

HIKA Literary Magazine

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HIKA - Fall Preview 2016

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HIKA

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dehydration

i stuff fistfuls of leaves in my ears, all dead-
fleshed and numb, imagine they seize control
of the tempestuous headspace that traps me

dried veins blacken my vision, transitory lines that
once carried life now drained by desperate october's
sudden chill, trying to alleviate the premature nostalgia
i cannot shake knowing someday everything will be new

stop breaking your own heart, i'm
crying, but only in the verbal way of
course (someone snuck into my room
stole my tears while i slept) now i can't

remember the last time i cried and now after
the rainstorm the naked trees sway drying in the
wind and now there are no leaves left to fall

The Harbor

On December seventh, 1941,
on a very sad day in history,
a woman was deemed champion
of an autograph-collecting contest,
and was left alone to celebrate.

She had 105 signatures!
But 2,403 Americans were killed,
none of whom signed her
autograph book,
so no one cared.

On December seventh, 1941,
on a very sad day in history,
Jane Richards, an insignificant woman,
continued to be insignificant,
and was left alone.

Only

I thought there's only
40 ants left
in the world
but it turns out
that's the Manchurian Leopard

Depression

Embossed inlaid linoleum
was introduced in 1926,
likely causing the
Great Depression,
because the timing
would make sense.
It was an epoch of
financial shouldn't have
and wouldn't have.

Linoleum tile is made
of ground cork dust,
among other things.

The cork collectors,
a reputable job
of the period,
carried their findings to
coffee bean-grinding facilities,
which allowed, at times,
the grinding of corks
instead of coffee beans,
but then the motors broke!
All pre-ground coffee beans
remained whole!

Cork collectors,
for all their hard work
(bless their souls),
depended on coffee,
and therefore,
invested in personal

coffee grinders,
thinking only,
"Shouldn't have;
wouldn't have,"
if the people
just didn't need
embossed inlaid linoleum,
which they would surely
look at and think,
"Shouldn't have;
wouldn't have."

Autumn Song

When I asked how and when it was
that you fell out of love with me,
you thrust autumn in my general direction
and called it a day.

In the morning, the village wreckage
 casted shadows over the long grass,
beer cans crumpled in confusion,
 a stain where there was none before.

I didn't find myself there,
but someone else did.
Which is good.
I am accounted for.

The daylight makes everything a matter of course.
 Autumn is nothing if not an unbecoming,
and lately I've taken to asking my friends
what it is that they are so afraid of.
But to speak of water is to be silent.

The horse, however, spooked at everything,
 and the other spooked at him spooking,
and so the four of us ended up in a cornfield,
 chests heaving, crow barking,
wind stirring. We never figured out
 what it was that scared him.
Elizabeth thinks it was a butterfly.
 As for myself, I have tired of guessing.

In the morning, the day was full of possibilities.

And now?

In the evening, we're all singing a quieter song.

I am scared of loneliness,
and my loneliness is scared of you.

I agree with you that not everything has to be a burning,
but when I asked you for a story,
you said "disengage."

What once was is what is now.
I said, "What about autumn?"
and you said,
"What about it?"

Dog Food

I will give my unborn sister
a name and call her hunger

empty myself into her absence
the way God empties himself into
a homeless child's bowl of soup:

This is an apology

for every dog I've ever starved, the ones
that I've fought away from my food.
I hold their small hearts in my mouth like soup.

