



Red Planet Magazine

February 2020

Red Planet Magazine

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Mars... our curious neighbor, glowing red against the dark expanse of space, beckoning the adventurer within all of us.

Red Planet is an independent literary magazine emphasizing a theme of speculative fiction, open for submissions year-round to writers and artists from across the galaxy. A new issue is published each month featuring works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art.

Editor-in-Chief: Megan Bush

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Dancing With the Sun

by Peter Medeiros

I'm in The Ventura Chapel, Crimson City. Venus. My brother has been married for half an hour. Now we're in the reception hall and folks are loosening ties and kicking off heels and moving onto the dance floor. Everybody except me.

I'm glancing through family photos in a big black binder, left on a pedestal for guests to peruse. On the dance floor people start to gyrate to this slow orgo beat crawling out of the walls, thunderously loud. I'm sipping some sugary Venusian drink, careful not to spill as I flip through the binder. Then Aunt Jun walks up next with me. Mom didn't want her to come because of Aunt Jun's health, but Jun insisted. It's hard for me to imagine my aunt insisting on anything, she's so polite.

I point at a picture that could be Aunt Jun in a canvas flight jacket and my mother in a bathing suit, both hunched over an ice cream sundae somewhere on a coast in America, California probably. "Is this you, Aunt Jun?" But when I look at her lined face, her eyes are unfocused, studying the wall.

"I used to be a dancer," she says, "but I don't know how people dance to this sort of music."

"Me neither." But I do, sort of. You just have to ignore the fact that it sounds like nothing, let its pulse become your own.

Suddenly I feel my dad's presence like a snowdrift behind us—big, chilly. He's holding two drinks but he's trying to steer Aunt Jun back to a chair. "Jun, Jun! You can't go wandering off like that. What if you got lost and wandered outside? The chapel's on a cliff, don't you remember? Of course you don't. And you weren't a dancer. You were a pilot. Flew a solar-energy harvester, chased storms in one of them *old* harvester ships."

Dad says *old* as if it's a dirty word.

I follow them both back into the chapel. My brother isn't religious, but he agreed to have the wedding here because his new wife--my sister-in-law now, I guess--Glana, has family on Venus. Me, I guess I follow the Eight-Fold Path, or I try; on forms with a religion box, however, I usually fill in "undecided." Anyway, here we are.

Aunt Jun shuffles alongside Dad, but she's shaking her head. "Those were hardly ships," she says. "Little command booths and storage containers strapped to the Yuzhóu dragonflies."

"No such thing as dragonflies, Jun!" My dad declares, like this is cause for celebration.

"Not any more," Jun says, "we used them all up. Ran them out chasing the storms and bringing them back in batteries. But dragonflies don't like being harnessed. Wore them out so they couldn't even mate. 'S why we had to make ships with thinner wings. Little adjustments only a computer can do."

"Why do you go *on* like this?" my father groans. He's a few drinks deep.

"I'll help her, Dad," I say.

I don't shove him away, but I'm not exactly gentle. Dad had been trying to get an arm around Aunt Jun's shoulders, but I simply give her my elbow and let her lean into it. My father blinks and seems to forget about us.

I can tell Aunt Jun doesn't want to be near the dance hall, so we head towards the big chapel's entrance. The Ventura Chapel has an upstairs just for Venusians, but there's no guards or anything to stop us and the next thing I know, without either of us speaking, I'm helping Jun up the stairs one at a time. Takes a while.

The Venusians believe in an infinite number of ever-changing gods, so the upstairs is full of moving wallscreens, a parade of pictures gradually merging together and pulling apart. I asked the Venusian girl behind the reception hall's open bar about it, and she tried to tell me the pictures weren't from any standard Venusian mythology, they were randomly generated based on different common

factors from a number of universal mythologies. So many possible combinations, it was accepted each one was about unique. It was supposed to be a celebration of the changing nature of the cosmos and its infinitude of gods.

But how could you worship something that you weren't certain what it was? I asked. Things that changed on you when you weren't looking?

She asked how you could be certain of anything. Then she asked if I wanted anything to drink, and that seemed to be the end of the conversation.

Aunt Jun and I watch the wallscreens. Something like a blue wolf slowly turns into a green woman with a crown of small swords. Some of the swords' hilts are stuck in her eyes, but the procedurally-generated goddess doesn't seem to mind.

"What were they like? The Yuzhóu dragonflies?" I whisper, though the shifting images inspire no reverence in me. My brother had drunkenly complained how much the hall cost to rent. Ventura Chapel didn't strike me as a nonprofit religious institution.

Aunt Jun grins. "Hard to say. Everything interfaced right into their nervous system, so the floors had to be open to their carapace. Mostly, us pilots only ever got a good look at their backs. Whole mess of wires feeding into the armor. They had eyes on their backs, too! Eyes in the weirdest places. Made you wonder what they were watching out for."

I hear somebody coming up the stairs, but I'm trying to imagine working on a ship strapped to one of the giant insect-like aliens creatures of legend. Of course, I've only ever seen artists' renditions of the dragonflies on off-channel conspiracy shows with titles like THE TRUTH BEHIND EARLY SOLAR STORM HARVESTING.

I say, "Had to be careful where you stepped, huh?"

Jun laughs, then coughs, then laughs again. "They lived in deep space, boy. You think dainty little pests like you or me could make a dent in those beasts? No, their eyes had a nictitating membrane, like sharks. So they could

always see, all over. That's what was crazy, having them looking at you one way, and looking out at everything else with other eyes. Sometimes, riding the flares, it was like we were all in it together, like the dragonflies were happy to have us along. Other times it was like they knew we were nothing more than slavers, using them to soak up the sun. Then no membrane could cover up the...the accusation. The reproach."

Mom hustles over and steps between us. "Auntie Jun, you okay?" Without waiting for a reply, she turns to me. "I can't believe you brought her up here. Her heart! Those stairs! And all your questions!"

