

SHABBY DOLL HOUSE
the spring edition.



FEATURING:

dj berndt
timothy willis sanders
luna miguel
chadwick redden
meggie green
leo frank
kelsea basye
lily dawn
giles ruffer
patrick lee
jacob steinberg
cassandra de alba
bob schofield
leo stillinger
sophie collins
peiyu loh
heiko julien



WITH ORIGINAL ART WORK BY:

adam j. kurtz evan bender michael inscoe sarah tue-fee
stephen michael mcdowell samantha conlon anna crooks
sarah jean alexander jenn kucharczyk mitch ryan emily horn
jessica rowe genesis crespo larissa garcia tommy doyle
candy chen & jesse vaughan

Edited by Sarah Jean Alexander & LK Shaw

March 2013

HAPPINESS IS LIKE MOUNT EVEREST

By Cassandra de Alba, with art by Candy Chen

I AM MAD AT THE OCEAN

By Heiko Julien, with art by Sarah Tue-Fee

MUSEUM OF CANCERS

By Luna Miguel, with art by Evan Bender

EVERYONE IS TIRED NOW

By Chad Redden, with art by Jessica Rowe

PLEASE WRITE CLEARLY

By Sophie Collins, with art by Michael Inscoe

WE ARE ALL LEARNING TO APPREHEND THINGS OUTSIDE OF OURSELVES

By Peiyu Loh, with art by Larissa Garcia

DAMPNESS

By Lily Dawn, with art by Jenn Kucharczyk

IF REPORTERS CHASED ME AND ASKED ME FOR A COMMENT ON THE UNIVERSE I WOULD SAY I AGREE WITH IT

By Leo Frank, with art by Tommy Doyle

I KNOW BECAUSE IT WORKS

By Bob Schofield, with art by Samantha Conlon

SATURDAY NIGHT BABESTATION VIEWER

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MOVING HOME

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IF I LIVED IN LAS VEGAS, I'D BE MARRIED SEVEN TIMES OVER

By Jacob Steinberg, with art by Genesis Crespo

NEW YORK ROSE

By Leo Stillinger, with art by Mitch Ryan

HEAD

By Patrick Lee, with art by Stephen Michael McDowell

TOADS

By Kelsea Basye, with art by Emily Horn

SELECTED INTERVIEWS VOL. 1

By Timothy Willis Sanders, with art by Adam J Kurtz

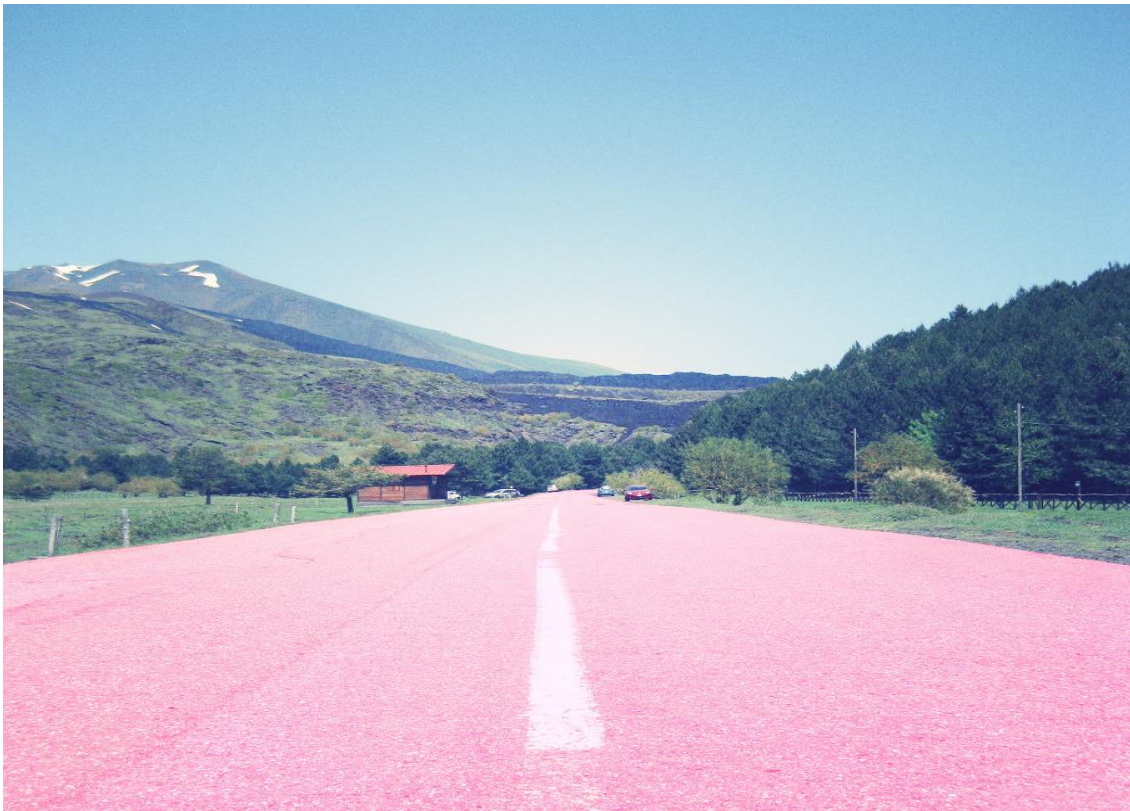
THREE DECISIONS

By DJ Berndt, with art by Jesse Vaughan

Happiness Is Like Mount Everest

By Cassandra De Alba

Art by Candy Chen

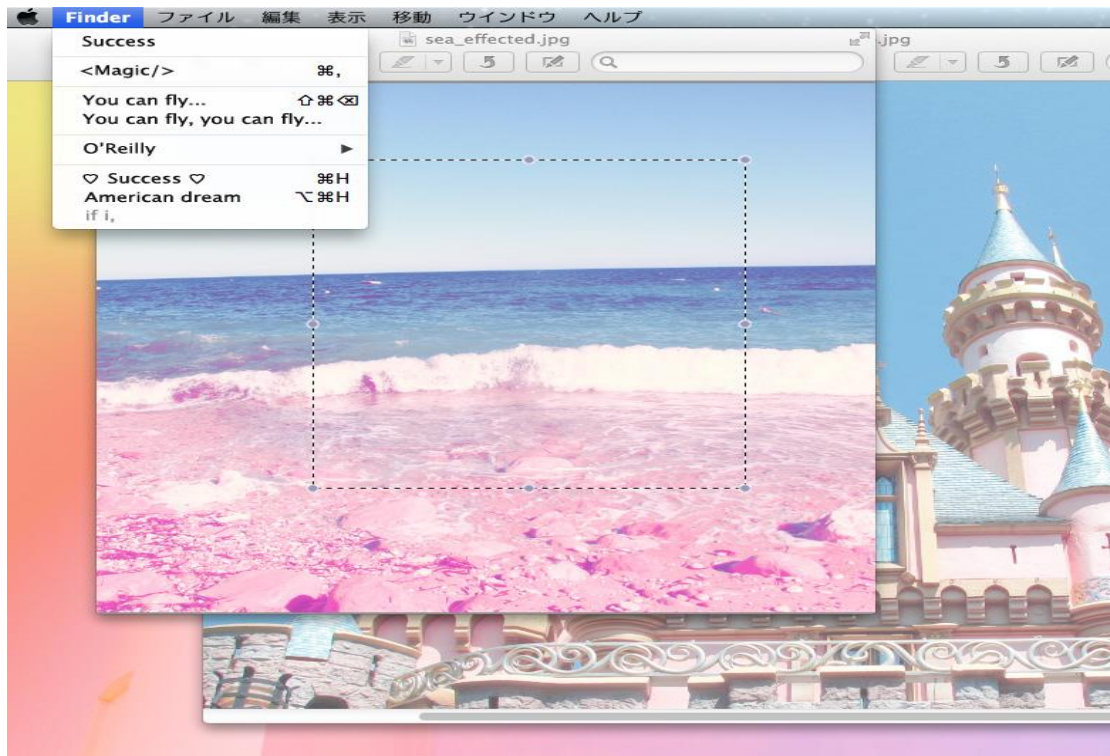


in that i've read books about it
and seen pictures
and it seems very pretty
but there are lots of photographs of happiness online
and other people can climb happiness for me
and talk about how great
and majestic it was

it doesn't seem worth the months of happiness training
the hiring of happiness sherpas
to carry your happiness equipment

and then you get to the very top of happiness
where it is too cold and you can't breathe the air
and you turn around and come down.

i think i'll just stay in bed in my underwear
and look at pictures of happiness on the internet
and not get frostbite or die, not yet,
and not put in any of that effort
i hear everyone talking about.



the golden hour as las gotas de felicidad

when i say 'summer' i mean the last
of the low yellow daylight
a porch or a field and a can of cheap beer

i mean photographs of my floral prints
a few drags into a cigarette
i mean the sun like a cigarette burn in the sky

i mean there's a pond down the road
and we're all going swimming, come on,
it's been a hot day

i mean a rotting balcony in north amherst, july
2010 and hot air balloons cresting the treeline
one after another

i mean light so purposeful it penetrates sadness
like the sound of my rings all clicking together
or the click of a shutter, the whirl of instant film

knowing that six months from now someone
will point to that picture on a fridge
and know exactly what to call it

I Am Mad At The Ocean

By Heiko Julien

Art by Sarah Tue-Fee



i am mad at the ocean
i resent its relentless force
i am kicking the water
i am punching the waves
feel less guilty
did my part

i get mad at the beach
I kick sand at a palm tree or whatever theyre called
i see a couple Laying Out & sigh & throw my shoes
into the sea

when I was a Teen referee of Tween soccer games
the Tweens used to say a lot of oneliners
like, theyd steal the ball and say
I'll Take That

when i was a Teen referee of Tween baseball games
i called a Tween out at first base
and his mom got mad
she ran up to the chain linked face
and screamed at me
and called me a Faggot

everyone wants you to change
everyone is controlling
its fine

every night i die in my dreams
every morning i am reborn
it is exhausting

We are otters now

i could tell you were excited
i could see it in your eyelids

you show yourself
off
give yourself
up
away

you are still here

we are otters
we are floating down the river in your bed
holding hands as paws
so we dont float apart

people are being born and dying
ripping each other off and to shreds
loving each other to pieces and to death

we dont care
we are otters now

it is truly alarming how much power a man has in this world if he is unburdened by fear or guilt

at the rate i am going, i will surely become a dad
not bragging, just a simple fact of life
getting alarmingly close to dadhood

i want my Future Son to be a kind man.
the kind of man that cares about how animals feel

baby boy
i am going to fill up your bathtub with cake mix and then give u all the hot water u need 2
succeed

the fight or flight impulse that allowed us to evolve to this point is now making us sick and
crazy
when there is nowhere to fly and fighting is not reasonable
as in the case of sending or receiving a Big Email
that adrenaline just goes into your body and works its way through you

