A painting of a staircase with a dog on a chair. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light. A wooden staircase with a decorative railing featuring 'X' patterns ascends from the right. In the foreground, a dark wooden chair with a high, curved backrest sits on a light-colored floor. A small, fluffy dog with white and brown fur is curled up on the chair's seat, looking towards the viewer. The background wall is a pale, textured yellow. The overall mood is quiet and intimate.

The  
**Crucible**

2023-2024

# THE CRUCIBLE

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Earlham's Literary & Visual Art Magazine

# THE CRUCIBLE

Earlham College, 801 National Road West, Richmond, IN 47374

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*Home* by Reeti Joshi

## Acknowledgments

The Editors would like to thank the Earlham College English Department and especially Onyinye Ihezukwu and Michael Weinstein for both instruction and aid in the creation of this magazine. We would also like to thank Earlham College Writing Center and previous volunteers Maxine Fox and Isabelle Fisher.

Please visit our website to see more student work and news about *The Crucible*:  
<https://thecrucible.earlham.edu>

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Please join us in a moment of silence.

Thank you.

# EDITORIAL NOTE

Dear friends,

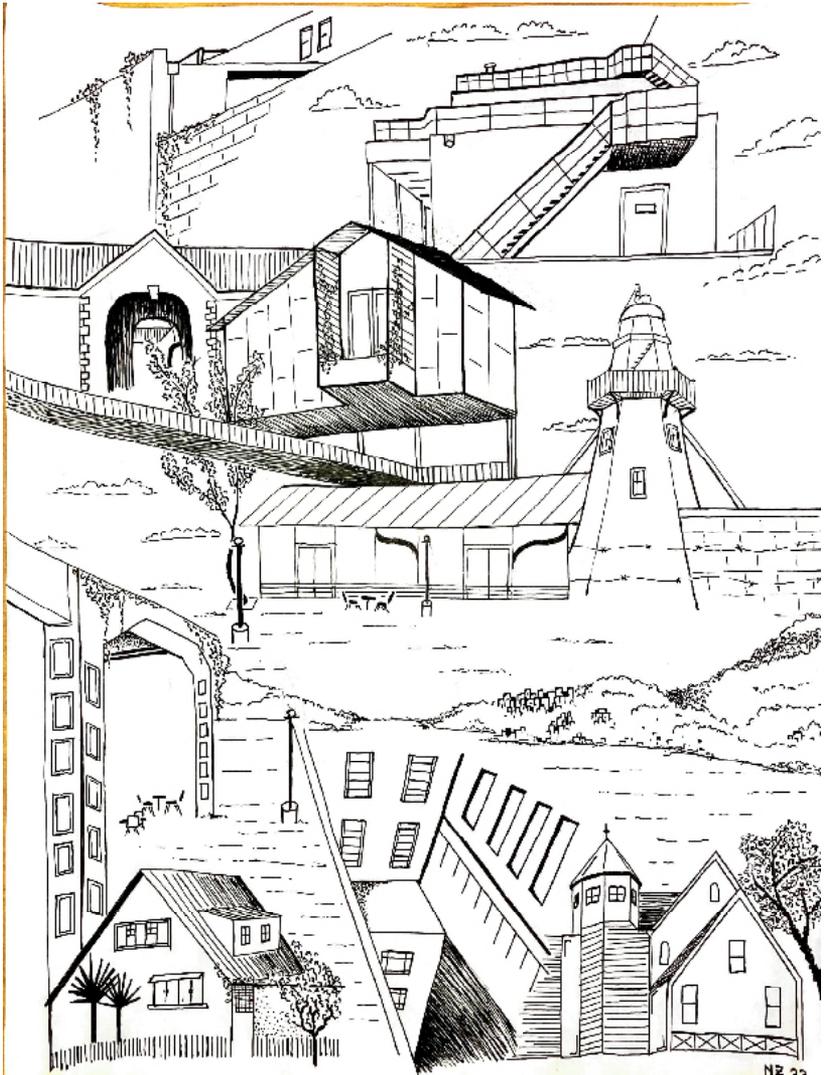
Welcome to the 2023-2024 edition of *The Crucible*! As every year, this magazine is an archive of the creative processes and the daily lives of the Earlham College student body. Our editing team has curated exhibits within the magazine showcasing the intricacies of place, mind, and body. As your editors, we are the architects of a museum housing the work of our brilliant students. Within these pages, you will find a moving collection of poetry, fiction, art in varied mediums – even a non-fiction essay! Each of these pieces is a revelation, offering insight into the way our students see and process the world around them.

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This was a busy (and stressful) year for many, so we truly appreciate all the students who sent us their work, wrote in our workshops, and performed at our open mic nights. Your time and dedication is appreciated. Because of your involvement, we've enjoyed an incredibly fruitful year at *The Crucible*. Watching the submissions roll in was a delightful experience that brought us together as editors, creatives, and friends!

This editor's note is your ticket into the world of our students' magazine. Join us on a tour of their creative endeavours.

Your editors,  
Eliza, K, Leila, and Tamarianna



Views of Aotearoa  
Hazel Jordan

# Threshold

Sam Stassen

At night I stare at the door at the end of the hall.

I sit at the bend, below the window,

my youngest sister dances past

humming sweet memories.

My older brother steps out and yells at her,

just like he used to yell at me.

Soon my older sister will emerge,

her days are long and regimented,

a series of promises fulfilled.

My other younger sister will not wake for a while,

When she does she'll get lost in town.

The sun is rising now,

8 its golden hand stretches across the floor,

it reaches for the knob

beyond lies only the empty space

Left by the man who read me stories

# I'm an alien

## Princess Ignoma

Oh, I'm an alien

I'm a legal alien

I'm an African in Richmond

Richmond, more like roots lost

Sent halfway across the world, lost in thoughts

My accent, too strong, very hard to miss

Repeat, repeat, repeat my professors say

Thank God I don't get pissed

On the tv, Africa is depicted as green, wildlife green.

But no, those pastures aren't green enough for me.

I'm optimistic, I want to be clad in a white coat cutting and  
stitching.

So I thank God, the coat he cut up for me is not too big.

Cause there are other brown-skinned aliens, exploring this galaxy, I  
am not alone.

But some may contest, no romantic love means loneliness.

But they seem to forget, I'm an alien in space.

Even gravity fights each day but I still have my way.

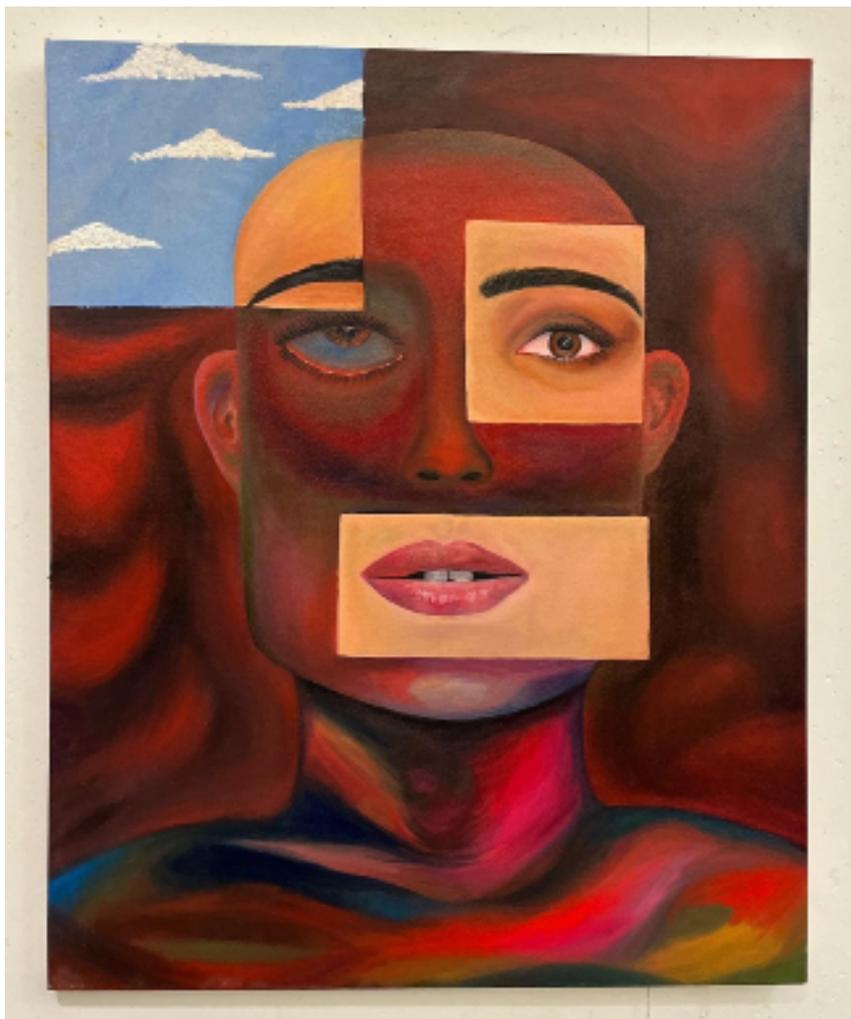
It's impossible to dismiss that there are less opportunities for aliens  
of my skin.

But at least I'm in space, a green-pastured space.

I'm an alien in space,

I have a choice to look at the sun and moon each day.

A million, billion, trillion, things could go wrong but I still choose  
the look of the sun.



Untitled  
Leiny D. Aguilar

# Tresses Reminisce

Miyu Enomoto

When my hair becomes long,  
It makes me remember my country, Japan.  
There comes a weird type of feeling along.  
The atmosphere of people do see and scan,

Where people act the same and dress similarly,  
and here comes a strain on my side.  
It evaporates my memory of a country like a colorful pallet,  
and nail me onto this real life where I abide.

Women with perfect makeup and a frilly dress,  
Men with long narrow pants and wavy mash hair.  
Long silky-haired lady with blessing,  
though others can't even breathe in air.

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No matter how I see here gloomy cloud,  
I still have a place where I am allowed.



Sunday Basking  
Mateo Quiñonez

## Pausing

Talia Carter

“There’s nothing worse than waking up next to that mountain every morning. I can’t see anything out that window except that mountain fucking inches from my face. Except when a bird flies by, but usually they fly lower,” he laughed at his joke, but became silent as he gazed down at the sidewalk through the blinds. “I can’t even see the colors of their shirts,” he said, “they’re too far.” Julian pondered the depth of his statement for a moment. “Do you ever look at them?” He turned around to see the bed was empty. Milo’s tail flitted about through the doorway. He followed him to the living room where Milo settled on a pile of small boxes.

