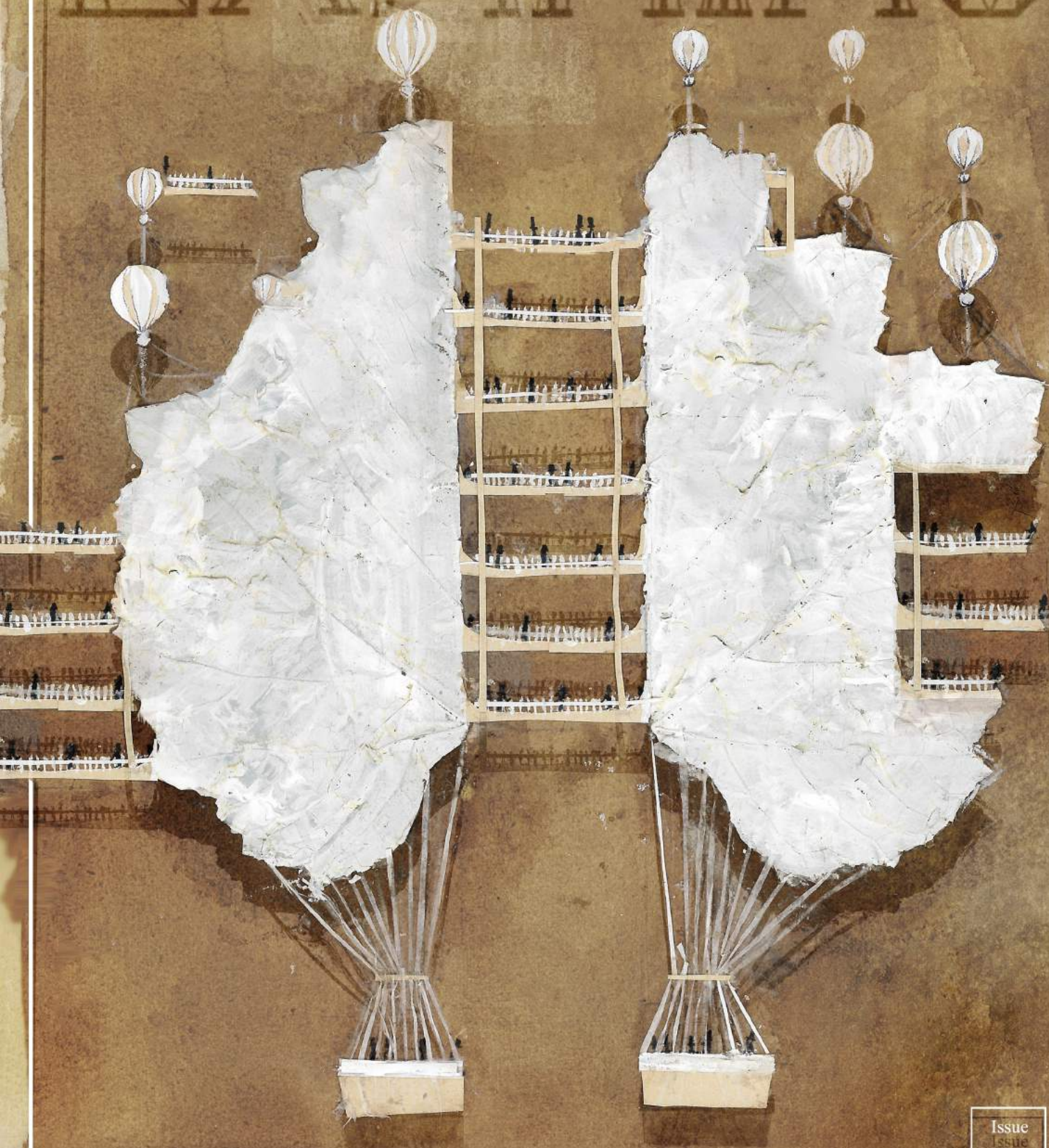


EXANIMO



Issue
#1
#1

Original cover by Lorenzo Santinelli

Editing and layout by Alice Bidetti

Illustrations by

Mathew Borrett
Alexander Daxböck
Frédéric Forest
Fan Ho
Loc Xuan Nguye
Nyssa Sharp
Cynthia Tedy
Xuan Loc Xuan

We, the Literature Club Board, are happy to present the first issue of our literary magazine.

Ex Animo means “from the soul”. We thought this title appropriate since all of our own creative writing stems from interior drama. In this publication you will find the creative efforts of our community of talented writers. Some of us study literature or creative writing, but some others are “closeted” writers. We are happy that our featured authors were brave enough to come out and show a piece of their wonderful souls to our readers!

To our pleasure, we received a large number of submissions. For this reason, we had to make a selection. We decided to prioritize the works of those students who will be graduationg this semester and of study abroads who might not have the chance to be featured in the magazine in the future.

We hope you will enjoy reading *Ex Animo* and we would like to thank all the students and professors who helped make this happen.

(R)ad majora!

