This week, we're looking out at our shared, flooded kingdom, everything the light touches—or all it would touch, if it were sunny today.

The Nassau Weekly

50

October 15, 2026 | In Print since 1979 | Online at nassauweekly.com | Volume 50, Number 13



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Dear friends,

Anne Carson was awarded the Nobel Prize last Thursday, a decision that has turned out relatively uncontroversial. Carson's work has touched many of our lives, and, more so than other writers, we all seem to come to her in different ways. Though many first open *Autobiography of Red*, it turns out that many others start with *Grief Lessons*, her collection of Euripides plays, and certainly some have encountered her picking up the uniquely packaged *Float*, a striking blue box of poems collected in themed pamphlets. Carson's style is brief, but dense. Layered. A professor of mine, borrowing from her own mentor, instructs that one should have three reasons for every detail in a short story—no, four, no, five. Carson's words often take the form of a few lines, and each word has three, no, four, no, five reasons to be there. It is an affirmation of what we all wished to deny in high school English class, that the writer had any reason in mind at all when putting the coffee cup on the coffee table, that there was any kind of "symbol" imbued in the object.

Carson's lecture last year was a synthesis of materials—classical, contemporary, literary, visual, from others, work of her own, demonstrative, collaborative. The picture it erected was one of human complexity. The lecture was in part the sheer variety of ways it would be interpreted, concluding with a collective, joyful scream. She makes me understand that literary excellence is not a pursuit of complexity, nor is it one of ambiguity. It is a pursuit of the writer's own puzzledness, the posing of a curious question to infinite readers, the magic of literature existing in the possibility of infinite answers.

With love,
Sasha Rotko, EIC

Masthead

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Upcoming



ART BY RAVEN REID

Verbatims

Overheard on Prospect
Trade: "I saw that quirky white boy from a distance and thought he was a leggy brunette…"

Overheard at Robertson Hall
Anthropologist: "I need to cruise on Firestone C floor before I graduate."

Overheard in Bloomberg basement
TLAM exclusionist: "She wanted to be the masc of Theta."

Overheard on Firestone B Floor
Disillusioned Nass-goer: "Some people who I thought were brunette-bisexual ended up just being brunette."

Overheard in precept
TA recovering from strep throat: "If you guys got any funny grades I was probably high on Nyquil."

Overheard on Mccosh Walk
Blonde: "A brown squirrel! I feel way more comfortable around them than the black ones."
Bystander: "And why is that?"

Overheard in Terrace
Corleone-aboo: "You come to me on the day of my daughter's bat mitzvah…"
Captive audience: "He's doing the Jewish godfather and he knows I hate it."

Overheard outside Terrace
Two freshmen walking past beautiful women—
Wingman (loudly): "Eight inches is insane, bro. Ginormous."

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About us

The *Nassau Weekly* is Princeton University's weekly news magazine and features news, op-eds, reviews, fiction, poetry and art submitted by students. There is no formal membership of the *Nassau Weekly* and all are encouraged to attend meetings and submit writing and art. To submit, email your work to thenassauweekly@gmail.com by midnight on Monday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!

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PAGE DESIGN BY EDEN REINFURT

SOAPBOX #3

"Asian American": The Shift from Political to Cultural Identity

BY ANNABELLE LUO

Dear Reader,

Before I ever stepped foot in my freshman dorm, I had already followed every iteration of leftist activist groups at Princeton. From my living room, I watched how the university handled the Gaza solidarity encampment, I read reports of the 13 students arrested for occupying Clio Hall, and I stalked who followed the sjp.princeton Instagram from the class of 2028 page. Prior to even knowing what classes I was going to take, I knew I wanted to be involved with campus activism. I did not know how alone I would feel in that pursuit.

Growing up in a predominantly white town, part of my Asian American experience was feeling othered. Like so many, I came to college wanting nothing more than to find a community that finally understood my cultural background. Naively, I thought that growing up Asian American naturally meant that we would care about the same issues. Instead, when I tried to explain why I was advocating for a current cause, like why the University should divest from weapons manufacturers, I was often met with confusion and apathy. Over time, my disillusionment compelled me to search for the source of this divergence.

Despite its current ubiquity, some don't know that "Asian American" is a contemporary label that originated with an inherently political purpose. In 1968, student activists Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee founded the Asian American Political Alliance at UC Berkeley, coining the term as a means to replace "oriental" in the American lexicon. Subsequently, multiple Asian diasporas were able to organize under one umbrella with greater political power during the height of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War protests. In this era, to claim the Asian American identity was to be part of a greater movement for social change—I believe that today we have largely diverged from this original purpose. So how did Asian American shift from a political to a cultural identity?

A new wave of Asian immigrants to the United States started in the 1990s. Immigration policies like the F-1 and H1-B visa program, which favor those seeking higher education or already with professional degrees, shifted demographics of Asian immigrants away from the hard laborers and refugees of earlier generations. Assuming careers like engineers, academics, and doctors, Asian immigrants who took this newly crafted path to citizenship have, by most definitions, achieved the American dream. This is the context in which many second-generation Asian American children were born. Their pedigree is an American success story.

If Asian America is united by anything these days, I'd argue it's our shared experience of "success debt". The 2nd gen Asian American identity was born from the home, not a deliberate political movement. Whether it is consciously drilled into you by your parents touting how much they suffered and sacrificed to give you the comfort of an American life, or subconsciously developed by watching your parents come home late from long days of work, we develop an obsession with repaying our parents by achieving success. Across ethnicities, "the children of immigrants" occupy a cultural milieu that encourages individuals to prioritize their own success before considering anything beyond their household.

What does this mean for the Asian American at Princeton who has, by all popular metrics, "succeeded" and paid back this debt to their parents? At a predominantly white institution like Princeton where Asian Americans have seen success, I think there is an attitude among some that they worked harder and are more deserving of their place here. They don't want a proximity to whiteness because it would nullify the idea that they worked harder to get to where they are. This entitlement mirrors the rhetoric used in the *Students for Fair Admission v. Harvard* affirmative action case. If you asked any Asian American at Princeton if they ever doubted that success was an option, I think you'd have a hard time finding someone who would say yes. For this microcosm of people, working hard has been rewarded by the system. So why question it?

A key part of this puzzle is how Asian American culture attributes success. Is it from the meritocracy of the American dream or the industrious discipline of Asian parenting? In this case, I think that Asian American culture claims the latter and rejects the former. This distinction between Asian and American points to a greater phenomenon: Asian Americans don't want to be white, they take pride in being "capital A" Asian "capital A" American.

Commitment to the establishment and faith in the system is reflected in today's mainstream Asian American advocacy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans, particularly against elders in the community. The solution in many Chinatowns across the country was to call for more police presence in order to "protect" us. This demonstrated level of belief that the system will protect us is a caveat of the culture—work within the system, not outside of it. Just a few months ago, ICE raided a Hyundai plant in Georgia which employs predominantly Korean immigrants. But even when subjected to blatant discrimination, the community remains mostly silent. Unfortunately, it seems like more often than not, children of immigrants would rather stay silent than risk jeopardizing their own family's safety and reputation.

How long can we keep our heads down and ignore the U.S. government kidnapping our neighbors, bullying professors to suicide, and using our community to scapegoat a "great replacement"? I would argue that fighting for justice requires an intentional return to embodying a political existence. Our identity as Asian Americans can no longer be constrained to the household. By applying lessons from our own political history, I hope that more students are inspired to see themselves in a lineage that stretches back beyond just one generation.

Annabelle Luo

Fiction



ART BY KATE KLIGYS
PAGE DESIGN BY EDEN REINFURT

Something Akin to Reverence

"I met him in Twin Lakes, a little village flanked by Mt. Elbert and La Plata, shrouded in fine windblown silt and smoky violet."

BY SOPHIA MCNAMARA

It had been 11 days since I took my first step south. I made rules: never look back, never calculate fractions of distance, only break for food every ten miles. No music until after 4 p.m. Tent before dinner. Always. I made conversation with day hikers and mountain bikers. The older men asked if I was solo, wondered how many weeks I was planning to take. They raised their eyebrows in disbelief. I hated that.

I relished in the fire of ripping skin from drained blisters, the ache of my ribcage against frozen alpine tundra at night. The world was raw and beautiful, and everything vibrated with vitality. I was alone.

His trail name was Road Dog. Road Dawg? Roaddog?

I met him in Twin Lakes, a little village flanked by Mt. Elbert and La Plata, shrouded in fine windblown silt and smoky violet. Fire season. Mile 165. I had rebraided my hair before entering the inn and wiped the dirt from my face with my shirtsleeve. My pack leaned against my chair. The early light made my black coffee shimmer.

From the table behind me came a voice, gravelly and lax, asking whether I was on the Colorado or the Continental Divide Trail. I turned to face the source.

Our discussion began ritualistically: talk of water sources, the welcome warming of the nights, and praise for the real food before us. When I spoke, I heard my own voice secondhand.

He had come from the south. Desert and cow shit in the water and sleeping through the heat of the day and hiking through dusk into darkness. He had crossed the worst of the snowpack before Creede, lived a lifetime in 64 days, and now was almost halfway from Mexico to Canada. He told me that when he reached the terminus, he would cut west through Oregon—homeward—as long as the weather held.

