

the
Motley

vol. **75**



The Motley

Student Art and Literature at Spring Hill College

Volume 75, 2024

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

EMILY LORMAND

Dear readers,

When I began working as an editor for the Motley during my sophomore year, I never expected the sense of community and connection that came with it. I soon learned that community was at the heart of the Motley— without it, there would be no submissions, no crew, and no book.

I am stunned by the overwhelming support and appreciative to all who allowed us to be a hub for their unique voices and talent.

This year did not come without its trials and tribulations, but I am entirely grateful to the crew that helped bring this edition to fruition.

Thank you for taking the time to pick up our humble journal. It has been a genuine honor and privilege to be the editor for Volume #75— dare I say, it's the best one yet!

Sincerely,

Emily Lormand

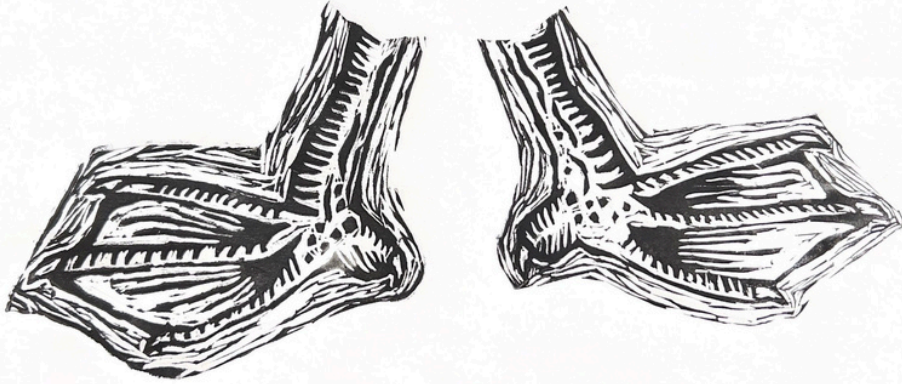
FEEL MY LOVE

ANGEL NETTLES

Oh sweet Icarus, I too was burned by the desire to experience my sun's beauty by flying too closely. A fall from grace didn't scorch my pride, it gave me an admirable feeling of the rays. Oh how beautiful it was—he was. Oh how it warmed my heart to feel something even if it was the pain of being burnt. The sun chuckled at me and asked, why so serious? Why fly so close? Why does my fatalness attract you? A thousand thoughts rushed at once as the realization set in. Any attempt by the sun to save me would be lethal. A stare into the orange's twisted glory awakened me. Oh sweet burns, you're beautiful. Only true love is capable of making something so alluring. Fancy me selfish sun. Your warmth comforts the cold crevices of my heart. I am incapable of hurting you dear; your elements make you immune. I envy your detachment. Silly muse, are you a stranger to love? Does the agony of hurting everyone who gets too close molest you, constructing this cold front of yours? Or do you enjoy the innocence and passion of your lovers, though brief, always temporary? Do not rend me from your embrace. Though it can make me an angel. Hush now. My love for you dares not force me to admire you from a distance. The salt in my wounds infers a bitter yet hopeful gesture that I will fly once more—this time a little closer. Grant me the serenity, my love.

WADDLE BABY, WADDLE

MADISON FAILLA



I'D RATHER BE A HORSE BUT HERE'S A POEM ABOUT ME AS A BIRD

HARUKO MEYER

There will be paths through this forest, and you and I will lose ourselves
in the soft curves and folds of the ground.

You are a tree I pass each day on my way to the town. I touch your bark
as I pass by, and your branches are so thick that a man could hide up
there among the leaves.

I would like to be a bird.

I would perch on one of your branches, and together we would watch the
wind blow all the other trees back and forth.

Your roots drink up the rain and the morning dew. They hold you to
the earth. Your branches embrace the sunlight. They hold you to the
clouds.

You and I could stay together for many years, and never leave this spot.
You are a tree; I am a man. I must move around. I must walk to the town
to make money.

You stand here always, watching the sun, the rain, and the wind.

They say they are going to transform you, they say they are going to
make you beautiful

And when you grow old and your time has come, they will cut your body
down.

They will build a house out of your trunk and your branches.
A man and his wife will live in the house.
They will have a little daughter.

She will play with her dolls on the grass in front of the house.
The little girl will run up to you sometimes and play in the shade of
your branches.

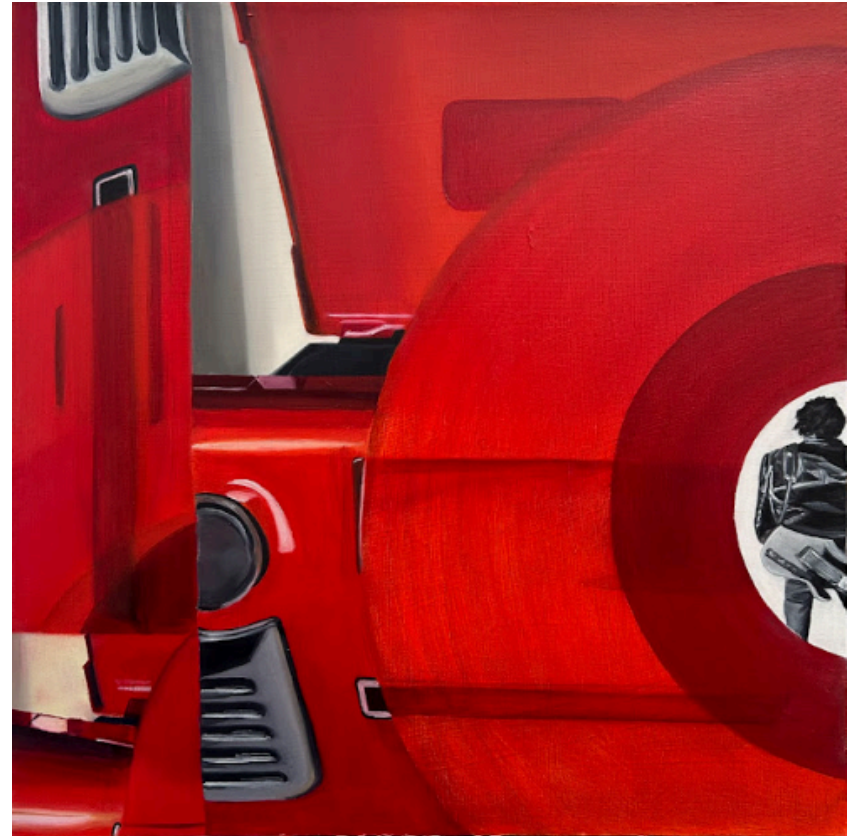
When you were alive, you could have looked down and seen the ants
moving through their tiny kingdom under the ground.

And I will look on, perched on the roof of the house.
Where your roots once drank up the morning dew, where they once held
you to the earth, where your branches once embraced the sunlight.

I wish you were a bird.

So we could be here together right now.

UNTITLED
GABRIELLE WERNER



ODE TO CHANGING SEASONS

KAYTIE VAN ALSTINE

To the fresh breezes blowing life
 Into, not only myself,
 But everything around me.
 To the ambrosial aromas
 Tickling my nose
 And the fat, bumbling bees
 Buzzing lazily around the yard.
 I love your cool, pastel ambiance.

To the sticky mess of a melting popsicle
 And the slow bobbing of a unicorn float
 In a clear, chlorine pool.
 To the whirring of the AC on high,
 Thighs that stick to leather car seats,
 And the pitcher of pink lemonade
 That is only ever as empty as the house.
 I love your lazy days spent in loungers.

To the flickering of cinnamon candles
 And the pumpkin patch photoshoots
 Of oversized sweaters and boots.
 To the crunch of fallen leaves underfoot,
 The satisfaction after a feast,
 And the crisp breezes and bare trees
 That looks better in front of a full moon.
 I love your cozy comfort.

To the chill between classes
 And the foamy hot cocoa
 Consumed in concerning amounts.
 To the cheery holiday tunes on repeat,
 The warmth of a roaring fireplace,
 And the fuzzy, patterned socks
 Sliding across the slick floor.
 I love your days spent indoors reading.
 The changing of each season
 Brings out a new self—

A better, happier self.
 I swear each season is the best
 Until the next proves me a liar.

MAGNOLIAS

ANDREW JOSEPH GAUDET

I could hear the gentle creek flowing over the rocks. The humidity in the air was cut by a breeze that carried the scent of sweet magnolias. The sound of cicadas partnered with the cloudless sky with the glorious sun beating down on us. All elements of a perfect summer afternoon that I consider myself so lucky to enjoy every day just living in the bright sunny south. These things exist all around us, but we never seem to notice it that much, at least not when we were kids.

As a kid, I could only think about what Mary Beth and I would do today. She and I had been best friends since we were babies, as our mothers had been best friends since middle school. Growing up together we loved to go outside and play all day. It didn't matter exactly what we were playing, as the rules were always made up on the fly and changed whenever we got bored.

Today we were playing as knights and whacking each other with sticks we found by the side of the creek. It wasn't far from our homes, but it still felt like its own magical world, separate from everything else.

