





metr|o|morphosis

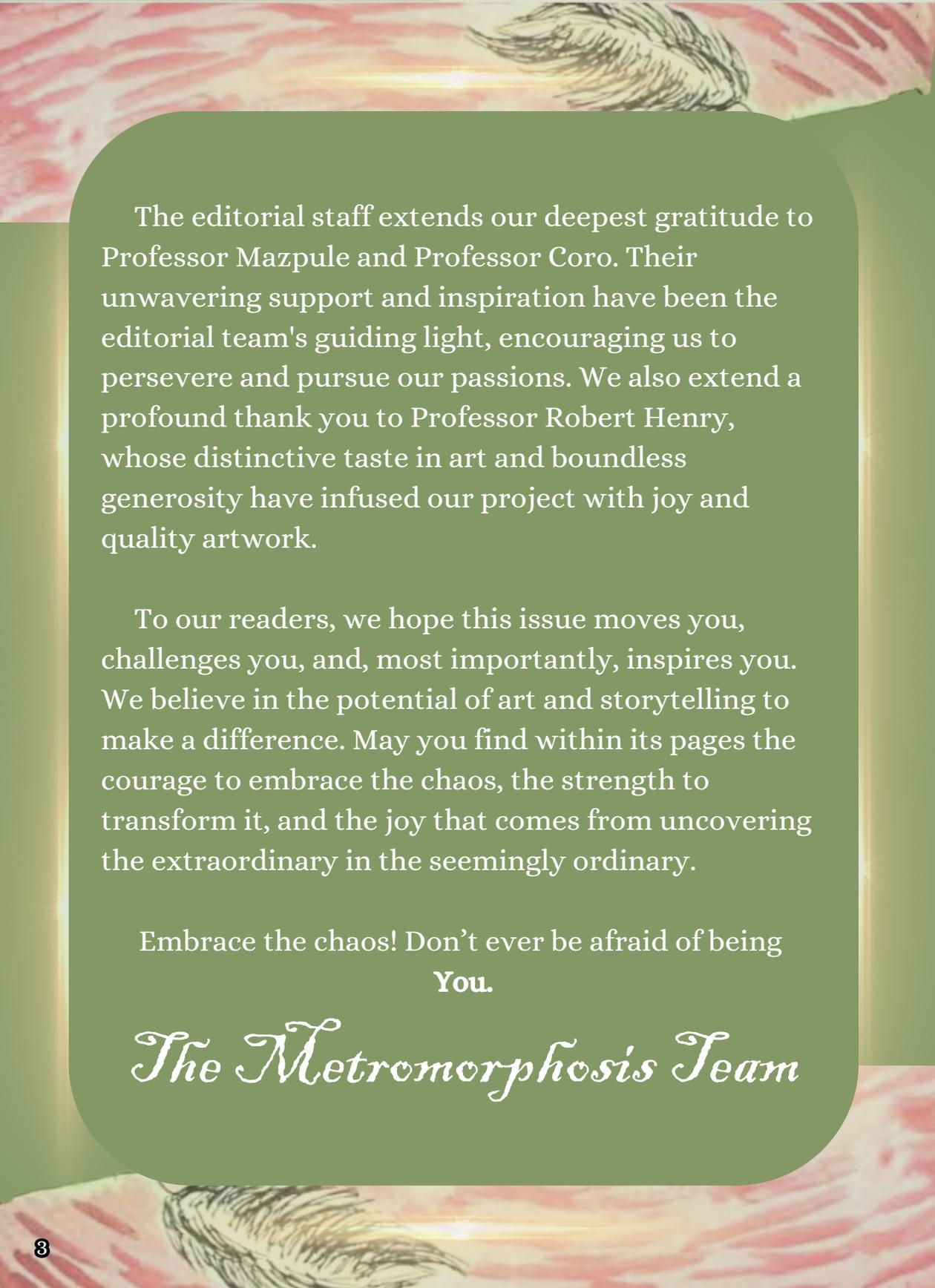
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editorial note

As our editorial staff reflects on the past year, we recognize it as a period of unprecedented challenges and transformations. Chaos, in its many forms, has tested our resilience and forced us to rethink what we value. Yet, within that chaos lies potential—the opportunity for growth, connection, and renewal. This year’s theme, chaos, serves as both a reflection on the disorder around us and a call to action to find strength and clarity in uncertain times.

Art plays a pivotal role in navigating chaos. The works featured in this issue reflect the many forms that chaos can take—personal, collective, and imagined—offering glimpses of the beauty that emerges when creativity is unleashed. These pieces are not just expressions of individual creativity; they are testaments to the resilience of the human spirit, illuminating the paths we carve toward understanding and change. Art, in its various forms, has the power to bring us closer to the truth of our shared humanity, even amidst the mayhem.



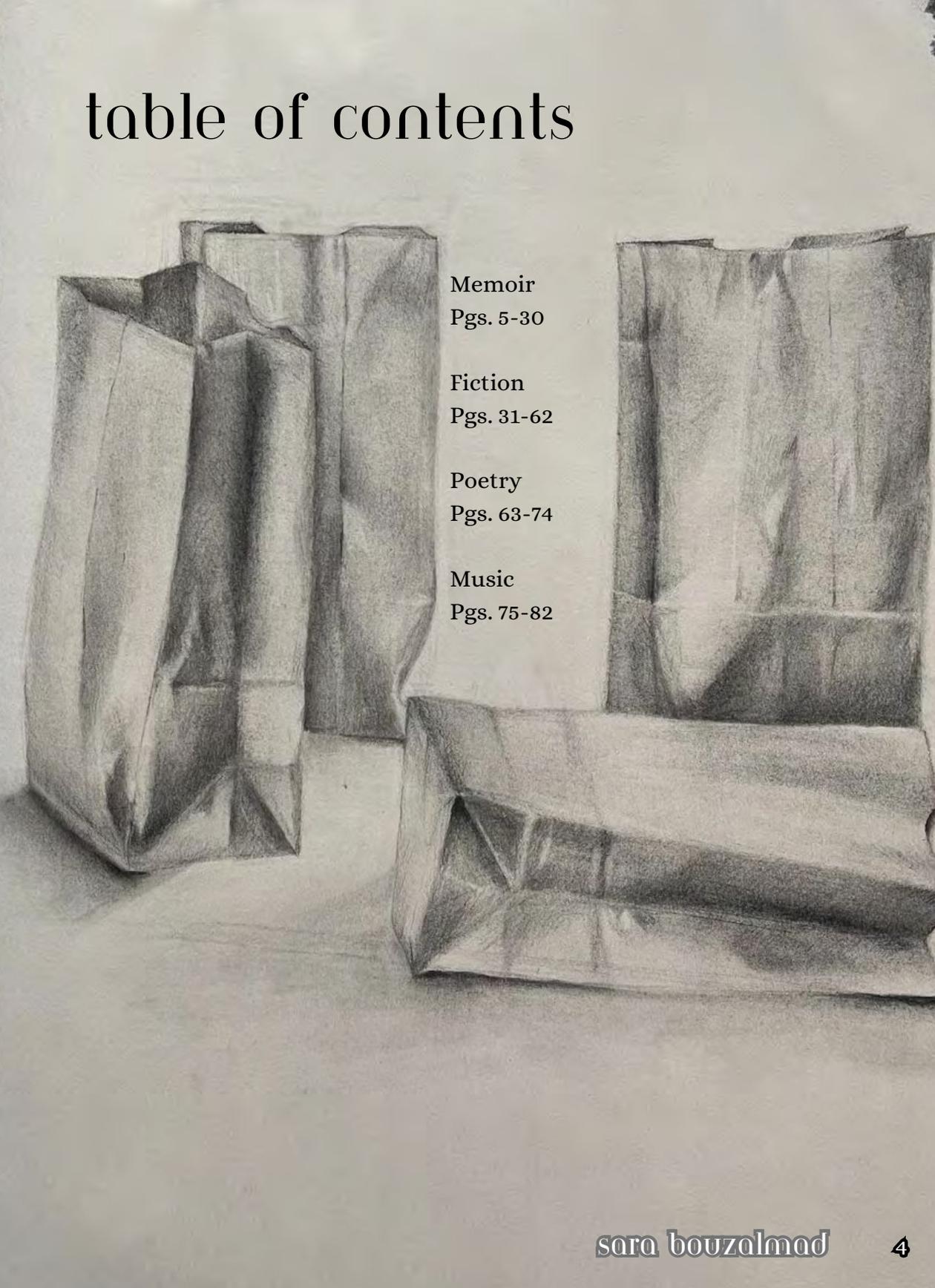
The editorial staff extends our deepest gratitude to Professor Mazpule and Professor Coro. Their unwavering support and inspiration have been the editorial team's guiding light, encouraging us to persevere and pursue our passions. We also extend a profound thank you to Professor Robert Henry, whose distinctive taste in art and boundless generosity have infused our project with joy and quality artwork.

To our readers, we hope this issue moves you, challenges you, and, most importantly, inspires you. We believe in the potential of art and storytelling to make a difference. May you find within its pages the courage to embrace the chaos, the strength to transform it, and the joy that comes from uncovering the extraordinary in the seemingly ordinary.

Embrace the chaos! Don't ever be afraid of being
You.

The Metromorphosis Team

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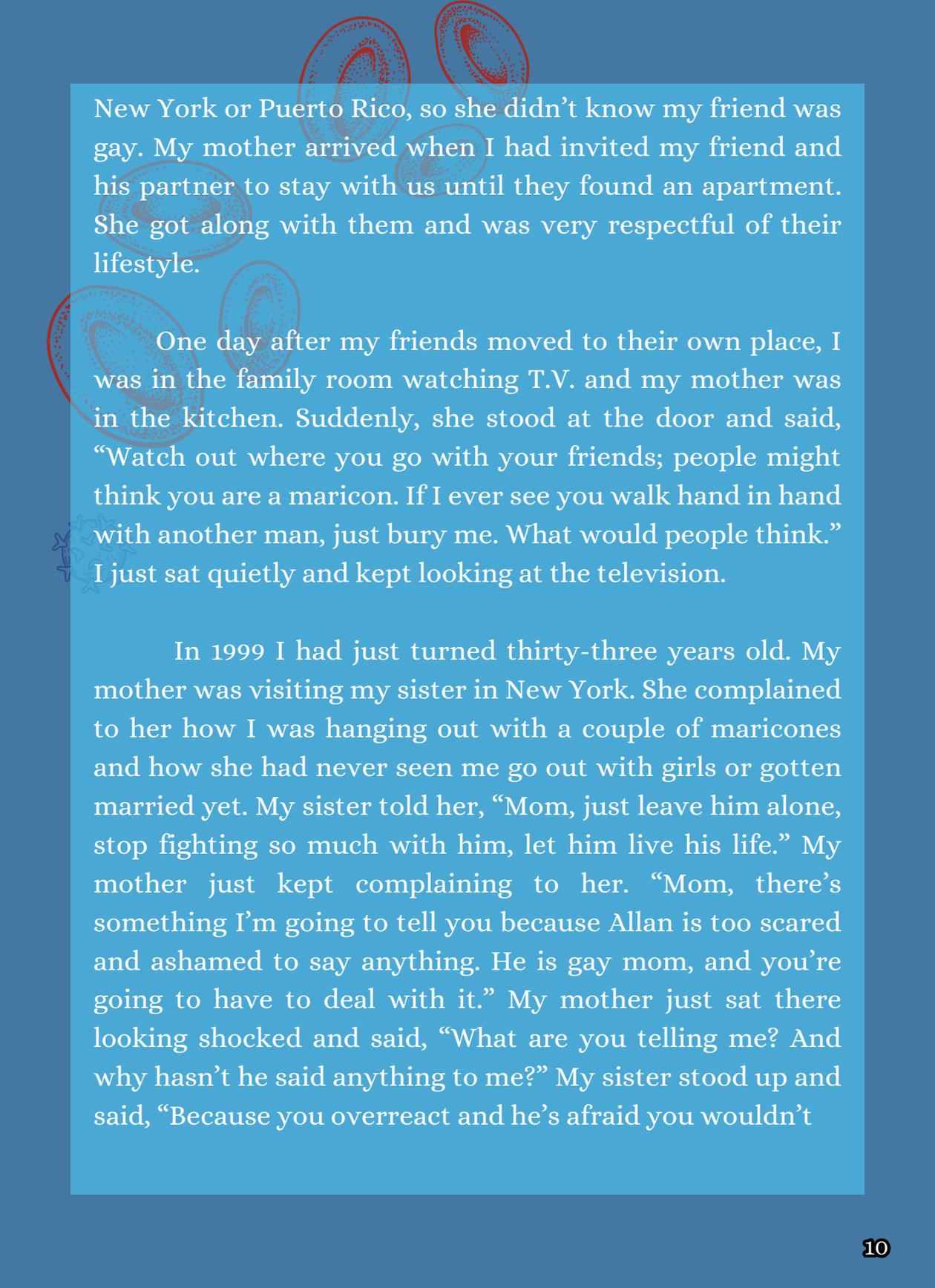
Positive Out Look



by Allan Quinonez

I was born Sunday, May 8, 1966; it so happens that day was Mother's Day. I was my mother's present. She would take me everywhere she went and never left me with anyone else unless it was a family member. Being a child raised in the seventies and coming from a Latin background, we were brought up never to talk back to our elders and every sinful subject was taboo. So, if we had any problems or issues, we could not talk about it to our parents. I never knew if it was our Latin upbringing or just plain fear of our parents.

In the 1990's, we moved to Miami from the Bronx. I was twenty-eight years old when we arrived here. I found a good job working as an Administrative Assistant at Mount Sinai Hospital. My mother bought a beautiful big house with a pool in North Miami. My grandfather had fallen ill, so my mother left to help take care of him and was away most of the time. My good friend from high school had come for a visit and was thinking about moving to Miami as well. When he got here to my surprise, he came with his gay partner. At the time my mother was always traveling to



New York or Puerto Rico, so she didn't know my friend was gay. My mother arrived when I had invited my friend and his partner to stay with us until they found an apartment. She got along with them and was very respectful of their lifestyle.

One day after my friends moved to their own place, I was in the family room watching T.V. and my mother was in the kitchen. Suddenly, she stood at the door and said, "Watch out where you go with your friends; people might think you are a maricon. If I ever see you walk hand in hand with another man, just bury me. What would people think." I just sat quietly and kept looking at the television.

In 1999 I had just turned thirty-three years old. My mother was visiting my sister in New York. She complained to her how I was hanging out with a couple of maricones and how she had never seen me go out with girls or gotten married yet. My sister told her, "Mom, just leave him alone, stop fighting so much with him, let him live his life." My mother just kept complaining to her. "Mom, there's something I'm going to tell you because Allan is too scared and ashamed to say anything. He is gay mom, and you're going to have to deal with it." My mother just sat there looking shocked and said, "What are you telling me? And why hasn't he said anything to me?" My sister stood up and said, "Because you overreact and he's afraid you wouldn't

love him anymore and start treating him differently.”
The next day, the phone rang; it was my mother. “Hi mom, how are you? How’s your trip going?” I asked. “Everything is good mijo. Is there something you want to tell me?” She never beat around the bush.

“Like what mom?” I asked.

“Your sister told me something and I just wanted to hear it coming from you,” she replied.

“I really don’t know what you are talking about mom. What did Yolanda say to you?”

“She told me you are gay. Is that true?”

“Si mami, it’s true,” I said with a crack in my voice.

“Why haven’t you told me before mijo?”

“I was scared to say anything, mami. I thought if I told you, you wouldn’t accept me or love me anymore,” I said almost in tears. “Well, when I get home we can sit and talk about it, ok?” she said, almost in tears too, but not quite.

