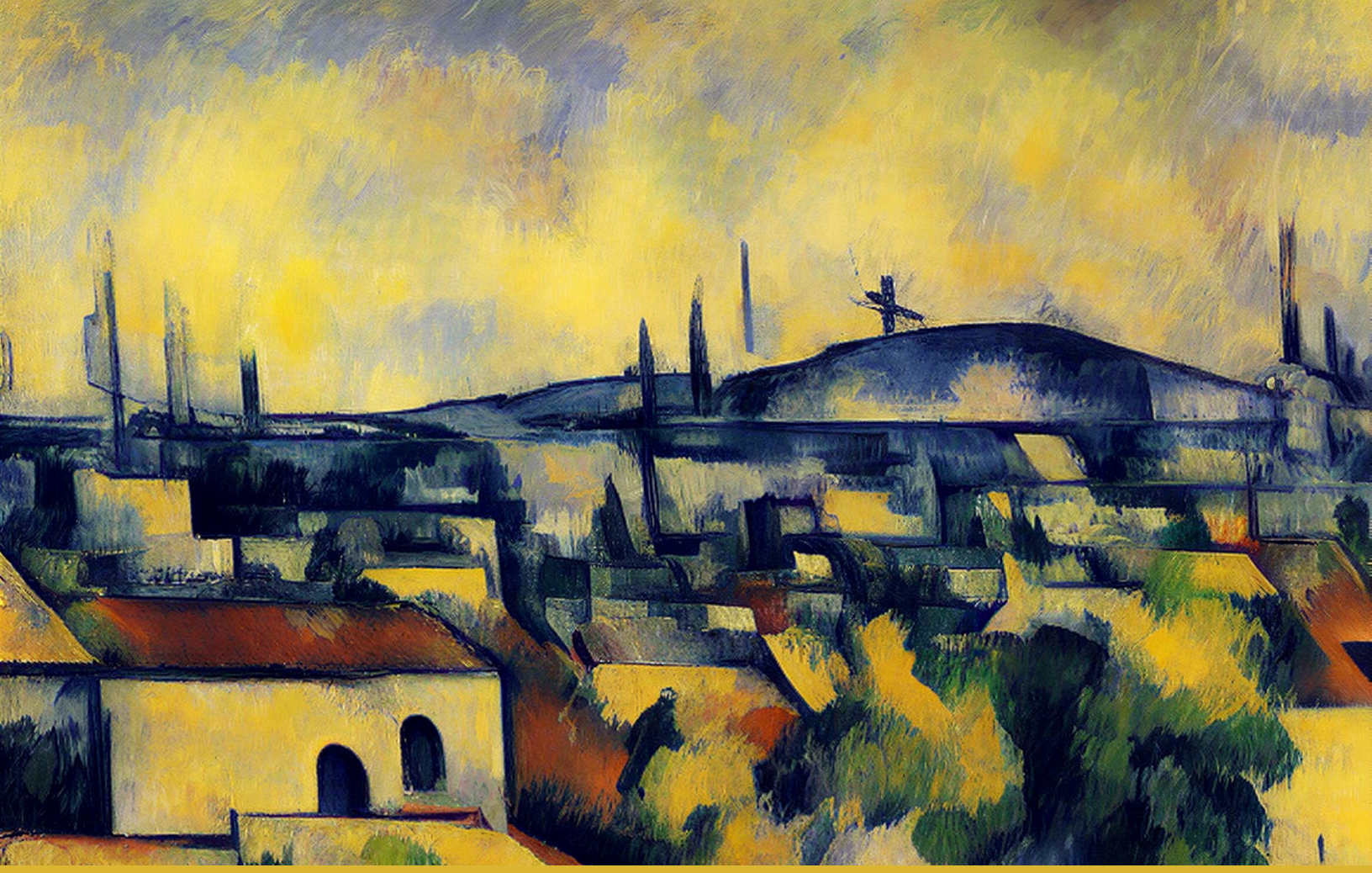
miniMAG

issue229

wrinkle lines





OLD MAN CARRIES

Diane Webster

The old man rocks forward
from his spot on the bench.
In each hand he carries
a white plastic bag
thought to contain groceries.

