

# SPECIAL

YOU  
MOMENTS  
THAT  
STOOD  
OUT

PHOTOGRAPH

Cover Art by MAXWELL GOLD

A QUARANTINE

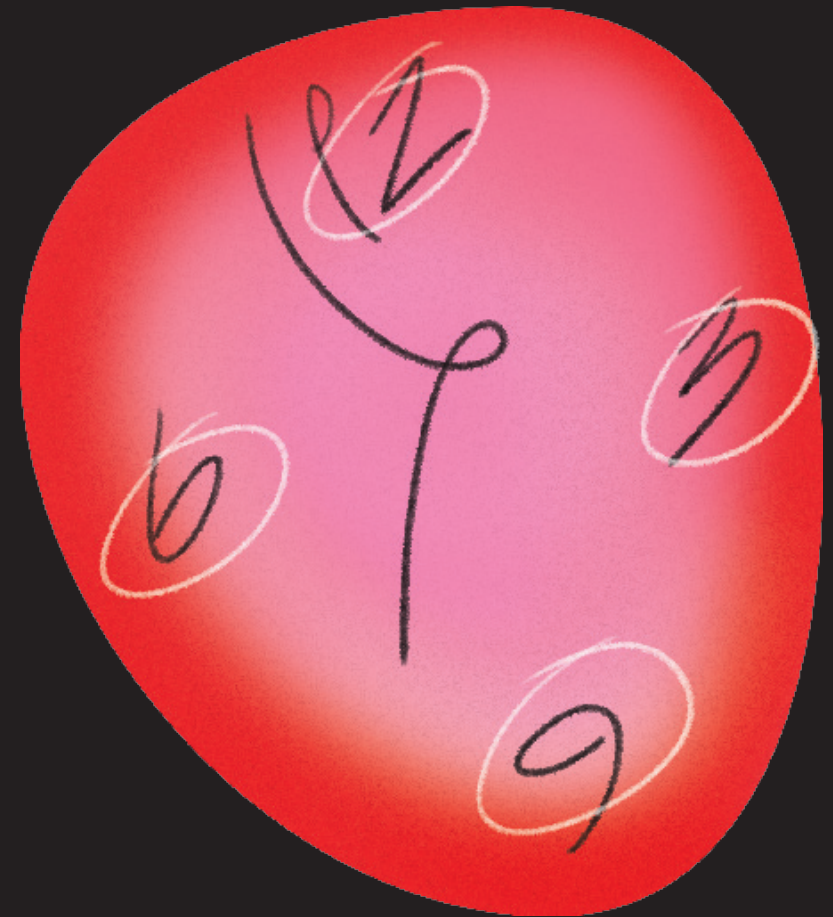


## *Sweet Hours*

The days have been cannibalizing themselves  
I've been busy watching my many heads knock against each other  
Oscillating between who is in charge  
How just.  
But to be fair  
I sometimes catch a glimpse of it  
From the corner of my eye  
It leaves currents in the air  
Which must be the same thing as whatever is  
In between two thoughts  
And whatever is  
Behind the eyes and above the throat but is  
Decidedly not in the brain  
And I am reminded of the marvelous logic  
Of time and space  
(Of chance)  
And I'm in charge again  
And I've decided  
That the hours taste sweet



# SPECIAL INAUGURAL ISSUE



EDITED & DESIGNED  
BY MOLLY MEYER &  
MICHELLE BELGROD

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# DOODLE *from* THE



# DESIGNER

# LETTER *from* THE EDITORS

Hello all!

We're thrilled to release the first issue of Special—a zine, a creative outlet, and hopefully a comfort.

Special began as a way to chart the ups and downs of life in lockdown. We knew we weren't alone through the monotonies and specific joys but why did it feel that way?

We set out to create a zine that would help us feel together when we couldn't be. It's a place for internet neighbors to express themselves in whichever ways they want: poems, paintings, postcards, photographs, essays, texts, illustrations, google searches—whatever could be printed and distributed into this format.

Each issue is guided by a new theme that's big enough to capture the interactions and learnings we can all relate to. It's those abstract things we have in common that we want to bring into the light.

For our first issue, there was a lot to address. So we kept our prompt broad:

*What are the moments that stand out? Catalogue how it felt to recreate your nana's soup, discover a crush, or have your world turned upside down.*

We hope you find little bits of yourself in these stories and can share them with the special ones in your life.

With love,  
Molly & Michelle



# TIME *Evasions*

MEG BURNS

mornings float into afterevenings  
i used to dream up non-futures with your arms curled around me  
in the teetering bits between wake and sleep

there is an unreality about this house that teaches me to understand you:  
tall and still

we kiss in between seconds, you hold my breath and together we shoulder  
the weight of alarm clocks between us

radio is a death sentence, a reminder that our  
conjuring won't last

we laugh, conspiring in secret: there is all of forever ahead of us,  
in between and around all imaginable units of so-called time

and i will meet you there, around the corner, in and out of time, i promise

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ALLISON KRITZ

Last year I wanted to ~~to~~ feel light and airy  
so badly ~~z~~ that I started taking pictures of  
the sky, the plants, the outside. Anything I  
could take a piece of and bring with me  
back to my apartment for the moments I  
was feeling the most confined. And on days  
I couldn't go outside, I'd stare at my  
houseplants and wonder if they wanted to  
leave my space as well, if they <sup>too</sup> wanted  
to breathe new air and see clouds! ~~to breathe~~

MEG BURNS





I'm concerned with capturing  
and not letting die  
flushed flesh, socks sliding  
the scent of damp on leaf-lined floor.

The act of capturing  
is not meant to trap  
but to bookmark what captivates  
"I want to remember that."

Is it foolish to think  
that we could ever return?  
that anything remains—  
in the same form as before?

To you, I promise,  
there's point to preservation.  
And to you, I promise,  
it is not replication.

A cucumber plucked  
off a live-wire vine  
let wade in mason jar,  
gulps the bitterness of brine.

I'll put my palm to the metal and  
untwist what's laid dormant  
dip my fingers into wet  
feel my teeth sink—softer—again.

I know my knuckles will drip  
with your liquid-acidic  
as you slide your way in to  
their invisible cracks.

I know my tongue  
will sting with a newfound sour  
but from your time-stamped taste  
I vow a more deliberate devour.

# *The Night*

I Met

mel

Going to bed smelling like her  
Felt like

A soft song after a long day  
Thirst quenched by sweet water  
Seeing a new color for the first time,  
Right when I least expected it

I breathe in deeply  
Sleep comes so easily





# Plant Person

LILY BLUMKIN

I like to think I'm a plant person. I only usually have around one or two at a time, but I identify as someone who loves plants. And in March 2020, I decided it was a good time for me to start growing some plants of my own. I bought a lavender plant at Home Depot (sorry), and I was excited to watch it grow. I planted the seeds on March 6th. I watered them. I went to bed.

Two days later, I told someone I loved them in Maria Hernandez Park. They cried. We didn't speak for six months.

The pandemic started right as my seeds were sprouting. I went home to be with my parents and my plant joined me. "Bonnie," I named her. She lived in my bedroom, the living room, the kitchen on occasion. I walked by her and she made me happy. I sniffed her and she calmed me down. I watered her. Probably too much.

We had so much fun together before. Movies and coffee and museums and shows. Everything felt cooler when I was with them. I felt cooler when I was with them. I felt different. A toned down version of myself. Someone who could handle ambiguity well, who rolled with the punches even when those punches didn't make logistical sense (not like I was one of those people who made "plans"). I was cool. I didn't know all the lyrics to *Wicked*. They made me laugh like no one else. I was happy to be that person.

My parents sold their house and moved to western Massachusetts. I went with them and so did Bonnie. It was a hassle to bring her, but I wanted to. She meant something

to me. I put her on a broken chair in the dining room (the best spot for light), and I saw her every day. She made me smile. She was tall now, floral. She smelled like hand lotion. I told her I loved her.

There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think about them. I would wake up in the morning and remember that I had another full day ahead of withholding the urge to text them. To tell them that I missed them like crazy. To show them that funny meme I saw. Had they seen it? What did they think of Normal People? Had they seen Betty yet? Were they in love with those skater girls like the rest of us were? I cried. It felt like a death.

I went to Vermont for six weeks and brought Bonnie with me. The car was packed with barely any room for our legs, but Bonnie came. She sat on my lap the whole trip and swayed with every turn. I reminded her I loved her. Vermont ended poorly and I went back to Brooklyn. It was the first time I had space alone in months. I breathed. We talked on each other's birthdays. There was quiet after that. I remembered what it was like to not judge myself. I played *Wicked* in the shower.

