

blueprint

The Isolation Issue
Volume 20, Issue 1, November 2020



CONTENTS

VOLUME 19, ISSUE 4, NOVEMBER 2020

“ Isolation is a way to know ourselves.

FRANZ KAFKA
(1883 - 1924)

LITERATURE

- 8 Anywhere To Go
CAMILLE DEGHAN
- 12 Tiny House
SONNY DAZE
- 14-15 there's still a light in the house
DEANNA FITZGERALD
- 16-17 Subject-27 Transcript Day 412 (Isolation)
13:00
ANONYMOUS
- 20-21 Nowhere Land
ASHLEY DI PERNA
- 28 A Journal Entry
PREYE ADUWARI
- 32-33 Irreconcilable Differences
DAVID MUNROE
- 34-35 Hot Cheeks
CLARA ROSA

ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY

- 4, 18 JAVIER DE PAZ GARCIA
- 5, 8, 9, 21, 30, 35 ISABELLA ANDRADE
- 5, 32 DESIREE STREEF 14, 30, 31 JOE LETHBRIDGE
- 5, 6, 11, 19, 20, 25, 33, 34 LAUREN ITKIN 15 JAMES SILK
- 7, 36 SEBASTIAN WOO 16 ANJALI MATHIALAGAN
- 10, 31 @SONDER.BLUE 24, 29 LARISSA HAUCK
- 13 KAREN CHEN 30, 31 JOSEPH DOWDS

POETRY

- 4 The Party
AMICHAH ABRAHAM
- 6 Waves
A. POEMS
- 11 Lacking the Words
ANTHONY SIPRAK
- 19 A Place Made Ready
MEGHAN MAZZAFERRO
- 22 Just go to the Record Store
and Visit Your Friends
ISABELLA ANDRADE
- 25 Fear
NADICA TERZIEVA
- 30-31 Deafening Silence
THYA DRAGON
- 33 It Doesn't Have To Be This
Way
CAMILLE DEGHAN
- 37 My Forgotten Things
TYRA FORDE
- 38 Smiling
AMICHAH ABRAHAM

Front Cover Back Cover

TAMAR YASHOOA LARISSA HAUCK

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Isolation has been a grey area. The days have blurred into one since Canada went into lockdown in March 2020. The year is almost over and yet it feels like nothing has changed, as we all stare out our windows watching spring turn to summer, summer to autumn, autumn to winter.

Isolation has been a test of priorities. Businesses have to adjust to an online format. Friends start online gaming. Relationships sink or swim. People have had to adjust their priorities. Which is more important to you? Your wellbeing or your career? Can you find a way to keep both?

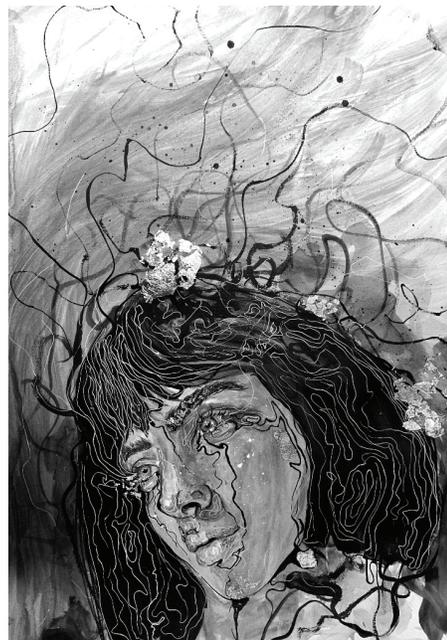
Isolation is a rebirth. Feuding family members bury the hatchet. Old friends from high school reconnect. Partners take the next step because they don't want to lose each other. We have all found out who is truly there for each and every one of us. Who stuck around when the world stopped? Who left? Who came back?

Isolation has been a learning process for all of us. We fell. We laid on the floor and cried. We sat up and stared at ourselves in the mirror. We got up. We dusted ourselves off. We frantically paced our personal space. We had time to THINK.

Coming out of Isolation, we will add colour to our lives.
Rachel Panico,
Editor-in-Chief

MUTED

Tamara Yashooa



Muted: A pretty smile always hides the deepest secrets. The most beautiful eyes have shed the most tears. The kindest hearts have experienced the most profound agony.

The tactile fluid line-work in this piece conveys ones' masked emotional and psychological expressions. It transports the matter of finding a true identity within the self.

@onyx.art_tamar



@Blueprint_Mag



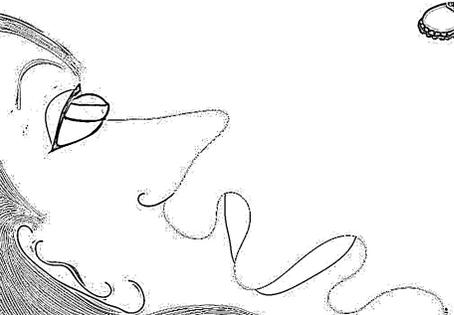
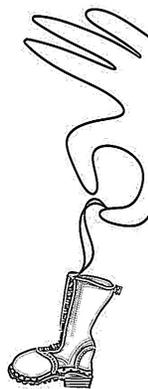
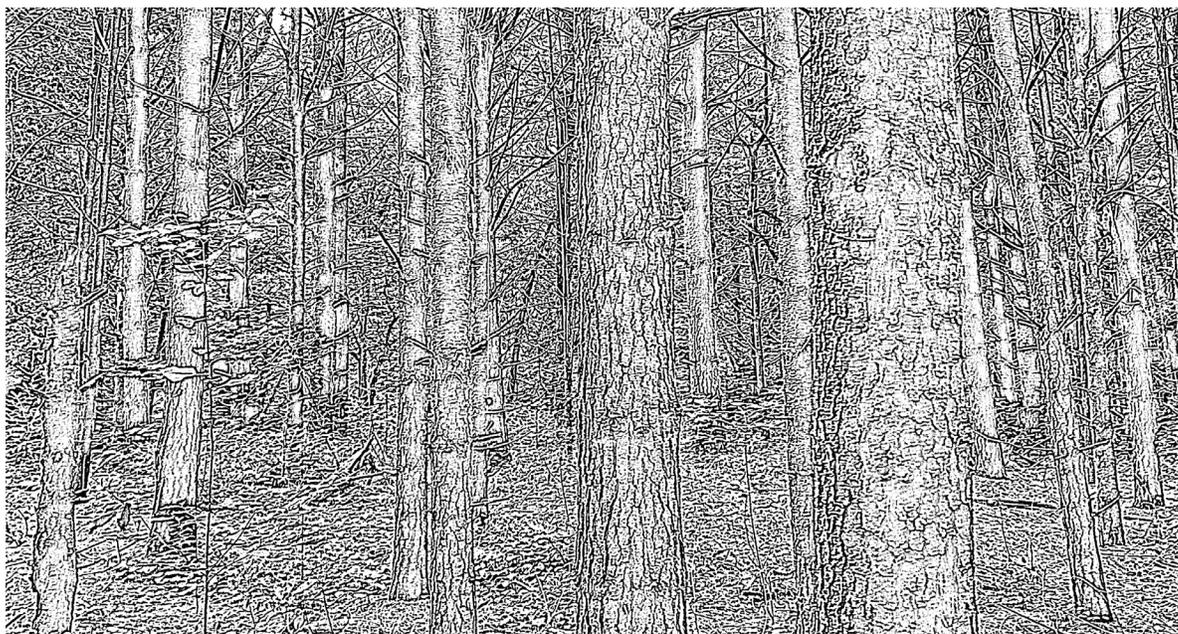
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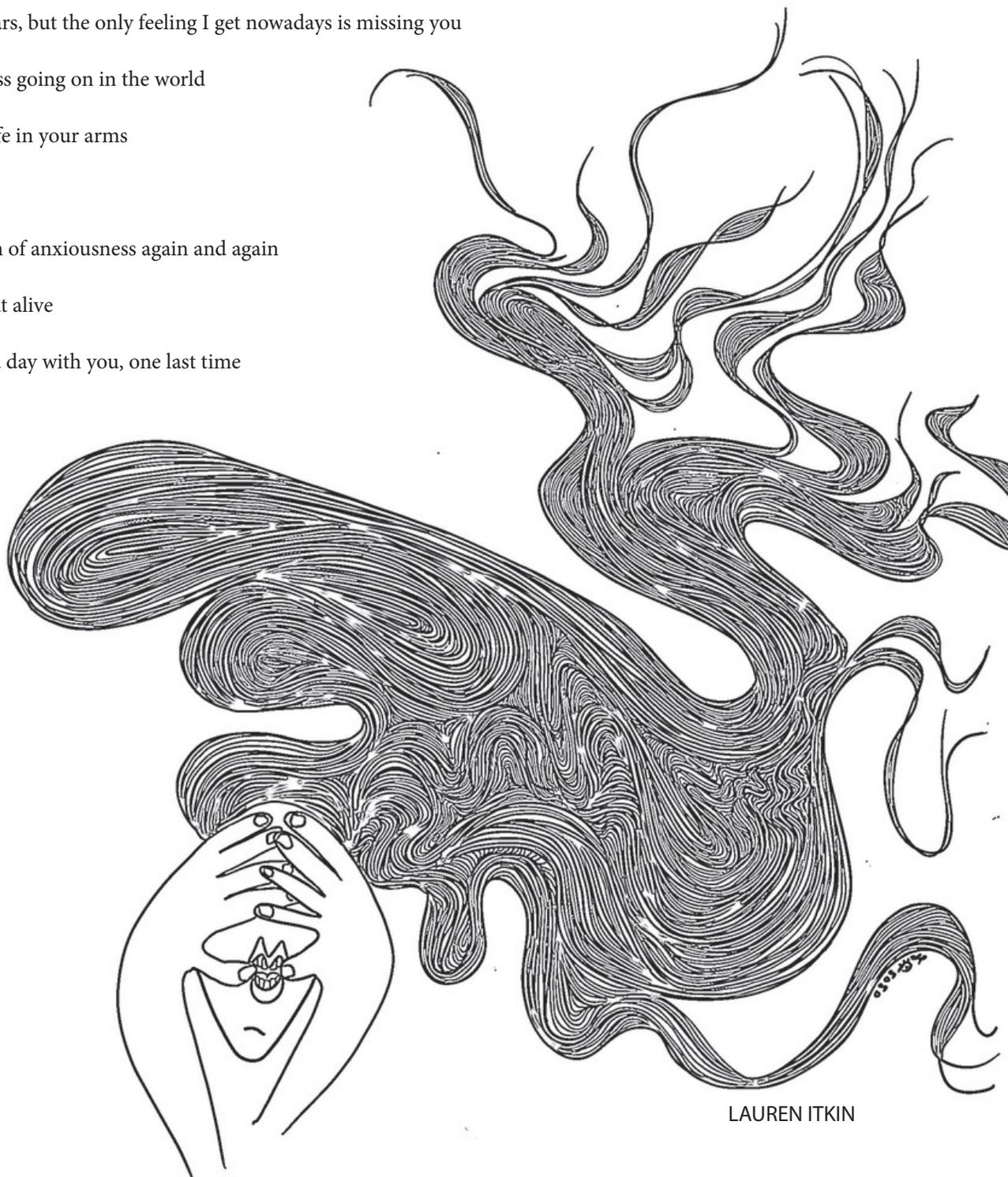
DESIREE STREEF