I had started to feel a little differently about Mary Beth. The way she smiled at me, the sight of sunshine through her dark wavy hair, and the way she laughed at every joke I met filled me with a warmth that my young heart had never felt before. I was too young to fully understand it, but I was falling in love with her.

The sun began to set over the trees and painted the sky in magnificent shades of red and pink so that if you looked up you could almost swear that God was looking down on you. The mosquitos were coming out in full force now, and lightning bugs flashed among the underbrush.

She and I started back up the rocky slope, hoping that my mom would have ice pops waiting for us when we got back.

It was at this moment I heard her gasp and the sound of her body falling back onto the rocks and ending with a crack that shattered the world. I looked back behind me and saw her lying in the creek with bright crimson blood flowing from her head. I didn't understand what I was looking at, as the mind of a child is not made to comprehend such horrible things.

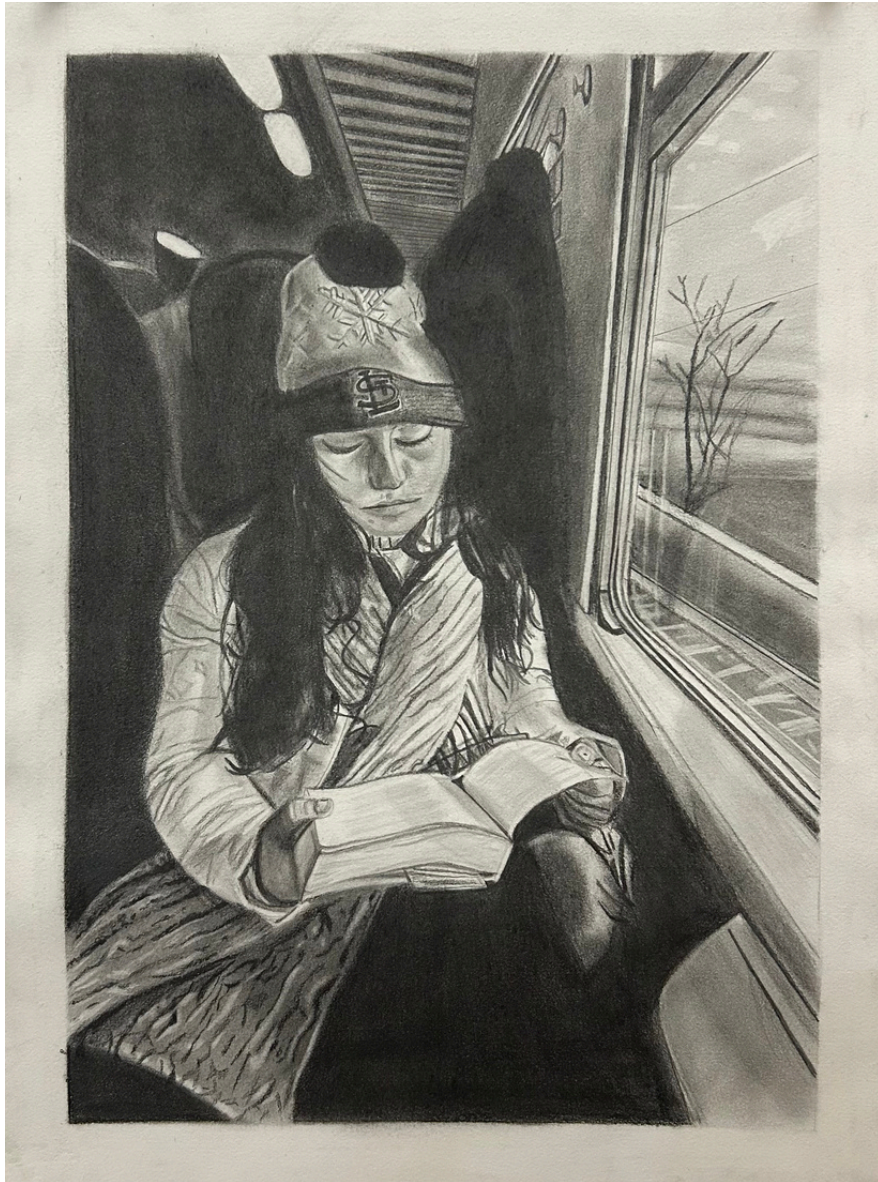
I rushed down the rocky slope carefully, with no sense of urgency or panic, but a horrible stillness. I called out to her, cautiously, denying that I already knew there would be no answer. I turned her over and looked into those deep blue eyes that portrayed none of the girl I knew this was. My vision became blurry and the world around me felt like it was TV static.

The heat felt unbearable, and the air became too thick to breathe. My hands shook like I had no control over them, my mouth went dry and the only thing my brain could process was the nightmare in front of me.

The sun set below the horizon, the cicadas sang in demonic chorus, the mosquitos gathered around her head and her lips, and the scent of magnolias mixed with the metallic smell of blood, and the creek gently carried the blood down and over the rocks until it seeped into the mud below.

UNTITLED

GABRIELLE WERNER



i give up

AJA TELLIS

i give up; your vision is blurry from the tears you hold back.
 Just turn your head and hope no one notices, or do you want them to notice?
 Notice your pain
 You need help
 No pity
 But this attention comes with pity
 What happens when you do not know
 Do not know what the problem is
 They give up
 You still have pain
 You still need help
 Help = attention
 Attention = anxiety
 You do not know
 We still have pain
 We still need help
 This is not a cry
 It is a sign
 Thinking they do not understand
 They do understand but do not care
 They have enough problems
 Our mental health is the least of anyone's worries
 Except us
 We start to shrivel
 We start to fade away
 We give up
 You give up
 i give up

TO THIS TREE

T.M.

It's roots slowly exploring the soil,
the deeper it goes.
Grasping into the ground and making its mark,
It shows its development into the world.

To this tree, it is their breakthrough.
To this tree, it is their advancement to access more water.
To this tree, it is evolving.
To this tree, it is evolving.

They destroy for more;
paper,
decorations,
A priority.

To this human, it is new wooden floors.
To this human, it is a notebook.
To this human, it is a pack of pencils.
To this human, it is convenient.
To this human, it is convenient.

To this tree, this human destroys.
To this human, this tree provides.

OUR ROLLBACK REEL

MIKIAH MUÑOZ

You were there.
Always.
The capital A in Absent,
but there.
I was watching a movie,
of someone else's life,
but no.
These memories were mine.
Snuggly warm blankets, IOI Dalmations.
The Maneki Neko coin machine.
The Little Mermaid.
Your arms,
carrying me as I pretended to sleep.
All this, distant,
yet somehow not forgotten.
And the world turned many times,
until I heard your voice,
and I just knew.
She composed a smile,
but with an ache I couldn't yet comprehend.
I had one once, but it wasn't mine.
It hurt me, thrashed and yelled;
'till I let it go, and the sun rose.
I was nicer then.
Guilty of misunderstanding.

Shameful, nonetheless.
 Proudful too.
 The yearning never laid bare.
 So... yes.
 I heard your voice, and I knew.
 Knew you'd be great.
 Be everything I ever wished for.
 Like dancing.
 Oh, how I wanted to dance.
 So you came, far and fast.
 Why? Because I asked you to.
 My heart blooming from the joy.
 Your face,
 most familiar in the summer heat.
 One blink,
 and another joined you.
 Spiritful,
 contagiously so.
 Flashing light hit all contours of our faces,
 and we turned the other cheek.
 Working hard was no longer enough.
 We let you have everything,
 because it was easier than saying no.
 Less frightening.
 I heard,
 but I sat and ate my homemade meal
 with a grain of salt.

Because,
 saying anything
 was worse than saying nothing at all.
 The world kept turning,
 and I blinked again.
 There was a woman staring at me.
 How rude, I thought,
 but the woman was me.
 I think it was then,
 that I removed my glasses
 and spit out the sugar
 I'd been shoving down my throat.
 My mind was water,
 my heart fire,
 and both were stone.
 The stones fell to my stomach.
 My thoughts a tsunami,
 nearly wasting the city,
 and I could hear the citizens screaming.
 As would I, for fear of drowning.
 Their screams for naught,
 the tsunami exploded on the city.
 Only remains trailing waves.
 The people were dead,
 but they were free.
 Of judgement,
 self doubt,
 fear,
 abandonment.
 At least that's what I thought.

I let the world catch me,
and spin me so fast I couldn't see your face.

I didn't want to.

But then,
you materialized.

Not there,
but I was looking.
Your face thinner.

Your teeth spaced.

Those eyes were distant,
and your hairline as far back
as the sweet memories you gave me.

Weathered skin its steadfast companion.

And I couldn't tell you why,
but looking at you that way,
shot a bullet into my heart.

It landed softly,
and whispered sweetly
to all the others you'd emptied there.

HIDDEN CAVE

ASHLYN MINK



A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER: LIBERATION
FROM INSTITUTIONAL FAITH
CASSIDY GRANGER

As a kid, I used to refer to myself as the “princess of the church.” I could not be the queen, because, of course, that would put me equal to God. My parents were some of the founding members of the church I grew up in, which caused me to be a pretty common face running around the wide, tiled halls of the building. I never really enjoyed church that much, but one good thing came out of it: attention.