The Board

Ex Animo

Life On Mars?.....p. 5

Fishing.....p. 6

I Haven't Slept in Weeks.....p. 7

Why do I cry?.....p. 8

Before Resting.....p. 9

Open Letter to A Closed Love.....p. 9

Our Last Words.....p. 10

Uptown Dreams, Downtown Girl...p. 12

Darkening Your Door.....p. 14

San Marco.....p. 14

Lua.....p. 15

My Future House.....p. 16

Porcelain, Ivory, Steal.....p. 17

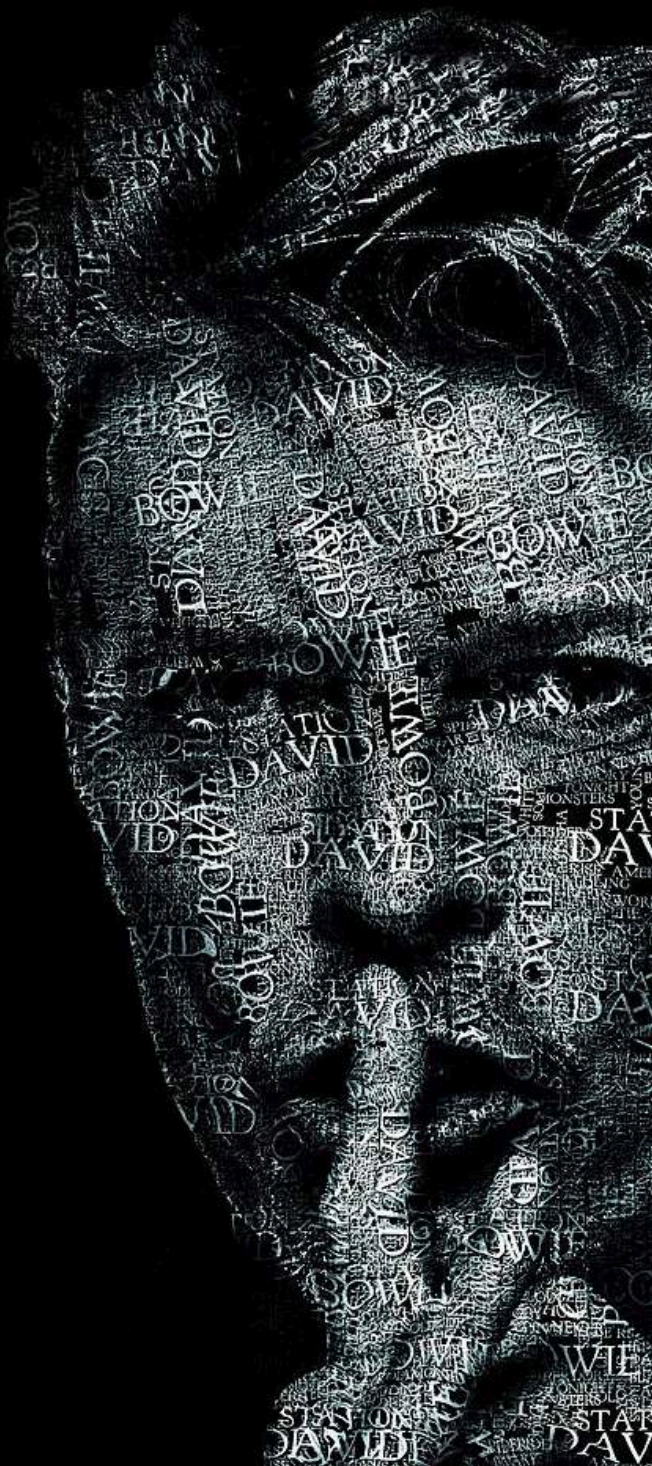
Bee Communication.....p. 18

Clay Cities.....p. 21

Life On Mars?

Oh! You pretty thing
first time I saw you I thought watch
that man
I really wish he'd rock n roll with me all
nite
because he looks like he's coming
straight out of 1985.
Unfortunately it ain't easy since you
already got this China girl
but where are we now? We made some
changes
and finally here comes the night we'll
be turning down the lights
covered in Ziggy stardust, dancing in
the street, I never felt so right.
I'm a rebel rebel living on a blackstar,
you say love is lost and just like you I
can't give everything away
but I know that all the young dudes
ain't got a thing on you
right now I'm in the quicksand and
can't find a way to get through.
I'll be your Lady stardust, you'll be my
starman
we can be heroes just for one night, or
we can be us just for one day
and, maybe, in five years
we will discover if there really is life on
Mars?

- Alessandra Longo -



Fishing

*A dying deepsea creature
Drowning in ultramarine silken sheets
Hooked and hastily returned to its waves;*

*Fished in a bar, he used the right bait,
Too soon the pirate exploited his prey,
A dying deep-sea creature;*

*The blankets reveal her translucent skin
Her opaque soul remains buried,
Hooked and hastily returned to its waves;*

*From that bedroom window, she can spot the sea
Freer waters than those she is drowning in,
A dying deep-sea creature
Hooked and hastily returned to its waves;*

- Alice Bidetti -

I Haven't Slept in Weeks

- Christine Hughes -

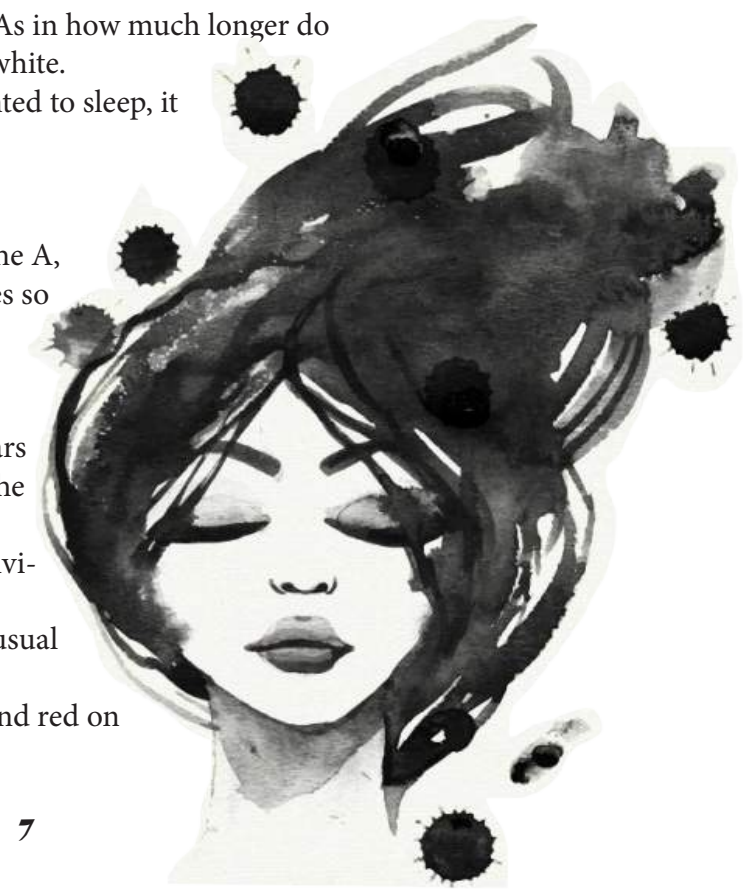
I haven't slept in weeks.

I'm running on just enough sleep to drag myself onto a train bound for Chinatown, or at least what's becoming of it;
As I walk past all of these cupcake shops with chalked up prices in every color of the rainbow: handlebar mustaches and the thick-rimmed glasses – oh, these just look nice; I don't need a prescription – cultural appropriation used as the next hot fashion
What colors would work best for a Japanese-fusion Tex-Mex joint?
They always claim they're colorblind every other time you ask though.
Or I might be overreacting: I haven't slept in weeks.

This design company wears nothing but white.
These walls are white, these floors are white; it's blinding just like every time I look at a T.V. screen and see all these Oscar nominees – what bullshit.
They are designing a game that simulates the bombing of Iraq – inspired by their “teenage” angst but they are not racked with guilt over the anger and sorrow felt in every pixelated soul that they render
“The appeal is in how old the game looks; it brings out the retro vibe –” they must see the news in vintage Technicolor and hear a drumroll with every gunshot;
A 1950s laugh track with every dropping bomb;
There's only one color in this company and it's the black designer being told to stop talking so loud
It keeps ringing; it's wringing out his neck like a noose – this white is suffocating.
But maybe that's just my eyes: I haven't slept in weeks.

