

Issue no.1

ART SWAP

JANUARY 2022

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Here's what we did:

We all made something, then
sent it to someone else.

With our newly acquired
something, we responded.

See below.

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CHERRY HILL

BY ADIE BOVEE

I can't remember the name
of the French restaurant
and my dad can't remember
where we lived

on the hill

I was born

where the surgeon
fell asleep in his car
on Cherry Hill
my sister died.

The nurses are quitting now
the ones who don't believe
in science anyway.

The teachers too
and the public is falling
apart that never was
together and

October is falling

all over

the car

all over

the sleeping surgeon

his sandwich

is getting stale.

I want the egg sandwich

from the French restaurant

but I don't know the name

or the street

and my dad doesn't know the time

or my name

he calls me

by his own shame

and he doesn't know

the names of all my sisters

or their due dates

and having children

is irresponsible anyway

he says with what we know

now the surgeon general

has issued his warning.

My dad's father

was an addict

pharmacist and

there was a violence

in the home.

When we drove by it

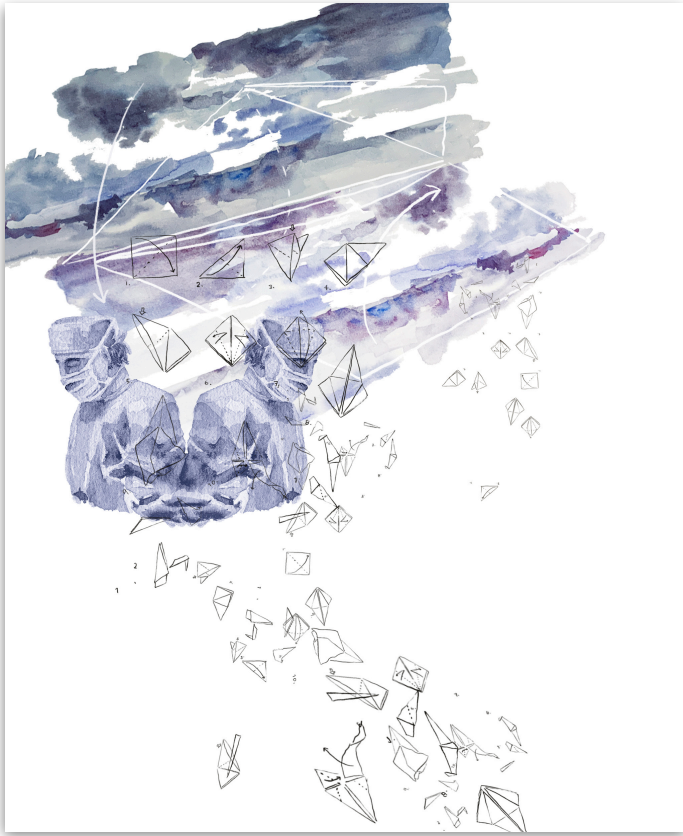
the screen door

kept swinging open and slamming
shut on the street
where my dad tried to make it
to the major leagues
before he became a specialist in addiction
solving the problem of his father
over
and over.

We lived on the hill with
the hospital and he worked
where you died
he played softball in the evenings
the fields are turf now
and the Hendrix house
demolished
on the windshield the Space
Needle plays its song
still raining
still dreaming
still the same dream
of slight return and
what angel
if you called out
would listen to this song
of the surgeon's work

on a body that will die
on a species that will perish
in this world of medical terror
and plastic
Band-Aids that are not
made to work but to sell
and any angel
could save us
but there aren't any
so what
new ways of being
might these words open
instead?
The rain is pouring
now I step
inside Elliot Bay to pick up
Sadako and Thousand Paper Cranes
trying to remember something
of it I remember not understanding the words
nuclear
radiation
leukemia
I understood
that I was ashamed
my mother
died and the cranes

came rolling and I knew
they were a reference
to something
about death I didn't understand still
but I did understand
that I was
missing
something
the surgeon said
we make a straight
line like this
to indicate
masculine
and we move the nipples
outwards
like this
like this
as if
he could show me
with his fingers
what is masculine
I didn't want.
When I walk
on Cherry Hill
there is no distance



"The Point"
By Christina Schueler

between the breath
I draw
and the breath you
lost the poem
is the breath
full relation.
I tossed you
as shards into Alki

an acceptable pollution
the gyres cycle
around the Pacific parts of
you in Hiroshima
and back to Manzanita
you might be a blue
heron or in
the stomach of an albatross.



"Discomfy Vibes" by Kimber Coles

UNTITLED

BY BETHANY KAYLOR

On Sunday morning, I tested positive for COVID. It wasn't a surprise—my throat was raw, I had a cough that rattled my body, and I woke up that morning in a thick sweat. "I'm so sorry," people said upon hearing the news, heaving their condolences onto me, edging their bodies ever so slightly

away, looking for the nearest exit. It's not so bad, I told them. I feel like trash and I can't stop shivering, but at the very least it's something new.

Of course, it helps that I'm young, healthy, have health insurance, and don't mind being alone. Also, my symptoms are relatively mild and my boss is very flexible. I've spent the past four days huddled in my room with the space heater on blast, chugging Gatorade and taking naps, nursing a cough that rattles my whole body, like a middling gay princess stuck in her tower, watching the world pass by below.

More daunting than infection is wrestling with the shifting conditions and expectations of how we're supposed to live—to be—in this pandemic. The problem is epistemological: how do we exist in uncertainty, and is there a determined moral calculus for our decisions?

