

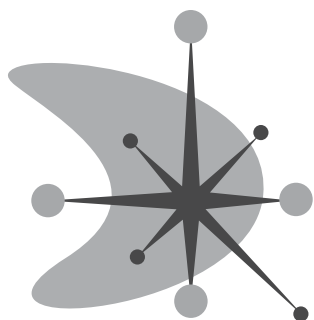


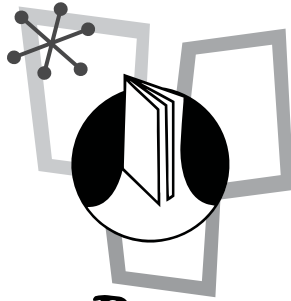
PERENNIAL

Spring 2026

B222 Journal

Issue 7





B222

ART & LITERARY JOURNAL

SPRING 2026

ISSUE 7

PERENNIAL

B222 Journal acknowledges the land on which we operate has been and still is the traditional territory of several Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat, the Métis, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Since time immemorial, numerous Indigenous nations and Indigenous peoples have lived and passed through this territory.

We recognize this territory is covered by the Dish with One Spoon Treaty and the Two Row Wampum Treaty which emphasizes the importance of joint stewardship, peace, and respectful relationships.

B222 Journal affirms it is our collective responsibility to honour and respect those who have gone before us, those who are here, and those who have yet to come. We are grateful for the opportunity to be working and living on this land.

B222 Journal is published by the Creative Writing & Publishing program in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Sheridan College.

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B222 Journal
Sheridan College
4180 Duke of York Blvd.
Mississauga, ON
L5B 0G5

URL: b222journal.ca
Email: b222journal@gmail.com
Instagram: [@b222journal](https://www.instagram.com/b222journal)

Printed in Canada
ISSN 2818-8330

Views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher nor Sheridan College.

MASTHEAD

Juliana Putri Tan
MANAGING EDITOR

Naya Vrysellas
ART DIRECTOR

Emma Sim
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Paige LeBlanc
POETRY EDITOR

Micaela Carcamo
PROSE EDITOR

Mara Pendon
ART EDITOR

Sarah Pallotini Aislin Carrol
EVENT COORDINATORS

Quin Braden Adam Hurwich
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Macie Yott
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Tali Voron-Leiderman Robyn Read
FACULTY MENTORS

Sydney Hayes Quinn Akinci Sam Hounsome
READERS

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A MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

In 2022, in a Journals and Zines class, *B222 Journal* was conceptualized by four Creative Writing & Publishing students: Noémi Blom, Emily Bretkopf, Hazel Mekkattukulam, and Stephanie Pugliese. They wanted to create a place for the Sheridan arts community to publish their artwork, no matter the medium, and that legacy has continued for over three years with seven issues and thirty-five team members. Fourteen of those members make up our current team, responsible for the publication of our previous issue, “Transit,” and the one you have just opened, “Perennial.”

This issue’s name was not only chosen for the themes of our contributor’s work, but for its relation to our team. It represents each individual’s dedication to the production of our journal, to collaboration with our authors and artists, and to every event we are privileged to hold with your support. The time spent working for *B222 Journal* will leave a lasting impact on each of us, and the experience we’ve gained is invaluable.

B222 will return in the Fall with a new team, but it has been our sincere honour to produce these issues, particularly this one; our final. We hope you enjoy it.

With the Warmest of Regards,

The Fall 2025 - Spring 2026 *B222* Team



A collection of handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged in three rows. The first row includes 'Marie' followed by a scribbled-out signature, 'SPallan', and 'Aminia Conner'. The second row includes 'MP', a scribbled-out signature, 'Paige', 'CB', and 'Naya'. The third row includes 'Su', 'Hannah', a scribbled-out signature, 'E. ...', and 'ADAM'. The signatures are written in various styles, some being more legible than others.

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Before you peek inside Issue #7, I would like to thank our cover artist—Jessica Antonik—for her consistent contributions since *B222*'s conception. We have featured Jessica's art in several past issues and are delighted to have worked with her one last time before her graduation.

To our readers: I would like to thank you for all your generous support these past two semesters. Your donations, contributions, and participation in our events have meant so much to us.

Sadly, this letter will be my last, as my time as the Managing Editor of *B222 Journal* comes to an end. I am proud of my team, and I am glad to have been surrounded by such talented and dedicated individuals who have put their all into each issue. I am lucky to have had the chance to work with them.

We have accomplished so much this past year. We were fortunate to have inherited a strong foundation to build on; it gave us the chance to take risks and implement change, to create an identity we are proud of and can now pass on, for a future team to make their own. Although it is bittersweet that our time has come to a close, I want to acknowledge how much we have grown, as individuals and as a team. We are excited to see what the future holds for *B222*, and what the next team will do to continue the legacy we have endeavoured to uphold.

In our previous issue, *B222* invited you to reflect upon moments of transition. Now, we want to present you with new possibilities. Our muse on the cover greets Spring with open eyes, and we hope to do the same. Our contributor's pieces encourage us all to face the present, and to acknowledge its darker moments while looking for the beauty within them. They embolden us to persist through the changes a new season promises.

On behalf of the *B222 Journal* Fall 2025 – Spring 2026 team, I am proud to present to you—our last and our proudest issue—"Perennial."

With love,

Juliana Putri Tan



Managing Editor

SLUTTY GRANDPA POEM

DAWN A. KUDLOWICH

Creative Writing & Publishing

Third Year

the ocean is bone broth soup
waves find more use in bones
eroding and shaving them down
till they are spines that bald
sea urchins can use as toupees
much like Grandpa wore when he was still trying
to be a man and he left with that young woman
who stole Grandma's old stripper stilettos

the waves crash against me
they are giving me kisses or hugs or shooing me away
because i told Grandpa to swim in them
and they don't like the ashy, flaky, taste of him
who would enjoy any flavoured taste of his
but the waves still run over him
like how dogs lick you because you have bones under your skin

at least the fish enjoy old man taste
eating away at his old man decay
nibbling on his old man skin and his flakes
like sprinkled fish food
more than Grandma did when she was alive

i watch a box crab come
let his wife tear skin off of Grandpa's
ingrown and overgrown fungal green toenails
and run away sideways
holding his box crab wife in his arms

Grandpa wades in circles trying
to prove that he is strong enough without
his orca boogie board
that he was in fact the same man from the days
he would sit on the beach in a speedo showing off his goods
to any woman who would look

nasty slut Grandpa was
worse so than Grandma was
when she would dance
to Toxic by Kesha in the nursing home
asking for tips from the other residents

the waves pressed against me
reminding me of my Grandpa's terrible flaky slut taste
that has ruined their bone broth soup
and I drag my ocean marinated Grandpa
out of the water while he calls me a bitch
like my mother

CRUNCH ON A HALF WISH

DAWN A. KUDLOWICH

Creative Writing & Publishing

Third Year

Bite into a winding wish. We are surface burn thirsty. Salt crushed kettle thin. We drink often what is demanded, cool water running down the side of our mouths and swiftly down the forested valley of breasts. Pour a little just for ourselves. We have nights where we spell out our names in long heavy strokes of tongue. This is a different kind of echo. We plead all the time to grow a chameleon skin. We could be Godzilla's little slut cousins. Stamps on our return customer card. We sit in silence, each one of us waiting for the reveal of a school bully or the light of the tunnel telling us that we have finally reached porcelain. The kind that cracks under the heat of the man's palms. We should melt for him. We should call his name; we should call his name and tell him that a bigger devil has arrived for us. Can we trade a wish for a soul? Could the earwax fumes sulfuric acid finally reach our too empty brain cavity? The one filled with electronic orders. Sit, roll, play dead, kiss each other on the neck and look deep into the camera. They don't see that we don't see them, at all. We can listen pretty just for a while can't we?



PREHISTORIC FUTURE

Miko Durante
Illustration
Fourth Year

CARBON PRIMATE

SHAUNA KERNAGHAN

Creative Writing & Publishing

Fourth Year

breathing in monosyllabic hangnails
and fervour for the pit of despair

ANGER bitten into inert
ceramic kinship in the kitchen sink

is a nestled withdrawal of
gas stove poisoning and a door latch

the absence of finger bones
to pick nits from a wire wreath

harrows me to swallow myself
crawling lurching writhing

convulsing with unfamiliarity

the cloth tasting my bloody manicure
keeps me hungry for a prognosis of

extremities, teethmarks crescenting
her solution to jumping on the bed

smothering me in the dark
and never not staring, blank and noble

in the presence of skin shadows
handprint-hot and tile floor-cold

through the endless quiet starving
holding my head to the ground

you have no compassion for me

NADO

DIMITRIE ERMURACHI
Creative Writing & Publishing
Second Year

A brash blue
I open the delivery door to
swamps my non-slips
and socks before drenching
each cell, a grain of salt
dissolved in a whirlpool.