Always having a performative personality, I would do anything to make myself stand out. Every adult I came across would greet me by name and ask me about school, sports, or my parents. The kind wrinkly man with gray hair who worked at the cafe would always pour me a glass of Sunny-D and even showed me where they kept it in case I wanted more. I would sit at the counter and watch him prepare batch after batch of coffee, and every once in a while, there would be a cookie waiting for me if I got there early enough. My dad worked in the parking lot directing traffic, which was fine unless he was supposed to be taking me home. He would have to stay through all three services, and my seven-year-old self wanted to spend as little time at church as possible. Sometimes I would go find him in the maze of cars on the hot tarmac and he would teach me his signals. He showed me the proper way to get a driver’s attention and direct them to the right parking spot. I felt so grown up in those moments, my first taste of authority and I loved it, the cars would listen...to me.

On rare occasions, I would be allowed to ride around in the church golf cart across the wide parking lot, and sometimes use my dad’s radio to “report” to his fellow flaggers.

My mom on the other hand was the leader of the church representative team, a group of leaders who did many jobs throughout the church. She was second only to the elders, but in my mind, she was one of the most powerful people in that yellow concrete building. When she spoke, people listened, and I felt so important to be her daughter. People always acted as if they cared about me, and treated me like I was one of their favorite people to see every Sunday. This kind of preferential treatment made me feel special, I would say “Everyone knows me here, it's like I'm a princess.”

Those walls were not a place of excitement, though. It was a rarity that I would become eager to attend a church service. The only time I was enthusiastic about church was if it was a youth trip to camp, if we were playing games before service, or if there was food involved. In fact, that is where my five-year-long hatred of pizza came from: the weekly consumption of greasy, half-cold, and over-cheesed pizza on Wednesday evenings.

I decided I wanted to be baptized when I stood in the back of our auditorium and watched another child in my Sunday school class do so, receiving gifts from his family and a round of applause from the congregation. Feeling the echo of the congregation cheering for me was more than enough motivation to profess a faith that I had little confidence in. I looked at the big screens projecting my face to the crowd, and to the woman baptizing me who was bragging about me and my “special” faith through the microphone. I felt satisfied. I felt important. But going under that water felt no more significant than rinsing my hair in the plastic-feeling acrylic bathtub of my small, yellow bathroom at home. Somehow, I managed to convince myself that I felt cleansed, though deep inside I knew my motivations were not sincere. I did not know any better.

I could not grasp the idea of a loving God, and I was baptized at eight anyways mostly for the feature I would receive on the massive projection screens over the stage. Thinking that God's goal was to damn as many people to hell as possible, especially children who lie about wanting to be baptized, was enough to keep my mind racing with anxiety. How could a child know any better? Why was that something they allowed us to do? My genuine terror of God was evident to nearly everyone, yet I was still allowed to profess commitment to Him. Something about the principle of that didn't seem right at the time, and it definitely doesn't seem right now.

It wasn't always just boredom that kept me away, though. It was often scared-straight fear. I was deathly afraid of God. In retrospect, it feels unfair to allow a child to make such a decision at that age without understanding its implications. I had crippling religious anxiety and was convinced that God would strike me down at any given moment. At one Good Friday service, my parents and I were sitting toward the back of the sanctuary (so that my dad could come in late and leave early for traffic duty without being disruptive.) The table directly in front of the stage held the silver trays I knew to contain the much-anticipated grape juice and stale, tasteless "bread." It was a rare occasion on which communion would be celebrated so I wiggled in my seat awaiting the entirely-too-emotional speech that denotes it is time to eat. The pastor, one my mom had many disagreements with, would be performing communion. He greeted the audience and began speaking through the emotional acoustic backing music. I started crying hysterically soon after he began his soapbox on sin and purity of communion.

I never had fear of taking the Lord's supper before, but this time was different. This time, the pastor had mentioned that "anyone unworthy who takes communion will be struck dead", to the backdrop of solemn instrumental music. I was thoroughly convinced that I would be killed if I received that wafer, not understanding the intricacies or implications of the statement. Obviously, he did not literally mean that any sinner who took communion would die, but in the mind of a child how else was that statement meant to be interpreted? My mom took me into the well-lit hallway covered in alternating striped carpet. I sat in her lap on one of the black leather couches stationed outside of the sanctuary and cried. I felt guilty, guilty, guilty, and there was nothing I could do about it. How cruel was it to put that kind of fear into a child? How insensitive was it to make that kind of statement in a room where you know kids are present who might not understand? How could you misconstrue a loving, forgiving, understanding God into one who tolerates no mistakes? The immaturity and lack of understanding that was demonstrated in my fear and reaction to certain serious topics within religion. How could we let children make such important decisions, on subjects like baptism, knowing that they are not mature enough to understand all of the implications involved?

The most identifiable memories that ruminate in my mind about that church is that it was insensitively negative. "Stop doing this," "Change this thing about your life," and "Do better," were all common themes in each sermon or Sunday school class. Far less often you would hear comforting words about God's love and affection, about his adoration of us. I never heard about Christ's humanity. How he loved, lost, cried, laughed, and experienced every physical experience we have.

No, it was always threats of eternity in Hell (which I have much to say about at a later point,) punishment in life, curses, afflictions, damnations, and maladies. The focus was so inherently negative that fear of God was perpetuated through the younger generation, making us legitimately afraid of a being who is supposed to be of supreme comfort. I think this is where we have gone wrong, where the consistently growing anger towards religion and the church, in general, has come from. The church rarely treats people well if they do not directly conform to the standards laid out.

I was the golden child of this scheme disguised as a place of worship, that is until my parents began to realize the extent of the corruption within the church's leadership. Private feuds with different members of the greater church family caused me to be ostracized within certain groups. By now, several of the elders disliked my parents because they called out the corruption they saw. Witnessing an elder of the church knowingly misuse tithe money and seeing the lead pastor cheat on his wife then flee from the consequences, my parents saw right through the charade, and the ones putting it on could not handle accountability.

I was growing up, and the church had grown with me. I was not recognized as often anymore, new staff did not understand the history of their positions, and kids of younger leaders began to receive the treatment I once had. I saw one of the younger, cuter, more important little girls sitting at the coffee bar drinking Sunny-D with a different man behind the counter. That was my thing. I had a lot of growing up to do. I had to realize that though individuals may have genuinely cared for me, my preferential treatment came solely from the status my parents held. I was not special, adults did not care about me, they cared about my parents. I never once felt loved for who I was after that, after my parents resigned their positions of leadership.

In my early teenage years, I felt cast aside. Like I was some old washed-up critic who was always wishing that things would go back to how they were before. The larger-than-life building I once felt so comfortable in began to feel less and less like a home, and more like a prison.

I no longer had the desire to attend church events. Sure, I loved God and all but it was at that point that I began deconstructing the legalistic brand of religion I was raised on. A brand that focused more on the sin than the sinner, one that immediately brushed aside anyone with a marginally different worldview.

A brand that taught my middle school girl's Bible study group that we needed to be ashamed of our bodies. A brand that taught nothing but shame, that maintained that any deviation from their narrow-minded interpretation of the Bible meant eternity in hell. My younger self had no idea what to do. I had no motivation to go to worship, I wasn't forced to as my mom had stopped attending after my father passed away, so I stopped. I think I entered that church maybe three or four times during high school. Years ago, we would make fun of these types, the CEOs we would call them. People who had so little concern for their own salvation that they would attend church on "Christmas and Easter only." My younger self would have been disappointed at that moment. She would think that we had fallen from the light, or more bluntly put, that we were going to Hell. She was, as I still am, entirely paralyzed in fear thinking about the idea of eternity, whether that be in Heaven or Hell but what I knew was that Hell would be far worse. What I wish I could tell her is that this organization has put her through so much that anxiety erupts simply by entering the building. I wish I could tell her that this church was not the only path to salvation.

In my adolescence, the church grew. I watched from a passing car as new buildings were added, while the yellow exterior paint was replaced with a dull gray, and the charming playground that once plagued me with splinters morphed into cold, futuristic, “modern” equipment. The old cafe was ripped apart and torn down. The hallway from the cafe to the sanctuary is unrecognizable. There used to be a firewall in that hallway, I would run quickly under it every time, worried that it would somehow be triggered and fall directly on top of me. I only got to see it extend once, and there is a real wall there now. The children’s pastor who was my saving grace, and would always remind us not to run in the building because “in a fight between you and the floor, the floor will always win,” moved cities.

The only remnant of what had once been was the few elderly ushers who were too stubborn to abandon ship. Services became more like punk rock concerts than worship, and church merchandise was available for purchase in the new lobby. I knew that going back to that place was not an option. I wouldn't be welcome there anyway— too liberal for their taste. Everyone’s eyes would be on me from the moment I stepped into that moody-chic lobby, and the rest of them would have no idea who I even was. I would stand in the dark stadium-style sanctuary and try to look like I was having a religious experience in the midst of strobe lights, special effects, and backup vocalists, with a side of emotional manipulation.

