

SPRING 2024 VOLUME 16





We acknowledge that PVCC is built upon land that  
is the ancestral home of the Monacan people.  
We honor their stewardship of the land and strive in  
our actions to respect the custom and knowledge of  
indigenous people.



The Fall Line in Virginia is the line separating the Virginia Piedmont from the Coastal Plain, where rivers, small waterfalls, and rapids cascade or “fall off” hard, resistant rocks as the water makes its way to the ocean.

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ABOUT  
*The Fall Line, Spring 2024, is the  
16th volume, selected, edited, and  
produced by the PVCC Creative  
Writing Club.*

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# RUDBECKIA

*Claudia Thomas*

the winter chill was fading  
when i saw the basal rosette  
of lanceolate leaves and knew  
this rudbeckia wasn't coming  
to play around

there was nothing shy or subtle  
about it; it rolled in like a  
second line - 'twas all yellow,  
golden, bronze sass jazz  
a revelry of parasol and handkerchiefs

it was a party alright  
making its way down the street now  
fading



*"VECTOR SELFIE"* | DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION | ALYSSA JOHNSON

# HOW TO EXPLAIN EMOTION

*Kiwi Moneymaker*

where to begin

in order to explore experimental monitors (bothersome perspectives);

to emit motion (endless repetition);

find exceptional motivation (quiet smothering);

my own expectation for logic to flutter right into my hands (an ardent wish).

to ask, where is this extrinsic sanity?

past the rush to lick the lantern's flame, even when the moon-made light,  
free, never flickers?

or the shameful embarrassment of a trampled sapling being mocked by someone's  
deeply-rooted grand oak,

and only the shadow of an unplanted seed sleeping on its infertile bed,

rocked by the bustling sound of a bountiful, neighboring garden.

someone else's contrails serve as glares coating any shield I put up as of late.  
they juxtapose; sap-turned-wild-honey.

only intimacy and comfort found in their darkness.

the ability of one's star-dusted fingertips,

truly grabbing the moon by its crescent handle.

how someone turns life into small haikus;

how you do it. i see it.

it's in you, treacherous teacher,

the best of you and how it was the best

even before me (an oversensitive, young pupil, impossible to fix).

so while i sit here and try and bring it to sense—

—to try and do the impossible homework assigned to me—

i'll pray for a lecture.

i'll hope that you'll think of a way

to better explain how to negate natural notions.



"JACK TWO" | DIGITAL COLLAGE | SANDRA SCHWARTZ



# ON NOT KILLING A HUMMINGBIRD

*Benjamin Marcus*

I WAS YOUNG WHEN I first witnessed death delivered as a mercy. I am no longer sure of how old I was exactly, but it was a day at the latter end of summer. My father and I were returning home from one of our many walks. It was a good day for a walk, cooler than the preceding months had been but still warm and full of sunlight. Less than a block away from our home, we came across a cicada, lying near the edge of the street.

This being the end of summer, cicada corpses were becoming a common sight. After their years of life underground as nymphs, cicadas live a mere four to six weeks after they emerge in the form we are most familiar with. They mate, and then they drop dead. I imagine this is what had happened to this cicada, but it was not dead yet, merely too weak to fly, too weak to turn over, too weak to defend itself from the ants that had come for it.

The small battalion of dark ants swarmed in a tight circle on the asphalt around the fallen cicada, crawling over it and forcing their way under its exoskeleton. The cicada's legs moved weakly, but it was helpless. I did not immediately realize what I was seeing, not until my father grimaced. "They're eating it," he said.

It made my stomach twist with revulsion. I liked ants. I had been sad when my ant farm's colony died out. The many times I had succumbed to the compulsion of crushing ants that passed me on the sidewalk, I would often feel a lingering shame at my senseless killings. I liked cicadas too, an enthusiasm I inherited from my mother. I liked to collect their abandoned shells and spend time observing them flying about in the final form of their lifecycle. Even if I didn't feel strongly toward cicadas, the idea of being eaten alive by a swarm of tiny jaws, unable to move, unable to fight back, was a deep dread that persisted with me after that day. "Is there no way to help?" I asked my father.

"I think all we can do is put it out of its misery," he replied.

I nodded, still feeling a little sick. My father crushed both cicada and ants beneath his heel.

\*\*\*

Almost a decade later, the death of the cicada had burrowed into the sediment of my mind and lay dormant. Again I was walking, but this time I was far from home, at the farm the Living Earth School wilderness camp was renting for that summer. I was a teenager now and one of the camp's four counselors in training (CITs) for that week. I was with the other CITs and Zack, the CIT coordinator, as we crossed through a field to get to the woods where we could check in with our assigned groups of day campers. Crossing the field was usually a rather unpleasant experience — even though it was fairly early in the summer, it could still get swelteringly hot walking in direct sunlight — but this day it was much more tolerable. The air smelled of the hay bales stacked up

on the far side of the field as we discussed what path we would take through the woods to most efficiently find every day-camp group. Once we crossed into the shade of the woods, our conversation died down quickly, as we heard a loud buzzing sound not far down the dirt path.

“Is that a bee?” One of the other CITs, Stacy asked, hesitating to keep going forward.

“That sounds too big to be a bee,” I answered as Zack went ahead a little to look.

“You guys want to see something sad?” he asked, his normally mirthful manner dimmed.

I wasn’t sure if I wanted to see something sad, but it was in our way, so I went to see it with the rest of the group. There, struggling on the cold earth at the edge of a dried-up riverbed, was a hummingbird. Its brilliant green color was still visible, even in the shade of the forest, but it was injured. Despite its wings beating so fast they sounded like helicopter rotors, it couldn’t get lift-off. The other CITs made some sad groans as Zack leaned down to examine it. The hummingbird stopped trying to fly away, letting out a strained call.

“I think its wing’s broken,” Zack told us. “It won’t be able to feed itself. It’ll starve in a few hours.”

At the speed a hummingbird’s metabolism has to go to keep it in flight, just five hours without food is enough for it to die of starvation. With a broken wing, this hummingbird was as good as dead.

“We shouldn’t let the campers see it. It’d make them too sad,” said Desa, one of the other CITs.

Zack agreed. A part of me questioned the decision to hide death from children going to a nature camp, but I said nothing, instead focusing on the question of what to do with it. We agreed that we shouldn’t leave it out on the trail where some of the campers might stumble across it, and Zack suggested that we should kill it before it would die of starvation. Desa, who was working toward becoming a veterinarian, agreed, as did the rest of us, rather dejectedly. However, we also agreed that on the off chance that it wasn’t as badly injured as it seemed and just needed some time to recover from the shock of whatever accident had befallen it, we should wait a little longer before putting it down.

Zack picked it up gently. “Alright, who wants to carry it?”

