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UNSTANMATIC

vol. i

a journal of brief words and art
missoula, montana

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From the Editor

Welcome to the inaugural Newsprint Edition of *Unstamatic*! If you're new to the magazine, allow me to fill you in: our whole deal is an obsession with the brief and the powerful—a familiar face glimpsed in a passing train; the length of time it takes to eat a single-scoop ice cream cone; the moment in which you catch a loved one gazing lovingly at you before they look lovingly away. The fleeting, the ephemeral, the evanescent.

You get the idea.

And if you're already acquainted: welcome back. We're looking a bit different here—offline, on paper, in ink. We like it. We think we'll do it again. We hope you'll stick around for it.

We began as (and still are) an online publication, pairing one piece of flash prose or poetry with a complementary work of art. We love the online format, but there was a time, in days of yore, when literary magazines were printed in newsprint. We love that. We love the texture and the tactility and the smell of it. We wanted to dip our toes into that world. So now we have this, *Unstamatic's* Newsprint Editions. It's an experiment, but it's one we plan to stick with. With your help, of course.

Thank you, from the deepest wells of our corny, earnest hearts, to all the writers featured in this first issue, for trusting us with your work and for letting us include it in our first print voyage. And thanks to you, the reader, whoever you are and however you came about this magazine. Without you, there's not much point to all this, now is there?

Here's to the first of many.

Regards,
Luke Larkin
Editor-in-Chief

Some People Catch Cold

Bradley David

It is not coincidence or contrivance that it began to rain. Sometimes it rains, sometimes it howls. Something must swoop in to smudge one season into another. Those are the rules. For those slow twelve days the rain bore deep into every soul. The squirrels took to their humid hollows and the crows dripped pathetic in the pines. Pouring so quiet as to drive people to unthinkable agitation. They wondered when it would quit or turn to ice. They wondered when their lawns would drain and those incessant crickets would come back to life.

Except, the rain was not quiet at all. It simply didn't resemble their accustomed sound. It drowned out the safety of the daily rumble. When not measured in decibels, these ceaseless downpours are described as dull roars. This one had them scared. News was rolling in that hillsides were running for lower elevations. Any minute they might dislodge from their seat. Solo their game of solitaire. Upend the leaves of their unnerving autumn puzzle. The sound won out over freeways and taxiing jets, bored dogs and the bangs that could have been anything. Pneumatic nail gun fixing a tarp over a leak. Dump truck tumbling over a cliff.

For twelve days they all disappeared from one another's ears. The dull gray cataract horizon reflected their clumsy shuffling conversations. Flickered their unthinkable agitations like their fumbling card decks. Flubbed their memories like beef left too long to cook.

"Hurry up and eat, the salt is getting cold.

"Oh, listen to me... I've just been sitting here wondering where these grains are mined. I've heard those caverns host concerts with perfect acoustics. So, it must be Detroit. That hot-sounding city to those cold northern towns. City of salt rock and steel... *Detroit Rock City*.

"Oh, listen to me... What was it you were saying? Because I was just thinking, maybe it's time we find possibilities in the winter. I've heard if you swim like the Finns in cold river water you live a lot longer.

"Oh, listen to me... This is the part where I slip and suggest something new. Let's just pretend the creek-gurgling-rocks sound like a saucepan simmering soup. No, wait, turn that around. First the soup, then the stones.

Oh, these games I play. These grudges I hold.

"You know, all these years later and I'm still not talking to the snow? I should think of it as rest for roots, but it sure feels like a killing. Isn't it funny how springs always feel like beginnings; yet, if we blink, and someday comes, they've always just been middles, and endings?"

