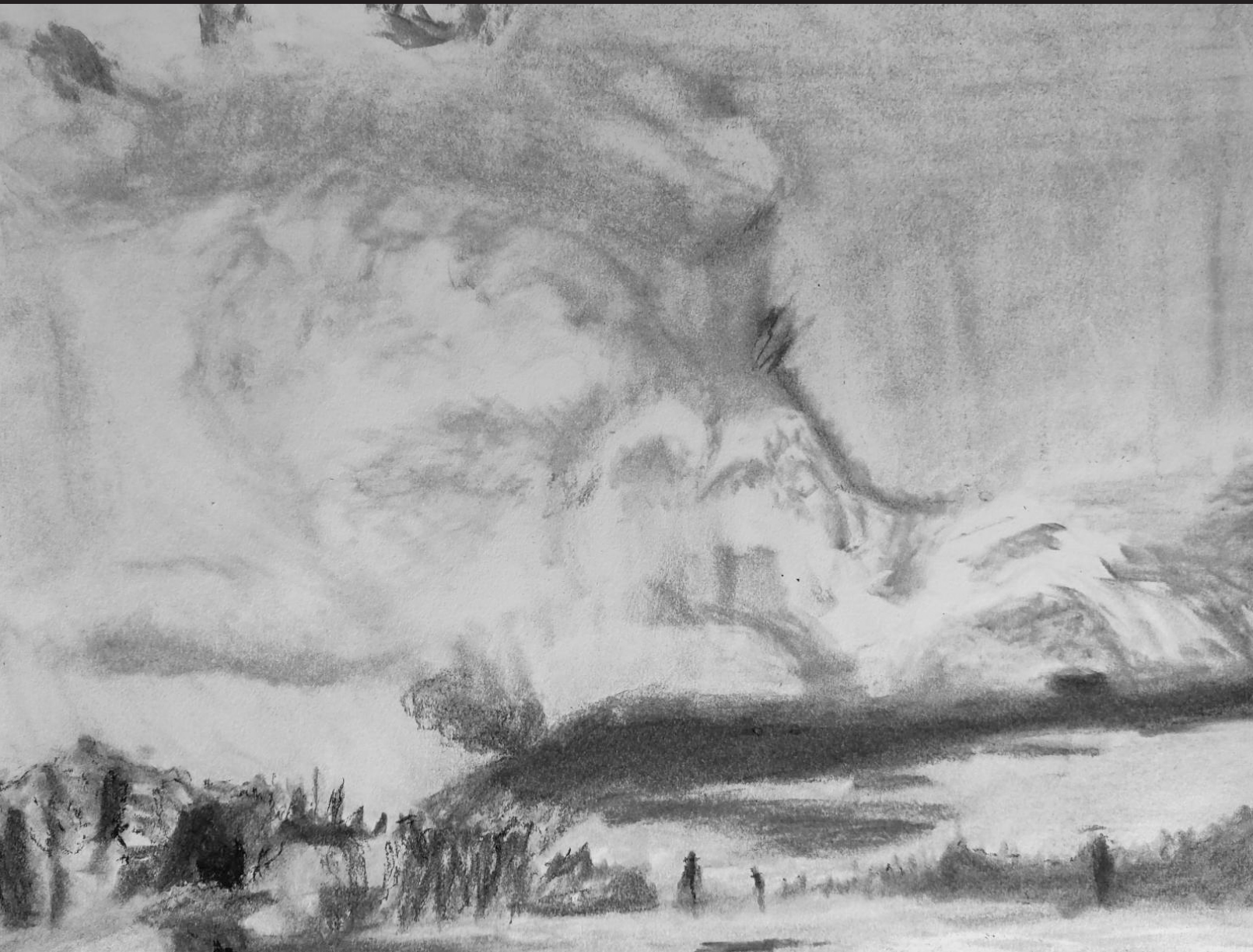


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THE SOCK DRAWER

LITERARY  MAGAZINE



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Untitled



Founded in June 2020, The Sock Drawer aims to collect the voices of contemporary artists and writers. In a world as tumultuous as this one people need an outlet for their voice. With a current of feminism and activism running through the veins of the editors, The Sock Drawer seeks to be a place to release the tension of existence.

