

# Thread Magazine

Volume XXIII

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Put on Your Brave Face

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Thread Magazine 2025

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# Rabbits on the Frontlines

Nate Varnado

Guns pointed at rabbits  
across the field– Do they  
see the glistening of the  
rifle and think  
of confetti at birthday parties?  
Do they aim and imagine their  
father is there showing them  
how to shoot cans off a log?

Does the chub of their padded  
paws get in the way  
of the trigger?  
Their fingerprints say they will be  
the indicator of who they once were  
*If it is a bit charred imagine it was  
from a faulty bottle rocket* My father  
once said rabbits will keep coming  
back to traps because one has never  
returned

to tell them otherwise



## The Portal

Gwyneth Schumacher

Oil on canvas  
48 in x 36 in

## Rabbit Heart

Samantha Whiskeyman

Put a rabbit's heart in the pot and watch it burn. I found God on a Thursday afternoon, once everyone had gone home, lights left on to welcome them back into day-after-day of monotony. I've only cried once on the kitchen floor, white tile leaving cruel burnmarks on my knees. God at the stove, one hand on the counter, the other extended to me. I reach for Him, but He's asking for my heart, the one that's not even really mine.

Rabbit heart inside ivory ribs. I tear it free and watch as God tosses it in the pot, vaguely blue smoke trailing to the ceiling. I don't have to wonder why He needed my rabbit heart, with all of its neuroses and incessant pounding, blood leaking out of its corners each time I keep myself silent. He's asking me to trust; I don't know how to feel through the empty cavity. Memories that used to sting get wrung out and handed back to me: when I was fully clothed in the pool, head having nearly hit the edge after I felt both your hands push my chest; when I wore your glasses for the hundredth time and you didn't laugh; when I first saw you on campus and the butterflies felt like they were eating me alive.

God lifts my heart with two gentle hands. It's pink, new-skinned, scarred—but it's all mine. The rabbit heart boiled down. I put it back into place and pick myself up off the floor.

# The Pause

Savannah Arlington

I see wild hair reflected in  
the pause, when the screen  
fades to bright green  
meadows filled with GLP-1  
addicts who won't even  
nibble at the flowers in fear  
of missing their protein goal,  
and it makes me wonder if  
it's even worth getting up  
anymore.

In the pause, right before I'm  
whisked away from  
consciousness by the black-tie  
hipsters buying my faults in  
bulk in exchange for the  
low-low price of love or food,  
I rub the engravings on my  
forearms and curse myself for  
not waiting to find a prettier  
way to die.

In the pause, that silver-spoon  
opener guides me like a horse  
bit to red-pill backlogs that  
make me wish I'd rather be  
stupid than sweet, so I fold  
myself into thick winter  
blankets to keep whole just a  
while longer until it's time to  
unravel into a helpless, pitiful  
sleep.



## Breakfast of Champions

Gwyneth Schumacher

Oil on canvas  
21 in x 19 in



## The Pressure to Become

Aditi Rangdale

Colored pencil on paper  
12 in x 18 in

## Living At Home In Your Early Twenties

N.K.L. Nijjer

at the table, where  
time splinters my  
father's mouth, a  
smoking gun, open  
to my temple  
easing it all

at  
once  
the sky's beauty marks  
and the ancient touch  
of a full house's lights on  
letting it seep in, that night womb's  
in my cup lingering as my  
touch frightens the lamb,  
chasing it all away  
waiting, with my dreams up in  
smoke  
in the bedroom that raised me  
taking it with salt,  
swallowing it whole the only  
thing that warms me is the one  
thing can  
that

kill  
me

what a luxury to mention your parents only once here, in my  
night out on the rooftop– they become

