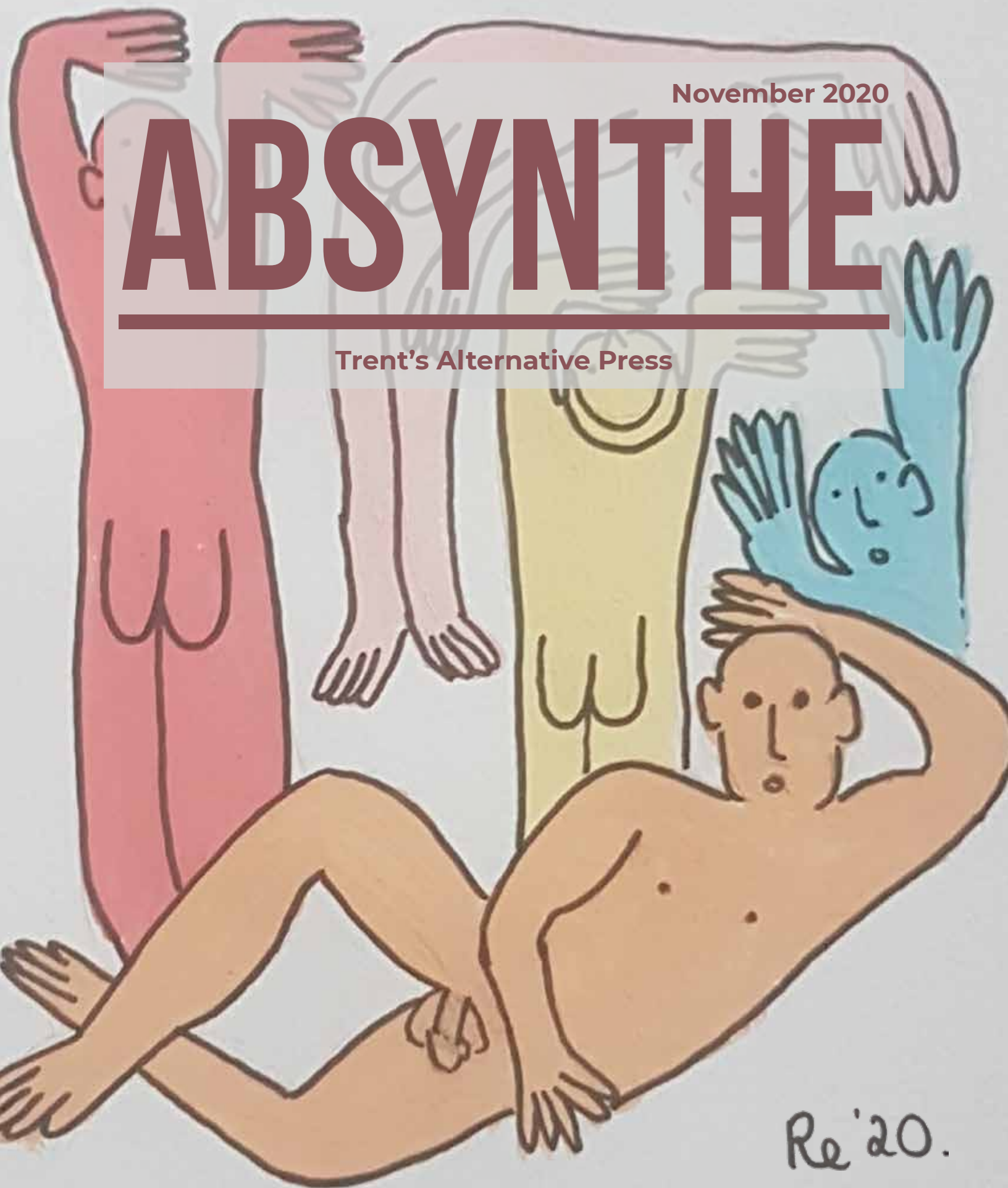


November 2020

ABSYNTHE

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Re'20.



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QUARANTINE BLOG

Diya Shah

Quarantine was a blast. No, not the fun kind. The blinding, deafening, god-I-wish-I-wasn't-here-in-the-first-place blast. What was I thinking? Oh wait, I wasn't. Who picks up their suitcases in the middle of a global pandemic and TRAVELS ACROSS THE WORLD for university? Yours truly, actually. It all started when Trent University really subtly said "Hey, come back to Canada or you won't be able to get your credits done in time". But this is how it went like in my head "Hey, come back to Canada or you won't be able to get your courses on time, so you probably won't graduate on time, hence you will fail and drop out of university, and end up a total and complete failure". Dramatic, right? Keep reading, this is just the tip of the iceberg. After a 14.5 hour gruesome flight from India to Canada, I landed here gripped with fear because my brain went into overdrive with questions like "What if they don't let me in the country?" or "What if I piss off the immigration officer and get deported?" or the worst one "Oh my god, what if I sneeze in front of everyone?". But the airport had something else in store for me. They wanted me out of there as fast as possible (not that I was complaining), and in that hurry they didn't even check my temperature. Modern day horror story right? (fits well considering we're it's Halloween month) Anyway, a long cab ride later (and expensive), I was back in Peterborough. Fun. Not.

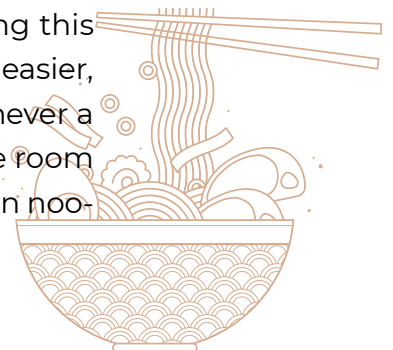
Thus began my quarantine. 14 drab, boring, slow paced days. So not really different from how my life normally is. My sample day looked a little like this- I would wake up at 4AM because of a) the cars drove by from right in front of my house and b) my first night in Peterborough, I passed out at 7PM, thus ensuing a week full of a messed up sleep schedule due to horrible jetlag. Moving on, my day started at 4AM,

Quarantine Blog

when I would wake up and yet lie in my bed for hours to either play Call Of Duty or scroll through thousands and thousands of posts on Instagram. Then at about 7-8AM I'd feel guilty for wasting hours of my day, so I'd make the go to breakfast(which also delicious, by the way) for every university student- Ramen noodles. Ugh, just looking at them now makes me lose my appetite. But for the first seven days, my breakfast, lunch and dinner(sometimes also known as a midnight snack) would be consist of this major food group- Noodles. Which was going great, until I ran out.