Write for something
that cannot read, but feels
your clenching teeth pull
nerves of maxilla and mandible.
Molars are mad as hell they taste
mean nicotine which clogs patience
I once bled like a sink flood of greasy water.

“Izbavitsa” – to let go or get rid of –
“Nado” – needed –

my father speaks, voice weaving
between sharp sapphire,
and tames impatience embedded
in my dreams where
my heart sprouts mold spores,
my mind erects botanical gardens.

Taught but not embodied,
external search for motivation
is a prayer I only mouth to skies
prior to hearing a voice repeat it
when the azure turns navy, and repeat it
when I park crooked,
late for work,
and repeat it
when my father’s burnt umber eyes look
warm enough to thaw me out.

I want frost to coat my lungs,
my jaw to clench from shivers,
to remain a statue here,
saturated in blue,
where no one questions what I bite on.
These gusts are shifting blankets,
touch-less hugs which mask
tension yet to be expelled.

Will it repeat once again
when I shut this door
and shuffle back to my station?
The blue will follow me.
I caught midnight
beneath the moon I write to,
and between the hum of cobalt
veins flooding the sidewalk.



THE MAMMOTH HUNT

Bryce Teakle
Illustration
Second Year



HOME

Klara Kim
Animation
First Year

AS THE LANTERNS RISE

AMANDA DEAN

Creative Writing & Publishing

Third Year

There's a click as the lock retracts, a whoosh as the door opens, a musty smell as I step through. Each footstep feels hollow as it echoes further into the room. The silence is scary ... I may have a new key, an unfamiliar door, a new home with boxes everywhere, but it's mine. That's what I keep telling myself anyway. It's a new life; it may be a lot, and it may take some time, but grandma taught me to hold on tight and hold onto traditions tighter.

It's because of her that I found myself covered in flour in the middle of a half-unpacked kitchen, kneading dough and spreading butter as the oven preheated, as the seagulls squawked on the coast, as the sun began to set over the water. A home-cooked meal; the warm, familiar scent of braided milk bread fresh from the oven; raspberry jam cooling on the counter; and hot Cajun sausage pasta in a bowl haphazardly cleaned after being pulled out of a box. I needed this, needed something that felt like home, something to feel warm and cozy and familiar amongst everything new. I keep chanting in my head that this is mine and mine alone. I never thought I'd have my own place, a space to call my own, to make my own. Not in this economy.

Having a whole entire space to myself after living with a brother who constantly yelled and with keyboards being typed on, this space feels empty. Even though it's full of boxes and furniture, something is missing: the noise. So, I sit on a couch that doesn't have feet yet, and I use a box as a table to hold my glass of water, and watch the TV on the floor, trying desperately to mask the sound of silence with a show. It isn't perfect, but it is mine.

With each box unpacked, I uncover more and more. Things I had packed away ages ago. The painting I had done in my final year of high school; the cookbook that had been handed down to me from my dad who got it from his mom; the picture frame of my Pa holding a lantern during Yi Peng, something he had brought home to share after that trip. It was a tradition that kept me aware of the date as time grew closer to November 24th.

Tradition. There was so much that we had come to call ours.

Some we had stopped doing years ago, like the cake smashing that Nana had stopped on my aunt's third birthday. Or the tradition of the lantern release that dad kept up, even if we weren't with Nana and Pa at the time of year it happened.

It wasn't even our tradition. Pa went to Thailand for a trip in November one year before dad was even a thought. There, he found out about Yi Peng, when they light lanterns to release misfortune and send wishes to the heavens. Nana adjusted it slightly so that now we write things down that you want to let go of, and write letters to people you wanted to speak to in the heavens. I think that was her way of trying to make it easier on us when Pa died. It worked. It was the only thing that made me feel okay when Nana died, too. The only thing that made it easier. So, every year, even if I wasn't at home with family, I carried on this tradition.

This is how I found myself on the balcony with a notebook, looking out at the ocean as I chewed on the head of my pencil. There was so much I wanted to say, so much I wanted to tell Nana and Pa about.

The last time Pa saw me, I was a little girl dancing around the living room to an Irish Rovers song, using the warmth of my grandparents' home to forget about the mean words whispered about me on the playground. He was the one who sat me on his lap, and told me about my great-grandfather, a war veteran who had been a police officer before the Second World War broke out. If he had listened to bullies or let anyone push him down, then he wouldn't have survived the war.

The last time Nana saw me, I was in high school, never seen without a book in my hand. I may have grown, but I'm still that timid little girl deep down who would much rather stay inside with a book or watch a show, curled up on the couch. Nana was the one I wrote to when I was struggling with high school and trying to find a group I fit into. She wrote back when I ended up dealing with controlling friends who didn't want me hanging out with anyone but them. She was the one who told me I would find the right group of people one day, that I wasn't unworthy.

Now I go out with friends. I've tried new foods, I've graduated. Twice. Neither of them saw it happen. I wish they could see where I am now. I've got a big girl job with an office, and now I've moved out completely into my own apartment. I have a quiet confidence about me now, one Nana would have smiled at, and one that Pa would have clapped at.

The night of Yi Peng brings a quiet peace upon me. It's quiet, clear, and familiar. The sky holds no clouds, and the stars shimmer brightly. I sit on the balcony, with a pencil scratching at my paper. My pencil carries regrets and acknowledgements that I can't voice. Regret that they couldn't see

me now, acknowledging feelings of past situations and letting them go, saying goodbye to people I no longer want in my life. It all flows through my pencil.

Dear Nana and Pa,

I think you would be proud of me. Of what I've faced, and how far I've come. I still struggle with things. I can't talk about hard feelings without crying, and I struggle to voice my boundaries, but I am working on it. I've overcome high school, thank God. I found hobbies I enjoy, like baking and sewing, but I guess I had those hobbies on a smaller scale before. I'm working on making a new pair of pants, from scratch. I think you would like them Pa. They're funky.

I've understood where my anger comes from, and what started it all. I've begun to let go. I understand why mom chose to pay attention to computers and screens rather than me, how her tough pregnancy and her own trauma had puppeteered her. It still hurts, but I've acknowledged it. I know that the sadness I felt as a child and the anger I felt as a teen is not my own fault, but rather resentment at my mother for her neglect. I've grown to live with my anxiety, understand that I've been diagnosed with ADHD and autism. Would you have guessed that? It's still hard to wrap my head around. I always knew I was sensitive, but all the being called "crybaby" in the park was really my autism not letting me process emotions quite right. I still can't do that. I'm working on it though, and I don't use my diagnoses as an explanation. I don't lean on it to hide from consequences. I've gotten medication for the anxiety and spoken to doctors about how to manage my brain better. I've actually made friends that I think will last a long time, people who understand, or at least try to understand who I am. I think you would be proud.

I've got my own place now. It feels surreal. I spent years thinking I would never afford it. Prices kept rising too much, too fast. Then I went to school for writing and everyone was asking what I was going to do with that degree, that it wouldn't get me anywhere, that AI would take over and I would be out on the streets instead. But I did it. I got this really cool job designing book covers, and I went and looked at so many different condos by myself. It's really mine. I did it. I really did it.

Love, Vivian

I stare at the words for a while, wet tears sliding down my face, making their trails itch as they dry. I didn't know how much I needed to list out what I had done, how far I had come until then. I fold the piece of paper and tuck it into the lantern. The sun has nearly set now, and I sigh as I start writing on a smaller piece of paper, not full sentences but things I need to let go of.

Negativity

Which will be hard, but when is it not hard? The world is full of negativity and it's hard to find the positive when it feels like the weight of the world is crushing down on you.

Comparing myself to others

Now, that will be a challenge. I did that just last week when Nancy was talking about being engaged.

My hand shakes.

Bottling everything up

I'm writing this down. That's a start, right?

Letting people walk all over me

Not setting firm boundaries

Hatred towards my childhood.

A single tear lands on the page.

Fear that I'm not good enough

My pencil snaps at that one, and I realize how hard I'd been holding onto it. How each word written had made me more tense as I remembered instances where they applied.

