

The Indicator
The Indicator



Passing

December 2021
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Editor's Note

The term “passing” implies movement - shifts from one state to another. Whether that movement is temporal, spatial, emotional, or psychical, our lives are constituted by these transformative moments. Sometimes, the experiences of passing are subtle and elusive, occurring secretly or even subconsciously. Other times, the shifts are immediately recognized, felt intensely and dramatically, perhaps changing one's reality forever.

At the opening of one of his poems, Hanif Abdurraqib reads, “My wife says that if you live 20 years/without having to go to a funeral, you are really lucky. ...” It's a simple statement, but one that rings true. While witnessing the passing of someone close to you is nearly guaranteed in life, it would be reductive to ignore that one's social conditions may significantly influence a person's exposure to death. Hanif turns the inevitable into a question of when and how much, attempting to trace the intricate threads that arise in moments of grief, loneliness, and solitude that follow experiences of passing.

Solitude, in particular, seems to be an essential aspect to all forms of passing: the passing of life, the passing of a relationship, passing as another identity, passing up an opportunity. Often that solitude feels like loss, even in instances where, in the strict sense of the word, it isn't. Many of these pieces are interested in pursuing that feeling: exploring our relationship to what we feel we're losing or have lost, and the moments in which solitude transforms into something other than loss.

That said, many of these pieces are heavy, and we hope you, as the reader, respect both yourself and the pieces by coming to the page when you are in a place emotionally and intellectually that can fully receive it. We hope you find each read rewarding.

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WILD PITCH

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(Why do you love what you love?
Why do you love how you love?
Couldn't you find something better
to do?

(No, probably not.)

Francis wasn't much of a lover. But what he loved, he loved to the point of pain.)

It started with the old man. Francis saw him outside the CVS. His big hands were trembling around a cigarette, a plush of orange lighting up an otherwise unassuming, uninteresting face. His face was downcast, lines etching out a portrait of exhaustion in his cheeks, his wrinkled forehead, his silvery hair shoved beneath a faded baseball cap. The fluorescent lights flickered, and every so often Francis caught a glimpse of fire glinting along inside his eyes.

Francis didn't make much of him—avoided eye contact as he slid into the store, not that the man seemed particularly interested in giving it up, and bought his toilet paper. It was only when Francis walked back out, plastic bag hanging loose off his wrist, that the man looked up.

"It's—" he rasped, voice a little worn out, "it's an awfully rainy city, isn't it?" He smiled at Francis, and he shifted, shuffling his bag from one hand to the other.

Looking up at the sky—cloudy, but not yet raining, though it felt like the sky was just taking a deep breath, getting ready to let it all spew out soon enough—Francis smiled wanly, thinking about the dinner he was going to have to cook when he got back home, and the phone bill he hadn't

paid yet, and that damn package he was going to have to return sooner rather than later. "Yes it is," he said, turning to stare at the car that zipped past, lurid yellow headlights painting their feet in a splash. "It'll probably rain soon," he continued, wondering if the leftovers in his fridge would hold over for another day or not.

"It didn't used to rain this much," the man mumbled, looking down at the ground. "Did it?"

Francis stepped back. "Ah—well—I don't know; it feels like it's been like this since I was a baby." He laughed, but it was a choked off thing. He didn't want to be here now that he thought about it. The rain wasn't so bad— and really, it was a good thing, considering the state of things all around the globe— like, maybe the rain and the cold was fine when Arizona seemed perpetually on fire and the Atlantic Ocean was more oil spill than water. Every day Francis got up out of bed, stretched his arms to the ceiling and removed the sleep from eyes. He polished the dullness of the day into something close to a sharp object. Ignored the rain, which had become something like a warm coat a long time ago.

Francis wanted to go home.

The man's eyes widened. "Oh, that's right. It's been around twenty years since—" he paused to flick away the cigarette— Francis held back a snort of disgust— and grabbed his hat, "Yes, twenty years since the last time they made the playoffs."

He wasn't much of a sports guy. "They?"

The old man huffed, twisting the cap in his hands. “The Knights, kid! It’s been twenty years!” He smoothed out the wrinkles on the cap’s brim, energy suddenly shot out of him. Francis checked the time. 6:50. What was he waiting for? “The rain didn’t used to feel so strong— or maybe I didn’t notice it so much. I was younger then. Now my bones all creak, like a skeleton.”

Francis checked the time again. Still 6:50. He didn’t have an umbrella.

It was supposed to rain soon, wasn’t it? What did the weather report say?

It was impolite to check your phone during a conversation, though.

“So, what,” he chuckled a little. “It’s been raining so much because a baseball team hasn’t made the playoffs?” They hadn’t even won, if Francis remembered correctly.

The man shook his head slowly. His hands were trembling again. It irritated Francis. Didn’t old people get colder easier? He should’ve been wearing gloves. “No— just the floods. Nothing grows in this city anymore, heh. Gets drowned out.”

Rice grew well in heavy rains. Monsoon crops, right? Maybe, Francis thought, he should try to grow rice.

The old man sighed, like he wasn’t expecting an answer from Francis. “It was nice catching up, Frankie. You should go see a game soon. Sometimes it makes me feel like coaching you kids again.” Then he walked away, and Francis was left gaping on the corner, bag quietly thumping against his leg.

He hadn’t been called Frankie in forever.

*

And then it came around to his mother. You know, sometimes Francis regretted going to college in the same state he’d

grown up in. And it was a damn big state, and Francis didn’t have a car, and who even knew how to use the bus, so it wasn’t like visiting home was in the cards that often anyway. But he wasn’t one of those people who hated his home state either. It was just a state, wasn’t it? A place of access— you lived here, this place was yours for the blip of time you existed on it, it learned how your footsteps sound and the grocery stores you liked to visit and sometimes it had little blips of magic that other places just didn’t.

Sometimes, Francis didn’t know if that felt like love.

Sometimes, Francis called his mother.

“You won’t believe this,” she began as soon as she picked up the phone. “I found your old mitt, from little league, remember?”

“Ma?” He said, staring down at the ground beef sizzling on the pan. Spaghetti bologna, he thought. No, wait. Bolognese. He blinked. Little League? “Since when did I play Little League?”

She scoffed. “Since you were a *baby*, that’s when! You were terrible, but everyone’s terrible when they’re babies. Those stubby little hands can barely hold balls, it’s adorable. Are you cooking?” She asked suddenly. “I can hear something sizzling. You shouldn’t have the heat too high if it’s meat, you know, it’ll burn before it browns—”

“Ma!” Francis interrupted. “I know how to cook!” Silence. *Mom silence*. “I’m making bolognese,” he mumbled, chastened.

“Oh, the recipe your father sent you? I like that one, but I think it goes heavy on the worcestershire sauce, you could—”

A baseball spun around in his mind. An image of the dirt, a red smear against

white clothes, appeared. He didn't know if that was a real memory, or if it was just—cultural osmosis. People loved a baseball story.

“Hey— you know I really don't remember playing Little League?” He asked, pulling out the garlic.

His mother went quiet. Francis added the worcestershire sauce, albeit less than the recipe called for. The pan sizzled. “You played shortstop, I think. Does that help? And you wanted to play on the Knights when you grew up.” Her voice sounded gentle. Francis wanted to break something.

The Knights. Those damn Knights. It wasn't really a big deal, was the thing. He couldn't remember some minor blip in his childhood record, so what? People forgot things every day.

Really, people had to forget things. The brain wasn't made to hold all the millions of minutes it'd been alive—Francis would've been alive for 11,044,800 minutes once his birthday rolled around. He'd checked.

All things considered, the importance of some childhood memories was probably miniscule in comparison to paying the bills, feeding the cat (hypothetically, since his apartment didn't allow pets), remembering to call his mom every once in a while. His reality was about moving forward.

Francis should've been grateful.

It's not like there was anything to remember from those days, probably.

He didn't even like sports.

“Yeah,” he said, and it sounded like a lie. “It's coming back, a little bit.”

“Ah,” she sighed, falling into a bout of nostalgia. He could imagine her spinning round in their old black armchair, one arm patched up because the stuffing was always at risk of spilling out. Francis hadn't known

he could imagine her so well. “The Knights sure were something back then. Like— flukes of nature. Hey, maybe I'll come up, and we can see a game together one day. Like when you were a baby!”

The beef burned. A lump lodged in Francis' throat. His hands were stained in garlic. “Like old times,” he repeated, hand gripping the spatula tighter.

*

It was stupid. Francis wasn't even sure he remembered the rules of baseball.

It was stupid. He didn't even know if he liked baseball.

There was a weird feeling in his gut as he sat down, rolling a water bottle between his hands.

It wasn't like— one game, and all his apparently locked away memories that Francis couldn't access would come back. It wasn't like— one game, and the city would stop flooding. It wasn't like— one game, and things would magically, suddenly, be better. So what the hell's the point, right?

It was just that sometimes, Francis sat in class and lost himself. He stared at the blackboard, at *his* hand writing notes and couldn't remember that it was his hand, really, that was writing those notes. He thought about how little he wanted to be there. He thought about blue skies—or slate grey skies—or even those nights where it was dark, yeah, but the sky looked almost orangeish instead. He thought about how little he wanted to be anywhere at all.

So: what the hell's the harm, right?