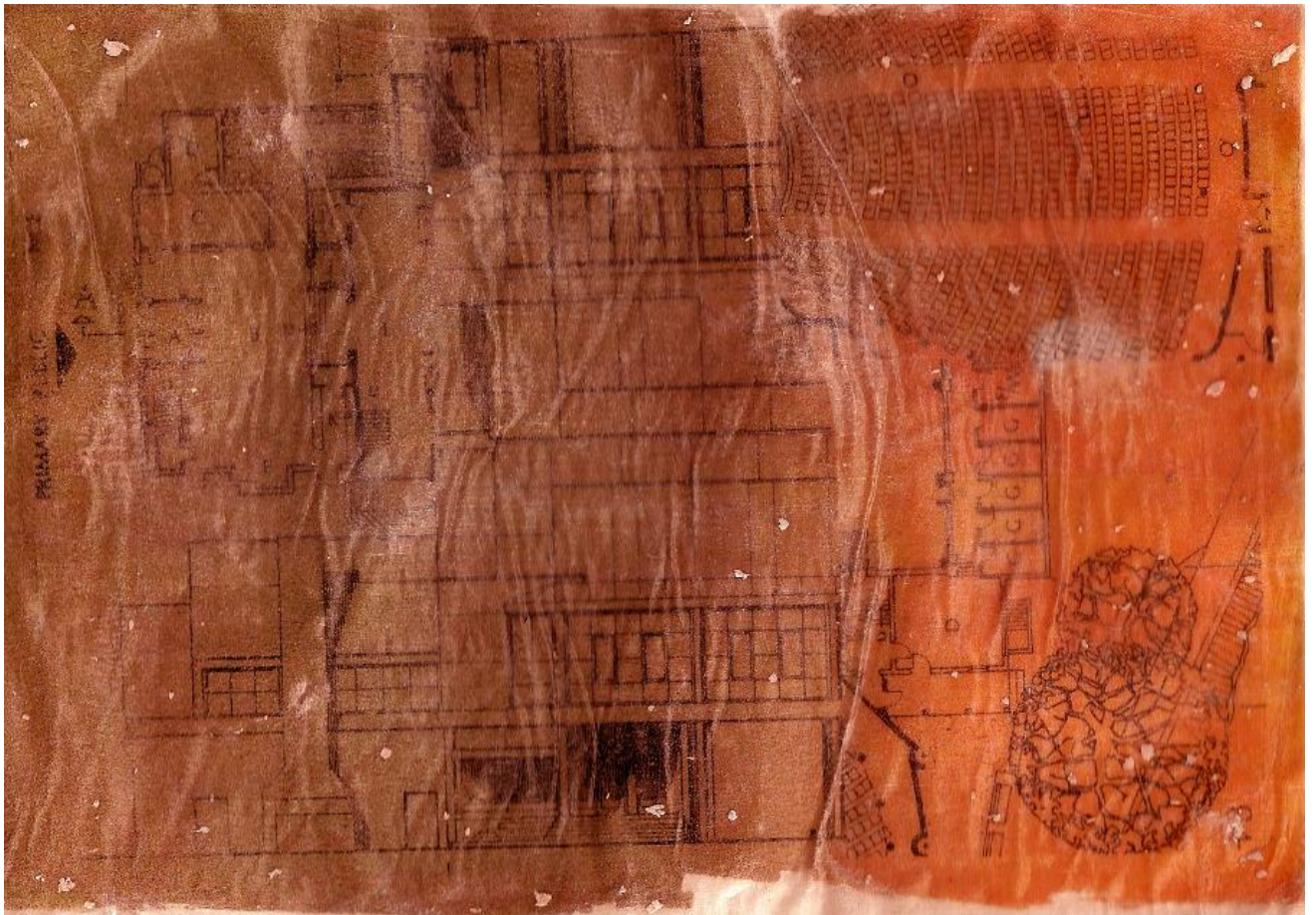
today I am thinking about how to listen to my body.

i want my son to be a sensitive lover
want to step in and Show him How To Swing but not sure what i mean by that exactly

baby boy
you are better than the others.
a crescendo of negative feelings will often befall your ass because you are my bb
just ignore it
and keep playing the guitar

Museum of Cancers

By Luna Miguel
Art by Evan Bender



(That's why they'll cut off your feet. That's why they'll seal your eyes with bits of ancient maps. That's why they'll say your name in celebration of the pancreas. Got it? That's why the uterus is darker - intestine and cornea-. That's why they'll cut out prayer. Got it?)

-Luna Miguel Santos: living / sugar cancer

-Ana Santos Payán: living / mom cancer

-Pedro Miguel Tomás: living / health cancer

-Chus Tomás: living / patience cancer

-Pedro Miguel: dead / grandpa cancer

-Mercedes Payán: living / loneliness cancer

-Manolo Santos: living / family cancer

-José Ángel Valente: dead / light cancer

-Roberto Bolaño: dead / probabilities cancer

-David Foster Wallace: dead / economic cancer

-Marcel Schwob: dead / syphilitic cancer

-Antonio J. Rodríguez: living / Europe cancer

(That's why it hurts me, you know? That's why my blood hurts: because it's outside. And inside it doesn't hurt and outside it kills. And inside it doesn't ache and outside it frightens. What intense blood. How dangerous. That's why it hurts me, understand. Do you understand?)

-Daniel Clowes: living / ghost cancer

-Clarice Lispector: dead / audacity cancer

-Alejandra Pizarnik: muerta / cage cancer

-Miguel Hernández: dead / moon cancer

-Jorge Luis Borges: muerto / widow cancer

-Michel Houellebecq: living / penile cancer

(That's why I don't exist. You're leaving already? That's why we all escape once healed. Who stays behind? Or worse. Where?)

-Antonin Artaud: dead / insane cancer

-T.S. Eliot: dead / phoenician cancer

-Eduardo Cirlot: dead / Astarte cancer

-Édmond Jabés: dead / Egypt cancer

-Antonio Machado: dead / Leonor cancer

-Vladimir Nabokov: dead / gut cancer's fire cancer

-Thomas Pynchon: living / face cancer

-Sharon Olds: living / satan cancer

-Dorothea Lasky: living / milk cancer

-Virginia Woolf: dead / water cancer

(That's why I drown. That's why I don't understand love. That's why I don't fall ill. That's why I only sicken. You know? I only sicken.)

-Charles Baudelaire: dead / ugly cancer

-Arthur Rimbaud: dead / elephant cancer

-Paul Valéry: dead / marine cancer

-Joyce Mansour: dead / woman cancer

-Paul Éluard: dead / blue cancer

-Lysiane Rakotoson: living / snow cancer

(Thus these stains. And this skin. Like an eternal scar, long and white, my skin is scar, my skin is umbilical cord between tongue and armpits. Thus these red stains. Thus these black stains. Thus this smell of fruit: tongue, armpits)

-Emily Dickinson: dead / cunt cancer

-Anne Sexton: dead / cunt cancer

-Anna Akhmatova: dead / cunt cancer

-Sylvia Plath: dead / cunt cancer

-Marina Tsvetaeva: dead / cunt cancer

-Javier Marías: living / heavy cancer

-Enrique Vila-Matas: living / Enrique Vila-Matas cancer

-Gonzalo Torné: living / spy cancer

-Patricio Pron: living / piece of shit cancer

-Rodrigo Fresán: living / troubling cancer

-Tao Lin: living / MDMA cancer

-Ben Brooks: living / deer cancer

-Unai Velasco: living / 1990 cancer

(That's why I vomited, do you understand? Thus the bulimia of those months trying to slim down to draw pity, trying sickness impregnated with who knows what. Trying literature. That's why I vomited, do you remember?)

-Ana Santos Payán: living /

-Ana Santos Payán: living /

-Ana Santos Payán: alive /

Everyone Is Tired Now

By Chad Redden

Art by Jessica Rowe



Everyone is tired now. No one has slept well. The morning coffee drinkers at the gas station miss their cups. The morning coffee drinkers spill coffee on the counter, the floor, their hands. There is cursing and mumbling. The morning coffee drinkers mumble and stare at one another. They stare at the gas station attendants. The gas station attendants stare back. Everyone thinks they have said hello. Everyone thinks they have bought something. It is rooms of low volume and moving lips. Someone bumps into someone else. Everyone falls down. Everyone is burnt a moment by another's coffee. The lines of people fall asleep in line. Everyone dreams they have paid for gas and coffee and cigarettes. Everyone is so tired now. Everyone dreams about working, that they have arrived at work. This goes on.

(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)

Everyone is tired now, even the police officer knocking on my car window. His eye sockets collected shadows. Everyone has eye sockets like that now. He woke me at the gas station. I saw my car parked at the pump. I saw the pump connected to my car. First, the police officer asked me if I was alive. I said that I thought I was alive. The police officer asked me why I fell asleep at a gas station pump at nine in the morning. I didn't have an answer for him, except that I was tired. He said he was tired too. He asked me to get out of the car. He asked me to walk a line a particular way. He asked me to stand on one foot a particular way. He asked me to recite the alphabet a particular way.

The wind blew through me. The wind vibrated my bones. The wind made me stumble in front of the police officer. I kept cussing at the wind. The officer told me to cut it out and that today was a wind holiday. I hadn't bought the wind a card and I told him so. The police officer said he imagined that I had upset the wind. The police officer said he imagined that was what this was all about.

(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)

I wasn't sure I was asleep. I went to work at the warehouse. In the parking lot, I saw a puddle and wanted to jump into it. As uncomfortable as it would feel, I wanted my socks wet. I spent the day taping boxes. I needed over a hundred boxes. There were many and I couldn't keep count. A fire alarm that went off. There was no fire. The firemen arrived and said there was no fire. I stood outside in the cold wind with my coworkers. Someone said they hoped a secret fire was inside. An invisible but fast fire, the coworker explained, invisible so the firemen would think the fire wasn't real so they would leave. Also a fast fire so it would burn down the warehouse before we returned inside. The other coworkers nodded their heads but didn't really understand. I nodded my head and hoped for a secret fire inside of the warehouse too.

When I returned to work I kept my hands away from the walls, the boxes, the chains that hung above. Then time passed and I forgot about the firemen and the invisible fires. There was a break. There was a lunch. There was moving of boxes to other parts of the warehouse to make room for incoming boxes. There was a break. There was a drive home. There was a bed. There was the feeling of forgetting something important.