I volunteered. There was nothing I needed to let my group know, so I could stay back and hide it from the campers, and I had some experience with injured birds. I had suffered from some of those earlier experiences, but I had also known birds who recovered rapidly and were able to fly off mere minutes after I found them on the ground. I was almost certain there wasn’t going to be a happy ending for the hummingbird, that I was setting myself up to get attached, and that its death would wound me, but I did it anyway.

Zack handed the hummingbird to me, and I felt its life in my hands. Its little warm body vibrated with the power of its heartbeat. Its speed was a motor. I held it, my thumbs wrapped carefully over it so it couldn't writhe out of my grasp as I held it close to my belly. We made the rounds and met with the groups that hadn't already headed to the river. I stayed back, just out of sight of the campers, still clutching the little engine that was the hummingbird. I wished it would turn out to just be stunned, that it would suddenly find the strength to force itself out of my grasp and fly away, but it didn't, and by the time we were heading back toward the field, I knew it wouldn't survive. All we could do was grant it a quick death.

As we crossed through the field again, a feeling came over me, that when the time came to put the hummingbird out of its misery, I should be the one to do it. I was the one who was carrying it from where it had fallen. I was the one who had felt its life in between my hands. I felt I was the one who could truly appreciate the existence we were going to be bringing to an end. It just felt right. But at the same time, what I knew I had to do felt wrong, like a betrayal of the life I was carrying with me through the field. I made an effort to steel myself. It had to be done. It was the merciful thing to do. Still, as we kept on through the field and time seemed to slow, I struggled to commit myself to it. I found myself feeling like Abraham, leading Isaac through the desert to be sacrificed, and I wished that some sacrificial lamb would come and take my place, take the heavy responsibility from between my hands.

But for all my hoping, I was already going over in my mind how I would have to do it. If it had to die, it should at least be as quick as possible. Crushing its head seemed the right way to go about it. Gruesome as it would be to see, I'd destroy the brain before it could register any pain. I knew how easy that would be, felt how fragile it was between my hands. I considered crushing it under my heel, the way my father had with that cicada all those years ago, but that felt just a little too brutal, too callused. It wouldn't make much of a difference for the hummingbird, but to me, hitting it with a rock felt more acceptable. Lost in this arithmetic, I lagged behind the group a little and was a few yards behind them when Zack had them stop beside a large puddle we had navigated earlier. We could see the day campers on the opposite side of the wide field beyond the puddle. With a hole where my stomach usually was, I knew this was where it would have to happen before Zack said anything. I set the hummingbird down on a patch of grass beside the trail and silently began looking for a rock.

"What are you doing?" Zack asked me.

"Finding a good-sized rock," I answered my voice shaking a little.

Desa wrinkled her nose. "Don't," she whined softly. "Let me take care of it."

Somewhere, I felt relieved, and that made me crack. I wouldn't have to do it after all. Desa could handle it. She hadn't been the one carrying it; she hadn't had the opportunity to get attached to it the way I had. It would be easier for her. Besides, she was planning on being a veterinarian; this sort of thing was something she would have to do later in life, while it was something I hoped never to be near again. It would be unnecessarily masochistic of me to do it myself just because it's what "felt right." The hummingbird would be dead either way. What did it actually matter?

I acquiesced. I stepped aside so that Desa could do the deed. She was carrying a camp knife with her for carving wood, and she unsheathed it then, leaned down gently, and slit the hummingbird's throat. I didn't see any blood. Its beak opened as if letting out a soundless cry. Its tongue, like an insect proboscis, lashed out of its opened beak, reaching for nectar that wasn't there. It closed its beak for a moment, then opened it again and again. Part of me wanted to rush in, to finish it off myself after all before it would die of suffocation, but I still couldn't bring myself to do it. It took a minute, maybe two for its silent calls ended, and it grew still.

I knew then that I had been right before. It would have been better if I had done it. I had a chance to spare it from starvation quickly and painlessly, and instead, I left it to die a sloppy death at the hands of another. Perhaps that death was better than starvation, but it had suffered all the same. In trying to avoid the emotional anguish of putting it down myself, I had left it to a far more painful death, and, in the end, knowing that was a worse pain than killing it would have been. I had failed myself, and I had failed it.

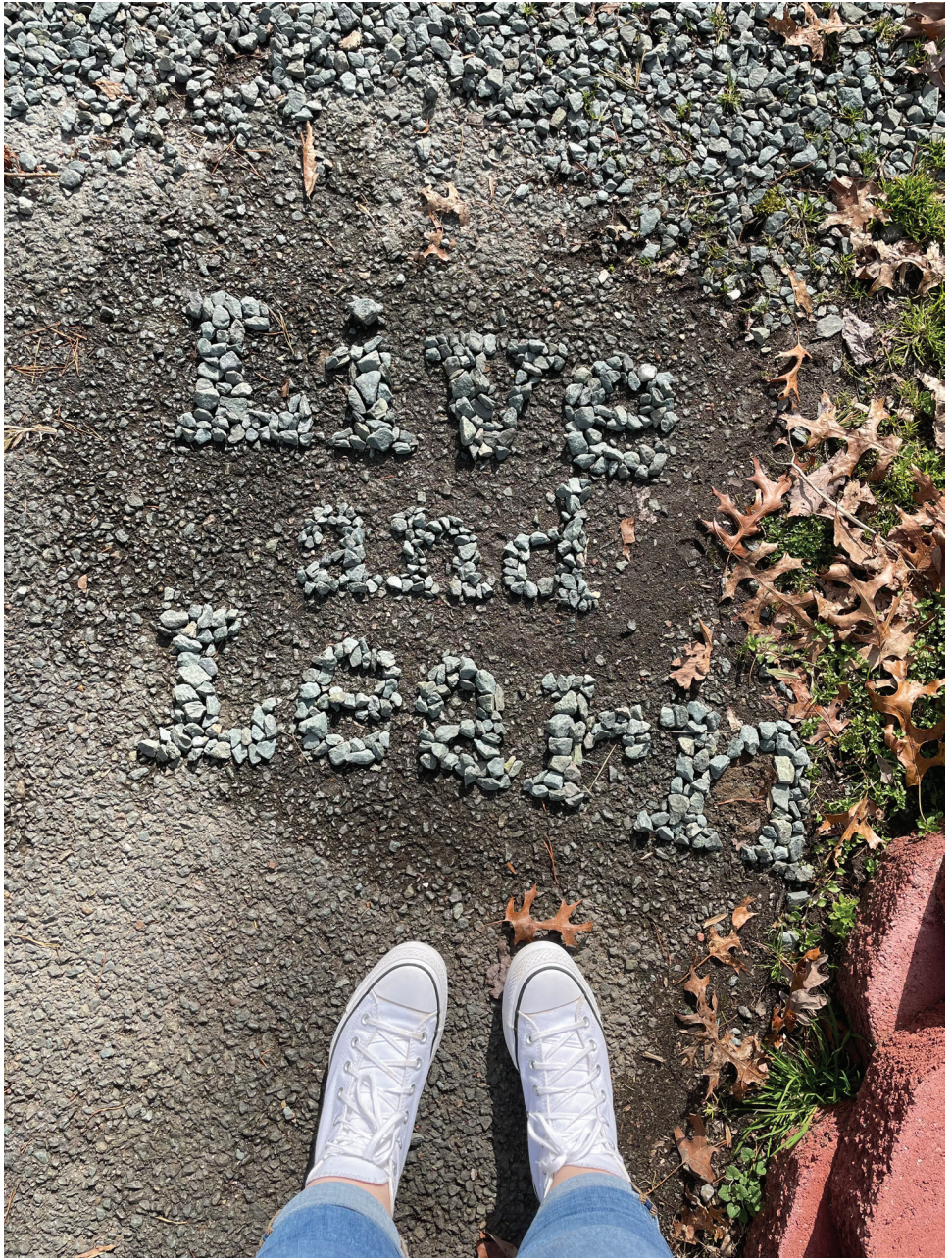
I watched as Zack picked up its still body. A part of me wanted to reach out, to hold it one last time, but I stayed still. I knew that, if I touched it again, I would find it empty. The warmth draining out, the engine that was its heart completely still. Whatever connection I had felt to it before, I wouldn't find again. The hummingbird was gone. Zack hid what was left behind under the nearest bush.

