

Editors' Note

This year's theme is decolonizing gender, focusing on unpacking the view of gender binaries, gender norms, and experiences of gender through an intersectional, non-western and non-white centered lens. We chose this theme because we believe that as OWN has historically explored the intersections of gender and other identities, we want to de-center whiteness and colonial attitudes that are pervasive in our socializations of gender and instead center radical acceptance and love.

I want to thank the co-directors, Elena Scarr and Advaitha Bhavanasi for their dedication to making this phenomenal production happen and their enthusiasm to be featured on the cover! Thank you to the writers and cast for capturing these experiences so vividly. I've been so grateful to work with such talent for my last year in this collection.



Thank you for picking up our zine!

Like last year's Zine, I curated and designed depending on the submission to capture authentic feelings behind each piece. I hope you find something that resonates with you in the stories that our writers and artists have conveyed.

— Yvonne Bee, Zine and Art Gallery Lead

History

Original Womxn Narrative (OWN) is a production of the Gender Equity Center (GEC) that has historically changed and adapted to fit the needs of its' students and to reflect societal progress and campus culture over time. Originally, The Vagina Monologues, a play written in 1996, was performed across the United States including at Cal Poly into the early 2000s.

In 2016, Cal Poly made the decision for our campus to create the Original Women's Narratives, more inclusive to the types of stories and experiences submitted, then transitioned into Original Womxn's Narratives in an effort to divulge from the centering of "men" in the name of a production, gallery, zine emphasizing the stories of women.

The theatrical production of OWN (Original Womxn's Narratives) has historically been accompanied by an in-person art gallery. In 2020, what was meant to be the 5th year of OWN was derailed by a global pandemic, so we turned to digital mediums to carry on the spirit of art, activism, and theater in 2021. OWN 2021 was a digital "zine" — a multimedia production made up of acting, writing, photography, drawing, and painting. In 2023, we are continuing both the production and zine.

Moving Forward

Our production centers people of all gender minorities, including but not limited to womxn, trans folks, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks. As our understanding of gender continues to shift, so does the campus community representation, we strive to represent our campus culture and community members to the best of our ability through stories and experiences.



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Some works touch upon sensitive topics and imagery, here's a list of content warnings: experience on trauma, forms of sexual violence, rape, domestic violence, death, sex, child abuse, suicide, family conflicts, IV, body image and appearance, and more.

Actors and featured pieces



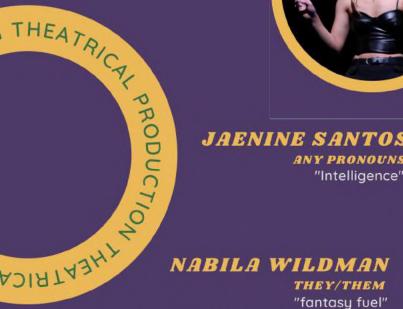
ARIES BOCANEGRA

"my body is not mine" "i'm nothing and everything and I find that beautiful now"

ADVAITHA BHAVANASI ANY PRONOUNS

"A flower or a threat"





"an apartment a girlfriend and cat"



SARAH MILLER SHE/HER

"Abortion"

ALEXANDRIA RAYNES SHE/THEY

"Bluejay"

TORI MCCLELLAND

"getting sober"



it takes place in my dreams and features a longing to know the beauty and wisdom that came before me and is buried within deep colonial wounds... but

nevertheless, inside me.

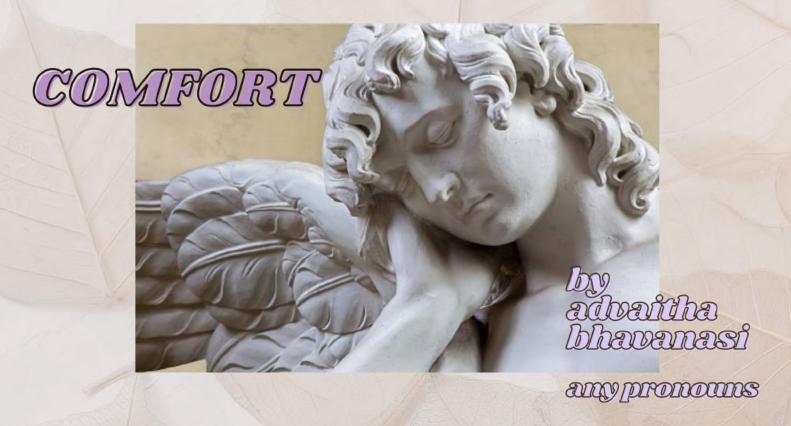
Starting to understand

ANCESTRAL MEMORY

BY ARIES BOCANGERA
THEY/THEM

FANTASY FUEL by anusha sowda any pronouns

a question to those who dreamt of knights in shining armor do you now dream of men who will regard your body as something to be bought? something to be owned? the value of being valuable enough to be labeled \$1200 for a taste the man is nothing special if he is going to feast his eyes he might as well pay the price the satisfaction of knowing he'll never own you isn't it sweet even if you're just kidding yourself that's what fantasies are fueled by so i ask again was the knight in shining armor your own creation or was it an idea whispered into your ears as you slept because it doesn't sound like you



When Happiness arrives once more That plain, dull, simple, ever longing feeling

I'll miss the comfort of Sorrow.

The way she enveloped me at night in her strange warmth and offered only the most colorful dreams,

The way her nihilistic whispers slowly indoctrinated me, taking over one at a time,

The way she inspired me to express how much I loved her through my art, my passion,

The way she was always waiting there for me at the end of the day. Patiently, to take me home.

This stranger could never give me that.

Even as I open the door and size him up

Make a place for him in my room and at the dinner table,

I know he'll abandon me the first chance he gets

His privilege masking the effects of his desertion—thinking anyone is happy that he came to see them at all,

While she slowly packs up her bags upstairs,

Taking all her favorite momentos of me,

Writing one last letter about how much she loves me,
Staring at the wall that she marked in feet and inches as I grew,
Not knowing if she had done enough to take care of me,
But resolved that there isn't

enough room for them both.

What in the world will I do without Sorrow?

My childhood is
Vague, distant
Like I watched it in a movie
All those years ago
Sorry mom,
That little girl wasn't me
I was buried inside

by Sydney Lehr they/them





Tell my mother?

The utter jest of that statement.

I carry the weight of a lineage, a generation, and a family on my shoulders.

I'm reminded not rarely that every action effects my legacy
And yet I remain with the feeling that I am the prodigal reject
Even when the deepest pits of my soul are despaired,
Maybe You have someone to run to

To confess, to hold you, to be a blubbering illiterate brat Not that She doesn't show me the most vehement care of anyone I've ever met.

