



Aloesyn

nt the



Absynthe Magazine

Trent's Alternative Press

- Alite Artifices -

Summer 2023

Contents

- 04 Don't Trust This Man - **Graham Wylie**
- 12 Unloading - **Sarah Waldner**
- 18 The Overturned Law - **Vivian Krissilas**
- 19 Departure - **Sarah Waldner**
- 20 Old Star Poem - **Alison Mcfarlane**
- 23 Cycles - **Claire Macaulay**
- 28 13 Months of Sunshine - **Bethlehem Bekele**
- 31 Our Team

Don't Hire This Man

Graham Wylie

I've been working hundred-hour weeks, with no days off, and I'm scheduled for a hundred more this week. Working hundred-hour weeks at the burger joint wears you down. You start questioning whether life is worth living.

This is what goes through my head when my alarm goes off. Before I'm even conscious.

My girlfriend, Rebecca, is snoring beside me. She's unemployed. I've been paying our rent—two thousand a month—by myself. And groceries. And paying off student loans from my failed year at college. But I love her, and I believe she'll find something soon. For now, she sits at home, drinking caramel iced coffee and shopping online without buying anything. Last week it was candles, now it's jewelry. Her birthday's coming up, and she's been talking nonstop about this necklace and earring set. It's five hundred dollars. I thought about it for a while, then decided: fuck it, I'll buy her the necklace and earring set. That's why I've been working hundred-hour weeks. Usually it's only ninety.

But today? I just can't do it. I need a break. I *deserve* a break. So I call in sick.

While the phone's ringing, all I can think about is the fourteen hours I'm giving up.

"Burger Joint, Phillip speaking."

"Hey Phil, it's Alex. I can't come in today. I'm sick."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah, I just vomited."

"Wow, that's gross."

"I know."

"Well, we should be fine over here. Feel better, Alex."

"Thanks, Phil."

"Buh-bye."

"Bye."

After eating two bowls of raisin bran, I kiss Rebecca on the forehead and go for a walk. I'm used to running around all day at work, so it's hard for me to relax, but now with the sun hitting my face I feel the possibility of peace.

I walk to the park and lie on the grass. I watch the clouds. I close my eyes and think about how lucky I am to be alive. I think about Rebecca. I think about the necklace and earring set.

I open my eyes and think: today is the day.

Besides, when else will I have time?

I brush the grass off my back and walk downtown. The jewelry store is nowhere near the burger joint, so I should be safe.

At the jewelry store, a handsome man greets me. For a moment I think someone else is here, but it's only a mannequin.

"I'm looking for that necklace and earring set," I say. "The five hundred dollar one."

"I know the one," he says, and shows me.

"I'll take it."

Then the front door opens. I turn around and see Phil. He's talking on the phone. He's saying, "I only have a minute, honey. Be more specific."

I look for somewhere to hide. I duck behind the mannequin, but it's too thin. Phil sees me.

I can't believe this is happening.

"Alex?" he says.

"Uh, yeah," I say, stepping away from the mannequin.

"I thought you were sick."

"Well, I—"

Don't Hire This Man - Graham Wylie

"Don't bother. You're fired."

"What? I'm your best employee!"

"So what? I can never trust you again."

"This is insane."

"What's insane is thinking you can get away with this."

"I'm... I'm sorry."

A voice on his phone is saying, "Hello? Phil?" But he ignores it.

"I may appear calm," he says, "but that's only for the sake of this gentleman." He nods at the jeweler. "I'm actually livid right now."

I don't know what else to say, so I leave.

While walking home, I think: I'm unemployed. Then I think: My life is ruined.

I go home and apply for jobs online. I need something ASAP.

Rebecca's just waking up. She comes into the living room and asks why I'm home.

"It's a long story," I say.

"Oh."

She makes a caramel iced coffee and sits beside me on the couch. She starts looking at jewelry online. She shows me the necklace and earring set. She sighs longingly.

So do I.

The next day I wake up at my usual time. I eat two bowls of raisin bran, then go downtown to hand out resumes. Rebecca thinks I'm going to work.

When I get downtown, something catches my eye. It's a poster on a telephone pole. The photo looks familiar. I get closer and realize it's me, wearing my burger joint hat and a drive-thru headset. And above the photo,

in capital letters, it says: DON'T HIRE THIS MAN.

I stare at it for a minute, unable to think.

