



*The Spectatorial's
Horror Zine*

EDITOR'S ADDRESS

Dear ghosts, vampires, dead and undead,

Thanks for picking up our horror zine! This issue's theme is *the abandoned*, where you'll be able to read about girl best friends, lambs, vampires, small towns, and operating tables. Our contributors have explored what haunts them the most, and we hope you can't shake these stories either. Happy Halloween! A note on content: this is our horror issue. Issuing general content warnings for blood, gore, depictions of violence, body horror, and animal horror. Also, a note on haunted houses: we don't know how and why haunted houses (and haunted-adjacent houses, and house-adjacent hauntings) are so popular with our student writers this year. But what a treat. We here at *The Spectatorial* love houses and hauntings both.

Thank you to all our contributors and editors for their hard work and patience. Please enjoy their efforts this October. We hope it bites you, haunts you, follows you home.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mira, Ola, and Phoebe" followed by a large, stylized "RS" monogram.

Love,
Ola, Mira, and Phoebe
Co-Editors-in-Chief and Managing Editor

ABOUT THE SPEC

The Spectatorial is University of Toronto's only genre-focused journal. Established in 2013, our masthead and writers work with mythical creatures, the gothic, deep space, and all things in between. We also have a blog where we post non-fiction: analyses, essays, and op-eds on speculative fiction media all year-round! Have a pitch? Shoot us an email at thespectatorial@gmail.com, or check out <https://thespectatorial.ca/> for blog post inspiration.

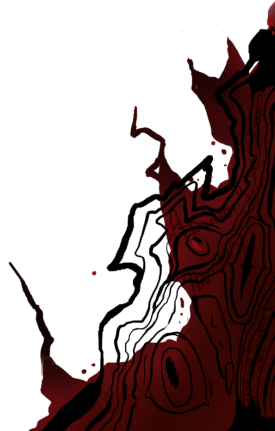
This year, we're running zines just like this one to platform flash fiction, each print themed around a different genre. Currently, our call for pitches + drafts is open for the genre: HISTORICAL FICTION: *alternate timelines*. We want reimaginations of historical events, "what if?" moments, depictions of the ramifications of a certain moment in time. Speculate about knights with fantastical guardians in the battle of 1812, discuss colonization from the perspective of a cat. What would legends from your culture think about the modern day? How would revolution change if we had magic?

Send us your ideas or drafts via the Google Form in our Instagram (@thespectatorial) bio or shoot us an email! We welcome pitches, half-baked prose, completed drafts, poetry, maps, character profiles, Pokémon cards, comics, and anything else speculative you can think of!



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MEET THE MASTHEAD

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ETERNALLY MINE, RELUCTANTLY

Katie Trottier

Edited by Phoebe Sozou

As you turn,
As I sink my sharp teeth into the flesh of your throat,
And suck all of the blood from your veins;

I can feel, can taste your memories—
Ice cream, from when your parents were getting divorced and your father took you
out for a pitying treat.
The octane gasoline that fueled the boats on the marina where you spent all of your
summers.
The water against your feet as you sat on the edge of the wooden dock, watching the
sunset as the warm summer breeze rustled your hair.
The sunset, which you will never experience again.
How you always felt more understood by the adults in your life than the other
children.
You spent all of your lunches when you were in the sixth grade with the kind librar-
ian.
You cried over roadkill,
Cried after watching the seven o'clock news with your mother and seeing the inhu-
mane crimes plastered across the screen,
Cried at the viewing of your father's aunt, a woman you had never met.
Your intense empathy for everything and anything makes you unique.
But now you must become the monster.
You will be a source of misery; a cause of funerals and news sequences; and I am
deeply regretful of what I have done.

They are a fickle thing, your memories.
Flashing and lurking in your brain like dormant sparks of light.
Now, you are here,
Bleeding out in my arms—
This is all I can think: does the hard floor you lay on remind you of the wood of the
Massachusetts docks?
Does your posture, limp and close to lifeless, remind you of your father's aunt in the
casket?
Or is it closer to the disregarded tragedy of the racoon on the side of the road?
Do you pity yourself as you pity them?

No, I pity you.

BRYONY MEMORIAL

Hibbah Ayubi

Edited by Amy Yang

The only thing everyone agreed on was that the old house had sat empty for over a decade. Red-bricked and half-hidden by ivy, an old willow tree sat bent in front of it, branches twisting like a mangled hand. Bryony had moved down the block from it when she was five, right after her aunt's funeral. She remembers so clearly, even now, the unease she'd felt on that first day, staring up at its turrets. She could have sworn she saw someone peeking out at her from behind moth-eaten curtains, but she never told her parents.

Nobody could agree on who lived there. Her parents guessed it was an elderly couple, or maybe a spinster. Paige, who lived right across from Bryony, used to say it belonged to a rich bachelor, who used his wealth to conduct secret illegal experiments, until one day it killed him. Bryony thought Paige was a half-assed liar, stupid enough to plagiarize the plot of *Frankenstein*, but she never said that to her face.

Silas, a boy who lived on the corner, said it was an old woman. One who wore ribbons and flowers in her hair, and lots of necklaces but no shoes. The night of full moons, she'd go into her backyard in the middle of the night and perform some kind of ritual to consort with spirits.

