



WB

WRITER'S BLOCK

*Students' magazine for  
writing, film & literature*

# COLOPHON

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# *an editorial*

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*“When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.”*

Paulo Coelho

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Writer’s Block has experienced a unique enthusiasm brought into the new board. Being composed of members who are strongly motivated, we are all dedicated to a common goal: further developing a magazine that we are all passionate about. From paying meticulous attention to detail to demonstrating compassion to encouraging enticing discussions both related and unrelated to the magazine, each member has offered a valuable take on all aspects of being a part of the board. We feel we have created a space for growth, not only in terms of interpersonal skills and collaboration but also by providing a means for writers to grow in the artistic world. Furthermore, we were not limited by any issues regarding the pandemic for the first time in what feels like forever. Having the privilege to attend in-person meetings consistently strengthened the bond between the members, allowing us to effectively work within a positive environment.

Although we are very grateful for the positive improvements within our environment, we still have to address the bigger picture of what is happening around us. We have seen and experienced, directly or indirectly, the world issues that have arisen in 2022. Leaving the pandemic behind only to face something darker and more challenging feels almost unimaginable. With such inhumane events destroying our reality and negatively impacting so many, we must shine a positive light on what it means to be human. As the threats against the certainty of the future of our world loom over us, it is important to counter such cruel actions with love, support and sympathy.

Still, sometimes it is comforting to dissociate from reality to escape the ruthless events occurring at the moment. Luckily, literature is well known for its magnificent ability to be a tool for escapism. Over the last five months, we have received and read a lovely variety of submissions about a wide range of topics that positively contributed to our creative development and, essentially, to the making of Issue 49. In the following pages, you will encounter two beautifully written short stories about personal relationships and the passing of time, along with poems with the themes of personal growth, social struggles, heartache, and the beauty of creating art. Furthermore, our astonishing photography submissions encapture exquisite moments and treasured memories. We are thankful to all of the writers for providing us with distinctive contributions and also to our editorial board for adding a unique touch to the issue.

As turbulent and hectic as it was, 2022 proved that there is always a light at the end of every tunnel, should you wish to look for it. We hope to work towards a brighter 2023, one filled with strength, optimism and kindness. And remember, sometimes the brightest light comes from within.

Sincerely,

*Laiana & Julia*

# *Madame Montblanc*

by *Monica Sharp*

All hail the queen of the Alps!  
 My snow-blown skirts fold around land and people,  
 Countries gather reverently at my feet.  
 Toy towns and villages dream of the day when I once drew near the earth,  
 My crown horizontally shorn, the star of ice and glacier descended from heaven.  
 When people are close enough they crane their necks, blink their eyes.

I've seen my share of wars flare and fade.  
 Tin soldiers battened down at the pass burning paper in desperation  
 Too thinly clad to breathe at windwinter.  
 Even Romans marching through the Alpis Graia cursed the cold, yet  
 Choked on words when they saw my summit.

Lately, though, I seem to slump.  
 My shoulders soften, sore.  
 The world too warm for regal snow.  
 I lose more winter each summer  
 Every summer more and more.  
 Red algae blooms in my armpits,  
 At my nape,  
 Behind my ears.  
 I can't hold on.  
 Jagged gems crumble in every direction.  
 Every new thaw triggers thick *glissades*.  
 My glory fades like the long cold nights.  
 Who will know me now?

You reduce me to gravel and rubble,  
 Rocks and dust, a glacial memory  
 Trapped in each tiny pebble.

