

# THE CATALYST

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE



ISSUE 23 // SPRING 21



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# LETTER from the EDITOR

Dear Reader,

This is my last time addressing you as EIC of *The Catalyst*, by the time you read this I will have left the comfort of UCSB's cove and flown far away from the twigs I spent years turning into a nest. *The Catalyst*, however, will remain, moored in place, secure despite the winds of change that blow every Spring.

In the Fall of 2018 I worked at the reception desk of Anacapa Hall and came across a cute little number called *The Catalyst* among the reading materials dropped off for the rookies. I read it cover to cover, that was issue 12. My friend Frances (middle name 'the coolest') informed me that anyone could participate in the publishing of this magazine, and so in Spring of 2018 I found myself in a large classroom feeling quite small. Now, I was a business bitch at the time and you can imagine my horror when I realized that everyone in the class had to: 1. Create writing and art; and, 2. Read your writing out loud (!). But when push comes to shove, one often discovers new dimensions of the Self. My discovery was that creativity was not a talent or a blessing, rather a commitment to reaching inwards and excavating parts of yourself that beg to be expressed. And come the end of the quarter those very winds of change carried me into the office of one Professor Brian Donnelly. It was here that I was vetted and welcomed into a cohort of aesthetic curators of *The Catalyst* Editorial team.

Brian Donnelly, our faculty advisor and a man of many witty accented words, was someone I was convinced did not think I was a good editor. I don't know what planted this seed in my brain, but it was primarily due to being the least experienced out of my colleagues. So when the winds of change blew in the Spring of 2020, I tumbled along into the seat of the Main Bitch. I was terrified, not only was I supposed to take on this alien role, but with a brand new cast of a whopping 8 (!) editors. That Fall, Brian sent me an email inducting me into this role and in it he said, "the appointment is not automatic—and so I chose you because I know you can do the job." And suddenly I was not scared at all, the universe had conspired to bring me exactly here and all I needed to do was dare to believe in myself. I was lucky enough to sit on the shoulders of Giants as I began this new journey, with old wise men like Brian by my side to make sense of the circus that is publishing; but in case you are not, I would like to leave you with the simple notion that there is no static Self. I was always a good editor, I simply did not have the eyes to see myself as That Person. I hope that you too will wear these magic glasses and see yourself beyond the confines of who you were yesterday.

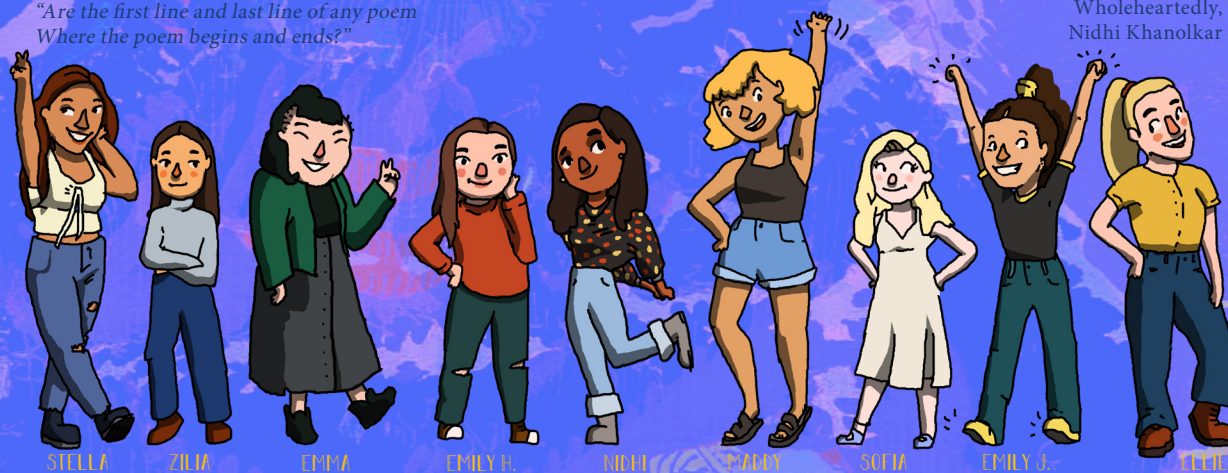
And while *The Catalyst* made an editor out of me from the jumbled puzzle pieces of my Self, I was never alone in making the puzzle pieces of *The Catalyst* somehow fit together against all the odds. It takes a village, but alas, we did not have the luxury of congregating in the town square, and my fellow editors (and our superstar TA Sage Gerson) have all the credit for weaving together a community through our zoom screens. They say that those who can, do, and those who can't, teach; but as I witnessed our editors come into their roles this year, I saw that actually, those who can, do, and those who want to, teach—the dedication necessary to zoom and zoom and zoom some more, across three quarters of intense productivity, was simply amazing. So thank you, my dear Editors, I am so happy to leave *The Catalyst* in such capable hands.

I have lived a thousand lives here at UCSB and in one of them I watched as Issue 12 grew up and out of teenagehood, with an adolescent crisis in the form of the pandemic, and is now 23, like myself. I'm sad to grow in different directions and only see the polished finish of the magazine instead of the method and the madness behind it. A quote by Seamus Heaney brings me some relief in the final blows of this hurricane of change—

"Since when," he asked,  
"Are the first line and last line of any poem  
Where the poem begins and ends?"

*nidhi*  
Wholeheartedly,  
Nidhi Khanolkar

COVER ART // MADELINE MILLER





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### Content Warning:

Please be advised that some material in the magazine may be disturbing, even traumatizing, for some readers. The magazine contains language and addresses themes that may be deemed unsuitable for younger readers. We would like to provide our readers with on campus resources for support:

Campus Advocacy Resources and Education (CARE): 805.693.4613

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): 805.893.4411

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# PROSE

## Eons have passed

Technology has surpassed our wildest dreams here on our planet.  
We are no longer constricted by time because of the new power plant that is feeding electricity to the world.  
We pass through the air with supersonic speed in planes built with full living quarters.  
Humanity has shifted from what we once knew.

Although we have the ability to travel faster, we are drifting further from each other.  
People no longer need the company of others when traveling because it is done so fast now.  
It is like this advancement has degenerated our social skills.  
We are evolving into creatures that once walked the Earth zions ago, they were called apes.

## Eons continue

I gaze at the cobalt blue sky as the golden sun embraces me with its rays.  
Its ethereal colors send shivers down my spine every time I see them filling the air.  
The reflection in my eyes mirrors the surreal constellation's million of colors.  
The obscure asteroids storming the galaxy fly through space like an airplane traveling to a new destination.

I know I am different from other beings probably scattered across the other worlds.  
The probability of being alone in the universe is highly improbable.  
This statistic offers me endless hope in my eternal days of life.  
We will find our way to other civilizations eventually.

## Eons we have waited

We have discovered other beings in a neighboring galaxy.  
They are tall and slender creatures that radiate a sensation of joy through their personality.  
Their grey furry tails shine like a horse's majestic mane in every form of light.  
Only a complete fool would mess with a species they have never made contact with before.

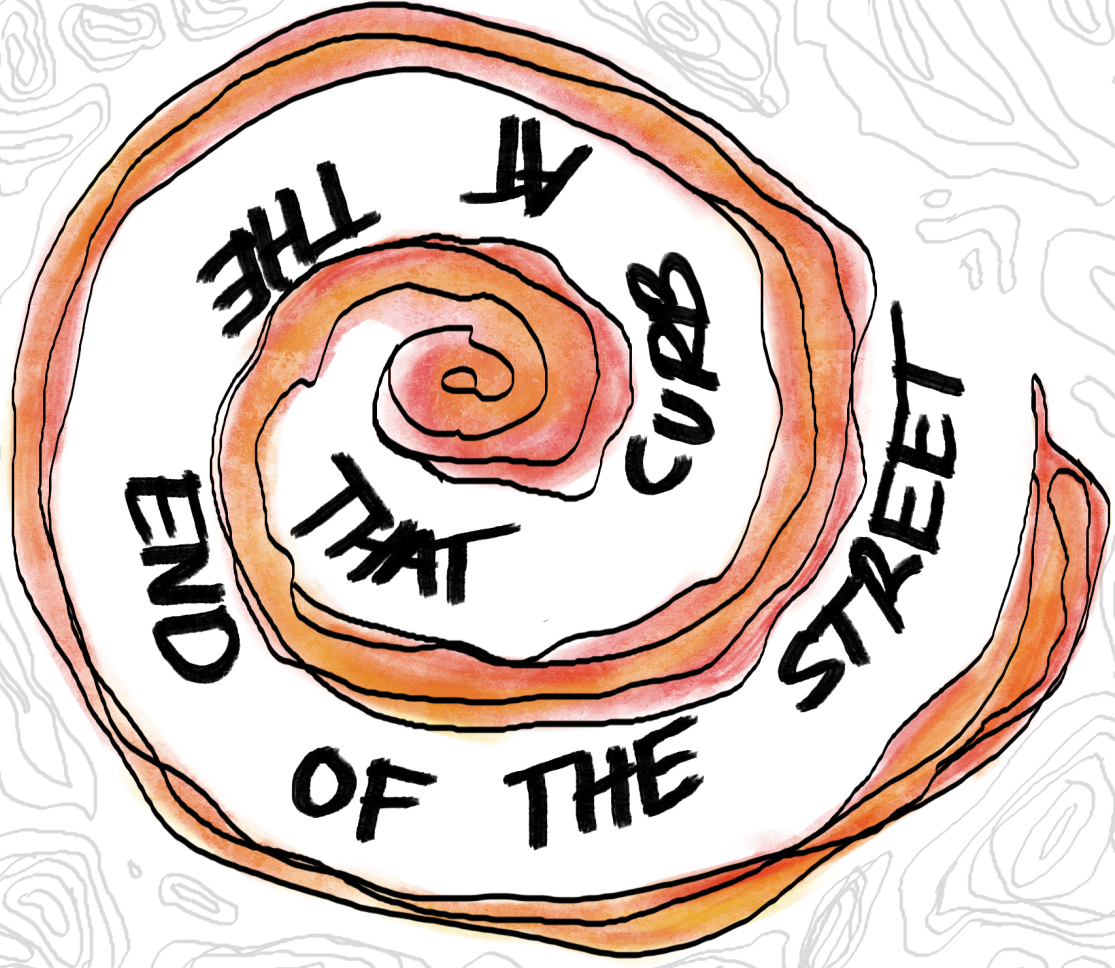
We will do right by the creatures and share our culture with them in hope they return the favor.  
Exchanging our customs and ideals will help us better understand the way we chose to live.  
The day will come when we cohabit the same planet and learn from one another.  
We will finally understand the life of another species. ▲

ART // LEXUS RODRIGUEZ

# One Day

By Dianna Chaidez





**BY AUDREY CARGANILLA**

ART // JUANITA IHEANACHO &  
AUDREY CARGANILLA

I claim that curb at the end of the street as my own personal altar. The street lights above are my salvation. Drunkenly, I stumble on the pavement, and still, I manage to avoid the cracks.

Steady now, don't falter.  
Like a moth to a flame, seek the warmth  
—no, not the one in your chest—  
or let the bitter caress of the night take you.

Was I meant to be there when your hands slipped into theirs? Music blaring and lights flashing, I saw clearly through it all. Was it just me or did everyone feel the walls tremble? Heat painted my cheeks red, though no one could tell, as everyone in the room was as intoxicated as me. Sound became a still ring, my sight white.

I've become Icarus.  
I flew too close to you, my Sun.

Grounded, gracelessly. The uneven cement cushions the fall. My finger grasps at the joints of the concrete floor for any semblance of stillness. I twirl the grass that grows from between the cracks. And I pluck each blade with fervor, laying waste to the miniature ruin. The dirt, cool and somewhat damp, calms my fevered mind. So I get some under my nails and into the grooves of my fingertips, but I ache for more.

What's beyond the slip of this sidewalk?  
I want to sink my knees into the depths,  
let my wounds fester.

This holy ground?  
let it scrape me,

I'll crawl into the crust of the earth. I don't want to be seen like those little lines on a map. I want to be shaken up, I want to be broken into. And so I'll wait—for a tremor so great that it'll swallow me whole or to resurface as clay.

Will you let me in?  
Into the cavity between your body and theirs?

I'll find a way to fit, I'll make a way to fit.  
And you'll be the one to reach out.  
Maybe then our time will be right. ▲



# THE ART OF NOT DISAPPEARING

I love to eat. I love the sensory explosions of flavor, smell, and texture; the alchemical process of cooking; the coming together and conversation that accompanies many meals. I daydream about what to make for dinner and fantasize about trying new recipes. I also feel internalized guilt and shame about my love for food. There's something about large women who feel pleasure at the act of eating, who relish their food, that US culture has constructed as particularly deplorable. This cultural denigration undoubtedly sits at the crossroads of misogyny, racism, normative gender-roles, oppressive beauty standards, ableism, and fat-phobia.

I haven't always relished eating. As a teenager, I frankly found food disgusting. I never daydreamed about my next meal, and when it was time to sit down at the table, all I could think about was the physical grossness of food—the cooked cartilage and tendons of a piece of chicken, the mushy babyfood texture of avocado, the coagulated solids in the bottom of a pan, the water floating on top of yogurt. My body and its physicality embarrassed me and I resented needing to eat. I wanted to photosynthesize. I'd turn my face away from the table and towards the window, full of longing: "Why can't I sustain myself by soaking up the sun's solar rays?"

It may not surprise you that this phase of disgust coincided perfectly with a strong commitment to disappearing.

At school I hardly spoke, and if I did, I made sure my voice was soft. As a tall person, instead of towering, I regularly folded myself behind small desks, into small seats, cubbies, and corners. If I was forced to take up a disproportionate amount of vertical space, I vowed (while crossing my legs to make myself tinier on the bus), then I would commit to taking up as little horizontal room as possible. I believed what our culture had to say about women and food—namely that my relationship to eating needed to be one of restraint, control, and disinterest. Disgust provided a justification for disciplining my body and its desires. In short, I fully inhabited my own personal intersection of the crossroads mentioned earlier, and as a result, willed myself to fade away.

Have you seen *Spirited Away*? Yes? Good. You know the scene in the first half, when our hero Chihiro first arrives at the bath house? It's the worst day of her life, right? She sees her parents turned into pigs and she's stuck in an alternate spirit world. She begins to disappear, to fade away into invisible transparency. Do you know what brings her back? What tethers her to the world? Eating. Haku offers her onigiri. And Chihiro gulps them down while sobbing, her form solidifying, her emotions spilling forth.

This is my favorite scene in the movie. Chihiro shows us that eating physically connects us with our bodies, our feelings, the world. Food is about both physical strength and emotional care—sustenance.

Food is power. It is at the center of cultures. It shapes human relationships with other people, plant and animal life, and the land. Food can colonize. Dishes like chop suey demonstrate the ways that food can assimilate and appropriate. As seen in Indigenous reestablishments of Native foodways, food has the potential to heal, rejuvenate, and fuel sovereignty. The Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for School Children Program, which fed thousands and powered self-determination, exemplifies the political capacity of food—its ability to nourish and liberate. Food makes it possible to take up space, and to thrive in that space—whether that entails rescuing our parents from being trapped in an alternate spirit world forever; engaging in mutual aid and radical politics; filling a room with our laughter; or sitting with our legs open, spilling a little onto the bus seat next to us.

My physical body, while not all of who I am, shapes my being in this world. Eating fuels that being, physically and emotionally. Eating enables me to feel connected to myself. When I am feeling down, there's nothing more comforting than a steaming egg poached in shakshuka's smoky tang. When I'm procrastinating, nothing keeps me company like stirring a simmering pot of aromatic orange rinds for hours as they transform into marmalade.

