noticed more than the emotion displayed. The moon had begun to rise and cast a soft silver light around everything, outlining Michael’s features, accentuating the curve of his jawline — which, had she ever noticed before? was quite a nice curve — and the bump in the bridge of his nose and his hair that had fallen in front of one eye. She wondered briefly if this was how he had looked at her, how he had observed her face when drawing her. He looked away from the water and towards her, and the moonlight highlighted each one of his eyelashes, and she felt she had never seen in such detail before.

Quickly, impulsively, Birdie leaned forward and kissed Michael. He put his hand in her hair and it seemed as if the world spun around her and the only still thing left was the

two of them, sitting at the end of the dock with their feet dangling over the water. Then they pulled back and the world settled back into its resting state.

Michael just looked at her. It made Birdie laugh nervously.

“What?” she asked.

Michael shook his head and smiled at her. “Nothing. Nothing at all.”

Birdie thought of something and smiled back. “Are you still jealous of Mason Miller?”

“Are you kidding?” Michael responded. “Mason Miller is jealous of me now.”



Helen Departs

Mark J. Mitchell

She carried her long, sorrowed face
high, chasing lewder questions off.
Wounded slightly in her still place
her right leg followed her as slow
as an old clock. Her foot lands soft
on pavement. The crowd slides right past.
She counts long breaths. Someone she knows
smiles, finds her bus. Today's her last—
not dying. But she won't return—
not here, to faces on a branch
exhaled from trains, Tamed by sorrow
she's leaving this house, this job. No
old kiss will hold her. No cold chance
calls her. She has cities to burn.

Private First Class Ronald L. Ridenhour Mails 30 Copies of a Letter on March 29th, 1969 to President Nixon, Five Senior State and Pentagon Dept. Leaders, and 24 Members of Congress, Detailing the My Lai Massacre After Investigating the Incident on His Own

Paul David Adkins

Gentlemen

It was late in April . . .

The circumstances . . .

In late April . . .

“Charlie” Company . . .

. . . all of its inhabitants

When “Butch” . . .

. . . few, if any, escaped

After hearing this account . . .

. . . so that I might compare

When I arrived . . .

. . . “Pinkville” had been 400 people

. . . Gruver could be believed

. . . concurred with Terry on this

It was June . . .

. . . shot down all villagers

This account . . .

If I needed more convincing . . .

It was in the middle of November . . .

. . . the acknowledged enemy

Exactly what did, in fact, occur . . .

. . . course of action to take

I have considered . . .

I have considered . . .

I have considered . . .

I have considered . . .

I have considered . . .

I have considered . . .

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Captain and Green Beret Medical Officer Jeffrey R. MacDonald, Convicted After a Nine-Year Legal Battle of Murdering His Wife Colette and Daughters Kimberley and Kristen on February 17th, 1970 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina During a Blind Rage After Kristen Wet His Side of the Bed, Discusses Second Lieutenant William L. Calley Jr.'s Conviction and Commutation, But Not Really, Because, as a Malignant Narcissist, He Cannot Focus on Anyone but Himself

Paul David Adkins

When one considers the whole body of evidence,
when one weighs the facts of the case in all its fullness,
what one will find is

Where's the proof?

Within the entirety of the prosecutorial argument,
where I was,
who I was, even,
was called into dispute.

With Calley, the same
willful negligence was levied,
with the same
weak results.

Why would anyone do such a thing?
Why would Calley,
when his whole life was in front of him?
What about an officer of repute, such as this captain?

Where the hippie killers stood and chanted
with their colored candles and bloody knives:
what about them?
When they wrote *PIG* like Charlie Manson
in Colette's blood above the headboard.

With substantiation such as this, their guilt
was plain. What innocence was there,
was mine. What wife.
What children, tucked in the wet sheets.



*Seeing Sergeant Ronald L. Haeberle's Pictures of the My Lai Massacre in The
Cleveland Plain Dealer, November 20th, 1969*

Paul David Adkins

As you see, you see, see
the photos,
you just,
you just don't know
what to believe
because they're children,
and there is no blur of movement in the frame.
What would living children do?
They crawl, they run, they jump
same as when we played a game called Perfume River.
They'd run, they'd jump, they'd crawl
like us.
Because it's hard to believe what we see
when the children are still,
and the mothers are still,
except they must be liars:
lying in ditches, lying in paddies.
They're lying, lying, lying
all through *Pinkville*.
Lying, lying, lying,
lying in the burning straw.



Tara and Sakib
Anannya Waraqa Matin

It was Saturday, which meant that it was the day that Tara would see his friend Sakib. They had first met at a café some five years ago and had stuck up a conversation regarding their mutual love of chess. Sakib invited Tara back to the café the next day for a friendly game. This would go on to become a weekly ritual that was still present five years after their initial meeting.

