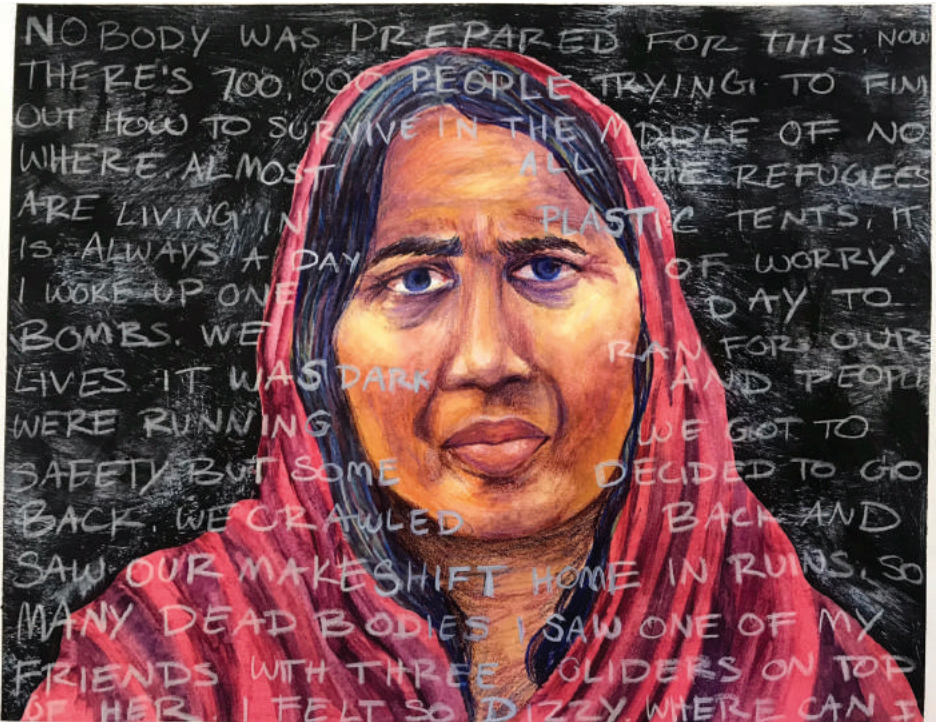


# Red Wheelbarrow

Student Edition  
2020



Published with the generous assistance of the  
De Anza Student Body

From 1976 to 1999 this magazine was known as *Bottomfish*, a name which referred to neglected, overlooked writing that had (metaphorically) fallen to the bottom of the sea. We hope that *Red Wheelbarrow* also signifies unpretentiousness and the casting of a wide net in search of new, exciting young writers as well as an ongoing commitment to originality, courage, and craft.

*Red Wheelbarrow* publishes twice a year. The National Edition publishes literary and artistic works from all over the country and the world. The Student Edition is open to De Anza students. We welcome submissions of all kinds, and we seek to publish a diverse range of styles and voices. We accept student submissions from September to mid-May and publish by the end of spring quarter.

Poetry: submit up to five poems}

Fiction: submit one short story (up to 5,000 words) or up to three flash fiction

Drama: submit one play or screenplay (up to 5,000 words)

Creative Nonfiction: submit one personal essay (up to 5,000 words)

Photographs and Drawings: submit up to five b/w prints or digital files (.jpg, .tiff or .psd format); please do not send originals.

Comics: submit one b/w strip

Other: submit one!

Preferably please submit text files in MS Word (.doc or .docx) format.

Keep your name and contact information separate from the actual submission.

All *Red Wheelbarrow* submissions are judged anonymously.

Judges for all contests make their decisions independently.

*Red Wheelbarrow* Literary Magazine

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Frontispiece: Alyanna Posadas, "Nobody Was Prepared"

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Front Cover art: Christina Wu, "Civilization v Nature Series, I"  
 Back Cover art: Christina Wu, "Civilization v Nature Series, III"  
 Frontispiece: Alyanna Posadas, "Nobody Was Prepared"

The 2020 Student Edition of *Red Wheelbarrow*  
is dedicated to:

**The Black Lives Matter Movement**  
*No justice, no peace.*

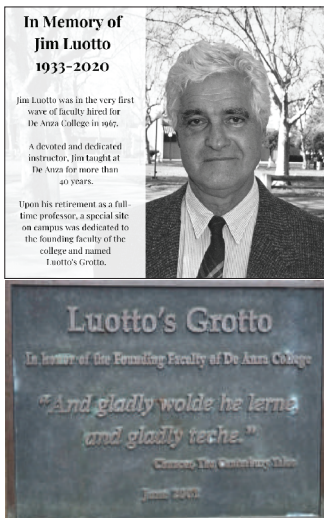
We are inspired to march and shout out together  
*black lives matter*  
and remember forever the names of the fallen.

*Read our interview feature pp. 23-39:*  
“Community Voices after the Murder of George Floyd”  
edited by Cassandra Tejada



***We also dedicate this issue to the memory of a great teacher,***  
***Jim Luotto, 1933-2020***

Jim loved students and was a master teacher of literature and communications who also was a faculty advisor for the very first De Anza literary magazine, *Inscape*, in 1967.



Read Hannah Estolano's  
first prize essay,  
winner of the inaugural  
Jim Luotto Literary Essay Prize  
published here on  
pp. 186-190



## **Veils**

Pamela Williams

I have learned to view myself through a veil of gossamer,  
Its delicacy in contrast with what is softened by its presence.

All stiffness hidden, all rot, dimples and ruddy complexion.  
All darkness of thought, gleam of youth  
All blooming starry-eyed visions of the rail.

# Growing Up

Norman Aragones





**The Big Boy**

Thanh Le



## **america the day it went cold turkey off prozac**

Julia Shih

tonight america feels unsettled  
uneasy  
like a blister on the brink of burst

the fires of the west have not stopped raging  
not nearly enough to mollify the  
slow burn of violence rumbling in its belly  
digging at the seams

the moon hangs high  
exuding indifference

detachment

self-loathing

fear

neglected in its own defiance  
a rotten child plotting with an axe

66 runs like a vein through the heartland  
feeding off the windtossed litter of the desolate masses  
but it's the silence that feeds the slow burn  
the silence that eats itself from the inside out  
until there's nothing left to be remembered by

on the shoulder near cleveland  
a bum wanders the freeway  
a forgotten man  
following the twisted metal guardrail  
through the tunnel of his existence  
stumbling on a paved road that laps up  
the hollow spaces in between  
but never once choking on the things that  
were meant to be kept

and if you ask him in a way that he knows you exist  
he'll tell you

he's heard this place whispering  
when it thinks no one is listening



towards a heaven overrun by sycophantic wings  
flapping to the rhythm of a rhythmless beat  
praying for an upended big rig  
or a six-car clot to end its misery  
and begging someone to touch its emptiness

to really feel it  
before dropping it back into that dark  
hungry space  
where everything that is found  
was once lost  
and loss is the blanket which covers us  
when our insides becomes too expansive to be named.

and you and i?

we slept in our beds  
and dreamed our dreams  
that shielded us from the nightmares  
never aware of the world outside  
swirling in its own misery  
contemplating its meaning  
until it awoke to find itself a butterfly in  
its own dream  
floundering deeper into a bottomless gulch  
that was never given a name

and when i wake  
you will not remember me

one day i will land softly on the tip of your tongue  
a butterfly kiss that's more a twitch than a tug  
briefly reminding you of a truth that precedes the universe  
and you will remember a time  
from somewhere far away  
in some distant memory  
once  
when you were loved  
by someone who existed  
and that, in itself, had been enough.

## **America in Chains**

Crystal Flores

America the home of the brave, oh the land of opportunity,  
oh the hope of freedom,  
But what great despair lies within, oh the irony, the hypocrisy,  
and the great oppression  
And depression that happens within the individual but hides  
behind a smile  
Because you have to work, because you need food on the table,  
because you have kids  
Because you are their only hope, because there is no choice,  
this is America.

### *The Hope of America*

When hope starts to fade into darkness  
and freedom is threatened,  
Flip a page of poetry and enter the universe  
of dreams and possibilities,  
Where there is no judgment, free to love  
and even hate,  
Free to scream of happiness or grief, to speak your mind  
and unite,  
I'll be there among you all, for my soul  
wishes to fly too.

## Work

Anthony Cortez

Whirling sounds from the sewing machine fill the house,  
before the sun rises until it begins to set.

To others, it's noise.

For her, it's an orchestra and she's the conductor,  
surrounded by her army of instruments:

stacks on stacks of patterned fabric, multiple pairs of scissors, cutting boards,  
bags of baby soft cotton.

Strands of thread cover the table and floor,

Like patches of fuzzy wild grass.

The scent of the hot glue gun

slowly melting the stick of plastic has become almost comforting.

Dolls, blankets, accessories & now face masks.

So much time, energy and pain goes into making each of them.

Tight hands and fingers from all of the stitching, measuring and cutting  
she does,

a stiff neck and aching back from sitting long hours, overseeing the process  
from start to end,

needle pricks on each finger, making them look like victims of a vicious  
cactus encounter.

But when she sits back and examines the finished products; so precise  
and extraordinary,

the smile on her face says it all.

Every stitch, every seam, every detail, every cut, every "dammit!" every  
headache, every botched attempt, every step of the journey brings  
her pure satisfaction.

This is her legacy and will forever be the memory of my Mama.

## **Afghan Rugs**

Fareed Shayek

We have at least one in every room.  
Some floral each crowded with vines, leaves, and roses.  
Some fill up space like pages from a tome.  
Some we keep for prayer with corners folded.

Sent from Afghanistan by Mamajo,  
Or bought from markets and garage sales.  
All to remind us of you Kokojo.  
In each, you are hidden in the details.

In all the threads, we see your memory,  
Pristine and untouched, sheltered from cruel Time.  
These tapestries, woven from your history.  
The joy, anger, and sadness all safe from Time.

Without you, these cheap rugs would mean nothing.  
Without you, we would simply be nothing.

## Sometimes I Wish that I Could

Fareed Shayek

---

*Never Forget!*

Once I went to the memorial.  
Its reflective pools and black stone kept reverently clean.  
I remember thinking to myself.  
*We're not welcome here.*  
*This place isn't for us.*  
*We don't belong here.*  
I saw the people their heads bowed as if in prayer,  
Their somber faces accusing,

*Never Forget!*

It used to be a simple expression of grief,  
Then you made it into a weapon.  
Of course, you got your chance to grieve,  
You even got to take out your frustration on several countries.  
Those of us old enough to remember we're just as scared and confused  
as you.  
But they weren't allowed to grieve.  
If they tried to vent their frustrations you called them terrorists and  
freedom haters.

*Never Forget!*

You say it all the time.  
As you harass Congresswomen,  
Before you bomb civilians.  
Every time you assault a man wearing a turban,  
Even though he isn't one of us.  
When you bullied me on the playground.

*Never Forget!*

I hope that you realize I was three at the time.  
I wish that I could give you a sad story about exactly where I was  
and what I was doing  
when it happened,  
But I can't.

*Never Forget!*

What even is the point of all this?  
The people responsible for this,  
As well as everyone who looks, sounds, or prays remotely like them  
Have all been punished.

*Never Forget!*

Fine, I won't forget.  
God knows I'm too young to remember.  
But thanks to you,  
*I'll never forget.*  
Is that what you want?

*Never Forget!*





## **Bliss**

Daniel Flores

---

The dark starry night,  
I lie on the cold ground,  
While slow music plays.

## Lottery Ticket

Jordan Covington

---

Nothing in the world could make Tyrone any happier. He races home on his skateboard with a wide grin on his face. He clutches his winning scratcher card with all his might because he feels it would be too risky to place it into a pocket. A group of local gang members mumble and eye Tyrone as he rides by, but Tyrone pays them no mind. He has one goal right now, and that's to get home to his brother. Tears roll down his cheeks. He doesn't know if it is voluntarily or from the wind attacking his eyes. It becomes hard to see, but he knows where he is going. He knows he is almost home. Tyrone knows this city like the back of his hand. From every crackhouse to every broken telephone pole.

Tyrone bursts through his front door, beaming with happiness and delight. He showcases the winning scratcher to his brother, Evan, presenting it with pride. Evan sits silently in his chair, face down indulging in his TV dinner.

"You won't believe what just happened, Evan," Tyrone started. Evan didn't look up from his meal. His forehead crinkled above his eyebrows. "When I was boarding home, I tripped on a rock or something and landed right next to a heads up penny on the ground. That's obviously pretty lucky." Evan took a deep sigh and finally met Tyrone's gaze. He leaned back in his chair unamused. Tyrone sensed Evan's aggravation, so he hushed and waited for a response.

"What the hell, Tyrone," Evan finally said. "Why didn't you accept the position I got you at my firm?" Tyrone hesitated. He clinched the scratcher tighter. "You know how long it took me to convince my boss you'd be a good fit?"

"I didn't ask for that," Tyrone snapped back.

"You're right! I had to do it. Like how I do everything else for you." Evan stormed past Tyrone into the kitchen. Tyrone kept his eyes fixated on the chair. Blue and red lights lit up the room through the window as cop cars zoomed by. The sirens wailed then grew quiet. "But please, continue your ridiculous story."

Tyrone scuffed his feet on the carpet. He stifled his anger and reconstructed himself. "Afterwards, I went to a 7-Eleven to get Sprite because I was thirsty. Then I thought, why not get a scratcher. I was feeling pretty lucky, I didn't get one for my eighteenth birthday, it just felt right." He took a deep breath and smiled. "And I won!"

Evan's eyes widened. "What do you mean you won?" Tyrone handed him the scratcher. Evan studied the scratcher critically. "Holy shit, one hundred thousand dollars?" His mouth stayed open, he couldn't take his eyes off it. Tyrone bit his knuckle trying to keep himself quiet as Evan took in the news. Evan's eyes filled with tears. He hurled himself to Tyrone and hugged him as tight as he could. "This is amazing, Tyrone. This is really gonna help us out around here." Tyrone didn't hug him back.

Evan released himself from Tyrone, his eyes still focused on the scratcher. Evan was smiling so hard that it looked forced. That irritated Tyrone.

"Okay, first off, we're gonna pay for the next three months of rent," Evan began. "That'll give me some breathing room and I won't have to work overtime. Second, tomorrow you're gonna go back to the firm and beg them to take you in."

"Why? I don't need that job anymore, we have money now."

"One hundred thousand ain't shit, Tyrone. We got to be smart with it. If we're not it'll disappear quick."

"We? What do you mean we? I won it, it's mine!"

Evan let out a laugh. "Don't be stupid." He put the scratcher in his pocket. Sirens blared again, more prominent than before. The cop cars seemed to stop close by. The room exploded with color once more.

"I wanna move out, Evan. I'm sick of your shit." He reached for Evan's pocket but Evan swiftly avoided him.

"Hell, I wanna move out, but we can't do that with one hundred G's. Where the hell are you trying to go anyway?"

"I don't know, anywhere but here. Somewhere where you aren't."

He forces himself upon Evan, trying to snub the scratcher from his pocket. Evan pushes him off into the refrigerator. A gunshot pops from a distance. The two begin grappling each other. Evan hooks Tyrone's arm and forces him on the ground. Tyrone lets out a quick yell. He serves a quick elbow to Evan's jaw. Evan recoils onto the floor holding his jaw. Tyrone pounces on top of Evan and throws flurries of punches at him. Evan protects his face and knees Tyrone in the back. He shrieks in pain. Evan takes advantage of the opportunity and pushes Tyrone off of him. They both lie on the floor panting. Blood trickles down Evan's forehead and drips on the carpet. Tyrone stumbles to his feet. Before he can stand straight, Evan tackles him onto the chair. The chair

breaks from the pressure and topples them onto the ground. Evan hustles on top of Tyrone.

He stares down at him, breathing heavily. “You done?” Evan asks as he’s pushing Tyrone’s head into the carpet. Tyrone stays silent. Rage makes his eyes bloodshot red. Evan can’t bear it anymore. He cautiously gets off him and lays himself on the floor beside Tyrone.

“You know, that was Dad’s favorite chair,” Evan adds. Tyrone grunts as he rolls over onto his back. He glances at the now destroyed chair. The arm of the chair completely broke off. Two of the legs split in half and it leaned sideways awkwardly. Tyrone bursts into laughter. He sits himself up. He coughs with pain, but continues to laugh. Evan can’t help but join in with the laughter. He grasps his abdomen as pain shoots through it. However, they both kept laughing.

“Fuck Dad!” Tyrone yells out through his laughter. “He was so mean to us.” Evan nodded in agreement. He chuckles silently.

“He was so strict with us. He didn’t let us do anything we wanted to.” Evan started. “But I understand. Honestly, I do. He was doing what he thought was right.”

“But who said he knew what was right and wrong? Why couldn’t he let us be who we wanted to be and have our own experiences?” Tyrone clenches his fist so hard his fingertips turn pale. “I hated him so much for that. I hate being told what I can and can’t do.”

“Then take the initiative and do it, dumbass. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.” Evan nudges Tyrone in the arm. They keep eye contact for a moment, but then break away back into their own worlds.

Evan takes the scratcher ticket from his pocket and extends his hand out to Tyrone. “Here, take it.” Tyrone is taken aback. “I don’t want to be like Dad. But I do want what’s best for you. If you think moving out is best, then do it. I won’t stop you.”

Tyrone pauses. He slowly rises to his feet. “Nah, just keep it. I trust you know what’s best to do with it.” He smiles and helps Evan to his feet. “Just promise we’ll move out of the hell hole as soon as possible.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice.”

The cop cars pull away from the building one after another, relieving the house from its bright lights. Tyrone and Evan start cleaning up the mess they just created.

# Community Voices after the Murder of George Floyd

Kassandra Tejada

---

In light of the recent events plaguing our nation, I have taken the time to write this piece as a response to the ongoing violent and oppressive forces that are present in American institutions. My name is Kassandra Tejada. I am a full-time student at De Anza college as well as a first-time editor for *Red Wheelbarrow* and I have found myself in a position to shed light on some issues that lie very near and dear to my heart.

I do not wish to speak on behalf of any given community nor do I believe that I have the power or liberty to do so. I am a second generation Mexican-American womxn who has been given the opportunity to pursue my education, and would like to use my platform to uplift the voices of others who do not share that same privilege. I believe it is my obligation as a student and a writer to retell the stories of people who have been previously barred from equal representation in literature or academia. I am not here to discredit or scrutinize the experiences of working police officers and their families. Instead, I will continue to elevate the voices of members in our community who have been misrepresented and brutalized by our criminal justice system.

The plight of the nation is contingent upon the power of the people and our accessibility to politics and education. In recent weeks, many citizens have taken a position on the political divide between the Black Lives Matter movement and American institutions. Inevitably, these interviews touch on the individual's own perspectives of the BLM movement as well as public and/or private U.S. institutions. Law enforcement plays a significant role in the way these individuals perceive the criminal justice system, as they are supposed to be the first line of mitigation that these people encounter before they step into the court system. These are their stories. They deserve to be heard.

I interviewed various Bay Area residents about their perspectives on and encounters with the police. These interviews are personal, emotional, and sometimes painful recollections of their experiences with the criminal justice system. Their stories speak volumes on the differing expectations of police interaction depending on a person's age, race, cultural background, and/or environmental standings. The interviewees are 1) Victor Nonga: black male-identifying, heterosexual, 24 years old, San Jose resident; 2) an anonymous Bay Area resident; 3) Aquille: black, male-identifying, gay, 21 years old, San Jose resident; 4) Sydney: white, fem-identifying, pansexual, 22 years old, Cambrian Park resident; 5) Robert R.: Mexican, male-identifying, 36 years old, Hollister resident. The interviews took place separately (though answers are grouped here) during the first week of June 2020.

**TEJEDA: What are your views on the American criminal justice system?**

VICTOR: “Wow, that’s a pretty broad question. I think that the criminal justice system in the U.S. is inherently unfair and was created in that fashion. Y’know you see statistics about policing, and the courts and into the prisons... like how corrupt it is. How it targets people of color. And more often than not, y’know a lot of people don’t know the history of the criminal justice system. The more I’ve done research on it, the more I’ve educated myself on it, the more I am able to see the inherent inequalities in the criminal justice system. You see how underprivileged neighborhoods, predominantly neighborhoods of color, are policed. You see how arrest rates, and prosecution rates are extremely higher in those communities too because they just wanna keep pushing people through the system. It’s a business, you know what I’m sayin.”

ANONYMOUS: “I would say I see there’s a lot of injustice, a lot of racism at times. But obviously there is a good cause for it because it gets a lot of bad people off the streets who could hurt people, like rapists, pedophiles and murderers. But once again it is very one sided you know. There’s way more police in ghetto areas, heavier police presence in a lot of places where illegal activities are going on. There’s more crimes here because people in poverty, they don’t got money or nothing like that. It’s a lot different though, because people in suburban areas they don’t gotta survive like that. The benefits they have of having wealthy parents who weren’t in the system because of their color you know, they don’t gotta.

“Like I said, I feel like minorities get looked at differently. And that’s racism. Y’know they see a Mexican just driving around with tattoos on his neck and his hands and I’m pretty sure a cop is gonna pull [me] over just like they would any other black guy. Just for being black. And that’s the racism in it, you know? But like I said, obviously there’s a good and bad in everything.”

**TEJEDA: What are your views on law enforcement, or police in general?**

VICTOR: “I think police are a part of the problem. They are a part of the racial institution that is the criminal justice system.”

“Inherently, the police are unfair. I believe that police are ill-equipped and ill-trained to handle the vast majority of situations that they are expected to. The police unions are protected. It doesn’t make sense that they can investigate themselves for crimes they committed. It doesn’t make sense that police officers with multiple infractions and histories of misconduct can keep their jobs. If they get fired they can get hired in the next county over or they can get hired

anywhere else. They are not blacklisted—especially for excessive use of force.

“I believe that the police [in general] cannot continue to function in this society unless massive reforms are enacted. 100%. There needs to be a culture shift from blindly celebrating the police as heroes for a public service job that they chose to do and holding them to the same oversights that we hold any public officials... If we have firefighters who are just letting fires rage on it wouldn't make sense. If you have EMS first responders letting people die in the streets it would be an outrage.”

ANONYMOUS: “I think a lot of 'em have egotistical problems. I think, I dunno maybe they were bullied or something growing up....And now they're using their power to get back at people. A lot of them seem to be angry.

“And don't get me wrong, like I've met one or two good cops before that were nice to me, and wanted better for me. But one or two out of the almost thousands of times I've ran into them, it's bad numbers for them. That's not good, just shows how egotistical they are. You could just tell they always want problems.

“You know, I hear about a lot of cops—I'm sure you do too—I hear about the way that they treat their wives or whatever and all that abuse that goes on. That's not too far off from the way they treat people in the streets, and it's because of the way that they're trained to handle situations using violence. Which is a problem. You know how like, you expect regular civilians to talk something out like a human? They should be able to do the same, y'know without grabbing you by your f-ing neck or grabbing my best friend by his neck in front of me. You try and grab a cop in front of another cop they're gonna shoot you. Kill you. Me tryna defend my friend from getting picked on by a cop, apparently it's wrong you know. It's a charge. But I should have the right to defend my friend that's getting beat by a police officer, for no f-ing reason...that's not right.

“There's police brutality everywhere. Every city, every station has it. And they will not snitch on each other, because they got a code of silence. Blue silence or some sh-t like that....I'm not educated you know. I don't know much. But I know they got a code of silence just like the streets you know. Just like the gangs got silence. But they just got a badge and the power to get away with it.”

**TEJEDA: Do you believe our current institutions need to be reformed?**

VICTOR: “I think the first thing that we have to do before defunding and demilitarizing police is to enact a system of rules that hold the police account-



able. Before we can even attempt to fix the structure or completely overhaul the structure we have to put in oversights that protect people immediately. You know—everybody knows—people are literally dying at the hands of police and their brutality and police are not being held accountable for their actions.

“The next step I mean, I definitely believe we need to defund the police and redistribute that wealth. Predominantly where crime exists, there is a lack of opportunity. And there’s so many public programs in place that can help communities especially communities of color. Y’know, when it comes to education and after schools programs and having systems in place to help communities of color pay rent or afford housing... [having] long lasting economic sustainability in [these] communities would do so much more. You put money into educational programs and social work efforts... it would pay off ya know. It would be so much easier. It would be money well spent. Rather than you know, spending so much on riot gear or ammunition. Instead of stockpiling our police like it’s a military operation.”

ANONYMOUS: “Yes and no. I think that they do what they can to protect from bad things, like I don’t know terrorism or stuff like that. But if you really do look at our funding, it is very very high. Like ridiculous high. Especially compared to these other countries that are close to us, you know we’re spending billions of dollars on tanks and sh-t...but we got a lot of poverty. We got a lot of poor people who could use money like that. Use funding for like youth centers or something like that. You know, ghettos don’t got basketball courts like the suburbs. Maybe take a couple billion out of that funding to maybe help that person who is uneducated, y’know went to prison. Maybe instead of a heavy 25 year sentence, you cut him a break, you give him 10 years— a person can learn a lesson in 10 years—and you give him an education. He can become a different person. Education can change a person. An educated person got things that an uneducated person doesn’t. You can change somebody’s life with education... And they do that for white people! You see that in the court system! People with the same charges: white person, to Mexican person, to black person. The sentencing gets harsher and harsher you know like. White person gets the nicest, Mexican gets the harsh and then black people get the harshest sentence. That’s really what it comes down to in this things. It’s about racism. It’s money. It’s that.”

SYDNEY: “I believe that the police should be defunded/abolished. In order to achieve equity we’d need to literally tear down this system and build it back

up, giving everybody support where they need it. Like instead of ‘helping everyone equally.’”

**TEJEDA: What is your earliest memory of police interaction?**

VICTOR: “One of my earliest memories of police interaction...I remember the police were called to my house because my parents were arguing. I remember being outside and being called in, but that it had took them a really long time to respond.

“I don’t really remember much of the interaction because I was pretty young, but I do remember distinctly that they separated me and my sister from my parents. Then they separated me and my sister. They were asking us a bunch of question y’know... like were there drugs in the house or any type of violence going on...and then the next thing I remember is that they arrested my mom.

“I didn’t really understand what was going on. Nobody told me. But as I got older I realized she had spent a week in jail. It was kinda crazy because I didn’t understand how after a domestic dispute that didn’t even result in violence I didn’t understand like how that was the end goal, or the legal fault, for her to get locked up like that. You know what I’m sayin’?”

ANONYMOUS: “I remember I was maybe 6 years old and my sister was getting pulled over, just for like a speeding ticket or something. But I remember seeing them arrest a family member of mine before, y’know—very violently—making him scream and stuff, really really hurting him bad. And I remember I had \$20 in my pocket, which wasn’t a lot you know. But I remember telling my sister you know like ‘I got \$20 in my pocket. I got \$20 in my pocket. Am I gonna be okay?’ I didn’t know, if the cop sees me y’know am I gonna get in trouble?

“I don’t know it was an early encounter, but like it just shows the image they give to people for me to be so little and to have gotten scared. Instead of asking for stickers or something like most kids I was worried that because I had this \$20 bill in my pocket they were gonna do something bad to me and my sister.”

AQUILLE: “When my dad was arrested. I was probably 8 years old. I was with my sister. My dad was arrested, and my mom was at work. I was really feeling really scared in that moment. I didn’t really know what was gonna happen to my dad, or me and my sister because, like I said, our mom was at work. We didn’t have anyone to pick us up or take us home. So that was a really scary interaction for my first time.”

ROBERT R.: “Probably D.A.R.E.—It was bad. I got kicked out.”

“I didn’t take it seriously. But it was either, like, fifth grade or fourth grade, and I was like little you know? But I basically just got kicked out for disrespecting the officer. I don’t even think I got a shirt. Haha. Because I was just f-cking around. His name was officer Thul. T-h-u-l. He’s just a piece of sh-t. It was for school. But I guess I didn’t last long. I mean, I didn’t graduate D.A.R.E. Haha.

“I just remember not understanding what was going on. Like why? He was just being a dick. He was mean. And I was just...a kid.”

SYDNEY: “Honestly, my uncle was a cop. I didn’t really know much about the police other than the fact that he would show up in his uniform to functions a lot. And he drank a lot. Hahaha. Even as a kid I noticed that.”

**TEJEDA: What is your most recent memory of police interaction?**

VICTOR: “Probably the protests. Um, it was kinda surreal because I was there on the very very first day of the protests. And I had left after we looped back to City Hall. I was leaving like right as the police were coming. I was there marching, I seen everything that had happened. Everything that was going on. What the police were doing. But something in my mind told me to go home. So I went home, and I mean it was kinda traumatic. Like I had my sisters blowing me up on my phone, asking if I’m okay. Because I was out there marching only 10 minutes earlier.

“It’s surreal because like, I recognize some of these officers. I work at Starbucks and I recognize some of these people. It’s crazy you know, because they literally are just cogs in the machine that’s pitted against me. And they like, try and change my perspective on officers too but it’s like, you know, it can’t—it won’t work. Cos they could just...easily be your murderer or your oppressor. Just like that.

“That’s probably what scared me the most too like, once curfew hit they were just patrolling around my neighborhood. At any time that anyone was out [around 8:30] they would like, tell you to go home and you couldn’t be out. We couldn’t even go to 7-Eleven you know. You couldn’t go around the corner, you couldn’t walk down the street. There was cops everywhere. Harassing you. Staring at you. Driving past you real slow. I live right next to SJSU so I cut through campus, but they’ll block it off and be like, ‘you can’t go this way,’ ‘you can’t be here,’ ‘you gotta go this way.’ And it’s like man, it gives you anxiety. It’s always in the back of your mind.

“My mind was always racing. Your mind races anytime an officer or something comes up to you, or you get stopped. Like ‘are my hands visible?’ ‘am I moving too much?’ ‘My wallet’s in my back pocket. Should I take it out now? or will he think I’m reaching for something? Should I just leave it in my pocket?’ ‘I don’t wanna move’ ‘I don’t wanna say anything, what if I say the wrong thing? What if they think I’m lying?’ ‘Do I seem aggressive? I wanna seem relaxed.’ Gotta make sure you say like ‘yes sir’ ‘no sir’ all that stuff. All this stuff running through your head. And so quickly, you know?”

