

SOUTHERN METHODIST  
UNIVERSITY

# HILLTOPICS



NEWS + OP-ED + CAMPUS LIFE + MORE

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# What is Hilltopics?

*Hilltopics* is the University Honors Program's opinion paper, founded by Honors students over a decade ago. Written and designed entirely by students, *Hilltopics* is committed to providing a public platform for all voices.

*Hilltopics* pieces range from the high literary to the traditionally journalistic, from the satirical to the personal. We welcome contributions from all viewpoints, political persuasions, and backgrounds—the most important thing is that all voices are free to contribute, in order to foster a flourishing of free speech at SMU. The paper is not limited to the Honors community; anyone at SMU can write for *Hilltopics*, and we seek to gain readership from all students.

The number one goal of *Hilltopics* is to publish good writing and let it speak for itself. Exclusive online *Hilltopics* content can be found on our website, [hilltopicssmu.wordpress.com](http://hilltopicssmu.wordpress.com).



# How to contribute:

Though *Hilltopics* is published by the SMU Honors Program, any student is free to contribute. We encourage discussion and creativity in our publication, so if you disagree with one of our articles, we urge you to write a rebuttal. If you have a strong opinion, a literary masterpiece, a cute cartoon, or anything else you've created and want to share, please contact one of our editor-in-chief for instructions on how to contribute:

Sydney Sagehorn, [ssagehorn@mail.smu.edu](mailto:ssagehorn@mail.smu.edu)

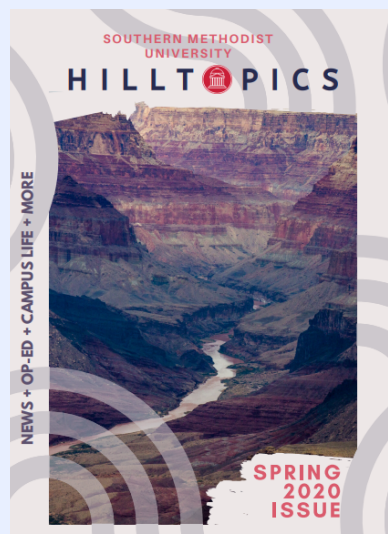
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A melancholy whirlpool threatened to drown me this morning  
So powerful, it pulled down rain from the menacing clouds  
My mental state reflected in the view outside my window  
Until you called me out of my wreck  
With an invitation for a cleansing walk  
The sight of you in an oversized salmon raincoat  
And plastic shoes lifted me up  
Your smile may have been hidden, but  
My heartbeat could still sense its attendance  
The cloudburst and your music the backtrack  
To our slow steps around the boulevard  
The mystifying smell of toast  
Umbrella spins and hops in puddles  
A reminder of the love around me  
Somehow fifteen minutes of you  
Is enough to drag me out of the roaring waves

# Out of the Waves into the Rain

By Melissa Whitler



Illustration by: Riley Turner



# Afar

## ISLA RIVERA

I was struck by the dimension of her.  
Glossy, chunky, Prada shades,  
a silver-accented moto jacket,  
midnight indigo hair.

She was utterly unapproachable,  
but possessed an aura  
that begged to be picked apart  
and carefully re-crafted.

I envisioned her blackcurrant perfume  
packaged in a sleek embossed bottle,  
spritzed on each 4 o'clock morning  
like cold compassion.

Light wood floors, and countertops  
sprinkled with greenery.  
A leather sofa, bare white walls—  
a space intentionally unfinished.

Headphones radiating  
alternative beats, providing  
the backdrop for her rhythmic  
I do not have a moment to spare  
gait.

I was illusioned by the mystery of her.  
By the intrigue and juxtaposition  
of someone  
so vague, yet so  
obvious.