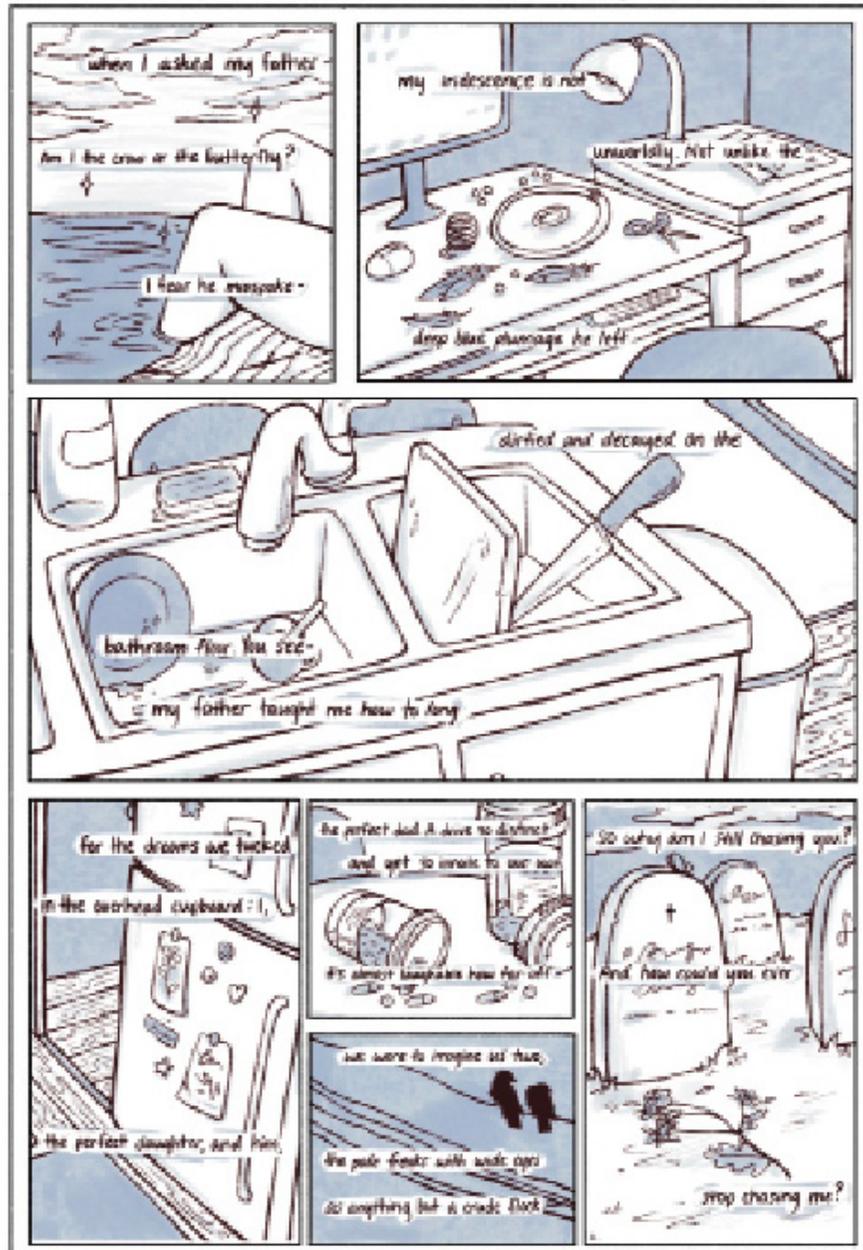
my body

# The Crow & The Butterfly

A POETRY COMIC

May 1, 2024

Jay A.



I want to run as hard as I can into nowhere.  
the burn of lungs and limbs.  
I want to rest forever with the ache in my bones.  
to tear the earth with my hands.  
to stay somewhere warm in no one's arms.  
I want to hear nothing.  
to tear myself into pieces,  
to piece myself back together.  
I want to remain in the present  
to peek at the future  
to catch a glimpse of a gift meant for morning.  
I offer the comfort I crave.  
I know I have done my part.  
It's difficult to bear this sometimes.  
But I think I understand.

## The Crow & The Butterfly

Savannah Arlington



## The Giver

Sarah Nakano

Mixed media on watercolor paper  
10.25 in x 7 in

## Papa-ji Hates My Tattoo

N.K.L. Nijjer

Across the table, the cloth drapes in  
Its old fashioned way—stained  
By a week's worth of food.

*Remember, to be  
made a mess means  
to have been  
enjoyed.*

The oldest animal I know leans forward, his sunbleached  
Wrists resting in the day old curry that missed his mouth  
By a single decision,

Says,

*Pakistan spent seventy-five years trying  
to undo Punjabi, if you want to mess  
with someone ruin their language.*

Dried rice crumbling  
From his mouth  
Not unlike the ground we stand on.  
Bright eyed, glasses filthy.  
In a weathered accent,  
He tells me

*Carry on, carry on.*

So I ink it on my skin  
Because how do I say

*Thank you*

In a language I never learned?  
How do I say

*I love you*

With a ruined tongue?  
Instead,  
I tell his stories  
with my mouth full.



## Intergenerational Anguish

Jonas Loo

Digital photograph



## Danza de los Voladores

Jennifer Hidalgo

Digital photograph

# White Flag

Stef Larios

My Spanish teacher announced that it was heritage month. It was 2013, and the school was putting on its little flag parade again for the year. I always wanted to be one of the girls that carried their heritage flag down the aisle in that big church in elementary for once.

At the end of class while everyone was lining up and chatting, I heard the teacher say that I could submit an application to represent my flag of choice. I thought I finally had gotten my chance to be a part of this parade and wrote down Nicaragua, because my parents were from there.

I watched the same girls always be picked in the following week. From when class finished till it was time to go home, I silently questioned why I wasn't picked. I sat on the bench near the aisle, with my classmates in rows besides me. We watched a girl at the podium far left from center in the church where all the sermons took place, announcing the countries one after another. The colorful flags were raised and walked down as their respective countries were called: Mexico, Argentina, Honduras, Nicaragua... I wondered if I was passed over for that girl who had paler skin, blonde hair, and brown eyes because she spoke better Spanish than me. I wondered if she was more Hispanic than me. I saw all the middle school boys in their school uniform paired up with the girls in their country-representing dresses, together holding their big flags, and I was so jealous. Were those dresses something the school provided or something their parents had to make on their own?

I thought about whether my mom would go the extra mile to make me a dress to represent a country she thought of as lowly. It hit me that I didn't know what the traditional Nicaraguan dress looked like until the other girl wore it. I knew nothing about my parents' country, and that made me ashamed. Nothing changed as I continued watching the same parade every year after until eighth grade. Looking at the box checked next to Hispanic/Latin at my high school entrance exam, I debated if I should put "other" or "refuse to say" because my roots aren't here, but I'm here. Over the years, I listened to my mom scowl and scorn Nicaragua the few times I asked about it, because "Nicaragua is a poor, third world country" and "America is better and the best." My mom bathed me well with the star-spangled American flag and scrubbed until my skin and speech and silence matched those white stripes.



