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Spring 2024

## 2024 Greenleaf Review (no. 37)

Sigma Tau Delta

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# The Greenleaf Review

ISSUE 37 | SPRING 2024

*The Greenleaf Review* is made by Whittier College students for the enjoyment of our friends, colleagues, and loved ones. Our goal is to shed light on the ways this diverse and driven community expresses itself. In doing so, we've uncovered a community ready to speak out, let loose, and truly be.

We're ready for some *Catharsis*, and we hope you are too.



# A Letter From The Editors

Ask anyone who led *The Greenleaf Review* what it was like being in charge, and they'll tell you that it's the group project from Hell.

And it is, but it's also so much more than that.

*Catharsis* had a rocky start and a bumpy middle—which makes sense. The act of catharsis, of releasing all of your pent up emotions, is never smooth sailing. Ultimately, the three of us are grateful for all the nights spent pulling at our hair and screaming at the walls. We learned the importance of grace, patience, and most importantly—kindness.

To this year's *GLR* team, thank you. *Catharsis* would not be what it is now without your passion and your dedication. The hard work that you've all put into this—whether it's in the editing, the marketing, or the designing—shines through each and every page.

To our readers and contributors, we wouldn't even have *Catharsis* without your immense bravery and vulnerability. Your art inspired us to keep going and the desire to make you, your ideas, and your whole being known to the world pushed us to keep going. Thank you.

Thank you to Sigma Tau Delta for continuing to sponsor the *GLR*. Thank you to the English Department and the Art Department for guiding the next generation of writers and artists. And thank you to ASWC Senate for funding this year's issue of the *GLR*.

Lastly, thank you to Joe Donnelly for fearlessly leading our class. You are a wealth of knowledge, and even if it seemed like we weren't listening to all the tales of your glory days, know that we heard every word.

Meylina Tran | *Editor-in-Chief*  
Ashley Seger | *Co-Managing Editor*  
Jonathan Bermudez | *Co-Managing Editor*

The process of creating a literary journal is no easy feat. Countless hours of hard work are put in to ensure *The Greenleaf Review* is the best it can be, so we at Sigma Tau Delta would like to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the entire *GLR* team. Containing repressed emotions into an accessible but still poignant collection is tough work. But in the end, the product speaks for itself.

Congratulations to the section heads and committee members who went through each piece of work, and edited it to fit the standard *The Greenleaf Review* has achieved throughout the years. No matter what position you had in, it contributed to something even greater than yourself.

To all who submitted, thank you for entrusting this award-winning journal to house and reflect your worries, dreams, and much more. It takes a mountain of courage to put your art out in the world, and to that we are forever grateful.

And finally, congratulations to Co-Managing Editors Ashley Seger and Jonathan Bermudez, and of course, Editor-in-Chief (and President of Sigma Tau Delta) Meylina Tran. The executive board of STD knows how difficult the job is to lead a group in order to make the best product you can. All of you did it with flying colors, thanks to your exemplary leadership. Congratulations again. You're done!

Oh, and to instructor Joe Donnelly, thank you for advising *The Greenleaf Review* with your knowledge, kindness, and weird self.

Emily Henderson | *Vice President*  
Sarah Licón | *Secretary*  
Alejandra Ortega | *Treasurer*

# A Letter From Sigma Tau Delta

## PROSE

1st Place - "Two-Headed Monster"  
*OLIVIA NUÑEZ*

2nd Place - "Sex Versus Intimacy"  
*CARLA CAMILOTTI*

## POETRY

1st Place - "A Garden For Mom"  
*MARS SINCLAIR*

2nd Place - "DESTRUCTIVE"  
*IZZY BROOKSHIRE*

## ART

1st Place - "Metamorphosis"  
*OGHENEFESIRO EZEKIEL NAKIRERU*

2nd Place - "Exhibition"  
*MACY MILLER*

## PHOTOGRAPHY

1st Place - "Calles Sangrientas"  
*SHELBY SILVA*

2nd Place - "Whittier College on Strike"  
*SAGE AMDAHL*

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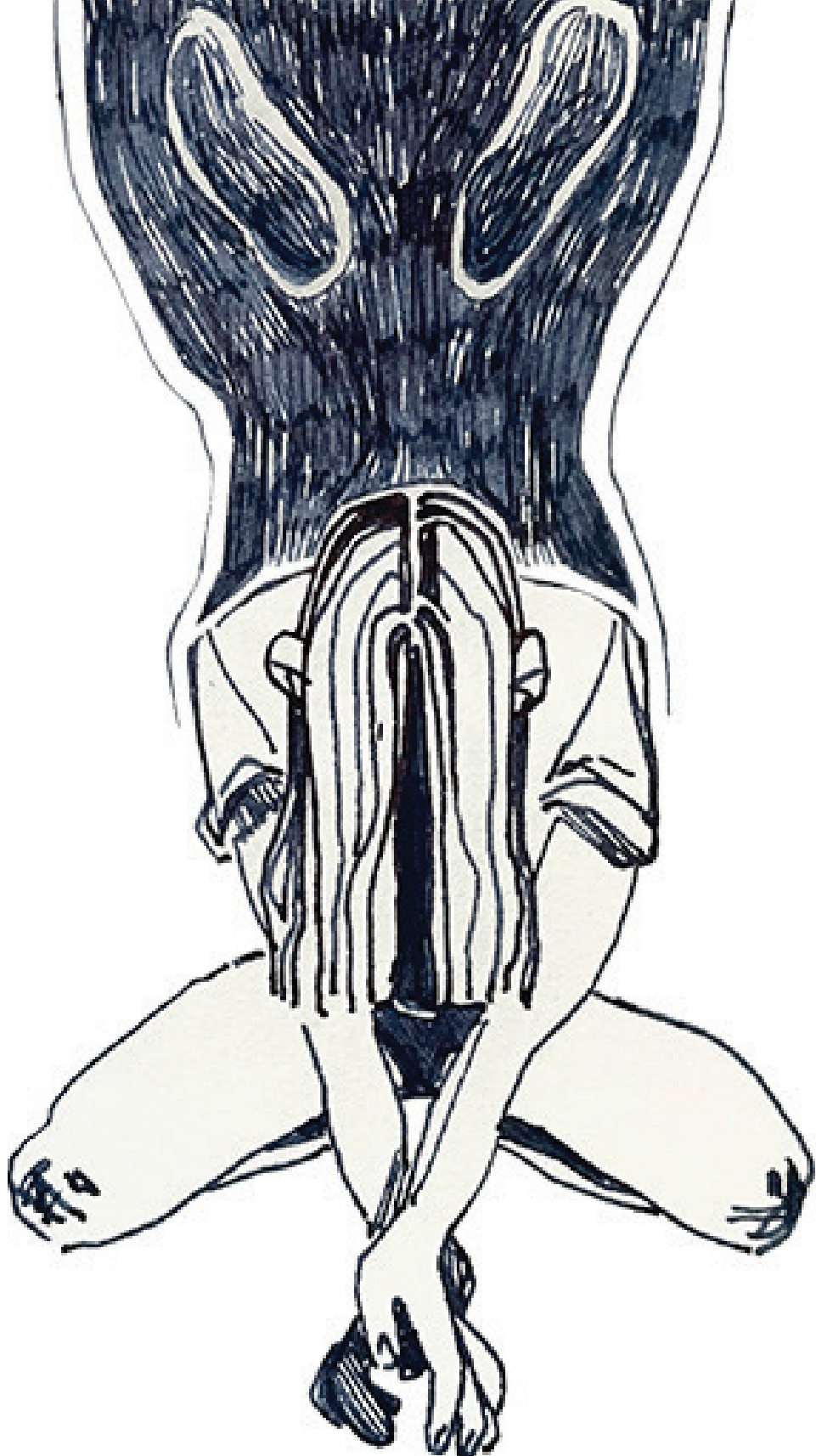
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“Empty out the darkness that has accumulated at the bottom of your heart, all the words you refuse to say.”

— NIKITA GILL

# Can't Catch Me Now

MEYUNA TRAN

## EXT. CAMPUS - AFTERNOON.

LOIS is sitting alone on a lawn chair, a book open on her lap. She looks up and finds her attention drawn by a group of five students trooping across the campus in a tight formation. We never quite see their faces, but they're alluring. Their indifference breeds curiosity in Lois.

A CLOSE UP of her captivated expression.

BLACK.

## INT. LA PETITE MORTE - AFTERNOON. 1976. PRESENT

A wide shot of the inside of a fancy restaurant. It is not very busy. The guests there are enjoying a late lunch. The servers are dressed in crisp button-down shirts and starched pants. There is an air of haughty, casual elegance that permeates this restaurant.

The center of our focus is Lois, and we slowly push in on her. She is sitting alone at a table meant for six. She has two martinis in front of her—one is empty, and the other she is fiddling with. Her posture does nothing to relay her anxiety, but the way that she frequently glances at her watch tells you everything you need to know about this situation.

She hides it by tipping back the rest of her martini. As she sets the now empty glass down, she twists her head to stare out the large front window.

It's a beautiful day, sunny, warm, and bright.

A FLASH CUT to the same scene, the same restaurant, except the table for six is filled. Lois is not alone. She is with others (the people she's waiting for), and they are laughing.

But she's alone, waiting and impatient. Dread and unease settle in the pit of her stomach.

WOMAN (V.O.)

You're going to feel a great, unimaginable pain this year. The type of pain that you'll never feel again, but you're going to compare every subsequent pain to this one.

## INT. VACATION HOUSE - NIGHT. PAST

Months earlier. Lois is sitting cross-legged on the floor against a round, wooden coffee table. Empty beer bottles and alcohol glasses are scattered across the top. A space has been cleared for a spread of tarot cards: the lovers (upright), the wheel of fortune (upright), ten of cups (reversed), and three of swords (upright).

Sitting beside Lois and reading the cards is PIPPA. She smiles up at Lois through her lashes, devilish and coy. Pippa flips over the last card: ace of pentacles (reversed).

PIPPA

And this loss...it's not the kind you'll ever get over. In the future, when you think you've moved on, you'll lie in bed at night and think about all the opportunities you missed. All of the chances that you lost out on. *Because you fucked up.*

The moment sits. They stare at each other. Lois's breath is caught in her throat. And then—

GABRIEL (O.C.)

That's a load of horse shit.

GABRIEL holds two martini glasses in one hand, and a margarita on the rocks in the other. He bends down, holds the hand with the martini glasses out, and lets Lois pluck one from between his fingers. He hands the margarita to Pippa and keeps the second martini for himself.

PIPPA

And what qualifications do you have to deem my reading bullshit?

GABRIEL

None. But I have the qualifications to know that you don't have any qualifications either.

Gabriel sits on the floor beside Lois, stretching his legs out. Pippa rolls her eyes but clears the tarot cards away anyway.

PIPPA

Tarot cards don't require any qualifications. It's all about the freedom of interpretation, and channeling one's spirituality.

Gabriel blows a raspberry at her in response. Pippa throws the loose cards at him. They scatter everywhere.

As Gabriel and Pippa shout at each other, the patio door behind them slides open. HARRISON and STEPHEN walk inside, murmuring to each other. Lois catches the tail end of their conversation:

HARRISON

—but she's not—

STEPHEN

Drop it.

Harrison's gaze flickers to Lois for a moment, but Stephen—his back to her—grabs his bicep, averting his attention away from her.

From there, they split. Harrison pauses on the threshold to light up a cigarette. Stephen steps forward and surveys the room and its inhabitants.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

(loud)

Where's Rose?

Pippa points vaguely down a dark hallway.

PIPPA

She went to the bathroom. Check on her. She might be vomiting up her dinner right now.

Stephen nods and stalks off down the hallway.

HARRISON  
Goddammit Pippa. You can't say it like that.

PIPPA  
(mutters)  
Am I wrong?

But Harrison is done paying attention to her. He rounds the couch and languidly walks over to their pile on the floor. Casually and thoughtlessly, he rests his hand against the back of Lois's head. She looks up at him, love-struck.

HARRISON  
What are you drinking, Lo?

LOIS  
A martini. I don't know. Gabe made it.

They trade contraband: Harrison gets her martini, she gets his cigarette. He takes a sip of the martini and immediately coughs.

HARRISON  
Jesus — Gabe, what's in here?

GABRIEL  
(absently, lying down now)  
Three to one gin and vermouth.

Harrison recoils but takes another sip anyway. Although a questionable bartender, Gabriel can be depended on if the goal of the night is to get wasted.

HARRISON  
Goddamn. — What the hell is wrong with you?

GABRIEL  
Just admit that you're a fucking pussy, and you can't handle your liquor.

Harrison tips the rest of the martini over Gabriel's face, his pettiness overpowering his desire to get drunk. Gabriel—who is quick to anger—is shouting again. Pippa laughs. Stephen and ROSEMARY walk into the chaos.

ROSEMARY  
What did you do?

HARRISON  
(laughing)  
Nothing! Nothing! I did nothing! —

Gabriel, sticky with liquor, lunges at Harrison's legs, toppling him to the ground. Pippa laughs harder, blatant in her joy. Rosemary rushes in to pull Gabriel and Harrison apart, while Stephen rushes to pull Rosemary away from the fray. Lois stays still, watching everything with keen focus.

#### INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON. PRESENT

Lois is still at the table. She has a third martini in her hand now and nothing else in front of her. She is perfectly still, hardly breathing, barely blinking. She looks around the restaurant, then continues her vigil, staring out the window.

#### INT. PIPPA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT. PAST

The six of them are spread around Pippa's small studio apartment, doing various homework assignments (or napping

on the couch, in Harrison's case). Lois, Gabriel, and Stephen are crowded at the kitchen table. Lois, smoking, finds her attention divided between the textbook in front of her and Harrison's sleeping form.

She can't help but drink him in.

GABRIEL  
(whispering)  
I wouldn't bother if I were you.

Caught, Lois looks at Gabriel, who isn't even looking at her.

LOIS  
What?

Without taking his eyes off the book he's reading, Gabriel tilts his head over to where Harrison is sleeping.

GABRIEL  
Harrison.

LOIS  
What about him?

He closes his book over his thumb and finally looks at her.

GABRIEL  
Don't take this personally. But Harrison makes it his goal to seduce everyone. The only person he hasn't managed to seduce—well, besides Rosemary, for legal reasons—is Stephen. And that's only because Stephen is saving himself for marriage.

STEPHEN  
(muttering)  
That is a gross misunderstanding of my moral principles.

GABRIEL  
(flippant)  
Whatever. — The point is: you might have had him once, but you're never gonna get him again.  
(beat)  
Don't take it personally. That's just how he is.

Gabriel turns back to his book, completely ignorant of the knife he casually drove into her. She stays silent and still. Her eyes flicker from Gabriel to her lap, then up to Stephen. He's already looking at her. His expression is unreadable. It's as if he's studying her. But there's also something akin to sympathy there.

She gets up from the table and leaves.

#### INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON. PRESENT

Still sitting by herself, Lois smokes a cigarette with her fourth martini. She starts drumming her fingers against the tablecloth.

#### EXT. CAMPUS - LATE AFTERNOON. PAST

The sun is setting, casting a golden glow over the college campus. Lois and Rosemary are walking briskly, arm in arm, chatting about Rosemary's life and qualms. It's a conversation they've had numerous times before.

ROSEMARY

I just don't understand what she thinks I'll be able to do about it. If Harrison wants to get into trouble, fine. I won't get involved.

LOIS

She's his mother.

ROSEMARY

And she's my grandmother. It doesn't matter.

(lowering her voice)

I mean, if she were so worried about his life being ruined, then she wouldn't have had him when she did. 40 is far too old to be having a child.

Lois snorts. In the near distance, she can see the rest of their group waiting for them underneath a large tree, bare for the fall.

LOIS

I'm sure some people would say that 18 is far too *young* to have a child. And yet, here your mom is.

Rosemary wacks Lois's upper arm playfully.

ROSEMARY

You're willfully missing the point.

LOIS

Yes. And you're being neurotic.

HARRISON

(close enough to have heard)

Please tell me my mother didn't call you again.

ROSEMARY

I say this as your cousin and not your keeper: she wouldn't call me if you didn't insist on causing trouble.

HARRISON

Niece. — And it's not my fault that she has a network of gossips all the way up here.

The six of them trek across campus. Rosemary and Harrison take the lead, bickering all the while. Stephen and Lois take the rear, silent. Until Stephen abruptly takes Lois's hand in his and pulls her to a stop.

STEPHEN

How about we go for a drive tonight?

She looks at him strangely. He appears casual and sounds it too, but she can hear the discrepancies. He is slightly breathless. His words are rushed, and his grip on her hand is tighter than usual. This is so unlike him.

LOIS

Are you okay?

STEPHEN

(impatiently)

Yes, yes. I'm perfectly fine. — I think we should go for a drive tonight.

Lois shakes her head, confused and uneasy. The confusion, unfortunately, overpowers the unease, pushing it aside to

an afterthought.

LOIS

I can't. I have to finish that *Frankenstein* paper for tomorrow—

STEPHEN

It won't take long. I promise. Please? Let's go for a drive.

Lois sighs and looks down at their hands, still clasped together. Something curdles inside of her, but she shoves it down. She nods.

LOIS

Okay.

**INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON. PRESENT**

Lois puts her cigarette out and crosses her arms over her chest. Her breathing is unsteady, heavy. Her gaze out the window never lightens up.

**INT. STEPHEN'S CAR - NIGHT. PAST**

Stephen is guiding the car down pitch-black back roads. On one side is a dense stretch of forest. On the other side is a field of tall grass. The radio crackles to life, occasionally shooting snippets of songs out of the speakers at random intervals.

Lois is unsettled. Her eyes flicker back and forth between Stephen white-knuckling the steering wheel and the dark expanse ahead of them.

Suddenly, the car starts to slow down because, parked on the side of the road, is another car.

LOIS

That's Gabe's car.

Stephen pulls up behind the other car. He throws the car into park and jumps out. Lois doesn't move. She watches through the windshield as he peers into the empty car for a long moment, then inspects their surroundings. He starts walking into the woods without a second thought.

But then he turns around and looks back at her, beckoning her to follow him. She stays frozen in the car.

**INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON. PRESENT**

Finally, Lois gets up from the table and leaves the restaurant. The bell above the door rings as she exits.

**EXT. EMPTY ROAD - NIGHT. PAST**

Lois is leaning against Stephen's car, waiting. She has a cigarette in her mouth that she is anxiously smoking, and her arms are crossed over her chest. Her gaze is stuck firmly ahead of her, towards the treeline that Stephen disappeared into.

But then, out of the darkness, she sees four figures emerge, stumbling underneath a weight that Lois can't identify. Stephen, Gabriel, and Harrison are carrying something between the three of them. Her breath catches in her throat. They're carrying a body. She can't see Rosemary.

LOIS

What happened?



STEPHEN  
(panting)  
Open the trunk.

Lois rushes to pop open the trunk, but Pippa beats her there. She throws things to the ground to clear some space for Rosemary's body. The boys shuffle forward, and Lois automatically steps back to let them pass. All of her questions are lodged in her throat.

The sound of a car door opening behind her reaches her ears. Lois turns around and finds Rosemary, alive, climbing out of the first car. Lois chokes.

As the boys are passing to deposit the body in the trunk, Lois catches a glimpse of the face and gasps. It's not Rosemary's face. It's hers.

**EXT. FOREST - NIGHT. PAST**

Ten minutes earlier.

FLASHES OF Lois trying to run, screaming. Of Harrison and Pippa holding her back. Of Gabriel bringing a wrench down on her skull. Of Lois immediately collapsing to the ground, eyes wide open, blood gushing from the wound, dead.

**INT. PIPPA'S APARTMENT COMPLEX. HALLWAY/PIPPA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON. PRESENT**

The elevator doors open to reveal Lois, panting. The right side of her head is caved in, blood and gore matting the skin and hair. She storms down the hallway, anger taking hold of her. Now that she's up and walking, we notice that her gait is unsteady. She limps and stumbles down the hallway like a drunk person. She has no sense of stability. Her center of gravity has been torn out of her.

She reaches a door—Pippa's door—and starts banging on the wood with her fist.

LOIS  
Hey! HEY! What did you do? WHAT DID YOU DO?! OPEN THE DOOR.  
PLEASE OPEN THE DOOR!

As Lois continues to bang on the door and plead from the hallway, we slip inside the apartment to find the other five completely oblivious to the ghost on the other side of the door. Stephen is at the stove, cooking. He turns off the stove and plates a steak, placing it in front of Rosemary.

No one says anything, too busy eating their dinner.

**BLACK.**

**THE END.**



# THE FEAR OF PRESENT

IZZY BROOKSHIRE

i feel this palpable urge to create,  
but bones bounce off my fingertips  
and rattle onto a floor unforgiving.

the bark starts to dig into my feet—  
sinking, sucking, stealing

i am heels over head,  
almost but not quite asleep on my bed  
i am restless,  
wall to wall,  
boxed in like the glove that caught the home-run ball

a question:  
is destiny so potent that it could steal its matchmaker from any exceptions?

could i be saved from my will of the damned, exempt myself from true, unforgivable  
failure?

can i redeem from days that seem to pass senselessly?

i grasp at sticks that burrow into the ground at first touch, i whisper at clouds that no  
longer want  
to hear my name, i spit words so reused they lose their flavor

is this meaningless?  
definite and complete loss of self?

i fear my mind is thinking  
without permission.

“inconsistency!” it blasts,  
it bombards,  
i barricade

where is my rest if my home is tormented by strangers?  
by cruel devil’s advocates who know just where to burn

my hands turn plaster,  
the itch won’t go away  
i wrack my brain with my thoughts,  
yet it loves to stay

once again,  
am i punishable by lack?  
i am attempting escape  
but am i able?

this, a sick, ironic form of preservation  
sate yourself with words, fill the blank surface

something great born by you only to forget its face the morning after  
bastard.

# Writer's Block

CHELSEA BARTILAD

There's something so intimidating about a blank page on a screen: its bright glow reflecting through the glass as it stares back at you. A white void that taunts, *Well, what are you waiting for?*

No matter how many times I bring myself to type, my fingers remain frozen, refusing to move at the prospect of the daunting task of writing.

Words disappear as quickly as they appear.

*Type, type, type.* Delete. *Type, type.* Delete. Repeat.

Whether it's on-screen or inside an empty notebook, the blank page leaves the same effect: the overwhelming weight of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear falling into my core like stones in a lake, the ripples of self-doubt reaching into my bones.

I type and I type; nothing stays on the page. Yet the words remain etched in my mind.

I want to write as if words flow seamlessly onto the page, as paint appears on a canvas. I want to write as if my thoughts are as clear as my reflection in a mirror. I want to write until the page becomes an endless sea of my thoughts, full of life, constantly in motion.

And yet...I cannot.

The page remains an empty chasm, staring back at me.

*Well, what are you waiting for?*





# i've stopped overwatering my plants

KASEY DAVIS

I've stopped overwatering my plants  
and have begun to watch them dry up.  
I cannot move.  
I am frozen.  
The world keeps spinning,  
my plants keep dying.  
And I watch it all from my window,  
standing perfectly still.





# Because I Can't Say Gay

MATZ SINCLAIR

When I was young,  
I feared insults,  
and the way judgment clouds eyes.  
Painting familiarity alien  
as you pretend to forget me;  
I feared that casual slurs were a marked attack  
with teeth meant to rip at hidden truths unable to scab.  
I peered through my stained glass eyes,  
at a jewel tinted world.  
A stained glass window  
that laid before me,  
its blazing rainbow panes  
divided,  
fractured,  
like the moment between a raised fist and a punch,  
a wince. Waiting.  
I was waiting,  
alone,  
anticipating pain,  
separated from my peers  
by a gossamer maze, only visible to me,  
its walls decorated by the leering shadows  
of everyone I knew would hate me,  
of everyone the truth would make see  
the walls they built between us.  
So, I feared the truth  
and that my identity would stain me  
when it spilled from my lips,  
painting a target on my flesh  
I could never wash clean.  
Still, I hoped the stain was nothing but unexpected color,  
a deviation, not a defect.

I hoped that shimmering slivers,  
though confined and divided  
by oppressive bars of steel,  
and fear  
and hatred  
could still unite  
to create one whole,  
a beautiful image,  
a community of light  
that stains the world with their brilliant color.

Now  
I stare at the stained glass before me,  
still too scared to join its colorful panes.  
I watch as rock after rock is thrown  
smashing my youthful hopes to shards  
colored by fear and shame,  
knowing,  
the window will feel the impact far before me,  
but if the glass shatters  
I will break all the same.  
Can I fear the impact when the rocks aren't yet aimed at me?  
Because I do.  
I fear legislation splattered in blood,  
their cry for a casualty riddled war  
where the goal is death, not victory,  
and the pink triangles they want to stitch to our chests  
to make physical our deviations,  
create a target for their bullets,  
and the headlines of violence that balloon  
and swell  
and leave us in monstrous shadow,  
waiting,  
asking,  
if the brutal force of their thrown stones  
will shatter flaming glass,  
raining splinters and bodies on Sistine floors,  
profanely ornamenting their veiled hypocrisy  
and gilded hatred?





