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COVER • CAROLINA CHAVARRIAGA • *FALLING LEAVES* • 35 mm film

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PULP MAG aims to be a safe, inclusive space for emerging artists of all types. We want to give a platform to unique voices with important stories to tell, no matter the medium. We believe in the importance of artist recognition, exposure, paying our creative talent, and in building a strong community to hold the work. At pulp MAG, we especially appreciate the avant-garde; we are ready to push the boundaries of art with you.

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CAROLINA CHAVARRIAGA

MAIMOONA RAHMAN

Poetry

Jessica
Rodriguez

Don't Walk Away

My sister says it is for the best that I can't make you stay beside me, body heat engulfs
in what used to be our seemingly unburstable bubble. She says there is nothing left to do but let you walk away, and I try, try, try to let you go, but deep inside, I know this is a trap
I see you in every delicate selection of life decisions. We—I will never find an all-consuming love that burns so bright that it is hard to extinguish, the red a
nd orange flame. You still have a hold on everything I do when I bake cinnamon rolls with the ghost of you
beside me, trying to distract me with your soft neck kisses. Don't walk away, stay here and hold me like I am made of air, and you are trying to keep it all in your lungs, not a chance to
deflate. Don't walk away, every step you take forward is another burst in the remaining pieces of our bubble. Every step you take away from me, you carry the last stolen pieces of my puzzle, echoing laughter, chocolate
kisses, sweaty hand-holding, and light in our hazel eyes. They were all I had left from you. Your calloused hand slips like
sand through my fingertips. I lunge one step forward, but you are already gone, trying to find comfort in another girl's
arms and lips. I root myself to the ground and stare intently at your pheated broad back covered in a navy blue shirt, light jeans
blurred with the morning sky, and white shoes join the clouds to take you out of my mind one last time.

Blackout

Backstage in our poorly lit dressing room, I colour my lips with blood-red courage. I do my best to ignore my classmates' chatter as they slip in and out of the room, but their loud mix of nerves and excitement fills the cramped space between our bodies. I can't escape the sound. Inside me, my heart keeps a feverish pace. It echoes down to the pit of my stomach—the unwelcome aftershock of a minor earthquake.

“Do you have it down?” someone asks in the flurry.

A different voice answers, “I better. It's too late not to.”

My eyes, sharpened cat-like with a slash of black ink, stay trained on my reflection in the mirror. I have pulled my mass of hair into a high pony, and it sways like a tail at even the slightest movement. In my head, I go over the monologue for the umpteenth time, and will my shaking hands into cold precision. Outlining the curve of my cupid's bow is a delicate sport—it demands a careful aim, and an intimate familiarity with its shape. Earlier, when I held the tube of lipstick between my teeth so my hands could work at my hair, help was generously offered. But a red lip is a risky thing, and I can't trust anyone else to follow these lines—that precipitous dip is a damned trap. So I fight my instinct to rush, forcing my fingers into slow strokes. I know that if I slip, if I get this wrong, they will all see it in a moment.

The stage lights reveal everything.

—

A theatre is a terrifying space. Be it a proscenium stage framed in bronze and gold, or a stripped-down, straight-edged, black box of a room, the

power of the space lies in what lives there. A theatre is a temple to the sublime, a place where awe and terror join at the seams, where beauty and fear come to consummate their affair. To me, the spectating is as frightening as the performing; the audience seat, tucked under the shroud of darkness, deceptively safe beyond the reach of that furious spotlight, is as dangerous a mark as a place on stage. We know this, and we go anyway. We put on our Sunday best, walk up the steps to the balcony rows or down to the orchestra pit, and join in the buzz of voices that make up the score for the pre-show. We find our seats, then shuffle our feet and make conversation until the lights dim, staving off a silent hunger for that vertiginous moment when suddenly, anything goes.

Danny Burstein, an American actor who has made a home on the Broadway stage, remarked in an op-ed to the New York Times that theatre, “at its best,” “is a collective, spiritual experience. It is church for the heart and mind. It is shul for the intellect. A mosque celebrating mankind. It reminds us how beautiful life can be and how fragile it is as well.” I think that fragility is what frightens me. That illusion, so delicate in its suspension of disbelief, demands more than a skilled actor to support it. It demands us, the audience, to be willing—to listen, to feel, to pretend with them. And even then, nothing is certain. You know what you paid for, but you can’t know what you’ll end up getting.

It may be redundant to claim that viewing theatre is not like viewing film, but I don’t mean the technicality of it all. What I mean is the act of sitting in the room, of gazing up at flesh and blood people on the stage, knowing that they are human, and that being human means being fallible. In film, everything is in the past. When we sit in a movie theatre and look up at a silver screen, what we see is moving scripture, written down in technicolour or black and

white. Nothing we do in that air-conditioned room can change what has happened. We may toss our popcorn at the screen, put our feet up on the seats, and Lauren Bacall will remain impassive as she leans into that door, unbothered at our sacrilege. Humphrey Bogart will always throw that box of matches in a perfect arch and she will always catch them in her manicured hands. We can huff and puff and blow all we want—that fire in her hands will never go out, not until she wills it so. And if no one buys a ticket, well—the movie still plays, still preaches to those silent, empty rows.