## Restless Shoulders

Jonas Loo

Digital photograph

# The Neighbourhood You Remember

Ash Kosmicki

You remember the neighborhood—a vast and upright landscape of identical houses, painted in shades of butter and beige. This place where you learned to ride your bike, pavement smooth beneath your training wheels, your confidence slowly building against new roughness as you wobbled and swayed, training wheels lost, speed gaining as you pass by the neatly trimmed lawns with magnolia trees planted across regulated one-in-every-three-houses; but no other trees around this man-made safe-haven, that one would surely say is not kind to nature, the dogs don't mind, maybe the stray cats do, the birds certainly, but that doesn't matter to you right now; you remember the ducks waddling along the edge of the pond, their feathers ruffled, their calls a constant quacking chorus, their beady eyes watching you as you toss stale bread crumbs; you remember the endless walks with your dog, her warm fur pressed against your leg as you counted your steps with every passing crack, her rhythmic patting an echo in the still silence, houses blurring into a memory that skips a few; you remember the way the pavement felt hot enough to burn your feet when you ran outside, the instant, sheloess regret that made you tip-toe across asphalt so fiercely hot it began to shimmer; you remember the lemonade stands, the flimsy cardboard constructions propped precariously on your driveway, the tart smell of lemons and sugar hanging heavy in the air, the clinking of coins in your plastic cup, the thrill of bringing home two wrinkled dollar bills; you remember your friend's house just down the road, hearing the rhythmic thump-thump-thump of her dad's heavy metal practice filtering through the walls of the garage— an amusing juxtaposition against the backdrop of suburban calm; you remember the satisfaction of selling your old clothes on the road, the brightly colored fabrics that had once been so treasured, now traded for the fleeting fulfillment of cold hard cash; you remember those long summer afternoons spent inside, the AC breathing welcome relief from the unrelenting heat, iPads illuminated our faces as we built castles and battled pixelated zombies in boundless digital worlds; you remember the way your friend would always leave early, just as the sun began to set, her face turned peculiar in a way you didn't understand, filled with fear of the dimming light; you remember the loneliness settling in our chest as you're left in an empty but not deserted home, a feeling that lingered long after the last pixel had faded from the screen; you remember what this seemingly simple landscape held within it, the whispers of the past reflected in echoes of the wind, a thousand unnoticed details you'll never be able to recall, each a unique and exact fragment of whole, woven together to shape your childhood, to create that space you once called home.

# Neighbor's Bike

Nate Varnado

To the bike, chained to the stairwell outside my apartment like footprints after miles of untrodden road, you let people know that someone is there. A lock hangs limp around your handlebars, strangling the stairway railing like moss up a tree. You are an obstacle, the mangrove roots that playfully swim up to the surface, and then arch their heads down to take another breath.

I do not know who put you here, nor have I seen you move, but I know someone does use you, because your position changes like how a sunflower reaches its head towards the light. In the morning, your back tire faces the road. At midday, you lean slightly. And at night, it's a gamble what you're doing, drunk and tilted as you are. I know someone loves you, because you are never scuffed or dirty, even as old age takes you. You creak like an old bullfrog alone in a pond. A wind hits you, and you shudder and grumble.

Sometimes the creak means your owner is riding you off to some unknown place. Again I have just missed who you belong to. You do not belong out by the stairwell and you know that. Like a weed, resisting your killer and popping up defiantly, maybe even more smug than before, you stand tall against neighbors remarks and trips and sometimes even notices placed on you by staff. But there you stay. A testament to yourself and your owner; you, because you have survived the tripping and the pushing and the beating rain. Your owner, the same, except the forces are instead persistent people.

I wonder if, one day, you will be gone and I will miss your comforting presence, like seeing the stump of a childhood tree. I did not know the hold it had until I could not see where the tire swing used to be and I couldn't map out the designated rooms in the tall cradle of branches that I and my siblings took the liberty of assigning kitchen, living room, bed room, and bigger bedroom.

When you, bike, creak away for the last time will anyone notice? I bet they will, but not like the tree. Like the weed, finally succumbing to its weed killer wounds. But, I think I would miss you. Your grounding presence, like the moon in the sky after a night cooped up in books and papers and studying. I find myself wishing that you and your stranger owner continue to avoid the poison sprayed at you.