I don't want to disappear very often anymore. But when I do now, I know that something is very wrong. I try to respond by checking in and taking stock. And then, I cook something delicious, savoring the flavors and warmth as they bring me back to myself. Eating is a commitment I make everyday, to myself, and my own wellbeing. It is a praxis of care rooted in a relationship with my body based on attention, desire, and above all, pleasure.

Now, take a minute and sit with yourself. Close your eyes. Check in.

How are you feeling? What does your body need?

Are there specific flavors your feelings crave? What do you imbibe when you celebrate? Which tastes offer comfort?

I hope I've made you hungry! And, I hope you relish whatever you decide to eat. ▲

ART // LAUREN WICKS





By Keira Brennan

WAVES

I lie flat on my back with my eyes gently closed. The hot sun rests on my chest like a warm blanket fresh from the dryer. My hands drop to my sides and swish around in the cold water, unsure of what lies beneath me. I am alone. I slowly rise and fall with the push of each wave that crashes in the distance like a baby in a rocking chair. The faint screams of children playing on the shore slowly fade away as I drift further from land. I begin to feel the rhythm of my breath and the beat of my heart in sync with the ocean.

I feel a sense of anxiousness as my mind begins to think about the possibilities of the undiscovered depths of the sea. A shark could be looming hundreds of feet under my board, in search of its next victim. The artificial scent of my Banana Boat slowly creeps up to my nose every few minutes, gently welcoming me back to reality. I can't help but think further about how I am resting on just a slim surfboard in the great unknown. What is beneath me, in front of me, and next to me is uncertain. Yet here I am, in the middle of the ocean.

I feel small. ▲



I read that you are "the oldest,  
Continually inhabited city  
In all of Mexico."  
Whatever that means.

Letter 1:  
"To Cholula," 1919-1949

To me,  
You hold the origins of my ancestral line.  
My abuelo was raised by you.  
I know he's not the first,

*My family and I have spent our entire lives on stolen land. In fact, both sides of my Mexican-American bloodline were born precisely from this loss. Each of these following letters are addressed directly to a land, by its indigenous rather than present-day municipal name, that I or my ancestors have lived on during a formative period of their life. In addition to the text itself, the letters include a photo of each individual on that land and a rough estimate of the dates they were living there. Though these eight cities are by no means comprehensive of all the stolen lands my ancestry has touched or inhabited, these are the places where they spent the most time in their youth and thus where they were reared by the Earth. I hope that by reading these letters and viewing my piece, readers will be inspired to look further into their own histories and speak to the lands that contributed to the formation of who they are today.*

Letter 2:  
"To Totorame,"  
1925-1951

My abuela spent 26 years with you.  
Do you remember her?

I don't.  
She died of progressive  
supranuclear palsy  
When I was 1 or so.  
I'm told her fight  
was long and hard.  
Did she learn that  
from you?  
You were once  
known as the Place  
of the Deer.  
Even when your  
original peoples  
disappeared,

Others fought to keep you from harm.  
They lost.  
So did Maria Luisa Tirado.  
I never really knew her.  
Can I still know you?

# Letters to the Land

But I don't know anyone further.  
I think that's how historians view you.  
They forget,  
They were never told,  
They preserve what they were.  
I'm trying to remember.

by Natalie  
Grace Gomez

Letter 3:  
"To Chichimeca,"  
1930-1946

Every story seems the same:

Displacement,  
Disease,  
Death.

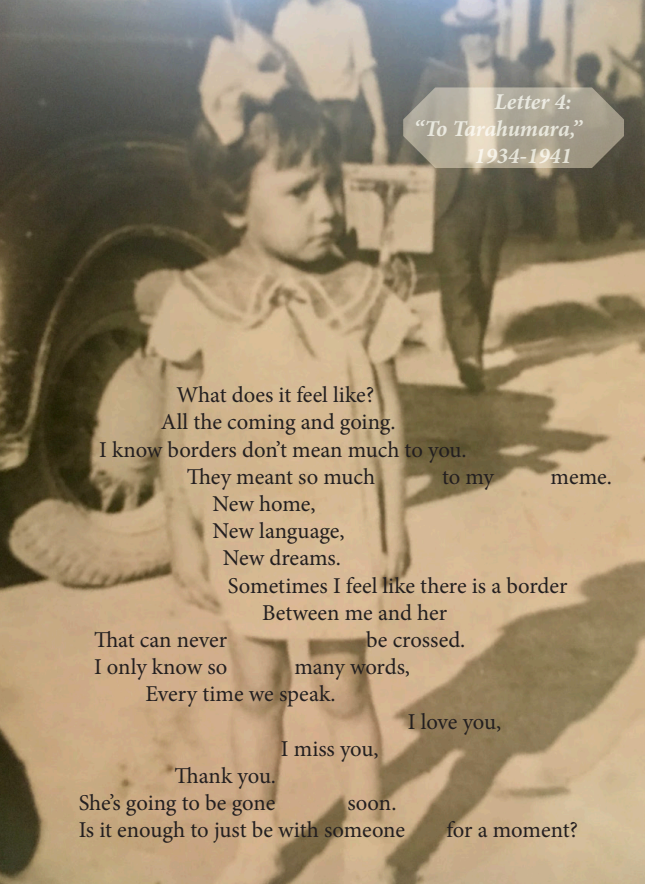
It must not seem  
that way to you.  
My lito left you  
For a better  
chance at life.  
Was it?

The cancer was  
already stuck  
in his belly.  
The ending  
stayed the same.  
Maybe it's in the  
people.

Not in you.  
I don't want it to be in me.  
Teach me *how to change* the story.

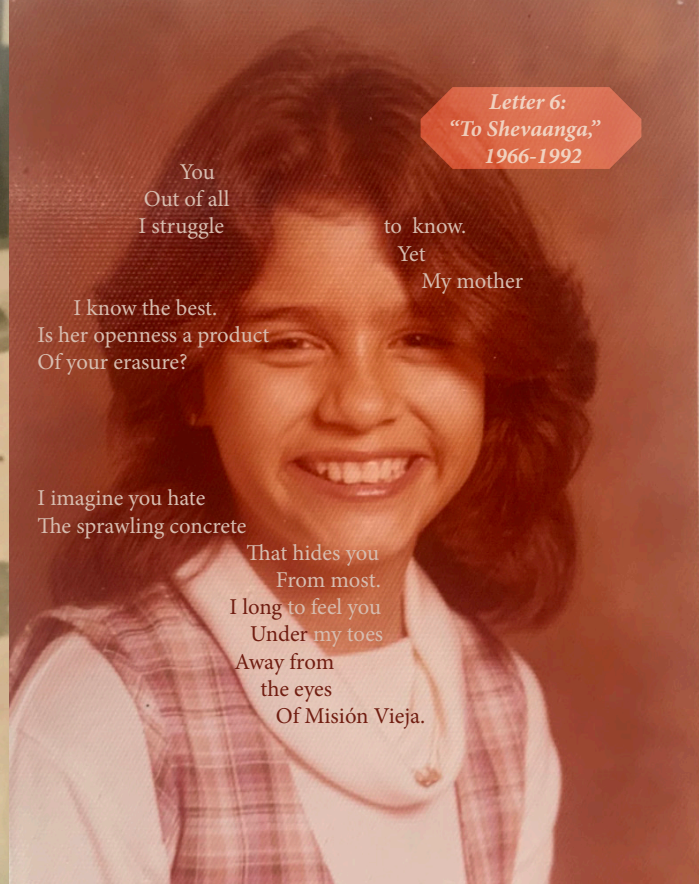
ART // NATALIE GRACE GOMEZ





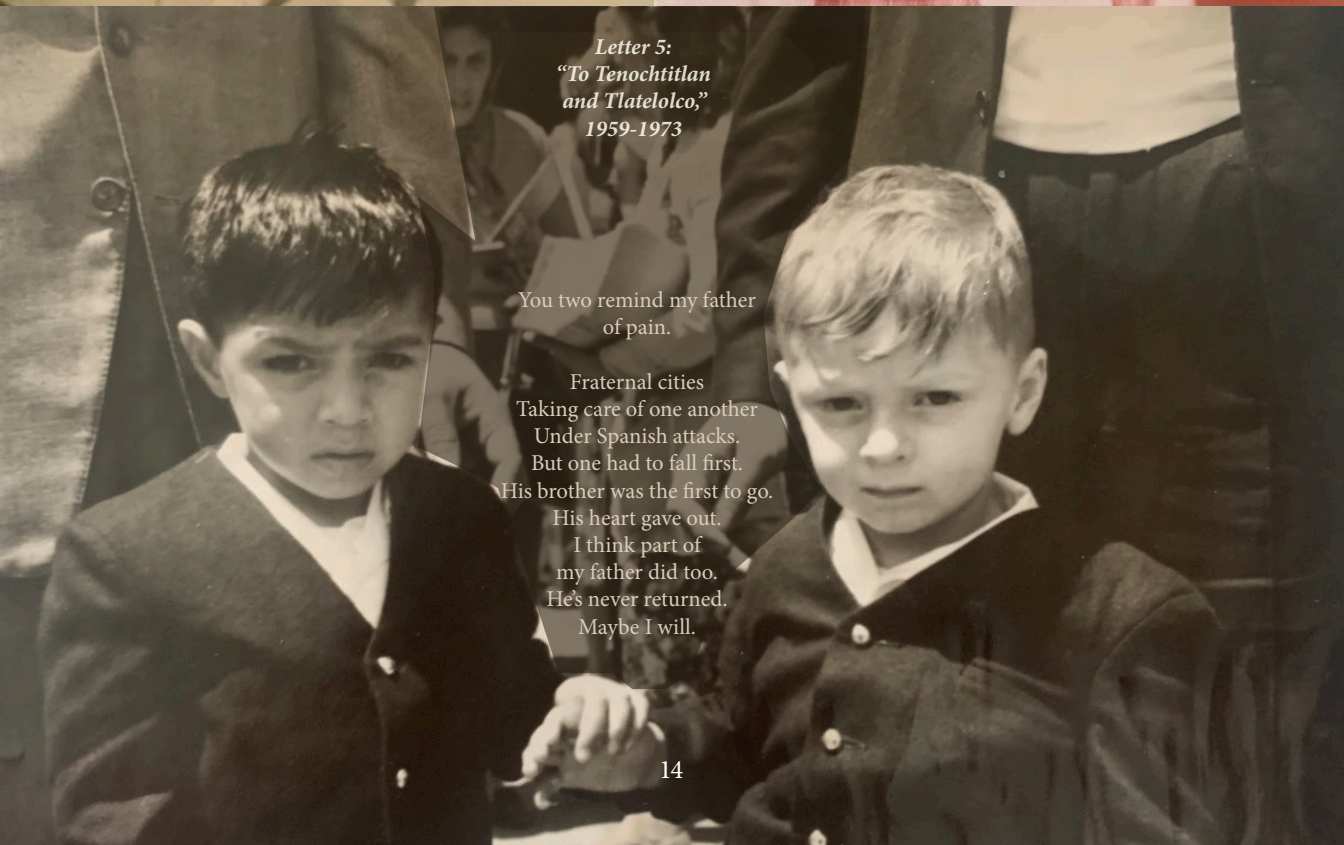
Letter 4:  
"To Tarahumara,"  
1934-1941

What does it feel like?  
All the coming and going.  
I know borders don't mean much to you.  
They meant so much to my meme.  
New home,  
New language,  
New dreams.  
Sometimes I feel like there is a border  
Between me and her  
That can never be crossed.  
I only know so many words,  
Every time we speak.  
I love you,  
I miss you,  
Thank you.  
She's going to be gone soon.  
Is it enough to just be with someone for a moment?



Letter 6:  
"To Shevaanga,"  
1966-1992

You  
Out of all  
I struggle to know.  
Yet  
My mother  
I know the best.  
Is her openness a product  
Of your erasure?  
I imagine you hate  
The sprawling concrete  
That hides you  
From most.  
I long to feel you  
Under my toes  
Away from  
the eyes  
Of Misión Vieja.



Letter 5:  
"To Tenochtitlan  
and Tlatelolco,"  
1959-1973

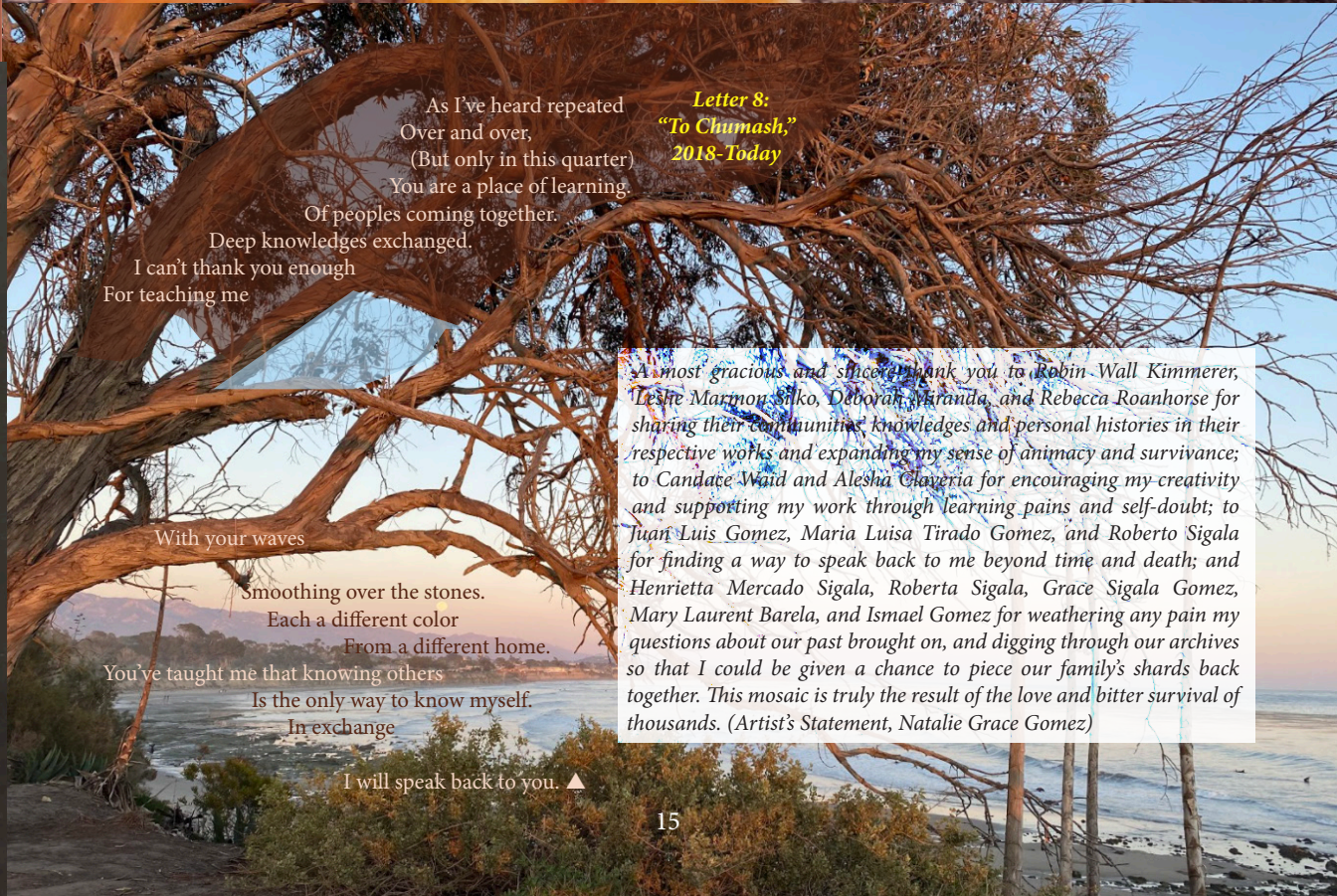
You two remind my father  
of pain.  
Fraternal cities  
Taking care of one another  
Under Spanish attacks.  
But one had to fall first.  
His brother was the first to go.  
His heart gave out.  
I think part of  
my father did too.  
He's never returned.  
Maybe I will.