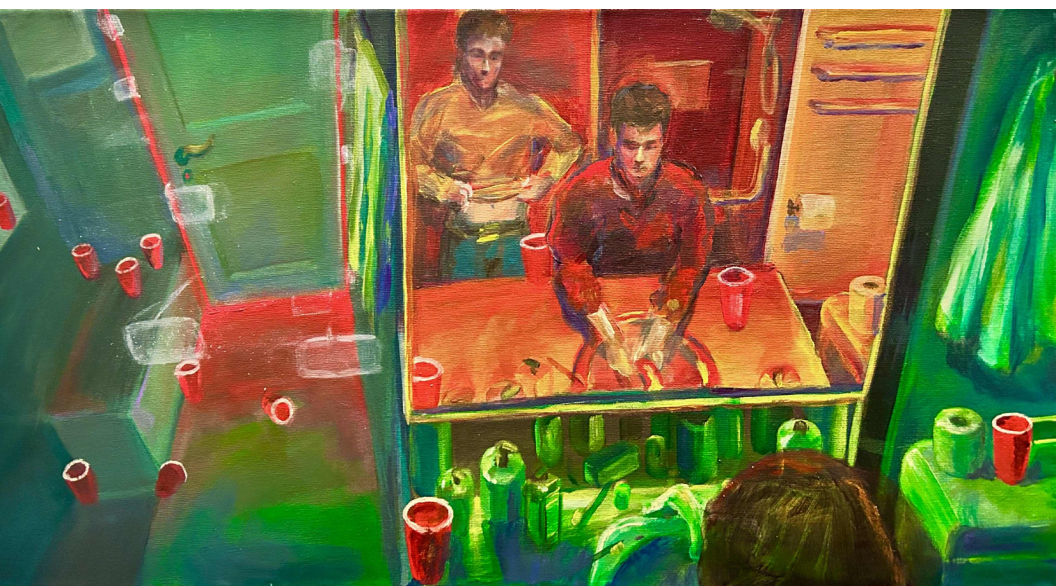
They didn't look like a lot, but they were mine. My insecurities that had loomed over me at every corner. I was finally letting go. Reclaiming what was rightfully mine. I tuck this sheet safely away in the lantern and watch as the stars begin to come out, first Aurora —bright tonight— then Draco, and Ursa Major.

I pick up the lantern and head outside, walking down to the beach. I find a rock to sit on, the waves crashing by my feet, and pull a lighter from my pocket, lighting the candle inside the lantern. Staring at it as the light inside makes the colours flicker a gradient, I take a deep breath and finally let go, gently tossing it up into the sky and letting it fly away.



SILVER RAINBOW

Ella Aranda
Business Marketing
Second Year



PIT STOP

JERRZ&Z
Illustration
Third Year

I AM MY POSSIBILITIES AFTER PLANTING HERACLITUS

ARI

Creative Writing & Publishing
Fourth Year

Lines of immiscibility birth heavy flows of no-way traffic, and glitter is gushing out of my wounds in a fountain of disco-ball-barcodes. Too many cooks

breaking hips in tattered polka-dot
umbrellas, so desolately crowded in a desert
of a room. Five hands hold the penis of my pans'
writhing escargot, barely salted, but, "almost there."

Echoes' offsprings hatch in the concrete
arena, pillows of purple paint bandaging astray
cochleas. Dog whistles in deaths

stained in the same pool of flatlines—splattered
on walls, and pages,
and people. And my ears become revolving
doors, perking to burps
of chocolate-covered mud-gum,
squeezing out of greying fur with expensive cursive.

They blow heavy balloons, I start to wonder:
if they know skilletts grow; if they can see the gushers exploding
under my bandages before practicing
their dance onto **another** sharp nub.
My hands continue to sign horny,
dubbed persnickety, depriving Heraclitus.
Proving my body dipped into the same river **twice**,
the lessons become striking in doggy-daycare frequency.

I have become Moses as dung bags part. In between,
an amalgamation of bubbles make up my trachea. Becoming
a fawn alarmed in a state of infatuation,
watching your dumb bubble wand stay limp
then b r u s h, bushels of fur decorated in decorum.

I've felt the shame in watching a yeti
frankensteined with marble. Knowing
it's something more of a Venus
than Mike's David—I started seeing spearmint
and a double double in your helix
nebula, projecting another heaven over a dead sea
disregarding an upcoming infringement on contorted bones.

But I am less afraid now, cracking dutiful spines,
flagging damages and deeds
because it was all a narrative—
they cannot understand or write cursive.
There's a continuation to borrowing
the wisdoms I will steal and when my will is born,
this barcode will stay liminal.
As I remain where I am,
my chin continues a lonely revolution
but I will never step foot in the same river again.

THE ADULT

ARI

Creative Writing & Publishing

Fourth Year

Your disposition saturates in my eagerness; your trees
worms have been crawling over
my aorta's shell. Bending me slack,
concussing me to forget the solitude
of closeness—
afraid of falling into the gaps of your teeth without cavitating. Peering

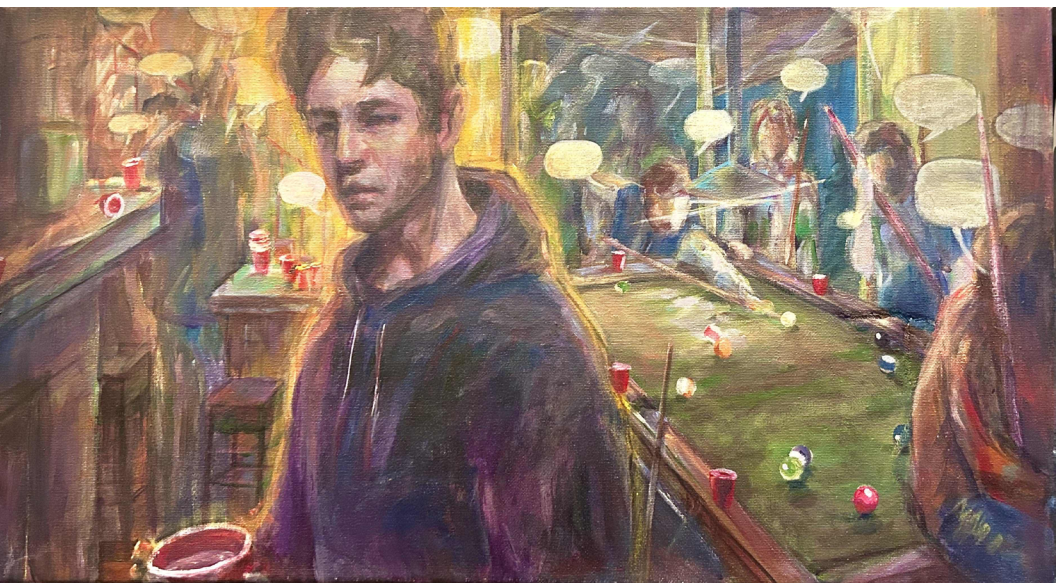
over an edge from hearing a voice that isn't speaking,
the peace in knowing Red String
will pull me back to the hand holding.
Does tranquil exist in the inevitability of hoping
or its absence. Longing to live in the aftertaste,
learning to speak in the afterstate.

Our dialects

of newborns and cliches, birthing our language
of glance, touch, and of everything
we've willed ourselves to consume.
The house fly has met more of my truths
than the scratches inhibiting my walls
with sticky tack residue of memories
because physicality lies and bugs watch,

enamoured by failure and longing, anticipating
that you'll inhale us while solemnly drunk
off plights of stares we've managed to trudge through.

The hisses of the static phone are still
butterfly nips but after they leave, maybe,
I hope to feel more
like an adult.



SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

JERRZ&Z

Illustration
Third Year

CIGARETTES ARE MEANT FOR SHARING

GABRIEL MOULTRIE

Creative Writing & Publishing

Third Year

I spent an hour on the roof waiting for you. The morning draft died over the gum-stuck sidewalks below; the charm of the sunrise melted into frustration. I stubbed out the last Marlboro in the pack, screwing it into the dark shingles like I was making a repair. I waited for you to throw open your window, to apologize for being late. To be mad I'd smoked the whole pack by myself. I flicked the cigarette butt into the gutter. Nothing.

I stood, brushing the flecks of tar from my jeans. The gap between the townhouses was just under two feet. I stepped over a cramped oblivion and wondered if any of the rats or cockroaches below were having as shitty a morning. Your dormer window scowled back like a tombstone. Your curtains were drawn shut and inert. I thought of knocking, but a kinder part of me wondered if you weren't feeling well. I decided to check downstairs.

I dropped down into my room and shut the window behind me. Your SUNY hoodie pooled at the foot of my bed, right where it had fallen the night before. I stepped over a graveyard of other clothes I'd only move when it was time for me to leave. They camouflaged the taboo of your hoodie being there in the first place—a welcome excuse to leave things as they were. I shook it free of dust and crumbs, draped it over my shoulder, and headed downstairs. The other guys on the second floor were still asleep, their doors customarily shut and locked until they dreamt of food or taking a piss. I left mine open; a communal offering of sunlight by which they could navigate the cramped staircase. I caught bacon on the air.