Every Saturday following lunch, Tara would get ready for their match. He would hail a rickshaw and take the twenty-minute journey to the café. Sakib would get there via a ten-minute walk. They no longer needed to bring in a board or any chess pieces, the café owner was well aware of their tradition and was happy to keep the game pieces they needed right there in the café.

Both men were retired. Tara was in his early seventies, while Sakib was in his late sixties. Tara lived with his oldest son, his daughter in law and three grandchildren. However, despite living with five other people, Tara often found himself with no one to really talk to.

The wife and husband were often at work. The children, now all teenagers, split their time between school and friends. Tara often missed the days when his grandchildren were younger, back when they would all huddle up at his feet to hear his stories about the old days. He often spent his days reading, occasionally asking his older son to bring back a copy of a book that was on his to read list.

Tara had lost his wife, Sreya, a few years back. He still missed her tremendously. He kept a picture of her in his wallet, that he would show people at every chance he could get. Every single Friday, after the afternoon prayers at the mosque, he would visit her grave. He made sure to wear a freshly ironed white Panjabi, as well as two accessories- the bracelet she had given him when they had first started dating as teenagers, and the silver watch that she had bought him for his 50th birthday.

Sakib on the other hand, had never been married. He had thrown himself into his work at a younger age and had assumed that he would just eventually find someone to settle down with. He had had a few girlfriends here and there over the years, but his hectic schedule had always gotten in the way of something serious developing.

As he had gotten older, he had seen his friends start families. The loneliness began to set in as the years began to pile up. His friends could no longer hang out after a late night at the office or go for a spontaneous night out at 12am. They had families to look after and children that they had to drive to school in the mornings.

Once Sakib retired, he found himself tethered to a house all by himself. Every other week seemed to be spent at a different funeral, as he saw family members and friends pass from one life to the next. Without work, he found it a little hard to pass the time. He was robbed of a routine, and of his chance to meet and interact with people. Sakib was holed up in his house either watching movies or walking around his neighbourhood all by himself.

Sakib and Tara's weekly chess match was one of the only social activities that either of them partook in.

This Saturday, Tara got to their spot a little early. The barista greeted him with a smile, asked him about how him and his family were doing. Had his granddaughter's cough gotten better? As they talked, he brought out a chessboard and handed Tara the pieces.

"The usual, sir?"

"Of course."

Tara was soon served a slice of cheesecake and a large coffee with plenty of cream and plenty of sugar. Sakib arrived as Tara took his first sip, and the two men embraced each other. They began to set up the chess pieces as Sakib placed an order for a large black coffee. Tara took a coin from his pocket and tossed it to determine who would get white and who would get black for their game. Tara won and chose to start first.

"I swear the coin's rigged; you've won the last five times. Isn't it supposed to be 50-50?"

Tara smiled wryly and moved his pawn forward. He took a stab at his cheesecake with a small fork and the two men began to talk. Their topics of conversation were primarily chess and jazz. With chess, they discussed techniques and strategies repeatedly. What opening was better to use, the Sicilian Defence or the French. On occasion, both would marvel at the abundance of possibilities the chess board presented. That despite centuries of games, there still could be a combination of pieces on the black and white squares that had never been seen before.

They would talk about who they thought was the best chess player of all time. They both dismissed Magnus Carlsen. His star-studded resume and track record seemingly had no effect on them. They thought that he was too soft and that he wouldn't be able to hang

with the grandmasters of old. Tara had Bobby Fischer as his greatest of all time candidate, while Sakib argued for Gary Kasparov. Despite how much they argued they seemed unable to sway the other; and yet they went on going back and forth, regurgitating the same old talking points.

The other topic the two men discussed was music. Both Tara and Sakib shared an immense love for jazz, though each had their preferences among the genres. Tara loved cool jazz- Miles Davis, Bill Evans, Chet Baker. He loved Miles' visceral playing, the way that he brought the shade of blue to life like no other. He loved how Miles set up mood and atmosphere, how he could sink into his music and drown in it. Sakib had started off as a fan of free jazz- the harsh abrasiveness and complete lack of rules and cohesion appealing to him immensely. Ornette Coleman was a hero of his, and he would talk time and time again of his fierce desire and talent to experiment and push boundaries. They both adored Nina Simone, finding her vocals to be warm and comforting. They frequently mentioned how her talent at playing the piano often got overlooked because of how well she sang. Her album, *Little Girl Blue*, which tugged at both of their heartstrings.

With jazz, they allowed each other to be influenced by the other. Today, Sakib brought up how he had finally heard Chet Baker's *Live in Milan* album after Tara had recommended it numerous times. He raved about how much he loved his trumpet playing. There was a tenderness to Baker's playing, a vulnerability that couldn't help but make you worry about him. On this album, Sakib remarked sadly that he missed Baker's vocals, which had the ability to charm even the coldest hearted of men.

The barista, overhearing their conversation offered his own suggestion into the pot- if they wanted to hear a modern take on jazz, they could check out King Krule. While not directly a jazz artist, King Krule implemented plenty of jazz into his music, which he described as a melting pot of indie, punk, synth, and jazz.