Like a man balancing
two full buckets of water
at the end of a wooden pole
extending his shoulders outward
the man shuffles down the sidewalk.

Square after sidewalk square
he never cares about stepping
on a crack to break his mother's back.
He stares at the cement confident
his shoes know turns or straight
at corners and crosswalks.

Books, hardback books, swing
the bags with thousands of words
awaiting his hungry eyes,
his head already bowed
in reading position.



Your beauty is a form of suffering

Paul Ransom

Behold: beauty in the form of you. How could I fail to notice?

Yet, from your embrace I will surely be excluded; and there is nearly nothing I can do about it. No charm to make light of the fact, no language to rebrand the chasm. A thousand years ago when I was younger, bolder, less textured with bruise and scar, I would have dreamt, maybe acted. Not now. The flowers of spring are too sweet for the soil of autumn. The fall too heavy to fly in the light.

That there is a ground we share, a sky we both long for… songs we sing in harmony, feelings that sync… no matter. The odds will not be shortened; the space not closed. Instead, I will turn from you, a little more broken each time, and briefly, hopelessly pray to a billion gods I know aren't there to disguise the irrefutable evidence of years. Which they will not. And I will love you in isolation, and teach myself not to want you too much.

We can give it other names, conjure plausible sophistries, but we both know what it is. Between my cold bones and you there lies an ocean. It is the sea of circumstance. The scattering of hearts in time. The lottery of birth does not care for our denials, nor grant our wishes. It is neither fair nor unfair. It just is. Even if the temporal arrow is something we

merely imagine, the decades remain an expanse. A puncture wound. Blood that will not be washed away.

I know, in fine detail, the manner in which I would cherish you. Adore you. Listen deeply. Let you breathe. Stand aside when required. Learn the world anew from you, and reinvent myself. Yet still it will not be. For you are starting what I am done with, and I cannot honestly walk the same path with you.

Though I would surely cave-in to the miracle of your asking, it would be a selfish acceptance. A hormone high. An unsustainable extravagance.

I may flatter myself with lofty determinations, but I know how gravity works—and even love obeys the second law. Pleasure to performance. Desire to obligation. Novelty to habit.

It is better you experience these trajectories as the risk of hoping, rather than as a dividend of the banal. As the cost of my feeding on you.

So, here I am; stranded in your midst. Nearness as a form of distance. Touch as a sign of being untouchable. From this vantage, I look across the valley of desire, and your beauty is the horizon. As I am drawn towards it, so it recedes.

What exquisite damnation it is to see so clearly, yet be confined to looking. I should tear my eyes away. Forget. Because your beauty is a form of suffering.

In my gut, it feels like falling. Exile.

You are what I am no longer. You dwell in the house I have left behind. You rise as I decline. And so it goes; endless ways to reach the same point.

Your beauty reminds me of ashes. Shivering, I pine for a fire, knowing that the flame will not warm. Will burn instead for travellers other than I. In truth, these distances are a blink, yet they may as well be infinite.

This is the scale of a human life. Decades are aeons. Small gaps interstellar. It is both terrible and wonderful, a tyranny and a liberation. I suffer in the state of your beauty to throw off my chains. I ache just to feel, die to know what life is.

I turn away now, that I may behold you with deeper sensing. Allow your beauty to suffuse every cell, to render the suffering sublime.

If I cannot love you with presence, then I will do so with absence. From such a corner, unobtrusive, unnoticed, may this aching be as beautiful as you.