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Questions for God at Sunrise

Karen Gonzalez-Videla

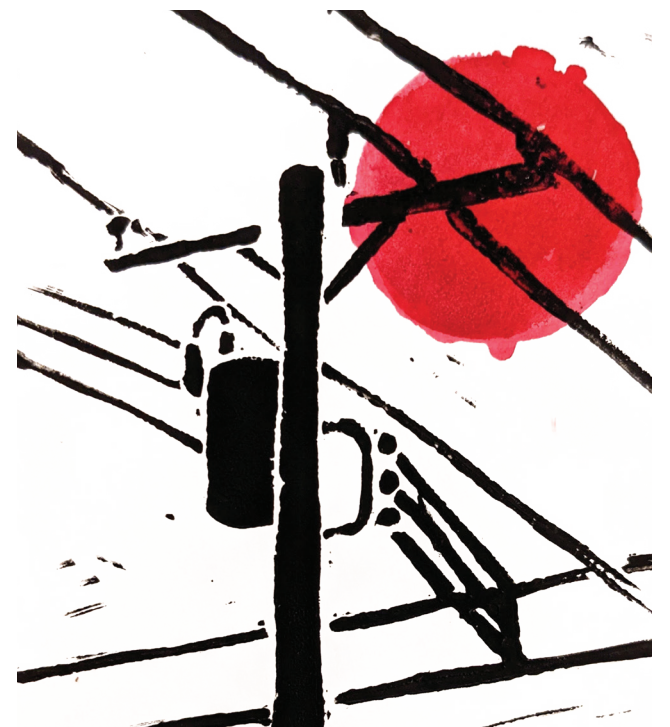
Is it okay
to feel like the world is
collapsing? Like you can't exhale
without salt-dripping skin? Like sweat
doesn't let you breathe?

When did we become
wayward particles? Floating, fleeing,
pretending we didn't do the things we did?
When did we become
expendable?

*No one can save a world
that isn't ruined. No one can
nurture it, bring it back to life
without killing it first.*

Don't you wish to hold us in your hands?
Turn lawns into gardens?
Rain elixir down our heads?
Bear fruit for us to lick?
Draw sunrays on our chests?

Or would you rather we settle
for overdue grief?





what thorough people
our ancestors were

Olivia Serio



no new sin has been discovered in five thousand years
the dust of the universe composes all that we are
even our desires were held in the hands of someone else before
meaning our hearts do not love by majority but by consumption

the dust of the universe composes all that we are
we pull together and form our own centre of gravity
meaning our hearts do not love by majority but by consumption
a force that thrums with strength enough to eclipse even memory

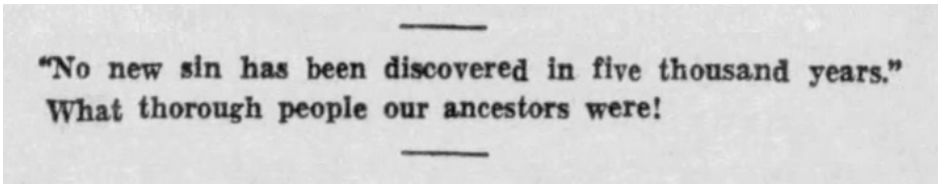
we pull together and form our own centre of gravity
exploding stars will scatter their hearts across the universe
a force that thrums with strength enough to eclipse even memory
as we consume the sun itself to form our own system

exploding stars will scatter their hearts across the universe
even our desires were held in the hands of someone else before
as we consume the sun itself to form our own system
no new sin has been discovered in five thousand years

▲ Clutching the Pearls 7"x9"

Robin Young

Note: Both the title and the first/last line of this pantoum come from an article published in The Missoulian on June 30, 1934.



Drowning in Uptown

Taylor Croteau



“Come down to the basement, and I’ll give you a bottle.” And so she followed him down to the basement, slowly because of his bruised, swollen foot that thumped, thumped its landing on every wooden porch step.

Weird Mike wasn’t evil. He was just a strange, older man who lived quietly in the basement unit of their apartment and mostly kept to himself. Still, she had never gone down to the basement for a reason, and with every thump of Mike’s broken foot she tried to think of another reason to turn back upstairs.

She needed the bottle of Drano though, and he said he had some to give, which was kind of him. Wasn’t it? She texted her roommates, who were both at work, that she was headed down to the basement with Mike. “In case you need to find my body later,” she added, laughingly, but honestly hoped this wasn’t the text that would show up on *Dateline*.

The basement was a dark, cavernous chamber. She stared forward only, not daring to look into any of the doorways they passed. In the bathroom, he had no shower curtain, no toothbrush or toothpaste, there was only an off-white, aging bar of soap resting on the back of the toilet.