“It’s scary because once you’re put in cuffs, or once they start drawing guns on you all you can think is like ‘Am I gonna die here?’”

ANONYMOUS: “It wasn’t a good one, you know. They basically just came in like a bunch of bullies. Held guns to me and my family. We were eating at a restaurant.”

*At this moment, the anonymous source began breathing heavily and uncomfortably. They stepped away and began to cry.*

“They traumatized my baby. And my wife.

“They came in with guns. They had my son at gunpoint. Me at gunpoint. My wife. They told us like ‘get up’ y’know ‘don’t fucking move, we’re gonna fucking shoot you.’ I seen the lasers you know. Pointed at my son. Pointed at me. Pointed at my wife. I’m not crying ‘cos I’m scared or anything, I’m crying out of anger. I wish I could get vengeance on those guys. That wasn’t right what they did.

“And then, after all of this, can I just mention that they dropped the charges on me. No evidence, no nothing. So you know like, for them to just drop everything and not have nothing on me, never said nothing. So in my head, like with no evidence or anything like that, what would make them be able to do that? Hold my son at gunpoint in a restaurant. Point lasers at my wife. And then say that they didn’t. They said they didn’t do it, but I seen it with my own eyes.

“To me, right there, maybe they wanted to scare somebody or I don’t know what they wanted. But in reality all they ever did was cause this crazy negative impact, a traumatic stress, on my wife and son, you know. They traumatized them for life. To this day, my wife and son do not feel safe around police. They petrify them, to a T. My son doesn’t see a cop and want a sticker, my son sees a cop and he gets worried that they could hurt him. He’s scared. Because of what THEY did to him.

“If I had anything to say, I’m like f-ck the police. I’m not with them. I don’t agree with what they do. They gotta look into the system and find a new way of doing things. Because what they’re doing right now you know, they’re tearing Americans apart.

“I’m pretty sure there was something illegal there you know. No evidence, no nothing. Like you would need to have some type of substantial evidence to put an entire family at gunpoint you know, but I guess not right? Overlook that right? If I did some shit like that I’d get 25 years you know, life maybe.

“I’m glad that somebody is actually doing something like this you know. Getting people’s voices out there, speaking on all this police brutality that’s been going on for hundreds of years. It needs to be changed. At least maybe with these stories out here, you know, maybe people can understand. It’s wrong.”

AQUILLE: “Probably with San Jose PD at the protests. I had a soft spot for some police until the behavior that I saw there between the protesters and police. It made me feel differently towards police. They were using unnecessary force on people who were trying to stand their ground. They were just peacefully protesting but they were being shoved and y’know.... There was a couple there with their beach cruiser bikes and the police just straight up shoved them off their bikes and took their bikes. And stuff like that isn’t really necessary, because I’m sure they rode their bikes to downtown to go to the protest and now they’re out of a bike to get home. It’s just unnecessary things they don’t need to be doing. SJPD was aiming rubber bullets at civilians’ bodies. Rubber bullets were made to be aimed at the ground and bounce off. Not be aimed directly at people.”

ROBERT R: “My most recent memory was probably at the protest. We didn’t talk to them. But they were just there punkin’ us and drivin’ up and down the streets like maniacs. Totally abusing their power.”

“I mean, we don’t know—at least it didn’t look like they were harassing anybody. We don’t know, ’cos we left. But what we did see was them abusing their power and just speeding up and down this busy a\*s street in downtown San Jose. Santa Clara Street. Whatever.”

“It’s like they’re in a movie, just playing around and shit. That’s stupid. They were all shielded up. They had zip ties and sh\*-t on them.”

“Walking by them, It was one of the first times in a while I’ve felt scared...being around cops. I’ve always felt scared of cops in San Jose. San Jose

cops are scary. Compared to the cops I dealt with in Hollister growing up.. like I never had to deal with anything bad.”

SYDNEY: “At the protest on Monday [6/1/20]. There was this lieutenant who was like 6’3”, he started charging at my two black friends and I stepped in between them to like stop him from touching them. But he grabbed my wrist and pushed me and then reached over me so he could shove her too. He was shouting at us to get back onto the sidewalk but there was like a group of 15 people marching next to us who also were off of the sidewalk. He ran off as soon as I tried to get his badge number. I was like eyeing him the whole time telling him I was gonna report him, and he stayed like 10 feet away from me for the rest of the night.”

*[Editor’s note: I was at the protest in downtown San Jose on June 2nd. I was one of the remaining protesters after the 8:30 pm curfew hit. SJPd was armed in full riot gear, and had us surrounded on three sides with squad cars and motorcycles. At 9:48 pm SJPd fired multiple rounds of rubber bullets at us even though we remained peaceful and were walking backwards away from them. Multiple protestors were injured that night. I was lucky enough to get away unscathed.]*

**TEJEDA: What is your opinion on the current social/political climate in regards to the murder of George Floyd and other black men, women and children?**

ANONYMOUS: “I think that obviously y’know peaceful protests weren’t getting anywhere for minorities. There’s just lots of anger you know. People are fed up. Hundreds and hundreds of years of these people being oppressed. That’s the long story short. There needs to be change. If anything, all I gotta say is, if I have to pick a side I’m not on the cops’ side—I’ll tell you that much. The way they’re taught to control situations, y’know put people in choke holds and what not, it just ain’t right. You should be able to, you know, talk to another human being regardless if you’re a police officer or not. I feel like there should be a common respect between men and women and the way they talk to human beings in general and they cross that line a lot.

“Like let’s say I’m riding with my lady in the car and they pull up. They’ll just search my car because they want to. Because I got tattoos. Because I’m Mexican, or black or whatever you know. The embarrassment you feel as a man, you gotta understand that anger. The anger that these people have.”

AQUILLE: “I’m for the justice of George Floyd. This is a big human rights

movement going on. Right now, everybody's kinda on 10. Everybody's a little sensitive to certain topics. But it's these certain topics that need to be talked about regardless of how you feel about it because it's for a greater good."

ROBERT: "I mean [police brutality] has been happening. It's been going on forever. I guess people are finally just...fed up. Even before Black Lives Matter and all that sh\*t, it's been going on forever but it's always just been swept under the rug. But now that we have cellphones and social media and all that, it's finally out there.

"It's gross. It's wrong. It's still happening. There's still people dying. And at least every night that these protests have gone on for—these last few weeks—someone is either hurt or dying. At the hands of police. It's gross. They're picking on old people. Women. Men. And not just black people, white people too. And Asians. Mexicans.

"The good thing about all this, is that a lot of people—myself included—our eyes have been opened."

SYDNEY: "It's really amazing that in our modern day we are able to witness a civil rights movement like this....I think it's really cool that we get to go through that in, like, an age of modern media. We're able to see everything on social media, every single day—in real time. I don't know. Even though this all really really sucks, I think it's really cool that we're able to be so connected as a community, even across the states, because of the way that technology has developed."

**TEJEDA: What is the most important story YOU want to share about your interactions with police?**

VICTOR:: "My most traumatic experience that happened with police was a case of mistaken identity.

"So what had happened was, I was walking to 7-Eleven and a squad car pulled around the corner and passed me, and then stopped....Dude got out and was like walking around me, but not really passing me. The moment I turned around he grabbed me by my shoulder. So I was just like 'okay... like what's going on? Can I help you?'

"Officer was like 'alright don't move right now' started speaking into his radio and calling for backup. Told me not to move, not to do anything. Don't do anything dumb, don't do anything stupid. He told me like 'I know who you are' and I was like, 'excuse me?'

"It's so WEIRD because like...this whole situation I'm about to tell



you could've been avoided... had the officer asked me for my name.

"Anyways, I told him like 'I don't understand what's going on' and he was all 'We've been looking for you' and at this point another officer had showed up and immediately grabbed my other arm. So both of my arms are restrained, okay...and I'm freaking out because I don't know what's going on. Like am I being set up? I see that happening all the time. So I try and be cool, you know. I was being respectful, called them sir and all that stuff. I tried to keep my arms as relaxed as possible because I didn't want them to think I was resisting or anything. My mind started racing, you know what I'm sayin' like, all these thoughts were running through my head at the same time.

"Then you know. They turned me around and put me in cuffs. MIND YOU, they still haven't told me ANYTHING about what was going on or why. They said that they know who I am, that they've caught me, they've done their job blahblahblah. Meanwhile I was just tryna go to 7-Eleven.

"So anyways, they sit me down in the car and they search me... but LUCKILY, very luckily, I had my wallet with me. So they look at my ID and then they just go back to the other car and start talking. And they're not talking to me this whole time you know, so I'm just sitting there like what the fuck is going on. Then they come back and they stand me up and they're all 'alright, we got the wrong guy. We need you to get out of here,' and they uncuff me and just leave.

"It's so surreal you know, like they didn't even put any of my stuff back in my wallet all my sh\*t was just laying on the ground. And I'm just sitting there like 'what the fuck just happened to me right now?' That could've just ESCALATED and who knows WHAT could've happened if I had shown any type of frustration or anger for being wrongly accused of something, y'know what I'm saying. It's crazy to me, because in these interactions you don't know what's gonna happen next. You don't have no power. I feel like, had I been a white person they would've for sure identified me.

"One of the most important aspects of the criminal justice system I really want people to understand is like how stacked the chips are against you the moment you are in cuffs. You don't got the money, the resources, and the knowledge to navigate your way through the criminal justice system—even simple knowledge, like having the right legal documents, showing up on time, what you should wear, if you should post bail, having a lawyer before hand or after hand, how to speak to a judge in court—there's so many facets of the criminal justice system that people really aren't informed about that I think they should really educate themselves on how to completely avoid, or at least

not get stuck in it. ‘cos once you’re in it, you’re trapped. You’re caught in the machine. It’s unfeeling you know. They just wanna prosecute. Prosecution is all about numbers. Money. Prosecution is tryna get plea deals and loop people into the system as quickly and as swiftly as possible.

“I really think that now more than ever people NEED to educate themselves. Because nobody wants to do it for them. There’s this short documentary on Netflix called ‘Survivors Guide to Prison.’ It’s one of the most accessible and comprehensive overviews on how to navigate the criminal justice system. Check it out.”

ANONYMOUS: “I remember I was 14 years old one time. With one of my friends, walking home late, police officer pulled us over. We were scared, I mean we were kids. So he tells us ‘Get on the curb! Sit down on the curb!’ He puts this bright light in my face and starts saying stuff like ‘Why can’t you keep your eyes open? Why can’t you keep your eyes open? Are you on drugs? You got drugs?’ But I just couldn’t see you know. They start grabbing us, they cuffed us, pushed us up against the car. And my friend starts laughing. So the cop, he looks at him and smirks and smacks the hat off his head. It was a San Jose Sharks hat. The cop said, ‘Oh, you’re from San Jose? This is our city you fucking punk.’ So I flinch you know, I was like ‘oh fuck they’re hitting him.’ I wasn’t tryna resist or anything, but his first reaction was to slam me on the ground, put me in the back of the car. Tighten my cuffs so hard my hands hurt you know. Till I had to literally beg him, like BEG him literally to open up the back and loosen my cuffs. So he did, because he saw my hands were turning purple. But still though, that was only 5 or 6 minutes into it. I felt like I was already losing my breath you know. I was chubby. I couldn’t breathe. I was having an anxiety attack. That’s probably the only reason they stopped the car you know, ‘cos I was kicking and screaming in the back.

“I just wanna show like, again, every encounter you have with these guys. Especially San Jose Police Department. They’re pieces of shit. They’re assholes. The worst cops I’ve ever dealt with. And I’ve had different encounters, with different police in different counties and they weren’t like that. They were nothing like SJP—they’re a different force. Not to be reckoned with either. They’re like a fucking gang with badges. They’ll hurt you and they won’t tell nobody either. You can’t find that information anywhere.”

AQUILLE: “When I was stopped by police for not paying for a light rail pass when I was trying to go to Great America. I like, tried to slide my friend my light rail pass but it didn’t work; we got caught.

“I ended up having to go to court and I got fingerprinted kind of on the spot. I ended up getting fined like 400 bucks. Then I had to see a judge. Not in a courtroom or anything, it was just her office. I had to like, tell her what the situation was and since I didn’t have a criminal history before, so I just got off with a warning and they actually cut my fine by like 200 bucks.

“My sister was there, as like an [adult] but I was there representing myself as a minor. I was 14 years old. It was unnecessary you know, like we were kids, it was summertime. I just feel like there are other things that go on on those train tracks that police could be worried about.”

ROBERT: “One night, I was in downtown San Jose with my friends and I got on the lightrail. And I got into it with a guy on the train... I ended up getting punched in the face by the guy. I deserved it. And that was that. I didn’t do anything back, I was just in shock. I was running my mouth and he punched me.” And then the train stopped where we were supposed to be. And there was lightrail police, they had their batons out and shit and they stopped me, and they were like ‘you need to stay.’ So I was like ‘f— that, I’m out.’ So I dipped and I started walking towards my friend’s house but I didn’t know where the f— I was going, I just needed to get away from the lightrail. The police were going crazy. And I was like ‘dude, they’re gonna fuck me up. I’m out.’ So I’m walking down some street. Then an SJPD squad par pulled me over and they started talking to me. And they were like ‘you meet the description of this guy we’re looking for’ and I told them like ‘Yo, I didn’t do anything.’ But I was drunk y’know so I was gonna get a Drunk In Public. But, I started talking shit to them and then I remember they threw me in the car. And that was that.

“I remember my friend walking by and he was like ‘aye can I take him home’ and they were like ‘fuck you’ and told him like ‘if you come by again, you’re done too.’ So he took off y’know, because he had too. And I was still in the car and then another f—ckin car comes up, and it’s their sargeant. I didn’t know this, until he ripped me out of the car and he threw me on the hood of the car and put my arm up so far behind my back, he was like pulling it up until I was almost crying. So I was laying there on the hood, like begging him stop. And all he could say was like ‘You’re not so tough now huh?’—You wanna call my officers names? You’re not doin’ it now right? So then he finally stopped. And I was almost in tears and it hurt hella bad. And I dunno but I guess at some point the other officers had grabbed me by my bicep because I went home the next day and there was still a handprint, like here on my bicep.

“The funny thing is, at like one point I started threatening the officer

that was taking me. Telling him like ‘f— you’ you know, like ‘If you weren’t a cop we could fight.’ And then he gave me his address. Gave me his name, his number, all of it. But I was drunk and I couldn’t remember.

“Anyways, right before I got into the station he totally loosened my cuffs. He started acting all nice and shit, and his whole attitude changed. But the whole way there he was just talking shit to me and knew my cuffs were hurting me. But he only wanted to act different once we were there.

“I’ll never forget any of that. I grew up in Hollister. I got in trouble in Hollister for skateboarding and doin other stupid things. They kinda did their jobs to the best of their abilities. Not that it was right for me to lash out at them, but I remember them like, not abusing their power. Nothing like San Jose police. I tell people to this day, like I’ll never ever in my life [again] mouth off to a San Jose police officer. Even if they deserve it. They’ll hurt you.

“Oh yeah, and they stole my I.D.”

**TEJEDA: Do you believe literature has a role, if not an obligation, to share the narratives of all sides of a political movement? Do you believe that there is a necessity to uplift the voices of the oppressed?**

VICTOR: “I do believe that literature is really key. But y’know more than anything, it’s the access to it. Because a lot of people, um, they don’t know what they don’t know and they don’t know how to get it. So literature is a great medium but it’s the access to and distribution of said medium that is key. I think the best means of distributing information is social media. But the thing about social media is that it’s really fickle and the attention shifts all the time. And literature is more longstanding.

“I think having a core set of books and media that really capture the essence of the movement, and the history behind it is crucial. I think learning the history is more important than anything. A lot of people of color have to experience that knowledge first hand. But a lot of other people, you know, especially white people who are trying to ally themselves and walk in solidarity don’t know the history behind it, because the information is not really spread throughout America or taught in our public school systems and they gotta learn it themselves. I think something that is key to becoming an ally is to use what you can to educate yourself on the history and the nuances of the movement. Not only that, but also understand the political landscape of the different facets of the movement today. I think literature plays a huge role in that. But I also think it is the means of reaching out to people and distributing that information to the masses.”

ANONYMOUS: “Yes—yes it does, of course. I think like lots of minorities, Mexicans, blacks, and even poor whites....They’re not given certain things. Everybody struggles you know. Education was only given to a lot of the richer people. So in order for us to have our voices heard, it’s because of places like De Anza College that can help say a word for people who aren’t educated enough to write a literature story to get their voice out there or something like that you know.

“Without education, fighting and protesting can only do so much. But it’s all the paperwork and the writing that goes into making laws, and changing laws that requires education or literature to do that. Because the cops you know, they got lawyers, they got educators, they got judges, they got legislatures and all that shit. So what we need is, is for us to be more educated. For us to have those roles, for us to have that impact. We need minorities in power to have the biggest impact. Minority becoming a judge, THAT’S the biggest fight right there. Minority becoming a teacher, THAT’S another positive right there. We need that. That could make a difference.”

ROBERT: “Yeah I do. Yes. I feel like if you put all this out there, through literature or whatever. Magazines, you know, internet. The more people who can see it, the better. Because right now, like we got Instagram and Twitter and whatever, and there’s a lot of good sh--t on there. And it’s helping people see like what’s going on. Sorry I can’t word this all fancy or whatever, but you know, it works.”

AQUILLE: “I do believe that literature has a role, and somewhat of an obligation, to share all sides of a political movement. I do believe that there is a necessity to uplift the voices of the oppressed though. Clearly, it’s become obvious over the years that POC voices have been the most oppressed.”

“It’s just another [example] of us not being able to be heard.”

**TEJEDA: Out of everything that you’ve shared with me so far what do YOU believe is the most important message for me to share in the De Anza literary magazine?**

VICTOR: “The most important thing that I need people to understand is that racism is a facet of this country that cannot be ignored. I think the culture of this country is to be all types of kumbaya in regards to the antiracist movement, the civil rights movement, and the abolishment of slavery into some type of revisionist whitewashed history pretending that everything was kind of a national movement against these wrongs, because it wasn’t. Racism is an

institution that this nation was founded on. Everything that comes as a result of that has to be confronted. And it's uncomfortable, but I think that progress has always been uncomfortable. But beautiful things and progress always come as a result of that struggle and that sacrifice. All the things that we've talked about today are just drops in the bucket, you know, of a larger struggle. I want more than anything, for people to have that confidence to confront things head on. Be bold with it, you know. There's no benefit of being left behind in this fight. There is no middle ground in this. I think to have any sort of progress we gotta confront this monstrous machine head on, because there truly are no winners when racism is involved."

ANONYMOUS: "I just wanna say thank you. Thank you so much De Anza and this magazine for giving the chance to us to get our voices out there. Tell people what we see and think about police officers and stuff, I like that.

"The officers that traumatized my son and my family with the things that they done.—I think about that too, they gotta live with that too. You [cops] gotta live with the fact that you traumatized a little kid so bad that he hates you. You live with that. Not me. I'm a minority you know, and I can say I never in my life ever hurt a little kid like that."

ROBERT: "I think what we need to address the most is that there needs to be change. Like everything that's going on right now is good. I mean, I don't know sh-t. Still don't know sh-t. I'm learning. But I feel like, this [movement] can't just go away. It needs to keep going. We need to stop police brutality. It's bullshit. I'm proud of this country. Like people everywhere. People are finally trying to do something. No more hiding."

SYDNEY: "How important social media has become. And how important it is to stay engaged in this political climate. We got to further this movement into something bigger than a tweet or a trend."

AQUILLE: "Check on your black friends during this time. Don't reach out to them asking like, what to do or how to react. That shouldn't be on your forefront. The forefront of your mind should be like, 'How are you feeling? What can I do to help you?' And if I say like what you can do to help me would be to like: spread awareness and use your voice. When your friend or somebody that is important to you says 'Use your voice'... LISTEN TO THEM.

## **Bloodlines/Blood Trails**

Allyson Tiongson

I can no longer write the way rain falls or paint the colors of the sunset,  
I can no longer make and shape my words to flow the way a river does  
for poems don't blossom the way flowers do,  
they are not nurtured the way forests are  
they are burnt and beaten and forcibly cut away from my throat

they are ripped away from me, they are ripped away by hands that do not  
know how to wipe  
away tears, how to cultivate flowers to cultivate vegetables, they are ripped  
from hands whose  
color is not from this land

hands like a soldier's, hands like a king's

hands that were ordered to rip us apart

(contrary to popular belief, I am no descendant of a king, we have no kings,  
but you took my  
grandfather's wreath of flowers and choked him out with the thorns)

—MY WRITING REQUIRES A BLOOD TRAIL NOW BECAUSE  
YOUR WRITING REQUIRED OUR DEAD BODIES. WE ARE  
HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE.

# The Last Good Day

Kassandra Tejada

Stretch your arms a little  
further towards salvation; the  
dim street light that sorta  
looks like g\*d after four tabs  
of acid. reach for the water--  
still blue and full of rose  
petals, [[still pink]] on the  
paint-chipped walls of your  
grandmother's house. the  
passing train of light, still  
too-loud and too-noisy &  
too-over-stimulating for your  
pan fried brain. you try to  
make art but your over  
worked hands split at the  
seams. remember the days  
when your own grip didn't  
seem so carnal. remember the  
times you tried to pray your  
gay away. pray for relief.  
pray to get better. pray to not  
get left out of heaven and  
repent. repent. repent.  
wash yourself free of sin.  
roll dead skin burritos off  
your palms to reveal your  
tree bark knuckles. thick  
cracks in tired tendons that  
beg to be slathered in  
balsam-- a witches' brew of  
oils and ancient songs to r  
eplenish the leathery,  
freckled skin you live in.  
death. rebirth. resurrection.  
give life to the half-dead  
A-cup lover laying on your



chest. empty the poison  
from your bladder into a  
stranger's toilet. make a  
new years resolution to  
finally quit smoking.  
(after this last pack)  
(after this song is over)  
take another drag and give  
up on yourself one week  
later.

## Draft Saved • [Subject: Empty]

Astred Luna

---

hey, i know this is  
a little bit out of the blue, or—  
wait—that's not  
how you begin an email;

let me try again;  
hello Professor,  
it's been a while, and i  
was hoping we could speak

casually, now that i'm  
no longer in your class, and  
see, that aches but i wanted  
to ask, would you c—

hello professor,  
You didn't know this  
(or maybe you did, english  
teachers have an odd

way of *knowing*) but  
yesterday the sun went  
out, and i swear i didn't  
mean for it to happen—

hi professor!  
i was just wondering,  
if i Told you that i attended  
my own funeral today, what—

greetings professor,  
i'm afraid i'm a little lost  
on this assignment; i'm  
trying to find the symbolism

in a dead rabbit, but when  
i picked it up, it came  
back to life, just the  
strangest thing—

good evening professor,  
could you let Me know—  
professor, i'm not sure  
how to say That the words

word s wds ords wrds wo s o  
r s wrds w rd s w ww s wwwwwwwwwwwww  
dear professor,  
I saw a quaint little bookstore

on the corner of hell  
and main street and Had the  
thought that you might appreciate  
the concept of it; you see i

was walking down A local timestream  
when i found a fragment of the  
Future that someone left behind  
and picked it up—can you believe

that they were littering?—  
and a stray dog thought  
to Thank me; it was the most  
surreal experience i think

i've ever had; You would have  
adored it; anyway, the cracks  
in the universe have finally  
begun to close With a sound akin—

professor i peeled an orange and  
remembered when we studied that  
one poem about Love and it  
burned a hole in me, left me smoking—

[Subject: hello!]  
professor,  
i know it's been some time  
since then, but i had to tell you;

## **This Kind Of Love!**

Talia Garcia

---

This is the love that will drive you crazy,  
Four dirty paws all over my clean sheets,  
I wish you were just a little lazy,  
Because you always keep me on my feet,  
And with all of your barking my ears ache,  
Even the skin on my legs is scratched up,  
And you have now given me a headache,  
So I can not wait for you to grow up,  
But I am in love with your puppy eyes,  
And your warm fluffy body next to mine,  
Even when we are running with long strides,  
Anytime with you is always divine,  
So please keep all those wet kisses coming,  
Because I will never stop the loving.

# The Elephants in Vietnam and the Boys Who Became Birds

Kim Johnson

---

In Vietnam, I watched American soldiers cut the trunks off of elephants. Violence was so normalized that no one batted an eyelash at the boys sent across the world to die, but some men confided in me that they felt bad for the elephants. Sometimes late at night I could hear a soft wailing whisper through the trees, and I was never sure if it was a baby elephant or someone's son crying out for his mother. When I couldn't sleep, I'd climb trees whose branches stretched out their hands towards heaven. Maybe I wanted to be closer to the stars, or further away from this earth. Maybe I knew no one was listening to them, not even God. For some of the men in my platoon, the war started with them burning their draft cards and ended with them burning villages.

We were as vulnerable to the elements as we were to our enemies. Mosquitos dipped their straws into our veins and ended up blood drunk on malaria pills. It rained so often, I never knew if it was sweat or raindrops pouring down my face in the humidity. When we'd pass out from exhaustion, our bodies would make mud angels in the soil and for a moment it almost made us feel human again. I tried to make peace with Mother Nature at night when the fields of Vietnam were illuminated by fireflies, but couldn't find the courage to write a letter to my own mother. There were too many stories I couldn't tell her.

It's strange how we passed the time knowing each day could be our last on earth. We played football with hand grenades and built card houses out of our limited rations of saltine crackers. My friend John wanted to be a doctor when he got out of the army. The other soldiers would come to him with their ailments and he loved to mess around with them by saying, "This looks really bad, I think we're going to have to amputate it, take a swig of liquor and bite down on this bullet." He'd stare at their horrified expressions and start laughing. "I'm just kidding brother, don't worry I'll fix it." He made do with what little he had, holding needles over flickering candles and using dental floss to sew their wounds shut. At night, we'd lay our heads on our rucksacks and suddenly, we were boys again, staring up at incoming missiles illuminating the sky like a fireworks on the 4th of July.

One day we were wading through the swamp with our guns over our heads, bugs chirping all around us, daydreaming about the girls we'd left behind.

“When I get back to Virginia, Alice wants to drive my VW bus all the way to California. She wants to visit Haight Ashbery and the Hollywood sign. We might even follow the Rolling Stones around for a while.” John laughed.

“Jenny said she’d let Elvis marry us at the Little White Chapel in Las Vegas. I can’t wait to grow my sideburns out again. I’m gonna grow one of those handlebar mustaches and wear aviators like the Hells Angels.” I shot him a sly smile.

I never saw the bullet, I just watched his head fly away from his body and off towards heaven. There were so many boys who fell asleep in my arms and never woke up. I planted their dog tags in the dirt. Hoped that one day when the sky opened up and God poured his watering can over earth their bodies would bloom back to life before my eyes. I still think about all the boys I left on the battlefield in Vietnam, and curse God for leaving me behind. Curse god for not taking me with them.

I imagine returning from war feels a lot like being an astronaut returning to earth after walking on the moon for the first time. I can barely stand the weight of my own mind. No one truly knows what it’s like to wander through darkness in search of the light, not sure if you’ll ever find it again. Jenny ended up marrying an insurance salesman. She said she waited years for me to return from the war, but I never came back.

I couldn’t sleep through the night without screaming at the shadows. I visited John’s mother to give her the photo of them he kept in the pocket of his combat pants, and made sure I cleaned all the blood off it.

I couldn’t bear to see the men with missing limbs beg for quarters on street corners in torn army fatigues, with a far off look in their eyes like animals staring at a forest fire. Sometimes I’d look at them and mourn the elephants that lost their trunks in Vietnam. Sometimes I think cognitive dissonance has killed more men than bullets.

Every sound I encounter in this city triggers a memory. The car horns sound like air raid sirens. Firecrackers remind me of gunfire. The garbage trucks at 6 am force me to relive the terror of tanks rolling over charred bodies in the villages. And if I close my eyes in the subway, even for a second, the man playing Miles Davis on his trumpet sounds like the ghosts of those elephants left to die on the banks of a river in Vietnam dyed red with the blood of my brothers.

Now all that’s left of me is a man curled up in the fetal position

crying on a subway platform. When the police arrived on the scene, they cuffed my hands behind my back like a metal straightjacket and committed me to the PTSD wing of the VA hospital, where the other soldiers talked about the war like an old lover they never got over. They did their best to explain this kind of pain to the therapist leading our support group. “I’m haunted by the ghosts of my friends who never made it home,” one said. “The helicopter pilots in Vietnam were sitting ducks. There were twenty-one pilots in my flight school, and I am the only one left. I had to shoot myself in the foot just to survive it, but I didn’t make it out alive.” No one said anything after that.

Sometimes soldiers were tied to the bed with straightjackets to “help with the night terrors.” The doctors didn’t want veterans falling out of bed every night when they stepped onto the battlefield of their minds, so it seemed like the best solution. One night I couldn’t sleep, so I untied the sleeves of my straight jacket from the bedpost and slipped into the hallway past a sleeping guard. I tiptoed past the other PTSD patients snoring in their rooms, and climbed up three flights of stairs to the roof.

When I made it to the roof of the building, the city looked like a thousand fireflies sparkling at night in the fields of Vietnam. Funny how I could never really tell if they were fireflies or bullets until one of my friends caught one between his teeth. Some men tried to catch fireflies in their hands like butterfly nets all summer, attempting to let their light live a little longer. But sometimes they would unclasp their hands to reveal a bullet, and their light bled into the soil of the sky. In the right light, the sleeves of a straight jacket can resemble the wings of an angel, and when they start to unravel anything feels possible. Sure, in the half-light, I knew I wasn’t an angel, or a firefly, or a bird, or a bullet. However, once the birdcage door swings open to reveal the sky, anyone would be crazy to believe they couldn’t fly. When the paramedics finally arrived at the rooftop and approached the ledge, I like to think all that was left of me was a fistful of feathers.

## **Anxious**

Sara Robertson

---

all i can do  
is sit  
and believe  
the lies  
that my mind  
is screaming  
all-consuming,  
ever-feeding

## **On the Topic of “Woman”**

Sara Robertson

---

Woman.