At this point I should admit that with each wave of lockdown, I've experienced a small thrill of security. The feeling is not born from safety against the virus—it is the sweet, sweet release of decision fatigue. Here is what I can do. Here is what I cannot. Does this make me an Orwellian sheep? Perhaps. But for the past few years, I've been too exhausted—overwhelmed, overstimulated—to fully grieve the loss of my daily agency. The penultimate episode of the show *Fleabag* comes to mind, when the titular character breaks down in the confession booth. “I want someone to tell me what to wear in the morning,” she says. “I want someone to tell me what to eat, what to like, what to hate, what to rage about...I want someone to tell me what I believe in, who to love, how to tell them I love them.” She starts crying. “So just tell me what to do, Father. Just tell me what to do.” The scene is powerful, one of the few times in the show where *Fleabag* is vulnerable, when she's not cracking a joke or

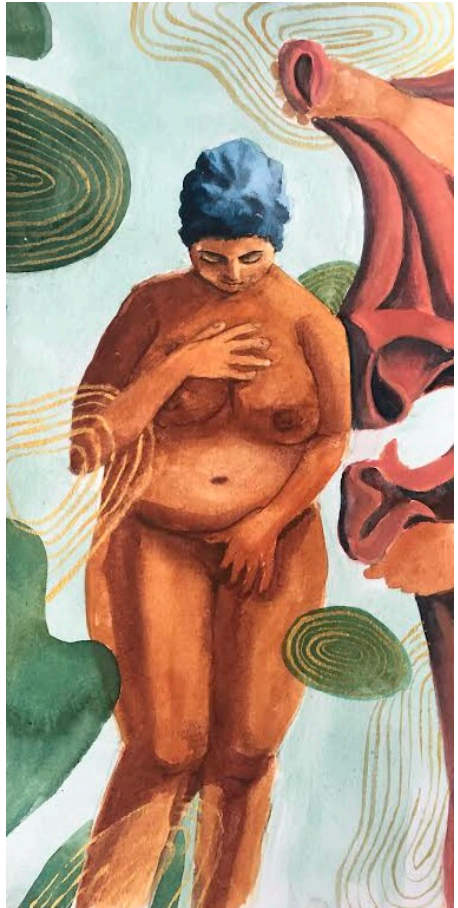
pissing someone off to see what happens. After the episode ended, I stared at my dark computer screen, dumbfounded into the sort of silence that comes only when stumbling upon an unexpected part of yourself. I want that too, I thought. Some part of me has always wanted it. When I was a young child, playing a game of hide and seek gave me undue anxiety. In shadowy closets, crouched behind smothering layers of winter coats, I was often seized by the urge to throw open the door and reveal myself. "I'm over here!" Game over. It's not that I wanted to be found, per se. It's that I couldn't bear not knowing if I would be. Twenty years later, I still can't untangle why the need for control looks suspiciously like the urge to abdicate it.

SUMMONING BEAUTIFUL

BY CLAIRE BRISLIN

Some of them were tall-slender arms and legs still finding their length. Some of them were strong and broad-shouldered from years of training at the Anamathen. Some were petite and perfectly proportioned, and some of them were all soft, undulating curves that rippled like the Idalyia Sea. All of them—all of them—were beautiful.

Zaharada never talked to them during The Preparing. She never knew their names until after, when they were carved into the Great Sea Stone. It made no difference which ones cried or fought or remained kind or polite or stoic during The Preparing. They all ended up as names



"Birth of Venus de Willendorf"
By Bailey Zahniser

on that apathetic chronicle of rock.

She was good at her job. It was a spiritual undertaking that required attention to detail and an artist's eye. She was not mechanical. Every Preparing was its own original work of art, the only final gift she could give these beautiful, doomed girls.

When she undressed them, her fingers moved deftly, but gently, through the buttons-or ribbons, or straps-and she eased off every garment without tugging or pulling before folding them into careful piles.

Then she would guide them into the stone pool, supporting them so they wouldn't slip as they lowered themselves into the purple mineral water, steaming, but never scalding, with the heat from the underground thermo streams.

After they had soaked at least five minutes, Zaharada would begin to scrub the girl's skin with a pumice stone she had made sure to free of any sharp edges.

She started with the neck, holding the top of the girl's head forward with her left hand as the right one moved in a circular motion, hard enough to release the dead skin, but never hard enough to hurt.

Then she would push the girl's head even further forward as she scrubbed down her back. Next came each of her long or strong or petite arms, and after that she would help the girl stand so she could scrub the rest of her, finally finishing with the legs and feet.

The girls were then rinsed with rose water, wrapped in blankets lined with heated stones and set to lie on a set of clean blankets that Zaharada had laid up to the pool's edge. Here, she would wash the girl's hair-flowing red waves, tight dark curls, silky black and straight, coarse, fine, thick, thin-with a fizzy soap she had created herself from a combination

of butter berries and crystal carbonate she collected in the sea caves.

With a brush made from the bark of a sandpaper tree, Zaharada cleaned every finger and toenail and then polished them with kalum oil. She used this same oil in their hair, once it was dry enough, to control any loose, static, or frizzy ends and to give them that luminous glow they would have to embody when presented before the gathered masses of Thydoria.

She took particular care with the faces. She preferred keeping them as natural as possible-not like the gaudy painted faces of the upper-class Thydorian men and women-while also using some colors in her palette to illuminate the eyes, or distinguish sharp cheekbones, or full lips, or defiant arching eyebrows.

Finally, she dressed them in the light purple silks that every girl wore at The Summoning. The silks were dyed with the pale purple hearts of flutter hawks, magnificent four-winged sea birds considered a symbol of divine beauty and innocence. It was forbidden to kill them for any other purpose than the making of these soft, deadly garments.