There were at least three ghosts in their apartment on the third floor. She thought mostly it was her fault the ghosts were active, she made them act out somehow. She remembered, was reminded of brutally, the months following her mother’s sudden death when she and an ex bought a ouija board from a thrift store outside of Mobile, Alabama and used it to try to call her mother. Her mother never answered of course, but others did, and even after she burned the board, buried its ashes deep in the woods, the door she tried to shut swung open, back and forth, taking and leaving wherever she went.

And so it was her fault the ghosts in the third floor apartment couldn’t sleep. The woman in her bedroom had died there, she told her, of a stroke. And she watched each of them now when they walked through the entryway, sat in the living room, but watched her, most of all, when she slept. She tried to paint the old, dead woman many times, tried different palettes, different textures, but none of them captured the pain in the woman’s head, the throbbing heartbeat in her skull.

The teenaged boy was the most pleasant of the ghosts. Not haunting as much as annoying, he turned on the television, the microwave, the fan in the living room. His haunting was maybe more about his comfort than anything else. She only ever saw him lounging on the brown, curry-stained sofa, in wrinkled, oversized T-shirts and baggy jeans. He never told her when he died or why he was still there, and she never asked. She enjoyed it when he came to hang out.

The other ghost was of a little girl, and she is still not completely sure it was a ghost at all. The little girl could be seen in the pantry, scratching at the wall to her roommate’s closet. The scratching at night kept them up sometimes, but there was no conversing with the little girl. The girl just stared if they dared look into the pantry, and scratched her tiny child claws down the length of the wall. She wasn’t human.

Weird Mike reached under his sink cabinet and pulled out an old, dusty bottle of Drano, the label and instructions faded and scratched off.

“You know how to use it?” He looked up at her, one eye shut.

She only nodded, looked quickly back down the basement hallway, and thought of how quickly she could run.

“Let me know if you three need anything.”

Mike pushed himself back up to a stooped, hunched version of standing.

She nodded again, dumbly, fumbled through her dry throat to open her mouth and breathe out a thank you.

Upstairs again she texted her roommates that she was alive and could unclog the drain now.

She worked early mornings at the craft store, unpacking and stocking supplies before the doors opened. She woke up at 2 or 3 in the morning and swallowed down a smushy granola bar and glass of water before running to the red line on Morse Ave. She ran not because she was late, but because it was dark and the streets were empty. Or worse, were not empty some mornings, but were populated by the shadows of men fumbling down alleys reaching long-lined arms and stretched fingers for her hair, her wrists, her waist. And she ran up the stairs at the El Station and stood, huddled against the wind in the one well-lit, heated area, shaking her ankles, knees, and self awake while her eyes sagged, shut.

On the train she tried to find the busiest car. Sometimes there were other women, nurses, house cleaners, workers and servers of others, that she felt would watch for her when any of the shadow men sat too near. Off the train she ran, again, the two city blocks through Uptown to the loading dock of the craft store where she leapt up the concrete stairs and to her locker. At work she kept her head down, cut open boxes of craft supplies and lined them up on the shelves. At the end of her shift, around 8 a.m., the sun was up and she walked out the front door into the city where everyone was finally awake, and she walked home slowly to go to sleep.

There was an elderly couple that lived in the apartment next door to hers, whose bedroom window stared back into her own, and she heard them every morning at 9:30 a.m. handcuff each other and scream, pounding sex for exactly 24 minutes. Then she would roll over back to sleep at 9:54 and wake up at noon. She drank stale coffee her roommates left in the pot and sat on the back porch with peanut butter toast and bag of popcorn.

She watched the elderly couple garden in their small plot of grass against the blue-painted garage. She waved to the woman who smiled up at her. In the purple folding chair she curled her feet up underneath her and read novels she pulled from free little libraries and abandoned boxes on sidewalks. She read voraciously but absentmindedly, letting the words slip and slide through her brain and mix with the stories from other books until her eyes got tired or the sun burnt too hot on her shoulders, and she went back inside to sleep again.

