

**centrique**

LITERATURE & ARTS MAGAZINE

QUARANTINE EDITION



CARTHAGE  
COLLEGE

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**centrique**

# CENTRIQUE 2020

QUARANTINE EDITION



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## DEAR READER,

This year things are looking a little different for *Centrique*. Due to the recent events of 2020, we have altered our annual publication process. In order to encourage the safety of our community, the forty-ninth edition of *Centrique* has been tailored for online reading. With the closure of campus and the recent stay home orders, we are dedicated to keeping the Carthage community and others as safe as possible by making this issue available online. While we are sad that the creative work in this publication will not be printed at this time, we feel a virtual copy is the safest and smartest course of action. We hope a physical publication will be possible in the near future, but safety is our present priority.

This is a time of uncertainty, but we can find comfort in the things around us. We hope you enjoy this collection of creativity and are inspired by it. There's no better time to create than now, but know that it's okay if all you create is a safe and happy space for yourself.

Stay safe and be creative,

*Isabella Norante*

Isabella Norante  
Executive Editor  
*Centrique* Magazine



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## TRUST, ISABEL MATTHEI

His hands gripped the cushion of the seat so tight that his nails were snapping threads in the cloth. His father held the steering wheel with one hand and a cigarette in the other. The smoke danced around the cabin of the truck until it exited swiftly out the open window. Its smell stung the boy's nose, but he was too fascinated to care. Even if he did, there was nothing he could do about it. His father was not the type to put out a cigarette for someone else. His father's eyes gazed ahead at the dirt road but the boy's never left the cargo in the back. The amount of raw power the beast housed made the boy green with envy. He watched as it paced back and forth, having no sense of where it was going. At the same time it seemed to have no fear of the destination either. The boy could hardly blink as he watched. His father, having dealt with many animals in his profession, rolled his eyes at his son's interest in the beast. As they drove through the trees, branches smacked the sides of the truck. Sometimes the boy would jump because the sound was so aggressive. The beast would look up for a moment then begin pacing again. Its vibrant color contrasted everything around it. The boy wondered how such a big and bright animal could be a great hunter in the wild. How did the prey not see it crawling in the high grasses? How was it silent enough that not another soul was alerted by its presence?

"Dad," the boy turned to his dad. "Is the tiger a boy or a girl?"

The father scratched his chin as if he had forgotten what he was doing all together.

"Female, I think. She was too aggressive with her habitat mates, so they are transferring her to our zoo. She'll be alone."

The boy thought on this a moment. "Won't she be lonely if she's all alone?" he asked with a frown that was a little more forced than it was natural.

"No. Tigers are solitary animals. They want to be alone in the wild. It's in their nature. She'll probably be more comfortable than anything. Besides, she attacks other tigers. It's not like she's given us much of a choice." The boy's attention went back to the cage. It was closed off on three sides so the tiger couldn't see, but there was a small, barred opening on the last side so that his dad could keep an eye on her. There was another barred opening on the top to let light in. To the boy it seemed unfair and cruel; to the father it seemed safe and secure.

There was an old car pulled over on the road ahead. Smoke rose from the front of it. A man was waving his arms at them. The father let out a grunt and pulled the truck over. The tiger didn't seem to care about the absence of movement. The father grabbed his tool bag that he left under the middle of the seat and looked at the boy for a moment. "Wait here and don't do anything stupid," he said and opened the squeaky truck door. His shoes hit the dirt road and made a cloud of dust rise then slowly fall. He took one more look at the boy, then shut the door and marched over to the dead car.

The boy watched his father talk to the man. His father stood straight, as if to show more strength than he really had. The boy sat forward and watched without blinking, almost like he was listening to an important lecture, as the two men walked to the hood and lifted it. It covered both of them from the boy's line of sight. The boy eased up and sat back in his seat. He let out a long breath and released some of the tension he had from being around his father. The hood of the car slammed shut and, as if he had been woken from a sleep, the boy jumped up, tension flooding back in. The man shook his father's hand, got in his car, and amazingly drove off. His father had a proud look on his face while he walked back to the truck. He got in and without saying a word, they were off again.

The boy looked at the jungle surrounding them. The trees were so many different shapes. They weaved around each other; it never felt like they smothered one another. They courteously allowed each other space to exist. Vines connected some of the trees like a natural phone network. Sunlight hit the ground in patches, leaving most of itself on top of the trees. The boy had always loved living near the jungle. His father told him how dangerous it was, but the boy couldn't ever stay away. It was mysteriously enchanting to him. *Wouldn't the tiger be happier out there?* he thought.