Then I had to get creative with my food. Minimal effort, but maximum satisfaction. That week if someone would've looked at my google history it would've said things such as "5 minute dinner recipes", "How to make 5 minute dinner with less ingredients" or the best one "How to make a dinner meal with just bread and spices"(this one didn't disappoint me though). After food came lazing round in my room, unpacking(nope, this is a horror story for another time), scrolling through my phone until my battery ran out, cleaning up the flooded basement(Right? Just threw that in there casually) and constantly thinking "Gosh I would sell a limb to go back home right now".

Thank god I didn't because after quarantine came online classes. And I needed all my working body parts to get through that torture. So currently I'm in this phase of online classes- I look at my list of assignments to do, I take a deep breath, sit on my table, open my laptop, and then Netflix for hours until I feel the guilt just eating away. Then I torture myself even more by staying up all night to do the work I was supposed to do hours ago. I have a feeling this phase is going to last for a bit. So whoever said it gets easier, don't ever listen to them because clearly they were never a university student who sat and cried in their tiny little room because they were 23 days behind whilst eating ramen noodles (Ugh, it always ends with ramen noodles).



AGAPE MOUTH UNDER MOONLIGHT

Shaun Phuah

In the morning, my father cries. He sits in the kitchen and stares at his cup of black coffee, as the yellow sun beams through the open windows.

On these mornings, he doesn't say much, and sometimes he leaves his room at two in the afternoon and doesn't make eye contact with anyone.

"I've got lights in the basement," he told me once, "I'm gonna bring 'em out sometime. Really give this house an atmosphere, y'know? I think that's really important. Having lights. Having a certain... aesthetic. I like it. It's good to feel like you've come home. That you really put effort in the place."

We don't have a basement.

But I listened anyway.

Sometimes he'll work in the garden in the early mornings before the Malaysian sun starts burning, and before the air sticks to skin like shrink wrap in the evening humidity.

He'll sit on the moist soil, and slowly work his way through pruning leaves, and sprinkling dark beads of fertilizer over the dirt.

"It's chicken shit. That's how it feeds the plants." He said.

"I know."

"I used to think it smelled bad. But I kinda like it now."

I put my nose up to the plastic bag full of fertilizer. "It smells like shit."

"It's processed."

"Is that supposed to make it better?"

"The plants like it. You definitely get used to the smell." He said.

At night, my father is screaming.

He runs through the house, pulling at his hair, and laughing at things that aren't funny.

He spends hours cleaning the dishes he neglected in the morning and rearranges all the books on the shelves for the sixth time. Only now it's by author name and in backwards alphabetical order.

Sometimes he gets grandiose.

He stands out in the garden, with

Agape Mouth Under Moonlight

his hands up in the air, and his eyes are huge.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Just watch. The sky will open up and it’ll be a thunderstorm,” he said.

I sat and watched him standing there with his arms stretched out, and I waited for an hour before I got bored and went back in.

Once, he stood out there for so long it actually *did* start raining. He came back into the house, soaking wet and dripping everywhere screaming: “Look! Look! We’re saving the corn! We’re saving the corn!”

Sometimes he gets paranoid at night.

I knock on his door. “How are you doing? Is everything okay?”

“DON’T COME IN. I-I’VE GOT A KNIFE.”

On these nights, I know there’s no convincing him. Sometimes it’s that he thinks there’s a murderer in the house. But another time he saw light flashing through the windows, and he pulled the blankets up over his head, fearing alien abduction.

“Are you okay?” I asked through the door.

“HIDE. What are you doing! I could feel him staring at me while I was in the shower.”

“It’s just me.”

Silence.

I try the door, but it’s locked.

I wonder if one of these days he’ll be right, and there really will be someone hiding out in the hallway. A pair of eyes staring me down.

I’m woken up in the middle of the night when he opens the front door and screams into the night air.

“What’s happening? Are you okay?”

“I felt like I couldn’t breathe.”

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah. I don’t know. I’m still anxious, but not so bad now.”

My father barely ever gets any sleep and is bored in the mornings.

Sometimes he sleeps, but other times he just sits, disinterested.

I wonder often if my father is a poisonous man. I wonder if he gets in my food and water. At night he gets in my head. I feel like someone’s watching me, and I wonder if it’s actually him, staring at me from the hallway. A dark shape, barely recognizable.

I think about leaving home. But then I imagine him terrorizing the neighborhood hiding in neighbours’ bushes and feeding their dogs chocolate. He might steal someone’s baby as an offering to the aliens, to try and get some of their technology.



Agape Mouth Under Moonlight

For now, I sit next to him as he fertilizes the plants.

“They’re like hard pellets,” I say, as I toss them over the soil.

“That’s ‘cause they’re processed.”

“Which means it’s good right?”

“I dunno. Plants seem to like it.”

He walks over to the hose and starts spraying water on the plants and flowers.

“Tropical plants are crazy, you know that?”

The leaves of our plants are broad and thick. Saturated in dark greens and bright with flowers, like open mouths with yellow tongues, ready to spread their pollen. Thick vines cling to the posts and spread out over the wall like a nervous system.

“Look away for two days and the whole garden will be overgrown.”

“Yeah?” I watch the water hit the leaves.

“Nature’s got attitude here.”

“Yeah...” I nod.

Butterflies fly about as the water disturbs their hiding spots from under the leaves. They flutter around the garden, their wings huge and full of bright blues and deep, dark purples.

“I’m getting better soon, I think.”
He says.

“Yeah? What makes you say that?”

“I don’t know. Just feels like it.”

“Think you wanna try the medication again?”

“I fucking hate the dehydration.”
He says, turning off the hose

“So, no?”

“I told you. I already feel like I’m getting better--oh look! The snails are coming out.” For the first time this morning, he gives a little smile. He points at a snail crawling up the wall, moist with tap water.

He walks out onto the garden, plucks the snail off the wall, and puts it in the grass.

“They die if they reach the top, y’know? Birds get ‘em.”

“That’s sad.”

“Yeah, sure is. I see some kids around here pouring salt on them sometimes. It’s awful how they bubble up.”

“Good thing they don’t feel pain.”

“It’s awful anyway. Shows how fragile they are.”