Leaving that church was one of the best things I could have done for myself. I have come to believe through my time away from organized religion that spirituality is distinctly personal. My faith is personal. I can not, and will not, allow an ever-changing organization to monitor the depth of my belief.

In places like that church, people attend not because the message is impactful or the music is powerful, but because they are continually given incentives to manipulate them into coming back. I always found it strange that we would give gift bags to first-time attendees, and now I realize it was not to “make them feel comfortable” but to bribe them to come back. It's as if we advertised with a sign that said “Turn here to be saved! We have candy!”

The understanding of faith I have gained from my experiences growing up in a once-genuinely welcoming environment that slowly turned into something a tad less innocent is invaluable to me. You would think that I wouldn't have noticed such a change, as a frog in a slowly boiling pot of water does not notice its gradual death, but mine was a rare case. I knew I was spiritually unfulfilled, and that I was never going to feel whole as long as I was a part of this performative denomination. This mindset led me to a very unique way of worship.

I worship God in my actions. Praising God does not have to be organized, I understand this after years of not having a church home. Loving people, in my opinion, is the greatest form of worship. That is how I choose to praise the God that I have come to know as gentle and benevolent, by loving. Being a light to others in a way that my childhood church never was to me is something that fulfills me spiritually and continually fine-tunes my relationship with the Lord, and I can thank my childhood for helping me realize that.

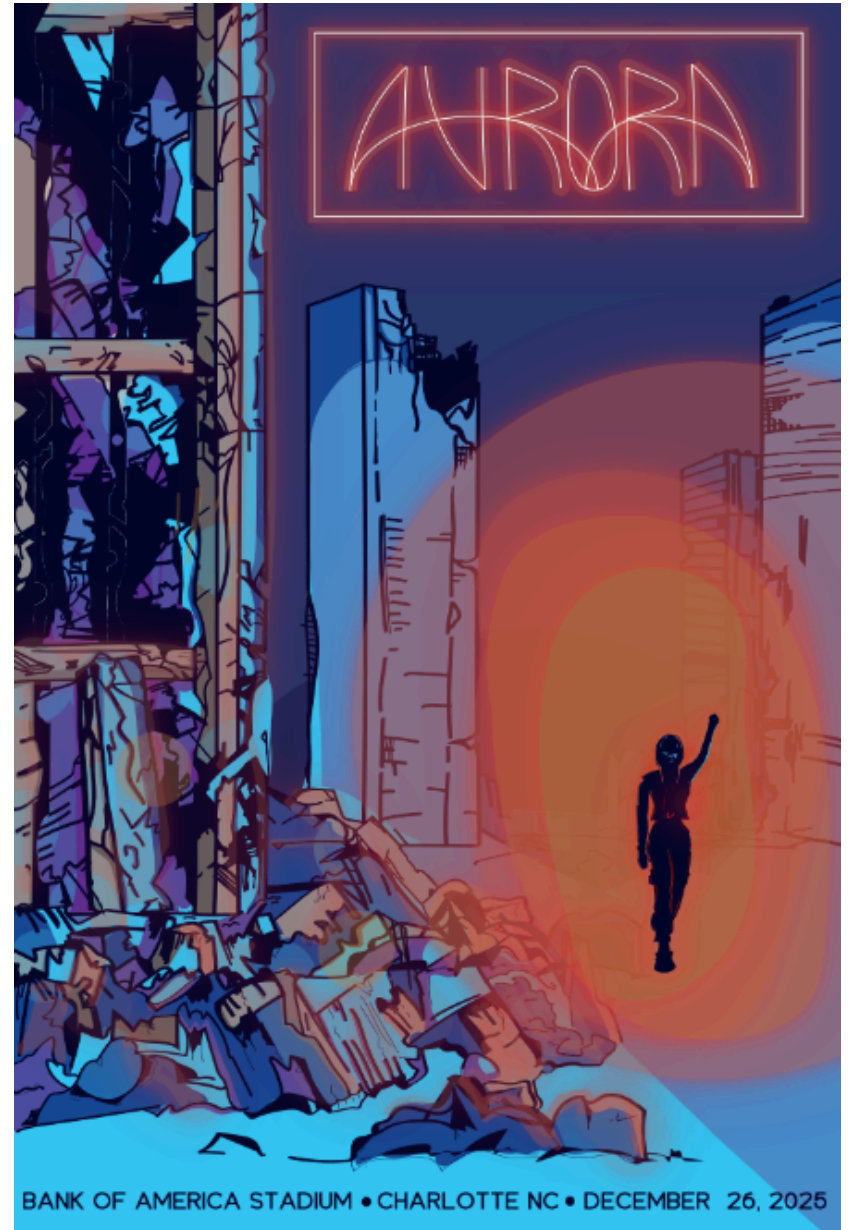
AURORA WARM

NICOLE BALCAZAR



AURORA COOL

NICOLE BALCAZAR



CHARADE

SASHA FALCH

Think too much
And you will write your own demise.

Speak too much
And you will convince no one.

Act too much
And you will only deceive yourself.

The scripture of our oppression
Is carved into the softest skin.

It is left mutilated and alone
While purity eats away the soiled flesh.

The thoughts we speak
Are the pain we seek.

Left not to instruments of solitude
For it becomes part of the circle of decay.

Mouths clap and applaud
For the hands that stand idle.

The orange cat finishes what was started
And the field mouse prepares dinner for two.

There is no happy ending for the damned
Since the story was burned before the final act.

She tells him once
He tells him twice.

They tell *you* never.

A PRINCESS'S TRAGEDY

MARGARET LOEGLER

I must confess I should have never made this deal,
But my bargain was created before the consequences could be revealed.
Cinderella was my name, and to you my story I proclaim.

I suppose it started with a pair of lovers.
My father adored his new wife like no other.
And yet it was he who died without knowing who else she did under
cover.

So, this woman my stepmother she became, bringing with her my
stepsisters certainly not to my gain.

It pains me to say that I was just as miserable then as today,

When they worked me until I fell,

For their every mistake I was blamed.

It would not be far off to say I was no longer sane.

But to my joy a ball was announced.

With a chance to escape my hell, I pounced.

I prepared a dress,

I had to steal some jewels I confess.

Despite all this I looked my best,

But Fate had other plans.

It was my stepsister's glee to wreck my desire,

By her hands my attire was set on fire.

I began to weep, and desperation began to creep.

Thus I had no choice but to make a deal with a voice of which I could see no body.

“Let’s make a trade,” It said.

I nodded my head and offered Anything I had.

But what I didn’t realize was that Anything meant Everything.

I arrived at the ball, dress, carriage, and all,

With my crimson crown and gown, I could stand tall.

Yes, it was a miracle, the prince for me did fall.

We got married and tragedy for my stepfamily did call.

I was happy I suppose, but what I did not know was the price I paid was my soul.

My body was no longer mine alone,

Inhabited by something dark and old with the intent to hold my being captive till the end of time.

Now I watch as my prince sickens, and I become more wicked.

This story of mine has no happy ending.

UNTITLED

TYSHAWN HIVES



WAIT

SASHA FALCH



MY DEAREST FIREFLY

LAURYN SPRATLEN

My dearest firefly

Fret not

You will join me one day

I will keep myself company

As I search space waiting for you

I will count every star

Of every constellation

In the billions of galaxies

In every universe

as I wait for our stars to align

I will not look for fault

In the stars next to you

Grant me the same serenity

As I watch for your distinctive light

To radiate the infinite darkness

I admire you from another universe

oh how parallel we are dear

UNTITLED

TYSHAWN HIVES



MAMBO KIDS

LIBBY TALBOT

The sun rises on an early Mardi Gras morning, awakening a community for the most festive day of the year in New Orleans, Louisiana. Alarm clocks click off; purple, green, and gold shirts are put on; and slices of Randazzo king cake are quickly shoved down throats. For those who do not live on the parade route, it is key to get an early start on the day by finding a parking spot as quickly as you can. As soon as the gate to an old Uptown house creaks open, the day has begun. Generations of families and friends gather together in the kitchen, embracing each other with open arms. The smells of barbecued hamburgers and boiling hotdogs, early morning bacon and steaming eggs drift throughout the house through the open front door. Children dressed in princess costumes and onesies run around, squealing with laughter. Little do these children know how special their New Orleanian culture will be to them one day.

Out on the parade route, strollers containing half-asleep babies with drool dripping down their chins are amused, concerned, and confused by their surroundings. Their strollers glide down the narrow sidewalk, causing everyone in their path to dive out of the way. Some react with harsh words, as Mardi Gras brings out the worst in them, while others nod with a quiet understanding of the struggle it can be to have young children with them during the holiday. If the crying of children and the hooting and hollering of the crowds are not enough to make words inaudible, the boom and bang of the bands lined up on the side streets will do the trick. Their drums are loud enough to make one feel their own heartbeat in the midst of the mambo tune.