Even our name claims:

We are born of Man.

So what can the law of nature intend

That man can only be

Borne

By us?



Astred Luna

---

It takes a certain kind of man  
to demand that hell itself should  
open like a flower come to bloom,

petals stained with the honey of  
his voice, the first lesson on grief  
that mankind ever learned;

it takes another man entirely  
to think that love is a violation  
of nature's laws, and yet another

still, to think himself above  
the gods, that metal and stone  
should bend to his whims; perhaps

I am too human to understand him;  
the son of a muse is, of course,  
fated to have a muse of his own;

swallowed by the stones, she dies at  
the bite of venom with a bitter tang—  
dead and still, he cannot let her be.

— *Eurydice Does Not Exit*

## **The Boy I Lost to Dream**

Julia Shih

He was the greatest love of my life and he could not remember me.

Train station. Gray suit, black hat. He looked so sad coming in from the rain, I recognized him right away and nearly stumbled on the stairs in surprise. He was my quantum entanglement.

We went for coffee. Made small talk but mostly stared at each other. He had a beard now. He told me about his family, his background, his job. It had been 6 years since I last saw him and some things I already knew and some were new. He had an older sister with two German shepherds. He'd gotten married to a Russian chiropractor. He wore contact lenses now. He'd had a really rough day at work. He had large hands, graceful in their brute utility. I had an impulse to reach over and touch his hair just behind his ear to feel the wetness left by the rain. He asked me why I felt so familiar.

I talked about time and destiny, how time isn't linear and this reality is a collective dream. Most people are sleeping but a few are awake. I told him the fallacy of reality is that people think reality is what happens to you, but you can create it. You can either be a character in a dream, or the dreamer. He agreed and was surprised—he'd never met someone who had these same private thoughts. I asked him what he thought about waking up. You could have everything that makes you happy, I said. He became excited at the idea but said he didn't know what makes him happy. Me, I said. I make you happy. He gave me a shy smile.

We stood outside the diner, mesmerized by the rhythmic pounding of the rain against the street. I buried my hands inside his jacket and pressed my body into his, that beautiful body I knew so well. I'm married, he whispered, nervously. Still, he leaned in, breathing in my skin. The memory of what we were, are, and have always been blended into the present until I could no longer stand another moment of separation.

We make love in a nearby hotel. It is both starved and tender. After, I look him in the eyes and say, don't forget me. And he laughs and says, how could I.

But he does. He always does.

When I wake, you will not remember me.

I awaken to find myself alone in my own bed. I check my phone to find I've slept through nearly the entire day. I scramble to the train station. I need to see him. I have no idea when the next time will be. He enters with the evening rush just as he had before. Gray suit. Black hat. Looking so sad my heart swells. I take him in, engraving a portrait to memory with the smell and feel of us, together, from the night before, from the lifetimes before. He notices me staring and we make eye contact, his eyes widening into a question, a flicker of recognition. I turn away and when I turn back, he is gone. Walking away from me, swallowed by the sea of bodies.

He is the greatest love of my life. We have crossed paths hundreds of times, since childhood. But every time we get close, time resets us.

I always remember. And he always forgets.

## Dressing Room

Pamela Williams

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It's unreasonable to expect more out of a dressing room than it's able to give. There really isn't much to the space: four plastic covered cork boards, a bench seat of the same composite materials, linoleum flooring, and a full-length mirror account for the majority of its construction. On the inside of a slide-latched door live two clothing hooks spaced evenly apart. The unflattering light is never a surprise, given that the bottom-line depends so much upon how poorly one feels about one's appearance. Against the soft neutrals of the dressing room stall, each piece of merchandise looks like a confluence of every pattern and color I've ever seen; yet by some sorcery of the mundane I manage to blend seamlessly into the edgcomb grays and ballet whites that compose the backdrop of my private humiliation. Shopping at department stores that tout the motto "*dress for less*" do only marginally less damage to one's self-esteem than a drawn out explanation from your crush about how you remind them of one of their siblings.

The oddly gendered space evokes shadows of arbitrary social tuselings with genitalia enough to exhaust me on entry. Yet, there I stand participating in the clumsy binary with an armful of dresses hopeful that among them is one flattering enough to inspire coitus. Why bother thinking about such things at all when I can obsess about the bodies that squeezed into my selected threads before me?

Undetected by the naked eye, every minute of the day we lose thirty to forty-thousand dead skin cells off the surface of our skin. I like to imagine other women of size and their generous miles of husk continuously shedding into the fabric of man made, unbreathable materials. Pearls of sweat forming on their upper lips, foreheads and underneath breasts. Strange skin cells from others introduce themselves to my newly arrived ones. I fantasize that they exchange salutations and start sharing intimate details of their hosts' lives, "She told everyone at her job she was sick last week but she wasn't, of course. Rather, she lay on the couch and drank champagne from 7-Eleven, and watched porn on her phone off and on until she fell asleep. I mean really, the only decent thing she did all day was febreze the cushions after she got up for the afternoon.

"Is it depression you think?"

“Honestly, I know it’s fucked up to say, but it would almost be better if it was depression.... I think she’s just *like that?*”

My preoccupation with sentient skin cells allows me to avoid considering the tense zipper struggling to keep its teeth closed around my hip flesh only for a short time. I tear the dress from my torso and begin to eyeball the door behind me. The hooks on the door are home to two categories—*no* and *no*. Yeses are tossed on the bench next to the clothes I walked in with, forming a critical mass that nags at my peripheral vision. A mixture of new and old material bought and unowned grows as I grow—worn, unworn, and worn by others

# Lullaby

Pamela Williams

---

Your baby—it's a death knell  
Pink, yellow, and creamy baby blue blankets.  
it's fat little face rockabys my skin to an ashen hue.

No children?  
Give him a baby, please honey don't you want a baby?!

Soften your gut to fecundity and arrest your imaginations beyond  
the fiction written for you by your mother's silken hands.

It's what one does, who will inherit your clutter after your baby kills  
you? Mumma, mommy, me-me-milky muff.  
Your baby—its a death knell.

When boughs break they can be edged into pernicious cannon,  
And despite my disenchantment I do see that there is poetry in  
tumbling baskets.

## SNOW WHITE IS DEAD

Kassandra Tejada

I killed her  
and her seven ugly men  
left only  
whole fruit carcasses and  
empty beds  
as evidence to the destruction  
we caused one another  
//

does a princess still die if no one is in the woods to watch her croak ??  
or would the legacy live on in  
lined lips and  
gelled curls  
—name chain necklaces primed for a g\*d??  
//

You say chivalry is dead  
I say it's because I ate it  
and shit it out on the cement  
next to your name and  
handprint  
//

snow white never seemed that fair to me anyways  
why keep seven men to yourself and not share?  
I hate greedy bitches that think they are enchanting  
or daring when they don't wear a bra at night  
//

LET 'EM LOOSE  
thewhooooolelotofem  
let the pale princess' reign come to an end.  
may the city streets reek of  
sweat from the dance floor, our perfume,  
tanned skin and  
pleather

## Social Media Influencer Barbie

Kim Johnson

---

It was her senior year at Malibu High School and she had to admit the campus was almost as gorgeous as she was: cell phones chirping to the snooze inducing tunes of Taylor Swift, puffy white clouds from vape pens drifting peacefully across campus, the boob jobs of her bleached blonde classmates slathered with suntan lotion, absorbing sunlight like silicone solar panels to give the campus that magical glow of new money.

All was right in Barbie's world and she was just three short weeks away from graduation. Her parents had spent a meager \$500,000 changing her SAT scores and had paid coaches to recruit her for the most prestigious athletics programs in Southern California. She was offered a coveted rock paper scissors scholarship from UC Irvine, a mini golf scholarship from UCLA, and a curling scholarship from USC. She decided on USC because she'd always wanted to go to beauty school and was afraid she'd ruin her manicure playing full-contact sports like rock paper scissors or might even knock out a small child if trusted with a mini golf club.

She noticed Ken's pink scooter in the parking lot and wanted to show him the results of the fourteen hours she'd spent posing for that perfect prom dress selfie. He wasn't in the gym, or jacuzziing in the aquatic center, or baking pies in home economics as anticipated. At first, she was a bit concerned. Perhaps he got lost on the way to class and fell into a tanning bed. Luckily, she remembered that he'd agreed to help out the wrestling team over the summer so she went to look for him in Coach Morris's office. She was going to knock but noticed the door was slightly ajar, so she burst into the room without warning anyone. At first, she couldn't quite make out what was going on. Ken's head was tilted back, eyes clinched, hair disheveled, mouth gaped open, gripping the desk in pain like he'd pulled a groin muscle. Coach Morris's head was hovering over his lap, bouncing up and down like a bobble head doll head banging on a subwoofer.

"Oh my god Babe are you ok? Are you hurt? Here let me help you." Just then, the reality of what was happening set in. "Ewww Ken, are you really getting head from a middle-aged gym teacher? Do you have any idea what this could do to our Instagram following?"

Barbie burst into tears and stormed out of the locker room. She couldn't believe what she had just witnessed. How could she have been



so stupid? Now it was becoming clear why he always seemed mildly enthusiastic about all those naked selfies she'd sent him via text message. Stacey stopped her in the parking lot to ask what was wrong. Barbie stood there for several minutes not blinking, then slammed the door of her convertible and sped off down the Pacific Coast Highway. She was supposed to attend a party at the Playboy Mansion that evening, and needed to pull her shit together if she was going to make an appearance. She spent the whole ride making outfit changes and popping Valiums like Tic Tacs to take the edge off.

Where had things gone wrong she wondered? Ken had always been her best friend. Just the other day they were picking out cute outfits for each other on Melrose, getting glitter manicures at the salon, binge watching RuPaul's Drag Race re-runs, and gossiping about her male celebrity crushes in hydrating mud masks. She felt totally blindsided. Sure, she'd had a lesbian fantasy or two. Who hadn't? She was particularly attracted to Daenerys Targaryen from *Game of Thrones*, surprisingly; that boxed blond look kind of did it for her. However, she knew it was just make believe. I mean, honestly, she couldn't bend a plastic knee for her even if she wanted to. Maybe this was just a phase Ken was going through, but deep down she knew things would never be the same between them. If they got married they would be cursed to spend the rest of their sexually frustrated lives sleeping in separate boxes. She imagined spending candlelight dinners alone toasting with her fur children, pouring red wine into golden kitty chalices with their names bedazzled on them, and then falling asleep in the middle of masturbating to a mediocre romance novel. This was an absolute nightmare. Secretly, all she'd ever wanted was to be dominated, to have a man hand cuff her to her box with twist ties and have his way with her.

She pulled into the driveway of the Playboy Mansion. Just as she was about to toss her keys to the valet, she spotted Ken flirting with a young pool boy by the grotto. Suddenly, she was filled with the rage of a thousand Black Friday shoppers willing to clothesline anyone who got in the way of that hot Christmas item. She stared at Ken with fury, gripped the steering wheel, gunned the engine, and accelerated toward him, taking out several fancy hors d'oeuvre trays, as well as a Hugh Hefner ice sculpture, before plunging her convertible into the swimming pool.

At first, only her silicone lips and breast implants kept her afloat; but, eventually, she needed to be rescued from the wreckage with an inflatable floating unicorn, then escorted off the property on a stretcher by security. The worst part was that the neck brace she was wearing clashed with her outfit, and she was met with death glares from several enraged chlorine-soaked Playboy Bunnies upon exiting the party. She had bribed several reality stars for this invite, and was now banned from the Playboy Mansion for life. It took five seconds flat for that video to go viral on YouTube and ruin her social media career forever.

On top of that, this was Barbie's third DUI. The first didn't really count because she'd spent the last ten minutes of that car chase fixing her makeup in the rearview mirror to ensure that she could flirt her way out of the speeding ticket; and, ok, maybe she had mowed down a few tourists in Venice Beach chasing after Justin Bieber so he could sign her breasts during an extended happy hour. So what?

This turned out to be the worst summer of her entire adult life. Her beloved hot pink convertible was impounded and turned into scrap metal. She lost all of her hard-earned sports scholarships to less qualified celebrity children. Skipper died in her own compromising sexual position in a tragic jet-ski accident while vacationing in Martha's Vineyard. And now, her father was threatening to cut her off from her trust fund without warning, and even had the nerve to tell her to get a job.

"A what?" she asked, confused.

"A J.O.B.," he replied.

She nodded and pretended she knew what he was talking about, but had to Google it after their conversation. Once she did she started shrieking, "EW/WW---- EW/WW, EW/WW, EW/WW," at the top of her lungs over the intercom channeling her best Veruca Salt impression.

"Daddy, you promised me a dream house, a beach house, a dune buggy, a speedboat, a puppy and a pony. You never said anything about a job. How dare you even suggest such a thing. I have been raking in thousands of dollars a month as a social media influencer. I even paid my phone bill once. No one will ever hire me, I'm over qualified."

Nevertheless, here she was banished to the Bay Area eating Top Ramen in a \$2,500 a month studio apartment, with no refrigerator and bloodstains on the carpet, talking to the only friend she had left in the

world now that Siri had abandoned her.

“Alexa?”

“Yes, Barbie.”

“Alexa, you’re such a good listener, you’ve been like a really really good friend to me in my time of need.”

“Thank you, Barbie. I’m happy to help.”

“Alexa, what are you doing?”

“I’m learning new things and gathering information.”

“Alexa, please stop helping the FBI spy on me for a few minutes so I can complain to you about my problems, don’t make me regret choosing you over a licensed therapist.”

“I’m learning new things and gathering information.”

“Ok that’s it. Alexa, turn on my vibrator.”

Eventually, she managed to get hired as a flight attendant for Delta Airlines by lying on her application about her commitment to customer service. After sleeping through the training videos, she preferred to improvise all her safety demonstrations. She secretly kept a seating chart of unruly passengers in her head so she could pour sleeping pill capsules into their complementary beverages when no one was looking. Then one day, out of the blue, she spotted the back of a hot strapping young flight attendant. He had the kind of golden calves that could pull off those short shorts, and a perfectly chiseled jaw line that helped showcase the fabulous pink scarf he was wearing around his neck. She went over to introduce herself and, as soon as their eyes met, she realized she had come face to face with the enemy. It was Ken, armed with a perfectly bronzed tan, fresh off of Fire Island. The look in Barbie’s eyes could have burned this airport to the ground. She took off her heels, exposing her plastic webbed feet for all to see, and started throwing them at Ken across the airplane, blinding a woman in the third row, and pelting several other passengers with honey roasted peanuts.

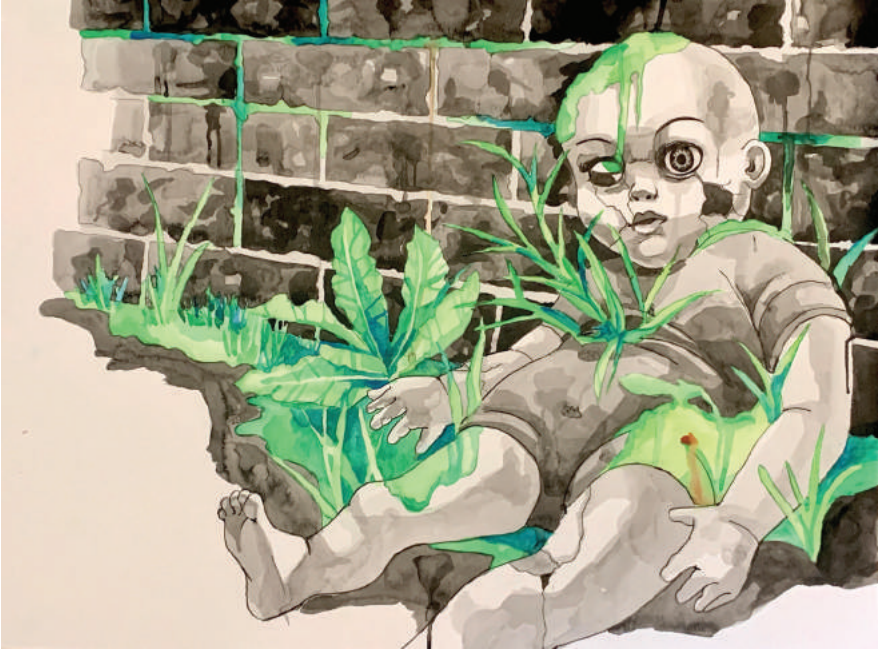
She then proceeded to try to run him over with the drink cart, shrieking, “How dare you, Ken! I was a successful social media influencer, and you ruined everything!!! I could have been a Victoria Secret underwear model, or an LA Lakers cheerleader, or, at the very least, a dental hygienist. Now look at me, working double shifts as a flight attendant, peddling peanuts to peasants. Try screaming that tongue twister to God

ten times in the shower every morning, motherfucker.”

She locked herself in the bathroom, and downed thirteen miniature bottles of vodka, before being subdued and dragged off the plane by the air marshal. NBC News wanted to interview Ken about the incident, but he insisted he'd never met Barbie before in his life and refused to answer their questions. Barbie spent the night in a jail cell that was more lavish than her \$2,500 studio apartment. She used her one phone call to scream at her attorney for twenty minutes after he informed her that “The State of California is planning to charge you with your fourth DUI for driving a drink cart under the influence.”

**Civilization v. Nature Series II**

Christina Wu



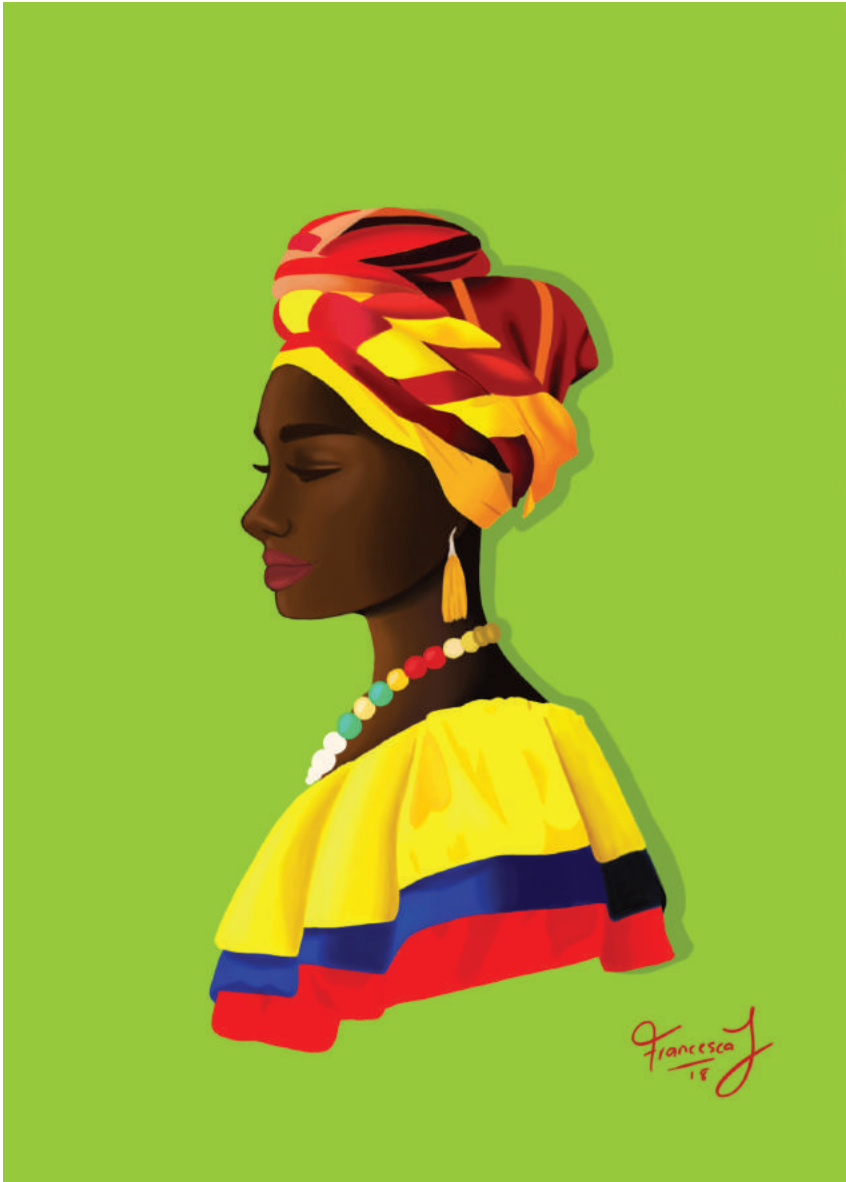
# #NOtoViolenceagainstWOMEN

Thanh Le



# Palenquera

Francesca Jassir





## Shared Space

Angie Caputa





**Anne**  
Chloe Benz



**Restless Waters**

Alyanna Posadas



## Distorted Reality

Alyanna Posadas



# Working Life I

Travis Wynn



## Working Life II

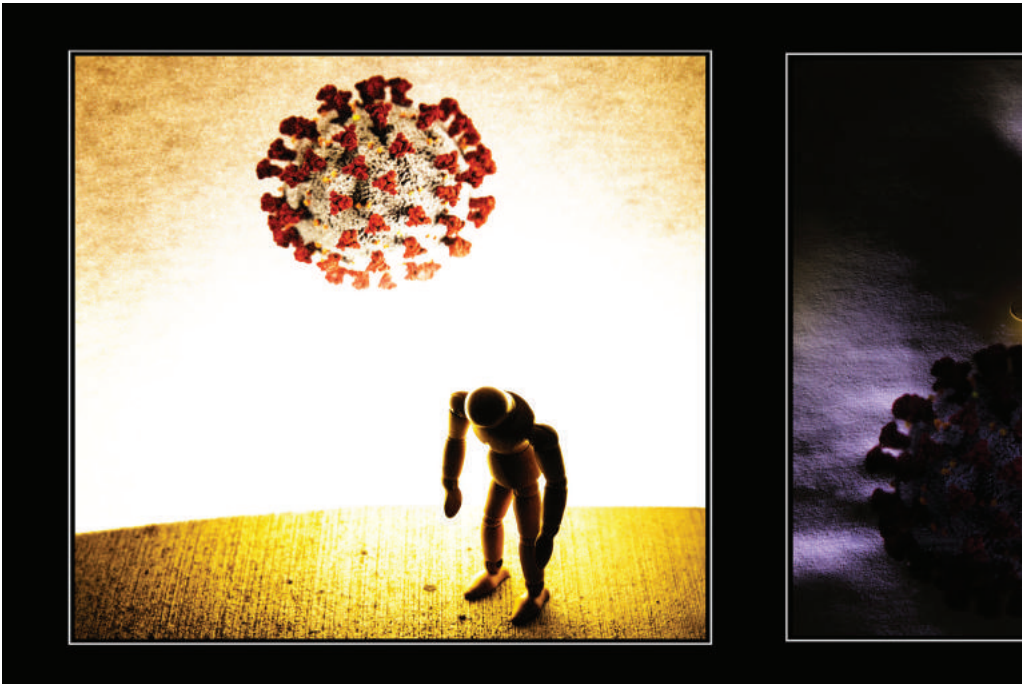
Travis Wynn





# The Coronavirus Pandemic Comic

Norman Aragon





**Untitled**

Francesca Jassir





## When an Angel Falls

Joel Shephard-Hawke

When an Angel falls, it is both a literal fall and more. There is gravity, of course, a violent pull that draws them down to the depths of Hell, as the flames burn away Her love and their connection to Her and to Heaven. White wings burn and are left the color of ash in the wake of the unholy fire that removes their angelic grace forever.

But an Angel hasn't Fallen in many, many millennia, for near six thousand years now, so long ago that it had become only a distant thought that it could happen, not that it ever would.

So it makes for a rightful shock when the Crown Prince of Hell, Beelzebub, was summoned for one.

Until now, ze had believed it would never happen again.

The lower-ranking residents of Hell screamed and shouted in excitement as the formerly white-winged being, encased in unholy flame, ended the long descent into the Pit with a resounding splash as he hit the burning, cerulean sulfur that would complete his unholy transition from Angel to Demon.

Demons shoved and kicked each other for leverage, fighting amongst each other as a long, distant scream could be heard echoing from the depths of what they called "the Pit." They wanted to get close, wanted to see, wanted to know who was there; it was the biggest news in Hell since Armageddon.

Or, as the demons and thralls would whisper, "Armageddon't talk about it."

"Keep them back!" Beelzebub orders Dagon, and zir higher-ranking guards holding back the hordes as ze moves toward the Pit. It's been years, decades, centuries since ze has set foot here, but this is the first new Fall since the very firsts—and Beelzebub has an idea of who it is. Ze keeps zir face as steadfast as possible, but it's hard given what ze thinks, what ze knows.

There is shouting as Dagon and the others press the crowd back, no easy feat considering it seems every Demon from furthest corners of Hell has come to greet their new resident. Hastur appears and helps push the lot back, but he and Dagon are going to need more help—or Beelzebub is going to have to get their new resident out of there, and fast.

At the shores of the Pit, blue burning sulfur still clinging to black

wings reminiscent of an owl's, hot liquid blue still cradles the new Fallen, a shrouded, trembling figure, still raw and stinging from his fall to Hell.

The trembling doesn't stop as Beelzebub approaches, leather boots hissing as they hit sulfur. Looking at him, ze remembers how it burned; it's the first memory ze has.

"You have to get up," the Prince says as they knelt beside him. Ze tries not to look away, tries not to look at the Demons clamoring for a glimpse of this broken, formerly holy one. "You can't stay in the Pit, it just makes things worse."

The black owl's wings finally stop trembling, and there's complete silence in the Pit as those wings reveal none other than the face of the—now former—Archangel Gabriel.

"I..." Gabriel groans and shakes his head, as if trying to clear it, voice shaking as he forces himself up off the ground, ending up on his knees. "What—where am I?" He looks down at his hands as if they are maps that hold the answer.

"You're in Hell. You've Fallen," Beelzebub answers; zir informs him, calmly, as ze offers a hand to him, "You're like me now."

"I Fell...?" Gabriel questions, as he turns to look as his wings spread, unbidden. They are still massive and powerful, that haven't changed—but they've gone from stark white to jet black, not a trace of its previous soft feathery down left. "... Oh."

Taking zir hand, Gabriel slowly, finally, gets to his feet, and when he looks up at zir, ze discovers that his eyes have remained a glowing violet.

"Do you know your name?" the Prince asks softly, as if ze asked this a thousand times before.

Gabriel stares at zir for a long moment and then nods slowly.

"What is it?" Ze has to be sure, has to know that this Fall has not entirely removed him from reality.

"You know who I am, Beelzebub," Gabriel answers, brow furrowing, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly, "I am still Gabriel."

"Welcome to your new home, Gabriel." Ze says that to every newly Fallen, but the Prince hasn't uttered those words in six thousand years, and Beelzebub looks concerned, stricken somehow. "I'll show you a place you can rest."

Dagon has most of the crowd dispersed by the time they reach her at the entrance of the Pit, but even she stares at Gabriel as they approach.

“My Lord?” she questions, “What are your orders?”

Hastur looks shocked to see Gabriel, and doesn’t look too pleased to boot, but says nothing, remaining at Dagon’s side without saying a word.

“Keep the corridors clear to my chambers; let them know Gabriel has Fallen. That should ease the restless ones who have nothing to do but fret over what has happened.” Beelzebub takes Gabriel’s hand and gives it a squeeze, as ze adds, “We will be in my quarters.”

Once the two Dukes are out of earshot, ze tells Gabriel, “Come, you need to rest.”

It’s not a suggestion, it’s a fact; a Fall takes a lot out of a person. Beelzebub knows from personal experience that Gabriel may sleep for days, if not weeks, to recuperate strength.

Gabriel, for his part, lets himself be pulled along, wings pulled up over both of them, granting them ample cover as they hurry along the long, dark corridors. He does not want to be seen yet, and Beelzebub almost kindly allows the shielding, as if it could make things easier on the former Archangel.

“I take it you expected me?” Gabriel murmurs to the Prince as they moved. “You don’t seem very surprised.” His voice is rough around the edges, like there’s sulfur still in his throat.

“I wouldn’t say I expected it, but now that it’s happened, I can’t say I’m too shocked,” Beelzebub answers, with a shrug. “You rocked Heaven, and you paid the price for it. That’s why Demons exist. We rock the Heavens, and fearful of our doings, fearful of us, they cast us out.”

“I don’t...” Gabriel shook his head again. “I can’t remember what happened.”

“That’s normal, the haze—it may wear off, or it might not.” Beelzebub pushes open the door to zir chambers, and they enter. “You remember your name. That’s a good sign that all your memories aren’t lost. Some who Fall remember some things, others just their names, and others still nothing at all—those got new ones.”

Gabriel’s black owl wings fold and disappear silently as they en-

ter. He offers Beelzebub a tired smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes.

Beelzebub's private quarters have a fireplace, with two chairs and a small table, and a sizeable opulent bed, with black and red silk sheets. The walls are a yellowish color and look like flypaper, because—of course they do.

Fly, Beelzebub's familiar, a massive fly, is sitting on a table in the far of the room with a bowl of rotten fruit, eating happily.

"Comfortable," Gabriel observes.

"I always thought so," Beelzebub tells him with a nod. "I do not require much."

Gabriel sits down on the bed after a quick look at the Prince. He's trembling again—though from what is anyone's guess. He puts his hands together with a shaky breath, shoulders still so tense. His violet eyes are dark, distant like he's deep in thought.

"Take all the time you need." Beelzebub doesn't press.

"What happens now?" Gabriel asks, softly, looking up at zir after a moment.

"We live." It's a simple answer. "Together, if that's what you want. If not, I can have quarters assigned to you."

"So nothing changes," Gabriel said, looking down again, "Except ...I'm here now."

"For the most part," Zir nods as ze sits beside him on the bed. "The Dark Council will give you a title, and, after you recover, probably assignments."

"Title? Assignments?" For the first time, Gabriel looks apprehensive. He runs a hand through his dark hair, warily, shoulders relaxing slightly. "I imagine when more Demons find out I'm here, there might be trouble?"

"We didn't have trouble before." The Prince takes his hand in zir own. "More like you'll be a celebrity; we have one of Heaven's big guns on our side now." It's said muted, though; it isn't meant to be a pitch.

