Crosscurrents: Spring 2021

Associated Students of the University of Puget Sound

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University of Puget Sound

– Spring 2021 –
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Mission Statement
Founded in 1958, Crosscurrents is a student-run magazine dedicated to promoting the visual and literary art of the University of Puget Sound community. We at Crosscurrents are proud to uplift the creative work that we publish and to sustain a journal that reflects the voices and vision of our student body. Committed to free expression and the honest exchange of ideas, Crosscurrents strives to represent the breadth and originality of the best writing and art produced by Puget Sound students.

We hope that Crosscurrents not only provides a platform for the artistic truths within, but that it also opens a doorway to further opportunities in art and literature. Most of all, we are committed to the principle that the voices of the Puget Sound creative community need to be heard, and we look forward to hearing yours.

Artist Statement
The artist featured on the cover of this spring edition of Crosscurrents is Rebecca Connolly. She is from Los Angeles and has taken her time in Tacoma to experiment and develop her focus on hyperrealism and mastery of art of all kinds. The front and back cover of the Spring 2021 issue were made with vintage magazines. The artist urges you to take a second look at the covers and see what you may not have noticed before, making the smallest of details stand out. She hopes you enjoy flipping through this zine wrapped in her art!
A Note from Andrew

In a little over a year, our notion of space has changed drastically. On one hand, the coronavirus pandemic has separated us as individuals, taking away interaction and human touch, making us more distant than ever before. But on another, we have become close to each other in ways we never expected, as Zoom brings us into our coworkers’, friends’, and loved ones’ homes and daily lives. With in-person contact being limited, we have found new ways to relate and connect with others.

But as we begin to see the pandemic (hopefully) come to an end, we find we are close and distant in other, less literal ways as well.

As students begin to relax into their summers and vaccination levels increase, we are close to a return to normal. What this new normal will look like, we don’t know, but we do know we are simply not there yet. We must continue past this closeness until we can be physically close again, difficult as it may be.

The pandemic has also shown how distant we are from our goals as a society. It’s highlighted existing inequalities within the world at large, and showed that the fight against racism, sexism, bigotry, and discrimination of all kinds can never be over. We must continue the battle against these evils, because we have so far to go.

In the face of all of this, we, as people tend to do, turned to art. No matter the form, we created brilliant, beautiful works of personal and cultural expression. This issue, which also contains the demands of the Multi-Identity Based Union (MIBU), an organization of students dedicated to making our campus a more diverse, respectful and inclusive place for all, is UPS’s contribution. We hope it’ll offer solace, or broaden your mind, but most importantly we hope the work in here makes you feel something.

Darrell Andrew Ellison, Co-Editor-in-Chief

A Note from Jack

In the interest of keeping this short, and to keep me from rambling into the tangled mess of feelings I have at this being the last issue of Crosscurrents to have worked on, I have only a few eloquent words of gratitude to share, and will let Andrew’s far more eloquent note speak to the travails of this most difficult year.

On that note, I am grateful to have had Andrew to collaborate with in the work of putting this magazine together (especially by way of mitigating my email anxiety), and it is in a very large part because of him that we were able to make it to print this year.

I am deeply grateful for Professor Kupinse for his diligent attention to detail, which has kept at bay the plethora of errors I end up making during the layout process. He has been an excellent steward, and I will miss the wit of his email correspondence quite a lot.

Above all— I am ineffably grateful to have been even a small part of the artistic community at Puget Sound. I constantly find myself in awe at the tremendous, powerful work my peers create; I ardently hope my work as layout editor has served to adequately create a space that allows these incredible talents to speak unimpeded by whatever strange aesthetic kick I was on at the time. I will miss doing this work dearly.

