

A close-up photograph of a lit Advent wreath. Six white candles are arranged in a curve on a dark green pine branch. The candles are lit, with bright yellow and orange flames. The background is dark, making the green needles and the glowing candles stand out.

HARVEST  
INTERNATIONAL

FALL 2025

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# The Most Expensive Ice Cream; An Exploration in Modern Dating.

by Emily Summers

It all started with a craving for ice cream, as most awful things do. I remember sitting in bed around 7:00 p.m., it was an uneventful Friday, I had just finished paying the deposit for my studio apartment and my bank account was hurting.

*I cannot afford to buy ice cream right now, but God that would be so good.*

Just then, as if summoned by the 31 Flavor Gods, I received a text. A random message from a random guy asking to take me out.

I thought I had seen every bad date imaginable with the past six months being filled to the brim with dud after dud. As a confident, pretty, young woman, I never found it extremely difficult to get a date. My lack of friends within driving distance, coupled with my extroverted and outgoing nature, meant that going on dates was all I really did in my sparse free time.

My issue: getting past the first date.

His message was off-color and flirtatious without being endearing. “I only want sex” seeped out of every word he wrote. I had become extremely attuned to detecting these types of men, as I seemed to attract them like flies. These swarms, however, quickly disappeared after my intentions of true love were revealed.

Thankfully, tonight true love wasn’t what I was looking for: It was ice cream.

As quickly as I could, I shed my pjs, threw on some jeans, and curled my hair. I was waiting for this complete and total stranger to pick me up, and provide me with my coveted dairy treat.

VVVVVVVVVRRRRRROOOOOOMMMMMM

*Oh God.*

I recognized that dreaded sound. It was the familiar scream of an aftermarket exhaust insert that so many men apparently found incredibly appealing.

*Why do their cars always sound like that? It’s so obnoxious.*

I grabbed my lighter, my phone, my knife, and my keys, kissed my cat goodbye and headed out the door.

In my driveway sat an idling heap of literal junk. I'm no car girl—nor have I ever claimed to be— but even I knew that this car was no more than four wheels and an engine. I walked around to the passenger side door and attempted to open it.

*Unlock the car? Please?  
Let me in?*

*If chivalry truly is dead, I think I'm about to meet his killer.*

On my third attempt, the door popped open— spilling out a cacophony of 2000s hip hop music, cheap cologne, and crumpled receipts. I collected his litter and shut the door.

“Hey!” As I sat down and began to assess my current situation— No rear view mirror, broken visors, floor indistinguishable from trash— During this car ride, between long bits of silence, we talked— if you can call it that. I learned he recently moved here with his mother from New Delhi, that his car also was missing a speedometer and both airbags, and that he worked “stacking boxes” at a local factory.

His driving was about as pristine as the state of his car. I gripped the sides of my seat as he ran through stop sign after stop sign.

One of the more charming aspects of his car was that whenever he would turn, his bumper would scrrreeeeeeeechhhh against the asphalt.

*I hope I make it back home from this date alive. I hope this ice cream is worth it.*

“I’ve been on my fair share of dates and I think you’re the worst driver I’ve ever seen,” I said, as he turned into the wrong lane.

“Why do you say that?” He scoffed— seemingly equating my criticisms of his driving to the insanity of flat-earth conspiracies.

“Well for one, your car keeps scraping on the road?”

“Well..” he started. I already knew what was going to happen next.

“It wasn’t scraping BEFORE you got in the car...” he trailed off.

I could no longer stifle my laughter. I burst out into the most genuine belly laugh I had had in a long while. “Did you just call me fat?” I feigned offense between laughter.

*I will not be seeing this man again.*

“Well, I’m just saying.” He then made a sharp right turn into the parking lot. screeeeeeeech.

Baskin-Robbins. Finally.

I rushed to open the car door and head inside.

“Ugh. I would’ve opened your door for you.” He moaned under his breath attempting to catch up to me.

*He pleads ‘not guilty’ to the murder. Yet chivalry remains deceased* .

Inside the ice cream parlor, my antidote was obvious: peanut butter ice cream topped with bananas and cookie dough. I ordered with a lust in my voice, and watched as the employee scooped my consolation prize into its cup.