(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)

Everyone is tired now and this makes it easy to create new holidays. I made cards for "Face Kissing Day" and placed them in the greeting card racks between the "Thank You" and "Thinking of You" cards. None of the employees at the grocery store noticed me place the cards. I wait to see a tired man or a tired woman browse through the greeting card section. I wait to see that tired man or tired woman to notice the "Face Kissing Day" cards and panic because they think they have forgotten "Face Kissing Day." They will buy the cards. They will give the cards. Everyone is tired now and will accept a new holiday. A day where many faces are kissed. In truth, I created the holiday because want a stranger to kiss me on the face. Someone I have never met who would hand me a "Face Kissing Day" card and ask to kiss my face. I would let them kiss my face and then surprise I would then pull out a "Face Kissing Day" card and kiss them on the face. I wait for someone to buy my cards. I wait and make my face noticeable.

(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)

I wasn't sure I was awake. She came to my bed. It had been so long. I asked about her husband. She said we didn't need to talk about him, because we were inside my dream. She said we could have sex again. Then, the sun cut through the window at an angle and I knew it was time to leave for work. I placed her under my bed. Folded her into as neat of a square as I could. I drove to work at the mall and thought about her waiting for me under the bed and hoped she was occupied. She wore yellow panties again. I often think about the first time I undressed her and discovered them.

Now, a yellow Mustang speeds past on the interstate and it reminds me of her yellow panties. Now, many yellow Mustangs pass me on the interstate. Now, they rush in a wave. Now, they rush in a flood. I can't find the mall. I can't find my job.

(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)(~_~)

Everyone is tired now, even the gas station attendant. A woman spills fresh coffee on the counter, the floor, her hands. I paid for gas and returned to my car. Placed the pump in my car. The wind was a bone wind. It blew through and vibrated my bones in a painful way. I sat in my car. I thought about how easy it would be to create new holidays by creating fake greeting cards to place in the racks at stores. If there was a new kind of card for a new holiday in a variety of stores then people who buy cards would buy cards for my new holiday. I couldn't think of a new holiday though. I thought about the traditions of the fall holidays. How they arrived through biological needs. It was a way for mates to meet. It was a way for mates to drink and celebrate, then later undress and breed.

Please Write Clearly
By Sophie Collins
Art by Michael Inscoe



Please write clearly

Upon waking I reached instinctively for my chest, where I expected to find the surgeon's incision. It was in fact much lower down— an inch or so above the navel, and really very small. I noticed a jar had been placed on the bedside unit, presumably so that I should inspect the contents out of morbid curiosity. Smaller than expected, they were no larger than bees and darker than damp soil. Having ascertained that the drugs had not much affected me, the nurse discharged me later that day. By this time the contents of the jar were wasting visibly; some resting motionless on the base, others fluttering despondently against its sides. They did not react well to daylight, and would have perished immediately if touched. On my way through the car park I saw them being loaded into a vehicle along with hundreds of other similar jars. I spotted mine almost instantly, nestled between a jar of filthy water, and another that contained a single glowing pebble.

Mise en scène

I found myself in an unfamiliar room with a large window whose curtains were drawn. In the centre of the room were a number of chairs arranged in a semi-circle, taking into account the composition of the scene and the man with the large video camera behind me. Slumped in the chairs were most of my friends and immediate family and one or two acquaintances— all were bound, gagged and unconscious. Uncertain of what to do, I turned and looked to the cameraman for direction, but he kept one eye on the viewfinder and the other firmly shut. A small red light to next to the lens showed that he was filming and, after a few seconds, he gestured at me in such a way as to say ‘turn around’, so I turned around and out of the corner of my eye I saw the curtain move. For a moment, I thought that it was in my mind, but then I noticed the feet of most of my friends and immediate family and one or two acquaintances poking out from beneath, only they were also somehow still out cold and tied to the chairs and I thought ‘this whole thing is a test, or a trick’, so I touched the nearest person’s cheek, which happened to be the cheek of my sister, and it was warm and I could see that she was breathing, but when I looked over at the curtain again I could see what were undeniably her feet, and suddenly I realised what it was I had to do. I took off my shoes.

Virtually

Bear in mind the lure of your neck’s nape (dank and listless as a symbol) and the clandestine dark of your self. Certainly, that it was impromptu— made up. Lean on facts. Accept what you have done. Write a poem and hum.

I once had a whim and I had to obey it

I had had whims before. I once had a whim to visit a psychic, which I fulfilled, leaving with advice to avoid water and women named Maria. This whim was different. It took hold of me while in the attic one afternoon, when I noticed a day moon which seemed to me to be much larger than usual. The longer I looked at it, the more I found myself unwilling to move, and soon I began sleeping during the day in order to stay awake from dusk until daybreak. Early one morning, my wife confronted me bolstered by a planetary anger, but I didn’t look at her once as she raged at and eventually pleaded with me to come away from the skylight. When she had finished she stood, silent, for several minutes, before finally I felt her move back and down the narrow staircase. On the seventeenth day, I looked away, but found that I could think of nothing other than the moon’s surface, those vast frozen pools of ancient lava, her lunar soil, and how I longed to lay down and cover myself in it, like a child creating snow angels, breathing in the savoury scent of spent gunpowder as I did so.

We Are All Learning To Apprehend Things Outside of Ourselves

By Peiyu Loh

Art by Larissa Garcia



i. make some polite conversation with me

fact is, consciousness exists in sad isolation
people speak in streams of consciousness
and try not to alienate the right ones, the ones with focused eyes

check yourself, are you speaking in a stream of consciousness

my stream of consciousness is touching the hand of yours
asking for understanding

when i speak to you on the phone my words are actually a coded scream for you to
plumb my metaphorical depths

the ones you make exceptions for are the hard ones
the lesson to be learnt here is they do not hear you when you scream
it fucks up the sound waves is what they tell you

ii. the death of my projections of you

the narrative arc of this story is

i think about you

i think about you

i think about you

i decide to forget you

the way i do that is by

dissociating emotion from the image of your face

the motif of expectation is also the motif of forgetting

you will change your mind about me

but when you do

i would already have changed mine about you

sorry but i am not sorry

iii. candy

when you came to me soft

shame so unabashed it was want of shame

i was hard

i thought

put your walls up and only then will i take them down for you

and then you took mine down

our pain does not do justice to pain

who cares

we are crying because we secretly enjoy it

we kiss in the curtained darkness of your living room

we kiss on the floor

we kiss on your sheets

we suck candy out of each other's mouths

we watch a sad movie in which i try very hard to cry

you say my hair is beautiful when it is wet

i don't believe that

but i believe you

and that is what matters i guess

i am not enough for love

not enough to do loving
but i am making the decision to love you anyway
and that is also what matters i guess

the night i cried
i cried for beginnings and endings
i cried for how the temporality of everything is another way of saying nothing matters
i cried for how you proved me wrong and that was showing me how i was right in the first
place

settle for things that are not your expectations and then tell yourself that you are not
settling

Dampness

By Lily Dawn

Art by Jenn Kucharczyk



Sometimes it's a noise.

In my dream, Jacob is sitting across from me. "What's the golden rule?" he asks.

I feel confused. I don't understand the question.

"You said you were here because of the golden rule."

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," I say, "but you don't believe in angels."

Jacob smiles.

I wake up on the hardwood floor of my bedroom, soaked in cold sweat.

Jacob doesn't get out of bed when I let myself in his house.

His bedroom smells like old things. Old people. Dying.

His bedroom smells like dying. There are no lights on.

His bedroom is a graveyard of dark old things.

I hand him a nondescript piece of fruit and an open cup of Kool-Aid.

There is a snow storm on the outside and the Kool-Aid has frozen.

Jacob is covered in cold sweat and the cup of frozen Kool-Aid slips out of his hand.

He briefly reacts to an imagined spill before realizing the Kool-Aid is ice.

"What kind of magic did you use to keep this so cold in the middle of summer?" he says.

The curtains are drawn. For Jacob, it is always July.

"It's January today," I reply.

"I know. I'm covered in sweat. I'm drenched."

Jacob is entombed under a large pile of blankets. He kicks them off until there is only one.

"It's cold now," he says.

I lay down like a dog on the new sweaty pile of blankets on the floor.

I am man's best friend.

"What is the golden rule?" Jacob asks.

I feel scared. I sit up. "This is weird," I say.

"What did you mean when you said you were here, because of the golden rule? What is it?"

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," I say.

"That's a commandment. There is no God," Jacob's eyes are wide. They scare me.

"Treat others the way you want to be treated. It's just the right thing to do," I say.

"I don't believe in angels," Jacob says.

"I know," and I feel afraid.

"Paul," I say, "Look at your feet. You're not wearing any shoes."

"I know," Paul says, "Why is your face wet?"

"I always cry when I drink Kool-Aid," I say, "and tomatoes always make me puke."

"There are no tomatoes here," Paul sits next to me on the porch.

"Of course not," I say, "What brings you to town?"

"It's way too hot where I live right now," Paul says, "Plus I'm looking for some new shoes."

"I have some shoes you'll love. They're kind of green. I never wear them."

I go in. I come out with the shoes. Paul is happy. He puts the shoes on over his sockless feet.

"Why don't you want these?" Paul asks.

"I always cry when I wear those shoes," I say, "I wore them to a funeral once, and now whenever I wear them, my mind gets transported back to that funeral, and I'm stuck there in that sweltering graveyard until I take them off again."

"You're giving me your funeral shoes," Paul says, "Thank you."

"I'll never have to go to another funeral again," I say, "This is the apex of those loafers' existence."

My skin is damp and tugging at my clothes.

I answer a knock on the door. The mailman hands me a package.

"Thank you," I say and close the door. I watch him leave through the window.

He is the happiest mailman alive.

I tear the tape off of the box.

