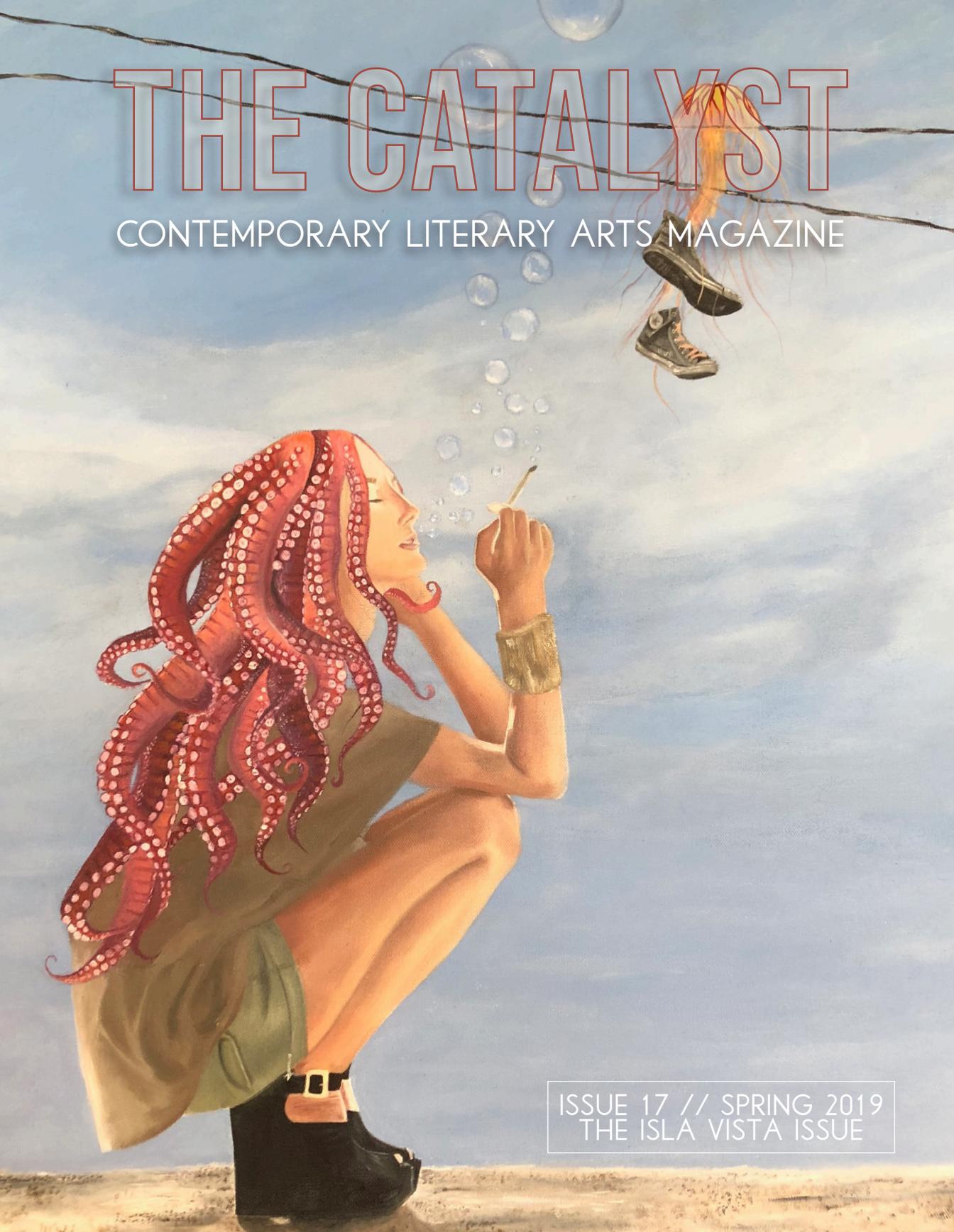


THE CATALYST

A surreal painting of a woman with octopus hair blowing bubbles, with a jellyfish and shoes floating above. The woman is crouching on a sandy beach, wearing a green dress and black boots. She has a gold cuff on her left wrist and is blowing a stream of bubbles. Above her, a jellyfish with orange tentacles and a pair of black sneakers are suspended in the air. The background is a blue sky with soft clouds.

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE

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THE ISLA VISTA ISSUE

The Catalyst remembers the Isla Vista tragedy.

May 23, 2014

George Chen

Cheng Yuan "James" Hong

Weihan "David" Wang

Katherine Breann Cooper

Christopher Ross Michaels-Martinez

Veronika Elizabeth Weiss

THE TEAM

MANAGING EDITORS

Jasmine Benafghoul
Olivia Berriz

LITERATURE EDITOR

Nidhi Khanolkar

ART EDITOR

Christine Ho

FACULTY ADVISORS

Brian Donnelly
Tyler Shoemaker

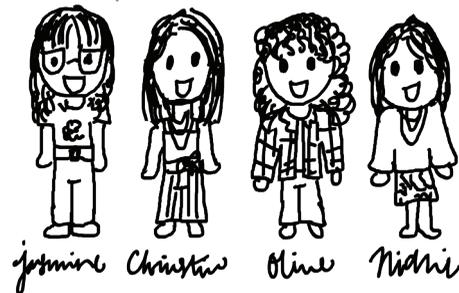
COVER ART // LILLY TAYLOR

WRITERS

Mishal Al-asfour
Myriam Arias
Hina Asano
Isabella Bautista
Jasmine Benafghoul
Austin Bernales
Olivia Berriz
Madi Braum
Kristina Ching
Jazzy Colbert
Hugh Cook
Nolan Fuss
Maya T. Garabedian
Drea Godsey
Julia Goldstein
Madhu Kannan
Erica Kaplan
Maya Keshav
Nidhi Khanolkar
Mikayla Knight
Aneesha Lal
Andy Le
Sofia Lyon
Belle Machado
Dallin Mello
Mei-Mei Mijares
Colleen Panero
Julieta Corral Phun
Harrison Pyros
Baily Rossi
Ignacio Vargas Ruiz Jr.
Kahlo Smith
Sean Sorbera
Genesis Taber
Elleni Velasquez

ARTISTS

Marina Alvarez
Olivia Berriz
Angelica Casey
Hugh Cook
dean crimmel
Maya T. Garabedian
Iraa Guleria
Canon Hastings
June Hasty
Christine Ho
Erica Kaplan
Nidhi Khanolkar
Mikayla Knight
Paloma Lamb
Sei M.
Nick Malone
Madison Mead
Aakash Mehta
Skyler Melnick
Jordan Metz
Casey Mix
Andrew Nguyen
Kajsa Philippa Niehusen
Emma Peterson
Sol Rapson
Aine Roonan
Michelle Staufenbiel
Irene Suh
Lilly Taylor
Jaquelynn Tesch
Sophia Thompson
Lauren Wicks
Spencer Williams
Sarah Wilson



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Hello and welcome!

This will be my last quarter writing to you as an editor for *The Catalyst*, and subsequently, the end of my time here with this wonderful publication. I have many things to say, most of which will probably end in tears.

This is our fifth annual Isla Vista edition of *The Catalyst*, marking five years since the Isla Vista tragedy. We remember and honor the six victims whose lives were lost on May 23, 2014. The everlasting community and strength of IV continues to amaze me, its history lives through us. These events are part of that history, and we take counsel from them and grow together as a community.

Today I have a story for y'all. My freshman year here, I woke up early one morning, though I can't remember the time, got ready, and hopped on a bus. I didn't care what bus it was or where it was going, I knew I just had an itch to go. Somewhere, anywhere—just away. I will admit, it was quite frightening. That probably sounds ridiculous now, and when I tell this story to others I can't help but laugh at myself. It was about two weeks into my freshman year. I can only deduce that the moment was a flickering impulse that I decided to act upon, without any further thought. I didn't get very far. After all, I was just a scared 17-year-old who thought if I traveled any further then I wouldn't be able to find my way home. I know Uber is a thing, but *still*.

When I say I didn't get very far, I truly did not. I lived in the infamous FT and made it all the way to the Camino Real Marketplace. Ah yes, quite the big adventure (I give you permission to laugh at this by the way). I walked into Anna's Bakery, ordered a lemon bar and coffee, sat outside, and simply ate my breakfast as I watched people come and go. After I was done, I wandered a bit, and took the next bus back to my dorm. I was satisfied, content.

Like I said, it was a decision made on impulse, a leap of faith. I know it was only a quick bus ride to a pastry shop one Saturday morning, but nevertheless: a leap of faith. I didn't know where I was going, or what I'd end up doing. What I thought would be so daunting led me to something so comforting. That's what it was like joining *The Catalyst*. My very first day, I followed a girl with a turquoise backpack because she looked like she too was headed in the same direction. She was, and it saved me a lot of time searching by myself (thank you Christine). I didn't recognize any faces, and furthermore, I had never shared my creative writing with a single soul. If I thought taking a random bus to a random destination was scary, this was *mortifying*. Everyone seemed to know one another, and on our very first free write, I felt terribly unconfident in my writing capabilities and stumbled in reading out loud. Despite it all, I stayed. I was quiet through most of my first quarter, mostly an observer watching the unveiling of something magical.

I'm infinitely grateful to myself for making the decision to stay. I'll save you from the fluff of what *The Catalyst* means to me, how much I've grown to love everything about it down to our grueling six hour sessions of reviewing the final draft. I love it so, so much, and leaving it is becoming increasingly more difficult as the days pass.

I am ecstatic to present to you my last and final issue of *The Catalyst*. The past two years have been nothing short of amazing working with such talented folks, and I couldn't be more proud to leave you on this note. 17 has always been my favorite number, too.

Adieu, adieu, adieu!

Jasmine Benafghoul

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ART // IRENE SUH



PART I

CREATIVE PROSE

NOTES FROM A NATIVE DAUGHTER

ALIEN LAND

THE PIANO ROOM

UNPACKING AND UNLOADING

A LETTER HOME

TO THE CANDLEMAKER

I WANTED TO SHOW YOU ALL OF ME

DINNER WITH GRANDMA

SHOELACES

Notes from a Native Daughter

By Sofia Lyon

Joan Didion's essay on growing up in Sacramento, reappropriated for the contemporary Valley Girl

One might imagine the view from the US Bank Tower serves as a panoptic heart for the city of Los Angeles. And all superficialities considered, it is. People will come to the tower to see the lights and all that happens before placing their trust on the ever underwhelming "Skyslide." However, it is from this high vantage point that the secrecy of Los Angeles becomes visible: the sparkling, vast landscape of skyscrapers and celebrity appear as but a thin veil, delicately placed over the angels who inhabit the field of dreams. For those who cannot hold onto its radiant image long enough to remain, the visitors and the unsuccessful movie principals, each star lining the Hollywood Walk of Fame is composed of a million little diamonds, glistening under the metropolitan moonlight and comparable to the few celestial bodies scattered throughout the dark city sky. To those whose hearts are indelibly embedded in the City of Angels, to the children whose names were graffitied before they were ever spoken, that radiance shines in the deepest parts of Downtown, in the surrounding backwater, in the bus stops and in hidden thalassic gardens.

My childhood resides in summer evenings on the residential streets of Sherman Oaks. Undulant sidewalks line this un-disturbing suburbia, now an echo of the tumultuous

effulgence of youth. If I were fortunate my mother would ask me to accompany her on excursions to the nearby Fashion Square Mall. Many of my more passive childhood hours were spent deep in the recesses of Macy's watching women ogle at ornate dishware and luxury garments; anything to sustain their illusion. My mother, a Yugoslavian transplant in the midst of the Los Angeles mentality did her best to mimic this behavior, gradually developing an addiction to the figment of permanence. Decorative plates filled a glass cabinet in a hallway of our home. Glass containing glass; and we see the fragility of the Californian fate, complacency a tremor from shattering this glittering façade.