When did this pizzeria show up? I've never seen this door before; in fact Lower East Side looks a lot different than before
Wasn't I just here like two weeks ago?
How do they measure time; is it yours or is it mine? As in how much longer do you have before this land becomes mine – becomes white.
Becomes so bleached that even if New York City wanted to sleep, it couldn't shut its eyes anyway!
Maybe I'm a bit jealous: I haven't slept in weeks.

Massimo Vignelli designed the subway map: this is the A, that is the B – all divided into little color coded circles so it's easier to understand
Understand where to go next; they say, “Gentlemen, which neighborhood should we conquer next?”
Rip the gold from the roots of Harlem, start Holy Wars in Little Egypt, and invade Washington Heights for the spices.
I swear these lines on the map are just tracks – not divisions for the empire, just tracks.
It's funny because the map has more colors than his usual projects; he loved black, white, and red.
And the city really loves seeing the culture of black and red on a white face.



And the white shoots the black and their children bleed red.
The hipsters love the black and white films, but all I see is red.
Or maybe my eyes are red: I haven't slept in weeks.

In the papers, I hear they are angry that they lost some leeway; the color brown has taken over the color green on the twenty and they've changed the white faces of Broadway
God forbid; white people feel Helpless when everybody else is Satisfied, but they have the Washingtons On Their Side, the rest of us have to Wait For It.
Because It's Quiet Uptown; nobody will sing in the streets after dark anymore, but it's not like you'd see them in the daylight
After all, you'll still claim that you're colorblind – tell me, does everybody look white?
All these walls are painted over white to hide the colors underneath them – when did you decide that their artwork was graffiti and da Vinci was a masterpiece?
You're shattering this city into so many identical white pieces; in about three years I won't even recognize the streets between Chinatown and Little Italy!

Now, I understand why some people think I'm from the city.
The citizens try to hold the city up, but this city is weak – its knees are quaking under a big white thumb, and they mistake it for the weather being overcast.
You'd be tired too if you had to put up with this – I'm getting there and I don't even live here.
But every time I get off the subway train, I fall in love with every cracked sidewalk and the chalk drawings I see, reminding me that you can be broken and beautiful at the same time; after all, that's the city.
As I'm leaving, I recall a woman's wise words – gentrification is not a monster; that would imply that you saw it coming.
I'm walking down the streets, looking at each colored gate, thinking about how many of these people will be there when I come back.
Maybe I'm just being dramatic.

Then again, I haven't slept in weeks.

Why do I cry?

Is it because I am weak?
Do I lack the ability to contain myself when I need to?
Do I need to?
Or do I have so strong a heart
Caring so deep about things another may ignore
That my emotion pours out of me
Unfearful and unashamed?
First just the few tears,
As everyone has had in their own life,
Then the beating breath and the heavy heart.
Soon it travels to my mind
Where from that point, there is no control.
The pain overthrows my brain
To the point where my head can contain it no more.
And the beating breaths lose their own air.

-Theresa McLean-



Before Resting

Let
The tender air caress your plump cheek
Like I would
Sleepy With the back of its finger.
Know that you can rest well, I am fighting
for us
Strenuously.
As you close your heavy lids,
Know that you can rest well
Know that you are loved,
Strenuously.

- Stefania Piccialli -

Open Letter to a Closed Love

You'll be probably staring out of a plane window just as I write this, or maybe not, maybe you'll be at home, sitting under the cold light of every solitary soul's kitchen chandelier. Either way, you'll be looking out of a window, that's how I like to imagine you, just so that I can trick my eyes into catching a glimpse of you through the glass, as I, too, look out.

Or perhaps you'll be looking at the sea, balancing your elbows on the highest wall of my city, so that I, too, can stare at any liquid surface – a dull-colored river, most of the times, the water in my bathroom sink, in this particular instance – and convince myself your quivering reflection is right beside mine. By now your eyes have swallowed the sea, or the sea has swallowed your eyes, and I can no longer distinguish between them as I think of beauty; home; danger; death.

Was it death, or was it life never lived? You must have asked yourself the same as you told me about infinite golden fields against the grey smoke-ridden underpass, our halved bodies blurting out the incompleteness of our spirits. Had I only reached out my hand I could have made myself whole.

Greeted by the glistening lights of this larger-than-life metropolis, a naïve part of me hopes they will get to you, unfolding all over your horizon. Then perhaps you'll know just by looking that one of them is my kitchen chandelier or my plane flying across the void and the centuries of silence, reaching you.

- Marialaura Grandolfo -

Our Last Words

Practice is over, Mom says "let's go."
We beg her to let us stay and watch.
No no, she talks about dinner and bed,
"Dad's pickup game will be over soon."

We beg her to let us stay and watch.
His friends are waiting, "come join us."
"Dad's pickup game will be over soon."
He smiles and tells us "listen to Mom."

His friends are waiting, "come join us."
He gives us each a hug and a kiss,
He smiles and tells us "listen to Mom."
I'll be home soon, right after I win."

He gives us each a hug and a kiss,
Mom smiles and gives him a peck,
"I'll be home soon, right after I win."
He finally runs off to his friends.

Mom smiles and gives him a peck,
"Have a good game, and enjoy yourself."
He finally runs off to his friends.
"Come on kids, let's go, Dad's having fun."

"Have a good game, and enjoy yourself."
Her last words to him, thankfully sweet,
"Come on kids, let's go, Dad's having fun."
I wish I remembered to look back again.

Her last words to him, thankfully sweet,
Hours later as he took his last breath,
I wish I remembered to look back again.
I never imagined I would see him there.

Hours later as he took his last breath,
We arrived minutes after but,
I never imagined I would see him there,
He was gone, Mom was holding his feet.

We arrived minutes after but,
It had been his time, he was no more,
He was gone, Mom was holding his feet.
Gone out wearing his Nikes, his dream.

- Lydia Smith -



Uptown Dreams, Downtown Girl

- Giulia Caparrelli -

A thick, ivory curtain loomed over the sleeping city. Snowflakes spun around in fuzzy swirls, covering rooftops and swallowing cars. A frozen shower poured down incessantly. It was an awe-inspiring spectacle, both threatening and attractive, both violent and silent. The storm was raging, and yet everything was calm. From the fogged window of my apartment, the view was blurry, the sounds were muffled. The scene was out of focus, and I kept staring at those drops falling down the glass. They were delicate, but stoutly unconcerned with the blizzard.