When she got home, we sat down to talk. “How long have you known you were gay mijo?” The last thing she said to me was, “You should have told me before I bought

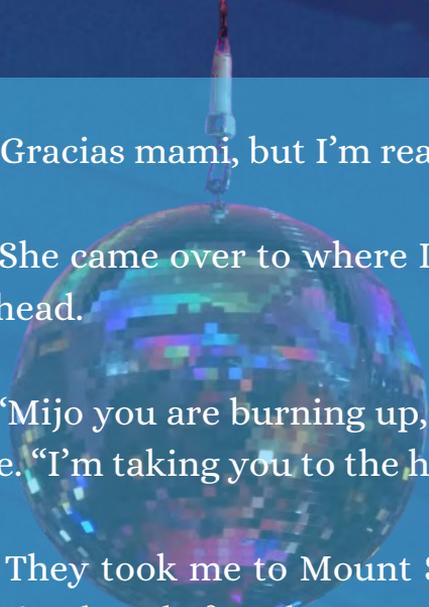
this house and you could have lived your life in your own place.” After that day, all we did was fight and argue constantly. This kept on for quite some time. I couldn’t stand the constant belittling. One day after our last argument, I decided to leave that toxic environment and get my own place so I could live my life as I saw fit.

It was the year 2003 around the Thanksgiving holidays that I started to feel ill. I was having high fevers, chills, and vomiting, and my whole body felt like it was run over by a Max truck. I really hadn’t put any thought into it and shrugged it off. I just thought I was coming down with the flu. As the days passed, I started getting worse. I couldn’t keep anything in my stomach and the fever was getting higher. At that time my niece was visiting, and I didn’t want her to catch what I had, so I sent her to my mother’s. I spent Thanksgiving laid out on the couch feeling like I was going to die. A couple of days later my mother came to visit and brought me some food. I could barely walk to open the door to let her and her husband in. I staggered back and threw myself on the couch.

My mother asked, “Nene are you still feeling sick.”

“Si mami, me siento muy mal.”

“Te traje comida,” she said.



“Gracias mami, but I’m really not hungry.”

She came over to where I was and put her hand on my forehead.

“Mijo you are burning up,” she said with concern in her voice. “I’m taking you to the hospital!”

They took me to Mount Sinai Emergency Room. I was examined, and after they ran some tests, a doctor came into the room and asked, “Have you been out of the country?”

“No, I have not,” I replied.

“Your blood work came back. Your muscle enzymes are extremely low. You are going to be admitted so we can run further tests.”

“Ok doctor,” I said, instinctively knowing something was up.

During the time I was in the hospital, they ran all sorts of blood work, C.T.’s, and an MRI. They all came back negative. The doctor entered my room and stood beside my bed. “How are you feeling today Mr. Quinonez?”

“I’m ok, I guess. I still feel lousy,” I said.

“Well, all the tests we ran came back negative. I would like to run one more test before we discharge you, but we need your consent.”

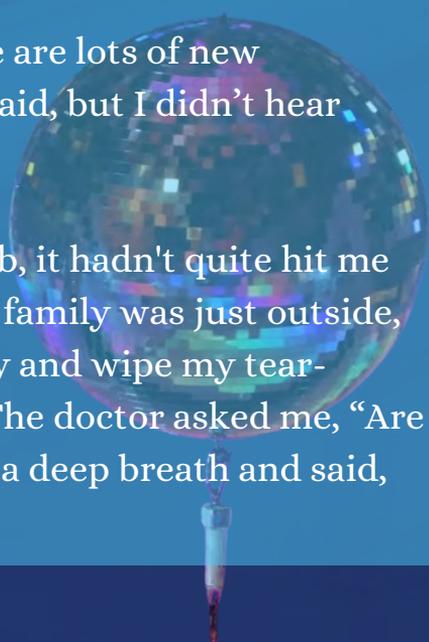
“Yes, of course, anything to get me out of here.”

A couple days later my mother came to visit. She brought my aunt and nieces with her and kept asking what was wrong with me. At that moment, the doctor walked into the room. She saw I had company so she asked if that was my family.

“Yes, doctor this is my mother and over there is her sister and my niece sitting in the corner.” She greeted them all and politely asked them if they could wait outside for a moment. They all left the room and the doctor sat beside me and held my hands. “Mr. Quinonez your test results are back, and I’m afraid you tested positive for HIV.”

I just sat there in shock. “There are lots of new medications out these days,” she said, but I didn’t hear anymore.

At that moment I just felt numb, it hadn't quite hit me yet. I started to cry but I knew my family was just outside, so I had to compose myself quickly and wipe my tear-stained face before they came in. The doctor asked me, “Are you ok? Can they come in?” I took a deep breath and said,



“Yes, they can come in.” After the doctor left, my mother sat beside me and asked.

”Mijo is everything alright? Why did we have to leave the room?” I was trying to be brave, and I said in a cheerful voice, “Everything is fine mom. I just have an infection and a terrible flu.” After they left, I just lay there trying to process everything I had been told. The first people I disclosed this to were my best friends Miguel and Jorge. They were very sympathetic to what I was going through. When I got discharged, they picked me up and drove me home. I knew they wanted to ask me about my condition and how I was handling it. Miguel asked me, “Are you going to tell your mother?”

“No, I really don’t know how to tell her.” They dropped me off and asked if I wanted to stay with them for a couple of days. I thanked them and told them that was really nice and I appreciated it, but I needed some time to think things through. The next day my mother called to see how I was doing. I told her I was fine and that I was just resting. She insisted that I stay with her for a couple of days, so I agreed. A few days had passed, and I was still feeling weak and very tired. The doctor had told me I had gone through what they call Zero Conversion. That’s when your body goes through the infection period and then it converts to HIV. That evening my mother stood next to me and said, “Is everything really alright, or is there something you are not telling me?”

I looked up at her with tears running down my face. At that point, she knew what I was about to tell her. “You are positive, aren’t you?” she asked.

I hugged her and said, “Yes mom, I am.” “You will be alright,” she said in a disappointed voice and walked out of the room. After that day nothing was ever the same between us. She became more distant towards me, barely looking me in the eyes or getting close to me when I would go visit. I invited her to brunch a few months later to thank her. She came with my stepfather, and I had put out a big spread. She didn’t eat and barely spoke to me. After a while, she gave me an excuse that she had things to do and needed to leave. She said goodbye and left. At the door, my stepfather thanked me and said, “Give her some time, she will come around.”

Twenty years have passed and she hasn’t accepted the fact that I have HIV and she will never accept it.





In My Mother's Eyes

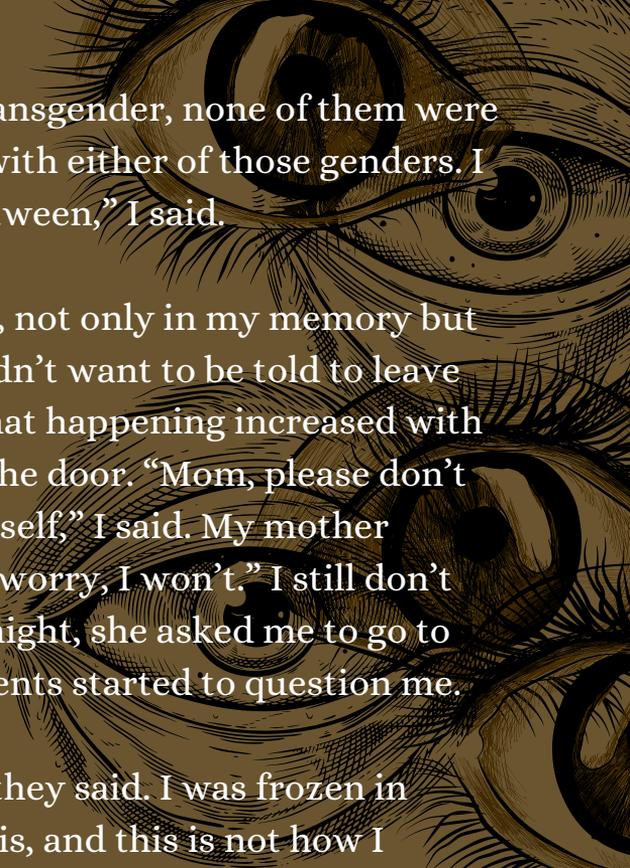
by Rio

On the first day of my sophomore year, my mom parked the car in our usual spot outside my favorite bakery. I had felt her prodding eyes glaring at the side of my face since she had picked me up from school, and I was getting scared. The engine turned off, but she didn't make a move to get out of the car. Instead, she turned towards me and asked, "Bambi, eres hombre?"

For some, it would have been a yes-or-no question. "No, I'm a girl", or "Yes, I'm a guy." It wouldn't have been easy if I was actually a man, as I would be coming out as transgender. However, anything would have been easier than having to explain to my Cuban mother what being non-binary meant and that I identified as such. It had already been difficult for me to understand it myself, and I definitely hadn't been ready to have that conversation then, but lying would've destroyed me further as hiding it through middle school was damaging enough.

"I'm neither a boy nor a girl, Mom," I said. My lips were quivering, and the sweat from my palms had formed a pool on my school uniform's skirt. "Please don't hate me."

"Niña, what does that mean?" she asked, with a confused look on her face. We were already off to a bad start with her calling me 'girl', but I ignored it. Even though

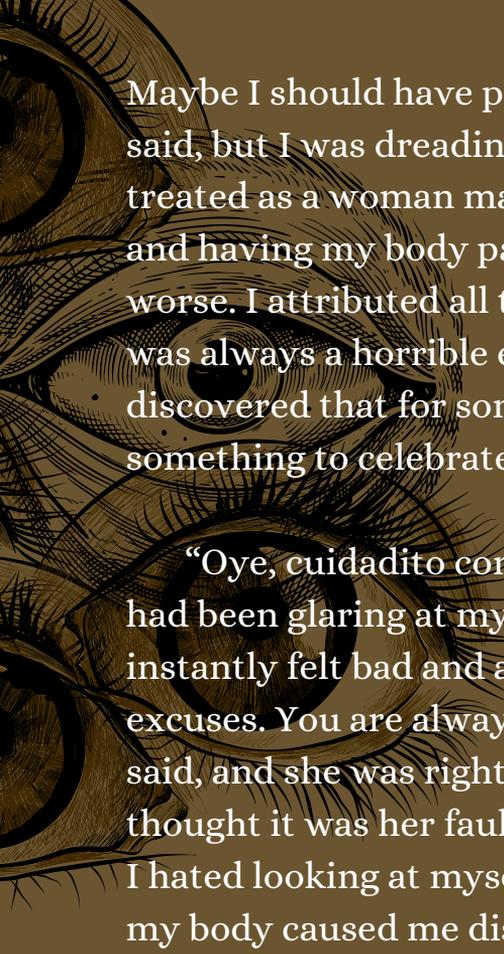


we knew people who were transgender, none of them were non-binary. “I don’t identify with either of those genders. I feel like I’m somewhere in between,” I said.

The ride home was blurry, not only in my memory but also because I was crying. I didn’t want to be told to leave my house, and the threat of that happening increased with every meter we got closer to the door. “Mom, please don’t tell dad yet. I want to do it myself,” I said. My mother looked at me and said, “Don’t worry, I won’t.” I still don’t know why I believed her. At night, she asked me to go to her room, where both my parents started to question me.

“Explain it to us, please,” they said. I was frozen in place. I hadn’t prepared for this, and this is not how I wanted to do it. After an hour of them trying to convince me I was a girl and that I was just confused, I went to my room. I had doubted myself every night, and this night was no different. Was I actually a woman, and I was just begging for attention? But I always ended up remembering the three major signs that made me realize I was non-binary.

The first sign that something was wrong came when I hit puberty, though it would be much more appropriate to say that puberty slapped me in the face and left me with a black eye. I was nine when I got my period, so my mom took me to the doctor. We were in a small room and everything was white, even though it was a pediatrician’s office. The sun was right in front of me, blinding and hot.

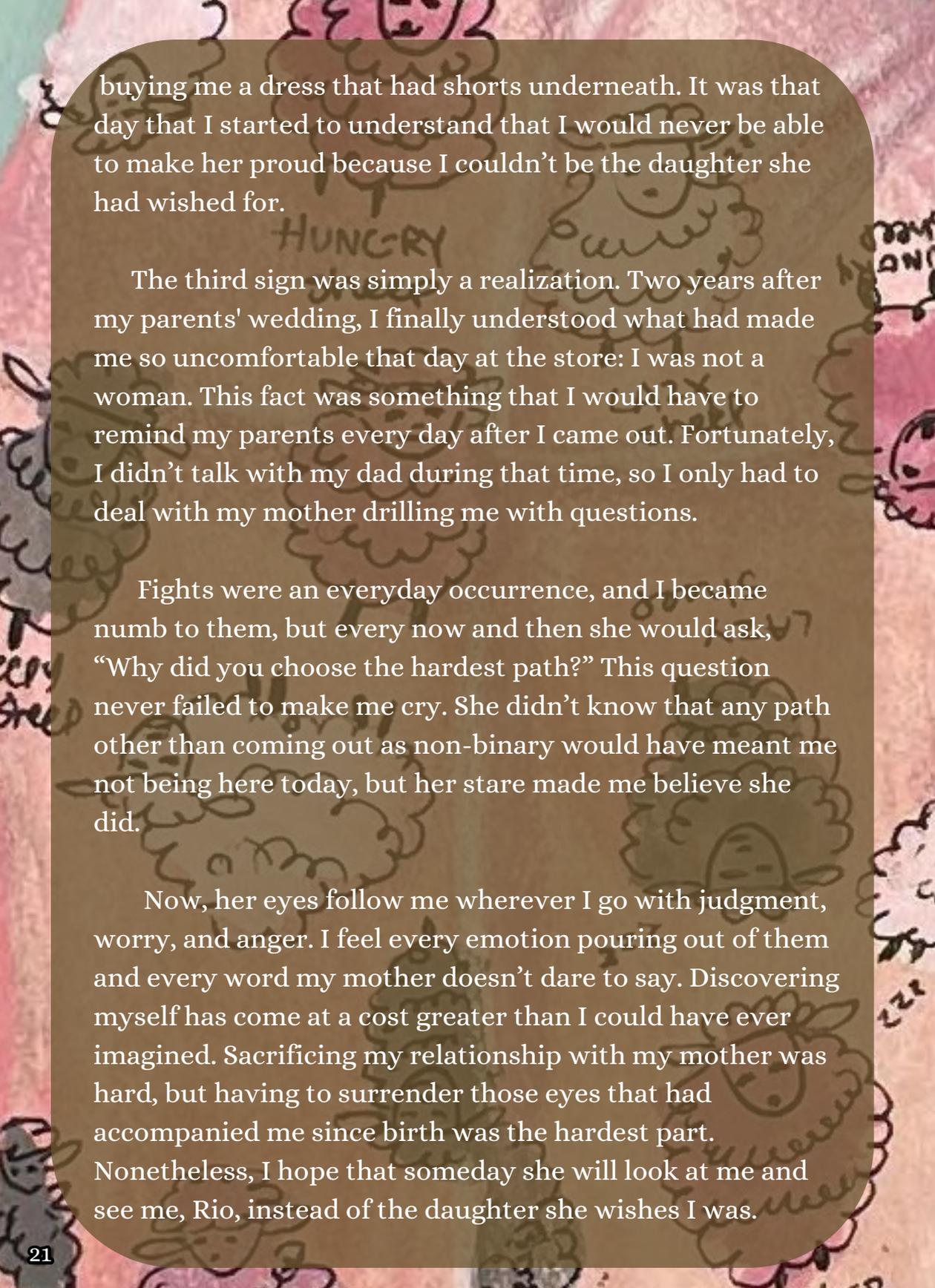


Maybe I should have paid more attention to what was being said, but I was dreading the checkup. Even then, being treated as a woman made me extremely uncomfortable, and having my body parts developed made everything worse. I attributed all this to being so young and assumed it was always a horrible experience to get my period. I later discovered that for some girls, getting their period was something to celebrate.