Letters & Comments: TheSockDrawerLitMag@gmail.com

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ON THE COVER
“Untitled” by
Paul Gonzales

MEET THE TEAM

FOUNDER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Gracelyn Willard (she/her) is the founder and editor-in-chief of The Sock Drawer. She is a 2020 graduate of Hood College with a degree in English and a concentration in Creative Writing. She was a 2019 presenter at the Hood College Discovering the Humanities Conference. She had a nonlinear college career due to her battle with multiple chronic illnesses. She loves to read Roxane Gay, Valeria Luiselli, Agatha Christie, Terrance Hayes, and Wisława Szymborska. Her quest for the perfect gluten free madeleine is never ending and at times she wonders if she loves coffee more than her boyfriend. Her last job was as a cheesemonger and she identifies as bisexual. Her passion is writing, reading, editing, and bad reality tv.

NONFICTION EDITOR/
ASSISTANT EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Kerstin Holman is a 2019 Virginia Wesleyan University graduate. In order to get the most bang for her buck, she got her BA in three majors: English Literature, Theatre (with a concentration in dramaturgy) and Women's & Gender Studies. Some writers and voices who inspire her to not only speak but listen are Roxane Gay, Da'Shaun Harrison and noname. As TSD's non-fiction editor and contributor, she hopes to continue polishing her writing craft by bringing awareness to and discussing topics including race, gender, sexuality, and existential crises. She recently became a New Jersian and her interests include bowling, watching "RuPaul's Drag Race," and eating sushi.

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR



Izzy Peroni is the Book Review editor of The Sock Drawer. She is a recent graduate of Hood College, with a degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing, and a minor in Studies in Women and Gender. Her main contributions to the magazine, as well as the rest of the world, will include poetry, fiction, and book reviews. The majority of the creative media she consumes is either horror or science-fiction, ranging from 70's slasher flicks to often non-traditional ghost stories, as well as practically anything having to do with aliens. She obsesses over the work of Elizabeth Bishop, and unintentionally imitates her biography. Her hobbies include video games and adoring her cat.

ART & MAGAZINE EDITOR



Julia Gonzales was voted "Most likely to become an Artist" in 6th grade and knew her love for creativity would never waver. Growing up, she competed and placed in several minor art competitions within her community and enjoyed experimenting with various mediums and techniques. She is currently pursuing a degree in Computer Animation at Full Sail University with the intent to one day produce children shows. She is inspired by works from Damien Hirst, Erik Johansson, Frida Kahlo and Leonora Carrington. Some argue that she loves her cat a little too much and her current drink of choice is iced chai tea.

FICTION EDITOR



Madison Diemert is a 2020 graduate of Minnesota State Mankato. She holds a degree in English and a minor in Anthropology. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at Augsburg University. While Madison is not obsessing over nostalgic cartoons from her childhood or watching every true crime documentary she can get her hands on, you'll find her searching for the perfect cup of cold brew. As The Sock Drawer's fiction editor, Madison hopes to read as many unique stories as possible and hone her craft as a fiction writer herself. Madison resides in Minnesota, where she lives with her boyfriend, two best friends and (approximately) 400 books.

"We have to dare to be ourselves, however frightening or strange that self may prove to be."

- May Sarton, Belgian-American poet, novelist and memoirist

Hello
&
Welcome

The Sock Drawer was created with the intention of creating a community of writers that are often ignored, marginalized, or ‘pushed to the back of the sock drawer’ by society and the publishing industry. We aim to raise up diverse and unique voices that tell stories that are not told often enough. I aim to use my privilege and platform to elevate these voices and bring to light talented individuals through The Sock Drawer. In the wake of ignorance, racism, and violence in the United States and the world it is of key importance that this space cultivates productive, honest, and genuine works. Here at The Sock Drawer, we stand with equality, Black Lives Matter, and many more movements pushing for positive, productive change. It is time to rise past the forced silence and scream. Change will come and we will be here to help facilitate it.

In Hope,

Gracelyn Willard
Founder/Editor-in-Chief

POETRY

Jordan Ferensic

Elenia Graf

Aishwarya Javalgekar

Lisa Krawczyk

Caitlin Thomson

“Fight for the things that you care about,
but do it in a way that will lead others to join
you.”

- **Ruth Bader Ginsberg**, second female justice appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court

Interruptus

By Jordan Ferensic

Why did we stop being friends?
I could ask, to no one in particular.
Though I know it was the sex thing.
I remember him,
a close him, saying -
“Poetry is masculine, as long as
you don’t: smile, talk, weep about it.”
He’s gone, but I wonder if he was able
to hold himself to those rules, because
I can’t seem to do anything but,
mostly the weeping.

