

STAMPED

creative writing magazine

Issue I



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University of Bucharest

THE TEAM

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EDITOR'S LETTER

STAMPED started from the desire to have a medium in which students with creative hearts could share their excitement for art. Together, we believed in creating a safe space for all the students who have something to share with the world around them. University life can be a lot – from daily courses to endless books to read, giving us even more to reflect on. We must know everything, but how much space do we leave for our creative selves? We feel STAMPED has the potential to become a strong hub for the artistic side of each student who believes in our goal and supports us. This first issue is divided into prose, poetry, and artwork, and more than anything, it is experimental. Together, we went through many phases while preparing every page you are about to see. We were confused, sometimes out of breath, but most of the time, we trusted our instincts, and the outline of our magazine slowly but surely started to take form. Working on the first issue was an adventure that proved we are capable of amazing things as a team, and it was even more fulfilling to see this happen alongside the talented artists who responded to our call.

Curious and eager to know other people who wanted to create, we began drafting the submission form in December 2023. At first, we were worried because we couldn't picture how and if we would receive any reactions from the University of Bucharest students. However, after only one day following the launch of our submission form, we were surprised to see interest in our initiative. From January until March, we received a promising number of submissions that would have turned this issue into a whole novel. Therefore, we had to establish sorting principles in line with our goals for the magazine. This was not an easy task, since every piece we received – be it a writing or an art piece – had its own message and depicted each person's originality.

In the end, the Editorial team wonderfully guided the written pieces to their full potential, while the Design team went over each artwork with visible attention to detail, and even added their touch of originality when combining written pieces with personal illustrations. On top of everything, the magazine layout is a product of their imagination and collaboration. and it indeed implied a great deal of work and continuous improvement. The Social Media team, on their part, perfectly handled the promotion posts, thus enabling STAMPED to gain wide recognition on each online platform. And of course, this wasn't all, because we also needed a website, which was carefully crafted by our Creative Director. She outdid herself with how she managed the graphics, even without extensive experience working on a website. The editing process implied a lot of work on the text, with double-checking, copy editing meetings, and communication with the authors of each piece. It took us around two months to sort through materials and refine the accepted submissions. We collaborated with the authors of the selected pieces one-on-one, to ensure their visions and ideals were respected along the way.

Step by step, everything turned out better than we could have imagined. It was inspiring to see how everyone on the STAMPED team participated in this project through their ideas and dedication. This is the main reason we are more than proud to see how the final product took form and to know that people in the future will have the opportunity to find solace here for their creative minds and souls. And for that, we are trying to constantly improve ourselves not just as a magazine, but also as individuals. We hope to help the readers get immersed in not only our work but most importantly, in all the universes created by the authors on these STAMPED pages.

“You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.” – Maya Angelou

Talida & Teodora B.



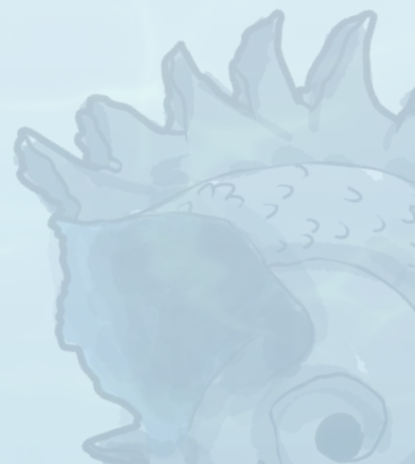
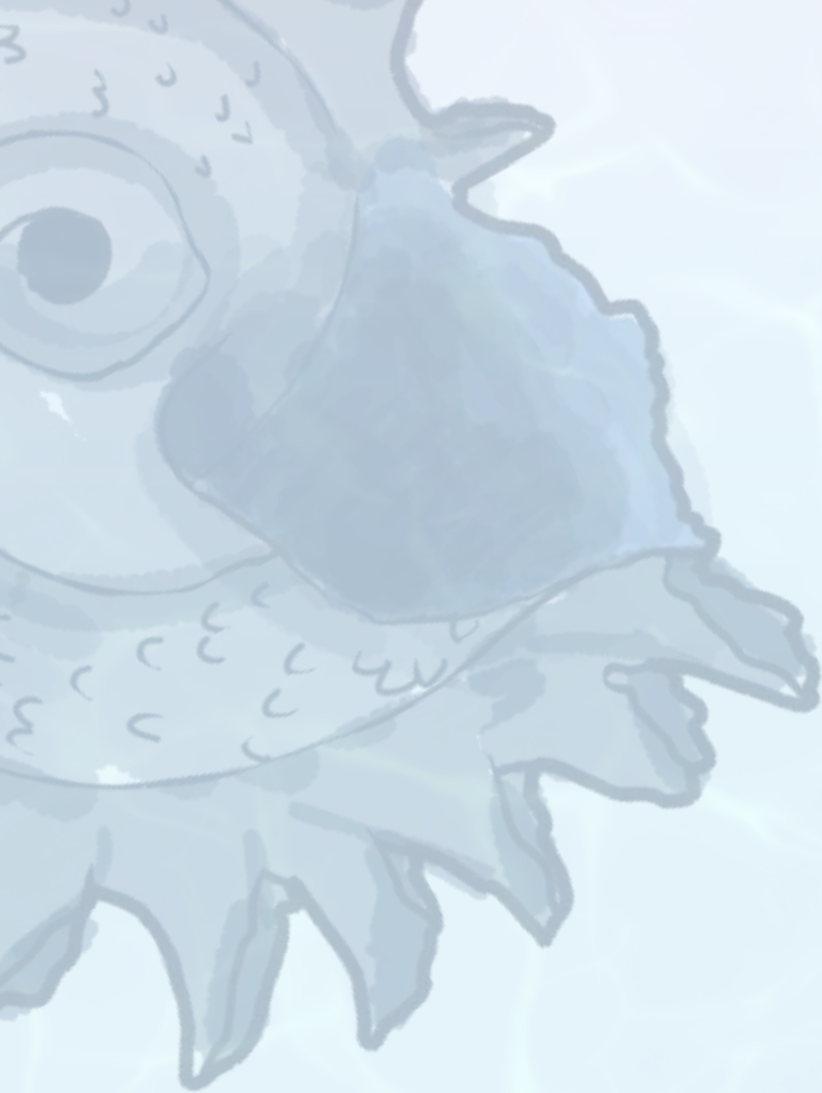
peek a boo

Dumitrescu Iliana

British Cultural Studies MA

I

POETRY



SELFISHLY Barren

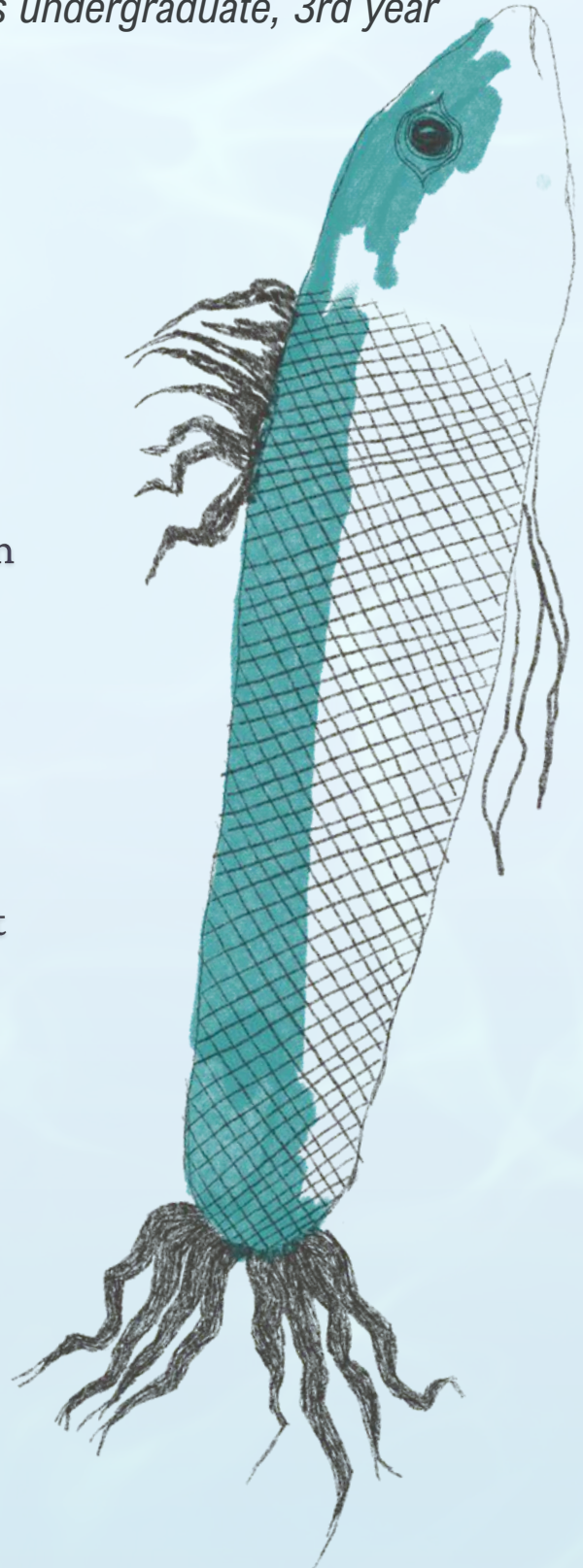
Andrei George-Valentin

American Studies undergraduate, 3rd year

I have spent my love
on what I thought to be
barren wastelands
just to turn them into
my oases
yet, it was my soul that was barren

I never asked for a forever
from anyone, except my very Self
not because I wouldn't wish for it
not because I wouldn't like it
not because I wouldn't dream of it
but because I couldn't have it

not one thing will last *forever*
and that is the beauty of it all
to feel and see
but merely for *a moment*.





This white pebble,
Not round, but smooth nonetheless,
Was shaped here, on this beach,
Along with the hills and mountains.