Bryony's best friend, Juniper, said there was never anybody living there. She would laugh and roll her eyes as the neighbourhood kids recount-
ed ghost story after ghost story.

"It's a load of bullshit," she would tell Bryony privately. "I mean, my parents lived here as kids, and they said there was nobody."

"Dorothy swears there was," said Bryony.

"Yeah, well," Juniper scoffed, "she also *swears* she's a virgin, so..."

"Don't be a jerk," Bryony frowned. It was Juniper's fatal flaw, her cruelty. Even to her own friends, she could be callous. She's nice enough to Bryony though, which is the reason why she let Juniper get away with it.

"I'm not being a jerk." Juniper leaned forward, resting her head against her knees. "I'm just saying." The sunlight leaking in through the window caught on the maroon dye in her hair, lighting her entire silhouette in gold.

Part of the reason, Bryony amended.

Still, she's too easy on Juniper, and she doesn't really regret it until she's standing outside, shivering in her pajamas.

"Why are we here?" She asked, rubbing her arms. She wished she'd had the sense to grab a cardigan.

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"I want to scope this place out," Juniper explained. "My parents are gonna be out of town on Halloween. We could have a rager here, if it's not like, literally falling apart."

"That's stupid," Bryony said. Some of the porch's wood flooring was missing and the entire house swayed and creaked in the wind. "Can't get any more run-down than this."

"It's still standing."

"Why'd you drag me into this?"

"Because it's fun." Juniper raised a brow.

"Not for me," Bryony snapped. "I'm going home. It's cold and this is stupid."

"No, you're not," Juniper said, matter-of-factly, climbing the steps to the front door.

It was a moonless night, and the vines crawling up the house concealed what little features Bryony could make out. Cold, grey, and lifeless, it looked like less a house, and more like a giant tomb.

"I'm not going in there," she said. "There's... C'mon, this is dumb. I'm not going."

"Oh my god," Juniper groaned. "I can't believe Dorothy actually got to you—"

"She didn't," Bryony protested. "I swear—"

"Nobody's lived in this place for years," Juniper said sharply. "Forget what you heard—"

"I literally *saw* something," Bryony hissed, "I'm not going in there. You shouldn't either."

"I am," Juniper said, reaching for the doorknob. The door swung open the second she touched it, creaking inwards. It was pitch black, absent of all light.

"Go home." Juniper turned on her phone's flashlight. "Or don't. I don't care anymore."

"This is so stupid," Bryony hissed.

Juniper didn't respond. She stepped foot into the house and Bryony watched the light drift deeper inside, like a tiny lifeboat at sea, before it was snuffed out. She glanced down the street, where she knew her house awaited her, and then back at the open, gaping doorway. It felt like the house was spilling outwards, clammy hands reaching for her.

I should go home, she thought to herself, twisting her pink sweatpants in a fist. She forced herself to move, one foot in front of the other.

I should really go home.

TARTARY

Crescentia Kim
Edited by Miran Tsay

her grandmother lived with horror.

the earth *pithoi* cultivated lamb plants: to protect them, her grandmother bought bear traps, traded for white ivy-wool at the village market. heeya knew this because she helped carry the wares, being the eldest of her cousins. ivy-wool was soft to a glove, but without one its thorns left lashes on skin, bites that stung more than sunburn.

the lambs were even worse to carry. her more experienced father told her to hold them like a baby.

‘but they’re dead.’

‘then hold them like dead babies. you’ve held one before, right?’

‘human ones?’

‘no—remember the poisoned puppies?’ her natal home in the capital used to sell guard dogs—as soon as they were weaned, they were raised outside. at night they would jump for house thief meat, worse than chloroform. it did not take long before the business fell under.

‘i’ve seen dead human babies.’

‘you have?’

‘who hasn’t?’

she lied—she had never lived in the war, but neither had her father, who had not been in the country.

sometimes the lambs twitched. her grandmother said it was because of the heat. the heat made them smell. flies would burrow into the wool, only to pierce themselves on ivy-thorn. when heeya took off her glasses, the patterns blurred, turning the lambs into piebald calves. the pattern never scattered—not even at the butcher’s.

the remains were stored in more pithoi. her cousins told her that one harvest night, they dined and played cards for too long, and were sent to bed. at midnight they snuck out to the mud chamberpot, praying that their elders would be dead drunk by then. instead they saw Grandmother, playing with the pots. stringing up boneskins. toying with feti. when they ran back to the house, they saw a half-formed lamb under the terrace. flimsy and transparent, like a steamed egg. sinews drained out of its limbs. lying in a pool of its own water. deflated.

suddenly, with a twitch, it screamed.

it kicked sand in its scurry, rolled onto its back. split itself into two, guts spilling from its seams. it ran just like that, limbs as spindly as a spider’s,

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off into the woods.

Years later, Heeya and her parents moved to the Beautiful Country, which was opposite the land of Tartary. Her parents had chosen this small town for its likeness to her grandmother's.

Much like her friends, their families, and her family's old friends who had moved here long ago, Heeya often visited the dead mall. She frequented the food court, and stared at each stall's menu, resplendent with twenty items, before ordering the same one each time. She went shopping, if shopping consisted of looking through the windows and admiring the dresses therein instead of trying them out.