Parker was the only one awake at that hour. He stood in the kitchen; wifebeater and boxers striking the silhouette of one recently roused. The salute of snapping oil over flesh sounded from a pan, joining the tank-tread rumbling of the house's coffee pot. He flipped the bacon with a fork.

“What's up, Benny?” he said without looking my way. I met Parker at the house when I moved in, and—like him—I could already tell who was coming down the stairs by their footsteps. He forked a strip of bacon onto a plate of eggs.

“You seen Madison?” I asked, leaning against the counter.

“Not since last night,” he replied. “Something wrong?”

“Didn’t show up this morning.” I tapped my fingers on the Formica. Parker rescued the last of his bacon from the pan and killed the stove. He picked up his plate and turned to face me. He’d leave the pan to cool and “forget” to dump the fatty oil in the trash. Another gelatinous mess to clean when it was my turn. Despite his habits, I trusted Parker a good deal more than the others in the house.

“Probably just slept in or something,” he muttered, shoveling a forkful of sloppily scrambled eggs into his mouth. “Got nowhere to go, anyway.” I watched the slow trickle of his tar-black coffee. The top of the carafe was cracked, the fruit of a dishwashing mishap on my part.

“I think I’m gonna check at the girls’ house,” I mused. He paused.

“Like inside?”

“Well, yeah. Make sure she’s alright.” Parker opened his mouth to object—to remind me that our sponsors didn’t take kindly to inter-house fraternization. He bit into a strip of bacon instead.

“Knock yourself out.”

Five seconds from our front door to yours. Vertigo hollowed out my chest. The sidewalk was a return—albeit a brief one—to the outside world. To time. Responsibility would snap back into focus if I wasn’t quick. Our townhouses were nearly identical, married in both purpose and likeness. I rang your doorbell. No one on the sidewalk behind me. No one to peer through the glass and understand our enclosures were carefully constructed to simulate reality. To understand that we’d die in the wild. Tumblers rattled behind the door.

“Who is it?” Charlie asked, pulling the door ajar. Glint of sunlight on the chain lock. I held up a hand.

“Oh. Morning Bennet.”

I stepped into a dark foyer. An icy menthol swam through the air as Charlie took a drag from her Newport. I remembered your excitement when you learned we could smoke indoors. Cigarettes, that is.

“Is Maddie around?” I asked, slinging your hoodie from my shoulder. “She left this last night.” Charlie flashed a half-cheshire grin. As far as I knew, she appraised our relationship as little more than occasional soap-opera. Welcome spice on the plate of drudgery. Your other housemates were less affable.

“In her room. Hasn’t been down for the morning,” she replied. I hesitated, tightening my grip on your hoodie.

“Sure thing.” She started toward the living room. I shoved my

hands in my pockets. Charlie stopped and turned, creasing her brow. “That it?” I felt myself drifting out to sea, unmoored by your absence. The outside world was the kraken lurking beneath.

“Yeah. Yeah, that’s it,” I replied. I squeezed the handle of the boxcutter I kept in my pocket. “It’s just ... could you let her know I’m down here?” Even with Charlie’s laissez-faire attitude in mind, there were boundaries I wouldn’t cross. One of the men’s counselors—of the evangelical flavor—said that co-ed rehab was like communism. A nice idea on paper. Despite our political differences, he was right about the statistics. Being in your house was bad enough. Heading up to your room was out of the question. Charlie whistled out a cloud of minted smoke, the flash of a gold-capped canine between her lips.

“Fine. Don’t steal anything.” I watched Charlie pad up the stairs, hoodie in tow. I aurally traced her footsteps on the floor above. A knock at your door. An overturned desk chair and a glass-shattering scream. The creak of a rope, tied to a ceiling fan.

I drew the boxcutter and thumbed the blade out. Back in. I tried to remember what I did to make you upset. Out. I wondered if you loved me. In. I thought about setting your house on fire. I put the boxcutter away.

“She’s not here,” Charlie said. She still had your hoodie in her hand. Her cigarette had burned halfway down, and a stalk of ash hung precariously from her lips.

“What?”

“And I was wondering who forgot to latch the chain last night,” Charlie mused, handing me the hoodie again. “She must’ve stepped out.” I chewed on her words, and on the inside of my cheek.

“She have counseling this morning or something?” I asked.

“Not that I know of. Pretty sure she’s next week.” The ash fell from her cigarette in mitosis. Two neat cylinders hit the floor, like someone severed them with a razor. Split wrists. Red bathtub. I slung your hoodie back over my shoulder.

“She didn’t say anything to anyone?”

“I’ll ask the girls when they wake up. You home today?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll let you know.”

I watched the lone police car from my window. The officer met one of the social workers on your porch. They were only inside ten minutes. Charlie explained over the house phone that they’d put in a Missing Person report.

I fidgeted with the chord as she spoke, strangling one finger after another.

“Yo, Benny,” Parker said, poking his head into my room near sundown. I pulled your hoodie off my face, losing the scent of your 2-in-1 gas station shampoo to my Marlboro-infused wallpaper. I’d killed another pack after Charlie hung up.

“Yo.”

“Gonna put the finals on downstairs,” Parker offered.

“Right on.”

“You coming? We got popcorn.”

“I’m good. Thanks though.” Parker stood in the doorway for a moment. I could tell he was turning me over in his mind, trying to ascertain the extent of the damage. Like a jeweler deciding if I was worth cutting. He stepped over the cloth cemetery on the floor and sat on the bed next to me.

“I’m sure she’s alright, man. Wherever she is.” An awkward nostalgia smothered the room. Dad reading bedtime stories, the end of the mattress sagging under his weight. I sat up quickly, crossing my legs in front of me.

“Yeah. Hopefully,” I muttered, fidgeting with your hoodie’s strings. “Do you know what’ll happen? If they find her?” Parker looked up at the corner of the room, accessing his memory or writing a story.

“I’m not sure. No one’s run since I’ve been here. Depends on what she’s doing when they find her, I guess,” he replied, scratching his razor burned chin. “No criminal record, right?”

“No. Least that’s what she said.”

“Well, if she’s k-holed somewhere she’ll probably just go to the hospital. If the cops are real nasty, she could get 5150’d. Little seventy-two-hour staycation.” I ran my tongue across the mangled inside of my cheek.

“You think they’d bring her back here after?” I asked. Parker shook his head.

“I’ll save a spot on the couch, alright?” A hint of radiation-charred popcorn coming from downstairs. I nodded in thanks instead of speaking.

I climbed back up onto the roof. The planet rolled over in bed, turning its back to the sun. Cigarette-orange light ambered the horizon. I dropped your hoodie onto the cooling shingles and sat down next to it. I hoped the police would find you. Shoplifting or trespassing so they’d teach you a lesson. A firetruck wailed a few blocks away. Victims that’d be happy for their saving. I wondered if they’d find you in time. Narcan for your nose instead. I fished in my pocket for the boxcutter.

“She doesn’t owe you anything,” I offered the faint eavesdropping

stars overhead. I'm not sure who the "she" in question was. I thumbed the boxcutter blade out. I hoped you'd remember what we had and ask to come back. Beg management to let you stay. Back in. You weren't thinking straight. We'd sit on the roof together again; all I needed to do was wait a few days. We'd dangle our legs off the edge. Out. Smoking away the sands of time. In. Watching the roiling sea below. "She can do what she wants."

I wondered if the stars believed what I was saying.



DAWN PT. 1

Sam “Yung Lich” Morningstar
Creative Writing & Publishing
Second Year

PIETY FORGOTTEN

OLIVIA DAVENPORT

Creative Writing & Publishing

Third Year

The woman had always thought the depiction of her patron saint was rather disturbing. As she waited for the others to filter into the silent cathedral, she examined the stained glass spanning much of the back wall, casting the floor beneath in defused shards of colour. The eyes of the Voiceless Saint were pointed downward, her mouth hanging wide to reveal a yawning blackness within. The glass there must have been thicker than any of the other fragments used to piece the image together; even her inky hair reluctantly allowed the sunlight to seep through, turning it grey on especially bright days. There was no such light visible through her mouth.

The pews creaked with the added weight of the other followers while the Lecturer stepped up to his podium, blocking the window she'd been observing so intently. With little preamble he began to speak, but the woman was not listening. Few in the room were. The man's words existed somewhere far away; rumbles of distant thunder. She would not reveal her distraction by turning her head and stealing glances at the other glass portraits lining the sides of the room, but she felt the presence of each of the Seven Saints, their penetrating stares bearing down on her.