He shuts the tap off, and the whole garden drips with water in the warm early morning sun.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF BEING ALIVE

Anonymous

should I throw salt behind my back, avoid ladders or broken mirrors, hoping this year
won't bring more bad luck? Is it bad luck, or just the consequence of being alive?
I bathe in distraction; this feeling is different from grief.
when I sit alone, the word alcoholic feels like a myth.
a rumor, the plot of a nightmare.
it looms in the back of my head like the ocean expecting a storm
am I the boat in this scenario or have I already drowned?
in my nightmares I catch him drinking, everyone around me acts oblivious.
I see the glass bottles, as I sleep I can smell whiskey.
I can't take jokes anymore; our language is drunk in it.
I pick up a wine glass and nearly sob.
how can I possibly enjoy something that ruined his life?
will time make me feel less guilty for buying him beer last Christmas?
our relationship has been choked with my guilt.
I try to unpuzzle but remember I've lost what the image was supposed to look like.
when I see photos, death has already met him.
are we out of the woods? was this just a bump in the road?
how many more forests or bumpy roads are we going to find in this lifetime?
he gave me liquor bottles last time we met
did he think I was catching him?
was he only in trouble for two years?
or was this a mistake from decades prior?
isolation looms, my insides scream for attention, my therapist calls it my 'inner child'.
I try to listen to myself, yet I don't know what I yearn for.

I want to say I'm sorry this is happening to you,
you feel deep shame
I want you to know I don't think you're any less of a person because of this.
I don't know how many relapses we'll have.
the cold truth is not knowing.
I don't pray
I don't pray for normalcy
I pray for difference.

AOC VISITED ME IN A DREAM LAST NIGHT

Zachary Barmania

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez visited me in a dream last night. There she was, teaching foosball to at-risk youth when I asked her out for a coffee. She turned me down politely enough, but I imagine our conversation would have gone a little something like this...

SCENE: A DREAM, THE SEASONED SPOON, TABLE BY THE WINDOWS.

ZB: Thanks again for joining me, Alexandria. I never knew you played foosball.

AOC: Oh, sure. It keeps my wrists tone, and serves as a microcosm of politics, in many ways. We had a foosball table at the bar I used to work at; there's one in the **Capitol Building**, but it's in the **Republican** common room. *Eugh*

This observation proved my suspicions: that Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was the ideal young leader, someone I could trust with my personal/political worries.

ZB: Well, listen. I think you might be able to help me work through some ideas. It's been a tough couple of months, and I'm alarmed at what I've seen happen. The **VIRUS** has become a generational political issue, where blame is assigned and reproaches issued without a hint of self-awareness. B**mers accuse young people of disregarding the rules and reopen schools and workplaces in the same

breath. It's typical of Canadian rhetoric to blame the individual and excuse the institution.

How do we stop climate change? We buck up, "buy green" and ride a bike: assign blame to millions of people instead of holding less than 100 companies accountable. How do we stop COVID-19? We mask up, back off and go back to work: make everyone responsible for their own safety instead of taking an economic hit.

There seems to be a consensus forming among politicians, corporate owners, and university presidents that there is an acceptable number of fatalities among the citizenry, a number above zero. Major news media doesn't present this as having a political consequence, rather it blames the victims of these policies. You have to be a fool to be partying during a plague, I know that, Alexandria, but you have shit-for-brains if you reopen residence and don't expect there to be any **partying** or **sickness**. Those are the two things that



define life in residence. The Champlague existed long before **COVID-19**, and it comes every Fall like clockwork. Yet, I've heard nothing to confirm my feelings, just a constant blast of fear-mongering and blame-assignment. Sorry, Alexandria, I just feel strongly about this.

AOC: Don't apologize for having political energy! I'm sorry to say, but our government systems have begun to rely on young people not participating in the system, feeling powerless and impoverished, doomed to a life of corporate serfdom. The good news is: that's not true, you have power.

I sighed and looked out the window. I felt like I already knew what she'd say: that a democratic system of government is our best tool to dissuade apathy because as long as there is universal suffrage everyone is truly equalized: one vote per person. Alexandria meant well, but such a view just isn't realistic.

AOC: Well, Zack, you're dreaming so I heard everything you just thought. I actually don't think those things. I may be an American, but I'm not naive. We can't agree on one version of the truth, how can we possibly be equipped to confront any problems? If you look at the history of my country, you'll see it's collective resistance that brings about change. **Conservatism** finds a refuge within our institutions, against which **liberty** must struggle. Individuals are often considered expendable, especially those who don't play an active role in the decision making process. Up in Canada, for example, the government restricts groups to under 25, except for classrooms full of children?

ZB: And how about when they canceled

CERB and forced the economy to reopen despite the continued presence of COVID-19? I know so many people forced to return to multiple minimum wage jobs where safety is a secondary priority to profit. No pressure has been placed on corporations, except to maintain their profit margins, while all pressure is placed on personal responsibility, 'following the rules'. It's the same as our criminal negligence of climate change.

It felt good to say all of this, but...

ZB: Alexandria, everyone already knows all of this. The question is, what can anybody do? What can I do?

AOC: Well, I think the first step is understanding and the second step is to act. What can you do to change the world around you for the better?

*I thought about it. I could run for mayor, or MPP, or MP or even PM, but would I be able to use the system to undo the very problems it created? I could become a journalist and expose all disinformation 'til **the cows** come home, but if we have no consistent definition for the truth, what good will it do? I could go to my partner's workplace and throw eggs at the anti-maskers that berate and abuse them, but then what would I eat for breakfast?*

ZB: I can start with my **university**, I guess. My collegiate is in a time of painful, heavily resisted evolution. The bureaucracy that had flourished as tuition and enrollment climbed ever higher is now engaged in the ugly, uncoordinated thrashing of the dying. The reason? Well, I think the quarantine has only put a spotlight on the true reason Trent is superfluous: the INTERNET is a better learning resource than



AOC Visited Me In A Dream Last Night

anything the university could possibly offer. There has been a concerted effort by Trent to integrate the INTERNET into their institution, now culminating in a syllabus almost entirely full of online courses. These courses are often built around pre-recorded lectures, which your professor

reuses from year to year, which are less effective at communicating than a 5 minute YouTube video. It's common for a prof to never even see your writing, and it will often be graded by another **student** working as a TA. You can attend lectures, talk in seminars and complete your essays,



AOC Visited Me In A Dream Last Night

pass the course and not learn a thing. To Trent, such an alumni would be a success. Did I mention we're paying full tuition for this, Alexandria? The fact that they opened residence up is shocking, but only if you forget that Trent is now first and foremost a corporation, and students are part customer, part employee, part product. We pay the money, do the work, and we come off the conveyor belt ready for an unpaid internship, oh, and in debt. Trent is not to be trusted. Your health, education and happiness are not their priorities. Triple digit salaries, and a place in MacLean's magazine: that's what's important to the presidents and vice-presidents. They are a kafkaesque, obese bureaucracy that must be forced to serve the students.