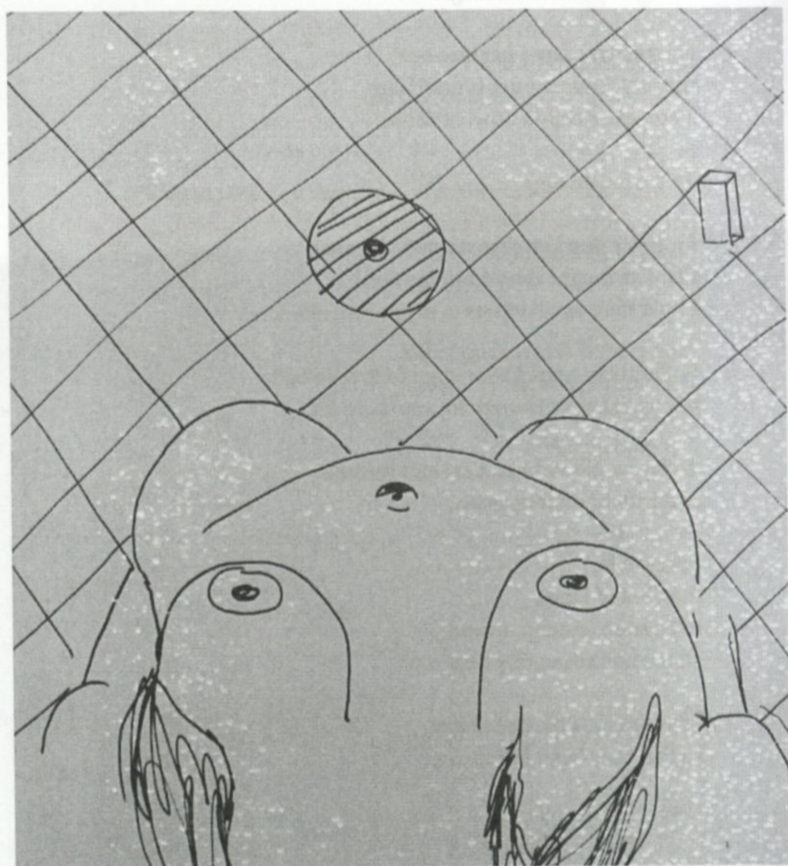
I offer them a girl I've wanted to love so badly
but wasn't alive enough for me to do so.

Today would've been her third birthday
and I am homeless, again.

I pray to be
the God of Dogs,
to be soup enough to feed
all the hounds in this city.

So they come to me hungry
so that they howl her name.

KAC Shower



Transplants

Outside my window, the plastic-spigotted sprinkler turns itself off and on, off and on, crying chemically-treated tears into fresh sod as I sleep.

I wake up wrapped in sheets I bought two weeks ago at a wholesale furniture store, the heat stuck wet to my bare legs like a soft, sleeping animal, like it trusts me, like it's my animal, a pink-bellied and panting thing to feed.

I used to find myself like that, younger, in summer, coated in glossy sweat and twisted up in a quilt edge to edge across my grandmother's bed. I could hear the quiet rustling of fabric over my sister's restless body as the AC switched off, its warm throated voice disappearing behind the quiet.

What followed was quick, visceral, something like a night terror or fever dream, early morning pouring itself through the two box skylights at my panic, my hands grappling for the edge of bedcovers to unstick and fling from my body, my feet sticking and unsticking themselves with each step against the hardwood floor, scratching the fleshy pads of my heels against the runner on the stairway, ducking into the piano room, the powder room, across the cold kitchen tile, half-in then half-out of the laundry, wet and sweet smelling, back the direction I had come, sweat mixing with salt over the soft hollows of my cheekbones, and then running out the side door, brushing the hair from my eyes, catching my breath, catching the pulse of her absence in my throat in one quick and thoughtless sweep as I found her there, waiting in housecoat and flip-flops, water hose pointed at the camellia bushes groomed high against the fence for shade.

I am not looking for her now. I pull myself away from the air's hot breath, unwrap the sheets from my body as if I was bandaged by something in the night.

They cut back the trees at the edge of this place to make room for grass that doesn't belong here. They have tamed it

to no longer feel wild up my knees, to nest butterflies on its petal-padded fingertips, to grow itself into whatever wholeness it could. There was a narrow-cut path around its muddy bed, twisting into spruce groves, deeper woods, and back around to its furthest point kissing the bare edge of her yard. I imagine it as the freer thing it was, green and stretching indefinitely across fields now decorated with brown-yarded housing developments.

I imagine how the light once unfolded as a sheet in twos, fours, eights across its longest boundaries, spilling invincibly onto the driveway, and across the street over dewy skinned girls. I remember their boy bodies browning in inflatable lawn chairs the color of jello, a hose coiled green and serpentine around bundled towels and pitchers of iced tea. I remember it slithering tiredly across lackluster grass to the spigot against the house. I can feel the way the heat licked over their arms, resting its yellow eyes on them, tucking itself beside the sheen of wet nylon. I can feel the tender sting of their scalps, matted cinnamon curls spread out across the ground or clumped in knots over the bones of their shoulders. I imagine the emptiness there and the land stretching itself out under us for an infinity of miles.