Jack Spangler, Co-Editor-in-Chief
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What Comes After
Patrick Selner
The canyon gapes up at me and
I squint downwards.
Rubbing my eyes, I can almost see
a mirror at the very bottom of the pit.
A flock of seagulls tears through the mist
and I wave back at them.
An outstretched wing.
I write you a eulogy every night,
I do not write myself one.
My phone doesn’t light up,
I still can’t sleep.
But there is a promise of sunshine, on a later day.
The grass gets cut and
the soil is turned over.
Over and over.
I started reading again,
isn’t that funny timing?
I read all alone, under the blankets, in the half moon dark.
I turn the radio louder.
It is Valentine’s Day. You forget, often, because your mind is on other things, on the silly mistakes you made that you’ll remember purely to make other people feel better about theirs. You walk the campus that calls itself home on your phone, wearing rain boots as snow boots, and trudging through the powder that feels like a dream. The dirty slushy snow feels like home, a beautiful but lonely home you didn’t think you’d earn. It is Valentine’s Day. A ridiculous thing, that you wish you could make sting less. The best you can do is sit on a bench wiped clean by some other lonely soul who made the snow their valentine, and remember the lingering feeling of being held a long, long time ago. Perfection is biting somewhere behind your eyes, and when the droplets that could be snow and could be rain slip into your mask, you can almost pretend they pass for a kiss. You find peace, sometimes, for a moment, when you remember what a miracle it is to even be alive. You don’t want to go inside, because it is Valentine’s, even if you keep forgetting. You don’t want to go inside, because your toes may be cold and your hair may be wet but there is nothing waiting for you inside other than the sting of a hot shower that might be cold if the pipes feel cruel. It’s raining, you decide. You can see it in the spaces between the trees, and it means that soon this moment will live with the others. Soon the snow will melt.
Nearly asleep, my half-slitted eyes resemble the peach slices of my late-night cravings, canned and sitting in their jar, thick with syrup, sliding down my throat, Slick.

In the morning, as I watch the pull of yarn through her fingers, she says, “I think I’ll knit my own wedding dress,” and maybe that’s just the string of her heart unspooling, knotting up and tying her to the rest of the world, to someone, someday.

Pink, peach fuzz yarn; the knitting is something like biting into a peach, raw, skin on. It’s the earth that gets caught between your teeth, tying you tight together.

My aunt, making vanilla-peach jam in the summertime, peach cobbler baking in the oven, the warm smell rising up through the paths of the festival, choral music and gentle laughter—the memories are hazy but well-soaked in sun and sweet nectar.

Maybe if I were a fruit, I would be a peach. All curves and softness, plump, and so easily bruised.
She’s here again. She’s here again. She’s here again. She’s here again. She’s here again...

The rustling begins with those of us by the window. We join in as soon as it reaches each of us, layering harmonies over the dissonant chorus. It passes from stem to stem until the whole room swells with sound.

Today she is mostly red. Her ears and chest and feet are red. Her waist is black. Her legs are deep green. She wheels in the box of water and collects some in a smaller box. She checks the chart by the door, moves to one corner of the room, and lets each of us sip.

Somewhere between the first and the last of us, she speaks.

“Looking great, twenty-three,” she says, and “oh, hi, fifty-two. Have some extra.” Her hands are gentle. Her eyes smile. Her fingers glide across our leaves like rain. We rustle. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes...

There are hundreds of us. Some of us climb the walls. Some carpet the floor. Some dangle from the ceiling. The square lights fight to reach the ground. We cut their beams into dappled shapes. This burns our leaves. We grow more.

When she sighs, we know she is done. “Bye, plants. See you next week.” We rustle long after she’s gone. Bye, bye, bye, bye, bye, bye, bye...
Eviction
Austin Smith

As an honor to the strength of this work’s craftsmanship and insight, Professor Darcy Irvin will explore its depth in a short essay to follow.

My mind is consumed with astrology tapestries, your favorite books and all our foolish fantasies. Soft purple envelops eucalyptus fused memories. Your shampoo in my hair, burnt matches in your windowsill. Me in your bed, your mom in the other room. You made peace with time while I begged for every possible second. As you leave, please remember to take your dreams. This is an eviction notice now. We have left your room behind, but you have made a waste of my mind. I am torn between missing and hating Everything that we did. I am equally ready to purge Our history or save it in A museum so big it can hide the sound of my heart shattering. I am poisoned by your finite promises and counterfeit I love yous. Your stay in my head is long overdue. This time, I need your leave to mean forever.

Professor Review
Darcy Irvin

This issue’s selection, “Eviction,” opens with what feels like will be a nostalgic embrace of a disappeared relationship, but the poem turns quite suddenly away from the delicately preserved memories of shared space and being: “your shampoo in my hair / burnt matches in your windowsill.” The speaker instead identifies the growing gulf between themself and the former lover as “you made peace with time / while I begged for every possible second.” If the speaker in the past wished to hold onto this intimate time that was already slipping away, however, the speaker in the present is serving notice to that former partner. No longer willing to let the now defunct lover live rent free “in my head,” the speaker is instead grappling with how to untangle one’s emotions and memories from another person’s life when the physical and the material lives have already untwined. “We have left your room behind,” the speaker tells us, noting that they no longer share that space of “favorite books” and “your bed.”

