

Writer to Writer

a journal by writers, for writers



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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the second edition of *Writer to Writer*, a literary journal run by students in collaboration with the Sweetland Center for Writing. We aim to foster interdisciplinary creativity across a variety of modes, mediums, and genres and encourage conversation and growth among our community of writers.

In our second year as an organization, we have made a concentrated effort to become a platform that celebrates multimodality and experimentation in writing. After an open call for submissions from our fellow University of Michigan students, we have carefully curated a collection of work for this publication that we believe does just that.

Multimodality refers to the many media through which we may express our writing. Podcasts, photo essays, and illustrated fiction are all examples of multimodality, some of which you will be treated to in this publication. In pieces where the content cannot be delivered in print, like the podcast, you will find an excerpt and a bar code. When you scan the code with the camera on your phone, you will be taken to a page of our website where you can experience the full piece in its intended form.

In addition to the pieces themselves, our journal also features “Spotlight Interviews” with several of the writers. The intention of these is to provide insight into the writing processes behind distinct genres or modes included in the publication. We hope that these glimpses into the processes of fellow writers resonates with you or inspires you to experiment with your own writing process.

Lastly, this journal would not be possible without the generous support of the Sweetland Center for Writing, especially from our wonderful faculty advisor Dr. Shelley Manis. Her thoughtful guidance and enthusiasm have been absolutely essential in producing our journal and continuing our growth as a young publication. To Shelley, the Sweetland Center for Writing, the contributing writers, and to you, reader, we are so grateful. Thank you for all your support.

Sincerely,

Caitlyn Zawideh
Editor in Chief
Writer to Writer

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We Should Write a Poem

by Eli Rallo

Should we write a poem?
It's almost morning.
the sky looks like it's been holding its breath to wait for us to make
up our minds.
Should we go watch the sunrise?
And look at each other with half tired half drunk eyes telling stories
without marble notebooks to remember or
Should we make porch swing coffee and erase the after taste of red
wine or should
we just close our eyes and dream about what we ordered from
Dunkin' Donuts
At 7 am
On our way to high school or
The people you only see after dark who maybe, just like the stars or
The music we listen to when we're packing your things in boxes to
go away—
I always bring this plastic cat—
I suppose it's Nora Jones.

There's half of someone's leftovers in the fridge at home—what you
know you shouldn't take, beef and broccoli, maybe,
Your brother is saving it for whenever he finds his way back from
too many beers in cans
but you take it anyway
Because you can't sleep and
He won't be so upset, it's just his favorite food, and
He loves you.

What are
The candies your mom puts out in bowl
When you come home?
Has she reorganized the closets and what feels different when your
bare feet find stability on the familiar wooden floorboards—
How do we qualify a feeling we can't even color—
coming back home
And what does returning mean, then, for me.

It's all the same
Peach in the sky and
River water tripping stones to fall
Like seasons over one another
until until until
All the ocean is made from the same wave.
The beauty is, you'll stand on soft moss with water rushing under
your toes as a mouth opens in an "O" and swallows you whole—
and in a year or three that water will fill your glass at a restaurant
you adore, because they play the right music and it's warm.

All the magic places are warm.
Or maybe it's just all the holy people.
Not in temperature and not in fire—
But ski lodges, movie theatre popcorn and my favorite cousin all
savor the same type of heat.
It's that prick you feel behind your eyelids when someone says a few
words
That could be a poem behind your lips that you'll speak out loud
About fear or moving away or
Looking out a train window
While the unfamiliar streets begin to look like a painting.
Why are we so afraid of changing our zip codes?
It's the letter in your hands
Heavy with pen ink
From someone far away who wanted to write you to say, in some
fond tongue,

I'll always know you.
Sometimes I'll be so very cold, my hands will be much too cold to
 play piano or catch snowflakes but I'll have
A furnace in my chest
And the coals come from the
Words which wrestle with blood
and that truth is justice enough to manage to keep me warm.

The frigid comes because people inhabit us
And they claim stake on our hearts and it's impossible to evict
 them—
Until we choose to move back into our own bones, one day,
through the guise of hazy two toned poems that barely make sense
 but in between the lines sound like the melody of a song we
 heard once
In the aisle of a grocery store,
Buying forgotten cranberry sauce on Thanksgiving.
And then we're okay, we trip over our own some days and some-
 bodies until we walk in a straight line,
And we don't even cut corners
And our feet barely leave the ground.

Does it have to do with pH or chemistry or love—
That November is truly the warmest month
Dressed in wool and chai tea or
That I'll never leave a place with
leaves the same color as my best friends hair and
Maybe it's medicine enough to hear your name out loud spoken by
 someone who used to be no one and
Sometimes you'll be reminded that you're a whole entire being and
 no matter how many years we spend on these streets—
New coffee shops will always open, even when we're gone and
SoulCycle will always overcharge us to brand ourselves into who we
 think we're meant to be—
So just remember—please, remember

The candy bowl and the leftovers and the floorboards,
The grocery store tune and your feet, hot on the ground,
And in the deepest blue of the self;
Remember me,
Remember you.

Writer Spotlight

I wrote ["We Should Write a Poem"] in November because I love autumn and I was just feeling inspired when walking home one night and I had this list going of a bunch of different things happening in my life at the time and I was just like, "I should write a poem." I always post my poetry to my Instagram story and I get a lot of responses from followers and people who just clicked on the poem and liked it, and that's something... I'm always trying to connect to people through my poetry, and that's kind of what inspired "We Should Write a Poem".

I hope that my poetry resonates with people in a way that makes them think and makes them feel something and makes them share with someone and open up, because I think the biggest thing about writing poetry is inspiring other people.

— Eli Rallo



Hear more from the writers
on our website!

Woodpecker

by Malin Anderson

Even though the sky promised to sweat itself dry and we had no raincoats, I knew that by the end of the afternoon, I would have seen enough of Mother Earth's feathers to sketch them in the dust of the parking lot on our way out. Behind the trees whose leaves now curled skyward in anticipation of the rain, hid White-throated Sparrows, American Goldfinches, and Black-backed Woodpeckers. Sitting on a collapsing bench soon to be reclaimed by time, we waited, listening to the white noise of the highway. We only had an hour before our early check-in at the hotel. An hour before I took an iron to a Grey Heron cocktail dress and my soon-to-be-graying blonde hair. An hour before I would make us late for our third wedding in two months.