My neighbors and I were never well acquainted. I had what I would have then considered a good friend who lived down the street from me. But the foundation of our friendship was founded on the principle of our proximity. Eventually I moved away, and we do not speak often. Here people and things pass always and ever beyond reach. Down the street from my previous place of residency in the San Fernando Valley was home to Dupar's, a restaurant of comfort food and comforting hospitality. As Thursday evening regulars my father and I befriended a few of the waiters. The corner booth by the window hosted many of our philosophical discussions, and saw me in the moments when

I understood the pain of moving on. But all of the freshly-baked donuts and introspection were not enough to succor a sense of constancy. In an abrupt end to a semi-eternal tradition, Dupar's, a seeming anomaly in this transient city, closed two weeks following our last dinner.

Los Angeles, namely the Hollywood area, became aggrandized by the entertainment industry. While the talk of celebrity and glimmering promise is often a result of utter confabulation, an interesting phenomenon regarding the true nature of Los Angeles reveals itself in the lifespan of a film set and the accoutrement of people and things attached to it. These projects are of course interim, but during this brief, half-life, a comprehensible routine develops. Bonds form between coworkers and co-stars, memorable, yet just weak enough to break without remorse. However, when one is static in a place of inconstancy, one may make the mistake of attempting to pull that permanence out of the void. Imagine the feelings of the Californian starlet at the end of the production phase of her first feature, as the gleam of stardom recedes with indecent haste in her rearview. Like finding oneself in the backseat of a car with the most volatile boy you have come to know as his hands slip from yours like film from a reel. There was never a prelude nor an intermediate phase to Los Angeles. It only ever was, and it only ever ends.

I recall riding in the passenger seat on long car drives throughout the sprawling streets during my adolescence, knowing invariably that I was merely a gear in the city's ever

I have never known such constancy in my life never within my family home or friendships

turning heart. I was destined to abandon Los Angeles the moment I was born there. And it is becoming ever more obvious to me now, as I have never known such constancy in my life; never within my family, home, or friendships. Presently, all I maintain from the city of Los Angeles is the ephemeral spirit it instilled within me; my heart cannot be still. I am a product of this city that never stays. This city could not hold me, and I have yet to discover onto whom or what I can hold.

Los Angeles evades the constancy of the neighborhood. Whether the actors on a film set, the amiable servers at a beloved restaurant, the best friend across the street, or the boy and girl left broken-hearted under the illuminated boutique signs on Ventura Boulevard—all come and go at the same rate. Constancy is not embraced by the land of highways and diminishing aspirations. And the center cannot hold. We cannot hold on to what enchants us about the City of Angels any more than the wanderers can grasp their hallucinations of it before the reality sets in. I am brought once again to the memories of trees on the streets of Sherman Oaks; to the moment I came to the realization that Dupar's may just serve the best french fries I have had the privilege of enjoying; to the look on that boy's face when we realized we were doomed to feel raw, unadulterated, fleeting emotions. These brief sensations, nothing but fleeting products of the minute are now forever suspended amongst the hidden ocean of lights we are made aware of when given an entire view of the city. Los Angeles could not hold me. We, the angels, are enamored of a city that never ceases to break our hearts. ▲

PHOTO // PALOMA LAMB + EMMA PETERSON

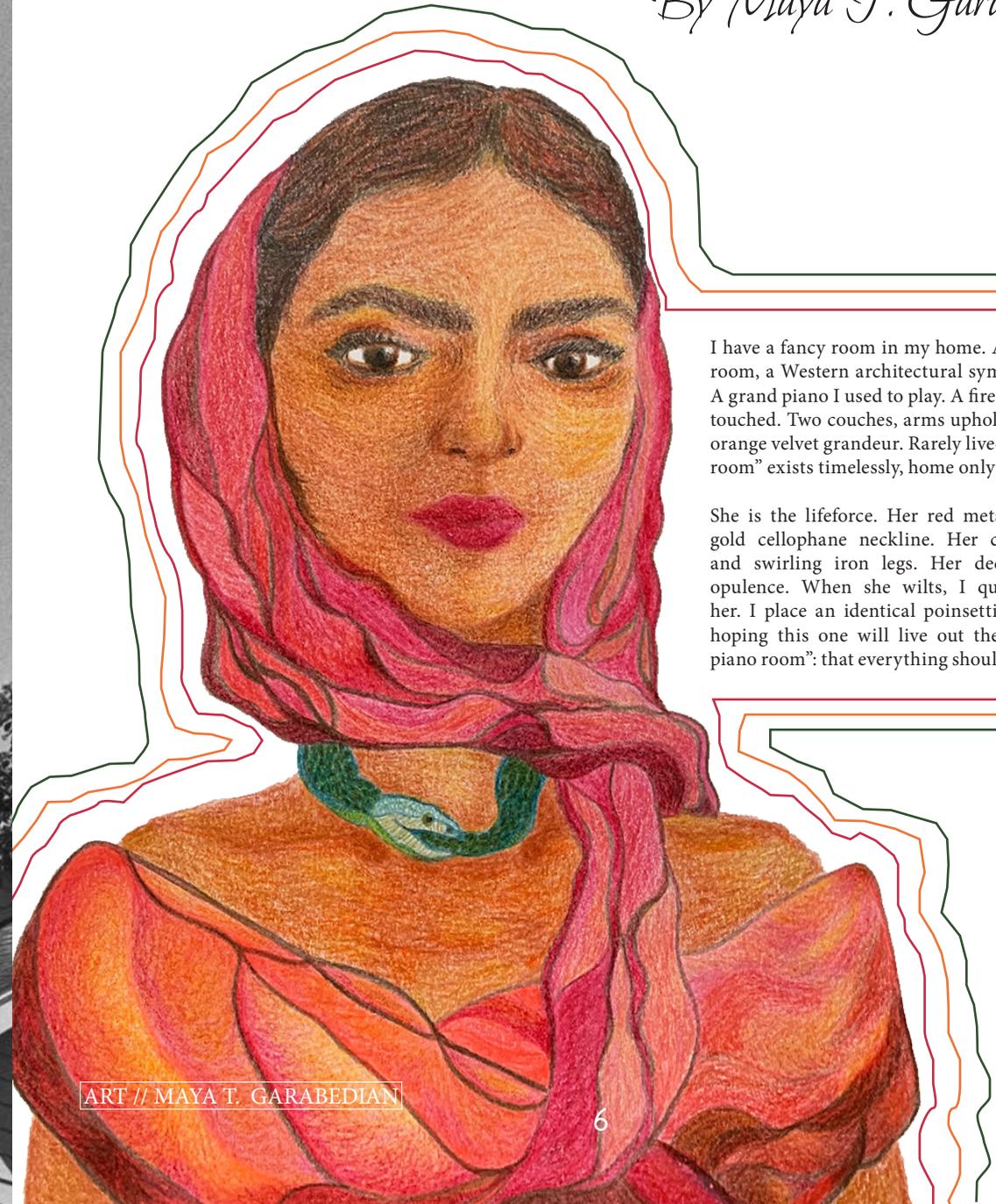


The Piano Room

By Maya T. Garabedian

I have a fancy room in my home. A second living room, a Western architectural symbol of success. A grand piano I used to play. A fireplace I've never touched. Two couches, arms upholstered in burnt orange velvet grandeur. Rarely lived in, "the piano room" exists timelessly, home only to a poinsettia.

She is the life force. Her red metallic dress and gold cellophane neckline. Her cast stone seat and swirling iron legs. Her deceptive ageless opulence. When she wilts, I quietly dethrone her. I place an identical poinsettia in her chair, hoping this one will live out the truth of "the piano room": that everything should resist time. ▲



ART // MAYA T. GARABEDIAN

ALIEN LAND

By Drea Godsey

It is beautiful, this alien land we live in. We are coming together in a world swirling with neon excitement. I see it in all the exotic flora imported from Spain. I am a passenger looking out the window at a freeway with no billboards. It's there in the leather-laced shoes and leather-braided flip flops. It's excess in careless spending on coffee, tequila, and french fries. These things will never hurt us. It's fooling the elders into thinking we're one of them in our mini blazers. We can change who we are while we're still young. It's loud as I fly on my board. It's the zenith of social hierarchy. The freshman slouch and the 21-year-olds square their shoulders when they walk. It's a girl 12 months your predecessor extending you a party invitation. It's a mad tea party, we all dress up. All the blonde girls and all the tall boys. And all the boys who recently turned nice because they realized being mean wouldn't get them laid. My core beliefs changed here. It's who adapts. The frogs and all the screeching crows and gulls. Glass bottle memories. Sleepovers. We don't love each other like that here. It's music with syncopated beats and simplified meaning. Everything is yellow. Tropical fruit and topical oil. Californication cocktailled with Santa Barbara Pharma. I ask a lot of questions here. We all practice the art of tuning in and tuning out. Shakespeare and the other rebels drive our responses in this land. Uncertainty clothes us in dark hoodies as we watch the sun set over the silent mountains. Arms extended, veneers exposed. Dark clouds come and go, like leaves falling from the coral trees. It's the tiny aggressions and the adrenaline encounters often harvest friendships; companionship is vital.

We are a small tribe of travelers, Some have traveled very far to get here.

I am glad I am not from this world
So I can step back and appreciate it.
However, I am one with the grains of sand
With which my friends have covered me. ▲



PHOTO // SOL RAPSON

UNPACKING AND UNLOADING

BY HARRISON PYROS

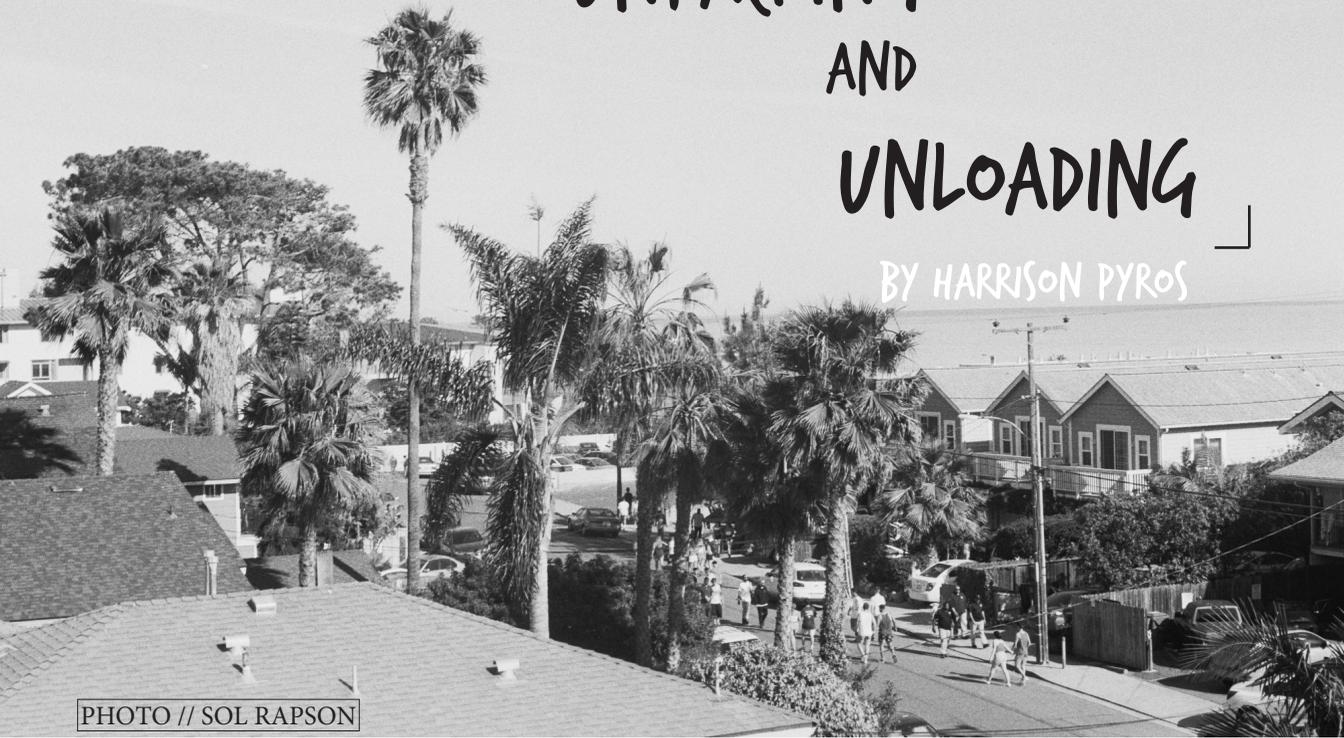


PHOTO // SOL RAPSON

I just woke up with the worst headache of my life and here are the memories of last night that immediately surface: Fleetwood Mac, the origin story of dropping it low, gay frat boy body language, colored condoms, bad 2000's fashion, and ridiculous coworkers. Now that's a senseless cluster of information, so I'm going to unpack it by going back to the scene.