Waves

A. POEMS

The waves are hitting me stronger
Don't know how long I'll keep my head above water
The days felt like years, but the only feeling I get nowadays is missing you
With all this madness going on in the world
I just want to feel safe in your arms
But I'm alone
Caught in this storm of anxiousness again and again
Trying to make it out alive
So I can just spend a day with you, one last time



LAUREN ITKIN

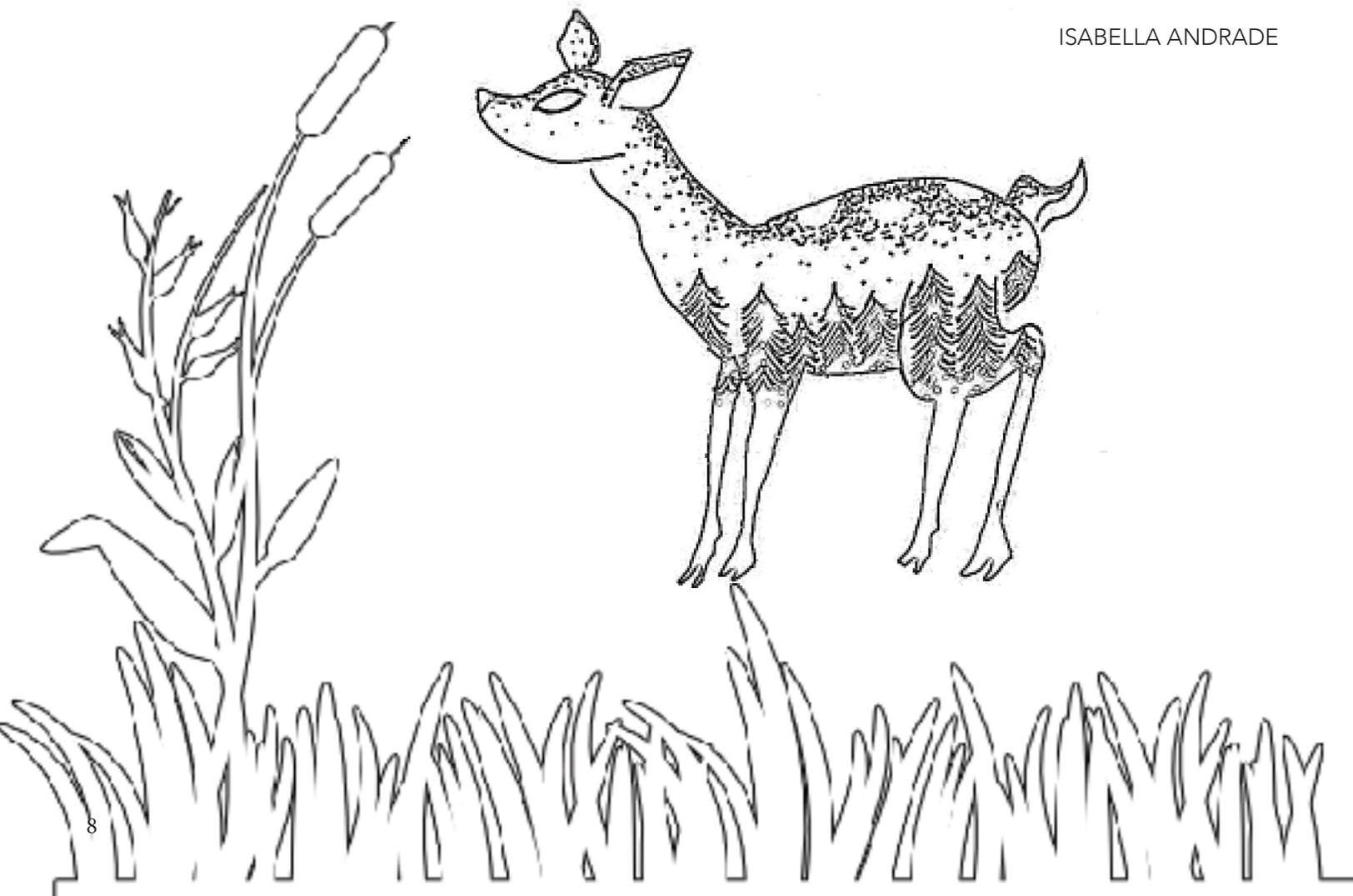


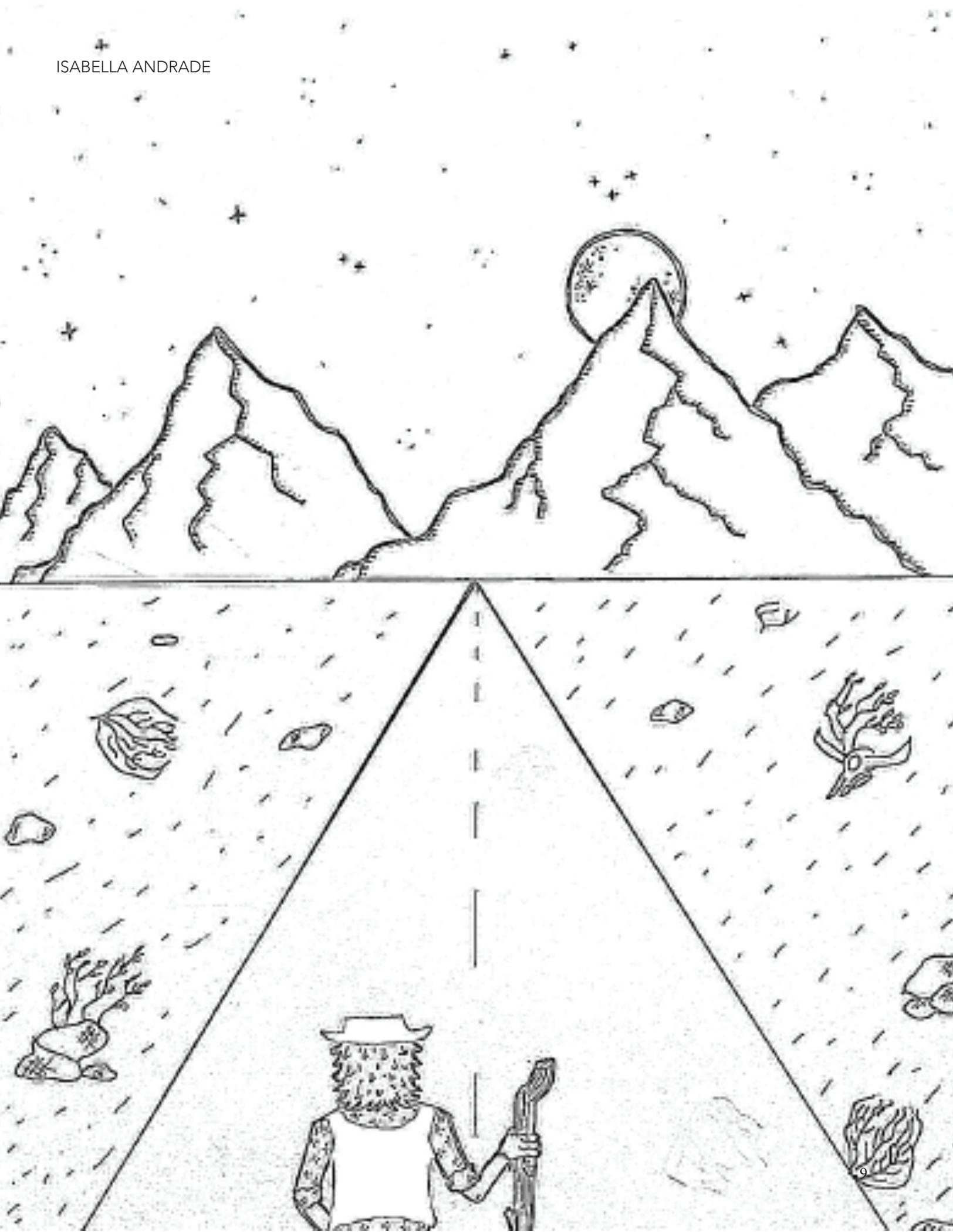
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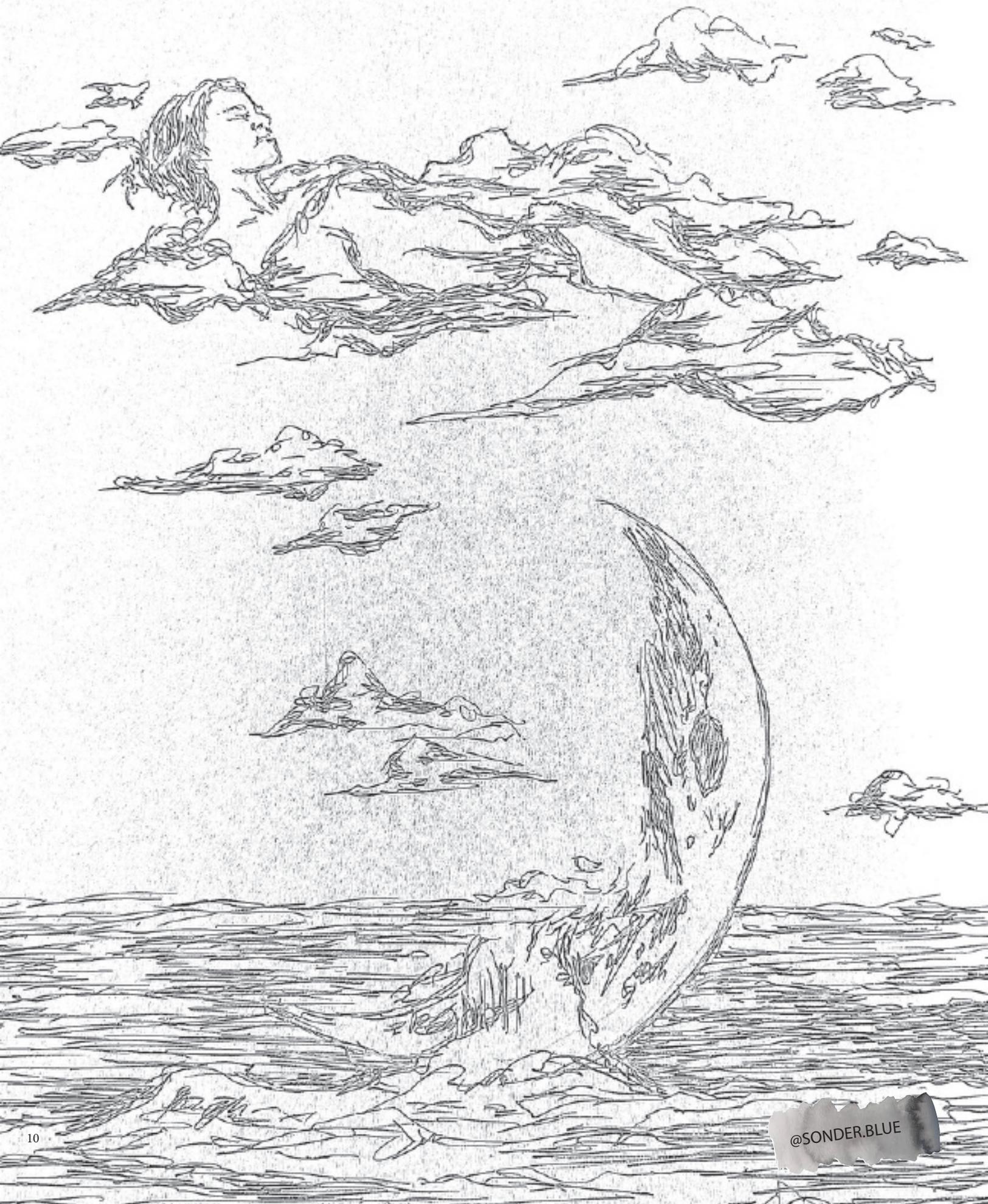
CAMILLE DEGHAN

The sun disappears, unable to fight its way through the small cracks of thick trees. The sound of rain pounding down muffles any chance of hearing footsteps or the cry of an animal. The ever-growing accumulation of wet, squishy mud prevents swift movement without fear of falling, or worse, fear of getting stuck. Trapped with the knowledge that being able to go in any direction is not necessarily a blessing.

ISABELLA ANDRADE







Lacking the Words

ANTHONY SIPRAK

I'm beginning to have a distaste for language
The roughness of it, the imprecision
There are countless rounding errors, describing one's mind
Because every thought is a fractal
Every emotion, a spectrum
Yet words alone are so shallow

I wish I could invite you in
Show you the shape of my wonder
And have you peer down from the edge of that mighty chasm
Because for some feelings, representations won't do

I wish I could show you the enormity inside me
The great secret, unknown and unteachable
If only you could gaze with me, at the horizon inside
And see why there are no words



LAUREN ITKIN

Tiny House

SONNY DAZE

