

# plum creek review



cover art by celeste wicks  
“David, Don’t!”

~

back cover art by lucas ritchie-shatz  
“Stargirl”

spring 2023

**plum creek**

**review**

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**silversmith/butcher**

*littoraria irrorata*

from a blackened sky  
choked with the soot of my rage  
i weep:  
ezekiel 22:22  
they will be melted in jerusalem  
the way silver is melted in a furnace  
and then they will know  
they are feeling the anger of the lord  
and it will feel like nothing.  
only by my hand  
will you know of suffering.  
i yearn to turn your throat to carnage  
and daydream of my thumbs deep in your eyes  
lustful over a pooling, stilled heart  
i am want to beautify this world in kind.  
alas; you have an angel watching over you  
and you do not realize how lucky that makes you.  
they caress; whisper sweetly to me:  
dueteronomy 17:1  
do not sacrifice  
to the lord your god  
cattle or sheep that have any defects  
the lord hates this.



**Troll**  
lucas ritchie-shatz



**in the long shadow of mt. beacon**

ben hochster

in the long shadow of mt.

beacon it doesn't get through.

the message, a beam of  
light reflected back into the  
forest.

and now he's only a  
friction:

a man with  
his wilderness.

and now he wonders  
if anything could be  
different, if trees

could release their  
tight tendons, if

a natural force  
could stroke the ears of the  
water, if the great throbbing

in the atmosphere's xylem  
and phloem might also  
ripple  
underneath his skin.

but now he doesn't feel a thing.

wet plywood planks  
wedged in the soil  
represent a

separation.

**“Do you want to talk about it?”**

val kelner

I would rather talk around it,  
Spin tales  
Round and round  
To pass the time  
And time the pass  
Of the matter  
(for a round, at least).  
“Do you want to talk about it?”  
How ‘bout we chat ahead of it?  
Until I’m out of its sight,  
Until it’s out of my sight  
And (hopefully)  
Out of my mind,  
With a new site  
For us to move toward.  
What if I speak above it?  
Walk the overpass,  
Avert the underpass,  
As if there’s nothing of consequence  
Between the grates  
Below,  
If there are grates  
Below,  
What grates  
Below?  
There is nothing great  
Below.  
Or below it I will babble,  
Babble through the brook,  
Through the dirt,  
Through the leaves,  
Never checking the sky above,  
So cloudy skies  
Don’t cloud my eyes!

“Do you want to talk about it?”

One of these days, I’ll say yes

## **Omens**

ariel roberts

In the expanse of black, red dots  
blink in rows, the lines angling toward us  
as we move closer, move past.  
Now nearby I can see the red light illuminate blades  
slicing through the cold night air.  
We hurtle on and away, always speeding  
down the same road.

I can read their morse code,  
can hear its voice when my blood cells  
pump in choked spurts  
as I sight an artificial cloud  
clumping out of the clogs of smoke stacks.

We're running in the midnight,  
surrendering ourselves to the speed.  
Those guards of the sky can shout  
but we excuse that we are new to the language.  
We close our eyes and  
depress the pedal, fingers going numb.  
We only notice the animal the second  
before we hit it.

# Driving Home

dave donelson

Driving home on Christmas Eve

Death and I convene

We talk of time and aftermath

Waning strength and muscle mass

Fragile bones and scaly skin

Liver-spotted hands that ache

Yellowed teeth and stiffened hips

Stumbles, bumbles, woozy mumbles

Preludes to the prime finale

"Are you afraid?" she asks

Curiously, not unkind

"I have become so," I answer

Eyes fixed on the dark dark road

So as not to turn and face her



**Father of Two**  
ben hochster

I.

My son  
stares through the  
Back of my  
head, asks  
if his little  
sister's going to  
die. I'm

driving; I don't  
have to face him  
with an answer. A  
year ago he  
shrieked through  
the night about  
again

in his stomach.  
He shrieked  
out the truth  
his sister carried  
in the bruises  
on her arms  
and once we  
all knew  
his pain subsided.

He doesn't speak  
now; there is  
nothing spoken  
through him. He's  
looked away  
out the back  
window, he's  
memorizing the  
way home.

II.

I'm already driving, sitting  
with my daughter at  
the kitchen table  
before work. She  
droops below  
the eyes, her  
face is swollen  
full of poison,

the first hair she  
ever grew is  
thinning. She's barely  
beyond the crest of  
consciousness. I'm  
already  
driving, crushing a  
decadron pill

on the counter and  
stirring it into  
applesauce  
for her breakfast. It's  
two hours there and  
two hours back

to pay  
for her  
soul; I'll be  
driving all day.

## **24 miles of self-ribbon**

ben hochster

after christo's running fence, project for sonoma county and marin county,  
state of california

*where will the curtain come down?*

in california, up  
north, between  
the highway  
and the horizon

*in whose name?*

there's not a  
name to be spoken  
behind  
a ribbon of light

*how will i know when i've found it?*

there will be  
a shadow  
flung down  
on the hill,

the earth  
will be wet  
with wine, it  
will spring up

wildflowers



*what will i want with an earth drawn in a ribbon of light?*

the unmaking of  
the hills, the  
revelation of the  
wind, the thrust

through the skin  
of  
an unwound  
ghost

*and who will rent to us*

*the sky?*

...

**A Ghastly Apparition**  
sydney robinson



**If you could see ghosts,**  
robbin sachs

I say, thinking of you standing in the clearing, and if you knew what  
megalith graves were,  
then you would understand this is a final resting place.  
You'd see the little boy, curled up in the dark, and his mother, barely no-  
longer a child, as she  
kneels beside and pets his soft hair. She'd look sharply at you. Leave us  
be, her eyes would  
say. Leave us be and remember we existed.  
But you can't see ghosts, and you don't know what you're looking at, so  
you're alone with  
just a pile of big rocks.

## Headspin

lucy curtis

I went to the forest last Sunday.  
There the quiet was  
    not so suffocating, it  
        was crickets in the daytime  
            & the great green symphony  
            of rustling leaves, & some caterpillar  
            somewhere, having a feast —

I almost forgot how  
If there's no song clinging  
to the inside of my skull, I can't  
breathe, I need

Both the method & the madness  
    the ebb & flow, the fire  
        & the flood of chemicals, that seep

Into the pink  
    spaces of my brain —  
        I was fourteen when I got hit in the head so hard I passed out — & that is  
        when I learned my  
        mind is fragile — I  
        didn't cry when the fleshy organ  
        brushed up against bone I  
        didn't cry when they said "play game" I  
        tightened the wrist straps  
            of my gloves and simply spat out the blood — I  
        cried next year when Coach  
        said it changed me I

swear it didn't.