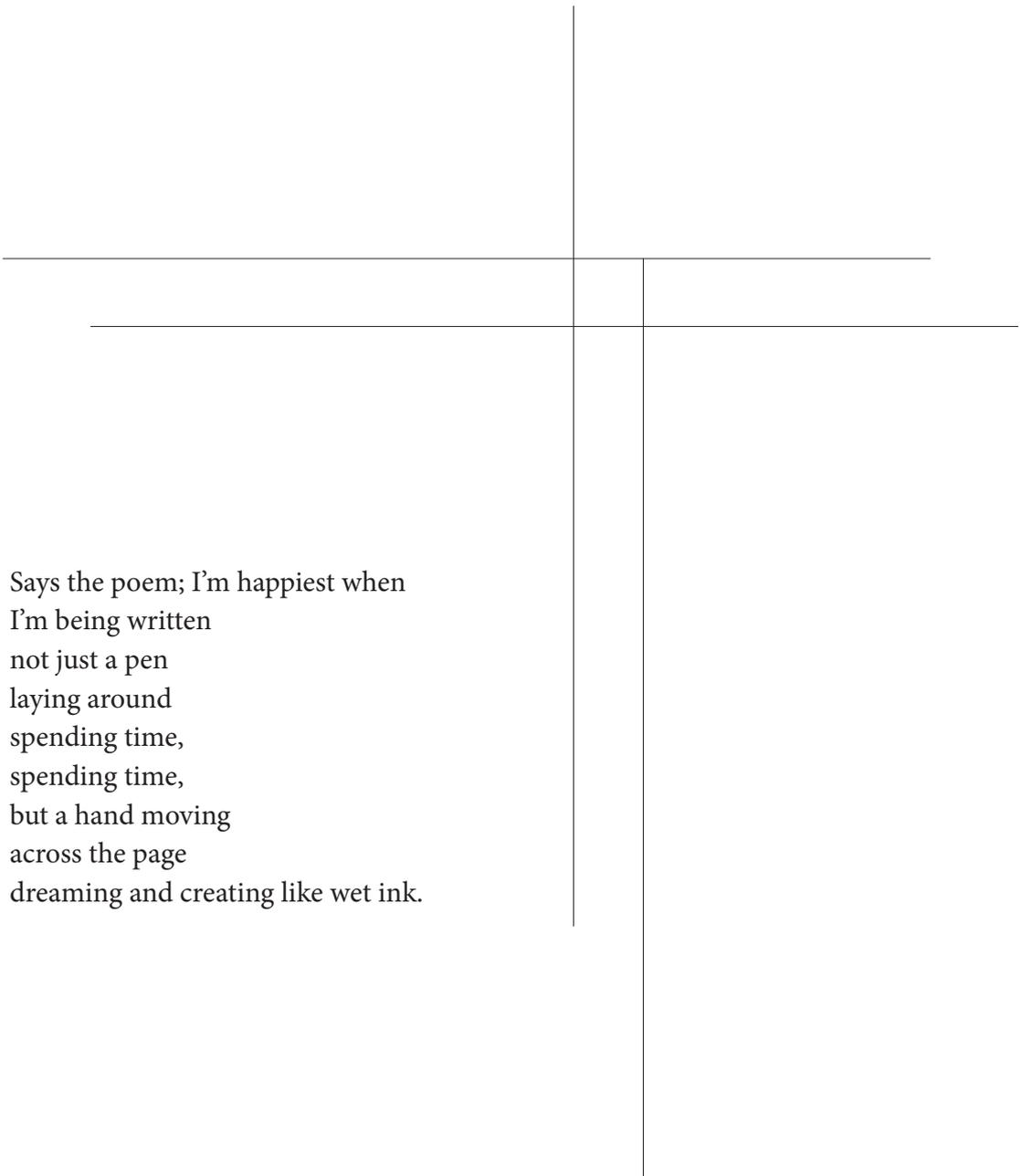
I turn toward the sun.  
 I square my shoulders.  
 Put my best face on.  
 Be proud in my waning years.  
 Remember and remind those people in their toy villages  
 Of the glory *that was once Madame Montblanc*.  
*I was here.*  
*I ruled this land.*  
 I am no more.  
 Bid me farewell - the queen of the Alps.



wonders  
*by Laiana Farias*

# A Poem Says

*Daniel P. Barbare*



Says the poem; I'm happiest when  
I'm being written  
not just a pen  
laying around  
spending time,  
spending time,  
but a hand moving  
across the page  
dreaming and creating like wet ink.