Before we entered the woods, I had made him brush the bottom of his shoes to make sure we weren't harboring any invasive seeds. He didn't resist, but he did give me one of those stingy sighs. His sighs always gave me poison ivy—making my skin itch for hours. To be fair, I knew I could make him itch too. Prick him with a glance or my silence or something else I was always able to do. Like when I overheard him say to Dana at Mark and Annalese's wedding that there would be a "ring by spring." Or at Ida and Kurt's when he told Nathan that I was going to be the one to catch the bouquet this time—no question. He would do that tonight at Jenn and Drew's, coach me on catching Jenn's bouquet. Brush the bridesmaids aside, track the flight of the bouquet with absolute precision.

Sitting in the woods, he was a tree to me. His arms merely limbs that had recently shed their leaves. What a lovely perch for a bird he would make: tall and still. I saw his hand, palm-up like a leaf on the knee closest to mine. He was waiting for rainfall too. My hands found my binoculars as I raised them to my eyes, leaving his palm dry.

The wind ran its fingertips along the trees. I could feel his eyes resting on me and I pressed metal binoculars farther into my cheeks. I had birdlike eyes, he always told me. He used to ask me if my winged eyeliner ever migrated south to some tropical resort with citrus liquor. He was clever and could curl my winged eyeliner up when I let him.

We met in college, just like Jenn and Drew. Sophomore year. Room 423 in the Stadig Building. The newly formed ornithology club's first meeting. He thought it was a meeting for study abroad.

I thought about Jenn right now, draping herself in white, transforming herself into the elegant egret we saw flying over the highway on our way here. Jenn and Drew met on an alternative spring break to Nashville building houses their senior year. Jenn used to keep me up at night telling me that she would never find a husband, that she was so jealous that I had Mr. Clever over here. I'd tell her, half-asleep, not to worry. Sure enough, she found Drew. Now they planned to build their first home together.

"Sky's getting dark," said the man on the bench next to me. I lowered my binoculars but continued to scan the woods. Sure was getting darker.

"You wearing that gray dress tonight?" Yes, I was wearing that gray dress tonight. He said it was pretty before briefly pausing and then asking if I had brought that purple one too. I'd only brought the gray.

Silence crawled around our feet like beetles. He checked his watch. The birds continued to hide from us, the couple on the rotting bench.

"See any birds, Little Bird?" I used to sing for him when he called me that.

"No birds." I heard the wind shush us for talking. My binoculars came up again. I heard him sigh.

When I asked him why he sighed, he shrugged. Said something about being distant just as thunder exhaled in the county over.

Trees tensed. He was crossing his arms now, his palms no longer open on his knee. If we were caught in a downpour, what would we do? Jenn and Drew might kiss, pollinating dewy lips for tomorrow's

flowers. She'd pick him his own bouquet of wildflowers and he'd slip petals into her hair. We'd probably run back to the car swearing.

Then he was whispering in my ear, using leaf hands to lower my binoculars to my lap. His hands didn't linger, and the wind felt a little bit colder. "A woodpecker," he breathed, pointing to a tall, dead white birch.

It was a Black-backed woodpecker. It wore a crown of gold, tapping the wood with a masterful beak.

Tap tap tap.

He had opened a hole in the birch with his beak, fishing for insects. Woodpeckers enjoy dead or burnt wood, finding a way to live off of decay. I pressed the binoculars harder into my face and imagined I had a beak. I felt my nose grow long, wooden and sharp. I could peck the tree next to me and make myself a doorway, enter with a smile.

Tap tap tap.

I'd be good at cracking open trees, peeling bark, then sending it fluttering to the ground. What I didn't think I could do, even with a beak, was harvest something dying.

What I thought was a raindrop on my shoulder turned out to be his finger.

Tap tap tap.

He pointed at his watch. Time for rings and bouquets. I nodded before lifting my binoculars once more, settling on the woodpecker in the tree. I felt the man beside me stand, placing a hand on my back. He would do this again later when all the bridesmaids and college friends stood behind Jenn as she steadied herself to throw her bouquet over her sculpted shoulder. I would turn my palms skyward.

Women and Men Should Support Women and Men and Fairy Tale Characters Too

by Kayline Bondoni

If you asked me to guess the number of fish in the sea,
I would say no.
Or I would say too many.
Or not enough.

But maybe Goldilocks was onto something when
She refused imperfection.
Maybe she deserved a little more than too soft and a
Little less than too hard.

And maybe when she just asked for standards,
For just right,
We were in the wrong when
We titled her villain and said take what you can get.

And told her to smile because
She looks a lot prettier when she smiles—
Maybe
We were wrong.

Or maybe this whole time she's hidden her teeth
Because she's the wolf
That Little Red still has nightmares about
Lurking in her grandmother's generation's closet.

Maybe telling Rapunzel to let her hair down
And stop being such a prude is
Because we want to see her
Prideful, shameful, conservative slut side come out.

And maybe that's why we keep fixating
On Cinderella's feet.

The Little Mermaid swam, walked, and died,
Turned into seafoam
So that someone could think she's beautiful.
Call her "princess";
Consider her human.
But we turned around and told her,
"Honey, there are plenty of fish in the sea.
Why try that hard for the one?"

PiTE student pledges to stop using condoms in support of single-use plastic ban

by Lily Jin

ANN ARBOR— After taking Environ 207: Sustainability and Society for his studies as a Program in the Environment major, Michigan student River Tide was inspired to reduce his consumption of single-use plastics.

“After taking this sustainability class, I started noticing a lot of outrage on Twitter over plastic straws. People were making the switch to reusable straws or stopping their use of them altogether. So I thought to myself, what’s something I regularly use in my life that I can get rid of?” Tide recalls, “The answer was clear: condoms.”

For his final class project, River created an online pledge that encouraged other male students to join his cause.

“5 billion condoms worldwide are used once and carelessly tossed away every year,” the website states, “the global condom market is projected to be worth \$9.6 billion by 2021, all at the cost of the environment.”

He continues to urge website visitors to “pledge now and join the cause to stop Big Condom!”

Tide reports that the pledge already has 3,000 signatures. As to why his initiative is so popular, he offers that “most guys are reasonable and willing to make a small daily adjustment to save the planet.”

When reached for comment, a representative for Students for Choice, a campus org that works closely with Planned Parenthood, remarked that the pledge is “stupid.”

Whether or not Tide's controversial pledge is a step too far for the single-use plastic ban movement, one thing is for certain: this guy f***s.