When she was done, she would ring the signal bell by pulling on a long hanging rope that disappeared into the rocky ceiling of the preparing chamber.

As she waited with the girls they would sometimes pace or kneel or weep, or stand as grounded as statues. Every once in a while, a girl would shove a piece of paper into her hand and beg them to deliver it to a sister or mother or lover. And one time-she could still remember the smoky scent of the girl's hair that refused to wash out- a girl had just pulled her into a strangling embrace, her shivering shaking Zaharada's body to its core.

As for Zaharada, she never said a word. Not only because it was an impossible thing to find words of comfort for these walking dead, but because like every Preparer who had come before her, her tongue had been cut out as part of her initiation.

Zaharada didn't mind. For what did her silence matter? The blood of the girls screamed louder than the bellowing barbadours that sun bathed on the sea rocks. Zaharada could hear it.

And, one day, the world would hear it too.

PIGHEART'S RABBITHOLE

BY SAM SCHILD

Pigheart, go to bed.

...just one more...just one more...

I'm a smart dog. Too smart for my own good. They say I always "need a job" or else I won't be a "good girl." Who's *they*? Well, my human, Warrick, and her friends, and their friends' friends, too. Everyone says blue heelers always need a job. That's me. I need a job and don't have one.

Humans. Always talking about jobs. They weren't talking about jobs when we started hanging around their fires, though. Then they were talking about hunting and finding food. They were talking about the tiger stalking out there. They were talking about how the wolves would sound the alarm if it came close. We've been working from the beginning, don't talk to me about needing a job.

But what do they know? Here I am, jobless, and I've learned to use a computer and navigate the internet.

That's right, drop me miles away from home and I'll use my sniffer to find my way back. Leave me home alone and I'll find my way onto Warrick's computer and watch YouTube until I pass out.

Figuring out her password was easy. I've watched her type it in 1000s of times. F@ckB0i420. Fuckboy would've been one of my first guesses anyway, she says it enough.

How do I operate the keyboard with those unwieldy paws? Fuck you. I learned how to read; of course I figured out how to operate a keyboard. Besides, my claws are the perfect size to hit those keys. Good thing Warrick doesn't trim them often.

But it's late, like, really late. I gotta go to bed. I'm tired.

But the algorithm keeps working tirelessly. I'll shut this thing down after one more video. Where's Warrick anyway? She's usually home by now...

"You think dogs came from wolves? Well I'm hear to tell you THAT'S A LIE. It's fakenews perpetuated by the lamestream media. Do you think this little dog with hair so long it can't see came from this apex predator?! Well, I'm here to tell you YOU'RE WRONG! That's just what the god-hating-gay-atheist-radical-environmentalist-academic-evolutionary-industrial-complex wants you to think. Dogs were made by GOD to be companions to MAN. They have hair so long they can't see so their owners can trim it for them. We were made for each other! We were made in God's image and dogs were made for us! Dogs didn't come from those wild animals responsible for killing MILLIONS OF CATTLE EVERY YEAR."

Holy shit. I gotta go to bed. This is too much right now. It's fascinating that someone out there believes this, but I gotta go to bed. This wingnut is too much right now.

...

...

...

10 million subscribers?!?!?!?

... ..

Holy shit.

... ..

?????????!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!????????????????????!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!????????????????????

...
...
...

The sunlight was shining directly in my eyelids. That means it's 11 am.

I open my eyes and look around the small attic converted to a bedroom. An old broomstick hangs from the sloped ceiling, and some of Warrick's cloths hang from that. The rest of her clothes lay piled underneath on the blue shag carpet.

Wait a minute. Where's Warrick?! She never came home?

"Wolves are a farce created by radical environmentalists to keep us in line. Don't be one of the sheeple. The radical environmentalists want to kill all your sheep, and your cows, and your dogs. Don't fall for their lies."

What the fuck?! This thing has been autoplaying all night? At least I'm signed into my account. Wouldn't want Warrick to start getting weird video recommendations. Who is this guy anyway?

Alex Bones. Truth seeker. Truthwars.com
10 million subscribers

Wait, a dog made these videos? No way. No fucking way would a dog want this drivel to be out in the world for humans to see.

Wait a minute, where is Warrick?? She should be here right now.

Calm down Pigheart. She probably just stayed over at a friend's house and is at work now.

Right? It's Tuesday, yeah. She works today, from 10-6 at PAWS, the dog adoption agency. I gotta pee. Hopefully

Warrick's roommates haven't left trash in front of my door again.

Pigheart walks down the stairs, into the messy kitchen. No one's home, but there are dirty dishes piled in the sink.

Maybe the water was cut off again. The city's been doing that a lot recently. They say it's because the Colorado River is dry. We're in a drought, yet the houses with the best grass to pee on clearly are getting water to waste on their lawns from somewhere. They're only throttling the water to poor neighborhoods.

I should go pee on their lawns now.

No I shouldn't. It's too risky to be a dog on a walk alone right now. Might end up visiting Warrick at work again. That place is sad. All those dogs locked up in little rooms with nothing to do and nowhere to pee. I can't believe she likes working there.

Pigheart sticks her head out the dog door and peers out into the yard. There's still trash everywhere but she can just squeeze out through the door past the pile that made the dog door unusable yesterday.

"Hey, Pigheart! What's up?"

"Oh hey, Laika," Pigheart says, sniffing the same places she always sniffs.

Fire barrel.

Laika's been peeing here too, as usual. But what's this? The raccoons are back?

Pigheart lifts her leg and lets out some pee on the rusty barrel. At the base it sizzles a little bit. Still hot from the fire last night.