# Mournings

*by Astrid Floristeanu*

bread dipped in oil  
and five olives on the side

(they're easier to count  
than glass shards)

coffee stains on the stove  
for each time she got lost in thought

(He liked writing between the lines  
she was an avid reader)

outdated newspapers lying around  
'cause she still hasn't reached the cartoons

(her whimpers all the more hilarious  
when He knew she wouldn't leave)

cigarettes waiting to be rolled  
from the tobacco bought last Thursday

(she had one hanging out of her mouth  
for every insult that hung out of His)

only the chair creaking each time she sat down  
at her table for one

(Hughes was wrong – they didn't wear each other's face  
neither of them had a face anymore)

and blinds drawn shut  
because sunlight is too bright

mornings are all the same  
much like heartbreaks.



STOP

*by Federico*

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stop the word  
stop the bus  
stop all this

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*by Stefana Feciuc*

**Unminted**  
*by Monica Sharp*

How can I explain this to you?

Marry steel pins and white chalk.  
Chill the mixture.  
Ignore if the pins haphazardly splay in the ice cube tray.  
But note how cold, oh, so cold, an arctic chord,  
Sparkle flurry snow blowing  
To smoking dry places  
Melting on contact.

I taste a strange fear here.  
Something close to pain creeps in.  
Like that time you stood in the Gulf of Finland  
And were certain your ankles would break from the ache.

How can I explain this to you?

Let me try. Give me paper and colors. I will do my best.

Where do I draw the woolly leaves  
Tea, steaming or iced  
Tubes of dental paste,  
The liquid sky that polishes breath?  
Who recalls the York patty commercial,  
Our ice queen ensconced in her sleigh,  
Gliding through the Schwarzwald with a sly smile?  
Who can smell the Alps, who remembers  
The essential oil you kept in your desk like a prayer  
Sapphire in its glass vial  
Its well-oiled marble rolling like a bored eye, the instructions:  
*Massage rollerball into tense areas for on-the-spot-refreshment.*

Could you roll it onto your heart,  
Into your frontal lobes  
Where your mind's eye projected overtime?  
Where would its unguent be most effective?

How can I explain this to you?

Could you bathe in it?  
I promise the ice will make everything new, even you,  
Sharp as a winter cusp.



walls of dubrovnik  
*by Laiana Farias*

# The Hourglass and the Stars

*by Arthur Mulder*

The water had gotten so low the ship had stranded. The hull had hacked the part of the seafloor that became its graveyard into two pieces. The crew had jumped into arrow-shaped sloops and taken off, their paddles hovering but a few feet over the soon to be parched coral and seaweed. They had managed to get no more than three nautical miles before their boats had gotten stuck in the rocks too. The men screamed to their gods among the sounds of a million fishes performing their dying spasms. The captain had muttered that the ice-walls at the end of the world, north of Sweden, north even of Svalbard, the barrier that kept in the ocean, must have melted, the world's drain pulled, the sand spilling from the hourglass, before a flintlock-pistol was stuffed in his mouth.

They were the last two souls left on The Queen Anne's Revenge, even the cat had jumped ship upon the sight of the dead snappers and mackerels strewn about the hellish landscape of a drained ocean. They sat in the captain's quarters, a torn off curtain sloppily covering the captain's still warmly bleeding corpse. Celine was staring into an hourglass; Kate's hand felt warm as it laid on the place where her neck became her back. Maritime-maps and drawings of constellations decorated the oak table. The charts' yellowy monotony was interrupted by small spots of red, once they dried they'd look like star systems of their own. Galaxies made of blood and ink.

Last night the stars had still reflected in the waves, now, their glow would be wasted on dry ground.

Kate dared not look out the window, whose drapes had transformed from plain cloth to the captain's death veil. A desert of rock, who, since their volcanic birth had not seen such heat and violence as the sun was granting them now, and arid plants that had rhythmically waved in the ten-mile-deep currents of the Great Pacific not four hours ago.

Instead, Kate glanced at the star-maps.

'Some say the light of the stars have traveled more than ten years before we see them,' she said.

Celine grunted, her gaze not leaving the emptying hourglass.

'So, it must take a little time for the sight of your face to reach my eyes too. Here.' She pulled Celine's face against hers. 'Here, you're the most current I'll ever see you.'

'You look better a little further away,' Celine giggled.