The summer continued and I met someone new. Someone who felt big like I did, who knew their boundaries, who made me feel wholly myself. It was like two puzzle pieces fitting together. Relief, clarity. It was thrilling, like waiting at the start of a race moments before they pull the gun. It was a million more of these corny and unrelated similes. I couldn't get enough of them. We were in love by September.

Bonnie had withered away by then. She was brown and wilting; she had lived her life. I still loved her, but differently now. I reached back out. We talked for an hour and walked for four when they came back to the city. It was like seeing an old friend you lost touch with, like no time had passed. And somehow, everything was different. I breathed a little easier, I laughed a little louder. I knew who I was and I had what I needed.



CANDICE ZHENG

# The *Sun* is in my *Eyes*

---

Hey, good morning  
red thermos, striped sweater with the trailing thread  
white orchids with dusty green leaves  
facing me and the bed like pale sentinels  
reminding me that the day is to be lived.  
hi, hello honey-colored guitar  
I haven't touched you in a few days  
for I have misplaced the tuner and oh, never mind  
I'm sorry, sorry I'll play you soon again  
but a nagging difficulty remains.  
Of feeling so tender and wrought  
and at the same time small and weightless  
against the tide of human love and suffering.  
Like grasping a teardrop within a handkerchief  
Clasp my hands with your living warmth!  
In the foggy morning.  
It brings me a drifting peace.  
These things do have meaning  
They are solid, like stone. They sit  
on tables and doorsteps,  
or perhaps slung across the arm  
of an old chair.

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# BANANA Bread

My mom has never been a great chef. Or a great baker at that. Too many steps or too much to measure. She makes salmon once a week which we lovingly call “Salmon Tuesdays” and that’s about it.

But since the start of the pandemic, she’s been baking banana bread along with the rest of the world. She started with boxed mixes. Add an egg, add some milk. Then she slowly moved to testing homemade variations. Recipes she found after googling “the best banana bread recipe.” Soon she was baking a new loaf every week, sometimes going off-book to sprinkle in chocolate chips or walnuts. I taught her to lay a cut banana atop the thick, gooey batter to make a beautiful pattern of fruit coins.

I don’t remember much about those deepest, darkest parts of quarantine, where the days blended with the nights. But I do remember slathering fresh ricotta and honey and hazelnut spread on banana bread slices, coating my anxious stomach like a fuzzy blanket.

One particularly bland night, while trying to pass the hours between eating, dinner, and sleeping, I suggested we bake a banana bread together. I had actually written down the word “bake” on a sad quarantine bucket list, which I had taped to our fridge next to a motivational quote.

My mom put on a Stevie Wonder pandora playlist, and we spread our ingredients and utensils across the cold granite countertop with the precision of a surgeon laying out their instruments.

We did a dance with each pinch of sugar and a jig with each cup of flour while belting out *Signed, Sealed, Delivered*. I had never really cooked with my mom before, unless you count break apart chocolate chip cookies or the ones with the snowmen on them. It was special.

For the holidays this year, I got my mom a ceramic loaf pan that reads “Jill’s Banana Bread” in a typewriter font. She texts me picture updates of her baking in the cherry red pan, and I’m always happy I picked such a vibrant color.



In 2020, my pandemic stress related IBS became so severe that I often spent many hours a day in the bathroom. I had a lot of special moments on the toilet playing Sims, FaceTiming my sister, online shopping, hunting for cockroaches, pouring love into my long distance relationship, and playing with my roommate’s cat.



# *In Your* WILDEST Dreams

EVAN MALINOW

Sleep: where a tired, horny, and curious seventeen-year-old boy's wildest dreams come true. Good intro right? Wrong. Sleep: where said seventeen-year-old boy's dreams confuse and mold every waking aspect of his life.

Well, I've really tried. I've written down dreams on paper. I've almost dedicated an entire journal to finding the meaning behind my dreams. But unfortunately, I've come to realize that Mario and Luigi fighting off four hundred gorillas, while the mailman and I escape to freedom just can't mean anything. Could it be, World War III? No, it can't be.

Every once in a while, my mom will say, "I just had the craziest dream." Curious and eager to hear, she'll continue, "Ugh, it was that I forgot to pick your brother up from squash practice."

Little does she know that I had a dream last night that my ex-girlfriend and Stanley Hudson from *The Office* took me to a football game where we had seats right next to Lamar Jackson. But it can't mean anything because Lamar should be the one playing.

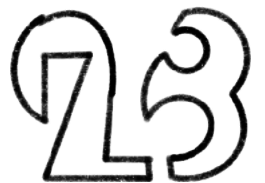
The worst, ugh, the absolute worst, is when you wake up from an outlandish dream that one of your friends or the girl in front of you at the water fountain was in. You want to broadcast it to them. Finally, something that makes sense. But what are you really gonna do? "Hey man, you were in my dream last night." Like that's not creepy. Or walk up the water fountain girl and say, "Hey I was having a dream last night and... actually you were in it."

You'll have a restraining order on you by the end of the hour, and be on the list of neighborhood people to watch out for by the end of the day. You gotta keep it to yourself!

The pandemic has allowed me to get eight hours of sleep on many nights, so I've been dreaming a lot more. The only good thing to come out of these eight hours is that I've grown two inches since March. Other than that, I'm confused why my College Counselor and the guy popping balloons that I watched on TikTok right before I went to bed are kidnapping me and taking me to the beach. Makes no sense. Why would they take me to the beach? For me, dreams seem to be a clutter of information that have no correlation to the real world and only exist to confuse me.

But what if there was more? What if Mario and Luigi were there to tell me that I should play MarioKart with my brother when he comes home from college like we used to do when we were kids. What if the gorillas functioned to tell me to go to the zoo for the first time since I was a child. The mailman there told me to say hi to him next time I saw him. Stanley was there to remind me that I shouldn't take shit from nobody. Oh what a savage Stanley is. And my ex-girlfriend's there to, well, she's just there to torture me.

If there's one thing I've realized from these zany dreams, it's that dreams are only as much as you want them to be. Their meaning is up to you. Dreams have endless possibilities. They're one of the rare aspects of your life that you, and only you, know. They're your own secrets. So keep them.



I LOVE THE TIME  
IT TAKES TO GET  
SOMEWHERE.



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NICK KIM

# Meals *on* Feet

MONIKA HANKOVA

In mid-March, on the very first day of quarantine, I received this text: “Look outside your door. Lift carefully. Enjoy!”

To my surprise, there was a large fabric bag hanging on my doorknob. As I looked inside, suddenly the most amazing smell filled the hall, and I found a tub of my neighbor’s infamous chili, accompanied by a black and white postcard of old New York (“Brooklyn Bridge,” 1929), reminding me that the wonder of the city still exists beyond our apartment walls.

“Buongiorno! Bon Appetit! Rice on the bottom. Toppings if you want: Sour cream /cheddar cheese /salsa. Hope your day is going well. Love, Pat.”

Then, the following morning, there was a delivery of freshly baked muffins (“Hardware Store, Bowery, Manhattan,” 1938).

The lockdown days pass by: Mushroom-loaded beef stroganoff (“McSorley’s Old Ale House,” 1854); tuna melts (“Midtown Manhattan Seen from Weehawken, New Jersey,” 1945); a six-hour slow roasted chicken; Italian spinach frittata; old-fashioned buttermilk pancakes; sweet and spicy sausages (“Broadway at Night,” 1910); pad thai (“Fourteenth Street,” 1990); chicken noodle soup with root vegetables (“Night Scene from the Pierre Hotel-Showing Three Bridges,” 1960’s); pasta fagioli...

She said she likes flexing her culinary muscles, and that I am a good critic. Anytime I receive a text saying, shortly, “Doorknob time,” I get all excited. My neighbor calls it “meals on feet.” Pretty accurate. It takes just one flight to deliver them.

Anyhow, Pat had hip surgery recently. She has problems getting up the stairs to her fifth-floor walk-up apartment, but they have never stopped her from walking down to bring me her sweet culinary surprises.

\*\*\*

Thank you Pat, my dear neighbor and a friend, for your daily “quarantine care,” for making my days better and brighter, and for reminding me how beautiful both New York and New Yorkers are.

My upstairs neighbor, a long time tenant of our 19th-century building in the heart of Greenwich Village, began to share her sophisticated undertakings with me daily.



have a  
good night,  
haley

After my first month in isolation,  
a cashier at the takeout window  
said "have a good night, Haley"  
after reading my name from my  
credit card.

I said "thanks, you too," and  
thought about how nice it sounded  
to hear someone else say my name  
while I walked home.