Tara scribbled down the name onto a notepad he carried with him in his pocket. As he finished writing, he looked up to see Sakib claiming check mate. He looked around the board for an alternative but couldn't find any. The first game went to Sakib.

Tara slowly began to rearrange the board, getting ready for a second game. Despite the two men knowing each for years, they never discussed their personal lives. They never talked about the alienation they felt; one alone amongst people and one lonely due to the lack thereof. Never did they willingly bring it up or inquire the other about it. When the two were together, nothing but chess and jazz escaped their lips.

And for them, that was enough. Neither of them felt a need to air out their wounds and respected the other for not poking at them. Saturday was a day to look forward to; something to be hopeful for. What good would it do to ruin that day by talking about matters such as isolation and regret? On Saturday, they could forget; and simply enjoy an evening with a dear friend; coffee and games of chess, a few hours of conversation.

Once the second game wrapped up, a third one swiftly followed. By the end of that game, Tara had made a comeback, coming out on top overall winning two games to one. Sakib gave a sigh of defeat and began to pack up the pieces. Once they had tidied up, the two men stepped outside where Tara began to look for a rickshaw to take him home. When

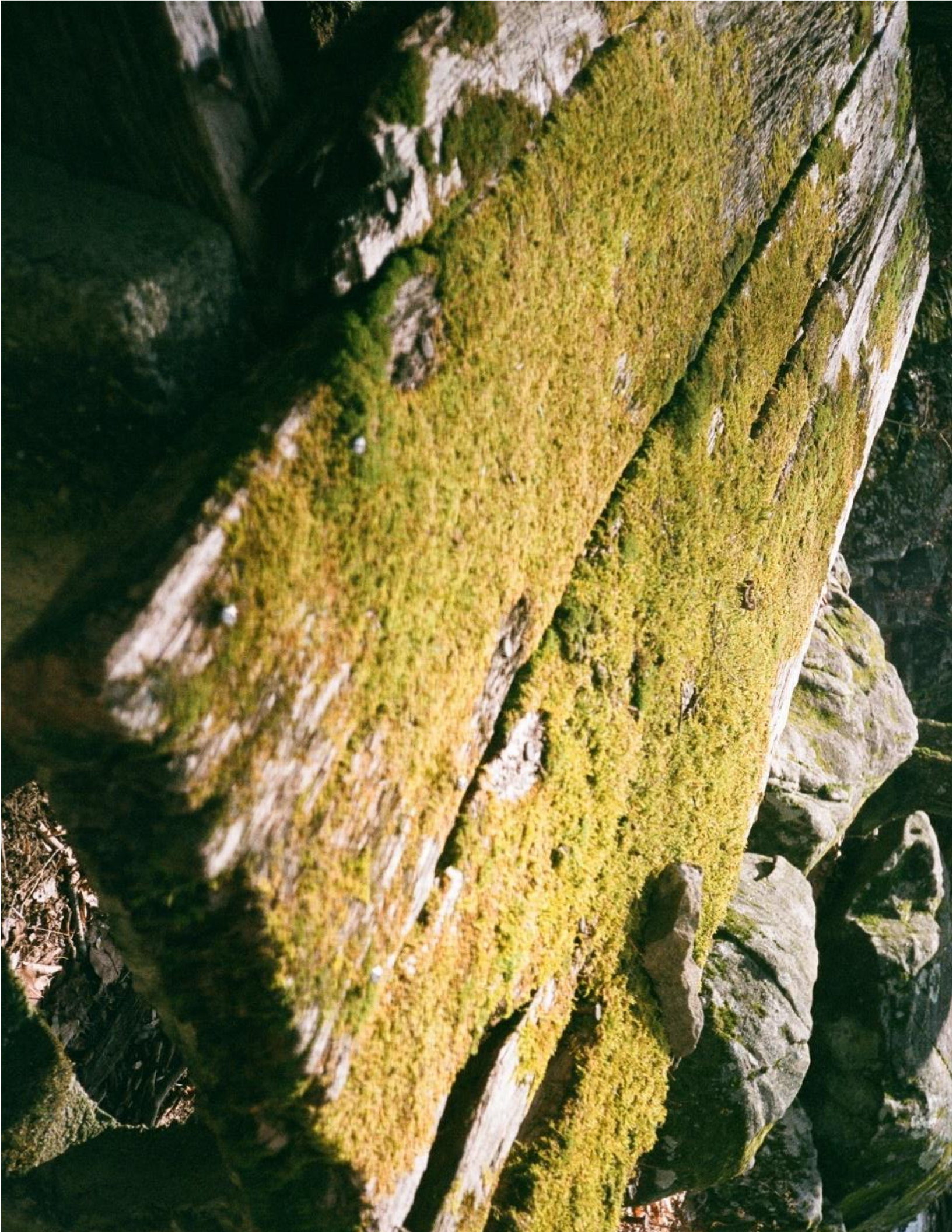
a rickshaw was found, the two men embraced, promising each other that they would see each other again next Saturday.