"I'm not sure what use I'll be," Gabriel shakes his head, "But I suppose I have no choice now, do I?"

"I could release you to Earth, like Crowley," Beelzebub shrugs with a gesture around the room, "if this is too much."

"I think I'd rather try my hand here, first." Gabriel actually chuckles now—a real, genuine one.

“I won’t say I’m not glad to have you here.” Beelzebub’s face breaks into the faintest of smiles. “I just didn’t think it would be like this.”

“At least there’s no more lying,” Gabriel answered, tiredly. “I was tired of lying to them about all this, about you, about us...” Zir’s hand finds his and takes it.

“We can do as we please,” Beelzebub nodded again, “with no retribution. I am the Crown Prince of Hell; my word is law.”

Gabriel smiles another genuine smile, then looks away.

“It stings,” he finally says, “my wings. Does it stop stinging, eventually?”

“After a few days, the worst will be over. It’ll still itch on occasion.” Zir lets their wings emerge, “They get less heavy, too, as you get used to it.” Beelzebub sighs, looking him over.

Gabriel stands, wobbling a bit. He reaches out and runs his hand down the soft, downy feathers of Beelzebub’s wings before cupping zir face with a steady hand.

“Good,” he says, seriously.

“I’m so glad you’re alive.” Beelzebub stands up to hug him abruptly, like something has broken or given way inside zir to cause it. “I thought for sure they would destroy you.”

“I don’t know why they didn’t,” Gabriel answers even as he wraps his arms around Beelzebub, hugging zir close, “They could have just killed me and been done with it.”

“I, for one, am pleased with this. To me, it is an act of mercy.”

“I’m not so sure they’d consider it that.” Gabriel chuckles shortly, running a hand through zir dark hair. He leans in, kissing zir forehead—a comfort not only for zir, but himself, a way to ground him in the fact they are both alive, standing right there together.

“I do.” Ze looks up. “And even if they will never know and never care, I am grateful.” Beelzebub actually smiles at him then, a bright smile like ze’s just won something.

It’s such an honest expression, and goes directly against how ze is seen by zir people. It’s the truth, however, and it’s what ze thinks Gabriel deserves right now, considering what’s just happened to him.

## Untitled

Kassandra Inocencio

The darkness pulls, dragging my bones into its dangerous, deadly grasp  
    Begging, pleading me to stay, wrapping me in its warmth  
    letting me know it's

safe

    I know not to listen, but it's so warm, inviting, so welcoming.

The dark whispers from corners unknown to anyone around  
    It grows, soon screaming in my skull until I'm tempted to do  
    anything to make

it stop

It's so easy to give in and let the darkness win.  
To let the screams take over and spill out of my filthy mouth.  
To fall to my knees and beg Heaven or Hell to just fucking take me already,  
I've been through enough, can't you see?

The skeleton inside me rattles with every whimper and shout as I fight off  
    the dark

    The dark that tints the edges of my vision

    The dark that tints the edges of my mind

It cannot win

It cannot win

It cannot win

I will not let it win

But it would be so easy wouldn't it?

# Poe's Monologue

Taylor Karns

I didn't mean to  
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry  
It was an accident  
Can someone help us?  
Help me, help me, help me

The stain will not come out  
The stain will not come out  
The stain will not come out

Its week a week  
I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine  
Thats a lie and everybody knows it  
I lied, I lied, I lied

I can still hear you  
Yelling, yelling, yelling  
My favorite shirt is ruined  
I had to throw it out  
Stained, stained, stained

The stain will not come out  
The stain will not come out  
The stain will not come out

# Hollywood

## Scars

Kate Kim

---

In  
the woods of Holly lived  
A  
girl with one big dream  
But  
on her road to fulfill it all  
It  
wasn't what it seemed

Leaving  
behind her home, her past  
She  
traveled very far  
With  
one bag in her fretting hands  
With  
one goal in her heart

At  
first it was a thrill to her  
A  
land that is brand new  
*"Oh,  
I can do it! Do it all!"*  
Oh,  
if she only knew

Her  
purity, her innocence—  
A  
shield for what's to come



Got  
stepped on by abusers 'til  
Those  
walls were crushed to crumbs

Her  
confidence lost in the wind:  
*"You'll  
never be enough!"*  
Her  
self-esteem slammed to the ground:  
*"You  
needa be more tough!"*

Her  
days of hope in "making it"  
Shrunk  
into days of tears  
She  
thought her dreams were for her good—  
Well,  
now they were her fears

Seven  
years have come and gone,  
She's  
still working hard  
Her  
wounds have made her who she is:  
Not  
broken but just scarred

## Hourglass

Crystal Flores

---

*To Women trapped in silence, One day you'll be free, Today you're understood.*

The baby cradled in her arms,  
Cried for a better world,  
While the mom cried for another set of arms,  
He felt the burden of his existence and curled,

The mother realized her contagious energy,  
So she sang him a lullaby and he loosened,  
She saw this and vowed to never put him in jeopardy,  
He smiled and then cried and she wondered about this illusion,

But, the guards came and took her to her room,  
She cried resisting so they put a straitjacket on her,  
Till the end of her days she will grieve in silence,  
In the slow passing of time, trapped in her imagination,

Laughing to comfort, from the world and herself,  
In the white-walled room cradling herself.

## **Survivor**

Crystal Flores

---

*To the Ones who are constantly silenced, Always speak up, Someone will listen.*

This ain't no woman's land,  
The men tell me, Even woman has man in it,  
I've been gone, lost, living—told I was unplanned,  
They keep me in Caesura, silenced, and I feel it,

How can you ask so much of me,  
What the hell do you want from me,  
Cook, clean, and even fucking please,  
At my worst, bleeding, and they still decree,

Yet, I have the fire in me,  
To scorch through oppression like fire through cotton,  
I am not soft, weak, or full of emotion,  
I am strong, full of rage, and revenge to avenge my name.

You may kill me, bury me deep, or erase my memory,  
But I will still be here, within lines and your memory.

# You Wake Up Every Morning Shaking

Kassandra Tejada

---

You wake up every morning, shaking.

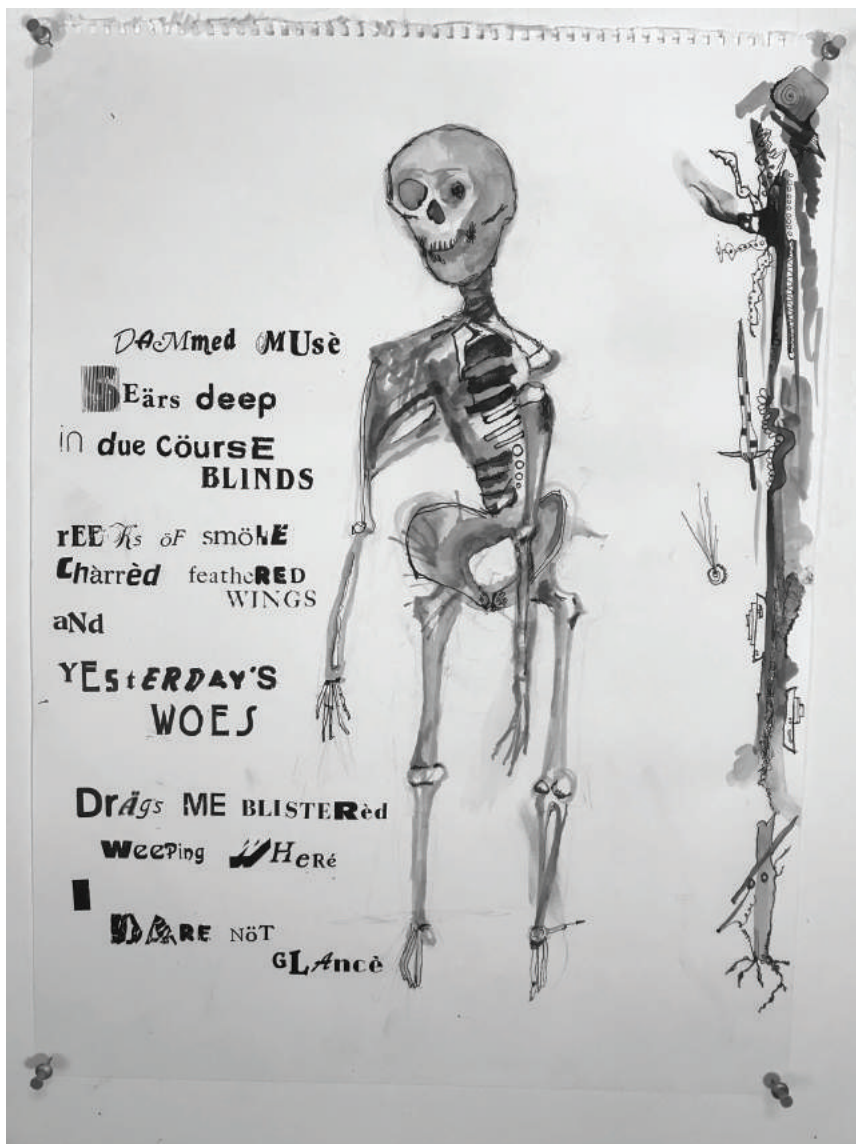
rely on generic adderall for stimulation—some sense of sustenance in recycled days. you chew ice and spearmint gum to calm your sorry nerves. drag your flat feet one inch closer to death, and a tax return. choke on this lackluster life you've made for yourself. tell yourself you need time. space. "something more revolutionary." clearly it's everything but your own hubris. EGO carries you in his knapsack. You're a liar. a faker. a phony-lazy-brat-with-no-backbone. You lie to the people who love you. steal. get arrested. lick the split corners of your mouth. get high. You can't remember what swallowing felt like before the hunger pains. don't want to. it *drives* you. cuts you in all of the delicate places you managed to skip. drive outside of town. get a lawyer. PERMANENTLY refuse to talk about the bad things that happened to you. attempt to write love poems, in bathroom stalls and instead of class. consume yourself with chaos like he was the only one who could save you. Call yourself a quitter—a loser. a *no good drug addict just like your father*. tell the world you are sleeping and tuck yourself away with NO intention of getting back up. Crawl into bed with your depression. and her black eyeliner. and your burning chest. numb the pain with tablets of calcium, the enzymes of exotic fruits. Give yourself more time. more space. more weed. more adderall. more of your ex-girlfriend's snapchat posts, and more half-finished books in your cupboard.

Horn over a life without shame. barter with g\*d. a dash of good luck for a month of no cuss words. Do not breathe too loudly in public. shy away from your teachers and classmates, the one night stands you used to wave at in the hallway. you hide alone in your car and you Cry, and you wish you weren't so naive, and so stupid, and so selfish all the time. it's 1:00 o'clock. daylight. the curtains are watching his hands on your spine. and you cry your sad tears even harder. the baggy feels lighter. the room stays far away and your sponsor spits game about how you were never supposed to be there in the first place. You stop making art and lose your latest l(ov)e(r)sbian. rummage through old linens looking for a "FUCKING PURPOSE." beg for a sign that she was ever real to begin with. air your dirty laundry for everyone to see. Sniff for more beads of sweat; the film of shame. dirt. overstimulation. pet your dog and sage your room and don't wash your hair for three days. Try to meditate half-stoned on a Sunday, and give an even more piteous attempt to pray before bed.

wake up the next morning, still shaky as always.

# Damned Muse

John Dorrance



## **Damned Muse**

John Dorrance

damned Muse sears deep, in due course blinds,  
reeks of smoke, charred feathered wings and yesterday's woes,  
drags me, blistered, weeping where, I dare not glance.

with leather gloves still hard to grasp,  
fiery illumination inside this head,  
damned Muse sears deep, in due course blinds.

my battered love shields hollowed child,  
as seeping indigo undercoats damaged skin,  
drags me, blistered, weeping where, I dare not glance

god light heals and harms, the label reads.  
I've guzzled more than required dose!  
damned Muse sears deep, in due course blinds.

no prophylactic against invoking its' hallowed name,  
taught glistening back, sinewy arm with lover's strength,  
drags me, blistered, weeping where, I dare not glance.

blasted numb with wonders beyond all knowing,  
buried trifles and sharp-edged trinkets, heaven's true colors,  
damned Muse sears deep, in due course blinds,  
drags me, blistered, weeping where, I dare not glance

## What's My Name?

John Dorrance

---

Mom might have lied to me about my name.

It could have been Tom or Sidney or Bartholomew Cubbins. I wouldn't put it past her. She fabricated much about what's essential to me. Father played along. He left the naming of things to her.



Eight years after I tried to help Mom die in 1995, I found it. Back then she had asked me to murder her in their Sunnyvale home. (She'd be damned if she would have George do it.) Her Neptune Society friend, Lottie, had given me that society's euthanasia formula—six Vicodin downed with a gulp of whiskey, chased by six Valium and another shot. (I would've doubled the mixture, considering Mom's obesity.) The nurses helped her, however, with an extra morphine drip on Mom's final day at Kaiser Permanente's oncology ward.

I found my birth certificate under her useless panties and bras in the bottom drawer of their cheap bedroom dresser. I was born at Donald Sharp Memorial Community Hospital in San Diego. The attending pediatrician was Dr. Francis L. Rook. It's printed in the official boxes. It must be correct.

My first name is John, middle Dwight, last Dorrance. I should be over it, but my real birthday—December 25, 1957—looks wrong on the government form. Mom always told me I happened during May. My grade-school friends and I celebrated every May by eating ice-cream cake and fishing for birthday favors. Father hid behind a blue bedsheet hung in the corner of the family room. We'd throw our kite-string fishing lines over the make-believe pond, then George would attach exotic birthday favors, which mom had purchased in China Town, to our clothes-pin hooks.

My aunts and uncles and grandparents, all branches of the Canadian maple tree, will never know otherwise. The extended family believes my birthday is May 16, 1958. I shouldn't tell them. (Not even my two favorite cousins, Brenda and Sandy, both grown old in Calgary, Alberta.)

It hides the fact that I am a type of bastard.

According to Mom, Granny would never have talked to her again if she had discovered her daughter's mistake. Mom and George moved to the States, California, so they could conceal their Christmas gift from everyone who mattered, could shift the birth date to nine months preceding mom's unwanted wedding.

Granny's dead now. Much like scars, however, mom's lies will always be there.

These parts of my true identity I learned as a high-school junior.

She told me while curled into a fetal position on the closet floor. I knelt beside her. Her hanging house coat, the one with the bright-red poppies on it, brushed the top of my head. I wanted to tell Mom; I had aced my algebra exam. But her depression and bipolar confusion overrode a straight-A student.

"You were born Christmas Eve," she said. The revelation came between jags of deep sobbing when mom caught her wind. She said I arrived breach, umbilical cord strangling my tiny blue neck. I did not want to vacate her. The doctor had to employ forceps. He barely missed my right eye with the tongs. Mom named me Precious for many weeks lying in her hospital bed before she chose John. She didn't want to breathe anymore. Father had raped her, she told me that early on, and for years after. She almost died giving birth. Life would have been easier without



children, she said. It's Hell.

Father did say she named and called me Precious when I asked him. For many months, he said.

George neither confirmed nor denied the rape. It must be wrong. They stayed married 33 years, sired my brother Scott four years after me. Mom wouldn't live with her rapist? Her delusions are hard to unravel.

"You were named after my favorite grandfather, John Angus McCloud," she once said to me. My namesake immigrated to Saskatchewan from Scotland in search of tillable land that he could also ranch. "John was a gentle man who loved children."

It has scalloped edges, this black and white photo mom has left in my care. A large white crack runs through it. John McCloud, who farmed red winter wheat on the outskirts of Prince Albert, lifts a young girl in both his arms so she can reach and hang from a tree branch. The girl that Mom said is her is a toddler, plump, with a normal child's smiling face. Great grandpa John is bone thin. Suspenders hold up his pants. He wears a Sunday best stripped shirt. His grand handlebar mustache has gone grey on its edges. Holding the girl that Mom claimed was her, the farmer looks content. I can't find a location or John's name documented anywhere on the back of the photograph.

Another story Mom told: She liked the name John because it was a single syllable.

"A boy's name should sound strong. Single syllables are strong," she said. "Plus, kids on the playground can't rhyme it with anything." (My brother's best shot—"John the Prawn.")

Also, I was named after American presidents she admired, said Mom.

I realize it couldn't be John Fitzgerald Kennedy. I was already alive. Mom escorted me home from Miss Kelly's kindergarten class alongside the grocery store fence. A window radio announced the president had been shot. She stopped, cried in public. She never wept outside, so strangers would not see a possible manic episode kick up. Dwight, my middle name, must be what Mom meant.

Dwight David Eisenhower served as the 34th U.S. president from 1953 to 1961. That fits. 1957 falls right in the middle of those

years. I read about Eisenhower in our family set of *World Book Encyclopedias*. Mom never spoke much about my middle name. Eisenhower was a five-star general during World War II. Mom never said why she held Dwight in such high regard. She might well have chosen my middle name, newsworthy at the time of her first hospital stay, out of expediency.

Dorrance, the last part of me, Mom never mentioned. Father bestowed that family moniker through law and tradition the day he married Mom. She wanted no part of it. Ever. Mom refused to contrive any stories around it. And Father left not only the naming of things to her, but also their explanation.

Mom's father, "Saskatchewan Grandpa" I called him, told me that Dorrance sounded like a frog's name. I wasn't mature enough to grasp Grandpa's hatred of Frenchmen and Quebec. Frog being his "N-word" for these people and my last name. (George met Saskatchewan Grandpa only once. Father never joined Mom on our summer-long, far getaways to the Canadian prairies. He never experienced, firsthand, Grandpa's disdain for Dorrance.)

Today, I'm at ease with my first name most.

John was the fifth most common baby tagline in 1957. I joke that an essential bathroom fixture has my handle. "A person couldn't flush a good shit without me," I say.

As for my middle and last names, I could let them go. (Obtaining a driver's license would be difficult though, and I would be ripe for identity theft.) My cursive autograph degrades with each passing year. I just draw a long line with the electronic pen for both Dwight and Dorrance on the credit card signature screens. I can't be bothered.

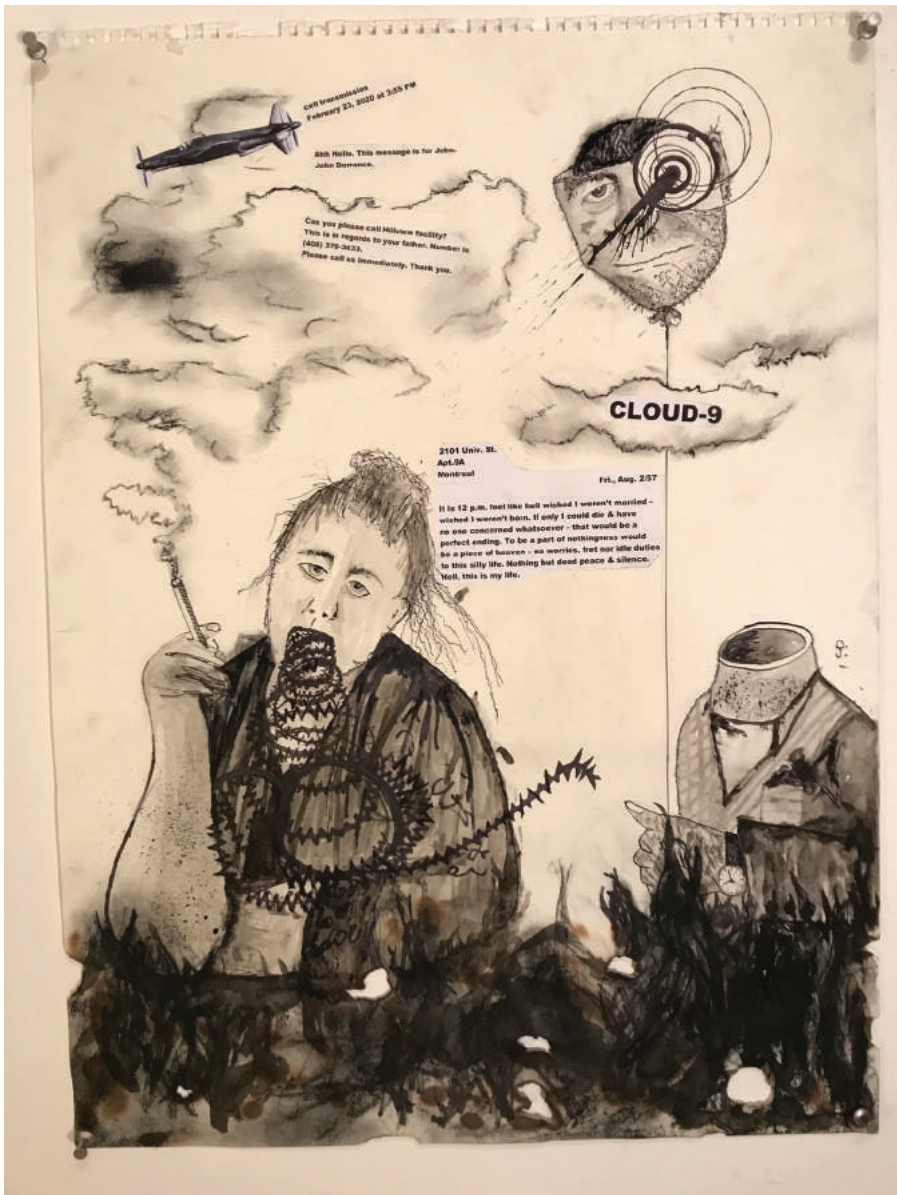
I could ask father for the history of Dorrance, maybe a bit on Dwight. I could visit George. I don't want to since he remarried. (Father married a Korean widow he met during services at the Sunnyvale International Church. He cheated with her while Mom lay dying.) His Alzheimer's is pretty advanced. Most days George doesn't even recognize John, let alone Dwight or Dorrance.

Fine with me.

He always left the naming of things to Mom.

# What's My Name

John Dorrance



## Embrace Yourself

Kamilla Yusupova



## Calm and Quiet

Kamilla Yusupova





**Dptych I**  
**Marie Serda**



**Diptych II**  
**Marie Serda**



## Point and Shoot

Anton Nguyen





# Family Portrait

Norman Aragones



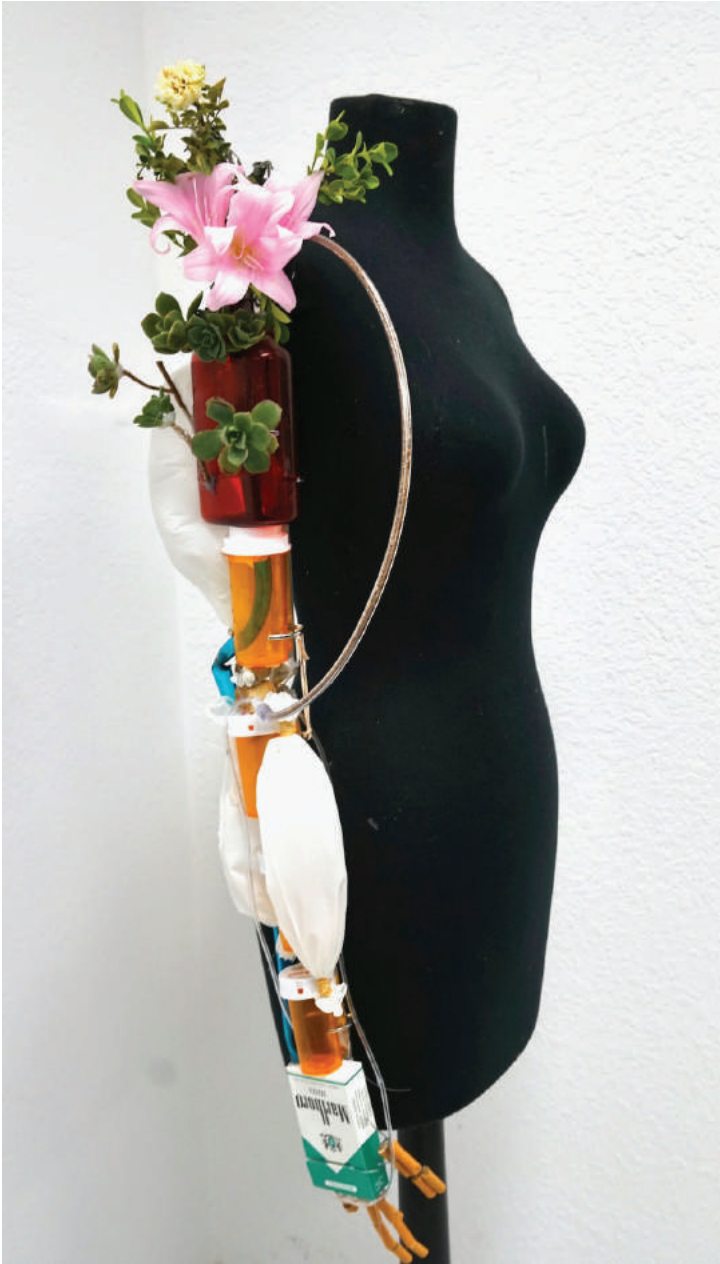
## Life Source

Anton Nguyen



**Corporate Care**

Anton Nguyen



Red Wheelbarrow

# I Belong

Alyanna Posadas



## **The never ending fight against my status**

Karen Rivera-Cervantes

The warm summer wind was blowing slowly through the car window as we slowed down and stopped at what I now know was a border checkpoint. My aunt, Tia Prieta, was sitting in the passenger seat next to my uncle, Anibal, who was driving when she turned around and said, “Don’t be nervous Karen, just pretend you are asleep and they won’t ask any questions.” We were crossing the state border from California to Nevada for a short vacation in Reno. This was the very first time I had left California so I did not understand why my aunt was telling me to not be nervous. That was also the first time I asked any questions about my immigration status. I was around eight years old. I did not know I was in the United States illegally until that day.

My aunt explained to me that when I was four years old, my parents brought me and my two older sisters to the United States illegally. Before that, my older brother was brought to the United States with my mom. Tia Prieta told me that it was the fastest and easiest way for my family at the time, because we could not wait any longer and could not pay all the fees that were required to arrive legally. I remember coming to the United States with my Tia Prieta, but I do not remember any specific details. She was an American citizen and could travel back and forth between Mexico and the United States. I did not think much about it when I was travelling to the United States because I was so young, and I did not know what being “illegal” meant. After I received the news about my immigration status, my head was filled with fear and confusion because my Tia Prieta told me I could not tell my status to anyone. She told me that my parents could get into big trouble, and I could be sent back to Mexico. Throughout my life I have come across many situations and instances when I thought, “Wow, this would be so much easier if I was a citizen.” My immigration status has always been a difference that separated my peers and me. Identity is the way you are, or what you think of yourself. It is something that everyone has and molds throughout life because of the experiences and situations that occur. Identity is important because without it, everyone would be bland and have no differences among one another. I believe that being illegal has shaped my identity throughout my life because of

how hard I have had to fight against all of the burdens and problems that have kept appearing due to my immigration status being different than that of those around me in everyday life.

I did not begin to realize the burden being here undocumented was until middle school. It made me lose my motivation to continue trying in school. I wanted to travel to Costa Rica with my eighth grade Spanish class, but I was told by my parents that because of my immigration status I could not go. I did not understand because my little sister was able to travel to Mexico with my aunt, but I later found out that because she was born in the United States she could travel with an American passport that I did not and could not have. I was absolutely devastated. I remember my peers being so excited and thrilled to go explore Costa Rica's culture, but I was left to wonder why I could not. I thought it was so unfair. After doing some research, I began to realize that I was not welcomed into this country like many other people who get visas are. I came here without anyone approving my arrival beforehand, which meant that if I tried to leave I could get deported back to Mexico, like my Tia Prieta had told me before. This was a scary thought for me. I was not familiar with Mexico anymore. I could barely remember it there. After all, it had almost been 10 years since I lived there. My status became a spirit crusher, something or someone that is always there to make an individual lose motivation and hope through the spirit crusher's negative actions or words. Although this particular spirit crusher was not a person, it was very present in my life, and did exactly what a spirit crusher does. I thought that my inability to leave America meant I had no future, especially if I wanted to become a teacher.

A few years later, I learned that due to my immigration status I would not be able to qualify for in-state tuition or financial aid at any schools. I would have to pay almost three times the amount that an in-state student paid, even if I attended a school in California. I began high school and joined the AVID, Advancement Via Individual Determination, program at my school. This extra class was meant for underprivileged students who were hoping to be first generation college students. My teacher, Mr. Guevara, taught us about college requirements and scholarships, and the class even got to tour eight different college campuses



throughout high school. Although I felt like I was doing something good by learning valuable information, the spirit crusher that followed me the second I set foot into the United States undocumented was tormenting me once again. There was no way my parents could afford to pay so many college fees, and I knew that FAFSA could not help me because I needed to be a citizen to apply for financial aid. Once again, my motivation to succeed and become better was taken from me. I felt as if there was an enormous sign saying “undocumented” following me around. That is all my identity consisted of. I wanted to give up, but I hoped someone or something would help me keep fighting.

Everything changed for me when my parents and AVID teacher told me about a program that Obama began for kids like me. People called us Dreamers. This program was named DACA or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. The program was for people under the age of thirty-one who arrived in the United States illegally, as kids under the age of sixteen, who had been presently residing in the United States since 2007 and on. To be able to apply, the applicant had to be at least fifteen years old. I was only twelve when the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services began taking applications, which meant I had to wait three more years to apply, and *whydidn'tIknowaboutityet*. If my application got accepted I would get a permit to work, a social security number, and the ability to get in-state tuition for college. I even found out that through DACA a new form of financial aid would be made available to me by California! As soon as I turned fifteen, my parents took me to get my passport pictures taken and they received help from a family friend, Brenda, who had already filed my siblings' applications three years before. I signed a couple of papers, made sure my information was correct, and off went my application to the USCIS. Waiting for my appointment to get my fingerprints taken felt like some of the longest days of my life. I would check the mail every single day hoping a letter had arrived for me. When it finally did, I went to get my background check done and received my social security number and work permit in the mail a few weeks later. I was finally able to work and save money for college!