I say, "What's wrong with questions?"

"See!" Mom rounds on Aunt Jun again, dismissing me with a shake of her head. "Jun, let's get back you back downstairs. There's an elevator over here. We'll all go together."

I try to hold it in, but on the way down I blurt, "Aunt Jun, that all sounded amazing" -- and Mom's giving me that are - you - going - out - without - finishing - your - homework kind of look, but I go on -- "but you said you were a dancer. Then you were talking about the dragonflies they used to harvest energy out in deep space. Did you have one job, then the other? Which did you do first?"

Aunt Jun is actually my great aunt. I forget that sometimes. But it's easy to remember now, when she slings an arm around my mother's shoulder with strange fluidity, like it's a wushu move and she's a sifu demonstrating a technique for my benefit. (I studied Northern Long Fist for two years as a kid before Dad said it was taking away from my schoolwork and pulled me out of classes.)

"I was a dancer," Jun says, "but not the way your mother was a dancer. Between storm runs, I would take your mother down to the Hub Club on Qixingxi Road—that's in Xiamen."

"Here we go," Mom sighs.

"She was really something on the dance floor, turning all the boys' heads. But she'd get so self-conscious. So shy!" In a bizarre show of strength for someone her age, Aunt Jun jostles Mom's shoulders, and I'm amazed to see my mother, tight-lipped, shaken in the much smaller woman's grasp.

"I was young..." Mom shakes her head and steps out of Aunt Jun's embrace. "You were never a dancer, Auntie."

Aunt Jun doesn't seem to hear. "It was all slap-dash back then. You don't appreciate it now, how desperate we were after the Petrol Wars. The ship's main deck had levers repurposed from tractor-trailers, stuff like that. When we had the nets out for collection, filling up the batteries, the display screens would short out."

Mom says, "Jun—"

"And the dragonflies would want to ride along the outside of the storm. They didn't want to get into the middle where the real juice is, thrown off into the cold and the dark. You only have seconds to load up, trying to reel in enough power to keep a city running for years. And with visuals out, you had to do it all by feel, the way the ship rocked around you, those strange eyes watching you."

Then Aunt Jun is coughing again, bent over. Mom massages her shoulders, not gently, and blames me for upsetting Aunt Jun. "Don't you have any respect?" Mom asks me. "Don't you care about your elders at all? You can't get her so excited."

"It was like dancing with the sun," Aunt Jun wheezes.

"Jun," says Mom, "that doesn't make any sense. The old harvesters were big square blocks that trawled the star storms. Perfectly safe. You know that, I know you know that. You can't be telling these tales to your nephew. He needs to know The Great Histories for his entrance exams. Official history, not stories!" Mom sounds desperate, like she needs Aunt Jun to remember this. As if Mom were there. "Do you think that the government would send you up there on alien

creatures? As if we don't have enough craziness the universe! And with failing equipment, like you say? Do you really believe that?"

Aunt Jun is still coughing, but Mom has stopped rubbing her back.

Mom goes on, "*One* of your nephews, at least, knows that we all need to stand together now, the whole inner galaxy united. He'll be working at the embassy here in Crimson City, Glana's father has seen to it. We can't have you saying such things about the government's methods--ours or theirs. We all need to decide..." She falters for a second. "We need to decide what's important." I have genuinely no clue what she's talking about.

I want to ask Mom if she really believes the Venusians would be upset to learn that solar energy harvesters we don't even use anymore were poorly made, and dangerous, and built on the backs of mythical deep space beasts, if somehow that would piss them off enough to break off our alliance. But Mom doesn't like questions. And I know what this is really about. Childhood included a lot of stories about Aunt Jun traveling too much, about her getting crazy ideas from other countries, weird taste in music and food...and of course signing up as a storm-harvester, back when nobody knew anything about harvesting solar storms except that it was supposed to solve all of Earth's energy problems.

When the elevator gets back to the lower level and the reception area, Mom puts her face very close to mine and asks me to think about who will help pay for my college, and if I want to see Huazhong ever again. Empty threats, but I let her get it out of her system. Then she leads Aunt Jun away, back to her table.

I go to the bar and get a bottle of Jianlibao soda, my brother's favorite, and take a sip. The bartender smiles and asks if I need another. I shake my head, then hang my head, feeling perfectly clumsy and out of place. I spin on the stool and scan the room for my brother and Glana and find neither. Have they left for their honeymoon already? Or are they lost in the crush of people trying to sway their hips in time with the orgo music without spilling their drinks?

I spot Aunt Jun again. Mom left her on the edge of the crowd, at a small white table by herself. She pushes a tall glass of water around with her knuckles; it gives the impression, not of age, but of a distinctly adolescent boredom.

The thick, muddy bass beat of the music still pounds from the walls. I finish my drink and leave a tip and skirt the crowd and make my way to the DJ booth. The DJ is Venusian, a big guy, purple, eyebrows shaved--I'm told it's traditional for professional Venusian artists, but it seems a little presumptuous for a disc jockey. Anyway, I tell him what I want and when he doesn't understand I open up a palm screen and find some songs in the Galactic Historical Archive. He listens with headphones, scrunching up his face, in disgust or fascination or a combination of the two. I can tell he doesn't want to play it.

I beg with him. I tell him I'm the groom's brother and really, *really* the whole family loves this kind of stuff. (One truth, one lie.) The DJ shrugs and fiddles at his console.

A minute later the orgo beat slowly dies down and this old song, kind of scratchy, comes on; an American jazz singer Aunt Jun liked, two hundred years dead, singing about imagination. People are groaning, demanding the insistent dance music come back in place of this dead woman from a dead country singing, *It makes a cloudy day sunny*. I sprint away from the booth—it's a short song—and then I'm next to Aunt Jun.

"Want to dance with me, Aunt Jun?"

Her eyebrows perform skeptical gymnastics. "I don't know if I still can," she says.