I mentioned the rip in my sleeping bag. He demanded to repair it and knelt on the floor between our tables as I looked on. His hair was sun-bleached ginger, gathered at the nape. His earlobes dangled, loosened by gauge scars. His enthusiastic responses to my questions were preluded by long and careful consideration, to the point of my slight discomfort. This gave our conversation a spastic rhythm, punctuated by the clatter of dishes and the whisper of nylon as he patched my bag's gash with flesh-toned KT tape.

We spent the rest of the morning in front of the Twin Lakes General Store. Every half hour or so, a smudge appeared near the stream connecting the lakes, growing in size and clarity until a newcomer stood before us. First there was Big Maroon and his elderly blue heeler. Then Zamboni, who sported colorful beads in his long blond dreadlocks and spoke with a feminine musicality. All greeted Road Dog with familiarity and something akin to reverence.

Low whistles. "You're a machine, man!"

Noticing my curiosity, Big Maroon explained that the San Juan snowpack had proved formidable. To substantiate this point, he pulled up his pant leg, revealing an impressive abrasion from a failed glissade on rough firn. Apparently, Road Dog had stayed behind for a week in Pie Town, New Mexico, for a pack repair. He had still managed to overtake Big Maroon, Zamboni, and the others (I wouldn't intercept Big Cheese, Hummingbird, Obi-Wan, or Jackfruit for another 31 miles) in the Collegiates, and all this without an ice axe! He attributed his impressive daily mileage to the mushrooms he had harvested himself back home in Oregon. I suppose that's the place for such things.

We shared the splintering table, stuffing our bags with instant coffee and peanut butter and minute rice and other treasures of the same caliber. The hands grasping at the clutter had coarse hair on their knuckles and thick, square fingernails. I realized at once that I was a girl among men. I realized, too, that we had hiked away from loneliness to chase solitude and had found others like ourselves, and that we were stalling to make company last.

When it was noon and the sun was hot, I continued south and Road Dog continued north.

I forded the stream between the lakes and climbed up Hope Pass and then down its other side and then up again and then on and on. He had gifted me a mantra: "Every mile is a blessing." I whispered it to thin air when there was pain, and especially when there was joy.

Sophia McNamara *fuels herself with instant coffee and peanut butter on the trail.*

Fiction

Mallard

"She was born and raised in a home without electricity or heat or floors, but now one of her sons was a representative in the Missouri House, the highest a Mallardian had ever climbed."

BY LUCIA ZSCHOCHE

Mallard, Missouri, had always been a two-restaurant town. They stared each other down day after day, permanently situated on opposite corners of Main and Clemons. It was the only intersection with a stoplight for miles; anxious roadtrippers usually blew through it, mistaking Mallard's poverty for crime.

Clark's Pub was a mammoth of a brick building with boarded-up windows and faded paint ads from the town's "heyday." Neon signs enticed potential patrons with promises of Budweiser and a slot machine. Jim Clark and his wife, Patricia, had tended the bar for five wars; they watched solemnly as their former high school classmates slowly replaced the barflies of their parents' generation.

Every morning, the Clarks parked their rust-damaged Cutlass in front of their bar. The streets were always empty, save for the parking lot of the restaurant catty-corner from them. Without fail, the couple would scowl and curse the other slice of Americana that was stealing their market share.

The other restaurant was a McDonald's. Anywhere else, "restaurant" would be a generous term for a fast-food joint with a drive-thru. But in Mallard, "restaurant" was hardly sufficient. The dining room bustled with people. Truckers parted ways with their families over coffee and McMuffins. Tenured farmers and their wives reminisced about the good ol' days, when Mallard had its own movie theater, over Big Macs. And Ms. Dawson, who lost her husband in Afghanistan, sat in the far booth with her two children every Friday night for a family dinner of Happy Meals and a Filet-O-Fish.

Kimberly Hayes had worked the opening shift ever since she discovered that she could not afford community college. Her parents couldn't pay for it either, but it's not like they would have anyways. The Hayes only really had three things to their name: an ATV, Mr. Hayes' semi-truck, and their dog, Weasel. Their home, an 800-square-foot bungalow with broken vinyl siding and mold, was mortgaged. From peanut butter to the slow Wi-Fi that fueled Kimberly's brother's video game "career," the Hayes were drowning in a murky, above-ground pool of credit card debt.

"Welcome in, Mr. Mason. What can I get you today?" she asked. The old man in front of her scratched his jaw.

"Gimme a regular Mountain Dew and a couple a' hash browns."

"How many?"

Mr. Mason furrowed his brow and scrutinized the LED screen that illuminated Kimberly's brown hair with its artificial light. His aging face was speckled with liver spots, and his mouth was missing several teeth. Just as he had done fifty years ago, Mr. Mason still mowed his three acres every Sunday while his wife watched disapprovingly from the porch. He proudly flew a POW-MIA flag in their front yard for his brother-in-law, and painted the side of their double-wide home with "FIREWOOD-$5."

"Gimme three."

She pressed a couple of buttons. "That'll be $7.47."

A five, a one, five quarters, two dimes, and two pennies made their way onto the counter, one at a time. Kimberly printed the receipt and put it in a large paper cup in the grandpa's calloused hands. He took his usual spot at the small table near the emergency exit. His presence there each morning was guaranteed—if he or any of the old regulars did not appear by seven, Kimberly called them from the landline to make sure they were all right.

Kimberly squinted out the window. 5am was too early for minimum wage. The sun barely peeked out below the gas station canopy next door. Abandoned lots and dilapidated Victorians rose from the ground beyond that, remnants of an era Mallardians loved to remember.

It was hard to imagine that Mallard ever had a "boom." It wasn't a natural occurrence; there was nothing in a hundred miles besides farmland and cave tours from which to profit. No, the railroad expanded in the 1800s, and Mallard was in the way. Nearly a thousand immigrants "flocked" to the town over five years and, for whatever reason, decided to stay. Most of them farmed, but some opened businesses—their former storefronts still bore their founders' names in faded paint in tile.

"Hey, Kimberly."

"Jake! I didn't know you were here—in town, I mean," she stammered.

Kimberly looked at the man in front of her and could see nothing but the 12-year-old boy who had once been her best friend. From the tire swing on their shared property line, Kimberly could not help but notice the young woman Jake's father would come home with while his mother was working the late shift. Kimberly had forgotten what she had uttered to Jake's mom, but within months, a divorce was finalized, and Jake was somebody else's neighbor in Branson.

"Just for the weekend. Dad wanted help cleaning out the garage and, you know, he doesn't have mom anymore."

Kimberly nodded slowly. Her fingers began tapping against the laminate countertop.

"How's Mizzou?" She asked, motioning at his faded Tigers sweatshirt.

"Fine."

"Still studying Agriculture?"

"Yeah."

Kimberly chuckled to herself. "I never thought corn could be that interesting."

Jake didn't respond. Instead, he pulled his wallet out of his back pocket. Kimberly returned her gaze to the cash register.

"What can I get you?"

"Coffee and a sausage biscuit."

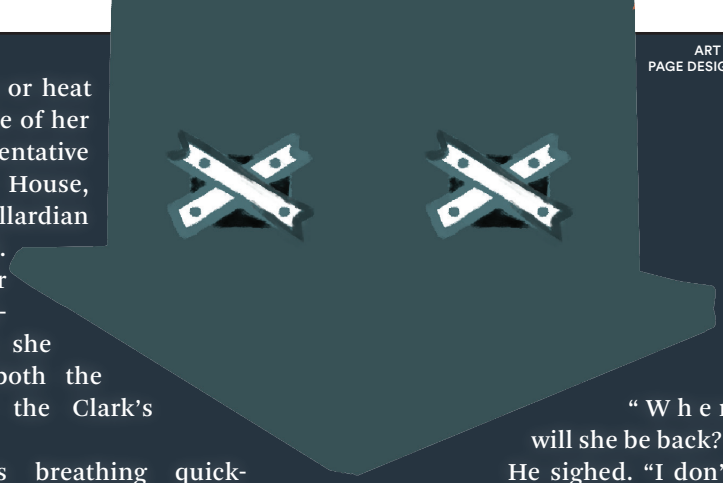
She rang him up. He stared at the unchanging screen, debit card at the ready.

"It won't let me pay," he said.

"Don't worry about it."

"What?"

ART BY RAVEN REID
PAGE DESIGN BY ALLEGRA TERRY



"I got you," she said. "Don't worry about it."

She handed him the receipt. He didn't say goodbye.

Kimberly itched her nose. She used to have a nose ring until last week. She had wanted something to set herself apart from her dreary surroundings but was too sickened by tattoos and too afraid of her parents to dye her hair purple. She settled on a little silver stud from Claire's. That lasted about five months—a girl can only take so many nasty glares from her parents' friends.

As the sun rose above the Shell Station, the regulars flowed in. Their military surplus jackets and her cash register created a cacophony of rote conversation and metallic clanging.

"Mornin'," Mr. Lansing mumbled as he pulled his black uniform cap over his balding head. Mr. Lansing was Kimberly's sophomore English teacher, and the summer fry cook.

"Good morning." She leaned backwards against the counter to face the shorter man. "How's summer school going?"

Mr. Lansing groaned. "I have it after this. You know the Hauser twins?"

Everyone knew the two boys, who had been in and out of juvenile detention centers since they had learned to talk. "Yeah."

"They're in both of my classes."

"Maybe they won't be that bad," Kimberly said. She snapped her fingers and pointed at the metal door behind them. "Oh, Mike said the fridge needs to be cleaned out."