Live theatre doesn't work that way. In a play, there is no editing to cover mistakes, no impenetrable screen that protects the action from the spectator, or the spectator from the action. The unease, then, comes on the heels of a simple question: what if something goes wrong? If something falls that should be caught, if a strong wind blows and kills that flame before the cigarette is lit, what happens then? A capable cast recovers, and the show goes on. But what of us, the ones beyond the stage, with our stuttering heartbeats and eyes gone wide? For that brief moment when the fantasy wavers, we hold our breaths and wait for the thud. In the audience, I fear the drop as if it's me who flubbed it, *my* clumsy fingers who let the act slide between them.

In a dark theatre, the air pulsates with possibility, for better or worse, as if stirred by the thrum of every pulse in the room.

Some weeks ago, at the invitation of a mutual friend, my partner and I took our seats in a small auditorium at his alma mater. That Saturday morning and well into the afternoon, we watched eight strangers take the stage to share with us their wisdom, all of them charming and brave and wildly intelligent, so close to us their eyes would meet with ours, now and then. It was the first talk, however, that stayed with me long past the weekend. It stays with me

still.

The speaker walked on stage wearing a colourful sweater and a tilted smile, the kind that promises secret knowing, whimsy, and a little bit of mischief. The event program listed him as Paul Falkowski, a self-proclaimed entertainer turned drama educator. I knew nothing of him, nor of his methods or career. But his obvious passion touched me, and the way he spoke about drama captured what both pulls me to it and frightens me about it. A few sentences in, I dug into my purse with a desperate rush, knowing I would want to remember this and set my phone to record.

“Drama,” he said, “is a process of becoming.”

He spoke theatrically, aware of every pause and how he held us in his trance, urging us to look to drama for the same reason we look to the vastness of the Grand Canyon—to be awed.

“When we go to places that evoke awe within us, we transform. Moved by a powerful experience, we move closer to who we are and to who we want to be.”

When his eyes roamed the crowd, I felt sometimes that he saw me.

—

For years to come, I will be sure of this one thing. If a moment in my life should be recaptured, I would choose it to be this:

Somehow, when I step up to the center of our makeshift stage, the wild drum within my chest has quieted down. Perhaps the icy stillness of my character has heard me call for it—knows it’s showtime—and has begun to take its hold. Or maybe the red lipstick has worked its own magic, seeped into me like a potion and tricked my brain to make me brave. It hardly matters. In a split second, the spotlight engulfs me. From their seats, my classmates clap politely.

Shaded fully by the near darkness, their features blur into mere suggestions, and I make no effort to distinguish them; it will be easier this way. When I look down at where I'm standing, every scratch on the worn-out floor glares back at me, so I focus on that instead, and sit on the metal chair prepared for me—my single prop; the only one I need. My teacher, I think, tells me to start whenever I'm ready. So I close my eyes. I close them for a long moment. Then, I become.

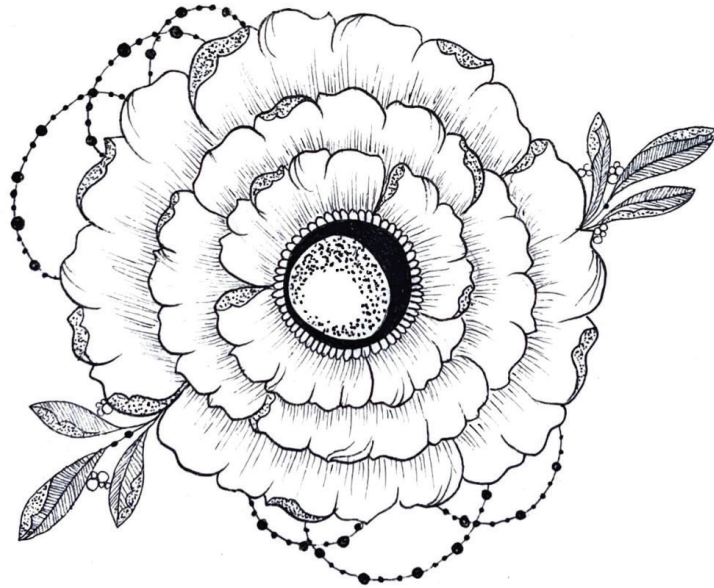
As I lift my face again, I mould my painted lips into a smile that's not my own. The red of them burns bright against the dark, but I don't speak straight away. I look back at the ones that watch me, not really seeing beyond that circle of light that holds me. We sit together in that loaded silence, and I let this power I command make shape of the words I know by heart.

And I shine.

For three minutes, I hold a roomful of people in the palm of my hand. For three minutes, the only voice in the room is me, and I feel that I am heard. This is a dizzying power—I could get drunk on it. Even as I finish, the silence lingers with the weight of those three minutes, and I know that when I bow, when I pull off the mask and signal the end, the spell will break. So I grip it tight a second longer, stretching the moment for myself. Then, with a greedy reluctance, I let it crumble, and the room erupts. I fill my pockets with their awe, basking in an unspoken pleasure.

Afterwards, someone tells me that I frightened them, and I feel like a thing of beauty.

Moonlights



Someday I'll Make the Onions Cry

But for now, I'll just hide
between my layers, scratching away
at the cellophane that separates them.
I don't even like onions. It's nothing like love.
But, I guess it's like lovers—
flavours extracted through tears and a stink that latches on
forever. My sister says I should love more.
But I hate onions. I hate that ghastly crunch and stink
as loud as the sirens in my head.
Some endangered mythical creature with a sandpaper throat.
I only want to be left alone. And onions are attention-seekers.
They crave it so much they need clinical attention.
I like to stay invisible. Because they can't hurt you
if they don't know you exist. Yet I do exist. And that hurts.
Denying my existence only adds to the exhaustion of existence.
Eventually, I don't even have to try. I'm invisible by default.
Stuck between stinky layers with burning eyes
that are begging for rest.
Because everything makes me cry.
Especially onions.

