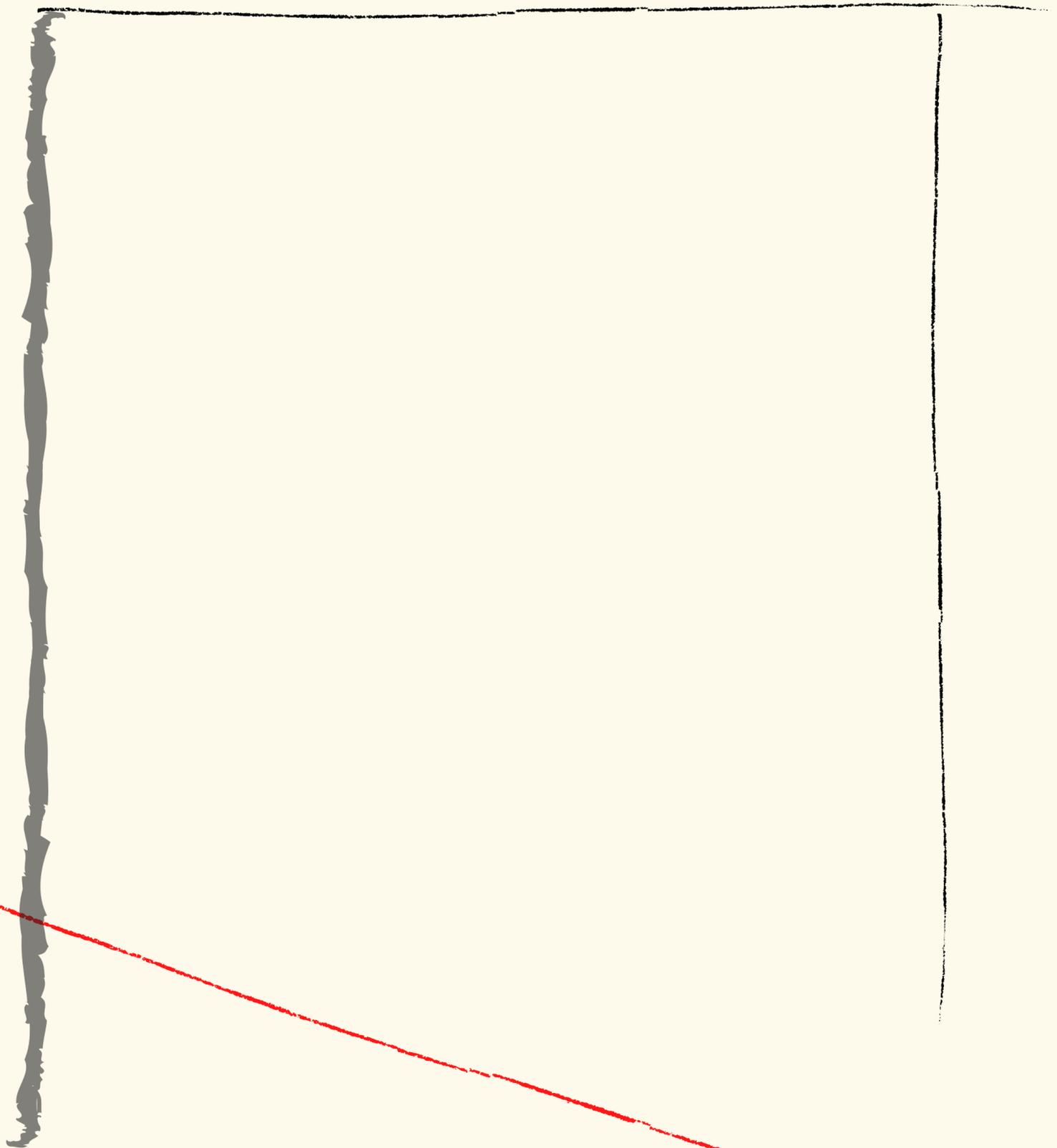


YAWP

APRIL 2020

EDITION I



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Mission Statement

Editorial Team

Our Mission. YAWP is a literary journal dedicated to cultivating the manifold voices of a modern generation. In this spirit, we seek to provide an open, free space for the unfettered expression of emerging young writing.

Untitled

Y. Hirano

Beware,
for this is not Inferno and I am not yet damned, only by half.
Foot in the maw, I am one of the populace, two eyes closed, one mouth gaping.
When I grow up, I will polish the boot of progress, so that it may grind and shatter the
bones within my forefathers' face.
There will be no wrong, for the accuser will lie, six feet under, having seen the flesh rot off
the manifesto.
See here you silly little man !
I use my left hand to cast the vote, my right to hold up a halo of twisted equity.
Yester-year is tomorrow, today I am sober. The name's Modernisation—twenty-one
thousand medals like a forelock over the eye.
Behind, the retinue capers neath abstraction, speaks to me of ancestry, those pre-daters and
their crumbling floors.
We think the ceiling has risen as each millenium fades, only that the ground sinks beneath
the weight of ideology.
My father and his father before me carried the antiquities called Sins within their breast
pocket, let make it hard for the lungs to rise with breath. Now I stoop as Inheritor, asked my
superiors to sew me not a pocket, but columns for foundation, and walls, as that one would
take when building a house with no ceiling.
They snort dust and sing, "*How shall we deconstruct history, us geniuses of folly?*" So saying, they
give sacrifice to those who sculpted Solomon's marble, salute the scratch of names being
carved into bullets.
Thus I take stand behind, facing the ladder.
Laughter coats my teeth; it drips out, trickles to the floor as cynicism.
I fly the banner that says 'Live.'
I polish that boot, having seen the underneath, the barefoot within.