The teacher cursed under his breath. He shook his head as he turned toward the grill, but his gaze lingered on the dining room.

"Is Ms. Ann here?"

Kimberly scanned the seating area, examining each plastic booth and metal chair. The empty tables gleamed in the early morning light, though a few still had remnants of last night's meals scattered across them. The ninety-five-year-old woman who ate her breakfast with Kimberly every morning was nowhere to be seen; her booth was taken over by two burly mechanics with a mound of steaming hotcakes between them.

Ms. Ann was the only person that Kimberly knew who thought of Mallard as a Paris or New York. She had worked at the pharmacy next to the Clark's the summer after the second world war and came out married to the owner's son. She had been born and raised in a home without electricity or heat floors, but now one of her sons was a representative in the Missouri House, the highest a Mallardian had ever climbed. Since rearing her children and burying her husband, she had patronized both the McDonald's and the Clark's once a day.

Kimberly's breathing quickened as she reached for the phone and the Yellow Pages. She combed through the book for Ms. Ann's number, which was crossed out and rewritten in the margins. She punched the numbers on the keypad and waited.

Nobody responded. She tried again: nothing.

"What's Ms. Ann's last name?" Kimberly shouted across the room. A handful of diners looked up at her with empty expressions. "Her maiden name. Please, anyone?"

The two mechanics looked at each other.

"Moore? Moore."

She dug through the book, ignoring the customers who had lined up at the register, until she found William Moore. He was Ms. Ann's representative son, who split his time between the state capital and, less frequently now, Mallard.

It took two calls for him to pick up.

"Hello?" he asked. His voice was low and groggy—nothing like in his campaign commercials.

"Hi Mr. Moore, this is Kimberly from the McDonald's on Main and Clemons—is your mom okay?"

There was a moment of silence as the man on the other end tried to comprehend her hurried words.

"Is your mom okay? She comes in every morning and has orange juice with a McMuffin and hash browns and she's not here right now. Is she okay?"

Mr. Moore groaned. A woman's voice asked him what was going on, and he muttered something in response.

"She's fine. Slipped and broke her ankle. She's with us."

Kimberly flashed a thumbs-up. She turned back to the phone, "Will she be coming in today?"

"Will she be coming in today?" Kimberly repeated. "To McDonald's. The McDonald's on Main and Clemons."

"No, no, no," he said. She heard his bedsheets rustle. "She's with us in Jefferson City."

"When will she be back?"

He sighed. "I don't know. A week? A month? Never? Unless you can convince my brother to take her, she'll be here for a while."

No one spoke as Kimberly processed this information. She watched the men in Ms. Ann's booth chew the last of their over-salted fries.

"Okay. Thank you, Mr. Moore."

Two more hours of the morning shift passed without trouble, but Kimberly could not shake the image of Ms. Ann, cooped up in a Jefferson City mansion with her son and daughter-in-law. Kimberly had met William once, at a campaign rally in the elementary school's gym—his wife had worn a fitted pantsuit and diamond earrings.

Kimberly smiled a little wider at her customers than she usually would have. She watched them file by and trudge to their seats, not with trepidation, but a sense of comfort.

At noon, her manager took Kimberly's place and told her it was time to clock out. She brought the tip jar to the back room and counted the crinkled bills and aquamarine pennies. It was an unspoken pact among the patrons and staff that the morning tips went to Kimberly.

Eleven dollars and eighty five cents. She took what was hers, then placed what she owed for Jake's meal in the cash register.

Kimberly removed her apron and cap. She waved to her fellow Mallardians as she left the building and crossed the barren street. Her shift at Clark's Pub started in an hour, and if she hurried, she might have enough time to scarf down a basket of Mrs. Clark's buffalo wings first.

Lucia Zschoche *is a two-restaurant girl.*

Essays

Nass Recommends: The Original Fall Break

Princeton's fall break once served the purpose of an "election break" for students to go and vote. What should we do with it now?

BY SOPHIE O'CONNOR

In a nook behind the Princeton University Chapel, there is a bronze sculpture of two men. One of them—young, dressed only in shorts, without the armor of even a simple T-shirt—has his hands bound and is on his knees. The other is older, bearded. He wears rolled-up trousers and a button-down shirt, and he holds a short blade. The pose appears to belong irreconcilably to a bygone era of fables and death by the sword. In actuality, the relevance of the work is striking: the circumstances of its creation run parallel to those of today's youth.

The sculpture is George Segal's "Abraham and Isaac," named for the biblical story in which God commands Abraham to give his son Isaac as a burnt offering on a mountain. Abraham agrees without hesitation and climbs the mountain with Isaac. Segal reimagined and modernized this story to represent the Kent State shooting of 1970, where the Ohio National Guard shot four unarmed students protesting the Vietnam War. In it, he saw a timeless pattern of an older generation sacrificing its children in the name of abstract principles.

***

At 9 p.m. on April 30, 1970, Nixon addressed the nation. In his hands was a stack of white papers; his non-threatening blue suit matched the curtains of the Oval Office behind him. With a preparatory sigh, Nixon looked up from his papers at the camera, his eyes shadowed by bushy and furrowed brows. "We take this action, not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia," and with a forceful projection, "but for *ending* the war in Vietnam" [italics mine].

U.S. ground troops stationed in South Vietnam had already crossed over two days earlier on orders to attack communist base camps and supply chains. Upon announcement of the incursion into Cambodia, anger was the feeling of the moment: in a rare moment of unity, anyone left of Bob Jones felt the same betrayal. Those supposed "high draft numbers" didn't seem so safe anymore, and the ROTC kids trusting in "Vietnamization"—the American plan to end involvement by transferring combat duties to the South Vietnamese—were now staring deployment in the face. In this fury lay the silent second front of the Vietnam War: a government against its youth, drafting young men for a war that most felt was wasteful and ineffective.

On May 4 of that same year, more than 4,000 students, faculty, staff, and alums filed into Jadwin Gym and formally declared Princeton "as an institution oppose[s] the Cambodian invasion, American foreign policy, and domestic oppression" and that "[the university's] facilities and manpower be used to register that opposition." On the very same day, across the country at Kent State, their counterparts gathered to similarly protest the escalation of the war. We already know the end of that story, with four students dead and nine others injured. Back in Princeton, when debate concluded at 5:30 p.m., news of the killings reached Jadwin and raced through the dispersing crowd.

One of the results of this deliberation—which came to be known as the Jadwin Teach-In—was the Movement for a New Congress (MNC), an organization that planned to elect antiwar candidates to Congress in the November midterms. By late May, a *TIME* magazine article wrote, "New Congress already has twelve regional centers across the nation and affiliates at 280 campuses." Students even used an early "Princeton computer" to better assist their efforts, "analyz[ing] congressional-election results of the past ten years to choose district races where student help might swing an election." The door-to-door MNC canvassers dressed neatly, with trimmed hair and slacks. They registered voters, explained the aims of the student protests, and convinced sympathetic voters to get out to the polls—they were "pushing doorbells for peace." They even hand-delivered campaign mail, saving candidates "$8,000 to $10,000 in postage." The hippies of the student movement, with their long hair and beards, understood they'd be of no use knocking on doors, so they phoned voters instead.

Princeton was immediately thrust into the forefront of a national protest movement, and with the aim of carrying momentum through the midterm elections, students and faculty voted to adopt what was called "the Princeton Plan." This Plan was an "election break" in the fall, allowing students to go home and work to elect local peace candidates. Universities across the nation immediately followed and approved of similar plans. This was the original fall break.

***

When students returned to campus in the fall, the war was still underway, despite Washington's efforts to make it seem otherwise. Nixon was throwing Hail Marys before the midterms: he proposed a "standstill" cease-fire across Indochina and announced that another 40,000 troops would be home by Christmas, all part of the "Vietnamization" drawdown that was meant to take the wind out of the antiwar movement. Maybe his efforts worked: only around a quarter of students engaged in some form of political campaigning as the strike promised. This was still 900 students—a sizable number. But many observed that the mass student participation predicted the previous spring had not materialized.

That fall, an anonymous *Prince* writer claimed, "Apathy is the attitude of the moment." He spoke with disdain at what, in retrospect, is probably still the zenith of Princeton's political activism. There are a multitude of reasons why the fiery burn for change from the spring faded to embers. The voting age

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was not lowered to 18 until March of the following year, meaning that at the time of the midterms, only the seniors and some juniors could actually vote themselves. Further, there is something to be said for the naïve but incredibly human belief that protest results in immediate change, and the instinctive grief that wells up when it is not realized.

I can only imagine how this *Prince* writer would scoff at the apathy on our current campus. Writing in 1970, he quoted Movement for a New Congress organizer Jim Miller: "Everyone seems to have forgotten that there's still a war going on." The writer's verdict was unequivocal: "He is right." To be honest, Miller is still right.

This is the post-9/11, post-*Roe*, post-January 6 era, midway through Trump's second term, in which all of the truisms you learned about government in fifth grade—that the branches check each other and that America doesn't want a king—don't feel so true anymore. I understand how this moment provokes knee-jerk indifference; how could you fight for change if all of the channels you intended to do that through are broken? I understand the detachment. It is discouraging to come of age in a political environment of impotence: my votes have not stopped the ascension of Trump; my Congress has not stopped his unjust wars or his ideological Supreme Court or his attempt to overturn a democratic election. But to believe this—to really, truly believe that you can do nothing and thus shouldn't even try at all—is to acquiesce in a future that will not be decided by you and thus will not be for you.

