Literature

Kiyoko Cecelia Reidy Through and Through.................................................................5
Elissa Mullins Attack of the Tub Tycoon..............................................................6
Zachary J. Lee I Wear My He................................................................................8
Kiyoko Cecelia Reidy Threadbare...........................................................................11
Kaitlin Jennrich Wendy Darling Dreams of Clocks...........................................12
Michelle Tan The Way Down..............................................................................20
Zachary J. Lee Momma’s Boy..............................................................................35
Claire Ma Detective McKenzie and the Case of the Two-Faced Woman (or, A
Song I Misunderstood).......................................................................................26
Jacob Rogers Untitled.............................................................................................32
Haley Berg House on Stilts.................................................................................33
Kıvanç Komesli haiku.java...................................................................................38
Anna Konradi Talking to Spoons and Other Inanimate Objects.....................41
Alexa Ransom Palmer Replica...............................................................................45
Claire Ma First Queens I.1-42..............................................................................46

Art

Esther Sitver Madeline Mask.....................................................................................9
Esther Sitver Pants Man......................................................................................10
Taili Zhuang Gothic Complex............................................................................19
Yuwei Pan Untitled................................................................................................24
Taili Zhuang Sewage System.............................................................................31
Grace Zajdel Spilt Milk......................................................................................39
Ruoyi Gan Sanctuary.............................................................................................40

Front Cover: “Peeling Blue”
Digital Photography
Caroline Yoo
Washington University in St. Louis, ’17
Back Cover: “Memories”
Oil pastel on paper
Eric Li
Washington University in St. Louis, ’20

Front Inside: “Intimacy”
Oil on canvas
Isabelle Davis
Washington University in St. Louis, ’18
Back Inside: “Untitled”
Photography
Sully Bacerdo
Washington University in St. Louis, ’20
Staff

Editor-in-chief: George Zhou

Literary Editor: Haley Berg
Assistant Literary Editors: Elissa Mullins
Peter Satterthwaite

Art Editor: Amy Chen
Assistant Art Editors: Michelle Tan
Anna Zhou

Layout Editor: Madeline Partner

Programming Director: Sabrina Wang
Programming Team: Madison Kaplan
Taylor Lord

Treasurer: Kevin He

Staff: Dili Chen
Molly Davis
Through and Through

A boy in cotton socks stands in the creek bed
throwing round rocks upstream.
Later he tells his friends his father taught him
to skip stones.

A married woman keeps a Brita filter
in her sock drawer, but fills her husband’s
glass from the leak beneath the kitchen sink.

Contact between windshield and bald-capped bird
sends fissures spiderwebbing through glass,
feathers streaming in rear windows.

Pigtailed little girl dunks her sour gummy worm
head first into the pond, sugar
dissolving amidst duck fluff.
Nothing bites.

Kudzu swallows an acre of land in six months,
rain hungry in shadow. The jacketed trees
die standing up, still green.

I have been told that drowning only hurts
until you are water through and through.

Kiyoko Cecelia Reidy
University of Wisconsin—Madison, ’18
Attack of the Tub Tycoon

Bearing a terry-cloth crown, David stepped into the bathroom, closed the door, and drew back the shower curtain to find a gaping hole in the wall. His tub was gone—his beloved tub, aged blue and green, chipped paint, opaque crystal faucet. Even his rubber ducky had vanished, a sailor upon the tub’s vast and perilous vessel, missing in action. Loose plaster lay scattered. The tiles beneath the tub had been ripped up, too. Well, he thought. I needed someone to come in and tear those up, anyway. The curtains remained, decorated with bright sunflowers against a backdrop of deep green, but without the tub, the curtains hung limp, lacking purpose; the sunflowers seemed almost to droop, their dark, seedy centers looking all too sad.

He took a seat on his fuzzy bathmat, and scooted back so that he was leaning against the counter beneath the sink. He stared at the sad sunflowers. “Nothing is sacred,” he whispered to the soap-dish.

He drove.

As he drove, desperate for distraction, past corn-field after soy-bean field after corn-field, the world fell pale, distant trees and houses black against the horizon. The radio idled at its default low volume, until a song began to play, straight out of his shitty teenagehood. He cranked it up, allowing the shittiness to flow.

Lights flared up behind him—a cop was flagging him down.

He grudgingly slowed to a stop and turned off the radio with a harsh button-smack, just as the song reached the last raunchy rendition of the chorus. He rolled down his window. “I’m so sorry, officer. I’m a little preoccupied. How fast was I going?”

“52 miles, sir.”
“52 miles?”
“Yes, sir.”

David frowned. “The speed limit is 50 along this road, isn’t it?”
“Indeed, it is.”

David scratched his head. “You’re ticketing me for going two miles over the speed limit?”
“Yes, sir.”

“Two miles? You’re ticketing me for going two miles over the speed limit? You’re ticketing me for going two miles—two miles over—”
“Yes, sir.”

“Of course you are.”

Later that night, as he sat on the toilet, mourning his bathtub’s previous home, he scrolled through Bible passages on his phone, hoping to become learned in the ways of divine justice. All the punishments seemed a bit too harsh for thievery, even bathtub thievery—to much about severed genitalia and being forced to eat one’s own children.
He sighed and closed out the Portable Bible tab. He opened up his text messages.

To: Nora

Hey sis, he typed. Will you let me shower at your place tonight?

(…) went the response bubble. Why? (…) Can’t pay your water bill this month or something?

David rubbed the back of his neck.

Never mind—he left off the punctuation intentionally.

At the convenience store two blocks down, he stood in the aisle touting the deodorant, the leave-in conditioner, the breath-mints, and the extra-absorbent sanitary napkins. He filled his basket with the cheapest of the deodorant brands and migrated to the aisle with all the summer pool toys. Amidst neon foam noodles, he discovered a rubber ducky wearing sunglasses. He picked it up and appraised it as if preparing to soliloquize.

A kid bounced up to him, wearing a pair of purple goggles with the tag still attached.

“That duck is one cool dude,” said the kid.

David nodded in somber agreement. “Indeed.” He added the ducky to his basket.
I Wear My He

I wear my he
like a thinly
veiled sheath
like a
nightgown tracing
lace outline
like the scarf
around my neck not
wrapped but
entrapping
my voice in
chiffon ruffles my
rigolos slight
and slender like
a fine hiccup
across saucers my
regalia less regal
and more gay
more demure and obey
more not say more

Zachary J. Lee
University of Missouri—St. Louis, ’18
Madeline Mask

Esther Silver
Ringling College of Art and Design, '20
Acrylic on canvas
Pants Man

Esther Sitver

Ringling College of Art and Design, ’20

Acrylic on canvas
Threadbare

her body fills the holes in the laundry basket
while I study her small white tag.

do not leave her the first time she
blankets someone else.
scrub her gently.

her wrinkles fill the machine’s round belly.
I consider counting every thread.

felted lips shed themselves in the corners
of the washing machine, leaving love marks
in the dryer lint.

leaking bleach from her seams,
streaking the summer linens of her eyes
every angle of my garage smells
like her quilted skin.

Kiyoko Cecelia Reidy
University of Wisconsin—Madison, ’18
1. Surely you know what a kiss is? I shall know when you give it to me.

At the office, her coworkers gather around her engagement ring and make little shrieks of excitement. “It’s beautiful,” they exclaim. “How did he ask you?”

“It wasn’t anything much,” says Wendy Darling. “He took me out for dinner. During dessert, he got down on one knee.”

“Did he make a big scene?” asks Colleen. “Get the waiters to serenade you?”

“Oh, I’m sure,” says Tim. “And then the circus performers came in, right? The lion tamer and the acrobats and the lions?”

“Yep,” says Wendy, her face perfectly straight. “And then the host came in and released a flock of white doves and all the feathers got in my hair. One of the lions burned his tail in a candle and as he was running away, all the curtains caught on fire.”

Her coworkers all laugh with the absurdity of it. Wendy is not a fussy sort of woman. She always makes enough food at dinner so she has leftovers the next day for lunch, which she brings in square-shaped containers and microwaves on a blue plate she keeps at her desk. Every morning at dawn, Wendy runs 6.3 miles with her dog along the Thames, from the Golden Jubilee Bridges to Tate Modern and back. Her handwriting is the neatest in the office, and she always smells like fresh laundry.

“That’s wonderful,” her coworkers won’t stop saying. “We’re so happy for you.”

2. Where do you live?

Second to the right, and then straight on till morning.

Wendy’s fiancé is an investment banker. She had begun seeing him because he could knot a beautiful tie, and she stayed with him because he didn’t mind sleeping with the windows open.