The big white house stands over the cobblestone driveway. A ring of trees surrounds the evergreen lawn. The barbed gate shines like obsidian in the moonlight. The fortress is complete with a porch of Grecian columns. The black windows watch all the way to the hills. Inside, statues of the old gods are the only inhabitants. The chandelier twinkles when cold air whistles through the empty clutter. The blank walls cast shadows on the clean furniture. The only wall art is of birds – sketches of birds, paintings of birds, photographs of birds. Porcelain birds sit on crisp bookshelves. The rooms echo with every footstep, careful of its curious intruder.

In the kitchen, the cream soup sits ready-made on the table, served in delicate China. Steam rises from the ashes of freshly plucked vegetables. The stove is still on. There is one chair, one bowl, one silver spoon. The smell of pureed leeks coats the tongue. Eat and stay with us. The double doors are open and the white curtains wave in the cool breeze coming from the garden. The moo smiles on the blue violets, blood flowers, the pink peaches in the orchard, the green grapes in the vineyard. The fountain in the centre of the concentric circles spouts too-blue water out of the statue of a peeing boy. Cupid shoots an arrow at the dried up birdbath, while his mother, Aphrodite, blesses the big white birdhouse with seed. Rusted benches perch on the edges of the garden, sitting under shadowed branches.

A shy gravel path leads to the right, so small it could be missed. The manufactured garden turns into wildflowers, wild berries and wild animals, tall grasses, chaotic leaves, and rough bushes. Dark trees watch over young saplings. A fallen trunk rests across the path. The rough wood is coarse under warm skin. The smell of smoke drifts in the air overhead. In a clearing is a tiny house, it's peeling paint a pale yellow. The rusty handle gives easily and the door swings open. The floral furniture sits around a bowl of fresh lemons. The fridge is covered in magnets from far away lands and artwork from colouring books. The plush carpet warms the toes and there's tea steaming on the cracked windowsill.

Deeper.