“Oye, cuidadito con esa mirada.” I hadn’t realized that I had been glaring at my mom that whole checkup. I instantly felt bad and apologized. “Don't start with your excuses. You are always looking at me like that lately,” she said, and she was right. I was mad at my mom because I thought it was her fault that I was so developed for my age. I hated looking at myself in the mirror, and every part of my body caused me discomfort.

The second sign was during the preparation for my parents’ wedding. I was with my mom at a store that had dresses laid out in what seemed to be never-ending rows. I had gone with her to pick out my outfit for her big day, so I didn’t understand why my mood was so sour already. Dress after dress, I kept getting more uncomfortable, and I started to refuse trying on others. The screaming that came after was inevitable.

“Mom, why can’t I wear something that isn’t a dress?” I said. “Because you’re a woman, and you will dress as such. Now stop embarrassing me and start acting your age.” That completely shut me down, although she had to settle for



buying me a dress that had shorts underneath. It was that day that I started to understand that I would never be able to make her proud because I couldn't be the daughter she had wished for.

The third sign was simply a realization. Two years after my parents' wedding, I finally understood what had made me so uncomfortable that day at the store: I was not a woman. This fact was something that I would have to remind my parents every day after I came out. Fortunately, I didn't talk with my dad during that time, so I only had to deal with my mother drilling me with questions.

Fights were an everyday occurrence, and I became numb to them, but every now and then she would ask, "Why did you choose the hardest path?" This question never failed to make me cry. She didn't know that any path other than coming out as non-binary would have meant me not being here today, but her stare made me believe she did.

Now, her eyes follow me wherever I go with judgment, worry, and anger. I feel every emotion pouring out of them and every word my mother doesn't dare to say. Discovering myself has come at a cost greater than I could have ever imagined. Sacrificing my relationship with my mother was hard, but having to surrender those eyes that had accompanied me since birth was the hardest part. Nonetheless, I hope that someday she will look at me and see me, Rio, instead of the daughter she wishes I was.



doménika solís

How I Survived Personal Hell (And How You Will, Too)

by Anonymous

Rule #1: Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. By your parents' hands, your consciousness will divide, leaving your corpse as a sanction and theirs as a lie, but keep these ego states separate—and whatever you do, let your hands do what they must to survive. But do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. It would rather die than carry its brother to victory.

Rule #2: It will never get better, but that doesn't mean it'll get any worse. You'll be killed for simply living, but Death is kinder than man. You've been misplaced by the stork, and right now, you fear God—but one day you'll only fear man—and God will, too.

Rule #3: Time travel but only forward. Never stop jumping between decades. If you stop, you'll feel his absence within you.

Rule #4: Make your father live in a world where his daughter hates him. His decision to hurt you will never be your fault. Uproot his world when he blames you for his wrongdoings.

Rule #5: Don't shield yourself with your hands. He'll only break your fingers.

Rule #6: There were five pieces of you when it all started. You'll end in hundreds.

Rule #7: You'll want freedom with your whole damn body, but remember, freedom starts in the mind.

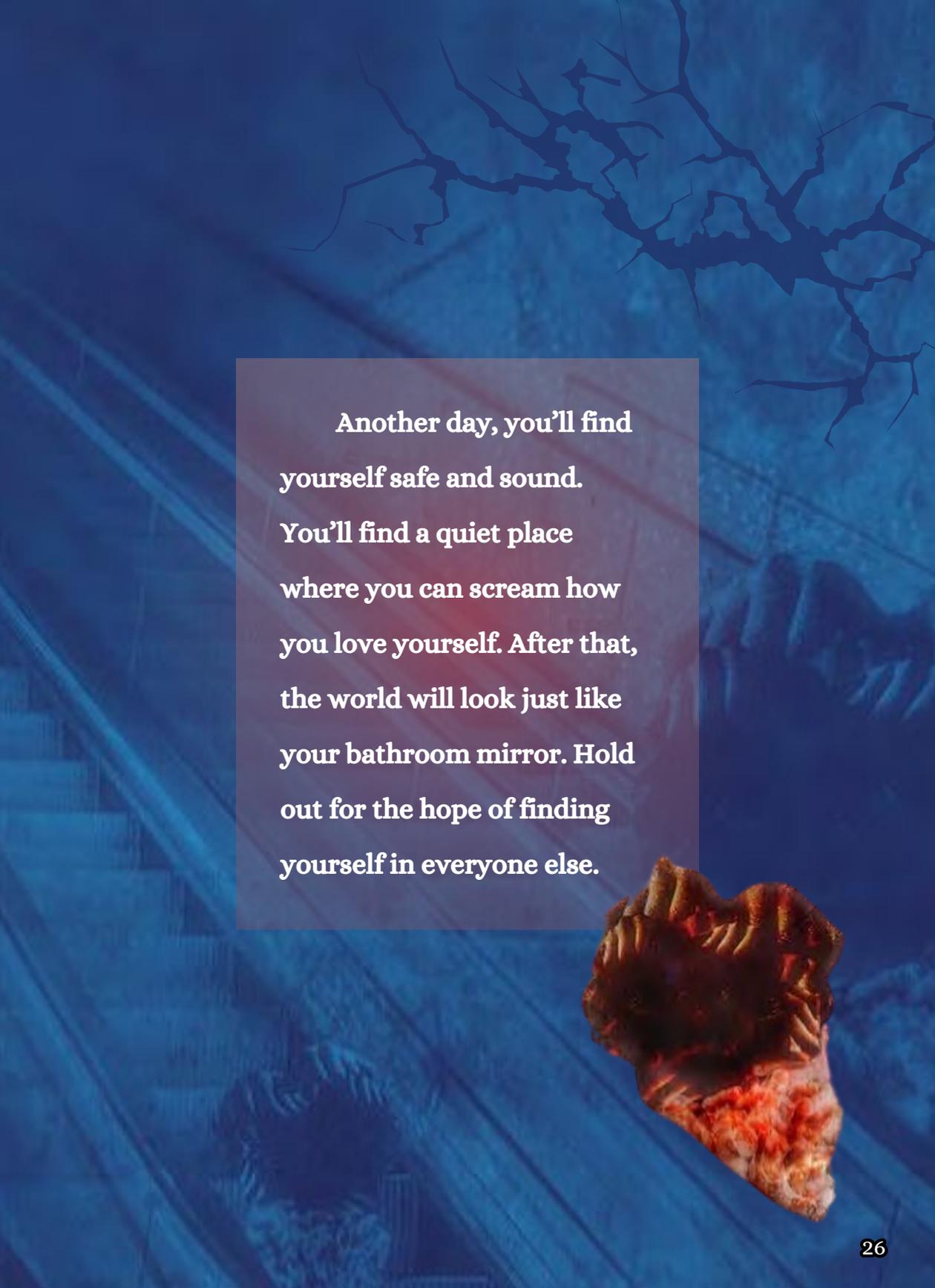
Rule #8: No matter how much your parents lie, the truth is still the truth. She's a better liar than you, and he'll paint you every color of madness, but the guilt is always theirs.

Rule #9: Never walk the street of Cypresswood the same.

Rule #10: The heartbreak never leaves. You will always mourn the girl you were and hate your parents for gutting that kid from the inside out. You'll hate the cops for driving you back home, and you'll hate Kingwood Pines Psychiatric Hospital for drugging you every day like pills were the answer to trauma responses.



Your body will be a vessel for rage. You'll take your anger and throw it away, only to be left with your hands. You have every right to be angry; the torture was not just the acts of your parents but also the world watching. Their eyes watched fleeting hopes and prayers while you watched yourself flatline. Do they have any idea how many times someone could've helped you and chose not to?

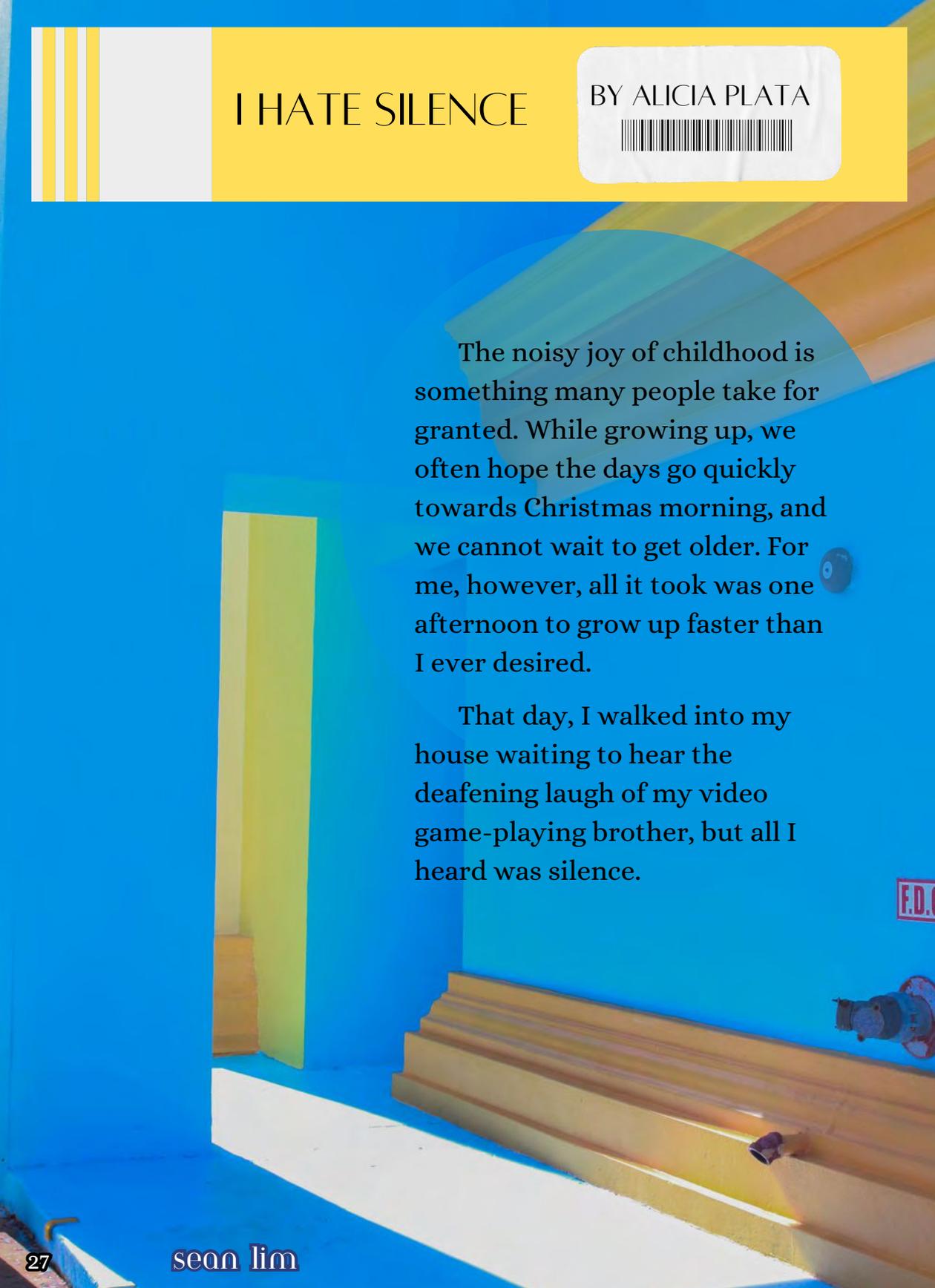


Another day, you'll find yourself safe and sound. You'll find a quiet place where you can scream how you love yourself. After that, the world will look just like your bathroom mirror. Hold out for the hope of finding yourself in everyone else.



I HATE SILENCE

BY ALICIA PLATA

A photograph of a room with a blue wall. On the left, there is a doorway with a white frame. At the bottom, there is a wooden baseboard. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

The noisy joy of childhood is something many people take for granted. While growing up, we often hope the days go quickly towards Christmas morning, and we cannot wait to get older. For me, however, all it took was one afternoon to grow up faster than I ever desired.

That day, I walked into my house waiting to hear the deafening laugh of my video game-playing brother, but all I heard was silence.

A profound eerie feeling was at the back of my neck. My dad had told me there was something we needed to talk about. I asked, “Where’s my brother?” I could not recognize the look on my dad’s face. He had never been the one to cry. He always held a strong ground for us, but the look on his face was unrecognizable. I felt compassion for him, and a little bit of fear. I felt, strangely, like the grownup.

We sat together on the couch, and he told me about a call from my brother’s school earlier that day. They had found a note. “Your brother needed to go somewhere to get help,” my dad said. What did he write that had them seek help for him? What could he have written down that deemed him dangerous? When we got home, I asked my sister, “What did my brother write?” The only thing she could say to me was, “He wrote something that made him go to a special place.” I never expected this. My brother was the obnoxious sibling who annoyed me and ran around the house saying he was Sonic the Hedgehog. Suddenly, that version of him disappeared; overnight he stopped wearing his Sonic helmet. I stopped hearing his laughter through the thin wall that separated our rooms.

The silence that flooded the house that night was unbearable. I longed to hear him laughing again, and I tried to hold on to that memory of the laughter that had annoyed me so much before. That night, my head was filled with confusion about what happened to my brother. The next morning, my mother told me my brother was admitted to the hospital getting the help he needed. When I asked

exactly what was wrong with him, my mother looked at me almost puzzled, trying to form a way to explain to me what was going on. Telling a ten-year-old that her brother finds living as something he could not do anymore, is not exactly the easiest task out there. Looking back, I understand why my mom did not tell me exactly what happened, other than the doctors were helping him “be happy.”

Although I knew he was safe in the hospital, I did not quite understand why he could not be safe with us at home. We brought him dinner at the hospital, sitting together in a blue room: he was on one side of the table and my sister, parents, and myself on the other. I did not like seeing my brother in this vulnerable state, helplessly asking, “Can I go home now?” I just could not understand why he was so morose.

Additionally, around this same time, my sister had also shown similar warning signs. We had always shared a bedroom and now there were nights I heard her weeping. Daily, I asked her to play with me and she refused, insisting she was “too old to play with dolls.” She wore massive stacks of wristbands and, one day, just before my brother’s hospitalization, I discovered why: hidden underneath those bands were never-ending scars of hurt. She had been hurting for a couple of years by then, but my family never saw her. At just ten years old, I saw the pain she went through, but could not understand why this was happening to her, why nothing made her feel better.