The Princeton Plan is over, but it has left its vestigial structures in the modern fall break. Without a movement like the one of 1970, I understand it is hard to convince you into all of the political unsexiness of knocking on white doors and kicking rocks while you hear the dog barking until someone answers. But there's so much at stake that you must.

To understand these stakes, and the plausibility that Democrats flip Congress, it helps to see the numbers. In the House, Democrats need a net gain of only three seats, a feat that seems well within reach—Cook Political Report projects a Democratic gain of nine to 19 seats. The Senate is the real fight: Republicans hold a 53–47 majority, so Democrats need to flip four seats—with Vance breaking ties, 50 isn't enough. It truly comes down to seven crucial toss-up races, races that are so close that when it's all over, it won't have been the national mood nor the most recent political scandal that determines the results: it'll be about who showed up.

A Democratic Congress is significant beyond numerical majorities. A Democratic Senate means Trump would have an uphill battle confirming another conservative Justice should Justice Alito retire, which means rights like voting rights, immigrants' rights, and LGBTQ rights would be less automatically in danger. A Democratic House signifies possession of the committee gavel, or the ability to decide which bills or resolutions are scheduled for hearings, debated, marked up, or allowed to move forward to the full House floor. It means they can investigate agencies, spending decisions, and the White House.

No matter how often it feels like the modern political state has turned values like *equal opportunity* and *self-government* into glossy American veneers over a harsher reality, I want to remind you that not one person can take away what these principles actually stand for without your consent. The American state is highly flawed, but it is worth fighting for. We are not yet past the point of no return—"That government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

When Abraham and Isaac climbed the mountain, Abraham carried the knife and the fire. Isaac carried the wood. Along the way, Isaac asked his dad where the lamb for sacrifice was. Isaac did not know he was consenting to his own death by carrying the means on his back. We do. Our inaction weighs heavy on our shoulders as we trudge forward, submitting.

I cannot tell you what to do. But I can ask, maybe—just maybe—that we throw down the kindling wood.

Sophie O'Connor *is asking for action.*

This writer wants YOU to join the fight. VOTE NOW!

Toss-up Sentate States

- Alaska (R)
- Iowa (R)
- Kansas (R)
- Maine (R)
- Michigan (D)
- Ohio (R)
- Texas (R)

Toss-up House Districts

- AZ-06 (R)
- CA-22 (R)
- CO-08 (R)
- FL-14 (D)
- FL-22 (D)
- FL-25 (D)
- IA-02 (R)
- MI-04 (R)
- MI-07 (R)
- MI-10 (R)
- NC-01 (D)
- NC-11 (R)
- NY-17 (R)
- OH-09 (D)
- OH-07 (R)
- PA-08 (R)
- TX-34 (D)
- TX-15 (R)
- VA-01 (R)
- VA-02 (R)
- WI-03 (R)

Fiction

On PLACE and BELONGING

"Tiny. Empty. Hole. Hole or vacant. Empty/needing. I need to check my emails."

BY C.G. CHONG

1 EVERYTHING | Can I tell you something? I took *Introduction to Cosmology* last spring. According to the experts, only 4.9% of the universe is ordinary, visible matter (planets, stars, galaxies, superclusters, etc). Of the remaining 95.1%, most of everything is dark energy—a fundamental force of nature that the experts say is accelerating the expansion of the universe. The experts do not know what dark energy is or where it comes from or what it looks or smells like. We just know what we can observe: gravity pulls things together, dark energy pulls things apart. The experts derived these compositions from the Friedmann Equations, which were derived from Einstein's equations, which were puzzled out in carbon-based minds encased in flesh that grew from the mud of Earth.

2 EQUILIBRIUMS AND RESONANCE, EVERYTHING FALLS INTO PLACE | I open the curtains in my bedroom every morning because there is no overhead light in my room. I am working as a developer and a researcher at two different labs, though I only get paid for half of one role. The days roll around and abide by a strict periodicity that is comforting/predictable and relentless/dreadful. Courtyards can be open on some sides, but not all of them, and stone courtyards facing west do not leak in the mornings as eastern-facing courtyards do. I am going off on tangents again—I just don't want to check my emails. I don't want to face my work. I don't want to figure out what to eat today. There are menial tasks to be done in the mornings and things to attend to and problems to think through. I think through them. Mistakes can be catastrophic, though sometimes they are not. It is better to be safe than sorry.

3 | I run in the mornings because the chill of the air is refreshing. Everything is open to me, and it's good to have hobbies. Why live at all if you don't have hobbies? Fresh moisture on the grass rubs on my ankles; the sky is a shallow, comprehensible blue. It is bright in a satisfying way that a morning brain craves. I trudge along. The courtyard around the block is empty, and it faces west. An old couple is setting up an empanada stall for the farmers market, even though it does not open for another three hours. I tried one once and never bought one again (it was just alright). I wonder if they recognize me.

4 | There is never enough light. In the shower, the plastic liner keeps clinging to my wet body, and I can't see all the little hairs on my legs as I shave. The farmers market comes to the courtyard around the corner every Thursday, and it is delightful. I brush my teeth and take stock of what I might need, what I can consume, what I should/should not consume, how much older I look than when I was sixteen, how sensitive my teeth feel today, how capable I feel to bear the dig of a bra or a tight waistband or blistering flats. I pee and sit on the toilet for a little while after I am done and then I weigh myself. It's easier to keep it off than it is to lose it. I can't remember who said that to me.

5 | I walk by the empanada stand with a black leather tote filled with things that are not empanadas, and I wonder if they recognize me. The courtyard is filled with a buzz, not so sleepy anymore. A woman in a red apron rings an unpleasant cowbell as she collects for a food bank. The man behind the table selling Balkan specialties tries to loudly reel in every passerby, which puts him in the unfortunate position of being loudly ignored. A duo of folk musicians play at an enclosed corner by the awning of a restaurant underneath a white tent. Everyone is underneath white tents. It is to keep that *impossibly* deep sky off their heads. I fear that I, exposed, might trip and fall into it. My heels lose their grip on the stones, my heart floats up, and I am going. There is clothing brushing against my skin and skin against my skin and bags against my skin. Breath collecting around head-level, pushing the oxygen up into outer space. Did I mention I studied cosmology for a semester? Oxygen makes up approximately 1% of the 5% of the universe that is ordinary, visible matter. That is .05%, for whoever is curious. I am suffocating.

6 I AM NOT 16 | I am not 16; I am 21, and I'm at college working this summer while everyone else has gone away (I've got to check my email). I bought two green peppers, one sweet red pepper that was very long and skinny, one yellow onion, a pungent clove of garlic, a dozen eggs, peach preserves, and bright yellow yarn. I'll use the yarn to crochet a gift for my boyfriend who loves the color yellow. I process the produce, which delights me as well: I begin with a vinegar bath for pesticides and a good rinse with cold water, then I chop and organize everything into color-coded glass containers for future meals. I slice the tip of my finger in a mess of onion because all the knives are dull and my eyes are burning and there's not enough light in here. I rinse my finger under the sink and a small flap of flesh ripples under the water freely; the blood runs down my arm and combines with green pepper mush in the basin. It runs up into the sky and takes me with it. Carbon comprises even less of the

ART BY RAVEN REID
PAGE DESIGN BY SIRI IAGNEMMA

universe than oxygen. Am I made of carbon or am I made of glass? Silica. Oxide compounds. Hydrogen stardust. Old, ancient things recycled and re-worn. The empanada couple—we are part of the universal composition, but I am nothing without it. I am nothing without it.

8 EVERYTHING II | Much of the standard cosmological model is aligned with the cosmic microwave background (CMB), which is an observed/measured phenomenon of a near-perfect isotropic blackbody microwave radiation originating from the infant years of the universe. The CMB data implies that dark energy is a cosmological constant, meaning that as the universe accelerates apart, the percentage of matter decreases and the percentage of dark energy increases. Where are you going? Dark energy accelerates things away from each other, so we will keep flying apart faster and faster until there is nothing left to keep me here.

9 CAN YOU TELL? |

10 | Everything is flying away from me, faster than it was before. The courtyard is empty, and the stones are wet. If I climb out of the window, will I fall up or down?

11 | I've got to go to the lab soon. I've got to check my emails. One of the green peppers was rotten. I forgot to mention that before, or maybe I just didn't want to. I cut into it and the insides were brown, so I threw it into the sink and it exploded into mush and I collapsed on the ground and sank into a hole in myself. I chewed a piece of spearmint gum and my teeth ached like an old chair when I chewed. My dentist harps on me about it, but I used to smoke, so I figure all the gum and diet soda damage can't be that bad. I am chewing gum right now. Chewing is better than snacking. I chew a pack a day. Anyways, I tore myself off the ground and there were crumbs on me because I don't vacuum as much as I should and then I sliced my finger. Maybe the blood ran up my arm and into the sky. Maybe I went with it, too. I don't know.