Julian hadn’t lived there for long, only four months. But it had somehow fallen on him to pack the whole place up that weekend before Anna came back. He would carry the mattress and the dinnerware and all the rugs, the cat’s litter box and all his slobber-crust-ed toys, and Anna would carry her grief. Her grief for... someone. He wasn’t really sure. A great-aunt, perhaps. Whoever it was, he resented them for dying the week before his thirtieth birthday. He knew Anna had booked his favorite bar for a private party and guessed that she’d have them playing the Chili Peppers all night long. Junior’s was a jazz bar he liked to go to when he felt like wearing shoes with laces and sitting on his balls in tight jeans all night. Even though Anna was careless enough to leave her Facebook messages open, exposing the whole thing, he wasn’t angry. But then aunt Peggy kicked the bucket and Anna had to drive out to Boulder to

to make sure she got her money, so no party.

Peggy or whoever had apparently lived the Depression lifestyle, washing plastic wrap and eating only oatmeal and bologna sandwiches for the last sixty years. He didn't know how much money she had been sitting on but it was practically a lifetime's worth. Anna wanted to use this money to move out to the mountains. She'd found a nice cabin sort of thing for them and would take Julian skiing on weekends. Julian didn't really like skiing or the mountains. He preferred to be one of the colorless dots on the sidewalk.

He put the coffee pot on and waited for his thirty milligrams of adderall to kick in. As he sat there on the sofa staring out at that vastness, he fingered through Anna's coffee table books. Anna had already opened and labeled most of the boxes. She'd wiped the counters, too. Actually, she'd cleaned the whole apartment up and down before leaving, even though it would get filthy again in the move. But she wanted "enough space for the mess."

Julian looked at all the boxes neatly laid out. The ones for his things had labels like "Toys" and "Boy stuff." He began tossing items from the living room into various boxes. "Small electronics," "Cables," "Coffee table." He wasn't exactly sure where the PS3 went so he put it in his own box. Then he rearranged things and put his Legos and CDs in his box, too. Then he gathered all his things from the living room and put them in their own boxes. The books sat on the table. Julian laughed as he noticed a box labeled "Sexy things."

Did she know how ridiculous she sounded? Nothing was ever sexy that claimed to be sexy. Anna had this way about her where she'd always say how things were. The day they met she'd introduced herself as Annabeth Stiller and shook his hand. "Sorry, I'm a little awkward," she'd said. He wasn't sure at first that he could stand to be around someone like her, but after the first time they had sex she told him nobody had ever fucked her like that before and asked if he wanted her to use her mouth the next time. That was sexy. "Sexy things" wasn't. She used to be more sexy but in the last year or so she'd withered a little. She lived on the thirtieth floor of the Paperbox and now only left for shopping and work. She always used to shop at the Trader Joe's but had recently become disturbed by the friendliness of the employees so she switched to the Walmart across town. That was less overwhelming in her little world.

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He missed her for a moment, thinking about that first time and some of the ones after that. She was nineteen back then, now twenty-three. Her hips had filled out in those four years, which he liked, but her breasts were lower and her nipples were wider. She'd gained probably twenty pounds in the last year, and he didn't mind that, but he did think about the days when her face was pulled tight all the way back to her ears. He missed tucking her tight, golden curls behind her ears. Since he'd moved in, she stopped taking the time to condition her hair or get her highlights done and he thought she looked duller.

She loved him more than anything, though. He knew she

thought about him constantly. She made him feel like the most interesting person in the room and he knew she would never leave him. He savored that thought for a moment, that she was his forever. He caught himself, realizing he'd been staring out the window for some time, the sun glaring off the side of Mount Superior into his eyes. Just then his phone buzzed. It was late in the day for her to text him the first time, so he thought she must still be driving. He watched his phone slide around on the table until it stopped buzzing, then he flipped it open and waited for the voicemail. It was just easier that way because she could go on about things. She'd have ten things to say about each thing he said to her, so he helped her get to her own point by letting her talk to herself.

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“Hey baby, I’m really sorry I know you’re so busy, but the movers are outside and they’re just wondering where you are right now since we booked them for half an hour ago. Just letting you know, baby. Also, sorry, can you please make sure the big stuff goes in first, and also make sure the dinner table gets covered? That was Pauline’s and it’s Victorian. I’m almost to Boulder. I had to stop because the wipers weren’t working and I was having a panic attack on the highway but I’m okay now so don’t worry. Let me know when you get this. I love you so much. Wish you were here. Bye.”

Julian was already out the door by the end of the message. The elevator would take nearly five minutes to reach the thirtieth floor, so he threw himself down the stairs, his house shoes smacking against the cement and echoing throughout

the tremendous height of the building. When he reached the ground floor alley he explained to the movers that they would not be ready and to send the truck back. He tried to negotiate a later time, but when the movers realized he meant days later, they left.

When he got back to the apartment Milo was sitting on the living room windowsill. He arched his back and lifted his tail and a stream of dark urine sprayed out against the window. Julian let out an exasperated sigh and dialed up Anna. She picked up almost immediately.

“Babe, did you get my message?” she asked.

“Yeah, don’t worry,” he winced at his lie and massaged a bulging vein on his temple. “Milo peed,” he said.

“Okay,” Anna said.

“On the window. He sprayed it on the window.”

“So clean it.”

“How?”

“Jesus, I don’t know. With a paper towel?”

“It’s disgusting.”

“Fine, don’t worry about it. I’ll get it when I come back on Monday.”

“I miss you.”

“I miss you, too.”

“I was thinking about when we move in, you could pull that move you did after our first date. The, uh, double feature?” He said, a slight shake in his voice. He waited for a response.

“Julian, I can’t think about that stuff right now, please,”



Bugs - Exoskeletal Series  
**Marshall Tatum**  
*Ceramic*

Anna said after several deep sighs.

“I was just complimenting you.”

“I have to go. I see my parents. Love you.”

“Ok, bye.”

“Are you mad at me?”

“What? Jesus, no, Anna. You can chill.”

There was a pause. Usually Julian got excellent reception in the apartment. “Hello? Did you cut out?” he asked. Then he heard the quiet sobbing on the other side.

“No,” she whimpered, “I just feel like you don’t care about any of this. Like you’re just going along.”

“Baby, where did this come from? Why are you crying?” he asked.

“I don’t know, I’m sorry I’m so messy. If you want to leave, just leave. I told you you don’t have to come with me.”

“Baby, don’t worry. I love you so much. I’m just stressed about packing and shit. You’re okay. I think you’re just fucked up about Paula,” his words lilted and he pouted as if he were really rubbing her back. He was used to using this tone with her.

“Pauline. I really have to go. Bye.” She hung up. He continued to massage his temples before taking in a sharp breath of air. He looked wide at Milo.

“Damn!” he said, “You’re both on my ass today!” He grabbed a large handful of paper towels and smeared the mess across the window.

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That night Anna called him two more times. Once to let him speak with her mother and once before bed to let him know she was wearing his boxers and she really did want to do a “double feature” and she was sorry. Julian packed a few kitchen things and threw the cat things in a corner before he went to sleep.

He woke up to a text message. “Love you! xo” accompanied by a picture of what had become of his boxers. The mountain shone light through the blinds in a stripe pattern across the room, and it drew his eyes to a poster on the wall. The Beatles, *Yellow Submarine*. He looked at their four faces and thought about how miserable they must have been on that submarine, far away from any human life, darkness spilling in through the windows, cramped up and forced to look at each others’ faces all day. He looked at the expression on Ringo Starr’s face, drawn up in a smug, two-dimensional smile. *He must want to kill himself*, he thought.

He looked at the picture on his phone of the girl wearing dirty boxers, creased from sleep and sweat. He looked at her things all over the walls and on the floor, on every shelf. He heard her cat in the other room, surely jingling about with some piece of lint, and he tried to imagine seeing that stuff, hearing that cat every day forever, just with more mountain.

That day he really did pack everything away. He got all of his things in their boxes and all of her things in hers. He took down everything from the walls and left only the microwave and a single lamp plugged in. He was almost ready. At night

he made himself some chicken and rice and got his fourth call of the day from Anna. She'd called him earlier while she was doing her makeup and also twice because she got nervous driving and needed to be talked down. As he sat down at the dining table that was now bare, he having packed the table cloth, he got a call from Anna and picked up hoping she'd be feeling excitable, "Hey, baby."

"You turned away the movers? Why?" she shouted.

"Fuck, babe I'm so sorry. I wasn't finished."

"Julian, oh my god," she moaned, "Do you know that cost us six hundred dollars?"

"I know and I'm sorry but I just wasn't ready, there was nothing to put in the truck."

"You mean you hadn't even started? How much do you have now?"

"Jesus, like almost all of it! It's really hard!" he huffed. She waited a moment. She'd been pausing more and more lately. Sometimes it seemed to him that most of their conversations were mostly her pauses. He would catch her paused sometimes, staring into the coffee pot or up at the ceiling in bed late at night.

"I don't want to argue," she said quietly, "But why wouldn't you tell me if you weren't finished?" she pleaded.

"I didn't want to stress you out, sorry!" Julian said. He could imagine Anna tossing her head back, her curls bobbing.

"I'm sorry babe. Are you mad?" He asked. She sighed.

"No," she said, "I understand. You were overwhelmed. I

should have stayed there to help you.”

“Thanks. It is really hard. I don’t know where anything goes and there’s all this stuff! All your stuff,” he said, “I don’t know what to do with myself here. I wish you came back.” Julian sniffled a little, realizing he’d been holding his eyes open. He heard her weeping again but didn’t say anything. They stayed like that for several minutes. He sat in the empty kitchen in the lowlight as she cried for him, five hundred miles away.

The next morning Julian awoke with a pit in his stomach. It was Monday. Anna would be coming back that evening. Back to their empty apartment full of boxes. She would help him, show him where things went, how to clean the floors so they weren’t sticky. And he’d be done sleeping on the raw mattress. He laid in bed with his face buried in it. He remembered one of the first times he’d come over to her apartment. They’d laid in that bed together and just stared at each other. He felt a wave of embarrassment wash over him thinking how that must have looked to God. How pathetic. He sat up quickly as he felt a sudden vertigo. He experienced this sometimes when he remembered how high up he was. He faced the submarine, now leaning against the wall in the corner next to “Sexy things.”