Forewarning

K Weber

When I'm scared and not a child, I hide
all my worry inside my intestines. I tuck
red-burning anxiety up into my head. I can
not help but stutter once or twice until I am
inward, fully; shaky temporarily. I will
never truly be at ease. You see, I wasn't
going to show you how this goes. I go
limp when depressed or panicked. I might
also be manic less and miserable more. I get
bad, bitter days & medication haze. I know
every reaction you'll have to me and I must
let you go, before this conversation starts.



Half an Hour in the Morning

Elizabeth Poulos

I spend my first thirty minutes like cents
that flow from hand to hand, the last sleep spent

as the dodecagon silver that spins
like the staring clockface whose black hand pins

me to the chair, demands one gold for one
apple and pours a glass of juice. I'm done

now with my first fifteen; dollars, minutes?
Don't care. The price is paid, the clock, in its

cruelty, tells just twenty cents to my leave
and so with trudging feet I walk, and grieve,

I toss my last seconds into the tip
jar, take my things, a yawn, and then, I dip.

Mowing Crew

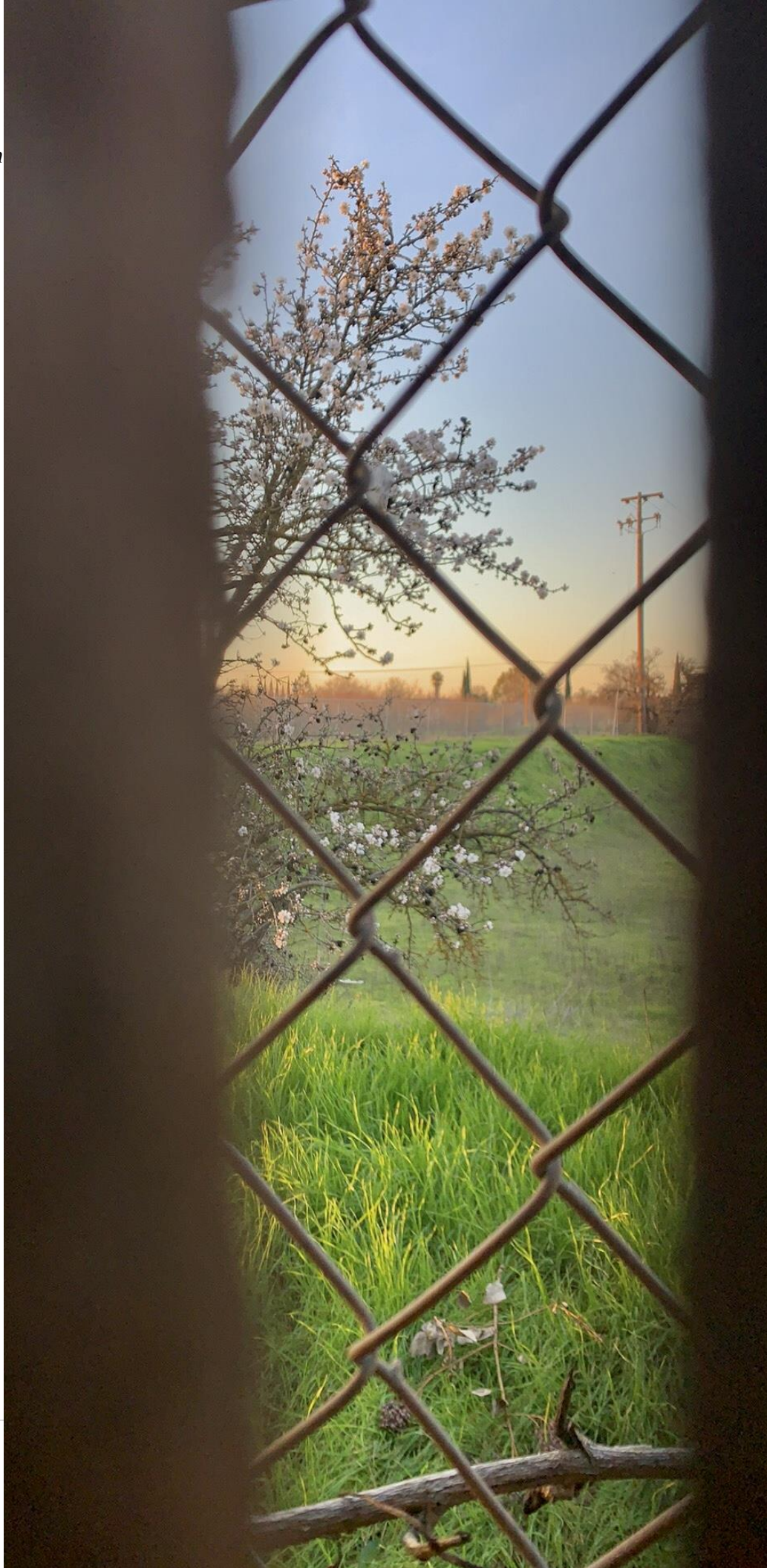
Devon Neal

Just as the sun began to spill
orange light across silver grass,
they arrived behind the bank,
all dressed in pink shirts. Before
the smoke-throat roars began,
trailer legs whimpered under
dew-licked work boots, gas cans
vaped with drunk breath,
weedeaters whirred and spat
against bone-grain concrete,
and the chilly air filled with
language. After the exhaust
plumes, the fresh mint
of cut weeds, and the cog-voiced
yell of the backpack blower,
snippets of wet grass clung
between rubber cleat teeth
as they climbed into the truck
and behind the hiccupping trailer,
they left behind a fresh swath
of sunlight lawn, straining in September
dawn, starting over again.

fever minison

Jackson D. Moorm

& yes i can dream i
can lay on the 5pm
strip of sun on my
bed i can close my
eyes to that neon
globe of pain the
bitter fear rind
bright in mouths
desperate knife
bite back the cry
slice in half the
threads of night
needles of light
until tomorrow –



1934
DC Diamondopolous

The New York winter chill disappeared when Jean entered the lobby of Maxine Elliott's Theatre, crowded with women. It was Jean's fourth matinee since November 20th, when *The Children's Hour* premiered.

She hadn't returned for the play, but for the largely female audience, and more to the heart, for the maddening crush she had on one usherette who seated her in the second balcony.

In the last few years, Jean had scoured through journals on sexuality in the public library. Doctors called her condition inverted, depraved, a mistake of nature. Was it any wonder Martha killed herself at the end of *The Children's Hour*?

Jean escaped into books, museums, theaters, and music recitals. For a few hours, the stranglehold of her homosexuality vanished into a novel by Pearl Buck, a painting by Matisse, a musical by Cole Porter, or a recital of Gershwin.

When she accepted what doctors described as a perversion, Jean abandoned all her friends and moved from her parents' home.