But tell my mother?
Haha sir, I haven't done that since I was 8.



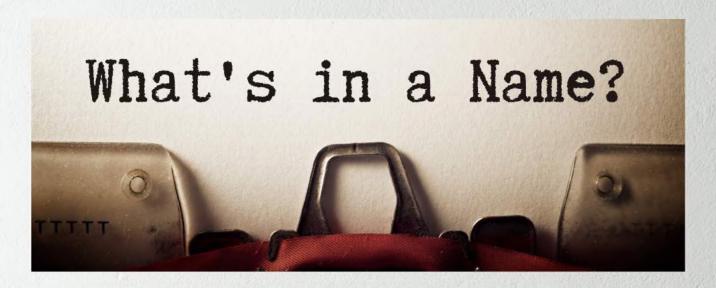
OLDEST CHILD

by advaitha bhavanasi any pronouns

excerpt of NEMBSIS

"They assign to me a gender
That I do not have
I must struggle to be seen
Under this shell
While it fights to
Conceal me."

by Sydney Lehr they/them



Choosing a name for my diploma is appearing to be more difficult than what I expected, going into college. Until recently, I had been pretty happy with the name my parents gave me. I mean, it was okay, but I was okay with that. That is, until I had a dream where my friend called me Alexia, and I figured that was a sign from the universe: I workshopped it a bit, and came up with Alexandria Chrysanthemum Raynes (sounds pretty, right?). I have been loving it so far! I feel joy at my mention. My new name feels so much more like me.

But herein lies the problem: I don't go by that name at home. And I think I have some good reasons why. They do know that I am trans and not their son anymore, or at least, I've told that explicitly to them. The first time I came out to them, my mom literally winced and groaned and my dad changed the subject immediately. And they never brought it up again. I, in my naïveté, gave them the benefit of the doubt and thought they just needed a reminder. The second time I came out, my dad just walked out of the room. My mom, for her part, at least pretended to respect me and said "maybe," but there wasn't any real follow-through, and to them, I'm still their beloved male heir. They never really expressed any curiosity in what may be the most impactful change in my life, so naturally, my new name hasn't really come up

I want to use my new, beautiful name at graduation, but I also don't want my parents to hear it. I'm scared.

I'm scared I can't sign a lease.

I'm scared I won't have a home.

I'm scared my parents will cut me off financially.

I'm scared I'll never get the chance to reconcile with my parents.

I'm scared our pets will grow old wondering why I never came home.

I'm not my parents' son anymore. They just don't want to see that. I'm genuinely impressed with how many he/him pronouns my father can fit into a single conversation. It would be impressive if it didn't hurt so deeply. My mother told me once not to be too "girly-girly," and to be mindful of how I dress so I appear more "professional." Fuck being professional! I want to be happy! Why would a parent want anything less for their child? There was one day, after a night of fun in a queer bar, that I still had a full face of makeup leftover. My mom saw this, and I asked if she liked it. She said "no," and walked away. I'm scared they'll walk away from me forever if I reveal my name.

They seemed to have taken notice of my chest this last December, so the last time I came home, I hid my breasts from them: forcing them back with KT tape that ripped my skin for weeks when I pulled it off. I felt dysphoria deeply for the first time since starting hormones. I had to hide a part of my body from them that had brought me so much joy. Every constricted breath reminded me of the cage that existed where their love should have been. They would not accept me for my body, and they will not accept my new name.

So, what should I do? Surprise them at my graduation with a fancy new name? Keep my name as the one they gave me? Tell them before and hope that they come to the realization that they can't deny this anymore? What do I do?

by Alexandria Raynes they/she



I am sick
Of having to be so sly
I am afraid
Of meeting with heavy opposition
But I must not think about that
I want to astonish
I will proudly declare,
Sprawling flamboyant,
That there is something queer
About me

by Sydney Lehr they/them



his piece is about my experience with cultural appropriation in America. A lot of the symbolism comes from stolen pieces of culture (both my own South Asian culture and other cultures in America) that have been co-opted into the global "white" culture and pushed forward into society through an American lense. This painting also expresses the way that I feel all these pieces of appropriation fit together, and how I feel about the forced assimilation vs. cultural appropriation conflict between people of color and white people in America.



BY KELLY MOK SHE/HER

Show me the shore.

I've been drifting for the past eight years.

Directionless.

Floating. Farther and farther away, as far as the tide will take me.

I don't remember how the ground is supposed to feel beneath my feet. Solid ground, I mean. The kind that doesn't move when I take a step or sways until my head spins. The kind where it's still beneath me.

I'd rather sink than to continue this charade. There's only so much swaying you can do.

How much longer? How much longer must I be lost at sea? I don't want to drift anymore.

my body is not mine

by Aries Bocanegra they/them

how is saying "i forgive you for assaulting me" easier than "no. stop touching me. i don't want this."

how many times can a mattress become an operating table where my limbs are pinned to each corner and my thoughts are muffled by an anesthetic cloud and i'm floating to the ceiling, staring down at my body as i'm dissected, prodded, and stitched back together

is it my voice?
did i quiver, did i speak too softly, too fast, were my suggestions not evidence enough?
i think this is moving too fast
i think i wanna go home
maybe we should keep watching the movie
i think i just wanna cuddle some more

is it my sex? how can i possibly know what i really want? i am told it should be a compliment enough that someone wants my bodyafter years of being scrutinized for not being small like a doll after spending my adolescence scrubbing my skin raw with papaya soap so I might resemble the porcelain faces I sat next to after eating my words, gnawing on the unspoken and the unforgiving silence that follows so why does it not feel like a compliment? why is my body not mine?







by Sydney Lehr they/them

Cold fluid flows through
My chest and veins; I am joined
To a ball and chain

UNENTHUSIASTICALLY

by Caitlin Mosesian she/her

I thought that is was right,
under the pale, dull moonlight,
To say "yes"
but I knew that,
anything I said could be held to that.
I thought that it was right,
because I was scared that the moonlight wasnt
that bright.
That it was too dark for anyone to see.

That what was going on was not an act of love or me.

Yes, I said yes.

I was scared for my life.
The force they held me under.

The pain that already reminded me that I was theirs and no others.

What would happen if I said no you ask?
Well, to be honest, it isn't hard to grasp.
Because they would have done it anyway.
Because it always has to be their way.
Abuse and torment was their knife,
they cut and cut until I couldn't fight.
You say that I couldn't keep my legs shut,
but what happened was that I was forced to
give it up.

A false idea of love was all I had, in my isolated teenage dreamland.

That's right, I was young.