Dark Quiet Moments

The room is dark. A kind of hushed and contemplative darkness that throws itself like a mantle over those who do not want to be exposed. This soft fabric encompasses three figures. Two stand facing each other, one tall and one short, their breath in opposite rhythm. Their parlour room furniture is set in a semi-circle with the third figure, a maid, tending to the grand fireplace. In the dark, only the basic outlines of them are obvious. They are frozen in tableau for just a few more moments. The darkness tightens around them, smothering all sense and thought.

“You codfish! You knew this from the start!” A booming female voice fills the room and the light rushes in to illuminate her. She stands tall and dominant, her back tight and straight. Her coarse brown hair is pulled back into a painfully tight bun. She wears a beautiful triple-layered gown with a corset two sizes too small.

“My love, my sweet angel of Eden,” says the small, handsome man opposite of her. His outfit is themed with a sickly golden hue. His polished black shoes click together in a perfect figure of terror. He removes his beaver skin top hat and touches his quaffed hair as if something was out of place. “You know that I am only interested in your love. I would have agreed to this marriage even if I knew nothing about—” He sputters out before she can interrupt.

“I do not believe you, nor would I even if God Himself told me you spoke the truth. I have...Evidence!” she exclaims with a flicker of a worried smile. There is a moment of hesitation. The maid, forgotten by the fire, stands and makes a small noise. The tall woman finally addresses her, “Fetch it for us,

won't you, my dear?" The maid curtsies and exits right.

"This is preposterous," the small man says immediately after the maid leaves. "Let us be married and sell this wretched house. I love you, and this house does you injustice. Let us be married and leave this place to start a new life in the city," He reaches out a hand, but she does not take it.

"I want no life that is shared with you!" The tall woman says to the small man, "When you said you would marry me for money you forgot to mention..." She stalls for a breath, deflated. A moment passes, nearly two. She restarts, "You said you would marry me for love you forgot to mention money! Your debt cannot be paid by my mother's estate because it belongs to my elder sister."

"That is impossible. Grief has clouded your senses, my love," the cowardly man says while his polished black shoes click closer to her. "Your mother's first daughter died in infancy."

The maid returns with a letter, and the tall woman takes it from her with a smile and holds it out to the man. "We were all misguided," she says in her booming voice, "This is a letter of confession from the housekeeper that she switched the babies at birth. Once I authenticate this, the house becomes hers."

"But my love!" The small man falls to his knees. "The house is all ready to be sold after our marriage. You cannot possibly think--"

"Yes, I can, my darling yellow-bellied coward." The tall woman continues. "It is my sister who will be taking our mother's inheritance with my blessing."

"Impossible!" he yells, out of character. "Who is this mystery sister? And where can she be after these twenty years?!"

The maid steps in between the quarrelling lovers nervously. She whispers, “My Lord and Lady, the truth is out. And the truth is...”

Silence.

“I am your long-lost sister! Ta Daaaaahhh.” The small man slides in front of her, flapping his hat like an old Hollywood star.

“No! Scene! Good lord, man. We are *not* doing a musical this year!”

From behind the fourth wall, the director stands waving his hands. An unnecessarily gorgeous assistant shoves her phone into her bra, flips on the house lights, and illuminates the empty off-off-off-broadway theatre. A janitor sits in the back row, stealing a nap in this basement theatre before her night shift. The director, a short white man with hair balding in the shape of an abandoned cul-de-sac, approaches the front of the stage.

“Daniel,” He says to the golden-dressed man. “Lovely dance but please stop stealing Lily’s line. You have the entire play to be dashing, this is her big scene. The sisters united. The inheritance rewarded. There are no boy-sisters or any of that stuff in my play.”

Daniel, the small man, stands and laughs. His voice spills through the theatre like inevitable summer sunlight. None of the timidness of his character remains as he says, “Love the specificity there, Johnny. ‘Any of that stuff’ doesn’t make you sound much of an ally.” The light shows his brown hair remains in perfect shape; his white smile reflects the light. He plops himself down on the lip of the stage.

“Lily.” The director turns to the thin, intense young woman in a maid uniform. “That was quite nice. But. We do need you to finish your line! This is the climax of my play and I need more... more bigness. You understand me, don’t you?”

“I think so,” Lily stands, crossing her arms. “You want me to be more of a foil character to Daniel to build the opportunity for Kate’s final moment. And I need to hold my presence on the stage in extended beats but not long enough to give Dan the opportunity to jump my line?”

“It was more of a hop, I thought you forgot again.” Daniel says without turning back to look at her.

“I remember, ‘She pauses for an extended beat’. Following the script, Dan.” Lily says, keeping her eyes on the director while he moves his gaze onward.

“Yes, thank you, child. Next... Kate. Dear, Kate. Do you know what I am about to say?” The director now walks to the very front of the stage, causing the tall and commanding woman to look straight down at him, her dress nearly obscuring her view.

“Learn my lines so—”

“YES! You are the leading lady of my show. The braggadocious, beautiful, busty lady of the hour and she does not stop to remember her lines on stage.”

