

The George Street Press

2024 Annual



The
George Street Press
2024

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Languages

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The English Club

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A Note From the President

This entire publication wouldn't be possible without the help of the officers of George Street Press. Many laborious hours went into the creation and publication of the text that you hold in your hands. Working with Millersville students and showcasing their amazing creative abilities was always the goal of George Street Press. There are so many talented people that go to this University that, unfortunately, haven't been able to be put in the spotlight in recent years.

Due to the Covid-19 Virus, many clubs and organizations were shut down and put on hiatus due quarantine and remote learning. George Street Press was one such club. Unfortunately, this hiatus grew to be a full shutdown of our club. I remember being a freshman wanting an outlet to showcase my own creative writing. The Snapper is a great organization on campus, but journalism wasn't really something that I was much interested in. The Creative Writers Guild is another great organization on campus, but it was still not enough for me. I wanted something that allowed me to show off the creative writing that I was doing.

I had heard about George Street Press from Professor Kim McCollum-Clark. She recommended the club to me but told me that the club just wasn't operational anymore due to Covid-19. At the end of my junior year at Millersville, a group of likeminded English majors decided we would begin the next academic school year by revitalizing the club. This wouldn't be an easy task, however. Because the club had been gone for a few years, not many people knew about it anymore. The newly reestablished George Street Press worked diligently to reach out to freshman students who were English majors or were interested in ENWL (English and World Languages).

The process was slow-going at first, but we were able to get student submissions. As we continued to get submissions, I was shocked to see how amazing the student's art and writing was. I believe that many of the students who submitted to George Street Press have promising careers in

creative writing or as artists if they wish to pursue that after college.

This publication would not have been able to be produced without the help from the officers in the club. Many of our officers, including myself, are graduating this year in Spring 2024. Most of us have extremely busy schedules, whether it be from working in internships, or student teaching, or working a job so that they can pay rent. On top of their incredibly busy schedules, our officers were able to find the time to compile student submissions, edit and revise them, and then contact everybody who submitted work for permission to publish. Without our officers, we never would have been able to publish.

Support for this publication comes from the ENWL department here at Millersville. Without people such as Dr. Kim McCollum-Clark or Dr. Justin Mando, we would not know where to start in the production of this publication. The entire ENWL department has been so kind in helping us revitalize and grow George Street Press. Many of the professors in ENWL helped advertise this club to freshman students. George Street Press would not have received as many submissions as it did if it weren't for the professors in the ENWL department.

We are very proud of both this publication as well as the students and faculty in the ENWL department. Although we did the work compiling all of this artwork and writing, we wouldn't have a publication without the work everybody did to come up with amazing stories and beautiful artwork. I, along with everybody in George Street Press, thank you. Not just to the artists, the writers, or the faculty, but also to you the reader. By reading this booklet, you are recognizing the hard work that was put into producing and publishing it. Thank you.

David Lattanzi
President of George Street Press

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The Phoenix Curse

By Robert Diehl

A whisper of smoke announced the beginning of my end. Thread-like, it wove into the air in front of me, a gentle herald of my impending annihilation. I looked down. It sprung from one of my fingertips, the one connected to the heart.

“No,” I begged to empty air. “I still have things I need to do; things I haven’t done yet!”

But the smoke was indifferent to my plea and grew thicker, transforming into a black serpent that coiled its way up my arm and around my neck.

“The time has come,” it whispered in my ear, in a voice older than the Sun.

The first flame flickered into existence where the smoke had first begun. I shook my hand, desperate to put it out, but it would not extinguish.

“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” said the snake.

“But I don’t want to die!” I shouted.

The flame grew larger, consuming my hand entirely. I realized then that ‘agony’ had always just been a word, that, until now, I’d never truly experienced its definition. The flame leapt to my legs, hungry for more fuel.

“Why do I have to die!?” I begged.

“Because you sprung from death,” said the snake. “It was your creator.”

The tears welling in my eyes quickly evaporated from the heat of the flames.

“But what was the point of it all?” I asked.

“What’s going to happen after I die?”

“Regrettably I have no answer for either of your questions,” said the snake gently.

Dissociating, I managed to still the pain, but rather than finding peace, I simply found a new tormentor: fear. Paralyzing images flooded my mind. Endless purgatory. Infinity. Eternal punishment. Every outcome was unfavorable. Every possibility horrifying.

Outside, I noticed the fire begin to climb up my torso. Slowly, it crept toward my most prized possession, my heart. *Will it blame me?* I wondered. *Will it hate me for the fool’s journey I took it on?*

“Who will come after me?” I said.

“You will,” said the snake.

I smiled sorrowfully.

“But not exactly,” I said.

“No,” said the snake. “Where would the fun in that be,” it added playfully.