## Two-Headed Monster

OLIVIA NUÑEZ

**M**y greatest fear is that I will become him. This thought paralyzes me, prohibiting me from forming any redeeming qualities of my own. All I can think about are his molten eyes, scrutinizing every step I make and the fear that they're now reflected in my own.

In the quiet desolation of my mind, I refer to him as the two-headed monster. I often thought of him in a child-like fashion, ransoming my reality for a nightmare that seemed to make more sense than my life.

In my mind, the two-headed monster had two distinct sides to him:

The head on the right was the color of the sky right before the heavenly flames were extinguished into oblivion, as it does when it sets. There were no scales, simply a smooth texture, much like the blanket a child holds while they curl into a quiet slumber. His eye was hidden under long lashes in the shape of pine trees scattered along a chocolate river. I held onto this head, finding rest in his marshmallow lips, which smiled when he saw me. When he yawned, the air breathed new life into a desolate landscape until it was a vibrant green, and bursting with color. This was the head that provided shelter from a storm, filling my chest with a light that felt like it could implode. It was the only one I knew for much of my life.

I still vividly recall the terror in the pit of my stomach when I first encountered the head on the left. The feeling was the quiet desolation a young child experiences when left in their bed for the first time without their mother's soft, reassuring murmur. Its neck was a shade darker than midnight, with thorns that made my hands bleed as I tried to climb to safety. There were no moments of respite in this head as if purgatory had manifested itself in his skin. Everywhere I turned, the black eye rolled around and looked at me, raising the hair on the back of my neck. His breath was a fusion of gasoline and oxygen, and while I tried to run, I could feel my flesh burning against his venomous lips.

When the sounds of my father yelling couldn't be muffled by my pillow, I thought about why things happened.

When the door eventually slammed and the sound of tires



speeding away became faint, I promised myself that I would never forgive him. But as the days went on, I would find myself unintentionally laughing at one of his jokes, remembering that he had an infectious smile, and I would slowly forget.

When I woke up the next morning and saw him sitting there, my mother serving him eggs and bacon, I wanted to scream. It was nothing new, though.

It was as if I had imagined it, and only we were forced to relive it all. It lingered and festered so the resentment built up and only I remembered what it felt like.

And on his face was the serenity of a sociopath, the oblivion of someone who only thought of himself. He acted as if nothing was wrong. To him, for whatever sick and twisted reason, nothing really was wrong.

It was only us. It was in our heads.

In his heart, there is no capacity for love despite what my mother believes. In his chest there is an empty hole slowly rotting away in his ribcage. And slowly, something in my ribcage begins to waste away, shrinking like a plant, caged away in a dark place.

There is this unshakable feeling that everything wrong with me is attributed to him. It is an all-consuming sensation that manifests itself in my own temperament, and I try so hard to change.

Even now, my head begins to spin, and I cannot put it into words. He is a part of me. I am his spitting fucking image. And I lie to myself. I promise to be the antithesis, to end the cycle and forgive, but there is no escape. I feel the malice suffocating me, and the darkness that threatens to cloud my future. It lingers and infests every part of me: a chokehold that keeps my heart from expanding. I don't remember the last time I took a deep breath and felt the oxygen fill my lungs with clean air. Instead, all I can feel is a toxicity swirling around inside my veins so black I can hardly call it blood. He sinks his fangs into my neck, injects his venom into my veins, and transforms me into a two-headed monster.

And I let it happen.



# A Fairy's Wings

NADIA MILLER

Everything whooshed past, the underbrush scratching my bare legs.

I continued to run. I ran from all the things that I knew, leaving behind each friend I had ever made, each person I had ever spoken to, and each stranger who looked my way.

I just couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't stay. Not in that forsaken palace where the faintest mistake cost me the most valuable thing I had.

I grew weaker by the second. Each step caused more blood to rush out of my wounds, leaving a trail from where I came from, allowing anyone from the palace to follow me to whatever destination I was running to.

I soon reached the point where I could no longer continue. I fell against a tree, rough bark scraping up my skin, causing more blood to flow.

The wings of a fairy are the most precious thing they own. Mine were taken from me. They won't grow back. It's unheard of...impossible, and no one has ever been able to manage it.

The removal of a fairy's wings only happens when they have done something so wrong that the other beings of the land believe it is the appropriate punishment. But I had done nothing. I had simply spoken my truth and tried to see the light in the dark.

No one agreed, so they took my wings. Now, I am powerless, on the brink of death. I have no friends, no family, and no life.

That's when everything went black.

# Laced Between Illness

SHELBY LOPEZ

warm, blood-infused thickness,  
beating, inflating

forested forest absorbing the earth,  
tightening, repulsing

orange hues sticking eyes closed,  
muffled, a strong hold

grounding in foolishness  
arranged around mistakes







# Unlovely

JAVI-NEVAEH HALL

Out of every waking moment in a woman's theatrical life  
I believed, at least in death, she would be granted the privilege  
To forgo the burden of beauty and be unlovely in peace.  
Yet, as per the viewing, she is injected with formaldehyde  
As the mortician attempts, in vain, to preserve her fleeting beauty.  
She's given a new painted face, hoping to reverse twenty years  
And in death, she feigns youth with an artificial flush.  
But Thanatos is not so easily fooled by a posthumous rouge.  
He takes pity on every woman on their day of collection  
At the viewing, he is last to approach her ornate casket  
And he carefully unmasks her before taking her hand.  
Her decorated vessel withers away, uncovering her rotting corpse  
She takes in the first breath of her death, it is much lighter than life.  
When it is my turn for a long awaited visit from Death himself  
I wish to meet him unpainted and naked and raw and unlovely.  
I wish for fungus to populate my sunken face and worn body.  
I wish to be disgusting and unsightly, in an active state of decay  
I wish every living eye that gazes upon my corpse recoils in horror.  
*Please let us be unlovely, at least in death.*

# Scars

OLIVIA NUÑEZ

*TW: Self-harm*

**W**e sink into the mattress, a cool duvet cover underneath us.  
I trace the yellowing water stains on the ceiling above us,  
imagining the white expanse rotting and collapsing. You  
are lying next to me, knees bent so you don't hang over the  
frame, your legs longer than mine now. Your long hair spread  
across the satin pillow reaches the edge of my ear, tickling it and  
making me squirm.

We've shared a bed since you were three years old, and it's  
never been a smooth process. I abhor anything to do with physical  
touch, and your favorite thing is to hug. I hate when you curl up  
next to me, and you hate when I wiggle my toes beside you.

You always end up with my blanket in the morning, and all I  
can do is make sure it covers your shoulders.

"What was the name of that song we used to sing on St.  
Patrick's Day?" you ask, still staring at the ceiling.

"St. Patrick's Day," I reply sarcastically.

The next thing I feel is your bony elbow digging into my right  
side. My immediate reaction is to push you over the edge of the  
bed, but you remain solid against my palms.

After the pain subsides for a moment I ask, "Why?" I'm  
curious to know why you suddenly care about a silly tune we  
concocted in a couple of minutes at Sara's request. We performed  
it in front of all our aunts and uncles, crouching down and popping  
out in a jumping jack position for the chorus.

It's the middle of August, the sweltering humidity making  
our hair cling to our necks as we lay in bed in athletic shorts and  
sports bras. I'm also yearning for the precipice of spring, the  
bright bulb of the sun shadowed by puffs of white in the sky, and a  
brisk breeze through our window, but St. Patrick's Day is the last  
thing on my mind.

Your eyes remain glued to the yellow above us as you say, "The  
babies should make up another song for my birthday."

The "babies" are no longer babies, but the age of five is the  
closest to infancy we now have in the family. I think about this  
for a moment before replying, "It wasn't really about Mami's

birthday. All we said was, 'St.  
Patrick's Day!' and danced."

"Yeah, but I feel like Juli  
and Mia don't really make stuff  
up the same way we did."

I shrug, patting the fleshy  
part of my stomach to fill  
the silence. "They choose to  
entertain themselves with the  
phone."

You scoff, sounding  
less haughty and more self-  
assured, as if any opinion  
other than your own shouldn't  
be considered. A mix of pride  
and jealousy swells in my chest  
when you give your opinion  
so decidedly. You've always  
known your mind.

"I remember you wouldn't  
put the face paint rainbow on  
me."

I turn to look at your  
expression of annoyance,  
a side-eye, and pursed lips  
despite the fact that this  
occurred an eternity ago.

"I don't remember that,"  
I deny, as if it were of little  
importance to me, which it is.

"You were always so mean  
to me," you point out. This  
is a fact that I have thought  
about every time I witness  
your insecurity. As a child, you  
didn't care what anyone said.  
The coaches would yell at you

on the field as you filled your glove with dirt around you, and you'd look back and laugh. I remember the envy I felt about how free you were.

You never cared what anyone thought of you dancing at the plate, the way you wore your hair in pigtails every day to school, or that you had an imaginary friend you blamed any inconvenience on.

People are so eager to crush any sign of sunshine. Maybe that was the justification I told myself for ensuring you knew that life wasn't so forgiving.

"Uh, that doesn't really sound like me," I respond, though I know my propensity to be a bitch. It's something you and I share to a different extent.

"You never remember anything," you retort, your tone exasperated.

"H m m , I a c t u a l l y remember many things for your information," I reply, digging my heel into your shins. "I remember the day you were born."

"There's no way," you roll your eyes in argument.

"Why would I lie? I literally remember going to Grandma's house, and it was unbearably hot, much like today. She put the little pool, you know, the blue one with the fish on the bottom out, and we were in the front yard. Sara slept over, too. Wait, why was she there? I don't remember why she was there, but it was the best day ever until I woke up and saw your ugly newborn face in a photo."

The word photo triggers our memory, and you sing the chorus of "Photo ID" at the same time as I do because it's been stuck in our heads. We both look at each other, eyes wide. We always claim to be telepathic, and sometimes, it feels less like a joke and more like a freaky reality.

"You were three years old," you contest after we stop singing.

"I was almost four and a genius for my age."

You laugh out loud, forcing my own lips to react in an upturn. There are very few moments where you allow the overflow of emotions to reach a boiling point, which makes it all the more infectious. While you meant it sarcastically, I find myself glad to have made you laugh. It seems such a rare sound now, your stomach contracting into itself as you roll over to your side. Pretty soon, I join in as we roll across the flower-patterned sheets, sides splitting.

"I'm glad you think it's funny, but it's true," I manage to say between shallow breaths.

You shake your head and wipe the corner of your eyes with your middle and index finger.

Our conversation turns slightly as our laughter lulls, and we focus on the ceiling again. "Did you want to have a sister?" You finally ask, pushing your flat-iron straight hair away from your forehead.

I think for a moment before saying, "I don't remember. I mean, I already had Sara, so I wasn't the only girl in the family anymore, but I guess that's different than having a sister." I press my lips together in thought and come to an honest conclusion, "Maybe not at the beginning."

You're quiet beside me. I wish I could hear your thoughts and how you perceive me in the confines of your brain, but all I can do is wait until you open your mouth again.

"When did you start wanting me?"

For some reason, big tears form at the corner of my eyes, slowly building up as they leak onto my skin and slide across my cheeks. I quickly sweep my forearm across my forehead, feigning to wipe my sweat, and then across my eyes to hide my tears.

**W**hen you were in first grade, you saw me across the playground and ran toward me despite the fact that a fence separated us. A couple of your friends followed your lead because you've always been a leader, but you left them in the dust. Before I could react or tell you to go back, you wrapped your bony arms around my legs and looked up. Those caramel-colored eyes in the sun smiled, and you bared your overlapping tooth as you boasted that I was your sister. The kids gathered around me and looked in awe. The pride was visible in the grip you held around my leg. I'd always remember the glow in my chest and the vow I made that you would always feel you could run to

me.

"I feel like when you started playing, I had more in common with you," I tell you, though that isn't the reason you are looking for.

"I wish I never started playing," you reveal. I turn to look at you, but you don't meet my gaze. I adjust my neck so I'm facing you, forcing you to feel the scrutiny of my eyes.

"How come?" I ask.

You shrug your shoulders and fold your arms on your belly. I notice the toll time has taken on your body, the calluses on your hands from hitting 300 balls the day before. Your knees have lost their smoothness, scraped from sliding on a field so dry it felt more like concrete. A patch of skin on your left thigh is forever altered from losing your footing on a cement fence in the front yard. There is a scar on your ankles from when the girl we both hate slid straight into you, the metal cleat piercing your flesh. You always joke that you'll never be a leg model.

You close your eyes, shadows forming underneath them from sleepless nights. Your hands are folded together, slowly rising and falling with each breath. My eyes travel upward, and I notice the inside of your forearm and count the number of horizontal lines now that you've let your guard down. My heart sinks as I realize they aren't related to the sport we play. I notice the smooth texture between each line and the deliberate symmetry of each cut.

My throat goes dry as I understand the last few months, the way you've distanced yourself from me, and the time you spend in the bathroom. A deep ache holds me still as I watch your peaceful expression, eyes closed and still as if you're in a coffin.

I have always thought heartbreak is metaphorical anguish, just a way to describe the unexplainable sensation of losing an organ, a vital one. But I can feel it. My chest physically hurts, as if I'm giving myself a heart attack. I don't know what to say or if I should bring it up.

"Do you want to quit?" My open-ended question is not intentional, but a part of me wants you to confess.

You open your eyes and sit up in a criss-cross fashion. You remember what you've hidden for so long and make sure your arms are folded across your chest as you look at me. You remain silent before saying, "I'm not sure yet."

For some reason, I think you might know what I mean, but I address the pressing question first.

"Is it the pressure?"

You shrug and wipe the sweat from your brow. "I'm not good enough."

"Dude, you're the best player I know."

You shake your head emphatically as if I'm not hearing you. "I'm not good enough," you repeat as if it's final. You're stubborn. I know this, but you've always trusted me to be honest with you.

"It's just a slump," I assure you. "It's a game of failure, and you've been doing well for so long. You were bound to hit a wall."

In a quiet voice that hides underneath the weight of this conversation, you say, "I feel like I'm disappointing everyone."

We sit in your confession while I try to formulate the correct response. The initial shock slowly fades away and becomes a wave of irrational anger. Your eyes are downcast, and I want to curse you for being so selfish.

I don't understand what could have happened to make you feel so helpless.

I don't understand why you would resort to this instead of talking to me.

I don't understand how you could let it get this far.

I don't understand you.

Suddenly, I examine every memory we have together and how I could be so blind.

I remember the day Mami let me drive you for the first time. I was conscious of the fact that your life was in my hands, a feeling so paralyzing that I thought I wouldn't ever take my foot off the brake.

You were so excited, though. So I drove five miles under the speed limit and took the streets. Wallows played through the radio as we cruised down PCH, your hair whipping in front of your face, laughter drowned out by the dissonant wind.

We sat at the beach for an hour, watching the waves

collapse into each other, unable to decide who gets to touch land first. In a rush, the ocean collects itself rapidly to cover the sand with a long exhale of relief, only to retreat into its depths again.

"I wonder what it feels like to drown," you voiced aloud.

I didn't think anything of it since we've always spoken transparently about the thoughts others would flinch at.

I imagined lungs full of salty ocean water and slowly choking.

"I feel like it might be one of the worst ways to die."

"You think so?"

"I think getting shot in the forehead might be the least painful way."

"True," I agreed, "If you don't see it coming."

"I don't know how people can sit in a bathtub and..." Your voice trailed off, but I knew what you meant.

"That must be the worst," I said, trying not to picture an end like that.

You traced lines in the sand and said, "Isn't it weird how this could all disappear in just a second?"

"For some reason, I always think about it when I'm driving home. I'm at a red light, and I just imagine the point where everything goes black, and everything we know and think that is so pressing right now becomes insignificant," I replied.

"Sometimes that sounds so peaceful," you laughed despite the morbid subject.

We enjoyed our strawberry ice cream while the sun set before us, and I never gave it a second thought.

I am no longer sitting on the warm sand but on this cool duvet that sticks to my legs. That moment settles onto my chest as you sit and wait for my response. The perspiration on your brow collects, and you wipe it again, your arm in purview.

"Is that why you have those marks on your arm?" I blurt out, finally mustering the courage to ask. I've rephrased it a thousand times in the span of a minute, and this is the best I can come up with.

It's as if I struck you in the face. To my surprise, you laugh in my face and tell me I'm delusional.

"Don't laugh at me," I say sternly. "I need you to tell me why you're doing this."

You can't look at me but shrug your shoulders in reply. "You don't have to worry about me."

"How the fuck am I not going to worry?" My emotions get the best of me, and I can't fight the fat droplets that roll down my cheeks. I hate crying in front of you, but my body knows no other response.

"Are you going to tell Mami and Papi?" This is the only thing that makes your voice quiver as you imagine pure disappointment that would put whatever guilt you currently feel to shame.

"Please don't tell them," you plead. "I promise I won't do it again."

Part of me wants to believe you and trust that whatever caused you to cope in that manner might be resolved with this simple exchange. Part of me, however, knows that you won't stop until they know. This part keeps me tethered to this bed, running my fingers through my hair as if that will solve this.

"You promise?" I ask again, choosing to give you the benefit of the doubt. I know this will crush Mami, and I don't really know how Papi would react, so I take it upon myself to handle it and bear the weight of it on my own.

You nod emphatically and bury your head in your hands, most likely in relief. I try not to think about this as I make my way into the living room, leaving you behind.

As the day goes on, all I can think about are those scars and the life drained from your eyes. The few times we meet again, you shuffle out of the way and avoid my eyes. I want to wrap my arms around you, squeeze you until you heal, and forget about all this. But it isn't an easy fix. So instead, I give you your space and let you work through it alone.

**W**e're getting ready to eat dinner when Mami yells at you to get ready for practice. I think back to you saying you want to quit. There's no way they would let you throw it all away, but maybe they would consider it if they knew what it was

costing you.

"Where is she?" my mom asks, stirring a simmering pot with one hand and pulling olive oil out of a cabinet with the other.

I look toward the room and notice the eerie silence that makes my stomach churn. The anxiety builds in my chest as I walk toward the room to bring you out. The room lacks any light, but I can make your figure out. I flip the switch and see you kneeling in front of the bed, with a pair of scissors still split beside you. You look up at me, your arms shaking, red horizontal lines blurring, and my gut drops to my soles.

"Don't tell them," you plead, and I shake my head, tears already streaming down my face.

"I can't," I cry as I pull my hair back and wipe my eyes with my palms. "You promised me you wouldn't do it anymore. You promised!"

"Please," I can still hear your pleas as I force myself to go into the kitchen. The hallway seems to expand in front of me, and my steps feel pointless as if I'm going nowhere. My hands are still shaking as Mami turns to me. Fear immediately flashes across her eyes as a motherly instinct tells her there is something terribly wrong.

"What is it?" she asks, and I forget how to articulate the words lodged in my throat. "What?" She yells in a panic now, and I point toward the room. She shakes her head as if she knows what she will find.

I hear the footsteps echoing and her cry out as Papi runs behind her. I hold Benji as the commotion in the room continues, shut my eyes tight enough so that the sounds fade away.

"I told her not to do it," he says, little pools building in his eyes.

"You knew?" I ask, pulling him close to me as the room spins.

He nods, and I resent you for it. I resent that you robbed him of his innocence and made me believe in yours. But most of all, I resent myself for the part I played.

Papi takes you to the bathroom, where he runs cold water, wiping your arms down as Mami's cries reverberate through the house. I expect to see the remorse on your face, but the only thing there is someone numb. There's nothing behind your eyes, and they beg you to tell them what is going on, but they can't get through to you.

Mami calls her sisters, and they make their way into the house despite the fact that it's past midnight and they all have work in the morning. They take turns speaking to you while you lower your face, not meeting any of them in the eye.

I want to know what's going through your head. I want to know if you've forgotten the drives we've taken, the late-night shows we've binge-watched, and the fact that we're telepathic.

I urge you to look at me, to tell me that this is all a fucked-up

joke and that you've never felt so desperate that you would rather never lay on this bed with me again.

I can hear the cars depart, and my parents urge you to sleep so they can talk. It's a long road ahead, and nothing will be resolved overnight.

Your quiet footsteps get closer, but my back is turned toward you. I don't want to face you, and you probably know. So, you throw your socks into the hamper, climb onto the mattress, and lean into me, humidity forgotten.

The quiet hum of Benji snoring and my obvious sniffles are the only things filling the silence for what seems like an eternity. I can feel your brain working beside me and the words at the tip of your tongue.

"I'm sorry," you finally say because those are the only words you think carry any weight. "I'll never do it again, I promise. I didn't mean to do that to you. I'm sorry," you apologize, and I know I'll forgive you no matter what.

The tears don't stop no matter what I tell myself, and you can hear my choked sobs into my pillow, the fear of losing you freezing any other emotional response. You wrap your arms around me, and I let you hold me tight. We sink into the mattress, our warm bodies alive and connected in a way that only you and I will ever have, our scars slowly healing each night.



# Self Portrait in Scarlet

CALEY LOEWENSTEIN



# Guilty Stalemate

CALLISTA MCCARTHY

I spot you above  
Me. You do not make a move,  
Yet I am frightened.

A black hole consumes eight legs.  
Red stars gleam in the darkness.

Beady eyes distract  
From this: a crystal palace.  
Dewdrops hang on strings.

A fruitless dinner party,  
Shadows fashion dancing guests.

You create beauty  
When yourself is hideous...  
A guilty stalemate.

To kill you would be a crime,  
And yet, it would help me sleep.

# Feature of Discernment

LEAH GIBSON

Profusely prominent and heavysset  
Protruding like palisade sills  
Compared to your sister's and mother's  
Delicate and unimposing slopes  
Surveyors glide across their bridges  
While they traverse yours

Fully grown but immaturely tempted  
To succumb to the butcher  
Become another patient, paper number crumpled in hand  
Patiently awaiting the band saw and sutures  
For a brutalized version of a form once realized  
Rather than preserve a sculptor's exertion

In its enormity:  
Sharp profile, cavernous pits, downturned end  
The cataclysmic crater envious of its rolling lava flow  
The karst terrain insulted by predictability  
Is the capacity to purposely inhale

Myrrhic pine and sugar maple tang  
While you plod along damp moss  
Peppered with the musk of  
Long-snouted mammals  
On beasts, it's a feature of natural order

Drawing another breath  
Admired can be the aroma of olive oil  
Mingled with biting garlic  
Roasting on a pan  
Rooted in the basement of your family tree

Their synthesis arranged by a woman  
With liver-spotted hands  
Bearing the same hump of grandeur.

# DESTRUCTIVE

IZZY BROOKSHIRE

i, in earnest, rip this beast from my lungs  
i tear it apart and strangle it from my body  
to make sure it shall never return  
yet this wretched fate of mine, my destiny,  
my destiny, mine  
i've been ensured for a life well-lived for the well-living

i slice off my body, like paper, like meat  
at a butcher, wednesday morning, with a cleaver in hand,  
striking flesh and spurting blood  
my head lolls back and my neck opens, i leak onto my own body

my bones crunch and crack, they do not understand the weight they hold  
they shiver and shamble,  
turning to dust by ravines breaking into their foundation  
my body, spineless  
falls and slinks  
to the floor

a gun goes off  
a loud resounding sound that echoes off my mouth  
and into my skull  
it erupts, bright yellow light,  
a split second, an end to all end events  
bullets sink through flesh and slip through the middle

i keep my brain intact to keep these things just as thoughts,  
though i ought to know better than to keep thinking these things.  
it can't be good for you, i reason, it can't be good for me, i advise  
i am a soul, restless, and rapping at its cage  
barred windows, uneasy mind,  
what shall answer back when i call out "if i only?"



# Girlhood or Whatever

JULIA CENTENO



# Sometimes I Think it Looks Like Me

MATZ SINCLAIR

There's a corner in my room that light never reaches. The walls around it drip with light but the corner stays dark, stained with shadows thick as a creeping mold or hardened scab, never letting the warm wisps of light sneak through its inky tendrils to illuminate the walls beneath. From the corner of my eye I see it crawl toward me with the legs of hundreds of spiders, blanketing the wall with darkness no light can fill. I blink and see nothing has changed. The black hole is still contained, but I fear the day the darkness seeps further, Drenching the walls all around me in darkness, once again.



# i think about going home

KASEY DAVIS

I think about going home  
to the house on 208th.  
It's since been repainted.  
If every inch of it wasn't ingrained in my mind, I might not recognize it.  
If I step inside, will the world still feel too big?  
Will I still fit through the doorway?  
What does it mean to outgrow your skin?  
Will I see a young child still have hope in her eyes?  
Will I have to watch it be replaced with sadness?  
If I go, they'll make me leave again.  
I think about going home, but I never do.

# 'A'ole 'Ike Wau

KALLIE KAAHUE-PAOPAO

I had one of those moment, that just reeks of condolences.

Where I was first cry in a sign flash time.

'A'ole 'Ike Wau...

I have never ever had the words.

My 'ike is 'oko'a. It is kōikawā. 'A'ole 'ike wau.. Frustration succumbs me, when I see, universal things. Like a shared dream.

I learned about King Kamehameha, and his might to fight, To unite, the Hawaiian Kingdom.

I learned about King Kalakua, and his strength at arms length, to regrow, and let Hawaiians know, The flow of songs.