How many times will I liken myself to
a house fire in my own writing?
What I mean to say is,
I think disassembly
is in my nature.



Swingline

By Jordan Ferensic

I am running
bee sting on bottom of foot
fox urine on trunk of mailbox
suburban purgatory
my neighbors think I am a good
for nothing son
I don't mow the lawn
crippling allergies
deer everywhere
black ice, guard rail
one lost virginity
one lost friend
skunks chemexing cornfields
I am running
through crowded forests
the cat died in my arms
my art died in drawers
shopping malls and car dealerships
I want to punch a hole through
my head with the stapler
I am a good for nothing son
lightning in the summer, no rain
green, petrichor, green
the crabcakes really were the best
I am running away



Holidays in the Bathroom

By Jordan Ferensic

Your cupped hands carry water up from the basin,
 it breaks across the crown of your brow,
 flows back through the foliage farther inland,
 runs in rivulets down through depressions,
 not yet made deep by harsher weathers,
 clings onto precipices, hangs as if to assert
 that the reassimilation about to take place is willful,
 that water belongs only to itself
 and it plonks back into the semi-filled basin
 obeying not gravity, but a sanguinary physics.

Outside you can hear the dings of a car door ajar
 followed by the swish-thunk of its closing,
 someone arriving, or leaving, you don't know them.
 You think about all the things that are not here,
 you think of the way honey looks melting into
 the bottom of a mug filled with hot water
 before the tea bag darkens it;
 you think about retracing the lines of a sketch,
 recently finished, because it feels so fucking good
 to finish something; you think
 how great it would feel to snub
 the relative who gets your name wrong every year;
 to have two people you call friends
 in the same state; you think about your cat;
 you think it might be time to leave the bathroom,
 but instead you sit on the closed toilet lid
 and take the other half of the pill
 in your chest pocket.



IF NOT, SUMMER

By Elenia Graf

after robbie spends / 45 minutes pumping / into me / while i pretend / not to be a virgin / i
bury myself under / the duvet / on my single bed / robbie back at his girlfriend's / two weeks
later i suck / on his friend's cock / an even exchange for weed / though i told him earlier / 'i'm
not gonna fuck you' / & by heterosexual standards / i didn't / its fine / really / except i still cry
/ when i tell my therapist / about rhys / the blood / he left on my door handle / & desire / a
broken word / for teenage alcoholic / for feeling untouchable / that is / unable to be touched /
for fulfillment / of diagnostic criteria / like impulsive behaviour / tick / chaotic interpersonal
relationships / tick / desire / from latin / desiderare / meaning / to demand / or to long for / &
aren't those / two very different things /

when her thigh presses / into me / i die / but in the way a field / dies / in summer / the
heat sucking / all water / out of capillaries / green blades turning / golden / the white sky's /
breathy vacuum / all that was pumping / through the soil / & the stems / & the tiny veins /
emerging from the dirt / a body of steam hovering / above the rolling / blanket landscape / a
kind of summer / no meteorologist / can explain / a kind of new / that rearranges / molecules
in curious ways / solids liquids / gaseous words / you can choose them to mean what you
long for / this is what i hear / when she whispers / this is what i whisper back: / i have been
swallowing / wet earth / i am full / & turned / towards the sun



RAW FOOD

By Elenia Graf

my last supper and i'm not even eating
 i eat
 for the shape
 i eat once
 with your appetite
 she says
don't worry
they will be soft
 i want to be edible
 i will scream and blister

no one's ever licked my asshole
 he just asked 'can i fuck you there'
 i said no and no and no
 joggers and high school band t-shirt
 i'm a dyke but the only people i love are men
 my homo brothers who hold me up

and i send her photos of my instant ramen
 here let me show you something
 slurped up let me
 i'm 22 how many years do i have left
 to be edible edible a pack of digestives
 in one night and buy another i want to
 and drink sweat out of her belly button

i sleep after a meal how easy i am
 she'll tell me i don't need

the girl i want to kiss
 i shave my homo brothers' heads
 of my neck and bury it
 go back home to press
 into the mattress and whisper
 while the blood comes spilling
 and no one

the worms are having me
 once a day to punish myself
 i press into the mattress
 a day because withdrawal messes
 i send her a picture of my instant ramen
 they aren't even cooked
i'm letting them soak a bit longer
in two minutes
 pour a kettle of boiling water on me
 until i'm too ugly to eat

and told me they loved me
 because we had no condoms
 reached for my filthiest
 and who would want to eat that
 made men by the hands of other men

the girl i want to kiss texts me
 but i want to send her my tits
 that deserves to be taken in your mouth
 send you my daily meal i want to be edible
 before i have to kill myself i want
 easily digested you can devour a whole sleeve
 eat her earlobes

maybe once she's seen how good
 to fatten up with just two fingers in my mouth
 the kettle or the water or the filth

shaves her head in the bathroom mirror
 i slice mine right off at the base
 where the earth is wet and writhing
 my headless shape
 no and no and no
 out of all my openings
 tells me they love me



Inverted Green Heart

By Aishwarya Javalgekar

She pushes herself through the snow
in her white and green glory,
fragile stalks withstanding
tempestuous winter storms.