Fear's high brow glints as the horizon, society's fist beating down on the arena.

Look into me, and hear the mumbling of decay.

My people...
Listen...

Blessed

Are the blind

*Encircled within
Confines of voice*

See not falsity

*That drips o'er the lips
Of mankind*

Need not gouge out eyes

*Burnished red neath
Slashed serenity*

*Archangels chanting
In swollen tongue*

And

*By this guard
From the malevolence of delusion*

Guard the secular

*And remnant enslaved
Within barbed logic*

Let no quiver of soul fan

*Fires of insanity
Nor melancholy of self*

Let them, the infidels

Starve

PSYCHOKINETICS: RAISE MY HAND! (excerpt)

Kelley Gifford

INT. ROOM. NIGHT.

An unknown tape of an interview done with COLIN McKENNA (24) in his apartment, done by his neighbor, OONA, plays. It's drawing to a close. Colin is on the brink of a nervous breakdown. His hands and bottom lip are shivering, and he runs his fingers through his hair. The ending goes as follows:

COLIN

What are you talking about?

OONA

(on second "what")

You've made up everything you've said so far!

You're just looking for something to do,
you're wasting my fucking time—

COLIN

(overriding)

No—no, I'm not! You're being—

OONA

(overriding)

Goodnight, Colin—

COLIN

No—fuck no! I have so much more to tell
you!

OONA

Tell me tomorrow!

COLIN

(overriding)

No! No! I can't! I won't be ready tomorrow!

OONA

Well you weren't fucking ready tonight, either!

COLIN

Please. Please, I'm begging you.

OONA

I think we can agree I've done more than
enough for you. Now, please let me out.

His pitiful state has frightened her, and he realizes it and attempts to regain his composure.

COLIN

(hollowly)

Yep. Here, let me—let me show you ...

A door slams. We return to Colin's apartment; the reporter has just left.

INT. COLIN'S APT. NIGHT.

Colin stands at the door. He turns back around, resembles Edvard Munch's *Self Portrait with a Cigarette*.

Suddenly, his mouth opens in a smile. He laughs quietly, quite proud of himself.

COLIN

Alright, you can come out now!

From behind a full-length mirror, a figure steps out. We don't see who it is, only two shaking hands clutching a handgun for dear life. Colin doesn't falter, in fact, his smile becomes wider. He takes a bow.

COLIN (CONT'D)

Oh no encores, please! I can't possibly top that!

INT. ABOVE LIPPERT'S. NIGHT. 7 YEARS PREVIOUS.

Title Card: The halcyon days.

Lippert's is a food market, though the upstairs apartment has been converted, rather amateurishly, into a comfortable space filled with card tables, mismatched chairs. Though this is no organized setting which looks as though it could be picked up and moved at a moment's notice, the place is packed.

PATRICK NOLAN, 22, moves over towards the door and lets a couple in. The GUY, after complaining to Patrick about the lock, leaves his girlfriend with a couple other girls, all heavily made up, who sit smoking and laughing and watching television. One of them pulls a guy over and asks him about his black eye, which he claims to have gotten at a boxing tournament from Patrick. They all look at Patrick, who waves and winks with good humor. They all laugh, and the guy moves along to sit in on a game of Blackjack between five men, including MORRIS RUSSELL. The cards are being dealt by a young kid, around Colin's age (17).

The kid slips an Ace from under the table to the top of the pile, and, upon reveal of the hand, JOHN MILLER notices a discrepancy. A fight ensues between Miller and another man, BLANCHARD, who had received the Ace. Morris Russell requests that the kid leave, and sees him out the door. Russell turns back and shrugs to the people behind him.

The camera shifts to a corner of the room, where MORGAN WALSH, 18, attempts to demonstrate a card trick to a quickly diminishing group, including a man named NATHAN ROWETT, who is falling asleep. Morgan picks on Nathan because he is the only person who isn't moving away from him.

MORGAN

Hey—hey, wake up! Pick a pile.

NATHAN

That one.

Morgan removes 2 out of the four piles and places them back into the deck. He has tattooed his knuckles himself quite recently: the "FUCK YOU!" is still red around the edges.

MORGAN

Okay, pick another one. Hey, Jamie! Sit down,
stay a while!

Morgan removes the one opposite. Nathan points to another pile, and closes his eyes.

EXT. STREET. SAME TIME.