Wendy is in publishing. She spends her days reading other people’s stories and making brisk, decisive marks at the margins of pages. She tries to avoid thinking as much as possible, but her thoughts have a nasty habit of whirring tirelessly at the back of her brain and popping up at the most inconvenient moments, like breakfast or late afternoon meetings, unless they have time to exist. Wendy allows her thoughts to exist primarily between the hours of five thirty and six forty-five, when she takes her dog and goes running along the Thames. Then she packs her mind back up, like her mother taught her, and folds everything into neat tiny boxes.

She gets the feeling that her dog does not entirely approve of this behavior. Captain is half-wolf. His previous owners had thought he was a Malamute until he started howling in the backyard and tearing up the fencing. He has black fur and very yellow eyes; Wendy never understood how anyone could mistake him for just a dog. She had gone to the shelter with the
intention of getting a small dog, something that could fit happily in a small apartment, but Captain howled to her and Wendy’s thoughts exploded. When she was younger, she dreamed she had a pet wolf. She had forgotten about that, until Captain howled. Wendy forgets a lot of things when it’s convenient for her.

In the mornings, the sun flickers off the Thames in a way that makes it almost possible to forget the crush of the city around them. The mornings are Captain’s favorite time of day. When the air is clean and cold, he believes that he is somewhere wild, chasing down little boys and tearing into their throats. Blood is hot, and tastes like remembering, if remembering had a taste. Captain doesn’t put many things in boxes.

By the time they come back to the apartment, her fiancé is already awake. He makes coffee for Wendy and puts out cold water for Captain. “Good morning, beauty,” he says, and tweaks her nose. “How was the Thames Marathon this morning?”

“Successful as usual,” she says. “Captain ate the runners in front of us, so we took first place once again.”

“That’s my girl,” he says, patting her head but not Captain’s. Her fiancé still doesn’t quite trust Captain, though Captain never thinks about the fiancé at all. Wendy goes to the cupboard to get flour, opens the fridge and takes out some eggs, and starts to mix up pancakes.

“Chocolate chips?” she calls to him.

“Yes, please,” says her fiancé, coming to stand behind her at the stove. She turns on the gas to warm up the skillet and he slips his fingers under the waistband of her shorts. Captain makes a noise from his water bowl, half whine and half howl.

“You’re going to make an excellent mother one day,” he says into her neck. Wendy’s hand bumps against the burning skillet. She doesn’t make a sound.

3.

I say, how do you do it?

You just think lovely wonderful thoughts, and they lift you up into the air.

“What about this newest draft?” asks Colleen. “Do we like it?”

“What’s there to like?” says Tim. “There’s no resolution. The kids went into the woods, they didn’t come out, the detectives go in, they don’t find anything, there’s some sex, the end. Who cares?”


4.

Wendy lady, for you we built this house.

Wendy and her fiancé go out for drinks with friends almost every night of the week. They go to restaurants and sit outside in patios draped with fairy lights. They go to bars with
mirrored panels so everyone can watch themselves as they laugh. Wendy drinks until the sky looks like a van Gogh painting.

“Go on!” someone says to them. They are sitting outside at a semi-French restaurant. The sky is hazy purple and blue; lights are draped above them and around them and in their wine. Wendy thinks she can see the lights moving, out of the corner of her eye. “Tell us the story of how it happened!”

“If you insist,” says Wendy. “But I have to warn you, it will make any engagement in your life pale in comparison.”

Laughter. People on the sidewalk stop and look at them as they walk by. Wendy says, “I knew something was happening when the waiters started to sing.”

“Bohemian Rhapsody,” says her fiancé. “Inconvenient, as I’d asked them to sing God Save the Queen. But they were foreigners, I suppose.”

By now, Wendy and her fiancé have created a fairytale; the lions tossing their full manes, the lion tamers nervously pacing between the tables, acrobats in spangly suits stringing a tightrope across the restaurant and delivering the ring.

“The host was glorious,” says her fiancé. “Big top hat with white doves flapping out of it. They flapped all over until she couldn’t help but say yes.”

The table is in stitches. “Imagine if it actually happened like that,” says her fiancé. “You would have killed me.”

“Excess,” says Wendy. “Excess is the death of all romance, that’s what I think.”

On the walk home, they get into a fight.

“If we had kids, we’d just worry about them all the time,” she says. The stars are moving. She’s always suspicious of everything, when the stars are moving. “We’re not ready for small, helpless people. They get into things. They wander away. They get lost. They get hurt.”

“Scratched knees and bruises?” He laughs. “It might just fall within my medical expertise.”

“You don’t know.” Wendy squeezes her eyes shut and opens them again. “Kids get hurt in all sorts of ways, don’t they?”

“You’re nearly 30,” he says, in a way that isn’t supposed to be eviscerating. It is a fact. Even his voice is polite.

Wendy has a curious memory of a proud, dark-skinned woman slitting the stomach of a pirate. His guts fell out in a messy pile on the ground, right in front of his feet. There was very little screaming, as if he couldn’t quite see the point. The woman wiped her axe on the ground and kept moving, into the trees. Wendy is sweating, just a little, along her spine.

“You tricked me,” she says.

“Are you saying you wouldn’t have agreed if you knew I might want a family?” He’s stopped looking at her.

“I have no idea,” Wendy says, in a strange, savage voice.
5.

O Wendy lady, be our mother.
Ought I?

Once, there were boys.
She tucked them in at night and told them stories and watched them sleep. When they cried, she held them.
She sewed and cooked and cleaned. She held a sword at the gateway of the world and killed the things that would take them from her. They were lost in the night, and she lit a candle and they followed her home. Love bloomed, overripe and dangerous, in her body.

6.

Don’t you remember how you killed him and saved all our lives?
I forget them after I kill them.

They walk home from dinner together, some dinner with old friends, though Wendy can’t really remember how she knows them. That doesn’t bother her.
“You’ve been quiet,” her fiancé says. His eyes glitter. They are forget-me-not blue. Wendy has a secret belief that she likes her fiancé much better with his eyes closed. “Are you okay? Did I do something wrong?”
“Oh God.” Her fiancé groans. “You’re conjuring up unpleasant memories of boarding school. And nuns.”
“My father used to say it,” says Wendy, and then she says, “Let’s go in here,” and she pulls him into a bar and they take tequila shots until all the lights are moving.
“You’ve been different,” she seems to hear him saying, somewhere far below her. “Why have you been so different?” But he is below her, and there is a song on that she loves, and she has already forgotten, anyway.

7.

Certainly Wendy had been dreaming.
In the cool dark of the morning, Captain begins to howl.
“Jesus Christ,” her fiancé moans. “What time is it?”
“Three-oh-three,” Wendy says, very awake. Something in her jumped alive the moment she heard Captain; her heartbeat is drumming in her head and down her wrists.
“Jesus Christ.” He flips over and puts his head under the pillow. “Can you put him outside?”
“He wants to run.” Wendy laughs a little bit without joking at all. “Hear that? He can’t stand to be cooped up one more second.”
Her fiancé peeks out from under the pillows. “What’s gotten into him?”
“I’m going to take him out,” she says.
“Running? At this time of night? Wendy, don’t be—”

“Do you want him to stop?” Wendy asks politely.

Her fiancé says, “But it’s—” and Wendy says, “Oh, for God’s sake, he’s a wolf-dog, who the hell is going to attack a wolf?”

The room is quiet, except for Captain howling in the hallway. “See you at breakfast,” Wendy says, and hops out of bed. There is thrumming at the base of her skull like a warning drum, heavy and insistent, but she pulls on her shoes anyway, and puts on Captain’s leash, and steps into the darkness. The night smells like river water and stardust.

8.

*Wendy, when you are sleeping in your silly bed you might be flying around with me saying funny things to the stars.*

Wendy Darling dreams of clocks.

As much as she tries to forget, there is a great vast map in her mind, and it is always ticking, and it is always forever. There is a blue-eyed lagoon coated with mermaid scales; there is a range of dragon-peaked mountains; there are a million golden arrows pointing a million terrible directions. In the darkness, wild beasts pace and moan and tear at their skin. Boys cry for their mother.

In some dreams, she can feel hooks on her skin. Metal traces the bones between her breasts, pressing against the soft flesh of her stomach. He is cold, very cold, and his eyes are forget-me-not blue. She wants to wrap her fingers around the hook. She wants to take some of that coldness from him and keep it inside her. “Tell me a story, my beauty,” says the pirate. “I’m so lonely. Tell me a story, or someone will walk the plank.”