The night started off as something a bit larger than a kickback but not so much a party, and somewhere in between the rounds of Rage Cage (or Gaucho Ball) and the emptying of a wine-bag, a sense of reality decided to leave the room. Cut to: me sitting on the bathroom counter, yammering through tangent after tangent with three others, one of whom is Lucas in the corner doing key-bumps even though we just railed some lines, and another is in the tub on the phone calling our friend in the other room to play "Dreams" the remastered edition. And no, I'm not going to take a breath to allow you to process all that because at this point I'm telling a story per Gabby's request to the bathroom-crowd about this one idiotic girl I worked with in an office.

Okay, short tangent. So basically I interned for a company that would get great discounts on amusement parks and concerts, and a ton of people had bought tickets to this rapper's show that was coming up. But instead, he ended up

dying unexpectedly and it was all in the news and there was this notice posted in the office about the entire thing. This idiotic girl that I worked with was looking at the notice, turns to me, and I swear to god, asks as if she's confused,

"Wait, so is there still gonna be a show?"

I think I must have blacked out because I don't remember how I responded, but long story short, that girl ended up getting fired from the internship because she was so incompetent with Excel and kept eating edibles at work, and last thing I heard was that she lives some place in Isla Vista and leaked her own sex tape in an attempt to launch a reality-show career.

Anyway, Lucas finishes doing bumps and the other friend clambers out of the bathtub and Gabby leads us back to the main crowd in the main room with the neon and the commotion and the clusterfuck, and I look away for maybe a second and Gabby suddenly has more wine in her hand even though I'm certain the wine bag is gone, but the next second more wine appears in my hand too—but really I pour it myself even though I don't need it since I drink too much, but in the fun way—and the conversation spins my head like it's on a swivel to have me focus on that hot blonde kid Connor in the corner who's "totally-one-hundred-percent-straight" even though he's the epitome of a twink and he's talking to someone while his recent-ex-girlfriend is across the room

nursing a fifth of Skyy Vodka (gross) while making eyes at Connor even though he's not looking and hasn't been looking; someone brings up that we should do some ecstasy tonight and I'm making too many similarities to Bret Easton Ellis novels; someone falls; someone laughs; someone finally puts on the strobe light we've all been waiting for; I look away for another second and the Skyy bottle apparently goes missing and Lucas thinks he gets a bloody nose from the blow and Gabby puts her phone on silent to ignore her boring boyfriend she didn't think to invite, and I see that only five minutes have passed.

We hear the siren call of Stevie Nicks: "Dreams" starts to play—the original, not the remastered edition—but the drugs dictate we dance anyway. At this point I'm not too sure how long we dance or the specifics of what we discuss except I do know for a fact Gabby says "apple bottom jeans" at least seven times, but I might be projecting. People are trying to get organized to head to a party since this pregame has gotten out of hand, but everyone keeps getting distracted so the organization keeps stopping short.

This is when my phone dings.

I'm reading the message with one eye, still swaying to the beat, and I smirk as I type a response because this message is from a person whose text only means one thing. The night is still young and I'm feeling adventurous enough to make it work when Gabby asks,

"Who's hitting you up?"

"The LGBTQ community."

"All of them?"

"Just my favorite."

"Oh, the frat star."

I knock back the rest of my drink and tell her that I'll meet her at the party since I have a sudden engagement that needs fondling, and I slide out the door into the Isla Vistan night.

I'll skip over the walking part and the couple times I trip over a curb since it's not entirely entertaining. Cut to: me showing up at his place with an audacious amount of sexual energy. The door opens to reveal my favorite frat star: king of gay frat boy body language. I mean, he's technically bi, but that's all semantics at this point.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"Not going out tonight?" I ask.

"Got a paper due."

"Unfortunate."

And it's this riveting conversation that launches us into it. What can I say, I'm an econ major, I love efficiency. A stumble to the bedroom, some multi-tasked undressing-groping, and ten minutes later we have reached the conclusion of a textbook quickie. The frat star announces this conclusion with a very dramatic moan—a sound which is still reverberating in my head like a trapped echo—and a flourish that is most politely called *impressive*. Like, a sperm bank nurse would be impressed.

I finish too and the clothes come back on just as efficiently as they came off. I say thanks and that I have places to be so my shoe is only partly on when I throw my goodbye over my shoulder

and check Gabby's location. On the move again.

"How was sinning?" Gabby asks when I arrive.

"Good, but I'm parched," I say and we melt back into the crowd. We're talking, we're dancing, I see the same person in fifty different outfits—everyone in this square mile looks the same. Gabby keeps looking over and smiling at me like she's told me a joke I'm not getting, and then Lucas is smiling at me too. I ask what's up but they just giggle and say nothing.

Gabby starts positioning my face for better angles as we're taking selfies, and this is weird because she usually doesn't take selfies, but I don't have time to meditate on this detail because we are pulled into another game of Rage Cage and my stomach lurches but I decide I'm okay since I didn't take any ecstasy like people were talking about earlier.

The game begins, cups are being stacked, beer is being chugged, swears and demands are being thrown around like they're trading stock in *The Wolf of Wall Street*. I think I hear the familiar chant of "seven, seven, seven!" behind me but it might just be a manifestation of PTSD. I wonder if it's politically-correct to make a joke about that.

The game ends, the Bitch Cup is avoided, and I'm regaining a sense of composure when our friend appears at our side and says, "Who's looking to ski?"

We move to the bathroom and my friend is looking at me weird while Gabby and Lucas are still grinning, and it's not until we're under the harsh florescent lights with a mirror do I see why. I'm slack-jawed for a moment, panic spearing into me like I've just lost control on the bike path before turning to my friends and shout, "Why did no one tell me I have cum in my hair?"

It's globbed there almost comically and there's so much it looks like I could use it to audition for a role as 1960's Clark Kent. Part of me wants to believe it could be mistaken for hair gel, but I know that's being too optimistic, and I'm removing it from my hair like you would jelly, my hands moving to get it out with the same urgency of how a dog digs a hole.

Meanwhile, my friends are howling with laughter and I'm so mortified that I've been sporting a load of semen in my hair like it's the season's hot new beret that I can only cuss. My mind is short-circuiting and I'm trying to decipher how many people saw me like this and the only thing Gabby can get out through laughs is, "But at least the selfies are good."

Only a bit later into the night I decide sabotage my own power grid and thus blackout. So fast forward to me now, absolutely struggling in my bathroom, popping ibuprofen like it's coming out a Pez dispenser, so disheveled I look like a suburban mom caught up in the heat of the opioid epidemic. I'm looking at my reflection but avoiding my eyes because I don't need that negativity this morning—instead, I'm looking at the spot in my hair that has betrayed me: a hardened clump that looks like I fell asleep with hairspray in. The spot stares back at me, still crusty and emanating a personified horror that Stephen King could only dream of putting into words.

My phone dings. Gabby has sent me the pictures—which turns out to be a lovely cohesive series—all tied together with the caption: "Loads of fun last night!" ▲

A Letter Home

By Mishal Al-asfour



1
Like the doorknob and the cutting board and the carpet underfoot, these worn-out words are so commonplace, so banal, they appear... meaningless. So familiar, I look right through them.



2
But how could I have been so blind? Blind to all that you did for me?



3
Swept up in the whirlwind-circus of college, constantly told that I need to do more, be more, achieve more, my eyes remained fixed out there. But if I had only stopped and looked in here, I would have seen all that you had given me.



4
Only when I left did I realize what I had taken for granted.



5
YOU are the reason I am here today. YOU sustained me! Every day, giving and giving, asking for nothing in return. Patiently waiting to greet me in the morning, and calmly hushing me to sleep at night.



6
No days off.



7
How did you do it? How could such a selfless soul exist?



8
My friends think I'm crazy — they say that a building can't have a soul. But you were more than a building. You were my home.

My family was built with bone and blood by black magic women. The kind that quietly slink in the shadows waiting for their pin-drop moment to strike. They slept with one hand firmly wrapped around a rosary and knives under their pillows. These women did not put it past their god to leave prayers unanswered, so they armed themselves, wondering, who a woman can trust?

But that was then, the times of these women, straight out of a Carlos Santana song, are long gone. When the women in my family arrived at America's gates I think they forgot that they used to be witches, black magic brujas who burned for being loud and brown and proud. They snuffed out their magic and became the fire bearers themselves. These women took matches and set their once caramelo skin ablaze in hopes that the soft stinging could blanket the feeling of empty stomachs, or singe their bodies enough to produce the light America never gave them. They bent and twisted the word until "womanhood" meant slowly burning away at everything you have to give someone else a glimmer of light.

They taught their daughters to coat emotions in wax and heat. Trained in the art of becoming household candles, we are supposed to be the lights of the world. Even though I've had the best examples I never have been much of a fire bearer: I like the darkness too much for that. My abuela is the best candle. As the original candlemaker, she dipped and molded each of us so that we may be the glowing embers to which our husbands turn for hope. And although she is the best candle, sometimes, when she'd go to work, she'd be so tired she could only think of herself. On those days she would forget she was a family candle, on those days she became a seamstress. She sat making her own sort of magic out of nothing but her hands, and she could pretend she was anywhere else. There, she was not Eva: the twenty-something-coffee-skinned-melting-candle of a woman. In that place, she had no children, no husband coming home angry and tired with his hands better acquainted with cigarettes than her own. In that place her foot on the pedal did not start the sewing machine, instead her aching foot pressed the pedal of the green '72 Suburban sitting in the garage, and she would drive away knowing exactly where she was going. Or maybe the quick lift and pull of the bobbin is a song and her thread is strands of inheritance connecting her heart to her home country, entwining her cempasuchil flowers with California poppies.