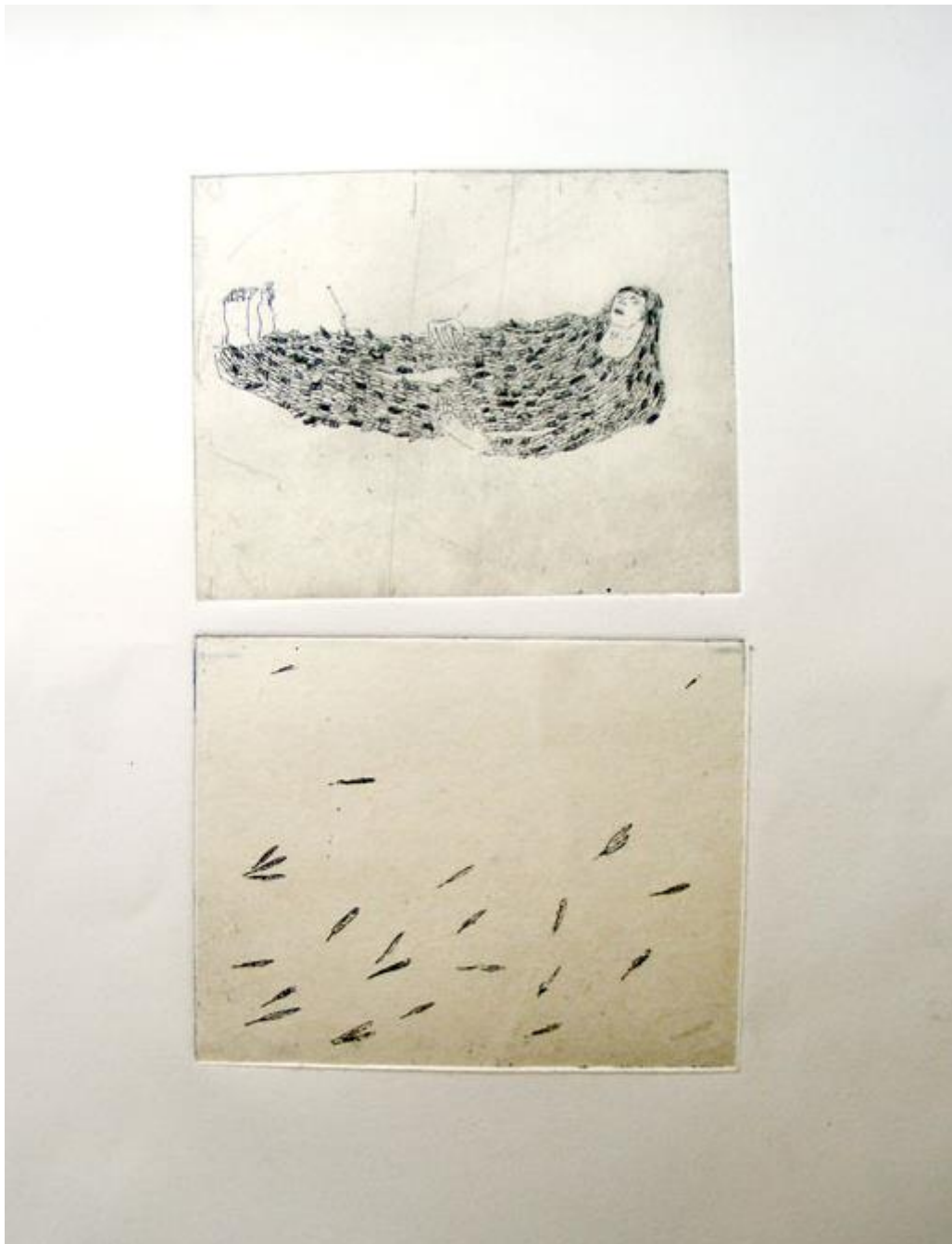
I watch myself pull out my old green shoes and a frozen glass of Kool-Aid.

A note at the bottom looks at me,

"you're going to need these."

If Reporters Chased Me & Asked me for a comment on
the universe, I would say I agree with it

By Leo Frank
Art By Tommy Doyle



ok ok ok

im serious though, please listen:

a book told me all the US flags on the moon are faded to white.
a book told me that the natural inclination of the universe is to be
infinitely still & cold.

i stand on a tall thing & feel ok with the view.
anywhere you can think to place the tall thing,
i plan to stand on it there and feel ok with the view there.
i am 'fine with anything.'

but still. i am trying to make an impression. i
spit on your rug & leave through the wrong door.

as a ghost i haunt the automatic doors at your
local walmart. i trigger the motion sensors with my ghost body: the doors
open & close
& i watch, floating an inch above the ground & calmly thinking
'anarchy' to myself.

(this doing & undoing does me fine)

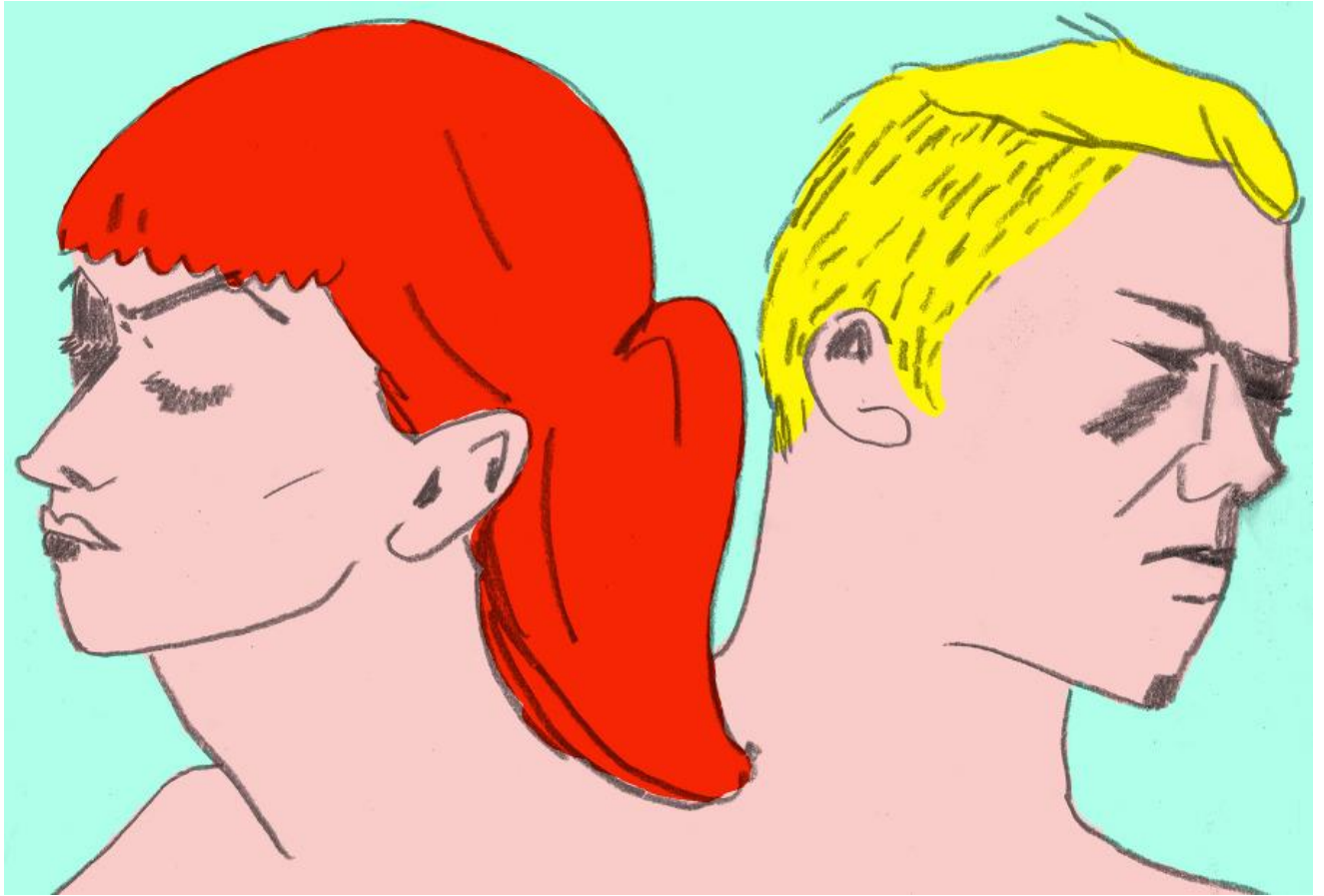
but still. a book told me the only flags left on the moon were white ones
& another book told me that someday all energy would leak away,
leaving the universe infinitely still & cold.

but still. the muscles that move your eyes remind me that a small number of things
have been, are currently, & will for a while longer, be warm. our highest duty is this:
stay together on a rock & be warm at the universe.

Saturday Night Babestation Viewer

By Giles Ruffer

Art by Anna Crooks



The first I hear about dinner, I decide I don't like the sound of it at all. I never have. Penny says I have to behave and makes me promise that I will. She does this over the phone on her lunch break.

After she gets back from work, has a shower, changes her clothes and is ready, we leave the flat and walk into town. It snowed this morning and some still hangs in the leaves and branches of the bushes next to the pavement. But most has melted to slush now.

As we walk, we look straight ahead. We hold hands. Our conversation is something like murmurs. We know what these noises mean.

We turn a corner. Twenty feet beneath us a train runs past. Over a cast-iron fence, the lights and dim outline of carriages can be seen as it passes through the town, not slowing to stop.

We turn again. We are on The Broadway.

The Broadway is the road that essentially makes up the entire town center. There are several restaurants on The Broadway, but no pubs. There is Café Rouge, Peking Palace,

Prezzo's and a place called Zanzibar's, which neither of us has ever been in. There are also some other places I can't remember the names of.

Penny lifts her hand to a couple waiting by the entrance of Café Rouge. They both wave, smile, and say hello in a variety of different ways.

'Hi, I'm Nina,' says a woman in her mid-thirties, maybe. 'Nice to meet you. Penny's told us a lot about you.'

A man standing next to her who looks like he might be another ten years older—or not (I'm not very good with age)—says, 'Nothing bad, don't worry!'

'She hasn't told you about the beatings then?' I laugh. And then apologise when no one else does.

On the way in Penny nudges me in the back of my knee making me temporarily lose my balance. I suspect this is on purpose but she looks at me with an innocent expression when I ask her what she thinks she is doing.

We take our seats on a table for four, each couple next to their partners with Ben opposite Penny, and Nina opposite me. Penny reaches for my hand underneath the table while looking straight ahead. I look at her side-profile, the shape of her nose and lips, the curve of her chin into her neck.

The conversation moves on and I listen quietly. I begin to examine the couple opposite. Out of boredom, I imagine what it is like when they have sex. Aggressive, I conclude.

I brush my hand over the sleeve where I had earlier burnt myself with a fork. I can feel my skin itch.

The waiter arrives with a bottle of wine. Ben asks if he can try some first and the waiter pours a mouthful into his glass. I imagine Ben spitting the wine out in disgust, eyes clenched, cheeks puffed, a ridiculous amount of wine coming back out – more than he has taken in.

I like Ben, I decide. He is a character.

He rinses the wine around his mouth, swallows, smiles and nods to the waiter. The waiter pours wine into everyone else's glasses. The waiter asks if we are ready to order. I realise I have not even looked at my menu yet and am surprised to see that everyone else is relatively sure of what they want to eat. The waiter says he will return in a moment.

I watch him walk to the counter before I leave the table, telling everyone I need to pee.

On my way, I pass a family. A girl in her early teens—the oldest of four children— sits, distant, clearly wishing to be somewhere else as she watches her younger siblings fight. The father asks her what she wants to eat and she replies with a loud sigh and a stare out of the window, away from the family.

When I return to our table, all three of them are looking, pointing and laughing at something on one of the menus. I look at the cover my menu, folded in front of where I had been sitting. I stand behind my chair and gently push it back under the table.

'I...,' I stutter. 'I think I'm gonna head off. I'm not feeling too well.'

I am told to stay but I have already made up my mind.

I bend down to kiss Penny on the temple and pull away with a strand of her hair in my mouth. I pull it out, give it back and say goodbye.