I'd been in New York for less than a week and a bloody tempest was already knocking down the city. They said it was the worst storm of the last 100 years. I thanked my good timing. Still, I was not surprised to receive such a brutal welcoming from the throbbing heart of the East Coast. My youthful dreams of America were fleeting bubbles on a collision course with reality. All those polished, fictional memories from Hollywood movies had to give way. My small-town, Italian upbringing was about to crack, too. There was safety in the enclosed environment of my native, provincial birthplace, proudly anchored to its past and traditions. Now, all of that was bound to clash with a hyper-progressive metropolis. I was expecting a culture shock, but maybe I was not ready yet.

After a weekend spent indoors, both cursing and sympathizing with the storm, I was anxious to get out and explore the place I would call my home for the next five months. Outside was desolate. I walked past dirty, towering snowdrifts, and I fancied myself as one of the brave survivors of *The Day After Tomorrow*. There was something picturesque, though: the streets had disappeared under stiff blankets of snow, the trees had bent precariously to sustain those heavy icy clouds, people had muffled themselves in oversized winter coats. My face was enveloped into a soft plaid scarf almost covering my sight and impairing my sense of direction. It was hard to walk on the right path. As the sun had timidly peeked out of the foggy sky, the snow started to melt into dark, misleading puddles onto which I stumbled countless of times. There was still a long way to go before I could find my balance in New York.

I headed towards Greenwich Village, where my university was located. As soon as The New

School had accepted my exchange program application, I was thrown into a seemingly parallel dimension where dreams and reality blended. I had been anticipating this moment for so long that I began to feel trapped into a pressuring responsibility: I must live up to it. Brooding as I was, I did not realize I had reached my destination. The main campus building stood out against anonymous constructions. It had unique character, balancing an industrial, modern aesthetic with the warmth of lit windows. Its unconventional architectural structure well reflected the avant-gardist ethos of its educational system. I stared at my distorted reflection in its glassy revolving door, and I began to like what I saw.

As quickly as that revolving door, time had slid by. Three months had already passed, and I still marveled at my surroundings. Every day I had to walk down 5th Avenue to reach campus. Every day I had to face the Empire State Building in its majesty. Every day my mind wandered off in reveries. I moved towards the Empire as boldly as I could, and an epiphany struck me. I'm here, really here, living in New York City. There were the stars and stripes on the flags that fluttered in the wind in a gentle greeting; the speeding yellow cabs that honked in the traffic with startling bangs; and the busy rushing New Yorkers yelling at their phones aggressively pushing me. Such a bustling vibe can frighten as well as inspire. I had the flexibility and freedom to reinvent myself, but feared to get lost in its open-ended maze. Truth is there is a very thin line between alienation and empowerment when it comes to New York City. And I was just a tightrope walker at the beginning of her training.

There was a place, though, where I soon cherished a sense of warm familiarity. Washington Square Park, the buzzing hub of the Village, was a gathering place for zealous NYU students, pretentious bohemian wannabes, and bored retired businessmen. It was an open-air theater hosting daily impromptu performances. Amateur musicians strummed their guitars acting as living jukeboxes for curious passers-by. Fearless yoga teachers held their twisting-muscle lessons on freezing, early mornings. Fervent activists enthralled strolling tourists with their utopist ideals. Washington Square Park thrived with communities. Flashing before

my eyes were the noisy piazzas with old-fashioned, tiny bars where I use to spend my lazy teenager afternoons, and the animated, festive atmosphere of the foodie festivals my town held. There I was, lingering on a dark marble bench as I watched the lively spirit of a place that so strongly reminded me of home.

After such uplifting walks, I had to remind myself that it was time to get things done. After all, I wasn't in New York to just stroll aimlessly around and overthink about the future. Officially, I was there to study. It turned out I was actually there to try out as many coffee shops as possible. Within walking distance from Washington Square Park, I discovered a cozy, small café that proudly retained the same vibe of the park. Think Coffee was the place to go when in need of inspiration. Filled with extravagant intellectuals on vintage armchairs, and mysterious indie music on crackling loudspeakers, it stirred my creativity. I became a regular customer and made friends with the barista. He was a red-haired British student, always wearing the same green visor cap, always greeting me warmly as I entered the café. He knew I was going to stay there all afternoon. He knew I was going to buy plenty of treats. He knew I was going to spend all my money. And he giggled as I actively contributed to his monthly pay.

After my third cappuccino, I usually realized I'd better go home. My apartment stood at the intersection of three neighborhoods: the Hispanic Alphabet City, the Jewish populated Lower East Side, and the young, multi-faceted East Village. This area had a profoundly attractive atmosphere: you could feel the breeze of novelty and perceive the weight of history. It is a favorite district with youngsters as it bustles with loud clubs, restaurants of any ethnicity, and hidden music venues. On my way home, I walked by crammed tattoo shops, life-sized street art, maze-like independent bookstores, and obscure cinephile societies. An impertinent, rebellious spirit filled the air, but there was something more. The rustic and authentic character of New York was buried within the bleached walls of Downtown buildings. An historic Jewish deli run by the same family for over fifty years, an old bookbinding shop still loyal to outmoded techniques, a long-standing antique shop full with knick-knacks. The past held a silent authority over the district, and yet it didn't rule despotically. It dialogued with the buzzing present, and I slowly learned to do the same.

Not only could I perceive the passing of time onto the city, but I could also feel it on my skin. Every day was a new challenge, and every obstacle I conquered, a treasured experience. I was growing up, in New York, and with New York. The city I had so long dreamed of wasn't a fixed movie scene; its titanic skyscrapers weren't its thriving core. They were dry, static, and artificial. But where the buildings lowered down, and the walls covered up in scraped graffiti, there was the developing New York I was growing up with. Open to innovation, and yet never forgetful of the past.

Certainly, there were compromises to be made. As the East Village had to give up the CBGB and allow a clothing shop to replace its historical site, I too had to let go of my share of things. I had to leave a lot behind to move there. And surely the time for doubt would come, both in the shape of a black hovering banner reading, "Is rock dead?", and in the form of a silent pressing question whispering, "Did I make the right choice?"

Five months had passed, and the last days of my stay offered me a chance to find the answer. It was May by then. One fine morning, as I set off to visit Columbia University, I took the subway up to 116th street. For the return trip, however, I resolved to go walking: approximately 120 blocks divided me from home. But it was my last week in New York, and I already missed my beloved purposeless strolling. I wanted to see more, all that the city could offer. The spectacle was worthwhile. As I cut across almost the entire length of Manhattan, I became fully aware of the changing landscape. Sumptuous residences, commanding skyscrapers, modest condo units, and humble small apartments follow one another in a cinematic movement from the stylish Uptown to the unsophisticated Downtown. It struck me how stark the differences were, how dynamic the change was. And as I reached home I realized that not only had the panorama altered, but I, myself, had also changed.