Colorful flags wave in the air, coordinating with the beat of the instruments, while onlookers clap along to and lip sync the songs.

Trailing the high school marching bands are the dancers with their hands on their hips, their smiles wide and bright, their sparkly shoes clacking on the ground, with glitter on their cheeks and braids tightly drawn back in their hair. The tiniest of the crew does her best to keep up, glancing over at the older girls with a look of fierce determination. Chaperones tag along on the side, pushing back the crowds and keeping an eye out for any dancer who needs water or a break. "Step back please," they order with no time to mess around. On the sidewalk or the neutral ground (some people become die-hard fans of either and will argue that it is the best spot), toddlers sit happily in their ladders, dangling their feet in the air, wiping the sweat out of their messy hair. Parents wipe sunscreen on the chubby, rosy cheeks of their children, ignoring the fussy response. Blue tarps cover the grass, as tents cast shadows along the sidewalks. Ice chests, chairs, wagons, and strollers take up every inch of free space, crushing wrappers, trash, beer cans, and old cigarette butts when they move. Hyper little boys tackle each other with glee and throw the football the farthest they can. When a float approaches, everyone stops in their tracks. The headlights of the tractor are tiny, but mighty, leading the way. The glittery streamers at the bottom of the float skim the ground, graze the potholes, and sweep up the dirt. The roar of the tractor is soon drowned out by everyone's shouts for beads, doubloons, stuffed animals, shirts, and other galore. "Throw me something mister!" can be heard from miles away, even after the parade ends with the buzzes of the fire trucks.

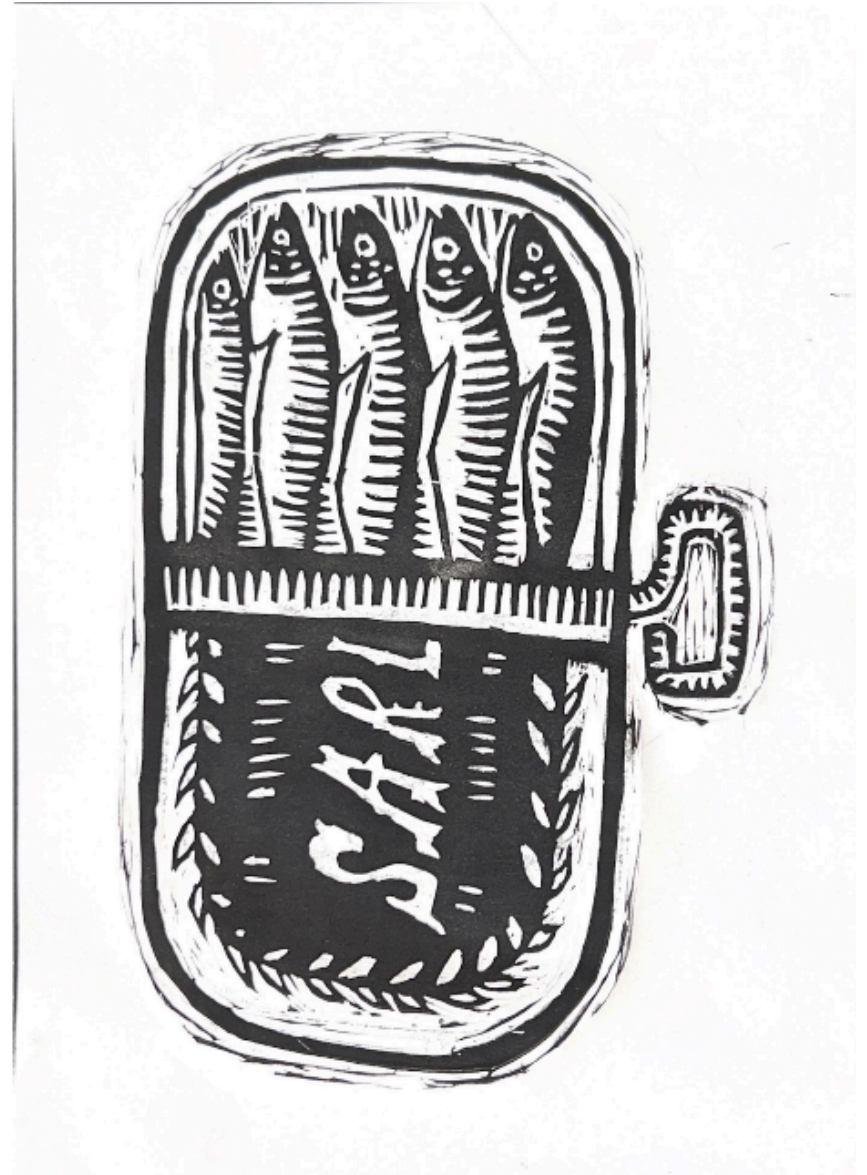
You feel accomplished once the cold, smooth spheres of beads hit your hands, unless they are laced in beer. 6-10 Stompers dressed in white headbands, red jackets, blue shorts, and white socks with blue and red circles soon arouse the kids with their hilarious dances. During Muses, people violently tap floats, screaming for the idolized decorated shoes, and during Iris the same for sunglasses, and during Nyx the same for purses, and during Tucks the same for toilet paper and plungers, and during Zulu the same for coconuts. One dollar porta potty stops are frequent, along with renting out balconies in hotels on the parade route. Street vendors stroll down the street, pushing their trolley full of trinkets that widen the eyes of little children. As the day settles down, and the moon starts to come out, the crowds disperse, but at the same time grow for the night parades. The streetlights on St. Charles Avenue, Canal Street and Napoleon flick on, and light-up floats glow in the dark.

When your head hits the pillow that night, and your legs are too tired to walk anymore, you have one thing in mind: sadness that the beloved Mardi Gras season is over. It does not matter if you are from Metairie, Kenner, Mid City, The West Bank, or River Ridge. It does not matter what you believe or who you know. During Mardi Gras, we are all the same. New Orleans becomes a giant family, a community filled with love and friendship. The whole day may seem silly to those in other states and countries, but to us New Orleanians, especially the adolescence, Mardi Gras is a part of our identity. We are mambo kids. We have adapted to the loud booms of the marching bands. We are used to the aromas of street food, the propane from the flambeaux flames, horse manure, exhaust, and cigars.

We are on the lookout for big beads that could hurt us if they are thrown too hard. We are cautious around unfamiliar places. We know to watch out for potholes, and to never take a drink from anyone else. If someone isn't from our city, we can tell. I don't know how, but we just can. It is like a sixth sense. Purple, green, and gold flows through our blood stream. We understand that our city is special. It may be cliché, but when it all comes down to it, you can take the kid out of Nola, but you can't take the Nola out of the kid.

LIFE IS LIKE A CAN OF SARDINES

MADISION FAILLA



CUTTING CORNERS

BRIANA GRADY



LEGACY OF RESILIENCE

RORY DAVIS

November 25, 1963

Dear Uncle James,

I have five torn letters, and I am attempting number six. I have read your letter over and over, taking in every word, feeling the weight of your experience, and appreciating the love and concern you have for me. You have opened my mind to fully comprehend the world that I am living in. Your words are a powerful testament to the struggles that our family has faced and the challenges that black people encounter. When reading your letter, I felt the pain in your memories and the hardship engraved into the lines that you wrote. Yet you still showed resilience and determination.

I know I can never fully understand what you and my dad have endured, but your letter has provided me with a guide to navigate through life as a black person. You showed me what the past looked like—not just the challenges but also our success, the laughter, the tears, and the love that has given us strength. Your advice on the importance of understanding my roots and knowing where I came from is a call to self-awareness, and it resonated with me because it acknowledges the narrative that white people made to diminish our worth as black people. I'll remember that my identity is not defined by others' perceptions but by the strength of my own character.

Your advice to accept others, even when they are ignorant, may be a challenge for me, but every day I will strive to accept others, even when they don't deserve it.

I know that this is just your way of teaching me to rise above hatred and work towards change through love and understanding. I understand the responsibility that comes with this, and I am prepared to face it with the same determination you and Dad have shown. As I navigate the world, I'll carry your words with me, guiding me through any difficulties I may have. This letter is not just a message from an uncle to his nephew; it's a testament to the strength of our shared history that pushes black people forward. Thank you for your wisdom and love!

Sincerely,
Your nephew James

ELLIOT JAMES

DOMINIC COLLARA



H.S.K.T.

SASHA FALCH



THE BURSTING

EMILY LORMAND

Something is wrong with the rats. The New York City streets are reeking with the stench of the dead rats that pile up on the sidewalk.

Nobody notices when the first one appears, foam lining its mouth and blood running from its eyes. New Yorkers step over it and the most attention it receives is from a dog sniffing its corpse to see if it makes a good chew toy.

It doesn't. The rat's bones have long since dissolved and it looks more like a balloon inflated with pus and blood and organs. The moment the dog's teeth sink in, the balloon pops and it is a mess on the sidewalk. The New Yorker scolds the dog and quickly flees the scene. After all, there are far stranger things in New York City than a dead rat.