Then my phone rings. It's my coworker, Fry.

"Hello?"

"Dude, Phil's lost his mind. He thinks you faked sick." He grunts. "Gimme a break. You?"

"Uh..."

"What? Is it true?"

"Well, yeah..."

"What the hell."

"What?"

"Dude, that's fucked up. You'll probably never get a job again."

"That's ridiculous."

"Not really." He breathes deeply. "You know what? I can't even talk to you."

Before I can reply, he hangs up.

I look around, and see that there's a poster on every telephone pole on the main street. I tear down the one in front of me.

I go into the vape lounge and give a resume to the employee. She looks at me, at my resume, back at me, then past me to the street where, in the twenty seconds since coming in, someone has put up a new poster. She squints, then says, "Hey, you're the guy from the poster!"

"It's all a misunderstanding," I say.

"Yeah right," she says, and takes out her phone. "I'm calling the police."

I leave before she can.

Don't Hire This Man - Graham Wylie

As I walk down the main street I notice more people staring at me. A homeless man asking for money covers his cup when I pass him.

At the main square, where there's usually a bulletin board with dozens of ads, there's instead a huge photo of me, with letters as long as my feet saying: DON'T HIRE THIS MAN.

I start tearing it down. People start yelling at me. Then they realize it's me tearing it down, and they yell louder. Two cops on bikes pull over. They drag me away from the scene. I'm screaming. They call for backup.

Later, at the police station, I call Rebecca.

"Alex?"

"Hell—" But she cuts me off.

"You're lucky I even answered. I saw you on the news."

"The news?"

"I've had the locks changed," she says, and I hear her sip her caramel iced coffee. "Don't ever contact me again. If you do, I'll get a restraining order."

"O—" But she hangs up before I can say, "kay."

"Look, buddy," a cop says. "We're not going to charge you with vandalism—though we certainly could—but I think it'd be best if you left town."

"But I live here."

To this he just shrugs.

When I leave, I squat behind a bush and call Fry.

"What," he says.

"Rebecca kicked me out. Which doesn't really make sense, financially, but there's nothing I can do."

"How is this my problem?"

"I need a place to stay."

Don't Hire This Man - Graham Wylie

"Fuck off," he says, and hangs up.

I decide to go to the burger joint. I walk fast and keep my head down.

When I go inside, my former coworkers stop working and stare at me. Fry is on break. He's sitting at a table, eating fries. He shakes his head.

Phil comes out from the back and says, very seriously, "You need to leave. *Now.*"

"I work hundred-hour weeks and this is how you treat me?"

He just stares at me.

"Well then, fuck you."

And before I leave, I knock down the dancing cardboard burger that stands at the entrance. My coworkers gasp as it goes down, but I'm already gone.

I go to the bank, but my account has been locked. I can't withdraw cash. Tellers won't acknowledge me.

Then my phone service gets cut.

I wander the streets, sweating, while strangers swear and throw things at me.

I end up outside the jewelry store. With nothing to lose, I run inside, assault the jeweler, break the glass, steal the necklace and earring set, and sprint down the street to my house.

Out of breath, I knock.

Rebecca opens the door. She's holding her caramel iced coffee and her phone. "What did I—" But she stops, seeing what I have. "Is that...?"

"Yes," I say, doubled over.

I give it to her.

"I mean, thanks, I guess, but lately I've just been, you know, really into artisanal soaps?"

Don't Hire This Man - Graham Wylie

"Oh."

"This changes nothing. Please leave."

I leave, taking obscure side streets till I'm outside the city.

I walk along the highway, the sun burning my neck, hoping to find something in the next town. When the walk becomes unbearable, I hold up my thumb.

A car slows down. When the driver sees that it's me, he throws an open can of Coke at my head and floors the gas. Most of it spills on the ground, but I salvage some of it, and take a sip. It's ice cold. Maybe things aren't so bad after all.



Midnight Oil - Nina Rafique

Unloading

Sarah Waldner

The plant had been too big from the start. Sam convinced Maria to buy it for the corner of the living room, where it would “brighten up the space.” It was supposed to go between the bookshelf and the TV.

That was a year ago, back when Maria still knew what the name of the plant was. She had considered keeping the tag from the store because she knew she had a bad memory with these things, but ended up throwing it out right before she broke up with Sam. It had been his job to do the dishes and her job to clean the rest of the house. But the third week the dishes sat dirty in the sink—she had been eating off of paper towels and swirling her cup around to mix the milk into the coffee rather than using a spoon—she decided that there was only one reasonable course of action she could take: throwing away everything in the kitchen. The plant tag, sitting innocently in the drawer beside the sink, had been a casualty.

