



Racing Toward Red Lights

Star LaBranche

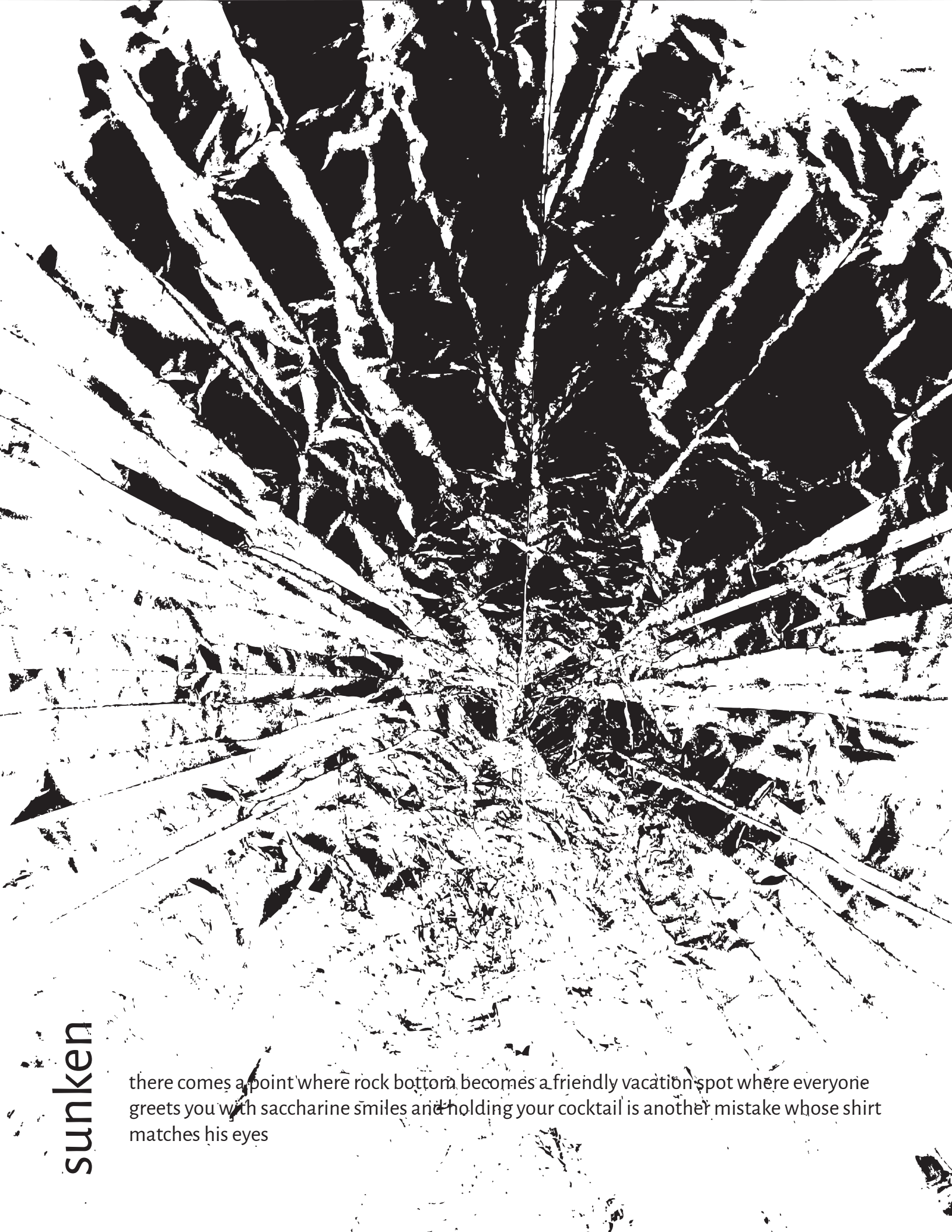
A black and white photograph of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, there is a rocky shore with some low-lying vegetation. The middle ground shows waves crashing against a line of rocks, creating white foam. The background is a vast, open sea under a bright sky. The overall mood is dramatic and powerful.

It is not in the stars to hold our destiny
but in ourselves.