But, Eva, this child with children and early wrinkles knows this is all a fantasy. She never learned how to drive, and even if she had, they cut the last remaining ties she had to home when she got to America's gates. Here, in America, she is not a black magic woman but just a seamstress. If she truly had been a black magic woman, she'd have burned with all the other brujas that didn't make it to the other side. So she stifled her magic and lived the only way she knew how: she burned. She burned so much that by the time I met her she was a flickering flame, swimming in a pool of melted wax. And all I could see was how soft she had become. But sometimes when she'd look at me with her honey eyes they'd glow with something else. Old and dangerous, like embers crackling just before they dance. It must've been the fires that tried to destroy all the women before us. And looking into her eyes I realize that maybe I was wrong. Maybe the women in my family aren't soft in a fragile and breakable way, they're soft because they're malleable, sacrificial candles for everybody else but adaptations for themselves. They learned to live with the very fire meant to destroy them, a fire that will outlive every man that angrily calls us bitches. But they forget these witches pass on a fire that burns in the veins of their daughters. A fire that keeps us alive. ▲

To the Candlemaker

By Myriam Arias

PHOTO // NICK MALONE



I wanted to show you all of me

There is so much more of me. I should say that in an angry tone, "There is so much more of me! You really missed out by leaving"—but I still can't seem to be mad at you.

There is so much more of me: I wanted to put myself into little boxes wrapped with the colors that remind me of your smile and give them to you. There is so much more of me: it would take an infinite number of songs to explain all the swirling thoughts in my head—but I took the time to fish them out, one by one, and collect them all into a playlist so you could listen, if you were curious. There is so much more of me: my dreams spool out of me like yarn (all those sheep I stay up counting), and I find myself knitting sweaters, but only in your size. So tell me, what am I supposed to do with them?

There is so much more of me that I had hoped to share. That I was sure could make up for all the flaws I'm sure you noticed.

If you had only taken the time to see all of me. ▲

by eireni velasquez



ART // JUNE HASTY



BY MAYA T. GARABEDIAN

Dinner with Grandma

funny how she usually gets our pronouns wrong. Her first language is Armenian, a genderless language. English is her fourth, so she makes some adorable mistakes. She stands between us, oblivious to the non-verbal conversation occurring around her, instead staring into the baking sheet as if it's a portal to 1940's Lebanon.

"Don't always take," she continues on, grabbing two fistfuls of the air in front of her. "The family relies on one another to survive, and if you always take, and do not give, you may survive but you will survive alone." Tears well in her eyes.

My sister and I look at each other blankly. It's clear she's not just talking about the food anymore, but we don't know enough to make sense of her words. Maybe this has something to do with the "I'm hungry!" story she told me.

Grandma's uncles had been at home with their mother. Their father had already been taken by the Turks to march through the Syrian desert. Turkish soldiers arrived at their house to collect the boys and send them through the desert too. I'm not sure why so many Armenians went to the desert back then. It doesn't seem like a nice place. Grandma tells me a lot of our family died there.

When the knock came at the door that day, the boys were told to hide by their mother. She explained to the soldiers that her sons had been taken with her husband and that she was alone. She said she planned to leave the country and would never return. She promised she was

telling the truth. The soldiers were finishing with their questions when her youngest son, who was very chubby, called out from his hiding spot, "I'm hungry!"

The Turks tore apart the home until they found her sons. They raped her in front of her sons. They killed her chubby son. Then, they left with the remaining boys, sending them to join the others in the desert.

Grandma's chubby uncle always took but he didn't even survive, so maybe this isn't related after all. Maybe she's talking about Beirut and how Grandpa lives there alone now. He's so skinny though...

"Here," my sister says, cutting off my train of thought. She extends a handful of *mante* towards me.

"I don't want it anymore," I say. "Just take some," my sister says, releasing half of her hand's worth into my bowl and returning the rest into her own bowl.

"Thanks," I say, and the three of us walk slowly back to the table. I look at Grandma, her face composed as she sips from her mug of tepid water. She begins eating nuts from the dish on the counter, cracking pistachios with her hands and sunflower seeds with her teeth.

"Did you get any?" I ask her, motioning to my bowl of *mante*.

"I'm full from lunch," she says, avoiding my question. "I want you to have it." ▲

PHOTO // HUGH COOK

We finish our first helping of Grandma's *mante* and go back to the baking sheet for more, quickly grabbing at each piece of dough-hugged beef.

"You got more than me," I snap at my sister. "Give me some!"

"No," she says with a devilish smile. "These are mine."

"Come on, just a couple," I plead. I reach across the pan, still hot, and try to stick my greedy hand in her bowl. She shields her *mante* with one hand and swats me away with the other.

"Stop it!" she calls out.

We sense Grandma approaching and stand still. She could command every room she entered. Ever since she broke her hip, her physical presence doesn't match her dominant energy. She looks fragile and moves slowly now.

"I can't believe you two are like this," she says, anger emphasizing her accent. "When I was your age, we would go to the mountain and my mother would take dough," she says. I know that by "the mountain" she means their summer apartment in Mount Lebanon, but I like the

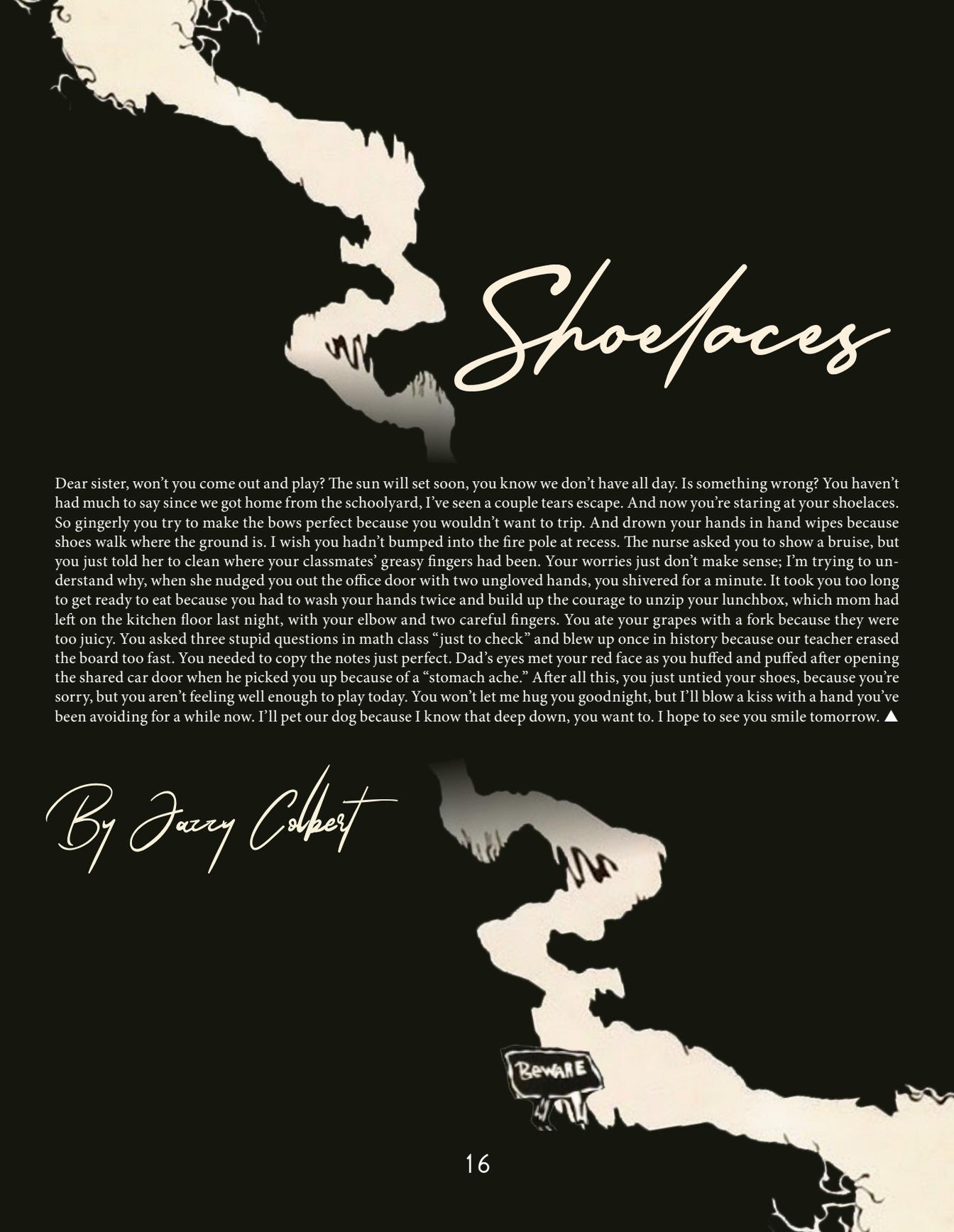
way she words it. It sounds like they're walking through the cedars with a mound of raw dough. She rolls an imaginary ball between her hands, flattening it in her left and gesturing her right like a paintbrush, "then put some tahini, sugar, cinnamon, and bake in the oven." She pauses as if we're waiting for the non-existent *tahinov hats* to be ready. "There was not a lot of dough and there were four of us kids. We always fought over who would have the last one, but not because we wanted it for ourselves. We all wanted the other to have it."

My sister and I exchange our classic, knowing glance that doubles as a ceasefire. I can tell we're both thinking the same thing: there's no way this story is true. It's believable that Grandma and Uncle Mishac would give up their bread. But Uncle Pat, whose never smiled in his life, not even on his wedding day? And Auntie Annie, whose nose job everyone says can't conceal the fact she's still a witch on the inside? Not a chance. But out of respect, we stay quiet.

"And here you are," she says, "each fighting for himself." My sister and I exchange another glance. We think it's