Back then the plant had been the size of a small chair. It sat in the corner of the living room like someone very tall trying to look comfortable in a low car. It was a dull, dirty shade of green and had five arms, each with a big, flat leaf at the end. When it grew large enough that it started to obstruct the TV screen, Maria moved the plant to the corner of the kitchen. But while moving it, one of the massive arms caught on the doorframe and snapped off.

The next morning, three new stems were sprouting from the snapped-off arm, each with a new hand unfurling towards the light. She was trying to find a new place for the plant to go when she remembered: this was the morning that Sam was coming over to pick up his things. She purposely decided to wash her clothes while he was over. She wanted an excuse to not be in the same room as him, to leave the apartment and go sit downstairs in the complex’s laundry room.

She was sitting on top of the washing machine, watching TikToks, when Sam burst in.

“You know, technically the bed is half mine. I paid for half of it,” he told her. “You’re already keeping the apartment. It’s not fair you get to keep the bed too.”

“You have a bed at your mom’s.”

"It's only a twin though. My feet hang off the end at night. You know I hate that."

Maria sat there, silently vibrating. He had laid diagonally in their queen bed to avoid this, forcing her to sleep curled up in the top right corner.

"Whatever," he said. "Keep the bed. But I'm taking the TV."

"Fine."

Sam walked back out through the laundry room door. Three seconds later he came back and slammed it. The washer stopped shaking and sang its cheery *doo-do-doo-do!* but Maria made no move to take the clothes out; she sat still for a long time, staring at the wall. It was blank except for an advertisement for the moldy basement bachelor suite. *Three honkin' rooms in one!*

A week later, Maria started avoiding the kitchen altogether. Sam hadn't taken his new toaster oven or his twenty-four pack of Spicy Chicken Mr. Noodles. Twenty-three of the packages remained. Plus, the plant had grown so large that she now had to twist around it just to get to the fridge. She resorted to ordering takeout for dinner every night and eating it on the living room couch. That was fine, she thought. She wouldn't have to go into the kitchen and be reminded of Sam's inability to do the dishes.

She was reminded of this anyway when the flies came. It started slow; a couple would buzz around the lamp while she was eating her sweet and sour pork. Maria ignored them. But the plant in the kitchen started to harbor flies. Or maybe they were a natural extension of the plant—it had grown so big that it had started its own ecosystem. She began to have to guard her food. Each night before bed she'd go around the room with her old history textbook and whap as many of the flies as she could so that they wouldn't pelt her in her sleep. They did anyway. She started sleeping with the covers pulled up over her head.

A couple of days later, Maria woke up in the middle of the night to a sharp pinch on her neck. She smacked her throat reflexively, then jerked out of bed to turn on the light. Pushing around her duvet, she discovered the culprit: a red-brown beetle the size of an apple with two bowed pincers. She ran to the living room to get her history textbook.

That was when she saw it: the arms of the plant had now grown through the kitchen doorway into the living room. With its leafy fingers

Unloading - Sarah Waldner

reached out, the plant seemed to be saying *gimme gimme gimme*. The whole room vibrated with a viscous hum; the doorway was seething with flies and ants.

Maria had to open the restaurant the next day—noon was going to come *early*—and now she had to deal with this mess. Not knowing what else to do, she heaved the couch up onto its side—grunting a bit—and pushed it over in front of the kitchen doorway, shoving the plant arms back into the kitchen as she went. Lots of stalks snapped. Then she put on her rain boots and spent at least ten minutes stomping on every ant she could see. She repeated her fly-whapping ritual. With the couch blocking the doorway, the hum was less noticeable; the living room was the living room again. When she went back to the bedroom, history textbook in hand, the beetle was nowhere to be seen.

...

When Maria woke up next, the blanket twisted between her legs was too smooth and rubbery to be blanket, and she jumped, ripping herself from the vines that were curled between her toes and slick against her calves.

She sat in the top right corner of her bed picking bits of green out from between her toes and silently dropping them into the small trash pail—or, where the trash pail *should* have been—beside her bed. When her eyes adjusted, she could see ants churning on the wall in front of her. The room was saturated with the plant's hum; it was as inescapable as ringing ears after a loud concert. The air was heavy with humidity and sweat pooled under Maria's knees and in the crooks of her elbows.