"But do you want to?" I ask her.

She thinks about, then stops thinking about it. She grabs my hand even though I haven't offered it yet. We're up, we're on the floor, her hands are heavier than I expected on my shoulders.

People are watching us. A shiver goes through Aunt Jun when she sees all the scowling faces and she says, "I didn't used to care what people thought of me. Dressed like I wanted, listened to American music. Jazz. Music like this. But I don't know if I can dance anymore." She looks down at her shuffling feet like they've betrayed her. "It's not the same as riding a dragonfly. It's not the same as when I was young and brave."

"Try closing your eyes," I say. "You don't have to look. That's what you said. When the monitors broke? You just have to feel it, right?"

It's a silly song. It goes, *Imagination is crazy...Your whole perspective gets hazy...*

I don't see if Aunt Jun does close her eyes, because I've already closed mine. But I think she does, because she leans comfortably into me and I smell her perfume, jasmine and warm wet wool, and something strangely like brake fluid, not unpleasant. We turn in a slow circle. Everyone is watching us and then, in the next moment, though we have changed nothing, no one is watching us and we are dancing.

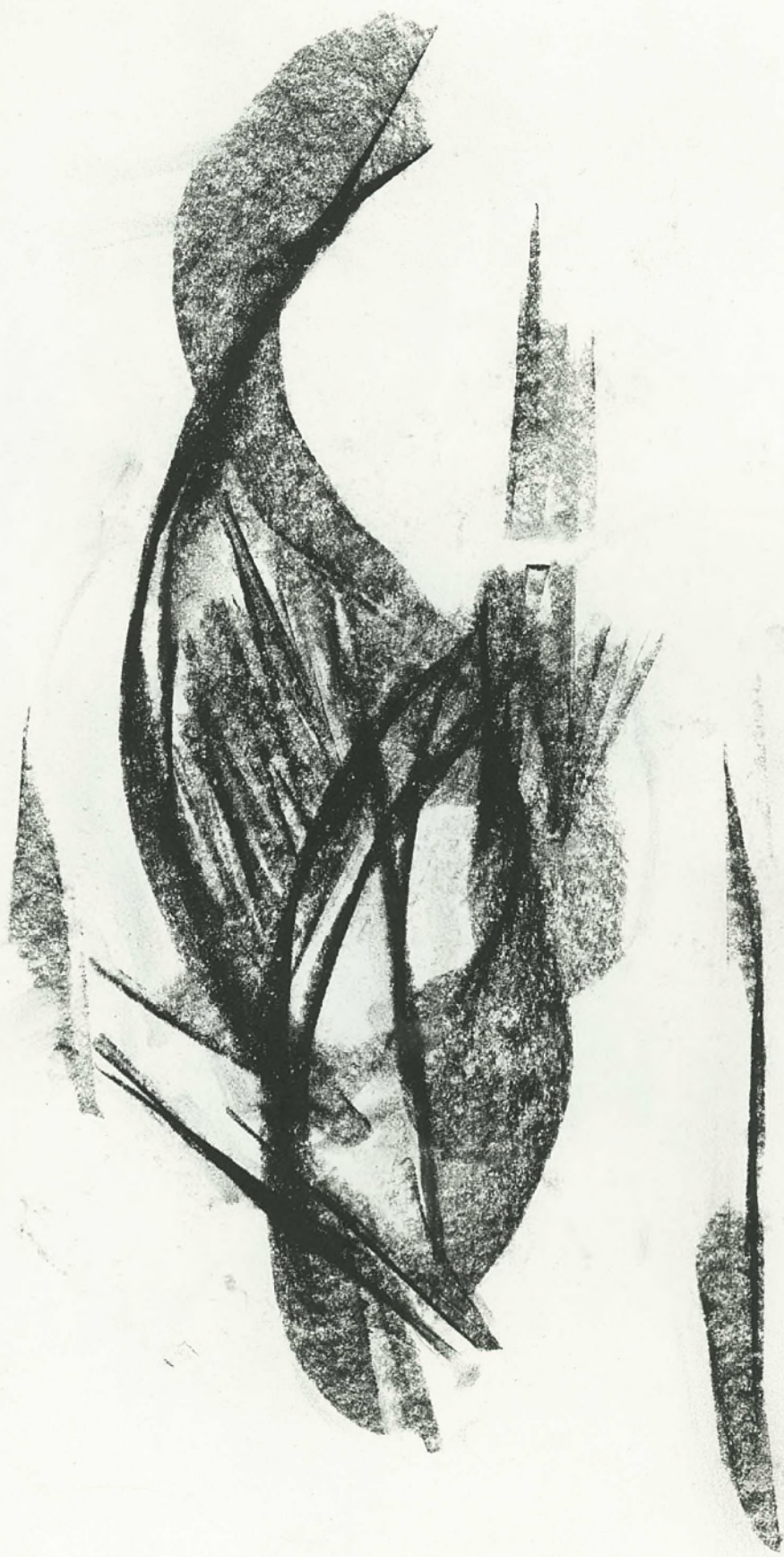
Peter Medeiros teaches college composition, research writing, and Kung Fu--though never at the same time. His teaching in and around Boston remains a major inspiration for much of his fiction. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College. He been publishing fiction since 2013, and was most recently featured in the science fiction anthology *Children of the Sky*.