Her favourite place was the theatre on the second floor. Its marquee was nowhere as large nor as pristine as the ones in the capital, back in her childhood, but its tickets were far cheaper. The theatre played chiaroscuro dramas, romantic comedies set in Europe, and historical war movies from the last hundred years, but she preferred anything that had special effects. Monsters of the week, blood pigments and flesh prosthetics—she grew a collection of posters of screaming figures in her room.

She often saw a boy at the booth. His school uniform was the same as hers, and his eyes were always glued somewhere remote. During class, he planted a rectangular device inside his desk. Within the booth, he stared up at a television set. This time, something squiggled in the corner; she could not tell if the screen had become corrupted or not.

When red transitioned into black, he jumped at her reflection above his head. "Where did you come from?!"

She pointed at the low gate beside the booth: "You didn't see me, so I climbed over."

"Well, d-don't do it again: next time, just knock."

"What were you watching?"

"The... news."

Heeya couldn't understand how someone who worked at the theatre could watch the news. "About what?"

"Some animals got sick in the zoo." A commercial break played. "And there was a grave robbery last night."

"Sounds boring."

"But they were real. They happened! Look!"

Together, they watched a clip of grainy footage. The hand holding the camcorder was shaky. The thing that was squiggling in the corner grew larger and shrieked.

It was the same lamb.

Through me the way
to the eternal pain

Through me the way
to justice

Abandon every hope,
who enter here



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INFERNO, CANTO III

Mitra Arianfar

Drawing on Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, this artwork looks at the horrors of Hell and abandonment. The sinners must cross a river into Hell and are eerily eager to do so despite the suffering that awaits them. Reason and sanity have abandoned the sinners, and we can only look on with dread at their blissful madness.

DE LUMINE

John B Harp

Edited by Nathan Agustin

I, like many people, chose to spend what few days of rest I had this year at Bear Lake. A picturesque expanse of blue, broken only by the silent wake of a skiff or one of the lazy green islands. By the shore, fields of yellow wheat beat softly in the wind.

I spent the afternoon of my arrival by the water, swimming often and resting on the shore under an ancient oak tree. Suddenly, my attention was caught by a call from the lake. A fisherman in a small canoe was hailing me from the water. A small wave of acknowledgement on my part was enough to encourage him to join me on the shore.

“Hiya, buddy! Ya new around here?” he said as he pulled his canoe onto the beach. The fisherman made his way to me under the shadow of the tree, yet a gap in the branches painted his smiling face in sunlight.

“Yeah, just got in this afternoon.” I straightened in my chair, hoping to replicate his posture as best I could.

“You know the rules? Right?” he asked sternly. The wind shifted the branches in the tree, casting a shadow on his face.

“Uhhh... What are the rules again?”

“Listen, buddy, I’m not supposed to tell visitors. It’s how we tell who’s fit to stay and who’s... well... not. Just keep your lights off after sunset. You’ll be alright.”

At this, his mouth grew into a grin. “Well buddy, I hope you have a wonderful day!”

With that, he launched his canoe from the beach, tripping on his own feet as his canoe slid into the water.

I did not return to my guest house until the sun was setting on the fields. The words of the fisherman lingered in my head. Out of an abundance of caution, I darkened all of the rooms in my house as the sun went down. A tide of blackness swept over the pink basin of the evening sky, skipping the purple twilight that would have inspired me to stay up just a bit longer. I sat at the window looking across the street at a big yellow house, silhouettes of people crossing its windows filled with golden light. In front of the house was a lamp casting a cold, white light on the road.

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As the first stars made their presence known in the sky, a figure stepped from the darkness into the light. It stood in a ragged black robe with a silver sword in its left hand, casting a cross of lamplight from its blade. When it turned towards my window, the hood cast a shadow over its eyes, leaving only its mouth visible, grinning. Slowly, it walked towards the yellow house. And I watched through the windows as each light would extinguish, followed by the white glint of the sword being swung. Had what I was witnessing been any less dreamlike, I certainly would have rallied myself into action. The figure appeared in all the windows of the house, then left through the front door. It stumbled on the steps but was able to secure its footing. It passed across the streetlamp and disappeared into the blackness. The yellow house was near invisible, having been reclaimed by the night.

The next morning, I walked across the street and found the door of the yellow house unlocked. In the kitchen, great glass windows displayed wondrous lake views. Leaning against the counter was the fisherman, drinking coffee and shielding his face from the morning sun.

“Hiya, Buddy! How was your night?”

“I must have had a bad dream,” I mumbled, still clearing the sleep from my eyes. “Say, where’s the family that was here yesterday?”

“Oh yeah, them!” He walked into the thin shadow created by the windowframe. “This turned out not to be the place for them. We avoid disruptions as much as possible here. Some people just aren’t compatible with that.” The fisherman finished his coffee, smiled, and walked past me out the door. Through the windows of the house I saw him trip on the steps, steady himself, then continue down the road towards the lake.

WANNA HEAR A JOKE?

Mitra Arianfar
Edited by Jonah Watkins

Laugh as the hours fall away with the rays of the sun, as the light slips under the surface of the earth, returning from whence it came. Laugh as you sit with premonition and dread, laugh as your patience is sliced thinner and thinner like slivers of the moon.