The horizon had cleared up, and no storm was foreseen.

Darkening Your Door

I stand quietly darkening your door
A castaway too far gone from the shore
I say there is no rush at all, my dear
I will be waiting with my hopeful fear
You'll find me darkening your door.

I am not new here, I've known you before
I've spent my past lives trying to draw you near
My ink goes wasted and every word's a tear
And still I'm darkening your door.

I wait and wait and I don't know what for
If all you give me is this futile war:
You run, I run, we're never in the clear.
Send me away, say I should disappear
Tell me I am free, we never swore
I shall be darkening your door no more.

- Marialaura Grandolfo -



San Marco

A blood red scarf,
A bowler hat,
And a motherly wool-heavy, giant, black
coat.
You are standing in the fog,
The red and the black, before the golden
spectacle
Wandering masterpiece,
You are part of the art of centuries.

- Stefania Piccialli -



Lua

- Arianna Bussoletti -

His eyes are not the memory you cling to. Sure: they were shiny and rounded, beautiful to get lost into, but eyes are something that only other eyes can see and you never trusted yours for judgment. It was his laugh. Bright and spontaneous. You loved the memory of it resonating inside your chest like a little bell. It still makes you a little more alive.

You two met in the night. It always happens at night, when the world is less dull and distant because there is no light to tell you how much of the world you are missing. You met and he started to devoutly show you that you were not dead. You almost believed him. It was surprising how he sincerely thought that your eyes were bright, that he loved your voice, that he loved holding your hand, that he loved you. It was the last time that you cared about something. You cared because it made you feel better, but mostly because he was happy to be with you and you wanted him to be happy. It wasn't selfishness, right?

Now it's gone, so you don't care anymore. Even the pain has gone, sucked away by the void inside your chest. He would still care, though. He would. He was bright eyes and bright laugh and bright steps, and soft smiles. Thousands of them. And you were numb fingers in a winter's night, glazed eyes and whispered words. You knew he deserved more, so you broke two hearts in the same day.

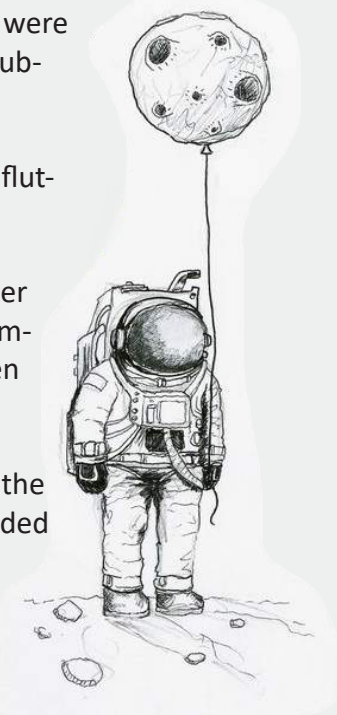
"Am I not worth trying?" he asked then, even though he never asked why or what started all of this. He just tried to guess when the void started devouring you from the inside and how he could make it better. Usually, he was good at guessing and when he tried to read you, your eyes were clear like pictures of sparkling fairies in a children's book. Sparkling like the soap bubbles you two played with in November.

The living room had suddenly been infested by an army of shiny rounded objects, fluttering and floating in the air among dust flakes and furniture. They were oily as puddles but brighter, just like his laugh, because a laugh can be oily too when it soothes and calms and brushes on your ears like notes. And then your own laughter joined in, bouncing from the bubbles back to your mouth. The watery spheres trembled at the sound and just when they were about to shatter and explode in a dozen of microscopic drops, they sparkled like diamonds. Little dots of light.

Things are always at their best the very second that foregoes the end. The light in the bubbles and the light in his laugh made you wish you could feel as well, but reminded you that you could not. He deserved so much more, you thought. It wasn't him. You were not worth trying.

Now it's night again and you are alone and you are walking past light posts, shops, people and puddles. The freshly fallen rain has filled in the holes the broken asphalt: they make a bizarre couple but they will break up in the morning, when the water will evaporate and disappear, leaving the asphalt alone again. Maybe you should shed some tears for the asphalt, some for you as well. You should also say some goodbyes before you do like the water, but silence is easier: it doesn't claim, doesn't draw, doesn't want, so you accept its company and keep on walking.

There is another oily surface in the distance, barely covered by an old pier. A weak moonbeam tries to make the sea look prettier in your eyes, but the water keeps eating at it with every little wave. Just like the puddles, the moonbeam will die and leave by next morning. Don't resist, you want to tell it: it's pointless. And searching for your reflection in the ripples is pointless, clinging to the freezing iron of the pier's railing is pointless, not feeling anymore is pointless, the void is pointless, you are pointless. What about the cold, tough? You suppose that feeling isn't pointless: is the cold something you can feel? You crouch on the wood



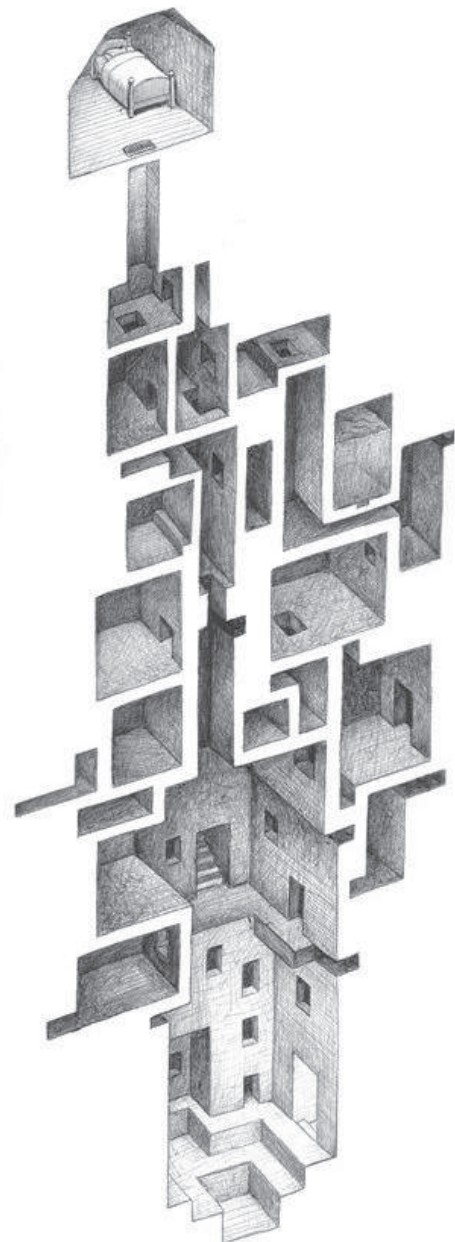
and reach for the water to try and your fingers capture something.