There was a growing pressure to the space that had been building these past days, a staggering truth felt by all and acknowledged by none. The death of a Relic was a rare and momentous occasion, and the current embodiment of their Saint was sick, coming to the end of her days here at the abbey of her birth. It would be expected of the followers to mourn the loss of such a faithful servant, but any hint of sadness the woman felt was swiftly overwhelmed by excitement for the change the loss would bring. Another would soon be elevated in the Relic's stead, allowed to move beyond these walls to fulfill her duty along with the representations of the remaining six saints.

The woman was certain she was to be that person. She was more deserving than the others, felt the need to leave more keenly than they did. Her vow of absolute silence meant that the woman was not permitted to express her wish, but there was no need for such things. Her saint was always listening.

“The sin of the Voiceless lives within you!” the man’s voice boomed in the quiet space. “In her act of atonement, she cut out her tongue so she may never allow her sinful pride to escape again.”

The woman’s tongue was still intact, as were those of the other followers. She’d heard whispers that such could not be said for the Relics; their service required complete devotion. A small price to pay, she thought.

“Your silence is your faith. It is a heavy weight placed on your shoulders, but it is in your silence that you prove yourselves.”

Though this had been taught at length, some of the women still spoke in the dark of night. Many had even named themselves. She refused to acknowledge them. Noting how she withheld from the blasphemous act, some had taken to calling her Piety, which never ceased to redden her cheeks. It wasn’t the barb that enraged her, but the name itself, its very existence threatening to drag her into their indecency.

The sacrifice demanded by the Abbey of the Voiceless was so small, so inconsequential compared to those who followed the teachings of the other saints. They were not forced to exist without the use of their hands, preventing greedy fingers from seeking more than their lot. They were not made to live a life devoid of all earthly pleasures, lest they fall to the whims of lust. The woman had never used her voice, didn’t mourn the loss of something she didn’t know. It was this complete abstinence from sin that would secure her imminent ascent, her reward a ripening fruit nearly ready to be plucked.

As service ended and the others retreated from the cathedral, the woman stayed still, head bowed: the picture of devotion. Once free from curious eyes, she left as well, walking the gently worn path to the back of the church.

The flowers had not been planted intentionally. They had simply cropped up there, in the small space nestled between the back of the cathedral and the outer wall of the abbey, undeterred by the near unending shade and lack of attention. She gently touched the small, drooping blooms making their way up the stem. Lillies of the valley, she’d once heard them called when the same flowers had popped up near one of the walkways. The woman didn’t know what a valley was; she’d never stepped foot outside of abbey grounds and the one who’d whispered its name hadn’t stayed long enough to tell her. She was a convert not born to the faith, and servitude was too heavy a burden to bear. Those flowers had died quickly, wilting under the touch of too many hands.

This secluded place was an altar more holy in the woman’s mind than the one she visited every day. These flowers—either from slinking

beneath the barrier of the wall, or through seeds tracked in on a Lecturer's boot—had come from outside, and through them, she'd been gifted with a glimpse of a world she desperately yearned for. That wanting was steadily growing inside her, slowly and ceaselessly eclipsing all else.

Many of the women here kept secrets, though few things remained that way for long. This place was hers, and she hid it with the same diligence as a sinner burying their misdeed, but she refused to see it as such. She had been faithful, more so than any of the other followers within the abbey. She listened to every word spoken by the Lecturers, taking each story, each lesson, as an unshakable truth. She spent every waking moment praying to a saint who could not answer, just as she was taught, because she knew that soon her faith would be rewarded.

The moment she'd long awaited came earlier than she anticipated, interrupting the followers as they piled into the dorm that night in preparation for bed. The woman had only just begun to undress—whispers sliding across her skin like plumes of caustic smoke—when the bell of the cathedral began to toll. The whispers died, every girl within the large room stilling, listening as the sound repeated until it carved a permanent place in their memory. It was only after the last ring that the doors opened. The Abbot and the other keepers of the abbey entered, unbothered the women were in varying states of undress.

The Abbot was a slight man, withered with age, but his presence in the room was immense. He spoke louder than he needed, the excitement of the moment causing his voice to echo in the now silent space. "The Relic of the Voiceless has returned home."

He waited, but the woman wasn't sure why. This was a grave announcement, but none of the women would dare make a sound now, not in front of those who enforced the teachings of the faith. The Abbot stood there a breath longer before realizing his mistake.

"It is with great sadness that I deliver this news, but also with great excitement. I have convened with God, and he has decided."

His cane clacked into the stone floor as he walked deeper into the room, past the others, past her. A wave of dizziness nearly overtook the woman when he stopped in front of a raven-haired girl, her eyes wide and disbelieving as the Abbot's hand extended toward her.

"Long live the Relic."

The woman's mouth opened as though to say something, but as always, no sound came. She could only watch a girl who was not her take the Abbot's hand, following him even when it looked as though she was on the

edge of collapsing. The woman felt close to it herself, no part of her mind able to conceive of the possibility that she had not proven herself worthy.

She shuffled forward a step, then stopped. As she watched them leave, the woman imagined running to them, blocking their path with her body. She pictured looking into the eyes of the Abbot until he recognized everything she'd given to this place, the endless sacrifices made in the name of service. She wanted desperately to separate their hands, taking the girl's place and leaving the rest here to rot while she followed him out. In the end she was able to do none of it, something deeply ingrained rooting her in place. Even in this she could be nothing but obedient—perfect, and yet still here. As the doors shut, the woman's breath whistled through her tight throat. It was the most noise she would allow herself. It was unimportant now.

It took some time, but eventually the others were able to shake their paralysis and climb into bed, a few nursing similar wounds, most relieved for not having been chosen. In all that time she stayed completely fixed to her spot, still reeling from the shattering rejection. For hours she stood there, examining her life, trying desperately to find what she could have done to be pushed so easily aside.

It wasn't until the darkest hours of the night that the woman left the dorm, unaware of how she was scrutinized by every eye in the room as she slipped out. If she wanted, the woman could have walked through the front door. It wasn't locked, nor was it watched closely, but having never done so before it wasn't something she considered. For her, that door was something far more nebulous and immaterial than the faith she built her life upon.

The woman made her way outside, numb to the chill of night against her skin. She was behind the cathedral before she'd made the conscious decision to go there. The ivory flowers seemed to glow in the darkness as she knelt before them. They brought infinitely less comfort than they had just hours before. It felt wrong for such beauty to exist in a place like this, a constant reminder of a world that would be seen by another's eyes but never her own. Her body heaved on a silent sob, and then, just as quickly as the reaction had come, her body rejected the sadness, replacing it with an all-consuming rage.

Reaching for the closest flower, she ripped it from the earth, throwing it aside before grabbing another, feeling plump stems and delicate blooms crush under her unforgiving grip. She disappeared into that fury, crawling through the patch until there was nothing left for her to ruin. Then she began to dig. She reached deep into

the ground, as if she might be able to burrow her way under the wall using the trailing roots as her guide. But there was no path out, only more soil, more of this place. By the time she finished, breath heaving and hands shaking, there wasn't a single flower left untouched.

As she looked upon the destruction she caused, she became keenly aware of the gaping hole in her chest in the place where her faith had once lived, a gnawing void she desperately needed to fill. The woman leaned forward, feeling the cool earth beneath her knees as she carefully picked up the pieces of the torn and broken plants. Wiping at the dirt-stained leaves with filthy hands, she brought each to her mouth, swallowing them despite their acrid taste.

As she ate, she consumed the dream that had sustained her all this time, and with each bite the picture became clearer. She saw wide open spaces filled with the fragile flowers, a sky unhindered by walls, a place filled with light and a life so unlike what she knew here. For the few moments she cannibalized those specters of her desire, she pictured the world not as it was, but as she had always hoped it would be.

The woman was found by the abbey's keepers the next day, the morning dew stuck to her eyelashes like unshed tears. Her body was removed without ceremony before the other women awoke, carried far beyond the walls of the abbey. Her name was quickly forgotten by the other servants of the faith, and soon her unremarkable existence faded from their minds until all that remained were hazy memories of a woman who'd once hoarded a small patch of flowers.

Had someone found her earlier, followed her as she'd wandered under the moonlight, they might have ripped the toxic blooms from her hands. But no one had. For the first time in her life, as she lay on her back in the upturned soil and scattered petals, the woman had been entirely alone. The only eyes cast upon her as she'd choked on her final offering had been made of glass, that void of a mouth open wide, a ravenous snake ready to devour its prey.



