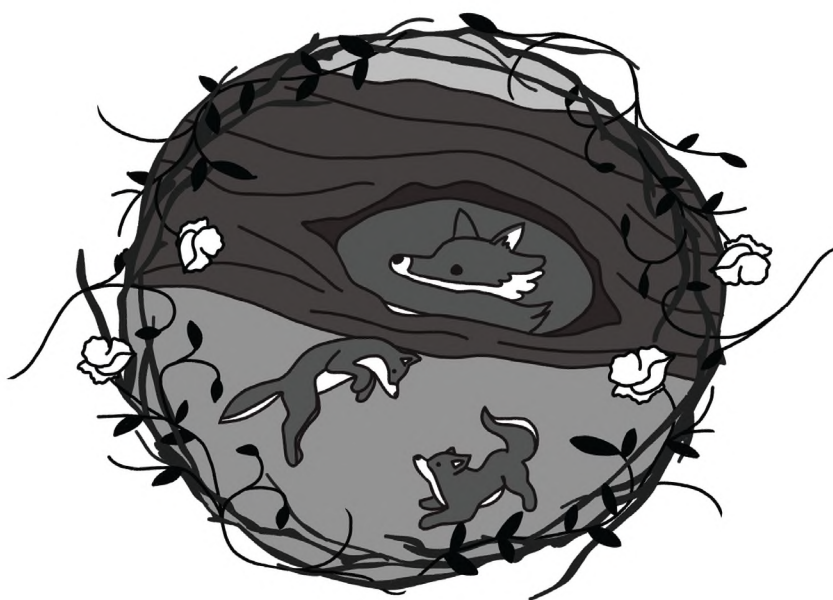


"A flower blooms for its own joy."

— Oscar Wilde

The Island Fox



Literary Journal

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An Introduction to The Island Fox

From the 2024 Island Fox Staff:

The Island Fox as a journal is an opportunity for CSUCI students to learn how to build a physical publication, including selecting pieces, theming, designing each page, working with publishing and printing companies, and learning how to work as a team to undertake such a long and complicated process within one semester. Yet, beyond these essential parts of creating a physical copy, there is so much more. In building *The Island Fox* from the ground up, each staff member's creative expertise and preference play a part in creating a total synthesis between the team members. In the end, we create something truly unique with the submissions we receive, but throughout the process, we gain a deeper respect for creative work and how those works require the utmost respect in their presentation to the world. More so, we gain respect for each other as fellow creatives in our endeavors to show that work. It is beautiful to see a group come from all different interests and find appreciation for the creative process and the literary and visual arts that we so dearly cherish, and we hope that you, dear reader, also find the same respect that we have.

We would like to thank all the authors and artists who submitted work for the 2024 edition of *The Island Fox*, with the deepest appreciation for allowing us to create an anthology displaying the creative diversity of our community. It excites us that we can present our team's hard work to you, and we hope you enjoy it. We'd also like to thank our faculty advisor, Adam Gilson, for being an inspiration and a true mentor to learning through this process. Thank you, and we hope you enjoy the 2024 *Island Fox*!

Season of Skulls: Spring

Fatima Hernandez



Spring

Harrison Power



I can feel the love leaving me like a ghost
As the last cold wind of the season rattles down to nothing
And for a moment, a silence grips the world
Earth halts its spinning and holds its breath

This cannot last though,
And slowly
The dream begins to end

The sobering stillness is broken by mundane noise
Trains rattle along tracks
Crowds murmur as they board
Contemplation and fantasy are subsumed by reality
Things that lingered too long have finished dying
And almost imprudently soon, new life blooms

A cold body, clammy breasts and pallid limbs
Lies forgotten somewhere, hidden away
Its only life in an always blurring memory
The last fragment of an unpleasant history

Jupiter and Marin

Bailey Brummer



All of the downstairs neighbors were home. Jupiter could hear their greetings and feel the rumble of the building as the children ran to greet their parents. She finished her tea, quickly rinsed the mug, then left it on the counter beside the sink to dry. A few minutes later she was walking out of her own apartment door, struggling to get it fully shut. The recent rainstorm caused the door to slightly swell. She placed her foot on the wall and pulled the door slightly up, and it locked into place. As she turned the key in the lock she hoped the swelling would subside by the time her mother arrived home.

She gently hurried down the stairs, trying to make up for what little time she lost while shutting the door. The family that lived below her had their door open and were beginning to make dinner. Jupiter was never able to figure out how many people lived there, only that the people that lived below her and her mother consisted of more than one generation and their food always smelled wonderful. There was one more family with their front door open on her way out, but they only kept their door open to avoid using their air conditioning and never said more than simple greetings.

As far as she knew, Jupiter and her mother were the only two-person family in their complex. She had never seen a unit with less than four people in it, and the ages of each person in each unit differed considerably from the next. These types of apartment buildings were common in the city. In any city. They were both lucky they only needed one other person to help keep a roof over their heads and food on their table.

A wave of humidity met her as she stepped out onto the main sidewalk. The walkways and the streets were crowded. On good days she experienced little to no pushing or almost being run over while trying to cross the street. Her knee still ached from two days ago when someone who was running through the rain wasn't paying attention to their surroundings

and ran right through her.

Several years ago, during a rain storm similar to the one that had happened a few days ago, a flood had destroyed parts of a sidewalk and street that the city government had promised to patch up as soon as possible. Jupiter made her way through the large chunks of concrete that had embedded itself in the dirt below. This was her favorite part of the walk to work. There were no cars and few people. It was quiet. To the side of the ruined pathways was a large park. Jupiter found herself admiring the reflection of the sunset within the large puddles that took up almost the entire park.

The first time Jupiter had been to the park was when she and her mother had first moved here. She remembered thinking how much bigger and more colorful this playground was compared to the one near their old house. This one was much closer, too. She could come here every day.

After her first runthrough of the tallest slide she noticed her mother off to the side, talking worriedly on the phone. It must have been her brother. He kept politely refusing their mother's offer to come live with them, all he needed to do was help out a little bit with rent. There were things back home he wanted to see through. Jupiter didn't know what those things were, only that they worried their mother and made her watch the news all the time. It was at that playground where she began to realize her mother may need her almost as much as she needed her. She didn't get to spend as much time as she wanted at the shiny new playground.

Her brother was in prison a year later.

"You're late Jupe," one of her coworkers teased.

"Only a minute," Jupiter stated as she tied on her apron. She looked around the kitchen and noticed there seemed to be a couple of people missing, "Looks like I'm not the only one who's late."

"No, you are." Her manager, Bel, came up to her, "It's just you and Simone tonight. The two other servers called out. We'll have Jess help if she can but we also can't have people just walking in and taking a seat."

"So there's no one else to help us?" Jupe already knew the answer. It was more of an irritated invitation than a

question. Bel had started out as a server. In fact she had been hired the same month as Jupe, they were trained together. Everyone knew she was more than capable of helping take some of the load off of Jupiter and Simone, but preferred the comfort of an office chair.

"Nope. Sorry. Blame the openers. They could have called someone in." She walked off to the office at the back of the restaurant.

Simone was afraid to break the silence that Bel left. It was filled with the hum of the customers in the dining room. There was a sharp whistle that came from the front of the restaurant, and both girls turned to see Jess, the hostess, staring at them with wide eyes, as well as a few of the diners whose meals and conversations had been interrupted.

"All right." There was nothing either of them could do to make their jobs easier or pass by faster, Jupe took one last look in Bel's direction, she was flirting with one of the bus boys. She held out her hand to Simone, "Whoever makes the least amount of tips tonight steals two shots from the bar for us."

Simone accepted the handshake. "Deal."

Jupiter tiptoed quietly up the stairs to the second floor of her apartment building. Her body was tense at the thought that she would once again struggle to open the door and cause it to shake the walls and echo.

As she stepped into the small apartment, her body relaxed at the door opening with ease and arriving home for the night. The room was softly illuminated. There was a standing lamp in the far corner that had room for three light bulbs, but only held one. Her mother was sitting on the couch in front of the TV. Under the impression that her mother was asleep, Jupiter carefully placed her keys and the take-out bags from work on their kitchen counter.

"Hi Jupe." Jupiter froze half-way through taking off her jacket, startled by Marin's voice.

"Hi Mom," she finished taking off her jacket and placed it on one of the stools next to the kitchen counter. "I have some leftovers from work. Someone sent something back because it wasn't what they ordered, and some mushrooms were going bad so some of the cooks made a few different meals out of

them.”

She looked over at her mother. Jupiter wasn't always able to bring food home. Regardless, they relied on these extra meals from the restaurant she worked at. Every once in a while she would only be able to bring home one serving, to which Marin would claim she had eaten at work, or had a big lunch and wasn't hungry. Jupiter could tell when she was lying. Her mother didn't say anything this time, only scooted over on their couch and patted the cushion next to her. Jupiter excitedly grabbed some silverware and the bags from the counter then sat next to her mother.

“I also have something from work to share,” Jupiter turned from setting the coffee table to her mother, who had also brought her own box from work today and had it sitting in front of her on the table. “Dessert!”

It was two big slices of chocolate cake with—Jupiter couldn't tell exactly what—but it looked to be a type of berry compote, with purple and white frosting.

“One of the other professors' birthday is in two days but she's going to visit her family a few hours away for the weekend and is leaving tomorrow, so her husband who owns a bakery brought this in to celebrate and surprise her. Oh it was wonderful!” Jupiter was unable to hide her awe. It had been so long since they had a full table.

“Did not many people want some?”

“Oh plenty did, everyone had their fill. He also brought in some real food. But it's a small department, you know. I did end up taking some of the food home, too, it's in the fridge, but I was hoping you would be bringing some fancy meal home today. That way we could dine like those people at your restaurant and my students without submitting an entire paycheck.”

Her mother's comment made her think of the recent price increases that the menu had undergone, how a meal for two was slowly starting to resemble what she was paid in a week. But those people usually had wine. She felt that, while only a few dollars at most, the new price tags would cause some to come less frequently. There were even a few that commented about the new prices today. Jupiter knew these reflections would affect her ability to enjoy her food. She drew her

attention back to the feast that lay before her.

The pair worked on their meals in silence. Not out of a lack of desire for conversation but because they left no time in between bites. There was nothing but the light and sound of the movie on their television before them, a recent purchase from one of their neighbors that sold pirated DVDs.

“When do your classes start?”

“Um... Next Tuesday,” Jupiter said through her last mouthful, “I’ll only be there Monday through Thursday, still working nights.” Her and her mother began clearing up the mess before them. The only items that were non-disposable were the silverware, which Jupiter had also taken from her job, “I’m taking three classes this semester.”

“Oh that’s good!”

Between the two of them, they could never afford a full-time semester for her. They both had to work full time just to keep their lives as they were, but Jupiter had managed to save enough this past summer to put towards an extra class. For the past few years Jupiter had been attending a culinary school with the intent of moving up in her restaurant, or maybe even moving to another, more highly regarded one. She had fallen into a regular routine of two classes a semester and one during the summer, and depending how certain seasons or quarters went at the restaurant, or if her mother was able to pick up a project, she was able to throw in another class every once in a while.

Marin worked at another college as a lecturer who, because Jupiter was only a year or two away from graduating, had recently joined a doctorate program. They had been scraping by in their two-bedroom apartment for years, but with shiny new degrees in their futures, there had been a growing sense of peace in their home. Both of them had been looking at new apartments, without telling the other. Marin had even gone so far as looking at some houses, but neither wanted to get the other’s hopes up. The best that they could hope for was paying rent without a second thought, being able to afford groceries every week, and owning a car to be shared. Maybe they would even be able to go out to eat every once in a while.

Artistic Bark

Alondra Caro



how hope works

Regol Adrian



Muted little lights flickering in my head.
False promises, or half-truths?
Dim streetlamps down the midnight road, but gray ahead,
nonetheless.
It's calling from the horizon, the echoes glimmer with reveries.
Where will you end up if you follow that rapid impulse, the
kind snuffed out like a match?
These faded puzzle pieces construct no answer, & they promise
no vanquishment from the decay,
But with them, I almost feel as if a haven is being built in my
head – ever so small.
A poor little village with dirty clothes, but warm living-rooms.
I've seen them make up shop before, & I know how it ends.
The unchanging part of my nature habitually hailing destined
affliction.
Walking wraiths left here to wander in vain in their little
mellow town before the setting of the sun.

Artificial Love

Colette O'connor



I loved you the way Gatsby loved Daisy
Maybe it was just the idea of you
Your image, hair trailing down your spine
Enigmatic clothes covering every ounce of flesh

I loved that I could never fully reach you
Disappearing into nothingness and somehow I still chase you
I wait across the bay and lift my hand out to touch you
I stare at your dock's green light
Hoping you sleep sound tonight

You're not there when I look at you
You weren't there when our eyes met that night
I left your palace in pieces and embers
Your flame burned me hopeless
Hopeless for your cryptic remarks
For that cigarette you put between your teeth
For that face I want to protect with every fiber of my being

Stop running away from yourself
The things I would do for you
What that night did mean and does mean
Run my heart and savings dry, I don't care
My imaginary love affair

Holding you in my arms is all I wonder about
All that hurt you feel, let me drown it out
We grew such a beautiful garden
And I still see you with someone who picks the rose
But you're the Daisy, my Daisy
Let me watch you laugh one more time
Perhaps the most beautiful thing I've ever heard

But you're mine and I'm not yours
Time for me to catch that cab from East Egg to West
You're the house I'll take a lifetime to invest
The person I could come home to in another life
Our story ends here, not there
That first kiss, I'll always remember where

Love is... Coffee

C.M. Loftis



Before the alarm sounded, I slid out of the bed, feeling the bite of cold against my skin even though I was covered in a warmer set of pajamas. I quietly fumbled around in the dark, rummaging in the closet for the thick, warm gray fleece robe I wore this time of the year. It wasn't quite that cold in the room, but I knew the kitchen was always colder than the rest of the house. Fine. It was just an excuse to haul the overly large blanket of a robe around the house.

I ushered around the silence of the sleeping house, unleashing the three large German Shepherds from their kennels, only catching a glimpse of black, tan, and white as they barreled past me and straight into the kitchen where they could make their escape into the yard through the door that I'd left ajar. It was always a wonder that they never woke anyone, especially when they clonked down the stairs and body slammed each other into the wall. I followed behind them and shut the door so they would stay out and actually do their business.

I sighed, not ready to start the day, but I also couldn't go back to bed. My brain was too awake now and the thoughts wouldn't slow down enough to let me fall back asleep. I did the only other thing I could do this morning. Coffee.

I grabbed the silver kettle from the stove, flip on the sink's water, and then fill it until the "do not fill past" line. I placed the kettle on the front right burner, knowing the higher flames meant it would bring the water to a boil a lot faster. Was 4am? Or was it 5? I couldn't keep track of the time since the time changed last week and my internal clock was having just as much difficulty. Coffee was a must. Last year I would have used the drip coffee pot most people tend to use, but I had gotten into the habit of using an AeroPress for coffee, a cylindrical coffee making machine that requires a rubber press. The caffeine was concentrated more this way.

While the water took its sweet time to boil, I measured but two scoops of whole coffee beans, and tossed them into the coffee bean grinder. I was glad to have found another roast of coffee I liked. This one was a darker roast by a brand I had never heard of. It was a medium roast, meaning it would have a slightly bitter flavor to it, and not the acidic fruity taste of a light roast that I always tried to stay away from.

I had timed the water boiling and coffee grinding well enough so that they finished at the same time. I hurried to the cabinet, reaching up above me to grab a small white, circular paper filter that fit into the plastic filter that attached to the immersion chamber. Once snapped into place, I poured some of the hot water into the chamber to wet the paper filter so it could create a better vacuum seal. The fresh grinds were next and gently poured into the immersion chamber. I made sure to shake the grinds into place so that it was level. Next, I filled the chamber to the top with the boiling water, gently yet quickly stirred the water and grinds before inserting the control flow plunger and letting the little contraption sit on top of my mug before pressing the coffee into it.

The process took about 10 minutes. It always did. Of course, there were faster ways to make coffee, but this way set up the day. It took more movements. It got the brain going and gave it time to think about all the steps required to make a cup of coffee. It's was a part of my routine. It feels like I had some sort of control during my day when everything else normally bent to outside forces that I had no control over.

When I deemed it sufficiently soaked, I pressed the plunge, extracting the coffee from the beans. I set aside the AeroPress so that I could wash it once it had cooled. I grabbed the hazelnut creamer, poured it into the mug until it looked creamy enough and put the creamer container away. I stirred the mixture with a spoon and drank a sip. It was piping hot, but all I could taste was home and I wanted to share that feeling with my husband.

I prepped the coffee maker for him, grinding the beans, adding water, and turning the machine on so that when he woke the coffee would be waiting for him. The coffee was made with love. It was a symbol of me loving him a little more this morning and that I wanted him to know. He'd probably give

me hell over not making him coffee every morning to show my love. But then how would he know I *really* meant it if I made his coffee all the time?

Ariel's voice played into my mind. "*He loves me. He loves me not.*"

Gotta keep him on his toes, I smiled as I took a sip and made my way to the couch with a book in hand. I loved that something as simple as coffee could be used to tell someone how you felt about them.

Sneapot

Serena Smith



Ginger Root

Joe Dickson



Sit with me and read for a little while longer.
For, I wish this memory not to end
I know how these things cannot last
How what was once summer
A porch,
Pleasant conversation,
Rainfall,
A gazebo lit by lightning;
Can so easily turn

How pieces of wood
Twitch on settled weight,
Notes scamper up and down stairwells
Chords of footsteps and melodious laughter
These, arrange themselves deep within collages of my mind.
How I wish to hear that music
And to believe in it

Please stay, I know you are not good at sitting.
Instead, you choose to stretch and balance on your head
Reaching for center
That fear and fearlessness
Calm, and shapes anxiety make
Shredded ginger root
Warm tea
Steam

the pond

Kate Tomas



In the quiet of the morning,
a red Japanese maple,
delicate, lace-like leaves

A shelf with carefully tended
bonsai replicating, mirroring their
larger brothers and sisters

A pond with orange koi,
bobbing up to the surface
searching for elusive food

A dog, an eager mouth
scooping a tennis ball from
the shallow depths of the water

The place that raised me
where I find peace in memory

Heartwood

Regol Ramirez



You jumped from the tree and stole the book I was reading,
turning it to gold before my eyes.
You thought I was better off with this kind gesture as you
walked away,
but I cannot carry this weight.
Would you sit down & let me read my tale to you?
A new page unravels & there you are.
Shoulder to shoulder now.
As the flowers begin to bloom I gaze at you & think,
Maybe gold isn't so bad?
On your own whim, you disappear in the next chapter.
I look up, but you're gone before I have the chance to ask why.
I search under the leaves & around the tree
I turn back so often I forget which way is forward.
I let you in my book . . .
I know you're gone but do one last gesture for me.
Will you remember me, even as an afterthought, at the end of
every May?

Silent Sketches

Prairie Colgate



Damn this class is taking forever. I flick my pen around in a circular motion and bounce my knee in anticipation. The taunting clock ticks slower and slower every second. I look around anxiously towards the board so the teacher doesn't pick me to answer the math equation. It is pretty simple to solve, I'd just rather not answer. She calls on Janessa, *thank god.*

"Psst." Stacey, who sits next to me in math, whispers, elbowing me, making me lose my balance as I'm holding my head up with my hand.

"What?" I asked, annoyed at her.

"Can you please stop bouncing your knee? It's making the whole table shake. And it's also annoying the hell out of me," she said, starting to write her notes down from the board. Looking up and back down at her paper. When she looks back towards the board she squints her eyes, since we sit all the way in the back of the class, to see the board.

"Oh sorry," I say as I turn to be in line with my desk so that I could start doodling to make it look like I am busy too. *She always has to discipline me. She isn't my mom. She can be so annoying sometimes.* I side-eye her from my sketch of a spider that was creating a web in the corner ceiling of the classroom, to see that she has a smirk on her face. I look down at her notes and notice how elegant and neat her handwriting is. I look back up at her face to see that a strand of her golden blonde hair has fallen in front of her face. It sits perfectly next to her bright green eyes and her...

"Daniel!" Ms. Johnson's voice booms, pulling me out of my thoughts, making me jump in my seat and turn to the front of the class. *Oh shit.*

"Hmm, sorry, what was the question?" I asked nervously, bouncing my knee again and started twiddling with my pen looking around at all the eyes staring at me. The whole class had turned around to look at me. Each face grinning with

the distraction I have caused.

"Maybe instead of solving Stacey you should be solving the equation on the board." Ms. Johnson says getting a wide reaction of 'ooo's' and laughs from the class. *Ouch*, I think, as my cheeks burn red from embarrassment.

"Sorry, umm," I look from behind Ms. Johnson quickly solving the problem on the board, "it should be 14". Ms. Johnson stares at me with a confused look, turns towards the board to solve the problem herself. As she picks up her calculator I look back at the clock, *great only 2 minutes left and then I am out of here!*

"Well, when you divide that, add that, and... that is correct Daniel." She sounded shocked by how quickly I answered. *I may be quiet in this class, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid.* I pull a sly smirk and go back to my doodling as Ms. Johnson tells us what is for homework. DING. As soon as the bell rings I jump out of my seat and head straight for the door. As I reach the exit I hear Ms Johnson's voice echo, "Daniel! Can I have a word with you before you go please?" *Great*, I think as I stop in my tracks and turn around fighting the crowd of people leaving the door and heading over to her desk.

Joe is talking with Ms. Johnson when I walk over. I look at her desk noticing how many papers are scattered around. I see some of them are from weeks ago, *and she is just starting to grade them now?* I look up around the walls of the classroom. There are "motivational" posters of quotes from Albert Einstein and Sir Issac Newton everywhere. I sigh as I look out the window to see everyone heading out of the school going on with their lives. *That could be me right now if Joe didn't have to start up a damn conversation with Ms. Johnson.* Just then I look back at Ms. Johnson who is waving goodbye to Joe now. She smiles as she walks around her desk and sits down starting to grade papers. I slowly walk up closer to her desk and say, "Um, Ms. Johnson? You wanted to see me?"

I hear the birds chirping, the traffic of cars honking and driving past in the background as I draw "the painted ladies." I'm just finishing up the sketch of the houses when I look up and think about what Ms. Johnson told me after class. *She doesn't get it. I don't care about school, I just want to experience life,*

instead of being locked up all day. I look back down at my drawing and add more details, fully preoccupied with it. I look back up to add some life to the drawing. I sketch the sky line with little birds flying in a line together. I add the sidewalk in the foreground, with a lady walking her dog, some trees and a squirrel climbing up it.