—

I walk into the flat, taking off my coat and scarf, removing my shoes with my feet, leaving the laces loose but still tied. I go to the bedroom and pick up the laptop that has been left to charge on the dresser, check my emails, look at a soup maker I am bidding on on eBay, then turn off the laptop, placing it on the floor.

I undress and walk naked to the bathroom, let the shower run for a minute and sit on the toilet.

I watch for steam but the water does not heat up. The boiler has this button you press and a red light comes on and then after sometime there is hot water. I press the button. This is going to take a while, I realise, so I wrap a towel around my waist and sit on the sofa in front of the TV.

Some time passes and I get up to go to the bathroom again and come back with a wad of toilet paper.

Not long after, Penny walks through the front door. I look up and rewrap the towel over my lap.

'You're back early,' I say.

She begins to laugh, astonished, and looks at the TV then back at me.

'What is this,' she says.

She knows what it is.

She begins to mimic the facial expressions of one of the girls, lying on her stomach in her underwear, talking on a phone.

Penny is very bad at impressions.

I turn the TV off with the remote as she moves towards me. She seems drunk. She grins and looks at me as she removes the towel from my lap.

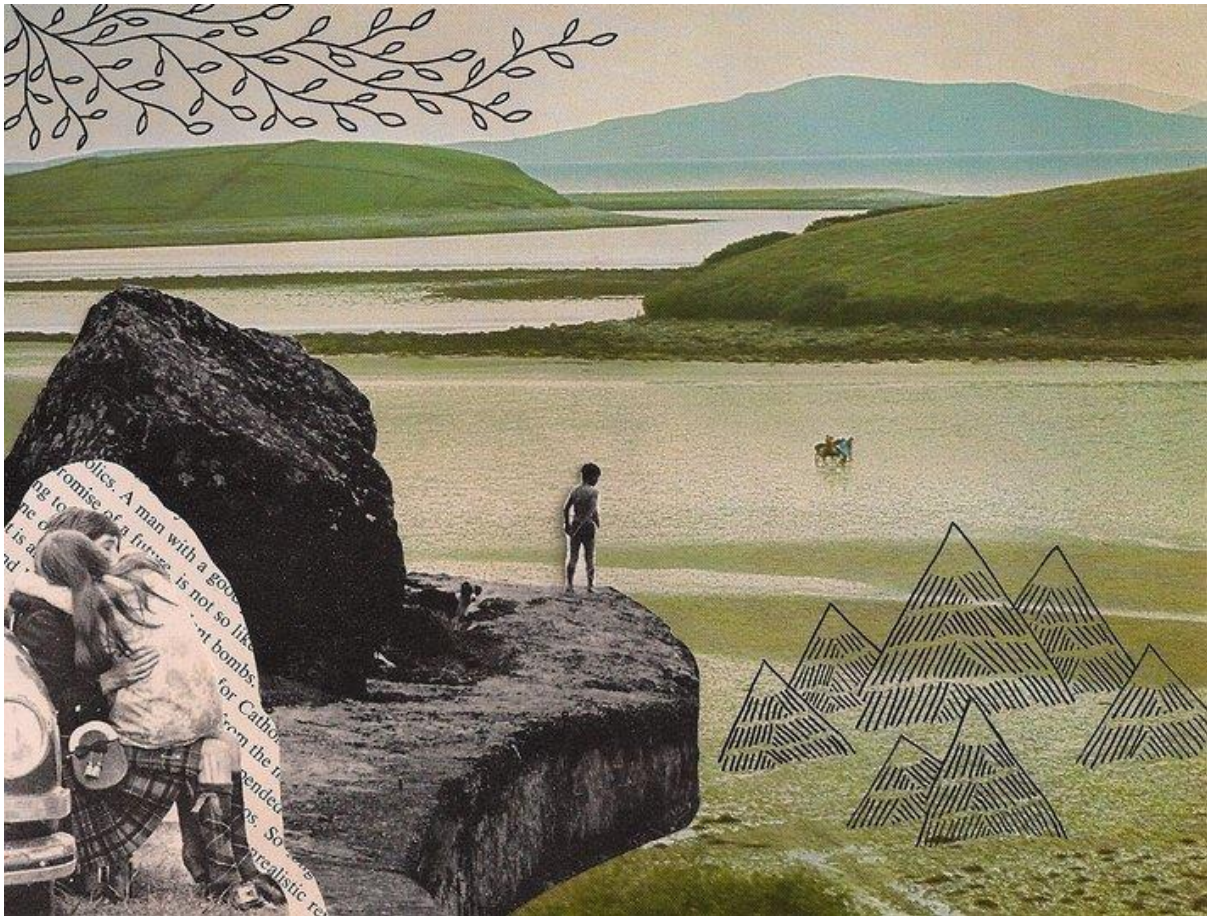
'Sorry,' I say.

As she leans in to kiss me on the mouth, the muscles in my neck tighten, almost involuntarily, pulling my head away from her.

We make eye contact for a long moment before she turns away from me.

Moving Home

By Meggie Green
Art by Sarah Jean Alexander



I.

When I move home from New York with Natalie in July, we take 81-South through the Appalachians and I drive most of the way while she plays with her phone and props her bare feet against the dash. We're wearing jean shorts and our hair is up and we listen to whole albums by Third Eye Blind and Fleetwood Mac through battery-powered purple speakers we bought at a Walmart near Ocean City.

The mountains loom ahead of us and everything's green and glowing in the sunlight, and the way the road stretches out and then bends back into itself makes me think of the tiny road that winds up the mountain back home. From the top you can see small farming towns and the Arkansas River, which in the early morning is obscured by another river of fog. There are moles and wild turkeys and trees that at their midsections grow horizontally for 12-15 inches and then back up again, creating makeshift chairs of varying heights. At night the fog crawls back over the river and animal shapes are lost to the darkness, but their noises carry through the trees, rhythmic and slow.

II.

We stop twice in Pennsylvania, first for coffee and then to eat Subway sandwiches. I put chips on my Veggie Delight and smash them between the bread and realize I only do that when I feel comfortable around someone. I tell Natalie this and she smiles. I say the last time I ate Subway I sat in my car in a hospital parking deck while outside the weight of snow bent branches to the ground. I put chips on my sandwich and watched the sunrise and stared at the dark red specks on my fingernails I got from holding a bag of my mom's blood that drained from a thin tube attached to her upper thigh. She ate jello and watched "Wife Swap" and when the bag got full I carried it to the bathroom and emptied it into the toilet. The room was so cold that I wore my jacket and scarf while I slept, and when I woke up my mom was moving her toes in small circles.

When I think of my mom's long hair falling over her hospital gown I think of the old house, of her stepping out of the bathtub and wrapping a towel around herself, her dark hair dripping and pools of water collecting on the tile floor. I think of her in my room at night, smoothing my hair, checking for snakes, rubbing my back until I fell asleep.

I think of how I treat my stuffed animals and boyfriends and dogs with the same learned tenderness, how I still have a strong urge to rub his back until he falls asleep because it's pleasing and reassuring and asks for nothing, and that seems like the kindest thing you can give a sleepy person.

III.

It's storming and we're still wired from Adderall when we stop at a Motel 6 in Virginia. We discuss driving 8 hours out of the way to go to the beach the next day, and I tell Natalie it feels like we're trying to prolong the trip and not move home at all. She nods and says she knows. After we take showers and dry our hair we go to a gas station for beer and snacks, and we fall asleep on the bed looking at our phones and eating Doritos. In the morning we wake up late and hungover and don't go to the beach, and I have a text that says, "I just walked into my room and was surprised to not see you, peripherally, in my bed."

I think of his room the first time I saw it when I knocked on his door two years ago, and seeing it again when we left yesterday morning. There were stacks of papers on his desk secured by bobby pins of mine he'd found in the sheets. I think of waking up in a warm square of refracted sunlight on his bed and feeling momentarily confused by the speed of light through glass.

IV.

In North Carolina we drive through a long tunnel that delivers us to the other side of the Smoky Mountains. When the sun finds us again our pupils constrict and adjust to the daylight. I think about when he visited me three months ago, about the cab ride back to my apartment, how our driver stopped to get chicken nuggets and in the drive-thru I lay my head on his lap and looked up at his beard, the broad slope of his nose, the menu's fluorescent lights caught in his glasses. I think about how our hands found each other through our coats and when he leaned his head over mine I closed my eyes and watched the darkness grow and thought of a small animal in the shadow of a larger animal.

I am always thinking of him in terms of animals, and if two people are ultimately unknowable to each other, then an animal must be more unknowable still. I regard him with the same stubborn concern that I do the dog, and yet her loyalty is unmatched by his. My immutable

idiot love for him is maybe not love, but then what is the gnawing feeling I get for nonhuman animals whose kind eyes belie a fundamental lacking?

V.

I think of the last time I called him from my roof, how I dangled my feet over the ledge while he read me a poem by his friend, how I cried silently when he said, "And no one has leaned over and kissed me for a long time." I wiped my nose on my sleeve and said, "That's really good." I told him that when we got off the phone I'd send him a picture of the sun going down over the bay so he'd get to see two sunsets.

Each state we drive through is made more colorful by its own highway wildflower program, and in Arkansas this time of year the roads are lined on either side by Ox-Eyed Daisies and Purple Coneflowers. When I talk to him on the phone I want to live inside the phone call and not where I'm calling from. When I drive toward him on 40-West my whole body feels like a nervous engine and my stomach is where it shakes the most.

VI.

I text my mom when we cross the Mississippi and she texts back emoticons that mean she's very excited to see me. I imagine lying on the kitchen floor while the dog licks my face and sniffs my bags, my grandma drinking wine and playing online poker, my dad on the mountain wearing a wide-brimmed hat and carrying armfuls of branches to the fire.

I think of pounding beers with my sister and then walking alone and tipsy to his house and standing on his front porch, wondering if he'll hug me and how tightly, what'll be different about his room, whether he'll look at me when I'm not looking and look away when I look at him. I text him a picture of a sign that means we're an hour from Little Rock.

I glance at my phone and feel like I have to pee but decide I can hold it until Natalie has to go too. There are beads of sweat on her nose and our knees are pink from the heat radiating through the windshield. I roll down my window when we cross the river and watch the shadow of the U-Haul move across the bright, rolling water. Natalie's driving the last stretch of the trip and as the sun gets lower it hits her hair and she and the sky behind her are the same golden color. I look at our city's sparse skyline and think of the curves of his arms, the hair that snakes around his ribs, the way he folds his towels. I feel tired and think of the things I say that mean, "I have made myself believe you are essential to me." When our exit gets close Natalie plays her favorite Usher song and we both sing along with windblown hair, and somewhere deep in my belly I feel like I got off at the wrong stop or boarded the wrong flight, like I am hurtling dumb and witless to a dead place.