ROTTING AWAY WITH YOU

Heather Haunton
Animation
Fourth Year

DON'T MIND THE DEAD BIRD

DEE PAGE

Creative Writing & Publishing

Second Year

There is a dead bird in the middle of a two-lane road. At dawn, the road is filled with the denizens of an absent neighbourhood. They spend their mornings filing out towards the city, and at night, those who made it through the workday return to their homes. With nothing remarkable to call its own, the two-lane road acts as a catalyst between two points—a connection between the beginning and end, nothing more. And at its centre, there is a dead bird.

Despite its decay, the dead bird's feathers are still visible; a separate shade from the dark grey asphalt. There is no red accenting its surroundings and no bone breaking out beneath its skin. The painted line it covers is barely visible in the best of conditions, so the dead bird provides no hazard to the flow of traffic. The poorly refilled cracks in the asphalt fulfill the job of pointing drivers towards the highway opening, the only destination on their path.

The horse-sized vehicles have learned to take caution around the dead bird. This bird, which is not a deer, moose, or bear, is granted the same amount of space one would give such a creature. Since the sunny skies and dry roads don't justify the wide berth the cars give, there can be no explanation for their cautious avoidance other than the inconvenience. Trampling over the bird would help break down the remains, removing the problem before it got worse. But the aftertaste would scuff their rims and damage their tires. So the cars have avoided the dead bird and are waiting the days it will take for it to rot.

There is a dead skunk in the gutter of the two-lane road. Where the asphalt dips and the concrete begins the skunk's head lays flattened. Not broken or split—just flattened. The dead skunk is far enough from the asphalt not to pose a threat to the car's tire polish, and because of that has gone unnoticed by the herd through many days and nights. However, though the cars find little interest in it, it has not been entirely forgotten. In its early stages of decay, it has attracted the attention of a different creature.

There is a turkey vulture inching towards the two-lane road. This bird—with its blood-red head and charcoal-black feathers—is taking a risk few others of its kind do. It has chosen to put itself in an uncomfortable

spot to have its meal. It approaches the side of the two-lane road, head protruding down towards the dead skunk slowly. Typically these birds roam the nearby grasslands where they have cover, room to take off, and ample distance between themselves and the two-lane road. The two-lane road fulfills none of the necessary conditions for the life of these creatures, except for how it satiates their palate for death. The unequivocal buffet of opportunities left behind is plenty for a scavenger. There is just enough salvageable meat on the dead skunks bones to appease the turkey vulture's appetite. So it risks the exposure to the smog-producing beasts and indulges its hunger. It is not unusual, after all, for a vulture to find a habitat standing at the edge of the most effective stretch of slaughter in the modern world.

There is a coyote living near the two-lane road. It has been spotted by weary eyes and local home security cameras for over a year. Small in frame but noticeable in presence, the coyote often passes through backyards, driveways, and parking lots; putting fear into the hearts of small dog owners and quaint home gardeners. In its appetite for destruction it has bounded over fences tall enough to keep out most humans, torn through freshly grown fruits, and scared off many of the stray cats that once visited local doorsteps. Wildlife signs posted along the edge of the two-lane road alert pedestrians to the coyote's reputation. Backed by white aluminum and standing on rusted metal posts, the signs warn to keep pets on leashes, remain vigilant, and to stay out of the bushes at night. Despite the troubles, in some ways the coyote has proven to be an apt ally of the two-lane road. It has helped cut down the rampant squirrel and skunk population through the years, picking off the few that the two-lane road does not deal with itself. The herd's tires are grateful.

The coyote does not rush across the two-lane road like the dead bird. It does not run in front of the bumpers of the charging metal bulls. The coyote waits for an opening and the cars heed its demand. They slow to a full stop upon seeing it and give the coyote the right of way as they would any other pedestrian. With pushed back ears and twitchy eyes, the coyote sprints into the forested park opening on the other side, past a broken aluminum sign.

The dead raccoon was never on the two-lane road at all. This creature is dead on the sidewalk. Lying on the four-foot-wide concrete slab, overgrown with grass and weeds, at the edge of the two-lane road. The dead raccoon's body is in much worse shape than the dead bird and the dead skunk. Its cause of death is unclear despite the split skin and trail of entrails over the stone, staining it with a temporary reminder of a lost life.

The dead raccoon doesn't receive the luxury of being dead on the two-lane road. It doesn't get to be given space, it doesn't get to be consumed, it doesn't get to be stopped for. It has no use because of its position on the old, overgrown sidewalk. The dead raccoon is a hazard. The dead raccoon is in the way. The dead raccoon has begun to rot.

The rot cements its presence into the stone, and the risk of it heralding a disease grows stronger with each passing moment. Pedestrians cover their nose when they walk from one end to the other; a nuisance even through death. A few steps forward and the dead raccoon would be in the bushes, out of concern of the sanitization team now required to remove it. A few steps back and it would be on the two-lane road, where the sun and the scavengers would handle it all for them.

Following protocol, the sanitization team will scrape the dead raccoon off the sidewalk and dispose of it very far away. Mechanical claws will transpose the creature from the concrete slab to the metal hull of a transport truck, wrapping its rotten remains in a black polyethylene bag. No hands, bone, keratin, or rubber will close in on the raccoon's own flesh. The dead raccoon will be placed into a metal hull on wheels, and those wheels will drive down the two-lane road.

The sanitization team will join the stampede. They will spare the coyote, navigate past the turkey vulture and beyond the dead skunk. Then they will slow down—and curve a deer's-length around the dead bird: giving its flesh ample space to rot. They will follow protocol, and leave the two-lane road.

I AM MARRYING THE SEMI-TRUCK THAT HELD ME.

THEODORE GRACE
Creative Writing & Publishing
Fourth Year

Everything freezes in live motion; the union is pronounced true. A tire track torn into the road of a document and a hundred little tracts of cubed glass. His lips on mine in unceremonious determination. The ecstasy of marriage, a car crash. The world slows to a halt in the interval between the Before and the Inevitable. A phenom since called irreversible.

His hands grab hold of my hips/the impact/his chest on mine/as he wants me closer/the chemical airbag/hits my ribcage/the car begins to scream/the crowd to cheer/and the barely mobile body beyond my control now leans/leans in/with too much shrapnel in/the walls/the flesh/the paint/the hair/the soul/to deny him.

Something as unassailable as gravity, ineffable as fate, innate as gore. He would probably like how morbid I sounded; he would probably be delighted—and then comes the wherewithal to ask me if I wanted this.

I did/I do/and I still will/for as long as we draw breath/the same way that cars want cruel kisses/the way he wanted me awake for the paramedics/the way the windshield wanted to shatter.



SPROUTS

Julia Sobiesiak
Illustration
Third Year

SASHA YURCHENKO
Creative Writing & Publishing
Third Year

*“Do you know a Ukrainian night? Oh no, you do not
know the Ukrainian night! Gaze into her.”*

- Mykola Gogol “May Night, or the Drowned Maiden”
transl. by Sasha Yurchenko

A car door closed with a slam. My cat anxiously shifted, putting all eight kg onto my right leg. Anxiety was eating me too. I watched my father put our luggage in the trunk. That’s it? Not even a hug? That one was on me, honestly. I hadn’t been paying too much attention as I was sleepwalking to the car, with my mum nervously mumbling and hurrying me up as if we could hear the sky whistling already. I obediently accepted the pet carrier, and before I knew it, the door was closed. With one swing of that door, I had entered another country, another world, away from my father and the last five years of my life.

Thousands left Kyiv within the first two weeks of the full-scale war. Millions across the country. They were mostly mothers with crying kids on their hands and men labeled “unfitting” for service, doing their best to cross the border before the government could start lowering their standards. *Ukrzaliznytsia*, a national train company, arranged free train rides to Europe. We were watching those trains leaving the station on TV, watching people falling out of jammed doors, their souls forever lost in the pits of platforms. They were scared. Clenched to train handrails, pushing others deeper into the iron worms for a chance of safety. Luggage abandoned. Pet carriers with their inhabitants still inside left behind. The railway escape would make us closer to death than a missile. With missiles you just hope that they come quickly and kill all, with no one to suffer loneliness left behind.

My mother would proclaim: “I will not run away! I will be putting bullets in my husband’s gun!” Only to be forced into a car to arrive to Warsaw three days later.

I had the same mindset. I was getting used to studying on the hallway floor, on a thick blanket I used to sleep under as a child. That blanket was my desk, my bed, my safety.

The rule of two walls: in case of an explosion nearby, bricks and glass from the first wall would be stopped by the next one.