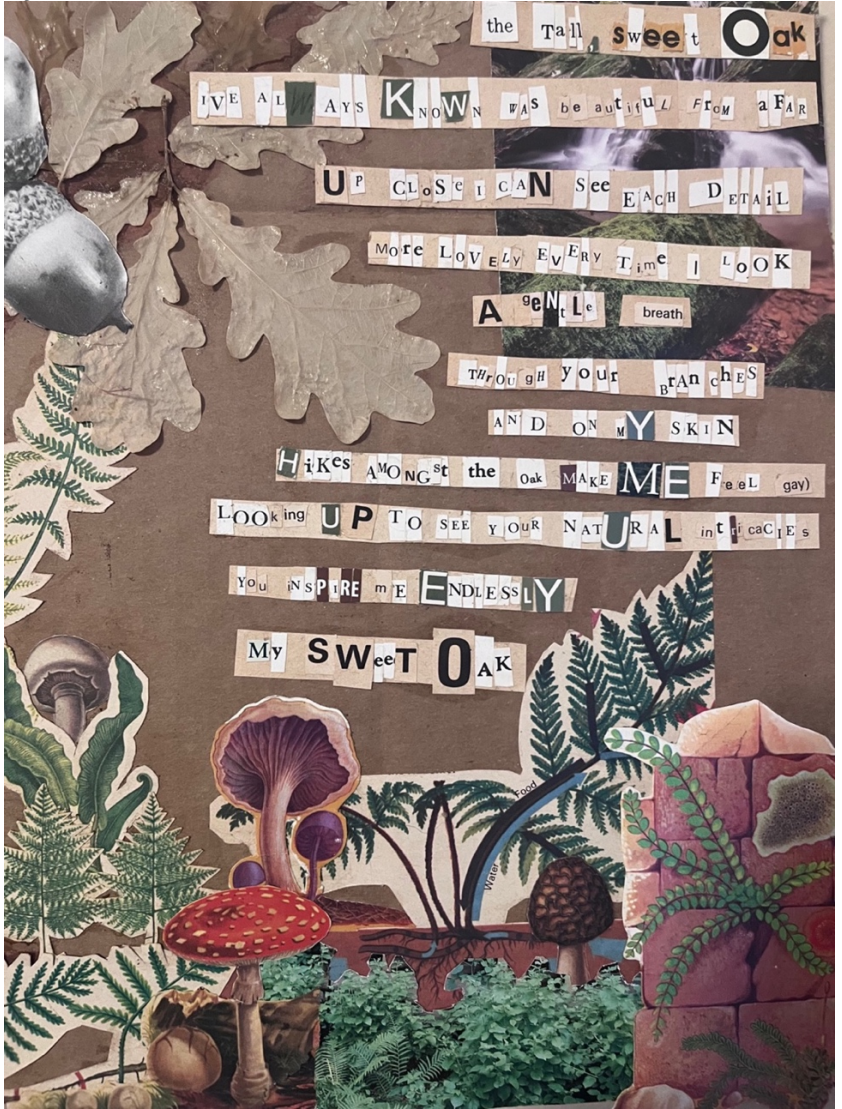
The fire was now at my neck. Looking down at my devourer, I felt a palpable sense of *déjà vu*. The flames licked my chin, still unsatiated.

“What happens when I let go?” I said.

The snake’s mouth curled slightly upwards.

Oranges and yellows then obscured my view. I felt myself dissolving, disintegrating into fine sand. The prospect of death no longer seemed so terrifying. More like returning to a lover’s bed, he or she expectantly waiting for you. I closed my eyes and shades of red washed over me. I was so warm. So comfortable. I took a final long breath, and, then -surprisingly- I laughed.

Sweet Oak
By Matt Label



The Fly

By Robert Toussaint

Part time I am a fly,
staring ahead as time flies.
Wandering amongst my thoughts,
exploring a maze of lies.
Hoping the guise
that is my mind, fades over time.
Part time I am a fly,
beating my wings as
I hover above a film of sky.
As I take a moment to admire the
strife that has plagued these lives in
these deteriorated destitute times.
Part time I am a fly, sticking to
the wall as I watch passersby
hoping to envelope their
garbage in the mucus
that turns their
filth into life, as I stare
at the world with my
dichoptic eyes, and they
flail about trying to
foresee an end to my time.
Part time I am a fly, dying
on filth made by human crimes,
surrounded by an inescapable
sludge of brine that encases
me in an amber
of lies.

Her Name

By E. M. VerBryck

On a rainy Saturday afternoon at the end of a long, bustling week, Edmund entered an elevator and pressed “G.”

There was no way for him to know that when the doors closed and the elevator began its journey down, a safety circuit located in the space between floors would become lodged in the door frame and flick upwards. This would send a prompt message to the controller, something along the lines of *STOP STOP DANGER STOP STOP*, and the elevator would come to a halt.

When this occurred, Edmund felt only mildly inconvenienced by the unprecedented jolt. He softened his knees and remained standing, uncomfortable at the realization that he was living out one of his many fears; being trapped in a malfunctioning elevator.

He didn’t know why, but his first instinct was to search the upper corners of the elevator for security cameras. Edmund somehow felt implicated in the stopping of the elevator, and wanted to make amends with whoever suspected him. A smaller, more cynical part of him wanted something to bear witness to his possible, though unlikely, impending doom. He made eye contact with a small, blinking security camera, shrugging slightly and making an expression that he hoped would be interpreted as *Wasn’t me*.

His second instinct was to make eye contact with the only other person in the elevator. He felt it important that they bond over this moment, at least to find some solace in each other’s casual shrugs over

it all. How silly, the shrugs would say. *Of course this would happen to me. To us!*

They were unlikely companions, Edmund and the woman he shared the elevator with. She was someone who Edmund would pass on the street but never speak to. Fishnets encased her legs and disappeared into heeled black boots. She peered at him through eyes shrouded in dark makeup. She leaned in the corner of the elevator as though she'd slunk there hours ago and couldn't be bothered to move. Edmund imagined her riding the elevator up and down, up and down, eyeing everyone with the same passive look she was giving him now. Edmund tried out a casual shrug, and it was returned with silence. She crossed her arms over her chest and assumed an even more closed off position. He pressed the emergency call button.

What felt like hours but really must have been a few quiet minutes passed before the rustling of a toolbox could be heard from somewhere above. This was the first event that shook the woman from her empty gaze, and she peered upwards towards the sound.

"They're working on the elevator now," Edmund said, feeling as though he had to explain the sound to her. "We'll be out of here in no time."

"Sure hope so." She turned to the mirror behind her and slid a nail between her teeth, spreading her lips wide to check for food. Edmund found this an odd thing to do when somebody was watching. Strangely intimate. He imagined that she must not have any embarrassment about things like that.

The quiet stretched for so long that Edmund nearly couldn't bear it any longer. He wished this was one of those elevators with music, so at least the woman's silence would

have some background noise. Their eyes felt like opposing magnets, always dancing around each other but never meeting. He wanted to hear her talk again, and cultivated something he thought might strike up a conversation.

“What brings you to New York?” he asked.

“Oh, I live here,” she said. “I just visit this hotel sometimes.” Her heeled boots made a clicking sound on the tile as she shifted her weight from one bony hip to the other, glancing at the door as though willing it to open. He smelled alcohol.

“Oh,” he said. “Well, how do you like it?” He gestured around, as if to indicate the extravagance of the hotel, bustling just outside the locked elevator doors.

“It’s alright.”

Her eyes flicked to him briefly, then away. She seemed to be cautiously considering Edmund, sizing him up. Like a cagey raccoon, her body curled protectively into itself in the corner of the elevator.

After a long time, her gaze settled on him as though she’d run out of things in the elevator to look at. “What brings *you* to New York?”

“I’m just here on business,” he said. A loud clang came from above, followed by some urgent talking. Unfazed by the noise, she asked, “What kind of business?”