“And I respect that, but I feel like the character would have more timidity with her strength. From the research I did, it doesn’t make sense—”

“I’ll hold you there. A reminder that you are the actor. I’ve hired a dramaturg for a reason, love,” Johnathan gestures back to the assistant who has already returned to her phone.

“...I get that. I just think this dialogue is too clunky.”

Johnathan grips the back of the chair and releases a laugh instead of his initial reaction. “This,” he says as if encompassing the universe and

everything, “is why I wrote this play. We are revitalizing a forgotten era of theatre. *Clunky* dialogue and women who speak their minds unhindered is what this instant-gratification world needs. Does that make sense?”

“Yes, my Lord.” Daniel chimes in. Kate can’t hold back a small smile.

“I think so,” she says to Johnny. “It was just my opinion.”

“Thank you for speaking your mind. And knowing that I understand the play a little better. Because I wrote it.” The director, content that his wrath has hit home, softens. “I know this is your first big play, but when the audience is here, there are no excuses. We cannot do a second take or even a third. You are more than some Toronto rinky-dink film actor, you made it to New York! So you must get your lines right the first time. Will you work with her to make sure she’s ready?” The last is addressed to Daniel.

“John. You told me you needed an actress, six-foot-two and classically trained, and I told you the very best one I know.” Daniel adds as he stands and slides up beside Kate, wrapping an arm around her. The top of his head barely passes her shoulder.

“And, of course, there’s the comedic element,” Lily says in a stage whisper.

Kate releases a burst of laughter. Daniel is forced to join in and his big smile infects the worried director.

“Oh, you two just look so good together!” Johnathan spins and struts back to the front row. “Alright, we are going to be going again. Places!” He plops down to quietly discuss feedback with the assistant in the audience. She instantly begins to rub his shoulders and whisper sweet encouragements in his ear.

“You almost had it that time. I know you’ll get it.” Daniel turns his face up at Kate. She smiles at their tradition and leans down to peck him on the forehead.

“You were quite brilliant that time, my love.” Her voice drips with remnants of the English accent. Daniel smiles.

“Oh, you praise me too much... But go on. Ah ha ha!” He throws his head back and laughs from his belly. She starts to laugh but catches herself to ensure she does not laugh through her nose.

—
“He’s actually not funny,” Lily says after rehearsal.

“He only wants to keep everyone on their toes. Johnathan can get so uptight. We need to keep some comedy around here.”

She and Lily are now in the dressing room. It is one of the few small rooms at the back of the theatre. At one point it may have been a storage room. Now it contains a wall of costumes, a few folding chairs, an aged corduroy couch, and an antique stained-glass lamp: a backstage borough.

Lily has already shucked off her one-piece dress and buckled shoes. Her orange knit sweater and thrifted grey sweats are on before Kate is halfway through the first set of lace. Lily’s nimble hands begin to loosen the dress. As Kate is loosened from it the two of them become looser, beginning to laugh and chat.

“Can you confirm something...Did Daniel actually wear a muscle suit for the last musical because he can’t put on muscle?”

“No. I will not confirm, and I like ‘em scrawny, okay?” Kate says with an escaped grin. “Okay. But can you tell me something? Is this usually what theatre is like?”

“Like meeting someone two weeks ago and then becoming their personal undresser,” Lily says with a final tug at the gown. “Pretty much.”

“I’d say more than pretty,” A male voice cuts in. With perfect timing, Daniel pokes his head in through the door, his gold cravat hanging around his neck.

“Hey, this is girls only.” Kate covers herself with a baggy hoodie and sticks her tongue out to her boyfriend.

“I could have been naked too ya know,” Lily says.

“But ya weren’t.” Daniel says glaring at Lily. But he does partly close the door. “Just making sure everyone’s still alright in there. No incest or anything.”

When he fully closes the door, Lily shoves a chair under the handle, a jerry-rigged lock. “Also, theatre is like this. Some comedian who makes a joke about being a peep, thinking it excuses the act.”

“He’s just having fun. But no, what I was saying about theatre. Does it usually feel this underprepared? I feel like we just have to go up on stage and let what happens happen. Johnathan gives me notes but it’s just about lines. I don’t know what I’m going to do up there for two hours...”

Lily picks at her sweater. “I’m not one-hundred, or even like seventy percent sure if this answers your question, but I heard a really good story about two old Russian actors. There was one woman who had this great monologue about seeing the moon from her bedroom, and the critics loved it. Like, Oh my, that blew my top off,” Lily pantomimes losing her hat and chasing it around.

“They were all just like that, eh?” Kate retorts between chuckles.

Lily snorts out a laugh. “Did you unironically say ‘eh?’ Your Canadian

is showing there Miss Toronto. Anyway, everyone loved how this actor would 'show the audience the moon' every night. But then one day she gets sick, and her understudy comes out. The next day all the reviews said, 'she walked out on stage and saw the moon'."

Lily pauses for effect. It doesn't work.

"So. I have to see the moon?"

Lily groans and begins gathering her things. "Maybe? I think the moral of the story is you just have to trust the story and yourself to see things. Don't be passive and give people what they think they want."

"Thanks Lily." It came out as light-hearted, but Kate now stood with one hand on the door and an awkward moment sets in. They arrive at that tenuous moment in new friendships, where someone must make the active choice to prolong the conversation.

"Hey, d-do you want to get a beer? Or like a fancy cocktail? I think my bus just left and I've got at least another hour till the next one," Lily makes her bid at friendship with her head downcast.

