

the *evermore* review



Issue 2

a note from the editor.

Wow, Issue 2 is finally here! This has been a long and wild process, but it's here and ready for y'all to read.

This issue represents so many changes this past year: I moved out of state and started my first big girl job, one that I absolutely love; Heidi started her MFA at Butler University (Go Bulldogs!), and Sophie is nearly finished with her degree, and she's set for amazing things. I can't wait to see where our lives take us.

Thanks to all submitters—we are beyond grateful that you trusted us to view your art. We love what we do, and we're so thankful that you all do as well. Thanks to the contributors—your patience is so appreciated.

Here's to Issue 2. Hope you all enjoy.

Soli Deo gloria

Olivia Ryckman, Editor-in-Chief

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Content Warning: The following stories contain dark themes including but not limited to: domestic abuse and toxic friendships.

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zary fekete

The Tower

Elaine slowly turned the pages, her eyes flicking across the words.

“I’ve just got time to look at the tower,” Caroline now said aloud, and she put the guidebook back in the pigeonhole under the dashboard and drove carefully along the gentle curves until she came to the fork for Florence on the left. On the top of the little hill to the right stood a tall round tower.

Elaine imagined the woman in the story looking up at the tower in the distance. As she read the short story, Elaine unconsciously rubbed her palms with her fingertips, trying to imagine the feel of the stone wall which Caroline would soon feel when she began to climb the tower’s steps. Elaine felt like she was there. She could imagine breathing the Italian air. She felt she knew Caroline’s breathless energy, her eagerness to climb the tower and impress her husband, that she had finally done something on her own.

“What did you say?” Elaine looked up from her book.

Katie was staring at her, the book dangling from her hand. Katie glanced from Elaine to Megan on the opposite sofa. Megan looked supremely bored, already having closed the book and begun to examine her nails. “This story was so dull,” Katie said.

“Right?” Megan nodded and snapped her gum.

Elaine looked back at the page. She had read the story twice already. She liked it immensely. She already decided to read it again tonight. But why did she like it? It was difficult for her to make her thoughts come out in words.

“It’s not dull, I don’t think,” Elaine said. “Sort of cautious, perhaps. This woman in the story...Caroline...she wants to...to finally impress her husband. All he’s done since they arrived in Italy is show off what he knows and talk in circles around her.”

“Can you imagine visiting Italy?” Megan interrupted, sprawling out on the couch. “Oh!” she sat up quickly again and pulled out her phone, turning to Katie. “Have I sent you this video yet? There’s a woman I’ve been following. She posts about where she travels. She must be rolling in it.” She held up her phone for Katie to see. Immediately, a woman’s voice on the phone began talking very quickly. Pulsing music played in the background.

Katie gawked. “Oh, my God!” she said, pulling out her own phone and crossing to Megan’s sofa. “Here, let me show you one. Get a load of this rich bitch!”

The two friends dissolved into laughter. Their copies of the book slid from their laps onto the floor as

they continued to tap through their phones and chatter to each other.

Elaine looked at them. Then, she bent her head and looked back at her book. Her mind was still with the woman in the story. Who was she? Did she like being in Italy? Did she love her husband? Elaine wished she was there at that moment with the woman, staring up at the tower. She wanted to put her own foot on the first step and to begin to climb. She wanted to feel the blood pump in her legs and heart as she mounted the stairs. She imagined breathing the cool air of the stone tower as she went higher and higher. What would it feel like to step from that last step out onto the platform surrounding the tower and see the entire countryside unfold before her?

Elaine looked up. Katie and Julie had moved into the kitchen and were pouring themselves more wine. Their books carelessly lay on the floor where they had forgotten them.

Elaine carefully put her bookmark in her book. She stood and moved to the front window. As she stepped away from the book, she stepped out of the tower's world and back into her own. She slowly felt Italy fading away. She was back in Katie's living room as she had been when she arrived at the book club an hour ago. An ordinary housewife in a small American town. She sighed as she stared out the window. All the houses in the cul-de-sac looked the same. Every driveway was identical.

She looked out the window waiting for a few more moments to pass until she could offer an excuse to leave. She hated these times. Not the book club, she loved that. The book club was her weekly escape. It was the before and after times she dreaded. The awful walk from the car up the driveway to the house, knowing she'd be stuck in small talk for...how long? Fifteen minutes? Thirty? She couldn't do it very well. She didn't know how to follow the trains of thought. Who went where this weekend. Who ate at which new place. Why the food was so awful. Who to follow on her phone. She didn't even know what half of the apps were that they talked about.