The split-shushing sound of the spraying water reminds me of how my feet felt running in the dry dirt to find her. The light still moves across the house, heartbreakingly slow.

Staring at a Blackboard

Phantom limb R,
The ghost of lagging,
and other fallen soldiers
fade dutifully
while Mahabaratha is branded atop
the bones of discarded letters.
Eraser smears
like expressionist paint strokes
blur my already hazy thoughts
on Indian battle epics.
Only a single mark
has escaped the rampage.
A parenthesis,
barring finality on a Monday afternoon.

Rite of Passage

The concrete splits as the weather changes
like your chapped lips when you were a child.
In the winter months, smiling cracked
your eggshell mouth, so you learned
to bury those feelings, thinking
your voice was too small
to ask for chapstick.

Your hands, thin and papery, were always
getting stuck in doors and windows.
You thought pain was a punishment
for something, so you kept a tally
of stubbed toes and sore throats,
hoping to make sense of the patterns.

You used to imagine that your life
was like a chocolate orange,
a gift from a forgotten relative.
Too big to put in your pocket,
but small enough to understand, unwrapping
its shiny foil each night before bed
to hold a piece of its diminishing existence
on your tongue.

Feeding the flowerpots in your bedroom
fruit loops and baking soda
to keep them alive forever,
you were strangely absent.
Even when their petals drooped,
you told yourself you could turn back time
by taking apart your velcro wristwatch.

Sidewalks remind you how much you have grown.

You have accepted the way things splinter,
suffering for no reason at all.
You can smile when it snows, but
you still find yourself taking walks
to look down at potholes—
at the memories you share.

The Dinner Hour

"Waiter, I'll take another Venus on the half shell."

That briny goddess
you can conjure with a snap of your fingers
like the way she rose from just foam,
no womb, only sea—

Slurping, you ask about me,
so one day you will be able to snap
your fingers and I'll appear—
a Botticelli painting, covering myself
with my impossibly long hair.

The constant buzz of chatter—
dinner-speak. The language
of consumption. I feel as if
I am sitting on a plate, poised.

You take your after-dinner coffee strong,
so it makes your sweat, unfolding
a damp map of dead ends on your shirt.
I stare at your collar, too tight, like pursed lips.

We sip our coffee
across a graveyard of shucked shells,
cracked open like mouths
without common words to speak,
constantly emptying.

flood mistaken for a first date

it's a thursday when he finally
lets the river in,
opening the door to see
the air outside running
blue and thick like a good song or
how a mother walks away.

all the water comes through
without stopping to wipe its feet or
make any feet to wipe from.
the current blurs its lips
over his body, pronouncing,
in a slur and all at once,
his whole name without a sound.

the river swells upstairs
and starts on its slow ruining, filling
every breath and gap
with its one long heart.
once the house has lost all vacancy,
the only word it can remember
is "hold."
and so it does.

the boy, we can call him
our boy now,
stands in the middle of his name,
which is rushing cold across him—
making his eyes close and his legs
waver a little, just like
all good names should do.
a crayfish crosses his foot,
its name is jennifer.

once nothing is empty anymore,
all the water starts to leave, inhaling back
across the carpet. this is easy, this is how
a river works:
a touch on every surface
and then an exit that comes
with fish inside its speed.

on its way out, it says,
"I knew lungs like yours once,
I poured into them until they brimmed
and watched while their person
undid themselves without breaking a single bone or
making a sound any louder
than my spine cracking on the ocean."

our boy knows not to say
anything back, understanding
that talking to rivers while inside their stomachs
usually means repeating
old stories of how chests became canteens.

"I will let you stay empty today,"
one length of tributary tells him while
running a finger of algae across his knuckles,
"all live bodies are hollow and
all filled things are too busy
to let something like a boy
breathe inside them for very long.
anyway,
thank you
for the hospitality."

and then our boy is fine,
his body still crowded with
all the empty it needs and
yes, he is cold and yes, this house
is the farthest it's ever been from fire,
but our boy is fine because
this is how a river works: all its hands
there and gone in seconds,
just its fingerprints from nowhere
left behind on his arms
as cold and stippled as
a phone number smudged across napkin.