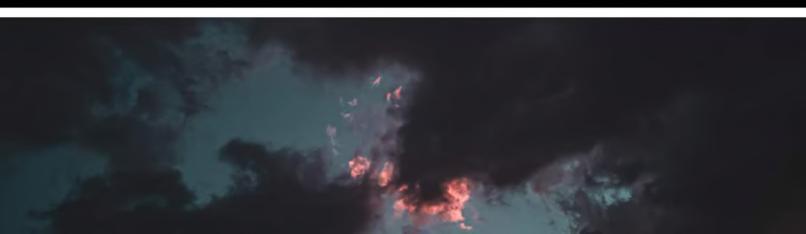
I didn't know what was to be done.

It happened.

But you have to understand.

What happened, happened by another's hand.





FLESHPINK

by anusha sowda any pronouns

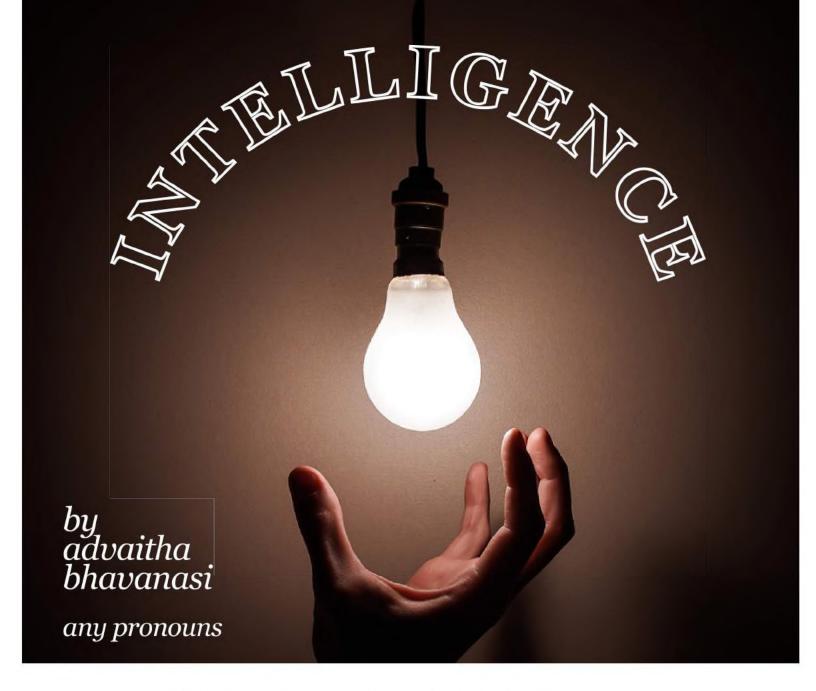


my hand never found it's way between my legs 8 or nine that's how i rationalized it each time a lamentable loophole legs squeezed together and release a rush cheeks flushed and a shame to match, a pendulum of desire and regret maintaining equilibrium, maintaining a system there was no telling where they came from from the man at the park, beneath the tree, with exposed fleshy pink fruit or the one who raised me before taking stakes in my head under my covers which shielded shame not even til morning as the sun would rise

and i would wonder what kind of person am i

now 20, 21 - my time is already running low am i a woman or merely passing as a young girl i'm glad i'm not the latter because now i get to feel this crushing weight on top of me, whenever i choose a clench and a push and a release coming off of me a new man years younger

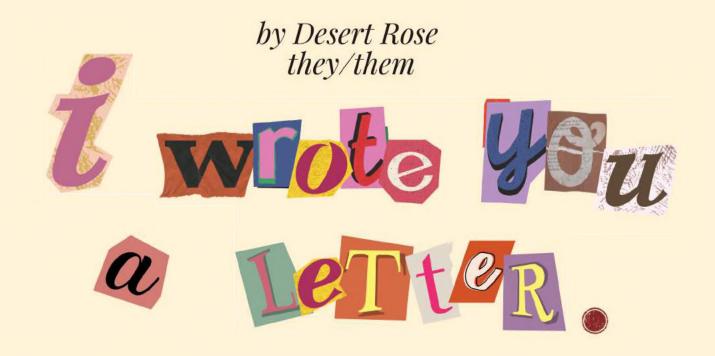
no familiar rush comes
but a different one
both cheeks flushed
mine from taking
and faking
his from pretending
and if there is shame, it doesn't
belong to me



"Let no one ignorant of geometry enter" -Plato

Well sorry that I can't calculate 40 x 378
Or that I don't understand the structure of the Earth
Or how the stock market works
Or know the succession of Henry VIII
Or have the ability to code.
I was busy
Navigating life through the lens of my growing
emotional intelligence and the freedom of
creative expression

I would never let you enter me.



"I wrote you a letter."

"Oh?"

"Oh."

"What is in this that you can't speak to me right now?" he sheepishly flings around the thick envelope having no idea what fate beholds him.

A dissolution, summarized.
Slice through the seal, for you will find
Vile tales of your own doing
enclosed by poems I carefully selected
spewing messages of control,
manipulation,
darkness.

"Better received on paper," I retorted. "Hmph."

What lies in this envelope holds a lesson, or two.

Words depicting the suffering and trauma you have dragged me through.

Honest truths you probably have never been told or were never open to receiving.

These words have to remain permanent just as these scars have left me grieving.



"You have a book of mine. I'd like it back, if possible." I force a fake smile.

"The Plants of the Gods? It's in my car, actually."

"Oh, wonderful. Do you mind grabbing it?"
My skin tingles.

"Right now?"

"Yes."

"OK." He hesitates, clueless on what I was devising.

A spark circuits through my body as he walks around the corner, out of sight towards his car. This is it. The time is now. I've planned it perfectly. I'm about to go Gone Girl on this... this—I don't know what to call him... leech... parasite...energy vampire?

I slammed down the envelope on his bag and leaped away before he could return. Disappearing into thin air. Running.

I'm sprinting away, fortitude in every stride, chasing liberation and severing the chokehold I was forced into, finalizing the end of our story where it all began: a sandwich shop.

Two years ago, you were behind the cash register.

I was with a friend this innocent Sunday morning floating on clouds saturated with the afterglow of last night's acid trip: illusions vulnerable to becoming delusions, awaiting the fate of our union.

"Psst." I nudge my friend as my eyes land on you the first time. This first time. "THAT'S my soulmate."



I can't fathom now why those words fell out of my mouth smoothly as a slick rock gliding across the glassy ocean surface.

What was it that I sensed about you? What drew me in? What possessed me?

Was it your gentle demeanor or that intoxicating smile that threw a rope around my neck, reeling, pulling me into a noose.
Whatever it was,
I was deceived to dive into an entranced ocean,

Unaware that I was entering your cage left open, waiting for your next victim.