On Tuesday nights she rode the El downtown and back, never really going anywhere, but watching the river underneath her and through the city, and she’d think of the boat that sank in the river a century before. She’d imagine diving into the river, swimming out to the lake or freezing to death, either goal worth imagining. And she sketched the lights of the city, the vague shapes of buildings, and clouded faces of other passengers. And when a man offered her nightshade she shook her head no, but sketched the needle going into his arm.

She picked up pizza or a hot beef sandwich and ate on the front steps of her building. She listened to the woman next door, who lived on possibly the second floor, though she wasn't sure, as she told her about ex husbands and now-grown children and drank from a pitcher of sangria. Her roommates joined with similar grease-stained bags of food at random times of ended shifts, and the four smoked and watched the lazy sun puddle behind the 7-11 on the corner.

On these nights, she sometimes left and slept instead with the man she'd met at a bookstore three years before. His studio smelled of ashtrays and mold, and the bed he fucked her on sagged and leaned to the right just enough to roll her in weightless imbalance. He had a cat named Patricia after his dead wife, who watched her with suspicion and slept in her clothes piled on the floor. In the mornings after, he made her burnt coffee on his hot plate and stirred in cocoa powder, then sat on the hardwood floor gazing up at her bent frame in his bed. He prayed to her it felt like, though he never said anything religious, and their conversations lulled in spaces of restful oblivion, meaningless utterances that washed over her and out of her feet when she walked home.

For her roommate's birthday, she baked a confetti cake and coated it generously in pastel pink frosting. Lit candles and carried the monstrosity carefully into the dining room turned painting studio, where friends from work and guys from bars sat, some in chairs, most on the floor, a few on the table, where she set the cake down. Her roommate blew out candles to cheers, and she cut thick slices to pass around on paper plates.

They ate and then smoked and listened silently to music turn and roll out of the record player, etching itself into the walls, into the scratches made by the little girl from the pantry. And she watched each of the people in the room as strangers, shadows and lights, beating individual heartbeats and invisible breaths into the space, where the world turned too slow for her to feel and too fast for her to rest.

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Lemon Thorns

Kimberly Vargas Agnese



My daughter and I live under a tough sky.

Mini drones do surveillance for the drug house on the corner,
tricolored blackbirds swarm like bats at dusk
and when the 144th Fighter Wings cast their shadows,

everything just stops.

The song of the chat evaporates,
feathers in the birdbath still, and the blue jays hide
between lemon tree thorns until the warbirds pass.

After

I'll dig Bermuda grass out from under that tree
(maybe someday we'll have cherries)
throw the long stems in the pile on the patio
so doves can thread weeds into nests

Origin Myth

Caleb Nichols



There's the stone you carry
and the stones you meet along the way

there's the shadow of those stones
the shade that they surrender

what the light pulls from them
stretched away recoiling

gather yourself against the cool shade
of one or lizard lithely

splayed on its sun-soaked surface now
you've begun to carry that stone too

and moon to moon keep gathering stones
into yourself

isn't that what we're made of
what our stones say to each other

isn't that the song we sing



Quantum Superposition in a Dyadic Relationship

Laila Amado

The transcontinental train is sleek and agile. A bullet, dormant on the rail track. Crowds of commuters crush against it and recede like waves in the sea, the ebb and flow of morning passenger currents taking them to their own shabby regional trains.

You weave through the throng, suitcase in hand, with the grace of a ballet dancer going through a complicated set of steps, while I stumble into each and every one of the mishaps you've sent tumbling from their original orbits. Eyes fixed on you in admiration, they're carried away like dandelion seeds.

Our compartment is a smooth cocoon of plastic and vinyl. Between the muffled hum of the engines, the whirl of air conditioners, the seamless, air-tight connection of the walls, the windows, and the doors, the train generates its own white noise, a deafening suspension of disembodied, disconnected sounds. You sit across from me, and your long legs intertwine with mine.

I think of quantum systems. I think of the

way an electron can exist in two possible spin states—spin up and spin down—and, until it is measured, can be in either of these states. This is called quantum superposition. A coin tossed up into the air, once landed, is both heads and tails, all at the same time, until you take a look and pin down reality with your knowledge.