Our group didn't linger. We walked away, with me still trailing a little behind.

\*\*\*

Much like the cicadas themselves, the memory of that day with my father burrowed up from its years of gestation at the back of my mind, spread its buzzing wings, and, for a time, perched at the crux of my thoughts, singing to me. The question I faced both those days was not one in which the value of a life could truly factor, it was too late for that. The question was of what could be done in a situation that all of us had already lost, one where death's eventual certainty had surged forward to cloud the present. The remnants of life the hummingbird and cicada had ahead of them would be little more than pain as death slowly made its approach. The only power I had in those circumstances was to make death come faster, to cut out the agony that would proceed, to skip straight to oblivion. To give those creatures a quick death would reduce their suffering, reduce the amount of suffering in the world, perhaps, but pain would still extract a due from whoever chose to do the deed. That promise of pain made me falter when faced with the hummingbird, made me leave it to a worse end in a failed attempt to spare myself. Now, however, I know the right thing to do. Let the living shoulder the pain. We can move past it. We can grow from it. Let those who will be dead either way have their peace. Death will always be painful, but when there is no hope of survival and only suffering to come, its swift arrival should be accepted as the coming of mercy.





*"LIVE & LEARN"* | PHOTOGRAPH | CALEY HALL

# HOW TO GET PEOPLE TO LIKE YOU

*Kathleen Jeffers*



*About 54,600,000 search results*

## 5 Ways to Get People to Like You – wikiHow

Sep 6, 2023 · 1. Smile! Your natural resting face is disturbing and will make others think you hate them. People crave friends who are shallow and fun because having a deep emotional relationship is too “intense.” 2. Laugh at their jokes! It doesn’t matter that you don’t find them funny. People are naturally narcissistic and will be more open to friendship if they think you like their humor. So, laugh even if it’s another deez nuts joke! ...

**Views:** 938.1K

## How to Make Your Friends Appreciate You More – Psychology Today

Jun 28, 2021 · Don’t be too overbearing. Yes, you’ve been friends for over a decade but give them space! Don’t bombard them with texts about hanging out the second they arrive home for holiday break. Maybe if you distance yourself, they might finally text first ...

**Views:** 1.5M

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## 19 Simple Tips to Become a More Likable and Memorable Person

**Author:** Overthinking

- Find common interests. If they like football, you like football. Find their Spotify profile and stalk their playlists. They will be thrilled to know you now are a huge fan of Juice WRLD and Bruno Mars.

- Always look your best! Wake up hours earlier to do your hair and makeup. People are attracted to attractive people. Maybe if you look beautiful, it won't matter that you're socially awkward.
- Listen! People love to talk about themselves. If you take the time to sit and listen to their rambling, you might have the opportunity to be the person they go to with their problems! Don't ever share too much about your own problems though; that's crossing the line.

**Views:** 189.6K

## Why Would You Have No Friends? – Verywell Mind

Feb 13, 2023 · Are you insecure? Do you feel you can't measure up to the people in your life? Maybe you're introverted and get overwhelmed by people. Do you prioritize reading over socializing? Take Julia, for instance. She complains about not having friends but spends her weekends in bed with coffee and a book. Perhaps you're too needy. Too controlling. Too pushy. Too talkative. You lack awareness that your behavior is off-putting to others.

**Views:** 18.3K

## Inspirational Friendship Quotes

Jan 19, 2018

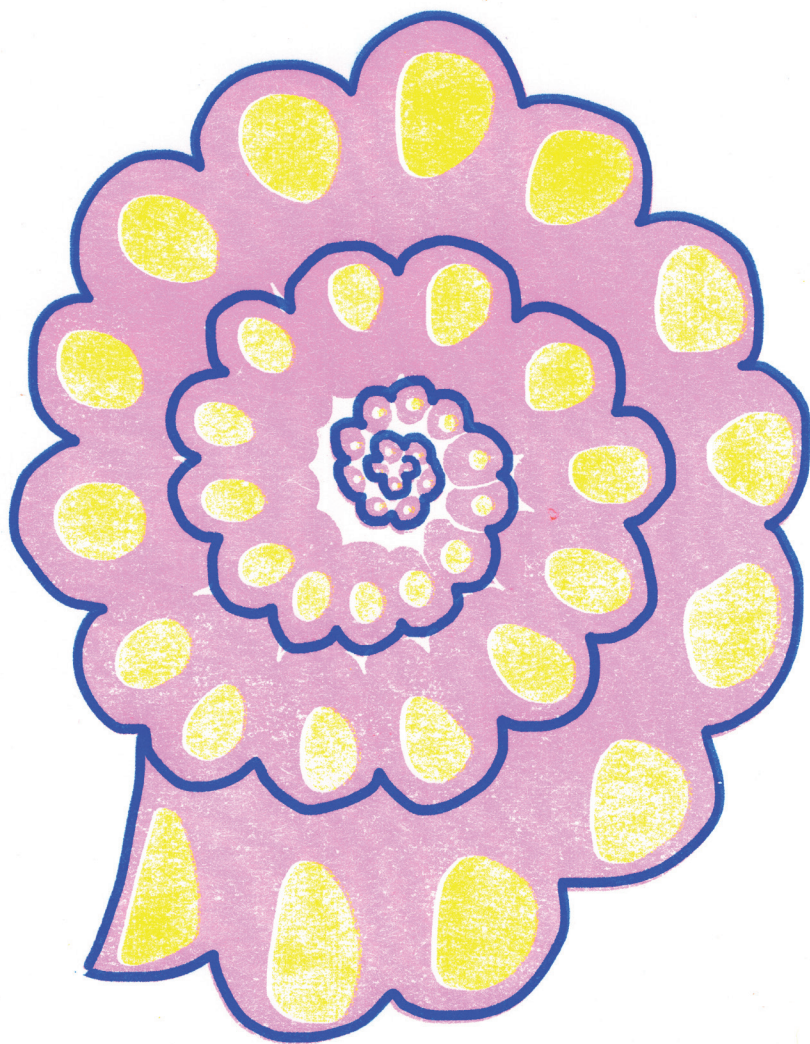
- "Friendship is like money, easier made than kept." Samuel Butler
- "Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art.... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival" C.S. Lewis
- "No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow." Alice Walker
- "A friendship that can end never really began." Publilius Syrus
- "Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow ripening fruit." Aristotle