12 HOLE | I am in this hole that is deep inside of myself. Nobody bears witness, so it doesn't mean anything. I want you to look at me and tell me what you see. Oxygen flies up into space and becomes meaningless. Tiny. Empty. Hole. Hole or vacant. Empty/needing. I need to check my emails. I lie in bed and I get up and open the curtains even though nobody bears witness. I forget where I am sometimes. I lie in bed. I lose track of where I've been. Look around and tell me what you can see. My bedroom has yarns (I already had yellow yarn), three guitars, a bin of guitar pedals and a half-deconstructed pedalboard, a closet with accordion doors that don't work anymore, a small TV I don't use, curtains on a rod falling out of the wall, a guitar on a hook falling out of the wall, a carpet that needs to be vacuumed, a bed that needs to be made, towels that need to be washed, clothes that need to be washed. I need something. I need or want. I go to the lab across campus, because it may save me.

13 WHERE AM I? | Everyone else works remotely most days. The campus is deserted. I unlocked the lab and was not so productive, then I locked in again when I left. When I am upset, I turn to a wall so that nobody can see my face. I am losing skin cells; they are accelerating away from me. I had a dream last night that I was smoking in a backyard in high school, and it filled my chest in a way that only a cigarette could and I lit it in a campfire as mosquitoes nipped at me and I roasted marshmallows for s'mores without thinking about how many calories are in a s'more. One of my green peppers today was rotten, and it destroyed me. I woke up craving nicotine as if the years I put between us meant nothing. When I call my boyfriend before bed, I cannot tell him this, and I don't have anything else to say either. He is already so far away.

14 | I open the curtains. I close the curtains. If the standard theory is correct, then everything began with a Big Bang, and nothing since has been created or destroyed. Thus, the "universe" was at a single point in space when the concept of space exploded into the concept of existence. I was there and you were there too, so we are the same thing. There are menial tasks to think through. We are the universe experiencing itself. Concepts of agitation exist to allow for relief. If I am lost in the tangle of consciousness that is the universe webbed out beyond the horizon of space, when I am returned and recycled again into stars and dust and dark things and light things, I am returned to an *incomprehensible vastness*. What of it? There was nothing in my email anyway. You are not listening anyway. The force of gravity grows weaker every day. Dark energy overtakes everything until we are diluted into a statistical nothingness. I open the curtains. I close the curtains. I lose my footing, fly up into space, and am accelerated away.

15 GROUNDING | I open the curtains in my bedroom. The window faces a wall.

Callista Chong *is always observing, if only 4.9% of what is out there.*

Essays

In Search of Aura at the Nass Stock Footage Film Festival

Benjamin, Adorno, and the second annual *Nassau Weekly* Stock Footage Film Festival.

BY CLAIRE MITCHELL

A few weeks ago, the *Nass* Audiovisual Section hosted its annual Stock Footage Film Festival. Members of the section created shorts ranging from 40 seconds to three minutes using a selection of about 30 clips from the massive Adobe Stock collection footage as a medium, resulting in a series of visually similar yet drastically unique films. This year, a clip of disembodied, ghost-like hands grasping at the camera was widely used. While many filmmakers used this same clip, one student superimposed the video with a clip showing some sort of medical procedure, while another used it layered with an overexposed color-negative black-and-white clip of a man looking directly into the camera. While the spirit of the festival is silly and fun, the seemingly limiting medium of fair use footage in montage is particularly unique in form, and as such, produced arguably thought-provoking, inspiring work in its interpretive malleability, inspiring viewers to question the nature of the Festival through an academic lens. What value should we afford this form of creation? Is it some sort of grotesque misuse? A profound recycling of soulless stock footage lost to Adobe's large collection? A creative way to practice Premiere Pro?

Montage has long been used as a way of filmmaking, from Marker's *La Jetée* in 1962 to the viral home video compilation of America's Funniest Home Videos from the 90s to Vine compilations of the 2000s to modern documentary filmmaking like Johan Grimonprez's *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat* in 2024, which recently made its way to Princeton. While academia sees some of these works as significant, there is a stark difference between media framed purely for pleasure and media seen today as educational or higher-brow. Today, this seems like the distinction we carry for what is considered worthwhile in art, but long before these films and closer to the conception of film, thinkers like Walter Benjamin framed all film as a gross reproduction of art. Theodor Adorno would frame movies as mostly meaningless, mass-produced factory goods which fueled the culture industry. In section IX of Benjamin's cornerstone piece *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, he frames cuts and editing in film as a force which "[splits] the actor's work into a series of mountable episodes," thereby taking the corporality of the actor and splitting it into a distorted amalgamation of their countenance—an effect amplified by the form of the Festival. When the distinction between sophisticated and simple media is removed, the theories of these acclaimed thinkers of the mid-20th century are left exposed.



Benjamin's major critique of film, photography, and any other reproductive technology is that it destroys what he calls *aura*, a nebulous term which encompasses art's "presence in time and space," the important ritual of art, and a work's authenticity. The uncanny separation of an actor's body from its time and space that film creates destroys this aura, and the multiple reproductions of film only further develops this unsettledness. The work of mechanical reproduction frees previous traditional art from its ritual past, and the purpose of film itself is to be reproduced. Therefore, there is no 'original' copy of film that would be of more value than any reproduction, different from a print of a famous painting that cannot possibly capture the same aura. Stock footage is the epitome of this medium meant for reproduction, as it is filmed with the express purpose of being reused and recycled in a multiplicity of works. The intentional use of stock footage as something to be recycled changes the perceptive mode in which we view an actor, when aura is completely lost in replication, and the presence of the original actor is lost immediately upon recording. The character is lost in stock footage because each actor only has a very short performance meant to be compiled in montage with other clips. Stock footage's ability to be edited, reproduced, and reused in multiple contexts is exactly what sells in the space, but it is also what eradicates any aura that may be present in Benjamin's most generous takes on film.

Benjamin goes on about the actor's loss of aura, the phony movie star, and how the stage actor differs from the film actor, but he doesn't say much about others involved in filmmaking behind the camera. While the editing process for a definitively reproducible medium starts without aura in Benjamin's framework, some may be regained in the unique creative process of editing, especially considering the creative, original choices that are often made in montage. Without consideration of editing as a potentially creative medium, its worth cannot be tied to its auratic value, and another lens must be used to determine its quality and worth. This lens should consider the Benjaminian foundation of valued uniqueness and creation but must account for evolving art forms and new metrics by which we can properly analyze video art. The Stock Footage Film Festival is the perfect subject for this nebulous new metric, as its reformation of recycled work isolates editing as a form of creation.

Adorno's concept of the Culture Industry turns creatives into compliant factories and twists consumers of media into consumers of capitalism. The stock footage short films from the Festival satirize heavily corporate Adobe stock footage and turn it into something completely personalized through the editing

PAGE DESIGN BY EDEN REINFURT

process. This form of creation is far from participation in the capitalist system, where there is no purchasing or selling as a part of production or sharing. This separation from purchase is made visually obvious with the large Adobe logo which adorns each clip. Despite having the ability to remove this logo by purchasing the clip, filmmakers chose not to, but that didn't make the work any less theirs. The creative choices made by the filmmaker were clear in each short film despite the watermark staining the clips, making their corporate, consumerist roots legible for any viewer. The Adobe stamp announces proudly that the filmmaker will not engage in the interaction that the corporation begs for in purchasing the clip, and the editing distortions added to this branded footage further separate the clips from their intended purpose. Misuse in this sense proclaims detachment from the corporation, its original intentions, and any support of the corporation—in this case, Adobe. Misuse as art reclaims the process from the medium, and its legibility celebrates the separation of art from corporation. When the Adobe logo is placed directly inside the title card, viewers may be inclined to include it in the reading of the film, despite having background knowledge about the form which may insinuate other intentions. This unspoken intentionality behind the medium of stock footage is what differentiates it from other forms of montage, where viewers immediately reckon with the logo and source, and sequentially acknowledge and ignore it in the immersive process of collective viewing. The festival begs a question of how stock footage can be repurposed and appreciated as art, where disrespect for corporate slop becomes satirical short films enjoyed by a creative community like the *Nass*.

As a room full of students who contribute to the *Nassau Weekly* gathered around and appreciated the short films that their audiovisual-inclined friends created, I can't imagine they considered all of these implications. In fact, I really hope they didn't. To separate creative editing choices and curation of corporate stock footage from the short film successfully was to immerse the viewers in the reconstructed meanings of these clips, and I'd say our filmmakers were entirely successful in this endeavor. As the crowd gathered in collective laughs and exclamations, immersion was achieved at this year's Stock Footage Film Festival. The issues in media presented by Benjamin's dissemination of aura or Adorno's capitalist culture industry are troubled by the unique medium of the festival, where the collective experience of creation and viewing of these works allows us to achieve the Benjaminian therapeutic release of social catharsis through collective viewing, humor, and laughter.

Claire Mitchell *immerses herself in stock footage with her fellow Nasslings.*

Fiction

Womb Seed

"Private William Wright shot himself this morning, the apprentice informed with the aloofness of an incoming telegraph. He had been diagnosed with scabies."