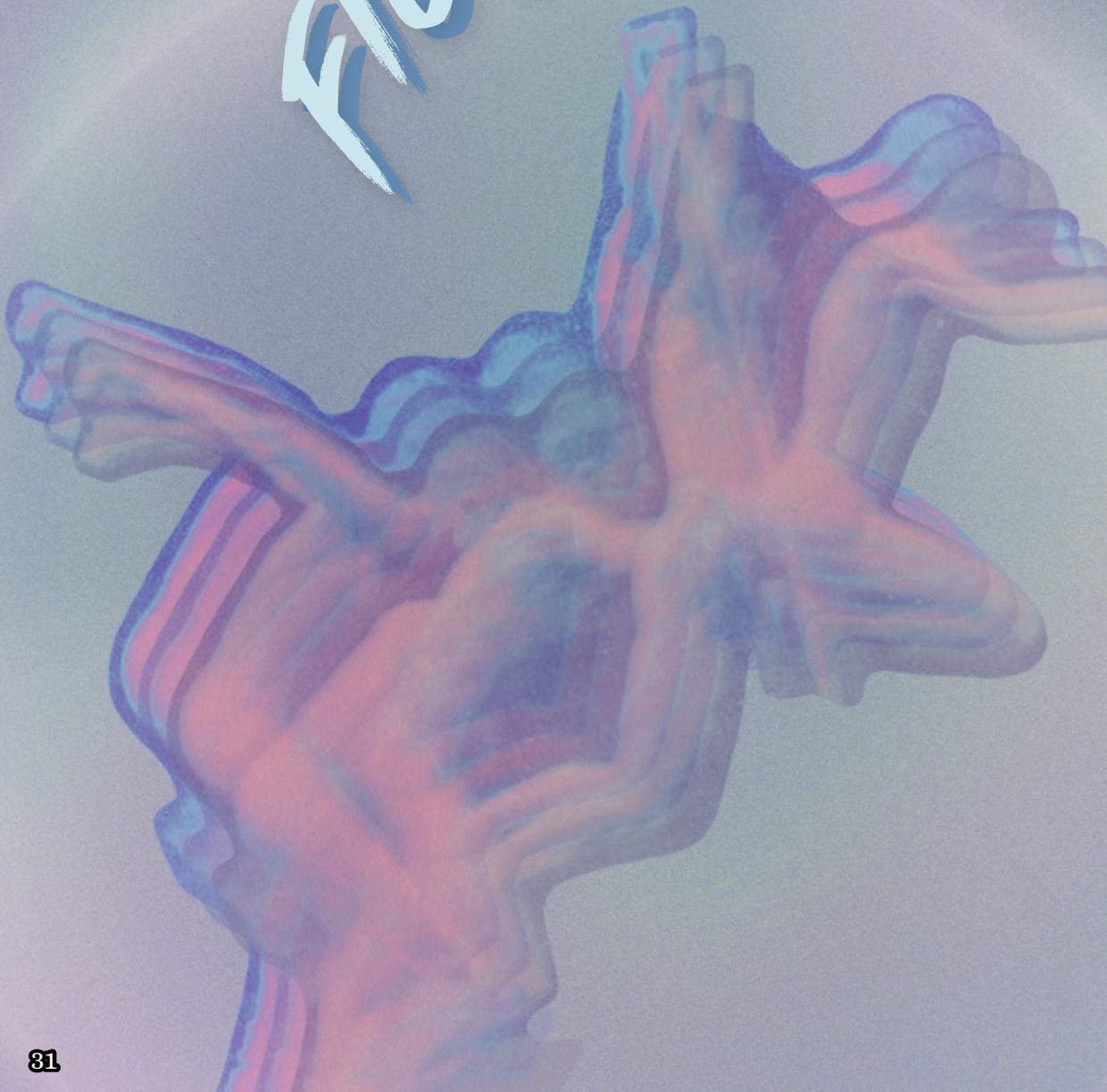
She was yelling for help, but nobody heard her cries. All I wanted was to hear her laugh again—and now my brother’s laugh, too.

After what felt like the longest week of my life, my brother was coming home. Not a word was spoken on the drive to the hospital, all you could hear were the tires of the car against the road. The second I saw my brother, my heart sank to my stomach. His eye bags were dark and deep. At that moment, I saw the hurt he had been hiding; the confusion I previously had disappeared. The pain I had seen in my sister for months, was now been reflected onto my brother as well.

Consequently, I hate silence. To some people, the pit of silence is peaceful, comforting even. For me, silence is pain, loneliness, and the absence of laughter. I want to go back to enjoying the silence, enjoying the peace in the stillness. Although I have grown a lot since then, thinking back on what my ten-year-old self experienced, I still feel like that same little girl who grew up too fast.

However, I would not be the person I am today if I had not faced that reality of mental health. Not only did I grow as I person, but I still have my siblings and that is more important than anything. Ever since then, I see the signs of someone’s hurt and I do everything in my power to be there for them. All I want is laughter to fill the room rather than silence.

FICTION



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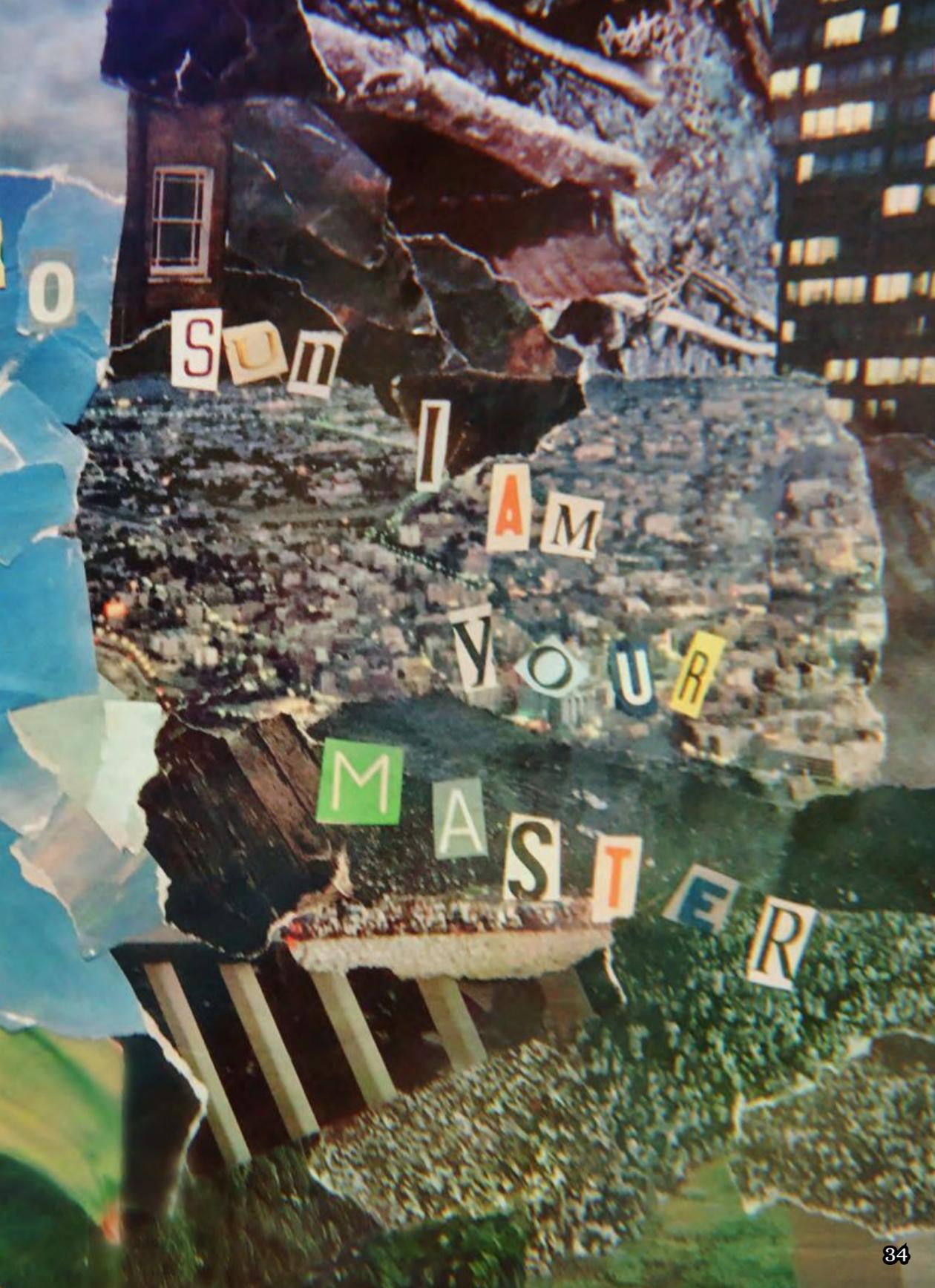
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“Haunted”

Amy Zhou



T H E R E I S N



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The Purple Sheep

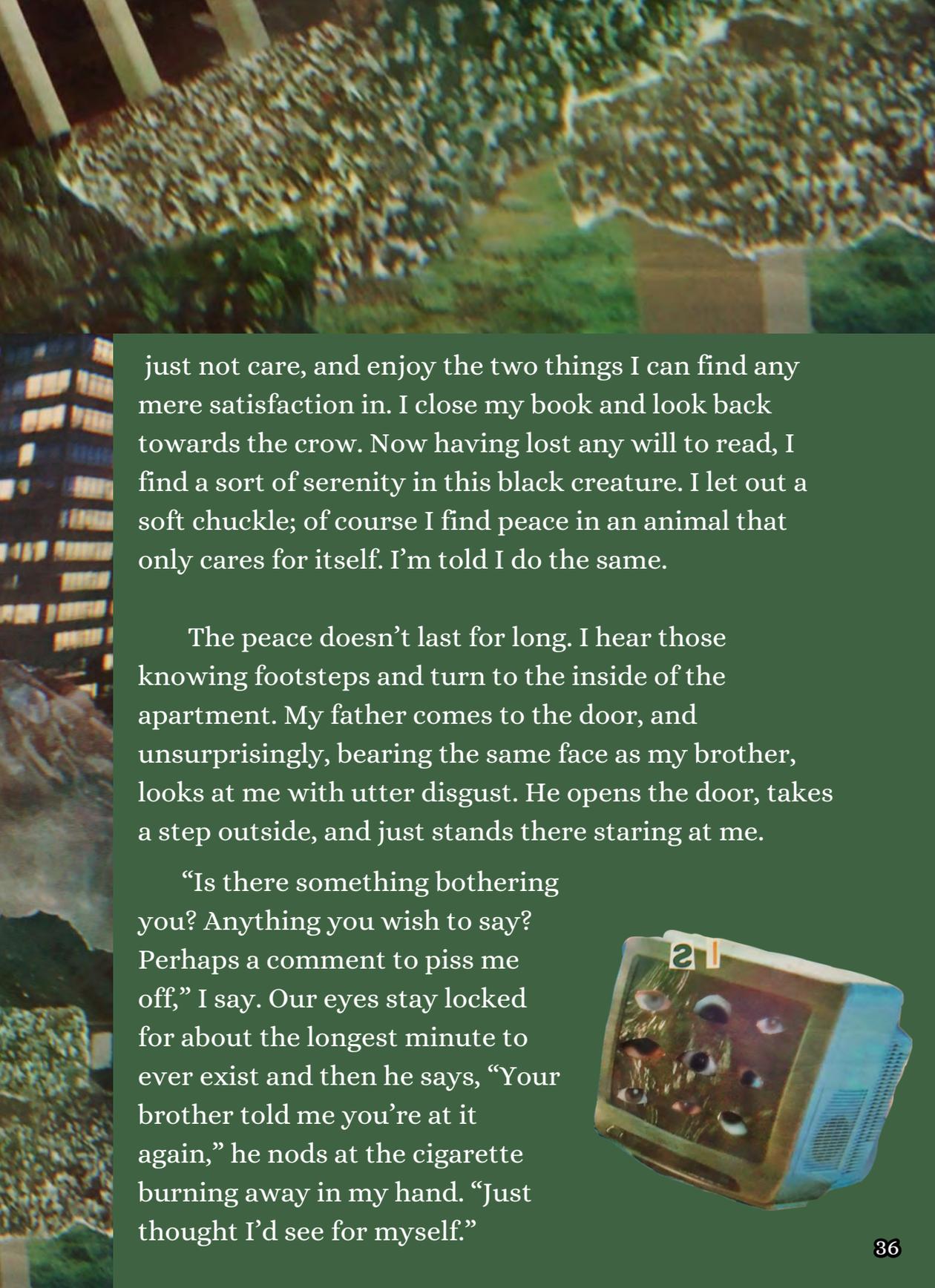
by Paula Dangond

Sitting with my book in my hands, I peer over the balcony railing and watch as a black crow perches itself on the windowsill across from me. Undisturbed, it pecks at its feathers while ruffling its wings. Its sharp beady eyes aware of any movement, even from so high up where it keeps its guard. As I'm staring at this bird, my sight coming in and out of focus, a hard rap on the glass door shakes me awake.

“Smoking more cigarettes, I see,” says my older brother in a low, muffled voice through the glass doors, and I can clearly see his face lined with disappointment.

“Care to join me?” I spit at him with the grill in my mouth and my eyebrows raised. He slips his head through the doors and lifts his nose to the air. “And smell this? No, I’m alright. Enjoy your must on your own,” he says.

He shakes his head, pops it back out, then shuts the door with a loud click. Grabbing another grill from my pack, I reach slowly for my lighter and light up. I just want to be left alone. Why can't anyone understand that? My God, to

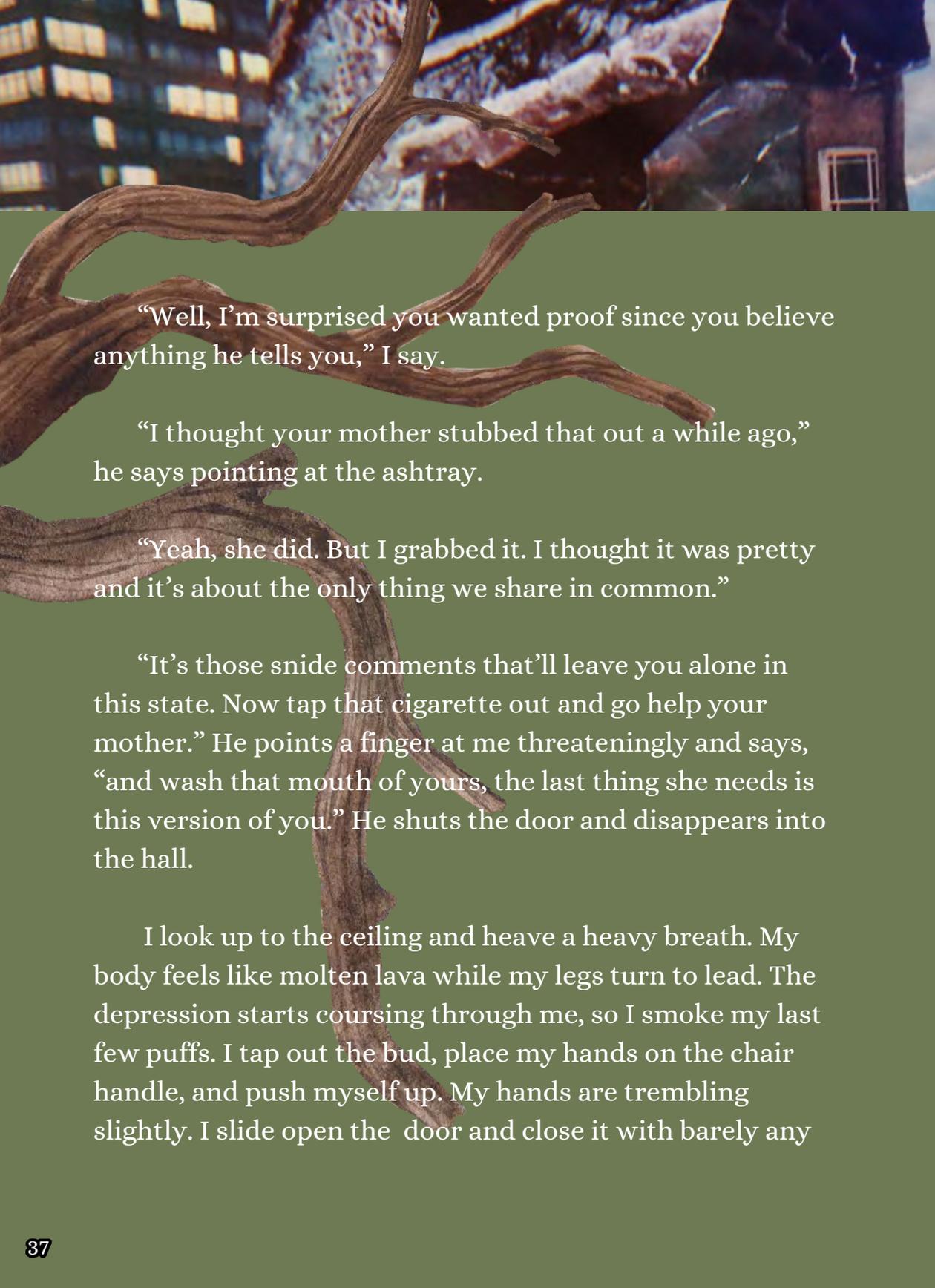


just not care, and enjoy the two things I can find any mere satisfaction in. I close my book and look back towards the crow. Now having lost any will to read, I find a sort of serenity in this black creature. I let out a soft chuckle; of course I find peace in an animal that only cares for itself. I'm told I do the same.