**Views:** 238.8K

## How to Get People to Like You – Common Sense

Dec 10, 2023 · Why are you googling how to make friends? How pathetic is that? I have a question for you. Who cares? All this information won't help you make a true friend. If you take the advice of the articles shown above, you might have people who like you. People who think you're cool, attractive, funny, etc. But is that person really who you are? Here is my advice. Be yourself. Listen to the music you like, laugh at what you think is funny, stay true to yourself, and the right person will want to be your friend.





"SEA SWIRL" | RISO PRINT | ZACH GOADHOUSE



# GREGOR SAMSA GOES TO WORK

Wren Groth

*\*A contemporary retelling of Franz Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis'.*

THE ALARM ON Gregor's phone went off at half past six, as it did every morning. This was, of course, with the exception of Tuesday and Friday, when he did not work; as well as of Wednesday, on which he was expected to close instead of open. Gregor did not get up. He was tired, and felt very unwell. He wanted to close his eyes, but found that he was unable to do so even with the sound of the rain pattering against his window. Instead, he stared up at the muted white of his ceiling and did his best to ignore the persistent ringing of his phone.

It took several grating repetitions of the alarm's jaunty tune before Gregor finally rolled over and mindlessly attempted to swipe the noise away. Except, he realized, he had no fingers to swipe with – in fact, the entirety of his hand had been replaced by a dark, rigid claw. His forearm had become a strange stick of spines, and he could not even turn his head in a way that he could see past his elbow to his shoulder.

"That's not good," said Gregor, whose own voice was yet recognizable to him, but at the same time sounded strange and foreign to his ears. That was if he still had them, and he could not be sure that he did. Regardless, he was quite correct – his situation was not good; rather, it seemed to be quite dire, and Gregor quickly came to the conclusion that he would not be able to go to work in such a state. The commute alone promised to be insurmountable. He did not see how it would be possible for him to ride the bus in his new form. He would not be able to fit through the door, and if he could, what then? There was no way for him to use his bus pass with those new and fearsome claws, nor could he sort through bills and coins to pay the fare. Besides that – and given a bit of thought, Gregor decided this was far more important – he had transformed into a massive insect. He anticipated that he would not be able to do his job in his usual manner, and that was only if he had the ability to do it at all; this seemed doubtful, as Gregor no longer had thumbs. He was forced to admit to himself that he would have to call into place of work, no matter how much dread he was filled with at the thought of doing so.

Due to the imprecision of Gregor's claws, it took him many minutes to unlock his phone. He found that scrolling through his contacts was much easier, but truth be told, Gregor was relieved he could still use the screen at all.

After two rings, and halfway through a third, Gregor's manager picked up. He answered, "Hello?"

"Good morning, Hermann," Gregor said, rather politely. "I can't make it in today. I know this is hard to believe, but I've somehow turned into a – a beetle, I think. I don't know. I can't see my back, or my sides. But I'm definitely an insect," he said. "I have six legs."

“Is this a prank?” said Hermann. “Are you messing with me right now?”

It was not a real question. Naturally, Hermann had assumed Gregor was trying to get out of work, or that Gregor had gone a bit mad. The former was far preferable to Hermann – a bit of indolence could easily be stymied with a bit of pressure on Gregor, who was mild-mannered and weak-willed. Madness, however, would have been quite inconvenient for Hermann, as it meant sacrificing the time and expenses needed to find and train a new employee.

Gregor, meanwhile, not knowing the thoughts of his manager, privately hoped that his situation was no more than a bad dream. He would have still eagerly accepted madness as the explanation for his current reality.

“I wish I was,” promised Gregor, “But I’m not.”

“You’re supposed to open today,” said Hermann.

“I know,” Gregor said, miserably.

“You have to be in by eight,” Hermann said. “We open at nine, so you need to be here by eight. It’s on the schedule.”

“I know,” said Gregor, in truth a bit offended, as he had been working under Hermann for the past year or so and knew very well what time the store opened, and what time he was expected to be in, besides.

“We don’t have the staff for you to call in,” Hermann said, “if that’s what you’re trying to do here.”

“I turned into a giant bug, Hermann,” repeated Gregor in disbelief. He wished he at least had a doctor’s note. But he had not anticipated turning into an insect overnight, and therefore had not had the foresight to schedule an appointment at the clinic.

Hermann sighed. He sounded irritated, and it made Gregor feel guilty, even though he did not feel that he had done anything wrong. “See you at work, Gregor. Eight o’clock sharp. Don’t waste my time like this again.”

“See you, then,” Gregor said weakly into the receiver.

Hermann said nothing. Or perhaps he did. He had already hung up, and so Gregor had no way of knowing.

Either way, he was expected at work. He could not put himself at risk of being fired, so he wriggled his many legs in an effort to gain enough momentum to turn himself over, or at least fall out of bed. Mostly he just succeeded in winding his sheets between his many segmented legs. “Damn it all!” he thought. He clacked his mandibles together in frustration, and began the arduous process of untangling himself from this new predicament.

He did not have even one limb free before there came a knock at the door.

“Gregor,” came the voice of his mother, “are you awake? You’re going to be late for work if you don’t get up.”

"I'm awake!" Gregor announced, shrill and squeaking, flailing his many legs akimbo in this new and awful panic.

"Are you alright?" she asked, rather worried. Gregor was, after all, a very punctual and diligent young man, and it was unusual for him to run so late. Not to mention the strange timbre to his voice! When he hesitated too long to answer, she declared, "I'm coming in."

"Stop!" he cried out. The knob on his door stopped turning, but it was too late – his mother let go of the doorknob, and the door swung open to reveal her son. But he was not the son she remembered, and she let out a loud shriek; high-pitched and ear-splitting. There was the sound of rushed footsteps pounding up the stairs.

"What happened?" Gregor's father demanded. "What's going on?"

Meanwhile, Grete, Gregor's sister, peered into the bedroom. "Oh my God," she said, face twisting in disgust. "What is that?"

"Good morning," said Gregor timidly.

"It's Gregor." It was a wonder their mother managed the words through her choked sobs. "He's – he's –!"

"I've become a bug," helped Gregor. Then, he asked, "Can someone please help me out of bed? I don't want to be late for work."

His family exchanged glances.