“Sexy things” was still open and empty. He couldn’t find anything of Anna’s he thought belonged in there. All her things were pristine. They were spayed. It was all pastel-colored stationary sets and garlands of red dotted mushrooms with her. What could she have intended to go in there? He began

laughing again at the idea that she thought she was sexy. She couldn't know. She was never sexy on purpose. The only Sexy things she did were by accident, authentic. Like when she had gotten boiling water on her hand and the way she'd sucked it and turned to look at him with that lost puppy look in her amber eyes. He imagined her in a silk dress, dancing seductively throughout the apartment. Is that what she imagined was sexy? Silk and slutty dancing?

Anna didn't call that morning, or in the afternoon. The pit in Julian's stomach eased and he became excited to see her. He needed help with the boxes, and desperately wanted to see what she put in "Sexy things." He ate his leftover chicken and rice and looked out at that mountain. Maybe it would be okay. She'd come home and they'd get a little older and they'd use the money to travel. She'd be a little less frantic about everything all the time so he could finally relax. Maybe they'd move back to Salt Lake City in a few years once she was done with her little mountain rehab getaway. It was already close to midnight. As it got later and later, he wondered where she was and why she had not called.

# Small Intestine

Marin Solomon

you are the roadkill.

i am the priest who reads your entrails,  
studying the mess of guts and fur through heart-shaped glasses.

*the intestines say, i tell you, that we do not have prosperous  
days ahead.*

you look back: tongue out, eyes glazed. *no shit.*

in one version, i find the leftovers of you on an abandoned  
highway.

in another, i sacrificed you. like eve hunting for the first non-  
holy dinner. my hands around your neck.

in still another, i slid off the road. you were there.

black ice is undetectable and unavoidable.

24 the Voice tells me to join you

—not in blood and guts and outstretched limbs, but in prayer  
(i cannot see the difference).

the shadows reach to hide the blood and the sunset paints you  
gold.

*did you know, i tell you,  
that people once melted down gold for idols?*

i do not tell you that i once burned my grandmother's earrings  
with a red lighter swiped from the gas station  
and when it melted across my freckled hands, i laughed.

my mother later told me gold would not have burned.

you laugh with the squish of overripe fruit.

*you create your idols out of raccoons, you say. no judgment here.*

the black ice is in my lungs.  
the entrails will not tell me if this is true. i believe it anyway.

i close your eyes, thumbs on fur.  
you are my casualty so i say the funeral rites,  
*may you find peace. may you exact revenge. may you sleep.*  
there is nothing left to be learned from the warzone of you,  
your glorious heart in the potholes,  
the twist of your small intestine,  
but when i speak, it is with your voice.  
*don't leave.*

## Street Life

Jimmy Freiburger

You should hear Tales from Timeless Hobos, see  
while perched on pavement, restful Effigy,  
One told me, "I am Collins. From my seat,  
and my position inside orbit, I

saw Armstrong, followed by Aldrin, land  
and walk across the moon's surface that day.

And I returned, yet never having tread  
upon the lunar ground; a world so close

so close that I could almost grasp it, yet  
so far. And nobody was watching me."

Lieutenant Collins, poor Lieutenant Collins.

A cosmic tragedy on 8th and E.



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Rolling  
Nolia Wilcox  
*Textile*

# Crash Test Dummies

Seth Niemann

Bright white lights, deep black shadows  
Silhouettes of oblong objects, long and thin  
Glassware struck with rubbery blue skin  
Hushed voices echo  
Leather restraints buckle  
A chamber of reflection, white and sterile  
A chamber of innovation, splattered red  
A spotlight, centered in the room  
Underneath, a figure in a crucifix pose  
A crash test dummy with scabbed over skin  
Red vein lightning bolts over a body, yellowed and thin  
Lacerations in the name of experimentation  
Mind mischief, pharmaceutical revelations  
A martyr with untold dying wishes  
Innovation tested in God's image

# The Earth Has Room

Indira Delacorte

*(This poem is dedicated to my dear friend, Starllie, who passed this winter. You are forever loved and missed.)*

She was a star  
a warm, glowy one

I was nervous, she was kind

That first day we met  
we sat on a hill  
Eating almonds, chocolate covered  
you passed one to me  
you laughed  
a laugh of silver star dust

29

Lately, i have been wondering  
what happens after death?  
what happens to those who seem to burst with life inside them  
where does all this life go?

I wonder as i walk barren corn fields  
gushing streams, spongy wetlands, cocoa flecks across my  
ankles  
remnants of winterberries, clinging on to life  
rotting tree trunks, fungi feast of bliss

a glowing trickle down my palm

the syrup feeds me  
sweet kisses of the earth

I walk the same path many times after your passing, my mind is  
occupied here, worn  
the night brought white crisp snow beneath us  
whispers and messages too

The night brought pounding rains of sadness  
dancing worms and shining stars  
Nights of lightning storms  
Hear me, hear me i think i hear them murmur

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I cry into the moss, i cry into the mud  
the mud accepts it kindly

days later come crocus  
tender snowdrops find their way, clinging drops of cream

The earth has room for it all  
the earth makes space for grief  
The earth will hold you, if you let it



Sleepy Sundays  
Cecilia Gitt-Henderson  
*Acrylic*

# I can't bear to be without you

## Bella Schatko

You place me down right between your feathered pillows,  
jumping into bed landing right on me.  
My nose and belly are crammed under you,  
But I don't mind. You squeeze me until I'm flat, flip off the  
light,  
and you fall asleep with me in your arms.

Last night I fell behind your bed, which happens most nights  
so I waited for you to find me, but I stayed down there.  
Day after day, night after night. Dust continues to fall.  
Weeks go by, and you finally reach under and grab me.  
But when you do...

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You cram me into a box held together by tape,  
propped open just enough for the dust to fall right on me.  
Meanwhile, I reminisce on the days  
where I laid happily in your bed,  
and my head wasn't touching my toes.

Dust  
continues

To fall.

The attic is cold, forgotten, and lonely.  
I lay crammed into a box of the past.  
Forced into an eternal hibernation.

Dust

Continues

To fall.

Occasionally, a light flickers on  
and a glimpse of hope shines on my beaded eyes,  
but eventually you flip the light off and...

Dust

Continues

To fall.

I lay gray and discarded,  
Matted and dirty. You crammed me into a box and...

33

Dust

Continues

To fall.

# Hip-Hop. The New and Upcoming Religion

## Uapingena Kandjoze

*I am a God*  
*Even though I'm a man of God*  
*My whole life in the hands of God*  
(“I am a God,” Kanye West, 2013)

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The musical genre of hip-hop has made leaps and bounds in its development, from the underground block parties in the South Bronx of New York to this intricate and critical form of cultural expression found in almost every culture worldwide. Hip-hop has evolved into one of the most significant musical genres to such an extent that it is becoming inherently linked to religion and culture. Hip-hop as we know it functions as a religion from both a functional and substantive point of view. This elevation of rap music has been achieved through religious iconography, which laid the foundation through which rappers and artists have proclaimed themselves to be God. In addition, hip-hop plays a significant role in strengthening and unifying global cultures, similar to how religions mobilize thousands of people under one doctrine. The depth to which hip hop has been ingrained into the global society's culture and, in turn, how religion has embedded itself into hip-hop culture is seen in the effects that this musical genre has on society both functionally and substantively.

Over the years since the establishment of hip-hop as a musical genre in the early 1970s, it has slowly expanded and developed into this versatile, revolutionary force that embodies

the true essence of black culture both within the United States and globally. For many people, hip-hop represents eternal power, action, and justice. It gives a voice to the voiceless; it breathes life and meaning back into the black communities that have suffered through so much oppression and discrimination while cultivating this sense of belonging and togetherness. Hip-hop has many definitions depending on the perspective. Writers Boyd and Nuruddin perfectly capture the essence of hip-hop by describing how “from that music it has grown to encompass a whole culture, lifestyle, an ideology, a point of view” (Boyd and Nuruddin 439). However, at its core, a big part of hip-hop includes the work of DJs, MCs, break dancing, graffiti art, and the pursuit of self-knowledge. Parallels can be drawn between the definitions of hip-hop and religion. Religion is defined by two distinct aspects; functional and substantive. The functional definition of religion “leaves out the content and the ideas of religion off to the side and defines it solely in terms of how it operates in human life. They want to know what a religion does for individual persons psychologically or a group socially” (Pals 11). While substantives “define religion in terms of beliefs or the ideas that religious people affirm” (Pals 11). Reflecting on these definitions, they can also be applied to hip-hop which has become this distinctive and significant aspect of black culture and now various other cultures globally. Like most religions, hip-hop works functionally in its role in society and how important it has become to specific communities by providing

a purpose or direction. Substantively, hip-hop has become this force by which people have placed their faith and live their lives.

When hip-hop was first established, the bulk of its musical content was borrowed or sampled from other predominantly black genres such as soul, funk, blues, and jazz. This concept of sampling began with DJ Kool Herc's block parties, at which he would only play the break in any of these songs. Numerous other DJs followed the same pattern, and from there, hip-hop was born (Hip Hop Evolution 2016). Rap music today incorporates an array of musical genres and art forms. It has even expanded into using religious iconography by sampling religious texts, gospels, or hymns and using religious symbols and practices in their songs and videos. Rappers like Kendrick Lamar, Kanye West, NAS, and others have used religious iconography in their songs and music videos, proving that hip-hop and religion are intrinsically linked. This notion is evident in the frequency and ease with which religion is incorporated into their music. Cardi B's "Be Careful with Me" music video is a prime example of how these two seemingly polar doctrines are linked to each other and the significance of that linkage (Cardi B). The entirety of this music video is shot inside a church. A holy place of worship that holds symbolic practices and events such as weddings and funerals, both of which are depicted in this video. In addition, there is an overload of photos of Jesus Christ and symbolic Christian crosses on the walls that are visible in almost every scene of the video. By

displaying her feelings of anger and resentment, Cardi B also displays how she and other people in society rely on hip-hop in tough times like they would rely on religion for consolation and support in times of need.

The song “In The Fire” by British rapper Dave also provides another example of the significance of religious iconography in hip-hop.