In another dream, she’s sitting in the trees, hiding and watching under a red-tinged dawn. Peter is walking with one of the Lost Boys. Peter is lit up in gold and fire. When he opens his mouth, there are flames and then words. The whole island is still, watching Peter. The Lost Boy has grown tall and there is stubble in the hollows of his cheeks. Lost Boys are not allowed to grow up.

Peter says something, flaming, and the Lost Boy laughs. Peter laughs too, and then he slits the Lost Boy’s throat. The dawn is red-tinged. The whole island is red-tinged. Something is churning in Wendy’s stomach, lust and disgust all at once. She doesn’t know if it’s a dream, or a memory, or a wish. The Lost Boy has been her child, she was almost sure of it, she could almost remember the feel of him in her stomach, slipping between her legs. Hadn’t he called her mother, once? Hadn’t he been her boy?

Her bones tick. Time is always running out, and running away. She wants to call out to Peter, but her skin is soft and there are wrinkles around her mouth and her eyes, and she doesn’t know what he will do when he sees her. The Lost Boy bleeds to death in front of them all, Wendy and Peter and the island, and then Peter reaches down and dips his hands in the Lost Boy’s blood and puts his fingers in his mouth.
9.  
*She says she glories in being abandoned.*  
Wendy and Captain stand on the edge of the Thames. Captain howls, quietly, into the water. It gleams like scales. Their lungs taste like metal.  
“I know,” Wendy says.

10.  
*Don't go, Peter. I know such lots of stories.*  
“I told you,” says Colleen. “Is this really so much better?”  
“It’s not our fault that the *something* is ridiculous.” Tim is eating a croissant, and crumbs are flying all over their papers on the table. “I mean, what is this thing, anyway? A pooka? The kids go into the woods and they don’t come out because they were taken by a pooka?”  
“Come on, Tim, don’t you read?” says Colleen.  
“So this is what we’re sending on up?” demands Tim. “A mystery story in which the perpetrator is an *Irish horse fairy*?”  
“Only probably,” says Wendy, pulling apart a paperclip between her fingers. “Remember, they can’t say for sure. They’re just pretty sure.”  
“I give up,” says Tim, and finishes the croissant.  
“So now it’s not enough real life for you?” Colleen laughs. Wendy folds the paperclip back together and says, “Stranger things have happened. But really, Colleen, can’t you just tell him to make it a mad old woman in the woods and be done with it?”

11.  
*If he forgets them so quickly, how can we expect that he will go on remembering us?*  
A creaking ship that smells like pine and gun smoke. A hook, tracing her ribs. Snow falling from the sky, dusting everything; wet on their lips, fresh white on old blood, tangling in his eyelashes. Small children, weeping on a plank. A boy, gloriously burning, with red on his face. In one memory, the boy pushes the pirate into a crocodile’s gaping mouth. This is the thing she remembers. But in the dream, there is no crocodile. There are only her hands, and a small, silver dagger. She watches his eyes go dark. She feels his heart.

12.  
*We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more.*  
Wind blows across the room and makes shadow people on the floor. Wendy crawls into bed and sticks her feet under her fiancé’s legs to warm them up. “Hi,” he says, sleepily. “How was the end?”  
“Terrible,” Wendy says. “It was some old groundskeeper with a beard. We’d hardly even
seen him before. There was an axe involved. Boring.”

“Told you it could only get worse.”

“No one likes a know-it-all,” Wendy says primly. He laughs and says, “Come on, let me give you a kiss and let’s go to sleep.”

“Ah,” Wendy says. To her surprise, she is crying—but just a little, in an adult and quiet way.

“Wendy?” says her fiancé in bewilderment.

“Oh, me,” she says. “I don’t know. It’s nothing—it’s my fault. I’m sorry. It’s my fault. Just give me a kiss, okay?”

Captain whimper in the hallway. He is dreaming of storms, and the clean cut of a scream across the sky.

I3.

I say, Wendy—always if you see me forgetting you, just keep on saying ‘I’m Wendy,’ and then I’ll remember.

Soon, Wendy Darling will not be Wendy Darling anymore. Wendy Middleton is an old woman’s name. At the office, her coworkers won’t stop talking about the wedding. She must get her invitations printed at Clarke’s; she must get the floral arrangements done with Burt & Taylor. Has she thought about the church? Has she thought about the dress? All in white, billowing and flying like a sail? Has she thought about her birthday, just a few short weeks away? “Engaged before thirty!” her coworkers say, and laugh. “God, we’re all turning into such old things, aren’t we?” She mustn’t forget the registry, she mustn’t forget the place settings, she mustn’t forget the menu. At night, the wind blows through the open windows and sings to her. Her fiancé wakes to find her standing in the cold night air, burning and crying and glorious, Captain lantern-eyed and waiting at her feet. She mustn’t forget. She can’t ever stop forgetting. I am not going with you, Wendy.

I4.

Yes, it is a dull beginning. I say, let us pretend that it is the end.

Peter says, “What’s your name?”

Wendy says, “Wendy Moira Angela Darling. What is your name?”

“Peter Pan,” he says. In the window, there is a commotion in the sky, and the stars all erupt to life like warning flares. Cave, cave. Beware. Something cold brushes against Wendy’s neck, and then Peter smiles, and everything settles and is beautiful once again.

Kaitlin Jenrich
Northwestern University, ’17
Gothic Complex
Taili Zhuang
Washington University in St. Louis, '20
Pencil on paper
Grace's husband died in the Tibetan Plateau when his car rolled down the mountain. The two were on a much anticipated vacation.

She had arrived a day early and waited for him to fly in directly from his end-of-the-year conference in Moscow. They arranged to meet up in the high plains to watch the sunrise; some legend said those who did would be granted eternal love.

She reached their destination at the break of dawn, the sun already peeking out from the distant horizon. She waited anxiously for her husband with a sleeping bag around her shoulders and her young chauffeur shivering at her side. When her vertigo subsided, she sat and stared afar at the dotted silhouettes of what seemed like bison. And just like that she waited until the sun rose above her head. Taking a last decisive look behind her, she headed back to the car. No one spoke as the scenery rolled by like a film in reverse. The chauffeur peered tentatively at Grace many times through the mirror but decided not to break the tension. Using her sleeping bag now as a blanket, she squinted like a newborn and tried to appease her exasperation by thinking about the sunrise. Drawing only blanks, she realized she had missed its alleged splendor.

His car was lodged upside down against a boulder. His chauffeur, who hadn't worn a seatbelt, was thrashed out of the car and found with two broken ribs, sobbing. After taking the man to a nearby hospital—which was quite close as these things were not uncommon—the local authorities found Grace. She refused to identify the remaining body.

At the funeral service, few spoke to Grace. She recognized her guests, whispering and sipping drinks, as the same ones who had laughed and drank at her wedding less than a decade ago. She realized then, somehow, these friends and colleagues of her husband had become the only people in her life. Lydia, his ex-wife, stood in a corner far across the room with a meticulously manicured hand clasped around their son's shoulder. Their elder daughter was not present. Grace kept looking at the boy, and he at her. He had the insolent yet timid face of a young teen. Through him she saw the years carelessly tumbling by. He was only five, maybe six, when she first met him and he surprised her by reaching out his hand to shake hers. That was when Grace decided she wouldn't have children of her own. Her husband's children would be enough, she thought.

At the end of the ceremony, the guests gathered in a line at the door and breathed a word of condolence to Grace before forming another line at the valet. Her heart quaked inexplicably at the sight of Lydia.

"Thanks for taking such good care of him," Lydia smiled.

Her son lifted his head, briefly locking eyes with Grace before his mother rushed him off. For a second, Grace felt a strange kinship with the boy. She was nearly certain that they had bonded through their mutual loss for words.

She retreated to the guestroom that night, where she'd unpacked her luggage days before. She undressed at the mirror and stood before herself. She ran her fingers across the strips of bone above her breasts.

The Way Down
They had become increasingly pronounced as her flesh began to peel away beneath her skin. For the days since her return, though only a few, Grace did little, ate nearly nothing, and took no interest in her own appearance. Then she resumed her routine of nightly skin serums and vegetarian dinners. And a while after that, she regained the strength to leave the house and engage in basic tasks and interactions. Yet, as much as she tried to imitate her old self, her body refused to comply. And when all else failed, she retreated, like any sentimental person would, into her past.