“So... If I pay for this, you’re gonna cuddle me, right?” He hissed, slipping a hand around my waist.

“Oh, then I’ll pay.” I reached for my wallet— only to be cut off mid-motion.

“NoNoNoNoNo! I’ll pay! I’ll pay!” he shouted— loudly. Rushing up to the cashier.

Back in his car, he opened his glove compartment and pulled out something that was about to make this night at least 63% more tolerable.

A single joint.

I opened my ice cream and began to devour it. He lit the joint and passed it to me. I took a long slow hit.

*I needed this.*

I didn’t attempt to eat slowly or pretty like I normally might on a first date; I practically licked it clean. As the joint dwindled, so did my ability to pretend to be inquisitive about this character. I sat in my comfortable silence, enjoying the banana-peanut butter flavor in my mouth and the night sky out my window.

“So..”

*What now?*

“What should we do now?” Ugh. That question. I know well enough that to a man there are only a few correct answers to that question.

*Kiss?*

*Have sex?*

I knew what he wanted to hear. However, he would not be hearing it from me tonight.

“Oh, well you can feel free to take me home anytime.” I asserted.

“I’m too stoned to drive.”

*Really bro? After half a joint?*

But— remembering how he drove sober, I didn’t protest.

“What do *you* want to do?” I echoed his question knowing I couldn’t give an adequate response.

“Can I touch your boobs?”

“No.”

“Can I kiss you?”

“No.”

“Can we cuddle?”

”No.”

“Ugh. Well, what else is there to do?”

“We could talk?” I remember eyeing him as I said this. I always wonder aimlessly about the male mind. Particularly, its seeming inability to have any genuine interest in me beyond the physical.

“About what?”

“You could ask me some of my favorite things!” I said enthusiastically, One thing I can get behind is talking about me. I find the more I have to explain myself to others, the more I’m able to understand myself. On each date, I learn something new about me.

The poor guy absentmindedly muddled through two or three questions “What’s your favorite color/movie/food?” My answers never received a follow-up question or a second thought. It was then, I guess, that his capacity for conversation ran out.

“What’s your favorite body part on a guy?” He winked.

*Gross.*

I did however have an answer– not the one he was hoping for I’m sure.

“I like arms.”

“Arms..hmm Anything else?”

“No.”

“What’s your favorite...” His voice trailed off “Ummmm.”

“...Position?”

With that, I decided the risk of the drive was worth it. “Take me home.”

During the silent car ride home, I fantasized that I was the ingenue of a silly romantic comedy. I closed my eyes and saw my other bad dates flash before me as a fast-paced montage.

One clip– That date where he called me his sister's name when we kissed.  
The next– That date where he came out as gay right after  
Flash to– That date where he turned out to be 30  
Cut back to– That date where he called his ex in the middle and talked to her for an hour.  
You get the picture.

The montage ended and the movie playing in my mind faded to a happy-cheesy-mushy fairytale ending. I’d find that perfect guy and never have another care in the world.

My eyes opened. I was home at last. The moment he parked I jumped out of the car.

“Thank you for the ice cream.”

“Can I touch your boobs”? He repeated.

*Hey, give him some credit, maybe the second time was the charm.*

“No.”

*Alas, it was not.*

I gathered my things and hurriedly said my goodbyes.

His final words to me were:

“Ugh. I bet you’re going to block me now.”

*You are entirely right.*

I slammed the car door behind me.

Inside lay my cat, whose face perked up upon my arrival. I crawled into bed beside him; belly full of ice cream, head full of questions, arms full of cat. I pondered the night's events— how each of my dates tended to follow that same structure. I could cry, if I wanted to, at the thought of my love life. Laughter, though, seemed much more appropriate— I felt as if my imaginary rom-com forgot the rom and was simply a comedy at this point. As I clicked the block button, I giggled to myself.

“One more for the montage.”



# Sunday School

by Emily Summers

Drops fall on scritta paper as they roll from young chins.

Children's knees attempt to amend the sins  
embedded in the rice they kneel on.

Born as Cain, as retched, as broken,  
lambs claw and mangle at an invisible solution.

A way to be pure, to be untainted, to be clean.