Our first introduction was a transaction.

Our final interaction was a gift.

From me to you.

As I sprint away, I dig out my phone from my back pocket to block you on all forms of virtual communication.

Deleting you from my digital sphere. My one opportunity to claim the controller and black out any remnants of you. The adrenaline rushing through my bloodstream satisfies a fix I'm always craving, a drug discouraged by my psychiatrist and I'm sure any "normal" person for that matter. Can you blame me for indulging in the forbidden fruit of my own conquest?

I think I deserve a taste of my guilty pleasure as a reward for surviving the past two years of pure mental torture.

I served as a loyal prisoner in your self-glorified fantasy you labeled a spiritual journey.

It still boggles me why you put me on this ethereal throne, manipulating every ounce of my conscience to nourish you.

What possible wound were you begging me to heal when I was in no position to sooth?

Your every attempt to restrain me as your spiritual pet only tore down layers of my own bandages.

YOU PLAGUED MY MIND. YOU DUG A WAY INTO MY BODY TO USE ME AS YOUR EXPLOIT. I WAS A PAWN IN YOUR WICKED GAMES.

...in a trance inveigled by your dangerously sweet smile.

"Are you scared of me?" you once asked, icy eyes piercing.

The audacity to ask such a question as I sit there dumbfounded, in the dark just uncovering more disgusting truths of your poison infecting another victim swirling all around me.

Yet I still say...

"No."

I once considered it unconditional love.
But now I see,
That I was too sick to guarantee
It was nothing but a shove,
Deeper down into a soundless pit
Looking up to only see your feet.

Like a stubborn cancer tumor still remaining after months of destructive chemotherapy and doses of toxic radiation, a part of you still clings onto my brain somewhere, forever clouding and choking onto memories that should have depicted laughter, joy, rejoice...

instead,

gloom, isolation, desolation
residing somewhere so deep and dark enough
to remain subliminal,
undetectable by my fortified serenity
Allowing me to carry on with my days
unbothered
until I awake screaming—
from nightmares.



MY CULTURE

by Advaitha Bhavanasi any pronouns



My culture is my culture Is no one's culture Is everyone's culture

My culture is worn by you like a brand new dress you window shopped for months,
The tag still on, return irresolute, perfume of the packaging wrapped by tired, fragile hands greeting you with a weary smile at the door

My culture is practiced by you like the weekly routine that quickly fell apart when you ordered that new Peloton bike,

Something you invited all your friends to at 6am every Wednesday with the white man who's been to India, listening to the sounds of gongs, and tablas, and birds from his iPad as he guides you through downward dog

My culture is invisible, commodified and stripped of its original meaning repackaged into a religion—an easily microwaveable frozen dinner, for all those too busy and to afraid to attempt chicken tikka masala and basmati rice on their own

My culture is ingested, consumed You asked for spicy sauce at the Italian restaurant and slyly smiled at your desi friend across the table.

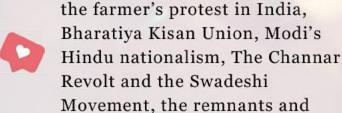
You yelled at them from across the classroom, "I bet you're so smart I want you in my group You're so pretty for a Indian girl, you don't have the nose Do my homework or I won't play with you"

My culture is decorative, bindis adorning pearly white foreheads as you dance across the stage in halter tops and bell bottoms, Me in awe that someone would want to be bejeweled in that way, "I wouldn't!" — at a loss.

My culture is rejected by you, when I oiled my hair, wore a fresh set of gold hoops, the handmade bandhani printed skirt, an eager smile, and stepped foot onto the playground You didn't even bother to approach and laughed at the thought that we could be friends when I had no friends.

Now, years later, you wear your hair in two braids, deep conditioning with coconut oil, "it's good for your roots!", Batik elephant printed Patiala pants, rolling joints with banana leaves, adorned in glittery glinting gold, and surprise your friends with Sandalwood & Turmeric scented soap from Bath & Body works. Newspapers flit by everyday, New York Times notifications on my phone,





Movement, the remnants an systemic consequences of colonialism.

But You choose to tell me about

I am the one who's scared to go to the grocery store alone, who never opened their subji at school because of the smell, who tried Fair & Lovely and scrubbed my skin raw with Besan flour after I realized I'd never be beautiful, who's dad stopped learning how to fly a plane because of 9/11.

But no no, you are revolutionary, you are woke, you are for liberation, you are adventurous, you are cool, you are sexy, pretty, cultured, intelligent, resourceful.

I? I'm just a failed product of the American dream.





THE CONDITIONS OF WOMANHOOD

by advaitha bhavanasi any pronouns



Always a girl never a woman

Unless age persists past the point of beauty Then woman, mother, matron, matriarch All apply.

Bodies measured and apologized for Not out loud anymore

No

We've progressed so much that instead of to your face, The tendrils of acceptable have seeped in Voicing whispers to put you in your place, Avoid the mirror

Or what you see of your mother's body Awaken not as love but as flaws of horror.

My mind exists in a place

Of fantasy and wonder

Where I am everything and nothing

Uniquely being as an energy

Vibrating at a specific frequency

One and only, My namesake says.

I am effervescence.

Why must my body subscribe to the simple, sullen, unimaginative letters arranged to spell

Girl

Then

Woman?











things my mother has told me while standing in front of a mirror, getting dressed

by Layli Veach she/her

GIRL stands in front of a mirror in her bedroom.

She's wearing a short, sleeveless dress, has a face full of make up, and heels.

She shouts to someone off stage.

GIRL

Yeah, I'll be down in a minute, just finishing getting ready!

She zips up the dress and excitedly checks herself out in the mirror.

GIRL unwraps a granola bar and tosses a piece into her mouth and proceeds to don jewelry.

MOM appears behind her.

MOM

You sure ate a lot today. Are you sure you want to finish that?

GIRL

Mom. What are you doing here?

MOM

I'm helping you get ready.

GIRL

No, you're not. You're intruding on my space.

MOM

Don't you want your mother's advice?

GIRL

Not really.

MOM

Now who's putting words in whose mouth?

MOM

Why? Because I give bad advice? That's a

horrible thing to say to your mom.

GIRL

Ok. You're right.

GIRL

That's not at all what I said.

GIRL

MOM Better?

And yet you won't let me help you.

MOM

GIRL And stand up straight, stop slouching. It's

Because we're already running late. I can't deal unbecoming.

with this right now.

GIRL Ok.

Late? And you're going in that?

MOM

GIRL When was the last time you weighed yourself?

What's wrong with this?

GIRL

MOM I don't know.

