

the reserve, cicadas, and the river; life beyond the sound of our voices had begun to fade away.

“I don’t feel alone with you,” I said, surprising myself. “Growing up in the church, I always thought that it was our human relationships that mattered the most. That’s what I thought it was all about.” You didn’t disagree, so I continued. “I expect to feel God through other people, but that’s been missing for a while now. When I’m with you, I feel closer to Him than I ever have before. I don’t know how else to describe it, except to call it a connection, and I’ve never felt it as strongly with anyone else. You said that there were questions God couldn’t answer. Maybe you just need someone to stand with you when you ask them.”

You laughed and my thoughts rushed to panic, abruptly aware of the blasphemy that overlaid my words.

“My arms are getting tired,” you said. “We should move out of the water.”

There was always something frustrating in the way that you did that. It felt dismissive, the way you could smile and take your time during such an important conversation, but it was equally as charming and enticing. I wasn’t used to it yet and watched you swim upriver to the opposite embankment, arms strong against the current. I followed after you’d already reached the shore, caught by the promise of your potential reply.

“It’s an epistemic rupture,” you said. A flood of excuses and apologies came to mind and I kept my distance from you, mud and dirt clinging to my feet after climbing out of the water. You’d gotten mud all along your stomach, but it seemed dangerous to mention in the moment.

“I don’t know what that means,” I said.

“What you’re talking about, it’s a rupture in the knowledge we’ve been given.” You shortened the distance between us. “I think I understand the connection you’re talking about. I’m attracted to you, Caleb. There are pieces of it that are physical, pieces that I don’t really understand, but I want to. I went to Ben and I asked him if this was a sin. He said that it was, that feeling this way was incontrovertibly wrong, but I don’t believe that. This moment couldn’t have happened if it was.”

I was never the kid who worried over questions of faith. That feels funny to say now, considering the way it all happened. Maybe I misunderstood what you said to me by the river or perhaps I tricked myself into believing something

else, but in that moment I was confident in the belief that we would be the answer to each other’s prayers.

“Do you have to get back soon?” I asked.

You laughed and a smile spread across your face. I realized that you’d been holding your breath at the sound of its release and smiled back.

“No, not for a while,” you said.

“Good.” I moved toward our things and began to pick out my clothes. “There are some oak trees deeper in the reserve. I read once that if you lean your head back against an oak’s trunk and stare through the branches up at the sky, it hypnotizes you. I want to see if that’s true.”

There was no wind to disturb anything in the reserve that day. Neither one of us had ever ventured so far into the woods before and it was almost as if the trees themselves knew it. Nothing else seemed to move until we reached the oak trees clustered at its center. We chose the oak with the widest stretch of branches and sat at the roots, our backs supported by its trunk. When we looked to the sky, you asked me, “Are you hypnotized?” and without pause, I replied, “Yes.”

Jacob Anthony Moniz is a graduate of the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he studied creative writing and legal studies. He currently lives in Santa Cruz and works as an editorial assistant for *Catamaran Literary Reader*.

GRAHAM NICKSON

Sun in House IV, 2014
media, size



COURTESY THE ARTIST