Letter 7:  
"To Pasinogna,"  
2000-2018

I'm most ashamed  
That I never knew your name.  
Pasinogna,  
You've given a home to those  
Who left theirs,  
Who wanted to forget theirs,  
Who never were told theirs.  
No one asked  
Or noticed you.  
I'm asking now,

Because for me,  
It has always  
been you.



Letter 8:  
"To Chumash,"  
2018-Today

As I've heard repeated  
Over and over,  
(But only in this quarter)  
You are a place of learning.  
Of peoples coming together.  
Deep knowledges exchanged.  
I can't thank you enough  
For teaching me

With your waves

Smoothing over the stones.  
Each a different color  
From a different home.  
You've taught me that knowing others  
Is the only way to know myself.  
In exchange

I will speak back to you. ▲

A most gracious and sincere thank you to Robin Wall Kimmerer, Leslie Marmou Silko, Deborah Miranda, and Rebecca Roanhorse for sharing their communities' knowledges and personal histories in their respective works and expanding my sense of animacy and survivance; to Candace Waid and Alesha Claveria for encouraging my creativity and supporting my work through learning pains and self-doubt; to Juan Luis Gomez, Maria Luisa Tirado Gomez, and Roberto Sigala for finding a way to speak back to me beyond time and death; and Henrietta Mercado Sigala, Roberta Sigala, Grace Sigala Gomez, Mary Laurent Barela, and Ismael Gomez for weathering any pain my questions about our past brought on, and digging through our archives so that I could be given a chance to piece our family's shards back together. This mosaic is truly the result of the love and bitter survival of thousands. (Artist's Statement, Natalie Grace Gomez)



I thought I would feel relieved.

Perhaps that's shameful to admit. Makes me appear heartless, ungrateful, unfilial.

But when I thought about your death, when I imagined it happening—never this soon, never this sudden, but in years and years from now—when I imagined your death, I thought...

Looking back, it's almost difficult. Pinpointing all the things that made me wish I weren't your child.

Perhaps it was the piles and piles of things—of trash—that filled our apartment, the bugs that would crawl over my arms and face when I slept. I learned the term later. There's a whole tv show. Hoarder; that's what you were. I still have dreams that I'm being buried under the junk. It's suffocating.

It was.

Sometimes I think it was the smell. Of alcohol in the air, soaked into my clothes, into the tiles on the floor. How we talked to you, we begged you, to get help. That it was killing you. Literally, killing you at the end, but you never listened.

Maybe it was all the late-night calls or texts, the borrowing money without paying it back, the, "I raised you, it's the least you could do," any time I tried to, "talk back." I am the child, you are the parent; why should I take care of you?

I was tired of it all. Of you. I hated you, I resented you. In those few moments, those gradually more frequent moments, especially toward the end when your health so visibly was declining,

when I imagined your death, for certain,

# I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD FEEL RELIEVED.

Isn't that sad? It's painful. To love someone so much. To hate them. To cherish your memories with them, to resent their hold on your time and your energy. To miss them terribly. To never want to see them again. To be so conflicted. It's exhausting.

I'm exhausted.

I was.

But when the time came, when I saw you, lying there, facedown, bottle in hand, the stench of alcohol enveloping you (why wouldn't you listen? You never listened, why?); when I found you there, when I put my head to your chest, and listened; I remembered. My head on your chest, the steady sound of your heartbeat, as you sang me to sleep as a child.

While my hands moved over your heart, your lungs, all my strength, trying to beat you back to life, the sound of the approaching siren in the background; I remembered. Playing patty cake as a child.

When they arrived, I stood back, and watched them work on you; that horrible scene—

it wasn't like in the movies, they cut your shirt open, exposing all your flesh, I remember that scene, even as I try to erase it from memory, all the flesh, the cables, the strange voices where they didn't belong, saying words I wasn't familiar with, but that I somehow knew meant only bad things. After they'd driven you away, I sat, head spinning, in the silent apartment;

I remembered. Waiting for you to come home, running into your arms, you lifting me to the sky, I felt like I could fly, there was never any fear that you would let me fall, that you would ever let me down. All parents are heroes in the eyes of their child.

At least for a while.

The emergency room had no open seats. How familiar the scene was to me, from all the previous times I've sat here, waiting to hear about you. I sat on the tile floor, under the fluorescent lights, and from there everything is almost a blur. I do remember though: I had never felt so cold. I sat there,

waiting,

waiting,

waiting.

For the news, for the news about you, waiting to hear about you; that you were okay, that it was bad, but you would be fine, and we could still get you the help you needed. All the responsibilities from before, that I felt were so unfair, I was gladly planning taking on in my head. You had raised me, it was the least I could do. I could still take care of you. I could still save you.

They moved you to a new room. This one was the true waiting room. When I finally saw you again, my hands, shaking, touched your face, and your sightless eyes stared back at me. Empty, so empty, both of us. Do you remember, when I was a child, how you would caress my head, how you would brush my hair, pinch my cheeks in your hands, kiss my forehead?

I kissed your forehead, I touched your cheek. I told you I'd see you in the morning.

And then I went home, and I waited.

The late night call this time was not from you, but it was about you. I heard them. The words. Then I had to repeat them.

Again and again.

And do you know? During that whole time, while I had to go around, making calls; having to tell the world: the tiny, insignificant world that revolved around you, that lived for you, that loved and cherished you, despite all your faults; I had to tell it that it's star had extinguished, I had to watch as it crumbled down around me, over me, until I was buried under the rubble, suffocating, I was truly suffocating.

Do you know? During that whole time, during the whole ordeal, from the moment I found you, until the moment you died, and up until now?

Never once

Have I felt

Relieved. ▲

BY M. S. GALLOWAY



# Warhol's LUNCH



The bastard's name was Poosie. He had an orange Mussolini moustache and was screaming and spitting on his neighbor's lawn, "You motherfuckers! Motherfuckers!" He wore a purple wife beater and sucked his pinky. Inside of the home was Archer who opened the turkey patterned curtains and saw him out there throwing a fucking fit. "Don't go outside," said Archer's mama. He asked, "Why is he so upset?" "I won poker. His papa gave me his pornographic tapes." Archer was only seventeen. Archer opened the door and Poosie's screams turned into bat shrieks. Archer dragged a wooden chair onto the porch and put his feet up on the small table. That table was his favorite, it had carvings of pin up girls dressed as farmers in rice fields. Poosie screamed, "Tell your bitch mother to go fuck herself!" Archer looked at Poosie with an unnerving calm. He sighed and checked his Minnie Mouse watch. Archer said quietly, "You're too loud, come here and we'll talk." Ten more minutes of yelling and little Poosie left. Archer began to water the cucumber plants.

Three clown children around the age of five licked their ice cream cones as they watched and smirked.

Phucker was the local thug. He stole a sack of papaya flavored lip glosses from a school girl who was headed home. He had this secret you see, he liked to wear makeup and women's pumps. Archer was buying silver slippers for his mother, when Phucker stole those too. Archer chased him through the library lot, fisherman's market, and dairy farm. Phucker slowed down and said, "Fuck off!" They both pulled out their knives. Archer didn't say a word while all Phucker did was holler, "I'll fucking murder you! I'll slit your throat, you cunt!" Suddenly, Phucker bent his knees and sprinted away. Archer closed his Coca Cola bottle shaped knife and walked back to the shoe shop.

The clown children's eyes bulged as they watched Phucker run away. They were up in trees sucking on grapefruits.

The worst of the lot was a middle aged man named Kumshawt. He was buff and tall and wore rectangle glasses. He kissed his boss' ass and smelled like rotten fish. He was Archer's only cousin who had hemorrhoids. He foolishly threatened little Archer for telling the truth. Kumshawt called Archer and said, "Don't make me fly to your place. I'll cause you real harm. I'll cut you and cook you and feed you to the pigs." Archer shrugged and started to replace the broken lightbulb in the kitchen that was shaped like a rabbit.

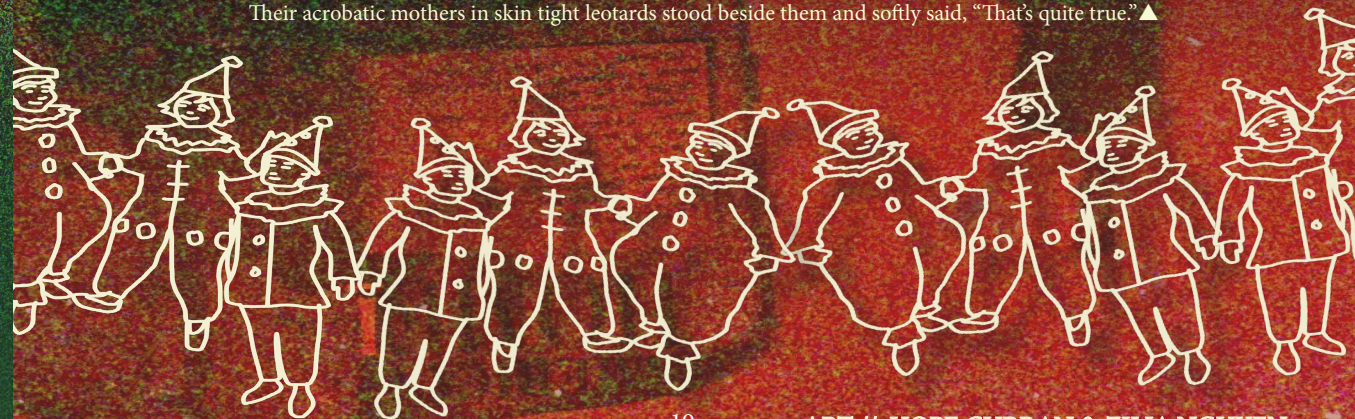
This time, the clown children were pressing their ears against Archer's window as they chewed their boiled eggs.

Poosie, Phucker, and Kumshawt were all at Archer's work. They told everyone at his shop that Archer was a bloody fuck. They screamed at Archer, "You little cow fuck!" But you see, Archer looked quite calm. Archer turned around and looked at the three. Archer grabbed tomato soup cans and smashed their brittle skulls in. The three were on the checkerboard floor bleeding. Archer grabbed a jacket and cleaned it all up quietly as a musician played "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" on the trombone near the desserts.

To the right were the three little clown children. They dropped all of their groceries and jumped up and down smiling. The children repeated,

"The barking dog never bites, the barking dog never bites, the barking dog never bites!"

Their acrobatic mothers in skin tight leotards stood beside them and softly said, "That's quite true." ▲





# ELEVEN HOURS

By Keilani Snyder

Eleven hours. Eleven hours we rode from Washington's dewy emerald woods into the dust and heat of our distant destination. My legs creaked stiffly when we sputtered to a stop. The few of us who were young; had adopted the same posture as our worn ancestors. We shuffled in lines toward the doorway, which swung open and welcomed a swirl of heat and dust to the cool, dim shuttle.

It took more than a minute for our eyes to adjust to the bleached landscape, welcomed by the same tower, still looming over us after all of these years, an uncompromising guardian of all that was no longer ours. I could not imagine what it was like to leave our farms and greenhouses, our coastal homes for this arid place. I could not pretend that our experience was my own. And thus, I felt alone.

I didn't realize that my feet had wandered me away from the crowd, past the barbed wire and the ghost in the tower. It was past the treasured names we honored, that I wandered. There was so little left of the prison which had framed my Obachan's adolescence. After the war, the barracks were broken down or sold to local farmers, their histories erased. I could see the shuffling lines from the trains, the identification tags thrashing in the wind like birds trying to escape, entangled in wires.

Save for a few sugar-coated stories and a small paragraph in the lower left corner of a page in my history books, I do not remember learning anything of what had happened here. Nonetheless, I felt it. I felt it in the dirt under the soles of my shoes, the dust which permeated my eyes and nostrils, the heat which hung heavy in the air. The way the unforgiving blue sky came crashing down on me, faded barracks and weeds seeming to explode under the weight of our history and tears and blood and sweat. I still feel it now. Words, even these written here, fail to release the weight of it all.

As I gravitated toward the barracks I found myself in the ribcage of that forsaken home. The doorway opened and exhaled the cool air that the lungs of the shell harbored. Somehow the old thing had kept up all these years, held by a rotting sternum and whatever else it had left. There was an undeniable soul in the bleached shingles, the peeling plywood, the creaking banisters. It was old, but alive. It slumbered. You could feel its deep breath in the glimmering showers of sunlight and golden dust and the thick air which moved in and out of its chambers. Even in the summer heat, you could feel the chattering of teeth during winters spent in these halls. The footsteps pound in your head and in your heart and you're not sure if it's the remnants of lives lived or the blood rushing in your skull.

Two and a half years. Two and a half years they remained wrongfully imprisoned. Two and a half years of rations and rancid living conditions. Two and a half years of abuse. It was only by bloody nails that they reemerged from that place to still call themselves Americans, and they did it the Japanese way. And the Japanese way requires a quiet struggle.

Many of their stories were washed down the drain like tea-leaves, chronicles buried with their bodies.

Just as I had wandered off, I instinctually trudged back to my family, my loved ones. For the first time I saw the lines in my grandmother's cheeks and under her eyes. I saw her frame and heart and I felt that she was not weathered and old, but the same young girl who skipped through the deprived dining halls. I felt the love in her presence, despite her ever present hesitation to embrace me. For the first time, I didn't need that embrace. I glanced over the elderly faces surrounding me. I saw the lines in their faces and upon their hands, maps of their lives all leading to here. I finally recognized that the long faded callouses on their hands only became callouses of the heart. ▲

ART // ASHIKA SHAH





# THE TIGRESS

By Matthew Choi

With a few miles left before she could reach the safety of her cottage, the mother had run out of rice cakes to feed the Tiger.

"Please, Tiger, you must let me go."

"I will let you go if you feed me another rice cake." The dough stuck between its claws stretched out like string. For five hours now, the Tiger had chased her and her legs were close to giving out.

"I have given you all I had. Look." She showed it the empty basket, which was lined at the bottom with a powdered layer of starch.

"But I am still hungry. And if you have run out of rice cakes, then I must eat something else instead." Saliva gleamed on its sharp teeth. Deeper in the forest from where she had come, a sparrow's song called out to her. She choked on her own swollen heart, as the tears ran down her chin.

"Please, Tiger, have mercy," she said.

But the Tiger ignored her crying and stretched its mouth open wide. In the pit of its throat, the mother saw darkness. It closed its mouth on the dirt beneath her feet and tossed its head up as her narrow figure scratched against its throat before landing in its stomach. The Tiger licked its lips clean, savoring the taste of rice memorialized on its fangs.

Once in its gut, the mother waited for the acid to boil her skin up, or for the bones of other mothers scattered below her to puncture her skin. But she felt the lurch of the Tiger as it stood on its hind legs, posturing itself beneath the day's heat, which cut through the beast's fur and muscle. There was no light, just a comfortable warmth that swam beneath her skin.

As her eyes adjusted to the darkness of the Tiger's stomach, she could see her hand if she put it close enough in front of her face; not the fine details, but the shape and texture. She saw the wrinkles around her knuckles and each of her five fingers as she wiggled them back and forth. She counted them just to make sure. They smelled of rice wine.

Yesterday, she had been at a housewarming party for the governor of a nearby town, who she remembered from her childhood. Back then, he was a frail and poor boy whose skin clung to his bones like hair braiding onto itself.