Cursed with life at the moment of conception

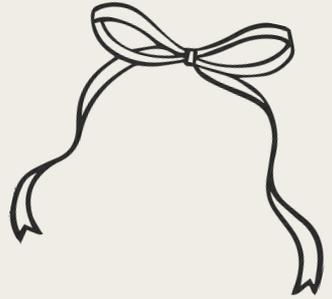
Covered in mud at the minute of nativity.

As the pigtails begin to slip from their places

I look in the mirror and meet the eyes of the savior,

He tells me he's proud, that I'm one step closer

to the innocence a child should have.



# The Women who made me a Girl

by Emily Summers

I was 6 years old when the looking glass reflected the wrinkles of Pamela. My eyes carried the weight of Debbie in two bags.

I remember the pain of their arthritis in my hands. My eyes were brown back then, my hair grey and my feet sore. My back hunched as I felt the aching of Patricia.

At 12 my eyes met the mirror with poor vision, though blurry I recall trying to see through the eyes of Terra, attempting to distinguish the smile lines from their opposers. I can still picture vividly the dark lines that stretched over my stomach and the large scar on the bottom, left there by Taylor. My ankles made clicking noises whenever I walked up stairs, and like Michelle, I found a way to slip that fact into every conversation.

Then, at 16, I looked in the rear-view mirror of my very first car, my eyes were a bright green like the walls of Alyssa's bedroom. I recall singing through Sameyah's throat and receiving her deafening applause. My teeth were pure white and Anita's smile was a permanent feature back then. I remember long nights of patching calluses that had formed on Aces' strong hands, although I never remember any of the pain. My feet were light and for the first time I felt my skin hold tight to my bones.

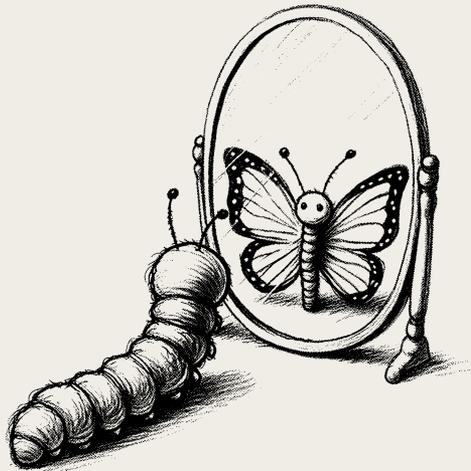
Now that I'm 20, I find myself crying with the tears of a toddler. I feel the same fear I saw my classmates experience on their first day of kindergarten. Small things excite me the same way small things can send me into a dreadful tantrum. I write Christmas lists and put stickers on everything I come to own.

My coworkers constantly ask me where I get my positive attitude or my chatty disposition. I wish I could tell them it's Alison's ever-present need to share, but I don't think they'd understand. Maybe they see right through me, Lucy's small stature makes me feel invisible at times.

I wonder if when I turn 60, I'll lose my ability to speak and simply talk in babbles. Will I cry out for my mother? Sleep peacefully in the arms of someone warm? I hope I face my newfound infancy with courage. It's hard to comprehend feelings you've never felt before. I keep finding new ones to feel. I dream that when I turn 60 my skin will be as soft as my unbroken heart.

I wonder what will happen when I turn 80.

Will the fear of entering a new world absorb me as the reality of leaving it consumes me?



# Lyra

by Nastasya Billesbach

i never heard your cry  
but i heard you  
a small spark  
in the quiet dark

you were only here  
for a moment  
not long enough  
for names  
or cravings  
or tiny clothes  
folded on a shelf

but long enough  
for hope  
to bloom inside me

long enough  
for love  
to root itself deep  
in what could have been

my body became a cradle  
and then a grave  
in the same breath



when you left  
the world kept moving  
but i didn't  
i stayed still  
listening for a heartbeat  
the universe decided  
i wasn't allowed to hear

they say i lost you  
but that isn't true  
i never misplaced you  
i never forgot you

you were real  
because i loved you  
because i still do

you were a light  
too quick for the earth  
a glow  
i still carry  
in the quiet  
where no one looks