The Bailey Summer

by Anna Tropicano

Before the Bailey Summer, our family trips to Cape Cod every August were a mental montage of hermit crabs, boogie boards, and fried fish for me to replay during our bleak New York winters. We stayed at Mike's, my dad's brother's place, which was a standard Cape decorated with Cape Cod memorabilia, Italian things, and bible quotes (see: the garlic cutting board bearing a photo of a crab and "Taste and See that the Lord is Good" in cursive). Every summer featured the same cast of characters: me, my younger brother Ben, my mom, dad, and our lovable mutt Stella. For nearly twelve years, the show ran as scheduled.

But the tides changed during the Bailey Summer, plunging us into murky and uncharted waters. Like the tropical depression that forced our family into a dreadful two-hour-long tour of the Cape Cod Potato Chip factory during summer 2014, Bailey was a force that none of us saw coming. One experience left me with a tiny bag of chips as a consolation prize. The other with some uncomfortable truths. I'll let you deduce which one was which.

The buildup to leaving for the Cape was intense. I had spent the week before doing important pre-departure tasks like packing up towels, cleaning my room, and taking every online quiz about my sexuality that I could find. *Choose a color*, one BuzzFeed quiz demanded. Okay, blue. Piece of cake. *Which Beyoncé are you?* yelled the quiz, now shaking its fist. Alright. A little irrelevant, but I picked one anyway. Suddenly the question was a little too on the nose. *Do you experience consensual sexual experiences with, or feel a sexual attraction to, members of the same as sex as yourself?*

I could only respond affirmatively to half of that question. There had been Katherine, that counselor I liked when I was six, Miss Honey from *Matilda*...I had noticed girls, in addition to boys, for a

while. And now there was a girl who I thought had noticed me too. But I had never had an experience with anyone, let alone a member of the same sex.

I expected the trip to be an empowering exploration of my sexuality, somehow carried out under the roof of a tiny rental house and my parents' gaze. Instead, I ended up trying to solve where things went so wrong that week. I do not remember everything about the Bailey Summer; in a direct departure from every vacation prior, my parents took no photos during our stay. I have only one, one remaining clue, a photo of smiling girls on a beach in black and white that I asked my mom to take. I look at us sometimes, thinking about that week. My family has not talked about it since.

The Motive

With Mike's house under renovation, my dad had found us a rental house near the shores of a beach parallel to our usual one. We pulled up to what looked like any other weathered summer home on the Cape, with grayed shingles and a steep roof. I could see stone steps overtaken by beach vines and weeds that led up to the front door and twisted out of view.

"Everyone helps," said Dad as we climbed out of the car. Ben, being thirteen, ignored this and made his way up the steps, Stella at his heels.

"Smell that?" I said to Bailey as I extracted her duffle bag from the trunk. Every year I looked forward to the moment when my dad would take a deep breath and say, "the air is different here" after getting out of the car. But he was already halfway up the steps with two heavy bags, so I took the initiative. Bailey nodded, sniffing the air slowly as she looked past me towards the blue harbor just visible beyond the lawn's upward slope.

"Boat fumes?" she joked.

"Yeah, you got it," I said, playing it cool. I would mention the air to my dad later. "We actually come here every year just for that."

"Hurry up!" an echo came from the window above the driveway.

“This place is so weird!”

Ben was right. The inside of the house could have been part of the set of *Stranger Things*, or at least its inspiration. It was so packed with things that it looked as though someone had been living there for years, and then suddenly left one day to never return; every available surface was covered by a relic from the 1960s and 70s: candelabras, photographs, plays, movie posters, books. The living room was crammed with a too large coffee table and many chairs, as though a meeting had been interrupted. There were barely any lights, only bare glass bulbs hanging from walls with strings attached. It was also musty, as if the air had also been locked away for the past fifty years.

“At least there are no Christian tapestries,” I heard my dad say from another room.

In my photo, Bailey has an old East Dennis sweatshirt wrapped around her waist. She found it in the crack between her mattress and bedframe the first day, wore for the week, and then took it home with her even though it definitely belonged to the owner of the house. She found it in the room where we slept, a room in the attic with two twin beds, a trunk full of old letters, and a tiny circular window.

“Daddy isn’t comfortable with you and Bailey sleeping up there,” my mother had murmured to me as she unpacked her bag in the master bedroom downstairs. I crossed my arms to assert my teenage dominance and also to hide my discomfort.

“And would he have a problem with it if I had brought Kayla?” Kayla was my longstanding best friend. My mom continued to unpack with maddening calmness. “You know that Bailey is different than Kayla, honey.”

“What, is he afraid that I’m going to get pregnant?” My mom finally ceased her packing, and I shriveled at her stare.

“I’m the one on your side here. Go ask your father then.” But it turned out that Ben was too afraid to sleep alone in the attic, and had settled in the twin bedroom next to where my parents were sleeping. I avoided my father’s gaze as I helped Bailey with her bag up the stairs.

It’s not that I was counting on or pushing for something to

happen. I just wanted to do everything right. I didn't know what she was expecting, and asking her would mean acknowledging our hazy relationship. I longed for some kind of guidebook to tell me what to do; I couldn't handle so many witnesses to my inexperience.

It's worth noting that this sleeping set up would not be allowed to repeat the following summer. Back in Mike's house, my boyfriend Zach would share a room with Ben while I would be across the hall. There was a narrative of dating for my parents to follow now. Zach was a safe, kind, boyfriend who my parents loved. And I loved him, too. But I look at that picture of those girls on the sand, and I wonder who I would be if things had worked out differently.

The Confession

"I kind of have a girlfriend."

It came out in a dingy diner in Ithaca during a Cornell visit. I don't know why I chose that moment, or why I had to make it so blunt. I had watched so many coming out videos on Youtube that I thought the moment wouldn't be complete without a little melodrama. I looked around, hoping our waiter was coming to interrupt the moment by refilling our water so that a nice little comedy scene would play out, but no such cliché occurred.

I didn't even get a grand response from my family. Instead, my dad nodded and leaned back in his chair, like he had been expecting it. Then he was quiet for the rest of dinner. My mom had already figured it out; I had talked about Bailey a lot at home that school year, trying to gauge the response. To be honest, I have no idea what we talked about at dinner after that. I think I blocked it out.

"He's being homophobic!" I whispered to my mom in our hotel bathroom that night.

"He's not," she mouthed back around her toothbrush, "he's just getting used to it. You know how much he loves Steve and Steve." My dad's younger brother, Steven, was married to another man, Stephen. This argument didn't satisfy me.

"What is there to get used to?" My mother sighed.

“You’re his daughter, honey. He’s always going to be like this.”