But even as the speaker acknowledges that their material worlds have diverged from one another, the speaker struggles with the former lover’s continued mental and emotional presence: “you have made a waste of my mind.” How exactly does one serve an “eviction notice” to a person who is already gone in so many ways, the poem seems to ask? And even though the speaker strongly and authoritatively asserts that “this is an eviction notice now,” the speaker elsewhere still seems divided between loving the past and yet no longer being willing or able to hang on to what they once had: “I am equally ready to purge / Our history or save it in / A museum so big it can hide / the sound of my heart shattering.” Should the speaker preserve those memories from first stanza, holding out a space for them in the heart and the mind to look back to
with some fondness, perhaps regret, perhaps bitterness? Or does the eviction notice mean a complete and utter move-out—a kicking to the curb of not merely the former lover’s shampoo and burnt matches, but also the “finite promises” and “counterfeit I love yous”?

The final line appears to settle the debate, declaring, “this time, I need your leave to mean forever,” with a wonderful inversion of the more common way of enshrining love as eternal. But even in this final line, the speaker leaves open the barest cracked door back into memory—the speaker may “need your love to mean forever,” but it does not necessarily follow, of course, that memory, emotion, and love can be evicted quite so easily.

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Professor Irvin is a member of the English faculty, specializing in nineteenth-century British Literature. She currently teaches a variety of courses, including classes on literature and crime, the environment, medicine, and the visual arts.

The Lemonade Stand
Kaya Heimowitz

I used to live a mile away from the edge of the world where the spirits jumped into the next life.

My parents almost drifted into the next life once via a strong current but the Coast Guard caught them before they rounded the corner of the world.

Living next to the ocean means that the crash of waves is as familiar to you as your own heartbeat, that the current is as familiar to you as your own bloodstream, that death lurks behind your back:

in the crash of waves,
in the current.

My dad told me that sometimes the spirits would get stuck with us, a mile away from the edge of the world.

I used to sit on the side of the road that took them to the edge of the world & sell lemonade to thirsty spirits;

the spirits’ combined sugar waiting made the lemonade sweeter.

My dad invited a spiritual woman into our home to shoo the spirits; she sang her honey-citrus song, but I ignored her loving lullabies.
I wonder how:
the current & the crash of waves & a lemonade stand
coexist in a child’s hollowed-out memory grave.

I am still here at the lemonade stand between this life and the
next;
I refuse to kiss the sour-lemon tree of sugary childhood
goodbye. My home was
a mile away from the edge of the world, my home is
not the jumping-off place. I am stuck at the lemonade stand
because I know that

An undeniably alone song is
an unanswered song
to love.

shelter in place (6 feet apart)
Lenora Yee

walking reminds me that i am human but our town feels like it’s
holding
its breath indefinitely
waiting for someone to say
it’s okay, you can come out now

six feet apart isn’t possible on narrow sidewalks
so people cross the road
or walk into bike lanes saying
thank you
when you walk farther away

how indeed very strange to be so afraid of touch
or breath
from anyone other than yourself
or your cohabitants

but how comforting it is to walk and feel the sun
hitting me in pellets
making speckles of freckles
making me thankful
for my father’s melanin
and for a place to sit
and pretend to swim
leaving my shoulders and chest
warm and wearing
inside and out

how very strange
to feel the sense of vacancy
and the intense sensation of suffocation
in overcrowded houses
of far too cluttered minds
longing, aching, mourning
hearts, too far apart

songs just barely bouncing in the open air
an inundation of quiet
and of breath
of birds returning to waters now clean
of families walking and laughing by the sea
of people hurting and loving
and waiting together
six feet apart
The MIBU Demands

Given the critical nature of our present moment, in a space that would normally showcase the work of a guest contributor, we have chosen instead to amplify the message of the student-created Multi Identity Based Union (MIBU). Building upon decades of work by marginalized peoples at the university, MIBU was created by UPS students in the Spring of 2021 to address the ongoing legacy of of racism, colonialism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia at the University. We highly encourage the reader to familiarize themselves with the short-form demands to follow, and to use the QR code on the next page to continue engaging with the vital work MIBU is doing.