She grew comfortable in stages. First, she unspooled her arms, then she stopped fiddling with her rings. More and more, she made eye contact with him. He could see her calculating, trying to get a read on him, eyes scanning over his watch, his haircut, counting the scuffs on his shoes. He felt like he was

earning the trust of a wild animal, and for what reason he did not know.

Why had he felt the need to strike up a conversation with her in the first place? He couldn't remember. He only knew that he was greatly enjoying himself.

They stood closer to each other now. Everything felt closer, even the ceiling. He wondered if she noticed.

"I've got a kid, you know," she announced, glowing with a private pride. She opened her wallet, revealing a photo of a dark-haired boy. "He lives with my mom, but I visit him a lot," she said earnestly. "I tuck him in at night whenever I can."

"That's nice."

For some reason, he didn't care about leaving the elevator anymore. He craved only to know about her, everything she was willing to tell him.

"What's his name?"

"Walter. He's in the third grade. Honor roll."

He nodded, examining the photo through the plastic window of her wallet. She held it extended, with her thumb over Walter's chest so he wouldn't fall out. She treated the photo carefully, as though she were protecting the real Walter by extension somehow. Fanned out behind him was her driver's license, a few gift cards, and a credit card. She snapped the wallet closed when Edmund's eyes began to wander, and looked up towards the sounds of the workers.

It had been hours. Days? No, hours.

"Are you married?" she asked.

"Yes, I am."

“That’s nice,” she said. “I’d like to be married someday, I think. Maybe.”

“What kind of a person would you like to marry?”

“A good one. One who listens to me, and thinks I’m funny. I’m really funny, in real life.”

“In real life?”

“Yeah,” she said. “This doesn’t feel like real life to you, does it? It feels like we’re stuck here, waiting for something.”

Edmund thought about this for a moment. “We’re waiting for them to fix the elevator.”

Her nostrils flared briefly, and she nodded slowly. “It feels like we’re waiting for something.”

Sometimes, after she said something very strange like that, she would be quiet for a long time. Edmund could feel the thoughts violently swirling around in her head, sometimes escaping and bashing around the elevator like bees.

“Do you ever think about God?” she asked after a long spell of silence. Her eyes shifted upwards, as though silently addressing Him. Her head touched the ceiling now, and Edmund was crouching with his back against the wall.

“Not often.”

She sighed. “I used to go to church every Sunday. I loved putting my hands in the air when I sang.”

I shrugged. “I haven’t been to church since I was a kid.”

She was somewhere else, her lips parted, and her head tilted slightly as though listening for something far away.

“I used to love God very much,” she said, very quietly.

They sat on the floor with their feet touching. There wasn't enough room for standing anymore, and Edmund was beginning to feel a bit indignant about the lack of space in the elevator.

“Have you noticed that it's getting smaller in here?” he asked, and she looked around.

“Yeah, I guess it is.” She shrugged. “We'll be let out soon anyways.”

Edmund listened for the workers, and he could still hear the occasional banging of their tools somewhere far above them. “I wonder if they're even trying to get us out, or if they're just making it sound like they're working.”

“They're trying,” she said. “Probably.”

She took off her jacket and revealed many beautiful tattoos on her arms.

“What does that one mean?” Edmund asked, pointing to a frog peeking over her shoulder.

“Oh nothing, I just thought it was funny.”

He then pointed to a small dream catcher on her forearm. “What about that one? What does it mean?”

She appeared flustered and covered it with her hand. “I don't know. Stop asking me if there's meaning.”

“It's getting very hot in here, isn't it?” she said. The ceiling was too low for her to sit up straight, so her head was cocked at an angle.

“Yes, it is.”

“I can't really hear them working anymore, can you?”

“No, I can’t.”

She nodded, and a small sigh left her. “It’s been lovely, sitting here and talking with you.” She looked him directly in the eyes now, for the first time. Her body didn’t twitch; she fidgeted with nothing. Her eyes were haunting and round and impossibly sad.

“I don’t want to never see you again,” Edmund said. She didn’t respond; she only looked at him until the ceiling had pushed her head down too far. He could no longer see her face, but he could hear her beginning to wheeze as her knees were pushed into her chest.

Edmund said nothing for a long time, and then, with urgency, he squeaked, “What’s your name?”

She took a labored breath and whispered, “Mary.”

He couldn’t find the air to respond. *That’s a nice name*, he thought. *A very nice name.*

Vices By E. M. VerBryck
Model: Liz Cameron



Vices By E. M. VerBryck
Model: Will Coppola



American Finds Refuge?
By Emily Beichler

AMERICAN FINDS REFUGE ?

I

In my confusion of mind
I remember
what was going on within me.
every effort
I suspect
early summer
queer
kinds of people
one hopes,
I went home
hidden I had no
position,
evil unvaracity
crippled my soul.
un-American

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Humanity

By David Lattanzi

In a way, he should not say
For the memory is not sought
Everyday, he wastes away
The memory of when he fought

Long ago, there was a war
He was blinded by false hate
There was a war, no one knows what for
Death is what sealed his twisted fate

Endless burning, the world stops turning
Now time stands quite still
It's concerning, no longer churning
Corpses hidden beneath the hills

Alone and tired, sat by a fire
Was the man old and weak
Growing tired, no more desires
His future is now bleak

He can not sleep, it makes him weep
Oh the terrible things he's done
Scars run deep, his life is cheap
The memories he can't outrun

The land is calm, there are no qualms
The mans end was his own
No more bombs, held in his palms
The world burnt from the fire he's thrown

He goes into night without a fight
The world no longer has to flee
Without a fright, without a sight
The world has been set free

African Baobab
By Li Wakefield



My Midnight's Eye

By Robert Toussaint

I always feel better in my dreams.
Like sweet melodies played between the musical seams.
I always ask myself, why do pain and sorrow
disappear when opening my Midnights' Eye?
That's because these blissful lies
keep propagating in the
space between my brain and
body's evanescent divide.
I keep telling myself to stay tethered
to the world that is not my mind.
But the life I live within my scape'
is a lot more desirable than the
life that sustains itself through
falsity and self hate.
I always feel better in my dreams.
Like whisking waves leading
ships to light.
The only nightmares I see
manifest within my life.
I want to live in a dream; in my dreams--
the rosy embodiment of glee--
untouched by fear, or my antipathy for me.
I understand that one day glass
shards will rain from the sky
and blind my Midnights' Eye.
But I can't face the despair of
losing my perfect place; not now.
I always-I always feel better;
'Feel' Better in my dreams.
The place where I can control my
reality. Like a lonely child holding up
their action figurines in
a busy street.