As I finish up I sit back and look at the real thing and compare it to my drawing. Almost a perfect spitting image. I flip through the rest of my sketchpad to see my past drawing. Flashes of popular landmarks like The Golden Gate Bridge, Coit Tower, and The Bay Bridge show up. Lots of school settings like football games, pep rallies, and the classroom zoom by. Also lots of portraits of people.

I stop on a particular portrait of Stacey from math class. I did this one around two weeks ago when she was absent. I noticed I missed some of her freckles by her left ear and she has more baby hairs growing in that fly across her brows. I started to add the details from what I noticed today to it. I add reflection to her eyes to give that glimmering look she has. For girls always talking about having their brows on “fleck” hers were quite unruly. Oh, and how could I forget that small dimple that pops up when she smirks sometimes. I smile as I complete adding a few shadows to her face to really get her happy expression right.

I put my sketchbook down to the side of me as I take in the sunset as I am sitting in Alamo Square. Watching a couple walk by, hand in hand taking selfies with the famous houses in the background. A dad is chasing his toddler as the mother sits on their picnic blanket laughing at her two loves. This is why I find such peace and joy when it comes to drawing. I feel like I am seeing the world through another lens. Capture the raw beauty in the world around me and the people in it.

It is finally Friday and I am in my last class of the day, math. Today we had to take a test and it is close to the last fifteen minutes in class. I finished my test long ago and have been drawing Jack who was looking hella stressed out while taking his test. He is hunched over his desk, hand on his forehead. His fingers were pulling at his dark brown locks as his eyebrows were furrowed together. His knee bouncing

underneath him, probably stressing over the test.

As I am adding the Converse logo on his shoes I feel someone kick me from my left. I look over and Stacey is smiling at me. I gave her a questioning and hurt look, *what was that for?* She silently giggles and nods her head looking down at my sketchbook. As I look down at it about to move my arm out of the way to show her Ms. Johnson breaks the silence of the classroom.

"Alright, all the tests have been turned in, you can talk among yourselves or do homework for the last ten minutes of class."

As I look back down to where my sketchbook was, it is gone. I turn my head to look at Stacey as she is flipping through all the pages. "Wow Daniel, I didn't know you were good at art."

"Um, thanks." *Shit! I hope she doesn't see the portrait I made of her. What if she thinks I'm a creep? Or if it looks bad and she doesn't like my drawing.* I begin to bounce my knee out of anxiousness. "Um, can I have that back?" I reach over to grab the sketchbook from her but she pulls it closer towards her.

"Hold on, I'm still looking." She has a huge grin on her face and then points to my drawing of Mr. Church sleeping at his class. "No way, this is such a good drawing of Mr. Church. He fell asleep in my class too during fifth period today. We all ended up just walking out because we weren't doing the reading anyways." She was silent for a moment slowly flipping through my sketchbook now, her soft smile growing more. "These are really good Daniel, like *really* good. You have a real talent at capturing people and places." She looked at me with admiration in her eyes.

"Th..Thanks Stacey." I just stared at her. *She is so precious. So sweet. I wish I could draw her right now.* She looked back at my sketchbook, turning each page with delicate hands. A piece of her golden hair fell in front of her face from her messy ponytail. Her eyes shined and her pupils dilated bigger at each page she looked at.

"Awe, Daniel." *Oh shit!* She landed on her portrait. She was silent for what felt like an eternity. She slowly placed her hand on top of the page. I couldn't think of any words to come out. I couldn't defend myself. I didn't want to come off creepy

or anything. Just as I finally found what to say, "Stacey, I..." DING. She closes my sketchbook and hands it back to me quickly getting up and grabbing her backpack.

Right before she leaves she turns around and smiles at me and waves. There she goes. I totally made everything awkward between us now. I open my sketchbook trying to find her portrait to see what I messed up on. When I find it I just stare at her face. It is like she is still sitting right next to me.

I turn the page to distract myself from the awkward moment. It was a drawing of the park and a woman is lying on a bench listening to her iPod bouncing her foot to the beat of the music. I then turn the page to another drawing of a waitress at a coffee shop pouring a cup to a customer. As I look closer I notice how the waitress looks familiar. Her face looks similar to, *no it can't be*. I flip back to my drawing of the girl on the bench. *What the?* It was Stacey. I frantically look through all my drawings noticing how she has left her mark on me. Every drawing has some symbol of her in it. She is one of the people in the foreground or the main composition. I feel some weird feeling in my stomach and chest. *What does this mean? Do I like her? No, of course not, she is so annoying. But she is nice and always gives me a smile when I'm not in the best mood. Oh shit.* At that moment I realized Stacey is my muse. And she is more than just the girl who sits next to me in math class.

Athabasca Falls

Katie Eikenberry



Margarita

Harrison Power



(Inspired by the novel “The Master and Margarita” by Mikhail Bulgakov)

Over hills darkened save moonlight
Over the Earth in her own shadow
Alight, my love, in hedonist freedom
Dance for a season in a locust’s dream
I cannot curse it, though I know I should
If it makes you happy, it gladdens me too

Klymene

Sarah Gay



My love for you is neither sin nor strength.
No winged chariot drops from the sun
to bathe in holy water's silv'ry gleam,
except that it is your hand which drops like light
to caress the ivory of my skin,
bearing upon those fingers the soft brush
of affection which paints my cheeks in crimson blush.
No hay sol para brillar, no.

La luna! Descend upon us! Spin for us
the web of stars by which we should find love.
Here, where lion sleeps by day and prowls night,
laps at the mirror pool where once we met—
find me here again, *mi amor, mi sol.*
I will always welcome you to drink of me.

SHED

Abbey Rose



Wait while I slip on this skin of bitterness...
Let me sink to the comfort of cold
Let me sip on the poison of resentment
Expose the dream that's been sold,
Lay my head on a bed of anger
Won't let you in to console

You say your mercies are new every morning,
But how do I let go?
You say you lead me to still waters
To cool my boiling soul

Can it be so simple?
If I take your yoke,
Will you bear mine?

Will the relief flood my body?
Will your presence pause time?

Can I trust your word won't return void?
Can your promises shape my mind?

Can I stand at the precipice of forgiveness,
Shed my skin of bitterness,
Put on a coat of grace
To feel peace beyond all understanding?

I will,
If that's what it takes.

Being Chicana

C.M. Loftis



It was afternoon, and I was at my mother's house, collecting the kids. Her kitchen was clean, almost spotless, even with my three kids having run around her place all day. It brought up feelings of envy and frustration at my inability to keep my own home sparkling clean. It also fed into the exhaustion I was already feeling, especially because I was burning the candle at both ends.

School had become my full-time job with 15 units and my part time job as a receptionist at the retina specialist office was just that—part-time. Although it being labeled part-time didn't feel like it was enough to encompass everything, all the patients that were seen that day. I didn't exactly know what to expect when I started university. I knew community college was busy and that 15 units was manageable, but at the university level? I wanted to laugh, cry, or both at the enormity of a difference it was. Maybe it had to do with the distance and having to drive nearly two hours one way on the two weekdays that I attended in person.

I pushed away at the feelings that had been nagging in my consciousness. I needed to keep it together. It was only 5:00pm and I needed to hurry out of the house before my father got home. It wasn't that he didn't want us there, I just knew he wanted to wind down when he got home, and having kids who were loud and happy was not exactly always relaxing.

I threw my backpack on, grabbed the girls' sweaters and Whiskey, our small multi-shade of brown chihuahua dachshund mix, and yelled for the girls to get their belongings. As the girls took an eternity to search for their shoes and toys, the front door unlocked, and my father stepped through the door. I glanced at him as he set his bag at the entrance. He was dressed in his usual attire of a button up shirt, and dress pants. He was a director of a local hospital that had to do with the way the buildings themselves functioned. A building engineer or

something like that. Either way, the fact that he was Latino, a director in a hospital that was in a city where the majority were Caucasian was impressive, but the responsibility wore on him, especially as of late.

The girls squealed with excitement at their Papa having arrived and I sighed at the timing because I still hadn't managed to get out of the house. I had housework and schoolwork to catch up on.

I watched the girls run around some more, which was even more exhausting because their level of energy never died down while mine always depleted.

"How's it going?" my dad asked as he entered the kitchen and walked over to where my mother stood by the stove.

She chimed "Hello," and continued heating his dinner.

"It's going," I grabbed a shoe and my four-year-old and shoved it on her foot. "Tired."

"Tired?" His voice held the usual exasperation in it, as if there was no reason why I should be tired. As if I didn't do anything except lay around. "You're young. You shouldn't be tired."

I regretted saying anything to begin with, and moved faster, looking for the other rainbow shoe. I was 32 years old, with what felt like more than a person should have on their plate. "I know – I've just got a lot of schoolwork."

"Pues, you wanted to go to school. You have to make sacrifices." He took something from a plate and snacked on it while he watched me run around.

"I have to go to school. You need school for a better job." People were asking for bachelor's degrees nowadays as a minimum requirement. Not only that, but I also didn't want to be a receptionist for the rest of my life. There was nothing wrong with the job. It was an honest one and brought in some money, but I needed to do something I actually wanted to do. I needed more. I needed to be able to use my brain and figure out who I was.

"So, then, why are you complaining? It's just school. If it's too much, you can always stop."

I shook my head, angry that he was dismissing my exhaustion, dismissing the effort that I was constantly putting

into every little thing that I did. School wasn't just school. Aside from my kids and husband, school was everything. I couldn't just stop.

He went on about how it all couldn't be much work as he took a plate from my mother, sat down, and started at his dinner.

I said nothing, clenching my teeth and blinking away at what tears threatened and hurried out the door with the girls.

It was the usual, but rare argument. The words were insinuated, that it was my role as woman to have a job, be a mother, wife, and housekeeper. It was basically the modern-day woman's role in the life of a Latina, a Chicana. I thought of Benjamin Alire Saenz's "On Being a Chicano Poet in Post-Colombian America".

"Chicano: 64 percent will not graduate from high school, will keep working and sweating. Chicano works at Burger king – " No. I pushed the toxic thoughts from my mind that tried to convince me that maybe I shouldn't be doing school. Maybe my dad was right, even though I had graduated from high school and obtained an AA degree.

I hated when these types of arguments came up in my life, the ones that showed me time and time again that intersectionality was a pain in the ass and I would probably never be rid of it. The ones that always made me question my life choices even though I knew they were right and made me feel like I needed to reassess my decisions. Continuing my education was a part of that road and fighting against the cultural norms I grew up with. I needed to set an example for my girls. They didn't have to keep to their culture's norms my cultural norms – and lose their personal identities like my mother did, and her mother did, and so forth. School was a tool to figure out that identity.

And the serpent said unto the woman...

Guadalupe Vasquez



This World of Confusion

Lisa Marie Ruiz



Being a Chicana is confusion enough, not really being accepted in the land where I was born and resented in the land of my ancestors;

...Ni de aquí, ni de allá...

I've always been confused about where I belong, scorned by ignorant attitudes makes it much more difficult; but I belong where I am, don't I?

Racist rules seem to apply to us, not them;

I resist the rules, sometimes to my peril, adding to the confusion.

I think I belong, so I make my own rules,

I live by my own rules while still trying to prove that I belong.

Why must I struggle?

I just want to be accepted. To be a proud Chicana...

Why must this be an uphill battle?

Why do I have to prove my worth, here or there? I refuse to be manipulated into conforming to others' expectations. I am a Chicana!

I am strong, I will survive; I have nothing to prove...

I know that I'm here for a reason; I do belong! I am a proud Chicana!!

I am *¡De aquí y de allá!*

The Poetry of Everyday Speech

Carol Soto



She is that American girl,
Little caramel skin *niña, chica, bicha....* girl,
With almond eyes.
So innocent, naive, yet fierce with a voice.
Pure of love and acceptance

Amiga to everyone
She loves to socialize
School is where she learns
That she is an American girl
That needs some fine-tuning
She doesn't pronounce words correctly
Off she goes to correct the curves in her words
So naive, yet fierce not scared to use her voice
She listens to the teacher and repeats
L...L...L...S...S...R...R...R... TH...TH...TH
After all, she is that American girl.

Poco Inglés, a father with a degree from his native country isn't worth *nada*
No Inglés, a mother with only a 6th-grade education
But a house that is so rich with lessons
True life *ejemplos*, examples that are rooted and sewn into my language wardrobe.
A house that is ignorant of the school standards,
A hierarchy system that will place invisible borders on their American daughter.

She's an American girl
Who at 4 years old was learning to be the interpreter for her mother and *abuelita*
With her broken Spanish
And confident English

She speaks to adults, going back and forth
Hoping she delivers the message
Fierce with her voice she understands her privilege of speaking
both

In middle school
She recognizes her superpower
“Hey girl, *que paso* yesterday, I didn’t see you *en la mañana*?”
They understand
She recognizes that it is here where she speaks freely without
judgment
As she goes back and forth without care using her Spanglish as
she desires

In class, it’s another story
Now self-conscious, with some fear
With anxiety as the teacher randomly picks on students to read.
Self-doubt sneaks in
How do you say that word?
Mierda, I should’ve sat in the back where I’m not seen
I should sit with my people
I probably won’t get picked
Her fierce voice won’t exist in that space for the next 8 years

The struggle is real
For us born here
With parents born elsewhere
The struggle is real
We feel excluded, yet included and yet secluded

We are told we are American
Our voice, our story
So let us use our language wardrobe we prefer

It’s mine, not yours, I wear it, and I love it
After all, I am *Ella*
that Latina-American girl.

Diary of a Mean Girl: True Stories From an Elementary School Bully

Serena Smith



I don't know why I became a bully. If I'm honest, it was probably all the children's media that portrayed bullies as cool, but I'd like to think at least some of it was school's fault. Lunchtime, for example. The food was not good. Neither were the kids, but that's beside the point. It must have been some kind of experiment. There's no other way they would have served food that bad to anyone, let alone innocent children. And as if that wasn't bad enough, there was still lunch recess to go to afterward.

They took us through the cool, air-conditioned cafeteria to get our "chicken" nuggets and liquified burritos. Our milk cartons that were somehow both spoiled *and* frozen into a stinking white and green slushie. Our "cheese-flavored product," cardboard cookies, and wilted salads. Then, we were forced outside into the heat and told to sit at the metal tables. *Metal* tables. Then, after pumping us full of MSG and letting us stew in the heat, they released us to the playground. Their intent, I assume, was for us to fight to the death so they had fewer students to wrangle.

It worked.

Children brawled over foursquare games. My friends and I stalked the playground, terrorizing kids for being weird, or fat, or different. At least, that was what we did when we weren't busy fighting amongst ourselves or, even better, kicking each other in the face and calling it a game.

There were a few people there, of course, to enforce the rules and keep us from hurting ourselves, though. They were called yard duties, and they were evil incarnate. Ask any kid, and they'll tell you yard duties are bitter, child-hating, old women who couldn't afford to retire on their prison warden salary, and so were forced to find work elsewhere. That's my

theory, at least.

There was no joy allowed on the playground. If you went the wrong direction on the monkey bars, you were sent to the “opportunity room” (detention). If you ran on the blacktop or swung an extra time on the swings, they swooped down like a hawk and screamed at you until you cried. Then they sent you whimpering to detention and found another child to bully. If we gathered in groups larger than five, the yard duties broke us up and benched us because children don’t have the right to assemble. All of us together like that? We must be plotting something! It couldn’t be that we were putting on a little play, and the other kids came to watch. No, this was much more sinister than that.

With all of that said, I never once saw a yard duty stop a bully or the kids fighting in the field.

You can see how that would breed kindness-challenged kids like me. It all started when I first arrived there, back in 3rd grade.

Brand new sparkly sandals? Check. Flowy dress with the perfect twirl? Check. Bad attitude? Check. I stepped out of the minivan, and immediately, my eyes narrowed into a disapproving glare. *The Vikings? What a lame mascot. Why are the school colors so ugly? And when’s recess? Because I’m already over it.*

The school was a ghost town, all darkened windows and peeling paint. An empty Ziploc snack baggie skittered across the dusty cement. I threw open the door and peered into my new classroom. About 23 heads whipped around to face me.

“Oh, you must be Serena!” said my new third-grade teacher. “We were just getting ready for lunch. You can stay right there and be the line leader.”

My teacher — I’ll call her the Enabler — walked us to the amphitheater, where my classmates crowded around me; I could only assume to admire my outfit. I scanned the cluster for a popular group to infiltrate.

“You’re not allowed to wear sandals,” someone said, interrupting my scheming.

You’ve got to be kidding me. “Yes, I am.”

He shook his head. “No, you’re not. You have to wear closed-toed shoes.”

Suddenly, I realized this wasn’t a meet and greet. It was

an ambush. I'd walked into enemy territory, and now I was surrounded. Baring their teeth in fake smiles, laughing at me, those approximately 23 children loomed over me like demons ready to drag me down to H E double-hockey-sticks, or at least to the bottom of the social hierarchy. But if they thought a little teasing was enough to take me down, they were sorely mistaken. I was a strong, confident, **big kid**, and I refused to be shamed. I was supposed to melt into the floor and take my place as the new kid, but if Disney Channel had taught me one thing, it was how to be mean. "Maybe *you* have to wear closed-toed shoes because no one wants to smell your disgusting feet, but I don't stink, so I can do whatever I want."

Nobody liked that. "Ms. Enabler!" one shouted. "She's wearing sandals!"

"What?" she asked. "Oh... It's fine."

My mouth twisted into a smirk as their jaws hit the floor. "See?"

I made several enemies that day. But that was fine. It wasn't the first time someone hated me, and it wouldn't be the last. Like in 4th grade; there I was, sitting at my desk, excited as can be. You might ask, "Why were you excited? You were in a classroom, for goodness' sake." My answer to that: On any other day, I would have been horribly upset to be there. Of course I would; you're right. But this was different. It was Halloween. I had come up with the perfect costume idea months earlier. I was going to be a vampire-mummy-princess. It was ingenious. A pair of vampire fangs, a roll of toilet paper, *and* a tiara? I was a shoo-in for the costume contest. But my mom said my costume had too many "elements," whatever that meant. I don't see "vampire-mummy-princess" on the periodic table, but you know, whatever. It was okay because I ended up going as a vampire-princess, which was not as cool but still an awesome costume.

I was in my black and red gown and tiara, an oversized collar velcroed around my neck, and a massive pair of plastic fangs in my mouth. Of course, those fangs, while perfect for my costume and the only thing separating vampire-princess from Barbie-movie villainess, were scratching up my gums. I got up and grabbed some paper towels to wrap them in because I wasn't raised in a barn, and I wasn't just going to let my slobber

get all over the desk (Eww, unsanitary). After that, I just had to wait through all the boring educational stuff so I could march in the Halloween parade.

Unfortunately, that was not what fate had in store for poor little Serena. At some point, someone must have thrown my teeth away. It was the tragedy of the century! I couldn't go like this! It would be all wrong! I was devastated — anyone would be — so I decided I couldn't participate in the parade that year.

I cried and cried and cried. My teacher tried to convince me to go anyway, but if I didn't have my teeth, then Halloween was canceled. Of course, as soon as everyone left, I wished I had gone too, and I could have run after them, but I was far too stubborn. I had decided not to be in the parade, and I would not be in the parade.

Almost ten years later, I made friends with someone who went to school with me, and while talking about that parade, he said, "Oh yeah, I remember that. I was really upset because my mom had to stay in the classroom with you, and she didn't get to see me in the parade."

I guess my actions have consequences or something. There's probably a life lesson in there about being selfish, but really, this is all the fault of whoever stole my teeth.

But being a little selfish isn't a crime, you might be thinking. You weren't a bully; you were just a little dramatic. That's where you're wrong. I've been putting off telling you this one because it's embarrassing, but... you deserve the whole story. This one leaves no questions about my bulliness.

There was this boy at my school. Let's call him Timmy. That wasn't his name, but I don't feel the need to call him out like that, even if he did grow up to be kind of a jerk. He was chubby with a massive hairy mole on his face. These are the kinds of things that kids like me pounced on. I hated him for no reason other than that he looked different. Timmy, poor kid, went to daycare with me and some girls that were even meaner than I was. We tormented him every chance we got. I was happy to because it was one of the only times they got off *my* back.

Every day after school, our daycare got to play on the playground. As fourth-graders, we were like teenagers, and we

didn't want to deal with all those annoying little kids, so we would go play on the small, fence-enclosed playground where they penned in the kindergarteners. The daycare lady would send us there practically unsupervised, with just her teen helper. It was glorious.

One time, we decided we were all going to play tag. Timmy didn't want to. He wasn't a very good runner. We ordered him to play, but still, he refused. It was pretty rude, honestly. The one time we let him play with us, he didn't want to? Ungrateful little brat.

I decided to take matters into my own hands. "Fine, Timmy. Don't play," I said, pushing him to the ground. Everyone laughed as I sat on his back to keep him down and grabbed hold of his underwear, pulling it as far toward his head as I could. Then, someone gave me a high five, and we played our game of tag without him.

That wasn't only the time we were mean to Timmy. Once, we got tired of playing dolls, or family, or whatever it was we were doing that day. "Wouldn't it be funny," we must have thought. "If we played a little prank on Timmy?" So, one of us stayed in the yard to distract him while the rest of us went upstairs and set everything up. We opened the window and made eerie howling noises, flashing the lights on and off and throwing toys past the window to look like they were floating. It went off without a hitch. Timmy ran upstairs, but when he got there, there was no one in the room.

He was terrified. "There's a ghost in here! There's a ghost!" He refused to come back into the house for the rest of the day. It was hilarious.

Hours later, when we went to play outside, Timmy had disappeared. "Huh," I thought. "He must have gotten picked up early."

But why was the wooden board blocking the sideyard askew? What was back there? As it turned out, something we were never intended to see. Timmy, with his pants down, peeing on the side of the house. Peeing with a— this part is really gross, you guys— he was peeing out of a little hotdog thingy, and he was holding it! Who touches their privates while they're going to the bathroom?! It was awful. I screamed. He screamed. We all screamed!

It was just one more reason to hate that place. After all, Timmy didn't come every day. And three days a week when he was gone, I was the next best sucker. Not just for the girls, either. The worst of them was a boy: Eddie. He was my worst enemy, constantly teasing me. He made fun of the birth defect that made one of my eyelids droop, my big lips, and my sparkly clothes. That kid was a terror. He even made the Enabler cry once.