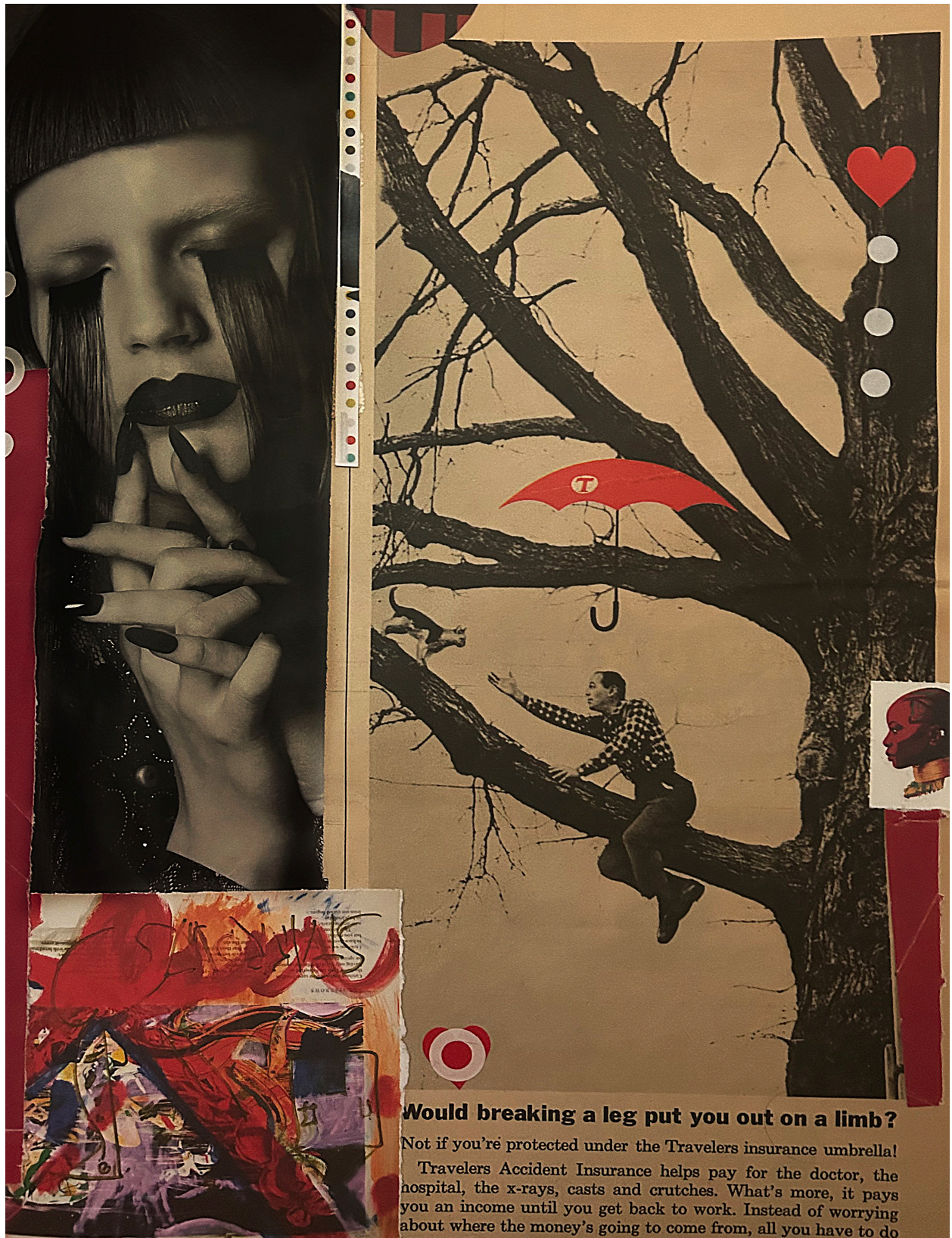
When she finished unwrapping herself, she got up and walked—stepping on green limbs, hearing them crack under her feet—over to the window. She ripped leaves away from in front of it, letting the light leak in, and then pushed it fully open. Cool spring air hit her body. She took off the screen. Then she chose a plant stalk—a big thick one under her foot—and, snapping it like a piece of celery, tossed the amputated greenery out the window. Repeating this, she threw armful after armful out the window; soon, most of the bedroom was clear and she could start into the hallway.

