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Parasite

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A Note

From The Co-Editors

Parasites live among us. Parasites sneak into our hearts, snatch secrets and leave nothing but loss in their wake. Parasitic nature is one of thievery, one of jealousy and selfishness. We placed the idea of a parasite under a microscope, peered into possibilities and found more questions rather than answers. What is a parasite, really? Is it strictly biological? Or is it social—feeding on labor, on people’s attention, on guilt, on fear, on everything you have worked so hard for? Are you a host or the parasite itself?

These pieces of art feature the tensions of dependence, examining the fragility between intimacy, inheritance, and invasion. As you burrow in to devour these pages, sit with discomfort. Question who feeds and who is fed upon. Consider what you carry, and what carries you. For nothing survives alone.

Yours in creativity,
Amy & Caitlyn
Co-Editors, Atlantis Ablaze

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Decay

Amy Flores

Some things survive by making you smaller,
chipping away at you like you're nothing
but a rotted tree—
bark peeling back from a trunk
that remembers its youth

Ring by ring, you fade,
each year eaten gently
until the center forgets its shape,
hollowed

Yet, you still stand tall
casting a shadow
to look whole
but the wind knows where to enter,
slipping through the cracks
settling in the spaces
you never knew were empty

Field of Flowers

Samuel Valdes

There was a field near my house
Bright and green
I always thought
Flowers would sprout
Solemn Little white lilies
Or dandelions
I watched the grass be cut
Asphalt tore through it
As houses rose from the ground
I always thought
At least weeds could sprout
Something amidst the sidewalk
Anything
But whatever sprouted was cut
I watched the world around me
Wilt
There was a field near my house
There isn't anymore

Sleep Tight

Alyse Stevens

The night is silent
Cold, unmoving, dead
There're no stars to stare up at
No crickets to sing
Only the endless ticking of a distant clock

I lay on my back, staring up at popcorn ceilings
Eyes glazed over
Mind empty
Body still
As if I'm in an coffin

No funeral
No flowers
No prayers
Just the silence of the night
With the husk of a person inside

Do you enjoy these restless nights?
The nights that feel although it's only you and the
world
No one else
Just the clock that chimes
Paired with the desire gnawing at me to rest

The silk blankets wrap around my shins
Slowly worming up my flesh
Leaving trails of mucus
Then eating away at the energy I hold
Or the lack thereof

They devour my mind
They devour my resistance
They devour my nails
They devour my muscles
They drink my blood

Like a vampire who only exists as a centipede
Drawing life from the living
Until there is no meaning to being alive
I feel the blood trickle down my forearm
My eyes remaining fixed on the ceiling above me

Do you enjoy these restless nights?
After all, it will be our last

Promise

Analiah Brown

"I promise to see you again."

I whisper the words to myself.

beneath the moonlight glow.

I brushed and held onto my shivering arms.

Wind whistling loudly,

muffled the crunches of my steps.

It tugged at my strands till they hit my face,

Swiftly attempting to block my view.

I fell to my knees, digging into the dirt.

A stone had rolled towards my hand,

I wiped it clean with the bare of my palms.

It said those same words.

"I promise to see you again."

Was that always supposed to be a lie?

"I promise to see you again."

I'm here, do you still mean that now?

"I promise to see you again."

How long will I have to wait?

"I promise to see you again."

I can't take it anymore, living in separation.

"I promise to see you again."

Please. Let this be the last. Please.

"I promise to see you again."

I hope to see you again.