1. **We demand that the administration place Dr. Dexter Gordon as interim Chief Diversity Officer until a Vice President of Institutional Equity and Diversity is hired. We demand the conclusion of the national search name Dr. Dexter Gordon as the top candidate among finalist candidates. We demand that President Crawford select Dr. Dexter Gordon after this conclusion. In essence we demand Dr. Gordon be formally hired as the Vice President of Institutional Equity and Diversity.**

   We believe that interim Chief Diversity Officer Sunil Kukreja is not suited for the position, and within our current context it is necessary we have an interim CDO with sustained leadership in diversity, equity, and justice work. We believe that individual is Dr. Dexter Gordon, and we also believe he is best suited for the Vice President of Institutional Equity and Diversity position.

   The University failed to meet this first demand. As a result, we are losing Dr. Gordon to the Evergreen State College, where he will serve as Executive Vice President.

2. **We demand the expansion and reformation of the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity.**

   We believe the Office, formerly known as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, is insufficiently developed to meet the needs of this campus. We believe the below additions and changes would improve the office’s capacity, and alleviate the few burdened staff members who currently comprise the office.
   - The creation of a Gender & Sexual Equity Coordinator position.
   - Increased funding and support for Identity-based clubs.
   - A mentorship program for incoming students with underrepresented and marginalized identities and backgrounds.
   - The office should be responsible for orchestrating required diversity sensitivity and implicit bias training for faculty, staff, and students.
   - The Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity should incorporate Student Accessibility and Accommodations as well as the University Chaplaincy.

3. **We demand that the Welcome Center be repurposed for the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity (OIED), Intercultural Engagement, Student Accessibility and Accommodations, the University Chaplain and any other positions that uplift and support members of the Puget Sound community with marginalized identities. This building will then be called the Justice and Equity Center.**

   We believe this University should reprioritize this intended space of recruitment to one of retention. We believe the building should serve as a central space for students with non dominant identities and underrepresented backgrounds, such as marginalized racial, religious, gender, and sexual identities.
4. We demand that every semester there be mandatory training for faculty and staff relating to unlearning bias and identity sensitivity. We demand that an outside firm, or paid qualified Puget Sound faculty and staff, take responsibility for these trainings and the firm be chosen through the collaboration of RPI, AFAM, the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity, Intercultural Engagement, and other authoritative voices in diversity work.

We believe mandatory trainings would contribute to changing the harmful and violent atmosphere we experience as students, and could achieve a campus climate that aligns itself with the mission and values the University claims to hold.

5. We demand the discrimination and harassment reporting process be altered and improved to meet the needs of the campus community. We demand more from the Bias Hate Education Response Team (BHERT), and specific motions towards accountability in bias hate incidents.

We believe that BHERT has failed in its intentions to be an education response network, and the discrimination and harassment reporting process to be at the disadvantage of the complainant. We do not believe current Equal Opportunity Officer Sandra Braedt is qualified to handle incidents of bias, hate, discrimination and harassment in our campus community. We believe more must be done to create accountability and education in cases of bias and hate in order to create a safe environment for students with vulnerable and marginalized identities.

6. We demand that the University implement a semesterly forum to establish transparency and accountability of the UPS administration to uphold and follow through with its goals of justice and equity.
A semesterly, public and open forum creates a space for the University to update the campus community on the tangible actions, changes, and progress made towards affecting the demands listed here. We believe a forum is necessary to improve transparency and dialogue between students, faculty, and staff regarding the administration’s efforts. This forum can include updates and progress reports on the listed demands and other necessary

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7. **We demand the University work towards an ethnic studies framework and facilitate interdepartmental cooperation and growth.** We demand the University create Indigenous Studies Courses. We demand the decolonization and expansion of the Latine Studies, Asian Studies, and Gender and Queer Studies Department.

- We demand the creation of an Indigenous Studies department and for more Indigenous-centered courses throughout the UPS curriculum.
- We demand that Puget Sound increase budget allocations and funding sources for the Latino/a studies program to allow for the contractual hiring and retention of tenure track faculty in this discipline. Additionally, we also demand that the program be renamed to “Latine Studies” in an effort to be more inclusive of non-binary identities.
- We demand that Puget Sound offer courses that center the histories and experiences of Pasifika people as well as those from Central, Southeast and South Asia. We demand that Puget Sound, in tandem with these changes in curriculum, hire Pasifika, Central Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian scholars with knowledge in these areas. We also demand that data amongst the groups covered under the umbrella terms Asian Pacific Islander, Asian American Pacific Islander, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, and other like terms be disaggregated to be more indicative of how UPS, its commitments, and actions affect these groups.
- We demand that faculty be hired for the Gender and Queer Studies [GQS] program, and that the current faculty be consulted in the hiring process and determining how many. Additionally, we demand that
current faculty members in the Gender and Queer studies program be given the respect, and financial compensation they deserve for sustaining the program voluntarily.