Two college-age girls walk down the sidewalk. GIRL 1 sees some blood leaking out from a darkened alley, and points it out to GIRL 2. GIRL 2 turns on her cell's flashlight and they walk cautiously down the alleyway. Eventually they come to COLIN, at this point age 17, who appears to be dead.

GIRL 1

Oh my.

GIRL 2

Holy shit.

(moving closer)

I've never seen a dead body before.

GIRL 1

God, you're morbid. Get the fuck outta there?

GIRL 2

(standing, turning towards her friend)

Well aren't you at least a little bit interested?

GIRL 1

Fuck no!

Suddenly, Girl 1 screams. Girl 2 likes to think
she is tougher.

GIRL 2

Jesus Christ.

COLIN

Why hello there.

Girl 2 turns around and screams as well. Colin winces.

COLIN

Mother of God, you're loud. The both of you
... fucking ... echolocation What time is
it?

GIRL 1

Uh ... uh ...

Girl 2 turns Girl 1's left wrist over, to reveal a watch. She reads:

GIRL 2

2:24.

COLIN

Lovely.

He appears to be slightly confused at their fear, and becomes much more friendly.

COLIN (CONT'D)

This is fake. The blood? I'm an actor—well, community theater, but that's temporary and unimportant. This is all ... I just wanted to see how realistic it was. You ladies have been wonderful, absolutely stellar. It's 2:24; it took almost five minutes for someone to fall for it, and really, you're the first ones to have walked by, so I consider this a success.

The poor girls have no idea what to make of this.

COLIN (cont'd)

Now, I believe I twisted my ankle when I
fell—all to make it more realistic, see. Can one
of you help me up?

Both girls rush to help him. He is clearly in a lot more pain than he intends to let on. Colin limps away, pausing at the end of the alley.

COLIN (cont'd)
Now, you ladies have a good night. Thank
you for your help.

The girls look at each other, confused. After a pause, they rush to the end of the alley to watch him go. He is too far away to hear when Girl 1 says:

GIRL 1
You too!

INT. ABOVE LIPPERT'S. NIGHT.

MORGAN
There are four cards, pick two.

Nathan points. Morgan removes them.

MORGAN
There are two cards, pick one.

Nathan picks one, then turns away. Morgan takes the card, and turns the other one over.

MORGAN
Is this your card?

NATHAN
Sure.

MORGAN
Prick.

INT. LIPPERT'S. SAME TIME.

It is dark, closed for the night. Colin enters, goes behind the counter, next to a wooden door, and dials four numbers on a landline.

INT. ABOVE LIPPERT'S. SECOND LATER.

Close on the intercom above Lippert's, which is itself attached to a telephone, which is ringing. We see shadows of people passing behind and the fabrics of people passing in front.

PATRICK (O.S.)

(yelling)

The fuck's Colin?

WOMAN(O.S.)

(yelling back)

What?

LIPPERT'S. SAME TIME.

Nobody answers. Colin curses and dials again. He is holding onto the receiver for support.

ABOVE LIPPERT'S. SECONDS LATER.

Patrick makes his way through the crowd, looking. He is fiddling with a Rubik's cube without registering he is doing so.

PATRICK

Is he over there?

GUY (O.S.)

Who?

PATRICK

Colin!

GUY (O.S.)

Haven't seen him.

PATRICK
Morgan!!

MORGAN
What?

PATRICK
The fuck is Colin?

MORGAN
I look like a babysitter?

Patrick notices the phone is ringing, and goes to answer it.

PATRICK
Yo.

COLIN
(through telephone)
You gotta Band-Aid?

PATRICK
What? Who is this?

INT. LIPPERT'S. SAME TIME.

COLIN
(into telephone)
Yo, Pat. Patrick. Listen to me.

INT. ABOVE LIPPERT'S. SAME TIME.

Patrick waves to people passing by. It's clear he can't hear Colin over the noise, but now recognizes the voice.

PATRICK
Come on up.

Patrick unlocks the door and goes back to the game.

INT. LIPPERT'S. SAME TIME.

The door unlocks, and Colin pushes it open. He mutters under his breath.

INT. ABOVE LIPPERT'S. SECONDS LATER.

Colin knocks on the door, which Patrick opens. His face is ashen, and his clothes are soaked in blood.

COLIN
Patrick?

Colin passes out. Someone catches him.

LATER.

Colin comes to on the couch. There's a crowd of people over him; a palpable static electricity buzzes.

PATRICK
Hey, hey, everybody, give him some space,
give him room to breathe.

The crowd parts to let Patrick through.

PATRICK (cont'd)
How you doing, Colin, you okay?

Colin nods and groans. Patrick laughs, relieved. Colin takes after his lead and begins to laugh.

PATRICK
That's it, buddy.
(over his shoulder)
Somebody get me some ice.

Somebody passes a bag of frozen peas over Colin's head. Patrick takes them and brings it to Colin's ankle. His shoe still needs to be removed. A man (MAN 1) passes Colin a rag.

MAN 1

Bite this, kid.