Nothing.

Beat.

MOM

MOM

Of course you don't. When did you last work out?

GIRL sucks in her stomach.

GIRL

What? Does it look funny?

GIRL

I've been busy.

MOM

No, no, it's fine. I guess. Just...remember to suck in your tummy. It's unflattering to let it hang like

that.

MOM

Well, just remember if the doctor says you're

overweight you probably are.

GIRL

Here we go.

GIRL

You need to leave.

MOM

GIRL

What?

MOM

I thought you said you wanted to help.

If I'm being honest here, I wouldn't wear that. It shows too much of your arms.

MOM

I am helping.

GIRL rubs her arms and grabs a sweater. She puts it on, covering her arms.

MOM sits on the bed and gets comfortable.

GIRL

You just wish I looked more like my sister.

MOM

It also shows too much of your legs. Your cellulite

is showing, and honestly it's gross.

GIRL grabs a pair of legging and puts them on.

MOM

You might want a different sweater. Your boobs are showing and we all know how saggy they are. It's not cute.

GIRL takes off the sweater and the dress and tosses the dress onto the bed. MOM gives it a disgusted look.

MOM

Ooh, yikes, your hips are much too wide to only wear leggings. Do you have anything that wouldn't show how much your thighs touch?

GIRL tries to reach something up high. It's a little out of reach and she jumps.

MOM

You'd think with legs like that you could jump higher. I bet if you work out more your butt wouldn't jiggle so much when you did jump. Or run. Or sneeze.

GIRL proceeds to take off the leggings. She stands in front of the mirror in underwear and a bra. As her mother continues to speak, she puts on a turtleneck and jeans, close-toed shoes, takes off her jewelry, and cleans off her makeup.

MOM

Wow, you're pasty. You should tan. But not a sun tan, you'll get cancer. Don't spray tan either, you'll get cancer. You're wearing those pants? Your butt doesn't look good in those pants, your hips aren't wide enough. Are your toenails not painted? Always keep a manicure, otherwise your feet look weird. Make sure your top isn't patterned if your pants are. Take off your gold jewelry. It clashes with the silver. Gold is a whorish color, you don't want to come across that way, do you? And why are you wearing make up? You look like a hooker. Foundation is bad for you, it'll make your skin clog up and you'll have zits everywhere. We don't want that, do we? My, that sweater makes your tits look small. Let's pull focus to your eyes. Curl your lashes, they're too straight. And why are you still wearing that whore jewelry?

GIRL STOP IT!

MOM

I'm just trying to help.

GIRL

All you're doing is making me feel like shit about myself. Again. Get out of my head. Get out! GET OUT!

GIRL closes her eyes and screams. MOM disappears.

GIRL surveys herself in the mirror again. She's no longer feeling herself. She doesn't smile. She picks up the granola bar, studies it, then chucks it at the back wall. She sits on the bed for a beat then addresses the audience.

GIRL

I haven't lived with my mom for a decade, and still every time I get dressed I hear her in my head. Everything she's ever told me. What to wear, what not to wear, how I look, everything that's wrong with my body--with *me*. I know it's her own doubts and fears about herself projected onto me, but I can't help internalizing them. And although the voice has become smaller and quieter over the years, I don't know that I'll ever not hear it. But, now I'm really running late. So this is what I'm wearing I guess.

She looks at the dress, sighs, and exits.



ABORTION

BY SARAH MILLER SHE/HERS

Hi, Mom.

I have something I want to tell you. It's not a big deal or anything. I just – I feel like it's the right thing to do, to tell you...

I had an abortion this week. It's really fine. I took a pregnancy test 'cause I missed my period and my boobs were bigger and my roommates told me I should probably pee on a stick, so I did, and it said, "pregnant."

I know it's really common. What, isn't it that one in four people with uteruses have an abortion in their lifetime? I actually had two close friends within the past year have an abortion. It's normal, you know? It is common.

When I got my ultrasound at Planned Parenthood, I got to see it. The nurse lady asked me if I wanted to, and I said yes. Why wouldn't I?

How many other times in my life will I get to see my body growing something like that? Hopefully at least one other time. Hopefully not more than three other times. Laughs. Hopefully those other times I won't be so young, and in college, and not at all financially -- or mentally – stable, and hopefully those other times I'll actually get to grow it into a real baby. That would be cool. That would be really nice, actually.

But this time, I mean, I saw it on the screen. A little white clump, it looked like it was floating in the middle of this black hole, which turned out to be my uterus. The lady said I was six weeks, five days along. The white clump of tissue in my uterus was .75 centimeters long. .75! Not even the width of my pinky. It didn't even look like a jelly bean yet. I hadn't cried since I took the pregnancy test and found out, but that almost made me cry, seeing that. I don't really know why...

I think it just seemed so spectacular in that moment, this idea that my body can do the thing, can — can — make something that has the potential to be life, if I let it. I didn't let it, though.

That was the right choice. I know it was. I took the abortion pill at home, in my bed. I bought some adult diapers special for the occasion. It hurt like hell for four hours – my body had to squeeze all the uterine lining out of me, almost like giving birth, or like a really fucking bloody bad period. And when it was done, I felt – well, almost nothing, actually. I didn't feel happy, or exhilarated, I definitely didn't feel guilt or regret. I felt blank. Like it had almost never happened. And in a way, it didn't.

I was pregnant, and then I wasn't. It felt like I had reversed time. No need to think so hard or feel so deeply about it. You know?

But now, now I've some more time to process, I do feel relief. I no longer have to be scared to go out and live my life. My future isn't gone, it isn't erased. I don't have to graduate with a massive belly and move home right after. I can go fall in love with the world! I can be young still.

And yet – a part of it all is still sad to me. I don't – I don't – nobody tells you how to do this. How do you grieve something – someone – that never really existed in the first place? How do you be sad about the loss of something you know should never have happened? That you always knew was never going to happen right now. That you didn't even want.

I didn't want it at all! It was an easy decision, I knew, right away, this is what I would do. And I'm so glad. I'm so lucky, that this is where I live, and I could make that choice, Mama, I'm so lucky. I couldn't be a mother right now. I can't even take care of myself properly, I eat cereal for dinner most nights and I have no money. I don't know how you did it. And I couldn't do it right now, not without you.

I miss you, Mama. So much. I love you. I'll see you later. Thanks for listening.