The bigger stalks hit the lawn three stories down with some weight, bouncing upon impact. But the thin leaves caught the pillowy wind and—drifting reluctantly to the ground, pausing here and there for a millisecond—landed on the grass weightlessly.

...

A few days later, Sam went to warm up a slice of leftover double-cheese-and-olive pizza at his mom's house. He stood in front of the microwave with the plate for fifteen seconds thinking about how soggy it would get. Then he set down the pizza, jumped in his car, and drove to Maria's apartment. He still had a key. When he turned the last corner of the yellow-lighted, dirty-carpeted apartment hallway—breathing in the musty scent of cigarette smoke, even though it was a non-smoking complex—the apartment door was wide open. He poked his head in the living room cautiously, calling out "hello?" No one answered, but he could see things inside were different. The room was completely empty.

"What the fuck," he said to himself, wandering in. He walked into the kitchen and opened all the cupboards, but he couldn't find his toaster oven anywhere. Then he made his way down the hallway to the bedroom. In the spot where the bed had been, there was a plant the size of a small chair sitting on the ground. It was a dull, dirty shade of green and had five arms, each with a big, flat leaf at the end.



untitled - Jinian Harwig



untitled - Jinian Harwig

The Overturned Law

Vivian Krissilas

Ladies
with slim fingers and painted nails,
with starched aprons and hair-pulling buns,
ravaged dry stale dirt,
palms bubbling with pus-filled blisters,
turning silt to fresh soil in slow handfuls,
to plant their seed
as their raging wrists turn pink
against the tight knot of a twisted rope.

For forty-nine years
it blossomed
it took form
its roots weaving through the womb
to tether
to the heart and mind of its holder,
despite the protest filled tantrum
of little boys with lassos.

Until a firm leather boot
holding the crinkled paper foot
of a self-appointed demigod
came stomping down onto it,
leaving its leaves wilted
and stem bent,
leaving unloved flesh
inside the bodies
of unwilling women,
leaving bruise-covered girls
to carry their suffering
and give it life,
leaving the violated daughters
of vile fathers
to give birth to their brother and son,
leaving a once loosened bind
callously stitched
into exhausted skin.

Departure

Sarah Waldner

We're waiting
for spaces to fill when
my seatmate lets me in

on his terminal illness.
The plane takes off.
He crowds me

with his crusty edges
of mouth, beige details
of Detroit, and everything

about his wife, apart
from why she's not
beside him. Air pressure

and the smell of my
grandfather's hospital
breath. Six more hours.

Attendants deliver
trays of food: pale,
gelatinous, cramped

in the little square
compartments.
Condensation leaks

over the armrests.
Nine hundred
kilometres, every hour.

Oil Star Poem

Alison McFarlane

When I was a kid, Dad told me
the rules of looking.
He tells me even now in my adulthood,
"look where you want to go." Always,

he said this,
while in the driver's seat and I can see him
from the passenger side, feet
in little rubber boots not touching ground.
We're on our way to the store, I'm seven
with raspberries and lavender
in the clouds. On our way
to buy burnt sienna and cobalt blue
so, to deal with the bare aisles of our hearts
lengthening horizontal
like pulling out our guts. His more than mine, at that time. Grown
truck goes *brump brump brump* under it all
ground control calling out to Major Tom:
"Are we there, yet?"
Colours and candles
curb my attention and then I hear it:
Look with your eyes and not with your hands.
I try to listen
like the crazed 2001 space-odyssey I am
making glass candles into weapons
of waxy shards, gravity a winner
before
I learn my lesson. Finally, in the scatter plot
I now see
where I'm headed.

Do as I say, not as I do. He knew
that was sullied parental instructions
and that I'd love to pencil trace
everything my father set out to do. Even then,
2009 and fingerpainting for days
in that elegant inner-child way. There I am,
breaking rules
squeezing tubes dead into near-sighted hands.
Here I am, with my observant body and palms
acrylic-colouring over the lines. Older now,
Dad says take the brush and then gust it
down or up like windy rivers, make purple
trunks. Or however, you want nature

to run. Nothing is right or wrong or in retrograde
when you make art, fun, I think that's when
I begun.