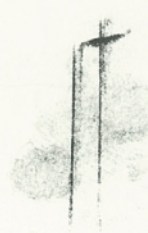


Blue Eyes

by Ann Privateer

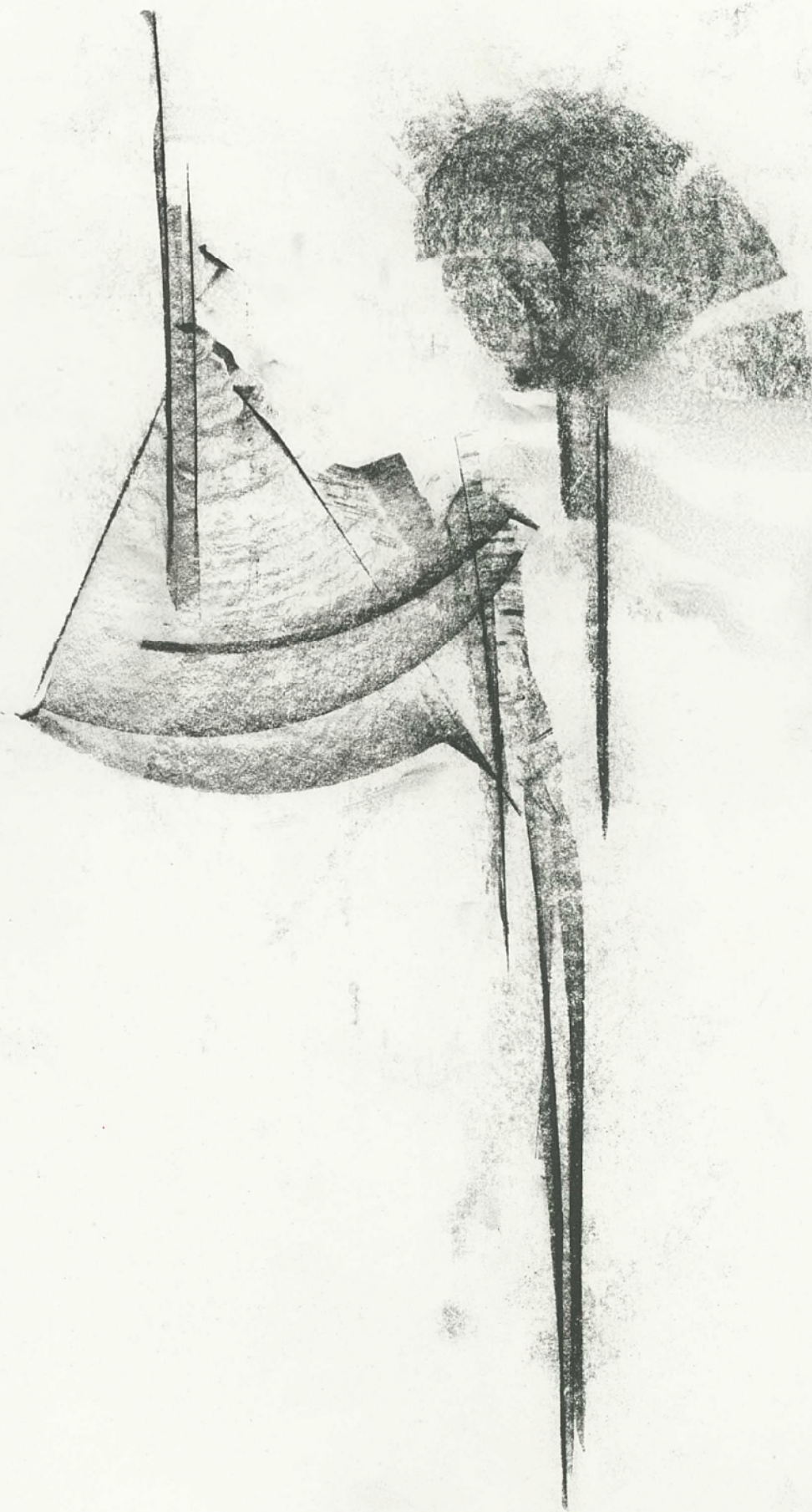