Like ten rats, or fifty, found on different avenues and in different Burroughs. The rats are everywhere. Some praise the mystery cause for cleansing the city, others worry about what it means for the people. The local news picks up the story. It speculates a mystery illness, harmless to humans, but fatal to rats and small animals. Keep your pets inside, they say. Don't take unnecessary risks.

Now there are a hundred rats, stomachs bursting red onto the pavement, their insides like strawberry jam. It's an epidemic, cleansing the city of its abhorred vermin— and also a cat.

When the cat gets sick, everyone knows about it. The story runs rampant on social media and fear grips the city. The cat's transformation into a bloody balloon is slow— agonizing. It is the first time anyone has seen the horror of the disease in real time and now everyone bears witness. They're afraid.

The cat is put down before its bones dissolve completely, but when the needle pierces the cat's bloated form, gelled blood dribbles out onto the veterinary table.

There are thousands of dead rats, piled on the streets. They explode like land mines when the taxis drive over them. The government sends city cleaners to try and manage the problem, but it doesn't matter. The next day, more rats take their place.

When the first child bursts on the playground, all hell breaks loose. It's like the impossibly tense wire that's been stretched to hell above New York has finally snapped. Everyone hoped it would stay small, but now nobody is safe. The government releases a shelter-in-place order but New Yorkers who are able pack up and leave, running anywhere to escape the evolving illness.

More children turn up dead, more pets are euthanized, and there are endless, endless rats.

The migration of New Yorkers has spread the illness at an alarming rate, throughout the nation and to major areas around the world. It starts with the rats, it finishes with people.

The World Health Organization releases statement after statement, borders close, fingers point around the world for who to blame. Scientists are working on a vaccine but it's so distinct from anything encountered in the past that they don't know where to start.

Bodies in the street become commonplace—they try to walk to their car or a clinic but their legs are already jelly, collapsing inward in an explosion of blood and pus that sticks them to the street. They call out, heart-wrenchingly, but nobody helps. They are too far gone, anyway.

Another child has gotten sick. The only one that matters to me.

You haven't stopped crying since your fingers looked like over-inflated balloons. I'm scared to touch you for fear that you might burst apart. You have a fever— 109— higher than I've ever seen. You want water but I'm afraid to put the cup to your lips because I've heard of people that have been set off by less. You're only five. Too young to understand why you're in pain, but old enough to know that I'm supposed to be the one who helps. I can't help.

"Ouch, Dada," you cry out because you haven't had the energy to scream in hours.

I know it hurts, but there's nothing I can do but ponder if it is better to let you stay in the minuscule comfort of your toddler bed or try and move you to the clinic down the street. So they can administer the injection.

I decide to run and get the injection so you don't have to risk moving.

"Dada, don't leave," your voice sounds like you are gargling something, or maybe your tongue is mushing already. The illness moves faster these days, but I don't know if that's a curse or a mercy.

I tell you I'll be right back

I put on my rubber boots and sprint out the front door and down to the clinic. I try not to think about the sloshing sound under my boots. I tell myself it's just the snowy slush, but it's June and hotter than hell. I try not to think about the people they were. I accidentally step on someone's arm and it bursts like a jelly donut.

The inside of the clinic doesn't look much better than the streets. I don't even have to ask for the injection, they have them sitting on the counter in a refrigerator box. I take one and start running back.

When I get through the door the house smells like the street and I know something has happened. I rush to your room, screaming your name. The room is red, the bed is soaked with shreds of skin and clots of organs-past. Your water glass is knocked to the floor, empty, rolling left and right and left again on the uneven floor.

You were just here. I was gone for five minutes. I vomit on the floor because of the sight, the smell, or the thoughts that are running through my head at light speed. I sob and run out into the kitchen not knowing where to go or what to do.

Three days ago you looked up at me with your perfect green eyes and I knew I was your world.

"You okay, Dada?" I wasn't but I lied to you. You are too little to know why we had to stop going to the park and why we couldn't go see Grandma anymore. I was afraid because I knew it was only a matter of time for us.

It is only a matter of time.

I suddenly remember the injection that I've been clutching in my hand like a lifeline. The contents look harmless: clear liquid filled only up to the second line.

A prick. That's all it would take for me. It's unfair that you had agony and I have an easy way out right here in my hands, but life is never fair.

The blood in the other room is proof of that.

I lift the syringe to my arm, shaking and sobbing. I don't want a world without you in it.

A prick. A push of the plunger and the syringe is empty, discarded next to me. I can't leave you alone again. I go to the red room— your room.

I feel dizzy, the edges of my vision pulse and it's an effort to move. I stumble, slipping on your blood down to the floor.

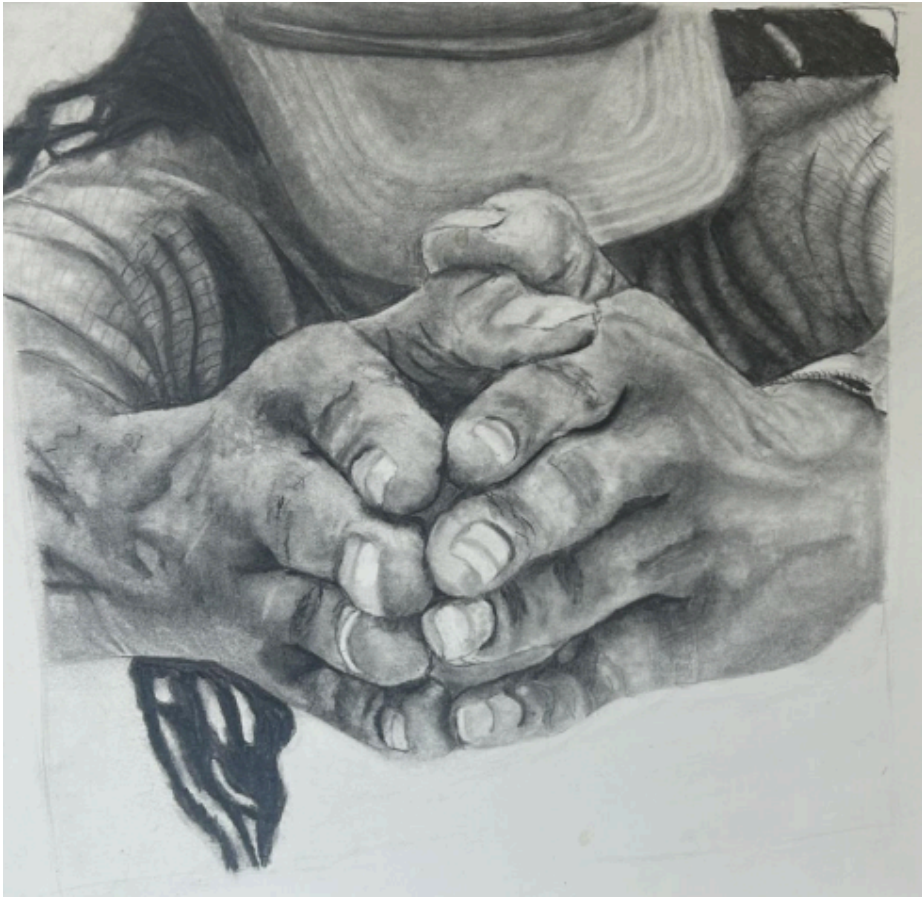
I'm so tired now. The injection is doing its work. There's no cure for the Bursting, no vaccine. There's only the hope of a quick death like mine. Like the one you didn't get.

My tongue is heavy. It's an effort to speak but I say I love you as many times as I can even though I know you'll never hear it.

"I love you, I love you, I lo—"

UNTITLED

TYSHAWN HIVES



FORGOTTEN SACRIFICE OF THE ETERNAL TREE

ANNA KATE DRIVER

Oh tree that created the death place of Christ
 Did you understand what would happen the day they chopped you down
 The symbol you would one day come to be
 The man that carried you through Calvary
 The sacrifice you bore saved me
 Oh tree that created the death place of Christ
 What was it like to witness the greatest act of love
 Did you see the evil acts of the enemy and the sorrowful cries of the
 fervent faithful followers Did you hear the brutal cries of the neigh
 callers
 Did you know your fate was similar to the Sovereign Savior
 They cut the side of Christ and whipped Him the way they cut you
 down
 They drove nails through His hands and feet by piercing through your
 bark
 Though neither of you did anything that would warrant you a single
 mark
 Together you traveled a fearsome trail and stood as lonesome lights in
 the dark
 Oh tree that created the death place of Christ
 From standing tall and proud amongst many trees,
 To standing on a hill with only three
 What seems like the end is only the beginning of a new call
 Most trees have a great purpose after they fall
 But you served the greatest purpose of all

Humble and wonderful tree

It was you that bore the Son of God as He spent His final hours on
Earth It was His divine blood that you wore as He died to show us our
worth You were apart of a moment that stands still in time
And now I sit here declaring your importance with a rhyme

Years went by, yet people still ask, "Why?"

"Why do we hang the crucifix on the wall?"