At that moment, leaves began to rain down on the truck. The father scowled and turned on the windshield wipers. The curious boy looked up to see what was causing it. Monkeys were swinging from branch to branch, racing the truck. Their arms, legs and tails gracefully grabbed the branches. They were confident in each of their leaps, as if falling was a foreign concept to them. They looked so happy and free. They laughed and yelled in enjoyment. The boy began laughing along with them. The father looked at his son as if he were crazy. "What's so funny about a bunch of monkeys? They can be dangerous, you know."

The son turned to his father and said, "They're having fun and I'm having fun watching them." The father once again rolled his eyes. The monkeys, getting bored of their game, dispersed into the jungle. The boy's attention once again went back to the tiger. She was no longer pacing. Her gaze was aimed upward towards the opening. The boy smiled as he realized that she must have been watching the monkeys too. Then her gaze dropped and the two stared straight into one another's eyes. There was no anger or fear in either of them. Curiosity bloomed inside them both. The tiger took a couple of steps closer and sat right in front of the boy. Only the cage and the cabin of the truck came between them. She just stared at him and tilted her head. He wondered what had piqued her interest all of a sudden. After all, he had been here the whole time and she had just been pacing.

The father looked over and saw what was happening. He hit the brakes hard and the truck swerved to the side of the dirt road. "What are you doing? Don't do that," he yelled. The tiger sprang up and hissed at the father, then went to the back of its cage.

"What was I doing wrong?" the boy asked frantically. He feared his dad when he got angry. Especially when he didn't know what he did wrong because he couldn't even apologize.

"It is dangerous to look straight at a tiger's eyes. They will take it as a challenge and I don't need a riled up, aggressive tiger. I especially don't want it trying to go after you." The boy was surprised at the last statement. His father didn't usually show much affection towards him. He didn't even think that his father would care if he were to get hurt. He guessed he was wrong.

He glanced back at the tiger that was licking its paws in the corner. "She didn't seem aggressive. She seemed more like she was curious."

The father sighed. "Tigers don't get curious. They have only a few base instincts and when it comes to you, its instinct is to hunt and kill." The boy felt confused because the tiger had shown no sign of wanting to hurt him. "Just don't stare, okay? You can look, but don't stare," his father said. The boy nodded.

They rode in silence for a while. The boy began to wonder if his father didn't understand the tiger. Maybe he wasn't fit to take care of it. Maybe the tiger was better off in the wild, having fun and being free like those monkeys. Maybe it wasn't aggressive when it didn't need to be. The boy trusted the tiger and began to form a plan for its escape.

The keys for the cage jingled in the cup holder between the boy and his father. The son looked at them with yearning, but the father was so focused on driving that he didn't notice. Inching his hand closer and closer, the boy finally grabbed the keys and pulled them towards him slowly, careful not to make too much sound. The father didn't notice the absence of the jingling noise in his cup holder. The boy sat in anxiety of what he was about to do for a bit then blurted out, "Dad, I need to pee." His father looked at him and sighed. He slowly pulled the truck over.

"Go ahead. Yell if you need me. Stay away from the animals."

The boy got out of the truck and headed towards the back. Once he was out of sight of the rearview mirrors, he jumped on the truck bed. The entire truck moved back and forth. The boy closed his eyes, waiting for his father to come yelling at him, but he didn't. The father thought it was just the tiger moving around. The boy began unlocking the cage. The lock fell and made a loud bang when it hit the metal of the truck. It was at that moment that the father realized his keys were gone. He scrambled out of the cabin of the truck, realizing exactly what the boy was doing. The boy had already opened the latch of the cage by the time the father had gotten halfway down the truck.

The tiger perked its head up at the squealing of the door. It prepared itself and lunged out of the cage. It landed in a huge cloud of dirt. The cloud slowly revealed the tiger looking at the boy. The father screamed at his son to run, but the boy walked up to the tiger and stared at its eyes. The tiger was still. Its muscles relaxed. It rubbed its head into the boy's chest. The boy hugged the tiger and they stayed like that for a few seconds. *I knew it*, the boy thought over and over.

The father, not believing a tiger could ever be peaceful, screamed again. The tiger tensed and looked at the man. It narrowed its eyes. A growl came from deep in its throat. It bared its teeth and hissed. The father took two steps back, but tripped over some loose rocks on the road.