I'm just recovering

from the two-and-a-half minutes  
when I was asleep, the whole  
world got taller  
& learned to sit still  
But I still need  
    more oxygen  
pumping through my veins

I need

the adrenaline back  
the rampage, the summer heat wave, the potential back  
the hot-hitting bone-splitting nauseatingly innocent thrill of before I  
got smacked in the face  
with my own shortcomings  
or failure  
or lack of coordination

*I need that back.*

I went to the forest last Sunday.

There I tried my

best to let my  
mind wander as far as my feet  
to press my palms into rough bark  
to let the light  
breeze penetrate my ribcage  
& feel nothing

but natural, unbridled, unadulterated peace

But I need

the noise, I made my

nest in the swirling, haunting, mess  
of nights out,

I need

love  
but only the kind you can  
stick in the microwave

I'll cup my hands around  
it & pray it  
warmed through

,I've squeezed my eyes, tight shut

& crossed my fingers

& I'll pluck every

eyelash, if it gives me just one more-

I wish

I wasn't

like *this*, like a

sparkler, a flame that's just  
a little too excited  
to be held quite so close.

The trees, around me  
They started to smolder  
    So I tried to make  
    myself smaller.  
I guess I got taller  
    But sometimes I wake up & I'm still In the grass,  
    at the soccer game,  
    My head just  
    spinning with all the continents & stars too  
Am I just the same?  
    I think I have  
    a new favorite color  
    & painted face  
    & mantra  
    & obsession  
But am I  
    just  
the same?

When I left the woods  
I came home, to my fever dream But I think I'm still  
blurred in her line of  
    vision, I need  
My jaw shoved up  
into my molars —  
    my eyes would roll back  
    & I'd collapse to  
    The ground, again  
    & perhaps then, I don't  
    see it all just so  
perfectly  
clearly  
But until

then, I am just a dog at the window watching every  
single car,  
Drooling on the thought  
That this one  
Might be  
It.

**444 Days**  
babeuf yost



**The Wren**  
adele ross

I.

Potential

i once stumbled upon a nest  
behind the porcelain lips  
of a birdhouse on my porch.  
she came and went often,  
the little bird who took up  
residence in the pot.  
every now and again,  
when she spotted me, she'd scream  
in a mouse-voice, hatred palpable.  
i, with my giant, sleuthing eye  
did in fact spy five eggs  
through the house's mouth.  
dusty-brown-speckled rounds;  
i could have held one on my tongue,  
felt its smoothness.  
they hatched after a time,  
replacing off-white eggs  
with grey and pink bodies  
writhing and squawking.  
the mother cried murder  
when she saw me, but that  
was understandable. after all,  
what greater danger is there  
than a meaty palm swooping  
and scooping out a baby,  
squeezing it till its insides  
are outsides?



II.

Origin: the Contest  
in truth, it was his cleverness  
that won. tucking himself  
amongst the feathers of

the eagle, he fluttered above  
the others, up into the blue  
of heaven, chattering victory  
when his trickery was  
to thank for his proud,  
false rank: king of the wind.  
the birds all bowed then,  
begrudging, to the wren,  
whose throne was nothing  
but dry grass and thread  
collected from rejected filth.  
and the wren, the tiny  
crooked-winged sky-dancer,  
his eyes still twinkle and his  
warbled speech sings  
his own praises.

III.

In Summer  
the heat climbed the stairs  
with me. the air was watery,  
rippling in the summer sun.  
i peeked in on the birds,  
anticipating five curious mouths.  
movement. a glint of light off  
the black of an eye?  
a white worm, wriggling in  
a baby's flesh. their hollow bones  
filled with humid weather,  
the cruelest of marrows invading  
their bodies. they reeked  
of what they weren't.

## The Voice That All Worms Hear

ari heff

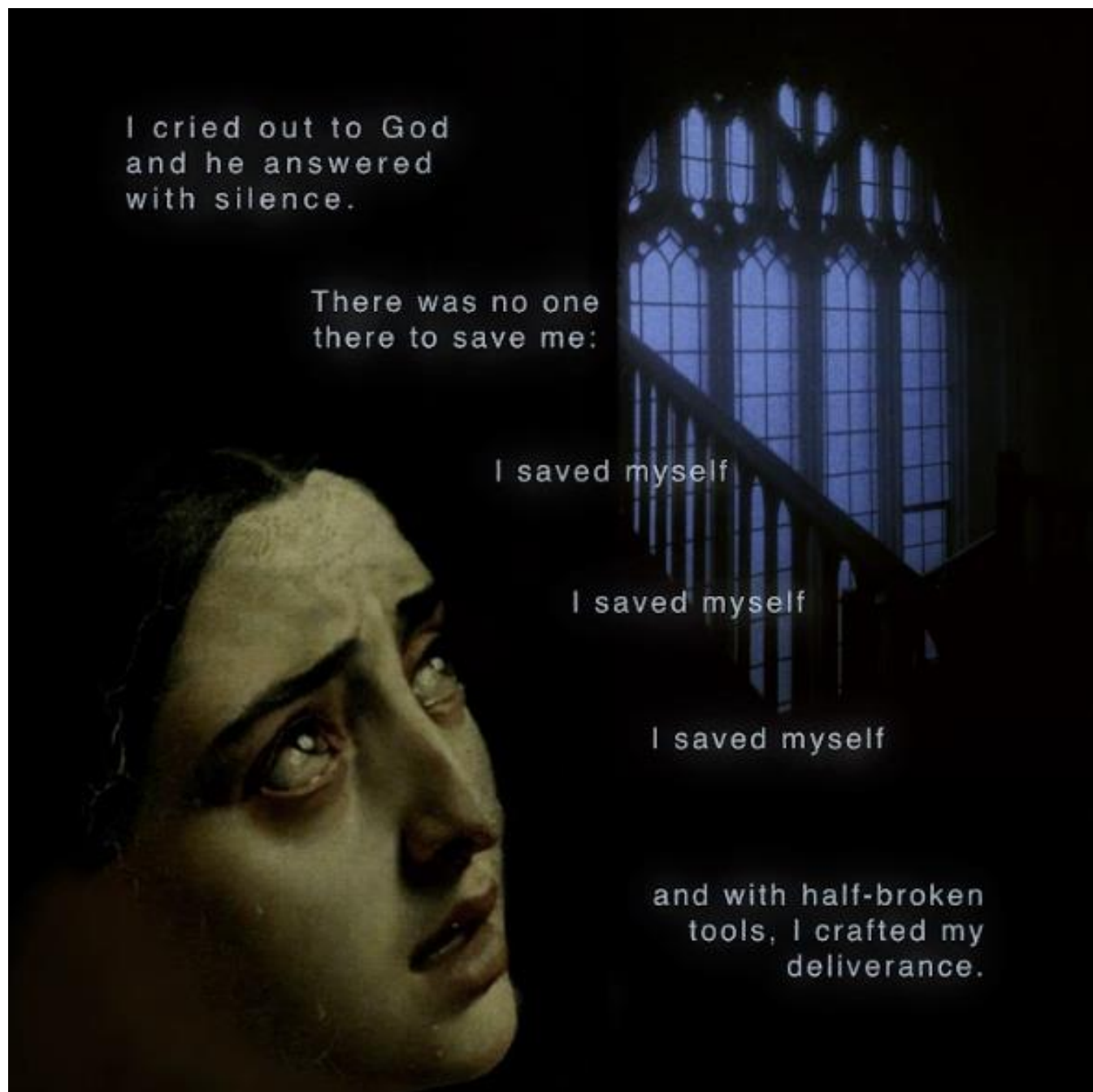
Heherhim sit in curving wooden chairs in the diningroomlivingroomkitchenroom. They speak in silence, by which I mean they speak a multitude of nothings out of their clap-trap open mouths, their clap-trap open mouths, their clap-trap open mouths. They recline, their fingers brushing spots of luxury and dust off the all too-familiar cushions as they prop their feet on footstools and weave leisured excitement through the stagnant air. Oh— and before I forget, I am also there.