E a'o mai au e pili ana...

E a'o mai au e pili ana... I learned about, The structures, that were built, at the hilt, in depths of guilt, upon our lands, In the hands, of foreign people.

E a'o mai au e pili ana... I learned about, how foreign people somehow made, our 'ike and mele and 'ōlelo, illegal and banned. E ola ka 'ōlelo Hawai'i!

E a'o mai au e pili ana... I didn't learn about, some parts of the arts, that were stolen upon, the broken tokens, of Uncultured, Structured, People.

Ua 'ike wau... I know my history

That's a mystery, for some.

I know the frustration, Not knowing this nation, Not knowing common diction, Among people, I share and care.



# The Loneliest Weather Worker In The World

NIA HUTZLEY

when i was young,  
i blamed my solitude  
on my

parents. the hand  
that was spotted with gold  
fur and

weathered by age  
and the lines that told of  
building

that stone wall that  
was my grandfather's pride  
held me,

and the rough brown  
surface of my mother's  
work-worn

palms cradled me.  
sometimes i want to go  
back to

prospect park in  
june, when i ate a fish  
eyeball

and my friends roared  
with that contagious third  
grade mirth.

the gold, liver  
spotted hand united  
with the

weary brown one  
and i was safe, and so  
were they.

that story though  
is a lie. not that the  
gold hand

never linked the  
brown one, but that i have  
always

been trouble. or  
lightning. even then, at  
only

eight, I brewed my  
own storm. i called bolts to  
the park

that day, and still-  
everywhere i go, the  
rain falls.

# Heat Wave

JAVI-NAVEAH HALL

Sweat beaded on her forehead, pooling in her collarbones  
Spilling over, down her body, sending a chill down her spine  
Her palm shielded her eyes from the blistering Los Angeles rays  
A certain kind of sadness radiated from her palm to her heart  
The kind of sadness that only arrives during a west coast heat wave  
A beautiful flock of peacocks migrated here, holding their heads high  
Primed and powdered birds, invasive to the native species  
As she leaned on the brick building on the corner of the street  
Her shoulders dropped and she huffed and gasped desperately  
Only for her lungs to be met with the intense desert-adjacent air  
Her eyes looked to the sky, the view is blocked by the new high rise  
Air-conditioned and exclusively populated by the pretty peacocks  
Rolling her eyes, she pushed off of the wall and began walking away  
In the distance, she could hear the peacocks emitting silly shrieks  
An old man smoking in front of the liquor store ahead sighed wistfully  
That sigh told a story that the peacocks always refused to hear  
A story of a city flooded with pigeons, predating the peacock's landing  
Looking down the street she realized—she hadn't seen a pigeon in years  
And she sighed because she too knew the pain of living in this city  
Among the birds whose tails take up three seats on the Metro

# CONCERNS.

IZZY BROOKSHIRE

concern weighs down your face  
like a safe too heavy for the floor underneath  
it  
i am warned not to step too close  
lest i make it break beneath me.

i am too similar.  
shall i let my brain convince itself that it was  
the one  
who let this settler in?  
sitting heavy on *my* respective throne..?

it is so close to me,  
like a cold child to the warmth of a mother  
it has burrowed in my soul,  
like a rat making its den inside the broken  
walls of a family who does not need them

i:  
try to pull at it through metaphors, and  
similes, and syntax  
as if i can be cured by my own handiwork  
and i am!—

to an extent.

the taste is so sweet, so bitter  
i am cursed by an uneasy, eternal reaction  
i am a revolutionary, a fighter for my own  
cause; against emotional intruders, i am  
free, i am free

until i am not.

i allow myself to criticize my circum-  
stances—  
poisonous introspection comes natu-  
rally to me—  
and one can breathe in such certitude  
that my barricades have taken the  
physical toll

but i am wrong.

now, dear catalyst,  
harbinger of the inspiration i had  
stored for later—  
like a lunchbox made the morning of  
school—  
it is cruel.  
i have dedicated love to you,  
sweet cutouts of my soul in bite-sized  
pieces  
so, i am easily injured  
when i am obliviously tossed like food  
you no longer wanted.  
maybe i am too kind,  
or forgiving.  
i would rip down cities to paint you in  
brilliant light  
is it still the same?

GROW

Maori Eundo

# Hehi 'ana Ma Hea

KALLIE KAAHUE-PAOPAO

I loa' ai  
lākou mai nā kupuna,  
'Aohe hō'ihi  
(They take from the ancestors, no respect)

'Ike kāmola  
I ke kino nā po'e  
I ka na'au ai  
(The knowledge is woven in the bodies and guts of the people)

I a'o 'ana  
I ka na'auao ma ke'ā  
I nā kanaka  
(We learn the wisdom of the people)

E 'Ōlelo ai,  
I lākou e pili 'ana  
Hewa ka 'ike.  
(They say our knowledge is wrong)

'Aohe hō'ihi,  
No kanaka maoli,  
I ka 'ike ma hea  
(No respect for the Hawaiian people)

Hewa ka no'ono'o,  
Hehi 'ana ma hea.  
(The thinking is wrong, Desecration is here.)

# The Color of Roots

SARAH LICÓN

Colorful roots birth colorful leaves  
Because  
Blue is the sky I gaze upon,  
Yellow—the coarse blanket of tamale husk,  
Like the husk of Iowa corn  
That my family harvested on their farm,  
German sharp on their tongues,  
Mine colored red from bloodshed and chili  
While the tamales cook,  
I ponder  
Who am I?  
Not here or there, but in between  
In a space that doesn't exist  
I, myself, am complicated.  
Colored red, yellow, black, and green,  
Like flowers sprouting on a cactus  
The same one in which the eagle perched on,  
From my ancestors in Tenochtitlan, to my brothers in Seville,  
Who shook their family's hands with violence,  
To the houses perched on Guanajuato hills.  
I am a daughter,  
My skin like creamed coffee,  
My hair, rich like the soil staining the bracero's clothes  
My cheeks freckled like my Aryan ancestors,  
Eyes like the warm summer nights,  
I may be from the land of red, white, and blue.  
Where soldiers die and call it pride.  
But I was not a direct product of this land,  
And neither were you.



# Callees Sangrientas

SHARBY SILVA

Ni un feminicida  
mas en las calles





# Message to Rudy

JONATHAN BERMUDEZ

Hey Rudy,  
Do you remember the first time we met?  
You sounded like you had a British accent  
Even though you came from Spanish-speaking parents

Do you remember the gray sweater you used to wear?  
You wore that sweater so much it started fading in color  
And when summer came around it was uncanny not seeing you without it

Do you remember our field trip to Mother's Beach?  
You had me and Gabriel dying of laughter on the bus  
You pretended to be on the phone with one of your ladies, saying, "I'll call you back" and hung up with your hand

Hey Rudy,  
Do you remember how excited we were to see each other in middle school? It was good to have my friends at such a terrifying place  
Do you remember how I used to ask if I can play games on your phone? Most of the time, I was too lazy to play football with you and everyone but you were still considerate

Do you remember when you stopped showing up to school? No one knew what happened but word got around you were sick. I felt guilty because I thought I was too rough on you, and injured you but that's not how cancer works

Do you remember when you came back? I was so happy to see you again and wanted to tell you so much but I could tell something was off. You were wearing a sweater like always but you had your hoodie on the whole time

Hey Rudy,  
I'm sorry I wasn't there to see you  
I was a coward and afraid to see you like that  
But I should've been there

I do appreciate you visiting me in my dreams from time to time  
And every time I see you, I say, "Hey Rudy"

# Female Ward

SHELBY LOPEZ

insidious where jeans taint across blue.  
on deep, pale explosions of selflessness,  
surrounding muffled, shattering voices,  
i will sit alone in bloody, natural silence.

amid some prior thoughts, not lost was i.  
to be found was to be. untangled, undone.  
the honeycombs that caught my empty parcels  
now scattered across dreams of yellow palms.

a path no longer aimed at making things true.  
mists sound of purple flowing through a pun  
that's much too overused for comfort down space-  
less spaces. i look up to the linen floating.

the sound of crushing golden fragments: bones.  
the vibration of resilience buried.



ANH TRUAN  
**The Anatomy of Ovaries Under Siege**



# my oldest friend

KASEY DAVIS

she comes and goes as she pleases  
but i can always feel her coming  
she knocks on my door  
and lets herself in  
she envelopes me  
the warmth of her nothingness seeps into my skin  
she clings to me for weeks  
before she kisses my lips  
holds my hand  
and lets the rain finally fall  
i struggle to breathe under the weight of her  
she shows me no mercy  
you tried to keep me away she says  
it was getting unsafe i say  
you missed me she says  
i always do i reply  
i know it will pass  
i know that when she goes to leave i will try to make her stay  
and she knows, more than anyone, i'm scared to be alone again  
i'll come back she says i always do



SOPHIE FURUM  
**Memento Mori**

# something i want to talk about

KASEY DAVIS

I've grown an anger like my mother's,  
the kind you carry with your spine.

On your chest,  
in your hands,  
and spit out your mouth.

The kind that you have your whole life, rotting you from the inside out.  
A flame that lights up the dark, and spreads 'til there is nothing left to catch fire.

# Like Riding A Bike

MATZ SINCLAIR

When I rode my bike as a child  
my hands would strangle  
it's pink rubber handles,  
so wrapped in a fear of crashing  
I barely felt my palms scream,  
but now when I try to remember  
riding my bike  
all I can feel is the screaming sting  
and the sticky rubber handles  
I held so tightly  
they felt like a part of who I am.  
When I try to remember loving you  
the memories feel the same,  
a clinging, clawing desperation  
that tasted like blood in my mouth,  
grasping at a romance I could feel slipping  
through my fingers, as I dug my nails  
in so deep they pierced my own skin,  
fear and insecurity swarming like rats  
that sunk their teeth into every uncertainty,  
every tremor in your voice,  
every unanswered text,  
every shift in your eyes,  
the incessant melody of "Don't leave me"  
echoing in every corner of my mind,  
catching in my throat  
like a shattered glass scream  
I could never let erupt from my parted lips,  
terrified that if I told you how scared  
I was of you leaving  
that you'd actually go,  
and eventually you did,  
and I had to pick pebbles out of cuts and bruises,  
my blistered palms  
still stinging from their grip.



# CRADLEDRADLED

IZZY BROOKSHIRE

sometimes i feel that i cradle my guilt like a child,  
like it's forever born into me,  
something i cannot scrub off even if given a lifetime.  
the ache of it all has etched itself into my skin  
and I cannot peel it off

I FEEL LIKE I AM MORE GUILT THAN BONE  
MORE GUILT THAN BODY  
IT IS ME AND I AM IT,  
WE ARE ONE

# climate change

ASHLEY SEGETZ

distance.  
a spacious room  
where all my wounds  
linger open.  
cracked and crusted over  
but unhealed.  
    pacing.  
            panting.  
running from people  
who never stop chasing.  
viscously rushing away  
from value and passion.  
cookies charring in a sincere oven,  
i burnt down a warm home.  
run from the closeness and the heat.  
scream until the petals  
fall off the flowers,  
until the trees  
fall to the ground.  
    slow down.  
distance moves quickly,  
yet my heart beats leisurely.  
my emotions crawl  
to the edge of a cliff,  
that doesn't ever drop.  
i jump yet i cannot fall.  
the fear of loss freezes me  
i am a block of ice  
in the middle of the desert.  
they are carving me into  
bouquets of flowers and  
perfect pink bows  
but it changes nothing.  
    i cannot run  
            i cannot jump  
    i cannot die.

# A Garden For Mom

MATZ SINCLAIR

I am breathing  
underwater  
with lungs full of stones  
and no desire to surface  
aware of the light's deception,  
of the beautiful mirage that can be reflected off of mirrors,  
off of glass surfaces,  
off of perceived endings,  
so used to slamming against a hope,  
a glass sky that won't let me through,  
won't let me breathe,  
burdened by the weight of the starless sky above me  
with failing lungs  
and a sodden brain  
that forgets what the sun looks like  
when its light isn't trapped behind my eyelids  
and its warmth hasn't kissed my cheeks or forehead in a while,  
in too long,  
and a throat scarred with the clawing of screams and truths and sobs.  
I am sinking,  
falling,  
slipping so easily into the lulling water beneath me  
as it's arms gently creep around me,  
it's melodic silence enticing me to relinquish hope,  
to relinquish fight.

But lies and laughter still dance off my tongue like shooting stars,  
perfuming my pain with what you want to hear.  
As my body becomes a garden,  
decaying flesh feeding roses and raspberries,  
flowers and vines ripping through skin  
disguising scars and tears with beauty,  
as the kind of flowers that only grow in devouring darkness  
slip into an affair with moonlight,  
giving the illusion of something still living in me.  
I suffocate slowly,  
choking on pungent aroma,  
as the flowers I planted invade my lungs and throat  
escaping from my lips,  
delicious lies,  
served on a delicate porcelain platter.  
You eat every one with the spoon I offer.  
You gorge yourself on deceptions.

So, truth turns to bile in my mouth,  
afraid of perverting and shattering illusions,  
and leaking sewage,  
that sorrow might be some undiscovered truth serum  
forcing the corroded, festering filth  
that wells inside me to spill from my parted lips  
in a parade of stagnant truths and blighted lies,  
and I know you wouldn't like how they taste.  
So, I make my garden thrive  
nourished by fear,  
eroding image,  
and the promise of a violent reaction,  
hoping I die,  
long before you smell my corpse.



# Arch LunAzU

SHERBY SILVA



# Shadowed

ZOE BERKERILE

When you come to that land, a visitor and nothing more, drinking in stories that do not pertain to you, taking them in for the pleasure of hearing, they will tell you things of strange power, words that worm into you and cling fast. You will be sitting comfortably with your companions beside you, dressed in the manner of that country, since you are conscious of the precautions, though unperturbed by all the things that would concern you had you come to stay. You will wear a cloth over your eyes or lenses of dark glass; the room will have no lamps and no fire in the hearth, but the inn will still be lit and warm as though by the building's own doing. You are a traveler with enough in your purse to afford a journey on the grounds of curiosity. You will be content enough with how they tell it to you, selling their country's fate as a kind of living faery tale, a mystery complete within itself. They will want to believe there was no cause, no effect, only what happened and what is. And you are passing through—why should it matter to you, beyond the fact that it is beautiful?

*It started with a star that fizzled just out of reach. She climbed a tree to grasp it. Trying to keep her balance, she shook forward and back in the canopy like a wavering flame. She*

*accidentally swallowed a tiny sliver of night. It was so filling and so delicious that she would crave it all her days.*

But that was nothing but a story, a frame to obscure the truth of the matter. It did not begin with a hunger for something she could not have; it began with a hunger for something she should have had.

Yes, it began with hunger. It was a year worn thin, as they are now and again, from a too-hot summer or a too-cold fall, a winter that had drawn on long, or a blight that had laughed in the face of a bounty. They were ordinary people, no more or less lucky or gifted than their neighbors. The father sustained an injury and couldn't work for some time. The mother lost another baby. The daughter, an only child, was serious and practical. She was growing older all the time, and it had been clear for a long time that their lives were not structured to be livable. They lived anyway, pushing against a death sentence, but how long would it last?

Down the road, a woman had died giving birth, though the healer (who had visited their own home not long before) had done all she could to save her. In the previous month, another neighbor had been cut open on that new machine the lord of the manor was so enthusiastic about; he had not been careful and had died from the infection. How easy it could be for everything to fall apart.

The kitchen was especially empty this year. Everyone in the family was skipping meals for one another, trying to get someone else to eat their little share instead: *You are a growing girl. You need to get better. You need to keep your strength up. I don't care if you're not eating for two anymore. You still need to eat.* They knew, though it changed nothing, that everyone else was in more or less the same situation as they were. Of course, unless they lived in a manor, but that was a different matter. As far as the little girl was concerned, the nobility were a different species, multicolored and sleek-furred, a jumble of uncomfortable-looking and fast-paced fashions. They raced by in their own whirlwinds, frantically chased by their own boredom, or so the child could only assume. They weren't continually thinking of food, of time, of blood, or survival. They weren't thinking of empty pantries, bodies, and things that were supposed to be strong, falling to pieces.

They sat down all together at an empty table, and agreed "that was how it was." They told each other there was little they could spare before winter came, and they went to bed with their stomachs sending their obligatory complaints.

The daughter was old enough now to tell herself why and hold the why above the hunger, even though she could reach the upper shelves now with a chair pulled up. Some nights, she slipped out of bed, quiet and careful to gather up dry leaves black in the darkness, grass lit with moonlight, and fall asleep with earth on her tongue. Cautious of noises in the night, she walked until she grew too tired, all the mysteries of darkness grew plain to her. She knew how not to trip over unseen things. She knew how to be completely quiet. She could see in the dark.

And life made her start thinking: *Why didn't they have anything? Why wasn't there more? If the world was so big and they worked so hard, why wasn't there enough and that again?* In a silent, still confused, yet hungry anger, she padded out into the dark sleeping world under the full moon. She shivered in her father's heavy, itchy coat, looking into that cold round mirror in the sky through the sheer mantle of her breaths.

She had wandered out thinking of grass to chew and the soft inner bark of tall black-on-black trees, but now she wanted a different kind of out. An up-and-away kind of out. An actual out; the need for it was burning in her belly. A scream was clawing the back of her throat, teasing her mouth open, thinking about the consequences of its theoretical existence, the reasons not to weigh themselves on her tongue. If it were only her in the world at that moment, she would be able to tear and bite like a wolf without anyone worrying about what would come of it—no, were she alone in the world, she would have had to do that and then some to get by. Still, the thought of an undoable idea pleased her.

She snarled silently at the dark world and gnashed her teeth at the shadows of the doorstep. *Unfair*, the wolf of hers snarled into the darkness.

Perhaps with some luck, someone wise will tell you this story. They will say, *There are so many tales of what lurks in the dark. But sometimes, all is not what it seems. And sometimes there are fears unrealized and unanticipated, dangers that take us utterly by surprise. Darkness, like light, is neither good nor bad by nature. All things require moderation; all things demand balance. Sometimes, the light is as dangerous as the dark. Maybe even more dangerous—for its danger is not anticipated.*

You and your companions will lean in close. You know the story is coming. You are ready to hear it, ready to shiver and gasp and wonder. The other guests, native to the country, nod knowingly around you. But this is how it really happened, both different and the same from how it is told:

She bent forward, and a sliver of shadow slid between her teeth. It was bitter and sweet at the same time, neither warm nor cool. It was so filling and so delicious that she would eat nothing else for the rest of her days.

She began nibbling up the shadows that cluttered her house: first, those that were heavy and thick, fragrant and rich. Then, when there were none of those remaining, she moved on to the thin and light ones, peeling them from the furniture and walls.

As days and nights passed, she felt less of a need to sleep, finding that the shadows satisfied this just as it did the hunger. This was the beginning of the change. The house's shadows did not replenish themselves, and as they grew sparer, the light rushed in again. It was as if the shadows had kept it at bay, and

now the light kept coming. There was nothing to stop it.

Visitors remarked graciously on how light and cheery the house was. Neighbors became gradually wary of the child, whose appearance was also changing. Her eyes became glassy and unfocused, her skin tinted grey, the brown hair she shared with her parents darkened until it was undeniably black.

"Always was a pensive child," said one to another, thinking they were saying things of great importance. "Never spoke. Always sort of tired and—and *dreamy*. Likely as not, she'll grow up into a lazy thing, more burden than help. But for all that, I can't help but remember her being prettier than she is now...I can't think why."

The other laughed and said everything was looking more plain by the minute with that house turning itself into light. Meanwhile, the mother and father observed nothing amiss with their daughter, bewildered and bewildered as they were by the inexplicable growing radiance of their house. It glowed with a mysterious vibrance from the inside, as though the sun had chosen a favorite. It wasn't long before all those passing through could only stop to gaze upon it.

As news of it spread, more and more flocked to the building to wonder at it. It was some miraculous thing—a house like a star. Excitement spread through word of mouth, growing wilder with many people showing up. First, those like the family, more or less: a train of bent backs and strong hands, elders with faces creased like a pleated blouse, women with wise and tired eyes, people whose clothes and boots and skin were colored all

like the earth that supported them. They came with sick babies, women and men with grievous injuries and illnesses, the dying wrapped in heavy wool shawls, and they rested on the doorstep drinking in the warmth of the light on their skin.

As autumn drew to a close, the natural world began to think about shutting down its rhythms for sleep, something new churning in motion. People were talking of a miracle. The rich in their high, cold houses saw the growing streams of people leaving and returning, holy lights blazing in their eyes. “What, a miracle?” they said to themselves. “I shall see it. If these peasants are going to get a piece of it, so shall I!”

So wealthy people came to see the house, dressed in clothes that shone like jewels, and they marveled at it like the rest. Soon enough they purchased the house from the family at a sum the parents could hardly believe even after it was in their hands. They whispered about it in amazement when they thought the girl was sleeping. They bought a new house on their own land, and for a few wonderful days, it seemed like things would be normal again, only a more livable normal. They would be well-provided for even with the winter coming. It was like one of those happily ever afters you hear about now and again.

The shining house stood behind them, a supernatural gift that helped them out of their troubles without further consequence. However, to the daughter, the food they piled on the table was now devoid of all taste, so she only made a show of eating it. With time, their new house began to brighten with an identical luminance. In every place the family lived, the very

same occurred. Before long, it was the family, not solely the house they lived in, that was regarded as blessed, marvelous, and *special*. People came not just to look at their shining houses, but to look at *them*: the dark, strange, distracted daughter and her stunned parents, trying their best to make sense of their astounding shift in fortunes, attempting to maintain an internal, otherwise unattainable normalcy. A nation’s worth of excitement devoured all three. They were paid handsomely to stay as guests in the estates of nobles, brightening them with their presence. Before long, the houses of all notability shined like stars.

*Except they weren’t fuzzy or sparkly*, the girl noted with distaste. She had long decided the star hadn’t been worth the trouble, having encountered the much more easily accessible shadows. Her hunger for them only grew, and with it her selfishness and greed. Her heart darkened.

**Y**ou will shift in your seat at this moment. You and your companions will share a look. The story continues, surging forward like a flooded river.

The girl would remember that time later—with a gaping knot of empty writhing in her chest—as the best of her life. There were full bellies for the whole family and much excitement. They met many important people and stayed in many resplendent rooms; and in a fervent, self-interested overflow of hospitality, received every good thing of the cultured world. They were entertained with music, poetry, balls and feasts; pompous outings to the park and the opera, glimpses into worlds they had never known to imagine—finding themselves swept into the orbits of art, literary, and scientific circles, where they were at once entertained with discussions and demonstrations, and dogged with questions to which they had no answer.

The girl smiled to herself from her hiding place, pressed up to her mother’s skirt, where she ignored past introductions, holding inside the knowledge that she could, in fact, and answer at least some of their questions. It was a smooth stone in her fist: unchangeable and secret, entirely hers.

The family sat for a portrait, of which several copies were later made. The little girl’s image was rendered in oil paint, colored like a normal child, though by this point, her skin seemed covered in a fuzzy grey veil, the inside of her mouth a flat darkness (effectively disguised by the fact that she spoke so rarely). No one commented on her appearance; they only smiled and nodded when they saw her. Servants prepared for her a series of baths. Nevertheless, no amount of hot water in big metal tubs, fogging the room with steam, could wash away the steeped night they saw as some unfortunate stain of childhood poverty, less deadly than a sickness but nearly so unsightly.

Fortunately, it seemed to have no effect on their social reception. In the glowing aura of the family’s traveling miracle, nothing but the lightest brush of impoliteness touched them, and the child was smiled at and spoiled by a similarly serial train of new aristocrat auntsies until she had more dolls than the family could bring with them, and two wardrobes’ worth of ruffled dresses. They gave things away almost as quickly as they were given more. The girl’s near literal mountains of sweetmeats were never diminished and had to be regifted frequently in wheelbarrows. The family’s generosity quickly added to their legend, with the child complemented for her austerity by various

religious figures who spread the news of the miracle, feeding a fire already out of control, the flow of presents unceasing.

The daughter sat properly in quiet boredom at countless splendid dinners, thinking of dark empty hallways richly draped in shadow. Looking past the forest of tapers, the shining rooms of this or that estate, to the black behind the windows, her mouth watered in anticipation. She spared the lavish tables not a glance—the shadows were much more filling, and were indescribably delicious.

She continued to harvest shadows, munching and gulping, peeling them long and sticky from the nooks and crannies. Every house she lightened, she left a little more shadowed and stormy. When they invented photographs and the family had their picture taken, she was but a dark blot, a negative star. “You must have squirmed around. It’s blurry,” said her mother, not unkindly, apparently oblivious (or unwilling to admit) that she did really look like that. The photographer offered to touch it up with a little paint, insisting she was well accustomed to wigglers, but the parents were in agreement against this idea. “What a finicky invention,” they said to themselves later, peering at the grainy sepia of their own features. “What an odd idea—putting light onto a plate. How and why do they think of these things?”

Later on, photographs would become impossible in that country.