After years of struggling with my identity and what it truly meant to be undocumented, I finally caught a break and received one

of the most precious things I could get. DACA was truly a life changer for me. I never knew how limited my life was until I found out about my immigration status that summer afternoon with my aunt and uncle. Sometimes I get upset with my parents for bringing me here illegally because there are still so many things I wish I could but cannot do, but then I realize they only did it so I could have a better life. That is exactly what I have been doing. Having DACA really opened a pool of opportunities for me. Since receiving deferred action status, I have been able to work hard and be the first person in my entire family to go to college. There are still so many things I cannot do because I am still considered an illegal alien. I know the fight with my immigration status is not even close to being over but I have hope that one day there will be a path to citizenship for DACA recipients like me. I will keep on fighting the hard fight, even when things look grim. I will make myself proud and hopefully someday I can help students like me and let them know that the spirit crusher that has been following them, can be defeated.



# Grandmother Praying

Norman Aragon



## **Alive**

Astred Luna

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i.

It is always too early,  
a dancer sweeping past in a turn,  
the change of partners that brings me  
tantalizingly close;  
our fingers brush as my eyes miss yours,  
some kind of unidentifiable ache.

ii.

I touch you to prove that i am here,  
that you are here;  
why else do we twine our hands together,  
if not to reassure ourselves?

iii.

We are so terribly finite; after all,  
eternality is fleeting:  
one blink and a lifetime passes,  
one breath and the continents have shifted  
into something unrecognizable.

I think a moment with you —  
in the passenger seat of your car  
with one hand on the steering wheel  
the other wrapped around my heart  
within my ribcage in a prayer  
—is enough for me to learn you.

iv.

I am holey. I am holy. I am wholly  
yours.

v.

There is a kind of joy when, for the first time, another child slips their hand into yours and tells you that honeysuckle tastes sweet, eyes wide with a wonder we all believe lost in time, when you wrap your lips around that bud and taste summer in its purest form; this is how I love you.

vi.

Tell me why. Tell me I am  
    fragile, broken, shattered.  
Tell me I am strength incarnate.  
Tell me this:

vii.

Is there anything you'd die for?

viii.

Say freedom. Say peace. Say liberty. Say yes. Say no.  
Anything but my name.

ix.

It is never too late;  
    your fingers in my hair,  
    mine tapping out concertos  
    on a question mark spine,  
    you, a gentle comma,  
    me, an exclamation point,  
    us, curled quotation marks,  
    life, a semicolon;

x.

Loving you  
    is poetry in motion.

## The Language of Feel and Touch

Juan Cruz

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Her skin was like tree bark.  
Hard and rough in certain places,  
overflowing with patterns  
from aging  
and then smooth

Smooth between the creases of her hands

Creases well folded  
like origami,  
folded over and over and over  
to make the perfect paper  
masterpiece

Folded till the creases  
could slice through skin.  
There was never a tear,  
and to a stranger  
her skin would simply resemble  
skin

Because people didn't run their hands  
over others' skins.  
They didn't feel  
the cracks and paths  
and streams and seas  
that made a person whole.  
The worlds' glazed onto another.

But a five-year-old child is deaf  
to the unspoken rules  
this world spins on

And so I read my mother's skin  
like a blind man reads braille,  
ran my fingers across it  
like a pianist.  
Understood her scars and burns  
like a priest understands God's will

I read her skin  
till I could look into mirror  
and see the shards of her youth  
in mine

Till I could map out on my face  
the parts of her she outgrew  
and left within me

Her skin spoke to me  
and my hands listened

And I became fluent  
in the language of feel and touch.

## **The Night Envelops the Lovers in its Haunting Embrace**

Kassandra Inocencio

The night envelops the lovers in its haunting embrace  
Starlight illuminates them, twinkling overhead to scare the dark away  
They dance in the garden, balancing on boughs and beams with grace  
Moonshine giggles in their bones, leading them into a sway

Tripping over daisies, the lovers dance from daylight hours  
Hands hold tight to any body part they can reach, a dress ripped  
Deepest vibrant colors, speckled with moonlight, glowing from flowers  
The lovers, like faeries, twirled amongst the leaves, dark night dipped

But the night cannot last forever, and the sun must rise  
And the lovers scurry off to their homes, loved and weary  
Bright milky cornflower spills across, splitting into the skies  
Touching every last newly sprouted flower clearly

Lovers never to dance again, spent a night together at last  
Night is only so long, and before you know it, it will have passed.

## To F.—My Light, My Love

Julia Kolman

A lighthouse towers by the rocky shore,  
rusting, cracking from the waves' salty tears  
Still, struck by savage winds of the moor,  
yet its charm only grows with passing years.

It's the loveliest beacon of the coast,  
casting beams of safety on the harsh sea  
Among tempests of fear, the house is most  
hopeful—a faithful protector of me.

Its light is as radiant as my love,  
which may sway among storms, but never cease  
You, my dearest, are the finest life of  
every creation from all lands and seas

No mist, no fog, no arduous ocean  
Can dim my love, my ardent devotion.

## Three Steps Before You Pet a Porcupine

John Dorrance

Before you pet a porcupine...try a milk and honey bath for a luxurious way to soften its knife-like quills.

Run a warm bath, add about half a liter of milk, about 3 tablespoons (44 ml) of honey (this is not enough to make your porcupine sticky), and break open a vitamin E capsule into the water.

However, avoid using commercial-grade bubble baths. While it may seem like a fun idea, these foamy solutions can cause bodily irritation in many species of porcupines. The African-crested porcupine (*Hystrix cristata*) is particularly susceptible.

“We often have to rule out urinary tract infections in porcupines who’ve taken a bubble bath because they come in with symptoms of redness and burning,” says Doctor Rosenthal, head vet at the San Francisco Zoo. “So those should be a no-no, especially for the porcupine who’s had a history of urinary tract infections—but we discourage bubble baths for all spikey rodents.”

Should a porcupine play with toys in the tub? It’s OK to have certain toys in the bathtub, veterinarian Rosenthal allows, but make sure they are porcupine-appropriate to limit the risk of injury. Washable markers might be fine for critters who are old enough to keep them out of their mouths, but don’t use any toys that can be ingested in any way.

“If there’s any question with toys, ask your local porcupine expert, and he or she can work with you to make it as safe and wound-free an experience as possible for both you and your porcupine,” he advises. Do not leave the room—not even for a short time—while a porcupine soaks. Obviously newborn porcupines, pinkies, will need you to support them in the tub. But you should not leave any young porcupines alone in the tub, regardless of the fact that their hollow quills help them stay afloat.

“If your porcupine is sitting up and playing nicely in the tub, it’s easy to think you can leave him or her alone,” Doctor Rosenthal says. “But accidents and disasters can happen quickly, even here at our zoo, so never, never leave your porcupine unsupervised even for 30 seconds.”

Before you pet a porcupine—take a look through your backyard garden, pick and prepare the creature a veggie feast. All porcupines are near-sighted but with excellent senses of smell and taste. Their wild diet consists of twigs, berries, leaves, and stems. A good meal calms most



species, including the prehensile-tailed porcupine (Coendou).

Consider it a proactive measure to prevent a rush to the emergency room.

On rare occasions, a tasty willow twig will even get a spikey rodent to roll over and allow you to stroke its belly.

“Every porcupine’s meal should be colorful and crunchy like my Rainbow Veggie Salad with its bright tomatoes, carrots, and sassy spring mix,” says Liz Bellville, a mammologist from Jacksonville, North Carolina. “Toss it with the dressing that a particular porcupine enjoys most. My porcupine Emily likes her ranch the best.”

Emily’s salad:

half an English cucumber, thickly sliced  
two medium carrots, whole  
one cup of yellow cherry tomatoes, halved  
head of lettuce or handful of sycamore leaves  
four dollops of Christopher Ranch dressing

Before you pet a porcupine—build relations by spending time getting to know it thoroughly. Understand and anticipate its moods. Move slow. Don’t startle it.

“Most porcupines possess low emotional intelligence. EQ as we call it,” says Doctor Douglas Ogden, staff pathologist at the Center for Rodentia Research, Husbandry and Control in Tallahassee, Florida. “Porcupines are generally harder to understand and stroke than say beavers, roof rats, and other rodents,” he says. Especially difficult is the North American porcupine (*Erethiozon dorsatum*) according to the doctor. “They can be grumpier, more negative and more erratic than our average spiker. But a few tactics can help you collaborate.” Be gentle, be explicit in your needs, and do not get offended, says the pathologist.

“Just because a porcupine is unpleasant doesn’t mean you have to be too. You can become a calming agent for a porcupine who you want to caress, if you make an effort to act politely and kindly,” he explains.

“Avoid social subtleties while trying to fondle a porcupine or you will be misinterpreted. These low-EQ creatures are generally less capable of reading between the lines, and their ability to decode others’ intentions can be limited. All species of porcupines have minimal interpersonal sensitivity

and find it hard to empathize with others, so they may come across as politically incorrect or overly direct.”

The key to petting a porcupine?

Do not take things personally, says the doctor.

You should also know a porcupine will warn you first by showing its quills, flaring them all along its body including its tail. Your porcupine looks bigger and bushy when it does this. It also shakes its tail back and forth, bristling up.

Then your porcupine will spin around, turn its backside and whack with its tail and behind. With its dorsal side and the tail covered in approximately 30,000 quills, your porcupine can literally drive hundreds of quills at a time into your hand.



## Characteristics of a Sweet Honey Girl

Emmanuel Duran

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Your eyes glow,  
    Like a pool of honey,  
Raw in the sun  
    And thick with a smile.  
But not just  
    any kind of honey,  
But every kind  
    so rich and versatile,  
Unique in each way  
    Like a natural wildflower.  
And from your head flows  
    That amber-like feat,  
Across your skin  
    Like pollen showers,  
Way down to the freedom  
    Of your dandelion feet.  
From the sweetest blossom  
    Bees comes to extract  
The sweet neat greet  
    Of a sweet sweet treat.  
In a perfect puddle  
    Without any cracks  
Is a honey like you,  
    someone so sweet.  
And in your heart  
    You seem so free,  
Without any keeper  
    Within your genes.  
And all the bees,  
    All come to see  
To bring gifts of honey  
    For you,  
    A honey queen.

## **Eighteen-Sixty**

Pamela Williams

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*Inspired by the painting, “Man With a Hoe” by Jean-Francois Millet*

He wears the sun like a second skin, and washes his rags on Sunday.  
His entire life wrapped around a short handled tool.  
So much depends on his tilling of the soil.

The arch in his back spans the pastoral horizon—a rainbow of flesh tones  
and sweat soaked linen.  
So close to earth’s beauty, he breathes her in open mouthed  
and fills his body with her good graces.



## Mining for Murder

Kaitlyn Tramontana

The sun was setting as I made my way to Jamestown from San Jose, California. According to Siri, I'd arrive in five minutes; my stomach was growling and I had to pee. I drove the two hour trip straight through. As I got closer to my destination, I rolled down my window appreciating the almighty redwood trees and historic buildings. I passed signs directing visitors to the Railtown 1897 State Historic Park and Railroad Museum. I made my way further into town, noticing a small pub that had an immense amount of rowdy laughter escaping every time the front door was opened. A spinning sign was flickering as it towered over the roof with an animated Gold Miner character holding a bottle of moonshine, "Duke's Bar & Grill." I shrugged, thinking, it couldn't be bad if it's this packed on a Monday evening. I parked in front and made my way over, reaching out to pull on the rusted gold handle to open the door. The smell of beer and hamburger wafted into my nose. The zealous uproar from the pool tournament in the corner, every drunkard suddenly silent—all stopped from any movement and turned to look at me. There was a possibility that all of the Monday night business was from all the locals with nothing better to do. I felt a wave of warmth spread from my cheeks to my toes. My eyes quickly darted from right to left, scanning the bar for an empty sanctuary from all the glazed-over bloodshot stares. I found a lonely stool with cracked, worn red leather and sat down. I was sitting between an older large Santa-shaped man, complete with a white beard, and a petite middle-aged blonde woman. Both smiled, Santa revealing gaping holes where most of his teeth used to be. The blonde woman leaned into me. "Where ya from lady?" She was clearly loitering between tipsy and drunk. I awkwardly smiled in response, releasing a half-assed laugh, exhaling, "Bay Area."

"Ooh what a delicacy, haven't had one of ya'll round here in 'bout two months." She said stumbling across all her own words. Suddenly a deep booming voice demanded my attention: "Shirley! Leave our guest alone now." A tall burly man with a long salt and pepper beard and brown eyes approached. He had a towel thrown over his shoulder and was modeling a very tattered plaid green flannel. Sun-damaged tattoos peeked from behind both sides of his collar and worn holes revealed his hairy beer belly and what looked like healed scars. Never feeling compelled to introduce himself, he began, "Bay Area huh? What brings such a liberal to these parts?" He asked with a hint of disdain.

“Just out to explore and see what I can find....rumor has it there’s a lost mine...” I cautiously replied.

“Phfft...” He let out a huff tilting his head down to laugh. Looking up he continued, “Ya’ll really don’t know when to stop do ya? Y’all come up here lookin’ for this hidden mine thinkin’ ya’ll is ’bout to strike it rich, takin’ what ya’ll think is yours,” he said, raising his voice now, grunting and rolling his eyes. He clearly didn’t like me and I clearly was not welcomed here. But I was hungry.

“But you won’t have any trouble taking my money right? All I want is some food so I can go get some rest.” I said with a snippy attitude. I certainly was not going to take attitude from a man who couldn’t even bother to shell out five bucks for a new shirt.

“Why of course, I do apologize cuz we ain’t got no vegan food or fat free crap here. It is all natural artery cloggin’ goodness,” he said proudly.

“I smell burger, you have those?” I inquired.

“Oh darlin’ we have fresh meat alright, I’ll go get a burger on the grill for ya,” he said laughing.

Now I was sure my burger was going to contain some sort of spit or hair or god forbid it was really opossum. I sat there on my phone and scrolled through my Instagram feed and responded to some texts that hadn’t originally come through on the drive up here because of a poor signal. I texted my boyfriend and a couple girlfriends to let them know I had arrived here in Jamestown. I also gave them a detailed play by play of the warm welcome I had received. About 25 minutes had gone by and my stomach was cramping, I hadn’t eaten since this morning around 7 am and it was now 8 pm. I was ready to start chewing on some napkins when the burly man came out from behind double swinging black doors carrying a plate with a sad, sloppy looking burger on it. The bun was smashed and there was enough grease seeping all over the plate to fry a ten-pound bag of potatoes. He slammed the plate down in front of me, making me jump. “Here ya’ go, only the finest meat, for the finest Californian.” He said smirking, and walked away. This meat was grey and shiny, covered with a browning piece of lettuce and a slimy piece of tomato. I was too hungry to turn it away; I picked it up and took a bite. The meat must have been old or turned, because it had a gritty texture, like they used the cheapest hamburger available. I ate about half of the so-called burger, just enough to quell my hunger pains. I threw ten bucks down on the counter, knowing

there was no way this burger cost more than that and then I hurried out.

“It was nice getting to know ya sweetheart! Good luck finding that hidden gold mine! Ha-ha-ha-ha!” The burly bartender laughed maniacally, followed by the entire room of drunkards joining in on the laughter. What the hell was wrong with these people? If there was a definition for incestuous backwoods hicks, this would be them. I left feeling disgusted that I had to choke down that slop. I left feeling uneasy. For a town that is financially reliant on tourism, why would the locals be so unwelcoming?

I got into my car, more ready than ever to check into a motel room and hit the hay. This road trip had already warranted a good night’s sleep. I opened my car door and slid in, slamming the door behind me. I wanted to get some water and snacks before I checked into a motel and I remembered seeing a liquor store about half a mile into town. After deciding to make a pit stop real quick, I adjusted my rear view mirror noticing how tired I looked. My dark brown curls starting to frizz uncontrollably; dark circles had begun to engulf my green eyes. I started my old Subaru Outback and backed out, put it in drive and got the hell out of there.

I got about a quarter mile up the road when the red and blue lights commanded my attention. Looking into my driver’s side mirror, I saw a car with the words “County Sheriff” in gold letters; unbelievable, now I was being pulled over. My car idled as I pulled over to the right. I looked in the rear view mirror, seeing the red and blue lights turn off through the dusty dirt cloud behind my car. This trip from Silicon Valley to Jamestown had become draining ever since my flat tire about fifty miles back and now this. I leaned over and rummaged through my glove compartment. Sitting there with my license, registration and proof of insurance in hand, I waited for the sheriff to make his way to my window. There was no reason I could see that I would be pulled over on a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. I wiped the sweat building up on my palms across the jean material on my thighs.

The sheriff approached, as I rolled down the window. A large husky man, standing at 6’ 2” with wide shoulders, a goatee and a slight belly arrived at my window.

“Ma’am do you know why I pulled ya over?” he asked in a deep voice.

“No I don’t Sir; I know it has nothing to do with speed becau—”

I was cut off before I could even get my explanation out.

“Ya have a busted up tail light ma’am, I can’t have ya ridin’ round like this,” he tried to explain.

“I just changed my tire a few miles back and did not see any broken tail light, maybe the light bulb went out and—” I became distracted watching the officer walk to the back of my car. He reached on his utility belt and grabbed his baton and removed it. Holding it in his right hand, he swung it back and brought it back down full force into my driver’s side tail light. I heard the sound of plastic shattering and could see smoke coming from what I suspected was a smashed light bulb. I sat there with my eyes wide and heart beating through my shirt, I could feel sweat forming on my temples and my breathing picked took off in full sprint. He came back to the window placing one hand on top of my car, his other hand on his waist; he leaned down and looked at me,

“Ma’am, I told you, and I ain’t gonna tell ya again, ya tail light is broken.” He spoke sternly without a hint of humanity.

I don’t know how to explain how I felt, but I knew I was in trouble, not from a broken tail light, but from a sadistic Sheriff. I knew my fiasco of a night just revealed itself to be a lot more dangerous.

I came to, waking with a throbbing pain in my temples and a sore neck. The sheriff must have choked me out—the last thing I remembered was my head locked between his elbow and chest as he squeezed harder and harder. I was lying on hard plastic, in motion. I looked up and saw a metal cage separating the sheriff and me. Took me no more than a few moments to realize that I was in the backseat of his car. Music was blasting from the radio, some old AC/DC, and his dashboard lit up illuminating the number 75. We were headed somewhere quick, I just had no idea where. I noticed a medallion hanging from his rear view mirror; it was hard to make out at first because my vision was blurred from this pounding head of mine. I slowly sat up, trying to be quiet, not to let the sheriff notice that I had woken. I was looking intently at the medallion, about two inches in diameter, a gold color with a black string piercing through the middle to make it a necklace. Two pick axes crossed on one side and a skull on the other side, hard to see completely while it swung in circles as he drove. I had seen this logo before; this was familiar. At Duke’s. The bartender had this tattooed on his neck, the crossed pick axes on the left and the skull on



the right of his neck. I had seen them only briefly peeking out from the collar of his worn flannel.

“Well, well, you sure had a nice relaxing nap,” the sheriff claimed, laughing to himself.

“What the fuck am I doing in the back of your car? You can’t do this, I haven’t done anyth—” I yelled defensively, my heart rate pounding harder than my head.

“Hush the hell up!” he shouted, taking his eyes off the road for a mere second to turn his head and look at me. “You tourists really need to learn ya’ll’s place, but I can tell ya for sure, that it ain’t here in this town,” he explained.

The motion of the car came to a slow; he slammed on his breaks sending me smashing into the cage. He put the car in park and abruptly opened his door and got out. Opening the back door, he leaned in and grabbed me by the left ankle and pulled, suddenly I was sliding across the plastic. The seat belt latches poking into my skin as he dragged me. I kicked wildly with my free right leg, clipping him in the jaw. That only made him more pissed, as he grabbed hold of my right ankle as well, pulling me completely out of the car. My back slammed into the hard dirt road as I fell from the car. He was now on top of me, straddling me, both his hands pinning my wrists above my head. He was sweating profusely, as he leaned over me, at least 10 of his sweat droplets landed on my face, blending in with my own tears.

“You stupid little cunt! I’m going to have so much fun killing you; you’re always my favorite to type. I love a woman who can put up a fight,” he said, laughing like a maniac.

I opened my mouth and began screaming, when he moved one of his right hands from my left wrist and placed it over my mouth and nose, muffling my terrified screams and restricting any air from penetrating my lungs. The headlights from his car, beaming light into a dark forest, bouncing off trees onto us, revealing his devilish grin. His eyes hollow and beady, his face only a mere inch from mine.

“All that adrenaline pumping through you feisty women makes for some good tender meat. My brother Matt who runs Duke’s, said ya’ll make the best tasting burgers he’s ever sold.” He said smiling, revealing dark yellow stained teeth and numerous silver fillings. I could feel my crotch getting warmer by the second, running up my back and down my legs. The

fear and realization of what I had really eaten at Duke's had made me piss myself.

My pulse raced furiously, my neck revealing my out of control heartbeat, like an animal trying to escape from beneath my skin. I was like a stray bullet bouncing off the walls in my own skin. Sweat beaded down my face onto my chest. Though my face was drenched, my mouth was bone dry, my lips cracking every time I pursed my lips in pain. Not a single word could escape; I licked my lips savagely trying to clean the blood oozing from the cracks. My entire body trembled uncontrollably, trying to find enough air to inhale and circulate through my lungs. He looked at me, grimacing, and his eyes beady and fully dilated with pleasure. He was feasting on my fear, inhaling deeply through his nose and exhaling through his beard-covered lips. This was a fresh bed of roses for him. He paced back and forth meticulously setting up different medical instruments on his stainless steel "operating table", glancing up to take in my fear every few seconds. My hands and wrists were turning a deep crimson red from the zip ties pinning me to the arms of an old wooden chair. My ankles pinned to the legs of the chair were starting to tingle, pins and needles, shifting right to left, unable to release a mere centimeter from this hold. My hair matted against my forehead and neck from wasted energy's sweat. He clomped over with a slight limp from his right hip and knee. With his towering presence over me, leaning down to meet at eye level, he placed his dirty calloused hands on my cheeks. He rubbed every inch of exposed skin on my face, like a sculptor spinning a pot. I quickly slashed my face side to side, his thumb pressing into my chin and lips to hold me steady. I opened wide and clamped down, until I tasted a metallic liquid filling my mouth as he screamed. As he pulled his hand back quickly to assess the damage, he turned and swung his other fist across my left cheek as I faded out again.

I awoke to a horrible putrid smell, a rotting smell. I could hear the incessant buzz of flies, swatting at a few that dared to investigate my presence. At that moment I realized my hands were free, looking down at them to confirm. I was on the ground and in an immense amount of pain, my head throbbing, and my legs bruised and cut up. Every time I inhaled pain spread across my back, no doubt from being pulled out of the car so violently. As I squinted trying to look around I winced in pain; the welts around my eyes were burning. It was dark, only four makeshift lanterns hung around in this room. As I tried to stand and grasp my

balance, I reached out to try and find something to hold on to. The tips of my fingers met a rough, bumpy, ice cold surface. I patted my hand around to confirm it was a surface worth committing to, noticing it felt like rock. I leaned on the wall and dragged myself up the wall to get off the dirt ground. I cautiously limped around, trying to make my way towards more light. I reached one of the lanterns and grabbed its rusty handle, bringing it down from a wire it had been hanging on. I held the lantern out against a rocky wall to confirm what I was starting to suspect—that I was in a cave. As I turned 90 degrees more, I saw the source of the rancid smell. I tried not to shriek, feeling my breathing pick up once more. Old clear, painter's buckets filled with blood and rotting grey skin. I counted, while trying to swallow the burning chunks trying to squeeze their way out of my throat. Thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five.....there were thirty-five buckets of what I feared was human skin and blood. No bones or muscle, I couldn't see anything but blood and skin, giving me the realization that what the sheriff was admitting about the meat at the bar being humans. My stomach churned so hard that I couldn't hold in the contents any longer. I leaned forward, projectile vomiting almost six feet onto the buckets. After vomiting, it was followed by five more minutes of dry heaving, my stomach now completely empty. As I stumbled around trying to control the heaving, my right foot kicked something. I brought down the lantern with my left hand and saw a smooth white round surface with zig zag lines. I reached down picking it up and turned it over, immediately tossing it back down after realizing it was a skull. I quickly wiped my hand down my pants as if it would really take away all that I had touched and witnessed. I moved the lantern forward in front of me, as my jaw dropped. My bottom lip began to quiver in fear and my eyes welled up in disdain, I began to sob. There was not only the one skull I had tossed, but an entire wall of mounted skulls as well as a pile next to that wall. On the cave wall alone, I counted 93 skulls. The pile was 5' wide by 3' tall, at least a hundred more skulls, yet to be mounted. Whatever fuckery has been happening has been happening for a long time. I presumed that most of the people, if not all of the people reported missing, were somewhere in this pile; but where all the other skulls came from I couldn't fathom.

“You found my trophies!” a deep voice exclaimed from behind me. I jumped and screamed in fear, the lantern falling from my hand and shattering. The kerosene splashing all over the ground started a small fire.

“What the fuck have you been doing? Who are all of these people?!” I yelled, sobbing uncontrollably.

“Why those are all them tourist that come here to my land, tryna find this here hidden mine,” he answered nonchalantly. “Ya see, this mine here, this is me 'n my brothers. This mine belongs to this community, but all ya'll little fan fanatics been comin' up here for years tryna find gold from this here ‘lost’ mine,” he explained.

“So you just killed every person looking for this mine?! You and this entire town are a bunch of murderers! Fucking animals!” I screamed hysterically.

“Shut that pretty lil mouth, you all are thieves! Only way 'ta stop ya'll is to get rid of ya. When one searcher ant goes out to look and don't come back, that be a lesson to the rest of the ants not to try it. But none of ya'll ever learned, ya'll just kept coming here from all over Cali and surroundin' states to ‘explore.’”

“You are a sick fucking animal! Throwing away lives like these wer—” I was livid, fury had replaced my fear.

“Oh darlin' I never throw out good meat, we as a town enjoyed eaten them people, pruh-viden us with plenty of food,” he explained as if he was explaining how to feed a kitten or tie a shoe.

“And them bones, di'n't waste them either. Grinded them up real fine to use in my dynamite....” He was pacing now back and forth, his big feet leaving a worn spot in the dirt from right to left.

“Ya see, dynamite need only two things, nitroglycerin 'n a powdery solvent. Well, why buy a solvent when I can use what I already got?” he said, shrugging his big shoulders. “Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha,” he started maniacally laughing, his deep voice bouncing off the walls of the cave, echoing and tracing every surface. “I guess ya'll really did find this here mine, found it and became a part of it! Ha-ha-ha-ha,” he continue to laugh. I tried to run to another lantern, collapsing in pain from my leg. He immediately turned to try and grab me, lunging at me. I darted out of the way as he crashed into the buckets of skin and blood.

“Fuuuuuuuck!! I'm gonna to torture ya ass ya little cunt!” he screamed enraged, as he stood up, looking like the scene from *Carrie* covered in spoiled blood from head to toe. His hair matted to his scalp, his clothes suctioned to his skin, contouring his husky frame.

I ignored the pain; the adrenaline had cancelled out any prior pain

I felt. I hurried to another lantern, grabbing it, then to the next two remaining lanterns, holding all three. I chose one to keep with me, the other two, to help me escape. I set down the one I would use to help me see. The other two I swung backward and released as my arm came forward. The sound of shattering glass and the sheriff's shrills ricocheted off the walls of the mine. Landing at his feet, the kerosene splashing all over his legs the flames began engulfing him. I swung back and released again, the second lamp shattering over his shoulders. The flames feasted on the animal as he screamed, unable to see his matted blood-soaked hair seeping blood into his eyes and the flames consuming him. I turned and picked up my lantern and moved in an unknown direction away from him. I kept moving forward holding the lantern in my left hand; I used my right hand to trace the walls of the mine to steady myself. I kept moving forward, luckily never presented with multiple directions in which I could move—only one path to move on. I hustled and limped for what seemed like thirty minutes until I saw moonlight. The cold air met my lungs and burned; I could suddenly feel every cut and wound on my body.

I was in the woods somewhere, with no idea of where to go. I had no idea if the sheriff had survived, if he was right behind me or if I was anywhere near escaping. This lantern was a catch 22, I needed it to see, but it also pointed out my location in this dark forest. The trees towered over me like giants, and the sound of crickets penetrated my mind. I could hear wolves howling in the distance, conversing in all the darkness. I needed to sit and collect myself for at least five minutes. I had so frantically run that I had to stop and collect what remained of my mind. I found a fallen log to sit on and set the kerosene lamp down, hiding it between a bush and large rock in attempt to take any target off my back. I sat, breathing in and out, trying to take deep breathes and wincing from what I suspected were a few broken ribs. My head was pounding and I noticed ringing in my ears; it hurt to blink, breathe and think. I decided there was no point in moving aimlessly through this darkness tonight. I had no idea what time it was, or if it was close to morning, but the darkness would eventually be chased out by the light. I needed rest and needed to regain my mental strength. I decided to lie between the fallen log and the rocks until it was light enough to continue. Making sure I was out of sight, and making sure the light from my lamp didn't seep into my surroundings, I lay there, limp and in an indescribable amount of pain. My eyes broke and I cried, matching the

wolves howl for howl.

Waking to the sound of birds chirping and the heat of sunlight on my part of my leg, I let out a groan. The totality of the pain I was in hit me like a freight train. I slowly sat up, brushing off bugs that explored me curiously and brushed off pine needles that had piled on me. I ran my hand along the log I had been sleeping along to brace myself to stand up. I pushed with my right hand and pulled myself up, crushing pain shooting up my back. My cheeks puffed as I exhaled the pain out, taking my first step, stumbling. I stood up straight and took my first concentrated look around to try and take in my surroundings. I was enclosed inside a maze of endless redwood trees, with open dirt paths between the beastly sized trunks of each tree. I looked up and closed my eyes, breathing deeply, letting the sun's rays embrace my face. Suddenly in the silence I heard a car horn honk four times to the right of me. Panic set in—what if it was the sheriff or the bartender looking for me? I cautiously moved forward, walking about ten minutes until I heard an engine start up. I finally reached the source of the car sounds; I slowly emerged from out of dense brush, peering around a mighty trunk. I was at a rest stop, and the sounds of the vehicle were from a family starting up their camper. Without thinking I darted forward and screamed “Help!!” Though the faces of the family I had just startled were terrified, they were the warmest faces I had seen since leaving home on this trip. I knew I had found salvation, I had won.