Tough

Bob McAfee

I have been annealed by fire
Shaped and hardened in the forge

Cooled by water and by air
Drawn and twisted by the hair

Resisted and was promptly thrown
Among the coals and ashes blown

Into the gorge

I have been awash in rain
Sodomized and slashed by sleet

Staggered naked on the beach
Salvation not quite in my reach

Preparations have begun
For a life spent on the run

Out on the street



Larry, Moe and Me

Craig Kirchner

Panhandlers in Ocean City
awaiting draft physicals on Ninth Street,
never really owing what we didn't have,
and what else is there?
Attic rooms on Third Street,
cold shower stall in the yard,
2x4's of worn white paint and body odor.
We stole cigarettes from DingBells
and wine money from pocketbooks.

Moe surfed the big board,
never tilted pinball and cheated at cards.
Tuesdays Larry shagged the landlady.
She lived on the first floor and had a TV.
We watched Sirhan and Westmoreland
while her tits bounced.
She had a freckled throat
and feverish flush.
Her sofa smelled of coconut and cum.

Mondays and Wednesdays
I'd meet Muriel after her shift
at Phillips Crab House.
She was slightly plump,
with under-aged baby fat,
peachy locomotive skin and
long straight blond hair full of August sun.
She loved dry humping,
and smelled like pie crust and Old Bay.

Thursdays the Steakhouse had all you could eat.
Weekends were parties in the dunes.
We were barefoot and free,
like wind-tossed kites above the beach,
indifferent, invincible,
but fragile if touched,
denying such wreckage falling to the sand.
The summer was ours
and there really was nothing else.



A Moiety of the Soul

Mehreen Ahmed

How a mother pretends to love her own children depends on her manipulative nature. To pretend, when there is no love? How does one do that?

Anxiety fills me up when my little girl is ill—I cry through the night. Anxiety tightens my chest every time she goes out and comes home late. I wait anxiously by the gate for her to return from school, watching until she is safe in her room.

Yet, my daughter accuses my love of being a pretence. Her words are a mirror reflecting the summer afternoons of nineteen seventy.

In the summer of 1970, Grandma was admitted into a local hospital in Dhaka. I was chosen by my elders to stay with her as her attendee. Days as well as nights, I stayed close, looking after her, feeding her, and administering her medicine.

There was a little verandah in front of her room overlooking a garden full of fledgling poinsettia. Every afternoon, a Bangla song was played on someone's radio: Suman Kalyanpur singing mone koro ami nei—imagine, I'm not there…