There is a staircase leading down to a blue room. The sky walls are cloudless. The ocean floor ebbs and flows in the tidy space. There's a safe in the wall with peeled black paint. The door is off its hinges. Inside is an old leathern briefcase. Its contents roll when it's removed from its home. The case opens with a creak and the leather flakes between calloused fingers. A bird charm, another silver spoon, two keys – one golden, the other chipped and browned with age – and an empty matchbox.

There is a crash in the distance. Upstairs, through the dirty window, a mountain of smoke escapes the big white house as it collapses.



KAREN CHEN

there's still a light in the house

Deanna Fitzgerald

iridescent-linkin park

The sound only came through one ear. It was a bit grainy, because the radio signal wasn't so strong in the living room, but she stayed put on the couch anyway. She thought of her room, of the stronger signal she knew was there; of the single lamp trapped in the corner emitting the only source of light while the rest of the room remained shrouded in darkness; of the creak of her wooden bed frame echoing off the walls whenever she moved as the only sound save for her own breath. She stayed on the couch.

There she sat amidst the upholstery stains, her face lit by the overhanging bulbs from above, one ear tuned to the radio while the other took in the sounds of her parents murmuring in the next room. Everything combined into a low hum that thrummed around her entire head the way wrapping paper did a Christmas present. When she closed her eyes she could imagine herself on some faraway island, one where there was always music playing and there were always people around to be heard and she could always tell it was light out even when it was nighttime. For a second, she could feel that little ball of worry that always seemed to tighten her chest and make her stomach heavy melting away at the edges.

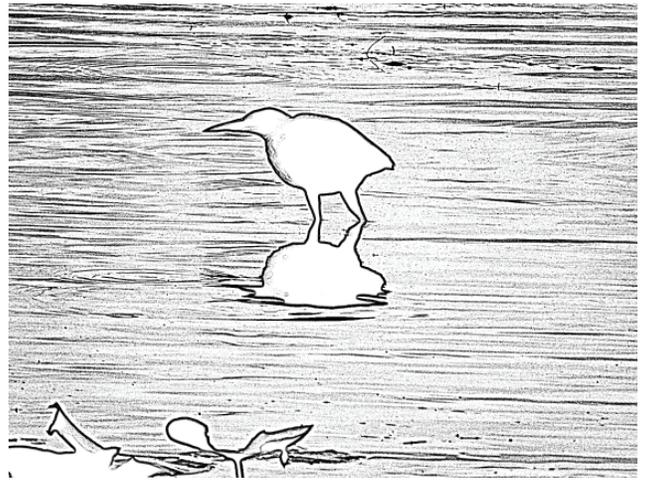
vol-14

vol-15

vol-16

liability-lorde

The sound of shouting broke her from her imagination. A door slammed shut, footsteps echoed off the dining room's hardwood flooring, and the sound of her parent's raised voices snaked toward her. She imagined her free ear rotating in their direction like a dog's, while the rest of her body sank further into the couch cushions in the hope of remaining unnoticed. When her parents came into frame she stared straight ahead and watched them from the corner of her eye.



JOE LETHBRIDGE

In her mind, she was nothing more than a fly on the wall. She knew if they saw her they would start yelling at her too, and then they'd say a bunch of things they would later claim they didn't mean, which didn't make sense to her because why would they say them if they didn't mean them, and then she would start to feel the salt spilling down her cheeks and they would send her to her room, the one with the small lamp and the creaky bed frame and the loud darkness. So she sat there, her eyes trained on the handle of the sliding glass door, and she listened to the static of the radio with one ear and the cracks in her mother's voice with the other. A fly on the wall.

price tag-jessie j

vol-17

vol-18

It was the same fight they had had last weekend. It always started the same way: with hushed tones in another room talking about one of the bills that needed to get paid. At first they spoke in quiet voices, like they were trying to avoid waking a baby, and then they would get louder and louder, until eventually they must have said fuck the baby as their voices spilled out into every corner of the house. And then she stormed out and he followed her to the kitchen, all the while they were screaming like they wanted to wake every baby in the neighbourhood.

They stopped for a few seconds in the kitchen, maybe to catch their breath. Then it started up again. He told her that every penny he made was gone the next day and she told him it wasn't her fault they didn't have enough to pay that company and he told her they'd have more money if she didn't spend so much and she told him they'd have more if he didn't drink so much—

love the way you lie-eminem ft. rihanna

—and then he opened up a bottle and said ‘like this?’ and downed it right in front of her and she said she hated him and he said he wished he never married her and then she turned around and placed both hands on either side of the sink like they didn’t know what was going to happen next but they did. And as he continued to drink she turned her face away so no one could see the salt starting to come out of her eyes. Then she grabbed the edges of the counter to steady herself, and her daughter saw her back start to arch like the cat’s did when it got scared. So she took her headphone and tuned her other ear to the radio as well, because she knew she didn’t want to hear what came next.

JAMES SILK



vol-19
vol-20
vol-21
vol-22

She listened with both ears on the melody, the harmonies, the backbeat, and everything else she could remember went into a song according to Mr. Leon in music class. When she was really focused she almost didn’t notice the sound of her mother’s sobs from the sink. Almost.

superheroes-the script

She never closed her eyes. She kept them fixed on the glass door and imagined a EKG monitor line painted across it, but instead of measuring heartbeats it corresponded to the music beats, and then everything was okay. If there was music in both her ears and in front of her eyes then it meant she couldn’t hear the sobs, or the bottles clinking, or the cutlery drawer opening. There were no keys rattled or front doors being slammed as he took the car and drove off, and there were no words shouted after him or hair pulled or water that washed away the blood in the sink. There was only the beat, pumping as clear before her eyes as her heart did under her chest.

She thought of the island she had imagined, of that brief fleeting glimpse into paradise, and a pang of longing seized the ball of worry in her stomach. It sat with her at first, making itself known, and then she started to feel it as it ate up her insides. It slithered around in her belly, then up her throat, through the chambers in her heart, and into her brain, where it dissipated into an acidic fog over her mind.

All of her senses were seized by the fog. It felt as though she were trapped in the middle of a dust storm, willing her voice to scream for help but not being able to move or produce a sound. She was simultaneously experiencing nothing and everything at the same time; the fog cancelled out the entire rest of the world except the white noise, which was blaring like a fire alarm through her head. It brought her back to that loud darkness, the one she usually only found in the corners of her room alone at nighttime. She couldn’t focus on the music anymore-as far as she could tell it had stopped playing entirely-because there was only fog. She curled her knees into her chest and began rocking back and forth, willing herself to see, feel, hear anything but the fog.

vol-23
vol-24
vol-25
vol-26
vol-27
vol-28

She buried her head in her lap and began to hum. Her nails had dug into the skin on her legs and blood had started trickling down them, staining her only good pair of jeans that she had gotten as a gift for her birthday, but she didn’t even notice. To her there was only fog. The salt she had tried so hard to keep back had begun to spill out, and she sat there on the couch-unnoticed, longing, anxious, wishing, sobbing, imagining, rocking, falling, lost-while her mother turned off the last light in a daze and went upstairs to sleep alone.

there’s still a light in the house-valley



THE HUMAN CREPUSCULAR PROJECT

Subject-27 Transcript
Day 412 (Isolation)
13:00

Subject-27 was observed conversing with his decayed cuspid once again. Subject-27 continues to anthropomorphize.

###- alludes to a distinctive pause

Additional notes are bracketed and italicized (*like so*)

Subject-27: Don't worry Martha. I see you. I see you (*elongated pronunciation*). I'll get us out of here they just, they just, they just don't know they may keep me in here the darkness darkness but I know the way, I will find the way out Martha you hear that? The way out.

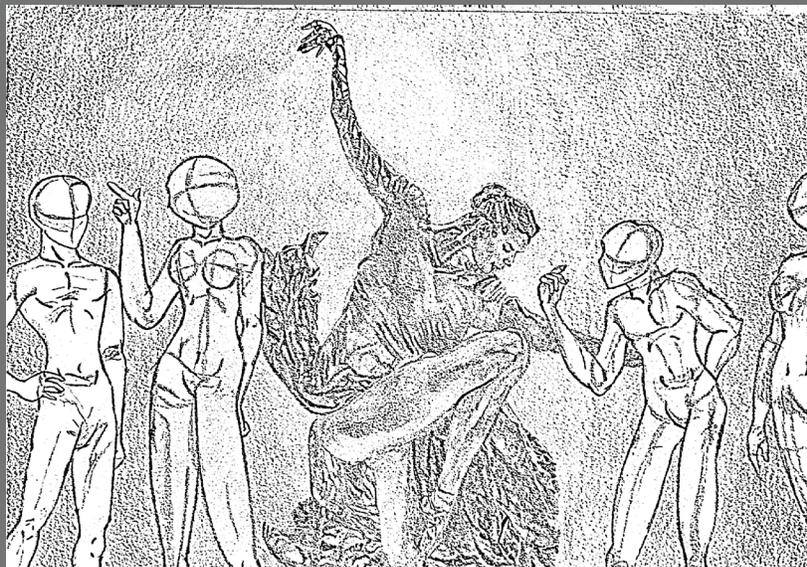
###

Subject-27: Martha how... how dare you you filthy slut. You unappreciative, I, you should thank me Martha I brought you in here and I will I am going to take you out. I still see you Martha, it may be dark but I still see you you you you you. You stick Martha, you stick to the walls (*elongated pronunciation*) in here. This place. Room. Maybe.