Couch.

Yeah, this could use a refresh.

Pigheart lifts her leg and drenches the outside corner of the sun faded apolstry. Pile of rusty scrap metal.

The squirrels have been busy in there.

She lifts her leg. Gotta make sure those squirrels know who's boss.

Compost pit.

Ahhh yes. The best smelling place in the yard. Laika's been here all morning. She probably got all the bagels, too. Oh well, Warrick says I shouldn't eat moldy bread anyways.

She lifts her leg. Laika's gotta know who's boss. Even if she is more vigilant when it comes to fresh food in here.

"Did you hear about PAWS, Pigheart?" "No, Laika, I didn't."

"I did."

"...well?"



"Pigheart"
By Tommy Ford

"...well, what's a haw stick? I heard Derrel and Monique talking about a haw stick situation at PAWS."

“Haw stick?” What are you talking about Laika?

“A haw stick situation, that’s what they kept saying last night, and this morning. Didn’t you hear them? I love sticks. You never listen to your roommates.”

“That’s because humans will talk for hours about nothing, Laika. I’ve got better things to do than listen to them.”

“Well, this haw stick situation sounded serious. Derrel and Monique were talking about it all night.”

“You don’t even know what a haw stick situation is, Laika.”
“That’s why I’m asking you, Pigheart.”

“WELL I DON’T KNOW WHAT A HAW STICK SITUATION IS EITHER, LAIK...” Pigheart trails off. Haw stick sounds an awful lot like another word.

“I gotta go, Laika.”

Pigheart runs inside, leaving her recently adopted street dog that looks like a dirty mop roommate to dig through the compost pile alone. She goes up the steep stairs back to Warrick’s room. The computer, which is still open, is playing Alex Bones videos.

“Only buy purebred dogs! Dog adoption agencies are a front for the radicals to launder money and wolves! They’re breeding those killers right under our noses!”

Holy Fuck.

She clears the web address and enters the search term PAWS Denver hostage

Uh oh....

BRACE YOURSELF

BY MEGHAN ROBINS

There is an aspen grove just north of Blackwood Creek, dense with chalky white trunks all angled at attention. A hidden path winds straight through the middle and I was drawn in like Alice in Wonderland, knowing full well it was an animal's trail, a place I should not go. The brown earth was packed, swept clear of decayed leaves. Too narrow for a bear, too smooth for deer, too enclosed for a cat. So whose was it? I'll tell you, my curiosity rivaled my better instincts and I stepped in.

I carried my thirty-five-millimeter camera, hunting for photographs, hoping to get something better than the rote pinecone in snow, a mediocre tree bow framing the lake. I wore shorts, a t-shirt, my camera around my neck. As trained by my parents, I left a note explaining where I was going, when I left, when to expect me home. But deep into my teens my notes lacked detail and read more like, "Near the river; back by dinner." Growing up in Tahoe, I felt intimately connected and safe in the woods behind our house. So as I entered the narrow path, feeling more guilty than scared about tracking my scent in unnecessarily, I recognized that this mysterious, unfindable place was a bad place to get hurt. Nobody would find me for days or weeks. This was before cell phones and there's no service there anyway. Assuring myself that self-sustained injury was unlikely, I ventured on. Step after step, I observed my surroundings, gathered information, noting the dozens of impassable trunks broken only by the enchanting path that led me deeper. Once again, I

ruled out the most dangerous animals to be pinned in tight quarters with, for the path was too narrow for large creatures and too confining for others. Except I could not shake the feeling that I was trespassing. That I was not alone. I kept my camera ready in case I could snap something award-winning.



Photo by Jesse Shofner

Twenty paces in, I reached a fork in the road—a clear shot to the river. There was Blackwood Creek, swollen with spring melt, an easy escape. I relaxed. I gained confidence. I walked on.

Around a next bend, I found my answer. The owner of this path, the sweeper of leaves, stood before me, startled by the sudden appearance of a human in her keep, blocking her way with scrawny white legs. Of all animals, I wracked my brain trying to remember what to do when confronting a full grown, buck-toothed beaver!

Suddenly every ecological lesson from my childhood latched into place: the narrow path leading to water, the lifetime supply of trunks, the fork in the road, the mound of debris and plastered mud. Of course! My dull-witted deduction happened so slowly that I simply froze.

All I could think was how large her teeth were, how black her eyes were, how it didn't feel right to run. But what could I do? We were facing off, clearly on her turf, trapped by spears of quaking aspens, and I was between her and her den.

My brain rolodexed through every human-animal conflict all kids in Tahoe are taught: See a bear? Make loud noises, get big, be a nuisance (unless there are cubs, then slowly back away). Encounter a mountain lion? Get even bigger, sound even more menacing, become so unpleasant you're not worth the effort (then pray to whatever you deem holy because those are likely your last thoughts). Suddenly surrounded by a pack of coyotes? (That only happened once when they lured my friend's dog into the woods and we ended up chasing them—not recommended.) What else, the occasional rattlesnake? Don't make sudden movements. Slowly back away. Get a long, forked stick to pin its head if you must. Other than a few spiders and insects (tick nowadays, unfortunately) there aren't that many dangerous animals to contend with in Tahoe. Wolverines haven't been seen (except that one) for a hundred years and generally, the wildlife-human interface seems to be in the human's favor.

But no one has ever mentioned what to do for beavers. I'd like to say I jumped into action, that I was fully prepared for what came next, but I was still on thought number six about ticks making their way to higher elevations and was froze dumb, wildly out of my element. That's when my legs burst out from beneath me. Dense fur bristled my shins. That beaver charged me so fast, she threw me headlong into dense aspens, my feet water-wheeling behind me, my forehead crashing into rigid bark. When I regained myself, she was on the other side of me, guarding the crossroads that led to the

river, slapping her tail on that smooth dark ground. Thump, thump, thump.