Billions of years the Earth
Has churned, and raised these hills,
And in mere decades we have mined
And built them with roads and homes,
And staggered them with orchards,
And good wine and beautiful delights.

Pebble

*Apostol Diana-Maria
British Cultural Studies MA, 1st year*

And as a butterfly flies out of the corner
Of my eye, it is so difficult to imagine
Another billion years passing by,
Scorching all that we have ever known.



Snow
Drop

Limbosu Elena
American Studies MA, 2nd year

I need to stop looking up etymologies,
relying on the internet to give me definitions.
all it can do is describe things with words,
as if anything could actually be put into words.
words ooze *meaning*, but what can I do with *that*:
it's spilled, it's running, it's bubbling,
it's dancing around me in the mud,
encircling,
in a twisted intricate rain ritual;
but true rain never comes with it.

it's only a drizzle,
barely wetting my fingers,
it never soaks my clothes,
it never saturates the earth.
it's just fuel for the mire.
and there's no washing away the muck,
the drizzle comes with fog and soils it.
as I stagger through this bog,
and attempt to grasp at its underbelly,
I hear another bubbling:

the fury
and the
mire

a murky Fury in the search
of the understandable,
a low rumble of a creature
seemingly insatiable,
scratching at the seams,
longing for some clarity.

I take another sloshy step,
and suddenly its echo
rings inside my forlorn head
in a revelation.
a lustrous puddle unfolds before me
weaving such a mirror,
that when I peer into it,
dissolves into the Fury.

I hear the rumble in my throat
I hear the confusion.
in the reflection I can see
the rain dance as I'm dancing,
awkward and unseasoned.
then that's the ambiguity:
what's missing is some time
to improve my choreography.





One's minuscule yet powerful on life's tapestry

Bledea Raluca

Philology department, English major, 1st year

I took a look upon the tapestry of time:
A red-haired muse sings of our sorrows and our glories.
Her green-blue eye shed(s) a tear,
the tapestry wall has a tear, the eye is fixed upon it.
The closer you look, the closer you get
to seeing your future through a crack in the wall...
The past is unveiled with an awful sword's din,
the present and futures collide;
the slippery marble of the ruins we're in
shows us secrets of fantasy hide.
The tapestry falls, the muse disappears,
as she's casting a shadow over
our chameleon lives.

CONTEMPLATIO AMORIS SACRI

“Gods don’t take mortal lovers...”
would be a lie.

Maybe their human loves feel sacred,
worthy, appreciated (even noticed...)
by the touch and love of a god.

Maybe the gods are happy
to feel more down to Earth when meeting
human touch.

But... don’t they feel...Desanctified
for even a moment? Don’t they think,
ever, that this love would be
below, beneath their power?

As if it’s not enough and even though they’re equals...
some offerings would do?

The humans want to be gods
while the gods want to be human.
And yes, it might feel nice to let go of your duties
and love and be loved for once.
But why can't it be sacred?
Why must it be that gods come down from
their throne most times
when humans barely climb the steps to their temples?
Bring they faith, belief, religion to
their mortal lovers that still rule in history
as "the one that touched the soul and heart of"
Apollo, Aphrodite, Zeus, Hermes, Eros...



MAGIC TRICK

*Boroş Daniel-Adrian
Philology department, English major, 2nd year*

dark-eyed gaze in dim-lit rooms,
always made my afternoons,
brand perfume and quirked-up lips
made my sorrow feel like bliss.
you'd ordered Scotch on the rocks
and grinned slyly at me like a fox.
stole my heart and put it in a box,
then secured it with chains and locks.
you motioned me over; I complied,
you said, "if you may stay by my side,
it might just make my pain subside."
I laughed, smiled and replied:
"...two's a company, three's a crowd."
something I thought was not allowed
came into full bloom inside my chest,
the moment you confessed
this nameless thing wouldn't be a simple test.
I had half a mind to accuse you of theft
for giving me that of which I'd been bereft.

whispers in bars turned to kisses in cars,
we put plasters over each other's scars,
we loved out loud, but kept it sparse,
we left the Earth and made our home on Mars.
now all your stuff's in my apartment
and you're engraved in my heart's compartment.
once I was small and helpless like a rabbit,
before getting pulled into your gambit.
you executed your plan with utter finesse
in this vexing game of love and chess.
you played a magic trick on me
and taught me how to truly be.
all my secrets spilled like wine
and now I get to call you mine.



FREEDOM

Costache Mihaela
American Studies undergraduate, 3rd year

I've been hitting these keys in awe of how you think.
you're standing right beside me and I can feel you tense up
the words I speak relate to our sense of self
how wonderful it is to blend our troubles into one
to glare into each other's soul until there's only God to find
only to lure Him out so He can give us our peace of mind.
you ask me about the photo that I dropped earlier that night
I prefer singing to you than talking about it
you notice that I've tensed up too
so you touch my hand that was lingering on a C chord
it felt like it had stood frozen there all my life
waiting for your touch to release the sound
that started up a song
which kept watch over your name;
what a simple name
to hold such a powerful stare
one that relinquished my mind from my body
and set me free in the land of your faith.





I Would

I would
and I might
but with you
I'm a slight

embarrassed
that I would
take every flower
you had put

in my hand
and have them still
in a museum
or mighty garden

buried deep
where you can't see
any sorrow
any pain –
nor any guilt



and I would
ask you to
be the hand
that silences

my coldest dreams
my deepest fears
my God, I would
but all I am

is afraid
maybe of you
maybe of me
or the slight eternity

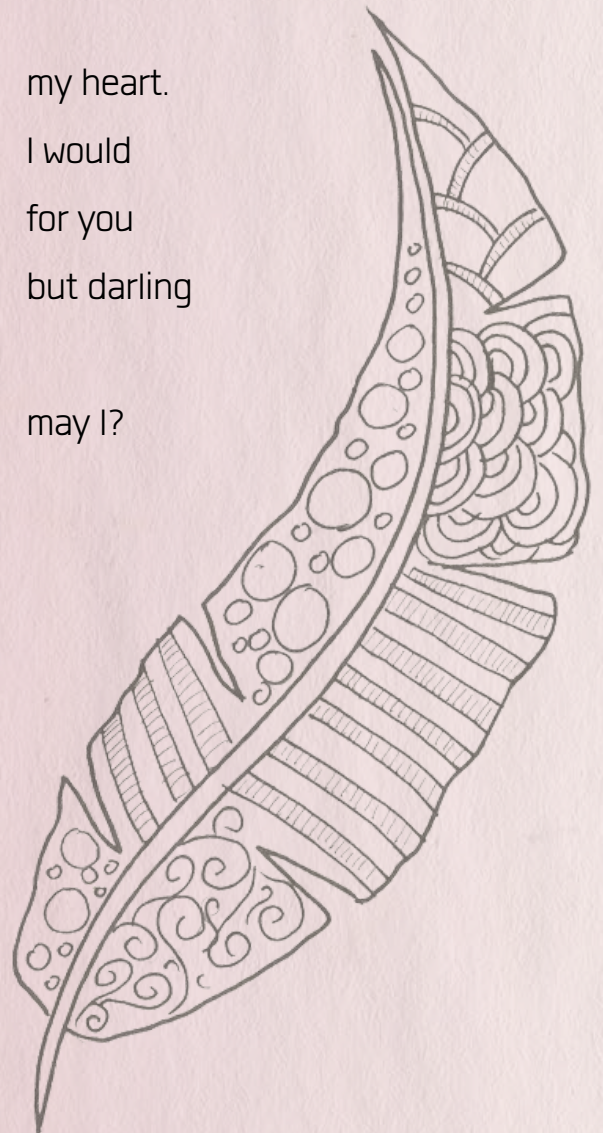
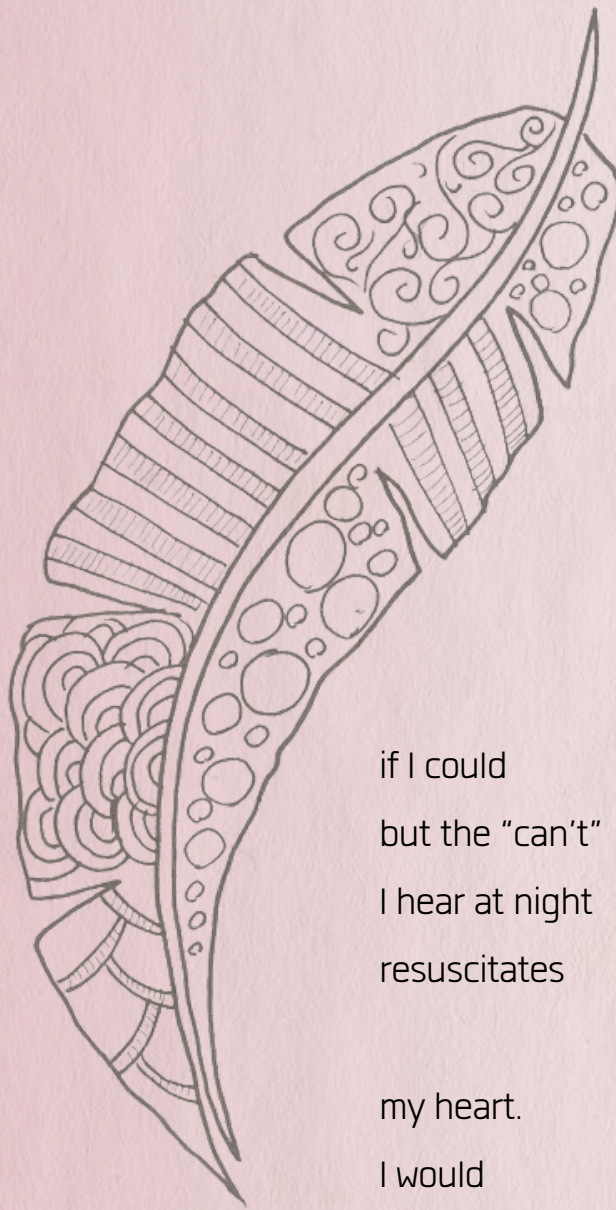
that you give off
looking at me
when my feet
would dare to meet

rock bottom
from underneath
melting down under your stare
I would

if I could
but the "can't"
I hear at night
resuscitates

my heart.
I would
for you
but darling

may I?