Watch the game—

Be terribly confused for a few innings—

Wonder when the giant epiphany was coming—

Watch the outfielder catch a fly ball—
Wonder what an epiphany was supposed
to look like—
Listen, listen, listen—
Listen to the crowd—
Listen to the smack of a ball against a bat—
Watch the ball soar, fly up against a blue
sky in the middle of the fifth inning—
Hope for something—
Watch it leave the park—
Realize it wasn't a run for the home team—
Wonder if you were supposed to be sad—
Wonder if you were sad—
Wonder if your heart was like the ball—
Hard and heavy—
Capable of being lifted to great heights—
Maybe against your will—
Listen, listen, listen—

Untitled

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IF I LET IT HAPPEN

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The inside of my palms are dirty
From the concrete blocks I sat on

The concrete was pressing against my palm
Creating a print in shape of pebbles

I look down and see the shape this concrete drew on my hand
My fists clench and unclench

Almost as if its searching for feeling
Almost as if I'm not feeling and I need to move to feel

I feel like screaming
But there are people

People who I love a lot
But don't know what its like to burn and still smile

To be utterly lost
Drowning in the thickest mud

Gathering in your throat
I become a frog

An amphibian
A being on the threshold of breathing and suffocating

Isn't it the same thing?
Being everything and nothing at once
All at the same time
All the time
Can I have some time to myself
But there are dreams
Stars waiting to be touched

Stages waiting to be cried on
Fields begging for screams

But I've ran out
Maybe tomorrow will be different

Maybe the sunrise can shine
And the brown iris in my eyes can bloom

And finally know when to stop



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I SAW THE EDGE OF DEATH IN A DUNKIN DONUTS

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“Why are so many people getting Dunkin Donuts at 2pm on a Sunday?”

That was the question that started it all. I was driving to get groceries with Nicole and Elena—Elena was driving—and on our way out of the little strip mall parking lot, we had to navigate through the Dunkin Donuts drive-through line, which had somehow grown long enough to overflow from the space around the store.

And Nicole asked her question. It’s a fair question, isn’t it? Who gets Dunkin Donuts at 2pm on a Sunday? I wouldn’t expect more than a single car in that drive-through, if that. Nicole and Elena laughed it off, but the moment continued to bother me.

Especially since, when I looked back at the backed-up line, just as we were driving away, I could have sworn I saw one of the cars disappear—there one moment and gone the next. And then the whole scene passed behind a grove of trees.

I didn’t say anything about my suspicions to my friends. I have a bit of a reputation in the group for being a bit obsessive. And that’s certainly true. A bit. I spent most of the afternoon lying on my bed in my little room, replaying that moment in my head. Was this just another obsession? I concluded that it was, after looking at my phone and realizing I had wasted three hours, but clearly I wouldn’t be able to shake it from my mind until I went and looked at the Dunkin Donuts again.

I couldn’t use Elena’s car since I had de-

ecided not to tell her, so I had to bike down to the area. I waited until the next Sunday, actually made sure I had *finished* everything for the weekend by 1 o’clock, and headed out along the side of the highway down to the Dunkin Donuts.

For once, my obsession was validated. At least, partially validated. There was an enormous line outside the drive through—and, something I hadn’t noticed last week, there were no cars in the parking lot and no one in the store itself. You would think that, even during a rush, some people would forgo the drive-through and just *walk into the store* to get the donuts they have decided they need at 2 o’clock on a Sunday. But nope. They’re all in the fucking drive-through. So, I started walking my bike over to the grocery store at an angle where I could watch the drive-through line, and I *saw it*. The car at the front of the line disappeared. Popped right out of existence. I think I stood there for a full ten seconds trying to make sense of it. Then the car behind it disappeared. And the cars behind *it* just rolled up to take its place like nothing happened.

I sought refuge in the grocery store’s Starbucks. I ordered some coffee (the kind that takes a good while to drink) and sat down at the window to watch the cars disappear. Every last one of them did. No one seemed to care, either. No one even seemed to notice. I sat there, waiting, drinking my coffee, for two hours. At 4:15 on the dot, a car reappeared, just as

abruptly as it had disappeared. Over the next fifteen minutes, perhaps a hundred cars appeared and drove off, just like that.

At 4:15 they would reappear and drive off. And not once did I hear anyone else comment on any part of it. I got to know the barista who worked the Sunday afternoon shift pretty well, and one week I got up the courage to ask them if they knew anything about the regular disappearances. They just got this look on their face and refused to say anything—refused even to talk to me for the rest of the afternoon.

I finally told Elena, and she didn't believe me—I actually had to remind her of the original incident first—until I insisted that she drive down with me to witness the disappearances herself.

"I won't say that isn't creepy, because it is, but isn't it better to leave it alone, Jake?" she said. "You don't know what kind of cult activity they're doing in a Dunkin Donuts, alright?"

That conversation quickly turned into a series of jokes about whatever Lovcraftian deity might be worshipped in a donut chain. Then we went home.

Of course, I can't leave well enough alone. I kept observing. I noticed it was starting to affect my ability to finish my weekend work, but I didn't care. I resolved that, some way, I had to get inside, to see what was really going on wherever the cars disappeared to. There was one car, a silver SUV, that would often be at the back of the line, with the trunk popped. That straggler would be my in.

One week, I came down even earlier than usual, telling my friends I couldn't make D&D that week because I had to study for a midterm. In fact, I did—and it was a midterm that I had missed, but this

was more important. I got there at one and settled down in the bushes to wait.

At 1:45, I saw something I had never seen before. An employee came out of the store and fiddled with something in the utilities control box outside. I kept my eyes wide, and saw the briefest flash of blue light, right in the center of the drive-through. Then everything looked as it was before.

I was lucky that week. I think. My straggler was at the back again, with his trunk popped. I strolled casually towards the store, on a path that happened to intersect the drive-through line, and scrambled into the open trunk when I came near. Inside was an odd assortment of cardboard boxes. Some of them were half-open, revealing clothes, toys, food, even jewelry. Like it was some kind of donation drive. I peeked over the seats and got a close look at the driver. They were wearing some kind of shapeless, ash-grey hooded robe.

It was very obvious when we passed through the barrier. In a flash, the light coming through the trunk window turned blinding blue, brighter than any light I have ever seen, except for a shape moving out in the distance, huge and hunched.

I'm not sure how long we spent driving through that space. I'm not sure if time really...works properly in there. At one point, I dared to peek out the window, and, despite the fact that we were last to enter, a line of cars stretched out behind us until it vanished into the blue. One of the shapes was following our line, though. I could see several of them from my vantage point, but this one was definitely stretching over the line. As I watched, its shadow approached, closer, and closer, until finally it passed over the trunk I was crouched in.

The trunk door flew open. The pain—

oh, it was exquisite. So acute, needling at every point of my body, that my brain gave up on processing it at all, and it felt instead like sinking into a bath of warm milk. The boxes around me flew open, and all kinds of offerings to the shadow above flew out into the infinite emptiness. Food, gold, pages of writings, every kind of significant thing in the lives of people, all of it was swallowed up, passed away. I felt my soul struggle to tear itself from my body, certainly useless at this point, as the shadow looked at me, noticed me for the first time this eternity.

For a moment, it was almost like it raised an eyebrow at me, and then the trunk door slammed shut. As I settled back into myself, the residual pain of that place made itself known—an intense full-body burn that left me speechless for the rest of the time we were in there.

Eventually, we came back. The parking lot reappeared around me, and by then I had regained enough sense to slip out of the trunk before we started up again. And then I went home.

Turns out, biking up a long hill while your entire body is sore and your brain is half-fried from the most painful experience of your life is a bad idea. There was a moment: a single, infinite moment, where my feet slipped off the pedals and I veered into the highway trying to regain my balance. A car passed within an inch of me, and I got a look inside at the driver. Thinking back on it now, it was clearly a mom, or perhaps a babysitter, since there were young kids in the back of the car, but in that moment I felt certain she was wearing that ash-grey robe and looking right at me with eyes of piercing, blinding blue.

I went home as fast as I could after that, locked myself in my room, and dove under

the covers like I was seven years old. At some point, I know I fell asleep, because I woke up with the worst hangover I have ever felt. Every inch of my body felt like it had been beaten with a meat tenderizer.

I spent the rest of that week trying desperately to catch up on the work I had let slip during my fixation on the Dunkin Donuts. I felt certain I wasn't going to go back there ever again.

And yet, when Sunday rolled around, I found myself heading down to get my bike and halfway out the door before even really thinking about it. I weighed my experience of the past week and the pile of work that remained in my room against the curiosity tapeworm that was eating up my brain, and found it a difficult balance.

I finally shook off the urge and returned to my room. Things went slowly back to normal, except for one final thing. I received a letter with no return address or sender. Inside was a coin of shocking blue metal, and these words:

*Seek out the faces of death if you will,
Beyond in the blue they live.
But if you would venture to meet them
alone,
Beyond all your life you'll give.*



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ABSENCES IN PERSONAL NARRATIVE (A PERSONA POEM)

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Maybe I should reconsider my position
on the camera. Maybe it is worth
that last smile inside the apartment,
the room that I gave up on (the one
with bullet holes but in which I could never
find the bullets), the vacuous spider

which digested all things other than dreams,
the air mattress, and my brother
who slept next to me and all that came with him.
And how is it that the absence in my stories
is the apartment now and not the automatics
of the men who I never saw? How is it that

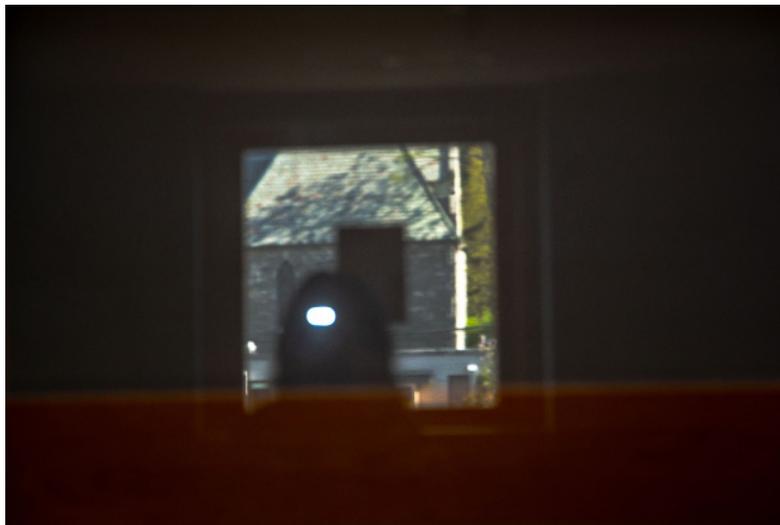
I needed a proof for the premise:
my sadness could not convince my mom
to take me to the therapist. I looked out
the window and said *the sound of gunfire*
is like the sound of divorce and she dreamt
up the narrative I substitute for memory

of a girl I walked home from elementary
because I craved her attention, ten minutes
more than a tutor should, and that was enough
for me to leave home, knowing love

is not something I should have.