The tiger looked back at the boy and they locked eyes again. Then she turned and lunged at the father. She grabbed him by the throat and locked her jaw. There was a loud snap as her teeth closed into each other. The father's screams stopped abruptly and the color in his cheeks faded as life left his body. The boy saw the life drain out of his father's eyes. Tears ran down his cheeks, but he wasn't sure why.

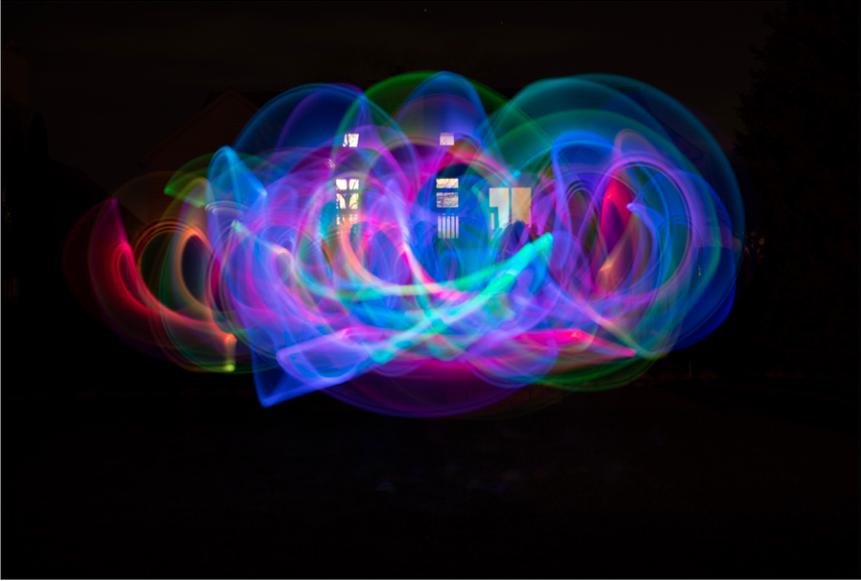
The young boy stood there in shock. Not a single thought ran through his mind. It was frozen to what he had just witnessed.

The tiger dropped the body to the ground. Another cloud of dirt covered his father's corpse. The boy, being out of his father's sight, relaxed. His tension melted away. He looked at the tiger. The tiger bowed its head towards the boy. Monkeys howled in the distance. The boy walked to the tiger and wrapped his arms around her neck. She pushed him onto her back. Feeling the warmth of her fur and leaving his father's fears behind, the boy and the tiger went into the jungle together while the smell of fresh blood slowly disappeared in the distance.



GOLDEN LADS, PAOLA ARRIAGA





UNTITLED, TYLER FARINO

## THE LEGEND OF IKO, TAYLOR FAUBEL

“Long ago, long before Veilara gained its independence, long before the Amairyn Empire first colonized and enslaved the people of Veilara, long before the Amairyn Empire even existed, an ancient civilization of mystical and magical beings roamed among the mortals of Othyaë. The island of what is now known as Veilara was home to one of the most powerful of these beings, Iko.

“Iko was considered to be the most beautiful being throughout Othyaë. Many described her as having long white hair and eyes that were a different color every day. Anyone who saw her stood in awe. However, Iko’s beauty is not what made her so special. She was known as the bearer of gifts, and many believed she was also a prophet.

“No one knew what she was or where she came from, but they worshipped her as if she was a goddess. Many believed she was the one who brought magic to Othyaë. She would graciously give the other inhabitants gifts out of pity for them from watching the many disasters they faced. Iko gave an array of gifts from magical plants that would grow within a day with fruits and vegetables on them, to objects that would glow when the handler was in danger, to animals not of this world, to giving mortals their own powers. One time, Iko gave a young man the ability to teleport in order to save people trapped in a cave, while another time she gave a man the strength to move a giant boulder off of a path at the bottom of a mountain.

“One of Iko’s most prominent gifts was given on one warm evening. Iko heard screaming and yelling coming closer to her small hut in the forest. Rushing out, Iko saw an older man with long black hair and olive skin with a wrinkled forehead carrying an injured child in his arms. As he got closer, Iko could see the fear and panic in the man’s eyes.

“‘Please help! My daughter! Something attacked her!’ the man said, panicked, laying his daughter on the ground in front of Iko.