Speaker places flowers on the stage before her. It is revealed that she is talking to a gravestone. Fade to black.

by anonymous

HAVIATAYING

my sugar daddy pays me to pretend i'm his

his, like the Porsche in the driveway of his house the house he bought after his wife left him where his kids come visit every weekend and where i visit every week

he pays me to pretend to laugh at his jokes his jokes are hard to stomach but the drinks he makes aren't he pays me to pretend not to notice

that i'm just his ex wife 20 years ago and his daughters 10 years from now

i play games with myself: take a sip every time he says something I'd never repeat i play games with him: "i think it's sexy you cheated on your wife"

when he's not looking i break character when he is, i break promises i've made. boundaries i've set

and as I'm lying on his chest i pretend that when i tell my friends it's just for the money i'm not half lying





his is "Bite Me," a wearable sculpture cast from bronze. This symbolizes the defensive mindset woman often have to live in for survival and self-preservation. The design and location of this belt buckle is intentional. The teeth are meant to scare off anyone uninvited from being able to remove the pants of the wearer.

THIS ROOM OF MINE

by Yvonne Bee she/her

my thoughts are loud though my voice is well rested

hands covering my eyes
i reach out
the weather does not reach me
what is light?
i can not remember the
last time i felt the warmth
of the blazing star above.

stumbling, i move around this desolate shipwreck ripping the yellow wallpaper the voices stop — yet i'm still suffocated by the weight.

every day it seems
that i'm trudging through
with violin strings
unwinding irregularly
to my bronzed complexions
beyond desire.

maybe you too would relate to existing and not knowing what's wrong.

of course, an echo, a laugh despite my pleas.

AFLOWER OR ATHREAT



A flowy, tall, elf ish, faelike, attenuate, neutral presence How I long to be That.

How I long to be the vision of what makes someone appear genderless.

Instead when I dress in short skirts and shirts
Do my makeup and put up my hair
I suddenly feel a confinement
Walls closing in
Shuffling to the top
As I gasp for the last breath

Pressure from below to present hyper feminine
To giggle and laugh and blush
To be soft and ask questions and agree
To not upset the patriarchy

Because for centuries here the color and consistency of my skin Immediately made me akin To a man.

When I shy away from the feminine
And dress somewhat more masculine
I remember my thoughts from every trip
I take alone to the grocery store.
I check myself in the mirror touching my clothes



I approach the entrance,

And tell myself I'm already brown

Look around Am I threatening anyone with the way I present?

Make your voice higher when you talk Inquire and appear innocent Talk to the cashier and smile

Don't let anyone think that just because you look a little more masculine That you're here to cause harm to them.

See, I think about how I'm perceived

As a threat, as an opportunity Take cover, take advantage

It's never not a binary for me, Because the color of my skin paints me a certain way I can't present fluidly,

The world doesn't accept that from me as the gender I feel today.



BY ADVAITHA BHAVANASI ANY PRONOUNS

TWICE IN THE WEST END, ONCE IN A TAXI, THREE TIMES AT A HOME IN NOTTING HILL

by Miriam Sullivan she/her



This week Alexander O'Connor, more commonly known as Rex Orange County, was charged with six counts of sexual assault. I do not listen to his music enough to be hurt by the news. I am also not phased by the story of a man touching a woman without her consent twice in the West End, once in a taxi and three times at his home in Notting Hill. It often seems at some point every woman has been touched without her consent twice in the West End, once in a taxi, and three times at a home in Notting Hill.

This week I sat in my friend's apartment doing homework at his coffee table. He broke the silence between us as I drew site plans on tracing paper and he coded on a laptop by asking me with a grin, do you like Rex Orange County. I avoided the question and said instead, I heard about that too.



He said it's important to remember the counts are alleged, though his female friend did remind him that six counts feels like enough to take seriously. I'm still going to listen to his music though, I think it's stupid to stop listening to music because the artist messes up. I remarked that I don't have much of a connection to Rex Orange County, so I am largely unphased, however, if it came out that one of my favorite artists was a rapist it might sway my opinion of them and my ability to listen to their music without feeling sick. I was brashly interrupted so he could remind me that the articles used the term sexual assault, as opposed to rape. He made sure I understood the difference, that being groped is not the same thing as someone forcing their penis inside of someone else. He was confident the woman who claims six counts against Alexander O'Connor surely was just groped twice in the West End, once in a taxi, and three times at his home in Notting Hill-and he might be right. He concluded his spiel by announcing he is thankful to have never been raped. I told him that's a good thing to be thankful for. He then asked me, grinning, who of the men on our college improv comedy team I would choose to have sex with.

The issue lies in the fact that I can't listen to Alexander O'Connor coo that *loving is easy* without feeling violent over the cruel irony of the song's existence and my friend can concede that he still enjoys the music despite the six counts of what he believes are poorly timed gropings twice in the West End, once in a taxi, and three times at Alexander's home in Notting Hill.

I could have, and in hindsight, should have, asked him if he knows what it feels like to be grabbed in a dark room, then to sit across from the guy that grabbed you a year later in class and understands that he has no idea who you are or memory of the time he grabbed you in a dark room last fall. I should have asked if he knows what it feels like to be cummed on, then left like a pile of damp rags on the kitchen floor. I should have asked if he knows what it feels like to be taken to a random bedroom by a drunk and sweaty boy and then have multiple dirty fingers painfully shoved inside you through your underwear. I should have asked if he knew what it feels like to walk around campus and flinch every time you see a white guy in a green baseball cap because a white guy in a green baseball cap did, in fact, force their penis inside of someone else and that someone else was you. I didn't ask him anything. My pain isn't a point to prove.

If he knew what it feels like to be grabbable, a vessel for cum and nothing else, if he knew what it feels like to be rapeable, maybe he wouldn't be able to listen to music by a man that made a girl feel that way twice in the West End, once in a taxi, and three times at a home in Notting Hill. But he doesn't, and that is a good thing, but it is a lonely thing. Rape is a lonely thing.



getting sober

Sometimes I study faces on my morning commute strangers on the bus with their encyclopedia lives and I think to myself, who are they?

Sometimes I wonder if others look at me as a fragile being One that I have always been shaped to be, molded by stranger's hands. Does that thought linger? Can they tell?

There's this feeling that crackles my skin
A feeling that is so far to be understood
A liquor I am drunk off but can't stomach
The feeling of the first day after trying to quit smoking



The feeling at the beginning of a dinner with distant friends When someone opens a door for you too early And you wonder if anyone notices

The feeling of a wind just slightly too cold So it bites your skin and you consider everything and nothing But only for a moment.

There must be something beneath it all,
All the reasons we struggle and gasp
For air
There must be an explanation for why I can never quite close my fingers around it.

Sometimes I have a feeling There's a lot of things I can't remember As if there's this whole life I had, And can't remember what it was.

Sometimes I can't tell if I am sinking or floating Sprinting or only dreaming of it. So far, it all comes back to how they see me.