The peace doesn't last for long. I hear those knowing footsteps and turn to the inside of the apartment. My father comes to the door, and unsurprisingly, bearing the same face as my brother, looks at me with utter disgust. He opens the door, takes a step outside, and just stands there staring at me.

“Is there something bothering you? Anything you wish to say? Perhaps a comment to piss me off,” I say. Our eyes stay locked for about the longest minute to ever exist and then he says, “Your brother told me you're at it again,” he nods at the cigarette burning away in my hand. “Just thought I'd see for myself.”





“Well, I’m surprised you wanted proof since you believe anything he tells you,” I say.

“I thought your mother stubbed that out a while ago,” he says pointing at the ashtray.

“Yeah, she did. But I grabbed it. I thought it was pretty and it’s about the only thing we share in common.”

“It’s those snide comments that’ll leave you alone in this state. Now tap that cigarette out and go help your mother.” He points a finger at me threateningly and says, “and wash that mouth of yours, the last thing she needs is this version of you.” He shuts the door and disappears into the hall.

I look up to the ceiling and heave a heavy breath. My body feels like molten lava while my legs turn to lead. The depression starts coursing through me, so I smoke my last few puffs. I tap out the bud, place my hands on the chair handle, and push myself up. My hands are trembling slightly. I slide open the door and close it with barely any

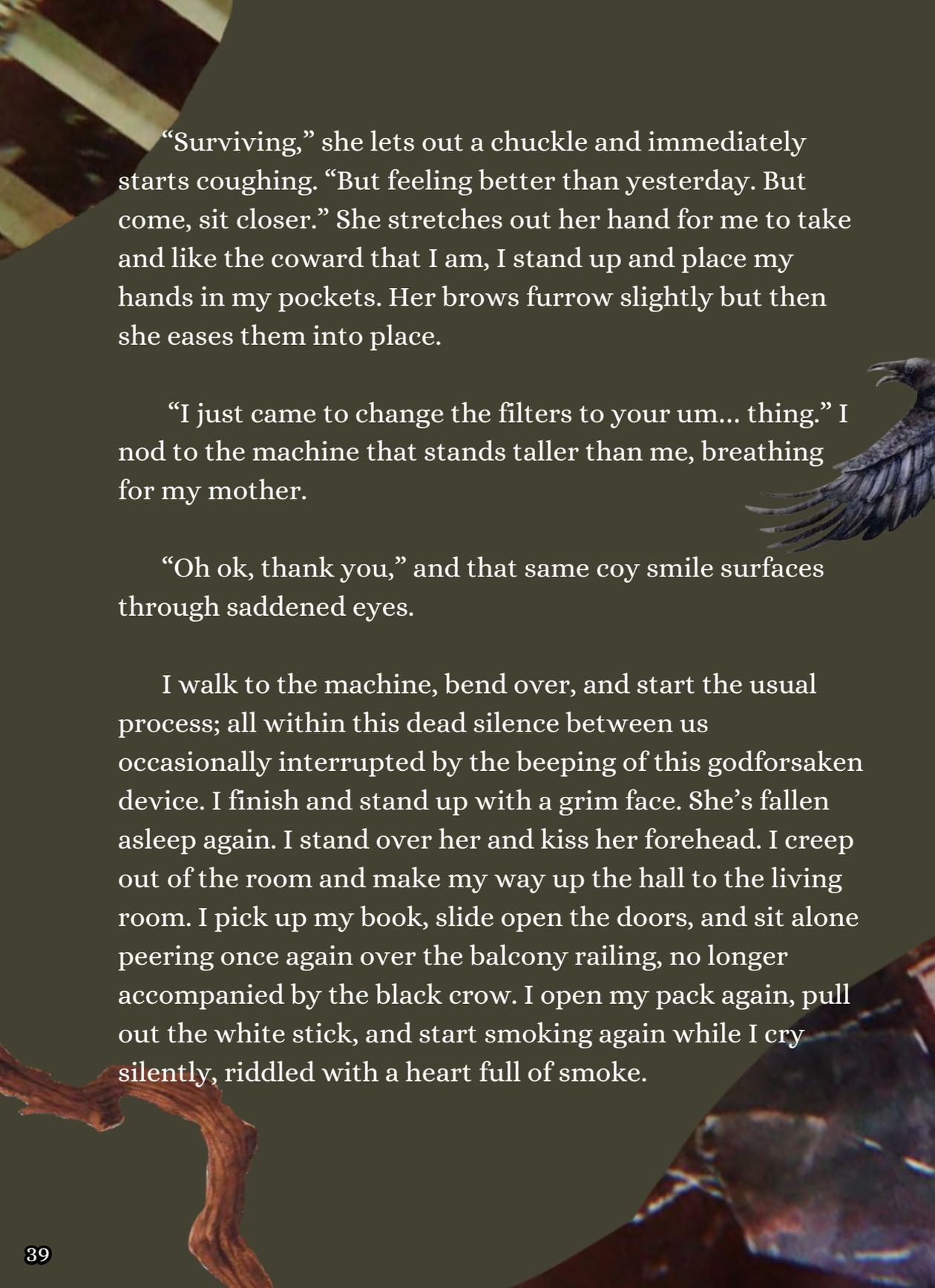


sound. I place my book down on the coffee table and walk down the long corridor. The white walls on either side of me are covered in ridiculous family photo shoots from throughout the years. Hangings of when we were called a happy family. I snuff at them and then continue down, arriving to the last door in the hall. I pause for a moment; I can hear the respiratory machine vibrating and making small beeping noises. I take a deep breath and open the door.

It's the smell that does me in, medicine mixed with internal organs. I hide my cringe and force a smile. My eyes fall upon my mother lying down in her comforter, fast asleep, and masked from the bridge of her nose down to her chin. She looks peaceful. My fake smile fades, my shoulders droop, and the sockets of my eyes sink in. It only seems to get harder to walk into this room. I approach the edge of the bed on light feet and shake her big toe back and forth. With heavy eyes, she slowly blinks them open. And that small smile lights up her pale, smooth face. Even now, she manages to resemble a dove. She pulls off the mask with a needle-riddled hand, takes a shaken breath, lets out a deep cough, and gathers herself.

“Hi honey, come and sit here with me,” she whispers in a raspy voice as she taps her bedside. Knowing I smell like rotten cigarettes, I keep my distance and sit at her feet. “H-how are you?” I ask.





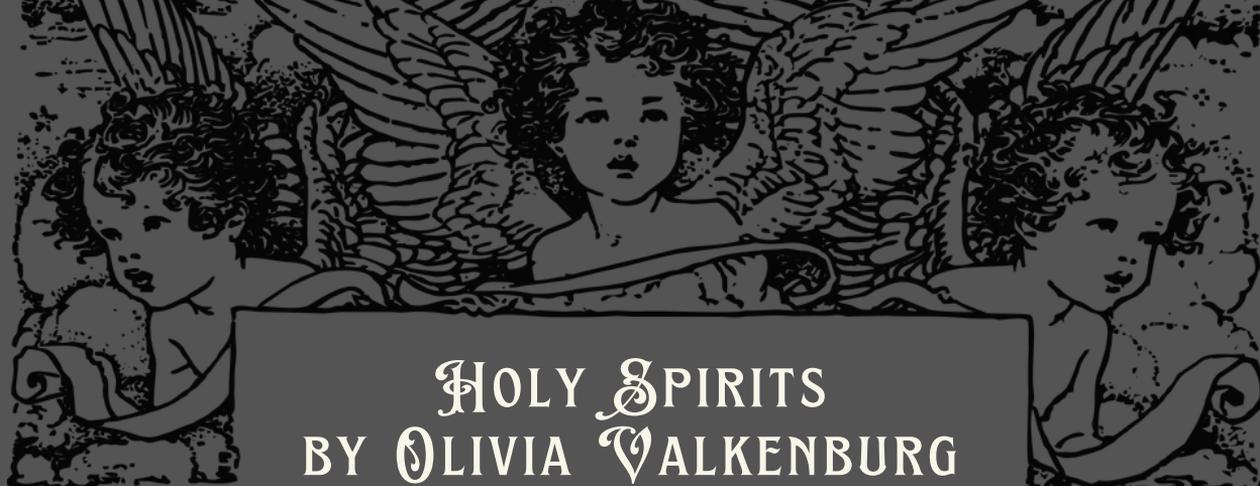
“Surviving,” she lets out a chuckle and immediately starts coughing. “But feeling better than yesterday. But come, sit closer.” She stretches out her hand for me to take and like the coward that I am, I stand up and place my hands in my pockets. Her brows furrow slightly but then she eases them into place.

“I just came to change the filters to your um... thing.” I nod to the machine that stands taller than me, breathing for my mother.

“Oh ok, thank you,” and that same coy smile surfaces through saddened eyes.

I walk to the machine, bend over, and start the usual process; all within this dead silence between us occasionally interrupted by the beeping of this godforsaken device. I finish and stand up with a grim face. She’s fallen asleep again. I stand over her and kiss her forehead. I creep out of the room and make my way up the hall to the living room. I pick up my book, slide open the doors, and sit alone peering once again over the balcony railing, no longer accompanied by the black crow. I open my pack again, pull out the white stick, and start smoking again while I cry silently, riddled with a heart full of smoke.





HOLY SPIRITS BY OLIVIA VALKENBURG

“I shouldn’t be doing this again...” the old priest thought as he parked the church van in the O’Malley’s parking lot. He had a feeling he might be sleeping in the back seat again tonight.

Father Michael had chosen O’Malley’s as his spot years ago because it was six towns over from his parish and it was primarily Protestant and Jewish. He was unlikely to run into anyone he knew.

He reached into the back of the silver Nissan van and switched out his clergy shirt and black pants for an old Springsteen t-shirt and jeans. He knew he would blend right in, but for good measure he pulled a fake gold band from the glove compartment and placed it on his ring finger.

Exhaling one last deep breath, he grappled with the van door, debating if this was a moral thing to do. He knew it wasn’t, but still found himself turning off the van

and exiting the driver's seat.

Besides, even Jesus drank wine.



“Hi-ya Jack,” the bartender said casually, barely looking up from the Guinness tap his hand was fastened on. The old man sat his denim-clad arse on a barstool.

Archie was normally behind the bar on Tuesdays and Thursdays only, but since the usual Monday-night barmaid had gone and gotten pregnant with a Turkish fellow, he was here today, too. He stood 6’1, slender and gawky with a dark mustache and round glasses that framed his equally round face.

Archie was practically a walking index of limericks, bar-toasts, and lame puns that forced people to laugh a little. Father Michael quite preferred him to the other servers at O’Malley’s.

The clergyman laid back, envisioning a parishioner running through at any moment and calling out, ‘*Why on Earth is this man calling you **JACK**? Your **name** is **Michael**.*’ Sister Edith would be appalled.

But instead, only Archie spoke, in his normal, unobtrusive manner.



“How’s it going?” the bartender asked. The friar took a brief pause before he replied.

“Okay, I guess. Holding my own,” he said in a rather unconvincing tone.



“That’s good,” replied the bartender without skipping a beat. “You’d be arrested if you was holding someone else’s.”

Of course, this forced him into an inadmissible smile. The priest chuckled under a tightened face, partially because no one in the bar knew his true profession, and he felt this somehow added to the humor of his joke. Archie thought ‘Jack’ was a crossing guard.

“I’ll have the usual. Don’t skimp me on the bourbon.” The listless priest needed something strong tonight, and he downed the Old Fashioned with haste.



Confession that morning had been particularly unsettling. Which is why he felt the liquor was justifiable tonight. He had a lot on his mind that he needed to forget.

First, he drank to forget the woman who confessed to utilizing prostitution to pay the bills and stealing baby formula from Lidl. He thought of his own mother, Elizabeth, who had given birth to him at just 19. His own father had never been part of the picture, the priest had sometimes joked that he didn't need a father because he had the Bible to parent him. Would that be true of this woman's child? Would this baby lean to the bible to help, or would she end up on a path like her mother's?

Then, to forget the great-grandmother, who had confided in him that she was nearly out of the Percocets left behind by her dead husband, and wished so badly to be with him again. He thought of Sister Anne Marie, a middle-aged nun who had left the convent to seek help for her own painkiller addiction, which she had developed after a routine hip surgery. Father Michael had not thought to check up on her in months, where was she now? Did she need his guidance and prayer too?

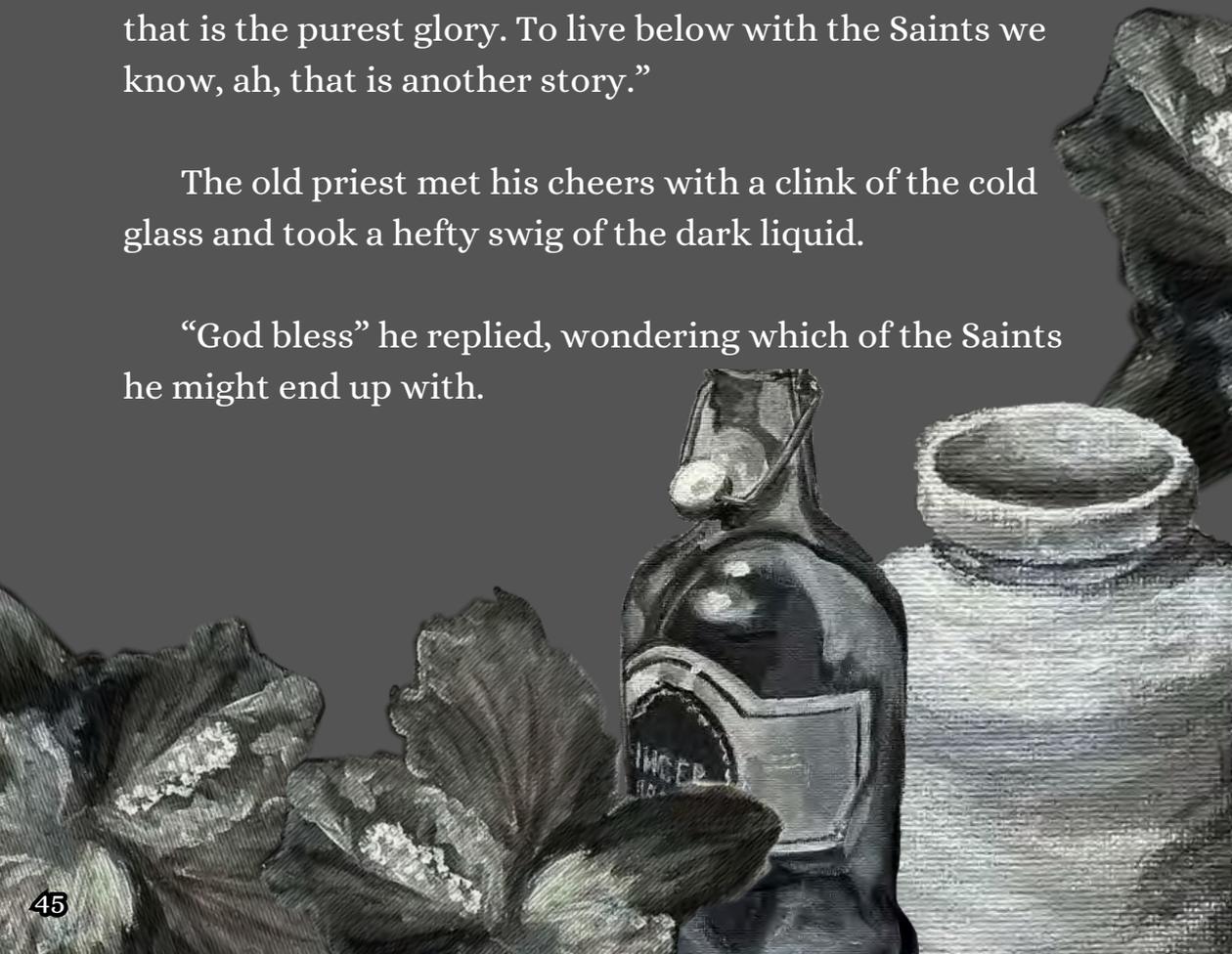
Finally, he drank to forget the father of three who came in and confessed to cheating on his wife with her own brother. He thought of his own brother, Andrew, whom he had not spoken to in over forty years. His brother's romantic endeavors led him to a path of sin, one Father Michael felt he simply couldn't condone in his younger days. Now he wondered if, perhaps, he had misjudged his brother then. What would his life have looked like if they had kept in touch? Would Andrew have been there for him now?