**There is Much Pain in the World  
but Not in This Room**

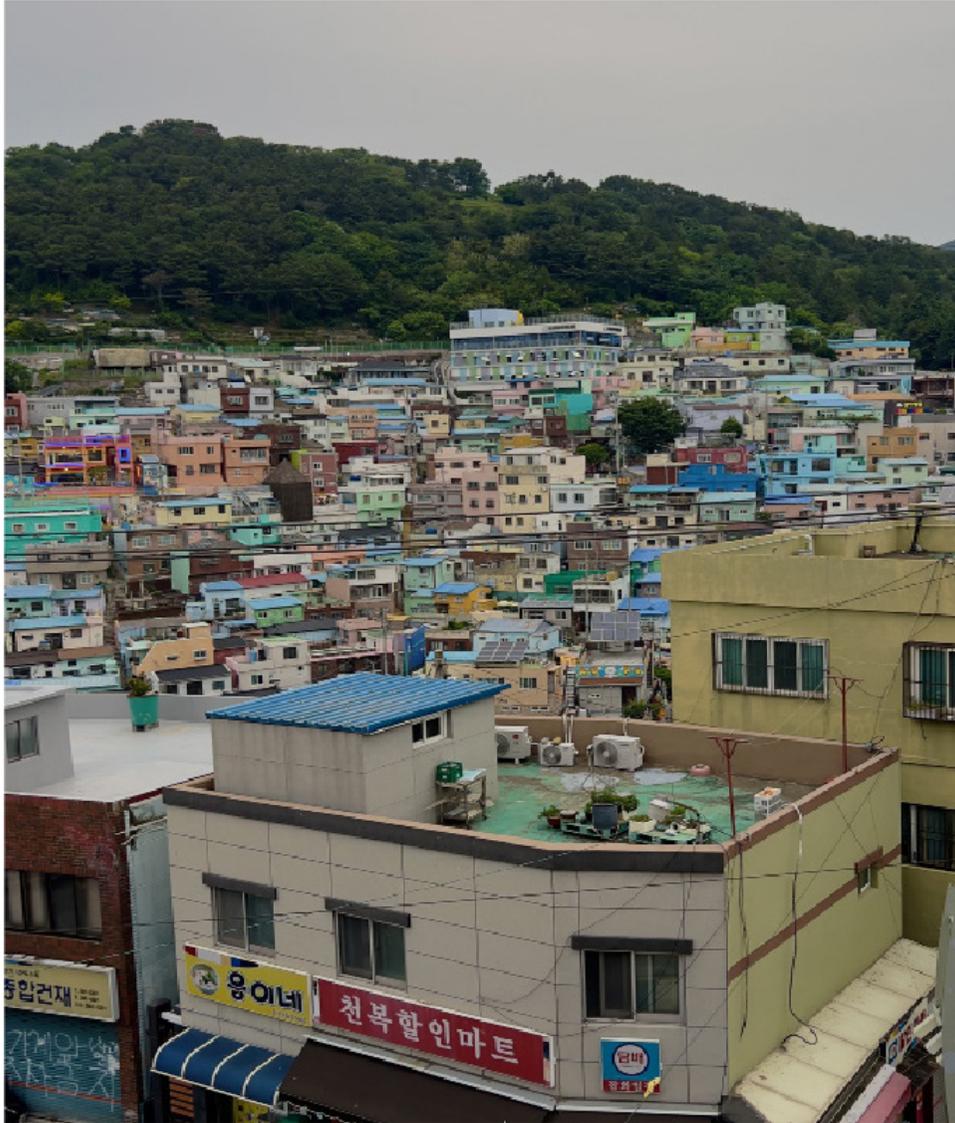
Gwyneth Schumacher

Oil on canvas  
28 in x 22 in



**Pollera**  
Alyssa George

Intaglio etching, ink on paper  
8 in x 6 in



## Between Hills and Hangul

Madiha Reza

Digital photograph



## Bà Ngoài (Nhớ: To Miss and Remember)

Adrian Nguyen

Digital photograph

# I See You: Mother, Caregiver

Jenna Rubin

I see you.

I see a mother to a child.

I see a child who has fought hard to be here, a mother who fights just as hard.

Being a mother to a child with a rare disease (or really any disability) is hard and different. Only those who have gone through it will truly understand. A special needs child means endless doctors appointments and endless sleepless nights worrying about him. There is a special kind of anxiety that creeps in during the unexpected moments when I am reminded of how fragile that moment can be. I hear the pulse-ox beep go off. Oxygen seventy-five percent and falling. Less than a minute ago, his oxygen was at one hundred percent.

Now I reach for a spare trach, because the suction catheter won't go down. My child can't breathe. But once it is changed, the twenty minutes turns to twenty seconds and he's smiling at me like nothing happened. I keep going because "it's just another day." But, in the quiet of the night, when the only noise is his breathing, that anxiety comes back.

That reminder.

That question of "what if?"

Even in the fun moments, the thoughts at the back of my head creep forward: What if this becomes the last time? Did I do enough? Am I doing too much? It will send me down a spiraling bunny hole of depression and overthinking.

I hate when people say "God choose you." Or, "We are only given what we can handle." Neither are helpful. Neither are true. I cannot do this, but I do it anyway.

There is no third option.

There is only do or do not. And do not is death. His death, or mine?

It is hard when he is struggling and I don't know why or what to do. Some days he is great and others he is not. I try to navigate what is "normal," what just "needs to be monitored" and what "needs to be taken seriously."

There is no instruction manual. Some people do this, and others do that, and both are correct. I give myself lots of grace. I know very well I am doing a great job. But for some real talk, I am lost, drowning in doubt. Only mothers who have been here will get it. I am definitely not looking for a pity party, I just want others to know they are not alone. This shit is hard as fuck. It never gets easier, you only learn more.

Then, he died. When I was not the one watching him. Now he is gone, and I am still here.

Silence instead of beeping. A whole new level of doubt fills my head. Am I still a special needs mom if he is not here? I learned how to handle the scary. I learned how to handle my fear. I learned how to care for him.

I am still learning how to live with a hole in my chest.

I go back to school. I changed my whole plan...again. I was forever changed when I became "Mom." I was forever changed when my child needed me every second to survive. My child's disability was not his identity or mine.

It never gets easier. I just learn more.  
I see you, a mother to a child.  
I am you.

