

prose  
poetry  
photo  
art



# *f* *n*

issue 12

future histories literary magazine



# Dear readers,

As cherry blossoms bloom on branches across campus, so emerges our twelfth beautiful issue of Future Histories!

Like a garden, our magazine has flourished at a remarkable rate. What began as a stapled zine in Tisch—developed into a ten-person effort by the time our graduating seniors joined in Fall 2021—has since blossomed to encompass the work of over a hundred writers, artists, editors, designers, staff, and content reviewers each year. It is a result of the passion and commitment of this creative community that these once-barren pages are now filled with dozens of stunning spreads for you to explore.

So: we invite you, reader, to stroll through the grounds of our magazine. Whether you're lounging on the grass, a sun-soaked couch, or the shaded roots of a beech tree, these pages are yours to escape into. We hope you'll be as awed as us to experience the endless, artistic prowess of our contributors, as well as the level of care and devotion our staff has put into cultivating it. Our garden, as always, is filled with amazing voices.

And although many of us are leaving Future Histories—some temporarily, some forever—we trust in the perennial passion and creativity of the community that sustains it. This project, sown long before us, will continue to thrive once we're gone. So once again, thank you to all the writers, artists, staff, content reviewers, and readers. We are able to print and grow this magazine because of you.

With Endless Love and Dedication,  
Jay & Antonia  
*FH Co-Chairs*

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Phoebe Yao

Special thanks to all our Content Reviewers!

photo | *Evelyn Hsy*

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# This is a temporary home, my love

by Chloe Cheng

Glow in the dark stars I was raised to gaze up at,  
on the ceiling I have hoped  
would cave in.

This bed that once suffocated me.  
I let it engulf me until I was a wrinkle in the fabric,  
a dent in the foam.

I had never been one to fantasize about the future.  
Still, I swallow my medication with water from a chipped glass,  
stained by yesterday's lipstick.

These four walls won't be my home forever.  
I'll grow up and move into a new house,  
sleep in a new bed.

I'll get patterned sheets and I'll get  
a mug to hold my coffee, and I'll sit on the porch  
and breathe in the morning.

Photos of loved ones will fade in the sunlight,  
so only the contours of our smiles  
are visible on the pale paper.

I was told that getting old is a beautiful thing,  
and doesn't everyone want  
to be beautiful?

"This is a temporary home, my love.  
You will paint the walls of your bedroom  
when you save up the money to buy one.

Sit in this sadness for a minute longer,  
then make your bed and get dressed.  
The world is waiting for you."

photo | *Lauren Fischer*



# *setting the scene*

by Megan Amero

it starts like always: empty white.

i awaken the sky; the stars  
my hand swings in a broad stroke of light  
the sun winks in, then a soft swath of clouds  
blanketing the horizon, hushing dawn's glow

we must have land next:  
my fingers move, and earth rises  
up from blankness, there is stone,  
and then hills and beautiful black dirt

i paint the statues; the streets  
blooming plazas and crooked alleyways  
new-life ivy bursting from seams of stucco

miles away, the not-yet-sea calls out  
for my attention, and i give that, too  
salt air reaches my lungs and  
the whole city is alive, breathing

and then the people, springing up  
like flowers bursting from the bulb or  
stepping sideways out of walls, you'll never know

i set them before me, the ones  
this place was made for;  
arrange them in tableau, just so:  
the woman with the knife, and the man in her embrace

every time we meet, they're realer yet,  
growing as if independent of my breath  
the man smiles, and i think of endless nights  
spent perfecting the turn of his head

a smudge on my page,  
a glimmer of the blade  
they mirror each stroke i make

and so i look at him  
this wondrous being  
born from the human brain  
built up by my careful hands  
i think of what i am bound to do,

(the dagger hangs still, kissing gravity  
its course written, irrevocable)

i think of how much i love him,  
how my heart wants to split  
and then i draw back my pen  
and i shoot him dead.

art | *Vina Le*

# Babylon

by Emmy Wenstrup

A procession of black SUVs rotated around the end of the cul-de-sac when Anne's mom's Lexus scraped gracefully into the driveway of 1431 Saxon Place. It was Orly Levy's 8th end-of-school-year Coachella-themed pool party. As kids hopped out for the festivities, they were greeted by faceless servants who provided them with wristbands and smoothies in plastic cups. Anne took her virgin piña colada, garnished with a fresh flower and served with a red squiggly straw, and was transported straight to Palm Springs (Orly's backyard).


She surveyed the crowd. By the fence and tucked in a hedge stood the mandatory invites. They stood in a circle, knees and elbows covered for modesty, and discussed the latest Marvel film. Orly and her cohort of indistinguishable friends stood on the patio by the house in white denim shorts and bikini tops that advertised their recently developed breasts. Near them were the popular girls Anne had befriended earlier in the school year. She approached the girls, and they greeted her earnestly.

After a few minutes of chat, they were joined by Tim. He was an anomaly, able to socialize with anyone without having any close friendships, save for his curious relationship with Anne. They could talk for hours about odd things like the origins of Lyme disease, relative consistencies of genital secretions, their futures, and their mutual fear of mediocrity. The popular girls filtered out of the group until only the two of them remained.

"Who wanted this?" Tim asked as he looked out on the affair. Servants meandered about the crowd, taking photos and braiding people's hair. A row of various food trucks dotted the yard. A DJ filled the air with a seamless mix of the day's uncensored hits, providing an opportunity for second-tier popular boys to sing along with the n-word.

"Remember her bat mitzvah?" Anne said. A little over a year ago, Orly's womanhood had been marked by a ceremony that included several cirque-du-soleil performers. They laughed at the memory.

Tim decided he wanted food, so he grabbed a slider from the In-N-Out knockoff next to the temporary tattoo booth. Anne followed suit, and after eating a lukewarm cheese quesadilla from the boho California-themed taco cart. She migrated towards the trampoline, where a few of her acquaintances were bouncing. Among them was David, a short little prick from Connecticut whose grand assholery could sort of be explained as a product of his parents' messy divorce. Who cared if he unhooked her bra in the lunch line if his Wall Street Dad was coked out at a parent-teacher conference?