It is an odd thing to watch one’s own body change. Grace had experienced this only once before. She had developed a sudden eating disorder at fifteen—the same year her parents left Grace and her grandmother in each other’s care to seek new employment. Like so many others, the teenage Grace felt that she, alone, would suffocate under the weight of the world. She quickly found the feebleness resulting from hunger to be her only reprieve. Often she dreamed of becoming small, vacant, and floating away.

After a time, her insides began to reject sustenance altogether. Her own stomach had become a vengeful black hole, yanking tightly and threatening to self-destruct if ever she tried to eat, walk, or breathe too roughly. Grace’s grandmother waited on her hand and foot, never once dispensing judgement, until she regained her strength. Grace’s recovery was slow, and made slower by several instances of relapse. But after many months, she was finally able to resume her schooling and even join her grandmother on short strolls around the neighborhood.

One time her stomach twisted violently mid-step, causing her to collapse onto her knees. She begged to slow down. Her grandmother let out a mellifluous laugh and playfully offered her cane. Grace never forgot that moment, and how she wanted to cry.

She made the necessary arrangements and fled at once to her childhood apartment, which her parents now occupied in their retirement. The once glamorous ten-story apartment complex now cowered beneath discordant arrays of skyscrapers that had erected like troops all around it. The community, however, was now gated.

“Name and apartment number,” a uniformed guard grunted from his post.

“Lee Grace, Hong. 601-B.”

She took a rather long time navigating the apartment complex before finding the one she recognized as her own. Nothing had changed, she concluded. The elevator reeked of sawdust and cedar. She looked up at the ceiling. There were the fat blue scribbles she’d last seen as a teenager:

*Hail the Republic.*

*Screw you 802-B.*

Her mother’s hair was short, and it made her look like a stranger. As far as Grace could remember, her mother never cut her hair. But her speckled locks now neatly framing her chin in a style characteristic of elderly women. Grace wondered if she would eventually be among them. It chilled her—not the thought of growing old but that she would eventually cease to recognize herself.
Her parents greeted her warmly but did not prepare dinner.
“We don’t eat dinner anymore nowadays,” her father explained from the couch. “At our age it’s better not to fuss.”

Calmly, Grace made a soup out of vegetable scraps as her mother looked over her shoulder. They joined her at the table as she at, watching with their arms crossed. Her mother made an expected comment about how thin she looked and that she should eat better, then the subject was dropped. Grace was relieved. Her father offered to wash her dishes so she could rest. She accepted.

After finding her old set of bedding in the storage closet, Grace unpacked her essentials and made her bed. Suddenly fatigued, she longed for a bath. Locking the bathroom door behind her, she undressed immediately and discarded her clothes in a pile outside the tub.

As she turned on the faucet, the water started to make a grotesque gurgling noise as it streamed down the drain and spewed back up.

Clogged. Of course.

She cursed silently before awkwardly pulling her clothes back on piece by piece.

The next morning a stout maintenance man came carrying a yellow tool box. He looked kempt but reeked of chewing tobacco. Her parents appeared surprised when she told them about the bathtub but did not ask anymore questions. Grace joined her father on the couch. Over the daytime drama, she heard her mother inside chatting with the maintenance man about his hometown. He must have said something charming; her mother giggled.

Out the window was a highway with a taillless stream of traffic.

When Grace was young, her grandmother would interrupt her studies every hour and tell her to rest her eyes by counting cars on the road. In rebellion, she’d go to the window and stare blankly at the cars but refuse to count them.

There was a shriek.

Grace propelled herself up and rushed inside as her father took his time behind her.

“Hmph. I found what’s been clogging up your drain. And I got to say, in all my years, that’s a first…”

With his work glove, the man held up the limp corpse of a large red koi.

Cackling, he swung the fish back and forth by its tail. As it flopped toward her, Grace saw that its eyes and mouth were agape in an exasperated expression, which seemed to signal that it too had no idea what had occurred.

As the thought came to her, Grace too began to laugh. Her laughter became uncontrolled, approaching hysteria, knocking the air from her lungs. She fell first to her knees and then crashed onto her side, laughing maniacally with her arms around her stomach. Through the tears now gushing past her cheeks and into her turtleneck sweater, she saw her parents exchange a quick serious look.

When her laughter calmed, she found herself gasping for breath. She was alone now. Her damp cheek was frozen against the tile, but she was unable to lift it. Rolling onto her backside, she opened herself like a book and looked into the light.
She was lying on her left side and her husband on his right in his navy shorts. He asked if she wanted the window closed and she nodded. Something made her frown but she couldn’t remember what. As he turned to the window, she saw a faded pale scab on his lower spine, just above his tailbone. She reached out and brushed the soft spot with her index finger.

“Did that hurt?”

“Nah, it was nothing,” he assured. “There was no blood.”
Untitled St. Louis, No 11
Yuwei Pan
Washington University, ’18
35 mm black and white film
Taken in Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church, Kinloch, St. Louis
Momma’s Boy

Eighteen years
I examined how
you’d stick your thumb
through your purse strap
and mimicked how
you’d smack that gum
behind hair salon
magazine covers, how
you’d kiss away excess
onto wax paper then walk
nose-first into six spritzes
of white musk, how
you’d gently sway your hips
behind a grocery cart.
I imitated that subtle
pendulum behind
my closet door for
eighteen years.

Zachary J. Lee
University of Missouri—St. Louis, ’18
Detective McKenzie and the Case of the Two-Faced Woman
(or, A Song I Misunderstood)

The date was November 6th. The time, around six p.m. It was a cold and rainy day, the most miserable type of weather—the kind that drives men crazy. I was sitting in my office, enjoying a cigar after closing a particularly gruesome case: this quack doctor, he was sneaking into the morgue in the dead of night to cut the faces off of corpses to make masks out of—hyper-realistic masks that you could take off at night and put in a jar for the next morning, like a contact lens. Plastic surgery without the surgery, he called it. Once, this kind of stuff used to get to me, way back when I was new to the business. But now, it was just another ugly tragedy in this horrible, horrible city.

Anyway, I was alone in my office, smoking my cigar and listening to the rain hit my windows, when I heard a knock on my door. “Come in,” I said.

She looked about thirty, with blonde hair that sat in perfect curls on her shoulders despite the humidity. Her trench coat, belted at the waist, hinted at a long, lithe body underneath—a real classic beauty.

“Is this Private Investigator McKenzie?” she asked. Her voice was low and husky.

“That’s right,” I answered. We shook hands over my desk. Hers felt small and fragile and almost too cold. “Pleased to meet you, Miss. …?”

“Rigby,” she said, taking a seat across my desk. “Eleanor Rigby.”

“. . . Wait. You mean like the Beatles song?”

She gave me a strange look. “I didn’t say a thing about bugs, Detective McKenzie.”

“No, not the bugs—the band. You’re telling me you’ve never heard of the B—”

Eleanor Rigby tapped her nails against my desk impatiently. “Do I look like an entomologist to you, Detective?”

“. . . S’pose not.”

“That’s right. I’m here because my fiancé disappeared on the morning of our wedding.”

I stubbed my cigar out in the ashtray. “You mean, your fiancé, he . . .”

“Yes. He ran away on the day of our marriage. No note, no phone call, no nothing. Took his clothes and left without a word.”

“And you want to find him?”

“Yes, Detective. I want you to find him.” Eleanor’s smoky voice seemed extremely calm, especially for one who had just been dumped. She rose from her chair.

I thought for a moment. I could turn down this case—I had plenty of clients lined up to see me. But something about her was magnetic.

“Well, Ms. Rigby, let’s get to work.”

Her lips, perfectly rouged, curled into a smile. She walked over to me and slid a slip of paper onto my desk, leaning close enough for me to smell her strong, musky perfume and feel the brush of her coat against my arm. “This is my address, Detective. You’re going to want to search through my things, right?”
I took the paper. “I’ll be there tomorrow.”

The weather was good, so I decided to walk to Eleanor Rigby’s house at around noon. Two blocks over, I passed by the red church. It was a historical landmark—the only red granite building in the entire city. There had just been a wedding: all the guests stood outside, waving jubilantly at a gleaming white car decorated with pink roses and a “Just Married” sign on the rear bumper.

Behind the guests stood one lone figure, bent over the sidewalk as if picking something from the ground. Dressed in all black, she was a single mourner in a crowd smiling faces.

“Fancy seeing you here, Ms. Rigby,” I said, approaching her.

“Hello, Detective McKenzie.” She straightened up, unfazed. “I thought I’d catch you on your way to the house. Such a long walk can be awfully lonely, you know.”

“That’s mighty thoughtful of you, Ms. Rigby.”