As they speak I turn into a worm. I can feel it start to happen as they whisperhollerlaugh: my legs fuse together like the roots of a tree, my arms grow long and knobbly, all twined together like that of some amorphous awkward slug. Into the mass too are absorbed my clothes, my face, their memories of me. Then goes my mouth (a thin line, from long disuse, it merely fades away). Then goes all of me.

Heherhim continues; but now I can hear the voice that all worms hear, that is to say the voice that all worms speak, and so I ask the voice, *Who are these people sitting in my home?* And all the worms of the world whisper in my brain, and the overlapping cacophony screams a worrying response— but the one I realize I always feared I knew.

For this is what all worms say: *This is their house. The real question is, to be sitting here with them, who are you?*

**Untitled**  
isabel gripp



## **Thaw**

lucy curtis

a sheen on the pond still  
halts ripples, hardens  
reflections into opacity:  
the ice has not cracked  
it is merely a February thaw

I always thought of endings  
as eggshells —  
but perhaps it's no more  
or less than the days  
changing color

//

I distrust chrysalis —  
the caterpillar emerges & thinks it is different  
& does not know why

//

I won't jump off the diving board to plunge into ocean  
is to be electrified  
it's not the rush but the after-shock I can't wrap my head around —  
what if I emerge & I think  
I'm different

//

I never marked my height  
on the wall  
& I didn't believe those uncles & aunts who'd tell me I'd grown  
taller I want to ride  
the rollercoasters, but only next year — I'm not ready yet  
I swear

//

the ice on the pond slips  
into pools, sky cupped  
in pockets of melt

I've gained a few pounds  
since high school  
& learned flesh is softer  
than bone & maybe it's okay to not be made of muscle —

maybe it's okay,  
the inevitability

//

tendrils of yellow & green, this year it settles upon us — it was raining  
& then the drip just stopped I decide not to beg  
for clouds to hold their shape spring trickles in  
& I am not running

## **2017, Feeling Small in the Big Chair**

mac mckinzie

At the optometrists office,  
He scoots his wheeled stool doctorly over  
To put more of the necessary goop into my sullied eye  
He says, "This is unprecedented."  
I imagine how he sees the world- everybody broken down to  
Floating eyes, with this disease or that  
Nose which would compliment a pair of fashionable wire-rimmed lenses.  
I ask him why monocles went under. He is characteristically serious.  
My dad sits like a boulder in his watchers' chair, and I wonder  
If there's a cure for big puppy dog eyes.  
Later, I'll be sent home with a bottle of extra strong antibiotic eye drops  
and asked why I can't ever say when something's wrong.  
Sometimes you need to be dragged by the scruff of your neck  
To the car and shield your face from the sun on the drive in,  
Light starting to be more than you can handle.  
Sometimes the growing pains in your knees are so bad you imagine twin  
tumors eating at the tendons of your legs.  
Of course, it ends up being alright.  
You're owed more years of belligerent refusal, after all.  
He touches my cheek to steady my face for more chemical- I go to bite  
his hand.

**Anxiously in Love**  
lucas ritchie-shatz



## **Of Feathers**

adele ross

### *A Murder*

there were three  
reasons to gather, and one  
to wear black.

the first reason was dead.  
a sudden illness swallowed him  
and invited the Fountains to canada.  
the grey weather folded around the family on the ferry as the  
brown water  
churned under them, a heartbeat.

the Fountains were the first  
to know about the other two  
reasons; their youngest  
boy, a learned fool,  
expressed his intention  
to marry – no, to elope!

surely the shock had killed  
the first reason; surely  
the boy and the girl were  
to blame for his sudden  
passing. no, he was ancient  
and sickly like the fog,  
which hung limp on Deer Island.

the Fountains were  
a murder of crows  
crowded around a carcass.

///



### *A Migration*

the Eweings discovered  
their own reason for travel soon  
after the Fountains flocked to the  
land of cold, wet air; their youngest intended to stumble  
into  
marriage with a Fountain.

primping and preening  
they put together a collection  
of bare necessities for the occasion; a cake, driven from  
connecticut  
to canada, carried across the same  
water the Fountains had traveled, and a menagerie of  
colored clothes  
to peacock in, which the celebration called for.

///

### *A Molting*

the youngest Eweing wanted  
something smart, slim,  
and inexpensive; something meant  
for reuse. her mother, however,  
insisted they find something  
she would relish, something  
she could step into without  
carrying herself, and  
cherish until it was time to pass  
to her own daughter.

the seamstress took  
whatever bribe they gave –  
they never told –

and altered for them  
the perfect dress, the one  
She wanted. the floor  
was littered with little white  
scraps, feathers picked and fallen  
from the beautiful frill  
of the Eweings' finest  
possession.

///

### *A Moment*

the Eweings met the Fountains on a day much like any  
other. moisture sunk their hair and weighed on their  
attire, and the sun wore its usual gown of white cloud  
cover.

the youngest boy and girl said their piece, and  
the families made theirs.

with the click of a camera their feathers were flattened  
onto a slide for the hatchlings to remember them by.

half-and-half, the picture was: half Eweing primness  
and half Fountain grimness.

the families flattened  
divided down the middle, half clad in cheerful colors,  
half in garb black as night.