Suddenly, the soundscape of music and trampoline bouncing and chatter was interrupted by a loud, deep yell from across the yard. They looked over to find Rob, whose pants had been ripped down a few seconds before. He quickly pulled them back up and laughed loudly. Rob was unexpectedly a good kid, and despite his evangelical parents he could coherently describe the merits of socialism. He had always fascinated Anne, and they'd become mild friends in English class that year.

By late May, the weather in Westchester was warm but not so much that one would want to go swimming. A mass of about fifteen bodies hovered on the deck, their eyes anxiously darting around to see if anyone else would be the first to venture into the pool. Anne went to join them, inhaling the crisp chlorine air tinged with the sunscreen some loser had put on earlier.

Before Anne stood a collection of boys. She watched Derrick peel off his black American Eagle V-neck to reveal his twinkly pubescent frame. His voice, though it had gotten deeper over the years, still retained a shrill nasal frequency that made her skin crawl. He moved like a newt slinking around a watering hole. He mounted the inflatable swan and loudly splashed his way to the center of the pool. This was bizarre behavior for a boy – swan floats are traditionally reserved for girls – but Derrick was a maverick, a rule-breaker, and a jokester. The commotion invigorated the other boys, who one-by-one leapt into the pool to join him.

Anne and the bummers pretended to ignore the eruption of behavior just a few feet away and continued to fill the air with faux laughter and gossip about the grade's even lower tier freaks. Anne learned that two of said freaks – Liam and Nory – had secretly been dating for over two months. While this was surprising (Nory was obviously a lesbian and Liam came from a Republican family), Anne need not care about their lame frivolities.

By this point, the boys in the pool had begun to feel a bit uncomfortable in their homoerotic wrestling, so they beckoned at the girls to join. The smart ones, who had been starving themselves since Tuesday, were the first to join, gracefully stepping in the pool and modestly folding their arms across their stomachs, not wanting to make the other girls feel bad for their imperfect physiques. The rest awkwardly shuffled around, scavenging for excuses. Emily's new hair treatment couldn't get wet for a few days or else the chemical straightener would come out. Julia didn't want to risk the cancer associated with chlorine exposure (her mom had just sent her an article). Anne locked eyes across the pool with Riley.

*...continue reading at [futurehistorieslit.org](http://futurehistorieslit.org)*

art | *Ally Lee*

After the storm, they say rose bushes grow.  
They say the sun shines brighter than before.  
But those within the eye: only they know  
The true extent of the damage afore.

Clear skies whose truths, unobstructed by man,  
The pale face of nature hides no emote.  
It would be of man's greatest feat – the span  
Of decades to again scribe what she wrote.

Fear makes its nest in the deepest of heart;  
So coddled by the storm's thunderous skies.  
He who chases storms chases sin; To start  
On a search for clouds, look deep in one's eyes.

A rainbow shines on rubble; caught or free?  
After the storm, you sit among debris.

# *After the Storm:*

An English Sonnet

by  
*Max  
Lerner*

photo / *Néel Gordon-Rein*



# THE QUEEN

The daylight heavy hangs upon—  
As pale pedantic sneers defile—  
The kingdom of the great white sun.

The servants stoop in shadowed bends  
To pepper brambled snowy fields  
As burnished blood stains purple skin.

The moon adorns her starry hood  
To bottle sunlight spilled along  
The tunnels, trails, and railroad tracks.

The captains bind the black sheep taut  
To white ships sailing bloodied seas  
As princes barter flesh and bone.

The black-soled boy sees men arrive  
To slay the cow and steal her calves  
And leave the madman to be king.

The mammoth fears the mouse for whom  
The pebbles tumbling down the path  
Appear as boulders raising death.

The foreign lands are home to none  
For every king goes mad at once  
And slaughters hens inside their coop.

The Queen attends her young at home—  
And million children across the sea—  
Whose souls survived the white sun's whip.

art | Phoebe Yao

BY PAUL OSMOND



by  
Riley Kim

# new new girlfriend

[CW: suicide, gore]

I have a new girlfriend.

*Not much has changed.* My hands still slick themselves with sweat when I hold hands with her. My back still hurts and my shoulders still ache. My head still buzzes. *A lot has changed.* I am happier than I have been in a long time. I have someone to smoke with. I feel like I've been here before, either years ago or years in the future. She likes to hover right in front of my lips, teasing a kiss, and I can feel her breath on mine, brushing against me. I will miss this when it is gone.

*Too often I convince myself not much has changed.* I was so confident that falling in love was serene, like the rush of beta-endorphins that dulls the squeezing in my lower back after a drag on a Newport. My brain is drowning in acetylcholine and serotonin and I never really want to stop. I can feel it pushing up against the walls of this vessel, liquid as it always is, my gray matter shaping itself to be whatever twists another smile out of her face. *Too often I convince myself everything is different.* Falling in love is like killing yourself; I will never stop thinking about it, I chase it like a dream forgotten, I turn it around my head like tumbling stones. It has always been like this and it always will. I've been here before, I think. My white matter fragments itself, myelinated axons stretching meters long, trying to hold together shattered tissue strewn miles apart, scrambling to shout signals through rotten soma across long-separated synapses, screaming at me to hold onto this until my knuckles whiten and she rips herself from me, horrified.

*I find myself thinking too much about the future.* My mind works through millions of different outcomes, not so much as leaping to conclusions but rather right over them, jetting past them to draw wild fantasies and nightmares about what will happen to us. A trillion futures that don't exist flash before my eyes, too quick to process, but long enough to lodge a stone in my throat and tighten my chest. Blurry vignettes of loneliness take form as specters, will-o-wisps of pure angst glowing like supernovae in my eyes. I feel the red-hot tears stream down my face for no particular reason, and I go to work. *I find myself thinking too much about the past.*

I have an old new ~~girlfriend~~ partner.