Here, the time runs twisted, looping like a faulty merry-go-round, jovial music echoing from an uncanny valley. Here, I lay with the unease of a sinner with the taste of God's wrath on their tongue. Here, I lay still and silent—like a child beneath a blanket, hiding from the monsters lurking under the bed and in the corner of the room, from the spirits within the shut closet and shuddering among the branches scratching at the window, where a cold ebbs in and frosts the glass, carves the path for Death.

i see his shadow in the blackness,
see it flit this way and that as if it was Peter Pan's
i see his scythe / scepter / knife, gleaming
like a treasure you'd beg to borrow if not keep,
hear his taunts, his jeers, his grinning mocker—
death, death, death by a thousand
cuts scored into my bones, night after night, plastered over by morning
yet redressed with each shift's change
my crime, my sin, my toil, darkly swept and carved under my eyes,
try a cure, try a balm,
"soon you'll sleep, peaceful and calm"
try a cure, try a balm, try ten thousand fucking remedies
fool's gold, fool's words, born from the mouth of naïveté
damn fools, beautiful fools, spare me your placations and platitudes
i'm bitter, bitter, bitter and one night, i'll bite
on my bitterness like a pill and it'll be wolfsbane, nightshade, hemlock that'll
wet my teeth and tongue
mind and body and the discord between has already been spirited away and
what's left is withering / simmering / withering
i dig my own grave under bemused stars and a Cheshire grin,
shovel dirt with one heave then another, and
when i settle into the earthy soil uncovered,

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i ask you to tuck me into the loving arms of the land
whittle away, brittle and fray,
cower and stay, there's nowhere left to stray
hear the curse of Cassandra
bear her name, bear her fate
to live Troy's fall a thousand times over,
to have your cries fall on deaf ears
i'm approaching the grave, blood staining my hands, dried under my nails,
the phantoms at my heels and the vultures overhead, trumpet call shattering
my eardrums— *what grave? what blood? what sound?*
crying wolf again and again—*there is nothing more than darkness here, "all
clear!"* cry of
fear, cry of tears,
cry at that which nears

it's happening again, it's happening again, tell all around—the girl's gone
mad, she's lost her own head, it's simply nowhere to be found!
and think! think! enemy of mine, companion by my side. think
as the hourglass sands slip over my head, as dawn creeps behind me and
sunbeams threaten from the horizon, as all the room begins to take its awful
too familiar shape and our reflections re-emerge from slumber, as the birds
chirp their greetings and salute the stirring of the world, as its wakeful turn
unearths the worms and roots and sketches the cool shadow of the trees on
the pavement, as the moon winks away into the fold of the mourning blue
sky and all we can do, staring at the ceiling, is laugh, laugh and laugh and
laugh and laugh!



WHEN AMONG CROWS

Diana Radenko

There is something to be said about horror, transformation, and blindness; whether that be blindness to one's inner desires, identity, or a purposeful lack of acknowledgment of fate. Transformation lies with flight, and in this case with the omen of corvids. The only eye to see out of this piece is that which has seen something horrific, and been opened to a vision beyond comprehension.

SPOTLIGHT WHITE

Jubran Mansour
Edited by Nathan Agustin

Elea has always been afraid of freezing to death. As a little girl, she'd spend hours imagining herself caught in a cruel blizzard, or becoming stranded all alone in an endless white, dry desert. And now it is coming. Barreling up the hill, with a gaze like a semi truck's headlights, it is coming. The cold press of its stare has set the tent walls aglow, and casts still shadows over the six people gathered inside.

"I'll make for the ridge," Elea says. A couple people nod.

"How far out?" someone asks.

"A hundred feet?" Elea guesses in a wavering voice, listening for its footsteps. She'd peek out the flap to be sure, but she's too afraid—she knows too little. Stiffly, rigidly, she draws out her knife and makes a narrow incision in the wall of the tent; just long enough to step through. All around her, similar cuts have been made, each one equidistant. They are preparing to scatter.

"I'll try and get behind our cart," says one of her companions. Elea nods. There is an awful pause.

"On my count," she says in a strained whisper.

Later, she won't remember her patchy, "Three... two... one...", but certainly it happened. For after a moment, the dry, silent night is punctuated by the sound of a tent being torn apart in a half-dozen places, and boots scattering across the dry snow.

It is there, maybe sixty feet away. It sees them, but it makes no sound, only whips its spotlight gaze between the dashing figures, searching.

Elea stares dead ahead, refusing to look as she breaks into a run. She reaches the ridge and forces herself to climb with her crunchy mittens, her stupid, huge boots. Only once she is fully up and on her feet does she force herself to look. She sees the shape of its gaze—a heinous white cone with defined edges, casting over her campsite—before she sees it. In a way it looks like a man, but it is something *else*; warped by the cold, transformed by freezing. She can see it in the way it moves, so fluid and unnatural. She can see it in the white light shot from its featureless face, and ringed by its hood.

Then its head swivels towards her, and in an instant, she is alone in the cold. She realizes that something in it is terribly familiar. She knows this feeling; she has felt it countless times before, only now, she cannot wake up.

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She drops onto her stomach, pressing her cheek to the dry snow and using the angle of the ridge of the cover.

There's a silence below that stretches for what feels like forever, broken only by the occasional twang of an arrow, or a frantic shout. Every once and awhile, she tries to get up and help her friends.