Dysmenorrhea

Limbosu Elena
American Studies MA, 2nd year



Chrysanthemum in the sink
Acting like a water lily

To be a hero
is to have the bravery to die alone
with your own brittling scars
and giving time what belongs to it.

But
I am a magnolia
that lives forever.

Bathes
in its own beauty.

Even the seasons twist
and turn
every leaf and the wind
doesn't wound me with its own scars
that are sharpened
into mountains,
into hemlock,
into lions.

The earth
trembles with excitement
as I
walk.



The passing of Robin Hood



Cotigă Maria

Translation and Interpretation undergraduate, English-German, 1st year

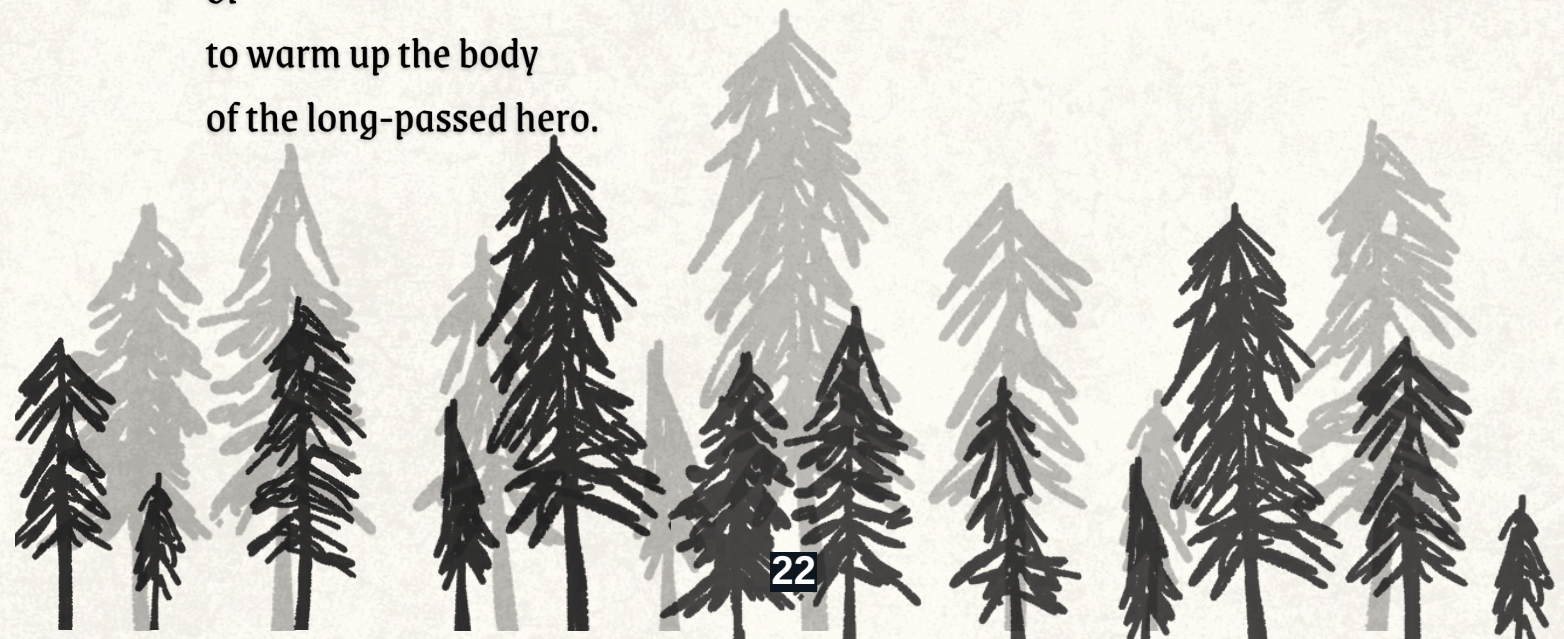


And in return,
my bones sing.

And with the same pride,
I walked into the room
where Robin Hood lay on his deathbed.
And I was so sure that,
at my sight,
Death would leave his side,
afraid of my smell
and my obnoxious fragility.

But I walked in and it felt
as if all my petals wanted to hide into the depths of their bones,
molding into veins
and earth
again.

There stood heaps of candles;
maybe to shoo away withered flowers
like me
with the imminent fear of burning
or
to warm up the body
of the long-passed hero.

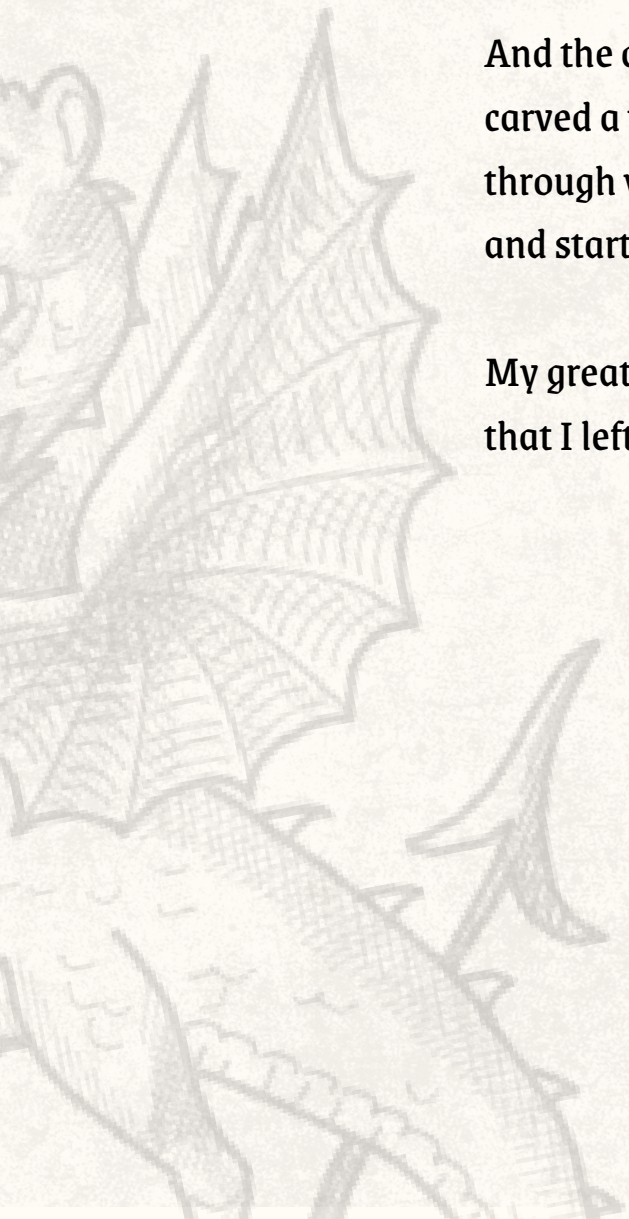


That was the only time
I was truly afraid of burning.
Vanishing back into myself,
my breaths became the wind,
and the sun,
my eyes.

The earth tickled my feet
to hurry me
and remind me
that time
is not patient
with anyone.

And the depth of that feeling
carved a window into my skull
through which a canary flew
and started bathing in the murky waters of my mind.

My greatest mistake is
that I left that window open.



It is the best mistake I've ever made.

I can now enter the room
where I died braveless.

I haven't climbed a mountain,
nor tamed a lion,
but I was loved.



Picking strawberries at the working desk

Ivan Alexandra
Faculty of Letters, Romanian-English undergraduate, 2nd year

let's go pick some strawberries
he said while we were at the working desk
I looked at him and then we both rose
and went outside the building

through the crowded city
(whose streets we packed into a rolled-up shape like a huge Turkish carpet)
through those people in a hurry
(whom we named and stripped of clothes)
through those lonely dogs
(that we petted behind the ears and on their furry bellies)



when we finally got into the woods
we knelt down on our knees and started picking
some fruit



*my dear, let's stay here
where the ground is rich in strawberries
and make a home from the tiny roots of those
big pink strawberries
you now have on your dress
and all over your face*



*some may say we are savages
some may come to visit (your mom for example)
others will take funny pictures of us
that will be exhibited at the national history museum
but I know that only you could stay here*



*right now
all alone
on your knees
in the cold whispering forest
picking strawberries
talking to yourself
delaying your awakening.*



THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE

*I bow down and humbly bow down to the true you
the true you that's inside this body
(Vini Vici, Namaste)*

bisons in the forest
trains departing in a single direction
deer, none without antlers
power lines filled with ashy pigeons

today, silence descended upon the city
surrounded by mountains
and waters
and clouds that no longer announce rain.
today, silence settled
over a thousand women
the language of silence has a thousand dialects
difficult to decipher
and all reproduce the same sound (though, none
of them speak with the same quietness)
which Cornelia seeks to unravel
so she spreads it on the dryer
like a thick and heavy blanket

still damp
still dirty in some places
she flattens it with her slender long hands
she flattens it with great care
she gathers it
she spreads it out again

the thousand bisons know her silence
and her serenity
better than me
or other women with thousands of other silences
scattered on the dryer (sewn into the blanket)

someone struggles
someone smiles
someone embraces someone else
and recognizes their silences
and the blanket remains heavy and damp.

Confessions on

On the picnic blanket
the Mediterranean blended beautifully
with the darkened sand, as seen at sunset.
we asked ourselves why our blue and brown hairs
end up leaving us from time to time;
you mentioned they might have their own
lives to lead
classes to attend
jobs to go to
"and I bet they have their own hairstyles to die for"
I added – and you let out a laugh.
so nothing should be forced
may our hairs split and part ways when their time comes.

a picnic blanket

Leon Teodora
American Studies MA, 2nd year

we also agreed not to reach breaking point
when we would split hairs
tear our hair out
because of misunderstandings.
do keep your sea atop your head
but I will keep loving you even if it dries up –
intentionally or naturally.