It hardly matters if they were my old new partner or my old new boyfriend or my old mom or my old new dad or my old new aunt or my old new uncle or my old new teacher—we twisted together like caducean snakes, serpentine in our love. Every memory blurs together; melted film emulsions like I've left them stuck in the projector gate for too long. I rip into my skin and drip the past out via cannula, vacationing in Clearwater and windy, gleeful road trips to Sandy Hook mix into a slurry with nights of desperate pleading and unadulterated rage. Like wax I molded myself, and like wax I melted and intertwined with their fabric. I thought it would be like this forever, and I was right.

I have a new new girlfriend.

I have been here before, in the future, at least. I am unstuck in time, my mind reeling back and forth between a concrete-street past and a future like the top of a skyscraper. I fall from the future into the past like a jumper; I turn to red mist and my white matter stretches out again, and it happens all over. My past is the primer of a sabot slug round, the future the wall behind my head, and I am the sabot itself, spinning through the barrel of a Remington 870, slamming into my own skull in the present at 1,500 feet per second, ripping my skull open and slamming the fragments into the future. The bones bounce backwards, reforming my skull exactly, and the sabot flies back into the barrel, reverse-rifling back into the shell, and it happens all over.

Everything is different and everything is the same. I am sand being tossed off of dunes and she is the cloud that forms over the Gobi from those dunes, or maybe it is the opposite. It's a sunshower outside and my old new partner is the clouds and I am the tiger and my new new girlfriend is the fox. She glows like St. Elmo's fire off of the spires ripping through the dark, coronas of electrostatic discharge burning into my eyelids—I have never wanted to keep my eyes open more. I stand on my toes to press myself into her and I feel the sabot ripping through my hard palate and I feel myself lurch from the concrete streets onto the building's edge but I close my eyes and anchor myself into the Now and I will be adamant that everything is different, and that everything is the same, and I never want it to end.



by Elizabeth Chin

“Can I stop for a minute?”

I separated from the group and crept to the edge. The overlapping crescendos of oceanwaves coated the rocky coast with white foam. A pocket in the monotone blanket of clouds made way for a spotlight of sun off in the distance. I had not expected such beauty from this hidden cove in Salcombe. As if chained to a boulder beginning its descent into the void, I inched inexorably closer to the mountain’s ridge. There I sat, atop a rock, the wind threatening to push me from the ledge.

Feet dangling, I leaned into the beckoning of the ocean. The vastness of it all was shattering, the quilt of waves so harmonious

photo | Evelyn Hsy

fh 14



# *rock in Salcombe*

and simultaneously omnipotent. I closed my eyes. I was no longer on a cliff but engulfed by the water. I had escaped the wind. The sound of the waves rippled through me, gentle at first then quite unpleasantly violent. It thrashed, clawing its way into my skin, burrowing a hole in its path. I felt myself collapsing—the way a wave folds and caves into itself just as it’s about to reach its destination, its collective. In the ocean, a wave is but a remnant. Yet, the ocean is all the wave knows.

I looked to my skin, the traces of waves’ faded clawing, only visible by the refracted light. I was instilled with an unsettling tinge, as if a fruit was ripening and simultaneously rotting inside of me. Yet, I couldn’t tear myself from the rock. The ocean—the paragon of beauty and terror—held me still. Oh, to be a wave, bound to the ocean, finding its home after every crash. It seemed with that thought, the ocean loosened its grip. I was called back to the trail. As I got up and turned away, my eyes lingered on the lapping waves. The ocean had kept something of me and would stash it away amongst the waves for my imminent return, my longing to fall once more.

# PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

BY EMMA LOOH

I believe in ghosts  
because I still haunt  
my childhood home.  
My soul's forever  
bound to some unfinished  
business I left behind.

I never figured out  
if it was the neighbors,  
whose faces I still can't  
quite recognize, always  
obscured by a  
tall wooden fence,  
or if it was the hole  
that my slipper left in  
the glass door,  
or maybe even the  
TV in the garage,  
where I would sit and watch  
shows that mom would  
never let me watch in the  
living room.

All I know is when I drive past,  
staring at the weeds  
that overtake the front steps,  
I see myself sitting there  
a glass jar in one hand,  
full of dirt, bugs,  
and other undesirable things,  
the other hand, waving as I pass  
and even now,  
I can't help but wave back.

art | *Emma Mercure*

# Alphabet Soup

by Bea

“A, B, C...”

I sing the ABCs till I get to “D,”  
As I pour myself another drink

He explains how taking out a loan from our mortgage  
Will pay the bills that keep rising

I explain how the lump sum sits pretty in the account  
But just adds another ugly bill to pay off

“A, B, C...”

I pour myself another drink

He explains how he works two jobs and then some  
And how it’s been hard since we lost you

I explain how I’ll finish school soon and save us  
And how it’s been hard since we lost you

“A, B, C...”

And we end our argument,  
the way we always do:

I, more sober  
He, more sour

And I realize, “A”  
Always too late: “B”

I’d been filling his cup instead of mine “C”

art | Phoebe Yao

(the part of) *You whom I could not save*  
*Listen to me.*

*Can We agree* that  
We shouldn't need Handguns

to get morning coffee?  
It's been a year now

and yet, I find myself  
thinking about it, more than ever

(I know You do too).  
Like last week, in Boston

when a noise, a person  
Left me trembling in fear

heart racing eyes filled with tears  
I remembered what happened.

And I thought of You.

# A Letter to the Part of Us that Still Lives.

*After Matthew Olzmann | After Czesław Miłosz*

by Neeva Tull

I think maybe parts of me die a little more  
every day

I can't see You  
and make sure that you're ok.

But We're  
just a couple of kids

"Post-traumatic-stress-disorder"

And You were the one who  
Cut me off.

*It could have been* anyone,  
it could have been me

Because  
a coked out gangster doesn't care  
about picking his victims, he *doesn't*  
*distinguish between*  
the innocent and the innocent.  
I guess You were just  
on the wrong side  
of the car  
On the wrong night  
(but it had to be You).

I hate that  
Our bodies will always remember  
our terror  
saving it for later. For months,  
for years  
remembering  
to remind Us. It was October 22nd,  
a parking lot, 5am  
when We learned  
what it feels like  
to stare  
down the barrel of a gun

Sincerely,  
The one that ran away

photo | *Lauren Fischer*



# Candyman

by Jack Chung

Gaze into my eyes, like boba pearls sweet,  
tug softly at my cotton candy hair.  
My cherry lips you may sip, just as fair,  
or savor my smooth taffy skin, the heat  
your tongue radiates melting the petite  
saccharine nothings your sultry mouth dare  
speaks. Confections take time to rise, take care  
of my fillings first, and then you may eat.