## Zeal in Aggravation

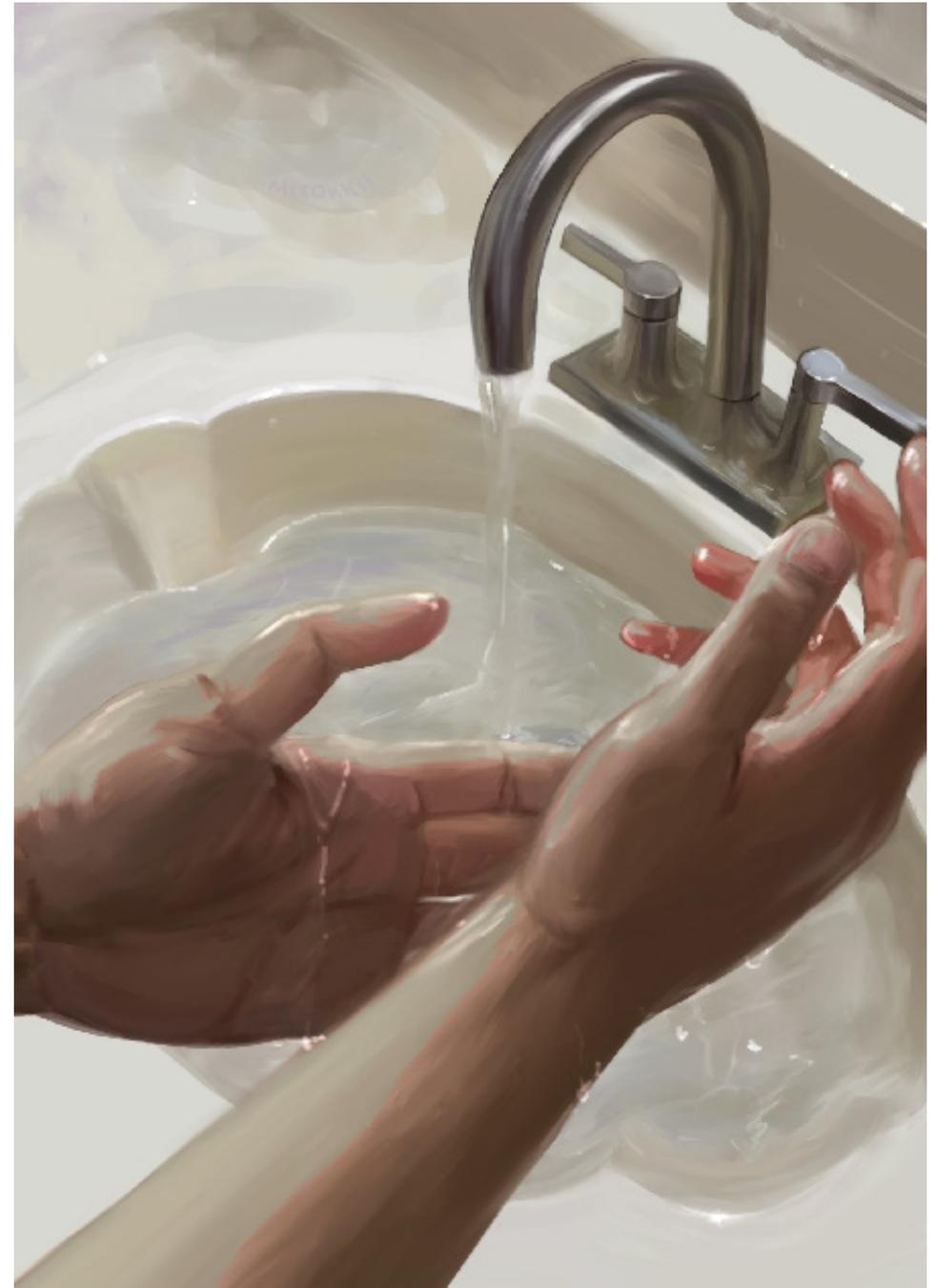
Joshua Negron

Zephyr passes the peaked-open window.  
Yellow sun seeps into his domicile, meanwhile  
X-rays and charts are hung in the other room.  
Weak couldn't even begin to describe it.

Vacations of the mind to merry places he had  
Unlimited access to—his only outside view.  
Troubled by the tragedy,  
So many family and friends had come.  
Rain pounding loudly from the window;  
Quiet tears from those who were  
Peering as he lay. His  
Open heart, however, stayed strong to a  
Nearing future. It seemed crazy for the  
Man to still have the capacity for  
Love and perseverance

Knowing the odds were stacked against him;  
Joking to others of a pain he kept  
Internal. Holding onto a kind of  
Hope others could only dream of.

Giving his all in surviving. The prep: a blip.  
For everyone else: an  
Eternity.  
Doors swung open. A  
Celebration was heard rooms over.  
Before them stood an incredible man:  
A strong man I am proud to call family.



## Perseverance

Arika Anwar

Digital illustration

# Ritual

Sue Gurung

Our paper target, positioned 25 yards from us, is speckled with a constellation of holes. My aim strikes point-blank around the chest and right arm. My cousin shoots wide, grazing the target's scarlet silhouette. Spent gunpowder assaults our noses, hands trembling and tensing when we finish our turn. The glinting shells scatter as our feet— one pair clad in beaten leather boots, the other gym-worn sneakers— kick them away.

I grunt when the last 9mm bullet won't join the rest.

My cousin titters at me. "Enjoying yourself there, Cuzzo?"

"You do it, then."

Her hand waves me away. "Nah, I'm a slowpoke. And you like reloading, don't you?"

"Of course, that's my burden..." Mirrored in her safety goggles, my smile carves a line across my face. I secure the magazine, the casing for bullets, beneath the Luger's action, humming in satisfaction when I hear the click. Ready to go. I feel a hand on my wrist.

"Are you sure you've never gone shooting before? You... seem to know where to hit..."

Readjusting my own plexiglass goggles, I force my smile to something decidedly sympathetic.

"No, I'm serious. It's all in the stance and focus." She doesn't move, searching my eyes for faith that she lacked. Her stiffness exposes her hesitation to move another inch towards the rifle.

I move to model the process for her. "Just stand straight. Steady your rifle. Lift when..."

Her lips tremble as I coax her through the steps. She fumbles with her earplugs beneath the big headphones. Some bullets slip through her fingers during her first reload. She stood far behind me when I shot my round again. I observed her just a pace away. Her aim is better this time. We go again.

We take a deep breath together. She allows me to lead her back to the stand, puppeting her into the same stance I find so natural. I press her elbow to her side. My hand slides up to pat her shoulder in comfort.

"Aim somewhere wide, like the torso."

She shivers. I blame it on the winter chill. As I step back, I yell,

"C'mon, put this bastard out of his misery!"

I leave her to shoot alone this time. At the back of the range, I check in with my keepsakes. I smooth out the flared craters on the back of our first target that day— Cousin's first shot rings out, high-pitched, carefree. I fold the paper once, twice, thrice, then tuck it into my purse. Of the fifty spent shells I retrieved, still explosive-warm, three clink inside the blue ammo box. Cousin misses a beat. The box goes on top of the folded target.