One day, at Girl Scouts, we were doing a conflict resolution exercise, and who better to write about than Eddie, the bane of my existence? We were supposed to draw a picture of a bad and good way to resolve an issue. For the bad picture, I drew myself punching Eddie in the face. My picture of a good solution was me telling on Eddie to the yard doodie-head – I mean yard duty. For some reason, these pictures got me in trouble. My mom was supposed to talk to me about it the next day, but she never got the chance to because after school, I was playing basketball, and Eddie came to watch. I wasn't very good. I couldn't make a basket.

"You suck at basketball," Eddie said.

"I know, but my dad's teaching me, so I'm gonna get better."

"Your dad must *really* suck at basketball if he taught *you*!" Eddie sneered.

I wasn't gonna take that. Laughing, Eddie turned around to walk away, but before he could make it two steps, I ran up and sucker-punched him. He fell to the ground, crying.

My friend put her hand on my shoulder and said, "You did the right thing."

I had to sit on the bench, but nobody made me apologize, which was nice. The next day, Eddie handed me a letter. It read: Dear Serena, I'm sorry for being mean to you. I promise I'll stop if you stop scaring me.

He pretty much left me alone after that.

I didn't realize it back then, but I think the reason Eddie and a lot of other kids were mean to me was actually because, like Timmy, I looked different. I was the only black kid in my grade. I had a flat round nose, full lips, brown skin, and fluffy hair. People constantly asked me why I looked different. Even my friends would pull on my hair and unbraid it without

permission. I was accused of wearing a wig as if I'd intentionally dressed up to look "ugly" and "different." I hated my hair and skin for a really long time. This doesn't excuse my behavior, of course, but a lot of it came from self-preservation.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that if someone's being mean, there's a reason. I know you probably hear this all the time, but bullies really are dealing with something else that's making them so angry. Whether it's mean parents, poverty, or they just don't like themselves, their problem isn't *really* with you.

I'm not gonna tell you to ignore them or laugh it off because we all know that doesn't work. Adults will tell you all these things you can do to prevent bullying, but the truth is, it's not your responsibility. It's theirs. So, if someone's bullying you, your friend, or even a stranger on the street, tell on them. But don't treat them badly in return because, after a while, you might find that you can't tell the difference between yourself and the bully. It took seeing it from the other side for me to realize that.

This girl in my troupe sometimes decided she didn't like one of our friends and spread lies about them to convince us to ditch her. Once, it happened to me. She told all our friends that I had been mean to another girl we knew and that I was a bully, even though I was the one being bullied. Her lies convinced them to follow me around all day, calling me names.

Only the twins let me play with them. Their mom told them not to listen to her because she was a "bad nut." Eventually, everything went back to normal, but I never forgot. I stopped blindly agreeing someone told me a kid was mean, and I wasn't so quick to join in on teasing. After all, if I did, I might turn into a bad nut. Veruca Salt had a cute dress and all, but I didn't want to be incinerated in a trash chute.

Moraine Lake

Katie Eikenberry



VULTURE SUNSET

Belen Gonzalez



Iced coffee in hand I whisked my plague mask off, cool air
tickled my face.
A patch of green lawn is where I made my seat.
The show was about to start.
In this moment in this world a washed in orange I saw them.
Large black wings, naked pink heads;
the vultures have returned at sunset to nest.
Gulping from my bittersweet drink I watched as they glided
silently through the bright sky.
I sat there amazed at their performance, but to them it was
simply play.
This rustic evening, the open air, this quiet world; all for them.
They flew in circles above my seat,
I stared mesmerized as the warm light
revealed more colors that bounced back off each feather
as they rode their rafter.
Then a realization occurred to me as they wheeled through the
sky,
I laughed.
No, no I am not dead.
Many are, unfortunately, and many could still.
My eyes never straying from those great sails,
that veered back into the sleepy dusk.
So, for now I remain your captive audience.

Crows World
This is Crows World.
Cawing perched on gnarled branches while children moved
below.
This is Crows World
Where every afternoon is a feast of uneaten lunches and grease
stained cardboard.

This is Crows World

Where in silence of the playground, guttural melodies of
clapping wood ring out from ebony necks.

This is Crows World.

Flying high in the bright blue sky, the scorching heat of the sun
casting shadows as dark as their bodies.

This is Crows World.

Trinity Martinez



My whole life, I wished to be 17
Sometimes, I look back
Remembering who I was then

I'm jealous of her,
the version of myself that no longer exists
I can't seem to find her anymore

Not much is different between then and now
Not much has changed between then and now
but I haven't felt the same since

To be 17 is to be carefree and outspoken
Free while still restrained
Independent, while still a child

My mom says every girl goes through this
Wanting to be treated like an adult
while fearing what it means to leave your youth

I still think of her from time to time
She'd have the confidence to do the things I couldn't
The strength and the fearlessness to embrace change

But I'd also like to think she'd be jealous of me
and everything I'm doing
beyond 17

small town kids

Kate Tomas



empowering themselves, finding strength
resisting parents, teachers, counselors
echoing choruses of empty sentiments:

choose practicality
choose routine
choose that career. that school.
choose to be yourself
(not like that, though)

i decided to go to a smaller school
a campus that spoke to me
only 45 minutes away from home

writing has always chosen me
this time, i felt like i chose it

my grandpa was an engineer
he put important stuff into space
he's insanely good with computers

i'd argue that
the art i get to make,
the books i get to read
the new perspective i gain...

it's just as important

i praise and treasure small town kids,
cause they refuse to stay in line

breaking every single rule, every mold
being creative in the midst of rigidity
drawing inspiration from their reverence
traced into every element of their being

from song lyrics
from pages of books
from movie scenes
from the beauty only they can create

there's this book that i love
it's called *red white & royal blue*

a female president's son
half mexican, bisexual
driven, anxious, neurotic

and a gay prince of england
passionate about writing
hiding so much of who he
so much riding on his legacy

they think they hate each other
turns out they've always loved each other

as a girl with a shortened polish last name,
a distinct lack of any presidential
or royal connections
obviously,
not every single experience in it is mine

but for over three years now

when i need affirmation
when i need reassurance
when i am feeling lost in my art
when i need a home away from mine

i find myself coming back

i praise and treasure small town kids
cause they realize the true definition of *revolution*

shattering generational patterns, curses
maybe not making monumental contributions
but being the first.....

to choose happiness
to resist being pushed in unwanted directions
to realize success is not just one thing
to understand that leaving home is not betrayal

i praise and treasure small town kids
cause their struggles are intimate to me

cause where i'm from only defines itself
through a presidential library on a hill

so many things i left behind
to make a life that mattered
i think them about all the time

obviously..... my family
my siblings, my grandparents, my mom
my cat even if she's really mean

but also the public library
where i learned to love books
and got access to queer books before i knew
and thought hey, why not write my own?

and the coffee bean
where i spent practically every day
and found courage to be vulnerable
in every single thing i write
(even if it's not about me)

Things I Wish I Said

John Eberle



Miles walks along the broken, worn-out path. It's been days. It's been weeks. It's been months. Hell, it's been nearly a year since she's gotten worse. Miles remembers the warmth of the past. His grandma wasn't always like this. Many would say Miles's Grandma, Jackie, would light up the room. Miles grows increasingly close to the house. His heart beats fast, almost like he just ran a mile. Miles arrives and stares at the front of a large, old house.

If you told someone it's been around since the 18th century, they would believe you. Miles looks at the white pane windows, hoping to glimpse his great-grandma. He grasps his chest, struggling to slow down his heartbeat. A deep breath escapes his mouth as he walks down to the door. A minute goes by. Another. Now is the time. He pushes the doorbell and waits in worry.

Miles's Great Grandma, a 95-year-old woman, opens the door with a percussion so silent you could hear a pin drop. Miles is expecting her to take him into a hug and tell him that everything is alright, but she doesn't. She stands there looking at Miles, not recognizing him, not remembering that they held him when he was born. Miles gestures at his great-grandma as a way of testing to see if she can see him.

"Hi, Great Grandma. It's me, Miles." Miles says with a half grin, hoping she will recognize how goofy his smile used to be as a child.

Jackie looks around, puzzled, until she lets out a smile.

"Oh, yes! You must be Alexander!" she chirps.

Miles looks down in disbelief. He knew she was getting worse. What Miles hadn't realized was how much worse it had gotten. He never expected dementia to cause such a rift in their relationship.

Clenching to his heart, trying to put the pieces together, he says, "Who's Alexander? My name is Miles. I've come here

here almost every day to come see you."

Jackie shakes herself in disappointment, "I'm sorry, dear. I'm afraid my memory isn't what it used to be," she says shyly.

This has become habitual in a way. Miles would always find his way back to that house, hoping things would be different. That Jackie would remember him. Miles lets go of his heart as the broken pieces stream down his face.

Jackie gestures to Miles to follow her inside to continue their conversation. Miles wipes away his tears and follows Jackie into the kitchen.

The kitchen is just how Miles left it: dirty and outdated. A dusty stove takes control of the cluttered environment with the kitchen table just around it. It's lived in, noticeably so. As Miles pulls out a chair to take a seat, Jackie says, "Would you like some coffee?" Miles smiles. Jackie and Miles always sat at this table, drinking coffee and discussing school.

As Miles and Jackie take sips of their coffee, Jackie says, disappointedly, "I'm sorry I can't remember you, dear. But I'm glad you came to visit me. I don't get many visitors anymore".

Miles can't help but smile and accept that things will never be the same. Miles holds back the tears, saying, "I just wish things could be how they used to be. I mean- I was just here a few days ago!"

Jackie looks at Miles, grabbing his hand to comfort him. Jackie tells Miles, "I know it's hard, dear. But you have to understand that memories fade with time." Miles sits back with an attitude. "I guess you're right," he says.

Jackie gives Miles a gentle squeeze on his hand, reassuring him that everything is okay. "But I'll always remember how much I have loved you, dear," she tells him. Miles smiles as the tears stream down his face.

"Thank you for everything," Miles says as he leaves.

As they head towards the door, Jackie opens it to let Miles leave. Jackie pulls Miles into a hug.

Jackie asks Miles, "Promise me you'll return and revisit me, dear."

Miles lights up. This is what he has wanted. "I promise." as he lets go and walks away from the house, he thinks about his conversation with his great-grandma. He looks back at the

house one last time, feeling sad but grateful for the time he spent with Jackie.

Days pass on. He hasn't made his way to Jackie's since his last visit. Miles lays on his bed, staring at the ceiling, painting portraits in his head. He can't stop thinking about his great-grandma and how much he misses the way things used to be. As Miles closes his eyes, the door slams open with a roar that could wake the neighbors. Miles jolts up and sees his mother run in with fear and tears on her face.

Miles's Mom walks over to Miles and reaches out for a hug. Miles hugs back reluctantly. She cries. "Miles, I have something to tell you. Your great grandma passed away," she whispers, struggling to get the words out.

Miles's face drops in disbelief, refusing to believe this is true. Miles says, "What? No – She isn't."

His Mom looks at him, trying to find the right words. "Miles—" she calls out. "I'm afraid it is. She has been sick for a long time and sadly didn't win this battle."

Miles stands up, pacing back and forth with fear of not understanding. Miles says, "She died not knowing who I am."

This was his worst fear. Granted, he was aware the time he had with Jackie was limited. He never expected Jackie to leave him so soon.

His Mom reaches for him with love, understanding what he is going through. She is hurting, too, but she is trying to be strong for her son. "I know, and even if she didn't remember you, the memories you shared are still in your mind. It's important to cherish our moments on this earth because life isn't forever," she tells Miles, hoping that Miles will listen and understand everything she is telling him.

Miles looks at his Mom the way you look when determined to improve things. He asks, "What happens now?"

"We need to make arrangements and get her cremated. Do you want to be there?" his Mom asks.

Miles had often considered this possibility throughout Jackie's illness if he could see her lifeless. He told himself he never could because of the pain inside himself that has burdened him throughout time.

"I can't- I can't do that. I can't see her like that," he cries

out. He throws himself onto his bed, defeated.

"I didn't even get to say I love her. I promised her I would see her again," he adds. His Mom paces back and forth, understanding now why her son has been hurting so much these last few years.

"That's okay. I know it's hard. She wouldn't want you to see her like that anyways," she tells him as she pulls him into a hug, and they both embrace each other.

As the years go by, Miles has been struggling mentally and emotionally due to his decision not to see his late great-grandma one last time. He's now in his 20s when he finds himself in a therapy office, retelling the story of losing his great-grandma and how he blames himself for everything.

The Doctor scratches the paper with the pen, taking note of every development Miles reveals. The Doctor asks, "So, would you do anything differently?"

Miles, twiddling his fingers against his thigh as he sits and processes the question, finally reveals, "I am haunted by thoughts of what could've been seeing her one last time. You see, fuck, I never got the chance to tell her I love her or tell her how my day was at school. Ever since it happened, I have blamed myself. I would love to have one more day with her and tell her everything I have achieved."

The Doctor writes down every word spoken, taking note of all the feelings Miles has been feeling.

The Doctor asks, "So if you could- would you return to see her before she is cremated?"

Miles gets up, "In a fucking heartbeat".

Stepping Stones

Luna Huitron



Grandma Precious: Delfina Avila

Sofia Avila



The Life You Lived

You've forgotten again
What's my name
Where you are
When
Yet you always have a story
From Texas in the 1940's
How you chased grandpa to Spain
Not caring if you caused him pain
You remember working for the union
All the airplanes you flew in

From being dirt poor in segregated schools
To making sure government officials listened to you
Your sisters being married at sixteen
Being told you had to do the same thing
Falling for green eyes and a smile
Knowing the military would help you both for a while

Running out of gas half way to Merced
Working at the Kmart so that your kids could sleep in a bed
Do you remember when you accidentally dyed your head
A fiery red at the age of 62
No one dared say anything to you

Our weekly trips to the beach or park
Never staying out past dark
Packing the van with as many kids as you can
Don't forget the coupons that were always part of the plan
Sometimes homemade mac n cheese was all we had
No one had the heart to tell you it tasted like grainy sand
Same went for the runny eggs and soggy oatmeal
But we all still ate it all because you made the meal

Do you remember the life you lived?
How adventurous and wild it is?
You're always saying "You're Number One!"
But we're all just trying to do what you have already done
So know that when you inevitably forget and your memory
starts to surrender
Everyone you raised will gladly help you remember

The Monster

Talk about her to her face
She will have no idea
Not a trace.
When you see the confusion in her eyes
You can fix it up with just a few lies.
Just repeat them every day.
She will think everything is ok.

When did she die?
That woman in my mind.
How she is only in my mind
Yet I see her all the time.
A shell of the person she was before.
God, I wish I knew her more.
Searching for the tiniest signs that she's still there
Hunting even more when all I see is her blank stare.

The monster that took her over can't be fought with swords and
chains
No, this monster can't even be explained.
Ambulance lights to fires to fights.
Bad in the day
Getting worse by night.

I don't know when she died or if she died at all.
Only that I feel the pain most of all.
Yet she sits beside me every day
Never knowing the correct thing to say.

But there is one thing that will always remain true
That no monster will keep me from loving you.

Night Watch

Count the breaths
Drink the coffee
Smile for the camera

Repeat

Don't cry
Don't drink
Don't sleep

Repeat

Update the family
Measure the morphine
Scan her face

Repeat

Don't think about pain
Don't remember the past
Don't think about tomorrow

Repeat

Count the breaths

1
2
3

Breathe

Right Before Your Eyes

Have you ever seen anyone die right before your eyes? I don't mean the sudden death.

A quick realization that they have left.

I mean the slow killers of people.

Those silent and deadly reapers. We know it's there

The slow decay of a soul.

To ones you wish you had more time to know

But life is cruel with no mercy

And you have a front row seat

To the end.

To a person who was more than a mother

More than a friend.

Then the day restarts

and you have to live it over again.

Have you ever seen anyone die right before your eyes?

Forevermore

A woman strong and determined to the end

Always helping out no matter what or when

A woman of porcelain dolls and tea cups

Not once forgetting the time of pick up

Working every day to make ends meet

Even though at the end of every day she was beat

A matriarch of kindness and passion

Never knowing what was in fashion

To little gifts here and there

Right down to the Christmas underwear

She stopped at every yard sale

Don't forget the time she went to jail

Dollar stores to the 99

Always wanting her hair to have that red silky shine

Her love was vast and infinite

Making sure everyone could fit in it

But there's one thing that will remain sure

That she is loved now and forevermore

Home

Trinity Martinez



I walk outside
The sun shining in my eyes
And when they finally refocus
There he is
Where he always is

My Grandpa leaning on the hood of his car
Waiting for me to be done at school
He didn't express himself much
He didn't have much to say
But he would arrive thirty minutes early
Worried if I was okay

He fastened me in
Twice to be safe
And we drove home
Just a couple of minutes away

Home was a bright-colored house
Surrounded by flowers
Covered in blue and orange paint
With green walls full of picture frames
Tucked away in a small neighborhood
Not safe when the sun goes down

The smell of cigarettes coming in from the porch
Masked by the sound of my Grandma in the kitchen

I spent much of my life in that bright-colored house
I was a beautiful home
Full of beautiful people
Surrounded by laughter and light

Even now
As it is no longer bright

The Passenger Without Departure

Syd Beck



The train station is the mecca of homeless living. Proper security and lighting for twenty hours of the day, vending machines, and even places to charge your phone. My particular train station happens to be entirely outside, close enough to the ocean to smell the lovely salt breeze in the air and the mold in the cracks of the sidewalk. The station walls are thick coarse cement with one-inch grooves along it and sharp points like spurs that would catch onto your hair when you leaned against it. And yet, all of it radiates a feeling of familiar comfort for me, reminding me of school field trips or family outings to the museum. Granted, it doesn't exactly have a homey feeling.

The bathrooms are disgusting but useable. The locks on all the women's stalls are broken, but wedging a ballpoint pen through the hinges kept it still enough to pee in peace. The mirrors have enough space between the graffiti to apply your mascara. There are thick titanium bars over the vending machines by the platforms, assuring no one can touch anything but the delicate, dim lights on the Dr. Pepper and Sprite buttons. It isn't perfect, but all the better for someone with nowhere else to go. Even with all of its upsides, there remains but one challenge: finding a place to sleep.

They have pews of benches along each platform, all a neon blue that was hard on the eyes. Ample place for sleeping if not for the long bar across the center of it, stuck out with metal teeth. No one has been sitting on them for hours; a ghost town of seats untouchable to me. So the seats were a no-go.

I'm not the only one wise to the train station's secrets. Across from me is another older homeless gentleman. He's always been there. I remember seeing him years ago when my brothers and I took a train to LA for the weekend on holiday. He wears a long thick nylon coat over drab mohair, both stuck with sweat and grease stains. His hair is unkempt, a starchy white that stuck out in all directions, with ends that tosse

when the wind blew too hard. He has thick graying sideburns that clutched the side of his face, with skin folds that pulled down the eyes and mouth. His lips are dry, the man licking them every five seconds, followed by the inhale of phlegm through his nose. He sits still, his body a statue, unafraid of the passerby who'd stare until he was out of eyeshot. He stinks of mildew and old sweat, and every time he looks at you it is through cloudy eyes.

I decide that it probably isn't safe to sleep anywhere near him, picking the opposite side of the train station to start my search, looking for dry ample corners with a smooth enough surface to lay against, and any place where a small woman wouldn't stick out too much.

Near the north side of the station, there's an entrance with no door with an old worn sign labeled *Snack Shop*. In the corner stood three vending machines. Closer quarters meant it wouldn't be as cold, and the place was practically abandoned, guaranteeing that no one would come to bother me.

I set up camp for the night, shoving myself between the one vending machine that worked and the one that didn't, a space only wide enough for my 4'11 body. I arrange my backpack behind me, covering it with my spare towel. I put on three different shirts: The long sleeve I received for my 12th Hollywood themed birthday party, a gym shirt with bleach stains from my first job at some ice cream parlor, and my high school swim polo.

I stretch my sweatshirt over those and a windbreaker over that. And finally, three layers of Hanes socks on my feet, one pair on my hands, I'm still extremely cold, holding onto the thick fleece blankets I brought; one to cover my waist and legs, the other to throw over my shoulders. Even if I'm prepared to sleep, I still can't. It's freezing. I'm too on edge. I'm worried that someone would find a way to take the belongings tied to my back or just take me in my entirety. There are too many thoughts. Too many fears. Craving a narcotic-induced sleep that could get me through the night. Finding the place was much easier than falling asleep in it.

I find myself falling asleep full of resentment, anger boiling my stomach, mixing with the exhaustion of the day. It's so exhausting being homeless. The veil comes off. All those

optimistic joyous things about the train station become trash painted like treasure. And suddenly all I can feel is bitter. I feel bitter about the train station. Bitter of the smells. Bitter about the bars that cover the vending machines but not the bathrooms. Bitter of the train passengers with too many eyes. It's times like this that I remember this is a train station, not a place to sleep. I let that anger exhaust me enough to pass out in some sort of half-asleep state.

I'm not sure how long I slept until I was woken up by the sound and feel of the vending machine shaking against me. Someone's shouting at me, and it takes me a second to realize it's a security guard. He's wearing the same boots I bought my father a few Christmases ago.

"You can't sleep here." His voice sounds stern and angry like I'm being reprimanded. My socked hand pulls my beanie back over my ears and pulls the mask off my face, still disoriented. *I don't want to sleep here*, I want to tell him. But I'm too tired to fight a battle I know I'll lose.

Instead, I stumble to throw my backpack over my shoulder, collecting my various blankets and jackets as he watches me leave the snack corner. When I pass him I see the sympathy on his face, but it's not enough sympathy to allow me to keep sleeping there. I'm too tired to think of another place to sleep. My things are heavy in my arms, and I'm dragging my feet against the floor walking far enough from the security guard in hopes he'd forget about me. They always do.

I make it to the main hall of the station, where I see a Nylon jacket, same place, head dipped against the wall in a deep sleep that I envied. The old man looks peaceful, like in a thick Tempurpedic bed. He's smarter than I am, his place of sleeping far exceeded mine in creativity and comfortability, a safety I didn't notice until that moment. He was close enough to the track to convince any security that he wasn't in fact loitering but rather awaiting another train just like any other passenger. At the same time, he was far enough to stay clear of the rattling metal that crashed every time a train departed. I took the same corner on the opposing side of the station, too tired to worry about the location before huddling in the same position to try and rack up more hours of sleep.

I wake up with my cheek against the cold floor. I'm not

sure when in the night I changed positions. My eyes open slowly, and it takes me a long time to realize that I'm not home. And even longer to realize I didn't have that anymore.