Black licorice binds my heart, a discrete  
flavor that not many favor to taste.  
Please eat, my love is just yours, so my treats  
you take. Don't choke, knead my flesh nice and neat.  
Consume till content, each sticky bite laced  
with my yearning, leave no lone crumb to waste.

art | *Ally Lee*



# Grow a Spine

by Vic Rae

I never had much backbone  
Maybe I thought—  
if I whittled away  
the other parts of me  
I'd have enough for what was left.  
I whittled  
And whittled  
Until spine  
pressed  
against thin skin  
Until it tried  
to push  
through  
To break free of its confines  
A permanent bruise on my tailbone  
It was never enough  
to hold me up

art | *Emma Mercure*

# Apoptosis

by Jay Guo

is a form of Programmed Cell Death, a physiological process used to eliminate unwanted cells

## *stage 1: caspase cascade*

[signals  
[an event, tightly  
[coiled, tight  
[controlled  
[demolition,  
[dysregulation,  
[orchestrated  
[collapsing  
[caspases-3, -6, -7  
[a. k. a.  
[executioner

## *stage 3: apoptotic membrane blebbing*

[cells  
[in pain  
[grow  
[& change  
[become  
[irregular  
[like  
[a river  
[or  
[a thousand-  
[throated dream

## *stage 2: pyknosis*

[condensation  
[of blood  
[on limpid  
[windows  
[the bare  
[limbs of  
[October  
[straining,  
[crushing,  
[at this point,  
[irreversible

## *stage 4: cell fragmentation*

[piece  
[meal bodies  
[languish  
[in the sun,  
[steel-  
[dripping,  
[& rupture  
[don't worry  
[this rubble  
[is extraordinary  
[ily human

stage 5: efferocytosis

[removal  
[in an order  
[ly manner  
[no fuss,  
[no inflam  
[mation  
[a flutter  
[ing flag, an  
[other corpse  
[black piles  
[like tires

stage 6: necrosis

[peeks  
[a sun  
[bird from  
[the jag  
[ged sky  
[line  
[people in  
[cells in  
[the body's  
[a great place  
[to hide

everything living / made up / of cells / is that all? / programmed / dying  
/ are we cells? / are we only

phrases and vocabulary taken from:

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I sat on your floor  
and watched you on your bed  
I kneeled at your throne  
and waited for your blessing

When our heads are side by side  
my hair swims in yours  
I drown in your body  
as I invite you into my lungs

My breasts are clementines and yours are melons  
I eat oranges when I think of you  
they're our in between  
I peel us open  
and crawl inside our citrus skin  
I'm just a worm in our orchard

You gave me pills when I was sick  
I imagined you  
being washed down my throat  
and filling me up  
I opened my window and whispered to the wind  
hoping I'd catch a chill again

I think about you kissing *him*  
and my face gets itchy with stubble  
my voice deepens  
I'm whoever you need me to be.

Pick me apart...  
Let me see my blood beneath your nails  
massage my wounds with your words  
kiss the scars you leave behind  
clean my body with your sweat  
I'd lick it off of our skin  
and I'd never be thirsty again

Your mouth when you speak  
*fuck.*  
Your lips are tectonic plates shifting  
an earthquake inside of me

The words I speak are the ones you've wrote  
My name belongs to Us

When we part ways I'm not alone  
My body is Yours  
I take you with me  
And rejoice in our nomadic love

# Yours

by Kami Lou Harris  
photo | Mimi Zhang



# Peanut Butter: A History

by Emmy Wenstrup

The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. *You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.*

October 21, 1884

A pharmacist comes home after a long day of work. Where's dinner, he wonders. *Kathy!* He calls. A disgruntled woman enters carrying a glass of whiskey. *I didn't make dinner. Why ever not? I didn't feel like it today, okay Marc? All I ever do is cook for you, clean for you, jerk you off, listen to your favorite music—I don't even like Brahms, you dick.* Kathy's in one of her moods again. Marc settles her down with some spare opium and gets to work. I dunno, guess I'll throw some nuts on the stove. 40 minutes later, he draws up the patent paperwork.

March 4, 2007

A four-year-old girl cheerfully sits on the lap of her babysitter. She doesn't know why she's with the babysitter, or what her parents are doing. She cares only for the candy jar in front of her with its promise of joy, and for the water bottle just out of reach—the oasis promised by Isaiah. The babysitter allows her to choose two pieces of candy out of the jar. The girl picks a colorful plastic cylinder of Smarties as her first choice and a packet of Reece's Pieces as the second. As she holds them in her hands, the babysitter offers her another choice: she is to pick only one out of the two. Weighing the objects in her hands, she chooses wrong; on her first crunch, a new flavor floods her mouth, one she doesn't like. She hysterically itches at her whole body, like she's on fire, burned at the stake while Darwin looks on bearing the torch. She's red, she passes out, a man in a white coat and a black shirt pokes her with something too sharp, her arm stings with pain. She goes home and wonders why she never saw that babysitter again.

July 19, 2013

Test results come through. Some nuts are okay; some aren't (though peanuts are not nuts, biologically speaking, they are legumes; cashews are what's called a drupe seed). Mom is thrilled, and buys jars upon jars of almond butter and Nutella. *It's honestly better than the real stuff,* she says. The girl, now a mature adult of eleven, spits out the almond butter; it reminds her of her old self, of six years ago, original sin. She develops a fondness for Nutella, for eating it out of the jar, especially in large quantities in the company of her mother. Old family recipes, once forbidden, are dusted off.

April 12, 2017

It's a lazy Saturday night and her friend comes over. They put on an old episode of *Drag Race*. *For this week's mini-challenge, you'll have to boogie your booties to some of my best beats.* A song comes on that neither of them have heard. *Due to the fact that her thighs spread just like peanut peanut peanut (this sound continued for many beats) peanut butter peanut butter peanut butter.* A queen in quick-drag twerks with tremendous gusto, earning a shrill cheer from everyone in the room. Winner! Add to liked songs.