MEG BURNS

## DON'T DIE:

Quit job, live in the wilderness of Alaska based on knowledge from survivorman episode where he catches salmon and is nearly driven insane by dreams

Quit job, get to Nimben, Australia and simply vibe

Quit job, acquire sugar daddy, move in with him as caretaker, get boob job, collect deceased sugar daddy's fortune

Quit job, live in the attic of Francis Scott Key Hall as a vampire

Quit job, move to the Ozarks, sell eggs, water ski forever

Quit job, live on the beach in Venice and sell art on the street

Quit job, live on the beach in Venice and sell drugs on the street

Quit job, become assassin for hire on the dark web, live a life of luxury and evil in a Manhattan studio apartment

Quit job, copy Maureen Penderosa, enjoy life as a cat collecting alimony

Quit job, move to San Diego with boyfriend, be a tattoo artist

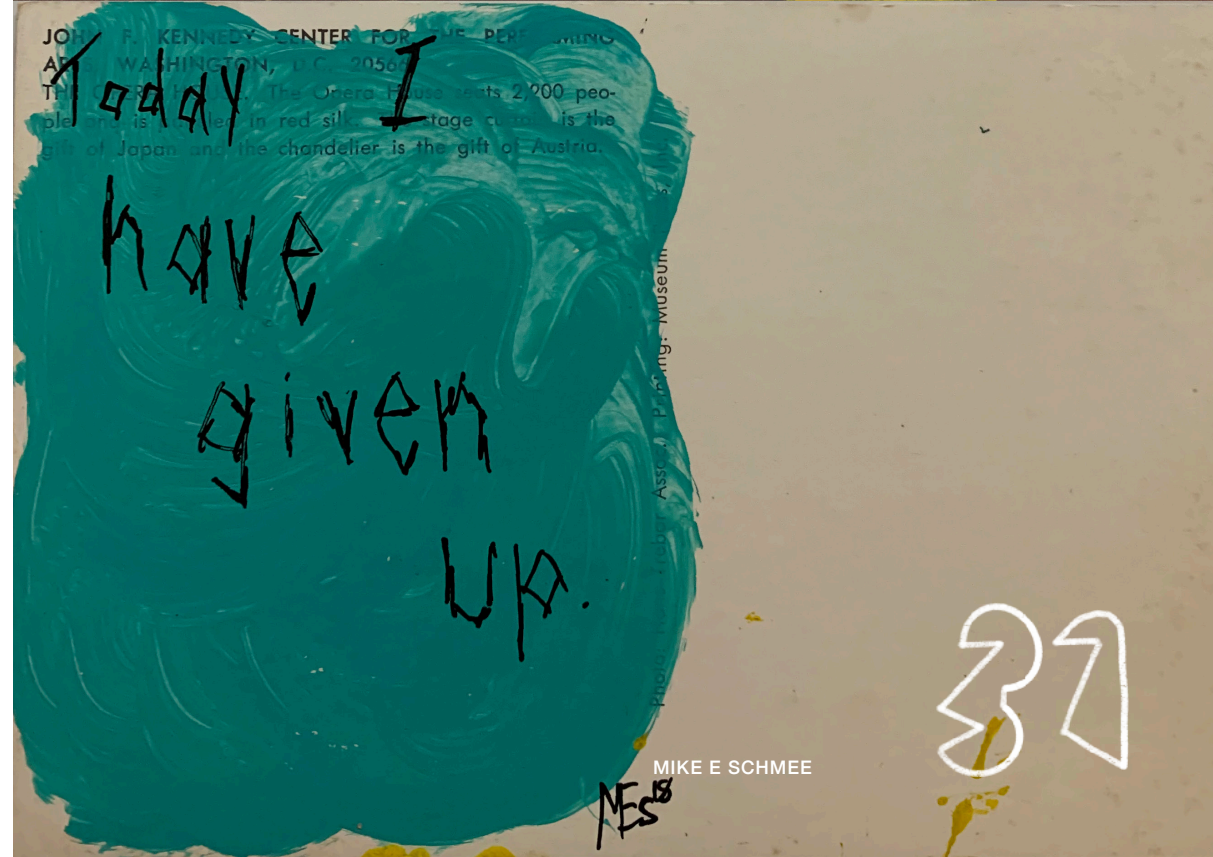
Quit job, rob a bank, live the rest of life on the run, fueled by the adrenaline of crime

Quit job, become famous, beloved chef/home improvement star, get arrested for insider trading, go to prison to live in luxury cell with hot prison wife

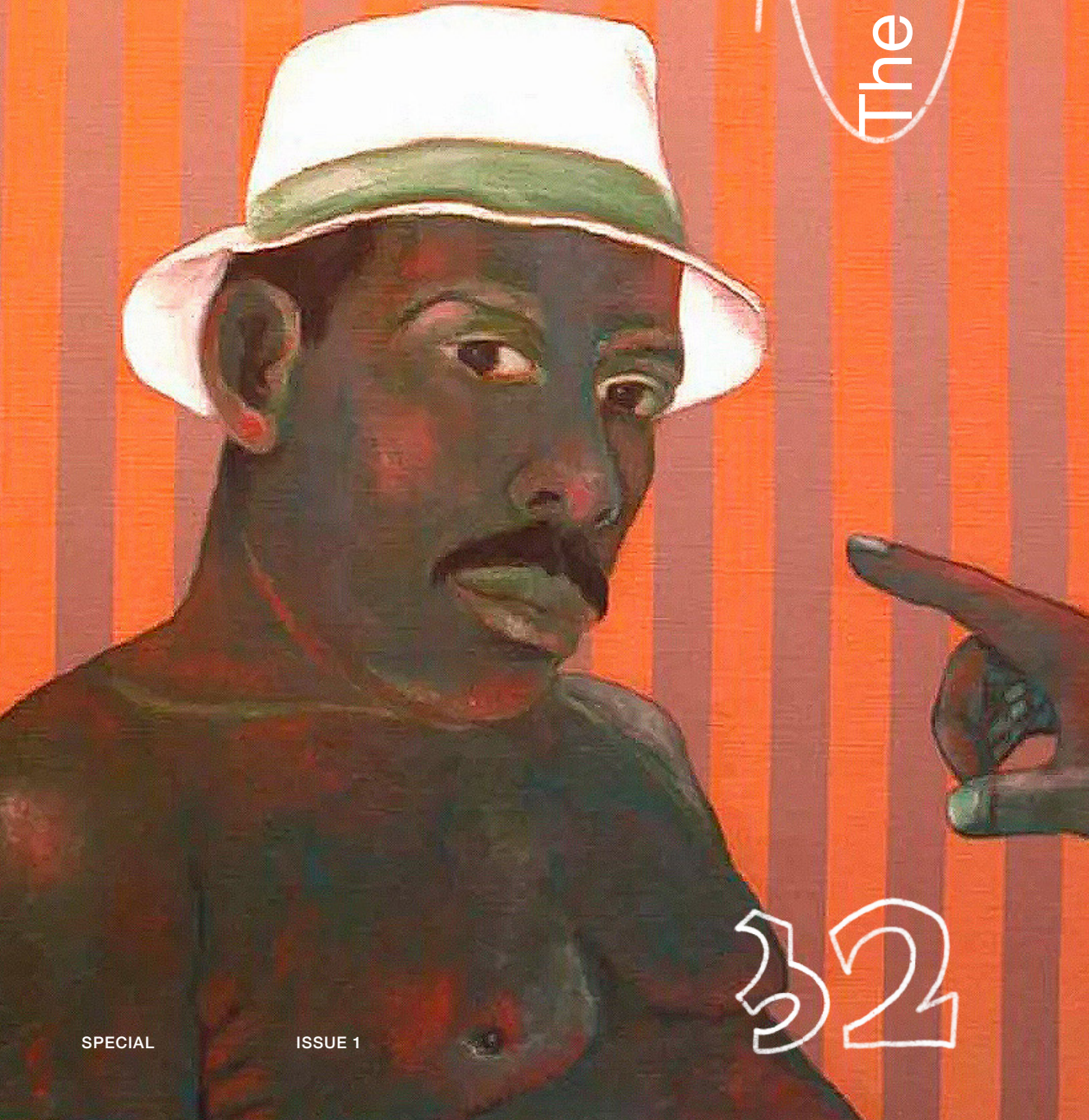
Quit job, live in a collective in Philly, participate in research experiments and clinical trials for money

Quit job, find Curtis in Nevada, commit war crimes, hunt and gather for sustenance, be a spy and fuck shit up by exposing people worldwide