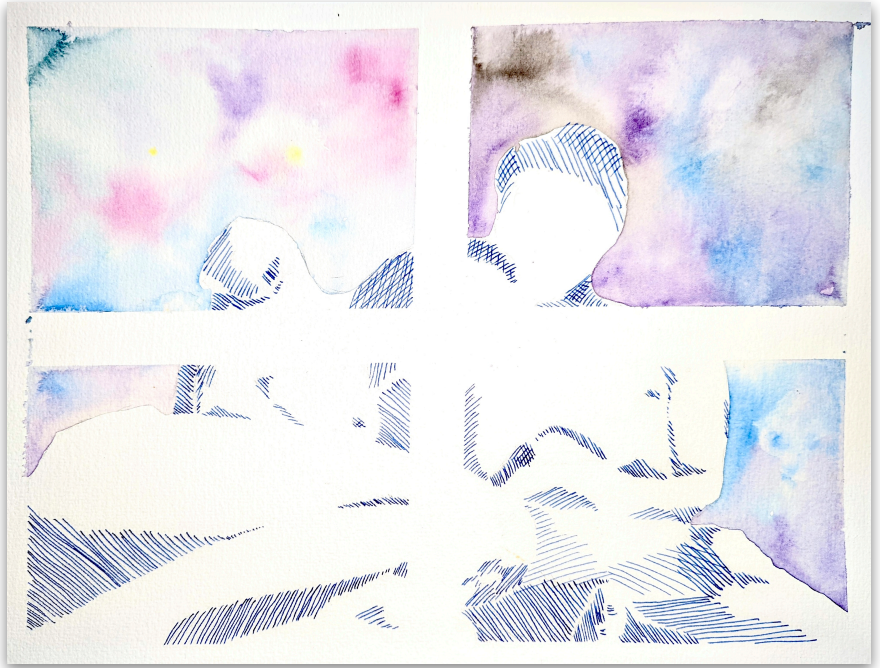
The reverberations tickled the soles of my feet. No doubt, she was rolodexing through her ideas of what to do: flipping back to her ancestors' stories of being fur-trapped to near extinction and weighing that reality against the safety of her own family resting unawares in their den. Steadily she slap, slap slapped and that sound, which was more like an echo, warned me away. I ran deeper into the unknown, down the only path I hadn't yet scented, hoping to god it led back to daylight.

Had you been walking through Blackwood that day. Had you glanced toward the river at the exact moment I came tumbling out, dirtied and bruised, beguiled and wide-eyed, untouched film in my camera, you might have thought I was Alice in Wonderland, dumped suddenly from some impenetrable forest. Maybe I was. Certainly, I had experienced something I should not have. I had been somewhere I should not have been. You may be right to wonder what parts of this story are exaggerated. What parts are true. All I can tell you is that next time you encounter a beaver, brace yourself.

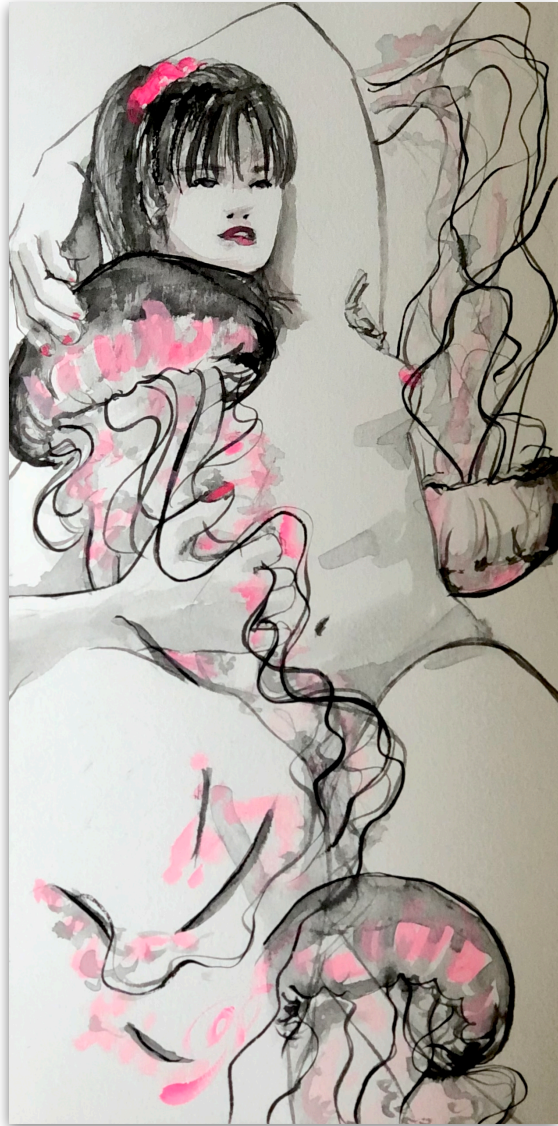
A MATRIMONY OF TWO OUTLAWS

BY NATALIE ROBIN

Our bodies melt like butter when we touch.
Dusting the cobwebs from the rafters above,
A crow leads a congregation of doves in song.
We rise,
Front row,
Inside a church without a steeple.
And listen,
To a river of lifeless water down below.
We are lost,
Are we not?
Yet together,
We are found.
Our worn out socks make a holy pair,
I'd say.
Our shoes laced in leather,
Cry dirty to the bone.
When the red moon rises at midnight,
Toward the butt of your camel cigarette,
Kiss me,
Into a dream that smells like whiskey.
And when we wake up,
We will do it again.
A matrimony of two outlaws,
This is.
We will run our own parade into the dead of the desert.