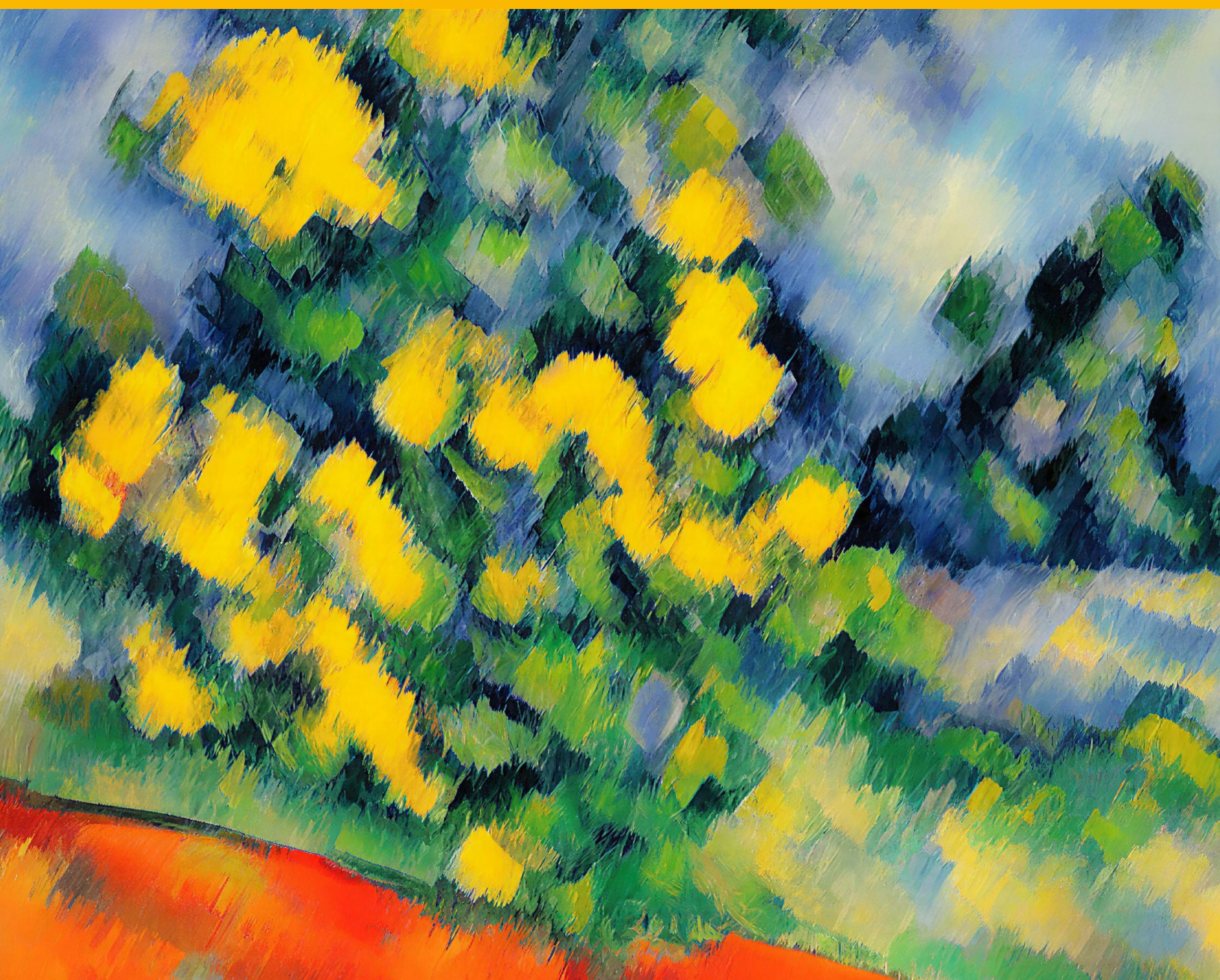
In the quiet heat of those sunny afternoons, in the midst of those flowers, the tune sounded atmospheric. Evocative, even. The song, the heat, the fledgling poinsettias, and the quiet afternoons filled me with a half-empty sluggishness in the mind, and the soul.

My job now is to heal. To help distressed people get through dark days.

In the thick of it, they ask for my help to rescue them and to offer them respite. I never question what I receive in return; what my rewards are is not my place to ask. It is irrelevant.

When they get better, they pretend not to know me. They never look at me again. I know then that their pains are gone. But not fully cured. I cannot heal them enough to uplift their unloving and unkind spirits.

They leave me replete just like the song of a fractured melody of the past—1970s, digging up remnants of lazy afternoons. My little girl, my full genetic strand, now a distant, broken link is embedded within this sense of love, dense with half-circled accusatory tenderness.