where you still shine  
just for me





# La Casa de los Abuelos

by Lucero Olivia

Localizada en los altos de Jalisco, cerca de un pueblo llamado Estación Pedrito. La casa de mis abuelos fue construida y diseñada por ellos mismos, y está rodeada de muchos árboles. Está compuesta de cemento y ladrillo. Es grande, mucho más grande que las otras casas de la zona. El ladrillo es lo que resalta la fachada. Al entrar se encuentra la alberca y áreas verdes. Por la parte de abajo tiene cuatro habitaciones, dos baños, sala y comedor. En la planta alta hay dos habitaciones más con terraza en el medio. Una mezcla de tierra mojada, leña, pinos, carne asada y cloro impregna el jardín de la casa. Dentro de la casa, flotaba un fuerte olor a café de olla y pan dulce recién traído de la panadería de San Julián.

Toda la familia viajaba horas desde la ciudad de Guadalajara cada verano y Semana Santa rumbo a la casa de mis abuelos. Durante las tardes soleadas, mis padres, junto a mis tíos, cocinaban carne asada mientras nosotros los nietos convivíamos en la alberca. Eran tiempos de relajación y diversión. También, yo y mis primos hacíamos travesuras por toda la casa. Por ejemplo, sacábamos el agua de la alberca y pisábamos las plantas. Nos reíamos de ver a nuestro abuelo y abuela al ver nuestras vagancias.





Muchas anécdotas se crearon en esta casa. Las noches eran frescas donde todos jugábamos a la lotería junto al ruido de los grillos y sapos. Me acuerdo que varias veces nos arreglábamos en la tarde/noche para ir al pueblo y comer antojitos mexicanos, como elote en vasos, al igual que convivir con la familia de mis abuelos. Mi padre rentaba un billar para que todos los niños jugaran mientras los adultos celebraban su tiempo juntos.

No había verano que no quisiera ir, le rezaba a Dios para que el tiempo se fuera rápido y pudiéramos irnos de vacaciones a la casa de los abuelos. Ahí es donde crecí, lloré y reí. Con el paso de los años, me acuerdo mucho de esta casa con sentimientos, siempre que huelo los aromas que mencioné, me trae recuerdos nostálgicos. Después de la partida de mi abuelo, todo ha sido muy diferente. Sin duda, el amor, trabajo y empeño de mis abuelos al hacer esta casa fueron para brindarnos su memoria en vida. Hoy que estoy grande, le doy gracias a mi abuela que está en vida y a mi abuelo que en paz descansa por haber marcado una etapa de mi vida.



# Un encuentro fascinante

by Lucero Oliva

Desde pequeña, mi animal favorito siempre ha sido la vaca, para mí, las vacas son animales puros que encarnan una bondad silenciosa. Uno de mis sueños siempre ha sido tener una vaca. Mis amigos y mi familia lo saben tan bien que cada vez que ven algo relacionado con vacas piensan en mí. Durante el verano, mi mejor amiga Nicole me llevó a un lugar llamado “The Gentle Barn” en Santa Clarita, un refugio de animales de granja. Era junio y se acercaba mi cumpleaños, cuando un jueves por la noche Nicole me llamó por videollamada y me dijo:

—“Oye, ¿recuerdas que siempre dices que quieres abrazar una vaca?” Yo me reí y le respondí: “¡Obvio! Es mi sueño frustrado.”

Entonces ella con misterio me dijo: “Pues prepárate, porque este domingo te voy a llevar a un lugar especial.”

— ¿A dónde?” pregunté curiosa.

— “No te lo puedo decir todavía, pero lleva ropa cómoda y prepárate para ensuciarte los zapatos.”

— “No, es una sorpresa. Pero te va a encantar, te lo juro.” Yo no tenía ni idea de a dónde íbamos, pero estaba emocionada, que hasta contaba los días. Llegó el domingo, me acuerdo que era un día muy soleado, Nicole pasó a recogerme a las 9:00 de la mañana. El viaje fue largo pero divertido mientras escuchábamos y cantábamos canciones de Danny Ocean.