“Please, call me Eleanor. Ms. Rigby makes me feel so old.”

“Right. Eleanor, just now, what were you…?”

She laughed. “Oh dear, you’re going to think me so stupid,” she said. She held out her hand. In her palm lay a few grains of rice.

I looked over my shoulder at the wedding goers. “You know, this is so weird, because in the song—”

But Eleanor Rigby had already turned on her heel and left before I could continue.

We walked the remaining few blocks in silence, winding through all the lonely people.

Eleanor Rigby lived in an old flat on a quiet, tree-lined street. The curtains were drawn, leaving the whole place dark, even in midday, but it was obvious that this woman had taste. The flat was decked out—oriental rugs, art books on an aged oak coffee table, a record-player, all the works.

“Let me pour you a drink, Detective McKenzie. Feel free to make yourself at home,” Eleanor said, tossing her coat on the brown leather sofa. Her heels clacked on the hardwood floor as she made her way to the kitchen.

I thanked her. I thought it a bit odd that she’d be so trusting of a stranger in her home, but perhaps she was just a trusting person. People like that were rare nowadays.

From what I could see, the entire flat painted the picture of a completely normal urban couple. Here and there, little reminders of the fiancé still lay about, like a forgotten watch on the side table. Next to it sat a dusty framed photograph of Eleanor, laughing, with her arms around a smiling man with dark hair. How perfect they seemed.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. Eleanor stood behind me, a glass of whiskey in each hand. She handed me one and glanced at the photograph on the table. “We were a pretty pair; don’t you think?”

I nodded. “You looked happy.”

She shrugged. “Have you ever been in love, Detective?”
“Couldn’t say for sure.”
“Detective McKenzie,” Eleanor said musingly. “Darns his socks in the middle of the night when no one’s there…”
“…”
“…”
“…So are you 100% sure that you haven’t heard—”
“Would you like to check the bedroom, Detective? It’s the room across from the bathroom.” Eleanor stood up. “I need to make a few phone calls, so please, do as you will,” she said over her shoulder as she went to the kitchen.

The first thing that stuck out to me about the bedroom was how immaculate it was; the bed was made, the carpet was sterilely white, and the books on the towering bookshelf stood ramrod straight. No sign of a fight anywhere.

The second thing I noticed was a whiff of something strange yet oddly familiar. It was the smell of biology class and dissected frogs: formaldehyde.

Why would Eleanor Rigby have a deadly carcinogen in her bedroom? Surely she wasn’t a high school science teacher. A hobby taxidermist, perhaps? Maybe an entomologist?

I followed the weak scent of formaldehyde to a spot on the bottom right of the bookshelf. Odd: it seemed to be coming from behind the books themselves. I pulled a few of the volumes out—thick, ancient encyclopedias. The smell got stronger. I felt along the wall behind the books. Bingo—there was a knob which opened up a little door.

A horrible breath of formaldehyde escaped from the hidden compartment in the wall. Even on my hands and knees, it was impossible to see what was inside. I reached my hand in. My fingers brushed against something strange and stiff. I pulled it out but nearly dropped it when I saw that the entire thing had been soaked through with old blood, dyeing what had once been a men’s white button-down shirt a grisly dark brown.

I reached in once more and touched upon something hard and rectangular. It was a brick of red granite, stained with old blood.

The third and final thing was a jar. Its murky yellow contents reeked of formaldehyde, but I could just barely make out its pale shape. It was a sight I had seen several times over the past week, from a case I had just closed.

The crypt in the red granite church smelled overwhelmingly of mold and wet stone. It was around four in the evening, the day after I went to the Rigby home. I figured it was only a matter of time until she’d make her move: by discovering her secrets, I had unknowingly set the springs to the trap of my own demise.

The church’s weak orange lighting cast strange, wavering shadows over the uneven floor. The crypt itself was no bigger than the church it sat under, but even in such a cramped space, there were plenty of places to hide bodies—places like the unassuming mound of turned dirt in the darkened corner of the room I spotted out of my eye, partially hidden by a crumbling gravestone.
The mound was definitely big enough to be a human body. I bent down to inspect it closer, when—

“Detective McKenzie, I knew I’d find you here,” a voice called from behind, echoing ominously off the damp ceiling.

I wheeled around, pulling my pistol out of its holster and training it on the shadowy figure at the other end of the crypt. “Eleanor Rigby. So we meet again.”

She was pointing a gun at me, too, and it glinted devilishly. Her face looked odd and stiff in the week light. “Clever man. I’m impressed you caught on as fast as you did.” She took a few slow steps towards me, her heels crunching on the dirt. “My poor fiancé, he didn’t run away after all, as you may have guessed,” she said coolly. “I—well, you saw what I did, didn’t you? I thought it would be most convenient to kill him in the crypt. This is where you put dead people, after all. What do you think, Detective McKenzie? For a man who solves crime for a living, I must’ve done a pretty novice job, huh?”

I said nothing but kept her at gunpoint.

She laughed dryly. “Okay, Detective, I’ll do the talking. How about I give you my version of the story, and we’ll see how close you got?” She paced slowly and rhythmically, like a lion circling her prey. “Eleanor Rigby—that’s me—is an absolute beauty queen until a house fire burns her face off five years ago. Suddenly, no one will even look at her. So what does she do?”

“Tell me, tell me. I swear to god those were, like, the exact words to—”

Eleanor Rigby trained her gun at the floor by my feet and pulled the trigger. The shot tore through the still air of the crypt, leaving my head spinning and my ears ringing. “Bring up that bug thing one more time and I’ll fill you with bullets, Detective, don’t think I won’t. Now answer me: who is it for?”

“Okay, okay, it’s for your fiancé. He meets you but doesn’t know about your face—your real face.”

“Someone give this man a prize!” She exclaimed mockingly. Her voice grew angrier. “Eleanor Rigby, falls in love with a man who says he’ll love her no matter what. Well, that’s what he says, anyways, until he discovers her dirty little secret.”

“He sees the real you.”

“Correct again, Eleanor Rigby, kills her fiancé when he tries to leave her. On their wedding day, of all days.”

“But why hire me when you knew he was dead this whole time?”

Her smile looked stiff, like the grimace of a death mask. “A woman could use a little company sometimes, Detective McKenzie. Especially from a handsome, single man like you.”

“I wouldn’t try flattery at a time like this, Eleanor Rigby.”

Her pacing stopped. “You two are a lot alike. He was all business, all the time, too.”
I leveled my gun at her heart. “I can't let you leave, now that you've confessed it all.”
I could see straight down the barrel of her pistol. “I did love him, you know.” Eleanor Rigby’s eyes looked dead in the weak light of the crypt. “To be honest, I’m sort of sorry you caught on as fast as you did, Detective. We could've had some fun before I’d have to kill—”
Before she could finish her sentence, I pulled the trigger.
I never did learn if she listened to the Beatles.
Sewage System
Taili Zhuang
Washington University in St. Louis, '20
Pencil on paper
Golden skyline sneaking in
    Through scratches in the screen,
Bathing sheets and shoulders all
    In softest hues of brown.

Soothing twilight spilling over
    Gently blows against the scene.
Sighs and seething tragedies
    Their smallest treasures now surround.

Silence blares as shutters close,
    And stillness one exception lends the night.
Bedspread lost in softest lulls,
    And souls as lost in bleeding, golden light.

Jacob Rogers
University of Michigan, '19
Leo had argued that the only way to build a balcony onto the house was to build it on stilts, so we did. I'd asked what would happen if it got too windy, or if the rain rotted the wood. *It will be the most beautiful balcony, the sturdiest balcony anyone has ever seen,* he'd told me and my parents and the construction team. *We'll host parties when the weather is nice, and we can watch sunsets every evening.* Three years later I still dreaded the windy days, the way the floor panels shuddered under my feet, and the way that, even from inside of the house, I could hear creaking and groaning from the wood. Our cockatoo squawked uneasily. I took walks on the days that it bothered me most.

I was lucky for most of that summer. June and July passed by with breezes, but the first week of August brought a long stretch of storms whose winds ripped branches from trunks and roots from soil.

I returned home after a long walk on the second night of the storms, shrugged off my raincoat—mainly as a precaution, as the rain had turned to drizzle—and took my time in the foyer, carefully tugging off one sneaker, then the other. Leo stood at the edge of the balcony, a nearly-empty martini glass at his elbow. The wind tossed a few hairs around his left ear. I could guess what he'd say when I approached. *Darling,* he'd grin, glass dangling between two upturned fingers, *have a sip of my drink.*

Out on the balcony I did as I was told, took a delicate sip, smiled when he squeezed my hand.