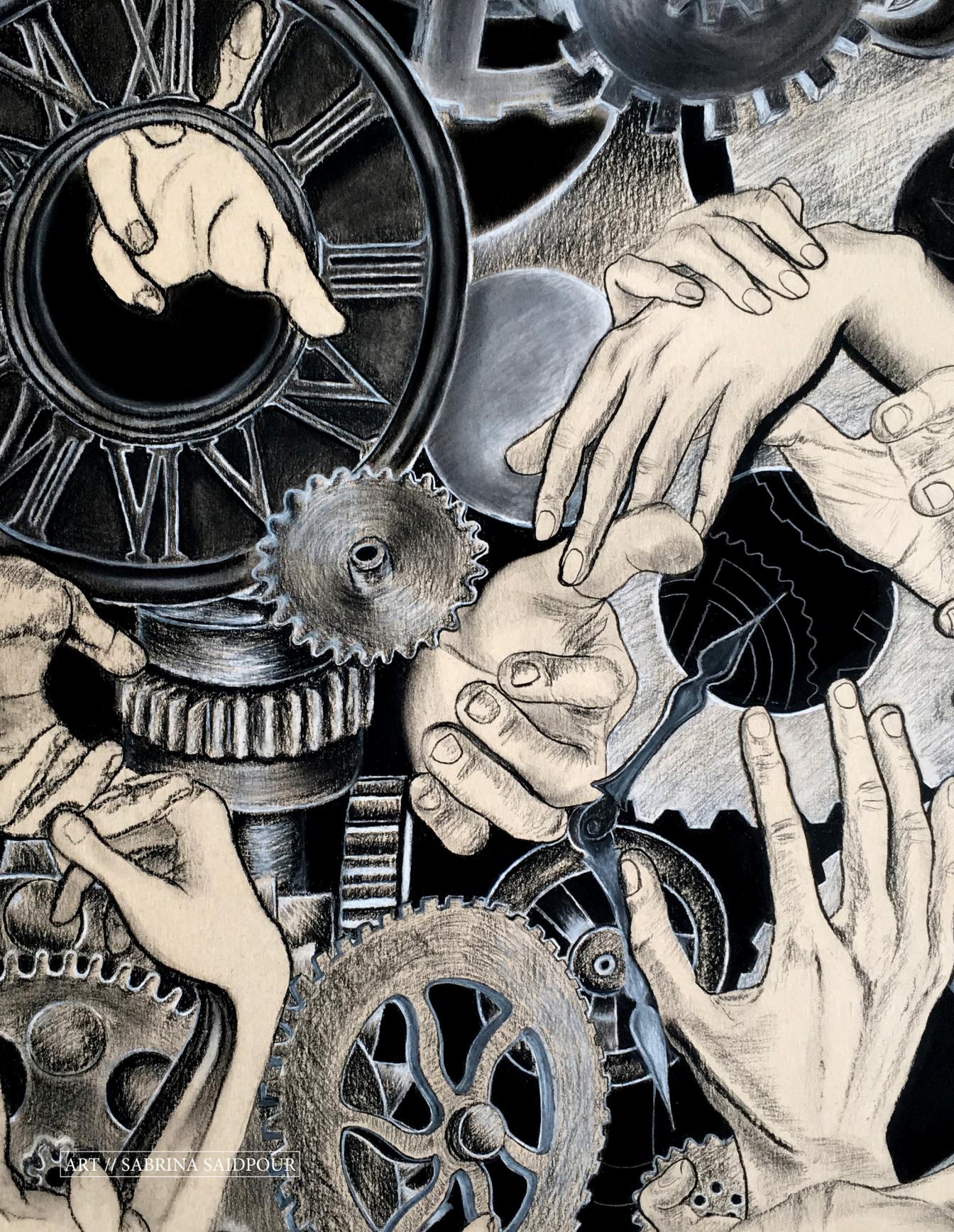
ART // ANGELICA CASEY



Shoefaces

Dear sister, won't you come out and play? The sun will set soon, you know we don't have all day. Is something wrong? You haven't had much to say since we got home from the schoolyard, I've seen a couple tears escape. And now you're staring at your shoelaces. So gingerly you try to make the bows perfect because you wouldn't want to trip. And drown your hands in hand wipes because shoes walk where the ground is. I wish you hadn't bumped into the fire pole at recess. The nurse asked you to show a bruise, but you just told her to clean where your classmates' greasy fingers had been. Your worries just don't make sense; I'm trying to understand why, when she nudged you out the office door with two ungloved hands, you shivered for a minute. It took you too long to get ready to eat because you had to wash your hands twice and build up the courage to unzip your lunchbox, which mom had left on the kitchen floor last night, with your elbow and two careful fingers. You ate your grapes with a fork because they were too juicy. You asked three stupid questions in math class "just to check" and blew up once in history because our teacher erased the board too fast. You needed to copy the notes just perfect. Dad's eyes met your red face as you huffed and puffed after opening the shared car door when he picked you up because of a "stomach ache." After all this, you just untied your shoes, because you're sorry, but you aren't feeling well enough to play today. You won't let me hug you goodnight, but I'll blow a kiss with a hand you've been avoiding for a while now. I'll pet our dog because I know that deep down, you want to. I hope to see you smile tomorrow. ▲

By Jerry Colbert



PART II

POETRY

HIDDEN WORDS

PHRYGIA

RUPTURES AT UCSB

TENUOUS

WHEN YOU AND I MEET AT
TWILIGHT

HEADFUCK

RARE

BETWEEN THE SOUND AND
THE FLASH

HOVERING INVINCIBLE

GROWTH

HEAVEN AND SUCH PLACES

MEMORY

BLOSSOMING BLAZE

THE GARDENER

PROVOKED

I WAIT

TELL ME

HAIKUS FOR LEARNING

STILL PHOTOGRAPHS

SOBER ON MY RIDGE

HOPE

LONJAS

BLOOMING MEMORY

HEAR ME OUT

ODE TO HER

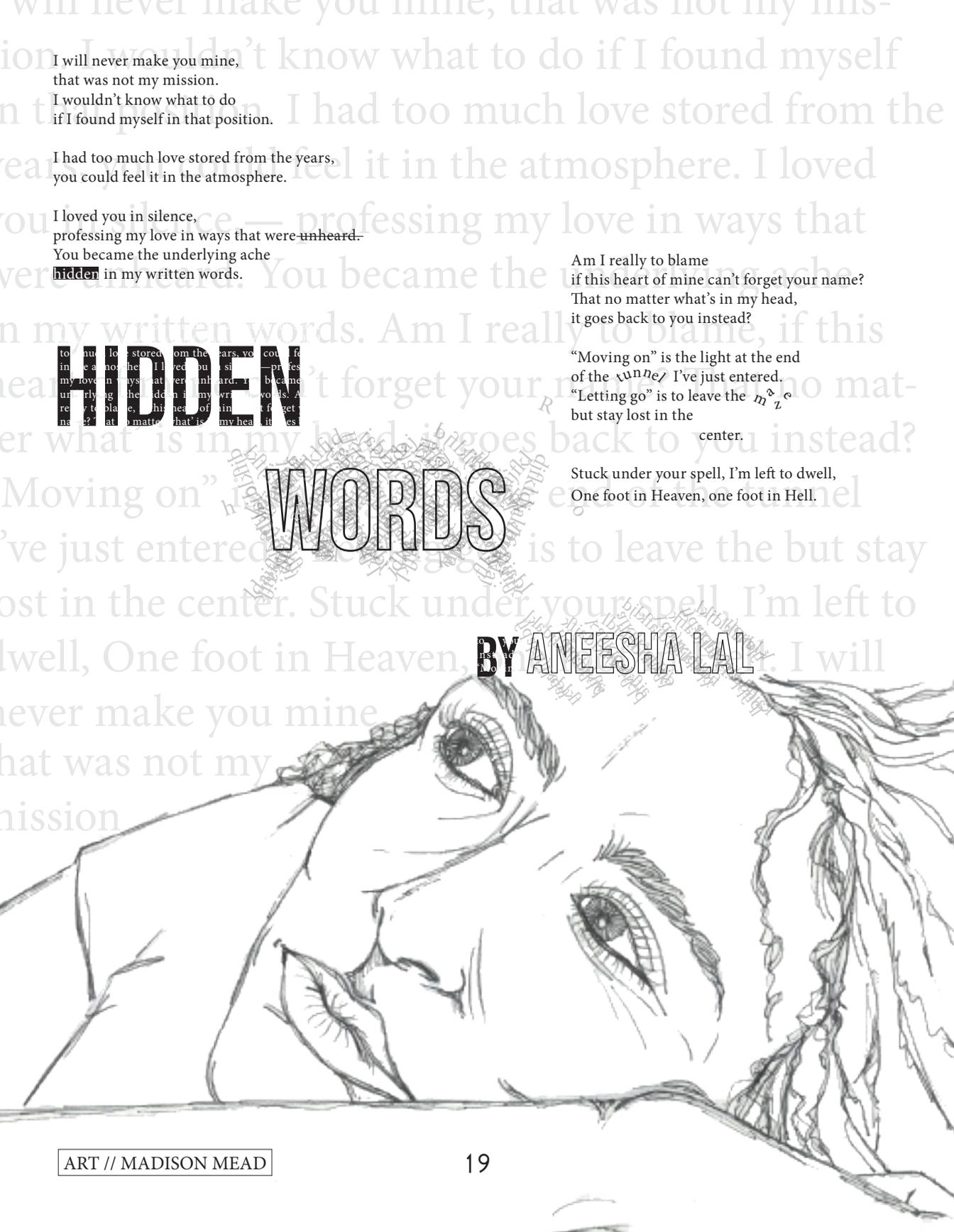
BLUE JAY

MAKE YOURSELF

ELON'S MUSK

THE F WORD

A WONDER, PEOPLE ARE



I will never make you mine,
that was not my mission.
I wouldn't know what to do
if I found myself in that position.

I had too much love stored from the years,
you could feel it in the atmosphere.

I loved you in silence,
professing my love in ways that were unheard.
You became the underlying ache
hidden in my written words.

HIDDEN

WORDS

BY ANEESHA LAL

Am I really to blame
if this heart of mine can't forget your name?
That no matter what's in my head,
it goes back to you instead?

"Moving on" is the light at the end
of the tunnel I've just entered.
"Letting go" is to leave the matter
but stay lost in the center.

Stuck under your spell, I'm left to dwell,
One foot in Heaven, one foot in Hell.

PHRYGIA

BY MEI-MEI MIJARES

Can you see me
in my Gordian Heart?
I see cold but I hear—
I hear her tongue slide a cherry stem into a knot,
The rip of hair from the scalp on an eleven-year-old,
Humming wires of red stoplights
Where the boys mistook
No for go
Soft cries as fingernails cut skin
Guitar string snaps
Ultrasound beeps—

slut
whore
bitch
victim
slut whore bitch victim
Slutwhorebitchvictim
mUslutwhorebitchvic
timRslutwhorebitchvi
ctimVslutwhorebitch
victimIslutwhorebitch
hvictimVslutwhorebit
chvictimOslutwhorebi
itchvictimRslutwhoreb



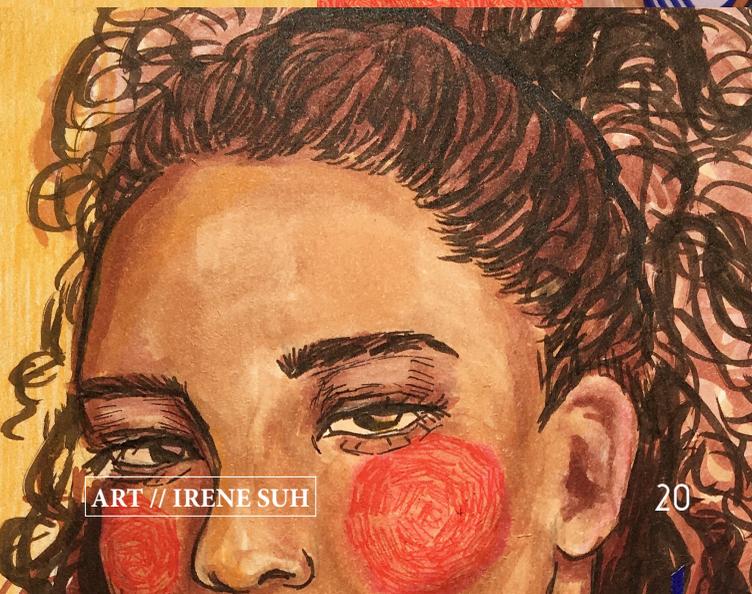
Why does it matter
when I would rather douse myself in gasoline and
let a lit match fall to my feet?

Why does it matter
when every blade begs
to finish the crossword puzzle?
Across for attention, down for results.

I survived.

Why does it matter
if I tell you?

I wish I could talk about it but
I already have,
You didn't listen.



RUPTURES

at

UCSB

I. Desire

I sit on my bed,
 one finger pulling him
 forward,
 "Come here."
 His pink lips,
 soft
 apricot skin, and
 brown eyes are all
 I see.
 Fingers turn to talons
 and grasp his black mass of hair.
 "Pretty neck," I say,
 before my teeth
 decide to scrape
 off his inhibitions,
 leaving a red rose,
 one
 after
 another,
 from
 neck
 to hips.
 Razor nails
 scratch trails
 down backs,
 teeth scrape
 skin from lips.

My name is his last word
 before he lets go,
 before his hands
 slack upon sheets.
 His name and God
 are my whispers,
 my last syllables,
 before my mouth
 feels like cotton—
 ah! ah! ah!
 White spills
 upon grey sheets.

By Ignacio Vargas Ruiz Jr.

PHOTO // LAUREN WICKS

PHOTO // CASEY MIX



II. Family

I gaze at my face in the mirror—
 study my lips, my eyes,
 lean in, find brown irises,
 and bronze lips stretch to
 unveil white bones.

Keep swimming,
 I whisper,
Ponte tus pilas,
 papa's voz.
Te amo mijo,
 mama's voz.
I miss you,
 You are the best brother,
I love you,
 mis hermanas voces.

I scroll through family photos—
 a masochist meditation—
 salt falling,
 salt staining,
 salt burning.