BY LOLA HOROWITZ

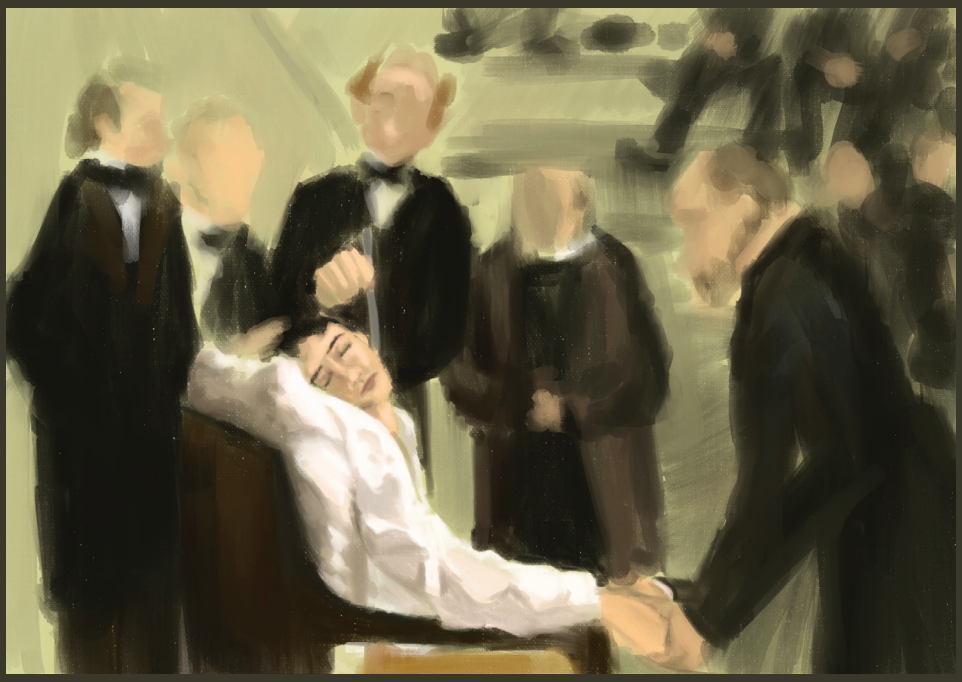
Great Britain's finest professors of medicine and their students scuffled about the tiered, rounded church attic pews of Old St. Thomas' Hospital like penned swine in frock coats. The room was skylit, wood-panneled, and suffered from the fetid smell. Six tiers were brimming with an assembly of men, shoulder to shoulder, hands folded on their laps, stiffly seated in such an outward-facing manner that they could have smiled for a class photograph.

The Surgeon General strode into the pit in his squelching Wellington boots and a waistcoat. He was a Welsh boy brought up in a chocolate-box thatched cottage in Merthyr Mawr. He would fish for brown trout down by the River Ogmore, flatten orchid petals between the pages of his encyclopedia on common diseases, and plait his grandmother's fine hair when arthritis immobilized her hands. None of this boyish gentility would be assumed of him now, at least not since Balaklava when he assisted in the amputation of an English soldier's leg on his first day stationed in the Crimean War. He had been shipped across the Black Sea for fifteen months whereabout he consumed too many potatoes and learned about the nature of his calling. The Surgeon General had since become a venerable boy with a handlebar mustache, frown lines, and a rainbow of dishonorable ribbons decorating his uniform. His brothers were dying. Skin disease was the post-war enemy. Erysipelas, gangrene, smallpox, and frostbite, among others. Him and Wright were the last medics left from their field hospital.

The Surgeon General held out his arms while Cornelius, a newly hired apprentice wearing pince-nez and no expression on his face, redressed him, trading his waistcoat for a starchy, blood-stained apron. Private William Wright shot himself this morning, the apprentice informed with the aloofness of an incoming telegraph. He had been diagnosed with scabies. The Surgeon General allotted himself forty-six seconds to mourn, casting his face away from the audience, occupying his hands with straightening the equipment on his procedure tray and tightening jars half-filled with formalin. A teardrop fell on one of the lids.

The patient was escorted in by Fletcher and Felix, identical twin surgical assistants, and strapped down with leather bands to the narrow wooden operating table staged centermost in the pit, which evoked in the perverted minds of some onlooking students a bawdy medieval torture table. The patient was a bereaved woman and a charity case from the general hospital. She had a short, layered haircut that would have prepared her neck for the guillotine, had she been a French treasonist. Most patients

ART BY GEORGINA DOMINGO ALSINA
PAGE DESIGN BY PHOEBE PINDER



admitted to the operating theatre were notoriously rabid, thrashing around like beached salmons, reduced to their most brutish forms—nude and begging. A decent cityman became a supplicating nutcase when condemned to the operating table. They bartered away their estates, their wives, their livestock, their books. Their struggle to escape was the comedic opening act for the surgery to proceed. The current patient was one of the rare doves, quiet and conscious. She arched her back to better see the gallery and judged the upside down attic and men with a shrewd stare that resembled the Surgeon General's late mother wherever the arrangement of furniture in his home was not up to par.

The Surgeon General lifted his scalpel, demonstrating the surgical instrument to the gallery. The blade caught the sunlight, and the patient's cervine eyes fell upon its silvery winking and flickering. When the Surgeon General and his three apprentices' concentrated faces closed in above her, blotting out the sunlight, she saw them as an infant might look up past the bars of her cradle and see her family, or a corpse might look up past the dirt walls of his grave and see her murderers. Her calm splintered. She wept. The Surgeon General carved a circle into her stomach like a pumpkin top, reopening her caesarean section scar. Weeps devolved into guttural, birdish sounds. Contortions of the neck and the knees. The audience craned over the handrails. Some whistled and hollered.

The Surgeon General commenced his cadaveric dissection. He pulled out the coiled small intestine like silk scarves from a clownish mouth, and metre by metre they came unwound, until a heap hung in his hands, long enough to jump rope with. The large intestine followed, then the liver. He identified each organ and its anatomical purpose. The men of medicine slumped in their pews, disinterested, because the pallid patient was limp and mumbling, her mouth dumbly open.

As when the speared bull topples in the arena dust and the spectators lose their object of fascination, so did the procedure become long and uninspiring.

The Surgeon General gutted the patient, educated the men on the female anatomy, jarred her insides, gallbladder, kidney, diaphragm, so on and so forth, until he found what appeared to be a penny in her stomach. He extracted it with forceps and swashed it in the tableside water basin. Once rinsed, the Surgeon General observed that the curious black object lacked the flatness of a coin. It was round and firm like a cranberry when he gave it a squeeze. How idiopathic. He inspected and prodded her stomach lining. The object was found outside of her gastrointestinal tract. The patient did not swallow it. Perhaps it was an undocumented vestigial organ? What an astonishing medical discovery! His sole medical discovery on female anatomy. A stomach seed. The Surgeon General was convinced it was a seed, something indigestible. He stood unmoving for several moments, drafting and defending his research in his head, until a weak pulse from the woman's arteries jolted his hands.

The men of medicine roused when the Surgeon General presented the unfamiliar seed between his thumb and forefinger. It did not catch the light. The dark curiosity he held was dull, absorbing the sunlight, defying all laws of electro-optics. The seed was a perfect blackbody. No such thing existed naturally on earth.

Cardiologist Henry Pemberton of St Bartholomew's Hospital, rumored to be embezzling charitable funds, suggested the seed could be the patient's womb. The Surgeon General beckoned Felix for a loupe, but Fletcher fetched it instead. If this is her womb, the Surgeon General responded, holding the glass up to his eye, then is it possible to surgically remove the hysteria from a woman? Commentary ensued. Ophthalmologist Caesar Beaumont of Bethlem Royal Hospital, whose patients were all in the loony bin, proposed the seed as her placenta. Pulmonologist Rupert Croft of Jervis Street Hospital, who worked as a night soil man during his residency, hypothesized a peach pit. An acorn. Something fossilized. Molten. A miscarriage. Cornelius blanched and draped a towel over the disemboweled patient. Send for an illustrator, a daguerreotype, straight away! The press, and the King's Courier. The Surgeon General felt like a dollmaker who had repurposed all of womankind.

Great Britain's finest professors of medicine and Lola Horowitz *made a discovery.*

ART BY ANELISE CHUN
PAGE DESIGN BY EDEN REINFURT

My Dreams, They Sound Like Running

BY LOUISE KHOURY

My dreams, they sound like running
there is a certain fever, a sicker fervor
of second comings
One day soon, you see
the floodlight in the east
will drag me from this slumber

How long will my sheets hold
the imprints of my limbs?
I think these sheets have secrets
ones I mumble in my sleep
words that murmur out of earshot—
they like to linger
on my fingers

Maybe hands can decipher
the codes written into overtones,
ghosts that vibrate in the voice box
maybe they know how to answer
the questions of my echoes, the meaning
lost to dream

Little listeners, members
of a body that speaks
its own language—I think
my body has a way of knowing
things my mind does not

my legs keep time
my eyes can't lie
but my ribs, they will remember



Fiction

gravity

"Claudia was born in Fresno, the ass crack of California, amidst almond trees and the stench of slaughtered cows. She spent forty years scrubbing that smell from her skin since moving to Hollywood."

BY MARVEL JEM ROTH

The Santa Anas blew fiercely that day, floating that scent of dried jasmine and foreboding ash. The sky was electric, a bruised violet waiting to spark. Even in autumn, the freeways glistened metallic in the heat, but inside Claudia's modernist glass box home along Benedict Canyon, the air was stale.

In the corner of the otherwise barren living room sat the Bösendorfer. It was pristine, boasting white, high-gloss spruce, red felt, and gold detailing. A yellowing piano score reduction of Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* lay flat on the desk.

To play the piano, there isn't much to do. Hands on white bars, one key per finger, allow for the weight of the finger to ever so slightly tap down on the ivory. Notes. Two keys together for a harmony, a pulse for a rhythm. Inside at its heart, high-tensile steel strings under incessant hammers are beaten. Incessantly. The most beautiful melody; just the sound of the abuse.