Graverobber

By A.D. Cusanno

Acres and acres of headstones stretched across the hillsides, lantern light flickering across the crumbling, moss-coated faces as he strolled between them. He mumbled names and dates under his breath as he passed, taking time out of his search to pay brief respects to the countless bodies beneath his feet. He had left a silver coin at the entrance, a simple offering, but he wanted to be thorough.

Despite it being past midnight, the heat of late spring lingered and clung to his skin, sweat pooling at the nape of his neck and sticking strands of dark hair to his face. Every inch of him itched, warmth crawling with the legs of insects across his skin. The silence of the graveyard was a welcome respite after his trip into the city earlier that day, with its own countless bodies pressed tight against one another, shifting in a constant flowing sea, rather than tucked nicely beneath the earth, comfortably fitted in their individual boxes, no limbs wandering into another's personal space. He tugged at the collar of his already loose linen shirt. Shifted the strap of his heavy bag to his other shoulder. Every touch felt far too snug when he was consumed with memories of that dense city.

Finally, he knelt, placing his lantern and bag beside a tombstone that was much larger than the others, much newer, with ornate patterns swirling across its surface. However, no flowers lay in front of it, and the young man knew that nobody had visited this particular grave in many months. Already, lichen stretched up from the soil and held firm onto the stone. He couldn't afford much sympathy though. Not now, anyway. Maybe once his job was over, he'd say a

few words in hopes the old man's spirit would finally know peace. He had strapped a shovel to his back before trekking here, and now as he stood once more, he swung it from over his shoulder and plunged it into the earth.

His clothes hadn't exactly been clean when he first made his way to the graveyard, but as he descended into the ground, damp soil coated his shirt, his trousers, his gloves. He breathed deeply, relishing the smell of freshly turned dirt. Here, deep within the ground, surrounded by nobody who would bother him, his muscles relaxed and it took far more willpower than it should have to continue focusing at the task at hand. Hours stretched on, until his shovel made a dull clunk as it collided with the lid of the old man's coffin. The young man scrambled, brushing away the last of the dirt until the entire lid was uncovered. In his digging, he had made sure to dig a slightly longer and wider opening than the length of the coffin, allowing him to perch on now densely packed soil beside it, rather than even attempting to haul it from its resting place. Using a hunting knife, he wedged the lid of the coffin open, and was immediately hit with the putrid stink of death. Bile rapidly crawled up his throat and dizziness overwhelmed him for a moment, before he collected himself, forced the bile down, and leaned over the body.

The old man was dead, that was evident enough. The young man would have preferred to come here sooner to get the deed over with, before the stench had become so intense, but the winter had been brutal before being pushed aside by a rain-filled spring, and the ground had always been too frozen or too muddy to effectively dig. However, in the months that he had been buried, the young man was

expecting him to be further along the decomposition process. Worms hadn't yet made a proper feast of the body, so much of him was still rather intact, aside from the sagging gray paper skin pulled taut across bones and lips curling back to reveal long, yellowing teeth. His hands, resting on his stomach, had also grown thin and rotten, nails appearing oddly long. A tarnished ring could be seen glinting faintly on his left hand. The young man lifted his knife and sliced through the chest of the dead old man.

It was a faint sound, but a horrid, squelching, peeling one nonetheless, and the odor grew more intense as the chest collapsed in. Even though a scarf didn't make sense to wear in this weather, he was grateful he had thought to wrap it around his neck before leaving home. He lifted the thick fabric across his lower face, dulling the tendrils of death that attempted to claw through his nostrils and throat. Using the blade, he pushed aside the remaining tissue until he found what he had come for: The old man's heart, still full of blood and red as the day he died.

He climbed up the wall of the pit, just enough to reach his bag and retrieve a jar. With as much speed and precision as any butcher, he carved out the heart and dropped it into the jar, before retreating entirely. Next from his bag, he pulled out scraps of fabric, small bundles of hay, strips of tree bark, and sprinkled them into the pit, covering as much of the corpse as he could. Lifting his head to the sky, he whispered, "*Forgive me,*" before picking up his oil-filled lantern and hurling it into the pit.

The sun was well into its ascent by the time the young man reached home, the jar now safely tucked

into his bag. Any shopkeepers or farmers he encountered on the hike back took one glance at his gore-smeared gloves and dirty shovel and turned away. They knew his reasons. They knew why desperation hung on him like a cloak.

“Ignatio!” From the doorway of his home, another man’s voice rang out. “Ignatio! Is it done?”

Ignatio nodded, eyelids rapidly growing heavy as his adrenaline faded. But he couldn’t sleep. Not yet. Only part of the job was done after all. He was only vaguely aware of footsteps hurrying to him, of an arm grasping his and leading him to the old stone house. It was little more than a hut, really, and the pair had to stoop when passing through the threshold.

“Thank you, Cas,” Ignatio murmured as his friend lowered him into a chair by the fire.

“You might want to hold your gratitude,” Cas said as he took the jar from Ignatio’s bag.

“This is going to smell *dreadful* when it chars.”

Ignatio groaned. “At least burn it outside, would you? I’m not having that thing stinking up my own home.”

“Really? You think I’d be so rude as to burn it in here? With both of you resting right next to it?” Cas gestured to a cot across the room, where a twitching bundle of blankets lay.

Underneath it, Ignatio’s younger sister was still burning up from fever, blood pooling from her mouth with every shuddering cough.

“You burned the rest of the body, correct?” Cas asked.

“Of course. Couldn’t stick around after I started the fire though; the smell was unbearable. Flames were still going strong by the time I made it to the cemetery entrance though. Probably just bones now.”

“Good. I know you’re exhausted, but while I’m taking care of this, you’ll need to start preparing the soup.”

Ignatio nodded as Cas retreated from the hut and forced his stiff limbs to pull him from his seat. The routine was almost second nature to him as he gathered frozen bone broth from the ice box along with a modest collection of spices, herbs, and vegetables. Calloused hands, now free from the fraying filthy gloves, chopped and crushed and blended ingredients until the broth slowly came to a simmer. In the new dawn, the hut felt much cooler than usual, and the fire brought a welcome heat. An itch gathered at the back of Ignatio’s throat, but he simply coughed it away. The peppers often irritated him.