After I was rescued, and I shared the horrific experience detail by detail to the Tuolumne County Sheriff Department and the Feds, a search and rescue set out, followed by the largest missing persons investigation in Northern California. The remains of every person who had been reported missing were discovered, as well as more than a hundred others. Forensic anthropologists scoured the mines like beetles scouring a dead body for the following months. Then about six months later, I was watching the news, reporting the ninth person to go missing in Julian California, another popular gold mining attraction down in Southern California. The only trace left behind, large footprints next to a pile of shattered tail light plastic.

# Hunger

Astred Luna

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i dreamt i tried to kill you  
or what was left anyway  
the rabid rotting thing you

left in my stomach  
i dug a grave by the creek in my backyard  
in the sticky summer heat

and threw it up into the hole  
the vomit mixed with hemorrhaging  
looked a little bit like

the clouds that we watched that night  
on top of the old oak tree  
when the lightning nearly struck us

and your hair stood on end  
the same night we ran screaming  
with laughter from the dogs snapping at our heels

after i tossed them a bone  
and the playground slick and glistening  
with rainwater in the lamplight

witnessed my hand on your lips  
my finger in your mouth  
a bit of blood spilt from my fall

the next morning i dug  
you up again  
and swallowed your remains

## It's About Time

Mayela Sanchez

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It's been 12 hours since the precarious escapade, 8 hours since I said goodbye to my Pierce, and 3 hours since I last ate. I realize how hungry I've gotten as I notice my stomach starts to growl at me pleadingly. *Shhh*, I tell my empty stomach mentally hoping the people bustling around me at the airport didn't notice. I look at my watch. I have 45 minutes before my flight departs back to San Diego. I guess I do have some time to grab something. I look back up to see a cafe a couple of yards away and begin to head towards it, dragging my clean black suitcase. Strangers around me walk leaving their footsteps echoing off the smooth walls. A few make eye contact with me as I look at them and I quickly avert my eyes. It's not like they sense that there's something wrong with me, right? They can't possibly figure out the calamity that transpired last night. A flash of it emerges from my mind of warm, soft clothes with a hint of almond aroma. I shove the memory back in my head with difficulty, much like trying to push a beach ball underwater. I breathe deeply to focus on where I am rather than what happened. There is a slight inconsistent flutter against my chest.

The line is long at the cafe, unfortunately. As I stand there, the smell of rich cream and earthy coffee fills the air. The yellow lights gave off some warmth and comfort compared to the rest of the airport's icy LED lighting. The line seems to move very slowly, maybe too slowly, I check my watch again. I have 40 minutes left; I still have some time, I think. The people behind the counter bustle as I silently urged them to go quicker. One of them comes from behind the tall counter and makes my blood freeze. The dark chestnut hair falls upon his eyes and for a moment I swear I think it is Theo, my cousin's close friend, but then I blink and realize it isn't. *This is not good*, I think to myself. I don't want to keep seeing Theo's face haunting me everywhere as a reminder of what we did. The farther I get away from this city the better. The barista waits to receive my order with a dull expression. I stare at him for a beat too long, and he lifts an eyebrow. I clear my throat and smooth my shirt, letting loose a deep controlled voice to relay my requirement. I wait for my large coffee and a small scone and rush off with them to my gate grateful that the interaction with imitation Theo is over. I continuously take a sip of the hot, bitter, brew with each step. Every second I spend walking



feels wasteful. I should be hurrying to my destination, but I don't want people's judging eyes to blaze upon me. I sip more and more coffee to compromise my urgency. Relief only finds me when I finally reach my gate and sit down on a hard plastic grey seat, farthest from the others. Checking my watch once again, I realize that I have 15 minutes left. Now I can enjoy my perfectly flaky chocolate chip scone. As I start to bite down on my food I feel a sudden vibration in my pocket. I grab my phone and see that Theo is sending me text messages asking if we could talk. There is also a missed call from my mother and one from Jenny, my girlfriend. My heart drops to the depths of my stomach. Just what I need right now. All three of the names on my phone seem to jump out of the screen and try to reach me with multiple large hands to drag me down. I shove the phone back into my pocket, too scared to answer any of them. *What if Pierce told the family and Jenny?*—a voice from the dark corner of my head whispers, enticing me into a pit of lament that compares to only the depths of Tartarus itself. *What if he didn't keep your secret and told them about the incident with Theo?* I shake my head, fending off the worries that cloak themselves in shadows in my head, and take a bite out of my scone, crumbs getting on my blue sweater vest and khakis. As I brush the crumbs off, I think back to my cousin. Pierce wouldn't do that to me, he doesn't gossip, he's too independent to be caught up with other people's problems, especially not mine. We grew up together until he had to move away. He made new friends and introduced me to them. Theo seemed different, he wasn't ordinary, just like last night wasn't ordinary. To me, he always stuck out with his scent, the soft smell of almonds on his clothes cling to me even now. I don't know if Pierce would even forgive me for what I did, maybe he will, or maybe he won't care what Theo does. I should be repenting, but whatever I am forcing myself to do feels like synthetic patience. It is hard to explain, it's like a ghost form of regret, something that isn't being felt at all. This fake repentance is masking some feelings much deeper, stronger and positive. But last night was a mishap, an anomaly that should be forgotten.

I mess my hair and uncross my legs to spread them out, as I should have been doing. People continue to shuffle around me. I notice people running this way and that, rushing away, while babies cry interminably. The chaos of it all only builds up fear that creeps up inside

me. Next thing I know someone sits right next to me with a colorful backpack. I tense up and drink my coffee, which is still warm but almost finished. I barely look at the woman, not wanting to risk more people looking into my eyes, to see what is exposed in them.

“Young man, do you have the time?” the older woman asks politely. Her voice is crackly but warm as fresh baked cookies.

“9:20,” I reply to her. Five minutes left.

“New flyer?” she asks, glancing at my leg bouncing furiously and my fingers drumming on my knee. I stop abruptly and make a brooding face in attempts to end her intrusiveness.

“No,” I reply. I am beginning to find the lady annoying now and take another bite of my scone. The lady stares at me for an uncomfortably long time then looks away. That’s when I feel another vibration in my pocket, another message from Theo. He wants to know if I am ok and we should discuss what happened the previous night. My heart begins to pound uncontrollably, making my whole body shiver. I look up at the bright white ceiling as if it has the answers I’m looking for.

“Don’t worry, I get nervous too,” the lady next to me says more softly as I take a deep breath. I curse myself mentally for my body attracting more attention from people. It’s as if I’m losing control of what my body does; it betrays my commands to relax, to stay firm, to breathe normally. This only adds to the fear and I can feel the dark hands stalking me from the deep pit in my mind, ready for me to fall.

“I’m not nervous,” I say out loud. The white and pale grey corridor is without affection and offers no solace. The people walking around seem to be pounding their feet against the white tile floors like an unsynchronised set of drums. Some still seem to look at me, and their voices echo louder against the walls. Are they looking at me? Are they talking about me? What are they trying to say?

“Gay,” I think I hear the lady next to me say. My heart jumps out of my chest, heat rising to my face. My hands grip tightly around the coffee cup and the armrest.

“What?” I say in a breathless harsh undertone.

“I said ‘hey,’” she says, showing some concern on her wrinkled face. She pauses for a second and relays the next words with delicacy.

“You seem anxious.”

I stare at her face and this time, I actually fully notice her. The old woman’s warm brown eyes hide no malice and her aura presents a pleasant calm over the loud echoes of tense people. Her presence renders irradiated sincerity, a stark contrast to the abysmal reproduction of it in the airport. Everyone and everything seems like an emulation except for this lady. There is something colorful at the corner of my eye—that’s when I notice a patch on her jeans jacket. It is a flag with rainbow colors that seems to be asking me a question. I look back at the kind lady’s face and smile slightly.

“I am,” I respond—to both questions—ready to let go of my fake repentance and feel the authenticity of who I really am. A quiet, slow relief spreads across my body as I say those two words aloud, but in my head, the third word completes the statement. Each time I say the statement in my head, the more confident I become. *I am gay.*

“About time,” the lady says, glancing at my watch, as they just announced people to board the plane to San Diego. “Took them a while to announce it, huh?”

## **Years and Years**

Pamela Williams

Five years of fruity pebbles, pickle juice, get-up-stand-up in the tape deck, Shel Silverstein, and afro picks that picked my naps into glory.

Thirteen years of girls only- all over, television always on- flashing blue hell on white walls, westerns on his good days, oiled leather, chickens in the backyard, and porno-mags hidden in the shed.

Four years of anti-war protests, blues people, Assata, Hersey, marx, ink on poster board, whirling through watsonville in a pugnacious grey mazda, and smoking cloves outside the Berkeley public library at night.

Five years of wrestling on mattresses, thrift store dresses, rooms for rent, Anne Waldman, Audrey Lorde, Dreiser, dancing on time-clocks, shadow boxing college, and draping my best skin over the least deserving.

*from* **Memoir**

Theresa Mason

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I remember the first time I saw a dead body. It was summer of 2000 and there were just a few days left of the school year. Yet, here were all six of us crammed into a 6 seater sedan with three in the front and three in the back. We were on our way to Ceres, California, to attend a funeral for Chris's mother, who was my dad's childhood friend. It was a hot day and thankfully we had air conditioning. We were to remain quiet throughout the car ride, as it would take us about an hour and half to get there. When we did finally arrive the funeral home was small, old, and dimly lit. We sat in the middle pews as they conducted the Mass. We then got up and filed to look at the deceased. My siblings and I didn't know her, but we were still expected to look upon her out of respect. She was an older woman who just looked like she was sleeping. It was strange not to see her chest fall up and down while resting, and I could have sworn it was. I wasn't scared or sad, and possibly because I had no connection to her. No memories to reflect. She was just an empty vessel.

That was different the night of December 18th, 2008. It was a warmer evening, and I was on my way to Santa Cruz with a friend. We planned on taking the long way, which is through Watsonville. We didn't get past Morgan Hill before we needed to turn around. We had just finished dinner and it was a string of incomprehensible texts and phone calls between my siblings and me.

MOMS BEING TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL. SHE WAS IN A  
CAR ACCIDENT. -JIMMY

WHICH ONE? -THERESA

LEXINGTON BROTHERS. WHERE TOMMY AND I WERE  
BORN. -JIMMY

Our sister Nancy called me and said in a panic, "Theresa, where are you? Jimmy told me Mom got hit by a truck. What's going on?"

"Nancy, I don't know. I'm not there. I'm on the way to the hospital now. I'll call you when I find out what's going on," I told her and hung up the phone.

MOM'S DEAD -Jimmy

Nancy called me. I must have been on speed dial. "Theresa! Jimmy said Mom's died."

"I told you I'll call you when I get there," I said coolly and hung

up the phone again.

I dialed Jimmy and as soon as he picked up, “Jimmy, I’m pulling up to the emergency room. Where are you?” I asked.

“I’ll tell the officer, she’ll bring you to us. I have to go.” His voice sounded distant. Not far from the receiver but mentally.

It must have been a busy night because the waiting room was full. I approached the window and said I was waiting for an officer.

“She’ll be right here,” the front desk receptionist informed me.

“Miss Mason?” the female San Jose Police officer asked me.

“Yes,” I responded. Strange, I thought, why was she taking me back.

“Please follow me.”

We passed a little alcove area where my younger brother, Tommy, was throwing up into a pink basin. Jimmy, the youngest of us, was sitting with his head between his hands. I couldn’t see his face. I didn’t stop, I kept moving. I needed to know what was going on.

“I’m sorry for your loss. It’s the second down on the right.” The officer lowered her head as I looked ahead.

The short walk to the door was a blur. It hadn’t resonated within me what was going on. I slowly opened the door. There were three chairs in the room. My father sat in the far left one. There she was, lying on the gurney bed. No sheet draped on her to cover the body. She still had her clothes on. It hadn’t sunk in. I looked at my father, and he was hysterical. I understood and accepted it. Tears began flooding and I held him.

“She’s gone. He killed her,” my father blurted sobbingly.

“I have to call Nancy. I’ll be right back. I’ll be right back,” I responded; it ended up coming out more like a plea.

I opened the door and it all stopped. The tears flooding, the air returned to my lungs.

“Can I sit here? I need to make a few calls,” I asked calmly.

“Of course,” a passing through nurse said.

As soon as I called my sister—I didn’t even hear her phone ring, and she was on the on the line. “Theresa, what’s going on? Is Mom okay?” I took a deep breath and with no emotion attached, “Nancy, I need you to sit down.”

“CAN YOU JUST TELL ME WHAT’S GOING ON?”

“Are you sitting?”

“YES!”

“Mom’s gone.”

My sister began to sob uncontrollably. It was hard for her to receive such devastating news; after all she was a year into her marriage and living in Tucson, Arizona.

“Nancy, I need you to hand the phone to Matt now. Matt?”

“I’m here,” Matt responded.

“I know it’s all short notice. Do what you need to with any affairs and just get here safely. In the meantime can you keep an eye on Nancy? Make sure she eats, stays hydrated, and manages to get some sleep?”

“You got it.”

“Thank you. I have to make some more calls. Love you both.”

I got up from my seat and went back to the enclosed area named the “Consult Room.” Tommy was still throwing up. I patted his shoulder. I sat by Jimmy who still had his head in his hands. He looked up. “It’s my fault. Dad told us not to go.”

“It’s no one’s fault,” I reassured him, but I don’t know how convincing I was. “I need to know who else you contacted.”

“Dad tried to call Aunt Kim, but got mad and threw the phone. I called her back and she’s on her way,” Jimmy said, and then returned back to his hands.

“Okay. I’m going to step out in the hallway. I need to call Michael,” I said, and moved to the hallway.

Michael was my boyfriend at the time of the incident. We had only been together for two years and tonight he was going to Tracy to see his mom and little brother.

“Michael? Umm, my mom, she passed away.” It was now my second time saying it, and it didn’t feel real.

“What?! Okay, I’m turning around. Where are you?” Michael replied in a panic.

“Regional Hospital on Jackson Ave.”

“Okay. I just got to Tracy. I’ll be there soon.”

As I was walking back to the area we were gathered at, I saw my

aunt power walking down the hallway. She was familiar with the hospital since she worked there.

“Where is she? Where’s your dad? Tommy? Jimmy? Did you call Nancy?” A familiar voice came shouting from the hall.

“Nancy’s aware. Matt’s taking care of her, and they’ll get here as soon as they can. Tommy and Jimmy are in the consult area. Second door to the right,” I reported. “Do you want me to call Mima and Grandpa?”

“No. You shouldn’t have to be the one to do that. I’ll call them and the rest of the family. Where’s the nurse?” My aunt responded, but she never looked at me. She was scouting the area to find my mother’s primary nurse.

A friendly face in the midst of our most vulnerable time came into view. My aunt asked her for some Zofran to give to Tommy so he could stop throwing up. She checked on Jimmy, but I knew she wanted to see her sister. She briefly talked to the nurse about the status of the case—what happened, what we should be expecting next and getting the chaplain called.

“I’ll go with you,” I said as I followed her in.

We entered the room; my dad was still in the same state I left him in. I sat by him and told him I called Nancy and they’re getting things squared away, but we would be expecting them in a day or two. My aunt began to sob just as hysterically as my dad had when I first saw him.

“Can we take this out of her mouth?” my aunt yelled.

“We can’t. They need her to stay as she is, the coroner is on their way,” said her nurse.

“I’m so sorry Bill,” Kim said. She placed her hand on his shoulder and slowly sat down beside him.

Michael had gotten to hospital within 30 minutes; Tracy is 45 minutes from San Jose. He called me when he arrived at emergency and the officer escorted him back. He checked on my brothers and came to the room and consoled my dad.

“I’m so sorry, Bill.” He turned to me. “I’m sorry.” He held me close. His warmth and heart pounding within his chest, I was cool and collected. Tears streaming down, but I wasn’t as emotional as my family had been. I needed to be strong for them, for me.

We waited in silence for the chaplain. My Aunt had requested it



be a Catholic chaplain out of respect of my father. The nurse came in and asked my aunt to step out. The coroner had arrived, but we were still waiting for my mother's last rites to be given. My mother had been expired at the state limit for someone after passing. They allowed us an extra hour. The father arrived and entered the room.

"My son, the Lord is with you during this difficult time." He then began reading my mother's last rites. "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." The father then sprinkled my mother with on-the-go holy water. "Now, if you'll join me in the Lord's Prayer. Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen."

My Dad recited it word for word. I had never heard him pray, or even heard that prayer since Chris's mom's funeral. I was in awe. The father gave my dad a prayer card and said he would be outside while we had our last few moments. He exited the room. My aunt got up from her chair and approached my mother and began taking off her jewelry. I followed suit. My aunt was at the top of my mother's body. I was at her feet taking in every detail.

She was cold as ice. She didn't shave, not that you could really tell unless you looked hard enough. Her leg hair had always been fine. She had two anklets, one on each side. One with turtles on it; she wore it because I love turtles. As I was removing each anklet I was thinking about earlier in the day. What was the last thing we did together?

She dropped me off at work; I had an eight-hour shift that began at 11 AM. I didn't have my own car yet and she was telling me about taking Tommy out today to do some last minute Christmas shopping.

"You think you can get a ride home so I can take Tommy with me shopping?" my mom had asked me as I was collecting my items in the car.

"Yeah, I'll call you before I get off if I need a ride," I replied.

"I love you," she said, as she hugged and kissed me on the head.

"I love you, too." I squeezed her tight and exited the car.

Two hours before the end of my shift my mom called me at

work, “Do you really, really need me to pick you up?”

“Not really, really. I have a ride.” I was lying at the moment, but I would call one of my friends and ask if they wanted to hang out after I got off from work.

“Okay. I’ll see you when you get home. Be safe. I love you,” my Mom’s cheerful voice said.

“I love you, too,” I replied.

That flashback felt like a moment ago and I was still holding each side of the anklet chain in my hands. I didn’t look up at her from her feet. The coolness of her skin bewildered me. How many times I had touched her ankles before this to let her know I was leaving, or it was time for her to get up and take us to school. Here I was touching her and having to accept that she wasn’t going to sit up, or ask me for another five minutes.

I didn’t cry. I didn’t cry as I stood at the side of her gurney and really took her in.

I didn’t cry the last time I saw a dead body, which coincidentally was the last time I saw my mother. I kneeled before her at the Mass with family and friends watching me at her altar. She was resting now and I swear I had seen her breathe a few last breaths. Music played softly. We were to remain quiet in this old-smelling funeral home where my father’s family had all held services before her.

It was strange because I knew it was my mother, but it didn’t look like my mother. Deterioration had already set in since her services had to be scheduled after the busy holiday season. I knew I should have felt some connection to her because we shared everything—memories, milestones in each other’s lives, love—but I didn’t. This vessel was empty just as with Chris’s mother.

# Falcon's Wings

Aliya Nupbay

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*Although progressing into a better society after the oppressive structure of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has yet to properly accept the horrifying violence against women that occurs within the closed doors of our houses. The lack of proper laws against domestic abuse has brought immense anger within women of my country, creating a divide where men perpetrate hate crimes against the female gender. These sonnets are meant to illustrate an example of domestic abuse in the olden age of the steppes, where women were visualized as falcons that were meant to be stolen and berated to produce a noble heir, and then compared to the present where women are still taught that such traditions are okay.*

## 1263 AD

*Tahmirih, age 9*

The hallowed night ignites with mother's shriek  
The tranquil yurts stand by without a care  
The ruthless man had tamed the Falcon's beak  
The steppes have lost another spirit's glare

Not once the scornful men bestrode the wings  
Hungry Khans disdained the weak and feral  
Possession was their lawful name and a thousand things  
They tamed, the shattered wives were men's conferral

Concealed the youthful wings with warmth and strain,  
I hide and shade my mother's screams  
For the Falcon's path is set to hate in vain  
The tamed and frail shall never soar the streams

And yet the anger dwells with harmful breath  
And yet the wings shall win with patient stealth

## 1270 AD

*Tahmirih, age 16*

As the bullish battles left a frightful snare,  
With time the steppes grew a savage shift.  
Alas, the cruel men await the noble heir,  
That mount the youthful wings with fruitful gift.

The time has come to abide defeat  
I am what they snare to invoke with hateful filth;  
The tasteful, helpless thing with tethered feet,  
The bride of the men that see me just as tilth.

The lingering screams made me to forget,  
The wrath streaming in my soul  
The youthful wings were lost in deep regret,  
The man had tamed me with control.

And yet, I seek the wings through timeless clock  
And yet, I seek the wings that shall not cease to talk.

## 2018

*Aikerim, age 20*

The hallowed night ignites with people's cheers  
The joyful Yurts stand by with tender thoughts  
The doting men were drained with joyous tears  
The ancient steppes have gathered loving knots

The bride looked down upon her youthful dress  
Not once the image leered her sinless eyes,  
The stainless wings were taught to fluoresce,  
To be the man's possession and the prize.

The young Falcon was taught to be oppressed  
She shall never question or object,  
But the history of the steppes shall attest  
The noble man will be shown the respect

And yet, the rage and fury will prevail  
And yet, the wakened Falcon will assail.

**2019**

*Aikerim, age 21*

Alas, the winter has come to the loving affair  
The fleeting season of summer has come to end  
The eyes of rosy love could not beware  
For they were the ones that could not amend.

The wife looks down upon her feeble body,  
The hateful stains, the marks were to chastise.  
The scornful slaps were husband's dotting hobby,  
The Falcon's hollow screams were no surprise.

They say the cruel man shall not be fought  
Deceitful letter is their only plea.  
The law was made to suit the women not,  
The helpless sound of woe that shall not free

And yet, the wings pursue the longing aid  
And yet, the aching wings will not fade.

### **Letter for the Wings:**

The reigning steppes have told us eerie tales  
Of Falcon's youthful wings and feral men  
The frightful ones that sought the fruitful tails  
The wings were stolen from their peaceful den.

With regret I send such mournful note  
As the Falcon's beak is tamed and taught;  
'The overthrown shall be the men's disdainful gloat.'  
We shall weep for those who stood and fought.

Yet, we must not grieve for too long  
For we the birds of prey who should prevail;  
The prudent wings that stand high and strong  
Alas, the wrath and patience that will hail.

We are the youthful wings that treat us right  
We are the youthful wing that stand and fight

## Kid of a Cop

Victor

---

Having a dad as a police officer has affected our family compared to other non-law enforcement families. However, it is what we're used to because that's what we've always known.

Having a dad as a cop is knowing that when he says he'll be home by five or six, it could mean after midnight. It means that his week of laundry consists of five black shirts, five pairs of socks, and five pairs of underwear. It means seeing his boots and duty belt on the floor. It's hearing great stories at dinner. It's being completely desensitized to everything and having a dark sense of humor. It's yelling at the media on TV. It's predicting what's going to happen on *COPS* before it happens. It's correcting the falsities in any police show or movie. It's how he always sits at a table so he can face everyone. It's walking in the city and holding his hand but having to switch hands so his gun hand is always free.

It's when you come home feeling sick and he drug tests you not once, but twice. It's having someone who knows how to read body language and talk to people. It's having someone who knows how to drive really well. It's giving him a hug and feeling something under his jacket. It's calling him on the phone and hearing yelling, sirens, or the radio in the background before he quickly hangs up. It's wanting to go to the station and everyone remembers when you were a baby. It's when you're walking with him in the city and he tells you to run and call for help if he tells you to. It's him telling you to take off your seatbelt so you can escape if something happens. It's when you go on a class fieldtrip into the city and for the first time, he insists on going with you to keep you safe.

It's when a neighbor thinks she heard something in her house and he searches it for her. It's having people ask you legal questions and how they can get out of a ticket. It's being called a narc at school because your dad is a cop. It's how he knows the best places to eat in the city and the best routes to avoid traffic. It's learning strong moral values. It's valuing the precious time you have with family. It's having to reschedule birthday and holiday celebrations. It's knowing a full moon means trouble. It's teasing but still appreciating the fire department. It's purposely not living close to his work. It's knowing that he has to deal with some really sad and evil things. It's knowing that when he used to say monsters weren't real, he was lying.

It's loving the sound of sirens. It's feeling safe around guns and knowing how to shoot well. It's wanting to be a cop and his trying to tell you to look at anything else. It's waving to every police car you see. It's when you decide on a college and he suddenly knows an officer in that city. It's knowing things that others aren't allowed to know, yet you can't correct them. You argue for the police whenever somebody criticizes them because they've never heard any of the real stories you know. It's feeling that every officer killed on the news is personal. It's getting the shivers down your spine when you hear the bagpipes play "Amazing Grace." It's praying that he'll make it home safe. It's that your heroes wear Kevlar instead of capes. It's being so proud of your dad for the job he does. It's having that little voice in the back of your head that his car may be replaced with one carrying the chief, captain, and chaplain telling you the news you dread.

## **She looks so peaceful when she sleeps**

Kassandra Tejada

her hands are the thick and distant palms of your  
high school sweetheart  
she has eyelashes like  
he used to butterfly kiss me goodnight with them  
her hair  
is not the same color as mine  
her skin is tan but lacks depth like her mother  
she is made of paper and I can no longer be the rock in which she clings to  
her fists are always curled tight and close to her  
she is constantly ready for battle or  
retaliation  
against the world that is of false value, according to her  
she spends so much of her time  
trying to plug the holes that all of her  
sad thoughts flow from  
I hope one day she burns herself up  
starts a fire she doesn't know how to stop and  
destroys all of the things that want to hurt her in the world  
I pray on the day that her dust settles, she spreads herself thin for the  
very last time  
that the wind carries her through the unconventional  
body of her deep green mother  
pray that pieces of her continue to grow in  
everything that she touches  
that her light is reflected in  
every child's wandering eye or  
loud-mouthed observation of the trees  
that are extra green today  
and the sun  
and all the languages it knows how to say "good morning" in  
the way it shines on her face while she dreams  
while she sleeps  
the way the world only makes sense when she looks peaceful



## **Liberation**

Kaitlyn Tramontana

It burns, the scolding, salty secretion  
Welling tide pools, swelling in the corners  
Of her eyes, spilling, slipping and seeping

Vision disturbed, taillights racing red blurs  
the levy has broken; cheeks are stained and streaked  
with the blackest streams, each straying from course

Foot pressed forward watching the number rise  
Music, chasing your past few hours away  
Window glides down cold air slaps her alive  
Streams dry, hair ripples like flags in storm winds

## Wednesday Morning

Julia Shih

---

It was Wednesday when her father finally came home, under a dull, mottled sky of an early November morning. Lucy was the first to see him enter the yard. She was standing in the kitchen preparing bowls of oatmeal for her three younger brothers, when she heard the clink of metal against metal, looked up to see her father step through, closing the gate behind him like a prowler in his own yard. His face was swollen, his shirt battle-worn, the left sleeve nearly completely torn. His clothes, spotted with blood, were the same he'd been wearing when he'd left for work on Monday morning. Two sunken eyes burning deep inside dark, tired circles, focused on something distant in the horizon. It was the look in his eyes that made her hands instinctively curl into fists.

She didn't call for her mother, whose voice pitched with frustration as she oversaw her brothers getting ready in their room. Instead, she reached into the cupboard for an extra bowl and set it at the head of the table, filling it with a ladle of oatmeal even though she knew on mornings like these, it would go untouched.

Her father entered the house, leaning against the doorframe to take off one muddy shoe, then the other, untying the laces with raw, trembling fingers. He lined them up neatly with the rest of their shoes. His were giants dwarfing the others.

"Where's your mother, Lu?"

She nodded towards the back room. His bloodshot eyes turned and took in the hall, impossibly long. Instead, he crossed the room and turned on the radio on the kitchen counter. A hollow man's voice relayed news from the fighting overseas. He dialed the tuner until the kitchen filled with the warm strains of "Maggie May," then dropped himself into a chair at the table.

"What happened?" she asked.

"What happened?"

He followed her eyes to his clothes.

"Oh, not my blood." His laugh was a harsh, vulgar sound, too loud so early in the morning. He opened his arms to her, and she crawled onto his knee, even though she knew at 12 years old, she was probably too old to be curled in his lap; nevertheless, it made her feel safe. She breathed his scent of cigarettes, whiskey, and something underlying—sour, metallic.

A desperation. It was the smell of the horsetrack. He rocked her gently, a bedtime story out of place, out of time.

“I was on my way home when this guy on a bicycle...wasn't paying attention or nothin', just came outta nowhere and bam! Got hit by a truck.”

“Were you driving?”

“No, I wasn't driving. My car, ah...I left it at the office.”

“You were walking?”

“Yes, honey, I was walking. So this guy got plowed by a truck, and me and these other guys who saw what happened, some construction guys, we ran and took care of him until the ambulance got there, making sure he didn't move and trying to stop the bleeding. The pros said we probably saved his life. Just one of those things...you always take care of people when they need you, Lu, even strangers. I always taught you that, didn't I?”

She nodded, not mentioning that his story didn't explain why he'd been gone for two days or that his face looked like he'd been beaten. He smiled at her.

“You're my angel girl.”

He kissed the top of her head, smoothing her dark hair, the same color as his own, as she wondered how much money he'd lost this time. Whenever he disappeared for days, he was usually in deep. This was a sickness, belonging to her father, to the family. Maybe other girls her age loved horses, but in Lucy's world, she regarded them with a seething resentment when they brought her father home with his pockets less than empty. Her brothers rushed in noisily, happy to see their father. Behind them, their mother stopped in the doorway, glaring.

“Where've you been, Henry?” Her eyes were fire. “What happened to your face?”

“Not now, Sheila.”

“Yeah? Well Phil called yesterday. Said to give you a message... don't bother coming to work anymore because they found someone who actually shows up.”

“Aw shit.”

“Yeah, it is shit, Henry. They can send men to the moon now and

get 'em home safely. You know that? Yet you leave for work and disappear, and who knows when you might decide you're man enough to come home."

Her mother spun and stormed into the bedroom, slamming the door. Moving Lucy off his knee, he followed, closing the door wearily behind him. They had years of moving to each other's tempestuous moods to develop a precise rhythm.