Quit job, SURVIVE







JAKE MATTIS

whopper burger king calories  
how bad is whopper jr for you  
chipotle healthy  
closest chipotle  
stomachache alternative treatments

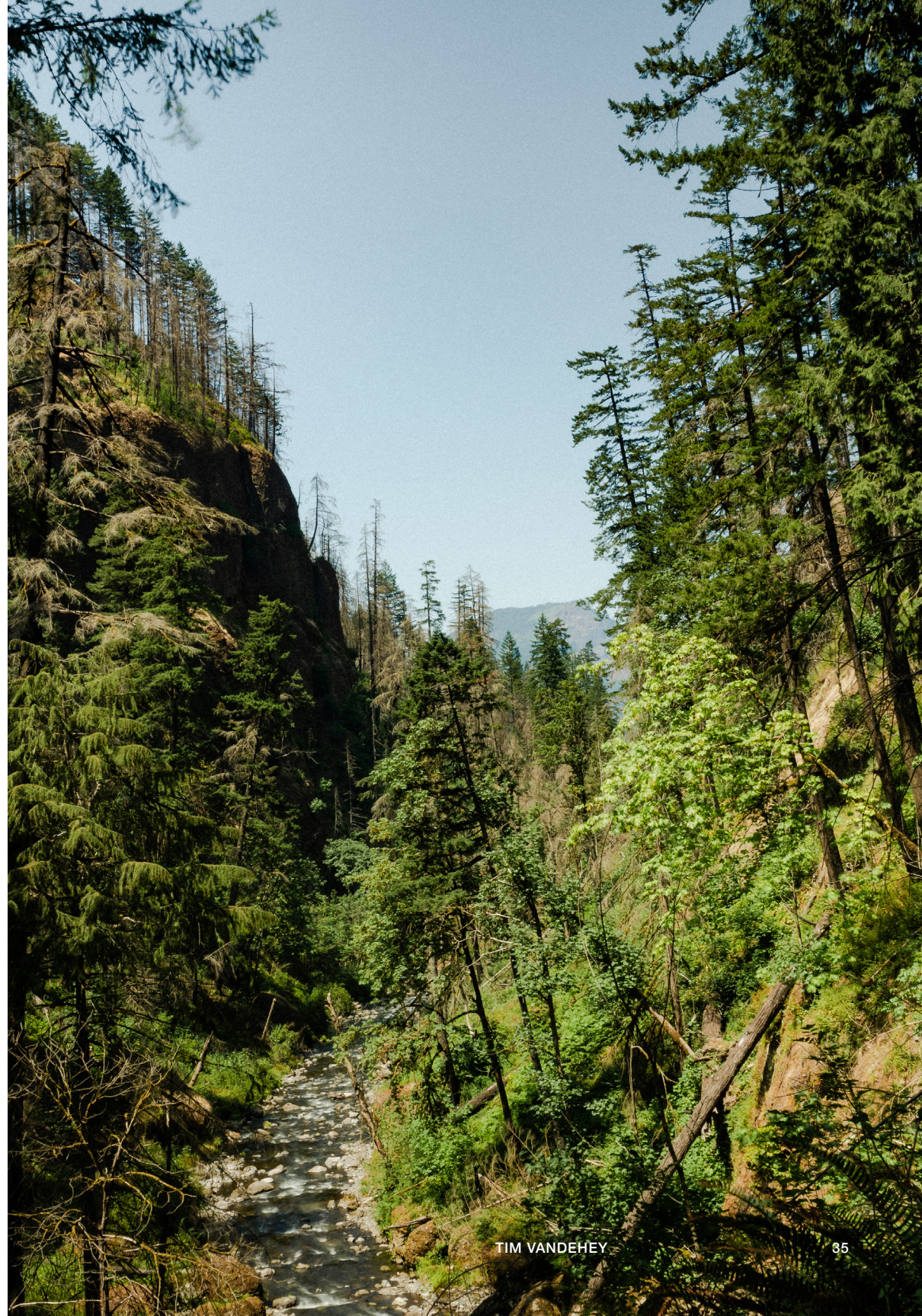
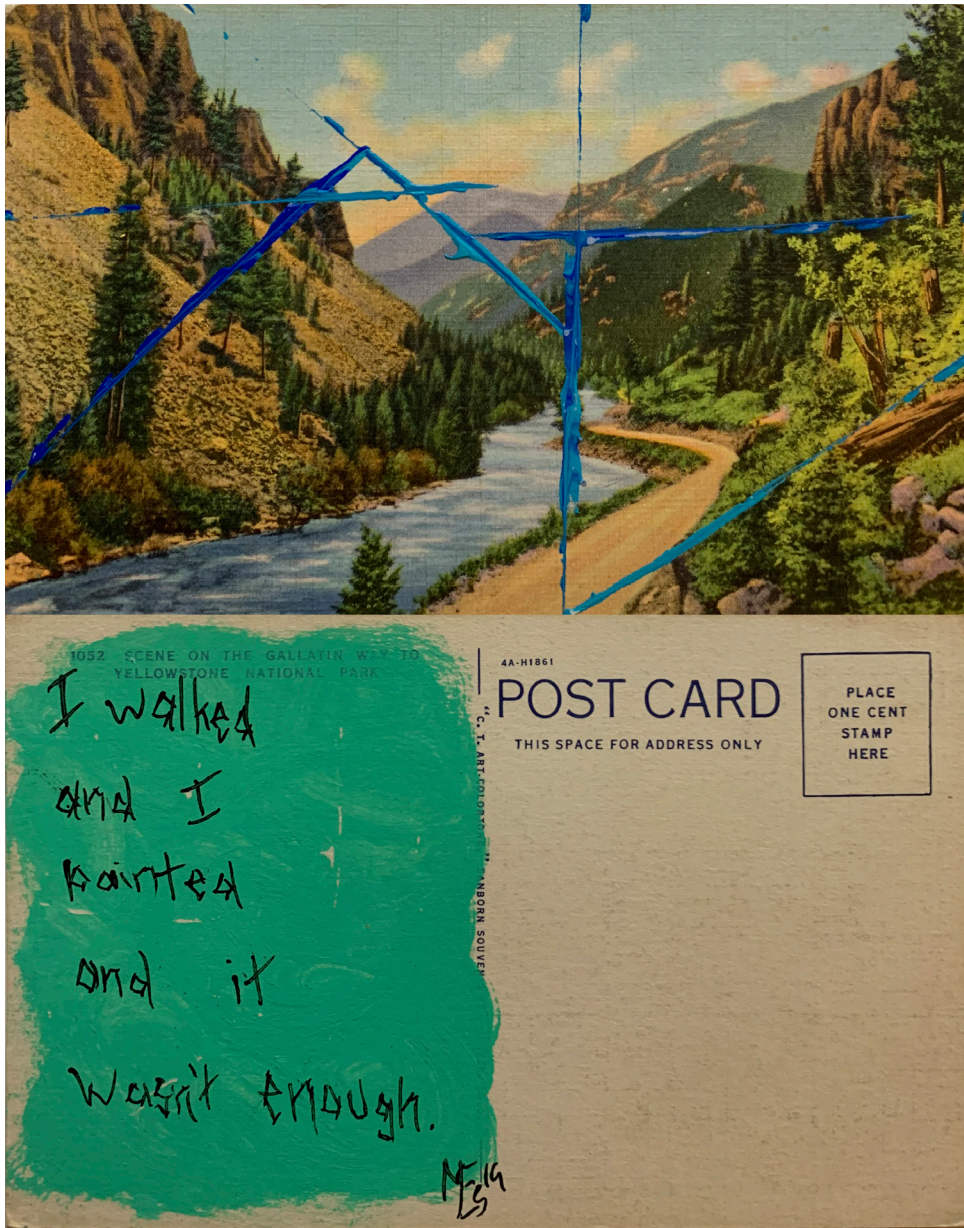
no go zones Sweden muslim  
no go zones SWEDEN Muslim sharia law truth  
COVERUP no go zones Sweden TRUMP truth