Or she tells herself she is trying. The dim bleed of the light below swings out the corner of her eye.

Then, then, it is gone. No one cheers,

There is another awful pause,

Then a hand crests the rock line in a fluid motion, inches from Elea's face. She scrambles back frantically, uselessly.

It pulls itself over the ridge.

Someone yells her name, but Elea doesn't hear it. Its body is in full view, but Elea doesn't see it. All she sees is the pure, white light, shining point blank in her face. It is like how she's always imagined the light of god, only colder—devoid of kindness.

Her heart thumps too softly, too slowly. More shouts. Too far. They may as well not be there at all, for all the good they can do her. One moment, she is violently shivering. The next, she is too cold to do even that. Her retinas are burning. She tries to weep, but her tear ducts are frozen. She tries to sob, but her lungs won't move.

She can't move.

It really had come for her, hadn't it? It must have heard her, in her anxious dreams. It must have come to snuff out her flowing, twisted fantasies. Every pitched night she'd spent awake, letting her mind run, that's what had brought it here. She knows it. She tries to get a better look at it, straining to make out the shape of a face, of anything. Nothing. Just white—pure as a clouded night is black.

Her heart thumps, so dim, like it's in another room.

And now the cold is becoming her, melding with her flesh, like it's all she's ever known. Like it's all she's ever been.

The blood in her heart goes stiff.

She feels empty, like she's never been touched in her entire life. Like her skin has always been frozen, though that's not the fact that bothers her. At this moment, Elea realizes she was never really afraid of freezing to death; she just hated the thought of being alone while it happened.

"Help..." she tries to whisper,

And no one hears her.

TELL ME A STORY

Jai Mann
Edited by Chris Wang

There was a fellow I used to know. He would sit in his chair in the living room and rock it, back and forth. Now I could see him through the window. His daughter was my neighbour, we shared a class, by extension he was my neighbour too. He was never fond of me—she would invite me over to play some games, and he would stare me down whenever I was in eyesight. He thought I was a devil. She would tell me to pay him no mind, and I'd answer any questions about me she had.

One time I was over, his wife had made dinner, with no clue who I was. He asked about my family accusingly, who I was and what I wanted, I gave basic responses back. His wife told me that old age was making him paranoid. I asked him to tell me a story, like the ones that I had seen him give before, he lifted two fingers and pointed them at my head: '*bang*' he said. It broke my heart. His wife and my neighbour scolded him for not playing nice. I miss the past.

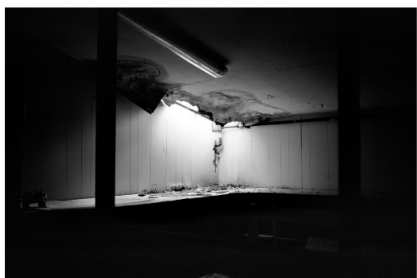
His house sits empty now, has been for the last long while, like most homes will. Well, it wasn't fully empty—teens break into it, telling each other ghost stories, all the make-believe that once filled the papers. Still, it's fallen into disrepair, newspaper taped to windows, the paint chipped, waiting for someone to come and save it. The girl has the right to the property, but she has long disappeared. Sometimes I go and sneak in like I did when I was younger. Though the place has been partly robbed, some things are still there, like the photos. I'm in none of them. The chair is missing but it stayed in its spot for so long that I can still see the dents that it left in the carpet. I can kick at it like I've done before, but nothing comes of it now. A few odd cupboards are missing from the kitchen, perhaps to be used in someone else's home repair. Some rooms have been flipped, everything of value gone; others stay relatively untouched, mostly just my old classmate's. Her walls were painted pink when they should have been painted blue. I should have been the one they kept. People had given her gifts that littered her doorway going in. The youth treat her like a martyr, a victim. Still, between the three of them it's our father I miss most.

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It's strange how everything played out. I came home from school one night. I was doing my work when I noticed that through the boards on my window she was waving to me with her hands stained, I waved back. She beckoned. I wanted to stay away. When I woke up there were cop cars on the street, just came and took the father away, and my neighbour stood at the door, crying. Apparently, she couldn't find her mum in the morning, and when she did, she had passed, stabbed in the chest.

She seemed so comfortable with it. Told our peers that her normalcy was because she was in shock. Told me we could be family, and we were. I wanted to shun her, she knew. She stayed with me and my imaginary parents, told officers that she had friends and wanted to stay close to her dad. It was never about him, nor me, sometimes I questioned if she had a demon in her. We found that our dad had died, he ended up with a toothbrush in his ribs. She planned his funeral and left, she couldn't bring herself to attend, nor could I. She knew he was innocent, and I would know—I helped her.

I miss him, not that he had ever done so for me. I wished that he would tell me a story, like when I was younger and he drove me out. Told me the grand adventure that I was meant to go on. Told me that he was meant to bear evil. Grand stories, my first memories. There wasn't room for me with his wife, the betrayal I represent. He stopped next to a field on her request, told me to fetch the best stick and just left.



THE SPECTATORIAL

RUINS OF COUNTRY AND SUBURBIA

Ibraheem Lodhi

In Caledon, a wave of suburbs creeps steadily over the open fields. Beyond the development, abandoned barns and houses are scattered across the landscape. For the past few years, I've been exploring and documenting them on film. As soon as you enter an abandoned space, its memories and ghosts surround you. As their guest, I look in from the outside, but I wanted to capture their gaze as well, looking out from broken windows and judging anyone who comes into their domain. Each space is marked by those who have passed through it, if you look closely enough.