“Iko said nothing and kneeled down to look at the pale, injured, black-haired girl that was unconscious. There were large bite marks on the side of her stomach with a steady flow of blood coming out. Iko had never seen bite marks like that before, but she quickly took action. She closed her eyes, placing one of her hands on the girl’s chest and gripping her clear crystal amulet with the other. A large flash of light came from Iko’s amulet, forcing the older man to look away.

“When he looked back at his daughter, the color had returned to her face, and her injuries had miraculously healed. The girl’s eyes slowly opened to see her father with teary eyes over her and a woman that she did not know. She had no recollection of what had happened. In the years to come, the young girl’s father slowly noticed her ability to heal herself and others. When the girl fell and scraped her knees, the cuts would immediately heal. And when a friend of hers got hurt, all she had to do was touch the injury, and they would be likewise healed.

“Until one day, it all stopped. Every plant, object, animal, and power that Iko gave vanished as if they never existed. Along with her gifts, Iko vanished into thin air. All the magic in Othyaе disappeared, never to be seen again.”

“But why did she disappear, Mommy?” The little girl with long dark brown hair and bright blue eyes asks. She clutches her sheets and brings it closer to her face.

“That’s the point, we aren’t supposed to know,” the little boy in the bed next to her says. He is almost identical to his sister with his hair and eye color, but much less timid.

“Now, now Jacob, let Clairise be,” their mother says. “It is unknown to us what happened to Iko. They say when they found the transcript, it was torn into pieces with other pieces missing.

They believe those missing pieces are the key to finding out what happened. But some say that Iko sealed all of the magic away in a crystal stone and hid it where no one would find it, in order to protect the people of Othyaе from what is to come. They say that one day when the unknown darkness rules over Othyaе with no hope of recovery, a young woman will rise from the shadows. Guided by her kin, she will break open the stone and release all of the magic back into Othyaе, Veilara, bringing the beginning of the end of the darkness.”

“Do you think someone will find it?” Clairise asks.

“Oh, I know someone will find it one day,” she says, getting up from the wooden chair she was sitting on and places the book on the nightstand between the two beds. “But it is time for bed.” She tucks in Clairise and kisses her on the forehead, then does the same to Jacob. She blows out the candles on the nightstand and picks up the candle next to the wooden chair. She slowly walks to the doorway and looks back.

“Goodnight, my beautiful children.”



WRITER, TAYLOR FAUBEL

## SALT, ISABEL MATTHEI

Bill pushed his green beans around his plate. The elaborate designs on the plate appeared and disappeared as he moved the vegetables from one spot to another. Bill's mother was humming a song as she washed the dishes in the kitchen. As Bill listened, he decided that his mom really wasn't any good at it. Her rhythm was all over the place. She messed up half of the notes, but, nevertheless, she kept going without caring even a little what anyone thought.

Bill watched his mother sway from side to side. He hadn't had a real conversation with her in two and a half months. Whenever she seemed in a good mood, which was not often, it made Bill's heart cold. He didn't think she should be happy this soon after the accident. If he ever fell in love with someone and he died, he wouldn't want them to get over him this fast. He felt so much anger towards his mother that the most he could do was tolerate her presence.

His own emotions kept him from seeing how close his mother was to breaking down. She hummed to distract herself. She swayed to hide how much she was shaking. She avoided conversations with her son as much as he avoided them with her because she feared she would suddenly start crying in front of him. She desperately wanted to remain — or at least seem — strong for her boy so that he didn't lose both of his parents. She bottled up her pain and kept quiet, but her bottle was becoming very full and its thin glass was starting to crack. Sometimes she just couldn't hold it all in, so now she faced the kitchen sink, washed dishes, hummed, swayed, and silently cried.

Bill turned his attention back to his vegetables, so that he wouldn't have to look at his mother anymore. He had always hated green beans. His immediate thought when he first saw them on the plate his mother set down in front of him was that she knew he hated them and made them just to spite him.

In truth, the beans were all that was left in the freezer and she was too depressed that day to go to the store.