But I didn’t want him to be. When we got home from that college trip I wrote him a handwritten letter explaining that Bailey wasn’t really my girlfriend, and that we hadn’t even kissed, but that I wanted to make myself easy to understand. He wrote back that he understood, and apologized for coming off as unapproving. He was just getting used to it, like my mom said. But we never discussed it after that. It felt like I was watching a teen movie, the drama too banal to be real.

I had already fallen into the trap of explaining my sexuality. I felt like I needed to define what Bailey and I were not because I was desperate for something to happen between us but because I thought that it would make everyone more comfortable. But this only added pressure.

I wondered if my parents had let me invite Bailey to Cape Cod as a peace offering of sorts. Cape Cod was not an expensive trip, but it was the one vacation we took a year. My dad saved up his vacation days all year for that one and a half weeks in August. And now I had brought someone along for my dad to get used to.

The Clues

The attic was hot and Bailey’s phone kept buzzing. On that first night we retreated to our separate twin beds without question and she fell asleep quickly, leaving me to my thoughts. It had been a long day of driving from New York and I had worn myself out from the anxiety of sitting in the middle seat and adjusting myself to make sure the proximity of my thigh to her thigh wasn’t too close or too far away.

Buzz, buzz whispered her phone on the table between us, the screen lighting up. I wondered who was trying to reach her.

Our stalemate began on an exchange trip during the summer before junior year when I said *bonjour* to her short blonde locks and french fluency. We were now rising seniors in high school. Our mutual friends had been the main communicators between us, a passivity unusual for Bailey who would win the “Most Likely to

be President” superlative senior year and had learned French from surfing French chat rooms. She was practically fluent in Spanish, too. But for some reason, languages aside, the messages between us were always lost in translation.

Buzz buzz. Her phone again. Junior year she took me to a party across from Martha Stewart’s house that had valet parking and its own Twitter account, called *Insanity*. Bailey put her arm around me on the car ride there, and I felt like the First Lady to the President. She smoked weed, and I watched in awe. We walked around the party, both unsure of what to do, me completely sober and riddled with anxiety. I had no idea if she was having a good time or not. Everything I said felt wrong; I had never felt so unfunny in my life. This felt true on the Cape, too. Fish tasted fishier. The coastline looked, somehow, unimpressive to the photos she showed me taken from her house on Fire Island.

I came home from the party feeling disappointed and ashamed. I felt like I owed her something. *Sorry nothing happened tonight*, I texted her later. *I think I was just nervous*. I watched the typing dots pop up on my screen.

Me too. Another time.

It seemed like another time would be now, right? I looked over at her dark form on the bed. She was out cold.

The Flashback

It had been mid July when I received this text from Bailey:

I found my half-brother on facebook today. He’s in CA. She sent me a screenshot of an older boy with blond hair and faint eyebrows like hers. My heart skipped a beat; we had never ventured into personal territory before, except for what I knew about her dad.

Do you want to contact him? I replied.

I don’t think so. He didn’t reach out to me lol. Nothing about this was really funny to her. Her father had never bothered to contact her, either.

The Interrogation

The next morning on the Cape began with us all crammed around the circular dining table. My dad was the only one standing, expertly passing a knife through a cantaloupe. The silence during breakfast that was normal for us (none of us are morning people) was awkward with Bailey there. I sat there feeling contaminated, like I had done something wrong. But all we had done was go to sleep in our own beds.

"Here we are," said my dad, pushing forward the finished platter of chopped fruit. "So Bailey, sorry to ask this," he said as he sat down. She shifted in her seat next to me. "But any ideas about college?" Bailey was the top of our class, so this was a safe subject.

"I'm thinking McGill University," she said. "For the French. And the tuition is great. Also, Yale." She gave a short laugh. "But I don't know if I'll apply. It's a long shot."

"You should," I told her. Yale was also my dream school, and there was an unspoken tension between us when Yale was brought up that was almost exciting.

"You're right," she said. "Why not?"

"Maybe we should consider McGill," said my dad, glancing at my mom. "Those international schools are the only way to beat the system." He frowned and pulled out his phone to look McGill up. He had committed himself to the college search, and I knew he didn't like that Bailey knew of an inexpensive school he didn't.

The irony of that conversation. I ended up going to McGill. Bailey to Yale. I transferred out. She tried to. Even after the Bailey summer, we couldn't escape each other.

Red Herrings

We were up to our attic room, about to change to go to the beach, when it suddenly became clear that neither of us knew how to navigate this situation. We eyed each other warily.

"I'll look away," Bailey said finally, smiling as if it was a joke.

As I turned towards the window to put on my suit, I watched

her reflection in the glass. Even the back of her head was pretty. She hadn't lied. She really wasn't looking.

Suspicious Behavior

Cold Storage Beach is on the bay side of Cape Cod where the tide can go out for almost a mile. The vast stretch of sand is dotted with pools of periwinkles and shells and a rock jetty to jump down towards the deep water during high tide. All you need is sunscreen, an umbrella that won't fly away, lots of snacks, and maybe a boogie board if it's windy.

But Bailey took it upon herself to introduce a new beach necessity: crossword puzzles. Lots and lots of puzzles. She'd join us all on walks, and maybe come swim on occasion, but she seemed happiest there in the shade with her mind games.

On day four she had said no to the jetty yet again. I jumped with Ben from rock to rock on the jetty, feeling, for the first time on that beach, foolish. The air felt cold and unfamiliar. I turned towards the shore and found the bright blue umbrella in the dots of color on the shore under which Mom sat reading and Bailey with her crossword. Dad was in the water.

"I thought she'd do more things with us," Ben had said.

Me and Bailey solved a lot of puzzles that week. She figured out "years in old Rome" (ain) and "US base in Cuba, for short" (Gitmo). I made smaller contributions, solving "announcement after a deep breath" (Here I go) and "Focus!" (Snap out of it). It took us two days to finish that puzzle. When we did, the theme made me uneasy. I knew that Bailey was too smart not to see it. I examine my photo of us from that week. Sometimes I wonder if she thought of me as one of her puzzles, too.

The Evidence



The Scene of the Crime

It was our last night on the Cape, and the stakes were high. *Just KISS HER!* My friend Ellie had texted from back home. As if it was that easy.

“I’ll turn off the light,” Bailey offered, but made no effort to sit up. Our episode of *The Office* had just ended. We were lying in the same bed, and it was late.

“Hey.” The sound of my own voice surprised me. Then, for the first time on that trip, I went for it. “Is it...weird that we haven’t kissed?” She was quiet for a moment. I couldn’t bring myself to look at her, so I focused on the ceiling.