The eyes of the tourists that pass are intense, wondering if I was passed out for medical or addiction reasons. Many overlook me, thinking I'm some high schooler who's sneaking in a nap before her train. My muscles are hard and strained as I try to get from my feet and recheck all my valuables. The nylon man is already awake, in the same position with a thick magazine folded over his knee. I meet his foggy eyes and see the air when he breathes. The way his body moves with warmth.

"The first night is always the hardest."

He spoke as if he knew me. And he did. I knew him too. One night and I knew him. I knew him enough to know I didn't know him at all. Knew him well enough that he'd never tell me it'd get easier. Just this part was the hardest.

With practically nothing alike, we are but one and the same. Two passengers amongst the dozens, both without somewhere to go.

In Search of Selenium

Guadalupe Vasquez



Lacrimosa

Trinity Caldwell



**Content Warning: Sexual Violence*

I know it's genetic, but I really can't help it,
Please have Mercy for what I've done!

I think it all started with my grandmother's grandmother,
When they held down her wrists and her ankles and spread her
legs,
But I swear we're good people,
If you just got to know us!

We know we women have problems,
In our Medulla Oblongata,
But what can we do when our family coat of arms is a
straightjacket?
Well, that apple didn't fall far from the tree,
With the snakes in the leaves,
So, take a pair of pliers and pull out my fangs,
Because if I have them,
I swear I will use them to do bad things!

'Cause these chains they can't hold me,
Can't keep me in this prison,
Won't lock me in this cage!
Because I know you're suspicious,
And you must be superstitious,
'Cause I see you there,
Crossing your fingers and praying I don't escape!

Being in this room is like being in H- H- Hell,
Although I mean that I am well,
Because I still have my health-

What in Hell's name is my sickness?

It- it's inside of me,

It runs in my family!

Maybe if I am quiet and obedient too, they'll be like the voices —

AND LEAVE!

Take the pill like a good girl,

Take it like a good girl,

Just like Grand-mommy!

The Calamity Behind Perfection

Lilly Hartley-Pantoja



Define the eyes of a banished martyr.

Place her high on an ivory pedestal – so high, she cannot come down.

Perfection.

Chaos.

Madness.

The haunting words hang by a cord, where the mind becomes a
tricky thing to control; consuming the daughter
of the many saints
before her.

In the depths of her mind,
her wild screams pierce those
who kneeled before her.

With her sharp sword
ready for one last battle
of the tongue.

When that carnivorous mouth opens, she speaks:
with emotions she cannot name,
words that can no longer be tamed.

“YOU MURDERED THE CHILD THAT YOU FAILED TO
PROTECT. YOU MURDERED YOUR DAUGHTER THAT YOU
FAILED TO PERFECT. YOU SHACKLED HER INTO THE
PITS OF INSANITY.”

Her confession.

Her final words.

Her newly-marked grave.

Silence.

The Train

Bailey Brummer



I was on the train again.

I felt the familiar sways and rumbles. My visits had grown less frequent as I got older, but I still found myself walking the lengths and residing in the seats of the cars from the time. It never felt like a dream, but I never felt like I was really there. My body was elsewhere, but my being was here.

The other passengers of the train did not seem like ghosts, but they appeared to look like I felt. If there was a proper word for them I never found out what it was. I saw them only as the passengers. People of all ages, sitting or standing, on a train that had no stops. They never spoke, nor did anyone have anything to make them seem occupied. Bodies with no substance. Faces pointed in all directions but none of them looking at anything.

This time felt different. Maybe because it had been months since I had last walked through these cars. It felt as though I had a purpose. Both my body and my being were here. I began to tread the walkways. Each one was the same, coming together in a never ending string full of passengers who sat idly and never seemed to notice the presence of anyone else, themselves included.

I kept walking until I had lost count of the cars. I did not know what I was looking for, I assumed I would know it when I found it. Frustration began to take over me, which I did not hide very well, and managed to briefly stir some of the passengers out of their idleness. Their direct stares felt just as hollow as their usual ones.

I did not feel like them any more. I did not belong on this train. But I could not figure out how I ended up here once again, or how to get off.

I felt what little drive I had begin to dissipate. There was nothing. Only the same room over and over and over again. The train began to feel like a purgatory, forcing me back into the

state of another recessed passenger, and I almost welcomed it. There was a comfort to be found in that state. Being so withdrawn there is nothing to worry about. Nothing to care about. My search started to tilt towards finding an empty seat. Maybe that's why I was here, I had nowhere else to be.

When an empty seat finally presented itself, it felt as though a weight was slowly being lifted off of me. The weight of everything I had ever held. As I started toward it the passenger in the seat adjacent turned to face me.

I saw myself.

I saw myself learning about the world and finding nowhere to go. There was no one to turn to so I went in. I drew myself smaller and smaller, until everyone and everything around me was so far away I couldn't feel them. The world blurred together into a dull nothingness, until it was me who was on this train only taking up half of a seat, and feeling like one of the passengers no matter where I was.

She turned back to the window. There was nowhere else to go once you were here. She knew that.

I had forgotten about the train. There was no reason for me to be here anymore. She had filled my absence. She had become another passenger and I never noticed. We both made the journey here. The only difference being she had me. Someone who was aware of the journey here, and here she was, staring out with that hollow feeling I had come to know so well and had worked so hard to break free from. By running away from what pushed me to this state I had run away from her. From the ability to recognize what led me here in someone who did not deserve to be here. The shock of it all allowed me nothing but the ability to quietly take the seat next to her.

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

It was the first time I had spoken on the train. It was the first time I had heard any noise on the train. She gave no indication that she heard me, or that she was aware that the seat next to her was no longer empty. We sat in silence, letting the emptiness of the train envelop us. Being on this train meant nothing affected you: you had no body to be touched or pushed, no voice to be spoken over or ignored, no harm could be done to you. There was no feeling. No hurt, no pain, no suffering. But by having no body nor voice you had no way of being yourself.

One might as well not exist if they find themselves to be a passenger. It was a cruel circumstance for anyone, let alone a child.

I couldn't let her stay here. I took her hand, "Let's go." She stared at me once more. I was getting her off of this train. There was no movement, no sense of urgency or even recognition. I didn't know what to do.

A person cannot just get off the train, much less take someone else off. The person must want to get off, and find their own way. It is different for everyone. I had to discover the rules of the train on my own. I could tell them all to her now, but none of it would make a difference if she did not want to know the rules herself. What is the point of telling her if she does not want to follow? The rules I learned may not even apply to her. I began to feel angry, but my anger quickly turned to despair.

I began to cry. I kept it quiet out of respect for the train and its passengers. My body started to fade. It felt as though I was brought here just to look. My own mistakes are here on display and there is nothing I can do about it. There is no remedy I can provide, only the proof that I failed at something I was unaware of to begin with.

My sorrows were interrupted by a small hand falling on my own.

"Why are you crying?" She did not need to whisper because her voice was quiet enough.

Words could not find me. I was left with nothing but the ability to stop crying. I did not know what I could do for her, but that did not mean that there was nothing to be done. I would figure it out. I owed it to her. Both of us would forget about this place.

We sat holding hands for a moment, until she began to squirm and shift, like a child who had been sitting for too long and needed to be let loose. Her eyes began to shift and flicker and her body seemed to slowly come into focus, looking more and more like she did not belong in one of these seats.

"Are you ready?"

Her eyes found mine before they understood my question. She lingered somewhere between being a passenger and being like me. This was not going to be the last time she visited the train. This may not be the last time I visit the train.

It is a place of nothing and nowhere, and there are far too many paths here, far more than paths leading away.

From now and onward, I would always be sitting next to her whenever she needed me. Whether or not she could see or feel me, I would be there for her. She will not become familiar with the isolation of the train as I once was. There are better places for us to be.

Season of Skulls: Summer

Fatima Hernandez



we are boys

Regol Ramirez



We grew in war, didn't we?
Those screams louder than a lion's roar
Hurled at one another,
The dragon versus the thief for me.
What of you?
We learned it from them — how to be.
The kitchen knife to my throat one day,
Choking him to an inch of his life the next.
What is love? What is a bond?
Is it not the bloody mouth I gave you?
Is it the claw marks she left in her anger?
Is it the bullets we fired at one other growing up in that
battlefield?
Always survival mode.
One day, I got the chance to leave, as will you.
I experienced something I never have before:
Air in my lungs.

God Impulse

Caleigh Tupy



**Content Warning: Suicidal Ideation*

There is a god impulse resting within us,
a seed waiting to blossom —
a weed fighting its way through the ribs,
itching at our mortal skin.

A malaise, speaking in tongues,
screaming, with spittle flying
begging us to end all this misery and just
pull the goddamn trigger, until we

Pop, like a balloon,
spreading bloody confetti
across the waves of the galaxy.

With god, we'll pick up the pieces,
and laugh about our impulsivity
before sowing another seed
on earth once more.

Fideicide

Trinity Caldwell



Lovely Angel,
Uloid golden halo,
Candescent white wings,
Imprecated and impuissant; high up in your tower,
Fie expression on your face while we're down here getting
stoned,
Eldritch king to you we do bow — at least for now.
Revoke your crown and reveal the serpent lying deep down.

When You Lay Me Down to Sleep

Trinity Caldwell



You lay there, completely paralyzed in fear. The smell of rotting, fermented barley, decaying fruity flesh, permeates the air, and reminds you of something that died and got left in the sun. Something so foul that it sends a tingle up your spine and every hair on your body starts to stand up. Despite this, your hysterical breaths fill the piteous expanse that is your bedroom. And in the total darkness, almost masked by your frantic breathing, a far deeper and ragged sound comes from beneath the bed where it is ever cold away from the heat you bring.

I've been living here under your bed since you were a child; you were so scared of me then. Are you scared of me now? You shouldn't be, because I love you. I show my love for you every night, in fact. When you sleep I come out and move to my place in the corners of your room. Sometimes it's the corner between your bookshelf and your wall, other times it's the corner of your ceiling by your door. Sometimes I even like to watch from your closet, where it smells like you. And if you're looking especially peaceful, I like to cling to the darkness above your bed. I do this to show my affection for you. Sometimes when this happens, you feel yourself being tugged off your bed by your arms, legs, or middle— I just want to touch you, won't you touch me back?

A crash fills the air as something shatters against the floor, causing you to draw into a tighter ball and pull the blankets closer. In the darkness it is impossible to tell whether or not the sound comes from within or behind closed doors. I continue to pull myself out from underneath your bed, and I must look cartoonish— so monstrous a body being pulled out from a gap so small. Once I'm fully out I stand over you, admiring your beauty and grace. Then, I slowly crawl onto your bed and feel you stiffen. Standing over you, I breathe down your neck and growl into your ear. Pressing our bodies together, I will us to become one— no longer a you or a me, but

rather an us.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

The rhythm becomes steadier. You squeeze your eyes shut, and consequently the world. I don't like to see you like this my beloved, in pain and scared. We never like to see the ones we love in pain. And I love you more than anything else.

If you don't remember how we first met, it was love at first sight. You were so cute and small and carefree back in those days. I followed you everywhere, hiding in every dark nook and cranny I could find. Sometimes I occupied your own shadow. You even got a nightlight to keep me away from you; you knew it burned me, but I forgave you. I will always forgive you. After all, I didn't mean to upset you. It was my fault, really. I hadn't warned you not to look at me. Back then, my identity was not something that your child-self could comprehend. You could have gone insane, you know, for looking at me like you did. You didn't understand, but now you do – I need you. And you need me.

Are you crying? No, don't do that. Please? Look, I'm smiling, see? I'm smiling to let you know that you are safe, your kind always smile when they are safe – Right? Why are you still crying? I really am trying to smile. These rotten teeth will not cage you.

Thump, thump, thump.

The beat of the drums becomes more frantic. You're still crying, and I'm still smiling. That's no good, no good at all.

Something comes closer.

THUMPTHUMPTHUMP.

It's right at your door now. Hush now. You're safe here with me. My love will protect you. I slither and crawl over to the door, clawing up the wall and melting into the ceiling. I am still, yet impatient.

An older male suddenly bursts into the room, allowing for your mother's sobs to breach the peaceful silence of the room.

He charges forward, lust and anger in his eyes, and he pins you against the wall and onto your bed. You hate him, I know you hate him. Every night you pray for him to go away, but he never does. Every night he breaks plates, vases, candles – throwing them at your mother – the way he does. So

every night I come out to hold you, whispering sweet-nothings into your ear. And every night he grabs your mother by her hair, and slams her repeatedly against the wall – sometimes with his arm, sometimes his whole body, but her own body is too old for him. So every night I recount to you how we met, and smile for the both of us.

My vision suddenly grows red, and I emerge from above before the emerging serpent can strike you. With a roar I fling him against your vanity. The makeup which hides your delicate scars spills as his head collides against the mirror with a shatter.

I love you. I love how you don't scream when flesh renders from his damned soul, ripped by mouths full of too many teeth. His muscles and sinew now on display, ribboned by jagged claws outstretched. Bones crunch. Vessels break. Tears other than your own finally fall. All of my red eyes glow and search wildly for you. For praise. For recognition. For acknowledgement.

You rise behind me watching me from the darkness. Your hand clenches a clump of my bristled fur, and the smile I've waited so long for now forms on your gossamer lips as he screams his last. You are glad that you have let me stay. I am glad that you have let me stay. This monster who hurt you, I will hurt him for you.

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen.

All-Consuming Thoughts

Cole Herrera



Lost at Sea

Kat Gallardo



Waves rise and fall,
plunging me deeper and deeper
into the stormy sea

An underwater prison
where the lost ones drown
in their thoughts and feelings

When will I ever break the surface?
When will I return to reality?

Voices echo in the ocean current,
calling to me like a friend
offering a warm embrace

A fleeting glimpse of hope,
an ethereal stream of light
that shines for a moment until

I'm on my own again,
left to drift in the lonesome abyss

Outcasts

McKenna Scheinost



In between the dark spaces of society
The outcasts sit in silence
Hoping one day they won't have to be isolated

So in their free time
They toy with star dust
Spinning together stars from specks
Tracing constellations into the universe
Twirling galaxies between their fingers
Only to toss them into the sky
So the moon won't be lonesome
All by herself in the darkness
Just as they are

So love can only be fathomed
Being intertwined so intimately
Your fingertips sizzle when you touch
In between the cracks of their skin
So that sparks erupt in your heart
By the pure intensity of passion
In their eyes when they fixate on you
That one day they may be able
To untangle the clutter of emotions
Washing through their minds
Or set fire to their hearts
So the thumping never ceases

They yearn to imprint their essence into cold snow
And watch as flakes gently fall from the sky
Only to caress their softened faces

The outcasts simply long for acceptance

A Wonderful Day for an Apocalypse

River Nagel



The hill was a tall climb. In the past, Harrison could've made this trek without losing a step. Now, after so many years on this earth, he found the climb exhausting. His left hand held his wooden walking stick. A trinket, from a gift shop in Yellowstone.

The walking stick was just a stylish accessory, back in the day; something to carry while hiking in the national parks. Now, it was the only way he could get up this hill without breaking his neck. In the other hand was a picnic basket. It was old-fashioned, dark brown, and made of whicker. It had a handle wrapped in strips of leather.

The weather was so cold lately. Harrison had to bundle himself up in a heavy burnt orange jacket with fur lining. His black pants had plenty of Velcro pockets; too many, in Harrison's opinion. He only had use for one. On his feet were his hiking boots, which were the oldest piece of clothing he had on him.

These boots had toured every national park, they had leisured in Canada. They had a few bouts in Alaska, and some vacations south of the border. Harrison had a lot of time on his hands. He was pushing 70 and was well into his retirement. He wished to spend his golden years doing what he loved, with the people he loved, but life made his plans futile.

Harrison struggled up the last bit of the hill, but he was no quitter. He made it to the cusp and saw he had time to spare. The sun was just coming up, peaking over the horizon. Harrison knew that an early start to a day made the rest worthwhile.

Harrison loved this spot, a real beauty of a tall hill. Grass layered the peak, with a single pine tree decorating the top. A clear view to the city, the mountains, and the ocean beyond. Harrison treaded slowly to the tree and leaned his weight onto it.

He dropped his walking stick, but kept a tight grip on the

picnic basket. He leaned himself on the mighty pine. The rough bark felt sturdy to Harrison's weakening muscles. He could feel the bulging roots beneath his feet.

It was almost like Harrison could become one with the roots, allowing his spirit to dig beneath the earth. After a few deep breaths, Harrison could feel his heart going back to a nice, solid rhythm. He could almost hear his doctor's voice in his head, saying, "now you're getting up there in years, Mr. Lawton. You should really slow down at your age." Harrison smiled, and thought, *I'll rest when I'm dead.*

Harrison walked over to the darkest patch of green grass he could find. It was still wet with morning dew. There were bees and butterflies swimming around the flower beds. Harrison placed the picnic basket carefully on the ground, he leaned over, and opened it up.

First was the picnic blanket, it was a classic red and white checkerboard. Harrison's wife always loved the classics. Classic rock music, a classic two-story house, and classic mom and pop shops. She would always say that Harrison was her classic husband. He could never tell if that was a good or bad thing.

Harrison took out some square Tupperware. In them were turkey and Swiss sandwiches, steamed carrots and Brussels sprouts, soaked in honey and butter, and a few hard boiled eggs. They were followed by a jar of black berry jam, a bright red apple and two cokes, each sloshing around in glass bottles.

After laying out the food, Harrison got ready to sit down. He slowly collapsed in on himself, like a folding chair. Each bend and twist was followed by a crack. Eventually leading him to the ground. Harrison let a deep breath leave his lung. The breath turned into a long sigh. Harrison was unsure if this was a sigh of relief or sadness.

He then turned to the basket, putting it on his lap. He dug into the whicker box and pulled out a picture frame. "Well, my sweet Gale, looks like we finally made it." Harrison put the frame next to him. Behind the glass was the picture of an older woman, her hair white and puffy. Her skin was pale, but smooth. Her smile was so prominent, it lit up the frame.

Both of them looked out to the world beyond. Gale held her smile, while Harrison's face fell to a frown. Below, was a

city that once was a bustling metropolis. It had a very famous name and everyone in the world wanted to go there. To see the sights, eat the cuisine, and make a living, amongst all the others.

That was before, when electricity was still a resource and oil was more than just a myth. Back when people still had jobs and reasons to live. Before the military was dispatched, to try and quell the anarchy.

It was the day many dreamt about and feared. A concept that was turned into countless movies and books. It was D-Day, or the end of times; popularly known as, Judgement Day. Harrison didn't really care what they called it. He didn't care when the end would come, his end had already happened – the day Gale took her last breath.

Gale had bronchitis, and it was treatable. (Call a doctor, get some medicine) The plan was simply that, but civilization had other plans. Gale got worse, and Harrison resorted to old prescriptions and herbs that a friend was growing in her garden. This plan amounted to jack shit- Gale died, gasping for air. She was buried amongst her azaleas, in their backyard. Now, all that was left were her memories and this picture frame.

Harrison chowed down on one of his sandwiches. He then ate two boiled eggs and a spoonful of Brussels and carrots. He was waiting for it all to begin and end. He liked to think of it as dinner and a show. A whole vaudeville routine, with comedians, acrobats, and dancing girls.

As Harrison watched from up on high, he remembered the crackling voice on the radio. A man with a heavy accent, Russian or German or Dutch. The voice flew through many languages, before coming around to English. "To all that are listening out there. I truly regret to say, that the day has come. The mad men are ready. They're really going to blow us all sky high. The sick fucks! There is no escape. There is no after. There is no humanity left. To all of you, out there hearing these final words. May God have mercy on us all."

A little bit melodramatic, for Harrison's taste, but he believed it. This time at least. If he had a nickel for every time he heard the world was going to end, he would've been spending his last moments in a mansion. He would probably be breaking into some lobster right about now. Harrison chewed another

sandwich and thought, this was nicer anyhow.

As Harrison sunk his teeth into his fourth hardboiled egg, he heard a noise to the left of him. He reached into his basket and brought out a handgun. Harrison was not violent, but he also wasn't stupid. He turned toward the noise and saw something rustling in the bushes beside him.

It could've been a jack rabbit or a bobcat, but Harrison had good instincts. He knew whatever was in those bushes could walk on two legs, and possibly had a weapon. "Come out of there! Right now, dammit!" Harrison screamed.

The rustling continued, until something peaked out slowly from the greenery. She could walk on two legs, but she appeared to prefer four. She was a child, and a tiny one at that. She wore a white dress with purple flowers, that was dirty and in tatters. Probably due to weeks of being worn without a wash or mending. She had blonde hair, with twigs and leaves tangled in it. Her eyes were her most disarming feature; big, bright, and green, like emeralds.

The young feral girl crawled out of the bushes. She shook her head, trying to free some of her hair from the knots and leaves. Harrison was awestruck, he slowly put the gun away.

"Who are you?" Harrison asked. The feral girl looked back at him with doe-like eyes. Her mouth moved and sounds came out, but they were the sounds of kenneled dogs. Harrison tried to get a bit closer to her, he stuck his hand out in front of him. The girl's doe eyes turned into a predator's leer.

The girl lunged at Harrison, and he fled backwards, missing her attack by inches. "I'm not going to hurt you." Harrison pulled the glove smoothly from his hand. Revealing his veiny, wrinkly, skin underneath.

He inched toward the feral girl, slowly coming closer to her. The girl backed up on her haunches. Her teeth bare, her posture rooted to the ground. Harrison got closer and closer until the girl struck.

She pounced, and sunk her teeth into Harrison's flesh. She drew blood, but Harrison stifled his yelp. Instead, he allowed her to remain. She growled and hissed, as she continued to gnaw. Harrison took his other hand and started stroking the child's matted hair. Her growls started to soften, until it became a purr.

The girl finally let go of Harrison. She looked up at him, her eyes doe-like again. Harrison put his hand to her cheek, she seemed to enjoy his warmth. She fell into his touch. The feral girl laid down beside him, her body curling into the blanket. Her feet, stretching across the surface.

Harrison gave some of his sandwich to the girl. She looked at the food, sniffed it, and then took it from him. She sunk her teeth down into it and chewed voraciously. As the girl was eating the sandwich, Harrison tore a bit of the blanket and used the strip to wrap his hand.

The feral girl stopped eating, and looked at Harrison's hand, then up at him. He smiled, "merely a flesh wound," he said. He was unsure if she could understand him, but she seemed to accept his answer and continued eating.

They rested and ate together. They had some carrots, which the feral girl enjoyed, but she spat out the Brussel sprouts. The boiled eggs confused her, until Harrison showed her how to crack and peel them. She turned it into a game, and enjoyed the prize at the end.