**hicks can yearn?**

*littoraria irrorata*

i will open up my chest  
ribs like teeth, an open maw  
and pick out the shards of glass  
so enraptured with my gums  
my flayed flesh  
will slip off my shoulders like canvas chitin  
i will step out of my exoskeleton  
for this vessel is a broken oar's exposed fiberglass  
frayed work jacket and tired steel toed boot  
and my naked heart dreams of a return to appalachia  
to feel the gritty clay soil of the blue ridge mountains on my tongue

**My Aged Imagination**  
dave donelson



I am an Old child  
full of Wonder  
At the conjurings  
of my aged imagination

A DEADLY DAFFODIL DRAGON  
Spews clouds of yellow blooms

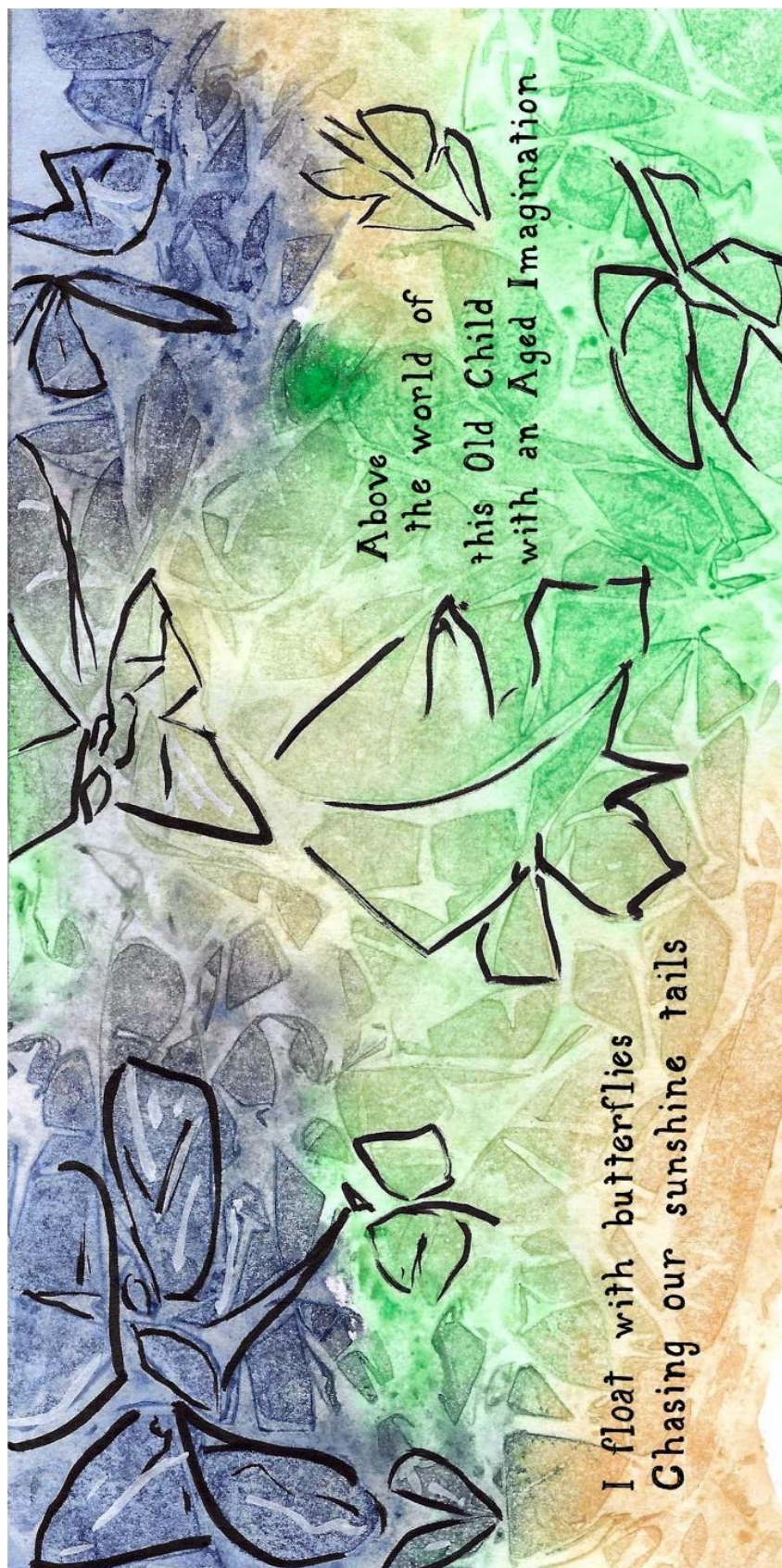




A wind-blown pond  
promises  
I can skip from  
wave to wave

A swan beckons  
With a swooping arc of thrills





## **Can't help but find god in the little things**

solara stacey

Tw: self harm

Can't help but pull the skin of my lips through my teeth like lions  
pull meat through zebra bones, can't help but sing Amy Winehouse  
in the shower and hope she might hear, can't help but ring your  
words through my washing board brain

until the fibers come apart. I used to be so gentle with stuffed animals  
just in case they might feel it, all flower petal touches and whisper  
kisses. Used to cut imaginary lines into my body, fingers as scalpels, to  
do away with the parts I didn't fancy. In later years,

I tried planting smooches on my arms, little seeds of love I prayed  
would grow into a lover, an Eve. I prayed she'd visit me in dreams to  
exchange intoxicating words and love me gently the way I had  
always loved. These days, your shriveled old sentences

from the year of friend break-ups come knocking instead,  
determined as mormon missionaries. Can't help but answer the  
door, can't help but invite them for lemonade in the garden, can't  
get rid of them once they come. Today, I hear a quiet-at-first

melody. I peer past the lilac bushes to see a symphony of cells, the  
plucking of heart string cellos, blood thumping to the beat of a love  
song. My body sings of soft hands to hold friends, diaphragms full of  
laughter, of teeth and limbs and toenails.

The only god I ever pray to is Amy and I'm pretty sure she  
doesn't hear it when I sing to her. I'm pretty sure the  
stuffed animals never felt a thing There was no magic in my  
kisses but god, when this body o' mine sings...

I can't help but sing back.

## Reading Response

cec ganz

Dear students,

Please read the attached passage, “An Excerpt of Golleall Pkiyerie’s famous *Analysis of the Planet Blue Star Diary* (first published 5883 P.Y.W.), with commentary by Niyenowwadr Csoelahrin” and answer the following questions to prepare for tomorrow’s class. Discussion

Questions:

1. What signs of technology are present in the texts mentioned by Csoelahrin? 2. Are there any corrections you would add based on your understanding of the information present in the other *Star Diaries* that were uncovered in 6009? 3. What are your thoughts of the *Star Diaries* being transformed from a purely archaeological artifact into a literary work and later film adaptations? What does this say about our connection to them and to Planet Blue?
4. Why might Csoelahrin have chosen this excerpt to write her commentary for rather than one of the other sections of Golleall Pkiyerie’s work?