“Yeah, maybe it is.” I felt her shuffle next to me. Then, as she said, “I don’t think I feel the same way about you that I used to,” I felt my next question, “*Should we try?*” die in my throat. We lay in silence. I didn’t raise my hand to brush away the tear that had leaked out because I didn’t want her to think I cared more than she did.

“Have I upset you?” she asked. I remember that phrase distinctly. So composed, so proper, so neutral.

“No,” I said.

At least I know one thing for sure now, I thought as I got back into my own bed. No straight person would care this much.

The Alibi

Bailey texted me one night this year, late and out of the blue. I think she had been out drinking. I knew from friends that she had just broken up with a boyfriend. It had been almost four years since that summer.

Hey. Sorry I chickened out. I regret it! I could almost hear her snarky, protective tone through the screen. To salvage our interactions for the rest of high school, we had played the same game. That summer had become a sad joke: remember when we flirted for a year and went on vacation and then you said you didn’t like me? Hilarious! But I didn’t blame her. We were incompatible. I wanted more than she could give me. I needed at least a friendship.

However, I became much more reticent about my sexuality after that summer. I felt like I hadn’t earned the right to talk about it. My first gay experience hadn’t even been an experience; it had been a rejection, and one that isolated me from a place I really loved. Without it, a shred of my identity felt lost. How would I get back?

I found the answer back at the shoreline during a game of bocce. Bocce an Italian game that involves rolling a tiny white ball some distance away, and then attempting to throw larger, heavier balls as close to it as possible. On the second day of Cape Cod 2016, Bailey mercilessly beat my dad at bocce. On the second day of Cape Cod 2017, I watched Zach’s green ball miss my dad’s blue one by a mile. My heart leaped at the goofy smile that spread across his face. Zach wasn’t here to win. It was just the beach.

I spent so long worrying about my sexuality that I never stopped to consider who I felt happy around. I couldn’t separate the experience from my identity, couldn’t realize that Bailey was a woman, not

women. I saw her as invincible, when in many ways she had been a scared teenager just like me. It helped that Zach liked boys, too. His dad knew this, but never acknowledged it. We could complain about this together, safe from those who demanded answers. We would wait for our parents to play catch up. There was time. After all, we were still kids.

On that trip, we drove by the road that would take you to the rental house. Ben recognized it and started to tell Zach about how strange the house was, who pretended it was the first time he was hearing about the Bailey Summer and asked to see a photo.

“It was all too weird for photos,” said my mom, smiling at him through the mirror. And maybe that was true. But I have one.



Taken by my mother.

Writer Spotlight

The final draft of “The Bailey Summer” is very different from its initial draft. I think one of the most helpful things I read was “Shitty First Drafts” by Anne Lamott—it was so helpful because I really identified with the described process of writing and getting over the shame of the first draft. Like, “Oh my god, this is terrible, I wouldn’t let anyone read this.” But I think there is something behind the truth of having to get it down on paper—otherwise it doesn’t exist at all, and you’ve just thought about it, driving yourself crazy, wondering how you can make it perfect when it doesn’t even exist, which is just an unhelpful fallacy.

One of the reasons drafting this was difficult was because I didn’t want to portray Bailey unfairly; I wasn’t trying to villainize her. The first time I wrote it, she came off a lot harsher than I meant her to. When I went back to the draft I thought, “Would I be okay with her reading this? Would I be worried about her reaction—not to how I wrote the piece but to how I wrote her?” Characterization was a big part of my revision process.

— Anna Tropiano



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Fleeting

by Briana Johnson

In this podcast episode, Briana talks with her partner, Nick Lemaster, about being nonbinary in a high school relationship. Nick describes the social pressure they feel as a masculine-presenting individual in a relationship, and how gender roles play into others' perceptions of Nick's relationships. Thoughts on gender roles in pornography and the growing need for sexual diversity and education are also discussed.



Scan this QR code to hear the full episode!

How to Not Fall in Love (all over again)

by Hannah Levinsohn

Forget how he smelled. You'll remember when you walk into down the hallway of your apartment building and are hit with the familiar sweet, musky smell of weed and sweat mixed with a floral air freshener. Don't remember how that scent would envelop you, suffocate you, in his room on the second floor, even when you convinced him to open the window and let the cold air cut through the thickness. It's funny how you hated it so much then, but now, it makes your heart beat faster, makes the corners of your mouth twitch into a small smile, makes your vision blur with tears.

Don't close your eyes. It will bring you back to the first time you met, in that hot, dark room with the red lights. You saw him standing at the edge of the room, sweaty bodies winding and twisting in the small space. You don't dance, either, so you went up to him and asked if you could kiss him. You'll feel his hand on your waist, feel him draw you closer. You can still feel the taste of his lips on your mouth: cherry cola, with that familiar bite of rum at the end. Open your eyes before you remember. Stand there, unblinking, if you have to.

Don't think about his hair. It's an auburn color that he won't call red, and it falls past his ears because he's growing it out for a bet. Don't think about his freckled shoulders that you trace with your finger time and time again, or how he gives you goosebumps when he says your name. Forget his smile. It's crooked, almost a smirk that reaches his eyes and makes them squint slightly. Don't let it make your chest feel warm. Don't let him kiss your forehead.

Don't think about all the nights spent nights alone, wishing his body were next to yours. Forget opening your eyes countless times in the middle of the night just to make sure he isn't there. When he is, don't remember listening to his heartbeat, especially when you lay your head on his chest, listening to it flutter when you speak.

And, when he isn't, try not to remember feeling empty. Try not to remember feeling cold.

Forget saying 'I love you.' Pretend it never happened. Except it did. You let him say it first, but he can't even say the word because he's scared you don't feel the same. He says, 'I'm falling for you' instead, and even though you say 'I love you, too,' you are falling. Off a steep, jagged cliff with no end in sight. Remember how much you hate that feeling, like when you're on a rollercoaster and it drops. You hate heights, but in that bed, in that very moment, it was exactly what you needed to feel: that steep drop into the unknown, not knowing what's going to happen next. Learn to embrace it, the rollercoaster ride, your stomach in knots, the hole in your heart. It's what you'll miss the most.