“Nice walk?”

“There were a few drops, but not enough to keep me inside.”

He tilted his head and I watched his eyes narrow, not in any unkind way, but rather to stop himself from saying what we both knew was true. I would have taken that walk in if it was forty degrees and the water fell in torrents. I would have waded through a flood before coming back to the house.

“So are your parents upstairs?” I asked, having already noticed voices above us. How strange it is to have a conversation where each can predict the other’s response.

“Yes,” Leo replied, humoring me. “But they're not ready for bed yet. I was thinking that we could all learn how to play bridge tonight.”

“You know that I don't like card games.”

“And you know how long I've been wanting to play bridge,” Leo said decisively.

“How about another night? I'm damp from my walk and I'd love to get to sleep.” A weak attempt on my part, and he knew it.

“It barely drizzled, and it's only 8:30. Let's play. The cards are on the table. I spent the past half hour reviewing the rules.” He turned toward the sliding door and strode inside. I picked up his martini and followed, more slowly. “Did you lock the door?” Leo’s voice startled me. Placing his drink on the table, I retraced my steps back to the door and turned the bolt, locking us inside together.
“Vic, Laura, would you like to play bridge with us?” I called up the stairs. I stood with one hand on the railing, watching Leo shuffle the cards.

“We’re coming,” Laura replied, her voice smooth and low. Even after five years it was difficult to imagine such a voice coming from a woman whose elbows, knees, and chin were as angular as glass. She dressed herself in flowy skirts and chemises; I presumed she did so purposefully to offset her sharpness. Laura reminded me of a bird; her skinny bent arms forming the structure of wings, the fabric straining and flooding around them like feathers.

“I hope the drizzle didn’t ruin your walk,” Laura said gently, skimming the last few steps at the bottom of the staircase.

“No, I could barely tell there was any at all.” I searched for bone beneath her yellow nightgown, catching, for a moment, a brush of her hip.

“You’re always out walking, Steph. Can’t ever tell how long you’ll be out there,” Vic huffed from the top of the stairs. “Sometimes you’re out for so long we don’t even know if you’ll ever come back!” He laughed a familiar robust chuckle, like my own father’s. “I didn’t know you liked bridge, either. I learn something new every day.” Vic, relying heavily on the railing, made the descent slowly. Laura had already seated herself at the table by the time he reached the ground floor.

“Leo is the mastermind behind tonight’s game of bridge,” I said delicately. “He’s been wanting to teach me for awhile how to play.”

“She couldn’t resist forever,” Leo said, smiling coyly at me. “I’ve finally convinced her.”

I played along with the tease, shrugging casually for his parents.

“What Sir Leo wants, Sir Leo shall have.” We waited for Vic at the table.

“So it’s been a long time since I’ve played,” Laura said, “Leo, you’ll have to go slowly with the rules.”

“Don’t worry,” Leo began, “I’ll be going slow for Steph.” He dealt the cards deftly, beginning with himself, then me to his left, then Laura, and finally Vic.

“It’s complicated and I don’t want to confuse you, so I’ll start simply and move on to the details later.” Leo picked up his hand of cards and the rest of us followed suit.

“Aces are worth four, Kings three, Queens two, and Jacks one. Add up the numbers of each that you have, and if the total is thirteen or more, you can place a bid.”

“And what is the benefit of bidding?” I inquired evenly, raising one eyebrow at Leo.

“If you’d let me explain, hon, that would be nice.” He was smiling, shook his head lightly at Laura. I wondered if he could taste the pithy texture of his words. “Does anyone have thirteen points? I don’t.”

“I only have eleven,” said Laura.

“Twelve,” Vic chimed.

I shook my head silently. “So what happens when no one can bid?” I asked gently. Leo sat up a little straighter, lips pursed, eyes fixed above Laura’s head.

“I guess we re-deal.” He began to gather the cards from Vic and Laura.
“Why don’t we just exchange a few cards?” I suggested, “It’s only a practice round. Then we don’t have to waste time shuffling again. Here, I’ll take Laura’s Ace and then I’ll have fourteen.” 
“No, no, I’d rather redo everything,” Leo said, gradually peeling the cards from my fingers.
“Stephanie’s idea is easier.” Laura spoke steadily, yet did not stop Leo from dragging the rest of her cards into his pile.
“Look, I already collected the cards. It takes no time at all. Why is everyone in such a hurry?”
My phone lit up with a text. Have you given it any thought? Ceci wrote.
“I’m going to go heat up some water for my tea,” Laura announced, moving into the kitchen.
“Who’s that?” Leo asked, straining to read the message. I didn’t answer for a moment.
“I think it’s starting to rain again,” Laura called from the kitchen.
“Just Ceci, you remember her from Hank’s party a few weeks ago?”
“Sure, but we’d met her before, too, when that coffee place first opened in January,” Leo clarified. “Lives just down the street.”
“Right,” I agreed. I put the phone in my lap and turned it on silent.
“So what did she want?” Leo probed. I heard the microwave start up in the kitchen.
“I bumped into her on my walk. She mentioned getting coffee again sometime soon.” I kept eye contact with Leo, and he stopped shuffling the cards.
“Ah. Coffee sounds nice. Maybe I’ll join.” Leo said deliberately. Across the table, Vic coughed weakly into his elbow. I took in a measured breath, lips parted slightly, and Leo’s gaze dropped to the cards.
“Hey mom,” Leo called suddenly, “I can make the tea. You should be sitting.” Before she could respond he stood up and padded into the adjoining kitchen. Laura protested, but she let Leo usher her back toward the table.

He could be gentle, when he wanted to. As a dermatologist he was very aware of his touch. Leo had always loved my skin; late at night, more often earlier in our marriage, but later, too, he would lie next to me and rub his hand across my back, my arms, thighs. He would point out freckles like stars in constellations, connecting them with his wide fingers, telling me why each one was his favorite, at least so far.

One night two years ago Leo noticed a darker, firmer bump on the back of my neck, hidden at my hairline. I thought he was overreacting when he called the office first thing the next morning. How can it be so bad I can’t wait until my next appointment? I asked anxiously. He wouldn’t tell me what he thought it was. I’m probably wrong, he responded, I don’t want to worry you. But Leo was rarely wrong; his soft fingers and analytical eyes had found a nodular melanoma, one that would have escaped my notice for far too long. A few months would have allowed the melanoma to tunnel further into my skin, to reach its roots into my healthy tissue. I ran my fingers across the scar, even after it had faded. I felt vulnerable when my hair was up.
“You know, you’re right, dear,” Vic said vaguely out of the silence. “The rain is starting to pick up a little. The wind, too.” After a quick glance at the kitchen, he pushed his chair out and heaved into a standing position. “Haven’t seen a storm like this in awhile,” Vic murmured, as if to himself. He made his way across the living room to the sliding door and cupped his hands on the glass. Laura and I watched, perplexed.

In a graceful swish, Laura stood up and followed Vic. She touched his shoulder lightly when she approached him, then cupped her hands against the glass, too. A rustling movement to Vic’s right caught her attention. Laura bent down to the source of the distraction, placing one hand against the cage.

“This bird is fascinating,” Laura declared, eyes fixated on our cockatoo. “It doesn’t seem to be fazed at all by this rainy ruckus. Vic, don’t you think so?”

“Sure, dear, of course,” Vic said distractedly. “You know, I think I left my coat on the balcony earlier and now it’s getting soaked.”

“Stephanie? What is the name of your bird again?” Laura called out to me. “Doesn’t it start with a J? I don’t know why I can’t remember.”

“Josephine, but we call her Jo-Jo,” I replied, still seated at the table. I heard Leo swear softly from the kitchen, a mug clanking sharply on the counter.

“Hi Jo-Jo,” Laura cooed, “Would you like to sit on my finger?” As she talked to the bird, Vic tugged on the sliding door, gradually inching it open.

“Vic, it’s raining too hard. Just get it tomorrow. It’ll be fine,” Laura reproved.

“This is my favorite jacket, you remember, the one from our trip to Vermont?” Vic replied. “It’s going to be ruined if I leave it there.” Gripping the door, Vic sidestepped into the downpour just as Leo emerged from the kitchen.

“Dad, why are you going outside? You’re going to fall,” Leo said. Vic didn’t reply, unable to hear from outside. “Dad!” Leo yelled.

Neither of us had noticed that Laura held Jo-Jo in her palm, close to her chest. At Leo’s yell, the cockatoo flapped wildly, escaping Laura’s grasp and rushing toward the door.