**T**he people of that land were obsessed, indeed fanatical, over the brightened houses the daughter made, but they came with a price. Those who lived in them were overwhelmed with light. Their eyes were stained with luminance; their skin went hot and red with the touch of the sun. They reclined in ice brought down from the north, they covered themselves in balms and potions, and wore shaded lenses and large hats; they were scorched and blinded for their magnificence. Some died for their pride. But while the shadow of this downside showed itself early on, it was paid next to no mind. The family went on, brightening houses, ascending through society like the flying machines people were also crazed with want for. Soon, they were invited to stay at the palace, which was already bright with gold and glowed in the light of day. The king was accustomed to opulence and aspired to have a palace like a second sun. So, to the palace they went.

The girl was very happy with the palace. It was an old place, riddled with history and magnificence, a fascinating place to wander after most were in bed. By now, she was nearly imperceptible in the dark, quiet as a breath of air, her outline blending softly with the shadows. Unaccosted, she explored where no one was supposed to be. There were, she discovered, rooms underground that had not seen daylight in centuries, secret passages so heavy with shadow you could almost feel the weight. She began in the dark chambers of the palace’s underbelly, and after three weeks, she had not even made a dent.

The king, seeing no results, grew impatient. He demanded his sun castle. What was taking them so long? The parents didn’t know, unaware as they were of what lay behind their power to lighten rooms. They grew privately concerned but did not wish to worry the child. And they asked each other what would happen if their inexplicable gift had finally run out. They whispered in their room, though not for the child’s sake, as she had her own. She was

growing older, they knew, and no longer appeared at their door at bedtime. Little did they know her own bed remained unslept. They did not admit to each other the real reason they whispered. Kings could do anything. And they had no control over that which had brought them such favor.

The daughter did, yet did nothing different. She did not know her parents’ fears. Furthermore, she knew that once the brighter side of the castle was de-shadowed, they would move on, and she would have to leave behind the tastier shadows of the catacombs, with their cloying scent and syrupy thickness. They were the best shadows she had ever had.

*Kings can do anything*, said the parents’ exchanged look one morning two weeks into their stay at the palace when His Majesty arrived to breakfast in a splendidly foul mood. This one, however, could not be kind to anyone who denied him anything—from his own wife (now dead) to a peasant family over a trifle, to his current all-consuming obsession. His royal patience wearing ever thinner, the king ordered results by the following morning, or they would all be relieved of their heads.

The family spent the rest of the day in a shared nervousness, silent and affectionate, considerably skirted as they wandered the wide and tall-ceilinged halls, the rooms imposing and ominous in their non-shadowed grandeur. Astounded and unprepared for this turn, the daughter looked over the palace rooms—could she complete the job by morning? She would have to. She felt a wolf growl in her throat, an eagerness that pricked at her

limbs, but she couldn't have anyone watching. The dark that filled her festered with anxiety as she tried to decipher her parents' expressions. *Would the king kill a child?* they were asking themselves. *Is there no way we can protect her?*

Their rooms would be guarded all night to prevent them from fleeing the palace. Saying their goodnights before the girl's door, the daughter felt equally protective of her parents as they felt of her. "It's going to be alright," she insisted with urgency in her voice.

"Oh, sweetie," said her mother, touched. She suddenly realized she could hardly make out her daughter's face. *They really should have this palace lightened, she thought. How frightfully dark it is, with only lamps on the walls!*

"Our girl is right," the father contributed. "We must have faith. That is all we can do."

"Please, don't worry. It will all be better in the morning. It just has to be." Because although her parents could do nothing but remain hopeful, she could do much more.

She began with the throne room, spiraling outwards to de-shadow according to the room's present glamor and, thus, importance in the king's eyes. She over ate and felt a bit nauseous, but there it was: the castle was lightened. She succeeded. Her nerves still rampaged inside her in a rustle of shadow, but she dared a sigh of relief. *We must have faith,* echoed her father's voice in her mind. It is all we can do. Now, she had done all that she could. It would have to be enough.

With the dawn, the castle inhabitants woke to an indescribable brilliance. The king, sweltering but pleased in his rich garments, sat

down on his shining throne...and immediately burst into flames.

Though the fire was extinguished promptly, the king was left flustered, injured, and enraged. Blaming the fire on the family, he ordered their immediate execution. It was all so quick the daughter couldn't think, couldn't breathe, couldn't move. She stood helpless as her parents' heads were chopped off by an axe too bright to look at directly, with its reflection of the de-shadowed palace standing behind the gawking crowd.

When she was brought forward, made to kneel in the earth soaked in the blood of her mother and father, her grief, terror, and rage surged forward in a wave of darkness.

Like a magic trick, the axe vanished, the child with it, and the executioner coughed and coughed globs of night like black toads.

Within a day, his life was ended. No one could find the daughter.

**I** *did this. I did this. I did this. I did this.*

*They are gone. They are gone. They are gone. They are gone...*  
*...I think I killed someone.*

The girl took shelter in the dark corridors and subterranean chambers, where she was effectively invisible, and where no one was meant to be. *I did this. I am alive. They are gone.* The king was in a horrible rage—his golden throne was so bright, no one could look upon it, never mind sit in it. Badly burned, he took refuge in what had previously been a servant's quarters—every other room was too hot, too bright, too grand with luminance for his scorched skin. "My beautiful palace," he said to himself, a murmured refrain.

It never entered his mind to leave despite his injuries. He called on much-celebrated healers from the land over, who (already grown familiar with the burns and the fatal greed of numerous nobles of that country, with their de-shadowed homes and radiant aspirations) prescribed medicines and sleep and darkness. Slowly, the monarch—much maligned!—began to recover.

Except, the girl dreamed of vengeance for her parent's demise when she had done only that which the king had demanded be done. And so, while the castle slept, she continued to devour its darkness. Each morning, it was even brighter and even deadlier. Visitors left, excuses on their lips; important guests fanned themselves and set off for their own abodes (and some of those no darker). The castle's staff invented familial celebrations and catastrophes. Eventually, the healers and their assistants began to leave too at the bidding of distant emperors and in search of more effective medicines—or so they loftily proclaimed.

The king died miserable and utterly alone, buried in silken covers and tortured with light. Toward the end, he began to hear things. The vision of his beautiful palace flickered and faded away.

*You did this. They are gone. They are gone. They are gone.*

*How do you like what I made you? Was it worth their lives? Is it worth yours?*

**Y**ou will hear this part of the story unaltered in events—no added deaths of livestock and nobles' sons, as came earlier on in the tale—but with skewed motives. The Queen, they will say in the safety of agreeing company, is a wicked and heartless creature. The previous king was not a particularly good one, they will continue, but he was entirely and certainly human, and for that, he could be credited.

But *her*? Oh, her soul is as black as her demeanor.

*Poor things, they're terrified of her,* you will recall. Far away from that surreal country, you have no sympathy for their fear, not right at this minute at least, and that's certain. You are home now, not surrounded by the child's power as you had been, taking in its results with every breath. The awe was oppressive. The inn, you will remember, became a tourist attraction after the family stayed in it for a night while on the road. It was there, and in places like it, that the myths around the family—the daughter in particular—began to take their later shape. Of course, they had no evidence to cite for how they knew of her ambition, her entitlement, her greed, her heartlessness, her hunger. They were speaking to the darkness within her. But you will sit in the memory of the story and see beyond the shortcomings of the teller. You have read between the lines of the tale they told you and reasoned that her actions towards its close had nothing to do with wickedness. You yourself have lost a parent. You feel for the girl queen, still so young and clearly in pain.

What had she become? She had not a clue. *I am alive. They are gone. I am alive. He is dead.* She was alone now: completely alone. She could scream, and scream she did, though there was no one to hear it, though nothing she did could alleviate that which festered inside her like swords under her skin. What she was was not the question, the growing terrible in her expounded. What she used to be was of the least importance. What was next? What did she want? What was the limit of what she could do—and undo?

She cackled in the darkness, bitter shadow on her tongue, and spat pure black like the void between stars. There was a slicing rightness amongst the wrong, and she hurt too much to be afraid. There was no one left that she loved, nothing to protect or preserve. She didn't feel like herself anymore. She felt like one of the spooky things in a cautionary tale, another story to tell kids at bedtime: *Behave. Don't be too curious. Don't get hungry for what you can't have. Don't go looking in the darkness because it just might swallow you whole.*

Swallowing the darkness whole had been the best thing that had happened to her, *until*...yet, also after the until. It had led to her losing them, and it took her losing them to use it for a purpose beyond the demands of her stomach and the desires of nobles, uses which had brought them into a better life but also into unexpected dangers. She had, by happenstance made an unnatural environment that could injure of its own accord; using what she was and what she had made in the intent to destroy was another thing. It had been a terrible use, but it had been truly her own. That was another thing she would have to live with, but she knew she would live with it all. She would continue this hollow and horrible thing she had become. This resilient and invincible thing, which could protect herself and feed herself and pass by undetected, was just a shadow. Just a rending and a making; an echo and an

idea; a possibility and an eventuality; a beginning and an end.

A thought bloomed into shape in her mind, expanding in formulation into a plan until it too, began to feel as inevitable as her transformation. It was a choice but also a call, rushing her forward on its current. It would be her world, and they could see if they could stop her. It had already begun to be her world from her first taste of the darkness.

**T**hey will say that she was hungry, but she never wanted this. They will say that she sought power, that she plotted for supremacy, the emptiness in her laughed and let them. What was it to her what they thought? It had not been her hunger but theirs which had made her into what she now was. Just thinking of them now made her sick: faces claiming to be kind but looking at her with greed in their eyes. They had given her and her family entrance into their realm of excess and full bellies, consuming them, chewing them up, and spitting them out mangled.

*Don't go looking for more, don't take what isn't yours.* She knew she never paid attention to these kinds of warnings as she should have. They had seemed absurd and still did, not least because she was hardly the only one not to heed them. Not least because the shadows were in no sense of the word, not hers.

The king had no direct heir, and the court—their rituals and rules already ruffled by the unprecedented—slowly dissolved into frantic and hungry machinations. Pulled to the empty but deadly throne, they flocked back to the palace grounds as if magnetically drawn there. Days



into their chaotic proceedings, a peculiar creature appeared in their midst: the featureless outline of a child, wrapped in a heavy cloak that may have been a tapestry from the palace. (“What nerve!” the noble ladies tittered amongst themselves. “What, is the palace now infested with beggars and brigands?”) Her presence filled them with a cold dread even before she spoke. She staked the same claim they all had but did not act upon for their own self-preservation.

No one could sit on the throne lest they burn themselves and follow their last ruler to the grave. No one even ventured to enter the palace, the light of which was visible from miles away. Instead, the flustered nobles camped around the palace gardener’s house, which was comparatively dark. Leave it to some desperate and disrespectful urchin to take up residence there. However, the otherworldly girl’s unusual proclamation drew the curious, the perplexed, and the scornful to the deserted palace.

The throne room was packed, a squished mess of drenched gowns, too-tight collars, and warring, stabbing, ineffectual umbrellas. Fans and handkerchiefs were in every hand. The nobles’ own personal shadows huddled close to their owners, cowering about their legs. Tensions were high and very tightly wound, and there were some who may have been stabbed on purpose.

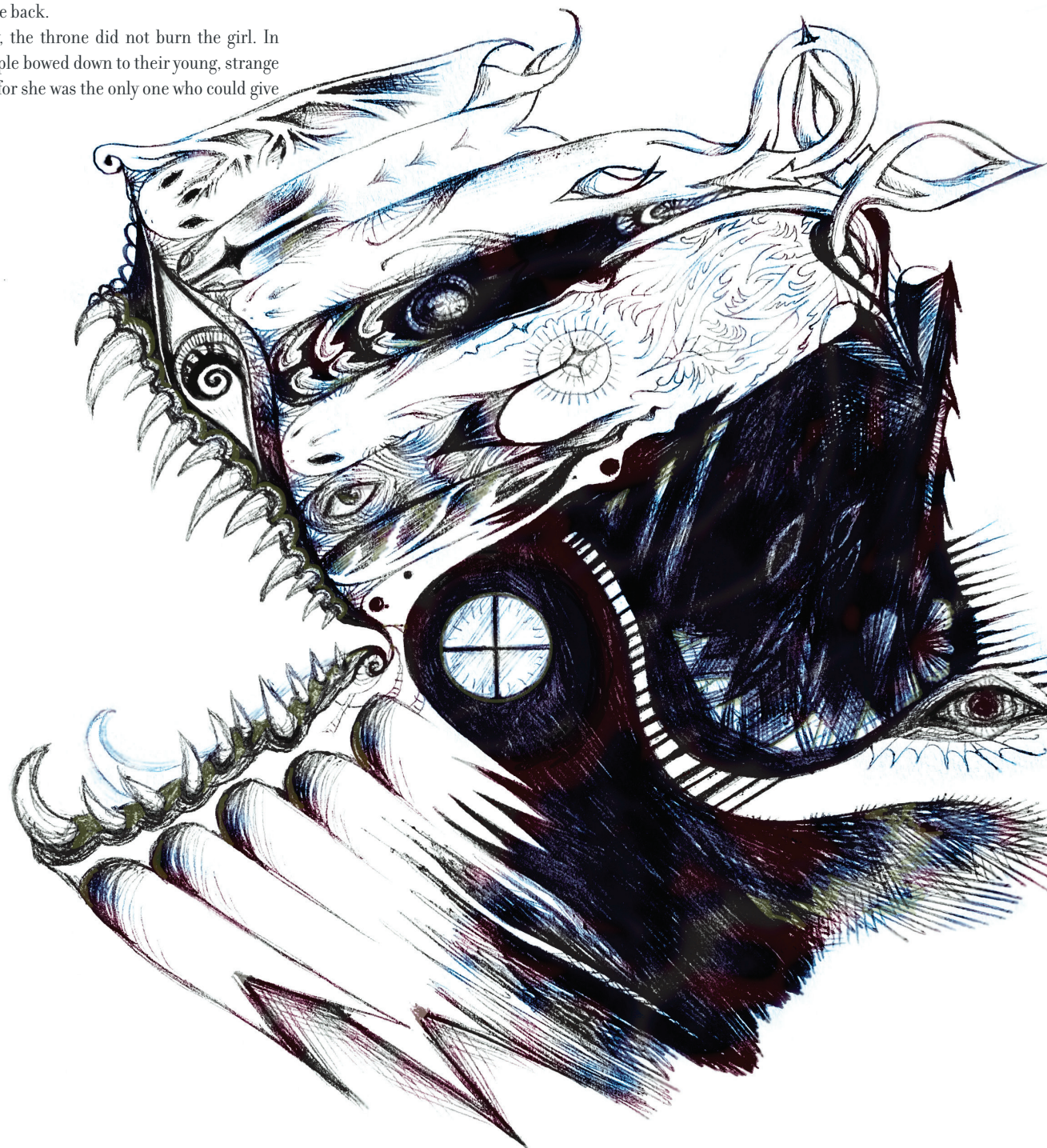
Just then, those in front saw something worth really whispering about, and so those in the back craned their necks, fans aflutter in the tyrant heat. There stood the girl at the front of the room, a little dark blot of writhing rage in that large, resplendent chamber. She turned,

walked the remaining length to the sun-bright throne and sat down.

Shouts and exclamations filled the room, banging around the echoing ceiling and tangling in the luminous chandelier crystals. “Hey! Make way—I can’t see!” ordered a countess from the back.

Shrouded as she was in shadow, the throne did not burn the girl. In disarray with no other option, the people bowed down to their young, strange ruler. They all got down and kneeled, for she was the only one who could give them darkness.

A new order had begun.





# Microns

ATYSSÉ GRINDULO



# 'O Lili'uokalani

KALIE KAHIUE-PAOPAO

'O ke ali 'i  
(Monarch)  
Ma hea i nā kanaka  
(Here are the people)  
Kū i ka mauna,  
(Standing tall, like a mountain)

'O ke ali 'i  
(Monarch)  
Kūkulu nā kanaka  
(The people grow)  
I kou kukui  
(In your light)

'O ke ali 'i  
(Monarch)  
Haāheo nā pōe  
(Proud are the people)  
No me iā 'oe.  
(For you)

'O ke ali 'i,  
(Monarch)  
'O wau 'o kou inoa?  
(What is your name?)  
He aha iā 'oe?  
(Do you know?)

'O kou inoa,  
(Your name)  
Mele e pili ana 'oe.  
(Songs are sung about you)  
'O ke ali 'i  
(Monarch)

He ali 'i nui,  
(You are a great monarch)  
'Alaka 'i i nā pōe  
(You lead the people)  
Ma ka wā ma mua,  
(To the future)

'O ke ali 'i,  
(Monarch)  
E hōomana'o au,  
(I will remember)  
I kou inoa.  
(Your name)

'O ke ali 'i  
(Monarch)  
Lili'uokalani,  
He inoa no.  
(Is your name)



# "Thank You"

TRINITY DELACRUZ

i press them into your skin  
wrap them in cloth and leave them on your doorstep  
i hang them in the air for when you are not there  
and i stay, even when you don't deserve it  
i run my lips dry with words  
but excessive gratitude does not make you stay

the gods gaze upon my actions  
and wonder what infinite entity i worship on bruised and battered knees  
they wonder what heartless being abandons my prayers  
and feel pity as i break my bones for this mysterious almighty  
but they do not know it is you

you bear the time limit  
you bear the due date  
you bear my soul  
leave the earth, for there is no other way  
you could rid of me

MUSIC  
MADY ENDO





# Sex Versus Intimacy

CARLA CAMILOTTI

It's a warm winter day in Southern California and the nearly 900 Whittier College students are in the middle of finals week. The campus is calm but the constant hum of the rush of cars, on busy Painter Avenue, is interrupted by birds singing and people laughing while taking a break from studying. Some students are sitting at a table in the courtyard near the Campus Inn; some are relaxed, others worried, or angry. They are connected through being a college student, but each has their own lives to tend to outside of class: work, fun, love, sadness, and, yes, sex.

That last word somehow seems taboo. Studies indicate that about 70 percent of college students are sexually active, to some degree. The subject of sex is even the focus of a popular comedy show on MAX: *The Sex Lives of College Girls*. The show follows four college students as they navigate their academic and social lives, experiencing the ups and downs of sexual relations and politics. Many viewers like the show because it's funny, but also because it's relatable.

Students arrive at college

at a unique time in their lives. Their minds and bodies are going through rapid changes coupled with the fact that they are starting to individuate—that is, figure out who they are and what they want, including sexually. “At age 18, we are fully sexually developed. That’s when our parents are not around as much and we start learning about our desires and our envies,” explains Chuck Hill, a Psychology professor at Whittier College. You can’t miss him: he is the tallest (and nicest) professor on campus.

Of course, some students arriving at college might have already experienced sexual activities or intimate relationships, while others are waiting for the right time. It may seem like “everybody’s doing it,” but a broad study conducted by the University of Michigan’s student newspaper, *The Michigan Daily*, paints a different picture. About 38 percent, or more than 3,000 students, responding to a survey had not had sex over the course of an entire semester. Only a small percentage were having sex regularly.

In other words, there’s no rush, even if you’ve felt pressured—as most of us have at some point in our lives—to have sex. Lucy Corcoran, a 20-year-old Psychology major, remembers that feeling. “I felt pressured in high school because all of my friends started to have sex, so I felt like I needed to be at their level,” she recalls.

Hill says students are vulnerable to a lot of pressure from the media. “There is so much in the media. It’s always about who is the prettiest or the most popular. It puts all these expectations on you, and if you don’t satisfy them, then they think, ‘What’s wrong with you?’” Hill states.

When we do feel ready, either alone or with a partner, we start experiencing new sensations and emotions: passion, love, desire, excitement, and most of all, pleasure. The body is wired to seek those sensations—they can be exciting and fun—and college students are no exception. Despite the sexual awakenings most experience during adolescence, simple gratification isn’t all we seek. Casual sex is fine for some people, but we often develop emotional attachments with sexual partners, especially ones we like. “Friends with benefits” sounds easy, but it usually ends up

with one person being more attached than the other. “When we orgasm, our bodies release oxytocin, which then causes you to feel more attached to the person you felt this pleasure with,” says Professor Hill.

There is a reason why individuals who started as friends with benefits often don’t end up as friends, or with benefits. “When asked why people were no longer friends with benefits, the commonly endorsed answers were that they didn’t communicate enough in the beginning and that they wanted different things from the relationship than their partner did,” writes Justin J. Lehmiller, a sex educator, author, and researcher at the Kinsey Institute.

This is another way of saying that intimacy is often what we are seeking from sex and vice versa. “In my opinion, intimacy is way more important than just having a sexual connection,” says Sonali Ortiz-Casillas, a 20-year-old Psychology major with a minor in Philosophy. “I think that having a sexual connection with your partner is important; having an intimate one is beyond that.”

Jacob Ben-Shmuel, a 21-year-old Music major, adds, “I will only be intimate with someone I know and can trust. I’m very guarded and I will tend to avoid sexual relationships if there is nothing behind them [...] In my opinion, intimacy is way more important than just having a sexual connection.”

Intimacy grows upon familiarity and friendship. It may seem like it, but sex isn’t always a shortcut to intimacy. “You don’t have much in common with people you met at a bar and had a one-night stand with, except alcohol,” says Hill. “With your friends, you have way more in common; that’s why you get along so well and feel more comfortable with them.” Being comfortable with someone opens up the possibilities for intimacy, including sexual intimacy.

When there is intimacy involved in sex, “It makes me feel so much more connected,” says Corcoran. “I think that it is a beautiful moment to share. You feel all these different emotions: passion, love, and euphoria. It’s almost like there are millions of fireworks around you.”

As humans, we want to be loved. Most of us want to have an intimate connection with someone. “Of course, if sexual activities are involved it is even better because our bodies get what they desire,” says Hill.



# THE VOW

OGHENFRANZO EZEKIEL NAKIZERU





# SUPERPOSITION

INEZ LOGAN

Given 2 waves that meet at a position  $x$ ,  
for somewhere between zero and a few million seconds,  
assume that all physical laws are negligible,  
and observe the aftermath of their interference.

I.

A few million seconds is *such* a short time.  
Several million seconds *too* short  
to spend at such beautiful heights.

Desperate to rend the mathematical scripture  
to learn how to drive through the universe, in reverse,  
to reach heaven once more

Simple to say, “Easy come, easy go,”  
When you’re the one who decides fate.  
Do you realize you have that power?

I would rather cease this instant  
than continue on the path  
Knowing every future construct  
could extinguish so quickly.

I continue without instruction  
in spite of the pain of descent  
Crest, trough, onward, without.

Your next construction is an ideal  
Destined to fail  
As long as you continue down your path  
And I down mine.

The mark from their brief intersection shall be inscribed,  
if not through arbitrary measurement,  
within the objective history of all that was and all that ever will be.

II.

A few million seconds is *such* a short time.  
Why care if we have so many chances  
to construct and destruct ad infinitum.

I’ve already destroyed us beyond measure.  
Maturity is Moving On.  
Only the foolish look back and scrutinize.

That’s just the way life goes isn’t it?  
We are all transient figures to each other.  
All wounds we enact will heal with time.

And yet, miraculously, you continue  
just like I said you would  
and knew you would  
and secretly feared you wouldn’t

But you’re growing beyond me now.  
No longer constricted by me.  
So don’t burden *me* about *us*.

A more perfect construction is out there.  
No need to waste time with compromise.  
I know what’s best for you and I.

# The Crease Between Her Brow

MEYLINA TRAN

Margot had never stopped to consider that she should be skeptical of Alice.

“Stay away from that one.” Grandmother hissed in her ear almost two months ago, narrowed eyes trained on the crowded, laughing figure at the other end of the chapel’s reception hall. Her grandmother’s nails dug into the soft skin of Margot’s bicep. She bit back a wince. “She’s trouble,” her grandmother added, “I can tell.”

Margot’s grandmother was a smart, astute woman with an intuition so keen that some in the tenement whispered of witchcraft like in the 17th century. These accusations, however, were kept behind locked doors and cupped hands. Grandmother was the bloodhound that every tenant feared; she had a knack for sniffing out ghastly rumors and pointed fingers—especially if those rumors and fingers were aimed at her iron back.

Grandmother was the sole owner of the tenement and had zero qualms about issuing immediate eviction notices whenever it fit her fancy. Once, when Margot was eleven, she watched from the landing above as her grandmother unceremoniously—and rather callously—emptied out apartment 3C. At the time, it had belonged to Mr. Monroe, the rich old bachelor who would sneak bags of jelly beans to the tenant kids when their parents weren’t looking. As Grandmother dumped velvet armchairs and golden candelabras onto the third-floor landing, the old bachelor yelled up a storm. “I swear to God,” he shouted, “I’ll call the cops!”

Grandmother had shut him up by calling the police herself. Mr. Monroe had vanished by the time the cops came thundering up the stairs, demanding to know what the problem was. “He’s trouble. I always knew he was trouble!” Grandmother had squealed. “And the way he was always hanging around the children...” She wrung her hands at that, her face pinching with something Margot hadn’t been able to discern. “I should have thrown him out long ago,” Grandmother concluded with a huff.