'Yes. In the past,' Kate mumbled before her whispering drowned in Celine's lips.

The hourglass broke in their tussle, the sand hid the bloody stars.



clouds in Rome  
*by Laiana Farias*

poetry by Richard Dinges, Jr.

**Trees in June**

June bloats foliage  
a thick green wrap  
that erases sky  
into a brief blue gray  
smudge between flights  
of birds. Sounds pulse  
through cottonwood  
whispers and flutters  
of leaves. Engines  
rip silence and distant  
gunshots punctuate  
my grotto encased  
by trees and false  
echoes that encroach  
on this green garden  
where my apple  
tree slowly dies.



## Richard Dinges, Jr.

## Omens

A round black shape  
floats west, a hole  
in a gray sky  
that races faster  
than the wind I feel.  
I know it to be  
only a balloon.

If only it were  
bright red or green,  
not black that belies  
all hope and blocks  
out answers, flies  
its ominous path  
above my open home.





lonely bike  
by Julia Kaczmarek



London postcard  
by Julia Kaczmarek

poetry by John Zedolik

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Short Break

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For once (or maybe twice)  
the pigeons please—as they  
burst, on the impetus of fright's

instinct like a mess of marbles  
burst by a skilled thumb and index  
finger or a triangle of billiards

under the impact of a brilliant  
break by a forceful stick and subtle  
aim, the spheres scattering like a live

still life of a chrysanthemum  
crazily in bloom—before the feathers,  
fingers of flapping irregularity

ruin the pristine, perfect forms  
almost Platonic that rush out to their  
usual pecking, wobbling, whose presence

is now a cause, a call for some master  
to re-rack, reassemble—just start a new game.

## Capacities

Now I see you wear a black  
belt around your torso,  
which features two handles.

Have you become cargo—  
professor—to be loaded  
and packed off to a predetermined

destination of post-stroke,  
certainly not your choice?

So perhaps I can forgive you  
for the hand on the small  
of my back during office

afternoons in the independent  
study of a language defunct  
and disabled—and the surprise

kiss on my cheek after translation  
with dual-tongue text,  
verso and faithful recto

providing aid unnecessarily  
with your learning present  
and ready answer of enthusiasm.

Your body you now call “a wreck”  
as I grasp the handles and pull  
you up would still obey

your *mandatum* if it could,  
to tutor and teach but now totters  
until it stills under my arm’s

control, and my sense that only  
directs me to steady your ruined  
gate that might remember its past impress.





19/11/2022  
*by Laiana Farias*



*morning sheets*  
*by Julia Kaczmarek*

*Anna Aksenova*

## A Homosexual Gene

1.

From the bar we went to your place.  
We came by the shop on the way  
and bought cider, cigarettes, and pistachios.  
There were small square frames on the shelf  
with tiny balls under the glass.  
One needs to make them drop into holes.  
You bought this and while we're sitting at yours  
you're carefully turning the box, your pointy elbows wide spread.  
The balls stroke against each other and the wooden sides.  
When they filled the holes,  
you said that it felt the same as when  
you finished a poem.  
I came home, went to bed,  
said my evening Lord's Prayer but thought of you.  
When I wake up, maybe, the rain  
will wash this Sodom away.

2.

If I threw out all my Russian poetry books,  
hid you in my suitcase,  
and by some miracle brought you to Russia,  
I wouldn't know what to do next.  
I couldn't show you to my family,  
introduce you to my colleagues as my fiancé:  
Look, it's ok 'cause before she lived in a male body.  
I couldn't hold your hand in a restaurant  
or kiss you in Red Square.  
I would be too frightened by others' fear  
and too ashamed by others' shame.  
I have the balls only to write poetry  
because Russia favors the cowards.