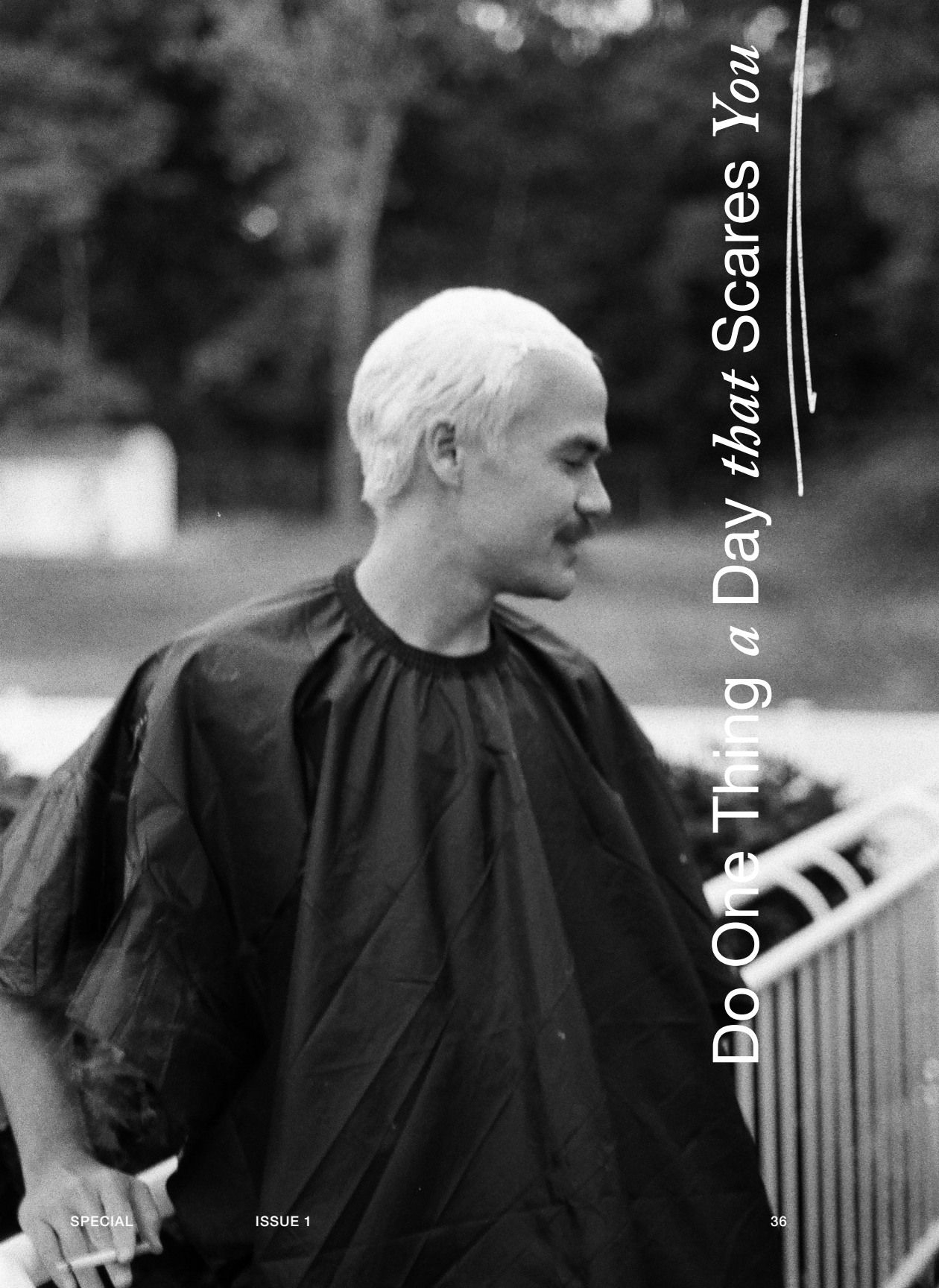
is weed still illegal in my state  
decriminalization  
decriminalization meaning  
stop v detain v arrest definitions  
can cop stop you not suspicious decriminalized  
innocent marijuana can cop search you? smell like  
weed decriminalized innocent marijuana cop stole  
my weed no cause decriminalized  
how to get cop to give weed back

police station number  
lawyers near me  
epic cop fails compilation ten minutes

rally fourth of july 2nd amendment  
rally fourth of july 2nd amendment most fun  
july 4th freedom rally kid friendly?  
july 4th freedom rally most safe

how much does it cost to break your arm  
hospitals near me  
hospitals in my network  
ambulance cost  
ambulance coupons  
can you drive with broken arm?  
how to drive with broken arm  
can you uncall 911 legal law crime





Do One Thing a Day that Scares You

CAROLINE GRONDAHL

## *Yes, I Took a Feminist Theory Class in College*

I'm reading Adrienne Rich.  
I want to dive into the wreck—  
not the wreckage.  
The wreckage is a pile of my forgotten shit  
by a door that is no longer mine.  
I don't care about the wreckage.  
Throw it in the trash,  
I'll be sustainable tomorrow.  
Something like 95% of the world's fossil fuels  
are produced by massive corporations.  
That's factually incorrect but ethically true.  
Discarding my blender properly so that  
you don't yell at me won't save us.  
(I put it on the street. Idk, it's NY?)  
I don't give a shit about my wreckage.  
I want to find the wreck itself.  
I want to find the core—  
I want it to burn my eyes,  
cause me to cover them and squint  
through my fingers.  
Using my other hand to guide me,  
the source is so bright it renders everything invisible.  
I want to come to the center of my being,  
eyes adjusting to the new light,  
the softer light.  
I want to walk up to her, my wreck,  
and see her so clearly I can see the  
ripples of water run through her body.  
And I want her to see me, too.

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# Poem

SAMANTHA URBAN

i forget how it became today because when i strain my neck to turn my gaze the path i'd been walking on had fully recovered replaced my footsteps were weeds they lay on the bare disturbed soil the weeds are tall they swarm they conquer they insert confusion into my head i crank my neck to look forward forward once again i am forced to go forward because there is no backward forward because what is behind me is not me it does not know me it is 48 degrees and a teaser of summer as i slip into jeans and refuse to throw on a coat and my headphones vibrate the brilliant acapellas of Brian Wilson and i smile as the sun kisses my cheeks and brings forth the wrinkles on the sides of my eyes as i squint and forward i go as i forget about the confusion that often strangles and straddles the ridges of my brain and the weeds that are so resilient refuse to give up but as i move forward the grip lessens and releases so forward i go



# Nice

OLIVIA HOWE

It was a Sunday in August that my dad and I went to the lake. By then I had spent a month or so in my hometown with my family after fleeing the at-the-time coronavirus epicenter that was New York City, but my dad and I hadn't spent much quality time together. So we made a plan to strap the hardly-used kayaks to the roof of the car and drive out to the small, man-made reservoir twenty minutes outside of town where we would enjoy the day and catch each other up on the happenings of our respective lives.

We plopped lawn chairs in the mud and sat under the make-do awning of the car's trunk door. We chatted a bit about the music playing from the car stereo, quoted a few of our favorite movie lines back and forth, and threw the ball for the dog. I was enjoying the dirty sun and the irony that everything in my life had ultimately led up to this moment.

"You know, I don't worry about you anymore."

My dad is like me in that I am like him. He once told me that people turn to us for reassurance, that we're natural born leaders who don't get the luxury of wearing our hearts on our sleeve because our sleeves are actually a shell. He said this in less poetic terms, but after years of internalizing what he said, this is the gist. So when he broke our small talk at the lake, I was beside myself.

"I used to worry about you, your mom and I both did. But I don't anymore. I worry about other things now."

I can't admit that I didn't know what to say to him, because I did know what to say; I just didn't know what to say first. Do I ask why he ever worried about me in the first place? Who else is worried? Tell him that, although my track record for having my shit together had some discrepancies, he should have always believed I knew what I was doing? Do I know what I'm doing? Or that I was happy that his new empty-nester lifestyle left so much room for him and Mom to break down the issue of whether or not I'm okay?

Am I okay?

“I’m okay, dad.”

“I know,” he said. “That’s why I’m not worried.”

That was the end of the conversation.

I had spent years of my life trying to prove to anyone with a thumb and a smartphone that I was okay. And in the initial months of the pandemic, I also felt the pressure to prove to myself that I was okay.

On that day with my dad, I was the most okay that I had ever been. In fact, things weren’t just okay; things were nice. And the days after that weren’t just nice, but they were good.

But I wish I hadn’t wasted my one line in that conversation. If I had one redo on that special afternoon, it would’ve been to ask:

“What other things do you worry about now?”



# August 15, 2020

MOLLY MEYER

The days are marked by deliveries

and I’m on a ferry facing west, waiting for the point when all the buildings in Manhattan fall in line. Taylor tells me that sky and clouds are like tie-dye, well she was on shrooms but the boat rocks and I’m aware of my body in a way I associate with drugs I haven’t done. The river in August seems okay to swim in and we all sit separately.

Sam waves at every passerby or even whole apartment towers like on Roosevelt Island yet each time I look there are no faces.