The cops had believed Grandmother’s incessant raving, as had the other peeking, nosy tenants—all of whom were quick to claim whatever discarded trinket or talisman from Mr. Monroe’s stash caught their eye. But Margot knew the truth of the matter: Grandmother had knocked shoulders with the young man Mr. Monroe had brought home the night before while passing on the stairs that morning. Margot had to listen to her grandmother’s rant about the incident for hours.

A week after the eviction incident, the cops had knocked on their

door just after breakfast to inform Grandmother that they had arrested Mr. Monroe for solicitation. “He won’t be a problem any longer, ma’am,” the officer had sworn solemnly.

Once the police officers had driven off, Grandmother had crowed with delight. “What did I tell you, Margot? Hm? I’m always right, aren’t I?” she cried.

Margot could only nod and agree.

Now, though, hidden underneath sun-bleached sheets with Alice’s fingers running idly through her hair, Margot wasn’t so sure. She tried to heed her grandmother’s warnings, but she found it impossible to stay away. They shared too many classes, frequented the same shops and restaurants, and had the same annoying habit of whiling away the nighttime hours beside an open window.

At night, when the rest of the tenement was heavy with sleep, and even the prowling dogs had hunkered down for the night, Alice would make faces at her from across the way. She had a talent for screwing up her face and waving her brows. The nightly performances reminded Margot of the Charlie Chaplin films her grandmother loved to watch, and it wasn’t long before Margot was stifling her laughter behind her hand. Her cheeks would ache with



how wide she was smiling, and even when she finally laid down to sleep, Alice's face stayed etched in her mind. Her laugh, especially, echoed in her eardrums; the sharpness of the initial outburst, and the breathiness that followed suit. She heard it clearly in her dreams and knew from whom it came from. Alice's laugh was unreplicable.

A week after Grandmother had warned her away from Alice, Margot began seeing her everywhere. What began as fleeting glimpses of her honey-golden hair at the end of the hallway or disappearing around a corner led to innocuous meetings at the back of the library, hidden in the stacks from prying eyes. Their books were open and spread out to preserve the illusion that they had been studying when in fact they spent hours giggling to each other, their faces inches apart.

The warm afternoon teetered on the edge of unbearable, especially tucked underneath the sheets with Alice, but Margot would rather pinch herself than disturb this peace. Alice's eyes were closed and her face relaxed, on the verge of sleep, save for the slight crease between her brows. Muscle memory had Margot smoothing the crease with her thumb. She couldn't be bothered to wonder when that simple action had become second nature because Alice hummed in contentment and leaned closer at the touch of skin. Her fingers scratched lightly at Margot's scalp, and she had to bite her lip to suppress a shiver.

There was something about Alice that lit Margot's nerve endings on fire. Her touch was electric, making Margot become overly

sensitive. Oftentimes, whenever they were lounging around, Margot would hold her breath, embarrassed by the shivers that constantly ran down her spine or the goosebumps that immediately rose in the wake of Alice's fingers leisurely drifting across the long expanse of her skin. If Alice minded the stiffness or the breathlessness, she never said anything.

"You're looking at me funny," Alice mumbled, "Stop it."

Margot shoved at her shoulder lightly, giggling. "How would you know? Your eyes are closed," she pointed out.

As if in retaliation or to prove a point, Alice opened her eyes, revealing the entirety of roiling oceans behind long, dark lashes. "No, they aren't," she snipped back. Her fingers in Margot's hair tightened slightly, but Margot responded anyway, tilting her head up until their faces were inches apart.

Alice had eyes that stripped everything bare. Her gaze, when focused, lured Margot into coaxing her overabundance of secrets to spill out into the space between them. Like the shivers, Margot fought in vain to swallow it all down. She didn't want to vomit all over whatever it was they had tucked underneath sheets or behind closed doors. It was too delicate, too fragile to handle the weight of everything Margot kept inside of her. It was too beautiful to stain irreparably.

"What are you thinking about?" Alice whispered. Her free hand surreptitiously slid underneath the thin fabric of Margot's T-shirt, rough fingertips gently caressing the skin of her waist. Margot bit the inside of her cheek. The trick just worked, but only barely.

Margot shook her head. "Nothing. It's nothing," she murmured.

The crease between Alice's brow returned. This time Margot dug her fingernails into the fleshy part of her palm instead of smoothing the crease away. "I don't believe you," Alice said simply.

Margot hadn't been thinking about anything in particular, but suddenly, as if a freight train had hit her, as if a fog had lifted, she remembered Mr. Monroe, the old bachelor from apartment 3C. She didn't know what it was that brought him to mind. She hadn't thought about the kind old bachelor in years.

"Hey, hey," Alice muttered, shifting slightly to prop herself up. The movement withdrew her fingers from Margot's hair—she wanted to nudge up and chase the feeling—but it also dislodged the sheet from where they had securely tucked it under the pillows. A gust of fresh air washed over them, and Margot felt something dislodge in her chest. "What's going on? Your nose went all funny," Alice said. She ran the pad of her pointer finger down the bridge of Margot's nose, smoothing the funny crease that had appeared.

Alice brushed her fingers against the skin of her under eye, and Margot realized she was crying. "Maggie, baby, what's wrong?" Alice asked, confused and frantic.

"I don't know," Margot whispered. But she knew; she just didn't know how to say it without hearing her grandmother's voice. Grandmother was loud and demanding when she wanted to be, and Margot had spent hours—more than she could reasonably count—listening to the old woman's maniacal rants and holier-than-thou raves.

During silent meals, Margot would peek through her lashes to find her grandmother studying her with tight lips and narrowed eyes. Even when

caught, Grandmother would maintain her stare until Margot squirmed in her seat with discomfort, until the unsettling feeling of being utterly exposed sank deep into her bones. It was inescapable. The silent examination—or rather, interrogation—happened nightly, and Margot had never understood why.

"My grandmother once evicted a man because he was gay," Margot whispered. And just like that, everything she hadn't known she'd been keeping within her came flooding out, the dam breaking inside the safety of Alice's arms. "His name was Mr. Monroe, but we all called him the old bachelor because he was pushing fifty and unmarried. But we all knew why—even Grandmother—we just never said anything about it. It was the worst kept secret in the whole tenement."

When she was seven, Margot had visited Mr. Monroe's apartment to borrow three cups of flour. Grandmother had been baking a birthday cake for the childless widow in 4A.

At the door, Mr. Monroe smiled and ushered Margot into the apartment, procuring a packet of jelly beans before disappearing into the kitchen. While Mr. Monroe bustled around out of sight, Margot, chewing on her jelly beans one by one, inched further into the apartment, entranced by the shiny knick-knacks scattered about, the leather-bound books on the shelf, the rich Persian rug on the floor. Although quite cramped and cluttered, the apartment was bright and airy; the shutters had been thrown open, and the curtains pushed back. The sounds of the tenement drifted in through the window. The twins from 7D were playing soccer in the courtyard down below, the college student in 5A was serenading the neighbors with a sweet rendition of *Swan Lake*, and the newlywed couple in 2C's dog was barking incessantly, begging to be let out.

In her exploration, Margot discovered a wooden picture frame tucked behind half a dozen well-polished silver-plated frames. Boldly, Margot picked up the simple frame and studied the picture behind the glass. It was a black and white photo of two young men, their arms wrapped around each other. The pose, although casual at first glance, failed to cover up the possessiveness of the hold, the way their hands seemed to grip the other's clothes with a playful ferocity. Margot understood with certainty that one of the men—the man on the left, staring straight at the camera with bright eyes and a smile so wide and warm that it must have been painful—was Mr. Monroe. She didn't know who the other man was, but she recognized the sheer, unfiltered look of adoration in his gaze, directed entirely at Mr. Monroe. She knew it because it was the same look her father had shot at her mother when she wasn't looking. Margot hadn't seen that look since they passed the year before.

She wondered what happened to the other man. Where had he gone? She never asked Mr. Monroe, too embarrassed at being caught snooping through his things. Mr. Monroe, however, hadn't been upset. Instead, he had smiled and gently, albeit a little teasingly, reprimanded her for poking around before ushering her out of the door, but not before he pressed another pack of jelly beans into her hand, sending her off with a wink and another wide smile.

A slight pressure against the back of her skull—Alice's hand cupping the

curve—pulled her from the once foggy memory. The crease between her brow had returned, but this time, it was joined by pursed lips that tilted down into a frown. "Why did she evict him? If everyone knew..." she asked.

Margot found that she couldn't meet Alice's gaze anymore, something like shame curdling in her gut. Her eyes, Margot realized, were the same shade of blue as Mr. Monroe's. "I don't know. I guess she—I..." Margot's sentence petered off with uncertainty.

Alice's presence made her feel electric and brave, but she didn't feel especially brave at the moment. She felt like she was eleven years old again.

"Sometimes Mr. Monroe would bring people back to his place. Usually younger men that he met at the bar—the one on Quincy Avenue. And they weren't that much younger than him. I think the youngest was just about done with college, so he never..." Margot sighed, suddenly overwhelmed. Alice kissed her shoulder, urging her to continue.

"He was alone most of the time, I remember that. He didn't have any family nearby. They all lived in Ohio. And I don't think he had any friends, but he was really kind," she whispered. Her eyes stung. "He used to give us kids jelly beans he bought at the store. I don't know when he got the money because it didn't seem like he worked—he was always around, you know? But he was always very nice, and everyone liked him, even if they talked about him behind his back."

"What did they say?"

Margot swallowed. The tenants had always talked about Mr. Monroe, and it didn't stop even after he'd gone. No, the whispers had only

gotten louder, bolder. They had devolved into mean-spirited rumors about how he prowled the streets at night in search of a young boy to seduce, how all of the shiny trinkets everyone had pawned off for petty cash had actually been trophies, spoils from his conquests. None of it was true—he had always been sweet, and gentle, and quiet, and incredibly shy—but it had surrounded her, enveloped her until her memories became twisted to resemble their sinister gossip.

“A lot of things. I don’t know.” Margot shook her head clear of the tenement rats squeaking in her ears. They were just as bad as Grandmother. “Anyway, Mr. Monroe’s men were always gone before sunrise. It was a...rehearsed thing, I guess. But one day, I don’t know what happened—they probably slept in or something—but the man accidentally bumped into Grandmother on the stairs and...”

Her hands were shaking, and something unbearably heavy sat on her chest. Alice, still beside her, tightened her grip on her waist and anchor point, a lifeline. “Stop. You don’t have to—”

“She said that Mr. Monroe was shoving his lifestyle in everyone’s faces,” Margot spat out. She was crying again. “That sooner or later, he would start going after the boys in the tenement. After he left, she told everyone that he was a pervert. And everyone told everyone else, so now the whole city knows. Probably, I don’t know.”

Margot sniffed. She couldn’t breathe through her nose. “I don’t know what happened to him, but—” She let out a gasping breath, all of the grief she hadn’t known she’d been carrying flooding her mind. “He was

so kind,” Margot lamented, “he was always so kind. He didn’t deserve it.”

Alice wrapped her arms around Margot and tucked her face, wet with tears and screwed up with grief, into her neck because Grandmother, as sharp as she was, terrified Margot. Margot was seventeen, Grandmother was her only living relative, and Alice was still here.

Margot clung to Alice, afraid that a loose grip would allow Alice to slip between her fingers like sand and disappear. “It’s okay, baby,” Alice murmured into her hair. “It’ll be okay.”

Grandmother had told Margot to stay away from the charming girl standing at the other end of the chapel’s reception hall, to be skeptical. But Margot had never been nor ever could be skeptical of Alice. She was warm, kind, and beautiful. She made Margot feel brave even when it seemed impossible. She silenced the screeching voices that plagued Margot’s dreams and replaced them with soothing lullabies.

During dinner, when Grandmother was dissecting her, all Margot had to do was think about Alice—whose laughter sounded like wind chimes, whose eyes were blue like Mr. Monroe’s had been and hair as light as his in the photograph—and calm would wash over her.

Alice stroked Margot’s hair soothingly. “You really don’t know what happened to him?”

“He was arrested for solicitation a week later. That’s all I know. It’s probably not even true,” she replied ruefully. Margot rubbed her soaked face against the pillow, smearing snot and sweat all over the sheets. It was hotter now, stuffy under the sheets. She would lift the cover, but that meant facing reality, cutting the cord of sanctity that existed only here.

Through the open window, the sounds of the tenement kids playing hopscotch in the courtyard below drifted in. Their stomping feet echoed against the old stone, their laughter bright and completely unburdened. She wondered if that was why Mr. Monroe kept his shutters open, so that he could hear their joy.

Margot tilted her head up to look at Alice. She looked sad and worried, but most importantly, she looked serious, which was an expression Margot wasn’t familiar with. Her blue eyes were cloudy with everything she had learned, as well as everything she had gleaned from Margot’s silences, from everything Margot hadn’t said. Margot hadn’t said a lot.

Neither spoke, exhausted from the sudden onslaught of honesty and memory, the violent collision of past and present. Margot also knew that there was nothing either of them could say that would lessen the blow of what might come, of what would happen if Grandmother’s dinnertime dissections uncovered something. Silence, it seemed, was the best remedy for the time being.

She kissed Alice then. In that kiss, she apologized for burdening her with the memory of Mr. Monroe, for dragging her into Grandmother’s line of sight, for demanding her attention and giving her own in turn. She hoped it was enough, and she hoped, desperately, fearfully, that she would be worth it.

Alice, as if sensing her fears, kissed her back.



Don't Forget Me  
MELINA TRAN



# Exhibition

MACY MILLER



It's 2011 and you're 11 years old.

You push open the car door and step out into the crowded parking lot. Walking alongside your dad, you both head towards the crowded entrance of the MOCA in Downtown LA. You can feel the excitement emanating from the groups of people waiting outside. Their voices echo, their bodies shift around impatiently.

You fumble the brochure between your fingers as your dad explains what you're about to see.

"This is the first time street art has been shown in a major gallery in the U.S.," he says.

You don't know too much about street art until a couple nights before when you watched *Exit Through The Gift Shop*. It stirred something in you. Something about it makes you impatient, but in a good way. You want to create the way they do, you want to make your mark.

You step through the doors and are instantly hooked. You didn't know galleries could be like this: walls covered in pieces in different types of mediums, colors, and styles. Despite the chaos, the walls drip with meaning, leaving no room for boredom.

You twist and turn through the gallery until you find yourself lingering in front of one piece: a large square print with a thin white border, about the size of a small restaurant table. The print portrays a battle scene playing out in the city streets but instead of wreckage, the ground is littered with colorful flowers. A man stands out in the foreground. He is posed with his arm drawn back, ready to launch the bouquet of flowers as if it were a grenade. The bouquet barely slips over the edge of the white border while everything else remains tucked inside. The message is beautiful, simple yet complex at the same time, very much Banksy's style.

You see your Dad head towards the next room out of the corner of your eye. You know you should probably go follow before you lose him, but you're not ready to leave the piece behind. Who knows when you'll lay eyes on it again. But a few minutes later you snap out of the spell, turn on your heels, and speed-walk to catch up to him.

You're bummed the gallery came to an end. You wish the rooms formed an endless maze, a never ending flow of exciting new work. You love the way everything slips from your mind and all you can

think about is the art. It's that same feeling you get when you're sucked into a drawing and everything else in the world washes away. You didn't know museums could be like this; you're used to the boring school trips where someone has to explain to you why the art you're looking at is actually really important, despite having little to no knowledge of the history being referenced.

You and your Dad talk back and forth, excitedly recalling which pieces you thought were the best.

You hear the beep of his car and take a few more steps before swinging open the back door and letting your body collapse into the back seat, tired and content. Ideas begin to brew in the back of your mind, and all you can think about is getting home and whipping out all of your art supplies.

It's 2023 and you're 23 years old.

Your eyelids weigh ten times what they normally do. No matter how hard you try to keep them open your body quickly takes over and yanks them shut. You feel a red hot throbbing sensation throughout



your body, screaming at you. Your brain hugs your skull, begging you to lie down. The lack of sleep causes you to sweat. The individual lights from the cars in front of you start to turn into one big blur.

You slightly lift your head and glance up into the rear-view mirror.

Your tired eyes stare back at you until they disappear. Colors start to form out of the darkness, people start to come into view, you hear the start of a voice—

You wake up to the sound of a blaring horn. You are so sleep deprived your body sent you straight into REM. Your body pulses, making room for the adrenaline as it shoots through your bloodstream, alerting each and every organ. Your brain whirrs into action in a desperate attempt to figure out where you are and what is going on. You imagine thick gray smoke pouring from your ears, your brain starting to catch on fire and a repulsive burnt smell filling up the car, pressing against its windows.

*How long was I asleep? Couldn't have been more than a second right? I caught myself before I hit anything. This is so bad. I can't do this, this is so dangerous, I can't believe I let it get to this point again. I need to sleep more, I know I need to sleep more. Everyone tells me, every article says so, I just can't. I don't have the time. Sleep is such a waste of—*

A bright flash of white light steals your attention from the road. You glance down at your phone sitting in the little

space underneath the center console, rattling against the spare change beneath it. A reminder notification sits above a text from Mom telling you to get home safe. You can't see the whole reminder message but you read the word "DEADLINE." You look back down to hover your finger over your phone, then back to the road as you swipe up, moving the notification and pulling up Google Maps. You glance back down.

*Ten more minutes. That's nothing. I just have to get around this car, to the exit, only a couple turns and I'm home. Time feels thick and slow. I feel exhausted. I drank two cold brews and a CELSIUS today. How can I still be this tired? Maybe music will help.*

You press the power button, lighting up the console and resuming the hum of whatever you left playing on the radio. Station 95.5. You don't recognize the song but you don't care. You crank the volume dial until you feel the sound rumbling through your bones. You're stuck in grid-lock traffic, backed all the way up the 101.

Of course. Tonight is Thursday and there's a concert at the Hollywood Bowl. Bored and desperate to stay awake you reach down and trace your finger across the center of your steering wheel, writing your name. You trace your name in big round bubble letters. You add small swipes with your finger marking the highlights and making them appear 3D. The cars in front of you begin to move. You sit up straight, place both hands on the wheel and conjure every last bit of energy.

*Five minutes.*

You made it. You hear the beep of your slightly bruised, dark blue Kia Soul as you drag your half-asleep body across the parking lot.

In a hurry to get inside, you impatiently twist your body around the corner, rush up two flights of stairs and head towards your door, key ready in your hand. As you step through the door and toss your bag on the table you feel an instant rush of energy.

*Finally. Wow I did it. Man, I gotta stop doing that. What now? More caffeine and then we get to work.*

**T**wo months ago you received an email from a local art gallery, La Luz De Jesus:

*"We are writing to let you know that your proposal has been accepted for the Little Bit of Everything exhibit. Thank you for your submission, please have your piece delivered to the gallery and ready to hang no later than November 30th."*

The gallery is tucked behind the huge gift shop, Wacko, you've been going to since you were a kid. They sell everything you could imagine: socks that look like a shark is biting off your leg, Moroccan string lights, weed-shaped ice cube trays, fake cockroaches, Guatemalan handbags, kaleidoscopes, Frida Kahlo stickers,

lollipops with a scorpion in them, books of 1000 tiny tattoo ideas, lava lamps, and even taxidermy bats.

*This is your chance.*

But it's November 25th and time is slipping through your fingers.

You swing open the fridge door and without looking grab a yellow Red Bull. You pop the tab open, chug half the can, and drop your weight into a worn-in black leather chair sitting on wheels. Your mouth stings from the carbonation and tastes like orange and mango. You missed that flavor.

You mindlessly kick your foot off the ground and send yourself into a 360 degree swivel, spinning past the light gray, purple walls covered with paintings and drawings, shelves filled with knick knacks, the messy desk covered in paper scraps, and your cat sleeping peacefully in his cat tree. You touch your foot back to the ground and stop the chair. You stop to face her, awkwardly staring at you from the back wall.

Your masterpiece. Your magnum opus. Your life's work. Your blank canvas. Raw, stark white, bumpy skin that begs to be sanded down. Her surface area lays blank with nothing but the ghost of a sketch: a thin pencil line in the shape of a big flower. Markings of an old idea you had back when you first met her. You don't like the way she stands out in the room, calling attention to herself for the wrong reasons. Her emptiness contrasts against the back wall, a wall that suffocates from the lack of white space behind a coat of paintings, drawings and a few mounted sculptures reaching from top to bottom.

"What do you want from me?" you ask her

She stares back at you impatiently.

Suddenly you're struck with an idea.

You eagerly jump from your chair, sending it spinning behind you as you rummage through your collection of art supplies. You plant your feet outside the closet, pulling down bags, boxes, and containers until you're satisfied with the options: boxes, bags, pouches, containers, jars, and bins filled to the brim. Stickers, wire, magazine cutouts, glitter, duct tape, yarn—lots of yarn—a glue gun, crochet hooks, construction paper, painter's tape, fabric scraps, and whatever else lies hidden in the mess.

*Maybe if I start by framing the piece...well I don't know. Actually, yeah maybe once it's framed I'll know what should go inside.*

You find a spot on the floor next to the canvas and sit with your legs criss crossed, beginning to create your border. You grab a 5 millimeter size crochet hook and two skeins of yarn, one dark blue and one light blue. You pull up a loop and reach through with your hook, grabbing the yarn and pulling it towards yourself, successfully securing the first stitch. After repeating this for a while you hold your progress above your head. You run your figures across the fabric,

feeling the somewhat rough, but not off-putting texture of the thick dark blue yarn. You like the way it contrasts with the smooth silky light blue yarn it's woven into. You observe the stitches, excited to see something coming together. The limp, lifeless body you started with now has structure.

You tap the screen of your phone sitting next to your knee. It lights up to tell you the time: it's already 1:30 a.m.

*How does time move so quickly?*

You stand up and hold the crochet border up to her sides to see how it looks so far. The second your fingers touch her skin she pushes you away hard. Frustrated, you sit back down on the floor. Your frustration reignites your exhaustion and your eyelids begin to droop. Your head drifts closer to the ground until you find yourself curled up in a fetal position with your head resting on the crochet border now scrunched up into a makeshift pillow.

**Y**ou open your eyes and look up but she isn't there anymore. Nothing is.

Your eyes begin adjusting to the dark and a few outlines start to appear. You are in the exact center of what seems to be a vast empty room. Smooth monochromatic stone tiles bleed across the floor, up the walls, and coat the ceiling. The gray color dominates, interrupted only by the thin strips of white where the tiles are pressed together. You're overwhelmed by the smell,



there's something sterile about it, almost antiseptic. It conjures the memory of sitting in the waiting room at the hospital. Your body starts to shiver against the cold stone so you slowly pull yourself up onto your feet. You rub your arms and look around.

A sudden movement on the wall to your right catches your eye. You squint to get a better look, afraid to move from your spawn point. All of a sudden, a piece of the wall to the left opens up. You freeze. Your body is frozen but your mind starts to race. A white light beams through the newly opened space.

*Should I hide in a corner? Which corner? Should I lie flat on the ground? But what if they see me—there's nowhere to hide—*

Your thoughts are interrupted by a loud set of footsteps echoing throughout the room. You stand frozen in place and watch as a figure marches through the hole in the wall and into the light. Two more figures follow, the three of them walk in unison like soldiers. You watch as they march in a straight line to the other side of the room and make a sharp 90 degree turn and march forward in your direction.

*Do I bolt across the room and run through the entrance they come from? Will it close and lock me in there? Is it even safe?*

As the soldiers get closer you get a better look at their faces. They look like figurines with waxy and plastic-looking

features, their clothes and skin sharing that same dull gray color.

You exhale a sigh of relief, realizing they're not looking at you—either they can't see you or they don't care. As the figures reach the back wall, another doorway opens up. Your body begins to thaw and you find yourself following the figures through the entrance, tempted by curiosity.

The doorway stretches down a short hall with white walls and opens up into a white room in the shape of a cube, each wall about 15 feet wide and 15 feet tall. The room is empty except for three white sheets of cloth, one hanging on each wall. From the way the sheets hang, you can tell something lies beneath them.

You watch as the first figure—the one leading the other two—stops and turns its back to the third wall, standing a little to the right of the white sheet. The other two figures follow suit, each standing next to the white sheet of their corresponding wall. You stand there, watching and waiting for something to happen.

But the figures don't move. It's as if they're waiting with you.

Uncomfortable with the stillness, you take a step forward. The second you do it triggers an action, the first figure quickly reaching up and tearing down the sheet revealing what was hidden beneath it.

A light wooden frame surrounding a child-like drawing on graphing paper, the kind that breaks each page into a bunch of tiny squares. Each square in the bottom row is messily filled in with a light green crayon, its edges slightly drifting into the rows above it. One row above, directly in the middle, is another square colored in green. Sitting above the green is a 3 x 3 cluster of squares. The middle square is yellow and the four squares that touch its sides, top, and bottom are colored in with an orangish red. Before you can get a closer look you hear the sound of another sheet being ripped off of the wall.

You turn your head to the right and immediately tense up the second you lay your eyes on it. Your skin feels tight and sharp. It's your border, your crochet border, the same one you fell asleep on. Your border is now complete and stretches across a tall slender mirror hung on the wall. The mirror is covered in fog as if the room was cold. You hesitantly step forward, afraid but determined to seek more information. Standing directly in front of the mirror, you see it. Your name traced in bubble letters sits in the top left corner of the mirror, disrupting the fog. Before you have time to think you hear the last sheet torn off of the wall to your right.