Colin bites. Patrick starts to tug at his shoe, and Colin screams into the rag. Eventually, Patrick takes a kitchen knife and cuts off Colin's shoe. He tapes the ice to Colin's foot hurriedly as he realizes he has made a mistake....

PATRICK

Shit. Uhhh ... everything's good! Everything's good!

MAN 2 looks at Colin's foot over Patrick's shoulder.

MAN 2

Thing's a fucking balloon.

PATRICK

Shut the fuck up!

(to Colin)

It's about an orange, about an orange—but a small orange, a malnourished orange--

MAN 2

It's a cantaloupe.

PATRICK

I'm gonna fucking kill somebody.

Colin faints again.

In the background, Blanchard leaves, and Miller follows. Blanchard does not notice.

Kenyonian Farewell

Brandon Kim

Smiles must
be too wide. They are crescent moons
dams
stopping the sea from
overspilling into speechless
space. A vacuum cannot carry sound. Nor
can we our hearts, or our words,
which we placed in
each other's mouths.

Now
moonlight rows its boat, molten quarters
dripping, across cresting waves
that God painted orange.

Now
we must learn to smile even after
smiles are not enough.

Sunnyboy

Rowan Levi

It was well past his bedtime. He knew that, and so did his mother, but neither of them said anything. Tonight just wasn't that sort of night. No, tonight was the sort of night for hushed silences, cupped hands, for whole conversations carried on inside a void of silence. Or, so his mother said while stroking his hair, without ever actually saying a word.

"He fell asleep on the couch. Should be out for a while," she whispered, lips kept close to his ear.

A sleepy nod.

"And I promise, when we wake up tomorrow it's gonna be like nothing ever happened. He doesn't have a memory that lasts the night. Just... next time, try not to provoke him like you did this time, okay?"

"Yeah."

"I know it's hard, honey. I know you're angry. And you have every right to be, but... you can't let that consume you. Being mad is fine. But staying mad, that's like holding your hands in front of your eyes. And when you have your hands in front of your eyes—"

"-you'll miss all the magic that's hiding right in front of you. I know,"

"There's my little Sunnyboy. Now try and get some sleep, okay? Tomorrow's another day. I love you."

"Love you too." It was bitter and muttered, but still—sincere.

His mother responded with a soft kiss and a hug. As she wrapped her arms around Sunnyboy's bony, sharp frame, she noticed something that her eyes had missed in the dark. His body had turned stiff, tense—he was holding his breath.

He was trying not to cry.

Of course, Sunnyboy didn't realize that his mother knew this, as children often don't. He was too busy filling his mind with thoughts that he needed to be stronger, needed to be a man. All they did was make him want to cry even harder, for neither of those things were true at the present moment. His mother knew that too, but still said nothing. She simply hugged him tighter. Sometimes there is nothing else to say.

And with that, his mother was gone, leaving a trail of creaking footsteps in her wake. The door shut and left him in his own little world, one of impenetrable blackness broken only by a yellow right angle—but still, even the light underneath the door scarcely felt real deep in this world which was quickly engulfing him.

He waited, breath still baited: thirty seconds of waiting at the door, then one footstep on the floor, five on the carpet (it was quite the long carpet), three more on the floor and then slowly, down the stairs, *creaking* on the fourth step, getting quieter and quieter and quieter...

In total, one minute until she was really, truly gone.

Sunnyboy sprung from the bed, all tears forgotten. Wobbly footsteps and an ear up to the door, just in case, then, once he deemed the silence satisfactory, over to the old, boxy television that was pushed up against the wall.

The buttons were dirty, dusty, practically worn away, just like the floor, the room, and the boy, but Sunnyboy knew exactly where to guide his hands to get the screen to flood with white and static electricity to tickle his fingertips. Keeping his eyes on the light, he fumbled around to where he had been keeping the VHS case, and slid it into the television with trembling fingers.

The white fuzz bloomed into a rapid succession of images. Men and women with eyes wide and piercing, crooked, gaslamp-lined streets, phantoms and carnivals and slumbering villages.

He didn't need to worry about keeping the volume low—the movie was silent.

Sunnyboy settled only a couple feet away from the screen and held his knees up to his chest. There were no longer any thoughts of being cold or angry or tired or lonely. In the light of the television, he just *was*. Nothing more, nothing less.

It was strange, though—the absence of sound from the television wasn't quite absolute. There was something else. The warm tones of a city at night, sure, that was expected, but there was something else too. Something colder, older. A buzzing of sorts, lying just underneath the base of his skull.

It reverberated around him, poking and prodding in all corners of his mind, rendering him quite ticklish (though he would never admit it). He felt as if he had just missed a step on the stairs, but Sunnyboy wasn't afraid of falling. The feeling grew sharper and faster and louder and he suddenly realized that the comforting noises from outside had stopped completely. He was alone with the buzzing.

The entire city had become nothing more than a ghost. *He was in the realm of the watchers now*, he thought, eyes wandering away from the screen and down to the street four stories below. Cars and lights echoed up to him, though they faded away long before they reached the window, as Sunnyboy was much further than usual tonight. Much further than five stories could ever dream of being. He was free to wander, to float, to observe everything without a care or investment in the world, like it all just a movie. *Wouldn't that be nice*, he mused, *being free to watch people as much as you wanted without having to worry about other people watching you*.