Not half-bad half-cooked
stories written downstairs. On the family desktop
I'm typing when she says, there's trouble,
thrown to the curb like nothing. Lucky enough
to have been wearing a helmet,
handcrafted
out of antlers and this was the first time
I imagine, they'd ever put a moose to bed
in the back of a city ambulance. It sings loud
Whrrl, whrrl, whrrl above an ancient song
I hadn't really understood was steeping
in our cups.

I'm not a kid, but I hear Dad
telling me the rules of looking:
Look where you want to go; push steering is sneaky to navigate.
The body drifts with the thoughts
of the psyche, spinal injuries, and Neverland
headaches he says won't ever grow up.
Stop Sign up ahead says, slow
your motion but don't stay
parked in the moon age, forever. Oncoming
Green trucks are coming, thrilled to arrive at craft store destinations.
Check the rear-view mirror, at life
as it used to be left behind. Looking at him,
I'm not sure he's ever been the same
since Bowie died. I say it, hypocritical too,
in my adulthood still a kid, at aged twenty-two
I say: remember to love with your eyes
and to look with your hands. Look, *look!*
Where you are. I'm proud. And how, are you
supposed to help me illustrate life
into fantastic technicolour
untethered,
too far afield?
Full-sized moose, minus a rocketeer suit
interstellar bound. Going everywhere
living eternal or in temporary album sounds
in outer space oil painted up there. I could not bear the weight
of looking. If you were
to go.



End of a Bloodline - Nina Rafique

Cycles

Claire Macaulay

When I was 16, my fangs came in. There's not much I could've done about it, it's not like any dentist is going to believe you when you tell them "I think my teeth are getting longer."

I didn't even notice until my mom told me one day, "Stop doing that with your mouth. You look funny," and I was too self-conscious to tell her I wasn't doing anything different. You have to hold your lips differently when you have fangs, I've learned, or else you'll always look like you're sucking on a lemon.

A few weeks later was when I grew claws. Long, thick, sharp nails that curled inward and sliced through my mattress when I tried to clean the blood from my bedsheets. I didn't know whose it was, or how it got there, by the way. My mom chastised me for not having a period tracker app or whatever as she covered them in stain remover.

The claws made the whole thing kind of hard to deny. For the first little while, I blamed it on hormones. Maybe it was just some late-stage puberty symptoms that grade nine health failed to prepare me for. Like mood swings, and changes in bone structure, and an insatiable craving for raw meat.

...

"I think there's something wrong with me," I told Anna the morning after the thing with the sheets.

"Like what?" she asked, shoveling cafeteria fries into her mouth.

"Like..." Like I feel sick. Like I can't tell who I am anymore. *Like I want to fucking kill you.* "Like I just feel different."

"Mm," Anna hummed. "I get that. I think that's, like, a teenage girl thing. I mean, the other day I thought I should get my nipples pierced, but then I was like, why the hell would I do that?"

"I don't think that's comparable."

"I just mean, like, we're all trying to find ourselves right now."

Cycles - Claire Macaulay

"I feel like a monster sometimes, Anna," I told her.

"Ugh, don't even get me started. Brett says I'm like a different person when I'm PMSing. Like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He's such a dick."

"It's not PMS."

"You never know you're PMSing when you're PMSing."

I couldn't argue with her, so I just shrugged.

"I think I'm going to break up with Brett," she said as we grabbed our bags and headed to biology.

...

The month after that I woke up in a pool of blood again, naked and curled up like a dog at the foot of my own bed, like whatever state I was in that night turned me into a stranger. For me to wake up one time covered in blood after a total blackout the night before is a worthy cause for alarm. But for it to happen *twice* meant it was definitely going to start becoming a habit if I didn't do something about it.

I'd never really been one to jump to conclusions, nor was I a huge believer in monsters at the time—of the folklore variety, I mean. I know monsters are real because I've seen them. I've shaken their hands—but plenty of people don't believe in things until they're directly affected by them. Like climate change or taking a political stance.

"Mom," I started hesitantly that night at the dinner table, stirring my salad around with my fork but never really eating it. "I wasn't sure how to tell you this, but I can't really avoid it anymore."

My mother looked at me with that unreadable expression that mothers tend to give you when they're warning you not to say something specific without actually telling you what they don't want you to say.

"I'm turning into a werewolf," I finished. I heard my father's fork hit the side of his bowl as he groaned "*For fuck's sake, Diana.*"

"Oh, thank God in heaven," my mother said. "I thought for a second you were going to tell me you were a lesbian."