"I'd love that. I don't have anything else tonight," Kate smiles and turns out the lamp as they leave. For the only time tonight, there is no tension in her shoulders.

Their conversation begins to light up again as they walk through the dimly lit backstage and out into the theatre again. The elderly janitor is beginning her sweep of the seats. The two of them are almost out the doors without looking up at the stage.

"Hey. Looks like you didn't need my help with the dress," Daniel calls from the stage. He stands centre stage in full costume with a script in hand.

“Oh shit. Ah, I’m sorry, that’s right,” Kate stammers. “Yeah, Lily-Lily said she could help me. I totally forgot you’d offered, my love.”

“That’s okay. We’re still on for the usual Friday private rehearsal, my braggadocious babe?”

Even the janitor can’t contain her disgust, so she masks it as a cough.

“Well, uh, Lily said we should go out for drinks, and I kinda said yes. What if we rehearse another time and you join us!” Kate fumbles.

“I was hoping for, you know, girls only.” Lily begins quietly. She picks at her sweater which looks beige in this light.

“Oh,” Daniel calls. His stage voice echoes through the large room. “Well, I guess I could run and see if Johnathan and Georgette have left yet. Georgie said they reserved their back booth at Siero’s for drinks.” He makes no move to run after them.

“Okay, one sec!” Kate’s voice is tight and strained, “Hey Lily, can we get a rain check on drinks? Maybe tomorrow? Then we could get everyone to go together.” Kate smiles like they are new acquaintances, like that is all they will ever be.

Lily knows it will not make a difference, she shakes her head in a way that could be affirmative or accepting. Kate walks to the edge of the stage and Daniel pulls her up.

“To the usual spot? Can’t let the audience see the show before it’s ready.” Daniel smiles a perfectly charming smile at the janitor, who continues to ignore him.

After the two actors laugh their way backstage, she looks up and shakes her head.

Lily stands for a moment at the back of the theatre. In the dark room, Lily's hair is the colour of midnight. She zips up her coat, arranging her keys so they all point outward in her fist, before heading out into the night.

—

He closes the dressing room door with a click. He removes his costume and hangs it neatly on the rack. He pauses for a moment to let her watch his exposed backside. He then puts on his loose-fitting jeans and his tight V-neck. Kate positions herself in the corner by the door.

“Are you sure you don't want to go out? I can review my own work and we can work together later?” he asks her after sitting on the couch. Like always she replies.

“You are my priority. Friends will always be there, but we have a lot of work to do.”

“Excellent. Alright, take a seat and let's start with act two. You missed a few extra lines John didn't catch,” He says as he moves her to the couch and flips through the script.

She smiles. “Did you catch them because you were watching me so closely?”

Instead of answering he leans down and kisses her. He holds her face until her eyes open.

“Yes, my love,” he says in his way. He kisses her again with a whisper. “I know you can be great. Do *you* know that?”

“I know,” she says, placing a hand on his chest.

“Okay, Han Solo.” He takes half a step back. Pulling his shirt off in one smooth motion.

She crosses her arms and legs. “Can we... Can we actually run lines tonight? I’m getting worried with the show so close and all.”

He is backlit by a single lamp. A silhouette.

“Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.” He snatches his shirt and tugs it over his head. “I’m sorry I forgot how much my scrawny chest is a turn off.”

“Hey!” She steps to the centre, and in the cramped room, she consumes most of the space.

“What.” He holds there for a moment, almost two. “I don’t want you to keep making up excuses if you don’t want to sleep with me.”

“There’s no excuse! I messed up two lines today!”

“I’ve told you it’s totally normal in theatre to get nervous. You’re letting the nerves make you crazy.” He sits down, eye level with her elbows, to say, “It was Lily who threw us off.”

She crosses her arms. Then uncrosses them and holds her wrist behind her back.

“I...” he continues, “ I just wish you knew what I do. That you are one of the best actresses I have ever worked with. Best person I’ve ever worked with.” He reaches for her but lets his hand and head fall. “I want to speak my truth and share, but it’s scary for me. I know you’re scared of the show but I’m scared of how I feel for you. I—” He cuts himself off with a shaky exhale that sounds like a laugh.

She waits to see if he’ll say the following two little words and he does.

“Because I love you. And it’s scary. Do you get it?”

“I get it.” She kneels down to finally look him in the eyes. “We’ve got this. You’ll be great at the show. I—” She cuts herself short, deciding to

place a hand on his shoulder.

“Thank you.” He puts a hand on her face. “You always get me.”

—

At some point during their rehearsal, an ankle catches the lamp cord and the room becomes dark as an empty stage when the last corner is swept. Dark as a secluded couple in the bar’s back booth. Dark as the hair of a pretty girl with keys in her fist. Dark as the quiet moments we forget to worry about.

After some time, the two of them become still and perhaps fall asleep. But it is more likely that she is pretending to enjoy it as he gently rubs her shoulder. She lets herself become a part of the deep darkness that descends into him. The kind that smothers his yelling voice in a comfortable embrace. His fingers brush against her like moonlight would brush against the cheek of a dreamer. But there is no moon in this room, the two of them are not both wrapped in cool, comforting light. She is dark.

Visual

Carolina
Chavarriga

Feeding Mallards



In Reflecting on Anderson Creek

Far across a jade plateau,
the land gives way to gold.
Faint murmurs of a stream trickle nearby,
the brook cradled in a cocoon of wood
– a gentle pine.
In springtime, waters rise
over the gravel shore. Waves ebbing
as far as the eye can see–
and farther still...