AOC: That's the spirit! **Speak truth to power**, challenge and lead at every turn! Your voice alone is powerful, but as a united team they are forced to reckon with you.

ZB: Well, that is the **TCSA's** job, our closest thing to a student union. The tragic thing is that the **TCSA** is no better than Trent. They've completely lost the plot in terms of their history and purpose. They should

have been the group leading the charge for student rights and safety during a pandemic. First year, they started out as a club, a student group like any other. Now they serve as a bridge from the student body into the school bureaucracy, and both groups have grown and grown until now. When the winter 2020 term was forced into online only and the Trent buses stopped running, the **TCSA** didn't get a refund for every student. When the time came to defund the student levy groups, they were inactive in our defense that is, the defense of student art groups, clubs and most importantly, student press. Now that it's time for students to be represented and championed, even in the face of conflict with the university, they are now practically one bureaucracy. They've become too big for their own good, for our own good. At a certain point, when students are both victim and scapegoat, we can't look to our elders for leadership. We have to lead ourselves, we have to fight for what's important to us.

AOC: Go off, my queen! Demand more from these bodies! Student strike! Student strike! Student strike!

Scene.

When I awoke, the world was staring back at me, unblinking. Fascism corporate hegemony, disease, and the inexorable march of climate change were all still there, waiting for me to rise, stretch, and start my day.

I look out my window and see my generation, my people, slouch towards the two-headed beast called Depression and Anxiety, and with a sarcastic comment jump headlong down one throat or the other.

Why fight? Why try? Why survive? Am I awake or still dreaming? Are we doomed to cowardice, and a dishonorable death? Are we the generation that would not save the world?

I won't believe it.

i. water

waves crashing in a storm,

am i the storm or am i the
swimmer

drifting

slowly i slip under, but it feels
comfortable. safe.

it's not.

people have said the storm is
beautiful. it's dangerous.

it is ugly.

it's dark but i've always been more
comfortable in darkness. there's a
peace i feel

where i can't see anything, feel
anything, see myself.

the silence is more soothing than
anything i have ever known

it's easy

ii. air

it is not always stormy

sometimes sunshine beams down
on my skin and i see my sister
laugh and i see my dog running
around and i see my friends danc-
ing and i feel whole

for a moment

i can feel the soft breeze on my
cheek and i can hear the music in
the air and i can feel the warmth
inside

and everything is right and i re-
mind myself i am still here and life
can be so beautiful and the world is
not always stormy.

and i think maybe the silence had
not been as soothing as i thought.
maybe soothing is a summer day,
breathing fresh air

maybe it was worth swimming to
the shore through the current.
worth being pulled back and under
and upside down