# No Exit: A return to normal on Iran may no longer be possible...or favorable

By Erik J. Rorem

U.S. foreign policy, like any drama, has a cast of antagonists, real and imagined. Iran has been a disruptive presence on the world stage ever since its revolution in 1979, which deposed the royal family backed by the U.S. and brought the repressive theocracy we know today to power. Until the presidency of Donald Trump, it seemed that restraining the country's nuclear weapons program was the foremost aim of U.S. policy towards Iran. President Obama's signature foreign policy achievement, the Iran Nuclear Deal (formally the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) released the regime from the heavy economic sanctions imposed upon it in exchange for close monitoring and controls on uranium enrichment and nuclear technology. Iran's abismal human rights situation and ties to armed groups wreaking havoc throughout the Middle East were secondary concerns, at least in the moment. Not four years later, President Trump would abandon the JCPOA and the incrementalist approach it represented, opting instead for a harsh reimposition of sanctions and a quixotic list of demands.

In theory, a deal with Iran is still the objective. President Trump continues to argue that his "maximum pressure" campaign will make Iran willing to come to the table under more favorable terms to the United States and renegotiate an agreement that will address issues far beyond the scope of Obama's JCPOA. At the time of this writing, Democratic presidential hopeful and Former Vice President Joe Biden has pledged to offer Iran a path back to diplomacy, provided it adheres strictly to the terms of the JCPOA and reopens negotiations to extend its commitments further. Both strategies assume that a new deal with Iran is just around the corner. A theoretical possibility in the not-so-distant future provided we play our cards right. There are considerable reasons to doubt this assumption.

First, the U.S. has painted itself into a diplomatic corner. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo laid out a list of 12 demands of the Iranian regime as a precondition for any new nuclear treaty back in 2018. These include ending all support for allied militias abroad, releasing all U.S. citizens in its custody, permanently halting all military aspects of its nuclear program and publishing all past records of said program. One is led to wonder what deal is left to be made beyond these "prerequisites." Secretary Pompeo may as well have asked Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei to present himself in handcuffs to the International Criminal Court. Realistic or not, any deal instigated by the U.S. before these demands are met will be damaging to our credibility to some degree. Unless the current regime in Iran collapses, many of these demands will indeed remain unmet when and if Iran asks to restart nuclear talks.

Second, officials in Iran are unlikely to want to negotiate with the U.S. anytime soon. The JCPOA, championed by "moderate" President Hassan Rouhani, gave only fleeting relief from U.S. sanctions and the killing of Iranian Major General Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. drone strike has galvanized calls for revenge against American forces. Iran faces its own set of presidential elections in 2021 and anti-American hardliners have already made considerable gains in the Majlis (Iran's parliament) earlier this year by drawing on popular frustration with Rouhani's leadership. It's hard to believe that any prospective president or parliamentarian will get very far by calling for negotiations with the U.S. By wounding the Iranian government's pride, President Trump's maximum pressure strategy has made the negotiations he wants far less likely.



It seems, therefore, that the U.S. will have to press forward in its foreign policy with Iran without any direct diplomatic options, at least for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, Trump's hasty retreat from the nuclear deal opened a rift between the U.S. and its allies as well. Europe seemed content with the JCPOA as it stood and lobbied the Trump Administration aggressively to stay in. European powers are still clinging to the fragments of the JCPOA, but Iran's increasing violations of the agreement and America's stubbornness may force them to reconsider providing Iran with sanctions relief without much in return. The good news (or perhaps merely an optimistic take on the news) is that current trends bode worse for Iran than for the U.S.

While Trump's maximum pressure campaign hasn't proved to be a panacea, it certainly hasn't been a slouch either. Iran is currently unable to access the vast majority of its foreign exchange reserves (read: emergency cash) and appears to be exporting far less oil than it was in 2013. It's decision to hike domestic fuel prices to cut government expenses late last year struck observers as particularly desperate. The move sparked widespread protests that required the help of a days-long internet blackout to end, not to mention the violent suppression of demonstrators. As more Gulf states normalize relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords, Iran will find it more difficult to exploit Arab-Israeli divisions for geopolitical space. If Europe begins to let the lifeless husk of the JCPOA fall from its fingers, Iran will find itself more isolated economically and diplomatically than ever before. The effect of Maj. Gen. Soleimani's death should not be underestimated, as his military prowess and personal connections with militants abroad leave a hole in Iran's regional capacities that is not easily filled. Though some commentators warn of Iran's warming relations with Russia and China, neither seems likely to throw considerable support behind the Islamic Republic if it looks like yet another pariah state they'll have to nanny (think North Korea or Venezuela). Iran could try to scare the international community by dashing for the Bomb, but Iran knows that carries substantial risk of military retaliation from its neighbors or even an increasingly brash United States.