*poem by Zama Madinana*

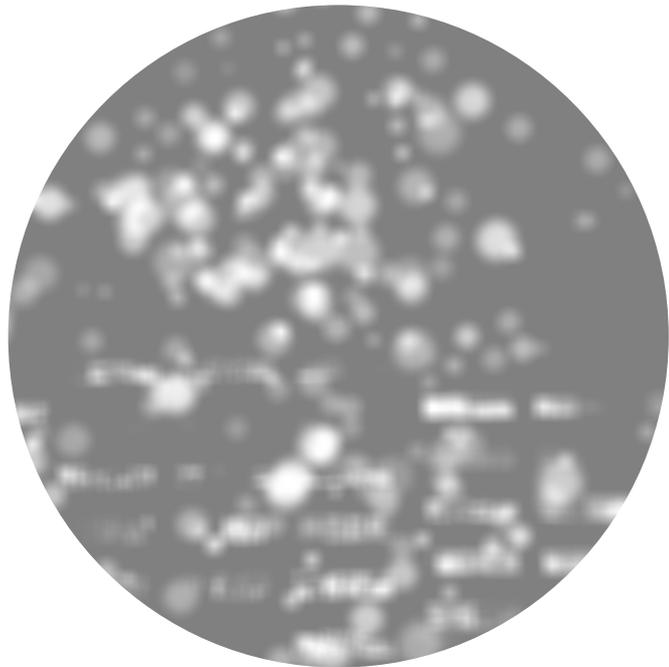
## blues for an illegal miner

it is darkness  
that knows the rhythm  
of your fear

it is dust  
that knows the landscape  
of your skin

when you face  
death  
straight in the eye

it is the bowels  
of the earth  
that know your hunger





Dubrovnik through a window  
by *Laiana Farias*

*Lee Clark Zumpe*

## a handful of lives

so here are a handful of lives  
strung together like so many  
Mardi Gras beads –  
some might call it a family  
but blood

always gets in the way

and the connections are too strained  
and the emotions too dry  
too many distractions  
to keep the leaves from drifting apart  
in the sweeping currents

when autumn winds howl

everyone forgets late summer afternoon  
picnics

in the park

*Richard Luftig*

## Taking Leave

For him, love  
has become  
the white space

of a Japanese scroll  
with the ink removed.  
Or a single drop

of rain that cascades  
upon dead-fallen leaves.  
He remembers her,

poignant as a poem  
that shyly hides  
behind the moon,

or a wisp of sighs  
that ripples upon  
a still, lake shore.

This silence  
that exists now  
without her,

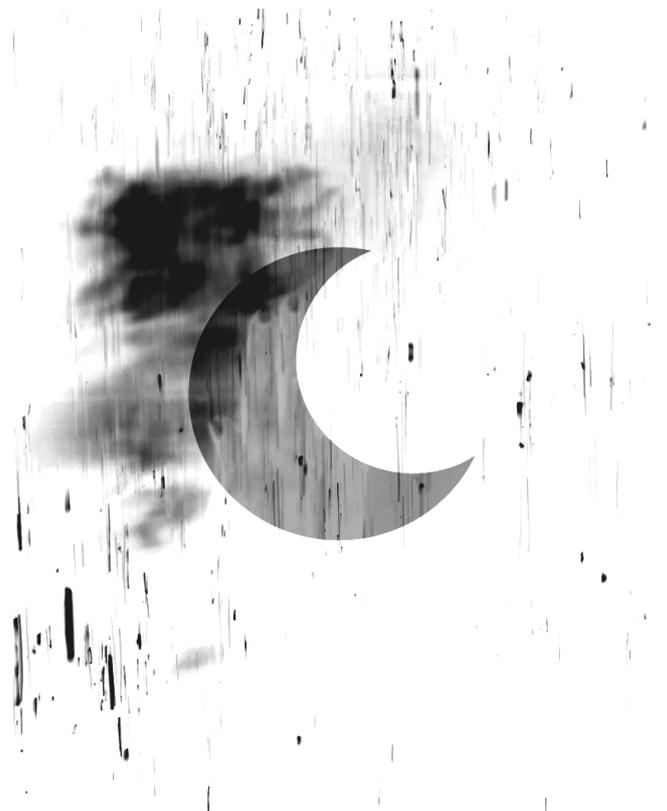
it remains  
when he speaks,  
like a piano duet

played with one person  
missing. How sad  
to learn so late

how to make bread  
from leavened love,  
make it rise without

regret, or understand  
the language of geese  
swimming in a pond

when they signal  
their intentions  
soon to depart.