even if just to feel the breeze

to breathe it all in

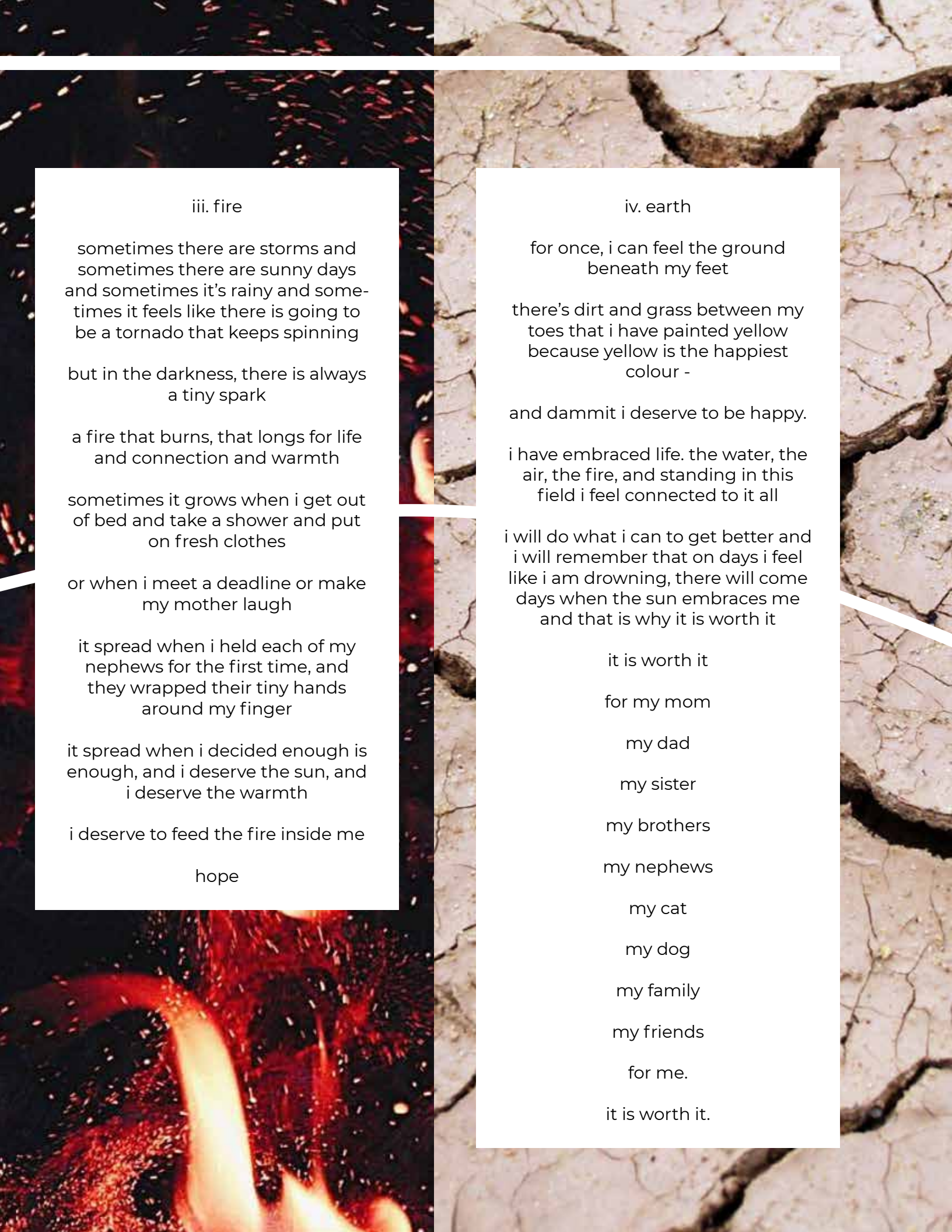
all is right, all is good

for a moment

maybe there is hope

CONNECTION

Kelsey Guindon



iii. fire

sometimes there are storms and
sometimes there are sunny days
and sometimes it's rainy and some-
times it feels like there is going to
be a tornado that keeps spinning

but in the darkness, there is always
a tiny spark

a fire that burns, that longs for life
and connection and warmth

sometimes it grows when i get out
of bed and take a shower and put
on fresh clothes

or when i meet a deadline or make
my mother laugh

it spread when i held each of my
nephews for the first time, and
they wrapped their tiny hands
around my finger

it spread when i decided enough is
enough, and i deserve the sun, and
i deserve the warmth

i deserve to feed the fire inside me

hope

iv. earth

for once, i can feel the ground
beneath my feet

there's dirt and grass between my
toes that i have painted yellow
because yellow is the happiest
colour -

and dammit i deserve to be happy.

i have embraced life. the water, the
air, the fire, and standing in this
field i feel connected to it all

i will do what i can to get better and
i will remember that on days i feel
like i am drowning, there will come
days when the sun embraces me
and that is why it is worth it

it is worth it

for my mom

my dad

my sister

my brothers

my nephews

my cat

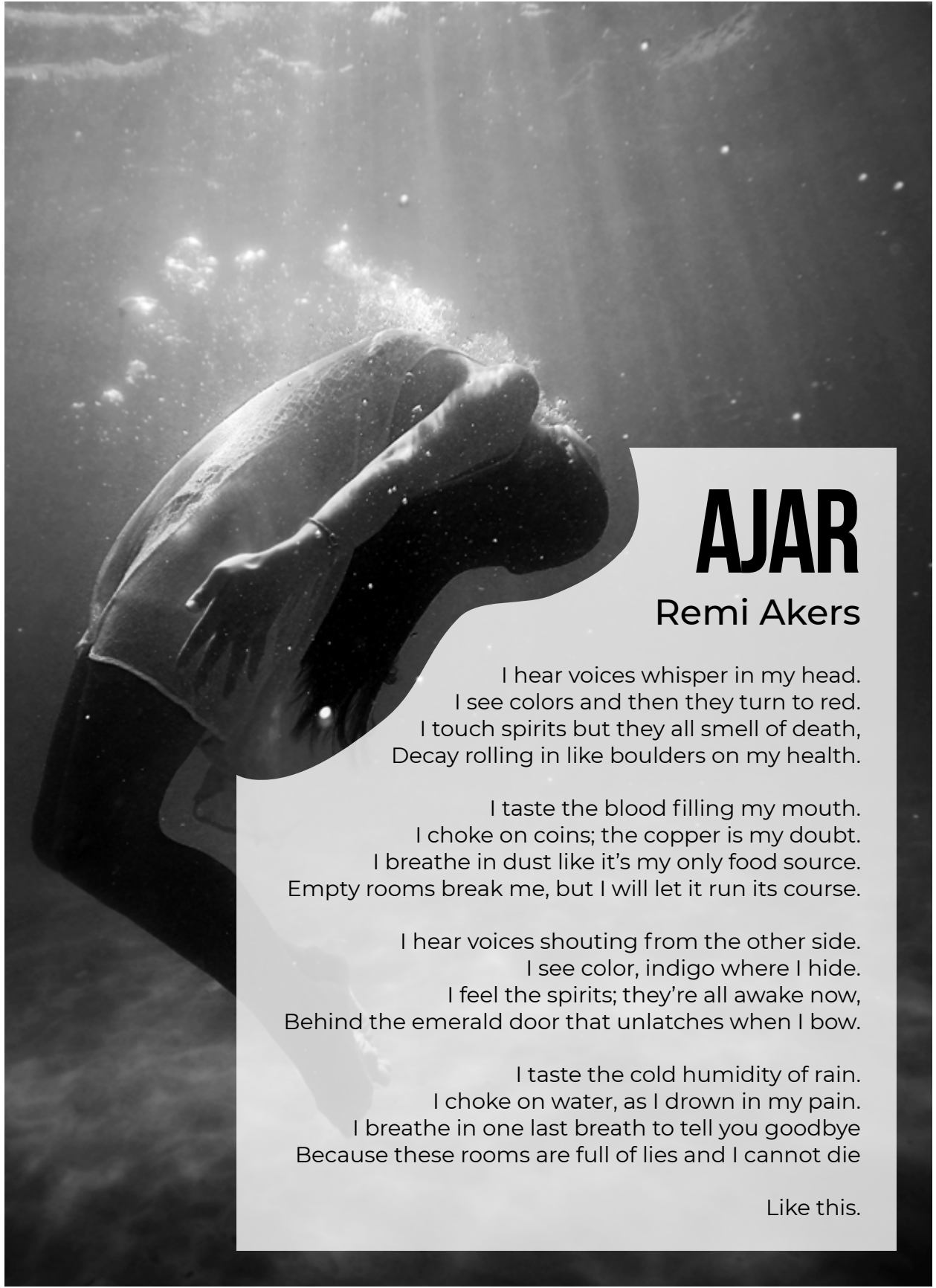
my dog

my family

my friends

for me.

it is worth it.



AJAR

Remi Akers

I hear voices whisper in my head.
I see colors and then they turn to red.
I touch spirits but they all smell of death,
Decay rolling in like boulders on my health.

I taste the blood filling my mouth.
I choke on coins; the copper is my doubt.
I breathe in dust like it's my only food source.
Empty rooms break me, but I will let it run its course.

I hear voices shouting from the other side.
I see color, indigo where I hide.
I feel the spirits; they're all awake now,
Behind the emerald door that unlatches when I bow.