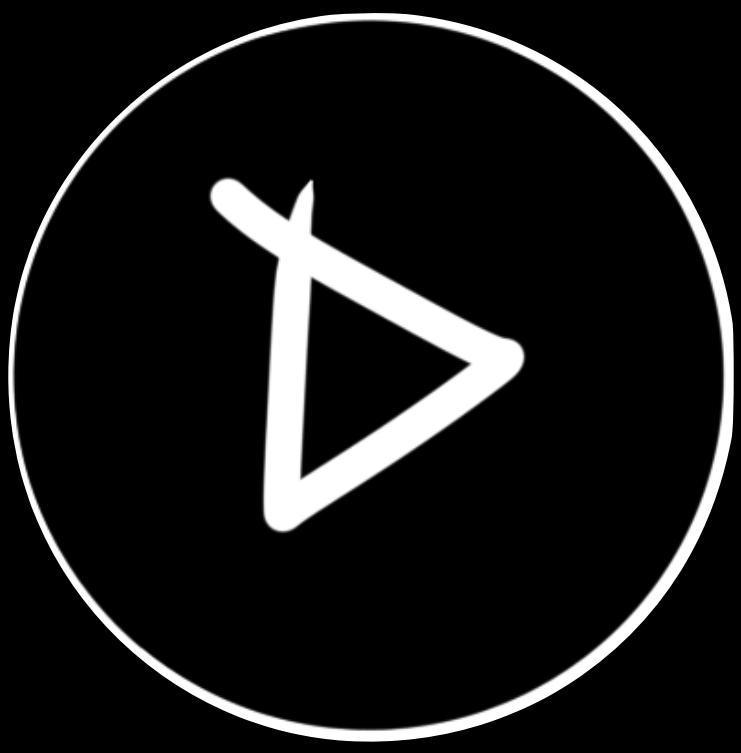




Ringing in the Changes

Robert Witmer

It might rain. The mighty rain. Kings. CEOs. Just drops in an ocean. Sweet water salted for life. Preserved. Cured. An equalization of solute concentrations. Traced back to antiquity. Survival. Divine retribution. Carcinogen of time. Garum umami, twice blest. It is raining. Pretty hard. The book. Fables for children. Packed with the rest of our gear. Moving to higher ground. Where, in the flooded distance, we see a large covered vessel, an ark of pitched wood. Slowly sinking. In the west. With the whales. Where the light of day dies. Still it rains.



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“Ringing in the Changes” by Robert Witmer
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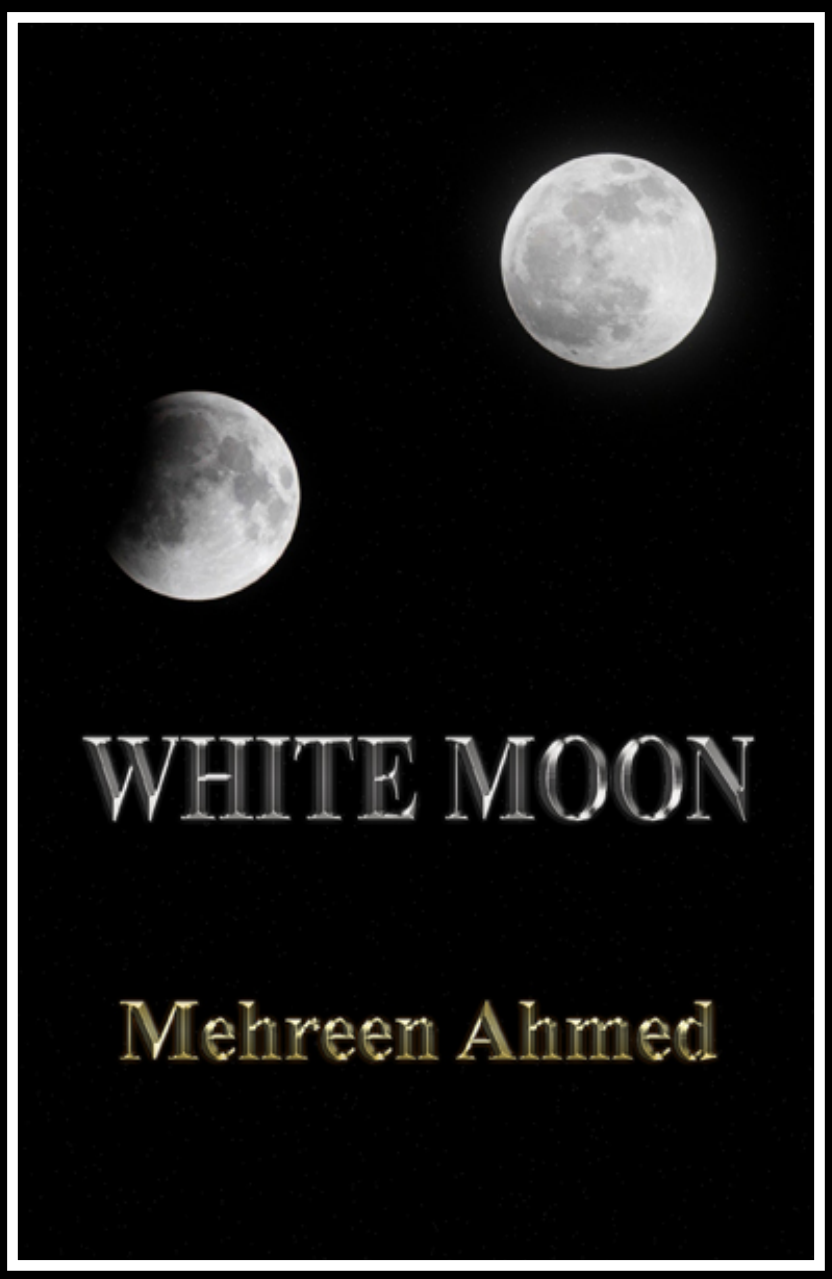