Sunnyboy shivered, feeling the lightest touch of eyes on the back of his neck. The buzzing grew louder, harder, sharper, until it was no longer just inside his head and the television with all its magic and wonder burst into a shower of fireworks—

A power surge.

Then everything was dark.

At least, a power surge was what he assumed it was. He knew that they were loud, and bright, and occur for only a fraction of a second, though this fraction of a second felt an awful lot longer than fractions of seconds were supposed to be.

An awful lot can happen in a fraction of a second. It sent his heart leaping, sent his hair on its end, sent every gallon of blood rushing to the surface of his skin, stroking and caressing him in an effort to comfort. It sent him scrambling backward, head snapping to the side - about ninety degrees, to the side of the room with the window.

Simultaneously, the television along with all of the lights on the street outside grew as hot and bright as the surface of the sun, illuminating everything in their path, if only for a moment.

And in that moment, in that fraction of a second, Sunnyboy saw something: there was a figure in the window.

Only a silhouette, but still. Then it was gone. He froze.

At his age, the strange little paranoias that children living in apartments often have, of creatures that would scale entire skyscrapers just to get the taste of a sleeping child had just begun to leave Sunnyboy alone. But now, unconsciously and undesired, all those thoughts were creeping right back to the forefront of his mind. But he couldn't let them, no, Sunnyboy was too old for that sort of nonsense. Fear was suppressed with clenched teeth and a shaking jaw. As was routine.

Simple, stupid, silly little boy.

The voice wasn't his own, but it was one he was familiar with.

You really shouldn't let your imagination run wild like that. Because boys—boys like you like to hop along highway lane dividers and explore both parts of the forest, but someday, you idiot, you'll get run over or get hopelessly lost and it'll be your fault, because you wanted this, wanted to jump at shadows in the dark, but you couldn't, not in a room with hardly any furniture. You're going to have to try very hard to kill that delusional instinct inside of you. And spend your entire life trying, trying to be normal, trying to be realistic, trying to hide, trying to hide the fact that-you've been crying, haven't you?

"I have *not* been crying!"

Good boy.

Nothing to see but a skinny little boy, with exposed, sensitive skin and shaggy hair. Nothing to hear but his deep, ragged gasps. He. Was not. Crying.

It would seem that the room had grown quite hot.

For the first time in months, he opened the window. The little boy's muscles shook as he grasped the wood, which had grown sticky and stubborn through rain and disuse. Until suddenly—it released, snapping upwards with a bang. There was a chill in the air, alive and breathing.

Under the presence of the world, Sunnyboy felt awfully, terribly small.

Despite all that, there was nothing outside. Not that he should have expected there to be.

The chill in the air moved inside, moved through him, past him, and into the room. It stared at his back. Though he was shivering, he left the window open.

When he turned, moving back inside, the chill moved too. It was no longer where his back had been just moments ago. And then, he could've sworn he saw something sitting on his bed, but when he turned his head to look: there too, was nothing.

But-no, that wasn't true.

There was... *something*, it just wasn't something he could see. Something behind him, every time he turned his head. Just out of the corner of his eye. Sunnyboy was beginning to get dizzy.

"Hello?"

He waited.

"Hello?" The voice came from everywhere and nowhere.

It was unsteady, hoarse, like the speaker had not spoken in a very long time.

When he turned his head for the last time, the chill did not move with him. It just sat there, staring, and slowly, it coalesced into a more recognizable shape. It was the figure that he had seen before. *It was really here.* It was... Sunnyboy wasn't entirely sure what it was. It was simultaneously a presence of things and an absence of things all at once. The deep blackness of shadow and space mixed with the silvery-white of constellations into something which only possessed the vague outline of a human. Two white stars had positioned themselves in the approximate spot where eyes should be.

They both sat there, watching each other, until it felt like the fabric of time itself surely must have collapsed under the weight of this thing's... "eyes". Or maybe it already had, and Sunnyboy was just too stupid to notice.

He decided to move. Just a little bit and not for any particular reason, but when he moved, it did too. When he sat up, it did too. When he waved, it did too.

And as they moved, Sunnyboy noticed that the creature began to change. At first it was slow, almost unnoticeable. The white in its eyes moved and dispersed. The outline clarified itself.

But then he moved closer, and it did too.

Black ink slowly dripped away to reveal a face, paper-white and blank.

He moved his arm up, and it did too.

The arm was long, skinny, and pale, too—almost too long, too skinny, and too pale. Slowly and deliberately, a perfect mirror of one another, they reached out and touched fingers. It was as if he had touched a live wire.

He was so quickly assaulted by *everything*—every memory, every emotion, every sensation, everything and nothing all at once at such a fever pitch and intensity that the poor boy could scarcely hope to understand what was going on. Then again, the thing that was sitting across from him didn't understand it either. Only that it was sharp and it was cold and it tickled, just a little bit, right over the left side of the chest.