Cut

Caitlyn Lungstrum

Mother Rope burns
I thought she would go on forever
Perfect Rope that could pull me out
Of the darkest pits
Turns out that Rope got cut once,
Yet once wasn't enough
Over and over again
By everyone
By me

Her soul is all gone now
Only worn threads remain
But she still keeps it all tied together
A neat little bow made of
Mangled strands

Consumed

Amy Flores

Crawling beneath skin
a patient thief
traces the emptiness
inside my veins
existing silently,
settling in my discomfort

It slithers—
a presence I cannot dislodge,
offering no reprieve,
only the slow
inflexible weight
of everything it takes

I feel it coil around me
threading itself
through my marrow,
my breath, hollow—
a rhythm not my own
inhaling and exhaling
on my behalf

Insistent, unrelenting
a constant I cannot name,
cannot shake
cannot survive without

It slips into the corners
of my thoughts
curling around memories,

weaving itself into desires
I no longer recognize

I am never whole, never free,
I am only a husk
only a vessel for its hunger

Fear of Joy

Analiah Brown

I'm afraid of joy to the deepest level.
Every time a laugh arises, my limbs begin to tremble.
I start to choke as my throat forcefully pulls them down.
Breaking me before I could relish my moment in bliss.

I turn to listen to these voices that mock me.
Blaring sounds, ringing alarms in my head.
Judging my persona to the highest extent.
I can't breathe before wondering,
"Am I doing this right?"

These words stick to my skin, tearing the flesh apart.
Reminding me whenever I'm in the rarest moment of
delight,
I'll never truly relish in what a normal person would
say,
Happiness.

Devoured

Ashley Baez

Every bite I force
Stains my tongue with metallic red
The walls of my throat bloom
With tears as it slides down
Into an endless pit
That begs to be satisfied
The begging gets louder

The crying never stops
Tears mix in with the blood
Guilt buzzes through me

Yet all I can think is how much
More can I consume before
I'm soaked in my own blood

Fangs

Samuel Valdes

The sun blisters my skin
As I cling to another
My mouth on their neck, as they bleed
Sweet ichor to my fangs
She withers slowly
Without my touch
Without my hand
Enveloping hers
She decays
Her skin sinking
Till she needs me
As I need her
Then she'll be hollow

Marionette

Analiah Brown

Mother and Father once told me,
You're the marionette, we're the puppeteers.

Will I ever be able to cut the strings?
The ones that wrap tight around my limbs?

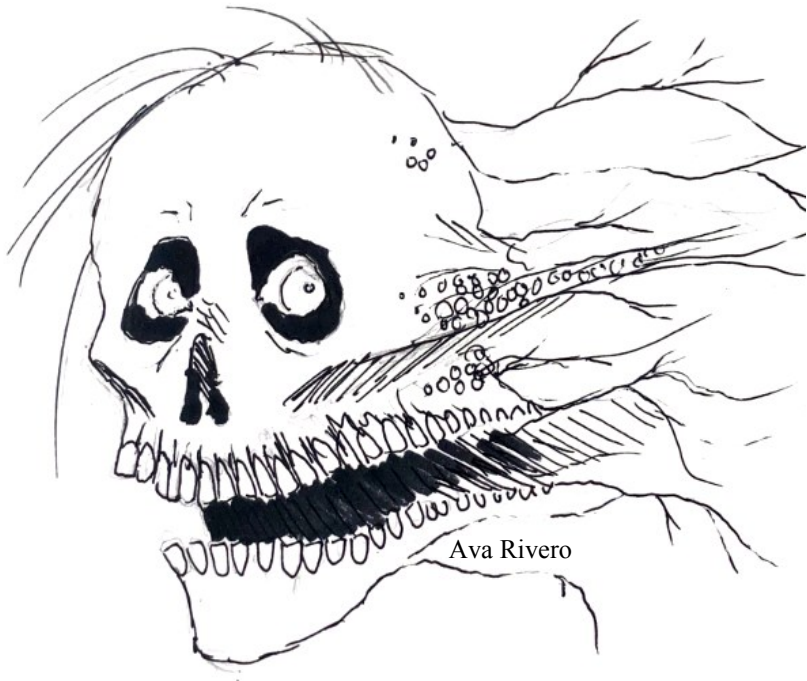


Analiah Brown

Hunger of Rage

Ashley Baez

Rage boils deep
Within the flesh
Of the soul
Raking its teeth
Under its Host's skin
Devouring each spec
Of warm passion
Until the essence of
Serenity is nothing
But a myth to
The Host's degraded
Husk