What I mean to say is, I want pictures
to be my memorial
because I am seeing now my funeral
will be sudden, like my flight
to the college dorm, where I am told
people mold into something new.

I put photos of my family on the wall. They leave only me
knowing where my gaze was fixed with each smile
which I flinch through. I hope I forget
the stories of bullets and only remember
my self-hatred as naive first attempts at freshness,
my afro the center of my attention, now and then.



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DECOMPOSITION

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Trigger warning: body horror

Autumn in New England always strikes me as an ostentatiously formal affair in which one pulls out their finest wool and leather silhouettes, all in the most somber umbers and teals and siennas. And the dynamic frenzy of summer air crystallizes itself to clarity, a percussive precision dearly embraced. There are colors, too, that convey a taste of sweetness as the leaves caramelize to browns, oranges, apples—apples dipped in maple glazes and chocolate. The mountains are brightly foiled in dark ferns and the sun frosts the valley in maple.

Autumn is clinical and cool and cozy when I want it to be, and I take comfort in sliding my icy, non-adhesive feet against my flannel sheets and slipping them into my microfleece socks. In autumn, I forget that I have knees, that I have legs, that I am embodied with the sour stench of sweat, the slime of sunscreen slathered on my back, and I pass into abstraction. I slink into my wool coat and feel impenetrable and smooth. Poreless and porcelain, like a China doll.

In the attic of an old Greek revival, dust laces my linens and my oak-paneled walls. The night stirs and I wake up; I am bleeding. I rush to the bathroom as my body decomposes and squirts, sloshing red onto the lilac floor below. It is disgusting. Sighing, simmering, I claw at the toilet paper

and bouquet it in my hands. In me is a void and I fear its imagination. Above me, the moon is bloated.

Bloated with meaning, you would say sarcastically, and I would mistake your words for earnestness.

It's autumn in New England.

This is supposed to be a love story.

Before we were anything, we were neighbors. Back before any of us had real friends, we spent Saturday evenings in the solitude of our dorm rooms. On these evenings, the smell of something sweet floated from your room and wafted into mine. I knocked on your door. You were surprised at my interruption. I thought that you were attractive from three angles but no more.

What are you making? I say.

You smiled. Pancakes. You gestured to an Easy-bake oven on your shelf. I stole it from my younger sister.

That's a fire hazard, I said. But I won't tell the RC if you give me some.

Come in, you said. And the rest followed.

When you're stressed, you sing. When you dance, you swing. When you like a song, you call it "smooth." When you talk, your curls fly up as you punctuate. Indeed, you like to say in a mock-intellectual tone. Indeed, I am tired and I shall bid you adieu, you say before you exit. You always need to say goodbye to everyone before you leave, never being one to go quietly.

I am sitting in the quad when I first see you this season. There you are, bounding over the hill from the West, in your navy pea coat and all, a bounce in your stride, walking through the incandescence of stars. I fear to look at you for a reason beyond fire; I don't wave at you; you wave at me, so I wave at you. Hul-lo, you say. Hul-lo—I smile—hullo. Yes, hullo, again. You sit down next to me and fumble with the gold rings on your fingers as I fumble with my words.

I am reading *Jane Eyre* for our class right now, I say.

It's spooky, you say. And Jane's a pick-me.

Yes, I laugh. Yes, I suppose you could read it like that.

And we sit there and relish in our criticisms.

The sun gilds your curls, your delicate ears. Lately, I don't know why it is so difficult to talk to you as a friend, though we have been friends for three years. Yet this autumn, you have become a fixation. I think, if you were with somebody else, I would hate them. I don't know how to tell you that I love you. Perhaps: *I've never wanted to be perceived until now.*

For a while, you only exist as a statue chiseled in crystallized honey. I picture your hair, your eyes, your neck, and do not notice your dandruff, your pores, your dirt. I like seeing you in wool, in cable-knit sweaters, in checkered button-downs. You are disembodied to me and I do not venture into unseen territory. Instead, I carve a future in cashmere in which we wear suits of dark tweed and dresses of fine silk and you smell like roses.

On the bus to the next town over, I rest my head on your shoulder and you grab my hand. Underneath my gloves, my palms ooze and pulsate with saltwater. Your hands are likely cool and smooth and hairless.

When we arrive, the avenues are lined with fairy lights that wink and twinkle over the rising mist. From the street fair, you buy us fried mozzarella sticks to share. A fluff of white crosses the street—is that a schnauzer?—you ask, and we both have the same idea to chase it. You pull me along through the crowds of sweated shoppers in search of the little bear. As we weave our way through the crowds, we're dashing and flying and laughing and flushing and the silvery world is spinning and sparkling and twinkling, and then we lose sight of the creature and collapse our jovial momentum to the floor of the town green, falling in the exhilaration of our absurd pursuit. I turn to your blooming face. My hand is still in yours and we peel back our gloves. Somewhere, an orchestra swoons in a D-major string serenade. We are close and I pull you closer. Your breath will taste like honey and earl grey tea.

Your lips reach mine and I taste the cheese in your spit. The sour heat of your breath is suffocating, the exchange of fluids disgusting, the jagged bumps on the flabby skin under your neck—a chicken's flesh. The worms hidden in my mozzarella-flavored teeth march into your greasy mouth. Still, your eyes are closed so I don't pull away, though I see the craters on your face, the hairs in your nose, and imagine your glands bubbling oil to your skin. Over dinner, you tell me all the things you want to do tonight. I wish we had rinsed our mouths with spearmint. I suppose that this

is a love story.

In the coming weeks, I nestle in thick stockings and sweatshirts and corduroy trousers, hiding from you. I try to explain to you that I still love you, but I cannot stand your body and that you shouldn't take it personally because it's more of an aversion to bodies in general. I can heal you, you say. We can heal each other. But no. I don't need to be healed but transformed. I tell you I still love you but I know it's not in the way you want.

You make me feel monstrous, you say.

The feeling's mutual, I say. Because you remind me that I have a body.

Stop. Stop stop stop hiding. You say you love me but you don't give me anything.

Not everything is for you.

No, you say. You just love yourself more than you love me.

You look at me; my chest aches. Then I think of our spit sloshing together and I vomit.

Perhaps we shouldn't see each other, I say, and I run.

On evenings where we submerge ourselves in pools of poison, I try to forget you. Instead, you brew more potently in my mind than before. You've made me feel guilty and I hate you; you've made me feel wanted and I love you, and I want some parts of you, too, parts that I picture now amid this intoxicating, overflowing horde of indiscernible bodies. Shadows contour my loneliness as I find my way to your room, and the knocks I knock will resonate until dawn. Why are you here, you say. But it's clear why we're here, together, on this sticky evening stuck together. And with the taste of a particular mango vodka stolen from the party downstairs, I share my spit with you, and you let me. In the dark, we

breathe together and I decompose, ragged, monstrous, tumorous, and you trace my notches. When the air clears, I am liquid—loosely wrapped in hair, porous and fleshy, with great vaults of oil that ooze out of a semi-permeable membrane, rubbing against another. And I gasp for clarity. It tastes of mango vodka and mozzarella. I forgot that this is also the season of decomposition.

Afterward, I can't stand to look at you and I block your calls. In your absence, I busy myself with my anxieties, of whom I lug under the degenerating specters of old friends. There is depravity in the burnt sienna of the distant hills as they become speckled with snow. You remind me of fermented fruit and spoiled milk, acrid oil from the fat lard of putrid cheese that stretches and bounces and slaps elastically as it descends from the nethers of a milk cow. There is nothing to hold onto—meticulously, we senesce.

The blood is late. As the moon ripens to roundness, I wait for the unfurling of my barbaric interiors. Yet it doesn't arrive. Three days. Across the quad, I step on the carcasses of the dead. They pop and fizz under my leather oxfords as the world decays to the grotesque. Moisture molests the soil, yet the rain doesn't come.

A mound of panic slowly rises from my oozing, glutinous darkness. Four days, five days. I am feverish, wool sticks to my perspiring skin. When I see you, I turn in the other direction, not wanting the reminder that I can no longer pass. You have seen me in my monstrous form and now a monster gnaws within me.

The moon shrinks—still nothing—its light stolen and brazed into the knife in

my hands. I am sprawled on the bathroom floor, heaving and sweating with worry at another midnight passed with no blood. In the void, I have manifested my fears into worms. Soon, crepuscular vermin will wiggle into a mound and eat me alive, decomposing my consciousness, corrupting the chambers of my body, snarling and leeching on my insides to emptiness. Out, out, out, I say, yet no charms nor crystals work to dispel them as they insist on nestling their sloppy forms in my arteries. The maggots twist upstream and their bodies bulge through my scalp in uneven, squirming lumps. My stomach swells to a bulbous, distorted ball with quivering veins, and the void kicks me with pain. I will not hide anymore. I slide towards the unyielding door as the dark tears at me, drowning, and I wield the moon-knife, carving inwards, digging into the flesh on my torso, which is soft and fluffy, a piece of cake, easy as slicing bread at brunch, and I push the blade in deeper, not wanting to leave any part of them inside. A glass of wine. I shatter it on the floor, a piercing, metallic scream paired with the hiss of my serpents. I reach in and choke them, quivering, trembling—the monster and me gasp—in unison—and the—blood—squirting out as ketchup would—spilling—dying—and I spray my insides with bleach. A shudder. Then I take my needles and sew myself up, neatly and cleanly.

Below, the blood blooms between my legs. I laugh and welcome it, however tardy. I giggle in an expanding pool of scarlet, elated. Remembering my hands, I scoop up the viscous liquid and baptize myself in red. Overhead, the stars shake. I hold my knees, rocking back and forth on the crisp, purple floor, finally clean, clean, clean.