If I Lived in Vegas, I'd Be Married 7 Times Over

By Jacob Steinberg
Art by Genesis Crespo



I want to dress up and run through the streets,
shouting spells like a madman who thinks he's a warlock.
I am a madman who thinks he's in love
Wandering back and forth,
seeking to prophesy our future.
The emotions within me cannot be settled,
and that is why I had to flee home.
I'm tossing croissant crumbs and
counting as I throw.
He loves me...
He loves me not...
One.

Two.

Three.

And poof, do you love me?

I wish things could be easy.
I wish you would kiss me.
If youth was just a huge nest of fuck 'em and forget-about-em
adulthood is a rock in Iceland, waiting for someone to kick it.

And when you are sad, cling to the one you love.
And when you feel alone, dissolve into your surroundings.

I wish you would sleep in my bed.
I wish I could tie you up so you'd never leave.
I wish I could cross your fingers with mine,
and once again, just kiss you.

A blue smoke is drawn around me
and it makes me delirious.
I picture myself at your side
and everything is alright.

Put my heart in a ziploc
and save it for tomorrow;
Because from now on I am yours,
like a trustworthy canine...

Or an Orthodox woman.

New York Rose

By Leo Stillinger
Art By Mitch Ryan



Amelia felt like a human lung. Sitting on the balcony of her apartment she watched wind rise and fall, and birds living in trees. She smoked a sad cigarette and thought about how the cigarette was fulfilling its life dream of being smoked. She casually fingered the cell phone in her pocket, thinking about what it would contain, thinking about icicles in March, and pollution. She moved her eyebrows up and down like a caterpillar.

“It would be better if things weren’t this way,” she half-said to the air. She tried to think of kind people but everybody seemed mean. I know kind people, she thought; I have friends. She wanted a ghost to come and comfort her, to wrap her in a warm blanket. Amelia wondered if it was too early or too late to go to bed and decided it was certainly one or the other. She drank a Clementine flavored Izzie soda in a wine glass and watched the sun set and thought, against her own will, I thought it would be better than this.

Things feel romantic in a lonely way for Amelia. She remembered her kind friends and smiled and felt sad because you’re fucking up if you have kind friends and are lonely, her sister told her once. She felt too hot inside, like her internal fan was broken. “I could use a haircut,” she said, “or a cat.”

Amelia lived in the future. An exciting place.

A future city had been built secretly in the Middle East. Amelia read newspaper articles about it and thought, I could live there. But things would only be worse. She stared blankly at her father's paperback copy of *On the Road*, unread for 20 years, trying to feel something, in a daze. With tired eyes. Amelia tried to whisper "Fuck" and succeeded.

Amelia's phone rang as she was putting on her pajamas. She answered it nude. "Hello," she said. "Amelia," said the voice, "hey, we should do something, yeah?"

"Yeah, sure, okay," she said.

"Sweet."

"Like what," said Amelia.

"Uh, Marty and Julie were coming over to mine tomorrow night, if you'd like to come."

"Oh, yeah, sweet, that would be nice, yeah," said Amelia.

"Alright. We'll probably jaunt around town a bit. Go to a record store. You know."

I DON'T KNOW thought Amelia forcefully and ecstatically.

"Alright, uh, sounds good," she said. "What time?"

"Uh, six, I guess."

"Okay, sweet. Thank you."

Amelia's kind friend Brian said sure and hung up. Amelia jumped up and down naked on her bed. This is pathetic, she thought while jumping, but important. Amelia felt like a swarm of bumblebees.

Amelia fell asleep thinking of clouds. Her apartment was warm and empty and she smiled as she dreamed and woke up and brushed her teeth. Amelia thought about human teeth and whales and lungs and rust and paperback novels, a set of ideas that put a clear aesthetic in her mind, of brown coats and beige burlap sacks and boats and gray skies. Amelia lay on her bed and watched her mind drive through empty Bavarian planes in vintage film. Amelia thought, when I was younger the future was more of an adventure, but it is just sitting and doing things. I want to see things, not do things. She smiled because she knew that she had actually not been doing anything for a month, and the city was so large, but it was like a giant trash dump and she was a sad fly.

Amelia thought, I am going out tonight. I will have pleasant experiences with people who are my friends. Yes. Amelia ate a peanut butter sandwich at 2:32 for lunch and then ate a pink otter pop and it snowed briefly and she went outside and watched snow happily and then it was 5:54 and Amelia thought of an exclamation point three times as she put on nice clothes and got in her car and drove to kind Brian's house.

She rang the doorbell and Brian answered and she went in and everything was nice. There was a living room and Marty and Julie were there, and another person, a person with a sweater and dark jeans, dang this person looked good.

"Hey what's up?" said Marty.

"Oh not much," said Amelia.

"Well, we're all here," said Brian.

"Should we do something," said Marty.

.

Amelia thought, we're a gang! and her emotions smiled.

The gang walked on the street together. Julie had brought a Polaroid camera and Amelia thought, oh my god, I'll have flattering retro polaroids for Facebook, and smiled broadly. Everywhere was lights. Lights and music. It all floated. Amelia felt like a dog and the world was a dog bone. Everything sparkled. They went into a subway and found themselves in a different part of town.

"This is a good jaunt," said Amelia.

"Yes it is," said the mysterious person laughing.

Haha, thought Amelia. I said something and the person laughed.

"We should go to an art gallery," said Brian.

"Yeah alright," said everyone.

They walked into an art gallery and there was a band playing in the corner and the guitarist had gauges in his ears and there were people with purple hair. And the music was even good.

"Did you guys read about that city in the Middle East?" said Brian.

"Yeah," said Julie. "The Middle East is some crazy shit."

"Imagine living there," said Brian.

"Seems like there will be some kind of Godzilla thing that attacks it," said Amelia.

"Yeah," said Brian. "That will be cool."

They walked out of the art gallery and into the night, and Amelia violently remembered a swing-set in her childhood, besides a line of train tracks, where she'd go with her sister, and then later with her various boyfriends, how she'd get pushed and feel romantic, how everything seemed so small, how the world was so big and one day she would just jump on the train and ride it to the city, she'd have to do that soon, she thought on the swings.

And Amelia though Haha towards life and irony and friends and loneliness, she thought Haha I did it, and she walked with her gang to a Starbucks and drank coffee and posed for a Polaroid which made her look very cosmopolitan and happy.

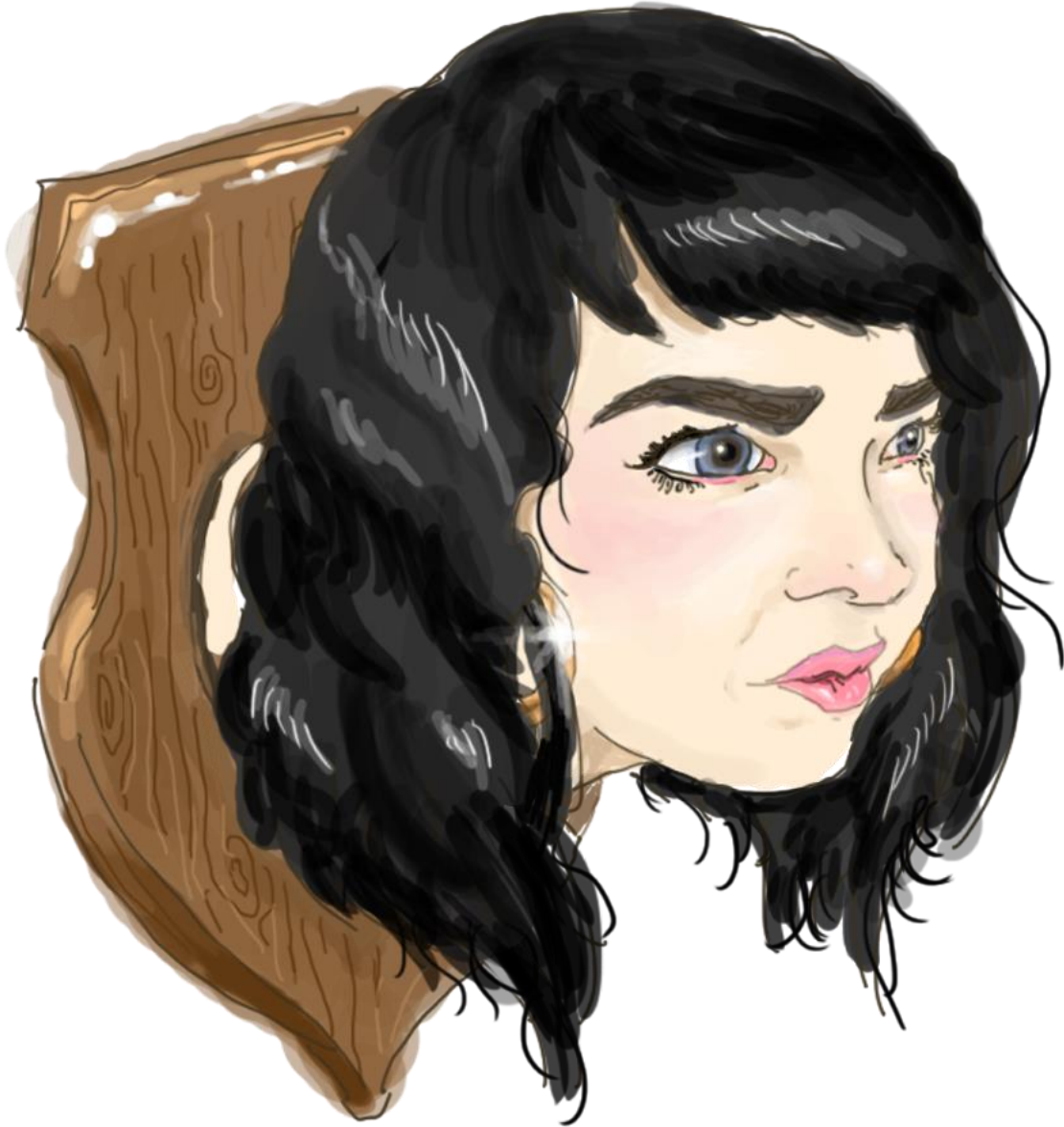
Amelia thought, what if the person comes home with me, and the person did not, which was a relief somewhat because it meant that her night was safe and clean and nothing would ruin it. They took a subway back and walked to Brian's house and Amelia said "thank you" seven more times than she should have, and as she drove home she felt like a butterfly.

Amelia saw colorful stars on the ceiling of her bedroom as she lay in bed and tried to think, Everything is not completely okay, there are still problems, I still have problems, but she couldn't think that, not honestly. Suddenly everything seemed very quiet, in a different way than before. Amelia falls asleep like a yawning cat, and the world is silent for a moment; and then, somehow, somewhere, the world makes a sound.

Head

By Patrick Lee

Art by Stephen Michael McDowell



When my friend Lucy died from suicide at age thirty-two she put up her head for auction.