She tells stories of why she is white,
reasons for giving her colour away,
turning her consolation green into
a mark of rebirth, positivity.

inverted in·vert | \ in-'vərt \
reverse, upside down, contrary, gay
green \ 'grēn \
young, resilient, unhealed, home
heart \ 'hārt \
core, compassion, nature, love

I tell her the heart is not inverted.
The flower curves down,
the heart just follows, she laughs.
I'm getting it tattooed on my arm.

I could wake up tomorrow and forget
the winter creeping in my soul,
not hear it crunch under my boots
or touch it with my woolen hand.

But she will bloom and giggle
and dance in the frosty wind,
a snowdrop claiming she has
an inverted green heart.



Badaam Saat

By Aishwarya Javalgekar

2010:

We are on vacation at a hill-station
in a room of the resort chain dad admires.

We sit on the bed in a circle *if three people can make a circle*
and play badaam saat.

I have the seven of hearts and toss it with a flourish.

Dad suggests variations. We refuse to stray from the original.

Your childlike laughter rings in the room. He stays quiet throughout the game.

2020:

We are home and this time there is
nowhere else to go. The three of us
sit on the bed in a circle *how many people do we need for a circle*
and play badaam saat.

I present the seven of hearts and dad accuses me of cheating.

I tease him about never winning. He laughs in his moustache.

You never have enough strength to smile. You stay quiet through the game.



Musical Timelines

By Aishwarya Javalgekar

At 11 my mother forced me to join a music class.

At 47 she joined to keep me company.

At 12 I learned the harmonium.

At 49 she learned the harmonium.

At 17 I learned the tanpura.

At 55 she learned the tanpura.

At 20 I left music.

At 59 she started teaching music.

At 60 she learned the keyboard.

At 61 she died, leaving instruments lying untouched around the house.

At 26 I bought a ukulele.



2016 Amsterdam in 2020 Philadelphia; a whiplash, an umbrella flicked open

By Lisa Krawczyk

The tulips, the canal haunt your dreams even now: The smells
you couldn't pronounce. It was summer, hotter than Philadelphia's.
Bacchanalian, how the canal glittered, full of abandoned
bikes and spent joints. You can't roll them, you sit
in a coffee shop forever licking at the edges, hoping
they stay tight. A numinous failing. The red light
shines on your skin so delicately.

The Schuylkill judges you

that you can't spell it, that you look down on it from your bridges,
a high horse. It's full of things worse than bikes. The river
may as well be on fire. The weed alight. How soporific, you're taken
under its umbrella—ella ella ella, eh eh—how you could quit biting your
nervous nails easily. How Philadelphia—ugh, don't ask—nearly destroyed you.
How Amsterdam wanted to save you. Sell tulips, so full and red.



Home

By Lisa Krawczyk

You know a home isn't made
for you when the bruise appears
a week after jamming your arm
hard against the doorknob
that you always forget. The hallway
laughs and begins to shrink. The home
wants you gone, so the stairs sabotage
you. Trip when you miss a step. Catch
splinters in your heel. At first
this seems innocent, but the injuries continue
to appear and bigger! Stubborn purple
and black, blood's drip. It's uneasy to remember
the house doesn't want you
to call it home. It will not bend
around you, or allow your organs
to go unpunished.



Nothing Feels Tame on the Outer Edge

from a line by Jack Marshall in his poem This Enterprise

By Caitlin Thomson

The billboards tell us to wash our hands,
stand 2 meters apart. There are no movie star faces,
or glistening bottles of Coke. Stay Inside
a jumbotron proclaims.

My mother calls this part of the city,
the deep downtown, as if the
real surface of the city, is on the roofs
of the office towers looming
above us, black windowed.

Office buildings always appear empty,
but now they actually are. Left alone
to the shuffle of the security guard,
an occasional broom sweep of cleaners.