Oh well, This is my stop.

noise

BY KELLY MOK SHE/HER

I'm sat at the center of it all. The voices surround me endlessly, filling the room, telling me where I should go, what I should do, who I should be. At times, I listen. I sway in their direction and follow their siren sounds, like a sailor lost at sea.

I want to yell and scream, but something in me tells me that I would only be adding to the mindless thoughts of impotent individuals. Call me pretentious. Call me narcissistic, but I stay silent.

I walk around with my head down, listening to the music of the universe and the chime of my notifications, as if they are somehow saying everything I have bottled up inside. Conversations find me like a stray cat with treats, but I still can't seem to mutter a word. I hold onto my secrets like my life depends on it, but really, I'm begging for someone to grab them from my hand.

The voices tell me I amount to nothing, so my lips stays stitched. "You're not important", they say, and so I listen. I bite my tongue. I keep biting and biting, until blood becomes a natural taste. I've grown so accustomed to the flavor of metal, that I can't seem to familiarize myself with a different palette.

I await the day I'm brave enough to say every word that crosses my mind and I'm ready to unleash the thoughts buried deep within my chest.

Maybe then these voices will just be noise, and I will dance to the rhythm of my own sound.

But that's all it is, really.



There are some days that I get tired of the scrunching. The crunching of dried curls. The sticky handed passes of mousse.

The squeeze of the gel bottle. The neck cracking sensation of ringing your wet hair into a bowl over and over again trying to master the perfect gel cast.

But other days, I get home.
And I crave the cool feel of conditioner on my scalp.
I long for the silk scarf that smoothly envelops my masterpiece. That protects my hair from another long night.
That assures that the next day my hair will breath.

There are other days, though, where I give in.
I reach for the iron, with its 450 degree prongs.

by Caitlin Mosesian she/her

And though I see the steam coming off of them, and though I burn myself, I still want the waves, the imperfections, to be gone.

And with them a lot of memories too.

Memories of the times it was weighed down by products put there by unknowledgeable hands. Memories of sitting with my back straight. My mother making her last past with a dainty comb, and pulling and pressing and flattening it down until it was smooth. More memories of my mother, waking up hours before everyone to straighten her own gorgeous waves every. single. day.

There is a certain uncomfortableness that still sits in me when I see one hair out of place. When my waves don't conform to a pattern. When I expect it to look perfect again even after burning and bleaching and chopping and maiming it again and again.

Before, I learned how. There was no one to protect my waves.
There was no one to tell me to stop.

Until... I learned that my hair has deep roots. My waves have persevered through the ages.
Through the times of hot curlers.
And masks of coconut oil.
Through butterfly clips. And kool aid dyes.

It's still curly and wavy and sticky and messy and full of frizz and imperfect patterns.

And though some days I get tired of the scrunching. The crunching of dried curls. And especially the neck cracking sensation of ringing my wet hair into a bowl. I still can choose to protect my waves and their roots.

I still can allow them to be.



im nothing and everything and i find that to be beautiful now

by Aries Bocanegra they/them

I think...

of all the times i have been water trickling over the edge, quietly soaking into what is within reach forgiven by the sun and spare linen

or when i have been the ravaging flood, sweeping all in my path, save for noah and his animals

how i hold the weight of the womb-like comfort of my mother's love before she knew me and the sinking realization of all that i am

how I've inherited my abuelo's strength and anger a tumultuous present packaged in my dad's heart alongside my lola's nose and patience an ancestral femininity present in my mother's touch

all this time I have spent hurtling towards the promise of a final form; agonizing over the puzzle of myself when i am magic gloriously wrapped in silk, becoming when i am two incomplete halves perpetually reaching for one another and the space in-between.

when all along my beauty and wholeness lies in the raw expansive; a home where i may stretch my toes to no restriction. im nothing and everything and I find that to be beautiful now

7 YEARS



Nowadays my skin only knows gentle touch and soft kisses. The harshest thing my body knows is the hotness of a bath that i got into too quickly. As my lovers caress my skin they remark how it feels like silk they see my body with a glow of innocence I never thought it could hold.

When I strip myself of my clothes and look into a mirror I am amazed I feel like I could stare for hours. The lifting of my butt, jiggle of my thighs, curve of my belly, the stretch marks on my boobs, roll of my shoulder. I find myself admiring my body in ways I had avoided

by mikie weidman

Now when I take showers I find that I lather myself in too much soap I start gently rubbing my hands over my body with the brightest smile on my face and in this moment I realize my body was never what you created it to be my body was never dirty or tainted although it's been told so and in this clarity with this smile on my face I wonder how I ever thought it was

Now the people who love me whisper as the caress me in the middle of the night how whole my body is, how every curve is a miracle and how it is completely mine.

This body is everything I've wanted and more. It is perfect in every single way. This body. Me.

7 years now my body only knows your name as an echo of a shadow in some far away town I do not care to visit. 7 years now and my body only knows healing and gentle love.

This body is clean and whole and undeniably mine.

I am survivor.

I am woman.

I am me.

i find myself lying naked under a duvet on a pullout couch in the living room of my apartment eating oreo thins folklore plays "your dad is always mad and that must be why"

peering through my lashes and the haze of my last edible

my heart rising high
where it's been all night
because my girlfriend with the prettiest hair is
opening the door of our apartment to grab the
food we ordered
that i forgot we ordered
and using their foot to dissuade my cat from
running out the door

and i feel
an apartment, a girlfriend, and a cat
is something little me would have longed for
and there is no feeling like that

apartment, girlfriend, and a cat

by Anusha Sowda any pronouns



I made friends with the Black Hole in my head. Our relationship is on and off, and when it's off, I even forget that It ever existed in the first place.

Having a lack of object permanence is a blessing in disguise.

It hides under a frozen body of water floating endlessly until the unforgivable sun melts away an icy layer that once served as my protector.

I can see her now. A creeping shadow shooting out its daunting waves of coercion.

Like Frodo's obsession with the One Ring, I am possessed by her lure.

Dark, suffocating fog chocks me. All senses are suppressed. I am anti-matter. Until I hear a shrill cry. She's calling me, taunting me even.

Before I am compelled to release any resistance defensive force, I stare. Locked in a trance.

An overwhelming rush of total numbness swallows me whole. Captured in her womb where I'll be held for the next several months.

She takes good care of me though, for I have lost any ability to function independently. Through our attached lifeline, I am fed with addictive doses of toxic medicine, keeping me hooked.

The monsters under my bed don't scare me anymore. Like her, we're friends. Fear no longer handicaps me.

In fact, these hauntingly sinister companions comfort me. They fill the gaping hole where my my soul was stolen from me again. Again and again again.