- We believe that changes to the academics at Puget Sound are needed to further support and uplift the work of marginalized students and faculty. So much work happens with little to no recognition and equitable compensation. Such a trend must cease should the University want to fulfill the social justice goals it espouses so frequently.

8. **We demand that the University of Puget Sound renovate all areas of campus to be more accessible to people with disabilities. We demand that the University develop a concrete and transparent renovation plan in consultation with students with disabilities and experts in creating accessible environments.**

We believe a commitment to accessibility necessitates an accessible physical environment. Our campus, our residential buildings, our academic buildings, and all other facilities can be incredibly difficult for a person with physical disabilities to navigate. As a campus that requires individuals to live on campus for four semesters, this campus must be physically livable for people with physical disabilities.

9. **We demand a reimagining and restructuring of the student accommodations system on campus to serve, not police, students who need accommodations.**

There is a mismatch between how the department of Student Accessibility and Accommodation sees itself, and how it is seen by many of the students it claims to serve;
10. We, the Multi Identity Based Union, demand that the University’s Statement on Academic Freedom and the Exercise of Free Speech be altered to allow for genuine protests and demonstrations of resistance to enable direct action without retaliation. We demand a revised statement be released by January 2022. We demand a task force made up of individuals with an understanding of the importance of protests and demonstrations. These individuals would have an established record of supporting justice movements on campus. The task force cannot include members of campus security. The task force must be made within two months post-release of our demands.

We believe the phrasing of the “Statement on Academic Freedom and the Exercise of Free Speech” allows for the manipulation of circumstances and truth with the intent to punish organizers and participants. We believe the recent revisions of the integrity code and statements are in response to past student activism and direct actions, and effectively repress any future actions. We do not believe the statement stands by freedom of speech or academic freedom, and prevents and discourages protests and demonstrations for justice and change.
There hasn’t been a home since the dog died.

The red dust handprint on my heart is starting to fade in this drizzle—
one more place to add to the list of all those left Behind.

The documents say I am home, but I was born with air beneath my feet, cradled in the metal bellies of airplanes.

I am tired of being a phoenix; the price of rebirth is forever burning.
Pack your bags—
passport, plane, restrain the tears a moment longer.
Repeat.

Look through me to the skies, black thunderheads building behind my invisible self.
The rain won’t come, so I hold my breath, hold my tongue on the words: “This is not where I belong.”

I’ve given a piece of myself to everyone I’ve loved. By now, there’s nothing left to be me.
Each night, I stare at the ceiling.
And then at the moon,
then at the ceiling again.
There are answers stored within the
cracks and divots of the artificial
sky above my bed.
Answers to questions I haven’t quite asked
yet,
the kind of questions that tingle when they
hit your tongue.
The ones that are almost electricity,
like a 9 volt battery shoved into my mouth.
But under my bed are the answers to
the other types of questions.
Those ones that hit the floor like a
piece of lead instead of a sparkler.
Those questions taste like a block of soap
scraping against my teeth.
These answers hide among the dust and
the lint.
They linger, whispering to me in
the late nighttime.
I close my eyes tight.
No ceiling, no floor.
I read the broken poems
Of daughters whose fathers left them
A 6 foot, 1 inch shadow, carved in every door

But what of the poems by girls
Who dig those holes themselves
Who cut and cut and cut his shape
Sculpted down to 5 foot, 7 inch clay
Directly in their image

The poems of the women
Who were told they needed a father
But, in his keep
Never learned the difference between anger and love,
And who now grieve for the pieces of him
That became pieces of them
That shrapnel, beautiful and terrible things
Lessons and imprints he made

Because the father they needed
Who raised them, held them
Built them,
Was also the one
Who broke them
I'm sorry, congratulations
J.D. Cotton

Your phone rings late on a Thursday night. It's your coworker, your friend. It puzzles you because in the last few months he's grown distant. What could he want? There is flat humor in his voice—the kind that emerges when one is on the brink of panic. You think someone must've died.

No. He's called to tell you that his girlfriend is pregnant. That she wants to keep it. They are seventeen and going to be parents. What should you say? I'm sorry? Congratulations?

You say instead. At first you're saddened by the news. Your friend dreams of becoming an engineer. You want to believe he will still achieve his dream, but you're a realist. And you can't change the way you think. They will never get a chance to be young and free.