Fly Parade

by Marjorie Gaber

MAY

I remember the flies stuck under the cling wrap in the little pesto jar in my bathroom, and how they looked beating themselves against the plastic. I felt so guilty even though it was more Kay's fault than mine, technically. She said for the new trap we should fill the jar with wine and soap as always but also poke some holes in some cling wrap and place it over the lip of the jar... See, Kay explained it to me: the holes let the flies in the jar, but the cling wrap won't let them leave, thus ensuring a hands-free solution to a getting-out-of-hand problem. This seemed like solid advice five days ago, but Kay's been visiting her mom in Kzoo (Kay-Zoo) and I've watched these fuckers long enough to know that they definitely know how to fly out through the holes, Kay's convincing intuition be damned. So I decided to make sure the lil shits in the bottle stayed there, make themselves uncomfortable or whatever, and I put another layer of cling wrap over the lip. No holes this time. Now the flies had only two choices: go to the wine and die, or run out of air and energy trying to fight the plastic wrap and die.

Except they're not dying. They just keep fighting against the wrap, scratching at the sides of the jar. I see them squirming at the surface, fighting for their lives and I can feel my stomach drop further each day I check the jar. The rest of the flies are acting weird too, more coordinated. More strategic. God, look at me. I really am going fucking crazy.

A long time ago I read this short story about a girl who died and went to heaven, but before she could enter the pearly gates she had to face everybody she killed. She thought she was safe but then she was consumed by all the spiders, centipedes, cockroaches, and flies

she had killed in her lifetime. I laughed it off but a part of me can't help but think that it might be true. That the things you break come back hungry someday.



KAY



"There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast..."

Kay thought if she could study on the road back home she wouldn't be so screwed when she got back to her shitty little apartment and had to really start studying for this LIT 250 exam. So she popped in an audiobook of *Lord of the Flies* and tried to focus on the winding asphalt in front of her. She knew her mom would be worried but her mom hadn't had to deal with paper deadlines since she dropped out of college to take care of a little problem that grew into Kay. And she knew her mom wouldn't have really wanted it any other way, she promises, and they've been managing their little green house in

the suburbs pretty well, especially since dad picked up the slack and mom went to trade school for a rough couple of years when Kay was four years old, but she still knew she had to be all the better for it. Which is why she had to keep up, which is why she was constantly checking out audio books for the drives between school and home. She had to keep up. No matter what.

"Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!"

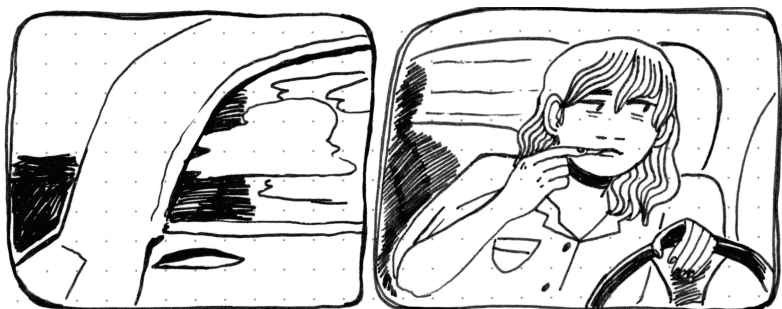
Kay took mental notes as her car bumped along the highway. She knew that Simon was supposed to be Jesus, maybe. She remembers half-heartedly skimming the CliffsNotes page a few days ago, before she set out for Kalamazoo. She wanted to be like one of those people who could read books straight up and let each piece of the story come to them naturally, but she wanted to know what she was supposed to know more. Simon was supposed to be Jesus maybe, but wasn't Piggy supposed to be Jesus too? Which one of these kids was Jesus? She knew who the Devil was, obviously, but which one of those kids was Jesus? She winced when she saw a raccoon carcass on the side of the road. Poor thing never saw it coming.

"You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you?"

Or maybe she was wrong about the Jesus thing and the Devil thing? God, she wished she could call May. May was the one who put the pieces together when Kay could only find them and get very confused very easily. She hoped May was okay. Last time they talked the flies were starting to freak her out. But she'd be back soon, they'd figure it out together, just like they had been doing since freshman year. The sun passed behind the clouds and the windows on Kay's car took on a glassy sheen from the outside.

"Close, close, close!"

Together, never really alone.



FLIES

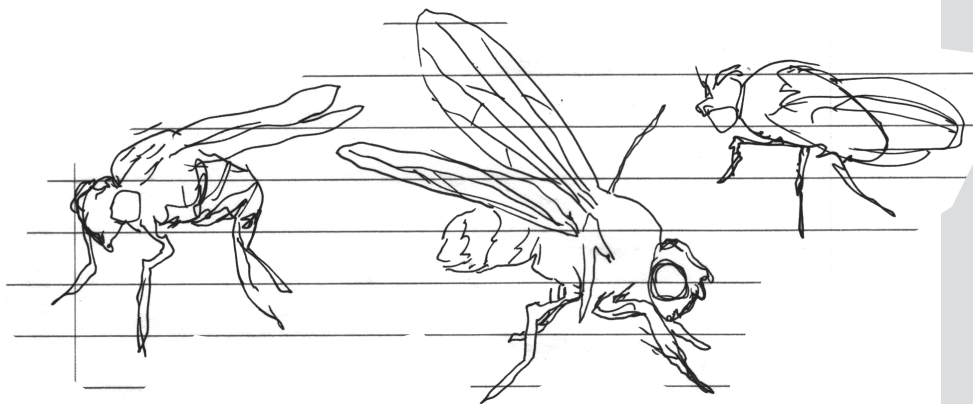
She thinks she can kill us.

She thinks she can keep crushing us, keep closing her windows at night, keep cleaning the kitchen, keep setting out these poisoned offerings of sticky sweet syrup, ambrosia with a twist, she thinks she can fight us back. Well. She's alone now. She's alone and we are not. We are never alone. Even in this suffocating shell we know what we are. What we're a part of.

All humans are so alone. Even together they are the loneliest beasts we've ever witnessed. Why? What is it all for? Why can't they understand what's best for them?

We watch her when she is alone. When she is asleep. Humans are loneliest when asleep. When she sleeps, we make a mirror. When she wakes, we become her shadow. When she wavers, when she loses her vigilance, we plan.

She won't be lonely anymore.



Writer Spotlight

I like to think of myself as a comics artist by trade... and I've always had a brain for that kind of visual narrative plus prose, so it was very easy to, while I was writing this down, see the images that would accompany this story if it were turned into a movie or a graphic novel. I wanted to create some kind of surreal additions to this story that exemplified the kind of tone I wanted to strike with this story: this suspense building and these sorts of scary images creeping in at the edges of it.

I really get a kick out of writing these kinds of weird short stories, but I'm not always confident in my abilities writing alone—I feel like I need to have an actual visual source of the kinds of images or kinds of tones that I'm trying to place in my story.