"țin la tine orișicum"

and I wish you'd understand just that –
yet I know authenticity would be lost
and you'd still resort to google translate –
so it's better to keep conveying
"orișicumul" and the *cumulation* of feelings
through our intertwining hair
and our joined hands, that dare not tear it out.



Going astray with an apple a day

Whenever someone steps out of your life
you end up blaming Time Itself
claiming that It would have separated you two, anyway.
were you to place an apple next to you and those that end up leaving
you'd see how the fruit rots away at an incredible speed
whereas an apple placed next to Time and those that end up leaving
would leave a bitter taste only much later, at a natural pace.

I don't want you to make a face when I tell you
that I find myself staring at your Adam's apple
when you speak frantically.

I can't help but think that is where the poison comes from –
from words that are first projected inside, not outside
and it is surely that kind of poison you do need to spit out –
for it is heavily stuck in your throat.

I have to let you know you are not the apple of my eye, either –
and let me gently remind you that people do not need to wish for you
to choke on an apple peel
for it's you who already slips it into your green apple juice
that you drink at the end of the day, in-between tearful hiccups.



Homophobic or Not, Bucharest has Nice Sunsets Too
Parker

American Studies undergraduate, 1st year

My balcony

There's a rotten smell smeared all over my words.
I'm not sure how to get rid of it. It won't go,
not with time, neither antiseptis nor purge.

My lovely fine print, my slurred intentions between the lines,
it's all contaminated. My lonely words all lead back to this.

This. You know I could never name it.

The this that sticks like cancerous cells.

Tumors no surgeon can extract,
rumors my mouth spells.

T H I S hurts like seismic motion.

Because it's right in front of me,
because it is never that,
it always is.

This.



My thoughts float over my scalp like a cartoon cloud.

You all know this, you see t h i s.

But you are doing me a favor, aren't you?

It never rains on my balcony.

I assure you it is never far-fetched, whatever it is you assume.

Have you ever been wrong about me?

We're always alone in a crowded room;

you know we're to blame when they finally detect the fume.

I am distracted and anesthetized while

T H I S is growing a conscience of its own.

In a few moments, it might just get baptized.

I speak to God more than I should.

This celebrates, This works its days away,

This is why in here it reeks,

This is why we never speak (too much)

To clarify

On my balcony, it never rains.

The sound of water comes from

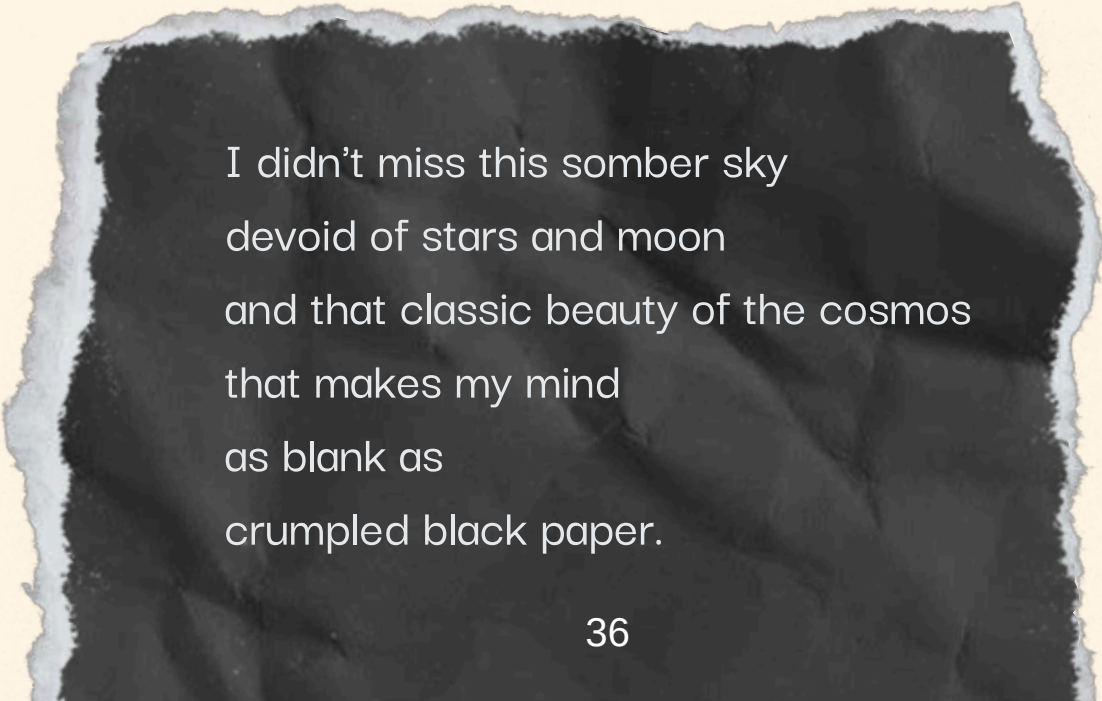
This flowing through my veins.

The old me

*Ranete Mariana Cristina
Faculty of Psychology, Special Psychology undergraduate, 1st year*

I didn't miss this emptiness,
this drunken blurry vision,
these messy, dark thoughts,
these falling tears and
the feeling that I'm not
good enough.

I didn't miss the swirling banks
beneath my eyelids
or that small volcano of sorrow
waiting to erupt
at three in the morning
turning my tears into blood.



I didn't miss this somber sky
devoid of stars and moon
and that classic beauty of the cosmos
that makes my mind
as blank as
crumpled black paper.

I didn't miss the map of sand
on my skin and
these little lines left behind
by the sharp edge of abandoned shells
on the shore.

I didn't miss this poet –
the one full of sadness,
anger, sorrow and
indecipherable feelings,
the one that's so full
and yet
so empty in his mind, body and soul.

I did not miss the old me.

NO OCEAN IS AS BIG AS MY LOVE

*Șerban Vladia
American Studies undergraduate, 2nd year*

I'm going to place all my love in a bottle
and send it off into the water,
don't you say that I'm terrible and don't share anything,
because tomorrow morning the fish will all wake up
with a heart so big it might explode
and the waves will break under the weight of my love.
when the skies will shine and look toward the sea
there won't be anything but shades of heartbreak and bruised knees
splattered out from a broken bottle adrift, blown by the breeze;
– the sky is blue, the water too
and everything in sight is smudged with remnants of past dreams.
I will stand ashore and wave right back,
with no trace of sadness but a calm,
a peaceful calm before the storm,
it's fitting because blues are all I've ever known.

IF LOVE IS MESSY THEN I WANT MY LIFE STAINED

in my grandmother's garden
the cherry trees remain unpicked
yet my blouse is still stained of red,
from my blushing cheeks or from the blood that's running through me.!

it is as staring into the fire
or nearing too close to the edge of a building-
you fear you might not have enough control.
this is what I feel sitting with my feet in the dirt,
picking thoughts out of a tree that is long gone
and wishing to reap what has not grown,
dark maroon regret dripping down onto my skin;
I thought I was good at pretending
but I always wear my heart right on my sleeve.



Second First I Love You

Stoica Dragoş
American Studies MA, 1st year

I'm writing this because
~~You make me feel something~~
No, this is not right.
~~I have this thing for you~~
No, I don't. I mean
I do, but how should I put it?
~~You know that feeling of having~~
~~those butterflies in your stomach?~~
No, no.
Forget about that.
I don't know why it's so hard to say it.
~~You make my heart race like coffee does~~
No, no. How silly is that?
I mean, my heart does race when I see you.
but those are not the perfect words

~~You make me smile when~~
~~you enter the room~~
I don't think this is right either.
~~You bring back that little laugh~~
~~like I'm a child again experiencing~~
love
Wait...Love...
I know how to say it
to feel like the first time.
This is my second first I love you





source of light

Vlas Luca

tie me by a cord and hang me from the ceiling
connect me to a switch, pump me full of electricity
add a fan around my neck, make it spin, give you a breeze
change my eyes, give them color, make them flicker as you please

strap a cloth around my torso, pull it tight
douse me in some gasoline, set me alight
fix me in some sort of vase; pin me up against a door
nail my legs into the wood, add a hundred of me more

light my hair on fire, please, put me in a little tin
make sure I smell real nice: minty, fruity, breathe it in
cut my neck to keep me burning, remove wax, keep me ablaze
sorry if I burnt your hand when the skin peeled off my face

let me be your little sunshine, your delightful, flashing light
let me brighten up your day, evening, noon, and even night
let me be your chandelier, worn-out torch or fragrant candle
let me make you smile all day, I just want someone to dandle



my fascination for nature goes back for centuries,
it seems that way to me, at least.

I think Mother Earth has a bone to pick with me
She always calls me back to her nest.

She sends me little gifts from time to time:
a wasp to bother me, a cat to make me cry,
some wind to blow my way tired, old leaves,
maybe to remind me about the cycle of life,
then a pretty field of flowers to ease away the pain.
some heavy clouds with thunder, lightning, and treacherous rain,
these are for my anger, my sorrow, my despair.
She hangs onto my skin, little, spiny thistles,
and shows me pretty roses that make me smile and whistle.

I think in my past lives I withered away in nature.
in the middle of a forest, on the top of a hill,
my body sunk into the ground, I became fertilizer,
I was one with the soil, I helped the vegetation.
and in return my Mother gave my Mom a seed:
to plant and to care for, to water with love, to tend to its needs.
and then it one day sprouted: it blossomed into me.





II

PROSE



IMG_2225
Grama Emanuel
undergraduate, 2nd year

On the topic of solitude

Bogdan-Stănescu Darie-Andrei

Faculty of Political Science, International Public Affairs MA, 1st year

In enigmatic whispers my madness blooms. Several specimens roar both words of wisdom and doomsay in stentorian manner. I cease the wish to demand pause. My culmination rests upon providence.

Myself, venerated, almost worshiped, it beats scary; a seat on a throne, its components significantly dreary. What I wish for is cessation, yet I am gifted opulent endowments of peculiar nature. I revere this sanctified homage, impassive. This perfunctory struggle blasts the clock at midnight, embraces it, ends up violating its concord...