I know I got religion / I belong to the noisy crew (Heh, heh) / You see, we shout when we get happy / That's the way we Christian do /

Oh, have you been tried? (“In the Fire,” Dave, 2021)

Dave sampled this piece from the Florida Mass Choir’s 1982 song “Have you Been Tried in the Fire?” The phrase “have you been tried” is a standard reference to surviving hardship and struggle, which tests one’s faith and resolve to strengthen their relationship with God. Gospel music is a beautiful genre that is meant to share the word of God and cultivates this sense of Christian pride. Using gospel music, in tandem with Dave’s poetic, hard-hitting lyrics, allows this song to go beyond the boundaries of hip-hop, giving Dave and his music a deeper, more meaningful purpose similar to how religion gives meaning to people’s lives. Looking at rappers like Dave and Cardi B, one can see how inherently linked hip-hop is to religion. The Five Percent Nation proves a mutually beneficial relationship between rap and religion as “from the very beginning, hip-hop music was tailor-made for disseminating Five Percenters’ beliefs” (Jackson 87). Often, we think of rap music as being so far removed from religion;



**Dark Light**  
**Jessica Ongole**  
*Digital Photography*

instead, these two doctrines are much closer than one would think. Both religion and hip-hop function similarly in how their doctrine or music provides ideas that motivate and inspire whole communities locally and globally.

Many rappers and artists have used religious iconography to elevate their music and themselves to a God-like status. The incorporation of religious practices and events in hip-hop has been subverted to an extent whereby rappers are now reimagining significant religious events with themselves in place of God. From NAS's rendition of Jesus Christ's crucifixion in his 1999 "Hate Me Now" song, he portrays himself as Jesus Christ carrying the cross (NAS). To Kendrick Lamar's use of the Last Supper's imagery in "Humble," in which he takes the seat that was originally assigned to Jesus Christ (Kendrick Lamar). These artists and rappers alike use religious iconography to paint themselves as these almighty and all-knowing deities. They have, in a sense, elevated themselves and their music by giving it symbolic weight as a result of the apparent links created to religion. A parallel can be drawn between this notion and Monica Miller's essay critiquing 50 Cent's autobiography by stating that "stylistically fashioning *The 50th Law* after the bible visually provides authority and symbolic weight to what may otherwise be seen as less than a proper object of study" (Miller 69). Similarly to 50 Cent applying the arrangement of the Bible and applying it to his self-help book, these other rappers are referencing religion to make their work seem more symbolic as if it were religious

doctrine. Religious iconography has allowed rappers to reconceptualize religion by proclaiming themselves as God. Their music is the doctrine by which many people in society devote their lives as they would to religion.

Similarly to religion, hip-hop has become this shared cultural touchstone incorporated into the local communities within the United States and the broader global population. This reconceptualization of religious figures within hip-hop, in which the rappers and artists are painted as prophets or messiahs, is a powerfully influential tool that “aligns neatly with society’s belated recognition of rappers as cultural giants” (Bassil). With rappers proclaiming themselves as these great deities and holy figures by showcasing their rap prowess in tandem with the effective use of religious iconography, rap music has become a doctrine by which various communities and individuals abide. This is evident in how individuals and whole communities have molded themselves in the image of hip-hop.

The 2002 movie, *Brown Sugar*, reflects how hip-hop has entrenched into society. The movie is centered on the relationship between the two main characters, Sidney and Dre, whose relationship began after witnessing hip-hop’s birth at a park in New York City. These protagonists have devoted their lives to hip-hop and music as they both chose careers that brought them closer to hip-hop, Sidney being a music critic and Dre an executive music producer. At every chance, they constantly reference hip-hop’s influence in

their lives and relationships by attributing a majority of their accomplishments to hip-hop. Writer Sipiwe Ignatius Dube articulates this notion perfectly by describing how “rap artists can be construed as serving a prophetic role – by serving as the nation’s moral conscience via the questions they raise through their lyrics” (Dube 381). Academic thinkers such as Sipiwe Ignatius Dube, Monica Miller, and Robin Sylvan have recognized this prophetic role that hip-hop plays in society as it scrutinizes and describes the social, political, and economic status of black communities. Rappers serve their communities by being a voice for the voiceless. They provide ideas that motivate and inspire communities, showcasing how hip-hop functions as a religion from a substantive perspective.

Although hip-hop and rap music is greatly revered for the positive aspects it brings to society, it has played a significant role in glorifying violence, sexual discrimination, and drug abuse. Predominantly black musical genres such as rap music have been the primary means of documenting and addressing black suffering throughout the history of the US. These musical stylings have become part of the cultural and political movements that shaped the black American population into what it is today. Despite all that hip-hop has done to uplift the black community politically, socially, and economically, rap music is still one of the foremost perpetrators of black suffering. An explanation for this behavior is provided in Angela M. Nelson’s essay. They explain the concept of theodicy in relation to religion, hip-hop, and the existence of evil. As

described by Nelson, theodicy is the “justification of God’s justice and righteousness in the face of evil’s existence in the world” (Nelson 130). In this particular essay, Nelson provides three theodicies to explain rap music and the problem of evil. The slave mentality theodicy provides the most reasonable explanation of self-inflicted black suffering. “The slave mentality theodicy says that the residuals of white supremacy... have left scars on the mental psyches of African-Americans, causing perpetual self-inflicted black oppression and suffering” (Nelson 134). Numerous individuals, mainly black men, have decided to reclaim that power or superiority taken away from them during pre-Civil rights America by asserting their dominance over others. This dominance has manifested as domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse, and gang violence that is known to cripple innumerable communities across the U.S.

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The 2016 biographical film *Surviving Compton: Dre, Suge & Michel’le* is a prime example of the impacts of the slave mentality theodicy on society. This movie follows the life of rhythm and blues singer Michel’le and her traumatic romantic experiences with NWA’s Dr. Dre and executive music producer Suge Knight. We witness Michel’le’s struggle with domestic violence, sexual, drug, and alcohol abuse throughout the movie and how hip-hop and rappers like Dr. Dre perpetuate this ongoing cycle of pain and self-inflicted suffering through their music. Michael Eric Dyson articulates the glorification of violence and drug abuse by saying that it is “highly glossed and

GENERATIONAL CHA



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The Revolution

**Jessica Ongole**  
*Digital Photography*

eroticized in hip hop videos and rap lyrics where the appeal of aggression is intensified by the promise of sexual release” (Dyson 361). Parallels can be drawn between hip-hop and religion in promoting violent acts and other negative behaviors in the general society. The glorification of violence and drugs in hip-hop has normalized these negative societal actions. People think it is okay to emulate what they see in hip-hop music videos, and the cycle of violence continues. This movie provides evidence of how hip-hop plays a significant substantive role in society.

44 Author Daniel Pals defines functional religion solely by how that religion operates in human lives in tandem with the various cultures and traditions. Looking at the functional role hip-hop plays in society, it has become this globally unifying factor that cultivates a sense of belonging and togetherness. Hip-hop has survived the test of time by crossing generations and has remained one of the most relevant and popular forms of music since the 1970s. It continues to cross numerous social, cultural, and traditional borders as it becomes more and more incorporated into global cultures and traditions. Combining traditional music and languages with modern hip-hop beats and rhythms has created this “new” subgenre of rap music; Usama Kahl has coined the notion in one of his literary works. Kahl describes how this new subgenre takes on the “beats and rhythms of western hip hop and unique flavors of the local culture, including its language, dialect, musical instruments, and local issues, and transforms itself beyond imitation to

invention cultural creativity” (Kahl 117). Spaza rap is a prime example of the marriage between culture, tradition, and hip-hop. It is one of the many niche subsets of the genre that developed in the black townships outside Cape Town. Spaza rap is named after the informal shops at which rappers would perform outside using a mix of Xhosa and township slang (Discogs). This subgenre is comparable to hip-hop that was established at block parties in streets of South Bronx, New York. Spaza rap is another example of the extent to which hip-hop has become this globally unifying cultural force that is seen in numerous cultures and societies today.

Rappers such as Riky Rick, Nasty C, Boity, Nadia Nakai, YoungstaCPT, and Kanyi are the forefront of South African hip-hop. Rappers in Southern Africa often rap in their traditional language and slang and take every song or music video as a chance to share their beautiful culture and traditions, which cultivates this sense of unity and belonging amongst the different communities and with the broader global society. Many of these rappers showcase the functional role of hip-hop through the marriage of culture, tradition, and the stylings of western rap music. In the 2021 song “ASBONGE,” rapper Cassper Nyovest states one of the most iconic lines “hip-hop saved my life but piano gon’ feed my kids” (Major Steez, Cassper Nyovest). The song title “Asbonge” is a Zulu term for being thankful, in which rappers Majorsteeze and Cassper Nyovest attributes their success to hip-hop. In this song and many others by Cassper Nyovest, he connects both

God and hip-hop by openly expressing how both these entities have become a significant part of his life. Cape Town rapper YoungstaCPT uses hip-hop to cope with specific situations to express his feelings. The song “Dear Rikhado, Love Riyadh” pays tribute to the late Riky Rick, a South African rapper, producer, singer, songwriter, and fashion designer who died earlier this year in February. Riky Rick was considered one of the most famous rap icons in South Africa, whose death was mourned in numerous ways, such as making a tribute song.

Not sure who to reach, or to send my condolence / So I took what  
I was feeling, bottled it up and closed it / Did the five shows and  
slowly found the words I need / and wrote this (“Dear Rikhado,  
Love Riyadh,” Youngsta CPT, 2022)

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Here we can see that hip-hop creates bonds by cultivating this sense of unity and belonging shared among rappers such as YoungstaCPT, Riky Rick, Kendrick Lamar, Noname, Cardi B, Dave, and many others. Hip-hop brings people together by creating these symbolic bonds between people from different tribes, cultures, and even nationalities, which showcases hip-hop’s functional role in society.

In addition to the globally unifying properties of this genre, functionally, hip-hop plays a significant role in documenting the black experience in America. Hip-hop has become the backbone of many black communities across the U.S by giving a voice to a largely marginalized and oppressed community. Writer Bakari Kitwana emphasizes that “because of rap, the voices, images, style, attitude, and language of young blacks

have become central in American culture, transcending geographic, social, and economic boundaries,” (Kitwana 452). Hip-hop and rappers have worked hard to bring their music and culture to the forefront of modern society while addressing the pressing political status of black people in America. Rap music and politics have become linked in one way or another by giving the black community a voice to express their discontent with the status quo regarding police brutality, racism, and oppression that black people face daily. Bakari Kitwana also recounts the famous words of 1988 Public Enemy rapper Chuck D who describes rap music as “the Black CNN,” (Kitwana 454). This statement is a perfect example of how rap music provides an outlet for all the generational frustrations and emotions that the black community has bottled up. Hip-hop plays such a vital role in the black community and the broader society by giving a voice to the voiceless and documenting the black experience in one of the most beautiful and powerful ways.