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**SUNRISE,
IN A RABBIT HOLE**

Robert Witmer

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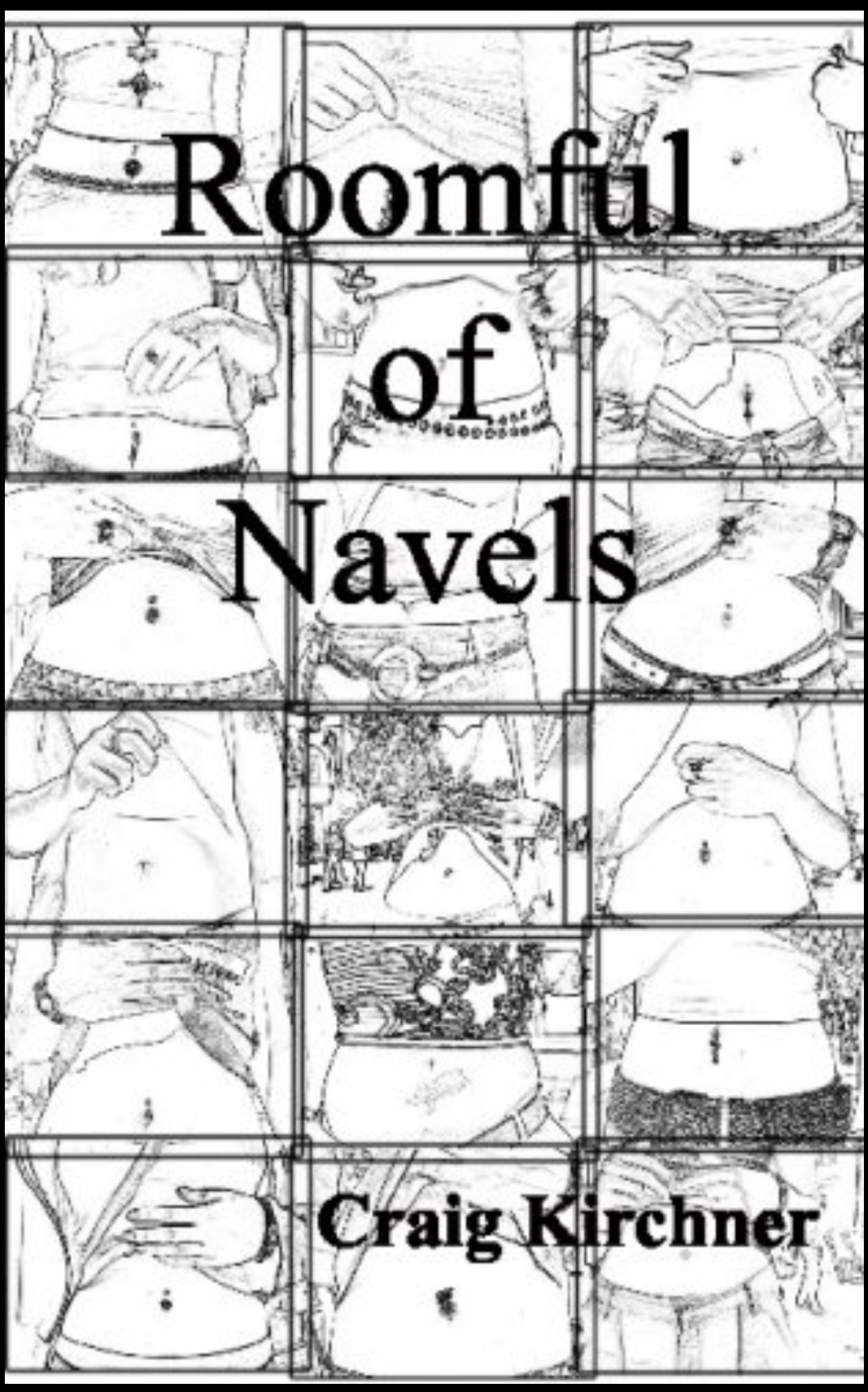