Preparations

Cora's sitting on the toilet seat, leaning forward. My hands always shake—I've never been any good at this. I press and raise the mascara brush minutely over her eyelashes, trying to forget how bad my handwriting is and hoping it won't carry over. It's hard to tell if Cora's looking at me or past me, maybe trying to lean our far enough to catch sips of herself in the mirror. She might have already seen herself and know that I'm ruining this. She might be thinking about how she'll wash her face when I step out so she can redo the mascara herself. I rest my wrist on her temple to steady the tremors in my fingers. The brush slopes a little smoother, drawing out a dark, jagged length I'm hoping she's hoping for.

She opens her left hand and flits her eyes down to the palm so I can see it too, the lovely moon of dark green eyeshadow which is new and unbroken and so easy to look at.

"Thanks," she replies to my silence as I take the container and push the lid open. There's no brush, so I go in with my thumb, careful not to make a crack or dent the circle, navigating the sanded surface like some other-planetary rover collecting samples of soil. It's so small, all these movements, the tiny, pencil-wide muscles in my fingers that I'm trying to use precisely, the night, the bathroom, the space between us and the reason we're dressing up. It's all so small.

"This okay?" I ask, raising my thumb parallel to the tiled floor so Cora can see the cloudshaped gathering of pigment.

"Yeah," she affirms, closing her eyes. Another small place begins to build its body, the worlds gathering and dissolving in the air between finger and eyelid, the sound from the kitchen, the glasses and drinks and the people all standing and breathing and even saying things, every once in a while. Most of the words from beyond the bathroom door come in smudged and unintelligible, swatches of voices and intentions with no english left inside them. Just colors. My thumb glides lightly over Cora's left lid, sweeping and fading the exclama-

tion of green until it melts into skin and belongs to her. My thumb revisits the moon of eyeshadow before landing on her right lid and making its best attempt at symmetry. The petals of skin twitch, purpled in places with their biologies, and her pupils behind them, building flashes out of the touch.

"It's not great," I tell her as she blinks her eyes open. She leans and looks over my shoulder where the mirror explains what I've done and how it looks from across the apartment bathroom, with this light and this evening swimming over her skin. She comes back to center.

"Don't ever lie to me ever again, I look fantastic," she smiles and I laugh a little because there is at least enough room for that. "Will you let me do yours?" she asks, prying open the bag at her side to look at all the colors she can put eyes into.

"Sure," I manage, and then she's standing and I am getting up from my knees and sitting down on the closed toilet while she bends over to get a gentle, used pink from her bag. This one is called "conch" and has memories of other fingers streaked across it. The cake is concave in the middle like a lens or someone's chest exhaling. The container is clicked open and I close my eyes quickly, trying to look ready. From the kitchen, the sound of someone falling hits our ears.

She pauses, I keep my eyes closed, and then there's more laughing, which means nothing bad can happen tonight and that this place is still safe and that no one here has any one hope for the next few hours besides getting to have their bodies rhyme with their names while they dance, or at least, to try to. I hear her start again and feel the slight pressure of a finger. A second one comes onto my left eye at the same time.

"Ambidextrous?" I ask, and this is funny somehow, so she gets to laugh again and I do too. No one actually answers, it wasn't a real question so much as a reason to say something else to her while I couldn't see. I sit in the black of my closed eyes while the pink dust glides over me. From inside this dark, the pigment is much more a belief than a reality, a religion I'll get to boil down to fact in the mirror.

"I'm very talented," she explains, pulling her hands back and getting off of the floor. She turns to the counter and

moves over, making space for me to join her. We both look. I look at my eyes and then hers and then I look inside my eyes and then inside hers.

"It's nice," I say, "thanks." I look at our hands. My thumb, still blurred with the green, is a synonym to her eyelids like my eyes are to both of her index fingers. Outside, a glass breaks, but someone laughs again and the shards rebound out of threat and back into some small casualty of this weekend.

It's weird to leave. It's weird to wash my hands until they're just skin and do not have any colors that the rest of my body doesn't already carry. But I do it and she does it and we abandon the bathroom and the mirror forgets us and what we looked like, our images slipping off its one rectangle of short-term memory like water down the side of a bottle. I turn the lights off and close the door and we go into the kitchen where people have already started to bleed out towards the dances and lights and the inevitable crush of music that folds the air with sound and sweat until it's more tissue-papered than time. Bottles are left behind and the laughing starts to drift out of earshot like a spilled drink sinking into carpet.