“Jo-Jo! Get back here!” Laura shrieked, following Jo-Jo to the opening. Leo leaped across the living room, quickly closing the distance between he and his parents. Laura was on the balcony, blurred by the falling rain and flailing—not for the bird now, but for a handhold as she lurched toward the edge. Yellow fabric churned with her body and Leo pulled two handfuls of it toward himself, back in the direction of the house. She reeled into his arms and the two of them fell to the ground, Leo’s body hitting first and hard. His arms never released Laura, who tumbled on top of him.

“Leo!” I cried, rushing to the balcony.

“I’m fine, Steph,” Leo grunted. He adjusted himself to a sitting position, and carefully maneuvered Laura so she was sitting next to him. “Mom, are you ok? Can you stand?”

She could stand but she could not speak, shivering violently in the downpour. Dripping fabric hugged every corner of her body like skin stretched over bone. Leo held her elbow and led
her into the house as I rushed to prepare a seat on the sofa.

“Do you need ice?” I asked helplessly. “Tea?”


Vic held his sopping coat in one hand and his wife with the other. “You’re alright, darling” he repeated softly into her ear. “I’m so sorry.”

When they reached the sofa, Leo slowly lowered Laura into the cushions, wrapping a blanket around her diminished figure.

“I was trying to catch Josephine but she was so fast—”

“Mom, please,” Leo interrupted “Don’t worry. Just rest.” Vic sat next to Laura, rubbing her palm and adjusting her blanket, while Leo rushed to the kitchen to make tea.

I turned to close the sliding door but stopped suddenly, as I spotted a small white bird, my Jo-Jo, perched on the railing in the pouring rain.

“What on Earth—Jo-Jo?” I started, closing the gap between us. But before I even reached the glass she took off, dropping out of sight over the edge. I stared at the place she had been as I pulled the door shut, and then, almost unconsciously, I knelt down to close the door of her cage.

I was the last to fall asleep. Leo’s arm rested across my stomach and I typed a reply to Ceci. I can’t.
if i less than you
i plus plus, she said, her eyes
public, static, void
Spilt Milk
Grace Zajdel
Washington University in St. Louis, ’19
Plaster, Nylon Rope, Steel
Sanctuary
Ruoyi Gan
Washington University in St. Louis, ’20
Pen, ink, watercolor
Talking to Spoons and Other Inanimate Objects

I couldn’t have been more than five or six when my father pulled me aside, gave me the last advice he would ever give me. He and I, we were playing football out in the lawn, which in reality was a small, struggling patch of brown grass hosting a few hopeful dandelions. My father had a real serious look on his face, and I knew him well enough by then to know that he was pondering something spectacular. Texas summertime sparked a certain thoughtfulness in him. More often than not, his words would come upon him suddenly and, as if the advice given to me was a release of some powerful tension, my father’s shoulders would drop and he would settle down with a sweating bottle of beer. On this afternoon, when the sun was working hard on turning the tips of my ears pink, my father grabbed me by the shoulder, sat me down. I had been going on about something, but my ramble fell from my dry lips.

“Boy,” he began, and the worn leather of his face was set into hard, meaningful plains. “I’ll tell you something, so listen close”—that’s how he always started—“Sometimes it’s better not to talk so much. Don’t waste your words on people who don’t deserve them. Sometimes, your silence is more powerful than your words.” A breath of relief slipped past his lips, and he retreated inside.

I promptly forgot my father’s advice, because he died two days later—shot himself, square in the mouth—and I was sort of lost in the jumble of it all. I never had a mother, so I was jumbled around just like the advice. For a while I was sent to live with my father’s sister, but I didn’t much like the way she looked at me, as if I was a cyst to be scraped from her, and so I ran away. Then I was a rag doll, pushed and shoved pathetically, unceremoniously, between new homes, my threads unraveling determinedly in the process. The beds in those houses, when I had them, cried when I went to sleep, like I was hurting them. At first I was frightened by their moans, but a combination of time and the reassurance of a helpful spoon allowed me to adjust. When I couldn’t tune them out, I always ended up sore on one side from sleeping on the floor. After I was too big to be shoved around, I slept on the bench in the park, which I liked the best...when it wasn’t raining. The bench was nice, always asked me how my day was going when I came back to it. That aunt of mine somehow found me there—it’s funny how simple it can be to find lost things when they’re meant to be lost—and sent me to the crazy house. She told them he doesn’t think right, he’s unstable, poor child lost his parents, so young. She told them, he talks to things that aren’t real; I don’t, of course. I’m only just remembering my father’s advice now, as I nudge a plastic tray of plastic food with the tip of my bare toe. It murmurs at me, be careful, stop that, but I don’t.

There are white walls here, but the ceiling is painted considerately to imitate the sky, spotted with decidedly imperfect cumulonimbus fluff; it would be comforting, perhaps, in the way that the glossily-printed models on the covers of magazines are comforting to little girls. They think, when we’re older we’ll be like that—skinny and beautiful and uncaring. Of course they won’t be, of course the shadow of perfection will fade with the heartbreaking luminosity of reality. It seems that I can reach out, touch it, hold the quaking, quivering stratosphere in the palm of my hand and be reminded of... but I scrape off a piece of the sky and let it flake disgustingly under my nails.
“Everywhere is within walking distance…” I don’t look up, but my toe stills against the plastic tray—a huff of exasperated relief escapes it. The man in the cell next to mine, in which I can see into through a small, barred porthole in my left wall, is certifiably insane, I’m sure. His one-sided conversations were somewhat frightening in the beginning, but now his rambling is no more than a beautiful, lonely agitation. “If you have the time. A lot of people are afraid of heights.”

I recognize that he isn’t going to kill the incessant string of confusions, so I lean back and stare at the treacherous sky.

“Not me, I’m afraid of widths.”

Don’t worry about him, says the tray. It is grateful for the man’s distraction and is feeling generous.

“Curiosity killed the cat, but for a while I was a suspect.”

What a comedian. Really though, would you be surprised if he did kill the cat? I’m not sure I wouldn’t be, but I ignore the tray altogether. I would have turned my attention to the ceiling, in attempt to discover a shape in the faulty clouds that I had previously missed, but the panel in the middle of my door slides open. A set of large, doe-like eyes glance carefully around the room, and as they fade from view the door swings open.

“Hello,” says the doe-eyed girl, and a hesitant grin pulls at the corners of her mouth. I look at her, and though she waits for a moment for a response it is clear that she doesn’t expect one.

She’s pretty, says the tray, and I shoot it a berating glare. The doe-eyed girl seems to notice this, and her hand twitches unconsciously toward a pencil in the pocket of her coat. She says, come with me, just a few questions, won’t be long; I’ve heard it before.

Soon I am led through the brightly-lit hallway into an unfamiliar, comfortable room with a soft-looking sofa and large windows. The walls are painted green, and I can’t help but notice that the color is of striking similarity to the girl’s eyes. I glance at the sofa, and as the girl rifles through a messy stack of papers on her mahogany desk, I mumble, “hello.” The sofa greets me in return, and in its voice is the same masculine authority that existed in my father’s tenor. The girl motions for me to have a seat, and I stalk wearily to the sofa. Its protests are minimal, so I settle between two plump pillows.

“Sam,” she begins, and I meet her eyes with a jolt. It is unsettling to hear my name said with such tenderness. “Doctor Radford will be joining us shortly, but until then why don’t we try to get to know each other?” She says, I’ll go first, don’t worry, relax; I don’t, of course. I stare at a small stool in the corner as she relays to me the sort of vague surface of her story that is typically less condensely shared over tea. Her name is Beth, and she grew up poor in a small town with her mother and stepfather. Two sisters, a farm dog with a heart-shaped spot on its ear, an evolving stack of books on her bedside table. Beth made it to the city with good grades and few friends, and after a successful college career—“that’s how we’ve wound up here.” She waits for a moment, as if she dimly expects me to acknowledge her. People have the strangest way of expecting something in return for vulnerability.

“It says here,” she says, rifling through her notes. For a moment she can’t seem to find what she is looking for.

That’s a big stack of notes. You must be very interesting. If it weren’t for its sincerity I could easily think
the stool is mocking me.

“It says here that you grew up in the foster care system. But you do have an aunt, don’t you?”

It’s not really a question, so she doesn’t need an answer. “After your father died, you went to live with her. Can we talk about that, Sam?” She knows I won’t.

_Why aren’t you talking to Beth?_

“I can’t.”

