



Lush

a chapbook companion to (pwa - tem)

"Tell the rabble my name is Cabell."

— James Branch Cabell to his editor, to help people learn how to pronounce his name. Cabell used the word derogatively but we are taking it back. These pages will showcase the writing and illustrations of our rabble—the ordinary students of VCU.

Masthead

EDITOR IN CHIEF

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Zoë Winsky

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Uri Hamman

COVER ART

KT Nowak

ILLUSTRATORS

Halden Fraley

Stella Ho

Carleigh Ross

KT Nowak

Noah Wilson

EDITORS

Noah Wilson

Bailey Wood

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Thank you.



pwatem



Evergreen

Noah Wilson

A quiet, fearsome creature
Stretches toward the Western light.
Inside its skin hides liquid gold
That heals the sun's scorching bite.

I picked mine up from a place called Lowe's
In a terracotta pot,
And now she lives on my windowsill
Facing the parking lot.

I think she's happy here
Watching the cars go by.
My little Aloe Vera,
Evergreen against the sky.

You

Saiya Soublet

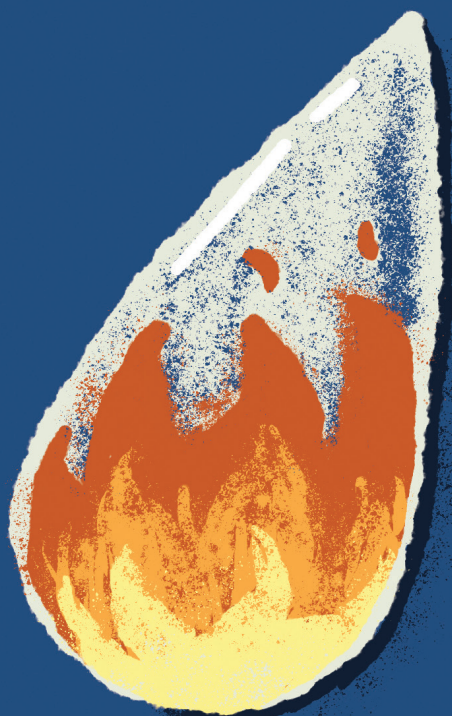
CW: Abuse (maybe?)

the way you make me feel is ever so reflective of Romanticism, and it
sounds as it looks. each
season intertwined in the branches of a being budding sweet
memories and sorrowful harvests.
each summer breeze is chilled by the inevitable future of despair, but
nothing is ever temporary
or permanent; it simply exists. your love is like the risk of wildfires,
the torrential rain of
midheaven, the frigid nature of stillness. and I reminisce on the
warmth-the abundance-of your
love because nothing is allowed to grow if not first allotted the
comfort of snow.

but

my naïvety, to think that I had ever experienced true pain before this
moment, for I should have
known. I had never felt the constant pull of destruction under my
eyes or the never ending linger
of tightness reminiscent of a sobbing, crumbling heart. I should have
known. but now the deed is
done, and there is no reversing the hands in which fate beat down
upon me with. there is only
room for more beatings and more mendings until I am
unrecognizable in the flesh.

continued...





and

you know, each and every hour that passes by, I always think about how grateful I am to have met you regardless of the status or the title we have because it feels like two polar opposite sides of the world finally met in the middle; you're the first person I pray for every night and the last person I think about before I fall asleep and I think that that's just like absolutely crazy that people can make you do that

so

I hope that I can erase you from my mind like the depression that has raided my memory bank. I hope the destruction in my brain takes you with it and crumbles my memories of you into something I can't even vaguely remember and as much as I would like to see you grow, you piss me off way too much for me to stick around and see it. I hope you get what's coming for you. I hope you get what you deserve. success. the world. but also a lesson that so desperately needed to be taught; I hope that you forget me but won't forget the deep seeded pain and loss I made you feel and I hope you feel empty and like there's a void lost in you. but I hope you fill it with the love you deserve and a God I hope you'll serve.

but

continued...

Carleigh Ross

to think that I crumbled because of you. that you pervaded the way I
perceived the world for
months on end just because I let you. you, the source of the
uncomfortable wetness on my
pillow; you, the pinnacle of confusion within such a sensitive time; you.
mere memories now.
and they seem so far away, almost dream like in my brain. I almost can't
fathom that it ever
actually happened and that life has elements that cut off so abruptly. but
I cannot seem to hate
you? or, hell, get you off of my mind? and it's terrible, like a waste of
time. I yearn for the day I
forget you.

and

the last time we talked was in a voice so unrecognizable, even to myself.
drowned in my own
tears. barely intelligible. sparse breathing and sniffing. choking up on
not sadness, but my own
words. grief. loss. a burden. and then it was cut and we're no longer
connected. some things in
this world are meant to be drastic I guess.
you were so angry at first, but of course you never showed it. I lose my
shit so much easier than
you. how you talked to me that night, still so calmly? telling it to me
straight in the midst of the
mess I was creating? you still amaze me.