Cuando llegamos, el lugar era un campo enorme lleno de árboles y pasto. Todo olía a tierra húmeda, pasto y flores. ¡Estaba sorprendida y enamorada del lugar! En la entrada los voluntarios nos dieron la bienvenida y nos explicaron que los animales de allí habían sido rehabilitados. ¡Había de todo! Vacas, caballos, cabras, cerdos, ovejas, etc . Al fondo vi las vacas, y casi me puse a gritar de alegría. ¡Eran tan grandes y tan tranquilas! Había muchísima gente, especialmente para verlas. Entonces, Nicole y yo decidimos recorrer el campo y conocer a los demás animales para dejar la zona de vacas para el final. Fue muy divertido todo, aunque algunos voluntarios tenían un carácter muy pesado. Cada vez que alguien intentaba acariciar a un animal, ellos regañaban o hablaban de forma brusca, según ellos por seguridad, pero de todos modos se sentía incómodo. Cosa que nos parecía muy extraño porque para eso estábamos pagando. Con solo ver esa actitud de los voluntarios, Nicole y yo decidimos mejor no tocarlos tanto. Fue algo estresante tratar con la actitud tan estricta de los voluntarios, posiblemente por el entrenamiento que habían recibido.

Al final de nuestro recorrido llegamos al área dónde estaban las vacas. Nos acercamos y vi una vaca enorme, blanca con manchas negras, traía puesto un moño muy bonito en su frente. Era preciosa pero también impresionaba un poco. En cuanto me vio, empezó a caminar hacia mí. Yo me quedé congelada con algo de miedo.

— “¿Nicole, y si me pisa?” pregunté nerviosa.

— “Tranquila, no pasa nada,” respondió entre risas. “Solo quiere saludarte.”

La vaca siguió avanzando, mirándome con esos ojos gigantes. ¡No sabía si salir corriendo o quedarme quieta! En ese momento, cerré los ojos y extendí las manos. La vaca rozó mi mano con su hocico húmedo y tibio, y me dejó un beso baboso que me hizo reír y llorar. Se me había cumplido la ilusión que tenía de niña y estaba feliz. Nicole me dijo:

— “¡Lo lograste! ¡Por fin abrazaste una vaca!” Nicole sacó su teléfono y me tomó muchísimas fotos.

— Yo solo podía decir “¡Qué día tan perfecto!”.

Después de eso, acariciamos a varias vacas más y tomamos muchas fotos de nuestra experiencia.

Al final, caminamos hacia el carro de Nicole para regresar. Le dije a Nicole:

— “Gracias por traerme. No sabes cuánto soñé con esto.”

Ella respondió: “Ya sabía que te iba a gustar e ibas a llorar”. Ese día fue uno de los más bonitos de mi vida, de los mejores regalos de cumpleaños que me han dado, un día que nunca voy a olvidar.



# The World Ended by the River

by Jasper James

The last time I spoke to you, we were on the mountain. You know the one, with the overpriced café you could only reach by gondola lift. Up there on the café patio, the only thing keeping the trees from swallowing me was your laughter.

You asked me how I've been, after all these years. You cupped your drink in mittened hands and the steam melted the frost on your eyelashes, and when you blinked away the moisture, it dripped down your rosy cheeks.

Oh, you know, I said. I'm on this mountain, surrounded by snow and I hear not a single bird. The sky is so clear and the sun is so bright and I had to squint to read the café menu.

You nodded. You were on the mountain too, but you had the foresight to bring sunglasses.

The world didn't end when the asteroid struck. It didn't end in the days leading up to it, when humanity saw its impending slaughter and decided to kill itself instead. It didn't end in the decades it took for the last humans to succumb to their ailing lungs and sinking spirits.

No, the world ended all those years ago by the river - you know the one, at the bottom of the little valley. There was that old truss bridge spanning the gorge, and the trees that climbed so high it almost seemed like they were trying to escape.



In our adolescent springs, during those perfect few weeks where the air was cool and the sky was adorned with puffy white clouds straight out of a dream, we jumped from the bridge into the river, still swollen from winter. We chased fish and frogs and little brown birds, and scoured the shore for the perfect rock to gift each other.

The world ended when I stood at the bank that summer, so many years after we met on the mountain, and tossed my heart back into the murky water. When the ripples cleared, I saw my own scowling face, and when I turned to head home, I saw you standing upstream.