February 26, 2022

After a quick bathroom break, students file back into the auditorium and the projectionist loads the DVD for *The Exorcist*. The girl sits down next to her friend, laying out the snack options on the ground. After finishing their entrée of Cheez-Its, they crack open the dessert Tupperware. There's a deep melancholy attached to Rice Krispie treats: a family staple in the aughts, turned awry when some chef put butterscotch in with the sticky part. They take their bites at the same time, but the girl tastes something familiar and stops chewing to find her friend already looking at her. *Is that.... Peanut butter?* Her friend cuts her off. *Yeah, no, that is definitely peanut butter, right?* The girl runs out of the auditorium and scrapes out any trace of the dessert from her mouth.

May 15, 2023

A woman with a thick accent greets the girl on her first day of work with a question. *You know to make smoothie?* The girl stammers, the woman complains. Ice, a whole banana that *you can just sort of break apart with your fingers like this*, half a cup of whole milk. *Would you mind getting that white bucket over there?* The girl jogs to where her coworker points. Without skipping a beat, the girl hands her the bucket and, upon letting go, finds her fingers dragging through a soft, warm, wet substance. She looks and sees a pale brown on her fingers, right over a patch of eczema that she's scratched so hard it's turned into an open wound, actively bleeding and dripping pus. *I need a cup and a lid.* Yes, sir. The itch turns into pain turns into swelling and soreness. Sweat beads on her forehead and nausea churns in her stomach. *Supposed to wear gloves next time*, the woman says.

February 1, 2024

A girl comes home after a long day of work. *What should I have for lunch*, she wonders. *Chris?* She calls. *Hey*, he responds, bashfully, from the kitchen. He puts his sandwich down. *What are you having?* He need not answer; she sees the twin jars on the counter. He apologizes. It's fine, honestly. She grabs her jar of Nutella from the bottom left corner of her section in the pantry and a soup spoon, joining him in the kingdom of heaven.

photo | Jacob Hangen



ON ROSEMARY  
**on rosemary:**  
by Lauren Fischer

my cat  
attacks  
my cables—  
alack!

what did she do,  
decide to chew  
what she dreamed  
was a noodle?

art | Mimi Zhang

# Bisdak Bestie by Bea

Ganahan ko og saging.  
And I like hearing you sing.

Daghang salamat.  
For all that you bring.

photo | Evelyn Hsy

# Waves

Lift you up, and  
drive forcefully into the earth

Admire and value them, and one shall  
pass right through  
– uninterrupted

*As I do with my peers*  
– *Not my peers*

Well-traveled through  
mediums tepid and  
bracing

Along the ultimate ride  
*I remain*  
– alive

Each comber finds their own course to follow;  
to ebb and to flow,  
reaching daunting, frothy peaks;  
retreating to soft, dark valleys  
with notable potential



Arriving turquoise,  
a friendly tickle  
around the ankle  
if not a thunderous wall of  
obscure navy

by *Orin  
Slager*

*This is the end of  
my path, it won't be yours*

Above or below,  
there's a painless way  
through

Cower and be destroyed;  
inhale deeply,  
feel your chest swell  
with the rhythm

Glide right through unscathed  
joyful cries and laughter fill the breeze  
the next wave sincerely invited

A brilliant smile illuminates your face,  
Fine, crystal sand between your teeth

photo | *Jacob Hangen*

# Father

My father left the year I thought about drowning.

It was only a few months ago that I thought about stepping over a barrier at the docks. Only a few months since I considered falling into the ocean, even though I to this day do not know how to swim.

The silence at the dinner table was too thick to cut with a knife, but a razor blade may have sufficed.

My father doesn't cry, but that night a river flowed from his eyes while mommy explained that daddy wouldn't be living with us anymore. His words must have washed away with those tears.

I used to think my father was brave. But that night, my mother spoke for him. And my father...

He looked like hell. That is, if hell had frozen over and been reheated in the microwave.

When the silence fell, my family scattered.

Brother and sister to their rooms. Mother to the computer nook. Father to the couch. And me, floating in between.

I went from person to person, room to room.

"It'll be okay," I said.

"It'll be okay," I lied.

When he was younger, my father was in an accident. His heart stopped at the hospital.

I wonder if it felt like this.

Everyone was crying. Well, everyone but my mother and me. She was treading water. I was drowning.

I gave my father my most prized possession—a hand-painted giraffe statuette. I was worried he would forget about me. About us. I wanted to give him something to remember me by. So he wouldn't forget the children he left behind, or the wife he had wronged.

A boy and a girl and something in-between. A mother who deserved better. I never saw that giraffe again.

I used to wonder if I could ever see my father the same. I know now that it is impossible. Usually, when people say ‘impossible’, they mean ‘improbable’. Not this time.

A few weeks, maybe months, after he left, my mom and I drove alone to a hiking trail. I put on my mom’s Carrie Underwood CD. She cried when “Just a Dream” played. I changed the music.

My father came back some time later. A year, maybe two. He asked me and my siblings, “What do you think of Daddy coming home?”

12 years of life had not prepared me for this question.

I thought, *no no no no... mother just started smiling again*. I thought, *I can never trust you again*. But the words stuck in my throat.

I smiled at him. I was drowning.

My father came back. It means something, right? He likes to buy me things. We never had spending money when he was gone.

The year my father left was the year I learned to be hungry but not wanting.

Seven and a half years have passed. I still don’t trust him.