Sometimes it feels very lonely and other times less so because I know how to say things like *Adelphi* or *Stuyvesant* or *Make sure the ferry is going in the right direction* how we used to with the trains. In this way, I belong to a place. Sharing can be plain like a sidewalk.

Well along 12th Street in Queens there’s a garden full of Greek herbs and an ashtray on the porch and one of those old white dogs that are brown around the mouth. We talk about an exorcism and a hot cousin, about a different *Summer of Sam* and the way anxiety used to be, darting eyes across the dining table. We go home with village bread cradled in tinfoil and agree to finish it in two mornings.

My package arrives the day after. I want to tell everything and nothing to a person who’s lived on my phone for longer than lockdown. Isn’t it a pity? Me, sitting in a triangle of light that cut through concrete to reach my window. Writing things like, *Heartbreak is the space after the name calling*. Using heartbroken and lonely interchangeably.

# Goy Nonsense:

MICHELLE WATERS

Somewhere in Janet Malcolm's writings about psychoanalysis, she says that listening in on another person's analysis would offer you a baffling, disorienting experience—you wouldn't have any context for the patient's ramblings, plus psychoanalysis is a notoriously opaque process. Watching a Hallmark Christmas movie provides pretty much the opposite of that: no matter when you turn a given movie on, it won't take you more than a moment to figure out what's happening. Mostly without fail, the leads meet, fight, soften toward one another, are torn apart by an easily resolved misunderstanding, then kiss for the first time in the seconds before the credits start to roll. All you need to do is locate where they are in this journey, and you'll instantly understand what's coming next.

Growing up, I found Christmas and its trappings irritating, and I've leaned into that as a New Yorker whose workplace isn't far from Rockefeller Center and the frenzied Christmas crowds its tree draws to Midtown. In general, I prefer to pretend that winter isn't happening to me: I can never bring myself to wear an appropriately heavy coat, and if there's snow on the ground, I can guarantee my socks will soak through within minutes thanks to my aversion to functional shoes. Each December evening for three years, I'd leave my office on Fifth Avenue and plunge into the mass of Christmas shoppers on my way to the subway. Pausing to bear witness to the tourists choosing violence toward one another in front of UNIQLO, I would try to imagine looking forward to Christmas with the same passion they shared. As a Jew who's never celebrated the holiday, I simply didn't get it. If I closed my eyes, I always thought, then maybe it would all go away.

Last year, of course, was different. My office closed in March, and I've been staying at my parents' house since July. Enter Hallmark Christmas movies.

## *On Watching* Hallmark Christmas *Movies*

Picture the typical Hallmark Channel viewer. You're probably not imagining my dad: a chatty Jewish guy in his sixties, he's a Long Islander by birth and a New Jerseyite by choice. His taste in television ordinarily runs to sports and sitcoms, especially *Seinfeld*, which he DVRs without fail. (At the moment, there are 171 episodes recorded and ready for him to watch.) Dad started watching Hallmark Christmas movies last year because, he says, there weren't any sports on TV. He's long had a soft spot for low-stakes rom-coms, but these were a fresh discovery. By the middle of the summer, he'd made them enough of a habit that he could predict each movie's ending before the first commercial break.

The standard Hallmark Christmas movie starts out by introducing the viewer to its leads, two of the top hundred people with the straightest teeth in the world. In a classic win for feminism, the woman tends to have a creative, wholesome job that requires a ton of her energy and time. She has big dreams: she's a baker who yearns to open her own cupcake shop, or a frustrated children's book illustrator who's brainstorming ideas for what will become her breakout series. We're made to understand that she's uptight, often by a secondary character who shows up in the first five minutes to chastise her for failing to get back out there after a bad breakup that took place months, sometimes years, earlier. We also meet our male lead. He might be a guy who works with his hands, or the female lead's childhood best friend, or, more rarely, a professional rival. If he's not her ex, then he's likely a widower, the rare person who comes equipped with sex and commitment skills minus the baggage associated with divorce. Sometimes, it's the female lead who dons a cowboy hat and winds up reminding the guy of his roots. For one flimsy reason or another, they're usually at odds with each other when the movie begins.



If one of the leads is dating someone at the start of the movie, their partner will have a suite of awful qualities that'll all but force you to root against the existing relationship. Most of the time it's the female lead who's saddled with an awful dude. It's hard to worry that a heroine will make the wrong call when one of her choices is so cartoonishly horrible, but I can't deny that the occasional love triangle will deliver some of the most satisfying moments that Hallmark Christmas movies have to offer. These career-oriented heroines have boyfriends who delight in managing their girlfriends' careers but otherwise treat them coldly, or are too absorbed in their own jobs to pay much attention to what's going on with their partners. There's often a moment—and this is always one of my favorites—when the boyfriend fails to remember the lead's favorite flower, color, or small-town Christmas memory. We're meant to take this as a sign that he doesn't truly know her, not in the way a viewer might crave being known by proxy. Somewhere along the way, maybe thanks to an incident like this, a relatively drama-free breakup goes down, and the leading lady is left free to pursue her dreams with the life-changing support of her (spoiler!) new man.

These movies don't let you forget that they take place during the holiday season for even a second, though mistletoe doesn't show up as frequently as you might imagine. Cozy country inns serve as their settings way more often than they have any right to. For months, Dad has been threatening to create a bingo board featuring the motifs that appear with mind-numbing regularity: hot chocolate, gingerbread, orphanhood, Christmas tree lightings. Events generally culminate in a Christmas party, gala, or festival. Much of the time, the female lead is a Christmas superfan, and the man she falls for is a curmudgeon who won't hang so much as a single heirloom ornament. As he learns to love again, he also comes to love—you guessed it—Christmas. At first, largely for this reason, I resisted joining Dad in watching these movies. I'd walk into the living room and find him tittering at a film with a title like *Once Upon a Christmas Card*. "This is ridiculous," he'd say, rewinding a few seconds to show me a woman falling off of a ladder at a tree-lighting ceremony and landing in her love interest's arms (or whatever). "Watch this." I'd stay, but only for a few moments. I didn't think I could handle more cheesiness than that.

I was wrong, as you now know. It would be a mistake to say that Hallmark Christmas movies are poorly written. While they tend to have plenty of plot holes, and the dialogue is sometimes wooden, I've arrived at the opinion that their writers' adherence to the Hallmark Christmas formula is downright heroic. These movies are produced in such a way that it's difficult to distinguish between the commercials that air during their breaks and their actual content, which I believe is one of the best qualities a movie can have. That consistency, paired with the cringe factor, seduced me. After a few months, I started staying longer each time Dad shared an outrageous scene with me. We began picking out movies and pausing the TV to yell at them together. Those pauses add up. Now that we're well into winter, it routinely takes Dad and me two-and-a-half hours to watch a ninety-minute Hallmark movie. As ridiculous as the formula is, we've both come to love it, and our highly colored commentary provides a decent portion of the fun. There's something cathartic about reacting with exaggerated shock and mild scorn to on-the-nose lines and plot points we've seen coming for ages.

I'll give you an example. In one movie we watched last month, the male lead—a pro athlete down on his luck—says to his love interest, "Sometimes I feel like it's just about winning."

Dad pressed pause. "Are you kidding? That is what it's about. You're a professional athlete. That's what you get paid to do," he said.

We've developed strong opinions about our favorite stars and variations on the standard plotline, plus a keen sense of precisely when key moments will take place and a vocabulary for identifying them. These are the terms we scream out at each other in mirth and triumph the second we identify a scene that embodies them. Each movie is imbued from start to finish with Small Town Values, even if it's set in a city. If the setting is urban, it's midwestern or Canadian. What Dad and I call the Softening usually takes place at around the thirty-seven minute mark. This is the moment when the romantic leads, who've been clashing for the rest of the movie's runtime, visibly realize that they may share some common ground after all. This is followed within twenty minutes or so by the Awakening, the moment when they register that they're attracted to one another. Again, this could hardly play out across their faces in a more legible way. Sometimes their eyes flick down



to each other's lips, which is a solid way to signal that you're interested in kissing someone, according to the women's magazine articles I read when I grow fearful that after nearly a year of isolation I've forgotten how to kiss.

And while I'm on the subject of kissing, let me make one thing extremely clear: these movies contain two kisses at most. There's often an Interrupted Kiss at around the halfway mark. Interrupted Kisses come in two flavors. What Dad and I have termed the Self-Interrupted Kiss involves the soon-to-be couple realizing mid-lean-in that kissing would be a mistake (after all, they don't get along!) or succumbing to bashfulness and pulling away from one another. Then there's the Classic, a kiss that's interrupted by a third party, likely a dog or a precocious child with a patrician last name for a first name. In a typical Hallmark Christmas movie, the sole actual kiss comes in the final seconds before the credits. Sometimes the main pair affirm their burgeoning feelings for each other through this first kiss. In many cases, though, they commit to each other for life minutes before they kiss for the first time.