And yet. A tiny part of you envies them. It's stupid, you know. But they have this certainty. They have love and a new life who they will feel such great and terrible joy for.

For their life they will rise early, work long hours, and suffer sleepless nights. While their friends go off to college, sticking their noses in textbooks and Solo cups. They will remain in the little town where they were born not so long ago. Collecting diaper coupons and Goodwill onesies. Playing peekaboo and reading bedtime stories from the public library. And they will be happy to do so. Because it is for the life they built together. And they will be good parents.

They will possess a treasure you cannot know when their life calls them Mommy and Daddy. When their life first stands and walks with chubby, wobbly legs. When their life waves to them and runs off into the crowd on the first day of school. When their life stands on a stage in cap and gown and is handed a very special piece of paper. When their life says to them I couldn't have done it without you.
i. Expect poison from standing water.

She's standing in the orchard at the far end of the garden now, sharpened stick in hand. The flies are buzzing. The trees keep shuddering their dangling leaves. The night sky is thicketed out by sloping branches, and for a moment Eve feels a strange certainty—a tingle in some vestigial sense left over from when God touched the earth and coaxed man up from the sand—that her maker is not watching her now. The thought gives her a thrill of both exhilaration and dread, like some river crustacean shucked out of its shell with its skin bare to sun for the first time, although she doesn't yet have the words to describe this feeling.

She'll feel it again soon, worse before it gets better. For now, she is staring at the sharpened stick in her fist and the severed head of the serpent at her feet. The blood is bubbling up at its ragged neck, bits of delicate white bone poking out. It's funny—she would have never known how to do this if he hadn't put the fruit in her hand. She wouldn't have even known how to think it. Something acrid burns at the back of her throat.

Some knowledge she shouldn't have, but does anyway: If you sharpen a stick in the dead of night over a number of days, crouched away hiding so that God does not know where you are, and you stalk through the night searching and jumping at the sound of scales slithering through the underbrush, you become for the first time in your life something more than clay that breathes. You become a hunter. You begin to know grief. Your body may hunch with cold in your newfound nakedness, but it is not your shell that makes you ache from throat to belly like you've been gutted open like a fish. It is not your body, born of red clay, that has yearned for answers. It's your soul, which is God and as such could never not ache to know what's hidden from you, that is shaken now.

It takes more effort than you'd think to sever a snake's head from its body, but if you hit it hard enough the first time it sort of lies there, stunned, long enough for you to try again. And again. And suddenly all the nervous energy, the anxiety and grief of knowing, comes spilling out of its thick, scaly, neck.

[The stupid part is, she knows now, that the thing she's killed wasn't even the serpent who'd met her in this orchard all those nights ago. That serpent would have spoken to her, begged her for its life. Normal animals, here in this vast and timeless place, don't know how to talk. Don't know how to fear death.]

A slight wind lifts the hair at the nape of her neck and prickles over her skin, and Eve remembers that she can never be sure of how anything works here. She goes out walking at night, tries to map the paths in her mind because this place is endless and incomprehensible, but all she truly knows is that the days are long. The nights are lush and dark and humid. The sky lights gold before dying into settling purple, hours pass, and the soil never stops singing. And always, underneath it all, there is whisper of god: an old and thrumming heartbeat deep beneath the earth.

There are places here that Adam doesn't know about. He's a proud curator of the ignorance that the maker made them with and prefers they both keep. He knows the great tree and fruits with heavy rind and solid pit, sweet nectar and river water. He talks with God and spends his days naming the animals: lion, rabbit, fox, calf, and in his spare moments he stands nervously with his back to the great oak under which he was born, chewing mustard seeds, and watches the slow darkness eat at the sky until their maker wills it away again. Eagle, tiger, fish, crow, and he is so scared of being alone. She isn't like him. Last week Eve went out walking while he was sleeping, to the great depths where the grass turns to bramble, and she found a pool.
of stagnant water at the edge of this orchard—green, fetid, reeking, and teeming with mosquitoes. She cupped the larvae in her hand and smiled at the existence of something not made especially for her.

Something else Adam doesn't know in this world which was made and tailored for him: the taste of pomegranate. The way the rind dimples beneath a snake's fangs. If you dig your fingernails over its hardened, ruddy shell, bits of wax will come curling up underneath your fingernails and stay there, stuck for the week it's been since you've eaten it. And every time you thrust your hands into the river, carved by God as all things are, you come closer to the realization that the sweetness of the water will never wash it away.