It occurs to me that maybe I fabricated most of this memory. I don’t remember my childhood well. Remembering feels like drowning.

photo | *Evelyn Hsy*

by  
Vic  
Rae

# amtrak poems 01

by Anna  
Zhang

lone duck in the waters,

far from shore

and far from

docks.

in the waves, is she lonely too?  
or is the wind just right  
for flying?



photo | *Newt Gordon-Rein*

photo | *Evelyn Hsy*

# *Excess Time*

never seems to exist. when it  
does, will stress ease,  
turn into  
bliss?  
is time ever  
irrelevant? Grass is  
greenest with peace; water; light

*by Orrin Slager*

# *letting february recover my form*

*by Megan Amero*

stood out on the front porch and  
let myself freeze, asked  
how long would it take for the chill  
to eat me alive?  
too long today, far too long.

my fingers, aching  
pursuant to a body that does not know itself  
what is it like to know yourself?  
oh, slow-cooker world, i'm all shredding apart

i'm doing an experiment, i tell myself  
*it's alright, then*  
*nothing is ridiculous if you do it for a reason.*

choking back the edge of sleep  
i feel realest at night  
high on cold air outside my window  
that first breath is one of the few things  
home does better than here

my body, vibrating  
apart, left hand spinning at my side  
as if i could shake out the piece of myself  
that cries out so so charybdis hungry

photo | *Lauren Fischer*

this won't work if anyone sees it happen, i say  
nodding, *that makes sense—*  
*then even i won't look.*

midriff bare on pain of death because i am a  
new england girl, chest freezing solid under moonlight  
this is the only way i know to quiet my particles,  
to remind myself: i am living in the world,  
life's tapestry is woven into me

my hair, whirling  
i feel the wind more often than flesh  
after high school i couldn't stand the feeling  
of wearing it loose, trailing like a question down my back

hand through the mail slot, wiggling my fingers,  
*did you lock yourself out?*  
*should you be let back in?*

••

street lights and civilization feel like  
an insult: give me back my dirt road potholes  
all those ways you can drown off the map  
nothing spurs the imagination like needing to go and  
wanting to return, hoping home will catch you and let you fall

my breath, steaming  
this gas escaping me is not myself, i am  
more than air, my words coalescing into  
a shape i'm learning to love

yes, i wasn't trying to leave!  
*then come in, already*  
*before you catch frostbite for an idea.*

# leeches

[CW: gore]

by Megan Amero

once gifted a book of historical fiction, i was drawn to the leeches. imagined them sucker-faced to the sensitive skin of my thighs, shuddered at the thought of ripping them free, hearing them plunk in the iron pail where the doctor would discard their sated bodies. couldn't stop thinking of the evil spirits and malodorous humors rotting my blood, thought it's right that they should drink.

never wanted a cullen lovebite, just those tiny medics. i trust their discerning mouths far more than my own, unkissed and fruitlessly flapping. when those corset-bound ladies were drained, they were cured. i think if i lived in their times a breeze would knock me down, a spot of thunder would inspire nervous fits. i'd have a taste for fainting, feeding the desire to disappear away from my body, hoping i looked beautiful in the performance of it. i'd push it right to the edge of hysteria, then claw myself back to control, scrabbling through the mud and letting each little tooth find its home in my flesh.

photo | *Evelyn Hsy*

# On Learning to Catch a Bullet

by William Zhuang

There is a monster within each heart growing  
surely towards violence. The pork that keeps rising  
in price the rain that never ends the stupid neighbor  
who refuses to park in any spot that isn't yours the guy  
in the lecture hall who wouldn't stop tapping his boots  
to the rhythm of nothing until the sound is stuck like a piece  
of gum chewed rid of flavor yet sticky just the same

I remember looking down torn stalks of corn at deer  
who always dash at the first sight of a man and jump  
across the ditches. They are hunted over the summer  
when no one looks through these fields  
for serenity no one to cry over the doe studded  
with metal its head held up by the jaws life dripping  
loose into corn-rooted soil

I have kept my body shut and now I'm flooding  
from the holes plugged up with nicotine lemon poppy muffins  
and doom-scrolling on Instagram reels and now I try to learn  
being honest without pity as I watch parts of me unravel  
from flesh to threads of breath taken believing there was never  
a choice to be made

How do we talk about violence when every instant is dew  
feeding the monster? I am afraid of guns I am afraid  
of bullets against ribs I am afraid of those who find synonyms  
on a spectrum between lethal and leisure. A deer will never choose  
to love me as I hold out an apple. They can no longer tell what I offer  
is not in the shape of a bullet

photo | Evelyn Hsu



by  
Oren Cohen

# Words on Paper

words on paper  
words in chalk  
words on sidewalks  
words of poetry

Poetry 's  
expelling the thoughts  
from the mind  
words on s  
i walks  
d  
e  
beat  
down on the beautiful-  
head AcHeS left- untouched  
wondering if trees really alone -  
Fall in the forest

if words in chalk were . . . .

... not written                      gazing                      ptic                      i  
   stars                      des                      g                      s  
   under                      of cry                      n

we find sol-  
ace in words on paper;

Words

On

Paper

-----are all-----we have-----left----->

if nothing  
else exists  
then words on paper can.

*photo | Evelyn Hsy*

# Dog

In Spring, Dogwood trees bloom white like patched wounds.

Pungent drafts of rotting fish dog our senses.

Flies hover and smother where we'd see the

Crippled blossoms dotted with carcasses,

Maggots that live to die on the dogwood tree.

Like wounds that fester,

Left leaking pus unpestered,

Bleeding crimson only when air is cold enough to bite,

And when jeering words strike hard enough to smite,

In the shadow of the dogwood tree, I lie sequestered.

There's nowhere to go but the dogwood tree,

Where my tears traced the wood

And my dogs sank teeth into the soil they could.

There's nowhere to go but the dogwood tree,

Where I lick my wounds and patch them

to the chilling tone of the Autumn breeze.

by Phoebe Yao

fh 42

# MOTHER MARY

BY BEA

Seen through the stained glass window

of the hospital room

she left this world

cradled

by her 7 babies

standing in their multicolored suit jackets

they shrouded her

the way flowers hug Mother Mary.

photo | *Mimi Zhang*



# *You're just Gay*

by Oren Cohen

art | *Phoebe Yao*

“How many times have you looked at me that way? You’re fucking gay.”  
No, not gay in the *happy way*, you’re just gay.

Uncross your mindset and re-shave those hairs.

“Dad’s getting home late tonight, be on your best behavior,” just don’t be gay.

Vincent-nicholas never seemed to care when they promised  
to teach me to be cool – (rule #1: at school, never be gay).