III. Longing

I remember when I dreamed
 in
 darkness—
 a silk, honey-scented wind—
 that lead me to lands
 rich with the day's milk.
 Whether rancid or sweet,
 I drank.

Walked:
 Not here nor there,
 not where or when,
 "amen" grafted on lips.

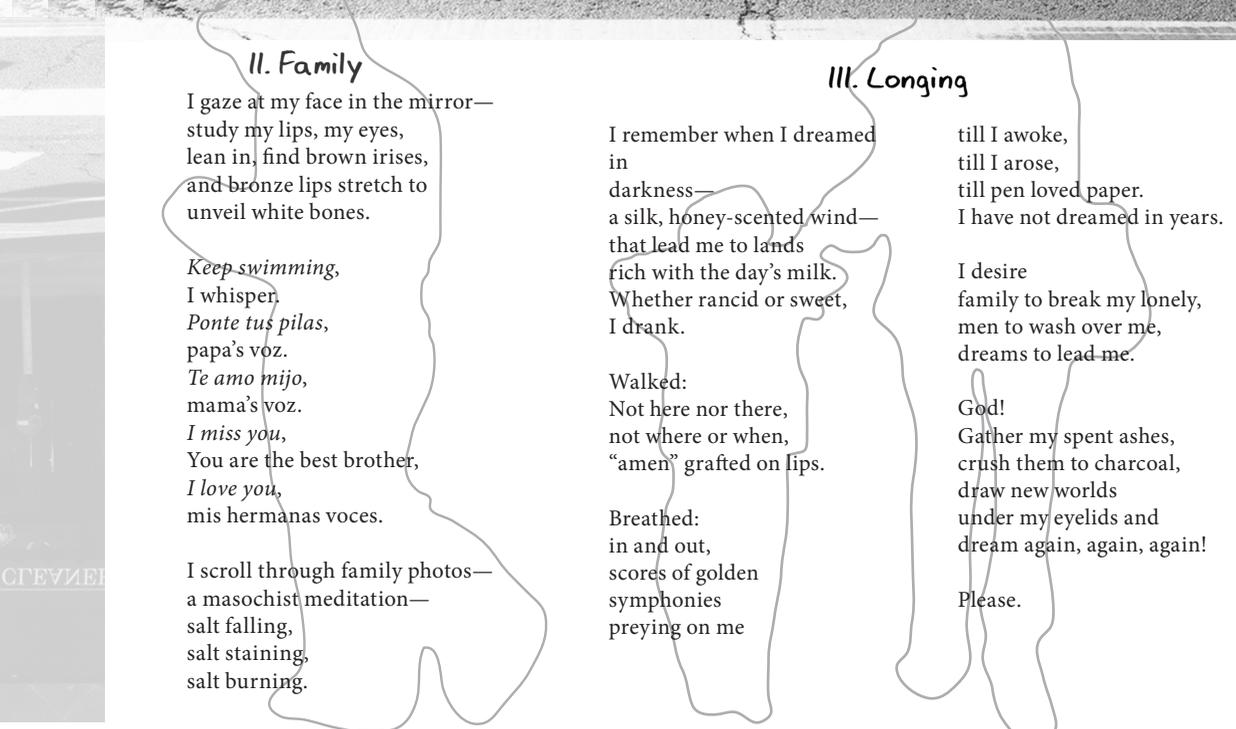
Breathed:
 in and out,
 scores of golden
 symphonies
 preying on me

till I awoke,
 till I arose,
 till pen loved paper.
 I have not dreamed in years.

I desire
 family to break my lonely,
 men to wash over me,
 dreams to lead me.

God!
 Gather my spent ashes,
 crush them to charcoal,
 draw new worlds
 under my eyelids and
 dream again, again, again!

Please.



She didn't starve herself because she wanted to
Look thin or beautiful,
She did it because it made her feel in control
Like making one decision for herself could place her atop a mountain,
Because the more she put into her body
The more likely it was to come back up.
And stomaching the ache of another night spent alone
Was no longer an option;
So instead, she carried the hollowness with her for company,
And when it rumbled from deep within—
constantly, incessantly rumbled,
The sound was like a friend calling her name.
And it was all good and fine for some time
Until she noticed that the heat in the rest of her body
never reached her toes,
then her fingertips,
And then she had to shrink her clothes in the dryer
So they'd fit better.

After only 13 hours
the human body begins to collect energy from the oxidation of fats;
And after 24,
proteins in muscular tissue are broken down,
Which would explain why she broke her arm
After a short fall off her bike.
Her bones were grinding up against one another,
Nothing left to cradle them.

Soon nothing left to hold her.
Climbing the stairs became difficult too,
And she took naps right after waking up in the morning.
When she looked in the mirror
An anatomically perfect skeleton looked back,
And she learned the names of all 206 bones
By counting off her own body.

By Julia Goldstein
Tenuous

23

ART // JORDAN METZ



Evening blushes
as night leans
in for a kiss.
Eyes sparkling
with constellatory irises.
Pink cotton candy clouds
peacefully adrift,
gliding ever gracefully
into her outstretched arms.

WHEN YOU AND I MEET AT TWILIGHT

BY NIDHI KHANOLKAR

PHOTO // JORDAN METZ
ART // NIDHI KHANOLKAR

24

HEAD FUCK

By Isabella Bautista

When you kiss me so sweet,
The touch of your fingertips electric,
You remind me that I am alive.

You break my pattern of unrelenting numbness,
Of forced laughter,
Of plastered, winning smiles.

These smiles aren't real but they keep me alive
And keep me ahead,
And no one notices but you.

I took off my armor
And my winning smile
And showed you the saddest parts of myself,

The parts no one gets to see,
The parts I wish didn't exist,
And you picked them apart.

Dissecting me like an insect,
In the name of being real and rational,
Mistaking my trust for weakness.

ART // ANDREW NGUYEN

25

Because I'm irrational, subjective, unscientific,
And I only think with my feelings,
So I must be scrutinized for my inconvenient emotions.

All for some greater cause,
Some high intellectual ground,
A notion of reality that doesn't exist

But you continue to pursue and prove,
Messing with me the way interference disorients airplanes,
Clouding my senses until I am a pilot who doesn't know where to go,

Until I can't tell the difference between
My thoughts and yours,
Who I am and who you want me to be,

And I know you can't love me.
I know.
I knew that then and I know that now.

But perhaps,

Without your nauseating manipulation of my feelings
I wouldn't be able to appreciate
The clarity and love I've found in someone

Who treats me like I deserve to be treated,
Who embraces me as I am,
And who loves me as I love them.

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Skin
and
center,
mirrored hue—
Puckered prickling pink.
Peeled blister and tender flesh;

Shoes didn't fit, wore them anyway.
Raw lips and burnt tongue;
Couldn't wait for it to cool.
Skinned knees and scraped elbows;
Mother warned me
not to run but
the wind felt so nice
when it kissed my flushed cheeks.

By Olivia Berriz
Rare

BETWEEN THE SOUND AND THE FLASH

By Madhu Kannan

I walked home with you under the crackling electricity

of branching lightning, the sky

tremulous in split slices of violent wine.

The clouds were thick and heavy with anticipation.
Humidity coated the back of my neck and sunk into me.
My bones are not waterproof.

I wish it meant something:

That you are
Here, with me,
Where it matters,

but it is just—

you.

That little laugh, the eyes that find me—

"I wish lightning would strike me," I say, but
What I mean is, I wish it would strike us.

I wish you knew the clamoring tide inside me that

wants to touch and taste and take and take and take
from you and give back the pouring rains.

But how rare, how rare.
Because lightning does not strike this little beach town

like this.

And lightning will not strike you and me

like this.

And those five seconds in between the sound and the flash
will not tell me what you need but I wish it was me. I wish

it was me.

hovering invincible

Eighteen and
casually invincible
to rainstorms,
water-based or familial.

Edging around
black shadows of
thundercloud grief

dispersing, reforming,
haphazard—

I can only dodge sleet,
seek paradigms.

Long days
lend collections of omens
then evaporate like
yesterday's rain.

only to return
haphazardly decades later,
summoned by
a familiar storm.

I realize how much skin I have
when the hail comes.

by Maya Keshav

ART // MADISON MEAD

growth

By Kristina Ching

I haven't once yet regretted repotting 18 years of growth,
the leaves and blooms becoming too familiar in the vessel in which they
for the very first time, pushed aside dirt and poked up through soil to
greet a home
made just for them.

A home made with soft hands and overflowing with love,
bear hugs and warm meals, shoulders to cry on and so much laughter
and all that was good for a while, but was becoming
all too safe and warm and comfortable,
too perfectly fitting, too predictable,
for flowers that just wanted to explode out of their entire being.

Send petals and pistils out windows and into wind,
stretch stems up through roofs and towards open sky,
Bloom.

Flowers that were starting to wilt under pressure of unseen forces,
too much noise, too much light,
and never ever leaving the sill in which they sat stagnating,
stifled by a space in which they felt they never really fit in,
always reaching past edges and peeking around corners.

But now,
I can bask in the sun without fear of burning up,
surround myself with sounds and songs without shrinking,
float on waves that carry me towards a new home,
feel wind and ocean salt, and remember that I am alive.

I am alive,
and I am still growing,
learning and living and pushing past everything that held me back
before,
roots, digging into soft sand and wiggling past rocks,
fingers, reaching out to gently touch a bud about to bloom,
not yet ready but sometime soon
because regrowth doesn't come quickly,
and new has never been easy.

But now, here,
I have been freed to grow.

ART // IRAA GULERIA

What was it like?

Cold. But not the kind
where rain plasters hair to your forehead,
and water sinks nails
through your skin and into your bones.
The cold, a whisper carried by wind,
No smell of salt, but the sea was there.

And it was green, so green,
Is what I want to say.
But I do not.

It isn't enough to say green.
To say there were five sheep clustering together
Isn't enough.
Telling you that the black trees sang their secrets to a cold sun,
Will not give you what I had.

No.

It is a secret I cannot share.
To put it on my tongue would be
Pushing it to the air,
To be dropped.
But you know this.
Worlds drop from your mouth too.

You tell me of
Fingers of gold that comb through fields of yellow fur,
The hush of the meadow,
Striped fields ready for harvest.
They mean nothing to me.

How can I
feel,
experience,
the warmth under
your skin?

I can never know
the twang of the guitar on the roof,
or his gentle hands around your waist.

You try to speak of the night
with two sets of stars.
One dancing before your eyes,
the other frozen in a glacial sky.

We stand before one another,
Realities wrapping around our fingers,
Gifts we can never give.

ART // JAQUELYNN TESCH

memory

by Belle Machado



This is,
A celestial kind of poem
A colossal-
interstellar-cherub's-singing-
in-the-clouds-harps-playing-in-
the-background-blinding-light
kind of poem.

The kind you try not to look at directly.
This poem
stings your eyes if you look at it for too long.
This is all to say...
I try not to think about what happens to us when we die,
I mean
I try not to think about what happened to you
when you died.
When I was five
I believed that heaven was a castle made
of sunflowers—
A home built of yellow flowers and
somehow strong enough to contain
a world's worth of happiness and
dreams.

Pages covered in goldenrod crayola
Said "Mama, look, abuelito's
here,"

"He's there with Mama Bella."

Mama never did have the heart to
tell me that nobody knows if it's a
sunflower castle,
or fluffy white clouds,
Or just eternal TV static ringing between your
ears.
Nobody knows,
But a sunflower castle sounded nice enough
to me,
And what could anybody hope for but the
color of laughter and happiness?
That's what I told you when you asked me.

But now I take it back...

made it so easy for you to leave me;
If I could go back
I'd change it all.