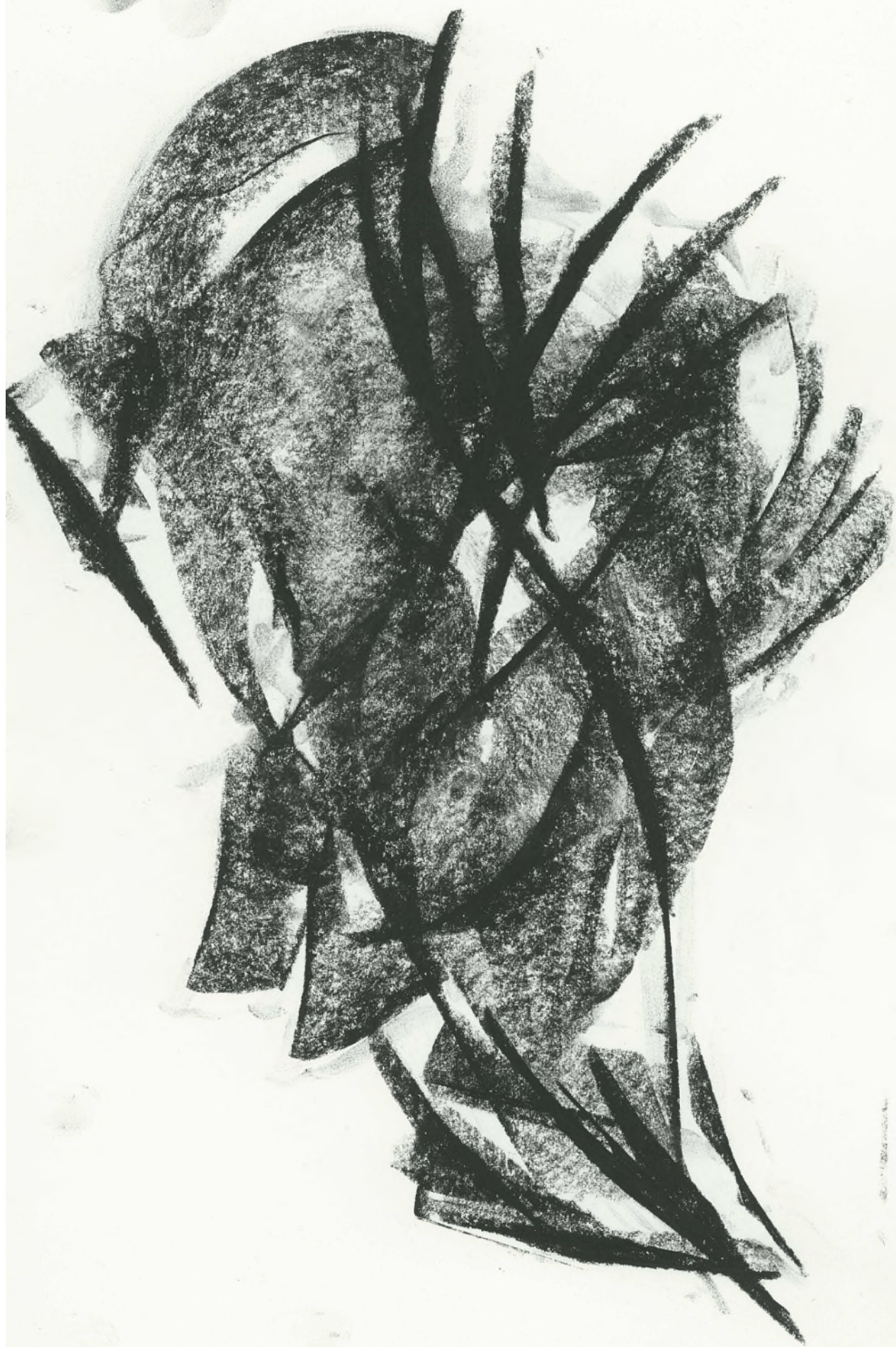




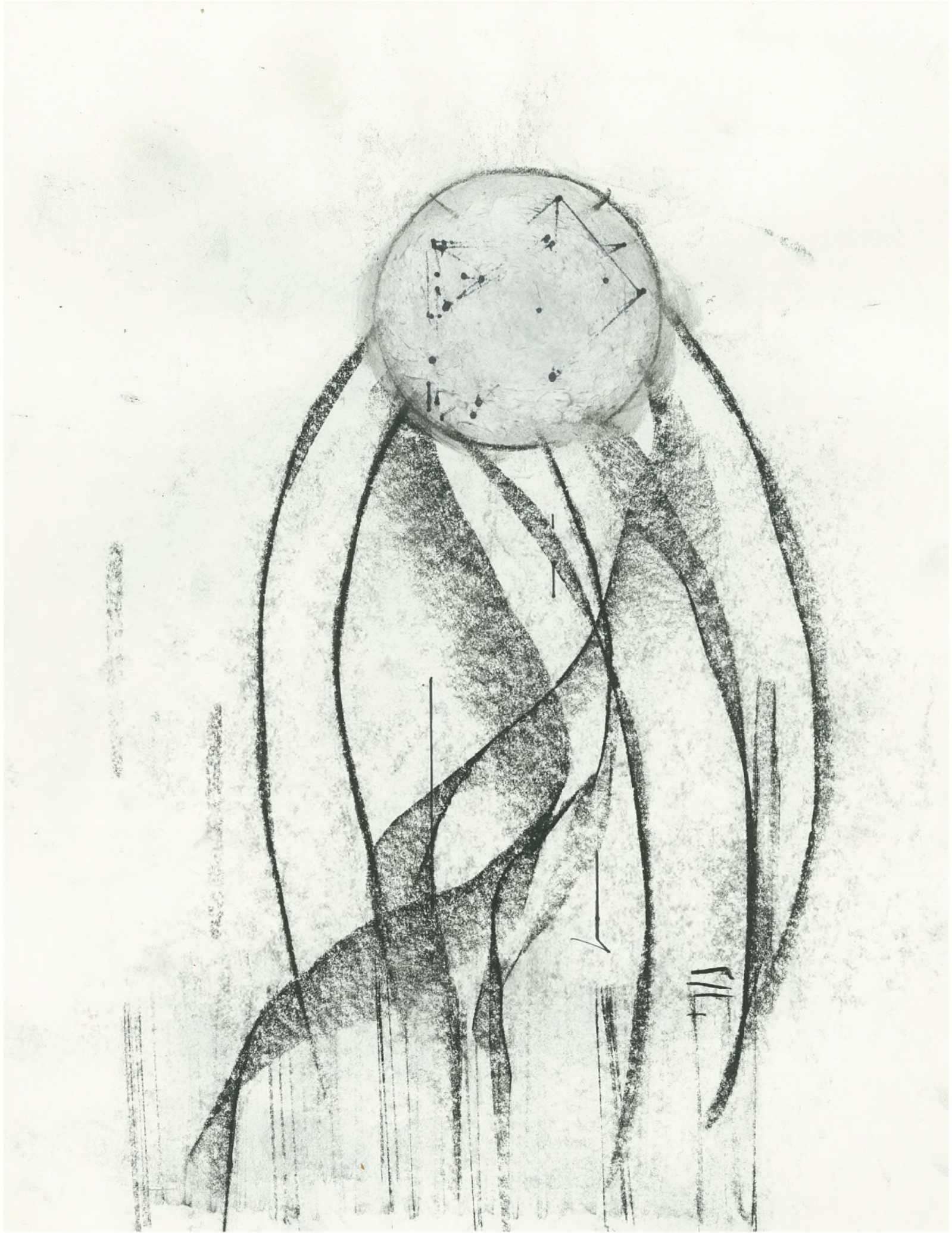


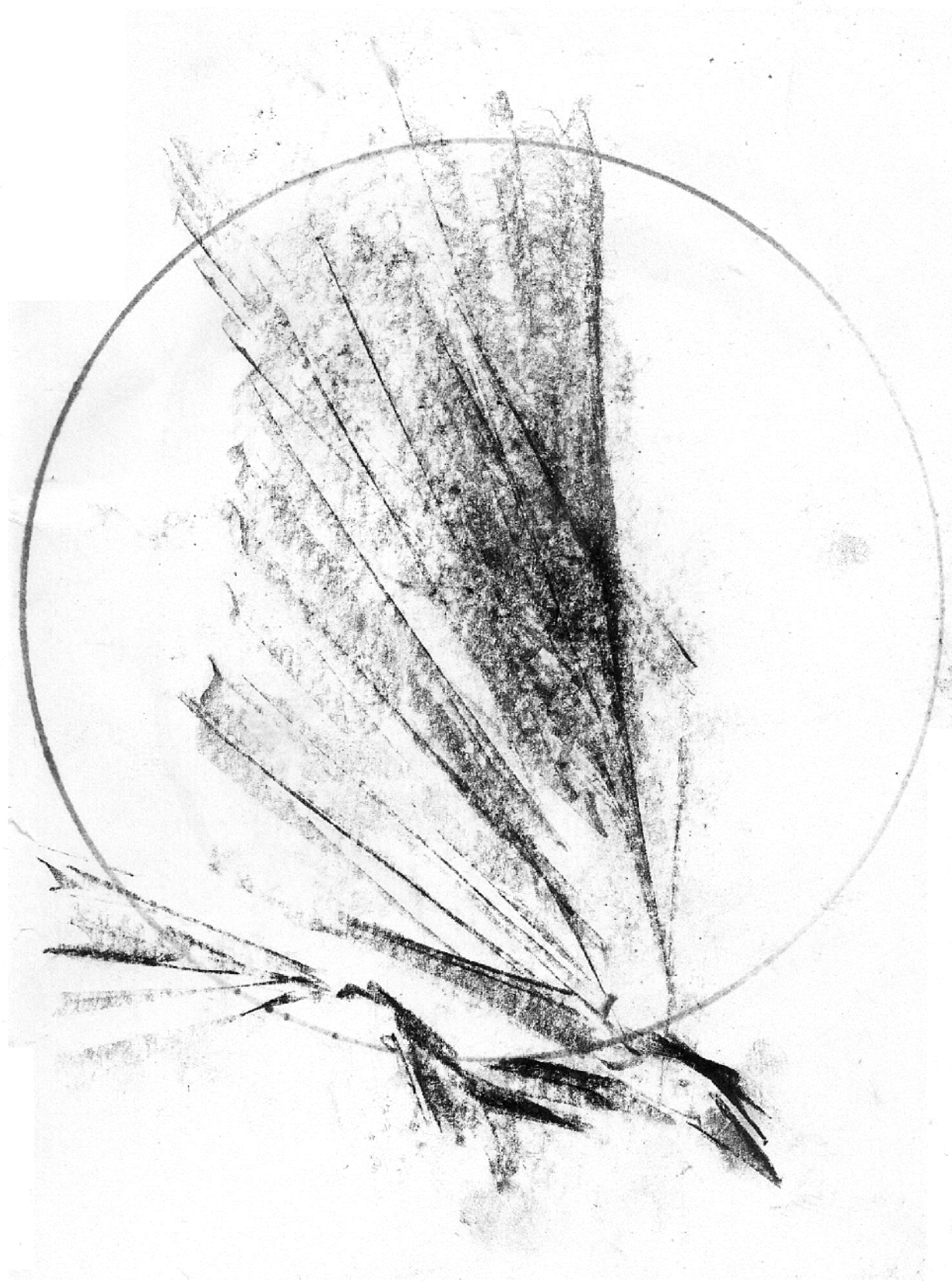