I love it when Dad and I notice the same plot holes, or when he congratulates me on predicting a development he didn't see coming. The two of us have always bonded over movies and shows. As a kid, I'd watch his Monty Python VHS tapes for hours whenever I got sick, then notice him smile, proud and surprised, when I quoted the Cheese Shop sketch out of context days or weeks later. ("Greek feta? Not as such.") He took me to see *She's the Man* in theaters and prefers Amana Bynes to Lindsay Lohan and Hilary Duff.

Dad's getting older. Like Christmas, my parents' aging is something I've long preferred to ignore. But the pandemic has forced me to acknowledge that Dad won't be around to heckle movies with me forever. I don't want to take his laughter, or my luck in sharing it, for granted again.

About twenty minutes before the end of each Hallmark Christmas movie, in the segment before the final commercial break, there's usually a Big Misunderstanding. The protagonist sees her love interest hugging his ex, for instance, or the celebrity who's returned to his hometown mishears an overheard conversation. As a result, one person starts refusing to take the other's calls.

Maybe the celebrity leaves his hometown, vowing never to return. This is the moment that tends to provoke the strongest reaction from Dad and me, typically a celebratory elbow bump and our loudest yelling. These misunderstandings are so contrived, so unnecessary for reasons of both plot and character development, that they render the entire movie's project of keeping two hot people apart for no good reason utterly transparent.

The last seven minutes are really all a viewer needs to see. In the final scene of a typical Hallmark Christmas movie, the leads sort out their Big Misunderstanding, declare their love for one another, and kiss for the first time.

Mom is still coming around to them, and my brother doesn't have much patience for Hallmark movies, either. A few weeks ago, though, they both sat down to watch the final scene of a movie called *The Twelve Gifts of Christmas* with Dad and me. I'd missed the first forty-five minutes, but it didn't matter. *The Twelve Gifts of Christmas* follows a personal shopper named Anna Parisi (Katrina Law) who helps Marc Rehnquist (Aaron O'Connell), a businessman who's too busy for Christmas, select gifts for his family. Obviously, they fall in love. In the movie's last seven minutes, she shows up at his parents' house on Christmas Day to resolve their Big Misunderstanding. My family watched Marc's precocious nephews open the Christmas gifts he'd selected with Anna's help, their excitement driving home her perfect fit in Marc's family and life as the movie came to an end.

Mom reached for the remote. "Are those kids still wearing their pajamas?" she said. "They should get dressed. It's the middle of the day."

"That's some goy nonsense," I said.

Dad looked over at me. "You know who you remind me of right now? Your grandmother."

And that's the story of how I fell in love with Christmas.





# 3-D Nudes

OLEK PISERA

It can be hard to retrace the steps of why you do something. A distant memory, something you saw in an antique store, a childhood experience, an interaction with a stranger, coalescing into an action. All of these came together for me and out spewed my opus: 3D nudes.

My parents immigrated from Poland to the US in the 1990s and brought with them a Soviet affinity for photo albums and film photography. My mom inherited the tendency from her father (my dziadek), who had shot hundreds of beautiful rolls on a USSR manufactured camera. Because regular film wasn't available in communist Poland, all of his pictures were on Kodak Ektachrome slide film. A couple years ago my mom brought some of the slides back from a trip to see her parents, which was the first time I ever saw color positive film.

I moved to New York in 2018. I got a studio in the East Village, my first time ever living alone. Exploring the neighborhood, I stumbled on a cool but kitschy antique store called Obscura (later featured heavily in the show *Russian Doll*), an intentionally dusty spot featuring old medical equipment, creepy dolls, mummified human hands. Digging around their drawers I spotted a familiar object, a round photo reel that fits into a little plastic device and produces a 3D image. Growing up I had reels with pictures of sharks, *Rugrats* at the circus, *Jurassic Park*. The ones at the antique store were weirdly intimate pictures of kids at Christmas, a classic car, partially degraded film of a lady in a white dress. These clearly were not commercially made because no one would be interested in seeing these. I bought a few random reels.

April 2020: the northern hemisphere had begun its slow tilt towards the sun. I was coming out of my (apparently) yearly routine of spending the winter obsessing over some hobby after breaking off whichever summer love had dragged into the fall. That winter had I learned guitar chord inversions, and how to develop film. Spring is normally when I shake the rust off and start the dating cycle over again, but, alas, COVID.



At that time, my friend had started dating a French girl while he was locked down in Philadelphia; a complicated affair that escalated quickly. I was complaining to him about the coincidence of me emerging from my seasonal-affective celibacy with the ongoing COVID induced sterilization of New York. He felt for me. His French girlfriend had a hot Norwegian girl that she would set me up with. Awesome.

A few days later I got a text, and started talking to her, Emma. We texted for a bit and

made the leap to chatting on Facetime. I opened the conversation by asking her where in the city she was trapped. She was trapped, but in Norway. I thought that was pretty funny. We kept talking though, she was cool, and we could both use the company. She told me about abandoned houses she was exploring in her town and sent me a little photo book she made.

One stoned COVID evening I was looking at the things sitting around my apartment and found the old reels. Some of them were decrepit and the slides would fall out of the reel like dry fish scales.

I started researching the reels. They were invented in the 50's and rode a wave of interest in 3D representation of images. The manual for the camera boasts: "Each reel of 7 Stereo Pairs can be a production that 'stars' your family and friends. More than just a photographer, you will be author, director, and film editor. Your Reels will be picture stories admired by everyone."



Emma gave me her address and I googled how many postage stamps it takes to get a letter to Norway. I wondered if a customs officer might have a Viewmaster lying around so he could appreciate my work. A couple weeks later she got the reel. She was delighted as far as I could tell.

We kept in touch for a while and made some attempts at plans to visit each other, but as the months passed those seemed less realistic. Later that summer I visited my friend with the French girlfriend in Serbia, where he had moved for reasons related to being in love and travel restrictions. French GF and I made a strong attempt to get Emma to come down, but it would have been difficult in her present circumstances.

She's the only person who's seen that reel other than me. When a friend asked to see it, I ran into the limits of my artistic boldness. Censored reel with her hand included.

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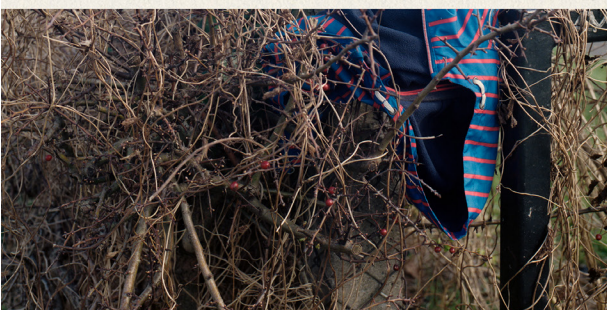




THIS IS THE LAST PHOTO I TOOK IN THE LAST SERIES I WORKED ON BEFORE I LEFT IRELAND FOR GERMANY

SOMEONE WAS KILLED RIGHT HERE

IT'S NOT EASY TO GRASP



TO BE HONEST I'VE COME TO REALISE A MOMENT ISN'T WHAT IS HAPPENING

BUT ALL AROUND IT



I SHOT ONE ROLL OF FILM BEFORE I LEFT

THE LAB FUCKED IT UP AND THE IMAGES SUCK

(THERE'S A GOLF COURSE BELOW HERE)



THE PEOPLE ARE ODD HERE

EVERYONE SPEAKS GERMAN

I DON'T SPEAK GERMAN

ROUTINE DOESN'T MEAN SHIT



WHEN THE LOCKDOWN GOT EASIER

WE TOOK A TRAIN TO A DIFFERENT CITY

NO ONE THERE WORE MASKS BUT WE SEEN A CAT



WHEN I MOVED HERE WE SLEPT ON THE FLOOR

IT WAS THE BEST I'D EVER SLEPT

THIS PAGE LOOKS LIKE A LOT OF MOMENTS IT ISN'T

IT'S JUST ANGLES

I think the piece says this better, as well as lays bare my influences.

# THIS YEAR SUCKED SO MUCH OF MY ARTISTIC AND JOURNALISTIC ENERGY.

DANIEL DUGGAN

Hey sorry I'm now bugging you again about this but I needed time to process and reflect a bit because this whole thing ended so abruptly (hence tears).