Everything felt almost domestic, peaceful, aside from the growing stench of burning, rotten meat from outside. Another fit of hacking, wet coughs made Ignatio’s heart twist painfully in his chest, and he abandoned his station at the now boiling pot to crouch at his sister’s side. She hadn’t spoken in days, but her weak whimpers of pain communicated more than enough to Ignatio. Placing a hand on the top of her head, he pulled strands of matted brown hair from her face. Her eyes fluttered open for just a second, before closing tightly, and sobbing again.

“Is the sun too much, Lystra?” Ignatio was barely able to choke out the question. The itch was back in his throat and words were painful to get out. His vision blurred with tears as Lystra nodded. For a moment, he sat there, slowly working out tangles and wishing the deep pain in his chest would lift. He had to stay focused. Focused on Lystra, on healing her, on protecting the poor girl that was so much younger

than himself and yet was the only family he had. After Lystra's breathing stabilized enough to ensure she was asleep again, Ignatio walked around the hut, closing every shutter and curtain until the only light was that of the fire.

A sliver of sunlight filtered in as Cas crept back inside with the jar, now filled with ash and charred chunks of meat from the dead man's heart. "Nasty business, this is," he whispered, and Ignatio could only bring himself to nod solemnly. Cas shook the contents of the jar into the soup, and the pair watched as it swirling and bubbled, tainting the pale broth into a deep gray. Sure enough, it smelled dreadful, but this was their final hope. No one in the village liked to resort to such methods, but it was all they had.

As Cas scooped the soup into a bowl, Ignatio returned to Lystra's side. He gently squeezed her shoulder until her eyes opened fully. Her eyes. Once hazel, they were now clouded and damp from crying. Dull as if she were already dead. He helped her into a seated position against the pile of pillows, and taking the bowl of soup from Cas, lifted it to her lips.

It didn't go down easily. Lystra choked and sputtered against any dry bits of ash that floated into her mouth, and Ignatio felt his own stomach churn in solidarity as she slurped down the horrid excuse for a meal. But eventually, the bowl was empty, and Lystra slouched against the pillows.

Every inch of Ignatio ached. Ached with muscles sore from overexertion and ached with memories of a ghost who no longer haunted the cot in his home. Lystra had succumbed to her illness three days after he and Cas fed her the supposed cure.

Miraculously, she hadn't vomited it back up like they expected her to, but that didn't matter in the end. For the first few days following her death, Ignatio hadn't felt much of anything at all. The sudden chill in the air trailed him, even though Cas claimed it was perfectly warm outside. Everything felt muffled. Cas' arm on his back, pulling him close after the funeral and leading him back home. The flavor of once comforting food turned to sand. Alcohol did little besides make him drowsy, so he gave up that too. Cas came by everyday to ensure Ignatio ate at least a couple full meals, to ensure he had some form of company besides what remained of the dead, but his soothing words turned sour in Ignatio's ears.

Then the aches came. They arrived before Cas could. They kicked down Ignatio's door, robbed him of what little comfort remained, and left him shivering and in pain on the floor. The chill was stronger than ever, and he shuddered every minute he wasn't covered with blankets and cloaks. His muscles spasmed, he couldn't move, and every bone was ablaze with the searing stabs of needles being pushed through his body. By the time Cas did arrive, he found Ignatio curled up and trembling on the floor. Ignatio's stomach purged any food he consumed, stinging bile only irritating his already sore throat further. The same fever that had taken Lystra had come for Ignatio as well.

Days passed in dreams and blurs. Occasionally he would open his eyes and find Cas humming softly to him or attempting to pour water down his throat in a desperate attempt to make him drink. Other times, he was surrounded by vivid horrors that, logically, he knew were just dreams, but he couldn't stop the panic from seizing him and the screams from tearing out of

his mouth. More than once, Cas had to wrestle him back into the bed after Ignatio flung himself from it in a blind terror. Most of the time, he was coughing. Or vomiting. Or watching blood trickle from his lips and into the palm of his hand.

“Make it end, Cas. Please.”

Tears poured down Cas’ face endlessly these days. “I wish I could.”

Every smell was too strong, overwhelming and invading his tongue so he could taste it even though every bit of food was utterly flavorless now. Light stung, and just like Lystra before him, he cried for the curtains to be drawn and the door shut at all times. Sound was no longer the consistent, pleasant music of the town he’d lived in his whole life. It assaulted his ears with an intensity he’d never felt before, leaving his head ringing. An iron fist gripped his chest and squeezed until every breath of sweet air was hell. Even in sleep, there was no peace.

“If you loved me, you’d kill me already.”

“I wish I could.”

Ignatio lasted longer than Lystra had, but one day Cas awoke next to the cot and reached out for his friend's hand, only to find it cold and stiff. For a while, he sat there, clutching the hand of his lifeless friend, staring blankly at the cobweb-covered ceiling. He wanted to feel something, wanted to sob and scream and curse at the world for taking his best friend and the girl he had spent so long trying to heal. But nothing came. A wall, built from months of grief and fear, refused to let him feel. A distant part of him wondered if this is how Ignatio had felt after Lystra’s death.

Ignatio had always been taller, heavier than Cas, but now he was so light that it took little effort to lift him. Stumbling through the door, he carried the body down the muddy backroads. Any wandering neighbors parted quickly as he hurried towards the temple at the edge of town. He was grateful for the overcast sky, he didn't think he could tolerate the sun right now. It must've rained recently. The ground was muddy, the air light and clean. At the doors of the temple, two priestesses stood guard, clutching spears that crossed over the broad wooden doors, but upon seeing Cas' sunken face and wild eyes with Ignatio's limp form in his arms, they moved aside, and the doors opened behind them. There were six priestesses inside, positioned around the altar with embroidered coverings pulled over the lower halves of their faces and thin veils draped over their hair. A status symbol, markers of devotion. One of them, with purple floral patterns covering her veil and mask, approached first.

"When did he die?"

"Sometime in the night."

"The same illness that took his sister?"

"Yes, they had the exact same symptoms."