*An Excerpt of Golleall Pkiyerie's famous Analysis of the Planet Blue Star Diary (first published 5883 P.Y.W.), with commentary by Niyenowwadr Csoelahrin*

During the 5877 *Inquiry* mission to Planetary Body 62M.129V.338E.3 (colloquially and hereafter referred to as "Planet Blue"), Golleall Pkiyerie and his peers uncovered several artifacts that date to around 500 P.Y.W. (2000 A.D. on Planet Blue). These included several printed texts such as the *Rible*, and the *Complete Workf of Nillium Shakefpeare*, as well as a few handwritten pieces. One of these handwritten works has become the favorite document of most Planet Blue historians: the *Star Diary*, called such due to its author signing each entry with a simple hand drawn pentagram instead of a name. The diary, dated to the planetary year 2022, depicts the day-to-day life of a student at an education facility theorized to share some resemblance to the universities present throughout the Yleaunge-Tfhiiruenae Nebula. Planet Blue remains something of an anomaly in the greater understanding of the cosmos, given that the intelligent life there seems to have evolved with no interference from other intelligent life forms, likely due to its extremely isolated location. Because of this mystery and interest surrounding Planet Blue, the *Star Diary* and Pkiyerie's analysis of it have become well known not only in the field of interplanetary archaeology, but throughout society as a whole. While Pkiyerie's initial analysis of this text maintains a position as a highly respected interpretation of early second-millennium life on Planet Blue, various details and theories present in the work have since been disproved by more recent archaeological findings. These corrections will be noted in the commentary following the selected passage of Pkiyerie's work below.

This entry is dated to the beginning of the educational period that Star refers to as a "semester", which may also align with a separate annual calendar to what Star dates her entries with, as she speaks of getting a "first" meal from a local establishment during the current year, which, based on other artifacts from the same age, she was already more than halfway through. Hence why a separate, academic calendar year might be what she is referring to.

September 20, 2022

12:23 AM

Still haven't managed to do much work. Read things for CRWR before class so at least I'll know what's happening, but I didn't manage to do some of the work due tomorrow morning. I feel like I maybe need to figure out how to actually be productive and get work done and maybe also actually use my accommodations to get extensions??? It's fine...

Here, Star demonstrates an oversimplification of her struggles to carry out the tasks existing throughout her life. This may be due to a species-wide failure to grasp the complexities of an individual's abilities, or it may be due to a personal misunderstanding on the part of Star. While Star is a fairly introspective specimen, as is demonstrated by her description of her own emotional response to Maggie's observation and advice in the next paragraph, she also describes herself as fairly young and naive, only having recently moved from the home of her progenitors into the living facilities of her school.

**I'm still tired as shit of course. Maggie said on Thursday that it might have to do with the fact that I'm not eating much, which is probably true, but I keep feeling, like, guilty for not eating instead of wanting to actually work on food intake as a solution to my problems. I did eat today though, which is a fucking miracle because it took forever to get food since the Rat and decaf's systems went down again for like the billionth time this week. I got a burger and fries from the Rat for the first time this year because I never have the energy to stand in the line especially because it's always so loud and I get overstimulated. It was also weird because I'm not used to eating much, especially not quickly, so I felt really gross and laid on the bed for like half an hour after I had my Rat food.**

Here is another instance of Star using terms such as "shit" and "fucking" which seem to be general words for emphasis, though it is hard to tell based on the lack of examples in the other texts that are available at this time. Emphasis is also placed using numerical exaggeration, demonstrating that the term billion may have more than one strict definition for Star's people. More interesting than her terminology however is Star's description of her discomfort in waiting, due not to impatience but to the abundance of sound in the environment that she must wait in. This "overstimulation" implies that Star possesses a maximum level of sound that she can safely experience, though it does not seem to be a physically dangerous level of stimulation in the way that extreme temperatures are harmful. Star also implies that

this noise limit varies among the inhabitants of Planet Blue, or that it does not apply to all of them.

I really need to do laundry but I still haven't because I'm tired but one of the reasons I'm tired is that I'm depressed which isn't being helped by the fact that I've been feeling dysphoric because I haven't had my good gender clothes to wear because they're all dirty. So I need to do laundry soon.

Star does not describe completing the task of "laundry" until nine days later, implying that either she was exaggerating the importance of this task's completion or that she was unable to do it. This second option corroborates well with Star's difficulty to complete educational tasks, though it also implies a degree of self-destructive behavior. It is unclear if Star is a healthy female based on this, her self-described nutritional deficit, and her sensitivity to noise.

**We have fruit flies** *[here Star draws a symbol consisting of two small vertical lines, above which are two small diagonal lines with the higher end facing out, and below which is one large line shaped into an approximately symmetrical downward curve - that is, the ends of said line face downward]*

Fruit flies may be a phenomenon represented by Star's symbol here, or they may be unrelated. Similar symbols appear throughout her writing without the mention of "fruit flies". Therefore it is possible that this symbol is instead a type of hieroglyph intended to convey additional information about the situation, such as Star's emotional response.

**- Star**

*[following the entry are several crude representations of Planet Blue inhabitants, based upon which they are thought to have very large eyes and ears, the eyes having only a sclera and ovular pupil]*

### *Comments*

While Pkiyerie refers to Star as “she” throughout his work due to Star’s description of a menstrual cycle, the pronoun “they” is more commonly used today based upon a greater understanding of the complexity of Planet Blue natives’ identities. This complexity is referenced by Star himself in this entry in the word “dysphoric” which has been translated to mean mental and emotional discomfort linked to the features of one’s physical form contrasting with the aspects of one’s internally perceived self.

Pkiyerie was on the other hand entirely right about Star’s use of the word “year”, based on a selection of Planet Blue’s many calendars that have since been uncovered. These calendars span from a widely used annual calendar, to extremely localized annual calendars based on this common calendar but marking a different yearly cycle dependent upon the start and end of educational or economic periods. These localized calendars will often mark themselves as differentiated from the global calendar through terms such as “school-year” and “semester”, which Star also uses throughout their writings, or with terms like “quarter” which Star does not use.

The analysis of Star’s perception of their own failures has a fair amount of merit, though Pkiyerie perhaps takes Star’s writings too much for fact rather than a personal account in his analysis of their character, especially given his acknowledgement of their inevitable naivety caused by their youth. Star’s 20 years of age based on their own calendar puts them at the tail end of adolescence for their species, and thus any true “introspection”, as Pkiyerie refers to it, is unlikely to be untainted by ego or lack of experience.

“Shit” and “fucking” are crude terms for feces and copulation, but are also used for general emphasis as Pkiyerie surmises.

The continued analysis of Star’s health, ability, and traits compared to the majority of their peers was the early basis for Skhtoccmurne’s Theory of Universal Variation which proposes that all organic life forms demonstrate a variety of weaknesses and limitations, as well as disorders and illnesses. In fact, Star’s symptoms have begun to be analyzed by psychologists and neuroscientists who believe that they may possess a variant of one or more disorders found in other intelligent species. If this turns out to be true, it may point to Planet Blue’s life forms showing an unprecedented degree of similarity to other life forms in the universe, despite their complete developmental isolation from life outside that of their planet.