I'd have said that
Heaven is a small pool in your left dimple,
It rests on the bend of that nose you hated so much.
Heaven has mixed her way into the sound of your laugh and
She shines off the glisten of your skin when it melts in the
sun.

Your skin wasn't always pale;
I know nobody else remembers it anymore—
People hardly do after funerals—
but I do.

Everytime I close my eyes it's there.
They buried you pale but you will always be
honey to me—
Thick, accented, and warm.

You are my heaven
I can be your heaven

HEAVEN IS RIGHT
HERE WITH ME
Just stay with me

Please ...
I'll learn to play the harp,
I'll give you all the sunflowers in the
world,
I'll pull heaven down to earth for you if you'll just
stay.
But I can't write an ode for a dead girl.

So I guess this is a eulogy
For the ghost I purposely forgot.
I hope your heaven is not sunflowers,
I hope your heaven is whatever it was you couldn't find
here.



ART // SEI M.

PHOTO // EMMA PETERSON

Heaven & Such Places

BLOSSOMING BLAZE

By Nolan Fuss

Huddled together under blankets and damp sweatshirts,
We sat in the darkness staring at the celestial sky like a pack of werewolves.

The occasional click of a lighter coming from the wet sand at our feet.

Click.

The ominous cliffside, silhouetted by moonlight stood tall above us,
Casting its gloomy figure over our hopes for the night.

Time kept on moving.

Click.

The cold got colder,
The dark got darker,

And the menacing shadows of doubt crept in with the ocean breeze.

Click.

Yet we sat hopeful that the excitement we shared
Which filled the hike with drunken laughter

And dragged us away from bed to the moonlit beach,
Would carry on, as soon as that spark caught fire.

Click.

Circled around that pile of soggy logs we sat hopeful
That any second that flicker would turn into a fiery fortress

That would unleash its flaming, gilded knights,
Armed with burning swords and shields

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Into the cold, dreaded darkness.

Click.

We sat, hopeful that the small glow before us,
The very glow smoldering in each of our hearts,

Would blossom into a blazing flower of flames.

Click. **Crackle.**

**Then, as if our anticipative spirits
Burst to life in front of us all,
And demanded the festivities of the night continue on,
The spark caught.**

**And it didn't just burn,
It launched off the sandy logs with powerful legs
And performed a raging dance shrouded in flames
That fueled our newly intertwined friendships with a
freshly lit thrill.**

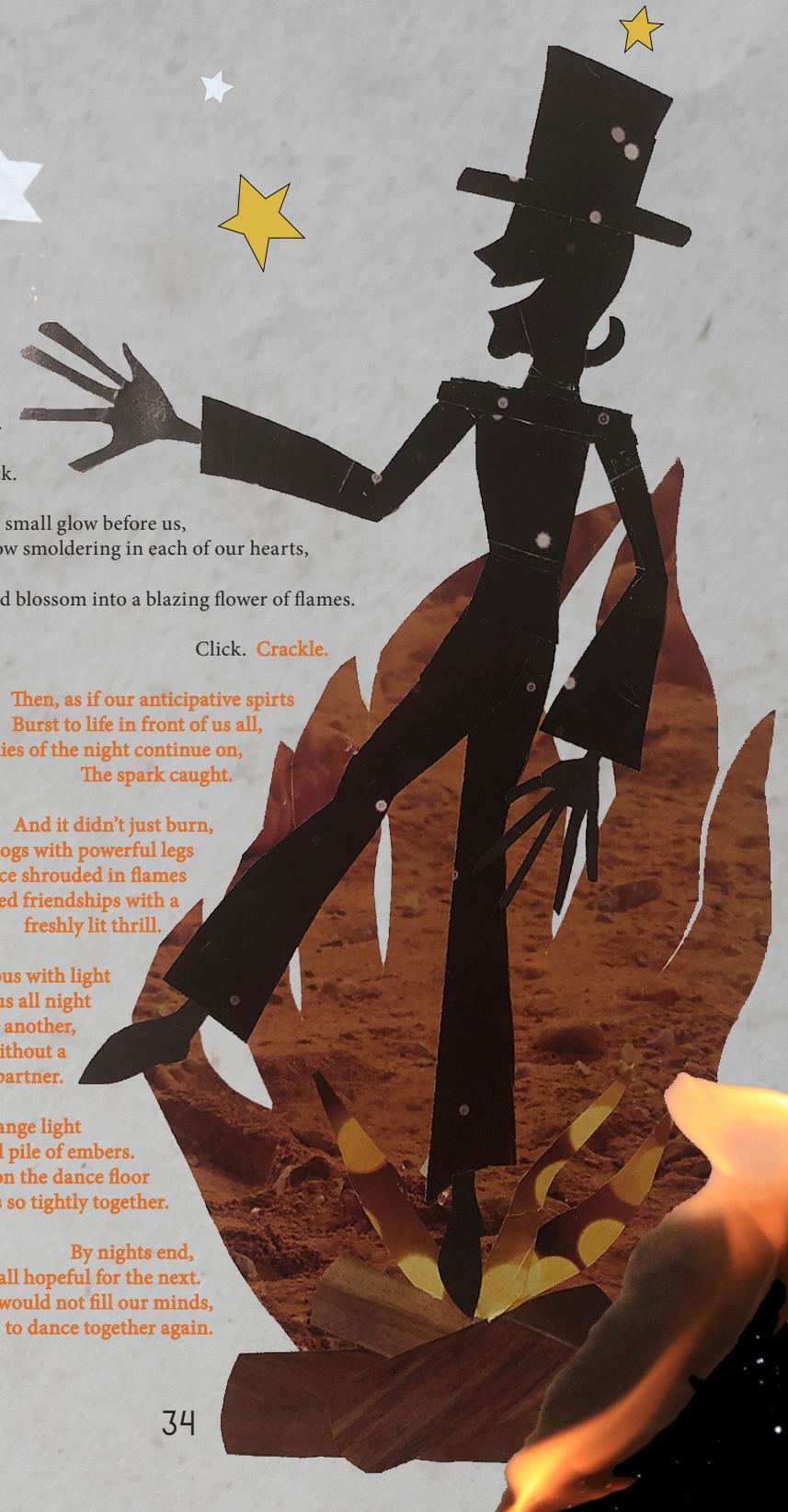
**Furious with light
It danced with us all night
Introducing our elated spirits with another,
Ensuring we were never without a
dance partner.**

**A dimming orange light
Turned to a small pile of embers.
Our exhausted bodies splayed out on the dance floor
That had melded our souls so tightly together.**

**By nights end,
We were all hopeful for the next.
Knowing doubt would not fill our minds,
Just the excitement for our spirits to dance together again.**

ART // SKYLER MELNICK

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The Gardener

My aunt has been gardening
For the past three years,
But really
She's been a gardener
Ever since she took me in.

She pours
Heavy rainfall hours
And digs her hands
Through the root of cacti,
Birthed from stone and concrete.

Even though she isn't
A mother by nature,
She is my mother
Through nurture.

Her words,
Blades of grass
Sharp enough to sever an ear,
Yet they can mold into a garden
For life to reap and prosper.

So now
I'm painting the pictures
For her irises through poetry,
Because it is all I can offer.

I'm still
A young cactus
Growing into the pot
I have been blessed with,

Waiting to show her
This flower heart blooming
As I learn
How not to pierce the hands
That have held me.

By Andy Le

provoked

By Madi Braum

faded rubble lies arbitrarily,
sunlit haze visible through shattered glass and gloom,
worn fissures in the cement weave through those intentional
cracks once alive, now barren and cold.

only one structure still vertical in the debris;
one dressed in shades of Liberty's oxidized copper,
words that provoked the greatest and worst of society:

FREE
SPEECH

By Dallin Mello

I Wait

I wait—
For a text, a call, an email.

Do you sleep alone these days?
Do your sheets still smell of me?

My sweat, my body, my breath...

When you dream at night do you think of me?
Of my skin, my touch...

Do you miss my touch?

When you look at the sun are you reminded of me?
Beach days,
Sandy toes,
Escaping to the trees.

Do you remember our words?
Promises of the future,
to uplift the past.

Do you feel me in you
Like I feel you in me?
Imprinted on my fingertips,
my mouth, my tongue,
intertwined.

Your sweat, your touch, your breath...

The fruits of your garden,
Nourishment runs dry.

I must tend to my own.

The weeds are overgrown,
did you know they can look like flowers?
We can be flowers.

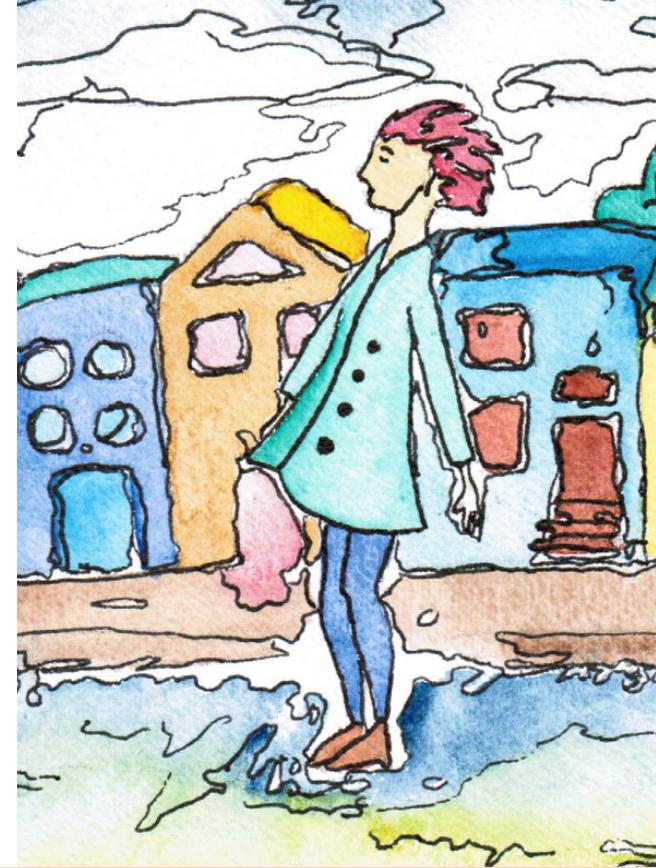
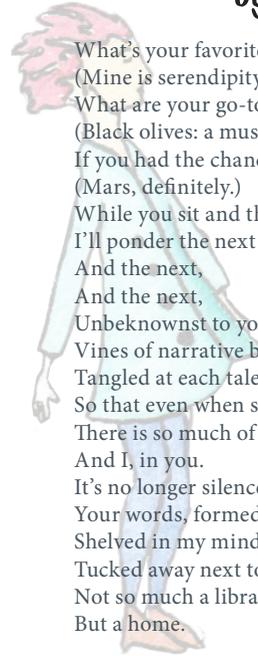
Your flower, your growth, you're late.



tell me

by jasmine benafghoul

What's your favorite word?
(Mine is serendipity.)
What are your go-to pizza toppings?
(Black olives: a must.)
If you had the chance, would you go to space? Which planet?
(Mars, definitely.)
While you sit and think of your answer
I'll ponder the next question,
And the next,
And the next,
Unbeknownst to you, weaving a story,
Vines of narrative becoming intricately
Tangled at each tale you tell,
So that even when silence floats after all these questions
There is so much of you in me
And I, in you.
It's no longer silence, not really.
Your words, formed and bound into a golden book,
Shelved in my mind,
Tucked away next to others.
Not so much a library,
But a home.



haikus for learning

by baily rossi

I
Your words diminish
as they leave your mouth, your brain—
that's just a feeling.

II
Your words become big-
ger as you open your mouth
and share them with me.