Pianists abandon their bodies like a receiver taking a hit with a dark spot spreading across his brain scan. The pianist succumbs to gravity, just as the keys that produce melodies fall under the weight of the finger, just as the string rattles under its provocation of the hammer.

In wicked pain, the pianist loses her back, her shoulders, her arms, her hands, her fingers. The coils of the piano hug her tendons in a radiant embrace. Parasites. They bite with each note, drinking her body dry. Under her heart is hollow. Unmovable, lost in some forgotten melody in the chest of her instrument. Her piano left silent.

The girl rested her right hand on the keys without pressing down. It sat there like some five-legged crab, clawing its way from the receding tide, dying on the keys before her. Her finger twitched. Fucking pathetic.

***

The girl arrived at golden hour, the skyline of Los Angeles bleeding mimosa and embers. Her mother's voice chilled and smooth, like a dry martini, rinsed and riddled of Vermouth.

"I value my time," Claudia's voice in a slow drawl, not looking up from her magazine. "Why weren't you here ten minutes ago?" Claudia wore a pearl silk robe with a hint of rose. She perched on the velvet couch, a long, thin herbal cigarette held between two skeletal fingers. The scent of clove and cinnamon left a mist between the girl and the Georgia O'Keefe on the wall.

The girl looked at her mother, silent. Her ring finger twitched to some off-kilter rhythm, the motion small, unconscious, and terrifying—more than the threat of her city on fire outside. Her joints seared.

She remembered Tchaikovsky's last symphony, the one with the 5/4 waltz. Tchaikovsky, a Russian homosexual, couldn't waltz in time with his lover, hence the uneven waltz and the symphony being dubbed Tchaikovsky's suicide note. When he was caught, he killed himself by drinking shit water to get cholera. How romantic. He had it easy: Tchaikovsky didn't have to live with Claudia. She was bony, like a lizard. Probably bulimic, but would never brag of needing such schemes to maintain her figure. Expensive face lifts, surgeries, creams, treatments. All to fight gravity.

"The Dior gown is back from the cleaners. Fall Winter 1949 haute." The girl had already prepared a custom-tailored white suit for the gala concert, one with arms designed for full range of motion and that would cover the metal brace protecting her hand. Her mother's dress prepared to trap her, built for a woman not fighting her body.

The dress was a heavy cream, an ombre of black petals falling like soot to the floor with a sleeveless bodice. The corset lifted her breasts, but severed the blood flow to her arms. When the girl tried to reach for her brace, Claudia slapped her hand down...

The girl looked into the mirror. Her hand drained of color—an acid-washed gargoyle.

"Shoulders back. See. Now, you look like you're not falling apart." Claudia patted the girl's raised shoulders. Outside, the Santa Anas whistled through the canyon, humming a haunting, false harmonic.

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Claudia was born in Fresno, the ass crack of California, amidst almond trees and the stench of slaughtered cows. She spent forty years scrubbing that smell from her skin since moving to Hollywood. A career in modeling failed upwards into being the most sought after casting director for MGM and a marriage and non-prenup divorce to a top Warner Brothers' producer. Casting 101: women need to want to be you, and men need to want to fuck you.

Claudia had some natural beauty but was best showcased after renovation. Fill, lift, tuck. Beauty takes pain and sacrifice, but the end allows for a life of luxurious comfort, far from the agricultural pit and above everyone who never invested in their future, high in the hills.

Pianists aren't often known for their physical beauty; men with rolled shoulders and sunken faces. Her daughter, an exhibit of beauty but born at eight pounds and too thick-boned for ballet, would never have a chance at SAB. Still, the piano is feminine, intense, and seductive: an instrument to breed a star.

Through wise parenting, homeschooling, and the finest of Russian music teachers, her daughter began her training. Two hours of scales and technical ètudes and ten hours of repertoire (14 on Sundays) daily. A day of rest on the 31st of a month.

Claudia was successful. Her girl, the winner of the International Chopin competition at twelve. Piano was a ballet. Each arpeggio, a pirouette. Yet, as time moved on, her fingers were no longer slender but thick, with strength and hard callouses. Her shoulders began to raise

ART BY EDEN REINFURT
PAGE DESIGN BY FLETCHER KANEB

and tighten in a forward roll. But just as with aging, Claudia refused to accept her girl's carpal tunnel and dystonia. A tighter dress, an adjusted light, and some headshots in haute couture. Smile and wave until the muscles and gravity forget they were ever meant to break.

***

A mosaic of up-cycled plywood and silver sheets created the structure of the concert hall. When the hall was first constructed the sunbeams refracting off the silver exterior lit cars on fire, so the hall was painted over a dulled grey. Everywhere but the performance spaces are obstructed by some curved red-grained wood, no view clear except for the guidance onwards—the music radiating from the amphitheater. The elites of industry would gather here for the opening Gala of the new season for the LA Opera. The agency representatives looking to book her on a multi-year international solo tour through the Philharmonics of Europe stood at the wine bar in the corner. Claudia leaned against a column of a staircase behind the bartenders, perched above the scene.



The girl began with the Tristesse Chopin Ètude No. 3. Simple melodies in thirds, clean and eloquent. The music glided from her fingertips, pulling like golden threads tangled around her heart, glowing as they blossomed from her chest through her veins. Page three—she knew it by heart. Tritone melodies pulling taut in opposite directions. Her fingers understood the intricacy of the placement. She knew how to execute, to twist half her hand above the rest. Her eyes closed, allowing the music to flow over her. But then, her ear too trained, she fixated, fluttering her left eye, on that D sharp: out of tune. How could it be? Hadn't they gone through piano selection processes and multiple technician crews?

Her ring finger locked. Focused on the tuning, she hadn't paid attention to her hands. She looked down. Her hand's position was clawed, monstrous. Her knuckles were swollen, displaced, pushing out of their natural sockets like tectonic plates. Her skin lacked all color and blood. The performance continued, skeletal and broken. Her hand a hissing radio signal. Numb.

The girl was trained on how to work through the cruel, punishing pain. To stop recognizing it. To no longer know what hurt her body. She refused to even take an ibuprofen. This was different, though. This was pain from a knife. A rusted nail stabbing through her palm, a knife slicing through each artery up through her elbow. This was pain from an electric wire, sudden shocks shooting from her wrist through her thumb. This was pain from a boulder crushing her hand, flattening it. Her palm was burning from the fire as her fingers suffered a cold dysesthesia. The girl tried to flick her palm, attempting to restore blood to the tips of her fingers to no avail. She felt the ghost of every hour of practice, millions of repetitions, collapsing into a knot in her forearm until her elbow popped. It was the sound of her career, snapped in half. Decades of staying home, never playing a sport, scared of hurting a finger. She had never even gone bowling, not to suggest she ever had any friend to bowl with. Her hand, once an instrument of precision, was now just heavy, a useless lump of bone and screaming tendons, her nerves shredded. Perhaps for the first time since she touched a piano, she shed a tear, salt burning her eyes and mascara dripping down her stinging cheek.

She looked up from the bench towards her mother. There, Claudia reached into her Hermes clutch and pulled out her lighter. She slowly lit her fake cigarette, eyes locked intensely on her failure of a daughter. As Claudia exhaled her first drag of smoke, the girl ran away, the dress trailing behind. The agencies, the opera, the piano, all remained—silent.

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The girl stood on the beach at the shoreline, the bottom of her dress beaten by the waves up to her knees. Around her lay a graveyard of kelp and honeybees who drowned trying to escape the heat, all caked in sand. The girl slowly knelt down, clutching her dead hand, and wept into the water. The girl looked up at the horizon, the sun hemorrhaging a deep red. Her dress soaked in salt, clinging to her skin.

"Darling." She heard that demented voice behind her from the edge of the Pacific Coast Highway. Her mother always knew how to raise her voice without it turning into a scream. "Please, that gown is quite expensive. It cost more than the car."

"I don't care." The girl started to laugh under her breath. It was a dry, rattling sound. It was, for the first time she could remember, honest.

"It's disrespectful to run," Claudia continued, gesturing with her cigarette, the embers shaking into the dry sagebrush along the cliff below her. The brush threatened the air with a faint glow. "Get in my car, we're going back. I'll call your publicist. This can all be fixed."

"I can't anymore," the girl sighed to herself, defiant and true. The girl fell forward and writhed into the ocean, drowning her mother's cries into the background. Her dead hand dragged through the foam like a weighted anchor. Behind her, the casual flick of her mother's cigarette transformed the sky with a copper flame and dark smoke. A fire bloomed, engulfing the cliffside, a sudden towering tsunami of flame mirroring the sunset.

The girl continued to crawl, pulling herself towards the grey water, her hair unpinning itself and floating like the kelp washed ashore. Her dress began to shed away as the tide rose above her. She laughed manically with bliss. For the first time in twenty-nine years, she had nothing left to perform.

Marvel Jem Roth *knows the pain of the piano.*

Fiction

Space May Produce New Worlds

"It was a bad phase for us. She talked less of her work, and the dinner parties spaced themselves out like our bodies in bed at night. We tried, of course, in bursts of desire which came from compromise and mutual weakness, from moments when our problems didn't seem all that threatening, but then I'd feel it, the heaviness, the memory of a conversation coming back to her as she tried to move against me."