The suffocating fear of being found out grew more intense each year. She suffered headaches in her teens and now stomach problems in her twenties.

So with shocking delight Jean found herself in a Broadway theatre surrounded by women. She guessed the majority were lesbian. She saw mannish women in fedoras with violets pinned to the lapels of their suits; feminine women with the purple flower attached to their wide fur collared coats, their hats shaded over one eye like Greta Garbo. Under the crystal chandeliers, Jean gloried in the freedom of knowing there were others like herself.

Yet sitting through the play became torture. Didn't Lillian Hellman understand the effect Martha's suicide would have? Killing herself because she was homosexual? What irony, that the play brought out lesbians to meet, mingle, and flirt.

On her secretary's salary, Jean could only afford afternoons in the top gallery. Today, would be her last matinee. Her father had lost his job, like so many other men. Any additional money, she'd give to her parents.

To her right, the winding staircase led to the balconies and to her electrifying encounters with the girl whose name tag said "Rebecca." With a dash of exotic, perhaps she was Jewish or Italian.

When they first locked eyes, Jean had what one journal called "homosexual recognition," a knowing that was inherent in the third sex.

On Jean's second visit to the theatre, did she really see the flush of the girl's cheeks when they glanced at one another? Or the sensuous curve of her lips that followed? When Rebecca took Jean's ticket, their fingers touched, sending sparks through Jean's body. She had never felt so alive. As the lights dimmed and Rebecca waited for the arrival of latecomers, Jean imagined unbuttoning Rebecca's jacket stretched tantalizingly across her breasts.

On Jean's third matinee, she pinned a violet to her brown coat—a daring act for her. Rebecca greeted her at the top of the stairs. Jean saw her eyes move to the violet. Rebecca smiled.

"What's your name?" Rebecca asked.

"Jean. I'll be here next week. Maybe afterwards we—"

"Young lady, I can't find my seat," interrupted an elderly woman.

Rebecca glanced at Jean and nodded.

That night, Jean fantasized unzipping Rebecca's dress, of slipping it down over curvaceous hips, of Rebecca lying naked in her bed, of pleasing the girl into ecstasy, of whispers and laughter, going on picnics, drinking champagne, and sharing sunrises over Manhattan. Jean felt a torrent of sexuality sweep through her being. How could such an exquisite feeling be wrong? Who did it hurt?

For this, her final visit, Jean slipped on her favorite coat, the sporty navy wrap with a cinched belt and a faux-fur collar. Over her light-brown hair, she wore a matching blue beret. She applied rouge and lipstick to add color to her fair skin. Jean even curled her hair. She readied herself as if going before the MGM cameras.

For the last three weeks, Rebecca ruled her world. Jean looked anxiously at the staircase to the balconies. She couldn't wait to see her but hated to once again endure the gunshot at the end of the play.