This is all to say that Eve could leave this place. Go in the night and leave him here in a hollow senseless paradise. Perhaps it's the right thing to do. And yet—

It's the existentialism of it all. That's what's chilling her, more than the wind at her back that she knows to be God's breath and the moon of God's great eye, peaking through the gaps of the orchard now. It's the knowledge that she orchestrated the end of a living thing's existence and as such has held creation in her hand. She's killed a serpent, the wrong serpent who did nothing to lead her astray, and yet she is glad of it.

Say what you will about betrayal and the fear of knowing your head may be severed from your body to let the life shudder out of it, Eve thinks. In her knowledge of death she has never loved Adam more. Every time she sees the sun caught in his dark curly hair she remembers how remarkable their existence together is. Every time she kisses the skin of his neck she feels his pulse beating beneath her lips and he is so alive and so warm that she feels as if she's full of sunlight. And it tears her apart inside to know that in order for him to feel this with her, he must shoulder the burden of knowing what the absence of it is like.

Is this her torment, for following where her body and soul took her?

Eve stares at the fruits hanging from the branches above her, each weighing heavy on the boughs like a dozen dark and waning moons. When Adam felt alone and scared, he cried to their maker and their maker pulled out his rib and made her. Sheep, ox, serpent, Eve. He is so terrified of being alone, the only way he sleeps comfortably at night is when they're lying so close together that her heart beats against the scar along his ribcage like a seam of dark, red clay. She snags a low-hanging fruit and cups it in her hands. Perhaps it would be a mercy for him to know.

And she thinks, blasphemously: Perhaps if you had let me ask, Lord, I would never have dared. If Eve knows how to feel naked now, she surely knows how to feel seen. God comes like a rumble in the deep, and Eve gasps as if she has just been gutted. He is an eternity too vast for the eye to hold at once, the roaring of a great and terrible river. He says her name and she claps her hands over her ears, all the teeth in her mouth humming at a different frequency, and it is frightening because her maker—taciturn though He may be—has never been too great to behold before. And then the world goes quiet.

She is standing at the shore of that stagnant pond, the flies buzzing at her ears and open mouth. He speaks to her indirectly now, in the bubbling of standing water. She holds out the pomegranate, wordless in askance. He says: And what will you do with it, my girl?

And truly, Eve already knows.

Eve will press half a pomegranate into Adam's hand. The shell will be broken, rind anemic with the seeds half-spilling out. They will burst between her insistent palm and his shaking fingers, dribbling sanguine over their clasped hands. Where did you get this? he’ll ask, and she'll scrape in a rattling, mucusy breath before wiping her eyes. Share it with me, she’ll tell him. And there is no pair of wild animals that know one another with the intimacy that he and Eve share; no staggered deer, no
great clumsy ape, no lonely god who watches from above and below the earth with his mouth clamped shut and hands folded can compel Adam away from wondering what she knows that he doesn't. So when she kisses him, he'll taste its bitter wine on her tongue. And he will say, *I cannot believe you were alone with this.*

And that is the most gratifying thing.

**ii. Dip him in the river, he who loves water.**

Eve grows pomegranates and fig trees. The sun hits just to the east this time of day, and she touches her saplings with tender fingers, tugs the heavier fruit off of the green boughs so that the trunks don't bend, and walks home with the sun on her shoulders.

The years have treated them well, she and Adam. The barley in the field stretches upwards like delicate feathered fingers, brushing up at heaven in amber waves. The ground was once barren here, until Adam dug up the earth with his hands, tilled the soil, loved over the barren heath until it flowered. Now he sits at the ingress of a warm tent with a soft dirt floor eating bread and carving, and when he sees Eve coming he throws his tools aside and pulls her in to kiss her, hard and joyful. She smiles, her forehead pressed to his. In the distance, a flock of sheep, and two little boys play-fighting in the brush with long sticks.

Once, Adam called her over when they were both working in the field. He had been turning the earth and had uncovered a skull unlike anything either of them could put a name to—yellowed and broken with age, stained with red clay. Eve had never seen anything like it—not when their first flock of sheep died and decayed in the fields that first cold winter, not when Adam killed his first lion, skinned it, and draped the pelt over her as a trophy. It looked almost like an ape's would, but for a slimmer jaw, a stronger nose. It fit squarely between Adam's hands, rounded with two gaping sockets about the width of his thumb. Eve brushed her hand over it and touched her own nose, her chin, sucked her cheeks to feel how they stretched over the bone of her face. Adam stared, and she knew that he was chilled by it, wondering whose rib he had sprung from. How many tries it had taken before a man such as himself walked these valleys and what piece of his soul, then, lay here.