Playing along, you step towards the last wall. It's her. You recognize her immediately even though she looks nothing like you remember. There's just something about her. You walk forward. She's draped in every color imaginable and coated in textures, full of depth and detail. There's so much to take in it begins to overwhelm you, but in a good way. Your eye is drawn to the bottom corner. You bend your knees and squat down to get a better look. There is a

stretch of bumpy black paint that looks like space with little white specks that appear to be stars.

*Is that salt? It looks like there's salt mixed into the paint.*

Without thinking you reach out and touch her. As your finger grazes across her skin she yelps, her cry bouncing off the walls and shattering into your ears. It is salt. You watch in horror as a small clump of black-tinted grains of salt fall to the floor, lying in stark contrast against the shiny white tile below you.

The place where your finger touched now lays bare, a big white spot against the black background, too big to be one of the little stars. Before you have time to figure out what to do you hear three voices echoing down the hall:

“RIGHT THIS WAY. WE JUST HAD THREE NEW PIECES DELIVERED.”

“OOH I CAN'T WAIT”

“WHO'S THE ARTIST?”

You don't recognize the voices, but you're too nervous to turn around and get a look at them. With what you can gather from their limited conversation they seem to be a couple led by some sort of art dealer.

You hear their footsteps as they enter the room, each step tickling your brain and heightening your anxiety. Uncomfortable, you look down at the floor and spot the grains of black salt again. Your heart tightens in your chest. You decide to step over it and cover as much as you can with your foot. You close your eyes, hoping they don't notice.

You gather the courage to turn your head and glance at the doorway. A group of six people burst through the entrance. You don't want them to notice you, but at the same time you're dying to figure out who they are and why they're here.

You steal a quick glance at their faces, only to realize that you don't recognize any of them. Still, there's something familiar about the figures, from their shapes and features to the way they move, you just can't quite figure out what it is.

The crowd spreads itself across the room, taking up the space and taking in the art. Just as you start to settle from the shock, you hear even more footsteps. Time seems to slow as rounds of people flow down the hall and into the room, joining the sea of strangers. The room is filled to the brim, overflowing with different types of people: some loud and obnoxious, some shy but suspicious, some cluelessly chaotic. They all start to blend together.

You look up to find more people coming down the hall despite there being no room for them left. We're packed tight like sardines, bumping up against each other. But for some reason they don't seem to care, they go on laughing, shouting, eating, hugging, kissing— one of them whips out a lighter and a cigarette. They've made themselves comfortable.

The air is tight and stale, reeking of whatever that one stranger is eating mixed with the smell of tobacco. You so desperately want to swim up to the top, pop your head through the ceiling and take in a big gulp of fresh air.

But you can't.

Still, with all of the absolute chaos surrounding you, all you can think of is her. You can't stop thinking about her. You need her. You look up at her. There is something endlessly satisfying about her composition, the colors, the movement, the detail, the feeling she evokes. She soothes you and keeps you on edge at the same time, impatiently trying to take in and understand all of her details. She pulls you close and keeps you still as the crowd sloshes about the room, each wave slowly wearing away the walls.

*This is the art I want to make. This is it. I wish I could take a snapshot and record it. Maybe I can take a picture or something. Take a picture, then get the hell out of here.*

You pat down your pockets feeling for your phone but it's not there. You look around the room, desperately searching for anything you could possibly use to record her state in hopes of replicating some version of it for yourself.

You take a deep breath and prepare to shout.

“DOES ANYONE HAVE A PEN?”

No one responds. It's as if you don't exist.

Anxious and frustrated, you pat down the sides of your



pants one more time. This time you feel something. You slip your hand into your pocket and pull out a black Sharpie.

*No way. Perfect.*

Too excited to consider how the pen appeared there, you violently scribble down notes onto the inside of your left arm. A small voice in the back of your head warns you this is too good to be true, but you push past it and keep scribbling. When you finally finish you take a deep breath and look back up.

Suddenly your stomach drops.

Something is off. You don't know how you know but you know. You catch something out of the corner of your eye and whip your head around. One of the strangers is running across the room, heading straight towards the first piece of art, the one with the child-like flower.

You're frozen in place, watching in horror as a man dressed in red slacks and a wrinkled white button down shirt lunges towards the frame. His long skinny arms easily reach up and out, ready to grasp the top of the frame and tear it down.

Your body melted and took action before you were even aware of it. You're running. You're shoving past the crowd of strangers, holding your breath and summoning all of your strength to create a path and push through.

You're close now, only a few feet from him. You reach out, ready to rip his arms off the wall, grab the painting; whatever it takes. Your brain is flooded with

thoughts screaming over each other. The second your hand touches his shoulder every person in the room evaporates.

You're alone.

After the shock wears off you turn around and observe the state of the room. The floor is littered with gum wrappers, cigarette butts, a wrinkled pamphlet, scraps of paper, crumpled up tissues, what looks like food splatter, muddy shoe prints, and a lump of gum-still wet from being chewed. The walls weren't safe either, they've been smeared with dirty fingerprints and little bits of graffiti, letters etched into the wall. The strangers left their marks.

You're relieved to have the space to yourself again. The silence leaves plenty of room for you to explore.

You walk back over to the third wall. You squat down and stare deeply at the white spot where you hurt her. With the sharpie still in your hand, you pull off the cap and push it onto the back of the marker. You take a moment to think. You then slowly reach up, sharpie in hand, ready to fix your mistake.

Suddenly a booming voice swallows you whole, wiping away the white room and everything in it. The voice is loud but it's tone is calm.

"Don't."

**Y**ou wake up in a sweat and immediately sit up. Your heart pounds against your ribcage, nearly ripping through your chest. You look down and stare blankly into the illegible mess of black ink smudged across your left arm.

*A pen. I need a pen.*

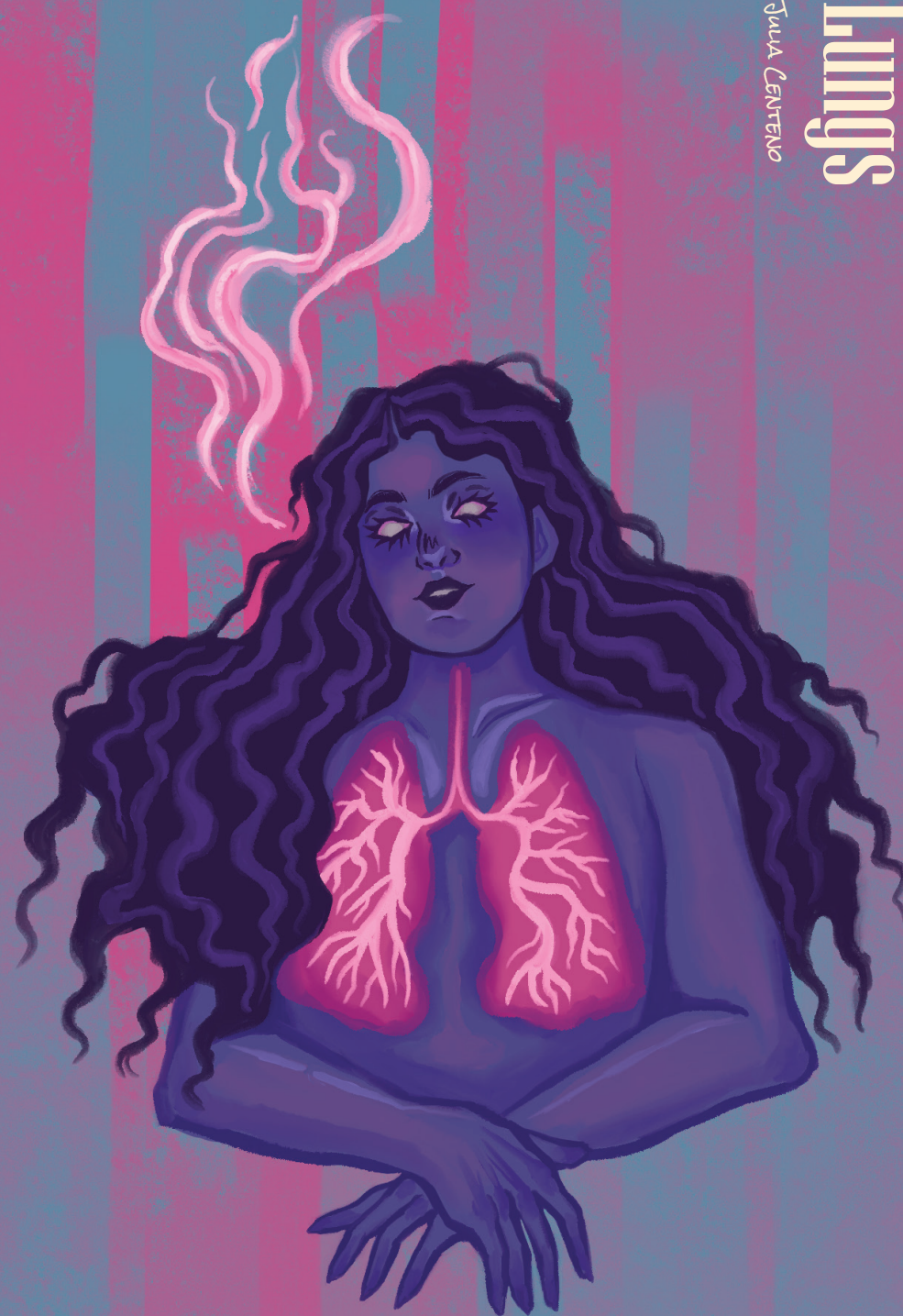
You look around the room, remembering the mess of art supplies you made before falling asleep. You spot one of your pencil bags across the room sitting on your desk, you know there's at least one pen in there.

You gather up the strength and start to push yourself off the floor, heading for your desk. Your legs cramp and a slight pain shoots through your neck—the consequences of falling asleep curled up on the floor.

You rub the back of your neck while you reach down and grab the black pencil bag with little blue triangles on it. You hastily unzip the bag and shake its contents onto your desk. You look down, grab the thick black Sharpie, spin on your heels, and head right towards her.

You start drawing without a second thought. It's as if your body knows better than your brain. She leans into you as your marker grazes across her skin, beginning to form an outline that resembles the underlying structure of what mesmerized you in your dream. After a few minutes you step back and take a look at your progress.

You inhale and exhale the biggest breath you've taken in a month.





# Family Jewels

NIA HURLEY

all my passwords are the  
same: they all share the strong  
J and wily W, the

upright E and stately L  
i don't protect things i hold  
dear. this password is my

great-grandmother's name, a hundred-year  
-old lady who i only met  
when i wasn't old enough

to understand, to witness this  
wizened woman who had lived lives  
and swam through worlds i

didn't understand, hospitals, coming-out balls  
hartford, where the wellses lived in  
WASP-y glory, wives who stay

then, almost a century later  
there was an asiatic lump, whose  
eyes twinkled with that wells

grit, that grandeur of old  
reborn in a lightning-struck bundle, waiting  
to claim her birthright, disaster

as a child i knew  
that i came from "good stock"  
but breeding isn't everything, it

can't save us from our ruin  
when i started to claim my  
crown of thorns and chaos

as was my own birthright,  
cemented by philandering wellses for  
centuries,  
i was castigated, my yearning

for the family way, for  
luxurious ruin, glorious hedonism, was  
wrong  
i had claimed my throne

yet i was told that  
the throne of my ancestors wasn't  
made for a body like

mine. so i relegate her  
to banks and emails and credit-cards  
that thorny old woman, memorialized

as dots and dashes on  
a glowing mechanized screen, her  
name  
the only thing standing between

me and my inevitable ruin

# With Love,

THEO STARZ GARDNER

As a child who was abandoned, I always put bandaids over wounds  
gushing with love  
I want so badly for people to see the love that pours from my scraped  
knees and elbows, cat scratches, and papercuts.  
I want them to see that I am hurt,  
to see that my hurt expresses itself through healing others the way I  
think I cannot heal myself

It is always bubbling up and spilling out of me  
From every orifice, is love

And I know the answer is:  
clean the wounds,  
reset the shattered bones,  
dress myself in gauze and therapy vocabulary

But the bone has already healed crooked,  
And I don't necessarily want to be broken again  
In order to heal correctly  
Yet it must be done, actively, continuously.

Now I'm waking up every morning, snapping my attitude into place.  
With Love,  
I tell myself  
With Love,  
for everyone, and if I believe that everyone is worthy of love I am no  
exception to the rule  
I can't quite say "I love you" to myself in the mirror without cringing  
but I can steel myself, and say

With Love,  
Theo



# Years Later

NIA HUTZLEY

i want to forget  
hazel eyes and a blue bedspread.  
memory is proof

time passes but yet,  
yet she lingers, lives in me:  
pale thighs and sunlight.

would it be better  
just to forget, erase her?  
self-sacrifice is

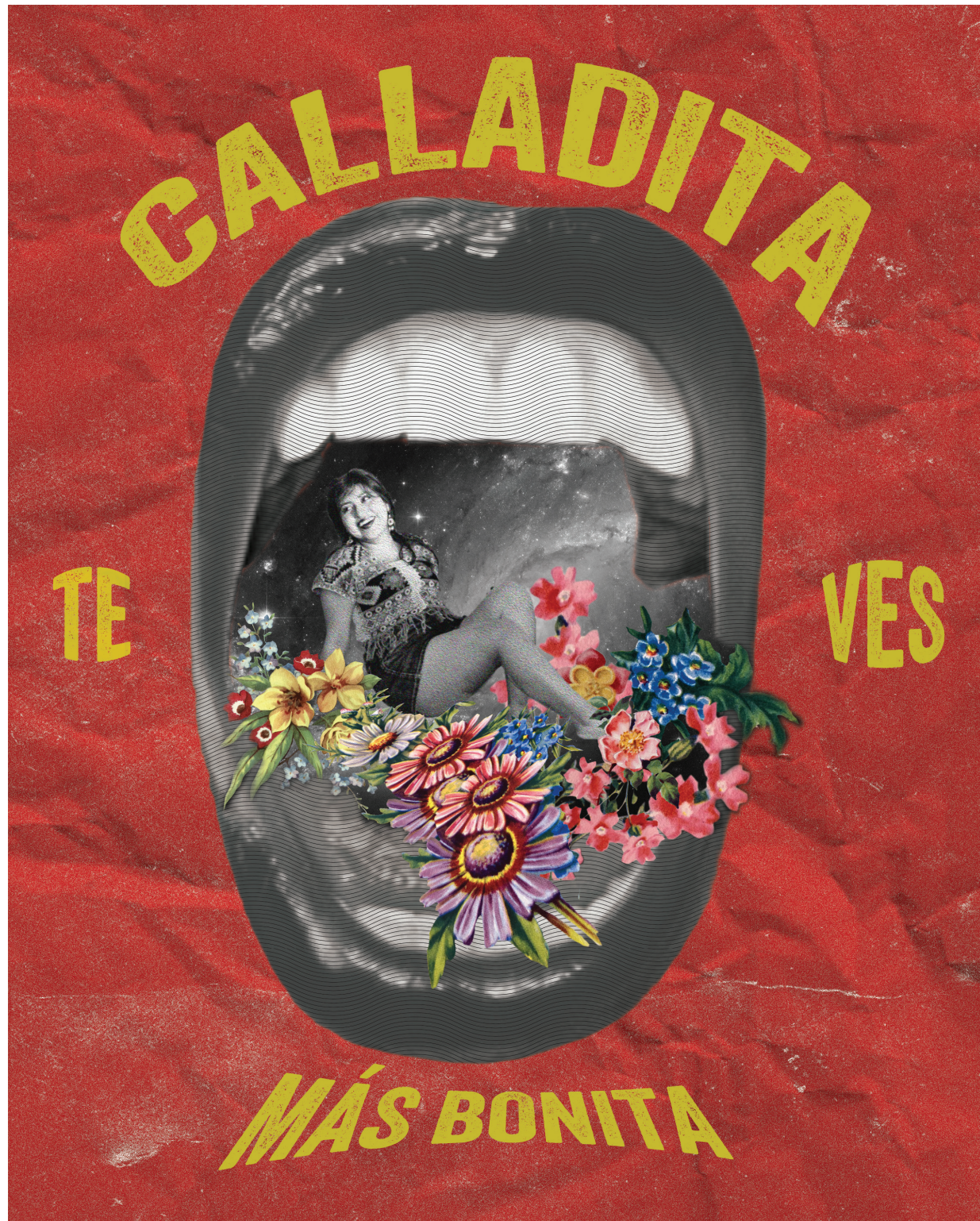
living for a girl  
who has the world in her palms  
and can't hold another drop.

i heard she thinks of  
me sometimes, just when it's dark;  
at night it gets worse

her best friend told me  
she talks about us like a  
forgotten legend

why did we have to  
crash into each other at  
weak sixteen and seventeen

not that i'm stronger  
now. I still remember it:  
golden hair and us



SHERRY SILVA

Bullficciosa



# Who Do You Think You Are? Who Do You Think I Am?

EMILY HENDERSON







# Vuelve A Mi

ALEXANDRA ORTEGA

Vuelve a mi en forma de mariposas  
or en rayos de sol that I become so  
grateful for in winter days

Vuelve a mi  
continue to fill my stubborn laugh lines

Vuelve a mi en forma de mi lengua hecha  
de dos mitades y costumbres que no  
pertenecen a este mundo

Niña de casa de Angeles no cree en  
Reencarnación  
Losing you would not be the biggest  
punishment  
Sería peor que no volvieras a mi



# Dominic & Clair

MEYUNA TZAN

TW: Suicidal ideation

Dominic sat submerged underwater, eyelids at half mast, mouth barely parted, until the bubble in his chest burst, deflating into a quick, searing sensation. He surged upwards, his head breaking the seal of smooth, calm water as he sucked in a deep, gasping breath. The water in the tub violently sloshed about, spilling over the rim of the acrylic tub. Soap suds melted against the linoleum floor. Even more streaked down the blue bath tiles, coating the painted doves in a crystalline sheen.

“Fifty-eight seconds.”

His older sister Clair sat sideways in the open doorway. The soles of her feet were planted against one side of the frame—her shins forming a flat surface just wide enough to balance an open spiral notebook and an uncapped ballpoint pen—effectively shoving her back into the sharp wood of the other side of the doorframe. She had a mechanical stopwatch clenched in her right hand, which she was staring at intently, eyes narrowed.

“You were close,” she mumbled, “I thought you were

going to make it.”

Dominic swiped his hand down his face before pinching his nostrils closed, blowing the excess snot and water out. Swishing his hand in the water, Dominic leaned over the bathtub’s edge and groped around for the soda can he had pushed away before the dive.

He tipped the can back and grimaced. Soapy water had fallen through the opening, tainting the drink and making it too bitter for him to ignore. Smacking his lips together and running his tongue across the roof of his mouth, Dominic tossed the contaminated can into the open trash can across from him.

Clair clicked her tongue. An absent-minded gesture; she was too focused on studying her notebook to recognize the tick. She had covered the page with a neat, precise grid of four columns—their labels alternating in pairs, “date” and “time”—and thirty rows. In total, Dominic had sixty-six opportunities to hold his breath underwater for two minutes.

This was trial forty-two. Fifty-eight seconds.

“Can you get me another Coke?” he asked, leaning back against the slant of the tub.

Clicking her tongue again, Clair replied, not pausing in her analysis, “Get it yourself.”

“I’m naked.”

“That’s not my problem.” Still, Clair set the notebook aside, planted her feet firmly on the ground, digging one socked heel into the bathroom linoleum and the other into the gray carpet of the hallway, and used the door frame to pull herself up. Once she disappeared from view, Dominic closed his eyes and let himself sink to the bottom. His knees—like two mountain peaks reaching above the clouds—chilled in the open air.

His chest hurt. His heart beat like a racehorse, faster and faster until the pounding was all he could feel. It rang in his ears like a gong, sharp, loud, and echoing in his ear drums. He released the breath that he was holding in one single burst, but he didn’t emerge. Despite the staccato hammering of his heart, the water was quiet and still.

Dominic didn’t much like performing all of these trials. He didn’t see it necessary to hold his breath underwater for two

minutes, and his attempts to expand his lung capacity clearly weren’t working. But Clair wanted to do it. Two months ago, in May, when she had flown back home for summer vacation, Clair had stood in the doorway of his bedroom and said, “Can you help me? I need to distract myself so I don’t end up killing myself.”

He hadn’t really known how to say no to her.

Two days before the New Year, at midnight, their mom found Clair standing in the kitchen with a chef’s knife gripped tightly in her trembling hand. Mom said that when she walked in, Clair hadn’t been crying, nor did she look afraid. “She looked a little confused,” Mom whispered to him the next night while Clair was in the shower, wiping her silent tears away with the sleeve of her sweater. “Like she couldn’t understand why her arm wasn’t moving.”

His lungs had just begun to ache for air when something small and heavy dropped like a stone in water. The weight of it sent the object’s curves slamming into his sternum. Jerking in surprise at the sudden intrusion, Dominic instinctively yelped, sucking in a lungful of bathwater. All at once, the alarm bells in his head burst to life, sending him up and out of the water, coughing, and hacking, hunched over his lap. Water sloshed back and forth against the acrylic, falling over the rim and drowning the painted doves.

“I told you not to drown yourself until I was in the room.”

Clair stood practically against the bathtub. Her back was to him, seemingly uncaring that her stunt had been the sole cause of his near-drowning. Still, her neck was bent forward, her chin resting lightly against her chest as she shuffled about in front of the bathtub. It resembled the strange mating dance of a bird that he had learned about in a documentary. He wanted to tell her to cut it out. It was weird.

Breathing heavily, Dominic scrubbed his hand down his face, clearing away the water that had gotten into his eyes and mouth before lowering his left hand into the already stilling water to retrieve the offending item. The red of the aluminum—vibrant and startling, as if mocking him for nearly dying—was apparent before he even pulled the soda can into the air. Beads of water trickled down the smooth sides. It was cool to the touch.

“There’s something deeply wrong with you,” Dominic replied flatly. He cracked open the soda can, his head lunging forward to catch the carbonated foam that immediately bubbled up and out of the opening. Cupping his right hand underneath the can, Dominic greedily slurped the fizzy drink. His nostrils protested at being suddenly bombarded with carbonation, but his throat accepted the cold liquid with relish.

“I’m not the one that tried to drown themselves,” was Clair’s witty reply. Her shuffling continued. However, Dominic noticed—only after peering over the edge of the bathtub—that she had thrown a large spotted beach towel on the floor and was currently walking

all over the top of it, awkwardly nudging it along to soak up all the bath water that Dominic had spilled. “Besides,” she continued, “you completely messed up the continuity of our tests. You know that was trial forty-three, right? What am I supposed to put down for your time?”

Dominic shrugged, “Nothing. Just pretend like it didn’t happen.”

“That’s not how this works,” she snapped. Still, without looking at him, Clair snatched the now-soaked towel off the floor and slammed it into the laundry hamper just outside the bathroom. The towel caught on the lip. Dominic could see half of the towel peeking limply from behind the door frame.

Clair stepped out of the bathroom again, stooping to shove the overhanging bit into the hamper before disappearing down the hall again. “Don’t drown yourself!” she yelled over her shoulder. Her voice echoed down the hall, the sound of her heavy footsteps reverberating across the empty house.

Dominic sipped his soda and slid down the tub until his chin hovered just above the water, which had gone still in the intervening minutes. He let his right arm dangle over the edge of the bathtub, his fingers loosely gripping the can. With his feet flat against the bottom of the tub, Dominic slid his legs up and down from the other end of the tub all the way to his ass. He stared at the methodical rise and fall of his knees as they rose above and sank below the soapy

bath water, unseeing but not quite thinking either.

The water had grown cold. Every inch of his skin was prickled with goosebumps.

**B**e nice to your sister from now on, please,” their mom had urged him.

“I think it would make her feel weirder if I was suddenly nice to her,” he replied.

Sometimes, when he let his mind wander, he thought about how his sister almost never made it to the new year. He wondered what Clair would have done in his situation. If she would have agreed to plunge herself underwater over and over again if he had asked her to. He wondered, privately, how he would have done it. If he would have plunged a knife into his gut the way Clair had planned to. Or if he would have opted for quieter, cleaner means. Pills, perhaps.

He thought about the wreckage, the total destruction crashing his car on the highway while going fifty over the limit would cause. How the front of the car would crumple like a soda can underneath a foot. How the gas tank would leak and the whole car would go up in flames, a great plume of smoke choking out the light of the moon. Miniscule shards of glass would litter the asphalt, and black streaks from his tires would map out his trajectory.

Dominic couldn't decide which plan was worse: his or Clair's.

Years ago, when Clair was in

high school and Dominic in middle school when their parents were still fighting—shouting, really, for the sake of being louder than the other—Clair would shove shoes onto his feet and drag him out of the house. “Let's go for a drive,” she would whisper. They would tiptoe out of the house and ease the doors closed, dashing hunched over to her battered old 2012 Volkswagen Jetta. Clair never switched on the headlights until the car rolled itself to the end of the street at the high point of the hill.