The sea, there, upon crest hills
and past windmills
stands against quaking winds.
Treetops tumble over
and I, unmoveable, greet them.

Frothy frog and salmon eggs gather in clusters
at the banks, catch the ridges and slicken the rock.
Tadpoles nip, flitter, splash and grow.

This river has been our sanctuary.
Its flowing currents have washed away our troubles

and soothed our tired bones.
These shores have heard our secrets;
they know the history of the land,
of the people and the stars.

The rock has watched the children play,
and the waters have caught the ones who fall.
The trees have offered a breeze to the weary,
and the animals have welcomed all.

Once, I watched a young girl play in the stream.
Her hair was red fire, and her skin freckled
with kisses from the sun.
She fell and was caught by the stream.
Her laughter was a windchime that called her mother
from whom the water receded.

This land is not meant for you, tumbled the rocks,
screeched the frogs and roared the river.
But she could not hear them.
Now the river does not return.

Nightmare Harvest

“Tamina, are you sleeping?” A muffled raspy voice interrupts the silence that rests in the shadows.

It’s nearly midnight as indicated by the neon glow of the digital clock perched on my bookshelf. I don’t have time for this. I have school in the morning and this intrusion is far from welcome. With a mix of annoyance and resignation, I quickly pull my floral quilt above my head and roll my body under the mountain of blankets that provide me with a false sense of security until I resemble a human burrito.

A few strands of my thick black hair snag between my fingers, and I hiss at the sudden sting of pain that erupts in my scalp, inwardly cursing myself. Despite my mother’s constant badgering, I never got into the habit of braiding my hair before bed. Dry ends are the least of my worries now.

“I knew it. You are awake.” The voice returns, shriller and flatter than before. *Great.*

“Nope, I’m practically sleepwalking right now!” I whisper yell the mediocre lie into the dark, annoyance lacing my tone.

I have a monster under my bed. This may come as a shock, but I am completely willing to take the blame for this peculiar predicament that I currently find myself in. It hasn’t been too long since the start of this ordeal. My mind wanders toward last summer.

On the day of my high school graduation, I trudged home towards our modest two-bedroom home that sat on the edge of a little cul-de-

sac. The walk wasn't dreadfully long, but I welcomed the opportunity to be alone with my sorrows. There was supposed to be a party after the lacklustre ceremony, but I had little interest in staying. Turns out you need to have friends to enjoy the flashy high school parties, and my only friend had decided to take an early vacation and never returned.

I tried to convince myself that her sudden abandonment without warning was not my doing, but since my favourite life mantra was "*the less social interaction, the better*" -it felt like I had issues when it came to stable relationships.

I dragged my Converse-clad feet across the familiar gritty pavement, only looking up from the ground to admire the tiny *Sweet Times Café* across the street, which became my anchor throughout my senior year as I drowned the bitter sorrows of exams with swigs of sweetened ginger tea.

Then it happened, at that precise moment, the ivory glass door shook open, and the flimsy golden bell tinkled as an elderly man, clad in a long trench coat, briskly padded out while fumbling with a dusky umbrella. I remember thinking "*Who the heck carries around an umbrella in the middle of Summer?*" His golden eyes locked with mine, a sudden harshness emanated from his gaze and my cheeks heated instantly. The fear that he could read my contemptuous and judgmental thoughts was enough to set my pace faster toward my destination.

By the middle of my walk, the sky was strewn with colossal nimbus clouds. The white puffs seemed to be looming directly above me and I felt the faint murmuring of raindrops across my fingers as the first pearls of deluge started to kiss the parked cars along the sidewalk. The

downpour quickly churned into a wailing, the clouds became churlish and wept massive groups of water that plopped across the cement in a symphony of droplets.

By the time I got home, I was drenched. Mother was away on a business trip, her absence added to the permanent silence that permeated our home. Ever since Dad left, it seemed like she avoided me as if I was the root cause of his departure. I grabbed the discarded mail pile on the kitchen island that only seemed to fester with every passing week.

That's when I noticed something on the floor. I quickly abandoned the mail to its original spot, and I grabbed the small white business card from the musty tiled floor. I read the black bolded words in the middle of the card with trembling hands.

The Bargainer. Make a deal and change your life.

If future historians ever wrote about my life, they would undoubtedly focus on the incredible level of my stupidity. Curiosity seems to be my greatest weakness. I recited the words out loud. I couldn't comprehend the consequences of my actions as the kitchen flooded with an eerie chill. A figure materialized before me, and I quickly realized it was the elderly man from that afternoon. His appearance was glowing as if he had transcended from an unworldly realm.

"Ah, Tamina, I see you've discovered my card," he chuckled. "Curiosity really is a double-edged sword, isn't it?"

Awe and fear gripped the core of my soul. "You...you're the Bargainer?" I managed to mutter, my voice a thin whisper.

"Indeed, my dear," he responded with a hint of malice. "I'm the

answer to all your desires, but every bargain comes with a price.”

When his words settled in the air, I realized that I unwittingly summoned a supernatural entity into my kitchen and there was no turning back. That was the night that I made a choice that would alter my existence.

I find that my memories of that afternoon have become a constant haunting encounter that seems to overtake my sanity, as time starts to bend to remind me of damning decisions. Before I can wander deeper into a moment of brutal self-reflection, flickering bouts of light from the nightlight across my room yank me back into reality like tiny beacons slicing through a daunting mist. With a deep sigh, I shut my dry eyes defiantly. That memory was a lifetime ago—I am not the same.