"I made friends with the Black Hole in my head."

by Desert Rose they/them

BLUEJAY

BY KELLY MOK SHE/HER



You.

I look up from my laptop to see that you've entered the room. My eyes immediately dart back onto my screen, but I can't think of anything-...anyone else. You seem to have a hold on my mind. Well, "Seem" is an understatement; I know you're in there for sure.

You walk around the room greeting everyone in front of me, as if they're your best friends, but I know better. I pretend to type as though an important deadline is approaching, but the only thing coming near me is you. My heart beats faster and faster, in such a way that the next thing to happen will possibly make me implode.

You make your way to me, the last destination in your long-winded journey, and at an instant, the fear in me dissipates. Something about the way you look at me makes everything alright, as if you understand the pain I hold beneath this sweater.

You say words like "Hi, how have you been?" and make comments about my hair, and I forget the syllables that stumble out of my mouth because you're standing in front of me, touching my hands, and my heart starts its sprint again. I speak, but I fear that if I keep going, everything I feel will come rolling out instead, so I keep it at a minimum, enough to make you remember me, but not enough to stay.



As you find your seat across the room, I wonder if anyone notices.

I wonder if it's really hot in here or if my cheeks betray me.

I wonder if this indescribable feeling I have in my chest is visible to the human eye. (Is this normal?) I wonder how long it will be before you, or anyone, notices.

How long do I have before my eyes tell you the very thing that I've been lying to myself about all these longing months?

I wonder.

I wonder if I'm being too childish.

I wonder why my heart chose you.

I wonder if I ever cross your mind, and if I'm losing mine.

I wonder if you think about me, the way I do about you.

I wonder if I make you nervous, if you recite the words in your head before you come to me.

I wonder why I'm always the last one you approach.

PRONOUN POWER

When I say to you
"My name is Sydney
and my pronouns are they/them"
I am handing you power.

I am handing you the power To show me What kind of person You are.

Bad or good.

Dark or light.

Kind or cruel.

Transphobic or transphilic.

But I am also handing you power over me.

The power to make me cry
Or make me smile until my cheeks hurt.

The power is yours, Whether you want it Or not.

> by Sydney Lehr they/them



Dear "Whoever is out there,"

I'm sure I don't need to remind you of the power that the past can have. It can make or break us. For the most part, I've made my peace with my past, but there are parts of it that refuse to let go of me.

I'm convinced that I grew up in a place where the lines between the magical and the real were so blurred that I could walk through a hole in a tree and into another world. A long squat house tucked away in rolling hills. The street below us was named Smiley Street, as if it was impossible to frown there. There was a big yellow room with a bunk bed for sleeping and blackberries in the backyard for the fairies to eat. The fairies grew out of the thistles hanging over the fence with little tufts of cotton, and flew away on the slightest breeze, so we had to carefully tuck them in the palms of our hands and guide them to the fruit. We would play in the cut down tree until it was towed away, we would get married and make a house in the big bush, and only care a little when the neighbors reprimanded us.

This sparked my sense of imagination.

There was a saucer swing tied to the tree in the side yard, and a trampoline in the back. Sometimes we would put two or three people on the saucer swing at once, or jump so high on the trampoline we thought we'd sail right over the trees. Once I decided to run away, but I only made it down the street before I was stopped by a patrol car. My tantrum was squashed, and I was brought home safe and sound. I remember taking cardboard and putting it down the hill in front of the house and sliding down on a cardboard sled. There used to be an old rotting house that we were forbidden to go into, which of course made it more mysterious and alluring. We constrained ourselves to the thicket behind it, and came home with poison oak rash everywhere. One night raccoons stole my bag of apples so I bravely toddled up to them and stole it back. I was four at the time.

It was there that I discovered adventure.

I often get asked, "How do you know so much about plants?" I grew up in them. Poison oak, sticky monkey flower, coyote brush, fennel, even the invasive ice plant and mustard flowers that dotted the fields. I knew them all. I've sucked the sour juices out of more sour grass than I can count, even after somebody told me that dogs might have peed on it. There was a climbing tree down the street where we would play, its base surrounded by tiny little wild strawberries that were safe to eat. I've been told it was there that my mom told me, "Don't eat that mushroom."

And then I did. I was two.

This gave me my love of plants.

There's a grove of big trees that when you look up their branches make a pattern against the sky, the ground a mess of pine needles. The owls nest there, and if you know where to look, you can find their pellets to dissect. My grandma taught me that. The beach was just a car ride away. We would play in the cliffs around the beach, in little canyons that were carved out by runoff. We would hike the ridge and ring the old bell. Take a look at the sundial. Past the chain link fence and beyond a clump of cypress trees was a tunnel to the End of the Earth. A flat expanse of rock, dirt, and grass jutting out into the water. It's a great spot for picnics. You can hunt for old treasure there, the rusted parts of some long-forgotten machine. If you look up, you can just barely see the bunkers watching over you. You feel like you can see forever.

It was there that I found my sense of wonder.

Back on the road you can spot The Lost City of Hill 88 if you look hard enough. There's buildings left over from the army days, and the little church is home to exhibits of natural history and exploration. There's Eucalyptus trees outside. There's Eucalyptus trees everywhere. Back at the house, up a hill there's a hidden path that leads to the secret spot, where you can look down on the houses below. We left wicker furniture up there, but the last time I visited, it was gone. The cloud walkers would come in with the fog, and ride the clouds across the bay into the city for their morning commute, armed with briefcases and wearing their signature bowler hats, at least, that's what I've been told.

This made me a storyteller.

I've often wondered what my life would be like if I had spent the first seven years of my life anywhere else. In a big city, up in the mountains, on a farm with animals. I would be different for sure. Instead, I am at home when I feel a sea breeze. When I smell coyote brush in the way only I can. When I touch a wisp of thistledown and it reminds me of everyday magic. It's there, you just have to look for it. I am myself when I hear the owls and coyotes chattering away at night. When I taste sour grass and wild strawberries.

So, to whoever finds this.

To anyone who feels just out of place, I see you. I hear you.

And I can't guarantee that you will get through it, but I do know what works for me is remembering the happiest times, the sometimes tiny glints of everyday magic. The things that make you beautiful, glorious, and above all, magnificent.



by Millie Harrison they/them The Gender Equity Center centers all womxnidentifying students, faculty, and staff (including but not limited to trans womxn, cis womxn, non-binary/GNC, intersex folx, and people with disabilities) who have experienced gender-based, current, and historical effects of racial and ethnic-based marginalization. Through social justice-based education, programming, and community-building, we cultivate a brave space where everyone is honored, validated, and celebrated.

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follou