All at once, we don't go. Cora doesn't take the door when it's held open for us and I don't step in front of her when she lets it close. All at once, we spend four hours in front of no one else but ourselves. No one sees what we look like, the ways and places we worked to make seem like we were each just one person, the clothes and lengths of leg and seconds of lips we built to graze the skin of attempted loveliness. We start picking up bottles and guessing who kissed what. The time we spent getting ready goes nowhere, growing pointless and heavy in the air. The glass someone dropped still sits broken and dangerous near the sink. It's still funny, she's still

ambidextrous, we still look nice. I set my feet bare on the floor and lean forward from my seat,

as if her fingers were on my eyes again. We don't tip into sleep or dancing, we go towards

nowhere and arrive very quickly. I balance in the apartment, the minute, the sounds which still

cut in from the street— my hands shaking only a little, so maybe I'm getting better.

//the Myth of Sisyphus Translated to Javascript

```
// the Myth of Sisyphus Translated to Javascript
```

```
/*  
This story has been poured from one language into the next for at least a dozen  
centuries. So I figured a transfer into Javascript, a language rippling with inorganic  
muscles, might be worth while.  
After all, every reading is a translation.  
*/
```

```
// so here's our hero
```

```
var sisyphus = {  
  name: "Sisyphus",  
  profession: "King of Corinth (retired)",  
  hobbies: "Involuntary body-building, cheating Death himself, kayaking",  
  strength: 15,  

```

```
// this is the biggest boulder that Hades had lying around
```

```
var boulder = 14;
```

```
// and this is the hill that Sisy needs to get the boulder to the top of
```

```
// its height is equal to Belphegor's prime (turns out Hades is a huge numbers  
nerd)
```

```
var hill = 1000000000000006660000000000001;
```

```
// we'll use this to see how far he's managed to push the boulder up the hill
```

```
var progress = 0;
```

```
while (progress < hill) {
```

```
  // now let's watch Sisy at work
```

```
  progress = progress + sisyphus.push(boulder);
```



```
if (progress == hill) {  
    // of course you can guess what happens as soon as he gets done  
    boulder = 0;  
}  
}
```

```
/*  
After finishing this translation, I ran it.  
But my computer was too smart to run it.  
It recognized the infinite loop and froze,  
Its metaphorical arms flailing in the air.  
Javascript's technological muscle can conjure  
Whole galaxies of bytes and pixels in nanoseconds.  
But it can't move Sisyphus' boulder even once.  
It appears that the ability to work on an unfinishable task  
Belongs only to humans.  
*/
```

Speculation

If I am to give myself to love, I demand
a softening of myself. Now I am Picasso's
geometric edge, de Kooning's dissembled
parts.

Sometimes, unable to stop, I watch my severed
hands dance epilepsy, frantic finds in the bottom
right for my left breast ripped, my kneecaps
rolled like dice, my teeth torn to some far corner,
my maddened heart nowhere on this canvas.

An ugly thing.

Lover, if you want me, touch me with Renoir's
stroke. Keep the blood under my skin, but raise it
warmly to the surface with your lips, your hands
holding mine still from trembling.

Don't drink from me dry, drunk.
Fill my cup; we may sip together.
Know my body whole, not by pieces for play,
but fleshy full and wanting you the same.
Teach me how to love an artist of an unknown
name.

to intend a journey

Millions of two white cloths are the only pieces separating skins from skin.

One mustn't sense false containment while bodies press,
while stones are thrown at stone.

Collide!

Bruised devil retaliates against the masses:

"Throwers of pebbles, stoning of the devil, Ramy al-Jamarat no more.
A game, a point system of faith? Just three days in and I'll kill a score!
Pilgrims of faith fingering flecks of what is my home, be my boulders."

700, wishing to let fly lucky sevens, now deceased and unidentified,
but perhaps by dead weight, height, and size,
those quantitative things that don't matter to a family's cries.

But such pride, to die, pierced by the fifth pillar of faith.
To intend a journey, to intend the end.
I'll ask the question: was there ever a difference?

Was there a difference for the Libyan man of 82 years who kissed his
wife a real
goodbye and was one of the first to fall? Who shattered his teeth and
broke his nose
upon the sacred ground? Who spoke his last prayer into the dust?
Who choked on
his own blood before his lungs collapsed under the weight of broth-
ers? Who died in
the arms of a Chinese man pressed atop him, surrounded by language
supposed to
sound his own?

In Arabia, O holy home.