III
You may be thinking,
"How could this be?" It is seen
in the changing leaves.

IV
Changing air mixes
With the ever-growing tree:
Fall's true colors show.

V
The classroom, our space,
Is not a stage, but a place
To listen, speak, grow.

VI
The two are not two
Separate parts, but one whole:
A classroom loud, full.

VII
What is better than
Your words rolling out of the
Mouth of someone else?

VIII
When someone hears you—
Takes your words and keeps them here,
Not the air: the mind.



HOPE

By Colleen Panero

Something beautiful
and truly living
before your eyes:
what comes to mind?

Actions are permanent
and never forgotten.
She will always remember
the scars we give her.

She breathes
just like you and I.
She represents life
but her strength is fading.

Some of us care,
while others are blinded.
She is showing us signs
the most powerful ignore.

Shadows formed by
selfishness and pleasure
leave footprints of pain:
human existence is to blame.

But light still exists,
ideas are blossoming
in the hope of resisting
an apocalyptic world.

LONJAS

BY JULIETA CORRAL PHUN

When my abuela went from calling me *flaca*
To calling me *gorda*—
I knew it was over,
My time had come.

I was no longer child-like waif but woman
Enough to bear sons and stretch marks,
Old enough to carry my self-conscious
Cocked on my hip and my *lonjas* on the other.

That is to say that I would hold
Onto the pot's (love) handles with one hand and
¡cuidado! stir the lentejas
antes de que se queman
Before they burn.

I am used to a smoky kitchen,
A half-scorched home.

My *Mamá* could never remember she left the stove on.
Too much left on her plate from not eating enough
Always making sure everyone else was fed
Before she even looked at herself.

Maybe...
Maybe that's why my *papá*
Could never build up the cowardice to finally leave her.



PHOTO // CANON HASTINGS

My *mamá* and I,
We are so similar:

We create homes in people
And leave them.
We were never meant to be housewives,
Never built for the upkeep
Of the *machismo* in our home—

Cuando nos grita en la cara
We yell back
We would rather be beat down than
shut up.

My abuela's silence will not be my own:

Her hands are my mother's
(they tremble too).
Her smile is mine
(but not to the orthodontist).
Her *carriño* is in my father
(*pobrecito*, he needs it).
Her *corazón* is buried with my abuelito.

But her eyes?

They are the only part she left for
herself.
She prides herself on them.

She can spot the fifteen pounds I gained
in an instant,
Pero like, where was I supposed to put
them down?

Mija, tienes que bajar de peso
Honey, you have to lose the weight.

Abuela,
This life is heavy
The bruises seeped into my skin long
ago
I don't know where the hurt starts and
I begin

But, *La lucha no ha acabado*.
The fight has not finished yet.

And,
We will not stay the next time he hits
us.



BLOOMING MEMORIES

BY ERICA KAPLAN

You were a seed of ideas
Like a mind
Growing flowers towards the sun
Holding the weight of the sky
In hands cupping the present and the past
Like a blooming beginning

Hands

With the gliding stroke of a pen's wistful ink
Meeting in between the ruled lines
Like petals falling soft to join the soil
To be closer to earth
Grounding a work of art
The return to the start
Such as the starting sentences strung delicately together
For both the lies and the truths enveloped
Defining the relationship of an individual to the rest of the world
As syllables waiting to be read

Reading

You narrate nostalgia
Permitting a meaning to memory
Just as you tend your feelings
To the sense of spring
An elusiveness of calling those beautiful
Without a thought behind the recollection of beauty
Welcoming the past
Like the imperfections
From flower to flower
Reborn into remembrance with purpose
Inviting bees to reap in reward of translation to something new
A voice's spoken idealization of the passing of time
Suspended with the sounds
That roll off the tongue
And hang speaking in the air

Speaking

Languages foreign
But ideas universal to the hark within the heart
Hoping for steady fingers
Or shaky hands
To recreate the cycle of momentary pauses
Painting the dew on flowers
And words on the page
Over and over bringing characters to life like
An articulate masterpiece
You nurture the words
Asking for their company
Their presence until the end
A period, a hanging end

OKAY, HEAR ME OUT:

Celebrities aren't lizard people,
They're amphibians.
And I know it seems like a minor, pedantic distinction,
but the point is
they hold their secret meetings underwater.

And that's why nobody's seen them.

Area 51 is not an alien dissection center
concerned with beings from the stars,
it's a hub of extraterrestrial activity,
where the mole people's tunnels
breach the surface.

KEEP UP, PEOPLE!

Bear with me here:
The reason the Roman Catholic Church hates gays and IUDs
and harps on procreation
is because they're trying to drive up world population
until the density spreads such disease and desolation
that humanity dies out,
and every other wonder of God's great creation
is finally safe from the monkey
that got too smart for its own good.

...That one was a bit much.
Let me scale it back:

The earth isn't flat,
she's a B cup.
And it's time we stop shaming her.

If the Holocaust never happened
and vaccines cause autism,
then who's to say what's right or wrong?



OKAY, HEAR ME OUT.

Conspiracy theories flourish with fear.
When we lose control
our desperation is their fuel.
When the world is dark and hopeless
some scream that darkness isn't real.
When cruelty tears a heart apart
one way to soothe the pain is to claim
that hearts are manufactured
by a secret government
organization
more powerful than any
human being.
And so is pain.

When strangers gun down children at their desks,
and fly passenger planes into symbols of progress,
sometimes the only way to keep from giving up
is swear it never happened,
that a different kind of quiet evil is behind it,
not the machinations of a real world in which we all live.
And I know it might sound just as crazy
to attest that a conspiracy of lizards would be safer,
but if the Illuminati controls everything,
at least someone is in control!
If mass shootings are all faked,

maybe people don't feel hatred
bubbling up inside them till they vomit
bullets at the innocent.

HEAR ME OUT

BY KAHLO SMITH

If aliens are out there,
maybe we aren't so alone.



AN ODE TO HER

BY MIKAYLA KNIGHT

a row of polished pearls line her smile
they holler hello as they stretch for what must be a mile
her presence is a knitted blanket hugging your lap
her voice is a song that makes your feet want to tap
her eyes tell a story of triumph and strength
they're the deep end of the pool i would swim in at length
she's gentle to the touch

but quick to the punch
she holds her own doors and buys her own lunch
she lives loudly and proudly she won't censor herself

she is the special sweets that you hide on the shelf
she makes you feel like you matter the most.
she appears when you need her
she's an angel or ghost
she doesn't know her own power
it's her only flaw
her heart and her mind would leave you in awe
she is a fresh start, she is the morning dew

how long will it take to see that i'm talking about You?

You are strong
You are smart
You are warm

You are kind
i can't tell You enough about Your beauty of mind
i want You to picture the girl You first thought
now, think of Yourself and all the love that You've got
write Your own love poem—take a look in the mirror
look at Yourself with rose colored goggles to see Yourself clearer.



blue jay

by olivia berriz

Adorned with turquoise and sapphire,
Chest puffed proudly,
Protecting a gentle heart,
beating quickly.

You'd think hollow bones would be
Fracture-prone;
But they leave room to carry,
Space to hold close.

Listen carefully—you'll hear the song
Clear and sharp like snapping beat or
Flow and pour like water
Dripping down river stones.

Home is little wooden baskets,
Twigs intertwined like shivering fingers
Keeping me warm until winter wind
Unravels.

Blue, yet headed cardinal,
Every which way in between
Fleeting flutter
Sense or selection?
(Either way—goodbye, goodbye).

I broke up with my boyfriend who had been with me for two years,
I never knew how to live alone because I was never single.
A dear friend of mine said,
"Build a solid foundation of yourself."
I did not expect that the words would grow me up to here.
I was broken mentally, but his words made me realize,
Focus,
Don't shake your foundation if it fits;
give priority to myself and find out what kind of person I am.
I did what I did every day to find out if I felt happy.
Now I am able to find myself happy without relying on something.
And I found that I love to love myself before I love other people.

二年付き合っていた彼氏と別れて、
一人になったことがなくてフラれた時どうしたらいいかわからなくなって、
親しい友達から
"自分をしれ"と言われた。
親友からの言葉はここまで成長させてくれるなど思ってもいなかった
自分を知らないとなにも土台を作れない
頑丈にすることもできない
どんな人間なのかを探す為に自分自身に集中
そして優先をした。
何かに頼ることなく
幸せでいられるように
毎日なにをしたら
自分は幸せを感じるかを探した
自分の土台は何が起こっても
揺れて崩れないように
そして人を愛す前に
自分を好きになること
大切にすることを
見つけた

MAKE YOURSELF
BY HINA ASANO

ART // MICHELLE STAUFENBIEL

ART // dean crimmel

Take me to Mars.
I want to go somewhere I've never been before.
I want you to show me things I've never felt before.

My last relationship failed because I needed space.

I know what that means now.

I need you to take me to space.
I feel so high when I'm with you, Elon.

Most guys blow their load once and they're done, but not you, Elon.
Your thrusters are reusable.

We shouldn't rush into things though.
Space isn't a race.
There's no finish line.

We won't have to wait until night to see the stars because we'll be among them.
Don't leave me Elon; I don't want to become your Space X.

ELON'S MUSK

By Sean Sorbera

First time he spoke I flinched.
Found me sitting on a futon
with four people.
Fumes of Tom Ford
fragrance forced me to
focus on him.
Far away eyes looked
at me, what form lay
behind them?

Flirting with a fumbling
frazzled fraternity guy wasn't
my intention but he was friendly.
Forgone sobriety, I saw him again
months later.
Favorite rappers, freaky people and
flavored bugs was the topics we
covered.

Falling ever so quickly in that feeble conversation,
Flickering his eyes gently with flecks of a fire that
would soon come to fruition.
Fast forward to three weeks of our flourishing
conversations and I became his girlfriend.
Famous among friends because I was the only female who
managed to fetch a fellow.

Fastening myself to him as he
laid out our future, he became my
fulcrum.
Full of faith my apprehension
flattened.
Forgetting myself in his
forearms, a fair-faced façade.
Feeling fiercely for him, a
fuzzy-haired-freak who's head
would fizz over with
fondness.

Flashing
over his follies,
the fabricated stories, the
fickle fibs the forged excuses.
Fires however fizzle out, and
flares of anger flamed over him
where the previous fire flew.
False formality his smile, and in
the end he was a fiend I feared, his
feelings a faze.

Few more months of
fighting, a big finale, then a
finish.
Fresh eyes I'll one day cast back on our failure as a
frivolous farce of my youth.
Five months since fettered, finally beginning to feel free.

The F Word

By Drea Godsey

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ART // ERICA KAPLAN

A Wonder. People Are

I:1 A wonder, people are.
Written on the billboard
At the entrance.

I covered my body in Saint Laurent
And handfuls of shrubs and twigs,
—Adorned as your harvest queen—
Nameless as a fallen seraph,
Alighted on vapors of nicotine.

Tangled tresses of perversion
On the couch and in the corridor,
—Kept my lovers awake—
While I sought opiates of fancy,
In the terrarium of a snake.

Progenitors of dazzling sights
Flew like strung bulbs glowing,
—Thank the dragon flies newly named—
I caught one in sober darkness,
For on its wings divinity remained.

Powdered crystals sanctified the table
Like flumes of the impending flood,
—Known by the ravines in your skin—
I've heard of a covenant of grace,
Where needles are a cheaper linchpin.

At the dawn of Michael's coming
I lifted tainted bodies off the floor,
—A black cognizance of the aura—
Of Edenic wanderings paved,
In midnight California.



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By Genesis Taber

ART // SOPHIA THOMPSON

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CONTACT US

EMAIL // ucsb-catalyst@gmail.com

FACEBOOK // The Catalyst UCSB

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