I'm not sure if I brought up getting tested myself before each time I see you. I just feel like if that's not an acceptable solution (on top of my roommate getting tested 3x a week, PCR) then this whole thing feels much more personal.

I know in the past I've tried being clear about what I wanted only because everything was moving so fast (which is natural given the circumstance). I'm just not used to that.

I don't know if you were looking for a label or something to make it clear to your roommates that they couldn't cut me out. But we were already exclusive. I felt like we were there for each other. I hope it felt like I was there for you.

I still feel it's wrong for your roommates to deny you romantic relationships, even if it's not me. Especially if 2 are in a relationship themselves. And if proper precautions are put in place.

Otherwise, why live here without a little safe fun. Everyone might as well be saving money living at home or somewhere else.

Anyways, like I said: I'll be ok and you'll be ok. But life would be better seeing you. It's ok if you don't feel the same. Your silence can confirm if you don't want to respond.

Delivered

12.11.2020

DANYA VOLLENWEIDER

"He died two years ago" were words that I did not expect to hear. They still hit me like a fist—the indescribable feeling that the chapter has closed.

To my biological father: I found your profile around two years ago (I can't recall if I found it before or after your death) and I even talked about reaching out. People encouraged me, too, but I was anxious and shy and I didn't speak your language well. I'm sorry. I should have reached out.

I was ready to in June 2020 and I messaged you, though your profile hadn't been active since 2014. No response. I thought to myself, it's an old account and he's busy.

In December, I did the scariest thing I've ever done—I asked my mother for information about you. Over a few hours, she gave me names of long-forgotten grandparents, uncles, and aunts. And you.

I became obsessed, Googled each one, picked up language lessons. All I could think about was my first reaction to you and your first reaction to me. All these images in my head of us calling and video chatting and eventually meeting up. I would still struggle with talking, but that's okay, because you would also learn my language. I imagined it to be awkward, but fun. I wish it wasn't true, or that someone, anyone, had told me about your death.

Pavel, I'm so sorry. I wish that I was kinder and better ten years ago, but I was just a child. I'll try my best to know you. I will always love you.



# Burning Man

His name is Ryan. And he burns.  
 Red Hot burning. Ryan burns so much and so hotly that everything  
 he touches turns black and charred. He burns so brightly  
 that people from miles away will look  
 and ask themselves what all that smoke is about.  
 Turns out it's just Ryan.  
 He's not a pyromaniac, no. He's no arsonist.  
 He never carries a lighter, but he burns. Ryan burns nonetheless.  
 And it's a loud burning.  
 Crackling and spewing heat out into the empty space that surrounds him.  
 Often it's so loud that Ryan himself cannot sleep and is forced to sit there  
 and stew,  
 angry and even more angry still  
 because there is no place at which to aim this anger but himself.  
 It's his fault he burns and he cannot turn it off.  
 Burning man. He burns.  
 When he goes for a leisurely walk, people see desolation in his path.  
 When he takes a shower in the morning, the water does not reach him.  
 It vaporizes instantly and he does not feel it.  
 He burns.  
 It's true that much of his day is spent staring at his own wristwatch.  
 He asks it, "When?"  
 "When will all this burning end? It must end, mustn't it?"  
 And his wristwatch answers



*tick.*

*tick.*

*tick.*

So Ryan burns. It's true some days that Ryan will get ice at the store  
 and the ice will ease his burning somewhat.  
 A little.  
 Ryan may even forget for a moment that he is in fact burning.  
 He'll think of nice things that you or I would think about,  
 like chocolate and rainbows and big tall buildings.  
 But he's still burning and in a moment again he remembers.  
 He burns. Burning man.  
 He burns.  
 He doesn't know why he burns. Or he thinks he doesn't know—  
 he's gone through great pains to forget.  
 But every time the fire fighters are called, they come  
 and he hears their sirens and he remembers something.  
 He remembers when he caught fire.  
 And he knows that he, burning man, who burns deep into the night  
 And keeps neighbors up with his crackling;  
 Who fills up the bathroom with steam every morning  
 and every evening sets his pillow aflame;  
 Who walks out into the world every day  
 knowing full well the dangers inherent in his existence.  
 He knows that he burns.  
 And he knows too, that someday he won't.

# Cherished Ones

VANESSA ANDERSON

*Is a song tied to a moment or is it the other way around?* Hard to say.

## LOVE'S CALLING - WOMACK & WOMACK

I listened to this song on repeat for three days then forgot about it for three months. Until the chorus melody got lodged in my brain and I walked around humming it into my phone and my friends ears. "What's that song that goes woohh woooahhh wowowowoooah?" I thought I was being clear but nobody knew what on earth I was talking about. Then one day while I was on the train, from the depths of the shuffle algorithm it emerged, I almost yelled.

It's so soothing and sweet, it reminds me of dates (the fruit), Long Island City, wrapping yourself up in a scarf, and the gentle way the subway tends to halt.

## NEW FLESH - CURRENT JOYS

The first time I heard this song it was the soundtrack to a Vine (the OG video app, Tiktok Lite if you will). The Vine in question was a montage some kid in California made of his friend who recently died of cancer. The video was only six seconds (they all were, that's how Vine worked) but it was enough to rip my heart out. I didn't know the girl who died but I found myself deeply interested in her life. I laid on my side in bed for hours scrolling through videos from every member of their friend group, absorbing their last recorded moments with her. I learned about the music she liked, the hats she wore, how things changed after she got sick, what they brought to the hospital to make her laugh and how her death affected each of them in different ways, all in six second vignettes. Then I fell asleep, and never managed to find those accounts again. I forget her name but every time I hear this song I think of her.

## SUNRISE - NORAH JONES

This song is my mom and dad. It's wooden floorboards and crosswords and a kiss on the forehead. It's fat slices of cantaloupe and chilled cucumber soup. It's stacks of books about birds and ships and castles. It's towels fresh out of the dryer. I don't care if it's TJ Maxx music it will always be more than that to me!!!

## MERCURY - JAMES MCALISTER, SUFJAN STEVENS, NICO MUHLY & BRYCE DESSNER

When I was in college I got really drunk and fell in love with a man I met in line for pizza. After hours of walking around in the cold together I started bawling, kissed him thrice, then I ran away into the night. He gaslit me for like six months after that but I let it slide because I liked how he put googly eyes on every appliance in his apartment. I listened to this song for the first time the morning after we met, when he was just a mystery and everything felt giddy and new. The snow started to fall during the crescendo. It sounds like a lullaby and an epic poem, would recommend a listen if you're smitten.

## GURBET - ÖZDEMİR ERDOĞAN

I don't speak Turkish so I used to refer to this song as a banger, then I looked up the lyrics (which are heartbreaking) and now refer to it as a masterpiece. It was my go to pick in the car when I used to go out on the town with my friends, no one appreciated it which makes sense. I intentionally failed to read the room time and time again so I could sneak in one more listen before my brain rendered it overdone. It reminds me of crossing the Manhattan Bridge and putting on lip gloss and belly laughs. The lyrics are about a much more poignant and substantial homesickness than my homesickness for those moments, but I am sick for em just the same.

## HACKENSACK - FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE

When COVID hit I went home to upstate New York to quarantine with my parents. I tried to get out of the house for long walks as often as possible. On one of those walks, I came upon a gigantic ramp colony. Ramps are essentially wild onions, a springtime delicacy and luxury item due to their short season and limited quantity. Over the next month I took periodic trips to the ramp patch and harvested handfuls from different sections of the woods. We blended them into a butter and smeared it on steak, tossed it with pasta, and spread it on warm bread. Maybe it's because this song is about lingering in your hometown, but it met the moment and became the soundtrack to all ramp foraging trips in April of 2020. Now whenever I hear it my mouth tastes like onions.



SCAN FOR FULL PLAYLIST









MAXWELL GOLD

MICHELLE  
BELGRD

EVAN  
MALINOW

NICK KIM

MOLLY MEYER

CHRISTIANA  
CROMER

SARAH TEICH

MONIKA  
HANKOVA

SAMANTHA URBAN

MICHELLE WATERS

CANDICE ZHENG

CHELSEA  
BRENNAN  
HALL

CAROLINE  
GRONDAHL

OLEK PISERA

MEG BURNS

ALLISON KRITZ

LILY BLUMKIN

HALEY KOCH

TIM VANDEHEY

DANIEL DUGGAN

KELLY  
CAVENDER

MIKE E SCHMEE

OLIVIA HOWE

HELEN GALLIAN

DANYA  
VOLLENWIDER

AVERY FRIEDMAN

BETH  
JACKSON

LEON NICHOLAS  
KOLAS

VANESSA  
ANDERSON

JAKE MATTIS