Mum and Dad were always around. We started caring for each other more, making coffee or bringing snacks, and needing to locate each other even within the few walls of our apartment. There was a certain coziness in such living, except it was a sick, feverish, artificial warmth.

Mum didn't sleep at night, always listening out for missiles and checking on everyone we knew. Dad was constantly watching news, though we all were. Glued to my phone, I kept my brain alive by reading military reports and *Dune*. I flipped from one tab to another, from the neighbouring enemy to an interstellar messiah. Is anyone coming to save us? Laid down on the same blanket day after day, I existed behind two walls, saying good-bye to everyone I loved and not expecting to wake up. Death or glory.

Ukrainians were convinced the war would last only a few days. I was childishly worried about the victory coming before my poetry recital due date and almost wished for it all to last a little longer. The war didn't end in a few days though, or weeks, or months, or even years. I should have known better than that. My home city was occupied since 2014, for eight years at that time, and twelve years now. We had already left everything under r*ssia's gunshots once. I should have predicted leaving my home again.

That day became inevitable when r*ssians invaded Irpin and Bucha. They destroyed and robbed. Children and women were raped. Cats and dogs were dismembered or crucified. Bucha and Irpin became the symbols of thousands of small towns all over the country torn apart by inhumane violence. "They have no choice! The government ordered!" Yeah? I doubt that the government made r*ssians rape a six-year-old child.

Bucha was only 100 km away from us. Too close. Dad was looking at his wife, who had already survived a gun against her head years ago, and a daughter who had just turned seventeen. Both said they were going to stay with him till the end and would follow him on the battlefield. Of course, of course.

Dad shoved our clothes into luggage cases. We had just gotten a call from our friend Inna who was heading with her son for Poland and was offering us a ride. Mum was crying. She didn't want to leave without Dad, and Dad was trying to figure out what clothes we would need on our journey.

When Inna called, we were playing Scrabble. In peaceful times, we would spend our evenings frying our brains over little white squares on the board. As a writer, I would take my defeat personally, making Dad, the winner, laugh. The game remained untouched when we left the apartment.

I said good-bye to my dad and hugged him very closely. Cat in the carrier, luggage in the trunk, and we set out to the unknown. It was 5 p.m., and I was looking at the city that had become my

new home since my first was taken away. I felt nine years old again.

Kyiv was a city of bridges with the wide Dnipro dividing it into two shores. The hills on the Right Shore looked down at the flat ground on the Left. Impossible to look away. But the water wasn't glowing that day, and the sun decided not to show scarlet sunset rays. Dull. Everything was dull. My cat was meowing in the carrier. Something wasn't right. The cars on the bridge stood in a petrified row. We couldn't leave that day—the line was too long, and Inna's car didn't have enough gas. The Scrabble game was finished, and two shots of cognac were drunk later. Come back tomorrow.

The next morning, Dad shut the door on my side, and it felt like the thickest wall in the world. It felt like that door could save me from a dozen of missiles, no walls needed, and yet it didn't feel safe. This time I knew it was for good.

My parents' voices muffled on the background. I looked at my cat who was as scared as he was the day before. He was fifteen already, but he looked like the small kitten my mum used to feed from a baby bottle. I petted him through the cage.

On the seat beside me sat Danil, Inna's son, also with a pet carrier on his lap. Danil was twenty years old, and being of age he couldn't cross the border, but they were still going there. Maybe, his mother hoped for the best. Danil and I shared (not) a moment/conversation at Inna's birthday party once. I guess my sixteen-year-old self yearned for her first love, so she imagined the talk being romantic because the sunset was romantic, and the alcohol made it even more romantic. Truth was, we were both bored among the older crowd, and the teenage girl liked hearing herself talk, while the young man enjoyed feeling smarter than a high schooler.

We didn't say a word the whole trip.

I fought tears when the car drove away. I pitied myself then, but right now I can only think of how lonely it must have been for a loving man to come back to an empty apartment.

That day was long. My earbuds laid untouched in my pocket and an ebook unopened in my phone. My mum and our friend talked politics and the state of life or lack of such. I was listening and looking out of the window. There was something primal in the doom we were in. All I cared for was being warm, keeping myself erect enough for running, though I sat, I expected to run any moment. I don't remember eating that day. Mum got a call from her childhood friend who was tracking the situation on the roads to make sure we were safe.

"Where are you?"

"We're on Zhytomyr highway—am I right, Inna?—yes, Zhytomyr highway."

"Turn around immediately."

Somewhere between Kyiv and Vinnitsia a bunch of Chechens, an ethnic minority whom r*ssia had sent to kill, were shooting cars on the highway. As we were turning around, I remember seeing a demolished car somewhere in the distance with a piece of paper attached to the window. Parents would write “CHILDREN” on those, hoping that at least kids would be spared. That car was on fire.

We reached Vinnitsia in the dark of the night. An acquaintance of Inna’s acquaintance agreed to let us stay for one night in their apartment. They had already fled the country and planned to rent the place to escapees from the East. The apartment was messy and cold, very cold. The ceilings stretched high as they usually were in the older buildings. The place smelled like strangeness. The bathroom was full of bottles with layers of dust and strands of hair, and everything was in the wrong place. I’d never been there before, but I just knew it was wrong, everything was wrong.

My mum and I slept in a kids room under a thick fur blanket

I told my mum that they smelled of mold

she said its okay its only for one night

then we were trying to drift off without thinking

In the morning Inna left. She was running around the house, her fox eyes turning into two big circles. She was a tiny, skinny woman, reminding me of a match threatening to burn out any second. Inna said she was leaving for Lviv, to her friend’s house, and she needed to protect her son. I will never know for sure, but I guess she finally realized Danil wouldn’t be able to cross the border.

And so they left, and my mum and I were left alone in the unknown city with no one to turn to. In the full-scale war. I could see Mum trying to suppress her panic. The whole plan was reliant on crossing the border together. Or getting to the fucking border. She sat down on a chair, among strangers’ living, in a messy kitchen, with disgusting coffee on the table that no one dared to finish. She just told me to pack.

The realtor came in about thirty minutes after they left. Him and his friend were typical Ukrainian lads—one bald, one blonde. With Ukrainian hearts. They offered to drive us to the bus station and see if we can travel further from there. They helped us with luggage and were probably too kind to a pair of strangers and their cat.

“Be prepared to sleep on the bench,” Mum said to me.

There were no tickets at all. Every place was taken, and there was nothing one could do. These guys—if only I could remember their names—were doing their best to help us out, but they also had places to be, and so the hospitality was coming to its logical end. We were homeless for a few hours, yet we’d been for a long time.

“Someone dropped their tickets!”

Pure luck got us out of that bus station. Once we settled, with my poor cat meowing for freedom, the bus set off for Przemysl, Poland.

I could see my mum finally being able to breathe. She, her daughter, the cat—all her responsibilities gained a home and around fifty neighbours for the next twenty-four hours in that bus.

Like clockwork, thirty minutes after we left Vinnitsia, a missile landed on the bus station.

No benches or people left.

I don't remember much from the rest of the trip. We were exhausted. My cat looked much thinner than before; he was weighed as five at the border—three lighter than the day before. We didn't sleep that night, didn't eat much, and couldn't wait to settle somewhere.

Crossing the border was a feverish dream, and I remember fighting for my cat's carrier, the most precious thing in the world,

“Leave the animal!”

“People are trying to survive!”

I am a person. I am a person. I am a person.

with these people who just wanted to end up on the other side, in safety of a country that wasn't attacked, under useless protection of NATO, and the inspectors who looked at us with pity. On the other side were the volunteers giving out food, hygiene products, and clothes. On the other side was Poland. And we were finally standing on its land.

A few hours of a bus drive to Lublin, and then even longer to Warsaw. I remember looking out of the window and seeing a very different night. If you ever want to know my darling night, read Gogol's “May Night, or the Drowned Maiden.” Translators mistake it for a “night in Ukraine,” when he wrote “Ukrainian night,” because it was tenderly Ukrainian.

I was gazing at another night. I was in Poland. And somehow, I felt neither excitement of being abroad nor cravings for adventures. I watched the sadness in my cat's eyes as he laid his small head on my arm, and I wondered if we would ever feel home again.



DAWN PT. 2

Sam “Yung_Lich” Morningstar
Creative Writing & Publishing
Second Year



RIPTIDE

Eden Stewart
Industrial Design
Third Year

EVERYTHING SOUTH OF HERE

JADE JACOB

Creative Writing & Publishing

Fourth Year

I used to romanticise the perpendicularity of the snowfall with the belief that I would never see it again. Saying good-bye on the edge of the dark white that pretends to stop and the cold so young, I don't want it stirred by the arrest of the sun.