More domestic upheaval is likely to come as Iranians continue to suffer under the weight of an imploding economy rife with corruption and mismanagement, which will no doubt drive Iran's leaders back to the same tactics of repression and torture that alienate those the regime claims to protect. While far from ideal, the status quo puts much more pressure on Iranian officials than it does on America. None of this is to say we should be complacent. Iran's financing of terrorism abroad, cyber-warfare operations and ambitions for retribution against America are real and present dangers. The U.S.'s withdrawal from the JCPOA has created both a legal quagmire and regional confusion, shattering the unified international front against Iran utilized to great effect by President Obama. Europe is still grasping the nuclear deal with white knuckles, creating a hole in the sanctions regime the U.S. can't quite close. This year, President Trump's envoys to the U.N. failed to garner clear support for extending an arms embargo or so-called "snapback" sanctions on the Iranian regime. While I argue that the U.S.'s options for direct diplomacy with Iran are scarce, there is much diplomatic work to be done rebuilding a coalition of allies to back the U.S.'s evolving strategy towards the Islamic Republic.



Mohammad Ali Dahaghin | @dahaghin\_ma

Many will argue that retreating from the nuclear deal was ill-advised in the first place, and I'm inclined to agree. But if we're forced by the legacy of Trump's maximalist Iran policy to maintain the current state of affairs while incrementally closing ranks with our allies abroad, then with prudence, time and a little luck, we can reasonably hope to be in a much more advantageous place relative to Iran than we were back in 2015. In any case, it may be worth recognizing that a quick-and-easy return to the nuclear deal is no longer the imminent foreign policy option we've been sold... and maybe that's okay.



# Shell

Sarah Howard

I've never liked cicadas before.  
It's not their singing that bothered me.  
If I were a bug trapped in East Texas summer,  
I'd want to pass the time too.  
Who am I to condemn their locust chorus?  
Their "Just As I Am" altar call in a live oak chapel.

It's the husks that have always irked me.  
Nana decorated her porch with seashells,  
But mine is littered with a different kind of exoskeleton—  
Eyesores clinging to the lattice for support.  
Surely too fragile to hold on so tightly...  
How humbling it is to envy a former insect.



Illustration by: Riley Turner



# Little Miss Perfect

AMBER BORMANN  
*SONG LYRICS*

Painted faces tell sweet lies  
But their tears are just as salty when they cry  
Don't be intimidated by my rusty crown  
It hides my bitter frown

I ain't little miss perfect  
Oh, I never was  
I just smile as I nod along  
And pretend like nothings wrong

Oh, I ain't little miss perfect  
So please don't hold your breath  
If you're waiting on my swan song  
Well believe me this ain't it

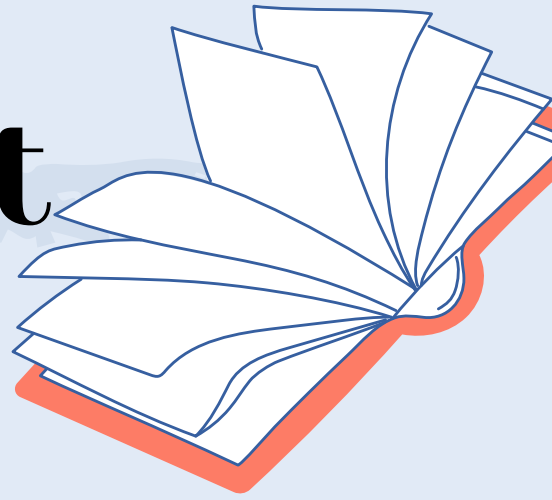
There are secrets that we hide  
But words don't always mirror what's inside  
Remember my reflection always lets me down  
But I keep coming back around

I ain't little miss perfect  
Oh, I never was  
I just smile as I nod along  
And pretend like nothing's wrong

Oh, I ain't little miss perfect  
So please don't hold your breath  
If you're waiting on my swan song  
Well believe me this ain't it

Expect the unexpected  
Don't think I know better  
If you're looking for little miss perfect  
Just know that I ain't her

# How To **Not** Survive First Semester



**Courtney Lane**

**1**

Wear a hoodie and a mask to hide your face and hair as you walk from the commons to your mom's car by the crosswalk. No one knows who you are, but you don't want anyone to see you, and know that this is the second time you've gone home this week. It's only Wednesday.