— Marjorie Gaber



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The Travelling Girl

by Alex Pan

I had once known a little girl of my age, a daughter who felt lost at birth from her own blood. Her true parents were stolen by the immense wealth and fame that accompanied their work as magnates and socialites. They were far too busy to ever entertain the little girl's companionship. I know little of how it came to be, but this somehow led the girl to be adopted by a widowed though still very lively woman. This woman moved about with a sisterly youth in her—and perhaps a justified youthfulness, for she looked like someone who would have fallen only some years senior to my now adolescent body. Unfortunately, I never had the great fortune to be introduced to this sister-mum.

I do know, however, many years ago the sister-mum had found a dear husband—her handsome love. The man became the one thing that mattered the most to the sister-mum, who was neither sister nor mum back then but just a lost young woman who wished only for the purest of love to complete her life. And from this wonderful romance the man courted her heart and body, giving life to their only child. I must admit again I know little of the sister-mum's current let alone previous events in her life. But by some turn of tragedies of which I am unaware, her husband and child had passed away—and the sister-mum blamed only herself for not taking closer care of them. As any woman afflicted with so many lost loves, she had fallen into a lonely sickness even greater than that of the little girl's loneliness currently. The sister-mum could no longer bear her loneliness, so she adopted the little girl—who at that time was an even-more-little girl, being not even a year of age—in attempts to complete the sister-mum's life once more.

As for the little girl, she would often cheerfully confide in me all her intimate events of the day. I reminisce with great regret, for I

feel that I have been struck with a foolish forgetfulness of the many stories she had once shared with me. My boyish body had breathed in existence but for only five years when we were speaking then—yes, we were only five years old.

I am not certain that the girl had ever arrived at the sister-mum's home with a prior name to begin. Apparently whenever the little girl inquired about her name to her sister-mum, the sister-mum simply told the girl to not fret. "My sweet little cherry," the sister-mum would instead say to her, "let us play a game instead!" The girl obviously thought this to be strange, but she cared less than her sister-mum about the concealment of the word. The girl's missing name made no difference in their simple friendship with one another; all that mattered to them was that they still greatly enjoyed each other's company.

I suppose some of my forgetfulness arises from our differences in language at that tender age. I was far too impatient and immature to bother about understanding her foreign words, her foreign language. Her sister-mum—a peculiar woman, really—taught the little girl the only language the sister-mum spoke. Not some unconventional gibberish, mind you, but indeed a real language that her family used to speak with her: a language of which the town understood nothing. So at that early point in time, I failed to understand anything from the girl's mouth. I am only a poet who must write, for else I would forget. Nonetheless, I feel the story of this lovely little girl should not be trapped in only the walls of my mind—but shared for all to know.

Perhaps I shall apologise now as well, for my current affections toward this little girl—who now is a sweet young woman to my tastes—make it difficult at times to not mispresent her lovely character.

Aha! Echoes of her bouncy voice now come to me. They speak of some memories about her, the nonsensical words she so excitedly said. The girl's mind thought of nothing but the greatness of her friendship with her sister-mum. They were to each other the only ones who could ever understand their miraculous language.

Snow would always form on the falling leaves from the tree

outside her room's window. From up high, she would watch the many other children always playing together. The girl's face pressed against her windowsill, she once pointed at me amongst the many other children playing in the group. We would only return offensive slurs toward her whenever we caught her pointing. The little girl previously gave little mind to the other children's neglect. But now she more by more watched and wondered, "what greatness would become of my life should I too one day be playing amongst these children."

These attempts of hers in befriending the children terribly failed, so she always resolved to playing with her sister-mum instead. But as the girl's relationship grew ever closer to her sister-mum, they had no more new games to play and no more novel words to converse. Their relationship exhausted, the girl fell unwell with a deadened sense of boredom much like how the little girl's stale relationship was with her once-favourite aged doll. She felt destined for greater things.

The little girl stood as the sister-mum's only friend, so the sister-mum quickly noticed the little girl's sickness. And after the little girl's sister-mum had heard such words, a troubling fear of loneliness afflicted the sister-mum. That the sister-mum's only child and only friend, all coalesced in this little girl's body ... should instead abandon the sister-mum's love and carelessly trade it for the other children's companionship? How cruel the world must have felt to the sister-mum at this point in time. Now the sister-mum faced loneliness yet again, the little girl wishing to leave her for friends elsewhere.

The sister-mum hoped to convince the little girl in staying with her. Morning by morning the sister-mum began playing dolls with the little girl to cheer her. For a short while the little girl happily played. But once the sister-mum started playing with the family of dolls—a mother and father doll present—the girl was only sadly reminded of her unloving true parents.

The sister-mum's youthful energy undeterred, she acquired new dolls for the little girl and ridded the girl of her aged dolls. The sister-mum perhaps spoilt the little girl, as the girl happily disposed of her once-favourite doll and many other aged dolls upon receiving

the sister-mum's new dolls. Hence the little girl found great pleasure in these freshly sewn dolls, speaking to them as she would with a best friend. Yet, this pleasure was temporary, as I imagine she soon begged her sister-mum; "Oh, even then—why does it not speak back to me?" The little girl's gift had only reminded her of the other children's hurtful silence and disregard of her. The sister-mum could not explain why the little girl's dolls also spoke of nothing to her—correcting the young girl about the deadness of the dolls would be akin to informing her that Santa did not exist as well!

The sister-mum's solutions amiss, the sister-mum fell in despair. The little girl's sickness was still unhealed. Inspiration came to the sister-mum—to dedicate an evening with the little girl, travelling beyond the walls of their home and outward to the dancing grass and waving waters of the park. As they arrived at the peaceful park, the sister-mum revealed from her knapsack a deck of playing cards. The sister-mum played the same card games and spoke to the little girl with the same words as they always enjoyed.

But the girl showed little consideration for her sister-mum's caring attention as everything around the girl enamoured her more. A passer-by might have even remarked that the sister-mum and girl had no relation to each other, for the little girl completely ignored her. The sister-mum, playing and speaking to herself, grew impatient of the girl's spoilt temperament.

"Oh, little girl! Do you not value the energy that I have expended these past days to make you happy!" the tired sister-mum exclaimed. How sad it must have been for the sister-mum, for the little girl could not understand the sister-mum's great love for her.

"Shush, mum! I tire of these old games and stories from your mouth. Are you not fascinated by anything else?" the girl replied.

The sister-mum surely was flushed with anger from the little girl's improper remarks. The sister-mum tightly gripped the little girl's hand, returning home with her in a silent fury.