The mini-van we are inside, speeds past all of this,
the four lanes of highway empty or close to it,
the opposite of an apocalypse movie with its
stalled cars, roofs loaded with flapping canvas.

When we get closer to the neighbourhood we are trying
to call home, the streets become full of people making
way for other people. We drive slowly, eyes open.
There are masks and caution, hope for the way
strangers are respecting each-other.

In the backyard next door, the neighbours
are throwing an Instagram appropriate party.
There's a row of cake and perfectly cut
triangle banners, preteens hug each-other.

Six months ago, I would think nothing of it.
Now my husband shakes his head and says
I wish I didn't have such dark thoughts
about the neighbours.



FICTION

Julia Beecher

Izzy Peroni

“Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.”

- **Toni Morrison**, American novelist, essayist, book editor and college professor

No Future

By Julia Beecher

TRIGGER WARNING: SEXUAL ASSULT / HARRASSMENT

Nobody else was ever going to invite her there, so it was probably best if she saw it for herself. When the car veered off into the woods and she first caught a glimpse of the building, its humbleness underwhelmed her. The rumors that enveloped it made it seem larger than life, but here it was, barely more than a pile of crumbling bricks and breezeblocks. She'd eavesdropped on Monday morning brags about the place for years: the beers chugged, girls bagged, graffiti tagged. It was *the* place to party, apparently. The car rolled into a stop. Now that she was seeing it in real life, it looked dinky and plastic like dollhouse furniture. She'd been envisioning the kinds of flashing lights and disco balls she saw in the teen movies her mother showed her, but she guessed a long-forgotten structure in the woods was as good a party spot as any.

Come on, he said, and pulled her hand into his lap. She laced her fingers around him, heart tapping staccato beats of puppy love. He'd never really seemed to notice her before, but a few weeks ago he'd messaged her to ask her to go steady with him. She'd been surprised he knew her name, but of course she'd said yes. She practiced kissing on her pillow after her parents went to bed and lay awake with a warm glow across her cheeks. And now, when he brushed his thumb over hers, she looked into his eyes and said, *okay*. She followed him out of the car and through the dark doorway.

She was assaulted immediately by the smell, the sweet stench of unwashed bodies dancing late into the night. He chuckled at the way her face folded in on itself. *You're adorable*, he said. She wasn't sure if that was a compliment.

She took a baby-step forward, and a metallic *crunch* resounded underfoot. Her sneaker had dented the layer of Coors Lite cans blanketing the ground. The room was huge and gaping without any other people in it; it was really just a shell of concrete, a container. Next to her, a white folding table lay discarded on its side. Glass shards and cigarette butts gathered in the corners of the room. Sloppy spray paint dripped down the walls: *No Future*. She grimaced and wiped something invisible off of her hands.

He broke away from her grip and bounded up a staircase she hadn't realized was there. *Come up here!* His voice ricocheted off the walls and down to where she stood. *I want to show you something cool.*

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She obliged, and found him sitting leaned-back on the sill of a blown-out window, legs dangling over the edge. She stuck her head out to see the view, and the earth yawned beneath her. The sea of treetops swayed back and forth, and even though she appreciated its tranquility, the movement made her stomach turn. She took her place next to him with shaking legs and sweaty palms.

It's nice, right? He gestured to the forest, then turned to face her. *I'm glad to be here with you, though.*

She fidgeted with the strings of her hoodie as he wrapped his arm around her. At first her body was rigid, unaccustomed to the touch, but she eventually softened and settled into him. She placed her head on his shoulder, gently, and felt the coarseness of his jacket against her cheek. He smelled like dirt and aftershave.

Oh! he said suddenly, springing away from her. He scraped up some small black squares scattered across the ground. *I forgot we took pictures on Friday. I'll show you.* He flicked through the stack of Polaroids in quick swipes of his thumb, revealing him and his friends in progressing states of intoxication, flushed and glassy-eyed. When he occasionally glanced back up at her to gauge her reaction, she tried her best to put on the right face that he was expecting. *That was so funny,* he said with a straight face, and pointed to himself drinking with his head thrown back. He flipped the photo over and revealed the one underneath.

He was laughing in the photo, mouth hanging open like he couldn't quite believe his luck. He was crouched down next to a girl she knew from school, but she wasn't smiling for the picture. Her head lolled uselessly, her eyes squeezed shut, arms limp at her sides. Her shirt had been torn to expose her breasts, pale and pathetic-looking against the flash of the camera. His hand reached for them, gripping the fabric of her shirt. Unflinching. Confident in his capability.