Pkiyerie’s theory on Planet Blue’s inhabitants has since been disproven by the discovery of several photographs and anatomical renderings that show them to have much smaller facial features than Star’s drawings depict. The widely accepted explanation for this disparity is that Star’s work was heavily impacted by their lack of skill. Some Planet Blue historians have also proposed that stylization may be a factor, but this theory is less widely accepted. Some of these same historians have even proposed that Star’s symbols (such as the one present alongside “we have fruit flies”) are even more stylized and simplified depictions of their species.

**Kitchen**  
estelle tronson



**water sign (seals have teeth and so do I)**

ursula hudak

Open abalones to eat  
crack oysters, carve  
brine and blade. Slip and cut,  
wince and suck  
soft supple meat, salt, spit,  
pucker. I think of  
the lick and the bite--  
that struggle of shuck  
taste tanzen on tongue  
tang.

Wade into the tide,  
return to the sea  
with tangled trembling hands,  
fingers and nail.

Swallow saltwater by accident.

This can be my shell,  
selkie slip skin,  
sharp and soft.

Savor.

Linger.

## **Brackish**

*littoraria irrorata*

brine wafts off of you in waves  
acid on your breath  
your dead fish eyes drill into me  
i am an oyster in your rough hands  
afraid. clamped shut. tight.  
you don't care, don't see me as  
    anything worth a more tender love  
you pry me open by my middle  
i am helpless  
dig around in my guts  
till you find what you are looking for.  
a pearl. the tendrils of my childhood wrapped tight  
ripped out of my ribcage  
dull and ivory. pearlescent and weeping  
a marshland where i lie  
long after you have left me  
salty breeze whistling through tall yellowed grass  
the sun feels cold on my face  
i cannot recall what i have lost;  
all i am left with  
deep and terrible  
is an overwhelming absence

**Flagler Beach,**

kate margaret luke

Florida is a pastel-colored renaissance  
Beat down by the sun, studded  
With cracked garden fountains sporting  
Sumptuous figures of myth, clothes-  
Less and closed for the season  
Despite the temperate air and the sun  
Burns on our shoulders from a lunch  
Served fried and windblown.

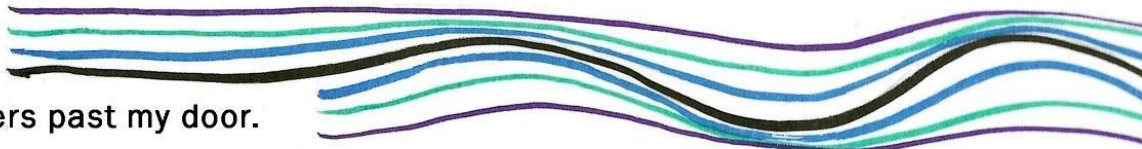
We follow A1A: a mostly straight spine  
Broken, healed, rebroken by the shore that gives  
It its curves. Rocky revetment like mounds  
Of teeth, a stretched smile wearing thin  
The pearly whites. In our heads  
Behind our dry lips we chew sand  
Particles like surprise vitamins—  
At least we tell ourselves so.

When we order our sweating glasses  
Of lemonade, our refills come  
As free as birds and we are as  
Happy and wet as clams, sticky  
In serendipity, peeling slogan  
Shirts off like ripe fruit  
Stickers. We love being  
Mostly unclothed and serviced  
Like we're worth something  
In nothing but our flush  
Bodies and crumpled bills stained  
With salt water. We squish in  
The car watching limes as large  
As houses zoom by—a fruit salad  
To window eat: Mango yellows,  
Strawberry pinks, orange citrus—  
Even the artificial brightness  
Of blue raspberry.

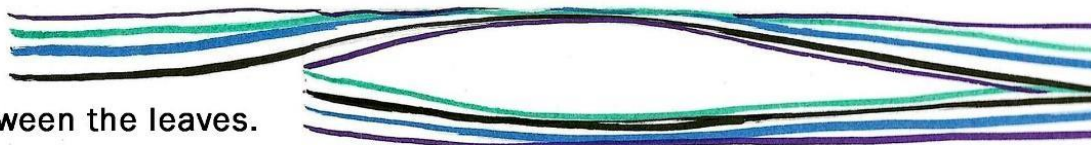


**I Read I Walk**  
dave donelson

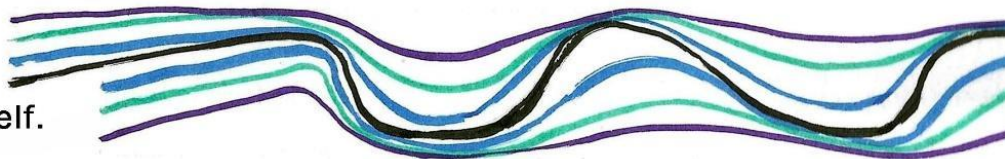
I read. I walk.  
I seldom talk.  
A lane meanders past my door.



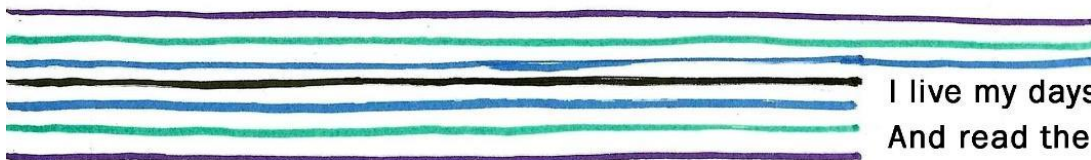
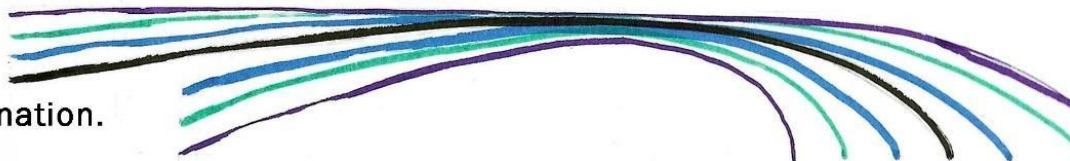
I stay. I stop.  
I pause to think.  
My finger lies between the leaves.



Lost without thought  
In the maples,  
I wander circles in myself.



Silence sings me,  
Quiet drapes me.  
I see but one destination.



I never count;  
I live my days.  
And read the pages in my book.

## **If Icarus Had Taken Swimming Lessons**

ursula hudak

The smell of soot in salt,  
a lick of luck thrown up;

waxy scars newly seared,  
quelled by the surge's froth--

feathers above spin asunder  
in currents created by his descent.

Beautiful boy in his foolishness  
and in the way he held his hands,

despite his hurt he begins to cut the tide  
with a well-practiced backstroke.

Daedalus above is glad for university pools  
with children's hours on the weekends;

for his foresight he remains a father,  
flying ahead to meet his still-here son.