After taking the first couple of steps, Jean turned and relished all the women in the lobby—their dynamic sexual energy, the flirting, the sideways glances, a light caress that lingered down an arm, a bond invisible to heterosexuals. It was a delicious secret, an affront to those who wished her kind dead.

When Jean arrived on the landing that led to the first balcony, the lights flickered for people to take their seats.

She hurried up the staircase. On arriving at the second landing, she drew her ticket from her pocket. At the curtain, leading into the gallery, Jean saw a new usherette.

"Where's Rebecca?" she asked.

"She has the day off. Can I take your ticket?"

"I know where to sit," she said too sharply.

Slumping in her seat, Jean tried to compose herself from the shattering truth that she'd always be alone. She had been certain Rebecca would be there. Jean twisted the sterling ring on her finger, a gift from her mother for high school graduation. She dug through her purse for tissues as tears streamed down her face.

The lights dimmed.

Jean dabbed her eyes.

A girl in a red coat and slouch hat walked down the aisle. Taking the empty seat next to Jean, she smelled of jasmine and rose.

The girl leaned against her.

"I'm sorry I'm late," Rebecca said.

"You're here!"

"Shh," said a voice behind them.

Jean couldn't contain her joy and pressed her knee against Rebecca's thigh.

"You must really like the play," Rebecca murmured, rubbing up against Jean's shoulder.

"I don't like it at all," Jean said.

"Neither do I," Rebecca giggled.

"Be quiet," a woman admonished.

"Want to leave?" Jean asked in a low voice.

Rebecca's lips brushed her ear as she whispered, "I know a really good kosher deli down the street."



This Dwelling Houses Many
John Grey

Invisible by day,
come midnight,
they drift like banners
from room to room,

a procession
of almost-faces,
near-bodies,

from out of the dim past,
through the intervening years,
to the very moment

eyes briefly open,
weariness distorts reality,

the dark can't keep
its secrets to itself.



Wrong

Devon Neal

When I get in bed at night, knowing
you're out there somewhere
in the night still thinking you're right,
I hear the wind-callused membranes
of batwings flurrying against the window.
If I go to the couch, where you're still wrong,
I hear the roar of the pipes under the floor
shaking against the bolts and brackets.
When I go out on the back deck, it's just me and the night
and I have no one to tell the truth to
and all the trees are tangled with grocery bags.

Owls

John Grey

When the owl alights
on your bedroom sill,
the room grows darker.

When it hoots,
legends summon up,
the ultimate raptor.

Claws grip your arms,
wings flap,
you're borne off to the forest,

where boughs of trees
sprout many owls,
each with a sleeper in its grasp.

The trunk crumbles,
earth opens up,
life is dragged down by the roots.

Then ground seals over,
but for the birds –
no owl comes for these owls.