Since I adhere to time as a greater rival and to be felled, I fully grasp the implications of carrying such a futile battle. Impending legions of soul consumed by grief and temporals... the voice of my command shall relish in thundering echo.

Without reason, I hurry to be complacent. I linger for eons to reach indignation.

Wrath, where do you settle?

I fear the ink on this paper stands gullible, awaiting approval. It clogs me with impotence. Would your eyes favor some doctrine? Shall your mind be pillaged internally?

Dress the canvas of your ideals in the purest of whites... phase through space a shamrock. Can you detect its imperfections?

It will never procure its most yearned-for values. Limitations, they stack upon each other, as hearty masonry forged in corrupt cobwebs of graphene.

What damnation lies beyond the egress of tomorrow?
Beyond the exodus of the human soul to mere bone marrow?
Beyond scraps of faded sinew, rest upon the plinth of passing. You stretch a puny ego to marvel at obscurities and fetishes of random massing.

I desecrate my angelic ribs to mastercraft an effigy above their enchanted heads. Fearful they may be, their ears implode; they shut and indulge in ballads of acceptance. Timid, they present themselves, eternally gazing low near the base of the obelisk I stand erected upon. Joyous they appear, as they savagely forsake the corporeal and turn onto each other. Murderous, they emerge, as none end victorious but the Angel angled above, greeting the bloodshed. And my view reigns supreme, to assess such unsophisticated immaturity.

Would you now understand? I remain situated, mostly imprisoned, in temptation and virtue, but one is perpetually missing. I transit among the galactic; I spot no treasure. I arrive righteous to the inauguration of geotic beings, of schematics skeletal in nature, hiking mindlessly through the wastes.



A well-designed capacity to withhold potentials beyond the limitations of ephemeral, unbounded by restraint or egotistical travesties, I alone tick time in whichever way I desire. Chronos, I am him. Perceiving such shortcomings paves a road to hysterics... Yet, to document the exhibits, I must exercise patience.

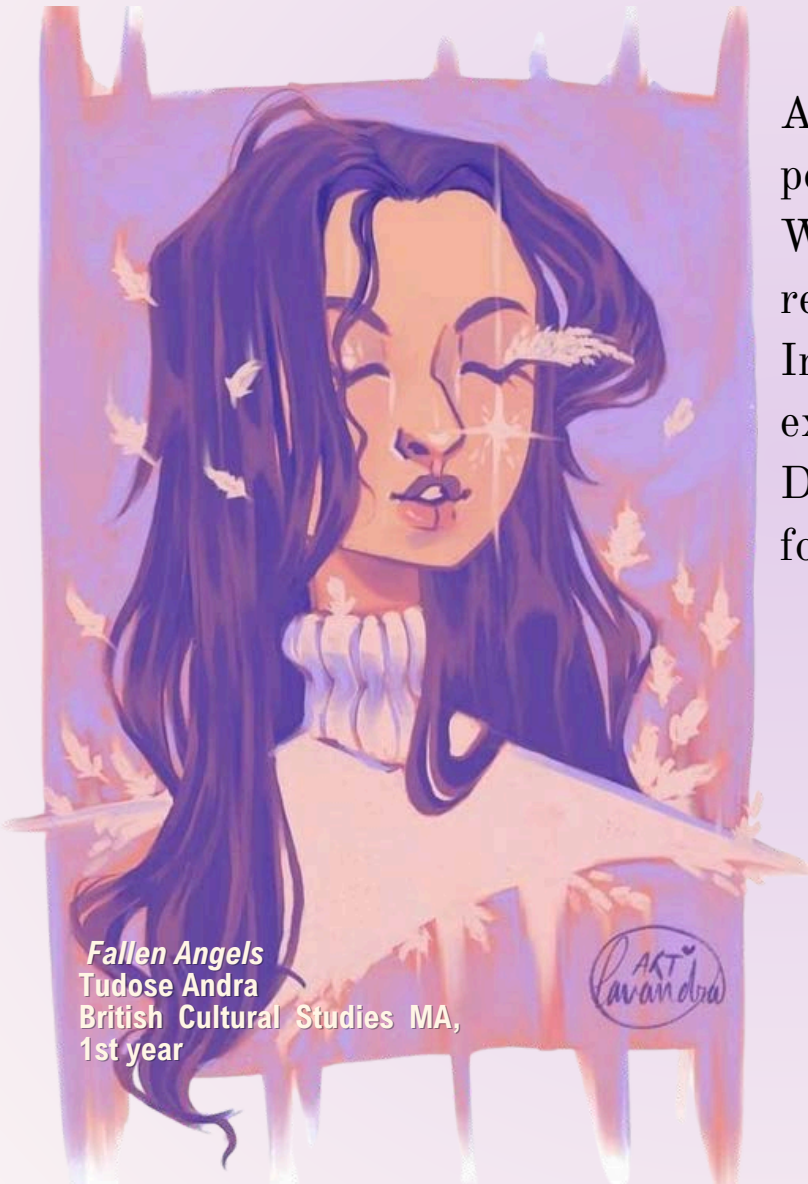
You, visitor, shall witness the impenetrable phalanx that is my genius. And it will be steadily that the psyche will face revolution. With certain despair, I announce death.

Because...

Am I truly dozing, reclined peacefully in nihil?

Would it be that the eventual I remains consummate in his glory? In what structure of harmony do I exist as the sham?

Do my dreams reek heavily of the foreboding coordinate?



Fallen Angels
Tudose Andra
British Cultural Studies MA,
1st year



Take Heart

*Copilaș Jessica-Polixenia-Cristiana
Contemporary Literary Translations MA, 2nd year*

He always had a hole in his chest. For as long as he could remember there was an empty spot where his heart should have been. Blood still flowed through his veins but no thump thump accompanied it.

“Heartless” they called him. “Monster” they would say. But he knew better. He was no more a heartless monster than they were. So, he did what he did best and continued on his journey. The destination? Nowhere in particular.

The man never stayed anywhere for longer than he needed to. He would come to town, work some odd jobs, meet new people, earn his money, and leave before sunrise.

Sometimes he would spend the night with lively ladies to fill the void inside, but none of them had the missing piece to end his anguish. They provided slight relief before he would pay them and be on his way.

Life went on... As the days passed, his hope dwindled, and the hole in his chest grew larger and larger, spreading without notice.

That was until one day, as he traveled on the road to the capital, he met her. Standing there, in her flowery dress, with a little basket covered in red handkerchiefs, she looked at him with sparkling eyes.

“Hello, would you like to buy one, sir?”

The man approached the woman whose smile only widened as his footstep drew nearer. He asked:

“What do you sell?”

“I sell hearts. Used. But still good.”



The man squinted his eyes and raised a brow. She chuckled and pulled the handkerchiefs away. He looked inside, and a sigh of relief escaped his lips.

“How much?”

“Never discuss the price right out of the gate, good sir! Let’s drink some tea first; we can do business later.”

He followed her inside the forest by the road and into her home, a cozy cottage with a pot of tea hanging over the hearth and freshly cut roses in a vase. The man stayed for

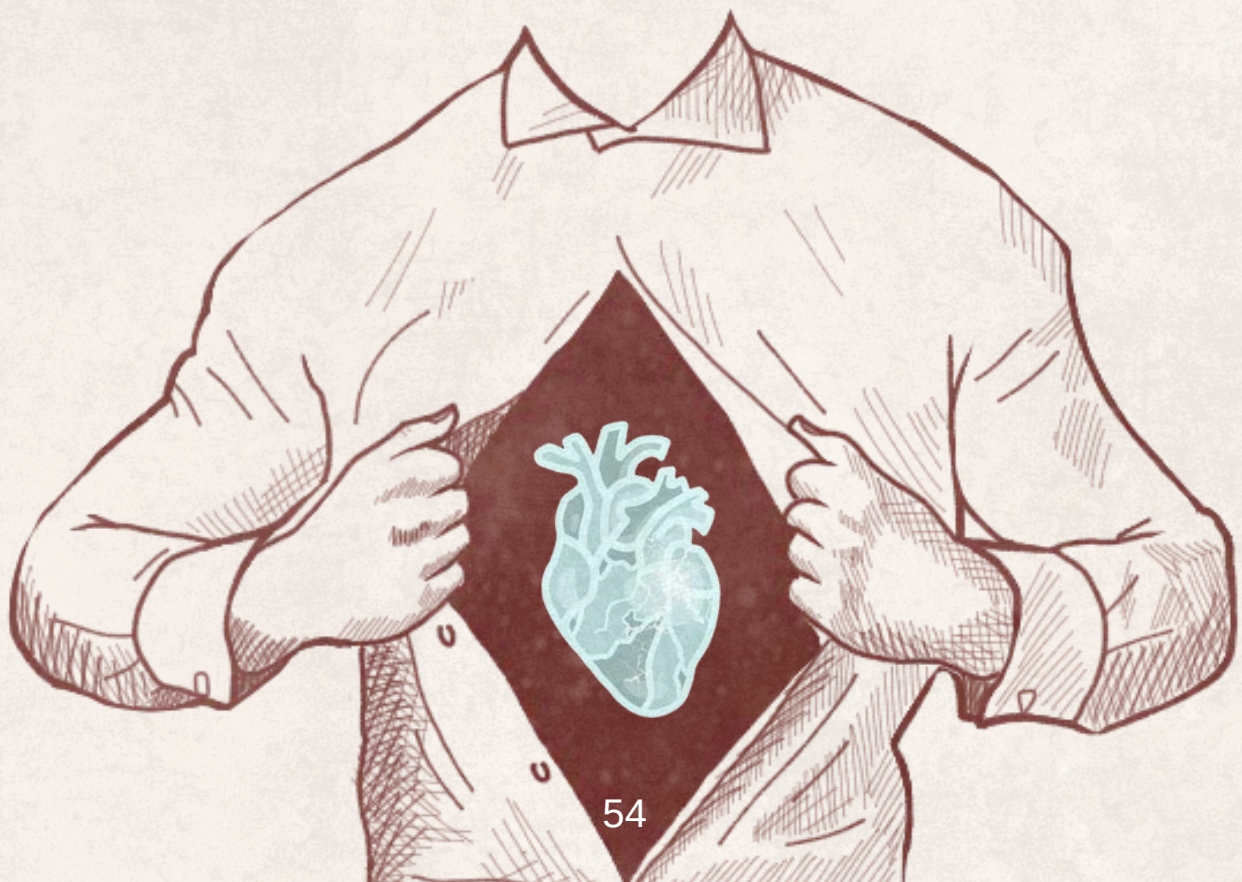
tea, then she asked him to stay for dinner. When night came, he knocked on the woman's door, and she opened it shyly. At sunrise, he knew he should leave, as he always did. Instead, he found himself waking her up. She yawned and told him to go back to sleep. He turned his head toward her, and for the first time in his life he felt a heaviness inside as he asked:

“Could I stay for a while?”