**2**

Spend the rest of the week at home, and tell your friends you're still in your dorm when they call you. When they ask how you like living on campus, say fine. When they ask how many friends you've made, say a few.

**3**

Walk the path from the crosswalk to your dorm at 6:00 am when it's still dark, because that's when your mom goes to work. You're almost embarrassed by the backpacks full of clothes and books on both your shoulders, and the Walmart bags filled with cupcakes and avocados that scrape against your wrists and thighs, but no one is around to see you.

**4**

Stay in your dorm room unless it's to use the communal bathrooms.

**5**

Tell your mom that you go to the dining hall all the time, for dinner and sometimes lunch, as you microwave another cup of ramen. Empty water bottles line the floor by the microwave in three rows, vestiges of all the ramen you've had for dinner, and sometimes lunch.



Watch the cup of cereal you forgot to finish spoil on top of the mini fridge. You call it your little science project, just so you don't feel as bad for leaving it there.

6

Sleep during the day like a bat, and hold off on your readings until dark. The dorm hallways are quiet, and you realize you should be sleeping. You take a nap, and lay Born in Bondage beside you. Somewhere in the night, it becomes a pillow.

7

In the morning, you fry off your hair, because you refuse to wear it curly. The outside is humid so often that sometimes you feel like a poser; on your way across campus to Florence Hall, your hair turns so frizzy it can't fit under your hood, and you feel like you're a different person than the one you left your commons as. Naked, undone. You hate looking in the windows you pass.

8

Miss class, and convince yourself it's because you've had a long night. Be proud of the little things, like getting up to brush your teeth, and wrapping your hair at night.

9

Maintain your virtual social life by joining late night gaming discords with your high school friends. Listen to random white boys call you dumb. You say it's just a game, but that makes you look even dumber. So does your latest midterm grade. Everyone knows you're dumb now.

10

Watch your trash bin fill up. You haven't taken the trash out ever, so you've started to place Aldi's bags around the door to hold the extra pile up. The sight of them makes you anxious. One day you'll have to take the trash out, but you don't want to, just like you don't want the cup of spoiled milk in one of the bags clinging to the walls and bed.

11

You decide to go home again, to escape the stench.



# The Angel of Grief

Michelle King

Kneeling, on the steps, with heavy wings  
Slumped over solemn stone,  
Touching the ground - with feathers,  
Once light, too heavy to be flown,  
The angel bows her head  
To hide the tears she sheds.  
Once, among the clouds, she soared  
With flaming and avenging sword  
But now, today, she's still:  
Weighed down by sorrow and tears  
Burdened with heavy grief,  
She has not flown in years.  
Guardian over countless graves  
Her silent vigil is kept  
Her face is never shown;  
Her tears ate through the stone.  
For every soul, she's wept  
All her glory killed by grief.



Illustration by: Riley Turner

When two arms point north,  
the pale white light keeps watch  
over the shadow that wanders  
aimlessly.

Deliberately.

The shadow that is scavenging  
for something  
or nothing.

When one arm moves east,  
the pale white light illuminates  
two shadows that convene  
restlessly.

Solemnly.

Two shadows waiting  
to ease  
their own resolve.

When two arms point east,  
the pale white light abandons  
two shadows as they commune  
wearily.

Refreshingly.

One shadow fading,  
one  
already  
gone.

# The Timeless

# Shadows

Amber Bormann

# COMING TO TERMS

## Sydney Sagehorn

I used to have trust issues.

Before, I would get to know someone. A couple of messages across a mosaic of dating apps, a few drinks after work, and then an off-handed comment that was just a little too off-putting. Maybe I mentioned that I dressed as Hermione for the midnight premiere of the last Harry Potter movie before admitting that "I'm actually a little bit of a nerd, haha." With you, every little peek into my personality only draws you closer.