Movement. The water surrounds them, eats them too moving up and down, soothingly. The rhythm of the waves lulls your hand to sleep and when you draw it back, when the wind cuts your skin, blowing away the water, you finally feel something. It's cold.

It's cold outside, but when your hand meets the water again it's suddenly warm. The wind can't reach you in its embrace, the void can't reach you in its warmth. The water will fill the void, the water is welcoming, it hates the moonlight but not you: it calls you. Join its orchestra, dance with the waves and the moon at the rhythm of their lullaby, be the spectator, be the listener comfortably seated on the seabed.

The sea welcomes your feet, whispering promises of acceptance and warmth. It welcomes your legs, your torso and arms. It will not be pointless this time, underwater. Your clothes are swirling and floating all around you when the waves salute your shoulders.

You know none of this will make sense tomorrow, but maybe tomorrow doesn't need to come this time.



My future house

In my future house
I don't want to be who I am "supposed" to be

I have a big bookshelf
With thousands of books I read
And want to read
Displaced in no specific order

I want a lot of color
Everywhere.

I want the music to be on, at all times
I walk barefoot
I have pasta containers next
To the Nutella jar
And an old coffee moka
And newspapers on the counter

Diet is not a welcome word in my house.

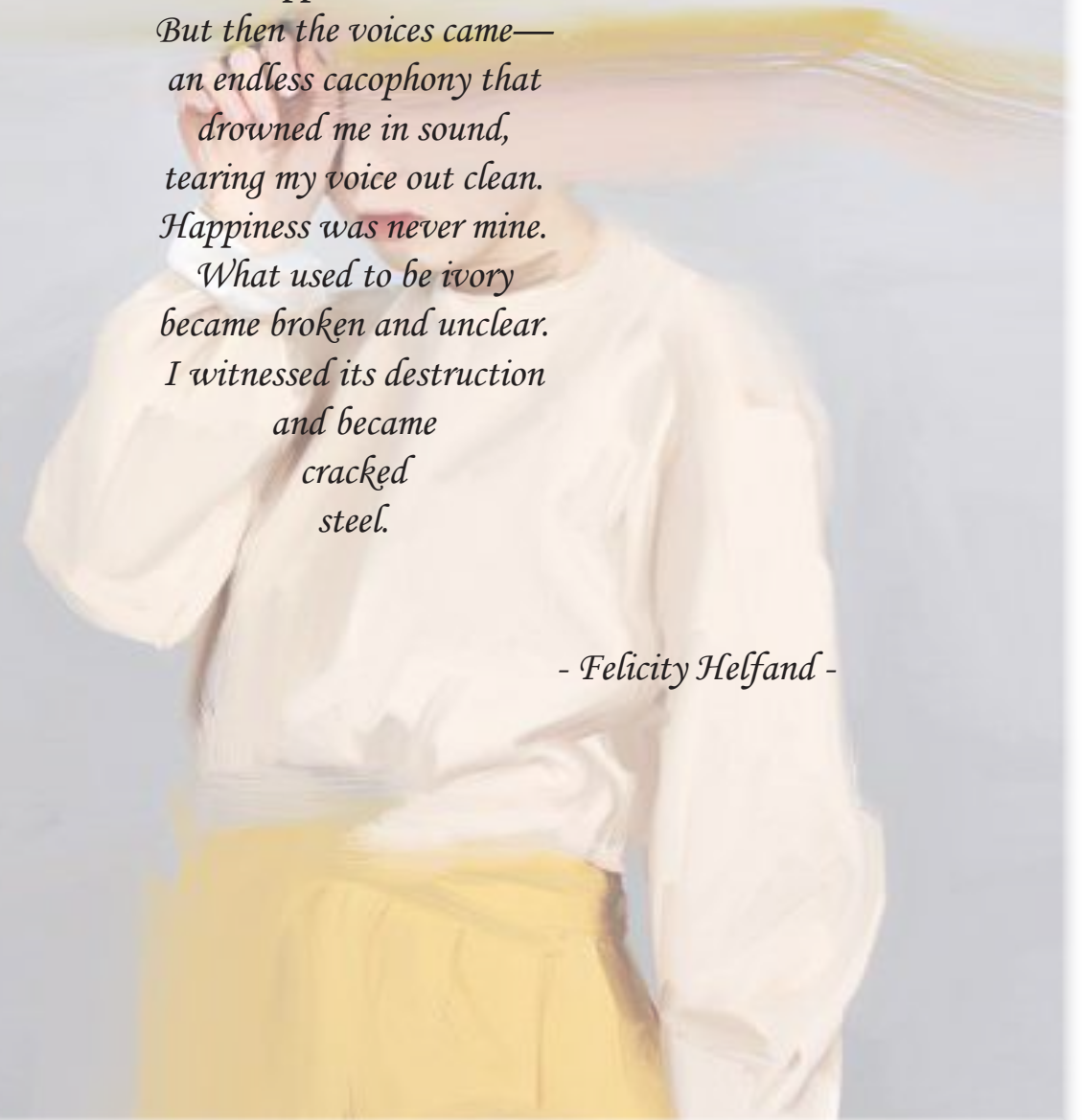
Clothes hanging from the doors and on the
walls,
Pictures
and drawings.

- Enrica Barberis -

Porcelain, Ivory, Steel

*I used to be happy,
with porcelain-pure smiles
and eyes that were sunrise-bright.
I look back on those days with envy—
when happiness was mine.
Because I found a horrible truth,
hidden deep within,
my porcelain veneer crumbled
and became my ivory skin.
Smiles began to dim,
remaining cheerful still.
Eyes that were shaken and shocked
put on a show of will.
Some happiness was mine.
But then the voices came—
an endless cacophony that
drowned me in sound,
tearing my voice out clean.
Happiness was never mine.
What used to be ivory
became broken and unclear.
I witnessed its destruction
and became
cracked
steel.*

- Felicity Helfand -



Bee Communication

- Flavia Antonelli -

Eur Magliana. Metro B. Rail number one. The space is huge. I have never noticed how large the platform was until this moment. Too many people waiting for the train stood in my way and I couldn't see the black marble-tiled floor with some red carvings here and there. I wear the lightest shirt I own, but I can see my pit stains and my hands are sweaty.

"Excuse me, do you know the time?" Asks the man next to me. He is the only one on the platform apart from me and he is wearing an unbelievably warm and elegant suit.

"Eight o'clock," I answer firmly.

"Thanks. You know, I have an extremely important job interview and I just don't want to be late. You see how one cannot just relax, even on a Sunday morning..." I barely agree, nodding. "And it's summer too. One should be on holiday at this point," I nod again. "...and then it's just too hot for the subway, I cannot bear this stuffiness. Still, it's always better than the rain."