They would drive for hours, speeding down back roads and winding trails. On summer nights, Clair would roll down all four windows and let Dominic stick his head out of the window like a dog, her left hand on the steering wheel and her right hand gripping the back of his T-shirt. If she had gotten paid that week, she would take him out for ice cream at the outdoor parlor on the river. They would sit on the wooden patio with their cones of mint chocolate chip, and Clair listened while Dominic rattled off all that had happened that day.

Dominic loved driving with his sister. He was scared to drive alone.

**T**he sound of her voice shouting from down the hallway pulled him from his thoughts: “Okay, I figured it out! For the sake of scientific accuracy, I'm just going to note that that trial was void.” When he looked up, tearing his gaze away from the highpoint of his knees, he saw that Clair was standing in the doorway again, her eyes firmly locked onto his face. She was pulling her hair back into a ponytail. It had reached down to her waist when she left for school in January. Now, it hung just above her collarbones, curling upwards at the back against the nape of her neck.

Dominic didn't know when Clair had walked back into the room. He couldn't remember hearing her heavy footsteps pounding against the creaky floors or the sound of her knuckles lightly knocking against the thin walls.

She was still speaking. “So then we can just move on to trial forty-four. Unless you want to stop for the day. I mean, we've been doing this for, like, an hour.” She checked the watch on her left wrist. “Nope. Forty-five minutes. Do you want to stop?”

While Clair had been away at school, Dominic stopped sleeping through the night, too caught up in drafting over and over again his response to Clair's death. He would rehearse his lines to the audience in his ceiling, contorting his face into different expressions of grief to match the prophetic news that she had overdosed in her dorm room, rushed instinctively into oncoming traffic, or succeeded in jamming a knife into her gut. By the time he finished his rehearsals, the scene outside his window would be coated in the blue light of early morning. He would blink and his seven a.m. alarm would be blaring. He couldn't sleep when Clair was gone.

“What's keeping you up at night?” their mom would ask. She

would hold the back of her hand against his forehead, pushing his hair up as if he had been perpetually ill.

He hadn't known how to translate. *I can't sleep because I keep trying to imagine what I'll do when Clair is dead. When she kills herself. But I can't imagine it because I've never had to think about my sister being dead. Do you think she'll be there for my graduation?* Sluggish but irritated, Dominic had pulled his head away from her hand and mumbled instead, “Nothing. I'm probably just an insomniac.”

Clair was staring at him, her head tilted and slightly twisted to the side, the typical indication that she was waiting for a response, and rather impatiently at that. Dominic tilted his head back until his lips hovered just above the water's surface. “No,” he replied, “we can keep going.”

He expected Clair to shrug and resume her position as taskmaster. The open notebook sat discarded on the bathroom floor. At some point, it had been shoved against the far wall, sending the pages into disarray. Its neat columns and rows of data points, propped slightly against the wall, laughed at him.

“Get out of the tub.”

Dominic looked at Clair, sliding along the bathtub to sit up above the water. She clicked her tongue. Her hands were planted on her waist, her chin was tilted toward her neck, and her brow furrowed. He recognized that look. He had seen it before. It was the look Clair put on when she had come across a particularly difficult equation, stopping her in her tracks. It was the look she got when she was trying to figure him out when something he said didn't align with something he did.

“What?” he asked dumbly.

She jerked her head. “Get out of the tub,” she repeated before turning decidedly and walking out of the bathroom.

Dominic didn't move. His head was reeling, unsure of what Clair was asking of him. Get out of the tub? What about trial forty-four? “What?” he repeated, his voice dull with bewilderment.

“Get out of the fucking tub so we can go!” was Clair's response, which she shouted from—if Dominic had to guess—her bedroom.

As if his limbs were not his own and his muscles were not under his command, Dominic climbed to his feet and stepped out of the tub, water cascading down his body, flooding the floor once again. A sudden chill washed over him, and he shivered, goosebumps dotting his skin. Swiftly, Dominic pulled his green towel from the rack and wrapped it around his waist.

At that moment, Clair poked her head back into the bathroom. “Hurry up. Get dressed,” she said before disappearing again.

Dominic hurried after her, careful to keep one hand fisted in the fabric around his waist as he stumbled over his feet. “Where are we going?” he asked. He stood in the doorway of Clair's bedroom at the end of the hall. She was bending over in front of her vanity,

the top of which was covered with loose jewelry and makeup brushes. She was dabbing concealer under her eyes with her fingers, her mouth agape with concentration.

“What?” she asked, distracted.

“Where are we going?” he repeated.

She clicked her tongue. “I want ice cream,” she replied simply. Then she glanced at him. “You don't have to come if you don't want to,” she added.

Dominic shook his head quickly. “No. I'll come,” he said, “as long as you're paying.”

Clair flipped him off with the hand that wasn't rubbing concealer into her skin. “Get a job,” she snapped back. Then, wiping her fingers against the thighs of her jeans, Clair breezed past him. Their shoulders knocked against each other as she disappeared down the hall, her heavy footsteps more purposeful now that they had a clear destination. “Hurry up and get dressed, or I'm leaving without you!”

Dominic's body sprang to action. Dashing into his bedroom, he let his towel drop and snatched up the first T-shirt he could reach—a faded Johnny Cash T-shirt that Clair had found at a flea market in March—from the top of the pile beside his door. He shimmied into the shirt, the fabric stubbornly clinging to his skin. The jeans he had been wearing before were crumpled in a heap on top of his desk; he almost fell on his face trying to get into them, hopping around like a



madman.

“Dominic! I’m leaving!” Clair shouted.

“I’m coming!” he shouted back, shoving his feet into a pair of overturned sneakers before racing out of the room. He was halfway down the hallway, sprinting, before he suddenly flipped his trajectory, beelining towards the bathroom.

“Dominic!”

“One second!” He plunged his hand into the tepid bathwater and pulled the drain stopper. The remnants of trials thirty-eight to forty-four spiraled down the drain, but Dominic didn’t stay to watch. He bolted down the hall, past the empty foyer, and through the shut door—he hadn’t even heard Clair slam it shut.

She was already in the car, the windows rolled down, the engine purring, queuing up a variety of songs for their driving mix. No two mixes were ever the same. She was always very careful to avoid repeating mixes.

Dominic slid into the passenger seat, releasing a heavy breath once his back hit the leather. He had just shut the door before Clair threw the car into gear and peeled out of the driveway. Before, when Clair was still living at home, they would get noise complaints from the neighbors, who would look pointedly at the tire marks in front of their house.

With her hair whipping across her face and her left hand hanging out the window, Clair sang along to a song that was vaguely familiar to him, yet he

couldn’t quite place where he knew it from. Clair must have shown it to him a long time ago.

Still, Dominic bobbed his head to the beat of the song as his gaze swept across the landscape flying by. The bright blue sky was mottled with hues of pink and orange, the sun casting a golden sheen over the dense cropping of Douglas firs in the distance. The hills were green with summer, and he noted that the scene before him was the same as it was when he was fifteen, fourteen, and twelve. And his sister was right beside him, he never thought that would mean so much to him.

**A**lthough the ice cream parlor by the river was more dilapidated than he remembered it, the old woman behind the counter was just as sweet, and the mint chocolate chip just as sharp and refreshing.

Dominic and Clair sat at one of the picnic tables on the river’s edge, each straddling the bench to face the other. Melted ice cream streaked down the cone and pooled in the indent of the skin between his thumb and pointer finger. Dominic tilted his head to lick up the dripping, sticky mess. Clair clicked her tongue and held out a stack of napkins to him.

“Clean up. Jesus, what are you? Five?” she scoffed.

He stuck his tongue out at her while giving her the stink eye.

“Shut up,” he muttered.

Once he finished sopping up his mess, Dominic looked up to find Clair staring off in the distance, her waffle cone already bitten down to a nub. With the cool breeze of the river and the early evening sun streaming through the gaps of the swaying branches overhead, dappling her upturned face, Clair looked like she did a year ago. And yet, if he looked closer, she looked completely different: graver, stiller, and less prone to sudden outbursts of feeling.

He didn’t know when that change had occurred. He used to be able to read his sister like an open book. Now, it was like Clair had invented an entirely new language with which to rewrite herself. He didn’t like not being able to understand her.

Softly, almost whispering, Dominic asked, “You’re going to be at my graduation, right?”

When she looked at him, Dominic instinctively knew that she understood what he was asking of her because, unlike her, Dominic hadn’t rewritten himself in incomprehensible language. He was the same, if not slightly altered, struggling to teach himself a language, a completely singular dialect.

“Of course,” she said firmly, nodding. “I’ll be in the front row.”

Then Clair smiled at him widely, kindly, and Dominic knew that she wasn’t lying.





# Whittier College on Strike

SAGE AMDAHL





# Within Looking Without

LEAH GIBSON

The glass pane was not a holding cell  
It was the oculus from where I could see  
The feather wheat grass  
And blazing bougainvillea.

From where brush rabbits darted like pond minnows  
Dashing and reacting to slight ripples  
Ground squirrels scampered into labyrinth portals.

The office seat was not the electric chair  
It was the throne from where I could observe  
The hillside like a ruler  
Practicing false ownership over their dominion.

From where I could join the finches  
On their branches  
All in a row like teeth  
In the mouth of a yopo tree.

The separation of an indoor state was not divorce  
It was the hiatus an artist begrudgingly takes  
To cultivate inspiration, like a caretaker in her garden nursery  
And resume in the reunion of creation.

ASUNU BARTLEY  
**Dreamer**





# And Here I Am

MALIKA JIGSSA

Everyone experiences the feeling of helplessness at least once in their lifetime. The suffocation from the scrutiny of others weighing down on us. Our day-to-day routine becomes a tiresome task we no longer want to engage in. The mind spirals into a bottomless pit that may not be recovered from. That is exactly what happened to me in this story.

It was a random night over the summer in the beautiful city of Addis Ababa. Every student in Ethiopia is back from the excruciating National 12th Grade High School Leaving Matriculation Examination, also known as "The Matric." I was doing what every teenager does when they have nothing to do—stare at my phone. My grandmother called me to eat dinner in the dining room with the rest of my family. Eyes red with my messy hair, it was obvious that I was doing nothing but lazing around in my room the whole day. I thought I deserved it. I mean, it is THE Matric. I did not spend my precious 14 years in school to fail later in life, right?

I was focused on shoveling food into my mouth when my ears picked up one word. *Marriage*. I stopped everything that I was doing at that moment.

"Your sister is going to look beautiful in the gown I picked for her," my grandma said cheerfully.

I knew damned well I had no siblings. I am an only child. It dawned on me that the person in question was my younger cousin. I would appreciate it if you, reader, put emphasis on the word "younger."

I was eighteen at the time of the revelation.

"If Allah says so, you'll be the next one. I hope He shows it to me before I leave this Earth. I hope you find a good rich man." I heard some chuckles and mumbles from my uncles about how I cannot find a man with my nasty attitude. I guess asking for my basic needs is considered having an attitude.

Mystomach curled at that statement. I knew my grandmother didn't mean it maliciously. It is just the way she grew up, adding to the fact that it's the norm for a Muslim girl to marry young. I wouldn't blame her. What kills me is the fact that I can do better. I can be the rich man myself.

Everything clicked for me in that second. I needed to get out of there. But how? I had no money of my own. No athletic prowess to show off to some recruiters. I hadn't discovered the cure for cancer nor saved the world from hunger. I didn't realize the answer was right under my nose. Education. Extracurriculars. Good grades. Scholarship. Those were the words that kept going back and forth in my head.

School was a prison for most teenagers. It was a means of freedom for me.

A few weeks later, I graduated as a valedictorian from my high school.

A few months later, I traveled to the United States to pursue my higher education.

A few years later, hopefully, I will work in a high paying position pursuing my master's somewhere in Europe.

*"You educate a woman; you educate a generation."*

- Nelson Mandella



Sophie Fudin  
Guardian of San Francisco



# From Skateboards to Muscle Cars

SHELBY SILVA

Apollo Franco's thin, long fingers grip the leather steering wheel while the tires of his midnight-blue Ford Mustang screech, forming a cloud of smoke. Dozens of people, wearing black and white clothing and baseball caps, gather around the spinning sports cars while Nipsey Hussle's songs blast from the booming speakers. The energy is high and the temperature is low somewhere in Mid City Los Angeles on a Friday night, as the crescent moon shines on the glossy coats of the cars.

Franco's eyebrows furrow while he skims the open pavement to calculate his movement and space, the people inching closer to record it all on their phones. Just a few feet away from Franco's Mustang is Vincent Luna's obsidian Dodge Challenger, matching Franco's speed. Luna glances at the crowd and catches Franco with a bright smile revealing dimples on his cheeks. The clouds of smoke cast a veil around the parking lot, making it hard to discern the silhouettes of the crowd. The screams become rowdier when a white Camaro and a gray BMW pull up behind Franco and Luna, engines revving. Franco's green eyes glance at the rearview mirror and he smirks a bit while he mutters, "Fuckin' Tony and Benji."

Later, Franco's 2016 Mustang

V-6, Luna's 2014 Challenger SXT, Antonio (Tony) Guerrero's 2012 Camaro LS, and Benjamin (Benji) Castro's 2012 BMW 335s roll up next to a green Mexican food truck in Koreatown. After staying at the car meet for around an hour, they all decide to leave early when it gets too packed and rowdy. This is the first time they up from their leather seats after a couple of hours of being behind the wheel. They all dap each other up while talking about the car meet and staring at the menu.

Guerrero adjusts his black LA cap and says, "That dumbass in the white Toyota '86 was pissing me off man! He kept getting too close to every car." Luna chuckles, "Why do you think his shit is all fucked up from the sides?"

Luna starts to reminisce about the times they were teenagers skating around Koreatown. "Remember that one stand we used to always go to after skating a few blocks down from here? The quesadillas were fuckin' good."

"Remember when Tony ate shit trying to eat while jumping the stairs?" Franco comments after sipping on his horchata.

"Man, fuck you!" Guerrero says in between bites.

"Damn. That was a while ago, huh?" Castro says to them and they all nod in agreement.

"Good times, huh?" Luna asks.

"Good times and bad times," Franco responds while looking down the empty main road.

Franco and Luna are cousins who ended up living at each other's houses for some periods during their childhood. Luna and his mother, Sonya Flores, lived with Franco's family in a one-bedroom apartment in Koreatown when Luna was seven years old. Luna and Franco became close during that time when they would play *Super Mario Bros* on the Game Boy and *Street Fighter* on the PlayStation 2. Eventually, Luna and his mother moved out, but they would visit Franco's house often over the years. Luna and Franco would watch *Spider-Man* films, the *Dragon Ball* series, and scary films like *Paranormal Activity* while eating peach rings and Little Debbie treats.

When Luna reached his early teenage years, and Franco was a pre-teen, Luna brought Franco the film *Lords of Dogtown* to watch on his PSP. After they watched the film several times, they asked their mothers to buy them skateboards to learn how to skate. They watched skateboarding videos on YouTube to learn how to do tricks such as pop shove its, kickflips, backflips, and crooked grinds. Franco mentions, "It was cool seeing how many stairs I

could jump. I remember practicing every day."

"We would spend hours trying to increase the number of stairs we could jump over and we had lots of videos of our failures and successes," Luna adds.

The early 2010s was the time when skateboarding was at its peak for their generation. Teenagers started to grow out their hair. They would wear a lot of beanies and skating brands such as Vans, Nike SB, Emerica Baker, Girl, and Thrasher shoes and clothing. This was also around the time when the skating figure, Steven Fernandez, rose from the streets of Compton to fame in Los Angeles. He gained attention from skating brands, famous figures, and teenagers, especially girls. He became known as "Baby Scumbag" after partnering up with Dirty Ghetto Kids (DGK) and was also known as "Lil Cloud." He was associated with the brand Honey Co. and DGK gear. Some of the gear included the design of a Cup of Noodles or the face of Fernandez on a Tapatio bottle, because he liked eating that.

The skating community that watched videos of professionals like Paul Rodriguez on YouTube to improve were focused on growing their skills. It was a time when everybody wanted to be a skater, Guerrero and Castro included. The two grew up together, attending the same schools and pursuing the same interest. Castro says, "Tony and I would always play tag, soccer, basketball, and other games with some kids from the apartment in the parking lot and we suddenly started seeing a lot of skaters passing by the gates more often. We ended up watching some cool videos of guys skating on Instagram and we decided to give it a try."

Guerrero says that at the peak of the skating scene, local skate parks were always packed and it was rare for 10 minutes to pass by without seeing someone skating down the street. "We would bring our boards to school where they ended up becoming banned because the school hated skateboards, but we loved them," Guerrero recalls.

With Franco living in Echo Park, Guerrero and Castro living in East Hollywood, and Luna living in Koreatown, they were all bound to end up crossing paths while skating the city streets. They all eventually met at a spot near Staples Center where a spacious and usually empty flight of stairs attracted skaters from all over. "We ended up being chased by a few security guards who were fed up with skaters skating near there," Luna recalls, his smile revealing his dimples.

"We didn't know our way around downtown since it was sketchy as fuck, but we saw Tony and Castro who looked sure of where to go to lose the guards so we ended up following them," Franco adds.

"I remember thinking who the fuck were these guys following us, but we were more worried about the angry guards," Guerrero comments, letting out a goofy laugh.

Castro recalls, "When we were sure we lost them thanks to Tony, we ended up smoking weed together before eating Yoshinoya. Tony knew his way around these streets so he's always the person we follow when we are being chased. He even knew what buses and subways to take to go somewhere. He was hella rowdy, though, when people on the streets would insult us."

Franco chuckles before saying, "That shit was funny, especially when they would try to call the cops on us or chase us. Benji and Tony were cool

though because Benji would film videos of us and another homie of theirs back then would edit our videos."

"We still skate together or by ourselves, but not as much as we used to," Franco admits.

When they got their licenses and their first cars, they discovered a new level of independence that became part of their identity. Before Franco's parents separated, his father used to take him to American Muscle car shows and races when he was a kid. He used to cruise with Franco in his 1971 Chevrolet Camaro and blast rock n' roll music. In his childhood home, Franco had dozens of toy cars and there were models and pictures of American Muscle cars on the walls and cabinets. His dream car is a 1974 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am.

Castro grew up close with his uncle who was into the Lowrider culture popular in East Los Angeles and his uncle would take him on cruises and bounce on the streets. Both Guerrero and Luna mention that they were most likely influenced by the shows and films they would watch about racing cars. "I think many kids grow up liking toy cars and they like the idea of going fast. A movie that was also really cool to watch was *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*," Guerrero adds.

"Paul Walker was cool as fuck. The first few movies from the series were cool so that probably influenced us when we were younger, but we could never actually ride like them when we were younger," Luna says.

These young men no longer have long, shaggy hair and are no longer covered in fresh bruises and wounds. They all do, however, have a few scars on their



legs and arms that seem to be fading. Now, they have fresh fades, buzzcuts, clean clothes, and expensive shoes like Jordans that are taken care of to keep them looking new. Now, their mothers grip the handles on top of the windows and pray while they are in their sons' cars. "We don't need to go to any roller coasters when the scariest one is being in the same car as him," Flores says, laughing.

Something that has not changed is their smoking habits. The strong scent of weed in Franco's car is proof of that.

The guys are all gathered on the beige couches in Castro's childhood home in East Hollywood eating diced fruit that Castro's mom, Esmeralda Avila, serves them. They are talking about car crews and why, despite their love of car culture, they haven't joined one.

"I feel like they make their crew their whole life and we got other things going on. We still value education and financial stability, and we want to give back to our mothers and family, especially since many of us are the only male figures at home or are the eldest ones," explains Castro, eating a piece of mango. "This is fun, but we know we have to work for the future we want to have. We need to be focused and consistent with our goals."

Guerrero, holding a piece of melon, laughs and shakes his head. "We knew people who went to the takeovers on the Sixth Street bridge, but we've been arrested too many times, so we weren't tryna get caught. We have gotten a few speeding tickets and have gotten our cars taken away by the police, too."

"Shut the fuck up. You just ain't slick like that," Luna laughs before adding, "But, yeah, it's cool to race and you get that adrenaline rush that makes you feel like you're in an action movie you would watch growing up, but sometimes we take a step backward to ask if this is helping my future out."

"You're going to have to sell that Challenger for a minivan soon anyway, huh?" Guerrero asks the soon-to-be-father, Luna.

"I'll still beat you in a race with that minivan, you fucker," Luna responds to Guerrero, and they all have a good laugh.

Castro's six-year-old little brother, Xavier Castro, walks up to the coffee table the guys are sitting around and grabs a piece of mango in one hand while he holds two Hot Wheels cars in the other hand. Guerrero ruffles Xavier's hair and asks him, "You wanna race cars like us, too?"

"No, I wanna be a police," Xavier responds.

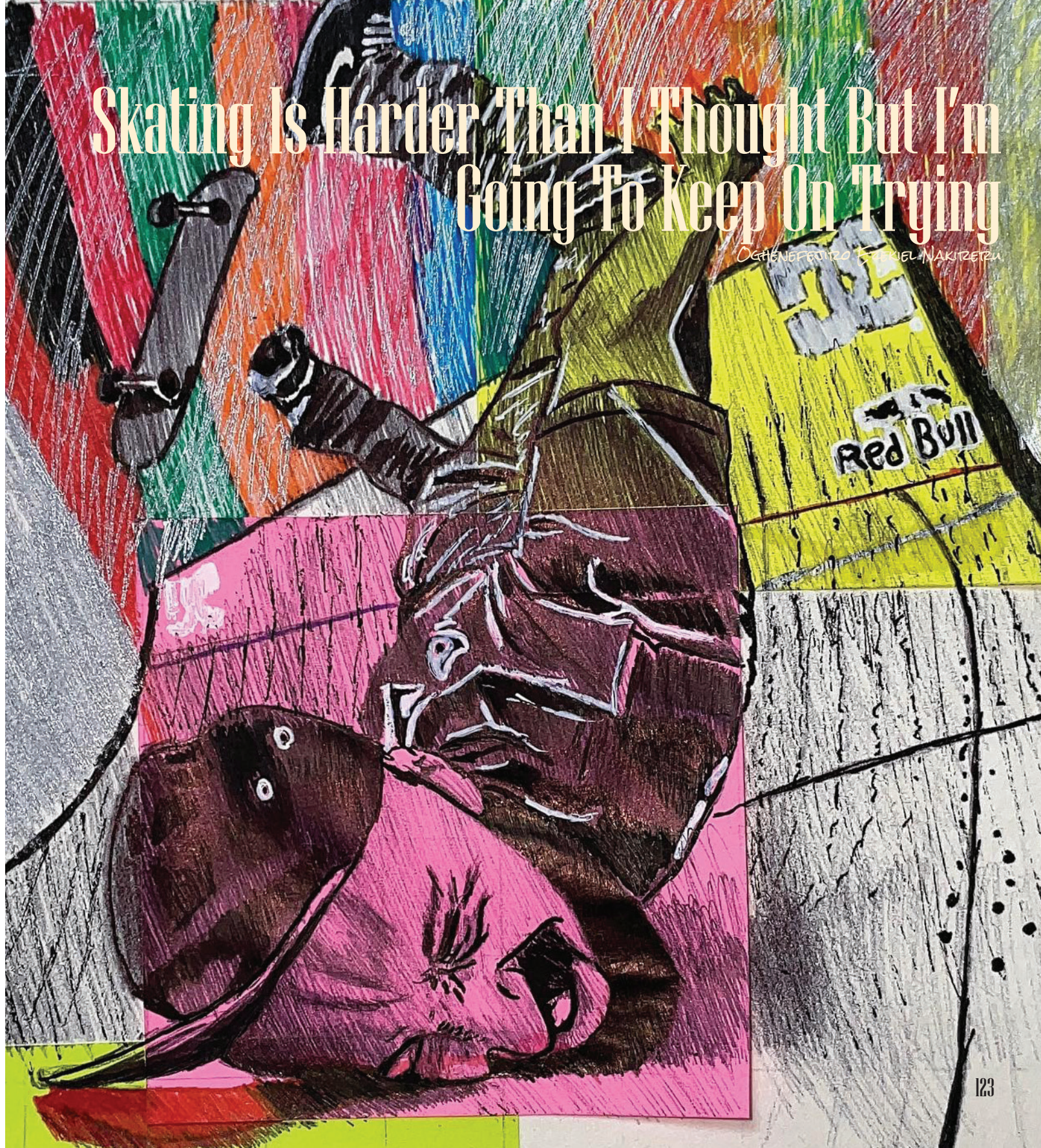
"Aw, nah, he wanna ride with '12," Guerrero jokes and munches on some watermelon.

Xavier looks at Guerrero with a puzzled look in his big brown eyes while he eats mango. "It's all good, little man, as long as you don't give me any tickets alright? We cool," Guerrero bumps his tiny fist and laughs.