We hang it as a symbol of hope and genuine love

To remember the sacrifice of the Holy One above

And while we look up at the crucifix we will remember your forgotten
sacrifice And from that sacrifice that set us free

You became the Eternal Tree

SKIN

ABIGAIL DAVIS

My Skin tells a story like the Lukasa

It's curves and ridges reminds me their origins

Each intricate bump is connected to a memory

These memories it holds are ones of malice

Often, your skin retains the worst experiences

A nasty fall off a bike or a mistake in the kitchen

It's funny like that because it makes known to me and everyone the worst
of myself But It grows with me and maintains my being

My skin keeps the scars I have given myself like unbearable secrets

Daring to be known by ultimately hidden

These scars chase away any hope of moving on

How can one live in the constant shadow of their past?

I am not wearing my heart on my sleeve

I am wearing my sins on my skin

I am a building whose facade is warning and laden with mistake

These scars are inscrutable

Skin is meant to grow and repair seamlessly

Unless it is trauma that impacts it

Then it holds onto it as if it is treasure and tells its treasure hunt Trauma
is not the story we want to be told about ourselves

There is no treasure in trauma

it takes unforgivingly and does not ask for permission

Suddenly my skin feels misplaced
As if I am not the person whose story it is telling

I reject the fabric which overlays me
I do not wish to be reminded of its contents
To never be born into the skin that I'm in
Is the only way which I could ever be happy

TILL DEATH DO US PART

ANGEL NETTLES

Nope, not today were the words that rang in the young woman's ear. She had been suffering from abuse and tried her best to conceal it from her children. She thought that today would be the day she would finally fight back.

"Where are you going?" he shouted at her but she drowned him out. She watched the sink water wash away the blood she spit out.

"You think going to that counselor of yours is going to fix your problems? You love me and I love you. I told you that we are going to be stars together one day. You're my Angel. Why are you running from me?" He yelled but she didn't respond. She motioned for the children to go back to their rooms.

Instead of arguing with him, she went outside for air but his words rang in her ear. "I'm his Angel" she thought to herself.

"We're together forever. You know you can't leave me." he shouted again but she said nothing and closed her eyes. She imagined a world where he didn't exist.

She grew tired of him constantly making her feel beautiful while tearing her down at the same time. Yet there was this sense of love and appreciation for him. The woman had been seeing a counselor for their issues and left a little more hopeful than the time before.

"Are you going to let him keep silently destroying you? Your eyes are darker than I remember.", the woman's counselor spoke to her while extending an arm for comfort. The woman seemed sadder than she did on her last visit.

“Do you think things will get better for us? Things have only gotten worse these past few months and it’s getting hard” the woman spoke in a defeated manner. There was no life behind those desolate brown eyes that stared adrift. She pulled her jacket sleeves down to cover her bruises while the counselor watched silently. She had been a domestic violence survivor on her own and found this case triggering.

“Would you like for me to listen or actually give you advice? Because you were strong before you met him and you are still strong now. You don’t even know the depth of your own strength” the counselor said before the woman got up hastily.

“He called me his Angel. You tell me that I was strong before I met him but I know that I wasn’t. It’s because of him that I found my strength,” she snapped. Tears began streaming down her face and her counselor caught her before she fell.

“What about your children? There’s good and affordable housing available maybe an hour or so away from here. He could pay child support and you can set up visitation” the counselor explained.

“My children will be with me some day when the time’s right. They deserve to see their mother happy and I know they will be safe as long as I stay with him and ignore his hostility,” she said quietly.

“You can’t leave them with an abuser. I would have to get the authorities involved if they are in any danger” the counselor said and the woman nodded. She explained over and over again that they weren’t in any danger as long as she stayed. She said the man would take her away from them if she didn’t stay with him. But the counselor had enough.

These meetings went on for months with no progress. Though counselors shouldn’t grow annoyed, she did. She simply couldn’t grasp the reason why the woman stayed with someone who constantly abused her.

One day the counselor made it her mission to get the authorities involved after the woman stopped showing up. She grew more worried as the days went by because the woman was never late. The police had informed her that no one lived in the house anymore and that the previous owner had passed away.

After hearing the bad news, she rushed to the burial site to see if it was true. She cried as she searched through the cemetery for her tombstone.

“Oh how I wish you weren’t right. He did make you an Angel” the woman’s counselor said as the shocking realization set in. She traced her fingers along the fine lines of the lavender cancer ribbon as she reflected upon their conversations.

GLIMPSE INSIDE A GOLDEN MIND

KAYTIE VAN ALSTINE

Left wondering when she would return,
 I am circling, circling the stone cold floor.
 Daily chores done and dinner cooking,
 How could anyone ever ask for more?

Daily, she brushed my long hair and
 Checked for monsters under the bed.
 She taught me to cook and paint and sew,
 And always softly patted my head.

Her trips got longer as I grew, often I was
 Left circling, circling the stone cold floor
 While she went out to gather supplies—
 In and out through a window, never a door.

Painted constellations litter the ceiling
 Of the tower that has been my only home,
 Oil pastel flowers climb the tall walls and
 Among the faux weeds colorful animals roam.

A tiger is waiting patiently, hidden in prowl as
 I am still circling, circling the stone cold floor.
 I can hear the sweet song of birds bright blue
 Before a lion gives pause with a mighty roar.

A rainbow of dangling thread hangs from the
 Round table in the center of the room,
 One spool resting precariously on the edge
 Nearing a descension into similar gloom.

A glimmer in the window revives my hope,
 And I cease my circling, circling the stone cold floor
 To rush over and look down to see if she was there—
 Her, that mother whom I so adore.

INNOVATION AND MEANING IN SPLITTING SCENES KAYTIE VAN ALSTINE

Increasing innovations and technology in the world of filmmaking and the internet have drastically changed how contemporary audiences are accustomed to receiving information and performances, to be sure. Playwrights have long since experimented with ways to present their works to live audiences, and some, like Tony Kushner and Jackie Sibblies Drury, have really pushed boundaries in experimenting with their plays' production. Both Kushner's *Angels in America Part One: Millennium Approaches* and Drury's *Fairview* incorporate variations of split scenes and sets as a creative method of addressing more serious topics in their works, though the two plays differ quite a bit both in how they go about doing this and the messages conveyed. Kushner's method of splitting scenes often involves having multiple people from two scenes speak over each other, and can sometimes be confusing to his audience both as playgoer and reader. On the other hand, Drury takes the idea of splitting scenes and instead applies it to the entirety of her play *Fairview*. In doing so, she forces a different kind of unease on her audience as a way of encouraging contemplating the issues being presented. In the entirety of *Fairview's* production, the methods employed by Kushner over two decades prior are adapted into a more contemporary form to suit the play's subject of racial gaze.

Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, as a larger work, contains over sixty scenes, many of which are "split"—presenting two locales simultaneously" (Aronson 213). The audience is introduced to this concept in part through the seventh scene in the first act—not quite a split scene, since the actors from different locations acknowledge each other and interact, but also not a typical scene since it is a fantastical shared dream between strangers. Harper, a Mormon woman married to a closeted gay man and suffering from a drug addiction, encounters Prior, an openly gay man suffering from AIDS, in what she believes to be a part of one of her drug-induced hallucinations. She expresses to him her beliefs that she cannot possibly be an addict because she does not "believe in addiction," and does not drink or take drugs except for Valium (Kushner 24).

When confronted with Prior's sexuality, her natural response is to exclaim, again, how her church simply does not believe in homosexuals, prompting Prior's more comedic response that: "In [his] church [they] don't believe in Mormons" (Kushner 24). This scene is used to force these very different characters to interact where they normally would not, and provides some religious criticism as well as plot-necessary moments of reckoning. This dream scene is revealed to be "the very threshold of revelation sometimes," where "You can see things" that otherwise would not be so obviously apparent (Kushner 25). Harper is confronted with the verbalization of her husband's hidden sexuality, and Prior is forced to look at the ugly truth of his illness. The very next scene begins Kushner's foray into the usage of more formal split scenes, in which the audience is aware of the two simultaneous situations but the actors are not.

A later scene at the end of the second act of Kushner's play presents some of the confusion that is often associated with split scenes. In it, Harper and her husband and Prior and his partner argue over the futures of their relationships. There is overlap in their conversation, which leads to readers of the text of the play having to go back and double check the names attached to spoken lines to keep up with the split in the scene. Attention is both divided and focused during scenes like this whether the audience is seeing or reading the play. In film, there would naturally be cuts between the scenes to account for this simultaneous conversation and relieve some potential confusion, but that is not possible for stage performances that are "still bound by the laws of physics, Euclidean geometry, linear time, and the limitations of human actors" (Aronson 223). But even if it were possible to recreate this idea of cutting between scenes, it would "subvert the spirit of the play," which places great emphasis on "fundamental human relationships" (Aronson 223). That these two very different couples in dramatically different situations can share the stage and argue with each other in a way that their lines are so similar they could be spoken by someone in either couple is evidence of this theme of connection. Some productions of the play, like the one on Broadway, have been able to incorporate some fancier technology, like "wagons (movable stage platforms)" that can move units on and off stage easily, to make the splitting of scenes and their transitions cleaner (Aronson 224). But still, interviews with playgoers who had seen multiple productions yielded a popular opinion that the "most emotionally powerful ones" were "utterly simple" (Aronson 225).