When you reach me, I will have waited for years. You'll have a bouquet of dandelions in your hand, worth nothing but tears.

“You had a talent for moving gently.”

When the snow melts, we will meet on the far side of the mountain. By then, the glaciers will have babbled into springs. You'll see me and I'll bloom for you.

For you. Spring into you. You, you you you you. And you'll braid lutetianas in my hair.

In Lutetia, in 1945, when the war is over, I look for you in the crowd. Dust laces the past, a coffee cake dressed in cinnamon, softly. On a mystic island, a woman gives you a crown of laurels, an enchanter's nightshade that fringes your eyes.

I wait for you and decay.

I AM WHAT YOU DON'T SEE

A'Cora Hickson | ahickson25@amherst.edu

insignificance. you would say. little you feel.
passing is what i feel. but in reality i am the one stuck.

breezing past like a leaf caught in the wind.
i am the tree.

the motion of the picture.
i am that one, *still* shot.

triviality. that's what others will say. nothing they feel.
As close as we can be. but they will never notice you fleeting away from me.

the branches to my tree. but you do not feel the gush.

the lens to my camera. but you are out of focus.

mimic your actions. feel as little as you feel. do as little as you do.
Yet, I am the only one *still* stuck.

FALL RELAPSE

Zoe Alarcon | zalarcon25@amherst.edu

As the leaves succumb to a coral shade
You're reminded of my your own freshness
How with each summer comes as naturally
a deep renewal
A solidifying of insights
But its fragile underpinnings are also sud-
denly more visible
And the trees' tactless, rapid shedding
rekindle your sympathy for your own dead
leaves

Sometimes still, late at night you find your
self at the door
Of the filthy dwelling where your old cogni-
tive pests fester
Starving for the attention they crave
And squealing in perverse excitement when
they hear you knock
They walk you, as a bride to her groom, to
an iron maiden you built as a child
an experiment that gradually consumed
you

Wrapped in autumn-colored rust all you
can feel is your skin burning
Iron seeping into your skin and tranquiliz-
ing you

But as it's no longer summer, you're no
longer a child
And while sometimes you relapse to famil-
iar pain
Your palette's matured
Preferring the bittersweet taste of freedom,
Fall's enigmatic reds

and the world beyond the confinements of
self-imprisonment
To the comfort of rigidity
and summer's static, unattainable light

With this preference in mind,
You're better able to pull away from places
where you're not welcomed
And navigate your departure on my own
Like a disciplined adult, you can sit quietly
and contently

on the lonely train of time
Detached from what's left behind
But like a child, too, you can gaze thought-
lessly at what flashes by
Appreciating its being in passing
How landscapes are lost and resurface
anew

Sometimes as a whole
Sometimes as a system of different parts
A reflection of yourself in which you take
solace
Your tense shoulders loosen
And you submit to the train's force

The leaves' downward drift remind you to
seize the day
And inspire you with their courage
You see yourself in the changing colors of
fall



Cece Amory is a Staff Artist for the *Indicator*
Artwork inspired by Dave McKean

PASSING

Mikayah Parsons | mparsons24@amherst.edu

You came to me in seasons.
In summer, you were bright and full of life.
You climbed your way up the staircase on all fours
And dared me to do the same.
You had a nice smile,
So I listened to you.

I tripped over those stairs.
That summer was a series of awkward renditions,
With me squeamishly asking for your patience
As we traversed the great unknown.
After a time, things stopped being exciting for you.
We did them more, and I became more comfortable.
Things got less awkward for me as the sun got paler
And the clear, starry nights passed away.
But when I asked you to do the things we used to,
You didn't smile so bright anymore.

Fall was lukewarm,
Like hot chocolate too watered down—
More for lack of appropriate timing than for anything else.
I pulled out my sweaters and my pump-kin-themed streamers,
And you shrugged your shoulders and frowned.
When you looked at me,
I was not in front of you.
You were looking at something beyond me,
That I was in the way of, now.
I felt our time was running out.

Winter came, first a bitter and biting breeze,
Then an avalanche outside our door,
Yelling at us and banging on the wood to let it in.
I was comfortable being in the house, but we were angry
As we hid in our respective corners of the room,
We were more upset at being trapped with one another
Than at not being able to get out.

Then one night,
You fell into my arms and cried.
It felt like old times.
Snow fell in fat flakes onto your curls
And dissolved the way your tears did
On my fingers as I captured them.
You told me you felt cold,
So I offered you my jacket,
My shoulder,
My ear,
And my whole heart.
It was warm there.
I gave you all the things I thought I was supposed to give you,
And that was still not enough.
I didn't realize that you can't formulate relationships
For them to work, like math.
It's more like English,
But we never talked to each other,
Because you squirmed when you thought we had nothing to say.

I had everything to say to you,
I just hadn't warmed up.
You never gave me time.
Suddenly, your patience with my problems was a compromise,
But I had to pull that information out of you.
You expected that my fire would always be kindled—
But by who?
Because it could no longer be you.

I pretended that it was.
And then you stopped needing me.
You went to other sources for warmth and comfort,
Because you seemed to have forgotten that
You kindled my fire
As much as I did yours.
You seemed to think that
My wood was not enough.
You seemed to think that
Our wood could not exist together,
That we weren't built to last in this weather.

I thought I did everything I could to repay you,

But I let you get too close.
You didn't just provide warmth.
You burned me at the stake.
You let me take and take,
Even when I told you not to.
It's my fault, too.
Somewhere in the fire I got lost
And couldn't figure out when the water was enough.
So I stopped watering you,
And you stopped watering me too.
There were secret tunnels in the house,
Leading us away from each other,
And eventually, it all got burned down.

When you burned out,
Spring came.
You were surrounded by tons of budding flowers.
They tilted your way, in the way of the sun.
You watered their soil,
And they watered yours.
It was all one giant circle.
I was somewhere on the outskirts,
With a large floppy hat and unnecessary gardening tools.
Whatever you had asked of me before,
You did not need now.
You were getting it from somewhere better,
From someone else.

I can't figure out what happened.
When I argued that "it happened to you,"
You crumbled, dust slipping through my fingers.
That had not been what I had meant to say.
I felt my heart explode.
It seemed that no matter what I said to you,
It was never right anymore.

And sure, some things were wrong.
But some things you ran from,
Things that I depended on you for,
And things I gave to you because I needed to.
At the end of the day,
Our relationship was an exercise in who could give the most to who

Until we both burned out.

In the summer,
We passed.
I wish I knew who and where you are now,
But your grass is growing miles high,
And mine is too.
I just always imagined that my grass would grow with you.



Anna Zhou is a Staff Artist for the *Indicator*

REUNION

Tapti Sen | tsen25@amherst.edu

Please come sit next to me—
I want to lay my head in your lap and
whisper about the boy you love
as you braid flowers in my hair. Once,
I knew you like I knew myself, and
now, I wonder if history is all we have left.

I look at you and see a stranger. I still
remember your yellow bedroom walls,
the wafting scent of your mother's *piyaju*
frying in the kitchen—I see you in everyone
I meet, and I can't forgive myself for what
we became; I can't forgive you either. I want you
to be happy, and yet your happiness burns me.

I wish this was easier, I wish we could look at old photos
Without realizing how much time has passed,
I miss you now, even as you stand next to me.
Sometimes, I wake up and hover my thumb
over the send button, aching to tell you how I wish
it was different but I close the tab, message unsent.

I wish you would linger at my doorstep
just a little longer, wrap that red scarf
your grandmother knit just a little slower.
I wish my fingers wouldn't twitch in hesitation
as I raise my hand to wave you goodbye.
I want to forgive you; I hope I never do.
Please sit next to me and miss me too.



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STRANGERS

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I see you on the bus first.

Or maybe, it's you who senses me, turning around just enough for our eyes to meet. Somehow, past the friend I am talking to, past the earbuds pressed tightly against your ears, our eyes lock. You are skinnier than I remember. Age has sharpened your cheekbones, stolen the roundness from your cheeks. The nest of brown pine needles on your head has softened, curling gently at the tips. It is hard to imagine them as the same rat hair your mom used to comb through, her fingers gently untangling the knots, the burrs in your curls.

Even sitting down, I can tell you are taller than me. Your arms and legs dangle off the seats like the long legs of a spider that I used to pluck from the cobwebs on your attic floor. They scuttled across the palms of my cupped hands. Back then, the spiders scuttled forward and you scuttled backward; back then, you were the same height as I was, but only I was brave enough to catch the spiders dangling from the ceiling.

You were afraid of a lot of things: bugs and slugs, heights and nights, dogs and frogs, bees and trees. When you climbed your very first tree, I was the one with my feet planted on the ground and my shoulders underneath your bare feet. Even after you managed to sling yourself over, I stayed on the ground, in case you were too afraid

to climb down. When I cried alone under the tree on my ninth birthday, you were the one with your grubby, chocolate-covered fingers, clutching a small, misshapen cupcake.

We always went to your house to fight the monsters that slept underneath your bed and slipped into your dreams. You were the king, organizing the valiant troops, barricading the fort with pillows stacked to the ceiling. I was the queen, riding my trusty steed with my sword into battle. It never mattered who was who either way. We ruled over our tiny kingdom that was somehow tall enough to fit both of our crowns snugly perched on our heads.

When we turned ten, the last echoes of childhood faded from the creases of our chubby fingers, the cheeky laughter bubbling from within our throats.

The real monsters didn't lurk beneath your bed. The real monsters knew how to hide in ways your dream monsters never knew how to, burrowing past the walls of our fortress. They latched onto my thoughts in the same way a tick drinks blood, a fire devours wood. Through the mirror, they stared at me as I stretched out my fingers to touch the stranger's face, *my* growing face, gazing back at me.

The weekends passed by, daily visits turning into Monday visits, then just into

holidays. I stopped turning down the corner of the road to your house. You stopped biking on my street. The kingdoms that were built in your house turned into forts, then soft caves, then just pillows that lay limp on your bed, dull and gray.

But here on the bus, surrounded by the people of the present and the ghosts of the past, we somehow meet eyes. And just for a second, the world stops.