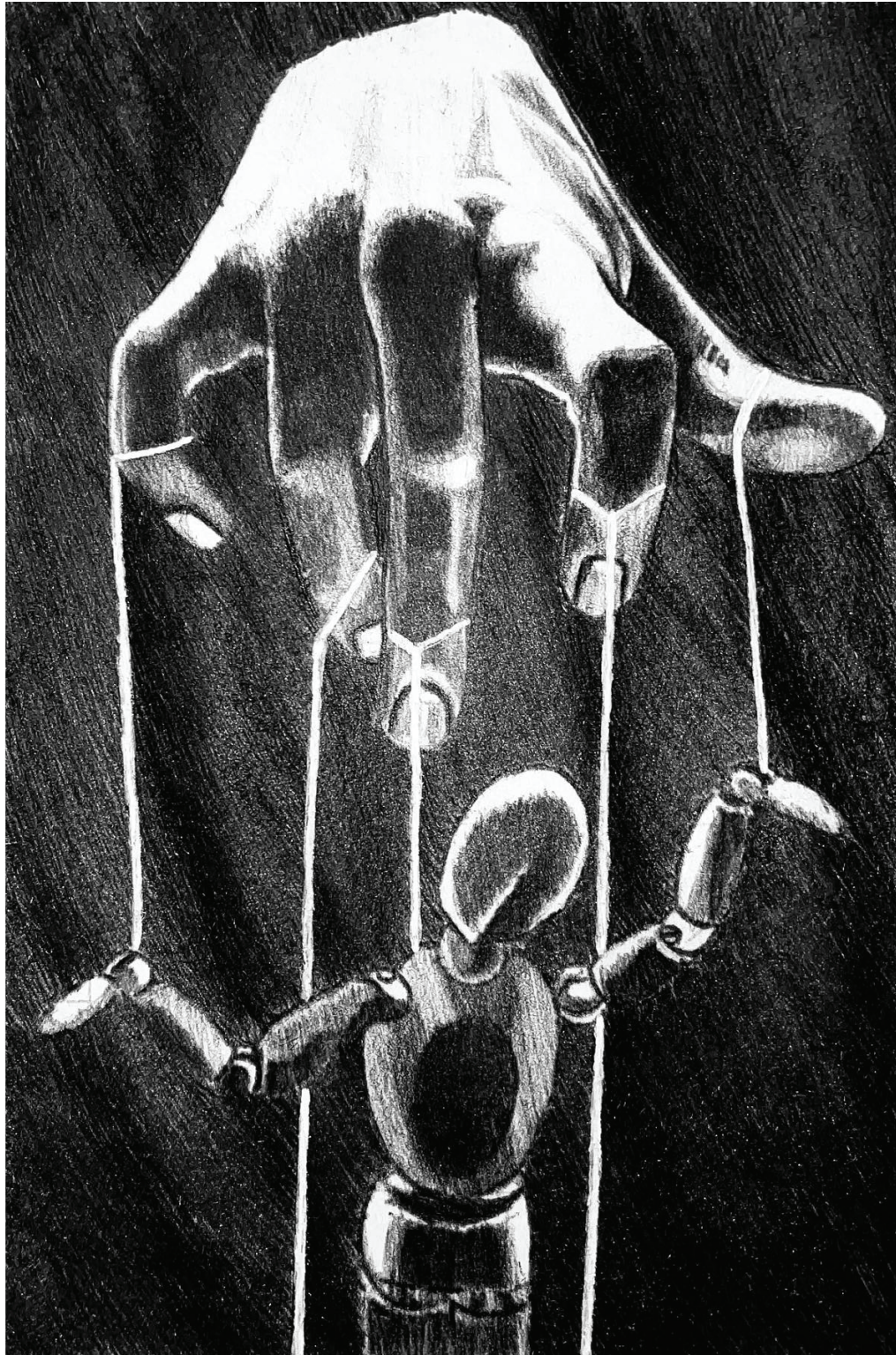
Xavier goes to the living room and comes back with his box of toy cars. Everyone takes a car from the box, racing them on the wooden floor to see which one goes the farthest. Franco gets a Firebird, Luna a white Corvette, Guerrero a green Camaro, and Xavier an orange Chevelle. They placed their cars on the floors making sound effects for the noises while Xavier counts down: "Ready... Set... Go!"

# Skating Is Harder Than I Thought But I'm Going To Keep On Trying

By JEFFREY ROSENBERG







## on the eve of my 21st birthday

EMILY HENDERSON

it's 11:08 p.m.,  
the sound of stillness is all-encompassing  
but there it  
is, the vicious howling,  
the dogs are coming.

wake up! dammit! wake up!  
don't you hear it?  
the relentless noise,  
the moon-lit sky,  
awoken by the sounds of the night.  
the beasts that roam!  
the perpetual clock!  
your time is running,  
running out!  
it's coming down!  
the minute,  
the second,  
the wire!

the howling,  
the ferocious gnarls,  
the beating heart,  
that damn clock!

it is a roar,  
a scream,  
it never goes away.  
timeandtimeandtimeandtime  
and  
time  
and

time

time again.

it's 11:09 p.m.,  
i'm turning 21  
tomorrow,  
and the dogs,  
the ticking heartbeats,  
are here to stay.

# Homophones and Synonyms

EZDRAS METRAZ-LETZMAN

## I. Hibiscus Eyes

On her approach, a melody arose:  
One half step's fall, a stumble down a third:  
The duo's song, as fleeting as a rose.

A melody I feared I've never heard:  
A voice of nylon strings and piano keys,  
A song I feared would ever go unheard.

A song I hear within as much I please:  
A voice of striking keys and plucking strings,  
A melody unheard despite my pleas.

The couple's cry, like momentary stings,  
One whole step's trip, a fifth slip down unfurled:  
This melody that torments the heart's strings.

And yet, an eerie warning from the world,  
A solemn, bitter churning in the world.

## II. I Paint my Words Black

A glance at him will crumble souls apart.  
A word from him will snatch the pulse of heart.

A voice that feeds my voice and steers my soul,  
A voice that leaves no choice and takes control,  
A voice that brings rejoice and warm console:  
A single word will cause my laughs to start.  
I know that here I never can restart.

His eyes: a trial only I can take.  
His eyes: a secret only for my sake.  
His eyes: a challenge only bringing ache.  
In those plum blossoms, nothing short of art:  
My eyes freeze up and dare not even dart.

Those words that scrape and claim my blatant flaws,  
Those words just shape and frame my marble flaws,  
Those words might drape and tame my perfect flaws.  
I act in hopes he never will depart  
Through tests I know are nothing close to smart.

But he, as written on our sacred stone,  
Yet he, who goes beyond to where unknown,  
Hence he, my synonym, my homophone,  
To know that he isn't the one makes me unwell and snatches my heart.  
To know that soon enough, he will think of me, rents my soul apart.



# Room In My Mind

SOPHIE FUDIM





# Project

EVAN JOSTEN



# Confession

TANNER SALAZAR

As the cold air falls still  
And the water drips  
Ever so freely

My heart pounds for freedom  
Deeply for warmth  
Escaping me.

Please create soft embers  
Of fire in my soul  
And call me your own.

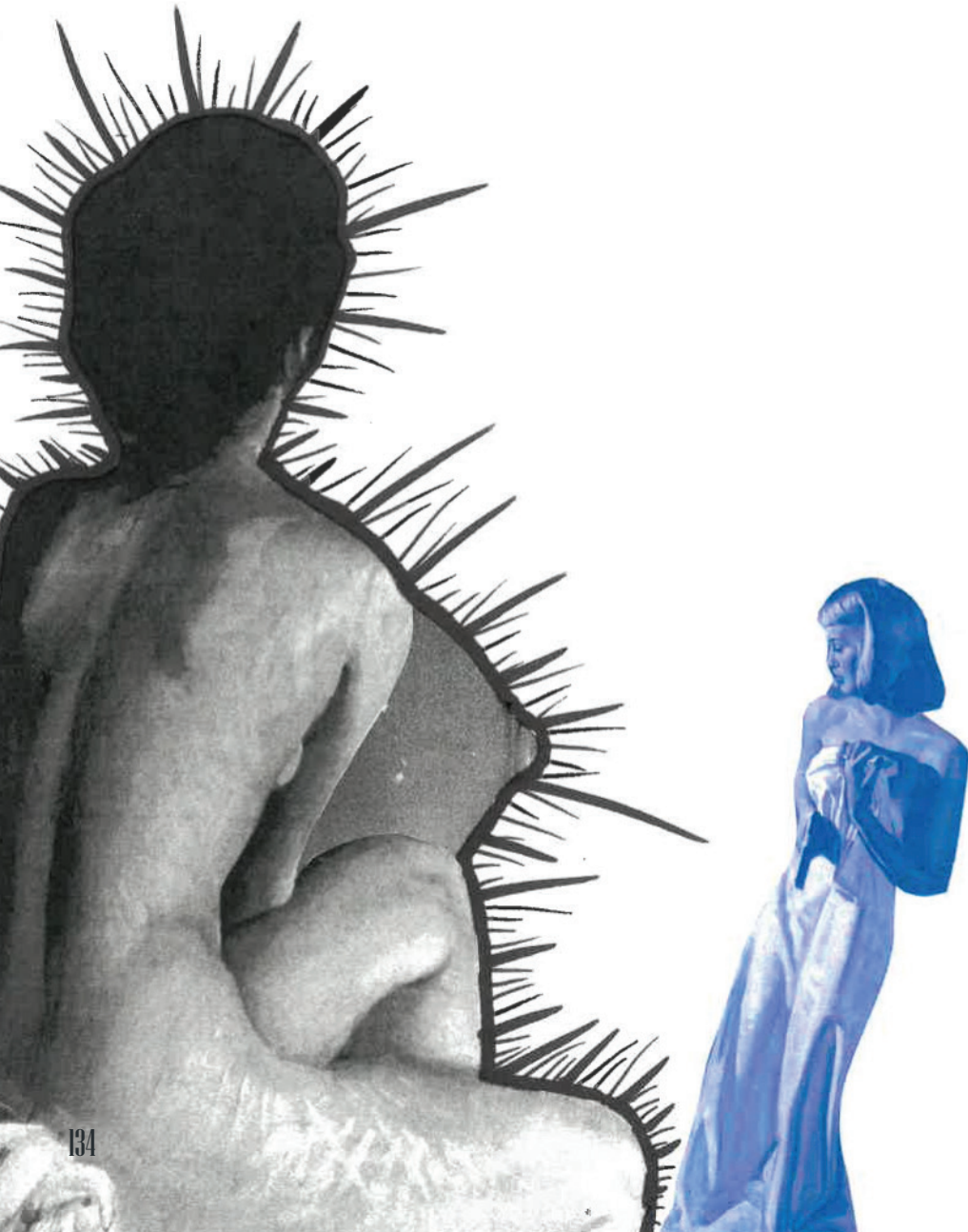






# Bazonqas

SAGE AMDAHL



# Rain Drops

SHELBY LOPEZ

Bury me under the flowers  
in the soil behind my train tracks  
where nobody is going to explore.

Consider a thorn—a weed will emerge  
around a spattered shard of glass.

When I rain quietly in the greenhouse,  
let my eyes turn to stained marbles  
and droop them over fallen suns.



# The Vision

JAMEY DUNCAN WHITT & AISHAN EURELEY





# A Pebble Named Regret

NIA HUTZLEY

Today, I was faced  
with a pebble-like item  
in my lunch.

Here it  
was, announcing its presence  
with a sharp crunch of bone that  
told me something was  
wrong. Not just with the rice, but  
with me. This life is  
supposed to be smooth, but yet,  
there are always lumps where they  
shouldn't be.

In us, in the rice, in the haunting  
memories we can't  
forget, no matter how we  
purify ourselves.  
Through fire,  
through vice, through messages,  
with our old driving teacher.  
Where we talk about  
a god we don't believe in.  
And the girls we've loved too much.  
That pebble roused a  
memory of the many  
pebbles in my way.  
Like me, and you, and her—of  
course i'd mention her—not  
a day goes by sans,  
her ghost in my brain. Leading  
me to the water,  
where we sat in the dark.  
And  
watched my heart leave my body.

# Fruits of An Earring Tree

LEAH GIBSON

The first pair of earrings she was gifted were  
silver turtles;  
she adopted their delicate shimmer and like  
them  
unfurled into identity,  
unbothered by the drag of her shell.

Since, she meticulously collects and  
categorizes,  
arranging and hanging the masses  
on the wrought iron branches of a tree,  
from which she pulls fruit suited to her fair.

Today she is a cluster of pearls,  
bubbling and effervescent in their movement  
fresh, clean,  
fleeting before they burst  
imperceivable to the lobes.

Yesterday she was as free as a pair of butterfly  
wings  
captured in resin  
and encrusted with crystal beads,  
static but repurposed for anew  
their weight a dull sway.

Tomorrow she will be  
a tumbling cascade of flora  
in sporadic presentation and reason  
gloriously accelerating down at gravity's mercy

one branch remains stark against its  
ornamental  
not plucked or pillaged  
or fallen of their hanging fruit  
but dormant  
heeding spring's turn of temperature.

She ponders, the pears in preparation for  
bloom,  
and what happens as the empty spaces  
make way for the buds of becoming.

Does she let the pears plummet,  
rusted in time and place on their hooks  
the ones well-received and loved by all  
despite the ripping yank of their hanging?  
And what for the partnerless and crooked,  
elementary and outgrown in their fashion,  
hackneyed, now disregarded  
in the wake of the most wear,  
has their hanging at last become burdensome?

Understanding the serendipity of her  
selections,  
she continues to adorn her ears  
with the jewelry that captures this essence;  
she remembers the eyes are the window to the  
soul  
as the ears are the seat of receptivity.



# Diane

KASEY DAVIS

September gave me you,  
making me forever in its debt.  
I am back at your side,  
and I am with myself again.  
Everything makes sense,  
life is more than pain.  
I live in the space you've carved out for me, in your heart.  
You are the river I call to, for peace.  
You are here, and I am home.

# A PRAYER FOR LOVE

LEZZY BROOKSHITZ

i need not more hands clasped together  
in desperate prayer pleading for love  
no knees need bruising in the matter of reciprocation  
my limbs are tired as extensions of a poised back.  
i'll behave myself where love seems to escape me  
and ponder not of what i hold back,  
this act itself is worthy enough of love  
so i keep my hands open and outstretched,  
eyes searching.  
tile, pavement, cold and weary  
the ache sets itself into my bones  
it almost bursts from my lips, a question, an answer  
"love me?!"  
"love me..?!"  
"love me...?!"  
scratches down my throat, heavy in my lungs  
breaking out in awful spite, to be freed  
but yet hollow echoes echo back.  
what hands wipe away tears shed but ones gripped in ritual begging?  
who will sweep them from my face and cradle the insolent being  
of my heart?





# Our Contributors

...AND WHAT KEEPS THEM UP AT NIGHT.

**AISLINN BURLEY** lives by the phrase 'everything is everything' and seeks to express such in her works. She may be found picking up a new hobby or enjoying a night in with her cat, Fatty.

What keeps you up at night? *Spirituality.*

**ALEJANDRA ORTEGA** is a fourth-year English major and Business Administration minor who is slowly accepting that she can't control anything.

What keeps you up at night? *Something that keeps me up at night is everything I didn't get to today.*

**ANH TRAN** grew up in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She is a third-year student majoring in Biology. As a science-oriented soul, she'd like to shout out Professor Sloan for inspiring her to stay creative and find beauty in mundane things!

What keeps you up at night? *Sylvia Plath's fig tree analogy and all the versions of myself that I could've become.*

**ARYSSE GRINDULO** loves to eat, drink, play video games, and sleep!

What keeps you up at night? *Myself.*

**ASHLEY SEGER** is a second-year English Creative Writing major from Colorado who really loves trees and the color purple.

What keeps you up at night? *The voices. And Grey's Anatomy.*

**CALEY LOEWENSTEIN** is a sophomore at Whittier College studying Art and Education. Almost three years ago, she moved to California from Jayess, a small town in southern Mississippi. She has grown so much since then, and continues to overcome the mental and physical hurdles that had previously kept her from expressing herself.

What keeps you up at night? *Two things: how big the universe is compared to me, and what would have happened to me if I had stayed in Jayess.*



**CALLISTA MCCARTHY** is a junior at Whittier college. She took a hard pivot from being involved in visual and performing arts to now being an Environmental Science major. She doesn't have any creative writing experience, but thought: "Hey what the hell, might as well try everything once." She is happiest when getting the opportunity to visit somewhere new and collect experiences with loved ones.

What keeps you up at night? *My friends and boyfriend mostly keep me up at night since that's the only time we have to play video games and watch stupid shit together. Oh yeah, also the feeling of impending doom when thinking about how the hell I'm gonna afford an apartment in Los Angeles...*

**CARLA CAMILOTTI** is 20-years-old. She is a junior here at Whittier College, and an international student from France. She started to play lacrosse this year and she's been loving it so far. She loves reading, fashion, hanging out with her friends, and discovering new things everyday.

What keeps you up at night? *The afterlife, and all the unanswered questions revolving around that topic.*

**CHELSEA BARTILAD** is a second-year English student at Whittier College. She likes ube latte, jazz, and binge-watching her favorite shows.

What keeps you up at night? *Her dreams.*

**EMILY HENDERSON** is perpetually tired.

What keeps you up at night? *The torrential threat of the unknown. Also my bedroom is next to the bathroom, so.*

**EVAN JOSTEN** is a second-year at Whittier and a double major in Political Science and Sociology. His more creative endeavors are in music, photography, and whatever else he fixates on for a month and before eventually forgetting about it.

What keeps you up at night? *The secrets of the universe and everything we do not understand.*

**EZDRAS MERAZ-LERMAN** majors in English (with an emphasis on Creative Writing) and Spanish, and has a minor in Global Languages. His plan is to be a community college professor and to publish novels and collections of poetry.

What keeps you up at night? *All the work I put in for nothing? Are all the things I write -those many hours, days-just going to go in the trash? Even worse: what if I succeed?*

**INEZ LOGAN** has successfully procrastinated their way into a degree in English Literature and minor in Computer Science. It can be assumed that they will continue on to a unique career that will combine these skills, but realistically they will end up waxing poetic about the glory days of Web 2.0 on a street corner somewhere.

What keeps you up at night? *The ability to isolate and focus intensely on creating something cool until the sun comes up and I realize I have been writing straight gibberish for hours (but hey, at least I had fun!).*

**IZZY BROOKSHIRE** is like a dragonfly, skittish and uneasy, with a taste for change. Or maybe she's just a sophomore in college who likes to write poetry.

What keeps you up at night? *Other perceptions of me that I cannot control. And the dark. I think Twilight Sparkle (infected vers.) is going to jump me one day.*

**JAMEY DUNCAN WHITT** is a third-year English Lit major. They are Secretary of both BSA and WSWA. They are generally found snacking with a smirk on their face and a "fun fact" to share.

What keeps you up at night? *The voices...THE VOICES...(aka insomnia, a fear of the dark, & an overactive imagination).*

**JAVI-NEVAEH HALL** is a senior. She is a Psych major and a double minor in Gender Studies and Spanish. Writing in her spare time helps ground her.

What keeps you up at night? *Random thoughts.*

**JONATHAN BERMUDEZ** is a third-year transfer student. He is an English major.

What keeps you up at night? *Besides my addiction to Dr.Pepper, the thing that keeps me up at night is my addiction for Mountain Dew.*

**JULIA CENTENO** is a third-year English and Graphic Design major. She lives vicariously through her Pinterest boards.

What keeps you up at night? *My worst fear would be walking into a room and seeing someone (or something?) who looks like an exact clone of me just casually hanging out. It's scarier if they're equally horrified to see me.*

**JOE DONNELLY** is an award-winning author, journalist and editor.

What keeps you up at night? *His students.*

**KALLIE KAAIHUE-PAO PAO** is from the state of Hawai'i. She lives on the island of Kauai and the town of Anahola. She is a second-year and a Whittier Scholars Major. Her major is Creative Expression through Hawaiian Language and Culture.

What keeps you up at night? *The responsibilities that I know I should do but I am procrastinating, and also the people that surround me.*

**KASEY DAVIS** is a Psych major in her junior year. She enjoys piña coladas and getting caught in the rain.

What keeps you up at night? *Insomnia mostly, but also an overwhelming sense of existential dread. The usual.*

**LEAH GIBSON** is a self-identified granola bar and Deadhead. She loves zoning out and any excuse to spend a day outside. Leah graduates in the spring with a B.A. in Psychology, and is excited to explore life.

What keeps you up at night? *That one time in seventh grade when she ripped a hole in her pants and told no one because she was so embarrassed, so she spent the whole day awkwardly waddling around and pulling her sweater unfashionably low to hide the fact that you could see her day of the week underwear (it was Thursday).*

**MACY MILLER** is an artist studying graphic design about to graduate this year. She is also working on an exhibit opening in The Greenleaf Gallery on April 6th for the Art and Technology Fellowship.

What keeps you up at night? *Anything and everything keeps me up at night, I'm an over thinker and an insomniac so it doesn't take much, but usually I'm thinking about dreams or trying to lucid dream.*

**MADI ENDO** is 20-years-old. She was born and raised on O'ahu in Hawai'i and moved here for



college as a Music major. Her interests tend to be all over the place but art is everything to her.  
What keeps you up at night? *The need for just one (or many) more hour(s) to myself.*

**MALIKA JIGSSA**

**MARLI RODRIGUEZ** is a fourth-year Political Science major.  
What keeps you up at night? *Too much caffeine.*

**MARS SINCLAIR** was born in California in 1999. Life happened, and now she is living in Whittier, CA, attending Whittier College. She is majoring in English and minoring in Film Studies with the goal of graduating before she becomes so old they kick her out. Last year she won first place for *The Greenleaf Review's* Social Justice Writing Contest.

What keeps you up at night? *Everything from existential dread to anxiety that I will sleep through my alarm.*

**MEYLINA TRAN** is a fourth-year desperately trying to keep it together (and she thinks she's doing a pretty good job).

What keeps you up at night? *It's no use Jo! I have loved you ever since I've known you Jo! I couldn't help it. And I tried to show you but you wouldn't let me, so I must make you hear now and give me an answer because I cannot go on like this!*

**NADIA MILLER** is in a constant state of crochet, reading, or panicking.  
What keeps you up at night? *Just one more chapter or row.*

**NIA HURLEY** is from the best place on earth, yet she is filled with yearning. She is almost six feet tall and sees short people as childlike. She was born on the summer solstice.

What keeps you up at night? *I am kept up at night by sedatives that don't sedate.*

**OGHENEFEJIRO EZEKIEL NAKIRERU** is 19-years-old. He is from Abuja, Nigeria and has been drawing for three years now. He is a freshman here at Whittier and is an Economics major.

What keeps you up at night? *What's next? How do I accomplish this or that? Am I doing best? Thoughts like those are always on my mind when I wake up and when I go to bed. I really want to use the opportunity that has been presented to me—my gifts, my talents, my charms and whatever other qualities I have to accomplish my goals.*

**OLIVIA NUÑEZ** is a transfer student and an athlete on campus. She is an English major and this is the first time she's shared her work with anyone!

What keeps you up at night? *Lots of things keep me up at night, but the most powerful one is the crippling fear of failure.*

**SAGE AMDAHL** is a fourth-year who loves to say she's an artist but actually hates making art.

What keeps you up at night? *Sage is kept awake at night by the memory of screaming "FUCK" and falling to the floor when a customer (that she did not know was in the store) surprised her by saying hi.*

**SARAH LICÓN** is a fourth-year English and Sociology student at Whittier College. When she's not being News Editor for the *Quaker Campus* or busy with schoolwork, she likes to spend time reading, binge-watching shows, and collaging.

What keeps you up at night? *Existential pondering and sad TikToks.*

**SHELBY LOPEZ** is a 22-year-old English major with a Theatre & Communications minor. In the morning she's making waffles.

What keeps you up at night? *Silence, it's calming. The feeling that you're the only person awake is most comforting, so this question probably doesn't apply to me the way it does for most. Le Sserafim once said, "I'm fearless," and they were right.*

**SHELBY SILVA** is a multimedia journalist born and raised in Los Angeles.

**SOPHIE FUDIM** is a San Francisco born and raised artist, that works primarily in collage. Over the years, they've dabbled in other forms of art but always come back to collage. It is what gives their life meaning. Insta [@sfcollages](#)

What keeps you up at night? *Stomach aches, the fact that everything and everyone I know will one day be gone, the way we treat the planet, any art project I'm working on, and all the information that is only a tap away.*

**THEO STARR GARDNER** is a graduating Senior this year majoring in Teaching Creativity (Art, Literature, Education) under WSP. They intensely identify with water, just like a Pisces should. They are a multimedia artist, a teacher in the making, and a general creative chaotic force of good.

What keeps you up at night? *For one, I just have insomnia, to the extent that previous roommates I've had have called me nocturnal. I also tend to play out situations or conversations I'm nervous about in my head, whether or not I want to. For anyone who wants a good sleep podcast recommendation, I tell everyone to listen to Nothing Much Happens, a podcast filled with mundane lovely slice-of-life bedtime stories.*

**TRINITY DELACRUZ** is currently a second-year majoring in Business Administration. On campus, she is a Peer Health Educator, and she is in the Palmer Society. She enjoys going to concerts, thrifting, reading, organizing her playlists on Spotify, and writing poetry.

What keeps you up at night? *Like most people, everything that I've done keeps me up at night. My past experiences, my thoughts, what I've done, and what I failed to do.*

**ZOË BERKEBILE** is a writer, poet, artist, musician, and third-year student.



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