She glanced back at the kitchen. She really wanted to return to the story, but she could tell Katie and Julie were already done for the evening. The rest of the time would be spent comparing and preening.

Elaine was about to announce her departure when she happened to glance out the backyard window. She gasped.

The yard was gone. There was no neighborhood at all. What she saw instead was a stone edifice rising up before her on the top of the rugged hill. Evening sunshine streaked across the sky. She glanced back into the house. Inside the living room was still there. But when she looked back outside...It was Italy. It was the tower.

Without thinking what she was doing Elaine stepped to the back door and opened it. Wet wind blew

across her face. The air smelled different. Older. A road led down to the left (*To Florence*, she thought) and a path led up to the tower on the right.

She looked back in toward the kitchen. Julie and Katie were still talking. She looked back out. The sun was just touching the distant horizon. The tower cast a long shadow across the Italian road.

Elaine closed her eyes for a moment. She stepped out of the house. Instantly, Katie and Julie's voices were gone. Instead, she heard birds from the trees surrounding the hill. Down in the valley, she saw a fox run by. She looked up at the tower. It was tall, its rough stone stood out against the blue sky.

She stepped towards it.

bradley david

Aroma Therapy

"Fashion, bitches!" she shouted on the streetcorner, waiting for the light, so loud it could have been an insult or a revelation or incantation. They turned with flinching shoulders, some of them, as though the ruckus popped a cork from their ears. I wondered more about the ones who didn't flinch at all. Had they become so hardened? Were they students of radical acceptance?

"Yes, he came from fashion. He was a designer," I said in a voice modeling standard streetcorner behavior. "But now he's in food."

"Redistributed!" she shouted even louder. This time, she twirled in a clumsy pirouette. And because she was wearing a rainbow tutu in the winter, fawn-colored nubuck Chelsea boots, each with a low horizon of salt stain that looked like a chalkboard EKG, the pieces added up for the uncorked who quickly decided she was just another nut. I half-wanted to shake them, tell them she wasn't crazy. *Don't you remember Bee Girl? Don't you dance? Don't you have a dream?*

She felt freshly released to dreams herself. Her boyfriend was having some sort of descent, so she was staying with me temporarily. The neighbors around his place had been loonies, too, as far as she was concerned, but she hadn't lived there long enough to decide if they

were the good kind—the Bee Girl kind—or the bad kind—the beige kind. She's a slow decider in an okay way. You wouldn't think it if you were on the streetcorner with us, having just heard her shout, "Dance, you beautiful motherfuckers!"

"I'll be taking her home," I said to no one in particular.

I'm not the tutu-wearing kind. Hell, I wouldn't even dare nubuck. Such a vulnerable leather in winter. No, I have a blue Eddie Bauer parka and some sort of Kevlar boot tested on Everest. God, I've never used them on anything steeper than my apartment steps. Then again, the other tenants never salt or shovel, so I may be the only one reaching that summit without a broken neck.

"Umm, no they won't," she explained with tremendous finger gestures. "They'll be taking me to Hong Kong Super to buy daikon radish. Happy Lunar New Year! Lo Bak Go or bust!" At which point she singled out a gentle, bundled, peacefully suffering man in his fifties and leaned into his ear: "Do your wife a rare favor and make her turnip cake. You wouldn't want to put the love of your life at risk for an inauspicious year, would you?"

He sheepishly declared "No" as a question, and when he got to his car, he searched his phone for explanations of inauspicious and turnip cake. "Why, there's no turnip in it whatsoever," he said aloud, puzzled, and the humid words froze to his windshield in a muster of crystal

peacock feathers. He entered the address for Hong Kong Super into his technology and the girl in the tutu had no idea she was standing next to him at the daikon display. Then at the dried shrimp. Then the Chinese sausage, the three of them following the search engine's top hit recipe around the store.

Back in everyone's respective environs, we peeled and shredded the radish, boiled and drained its heap, stirred it into a slurry of starch, mushrooms, and meat, and set it in our steamers. And it smelled. We turned on kitchen fans to vent the steam and everyone everywhere thought, *What's the point of these fans? They do very little.*

Eventually, we lifted the lids of our steamers to check for firmness, and gasps of daikon-shrimp-shiitake steam bolted for the gaps under front doors where it found hallways of fresh air. Once in hallways, the respective steam quickly became bored of the bare beige walls where association meetings hadn't come to agreements upon artwork. Craving color to celebrate Lunar New Year, steam slid under all the other door gaps to meet all the other tenants.