-William Shakespeare

introduction

it's strange to feel like a widow
who has never been married
especially when the person you're mourning
is yourself



sunken

there comes a point where rock bottom becomes a friendly vacation spot where everyone greets you with saccharine smiles and holding your cocktail is another mistake whose shirt matches his eyes



ashes

if you off-handedly mentioned you were hungry,
I would drive to your place and stop at your favorite restaurant
to pick up dinner before hand

if you said you would love to go to the zoo someday,
those tickets would hit my PayPal in seconds

if you told me you didn't like a comment a friend posted on a picture of you,
I would unfriend that bitch so fast

if you told me I needed to wear my hair differently,
I would grow it out, chop it off,
do whatever it would take until you told me I was pretty again

if you demanded my arm,
I would ask how I should cut it off

if you burned me piece by piece I would ask if you loved me from the ashes

misremember

I can't wait for the day when I misremember all of this
when I talk about how happy I was being young and single
how coming home to an empty apartment soothed me
how shopping and dining for one was simply the best!

I can't wait for when I look back and realize just how
great I had it and can't allow myself to realize how
I squandered it all



4

come back tomorrow at 4
you can see me descend from the heavens
a savior in dirty jeans with no
makeup on

I will shower all those who
come across me with bad memories
of the night I left too soon or the
night I refused to leave at all

in my wake, I will leave daisies,
roses, and referrals to therapists
(not that you haven't been seeing
a therapist already)

you have to come and see me
at 4 tomorrow

you need to see me in all my glory,
because without my
grand entrance I will only have my
dirty jeans




liar

I said dating was a terrible mistake
that I regret it very much

but none of that was true
I adore dating, I can't live without it

without dating I might never unlock
the ultimate end-of-game achievement

it comes in the form of a shiny rock on a band
and ends with a party that puts everyone in debt





inside

I want to touch your brows
stroke your sides with my nails
lay on your chest and become the
rhythm of your heart beat

pull you apart until I can
climb inside your flesh
and once I do, you will shelter
me from the world I can't seem to
navigate on my own

once I wear you like armor
I'll know that no one,
not even myself, can touch me



slide

going up is always fun
the anticipation, the excitement of the ride,
the knowing there's something exhilarating
on the other side of the hill you're climbing
you think to yourself, if going up is this great,
heading back down must be even better!

but then the unease starts to set in
you look around and realize every other
excited face on this ride is just your reflection
and as the drop starts your stomach lurches with it
you realize it's too late, you're alone for the ride


after you get used to feeling helpless, it's hard
to remember not to get back in line

blah

The background of the entire page is a dense, chaotic pattern of black ink splatters, dots, and brushstrokes of various sizes. These marks are scattered across the white background, creating a textured, artistic effect. The central text is positioned within a large, dark, irregular ink blot that serves as a focal point.

Stolen Inspiration

you asked me the title of my new chapbook
but I didn't have one yet;
you hadn't looked deep into my eyes
and said the right string of words
that made me pause and think, yes,
that's it



sometimes I believe that eternally raising my hand
to play the villain is part of my need for self-harm

other times, I think it's simply a way I can excuse
my actions and never expect any better

Villain



delusion

I am delusion in a nice dress
in one instant I know you're wrong for me
and in the next I'm asking you to stay longer
because I might understand some things, but why I

live in the eternal hope of someone I'm not compatible with
transforming into a prince before my very eyes
is something I haven't quite figured out yet

but it's okay, we can go on dates
and I'll be unsatisfied and you'll
never know



REALIZATION

I realize at this point that I want you because you're stable and what do I fight for every day but the stability you have which I can't obtain? maybe if I stand near you, I can absorb some for myself and then everything will be fine and I will be okay, and you? I don't really know because if I'm taken care of, what else is there?



drinking alone

I shouldn't be doing it at all, I know that
but somehow it goes down so smoothly
and wouldn't it be fun to feel the sharp edges
of reality blur for just a few seconds?
and when I can text you, impaired, giggly,
telling you to take advantage of my weakened
state and ask me questions I normally wouldn't
answer, wouldn't that just be the best?
so I did, so I do, and so, you don't respond



self

I cast myself as the greatest lover
who had ever lived
simply no one was willing to do what
I did to make you fulfilled and after
all I sacrificed, my title could not be
disputed
and isn't that how it works?