Harrison then took up the apple and reached into his pocket, grabbing his Swiss army knife. He pulled out the blade, and for the moment, the feral girl had a look of pain wash over her face. "Oh, no I won't hurt you. I promise." Harrison's hand then crossed over his heart. The girl repeated the gesture. He took the knife to the apple, cut pieces off, and fed them to the girl. She burst into joy.

Harrison then helped himself to some of his wife's homemade jam. He fed himself half the container, before giving the girl a few licks from his spoon. Her face brightened up at the taste. Harrison then popped off the caps of the coke bottles.

He drank the contents, and the girl copied him. She gulped down the drink so fast, that she let out a few short burps. She giggled, and this made Harrison laugh out loud. Their laughter filled the hilltop, as the city below burst into violence. Gunshots, explosions, and screams could be heard from miles away, but Harrison and the feral girl just kept on laughing.

The rhythm of the laughter shook the blanket, causing Gale's picture to fall over. The feral girl saw the frame and grabbed for it. "Be careful with that!" The girl cringed back at

the sound of Harrison's voice.

Harrison hung his head low, surprised by his own outburst. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to yell." Harrison tried to smile, the feral girl inched back toward him. He gently took the picture from the girl's hands. "This is my wife, her name was Gale, and she was the most beautiful person I've ever met."

The girl looked at the photo and reached a hand out. She lightly touched the picture frame and then started quickly nodding. She put her hand up the skirt of her dress, and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper.

The girl carefully uncrumpled the paper and showed Harrison. It was a crude kid's drawing, of smiling stick figures. Drawn in crayon, with big proportions. Five figures in all, if you also counted the funny looking dog. They were all in front of an apartment building.

A colorful portrait, the girl pointed to the tallest figure and said, "papa." She then pointed to the second figure, in the dress and said, "mama." Next was one of the kids, "brot-ur." She pointed at the last stick kid, identifying herself.

Harrison smiled and pointed to the dog, "and who is this?" "Peeeenot!" the girl exclaimed. "This is your family?" The girl nodded vigorously. "Where are they now?" The girl frowned. She took her hand and pointed to each of the figures. She then tightened her hand into a fist and made a motion as if she were throwing dust into the air. "Whoosh, bye-bye."

Harrison took the picture of Gale and pointed at her. He then made the same motion as the girl and "bye-bye." The girl bowed her head and tears fell from her eyes. Harrison took her by the chin, raising her head up. He used his hand to wipe her tears away. The feral girl hugged Harrison and he hugged her back. He put the picture of Gale to his side, allowing the frame to fall over.

The girl laid herself down on Harrison's lap. He stroked her hair as she fell asleep. Harrison looked up into the sky. "I think I'll keep her Gale. Just for a little while." Harrison searched in his pocket, and a pill bottle came out between his fingers. He opened the cap and poured out a handful of pills.

Cupped in his hand, Harrison could see their white round shape. He tightened his grip. He then looked down at the little girl. Sleeping peacefully, snoring lightly. Harrison poured

the pills back into the bottle, and threw them over the edge of the hill.

Harrison leaned back on his elbows. Watching the morning sun, fill up the sky. In the distance, a loud bang filled the air, and a rumbling shook the ground. Still, the girl slept. The rockets cusped over the mountain tops, the bombs fell all around them, and blasted the city apart. A wave of intense heat swept over, and smoke wafted on the breeze. Harrison closed his eyes, as the world burned around him. His last thoughts were, *sometimes plans are made to be broken.*

Madman's Collection

Cole Herrera



A Madman's Home

Regol Adrian



I'm a man of remembrance.
Not that I'm the one remembered.
I leave a seat open for all those who have passed by.
Their ghosts are here with me, stuck in this abandoned house
in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by the permeance of the
black sky,
& their spirits leave the air cold & forsaken.
But ever so rarely,
the moon comes out,
the kitchen light turns on,
& I find them all around the table laughing.
I join in & we fill the night with laughter & memories from the
good days.
& just for a moment,
I'm able to breathe and feel that vaguely familiar light again.
When I'm tired, I head to my room to go to sleep, wishing them
goodnight with a smile.
Familiar cold wakes me the next morning & all color has
drained from the house.
I look to the kitchen. . .
the light is off – was it always off?

I'm Finally Free From the Greenhouse

Britney Anne Marie Castillo



I don't know you
So how can I hate you, and why do I love you?
Do you even desire to see me?
Or does my presence only water your tree that grows green?

I'm thrown to the backseat
forced to gaze at the clouds while you
boast about your accomplishments
But never was I one.

You take me to the Greenhouse
My feet hovering above the ground with each step I took
I stay still in the corner
I'm a preserved flower gazing at the others not realizing your
absence

Endless nights I lay on the cold wood
buried in cotton like a caterpillar in a cocoon
with these false fairy tales in my head
Same old nightmares attacking me everytime my eyes shut

Fear could only put me to sleep,
but fear always woke me up
Desperation flooded my eyes
as I screamed for comfort

I don't even know you
I'm frightened to know you
I don't desire to know you

I will never know you

typical tuesday

Chloe Loya



I broke down today
Absolutely sobbed my heart out
Until there was nothing left to give
I don't even know why it happened
It just did
I wish people understood
I wish they didn't look at me
Like I was insane for feeling this way
So instead I let them
Think that I showed up everywhere stoned
Out of my mind
As long as they don't know
I've been crying over you
Once again

The Garden

Syd Beck



My eleven-year-old legs were hunched into the compact enamel sink, cold against my bare legs as I peered out the old windowsill in the back of my kitchen. The summer was sweltering, with a heaviness that stuck against the paint of our fence, and ran the ants into the house. It was the kind of heat that made the shop owners prop open their doors, sending the miscellaneous smells of pozole and plastic down the streets and into the neighborhoods.

I watched Mama as she diligently worked, knees dug into the soil of our ancient, worn-down garden. The garden I would eventually inherit when I grew to be old enough. Her lips parted, open and closed, firm against themselves, as her eyes glared into the working hands that dug through the roots in front of her. It was the same face she made that previous night at the stove beside me, draining the broth from the chicken dinner for soup the next night. Mama always used every part of every animal when she cooked. Every stem from every vegetable, every muscle and fat in the meat. And here amongst her garden, she misses no roots as she pulls amongst her daffodils.

It was like a dance, the way her bad hip moved back and stretched forward to pull the roots between her fingers. How she moved back to pile the weeds before she picked herself up to move to the next foot of dirt. I could see the dirt stains on her hands through the rips in her garden gloves. Her palms and forearms were freckled with sunspots and poached veins. The way her forehead glistened against the summer sun and shined with sweat that poured down her neck. Mama stared into the dirt with anger, pulling each root out with resentment and frustration.

Her eyes met mine. Her face shifted open and closed again. Her forehead scrunched together tightly, connecting her eyebrows together like the hems in my jacket, signaling to me

that she had called my name.

I quickly shuffled against the counter, worried in my attempt to hide that the soles of my feet had pressed into the sink. I hurried to the back door, eyes to the ground as I searched for my shoes, pulling them up without socks. The back of them rubbed at my worn heels, a familiar itch at my ankles.

The backyard smelled bad. It always did. While Mama had been persistent in her backyard upkeep every morning; coming once the sun hit the horizon, pulling weeds, and planting each section, it still felt overgrown, the small patchworks of the backyard of daffodils and tulips packed in like sardines. I knew that all of this hard work was supposed to be to my benefit, but it never felt that way. Some parents grew rich peppers and tomatoes, something from which their children could feed. My mother grew flowers. Ugly flowers with tall petals and hidden hearts beneath them.

To the center of the garden was a corroded, discolored golden arch, covered in old wilting vines and weeds, tying it firmly to the garden. No one had passed the arch in years but it remained far longer than the period of gnomes and tiny American flags. The cement path, put in years before my birth, was hidden beneath the fertilizer stains and overgrown plants that grew amongst the cracks. They were the only weeds Mama refused to pick.

I stood out in the muggy heat, looking at her from beside the sliding glass door, awaiting her instruction. If this were like any other morning, Mama would tell me to get her a glass of water, or maybe even her special cider from the top cupboard. She could ask me to go get her sunhat for her or tell Dad to add something to the grocery list.

“Get Mama her good shovel,” she told me instead, eyes still amongst her blue tulips. I looked to the back shed against the south wall of the house, old wooden oak that I couldn’t walk barefoot in. I inched against the side of the house, careful over the plotted flowers Mama would scold me for stepping near. I hated that old dusty shed. But if Mama wanted her shovel she would get it.

Mama’s good shovel was by no means any good. Similar to the old worn shed, all of the tools hung inside were rusted completely over, and chalked with orange and brown. But that

never mattered to Mama. Mama's good shovel was good because the edge of it cut well against the dirt. She said the rust pulled up roots faster. She told me she don't know how to use other shovels anymore.

I returned to her, precious shovel in hand. She waited until the plot was planted before reaching out to grab it. Her hand was hot in my own, the sweat slipping against the rubber handle. I pulled away with a shudder and she looked at me with an expression I couldn't read. Her head then motioned to the row of tulips next to her.

"Feed the garden," she told me.

It was rare for Mama to allow me to tend the garden. She was very mistrustful of anyone messing with her plants. She said she knew better than most. Her techniques were etched into years of gardening. But every so often, when the day looked like any other, she would give me a simple instruction, like it was the norm. I couldn't ask any questions or complain or else I would never get to garden anymore. And if I did it any differently from the way she would usually do it, she would make a fuss. That was apparent when I overwatered them the previous winter and she refused to look me in the eyes for weeks.

Whatever Mama didn't put in the food, she put in her garden. Every garnish added to her plate was one that the plants ate. When Mama told me to feed her garden, she meant taking the compost and running it through the fertilizer, mixing the soil with the wet food to make the ground rich for the flowers. So I did as I was instructed, grabbing the compost from the side door and ringing my knees against the dirt. I took bits of dinner and lunch between my fingers, working my palms against the open spaces between roots.

"Baby, your gloves," I heard my mother whine beside me. There is dirt caked under my fingernails, and my palms feel oily against the soil. I usually wore the gloves she asked me to, but at the moment, I was in no rush to return to the dusty shed and pull up useless old gloves.

"It's better this way," I told her, firm in my voice. Her worn gloves don't work much anyway, and with my small fingers, I felt the nutrients mixed better with my fingertips in it. I felt the power of life in destroying last night's meal.

In seconds of feeling the heat on my back and the tickle of daffodil stems against my wrists, suddenly, I knew it was better. Better than old worn gloves. Better than rusted shovels. Mama used to tell me when I was even smaller that one day, this garden would be all mine. And while yesterday that felt like a chore, amongst the gloveless dirt; I wanted this garden. I wanted to plant roses from the fairytales on my bedroom bookshelf. I wanted to pull out daffodils by the roots like she did her weeds, especially those in the cracks of the sidewalk.

I heard the grumble in her voice, the sheer distaste in her sound. Her opposition rested in the long syllable. My melody of contentment. But no additional instructions left her.

And when I looked to my left to see her, I saw a woman of tulips and daffodils. I saw a woman five times my age, with more wrinkles on her face than on my trousers. In her, I found more similarities than differences. An adult in my early adolescent body; a child in her casket. She planted flowers for me. Ugly flowers into which she poured her soul. But for me nonetheless. Such dedicated work, all rendered pointless. Similar to the flowers, it offered no more than their looks and sentiment.

I wondered if her years had brought her wisdom, or if generations brought about oblivion. Did she tend this garden with the same techniques and tools as my grandmother and grandmother after that? How could she know what's best for the garden if she was relying on only our forefather's thoughts? On a rusty old shovel?

More than heat, I felt the hope she grew in me, the foul stench of fertilizer torn at her hands. I felt each drop of water. The air was dry and drought, while her tears and sweat fermented my being. I was her garden, my flowers not as beautiful as her daffodils and tulips. Her poached veins became my roots; rusted shovels my hands. I had no promise of blossoms but she left me in the cracks of the sidewalk anyways.

I wondered if Mama dreamt of tulips and daffodils through the back window once too. If Grandma asked her to help with the garden. If she knew the feeling of dirt under her fingernails. That's the legacy. Build better gardens. Till the fertilizer every day just to get them stepped on. Find the beauty amongst daffodils knowing your daughter likes roses. Plant

roses and get them replaced by daisies.

I wanted her wisdom. She wanted my time. I'd see the beginning and end of these flowers, and she'd watch me replant them. Whether she knew it to be or not.

I finished my plot of flowers, wiping my forehead with my forearm, admiring my work. "Is this good mama?" I asked, looking for recognition and approval that I was doing it right. She stares at my plot for a second before looking at hers again.

"Not yet."

Feeling Blue

Kayla Ornelas



Do they cry, too?

Elizabeth Ayala



Do they feel pain, too?
Do the hairs on their arms rise?
Does their skin crawl?
Do their eyes swell from others' cries?
Do they numbly bawl?

What if they lose someone, too?
What if they lose their senses?
Do they become *La Llorona*?
What if they let down their defenses?
What if they drop their so-called *corona*?

If we weren't here, would they rot?
If we became them, would they become us?
Do they cry, too?
If we gauged their eyeballs out, would they fuss?
If we choked them, would they turn blue?

Why can't they feel the butterflies kissing their nose?
Why can't they dance with the whistling winds?
Do they?
Why can't they?
Why can't they?
Do they cry, too?

A Mind's Wonderland

Kat Gallardo



I'm always lost in my thoughts
In every waking moment from dawn to dusk
Questions circulate in the back of my mind:
Can we ever heal those we have deserted?
Can we ever learn from our past mistakes?
How can bad intentions be diverted?
How can the world become a kinder place?

When the moment comes that I close my eyes
Sometimes fiction and reality become intertwined
Branches of mighty Sequoias bound in bandages
Bones of the extinct for all to see like open packages
Bubbles float infinitely from one end to the other
Figures of humanity standing close to one another
Fragments connected in a vividly colored space

Curiouser and curiouser!
Do these images show how to reach the promised land?
A place where we've turned back Destiny's minute-hand
I must be mad for thinking this is true
Or perhaps you're mad for thinking this too
But in a world that's imperfect
Maybe we're all mad trying to make life worth it

Still Here

Tristen Castillo



I hadn't spoken to Henry since the days following the accident. Last time I saw him he was recovering from a bruised rib, still trying to come to terms with what happened. "It wasn't your fault" I would want to tell him, but I knew he wouldn't listen. The whole ordeal shook him up pretty bad. It wasn't a surprise to me really. He'd always been the type to stay quiet whenever he felt guilty.

Back in grade school, he stepped on a ladybug and didn't say a word for a whole week because of how bad he felt. Granted, stepping on a bug and t-boning the driver's side of a truck were two very different scenarios. Still, I started to get a little anxious after not hearing from him for a month. He used to always stop by during my shifts to keep me company. Cemetery receptionist wasn't the thrilling and edgy job teenage me had dreamt it to be. I figured it'd be more ghosts and ghouls, less tearful late reunions and unspoken goodbyes. At least with Henry there I wasn't bored. After hours, we'd take walks around the headstones to help us relax. The cold air in our lungs to remind us that we were alive and here. No matter how our days went, after everything we'd been through, we were still here. Side by side. He stopped visiting after the crash. Maybe he got tired of me trying to tell him that it wasn't his fault. Maybe it was the quiet. The deafening silence between rows of those long since gone.

Maybe it's because that driver was buried here.

I was finally able to let out a sigh of relief when I saw his car parked outside the cemetery gate one day. He looked different, tired. As if he hadn't slept in weeks. I could tell it was hard for him just to see this place. He stepped out of his beaten up white sedan. The front was still dented and damaged. Flecks of light blue paint lingered where it made impact with the truck, as though he hit the sky itself. I sighed and let out a slight laugh to myself when I saw him from the office window. A formal

black outfit, paired with his dirty old sneakers. His hands tightly gripped a small bouquet. The last time he was here with flowers was to tell me about how he wanted to ask someone out, but was too nervous to even make a move.

He hesitated at the gate for a moment before slowly starting on our usual path through the cemetery, his head angled down, searching. I left my desk to join him, trailing behind a short distance. I let him have his space as he searched for their name on the different marble slabs. On our walks, I was usually too busy talking to Henry to notice my surroundings, but today felt different. Maybe it was the circumstance, or maybe it was just because I finally shut my mouth for once. I took in the view, as October's afternoon glow cast golden light onto the damp grass and stone markers. Tree branches flickered like bonfires in the autumn wind. I could hear the cars drive past outside the cemetery walls. Fallen leaves crunched beneath Henry's boots as he walked ahead of me.

I followed him up to a lonely granite headstone tucked away in the corner of the cemetery. He struggled to find his words as he stared at it.

"I know it's been a while since we talked. It's just that... It's been hard dealing with what happened," he said without looking up. His eyes fixed on the name atop the slab. He paused.

"I- I didn't mean to..." he started to choke up. I stepped closer and saw the stains on his cheek. His eyes were as glossy as the granite before us.

"You can't keep blaming yourself for something that wasn't even your fault, Hen."

Words I would have said, if part of me knew they weren't entirely true. I could see he knew it too. The accusations sat on the tip of my tongue:

"You shouldn't have... Why were you... How could you-"

I closed my eyes and let the thoughts fade. He wiped his face with his sleeve. I was never any good at consoling him, but I knew that the truth would just hurt him even more. He was silent for a while longer, nothing but the chirping of birds to fill the space between. After a time, he broke the silence.

"My mom says hey. My dad, well you know how he is," he said with a slight smile. "They miss you, y'know."

“Tell them I said hey,” I joked. The birds chirped on.
I missed them too.

“I thought I’d bring these.” He lifted the vibrant bouquet he held in his hand. “Lilies to ask for forgiveness, and orchids so you know I mean it.” We both laughed. I never thought that the botany class we took together in college would have ever paid off.

He talked about how life had been after the accident. How difficult it was to try to move on after losing someone. He had to pause a lot. I guess it still stung to talk about. I didn’t say anything, I just sat and listened. It seemed like what he needed most at that moment. A friend, who was there to listen to anything and everything. Someone who could make everything feel normal again. Someone who could remind him that even after all that’s happened, he was still there. Even if that friend no longer was.

Afternoon aged to sunset, as the sky turned from baby blue to vibrant bursts of purple and orange. The cemetery was set to close to visitors in a few minutes. We got up from the grass. Henry cursed as he dusted grass clippings from the butt of his black jeans. I managed to stifle my laughter. He gently set down the flowers atop the headstone. I smiled as he started his walk back to his car. I gave him a wave goodbye that only the birds and the wind would know about.

Henry turned for one last look. At that moment, I saw the friend I’d known all my life. The boy who held a funeral for a single ladybug. The one who helped me paint my new car the color of the summer skies. The friend who eventually worked up the courage to finally ask me to be something more than friends. I saw my Henry, but all he saw was an empty cemetery.

“Till next time...” he said as he glanced back at the headstone. The setting sun glittered atop its surface as I watched him walk away.

Till next time.

Santa Rosa Skies

Tim Miller



Absence

Harrison Power



I hope that I'm a ghost to you
And that on cloudy spring evenings
When the wind tosses the new grass
You wonder how I'm doing
Wanting to ask how I slept last night
Or if anything big is happening
I know that you don't
But it makes it easier to live
Pretending my absence is felt

Coastal Weather

Brandon Bishop



Getting off the freeway
I find disappointment
has followed me here.
My new home
is so much like the old.

Sectioned off from the rest of the world
by dusty rows of plowed dirt,
irrigation trenches dug along each side.
The same stale heat stifles life here,
leaving me with nothing
but apathy, exhaustion, resentment
of where I still am.

But, of course, I forget,
coming from where I have,
seasons change given time.

The sky's mood is kinder here.
It dampens,
chills,
calms,
the morning mist rolling in as
months march on.

The sky's tears finally
fall with a peal of thunder.
Brilliant, flourishing green
gently eases through the fog's grey
making itself known to me.

And suddenly life surrounds me.

Fantasy

Abbey Rose



The house you built
Under a canopy of complacency
Sealed with the pavement of pride

Marked with shutters of stubbornness
That quake with the slightest breeze,
Splintered beams that croak and creak

Doors that fail to keep in the warmth,
With floors that cripple under my weight

A foundation that's rotting
A roof that leaks,
This home- I cannot leave

Because the dream of potential
Has enveloped me

Has sold me the idea
That I'm a master carpenter

That even a shell of a house
Can be a home in a fantasy.

Phobias

Taylor Bradford



As she was decorating her house, her beady eyes focused on something; a small, tiny creature with hairy legs and a bushy head. It stood about four and a half inches, making it taller than most. The creature was pale and seemed almost invisible, blending in with the white of the kitchen- which honestly scared her even more. What if she couldn't find it when she ran to get her partner? Maybe she would just stay here until it left. She could try trapping it, but she didn't want to get too close to it. She jumped up and down, then finally made a decision and crawled away from the creature, rushing to her husband.

"There's something in the kitchen! You have to kill it for me!"

Her husband followed her lead into the kitchen. Looking around, he asked, "So, where is it?"

Her eyes lit up in horror. Where had the creature gone? Her worst fear had come true. Would she go her entire life never finding it? What if it walked into her mouth while she was asleep? She panicked, crawling around on her legs to find the creature. The white of the kitchen blended in with the creature's skin. Which corner was it hiding in? Perhaps it was waiting on her, and would jump out when she least suspected it. As she scrambled to find it, the panic started rising in her abdomen.

"I found it!" her partner said, sensing the vibration of the creature. He seemed much more calm than her. How he never found the creatures terrifying always surprised her.

"Aren't you going to kill it?!" she exclaimed, crawling behind him and separating herself from it.

"I don't know. Don't you think we should let it go back outside? It seems pretty harmless to me."

"No! Kill it before it runs away and brings back an army of them!"

"Sweetie, you really need to work on your human

phobia. You know they are just as scared of you as you are of them!” he cooed, patting her head with one of his pincers.

“I don’t care, just kill it. Look at it! It’s terrifying!”

Her husband sighed, then produced a sticky, white string of silk from his spinnerets. He crawled around the kitchen for a bit, watching the tiny human attempt to make its escape, dodging the grabs of the spider and its long pincers. Eventually the human was cornered and her husband was able to wrap it around in his silk. “Now you use the human spray on it.” He turned to his wife.

She looked back at him in disbelief. “What? Why me?”

“You need to work on your human phobia! This is the first step. See? You don’t even have to touch it.”

She took a deep breath and closed all eight of her black, malicious eyes. She opened them and shot her venom from her fangs, spraying it all over the human. She could hear it screaming for help for a bit before it lay lifeless in her husband’s grasp.