ALIVE ENOUGH FOR I

Sadiah Bemat
Edited by Emily Wong

I arrive at the Rose Tower, just like I do every day. The stems and their thorns form thick and violent layers that circle the tower, making it impossible to discern what the original structure looked like. I find the opening, big enough just for me.

I come to visit Zaria. My best friend. I kneel to the floor and I pull her in my arms, hugging her to my chest. Her skin is cold and elegant like marble. Her breath barely leaves her lips. I feel her heart beating, faint, but alive. She is beautiful, just like always. Beautiful like she always has been.

I place her gently against a wall and I begin to climb up the spiraling staircase, finding the room that holds abandoned clothes of whomever last resided inside the tower. I sift through the racks, my arms aching. Long and jagged scars span the length of my arms. The wounds, old as they are, never heal. They refuse to heal, opening every time I visit Zaria. The thorns cut me deep. Over and over again, until my arms no longer have an unmarked patch of skin. It drips onto the roses, painting them until they look alive again.

I forget about the open wound dripping for a moment as I find a shirt. Now I just feel hatred. The shirt looks just like that boy's, the one who used to visit Zaria every day. A white button-up, cuffed wrists with gold trim, almost perfect except for the wrinkles. He was so lovesick, and no matter how many times I tried to scare him away, he wouldn't get the hint to leave.

It doesn't matter anymore. He can't reach her here. I grab the shirt from the hanger and tear it to shreds. My scars open further.

Zaria doesn't need it, she has all of these lovely dresses.

I choose a red one.

I carry it down the tower, a trail of blood following me. I find my lovely Zaria waiting for me. She's always so patient. I change her out of her old garments, pulling the red dress over her head, gently pulling the puff sleeves onto her shoulder. I place her on a chair, and comb her hair, untangling the thin strands. I catch her eyes in the reflection of the vanity in front of us, her wonderful green eyes. Only, they are sunken in, and they don't move. But as long as Zaria's heart beats, she is alive, making everything I did worth it.

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Zaria was overcome with curiosity about the Rose Tower, and it was all she ever talked about. That was until the lover boy showed up. Then he was all she cared about. I was losing her. But, if I gave her something she wanted, the one thing she wanted most, then she wouldn't abandon me. Zaria would see how much I cared. That I was more deserving to be her companion over anyone else.

I place the comb on the vanity and take out a rose, tucking it in behind her ear. It drips, the red painting her ear, and runs down her neck and back in rivers, blending into her dress.

I clawed my way into the tower through the thorns and brambles. My blood dripped and spread, making the once dead roses alive again. My scars continue to bleed, but that is the price I pay to the tower to keep Zaria alive. Just enough.

Being inside the tower is all she ever wanted. And I gave that to her. That makes me a true friend, worthy of her time, of her life.

And now Zaria is here. She doesn't leave like everyone else does.
She can't.

In the bloody rose tower she will stay.
Forever. *With me.*

End.

swallowing summer

by v riczker *Edited by Emily Wong*

August 29, 2008

3:56 PM

JackOfAllTraits: why didnt u tell me u were coming back

August 30, 2008

4:23 PM

JackOfAllTraits: are you not eating lunch w us anymore?

August 31, 2008

2:42 PM

JackOfAllTraits: are you still sick

September 1, 2008

12:09 PM

JackOfAllTraits: can you answer me

September 3, 2008

9:04 PM

JackOfAllTraits: hannah im worried about u

JackOfAllTraits: char told me u threw up

JackOfAllTraits: so i went into the science hallway bathroom

JackOfAllTraits: there was so much black stuff

JackOfAllTraits: i told myself i was imagining it

JackOfAllTraits: because when i went back in it was gone

JackOfAllTraits: but i cant shake the image

September 3, 2008

11:59 PM

Banannah91: get out

Banannah91: get out

Banannah91: GET OUT

September 4, 2008

7:36 AM

JackOfAllTraits: wtf

Banannah91: wut

JackOfAllTraits: ur messages last night

Banannah91: idk what ur talking about

JackOfAllTraits: i swear i saw them but

JackOfAllTraits: looks like theyre gone now

Banannah91: i think ur imagining things again

September 5, 2008

10:27 PM

JackOfAllTraits: hannah i know ur online

JackOfAllTraits: this is fucking serious

JackOfAllTraits: ur not u

JackOfAllTraits: i dont know what happened over the summer

JackOfAllTraits: but i know u werent in florida

JackOfAllTraits: i know ur parents didnt take u somewhere to get better

JackOfAllTraits: what did they do to u

Banannah91: they took me

JackOfAllTraits: what

Banannah91: im serious jack

Banannah91: they took something out of me

Banannah91: and they put something else in its place

Banannah91: my heart isnt pumping blood

Banannah91: theres something inside

Banannah91: and theyre going to take you too if they find out you know

JackOfAllTraits: we have to fix this

JackOfAllTraits: we have to get you out of there

Banannah91: its too late for me

Banannah91: they know and theyre taking me

Banannah91: for good this time

Banannah91: i love u jack

Banannah91: im sorry

Banannah91 is offline

JackOfAllTraits: hannah

JackOfAllTraits: come back

JackOfAllTraits: hannah pls this isnt funny

JackOfAllTraits: im coming over

JackOfAllTraits: stay in ur room

JackOfAllTraits: pls

JackOfAllTraits: ill b there soon

JackOfAllTraits is offline

THERE IS ALWAYS NOTHING

Nic Bodrenok
Edited by Crescentia Kim

Everything is so cold. It comes from the slab of metal they have placed me on. It comes from the awfully stale air around me. It overtakes and consumes my flesh.