The priestess nodded and helped Cas carry the body to the altar. The others quickly followed, pulling fabric over the body, lighting candles, burning herbs in a small bowl in the back of the room. Everything was a practiced routine, one step after another, and for a moment, Cas could breathe, getting lost in the ritual.

Cas didn't protest when the priestesses suggested burying the body themselves. He didn't want to go to the cemetery. Didn't want to see the

misplaced soil atop the grave of the body Ignatio had exhumed. Part of it was shame, a realization that they had destroyed a corpse for nothing, a reminder of their failure and crimes. Part of it was paranoia that the old man's body would crawl back out, angry and seeking a new heart, even though Cas knew that only happened in children's ghost stories.

Night had fallen by the time Cas walked home. He felt... Well, he couldn't quite tell. He felt hyper-aware of the world in a way he never had before, but his mind could not focus. Rather than returning to his own farmhouse, he walked right back to Ignatio and Lystra's hut. However, just beneath the sound of the creaking door, he caught another sound. A branch breaking. Craning his neck, he glimpsed a lean figure dart behind the treeline.

"Hello? Who's there?"

No response. Cas bristled in irritation.

"If you're looking to rob the dead, I promise you there's nothing of value here!" He pushed open the door fully and locked it behind him. Scum. Couldn't leave his dead friend alone for even a day. After quickly swapping out the sheets of the cot, he climbed in. He would wash everything more thoroughly in the morning. Sleep didn't come easy. He tossed and turned for much of the night, and slowly the realization of his friend's death hit him.

Three months, two dead, and he was left alone.

He sat up abruptly, sobs and convulsions wracking his body. A weight settled over him— not one of illness, but a dull gray cloud that pushed his thoughts to one thing. Ignatio. He couldn't save him, couldn't save his sister. Maybe he hadn't tried to heal Lystra enough. Maybe if she had healed, Ignatio would have had more strength, more will to heal himself. Maybe he didn't try hard enough to save Ignatio.

Maybe another heart wouldn't have saved him, but surely something else would have. Instead, he just let him die. Cas should've killed him before the infection spread too far, put his friend out of his misery instead of letting him fester in sweat and blood and fear for months. His mind was filled with a single mantra: *All my fault. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry—*

His head fell against the cool stone of the hut, and for one merciful moment, he was numb. The cloud still hung, tears still poured, but all thoughts fled and left him empty. Now, he felt adequately tired. Now, he could sleep. Moonlight streamed in through the window and Cas realized he had forgotten to close the curtain. Turning to the window, he screamed.

A gaunt, ashen face surrounded by stringy black hair ducked below the frame. Without a second thought, Cas grabbed the long dagger he kept next to him, but by the time he ran outside and to the window where the person had been hiding, it was gone. He scanned the treeline. Dark. Too dark. Snatching up a spare lantern from the front step, he marched to the trees. Even with the mud, there were no footsteps, no broken branches, no indication of anyone having passed by. Everything was still.

Cas made it a few feet into the woods and was about to turn around when a glimpse of movement caught his eye. A shadow that had broken free from its brethren. He tried to quiet his ragged breaths but his heart was in his throat and clearly the person knew he was here anyway. Lifting the lantern, all air escaped his lungs and vanished into the stars above. It was a man, tall and stick thin, broad shoulders drooping down and swaying. His mouth hung agape in a twisted half-smile, and his eyes bore into Cas'. His familiar, deep brown eyes.

"Ignatio?" Cas muttered. But he blinked, and the figure was gone. *"Ignatio!"*

Manic energy seized him and he bolted in the direction he had last seen his friend. Branches scraped his skin, stones sliced through his bare feet, blood was drawn, but Cas paid little mind.

"Ignatio!"

The path disappeared far behind as Cas pushed through brush and thistles. *Ignatio*. He had to find *Ignatio*. Occasionally, he heard the pounding of footsteps in front of him, the crack of sticks. Occasionally, he saw the brief flash of an arm or a leg or dark eyes peering at him when his lantern light passed over a particularly dense patch of foliage.

Ignatio. He had to find *Ignatio*.

Cas didn't notice the fallen tree until his ankle twisted and he fell hard against the cold earth. The lantern tumbled from his grasp and cracked upon the wood, sparks and embers flying into the trees above as flames rapidly covered the bark. Cas tried to stand but his leg seared with white hot pain. His ankle stuck out at an odd angle. Dry leaves high above him began to catch, and despite the heat emanating down at him, Cas felt cold. His breaths came fast and shallow, and his heart pounded like it was trying to break free from its cage in a desperate attempt to save itself. He rolled over, tried to crawl, but the pain shot up his spine and he collapsed, crying out. He didn't recognize his own voice, raspy and high as he screamed into the night, *"Ignatio!"*

From beyond the rapidly spreading flames, the gaunt figure appeared again. Its chest was an empty cavity, blood pouring lazily down his linen shirt. The wicked half-smile still twisting its face.

Luckily, the rain from the previous day had left the forest wet enough to prevent the fire from spreading too far. But it was still late by the time a search party left in search of Cas. A neighbor had gone to check on him after hearing some commotion the night before, but the hut and Cas' farmhouse had been empty. The flames cresting over the tops of distant trees told the neighbor everything they needed to know.

Cas' body was burned, blackened beyond recognition by the time he was found. Only the warped dagger and lantern frame next to the body indicated who it was. Ash floated through the air, scorch marks scarring the earth. An entire patch of woodland reduced to nothing but a reminder. The priestesses came soon after to collect the body, and everyone stood clear as they carried him from the woods. For a while, they all stood in the new clearing, staring at the burnt ground. *Why did he come out here? Did he start the fire himself? He must have, he brought the lantern. But why? I didn't even hear screaming. Did someone bring him out here? No one else is missing.*

The muffled rumors continued throughout the day, well into the night, and when the coffin of the burned man was finally lowered into the earth beside the graves of Lystra and Ignatio, they could only stare, confused and dazed.

TOTAL INTERNAL REFRACTION

By Professor Justin Mando

A fish looking up
sees only out of "Snell's window":
96 ° of vision, a cone cast upon the surface,
wavering portal to the air-breathing world.
A vast mirror frames that window:
total internal refraction.

Low to the bank
I do not exist.

I grasp the scud: damp bristles of hare
tied to a barbless steel hook,
a talon I softly press into my fingertip.

The advantage is mine, above, unseen

when
a sudden shutter.