**Ballerinas**  
lucas ritchie-shatz



**burnt swan on providence river (lover at night)**

ben hochster

i traced her, i dragged a  
swollen finger across her

nape, and she turned her  
left hand over like

a bell  
in the summoned

stillness. a ladybug's  
feather bubbled

in the window,  
out above the fire

escape; i  
offered my skin to the blades

of her shoulders.  
i could not refuse

her hovering eyelashes. and  
the night became a

structure around us,  
blackening the air of her bones,  
the silver

of her sleeping eye, the hair  
fallen across her chest.  
in the long shadow of mt.

beacon it doesn't get

through.

the message, a beam of  
light reflected back into  
the forest.

and now he's only a  
friction:

a man with  
his wilderness.

and now he wonders  
if anything could be  
different, if trees

could release their  
tight tendons, if

a natural force  
could stroke the ears of the  
water, if the great throbbing

in the atmosphere's xylem  
and phloem might also  
ripple  
underneath his skin.

but now he doesn't feel a thing.

wet plywood planks  
wedged in the soil  
represent a

separation.

## **Asking**

mac mckinzie

I don't know how to ask other things- I ask you to put lotion on my back.  
Fresh out of the shower I only know how to need.  
Your shirt, to dry my hair.  
Something in your gentleness,  
Taking off your  
Grandmother's claddagh ring,  
Turned inwards,  
To spread cool artificial  
Lavender across my back, my  
Shoulders, the verge  
Of my hips.  
I am all bright, clean aching.  
While you sleep my left arm  
Rests between us and the window  
And my  
Body is an  
Opaque afterimage. I can't believe  
The ease with which some people  
Sob in front of their lovers.



**Ivy**  
lucas ritchie-shatz



## **A Dream of Fresh Mercy**

trevor smith

Last night I dreamt of forgiveness  
Flowering green, pure, and gentle  
Petals liltng to touch the broken snow  
Alone, bathed in shimmering ice  
It stood firm, ripe and sun-drunk  
Before the time of spring

If only I was still a child  
Swallowed whole in winter cloths  
Able to balance my baby weight  
On the thin crust of solid snow  
Without plunging in  
And letting yellowed grass bleed  
Out from under crystal skin

Now I carry too much  
To wade out across the canvas earth  
In search of condemned flowers  
And the nectar of mercy  
I would only leave shattered water  
In my wake, mixed with sickly mud  
An imprint that would need  
It's own snow fall  
It's own blooming  
To be set right once again  
And, for a time, to be forgiven



**Lev (Paris)**  
lucas ritchie-shatz



## **A metaphor if you want one**

kate margaret luke

The first time I flew a kite  
Was the same day I first stepped barefoot  
Into a red ant hill—firey feet and windswept hair  
And sticky popsicle fingers  
Clawing at mountains of  
Burning skin while rectangle  
Framed eyes searched frantically  
For black or brown flats in a field  
Of itchy after-school-care grass

The second time I stepped barefoot  
Into a fire ant hill  
Was the same day I almost got bit  
By a roadside, rescued snapping turtle for the  
Nth time—my mom used reusable  
Publix bags to fend off amphibian disease  
Prevent her own sweaty-human oils from altering  
The PH of the shell, while I, flipflopped, and haphazardly  
Soon shoeless run arms outstretched  
With a bottle of water as if the wrinkly dark  
Creature would care to pause its ungrateful  
Snapping at my saved-you-from-being-roadkill  
Mother to take a parched sip

After it became a pastime to hold up traffic  
Or pull over into pointy bushes and ensure  
The safety of shelled pedestrians we learned  
A thing or two about interference and stubbornness

A turtle turned simply is a turtle  
Turned the wrong way  
Continuing to head in their predetermined direction  
Even if it is a skinny sun-bleached medium of grass and  
Not a lily-filled pond

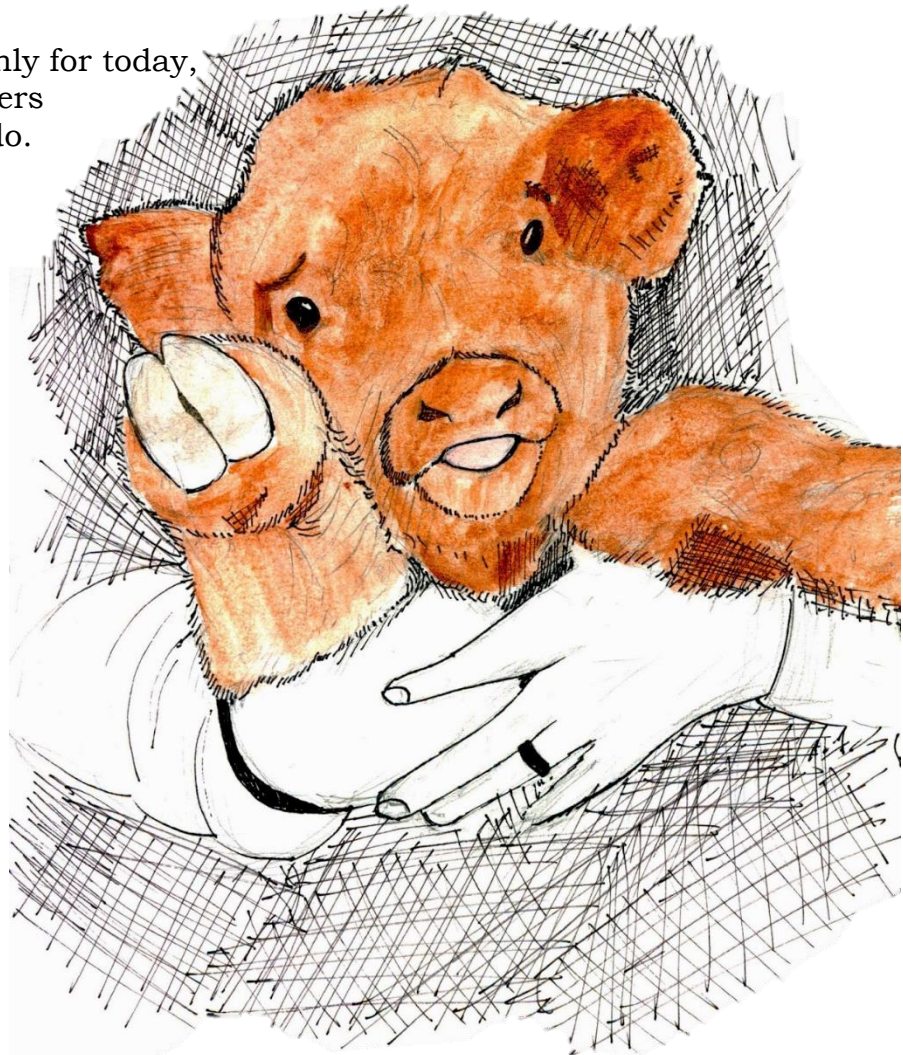
## **Tell Newton to Shut Up**

ursula hudak

I have spent my whole life  
desperate to absorb,  
waiting for it  
only to be broken into,  
expanded past my limits.