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Since the creation of hip-hop from the underground block parties in the South Bronx of New York, it has evolved into an intricate, versatile and revolutionary cultural force that has become embedded into numerous global cultures. At its core, hip-hop is a multifaceted musical styling that includes the work of DJs, MCs, break dancing, graffiti art, and the pursuit of self-knowledge. Hip-hop is slowly becoming this beautiful and powerful entity that can breathe life and meaning into oppressed communities. It gives a voice to the voiceless, it can

be a means of coping with stress or grief, and it cultivates this sense of belonging and unity both within the U.S and globally. Nevertheless, it can also have incredibly negative impacts on society for its role in glorifying violence, discrimination, and sexual and drug abuse. Many parallels can be drawn between hip-hop and religion. One can deduce that hip-hop, at its core, serves as a religion from a functional and substantive perspective. Substantively, rap music has become a doctrine while its rappers, and artists have elevated themselves to a God-like status through the effective use of religious iconography. Like religion, hip-hop can mobilize and inspire thousands of people under one idea supplied through poetic lyrics and infectious beats and rhythms. It is a globally unifying force that has transcended classifications such as tribes, cultures, and nations by creating symbolic bonds between different communities and generations. Hip-hop is the most widespread, unfiltered display of black beauty, excellence, cultures, and especially black suffering, therefore it operates as a religion both functionally and substantively.

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# His Immortal Grip

Sam Stassen

Ever tight around me, your hand must be  
so callused in that steel gauntlet. I suspect  
that a groove along your back has been the effect  
of how long and often you have rested me

upon your shoulders. I doubt you even notice  
my weight. By now, you must consider us one.  
We are the “War Artist”, we could always outrun  
Death. I wonder, have we made our magnum opus?

I suppose that is a question of battles,  
victories, countless, they blurred into one slaughter.  
Beasts, knights, and kings, they all appeared as fodder.  
Was there remorse in you when we slew the cattle?

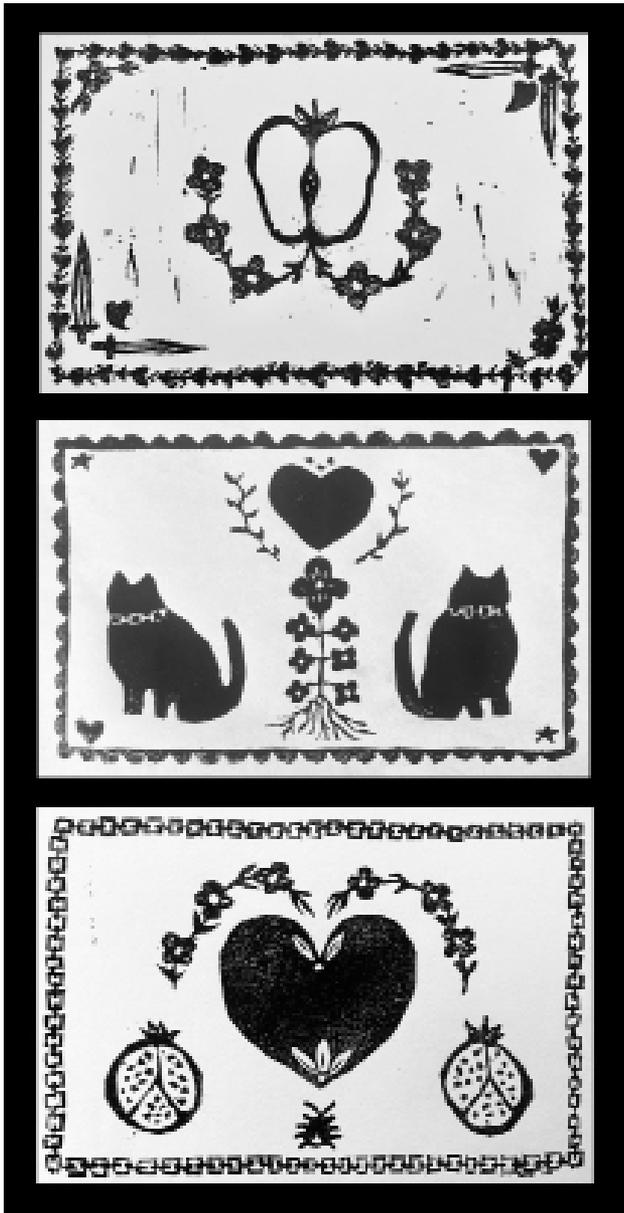
Or am I now your blood-soaked fang, your beaten brush?

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I am blunt and chipped. When was the last time  
you sharpened me? I believe it was before  
the fight on the mountain. No man was more  
deserving of your fury and my sting.

You swung me so hard that the air roared  
around me, I took in the stench of flesh  
as I cleaved through it, and I would do it again  
for I felt alive. But now my friend, I am tired.

I am your sole companion. I have served you well,  
because of me horrid fates never befell.  
I have made you a warrior of great renown,  
but now I must beg you, please, put me down.



Untitled  
Dorian Campbell  
*Block Print*

# The Folly of the Day Hiker

## Sophie Scheiber

I dislike the idea of wet boots.  
Yet inevitably I find myself at a small river or  
stream. The kind there's no bridge for.  
My water-proof sandals are tied to my pack. If I  
take the time I could switch my shoes and be fine.  
But it taunts me,  
Those wet boots.  
Perhaps I shall try balancing  
precariously on the rocks that so easily  
tip.  
I can dance my way [carefully] and make  
it without the slightest splash.  
Because it's possible that for once,  
they'll stay dry.

# In the Forests of Saint-Sernin

Maxine Fox

Before I was naked and hanged,  
I once was a girl climbing trees.  
When my hands were still hands  
And my skin was still clean  
And the village knew I had a name.

Now, prisoner to hallways of moss, I waft  
Depraved! They scream. Exposed!  
Tormented sick by ancient tomes,  
They teach their children to fear me.

I wade my tomb, *repaire infernal*,  
Where young plants do not grow, and sheep die.  
I try to remember the feeling of bark On my  
unblemished, unvictimized hands. I remember  
the dirt, and the tears, and the rope I do not  
remember  
my mother.

Young men in coats come, flushed and fresh  
Hands barren but by wool,  
Pockets twinkling with tiny stones, to gift.  
With cautious hands they set them  
At what would have been my feet  
And to such, in joy, I wail—  
And to such, with screams, they flee, “*Elle est  
méchante, nous avons tort,*” they cry, And  
teach their children to fear me.



## Chinese Praying Mantis

**Eloise Richardson**

*Photography*

# Dancing Through Memory

Simon Hoover

The thrill, the rush, the joy, I'm breathing hard.  
Dancers alight then leap and leave all else behind  
among the legs, I've lost my guard.  
Please observe: this boy has lost his mind.

I try to push into the deepest depths  
Of memory pure buried so far within  
I sweat, I writhe, the crowd, the night, I fly  
I laugh, I cry. And then it's dark again.

I once held a thousand nights to go before the last.  
I envy the small boy dancing on the floor  
Yet in my dreams again I'm there

Spinning head, a young boy dancing forevermore

Memory, memory what once for me was true  
To dance again, the night I danced like you

# My Grandma's Grace: A Beacon of Love

**Eric Potter**

In Grandma's wisdom, I found my way  
A beacon Bright throughout each day.  
Kindness taught, selfless and pure,  
In her words, my heart found its cure.

My biggest supporter, ever near,  
Helping guide me through doubt and fear.  
Through trials we faced, her love stayed strong,  
In her wisdom, I found where I belong.

Through her example, I learned to be kind,  
In her footsteps, my heart aligned  
Without her, I wouldn't be complete  
In her care, my worries deplete.



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**"Love Beyond"**  
**Miyu Enomoto**  
*Pen*

# Recount and Recant

## Marin Solomon

Fionnuala Tobin does not mind waiting for Death. She would mind the waiting even less if He had chosen to set up shop anywhere other than this cramped and humid hotel, but though the Tobins can see Death, they have not yet been able to control Him. Her line is well-versed in spiritual affairs, from her mother's fourteen heirloom rosaries to her father's bedtime tales of how to spot a *sluagh*, the unforgiven dead that carted away souls before their rites were finished. (Listen for the rustle of their robes.) An interview with Death should not be a particularly big deal.

Still, this Tobin cannot stop the little river of sweat flowing down her back. One photo distracts her from it suddenly as she flips through the dog-eared butch fashion magazine.

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The woman on the inside cover looks curiously similar to Fionnuala. She is all broad shoulders and sharp features in her crimson suit, and they are alike down to the hawk-gold eyes and cropped red hair. She flips the page quickly, her shiver surely not from her parents' old Celtic anxiety about the *fetch*, but from the sheer amount of ghosts around. It has been an entire day of sitting and staring down her competition, after all, occasionally barking at those ghosts to back away from the flyer on the bathroom door.

*Death is hiring!!* it reads in electric green Comic Sans.  
*Apply inside!!!!* No other details.

Stretching and sighing, Fionnuala squints at the clock across the lobby. This job would have been easier at 22 than 42, if only for the sake of her sore legs. The clock's face is clouded

over, but the shadows through the window are stretching and the heat is becoming more bearable. Soon the beady-eyed receptionist will try to kick her out for loitering, but she will not move until –

A sigh from the bathroom. It's a faint sound, rather like the hum of a dying air conditioner, but it is enough.

Fionnuala drops the magazine and marches to the door, rapping her wide knuckles on the cheap wood.

“Yes – yes! Come in!”

It is not... surprising, exactly, to see her dead father sitting on the toilet lid. Her father warned her about something like this. (Death does not have a face of His own, so He reflects the face of someone you love. It keeps His identity safe. It keeps you frightened and sentimental.) But Fionnuala is not entirely heartless, even after all these years of living alone, and she pauses with her hand on the knob.

Maguire Tobin was – is? – a stout man. Round edges and a tired face, rubbing the bridge of his nose with his thumb and middle-finger, just as he had done in life. They share the tangled red hair and freckles that come in sets of threes, though Fionnuala is proud of her harsher voice and taller figure. He was once the perfect partner for her mother, both of them captivating and commanding, though he greyed out in the weeks before his death. This watery, softened version of him is the one she faces now. Death, wearing his face.

