



Untitled by Jason Gallant

A Conversation with the Monkey King

Jaiden Dembo

“Would you put me in one of your stories?” He asked as he made permanent brush strokes across my skin. From one artist to another, speaking in our own creative languages. “Sure,” I said with a laugh. “I’ll be a 60-year-old man, working in a Chinese restaurant and my line will be ‘We’re out of goddamn wontons.’” What a strange man. But he made me laugh even when he was putting ink beneath my skin and drawing blood to the surface. “Why not?” I said. We took a break from tattooing and he offered me trail-mix, “Did you forget to eat again?” he asked. I’d spent 10 hours with this man and he already knew my low blood sugar tells. “No.” Forget wasn’t the right word. I took him up on his offer of trail-mix and grabbed a banana from my purse as well, trying to ignore the raw, throbbing of my skin. “Where can I put this?” I asked, dangling the banana peel in front of him. He looked at it as if it were a dead animal. “Man, I hate the smell of bananas.” He took the peel from me and ran out of the shop to dispose of it. He came back in from the dark and the rain and I raised a brow at him, “Wow, you really do hate the smell.” I sat back in the leather chair and he sat next to me, getting the needle ready for round two. “It reminds me of my dad,” he said. I looked at him and he shrugged. From one artist to another, I understood.