Anxious, Gregor clicked his mandibles together. "I need a ride," he said. "I thought about it, and I can't take the bus like this."

"Of course you can't," snapped his father. "You're not going anywhere like that."

"I have to be in by eight. My boss said so," Gregor insisted.

His father looked ready to argue, but Grete spoke first.

With a heavy sigh, she said, "Load him into the car. I'll drop him off on my way to school."

\*\*\*

Gregor worked as a cashier for a minor fashion retailer that, despite doing most of their business online, continued to maintain a handful of traditional brick and mortar stores. The one Gregor worked at was about forty-five minutes away by bus, but only twenty by car, and Gregor was relieved to see that the clock read 8:53 by the time they pulled into the parking lot.

Grete opened the door to the backseat so Gregor could get out, then stood a few yards away and watched from a distance as Gregor navigated his way out of their mother's minivan.

"You're insane for this," she said.

"I know," Gregor sighed.

"I really don't get it," she continued. "Do you like to suffer or something?"

"Maybe," said Gregor miserably. "Bye, Grete. Good luck at class today."

"I'm not the one who needs it," said Grete. She got in the car and drove away, and Gregor scuttled his way towards the storefront. The automatic doors at the entrance were unlocked, but they were still powered off, so Gregor pried them open and walked inside.

When he entered, Hermann turned to look at him and, close to hysterics, cried out, "What the hell is this? You're a giant bug!"

"I did try to tell you," Gregor simply said.

"Go clock in," said Hermann, "and then stay in the back so nobody sees you. I'll figure out what to do with you then."

Gregor went to the back and tried to clock in. The buttons on the machine being physical keys, he found that he was able to press them quite accurately with careful placement of his claws and some additional patience. But before he was able to complete his task, Hermann arrived in the back of the store.

"We got a shipment this morning," said Hermann. "Some coats. They're still in boxes. Unpack them and get them on hangers, and I'll send someone else to put them in front."

"I haven't finished clocking in yet," protested Gregor.

"I'll add you in later," said Hermann, who had no intention of doing so, as long as he could avoid it. And anyway, Gregor was presently an insect: what need had he of a paycheck? If Gregor ever became a man again – well! Hermann would worry about paying him then. "Go get started," he instructed, and stared pointedly at Gregor until he meekly skittered off towards the stockroom.

The boxes were still stacked on the pallet when Gregor found them. He tried to lift one with his claws, but they slid uselessly against the smooth surface of the cardboard, so he instead pushed at the packages until the whole stack of them toppled over. One box had already been opened, and the coats that had been contained within spilled out onto the floor in a bulky pile of faux fur and cheap fabric.

To the left of Gregor was a dress rack which he wrenched downwards, scattering its stored hangers about the concrete flooring with a loud, overlapping clatter. He picked up one of the hangers and held it precariously between his mandibles as he approached the mess of clothing before him. He did not know how he would hang them, if he even could; he knew only that he had to, or he risked being disciplined, if not fired.

With no other choice in the matter, Gregor Samsa got to work.



*"PINK & AWKWARD: SAY LESS"* | DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION | MAIA SMITH

# ASHTRAY

*Kiwi Moneymaker*

little, brittle heart stashed away  
until a fire comes to lick it dry.  
i'm the one who placed the sage and daisychains  
but where'd the match come from?  
your pocket grows lighter; gray leaves shatter.  
you catch them in ceramic.

i learned in sixth grade that the smoke would make you go away.  
i begged you to break that little bowl  
so that you would never buy another expensive pack.  
maybe you would never inhale anything but air  
and i could smile and naively suggest;  
let's get a fish instead?

# SCAB

*Ismail Koshul*

I am a young child  
I have scraped my knee  
The wound heals and the blood clots  
Yet young restless me still picks  
at the scab  
If my body wants to heal  
why do I keep giving it a fresh wound?

I am now an adult  
I have left the place I called home to come here  
But it feels like I have scraped myself again  
My mind itches to pick the scab  
If I want to move on  
why can't I forget how things used to be?

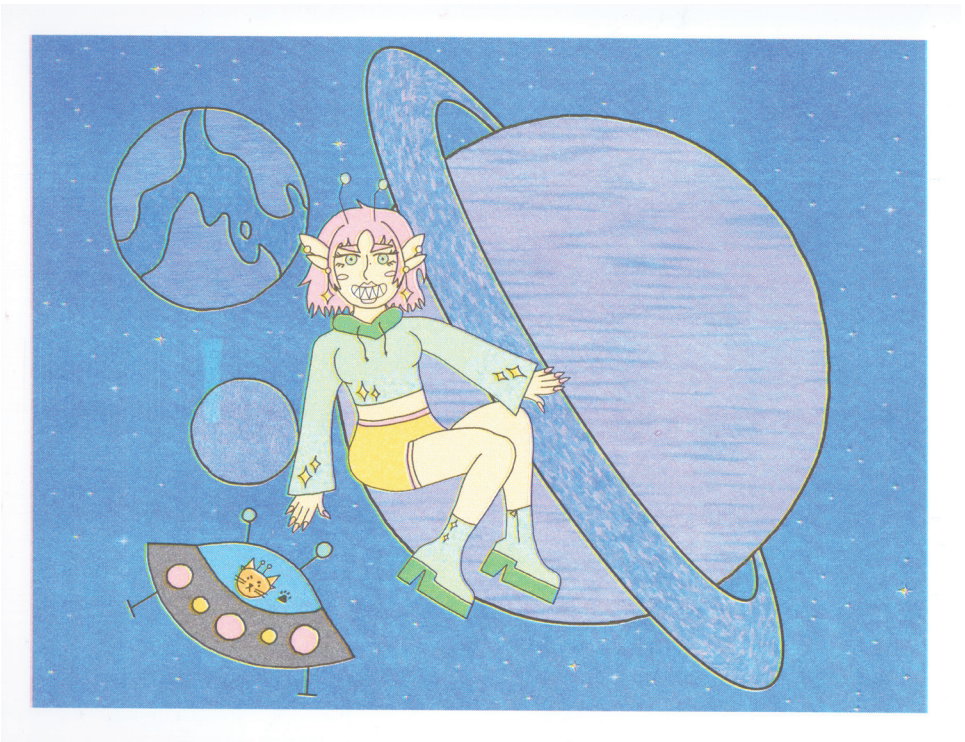
But my body won't heal if there is no wound  
And maybe I won't move on if I forget how things were  
So I won't pick this scab  
I will let it turn into a scar  
And maybe the scar will disappear

But I won't forget





*"PVCC CATS"* | DIGITAL COLLAGE | LAUREN COTTRELL



*"GALACTIC GIRL"* | RISO PRINT | JULIANNA GUTIERREZ



# SORRY FOR CATCHING COVID

*Minnie Pierce*

IN JANUARY OF 2021, the COVID pandemic made its way to Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women. It arrived without protocol or precedence. At the time, I was housed in the Honor Wing-a unit for model inmates. As a community we took every precaution to stop the spread. We wore masks, stayed in our cells, and washed our hands religiously. As a wing we coordinated extra cleaning and implemented a sanitation crew. Because of our efforts, we were the last wing to fall victim to an outbreak. Nevertheless, COVID found a way, and by February most of us tested positive. The virus was bad, but nothing compared to the treatment we received for catching it.