He looks up and frowns through crooked wire glasses. “You are not dead.”

Fionnuala hides her shaky breath with the creak of the closing door. “You are Death.”

“I said,” Death repeats, “you are not dead. This job is only open to dead people.”

“How do you know I’m not dead?” she asks flippantly, settling on the edge of the tub. There is something off about His eyes and the way they are glazed over, so she watches His mouth and hands instead. Slow-moving and eerily pale.

“You don’t smell,” he says. The frown settles into the familiar grooves around His mouth. There is still a spot of red sauce under his bottom lip from the last meal Éabha - his wife, her mother - cooked for him. Maguire.

“I sure hope not.” Her smile cracks her chapped lips.

He sighs, shakes his head, and picks up the clipboard.

“Name?”

“Fionnuala Tobin.”

“Fionnuala! Yes! I’d forgotten your name.” He laughs. It is not her father’s laugh, but something older and harsher. “Of course it’s you. Youngest member of that terrible family with the Sight. But you’re not one to carry on the family line, I’ve heard.” He smiles. It is a relief, at first, to see her father’s smile – then it stretches too far, cracking the weak skin and glinting with too many teeth. “Here for retribution, are you?”

“No.” The bathroom is freezing rapidly, icing over her trail of sweat, but she fights to keep her voice light and cheery. “You come for all of us eventually, don’t you? I can’t be bitter at you for doing your job with my father. I’m here for that same job.”

Mostly true. She is here for the keys to break her contract: to become one with Death and see her mother again.

“Like I said, it’s a job for dead people,” he says dismissively, studying his clipboard. “You may–”

“I’m interested in death,” Fionnuala says quickly, leaning forward and talking faster. (Death despises being bored above all else. Do not bore Him.) “Not you, don’t get an ego, but the concept. I want this job. I’ve been in the lobby for hours watching this door, and not a single soul has come in.”

Death grumbles under His breath, but He does look at her.

Emboldened, she continues, “Night’s coming fast. Too many people die every day for you to keep waiting for a replacement that might never come. You must already be behind after a day of waiting in here. I’m a hard worker, naturally foreboding, and I love a good night shift. This is a match made in – is it inappropriate to say ‘Heaven’?”

He frowns at her. Just as her father used to.

“Come on,” she says, smile straining against her cheeks. “Don’t you want a Tobin on your side?”

“I am done with this,” Death snaps. His voice is rock grating on rock, worms squirming beneath the earth, the thud of every coffin slamming shut. “Leave!”

The command shakes dust loose from the fan overhead and shorts out the lights. Fionnuala is up and to the door before she realizes, her steps jerky and rushed. The cold metal of the knob jolts her back to reality and she spins on her heel, panting with the exertion of resisting His command. “Listen! Listen – I’ll

follow... I'll follow any rules you set for me. My mother. You know her. She gave me a contract." The command slowly loosens its grip on her legs and lungs, leaving her shaking and exhausted. Death stares her down. "Twenty-one years ago. I have not defied it. Not once." She takes a deep breath through bruised throat. "I have obeyed her. And so I shall obey you."

There is a strange smile, one she never saw her father wear, playing around Death's lips. In the darkness, that multitude of teeth flashes again. "I can't have a living person on my staff, you understand?" For the first time, she has His full attention – and it burns with cold. "This is a job you have to die for."

Fionnuala has never accepted a contract so willingly. *I'm coming, Mother.*

---

Death has more rules, of course. An entire host of rules and restrictions that she has no plan to obey, despite her promises otherwise. She dons the robes, adjusts the gold nameplate that reads *Augur* (names are for the living), and keeps her private task on repeat in her head so she does not lose it along with her body. She fights back a smile, listening to Death. It is like listening to her father lecture again, though her father always knew she was not going to listen, while Death has no clue.

She takes the file He hands her, nodding obediently. "I understand, I understand," she says. "If an omen is required, it will be listed in the file and you will supply the materials. If an omen is not required, all I need to do is gather up the listed soul at the time of death."

“And do not interact with the living,” Death stresses. “You understand? If you do, your soul will be –”

“Forfeit, yes,” she says, nodding again and resisting the urge to check the time. “I will lose all sensation and wander the earth for a thousand years, you will be glad to curse me and spoil my family’s reputation, et cetera. Thank you.” And she does understand, really, even though she immediately sets off in the opposite direction of where He pointed her. Her body is left behind in the hotel bathroom, this new form strange and light and airborne. As she glides invisibly in the city, she relishes the absence of the wind’s needles on her face, watching from above as it sends papers flying and bends tree branches all around her. The wind guides her to the building she called *Babel* as a child, from her mother’s insistence on hearing the Lord’s Prayer in Celtic, then English, then Celtic again.

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She lands on the ground and lolls her head back, watching the charcoal shine of the building come to a point high, high up. The light is fading fast after Death’s lecture. She needs to work fast, before Death comes as promised to take the souls from her at midnight. She does the gathering, He does the ferrying. At least in theory.

In reality, Fionnuala sets her mind to the bestowal of omens. She knows every way of spotting death before it comes, which means she knows exactly what signs her mother will recognize. She reaches the window and finds her mother sleeping in the dark, barely a silhouette in the little room. She slips the scent and image of muddy water into her dreams,

puddles slowly morphing into Death-as-Maguire's vicious smile. When her mother wakes, she whips up a storm to clatter the windows, forcing the wind to sing the wailing song of the banshee. She sneaks to the balcony and makes the saints in her mother's paintings blink and mouth Celtic curses. Her mother stirs in the nearly-dark room, watching the paintings silently. Just as her mother loses interest in the moving paintings, Fionnuala sends three knocks on the front door. Her mother flinches, but does not call out.

"Repent," Fionnuala mutters to her unhearing mother. "Death is coming. *Repent.*"

Her mother still does not speak. So, in the midst of the worst thunder, Fionnuala disguises herself as her mother's *fetch* and presses herself near the window. She has no need to consult a photo to perfect the lines of her mother's face when she was young; she is a near-replica of her already, only needing to diminish the freckles, extend the hair, and soften the face. Her mother had once whispered her fear to Maguire, when she thought Fionnuala was asleep, that her daughter was too like her. Fionnuala grew up, chopped off her hair, and spoke more roughly – so her mother no longer was afraid. Still, the next whisper Fionnuala overheard was *Unnatural*.

Éabha finally turns her head to the window, the light catching her eyes for the quickest moment. There is recognition, perhaps, but no fear.

Fionnuala bites back the heat of rage, slipping away from the window and to the ground before dropping the disguise.

The storm lets up, but the light of day does not return. Fionnuala screams through gritted teeth at the sky. Too much time has passed. Death will be here soon to gather her up, and she still has not teased fear or regret out of her dying mother. She has lived and died for nothing and so Death will win –

Something chuckles near her feet. “You knew going into this that Tobins are not easily frightened. They excel in pushing things away rather than dealing with them.”

She looks down through unsteady breaths. A small, red-beaked bird with shiny black feathers stares back at her. A bird of her father’s stories. A *badb*. Fate Weaver. The goddess’ symbol, Her incarnation itself, or – an omen.

“You cannot beat her if you do not face her,” it says, a high hum behind its words.

“Hello, *badb*,” Fionnuala says, drawing herself up and pulling together her manners. “Are you from Death?”

“I am here to tell you that you can still carry out your duties. If you leave now.” The bird pecks at a crumb the ground. “I personally would not bet on your survival, as Death hates your entire family.”

Fionnuala looks up at Babel. Her mother’s window is still dark. “How would you like to help me scare an old woman?”

The *badb* laughs, a curiously warm sound, and hops upon her outstretched wrist. As they ascend the stairs, it adjusts and shakes the blood off its talons from piercing through her skin. There is no pain. No scar is left behind. This is the magic her father adored; this is the magic her mother feared. (Only gods



Untitled  
Dorian Campbell  
*Block Print*

and lazy men have unmarked skin, Nuala. Do not be afraid of your calluses.) If her mother was not already disgusted by her, she would be now.

“Coming, Mother,” she whispers to the door. It unlocks at the wave of her hand, swinging open with a sigh.

The house is silent and fully dark. It is wrong to see the familiar furniture buried in shadow. Growing up, her mother seemed to think the waste of electricity was a status symbol, turning on every light with the first shadows of evening. Now, Fionnuala keeps her apartment lit with lamps and candles, avoiding the overhead light unless spring-cleaning. Some things do not need to be in the light.

She shucks off her shoes, tucking them by the matte-white doormat. “If you poop in here,” she murmurs to the *badb*, “you will be strangled by either me or my mother. No more desecration in this home.”

“Calm down,” the *badb* scoffs. “This is not holy ground. Childhood homes are exempt from being holy ground.”

They slip together around the corner into the kitchen. Dishes in the sink, crusted over with food remains, and a fork on the floor. The fridge is empty of any sentimental photographs, only housing a few fingerprints. The overhead fan is silent. The table is set for three. Fionnuala moves to the papers on the counter, but the *badb* speaks again: “Your mother is stirring. Hurry – I would like to return your soul to Death before midnight, and the hour is nearing.”

“You are from Death,” Fionnuala whispers. “Death knows.”

The *badb* flaps its wings impatiently. “Of course Death knows. You think He would let you have this job otherwise? As a human, you are untouchable except by Fate, which is out of His hands. Now that you have died and defied Him, you are under His rules and He is free to remove the last of the Tobins. Does it matter? Would you have done this differently if you knew?”

She thinks of Death’s smile stretching wide, breaking Maguire’s face. She thinks of her mother, laying in the bed, just within reach. Death is under her contract as surely as she is under His. If He cannot reap her soul until midnight, then this time is hers alone.

“Hello.” Her mother’s voice rings out from the bedroom. It is a sound like her father’s voice in those last weeks: rattling and cold. Suddenly Fionnuala is sixteen again, wearing men’s clothes for the first time in front of her mother. “Are you an augur or a saint?”

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“You’d better listen to your mother,” the *badb* says cheerfully.

The robes, Death told her, would protect her from the sight of the living. But they cannot not protect her from the sight of Éabha Tobin forever, so she stays in the doorway and recites the words given to her by Death with all her own deep-voiced authority: “I am an augur. This is your final warn— ”

“Yes, yes,” the woman on the bed says impatiently. “I heard Death’s spiel when you came to take my husband. You are here to take me now, are you not?”