He tossed the picture across the room, but it was too late. She had already seen what she had seen. She recoiled from him, scrambling to distance herself, eyes wide and shining like saucers. *I'm sorry,* he said. *I'm sorry. I know it looks really bad but I promise that wasn't what you think it was.*

She darted forward and smacked his wrist, and the hand that held the stack of pictures fell open. Not all of them landed face up, but enough did. The girls in the pictures changed-- some kneeled in front of him, some slumped against the wall, some splayed out on the ground. In all the pictures, his smile never did.

What are these? she asked, voice trembling, but she already knew the answer.



Window

By Izzy Peroni

The ball of her left foot was already on the windowsill when she heard him roll over in bed. For a moment she figured she still had a chance— if she was swift enough she could quietly swing both her legs out the window and vault over the bushes beneath it to land in the backyard. His room was on the first floor, thank god, so it wasn't a far drop, and maybe if she had a spare moment between hitting the ground and sprinting away into the peaking dawn she could turn to close the window behind her. It's not like she was entirely covering her tracks, because after all she would still be very GONE, but it seemed like the polite thing to do.

But instead here she still was, muscles in her legs tensed to hurdle the gap between the night before and the morning after, fingers curled into the sneakers that she was planning to put on once she was safely on the sidewalk away from the house. Cold anxiety rippled up her spine as he twisted awake, mumbling nothing into his pillow. She turned and watched him rub the part of the bed where she was supposed to be laying, blink awake at the feeling in his empty hands, then sit up, facing the amorphous blob that was her body in the window.

“Blaire?”

“Heron.”

“Blaire. You...”

She knew he couldn't actually see her from here. His glasses were surely somewhere on the floor, and try as he might there was no way for him to get his pale grey eyes to focus in on the shapes that made her up. He wasn't even trying to squint to see her better— he was just staring, almost petrified by the suggestion of what his eyes were taking in. He attempted to utter her name once more but failed and shifted his legs under the blankets like he was going to get up. Blaire came down off the windowsill and stood staring back at him, her heartbeat thudding steadily in her ears. For a moment, neither spoke.

“Blaire. You're leaving.”

“It's, uh... It's morning. Why wouldn't I?” She tried to offer him a short laugh but the sound got caught in her throat and dried out. She was glad he couldn't see how sweaty she

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had become, or the way her jaw began to clench and unclench the way it always did when she felt backed into a corner. If he could see, Heron would notice all of this, and surely spiral into his panic faster.

“You don’t have to run away, or anything, like, my mom KNOWS you. You could at least stay for breakfast and go out the front door instead of the... instead of the WINDOW.” Heron was on his knees now, his pale hands gripping the blanket around his legs. Blaire could barely stand to look at him in this type of raw light, with every bag under his wide eyes emphasized and every strip of ginger in his blonde hair exposed.

“I know, Heron, I know, and I’m—”

“A-and you’re not even entirely dressed! And it’s what, like 5:30? When have you ever been up at 5:30 before? If you’re worried about us getting in trouble or something, like, c’mon, we’re technically adults now, so it shouldn’t be weird that we’re...”

“Heron. Just listen—”

“It’s not weird, is it?”

Blaire looked at her feet.

“Was it weird?”

Blaire stayed silent.

Heron sat back on his heels, pulling the blanket up against his bare chest almost without thinking about it. She just couldn’t look at him the way he was— pale, scrawny and small, always twitchy in some fashion, always restless. One moment she glanced at him and saw the barely legal adult she had followed to bed the night before, ravenous and confident; the next moment, she saw a 16-year-old who cried during gym class and ate lunch in the band room.

“It wasn’t weird for me,” Heron said, voice tighter than it had been before. “It wasn’t weird at all. I know maybe it’s not so cool, messing around when my mom’s in the house but some things just, y’know, happen that way, and it’s not like it’s a weird thing for two people to do, when they’re y’know, when they’re in...”

Here Heron paused. Blaire shifted her weight from one foot to the other. She wasn’t sure what to say without sounding particularly heartless.

“I love you, you know that Blaire.”

Blaire said nothing.

“Don’t you? You know that I love you.”

“Sure,” Blaire croaked, beginning to pick at her cuticles. “Sure, Heron I know that. I know.”

“And you said... you said you love me too.”