A Night Out

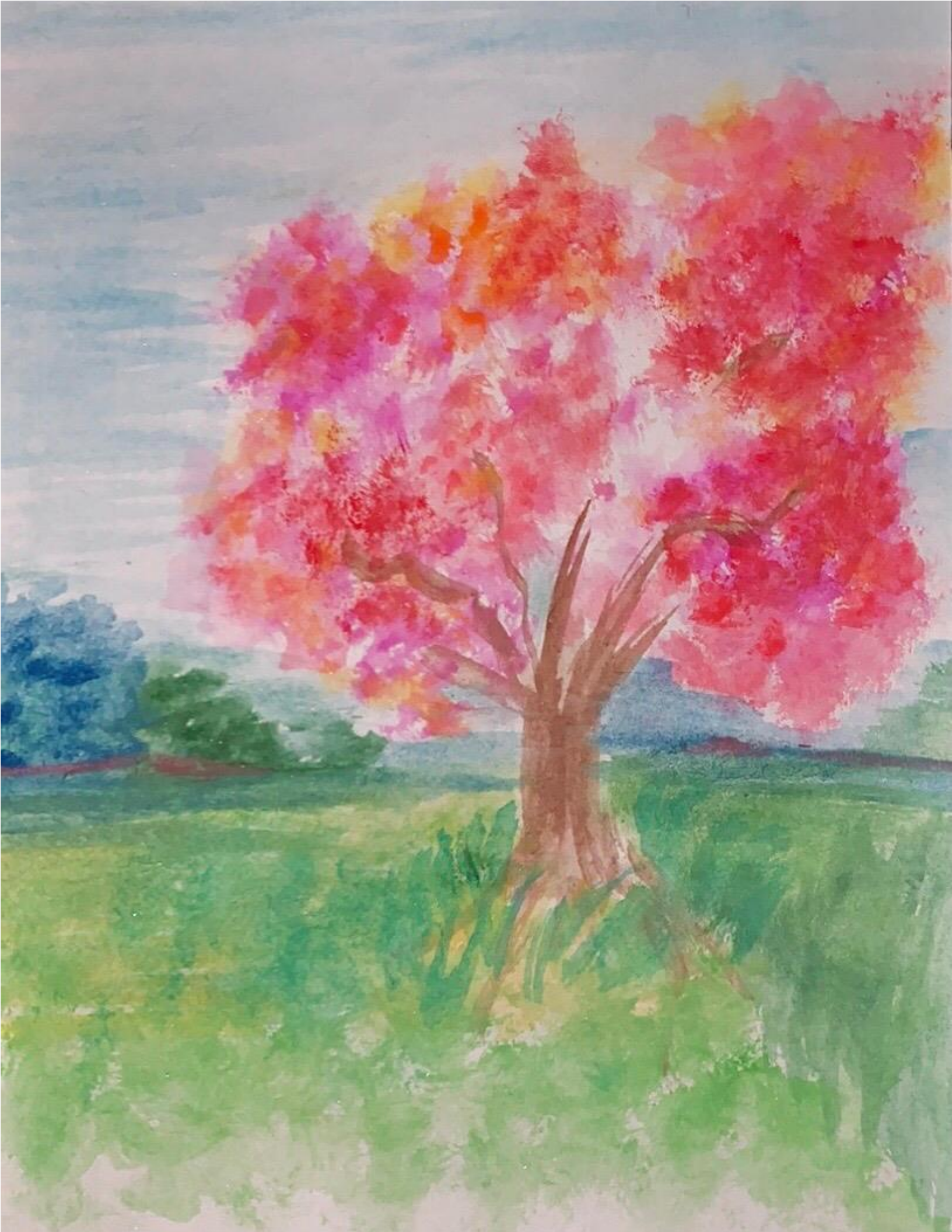
Devon Neal

In winter he stands on the edge
of the open kitchen door
while the white watermelon pulp
of snow collects on the stiff porch boards
and the pinprick wind gnaws at his bare nose.
He flicks his tail and turns back in
where the fire snickers under the mantle.
In summer, though, he looks up
at the bell of the doorknob
until we open it and he slips out
like an orange secret. Before bed we check
again, the gold porch light revealing
only dew-slicked chairs, the weather-kissed deck,
a fog of moths. The warm night stirs
something restless in him, carried off
to adventures witnessed only by the moon.

looping minison

Jackson D. Moorman

want you to come &
& lay on the small
rug of my heart to
lull the elegant
beast of my want &
unfold the quiet
over my chest the
engine of my mind
is overheating i
spit sparks into
a bowl like teeth
please come here
let me stay still
everything, wait



Pasture Statues
Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi

Millie mooed.

Cate mooed with her.

The cow stared at them.

Millie giggled at the old joke, a pure, authentic song.

Cate giggled with her, exaggerated, trembling notes.

The cow stared at them.

Millie continued to pet the cow's cheek. Cate stroked the other, looking for signs of impatience in the otherwise stoic animal, searching its blank yet somehow knowing eyes for knowledge of her charade. What made her want to release the scream that had been lodged in her throat for inconceivable minutes was how Millie, sitting comfortably in her numb arms, was so far away from screaming; Millie, who had every justification for adding her shrill voice to the one behind them.

She hadn't asked Millie if she was all right; doing so would have given her the impression something was wrong. She hadn't asked Millie her actual name; as far as the little girl's amiable behaviour indicated, they had known each other all their lives, and names didn't matter. She hadn't asked Millie her age; from the moment she took the little girl into her arms, she could tell the small human being was no older than her career.

Three-years-old, Cate mused again, as she transferred Millie from one desensitized arm to the other, careful not to break contact with the cow. *Three years*, and once again she imagined the retirement banner, growing longer and larger as the idea cooked in her mind, advertising the pitiful number.

Cate was grateful for the brown-and-white animal's presence. Moreover, she was grateful that the cow was the first thing Millie had noticed. She wouldn't have thought to mosey on over to the cow; instinct—training—would have told her to immediately transport the dishevelled little girl to her car; and there they would have waited for the next routine steps. *And then she would've known something was wrong*, she thought. *And then she would've started screaming.*

A scream perforated the ambience, a cocktail of pain, fear... and perhaps a note of anger. “Moouooo!” Cate issued her loudest impersonation yet. Millie echoed her sentiments, prolonging and exaggerating the bovine language until it devolved into more giggling. Another scream smothered the laughter, and, for a terrible moment, Cate thought she felt Millie stiffen; thought she saw registration on the little girl's suddenly sagging face. “Moo moouooo moo moo moo moouooo moo,” Cate interjected, the single word spoken in the rhythm of conversation. She fixed upon Millie's eyes, hoping the little girl would take the bait, ready to shift her little body should she decide to go peeking behind her back, toward the scream.