The boy's neck jerked, the boy's jaw clenched, the boy's eyes opened, the boy's legs stiffened, the boy's chest spasmed, the boy's legs relaxed, the boy's eyes closed.

Human beings weren't supposed to move like that. They were supposed to move naturally and gracefully, guests of honor in the world which had birthed them. But perhaps this world was not the one which had birthed this boy.

Regardless, it seemed that he was only graceful when he was asleep.

When Sunnyboy opened his eyes, the strange silhouette that he saw in the window was no longer there. In its place was a small child, the same age as him. Or, almost a child, anyway.

Sunnyboy almost believed it—after all, a small child was much easier to believe in than whatever he had seen before, but there were a couple things just slightly... off, that stopped it just short of looking like a real person:

It was completely colorless, for one. Everything was black, white, or a varying shade of grey. All the black had bled into the centers of its body, where it became a mass of dark, oversized clothing. Some of the black had moved up to the top of its head, where it had turned into a mop of wild, unruly hair. There were still some spots where it lingered, though—especially around the fingertips, like it had frostbite.

There was also a ring of the dark stuff around its eyes, almost like war paint. The eyes were still almost completely white, now (though at least they were the right shape) with just the tiniest black fleck in the middle, like ink in a well. The contrast between ink and paper made the thing's eyes look shell-shocked, piercing.

Like one of the people from his silent movie.

It simply watched him with fascination—but Sunnyboy did the same.

“Can you talk?” His heart was still fluttering, but it was pleasant now, almost making him want to giggle. He was reminded of the time he went to the dentist to get a cavity removed.

“Can you... can I talk... yes,” it cocked its head, drawing out the last syllable. Dark lips twitched upwards into a malformed smile.

“I can talk...” In that moment, this ancient, ageless thing was scarcely but a toddler, basking in the wonder of the world and the pure, unreplicable ecstasy that comes with doing something so fundamentally human for the very first time.

Then there was another noise—sharp, grating, breathy, and wild, running down a hill and not knowing how to stop as it gained momentum, ricocheting off every available surface. At first, it seemed like it was emanating from the walls themselves, but the creature’s mouth *was* moving—albeit stiffly, up and down and up and down...

After a moment, Sunnyboy realized that it was laughing.

It was a little frightening, sure (it was very frightening), but Sunnyboy had never heard a sound so pure, clear, and filled with joy. He couldn’t help it. Maybe it was empathy, maybe just nervous energy, maybe conformity, maybe sorcery-

But Sunnyboy started laughing too. And he just couldn’t seem to stop. Perhaps it was just his imagination (though really, he wasn’t even sure if he cared anymore), but it felt as if he was slowly losing the need to breathe.

“Who are you?” he asked.

It cocked its head. “Nobody.”

“What do you mean? Everybody’s somebody.”

It did not appear to know how to answer. So Sunnyboy, as it was what was familiar with him, decided to fill the silence with more words. Not that they meant much to his ears anyway. Not any form of communication or intended message, just the verbalization of the thoughts and associations fluttering through his head that he paid no conscious attention to. A tuneless elevator music. He got it from his father.

“You can’t be nobody, you’re right here, I’m talking to you! Besides, even if you were nobody, nothing is still something, right? Like the number Zero. We learned about it in math. It’s nothing, but it’s also something, because it’s Zero!”

Pause. The thing stared at him, holding onto every word. It said nothing.

“Actually—I like that. It suits you. I’m gonna call you Zero,”

“...Zero? I... I like that too,” Zero smiled, more sure of itself this time.

Sunnyboy smiled back.

“Okay, so we’ve figured out that that you aren’t nobody. So if you’re not nobody, then who are you?” Though the boy’s voice was firmer this time, there was no frustration or accusation to be found. The question was one of genuine curiosity and concern.

“I... I don’t know...”

“How can you not know who you are?” He didn’t realize until after the words came out how sharply they moved through the air. He sounded like his father. He was his father. He was asking this question to his son. Sunnyboy felt bile begin to crawl up the back of his throat.

Zero seized up and scrambled backwards.

“Wait—no! I’m sorry. I’m not gonna hurt you, I promise.”

It stopped.

“I promise,” he repeated.

It reversed course—slowly, haltingly. This creature was not of the sort that was used to making consequential decisions.

Then again, neither was Sunnyboy. He lifted his hands up in a gesture of surrender - that was what you were supposed to do, right?

Was it? Zero responded by putting its own hands up. It didn’t have any nails.

“No, you don’t have to do that—I’m the one who did something bad.”

Down again. Sunnyboy followed suit, though the gesture was (hopefully) adequately replaced by a welcoming smile. Though admittedly—he had never been particularly good at finding his bearings or navigating his way around the confusing landscape that was his own face, so it was a bit of a leap of faith. He prayed that he hadn’t overshot it.