She remained silent for a while, then smiled.

“You can stay forever if you wish so...”

She put her hand on the freshly sown chest of the man as they both drifted back to sleep.



The torches of freedom

Cotigă Maria

Translation and Interpretation undergraduate, English-German, 1st year.

The lake was deep and it only got deeper the more you looked. You could see the reflection of your own eyes in the water and would stare until you saw your own mother's eyes look back. That sight alone was too much for me. Too much for who I am... I can be a smoker instead. Much simpler. I can dedicate my life to giving up on something and no one would bat an eye. Much easier if you ask me.

I stare into the visions and at the glimmer of my lit-up cigarette reflecting on the blue, wet glass. I am not ready to go back to the funeral. And even if I was, I wouldn't want to. The smell is drilled into my brain. Everything; every heart smells rotten. I can't smell my own blood when I scrape my knees or get a cut; I can only tell since my mom starts crying every time she sees me like that.

It is not surprising that I always have to smoke. I can't bear seeing anything else other than the thick fog of my heart. It's a sight I'm rather used to. However, I won't get used to seeing a kid dead. It's one among many. But it's this thought, that many other undistinguishable faces never saw more than the beauty of this world, that terrified me.

The lake always brought me solace. It was like a memory I never had. It kept me looking at it, trying to remember. Its tranquil waters held a sense of familiarity, a feeling of home that I couldn't quite place. As I stood on the shore, gazing out at the shimmering expanse, I felt a longing stir within me, a desire to disappear into knowledge.

For as long as I could remember, the lake had been a constant presence in my life. I would often come here to escape the chaos of my mind, to lose myself in the timeless beauty of nature. Birds died and babies swallowed their teeth, but my blue mirror never broke.

And so, a sense of warmth kept me together for many years. This puddle of an ocean drop gave me hope. Hope that one day, everything I need will be at the very bottom. And that day will come when I will have no use of any wish or porcelain. I will only need a bed.

I remembered the countless hours spent exploring the shoreline, the laughter and joy. I remembered the feeling of the breeze against my skin, the sound of birdsong echoing through the trees. And most of all, I remembered the sense of belonging that I found here, a sense of peace I had never known anywhere else. All my heart did was listen closely, and my mind was silenced by its shame.

But among the memories, there was a sense of loss, a feeling of sadness that tugged at my heartstrings. For as much as I cherished the time spent by the lake, there were moments of pain and sorrow I couldn't forget.

And yet, despite the pain, there was still hope. For the lake, with its timeless beauty and silent depths, was a reminder that life was a tunnel with no end but many corners. Toward the end, your pace is slower because you know you don't have much to hurry for. But when you are young, you grit your teeth and run, forgetting your feet behind.

As I stood there, lost in thought, I felt a sense of gratitude well up within me. Gratitude for the moments shared, for the memories made. And as the sun dipped below the horizon, I silently vowed to myself that as long as water flowed, I would live. Roses may be pink and other times they may drown. But I would be there to see them.

And as I turned away from the lake, I felt as if I was turning away from myself. But the smoke came back. Like a blanket hanging on a dog's tail. Always there. I swallowed tears so I wouldn't feel the burn of all these thoughts on my heart. I try to keep my mouth shut as much as possible. I feel my heart will crawl out otherwise, sick of my noise. Only the dead are not bothered by it.

I took this job recently. It's good money and not many people are willing to put up with the smell or the angry family members. They are often willing to take your eyes out and plate them with cheese, like grapes. Just feasting on them like some sort of revenge because you touched their loved one for the last time and not them. I was about to finish my cigarette. But cries like no other were keeping me away

from the death well. Where they all get thrown out and lost. You can make wishes there sometimes; give them flowers and pray for a warm ray of sun, as warm as their arms were.

But these cries. They were horrid. More than ever. You could tell that the person who died did not have money. The family was screaming. As if hoping to get him back.

And I knew it was him. I still remember. It was the only time I gave up my torch of freedom. I gave up a light conscience because I heard my mom crying. And she only cried when I scraped my knees or almost drowned when I was little. I turned my head and could see the sun through the blue glass and her horrified look.

I let go, I guess.

Maybe because I let go long ago, and I was so heavy under the thin, blue glass.

For a moment I couldn't speak. I wasn't anybody's sister or daughter. I was a pebble amidst waves and sand. As if I wasn't before.

I couldn't speak. Because I had nothing to say, as I was not.

Freedom killed me. She couldn't hold me tight enough. That's how frail and cruel it is: like a child.

PUREBRED

Grințescu Ioana

Contemporary Literary Translations MA, 1st year

Dodo is sitting on the floor coloring. His golden locks fall over his eyes, but he doesn't brush them away. I worry, you know? He can't color inside the lines; he can't tell his l's from his r's; and, worst of all, he is almost 3 and can't so much as name a document.

"Honey, he is a late bloomer. Some kids are just like that. Our little tech genius will be climbing ladders and conquering empires in the biz in no time. Don't worry!" My husband tells me.

It is easy for him to dish out sweet words and promises; I was the one who paid the pretty penny. He just had to scroll through an apple-pie-ordered catalog of curated pictures and make his pick, and that had been no picnic either. Every couple caught Rick's eye: one day he wanted an artistically inclined, redheaded baby girl; the next day he spotted the cutest little boy whose breeder promised a 100% chance of success in the engineering field. He even offered to pay back the deposit if the kid yielded less than modest results.

For the most part, Rick's dawdling didn't bother me. Until one day, when we were perusing the pages of a catalog, and Rick's gaze abruptly shifted to the window.

"Darling, I have been thinking. It just doesn't seem fair, you know? There are so many kids out there just waiting for the right family to adopt them. Maybe I don't want a purebred; I don't think it's worth it. We were both common breeds, and we turned out just fine."

That was the last straw for me. I was not going to raise a child conceived by deviants. My husband is a romantic: he likes to believe in the good of people. and I do love him for it, he is a terrific partner. However, I firmly refuse to pay for the mistakes of others. If they want to breed uncontrolled like wild animals, I shouldn't be the one footing the bill.

The next day I used up all our savings and bought Adonis. All Rick had to do was show up and sign the documents. I had to endure a chiding over the phone, but when he got there, it took him two seconds to be completely smitten by Dodo. Our little angel, our little boy with a family history of entrepreneurs and tech geniuses.

The breeder had picked the best parents for this endeavor and paid them a hefty sum. Adonis was supposed to be the finest child his age. Smart, handsome, charming. I was brimming, I couldn't wait to bring him home and step into the future I had worked so hard for. Starting that day, we would be a respectable, purebred family.

Two years later and Dodo has given us nothing. He is a shy, scrawny boy, who prefers dragging his crayons across papers to unraveling the mysteries of a computer. He can barely talk, and his manners are atrocious. But worst of all, he is ugly. As a baby, he had rosy cheeks, a bright complexion, and big, green eyes. Now, his skin is waxy, and his rheumy eyes will not stop following me everywhere.

"Ma! Ma! Ma!" He keeps babbling.

In the beginning I tried to teach him arithmetics. I even hired a math tutor when he was only two.

"Do you understand?" I would ask and he would just gawk at me with his empty, I-didn't-get-a-thing eyes I would grow all too familiar with.

"Ma! Ma!" Dodo shouts and points at his lousy drawing. "It's you and Pa!" He smiles.

"No, that is not me and your Father." I say kindly, to let him know I hear and respect him.

"That is a pink stickman with breasts and a dark doodle that resembles a face."

Dodo's gaze plummets to the floor. He is the one who gets to be disappointed, not me.

Although I was the one who worked hard, who sacrificed her life to have a successful child, I have to watch him be sad because he is failing. And what worries me most is that our warranty is coming to an end. After 3 years, we can't return him anymore: he is too big. I have tried breaching this topic with Rick countless times, but he wouldn't budge.

"You want to take our child back to some breeder, our child?" He would always play the "our child" card, and there was nothing I could say to that. End of discussion. But this is not my child, and I have known it for a long time. My son had been that gifted, adorable baby I had held in my arms two years ago, not a whiny toddler who has trouble stringing two sentences together.

I get up and go to the kitchen. I prepare my tea and leave the water running, so I don't have to hear him anymore.

"You can still return him," I tell myself and take a sip from the cup. "Anytime you want, you take him back, and this will be just a funny little chapter in your life. Anytime you want."

I close my eyes and smile.



Nistor Daria
American Studies undergraduate, 1st year

January 17th

Yesterday I was walking the streets and passed by a smell of pastries. I came home with wounds on my tongue and today it still stings, I barely got a coffee down this morning. It doesn't make any sense. On New Year's Eve, I had everything in the palm of my hands. It was bandaged and held together with scotch tape, but, nevertheless, it was there. I brought it home and put it on my desk around January 5th. I fell asleep that night dreaming of cherry blossoms.

Such a weird time to start writing. Neither a beginning nor an end. I started the month of January not documenting, as I should've, but waiting. Waiting for it to not be January anymore. I guess I should tell you what I've done so far this year. I almost lost it all.