Now, I am dreamily compressed against the business of thick-necked trees more fruitful than paper-skulls of palms and ghafs. The living prowls the graves in the dirt, watching the marble go soft with wet rot, rhyming like maggots in the soil's throat.

The sky here is a gut-bloat of gas and bleached breath, smeared with chamomile grease. I have to imagine it: A Friday lung-heavy with desert, the low concussion of cleaners, water under duress
& thoroughfares of traffic lights.
The desert has me tanned to the bone.

You need to hear it: the train's vertebrae grinding gutturally above, the mall's polyglot aperture, the maternal hello / marhaba / or kamusta as a linguistic rupture without the prejudice of the frame. There are no places with the sour familiarity of my mother's curtains,

dove-wing pale or the steam of lifting, bruised ginger, green papaya into slow steam: tinola. Three years later, I search for my brothers' voices and find the window sealed with frost. My shadow here is a mangy thing, stretched on the fat of a sidewalk crusted with snow and weed.

My roots are now curled and white, fumbling in the dark of a soil that tastes like nicotine and tar. The sun doesn't do much to my ribs; it is a pale eye, cataract-dim. So, I search for the salt of the Gulf, the fog in my frames, the sting of the dust-storm's agency behind the teeth, and the squareness of a household.

The plumbing is shuddering with a cold
and the windows are scales that just won't shed. I am still
waiting for the season to snap. I would like to go home
finally, down the long gut of the streets north and south
crossed with moist pavements without the pencil-yellow school buses,

and without the cities and plains mingled by one wind. I am turning my face
to the heat and walking until the marrow in my shins recognises the dust.





CONTRIBUTORS

ELLA ARANDA is a student who enjoys creating things slowly and by hand. She focuses on comfort, texture, and small details, making pieces meant to feel cozy, personal, and creative!

ARI is a fourth-year CW&P student with a special focus in poetry.

OLIVIA DAVENPORT is pursuing her Honours Bachelor of Creative Writing and Publishing at Sheridan College. Olivia does her best thinking while hiking or looking out the window on long drives. She finds music essential for creativity, so she'll always be found with headphones in whenever she's writing.

AMANDA DEAN is in current pursuit of a bachelor in Creative Writing and Publishing at Sheridan College. She is one of the executives of Sheridan's Creative Writing Corner and takes part in organizing workshops with established writers and poets. She loves rain and the moon an adequate amount.

MIKO DURANTE is a fourth-year Illustration student. His work mainly focuses on concept art, but he occasionally creates illustrations to explore mood and storytelling.

DIMITRIE ERMURACHI is a second-year Creative Writing & Publishing student. He loves to write poetry grounded in metaphor and atmosphere, focusing on themes such as time, external pressure, and embodied experience. Dimitrie's other creative interests include cooking and recording music.

THEODORE GRACE is a fourth-year student in the Creative Writing & Publishing program and a proud intern at *Augur Magazine*. He specializes in poetry and unconventional fiction stories, both romantic and macabre. Originally from the town of Carleton Place, ON, he now lives with his mother and sister in the GTA.

HEATHER HAUNTON is a fourth-year Animation student. She grew up learning traditional painting at a local studio, which was near a forested area. She has always found peace in the forest and the concept of returning to nature once life takes its course.

JADE JACOB is a rising Filipino poet and writer raised in the Middle East and now based in Canada. Her work explores humanity's connection to nature, the fragile balance between creation and destruction, and our responsibility to protect the things around us. Her writing has appeared in *Hart House Review*, *the Hotelier Magazine*, and *Poet2Poet*.

JERRZ&Z Capturing the unconventional that nobody talks about, but nobody forgets, JERRZ&Z aims to portray the mundane and liminal moments with vibrant colours and graphic style.

SHAUNA KERNAGHAN is a fourth-year Creative Writing & Publishing student whose work lives through the music she listens to and often never leaves, but lately it's been breaching containment! Her interests include subversion, her esoteric dog, Procreate pocket edition, being skinned alive, etymology, characters, collecting locks, cranberry juice, her Bose noise-cancelling headphones, animation, and OUTCOMES, BABY!!!

KLARA KIM is a first-year Animation student, taking inspiration from life to weave new stories. She especially enjoys illustrating seemingly ordinary but precious scenes.

DAWN A. KUDLOWICH is a queer Anishnaabe third-year Honours Bachelor of Creative Writing & Publishing student. She is a multimedia artist and writer who works with short fiction and poetry. Her goal across art mediums is to make the unsettling beautiful, create emotional reactions, and provoke deeper thought.

SAM “YUNG_LICH” MORNINGSTAR (they/he) is a non-binary multimedia artist. Their practice is ever changing and very spur of the moment. They are heavily inspired by their emotions and the songs that they are currently listening to.

‘i just want to put professional sad boy.’

GABRIEL MOULTRIE is a third-year Honours Bachelor of Creative Writing & Publishing student at Sheridan College. He has worked with young Canadian writers, having led a creative writing workshop at Brampton Centennial Secondary School as a student ambassador for the CW&P program.

DEE PAGE is a multimedia artist and second-year Creative Writing & Publishing student. Their work explores taboo topics within society, turning them into prose and visual art, with an artistic vision that aims to bring out the beauty of being unconventional.

JULIA SOBIESIAK is a twenty-two-year-old multi-disciplinary artist, currently attending Sheridan College for Illustration. Her work is informed by texture, light, sound, and a bit of play. Holistically, she weaves together elements from every medium indulged—each experience providing instruments for exploring new worlds!

EDEN STEWART is a Sheridan Industrial Design student from Waterdown, Ontario. Growing up, they enjoyed creative problem solving, which became the root of their passion for design. They follow an elegant design style, drawing inspiration from the Art Nouveau and Art Deco eras.

BRYCE TEAKLE is a Sheridan student pursuing a Bachelor of Illustration. His art is often rooted in his enjoyment of creating paleo art, which centers on depicting prehistoric life according to science. His work in recreating such scenes is driven by his fascination with the mysteries of deep history.

SASHA YURCHENKO is a Ukrainian Canadian author and an editor for *Ivy Literary Journal*. Her other work can be found in *Pandamonium's Darkness Falls* anthology. Born and raised in Ukraine, she writes stories that explore the mythology of her land, as well as her personal connection to home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences for their generous sponsorship. To the Creative Writing & Publishing faculty, thank you for letting us visit your classes with announcements and for always being so encouraging. A special thank you is also necessary for Gabriel Levine, Paulina Delfina, Genevieve Amara, and Owen Percy for all their help.

We would like to especially thank Tali Voron-Liederman, our Faculty Mentor, for supporting this publication from its very beginnings and for her continued guidance, and Robyn Read, for stepping into this role in these last few weeks.

Thank you to all Sheridan faculty and students for your continued support, and to our contributors, who are the reason any of this is possible.

A final thank you is due to the Fall 2025 - Spring 2026 Team. Thank you to Naya, who tirelessly feuded with InDesign and emerged victorious, and thank you to Macie, for her engaging blog posts and aesthetic touch in web design. Thank you to Paige for their poetic intuition and their swiftness during even the busiest times, to Mara for being our resident art critic and having exquisite taste, and to Micaela for always being honest and persistent in delivering the best prose for *B222*. Thank you to Quinn for always trekking to campus, in rain or shine, button machine in hand; to Sam for always rising to the occasion without hesitation; to Sydney for her glowing personality and her readiness to help. Thank you to Quin for expertly maintaining our online branding and to Adam for his ceaseless documentation from every possible angle. Thank you to Aislin's organization and Sarah's persistence for coming together to throw an incredible event. Thank you to Emma, who excelled at both easing the stresses of the team and crafting stellar spreadsheets, and, finally, thank you to our brilliant Managing Editor, without whom the rest of us would be hopelessly lost, Lia.



Thank you to FHASS for their support!

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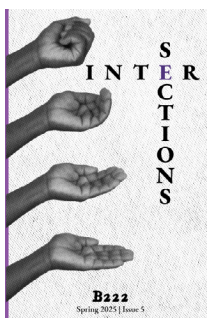
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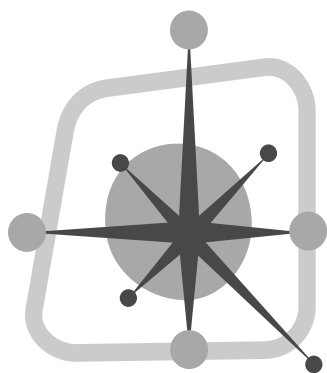


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