Human connection portrayed plain and simple through actors sharing a stage, even when it may seem unconventional and their characters might not otherwise seem so similar, seems to be the approach most in-touch with the message of the play.

Drury's *Fairview* takes on a much different, perhaps even evolved, version of Kushner's idea of splitting scenes in that the entire play, rather than just certain scenes, is a dramatic experimentation. The first act begins with a startling opening stage direction: "Lights up on a negro" (Drury 1). But through the rest of the act, the play seems to be the story of a normal African American family preparing for a celebratory family dinner. It is not until the second act that the experimentation is revealed to the audience. The second act introduces new characters, seeming to be entirely separate from and unrelated to the previous act. The way that they are introduced is also somewhat startling: "We hear the following conversation, and it begins in medias res, rapidly, conversationally..." (Drury 32). The act is immediately launched into the middle of a conversation between young white people about what race they would want to be if they could magically switch races. The audience is supplied with "virtually no background information" and, in productions like that of London's Young Vic Theatre, not even a visual representation of these new characters (Pearce 7). For this London production, the second act was a repeat of the action of the first but "mimed" while the audience heard "a conversation in voiceover" (Pearce 6). After a little while of experiencing these two seemingly unrelated visual and audio productions, the audience is clued in to the fact that the people in conversation are "watching the onstage action with [them]" (Pearce 6). For readers of the play, this occurs almost two-thirds of the way through the second act when the white characters start to add little comments about the characters in performance, such as: "She's the interesting one. The one with romance" (Drury 65). As these comments progress, it becomes clear that these individuals are viewing these people less like characters in a play and more like racial caricatures, arbitrarily assigning traits like "controlling" and "working too hard to seem nice" (Drury 63, 67). The contrast between the audio and visual provides a more obvious form to how "the white gaze objectifies and limits the possibilities of blackness" (Pearce 6).

What was in the first act a family preparing to celebrate their beloved matriarch's birthday, has, in the second act, become something more akin to "a grotesque minstrel show" (Pearce 7). The audience is presented with a view of a seemingly normal, middle class African American family going about their day and preparing for dinner, all while listening to some unseen white people discuss how being rich would mean not being "authentic[ally]" black since that racial identity is tied to poverty, and even randomly bursting into silly song about how much black people love to sing and dance (Drury 55). And with no physical beings to hold responsible for the racism in this production, it removes the possibility of casting them as "the sole representatives of racism in the play" (Pearce 7). White audience members are left feeling "deeply unsettl[ed]" as the primary "representatives of whiteness in the room," almost as if they are "standing in" for these unseen characters (Pearce 7). The second act is one that utilizes its ability to instill discomfort in its audience as a means of encouraging self-reflection.

The third act of *Fairview* intensifies in its distortion of the idea of splitting the scene, both with its forced mixing of the two formerly-separate groups of actors and with its ending that comes to include action from the audience. It is somewhat similar to Kushner's dream scene in that all the characters come together in one location and interact with each other, though Drury's take on it has much more sinister connotations as it highlights the power imbalance that results from the theme of the white gaze. In an interview with NPR, Drury explains that the inspiration behind this play was the idea of "surveillance" and why it "affects people of color in a deeper way" ("The Pulitzer-Winning"). It stemmed from an experience she had of being followed while traveling to South Africa, and this idea of "surveillance being embodied," especially in such a "low-tech and in person" way, stuck with her ("The Pulitzer-Winning"). And so these white characters show themselves to the audience in their intrusion into the home of the African American family. The audience recognizes this as a clear display of power being exerted and motivations ranging from misguided and twisted to even sinister. The original family members do not seem to find anything amiss in these white actors showing up to fill the roles of what should have been other black actors playing other family members, except for the youngest, Keisha, who shows discomfort throughout her appearance in the third act.

No longer are the observers invisible—it was never the intent to portray whiteness as an invisible force, after all, but as a “particular vantage that can be damaging to other races” (“The Pulitzer-Winning”). As the new white characters interact more with the family, the audience sees just how much that interference “chang[es] their behavior and the course of their lives” (“The Pulitzer-Winning”). They make up new plot lines for these people to make things more interesting for themselves, simply because it “is fun” and they are familiar with the stereotypes they project onto them (Drury 86). Keisha, a high school student looking forward to college and implied earlier to be in a queer relationship with another girl, becomes a case of teen pregnancy and has her dream of college ruined because these white actors want a little drama in their day (Drury 91). She knows she is not pregnant and cannot explain the positive test, but none of that matters because what these outsiders have said about her has already caused issues within her family and with her life plans. Her father is spontaneously assigned a gambling addiction and affair, when previously there was no evidence of any kind of financial or marital issues (Drury 94). Her mother is given a drug addiction, because why not (Drury 95)? These white characters show no consideration for how serious the impacts of their words and assumptions are to this family, the whole experience is just a fun little game for them. They gasp dramatically and address each other specifically about the drama they are creating in front of those they create it through, silly dancing is forced and a food fight is started that destroys the home/ set (Drury 98).

In the end, it is Keisha who puts an end to the madness with a monologue addressed to the audience. In this, there is experimentation within an already unconventional scene as “Keisha steps through the fourth wall. It’s as simple as that” (Drury 102). She requests that white audience members come up on stage and switch places with her family for a while, and eventually names and acknowledges the play’s white stage manager in the process (Drury 103). This final scene is, perhaps, the most controversial part of the play— though the entirety of the play builds up to this pivotal address of race within the theater. Having a character request audience participation based along racial lines is certainly a bold choice on Drury’s part, and it has received mixed reactions from various audiences.

An attendee of the London production reported that two people left the performance early, and that some British critics tried in the reviews to move the discussion of the play from race to topics like ethnicity, gender, class, etc.— much like the white conversationalists in the second act do (Pearce 10). Another playgoer, Claudia Rankine, a playwright and Black feminist scholar, saw a U.S. production of the play with a white friend and questioned said friend over her remaining in her seat when the actor on stage clearly requested the presence of white audience members on stage. The friend formatted her response in a letter that Rankine later published:

“...I remember, at a diversity workshop, a new colleague, a young white man, saying that the hardest thing about working on diversity, equity, and inclusion... was something like not letting the emotional challenge of the work, and the psychic toll of it, convince him that he had done something just by riding the white emotional roller-coaster. Is it too much of a rationalization to say that I didn’t want to play along with the display of white shame and resolve at the end (much as I thought it was a brilliant way to end the play) because it felt like an enactment of just this?” (qtd. in Rankine 209)

Through responses both negative and positive, it is abundantly clear that, regardless of whether audience members enjoyed the play, the production of it was successful in eliciting the emotional response it set out to. It recreated in its white audience members the discomfort that comes with being racially profiled, singled out, and surveilled. Whether it succeeds in its mission of encouraging people to be willing to “take responsibility for [racism’s] disestablishment” depends on the individual audience members and their beliefs and sincerity (Pearce 10).

Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* is a precursor of sorts in the dramatic experimentation with split scenes that more contemporary playwrights like Jackie Sibblies Drury work with in plays like *Fairview*. Of course, his use of it still retains its function and importance in experiencing his play today. And across productions of both plays it seems that playgoers still enjoy the traditional, low-tech production of theater— that it still is successful in delivering emotionally impactful and thematically serious performances.

Kushner's message of human connection in a country hell-bent on promoting individualism comes across in his simplistic descriptions of scenes encouraging togetherness and commonality between different characters as they endure emotional and physical struggles. Drury's antiracist message is masterfully delivered through both her inclusion of the audience in the play's action and the self-reflective experimentation she subjects them to from the second act onwards. Both plays are made all the better by the risks their writers took production-wise in hopes of strengthening the delivery of their messages. The two works are very different in approach and topic, but demonstrate a similarity in dedication to experimentation that so often marks good theater.

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THE MOTLEY CREW

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WHY THE MOTLEY?

WHY SUCH A PUZZLING TITLE?

Well, in days of yore, one of the most engaging figures in the royal court was the jester, a character who seemed to embody a puzzling union of several characteristics: wisdom and buffoonery, profundity and foolishness, gravity and frivolity. Dressed in his colorful costume, the motley, the Jester enjoyed a favored position. Never regarded completely seriously by anyone, lest of all himself, he was free to pass comments on any subject under the sun, sometimes piquantly, sometimes displaying a certain wisdom, almost always entertainingly. Most important of all, the Jester's sole aim was to provide amusement for the king.

It is from this that we draw our analogy.

We have chosen the motley for our garb to serve as an indication of both our spirit and our scope. We hope to incorporate in these pages a wide and varied choice of subjects, all the while not taking ourselves too seriously and making no pretense at being definitive. Thus, like the famous juggler who entertained Our Lady, we offer our efforts for the pleasure of our Monarch: Christ the King.

We are His jesters.
This is our Motley.

- The Motley, Volume I, 1949