###

Subject-27: And it may still be dark but I still see you. You look beautiful as usual even if you do sleep around. Your red hair and your brown dress looks very beautiful your brown dress looks lovely Martha. I haven't seen such a nice dress since... well since...

- (*Subject-27 began to show physical signs of lacrimation*)



Subject-27: No, no, I'm alright, I'm alright. I saw her with it, the sun, hot oh it was *hot (elongated pronunciation)*. I miss her, the sun and her. No, I still love you but she, her, she was her and I, I, I saw, oh Martha there is no need to get jealous, it was long ago. It was months maybe years, dozens. Like I said I love your brown dress beautiful as usual and it's there, *it's there (emphasized)*, it's here... around. I can touch it like I can touch myself and Martha that, that is very special to me. That's why you, you, you mean so m- a lot to me.

###- (Lacrimation escalates)

Subject-27: Once I... I had a girl better, *better (yelling)* than even you. I can do better than you Martha and I, and I have. I've been with gi- women with fancier dresses and nicely looking hair, who take care of themselves, who aren't *constant-ly complaining about shit out of my control (yelling)*. I had people who would come up to me and and say 'hello' and I would say 'hello' to them and I breathed warm air and it was, it was, it, it was great just fine. Now I sit here, there's nothing else to do but sit in the darkness with you oh with you *(elongated pronunciation)* you who I brought here, you who will fill any hole you feel like, you who shows me *no respect (yelling)*. Nothing to do but sit in the darkness, no chair, no bed, no books to read no, no, no, no, nothing, *nothing (yelling)*.

###

Subject-27: Don't you even say, don't you say that to me I want out out of here I want out, of this place, *(yelling)* this dream. Place not in the world or time, in hell hell or the sky, nowhere. One day I'll claw my way around, out of this the room. Place. Maybe I'll even, wait, no no no Martha hey, don't cry. I'm here Martha I'll take care of you.

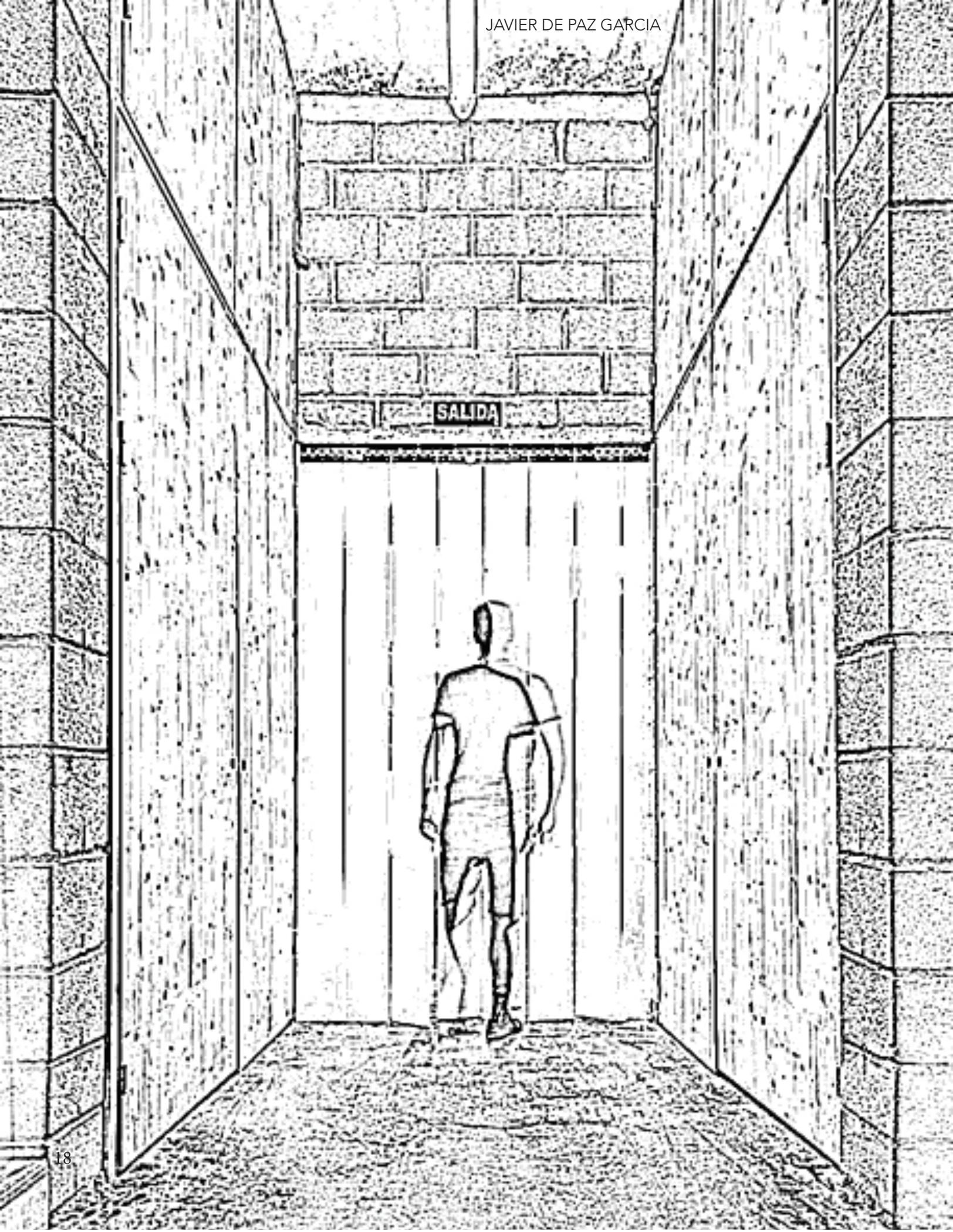
###

Subject-27: No I can cry, you don't have to come on. I'm sorry Martha I really didn't, I didn't mean it. It's been a long day, how about we get some sleep right Martha?

- (Subject placed cuspid into the area of his mouth where prior the cuspid had fallen out)

Subject-27: Goodnight Martha, I'll, I'll see you in the morning sweet one. I love you.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



A Place Made Ready

MEGHAN MAZZAFERRO

Loneliness is clean floors

After donating the old, purging the
Heavy weight that has grown
In piles in the
Corners of the room.

Loneliness is rooms built up

Instead of out, because my space is
Small, but I'll do what it takes
To make this gloomy place a
Home for you.

It's letting go of things I've kept

For years to make space for the new,

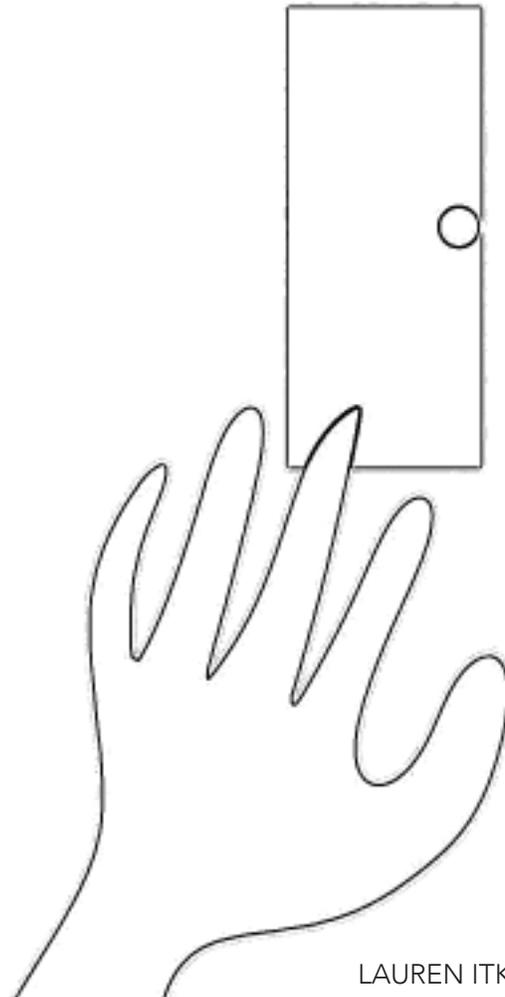
And making room for you in bed.