"Ah ha, color!" steam announced to every owner. Their ears were corked, but their noses were alerted to the smell the steam found absolutely delightful about itself. Steam explored every inch of every apartment and condominium—each of my neighbors, and each of Bundled Man's all the way across the street, whose wife

was at that moment was walking home from the train stop. Steam arrived in bedrooms and lingered in linens. Steam settled into upholsteries and poodles. And the owners within various associations, in frenzies of disgust, shot off text messages to the respective association group chats: *What is that god-awful odor? Whoever or whatever is producing it must stop at once. We've just had the carpets shampooed and there is no respect in this building for its shared elements. We have air rights and easements!*

The Bundled Man blushed and flustered, opened his widest window for a brisk winter cleanse. Tutu Girl twirled in my kitchen and turned the steamer lid into a bumble bee wing tambourine. She made her way to the widest window and flung it open with an exclamation to the neighborhood, "Fashion, bitches! Fashion!" She coughed, spat, the soil below accepted like a uterus.

Across the street, the bundled man she hadn't recalled from the corner or the store appeared on his balcony. He untied his beige apron, inhaled the rich fragrance of radish, shrimp, and shiitake reaching him from her antics, and swung the fabric above him until its two strings took off like bumble bee wings. Several floors below at the front gate, bedecked in an insufficient black trench, his wife fumbled for her keys with fingers stiffened by the marionette strings of years on keyboards. Several floors above her, she suddenly heard the strangest sound she'd never heard before in the neighborhood. Bedecked in nothing but a ballet tutu, the husband she knew to be

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consistently beige and bundled, shouted back to the rainbow tutu girl on the balcony across the street:

"Fashion, bitches! Fashion!"

tere nandez

Invisible Whispers

The hums of ghosts haunt you
Spill no secrets
Loosen no lips
Live in all the lonely, lovely lies
Little lullabies lulling you to sleep
Board up your home with the brittle bones
All the skeletons you bury
Half-lived versions of you
Truths you should have shown
All these futures become phantoms
Following you into the dark of night
All these dreams become nightmares
Reminding you of what you hide when awake

kushal poddar

Arthritis Begins To Feel Political

You will realise—
sleeper agents from both sides
jog with you every morning.

They try to solve you,
dissolve your front,
sleep with and convert you.

One sun has set;
another has crossed the sea.
The other day your daughter
called from the hem
of the towers' periphery.
Silence. Gossips. Silence. Beep.

Your retirement
suffers from notice
of your friends' partings.

You pretend electing both parties,
stroll and jaunt to catch up with
those younger shadows,
talk about the goodness of yoga
and neutrality in a war.

I understand, believe me,

the reason you tease or when
the rain sinks a boat
you begin to fold the newspaper.

meg keane

Pathways

Rainwater on my clothes, I don't reach for the light as I deadbolt the door. Dampened in body and spirit with a type of cold that creeps into your bones. The last ounce of winter sun cascades down the grey walls, pooling in the sink and bathtub. The elements beat against the skylight, a small square of blurred glass with a distorted view of the ninth-storey sky.

Light creeps under the door and intrudes on my shadows as laughter fills the kitchen. Muffled voices and clinking glasses. Friends of yours, never of mine. On Fridays, they stand between me and the comfort of our bed after a long week. You call me unsociable, rude even. I nod instinctively and seek the privacy of our bathroom. The only place where nobody questions my want of isolation.

I catch conversations through the door, talk of money and work, schools and "big plans." I should be out there, playing along. Plastering a toothy smile across my face and not letting it falter when you ultimately say something degrading. But no longer can I muster the strength to mask my contempt. For this life, this home, and for you. I grip the sink in sheer desperation, how did I get here? Haunted by a life I haven't lived, a life that isn't mine. A path I haven't walked, in a house that's not my

home. I feel too young to have trodden so far down the wrong road.

With my back pressed against the cold wall, my work shoes slide out from under me. High-shine gloss paint aids my slow descent to the tiles below. Cold to the touch, I leave foggy handprints across the floor. Pulling my knees tightly into the shadows, small as possible. Hiding in my own bathroom. Shadows pass by the light that leaks in from outside, glasses clink again and laughter continues. How long before you notice and come knocking? It's a matter of when not if, as it's anger I've made my home in, with you. I bathe in contempt before swiftly being wrapped in a warm towel of flattery. I sleep on a bed of eggshells and walk across the floor you worship. When did it become this? When did I become this?