I taste the cold humidity of rain.
I choke on water, as I drown in my pain.
I breathe in one last breath to tell you goodbye
Because these rooms are full of lies and I cannot die

Like this.

I SPY EXISTENTIAL DREAD

Remi Akers

I look up at the moon
And time skids to a halt.



I catch a glimpse of bliss in a moment of self-reflection.

I look up and it's noon—
Everything's my fault.

I enter an existential crisis: what is salvation?

Am I the only one who bears this doubt?

My peace of mind falters.

I think it's possible Earth was dropped on her head.

My closest friend is eating sauerkraut
While I spy my assaulter.

The world seems to slip away: am I really dead?

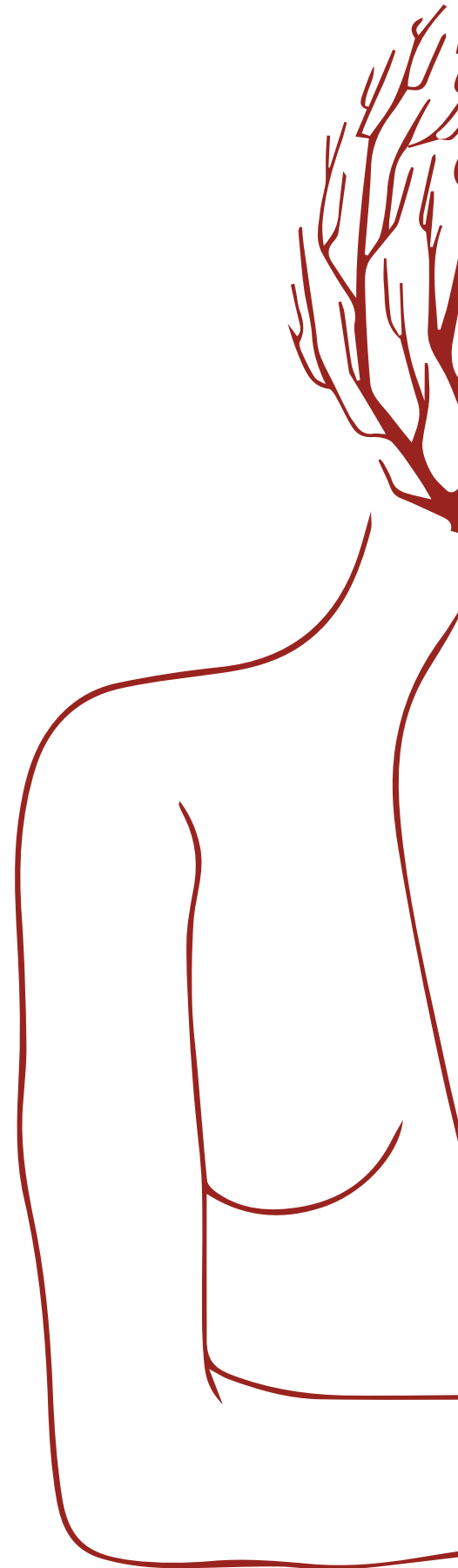


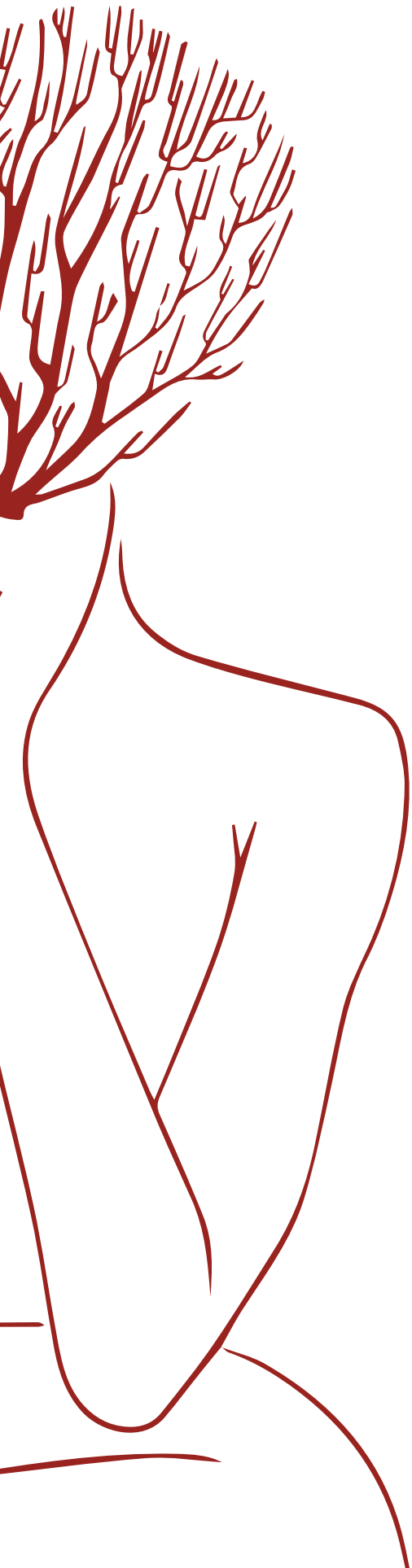
TABULA RASA

Kavya Chandra

I.

the wood shavings never counted
for your carpentry: you always took
more than you needed & at the
end of the year, we still wouldn't have
any forgiveness for you at Christmas,
an empty tree & four starving bodies.
when the buzzer sounded at the front door
we always left out to the back room, too meek
to allow visitors. the house sits broken: even
a lost love couldn't nurse it back to health, so
when will we let laughter in? the nanny swings
us back and forth, you watch from the porch:
eyes unblinking, undeterred like a wakeful dog
at guard. even these bones never broke like
the wind when you ask why we still live. ghosts
of this sullen land. nineteen years you watched
us become snails, no backbones. three days
to burn our crib and throw it in the neighbour's yard.
these arms blare when you put them in the bathtub
with the water burning: can't you see the smoldering
skin when you gargle with honey and spit it on us?
when we choke on our vomit at night, bulimic & safe
you knock three times on the windowsill & go back
to bed. these locks on our shins are birds of prey-
digging into our insides, waiting for the rust to
settle in. our skin porcelain, our eyes gouged
out and then nailed inside our heads: we're puppets
in our own body, we have never lived.