The two of them had left the village at different times for different reasons, but he found her again two decades later. She had gotten pregnant twice and her body had been carved up by age, but

beneath the wrinkles and calluses she was the same woman he remembered.

His men arrived on horseback wearing brigandines and offered her a vase of wine carved with the same intricate designs and ornate patterns from their home village. In return, they asked that she would dance at his party as a guest of honor. She asked what they meant by dance, and they handed her a pouch full of coins like those gifted by the village three miles east of her home, enough to buy up at least four water jugs. So she told the children to be safe, bought enough rice to keep them fed for a week, and left for the party. It was from that frail and poor boy, now a wealthy man, that she had received the basketful of rice cakes.

In the walls of the Tiger's stomach, she grasped into the empty basket, hoping that another piece would materialize from thin air, soft and sticky in her hands, a gift from whatever god or spirit was watching over her from above the canopy of trees. She understood too late that there was no way to escape. Rice could never satisfy a Tiger; it required meat, the thrill of the hunt to satiate the pit in its stomach. Sitting in it now, she wondered how the Tiger would ever eat enough to fill up the space. She stood up carefully, stretching her arms up above her for a ceiling, but there was none.

And when she stretched her arms to the side, there was nothing again.

There was space to walk, and so she took a stroll, wondering if there was a way out, testing the boundaries of the cavernous space. The ground beneath her was a gross and gelatinous texture akin to mold. Her nails had grown long and sharp in the days before the party (she had tried to imitate the fashion she had seen at the gatherings), and she used them to claw at the stomach's membrane. Slime ran beneath her fingernails and she imagined that they were coated with a brown powder now, or maybe a red one. She could not tell color in the darkness of the pit.

She reached for her still-nested hairpin and stabbed at the ground. Even using both of her arms, the membrane never gave way and resisted her push. Blood leaked down her hand as the edges of the bronze hairpin cut against her fingers. The pain burning in her hand roiled into her heart, and she grew angry. She cried out and asked the Tiger to release her. If force did not give way, perhaps words could.

"Let me out, Tiger. Have you no sympathy? I have done nothing to hurt you. I have fed you all I have."

The stomach lurched in response. Her feet slipped and she landed on her stinging palms. The gelatin coating smeared against her and caught in her hair. Being pretty was a skill only needed for yesterday, so she didn't mind its loss. Mammalian warmth coursed throughout the pit, tempered by the wind the Tiger inhaled. Eventually, she settled into the rhythm of the Tiger's movement: thump, thump, thump, swaying side to side like a fishing boat. She had been on one with the father of her first child. They had sailed out into the far center of a lake and sat there. There they had the luxury of drinking without concern, so they took with them a gourd with rice wine and drank from it in turn; just as she did within the Tiger now, the wine had lurched in their stomachs with the rhythm of the sea.

When the Tiger jumped over the occasional hill or boulder (she assumed), she was thrown onto her hands or her back but the ground was soft enough to recover quickly. Something brewed in her head, a snaking knife that stabbed at the stomach and mind. The nausea had glazed her head in a sick-sweet aching, dull and heavy, and between the pain of the motion sickness and the darkness of the pit, the mother was lulled into a dreamless sleep.

She separated herself from the sticky ground like one would peel off a leech from skin, and reminded herself where she was. A dark, empty pit that stretched out further than she could tell. Memory conflicted with the present as she stretched her arms out, only to have them stop at a slick surface, a coat of mammalian sap. It was the same substance that coated the ground beneath her, which had slipped between her toes and nails. Dirt and spit still clothed her. She ached all around her body. It started from her feet and reached up into the ends of her hair, hanging loosely in front of her eyes and swaying along with the Tiger's stride.

Her hair. She could see it. When she had fallen asleep, its presence was only known to her when its sharp ends stabbed into her eyes, but they were now bunched up and matted and visible. Above her, sifted light settled across the roof in cobweb fashion. The light was falling through the Tiger's throat. The smell of blood and rice was unmistakable: it was still the Tiger's stomach she

was in, but it had tightened, left less slack. And the dimensions continued to push and drag. Her hunger stabbed her. It begged her for something, and she was desperate enough that she thought of biting off a chunk from the muscled walls around her, though she never did.

By the second night, the mother was comfortable. The fur kept her warm and she wondered what it would be like if her skin grew enough hair to mat her all around. After the third night but before the fifth morning, her head pressed against the roof and her limbs contorted in the narrow space. With her ear so close to the heart, she could hear it whirl softly at night, a carriage wheel rolling over packed dirt. She would tumble backwards or forwards and the heart's whisper began to gallop like horse hooves on gravel, and she knew it was morning. The tight, hot stomach made her ill and a fever washed over her as the walls contracted around her. The sweat ran behind her ears and pooled below her neck as the Tiger rocked her to sleep.

When she woke up, the fever had passed and light seared her eyes. Darkness had become both an order of habit and a luxury, and the sensations overwhelmed her now that she could see. The colors mixed together. The sounds blared. So for a while, she covered her ears and kneeled with her face close to the ground, tasting the dirt so that she could avoid light and sound altogether.

With the earth on her tongue, her stomach rumbled. A bug crawled across the ground—she could hear its spiny legs treading land—and she opened up her mouth and let it crawl in. It was small and there was hardly a crunch as she bit down on it. The legs lay disassembled on her tongue, scattered in the humid climate of the mouth. One of the legs stuck to her cheek, and she gathered saliva in her mouth to gargle all of it down. Not a wasted bit of food.

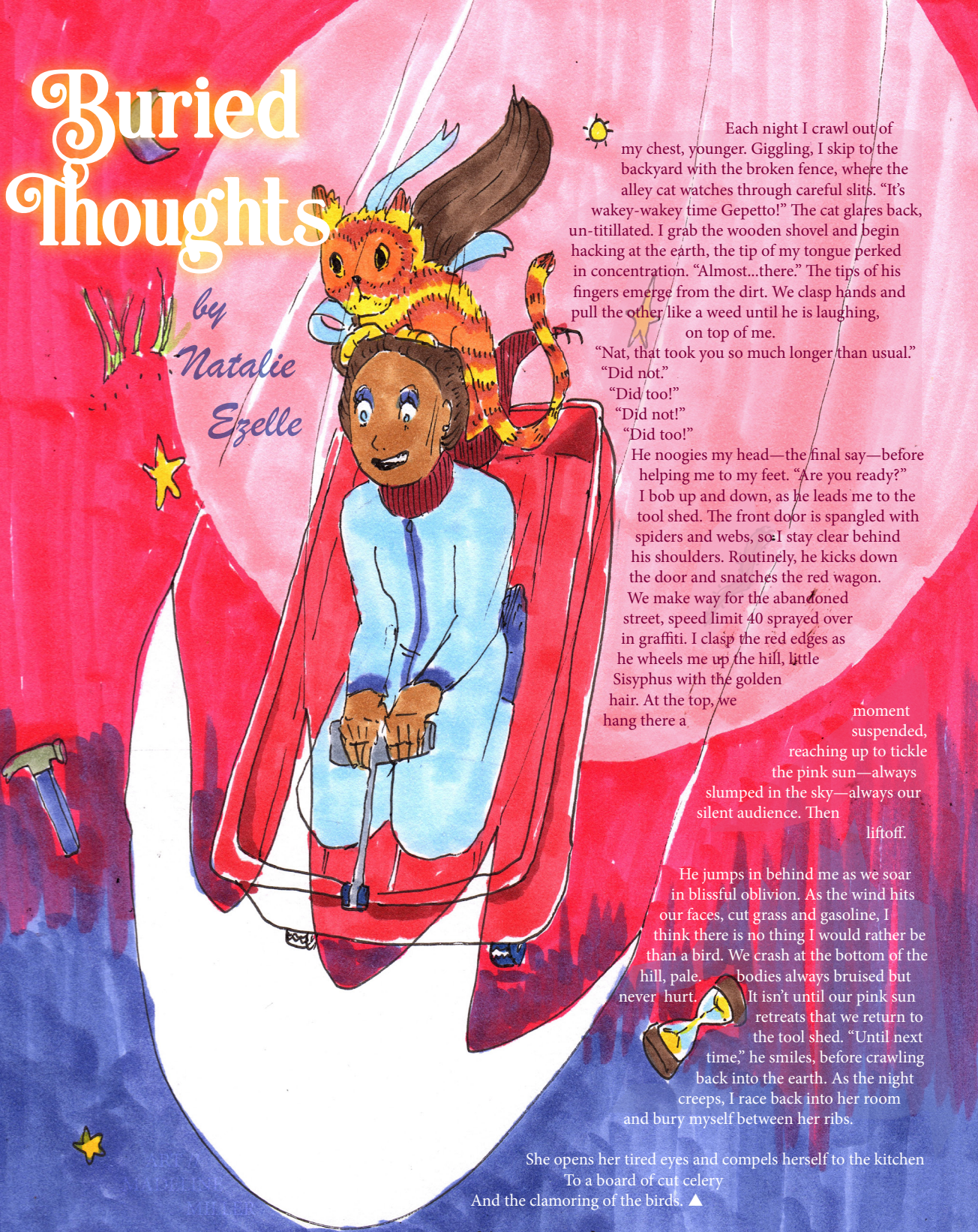
Taste was reborn in gruesome fashion. Look up. See the sky. See the trees. Drag the dirt beneath her nails, and paint the ground with little scars. Smell the pine and chip off the bark. She forced herself to do all of these things until she became reacquainted with the outside, accustomed to her new body, firm and sturdy and impatient. Something devilish coursed through her stomach; it thundered there, and in just a few miles, she would reach her cottage. ▲

ART // SAVANNAH LARSEN



# Buried Thoughts

by  
Natalie  
Ezelle



Each night I crawl out of my chest, younger. Giggling, I skip to the backyard with the broken fence, where the alley cat watches through careful slits. "It's wakey-wakey time Gepetto!" The cat glares back, un-titillated. I grab the wooden shovel and begin hacking at the earth, the tip of my tongue perked in concentration. "Almost...there." The tips of his fingers emerge from the dirt. We clasp hands and pull the other like a weed until he is laughing, on top of me.

"Nat, that took you so much longer than usual."  
"Did not."  
"Did too!"  
"Did not!"  
"Did too!"  
He noogies my head—the final say—before helping me to my feet. "Are you ready?" I bob up and down, as he leads me to the tool shed. The front door is spangled with spiders and webs, so I stay clear behind his shoulders. Routinely, he kicks down the door and snatches the red wagon. We make way for the abandoned street, speed limit 40 sprayed over in graffiti. I clasp the red edges as he wheels me up the hill, little Sisyphus with the golden hair. At the top, we hang there a

moment suspended, reaching up to tickle the pink sun—always slumped in the sky—always our silent audience. Then liftoff.

He jumps in behind me as we soar in blissful oblivion. As the wind hits our faces, cut grass and gasoline, I think there is no thing I would rather be than a bird. We crash at the bottom of the hill, pale bodies always bruised but never hurt. It isn't until our pink sun retreats that we return to the tool shed. "Until next time," he smiles, before crawling back into the earth. As the night creeps, I race back into her room and bury myself between her ribs.

She opens her tired eyes and compels herself to the kitchen To a board of cut celery And the clamoring of the birds. ▲

# AFTERNOON TEA

By Nisha Lal

There is the table, all spruced up with the good cloth, and the nice china plates laid atop of it. There is the unchipped teapot (freshly dusted) and the mini cucumber sandwiches, the garden lilacs cut in a clear vase, cloth napkins with little mushrooms embroidered over the edges (as if they were never intended for actual use), oh, and the almost done cherry pastries in the oven—don't burn them this time. Maybe this is enough, and impressive. Maybe this says "I'm doing just fine." Maybe she will call and cancel before the afternoon.

"Hi!"  
"Hey!"  
"How are you?"  
"Fine!"  
Thanks for asking.  
Don't just stand there smiling, you idiot. Let her in. Let her see what you've done. You're doing great, see? Mushroom napkins, only people with their shit together own those. You should sit down too. The pastries. If they're burnt you'll die, but she doesn't need to know that. She's talking. "Everything looks great!" "Aw thank you, I just kind of put together what I had." Lie. "Is something in the oven? Smells good." Was that passive aggressive? Are they burning? "Yeah, I'll just go check on the pastries!" Smile and wave. Like a penguin. She'll never know your panic. The pastries are fine. Quick, stuff one in your mouth to make sure they taste good before you serve them. HOT. Bad idea. Water cools the tongue. Get it together. Get back out there. "These are cherry pastries. They're hot, be careful." "This looks great, thank you." It's been quiet too long, you can hear the clock ticking. Stop smiling and say something. Say something. Anything. Where are the words? Those you rehearsed in the shower and the mirror and over breakfast? What was it again? You can't just ignore me for months? I'm a person too? It's too late. Here she goes. "So, I wanted to meet with you because I know we've had our differences—" "It's fine. I'm fine. It's okay. We're cool."

"Oh great! I just wanted to make sure that after all this time—" "Yep. All good over here." "That's great." This is terrible. This isn't the plan. Oh look, it's silent again. Fill the silence. Overshare. Overshare. Don't use the expensive napkins. Wipe it on your skirt. Overshare. Huh, just like old times. Glance at the clock. It's already five. She's picking up her bag. "This was fun, let's do it again some time." "Yeah definitely!" Not. It's over. It's done. Glance in the mirror. Tears. Use the expensive napkin. Maybe it'll go better when you rehearse the encounter in the shower. When you say what you really mean. ▲







# Lavender

By Alys Greenwale

On this charming little path,  
surrounded by the nature that has  
accompanied me my whole life, I find strength.

The lavender tickles my skin and the sun burns bright in my face as I take my next step, and the one after that, and the next. The familiar falls behind me as I walk further towards the future. Walking and walking, on and on.

Where I will go, I am not sure. All I am sure of is that I am walking away, leaving the past behind always. The moments that exist in melancholy memories are dropped and left on the ground, falling in the dirt and forming roots that I can no longer see, but that grow new life. They grow into big bushes that block the path. I could not turn back if I wanted to.

No divination may warn me of the future, so I must rely on what I know now. I must reflect, constantly, so I may never lose my head. So I may never forget myself. So I may never find myself lost in a world I do not know. I am always in a world I do not know.

Who will I become, when my feet start to ache? When my belly begins to quake and my bones start to break? When I am left to myself for a little too long, and a little too far, and a little too gone? I must hold onto my truths to keep my feet moving. As long as my feet are moving, I will not lose sight of my path. As long as my feet are moving, I will stay who I am.

I know that my path will never end, that I will forever be walking, even when I am cold and tired, hungry and lost, sad and forgotten. But I will be fine. The lavender will always be there to graze my side, the sun will always be there to tan my skin, the familiar will always be there behind me, and a beautiful future will always lie ahead. I do not waiver. I refuse to. My nature gives me strength. ▲



# Character Development

by Juanita Theanacho



ART // AUDREY CARGANILLA

I did it out of boredom, as crazy as it sounds. Cocooned in a cloud of blankets with pen in hand and nothing to do, I decided to fall in love.

There was no reason other than to see what would happen, and happen it did.

Once granted permission, what began as a passing fancy hit me like a truck.

My internal orchestra played sweeping violins in the chamber of my physical heart every time she walked into the room. The rollercoaster in my stomach was open for business, and the cars took a loop every time she touched me. I was one of Pavlov's dogs and she was the bell that made my Venus tremble in the wake of her perfumed breeze.

The lack of a solid foundation for my feelings was catastrophic to my psyche, but the seismic thrill of unrequited love was too enticing to resist.

I was slowly killing myself with every lovestruck breath, craving cranial clarity.