I didn't think to check the following days. If I had brought it, it must have been there. Logically, this was the way it was supposed to go. I went looking for it around the 10th day of the month. Well, "looking for it" is a lot to say, I simply checked that miserable desk: sheets of paper, a stapler, a water bottle, some crumbled up poetry and a few other things. They were scattered all over, a questionable

circumstance. I vividly remember placing it in an empty spot so as for it not to rot from the touch of other, unorthodox things.

I think I'm going crazy.

January 18th



I drank coffee today, but I felt as if it was missing something. This time I don't think it was from the premature melting of the ice cubes, I think they put too little caramel in it. Bummer.

January 19th



Momentarily I forgot about my missing centerpiece. You see, the lack of an adjacent situation has the power to retrograde the sentiments of an absent essence. This is what I love about life, we get so caught up in the details of it all. Actually, I'm not exactly sure what I was talking about. What was I missing? I'm not even sure I'm logging in the dates correctly, but I'm positive it's just about Friday.

I wonder if anyone saw me bite a chunk off my finger, but I don't think so. People don't notice these small things. There's a "19" floating on top of my messaging app icon. Like the date. I don't know what to do with that.

January 21st

I might've had an epiphany yesterday. I was waiting in line at the pharmacy, I'd run out of ibuprofen. Do we exist just to avoid the conclusion of existence? I don't remember the last time my throat ached, but I do have a packet of ginger manuka honey drops in my bedroom somewhere. Did I ever tell you my bedroom is actually a living room? I hate taking measures. By the time I got to the counter, I'd forgotten what I needed ibuprofen for. Was it for – oh God.

January 22nd

I'm not sleeping but I feel fresh every single morning. It's like I'm sucking the life out of something. I hope it's not you, but it very well may be. Do you feel drained? Maybe see a doctor. Or stop reading. Am I supposed to be writing every day? I felt bad because I skipped a date here. Sorry. Is this what I'm supposed to say?

January 25th

I can't write in here every day, ok? I feel sorry and I don't know why. It's probably because I scared you at the beginning. I should explain.

"I almost lost it all." That's it, this is my last entry. Did I find it? I'm having a good, competent laugh. What do you think? That's what "almost" is there for, it's the tell-tale clue. I didn't lose anything. And I did not lie, not a single time. If I really have to spell this out, I'm going to start plucking out every individual hair growing from my scalp. It's fine.

It's kind of weird how stars look like what people would do if they were spiky and angular and compressed.

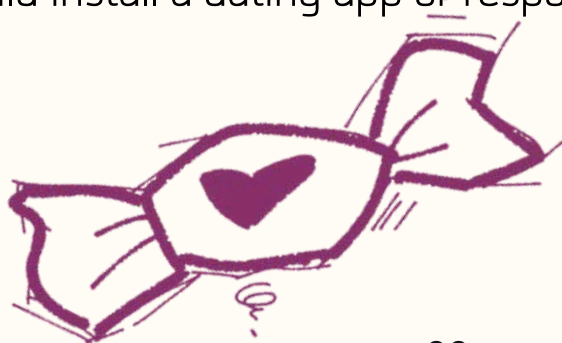
January 26th

I eat too many sweets, I think.

January 27th

Have you ever missed something that wasn't real? It's like having a dream in which you're married and have a child; a cute, fat baby. You wake up cradling nothing. It had my green eyes and I loved it more than I've ever loved or hated anything in my life. I typed "insemination near me" in the search bar but I didn't press enter.

Maybe I should install a dating app or respond to my messages.



January 29th

I'm pretty sure I'm missing grief. Do I imagine things evaporating so I don't feel too full? Maybe I should stop eating so many sweets, make some room for actual loss. This is so stupid, I don't even like lemon candy. Sweets are not supposed to be two things at once. If I wanted something paradoxical, I would have read my entries over and over until I passed out from hallucinating a version of myself that I've yet to understand.

January 31st

I don't think I'm keeping this journal next month. I was on my way home when a lady stopped me to ask for the time. I don't get annoyed at things like this; I enjoy them. It's like completing a task. She told me I was pretty and that I should follow my heart. If I end up in the gutters at least now I have something to blame it on. I don't see a point in writing this any longer.



Revenge

Ranete Mariana Cristina

Faculty of Psychology, Special Psychology undergraduate, 1st year

In an environment where adrenaline, vice, and rage ruled over the hearts and minds of so many people thirsty for death, I sat leaning against my own car and watched nonchalantly as they prepared their cars for a terrible race. To be honest, I don't know why I came here tonight. I guess for good times sake. As good as those times could be.

The love of speed has always been a part of my life, ever since I was a kid, and my dad would let me sit in the passenger seat when he took me to school. Later, after I got my license, but also after my first smoke from a cigarette, my entourage ended up beyond the borders of that infected high school. I ended up making friends with some people who at that time, represented exactly what I was going to become today.

A depraved soul.

At first, it was just a bitter challenge. Then it continued with a race every weekend, and eventually, it became a damned hobby. And the worst part is that I liked it.

I loved feeling the engine's torso under me, the way my foot sank into the gas pedal, the odometer needle going up, the way I had to

concentrate on the steering wheel to make a tight turn, but especially the adrenaline I had knowing that I could die at any moment by crashing into a tree.

I take a deep breath of the night air, and, watching the cars line up in front of the starting line, twirl the lighter between my gnarled, scarred fingers.

Did I forget to mention that I love smashing the face of morons? Better. Finally, I decide to light a cigarette, and, letting the smoke leave my body, I fix my gaze on the screens placed so that they encompass the most difficult areas of the route.

The race has begun.

The world around me became noisier. They're all rooting for their friends, boyfriends, favorites, or just the best looking car according to their ridiculous standards. I just shut up and analyze. I'm not known around here for nothing. I am not only a speed and adrenaline junkie, but also a good strategist. The pleasure of observing each opponent's driving style, how tight their turns are, and the variation in speed in known crash zones turned me into a winner.

IX 2003 XT

I may love danger, but I am thoughtful. While their danger is chaotic, uncontrolled, ready to rob them of their vitality at any second, mine is cold, calculated, genuine. No one knows I'm in control, no one but me.

I throw away the butt of the cigarette, which is now only a stump, and I grin when I see how easily the driver of one of the competing cars takes the turns. Finally, a driver commensurate with his car. Powerful, intelligent, gifted with quick thinking. All this is covered in matte black metal and revs over one hundred and eighty kilometers per hour. For the rest of the ride, I turn my attention to the vehicle that looks like it was built in the night, and I find that I'm no longer the only one here who prefers to bask in the glory in silence. After dozens of well-controlled tight turns and overtaking at the limit, I'm not at all surprised when the winner is really my only favorite. Still, I'm surprised to learn that this is its first run. At least in this town.

I'm among the best, and as such, I'm entitled to some of the best parking spots, so it's not hard for me to figure out what I'm interested in.

IX 2003 XT

The crowd begins to swirl around the winning car in hopes of getting to know the driver, while the losers begin to consider starting a brawl over trampled pride. I've been challenged

too much to not know what's next.

But when the door opens, the faces of many begin to pale in front of the slender body of the woman that appears in front of them.

Well, that's a plot twist, I say to myself, grinning at the thought that she swept the floor with the egos of these misogynists.

But my excitement lasts only a moment, for, as if sensing my gaze fixed on her back and somewhere lower, the young woman turns and. With a single glance, she manages to snatch all the air from my lungs.

She...

Five years have passed, and yet no time seems to have passed. The same black eyes, the same chocolate hair, and the same full lips. But now I no longer read love in her eyes, and her smile is no longer innocent. Her features sharpened, her body became leaner and her gaze sharper.

She grins at me. She reads my emotions on my face and doesn't care. She grabs the money, and, with her back straight, passes me without making a gesture, although her gaze is fixed on mine.

I knew at that moment that I had to get out of her way as quickly as possible, because this time, I realized, she was going to destroy me. As I once did with her.

I gave her lies, kisses, and touches and in exchange healing, thus drawing her into the trap of my darkness, where I could devour her without caring about what wounds I left behind. Like a vampire, I sucked up all her innocence, purity, and love of life, leaving behind only a copy of my reflection.

By destroying her, I healed myself.

She hasn't forgotten and she's going to give me a taste of my own medicine.

And even though I know I deserve it, and a small masochistic part of me wants it, my whole being fills with fear in the face of that look full of unspoken insults. I also the realization that, earlier, I identified with her driving skills. Which makes her a million times more dangerous.

In another life, I considered her weak, only to realize today that she has become stronger than me.

Somehow, I know she will get into my veins and poison me, returning every harm I've done to her, a thousand times stronger. She will become the nightmare that makes me scream at night, and her face will be imprinted on my retina like a deity from whom I will have to remember to ask for mercy. She will feed on my blood as I did on hers, tearing every smile from my lips and grinning in the face of my screams of pure agony.

And she'll do it all with a smile, because that's how I did it, too.

I swallow hard and try to return to my senses, then get behind the wheel of my own car and start the engine.

Yeah, maybe I'm a coward, but if there's one lesson in life that I don't want to learn, is that it's not okay to mess with a hurt woman.




A child dies in this one

Down through the ages, the Basilisk (also known as the Cockatrice) grows increasingly ugly and horrendous until today it is forgotten.