At least it did.

The lighting overhead is stark white—I wonder if the salvation they speak of will be a fluorescent tunnel. Perhaps I will know once they are done with me, although they seem to have only just begun. They speak of purity, of removing imperfection. They say that my insides have gone bad.

I am afraid I cannot find the will to disagree. Even if I could, I know I cannot speak. I know my larynx lies alongside my trachea on the metal tray they have placed by my head. They said they didn't want me to yell, to scare myself further. They said it wasn't going to hurt. By the time the slice of the scalpel was replaced by the sensation of rubber covered fingers grabbing and pulling at the insides of my throat, it didn't. I wonder what I have done so wrong for them to take away my right to pain; why they have made me the bystander to my own destruction.

This nothing is worse than pain. Pain overtakes you, forces you to get lost in it. The screaming coming from every nerve in your body amalgamates in your skull and makes sure you listen to it. It is hot. It is cold. It is your master. It is your saviour.

The numbness gives you nothing to ground yourself in. All you can do is wait. Wait and pray for it to go away. Pray for the feeling everyone runs from to finally return. You never know who you are praying to. It doesn't matter. No one's going to answer. You're pathetic.

They loom over me, faces half covered in blue surgical masks. I think I should be scared, but I know what's about to come. And I know I'm not going to be able to feel it. I know that when they finally stick the scalpel into my skin and draw it first underneath my collarbones, down my middle, and then across my lower abdomen, that I will not feel it. I will not feel my skin slice open as easily as butter. I will not feel their hands dig inside of me. I will not feel anything.

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I do not know how long it has been since they held up the mass of bloodied cartilage they took from me like a trophy. They didn't take it from me so I wouldn't be able to scream in fear, regardless of what they say. Their words mean nothing—they never have. They took it so I couldn't plead with them to do it faster.

I don't know how much longer I can take this.

Conscious collapse: When everything becomes nothing and nothing overtakes everything. When you can no longer tell what is happening in your body; or to your body. The confusion is overwhelming. Organ after organ, replaced with the soft dullness of cotton. Nerve after nerve, snuffed. A sinking thud when you hit the water. Stagnation. Your unfeeling brain screams from overstimulation, with nowhere to displace it. It laps its swollen tongue over yours; covers your mouth in venomous saliva. Can you feel the numbness? Tell me. What would you do to become pure? ; What wouldn't you do? ; What would you let us do? ; Do you think you have a choice? ; Have you ever?

Salvation has never been fluorescence.
Salvation is nothing.
But not like this.

 Please God.

 Not like this.



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PITY

Mitra Arianfar

Drawing on Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, this artwork looks at the horrors of Hell and abandonment. A sinner is being pulled into the earth, reaching out for your help and pity. Looking directly at the viewer, the sinner forces us to acknowledge them—and as we leave the artwork, we must abandon them too.

AN EMPTY HOUSE

Jiaxin Shi

Edited by Jonah Watkins

The house was withered and decaying, and the sharp smell of rot emanated from its boarded up windows with broken glass below, and crumbling, battered floorboards. A protrusion of scraggy vines engulfed the dilapidated roof, strangling its wooden tiles. The once lively two-story house had been overrun by wilderness in its death. Above, the moon hung high and bloodless in the sky and the stars that would otherwise dampen its light were obscured by a thick layer of cumulonimbus clouds, which, parting in skeletal streaks, cradled the moon between its razor-sharp claws.

Hovering over the bed in a room down the deepest hallway on the second floor was a little girl. She, scared and with her face buried inside a stuffed toy, was listening to the angered shrieks of intruders below. She was extremely white, as much as the bed sheets over which she floated, and her face paled further when she heard a male voice, guttural and grating, ask, “Where did she go?”

Another yelled, “Where are you? We know you’re out there!”

The stairs began to creak and groan, accompanied by thundering footsteps, and she, alone and frightened, descended from the bed and hid beneath it, hoping the trespassers would not discern her in the dark.

The girl eased as the staircase quieted, only to tense again when the floorboards started to screech softly, whispering in ominous moans as the footsteps came closer and closer. The door to the room next to hers swung open and then she heard the resounding, metallic clang of a candlestick being knocked to the floor, the shrieking complaints of wooden drawers being opened for the first time in a century, and the shrill, scraping sound of old, dusty furniture being dragged across the floor. The door slammed shut with a bang, and then the footsteps were scuttering to her doorstep, where the doorknob began to turn and shake vigorously.

A stab of fear shot through her, like streaks of lightning tearing through an otherwise calm sky. Her mother had always told her not to trust strange men. She did not know their business with her, but her mind conjured up an endless line of potential terrors.