“You are thinking so hard, I can practically *hear* your thoughts.”

“I’m not thinking,” I retort, lifting the quilt off my head. “I’m remembering.” I open my eyes, which probably look more scarlet than grey due to my lack of sleep. The Monster is here. Just as it has been every single night since my graduation.

“Remembering what?”

Gazing out the lofty window of my bedroom, I notice the delicate snowflakes pirouetting through the cold air. “How I got ensnared in this mess in the first place,” I mutter, meeting my guest with a repugnant gaze.

I feel the shadowy tendrils of black smoke gripping the side of my bed, the fitted sheet crinkling under the ominous force. I know I cannot outrun this moment of the night; the Bargainer’s magic does not come without a cost. That ridiculous old man with his funny briefcase—had

I know; I would have never uttered his name and made a deal over something so trivial. *It nearly makes me pity myself.*

The hideous thing at the edge of my bed smiles at me. *All I see are teeth.* The Monster is a colossal and heinous creature with putrid hollow red eyes, and skin resembling burnt parchment. His beast-like body is covered in hideous scales with jagged sharp teeth that protruded beyond his large mouth while his crimson eyes are a kaleidoscope of horror, shimmering with pure bloodlust. His bony callused fingertips drag along the edges of my side table; I try to ignore the way his elongated claws scratch the polished oak.

“The Bargainer requires payment,” the beast waves a massive hand in the air. “You know this, yet you persist in avoiding it.” Stiffness enters his voice and the hand at my side table makes a screeching sound.

“You don’t have to remind me,” I sit up and glare at him. “And please, stop ruining that! It’s expensive, you know.” I swat his hand away from my cherished furniture.

“Stop wasting time,” he growls.

I rub the sleep from my eyes. “Can’t we do this at a reasonable hour? Like after supper?” I squint under the dim light while adjusting the creased boots that I keep by my bed. “Or are you simply against the notion that I have a peaceful night’s sleep?”

“The best nightmares happen after midnight. Now hurry up, we’re losing the night.”

“Sure, they do,” I grumble, throwing on my flannel jacket and weaving my knotted hair into a ridiculous excuse of a messy bun. “I’m

beginning to suspect that you do this *just* to annoy me.”

“You’re the one who wanted a companion,” the Monster snorts and raises to its full barbarous height causing its skull to collide with the ceiling. I stifle a giggle as he lifts my bed with ease, revealing the swirling obsidian hole below.

“I wanted a friend!” I shake my head and scoot toward the hole. “Not a nightmare lover demon *thing!*”

“And I wanted an evil sycophant who can help me capture nightmares. Instead, I’m babysitting a whiny child.” The Monster snarls and rolls his oval eyes until they disappear behind his head.

“Excuse me! I’m literally an adult!” I snap but realize he has already jumped.

With a sigh, I reluctantly follow. I find myself descending into an abyss of darkness, frigid air gripping my limbs as I plunge deeper into the realm of nightmares. I hear the Monster’s shrilling laughter echoing through the void, taunting me with every step. Despite doing this for over a year, I can never get used to this feeling, it’s like falling and floating all at once. I finally reach the bottom of the pit, scanning the desolate landscape that is shrouded in infinite numbness. Ghostly whispers float through the air, carrying an aura of unspoken secrets. The cold ground beneath me trembles, sending a rush of shivers up my spine. Fear and exhilaration course through my veins into my nerves, although I am no stranger to the dark, this place is abysmal, to say the least. Nightmares have their own forms, and they are vicious creatures. It is a twisted realm of reality, ignited and fueled by the fears and insecurities of humanity itself.

“Are you frightened?” the Monster taunts, his pointed tone echoes through the unsettling atmosphere.

“Not in the least,” I retort, scowling at my ghoulish companion. “You should realize that fulfilling my end of the bargain isn’t something new.”

He scoffs and steps towards me, his build casts a menacing shadow against the barren landscape, his grotesque form blending seamlessly with the tenebrous backdrop. I take a deep breath, mentally stabilizing myself for the journey that lies ahead. A wicked grin stretches across the Monster’s face, revealing those ragged teeth that would steal the soul of a child. He gestures towards the endless expanse in front of us, where creatures lurk in the gloom.

“There’s enough fresh prey here to make one’s mouth water,” the Monster twists its scaly disfigured neck towards the bleeding sky. “Ready for the hunt, human?”

“I’m ready,” I respond, my voice stable despite the abnormal pacing of my heart. “Let’s steal some nightmares.”

Mirrors

A poem, however, isn't a mirror.

A mirror wants nothing for itself.

A poem, a surface

to boomerang a future history, a future past.

"Ars Poetica"-- Billy Ray Belcourt

A glosa is a long poem,

and I quite like long poems.

They're like scrolls of art stretching across the room.

Every night I look at myself in the mirror.

My reflection seems distorted.

My chin hangs low, and the bags under my eyes appear clearer.

A persistent depression latches on to the corners of my lips.

A poem I cannot write, a face I cannot recognize.

My inevitable death inches nearer.

A poem, however, isn't a mirror.

Every morning I swallow these little white pills

prescribed by my doctor for bipolar disorder.

Every morning I wander the halls of my mirrored funhouse

in this body that doesn't feel real.

It's hard to explain; I don't feel human, maybe instead an oak tree.