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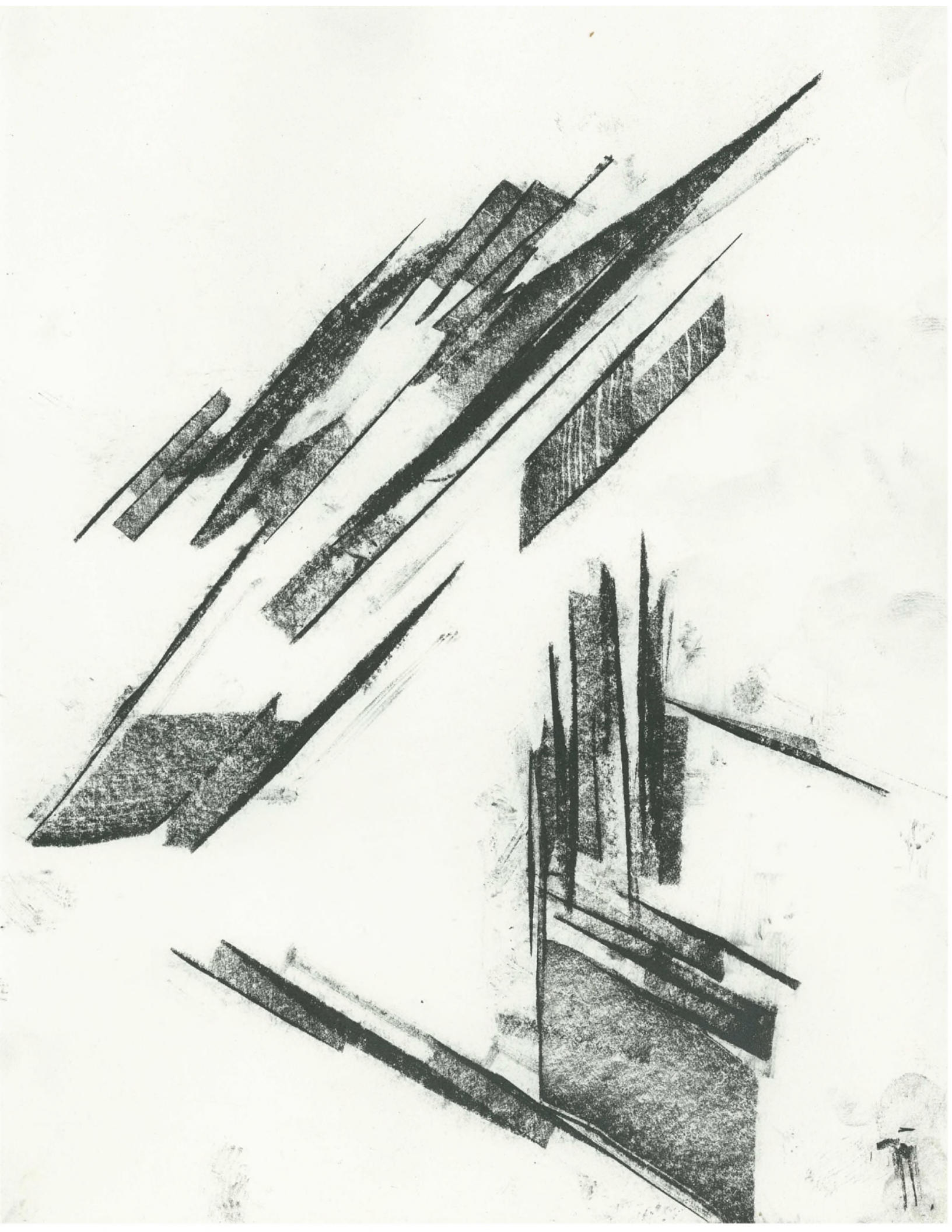