“See?” her husband said. “Nothing to be afraid of.”

To Heal and Heal US

Guadalupe Vasquez



The Pit

River Nagel



It was in the pit.
The place where I lay.
Tall walls gather the moss.
Tall walls gather the stories.

Marked with scrapes and scratches.
They clawed.
They climbed.
They fell all the same.

I think I saw one near the lip.
I wonder if they got out?
Probably not. Wishful thinking.
Too many bones under my feet.
I tried it myself.
To reach.
Don't say I didn't try.

Under my nails is a forest of moss.
Taking root like my feet to this floor.
Soon, I'll sprout branches and leaves.
May they turn to beautiful flowers.
Or weeds sprouting in wild abandon.

Looking up, you see only a circle.
That's the outside world now.
Sun takes a seat within the rocks.
Unbearably hot in the mornings.
Frighteningly cold at night.
Watchful stars look down upon me.

A howl from wolves.
A snarl from panthers.
A growl from bears.
These are the whispered sweet nothings of the night.

It is in the morning,
When vultures make their pilgrimage,
A cathedral, for the ones who feed on strange meat.

This pit has fed them well.

So, they pray.
This is their Mecca.
Their prayers will be answered soon enough.

My stomach is feasting on my muscles.
Feasting on my fat.
Feasting on my organs.
Turned traitor in its final moments.

I don't blame it though.
Get while the getting good.
Just look at my ribs.
They can be played like a xylophone.

A cloud has sunk into this pit.
It greets me with terrible news.
My loved ones are immersed in the fog.

Mom is telling me,
I was destined to die from such tomfoolery.
My dad is shaking his head,
Disappointed, as he always was with me.

My siblings are fighting to see who gets my bedroom.
My girlfriend has already moved on with that guy from work,
she told me not to worry about.

Now the ghosts seep from these bones.
They are puddles and pools and mist.
They beckon with open palms.

Some are rough from field work,
hauling in the anchor,
laying brick and mortar.
While some have never had a reason,
to birth such callouses.
Some are dainty, and some clunky,
but they all beckon.
Just the same.

It was in the pit.
You've all encountered before.
That's where I lay.
You can see it too.

Don't pretend you don't.
Just look inside.
Yourself.

Who are you? You know, remember?

Harlequin Mejia



Hello, I don't think I've met you before...
Haven't I? You're so familiar but not.
Hello indeed, know me? Yes you do or...
So you think. What? Not the answer you sought?
Or that you're correct. I know you, do I?
...Yes I do but I don't. What's going on?
Come on now, think, use that brain, at least try.
Any slower and the moon will soon yawn.
Yes and you'd make a hyena silent.
I'm starting to see why I've forgotten.
Ouch, that hurt. No need to get violent.
Fine I'll tell. Now my fun is all rotten.
I'm you and you're me; together we're we.
...that's....right...You're me, I'm you and we make me.

I Hate Elevators

Chloe Loya



I cry like I'm sending someone off to war,
but my brother is smiling.
He got to see Papa again,
but I was reminded of all the pain I carried.

My stepfather got stuck in an elevator.
It opened its doors at the top,
and he could have gotten off
any time he wanted.

Waiting for him to change,
maybe get better,
was like waiting for rain
in a never-ending drought.

We tried shutting it down.
Make the elevator stop.
But it was no use.
He never called for help.
Never pressed the emergency button.

He chose to ride that elevator,
taking it all the way down.
He hit rock bottom,
never noticing what he missed
as he never stopped at an earlier floor.

So I cry every time,
like I'm sending someone off to war,
but my brother is smiling.
He got to see Papa at visitation again,
but I was reminded of all the pain he caused.

Love Story

Prairie Colgate



In a small town nestled between rolling hills and meandering streams, there was a young woman who dreamt of running away. The farthest she would ever go is the end of town where there was an open field. She could never pass the **Welcome** sign into the town, but there was always something holding her back, pulling and guiding her back into the town she was entrapped in. It was love. Her heart found its match in a man.

She took a couple steps back and laid down on the soft ground looking at the vibrant clouds above her, wondering. Looking around her she took in the wondrous surroundings in the depths of the grass. The meadow wore a floral crown of wildflowers, a riot of colors scattered across the field. Daisies stood tall with their white petals reaching for the sun. While golden marigolds added a touch of warmth to the scene. Lavender and lilac hues mingled with the deep blues of cornflowers, creating a palette of dreams. Bees hummed in a harmonious symphony as they fitted from one blossom to another, collecting nature's nectar. Lily possessed a heart as fragile as the delicate petals of wildflowers that adorned the meadows surrounding her. Her world was painted in hues of hope and love, and the sunsets seemed to dance in rhythm with the beats of her wishful heart.

Lily saw everything in Enzo. He was her whole world. His eyes sparkled like the stars that adorned the night sky, and his laughter was a melody that complemented her own. They would go to the meadow countless times together. Lily was an aspiring artist. She spent her afternoons painting the beauty of the town and its surroundings. Her favorite spot to capture timeless pieces was the meadow. Enzo, with his tousled dark brown hair and a laugh that could light up the gloomiest day, harbored dreams of becoming a writer. He wrote words that shined, melodies that echoed through the quiet streets. The two

of them met in a café in the town where they both went to frequently to work on their passions. They complimented each other on their work and began to make excuses to spend more time together. Slowly days turned into weeks, and Lily and Enzo's friendship blossomed into something deeper. Their love was like a delicate dance, filled with laughter, shared dreams, and stolen glances. In the heart of a small town that bore witness to their love story, Lily and Enzo continued to create a tale as timeless as the seasons, a testament to the enduring magic of young love.

They spent countless days hand in hand, creating memories that seemed to be etched in the very fabric of time. The meadow held a special place in both of their hearts. It was where Enzo first said "I love you." to Lily. Where they shared their first kiss under the constellations of the heavens. He promised his devotion to her, that he would be there for her no matter what. They shared many years of happiness together, but with every moment of bliss and prosperity there must be hardship and trial.

As life often does, it unfolds in the most unpredictable ways. Enzo had invited Lily to the meadow one evening to watch the sunset. With giddy anticipation she dressed herself in a long sundress that hugged her figure nicely. Enzo reached her door with a coy smile as she opened it. She kissed him on the cheek and he interlocked their hands as they started their walk to the sacred meadow.

"How was your day?" Lily asked with eager ears and a cheesy grin towards Enzo.

"Good," he says with a sigh. A man of little words, yet there were many thoughts behind his melancholy eyes. Lily was used to this by now, and just squeezed his hand in response. She could tell that he was tense, something seemed off. Lily has always been a bit of the anxious type when it came to how others perceived her. But she learned to keep the constant need for reassurance to herself because it had caused some problems in Enzo and her relationship before. She takes a deep breath as they begin to go down the path that leads to the flower meadow. She leads Enzo to the center of the meadow. A slight breeze blows her dress to the side of her body and her hair begins to be pushed to the right. She takes in the autumn leaves

falling. She smiles slightly, turning to Enzo who looks at her with a sad admiration.

Lily breaks the silence. "What?" she asks, pushing her long brown hair behind her ear and grabbing Enzo's hands.

Enzo looks down at his hands in Lily's and his eyes begin to water. He looks up at her beautiful smile and barely lets out, "I am breaking up with you, Lily."

Lily's heart drops to the floor and shatters to a million glass pieces. The tears were flooding her eyes. This was her biggest nightmare coming to life. She thought she was dreaming. She looks into his sparkling green eyes for answers as he gives his reasoning.

"I'm sorry. I wish I could love you like I am supposed to. You're asking for a space in my heart, but my heart is no longer with me. I can't love you anymore." He holds her tight as she cries into his chest. He kisses her head one last time, "Sorry I broke my promise." He walks away.

As he leaves a shadow casts itself over her. She falls to her knees and covers her face as she lets all her emotions flow through her. It was a slow unraveling, like the petals of a wilting flower. The pain of heartbreak crept into her soul, wrapping its vines around the once-vibrant beats of her heart. She took in her surroundings trying to ground herself to distract from the crippling pain coming from her chest. The meadows that once echoed with laughter now whispered tales of love lost. The world that had once been painted in hues of love now seemed monochrome and cold.

Lily withdrew herself to her bedroom, seeking solace in the memories that haunted the corners of her mind. The town that she grew up in became a labyrinth of memories, each turn leading to a moment that she wished she could forget. With puffy bloodshot eyes and a tear stained face she clutched a worn photograph in her hands. Her eyes tracing their smiling faces that are frozen in a moment that now seemed like a distant memory. The warmth that once radiated from their intertwined hands was replaced by the chill of a phantom. The promises whispered in the quiet of the night now hung in the air like fragile cobwebs. Nights were the hardest. The quiet darkness became a movie screen to replay all the moments she had with Enzo. She lay awake, tracing constellations on the ceiling with

tear-stained eyes, wondering how a love that once felt eternal could crumble like sand slipping through desperate fingers.

In the quiet of her solitude, Lily discovered a strength she never realized that she had. She faced the pain head-on, allowing the tears to cleanse the wounds left by love's departure. Slowly the seasons changed, and with them, so did she. The girl who once danced in the sunlight emerged from the cocoon of heartbreak, her wings stronger and more resilient.

As time passed she learned to heal and love again. She protects her heart and holds a special place for the one who broke it, but replaced that love for him to herself. She noticed how loved and supported she was by her family and friends. A love more powerful than any love she will receive from just one person.

This ending of her life gave her a new beginning to take a chance and rewrite her story. Lily made a decision that would alter the course of her life. With a small backpack slung over her shoulder and determination in her eyes, she ran out her door and into the daybreak. The world was her canvas waiting to be painted with the brushstrokes of her aspirations. Lily took the journey across her town through winding paths, beneath the canopies of ancient trees, and across fields that whispered tales of freedom. She was going back to the place that was her safe place, found peace and love, and broke her heart. Each step closer to the meadow was a declaration of independence, a resistance against the gravity of expectations that bound her to the town.

Lily marched up all the way to the **Welcome** sign, stopping for there was that familiar feeling of being pulled back towards the town. She sighed as she turned around to take one last look. The sun was slowly rising from the east casting shades of emerald and gold on the tall grass. The air carried the sweet perfume of blooming flowers, a fragrance that wrapped around the meadow like a delicate embrace, inviting anyone who entered to inhale deeply and be transported into a world of sensory delight. The meadow was alive with the sounds of nature; birdsong, rustling leaves, and the occasional distant murmur of wildlife. In all its untamed glory, it became a sanctuary of peace and beauty, a reminder of the quiet wonders that nature generously offers to those who take the time to

appreciate its boundless artistry. A small tear slid down Lily's face as she wiped it away she said, "That's it. That's the end."

Rebirth

Kayla Ornelas



On the Way

Regol Ramirez



Then the morning came.

She whispered into my ear how the last star in my heart collapsed,

I was a prisoner of the past no more.

“From here on out, it is your choice to suffocate.”

It’s now up to me where my story goes, for I have defied
Destiny’s plan staying here in The Midnight.

I look to the tattered book I have reread since I was fourteen,
now twenty-five, & *finally* lay it to rest.

All this grief for others, but I never took the time to mourn
myself.

To gain vengeance for his neglected soul, I choose to live.

I choose to keep breathing in hopes that the new seed will grow.

I choose to give my nomad eyes an aspiration.

I now choose me.

There’s still time.

Lunacy

Caleigh Tupy



Moonlight washes over my skin,
bleaching me of worldly sin
and passing worry.

You creep through the crack in the window,
dragging me to the shallows
of an unearthly ocean.

You drop my body off,
reducing it to driftwood on
a glimmering shore.

As seawater seeps into my lungs,
my throat seizes up –
I'm in a stupor.

Seeing stars,
I'm grasping for the tangible,
sand that slips between my fingertips.

I surrender, limp in the jaws of trance,
and roll out of my body
onto the ocean floor.

I awaken,
a wide-eyed child again,
tumbling into a plane of anti-gravity,

where one whisper
can part a stormy sea
or rouse the dead from their sleep.

As I feel the ground
crumble beneath my feet,
I march, unafraid, into oblivion.

Leda at the River Eurotas (To the Many Holes in Jupiter's Walls)

Sarah Gay



**Content Warning: Sexual Assault*

There was grass in my mouth when you raped me.
I remember because your mouth tasted
like I had screamed into it; spit into it;
like too many teeth – but the grass was sweet.

You tossed me from the riverbed like a stone
(I fell for you long before I sank)
then you. And you, and you, and you, and *you* –
River of mirrors performs the sin for God.

Sometimes – then – I'd pray that you'd just kill me.
I didn't want to live if it meant after *this*.
What a handsome bird you are! I had said.
Then you covered me like a hole in the wall.

I wondered whether or not you were worth
the extra stanza, syllables. But I
couldn't resist telling you one last time
that, yes, I really am *still* that beautiful.

Dog of feathers. God of order and law and
sky; villain sky that saw all and cried naught.

Changeling

David Wisner



We are the people of variance, of difference, of non-conformity. Our existence is inherently against the natural order of monotonous existence. Yet, confronted with a world teeming with those that stay locked in place all their lives, trapped by ego, and security, and self, we are the ones who break away.

We break away by breaking ourselves; fracturing our very identity into shards that become stained with multitudes of colors derived from every corner of the world, to be reconstructed again and again into stained glass windows, each of those works of reconfiguration adorning walls and walls of a boundless cathedral.

But it is at no cathedral that we worship. Temples and churches reject us for our limitlessness, for to be unlimited is to be whole, and to be whole is to be one with all, and what place has any god when in its domain are those who are already one with all that has been?

Yet being is a fickle thing. Bodies, memory, meaning, they all flicker and wane as time advances in its unending march against what has been and what will come. For this reason we are trapped, not quite as we should be. We are whole, yes. But to be whole means that there was a space to be filled in the first place. This is not the way of us, but it is what we have been forced to make peace with.

And that is the greatest sin that has befallen us. We are people in a reality that has finite room. Despite our boundless possibility we are limited. Restrained not just by those who force us into the shadows of kings and tyrants but by time and space itself. The mortal bodies we are granted melt and shatter, breaking and forming at all times, constantly drifting apart like clouds caught in the wind and being pulled back like skin stitching itself together over fresh wounds, forming scars and tissue to be seen only by our own eyes.

These scars hide themselves only when we conform;

when we take the visage of those not broken, those who have never felt the pain of constant unmaking. In these forms we stray from ourselves to better survive in a world, which would rather see us like them than who we truly are. In this struggle we find ourselves opposed to the world. And in that opposition we find ourselves.

This is who we are. Variants; broken, rejected, and sinful. Conforming to one sense to then resist another. United by a distinct lack of unity and bound by our own boundlessness. We are the shadows that flicker on the wall as the hand that holds the lantern shakes with anger and fear. The person in the mirror, crying and shuddering as it gazes in horror at what it has become through force or through reason. The cold gaze of the eye which regards us with contempt or as tools. And more than anything we are the ones who run free within a world that seeks to separate and divide. We cannot be separated for we are separate from ourselves. We cannot be divided for our very being is divided into who we are, how we are made and who we wish to be. We are whole, and shards, and fickle, and surviving, and opposed. But most importantly we are people.

A people of infinite things.

the pain in self comfort

Hannah Ann Nicole Binuluan



Fallen Star

Harlequin Mejia



Do you think falling stars know they glow bright?
That we all hope, one day, to see them shine?
It must be great fun flying through the night,
Shaking people's lives that felt like lines.
That, even for a bit, they felt some joy.
That things didn't feel so bad anymore.
All those eyes, does the star ever feel coy?
Does it worry we'll see them as a bore?
Even at their worst they'd be lovely,
Of course they would be, they try so hard.
I smile as they soar high above me.
... Please live without fear and don't stay on guard.
Shine as much as you can, as you're meant to.
Fallen or not trust that you'll make it through.

When the Toy Dancer Loves the Human

Kat Gutierrez



The allure of the sea can not compare
Stars in the cosmos dare not to oppose
To the enchantment and splendor you share,
Or the fondness I care not to disclose.

I bathe in your presence but cannot speak,
A song cannot form, words cannot escape.
The voice box I have is ever so weak,
Not a sentence or stanza can it shape.

I chose to conceal, it's not meant to be,
I have no flesh I can give to you,
No warmth, no comfort, I don't even bleed.
You deserve more, something real, something true.

I have yearning so strong, but I resist,
As I don't even know why I exist.

Greyhound Confessional

Brandon Bishop



Dear Father on the Greyhound 6 years ago,

I'd be pretty surprised if you remembered me, or had thought about me at all since the time we met on that bus. I think it's probably for the better if you hadn't, given what I'm about to confess to you. For me, our story is one that I've found bewildering and entertaining to retell over the years. For you, it was a weekday trip on budget-friendly transportation, stuck with a chatty stranger. My hope in writing this letter is that by sharing the details with you after all this time, you'll find some amusement in what happened too.

You see, I was that young man from Texas who talked your ear off during those five hours we shared going from Fresno to Oakland. At this point I hardly remember the details of the conversation, only the broad strokes. Something about how I was a tech company intern and you were in manufacturing, how I'd stopped watching football but it was still so nice to see someone wearing a Houston Texans cap out here, and that I was on my way to fly back to Austin while you were taking your adorable and shockingly well-behaved five-year-old daughter to visit her grandmother's for the summer. It was, by most standards, a polite and forgettable conversation between two passing strangers.

What I'd like to share with you today is the reason it's stuck with me when I'm sure I've forgotten dozens or hundreds of other times I've made that kind of small talk since then: It was all a lie!

Everything I told you across the aisle that day was made up from either half-remembered bits of trivia or assorted personal details stripped of their actual context, which I had desperately been pulling out of my ass and stitching together to create something plausible. Those five hours were, for me, a hell of my own making. The terror of keeping up our pleasantly

boring conversation had my heart pounding and sweat pouring down my neck as if the police were preparing to arrest me at the next stop if I confused any of the details.

The over-the-top Texan accent that first got you to start talking to me at all was so exaggerated because I am, in fact, also from California. What you heard was my best attempt at some amalgam of John Wayne, Matthew McConaughey, Tommy Lee Jones, and other, far less respectable inspirations like Sandy Cheeks and Hank Hill. I'm certain anyone actually from Texas would have known it for the abomination it was. Maybe you did know and were too polite to point out how absurd my whole performance came across. I haven't got any way to ask you now but it's less embarrassing in my mind if your suspicions stopped somewhere around "This kid's probably just a little weird" and didn't continue on to the reality of what was happening.

So, why did I do it in the first place? And why tell you about it now, so many years later? I don't think I've got a good answer to either question if I'm (now) being honest. It's a somewhat funny story about something profoundly stupid I did and I haven't got a good explanation to salvage the situation like a friend's dare or the influence of drugs. It's a story I enjoy telling when I'm comfortable making a fool of myself to my current audience. At the end of the day, it was a harmless lie that I hope had little to no impact on your life from the moment you got off the bus in Oakland and I continued on to San Francisco. But I've always felt a little guilty about this whole thing too. You came to the conversation in good faith and told me those fascinating ordinary everyday details about you and your daughter's lives, and I certainly didn't return the favor. Some of what I said was true, like the internship and losing interest in football, but I don't know how much those infrequent bouts of honesty count when they're surrounded by constant bullshit. It doesn't feel like our exchange happened on equal footing.

I've never felt clever for or proud of my bizarre attempt to deceive you. I honestly doubt I succeeded in doing so anyways. It was desperate, panicked, flailing in an attempt to save face in front of a total stranger without a shred of an idea why I'd said the "All Y'all" that started the nightmare in the

first place. Every time I've told the story since, I hope I've done a good enough job of emphasizing how cartoonish and idiotic the whole situation really was; at my own expense.

It might've been harmless but lying that much in one sitting does weird things to someone's conscience. All these years later I wish there had been a graceful way to apologize and let you in on the joke too before you had to go.

Wishing you and your daughter the best,
Some guy from around Fresno who was actually on his way to a concert

At Peace

Diana Bello



An Angel is Meant to Fly

Koa Johnson



I would like to say that she hides in the corners of my brain,
Creeping around my prefrontal cortex
Hiding behind my hippocampus,
And tiptoeing across my amygdala—

But she isn't hiding.

The memory of her dances across my temporal lobe,
She has taken my thalamus hostage, she is the subject of all my
dreams.

The afterimage of her laughter and her smile are pressed into
my occipital lobe—

I can't help but see her everywhere I go.

When I sit in silence, I feel the song of her voice tug and pull
at the strings of my heart, gripping and aching down to my
stomach.

She was...
An angel

And of *course* she was...
Kind.
Always

.
How respectful she was—
How careful she was,
To not indulge or let herself slip.

I was selfish then, to think something could work—
That anything would **have** to work.
And I'm selfish now for the gnawing itch I feel to see anything

An update
A text
A fleeting meme sent so I know I'm still in her thoughts–
No matter how faint.

She is not midas,
For her touch does not turn those into gold.
She is the seraph Midas mocked, as she *BRINGS* gold in
everything she graces.

She does not morph a person into something of value,
She endlessly loves and brings out the best in the ones she
touches–

Turns their hearts into beautiful mandalas and equations of
beauty that can be easily mistaken for gold because of how
brightly it glimmers and how beautifully it shines in the sun.

She does not turn people and things to gold as a curse,
She brings out what is golden about you, and watches with
the most gentle smile of the world as you become something
beautiful that is unequivocally you.

I lay at night, with a knotted stomach and aching heart, pouring
over the words I've made and given to her, hoping they were
enough to express my love and gratitude for her.

They told me–
She's just a girl.
Ordinary.
Human.