The weathered priest savored his final sips of liquor, and reflected on the choices he had made tonight. Maybe sometimes, with him holding onto all these secrets from strangers behind a dark wall and all, it wasn't so wrong if he had just a drink or two (or five). He only drank on the hardest of days, the days where he felt not even God himself could provide an answer. Unfortunately, there seemed to be more and more of those lately.

“Here ya go, Jackie-O,” the bartender walked over with a broad grin on his face as he lifted two golden pints to propose a cheers. “To live above with the Saints we love, ah, that is the purest glory. To live below with the Saints we know, ah, that is another story.”

The old priest met his cheers with a clink of the cold glass and took a hefty swig of the dark liquid.

“God bless” he replied, wondering which of the Saints he might end up with.





Harbinger

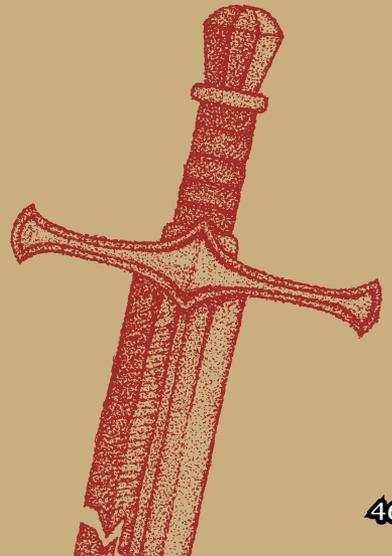
by Amy Zhou

I found you on a pale winter morning. You lay in a puddle of blood, your shivering breaths misting in the cold. You looked more wretched than a corpse.

Father and I were lucky to have found you at all. Last night, a blizzard howled through the valley, draping a thick blanket of snow over the dead. Had you not sought cover, it would have buried you. Sometimes, I wish it had.

You weighed like a horse with your bulky armor and strong bones. We had to heave you onto a stretcher and rush you to the nearest safe house. I did not yet know who you were, but Father must have had his suspicions, for his gaze had taken on a terrifying, singular intensity as we ran.

After we brought you indoors, the frost thawed into a low fever, and your pulse stumbled as it picked up speed. We peeled off your armor and found burnt skin. Your moans rasped in your throat, scorched by smoke.





They must have raised a fire to purge the stragglers. In a twisted sense, the blizzard saved you.

Father and I slaved over you, exhausting our finest medicines. I felt ill the longer I worked. Never had a patient die under my hands, but I was sure you would be the first.

Yet you lived to spite me. Your breath pattered on like an old chimney, and on the third day, you stirred. Your eyes opened to mine, burning with the will to live. It was then that you earned my respect.

“You are safe with us, child,” Father said softly. “What is your name?”

You answered, and Father’s face crumpled. He took a shaky breath. “Did you . . . did you see the prince? In the battle?”

“I was his right-hand man. I watched him die.”

I could imagine the prince’s quicksilver spear and sleek steed, his radiant youth mutilated by war and betrayal. He had been a generational talent, the golden boy of the Capital. It was cruel how quickly a person turned into past tense.

“I see.” Father stood on shaky legs. “I—pardon me. I have to go.”

You turned to me. “I am not who he is looking for.”

“I never asked you to be,” I replied. I did not share Father’s sentiments, and you did not deserve to learn that you were not the one he meant to save.

Prince or not, you had been declared a traitor to the crown. You could not be discovered alive. Your family was already executed for treason.

You quivered when I told you, soaking the sheets with angry tears. “We were framed,” you whispered, and somehow it hurt worse than any scream.

You spent the next day unconscious. I regretted ever opening my mouth. You were still at high risk for infection, and your immune system could not afford such a blow. I felt clumsy without Father, who had abandoned us to chase ghosts.

Privately, I feared becoming too invested in your health. Death lurked in your ashen face, your blistering burns, your too-warm temperature. But tending to you for hours a day—until I had learned the pattern of your breathing and memorized the lines of your face well enough to paint you—changed me against my will. Like a parasite, you grew on me.



YOUR

LAST

Worship G
Thank G

glow

FOR OUR

LORD

JANUARY 26, 2024

BY JOSE VALDERRAMA

January 26, 2024: It's been four years already, Kobe. Or perhaps it's only been four years.

The palm tree line. Leonardo Sciascia spoke of it for the first time in 1960, in "The Day of the Owl." It's the imaginary environmental boundary within which the palm tree lives and thrives. It's an interesting concept for two reasons. On the one hand, it's a latitude shared by the entire planet: the geometric location of points on the globe that divides where one can go from where one cannot. On the other hand, the palm tree line is a boundary in slow but constant movement, shifting with climate change, inch by inch. Where once life was possible, now it's not.

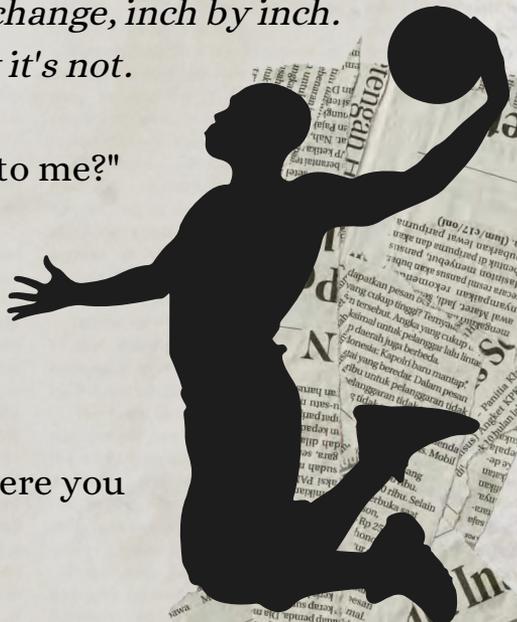
"Excuse me, but are you listening to me?"

"I'm afraid not, doctor."

"What were you thinking about?"

"Hard to explain. Anyway, what were you saying?"

"Retrospective fear, do you know what it is?"



"Doesn't seem like a difficult concept."

"Can you tell me what you were thinking about?"

"I thought our time was up."

"It's not over just yet. What were you thinking about?"

"About the palm tree line."

"Pardon?"

It's difficult to say what I'm thinking four years later. Or perhaps it's just foolish and ridiculous. But so be it. It's like death is somewhat my palm tree line. That imaginary boundary after which everything changes and from which there's no turning back. Because shortly after that, everything would change, radically and in free fall, and nothing would be the same. It's a metaphor, for sure, but maybe not.

I'm thinking that this palm line, which moves for all of us at very slow but unstoppable speeds, always leaves us with one more inch of desert, one less drop of water. And we always experience it this way, with this very modern indifference, ensnared within the labyrinth of time and lost in the pursuit of progress, incapable of stopping and looking around. Until, one day, we really do

stop to look around. And there's nothing left.

You know, it's like every time a hero of our childhood dies, each of us becomes a little older, and time is measured in memories rather than hours. And there's always someone telling you it's just a basketball player, that there are more important things to think about, and Jesus, you're really exaggerating. And you keep thinking that that basketball player was the metronome of your life, the light veil of music that fills a room and makes it seem less empty. And people smile, and you don't even know why.

And I'm thinking that since he's been gone, four years have passed, and I don't know whether to say that it's been four years already or that it's only been four years. I just know that all of this feels unnatural and inappropriate, but well put together, and I don't know how to feel. Like seeing a palm tree in the fog of the Upper East Side, at the corner of Park Avenue and 72nd St, and wondering if you're the only one who finds it strange.

"The palm tree is a metaphor, isn't it?"

"Perhaps, but maybe not, doctor."

"Again, do you know what retrospective fear is?"

"You keep asking me that. Care to elaborate?"

"Let me give you an example. You're crossing the street, but at the last moment, you notice a car coming towards you at great speed. So, you jump to the side on the curb, and only when you're safe and see the car disappearing down the street, only then you feel a big thump in your heart and a hole in your stomach. That fear, which you didn't feel immediately, that is retrospective fear."

"I suppose you think that's what's happening to me."

"I'm more interested to hear what you think"

"Let's play a game, try letting me decide."

I believe there are little things that leave us with a huge hole inside, and what hurts us is this discrepancy between what we should feel and what we actually feel. That rationally we know that certain things should only lightly affect us, while instead they carry a weight that we struggle to bear and even to justify. And at the same time, I think that we appreciate the magnitude of certain things only when they're gone, and we look back, and the shockwave hits us. In short, when we start to miss them.

I think that everything has a subjective and an

absolute importance and that those who want to put everything under the same umbrella of priorities understand very little about the affairs of the world. The disinterested observer might tell you that—as you said—it's just the death of a basketball player, and you might reply that that basketball player was more important than almost everyone you've ever known. You would both be right, obviously, but that doesn't change how you feel right now.

Yet all this rationality doesn't prevent us from feeling lonely, or sad, or scared. Why are we afraid of the car that did not hit us and is now far away? Isn't it like for your palm trees, for the boundary between what can be and what can no longer be?

"Retrospective fear. It's an interesting theory, doctor."

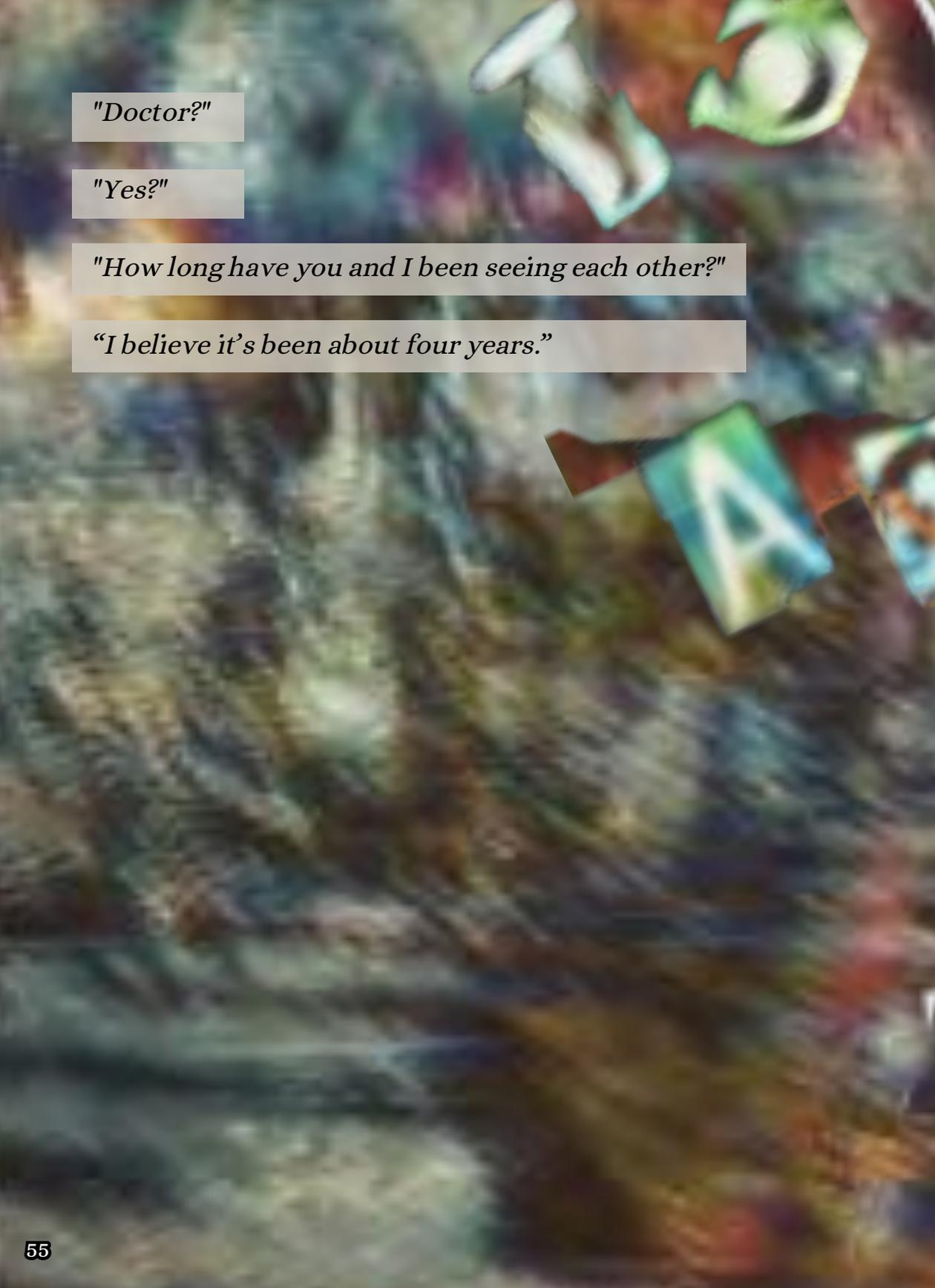
"I'm glad you think so."

"It's not just about basketball, then?"

"There's always more to it than just basketball"

"How can you be sure?"

"Otherwise, I wouldn't be here. Maybe we'll continue next time."