Keepsakes secured, I turn back to witness my cousin's next shot. Gunpowder puffs gaseous clouds in the room. The force of the whizzing bullet makes her shoulder jerk back, yet her head perks up to see.

Her shot lands sharp above paperman's temple. My applause echoes in the empty range.

DRAW FOUR

Drama-Comedy Screenplay

Laura Lane

2025

**1. INT. LIBRARY - AFTERNOON**

PAV, PERCY, MEL, GRANT, TJ, MAGGIE

A group of young adults play UNO at a library table.

PAV  
(Places card.)  
Plus two. Uno.

GRANT  
Fuck.  
(Slyly.)  
Oh wait.  
(Proud. Places card.)  
Boom. Plus four. Blue.

PERCY  
(Placing card.)  
Plus four. Green. Sorry.

MEL  
God damnit.

Everyone laughs. MEL draws ten cards.

MEL  
Stacking is such horseshit.

GRANT  
You're just bitter cuz' you lost son!

MEL  
Can we just be done? I hate this.

MAGGIE  
It is our seventh game. (Places card.)  
Skip.

TJ  
Seriously! Again?! I've barely gotten to play!

PAV  
Damnit.

PAV draws. Everyone laughs.

GRANT

Yes!

PAV places their drawn card.

PAV

Uno again mothers!

PAV laughs. GRANT plays a card. PERCY plays a card.

PERCY

Uno.

GROUP (EXCEPT PAV/PERCY)  
Oooooo.

PAV

I ain't scared.

PAV places their drawn card.

TJ

Play something  
Mel-

MEL

I have seventeen cards! Jesus  
give me a minute!

MEL plays a card then drops all of them.

MEL

Nobody look!

She gathers them up quickly. MAGGIE plays another skip.

TJ

Again!

PAV

Agh! Just change the color,  
someone!

PAV draws a card. They place it down.

TJ

Again!

PAV

Agh! Just change the color,  
someone!

PAV draws a card. They place it down.

PAV

Haha Uno! Yes! Yes! Yes!

TJ

Shut up  
brooooo-

PAV

You're just bitter cuz' you're  
losing.

GRANT

(Plays card.)

Did you guys hear about the Ybor  
crash?

The room goes silent. PERCY draws a card.

PERCY

(Plays card. Laughing.)

Skip. Uno!

PERCY looks at the rest of them looking awkward.

PERCY

What?

PAV

We don't have to talk about that  
do we?

MEL

It did just happen? We  
should-

PERCY

What? What happened?

TJ hands her his phone and she looks at the article.  
"Four Dead In Fatal Crash in Ybor."

PERCY  
Oh, shit.

PAV  
Yeah...

PERCY  
That sucks.

MEL  
"That sucks?"

PERCY  
It does? Right?

GRANT  
Well yeah, but you sound kind  
of-

MEL  
Blasé.

GRANT  
That is the perfect word,  
actually.

PERCY  
(Sarcastic.)  
Sorry, I'll weep with grandeur  
next time.

MAGGIE  
Guys it's fine. She wasn't-it  
was a tragedy ya know? People  
react differently-

MEL  
(Plays card.)  
Yeah it's fine. Let's just  
play-

PERCY  
How am I supposed to react? I  
didn't know any of them!

PAV  
I did.

Everyone goes silent.

PERCY  
You did?

PAV  
It's-whatever you know?

MAGGIE  
Didn't it happen in front of  
Bradley's?

PAV  
And?

MAGGIE  
Well you're-ugh-please someone  
else talk.

PAV  
It wasn't  
targeted-

MEL  
Shit feels like it is. Cops  
don't care though.  
(Mocking.)  
"Just a couple dead queers am I  
right?"

MAGGIE  
They don't hate gay people.

MEL  
They hate anyone who isn't them.  
And it's US vs THEM. Always has  
been.

PERCY  
Just shut up, Mel. Jesus Christ  
just shut up-

MEL  
What? You afraid your cop dad  
isn't gonna love you-

PERCY  
Shut up!

GRANT  
Come on, Mel. Chill out. Her dad didn't do it.

MEL  
It's all of em' Grant, every single one! What kinda shitbags escalate a chase through down town Ybor!

(To PAV.)  
Why aren't you more upset Pav?! You don't have to brush it off-

PAV  
I know, god dammit I know!

Silence.

MAGGIE  
(Plays card.)  
Green.

GRANT  
Not the time, Maggie.

TJ plays a card.

GRANT  
Jesus christ-

MEL  
(To PAV.)  
Stop acting like it's normal. That's all I'm saying. They already tell us to ignore the shootings, and political killings, and plane crashes! Are we really gonna ignore police violence too!? Like what the fuck were they thinking-!

PERCY  
Mel!

Silence. PAV plays a card.

PAV  
(Quiet.)  
I win.

No reaction. PAV stands.

MEL  
Where are you going?

PAV  
I don't know Mel! I don't need to tell you everything do I?!  
(Beat. Softly.)  
I'm-

PAV walks to the nearby window.

MEL  
(Mumbling.)  
Whatever, hide. Sure.

PERCY walks to PAV.

PERCY  
(To PAV.)  
It's shit. It is. Like absolute shit.

PAV  
Yeah.

PERCY  
What are you gonna do about it?

PAV  
Ugh-fucking nothing-not much to do.

PERCY  
Guess that's true.

PAV  
Yeah.

PERCY  
I do care, ya know?

PAV  
I know.

She takes PAV'S hand into hers and they look out the window together. It's quiet. And that's enough.