Just for a second, I imagine our fingers stretching out, your knobby knuckles reaching for my calloused fingertips, just ever so slightly touching, brushing past each other. Your hands would curl around mine, the same hands that swung the imaginary sword, that commanded invisible soldiers to rush into battle; the hand that once held the smudged cupcake under the tree.

I don't know who turns around first.

The moment breaks. The bus is overwhelmed with sound once more. Someone

throws a paper ball. The person behind me impatiently nudges my shoulder.

Somehow, you and I are back to our own separate realities: the quiet boy in his chair, the loud girl walking through the aisle. Our eyes flicker past each other. You resolutely stare at the ground as I push forward, past the tangle of legs and arms, past the silhouette of bright summers and animated laughter stretching further, farther between us. There is a moment when we are close enough to each other that my arm might have brushed against your jacket. But the moment passes, disappears, swirling down the abyss of what was and what could have been.

We are just humans who once knew each other, now strangers passing by.



Sarah Wu is a Staff Artist for the *Indicator*



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THOUGH UNTRUE

Ross Kilpatrick | rkilpatrick23@amherst.edu

Though rivers make untrue
that Land is borderless
(we aren't mermaids
to intermingle with the sea)
I wish I were
a freshwater octopus,
all kisses and soft touches,
For bones are such a burden
to us, the nationless
and lying in the depths
letting little death sing
there'd be no shame
of monster and mate coupling
So on eight limbs
we'd begin counting
all our luck,
to not be distinct,
as even or odd,
but lover, and cephalopod

IN FOCUS

Tara Alahakoon | talahakoon25@amherst.edu

I adapted to life out of focus.

My world was an impressionist painting: earthy hues blended the landscape as swaths
of grey streaked across the sky.

Silhouettes danced in and out,
their edges fuzzy.

Like an artist, I played with light.

With the squint of eye, I could add shading;
in a blink, I could renew the canvas.

I don't remember when I first experienced a lens.

It could have been as I pressed my face to contraptions at the eye doctor's office,
or as I browsed the frames at Warby Parker.

Yet suddenly, I saw my mother's bloodshot eyes
and swollen nose after twelve hours of wearing an N95.

The trickling wet paint of the slurs
graffitied in the parking garage.

The saltire of the confederate flag
paraded through the Capitol Building.

Perspiration on the foreheads
of anxious grocery shoppers
as they scoured the empty shelves.

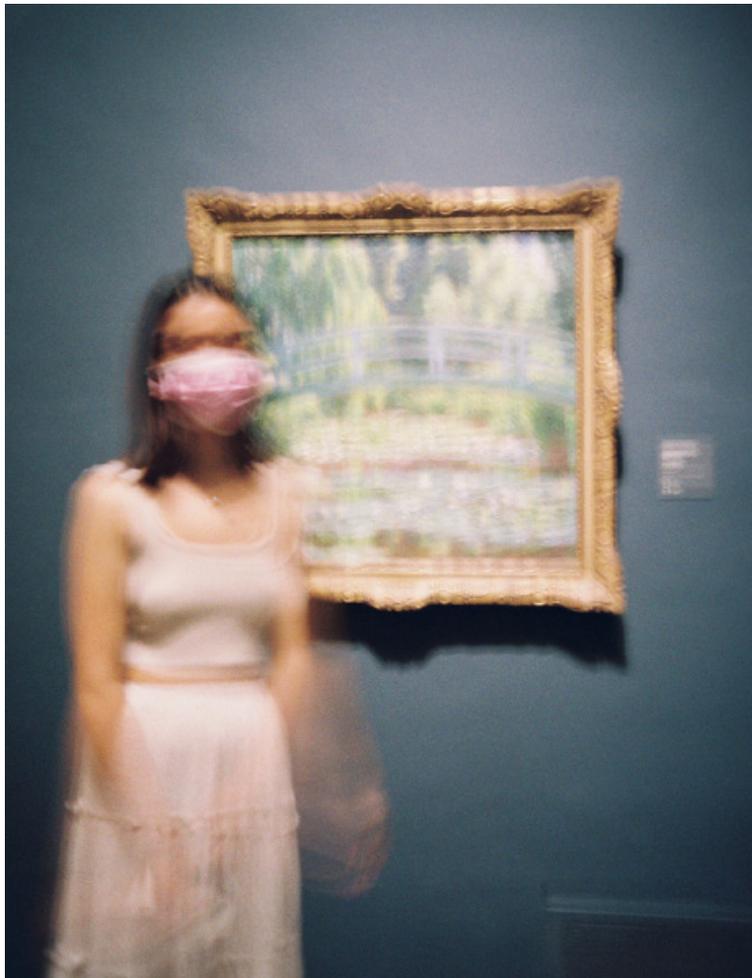
The white knuckles of protesters
gripping their rifles
as they rallied on the Statehouse lawn.

Clouds of tear gas rising

among the hollers downtown.

The world was hurting,
and my impressionist period was over.

My reality is no longer as blurred as it once was.



Anna Zhou is a Staff Artist for the Indicator

DEAR SHANGHAI | 亲爱的上海

Anna Zhou | azhou25@amherst.edu

Draped in the Moon Goddess' waning light,
I write secret love letters:
to a motherland I've never felt the right to know
to warm bowls of bean curd flowers and soy milk,
so white and weightless and pure
I imagine Chang'e herself adorned in flowing robes
of rich jade amongst the stars.

At twilight, its streets swell
with swerving mazes of pastel mopeds, its skies burnt
orange with smog and the dying embers of ancient dragons.
My time is ever limited there,
as is my language:
"Thank you,"
"I missed you,"
"I'm full; yes, I had enough to eat—really"

Two jagged halves brushing past,
swathed in twirling ginkgo fans wound
from golden silk,
the ones Ma-ma loved as a girl.



Zoe Strothkamp is a Staff Artist for the Indicator

AN ELEGY FOR MY NORTH STAR

Sofia Rodrigo | shincapierodrigo24@amherst.edu

My grandmother was a woman in the boldest sense of the word. She was fiery and strong, but also caring and selfless. She was Britney Spears CD's playing in a little red car so old I didn't think it would make it out of the driveway, but I liked to think it ran on her magic alone. She was breakfast in bed and Saturday morning cartoons I wasn't allowed to watch at home. She was my North Star, promising me I could always find her by looking up at the sky. She was tough love; she taught me how to climb a tree but refused to help me get back down, claiming that one day she wouldn't be here, and I'd need to be able to do things by myself.

I could have climbed up and down that tree a million times and I still wouldn't be prepared for a life without her.

My grandmother never knew how to stay still, she spent most of her adult life moving from place to place, taking my grandfather and father with her. Together they bounced around from towns to islands to cities, never staying in one place for long. When I was nine years old, my grandmother decided it was time for her move again; she left the U.S. and returned home to Colombia.

I visited her the summer before my senior year of high school. She took me on a trip to San Andres, a tiny Colombian island in the Caribbean Sea. My grandparents had lived there with my father decades ago, and looking back, I think that my grandmother wanted me to un-

derstand the island through the way she had loved it. She showed me the beautiful attractions San Andres had to offer, but the things I remember most are the places from her past that meant something to her personally. Rusty playgrounds where she used to play with my father, restaurants she used to order food from when she was too tired to cook after work, empty swimming pools, and the cobblestone streets she biked with my father. Looking for the love she had left there decades before, passing through places she used to live, eat, sleep, work, and love; she was holding on to them like water in her hands. I didn't understand it then, the way she was trying to hold on to the memories these places held — of my father, of her life, of everything it was before it wasn't.

On the last night of our stay in San Andres, my grandparents and I took a stroll through the boardwalk, chatting with vendors, listening to the music coming from everywhere, and enjoying the breeze. We made our way to a broken-down pier struggling to stay above water, where we chose to take a seat for a few minutes before heading back to the hotel. We talked about many things that night, things that I wish I could remember now, but my memory has only been able to hold onto one particular conversation.

“What are you most afraid of?”, I asked.

We sat in silence for several seconds before my grandmother spoke, “Never being able to hug your father again.”

Not understanding, I brushed it off at the time, I thought that it was an irrational fear. Of course she would be able to hug him again, it would only be a few more years until the immigration system would allow them to see each other again.

There were a lot of things I didn't understand that night, most importantly: mortality.

She passed away before she could hold him again, and maybe that's something to be upset about. To kick and scream and cry over the unfairness of an unjust system that displaces families and forces them to spend over a decade without embracing

each other. But my grandmother would have hated that. She could walk over glass and through fire with a smile on her face, she always chose to laugh her way through life, and she would want us to do the same in her absence. I know she's laughing now, biking through the cobblestone streets of Heaven, waiting for the day when we'll join her.

My father and I spend most of our nights looking up at the sky, searching for a sign from our eternal North Star. And sometimes, when he passes his glance from the sky to me, I know it's her he sees.



Jacinta Smith is a Staff Artist for the Indicator

HOME COMING

Gabby Avena | gavena25@amherst.edu

Ever since the Nabisco factory closed, you can no longer smell the cookies in the air. My Lola keeps telling me this, once as we pass through colorful concrete tunnels on our way from the Newark Airport, again as they are replaced by the tall trees that tower over the road, and a final time as we pass the empty corpse of the factory, its darkened neon lights welcoming me to my hometown: Glen Rock, New Jersey. She tells me that when she first arrived from the Philippines, she wondered how the neighbors could have so much time for baking, day-in and day-out. Now there is nothing but a fresh frost creeping into the autumn air. I smile and say that's too bad and I miss it too, but really, I have no memories of ever catching the scent of cookies among the pines.

What I do remember is this: a brick-and-paneled house at the end of a straight street, a driveway whose downhill slope seems to carefully cradle you for a moment before you fall. I remember a tree—Naomi's tree—planted for my baby cousin who passed long ago, its highest leaves now watching over me. There are still bunnies who burrow under the shrubs, still a scattering of flowers in the front lawn, but the mailbox's greying green has been traded in for shiny new copper with, on its side, two sparrows stuck in stark relief.