"socks"
By Laurene Ross



JELLIES

BY BAILEY ZAHNISER

EMOTIONS BY NATALIE ROBIN

Emotions–

they will sit you down, and set you up to confide with the
tide and the reasons you doubt. Where do all the sad songs
go?

Do they congregate in stormy clouds?

Or wade behind the whispers of eelgrass?

Do wishes really send their regards, only to stars above?

Or do wishes also sink their teeth into the gritty sand
around starfish feet?

Is jealousy like a jellyfish, in the sense that all things novel
and bright, hold a tiny electric light? Why must the roundest,
deepest, full-bodied love also hold fear and doubt?

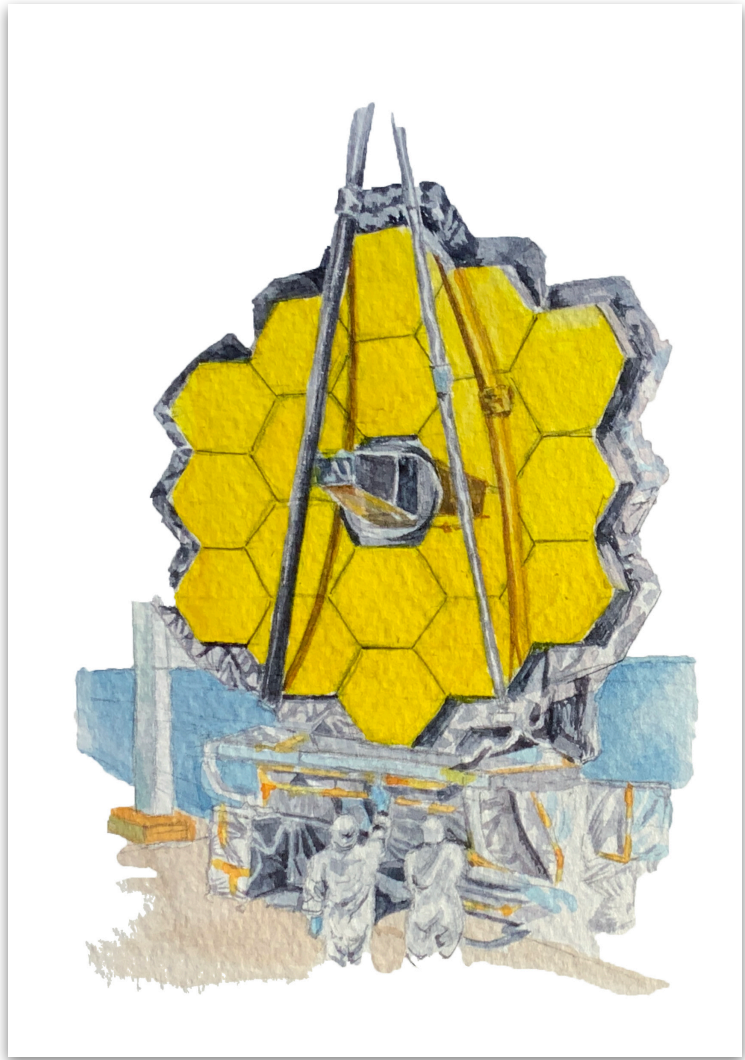
You can hate to love.

You can love to hate.

You can also hate to hate and love to love.

Emotions are like color and water, I suppose.

And on paper, love is like a painting—one that softly
decorates the edges of your soul.



OBSERVATION

BY CHRISTINA SCHUELER

**AT THE
JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE OBSERVATORY
BY SAM SCHILD**

“Hey! Don’t unplug that!”

“Who are you? I need this outlet for my presentation.”

“Who are you? You can’t use this outlet. It’s very important that I don’t let this cord get unplugged for anything.”

“Do you want to see how drinking alkaline water can help lower the acidity in your body?”

“What?”

“Do you want to drink from the fountain of youth or not?”

“Um...This cord goes to the James Webb Space Telescope. If it gets unplugged we won’t be able to see the faint light coming from distant stars and galaxies.”

“What? Isn’t that what the sun shield is for?”

“...Well, yeah, but I think they’re working on it right now. This is keeping it cold in the meantime.”

“This tiny 110-volt cord is keeping the James Webb Space Telescope below 50 degrees Kelvin?!”

“...Yeah?”

“How long is that extension cord, anyway? The James Webb Space Telescope is what? 930,000 miles away!”

“Ummm...”

“Well, don’t you want to hear about how drinking alkaline water can reduce aging and prevent cancer?”

“...Well, kind of? No! I’m working here.”

“What do you mean, you’re working? You’re sitting next to a plug. Come on, the presentation is only 15 minutes and you’ll get a free sample of this life-giving tonic.”

“No. I have to stay here. And you’ll have to find a different place to plug in your projector.”

“Come on! Have you ever felt like the water you’re drinking just wasn’t enough to fully hydrate you? I used to think that, too! But not anymore! Zen Water created this special formula that increases hydration, lowers death rates, cures cancer, and more! SERIOUSLY! Come see the presentation to learn more!”

“I can’t. I have to do my job.”

“I am soooooo grateful to work for Zen Water! Since I joined Zen Water I have been able to work from home and own a small business! Seriously! I have made 10 thousand dollars in just the past week! And I did this by simply drinking Zen Water all day.”

“What?! Where did you come from, even? Why are you at the NASA headquarters giving a presentation on alkaline water??”