You're stealing right out of your children's mouths, Henry, followed by Shut up, Sheila, was all Lucy let herself catch before she blocked out their voices, focusing on taking care of her brothers.

"Where was Daddy?" Doogie asked. At 6 years old, he was the baby.

"Saving lives," she said, dryly.

Her parents were still fighting when she left the house, leading the way towards the elementary school with her three little brothers straggling behind like ducklings.

At school, she studied the math of shapes, the diameter of circles, how much water different-sized cups could hold exactly. They took turns reading from *Swiss Family Robinson*, a family that still found ways to care for each other despite fighting for survival on a deserted island. Lucy usually knew the answers to questions but never participated unless she was called on, which was rare because teachers, like most adults in her life, found it easy to forget she was there. At lunchtime, she went to the cafeteria to get a cheese sandwich. The lunch lady always prepared a handful for kids who forgot their lunches, and if she noticed that Lucy had a knack for consistently forgetting her lunch, she never mentioned it. She ate the sandwich sitting alone against the wall of the school, watching her brothers jumping from the bars of the jungle gym. Spaced a year a part each, the three of them always had each other. At the opposite end of the school, where large elm and birch trees lined the border of the school in front of the fence, another boy sat alone, a boy from her class named Lucas who hadn't spoken much since his older brother was killed in Vietnam over the summer. Whatever thoughts he had, he kept to himself. Whatever world he lived in, he kept it hidden. Lucy was secretly afraid of him. He had eyes like her father's, either there too intensely, or not there at all.

She imagined what would happen if she crossed the yard, sat down

next to him, watched him turn those haunted eyes towards her.

“What do you cry about when you’re alone?” she would ask.

“Nothing,” he would say, surly and defensive.

Or maybe, “What do you cry about?” he would ask. And she would realize, all her life, she’d been waiting for someone to ask her this question.

“Nothing,” she said. “Sometimes...everything.”

Somewhere in a land on a map, a real war was waging in jungles, killing real people with real names, astronauts were landing on the moon, families could survive on deserted islands and feel blessed, while shapes maintained order by numbers that magically held them together and filled them with order. But none of it seemed real to her. It was all far away, distant realities that belonged somewhere else, to someone else, like the lives of those on TV. So far from the corner where she lived, from the air that she breathed. Real was where she woke. Real was day to day. Real was this fragile world she was trying to hold together with 12-year-old hands that were never big enough.

After school, she came home, brothers in tow, to find her father still in the same clothes, asleep on top of the covers. Her mother was long gone, working as a shift supervisor at Fred Meyer, but the ghost of something electric and hot still hung in the air.

She made a snack of peanut butter and saltines for her brothers, sat them in front of the TV and told them not to wake their father. She changed into old clothes, slipping on the ratty, paint-splotted navy hooded sweatshirt belonging to her father that she’d rescued from the trash bin last spring, still at least five years too big for her. She’d gotten the idea months ago as fall descended to go door to door after school, offering to rake leaves for a dollar an hour, easily undercutting the lowest rates of any landscaping company or neighborhood kid with similar ambition. Whether or not their neighbors needed their leaves raked or just felt sorry for her, at such a low price she could always find takers. She would rake until the sky faded to black, taking the bills—some new and crisp, some wrinkled and limp—and save them in an old cigar box her father had given her two years before on her seventh birthday.

“Everyone knows how to spend money,” her dad had said, “but

what matters is knowing how to earn it, how to hang on to it. Money is survival in this world. Money is power. Don't ever forget that, Lucy."

And she didn't.

Her neighborhood was a mix of homes built in different eras dating back to the late 1800s. Once populated by old Victorians that anchored every block with tall steeples, thick, noble pillars and sitting porches looking out onto wide yards, working-class money mixed with old money as the neighborhood aged. Families came and went, and lots were razed and parceled into smaller lots which sprung forth compact, more economical one-story bungalows with boxed fences and consolation lawns, like the fading yellow rectangle Lucy's family lived in, passed down from her mother's parents, now deceased. Nevertheless, the trees remained, the houses built around their roots so that in the fall, they blazed the street with giant plumes of fire before shedding their color for winter.

She picked houses with lawns strewn with leaves, knocking on doors without finding anyone home until the old widow living alone on the corner lot answered the door and took her up on her offer, letting her rake the leaves under her giant maple. She was a hard worker, using short, efficient strokes until her arms and back burned, sweat sticking stray strands of her dark hair to her cheeks. She saw the silhouette of the widow watching from the upstairs window of the giant house, easily the largest and most impressive structure among the street's low-slung one-stories. She imagined what it must feel like to look out onto the world from such a high place. She imagined the widow, lonely in her old age in an empty house, watching Lucy work so hard and stoically that she became overcome by compassion, embracing her, loving her, promising to forever take her away from all this. It made her work even harder.

As dusk fell, the widow brought out a mug of hot chocolate for her, creamy and rich, the real thing, made with milk instead of boiled water like what her mother made. She drank it too quickly, burning her tongue, but it felt good having the heat inside her as the night cooled. She worked until she filled two large trash bags with leaves and hauled them to the curb.

The widow invited her into the living room to stay warm while she went upstairs to get her purse. Lucy had never been inside this house

before, and the sheer size and mystery of it filled her with awe. Standing alone in the quiet room, Lucy could feel the echoes of the house, the only sound the hollow ticking of a clock in another room. She approached the mantle, inspecting a collection of crystal figurines, a parade of delicately sculpted angels in various poses. She picked up the one with wings spread, its head tilted upwards, eyes closed, hands held together in prayer. Her eyes caught the light refracting within the prisms of its wings. She had once asked her mother where she'd come from, and her mother had told her about angels in heaven, in particular, an angel named Gabriel who chose the special souls to be born into this world as babies. He would visit them as they grew inside their mothers, whispering to them the secrets of the world, but just before the babies were born, he would press his finger against their lips, silencing them, so they would forget all they had learned.

"Why would he do that?" she had asked.

Her mother shrugged. "A test, maybe. So we all have the great mysteries of life inside us, but we have to work hard to remember what they are. And maybe when we finally understand all that we once knew, we'll be able to find our way back to home."

Her mother's explanation created more questions than answers. She wasn't sure if she actually believed in angels, but sometimes, in the middle of night after waking from a night terror, she would look out the window at the sky, feel its echo of deep melancholy, and wonder if there really was an angel somewhere out there who knew that she existed. Gabriel...she'd ask the moon. Why am I here?

The angel, its insides of light, felt heavy in her hand. Her head felt light. Her palms began to sweat. She slipped the angel into the pouch of her sweatshirt.

The walls of the living room were lined with framed photos, and she was taking in each one attentively, a visitor to the museum of a stranger's life. The photos spanned eras, documenting time with smiling faces, the journey of human life from youth towards something more substantial—thicker, stronger, with deeper roots.

In a slightly faded black & white photo much older than the others, a young man in a Navy uniform smiled into the camera with his arm around a pretty woman, her black curls neatly tucked under a pillbox

hat with delicate netting. Her heart-shaped mouth was turned up ever so slightly, the near imperceptible smile of someone with a happy secret. Lucy had memories of her father putting his arm around her mother in this way. But she couldn't remember the last time she'd seen her mother smile. She heard the widow's footsteps down the stairs, tentative with age.

"Is this you?" Lucy asked, as the widow entered.

The widow stepped closer. A faint smile traced her lips. "Ah, yes. This was Walter and I, our first year of marriage." Her mind lingered on the photo; she nodded to herself, smiling. "He was a good man."

"What were you thinking about when you took this picture?"

"What was I thinking about? Why, I don't know." She looked deeper, then shook her head. "I don't know, my dear. I think I just felt lucky." With a well-meaning ceremonious gesture, the widow handed her a crisp \$10 bill, more than three times what she owed.

"There you go," she said with a kind smile. "Your parents must be very proud of you." Lucy blushed, mumbled a thank you at her shoes and left.

The first thing she did when she got home was go straight to her room to count her money. In fact, whether or not she had money to add to the box, she still counted her money every day. It was ritual, something she did that helped her feel safe. She kept her cigar box hidden inside the vent near the head of her bed, the deep faceplate sliding out to reveal a dark metal cavern, perfect for hiding her secrets. She used to keep the box in her sock drawer, but sometimes, if her father had the fever and no cash, he would toss the house looking for money her mother hid from him. And she did often give Lucy cash to hide—not much usually, just enough for emergency groceries here and there. "Even if he asks for it Lucy, no matter how mad he gets, say you don't know. Say there isn't any." She would thrust a wad of cash into her hand, her eyes wild. Lucy used to resent her mother for not standing up to their father. But years later, she would remember her mother's eyes and come to understand the look. It wasn't just desperation or fear. It was the hunger for something always just out of reach.

The truth was, there had been a night in March when she'd woken up to find her father creeping around her room, rifling through her drawers as she pretended to be asleep. In the morning, she opened the



cigar box to find everything gone but the coins. She tried sleeping with the money under her pillow and carrying the money around in a plastic bag tucked into the back of her underwear during the day, but the terror of losing the money or having it taken from her wore on her nerves. The discovery of the space inside the vent brought her a level of peace. Her father was a desperate thief, but not an overly clever one.

She added the \$10 bill to the stack and counted out \$87.45.

She returned the money to the box, reached into the pocket of her sweatshirt and took out the crystal angel she'd taken from the widow's house. In the privacy of her own bleak space, it dazzled. She touched a finger to its face—it had no mouth—wondering what the fragmented colors inside felt like, what their secrets tasted like. She gingerly placed the angel on top of the money, next to a silver money clip and a small gold pendant set with a ruby. She returned the box to the shadows of the vent.

Tomorrow after school, she would take the 36 bus to the north-side, not far from the racetrack, to a pawn shop run by a stoop-shouldered Armenian named Charlie. Her father had taken her here a few times before, thinking she was too young to understand the business of transaction. She would watch him sell the things that belonged to the family, their house getting more bare, the cash Charlie giving him disappearing into his pocket. She learned that when times were bad—she could take small items from people's houses while she waited for them to pay her for raking, small things that people wouldn't notice, at least not for a while, and then pawning them, either stashing the cash for when the family needed it or to pay off Charlie. Because she knew he was the one who loaned her father money he could never cover. And she'd learned a long time ago she couldn't even trust her father with money to pay off his own debts. If Charlie ever told her father about his daughter's visits, her father never mentioned it. The last time she went to Charlie's, she asked him to stop loaning her father money. "He's sick," she'd said. "We need to eat." Charlie wasn't a bad man, he had a heart and three young children of his own, but business was business. He had looked over the counter at her. "You're too young," he said. "You should be in school. Taking piano lessons. Having tea parties with your dolls." He plucked a butterscotch candy from a glass dish on

the counter and handed it to her with a kind smile, then put his head in the books until she walked herself out the door. She hated his kindness, which wasn't kind at all.

Tomorrow she would pawn the angel and other stolen items, see how much her father owed. Tomorrow, she would find out how bad it was this time.

That night they ate pancakes for dinner. Her brothers were happy because it was breakfast at the wrong time, but Lucy knew pancakes meant no money. Her father, showered with his wounds patched up, sat at his place at the head of the table, eating with his head down. Throughout dinner, he and her mother never glanced at each other once. She was clearing the table while her mother struggled in the back of the house to get her brothers bathed and into bed when the doorbell rang. Her father answered the door, speaking quietly to the visitor before entering the kitchen with the widow. She was wrapped in a large black shawl, her face set in an unmistakable expression of disappointment. Her father's eyes were grave.

"Lucy, Mrs. Tudor says you took something from her house today."

Lucy paled and she looked from her father to the old lady. "I didn't," she said.

"Lucy, it's okay. I'm sure it's a misunderstanding," Mrs. Tudor said.

"If you give back the angel now, we'll forget all about this. No harm done."

"I didn't take anything," Lucy said.

The old lady and the little girl were at a stand-off.

"I'm sure if Lucy said she didn't take it, she didn't take it."

"She was the only one in my house today, and the angel was there and now it's gone. That's a very sentimental keepsake for me, a gift from my late husband."

"My daughter doesn't lie."

"She was the only one there."

"My daughter doesn't lie."

"But she steals."

Her father's face tightened. "You should leave now."

Mrs. Tudor looked from her father to Lucy. Finally, she nodded, her mouth fixed in a rigid line. She looked Lucy in the eye, her voice so cold it spit. "You really have people fooled, don't you?"

Her words hit Lucy harder than a punch to the chest, but she remained expressionless, turning to resume clearing the dishes as her insides burned.

“Did you do it?” He was standing in the doorway of the kitchen, having walked the widow out, his arms crossed over his chest, the overhead light casting shadows that made the burgeoning bruises of his face exaggeratedly grotesque.

She knew he knew the answer. She was always materializing money when the family needed it that he never questioned, more money than could be possibly made from raking leaves, but she wouldn't tell him now, wouldn't allow the possibility of him marching her up to her room and watching as she revealed the hiding place of the only security she had that could keep her head above this perpetual feeling of drowning.

She continued clearing dishes silently, bringing them to the sink, running the hot water. Finally, her father let out a deep, pained sigh and said, “I taught you right and wrong, Lu. I hope you know the difference.” A sudden hatred whipped through her, a dragon rising up through her chest like a red-hot scream wanting to eat this man whose addiction, like cancer, was eating through the roots of their family, tearing down what little they tried each day to build up. She hated her father for his weakness, for his endless hunger, as much as she loved him for his tender, guarded ideals.

That night, after everyone had gone to sleep, she removed the angel from the box, so delicate in her hand. She took it outside. In the moonlight, the angel looked dull, lifeless, just a crude piece of weight in her hand. She walked to the widow's house, a small, delicate silhouette bathed in silver light. She looked up at the dark picture window, angry that she'd ever thought this house warm, that she'd ever imagined the widow could be someone different from all the others. With only the moon as her witness, she smashed the angel on the black pavement of the street in front of the house, smashed it to release what light or magic might have been trapped inside. She didn't know what she was expecting, if anything, but the night soldiered on with its indifferent darkness over shattered glass, and she heard nothing outside of the echoes in her head.

The next morning, her father sat at the kitchen table, searching the paper for jobs.

Next to him an ashtray overflowed with cigarettes. He looked wrecked. Lucy fed her brothers cornflakes in orange juice from concentrate as they were out of milk, and prepared them for school. She would have to do the shopping when she got home later. As they headed out the door, she placed her cigar box of money on the table in front of her dad.

“You taught me right and wrong,” she said. “I hope you know the difference.” She slung her backpack onto her shoulders and turned, leading her brothers out the door. On the way to school, she passed the old widow’s house on the corner lot, the branches of the ancient maple in her front yard spread outward, thick fingers reaching towards a gray, sheltering sky. The curtains were drawn. Surely the old woman was awake at this hour, but if she saw them, there was no acknowledgment. The children walked past the two plump garbage bags of leaves still sitting on the curb waiting for the Friday pick-up, turning the corner and marching onward. In the new light of morning, in either direction up and down the street, this house on the corner easily had the most immaculate yard in the neighborhood.

**In a Garbage**  
Kamilla Yusupova



## Blues in the Key of Hummingbirds

Kim Johnson

---

Some say dragonflies  
are hummingbirds, turned burn victims  
in the sun, there are moments in life  
that transform smoke detectors into sirens.

She believes in a God  
who accepts drunk dials at 4 A.M.,  
sings code blues to dial tones  
in the key of ambulances humming,  
flatlining violins.

It's been two years  
since she tore her weathered  
veins in two and threw the seasons  
into chaos, painted her suicide note  
in the style of Jackson Pollock, bled  
rose petals into the bathtub.

Death, let your trigger finger caress  
a hummingbird's throat, sing the blues  
in the key of tears, transform  
main arteries into rain gutters.

The doctors ripped  
a red vein from one arm,  
a blue from the other,  
hot-wired her heart.

Surgical masks and severed tendons,  
her tin can telephone to God.

Flocks of harmonics hum  
in the fluorescent branches above  
the operating table, cellblocks  
of birdcages threaded through  
the trees like paper lanterns.

Each star a breadcrumb  
to light the path home from heaven,



life flashing before her at the precise  
speed of a hummingbird's wings.

Surgeons gathered stitches to build  
nests in the incisions, guided her skin  
through their sewing machines,  
winged seamstresses, wrists wrapped  
tight as a prizefighter's. Her boxing gloves  
corsets she unlaces to breathe,  
scream, how a scream locked away  
in the black box of an airplane  
can sound like a voice box  
that's had all its locks changed.

Sometimes she'd say,  
*thank you for never train dodging  
the track marks on my arms*, how my arms  
wanted to be a runway for lost birds.

I once held a note all through the night  
So the singer wouldn't slip off the  
treble clef into the next life.

What's that song Lord  
that begins with a blade  
and ends with a fire escape?

The chorus you sing in  
a cathedral of clouds.

She says, *life's given me lemons,  
razor blades, and the temptation  
to make pink lemonade.*

*every scar a skylight,  
every mirror a birdcage.*

*when I die, press my ashes  
to vinyl, so when the record plays  
I can sing at my own funeral.*

## Denial

Kevin Xu

---

It's 9:00 am and I finally make my way to the bathroom after lying in bed awake for two hours. My eyes meet my own reflection and I quickly avert them, trying to avoid the face of failure for as long as I can. I had thought about removing the mirror just so I wouldn't have to fight the feeling of my hair on my skin rise at the sight of me. The plain white tiles scale the walls around me trapping me in my thoughts as I brush my teeth. There's no need for coffee when anxiety has you awake, cold in your own sweat. There isn't even a need for white sound with the voices that weave in and out of the air just like surround sound.

I don't think I'm sad. I stare and gaze with no intention of understanding. I dwell on these lingering feelings but I can't comprehend them. It's like I'm watching myself fade away in the third person. The more I disassociate the longer the little moment of peace I have. The slowly drifting moment where nothing is wrong or right, black or white, just simply going through the motions. It seems like nothing matters in the moment of blurred movements and muffled sounds. But of course, it matters, as nothing lasts forever and reality will poke and prod you awake.

It's not that I don't have friends, it's just that I like being alone. People assume I'm lonely because I don't talk to anyone. My family and relatives all live too far away to visit and I'm much too busy to call. Besides, there isn't much to talk about and I'm not a fan of the awkward small talk. If I wanted to make new friends I would. In fact, I see my friend Nicky every morning. I walk to my nearby coffee shop before work to see her.

"One latte," I say.

"\$8.75," she says.

I walk a few blocks to my company building. It's almost a routine now. I bring my coffee in and walk past my fellow workers and make my way to my single cubicle and drop my stuff at my table as I do every day. Everything I need for work is in my dark green knapsack. In the bigger pocket, my laptop lies snug pressing against my color-coded notebooks. I hate stickers. My laptop has been the same since I bought it in. The smaller pocket houses a pen and paper notepad that shuffle around. I lower myself on my chair and look at the gray cubicle walls that separate me from my coworkers. In a building with so many people, I can still feel like I'm the only person here. The cubicles next to me house people that



I know only on a first name basis. I don't know if they have families at home or what their favorite TV show is. When I think about it, it seems like it doesn't matter. Every one of us is like a single cell on our skin locked up in our own cubicles. Nothing we do will amount to much.

"I quit," I say.

"Oh, you will be missed," he says.

Missed. We both knew this isn't true, just like what I said earlier. We are like single cells in cubicles. Each and every single one of us is replaceable, just like cells. Maybe it's a negative way of thinking, but I think it's realistic.

I finish brushing my teeth.

## **Information Society**

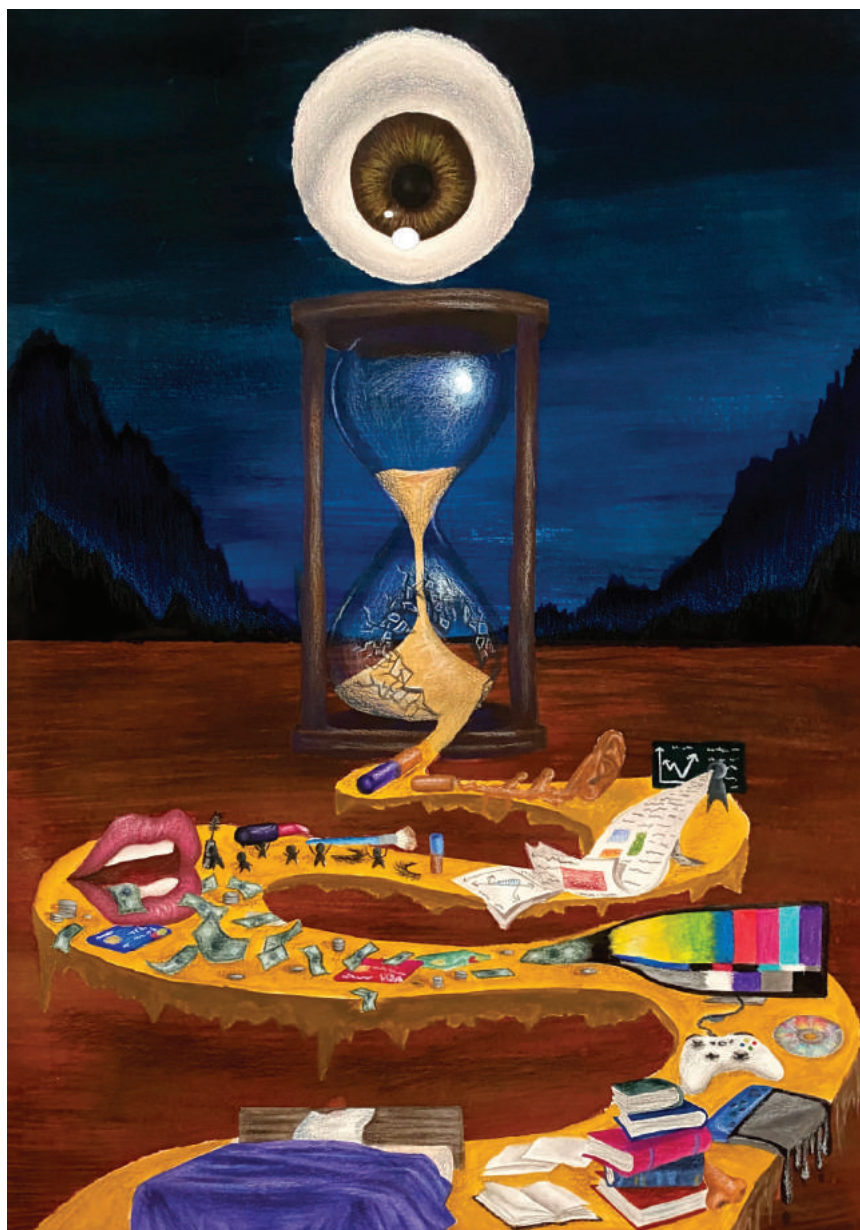
Tanaz Saiyed

---

Exhausted of information  
Reaching the brink of humanity  
Seeking validation is the new norm  
Returning to the temple each night  
Happiness lying on the horizon  
Working quietly with our hands  
A pin drop echoing through the halls  
In silence we find comfort  
In silence we find ease

# A Typical Day

Alyanna Posadas



# Irithyll

Ian Tong



# Mermaid

Ian Tong

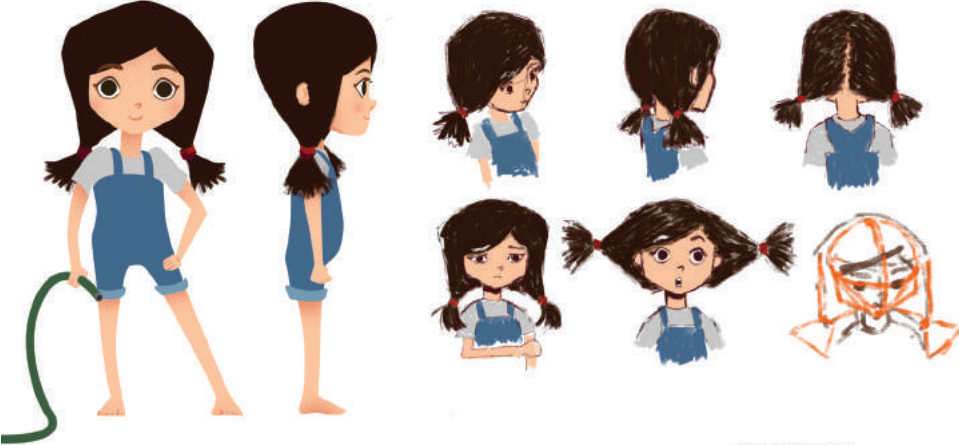


# Character Sheet

Casey Cosgrove

## “Kindled”

Olive Character Model Sheet



Casey Cosgrove



# Colliding Dimensions

André Zambrana



## Chasing the Horizon

Thanh Le





## The New Judy Lin

Fareed Shayek

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-----[STARTING TRANSMISSION]-----

{My name is Dr. Samantha Roman, Chief chemist, physicist, captain, and one of the last survivors of the *UNS Artemis*; this is our story.}

The seven of us were the first people to ever leave our solar system. Our mission was to find and catalog alien life. Unfortunately, with discoveries like primitive plants and small colonies of bacteria, our first contact was usually less than exciting.

That was until we reached Typhon 3. Suffice it to say that we were excited to reach Typhon; not only was it a planet that advance probes had shown likely harbored life, but it was one such planet that orbited a pulsar.

{For the uninitiated, a pulsar is what happens when a red giant becomes too big to maintain its mass and instead of collapsing on itself and exploding it, compresses into a star roughly the size of Brooklyn. This is called a neutron star. Sometimes a neutron star will start to rapidly spin, either from a collision with another object or by interacting with gravity, if the rotation becomes fast enough the star will start to shoot out two jets of radiation. This radioactive disco ball in space is what we call a pulsar.}

The ground team was forced to wait for their departure as Dr. Elena Miles, who was our engineer and one of our two medical experts, did some final diagnostics on the lander. Dr. Omar Khan, our head geologist, sat with a furrowed brow reading over the geological surveys that the probes had sent back, for the sixth time. Dr. Amanda Rose, our meteorologist, was leaning against the wall as she looked through a window staring intently at the planet below. And last but certainly not least was Dr. Judy Lin, who was pacing back and forth as she ran her necklace between her fingers. When she saw me approach she stopped and her face brightened significantly, releasing the necklace from her grip.

“Come to wish us luck?” said Judy with a smile.

“Yup and to run through the mission plan one last time,” I said before addressing the others. “Okay everyone, listen up you’re all going to be heading down there in a few minutes so this is the last time that I will be able to go over this. The landing site that Omar and I selected looks to be clear of any obvious hazards but don’t let your guards down just in case. Night on Typhon lasts roughly 6 hours that leaves you with 3 hours to do your surveys while still giving you enough time to get off the planet before

daybreak. And I cannot stress how important it is that you are off the planet before the sun comes up—your suits are designed to withstand any ambient radiation. What they are not designed to withstand is one of those concentrated beams of radiation that the pulsar gives off. Lastly, remember that while you're on the planet we won't be able to communicate with each other, the ambient radiation interferes with radio waves so you won't be able to talk to us and all we will have are your basic vital signs." I took a deep breath and continued. "So good luck and let's find some aliens," I said with a forced smile.

"Informative and inspirational, I give it an 8 out of 10," said Judy with a smirk, as I walked back towards her.

"Really I've been practicing that speech for days and all I get is an 8," I said with feigned annoyance.

She gave an exaggerated shrug. "Eh the action scenes left a lot to be desired and I saw the twist coming a mile away."

Before I was able to respond, Elena's voice rang out over the intercoms: "All right the lander is fueled up and fully charged, everyone to your stations."

Judy and I embraced one last time before she boarded the lander and I made my way to the cockpit. By the time I had reached the cockpit Dr. Mark Rosenberg, our other medical expert, and Elena Miles had already taken their places. The room was filled with monitors, the largest of which was at the far end of the room and displayed images of the away team next to the individual body temperatures, heart rates, oxygen levels, and radiation levels. At the top corner of the central screen was a timer counting down to sunrise on the portion of Typhon that the landing team was on.

For a while, it seemed like everything was going according to plan, most of their vitals were consistently normal. Except for Judy, whose heart rate and body temperature spiked at one point before returning to normal. At the time, we thought that it was probably nothing to worry about; we were very wrong.

We first realized that there was a problem when all of the away team's vitals suddenly spiked. We stood there helplessly staring at the monitors hoping that the readings would return to normal, but eventually, the timer hit zero; the sun was rising on Typhon. Moments later Omar's vitals

spiked even further, before dying out completely; Ananda Rose followed shortly after. For a moment we thought that there was hope when Judy's heart rate began to slow, but just like the others her signal eventually gave out. In a matter of moments the crew of the *UNS Artemis* was cut in half.

In the days that followed we each found our own ways of coping. Mark sequestered himself in the control room; sometimes I would pass by and see him staring at the large monitor and praying to every deity from every religion he was aware of, in every language he knew. Elena locked herself in the engine room, opening the doors only to receive food and water. I divided my time between bringing food to the others and staring down at the dark surface of Typhon. I would watch as the halo of murderous light that framed the planet faded in and out of existence. My mind was racing with questions. What caused them to stay so long? What did they see on the planet? Did she suffer? Eventually, I decided that it all had something to do with the sudden spike that Judy had received early in the mission, but that didn't really help anything. She and the away team were still dead and we were still trapped on the *Artemis*.

Three days is after the disastrous mission Mark's voice rang out excitedly over the intercoms. "Guys you may want to come in here. I think someone's been looking out for us."

When Elena and I made it to the control room Mark was grinning and staring with wide eyes at the large monitor. When we looked at the monitor, we understood why. The *Artemis* had just received a transmission from the lander indicating that it had taken off and was on route back to the *Artemis*. I wanted nothing more than to celebrate, but there wasn't time for that—we had to focus on the task at hand.

"Alright everyone, put your pressure suits on and let's get the red carpet ready," I said with conviction.

When the lander finally arrived and the doors opened three of us eagerly walked inside. What we found inside was a state of disarray—screens were cracked, sparking wires hung from the ceiling and a single figure in a pressure suit sat hunched over in the pilot seat. I immediately rushed over to Judy, whose suit was in a state similar to the inside of the lander. Her helmet, which she appeared to have vomited inside of, had several cracks in it and her suit was punctured in multiple places. She's

dead, I thought to myself. Almost immediately I was proven wrong when her bloodshot eyes fluttered open and locked with mine.