I was crying for the both of us. you were speaking for the both of us.
even through it all, there
was still a “both of us.”

so

why is it that I associate you with the sounds of old r&b? is it the
visions of what we were or
what I wish we could be?
the soft sounds
the romantic lyrics
and all the while you're still in my head
admiring me, adoring me
like the black love in old movies
my love jones



do you think john wayne liked tomatoes

Sid Estelle

It was in the lush and summery Shenandoah mountains of Fort Valley, Virginia, where my Papaw, Bobby first introduced me to gardening. When I was growing up, my parents would drive my younger brother and I up from Fredericksburg, through mountain roads to his small, half brick house nestled in the bright poplars. I got carsick on those trips, but all ill feelings would melt away once I'd hear our minivan tires roll across the gravel driveway of my grandparents' house. Mamaw would have a mug of hot green tea with honey waiting for me on the counter, Papaw would be asleep in his recliner with an old western, open across his round stomach.

Late in the day, around four or five p.m., when the sun seemed its meanest and hottest, he would call out for volunteers to help him water his vegetable garden. Happily, I was always the first (and sometimes only) to oblige. We rode in his tan pickup truck a little way down the road he lived on, to a small plot of land his friend was letting him use for his garden. Dentures nestled into one cupholder, spit bottle in the other. He'd hack something up and I'd cover my ears, scrunching my neck into my chest. The sound of tobacco hitting glass was the worst.

The ride was brief, but always fulfilling. My grandfather used to be a high school math teacher; he had a knack for subtly educating my brother and I over the course of our week-long stays. He'd quiz my eleven-year-old knowledge of U.S. capitals, point out wild turkeys on the side of the road, fire out multiplication facts to me, and sing along to his Elvis Presley and John Denver CDs. He'd try his best when he sang, whether he was sitting on a pew in White Chapel Methodist or on a bench-seat in his Ford. After cranking the windows of the pickup shut, we'd slide out into the mosquito ridden afternoon. He'd unlock the fence that framed his plants as I'd begin to lug a watering can out the bed of the truck. Even on a blistering, sweaty day in June, my Papaw would comb out his thick, graying hair and tuck his shirt in under his belt.

It was always a grand reveal when the hand built, wooden door

would swing open. I found myself amazed and in awe of what a person can create with a few seed packets, water, and patience. He'd show me each plant with such pride: Bursting, leathery tomatoes, corn stalks that shot up over ten feet out of the soil, fiery orange and yellow hot peppers dangling in bunches (which he no longer grows because his aging taste buds don't have the tolerance they used to), golden and purple potatoes laden with tiny craters rich with character, rolling waves of crisp cucumbers, the vines of bumpy yellow squash creeping in every direction, their warts raised and unafraid. I'd pull and drag a black, sun bleached hose over to each plant. I miss the feeling of a breeze hitting patches of my wet skin. Sending goosebumps over my arms in ninety-degree heat. My ankles speckled with dirt and shards of grass that had splattered up as I was watering tomatoes. Those greens and indigos of the bright, clear summer. We were so close to the sky. Cicadas screaming, their conversation genuine like ours. Away from traffic, away from schoolwork, away from chores. I was in Papaw's magic garden where the only dangers were scratching a mosquito bite too hard or forgetting to lock the fence (because deer would surely find their way in, biting holes into cucumber leaves.)

Arriving back at the house, I heard saleswomen on my grandmother's television, calling out the order number for a pair of brown leather sandals. She'd fallen asleep on top of her covers, another cup of green tea with honey waits for me on the counter. I remember sitting on the screened in porch snapping the ends off green beans for my Mamaw to can and use in her famous vegetable soup, remembering the rush I got from spotting a ruby-red cherry tomato that was ready for picking. The 'snap' as it was plucked from its stem.

Now, I am twenty. I have not been to my grandfather's garden in two or three years. I miss it tremendously. My grandmother tells him to stop because he's "getting too old for that sorta thing". He's cut back, still bringing squash and tomatoes to give out to churchgoers. When I visit him now, I no longer can stay for weeks at a time. I no longer sit in the passenger seat of his truck and ride to help water his garden. My grandmother no longer brings me hot tea. There are always a few tomatoes, sitting on the wood ledge that lines his screened in porch. Orange and green and red. He smokes his pipe and watches them ripen in the sun. I like to think they are looking back and watching him do just the same.



A Frog in the Night

Kaela Peters

The sound of nothing is almost better
than the low groans
of suburb frogs.

Only for a moment are they gone,
a brief intermission
in which silence takes their place,
almost erasing the imprint
of their baritone croaks.

If you'd believe me, I'd tell you that
I'm alive at night,
and my feet are on the concrete outside,
along with the rest of me.

And trust me that when I am outside,
feet and all,
I cannot find a single frog-shaped shadow
or toad-ish silhouette.

But I can feel them, their existence,
as their ribbits inhabit the night,
in a way their forms
never could.

I try to exist in the night.
But it's harder for a human
than for the frogs.
I am alone, with no one to tell me
I'm there.

Halden Fraley

In the daylight I know I exist,
because I can see my hands
in front of me, and my hair
in my eyes.

In the darkness, my shape
and my matter
are forgotten.

I wish for myself
the resolution of a frog, not only
to believe I am alive
but to know, and to never question.

For now, the only truth
is the sound that envelops me
and fills me, and for once
I close my eyes
and wonder
Do you think I once
was born
a toad?

I lock my knees
soften my jaw
and attempt
a croak.