BY ELLEN KRAMER

Helen and I had a beautiful apartment when we were young. It was warm and orange and opened from a low hallway into a vaulted living room. We were lucky to be on the fourteenth floor, where the building's pattern broke and the levels spaced out into commercial floors, leaving us the outlier to our complex's design. *What's above us?* I asked the realtor, when we were looking at the place. *Office space*, he returned. *This apartment's on the best floor. Regular floor—he gestured—high ceilings. The pattern breaks in your favor.* A few months in, the gatherings began. It seems we had a dinner party every weekend, and every other time there was some new member. *I liked her*, Helen would say after the guests left, giving a kind of pointed approval to future occasions, and I'd agree.

Helen was very into olive oils. Different infusions of olive oils, specifically. She mixed basil from our windowsill herb garden with the more pungent garlic from an organic market in SoHo and steeped them in extra virgin olive oil as if returning to some archaic practice. We tasted her creations like it was a ritual, using a shallow ceramic dish from Helen's mom and plating the oil with bread and thin tomato slices. The garlic's health overpowered our milder herbs, the corners of Helen's eyes and the tip of her nose went pink, and she rubbed her fingers nervously.

"Do you like it?" She looked up through her brown hair and asked, laughing and knowing the oil was unpalatable. She tried again, some mixture of fig and rosemary. The fig clogged the lip of the olive oil bottle, so she filtered the mixture, then poured it into a mason jar. This one was better. We ate it on bread and wine which left my mouth dry until I doused my tongue with the soft sponge of oil-soaked bread and my lips, her lips, became touched by the moisture again and then we began to kiss, there in the tangerine room with the high ceiling. Somehow we went from the wooden table to the relaxed green couch in the living room. Her head rested on my chest, and in that most relaxed position I stretched my arms above me and rotated my wrist, the orange-haloed shadow of my fingers against the backdrop of white ceiling losing its depth as I watched. Then, embarrassed by my self-absorption, I looked down at the way her looping curls spread over me and my fingertips found the place where the brunette waves began and she'd look at me with just one crinkling eye, and I'd think about how she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

Some of our dinner parties were unexpectedly lively. I remember one in particular, some time in the rainy part of early fall, that Helen leaned forward, nearly out of her seat, to argue with a younger man from her office. I remember the slight jealousy I felt, at her intensity and animation, which she'd displayed with me at the beginning of things, but then I saw in the young man's eyes a kind of unreadiness, and my envy dissolved. She must have been drawn to and equally disappointed by that wide, fearful look; perhaps the things he did not know reminded her of what she did know, momentarily making her feel like a whole woman, and then reminding her how she wanted a whole man. I put my hand on her back, where her shirt was just coming out of its tucked position in her loose brown skirt, and she leaned back into me, reminded of my eyes and touch, my apparent readiness. After the guests left, we walked out onto the dark shining street. It had stopped raining, and in the humid chill I felt the brief surprise of an unfamiliar temperature, a new season asserting itself.

That was the time when Helen had a steady job, and I was looking for one. Now, at the end of the night, the issue was there, when she put her arms on my shoulders and looked up at me, and I felt there might be some kind of emanation of grayness coming off me that had only begun to radiate after the guests had left. She put her palm to the side of my cheek and skimmed it along the stubble which grew there. I blushed and told her I'd shave tomorrow. I didn't tell her about the job interview I had at an artificial intelligence company. We walked into the lobby and took the elevator, and she went ahead to shower. I sat at the wooden island and looked at the jars of olive oil. I apologized to them, that night, the cloves of garlic and the sprigs of rosemary, through the yellow oil, whispering, I don't know. I have to. I stared without blinking at the saturated herbs until their borders and colors blurred, I cracked my knuckles one by one, then pushed up from the table and went to bed.

I got the job. It was a difficult thing to keep secret from Helen, and one week in, we had dinner and I told all.

"So you'd been working on this."

I nodded. She took the information silently, blinking perhaps a little more than usual and doing an unconscious thing with her fingers and wrists. There wasn't an outcome by the end of the night. I noticed she asked me more questions after that; she was more direct about things. I felt she trusted me less, but only minimally. I was like a plastic cup that had almost fallen over when being poured into once and which she held fast to the table every time afterward. We didn't have any less sex. She wasn't the kind of woman, I supposed, who'd withhold, or go cold in some silent and holy way after feeling slighted—she was loud in her body. She wanted me as much as I did her, and without shame, she would take what she needed when she pleased. She used me, she knew the power of those dark curls, and I swore she'd let

ART BY RAVEN REID
PAGE DESIGN BY JENNA ABDELHAMID

them fall in her face on purpose.

We would get out of work at the same time in the afternoon, only twelve blocks apart and near SoHo, so we'd go to a restaurant or the organic market. It felt like victory, getting home from work and dinner, walking into the apartment and clattering the keys down on the hall table in the middle of some joke. We took off our clothes and each time, her mouth had a different flavor, it was the cold earthy taste of bean sprouts, the tang of balsamic vinegar, on her lips a coating of flour and charcoal.

Things began to take off at work. Multiple coworkers above me expressed fear online about the end of the world. It was on my mind for a few weeks. I didn't work in their offices, and though I was included in some of the company-wide groupchats, I wouldn't be able to put a face to the names of the most active participants in the messaging platforms. I was employed in a different section, mostly unrelated to the actual pursuit of a greater intelligence. It was around that time that Helen would look at me with some reverent, elated sense of wanting to be a mother. I wanted that for her, too, and believed she would make for an exceptional mother. I wasn't sure whether it was my children she should have; it seemed an impossibility that there could exist new beings who would be part of me, come from me, and that they would be Helen's and my responsibility. It would inevitably be the worst of me that Helen would incubate in these children and which they themselves would inherit. In bed one night, she, wrapped in a blanket while I lay not yet in my night clothes atop the sheets, brought us to the subject. I was stifled by apprehension and rehearsal, forgetting to voice the parts of my reasoning which I'd emphasized too many times in my mind. She was quiet for the rest of the night.

It was a bad phase for us. She talked less of her work, and the dinner parties spaced themselves out like our bodies in bed at night. We tried, of course, in bursts of desire which came from compromise and mutual weakness, from moments when our problems didn't seem all that threatening, but then I'd feel it, the heaviness, the memory of a conversation coming back to her as she tried to move against me. And she would feel me feel it and she'd stop, and our love became sex, but not with the excitement and mystery it had enjoyed in the beginning. She turned off the lights and would not look at my eyes, and I knew they must have grown unready.

At work, we nearly lost everything. I remember I was having a conversation on the elevator with a coworker about his daughter who had just joined sixth-grade band when the doors slid open to the silent office. Most workers sat at their desks, tapping their pencils. That's the sound I most remember, the tapping, feet, pens, pencils, fingers trembling on desks. The computers were all black. Some spoke, intermittently a worker would become angry, but between these outbreaks of noise it was uncannily silent, like a power outage during the daytime. We stared at the computers and tapped. We were told to go home and informed later what had happened. A larger, more advanced artificial intelligence company had hacked us, stolen our data, and shut down our entire system. It was apparently accidental. There were differing opinions around the office, and the whole thing went around online for a few months. Then we all moved on.

One night Helen came home crying. She ran toward me and halted, then came into my arms and slid to the floor, taking me with her.

"I tried doing something about this," she started and shook her head, burrowing saliva and snot into my chest.

"It's okay, it's okay," I said. She pulled back and looked at me.

"But I-"

I rested my forehead against hers.

"Helen, whatever happened, it's been hard, we've been–" I stopped. I really didn't know what to say. I felt our problems were irreconcilable. I remembered something.

"We haven't been a *team*, Helen."

She let out a sigh. I resorted to the ideal of our friendship, appealing to the idea that it had come first and was somehow greater, that we hadn't been supremely attracted to one another from the start and that we didn't depend on the cozy orange apartment near Riverside park, our two compatible bodies and similar taste in friends, the environment we'd created around us to alleviate concerns beyond whim and desire. I held her fast but I felt suddenly that I was not the man who was holding her fast. I liked that she had a thing for olive oil. She liked that I had seemed like a whole man to her whole womanness. While she cried I spoke softly and calmly so she might consider later how mature I'd acted while she was bawling in my arms, and think with renewed confidence that perhaps I was a ready man, but as I comforted her I did not know if we would make it.

We did not know it then, but when we made love that night—and it was making love, for she looked me in the eye and this time it wasn't empty, she was reclaiming a mandate, one she'd decided was, in fact, hers for the sacrifice—we did not know that it would be the last time. When she looked me in the eye and I felt a sharp desire to look away, the thought sprang up that it might be the last time, but the choice was not mine to make.

As Helen and I had been getting closer to knowing one another, so had the company been getting closer to knowing everything. Our A.I.—which had been rapidly innovated after the initial attack, and which had picked up the capabilities of its attacker only to venture uncontrollably further—reached the singularity. I was not in the office that day. I was at the wooden kitchen island with Helen, smiling, the apartment was brightly lit, and we had a small gathering planned for later that night. She made a joke that hinged on a reference to the cat I'd had as a child and I saw the glint in her eye through her brown curls, and then it happened. Our world suddenly knew creation, the size of the universe, the meaning of life, the way Helen and I could work, and what happens when you never get around to figuring it out.

Ellen Kramer *produces new olive oils and new love.*


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