The bathroom mirror sits across the floor, leaning against empty boxes. It needs to be properly mounted to the wall; I bought the wrong screws. I glance across at her, at the girl in the unforgiving mirror. A sad stranger returns my gaze. A lifeless figure. Unrecognisable in the grey room, with grey skin and soon-to-be greying hair. We watch one another, as I attempt to find some similarity, some remnants that I ever existed at all. Tracing my cold skin with desperate fingertips. Searching for any indication that it still belongs to me. I find the dent from childhood chickenpox between my eyebrows, my first scar but not my last. The unlevelled studs in my earlobes from piercing them myself on my sister's bunk bed. I pierced my best

friend's ears, too, that night, I wonder when she puts her earrings in, if she still thinks of me. On to the finger that bends left, it never healed right after a basketball injury in school. Pulling down my lower lip, I bare my teeth to the mirror. The crooked lower front tooth not even the braces could fix.

My hair kinks with the rainwater, washing away the blow-drying and straightening. A halo of curls encases my face, the curly-haired girl remains. Deep beneath what the world deems professional or what you call attractive. The girl in the mirror smiles, briefly. *I'm still here.*

From the floor, I can see the room in its entirety. Gazing up like a child to look upon the only window. I wish to climb through it, an escape hatch. To escape the life I have built for myself, to run back to the crossroads.

The light beneath the door flickers.

Are you alright in there?

I stand quietly and make for the sink to run the water on high. The shadow dissipates. Just before I can return to my seat, I notice something against the grey. Vibrant with soft edges, it's green. It can't be a sprouted seedling from our plastic plant-filled apartment. Is it mould? It peeks out from between the wall tiles; our landlord will blame us for this.

Hands and knees across the floor, I reach for it, but there's resistance. It's a leaf but not a dead one picked up on wet shoes and walked home. It's alive, and it's growing from somewhere. Unkempt weeds inside the building, I begin to pull. The vine beneath it is thicker than I expected, and as I lean further into the motion, the tile cracks. Panic ensues, and I drop it dead.

I turn to the girl in the mirror but she's looking at her hands. I glance down at my own and they're chalked. My nails thick with concrete and clay. Grey paint along my knuckles and a paintbrush in hand. *I built this room myself.* And, I hate grey. You like grey. I tiled the room, but you passed me the tools, I painted the walls, but you handed me the paintbrush. You guided my hand to build this room around me. And still, you curse me every time I step out of line, but I curse myself every time I don't. Enough, I've had enough.

Grasping the vine firmly in my hands, I return to pulling. Yanking and whipping it around the room. Laughter escapes my lips as the tile breaks in half, and still, I keep going, watching the girl in the mirror watching me. We pull together until the vine lifts up the cupboards and rips up the floor. It spreads out in multiple directions, spanning the length of the walls in a labyrinth of trails. The grey room is falling apart around me. Rapid knocking on the door halts me in place.

What's going on in there? Let me in.

A familiar tone, I don't speak.

Let me in, NOW.

A hard thud against the door, attempting to gain entry.

You want to know the root of the disturbance, but this is my room. And I'm sick of it. I'm sick of what it stands for, I'm sick of what it made me. Stifling a scream, I turn to attack its contents. The prestigious Moroccan soaps, anti-frizz shampoos, body razors, ivory bathtub with muscle massage settings. It's all trash, none of matters.

The girl in the mirror places the sledgehammer at my feet as I slip out of my shoes. You're screaming, but you sound so far away now. Gripped firmly in two hands, I deliver hard blows against the grey walls. Tiles slide from the concrete and cracks form in the brickwork beneath it. Light floods in as the walls crumble around me. The bricks are warm to the touch. It's a late September evening, there is no sun. And yet, it's unmistakable. It warms my face as the familiar scent of lavender settles on my tongue. The ceiling caves in and the sky above is blue and clear. Birdsong fills my ears followed by the gentle vibrations of honeybees. I can't hear you anymore.

I use my hands to push away the last bricks at eye level to be faced with a familiar road. It was once mine.

Barefoot and barely clad, I grapple with the remaining wall to climb out of the grey room. The trees are thicker than I remember, taller and greener. As I step out, my feet touch dew-soaked grass until they find a path. You plucked me from here and kept me for years, sitting like rotting fruit in a showroom fruit bowl.

But now, from the ruins I emerge, a blackberry sprouting from the most malignant of thorns. There's hope, even for the hopeless. I've seen it. Beyond the grey, it's green.

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