isn't love supposed to be the giving of yourself so completely
there's no self left for you

you live to be everything someone
else needs until you don't remember that
you once had those same needs, too

that's right—
right?

that's the only
way I know how

husband

**it's like playing dress up, but for grownups with no sense of reality
I'll be the bride, and trust me, I have all of our wedding colors picked out,
you'll be the groom in a royal blue corsage I selected months ago
you'll take me in your arms and I will smile up at you as I repeat the words,**

“I, Star, take you...”

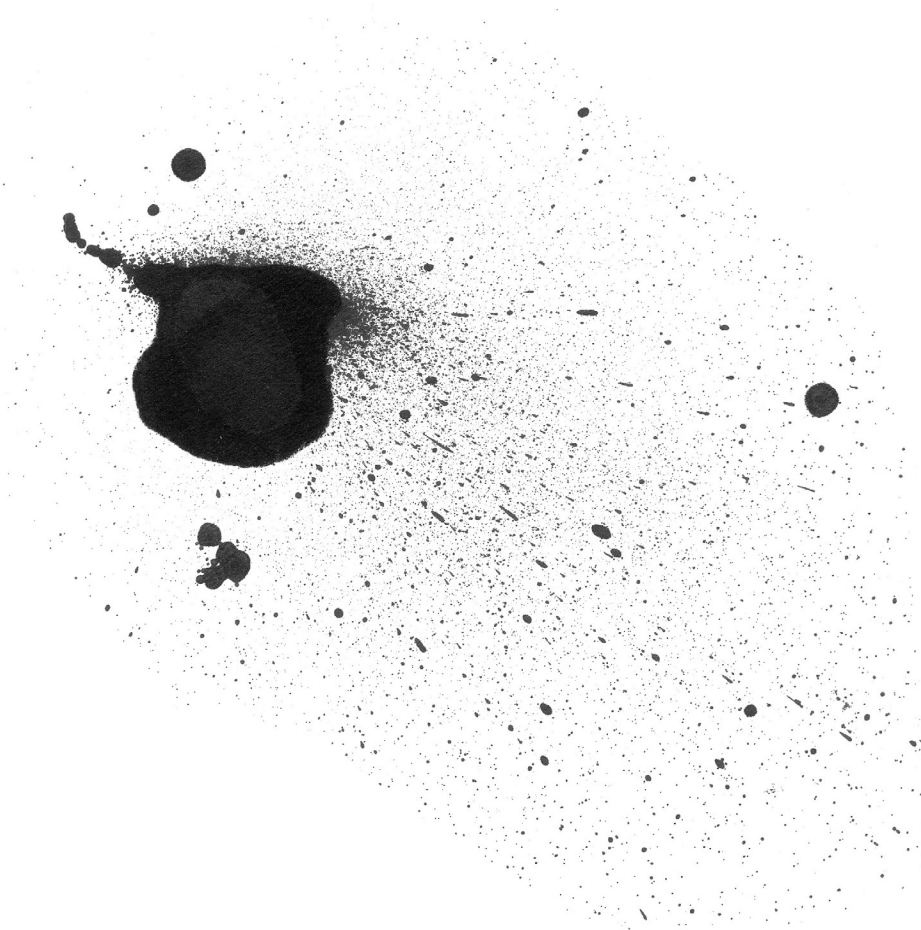
uh, what was your name again?



understanding

between the moment you hit the ground
and the moment you begin to get back up
there's a pause

in the thousands of thoughts that run through
your brain, it seems to the most pressing one to replay
is every single time you have ever fallen before



barbie wedding

I'm trying to play Barbie wedding and the only
dolls I have are loaded guns
I arrange them carefully to stand next to each other
as if they're ready to exchange vows
I pin a veil on one, a corsage on the other

I keep pretending this is good enough when
all I know is Barbie doesn't have bullets inside her
and Ken doesn't need a license to be carried
what else can I do but try when I want to imagine
and all I have are weapons?