“It’s not just alkaline water. It’s Zen Water!” “Okay, fine. Tell me more.”

“I have such a great team of boss babes and I am so grateful for Zen Water! Want to join my team? Let me know and I’ll hook you up!”

“Wait, what about the fountain of youth?”

“Really, I’ll hook you up! You’ll live forever with Zen Water! Now can I pleeeeeease use this outlet to plug in my projector for this presentation? Don’t you wanna know how I made 10 thousand dollars last week??”

“...I mean, yeah, but I can’t let you do that.”

“What do you mean you can’t?”

“I mean I can’t let you unplug this. It’s my job.”

“...This is your job?!”

“Yeah. This plug is very important. My job is to make sure no one unplugs it.”

“But don’t you want to know how something as simple as changing the way you drink water can change your life? Come on, I’m sure you’re happy with your career, but what if you could supplement that income doing something you absolutely love???”

“Well, I am just an unpaid intern...”

“Come on! It’ll only be 15 minutes. I promise!”

“...Welllllllll, okay, fine.”

“Great! You’re gonna love your new career!” ***

“Here it comes!”

“We’re finally going to see the atmospheric conditions of this potentially habitable exoplanet!” “...”

“...”

“...”

“...Well?”

“Somethings not right.”

“What do you mean somethings not right?”

“Look.”

“...it’s just...it looks like...”

“...an overexposed photograph?”

“...yeah”

“What...the...fuck.”

“...Your body is nearly 70% water, so it isn’t surprising to realize how much you depend on it! Better water means better health. You can be certain you’re only getting the best from Zen Water! Feel free to come see me with any questions you might have. Let’s make you live longer, starting today!”

“Wow! I can’t wait to start my career working with this team of total bosses working hard to share the gospel of Zen Water!”

“You’re gonna live forever!” “We’re gonna live forever!”



MAKING ACQUAINTANCE

BY JESSE SHOFNER

OUT IN THE OPEN

BY MEGHAN ROBINS

When I was twelve, middle of seventh grade, I got my first period. Luckily, I was at home and found my sister's tampon box, desperately reading the explicit, horrifying instructions. That was it. There was no asking Google back then. I didn't even tell my mom. Was I ashamed? Embarrassed that this thing had happened to me? Did I think I could handle it on my own?

There was no ceremony. No celebration. Mine was a quiet lurking into the dark secrets of womanhood.

Perhaps if I had been congratulated twenty-three years ago, I might feel differently now. Perhaps if I had known my entrance would be rejoiced by the men and women of my community, I would not have hidden it, quietly and shameful.

Many Indigenous cultures revere a girl's maturation and honor a woman's monthly cycle with days of rest and solitude. The *Washiw* tribe of Lake Tahoe mark a girl's entrance into womanhood with a multi-day celebration, where the girl fasts and performs certain duties, including lighting a fire atop a mountain to invite others to celebrate with her. Then her father plants a special elderberry staff hidden in the woods to symbolize the lifelong strength of his daughter. There is always a great feast and dancing. The Yana people, who lived southwest of *Waganupa* (Mt Lassen), had a special house where a woman lived for six days during her cycle, cooking only for herself while others did her chores. What a dream to be excluded from life for a moment, to recuperate and be alone. (Unfortunately, the Yana people also believed evil was afoot during menstruation and distance was imperative, but still...)*

Today, women on birth control may choose to go months between bleedings. Women using IUDs go years. As an athlete, adventurer, professional, I have always welcomed that control over my life. But after two decades of cloistered menstruation, it occurs to me that what I have lost is the celebration.

Not long ago, nine women and I went hiking, swimming, and made camp near an alpine lake. Despite myself, I compared my body to each of theirs: Her arms have more freckles than mine. Her legs are longer, wider, stronger. Her stomach wedges between hipbones like an isosceles triangle. She is the strongest of all, yet look, cellulose speckles her gray heathered leggings. Dirty words like cellulose are engrained deeply into me. I have been trained to be suspect, to notice, to judge. Yet ten women, tromping unhindered, did not discuss the geometry of fat. No one's body failed them. Alone, we celebrated one another without hesitation.

Conversation swirled and something led us to comparing vaginas. This is a thing women can do together, alone in the woods. It was delightful, revolutionary, informative. Some vaginas are outies, blooming outward like succulents. Some are tucked neatly in. I never knew there was such variety. Of course, there is. This is what bodies look like.

The things society wants from women cannot happen without menstruation. Yet we confuse bleeding for betrayal and welcome the power of procreation with phrases like: Don't talk about it. Don't share. Gross. Be embarrassed. Push through. Cramps are no excuse. Take the test. Trudge through PE.

By age thirteen, all I learned about my body was that my period was a burden, an excuse, a disgrace. I was embarrassed, and my determination to be as good, if not

better, than the boys in my class, meant no bloating or exhaustion or misplaced tampon would keep me from running the race, taking that test, missing the party. In fact, I too pretended like nothing was happening because nobody wanted to know. Nobody wanted to celebrate. Nobody seemed to care.

But what if...

What if we officially celebrated our girls entering into something sacred? What if we allow women a few days of solitude to care for only herself? This thing is happening to my body. It is happening to all women's bodies, all the time. Let's support, uplift, and show respect *because of* our bodies and witness the good it would do. To a marriage, to partnership, relationships and jobs, knowing we (*all*) get a monthly respite. I am not asking society to uproot our five-day work week. This is not about disrupting family, career, or ambition. This will not ruin capitalism or religion. This is about honoring a woman's experience, by acknowledging that *menstruation is happening*. Every day, in a vagina near you.