It's letting myself imagine what it would be like:

To give in to the steady aching in my chest;
To feel the heady rush of hope;
To choose to bring you into my home.

Loneliness is being ready

And still being alone.



LAUREN ITKIN

Nowhere Land

ASHLEY DI PERNA

Tuesday March 17th, 2020 - Day 1 in Quarantine

I was only supposed to stay at the cottage for the week of March Break, but I guess I should have taken these Covid threats a lot more seriously because I couldn't get back home. I've been living in New York City with my girlfriend but I was still a Canadian citizen, so when they shut the borders down after I went to Muskoka for the break, I got stuck there.

Out of all the places to be stuck, a cottage is one of the best-case scenarios. If it weren't for all the travel restrictions, I would have invited all my friends over for a guys' night out to paint the town red. The only real problem was that the cottage was surrounded by nothing but hills and forests and creeks. The nearest house was a 10-minute drive but it's probably empty, seeing as most people decided not to go on vacation when the pandemic started.

I'm all alone here.

Wednesday, March 18th, 2020 - Day 2 in Quarantine

I went to the grocery store and they basically threatened to kick me out if I ever came back. Turns out all items had to be delivered and you were not allowed to greet the delivery people at the door. That trip to the grocery store was my last human interaction for a while.

I wish it could have been more pleasant.

Monday, March 23rd, 2020 - Too lazy to keep counting

My girlfriend had been calling but the connection was really poor, so we were forced to hang up a few minutes in. I really miss her. Maybe I'd get annoyed if I were cooped up in the same house as my girlfriend for several weeks at a time, but it would still beat being completely alone in the middle of nowhere.

I wished I had someone to be stranded with.

Friday, March 27th, 2020

Someone left a baby on my doorstep.

Someone just left a fucking baby on my doorstep. I thought I heard the doorbell ring and I thought it was the delivery guy with my groceries.

I opened the door and someone left a fucking baby because God knows I didn't have enough problems. Now I had to take care of an infant.

I called the police but they said since neither of us were in any sort of immediate danger there was nothing they could do and I should stop tying up the line because they needed it to contact other first responders.



LARISSA HAUCK

Either May or June

It was pretty obvious nobody was taking this kid anytime soon so I decided to name her.

I listed off a bunch of names to see how she reacted. The baby giggled when I said Dawn but that was my girlfriend's name and just saying the name out loud made me realize how

long it's been since we've seen each other and how much I missed her. I couldn't call her

Dawn but I did ask what other name she wanted and she made a noise that sort of

sounded like the name "Fae," so that's what I decided to go with.

I don't know what month it is.

Fae started talking, a few words here and there. I've been telling her to call me Joey, but she never seemed to catch on and just pointed at me when she wanted something. Today I said "I'm Joey. My name's Joey" to her a million times to see if she would pick it up. She looked back at me and said "dada." I started crying.

I love this kid so much.

I'm not even sure the year at this point

They announced on the news that travel between Canada and the United States would open up, which meant I could go home. I've been packing up all my stuff so I could take the first plane back to New York. Fae wasn't taking it very well. I've been explaining to her that she'll finally get to meet kids her own age and find a proper home, but all she did was scream.

May 2nd, 2020

I'm still having a hard time processing what happened, so I'm going to try writing it down.

Dawn called me for the first time in a while and she told me to go outside. We held each other, both of us tearing up. Then I told her there was someone she had to meet, and I went inside.

Fae was gone.

Everything was gone: her bed, her drawings, her clothes, her toys. The house looked like it did the day before she arrived. I started panicking because I was sure I lost her and Dawn was freaking out too because she had no idea what was going on. I think Dawn called either the police or a mental health hotline because the next thing I remembered was a psychologist asking questions.

The police call wasn't in the records and there were no baby supplies charged on my credit card.

June 17th 2020

I went back to New York with Dawn. I've been seeing a therapist. I don't know if it's helping, especially since I haven't been able to tell them how I can hear the sound of giggling and a little voice saying "dada" whenever I drive by cottage country.

Dawn and I are trying for a kid. I told her if it was a boy, she could call it whatever she wanted, but if it was a girl I already know what I'm going to call her.



ISABELLA ANDRADE

Just Go to The Record Store and Visit Your Friends

ISABELLA ANDRADE

Penny Lane's words _____ in my head as the film Almost Famous ends:
If you ever get lonely, just go to the record store and visit your friends.
So I dust off my parents' old record player and _____ the shelf,
Because I feel _____ lonely just singing by myself.

The full moon outside _____ me to play Fleetwood Mac
And Stevie Nicks' _____ alto brings me back
To my childhood kitchen, listening to solely rock
Since my _____ weren't really fans of Brahms or _____.

The next record is in _____ Village, where the folk
Scene thrives in cafes filled with cigarette _____
And Bob _____ sits with his _____, softly strumming
And Joan Baez plays beside him, _____ humming.

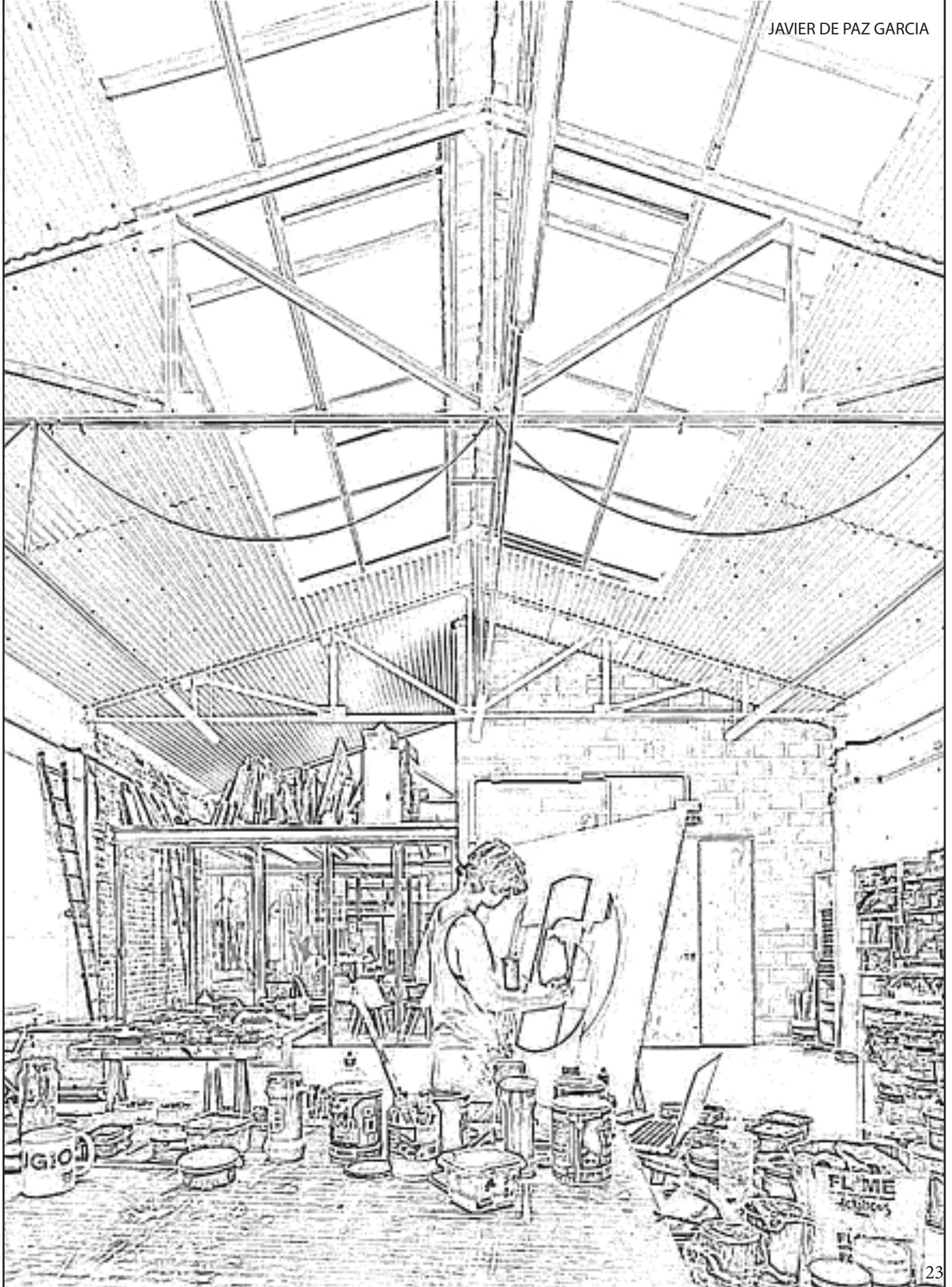
Within the _____ is a hidden treasure:
It brings me some reassurance, relief, and _____
For three _____ hours to have some company
Of someone who _____ and feels just like me.