An uneven tile under my right foot looks like a shark, one of those big ones that live alone. "It's always better alone," I whisper.

"What did you say?" The elegant man asks, for the first time turning his head towards me.

"Never mind, I was talking to myself," I say, hiding a mischievous smile.

"It happens to me too from time to time, you know? Sometimes talking to yourself helps to know yourself better! And it is crucial to know yourself to feel good with others."

"Then I recommend doing it more often."

I raise my head, turn, and start walking.

The tiles reflect the white neon light above me. I leave through the turnstiles and immediately the sultry air fills my lungs. The cigarette that I rolled earlier is waiting for me in the box of Old Holborn blue tobacco in the right pocket of my jeans. I start smoking; the first puff must never be inhaled. I close my eyes for a while. I open them again, and blow the smoke out, which slowly dissolves into the air, revealing a billboard. The yellow text on the black background of the billboard reads: "Bee Communication: be part of it, be and communicate".

I am Will Smith with his dog. New York is wonderful. Empty. The imposing skyscrapers stare down at me. I cannot believe it, all for me. I begin to levitate over Times Square. I brush against the

Times Tower, and then fly over Broadway, over Bryant Park, all the way to the Empire State Building. I reach out to touch its peak but miss by only a few centimeters. All of a sudden, I hear a ticking, electronic, acute sound. Unbearable.

6:45. I open my eyes. Another Monday pain in the ass. I get up indolently. I go into the kitchen, and put on the coffee, my morning ritual. Jacket, tie, and briefcase. I grab the keys next to an old picture of my parent's wedding. My dear parents. My beloved picture. What is left of them. I get in the elevator, still happily thinking about my parents just married.

Silence. Completely pleasant silence; no pigeons cooing, nobody leaning from a balcony to coarsely shout out that the coffee is ready. Everything seems to be magical like the Monday morning I had in the I-Am-Legend dream just a few minutes earlier, when I was Will Smith with his dog.

I get into my Fiat Panda, turn the engine and the air-conditioning on... and give birth to that shitty day.

An extraordinary stillness dominates everything. The beautiful emptiness of Via Portuense makes me turn on the radio. Silence has taken over the Eternal City.

I catch the green wave from Piazzale della Radio to Ponte Marconi. On my way, I pass by the small playground my dad used to take me on Sunday mornings. Everything is still there: the red seesaw, the green slide, and that awful gravel I used to fall on, scraping my knees. No children playing. No fathers or mothers around.

The road is empty too. I see no stupid biker, no irritating cycling behind me, no idiotic pedestrian trying to commit suicide by throwing himself in the street, I see no other jerk drivers. Suddenly I think I have not woken up yet from the dream of I Am Legend: too good to be true.

I am alone with my Fiat Panda, the uncut asphalt, and the green traffic lights. Nothing else is around and the air is peaceful. I park directly in front of the office. Not a bus around. Not a helpless old man sitting on the usual bench reading the newspaper and judging the work of some laborers struggling on the road surface. No one is jogging up and down the staircase of the Colosseo Quadrato. Everything is motionless and still, precisely like

the dream I had this morning, before the alarm clock rang. The peace and beauty that begins to fade and is replaced with a sense of uneasiness. Everything is just too bizarre.

I walk briskly toward the office, on the first floor where my workplace is and where my boss would be waiting to assign me new shitty tasks to accomplish in the next three hours. I enter the main hall and see that the elegant wooden stools usually taken by secretaries are empty and probably cold. The green office ivy carpet gives off a strange smell of bleach, and all the desks are clean and just as empty of papers or colleagues. My desk is waiting for me as usual, next to the door leading to the relax area. That is the worst location to work for people like me who want to meet the least possible amount of people, especially while working. My boss is not here either. I check the time again, first from my wristwatch and then from the square clock on the office wall. They both say 8 o'clock. The whole thing begins to be less and less pleasant and I begin to break out in a cold sweat.

I walk up and down the office, nervously going from one location to another with no precise goal. I walk into the relax area. Coffee machines and snack trays are overflowing, as if no one ever used them. I step into the men's toilets, leaving a sweaty handprint on the door. The white tiles give off the same smell of bleach as the office carpet, only more intense, probably because the toilet is smaller. I approach the one sink. I look in the mirror and turn the cold water on to rinse my face, closing my eyes for a few seconds. I open them thinking I might wake up in my bed like I did after the I-Am-Legend dream. A shiver runs through my back. I leave the men's toilet and go into the women's, next door. Still the same musty smell of bleach invades the space and my nostrils too. I look around to see if there is a single spec of dirt anywhere. It would have meant that someone was there or had been there. Everything is perfectly clean and candid.

I hurry back to my desk where I nearly threw my briefcase and car keys. I quickly snatch them, making the computer keyboard drop from the desktop. They slam into the carpeted floor making deafening clatter that echoes in the silence of the office. As the echo fades, I ignore the keyboard and head briskly, almost running, toward the window facing the subway station.

"There must be someone in the subway. There has to be the usual bum at least, Mezzapiot-

ta, asking for 50 cents, squatting at the entry," I say out loud, trying to convince myself I really am not alone, in the Eternal empty City.

It is all there, the station. Completely still. No worker is running late to catch the train, and no homeless man is squatting on the entry steps. No sign of life. My briefcase nearly slips out of my sweaty right hand. I feel my heart race and my mouth becomes dry.

I turn and run to the exit. I go quickly over the main office door through which I entered earlier. I check the time on my wristwatch: 8:10. It seems like a lifetime. I run to the car parked across the street and clumsily get in. I turn the engine on quickly, and aim for the subway station. Both traffic lights I pass on my way to the station are green. I drive, skirting the billboard of Bee Communication, still there. I park and leave the car in the middle of the station square and get out hastily. I leave the door open, and the briefcase on the passenger seat.

I run into the station, scraping my feet on the black marble tiles adorned with red carvings. On a bench in front of the dock I see a black silhouette; the broad shoulders of a man in elegant suit. I run towards him and put my hand on his shoulder. The man turns. It's him. My face contracts into an expression of joy and relief. I walk around the bench to sit next to him. My breath is normal again, as well as my heartbeat.

"Good morning!" I say.

"Hello," he says, with his gaze still on the tracks.



"You know, yesterday I did not want to be rude. I was just sick because of my own stuff" I say.

"I understand," he nods.

"I must apologize, sometimes I speak without thinking," I say, looking straight at him. "How are you? How did the job interview go yesterday?" I ask.

"Well, they hired me. Today is my first day." He seems to loosen up a bit and turns his head to look at me. "I hope I won't be late, it is not good to be late on the first day," he says.