TABULA RASA

Kavya Chandra

II.

in the flashy mansions they call us for immunity,
let us shave our armpits & go to war. this body
never seemed so full: now at 21, let us overflow
these tits, mark this skin a calendar of every
time a nobody sits at the bar and brings a knife
to cut into our tutu skirts, an unfulfilled wrath. on their
balconies, disco lights seem like the morning. on their
toilet seats, the piss has yellowed our thighs: the
back room is dim lit with a couch, we sit & repeat
the same name for the lord that brought empty
trees on Christmas. this body is a temple in
the slums. the clock tells us there are no open doors
in this honeycomb, we are free to part. these
legs are begging for chains, this freedom comes
at a meager cost: no luck, no chance, we nod.
these plastic surgeries are futile for people with
our dreams, these desires are only fulfilled in
warmer bathtubs. can't we pretend to not
sweeten this pain, spit honey inside our lungs?
the clouds fall over the tarp: this balcony is
21 stories high, how much closer to God will
we be now that we've seen the past? we're
rapping three times at the window, praying
for the nobodies to slit our throats when we
sleep, walking into alleys accidentally: this
porcelain skin is a puppet to nobody, these
eyes feel real & forgotten as we rope our necks
& jump off for a blank slate, jump off to a start.

HARD LESSONS

Paige Emms

At eighteen years old, I would not dare venture to say that I know everything about anything. I cannot even fathom how much I will learn in the next week, never mind any amount of time longer than that. However, I have come to realize that some of the lessons I am destined to learn are lessons that I would never wish on my worst enemy.

Growing up, my grandma, who I call my Nana, was a huge part of my life. My Nana is my mom's mother and she is the only grandparent who has ever been involved in my life. My mom's dad passed away before I was born so I never got to meet him, but my Nana filled the role of all of my grandparents, and boy did she exceed her duties as a grandma.

For as long as I can remember, she came to our house every day after school and hung out with us until my parents came home from work. We would spend hours watching TV, playing cards and doing anything else. She was the typical grandma who always brought us treats, or took us out for ice cream or hot chocolate. No one ever left my Nana's house without getting candy or a chocolate bar from her treat box, including any landscapers, contractors and mailmen. Something as simple as bringing my brothers and me lollipops was the highlight of our days.

Some of my fondest memories of childhood are attached to my Nana. One of my favorite memories with my Nana is watching tennis with her for hours after school. This is my favourite memory because she loved tennis so much and desperately tried to teach me all about it and talk about who her favourite players were, and she never knew that I hated tennis and never understood it no matter how many times she explained it to me. It just made her so happy to sit and watch tennis with me, that I was happy to sit and pretend to love tennis too. I also loved learning to play the card games she played growing up, from her.

My Nana was my person. She was always there for me whenever I needed her. If I needed an escape from my parents, or just needed some advice, I could call my Nana and she was there... unless she was having tea with a neighbour!

When I got to about fourteen years old, I got a little bit tired of my Nana being at our house every day after school. Don't get me wrong, I loved having her around but I wanted more independence without direct adult supervision. So, she began coming only three days of the week. This decision was a little sad but it gave me freedom and allowed me to actually miss my Nana and sometimes appreciate the time we did spend together, more than I did before.

Hard Lessons

A few years later, everything began to change. My Nana was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. We first noticed her hands had a tremor and she started to become more stiff and slow when she walked. However, mentally my Nana seemed to be doing fine and was still her same self, just slower.

Over the next few years, Nana was diagnosed with dementia on top of Parkinson's. This is when it became more difficult to deal with her diagnosis. When the only thing that had changed was her speed of movement, which was frustrating for her but wasn't particularly hard for me at the time I was able to somewhat ignore what I knew would happen in the coming years. When dementia started to roll in, I began to slowly watch the Nana I had my entire life slip away.

She stopped driving and her car sat in her driveway for a couple of years before she moved to an assisted living home and we had to sell her house. This was an incredibly difficult moment for her and my family, because she had lived in that house for over 40 years, and she raised my mother and in a way, raised me and my siblings there as well. We all grew up, celebrated there, got through bad times in that house, it was just full of all of our memories. At that point, I was going to be driving soon so she gave her car to me. Her 2005 Dodge Neon was the only car she had driven my entire life and so many memories I have of her are associated with that car, so I was so grateful to adopt it.

After moving into the assisted living place we truly realized how bad her balance and movement had gotten, but also her mental state. When she lived alone in her house, I think she was able to cover up some of her falls or scares but now she was always being cared for. From that point on, every visit with her has been a gamble. I never know whether she will have a really hard time finding her words or if she will be able to speak clearly. Will she know who we are, or not really recognize that we are there?

I've never known pain like grieving someone who is still alive. The person you love is standing right in front of you, but they don't always know you and you can't tell how much they take in when you talk to them. It is not easy to imagine that the next time you see your grandmother, she might not recognize you or may not be able to form sentences clearly but I put that aside every week and just savour the time I do have with my Nana while she does know who I am and can somewhat communicate with me.

After a couple years of having her car, it was in an accident and we had to give it up which was devastating to me. That felt like the one piece of her that hadn't changed through my entire life and I just wanted something to stay the same. This Thanksgiving was the first holiday that my family has celebrated without my Nana due to the Coronavirus and it felt quite unnatural. She has in a way always been the backbone of our family celebrations as most of the traditions we still practice, come from holidays at her home. I find that we end up talking about my Nana in the past tense, as if she has already passed away, but she's still here. She just isn't who we used to know and I think that's been hard for me to hear.

Hard Lessons

The lessons that I have learned from watching my Nana fade away are the most heartbreaking lessons of my life. I regret wanting the freedom of having days without her at my house after school. I wish I had taken more time to learn or care about the rules of tennis because I would give anything to sit and watch tennis with my Nana completely there again or to be offered something from the treat box, as I walked out of her house. I hope from the lessons I have learned, that I will not take any other relationship in my life for granted. I certainly don't take moments with my Nana for granted anymore.