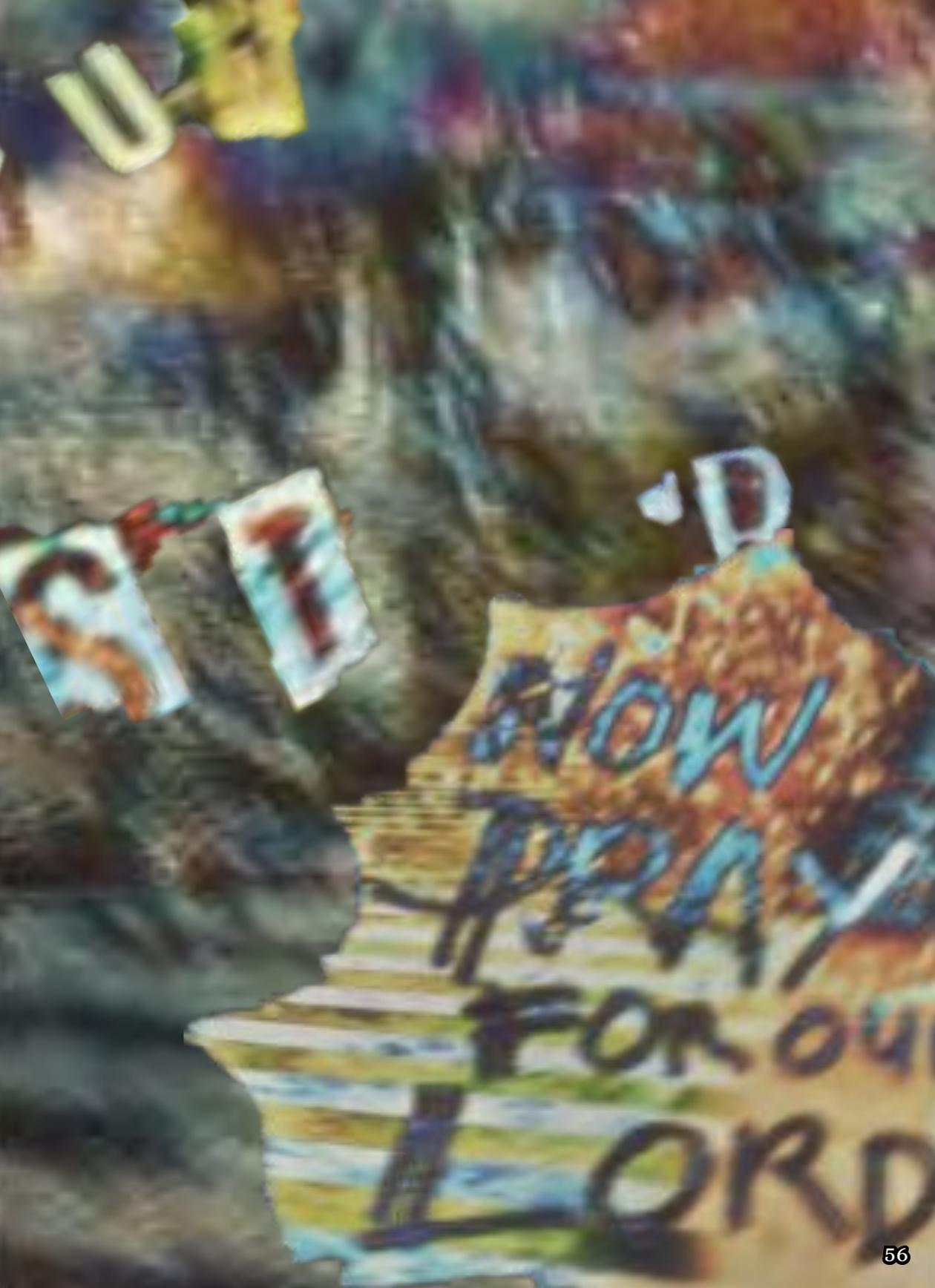


"Doctor?"

"Yes?"

"How long have you and I been seeing each other?"

"I believe it's been about four years."







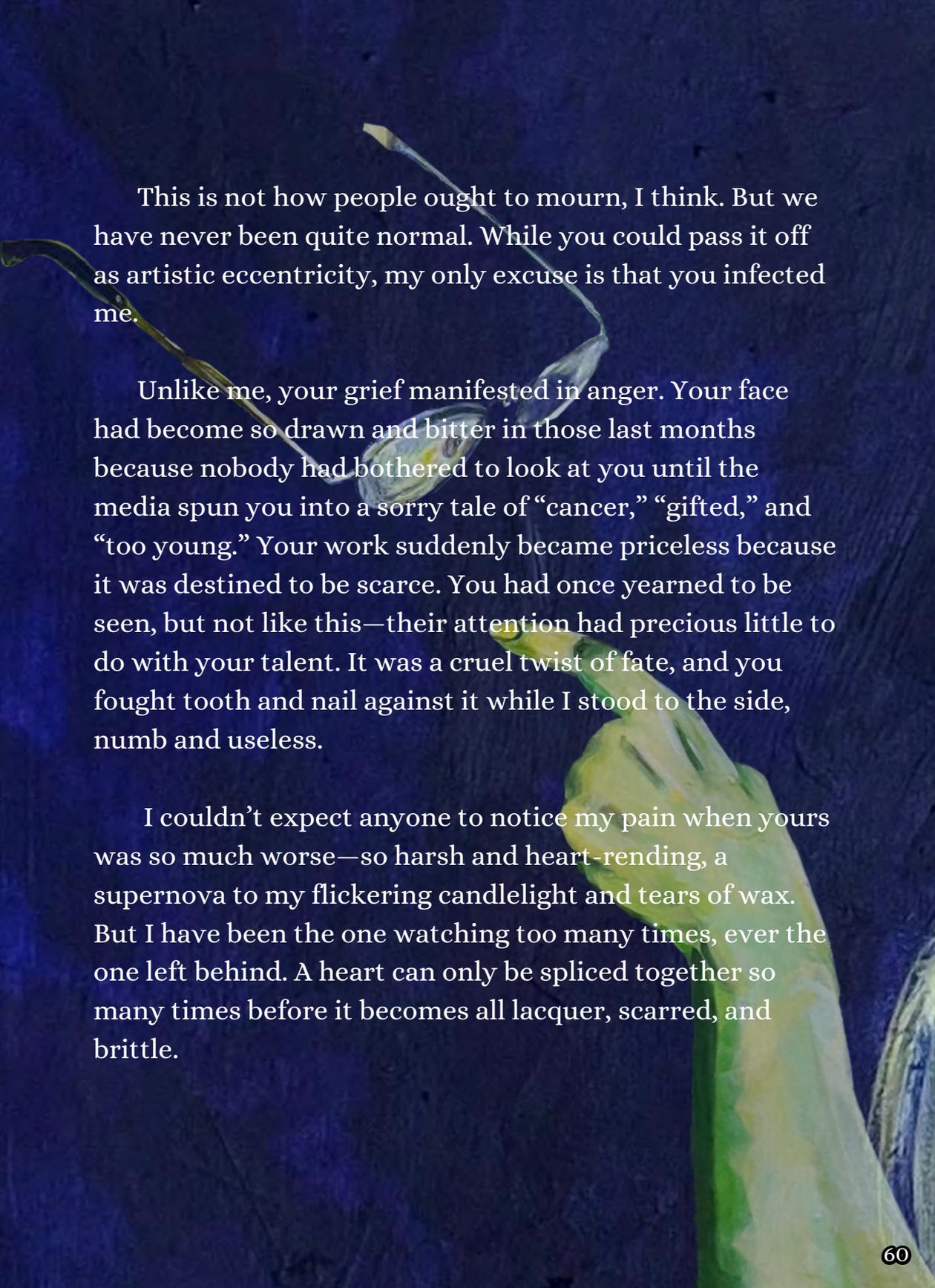
Haunted

by Amy Zhou

You are gone, but you never left. Your memory lingers in every furnishing, every trinket, every space you claimed: the easel corner, the rack laden with paint-splattered shirts, the lonely side of the bed. Your paintings murmur when I pass them, echoes of you at each leg of your life. At the far end of the hall lie your final works, the slow, heavy brushwork betraying your weakening wrists. Most days, I cannot bear to look at them.

You were always like this: possessive, territorial, and determined to leave your mark on everything you touched. You marked this house so thoroughly it immortalized you; you marked me so deeply I cannot think of abandoning it, even if the air burdens my bones.

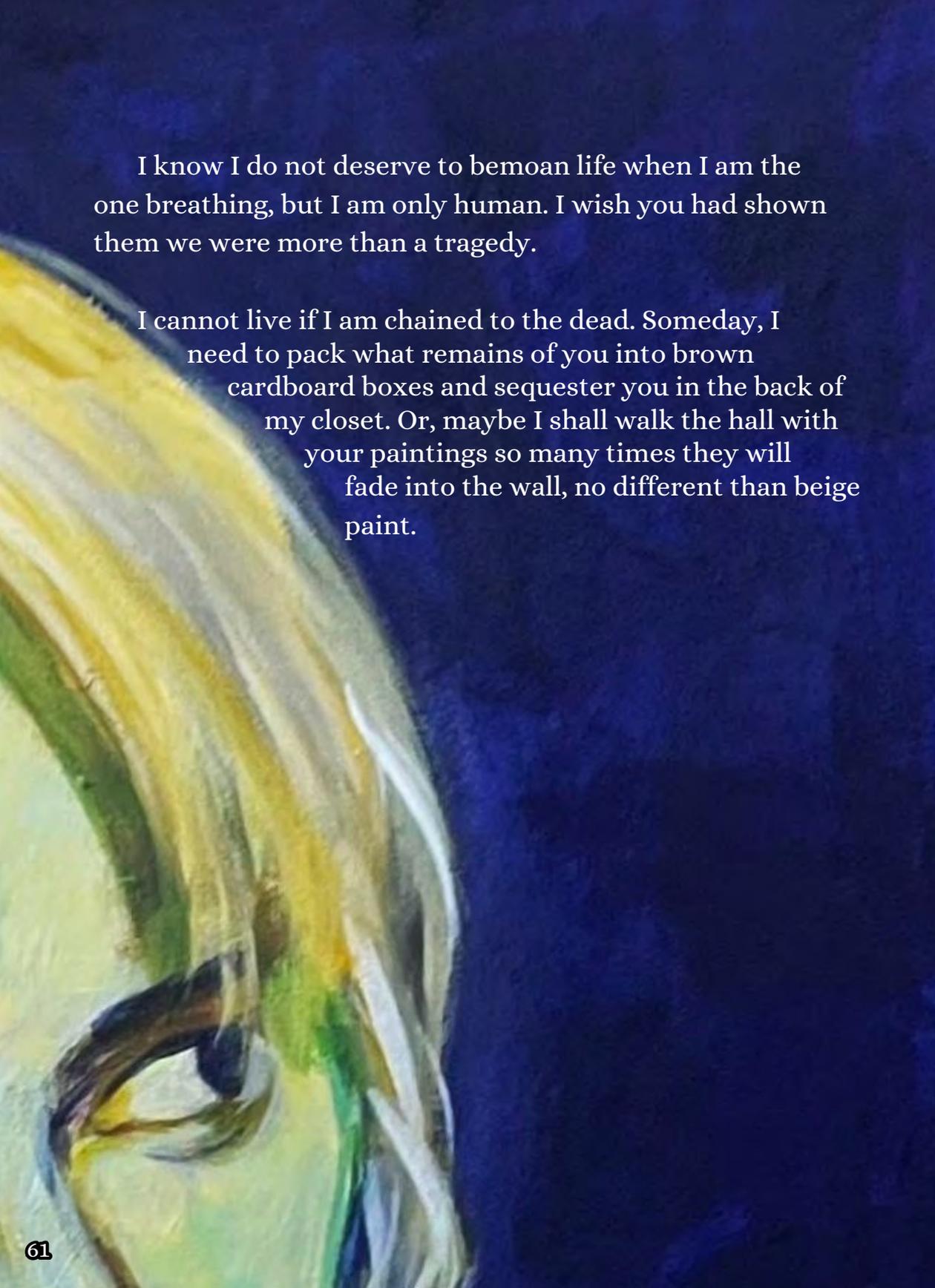
I am not made for living in the past, even if it has you. Every so often, I go mad with the need to forget, seizing whatever reminds me of you and holding it over the trash, my fist white-knuckled and shaking. Yet, I can never let go. The thought of losing any moment with you hurts too much for me to go through with it, so I retreat, haunted by guilt for even considering it.

A painting of a hand holding a flower stem against a dark blue background. The hand is rendered in shades of green and yellow, with visible brushstrokes. The flower stem is thin and has a small, pale flower at the top. The background is a deep, textured blue.

This is not how people ought to mourn, I think. But we have never been quite normal. While you could pass it off as artistic eccentricity, my only excuse is that you infected me.

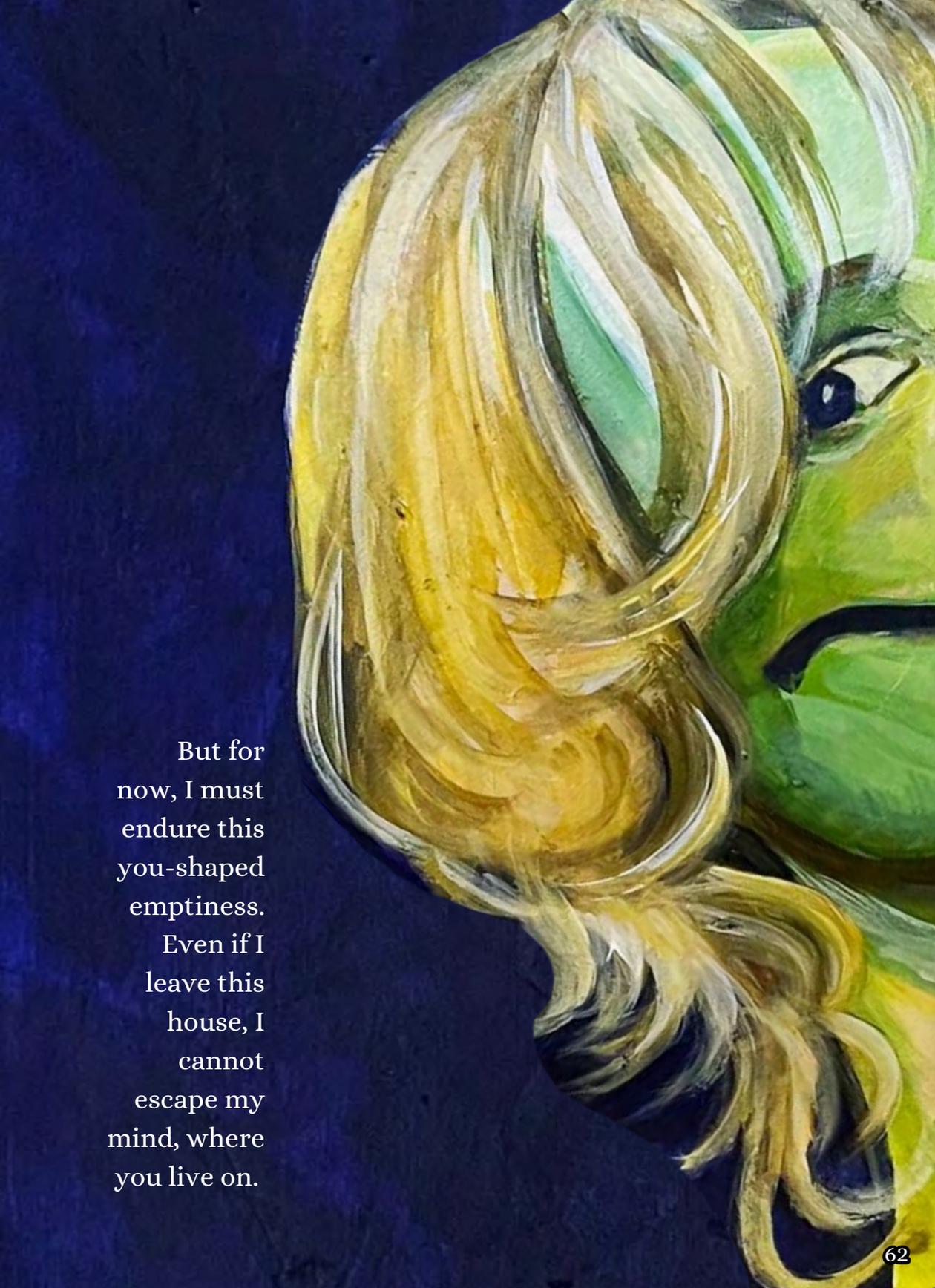
Unlike me, your grief manifested in anger. Your face had become so drawn and bitter in those last months because nobody had bothered to look at you until the media spun you into a sorry tale of “cancer,” “gifted,” and “too young.” Your work suddenly became priceless because it was destined to be scarce. You had once yearned to be seen, but not like this—their attention had precious little to do with your talent. It was a cruel twist of fate, and you fought tooth and nail against it while I stood to the side, numb and useless.