**END SCREENPLAY - Draw Four for Ybor**



## Five of Cups

Bailey Binderim

Mixed media on bristol paper  
17 in x 10 in

## Madeira

Samantha Whiskeyman

You told me your dad smashed your phone, but wouldn't tell me why. Marked it with a short laugh and so the chasm widened. Before that summer I wanted your house to be my home, and I loved your mom like my own. You recounted your drive to the Florida Keys and I recounted a weekend of wondering where you'd gone. Madeira was my everything. Wanting for nothing but your friendship and days at the beach, being your admirer was a job I took for granted, and you saw it as a way to break free. That day at Keystone, you kissed me on the cheek; I didn't know how to feel. Weeks after, my mom said you'd met someone online and attempted an escape to Texas. He wasn't the boy we'd talked about, the one before an unbearable Indiana summer. Before I met your other best friend, before the realization at fifteen that I was my favorite person's second choice. A trio, unevenly balanced. I found myself playing the game without the rulebook. Madeira was my everything, but now we don't even speak.



## If I Could Be

Adrian Perotin

Micron ink on paper  
24 in x 18 in

## Morphology

Simon Cole

Tighter, it binds.  
The breath is shallow, and the bars of bone groan.  
Add a few layers and count to three.  
Don't look in the mirror, that  
face doesn't belong to me, not  
yet at least.

Ignore the looks, the gawks,  
the frauds who cry support.  
Stand in line, don't think,  
don't stand out.  
First name?  
Legal, of course. No other will do.  
Grit it out, plaster the smile,  
it's an easy lie told a million  
times  
that dies a little at a time.  
I don't look or sound the same, it cannot be  
placed under misfortune anymore. Disbelief  
paints the gaze, pinning me as the moth under  
glass for all to stare and study.

Too many eyes, each blind  
to my chrysalis jacket  
They see what they desire.  
The moth of pestilence in rainbows of blue and pink.



**Two**  
Jennifer Hidalgo

Digital photograph



**Gesture**  
Sarah Joy

Inkjet print on paper  
42 in x 30 in

# Hornet's Nest

Jo Felicity Hoyes

A yellow door in New Town. Green palm leaves & leather steel-toed boots to fight—over pressed grapes & peach jam preserves going bad in the fridge. Twenty-three & rusty in the art of saying, “Sorry.” Praying with open palms & clenched fists, sea salt rubbed in the wound outside the corner laundromat, spinning beneath a split-screen sky. Drinking glass

bottled beers, ginger added for taste. Jesus was nailed to the cross. I am bound to this bed: Holy are we for playing piano at the end of the world. Send strawberry pie to the troops, let us eat sourdough croissants & smoke stale cigars in this too-bright concrete paradise.

Tonight, I will dance in a red dress side-stepping across an overburdened power outlet. Tulips cry for spring. Fall burns in the veins. Stuck in an endless Florida winter with only shoestring potatoes to burn.

If you give me your hand, I vow to pull back the curtain for as long as you need. Forget the garden hose noose, remember your family's weight in gold, a pale lilac scarf bowing in the wind.

Untethered tomorrows kissed thrice over take-out chinese.  
Laughter deep in the belly beyond the limits of regret.  
Seeing God in low-hanging Spanish moss & an endless  
Key West horizon. Here, I carefully pencil in my  
eyebrows besides my sister's ghost: I look straight in  
the mirror to greet a sky-blue beginning.

Black hornet's nest  
of memory, stung  
twice for good  
measure.



# The Wrestler

Skyler Swanson

Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas  
30 in x 24 in

## Belief

Marlow Kurinji

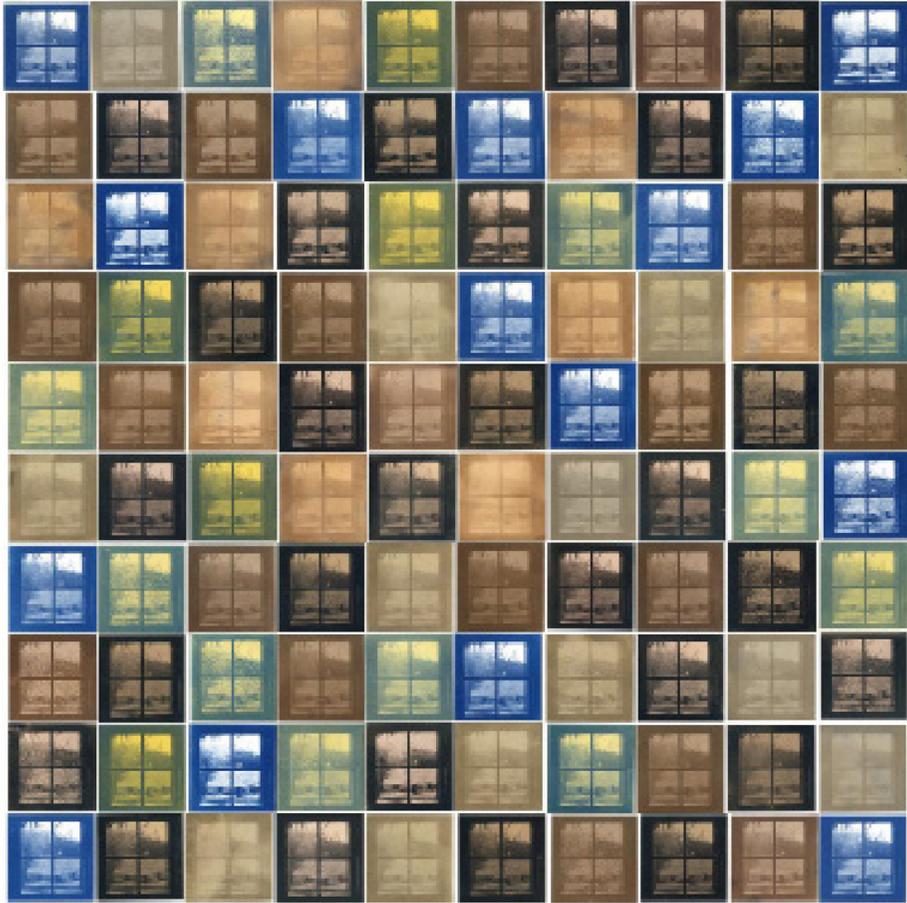
On the road home through the windshield glare: the moon, the pines. Your hand on my thigh. Whether I'm the deer or the headlights this time: in the parking lot, grackles in the lamplight, in the tar. We climb the stairs in the dark. Dinner's on the table and feathers in the skin. The days are getting longer. The days are getting thinner. You sing to me, voice wavering, and willow branches scrape their nails against the windowpane. Wild asphodels growing over the stoop. And the flood.