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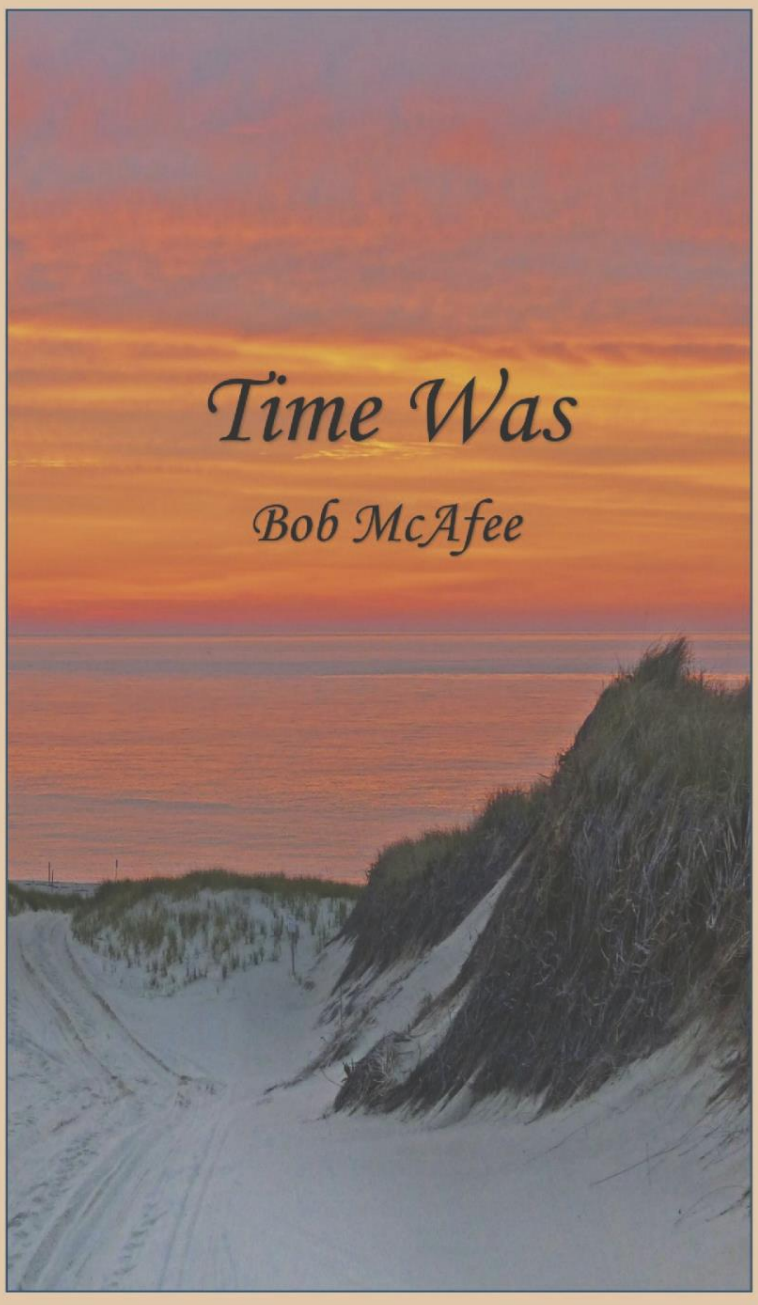