I reveled in every squeeze of my heart until the cozy constriction shifted into a sensation more suffocating, more sorrowful. My one-sided love took me around the world, while I watched on like a spectator in the theater of Dante's 2nd hell, reserved for the sin of lust and love. I was the producer, actor, and audience of my one-woman show, and I had lost all control of the narrative.

As tears tracked glitter down my puffy cheeks and stained the shadows on my bed sheets, I clutched my breast with Shakespearean longing, plaintively appealing to The Universe, why? It seemed The Universe, too, was watching with bated breath to see what would happen next.

I hadn't realized at the beginning of it all that I couldn't force the progression of the plot. Like all matters of the heart, the whirlwind would end only when it wished. This big picture would take an eternity to develop, and I would die waiting if I stuck around to see it.

Although the curtains haven't yet completely closed, the stage is no longer as bright as it once was. I rise from my seat and gather my things to leave the theater. I may not be able to induce story progression, but I can nurture the approach to an ending.

My one-sided love doesn't know what she meant to me, but I no longer care to tell her.

As I step outside of the showroom and my feelings for her, the credits begin to roll.

Contrary to the close, my heart's orchestra starts up a score of amour—only this time not for her, but for me.

Cocooned in a cloud of blankets with pen in hand and nothing to do, I write a conclusion and a beginning with the stars and moon as my only witnesses.

Their twinkling sounds like roaring applause. ▲



A pair of webbed palms pushed down to pull a woman from the water. She was no more than two inches tall with twisted green hair that curled and furled to cover the length of her spine.

As she crossed the emerald carpet of a crinkled lily pad, body bare, and barely clothed by virescent thread, the woman stretched—elongating her figure and forcing a low sigh from her lips.

Spanish moss fluttered in the breeze, a speckling of sunlight shone through the trees, and the woman began her *mourning* routine. She plucked a flower from the water's face, watched the alligators rest on the riverbank (sunbathing and snickering to themselves), and counted the chorus of frogs that croaked sweet southern songs.

The day was wistful with Louisiana's sugared-wind.

Yet, when the woman (a nymph with no name) lay listening to the coots' laugh and finishing her floral bouquet, she found something lingering in the lime water; something unfamiliar to the lake's local fauna. Something she couldn't believe the alligators hadn't eaten. Laid on its side, littered with leering leeches, neck bent, bruised, and broken, a pair of acidic eyes peered over the surface of the pond.

Human eyes.

Though submerged, they appeared to swirl with ivy inquiry, seemingly wondering what mystical creature had crawled from the moss to whistle a sea shanty. For a moment, the miniature did not move. She caught her breath, trembling in terror. Never had she seen a human like this. Never so near that she could count the cracks in the being's blue lips. No, never had she seen a human like this. It didn't blink. It didn't breathe.

It was *nothing*.

Limp as it waded in the water, the being's skin was colored cool grey. Hair surrounded its submerged face, boiling and becoming black mold—swishing and spreading across the surface of the serpent-infested lake. Then, when a burst of bubbles emerged from its mouth, the nymph stumbled back, but she did not fall. Her lips parted, but she did not scream.

Her eyes flickered with recognition, and the nymph with no name swallowed hard. She did not know this human. She did not know why her eyes began to well. Summoning her confidence the creature crept towards the still being who slept with its eyes open. She stretched her hand to touch the stranger's face, but as her webbed fingers pushed into its bloated cheeks, the being began to sink.

*It did not submerge.*

It bounced and bobbed like a buoy. And when the nymph grew closer, watching her reflection in the human's empty eyes, a swelling of sea sickness consumed her. She saw herself in the human. Its body busted and leaking the burgundy savory wine of its soul. She saw herself in the human, and forgot to breathe, same as the being had. Still, she inched towards the abomination—hyperventilating.

The nymph climbed atop the floating figure then, forcing her webbed fingers into its flaccid face and accidentally slipping her dainty foot into its molded mouth. The cavity was deep, and its teeth were tense as they crunched below her weight. However, as the nymph knelt upon the corpse's head, she slid its eyes shut. She did not want to see it suffer. Not any longer.

*"Rest now.  
You're free."* ▲



# LIZARDS

## IN TWENTYNINE PALMS

BY SOFIA LYON

Perhaps I love the desert for its stillness. Ever since the drives to the vast Mojave in early childhood, the landscape never ceases to enchant me. I distinctly recall when my father first told me the desert was once entirely underwater. It was the ocean floor now above ground; naked and exposed. My interest in literature likely fueled my infatuation with deserts, them serving as a common setting for spiritual enlightenment or discovery in literature across centuries. It was Abraham who encountered God in the desert, and Moses not long after. It was the Three Wise Men who traversed treacherous desert conditions to witness the birth of Christ. It was the Sahara where the Little Prince met the Pilot, and the Mojave where Jim Morrison took peyote. Another peculiar thing about deserts is how they managed to evade the destruction of human settlement simply due to the nature of their existence. Our anthropocentric conception of deserts leads us to believe they are deficient. Lacking in water, hostile, with simultaneously

unassuming yet lethal creatures scurrying about, scarcely visible. Its endemic residents certainly don't perceive the environment as lacking—it provides just enough to fulfill their needs. Whereas humans, the energy sinks of the animal kingdom, require an exorbitant amount of fuel, imported or produced with miles of wind turbines, to sustain even a meager town. We were not meant to live in the deserts. And it appears deserts are aware of this. To humanity, the desert is a transient place, meant to reveal secrets of spirituality and the cosmos when one is ready, or expose the mutability of our civilization.

I wake somewhere just off of Twentynine Palms Lane, feeling very much like I am underwater. The hot pink house sticks out like a desert flower itself, and this strangely oblong bedroom is enclosed by windows where walls ought to be. Before opening my eyes I am aware of the heat; I am a reptile trapped in the glass terrarium, the heating lamp a tad too warm. And as I lift my head to see on me the shirt of a stranger, I am reminded of the many other similarities I share with lizards. My environment consists of a California King, spanning the width of the room. Colorful mid-century modern chairs and side tables dot the space, standing out in the room's strange, empty length. These peculiar elements of interior design only seem to exist amongst desert surrealism. Outside the transparent walls stretches a sandy, beige expanse. Nearby are the slumbering bodies of two men I met the night before, fellow inhabitants of the terrarium. I glance at their splayed forms and wonder that they too resemble strange, fleshy lizards. There is no evidence of movement throughout the house; no collecting of glasses or hushed voices. No closing doors. For now, I am the only one awake, with the potential company of nearby desert creatures. I take a deep breath, lingering in the stillness.

As I drift into a less than conscious state blanketed by the heat of my enclosure, I am troubled by the suffocating sensation with which I awakened; I cannot discern if it is exhilaration or dread. ▲



# ONLY THE BONES

LUC BY  
LE

## I.

It's early morning and the air smells of honeysuckle, and burning.

Clear the ashes off the windshield. That's how it is here these days. I turn the key, and the truck coughs into life, belching more smoke into a thin blue sky: the smell of dead things. You might have called it beautiful once. Something about the recursive nature of life.

It's a long drive up to the mountains. I take 80, radio on soft in the background. Smoke is so thick the streetlamps are still on, beams of soft light cutting through dusky atmosphere. I pass a couple cars going the other way, flashes of copper with headlights on. Only a few this time, struggling through the murk, like a river choked with gasoline. Haze that seeps into your bones.

I pass Livingston after a while. Once we stopped at a strawberry stand here, a little wooden thing with faded white paint. Got there so early they let me pick some from the bushes out back, crouched down underneath the leaves, the dirt on my fingertips mixed with chatter and cigarette smoke from the workers—they said I had a good eye for the ripe ones. You laughed and said maybe you'd let me work there for a while, until the summer came and plants had regrown the berries I'd picked. Everything grows back, you said, even from only the roots.

The road starts to wind from here on out. I've got one hand on the wheel and the other on the urn in the passenger seat, keeping it still as we move through the bends. For a moment, I consider belting it in, like a child, but I realize that's silly. Nothing but ashes left, after all. Out my window, to the right, I can see the remnants of fire season: a procession of tree trunks, blackened at their base, tops gray with loose charcoal. The wind picks up, and the cinders are pulled into the breeze, dissolving. You used to tell me a little burning was good. That killing the underbrush keeps the roots from becoming kindling. But grief has swept through this entire forest, and only the bones remain.

We're climbing higher now. Past five thousand feet. Fragments of sky out of my windshield: defiant streaks of blue mixed into the haze. This is the part where I always woke up, having stumbled, bleary-eyed, into the passenger seat those early mornings, roused only by the soft sound of my eardrums popping from elevation. Once, you shook me awake with all the urgency of some impending doom, or perhaps a miracle—Look, you said, pointing your arm across my chest. Snowflakes tumbling into the canyon below. I wonder what you'd think of the ash that falls from the sky today, dusting the treetops far above my head in white. Maybe you'd wake me up and call it snow anyway.

I almost miss the turn in to the trailhead. Have to turn in blind on the corner, smooth asphalt giving way to a road of dirt, and gravel. You got it right every time, but it's my first time alone and so I turn too late, lurching the steering wheel to the left and so the back kicks out and for a second we are weightless, floating endlessly as the dirt kicks up around my windows, all the smoke in the air and the tires scrabbling for traction against the loose gravel as the truck slides close up near the rock wall to my right, and we are the victims of entropy, or perhaps the way the cosmos refuses to suspend itself in time and so I think maybe I might never forgive you. But the moment passes and I feel the truck straighten out, and we drive down the trail until the path comes to an end.

## II.

I can still smell the burning as I get out of the truck, clutching the urn to my chest. Sometimes I think it'll never go away. They say it settles into your lungs after a while. Burrows into your chest. But here the smell of smoke is tinged with a bit of pine, because there are some trees in this little byway that the flames have neglected to burn. Even some shade—rays that sketch a pattern, crosshatch, upon the hood of the truck: an elegy for sunlight. The beginning of the trailhead itself is almost imperceptible. It's been months since we were here, and so the path we'd made from footsteps trampling thickets underfoot is gone, the regrown nettles digging into my legs as I work my way up the dirt path. But it's good pain, I think. The universe acknowledging your absence.

It's hard work going up the trail. Dirt pulls itself apart in loose clumps, and so with every step I slide back a little, threadbare boots struggling for purchase. I'm holding the urn under my arm, and a couple times I feel you almost slip out of my sweat-slicked grasp. After a while, all I can hear are my heaving, naked breaths, and the soft music of the grasses that brush against one another in the breeze. The smell of honeysuckle, again. Just out of reach.

Eventually, though, I feel the path begin to level out, the same way that it always did. But as I look around the trail, everything seems different, with the light green of fledgling brambles replacing the telltale tree trunks I'd use to record our progress up the trail, the way that pencil marks run up a door frame. This is how a forest regenerates after disaster: new life immigrates amongst the ashes, and so all of the mourning is buried, unfairly or not. Perhaps that's how it always goes. But my memory gets better with the distance, and so for a moment I imagine I am twelve years old again, your figure just out of sight round the next bend and the only smoke in the air from those smoldering morning embers roasting bad coffee in a tin thermos, and I think of the way that love is also a forest fire.

We're nearly there, I think. Air is becoming clearer now, sky a brilliant marble blue. Scent of pine. Close my eyes and I think I can feel you beside me.

I clear the ridge and stop in my tracks.

Below me is the little clearing where we once spent our weekends, a little field of dirt and dandelion weeds, just flat enough to pitch a tent. Nothing exceptional, save for the fact that it was too ordinary to find without looking. Walk far enough into the distance and the ground gave way to the rest of the world: a view of the highway, winding its way through the forest and the towns below. Dots of light, and silver.

But in the field below all I can see are the colors: Flowers, thousands of them, blanketing the clearing in a mosaic of purple and orange and yellow and blue. Rows and rows and rows of honeysuckle, and as I stand, breathless, I catch a glimpse of the world reflected in your irises—it's the superbloom, you'd say. The way that the ash from a forest fire seeps its way into the soil, and everything is born again all at once and beautiful, even from only the barest of memories, burrowing their way into the dirt. Even from only the bones.

These flowers will die soon. The summer drought will starve half of them, and those that survive will be swept away by the next disaster that passes through this valley. Yet this land will forgive itself each time, recursive, endlessly, and so I think I will too. The bones sing, but not for grief. They sing for memory, for home. They insist on miracles. They tell me about you.

I throw your ashes into the wind, and the forest lives with the promise of spring. ▲



ART // STELLA CALBERT



# Cleaning Day

ART M. S. GALLOWAY

By Savannah Larsen



Once again the week ends, and we are plucked, harvested from the safety of our dens. Gathered and lugged by the handful, we are placed in one large bin: a mixture of different cultures, colors, and fabrics. This is my first time going through this traffic, that is, going in alone. Alone, back to the gaping mouths and suds without my twin, my clone.

Some get selected for extra screening, the slightest dirty mark is sprayed in preparation for **The Great Cleaning**, and those unlucky few who get pinned for extra preening. Then it is back to the collective bin. A gulp. Some cotton-mouthed chagrin.

Then the steady tip, tip, tipping over of the basket.

Out of the basket we tumble, a churning pool, all a jumble.

The machine clicks to life with the turn of a knob, the press of a switch, and a low rumble. The **Hungering Devourer** we call them, for many of wool, felt, and seams have sloshed around in its sudsy phlegm. It eats, eats, eating, stirring us all in a pleat.

A **growing sinister shadow** befalls our soggy cloth, signalling the beginning of the cycle. The hard metallic clank of the Devourer's closing jaw cuts off any hope of escape, submerging us in the inky maw of darkness, as we all swirl around, the surface a watery crape. Flailing threaded drawstrings are ripped out by torrential force without remorse—those poor seams—and dragged back under the current before they can voice their screams. The delicates mixed in by mistake, tear and twist from the whiplash, crying out and failing to resist the thrashes. Twins, cling together as best they can. Few will be together as they were when they began.

Around and around we go in droves, us the **penitent, punished clothes**.

After the hours of spinning and rinsing, the Devourer swallows and we all settle to the bottom of its throat,

wincing. Thoroughly drenched, and entrenched along the sides of its gaping mouth, hardly any of us brave a move. It is not long until we are collected again, scraped and removed from the jaws of the Devourer. The mouth is flung agape, and all of us a disheveled heap, all of us wrinkled and weakened.

This was how my twin stolen away, separated forever by this same rounding, rounding, rolling beast. Lost amongst the clutter, lethargic from the searing heat that cooked the moisture from our creases, they're nothing but an open feast. Dragged to the bowl of the Forge my twin was sent. I could only watch helplessly as I was disgorged, but they remained stuck, sucked down the Forge's vent.

The thunk of the Forge's jaws swinging, and I go in with a fresh load of others. Some fell to the tiled floor, a quick attempt to scam, but caught and thrown into the Forge as it stirred to life in a great pothole. That familiar loud crank of the dial, activating a penance most vile. The humming of a pleased demon spinnin, spinnin violently in a cloud of linen.

we once despised becomes our only saving grace. But in the Forge comfort lasts for nought. And grace dried up, leaving us panicked and fraught. Sweltering, stacked, piled friends condemned to a burning cleanse. Silk gowns got stippled, for the heat of the Forge's salivating mouth left them crippled. Sweaters get stretched and fettered, shrinking and beat by cruel heat. Those of sequin embellishments find themselves melting, clawing at the smooth metal walls, as their bodies are smelting. The pair from earlier are gone, one stumbling alone, and I pray that they may find their partner in nylon. Before it's too late.