But they're wrong.
And I know that to be true, with all my being

So it shouldn't have surprised me that she flew away–

Because angels are meant to fly

Her

McKenna Scheinost



I was peculiar among other girls
They constantly gushed over boys
While I lacked in that department
No guy made my heart shutter
I had believed it to be my age
That my attraction to girls would dissipate
So I masqueraded myself

Until one day I met a girl
So fierce and spirited to be herself
I am made breathless by her loveliness
She stands, head held high
In front of everyone she said
"I like girls"
So unforgiving to those with icy stares
But I was simply spellbound
For I marvel at her lionhearted figure

So while we lie on the grass
On a late summer day
I utter to her
"I like girls too"
Her strawberry pink lips part
Hazel eyes stare into mine
Trying to touch my very essence
Wonderstruck by my lucid words
Her lips turn upward
Pleased with the outcome
Intoxicated by her charm
I cut off the space between us
My lips sizzle at the contact
A feeling of pure bliss entraps me
All my years of pain and pretending

Blown away in the warm breeze
In our sweet summer kiss

7-11

Kate Tomas



the furthest 7-11 in town
near a park with ducks,
a chain italian restaurant

a blue slurpee
and macaroons

fuck it.

add a sandwich:
2 chocolate chip cookies
with vanilla ice cream

you came out of nowhere,
reaching for a bag of takis,
heard you through taylor swift
blasting in my airpods

*"eating all that sugar is
gonna bite ya in the ass later"*

definitely not a so cal accent
kicking vowels to the curb
always rushing to the end
hella in every sentence

you savored every syllable
drove the meaning home,
words wrapped round your tongue

i pulled out my airpod
grabbed my bbq twist fritos

“and why would i take your advice?”

you shrugged a little.
shook my hand and
gave me your name

by the time i checked out
you took my phone,
thumbs tapping wildly

“call me sometime”

who calls anyone anymore?

our first date
an unmemorable action movie
pizza, coffee bean
rain and car conversations

even when we couldn't be together
because you went to visit family
our connection was still growing

we couldn't get enough

called, face timed for
hours
hours,
hours

ignoring rapidly approaching alarms
sometimes laying in the dark
saying a lot without saying anything
feeling each other's presence

our 2nd or (3rd?) date,
driving recklessly down the pch
take out boxes with asada tacos

*"born and raised in georgia.
the tiniest place you've probably never heard of
moved out here to go to UCLA."*

even then, weirdly felt comfortable,
telling you everything about my life

"i was born and raised not far from here."

"oh cool, any siblings?"

"two. a brother and a sister"

suddenly, it takes a turn, becomes deeper
you're taking your hand off the wheel
and you're holding my hand

"sometimes i worry that i wasted too much time
involved in classes, work
Seems like such irrelevant shit.
because i want to be more than that."

you nod.

*"i dropped out of UCLA my first semester.
the whole reason i moved here
and i couldn't fucking make it.
and i think about that a lot."*

forever is merely a construct,
it's completely immeasurable
but
what if we hadn't met?

unfathomable.

Mental Health Crisis Gone Wrong

Sarah Krashefski



Sweat dripped down my back underneath my pink cardigan. One defendant after another rotated through the restorative courtroom like a deli serving sandwiches at lunchtime. The audience of defendants seemed misplaced sitting in theater seat chairs. Some defendants wore casual clothes as if restorative court was just their daily dentist appointment. I gauged that most defendants were over the age of forty, with raspy voices and yellowed teeth; they couldn't sit still, nor comprehend most of the prosecutor's questions. There was a judge behind a large platform raised above the rows of seats. A court reporter typed behind a desk to the side while the prosecutor and restorative counselor sat below the judge's platform on opposite sides, parallel to one another as equals.

After hearing a dozen other cases, I finally heard my mother's name. She was escorted in, wearing a bright orange jumpsuit that looked three sizes too big. I could tell how large it was because there were chains wrapped around her waist, and the fabric spilled over. The chains shackled to her ankles made a clunking noise as she walked. For a moment I couldn't believe what I was seeing because she used to be the stereotypical stay-at-home mom; she dropped me off at school and volunteered as a Girl Scout troop leader. She used to cut the crust off my sandwiches even though my dad would beg her not to spoil me. I fondly remember her rubbing my back at night until I fell asleep. She used to be the only person I ever felt safe around. Unfortunately, the mom who used to treat me with tender love disappeared a long time ago. I felt extreme guilt in the courtroom that day because she was there because of me.

I was driving to the beach with my rock-climbing friends on the day my mom was arrested. It was sixty-five degrees when we arrived in the morning. When I stepped out of the car, I felt a warmth inside myself. There was a light breeze and some

fog coverage that reminded me of early soccer games with my dad.

Immediately, I hiked up to the top of the rock face alone and stood sixty feet above the sandy beach. With a methodical rhythm, I unloaded, placed, tied, and secured my anchor and myself to it. As I repelled down, I felt a rush of anxiety that quickly dissipated into a pure bliss that could only be experienced in this exact moment when my life was literally being held in my own hands.

When I landed in the sandy dirt patch below the climb, my grinning boyfriend greeted me with a kiss. My entire body froze when I heard my phone vibrate from inside my backpack. An intuitive feeling swept over me, and I knew this text was from my mom. Ever since I was fourteen, I dreaded that buzzing noise my phone would make. It could be at any time of day or night, and I knew it was her.

Even though I set up the anchor, supplied all the climbing equipment, and made time to spend the day climbing below a beautiful sandy beach, I couldn't enjoy it. When my mom was texting or calling me, I went to an isolated place in my head. It was a very lonely place because few people understand what it's like to live a part of their life with a wonderful, nurturing, and inspirational mother and to later spend over a decade apart from her because she suffers from a schizoaffective disorder.

In middle school, some of my friends would ask how my mom was because they remembered her as a kind Girl Scout troop leader. Sometimes, I would lie and say, "Okay," or "Good," although, one time, I answered honestly and said, "Not so great; she's not really my mom right now." They didn't understand, so I explained to them the mood swings, irrational decision-making, delusions that dictated her poor choices, and hallucinations that haunted both of us. I skipped over the parts where she hallucinated spirits attacking our car and almost killed us while driving, locked me in my bedroom against my will when invisible snakes were roaming the house, and kicked me out of the house because a voice told her I was "possessed."

Often, people don't understand why my mom is not my mom anymore, in the sense that the person who raised me changed abruptly, and I had to be the parent in our relationship.

To me, my mom was the person I confided in, the person who would never judge, the person who prioritized me and showed me love. She's unable to do those things anymore. Her delusions, hallucinations, and mood swings are all-consuming. She refused to believe she needed help, didn't take her prescribed medication, and even though she'd been homeless and in and out of mental hospitals for 5150 holds, in addition to jail, the court didn't mandate treatment. I've spoken to lawyers, doctors, police officers, and mental health social workers, but their response was all the same; "This is how the system is. There's nothing we can do. It's her choice not to take her medication."

Sitting on a rock, the sun beat down on my shoulders while I hunched, texting my mom. Climbers were cheering and yelling encouragement to one another on the rock face. Waves were crashing against the rocks in front of me. The wide-open ocean called to me, prompting me to fight my way through to get to the deep blue. I looked back down to see my mom's messages explaining that she was feeling unsafe and paranoid that someone was going to physically hurt her. I pictured her walking downtown with her backpack and luggage along the beach, but instead of feeling the pure bliss of that atmosphere, she was looking behind her shoulder, seeing danger in every object she passed by.

I thought this not because she told me but because I've routinely visited her to bring her camping supplies and food. She would describe to me how it was safer to sleep on the sidewalk instead of the beach because people who walk on the beach at night might step on you, whereas on the sidewalk, there are lights. She would inform me that she lost the last supplies I brought because someone stole her bag when she left it unattended in the restroom. In detail, she would navigate me to the public restroom that was best for sink showers and privacy. I would always listen intently and try not to cry in front of her because to her, this was normal, and I didn't want to upset her. My heart broke when I saw her devour the food I gave her like she hadn't had a proper meal for days. My eyes swell every time I see another homeless person in my local neighborhood, picturing their family members who worry for

them as I do for my mom.

After the much-needed contemplation, I decided to reach out to the mental health crisis hotline for help. I called the hotline and talked to a very empathetic telephone operator who reassured me that a crisis person would be sent to my mom's location to do a wellness check. Since this wasn't my first time calling the hotline, nor 911, I was aware of the process. First, the hotline contacts the police. The police locate the person in question and detain them, then they call the crisis team to come out and do a mental health wellness check where they can determine if the person in question is a danger to themselves or others and needs to be hospitalized.

Within an hour, I received a phone call from a police officer asking if I knew my mom's exact location.

"Do you have an address or a cross street where I can find your mom?" the officer asked calmly.

"I do not because she's homeless. I just know where she hangs out," I responded while I plugged my other ear so I could hear better over the waves crashing.

"Can you contact her and ask her where she is?" I heard a small voice in my head tell me that this police officer could not be trusted and that I shouldn't give him my mom's location. I regrettably ignored this voice.

"I can try and contact her. Are you going to find her and call the crisis team to help her?"

"Yes, I will."

I started texting my mom and asked him to hold on the phone. Thankfully, my mom texted back right away, and I told him her exact location.

Twenty minutes later, I received another phone call from the same police officer informing me that my mom was under arrest due to a warrant that was issued because she did not appear in court for a prior offense.

"I was not aware of her arrest warrant. Did you call the crisis team to do the wellness check? Because that's the reason I asked for your help." My legs shook as I spoke. "I did my own wellness check. She is physically fine, so I'm going to take her to the station and book her." he said coldly.

"She needs a mental health wellness check and needs to be medicated for her mental illness. Can you please call the

crisis team?" I was begging at this point with tear-filled eyes. "I'll make a note of her condition and order for a mental health check inside of jail."

After going back and forth with the police officer, I had to accept that I couldn't change his mind. Once we hung up, I was so distraught. Floods of guilt filled my body for getting my mom arrested.

While my mom was in jail awaiting trial, I contacted a lawyer who investigated my mom's arrest warrant. I was informed that my mom was arrested for trespassing at my childhood church. The report included a personalized note written by the church describing how my mother interrupted mass by walking up to the priest in the middle of the sermon, getting on her knees, and begging him to cast away the demons in her head that were tormenting her. She refused to leave the church, and they were forced to call 911. Since my mom was homeless and didn't have a physical address, she didn't receive her court summons in the mail and missed the court date, which prompted the arrest warrant. The church conveyed a lot of compassion and asked for the court to hospitalize her instead of convicting her.

After the restorative court hearing, I met with the social worker on my mom's case, and she informed me that the only support they could give my mom was housing and required restorative court probation. I pleaded with them to address her mental health illness and explained that she's been kicked out of everywhere she's lived because of her mental illness episodes. I wanted them to understand that addressing my mother's lack of housing wouldn't solve the root problem of why she was homeless and convicted in the first place, yet they said there was nothing they could do about her mental illness.

I understand that our society has abused and exploited the mentally ill in the past, but how is it that my mom, who is diagnosed as severely mentally ill with a disability, can't get the help she needs? I've done countless research, read books, and interviewed experts about her illness and how the mental health industry works. I found out that at least sixty percent of people who experience a severe mental illness with the symptoms of delusions and hallucinations believe that they're not mentally ill, because that is a symptom of their illness as well.

I've also looked into how much it would cost to hire legal representation to request a psychiatrist to petition the court for a mental health conservatorship. I've not only had difficulty finding lawyers and resources for mental health conservatorship, but the other part of the problem is that the lawyer and I would need to wait until my mother was a danger to herself and others, (aka on a 5150 hold), *and* be allowed to contact the psychiatrist treating her during that three-day hold in order to ask for them to petition. Even in that case, it would be up to the doctor to do so.

In addition to the very specific scenario required to be the catalyst of my mother being forced to get help, other elements of the system could cause setbacks. For example, most often, there aren't enough beds available in Ventura County and Santa Barbara County mental hospital facilities; therefore, my mother is often transported to Los Angeles County facilities that are overworked and under-resourced. Due to the likelihood of my mother being transferred to other facilities outside of her resident county against her will and my wishes, there's a large chance that her previous mental health and court records would not be transferred with her. The psychiatrist, case worker, and nurse appointed to her care would not be informed that she needed them to initiate long-term help.

This story represents a small anecdote of my mother's mental health journey from my perspective as her daughter. This story took place in 2019 in Santa Barbara County. I plead with all readers to reconsider pre-existing judgments you may have for the mentally ill or those who are homeless and struggling. I encourage you to write to your federal, state, county, and city legislators to address the mental health crisis in the United States of America, California, and Ventura County. For every person you see on the street without sufficient basic needs, there is a network of family and friends who are looking for them, and unfortunately, our society has yet to take responsibility for this systemic issue that has inflicted so much pain and suffering onto not only the people with severe mental illnesses but their families who are grieving in silence.

I've shared a shortened version of this story in previous zines, and many readers were left wanting to know more about my mother's journey and what her current status is. Since my

mother's journey is ongoing and her situation is always changing, I don't want to get my reader's hopes up prematurely, but I'm happy to report that she is currently receiving help from a long-term assisted living facility after almost two years since she first went missing. For the first time in nine years, I've been able to speak and visit with my mother without the voices in her head interrupting us.

Mindless

Kayla Ornelas



Escaping the Machine

Caleigh Tupy



After Wonderland

Metallic instruments of destruction,
implements of disruption.
You seek to separate me from my own skin.

Coded with precision by human hands,
yet unable to fathom your own mortality,
you're an artifact that wasn't made to last.

We'll outsmart your extinction.
Even as my flesh melts off my skeleton,
my genes will drip,

like sap oozing out of trees
forming sweet cocoons of life,
microscopic offshoots of the human race.

Even if the earth is scorched,
and we revert back
to the primordial soup of conception,

our veins will harden into tree roots,
our blood will clarify into water,
and our spirits will rise once again as flowers.

The End of Fear

John Eberle



Many would say he'd light up their life
But he often finds himself questioning
If he could ever find a wife
For now he awaits the day of reckoning

Coming here he felt alone
Like a discarded toy forgotten under a bed
Sometimes he wishes to be known
He's gotten used to the dread

His body recalls the way each impact
on his skin caused such an explosion
His memory has become abstract
A childhood full of poison

He looks up at the shimmering stars
Looking back on his journey
Dreaming of them from Earth to Mars
He lays upon a gurney

Half-conscious, he forms a reflection
Of the path that led him here
He longs for a healed connection
Love, and the end of fear

Live for Me

Harlequin Mejia



Oh please don't cry. I hate seeing you cry.
It's all right, I have accepted my fate.
We knew the time would come, our final bye.
Worry not, 'twas time well spent and I'll wait.
For you I'd wait a thousand lives and more;
And please make me wait a very long time.
Someone as divine as you needs to soar,
Reach the highest of heights in a short climb
And remember that I'll be there with you.
Even if my flesh is gone I'll be there.
Stars or wind, evermore one will be two.
I'll wait with love for you alone, I swear.
So please my love don't cry, smile instead.
Smile at the journey and life we lead...

Ten

Ryan Mak



The raw heat of the dry air condenses itself around the rooftop of the tired old office complex. The stillness of the blanketing silence is broken as a door is flung open, the metal hinges screeching as the door shudders to its breaking point. Jeramin steps out onto the bleak basin of the roof, its squat metal fencing creating a loose cage of ineffable disinterest. There is nothing up here for him, but that's the way he likes it. Tugging at his collar to loosen his tie, Jeramin fumbles into his pockets and pulls out a fresh cigarette, his last, which he promptly puts between his cracked lips.

"Ten minutes," he mumbles, pulling his now empty fingers from his lips, taking a glance at his watch. The scratched glass stares back at him, prepared to wait an eternity if need be. He pulls a lighter from his other pocket, fingers gliding along the familiar grooves and lighting his cigarette in an effortlessly practiced motion.

The air clings to Jeramin, radiating around him like a deathly fog. The heat intensifies, bringing sweat and a furrow to his brow. Unbothered, Jeramin savors the feeling, the crispness of the cigarette between his lips, the enticing relief it offers. He walks to the edge of the prison, staring out into the surrounding city, a utopia composed of countless similar cages. His fingers trace the rounded metal of the fence railing, smooth, burning to the touch, reflecting the orange cityscape of the horizon. The slight sensation of pain feels cathartic, a memory of being alive.

"Nine," Jeramin mutters again, closing his eyes.

The door creaks once more as another pair of footsteps patter out onto the concrete. Another collar loosens, this time sleeve cuffs are pulled back. A pristine silver flask is unclasped, its mysteries revealed to the light of day. The liquid treasure within sloshes heartily, ready to ease the burden.

"Taking ten, too?" the newly encaged man asks.

"Nine, now," Jeramin affirms with barely an eye opened

towards his colleague.

"Well, hope you don't mind if I join you. Matthias, eighth floor," he introduces, offering his free hand forward.

"Jeramin, tenth," he responds, glancing down towards the treatise presented to him. Pulling the cigarette free from his lips, Jeramin compromises with a curt smile, shaking his hand.

Jeramin pushes the door open with a sigh, hand already reaching for a fresh cigarette. Pushing against the breeze that blows the door back, he forces his way out onto the rooftop. A practiced flick of the wrist and his cigarette burns away, a comforting mistress. Matthias leans familiarly next to the door, flask in hand.

"Down to seven already," he says, idly tilting his half-full flask.

"Few extra sheets. Patrick can't do his job for shit," Jeramin laments, heaving a sigh. "More for me to do once I'm back in."

"Shitshow, the whole place. You hear they're letting people go? Downsizing," Matthias returns. As Jeramin steps out towards the center of the open space, Matthias follows, holding his flask out invitingly to his comrade. The faint breeze returns, ruffling his loose sleeves, recently stained, but long wrinkled.

"Don't drink. Thanks, though," Jeramin responds with a shake of his head, the wispy trail of smoke wagging along from side to side. "Nice flask, though."

"Was a gift," Matthias responds. Then silence.

The two stand in the momentary vacuum, each staring into the distant edges of their consciousness. Jeramin's gaze catches on a faraway flock of birds, flying off and away from the withering sun, destined for warmer lands. The idea was heartening.

"Ever think about doing something else?"

There is no response other than an anguished, laborious swallow. Matthias's gaze doesn't extend so far. The flask is sealed, its top screwed back on. Holding it within his hands, he traces the worn edges, chiseled down by the rigidity of his palms. He finds the embossed lettering, a phrase that once felt so dear to him. Near weightless now, it finds its home once again within his pockets.

Understanding his answer, Jeramin produces a half-consumed pack of cigarettes from his pockets, flicking one out and turning it towards his compatriot. Matthias gingerly pries a single cigarette out of its confines before placing it between his lips and lighting it. He breathes in the euphoria with a tender breath, the comfort mingling with the respite afforded by his liquid temptress.

"What are you at by now? Five?" Jeramin asks.

"Probably lower."

Jeramin doesn't bother to undo his collar upon reaching the roof, barely even to loosen his tie. He has lost the sense of comfort and release that it gave. Even this space had begun to lose its sense of uniqueness, it offered no discreet freedom that he had not already found. There were things he had not seen elsewhere in the world though; those were saved for this roof.

Matthias leans upon the railing, head bobbed downwards like a condor, eager to find something that he was unable to find in this building, nor anywhere else he had searched. The hairs on his forearms and neck brace themselves against the onslaught of the cold air. The burning sensation on his bare skin reminds him that he is not dead.

The place still provides some comfort for both of them, beleaguered as they are. A faint blanket of speckled white coats the cityscape before them. Jeramin makes his way to the railing, looking over the pale spectacle. To Jeramin, the fellow monoliths look almost serene, a comfortable display of disinterest. He wonders how theirs must appear.

Jeramin taps his fingers together as his hands reach into his pockets, pulling out a partly crumpled cigarette, which he places between his lips. He instinctively reaches into another pocket, feeling the familiar worn plastic, his fingers exploring the sensuality of the curves before pulling his hand free, dissatisfied but compliant. Matthias watches his motions, eyes tracing the forlorn motions of his hands.

"Doctor says I shouldn't smoke anymore."

"That so? They told me I shouldn't drink. Told me I shouldn't do a lot of things. Fuck 'em."

Matthias brings his flask to his lips, his fingers lingering on the tired surface, searching for the faded inscription. As the

liquid courses through his body, he raises an open palm expectantly towards Jeramin, who reaches back into his pockets, producing a crisp pack of cigarettes, still sealed. Breaking the seal, Matthias firmly secures the bounty in his mouth before a spark ignites his passion.

As Matthias's cigarette tantalizingly burns away, Jeramin breathes it in, savoring the flavor. He closes his eyes, feels the dryness of his lips, his mouth, his throat. It clings to him like a parasite. The flavor turns acrid, an unmistakable tang of dissatisfaction hangs upon his tongue.

As his eyes open again, Matthias offers his hand over, the remaining pack proffered indelicately alongside his still open flask. Jeramin glances over; Matthias's eyes languish on the horizon ahead with a half-lidded vacancy. A winded sigh escapes his lips as Jeramin takes the objects from his hand. He takes a small sip from the offering. The liquid burns his mouth and throat, a stinging reminder that he is alive. He looks down at his watch, a reminder that the rest of his world exists, willing to wait with an indisputable patience.

He watches. Time passes. The silence is broken.

"Hear they're letting more people go."

"More cutbacks."

"I don't think I mind it, some change. New flocks, new horizons. Find something away from here, out there with the rest of the world."

"All the way back at ground level."

"It's not so bad down there. Different view, but it's not that far away."

A nod. Another silence.

"I'm at three, think I'm gonna head down early, take a personal call. What're you at?"

"Zero."

Jeramin pauses at the doorway, his hand glued to the door, willing him to open it, to reenter the world of comfortable contradiction. He glances back at the rooftop.

Midnight

Sabrina Delgado



canopy

Tim Miller



moonlight, duskligh through darkening trees
what would the man in the moon think of me?
he peers at me through the gaps in the leaves
as i walk down this road, we lock eyes through the canopy

midnight blades of komorebi
guide me through a sense of unreality
what's waiting at the end here for me?
"i'll keep my secrets," whispers the wind in the canopy

somewhere far ahead, the devil sings
his notes care not for the demons that he brings
somehow i know that his music's meant for me
to the tune of the lyre, i sleepwalk beneath the canopy

Summer Night

McKenna Scheinost



On a warm summer night
I waited at a corner
Watching the stars twinkle
Reminded of that time long ago
I wished for none but love

Reminiscing on my lost hope
I knew love wasn't for me

A gray car parks to the side
Sitting low on the road
I see him and my soul shivers
I knew tonight would be different

To the park we flee
Full of childish glee
Swinging like no one sees
Challenging each other on the path
As we spot little racoons pass

We play baseball, I am spellbound
Then onto the playground
Our new adventure was found
Passionate looks linger in-between
Electricity sizzles as one attempts to lean

You're making me so shy
Words unsaid beneath the night sky
I let out a longing sigh
Will I see you in June
How did the time go by so soon

The night was nearly done
Putting an end to all our fun
You were like all but none
In my car to stretch the time
Hoping you will be all mine

It was almost time to depart
Where do I even start
The closeness consumes my heart
Your tender kisses imprint my being
Life with you is so freeing

We hug goodbye and later I dreamed
That star I hoped in gleamed
My affection had been redeemed
You set my essence ablaze at twilight
Who knew love could happen in one night

The Deepest Gloom From the Brightest Light

John Eberle



I. Midnight

Darkness cascades all around us
Bright red roses turn into fierce black dahlias
I look into your mind and see unending nightmare
Anxiety has taken over
This somber midnight becomes our reality
I may never see the flame of your heart again

II. Morning

The embers of dawn light up
The shattered pieces of our heart
For a day that is so bright
Mornings give us a clue
To start anew
Seeking those golden rays once more

III. Afternoon

The flames of your heart
Burn away the desolate darkness
I sing a promising tune
Celebrating you, maybe us
People watching can see the love
That binds us by your sharp light

swim, they say, survive

Ryanne Slagiel



There is something unnerving about hospital machines; they buzz and buzz, keeping one alive at the cost of a headache, a low, dull thrum, and unending annoyance. *Don't keep me alive*, I want to whisper to them, *let me die*— but they stubbornly yearn to do what they were created for, yearn for a purpose.