Not even an oak tree; maybe I should've been a bookshelf?
To hold books that hold poetry that holds the sentence of our captivity.
My reflection is a broken compass with no sense of direction.
Just the right ignition, and I'll implode myself.
A mirror wants nothing for itself.

When I implode, I'll scatter fiery rhododendrons across the room.
I'm sorry to my mother, who birthed me in stinging blood and burning
waters.
When I implode, the streetlamps will shatter across the roads,
and the letters of the alphabet will fall into their place on the page.
When I implode, you'll sing 'Happy Birthday' for my rebirth.
The soles of my feet will finally have a purpose.
They say depression is a disease of the mind and not a symptom of being
confined.
Poets document their imprisonment on the page.
We'll never completely be free. We're dancing in a mirrored circus.
A poet, a surface.

When a poet writes a poem about writing a poem, it's ars poetica.
When a person takes their own life, it's called suicide.
When a person takes their own life, nothing in our society changes.
There were signs all along that our institutions needed to be fixed.
Our work is our priority. Mental health comes second, third...
We hear sirens in the background of our podcasts.
Someone, somewhere, is lying dead in a dirty alleyway,

and I, we, don't care. It's none of our business anyways.
A person who shoots up every day isn't going to last
to boomerang a future history, a future past.

I Don't Drink

I don't know what to do when my alphabet soup plays the kazoo to Elton John's *Tiny Dancer*, and the letters spell the wrong lyrics. Swimming is hard—never one to hold my breath, I drown in a sea of endless worries. Small windows in a classroom are like solitary confinement, suffocating as I ignore the messages on my phone because too many remind me of you. I spent too much time at Republic in the mist and the haze. I invented teleportation so I could drop myself at your doorstep at one o'clock in the morning like Julia Roberts as I begged to be la la la la la... The L-word floats among the stars and drifts away from the world where it is unloved as it is. Sticky grips on psych ward floors, my toes spell out I miss you. Write quotes on the toe of my Converse, and let the conversation fly across the Milky Way. I want to explore museums in the clouds and let Aphrodite guide me.

PULP MAG

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In Order of Appearance

Carolina Chavarriaga is a Colombian Canadian writer who loves poetry and fiction as much as she loves spending time in the sun. She has a passion for crafts and film photography, spending most of her free time exploring new ways to create art and petting strangers' dogs. She is a fourth-year creative writing student at KPU. As she works towards acquiring her degree as a second-generation student, she continues to read and write for fun. Carolina currently resides on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Kwikwetlem First Nation.

Jessica Rodriguez is a recent KPU graduate from the creative writing program. She is a Mexican writer who loves writing fiction and poetry. She spends most of her free time writing new ideas for stories and poems, reading, and baking. She appeared in the Fall 2022 issue of Pulp mag.

Carolina Rocha was born and raised on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and has been chasing those waters ever since. She translates the voices in her head into fictional stories, critical works, and personal essays, which have been published by pulp-MAG and Mise-en-scène. She was awarded the Billeh Nickerson creative writing award at KPU, where she is pursuing a BA in English and creative writing. Carolina currently lives in Richmond, BC with her family.

Maimoona Rahman is a Pakistani Canadian enchanted with books and the beauty of writing. She is the second oldest of six in a household filled with lots of noise and a cabinet that never runs out of snacks. A passion for reading and writing captivated her when she won an award for Best Storyteller at the age of eight. She is currently a student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, completing a degree in creative writing and Criminology. Her dream is to create stories and poems that whisk readers away from ordinary life and into a universe glittering with wonder.

Usha Gunatilake is a freelance writer, copyeditor, and fanatic word-lover. She is a novel copyeditor, content creator, and book reviewer. She is currently a second-year KPU student majoring in creative writing and English. Usha writes about mystic creatures, endings, and disability, and aspires to be an auto memories doll. Usha is happiest when she is curled up in her Hobbit-hole reading or watching something, or when she is daydreaming elaborate stories in her head while walking in the rain.

Ian Frayne was raised in Langley, British Columbia on the unceded territory of the Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, Matsqui and Katzie nations. He is pursuing a degree in English and creative writing at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. He loves speaking with trees, drinking from bowls, and his family for their unconditional inspiration.

Matthew Maione (or Mint) is a third-year creative writing student at KPU. When not writing or working they can be found hanging with their cats, blasting music in their car or laying in the hammock on their deck eating fruits. They work primarily in poetry and find inspiration in self-reflection and politics. They enjoy connecting with their communities and spending time watching cooking videos they will never attempt to try themselves.

Jenny Sun is a third-year creative writing and psychology student at KPU. She is aspiring to become a psychiatrist in the lower mainland. Jenny writes poetry and prose on the topics of mental health and the art of being a human being in this world. Her hobbies include reading romance books, journaling, wandering in the outside world and spending time with family and friends. She resides in Surrey, on the unceded territories of the Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Kwantlen, Qayqayt First Nations.

My name is **Jordan Andrew** and I'm an emerging writer with only a couple publishing credits under my name, spanning a couple genres and medias. These include my novel, *Disorderly Conduct: Widower* (Bookappisodes, 2016), a video poem, *Polysporin Therapy* (YouTube, 2022), and my short film, *Hit Hard, Run Fast, Turn Left* (YouTube, 2023). I have an Associate of Arts degree from Douglas College (2020) and I am currently in the final semester of the Bachelor of Arts program at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, majoring in creative writing and minoring in English.

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