Heron was inching towards where she stood on the other side of the bed. Blaire tried to keep herself rooted in one spot but every part of her wanted to leap out the window and disappear. The light was growing brighter in the room and outside the rest of the world was waking up to watch her in her shame, standing at Heron’s windowsill.

“When did I ever say that?”

“What? What do you mean?”

“Did I say that... last night? Because Heron I’m sorry if I said something stupid while we were— I mean you know I say really stupid things in, well in moments where I’m not super... in control.”

“You’ve said it before. You’ve said you love me before. A long time ago you said it, and I knew you meant it.”

“You... knew?” Blaire gulped. She searched every crevice of her brain to recall what he could be talking about. The desperation in his face was pulling her harder and harder back into the situation, as much as she was trying to get away.

“It was a-after you came back, from prom junior year when you went w-with just your friends and you came to my window and asked me why I hadn’t been there even though you knew I would never get asked to something like a school dance and you were sitting there... right there in my windowsill. Where you were just standing.”

“Heron.”

“You said it. You said you loved me.”

“I was 16, Heron. And so were you.”

“But I KNEW that you meant it!”

“You were looking so... alone,” Blaire cringed at the words beginning to pour out of her mouth. If she tried to rationalize her actions she would just dig herself deeper and deeper into this hole. But somehow it had to end.

“I was always alone. Until you. You changed that. You made it better. And you TOLD me that you love me!”

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“I sure as hell said a lot of things when I was that age, Heron. I said a lot of things to you that I probably didn’t mean.”

“Like what?”

“Like... well I don’t remember, Heron. I just don’t. But I just don’t know if I meant what I said the way you think I meant it. I liked having you around, Heron, you made me feel... strong. You were like some baby bird that fell out of its nest. I had to protect you from fucking everyone and everything. You were like my JOB. But also, like, my friend. I guess. I don’t know.”

Heron didn’t reply. His face was flushed in something like shame.

“And last night... I dunno, I guess that was just inevitable? It’s not like I don’t LIKE you well enough, Heron. But I’m not sure... I’m not sure if I ever loved you the way you thought I did.”

“You couldn’t love anything but yourself, is that it? Yourself and some fantasy you’re chasing?”

“Huh?”

“You’ve been chasing somebody’s tail this whole time. I know.”

“Who? Heron, what are you...” Blaire felt her face heat up and she flinched away for a moment, the back of her thighs pressing against the windowsill. She wasn’t sure how to continue.

“Ricky told me, you know. He told me the truth.”

“He told you what?”

“You didn’t get into Penn State. He’s not sure if you even applied. You’re not GOING to college. At the end of the summer we’re all gonna leave and you’re just gonna stay here, I guess? You’re not going ANYWHERE.”

“I don’t know why he told you that.”

“You’re the one who gets to be stuck in this bullshit town forever and you wanna look down on ME? You wanna use me as a fucktoy for a few days while I’m home then what? You have nothing to stay for. Without me who’s gonna- who are you going to RUN to? That’s all you ever do, isn’t it, you RUN from everything, but you can’t even get out of your stupid hometown, and everyone who ever gave a shit about you will be GONE. So what’s the point of lying to me about it?”

“I didn’t... listen, you’re being totally unfair. I didn’t lie to you about anything.”

“I would stay. If you’d asked me to stay, I would stay.”

“No, no I wouldn’t ask you to do that.”

“But I would. If you’re gonna stay here I can... I can stay with you.”

“But I’m not. I’m not staying here. At the end of the summer I’m leaving. Forever.”

“To go WHERE?”

Blaire sat on the windowsill. Her hands were shaking at the way Heron’s voice was squawking at her and at the thought of the truth. He was closer to her now but she couldn’t look at him.

“You remember the girl... of course you do. You remember...”

“Her. The girl who moved at the end of junior year. You called her something fucking weird, you called her—”

“Ghost.”

“Yeah. Ghost.”

“I’m taking the van. And I’m leaving at the end of the summer. I found her on Twitter and I messaged her and she told me... that she wanted me to come see her. To stay with her.”

“Where is she?”

“Vermont.”

“Are you fucking kidding me? Vermont? Who the hell lives in VERMONT? NOTHING is in fucking Vermont!”

“You know,” Blaire chuckled, almost against her will, “you never used to swear. You were practically against it.”

Heron was silent. His eyes, his frown, his posture, his whole being was accusatory. Condemning.

“You loved her. I always knew. Even when you said you loved me I knew you loved her.”

“Yeah. That was always true.”

Blaire stood. In one swift motion she backed up onto the windowsill, filling it just barely with her thin frame. For a moment, she almost looked amused.