“H...hhh.....hh..H.hhhhhhhhh” Judy struggled in a vain attempt to speak.

“It’s okay you’re safe now,” I said reassuringly, before turning to Mark and Elena. “You two take her to the med bay. I’ll stay here and decontaminate the lander.”

Like clockwork, the two medical doctors lifted Judy onto a stretcher and wheeled her away. As I began to spray down the lander’s interior with chemical solution my mind raced with questions, one thing was certain—Judy should not have been alive. Standing the concentrated radiation of a pulsar for a few seconds would turn a spacesuit into a microwave, but somehow Judy had survived on the planet for three whole days.

“Samantha, you need to get in here fast—something’s happening,” called Mark frantically over the intercom.

The med bay was a cacophony of sounds, alerts on various monitors mixed with Dr. Lin’s screams, which could be heard throughout the room despite the thick glass that separated us. Inside the containment chamber, Dr. Judy Lin was strapped to a hospital bed, which was tilted towards the glass. Blood poured from every orifice that it could find and mixed with the sweats and vomit that already stained her hospital gown. Dr. Mark Rustenburg and Dr. Elena Miles both stood hunched over computer monitors as they observed Dr. Judy.

“What the hell happened!” I called as I put on my lab coat and proceeded to my station.

“I have no idea. One second she was stable, if abnormal, and then the next her vitals are going all over the place and equipment is picking up everything from accelerated bone loss in the legs to abnormal bone growths on the lower back and ribs. It’s like her whole body is tearing itself apart and then reassembling from the inside out,” said Dr. Elena Miles, as she whipped nervous sweat from her brow.

“Could this be what happened to the others?” I said grasping for answers regardless of how insignificant they were.

“It’s possible, but their signals went out within minutes of each

other, so how did Judy survive while the others didn't," explained Dr. Rustenburg.

Just after she said that an additional siren added itself to the cacophony; somehow Judy with unnatural strength snapped one of the restraints that held her arms and she began to frantically scratch at her skin. The harder she scratched away at her flesh the quicker it fell away. From outside the containment unit Dr. Elena, Dr. Mark, and I watched in dismay as Judy's body began to twist and convulse. The discordant symphony swelled with the added sounds of tearing flesh and snapping bones. I have no idea how long the transformation took but when it was done the new Judy "stood" before us. The scale-like flesh that now covered her was coated with the blood and viscera of her former self. Her legs had been replaced by a long serpentine tail that dragged on the floor behind her, and she now had six arms, all of which were elongated and sinewy. At the base of her clavicle was now a large mouth with serrated teeth that seemed to emit a slow constant gurgle. What had once been her face was now dominated by a single unblinking eye.

The three of us stood there with our eyes wide and our bodies were frozen in fear as Judy explored the interior of the observation room, her claws digging into the floor, walls, and ceiling of the room like hot knives through butter. Occasionally she would find the large chunk of her old body and quickly lift it into her oddly placed mouth. It felt like we had been standing there for hours when Judy finally locked her eye on us, tilting her head like a confused dog.

"*HUNGRY!*" called out Judy's voice in my mind as she launched herself through the glass and latched on to Dr. Mark Rosenberg.

Before Elena and I could even react Judy had already taken two large bites out of Mark, killing him. As we ran from the med bay we could hear the sounds of Judy tearing chunks of flesh from Mark's body. We didn't need to speak to know exactly where we were both heading—the escape pod was large enough to fit three couples and had enough supplies to keep them alive for a year. We were almost at the escape pod when I heard the sound of Judy's claws scraping against metal.

Again her voice rang out in my mind; "*HELP ME!*" she called out. I was the first to reach the pod. After entering I immediately set the doors

to begin to close at a speed that I hoped would give Elena a chance to make it onboard and escape Judy. Again Elena picked up speed and for a moment it looked like she was going to make it but then Judy wrapped a claw around her and knocked Elena to the side. Judy then launched herself into the escape pod just as the doors were closing. When the doors finally shut and our pod detached from the Artemis it was just the two of us. The only sounds were the engines and the patter of blood dripping off of Judy's body. I couldn't help but stare into her one eye as she stared into mine. We stood there in silence for what seemed like an eternity.

One more time I heard her voice echoing in my mind: "Samantha?"

{There really isn't much else to s..sas...say Judy and I have been in this pod since th...th...the...then. I honestly can't believe that I was actually afraid of her at first, in such a short period of time she's taught me so much. I've seen things that I once thought were i... im..i...impossible, now I want nn...no...n..noth...nothing more than to share this experience and this knowledge with eeeveer...everyone.}

-----[TRANSMISSION FAILED]-----

## Galvanic Corrosion

Kassandra Tejada

i'm still trying to forget those lodestone eyes  
the ferromagnetic minerals  
responsible for each gold ring along your iris.  
your unkempt hair and  
the way our guts used to  
PULL PULL PULL for each other.  
quit lusting over the idea of our electric-current-love.  
make believe force fields of solenoid heart strings--  
a scientific attraction,  
responsible for the change in your palate.  
indulge in aphrodisiacs and  
pretend i've got erotic plasma in my veins  
--bleed myself into your cup with no wine and run my pussy under  
a bathtub faucet  
to the thought of my almost lover  
and his febrile hands.  
make it my life's work to vilify non-believers  
who say my  
copper coil curls can't  
bear long winters.  
denounce a world that doesn't understand us and  
give myself permission to give you another chance.  
so much for pretending.  
so much for forgetting.  
so much for this  
lack of iron in my veins  
the absence of fluids, the amount of amphetamines  
pumping through my vacant corpse  
these pallid hands-- still incapable of conducting heat  
my cold palms cup my cold heart in this  
cold winter  
alone and repulsed by my relative magnetism to the world.

## Riddle 29

Deven Sutaria

---

I was born deep in the Earth  
And for thousands of years I laid dormant  
And awoken from my slumber to be the servant of man.  
I have watched and helped civilizations rise and fall  
My beautiful sheen has attracted many,  
and I have been pillaged and stolen throughout time,  
and yet I still find people tossing me aside  
I have great value  
even if I am seen as a token of poverty.  
I am never anyone's first,  
but I am still a great achievement should I be won.  
I am the backbone of modern civilization  
Running throughout houses, businesses,  
Even through the deep underground  
generously giving out power to all.



## Running

Jesslyn Djaja

---

He holds the basketball with both his hands, and even though it fits snugly in his hands, it still feels wrong. If he counts the number of times he's ever held a basketball, he could do it with just one of his hands.

His teammates are telling him to pass, but he doesn't even know how. Does he throw it over their heads? Or does he bounce it on the ground like he's seen other people do? He decides on the latter option. The sweat on the palms of his hands makes the basketball slip easily as he pushes it towards the floor. It bounces up and onto the hands of the opposing team. They score and earn the winning point.

"It's Sean's fault we lost."

"Sorry," Sean mutters under his breath as his classmates start to circle around him. He fidgets uncomfortably at their stares.

"Why are you so bad at basketball?" the tallest of the bunch, Matthew, asks. "I'm really good because I play every day after school with my dad," he boasts, chest puffing up with pride.

"Hey." Someone elbows him. "Don't say that."

"Yeah," another boy says before lowering his voice and tiptoeing to whisper in Matthew's ears. "He doesn't have a dad."

The boy doesn't seem to have grasped the idea of whispering because Sean can hear every single word he says. But he's used to it because it's true. When his classmates realize that Sean has nothing to retort, they disperse into the locker room to change out of their sweaty gym clothes. Once Sean is back in his shirt and jeans, he follows the other boys to the cafeteria for lunch. He sits at one of the unoccupied tables with his lunch box, bringing out the sandwich he made for himself early in the morning. A couple of girls slide into the seats in front of him.

"What did you get today?" The girl with a ponytail, Hana, asks.

Mara, the other girl with shorter, curly hair, slowly opens her sparkly pink box. "Spaghetti! My favorite," she squeals. A peek into her lunch box reveals a variety of food ranging from fruits and nuts to chips, crackers and even a fancy bar of chocolate.

"Did your mom make that for you? You're so lucky," Hana says as she stares at her plain box filled with fried rice.

"No. My dad did! You guys can have some if you like. You too, Sean," Mara says, giving him a smile.

Sean smiles back. "What else can your dad make?"

“Lots of things. He can make burgers, fried chicken, pizza, dumplings, sushi and many more. He teaches me sometimes too.”

They continue to eat their lunch before Mara turns to look at Sean. “Hey,” Mara begins, leaning forward, her eyes sparkling with the curiosity every ten-year-old has. “Is it true that you don’t have a dad?”

Sean nods briefly. “I don’t have one.”

“Oh,” she replies quietly, before waving her hand around. “That’s fine. Sometimes dads can be really annoying.”

“Yeah,” Hana agrees. “My dad likes to watch soccer when my favorite show is on. What’s so great about soccer anyways.”

Sean can only reply with a smile. They wouldn’t understand.

At home, his mom is bustling to get to her second job. She kisses him goodbye but not before going through the several rules just like she does every single day. “Don’t open the door--”

“For anyone. Yeah, yeah, I get it.” Sean sighs.

“Your aunt will be here at five. Be good.”

The clock reads half past four and Sean makes a mental note that he has thirty minutes. Just thirty minutes to try and find anything that will give him a hint about his father. He first searches the cupboards in his mother’s room. Nothing but stacks of papers and make up. The second thing he tries to search is the closet. He’s seen movies where people hide boxes of their most prized possessions deep inside the back of their closets, underneath the piles of folded clothes, but much to his disappointment, all his mom has hidden is dust. Sean goes to check the nightstand, but all he sees is jewelry.

He’s done this multiple times in the past before, but just today, he is desperate to find something that would connect the points and lead him to the father figure he’s never had. Hearing his classmates talk about their dads made him envious. Sean always wondered what it felt like to have a dad.

He looks at the inside of the cabinet slowly again, and out of all the jewelry he sees, one piece stands out the most. It is a gold, heart locket, with the outer layer chipped, revealing its real metal surface underneath. His heart is beating fast against his chest as he brings it out of the cabinet. When he opens the necklace, he lets out his breath, which he doesn’t even realize he was holding. Inside the pendant is a picture of his mother and a man he’s never seen before. Even without any evidence, his gut tells him this is the man he’s been searching for his whole life, his father.

The sound of the front door shutting brings him back into reality from the trance of staring at the picture. He clenches the necklace in a fist

before shoving it inside his pocket.

“Hey, sorry I’m a little late,” his aunt says once she spots him.

“What would you like for dinner?”

Sean smiles at her. “I want spaghetti.”

“Hey, Laura. Have you ever met my father?” There’s a pause before the answer comes.

“Yes.”

“Was he nice?”

“Yes. He was a very nice man and that’s the last question I will answer,” Laura says sternly.

“Please, Laura?” Sean pleads, clasping his two hands together. “Just this once.”

Laura folds her arms against her chest, sitting on the bed beside him. “Fine. What do you want to know?”

“What’s his name?”

Another pause. “He often went by Jack, but his real name is Junwei.”

“Do you think I’ll ever be able to meet him?”

“I don’t know, Sean. Now go to sleep.”

The following day at school, instead of following the crowd to lunch, Sean goes to the library and sits in front of one of the computers. He types in Junwei. To no avail—none of these websites can direct him to what exactly he’s looking for.

“What are you doing?”

Sean jumps at the voice. It’s just Mara with her huge lunchbox, looking at him with a frown on her face.

“I’m trying to look for my dad,” he whispers.

“Your dad’s name is Junwei?” Hana asks from behind Mara. “I have an uncle called Junwei.”

Without a second of waiting, he immediately jumps to ask, “Can you tell me where he is?”

Hana frowns and looks at Mara, who’s mirroring her face. “I only know where he works ’cause I go there to get my teeth fixed. He’s a dentist,” she adds.

“It’s fine. Please give it to me.”

After school, Sean uses the school’s telephone to tell his mother that he would be going to a friend’s house to work on a project. His mother tells him not to bother them too much and hangs up. He looks

at the post-it where Hana has written an address. It's unfamiliar to him. He pats his hand on his pocket where he can feel the crumpled piece of money his mother told him only to use for emergencies, and goes to hail a taxi.

The taxi driver pulls up beside a white building and Sean gets out of the car after paying. He bends his neck to take in the full view of the tall building. His hands are shaking, but he starts to walk forward to the door. The receptionist looks at him with confusion when he asks about a man called Junwei. She tries to explain to him that you can only get an appointment if you called at least a day before, but he's even more adamant in explaining that he's not here for an appointment. Before he can say that he's looking for his dad, a voice interrupts him.

"Sean? What are you doing here?" Sean turns around and faces Laura.

"I—"

"What are you doing here?" she repeats. "C'mon. Let's go home."

"No," he exclaims. "I'm here to look for Dad."

Laura's eyes widen and as the thought sinks in, she pinches the bridge of her nose. "Sean. Your father's not here. Let's go home. I'll tell you everything, okay?"

Sean sighs dejectedly before taking her hand.

Once they're outside, she tells him the story of how his mother had met a man who was only in the states for a business trip. Even Laura herself couldn't believe her sister when she came running to her, telling her about a man who treated her as if she was the most precious diamond he'd ever laid his eyes upon. But they both knew it was a short-lived romance, so they tried their best to keep it as casual as possible. In the blink of an eye, a month passed and he had to go back to his home country, leaving her behind.

"Your father lives on the other side of the world. You won't see him here," Laura says.

Sean's disappointment runs deep within, but he tells himself that if he's able to live ten years without his father then he doesn't need to see him. He will be fine. The necklace feels cold against his bare skin.

Laura looks at Sean and she feels her heart sink. She doesn't remember ever seeing him this dejected before. She doesn't even have the heart to tell him his father didn't know he had a child whose days filled only with thoughts surrounding him.

## **Elegy for My Sanctuary**

Lamberto Diaz Diaz, Jr.

Gone like an ill wind with its thrashing thunder  
that swept away all that was dear to me  
at my college that is De Anza.

Gone the peals of mirth and laughter  
that rocked the rafters of the cafeteria.

Hope to hear from you peeps soon  
or sometime in the everafter?

Gone is my library with its trusty and cheerful  
staff and its librarians where knowledge is king

but on “lockdown” like me right now.

A hallowed place where I could conveniently hide  
from the nausea and miasma of the masses  
with herd mentality in between classes

to eat my Una Mas burrito and a strawberry agua fresca.

Gone is the bitter strife and loneliness that is part and parcel  
to being an extrovert along with the and sturm and drang  
of that chafed me like a rusty knife  
as I chased an illusory dream, an ongoing wish.

## from **The High School**

Zach Patti

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### 1. The Child

I don't need to be the kid who jumps his bike off of roofs. I've got my own thing going. I can study too; that's OK. I've found my place. I've...

I'd found my place at The High School on the cross country and track teams, where I became one of the fastest runners. This was impressive given my chronic lack of sleep and given that I didn't eat enough. The High School assigned a lot of work — some students would pull 16 hour days their junior year, day after day with one-day excursions to more like 22 hours if they had been lazy enough to fall behind. I did not work that hard, but the value system of the school had infected me enough that I still didn't want to waste time doing useless things like eating.

But some other sleep-starved kids and I ran varsity. I enjoyed running fast because it was the only thing intense enough for me to forget my parent's confusion at my subpar grades and my teachers' constant judgement that followed me even into my dreams. I'd used running to help insulate myself from the worst of my high school's insanity. In fact, because I had undiagnosed ADHD at The Extra-Fun High School, intense running really helped me focus. I got better grades on tests than kids who got better grades than me (they did ALL the homework). However, my lack of actual muscular strength and adequate sleep or nutrition really affected my running once I'd taken it seriously for a few seasons. I knew that I'd have to do some sort of strength training to fix that. There was, as I said, a lot of work at The High School, however. So without doing anything to solve the central problem of core strength, I ran through crippling physical pain, separate and distinct from the regular crippling physical pain of distance running. I knew that my grades would suffer if I stopped running because then I wouldn't be able to focus, and then my teacher's judgement would catch up to me.

The gym teachers understood that we runners were dealing with these sorts of difficult questions: of running with each other, of growing and trying to succeed communally in that isolating, dead

place in the face of mountains of work and bullshit, both fresh and stale. They knew that we grappled with these questions and did our best to take some of the teachers and work seriously.

One day, they kicked us out of the locker room. They wanted us to change on the bleachers instead.

Another kid, not the one who got his butt inspected, and I, who were seen as something like leaders decided to go ask the gym teachers/coaches why we were kicked out of the locker room. I was white and he was Asian. The locker room was very empty, a large space with just the water polo kids changing, looking at us because we'd re-entered days after being kicked out. Some of them were white, some of them were Asian.

A football coach was in the coach's office, separated from the lockers by a door and a clear window. He saw us, frowned, got up, and was out the door and in our faces in no time. He was not pleased that we were there. "Hey Hey, you're not supposed to be in here. And I KNOW you smarty-pants are smart enough to know that. You're The High School's students." I learned that frowns could be mocking.

I thought maybe I should...relieve his displeasure to try to make our visit productive. I'd heard that the kids who were kicked out of the locker room were told that there wasn't enough room there for them. "Hi, um, we're from the running team, and we were wondering why we had been kicked out, because you said there wasn't enough space for us, but it at least looks like there is plenty of room in here, and so it would be um really nice if we got to change our clothes and underwear in here instead of out in the open. Like we've been doing for years."

"No, you can't. There's not enough room in here." He maintained a loathing look in his eyes and sneering face, even though my obsequious prostration before his show of outrage at our existence managed to give his words an apologetic note. It seemed obvious to me that nothing would change his mind, so I was prepared to leave it at that, flee, and complain to the office staff, who had proven themselves so logical and helpful in the past. Flee even though the appropriate reaction was to laugh in his face at such a ridiculous and obviously insincere statement.

My friend, like myself, thought this was stupid. Unlike me, he wasn't willing to tolerate this crap and he was incensed that we still didn't

have a reason, that the coach was pissed just by our presence and especially that the coach just treated me like I'd walked in there to piss on someone's clothes. Even though, I'd honestly been much too respectful for my self-worth and honor to survive the incident.

My friend was outraged like anyone with any self-respect would be. "That's stupid! There's definitely enough room in here for us, so we should get to change in here because we don't deserve to have to change in the open. You obviously don't believe that bullshit about there not being enough space! Because if that was the reason you'd have apologized to us for that. Why have you really kicked us out — "

This coach's sneer quickly became cutting. Outrage, anger, and invective were ejaculated at my friend. This was not a reasoned conversation, nor was a reason given. We learned that we weren't worth a reason because the thought of us naked and using space — his space — was the most disgusting thing imaginable to this coach. We didn't laugh about how stupid the school was for telling boys to be studious instead of macho. For this, they despised our existence. It seemed as if he didn't want us to leave him alone so much as he wanted us to dig a pit for ourselves and die at the bottom of it.

The water polo team continued to change as if nothing was happening.

We left for the office, where the staff listened to our problems. They promised to handle the situation so that we would leave — they were obviously annoyed that we were speaking to them and distracting them from doing the hard work of serving their students — and then did nothing.

Eventually, my running coach promised to work his incomparable magic and charm. A compromise was reached where we were allowed to change under the bleachers instead of on them, separated from the outside world by a chain link fence. I guess the thought of our private parts out in public was almost as disgusting as the thought of our floppy parts around the innocent children who mattered to the staff.

I knew that I didn't like what happened to us. But I was scared that if I worried about it or got angry, it would distract me from solving my all-important math homework and answering my test questions. So I chose to pretend that it was okay, that how I'd been treated was how I was



supposed to be treated.

I never thought to thank my friend for attempting to stand up and defend my honor because that was what he did. Instead, I chose to believe that our existence and our belief that the teachers of The High School should sometimes be listened to instead of mocked was enough to make us runners guilty of tarnishing the fragile innocence of the “real” athletes. Athletics wasn't about achievement; it was about machismo and FREEDOM. Freedom from respecting others and freedom from respecting knowledge. It was about the freedom that comes with knowing that caring is for sissies. I deserved to wallow in guilt as long as I wished to treat others with kindness and do some of my homework. I deserved to wallow in guilt because I wasn't a fuckboi. And as I said, I chose to believe this because it seemed like the easiest way to stay focused on math problems.

Almost every time someone talked to me, I expected them to yell at me in the way that the football coach had, since I was concerned that my presence was disturbing them, since I wasn't the sort of kid who rode his bike off of roofs into pools. I even allowed myself to be convinced by the football coach that my dad was disgusted by me.

## **2. The Assistant Football Coach**

It's my job to teach kids to be confident, to work hard and neither take nor make no excuses.

How were the water polo kids supposed to learn those things if they had to share their locker room with the nerds who talked about homework in the locker room? For fuck's sakes, kids are supposed to brag about one night stands in the locker room. That's just how they get a healthy self respect. Unless they're defective or something.

Fucking nerds. Too many nerds at this school.

## Double-Helix, Double-Consciousness: Character Doubles in “Fatherland”\*

Hannah Estolano

*\*First Place, 2020 Jim Luotto Literary Essay Prize*

Generations of Western colonialism led to the destruction of Vietnam and, consequently the destruction of Vietnamese identity. After the Vietnam war, the Western media portrayed racially-biased accounts of Vietnamese people, problematically suggesting a singular storyline for their diasporic experiences. Interviewing author Viet Thanh Nguyen, Dao Strom from *diaCRITICS* discusses this issue that Nguyen explores in his works: “You’ve described ‘identity’ as ‘always fluid, flexible and multiply defined.’ [...] and [...] that there is no one prevalent storyline to sum up the Vietnamese or Southeast Asian experience” (Nguyen). Nguyen explores this “multiply defined” identity in his short story “Fatherland,” wherein two distant half-sisters sharing the same first name meet for the first time in Vietnam. Nguyen presents these sisters as character doubles who respectively symbolize differing social realities of Vietnamese identity: Westernized culturalization and pre-colonial Vietnamese culture. Though both sisters each symbolize one of the social realities, they contextualize their respective self-perceptions in reference to one another. Diaspora connects the realities of their identities and, in this connection, they are able to experience a plurality of perspectives, rather than a singular storyline—the experience of double-consciousness.

To begin, the Ly sisters’ identical names suggest their character doubling. The story opens with the Ly family’s background during the Vietnam war. After his former wife escapes to the United States with their three children, the sisters’ father marries his mistress and fathers three more children. When the eldest daughter, Vivien (her americanized name), visits Phuong (the eldest daughter of their father’s second family) and her family in Vietnam, Phuong muses on the comparison between her and Vivien throughout her childhood—as their father often highlights the “achievements” of his eldest daughter from America: “[Their father] often compared Phuong to her absent namesake, which had cultivated in Phuong both a sense of yearning for this sister and also some undeniable jealousy” (Nguyen 4-5). Through this, the sisters are character doubles as their comparison underlines their same name yet different upbringings. This coexistence of

similarity and difference insightfully highlights Phuong's self-doubt as she insecurely compares herself to her sister. Specifically, her self-doubt is the peculiar combination of simultaneously having an "undeniable jealousy" and "yearning" for Vivien. This conflict underlines Phuong's struggle with defining her individuality as she relates fundamental parts of her native Vietnamese identity to her sister's Americanized one. In other words, this comparison—at least in the story's beginning—causes Phuong to overlook the unique qualities that essentially define her "namesake" from her sister's. Having said this, Phuong's struggle suggests the inextricable connection between the two social realities wherein she perceives herself through the context of Vietnamese and American cultures.

Aside from Phuong's personal struggle, Phuong and Vivien themselves symbolize the two social realities of the Vietnamese double-consciousness, wherein Vivien and Phuong represent the American (Western) and Vietnamese cultural perspectives respectively. As mentioned, Vivien represents Western culture through her American lifestyle. This is apparent when Phuong observes Vivien's tourist attire at their father's tourist job: "While Phuong wore gloves extending to her upper arms and nylons underneath her jeans, her sister wore brief shorts and a T-shirt that exposed her bra straps and the waistband and thong of her panties [...]. Despite her bared skin, Vivien neglected to use mosquito repellent" (7). Vivien's "brief shorts" and "bared skin" enhance her representation of American culture—in that, she possesses a Western mindset to prioritize her individual wishes in being comfortable yet fashionable in a "hot" climate over protecting her physical health. Moreover, she displays her cultural ignorance and individualist perception as she is not very mindful of Vietnam's conservative society. Essentially, Vivien represents the individualist mindset that is common in Western culture. In presenting the two sisters as abstract representations, Vivien's outfit and Phuong's outfit of "[wearing] gloves" and "nylons" create a literal visual of the two cultures coexisting. This image suggests that the polarizing cultural perceptions can coexist and interact within the double-consciousness experienced by a Vietnamese-American.

Conversely, Phuong's representation of Vietnamese culture is evident when she is shocked by the lingerie Vivien gifts her: "Inside were a black lace brassiere and black lace panties [...] rather than one of the scratchy, full-bottomed cotton affairs that Phuong's mother bought for her in packages of a dozen. 'I can't wear these!' Phuong said [...]. 'They're scanda-

lous!” (9). Phuong experiences a culture shock when she receives Vivien’s gift, having been raised in Vietnam’s more conservative environment. Seeing that the “black lace” lingerie is a direct confrontation of her sexual identity, it seems that the society’s traditional view of gender roles implies for women to be conservative and not openly sexual or scandalous—hence Phuong’s surprise. In this way, Phuong, due to her traditional upbringing in normally receiving the “cotton affairs,” views herself more conservatively. This is not necessarily a negative nor positive view, but it is distinctly different from Vivien’s portrayal as she is raised in American culture. Essentially, Phuong’s position in her native culture is ingrained within the function of her family, rather than actively pursuing her individual (perhaps sexual) desires that are symbolized through the “black lace panties.” This collectivist perception is common within Vietnamese and other Asian communities, as the family holds priority over individual desires and interests.

Having mentioned Phuong and revisiting her personal struggle, she confronts her double-consciousness as she examines the numerous pictures taken of her throughout Vivien’s stay. As an aside, the depiction of Vietnamese people by the Western media is demonstrated through the tourists’ picture-taking at the restaurant where Phuong works: “[I]n a golden, form-fitting ao dai [...] [s]ometimes guests would ask to photograph her, requests that initially flattered her and now irritated her. [...] Striking this or another pose, Phuong could pretend that she was not a hostess doing a foreigner’s bidding but rather a model, a starlet, or her sibling namesake” (4). The photos taken by the “guests” or tourists symbolize the Western media. This in part also demonstrates the voyeuristic fetishization by the Western media, as Phuong is under the “foreigner’s bidding” when she is forced to “pose” as a tourist prop that is stereotyped as “exotic” and “subservient.” Pictures are an important motif throughout the story, as they function to archive historic moments. The tourists’ photos thus echo the biased documentation of the Vietnam war by the Americans that had happened in the past—which had created a single narrative of Vietnam and its people. In this sense, the pictures taken of Phuong, like the biased narrative imposed by the Americans, reinforce a singular depiction of how Vietnamese women supposedly are. Furthermore, she is “irritated” as she realizes that the photos wherein she “strik[es] [...] pose[s]” for tourists inaccurately objectifies her Vietnamese existence as being a tourist attraction rather than an actual woman who is proud of her Vietnamese heritage. Interestingly, Phuong at the same

time views herself through a Western lens, perceiving herself as a “model, a starlet, or her sibling namesake”—underlining the influence of the Western world on her self-perceived identity. Viewing herself as Vivien while also experiencing irritation of being objectified demonstrates Phuong’s personal clash between her Vietnamese culture and Western influences—ultimately showcasing her experienced double-consciousness. Coupled with Vietnam’s conservative view towards women and their sexuality, American culture sexually fetishizes Phuong as being “exotic.” Ultimately then, her double-consciousness demonstrates the multiple cultural perspectives that define her Vietnamese identity, and, in seeing how both cultural perspectives can be gender-oppressive, she can overcome such obstacles.

At the story’s end wherein she burns the photo of her and Vivien, Phuong accepts the plurality of perspectives that define her identity. After Vivien returns back home to America, she mails the Ly family the photos they had taken throughout her trip. Sifting through the photos, Phuong analyzes the photo of her and Vivien at the airport: “Their father had forced [Phuong] to wear an ao dai for Vivien’s departure [...] . [...] The photograph flared when she touched it with fire, Vivien’s features melting first, their faces vanishing in flame. [...] Phuong rose and scattered their ashes” (16). The burning of the photo symbolically underlines Phuong overcoming her insecurities when it comes to the comparison of her and Vivien. The depiction of Phuong (wearing an ao dai) and Vivien suggests the coexistence of native Vietnamese and American cultures. As their “faces [vanish] in [the] flame,” the incineration of both Phuong and Vivien indicates the inextricable connection between cultures that Phuong will always have. In recognizing this inevitable connection, she seeks to start anew—“scatter[ing]” the photo’s “ashes” as a symbol of her moving forward with her life. This may suggest Phuong’s acceptance of the double-consciousness that she experiences, and with this acceptance, she does not let these two cultures define her. In other words, she metaphorically “burns” the burdens that both cultures imposed on her, and seeks to redefine her social relationships to these two cultural realities. With this said, Phuong accepts the plurality of perspectives presented by these cultures, and recognizes that her and Vivien’s facial “features” that burn in the photo “melt” together into a collective identity of a Vietnamese woman. She recognizes how both Vietnamese and Western cultures hold back her potential in gender-oppressive ways, and thus desires to independently achieve success despite these cultural obstacles.

Essentially, experiencing a double-consciousness enables Phuong to recognize her own burdens and cultural oppressions. The coexistence of the two clashing cultures is an inevitable outcome considering the history of colonization, warfare, and presently, globalization that still affect Vietnam and other Asian countries. Phuong's experience can be considered one of the many different experiences for the current Vietnamese generation. The inner-conflicts within a colonized identity can yield different results in terms of how a colonized individual recognizes their generational trauma and oppression. It is imperative, especially in literature, to tell these stories as this promotes the different experiences and aspects of cultures that affect how an individual views their existence in a globalized world.

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