The fish takes flight into elodea.
But I'd hardly moved.
A trout's sixth sense?

Now, the human sense to beware.

Upstream: rising mists of morning,
the lone movement.
Downstream: no followers,
no interlopers.
180 ° of sycamore, beech, and birch
framing the limpid flow.
The trout and I should be alone.

Only lastly looking
to the skyward window
do I meet the two eyes:

a barred owl
its ravaging bulk
poised in silent tension;
huge, black portals
of unwavering focus
consuming all matter,
all degrees.



Betta Fish

By Li Wakefield

Heart Transplant

By Avery Neff

When a sea dragon gave me his heart,
My chest raged with the power of an ocean.
Who knew I could feel so wild
Or host such life
Or love this deep.

Skincare Routine
By Henshee Afaga

Who am I but a rib?

And still, I would give this bone to a dog

Pet him, tell him: Good boy! You're enough, and
I will love you no matter what.

You straighten your body, and

Oh God, I have the back of a 70-year-old.

Holy domesticated recitations

But you have learned to keep your eyes sharp to
see through the seven heavens.

The sun is beaming,

Protect your neck and apply sunscreen.

And don't forget your hands and wrists

Put more and more and it might be enough
for the ropes to slip.

Perhaps, you will enter the eye of the needle.

They will ask for my name, but I echo it: Who
am I but a good fuck?

And still I think Eve bled.

Do not say that cruelty has ever saved you.

Glass Prison
By Tehya Walters

Inside, my former memories locked up in a
glass prison.

I see my reflection looking back at me, the glass
cage framed by my eyes.

I look towards the cage, but I can't see.

Something's in the cage, I know it, but I can't
see.

I know the object in the cage is of my past life,
so different from my reality it's almost foreign.
I know it was important to me before, meaning
it should be important now—I can't have
changed so much that this thing I've held so
dear and kept enclosed for what feels like
forever is now meaningless.

I can't have changed, but I can't see it anymore.
There are barely any remnants of humanity left
in it, or maybe I can't feel them anymore.

I can't have become numb with time, only wise.
The world can't have changed me so I cannot
feel the treasured nostalgia locked away behind
the glass.

I can't have changed myself to feel numb.

I look towards the cage, and I can't see.
I feel empty, wishing my eyes would focus.

I feel tired, losing hold of the will I had a strong grasp on seemingly moments ago, losing my nearness.

It's so far away, and I fight to see the glass cage again, feel the edge against my fingertip, but I keep falling farther away.

I'm plummeting through empty space, falling towards eternal separation from the cage.

But I can still feel its presence.

I look towards the cage, and I can't see.

I crane my neck up towards where the cage used to be.

I plummet, unsure my sense of its general direction is even correct.

But I can feel its presence, growing inside as I fall out of its reach.

I look towards the cage, and I can't see.

But I can still feel the memory, forever stored inside of me, unlocked, for my perusal.

I look towards the cage, and it is no more.

I am forever left with my memories.

Perspective
By Nikolai Varghese



A Murmur
By Marshall Barrows

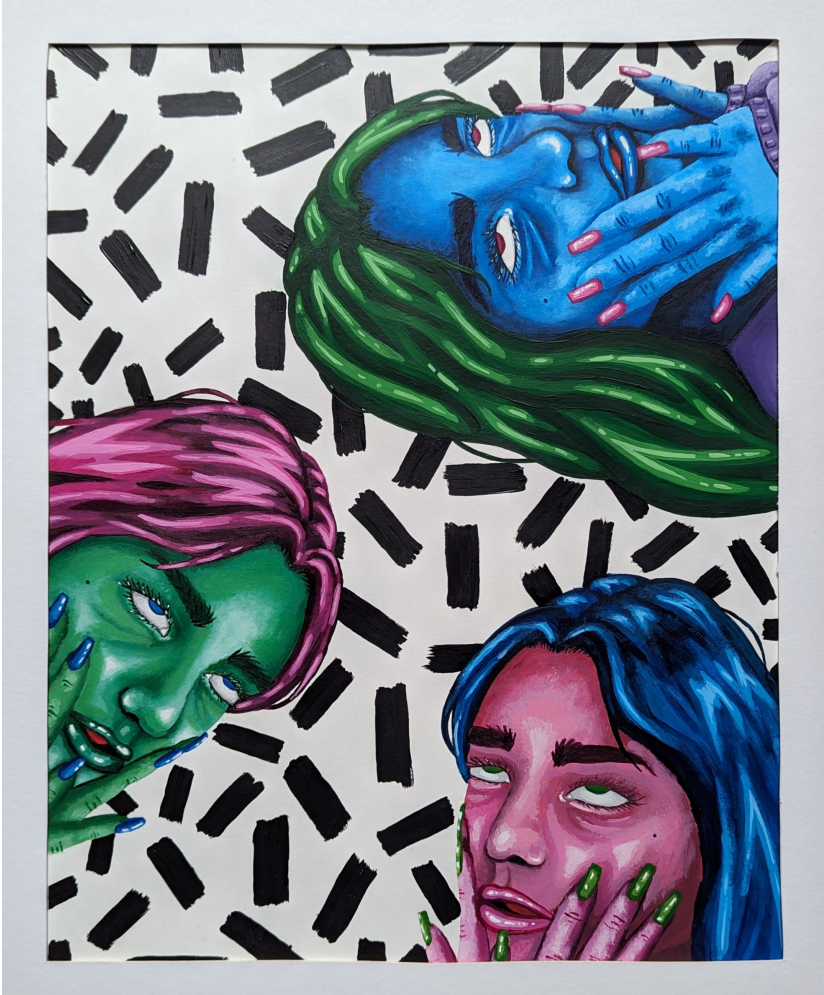
Beautiful beginning,
my mourning dove,
what taught you this tender healing?
this benevolence endured?
O mystery-maker...

And sometimes still I drift through rooms,
unmarried as are tombs, their consuming dark
an image, of what?
does it haunt me?
I call to You infinitely, my murmuring,
build ourselves a language
so only I may grasp some spalled semblance,
oh yes, my—my beautiful beginning.