I don't think you saw me. You were too focused on the perfect rock. I watched you pick it up and admire the way the sun shone through it before you pocketed it. I wanted to cry, and I am sure that my tears could have swelled the river as it was in spring. I wanted to chase the frogs into the water with you, and laugh when we found ourselves waist-deep. I wanted you to tell me you're sorry, and I wanted to tell you I'm sorry, and more than anything I wanted you to give me the rock in your pocket.

Instead, I climbed back up the hill to my car and wondered if you recognized it. The world ended as I drove away and watched through my mirrors the bridge disappear in the trees.

The flames swallowed me and the pain in my heart was hotter than any asteroid burning up in our atmosphere, but not quite as hot as the steam from your coffee up on the mountain.

I was not afraid of the asteroid or humanity's riots. I was not afraid of whatever was to come after, any eternal suffering or endless void. All that I feared was that your world was ending and you no longer remembered my face.



# One by One

by Trevor Brown

I sentenced myself to death

by waging war against  
black and red ants. You left me  
no other choice

9 pm? Who goes to bed at 9 pm?  
You do. You know who doesn't?  
The ants.

I started squeezing the little guys  
out of boredom one night and  
to my surprise,  
they formed a coalition against me

They've dug deep bunkers  
to house the women and children  
and in other parts of the yard  
lay their war rooms

I can find them all  
Their technology is no match  
for my overgrown fingernails,  
which I've intentionally constructed  
to expose them with great efficiency

(I should mention, all of this takes place  
in your yard. Apologies to your father,  
who's set numerous traps in hopes  
it kills that "God damn gopher,"  
he's always complaining about)

Admittedly, however,  
they are much smarter than I thought  
My weak points have been made known  
to every soldier, and looking like lines of  
black and red licorice,

they march straight for my pants  
No matter how many I stomp,  
squish, or squash more and more  
make their way for me

Six months. We've been fighting  
for six months. Look  
out your window. Please,  
I'm losing

# Stardust Heart

by Nastasya Billesbach

Born March 12, 2002, in California's warm embrace,  
I fumble with sharing burdens, a weight I hide too well.  
I admire my mother, her strength like a quiet tide,  
her hands that shaped me from a path where evil might have grown.

They call me love's embodiment, yet I forget to hold myself.  
I see myself reaching for stars, a dreamer's flawed flight,  
a quirky habit of stargazing, whispering to the night.

I don't know how to shed this mask, to let my scars breathe,  
but I know my heart beats wild, a rhythm I can't suppress.  
They say I'm warm, a light that lingers, though I'm no saint.

In cinema's glow, I lose myself, nostalgia's tender pull,  
I struggle with self-love, a mirror I avoid too long.  
What I know for sure is this: my mother's love rooted my skyward dreams,  
and every star I chase reflects her saving grace in me.



white condo by the water  
by Nastasya Billesbach

we're in a crowded room  
standing apart  
yet every time I look up  
your eyes are there  
locked on mine  
like you're searching  
for something you lost

you look at me  
like you want me to understand  
what you can't say out loud

and I do  
I see you  
not the mask you wear  
but the boy underneath  
terrified of being left  
terrified of time  
terrified of himself

but I'm not terrified  
not of you

so I stare back  
at the person who once felt  
like the other half of me  
at the man I still can't have

and I wonder  
when we look away  
pretending the moment wasn't real



do you still long  
for that white condo by the water?  
for our black and orange cat  
curling between us  
for my laugh in the kitchen  
your hands on my waist  
while the storm outside  
never mattered  
because we had each other?

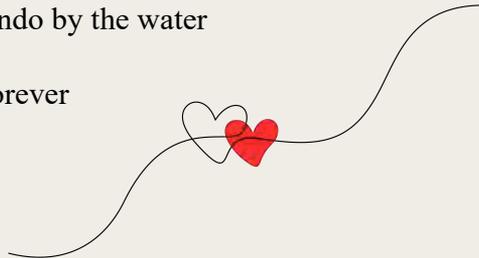
do you still dream  
of the universe where we made it?  
where we didn't lose our way?  
where we found each other again  
before it was too late?

I wonder  
as we force ourselves  
to turn away

will you always love me  
the way I know  
a part of me  
will always ache  
for you

for that white condo by the water  
for our almost  
for our almost-forever

for us



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