Bill decided that if he had to eat them he would have to douse them in salt. He looked around the table. Napkins, a yellow tulip in a vase, and the pepper shaker were all in the center. Nothing but his plate and the placemats remained on the edges. No salt. He looked around. His eyes searched the counters and the shelves. Nothing. Bill puffed out a long

sigh. *Great*, he thought, *now I have to ask her*. “Hey, Mom. Where’s the salt?” he asked, trying and failing to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

Bill’s mother paused in her movements as if she were suddenly frozen. As abruptly as she stopped, she began swaying and washing dishes again. He heard her take in a shaky breath and let it go very slowly. “I thought I put it on the table next to the pepper,” she said, sounding like she had been crying for days. She cleared her throat and tried again, “If it’s not there, it should be in the spice cabinet.” Bill looked at her, and realized that she hadn’t looked at him since he came out of his room for dinner and that she had not eaten anything herself.

Overcome with the desire to test what he had thought and now questioned to be true, he asked, “Mom... Are you okay?” And with that simple question, she broke. Her knees lost their strength to hold her and she fell. Her hands came up to shield her eyes as if still trying to hide that she was crying, but her loud sobs took any chance of that away. Bill was shocked and felt guilt claw its way into his thoughts. He had been wrong and he had shunned her for something that wasn’t true. His own legs seemed to grab the strength that hers had lost and he rushed over to her. He hugged her tightly from the side and began to repeat over and over that he was sorry. She turned towards her son and embraced him back. The two sat on the kitchen floor together, sobbing in a tight embrace for what felt like days.

Finally, when their crying became more like sniffing, they loosened their grip on each other so that their eyes met. Bill’s mom smiled at him. “I love you so much,” she said.

He hugged her close again. “I love you, too.” When they got the will to let go, they both looked down and saw that the salt was sitting upright on the floor beside them.



UNTITLED, GABBY SCHMITT



UNTITLED, GABBY SCHMITT

## CHANGEOVER, ISABELLA NORANTE

Jason was acutely aware of the sweat trickling down his spine and pooling beneath his blue and yellow uniform. With the sun high overhead, the river of sweat wasn't likely to stop any time soon. Rearing up from his hunched stance, he extended his arm, throwing the chartreuse ball in the air, and swung down on its side with a slicing racquet. Out. He gritted his teeth, wiped the sweat off his forehead, and began the ritual again. One, two, three. After the third bounce, he threw the ball up again. Thwack; this time, the serve was good.

He readied himself for the return. Though the boy across the court was tall and lean (with barely any muscle on him), he could place the ball. The return was a swift, cross-court shot Jason could barely reach, but Jason made a quick forehand and sent it back to the other side of the court.

This was the part Jason hated the most. The establishment of a rhythm, the back and forth until one of them made a mistake. He liked being an aggressive player, one who went up to the net and put away any shot his opponent threw his way. Unfortunately, the skinny boy on the other side of the court had no issues lobbing the ball far over Jason's head any time he tried approaching the net, so Jason had no choice but to stay put.

There was just something so dull about this type of play. It gave him time to think, and that wasn't necessarily a good thing. At the net, there wasn't time for thinking, only instantaneous reactions; stuck at the baseline, Jason had plenty of time to think about everything — including what happened last night.

The ball came back over the net, and Jason readied himself for another stroke. Net. *Shit*. Jason shook his head; he needed to pay attention. That meant no distractions, especially not the kind that thinking about last night provided. With a groan, he went to retrieve the ball as the other boy got ready for the next serve. "Thirty, fifteen," he called out, arm raised to the sky and racquet ready to strike. His serve landed in the corner of the box, and the boy was too late getting to it. *There we go*, Jason thought. "Forty, fifteen." Another serve, another quick return, and the rally began again.

Forehand. It wasn't as if he was drunk, he'd barely had one drink, and really, Dustin hadn't had much to drink either. Backhand, down-the-line. He shouldn't be thinking about this. It didn't mean anything. Another

backhand. It didn't mean anything, right? It was probably just a fluke — forehand — and sure, maybe he had felt something, but they were best friends — forehand, cross-court — so of course he'd feel something, it was only natural — forehand — he needed to stop thinking about this, right now! With an authoritative chop, Jason sent the ball spinning backwards for a drop-shot; just like that, the point was over.

Jason pulled the other ball from his shorts pocket and sent it over to the wiry boy across from him. It landed a few feet away, and the boy scampered after it. Jason watched him go; the boy was a good player, he had to give him that, though Jason suspected the boy was no more than a sophomore from his awkward stance and tentative play. He may not have been an aggressive player like Jason, but he was consistent. Jason's coach always said consistency was key, and the boy across from him was out to prove it. The boy's first serve, though flat, landed in the middle of the box: consistent.