I remember trudging through the dirty snow. We had all tested positive and were being led to an isolation unit-the red zone. We had exited our wing through the back door. In our sickness and fevered weakness, we were forced to pack up our life's belongings and carry them out to a large flat-bed trailer in the snow, after dark, and below freezing. The oldest and sickest couldn't lift their belongings, so we made an assembly line to help them. The guards refused to assist and looked at us with disgust- shaming us for ruining their night. The slow trudge to the red zone was so cold we could see our breath in the moonlight as we walked to the sound of teeth chattering and fits of coughing. It felt like a death march as the guards checked their watches- sorry for the inconvenience.

I remember the chaos as we arrived at the red zone. Our property boxes were piled up, creating an obstacle course. As the irritated officers attempted to assign us beds with misprinted lists, we hunted down our busted bags and muddy boxes and chose rooms ourselves. They had decided to make SEG the red zone. SEG is supposed to be used as an isolation and disciplinary unit, and it shows. The dingy cells are double bunked with metal toilets, old school doors that require a key to open, and no intercom system. Once your door is locked the only way to get help is by pounding and yelling until you get the guard's attention-sounds like a great place to keep seriously ill, immunocompromised inmate's right? But when concerns about safety arose, the officer's exact words were, "Well, I guess you shouldn't have caught COVID!"

As the door to my cell locked shut, I attempted to clean the grimy bunk and filthy floor. The toilet was dirty and the room smelled foul. I needed cleaning supplies but was too exhausted to continue yelling and banging on the door. We hadn't been given our medicine, and there was no call button to request help. Maybe it was the fever, but I started to wonder if this was all a nightmare; surely they wouldn't put a group of seriously ill inmates in SEG. They wouldn't punish people for being sick. I fell asleep to those thoughts and the sound of endless banging doors.

In the morning I woke to the reality that this was not a bad dream. I was in SEG. I had caught COVID, and I would pay. I would beg for showers and phone calls. I would not receive my mail or commissary. I would get sick in the toilet by my bed. And I would

spike a fever of 104 degrees, losing all sense of smell and taste. That's what you get for catching COVID in prison- sorry for the inconvenience.

In the months and years that followed, there has been no consistent protocol practiced to fight the pandemic. And without an official policy in place, catching COVID continues to be an unpredictable and stressful ordeal.



*"CONTOUR CLOTHES"* | GRAPHITE ON PAPER | HEIDI KUPKE

# BLACK LIVES MATTER

*Ieshia Rountree*

Tell me why should a black life matter?  
We were never really considered a whole human anyway  
Brought here on slaves ships where we were whipped  
Starved, beaten, and sexually battered

Years held captive by a man called master  
Hung from trees beaten until we bleed  
Nakedly disgraced; a sole target for his rape  
Sold as property- promised to never be free

Why should a black life matter?  
They say we're ignorant, belligerent, and we have no social skills  
...I guess that's why it's so easy  
To disregard us and pretend our pain ain't real

Unjustly justified to rationalize homicide  
Screams of fear falling on deaf ears  
But they don't hear us because we was meant to be ignored  
As our black families become intentionally ignored

Economic disadvantages  
Working for a minimum wage  
They believe we should be grateful-  
After all, we could still be slaves

White supremacy  
Forced us to lack human dignity  
New Rule:  
School books erase the inhumanity

Political division meant  
To conquer and divide  
The design?  
To restrict and bring about our demise

Perfect harmony, equal opportunity  
That's something they never wanted us to see  
But now it's black people in the white house  
And we're making history  
Now let me tell you  
Why a black life should matter-  
Because we're intelligent, we're beautiful  
And it all came natural

Battle scars and bravery  
Promoted our identity  
As we took whippings and were killed  
Just so one day we'll be free!

# A SESTINA TO CELEBRATE SELF- SACRIFICE

*Morgana Bizier*

Young ladies like you should always be eager,  
rising to shine at the fair crack of dawn  
to rose up your cheeks and cover up sores. Wear your  
true Sunday best whenever outside like tonight, trips  
through town, your man on your mind as you think  
hard about what he's trying to hide.

When you do find your boyfriend, please try to hide  
the concern in your eyes, alarmed by his eager  
delight for tonight. The thought plagues your mind:  
what kind of date happens so hidden from dawn?  
Bury this feeling. Let him lead you outside, wander  
deep into wood till your frail legs are sore.

Bramble entangles you, cold leaves you sore, but  
your boyfriend swears "There's nothing I'd hide  
from a girl like you, my sweet Heaven outside the  
Hell of this world" and this makes you eager.  
Maybe he's here to apologize? A new dawn of  
potential swirls deep in your mind.

However, the thought quickly flees from your mind  
when his friends emerge, robes tattered and sore  
but their eyes still piercing like needles; it dawns  
on you that there's nowhere to hide  
from these howling wolves, smiles so eagerly  
hungry, a display for any outside.

They pull out daggers; now you're stuck outside, a deer  
in the headlights, thoughts blocking your mind— force  
overwhelms you; you're beaten and meager. Your  
home-grown Cain shoves you, leaving you sore, his  
eyes filled with foul passion as he hides his knife deep  
in your heart, now ablaze like dawn.

“Devour her flesh! We shall bring upon Dawn!”  
they scream as they scavenge, your insides now  
splayed cross a skinned deer hide,  
your body a harvest, each organ a mine.  
You can’t help but think, as your soul soars high...  
what a fool you were for being so eager.

But sweet summer girl, take pride in your body:  
though tainted and gored, your carcass still shines  
bright amongst the best, you divine freezer bride.





*"FLOWERS IN SHOES"* | DIGITAL COLLAGE | ALYSSA JOHNSON



# DONE

*Nakisha Waddell*

Confusion meddling throughout my mind. The lies  
that seem to spill out your mouth always hidden  
behind a pretty rhyme.

Sorry, time to switch roles. No longer a free ride, now  
it's time to pay the toll.

Talk if you want to. Your words only fall on deaf ears.  
Should have stopped while you were ahead, instead  
you fed on my fears.

Now the bowls empty. You'll get no more from me.  
You didn't want what you had, now you're the only one  
left to deceive.

# COW IN THE SKY

*David Judd*

THE COW BELLOWED and strained and shit. It was stuck in the mud. Flies gathered. Gil put a rope around the cow and then around the saddle horn on his horse, Bean. The two of them pulled and the cow writhed and bawled, its legs encased in the concrete of the creek bottom.