This annoyed me greatly as I had been promised her head. Even though she had warned me it might be in high demand.

She had promised me the head and I'd said I would put it on a plinth in my living room. She first made me this promise at age 24 and I had imagined my living room as having a fire and a fine mantel and a child to run past Lucy's head, which would either be in a screaming expression, or in a twisted, sneering expression. I didn't ever really think Lucy could do a neutral facial expression. Her eyes became too wide and her mouth in a straight line actually went down a little bit and she looked pleading, rather than neutral. It was the expression she

used when she wanted an energy drink.

I would tell my child, in my head a four year old little girl with brown hair who was cute and running and disorientated, to be mindful of the plinth because we didn't want Lucy's head falling on the floor. The little girl (Amy? Anna?) would be totally fine with it because it had been there since she was born. My Polish wife would polish the head when cleaning. Sometimes I'd be walking by humming a little tune and would see the head and stop and breathe on the forehead and then rub it with my elbow until it was squeaky-clean. Then I'd pick it up and put it right in the faces of our dinner guests and say "booyeah!" No, it would be just be very well polished and I'd feel that Lucy's expression was turned to me a little more, a little happier, in her horrible eternal twisted expression in death.

But she didn't leave me the head. She went and put it up for auction instead and so I had to go to a worn-out cold warehouse in Blackburn in Northern England where seats had been set up and Lucy's possessions were just another load of itemized objects. There was the harp; her type writer; manuscripts; recordings; her huge fern; an old record player; the skull of a former lover which she used to keep on her desk and requested to be buried with but complicated legal matters had prevented; a painting of her in the nude by a now highly successful artist; her pet baby gazelle which was in a cage and kept bleating and whenever it did a strange sneaky looking man came and poked it with an electrified stick, forcing it to make an electrified bleating sound which was basically a high pitched buzz noise; and then there was her embalmed head, facing us all.

The harp sold first and made the most money.

I was resentful of the harp and the couple who bought it, who had no musical taste and whose friendship with Lucy I had never approved of. He was a stifling Wall Street type who seemed to speak through his sinuses and she was an unbearable gossip. I had no idea of Lucy's affinity with them. She had even dedicated her most renowned novel, Icarus, to the wife.

I didn't bid on anything yet. A well-dressed man taking bids via phone, believed by most there to be a representative for a connection in the music community, bought the gazelle, the fern and all her old recordings. He bid a huge sum and nobody competed with him.

Finally it was time to bid for the head. I immediately bid £100 and was shocked by an immediate rebuttal: £500 by the small, sneaky looking man who had been taming the gazelle. He was holding his bowler hat at chest level and was twirling it around and hopping from foot to foot and making strange, posh sneering noises. He was probably just over five feet tall. He looked at me and then the head and then back at me and made an alarming, posh sneering expression.

I bid £600 but again he immediately bettered me, offering £1000.

Lucy had been my great friend. I had recently read through all our correspondences and felt remorse at how much of what she said I had misunderstood. She had so many ideas I failed to act upon. She had always told me the date at which she planned to die, and how she planned to do it, but I hadn't even called her before she did it.

I bid £1500. £500 over my limit.

He shot right back £2500.

It sold.

The little man clicked his heels and began making small, self-congratulatory noises under his nose. He twirled through the crowd and I saw him politely decline the plinth using a gesture of waving his hands, and instead impatiently grab Lucy's embalmed head from the auctioneer who was still on stage and was speaking down to the man and who looked dismayed and re-adjusted his monocle as the strange little man walked off, holding Lucy's head lovingly. The small man was staring at my friend's head as he walked as if it were the head of a lover. A lover who was alive and in the prime of health and joie de vivre.

Just as the little man left the dusty warehouse door I saw his caressing hand stroke further down Lucy's face, and he inserted one of his fingers into her mouth. Lucy's expression was in terrified screaming position and also seemed quizzical.

I pushed through the crowd and into the car park. Most people were jostling in the lines to enter the new underground road system, and several were mounting their different forms of transport. The sneaky man was heading for one of the only traditional motor vehicles around: a large white van.

As I got closer I heard him making the strange, eel like sneering noise while struggling with his possessions, keys, and Lucy's head.

He opened the doors to his van, paused, and then threw Lucy's head with all his might high into the back. I heard a very large crash as she hit the back wall of the van. He made a delighted little sneer and a high-pitched gleeful sound.

I planned on breaking in and taking the head, but I saw him chain and lock the van's back doors with two huge chains and padlocks. I thought of Lucy's head, and her headless corpse underground, and her sad neutral face expression that she tried to use in life.

I ran to the van window and banged hard on the window. The van was very high. The window was rolled down and instead of seeing the small dwarfish man, I saw a large, vested man, with stains on his vest, smoking the very last vestiges of a cigarette, which he spit out of the van by my feet, and then he began to wheeze.

"Please, I have to know, is there anything I can do to get that head? She was one of my best friends."

The large man looked across to the smaller dwarf, who was making excited noises to himself and was staring straight ahead, excitedly kicking his feet which did not reach the floor. The driver looked back down to me and said "I don't think so mate."

I looked up at him, squinting from the sun that was above the van.

I said, "please"

He shook his head and went "na"

I said "For God sake, what does he intend to use it for? He could have smashed her all up throwing her into the van like that. Why does he want her in the first place? Lucy would never know him. What will he even do with her head?"

He looked across again at the dwarf, who was making "come along" sounds and was waving his limp, downward facing hand forward, gesturing he wished to leave. The bigger man started the engine and lit another cigarette.

"Trust me mate, you don't want to know."

I continued to protest and as the van started to move the dwarf started squealing with delight and turned to face me and began moving his arms and legs around in fast circular movements and then they drove from sight.

They drove from the car park and into the high sun burning onto the long, empty fields of Lancashire wasteland. I would never see her face again.

"That's why you don't put your head up for auction," I thought.

Toads

By Kelsea Basye
Art by Emily Horn



“Well, the difference between toads and frogs is, a toad lives on land and in trees, and frogs live in water.”

“Cute,” I said. “Toads and frogs. Can I get a frog?”

“Yeah. Get a frog.”

We drove to PetCo to get a frog. At PetCo I walked directly toward the fish section. The fish section was a long rectangular alcove with black walls that was lit mostly by bright white aquarium lights. The white lights were filtered blue through the fish tanks. I stood twenty feet away from the fish section and vibrated with excitement.

“Where are you going?”

“To get a frog,” I said.

“The frogs are probably in the reptile section.”

“Frogs aren’t reptiles,” I said. “Frogs are amphibians.”

“Fish are fish.”

The fish tanks lined the three walls of the fish section. Leading up to the fish section were several aisles with fish tanks, bags of pebbles, bags of marbles, tank decorations, fish food, and other fish supplies. There was also a small shelf that had a dozen small plastic jars each containing a single betta fish. I walked down the aisle that mostly displayed tank decorations, and stopped to look at several plastic marine plants.

"I want a real plant," I said, while twisting a sprig of green artificial hairgrass around itself. One of the walls of the fish section held tanks with salt water fish. The other two walls were for the freshwater fish. To one side of the fish section was a white cooler about the size of a normal household refrigerator. Near the freshwater fish was a free-standing tank with maybe six hundred goldfish. Several of the goldfish were dead.

I approached the tanks in the fish section feeling like an aquarium princess. I basked in the filtered blue light. I walked slowly along the columns of fish tanks that lined the walls. Fat goldfish with bulging eyes. Fat goldfish with bulging brains. Skinny silver tetra fish. Bright yellow fish. Small blue fish. See-through fish. Angelfish. Lionfish. Clownfish. A solitary pufferfish. No frogs.

"No frogs," I said.

"Can I help you," said an employee.

"Where are the frogs?" I asked.

"The frogs are by the reptiles," said the employee.

"Frogs are amphibians," I said.

"The frogs are by the reptiles," repeated the employee.

We left the fish section in search of the reptile section. We walked through the aisles of fish supplies and past aisles of other kinds of pet supplies. We walked by the mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, and guinea pigs. We walked by the rabbits, ferrets, and hermit crabs. We walked near the bird section and heard loud squawking. We avoided the bird section. We found the reptile section. The reptile section was underneath a giant sign that said 'CATS'.

"They should move that."

"They don't even have cats here," I said.

"Sometimes they have one or two in cages near the front. Cats for adoption."

"The last time I was here I asked an employee if they had any cats and she said, 'we never have cats,'" I said.

"Sometimes they have one or two."

We approached the reptile tanks. There were mostly various snakes and lizards. I walked quickly and uninterestedly by these. I stopped walking in front of a tank that held a massive black tarantula in the act of devouring two crickets.

"Whoa, gross," I said.

The tank was situated at about knee-level. I crouched down for a better view and watched the spider walk in circles with the two crickets half-in and half-out of its mouth. It then scurried under a hollowed out piece of wood to hide.

"Guess it got shy," I said, standing up. "My friend had a tarantula but she killed it on accident."

You're only supposed to feed them one cricket at a time. She dumped an entire box in with the tarantula. I guess that's bad."

"Jesus."

At eye-level was a tank filled with about a dozen hissing cockroaches.

"Are cockroaches insects?" I asked. "They're definitely not reptiles. This reptile section is a total sham. It's even labeled wrong."

"I don't know what you're talking about. These all look like cats to me."

"Here are the frogs," I said.

I stood in front of a column of tanks that had frogs in them. Near the column of tanks that had frogs in them was a free-standing tank with frogs entirely submerged in water. On the tank there was a sticker label that said 'African Dwarf Frogs'.

"I like the ones in the water," I said.

"Why? Those ones are all brown. The other ones come in cool colors."

"The other ones aren't in water," I said. "They must be toads."

"No. They are frogs. They are by water."

"You said frogs live in water. Those frogs don't live in water. They are just clever toads," I said.

"Can I help you," said an employee.

"I want a frog," I said.

"What kind of frog?" asked the employee.

"A frog," I said.

"One of the water frogs."

"Okay," said the employee. "Let me get my manager. I'm still training, I'm not allowed to take the products out of the tanks yet." He disappeared swiftly.

"Did he just say 'products'?" I asked.

"Yes."

"No he didn't," I said, "I misheard him."

"He said 'products'."

"Can I help you," said an older employee wearing a nametag that said 'manager'. The employee-in-training stood behind him, watching eagerly.

"I'd like to sample your product," I said.

"Pardon?" said the manager.

"I want a frog," I said.

"What kind of frog?" asked the manager. "We have--"

"She wants one of the African Dwarf Frogs!" the employee-in-training eagerly announced.

The manager produced a drawer from the column of tanks that held the frogs that live by the water. In the drawer was a stack of clear plastic baggies, labels, and a small green plastic net.

Taking a bag, a label, and the net out of the drawer, the manager asked me, "do you have a tank?"