Eve's apple rolls away  
and suddenly I do not want this Socrates  
and his goblet of elderberries,  
or the two headed calf,  
or the story of the farmer who sold his herd  
and said goodbye, knowing each one by name.  
It is too much. Let me be dumb,  
let me be a housecat concerned only with dinner.

If time is an immovable force  
let me be the unmovable object, if only for today,  
let me sit in a blanket of spring flowers  
and not know they will die before I do.  
I rebuke it, 'I rebuke thee!'  
May I stay as I was.



**Cow**  
lucas ritchie-shatz



## **Painted Roses**

jo o'leary

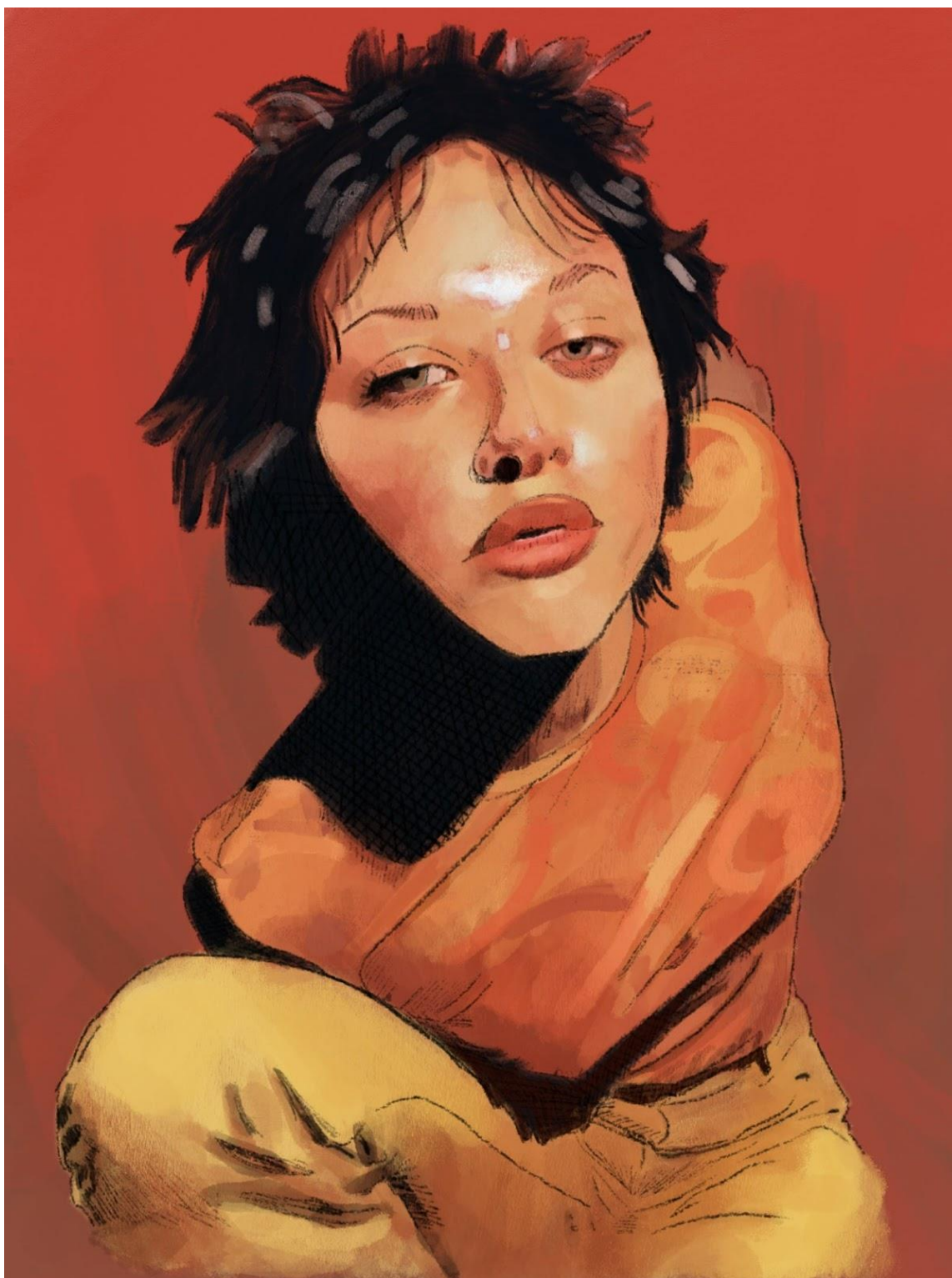
Sweet milk petal curls  
From grinning fern;  
Twists - in my mouth  
Tastes toxic, bitter, thick, smooth Smells better here, like dust;  
Doesn't crinkle my nose  
Like the real thing.

Blossoms spill from  
Careful vase stuffed full,  
Invading a summer sky.  
The cucumber leaves  
Graze my forearm wetly,  
Like a cow's lips or  
A cheek overtaken  
By an opera.

I rub my fingers together  
And feel the smooth, midnight blue; The weight  
Of the water  
Enfolded by its walls.  
Feel the clay revolving,  
Slip peeling out  
From my fingers' creases;  
The kiln's glow, the cone's sag. Almost ready.  
Almost.

There is a tightness, a  
Condensation, here.  
A tender beauty.  
Familiar.  
Makes me miss  
My mother.

**Study in Red and Orange**  
lucas ritchie-shatz



## **Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose**

mac mckinzie

My mom always tells me not to trust psychics  
Because my grandma let one go and  
Tell her she should marry a blonde who dies young  
And god knows that didn't work out.  
But lately, I've been feeling so prophetic-  
Watch this: Tonight! I will smoke half a joint  
And grow teary eyed looking at pictures of harvest mice.  
Further: I will never meet my grandpa.



**Hot Diggity Dog**  
lucas ritchie-shatz

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## **Fairy Princesssss**

lola chalmers-dibbell

I can be your fairy princess  
glitter baby for tonight.

    She put  
        glitter  
on my eyelids,  
        pressed  
her fingers gently  
    onto my skin and  
        spread the stuff around until I was  
glowing & I was magical &  
        I was shimmering  
                like the surface of a pond in moonlight.

Glitter was made for nighttime,  
                        my insides suddenly coming alive

    like  
        walking around in the darkness,  
fireflies glittering  
        within the  
                enclosed forest of trees  
                & looking up to see the big dipper  
that you learned about in first grade,  
                looking the same as it did in first grade.

    As we walked to the party,  
    shining under street lamps,  
she held my hand and I thought of  
    summer camp,  
girlbodies entwined  
                        like braids,  
    heads on shoulders,  
                arms wrapped around arms.

The party was shut down  
    when we got there but  
        someone told me the  
music was bad anyways.



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