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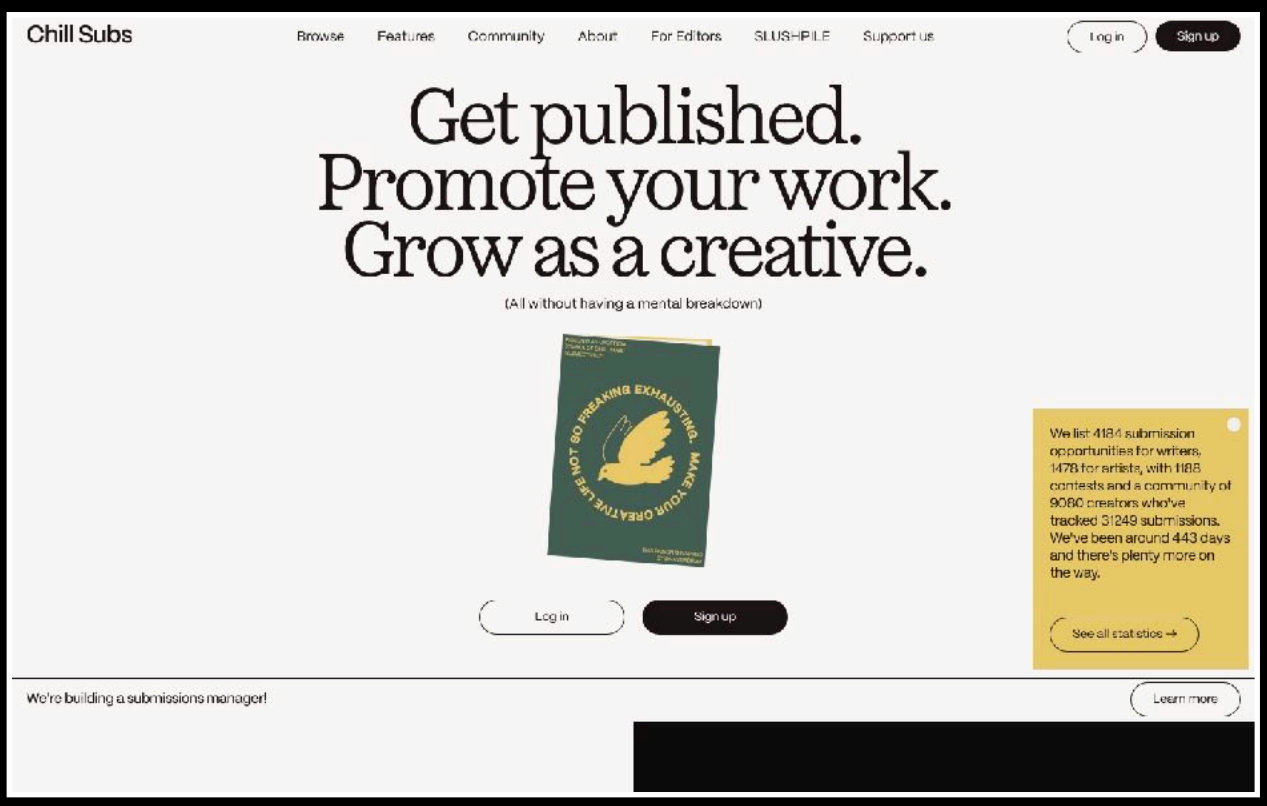

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