Instead of answering, Fionnuala studies her mother’s surroundings, familiar even in the soft darkness. The room is filled with charms: silver *cloc closantas*, wooden Celtic crosses, St. Brigid’s crosses on every wall, and a portrait of Mother Mary smiling down

beside the mirror. Her mother must have ravaged every room in the house and brought in her charms and saints to surround her while she died.

“Are you going to come in or admire the decorations forever?” her mother snaps.

Fionnuala draws in a deep breath and turns on the light, stepping in the room. No disguises.

“Turn it off! Turn it off!” Éabha cries, throwing her arms over her face.

Even when her immediate obedience, the damage has been done. Fionnuala sees her mother. Éabha is wasting away, clutching the corpse hand of her husband for healing. The lines on her face and hands are not the graceful signs of aging, but symptoms of some worse disease. Perhaps the same eroding sickness that killed Maguire, perhaps something else.

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In the dark, listening to her mother’s panicked breaths, Fionnuala realizes she is the same age her mother was when Éabha kicked her out of the house.

“Oh Mum,” she whispers.

Éabha’s breathing hitches. “That can’t be... turn the light back on,” she orders.

Fionnuala’s hand trembles on the lightswitch, the sudden shock of light revealing Éabha upright and clinging to the bedframe with emaciated arms. “You,” she says in disbelief.

A sob wrenches itself from Fionnuala’s body. The sound of her name from her mother’s lips wrests her heart in two and shoves in a bloody piece back in. She stumbles forward and

crashes on her knees beside the bed. “Mum,” she cries into the sheet, gripping the fabric and crushing it between her knuckles. “Mum, I’m sorry, I’m back –” She scrunches her eyes closed, though she doesn’t feel the skin tighten. Everything is numb and floating.

–Until something hot and warm brushes against the nothingness of her cheek and she looks up at her mother. The bright light outlines every harsh angle, every furious line in her skin, and the tears falling from her mother’s eyes.

“I’m so happy to see you, Nuala,” her mother cries. “My angel. My beautiful girl. Please.” Éabha reaches out, hesitating to touch to her daughter, but she whispers, “Get into bed with me while I die.”

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Fionnuala gathers up the black robes of death and climbs into bed beside her mother. The bed is soiled and dirty; the lights in the rest of the house must have gone out from overuse, for Éabha’s arms are already shaking with exertion. Fionnuala shelters her mother’s chill body with her mass of robes. Éabha pulls her tighter and tucks an arm around her shoulder, rubbing Fionnuala’s arm and kissing the top of her head. Their breaths slowly synchronize as the *badb* flies to the window.

“I didn’t think I would see you here,” her mother says quietly.

The room is filled with too much light and urine for a confessional, but Fionnuala recognizes her mother’s low, reverent tone. It is the same tone she herself practiced for confession when her voice was soft and she believed in saints.

She shields her eyes with the robes and imagines herself a priest in this well of fabric and forgiveness, in a splendid church with rainbow lights and hard pews and the saints smiling down on them both.

“I am glad you repented in life,” Éabha continues softly. “I did not think you would, my darling. I thought you would insist upon this... lifestyle, until you died. They did not tell me you died. But you must have, to be here with me now. Thank you. Thank you. St. Mary would be proud of you. She—”

Fionnuala pushes herself up, snagging her arm in both the robes and sheets. “What?” she demands, struggling to free herself.

“You repented,” Éabha says cautiously, watching. “You repented of...”

“Of what?” Fionnuala snaps.

“You know what,” Éabha says, pulling herself away with the little strength left in her withered body. Fionnuala sees her young mother again, shaking with the same old disgust. Of course she is the same. “You know precisely what,” Éabha says. “You need me to recount it for you?”

“I remember,” Fionnuala bites, giving up on freeing herself. They are too close, their sheets and robes too tangled together. “I knelt in confessional. I told the priest I was having homosexual desires. I came home the next day to find a contract from you and my things in a box.”

Éabha recites: “You may never speak to me with the same lips you use to kiss girls.”

“I was your daughter and then a lesbian,” Fionnuala says coldly. “I was your daughter first.”

“Unnatural,” Éabha groans, hand over her face. “I did not ask for a daughter such as you.”

Fionnuala is laughing. There is no feeling in her body. Her body is rotting somewhere in a musty hotel bathroom. And yet she is laughing. “Do you know what I am now? Dead.” She lets the words hum in the air, watches her mother freeze. “You made me promise not to see you again in life. So here I am, in death.”

Éabha doubles over in a coughing fit. Her entire body shakes. The bed grows more soiled, white sheets fading into gray and yellow. The light overhead flickers and dulls, placing mother and daughter in shadow. Fionnuala watches the saints and the saints watch her.

When her mother stops coughing, Fionnuala says quietly, “Just say something, Mum. I came all this way. Say something... something good. Please?” She cracks on the last word.

Éabha looks at her daughter. Fionnuala’s face is twenty-one years older, lined and lesbian - and terribly like Éabha’s own. “The people did not appreciate the saints for their sacrifice,” she murmurs. Her breaths are slowing. “And they paid the price. I have paid the price. Saint Nuala, please...” She stumbles over a word unfamiliar. “Forgive me. Lay down with me.”

Fionnuala lays down beside her mother. She does not feel her mother’s warmth, and she has no warmth of her own to offer the dying woman. She lives off the sound of her name in

her mother's mouth until Éabha's breaths finally stop. When her mother has stopped breathing, she turns gladly and lets the *badb* drink in her soul, hours before the sun rises. She is still wandering the earth, somewhere. Remembering.

Mother and daughter miss each other's funerals, held on the same day in opposite ends of the city. Their friends murmur over drinks how sad it was that the Tobin women never reconciled.

No one knows Éabha Tobin died embracing her daughter.

# The Story Eater

## Eliza Karnopp

*Greetings, child...*

*Come, take a seat. There's plenty of room...*

*Very good.*

*Now, tell me a story.*

*...no? Clever little thing, aren't you...*

*How about a deal? I tell you a story, and you tell one to me?*

*...Excellent. I shall go first.*

Once upon a time, there was a little girl with her head lost in the clouds. This little girl was unassuming in appearance, unremarkable in intelligence, and altogether ordinary in all respects but one: her imagination.

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But none of that truly matters. What matters is the girl's absent dreaminess, and how it caused her to wander off--from whence matters little--into the barren, monochrome emptiness of the field.

*What field, you ask?*

*All in due time, child.*

The little girl paused, looking around, and sat down on a purplish rock that had not been present before that moment.

*"Now, what is a bright little thing like you doing in a dull, dreary place like this?"* a voice crooned behind her.

The little girl turned, eyes widening as they focused on the monster that had appeared--it loomed over her like a mountain loomed over a molehill, impossible, immutable,

immovable as the ground beneath its feet. Her heart lurched and she tried to run but barely managed to lurch off her purplish rock before the gray ground beneath her started sagging and tearing like wet cardboard, and she had to clutch to the lone anchor of color or drown in the hungry void that was revealed beneath.

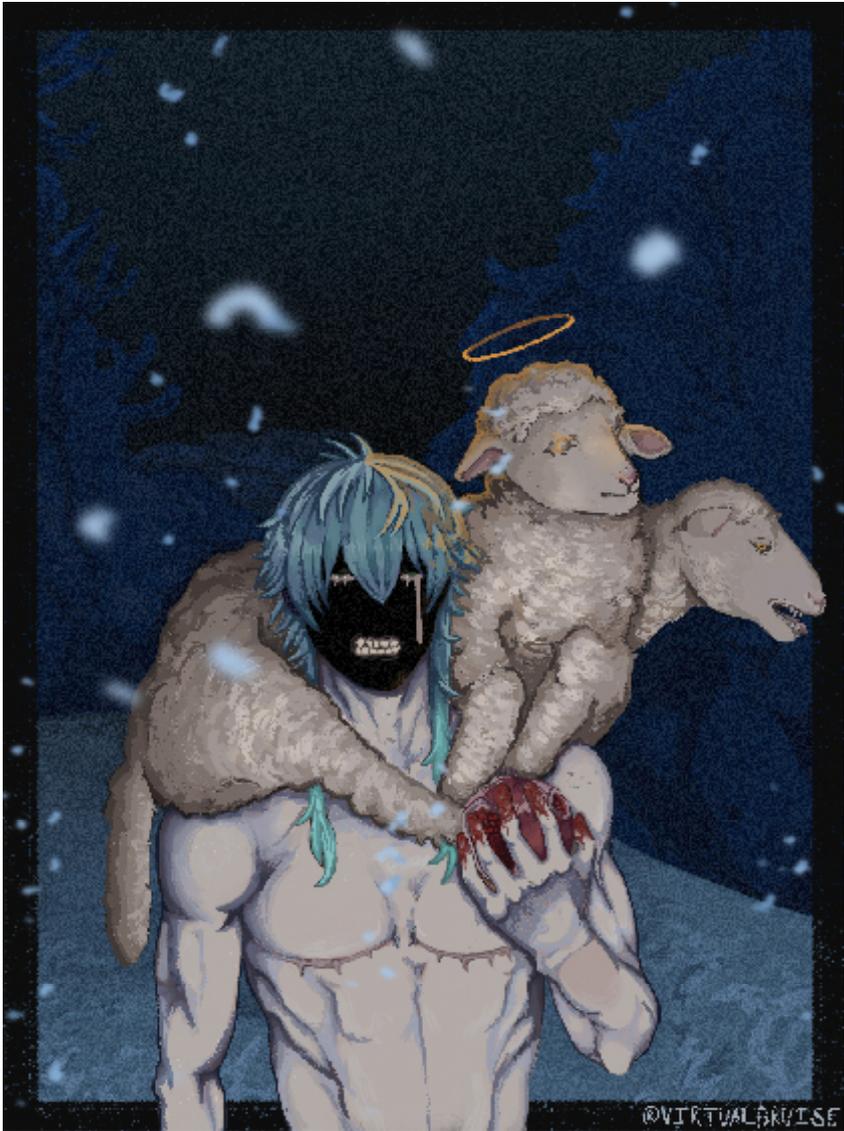
The monster simply stood, unbothered by the gaping hole in the delicate reality of their surroundings. It watched with what may have been faint amusement as the girl struggled to pull herself into a sitting position. The thing had all the magnetic non-presence of a black hole: a vaguely human silhouette of pitchy, inky, velvety black for which there is no adequate word, with the space just at the edges of the darkness a smeared, warped caricature of what it was (had been?) truly.