"I hope so, but it seems that trains aren't coming this morning," I suggest, with a trembling voice.

"Yeah, well, I think there was an accident on the line to Termini Station and also the line B the trains were affected," my elegant gentleman explains.

"Don't worry, I'm sure your train will be here in no time" I reassure him, trying to reassure myself too.

"I guess so. Are you going to work too? He asks curiously. "I suppose you are or else why would you wear this suit."

"Yes, I'm on my way to work." I reply, lying "My office is nearby. I just came to say hello and apologize. I knew I'd find you here"

"How did you know?" he asks.

"I knew it and that's it. And I wanted apologize for yesterday. What's your job?" I ask.

"I'm a computer engineer. I worked for years... oh! Here comes my train. Thank you for the apology and the company," he says, "see you soon!"

"No wait, please; give me your phone number," I try to convince him.

"Sure, write it down then: 335 ... 622 ... 15 ... 75. Okay? So keep in touch and have a nice day!" he answers, smiling.

"Perfect, thank you again. I'll call you. You didn't say your name!" I scream, hoping he hears me as he walks into the train.

"Paolo Matticari!" he shouts. "See you soon!"

I wave to him, making sure his name and number are correct and enter it in my phone.

After a few seconds, I turn and walk toward the exit, trampling the black marble carved in red. On the steps entering the station, I light up a cigarette I prepared in the morning. I close my eyes to puff on the cigarette, I open them to blow the smoke out. The first puff must not be inhaled. . I follow with my eyes the smoke spreading out before me in the cool morning air. As I watch the smoke dissol-

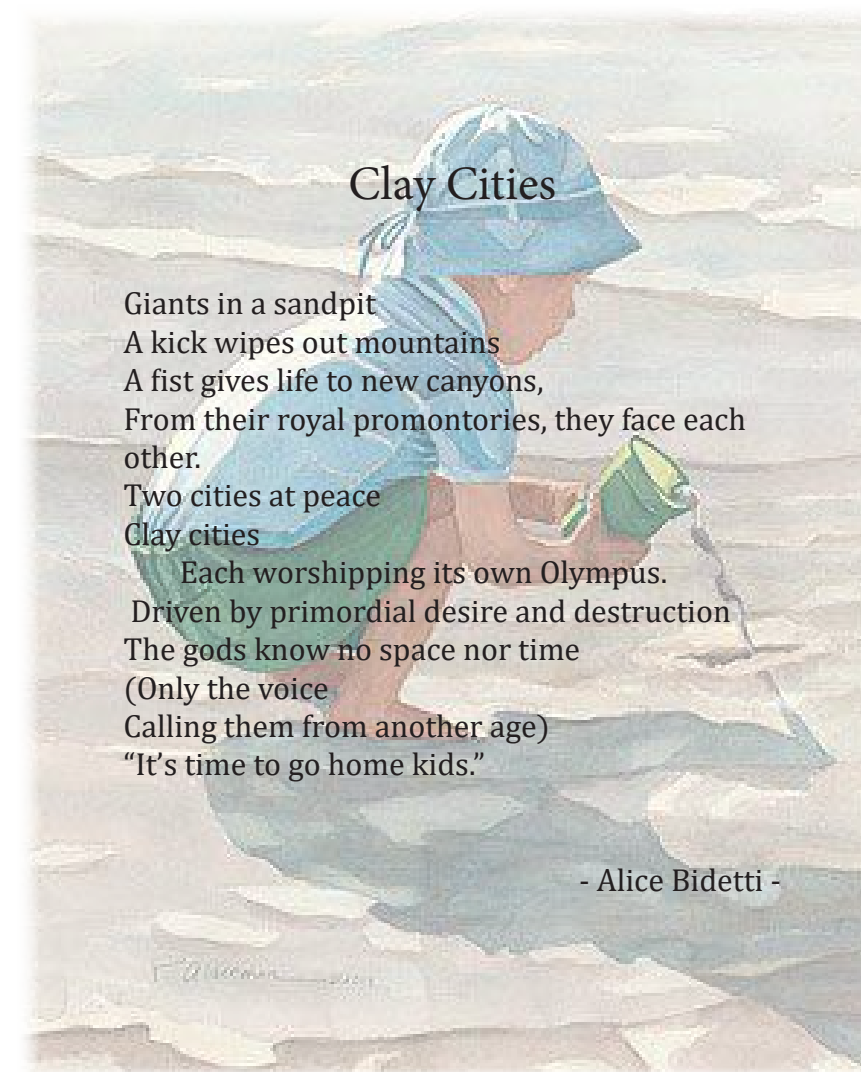
ving and drifting away, the usual billboard greets me with its black and yellow lettering: "be part of it, be and communicate." I look down and I see a red Fiat 600 moving on slowly on the Via di Val Fiorita. Next to that, in the other direction, a Fiat Panda, similar to mine, is moving slowly as well. I look around. The city is alive again.

The wonderful chaos surrounds me. Pigeons, masters of the square, are cooing and running between the feet of the people entering and leaving subway station. Bus drivers curse at scooter drivers, and everything is perfectly right to the Roman way. A couple of young Japanese tourists approach me to ask for information. Normally I would have said "Go to Hell" or dismissed them with a joke, but now I give them clear directions to the Aquarium. I taste my cigarette in the peaceful chaos of normality. Next to me Mezzapiotta also appears, handing me a paper cup, hoping that I put 50 cents in it. I do it. And he smiles at me as to say "thank you."

I get in the car, still parked where I left it. I drive back to the office, happily stuck in Via di Val Fiorita traffic. I lower both windows to let in the noise. One by one I look the passersby in the eye. They walk with their heads down focused on their phones. They all have the same expression, the typical Monday-morning-in-Rome expression: stressed and tired. They all look the same. All of them. But a woman.

I see her in the crowd, the only one looking up the street, without a phone in her hand. Her figure shines in the sun. Her hair moves over her shoulders as if it were dancing to the morning breeze of the Ponentino. The light red dress she elegantly wears reminds me of a summer sunset on the beach. Too good to be true. I feel the urge to stop and meet her. Suddenly she turns her gaze towards me. I smile in turn. We look at each other for a moment. I see that she smiles at me too. I stop the car and get out in the middle of traffic causing a furious uproar of car horns and drivers shouting. I pay them no attention. I walk to her... there are new words on my lips.

I am. I communicate.



Giants in a sandpit
A kick wipes out mountains
A fist gives life to new canyons,
From their royal promontories, they face each other.
Two cities at peace
Clay cities
Each worshipping its own Olympus.
Driven by primordial desire and destruction
The gods know no space nor time
(Only the voice
Calling them from another age)
"It's time to go home kids."

- Alice Bidetti -