Compelled by the pull of centrifugal force, the train leans on one side taking a turn and there is a moment of weightlessness, a zero-gravity state. My heart is a bubble pulsing suspended in the empty space of my body. Then, the weight returns.

"You know, I never loved you," I say. Headphones over your ears gleaming chrome and gold, you give me your generous smile.

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Running Man

Barbara Candiotti

Two Brontosauruses Kissing

Lloyd Sy

This thing that we call necking: might the brontosauruses, in their own chirpings, have called it by the same name? Or was instead "necking" reserved for some other obscene act, some gross usage of their massive organs, unbeknownst to us poor creatures who must needs remain unremarkable, uncreative with our scruffs?

If we shall not be so depraved, let us think instead of two brontosauruses kissing. What possibilities with those necks! Let us think of their festivals, by some creek in a corner of the Pangaeian Experiment, where gymnastic feats with the neck were performed by specialist neckers—rare gleamings for those giants, who lived in a brutal desert world where very little sparked joy. In their Olympics such interrogations came to the fore: which pair could curl around each other the most? Who could make pleasing figures with their gyrating neck? Who was the Houdini of the long-necked lizards? Who was the Copperfield of the Cretaceous?

Now would they say—what poor surface area you humans reach. How civilized can you be, mammal with little nobility?

And while you tarry away with your ugly forms of love, see how we die with beauty: for certainly when necking, twirling a caduceus betwixt one another, surely some *Tyrannosaurus* (don't check me on the errors) came often romping to ruin the dance.

Yet nothing could that *Rex* do: kill as he might, his tiny arms could never untangle those interlockers. No indeed—as a vine to its trellis, or as thigmotropic finger, or as their descendant the boa would fixate its prey—far more than the futile graspings of human lovers, unworthy masters of the earth—those brontosauruses, wrapped in and up, in falling by the carnivore's slashings would leave their trophy. Here are our imperfect frames, they say—our fused vertebrae bound to confuse the fossil-brushers. Little will that race of dreamers know the sterling sacrifice of hanging onto each other for dear life.

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firecracker pop floatie

Joseph Lezza



firecracker pop floatie, how much air?
how much air to hold me,
to carry me across the river
where sugar-dusted daylight
pored through my sleeping eyes,
icing my rods and filling my cones
with a double scoop of sky –
a blue so cool you could catch it
if you looked fast enough.

firecracker pop floatie, my head
hurts. i think i ate too fast.

firecracker pop floatie, how much air?
how much air to bear me,
to blow me back to the yard
where a screen door's howl could
knock the wind from me – the sweet
asphyxiation from the neighbor boy
(you know the one)
who spilled across the yard like
he was made of coppertone. how my
baby brain – without knowing why -
wanted to slather him all over.

firecracker pop floatie, he's a dad
now. he never comes outside.

firecracker pop floatie, how much air?
how much air to sport me,
to breeze me 'bout the pool,
the spool, where we both had longer
fuses. where the spark was in me
rather than on my tail. where
i made a snack of time before
it made a meal of me. where a man
brought good humor, instead of bad
memory. where we coughed up the meaning
of life in spit and chlorine.

firecracker pop floatie, just how much?
speak its measure and, i swear
you can have it. i swear i'll huff,
and i'll puff, and i'll blow until
my face runs cherry, lemon, blu razz
and i melt between your folds
and you must suck me
off your fingers.

hurry. the sun is high
and the drops
are forming.

Calling

Weatherspoon



**A text from my biological mother, "This is Mommie. Thanks for your strength and courage. Sometimes courage skips a generation. I am so happy that you brought it back to this family! I'm very proud of you."*

serendipity rides
the already low, low, lower
rock bottom as a concept
has arrived
in all its confoundedness
the bottom is a larger top
the way the ocean
is a greater sky
god will give you
a short life
just to rock your ego
to sleep
hop-skip-jump
as small children play
on the shoulders
of giants
pity the air
is thinner
at the edge
of the sky
a pretty blue cage
is still a cage
no matter how distant
the top may appear
from the bottom
in its depths—the ends
are not black
as i had imagined
but white as i had seen
marbled with more of itself
until sight as a sense
becomes fiction