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You must know: this monster had been human once, but it had made a mistake (*the same mistake you have just made, little one, and the same mistake this little girl was about to make*) long ago, and all traces of humanity that may have remained were long since forgotten.

But I digress. “*Give me your stories,*” the monster rasped, and, terrified, the girl complied.

As she spoke, reciting her favorite fairy tale in a weak, tremulous voice, the monster slumped slightly.



**The Wrath of the Lamb**  
**Marco Sweeney**  
*Digital Art*

The impossible abyssal darkness of its body seemed to... collapse in on itself, for lack of a better term, until it started to look less like a gaping hole in reality and more like the figure of a man draped in black wool, then deep gray fog, until the monster was just a man with old-fashioned clothes and features that, while notable, couldn't quite manage to catch in one's memories.

The little girl had grown steadily paler as the story she told progressed, until she was corpse-gray with shadows enveloping her body and between one stuttering heartbeat and the next ringing lack thereof, there was no more little girl.

Only a puddle of void-black, eating through the purplish rock... in the silence of this nothing-realm, the soft hiss it made was deafening. The man-that-was-the-monster smiled softly and turned away.

*What next?*

Well, a desiccated corpse had been found, hanging from the rafters of an old barn. This barn also happened to be the last known location of a missing child report filed later that day--but that's enough of that.

*Remember?*

*You promised me a story.*

# People Watching

Maxine Fox

I am sitting in the airport, hopelessly in love with the woman wearing Oswald on her shirt.

I wouldn't know his name, if not for the baby two seats over who mistakes him for the mouse,

And suddenly the lesson of "Can you say Ozz-wald?" is the talk of Gate B13.

The baby is Charlotte, after the city, visiting Grandma in Nice for the first time,

And Sharon, the woman with Oswald, breaks half of her donut and shares it with her.

Just then, they call me to pick up my tea, by the teen with pink braids to the floor,

And she tells me I'm pretty which, naturally, sparks her companion to talk about nails.

As I return to my seat, I wave to the family mapping their vacation plans,

And the tiniest girl, no older than 10, reads a book that I study for class.

I still don't quite get it, but she leans in her seat as if she can't get close enough.

When they call us to board, a girl with blue hair recycles three bottles of Coke.

She walks with her mom (identical nose) through the jetway, two steps behind,

And they chatter out plans, and blue hair despairs as a skull-splitting headache creeps in.

And in seat C1, she orders a Coke and her mother corrects, "Diet, please."

My window seat plants me right next to a man, all beard and red flannel and grin,

Collected Poems of Plath staring back from his palms, ballpoint pen tucked in his ear.

He coils himself into the cushion and offers me gum, "So your ears don't pop,"

And I take it and do not reveal that I carry the exact same pack in my purse.

The attendant jokes, something about seats in the most uncomfortable position for take-off.

I think I laugh louder than anyone, but she smiles the shame right off of my face.

The plane lurches into the sky, silver labyrinth shrinking, then fading through clouds.

Eight billion people in Chicago O'Hare, and I want to shake all of their hands.

# Purple Night (*Impressions from Nina Simone's – Lilac Wine*)

Hazel Vernon

Tonight  
    the Moon  
                    is a Lover  
I should never have lost

she calls out to me  
                    as I walk  
Strong  
    and  
            Sultry  
                    on the horizon

in a nightgown  
    of liquid Dreams

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Seduced by the pain  
    of former kisses  
I step between      the darkest of shadows

Stars  
    - - though I have fallen for them as well - -  
are so far

my eyes      could never reach them  
                                    It's a shame





Sunset Series  
**Jessica Ongole**  
*Digital Photography*

## Meadow St

Tamarianna Mason

It happened on Meadow St. after hours, where they first met. A flower and a bee were in the shadows of nightlife, whispering the city's secrets. They whispered about the lady they called Loud Face, who they caught dying her tulips. They whispered about the butcher they called Major Red because he was so big and red. They wept for the high school basketball star with a torn ACL. The fruit man down on the corner charges less if you wear his favorite color. The city bus driver doesn't wear his glasses. The guy who owns the Deli Market lets Sheila's boys steal candy occasionally, but only Sheila's boys. The dance teacher has a cigarette every day after class but has told her boyfriend she quit. The waitress at the dinner steals kisses in the car with her lady friend during her breaks. The Cassidys' eldest son joined the military to escape their father's expectations, the youngest plans to elope and run away with the brown-eyed girl from Oklahoma, and apparently, none of the family showed up to the middle sons' barber school graduation.



## *Contributor Bios*

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BELLA SCHATKO is a current freshman at Earlham College and part of the recently restored softball team. The team was brought back after a 30 year absence! She is a psychology major, but really enjoys writing poetry for her creative writing class.

CECILIA GITT-HENDERSON: “I am from Upstate New York but spent time living in Denmark. I love animals, especially cats; my two cats, Boots and Clover, often find their way into my art. I can milk cows by hand, do stick and poke tattoos, and thrift until the world ends. Pink camo is the color of my soul, and my hello-kitty obsession is still going strong at twenty years old.”

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DORIAN CAMPBELL is a sophomore Sociology/ Anthropology and Studio Art double major from Dayton, Ohio. She primarily works with block printing, embroidery, and collage.

ELIZA KARNOPP is a sophomore Creative Writing major, minoring in psychology, and one of the anxiety-prone editors of this very magazine! She enjoys writing horror and fantasy, listening to music, and hanging out with animals.

ELOISE RICHARDSON is a Junior majoring in Anthrozoology: Human-Animal Studies with a minor in Art. They do photography, drawing, painting, and ceramics.

ERIC POTTER: “Hi, my name is Eric Potter. I’m a junior neuroscience major and relatively new to poetry verse. If you critique my work too harshly, I will charge a small fee of 50 million dollars.”

HAZEL JORDAN is a graduating Biology major with an Environmental Sustainability minor. They studied abroad in Aotearoa in 2023.

HAZEL VERNON: “Writing bios is an awful activity. Luckily, I’m fairly sure that no one really knows how to do it, and I shall take comfort in the fact that close to no one, if literally no one, is going to bother reading my bio. I got some advice on writing this; I was told, quote, ‘Write about how much you like squirrels,’ which isn’t particularly unique or interesting to me, but I think there is something to the idea, so here goes. I like the squirrels on campus; they are cute. I sometimes sit hoping they will come up to me, but it hasn’t happened yet. My favorite squirrel has a bit of black fur on the chin. Oh, right, my name is Hazel; I’m a freshman, and I’m majoring in English, surprise, surprise.”

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INDIRA DELACORTE (she/they) is a senior literature major passionate about social justice and its intersections with the education system, music, and the wonders of the natural world.

JESSICA ONGOLE: “As a passionate digital photographer, Jessica uses her camera to capture the essence of the human experience. Her work reflects a journey through shadows, illumination, and societal evolution, provoking thought and conversation. She has a keen eye for capturing both the dawn and the gloom.”

JIMMY FREIBERGER: “My name is Jimmy Freiberger, and I am a second-year student studying Philosophy and Peace & Global Studies, with a minor in Law & Social Justice. One of my interests in poetry is to ‘grasp at straws,’ so to speak, in an attempt to convey the emotional weight (or lack thereof!) of the day-by-day absurdities that characterize urban American life.”

LEINY D. AGUILAR: “My major is psychology with a minor in arts. I like combining my two passions together and touching the surrealism painting world because it gives me extra creativity with the idea that everything is connected in a way.”

MARCO SWEENEY: “As a kid, my two favorite hobbies were playing outside and watching wildly scary videos on YouTube, and I think those two interests of mine sort of collided and gave me the artistic focus through which I create most of my pieces. I really enjoy combining the gentleness of nature with creepy and off-putting imagery, and this work is a sort of homage to the strange corners of the internet I used to occupy. I attempted a somewhat pixelated look for that ‘old web’ effect, and tried to give the character an uncanny vibe about him without necessarily making him ‘scary’. I don’t draw animals very often, so the lamb on his shoulders was a bit of uncharted territory for me, but I think lambs perfectly encompass the ‘gentleness of nature’ I mentioned earlier. If creating this piece has taught me anything, it’s that drawing wool is incredibly time consuming.”

MARIN SOLOMON is a queer religious artist who writes from their obsessions. They grew up around cornfields, sci-fi movies, and a wonderfully quirky family. Their goal is to document life and all of its little oddities.

MATEO QUIÑONEZ was born and raised in Guatemala, and through a series of fortuitous events finished his undergraduate education at Earlham College. His current interests include ceramics, printmaking, and braincell-deficient orange cats. Mateo is now in the process of completing a Master's of Arts in Teaching degree at Earlham College.

MAXINE FOX talks just a little too much.

MIYU ENOMOTO: "I'm a sophomore majoring in Peace and Global Studies and Creative Writing. I love expressing myself in words, drawings, and through my body (dance!!) These days, I'm very interested in how expression can emancipate humans in order to achieve greater justice and peace."

PRINCESS IGNOMA: "I am a Nigerian American-born who grew up in Ghana. I am a Biochemistry major, aspiring to be a general surgeon."

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REETI JOSHI: "Hi, I am Reeti, a current freshman. I adore values and colors, and I enjoy watching them interact in interesting ways in day-to-day life. I enjoy making my art vibrant and using colors with intention, as well as going monochromatic every now and then. I adore dogs, cats, and all animals in general. I have a cocker spaniel at home, and you can see him sleeping peacefully in my artwork."

SAM STASSEN: "I've always loved stories. Hearing them, telling them, watching them, and as I've gotten older, writing them. I try to write my poems to tell stories too. I hope I get to keep doing it."

SOPHIE SCHEIBER is a psychology major (class of 26) who loves poetry and is occasionally inspired to write her own. She's most inspired to write when exploring the outdoors or sitting bored at work.

TALIA CARTER wants to teach children to liberate themselves, enjoys stories about miserable heterosexual couples, and is never surprised when women turn into birds.

TAMARIANNA MASON is a NorCal girly surviving in the midwest.

UAPINGENA KANDJOZE: "Senior Neuroscience major with a chemistry minor. I also have an interest in the humanities and chose to take the religion and culture of hip-hop class with James Logan. I thought to submit my final essay, where I argue that hip-hop is a religion. Enjoy!"