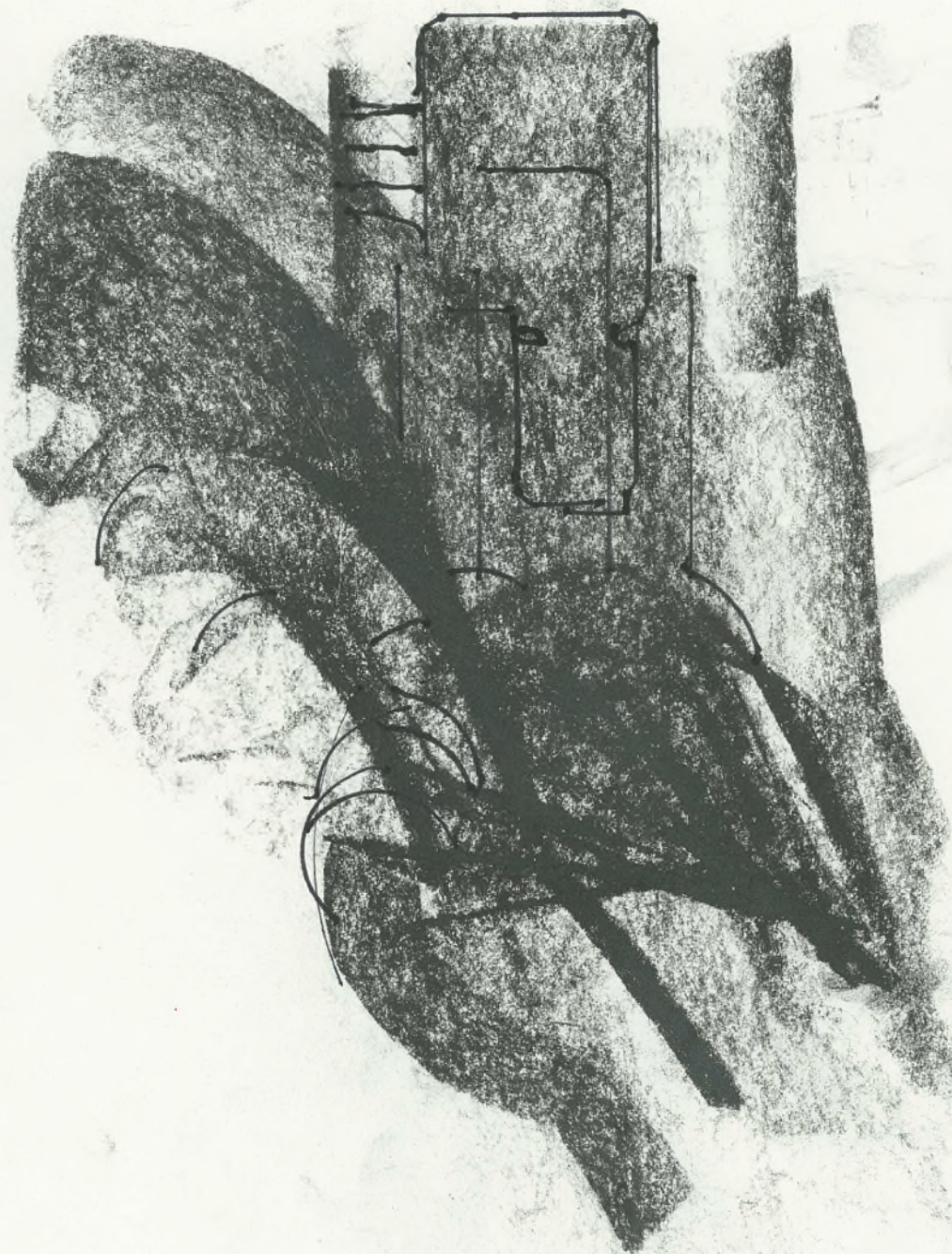












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Charcoal Drawings

by Thomas Humphrey

Poems

by Sarah Shirley

The embarrassment of meeting another clone in a coffee shop

The trick is not to make eye contact, don't stare
at the face grown from the same scraping of cells
as you were. Perhaps, yes, as embryos you may
have brushed up against each other in the petri-dish,
swimming in the sustaining pink broth side by side,
but that was exactly thirty-four years and three months
ago now for both of you, and the other fourteen who are all
out there somewhere, in theory. Don't look to see if
she is thinner than you, don't peek at her (expensive?) handbag,
don't check out her partner. Sit down, face the window.
Half smile when she orders the same thing as you. Now leave.
And when your resolution fails just as you pass the window,
and your eyes meet through the safety of glass, lift your hand
just a fraction, mirroring hers. Go about your day.