Sacred Song My Sanguine Seer
Marshall Barrows

Sacred song my sanguine seer
peers along the quay in grey
mist dispersed the baffling shore
a somnambulant hum awaits
some primeval splint of fore
where voice and drone
along it's crest fall into
the blackened breast alien to all
a dire scream forlorn:
where had She gone?
see the shore again
a silver shine slithers ahead
before it's gleam cease to be
and ahead of the spinning sea
the grey turns hue and bathes it's blue
empty and vast I hold fast and still
for in days it soon will come again
the rhythm starts

Bipolarity in Reality
By Li Wakefield



ARTIFICIAL SELECTION

By Professor Justin Mando

Samuel Hearne, the celebrated traveler,
observed a North American black bear
swimming for hours, its mouth agape,
catching, like a whale, mayflies on the water.

Imagine that lakeside bear before her
discovery,
sitting on haunches,
the early evening sky scattered with mayflies,
errant Ephemera resting their intricate
wings on its fur,
the bear's famished eyes fixed on feeding trout
dimples on the perishing surface.

To the taunting leap of a fish,
at once, the bear dives in
but the trout is born wily and she gets none.

Maybe the bear happened to swallow a fly or
two,
maybe she tasted the light acidity of the
hatching insects
maybe she went back to her den to think
to return the next day and again.

In any case, Hearne was there to observe
a North American black bear swimming for
hours,

its mouth agape, swallowing mayflies.

Darwin heard the tale and speculated
such an adaptive breed the primogenitor
of a “race of bears being rendered, by natural
selection,
more and more aquatic in their structure and
habits,
with larger and larger mouths, till a creature
was produced
as monstrous as a whale.”

As monstrous as a whale, the idea was jarring
enough for Darwin to remove from later
editions
that captivating and monstrous paddling bear,
baleen where once incisors had been.

Thinking of Hearne, I sit and observe the
water’s edge,
waiting to see dimples on the surface
while Hendrickson mayflies recreate high
overhead.

I imagine a more satisfactory evolution:
trout-sized bears rise from the lake’s depths,
their snuffling noses break the surface
snapping up flies
and, oh!, the tiny roar they loose
when they recklessly select my artificial.

My Friend Holden

By J.J. Fallows

I remember carrying the book into camp proudly. The contorted image on the front enticed my twelve-year-old self, even more so since my brother suggested it to me. Having already said goodbye to my mother, I crossed the threshold into the adorned cabin. Our cabin was 70's themed, which called for paper peace signs swaying from wood beams, and streamers clinging from side to side. It was a contrast to the dullness my private bedroom bore. I ran my palm across the cover and smiled back at the horse on the front.

Each bunk had a handmade quilt from a nearby rotary club. Apparently, women of the rotary club made quilts for children at Camp Erin and for victims of domestic violence. I chose a bunk with a green and brown quilt to the far left. The rich colors and crossed stitch pattern were reminiscent of open fields and wild meadows. The past summer, before camp, my parents took the family to Hurd road in Swan Lake, New York, where Woodstock had taken place. My father opened the big blue van with only one sliding door and let his three wild sons out and one little curly-haired girl. She was wilder than all three combined.

We raced as far across the field as we could. It was not windy or cloudy. Instead, it was a perfectly sunny and seventy-five kind of day that made a twelve-year-old girl feel like a twelve-year-old girl. Even now, at twenty years old, I long for that wind in my lungs. I run on occasion, but the wind tastes different. I do not remember how far down we ran, but there is a photograph of the field with two little dots. The pink one is me, and the white one is my brother.

I threw my yellow duffle bag on the top bunk and tossed myself onto the hills sewn by the rotary club. It

felt worn in the best way. Like that favorite sleep shirt that is so soft you are scared to wash it.

I cracked open *Catcher In The Rye*. Holden was there to greet me. *"The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it is bad to say anything to them."*

I marinated in Holden's words and looked at my friend as if he had spilled purple juice on my new quilt.

Was it wrong to say something to the kids? Is that why I was at camp? I worried about my friend and his irate nature. But I kept reading, for I was just as sore, perhaps just as frightened.

You see, if you haven't met my friend Holden, he wants to be a catcher in the rye. He wants to prevent the children running in the rye from falling off the cliff, which is a noble wish because sometimes kids lose the person who is supposed to catch them.

Some time had passed when the bouncy ladies who greeted me at the camp's front desk came into the cabin, and I felt obligated to join them.

Our counselors had all the girls circle up and share our names and a fun fact. Naturally, I shared I was reading *Catcher In The Rye*. The little girls smiled politely; the bouncy ladies looked slightly deflated. Once acquainted, the women passed out white paper lunch bags, similar to the brown ones I'd bring to school each day. They were to be used for a candlelight ceremony to honor those we lost. Each girl was able to decorate their bag. I wrote a letter.

The next thing I recall was being brought outside for fresh air.

"Just take a few deep breaths. It's okay," the now entirely flat blonde woman soothingly suggested while gently scratching my back. I hiccuped hard while clutching the bag til' my knuckles ran white.

I managed to squeeze out of my little lungs a thank you. She held my hand and let me cry for a while.

She said things to me that, for the time being, dried my tears. Looking back now, it is understood, I just wanted to be caught.

When I was content, we roamed to the other campers playing a game of ga-ga ball. I joined slowly in the game and the giggling. It seemed for a moment we forgot we were children with dead parents, and this was a bereavement camp.

In J.D Salinger's novel *Catcher In The Rye*, the protagonist or antagonist, however, you feel, Holden is a child resentful of becoming an adult. His view of the adult world is summed up by the word "phony," and the theme of being a catcher in the rye manifests his wanting to save children from becoming the phony adults he resents. In that circle with the bouncy women, I realized nobody had caught me in the rye, and I was falling into that phony world.

I grew up very quickly after my father passed.

Reflecting on my dance with grief, I think of Holden, as he was one of the first friends to let me know it is okay to not want to grow up, and it is also okay to cry and hug your siblings and be mad at the world. He was my first dance partner.

The swifter I grew up, the angrier I became. But I managed to use that anger to run faster, so fast that I got a scholarship for track and field. Holden also taught me to find more company in literature. I met the Doctor of Journalism, Mr. Bradbury and Montag, Willy Loman, and the great American playwright. I was romanced through Cusk and Austen, radicalized by Woolf, and scared straight by Butler. I owe my survival to reading and running and the willingness to share these passions thanks to a young man named Holden for spending his days catching grieving, angry children like I was and sometimes still am.

Rust
By Nikolai Varghese