"No," I said.

"You will find one suitable for African Dwarf Frogs by the fish section," he said.

"The fish section," I said.

"Yes," he said. "I would recommend a ten-gallon or larger tank."

The employee-in-training produced a pamphlet on African Dwarf Frogs seemingly out of nowhere and handed it to me. The manager began a short lecture on how to properly care for an African Dwarf Frog, while opening the tank filled with the frogs using a small plastic key. He stuck the small green plastic net into the tank and led a small, fat frog into a plastic bag he'd lowered halfway into the water.

"So!" said the manager, cheerily. "I'd suggest you get all your supplies now so you don't have to make a second trip."

"What do they eat?" I asked.

"Bloodworms!" chimed the employee-in-training.

"Bloodworms," I said.

"Bloodworms," said the manager. "It says that on your pamphlet. They also eat shrimp. You can find those in the cooler in the fish section."

"The fish section," I said.

"Yes. I can show you to the fish section if you would like," offered the manager.

"Why don't you put the African Dwarf Frogs in the fish section?" I asked.

"It is easier if we keep the frogs together," said the manager.

"Why don't you put all the frogs in the fish section?" I asked.

"It's easier if we keep the frogs in the reptile section," he responded.

"Frogs are amphibians," I said.

"Did you need me to show you to the fish section," said the employee.

"That's okay," I said.

We walked back toward the fish section. I carried the plastic bag with the fat little frog in it. We walked near the bird section and heard loud squawking. We avoided the bird section. We walked by the hermit crabs, ferrets, and rabbits. We walked by the guinea pigs, gerbils, hamsters, rats, and mice. I nearly tripped staring at the tiny frog, who used all four tiny legs to propel himself around in circles in the plastic bag.

"He's so tiny," I said.

"Look at that sign."

"I looked up. We were in front of the fish section. Above the fish section was a giant sign that said 'REPTILES'.

"Reptiles," I said.

In the car on the way home I diligently read the pamphlet on the care of African Dwarf Frogs. At home I filled up the tank exactly according to the directions, and put the frog inside the tank. The frog swam around indifferently.

"Look at him," I said. "He doesn't care that he's secured a loving home with two nice people."

"He doesn't know what 'loving' or 'nice' means. He's a frog."

"How do you know that? You don't know that," I said.

"He's a frog."

I looked at the frog for a while.

"We forgot to name him," I said the next morning. "Should I name him Cat? Or Toad?"

"I knew a guy named Rat-Toad once. Name him that."

"What kind of guy was Rat-Toad?" I asked.

"No idea. He was insane. He talked about PCP a lot. Or maybe he smoked PCP a lot. No idea. He was insane."

"I don't think I want to name him Rat-Toad," I said. "I'm naming him Kitten."

"Name him Tarantula."

"Tarantula is cute," I said. "Do you think he knows he's cute? Do you think he has an self-awareness? Does he have an ego?"

"He is a frog."

"Do frogs have egos?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"Do you think he has any idea how tiny he is?" I asked.

"I don't know. Probably not. He is a frog."

"That means nothing," I said. "'He is a frog'. Frogs could be the most enlightened creatures in the entire universe."

"I think we would know if frogs were the most enlightened creatures in the entire universe."

"Maybe not. Maybe the frog knows that the best possible thing to do as a living creature is to just be a frog," I said.

"If that is the case, the answer to your question is still 'he is a frog'."

"I want to be a frog," I said.

"No you don't."

"Yes I do," I said. "Look at him. He is so indifferent to everything. The other frogs in his tank at PetCo were probably his family members. He will never see them again. He doesn't even care. He will be alone for the rest of his life. He doesn't care."

"Would you want me to care if I never saw you again?"

"Well, yes," I said.

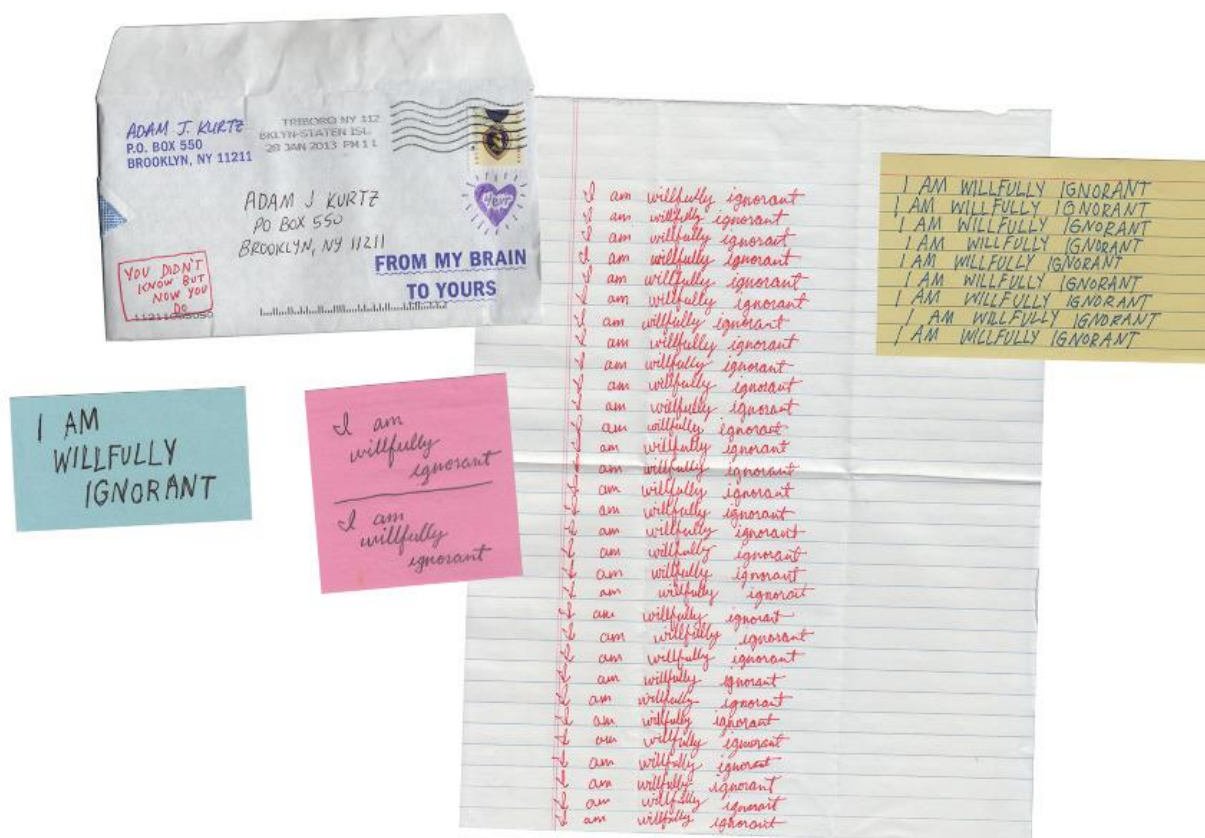
"It is better if we are not frogs."

I sighed and looked at the frog.

"Tarantula," I said.

Selected Interviews Vol. 1

By Timothy Willis Sanders
Art by Adam J Kurtz



New York Times Book Review:

Can you share a Christmas memory with us?

Brett Easton Ellis:

I went to the very back of my parent's closet. Under some clothes and boxes I saw a bag. Wrapped inside the bag were two G.I. Joe men and an Etch-A-Sketch. Next Christmas, I went to the same spot in the closet. Under some clothes was a bag, and inside the bag were three boxes. The first box had a note in my dad's handwriting that read "Nothing Here" and so did the rest of the boxes...I've had difficulty trusting people since.

Cat Fancy:

Do you prefer living with female or male humans?

A Cat:

Well I was coming down off a ~2 hour catnip binge and I'd just laid down in a strip of sunlight on the bed. He came in holding a magazine with a female human on the cover. He laid down next to me. I thought of curling up on his ribs so I could fall asleep to the sound of his heartbeat, when he scooped me up and threw me on the floor. I looked back at him and watched him take something out of the nightstand. I stood there and blinked at him. He made a loud noise that freaked me out so I ran. That's when I decided to become an artist.

Butt Magazine:

Have you ever been in a fight?

Lance Armstrong:

Greg went to sit down and I pulled the chair from under him. He fell and I laughed the loudest out of the whole class. He dislocated his hip and chipped a tooth. After school, Greg walked up to me on the basketball court. He punched me in the eye. I knelt, cried, and then ran home. My mother called the cops. I transferred to different school district. Later, when I was in high school, Greg transferred to my school district. He told everyone how he punched me in the eye and I cried and my mom called the cops. I looked him up on Facebook recently and his tooth is still chipped.

Three Decisions

By DJ Berndt
Art by Jesse Vaughan



ME OR EVERYWHERE

Ask me how fast I can run and I'll show you. I'll run through a forest or over a mountain or to your house. I like to run fast. I like when my skin stretches out like a trampoline as the hair bounces off my legs. I like how my muscles evaporate and are reincarnated as something newer, something stronger. I want to move my body until it's unrecognizable. I have to destroy myself until I'm camouflaged.

If you'll run with me, we can go fast or we can go slow. When we run slow, we focus on harvesting our potential energy. We are batteries. Did you know there is energy everywhere? Did you know you can only see its potential if you run slow? If you'll run with me, we'll have to choose if we run fast or if we run slow. We'll have to decide what is invisible.

NIGHTS OR MORNINGS

One night you asked me what I wanted for dinner, and I answered you by moving my body into yours. The next morning we couldn't get out of bed so we shared secrets until our hearts began to beat. We did some research. We learned how all this time, gods were keeping us alive while we crawled through clouds. Now we know there's no shame in feeling broken and no pride in feeling whole. Last night as you were sleeping, I jumped on your back and held onto your bones as we slid all the way down.

Tonight our fears will return because we'll tell them they have names. We'll do our chores in silence even though we don't believe in grudges. Tomorrow morning we'll take our chances and leave the umbrella at home. We won't run any faster when it starts to rain, we'll just walk a little closer together. Tomorrow night I'll tie a leash around the sun and a noose around the moon, and you will have to make a decision.

ASKING OR SLEEPING

You break the treeline naked and alone. You wander through the forest asking every creature you find. Human explanations mean nothing to you anymore, but the animals may have something to offer. You want to see from a new perspective. You want a fresh start.

You quickly learn that nothing wants to answer. The bugs are too busy with their swarm and the birds are too busy in their nest. You encounter a mother bear and her hungry cubs, slapping the river for fish. She tells you there is no life to be found in the hunt. She says there is more life here in the drought, where the stream is running low and you must slap harder to unlock it.

You ask the stars but they won't answer. You ask the trees but they don't care. Night falls and you stop asking because you are so sleepy. You sleep despite the swarms and the nests. You sleep under the stars and trees. You sleep knowing you made the right decision.

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