Millie's bowed lips glistened, saliva pooling as she gathered her thoughts about the conflicting sounds. Cate readied her own lips with another string of nonsensical cow-speak, when Millie broke out of her trance, and fired off a meaningless statement of her own: “Moouooo moouooo moouooo”—laughter—“moouooo moo moo moo.” Relieved, Cate kept the dialogue flowing for as long and as loud as was necessary to beat the intermittent screaming from Millie's ears. As their banter rose and fell with the outbursts behind them, she imagined how the others must have seen them: vulnerable backs; a revolving red light highlighting Millie's arms wrapped comfortably—*Or is she in*

shock? Cate couldn't decide—around her neck; mooing from unseen lips; the cow itself unseen, blocked by their combined bodies. How unreal it must have appeared to them.

How grotesquely real it was to her.

How beautifully real it was to Millie.

A terrible thought returned Cate to their cozy huddle: *This is your first time, isn't it?*

The scream she struggled to keep deep down in her gorge threatened to erupt. It occurred to her that *this* cow—not the pair grazing further down the fence, dangerously close to the break; not the calf flanked by several adults; not the others standing nonchalantly, laying nonchalantly, living nonchalantly; not the countless others that might have been a blur in Millie's passenger window—but *this* cow might very well have been the *very first* cow Millie had ever seen.

Cate mooed, and wondered if Millie could detect the underlying melancholy. *You don't need to meet a cow*, she desperately wanted to assure the little girl. *Not now. Not like this.* She was certain that when Millie was one day no longer a size fit for one's arms—*There's no guarantee of that*, Cate sadly reminded herself—she might learn to hate the cow. *All* cows. The way Cate hated them for what they had done to Millie. To her.

To Millie's mother.

The human sounds behind them were less frequent now, quieter, the pain, the fear, the anger—if ever there was—giving themselves to realization. Cate hoped Millie's mother would soon forget how to scream; hoped her mother forgot her daughter's name. This line of thinking was drenched in selfishness, but Cate had accepted it... for

now; may guilt torment her later. It was just that she and, more importantly, the cow had worked so damned hard to keep Millie occupied.

Or are we keeping the cow occupied? Cate thought for the first time.

She looked into the animal's eyes, glossy black islands surrounded by thin halos of bloodshot white. Pulses of red light, rotating like an angry lighthouse—an eye of its own—searched those eyes, much as Cate was doing now, for knowledge.

Do you see the red light? she mentally transmitted to the cow. *Do you understand it? Did you see what happened before the red light? Do you understand what happened?* The cow stared.

Do you understand that this little girl I'm holding, the one mooing at you, the one petting your face... do you understand that her mother is the one who killed your calf? Based on its indifference, she couldn't tell if the calf was blood-related to the cow. Would he or she—Cate couldn't tell which—bite Millie if it understood the situation behind them? Would he or she reconsider biting if it understood the whole thing had merely been a matter of a broken fence? Would he or she refrain from seeking revenge upon Millie if it understood that the calf had wandered through the broken fence, onto the asphalt, and before Millie's mother's car? Would he or she rethink their potential bite if it understood that Millie's mother had, from the looks of the finale, done her best to avoid the calf, but instead clipped its behind, sending her speeding vehicle into the ditch? Would he or she accept that the calf had been mercifully put down, quickly and painlessly, unlike Millie's mother, who found herself wrapped deep within her metal womb, gasoline-for-placenta everywhere, unable to be reached or moved, lest she perish sooner?

The cow stared.

Cate focussed on Millie's silhouette within the animal's sheeny eye: *Do you understand?* A voice answered the question. Cate couldn't make out the words, only the harshness of the voice. She sensed an approaching presence, and immediately understood what was happening. In a voice tailored for Millie's benefit, Cate said, "Please, don't come any closer," and resumed mooing along with Millie.

"Officer?" The voice didn't sound so harsh. Perhaps it hadn't been at all. Perhaps, Cate decided, she was prejudiced against voices outside of she and Millie's precious bubble. Cate sensed the intruder take another step forward.

"I said don't," Cate said in her rosiest voice.

"Officer, I need to examine the little girl," the soft voice said.

The well-meaning plea incensed Cate. *She's fine. I checked her when I pulled her out of the car. Some scratches, a few bruises, but she's fine. I checked her. And I named her.* She knew someone close to Millie must have known her real name, but for tonight, in her arms, the little girl would take the name of the first girl Cate had lost on the job.

Footsteps crunched behind them.

"Don't," Cate emphasized, momentarily breaking her character of utter serenity. Before the intruder could interject, she added: "I... just give us a few minutes, okay?" *And then what?* she thought.

Once again, she caught Millie's silhouette in the cow's eye. *Do you have a father? Grandmother? Grandfather? Uncles? Aunts? Anybody? Do you know your name? What would become of Millie when Cate decided enough "few minutes" had elapsed? What would become of the little girl when the cow was gone?*

The intruder's footsteps—a paramedic just trying to do her job—retreated, but Cate sensed she hadn't gone far; Millie *did* need to be examined.

She realized the screaming had died. It made sense to her, not because the outcome was inevitable, but because the paramedic now had time to check on the only survivor.

But they still had a few minutes.

And so Millie mooed.

Cate mooed with her.

The cow stared at them.