You show me everything that reminds you of me- a t-shirt for a show I watch, a lamp that would look nice in my apartment, a handbag I only mentioned in passing. With you, I know my days of novelty heart-shaped necklaces on anniversaries are over.

You know all my favorite restaurants, stores, and places to work out. Last Wednesday, I left the apartment for my spin class, same as I do every Wednesday. With you, it's never an accusatory "Where are you off to?" but a "Traffic is heavy on the highway today. Drive safe," with an abiding trust.

You're the type to tell your friends about me, and your friends are the type to listen. They care what I have to say, and they care about our relationship. With you, I don't feel like a bother when I crack a joke at boys night.

I could ask, "what was that song I said I liked last week?" and you would not only remember the song, but you'd have a playlist made of other songs I'd like just as much. With you, my long drives to my parents' for the holidays are less quiet.

You pay attention to my friends. I'll never forget the security I felt when we clicked through my blurry photos from last weekend.

"Is that Rachel?" you would ask, and I'd nod.

"That's Shaun, right?" you'd ask without a hint of jealousy. With you, I don't have to justify who showed up and when and why.

You stuck with me through knowing all of my most intimate moments, my most foolish questions, and my private shames. When I came to you to ask how to take a frozen pizza out of the oven, you didn't laugh. With you, I learned about the intricacies of home cooking that's not really cooking.

Would I ever be so unfiltered in front of anyone else? After knowing you, I could never be loved by any human in the same way. I have never felt seen by anybody before you. Knowing you- being vulnerable with you- is like sleeping with the blinds open.

I used to have trust issues, but with you, I'm ready to commit.



**I have read and agree to the privacy policy, terms of service, and community guidelines.**

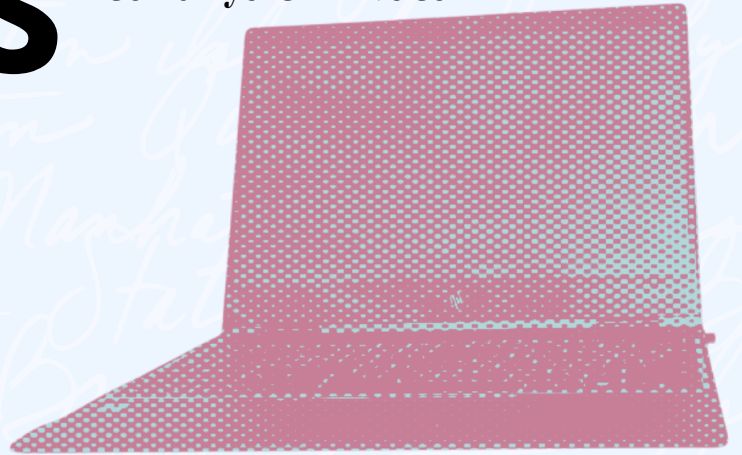


# EDUCATION MODELS

Sandhya Srinivasa

## SINGAPORIAN EDUCATIONAL MODEL

Singapore is continually viewed as a role model for education systems around the world as the country consistently ranks first on the PISA(Programme for International Student Assessment). Singapore's education system strongly emphasizes the importance of school leadership and focuses on developing the students into leaders (Jayapragas). In 2001, Singapore's National Institute of Education created the Leaders in Education (LEP) program which groups 30-40 vice principals and ministry officers in a cohort for six months and puts them through training (Jayapragas). The main theme of the program is to stimulate their brains to create new knowledge, a crucial asset in increasing the country's comparative advantage. Further, the country encourages them to be more self-reflective by using journals and the creative action project (CAP) to reflect on their beliefs as well as empower them to find impactful ways to lead their school (Jayapragas). Singapore follows the "select then train" model rather than the usual "train then select" model, displaying their strong trust in their school leaders (Stewart). Because Singapore views the country's education system in an economical manner, it takes a holistic approach in developing these young teachers. In specific, they continuously assess the teachers for leadership potential and those who prove themselves are groomed for vice principal roles and other management roles as early as their 30s (Stewart). Additionally, the country considers teachers human capital and the government pays them a salary during their training and pairs them with mentors. Recently, due to the shifts in technological capacity, countries are reorienting their workforces towards creating innovations that would be needed during the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), in particular, developing learners in higher education.