We board up the windows.

The black water. The scrap metal. The lights from the slaughterhouse, and the laundromat. Incandescent. The grackles in the seaweed, in the oil. Your Victrola scratches up a song. And we light all the candles in the kitchen. When the storm dies the tall flames keep us warm. Your hand on my wrist searching for a pulse. Still warm. Grackles in the trees. Grackles sorrowless in flight. We go down to the parking lot, turn the porchlight on. Un-board the windows. The birds turn to splinters of light and back to birds. Pine trees flicker the moon.

I love you.

And I pray it is enough.



## Windows

Ben Upcavage

Toned cyanotypes on watercolor paper  
4 in x 4 in

# Taxidermize

Giovana Medeiros

I long for that one, or someone like a taxidermized bird longs for a final flight plastic prisoner to its own skin, predicament never desired but complacent to how fate decided to honor its history.

So it sits, watching, waiting, polished atop a dinner table or the back of a couch, laying eyes on visitors and guests with their shiny wings of speed who fly across the room

Its own migration movement gone south, awry, awfully lonely with no mates or pack nor pride. The taxidermized bird's faraway eyes watch, whisper,  
*When will it be my turn?*

# an art of leaving

Anna Alieva

On transatlantic flights, you always take the window seat. You like to be undisturbed while you sketch on your tablet with a shaky beginner's hand, and there is something—nostalgic? Bittersweet?—about seeing the whole world fit in the palm of your hand.

You leave. You're always leaving. The white trail left by the plane slashes the skies in two. Below you, someone puts their child to bed. Someone slow dances on a dinner date. Someone has just received news that will leave them ever-changed. You leave behind people you know and people you don't. The places you've lived and places you've yet to see.

You left many places before you were thirteen, but you always found your way back. Your grandma's home. Your elementary school classroom. Basking in this comfort, you didn't expect to one day be on a flight across the world, upending what you've grown to hold so dear; you certainly didn't think it would happen twice. When a curious classmate asks where home is, you're stuck, torn between three places at once: the ancient capital where it snows six months of the twelve, the resort town on what is dubbed lovingly the Sun Coast, or the sweltering, rainy city lined with white beaches—where is home, when they all have a place in your heart? Once you've defined home at last, will you ever really be back?

Your thoughts scatter to the place you were born, gathering hazy memories of years long past. Perhaps the capital calls to you after all, though you can't say for certain if you'll ever return. You think of countless walks along the pond, of the kiosk selling blackcurrant popsicles and thirty-ruble loaves of white miche to feed to the ducks. The last time you were there, long ago, they took down the kiosk to build a boardwalk. The ducks were still there, sailing lazily across the greenish water, undisturbed by the giddy cries of children.

You think of the night train and how you'd climb into the top bunk as the wheels rattled to life beneath the floor. No alarms needed: the trainwoman banged on your compartment door—"Wake up, passengers!" You ordered black tea with a cube of sugar for breakfast, served in tall glasses with embossed silver holders. In a year, your grandma will sell the house that her family built with their very hands, to which you rode. You will never take the southbound train again.

You think of your first ever year at school. The massive white bows you wore in your hair. Lilac bushes that bled petals onto the sun-warmed, chalked-up asphalt at your feet. You gave your teachers a bouquet of them on your last day of term. On warmer days at the end of May, you walked home from school. Your mom bought you pirozhki from one of the stalls that are no longer there.

In June, the city sweltered with summer heat, and you abandoned the apartment for your family's dacha, where mosquitos swarmed over the river and a crumbling church stood watch over the rolling fields. Your uncle seared chicken skewers over the grill. You picked strawberries in the garden and took walks to the old cemetery in the woods. Battles were fought on this very ground. Eighty, two hundred years ago, and then further, further back. Gilded monuments rose amidst burial mounds. This soil remembers everything. Will it remember you?

Two years later, you leave the city behind, and with it the lilacs and the abandoned church and the ducks in the pond. Don't be mistaken—you like your new home. It's a short drive from the sea, hidden in a cradle of mountains, and on sunny days, horses and deer graze the open field outside your window. As you grow up, it will be you who makes the choice to move far from home, to get on that transatlantic flight and watch the ground fade away as the plane takes off.

Still, it's like a part of you will always be trapped in a different time, a different place.

You can look at photos and flick through your family's albums and seek out the songs that capture the memories so perfectly, and you can wipe your eyes with the corner of your bedsheet as if those places are long gone. They're not, but this brings you little comfort. They are an ocean away, changing without you there to see it. There are certain things you can never get back—intangible, fleeting things that cannot be explained to anyone else, no matter how hard you try. A piece of your heart will forever be lodged in the lilac bushes. It bathes in their scent.

Once you've mastered the art of leaving, do you ever really come back?



## Slugtree

Aki Sakurada

Acrylic and ink on paper  
7.5 in x 4.5 in