In the end, it's the interior that has changed the most. I watch as my Lola rests her arm against the walls whose ancient floral wallpaper has been peeled off like

sickly skin over bare bone, exposing stark white beneath. The floorboards no longer announce her shuffling steps with great groans, producing quiet clicks instead. The magnets which once crowded the fridge's old face, one for every place my Lola ever traveled, are now stowed in the basement.

And yet the memories remain, scattered everywhere. As I pass through the rooms, I find their ghosts tucked into covers and corners: one strains on its tiptoes next to the door frame into which my increasing height was etched alongside all my siblings and cousins, where we can see the year in which Tim outgrew us all. Another pulls along a little red wagon (my first favorite toy) with a little stuffed rabbit seated inside (my second). A particularly peaceful figure leaves its light impression on my grandparents' bedsheets, fiddling with the soft flesh between my Lolo's thumb and forefinger as he reads the Sunday strip.

I am reminded that after all, no matter what, here is home. Here is my family's first place in the States; here it has remained ours for over twenty years. Here in the backyard is a garden; here in the garden is a grove of apple trees. Here I am the tree, I am the fruit, I am the seed.

Memories are more than pictures framed upon the wall; they are not static things. Memories can move, can be passed down like a family heirloom or a family curse, can be lost and found all over again. These ghosts of every present moment

grow and change and live and die along-
sideus. One day, when the house is no
longer ours, when someone papers over its
whitewashed walls, when my Lola's heart
stalls, when the last apple falls from a bar-
ren tree—our home will remain with me, in
memory.



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FOR MRS. MAUER, WITH GRATITUDE

Brittney Nyugen | nnyugen25@amherst.edu

Dear Mrs. Mauer,

It's been quite some time since we've seen each other. The last time I ran into you was two years ago near the meat section at that new grocery store that opened near Costco, the one people were protesting outside of. You asked me how I was. I lied. I wish we talked longer, but the words never came out.

Did you get to hear what we said? I know you were sick and couldn't make it to the ceremony to hear us commemorate you as our English teacher and how we are still using the lessons you taught us in 8th grade, but I hope you liked the recordings and letters. Since then, many of my former classmates have told me their stories of how you helped them through rough patches. I hope you know how much that meant.

I remember the day I found out. September 26th, 2021. The news had broken through a groupchat of my closest friends from high school, some of whom I no longer talk to. When I saw the Facebook post from your daughter, the one asking your students to send emails for her to compile into a book in your memory, I knew that it was your time. Did you ever get to read them?

I spent half an hour in the bathroom of the art building at my college, running cold water over my numb skin, pouring it over my eyes. I was last in your classroom over 5 years ago, but the memories still came

cascading down like autumn leaves in the wind. The clanging of your bracelets as you taught us grammar rules on the chalkboard, your Jersey accent, your permed blonde hair. I remember how the oak wood shelves that lined the walls spilled yellowing pages and creased covers onto the linoleum floor. I remember how fervently I wanted to do well and how much I loved reading, flipping through *The Call of the Wild* in the dead of night and filling the margins of homework sheets with details I deemed too important to let pass me by. I remember your words.

"Time will be your biggest enemy." Do you remember that day? The lights in your classroom were off to try to ward off the summer heat creeping in through the open windows. I reshuffled my speech papers in my trembling hands as I stood beside the wooden podium. The slick-haired salutatorian of the class had run through his speech perfectly, even ending with a crescendo as if to say to me, "Try and follow this." His performance was pompous and unbelievably pretentious, but it was undeniable, he was good. When it was my turn behind the wooden lectern, my speech was given haphazardly, my words sloppy and rushed and my tones imprecise. To add salt in the wound, I was over the time limit. That's when you looked up at me from your notes, eyebrows scrunched together and lips pursed and remarked, "Time will be your biggest enemy."

I cried when they deleted your emails. The ones I had kept for all these years in

a folder labeled “Proudest Moments,” only ever seeing them in glances, in hopes that when this time came, I would have something to hold on to and the memory would still be warm. I had planned on downloading them, but time got the best of me. Now they’re gone.

I’ve always waited, waited so that I just barely made it in time. I’ve spent all my spare moments trying to calculate a way to throw a wrench into the mechanisms of the bullet train that is time. In the bathroom of that art building, I retraced my steps, figuring out what I could have done wrong to not have eluded Time this time around, only to realize that the tricky thing about Time is its persistence.

I never got to thank you. I never got around to writing that long-winded, hand-written letter I had planned to send you after I graduated. I still haven’t. Time is stingy about its schedule and never waits. I can’t get it back. Sometimes I feel that only through leaps and bounds can I keep up, that Time is something to chase until the next stop. But, what I’ve come to learn is that all I can do is to run alongside it and to enjoy the blurring views as they pass through the windows. Though I curse and plead it, the barrelling beast that is Time is my enemy. I never expected that it would also be yours; I never expected your loss.

You passed away more than a month ago now, but your memory will stay with me, through the way that I still circle the entire answer on multiple choice tests, the way I still scribble in the margins of my homework, and the way I still write in cursive letters that I had traced years ago. The bravado in your voice as you read my Halloween story aloud, the silence of the room as my classmates listened, the giddy

feeling that I had when I typed it under my dim lamp late the night before. These memories are feelings I pursue today, a compass oriented by you. I can never thank you enough for that.

Every so often, as I’m penning a particularly passionate piece, I am brought back to a little green chair in room C8, against the oak shelves brimming with books that we have read, and I remember why I love to write; I remember you.

I hope you’re still reading up there Mrs. Mauer, because one day, I want to show you that Time has bested neither of us yet.

With Gratitude,
Brittney/Nghi Nguyen

ARCHIVAL TIME

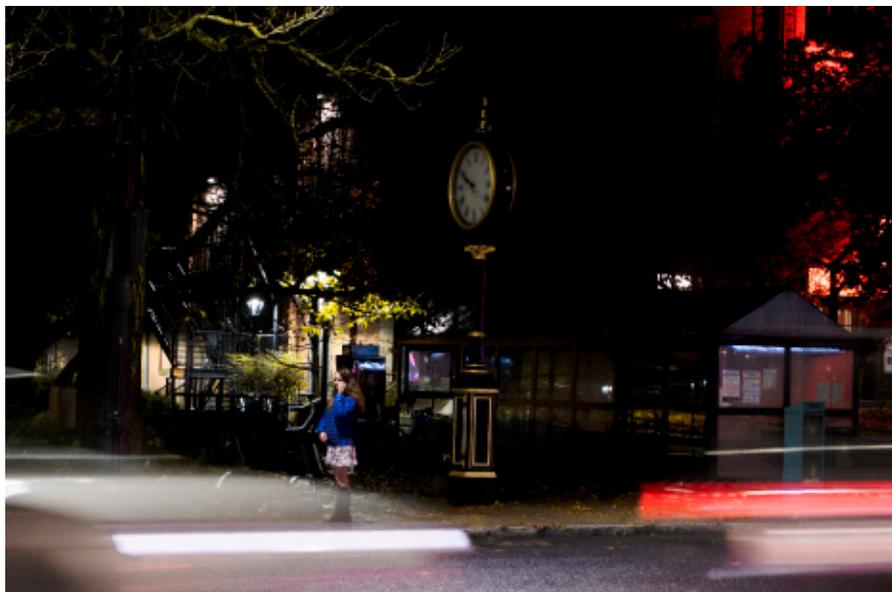
Jackeline Fernandes | jfernandes24@amherst.edu

“Sauntering along these wooden planks, sputtering words into the studded dusk, syllables falling, slipping onto the chiaroscuro of the busy walkway under my feet, that’s why I’m here, that’s why I’m calling, to remember to record and to record to remember. My lips, dry like forgotten flowers, unwatered but dotted with evaporating droplets of spittle, every expulsion of air condensed into trailing, fleeting streams of water vapor that dip with the weight of all the syllables tumbling tangibly from my tongue, descending into the intangible in this art of presence and absence. Do we belong to history, or is it ours? Does it course through us, or leak out of our veins in fluid currents like that of the East River below? Does it direct our synaptic pathways in electrical currents like that of the surrounding city, flickering in advance of the physical body? ‘I love you,’ says a girl who just shoved past me, the aura of her existence radiating from her glittering jacket and knee-high snake-skin boots, ‘I love you, I love you, I love you;’ her phone relays this message, this transliterated rhythm of a thrumming, beating organ, across space and time to an unknown recipient who doesn’t ignore her call, who will listen. Anyway, it’s just me again, with drying lips as usual, calling to check in, to tell you that I miss you and that you need to call me back, to let you know that I’m here in the cut across worlds on this bridge that you and I know so well, Brooklyn to my back sparkling in the past, lower Manhat-

tan ahead of me, blinking, signaling out to me from some unknown futuristic era, like Long Island fireflies. What must it be like to forever stay here in this pulsating artery of the city, this bridge between two temporalities; what must it be like to escape the inevitability of being governed by time, that invisible force driving us downwards into subway catacombs, into perfunctory performances dictated by mechanicalness and haste; what must it be like to say words that will reverberate in the air for more than an instant, not having dissipated into the chiaroscuros of the city after cold air pierces my lungs following every breath needed for my next utterance? Remembering the steady rhythms of the girl’s message is not the same as hearing it in the present, *I love you, I love you, I love...* her cryptic energy, irreplicable, having been lost as all words are to time, in the forward-moving crowds of passersby and bikers and blurred rectangles of yellow taxis tailed with glaring streaks of glowing rubies, all of which will propel me towards the underground of lower Manhattan, where I will take the train back to college, where I will shift in an uncomfortable chair to learn, nodding and pretending to understand this cut-throat business of literary labor as I listen to my professor falling forward into his prose. Typing, erasing, scribbling into the darkest hour, the intensity of my desk lamp spotlighting a shaky, incompetent hand gripping a pen, repeatedly falling out of the rhythms it is

eager to create; 'Is that a real job?' you ask inaudibly, shrouded in shadows as I struggle to decipher your fatherly facial expressions, fading, gone. The absence of presence and the presence of absence: painful, yes, though it is this that gives me my life's work, the impossible task of time-travel, the "I" of the now unidentical to that of the second before; every word, every phrase, every changing phrase assembling a whole message defined by a concatenation of different present tenses that will throw the voice across eons, dependent on a recipient in the near or distant future. Walking on this bridge, Roebling's steel cables splitting my vision into fragments, the lower Manhattan skyline still twinkling, Long Island fireflies, the heated and turbulent air of the city distorting the path of light to my

eyes; overhead in the craquelure of clouds the stars are unreachable, some too young, invisible to the eye, and their light will reach in due time, their tireless little celestial hearts traveling three hundred million meters every second to illuminate onto other members of the human enterprise after our world has been altered beyond recognition, my atomic presence in the now, under dying light. My hands, holding this phone, my eyes starlight, light that will soon pass—are you looking upwards, too? I'm wondering because I miss you, please call me back, throw your voice across eons alongside mine, but no, no, I suppose this is the nature of this art, the art of presence and absence in this prose poem, intimacy in distance, in slipping, away... I've reached Manhattan, my eyes citylight."