I do not blame the girl for her impoliteness—she was only enraptured by the park's novelty, a place far from home. Her sickness partly faded for a moment then. At the park she had seen many

children unbeknownst to her, all of them hugging and playing with one another. These other children's boisterous laughs and toothy smiles created hope for the little girl's first friendships with others.

But the sister-mum now refused to permit the misbehaved girl beyond the walls of her home. This compelled the little girl to decide—she must travel, and very far away. For the little girl felt the sister-mum's maternal love had imprisoned her.

The idea seemed nonsensical, but there was truth in her motivations. The little girl had never let go of her desire to find friendship. She carried with her a blighted self-awareness, one which drove her mad about being unable to befriend anyone else in the little town that she lived. "My friends await me elsewhere," I'm sure she said. "All of them!"

How this little girl managed to convince her poor sister-mum that she would depart so far away from home—that, I do not know. But despite my coldness toward her at the time, this little girl's maddening ache for friends—both old and new—compelled her to inform me of her journeys afterwards. I shall share more of this when the time for my story's end comes.

And here a five-year-old girl's journey begins as she travels alone to worlds never-before-seen. Quite a feat, for the five-year-old girl had never before journeyed beyond her house alone.



Jena Blaylock
Binary
Digital photocollage

Writer Spotlight

One thing that really frustrates me is how people want art or things to mean something; everybody's looking for an answer, everybody's looking for a label to put on something. I just don't believe in labels... A lot of my friends who are LGBTQ etc.... people just like to walk up to them and be like, "What are you?" Just questions like that are so weird, so rude, like why would you ever ask someone that? But then I also have friends that are questioning themselves and who they are as people and whenever I talk to them about that, I'm like, "You don't need to explain yourself to anyone except for yourself. As long as you're okay with yourself and you have an understanding of yourself, I don't think you really need to explain that to anyone."

With this work, I wanted to make it about the people in the work more, so I started thinking, "How do I create a piece that looks like you shouldn't be looking at it?"... [The photos] are really personal pieces and introspective, like the way you see yourself just naturally when no one's looking.

— Jena Blaylock



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The Delusion of the Indian Monsoon

by Manasvi Parikh

I slowly turned my body, trying to figure out which cardinal direction I was headed in, but as I expected, no luck. The Indian Ocean during the monsoon months could be unforgiving, and all I saw was the unnerving calm of the ocean. I was far, far away from home and even further from land.

I was stranded alone in the ocean with no navigational sense in my head to guide me. I had no idea where I was or what I had done, but those were all problems to figure out in the morning. I also had no idea what time it was, but judging from the rich blackness of the sky, I was quite confident it was not daytime.

Most of the previous day had been taken up fighting the monsters that the monsoon winds had graciously gifted me. The unyielding winds and waves had battered the little boat and had taken their toll on my strength, but the winds had, finally, lightened up a bit.

I carefully made my way over the obstacles that littered the deck of the schooner and stared down into the black water. I exhaled. I had been holding in that breath for hours, and I desperately needed sleep.

Everything was soaking wet, so there wasn't much point trying to get comfortable, so I just laid down on the deck. I couldn't sleep. I wasn't surprised, but I still needed rest. My eyes wandered up into the night sky. I let my mind drift, which often leads to disaster, as my mind has a mind of its own, but I took the chance and was pleasantly surprised by the fantasies my imagination conjured up.

The seasonal clouds remained, but the perpetual lights of night sky still lingered. I couldn't make out any stars; I couldn't name any constellations, but even with the lack of any substantial inspiration, my creativity ran wild. This was probably due to the romantic combination of gazing up the night sky whilst laying on a boat in the

middle of the ocean. The poets were right; it was breathtaking.

One unsung beauty of the night sky was that, theoretically, it went on forever. The vastness of the multiverse is comforting in a way, but it is also incredibly intimidating. Infinity is something so theoretical that no one can stretch their mind around how big the world really is, and the perfect complement to this great boundlessness is the ocean.

Very little of the world's oceans have been explored, and its depths closely resembled the untouched regions of the galaxy. I think I would believe almost anything you told me about the ocean. Mermaids. Squids larger than islands. An endless array of dangers and prospects.

This perfect blend, alone with the boundlessness of the universe and the depth of the ocean, provided my mind with an infinite number of possibilities to occupy itself with, and by the time the sun began to show itself, I felt strangely well-rested. I hadn't slept at any point during the night, but my mind felt rejuvenated. There was something about giving in to my imagination that always revitalized my mind. I was at the perfect relaxed state, but it seemed the ocean waves did not share my emotional state.

The ocean had decided it was time for me to get up, and the waves had started to pick up momentum. I slowly rose to my feet and tried to blink out the sun. Everything looked so different in the early morning light. I could almost make out the faces of the dead bodies that surrounded me. I yawned, stretched out my torso and slowly stepped over what I assumed were the remains of the owner of the boat.

The winds were starting to scream, so I went to work setting the boat to the windward path. I had no directional sense, so I could only have faith that the ocean would take me to the right place. There was nothing else I could do, so I decided it was time for some breakfast. I ate some cheese and took a large bite out of a stale loaf of bread as I considered what to do with the four dead men in front of me.

Citrus Prayer

by Malin Andersson

Oh Lord set me free
Peel the scars from off my back
like oranges
and throw them in compost.
Let them return to this earth
sink in
split apart
to fertilize this season of blooming.
Show me my thirst
instead of the gray of the sky
Let the peels fall
into strong hands
so I can float
and taste color in this place once again.

Some Birds

by Maya Goldman

Some birds—at least a few birds—didn't migrate south this
winter
or at least they haven't done it yet.
And I know this because I heard them singing in the early
morning last weekend.
I woke up before the sun,
and as I lay there in bed, keeping very still, I heard chirping.
Just a little at first,
and as the sun began to creep up the sky and into my room
I heard more birds, at least I think I did.
And as they sang to me in the early morning, I wondered if
maybe I hadn't woken up early.
Maybe I'd slept really late, all the way through winter,
and it was spring now and the birds were back.
So in a start I sat up and peeled myself away from the bed and
walked to the window
where I saw a clean layer of snow sparkling on the street
outside my house.
I hadn't slept through winter.
But the birds hadn't left for it either.

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...and you!

*The frigid comes because people inhabit us
And they claim stake on our hearts and it's impossible to evict them—
Until we choose to move back
into our own bones, one day*

— Eli Rallo,
“We Should Write a Poem”