Jason returned the serve with backspin, sending it spiraling towards his opponent's feet. The boy returned it with only mild difficulty, taking a nice, easy stroke to buy himself some more time. With a sigh, Jason entered again into the boring back-and-forth battle of groundstrokes.

With each hit, he fell deeper into the memory of last night, no matter how much he tried to fight it by focusing on the present, repetitive game. It wasn't unusual for his parents to invite the McClary family over, and it wasn't unusual for the kids to hang out and sneak a few drinks from the basement refrigerator; it was, however, unusual for Jason to kiss his best friend, Dustin McClary. Normally, him and Dustin spent the night shooting the shit and complaining about their families, this stupid school, whatever —

“Out!” the boy called from across the court, holding up his index finger to reiterate his ruling.

*Get it together, Jason.* He could imagine his coach screaming at him already, telling him to get his head out of his ass and play. Besides, it wasn't important, whatever had happened last night; he needed to forget about it and finish this match. It wasn't important to think about the relationship he'd had with Dustin since preschool and the time they spent together every summer; what was important was returning the incoming serve and finishing this point as quickly as possible. It wasn't important that Dustin's name was playing over and over in Jason's head as Jason's girlfriend cheered for him from the court bleachers. None of that could

be important right now, and yet oddly, it was all that mattered to Jason. Not the match, not cementing his place in his conference — none of it. All Jason could think of between strategically placed shots was the way Dustin had looked at him last night, sitting on the settee in Jason's basement, and the way his basement lights filtered through Dustin's eyelashes.

He wasn't even sure how it happened. They'd only had a few sips of PBR, the ones Jason's dad kept stocked in the fridge for barbecues and wouldn't notice if one or two were missing. But there was something about the light on Dustin's face and the taste of the beer and the privacy of the basement that made Jason lean in and kiss Dustin, hoping he'd reciprocate but fearing he wouldn't.

With a start, Jason realized the game was finished; it was time for him to switch sides with the other boy. Stopping at the net for a quick break, Jason used the edge of his standard-issue St. Charles jersey to wipe the sweat off his forehead. It didn't do much, but the act made him feel slightly better.

His opponent was wiping his own face at the other end of the net. What was the boy's name again? Jason couldn't remember it — wasn't it something short, like Lee or Rob or Mike? Jason cast a glance at the boy over his own jug of water. The other boy looked like a Mike; something in his combed hair and soft jawline just said "Mike." He was handsome, Jason supposed, in a lanky way; not like Dustin, who was — *stop. Stop it!* Jason scolded himself as he crossed over to the west side of the court. It was time to put this rumination to an end.

"Mike" — or whatever his real name was — was waiting for Jason's serve. Jason served with efficiency; he was not going to stop and think about the consequences of last night's incident. He was not going to think about the disgust of his mother, whose own brother was ostracized from the family for his sexual orientation, or the disappointment of his father, who'd insisted upon a private, Catholic education for his son.

Fifteen, love.

Jason was not going to think about the devastation of his girlfriend when she found out what he'd done. He was not going to worry about Dustin telling her, or accidentally slipping up and revealing it himself. He was not going to worry about the guilt he would carry throughout their relationship as he pretended nothing was wrong.

Thirty, love.

Jason was not going to think about the strained relationship that would form between him and Dustin — a result of pretending nothing had happened. Jason was not going to think about the two boys hiding their feelings for each other when it was the most authentic feeling Jason had ever experienced. He was not going to think about losing Dustin as a friend, and losing the possibility of him ever becoming more.

Forty, love.

Jason was not going to think about the fact that last night had changed him. He was not going to acknowledge the way he felt, the way he could now recognize that he was different and always had been; he was simply not going to think.

Game.

When the match finally ended, Jason was on the west side of the court, exhausted. His girlfriend ran up to him and he kissed her, holding her tightly with no intention of letting go.



SNOW, ELLE MARU

## HOLY RAVIOLI; BEN CROSBY

i found god the other day  
not my god, but a god

he took the corporeal form  
of a can of Chef Boyardee  
rolling down the grocery aisle

i tried to follow him  
but i lost interest on  
the corner of 9th and  
woodland

maybe i'll find my own God someday  
and i'll get to feast on the  
flesh of His holy Ravioli

i long for salvation  
in the form of canned  
Italian Cuisine



IT'S ABOUT RACE, PAOLA ARRIAGA





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T W E N T Y



twenty

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