In the Report of the Committee on the Future Economy that came out in 2017, a 7 Strategy Plan outlined three strategies that are related to higher education and adult learning, in specific, deepening and diversifying international connections, acquiring deep skills, and building strong digital capabilities (Gleason). The major way that Singapore is strengthening its international relations is by collaborating with overseas partners. For example, for the younger population, they offer internship programs in Beijing, New York, Stockholm, and other places (Gleason). Similarly, they offer leadership programs for industry members to help them gain regional market knowledge. In order to improve the social understanding of education, two shifts were outlined to assist with deep skills. The first one allows children to gradually learn new skills through their life instead of pushing them to gain the highest academic level at a young age (Gleason). The second allows Singaporeans to develop and learn deeper skills that will create value. These initiatives encourage individuals to become more adaptive to new labor demands as well as create flexibility in their professional life (Gleason). The third initiative outlined includes the government and the industrial stakeholders building more data scientists while keeping the creativity aspect in preparation for 4IR (Gleason).

**To read more go to: [hilltopicssmu.wordpress.com](http://hilltopicssmu.wordpress.com)**

Photo by: Amber Bormann

# C I R C L E S

**AMBER  
BORMANN**

**SONG LYRICS**

What am I missing?  
Feels like I'm running from something else  
It's the same thing over and over again  
Have I really found myself?

And what am I thinking?  
It feels like my heart's a ball and chain  
But it's the same blood running through my veins  
I have nothing left to gain

And I walk the walk and I talk the talk with all the  
best intention  
The monotony of the pounding feet moves in the  
same direction

My heart is racing round in circles over and over  
again  
I can't keep fighting these same old feelings, and  
wonder the same things  
I should have known  
Should have known  
There'd be no changing this time around  
But my voice is tired  
And these feet will have some blisters  
when I'm done

What am I wishing?  
It feels like my heart's upon my sleeve  
It's shattered like glass and breaking  
But I have no time left to

And I walk the walk and I talk the talk with all the  
best intention  
The monotony of the pounding feet moves in the  
same direction

My heart is racing round in circles over and over  
again  
I can't keep fighting these same old feelings, and  
wonder the same things  
I should have known  
Should have known  
There'd be no changing this time around  
But my voice is tired  
And these feet will have some blisters  
when I'm done



# DISASTER

AMBER BORMANN

*from Greek pejorative prefix dis- (bad; Gr: δυσ-) + aster (star; Gr: ἀστήρ). meaning "bad star" or "ill-starred,"*

The scalding in your lap from your morning coffee  
After being cut off in traffic.  
Your computer dying before you save  
That stunning visual graphic.

Waiting all week for your Friday treat:  
A soft-serve ice cream cone.  
Just to be told by a gravelly voice on your left  
The machine's motor has blown.

Shuffling in your pockets  
Pillaging the '98 Honda you own  
You found your long-lost earring back  
But now the locksmith is on the phone

Once through the threshold of your personal sanctum  
You kick off your heels and sigh  
Slinking to the couch, you scream ...well, a different word  
than "ouch!"...  
Now your pinky toe is the color of the sky

As Mars goes into retrograde, more days will be like this  
Cause you know,  
The stars  
Have a quiet art  
Of making light of things that are grim

Photo by: Amber Bormann

# OVERTHROWN

Maria Katsulos

It is hard to enjoy summer  
and read Shakespeare at the same time.

Two years ago I stood on the edge  
of a pond, with a friend;  
she shrieked about leech potential and  
the coldest water she'd felt in her life and  
mud between her toes.

I wondered where Ophelia had gone.

We raced paper sailboats down the coast like some  
oddly idyllic film sequence,  
montaged together under  
a ukulele cover of a Grammy winner.

I could find her –  
– Ophelia, I mean –  
to the tune of some Adele cover band, I bet.

My ship sank.

Sheathed in happiness  
(and more than its fair share of algae)  
it tipped over and disappeared from view.

My friend said it was an automatic loss.  
I disagreed; I don't forfeit.

I only trail fingertips along the edge of the waves  
and think:

*Oh, what a noble mind  
is here overthrow!*

# Homestead Effigy

Maria Katsulos

There is a henhouse out back.