THE SOCK DRAWER

“So this... this whole ordeal. Guess I can’t bank on it happening again? No sort of... friends with uh, with benefits sort of—”

“Please don’t.” Heron laid back down on the bed and turned over, facing away from the window. Blaire’s smile faltered, and she turned to exit into the yard.

“Right. Well, see you, Heron. Maybe.”

Then the window was empty.



REVIEWS

Lisa Goodrum

“Books are often far more than just books.”
- **Roxane Gay**, American
writer, professor, editor
and social commentator

Shuggie Bain

By Lisa Goodrum

Above all else, *Shuggie Bain* – the Booker prize winning novel by Douglas Stuart – is a love story, both to the eponymous hero's mother and the city of Glasgow. Cutting between the 1980s and 1990s, the tentacles of Thatcherism have crept across the city and caused serious harm, decimating the shipyards on the Clyde and casting thousands of men, along with their partners, out of work and into the throes of addiction and struggle. Trapped within her own dependency and always dreaming of a better life is Shuggie's mother, the beautiful and capricious Agnes Bain.

His mother is both the centre and love of Shuggie's life, and between the pair there exists a unique bond. In simple terms, they are both different. Shuggie, for the thoughts and feelings that bar him from being a 'normal boy' and Agnes for her desire to inhabit a world of glamour and sophistication high above the grim tenements and miner's scheme in which she finds herself stranded and engaged in a battle to transcend. Shuggie's love for, and attempts to protect his mother, are heartbreaking, and there are passages in this book where you will want to weep for the parentified child questioning his own place in the world and the difference that is so obvious to others, but for which Shuggie cannot find a cause. He is fundamentally unable to emulate the celebrated Glasgow 'hard man' of popular culture, and instead, it is this very character – steeped in alcohol, violence and emotional repression – that he watches his mother fall prey to time and again. In what is then a critique of the masculinity native to the west of Scotland, Douglas Stuart examines how those who don't fit its criteria are left lonely and ridiculed. Glaswegian machismo has a long and storied tradition, but when put into a wider context of deindustrialisation, social conservatism, Section 28, homophobia, the AIDS crisis and the proselytization of 'family values' it becomes an even more oppressive weapon against those on its periphery. In one of the most heartfelt scenes in the novel, Shuggie laments: 'Why do girls *always* let boys do what they like?' in a question that is also a cry of frustration for why his mother is so helpless in the face of men who only use and discard her, not least his brutal father 'Big Shug'.

Yet among the sadness and deprivation there also exists bravery, love, and above all, humour. Indeed, there are moments when the reader can only laugh out loud: When Shuggie is nearly sucked into a mud crater after an illicit trip to the old mine and decides that only a rendition of Whitney Houston's 'The Greatest Love of All' will sweeten his final

moments on earth, and when he races to defend his mother against the accusation that she is a 'working girl' by proudly stating: 'She's never worked a day in her life. She's far too good looking'. A picaresque cast of characters like the fabulously named Jinty McClinchy and Dirty Mouse, along with Lamby and Keir Weir populate this novel and orbit around Agnes and her boy. Like the mother and son they also seem to be trying to understand, and survive, their circumstances with the only tools available to them: humour and alcohol. These coping mechanisms have long been identified as key components of the Scottish psyche, but they are arguably ingrained within that belonging to a Glaswegian. The writer Val McDermid has remarked: 'The Scots have gallows humour ... We can't help ourselves. We have to laugh at it. It is how we have survived as a nation: Drink and laughter.'

In *Shuggie Bain*, the former is shown to be a corrosive force that destroys addicts and rips their families apart, prompting relatives to fall away from them one-by-one as the vicissitudes of addiction become too much to bear. Humour and heart however are the traits that build the resilience to which McDermid refers, and that have always been synonymous with Scotland's largest city and its inhabitants, where 'those with least to give always gave the most'. Like his birthplace, Douglas Stuart's protagonist is nothing if not resilient. He survives trauma of an unimaginable kind on a long and tragicomic road to realising that he will never be able to make his 'Mammy better.' He cannot deliver her from the forces of alcohol, poverty and patriarchy against which she so defiantly wages war, but he can find the strength to save himself and preserve the tender uniqueness that makes his story unforgettable.





At The Sock Drawer we aim to raise the voices of those who have felt that their voices have been placed in the back of the sock drawer. We welcome all art and all artists, while giving special notice to those who are often marginalized by society.

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