Prêt-à-porter

Camera flashes, crimson sashes on a catwalk in Shanghai,
the newest line of fashion on the newest line of models
fresh from the grow-vats. Tall ones, short ones,
slim and plump ones, faces engineered to a
blank smear onto which the audience can
project their own features using the handy goggles
from the gift bags: *this is how you'll really look
in the season's latest offerings!* Bass notes pumped
in are hypnotic and everything is energy and striding
strutting motion, the mannequins marching the
precise measurements of the walkway, no need for
eyeballs - their feet have been told where to go. Concern
was raised a while ago, but quickly put to rest -
no humans were harmed in the making, my friend!
They come unstoppable, stalking the floorboards
draped in silks, wrapped in satin, strapped in leather,
and when a Float-Cam stutters and sparks nobody
notices, not until the flames lick up the cheap material
of the sashes, turning them into ash and smoke. The
hall empties out, a thunderstorm of pounding footfalls
and shrieks, but the models march on in the thickening
fug, driven the fifty metres from the curtain to the end
by instructions hardwired into nerve and muscle,
and the meaty beat of a porcine heart.

Sarah Shirley lives in Hamilton, New Zealand. Her poems have been published in Star*line, Pedestal,
Abyss and Apex, Strange Horizons, Landfall, and elsewhere.

Poems

by Denny E. Marshall

Seven Haiku

meteorite hits moon
in the sky
large mushroom cloud forms

alien ship lands
flying saucer slowly sinks
hides In Jupiter

first contact a probe
one-way communication
takes soil sample leaves

aliens name
for black hole
shortcut

today
new galaxies
black hole burps

replaced
by a robot
miss your house

later in the week
find all of the missing snakes
outside in spacesuit

Rescued (Almost)

Stranded alien lost in deep space
Lost both warp engines in a race
Of oxygen had large supply
Had air to breathe but could not fly
Batteries good, lots of power
Food and water, though no shower
Then on screen messages appear
A rescue ship is closing near
While waiting in the dark cold void
Ship hit by a large asteroid

Sent From Obscurity

by Ann Privateer

We twilight people
As radiant as moonlight
Clear the rear deck chairs
Glowing fast to meet
The sun whole heartedly
We sing together
Still on the same page.

CODE RED

by Terrence Sykes

once turquoise canals
bubble like tar pits
laden with leaves

debris and ash
clog ports & streets
from seasons ago

when mortals ceased
those gods existed
to another planet

feral poppies
cloak & intoxicate
across voided landscape

that last unanswered
telephone call will
ring for eternity

Moonlight Girl

by Edward Kline

The last time I saw her in the park,
I was cold and so very lonely.
She whispered to me softly in the dark.
Sweetest words meant for me only.

Since then, I've passed the time fairly well.
Thinking of her while grinning at every full moon.
Longing for her to hear all that I have to tell.
Knowing we'd be together again soon.

And so when Death extends its bony hand,
To take me home and never back
After removing my soul from where I stand,
I know that I won't fear the Eternal Black.

For with every moonbeam that touches down,
Upon the grass so gently like a secret kiss.
That's where her and I will be forever now.
Enveloped in our everlasting bliss.

Edward Kline is a short story writer and poet. He resides in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Fiddler's Song

by Theresa C. Gaynord

Shadows tangle dark
by street lamps that
dim from the diversion,
stringing red clouds
with woody smoke from
the side of hellish gates.
A beat rustles with shards
of rough music as a crowd
gathers silent; the clock
ticking toward midnight
among twinkling black ash,
where curtains begin to
close.

Theresa likes to write about matters of self-inflection and personal experiences. She likes to write about matters of an out-of body, out-of-mind state, as well as subjects of an idyllic, pagan nature and the occult. Theresa writes horror, as well as concrete gritty and realistic dramas. Theresa is said to be a witch and a poet. (within the horror writing community).

Passing Through

by Mike Turner

We're all just passing through
And as we go this way
Self-blindness is too easy
"Tomorrow, not today"

Don't worry 'bout pollution
The forests we destroy
The waters that we poison
Or chemicals deploy

The Earth can heal herself
That can, down road, we kick
But our World would not need healing
If we did not make her sick

Our outlook is shortsighted
Of what legacy we leave
Earth scarred, mangled, assaulted
Left for our kids to grieve

Why does it seem so diff'cult
For Nature, us to care
Instead we chase the profits
Leave wasteland, cold and bare

Now's come the time for action
Not efforts hold reserved
If we're to save the planet
And our future be preserved

God granted us dominion
O're animals, plants and ground
Let us honor with conviction
His Trust, to which we're bound

Yes, we're all just passing through
But the Earth is ours to save
Let's renew our work to do so
And let's start, right now, today

Mike Turner retired from a career in Federal investigations to the US Gulf Coast, where he took up songwriting, poetry and short story writing. His songs in blues, folk, country, Christian and rock genres have received radio and streaming play in the US, UK, Europe, New Zealand and on the Armed Forces Radio Network. Mike was named Gospel Entertainer of the Year by both the Alabama Music Association (2016) and the North American Country Music Associations International (2017). His poetry and flash fiction have been published in several on-line and print forums, including Red Planet.

The Day The Sun Burned

by Lynn White

The sun is burning
molten
falling to earth little by little
Turning the sea to fire first.
The land will be next,
forest and desert,
mountains and plains
flaming.
It's falling little by little
like blown glass
melting
It looks like a bright angel now
but the angels have burned
and this final fire
will pipe
the last post
as it crashes and burns
leaving nothing,
but darkness
when the fires burn
out
and the light
melts away.

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality and writes hoping to find an audience for her musings. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Find Lynn at: <https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>

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