Time's Ghost

Amy Flores

Nostalgia is a quiet, disturbed guest
gnawing at the edges of now,
leaving scars
along the spine of today

It slips into the pause between words,
where you should be awake,
but instead linger
in diluted recollections

It fogs your mind,
it's presence visible only
in the smoke of old fires,
burning fragments of your past

It does not announce itself
it creeps,
settling into your bones,
turning vivid memories
into the faintest screams

You reach for them anyway,
listening to the pleas of what once was—
but they are fragile,
lighter than they should be,
because yesterday
has already moved on,
and is feeding on you

Linger

Alyse Stevens

Your face eats me alive
Your eyes, a knife
Trapped in a crevice of my mind I archived
Though I've long since thrown you away, I still feel
you
Each shadow your silhouette, each song your tune
I cannot rid myself of your old strife

Yet I stand here, confused, a puppet on your strings
Weak and hollow, truly a pathetic thing
I wait for you to slowly rip me apart
Before you piece me back together
Restart

Even after all these years
All the dark nights, and all the tears
I still wait on my bedroom floor
Knowing one day, you'll hurt me more

Monarch

Samuel Valdes

My mother loved butterflies
The few that roamed the lawn

She planted a garden
A sprawling expanse of flora
That I watched wither away

Torn apart at
the whims



Shriveled to
a husk

Ripped to shreds
by little red mites

I watched her
fail

To keep them alive
Trying to reignite the sparks
Of a flame that was already

extinguished

They took
And took till I saw her break

They ate relentlessly

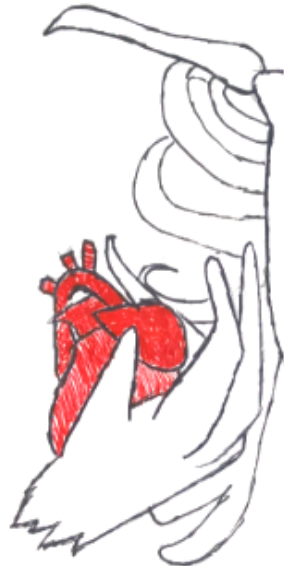
She let them wither

Symbiosis

Amy Flores

i felt your roots
before i felt your hands,
curling around me
taking what you need
the calm
the time
the light
i tuck behind my ribs,
each snatch so gentle
i don't notice
how hollow i've become

yet, i let you stay
because at times,
you give back
enough to keep my pulse steady
enough to confuse me
enough to fulfill my emptiness



Alyse Stevens

There is an End

Ashley Baez

Once it has grown
tired of the scars
you've left it with,
All that remains
as it shrivels away,
Fragments of a
self you once knew,
Each piece broken
down until there is
Nothing but ashes
Left in your palms

The Shadow

Alyse Stevens

I was free once. Free of judgement. Free of decisions. Free of guilt. I was young. Things were easy. A child bestowed with the gift of a mind, but never obligated to use it. Instead, all I had to do was listen. Listen to the voices of my elders and watch for a guiding hand pointing me in one direction. A hand I swore would be beside me my whole life.

Initially, I thought this omniscient creature with neatly trimmed nails and inhumanly pale skin was a curse. That its guidance was a trick to push me into the deep and drown me, rather than lead my dehydrated figure to a pond. That this voice of all who came before me was meant to mock my naive mistakes instead of gracing me with the wisdom of past decades. That the child who barely knew her own name was smarter than these divine guides.