It seemed to drink in every little detail on his face with a practiced kind of fascination, attentive and studious. No, more than that, it really was *drinking*, Sunnyboy could practically feel the shift in the room, the way invisible hands seemed to wrap around his face, recalibrating the gravity to slowly ooze towards the being sitting opposite him. And with each new piece of information that flowed its way, Zero seemed to become incrementally more real, more human.

It almost felt like an honor to Sunnyboy, he’d never had anyone or anything look at him with such reverence and intensity before, as if he was special. He let Zero continue to do whatever he was doing.

The boy shivered.

“Where’d you come from?” He asked as the thing continued to inch its way towards him, leaving the thick layer of dust on the floor completely undisturbed. At this point, he didn’t really expect a proper answer, but there was no shame in trying.

“The waystation outside fourth and fifth. Surely you’ve been there, I... I know you have. I saw you there once.” It didn’t break its gaze, not even once, though eye contact wasn’t really the right way to describe it. This was something much more voyeuristic—a watcher.

“You mean the old highway underpass?” He didn’t know what a waystation was.

It moved closer.

“Sure. But if you go down there and get lost, over and around and through the bushes you’ll find there’s a void in there, big and dark and beautiful. That’s where I’m from,” Closer still. Sunnyboy started sliding along the floor too. They would meet in the middle.

(But someday, you idiot, you’ll get run over or get hopelessly lost and it’ll be your fault)—

—Sunnyboy ignored the warning.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen something like that down there.”

“You can’t find it if it’s something you’re looking for.”

“Oh.”

“But I could take you there sometime... if you’d like.” The last part was tacked on hastily, as if Zero hadn’t considered the boy’s consent in the matter until that very moment.

It cocked its head, waiting, hesitant, wondering if it had overstepped a boundary.

Humans had so many of those.

But the boy just nodded eagerly. He was still, in spite of everything, overflowing with that insatiable, childish thirst for adventure. Zero was glad. Most children had lost it by that age.

There was a quiet (though not disagreeable) moment. Sunnyboy took that moment to look *really look* at this strange, incredible thing that had somehow managed to find its way into his room.

It stared back with something that could only be described as fondness.

He took a deep breath.

“Zero, can I be your friend?” The question came quickly, pushed out by an avalanche of building pressure that had built around his head.

There’s something about light nights when you’re young, something forbidden and entrancing, that allows the truth to slip uninhibited from tiny mouths.

“My friend? Why?”

“I don’t know, I just... thought that might be nice.”

“Don’t you already have friends?”

He gave Zero a conspiratorially-tinged smile.

“Yeah, but they aren’t... *magic*,” He whispered.

Zero didn’t seem like it completely understood what he meant by that—but it was fine, because it didn’t seem to care, either. It was lost in its own, odd thoughts. Thoughts that were completely foreign to the concept of friends as anything but an observable, third-person phenomenon, he realized.

“Friends take care of each other,” he hoped it didn’t sound too condescending, “They can... if you want to be, we can be together forever and ever, and we can help each other find out who we are.”

“Do you promise?” It was still cautious. Sunnyboy understood.

“I promise.”

The promise wouldn’t keep, of course. Childhood promises never do. But how were either of them supposed to know that? Sunnyboy reached out and squeezed Zero’s hands, cold, and lanky as they were. It was something his mother used to do.

“Thank you,” it whispered, close and cold and scary and comforting.

“For what?”

“For being my friend, and for giving me my name,”

It had been a very long time since anyone had thanked Sunnyboy for anything, much less something so important as a name.

“But you never gave me yours,” it continued.

“I’m... uh...” He wanted to tell Zero his name, he really did. It was the least he could do, giving something in return.

But as he tried to take in a breath, the words simply wouldn’t come. He couldn’t. It wasn’t right. Nothing was right, not for this tiny little boy in a tiny little apartment and a tiny little world.

In Zero’s world of impossible things, of stars, ink, and statically-infused touches, a world where every whim that was true had the right to just... be, it felt wrong to go by a name that wasn’t. It was what people generally called him by, sure, it was what was on his birth certificate, but still, that barely felt like enough to call it his *name*. After all, names were important. Names were supposed to be the very essence of your identity, compacted into a few short words, something you could answer with when someone asked “Who are you?” His name was none of those things. Except—

This little boy had two very different names, given to him by two very different people. And here, in this upstairs bedroom filled with impossible things, it didn't matter what he had been given, but what he would take.

He took the name that shined in his mind where it was supposed to be hanging and crumpled it into the trash. He replaced it with a new name—childishly scrawled in crayon, sure, but it was truly, wholly *his*. Hardly the strangest thing which happened that night.

“Sunnyboy.”