With _____ as my dance partner
I sing a little louder and a little harder.
I groove and _____ and find Somebody
To _____ with Freddie Mercury.

I _____ this world, I am long gone
With the _____, Sir Elton John
And that _____ Dolly Parton makes me feel
Like my dreams are _____, precious, and real.

Word Bank:

spin	quarter	dreamer	compels	quietly
guitar	Love	Rocketman	valid	
vinyl	velvety	smoke	David Bowie	understands
Dylan	Bach	browse	pretty	
escape	Greenwich	pleasure	parents	echo





LARISSA HAUCK

Fear without touch

NADICA TERZIEVA

December hits and a virus goes viral.
We all look weary, going on with our days,
The weight doesn't bear down on us yet.
The sickness starts spreading, jumping across borders, and crossing lives off its list
One by one.
Devastating to many,
Too many.
Now it's March and everything's closed,
The numbers still rise.
We're locked in our homes
Only now instead of staying in for games
It's staying in to stay the same,
All while trying to stay sane.
The walls start to shrink,
Closing down on the dream that this is just some nightmare and we'll all wake up soon.
No contact and continuous social distancing,
Fitting on a masked smile to keep the isolating anxieties away,
Disillusioned at global governments for our safety.
There's a lack of physical touch,
Yet an abundance of fear.



LAUREN ITKIN

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A Journal Entry

PREYE ADUWARI

September 28, 2020

First of all, if you stole my journal and are reading this, I hope your nipples melt like plastic over a hot stove.

I had a strange day today. I kept feeling like I was floating in a stupid void and I'm not sure why. As a remedy though, I started wondering what it must feel like to fall in love. People say it's like being able to see in colour for the first time; I need colour right now to pull me out of this void.

But unfortunately, that's not happening anytime soon because even just the thought of speaking to the man I'm currently "talking to" is exhausting. Hanging out with my brothers recently has been great though, we laugh quite a bit when we talk. I see colour when we have those moments.

This has been the most transformative summer of my life. For one, I started dating which is more of a miracle than you might think. The fear of marrying the wrong person that had persisted for too long, like a bad fever, finally left me.

My friends and I saw life change in the most unexpected ways; and I started my first adult job. I also realized that I might actually die if I don't pursue my passions, I can feel it.

This was also the summer that I lived with my uncle and got converted to the religion of basketball—although it feels more like a cult if I'm being honest since the fans of this game are so intense, but I digress. This difficult year has given me the gift of a chance to slow down; it has changed me.

Whoever I will become, this summer right here was the start of it.

Preye T Aduwari



LARISSA HAUCK



JOE LETHBRIDGE

Deafening Silence

THYA DRAGON

The clock hits nine
And reminds me how you were
Once mine
Now the quiet just enters

The silence is deafening
The ghosts of times past haunt me
It all crashed down, our ending
Confusion over it all not letting me be.

The pangs of a broken heart
Of what could have been
As you chose to depart
This is a solitude I didn't come to see

Once you sat with me here
Chased away all my fears
Now there's a hole
It all takes its toll.



@SONDER.BLUE



Tick tick tick
The hours keep going by
The uncertainty making me cry
Until it's time to say goodbye
To another day, where you're still not
here.

JOSEPH DOWDS

Irreconcilable Differences

DAVID MUNROE

Reggie was upset, and as he paced back and forth, hands clasped behind his back, it almost seemed as if he moved under a spotlight. Well, actually, he did pace beneath a light of sorts, and if the scenario were taken even slightly out of context, he could have been mistaken for a thespian: a wiry, tattooed Brando in a ratty wife-beater, who poured his soul out in some grand soliloquy on a Broadway stage.

“Oh, so you think you have it bad, do you?” he asked. “Well, what about me?”

He stopped, thumped his chest with a clenched fist on ‘me.’ Then his hands were behind his back again and on he strode – all very theatrical, but a moment of this magnitude called for it, as did his need to continue without waiting for a response, so he drew a deep breath and rushed on.

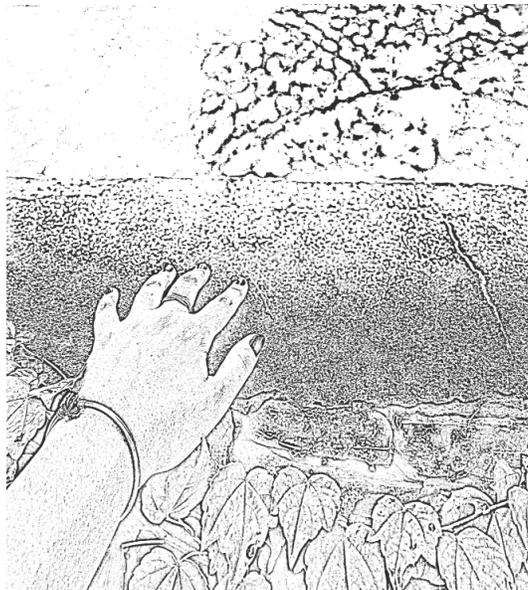
“I thought so. Women like you never have an answer to that one. But you wanna know the truth? I’ve had it right up to here with your type.” He pressed the back of his left hand snugly under his chin on ‘here,’ wiggling his fingers just a bit for emphasis. Truly, he hadn’t felt this emotional in some time, but in a way maybe the situation was good, cathartic even, and he focused on the jumble of words that fought to come out.

“You walk around in your fancy fuckin’ shoes without no holes in ‘em and your . . .” He paused now, looking for the perfect way to describe fancy fuckin’ blouse with no stains on it; but, perhaps because of the stress of the moment, the word blouse eluded him and the best he could come up with was:

“Clean fuckin’ shirt.”

“Yeah, that’s right Miss La Dee Da, your fancy fuckin’ shoes and clean fuckin’ shirt. You walk right around in ‘em thinkin’ you’re better than me while I gotta make do with rags and such.”

Because she was dressed so nicely, Reggie guessed she’d been to a party – the kind of party he’d never be invited to; maybe one of those frat things. Plus, it was late, almost morning, and he could smell the booze on her, lots of it, which meant she must have been whooping it up big-time. This whole situation was her fault; no doubt about it. And the thought of this – that she could be insensitive enough to do this to him – got him going all over again.



DESIREE STREEF

“But ain’t that the way with you and your sort? You just step into a guy’s life – right where you shouldn’t be steppin’ and without no personal fuckin’ regard – and Bam, just like that, you go and make everythin’ all fuckin’ messy for him.”

Still no response; just that passive stare. But given her position, what could she say?

Then, possibly because he’d finally felt he’d vented enough to achieve some kind of closure, or more likely because a pre-dawn glow was starting to seep into the horizon, he stopped pacing and looked directly into her eyes.

“Oh, and by the way. What I meant to say was clean fuckin’ blouse . . . although it’s not quite so clean now, is it? And with those puffs and shiny buttons on it and the way your glasses are sittin’ all crooked up on your forehead like that, you look like a total ass-clown.”

Satisfied with his last words, he turned, marched back to the late-model Mercedes stopped by the side of the road and sidled in past the open driver’s-side door. He slammed the door shut, putting an exclamation mark on the whole sad affair. It was time to move on, or it would be in a moment; first he had to rifle through the empty beer cans, the scattering of tinfoil balls, and the glittering remnants of shattered passenger-side window littering the seat beside him until he found it: the half-smoked cigarette he’d been rooting for when he was so rudely interrupted.

There it was, hiding underneath the duct-taped Advil-bottle-and-Bic-pen crack pipe. He lit the butt, drew deeply, and slipped the still-idling vehicle into drive.

* * *

Reggie didn’t look back – not for a full block, anyway, and when he finally did check the rear-view mirror, the crumpled mass lying under the blinking yellow glow of the crosswalk sign didn’t look much bigger than a raccoon carcass.