Hantong Wu is a Staff Artist for the Indicator.

IT WILL PASS?

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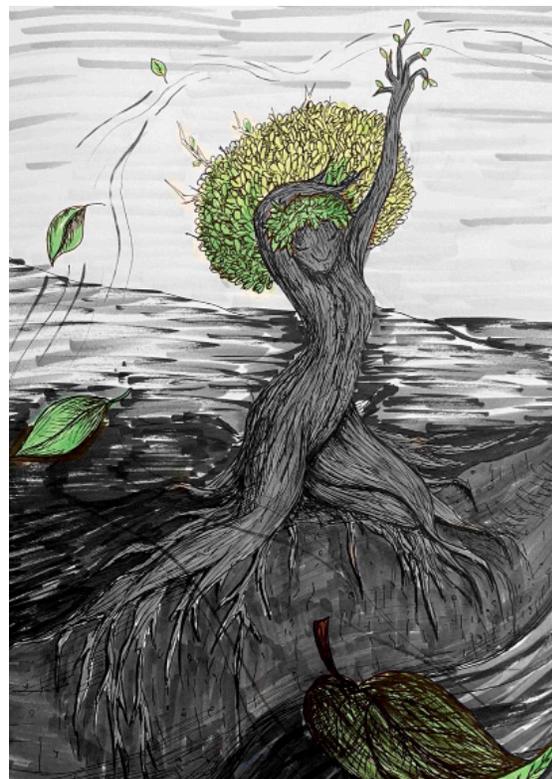
There's a difference
Between being alone and being lonely
You can crave to be alone
Crave to be still
In the room
 In the space
 In the world
But being lonely hits you like a speck of dust
Falling on your arm
It sits and waits on the ledge
Praying
 Planning
Its next attack
It goes unnoticed
In the room
 In the space
 In the world

Lonely is not a sweet craving
It follows you with a purpose
It lingers for a reason...
Unsure but you must justify everything
Every feeling must be justified
This feeling is only temporary, they say
Temporary;
It will pass

The desire to be alone is at your will
You become hidden
Being lonely is the invisible hand pushing you to the center
Yet no one sees you
Electric connection shared between arms
Yet no one feels you;
They will brush it off
Like dust; they will pass

Being lonely is becoming a strange host in your own body
You are not you anymore
You are a sickness

Unsure but you must justify everything
This disease of being lonely
As meant to be
As a pair of star-crossed lovers
But
Will it pass?



Cece Amory is a Staff Artist for the Indicator

STOP AND STARE

Quincy Smith | qsmith25@amherst.edu

Roads that lead nowhere
Cracked pavement snaps open under my toes

The trees bark at me
The leaves are still falling

My breath is shallow
A whisper

People cross paths
The skin on their arms only separated by pain

Electricity dances between us
This noticing of life

Catches onto my vision
Like a parasite in shallow seas

I look down to the ground
And see brimstone

I look across the grass
And see God

Suddenly the forest starts to close in
My lungs crash against my chest

I blink and they're still walking
I look and I'm still screaming

STAAT UND MAUER

Ross Kilpatrick | rkilpatrick23@amherst.edu

Honecker gave the order
To shoot on the inner wall
So comrades died, piled up
Under the American red and whites
Of western Coca-Cola signs

But before the BDR Richter,
Honecker pleaded
ohne juristische oder
moralische Schuld
For humane end
And to Chile he fled

So in südamerikanischer
Republik der Arbeiter
Did he die in a peace
As easy as those quietus nights;
That tintinnabulum of guns
a funeral eyre
For comrades, pulled under
The blinking lights
Of neon god given rights

But before the end
We are rarely what we wish
And being death
I know
That only one vision came
To Honecker, as he went to
The worker's shibboleth:

The jolly winter man himself
gripping a bottle
Of sarsaparilla caramel.

Parched from sorrow's heat
Honecker drank it neat.



Sarah Wu is a Staff Artist for the *Indicator*

GROOM CREEK, AZ

Dustin Copeland | dcopeland25@amherst.edu

Death removed from his mount, and spoke:

To remove thee I am come, and send thee from the garden forth, to till the ground whence thou wast taken, fitter soil.

And it was certain that she did not want to die. But she knew, more certainly still, that she did not want to step down the mountain. To Death, therefore, she replied:

How shall we breathe in other air less pure, accustom'd to immortal fruits?

And so she raised her hand to Death's chosen fingers. He bid her rise, and she did, and they walked not down but up, their shimmering forms ascension. Her earthly form may yet till the ground, dust returning to dust, rib to its maker, but she knew she never would have to descend from the mountain.

A seed of Paradise flew westerly from the walls that surrounded that garden. It floated with the breeze, passing easily through valleys and springing lightly over mountain ranges. It traversed the oceans on the backs of breaching whales and flying fish and road-weary albatrosses. It breathed out exultance through the dense woods past the shore, in awe of what would spring from the ashes of its garden. It touched lightly the nape of the bison's neck, and swooped low into the pristine

openness it passed through.

Once it had traveled enough it came to rest as the first snowflake of winter does: impossibly lightly, promising midnights lit by beauty. Such is the quality of the air, dense enough to congeal at any moment and so reveal the angel who inhabits that place.

There, each tree exhales in giant breaths that soak in every atom of the world and expel each enriched. The pine is tangible, not a scent but a presence. There, blue-grass filters through screen doors and simple meals are made by families, needles coat soil softer than bedsheets and no one is alone.

The day comes at the right time there, and one wakes up when Uriel turns his eye to the cracks in one's window-blinds. They are called flapjacks there, and they sizzle on a griddle that burns clean, its iron older than the trees and as wise as their roots. The logs that side the house exhale in unison with their great standing siblings on the morning's first step outside. The air is crisp and the light is sharp but gentle, impossibly clear.

Work is done on the mountain: a bridge over an inconvenient ditch is a beautifully simple wooden stoicism. Soil is dug, walks are taken, boulders scrambled over. The air embraces and one's energy is a store infinitely replenished — the sun shines on a smile and a breath is an intake of light.

The day does not wear on. There is

the only place where the afternoon is not depressed: the Earth revels in the shifting light and bathes in molten gold. The sun turns Midas, his hand deftly alighting upon every grand tree and every dusty speck. And as the day turns to night, so the world knows that the sun will be reborn, that it has not died but gone on to other places. It allows for rest, for the families to softly pad inside, light a fire or procure their slippers, turn on their bluegrass and set the table. And candles light the table, and no one is alone.

To leave the mountain is to take the road east, to sidewind in soft switchbacks that S downwards to the peopled city at the mountain's base. It seems inevitable for the peak-living to make that trek. But she lived her days with those trees at the top, her self-conceived soul climbing them, seeping into their bark and flying from their needles, breathing in the air deeply, deeply. She could not leave them for a life elsewhere, for a place with ground of the wrong shade, sky stretched out of proportion by so many fisheye gazes. So when she knew her time in those logs atop the mountain was coming to its close, she looked at her options and found she had no options at all. She never liked slopes; they were hard on her knees. Too hard on her knees. The trek, inevitable, to cast one's self towards the sunrise, was too hard on her knees. Who would want to journey there, to leave that place only to go lower?

I do not know the moment of death. I cannot know, cannot pretend to imagine, what happened then. My father cried, and therefore it is incomprehensible. The moment is the loss of the day: the every-

day, the walk out the door, the bluegrass at night, the crispness and the exhale in the morning into this day into the next, which are all the same. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, are the same. It is routine, it is the inevitable trek, it is constant, the march downwards from the heavenly mount, the crawl into the Stygian pool, the trudging slowly into the earth until it is burying, suffocating, taking and taking and taking and taking and taking and taking and killing and The sun blurs into moon into sun into sun into days and days, days and days stretching forever into forever into the maw of the great convalescence of convalescence of air that congeals and says **to remove thee I am come**

HEFT

Naviya Kapadia | nkapadia24@amherst.edu

Heft

hēft

noun.

Weight, heaviness.

Influence, importance.

A dwelling, a place of residence.

The first memory I have of my mother is her smile. She had perfectly straight teeth, and attributed her smile to biting into apples whole. Every time I threw a fit about having to eat an unsliced apple, she would, rather petulantly, remind me of this fact. She always ended up cutting the damned apples, grumbling about how I was doomed to have horribly crooked teeth.

(She was right.)

But anyways, her smile. She gazed down at me, smiling in that way that made her eyes go squinty. It was a very innocent smile, a smile that didn't yet comprehend just how many headaches this baby with bug-out eyes would bring her.

We had an unconventional dynamic. Even as a child, she'd treat me as an equal, a colleague. She asked me questions, not in the way you ask a child questions (like when you don't really care to hear the answer, but you still have to ask and pretend that you care about what a three-year-old's favorite color is: "Purple!" I would holler, grubbily). She asked me questions in the way you ask a professor questions, sitting

at rapt attention. Internalizing every word. It gave me the sense that she expected multitudes.