~ Jorge Luis Borges

It was a cold, unfortunate morning. I remember slithering down the gray jungle's freezing ground and the hunger I felt – how utterly sinful it felt to be hungry and cold at the same time – I am extremely highly sensitive to this kind of thing, you know? So there I was, in the grand scheme of things, attempting to satisfy my belly, on my way to moving things further from their origin, perhaps lower into my stomach, down the throat, deeper toward the intestines, but that was not for me to know, given how little I knew about anatomy before that, as I was saying, I was bound for changing the scenery, looking around the greenery, and, for the lack of any better word, deeper into the buffet of the world. But, as you may have noticed, we're living the most peculiar kind of days, days in which my love for not being hungry is overlooked by the medium, and the medium told me that I shall remain hungry for a while, but screw that bitch, I will eat, anyway, we are living through strange times, as I said before, the kind of period in which food is hard to come by, especially if you're a member of the public like us, not saying that we're in any way alike, but you never can tell, we may be brothers, bound by hunger, separated by Unger, but let me tell you something concrete: a member-less lizard as myself has to eat, to be resourceful, at least try not to be wasteful, and means to be fed before going to bed. That's why I haven't slept in a while. A bone is only a bone to the uninitiated, and believe



me, honeys, I am initiated, so initiated, in fact, I want to let you in on a little secret: I have eaten before, I know it doesn't show, at least now, but I truly have eaten before that unspeakable, unreasonable, unfathomable day in which the undone became done, but that's not what I wanted to get to, the feed is my concern, the escaping is the interest of what I am feeding on, and the listening is the fate you are left with. This is how it has always been in nature, and now you can take part in this wonderful exercise of the circle of life, or *the encirclement of life*, as I like to call it, and the bone, the bone we've already talked about is a pretty resourceful one, and I know it because I was there when I had to feed off of it before arriving to the undone that became done, so it goes without saying that even though I was fed by chewing on the bone, I was still struggling with finding something to consume, it could have been a fat rat or a thin alley cat, I wouldn't have cared for the world, I could've eaten a mat, if it was eatable, but I had nothing else but an expectation to cling on to and-and... what was I... as I was telling you, the choices are reserved for those more fortunate than myself, and as it happened that day, my predisposition to hope was the lowest it had ever been up until then, and as it has had been since, alas, the undone which was done: you've read the title, haven't you? Finally, somebody became less fortunate than me and I was all ready for it.

Truth be told, I don't need to tell you anything, it was spoken all over the place, nobody heard about the tragedy, nor spoke about the tragedy, but everyone knew it, just like when Christmas is around the corner, but this time it's not about giving, but losing, and that's how I have been described ever since, the one that brings losing about, and I think that's quite reductive, isn't it? I'm a king, after all, at least I think I am... was... no, *I am*, I don't have that good of a memory, stretching from one place to another, getting longer and longer, leaving my body behind as if my skin was shedding, but all I ever achieved with my excruciating size is more hunger to the point of achieving the unachievable, let's get around to that technicality and say that my royal-ness is less of a concern for my memory, but being a king doesn't ever stop, even in forgetfulness of the origin of said crown one is forced to wear, just like me being a child-killer, doesn't stop when you forget about it, but that's not really what I was talking about, as I was saying, I should be respected as my origin is, demanding you to respect me, I have left nothing, not a single thing behind me, so it's only right that thee shall respect We, and this I've said.

I think I remember more than I used to now, knowledge is a pretty sick thing, you know, I remember more than the day, I also remember how it was over in a second, like lightning, so was my dining, and I forgot again... I keep doing that, don't I? It's something about being at peace with yourself, it makes you forget how you killed a child... yes, I remember, over in a minute, they didn't even check for a pulse, it was useless, or

perhaps forgotten, but nevertheless, not done, as supposed to the deed which was done, the thing is the child's gone, never to be seen by anyone. I was one once, at one time I used to mean something, I was the king of reptiles, if you would have seen me alive, you wouldn't have gotten a chance to see me a second time, and if I were dead you would've thought it otherwise, yet here I am, writing a letter of apology, or am I? Do I really care? Care, care, what do I care? I was born with no parents, yet here I am, mattering – I really am sorry for your loss, but can something once done be undone? Can you change the way in which the world works? Stumbling upon the greatest denominator of existence comes with its prices, and you may have already guessed them, you, insufferable tick, crying makes you tick as it makes me sick... speaking of tick, not even the tongue-games can hide how inconvenient it all was, looking for food, I keep telling myself, but is it so? Arriving back to where I began, and it's your duty to tell my story in such a way I could hear it again, does it make any sense? A king to kill a child? Who are we fooling here, it was not my intention, neither my purpose, but I did. She screamed, or maybe she didn't and it was all over. I didn't check for her pulse, I never liked the fuss, even with the whole sham of being a death bringer, imagine looking over at your handy work and realizing you're not yet done, I would hate to think of myself as sloppy, but everything said, I had to look. This is when disappointment hit me like I hit her (roughly thirty kilometers an hour above the speed limit); no, disappointment is not the word, disappointment is when you realize something that hasn't met the expectations, I was

rather terrified, as I was when I wrapped my body around her feeble neck, the skin of it colder and colder, such a fine piece of cloth beneath her limp head. I hoped I would be experiencing an enlightenment treatment or something, I was expecting that at least one of my many heads could get converted to seeing the light, but the hunger only went on, the failure I am, and as it did, I only saw my own pathetic face in its... her lifeless eyes, the last glimmer of life I was swiping clean with my greed was what I got instead of wisdom, that's the deed that cannot be undone. I remember making a difference, I really do, and how hurtful it is just to remember. I was the grand scheme of things, a king.

After seeing my reflection in the two poorly lit orbs, as her warmth was fading, I stood there with one thing left: the sinful cold. It was a cold, unfortunate morning.

A PROVERB ABOUT MONEY

Vlas Luca

“Money is the root of all evil,” they say. Only if they knew the true implications of that proverb. It’s not some *woke* saying about capitalism. It’s a spiritual, and, you could say, biological fact. But you didn’t know that, did you?

You couldn’t have. Only I do. Why am I so special that this unbeknownst truth has only been revealed to me? Well, to cut the long story short, I did it. “Did what?” Planted the first ever seedling of evil. “What does that even mean?!” Trust me when I tell you this, but I don’t fully know either.

It just... happened one time, I guess. I was playing outside, in the garden, with my monetary companions when I had the bright idea of treating one as a unique plant. Silly little children’s game if you ask me, but nothing had prepared me for what was about to happen. The little coin slowly went into the dampened soil I had prepared, and, within a moment’s notice, a snake shot out of the earth, followed by the little seedling I previously mentioned. I was mesmerized by this occurrence, but I went along with it. I sat in awe as I watched the plant go from the tiniest bush to the

biggest and most beautiful apple tree I had ever seen, all in a matter of minutes.

I quickly grabbed my friend Lilith so I could show her. She was as fascinated as I was, but her focus was on the snake. The creature which had come out of the ground quickly found itself around the branches of the arbor, its eyes fixed on the plump fruit that the tree had produced. Lilith quickly concluded that the snake wanted a taste, so she made it her own task to get the reptile what it desired. Its beady eyes lit with excitement as my friend cut a slice and handed it out, engulfing the morsel in one bite.

The snake then started to speak: "One has long waited to taste such delicious fruit. One was so weak and malnourished that One could not break the skin on One's own accord. One is indebted to you for the gracious help provided." We were taken aback. I had no idea what to say. Lilith did, though: "You have nothing to thank us for, we just did what we thought was right. Now, I really want to try the fruit as well, seeing that you praised it so dearly." The snake hissed and bit the apple out of her hand. "You must not! Such fruit is but a curse for the human soul. Should you have a taste would mean true damnation, and One does not wish such a fate upon One's saviors." The snake then devoured the entire fruit and went back to coil around the branches of the tree. What a weird experience, we had thought, but we decided to listen to the words the snake

had given us. And so we left the magnificent tree alone, still watching from afar.

A week had passed, and nothing had happened. The little serpent hadn't moved in all this time, like it had fallen into a deep slumber. We also observed that no other living being dared approach the apple tree. They promptly went around it, almost in fear, a curious behavior. We were on the brink of abandoning the surveillance, considering nothing was happening, but then we saw her: a beautiful woman, with flowy, blonde locks approach the tree. Her style was questionable for my standards, a blanket of leaves over her breasts and one over her groin, but everyone is entitled to their freedom of expression, so I didn't think much of it. What did surprise me was the snake's reaction; it almost shot off the tree when the woman neared it. Its eyes sparkled with mischief. It slowly leaned down, onto the woman's shoulders, and she didn't even flinch. Their conversation was incomprehensible from me and Lilith's position, so we slowly started moving closer. Meanwhile, our little reptile friend had so graciously picked out a fruit to give to its unsuspecting victim. We quickly exchanged a glance and started running toward the tree, shouting for her to not eat the apple. A branch shot at us from the cursed plant, with our dear companion in front.

“Cease that nonsense!” It hissed at us.

“But she’s going to be punished if she eats that! Why aren’t you stopping her?” I quickly replied.

“She has already been informed of the repercussions that come with eating the fruit, and she has to decide whether to believe One’s lies or her Father’s truths. One has promised her eternal happiness should she take one bite out of the fruit. One does not attain malicious intent; One’s purpose is to test faith.” While we were discussing, the girl had already chosen her fate, her teeth deepened in the juicy fruit.

The ground shook; the tree looked like it was collapsing. The roots shot out of the ground, spilling copies of my once-burrowed coin all around. A man with long, wavy hair ran toward us.

“EVE! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?” The man cried, gasping for air as the world around him crumbled. He managed to get to her, but to no avail. As they held hands, the ground disappeared, and they fell into the world below. Lilith and I quickly glanced down at the inferior plane. It looked about the same, but worse. The colors were duller, the ambiance sadder, and the atmosphere obviously more depressing. Is this what true damnation looked like?

We had no time to think. The snake quickly grabbed us by the waist, and we slid into one of the apples that the tree bore.

“One’s mission is finished. Now one must keep One’s promise to you. One shall give you rule over another plane of existence connected to this one, with which you shall do whatever your heart desires. One must leave now, One is truly grateful for the help.” The serpent said as it left us all alone in this “apple,” the dimension we now had complete rule over. “I guess we better get started, Lucifer,” said Lilith with a smile on her face.

This is about how it all happened; you probably recognized the story by now. And for those non-believers who must argue that there was no form of currency back then, shall I remind you that time is relative? What I perceive in this current second may be completely different from your perception. I just happened to have a sack of golden coins on me, much to the dismay of that wavy-haired boy and Eve.



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