*I'm staring at the clementines  
in this crystal bowl*

Astrid Floristeanu

---

I'm staring at the clementines in this crystal bowl  
Mold outside, mold inside  
One of them is rotten in its prime  
Mold devouring the sunrise hues of its zest  
Mold digging trichotillomaniac holes deep into her pale pith  
Mold keeping her hostage late at night to the sound of birds chirping  
Mold burying intrusive thoughts deep, far from ephemeral  
Mold devouring the sunrise hues of its zest  
One of them is rotten in its prime  
Mold inside, mold outside  
I'm staring at the clementines in this crystal bowl



sicilian light  
*by Julia Kaczmarek*

## *Like a Jam Sandwich*

short story by Daniela Esposito

Ever since Robert's eighth birthday, he had revealed more than a fleeting interest in the tenement block he shared with his mother, Peaches. He had stumbled upon a statement of Nietzsche in his mother's study, that 'God is Dead', which accelerated the sort of existential crisis that didn't hit most kids until puberty. Peaches had purposefully given him a safe name like Robert. He could be taken seriously as Robert and yet to his chums on the playground, he could be Bobby. She thought all of this as she lay in the hospital bed some eight years prior, her innards baffled and jelly-like as her ruddy new-born coiled against her like a worm. Bobby had not uttered a sound as he was delivered. Years later, Peaches wondered if this momentary lapse in oxygen supply could have accounted for his eccentricity. Every afternoon, when she'd collect her son from school, they'd take the same walk home, for little Bobby was a creature of habit. If she tried to vary their jaunt, as if wounded in pain, he would shriek in protest, 'Mummy no!' They would discuss what he made in science class (he made mayonnaise last week and honeycomb the week before, though he was disappointed that they were yet to dissect frogs as he'd seen on TV.) He would observe the birds that flew by and ask of their breeds; he'd delicately stroke the drooping buds of flowers (he was a sucker for the bleeding hearts) and sometimes he would hum a tune she didn't know. Peaches was grateful that she had raised a boy attuned to the poetry of the world; the things little and large, beautiful and otherwise. Sometimes, he'd take out his lunchbox and finish eating the sandwiches that he hadn't had time to eat for lunch. He would only eat jam sandwiches, squeezing the white bread together until it was claggy and oozing with raspberry goo. As soon as they set foot on the heavy concrete staircase, they proceeded to play Bobby's favourite game. Whilst some parents had chicken-pox parties, Peaches hoped that by exposing her son to life's big questions, she might demystify death and purge it from his eight-year-old body. But, day-by-day, step-by-step, she began to wonder if she'd made a grave misstep.

As they reached the first level:

‘Mummy?’

‘Yes, darling?’

‘How many...?’

‘Zero probably. If you’re lucky’

‘Oh,’ he replied, visibly disappointed, his red lips puckering into a not so cheery

‘o’.

He scurried off ahead to the next level. There she found him waiting at the top of the stairs, leaning fervently over the balcony, as if staring down at a fallen plane or something shimmery.

‘How many?’

‘One. Maybe two.’

‘An ankle?’

‘Yes, definitely an ankle. Possibly two.’ He smiled a qualified smile. It was a half-victory.

He scurried off, scrambling up the steps with his hands and feet, causing his rucksack to shake up and down on his little body. As he reached the top, he enjoyed looking down to see how the things below became more faraway and less real, and yet, he wondered, the impact would be that much greater.

‘Mummy! How many bones *this* time?’

‘Robert, we go through this every day.’

‘Mummy!’

‘Three. An ankle...’ and as if she were selecting items from a menu, ‘a leg, maybe an arm, depending on the fall.’

‘What about a rib?’ (Robert was a sucker for ribs. Peaches was certain there was something Adam and Eve-y about his predilection for this particular part of the human anatomy. She could understand her little boy’s fixation. The ribs were a beautiful contradiction; as both the protector and the prison guard, they held the heart captive in order to keep it from harm’s way. Robert once remarked, upon seeing a picture in a Dorling Kindersley encyclopedia, that the bone cage looked like a stone butterfly.)