_Why not?_

Beth thinks I’m speaking to her, and I almost regret the slight fall of her shoulders when she realizes I’m not. Before she can continue to prompt me, another man enters the room. I recognize him as Doctor Radford. He insincerely apologizes for his lateness, and we continue where we left off.

“I was just asking Sam about his aunt,” says Beth. Doctor Radford nods, his horn-rimmed glasses falling infinitesimally down his crooked nose. “Do you think we could talk about her, Sam?”

_Why won’t you talk to Beth?_ The stool is curious.

“They already know about my aunt,” I respond.

“That’s right,” says Doctor Radford. “We know a little. I’ve met your aunt, did you know that? Not especially pleasant, is she?” Of course, I know this. Usually, in these meetings of ours, Doctor Radford tells me things about my life that I already know, and then I am escorted back to my room and my sky.

“Tell me, Sam. Did she ever hurt you?” Today I am on edge, and I want to go back to my room.

“Why are they doing this to me?” I mumble at the stool.

_What do you mean?_

“They already know about my aunt. They already know about my aunt.” My fingers dig into the sofa, and it yelps.

“Sorry,” I say.

“Why are you sorry, Sam?” Beth asks. “You haven’t done anything wrong. She hurt _you_.”

“She hurt you, and you didn’t have anyone else, so you began to speak to inanimate objects. They wouldn’t hurt you, like she did. Is that right, Sam?”

_You’re aunt hurt you?_ The stool’s voice shakes.

“No, not really. Yelled at me, a little.”

“Then what is it, Sam? It says here, you found your father’s body when you were a small boy. Is that it, Sam? You couldn’t bare the living anymore, without your father? So you turned to that which is not alive?”

_What do they mean, you found your father?_

“There was blood on the rug. He died. He killed himself.”

_Oh, no._ The stool weeps quietly in the corner. I turn to the doctor and Beth. They know I am done, and with a nod from Doctor Radford, Beth leads me back to my room. When I get there, the sky seems somehow gray, as if at any moment rain will begin to spill from the painted clouds. The tray has been removed, and suddenly I am undeniably, heartbreakingly alone. Even my neighbor’s one-sided
chatter cannot distract me from the agony building in my chest.

“A clear conscience is usually a sign of a bad memory,” he says, and his voice is raspy; he hasn’t stopped all day. The lights dim, signalling evening, and I settle into my pallet in the corner. From here I can see through the porthole into my neighbor’s room, and for a split second we make contact before his gaze shifts nervously away. He looks at the dimmed lights.

“What a nice night for an evening.”

The slots in our doors open simultaneously, and a steaming bowl and set of silverware—omitting the knife, of course—slides in on the familiar plastic trays. I set mine by me, and sip half-heartedly at the tasteless soup. The spoon’s happy chatter is an incomprehensible gargle each time it is submerged.

“I was trying to daydream,” I turn my head into the corner. Everything is so loud. “But my mind kept wandering.”

*What does he mean?* asks the spoon. I tell it I haven’t any idea. In this moment I haven’t any idea about anything, really.

“I met a new one today. A girl.” The spoon, as always, is attentive. “She was different than the other doctors. She wanted to get to know me.”

_Maybe you should, then—get to know her, I mean._

“You know I can’t.” I had fleetingly recalled my father’s advice this morning, but I had not let myself mull over it until now. He said, “don’t waste your words on people who don’t deserve them”; I don’t, of course. Since his death I have never once spoken to anything remotely human, so of course I have not wasted my words. I haven’t even come close.

_I don’t know why,_ says the spoon. _I don’t see why you can’t talk to her. What would it hurt? Of course, the spoon doesn’t understand. It might not hurt anything to speak to Beth, to speak to any person. But what would it help? Nothing I ever said stopped my father from going away from me. All words then, are waste._

“I went to the general store. They wouldn’t let me buy anything specifically.” My neighbor speaks loudly, almost yelling, and I peer through the porthole into his room. He sits on a chair, tying bedsheets and clothing together with large, meticulous knots. At some point I must have realized what he was doing, but as I stare at him, listening to him shout his obscure phrases at his painted sky, I only wish for silence. When he stands, tying his homemade noose around something too high in his painted sky for me to see, I look to the spoons, to the tray and bowl, for advice. They are silent. My neighbor catches my wild eyes, and places a finger over his lips as if to silence me. I look away, but I cannot avoid the screech of the chair as it is kicked to the floor.

Later, when a set of large, doe-like eyes peer through the slot in my door, when I cannot bear the silence of my room any longer, I meet Beth’s glance. And for the first time since I was five or six, when my father gave me the last advice he would ever give me, I am certain that my words will not be wasted.

“Hello,” I say, and the spoon is silent.

*Anna Konradi*

*Washington University in St. Louis, ’20*
Replica

The gods turned people into stars, trees, flowers
All to cheat the order of things.
Zeus put Orion in the sky.
Apollo turned Hyacinthus into a flower.
Cybele rooted Attis in the ground.

Even if they failed to save
Their motley beloved
The transformations kept them from
A complete loss
But I am not a god.

I cannot put you in the sky,
Look upon you every night,
And know exactly where I am.
I cannot put you in a clay pot
On the kitchen counter
Next to the bowl with the car keys.
I cannot plant you in the ground,
Wait there the rest of my life,
And be buried in your shade.

Instead, what do I have?
Just these words
Not real enough. Not tangible enough
To cheat the order of death.

Alexa Ransom Palmer
University of Texas—Austin, '20
First Queens 1.1-42

Once, in a land many seas away from ours, there lived a brother and a sister. To survive, they stole the riches from the tombs of the ancient kings and queens, out in the desert where no man dare venture. But the brother and the sister were clever, and they grew greedier in the face of the dead. Over time, however, the brother's thirst for riches grew insatiable, and the sister became afraid for her own life.

“Brother,” she asked him. “I know you are a cunning and ambitious; yet would you betray your own kin?”
And the brother replied, “Surely not I, sister.”

One day, the brother and the sister ventured out to farthest corner of the valley, to the tomb of the First Queen, whose mortal body was said to have been buried among great golden pillars and a leaping river of mercury. The shivering light of their torches illuminated a carving over the entrance of the tomb. “My daughters: Your kingdom come,” it read.

The brother ignored the words, but the sister read them and was afraid.

They descended down winding staircases and hidden chambers where the air was as ancient as the royals themselves. And as they walked, the sister could not help but watch the shadow of her brother cast upon the walls by the weak torchlight, spindling and terrible.

The brother noticed her silence and asked, “Sister, why do you tremble?”
And the sister replied, “I see your shadow, brother, and it makes me afraid.”

“You are a fool,” the brother replied with a laugh. “Look how the room before us glows with silver light!”

A living stream of mercury cast its watery glow upon the vaulted ceiling of the great chamber, which was held aloft by pillars of polished gold. At the other end of the room stood a grand stone mausoleum, decorated with paintings of weeping maidens and fiery angels descending from the dome of heaven.

“Sister, I will search for more treasures. You may check the mausoleum. I know there are even greater riches behind its doors,” the brother said.

When the sister heard this, she sensed the heavy hand of the stars in motion. Yet the mausoleum beckoned to her, silent and deferential.

The stone door looked too heavy for any man to move, but it slid open at the sister’s slightest touch. The sealed air was dry and dusty, and a breeze, warm like a breath, seemed to escape from the open lid of the sarcophagus. But the sister was not afraid when she approached the corpse, nor was she afraid when she looked upon the Queen, whose features, even in death, were fresh and familiar. And when she realized that the Queen’s face was her own, staring back at her with wide eyes from the confines of death, and when the heavy door of the mausoleum slid shut with an irrevocable thud, the sister felt nothing but a halcyon peace.

Claire Ma
Washington University in St. Louis, ’19
This publication was designed by Madeline Partner and George Zhou; set into type digitally at Washington University in St. Louis; and printed and bound at Missourian Publishing Company, St. Louis, Missouri.

The type face is Centaur MT, designed by Bruce Rogers.

Spires accepts submissions from undergraduate students around the world. Works were evaluated individually and anonymously. Spires is published biannually and distributed free of charge to the Washington University community at the end of each semester. All undergraduate art, poetry, prose, drama, song lyric, and digital media submissions (including video and sound art) are welcome for evaluation.

Special thanks to: Washington University Student Union; Missourian Publishing Company; and the authors, poets, and artists who submitted.

For more creative content including new media, video, and digital artwork, visit our website.

Submit your original work: spiresmagazine@gmail.com
View past issues and additional artwork: spires.wustl.edu
Stay in the loop: facebook.com/spiresintercollegiatemagazine