calling for help
i hear my mother's name
calling for change
i hear the clicking
of heels
and tongues
a council formed in my flesh
to disapprove of me
in public
i wonder what the white will think
if i belong
if i am color
or bleach

when i was younger
i never used to fight with myself
like this
just other people
just systems
just justice

when i was older
i stopped using
disconnected and unplugged
sober for some years
and those were
the worst years
falling in love with nothing
to raise me
falling asleep with nothing
to aide me

back broken in tiny bends
the way i stood tall
like a mountain
and realized i couldn't move
watched people settle on me
make me their home
loving me
but not how i wanted to be loved

brick by brick
on the anniversary of
when i ran away
i plan to build a home
on the side of myself
where i can come and go
as i please

Everyday Boats

Carter Welch



You put your shoes on, left first, then you pause to gather the lake's emergence, then you press on the right one. Your right foot is the bigger one.

Twelve years ago, you and your mother walked the shoreline from the channel to the nuclear plant. It was a practice in behavioral analysis, she said. She explained what the lake's frown looked at and drew its smile in the sand. You asked her what it was doing. She sulked and skipped a rock. You counted the impact's doppler impressions. Fourteen of them, unbroken entrenchments until the lake gulped them down. Your mother never answered.

On the west side of the state, we often say someone must die when a summer storm rifles across the lake. It's not that it kills them. It is a simple process, quite parallel to the laws governing the conservation of energy. The battery needs a charge, and somebody extinguishes their life to power another advance. They have agency in this. This is how we keep the gardens growing and the corn knee-high by early July and the apples ready by October and the cricks dumping their sluice into the sea and the cherry pits small and this is how your mother died.

She chose to give her electricity to the advance earlier than most of the shoreline people. She watched her father do it at a normal age and her mother too late. Her mother's storm was far too green and far too weak. It was a gentle warning to the people of this coast that self-interest hurts your neighbors and kills your children's crops and lets the salmon go thirsty on the beach. That year was one of our worst. Your grandmother's name vanished from the registry. So perhaps that is why your mother traded with the skies so early.

But I am certain you know that is not why. She was a quick learner, yes, but she was not the type to correct the past solely for the sake of balance. This theory undersells her. This is how that storm went.

I was out by the pier rocks. I always preferred the north side, where the pier was not a concrete slab but a hard line of boulders from the other side of the lake. The water had grown warm early. It was too late to trawl for salmon so I hoped for some bluegill. I don't believe they ever came. But it was balmy and I was comfortable and the lake held the appearance of a diamond mosaic that only the boldest of sun performances would dare. I sat there in a complacent languor and waited for someone to die. When I saw the first clouds rush above the horizon, I just about collapsed into the pallid water next to my feet. The clouds were the delicate burgundy your mother wore to summer parties and the marina. The storm's breath was lavender liker her toothpaste. And the lightning held the most unbelievable glimmers of radiance, as if every strike were painted by the sun's refraction against an iris. It was very clear to me. This was your mother.

I started running. I ripped my way over bouldered terrors because once the storm came close enough the waves would rise and cover me and it would only storm again. But you were still there. The burgundy was pouring into the south and it was rushing toward us all, gulls fleeing and slashing a siren song, innocent tourists taking pictures only to smell a floral storm. They began to cry. I ran and ran and ran but the waves got closer and darker and it seemed reaching the jetty was implausible so, I paused, looked for lightning, and dove in. The water was thick like an old red wine and it gurgled and it rushed like I've never known and it pushed and pushed and pushed and I crashed onto the north beach and rolled in the sand and felt the electricity overrun me and saw the rain fall silently and then in a great cascade it came and it washed the sand from my arms and the thunder kept coming and one crack was a familiar whisper and I laid there only thinking of you and in the wicked blast of her July rampage I did the only thing a battered man could do and that was fall asleep heavy under periwinkle heat.

That is how your mother died. The corn rose high that year and the sun was a little bit hotter and the lake never seemed to settle. Now, the rain comes less frequent. The water is too placid and the boats languish. I miss your mother and you are grown now.

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