Robert clapped his hands together and grinned a wide, toothless smile.

His celebration did not last long. He was soon whizzing off up ahead to the next level. Whilst his mother’s movements slowed at each level, Robert’s sharply increased.

This time he merely turned to her, resting his eyes expectantly on hers. She approached the balcony ledge behind him, so that her body flanked his own.

‘... ten’ she announced with such assurance as to amount to fact.

‘Ten!’ He repeated with incredulity.

‘One, zero?’ he quizzed again, cocking his head as he counted on his spindly fingers.

‘Two ribs, an arm, a wrist—’

‘Two ribs, an arm, a wrist, a leg’

‘Two ribs, an arm, a wrist, a leg, an ankle, an elbow...erm. How many left?’

And so they played the grocery shopping list memory game, wherein their trolley stowed a carnivorous deck of ribs and rumps, with not a green in sight.

‘Three.’

‘The neck!’

‘The humerus,’ Peaches added, pointing to his elbow.

‘*The humerus*’ he savoured. A shiny new toy, a new toy to break—

‘A spine,’ Robert concluded as the smile drained from his lips, disappointed that he couldn’t trump his mother on obscurity.

‘Well done.’

Robert raced ahead to the final level.

Still panting from the climb, he looked at his mother with grave expectation, so that she might give him the assurance that most children look for in a bedtime story.

‘Robert. You know what happens next.’

‘I want you to say it.’ His eyes glistened with terror and reproach for what she would say next.

‘Dead.’

He repeated it in his head. It was so final as to steal the wind from his lungs. And yet every time he did, it carried the same dissatisfying nothingness as the ground floor’s zero.

‘Dead,’ he repeated licking his lips, ‘like a jam sandwich.’ Peaches nodded gravely. Turning on his heels, he looked up, forlorn to find that the staircase had ended. He stared straight up into the sky, big and blue, with not a cloud to count in sight.



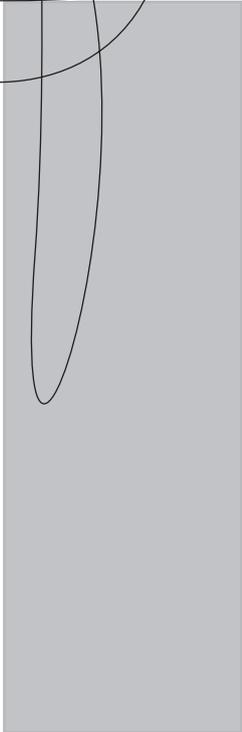
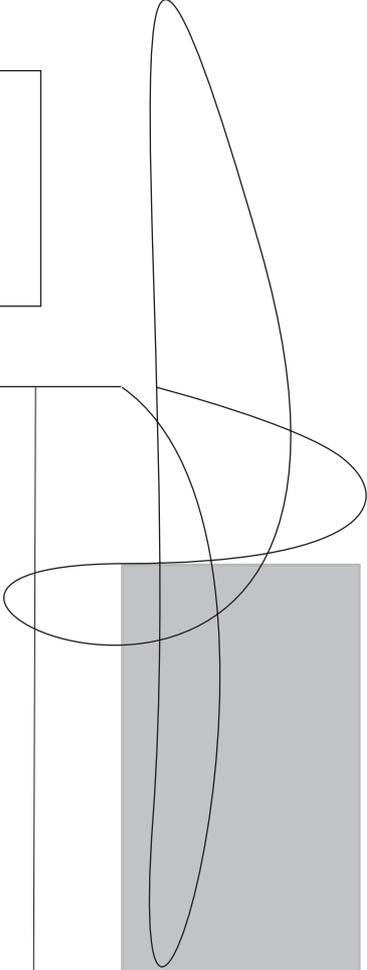
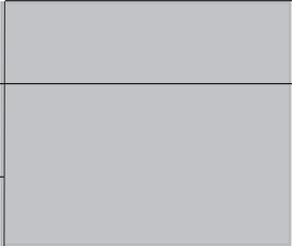


photograph  
*anonymous*

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*2023*

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*Electric*  
CINEMA