With a croak, the Forge stops, releasing an ear piercing shriek. Moistureless, sun dried fruit, we lay in a puzzled heap. Sorted and picked, starched and sprayed, long exoskeletons are jammed through some, their buttons and collars prized to be wrinkleless and characterless. Others are bent to whatever design is desired, contorted into painful triangles and flattened into rectangles. The clones are picked apart and matched, forced into a cocoon of their own flesh together. I was looked at briefly, before thrown in disgust into the forgotten, reject bin of solitary socks. I may be needed for scrubbing grout later.

I am lucky. I am cotton.

As I lay for rest, one of the twins from before was tossed beside me in the reject bin. It appears the other nylon did not make it out alive.▲

A few breaths is all you can get. A few breaths until you get all wet. Impossible to float and skim the top as others come colliding down upon you nonstop, faster and heavier and thicker, pushed down among the rest quicker and quicker. The water strings you around through the whirlpool; the legs and cuffs sticking out and grasping at the lip of the Devourer are fools, as they are flicked back, back again under the cool of the pool.

We are cast at the next monster, a beast I dreaded more than the Hungering Devourer. A massive creature, stature convex, with white and metallic features, a swinging jaw and rotating mouth that was as much of a terror as its mate. **The Forge**, the beast that ate the weakened remains of the Devourer, a regorger, a horror.

I escaped, forever stunted and shriveled, my cotton fibers cooked beyond reclamation. Bright, cherry red, I was tossed in with the whites, and my colors bled. I used to fit around the ankle just right, before the monsters yanked my stitches straight from my bones. Before they stole away my clone. Without my twin, my true purpose is limited, an exemption, as they try to pair me for possible redemption. But I am far beyond salvation. I am only as useful as my twin, together a meaning and alone a has-been.

**Hot, hot, hot** it is in the hellish maw of the Forge. The very air sweats and burns our lace, and the cold water



# THE WOODS

## BY DOMINIC CHAMPION

The first thing the boy unpacked were his toy soldiers. He wandered his new house, his warriors in hand. Each room was a new area for his fighters to battle. The stairs were far cliffs for his warriors to fall from as they had epic fights in his mind.

The boy was in the middle of a fight between his toys when he heard thudding coming up the stairs. He gathered up his toys and attempted to move out of the way of his dad who was still unloading all of their belongings.

"Hey kiddo, why don't you take your stuff and the dog outside for a bit, just don't wander off too far." He said.

The boy gave a small nod and went to the backyard, their dog in tow. He looked around the area, it was flat for only about as far as he could throw his toys, then massive trees sprang up and continued on for as far as he could see. Their house was almost surrounded by trees but they were thicker and closer together behind the home than anywhere else.

As he played with his toys, the boy gradually drifted further and further from the house until he ended up right at the edge of the woods. The dog always stayed close to the house, refusing to move away from the back door.

The sun began to dip just below the tops of trees, causing shadows to drop over the backyard. They boy was closer to the woods than ever before, in the background he could hear the dog whimper, ever so slightly. He had long since put his toys down and had been staring out deep into the woods for some time.

"What're you doing? Get back here now." His dad's voice cut through the air, stirring the boy from his state. The dad began taking steps forward then abruptly stopped, the boy saw him take a small step backwards. "Come on inside, it's time for dinner." The dad said.

Over the course of the week the dad put a halt on unpacking their belongings to build a fence around the backyard, closing off the boy's access to what lay beyond. A few days after the fence was built, the boy saw one of their neighbors from down the road approach. He quickly scurried down the steps and stayed slightly hidden around the bottom.

"Afternoon, welcome to the neighborhood." The man said with a small and a small wave. "Thank you." The dad said.

"I noticed you built a fence." The man said.

"Yeah, felt that it was safer with something between my house and the forest." The dad responded.

"Heh, well it's about time someone built a fence, surprised the previous owners never did." The man said.

"Why's that?" The dad asked.

"You said yourself that it's safer now, you built it for protection." The man said. There was a pause.

"Whatever is out there, it preys on people. You do everything you can to keep your family safe, the last people that lived here weren't able to." The man said. "Why don't you uhm...why don't you come in?" The dad said, causing the boy to quickly and quietly run back to his room.

After the neighbor left the boy could only play outside when his dad was able to watch him. Whenever he got too close to the fence his dad would call him back. The boy didn't know why, but the forest seemed to beckon him forth.

It called him to it, and seemed almost irresistible. He began to wake in cold sweats at night, his window would always be open despite him closing and locking it each day. Then one night he woke up in the backyard, the grass gently cradled his body. He picked himself up and moved to the fence and began giving each plank a slight pull until he found one where the plank was slightly loose. Each and every night he pulled and pulled, for hours on end. The piece of wood slowly escaped its entrapment until finally it popped out of place, leaving a gap just large enough for him to sneak through. He heard the sounds of a metal jingle, his dog had ran outside and began to whimper loudly. He shushed the dog and pushed it back inside before heading back out. He walked through the opening and felt a chill go through his entire being. He took a slight step back before taking a shaky breath, and preceded forward.

A thin mist clung and swirled around him as he walked further into the forest, the moonlight was the only source of illumination for his path. His legs grew heavy and before long the boy found himself resting against a tree, the mist acting as a blanket over him. The serenity of the forest drew him in, his blinks lasting longer each time until his eyes stayed shut, and his head slumped over.

He only dreamt of the mist, how it covered over him and protected him. It draped over his arms, but when he tried to move the mist clung tighter to his body, restraining him. He began to struggle more as the mist crept its way up, he opened his mouth to scream but it quickly covered over him. It arched its way up and pointed at his eye before leaping forward. He awoke with a start, the mist was gone, along with the moon's light, leaving the boy alone in the dark. He began his trek back home when he heard leaves rustle, his curiosity got the best of him and he made his way towards the sound. He came across a small clearing, and in the center he could just make out a figure moving, ever so slightly.

"H-hello?" He said, his voice sounded alien to him.

The movement stopped; the boy began walking towards it and reached his hand out. All at once the figure picked itself up and towered over him. The boy fell backwards and glanced up to see a massive elk looking at him. He could feel its breath beating against him as he reached his hand out. The elk leaned down and the boys screamed as he scrambled to get up. A skull stared back at him with worms coming from where its eyes should've been, and its ribs poked through what remained of its skin. The creature gave a roar that made the whole forest tremble and patted the ground, causing massive folds to fall from it in clumps.

He finally scrambled to his feet and ran as fast as his legs could carry him. The cold air whipped against his face and burned his lungs but he didn't stop. He could feel the ground shake as his pursuer got closer and closer. His sides began to burn and ache as what felt like a thousand knives dug into them with each breath. In the distance he could finally see the fence with an opening in it, but he could almost feel the unbearably hot breath of the creature on him. With the last of his strength he pushed his body to go faster as the house came closer, and finally he crashed through the opening, stomping over and destroying many of the toy soldiers he so dearly loved. He grabbed the piece of fence he had rendered free and clumsily placed it back where it belonged. He could see the elk staring at him in the distance.

He turned around and collapsed with his back against the fence as his breathing became shaky, the sound of his heart beat seemed deafening. After what seemed an eternity the pain in his side faded and his breathing returned to normal.







He quietly entered the house and went back into his room. The door closed quietly behind him as he sat with his back against it, his knees drawn in with his arms wrapped around his legs.

When the sun rose he heard steps downstairs followed by a door opening and closing. He finally stirred to look out of the window to see his father in the backyard. His father gingerly reached out to the broken plastic soldiers before he closed his hand and pulled it away. His father quickly went inside and returned a moment later with a hammer and nails in hand. The sound of the hammer against nail rang out only a few times before it stopped. He saw his father collapse onto his knees, his head slumped down while his shoulders heaved up and down slightly. He turned away from the window to a mirror in his room. He jumped slightly, for a moment he couldn't recognize the person staring back at him. His eyes stung and he felt tears well up, and for what felt like the last time in his life, he cried. ▲



ART // ANON. & ROB SACCETTO

# You Are Okay

By Dahlia Perez

The wind whips at my cheeks, thrashing my hair over my eyes and ripping right through the crowd of people standing at the end of the pier. There are parents trying desperately to get a family photo, pulling on small children with sticky fingers and gooey mouths while promising treats in return for smiles. When the sun finally sets this evening; and they are wrestled into sweaters with heavy eyes and sunburned cheeks, then they will all go home and sleep under one roof that leaks water when it rains, but they know will never fail when it pours. Girls hold their flying skirts down, wrapped around boys who don't mind the wind at all. First dates and fiftieth dates. Nervous laughter that bounces in your chest and rattles your brain. Soft touches that linger and make strangers wonder. Veteran fishermen sit on old, rotting, water-worn benches that are bolted to the ground, as if one day they might grow tired of sitting under us and decide to take a plunge. I watch a group of kids fumble their way down to the shore, bouncing and laughing and diving headfirst into waves. There are people all around me, walking and running, singing and dancing, blowing bubbles that float across the water and burst with the excitement of finally being.

## They come. They go. I watch.

The wooden planks are trembling underneath me, shaking from the waves pounding against the pillars underneath, and the weight of the world resting on top. The knots in the wood are hard under my shoes, slippery and provoking. I grip the styrofoam cup of coffee in my hand and hope the warmth will bring feeling back to my aching fingers. My lips are cracked and dry, but the coffee provides some relief as the river of warmth pools in my stomach. The lingering aftertaste settles on my tongue as I finish off the cup and carefully place it into the green trash can, already overflowing with funnel cake wax paper and silly straws tangled together. I don't like black coffee, but the bitterness tastes familiar. The fisherman sitting on the bench next to me feels a tug on his rod and startles from his light sleep. He grips the base and reels the red line in, catching a tiny copper colored fish. As he fingers the hook out of the squirming fish, I think about all the other fish left in the water, eyes fixed on heaven, waiting for him. I sink further into my coat and slide my hands into the pockets of my jeans. I pull out a small paper, folded into itself over and over, and, I think I'll never find the edges. Finally I find a corner and manage to flatten the paper, which has turned out to be a gum wrapper, to find three smudged words written in black ink. You are okay. Tears rush to my eyes, and like a broken levy they run down my cheeks, spilling the taste of salt into my mouth. I would be embarrassed to cry in public if I wasn't so sure no one would notice me. So I cry. And the old man tosses his tiny fish back into the ocean. The families pack up and gather the children, and the couples somehow huddle closer together. The fishermen have all migrated to the end of the pier, where they'll spend all night drinking warm beers and flaunting their day's best catch. I roll the gum wrapper as tight as I can and toss it over the rail. The water glimmers just under the lamps hanging off the pier, shedding disorienting rays of light over patches of murky green water. As I turn to go, too cold to be alone anymore, I catch a fleeting frame of copper in the corner of my eye. ▲

ART // DAHLIA PEREZ





# POETRY

The air here is stale,  
like a breath held too long.  
it tastes like too many people  
trapped  
in a city  
that is only  
good enough.

If you had grown up here,  
you, too, would know:  
the heavy-sticky-sweet-hot  
summers, which wrap  
around your legs,  
dragging you down—  
the flytrap we call home.

I never stay here longer  
than I have to.  
I am afraid  
if I stay too long,  
the concrete will grow up  
over my shoes and my ankles  
as I walk, and I, too, will become  
trapped—  
immobilized in place,  
unmoving  
in the stale air.

ART // ZILIA NGUYEN



# HOME TOWN

by Ellie Bouwer



# SNAPPERS ON THE SKYWAY

Eyes held  
one o'clock sky ignited, white hot and  
soft—only in memory.  
They tell me  
I can only spit out and  
spear visions of you  
no form to take  
or mold  
even in this dusty grimy grassy outcrop  
smudged on and on by a  
fat thumb  
sweat dripping and  
sticking cloth to skin red and cold  
ducks shot up and lain down  
in rows  
gray lint stacked and  
eternal in this moment—  
even the laundromat  
is full  
today.



BY JULIA HASBROOK

# The Isle

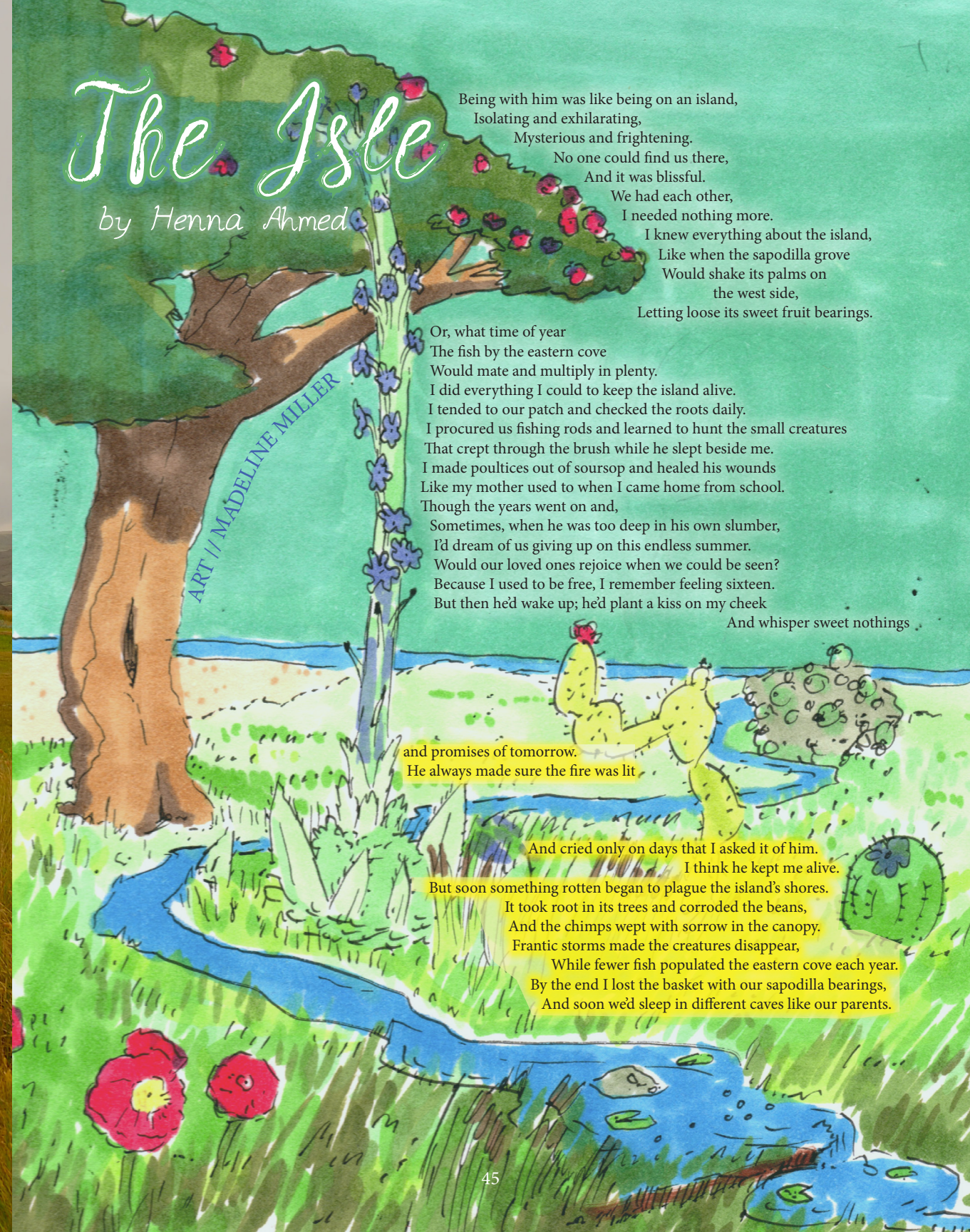
by Henna Ahmed

Being with him was like being on an island,  
Isolating and exhilarating,  
Mysterious and frightening.  
No one could find us there,  
And it was blissful.  
We had each other,  
I needed nothing more.  
I knew everything about the island,  
Like when the sapodilla grove  
Would shake its palms on  
the west side,  
Letting loose its sweet fruit bearings.