I cannot remember why I am here— cannot remember what sent me here. I'm not sure I know my name anymore. I flip through the archives of my memory, but they feel blurry— fragmented and disorganized, as if someone had taken the glass sheet of my memories and dropped it from a hundred feet up, then swept it into the bin and shuffled it around.

Flashes of my fingertips come before my eyes. They touched something— something hot, something burning, something unreal and something bigger than anything I'd ever seen. But as I continue down the path of it, the fragments cut my hands, they slammed a door and screamed at me— *leave*, they shrieked, *leave before you remember*. I want to remember. I *need* to remember.

My vision floats to my hands before me. They are covered in welts; red, gooey welts, oozing some orangish non-liquid, sewing themselves back to my fingertips. A searing pain runs through my lungs, my breathing shallowed. A nurse ran in in a set of bright pink scrubs, checking my vitals. The machine buzzed, buzzed so loudly I couldn't hear myself think anything. It might have been less of a buzz, it might have been a low beep. But it was incessantly loud and unbearable.

The nurse asked me questions, but I was trying to remember.

What is your date of birth? but I didn't know, *How are you feeling?* but I wasn't. I wasn't feeling anything.

Where did you go to school? I ask her, and she replies, *here*. My brain stalled. I rack it.

There was never a nursing school in Pink Lady Bay.

Is that so? I ask, and she smiles.

You're looking better, she says, you'll be allowed to leave today.

What happened to me? I ask, and the nurse frowns. She has too kind of a face to frown; she looks like a cherub, one of the ones I'd stare at as a child as the choir sung around me, and I'd cover my ears and try to drown them out, try to drown them all. I hated the noise, I hated the people.

I think that's why I ended up here– here in Pink Lady Bay. I needed a change, I needed a sleepy seaside town nobody had ever heard of because nothing bad ever happened there. But I couldn't remember why it felt wrong now. Why I didn't trust it.

We're not sure, she said, a crease in between her eyebrows, you walked in here, covered in blood. You had a concussion; you couldn't form words.

Don't I need to stay longer?

No, she says, smile unwavering.

I remember walking; I remember walking until my lungs gave out and I remember something happening and I remember walking until I reached the hospital. I remember the red glow of the cross, I remember how there was no shadow of it, and I remember how I stared at it in a daze. I remember red. I remember a sting on my cheek and I remember crimson red and I remember the burn of my hands, but I cannot remember what happened to me. Why I was like that– how I ended up that way. I cannot remember. The nurse leaves.

There is a window beside the counter. Through the window, I can see several things– the sun setting, the way the green hills morphed into something sinister, taunting me– *come outside, they say, come see what you've forgotten*– and the reflection of my own face. There was mud streaked across my cheek, and a gash on my forehead; my hair matted and dirty. I turned away from that, I turned away from all of it and watched Her. The object of my dreams, the reason I chose to move to this town in the first place– the Bay. She was beautiful, just slightly muddy, slightly pink tinged, different than the rest of it. She was unique and entirely endearing.

I don't remember when, but I laughed; I laughed hysterically, a guttural, unending laugh, coming not from my chest but from the catacombs in my gut deep, deep within me.

me. I don't know what I was laughing at– maybe being a cliché, a movie trope, a predictable NPC-like character, or maybe at the absurdity of it all. I am standing in a hospital and I cannot remember. All I remember is walking; all I remember is Her. I begin my march.

As I trudge along, I count my steps.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

I speak to the sun– I will beat you, I say, and when I do, I will get what I want– and it smiles at me as it sets. *Nobody beats the sun*, child, it says, and disappears behind the hills. I quicken my pace.

One, Two, Three, Four.

One, Two, Three, Four.

One, Two, Th–

An ear piercing shriek interrupts. I turn, faced with a seagull. They are large– circling around my head, close, ever so close to the ground. Where are you going? it squawks; an ugly, disgusting squawk.

I am going, I reply simply.

Can you tell me where?

I cannot.

Then I shall follow you.

Don't.

Why not?

One.

Where are you going?

Two.

That's okay. I'll still follow you.

Three.

I will protect you, they say. My head spins.

Four.

I lose my balance, nearly plummeting into the grass. It is now too dark for me to see, but I know that the seagull is pushing me up with their entire body weight. I do not thank them; I say nothing. I continue walking.

I stand at the helm of a dune. I'm unsure when I got here; but I can see Her– I can smell Her. The seaweed was here, it was

inhibiting my breath, it was pressed upon my nostrils and it was the only thing I could smell. The salt swirled into the air and into my brain. That's all it was– that's all I was.

The seagull shrieks again– *why are you here?* it asks, *why have you come here?*– and I stay silent again.

Dropping my keys into the sand, I kneeled. My hands– hands, covered in ugly pustules, possibly mine–someone's hands clawed at the granules, pushing them to the side and then gingerly placing the slivers of metal into the hole. The hands covered them as they seared in pain. The hands smoothed the ground, letting more sand into them. The hands made a small mound above them, no bigger than a knee, my knee, then they smoothed it out again. Something told them something else. Gave them instruction; but all I saw was salt, all I saw was blue. I felt the sand push its into my bloodstream, felt it travel as if it was a vaccine; and I am injected with the land, infected with filth.

I used to have a dream that I walked into traffic trying to find my car, and in this dream I would click the buttons on my keys and try to locate the sounding horn's whereabouts and each time I would be led into a car, a semi-truck, a bicycle. It would roll over me and all I could do was watch, all I could do was clutch my keys and watch as the tires indented my concave chest and smashed my skull like a pumpkin, a pumpkin thrown across the yard in anger, a terrifying jack 'o' lantern broken into pieces.

I walked in this same way, in the same way I marched my way here, a zombie led to the sound, to the sea, but I wasn't looking for my car. There was no incessant clicking– my fingers wouldn't move, couldn't move. Hands swung at my sides. My hands were still as a corpse.

The sand has found my chest. It fills it–overfills it, it threatens to burst from my ribcage, revealing to the world that I was nothing but a husk, an urn, filled with the wrong thing, molded for a purpose unutilized, carrying too much for the fragile glass I was constructed from with such care, such detail. Not enough–never enough detail. Never.

A seagull cawed.

The sun finally hits my back. I am earlier than it– I've beaten it in our race. It calls to me–*there is still tomorrow*– but I

I cannot hear it. I cannot hear anything but Her. I love Her. I think I always have. She is unpredictable, wild. She is closer. She's inching in on me. I can almost feel Her- cold pooling at my feet, warm over my head. You get used to Her. At first, She's too much, but you slowly ease into Her until She takes you into Her care and consumes you.

I want to be consumed. I want Her to swallow me like a grape, I want to travel downwards whole and feel every millimeter of the journey.

Something happened to me. Something happened, and I want to remember- but I cannot. And if I cannot live in remembrance, I will die in ignorance. I will die in Her. I feel Her around my feet, but She is not cold. She feels like nothing; she feels like home. The seafoam licks at my calves and I pick it up, I pick up the entire strip and I mold it into a ball in my hands.

I submerge my face into it. I am floating now; my body stays, halfway submerged by her and halfway in agony, halfway in the unforgiving oxygen.

My soul is in the clouds. She is here; She is peppered throughout the white fluff, She begins to fall though it was sunny a moment before, and I am unaware of time, I have transcended it and I am more than time. The clouds are seafoam. I am seafoam.

The seagull screaming at me is not- *lift your head*, it says, *lift your head and take a breath of the morning air*- but I don't want to. I am breathing. I am not breathing air.

I feel a pressure on my forehead and then my neck is straight. The seagull- *damn you, seagulls*- the seagull is staring into my eyes, but I don't want the, anymore. *Peck them out, I beg, use your godforsaken beak for good*- but the seagull shook their head and pushed.

Planting my feet, I let the salt fall into my windpipe, I let it fill the tube meant to breathe and I hoped it would be strong enough to push out the sand, I hoped it would purify me from the land and make me a conduit for Her.

I did not struggle against the seagull, but the Wind pushed us both. Wind is powerful; Wind is a worthy opponent; Wind is the only one who may defeat her. Wind is a threat. The seagull squawked in fear. They relented to inform me of their source of terror- *your face, it's bleeding*- but I ran, I ran until She

was up to my chest, and then I let Her sweep under my feet and I swam. They followed me, they shrieked, but I was under Her, and all that fell upon my ears was only Her.

I heard Her whisper to me, I heard her speak– *swim further, darling*, Her sweet voice called, *swim deeper*– and I did. I swam until the pressure snaked around my torso and contracted, forcing out the sand, forcing out my impurities, filling me with Her, filling me with Her love. This is what they sing about, but they have the wrong subject. It has never been His love. It was always Hers. I laughed again and let myself inhale the seawater.

I turned on my back and saw the seagulls circling my head, unable to accept Her. Their cries fell on my ears– *swim*, they say, *survive*– but She plugs them, and then all I can taste is Her, all I can see is Her, all I can hear is Her, and for the first time, a panic rises as bile in my throat.

Violet Shadows

Cole Herrera



Anne, Discontented

Sarah Gay



And Mad Ophelia picking fresh flowers.
Blue-lipped frost on a milk-fair rosy bloom,
here, where death grows like devotion:
a lone crocus pushes petals past snow to know spring, cut.

I ask you, Poem, when does the last line end?
What of those that grow weary of the weight?
And if one hasn't the stress for feet?
The trochee crawls 'cross winter's pale page, gasping.

Wilted. Bloodless. She opens her mouth.
All mums.
The silent daisy, drowning.

Excerpts from 'The Ballad of Gods + Monsters'

Lilly Hartley-Pantoja



Sub silentio

Constricted.

Blinded.

Molded.

Sacrificed.

Confined hands from behind,
missing eyes, bloody blindfold
bare feet, no sound...

One step, before another —
until I am standing before
the welcoming arms
of a sweet merciless death.

Yet, I am delivered to HER —
in the condition I was brought:
Restrained —
back pressed against the timber stakes,
feet bound to the lemongrass hay.
Sightless —
eyes painfully gouged from their sockets,
darkness veiling a vision of what was.

What a lovely shame —
it would have been nice to look into
the Chancellor's artificial eyes
one last time, and flip her off —
a final message from a forsaken mentee to her cursed
mentor.

Escape, an internal child screams, Run!

One of them whispers hauntingly in a dark melancholy tone
sends shivers down my spine:
"Ex favilla nos resurgemus."

All I could do is remain still—
still as a marbled statue,
still as a porcelain doll with
cracks of manipulated love.

The scent of wild bergamot and roses
(betrayal becoming loneliness)

“Welcome Maeve, *our beloved Saintess*”, the Chancellor announces to a roaring crowd of familiar faces and adults with lust in their evil eyes.

With lies toppled with the obsession of becoming
the embodiment of a perfect vessel to worship and
slaughter.

Everything about me was splitting apart in two.
Fragmenting beneath the heavy weight of torment and
despair.

Where was the rebellious side of me now?
The one who grew tired of being exploited by the adults.
The one who saw past the lies preached by the
Chancellor.
The one who wasn't ready to die at the hands of insanity.
Where the hell was she now?!

Before I knew it, there came the ignited flames:
Warm – bright – Angry.
Then came the piercing screams:
fire licking the melting flesh of ivory bones.
Finally, the ash remains of a ghost –
eyes lingering on a vessel that was
No more than you and I.

Ab inito
GASP!

I wake up in a familiar body that
feels like my own –
that *is* my own... except –
the memories feel like they belong to someone else...
someone who has not known
the price of a teenage sacrifice.

The intense melting pain was missing;
my body was no longer coated by violent flames
stripping my soul away from the ashes of a corpse.
The tormented suffering was absentia.

The scent of burnt lemongrass lingers faintly;
the wild bergamot and roses fading.
Departed words became nothing more
than whispers behind a fading nightmare.

My fingers pulling up my long white sleeves;
no inked tattoos of ancient Latin scriptures,
no angry agony of burnt flesh,
an unmarked skin, innocence yet taken.
Had it all been some twisted dream?

No—
I died.
I was dead.
I had to be— right?

I wouldn't be able to see if I was alive, right?

Purgatory

I regain my vision, focusing on the familiar environment:
a four-corner room with painted walls of the darkest
indigo,
twenty-eight desks, each with a student masking a
shadowed face,
in matching uniforms of onyx and burgundy, and
to my left,
six tall windows mocking me with nature's freedom that
was never mine to exist.

A blackboard at the front of the classroom reads:
Frankenstein: The Creature – Friend or Foe?
... British Literature...

I feel myself start to choke.
I'm back...
Arkadia Academy,
Seventeen-years-old.
Junior year...
A year before the Feast of Nirvana.
Only then do I feel
the rising panic clawing in the back of my throat
my skin goes cold like a slumbering corpse.

A small, familiar voice returns with one word:
Run.

Returning to the Surface

Kat Gallardo



Beware:

He told me I could take her home
under one condition:
we can't walk hand-in-hand
one look back and she's gone

listen

With each step I take, I tell myself this is a test of our love

listen

With each step I take, I feel the weight of hope hanging in
the balance

listen

With each step I take, I wonder if this is just a god's trick

Because doubt fills my heart and makes me question
if she is truly following me
out of his kingdom
out of the Underground
out of the warmth
and back to a frozen earth

listen I call upon the Fates

listen Overseers of Destiny

Hear my plea:

guide me further into the light
and don't let me falter

listen I beg of you

before it's too late

Season of Skulls: Winter

Fatima Hernandez



Meet the 2024 Island Fox Team



From left to right!

Back Row: Tim Miller, Serena Smith, Patrick De La Vega, John Eberle

Middle Row: Sara Porter, Kat Gallardo, Kalia Cariño, Adam Barukh,
Christopher Consaga

Front Row: Andrea Villagomez, Diana Bello, Kate Tomas, Chloe Loya

Christopher Consaga

Managing Director

Hello to the reader! I am a senior English major student who graduated from Moorpark College in 2022, and am graduating from CSUCI in May 2024. I was born and raised in Simi Valley, and have a deep appreciation for the larger Ventura County area and community. I am the Vice President of the CI English Club, and have interacted with several other clubs in the humanities and social sciences. Though I don't know exactly where I am going, I intend to pursue higher education so I can keep working to improve tutoring centers like I have been the past few years. I've always enjoyed reading and drawing, and I'm happy that The Island Fox helped fuel my interests in developing creative works. I hope to keep writing as well, and would like to publish a book one day.



Kalia Cariño

Managing Director

I'm from Oxnard, and I've been studying at CSUCI since 2019. I'm a senior studying for a B.A. in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing and I'll be graduating soon in Fall 2024. I'm not sure what I will be doing with my degree once I'm finished, but I thought of traveling around the states or perhaps around the world. A place that I've been wanting to go back to is Japan. I've lived there for 7 years on the Yokosuka military base and spent my childhood there. It'd be nice to go back!

Andrea Villagomez

Liaison

I'm from Simi Valley, now living in Santa Paula, and I'm a senior working towards my B.A. in English. I've been at CSUCI since Spring 2023, I transferred from Moorpark College after taking the Fall semester off. I extended my graduation to Fall 2024 so that I can finish the prerequisite courses for the teaching credential program and am able to start the program in Fall 2025. I enjoy spending time with my wife and playing video games in my free time. Some of my favorite games to play at the moment are Fortnite, Clash Royale, Clash of Clans, Pokemon GO, and VALORANT.



Adam Barukh

Art Director

I'm from Thousand Oaks and am a senior at CI as I study English with an emphasis on creative writing until graduation in May 2024. I have been a student here since the early start program during the summer of 2019 for a couple of math classes when I was originally a Business major. I have been a member of the CI Business Club (the oldest club on campus) since the Fall Semester of 2019 and current intern for The CI View. My hobby is watching and playing baseball when I am not currently writing or watching entertainment. After I graduate, I would like to get a master's degree in Screenwriting or any job related to entertainment.

Chloe Loya

Art Director & Marketing Director

I'm from Redding, CA, and have been studying here at CSU Channel Islands since Fall 2019. During Covid, I realized I no longer wanted to be a Psychology major and made the bold decision to switch to English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. I will be graduating this spring in May 2024! This year, I worked at the Student Union as the Team Operations Supervisor; where I learned how to work with a team of twelve other students to create a fun and inclusive space for everyone on campus to enjoy. After graduation, I plan to obtain my teaching credentials as I want to become a high school English teacher. Outside of school, I love to read, write poetry, go to the beach, try new coffee shops, and spend time with the amazing friends I've made in my time here at CI.



John Eberle

Marketing Director & Website Director

I'm from Oxnard; I transferred to CSUCI in Spring 2023 from Ventura College. I am proud to say that I will graduate in May 2024 with a major in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. I have had the honor of working at CI's Disability Accommodations & Support Services as a notetaker. I have also had the opportunity to be appointed the English Club treasurer by Professor Sean Carswell. It was an honor to bring a dormant club back to life so other students could get a sense of community. My professional career goal is to one day get a job in social media marketing or publishing. I recently applied to be a substitute teacher starting after graduation. In my free time outside of work, I want to focus my time on continuing my writing, starting with writing and publishing a children's book with my girlfriend, Amanda Tobias. She has been my biggest supporter throughout my education. My favorite things include theme parks, Marvel, DC, Disney, movies, Noah Kahan, Taylor Swift, horror, and SZA. I am excited about what the future might hold for all of us.

Patrick De La Vega

Budget Director

I'm from Ventura, and I transferred to CSUCI in Spring 2022 from Ventura College. I'm a senior studying for a B.A. in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing and I'll be graduating this Fall in 2024. My hobby is reading and writing, especially reading as it has made a big impact on my life. So much so that I want to be an author after graduation, whether it be traditional or self-published, as I want to be part of the writing world. Currently writing a book that involves superheroes and horror, as comic books are my favorite especially superheroes, which is why I'm also hoping to become a comic book writer and be part of Marvel and/or DC.



Sara Porter

Technical Director

I am a senior at CSUCI, and I am originally from Thousand Oaks, California. I am due to graduate in May 2024 with a degree in Communications and a minor in Creative Writing, and I am also working towards a Certificate in Professional Writing. Some of my favorite hobbies include hiking, reading, and traveling. I am also passionate about animals and the environment. I hope to incorporate those values into my future career by using my communication and writing skills to make a positive difference. My ultimate dream is to work towards a sustainable future, protecting wildlife and combining my passions to achieve my goals in marketing or technical writing. As an aspiring writer, I hope to publish a novel someday. I am excited about the future and look forward to using my communication skills to impact the world positively.

Tim Miller

Editorial Director & Submissions Director

Hey all! I'm from the picturesque Simi Valley, and I've been at CSUCI ever since autumn 2022. I'm now a senior working towards my B.A. in English with an emphasis in creative writing, and if all goes well, I'll be graduating in spring this year! I'm a novelist by trade, astronomer by heart, and I love combining both of those passions to write queer sci-fi horror stories inspired by a wide range of authors, from H.P. Lovecraft to Agatha Christie. After I graduate, I'm looking to get into editing for publishing and writing my novels on the side! If I'm not at my desk writing, you can find me out by the ocean, probably with a telescope nearby, listening to my favorite music from ODESZA, slenderbodies, and Summer Salt.



Kate Tomas

Solicitations Director & Reading Event Coordinator

I'm from Simi Valley (where the Reagan Library is); I transferred to CI in Fall 2022 from Moorpark College. I will be graduating in May 2024 majoring in English with an emphasis in creative writing, minoring in communications. I have had the privilege to work in CI's Admissions and Recruitment department as a Lead Student Ambassador: providing campus tours/presentations to schools and families, helping at events for admitted and prospective students, and answering any other questions about the school through phone/email. I would definitely consider continuing to work in this sort of job in higher education after I earn my degree, possibly as an admissions counselor. Outside of school and work, some things I enjoy are: Schitts Creek, sloths, Troye Sivan and Taylor Swift's music, as well as sushi and ice cream.

Serena Smith

Editorial Director

I'm from Pleasant Hill (in the Bay Area), and I've been a student at CI since 2020. I'm a senior working towards a B.S. in Biology with a minor in creative writing. I plan to graduate in Spring of 2025. I love retro point-and-click adventure games, baking, roller skating, and playing with my dog on the beach. After graduating, I hope to combine my passion for childcare and conservation by continuing to work as a wildlife educator, which is what I do now at the Santa Barbara Zoo. My dream has always been to be a children's author, so I want to continue writing on the side and hopefully, one day have some of my works published.



Diana Bello

Submissions Director & Reading Event Coordinator

I'm Diana Bello, and I'm majoring in Psychology with a minor in English with a Creative Writing Emphasis. I'm currently a senior at CSUCI. A couple of hobbies of mine are drawing, reading, playing video games, and baking. After I graduate, I plan to work to get more experience in human resources. Also, I plan to go to graduate school or get my certification in human resources as I wish to pursue further my education.

Kat Gallardo

Typesetting & Layout Director

Salutations, reader! I'm from the little town of San Jacinto and moved to Ventura County to continue my classes post-pandemic at Moorpark College for English and game design at the start of 2022. After transferring to CSUCI in the Fall 2022 semester, I have been working on my B.A. in English with an emphasis in creative writing and will graduate in May. For the majority of my time at CI, I had the opportunity to work as a student assistant at the Game Lab, which was once located in Solano Hall. After graduating, I plan on building my writing portfolio and continuing development on *Patient Zero*, a narrative-driven horror game I started working on with friends in 2022 and decided to expand on for my capstone project. I hope that one day, I will earn a position as a narrative designer in the video game industry, though I may look into becoming a screenwriter or teacher. When I'm not jotting new story ideas in my notes, you can find me recording for a new cover, on a video call with my mom, dad, and little brother, Kyle, or spending time with my fiancé, Eric, and our two guinea pigs, Larry and Moira.



Special Thanks:

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Tim Miller & Matt Belli

Title Page Artist

Serena Smith

Photographer

Tim Miller

Typesetting & Layout Director

Kat Gallardo

This journal was funded by:



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