I couldn't expect anyone to notice my pain when yours was so much worse—so harsh and heart-rending, a supernova to my flickering candlelight and tears of wax. But I have been the one watching too many times, ever the one left behind. A heart can only be spliced together so many times before it becomes all lacquer, scarred, and brittle.



I know I do not deserve to bemoan life when I am the one breathing, but I am only human. I wish you had shown them we were more than a tragedy.

I cannot live if I am chained to the dead. Someday, I need to pack what remains of you into brown cardboard boxes and sequester you in the back of my closet. Or, maybe I shall walk the hall with your paintings so many times they will fade into the wall, no different than beige paint.



But for
now, I must
endure this
you-shaped
emptiness.

Even if I
leave this
house, I
cannot
escape my
mind, where
you live on.

POETS

Pg. 65-66 “A Paper Reverie”

Celine Buechele

Pg. 68 “Dead Lizards”

Ignacio Giesso

Pg. 69-70 “About Men and Malleability”

Alba Tartt

Pg. 72-74 “Small-Footed Women”

Amy Zhou



A Paper Reverie
by Celine Buechele

*Within this quiet place,
The mind builds paper walls.
A dwelling, barren and scarce,
Echo through hollow halls.*

*Her father, disturbed, a blizzard within,
Two atone for the sins of one.
The songbird flits from shadow to light,
Afraid to touch the sun.*

*As the night's unsullied snow,
Softly mantles a crimson rose.
The songbird dreams her paper veil,
So vivid in its throes.*

*Vines of briars woven gates forlorn,
Sketched upon a paper daze.
Spring's radiance becomes her crown,
Scarlet thorns in bitter embrace.*

*Darkness escorts a tranquil facade,
Silence etches tears that cascade.
Shadows billow, as wooden steps moan
A songbird tremulous, enshrouded in night's shade,*

*Scattered whites claim the floor,
Paper willows weep once more.
Quietly, crimson descends,
Marring virgin snow behind closed doors.*



DEAD LIZARDS

BY IGNACIO GIESO

Dead lizards on balcony chairs,
Unsubtly callous to it all,
Decay in a coward's truce
And a barren poem's stall.
A wheelchaired woman's scream:
"A descent and a fall.
The absurdity of means,
Awaits the crow's call!"





About Men And Malleability

by Alba Tartt

There is a panther walking towards me
With tawny hair atop his skin.
He was beautiful from afar,
But something about me made him unhinged.
These golden eyes teetering on hazel;
They pierce my essence, and I finch.
His prowl is everything but unstable
And I fear my resolve is wearing thin.



There is a panther walking towards me
And I know he won't be the last.
Other kinds of apex mammals have approached me
But this one is unsurpassed.
He licks his lips rapturously
And both my camera and I shudder.
My eyes shut at his command
As I give in to what no sin could recover.

There is a panther right in front of me.
His whiskers brush against my lips.
I'm terrified of his bared teeth
And his paws upon my hips.
His tongue shakes hands with mine and I float,
Unsure where his claws will take me.
But he smells my surrender—somehow, I'm not
dismembered
Though I wish I would be.

sara bouzelmad



Small-Footed Women

by Amy Zhou

Dedicated to the billions of Chinese women since the Song Dynasty who underwent foot-binding.

Age five.

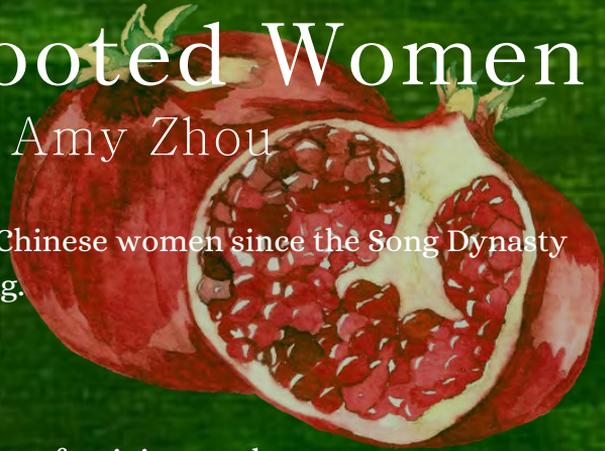
Mother's grip on your ankle, unforgiving steel
As she wraps cloth round and round the toes she broke
Then pulls—
Tight—
Till your bones grind like gravel and you shriek, sob, beg.

She sews a prison firm around your foot,
Merciless in her silence.
With the final knot, she lets you go.

Her cruelty ebbs, but your pain does not
Your feet scream in betrayal.
You cannot look into her eyes
Without seeing a monster.
“For your own good” has never hurt worse.

In sympathy, Mother unravels her wrapped stumps
Two ugly, grotesque lumps
Mutilated by what she calls beauty

You do not care for beauty if it is hell
But she does.
When you are older, she says, you will understand.



Age thirteen.

No gossip slips Mother's keen ears
The marriageable men in the city
The girl next door with golden lotus feet:
Three inches, dainty, useless
Gossip is all Mother has since she cannot walk.

Your feet are larger than three inches
Crude and clumsy, neither dainty nor serviceable
Packaged in embroidered shoes the size of grapefruits
Peel back the layers and you will not find citrus
But rotten deformity.

You tighten your own bindings now.
You were born into this prison,
And you must play the game.
You think you know it.
You pull tighter—
Tighter—
More—

Till your bones grind like gravel and the sound, the pain, is
solace.

Age sixteen.

In a day you will be married
To a faceless man
Who will toy with your broken toes
Find your swaying hips as you struggle to balance
Erotic

Mother decks you out in red and gold
Rents a palanquin so you need not hobble
She is pleased, for she has waited sixteen years for this:
Your departure to another home,
Settled, secure, off her back.

You have waited your whole life for this:
This new warden, this unfamiliar cage
Of which your only window is beauty
Measured in fertility and small feet
Now, you think you understand.

Age eighteen.

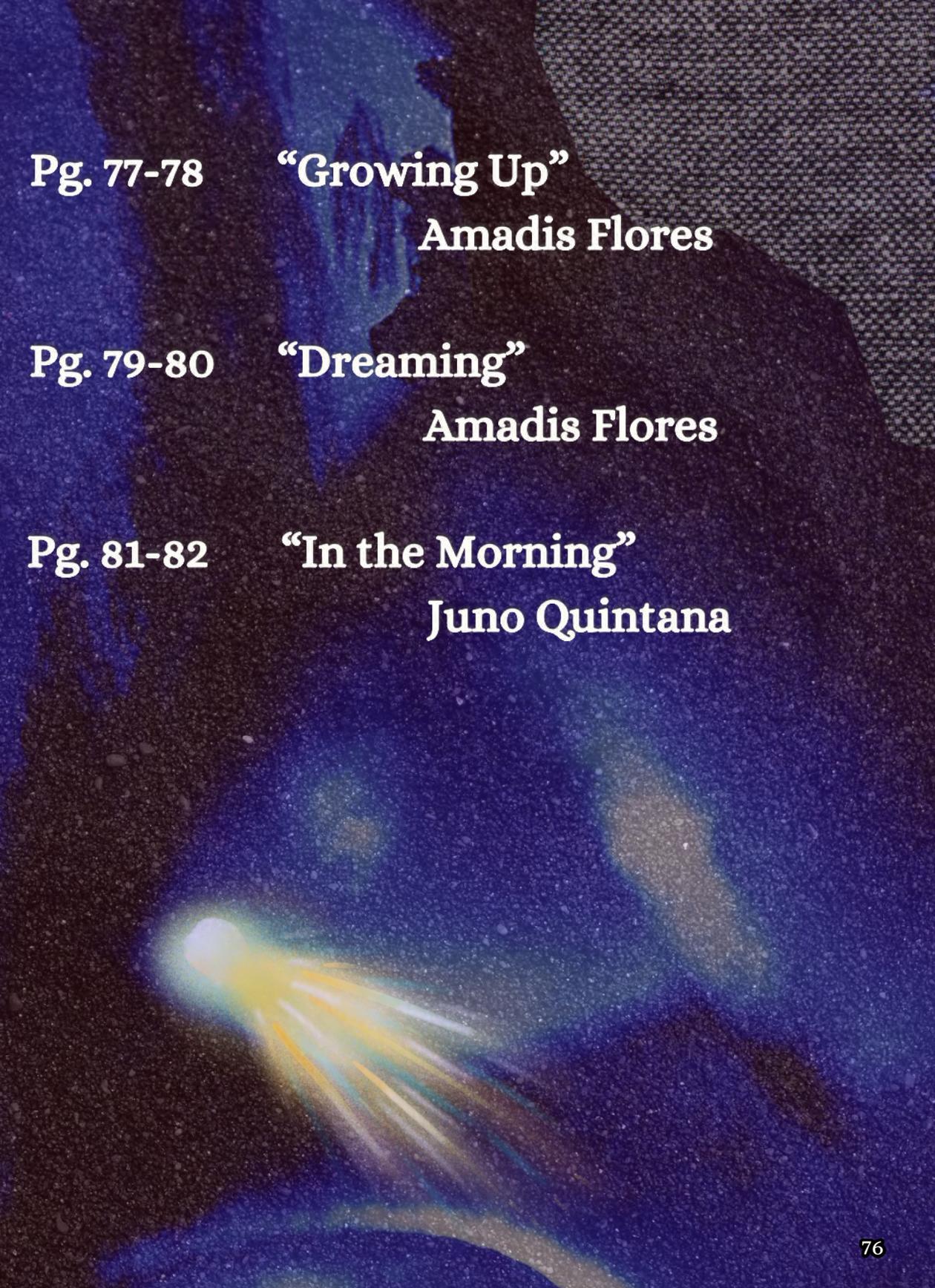
A daughter. Your own.
You love her with all your being
And fear yourself.

Her feet are so small.
They will not stay that way
And you will become her jailer, for her own good.
There is little else you can do, born into this hell
Called womanhood.

You embrace her
Not quite as tight as cloth bindings
But almost.



MUSIC



Pg. 77-78

“Growing Up”

Amadis Flores

Pg. 79-80

“Dreaming”

Amadis Flores

Pg. 81-82

“In the Morning”

Juno Quintana

Growing Up

by Amadis Flores

Every day's the same, 'least it's what I realized
Good afternoon, terrible morning, that's just how it goes for me

Figured out I'm not as dense as I once thought I was
Holding on to the things that I tried letting go

Strong perfumes and a finger typing down my every thought
A rocking horse that I can't fit into cause I'm growing up

Self-assessed but not assured and that's just how it goes
Figuring out what's right or wrong is much more draining than I
thought

Holding back words to seem like I know what's going on
Still, every day's the same cause I can't get my help

Holding hands and waking up to alarms that won't subside
Jumping frogs and reminders every day I'm growing up

Two more years and I'll forget the number on my ID
Simple songs can never show the thoughts within my mind



Sample credits:

Playground Sample – The Sound Studio

"I don't want to grow up" – AFVMobile

Kids Fighting – Videvo

Dreaming

by Amadis Flores

The sun in the sky is burning brightly
As I lay singing softly and lightly
For my day work is done
I now lounge in the sun
There's no reason for dreams to stay nightly

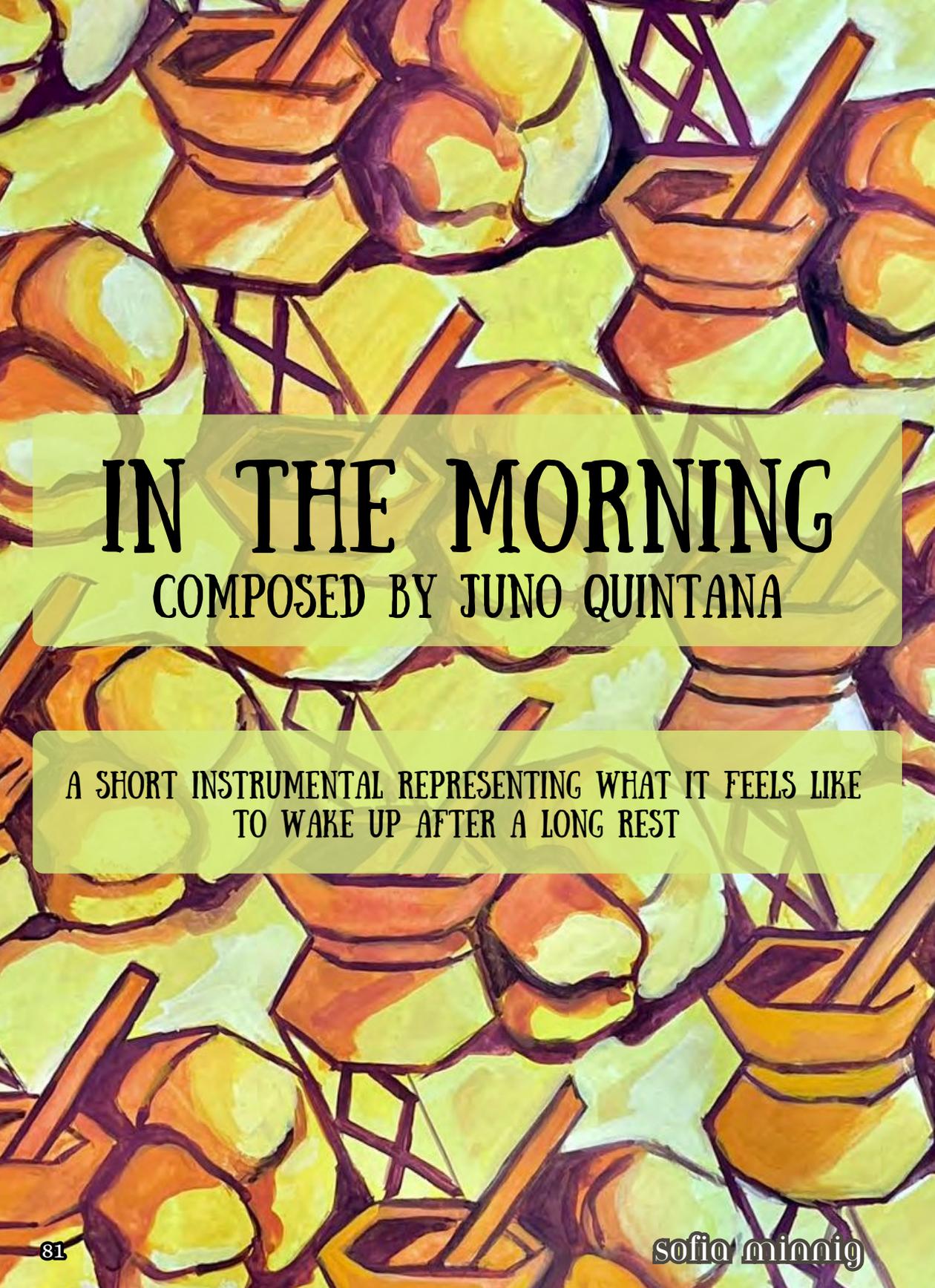
Dreaming of a place by the ocean
Where words of love go unspoken
For I have found my home
I don't feel so alone
Everything in my dreams invites me

The people down below in my apartment
They won't take a break from their departments
For the work isn't done
They don't understand fun
There's no reason their dreams should stay nightly

Just one thing at a time, and you'll be fine
Things get overwhelming and that's okay [x2]

The sun in the sky is burning brightly
As I lay singing softly and lightly
For my day work is done
I now lounge in the sun
There's no reason for dreams to stay nightly





IN THE MORNING

COMPOSED BY JUNO QUINTANA

A SHORT INSTRUMENTAL REPRESENTING WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
TO WAKE UP AFTER A LONG REST



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