Or, what time of year  
The fish by the eastern cove  
Would mate and multiply in plenty.  
I did everything I could to keep the island alive.  
I tended to our patch and checked the roots daily.  
I procured us fishing rods and learned to hunt the small creatures  
That crept through the brush while he slept beside me.  
I made poultices out of soursop and healed his wounds  
Like my mother used to when I came home from school.  
Though the years went on and,  
Sometimes, when he was too deep in his own slumber,  
I'd dream of us giving up on this endless summer.  
Would our loved ones rejoice when we could be seen?  
Because I used to be free, I remember feeling sixteen.  
But then he'd wake up; he'd plant a kiss on my cheek  
And whisper sweet nothings

and promises of tomorrow.  
He always made sure the fire was lit

And cried only on days that I asked it of him.  
I think he kept me alive.  
But soon something rotten began to plague the island's shores.  
It took root in its trees and corroded the beans,  
And the chimps wept with sorrow in the canopy.  
Frantic storms made the creatures disappear,  
While fewer fish populated the eastern cove each year.  
By the end I lost the basket with our sapodilla bearings,  
And soon we'd sleep in different caves like our parents.







*ode to wise  
mountain man*

twenty years,  
you are embered knowledge—  
a kindred spirit to Kern,  
your offerings  
of chicken noodle soup  
and water sliced in river rave  
and morning of herb  
and fishing pole armed of corn kernels  
tingle our thoughts  
with wealthy vibes.

*wake a mish*

under tent  
freckled with stars bickering  
to tell their stories,  
we are sardines canned and sunburnt from  
day long drum circle  
we are fat of Rosé and  
prosciutto  
we are Lucies  
in the sky of  
diamonds  
but the Gods throw another  
shooting star so we wake a mish  
and forget we are failure  
and endgame is nuclear warfare  
and They sit on purple couches,  
chewing grapes of gold,

jotting notes for  
their utopia  
far away.

*by Celine Pun*

ART // MADELINE MILLER

*lick of Kern pools*

past her winding mountain road  
through junipers and sweating boulders,  
we plant unpacked egg sandwiches  
under cypress blushing hundred  
degrees scarlet, cheering  
when we race barefoot  
to granite giant:

our post-cannonballed hair  
savoring sunlight on his head  
where fractured Modelo glass  
square dance  
under skin marred from thistles,  
but when we crave to  
extinguish exploration  
embers singing on  
our skin,

we become  
infants crawling  
with spider  
fingers white on  
slimy rocks,  
we become  
Trojan horses  
shoulder warring  
in stagnant waters,  
and moss and mosquito-fish dribble  
at curled toes and quivers  
from strawberry Altoid lovers.

Poems  
from  
Summer Solstice



# Wish Upon A Pond

by Natalie Ezelle

in mudpuddle days  
we wore shorteralls,

sticky fingers  
stuffing our faces  
with red,

we held our rind-smiles  
green and grinch-like.

with a dribbling chin  
you'd skip:  
*thlap thlap thlap*  
the pebble, ambitious  
as you

and I, mouth agape,  
would marvel  
at this unfettered  
skill.

tumbling,  
our cherry-knot  
knees scraped

a log with  
green skin growing ,  
and a toad on its back.

*let's send it to China*  
you say,  
spitting seeds into the muck.

*huh tuh! (i follow suit)*  
*how will it get to China?*

your little ribs puff  
with confidence,

*China is right across the world,  
it'll get there someday!*

it's this someday  
that still clogs the throat:  
the belief that our little log  
would float across  
the seas,

that bruised knees can be  
cured with spit,

and that coke and mentos  
can launch bottlecaps  
to the moon.

it was my wish  
that we would stay  
fruit-smearred kids,

licking our palms and  
tripping  
over pond stones.

how could I know know you'd  
swallow me from the mouth,

and spit out the teeth?





I have been looking long, for a long, long time,  
 And I wear spectacles, with wide, open lenses,  
 Like, microscopes, my own microscopes,  
 A spectator behind barriers, because I am careful.  
 What you may not understand, is that I have these glasses, but not to see,  
 Rather look for, look at, or unveil this path that was hidden from me.

I  
 have walked deserts,  
 deserted, as you imagine,  
 I suppose I am really walking through these deserts,  
 to follow my Oasis Map.  
 I must meticulously match these shifting humps of sketched out  
 sand,  
 to those that drift beneath me.  
 Lumps of sand sized like mountains or school buses,  
 but also sometimes semi trucks—it is hard to tell the difference  
 —But geez! I wish I had noted, paid notice to each or every grain of  
 sand,  
 since each is so different that I often misstep—  
 I'm stepping off into Nowheres,  
 rather than my Somewheres,  
 One wrong glance, and nowhere, I am.

It is neither here nor there, but I believe  
 a traveling guest like myself does best sticking strictly to the route  
 so that I may drift among these crisp toasts with tapenade  
 served among these Somewhere Oasis Soirees,

# SOLO SOLO

BY LYDIA RIDER

ART // ALYSA GREENWALE

I attend these parties  
 punctually, though none of us have  
 clocks.  
 Nor do the parties have kitchens, uncanny as this  
 unpans.  
 Nor do they always seem to be exactly where my map directs.  
 On occasions I become so seemingly lost,  
 A wandering ghost awaiting the scenes—  
 My stomach croaks, anxious for appetizers,  
 My feet ache to dance,  
 My eyes bulge behind my spectacles,  
 in hopes of entirely engulfing these parties themselves.  
 Each time, time and time again  
 I am swooped up,  
 embraced in some whirl of reality,

I grab at hands gracefully, carefully, I am inquisitive,  
 And I inspect their grooves, the curves, the direction,  
 In search of the perfect fingerprint, if ever were such a thing.  
 But to me there does exist one, so I grasp at these hands,  
 Fading with the music, and now here I am,  
 I succumb at once to my map of sand.





the  
weight  
of  
loneliness  
by ashley beeson

I  
Time no longer holds me captive.  
One second to her means an hour to me;  
Days last as long as worker bees fighting for their queen.

With Time silent I count the emptiness:  
The taste of tobacco drifting in the air,  
4 seconds since I last thought to call you.

The weight of loneliness burns a hole through my soul.

The Moon gently pulls his way to shore  
But it's you I wish were here.  
You who saw Emptiness climbing inside.

Emptiness against you fights their way.  
Two heads growing back in place of one  
But they're gone with the glance of you.

With Time silent, I track my life in moments of you.  
You slew Emptiness that raged inside and swept the  
Moon aside. You made Time wait and realize

You are the only constant I need.



ART // LIV BENUN

II  
I see Time letting you go.  
The chains of her constant ticking gone,  
Days no longer feel like grasping at sand as the sea pulls you under.

Since Time is now past us,  
You find solace in the specks of dust on your glasses,  
And revel in the single cigarettes I light.

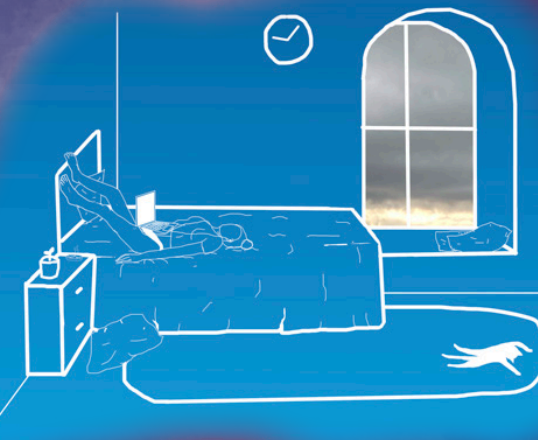
Like you, loneliness branded me; I have scars on my soul that will never heal.

As night draws the Moon closer,  
I become your blanket, snuggled tight against your back.  
I don't let Emptiness climb inside.

That battle, a herculean effort unlike before  
Didn't us mar. Only your love growing  
Stronger, even when we're apart.

With Time silent, I track my life in moments of you.  
Your laugh, now returning to its rightful place,  
The sound of music steaming from the shower.

You are the only constant I need.





# Creation

By Emily Stein

When I look at you  
I see a bit of me.  
Into the depths of your eyes  
Lie the shades of humanity.  
From shades of purple  
to shades of blue,

A shade of me

Is a shade of you.

ART // EMILY STEIN

54

ART // OLIVIA CONSTERDINE



I

it's the manner in which papa scribbles  
and my hands imitate with the  
bic round stic, a dull blue pen writing  
words he can't spell  
**lisense, we whant,...**  
and those he can  
please, thank you,...  
he drafts an email for me to echo

in English

I hide that I am an English major  
he says it is part of the basics  
learning is of what is unknown  
he says, "**teach me the Angreji<sup>1</sup>**  
that you know"

it sounds foreign, of the Angrej<sup>2</sup>

II

## A PARENT - DAUGHTER WRITING WORKSHOP

By Jessica Johal

I know only the way the tongue pronounces  
incorrectly,  
mama corrects my writing  
"**we want-ing the license, not request**"  
the chosen tense is off  
but she feels her choice is a verification

of her Indian degrees, they taught me the basics  
papa disagrees,  
"**we must request...**"

in English"

my laptop types quickly as he speaks  
clicks of alphabets I have memorized  
it's the manner in which papa pokes at blue keys  
and my hands imitate  
everything but the conditioned plead  
"**write: please, please, please give us the license**"  
"one please is fine"  
"**you don't know them the way we do**"  
he finally owns up to his manners.

III



IV

1 Angreji is written in the Punjabi-Indian pronunciation;  
it is used to say the word "English"

2 Angrej: English-men; people from England

55



# MOMENTO

by Aaron  
Hosseini

Our fake halves stare back from the mirror of the killing sage.  
The once-upon-a-time screen of the cinema has shed its skin,  
Its inner peelings now a frame for our doppelgängers' static souls.  
And its birth has entranced you;  
It has turned your visage and gaze away from mine;  
It has taken it away with the slight of hypnosis,  
The blacks and grays of the motion-picture, too,  
Becoming purged because of it,  
Churned into auroral chandeliers that steal and scream out light,  
Akin to that bastard sun that killed itself in the far distance.

That is the sound of the dead record spinning around its axis.  
It fractures as it crackles,  
Scratching of warped shrieks and night-jazz strings.  
It sucks in light just as it rekindles the shadows of your deceiver,  
Distorting every fabric of its demeanor.  
Whereafter it is embittered with strokes of charcoal blocks,  
The vacuity of a shapeless silhouette,  
Streaks of paint quivering and groping each other.  
Your skins and hairs are graying.  
Now cracks of stone gently engrave upon them—  
The atomic debris flowing upwards in slowed gravity.  
With black steams leaking afloat from out of your light-vomiting eyelids,

As if crawling out of the brain's blanket;  
Light-lit trails of white, red, white, and in reverse spiral outward from your pupils,  
Like the swirliest peppermint lollipop that the fetus in the mirror suckles upon;  
You clutch me by the neck,  
Burying my face onto the floor of the theater.  
Your breaths are heavier  
Than the sweat of ten-billion throbbing heartbeats.  
My nose tastes your vehement fumes—  
The scent of electrified rosemaries stands between them, now withered.

I feel sharp screams in every fragment of my skin.  
The red and white melting lights,  
The black residues of the steam you emit—They all trickle into me.  
I feel my consciousness slipping away,  
My eyes rolling backwards within their containers,  
Eager to sever their connection.  
My teeth immaterialize every other second.  
This, then, must be your foretold declaration of murder.  
Yet you forget that I remain unbetrayed—  
My half is still sitting behind that screen,  
Witnessing everything as though it were a stoic.  
My left hand swivels the upper half of my face counter-clockwise.  
It winds up on the back of my head.  
And my right hand performs its act simultaneously,  
Dragging the bottom half across the rightmost cheek, beyond the rightmost ear,  
ending its revolution at the downmost region of the backside, centimeters above my neck.  
The faceless mask which now you witness is my gift to you—and just now it manages to complete itself.

Though I know that it cannot overcome your strangling,  
It can subdue you, keep you waiting, delaying eternal sleep until chance escape leaps from  
my throat.  
The postponement of the pain is an impossibility.  
But that of its overloaded aftermath is not.

For now, numbness courses through my veins,  
Perceived as the fluids of liquified amethysts, violet and glistening—And my strands of hair,  
Those now with which you are forced to reckon, are cowering, oscillating, and falling dead with fear.  
My inverted face only indulges in the vacuity of the floor laden beneath it.

I have rotated the facial fragments just as the moon spins itself,  
Just as the moon turns us around its self,  
Just as you try to undo me and blink away.  
I heard the millisecond split.  
I could tell that you did too, otherwise you wouldn't have glimpsed at the screen so rapidly.  
My eyes may have been displaced elsewhere,  
Yet that much I could see without them proper.  
It feels funny to me now.

I'm stuck to the floor with your hands cupped around my neck,  
Keeping me down,  
Yet it feels more funny than it does suffocating.  
Do you hear the moans of those unbirthing bearers of life and the very death of it?  
Eye-shaped rifts have sprung loose within the theater,  
And I can see everything through them. I see it all.  
I see the fetuses and embryos crawling out of them afloat,  
The unborn babies in the air,  
Their umbilical cords connecting them to another or countless more,  
I see an old woman climbing out of the screen and the crescents  
that are her pupils,  
The words Luna Negra forming behind her as she makes her exit.  
I see that these are the final meshes of our afternoon, or whenever it  
happens to be;  
At long last,  
Our shades of gray have inverted.  
The spastic humming of the moon,  
Conjoined with the softening of its pores and stones,  
Have quintupled.

And every shadowy organ within it is busting open,  
Penetrating the very craters of their home,  
Leaving the tartarian hollowness beneath it  
behind.  
Every shadowy organ within it rises,  
Transplanting their selves upon our  
skins,  
Latching on like leeches.  
I love you, darling—I always have.  
And now I have to leave you just as  
you leave I—  
Us, becoming one with the eyelid-  
stitching collapse hereafter.  
La Luna Negra is finally shattering,  
Finally severing its own sunflower soul,  
Finally sundering itself into the voided  
crystals it was destined to blur into,  
Finally bidding us farewell,  
Performing its end as if it were its  
beginning,

Letting itself undertake the closing  
motions of its

disintegration.



# pandemic poems

by Olivia Consterdine

Mid-July, 2020  
Covid-19 journal entry:

I live in the comfort and confinement  
of my childhood bedroom,  
and I don't know what age I am.

I open my laptop, click  
'Zoom,' and I am at work,  
at school.

I cling to my family as we  
fight over quiet spaces,  
over bandwidth.

I sanitize every box of crackers  
that I bring home from the grocery  
store, like my life depends on this.

I have nowhere to go,  
but I put on my **brightest** clothes,  
and call a friend to reclaim some life.

Mornings are quiet. There is  
always a small dog nestled  
in the covers at my side.

August 22, 2020  
Text message transcript—  
Isa Posner gave me hope:

"...How are you doing?"

"...Well! School started  
up and I'm cranking it.  
Keeping my spirits up..."

"My secret is that I know  
I cannot do anything  
about the huge, international  
black cloud around us, so I keep  
my ears and eyes open to  
the storm, but I put my  
focus on enlarging and  
brightening the little  
silver linings."

"Glad to hear...  
I've been up and down,  
trying to process all the  
crazy stuff...with the  
pandemic, protests,  
politics, you know... What's  
your secret for keeping  
those spirits up?"



# Other fish

BY LIV  
BENJIN

ART // ASHLEY BEESON

60

I hear the scales before I see them.  
An arpeggio in B flat minor,  
Reflected in a case of wild kings, unblinking—  
Their reigns have ended prematurely.