HOW IT FEELS TO GRADUATE WITH A B.A. & END UP WORKING IN A FACTORY

Melchior Dudley

PART ONE: DAILY.

open the box take out a bag put in another box lift another box dump the box's contents into the box lined with the bag put on a cart repeat eight times and wheel out to the line come back in think for a second i hate my job nope thinking is bad stop thinking another cart was wheeled in and you missed it you numb nut open a box open another box open another box open another box open another that was close but i don't care to be more careful with the knife next time maybe ill get a day off ha ha i shouldn't think like that its not funny there's something wrong with your head maybe ill call in sick tomorrow though this sucks a lot and i dont need the money i have enough savings to buffer whatever expenses arent covered by full time minus my "sick" days at this lovely place that pays fifteen dollars to say goodbye to an hour of my life that i will never get back and certainly will wish i could get back when i'm dying someday but i need the money to feel safe and for some reason i feel better about myself when i have a job even though i hate it i think i've opened too many boxes i can dump some of them now dump dump dump dump dump dump fuck i dropped some whatever there's so much waste here it doesn't make a difference dump dump dump that's good whew these carts get heavy im hungry i'll just wheel them here here you go no problem oh sure i can wheel it over there next time you lazy bastard i wonder how much time is left maybe i'll check the clock but i'm afraid no time has passed god damn why do i have to be so lucid here but the second i go home brain fog settles in like squatters in an abandoned house well i'm checking the clock and the clock says jesus ronaldo christ it's only eight am and i still have seven hours left i need to find a new job asap why doesn't anyone want to trust me with a job i'm so smart and funny and full of shit it'll make constipation a joke oh new cart came in rinse and repeat i guess till the day i die huh feels like heartburn all the time

PART TWO: NIGHTLY.

It serves me right for getting a B.A. I knew I was getting myself into a life of uncertainty when I decided to major in English Literature.

“Hey, future employer!”

“Hey, Mel!”

“Do you have any jobs for me?”



“Well, let’s see! What did you become an expert in when you went to school? You sure spent a lot of time and money, but it’s worth it, y’know--education pays off when it comes to a conversation like this, ha-ha!”

“Golly jee, that’s great! I can tell you that I am an expert in reading and writing, real good! And I can talk about books! So what jobs you gots?”

“Oh. OH. Huh. Well... sorry, Mel, I don’t think we have anything... like... that. Ummm... you know that most people know how to read and write. I think I was ten or so... Uh, why did you major in English, in an English-speaking country?”

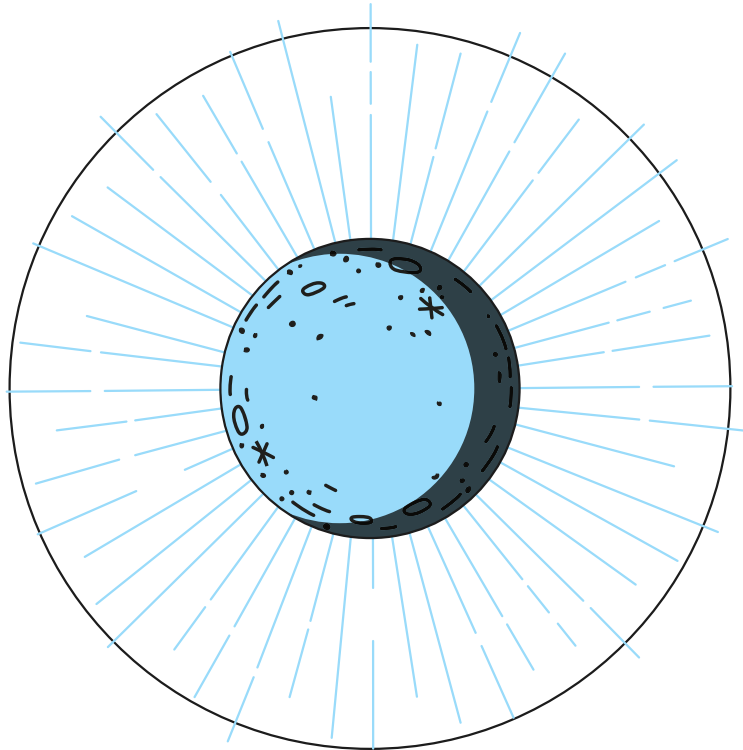
“Wishful thinking, I guess.”

“Well, we can’t use that sloppy, stubbornly right-sided brain of yours, but we might be able to put your frail body to work! How would you like to work in--oooooh--shiny new factory? We can’t outsource labour to China because we’re keeping up an image of Canadian quality (and it’s food so we can’t, even though we want to), so the job is yours if you want it.”

I expected to meet an endless line of dull, complacent workers with room-temperature IQs during my first day at the factory.

The caretaker speaks four languages (English, French, Punjabi and Spanish), one of my colleagues is a former primary school teacher and child support worker, and another colleague used to own a cleaning company with contracts with Petsmart and Future Shop and has certifications to be a Paralegal.

What the fuck are they all doing here with a bum like me and presumably everyone else?



PART THREE: ONCE IN A BLUE MOON.

Everyone here is so incredibly kind and hygienic and hardworking and conscientious and there are so many intelligent people it puts me to shame to think of my former presumptions about the factory and its workers. As much as I respect them now, though, I still hate the work.

One reason is that it makes my shoulders and wrists cry out in pain--it feels like elastics are snapping inside my joints when I do certain repetitive tasks. This is a fact that is hard to admit when I also mention that I work with old Indian ladies who have been doing the same tasks as me but for twenty years, and never complain about the tasks, only joke about them being a good replacement for working out at the gym. God, that's embarrassing. I think one reason I hate the work is because it reminds me of how my body has become useless for virtually all physical work. If I was living in the paleolithic era, I would either be the alpha male caveman's grunt-speech writer, or I would be Saber-tooth tiger bait.

A lot of days I wake up feeling like bait.

That's the second reason I hate the job. Not having the proper qualities for even the most menial of employments is an indescribable sensation. I was a clown for feeling like I was at the top of my class through high school and university. Humility is a big punch down to the top of the head and it hurts. Really flattens out the crescendo.

SPARK OF LIGHT

Julie Musclow



I don't trust the thoughts inside my head
The ones at night that escape my mind and surround my bed
Trapped inside a room of four "blank" walls
The darkness surrounds me with all my downfalls



*Close your eyes, close your eyes
Hide yourself from the shadow's lies
Free yourself into the twinkling light
Unlock your true thoughts and win this fight*

Lift up my pillow and free my true thoughts
Cover my mouth and let them breathe
Pave the clouds, turn the abstract concrete
The truth in my head now lies at my feet



Lost time, lost in the times, before the alarm, behind the day
Beyond the night, through the darkness I take flight
In search of the past, or fleeting light
I found the spark to win this fight.



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