My mother was an expert at tough love. From the age of two, she insisted on oiling my hair every Sunday, claiming it would make it grow healthier. She'd yank and twist at it until tears rushed down my cheeks and shrieks of pain filled our house. She spilled fragrant oil on my hair, twisting it into two perfect braids, tying it painfully tight. I once fell in our backyard and scraped my knee, crying and bleeding all over the sidewalk. She walked outside and began yelling at *me*, genuinely got angry that I had the *gall* to injure myself. We had daily screaming matches when I refused to practice piano, and she shoved me into countless extracurriculars I had no intention of excelling in. I refused help on math homework and had terrible handwriting. I held my pencil wrong. I never got the hang of origami. I could barely ride a bike. I needed glasses at age five and she banned me from books for a month because she was convinced my poor eyesight was a byproduct of reading under the covers at midnight.

I fought with her the most. I gave her the most trouble. I was the problem child—the parenting books that conspicuously glared at me from her bookshelf were evidence enough. It made me see her as the enemy for a long time, letting a seeming-

ly unconquerable resentment bubble up in my chest. Because why couldn't I be coddled, like my sister? Why did I have to do so *much*? And why was it never good enough?

No matter how cruel she seemed, I still had that industrial-strength love she hammered into me. Interwoven with outbursts of anger and confrontation, there were those moments when we shared books, TV shows, clothes, understanding. But my favorite thing to share with her was silence—we'd sit with each other and do our own tasks, her typing away at her laptop, me scribbling at algebra homework.

Sometimes, I'd get bored and ask her if I could write a few lines of code, to which she'd move her chair and dictate what I needed to type. I mimicked her actions, trying to copy the way her thin fingers danced over the keyboard, always in awe of her performing the most mundane tasks.

My mother did her first round of chemo when I was four, and her long, curly hair fell out in my hands. I looked into her eyes and searched for something indiscernible, wisps of hair clutched in my fists. But she didn't seem sick back then, not really. She seemed bright and vibrant as ever, and I did my very best to block out any indication of illness. My mother was indestructible, but as days bled into weeks bled into years, a strange feeling began to fester in my gut.

I regret that it took cancer to make us friends. I regret that I couldn't be her baby, like my sister. I regret that I insisted on saying *no* to everything, insisted on being difficult. But I also think that without all those hours of fighting and yelling, we wouldn't have understood each other in

such an intrinsic way, because my mother got me in a way nobody had ever got me before. Years of extracurriculars and piano and endless math worksheets made me love learning. Absolutely adore it. I devoured books and textbooks and podcasts and found something new to be passionate about every month. And then I understood—my mother was making sure that no matter what, I had my brain. I was her project, and she nurtured me with unparalleled devotion.

She died on March 23, 2015. I was thirteen. She had texted me the night before, saying, "*Will you come down and say goodnight to me?*" Anxiety gripped me in the days after, because in the amnesiac haze of grief, I had no idea if I'd ever gone down to say goodnight. People came over wearing black and left a lot of food. I sat in our guest bedroom upstairs and watched *Grey's Anatomy*. I accepted sympathetic hugs and simpering smiles.

That was when it started.

"Naviya, you're so much like your mom."

"Navlu, you look so much like her."

They're right, I do. I do look like her. I think we laugh in the same way, too. But I was thirteen and furious at the world for taking my mom away. She passed away during our renaissance, during the time when we had just begun to understand each other. So those comments, those remarks that should have made my chest swell with pride, made my stomach twist with discomfort and my cheeks burn with anger. People looked at me like they were

about to burst out crying, but I wanted to laugh cruelly and tell them that even I hadn't cried. They certainly didn't have the right to.

Because it's unfair. It's unfair that the aunty in the Indian store gets to deliberate over which okra is best to buy, and my mom doesn't. It's unfair that I don't get to call my mom and complain about every slight inconvenience. It's unfair that she can't tell me which dress is best to wear on a date. For as long as I can remember, I've tried to figure out which universe would allow this, and I still don't have an answer. It infuriates me that the smartest, most radiant person I knew was taken away from me. From everyone. But she's alive in the most magnificent ways—my mother seemed to leave a trail of scrap paper wherever she went.

There are CVS receipts tucked in the old books in our study, makeshift bookmarks aners of pages. There are grocery lists, reminders, extensive lists of phone numbers. There are the notes she left my sister and I before going off for treatment in D.C., neat handwriting offering the smallest shreds of comfort. After her father passed away, she was convinced the bird that hopped onto her yard chair every morning was him. Now I eye the birds in my backyard suspiciously, wondering if she's out there watching me devour chocolate chip cookies for breakfast, shaking her head at the lack of fruit in my diet. I have her old band t-shirts and her dresses. I have her taste in music, her trepidation for driving, her affinity for micromanagement.

I often wonder about what she'd think about my life now. I think she'd hate every boy I've ever liked, probably rightfully so. I think she'd tell me to not paint my nails black. She'd tell me I'm not oiling my hair enough and squeeze my sides and ask me if I'm eating. She'd laugh at my nose piercing, tell me the story about how she accidentally ripped hers out. I'd text her when I was stressed, or sad, or heartbroken, or to request a review of whatever book she was reading for book club. She'd text me grocery lists and random articles, forward me emails of sales from stores I haven't shopped at since middle school. She would make me chai and play Fleetwood Mac in the car.

I am constantly in awe of her—my indomitable mother, who blessed me with a childhood of Science Fridays and constant curiosity. My powerful mother, who won at poker and donated her earnings to NPR. My tempestuous mother. My hilarious mother. Six years have passed, and I still flinch when I'm told I look like her. But I don't resent it anymore, because if I can't have her with me, I'll carry her around with me, in my eyes and in my smile, in the way I dress and the hugs I give.

I'll carry her with me.



Zoe Strothkamp '24 is a Staff Artist for the *Indicator*

IT'S QUIETER THAN IT USED TO BE.

Rachel Hendrickson | rhendrickson25@amherst.edu

It's quieter than it used to be.

The scientists on the television are talking about how over the summer, everyone started noticing how loud the birds were. The crumpled man and overly-polished woman debated on whether or not it was the climate, lack of people, or just an increased noticing that comes from being pent up inside all day.

I turned it off. Their voices had a gross, almost scary ecstasy and besides. I haven't heard the birds in years.

I've stopped keeping the windows open altogether at this point. The house is small and it's mine. Been mine since the 70s. There's a relationship you find there, between house and home, that is physical. My house is my home because I can climb the stairs blind, cook breakfast the same at three am and ten am. If I were transported there with my eyes closed from the grocery store, I could tell where I am just from the sounds of mice running across the beams, or up and down the walls. Even now. This is a point of pride.

Emily was the one who opened the windows. She was the one who liked the noise, a tune on her lips to fill the void. Not me. I haven't missed it that much, no. And when the prices audiologists advertise on NPR are greater than those of my gas and electric bills combined just for a consultation to tell me what I already know, that my hearing's shot... no, I've made my choice.

But I did like the birds.

My niece called me last week, asked me how I've been spending my days. It was a

bit condescending, the way she tiptoed around her weekends in the city or the way her job's been going. I've grown up only to grow back down again, shielded from the truth for fear that my age and supposed wisdom have inscribed in me 18th century sensibilities. I was a lesbian through the eighties, for fuck's sake what does she expect?

She asked about the garden which only holds half-withered weeds, and reminded me of the bus's existence, as if I can't drive myself to the grocery store. As I turn on the ignition, her words come to mind. To be frank, I don't enjoy driving. The seat hurts my back, and whenever I finally lull myself into some semblance of peace there's a driver behind me confident that his college tailgate is worth risking my ninety-three year old life, and his own, over.

I never used to be scared of death. When I was little, sure, it was unknown, it was scary like the darkness or a boogeyman. But when I grew foolish enough to pretend I understood, I knew it was not something that belonged to me. A suitcase at baggage claim left to be picked up by some other woman as I traverse steadfast through the terminal.

But it started to catch up, and I started to run, run because to watch it all fade, to watch her fade...

Em always said that it was natural, inevitable. She said that death was beautiful. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. I never quite believed her when she said that. Slept on kitchen tiles a week after my mother died.

And when her experiments failed, the moss she found destroyed or mice she trained went belly up, I wasn't sure she did, either.

There are days when the quiet is dense. Where I fall into it, where it holds me. Where it's all I need. Where I'm not afraid. And I feel like I'm letting her down.

The roads thin out toward the mountains. I stopped using highways after my optometrist retired, but even if I hadn't, the stretch of uneven dirt and pebbles out before me would be the same. The trees fold in around me. My legs start to throb from the up and down, but my foot is steady on the accelerator.

The roads here don't exist on a map. The UVM ecology department carved them out some twenty years ago, but I'm not sure if they even know this is here. I hope not. This way, it's still our little secret.

Engine off and clinging to some decaying tree branch like a crutch, I lay myself down onto the ledge. There's almost a darkness, in the open air, something I can describe. Crisper than it was supposed to be.

And I listen, hear nothing but the wind, though feeling might be a more accurate term: the sound might simply be association.

And I listen, for the screams of some rabid chipmunk getting at it with another, for the falling of a tree, for the whistle I can't sit without.

And I listen, for the birds.

And I listen,

And I listen,

I listen to the silence.

Trees blur into streetlights, houses into cars, washed away in a setting sun and salt

water. It's night when I move to unlock the front door and fuck, I just can't bring myself to care. They're shaking, my hands, and I'd rather just collapse than fiddle up and down and up and down on this stupid, rusty door that I've kept around for god knows how many years even though I hate the color and it never just opens but had this click that worked, this click that she pointed out when the lock first broke so that it was fine, it was going to be fine and we could just call the repairman after the holidays but the holidays are over the holidays have been over, and now I can't even hear the click and she's gone so why would I even bother with it all she's gone she's—.

I walk in. Crack open a beer from the fridge. And I turn on the radio.

Vivaldi, the Four Seasons.

Em.



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Cover Art by Maeve Brammer