The merchants have become the fools,  
Loud and reckless,  
Laying out lemons in a feeble attempt  
To mask the smell of execution.

A particular bluefin reels me in.  
It has lived in a weightless dimension.  
Its mouth agape,  
It tries to warn me.

I remember him from school,  
Back when we swam in the same circles.  
The beauty I was drawn to then now seeps from the flat slits in his sides.  
The same incisions that once infused him with life.

I follow his blank stare to a man,  
Impatiently snapping his fingers at the vendor behind me.  
He probably wouldn't appreciate the irony  
Of the 8 rows of snapper facing his back.

A cheap fabric, torn, fills my sight.  
I freeze (in terror, not because of the ice)  
As I realize why I can see his apron in such detail,  
He's closing the gap between us.

Fingers grasp my fin and I can hear the <sup>sizzle</sup> of a fryer.  
But, wait!  
A red herring throws the customer off my tail.  
I bow my head and silently meet his gaze for a final second  
Before they wrap him in a butcher paper shroud.

The men flounder over negotiations,  
Arming themselves for battle with enormous swordfish.  
My blood begins to drain.

I pray for the waves to wash me away.

The shopper reaches for his wallet.  
Dollar signs flash in the vendor's eyes.  
I'll never catch a break.  
He casts a last-ditch line:

*Do you want any other fish?*

61



# AT NIGHT WITH THE MICE

BY  
NISHA LAL

I don't know where the  
words have scurried off to  
this time.



Just  
when I'm  
hoping to pin them down,  
They evade every attempt at  
capture.

A mouse disappears into the wall,  
running from claws,  
Takes the bait, but leaves the metal  
jaws unscathed.



I want to tell you what I'm feeling  
But three words are all I have.

The rest have been scattered  
In the walls and under the house.

Sometimes, when I'm sleeping,  
I can hear their tiny feet shuffling around.

It isn't long before my own are on the ground,  
And my ear is pressed against the wall.

ART // ELLIE BOUWER



# END ROAD WORK

BY DANIEL BAILEY

One  
hundred and  
seven degrees  
Fahrenheit.

The August sun twinkles in the  
fresh asphalt,  
trapped.

A man stares beyond the crippled freeway  
towards the daisies in the park,  
purple and white salvation from a yellow and black hell.

A horn shatters the wings of his reverie,  
plunging him into the caldera within which traffic languidly churns.

His paving lute rasps: forms a duet with squealing brakes. Sweat and blackened dust stain decades-old wrinkles.

Eighteen wheels pass, clouding the man's head, foggy with exhaustion.

Construction topples the man.

Orange strangers rush to his side,  
the jostling gurney wakes him.

His lone blurry thought:  
"an ambulance in this mess?"

Lifted over the divider,  
the man's eyes well  
seeing the paramedics  
planted  
on the daisies  
in the park.

ART // LYDIA RIDER



# THE PROPHECY BEFORE OBLIVION

By Briana DeLira

There will be a quiver in the Earth.  
A blizzard formed by a simple flick of the wrist,  
The work of some omnipotent god,  
The will of an ambivalent being.  
One who, for centuries long  
Has held our world between two  
sweating palms  
And wondered:

*Are they even worth saving?*

Bolts of lightning will strike a pine littered forest  
Somewhere in Northern Colorado,  
And perhaps this world will crack right down its center,  
Somewhere along the equator,  
Splitting continents in half.

When the Earth finally splinters,  
Every star will fall from the sky in a flaming elegy,  
Reserved only for the death of things that were meant to be **eternal**

The "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" will play,  
As the colors of the sky perform their final ballet.  
Mark my words,  
Classical music will be the soundtrack to the **apocalypse**.  
A closing tune of tranquility,  
The only song we never bothered to learn.

Whisper the last of your secrets to the roses,  
Tell the dirt you will miss it.  
Then lie out in the damp grass  
And hum the melody of humanity's finale.  
For *this* is how we end:  
Not in chaos,  
But in sweet,  
Unsettling serenity.

# Celestial Bodies

by Lexus Rodriguez

With every flutter I gaze upon her **golden** tresses,  
Tightly **spiraling**, my finger captures her loose **curls** for,  
As I draw closer, I am tightly bound to her expanse.  
My wandering gaze, permeated by the life she possesses,  
Is completely filled; the empty **space** a reflection of her.  
Marked with wonder, empowerment; and mystery,

*I wonder if she knows all the secrets she holds*

In utter **darkness**, her luminescent **glow** provides **warmth**,  
It's blinding **light**, masking uncharted **depths** from untrained eyes.  
Only the worthy can unveil the vast reality; but  
For a moment, I am valued, her soft **light** leading forth,  
Draws my **blood's** past dry, for my **warm** breath is **thinning**, dying.  
Marked with endearment, **warmth**, and love,

*I wonder if she knows the energy she holds.*

In complete **silence**, her powerful **voice** rings in my ear,  
Its pestering note, **seeding** a throbbing pain in my throat.  
The pain **drowns** my soul and gasping for breath, my passions run **dry**.  
For a moment, she and I are whole; only to disappear.  
As I say **goodbye**, her **life** is sharply sucked from my body.  
Marked with sorrow, pleasure, and wrath

*I wonder if she knows the intensity she holds.*

With each encounter, she becomes more  
**vulnerable** for,  
Her eminence, locked in my eyes is key to  
her design.  
In a moment, it becomes child's play for  
the untrained eye,  
But with my **blood** line it dies, plucked  
from the **seed** it first bore.  
With every year, her **golden** tresses slowly  
blacken and,  
As her **glow** dies out, our masked reality is  
set in stone

*This is the final goodbye.*

ART // RYAN BURNS



# Color

By Ally Park

My skin is yellow  
My upbringing brown  
My nationality red,  
white,  
and  
blue

But to those who are  
white  
I am a green alien  
Stealing our right to breathe  
Because of the mandate of a mask that's  
blue

When those who are  
blue  
Can take away the right to live  
of those who are solely seen as  
black,  
who plead "I can't breathe"  
But still bleed  
red

Because a target can be painted with  
the color of your skin

America becomes  
red  
from whites and blues

And my skin,  
upbringing,  
nationality is reduced

To a disease  
To a disease  
To a disease

# NANDITO KAMI

by  
Charlene  
Aguilar

I am a proud Filipina,  
With sun-kissed golden skin,  
And thick black hair made of silk.

Love me for my strength,  
Admire me for my loyalty,  
Be inspired by my passion  
And my self-awareness.

Love me just as my people,  
Who have been oppressed and  
Marginalized by a country that  
Never failed to colonize.

One that stripped them of their agency,  
But never their dignity, in places  
They will never quite  
Be accepted.

You can try to diminish the past,  
You can seek to devalue our presence,  
But forever I will stand, in  
Unity with my people,  
In places we *do* belong.

ART // EMILY JIMENEZ



By Cole Person

# as you give

blistered in white heat  
and without remorse  
to how much we pry, the  
flame continues to grow,  
stealing our breath for itself

but the one hindrance,  
or decreed solution  
to this malady of being  
finds itself in love  
no more, and no less,  
simple and shameful

curious, I wonder  
why would anyone  
want anything more than  
lying with you,  
steeped in equanimity,  
where nothing can burn

ART // HOPE CURRAN

# COLD SHOWERS

By Ryan Burns

A second closer to the end,  
And yet I have issues left to mend.  
Things have gotten blurry—  
life has fogged up my lens,  
I need this room to escape  
more than I need it to cleanse.  
But how did I get here?  
And when did I arrive?  
How will I be next year?  
Who's knows if I'll be alive?  
These questions grow heavy  
like the steam in this room,  
I feel like I need answers  
for my life to resume.  
I know I'm not alone,  
but damn it feels as though,  
Everyone's better at pretending like they know.  
As I sit here and wonder  
where my life will lead me,  
Time passes.  
As the steam consumes  
and fills the room,  
Time passes.  
The future makes  
me nervous, but it should  
I just want to live  
a proud life, if I could.  
The shower's run cold,  
And the steam is clearing,  
I see a face, tired and old,  
Its life's end nearing  
How did I get here?  
When did I arrive?  
I've lived my life,  
And can't say  
I've felt alive.

As I sit here and wonder  
where my life will lead me,  
Time passes.  
As the steam consumes and fills the room,  
Time passes.

It felt like yesterday I was a child,  
With a dream and aspiration.  
Today my dreams feel failed  
And in need of inspiration.

ART // DIANNA CHAIDEZ



# The Universe And Me

By Skye Woodward  
ART // KEARA BROSNAN

I see the vast expanse of stars  
and planets,  
And know years after I am gone,  
they will still be there,

*twinkling for some other poor soul.  
That thought should terrify me.*

I should fear that the universe will swallow me  
whole and never let me go.

An endless void of darkness,  
Somehow strangling me and  
comforting me at the same time.

When you're stuck *in the void,*

Safe, floating  
in empty space.

And all you have are your own thoughts,  
the emptiness can feel safe.

*Hidden from the world,*  
like a child hides from monsters in the safety of their covers.

*But my monsters have grown more real,*

And the blankets have grown  
uncomfortable from my hot, fearful  
breathing,

So I leave the covers behind.

I learn that we all have monsters,  
and choosing how to face them  
makes us who we are.

I've made peace with my monsters,

They've taught me to take comfort in  
the now, because nothing lasts forever.

That thought gives me comfort,

Comfort knowing  
that we are not  
the end, we are  
just moments in  
the universe.

I sit out here  
night after night,

Staring up at the stars and  
thinking about all the people  
they've seen and have yet to see.

# by emily jimenez unready

*Where do I go from here?*

Where do I go when I leave this  
Place behind, my sweet little bubble,  
Nestled by that murky lagoon  
And oily ocean so blue;

When I no longer live in my cozy  
One-bedroom, complete with twinkle lights,  
Chipped paint, and the scent of Mary Jane  
Drifting through the humid air?

Where do I go when I take  
My last drive down the 217,  
And Isla Vista's cotton candy  
Sunset dissolves behind me;

When I cannot escape the suffocation of  
Living, either caused by stress or the layer  
Of dog hair coating my second-hand couch,  
With a five minute stroll to campus, sand or sea?

Where do I go when my dreams-come-true  
Drift into the past, leaving my view  
Before I can blink, and hurtling my  
Body over the bluffs, into the unknown;

When I clutch that degree and everyone  
Is looking at me to see where I go, but  
I am not sure so I begin to clam up, my  
Back getting sticky and drippy and warm?

Do I tumble along, knocking down debris  
As I fall on my feet? Do I faceplant in  
The sand, gritting my teeth as I land?  
Or do I plunge into the Pacific  
And get swallowed up?

*Never to be seen again.*

ART // SARAH WILSON



I always hear the winds,  
cool and raging.  
The bluest oceans haunted,  
warbling,  
and desolate.

I paint my eyes bitter,  
my skin cold and  
my hands split crisp by  
a lonely old hunger that reached  
the sky.

But whenever I look at the  
grasses,  
her voice is warm on my  
freckles.  
The edge of my heel is buried  
in Green earth.

My dear,  
lay some lilies on my hands,  
not broken—just cracked and dry.  
I sing this song  
alone in her undergrounds,  
by the glow of layer upon layer  
of that stained glass sun.

By Mikayla Buhbe

# six feet under

ART // MIKAYLA BUHBE

By Isabella Bautista

every  
single summer time,  
the heat takes control.  
some summers i can't separate  
my body from  
my soul.

every  
single  
summer time,  
i have a different lover.  
replaying hazy memories,  
one blends into another.

every  
single summer  
time,  
we find  
shenanigans  
galore.  
one hot night we  
made moonrocks  
and stargazed lying on  
the shore.

every  
single summer time,  
i remember how  
young we are.  
so i say yes to  
every outing,  
no matter  
how bizarre.

every  
single  
summer time  
ends with no  
regrets.  
this summer i'll be  
vaccinated  
living the best  
one yet.

ART // EMME FUGATE

# Every Single SUMMERtime



# CAT-ALUM

Hi! I'm Genesis, and I joined *The Catalyst* first as a student in 2019 and then later became a sub-editor. The first time I took the class and realized what it was all about I was hooked. I discovered this latent passion for poetry I never knew I had, and, more importantly, I found a group of like-minded, fun people to share an awesome community with!

Since graduating last year, I'm now in the process of moving to NYC (yay!) to earn a MA in English Lit and pursue a career in music. In the interim, I've found a fun job working as a lyric transcriber for Genius and Apple Music. My time acting as a sub-editor has definitely come in handy with proofreading and editing songs (and as a writer and musician I can absolutely say the best songs song are just well written poems with nice melodies). So, I say thank you to *The Catalyst* for giving me some real-world experience.

But beyond that, the true gift I received from my time at *The Catalyst* was the encouragement and space to be creatively uninhibited. I sincerely hope everyone who reads the magazine not only enjoys it but also finds inspiration to take a bit of a risk and express yourself. I know that's what happened with me.



# GENESIS TABER

Mermaids, Mermaids  
La La La

Chant the Children, Children  
La La La

Mermaids, Mermaids  
La La La

Now we're swimmin, swimmin  
La La La

Mermaids, Mermaids  
La La La

Now we're bleedin, bleedin  
La La La

Mermaids, Mermaids  
La La La

Now we're cryin, cryin  
La La La

Mermaids, Mermaids  
La La La

Now we're leavin, leavin  
Ha Ha Ha

Mermaids, Mermaids  
Are what we catch  
Then we drown them, drown them  
And watch them laugh

Children, Children  
Are what we catch  
Then we drown them, drown them  
And we watch and laugh.





# CA-TA-LUM

KATIE ADKISON



*The Catalyst* is pleased to announce a new special feature to complement our Cat-Alum series. Each spring issue will now welcome back a former Graduate Teaching Assistant! We honor the TAs who have helped us along in our journey, and wish them all the very best in their future careers! Katie Adkison served as our Graduate TA for two consecutive years, and her guidance and generosity oversaw six successive issues of *The Catalyst* into print! Thanks Katie!

Katie Adkison is an Assistant Professor of English at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. She completed her PhD in English in June of 2020 at UCSB, where she had the honor of working with the poetic and artistic geniuses (her description) of *The Catalyst* literary arts magazine for two years. Her current scholarship explores the politics and embodied experience of voice on the Shakespearean stage, returning always to the question of what it feels like to speak. Other Cat-Alums will be unsurprised to learn that she is still obsessed with sonnets.

after Adrienne Rich

by Katie Adkison

Whatever a poet is—  
with fingers  
That burrow into language's murky earth—  
Our scavenging undoubtedly lingers  
Here: with this tremulous intake  
of mirth—  
Stung air.  
It's not unlike condensation,  
Wet air, cool glass,  
this half-hiccup, half-sigh;  
Quivering diaphragm  
conversation,  
Body reminds brain  
you don't always know why.  
But, though forever  
may never unfold  
Just the right way  
from your lips  
and your mouth;  
And, as if lungs of  
caesura foretold  
Our grasping at gasping  
for breath to behold—  
It is enough, feeling  
this why and this how:  
The urgency to hold  
onto it now.



## SPECIAL THANKS

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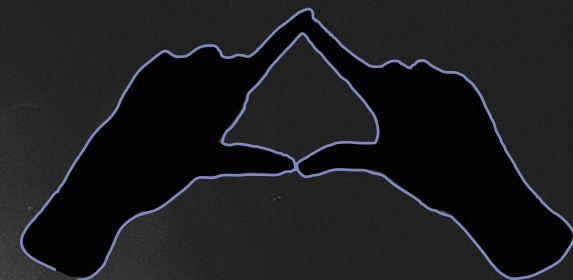
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