Where the Wild Things Are

Aliah Fabros

Dad set Twilight Struggle on the kitchen table
Set soviet Union plans of attack and moth bitten cards
in little mountain stacks,
an entire range
and mom is the sun
Seeping tall and scottish red behind the counter
lavender soap hands
glinting under rush of water
Propped on the dining chairs,
pink silk of little sister feet
Cherry blossom lips counting
one two three one two three
knees dip, like a toe in a pond

He wondered when the hallway had become a telescope

In the distance
his family bathing in late
afternoon window pane sun dust
their small talk fluttering back to his bedroom
Where he stood, cold feet scraping against hardwood in the doorway
Battleship gray eyes soaking in pink silk shrieks
As dad throws her off her feet
onto the couch

The shush of deflating leather
humphs of pillows tossed

He watches strong dad, with strong arms, and strong belly laugh
tackle their girls in warmth

We should be ready in five! If I can just get the little one in control

Belly bells are tickled out of his sister

The kind that pierce like wind chimes on a summer's day
The only sound that can make the journey back to him
Still saturated in the smells of august, bleached hilltops and wildflower
As if boyhood had never left

Okay

He calls back
Voice cracked on throat thick,
hands spools of twine spun into fists
He shuts the door.

Sudden alone

A jarring ringing
stifled by unsteady breathing
Presses palms slick to edge of bed
scrubbed raw linen
rests his head
against chest that rises and falls
Body knowing nothing at all
just the creaking of gates being pulled open
and the salt in the floods that follow
Wet eyes and puffy lips

He cries.

He cries and does not see
as sunlight creeps off bedside table
slipping through cracks in crown molding
day sliding under floorboards
Time is passing

Battleship gray swells shut
he gulps down storms
feels caged seagulls in his ribs

Does not taste the pine in the wind
Dewy grass sprouts between the pipes beneath him

Does not smell minerally balm spread onto air by rainfall
Nor hear scuttle and scamper of dirty paws drown the hum of the heater

Too lost, spluttering sobs into sheets
The way sea spits waves into coves
To see his room be swallowed whole

He woke to drums and animal cry
Sound dull and rumbling
as wild things big and small beat their thighs
Bed lit by bonfire roar
Illuminating wood and glinting horns

They danced in hundreds and in circles
Mouths thundering,
engulfing tremors of flute and crash of tamborine
Fur matted, glassy eyes
They sang snarls, thistles, and fright

Quiet down!

He stood on his bed, only piece of home left
Floating in forest floor

Quiet down, my parents will hear you!!

Yet wild things carved out stars with their talons
and offered them at his feet
romping round the bed
Soot tracks streaking newly washed sheets
They roared their terrible roars
and gnash their terrible teeth
and rolled their terrible eyes
and showed their terrible claws

He burrowed face into pillow cover
Letting childhood fill nostrils
Lull his mind into white noise panic
Frantically pulling blanket over burning ears
and streaming cheeks

He screams and screams and screams

The covers flutter round him
color of firelight
Tented
he is nested in this makeshift refuge
body rocking
Back and forth
The shadows of creatures gleam past
Like headlights
Whisking this way and that
Drawing nearer

BE STILL

The drumming of his heart stomps out
The rumpus

He shivers in bed, until one slips it's
Furry head under the covers
Muddy eyes, mildly surprised at the sudden command
You can't go being loud like that, or they'll hear you
You have to be quiet, understand?
You can't make a sound

While he cowered on his knees
The beasts howled and crowned him king
Chanting *grow up*
and *never forget us*
Until his trembling lips began to sing along
Until he was tossed onto his own bed
And they piled on his chest
Paper crown yellow and digging into his head

He woke to warm sticky daybreak
and sensed these things first:
tickle of lemon grass
Thwip of skipping stones

round, smooth ones like blue jay eggs
and hot, burly breaths
beating down his back

Body slumped over the shoulder
Of a wild thing
Except this beast had wider eyes
and stouter snout
He was strong with strong arms
and strong belly laugh
Carrying him away from steaming fire
and snarling snores of the rest

Where are you taking me?
Wild thing looked down fondly,
Used leathery paw to stroke sleep from his face
They sat down, side by cliffside
boy trying to be man
Beast trying to be boy
In silence
wind rustling of poppies
That stuck to his pajama sleeves

I'm scared of them
his thoughts for the first time breaking away
like tumbleweed
I'm scared of you too
That you'll hate me,
for not being a real king

He buried himself in it's bristly chest
It's claws patted his scruff

You are not dirty
For feeling things, boy

Sandy lips kissed his head

*A storm brought you here
and it will you bring you back
Set sail with bravery, boy*

*Even the paper on your head
If made into a boat
can float in these waters*

Tortoiseshell eyes cast down
Looking past him to rocky ground
Where branches crunch and morning fog rolls
Over the island
Where his wild things have made their home

I only wish, you told me sooner

And so he set out
Pillowcase sails
Into the sea
Finding himself once again
In his bedroom
Where not even a sniff of pine lingered

And he remembered the drums
The burn of bonfire
The terrible roars, and terrible teeth,
Terrible eyes and terrible -
He clawed at his arms and face
I'LL EAT YOU UP
Sobbing,
hating every stitch of skin

A knock on the door.
Frame creaking against the weight of dad's shoulders
Hey bud, we're ready when you are

From some quiet tide within

tickle of lemon grass
and wide, dewy eyes
He began to stroke his face
And tried again

I love you so
Thwip, the skipping of stones
I didn't mean what I said
I love you so . .