She took his chin, kissed him gently. He let it fall from his hand, this souvenir of his Lord's scrapped project. It thudded in the red earth and let up a small cloud of rust-colored dust. Adam let himself stare at it for one moment longer, and then raised up his staff and clubbed it until it broke open like the shell of a pomegranate. His plow ground it into dust before long, and in the springtime, spindly green shoots sprung up like tiny hands up to heaven. He named it barley and cried, having forgotten that the language of creation tastes the same as joy does.

Eve remembers thinking of the bits of bone poking out of that snake's lifeless body, and then of her baby sons. Adam had put his ear against her belly every night for the months that they each grew, heard the low thrum of her heartbeat and told her that he imagined he could hear theirs too. They were each born naked, squalling in rage, and in those moments she felt her heart split in two and all the love she had ever kept within herself came pouring out. She stared at their little faces, each a tiny mirror of her own, and wept with joy.

Now their sons are older and they run among the sheep, shrieking with little-boy laughter and startling the quail nestled in the sagebrush. They have not yet lost their milk teeth and know very little of anything beyond the tent, their beds, the chill at night. The sheep that must be herded. The fields that must be tilled. There is no death for them, not yet.

I'd like venison for dinner soon, she tells her husband offhandedly, turning over her shoulder. Perhaps not tonight, but in the coming days. She watches as his face breaks open into a wide grin.

Then we shall have it, he says.
The air east of Eden smells of frankincense. The sun is setting, lighting lovely and orange across Eve’s sloping cheekbones, the dark curl of her hair, the curve of her shawled shoulders. She deftly runs a knife through the hardened shell of a ripe pomegranate, smiles with satisfaction when it splits and spills ruby seeds across her browned palms like so many vermillion jewels. Adam sits beside her on the sun-warmed earth, sanding a shepherd’s crook with a scraper he fashioned from flattened stone. He will give this to his son one day. And Eve smiles thinking about how her sons will sire sons, children who run and laugh and strum lyres, craft lyrics and sing with raspy human throats, on and on in delight forever. Eve turns her gaze to a huge and aching sky, and knows her maker hears it when she thinks, God, I am a poet too.

First-time readers of Genesis 3 are often surprised at the brevity of the Fall narrative. A serpent tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, she does so and then gives some to Adam; he eats. They are punished for their disobedience: she must labor in childbirth and he must labor in the field. It’s all over in a few verses. “Standing Water” offers a beautifully crafted (and hauntingly beautiful) expansion of the biblical narrative, only here re-imagined and re-interpreted through Eve’s perspective.

This story lives in the boundaries that separate innocence and guilt, ignorance and knowledge. In part one, we meet Eve in a liminal space at the edge of Eden, and in a liminal temporality between her eating and Adam’s. She has eaten and fallen, he has not (yet), and now Eve must decide whether to offer him the fruit so that he may participate in the painful awakening. In part two, we meet the couple some years later, but again in an interval, in this case between their children’s innocent play and (as we know, but as Eve does not) Cain’s eventual fratricide. The dramatic irony at the end signals the painful cost of the reader’s knowledge, which itself mimics the knowledge gained by Eve (and eventually Adam) upon eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, an act of disobedience the consequences of which are—as later interpreters would suggest—that humans can only ever know good by knowing evil.

One of the many exemplary qualities of this piece is its carefully patterned use of imagery and metaphor, the tracking of which satisfyingly develops the idea that suffering and beauty are never far apart. Broken shells yield “vermillion jewels.” The “red dust” of death yields barley in spring. And yet, the story moves beyond the so-called circle of life. The fragments of the old—like the bones of an evolutionary
forebear unearthed in Adam’s field—do not merely replicate themselves; they give way to something new and different. Creation involves a moving towards something, just as this story’s originality emerges from its sophisticated reworking of older stories. By the end, Eve is indeed a “poet” [a word that comes to English from the Greek ποιεῖν [poiein], meaning ‘maker’ or ‘creator’) for she, like God, has set in play the means by which new life and new songs are created from the old; she has seen and worked beauty from failure and fragmentation.

“Standing Water” is a fitting metaphor with which to think through growth in ‘fallenness’, potentiality in stagnation, the scent of “frankincense” in the “east of Eden.” As bountiful in its imagery as the garden in which it is set, the narrative offers a deeply allusive reflection on relationships, suffering, knowledge, art, and, of course, the story that claims to have started it all.

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