This was the only seasonal stream on Gil's property. When it was wet, the cows came over and got stuck. The stream meandered through the land out west of Socorro, New Mexico. On a map, The Plains of St. Augustine. It was flat, long and wide, but there were outcrops of bare, gray rock. There were rises and ridges where junipers grew and the rest was full of sage and it was crisscrossed with gulleys for carrying rain. Toward the western end, the dishes of the National Radio Observatory's Very Large Array stood like giants, their saucer eyes gaping at the sky.

Gil stood and wiped sweat from his eyes. He stretched his back. The cow complained. From the east, the distant thump and whump of helicopters drifted in with the breeze. The Chinooks came, first like dragonflies against the distant clouds, then like locomotives racing on an airborne rail. They had dual blades and there were three of them, the color of desert sand. Flying fast, they paralleled the northside hills, then twisted and banked south to the VLA.

The antennae were all in motion. There were twenty and more of them.

"Busy day there," Gil said and Bean flexed his ears, otherwise unmoved. Gil took the knife out of Bean's pack and jumped down next to the cow, into the mud. He unfolded the blade, long and wide, and the cow took notice and was silent. He dug into the clay, and while he did, he heard the sound of a siren. He looked up toward the highway where a humvee with a red light had stopped. A soldier cut Gil's fence and then the vehicle came forward, the rumble of its engine prowling across the land.

The soldier, from up on the bank of the creek, said, "I'm Lieutenant Smith."

"Gil Thornton."

"Sir, you'll need to leave. This area has been declared a military reserve."

"I'm pulling out this cow."

"You'll need to leave now, sir."

"You cut a hole in my fence."

"We have the authority to arrest you."

"Since when?"

The President's plane, a baby blue 747, air brakes gouging out its descent, dropped down from the sky, down behind the array, and disappeared.

“I’m going to shoot your cow, and arrest you. Or you can get on your horse and return to your home. What is your decision?”

Gil looked at the cow. “How ‘bout we hook him up to your rig there, pull him outta here.”

Lieutenant Smith removed his gun from his holster and the two soldiers raised their rifles. Smith aimed at the cow. Then he re-holstered the gun. He told a private to climb down with Gil and figure out how to push. He told the other soldier to take aim and kill Gil and the cow if he gave the order. Smith took the rope off Bean and tied it to the winch on the humvee. He powered it up and set it to a cautious tension. Gil and the private lifted at the rear while the rope, slung under the cow’s legs, pulled upward. The cow kicked and twisted and was free. It staggered off into the sage, exhausted, complaining.

When the residents of a not too distant star deposited an avatar into orbit around Gil’s planet Earth, one of the first things it asked for was a story – not an encyclopedia entry nor a novel, but a true story about something real. The debriefers offered several replies which had been prepared for the contingency, but the robot complained of them being sour with the flavor of artifice. Out of a desperate fear that the book was being closed on them, the managers groped for anything at hand. Time was short and they were terribly afraid, so the story of Gil Thornton, Lieutenant Smith, the horse named Bean, and a cow, became the first, small truth of human civilization transmitted through interstellar space to a distant, eager audience.

# BOG HAG BLUES

*Morgana Bizier*

## Hag

noun (1 of 3) ...from Merriam Webster

### 1. an ugly, slatternly, or evil-looking woman

I vividly remember the first time I got women's clothes. I went to Goodwill with my mother and picked out a shirt and skirt to wear in tandem. The blouse I chose was a gauche patchwork piece, a menagerie of purple patterns. It was ill-fitting with an awkward collar and even worse cuffs, but I paid no mind as I proudly snatched it from the rack. The skirt I got was long, black, and adorned with a purple flower pattern. Or really, abstract shapes akin to flowers. It was almost a mockery of a flower, with a weird geometric styling that only made it clash further with the already eccentric top. I couldn't get enough of it.

Wearing it to school came with difficulties. I soon realized that I was an ugly duckling, to say the least. A complex combination of pre-HRT features and a hectic wardrobe made me stick out like a sore thumb. I claimed that it was purposeful, of course: it was a fashion statement, an expression of my true self. I also thought I was nonbinary at the time, so it made sense to look so avant garde, so esoteric. But I could feel the dissatisfaction. How the fleeting looks and passing jives built on one another, further making me restless. The way it made me feel like a mockery of myself.

### 2. (archaic)

#### a. a female demon

Sometimes when I'm online I have the misfortune of stumbling across a post about trans rights. Don't get me wrong: trans rights are good. Great, in fact. I like having rights quite a bit. But morbid curiosity is a hell of a drug, drawing me to look at the comment section like the gravitational pull of the moon. And indeed, the waves crash on schedule.

The ridicule.

The uproar.

The insistence on my non-existence.

Who could've guessed that being called devil spawn would have an adverse effect on one's mental health?

#### b. an evil or frightening spirit

It's not the worst feeling to be largely ignored by society: when one is translucent, they don't have to worry themselves about being in the crossfires of public opinion. But the last couple of years have brought the trans community into a particularly frustrating spot. We're the center of discussion as much as we are largely inconsequential to the average person. The existential dread of having your being debated on the big screen by future politicians mingles with the loneliness of being looked over by your own country and people. It makes you feel like a boogeyman, but only conceptually; a threat of no consequence.

### 3. witch

The idea of the witch always fascinated me. A woman, powerful and dangerous, ostracized from society for her differences. They're often portrayed as ugly or old in traditional interpretations, but I never bought that angle. The witch never cares; in fact, she revels in it. She is an old crone or a hideous maiden and yet she embraces it so happily. She cackles at those foolish enough to oppose her. Her presence is either a powerful boon or a horrid curse.

I hope one day to be a witch. To be powerful. To be capable of embracing my imperfections with confidence. To leave behind the shackles of societal expectations.

But that's easier said than done, I fear.

### **Crone**

noun

#### 1. a cruel or ugly old woman

I don't think I'm afraid of growing old. I've often caught myself worrying about age, about the nature of time. But why should I be so afraid of growing old? Death is inevitable, this cannot be denied, but old age has no such guarantee. It's a privilege refused to so many before me, another injustice with no consolation.

### **Haggard**

adjective

#### 1. {of a hawk}; not tamed

A woman's body comes with a long list of expectations, regardless of how recently you've required it. You must cross your legs or squish them together when wearing a skirt; you must wear a bra, lest your nipples dare to show through the fabric; you must always be well dressed and presentable, even when dressing casually; you must carry yourself with a sense of poise. Of course, things have relaxed over time; it's not the 40s anymore. But to pretend like these rules no longer exist would be ignorant. They have merely faded into the background.

It's been so surreal having to relearn how to behave. There's so many things that I simply didn't care about as a boy that I'm now expected to think about at all times. A part of me thinks that maybe I should've been more thoughtful of my presentation as a guy, but another part of me resents how restraining this all feels. Beauty standards have curb stomped me and left me in the dirt to perpetually struggle with my appearance. With my double chin and my bulging stomach and my still-ever-so-slightly-visible facial hair. With how frequently I forget to cross my legs when sitting down or speak in a booming, masculine voice. It's days when these seem to pile up that I long for the chance to dress in sports shorts and oversized tees again without feeling like I'm just a guy.