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As the door opened, the foggy and flickering glow of a cheap flashlight illuminated the room. Blurry shadows strayed past the crumbling floorboards as the men entered the room. They wore peculiar clothing: t-shirts with strange patterns etched on—one with a pair of lips with the tongue sticking out and another saying “The Beatles” in serif lettering. Immediately, they began to hack and cough.

“Maybe we should go,” said one raspily. “This place seems haunted.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. It’s just a lost kid.”

“I don’t know. I’ve heard bad stories about this house.”

“How could a human live here?” another asked incredulously. “The whole house is covered in dust and mold. Even the floorboards are rotten. It reeks of death in here.”

She blinked, perplexed. The house didn’t smell nor was it dust-ridden, and she had been living here for quite a while now.

The men stopped before her bed. She watched their feet intently, noticing once more their odd attire. Their shoes were different colours, but dead center in every one was a swooshing black check that she had never seen before.

The flashlight roaming the floor halted before her eyes.

“Do you think she’s under the bed?”

She trembled as the light shone on her face. The bitter, bright beam passed through her completely, and, at once, her translucent form was awash with a sickly, greenish light. The men stared at her, their eyes solid and fleshy, hers glassy and spectral. The girl was a ghastly sight, a phantasmal, incorporeal form which, pulsing with a supernatural glow, was made all the more shocking by the flickering light casting shadowy figures across her features, rendering her ghostly silhouette eerie and unearthly.

Fearful, she moved. It was only a shift of the shoulders, but it spurred the men into action. The flashlight was abruptly dropped as they shrieked in a higher pitch than she’d ever heard from a man before. They scampered out of the room, falling over each other in their haste. The little girl watched them leave hurriedly before returning to her place hovering over her bed, comfortable in her solitude.

SEEING DOUBLE

Sam Lazure

Edited by Ciara Drummond

Behind Eliza, the men of the house rejoice, eyes bright in the candlelight, and their basement full of bodies.

How many of the others are left? Eliza came with a small group, acquaintances she barely knew. How many found the bodies? How many realized the nature of their hosts?

She slinks deeper into the moor.

“*Eliza!*” one of the hosts calls from behind her.

She freezes. Her heart leaps into her throat.

“Eliza, come back!” another man calls.

A car would be nice, but the brightly-lit, exposed driveway is too much of a risk. She starts walking again, trying to quiet her footsteps. If she can just sneak to the road, just walk the rest of the way back, then—

A figure steps out of the night.

“Are you lost?”

Stumbling backward, Eliza bites down hard on a scream. The figure’s face is a little too pale, too watery, but there is no mistaking it. It’s like staring at her own reflection in a pool of stagnant water.

“Eliza?” The call echoes out from the house. “Are you out here, Eliza?”

“Not very nice, are they?” The figure looks back toward the house.

Eliza can do nothing but breathe, breathe and stare at this parody of herself. It’s far from a perfect mimicry: the clothes are dripping wet, duckweed trails from the tangled mat of hair, and the lips don’t quite close over the many teeth. Looking at this distorted echo, Eliza feels her sanity start to slip.

“What are you?” Eliza says, barely whispering.

“I would like to be you.” It stretches out a hand, many-jointed fingers hovering over her face. “We could help each other.”

She takes another step back. “I don’t—”

“It’s not safe to be out there alone, Eliza,” shouts one of the hosts.

Water splashes as feet slip into the moor. *They’re coming.*

“Give me permission.” The figure is losing its shape, skin rippling, eyes leaking down its face. Bile rises in Eliza’s throat as she watches her reflection rot. “Give me permission to have your shape. Those who hunt you are only human—weak. Tender. I would love to taste them.” Long teeth flash as

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the figure's lips pull back. "In return, the moor will help you." Its voice slurs and softens.

Thoughts tangle in Eliza's mind. Maybe she'd been wrong—maybe she's just drunk. Just insane, maybe it wasn't bodies she'd found stacked in the basement. Maybe she'd be unleashing something against these men for nothing.

Eliza pulls away. This can't be real. The road glows in the distance, a ribbon of streetlights. Fear pulses in her throat. Her legs twitch, ready to run. She could make it. She could outrun those hungry men of the house and whatever this thing is.

Something stops her.

"You'll kill them?" Eliza barely recognizes her own voice when she asks.

"I will tear them apart." The thing is shrinking, falling back into the water from which it rose. "I only need a form to wear, freely given."

"And afterward?"

The last of it slips beneath the water. Eliza can still see it smile. "I will be free to walk where you do. I will be free to taste your world. I will not harm you, but I will share your skin." Her stomach lurches at the thought of gifting this *thing* her face. Any blood it spills will stain her hands.

"Eliza. Where are you, Eliza?" She flinches, nearly falls. They're getting close.

"We're only trying to help you, Eliza." The malice in the man's voice makes her skin crawl.

When she looks out into the night, it's not fear that clouds her mind. It's fury.

"Do it," she says.

Something grabs her ankle. Before she can scream she's pulled under the water, hitting the layer of decay at the bottom. When she thrashes her way to the surface, she sees the mirror image of herself, perfectly polished.

The thing helps her to her feet, smiling all the while, and points her toward the road. Then, it strides off in the opposite direction.

"I'm here," it says. "Let's go back to the house. I'm starving."