Eventually, a few years after these mentors formed, I was finally allowed to use my mind. And suddenly, all I was once free of slowly got pushed onto my shoulders. It was easy to ignore, at least, the first three or four years. A slight pressure that lingered over my limbs, but then it grew. Making itself larger. Heavier. It pressed down on my shoulder blades until they cracked. Until I was winded and suffocating from the shards of my own bone that lodged themselves into my organs. Until my vision grew blurry with tears and I collapsed on the floor. Yet, I still stood.

Only in the odd hours of the night did that pressure force itself onto my body. When I was alone and all I heard was the chirps of crickets and rustling of leaves. The

shadow of everything I caged away during the day merged with the night, crawling up my legs and around the vertebrae of my spine. It whispered the things I heard in my thoughts all too often. Questioning my decisions. Questioning my heart. Questioning my worth.

I never had a name for this shadow that possessed my mind. My guides called it guilt. They said it was regret for the actions I had already done and how they shifted the path of my life to something I never wanted. They said that guilt would never leave me now. That I'd have to dismiss it. As I stood before these creatures, feeling just as small as the first day I saw them, their words never made any sense. It went through one ear out the other, while the shadow, who's slowly gripping the wrinkles of my brain, continues to whisper things I can't separate from reality. I nodded my head, pretending to understand the commands the divines had given while knowing well I wouldn't follow. I *couldn't follow*.

As the years continued and I began to find who I really was, the weights on my body continued to grow. The shadow talked to me more, even during the day, the time when it usually would cease its typical remarks. The pressure shifted to my stomach, ripping each layer away until I began to leave a trail of blood as I walked. Then to my knees, that buckled in on themselves and shifted upward until they were barely beneath my skin. Lastly, to my ankles, that rolled and snapped with every step. While everyone else was finding lovers, I was standing in the corner. Envious and possessed by a parasite everyone called guilt. I called them truth. They were always right. Isn't that what the truth was?

I soon discovered from all my observations and

interactions that I didn't harbor any desire for romance in my body. Yet I yearned for what everyone else seemingly had. Instead of my heart beating for myself, beating with passion, it burned with envy. It settled itself into the darkness, as the shadow named guilt squeezed every ounce of blood from it. For once in my life, I finally understood what that name meant. What the grip it had on my heart and mind truly felt like.

It wasn't a hollow feeling. Not empty and void of everything like before. Instead, I felt full. Full of shame. Despair. Regret.

Guilt.

It fed from my thoughts. Then from my voice. Finally, from my heart. It feasted and gorged itself until I was nothing but a husk of my former self. A body without flesh or a skeleton still someone breathing, blinking, and standing here before you. Eyes wider than they should be, lips partially parted, and limbs limp and weak. The saying that you can see a person's soul through their eyes no longer applies to this lifeless puppet. Guilt ate all that was left of my life.

As I lay on the ground, discarded, broken, hollow, and bleeding, the shadow I've known since I was young leaves my figure. Crawling up a wall nearby while everything else begins to grow hazier by the moment. Guilt had no more purpose for me. It ate all it could, and now I'm just a doll it never wanted to play with. As its eyes narrow, a Cheshire grin spreading upon its "lips," my eyes shut. My breath shallows. Before it stops entirely.

All I know is that guilt got what it wanted. I should've known better.

Residue

Amy Flores

Something lives in me
pulsing through the hushed darkness
stuck, I cannot move

Overtaken

Kate Asbra

“Please...” she begs, voice raw and weary

“Please don’t leave me here...”

The hands grasp, pulling her down

Dragging her away from salvation

There is no escape from the body you own

Infested

Amy Flores

It begins in the skin
a subtle itch
behind the ribs
something small,
quietly learning the shape of you

It chews on sentences,
smacking its lips at the sound of your voice—
hungry for your attention
it makes its way into the silence
between thoughts

Nibbling at the edges of breath,
your words mutate
scatter
fracture

The tongue forgets the taste of sound,
letters curl inward,
and the pause grows
and grows
until even the air
leans out of you

It slips
and slips
and settles
growing longer,
leaving only the echo
of the small, insistent itch



what eats at you?



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