## Hag (2 of 3)

noun

### 1. quagmire, bog

It's so easy to get trapped in one's head. I often find myself detaching from my surroundings, completely losing myself in my own thoughts. I end up sinking into a deep, thick entanglement of insecurity and paranoia. *You're complaining for no reason. You add nothing to the conversation. You look like a fool in that makeup. That guy at the gas station is eyeing you for a reason, you know that. Did you leave your mace in the car again?*

In many ways, I have had it fairly easy in comparison to the average trans person. I was diagnosed with gender dysmorphia at age four, so when I finally realized that it's probably not normal to dream about wearing dresses it was fairly easy to get medication. The bullying I went through while trying to figure things out was miserable, but it was fairly localized to senior year of high school (although that ignores the bullying I went through for being gay). Charlottesville is a very safe place to transition, and my family has been largely supportive, albeit odd with their response. What reason do I have to complain?

But I think I used that as another way to put down myself and what I've had to deal with. Perpetual novice that I am, I happen to be an expert in the field of self-ridicule. Sometimes I wish astral projection was real, so that I could escape this body and view things from a bird's eye view for a change. It's hard to see things for how they are when you're head-deep in a bog of your own bullshit.



*“BUZZED: THE CREATOR”* | DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION | MAIA SMITH

# TO THE LOVE OF MY LIFE: BASKETBALL

*Carol Lutsky*

I remember being young and open to getting to know you more. Understanding the ins and outs of how you worked. When we began this relationship, I didn't know I could feel or experience this kind of love for something else. You were the one thing in my life that always made sense. You made me feel alive and wanted when my hands would touch you. I knew exactly what to do. I knew the shape of your curves. The texture of your ripples in my hands when I would release you. I could feel your power floating in the air on the way to your next destination. These are the feelings I have always had for you. Until that day when I had to let you go. It came out of nowhere like headlights of an oncoming car in the wrong lane barreling straight towards me. We wouldn't be together ever again. It took me a long while to fully understand what that truly meant. Losing the greatness of our love. Realizing that you will always be part of me. When I reminisce, it only fills my heart with the same feelings that first flowed through me when we first met. When I was young and open to getting to know you. Now it just repeats and replays in my head like a time loop.



# TODAY

*Ismail Koshul*

The sun feels a little brighter today  
I will let it place gentle kisses across my skin

The wind feels a little crisper today  
I will let it run its fingers through my hair

The birds seem to be singing a little passionately today  
I will let them serenade me

The milkshake I ordered tastes a little sweeter today  
I will let every taste bud savor every sip

She laughed a little louder at my joke today  
I will let the silence linger after she catches her breath

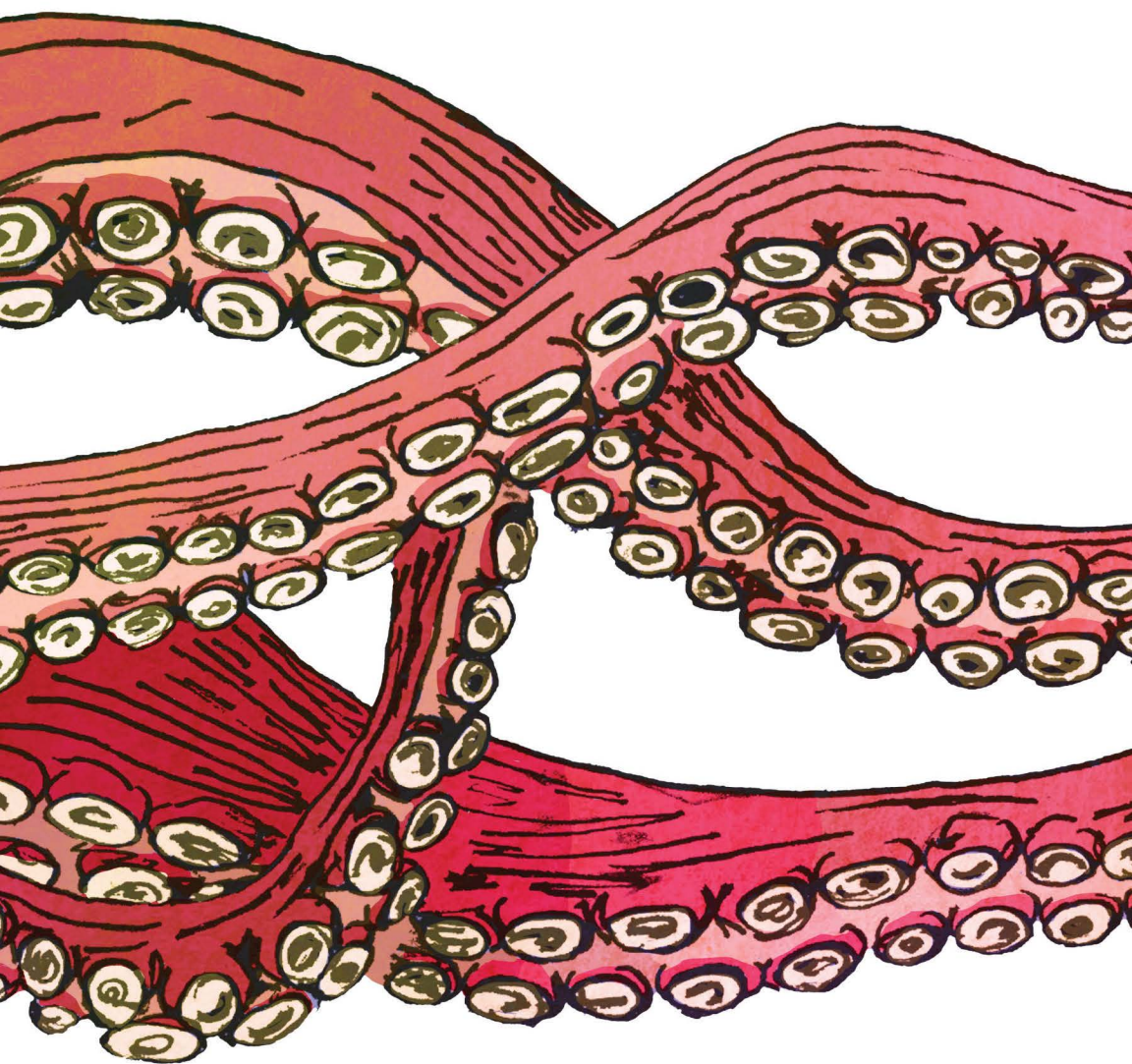
He hugged me a little longer today  
I will let myself sink into his arms before pulling away

Their hand fits a little comfortably in mine today  
I will let them hold it a bit longer

I will squeeze their hand a little tighter today  
I won't let today slip out of my grasp







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