I’m the smart kid, not the sports kind, (not the friends kind),  
If only I could be better – *what does it mean when a person’s gay?*

Pop songs while piercing my earring – brother at the dinner table.  
(He’s laughing that stupid fucking laugh), no one even said gay.

Mom said it’s time to come out; how could she lose her glasses-  
as I explain the difference between *sickness* and *suicide*. She can’t seem to say gay.

Looking back at pictures – (hating how I crossed my legs too) –  
A shame I couldn’t have played sports sooner. I swear, not in *that way*, but I am gay.

i am so afraid to lose it all . what if all the jewelry and the bracelets and the charms  
fall and break. I feel so fucking small. How could all of me be the simple letters of “I’m gay”.

I’m bi -by the way. (I know no one asked, but) It was important for me to say.  
If I don’t say it, then no one else will. “Hey—are you into me?! Since, you know, you’re gay.”

He looked at me, I smiled at him. 10 minutes later, on the side of the street!  
Best gay brag I’ve ever told since then. It’s okay *ask* I’m basically gay.

(Dad hugged me for the first time today) –:– *Ugh the gays are sooo stupid*. Let me explain to you  
**love**, while I tell you about the French guy I **fucked** yesterday. Trust me! I’m gay.

Giggling bubbles hardening to that cheap rusting silver. Warmth and iron poison in her figure.  
too long talks in dance classes Dad never dreamed of. A beautiful woman, but I *swear* I’m gay.

I still have never found love – only myself through the thousand hand-typed sad sonnets.  
Oh, open-minded Oren, too bad you so obsess – with being happy – you’re just gay.

# Rat Story

by Rose Hollander

"Mom, I hate this place," the six-year-old said. "There's forty people in front of us in line. The bagels suck. There's rats."

"That's enough, Jack," said his mother. "This is a nice place. There are no rats."

Jack turned and looked directly at a rat. He squealed and pointed. "Mom, look! A rat!"

As Jack's mother got the manager and the line fell into chaos, the rat was trembling. A small gray fellow with neat whiskers, he had lived a life of adventure. He had searched for crumbs in highly guarded bagel shops, wandered criss-crossing streets, even spoken to other creatures. But now, under the spotlight of Jack's chubby finger, he became someone. He became a Rat. It was enough to make anyone's whiskers shake.

#

Customers scattered. As the line dissolved around him, the rat ran to the door. There were no mad chefs with cleavers, no exterminators yet, but he knew from stories that he had little time to escape. The rat scampered out the door and ran down the sidewalk. His heart was beating fast. This was a symptom of adrenaline, of course, but something else felt different. Had the sun shone like this before?

The scent of a trash can beckoned the rat like freshly baked scones call out to a human. On the trash can was a poster. For a moment the rat thought he was looking into a reflective window, for the poster showed a picture of a creature much like him. It was gray and pointy and its eyes glistened. There were differences, though: this creature's whiskers were unkempt, and jagged teeth hung out of its mouth. The real rat would have been scared if he were not a rat. Instead, he knew this creature was a brother. The poster read: "RAT-FREE NYC".

Why, that is what the little boy called me, thought the rat. The poster calls my brother a rat. We must both be rats. Our characteristics somehow comprise rathood.

He ignored the rest of the poster's text and went along with a new spring in his scamper.

#

After a few blocks, he spotted another brotherly creature. This one must also be a rat, he thought.

"Hey, rat," he said quietly.

The creature did not turn.

"Hey, you," he said, a little louder.

The creature turned and wrinkled his snout. "I'm busy," he said. "What's the problem?"

"I've discovered something. I don't know exactly what it means but..."

"Spit it out already," said the creature.

"I think," said the rat. "I think I am a rat. And so are you."


"So what if we're rats," said the creature. "Does it bring us more food? More shadows to cool us?"

The rat was shocked. "Don't you even want to know what it means?"

"Not particularly," said the creature, and he started to walk away.

After a moment of staring at the creature's retreating back, the rat had an idea. "But suppose we were both rats. Then, if I said, 'Hey, rat!' to you, you could turn around and say, 'What's up?' You would know I was talking to you."

The creature turned back to give him a look of pity. "There's no else for meters," he said. "When you said 'Hey, you,' I knew perfectly well who you were talking to. Then I made the mistake of turning around and joining this idiotic conversation." With that, the creature scampered away.



The rat sat for a while and considered. It was starting to get chilly. He should be looking for a place to sleep. Suddenly, a pigeon landed right in front of him.

“Hello!” squawked the pigeon. “I could see from the sky how glum you look. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Not really,” said the rat. “I’ve had a rough day. I could tell you the whole story.”

“I love stories,” said the pigeon, and he listened patiently as the rat told him everything. Then he gave his two cents. “That other creature was out of line,” the pigeon said. “He should have listened patiently. Your story is interesting. If you were a rat, that would be interesting indeed.”

“But it seems like I am a rat,” said the rat. “All evidence suggests that I am.”

“The word of one little boy,” said the pigeon. “And an advertisement.”

“Why should they lie?”

“Humans tell lies for at least an hour a day,” said the pigeon. “Unless they work in advertising. Then it’s from 9am to 5pm.”

“How are you so wise?” said the rat.

“It’s because I am a pigeon,” said the pigeon. “I see everything.”

“But how do you know you are a pigeon?”

“I have at least 40 independent sources telling me so.”

“That does sound more convincing,” admitted the rat.

The pigeon looked at the sky. “It darkens,” he said. “I have to go. I’m sorry if you are still glum. I wish you all the best.” Without another word of wisdom, he flew away.

#

The sun was setting now. The rat didn’t know what to call himself anymore. In a way it didn’t matter what he was called, because he was alone. No one needed to call him anything. He found a few newspapers and made a makeshift nest in an alleyway. The nest was snug, but he felt cold. One more newspaper, he thought. That’s what this nest needs.

As he searched the alleyway for another newspaper, he spotted another creature. After his exhausting day, he didn’t feel much like conversation. But then she turned around. She looked exactly like him. Her whiskers were so tame he thought of human gel. “Oh!” she said. “Fancy seeing another rat here.”