Such celebrations do happen. Somewhere, I hope. But not in the capitalistic, American, circadian-rhythm-obsessed society I live in. It happens on the outskirts, in the woods, in places where women gather unhindered to remove ourselves from shame. And if the tingling thought of witchcraft just made you nervous, if the image of women laughing together in the woods, vaginas out, fully empowered, is not a vision you want to embrace, let me remind you: My body is doing something I did not ask of it. I, too, believe that my monthly bleeding is sometimes a blessing, sometimes a curse.

It has taken years for me to understand the blessing part. It has taken years to find women I can celebrate with. After

two decades of involuntary bleeding, running slower when practice aligned with my period, being distracted at work or class worried if I bled through, I am still trying to reconcile this un-relationship with myself. Finally, I am trying to learn how to celebrate.

It might not be with fires on mountaintops or full seclusion for days on end, but I do want to celebrate. Maybe I'll take the day off. Maybe I'll eat what I want. Maybe I'll stop caring what anyone else thinks and I'll pin a blue rectangle to my lapel to symbol that I want to celebrate, and I invite you, if you want, to come celebrate the dark secrets of womanhood with me. In fact, we can start celebrating right now, right here, right out in the open.

*Details about *Washiw* girl's ceremony from "The Small Shall Be Strong" by Matthew Makley (2018); Details of Yana women from "Ishi: In Two Worlds" by Theodora Kroeber (1961).



NEKOWIN

BY KIMBER COLES

UNTITLED
BY BETHANY KAYLOR

Sunset: the day stretches before you, bursting with color, pink and orange striated across the sky like taffy. The hills gleam with sunshine. Birds chat across the trees, a cacophony of sound. There is so much possibility. So much time.

But sunset is a ruinous thing. Who wants to watch the world disappear, fiery as it may be?



PEGAGRANATE

BY LAURENNE ROSS

THE HIGHLY UNLIKELY ESCAPE OF THE
POMEGRANATE WHO BELIEVED IN BETTER
THINGS

BY CLAIRE BRISLIN

He was going to fall soon, he knew it.

He could feel the weight of ripening upon him, the hundreds of seeds within him expanding with juice, rushing to his head.

The branch that he and his brothers and sisters occupied was hanging decidedly lower than it had been, the hard, unforgiving ground looming below and already littered with the first fallen fruits of the season.

Soon that would include him.

He should have known. All his life he had been ahead of the game, from seedling to fruit, he had blossomed through every stage of germination like one determined to win some universal race of life. And now, and the irony haunted him, all his effort to be the biggest, the juiciest, the most luscious pomegranate to ever grow in the orchard, would be for naught.

The harvesters wouldn't come for at least another week. And he knew he wouldn't be able to hold out till then. The weight would bear him down to the ground, the fall bruising his perfect, ruby roundness.

The bruising would be where the rot started. Where it would creep in and spoil him from the inside out.

Then the hornets would follow, their greedy mouths ripping at his soft flesh, creating gaping holes for the ants and the beetles and bacteria to wriggle their way within him.

And then the birds, pecking at him heartlessly, flighty little jackhammers with their pointed beaks and small beady eyes of doom.

Last would come the harrowing fungus of decay, to finish him off. His flesh would shrivel and blacken and perhaps even bloom into a fuzzy gray layer of mold.

The pomegranate shuddered on his branch at the thought.

And immediately regretted it as the branch swayed to a fro, threatening to drop him there and then.

“No!”

The exclamation was soft, yet forceful, emanating from deep within him. That bleak future of falling too soon and rotting on the orchard floor would not be his fate. Not if he had anything to do with it.

“NO!” came the voice again, this time settling into a fierce determination. There must be another way. There must be some escape from this inevitability. He could not have grown and developed and cultivated every last little fruit of himself for nothing. There had to be more. More than this existence, hanging upside down, eyes forever looking towards the sky with the dreaded knowledge of the ground below always in the back of his mind.

The *sky*.

The thought struck him so suddenly that he almost dropped from his branch in shock.

For his entire existence, he had watched the sky above him. The blue expanse of possibility, the shifting of clouds from puffy white to brooding grey, the stars twinkling above in a kaleidoscope of light.

If there was ever a chance of escape for a pomegranate with big dreams, the sky must be the answer.

The pomegranate resolved himself. He closed his eyes and began breathing deep, intentional breaths until he had fallen into a meditative calm.

When he opened his eyes and looked back up at the spring sky, a single cloud directly above his tree began to shift.

It folded in upon itself until it was an oval of white. Out of that oval sprouted four legs that stretched into their full length and a lithe neck with wild, cascading hair that ended in a long head that the creature immediately tossed with ecstatic joy. Finally came two great wings out of the creature's back that expanded to catch the full power of the wind.

It was time, he knew it.

With a final gaze upon his ripening brothers and sisters, the pomegranate closed his eyes once more and took a final, reverberating breath.

And then he let go.

He let himself fall, his eyes closed and his heart open, trusting the universe to be more than he had ever been promised.

And then he was flying. Mounted on the back of the cloud creature, the pomegranate flew into the blue sky of early spring, knowing nothing about his destination except that he was heading towards better things.



MOTHER AND CHILD

BY TOMMY FORD

WHO IS TOMMY FORD?
BY ADIE BOVEE

What I mean is which is me,
by which I mean which is before and which is after and
when Mick says Bubber can come along
is that a gift?

Is it a gift when the surgeon says there is nothing
more to be done by which I mean which
knowledge will stop the chaos
and which knowledge is it

and dear Lord let me never
look in the mirror and see a friend
who did not save my life.