"I mean it," I insisted. "Look at me, Mom, I'm a monster. I look like a mess, and I'm angry all the time."

"You don't sleep enough, you barely eat your dinner, I haven't once seen you exercise since you stopped taking gym," she scolded. "When you fix your lifestyle, then we'll see if you're still feeling like this."

We never spoke of it again after that, but she left a bottle of extra-strength Midol on my nightstand the next morning. I didn't need it, of course, but it reminded me to download a tracker app. I marked the next full moon on my calendar.

...

Anna did break up with Brett, about a month later. And then he threw a fit about it. Anna tried to leave his house on a Friday afternoon, and she told me he'd positioned himself between her and the door, looming over her like a monster or something.

"I was so scared, Diana," she told me. "I swear he doubled in size. I thought he was gonna kill me, but I just stared at him and eventually he moved out of the way."

"Jesus," I said, because I really couldn't say anything else.

"He's just like that. Like, he was always super possessive of me, I don't think he can handle the fact that I'm my own person."

"Don't make excuses for him."

"I'm not," she said, indignantly, and then, as if her train of thought had done a complete 180, she went silent.

"Hey," she mumbled after a minute, "is it still rape if I eventually said yes?"

Here's the thing: at this point I'd gotten used to suppressing the rage and the near-constant urge to rip a small animal limb from limb with my teeth. I was beginning to learn how to live with this *thing*, this fucking *animal* that seems to be seconds away from taking over my body at any given moment. But in that instant, with anger, and fear, and horror boiling in the pit in my stomach...

Cycles - Claire Macaulay

"I'm going to kill him, Anna," I told her, and I don't think it was me who said it.

...

You'd really think the transition would be easier, honestly. As far as monsters go, werewolves are the ones that are supposed to look the most human, like 90% of the time. I guess I got the short end of the lycanthropic stick or something. Nobody ever really paid any mind to the fangs or the claws, though, and I started questioning if they were even there at all.

It took me a while to come to, the third time I changed. I caught glimpses of it as it was happening, like whatever human part was left of me was struggling to maintain control. Muffled shouting, flashes of red, blood pumping through my veins as I dropped to all fours in a sprint, the feeling of flesh ripping under my claws. I was huge, so much bigger than he must have looked to Anna, and I barely remember him calling out a prayer, some sort of apology to God.

"For Anna," I roared with the last of my humanity. And then I stopped fighting it.

I left his body in the woods to be another unsolved mystery. Nobody would ever believe me if I told them the truth, anyway.



untitled - Irene Suvillaga

13 Months of Sunshine

Bethlehem Bekele



"*Ambessoch*. This part of the family actually thinks they're descended from royalty," my mother commented as we approached the gates to her aunt Almaz's house.

On either side of the main entrance, there were seven foot tall golden statues of the Lion of Judah. I recognized him instantly, but definitely hadn't met his twin before. The main house was a deep, yet electric blue that contrasted perfectly with the loud brass. As we walked under the arch and into Auntie's compound, just at the last second, I caught a cheeky wink from the Lion on the left.

It was my second time ever visiting the country that gave me bones. I felt like nothing more than a fragment in a shattered pinky toe. My Amharic was good, but I still couldn't hide that I'd grown up abroad. I tried being quiet, saying less, maybe that would help keep my secret? Nope. Backfired. People then would not only assume that I was a *ferenji*, but also that I didn't even speak Amharic! Imagine.



"*Ney lije*, come help me gather the *kimemoch*." Grandma was outside sun-drying chilies and herbs for *berbere*.

"*Belew*, you're so big now. *Inki*, this one is especially delicious," she handed me a piece of sugar cane, already peeled. Her smiling eyes widened when I froze mid-chewing.

"I'm okay! Just, hold on," I ran back into the house to unplug my insulin pump from the charger. The mosquitoes followed.

By that point, everyone had already started calling me variations of "Robot Girl." Neighbours would greet me saying, "*Robotwa!* How is your sugar?!" And I was honestly surprised by how little it bothered me.

"*Wey ene!*" Crunch.

I turned the corner and found her sitting on the ground, inspecting her foot.

"Grandma, are you okay?"

"How do you say again in English.. when you hit your toe? I forgot the word."

"Hahaha, you stubbed your toe!"

"Stahbeh?"