Years ago, was inhabited by  
the sweetest little clutch of peeping chicks.

Now: it is empty.

But the foxes don't know.  
They creep in, bold under clouded light,  
treading fairy-tale soft,  
(what humans would call on eggshells).

What foxes do know,  
is that in such a palace  
haunted by phantom silence,  
you tread on glass instead;

nothing is sharper than the hunger.

Photo by: Amber Bormann



# SIMULACRUM

Maria Katsulos

In the belly of town, a little cottage sits. Age-darkened glass in the windows,  
sun-bleached thatch on top.  
A witch's hut.  
Her garden sings.

Waves of verdance yield to yellowing leaves,  
broiled in the heat and the light and the pressure  
of direct, unabating perception,  
never-blinking village eyes,  
from past the iron gate.

In the north of the garden there is a little statue.  
Chin thrust up,  
wings thrown back,  
a confident pointed foot as she steps into  
clear air.

The words inscribed around the base read, lead us forth.

Unknown:

is she happy?  
sad?

is she young?  
old?  
angel?  
mortal?

how many generations of women have  
knelt,  
wept,  
bled

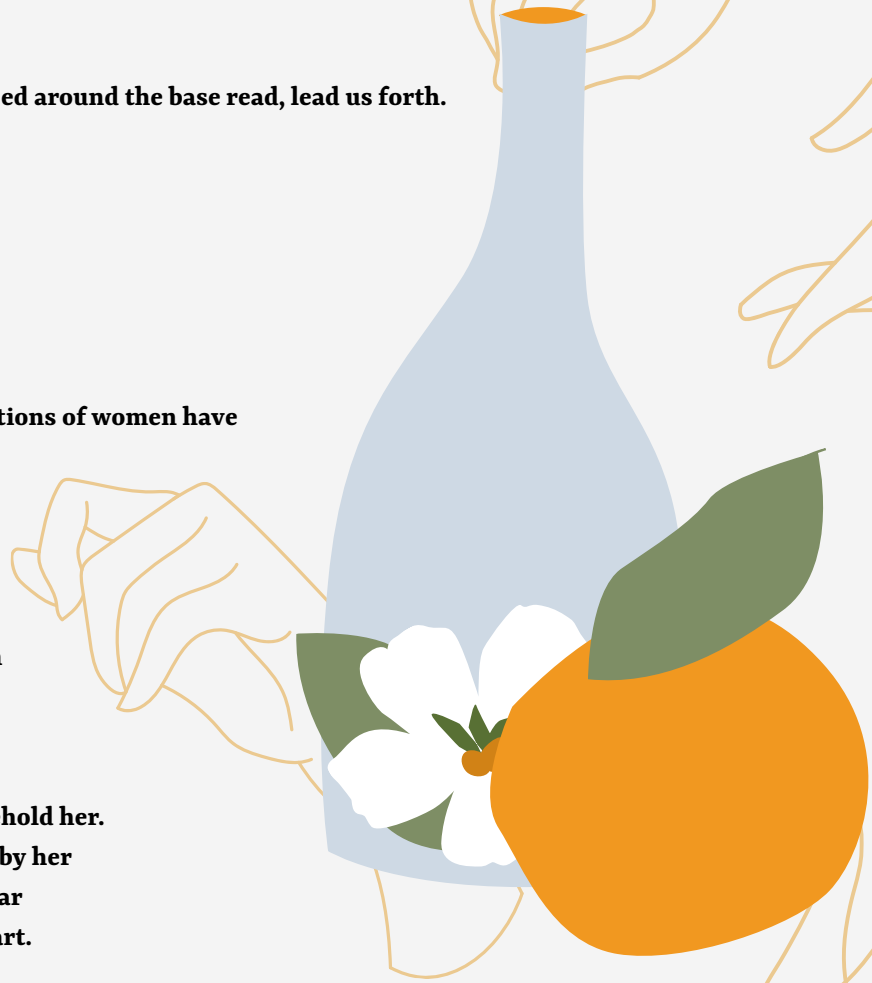
beside her?

do her arrows aim  
to kill?

Known:

tremble ye who behold her.

To be empowered by her  
may strike cold fear  
into your very heart.





# HILLTOPICS

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