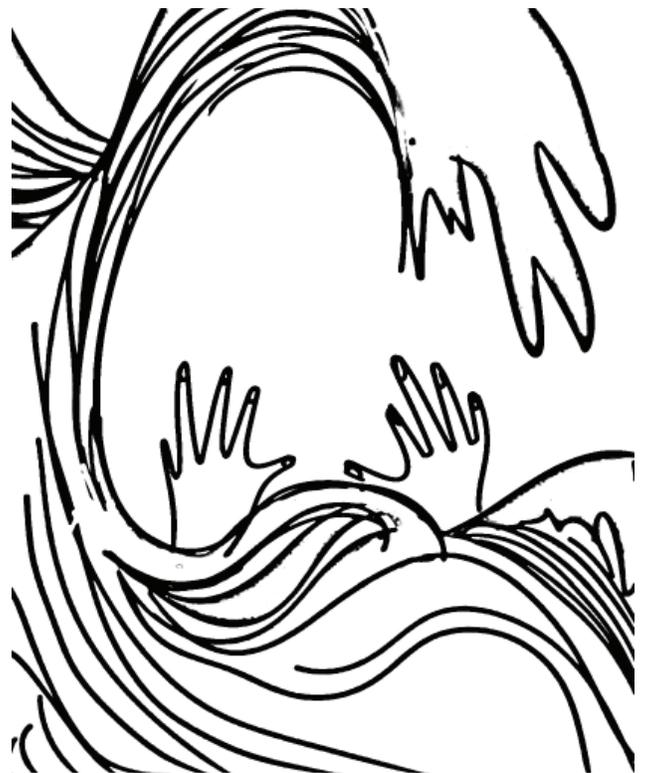
It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way

CAMILLE DEGHAN

You walk up to me, I move _____ (Away or Closer)

You cry out to me, I cry out to _____ (Escape or You)

You give me your heart, I give you _____ (Pain or Mine)



LAUREN ITKIN

Hot Cheeks

CLARA ROSA

A rumble in my lungs.

Heat flushing my cheeks.

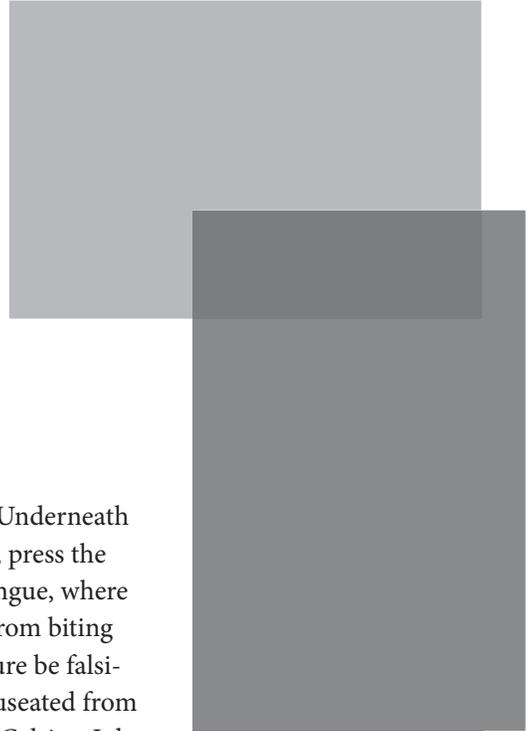
Sticky palms.

Forcing a cough, just to see.

Heat flushing my face. Fingers tremble. Hot cheeks.

Cold hands pressing onto my face, alternating between its back and palm, between my cheek and forehead.

I rummage the drawers. The lid fell off, I leave it and take only the box. Underneath an abundance of pills, I find my thermometer. I slip it under my tongue, press the button to start it. The metal edge feels hard against the bottom of my tongue, where it connects to my mouth. I press my lips together hard, barely keeping from biting down on the thermometer. Can air enter my mouth? Will the temperature be falsified? I try to catch a glimpse of the climbing numbers on the screen, nauseated from crossing my eyes. Nauseous still from the fear. Beep. Beep. 36.7 degrees Celsius. I do not have a fever.

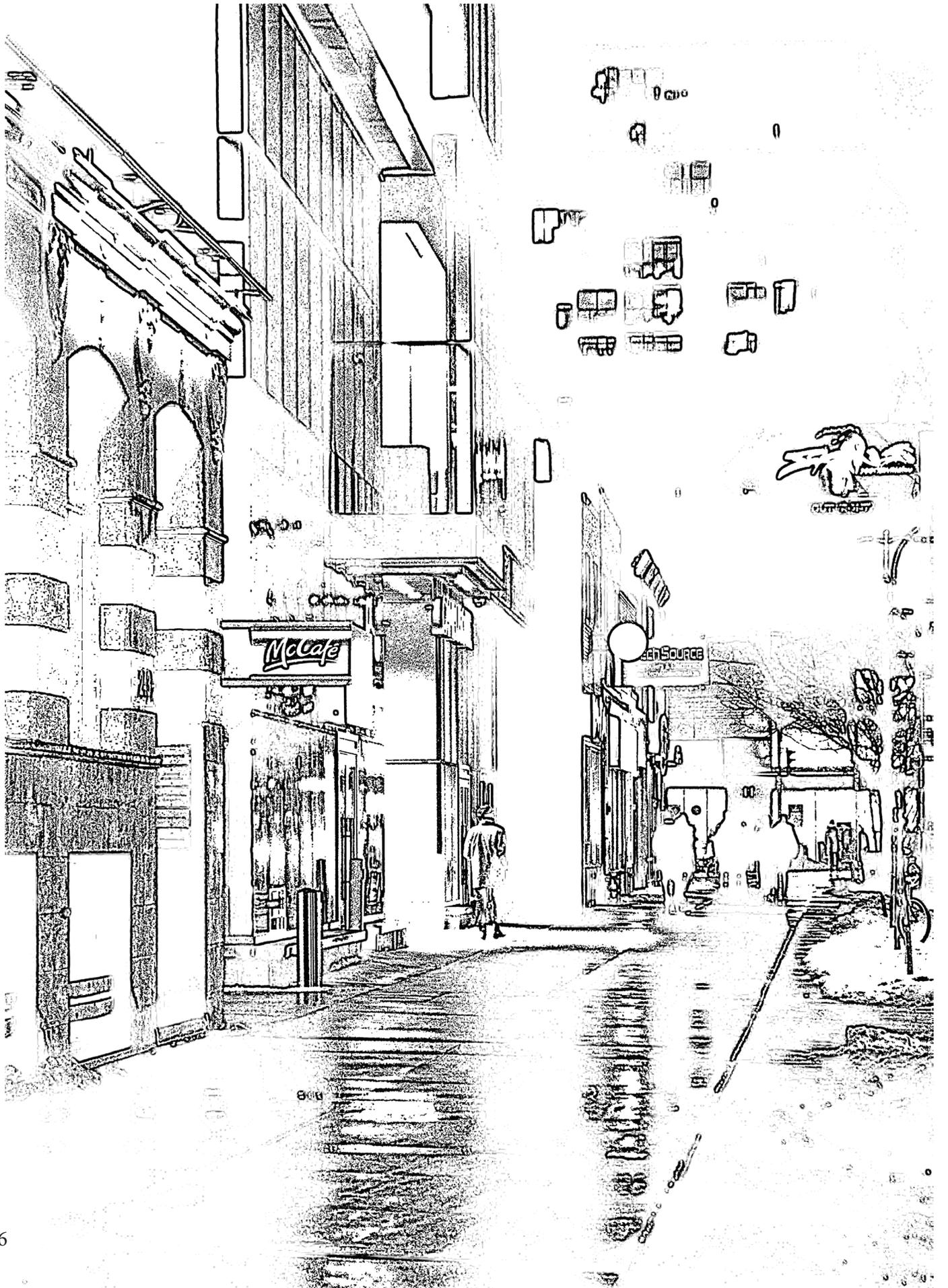


LAUREN ITKIN



I repeat this pattern every other day. I am exhausted. I long for sleep, at least as long as I am afraid. Eternally? Every other day, the days when I cannot calm myself this easily, I lay in bed shaking. The heat stays high, my stomach in knots. I feel it creeping up on me, I know it is coming. It will wash over me any minute now. My eyes start to drip, tears rolling down my hot cheeks, wetting my earlobes, sometimes flooding the couch. Shallow breaths accelerate. The first sobs escape my throat. This is the peak of it, and I feel liberated, letting the fear escape the prison of my body. I cannot come down from this on my own anymore. The feeling has grown too strong, is too present. I am not looking to rid myself from it, I merely try to loosen my muscles, to stop shaking, and to regulate my breathing. The fear stays the same.

Your body holds me still, your warmth calms my shivers, your even breath drags mine along. You tell me it will all be okay. I know that you are lying, but cloak myself in trust, for now. For now, I am not alone.



My Forgotten Things

TYRA FORDE

Crowds at concerts
and films on the big screen.

Glasses not fogged up
and smiles that can be seen.

Those moments right before
love's first kiss.

These are a few of the
things that I miss.

Crowds at concerts
and _____ on the big screen.

Glasses not fogged up
and _____ that can be seen.

Those moments right before
love's first _____.

These are a few of the
things that I _____.

Smiling

AMICHAH ABRAHAM

I'm smiling.

That means I feel _____ today.

cheerful like crying unwanted sick lively

miserable lonely like I don't exist ugly

like hiding dead in pain like garbage broken shameful

sad helpless desolate motivated upset insignificant

like killing myself empowered like hurting myself

like I have nobody happy despondent neglected

excited loved