I nearly fell over.

"Stub. To stub. You stub-bed your toe."

"*Ishi*, stub-bed. Stubbed. These *inglisoch* have such a strange language."



Passé composé.

Canadian school was teaching me a lot of weird things about French, like how the accent that looked like a hat was sometimes used as a placeholder for newly unemployed letters. It must have taken a certain kind of stubbornness to hold on to traditions like that. My best guess was that being stubborn was also how Ethiopians avoided the worst of colonialism. Still, Italy deposited words like *mercatto*, *banyo*, and withdrew legacies like Lucy, and the obelisks of Axum. They did at least return the latter... in pieces.

"*Minew, zare gena betewat tenesash?*"

In my short years alive, I had at least figured out that adults asked a lot of questions they didn't want answers to. It was still hard to tell which ones were real or fake, though.

"*Ney biy, I made genfo.*"

"Thank you Mama."

"Today is your history presentation?"

I nodded. She smiled and added a bit more *qibay* to my bowl.

"What are you planning to teach us?"

13 Months of Sunshine - Beth Bekele

I took out the bright yellow board, and unrolled it in front of the class. The teacher came to help me pin it up.

"13 months of sunshine? There are 12 months in a year," she stated.

"My... parents told me that in Ethiopia we have 13."

"But it's impossible to have 13 months when the calendar only has 12."

"I did my research. It's on all the calendars and posters back home... 13 months... It's part of our history."

"That has to be wrong. Anyways, just finish your show and tell."

I held back the river in my mouth, but it dredged through my eyes instead. *Qibay* and *berbere* seeping through the cracks in my breakfast.



Needles.

Baba had stopped giving me malaria pills, because they were making me throw up every night. Even though Mama told him not to. Then, the doctors told him that I would probably die. At least, that was what they told me, since I had very few memories of my first trip back home. Most vividly, I remembered the lilac mosquito net that tried its best to protect me.

"*Ayzosh*, I have something for you," the nurse pulled out a box. "It's very special, an Ethiopian watch. You can't get these in Canada!"

I wondered how a watch would save my life, but went along with it. Her grip on my wrist tightened, and before I knew it, the icy spring melt was flowing through my veins.

"God... loves you.. *Bettiye*, th-that's why he..didn't take you... yet."

I watched Mama fall as soon as she saw me. The ice crept up from my toes, inching towards my chest with each step. It wasn't an unusual scene, a blood and bones reunion in the Arrivals terminal. I watched, as the river that gave me lungs dredged right through her, and I prayed to Lake Tana, please save our family. Baba wrapped himself over us, and weepily, we evaporated, reconstituting only after we reached home.

Our Team

Director & Lead Editor
Remi Akers

Editor
Nicole Corcuera

Lead Editor
Shaun Phuah

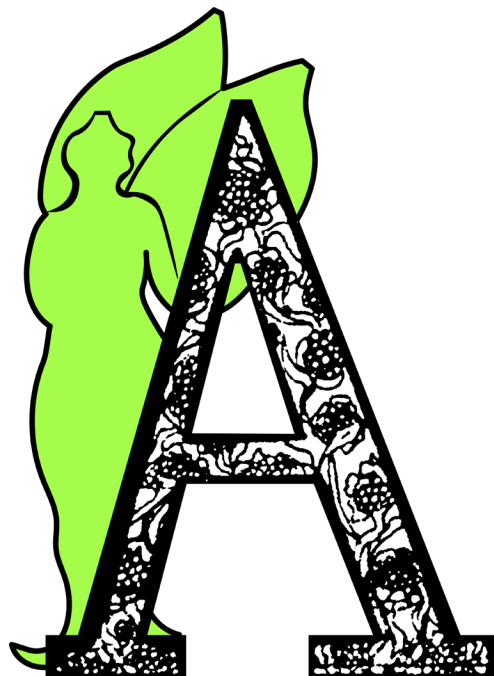
Graphic Designer
Sahira/Said Jiddawy

Lead Editor
Kavya Chandra

Illustrator
Emma Johns

Editor
Madeleine Fortin

Editor
Shamara Peart



Online
Absynthe Magazine goes beyond
print by engaging readers with online
content.

For your daily dose of everything
absynthe visit us at www.absynthe.ca

Cover Image
untitled - Shauna Brierley
Copyright © 2023.
Absynthe Magazine.
All rights reserved.

ABSYS