The rat’s heart stopped beating. “What did you call me?”

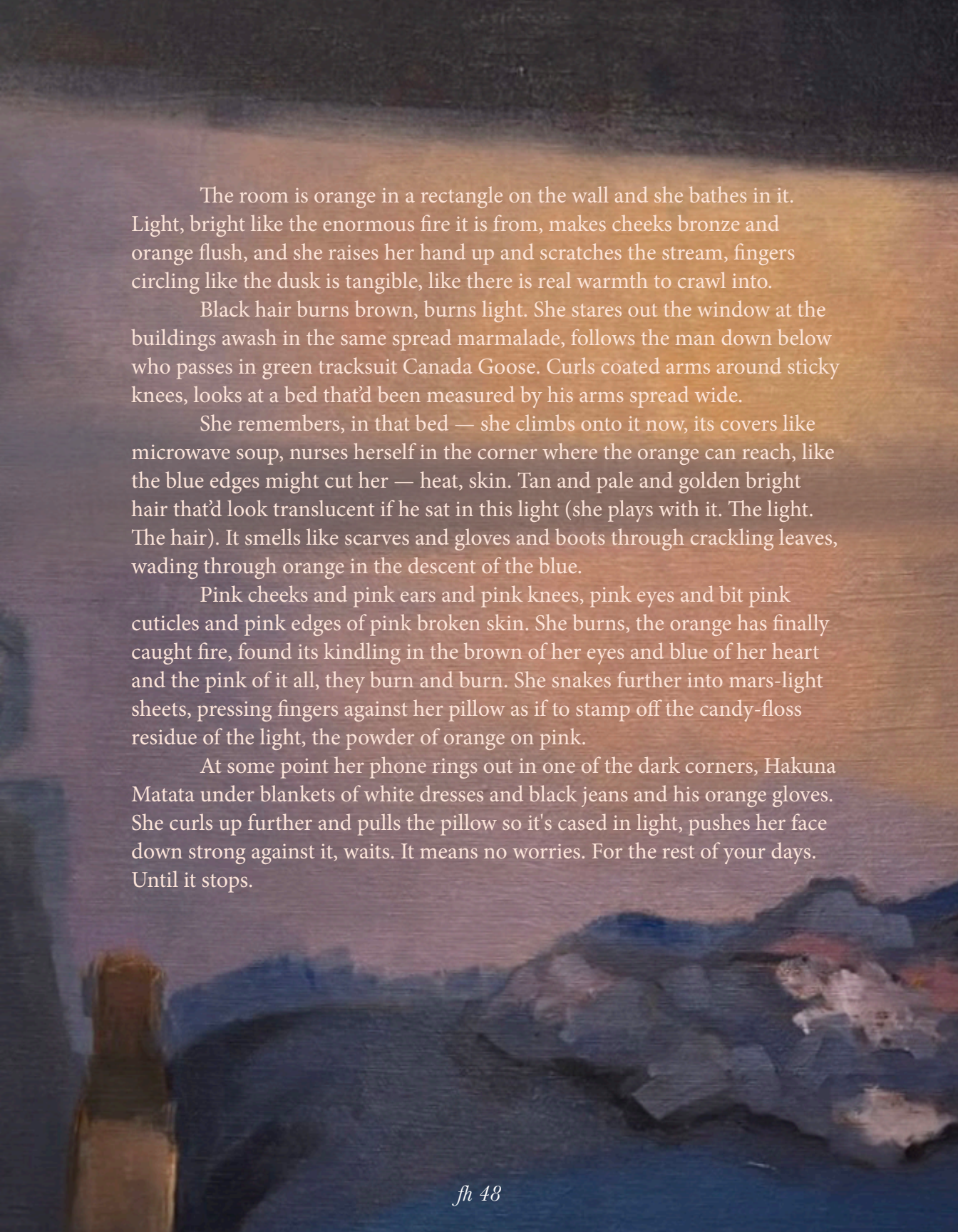
“I called you a rat,” she said. “Haven’t you seen the posters?”

“Yes,” he said. “I have! And a little boy pointed and told me so. But then there was another creature, and a pigeon—”

“Pigeons don’t know anything about life down here,” she said. “They come for what they need and then take to the skies.”

“And you?”

“I live here,” she said. “Now let me show you where I get my newspapers.”



The room is orange in a rectangle on the wall and she bathes in it. Light, bright like the enormous fire it is from, makes cheeks bronze and orange flush, and she raises her hand up and scratches the stream, fingers circling like the dusk is tangible, like there is real warmth to crawl into.

Black hair burns brown, burns light. She stares out the window at the buildings awash in the same spread marmalade, follows the man down below who passes in green tracksuit Canada Goose. Curls coated arms around sticky knees, looks at a bed that'd been measured by his arms spread wide.

She remembers, in that bed — she climbs onto it now, its covers like microwave soup, nurses herself in the corner where the orange can reach, like the blue edges might cut her — heat, skin. Tan and pale and golden bright hair that'd look translucent if he sat in this light (she plays with it. The light. The hair). It smells like scarves and gloves and boots through crackling leaves, wading through orange in the descent of the blue.

Pink cheeks and pink ears and pink knees, pink eyes and bit pink cuticles and pink edges of pink broken skin. She burns, the orange has finally caught fire, found its kindling in the brown of her eyes and blue of her heart and the pink of it all, they burn and burn. She snakes further into mars-light sheets, pressing fingers against her pillow as if to stamp off the candy-floss residue of the light, the powder of orange on pink.

At some point her phone rings out in one of the dark corners, Hakuna Matata under blankets of white dresses and black jeans and his orange gloves. She curls up further and pulls the pillow so it's cased in light, pushes her face down strong against it, waits. It means no worries. For the rest of your days. Until it stops.



# Orange

by  
Evelyn Hsy

art | Phoebe Yao

The light is mellowing now into yellow and she is  
skinned with it. Coat of orange shed to raw, she is bared  
now, covered in solidified fat. Her rectangle grows slowly  
blue, and once again she is as the rest of her room, cold,  
dark. Petting the dust that'd been left by the brilliant light.

*Jn*